



Tony Gammell and Adrian Smith lead hounds across the Robinson River followed by Greg Schwartz.

Huntsman's Hunt

Story by Barclay Rives

Photos by Liz Callar

The Virginia Huntsman's Hunt is a foxhunting all-star game. Each invited huntsman from Virginia or Maryland brings a few select hounds to participate. Huntsman Greg Schwartz of Virginia's Bull Run Hunt conceived and founded the event in February 2008 and hosted the second annual event this year on January 4. The day was made possible by the support and hard work of the Bull Run Masters, members and landowners.

The designated huntsman of the day, carrying the horn and trying to unify strangers into one pack, was Tony Gammell, Professional Huntsman of the Keswick Hunt Club. A native of County

Limerick, Ireland, Gammell has been at Keswick since 2000. His natural confidence was strengthened by six couple of his Keswick hounds, which were the nucleus of the pack (actually 12 hounds since they are counted in pairs). Other huntsmen were invited to bring up to three couple, so that the day's pack numbered a manageable 21½ couple, or 43 hounds.

Additional huntsmen from Virginia were Adrian Smith of Deep Run, Thomas McElduff of Reedy Creek, and David Conner of Rockbridge. Huntsmen from Maryland were Robert Taylor, MFH of Goshen and George Harne of New Market-Middletown Valley. Their invited

guests were limited to a master and whipper-in to keep the number of riders small, minimizing damage to the countryside and allowing all to stay close.

Will Rogers observed, "If you think you're important, try ordering around someone else's dog." Foxhounds, like any canine, love and heed their master's voice. When hounds from different packs are combined, some tend to be wary and skeptical. They glance around uncertainly and might tag along behind their own huntsman. The optimal galvanizing force is the scent of a fox. As soon as hounds run together, they begin to trust their new companions and leader.



Greg Schwartz (L) and Tony Gammell nearing the Bull Run Hunt refreshment truck



Bull Run Huntsman Greg Schwartz

Trailers brought horses, hounds and riders to a pasture at Arrowpoint, home of longtime foxhunters Bill and Lindy Sanford. Their farm north of Orange is bordered by the Rapidan and Robinson Rivers. As hounds were sniffing each other and getting acquainted, Bull Run Master of Foxhounds Mike Long welcomed the visiting huntsmen and their guests. He announced that there would likely be plenty of galloping and jumping.

Gammell blew his horn, calling hounds across the corn stubble and down to woods on the north bank of the Rapidan. In the spring of 1864, blue and gray soldiers faced each other across its waters. Traces of their camps and earthworks are still visible. On this day the area held a red fox who ran along the riverbank for more than half a mile. Hounds gave plenty of cry as they pursued him, stopping at a hole where he had sought refuge. Though it had been a short run, Gammell dismounted and enthusiastically cheered hounds to win their trust.

Within a mile of that hole, hounds started speaking again on what proved to be two foxes whose routes diverged on the far

side of a creek. The pack split in two, with mostly Bull Run hounds after one fox and the rest on the other. One fox went to ground and the other hounds checked, enabling huntsmen to reunite the two groups.

Hounds went into a very large woods. No fox was home. Hundreds of Canada geese arose with deafening racket from an adjacent field. As the foxhunters headed north across a paved road and up a gravel driveway, members of the Bull Run Hunt served refreshments out of a hospitality truck. This truck made welcome reappearances later on.

The following run was swift and furious. Only seconds ahead of the pack, a fox raced along the banks of the Robinson River. He dove into a hole just ahead of hounds roaring in full cry. This run greatly boosted morale. The pack eagerly followed Gammell across the Robinson River ford to the next thicket.

After the pack briefly split on two foxes, Gammell got them together on the scent of a fox who was far ahead of them. The going was slow at first. The pack made their way through a pasture full of cattle

and cow manure. Some riders and car followers had been in the field for 15 minutes. The fox had obviously meandered through long before they got there. Some complained about the slow going and suggested it was time to try another thicket for a fresh fox. Gammell ignored the comments and gently urged hounds to keep at their work.

Hounds have greater difficulty and generally make slower progress as they get farther behind a fox. Some foxhunters only want to gallop and jump behind a pack of hounds running full speed. They would advocate taking a pack of hounds to look for a fresh fox whenever they slow down. Gammell and most who are serious about hounds want a pack to stay on a fox. Hounds should hunt him until they catch him, he goes to ground or until all trace of scent disappears. This is an accepted principle of organized foxhunting on both sides of the Atlantic. In parts of his Keswick country, foxes are scarce, so Gammell must keep his hounds on any fox he finds because there might not be another.

Hounds crawled under a wire fence, following the line of scent into a

hayfield, away from the cow pasture. They were still having a tough time; only a few hounds were speaking or kept their noses to the ground. Nearly all had given up and it looked like the fox had vanished, when a black-and-tan hound, Bull Run Birmingham, spoke up ahead. Gammell cheered hounds who rushed to her, and the chase resumed. As hounds went into woods at the lower end of Cedar Mountain, their speed and the volume of their cry rapidly increased.

Cedar Mountain was the site of a Civil War battle on August 9, 1862. Stonewall Jackson sought to rally his retreating forces there with his sword. The saber had rusted in its scabbard, so Stonewall had to unbuckle sword and scabbard before he could spiritedly wave his weapon.

The pack roared over the ground that had once witnessed the roar of battle. They checked a couple of times. Gammell was insistent that everyone keep still and not ride in front of hounds as they had their noses to the ground, trying to regain the line. When they worked out the puzzle and resumed their full-cry pursuit, they afforded miles of galloping and jumping to their



Greg Schwartz bringing on hounds to reunite the pack

Robert Taylor MFH, Greg Schwartz, Tony Gammell, Rosie Campbell MFH, willing hounds and beautiful Virginia country





Crossing the Robinson River

mounted followers. The pack stayed on this fox for over an hour, crossing miles of beautiful country. Gammell did an extraordinary job of keeping the pack together, especially during the checks when only a few hounds with the best noses could smell the fox. Scent gave out in the woods where hounds had first found the fox.

Shadows were lengthening on this winter afternoon, but Bull Run's Schwartz suggested trying for one last fox. Scent often improves late on wintry days when

the air cools over ground warmed by the sun. The last run was a brilliant example. The pack screamed after a fox through a pine thicket and adjoining fields for about 20 minutes. They ran as a single unit, all hounds together in a tightly knit pack, with a melodious range of high and low voices. Their fox was forced to seek refuge in a hole along a fence line.

Hounds, horses, and riders were obliged to head back to the trailers, several miles across country. A half moon in a clear

sky lit the way to Arrowpoint where the Sanfords served a feast to weary and happy foxhunters.

Barclay Rives lives on a small portion of his grandfather's estate and foxhunts with the Keswick Hunt Club in Keswick, Virginia.