

Attire & Etiquette

MFHA Guidebook

We particularly emphasize that proper, neat and clean attire, tack and horses show proper respect to the Landowners without whom foxhunting would be impossible. Please take this to heart and show them the utmost courtesy at every opportunity. Thank you.

Please click to view the MFHA Guidebook for suggestions on appropriate hunting attire. Additional suggestions may be found by consulting the publication *Riding to Hounds in America by William P. Wadsworth, MFH.*

Etiquette in the Vineyard Hound Hunt field.

Fox and Coyote hunting

Most of us (other than the Huntsman and Staff) are following the hounds and watching the hunt that is in progress, this is the reason to be participating in the day's ride.

The focus of the riders in the field should be on the progress and conduct of the hunt while the hounds are hunting. This is not a trail ride, cross country event or a nature walk. There are proper conventions and etiquette that participants are expected to follow.

Any unsafe, rude or unsporting conduct will be addressed by the Master up to and including removal of a rider from the field. The Master is the final authority in the field; any requests by the Master must be followed immediately and without discussion.

The Staff

At the end of the day thank the Huntsman, and the Staff, they worked hard bringing you a day's sport.

The Staff has duties from before the hunt until returning the hounds to the kennel. Please understand if they are unable to socialize with you at times.

When a staff member passes by you, especially on narrow lanes or in the woods, turn your horse's head toward the staff member - never your horse's tail.

A call of "Staff please" or "Ware staff" requires that you quickly leave room for the staff member to pass safely.

Listen if the Staff member gives instructions and try to follow them as quickly as possible.

Greet the Field Secretary at the beginning of the day to ensure that you are recorded as being on the hunt.

The Quarry

The primary quarry is a coyote, and on occasion a grey fox.

We do not run or hunt deer.

If you see a fox, don't "Tally ho," that fox might not be the hunted fox, and even if it is you might scare him and make him turn around right into the pack of hounds.

Get word to your Field Master - quietly - and, after making sure the fox is safely on his way, the Field Master will signal a Whip or the Huntsman by pointing their horse's head and cap at the spot the fox was last seen and, if necessary, calling "Tally-ho."

If you see something and are not sure if it is a Fox or Coyote - tell the Field Master.

The Hounds and the Horn

Never let your horse kick a hound. It is a sure way to draw the ire of the huntsman.

Watch the hounds working - that is why we are here.

Each hound breed works differently.

-American hounds hunt with their noses close to the ground.

-English hounds hunt with their noses about six inches from the ground.

-Cross-bred hounds are more like American but can vary from one pack to another.

Listen for the horn and the hounds to tell you what is happening; learn the Huntsman's horn calls and you will find you are a bit more prepared for what happens next.

There are eight distinct calls the huntsman uses in a day's hunting. They are:

- Leaving the meet,
- Drawing a cover,
- Gone to an opening,
- Gone away,
- Gone away from the cover,
- Picking up hounds,
- Gone to ground,
- End of the day.

Never "rate" (talk to) a hound or correct a hound.

Never use your whip on a hound in any manner - dropping your lash to discourage a hound from going near or underneath your horse is acceptable.

If a hound appears about to get under foot "Ware hoss" will alert it of the potential harm.

Do not speak to one another when close to hounds - you will bring their heads up off the scent; do not mention their names when they can hear you.

Keep your horses head pointed toward passing hounds.

In narrow places, like the woods alert the riders ahead that hounds are coming up and on what side, "Ware hounds to the left/right".

Let the hounds proceed over coops before you do - do not ride or jump into hounds.

The Masters and Field Master

When you arrive at the Meet, greet the Master(s).

Regardless of the time of day the greeting is always "Good morning Master," and at the end of the day, say "Thank you" to the Master, the Huntsman and Staff.

If you must leave the field ask permission of the Field Master.

If you are heading back to the meet you should go with another person for safety reasons.

Try to travel the safest route, do not go through country that has not been drawn yet and avoid jumps whenever possible, larking is dangerous particularly if your horse is tired.

During runs following the hounds, you may pass others if they cannot, or choose not to keep up with the group. In a situation of full cry or a "Tally-ho" run, you may choose your best line and take it as long as you do not pass the Field Master or interfere with the line of the hounds.

Riding Etiquette

Stay in close to the field that you are riding with; straying off or working your horse is termed "Larking" and is not acceptable.

Watch the horse in front of you. Do not crowd other horses. If you cannot see the heels of the horse in front you are too close, even in the woods and on narrow trails.

Watch the group in front of you for changes in speed, direction, etc.

Watch out for holes, or wire, or any other hazard. Listen for instructions: Gate, please! Reverse field! Hold hard! Stay on the edge of the field!

Keep chatter to a minimum while the hunt is underway. Talking is allowable while hacking to and from the meet, at refreshment breaks and when the hounds are not being hunted.

Keep an eye on the Master for a raised hand or a "Hark" to signal quiet when the field is stopped.

If a gate is closed when you reach it make certain the last rider through closes it.

If a gate is open, leave it open, likewise with wire across coops.

Pass on warnings to the person behind you. Don't try to yell it to the end of the line. It is your responsibility to make sure the person behind you knows what to expect.

If you are warning about a hole, etc., say "Ware hole" and point at it as you pass it. If the message is "Gate please," or "Gate open," say it to the next person as you go through the gate.

Do not pass other horses too closely or at a high rate of speed.

Do not circle in front of other horses.

If you refuse a jump go to the end of the line, do not cut in and attempt to retake the fence.

Turnout

Your horse and tack must be clean and neat and in good repair.

You should be clean and neat as well too - there are plenty of opportunities to get dirty along the way.

Safety

Listen for warnings; Beware "Ware," "Ware wire," "Ware hole," "Hole on the right," "Ware Staff," (or Huntsman, or Master) "Ware hounds."

Don't slam into the horse in front of you. If you can't control your horse, excuse yourself from the hunt.

Put a red ribbon in the tail of a horse that kicks (and keep to the side or rear) and a green ribbon in the tail of a green horse. However, a ribbon does not absolve you of responsibility. You need to be aware of what is going on around you.

Rated safety helmets are strongly recommended and all helmet chin straps should be securely fastened.

Staff members and some field members may carry a spare stirrup leather in case you break one.

Coops and Jumps

Foxhunting is not about jumping. In the course of a day's hunt the first field may encounter a few or many jumps - usually coops that are placed in fence lines to facilitate the movement from one field to another.

There may also be fallen timber and perhaps ditches as well.

Ensure that both you and your horse are capable of safely jumping the obstacles that could be encountered in a day's hunting.

If you are afraid of a jump or your horse is getting dangerous, please fall back to the second field or hill-topper group.

Except for line fences or very wide fences (over 16-foot), jumps are to be approached in single file.

Leave enough space between you and the horse in front of you to be able to stop or turn away from the jump if the other horse refuses or the rider falls off.

If your horse refuses a jump, go to the back of the line and try again - do not continue to school your horse at the coop and do not prevent others from taking the jump and following the hunt.

If you need a lead for the next time ask another rider on the way back.

Never jump anything that the Field Master did not jump, if the field goes through a gate next to a coop, then you go through the gate.

The Land and Landowners

If a field is seeded or freshly plowed, ride on the edge only, even if the staff crosses it.

When in doubt never cross a field, always stay on the edges.

Smile and wave to all landowners and local residents that you may encounter.

Do not take a hunt as an invitation to explore the hunt country apart from the field.

Never take rides on hunt or non-hunt days across any of our country without landowner and Master's permission.

While talking to a landowner, introduce yourself; it is also proper to dismount, as a person on a horse can be intimidating.

Avoid confrontations with landowners - if a Master or Staff member is nearby refer questions and issues to them.

Report any damage the hunt may have caused to the Master.

Report any problems or landowner complaints to the Master immediately - get the name of the person that you are speaking to and tell them that the Master will call them.

General

Arrive early and give yourself time to be tacked up and mounted before the hunt goes out. A good rule of thumb is to be at the meet one-half hour before the scheduled time.

If you are late, the hunt will leave without you.

If you bring a guest, call the Master the night before for permission.

On the days hunting introduce your guest to the Field Master.

If you bring a guest it is your responsibility to inform them of proper etiquette and ride with them.

Never hesitate to ask a question about what is going on or what you should do, and always tell someone if you have a problem!