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CHATTANOOGA

MAY/JUN 2011 VOL. 21, NO. 3
www.chattmag.com

\$4.00

**2011
OUTDOOR
ISSUE**

**RIVERBEND'S
Anniversary
Celebration**



CHATTANOOGA MAGAZINE
6131 Airways Boulevard, Chattanooga, TN 37421

Get Away to the Hunt

In the borderland of North and South Carolina, lives an intrepid club of fox-hunters in the shadow of a magical bed and breakfast inn.

Story by Deborah Petticord

Photography courtesy of The Red Horse Inn



The Tryon Hounds Fox Hunting Club wrapped up its season in March and although the winter was colder than usual, the group considered it a smashing success. The club was having brunch at the lovely Red Horse Inn, after a grey fox had led them in circles for most of the morning. This beautiful area at the lower edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains straddles the border between North and South Carolina and is a big attraction to New Yorkers heading south to make homes in a milder climate. Its rolling farmland is perfect for cantering across on thoroughbreds, with an occasional fallen tree to jump. Its acres of woodlands hide plenty of red and grey fox. Coyotes too, live all around and when the foxhounds give chase, the coyote leaves...

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LIVES AN INTREPID CLUB OF FOXHUNTERS IN THE SHADOW
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These rolling lands at the lower edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains straddle the border between North and South Carolina and are a big attraction to New Yorkers heading south to make homes in a milder climate. The rolling farmland is perfect for cantering across, on thoroughbred horses, with an occasional fallen tree to jump. The acres of woodlands hide plenty of the red and grey fox. Coyotes too, live all around and when the foxhounds give chase, the coyote leaves as quickly as possible. The fox on the other hand likes to play for a while. Earlier in the day we witnessed the spectacle of a proper hunt.

Riding along with the car whip, a petite 84-year-old who retired from the hunt only last year, guests of the Inn followed the hunt on the backroads for miles. And on this crisp, cold morning the baying of the hounds stirred an excitement we hadn't expected as their sound carried long distances.

Communicating via walkie-talkie, Huntmaster Bonnie Lingerfelt kept the group organized while Jordon Hicks, the Huntsman, led the band of 22 horses and riders on through woodland trails after sounding the horn that a fox had been sighted. Over a couple of ridges and down into a swampland area and back again, the horses extended their trots and broke into the canter when the footing permitted. The radio-collared hounds got separated now and then. Later a cacophony of barking broke out. Merely "a few yard dogs," someone remarked into their radio. Variations of the route were repeated several times. By the time the hunters realized that the

fox had eluded them (they always let it go anyway) it was time to give up the chase and they gradually returned to the starting point near an old millhouse several miles away in three separate clusters.

The Tryon Hounds Hunt Club has recently absorbed the territory of the Greenville Hunt Club under the direction of the young Huntsman Hicks. Although Hicks grew up in Pickens County, North Carolina he spent the last few years as huntsman under contract to the Windy Hill Hunt Club in upstate New York. Last year the Tryon Hounds hired him.

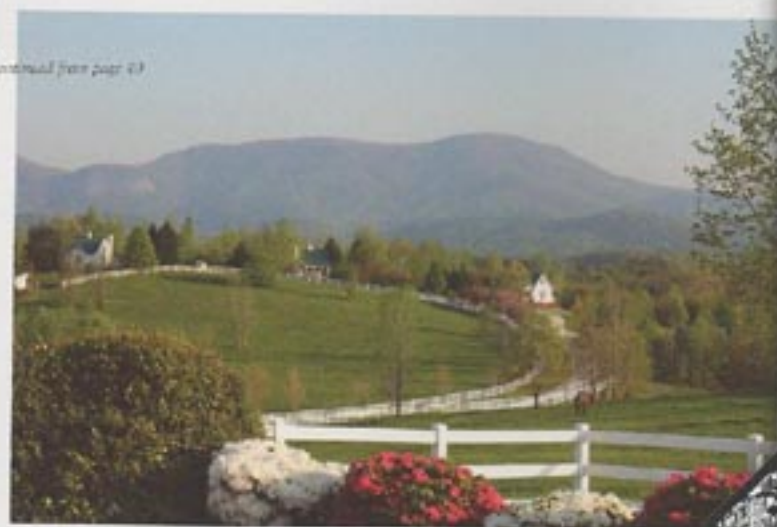
"We've restored the 30-year-old trails and bridges the club has always used," says Hicks. He and his wife live on the property the club owns, where its kennels and clubhouse are located. Each hunter pays an annual subscription to the club. Hicks is predominantly concerned with the breeding and training of the foxhounds, frequently taking them to shows for competition. He also helps the Huntmaster with fundraising events when needed.

Bonnie Lingerfelt has been foxhunting since the late 1960s. "I like being outside in nature, working with the hounds and with Jordon," says Lingerfelt. "The hunt is not predictable and I like that, too."

Horses and riders need to be in good physical condition for this romp in the woods and fields. The typical size of a hunt is 35 horses, usually made up of thoroughbreds, although quarter horses are also used. The largest hunt for the Tryon Hounds has been up to 75 horses in past times. This is rural recreation at its

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Backdropped by the Blue Ridge Mountains, cottages of The Red Horse Inn offer exceptional amenities.

finest, but as land is developed at a rapid pace, the acreage required for the foxhunt is dwindling, and at any rate, huntsmen say it may soon be difficult to find a fox. So these riders take every opportunity to get into the field.

The horses and riders begin training with the hounds in late August and the season officially opens on September 1st. Then on Thanksgiving, the local Episcopal priest arrives at one of the most popular hunting events of the year—he comes to preside over the blessing of the hounds.

Back at the Red Horse Inn, famished riders load up on a hearty split pea soup and scrumptious chicken salad sandwiches, with hot coffee and homemade cookies to follow. A square-jawed man with red hair and his wife, both native Carolinians, are among the impeccably outfitted riders, which are about evenly divided men to women. A pink-cheeked teenage daughter and her mother look stylish and happy in their longboots, breeches and tweed. "We enjoy the foxhunt," says the mother. "It's something we can do together."

F.E.N.C.E

Much easier than following a foxhunt may be observing a hunter/jumper competition at the Foothills Equestrian Nature Center (FENCE). The Center was established 20 years ago as a nonprofit to host a variety of events, chiefly equine ones. It is the scene of dressage, stadium jumping, steeplechase and driving competitions. The 380-acre nature center offers hiking trails as well as horse trails and may be rented for a variety of shows and exhibitions by clubs ranging from the regional garden club to the area's Carolina Carriage Club.

Visitors may want to plan their weekend getaway around an equine event. Upcoming shows include the 2011 spring Hunter/Jumper show, on May 20-22; the Carolina Carriage Club Event on May 28-29; the Tryon Summer Classic Horse Show, featuring stadium jumping on June 2 and the NCDTCA (dressage) competition on June 25th and 26th.

If no exhibition appeals and horses are just not the thing—visitors shouldn't fret. Other adventures are waiting. A visit to the historic town of Saluda, North Carolina only minutes from the stunning Red Horse Inn at Landrum should not be missed. The small town boasts the steepest mainline standard gauge railway grade in the United States. Although no longer in use, the train brought visitors to Saluda, which had become a favorite destination for vacationers wanting to escape the summer heat in the mountains during the early 20th century. A series of events from the Great Depression to the advent of air conditioning slowed the flow of vacationers from the late thirties to the 1970s. However, the town has retained its physical charm and friendly spirit and town officials are working to get trains back to Saluda. Several annual events draw visitors there each year. The Saluda Arts festival comes up on May 21st, when regional artists and craftsmen turn out with original works.

While the horse enthusiasts are attending shows or riding, fly-fishing enthusiasts may have other ideas, like signing on for one of several Curtis Wright Outfitters' expeditions between Landrum and Asheville. The company offers guide services, fly-fishing equipment and other types of gear, outdoor apparel and travel packages that take guests to rivers along the Blue

Ridge Parkway from three shops located around Asheville, North Carolina.

THE RED HORSE INN

One of the most impressive and original bed and breakfast inns in the region is the Red Horse Inn. For comfort, beauty and wide-open country vistas it is superior. Its unmatched collection of cottages, each with a different theme has helped it win awards and gain the attention of private and corporate guests alike. Mary and Roger Wolters purchased the acreage in the mid-nineties. These former New York City artists (although Mary grew up in the area) were the primary designers, builders and marketers of the country inn.

The Inn has a fabulous romance package, not to mention its all-inclusive Elopement Wedding Package. White cottages with green tin rooftops dot the hillside about a mile away from the main house. All have porches, basic kitchens, gas log fireplaces and are well appointed. Hardwood floors, carpets and lush traditional furnishings provide a pleasant atmosphere and the cottages range in size to meet the needs of guests.

Dinner was prepared for us the night we arrived. The Inn served a classic Coq au Vin and a steak dinner with crisp green beans almandine that evening. Our private dinner, complete with a bottle of Cabernet, near the fire on a cold night was the perfect introduction to the delights of the Red Horse Inn. A breakfast quiche, granola and fresh fruit were available the next morning.



The Red Horse Inn is a comfortable place for corporate retreats, especially convenient to Asheville, North Carolina and the Greenville/Spartanburg, South Carolina area. It is four hours from Chattanooga, taking Interstate-40 from Knoxville and down Interstate-26 through Asheville and Hendersonville.

Landrum's main street is lined with shops including an ice cream and coffee shop, several antiques stores and a restaurant or two. Visitors also enjoy Stone Soup, a restaurant on East Rutherford Street owned by Suzanne Strickland, a Bostonian who was drawn to the region for its equestrian pursuits. The walls of Stone Soup are covered with collected photos of friends and associates competing in various equine disciplines from barrel racing to show jumping. Her restaurant serves gourmet fare, with a few old favorites like shrimp and grits, added to an ever-changing menu. Diners should try the braised beef short ribs in a Pinot noir sauce, mashed potatoes and Brussels sprout slaw. The house-made ginger sorbet is a distinctively refreshing finish to the meal.

Riders visiting Landrum will want to stop by The Farm House tack shop at 22341 Asheville Highway for a fabulous collection of riding apparel, tack—including saddles, pads, bridles and bits, plus a variety of boots and gloves.

This unusual pocket of the South is well worth the effort to locate. It has a rich cultural fabric and a broad range of natural amenities for weekend travelers!

See www.theredhorseinn.com
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