

Rockbridge Hunt Newsletter - October 2002

Vote – Money for Horse Recreation Sites

On November 5th, you will have the chance to vote on a \$119 million general obligation “Virginia Parks and Natural Areas” bond referendum. Actually there will be two bond referendums on the ballot, but this article will only discuss one of them. Do note that there are no contested elections on this ballot, so be sure to get out and vote as voter turn out is expected to be light.

This bond would provide significant funding for various equestrian projects around the state. Money will also be used for improvements and repairs throughout Virginia's 34 state parks. Bond funds will not be used for operating costs. No tax increase is associated with these bonds and these bonds should not effect Virginia's “Triple A” bond rating. If approved, bond funds overall will help conserve Virginia's important natural resources and provide more varied recreational offerings. It will allow for the purchase of land for three new state parks, 11 existing parks, 10 new natural area preserves and eight existing preserves.

The portion of the funding project closest to home is the plan is \$700,000 for equestrian camping areas and horse support facilities at Douthat State Park, which straddles Alleghany and Bath counties. Douthat has some very old existing horse trails but improvements would be very welcome in this area.

Also in the plans is \$300,000 for construction of equestrian camping area and horse support facility at Fairy Stone State Park, \$500,000 for construction of equestrian camping area at James River State Park; \$600,000 for construction of equestrian camping area at Occoneechee State Park; \$1.5 million for construction of an equestrian center and camping area at Pocahontas State Park; \$100,000 for construction of equestrian camping area at Staunton River Battlefield State Park and \$750,000 for construction of an equestrian camping area at Stauton River State Park. There is also money for restoring the ‘complex’ at Foster Falls along the New River Trail, for those of you who have ridden down there.

There are also long-range plans to develop additional trails which would reach all the way to the Goshen and Brattons Run areas of Rockbridge County.

You can read more about the background and need for this bond issue in the “Virginia Outdoor Plan 2002” which can be viewed on the web at <http://www.dcr.state.va.us/prr/vopfiles.htm>. This web site is slow, so be patient!

New member!

We have a new member joined this fall – Sara Wood. Please welcome her to the group when you bump into her. Her address is Waynesboro VA 22980.

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Rockbridge Hunt Pony Club Drill Team

Before the 'junior' hunt on September 21st we all got to watch the drill teams try a dry run before they performed their two classes at the Commonwealth Games on September 28th at Green Hill Park, Salem. The riders were Carrie Fowler age 12 on Devlin; Grace Fowler age 12 on Bright Sirius Rebecca Tilson age 14 on Penny Ante; Alice Vaughn-Williams age 16 on Joey and Ashlyn Myers age 18 on Commander. Since quadrilles are supposed to have only 4 riders, one rider sat out the "Intro 1 Level Quadrille, and one sat out the musical freestyle quadrille. The music for the later was Glen Miller's piece "In the Mood". The team is coached by Carol Branscombe of Hoofbeats Therapeutic Riding Center, in Natural Bridge, VA.

For the 'junior' hunt we had 11 happy participants mostly from the Lexington area. Some of them got to ride with the staff and sighted the fox several times. These were Rebecca Tilson, Lora Richardson, Taylor Richardson and Bailey Jeffer. Additional RH Pony Club members who hunted were: Lisa Aulbach (Wes Shepherd's granddaughter), Carrie Fowler and Grace Fowler. And last but not least we also had in the field with us Logan Hedrick (Brenda Simmons' granddaughter), Hank Wood (Sara Wood's son), Audrey L Boulanger (guest of Pete & Susan Whitlock), and Elaine Flory (guest of Erica Jones). Although it was quite the warm day the hounds snuffed out a fox lurking in the hollow below Richard Fords' house and gave chase in he direction of Route 11.

"Ambassador Hound"

Rockbridge hunt is trying something new to help supplement the fox hunting talks Carol Atwood and Cindy Morton have been doing. One of our young bitches from a litter this spring, "Turn Up" is about 5 months old got to travel to Richmond and live with the Richardsons for about 2 weeks this summer. Turn Up learned about crates, slippery floors, leashes and other 'house dog' type canine things. Turn Up is back at home in the kennel now so she will still consider herself one of the 'pack' although there is talk of another trip to Richmond in the future. Carol is promising to have her come to various hunt breakfasts for more human interaction. The idea of this education is to get her used to people so she can go out on these talks as the 'visual aid' (but hopefully not an nose-sensory aid!) . Most people have no idea how big hunting hounds really are or how friendly they can be, or good looking, in this particular case. David Conner picked her out of the litter from this summer's one litter of puppies, but apparently did not want to completely part with her as a hunting prospect.

David reports that he is considering a fall mating to produce the second litter of the year, very soon.

Bath County Hunting

Although getting down to Bath county at 8 am might be a bit tough for fox hunters who are not used to the pre-hunt 2 hour drive, a very good contingent of 23 Rockbridge Hunt members showed up to hunt that Thursday. And the early start was definitely a good idea as the weather cooperated nicely until approximately 10:30 am when the sun finally came blazing through the mountain fog which had been keeping us cool. Rockbridge folks sure looked spiffy in their 'ratcatcher'!

The scenery at Bath was as nice as ever although the trout pond in the very steep wooded ravine we almost always ride by down seemed to be unoccupied. The hounds certainly did snuff out a fox and gave fine chase and a coyote was viewed later in the morning. Interestingly lots of horses lost shoes (6 naked hooves was one count) forcing some folks to go in early. There was a little mud in places but generally the footing was excellent. After a really fun morning we were treated to a really fine breakfast and some vintage 2001 made by Melvin Poe. Melvin reports that the grapes got wiped out this year in that funky late freeze we had so there will be no '2002'.

Calendar:

November 3rd – Farmington hunter pace

November 10th - Rockbridge Hunt hunter pace – Montafon

November - Bedford County Hunt hunter pace at Huddleston

November 17th - Glenmore hunter pace at Cobble Hill farm;

November 17th – Farmington hunter trials; Oakridge hunter trials

February 22nd – Rockbridge Hunt hunt ball

March 22nd – Glenmoe Hunt hunt ball

May 3rd – Derby day hound show

Not Having as Much Fun as You'd Like?

We foxhunt because it's fun. To a large extent our enjoyment is determined by the horse's performance. If any one of us can't ride safely in the huntfield it diminishes the fun for all of us. If you're struggling, you don't enjoy it and we certainly don't like watching, either. If you aren't happy with your horse's performance, do something!

What can you do? There are many possible solutions to every problem. Sometimes a simple solution like a different bit, a martingale, a different saddle pad, or getting a vet's opinion may be all you need. For more complicated problems it may be more difficult to figure out what you can do and what you can't do. Most of us have jobs and other commitments and not enough time. It can be a challenge to find more time for riding but spending more time in the saddle can fix a lot of problems. If you're short on time, regular, but brief rides really can be beneficial! Whether you're riding a lot or a little, try spending more time thinking about what you're doing when you are actually on your mount. In other words, spend your time wisely – have a plan, every day, every ride. Don't just go out and play! Lots of horses do much much better during hunting season if you can actually get on them at least once in a while and work on calm obedience in a not-so-exciting setting.

The experts at the MFHA seminars held this year all stressed that both rider and horse need to be fit in order to foxhunt safely. A fit horse is simply a safer horse for you the rider, and is a more human lifestyle for that equine. Certainly individual riders will require a different program with different emphasis but a certain level of aerobic fitness and basic strength and balance are essential for riding across country. While unmounted exercise workouts can't completely replace riding, there are lots of exceedingly useful supplementary exercises. Certainly improving your cardiovascular level helps a lot, not to mention stretching and strengthening.

Some foxhunters, particularly those who never get any outside help, tend to ride the same horse in the same way, over and over, for years on end. Problems get to be ingrained habits, and finding remedies can get more difficult. Sometimes riding a different horse or riding in a different setting or getting mounted lessons can give you a new ideas on how to fix your problems. We are very fortunate to have several knowledgeable instructors and trainers in this area – people who know horses and know about foxhunting – and they're really nice folks! Don't be afraid to try some riding lessons. Getting a reference from someone whose riding style you particular like can be a place to start in choosing an instructor. A good instructor really does not need to have done much foxhunting assuming they are not intent on teaching only one facet of riding, such as showing in a ring. Riders that are new to foxhunting and or riding may just not appreciate how much fun it really can be given the correct mount. There are horses out there that CAN keep up and/or jump and not be particularly hard to ride.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to "practice" for the huntfield and can be annoying to other field members if you try. On your own, you can certainly work a long time toward perfecting obedient response to your aids and control, but the huntfield is a different environment with a strong 'herd' effect. And once you're out hunting you can't stop and work on a problem – you've got to let it go and continue. The only way to work on these 'group' issues is to ride with a group- so call someone! We're all in the same boat. Be honest about your agenda, though. If you want to walk on trails with two other riders for an hour, that's fine but other riders might want to know that before starting out.

Carol Atwood and Cindy Morton would be happy to do some small, group trail rides – just call! Now that hunting season has started it may be tough to schedule but do call. And remember this offer next spring and summer when you're getting ready for hunting season.

If you know of a group (a 4H club, a lesson barn, etc) that's interested learning more about hunting, Carol and Cindy are also happy to attend sessions without horses to talk about hunting and answer questions. Carol has a great slide show and she's ready to travel.

It may help you to know that both Cindy and Carol have been taking lessons and have gotten training help with their horses over the past year. Other long time foxhunters might confess to taking lessons if you ask. Truly, we are all facing the same challenges.

A group effort

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