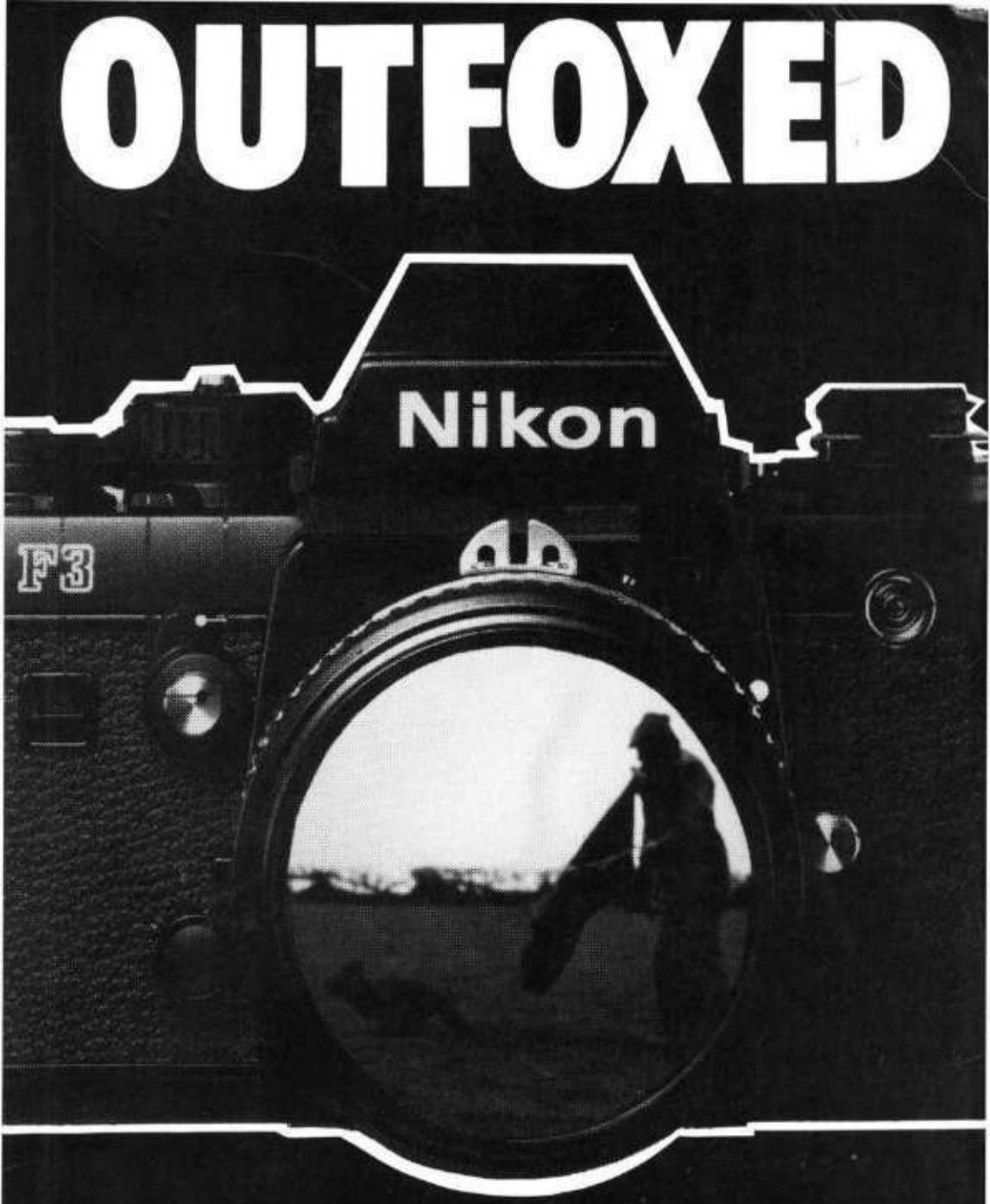
OUTFOXED



MIKE HUSKISSON

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A factual account of "sporting" activities in the countryside.

by

Mike Huskisson

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Mike Huskisson

Published by Michael Huskisson Associates
83 Union Street
London SE1 1SG

First published in Great Britain by
Michael Huskisson Associates
1983

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ISBN 0 9509284 0 2

Printed in Great Britain by

LOGOS Lithographic Printers,
Foxes Bridge Road, Forest Vale Industrial Estate, Cinderford Glos GL14 2PQ

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I WOULD like to extend thanks first and foremost to Richard Course, Executive Director of the League Against Cruel Sports, for accepting that, having paid my debt to society, I still had a legitimate and useful role to play in the fight against cruelty. Without his far sightedness in recommending this project and my employment to the League's Executive Committee the evidence contained in this book would have remained concealed from the general public.

I am most grateful to the Executive Committee and staff of the League Against Cruel Sports for their assistance, support and encouragement throughout the two year undercover operation, and since.

Special thanks are extended to Maureen Lawless for her assistance in preparing and editing the manuscript, to Liz Jordan for her excellent typing, and to Cee Wetton and Ken Sheridan for permission to reproduce their cartoons.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my family for their unflagging help and encouragement throughout the long years of observation in the field.

Lastly of course I express my appreciation to Ian Coghill, Arlin Rickard, Terry Beeney and the many others amongst the hunting set who showed me the truth.

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CHAPTER ONE

LIGHT rain was falling as I fought my way along a muddy track and through deep undergrowth.

Ahead of me, people swept forward screaming and shouting. Behind, motorbikes and Land Rovers bumped and roared their way through the mud. Screeching to a halt, their occupants ran past me as I slipped, slithering over a pile of logs, shielding my camera as I fell.

Through the dense pine wood, several hundred yards from the River Exe, an exhausted young stag had stumbled only seconds before. Four hours and many miles of desperate chase had taken its inevitable toll. Now he was defenceless.

Escape to the river was blocked by car and motorbike followers. Behind was the approaching fan of riders.

All the participants had arrived. The scene was set for the bloody, barbaric end of a staghunt.

Hounds were all round him, snapping and biting at his flanks. As he twisted, head down to fend one off, so another of the pack of forty would move in.

Bewildered, the stag was stationary, at bay beneath the green pine canopy.

I was carried along in the headlong, ghoulish rush, as followers dived at him and wrestled him to the ground. The proud beast keeled over as more and more people piled on top until he collapsed flat on his side.

"Grab his antlers. Grab him, pull him down. Let them at him," the cries rang out, as the hounds tried to move in.

My hands, numbed with cold, twisted and turned the camera controls. Menacing glances switched from the focussed lens to my British Field Sports Society* badge and Barbour jacket, then to my face and their owners, by tacit agreement, shuffled silently around, shielding the gruesome spectacle from the outside world.

Under the dense foliage on a late Spring evening there was no light anyway; f1.4 and an eighth of a second, is no combination for action photography. I concealed my camera, and squeezed through the closed ranks, determined at least, to see for myself.

Four muscular hands gripped the stag's short antlers and pressed his head into the soft pine mould soil. The young beast blinked, wide eyed and helpless and panted the primeval fear of all creatures who stare death in the face.

Rough work boots and tweed covered knees held his body steady, as hands deterred the hounds from their wilder excesses.

*B.F.S.S.: a small organisation that defends bloodsports.

"Where's the bloody gun?" a shout went up, but there was no gun to hand. Feeling twinges of remorse some willing people ran off searching for one of the hunt's executioners.

Others, young and old, male and female, crowded round to watch, laughing and joking at the creature's misery. They lit up cigarettes or had the last tots from their battered hip flasks.

The seconds ticked into minutes. The stag panted on, but there was no mercy. Over five minutes elapsed before a delighted red coated gentleman rode up with a small calibre pistol.

The crowd parted to give him access and I inched forward in his wake. After a few taunts as to where the muzzle of the pistol was placed on the stag's exposed head, a merciful shot rang out. The stag shuddered and was still.

The drawn out, staccato notes from the horn, signalling the kill, echoed across the deep, murky hillside as if taunting the nation of so called animal lovers.

It was April, 1982 and I, a member and employee of the League Against Cruel Sports had stood and watched as the Tiverton Staghounds made another kill.

Why?

To understand it is necessary to turn the clock back almost a year.

*****

A cold April air bit sharply at my face as I stepped out of the building into a late London afternoon. The door behind me closed on the top secret meeting I had just attended.

The place, The League Against Cruel Sports Headquarters in Union Street, where a plot had been hatched that was aimed at destroying the sport of some of the most powerful people in Britain, including the Royal Family — HUNTING.

For the next two years only a handful of people were to know the truth of my assignment — even fewer to actually know my real name.

Officially, I was Mike Wilkins, Press Officer for the League Against Cruel Sports, dealing with inquiries from the press, and publicising the sheer brutality of hunting.

To the hunt, whenever I met them socially, I was Michael Wright, an avid follower and supporter of all field sports.

Only my family and close friends knew I was Mike Huskisson, ex-public schoolboy with a degree in Zoology from University College, London — and a prison record.

At that fateful meeting in April 1981 I was given two specific tasks and

told to use any name I liked other than my own.

I was instructed to destroy the hunt by research and analysis, showing the public through the letters columns of newspapers and magazines how their arguments in favour of hunting were false and stupid.

My second task was infinitely more valuable and more dangerous — to penetrate the hunt from within. To use my cameras to collect indisputable evidence to show the British public that hunting was cruel and barbaric.

It was a task close to my heart and one for which I was well equipped. For the last twelve years I had learned the ways of the hunt and sabotaged them. My interests not only extended to putting an end to the cruel abuse of the hunted, be they otters, mink, stags, hares or foxes; but to all acts of violation against any animals.

I was one of the militant band of animal protectors who broke into the I.C.I. laboratories to save the Smoking Beagles, and was arrested for my part in the plot.

I had also taken part — albeit a passive one — in the desecration of John Peel's grave, a mecca for the hunting fraternity. For this I served a nine month prison sentence, part of the time in one of Britain's maximum security prisons — Durham.

So, there was no question that I had all the qualities to infiltrate the inner sanctums of the various hunts, and the knowledge to pass as a dedicated follower of hounds.

I even came from the right background. Indeed, I have relatives who hunt, so if there had been any early influence at all it should have been to participate myself.

The son of an army officer, I was born to a world of short stays, distant moves and boarding school education, but it was not until my father left the service in 1967 and bought a house in the small village of Abbotsley near Cambridge that I actually came into close contact with the hunt.

It was impossible to avoid them as the local pack, the Cambridgeshire, had two meets in my home village. One at the pub overlooking the green and another at a large farm on the outskirts.

At the time, I had no particular feelings against hunting. My first impression was of the spectacle, the colour and tradition of it all. Huntsmen in their pink coats mounted on beautifully turned out horses; ladies in black jackets and bowler hats, partaking of a stirrup cup as the hounds sniffed around, eagerly awaiting the off.

It was when I came into closer contact with the hunting fraternity while drinking with my parents in the local pub that I felt the first stirrings of revulsion.

Like most British people I feel a natural sympathy for animals and a desire

to champion the under dog — in this case, the hunted.

The hunting types interpreted such feelings in a young man of 16 years as weakness, an effeminacy.

Accordingly they baited me into arguments and delighted in seeing my reaction. Inevitably they carried things too far as they recounted the full, gory details of how they had dug foxes out and clubbed them to death.

The more they goaded me with lurid tales the greater my sympathy grew for the fox. Determined to see for myself I began to follow the hunt on a pushbike whenever possible. When I asked them with nagging innocence why they enjoyed killing animals they always reacted angrily.

Acknowledging whose side I was on, I soon determined not to be a bystander but to take an active part in thwarting the hunt. At that time, not knowing that Hunt Saboteurs existed, it was a purely singular and personal decision. Although unaware of it, the fox now had at least one ally — it was the hunt against the pair of us.

I read up on how to fool the hounds, the best information coming from military history books. During the last war, the French Resistance had used dried blood and cocaine to put German tracker dogs off their scent. Such tactics seemed a bit extreme for our tiny village, but, after discussing it with friends and teachers at school, I came up with a substitute much easier to obtain — aniseed.

I saved feverishly, bought up all the local chemist's stock of aniseed and planned phase one of my campaign against the Cambridgeshire Hunt.

The night before the next home meet, I went out with a bundle of rags heavily soaked in aniseed. Trailing them round and round the meet I led off down the side of an adjacent field. Dragging my decoy, I ran up one field, zig-zagged round another and ran on before circling back to where I started.

If my plan worked the hounds would be running rings around themselves, going nowhere. To enforce the false trail, I cut up the rags and retraced my steps, dropping pieces at 25 yard intervals.

That day the hunt was singularly unsuccessful, in fact, utter chaos. Whether it was entirely due to my actions or not, I felt I had won my first battle.

Almost by coincidence, a spate of publicity appeared about the Hunt Saboteurs Association. At nearby Northampton there was a particularly active group led by Rorke Garfield, a former paratrooper, whose exploits really impressed me. His well publicised clashes with hunts involved the use of smoke canisters, thunder-flashes and hunting horns to reduce the hunt to a complete shambles and allow the quarry to escape.

In September 1972 I went to University College, London to read Zoology. I quickly joined the Officer Training Corps, more out of an interest in the outward bound style of activities than from any desire to kill people. In

November that year, I also joined the Hunt Saboteurs Association, determined to continue to do my best for hunted animals.

Like most idealistic young men, I needed to take an active, adventurous role in a cause. Realising that there are many trying to fight to improve the lot of humans, I decided to concentrate on the more helpless species who share this planet with us.

Making contact with animal pressure groups, at that time, was not easy. I had to resort to Camden Public Library where I was given the telephone number of the League Against Cruel Sports.

I rang and spoke to Mark Davies, at that time Secretary of the League, now Chairman of the committee. He gave me the telephone number of Iain McNay, a committee member of the Hunt Saboteurs Association.

From the start, I enthusiastically pledged body and soul to the H.S.A.. Years later I learned that I was immediately marked down as Mike the Nutter!

My first organised 'sab' was against the Mendip Farmers foxhunt at Clapton, near Midsomer Norton on December 9th, 1972.

I was told to rendezvous with a van load of fellow sabs at Ealing Broadway underground station at 5a.m. Ealing at that time in the morning is singularly inaccessible from Camden Town when you lack transport and are broke. The only way was to set out at 2a.m. and walk. I viewed it as some kind of initiation test.

I remember little of that first day other than at one point having to cross a flooded track. We ended up wading up to our knees and enduring soaking jeans for the rest of the day. Sabbing was clearly no fun. At that first hunt, I met Dave and Cee Wetton, the key organisers for the H.S.A.

Christmas 1972 I spent at Abbotsley. Naturally I itched to try out newly learned techniques against the local pack. I phoned Dave Wetton and asked for addresses and phone numbers of keen local people who could help. I was given the number of Ronnie Lee who was later to be one of the founder members of both the Band of Mercy, and the Animal Liberation Front.

I eagerly arranged my first organised sab against the meet of the Cambridgeshire at Boxworth on December 23rd.

Ronnie arrived to collect me and showed me how to mix the pungent smelling 'sab special', that is so successful in masking the scent of the fox. I had alerted the local papers to a dramatic attack on the Cambridgeshire, but they were visibly disappointed when they turned up to find five dishevelled looking individuals pouring dirty liquids in gateways.

It would doubtless have made a better story if we had thrown paint or bricks at hunt followers, but it would not have helped the fox. As it was we trailed around fields, spraying wherever possible, bogging ourselves in the mud and ending up thoroughly soaked but feeling we had achieved something.

After this start, I drifted into the basic H.S.A. routine of planning all week for action on Saturdays. The H.S.A. was organised on a group structure with small active units dotted about the country.

The usual idea for new members is to join their local unit. Being in London and in close contact with the chief organisers, the Wettons, I affiliated to what was, in effect, the headquarters group. We were the flying pickets, travelling all over the country offering advice and exchanging ideas, as well as being responsible for the routine organisational activities.

Hunt disruption takes many forms. There is the open, active sabotage with groups of recognisable sabs preventing the hunt from killing by laying false trails and masking the scent of the quarry; or by confusing the hounds with shouts or blasts on a hunting horn.

When saboteurs were few in number, or the hunt known to be particularly violent, sabotage was usually done undercover. Saboteurs drifted secretly through the woods, dressed like hunt supporters, surreptitiously spraying their false trails. Often, at the end of the day, unless there had been false calls on the horn the hunt had no idea they had been victims of a visit by sabs.

For the benefit of the media it became a common HSA policy to demonstrate peacefully at the hunt meets with banners and placards. Bearing slogans like: "Watch out, sadist about," or "Warning, Pink Pervert at large," these protests were usually effective in encouraging local people to give voice to their long, but silent, disapproval of the hunt.

This did not please the hunt and our peaceful protests would often end with banners torn down and the bearers being hit.

Incapable of offering any coherent arguments, the hunting set would typically resort to violence and intimidation. By calling the sabs, unwashed Kremlin financed students aiming to disrupt the British way of life, they were able to recruit burly henchmen from the local pubs.

I sampled this kind of opposition on 13th January, 1973 when I met up with other sabs for a meet of the Whaddon Chase foxhunt at Shenley Brook End. A tank-like, bullet headed, country "gentleman" informed us that if we attempted to disrupt his hunt our cars would be tipped in ditches and we would be put "six feet under!"

Against such threats we had no choice but to carry on, although that day was distinctly "hairy". At one point, the fox crossed the road right in front of our car. We stopped, jumped out and sprayed the whole area to mask his scent. Then we heard the rumbling storm of approaching hunt followers.

We sped off laughing, the hounds stopped baffled, and we gave two fingered gestures of non-respect to the thugs, which we immediately regretted when a horse-box came round the corner ahead of us almost blocking the road.

The pursuing supporters, in their flat caps and wellingtons, had been

labouring to catch us, now seeing their chance they shouted to the driver of the horse box to swing across and block our escape. Revving our engine to drown their instructions, we bumped up onto the grass verge and managed to squeeze past, but it was close.

Operating with groups of sabs, in particular H.Q., I soon mastered the basic art of sabotage. Even so, by necessity I was forced to operate on my own on many occasions, and this inevitably led me into undercover work.

One aspect of this was to visit the meet hours before the hounds arrived and liberally douse the area with "sab special" — a harmless concoction of chemicals. I did this at one pub where the Cambridgeshire were due to meet three hours later. The astonished landlord asked me why I was watering his car park, to which I replied that I was from the university and testing the ability of a highly nutritious plant food to produce plants that could break through concrete — then sped off.

Hunting methods differ depending on the quarry. For open sabotage in groups it is enough to know the rudiments, but for undercover work it is important to learn every aspect of hunting.

Hounds hunt foxes by scent, so false trails and masking scents are of vital importance. The pack are wielded and controlled by the huntsman using voice and horn, while the other riders and onlookers make significant contributions by revealing the whereabouts of the quarry.

It was clear that although necessity frequently forced me into it, undercover sabotage offered unlimited opportunities to confuse the hunt; consequently it appealed to me far more than the open methods.

Instead of looking unkempt in jeans and sweatshirt, I wore the uniform of the opposition — Hunter wellies, a flat tweed cap and a waxed Barbour jacket, so that I blended in with hunt supporters.

By chatting with followers and opening and closing gates for the hunt, I was accepted and allowed to make further inroads, thereby gaining more knowledge of what really happens. While most hunt followers stayed in their cars sipping coffee and chatting to riders, I always aimed to be with the hounds during the hunts, up with the really dedicated followers.

This meant running miles over fields, being covered in mud, plunging into thick undergrowth, or wading through streams. But it was worth it. From that viewpoint, I could see hounds being directed, could calculate where the fox would make his run and how best I could stop the hunt following.

When drawing a copse or a small wood, the huntsmen and chosen riders surround it while the hounds are sent in to flush their quarry out.

Once the fox makes a break, those riders on point duty give a call, a cross between a shout and a scream known as a "holloa," to attract the hunt staff. The huntsman then blows the horn to call up the hounds.

I was so convincing in my undercover role that the trusted riders on point

duty, bored with sitting there in howling gales or torrential rain would ask if I would stand in for them so that they could go off and chat with other riders.

I have even seen some literally caught with their breeches down, behind a hedge, as the hunt has galloped off.

Left up front, I would often see the fox make a break. Hurriedly I would run to the other side of the wood, holloa like mad and direct the approaching hunt in the opposite direction.

The risk of being caught by a rider, whilst giving such a Nelsonian eye to an escaping fox is very slight. The greatest danger is from other foot followers. Several times I was accused by one of these of holloaing where there was no fox or ignoring an escaping one.

At such times, the huntsmen would jostle around me and the only course open was to swear in the first instance that there was no fox. Or to make profuse apologies and maintain that in my opinion the escaping fox was not the one they were hunting. It is a cardinal sin for genuine hunt supporters to call hounds off the hunted fox and switch them onto another.

One aspect of hunting, which is seldom talked about is the role of the "Terrierman." This is the most barbaric, cruel and totally unsporting aspect of hunting.

The idea of foxes being chased and eventually caught by hounds and ripped to pieces may be abhorrent, but the methods of the terrier men are sadistic and brutal.

When a fox goes to ground, finding sanctuary in an underground earth, there is no turning away and giving sporting salute to a quarry who has outwitted them. Instead they guard the spot and send for the terrier men to dig him out.

The terrier mens' standard equipment consists of picks, shovels, iron bars and the inevitable Jack Russell terriers.

First the dog will be sent down, either to drive the fox out from another exit so that the hunt can continue, or to drag him out so that the terrier man or huntsman can finish him off.

But, even when the hunt has a fox trapped in an earth, the undercover saboteur is often able to foil their plans and save his life.

I had been out with one hunt all day, playing the part of the stupid supporter and being a hindrance whenever possible. Late in the afternoon, they ran a fox to ground and the hunt staff leapt off their horses, feverishly trying to block all exits from the earth to stop him escaping.

The huntsman blew his horn until his face matched the colour of his jacket, trying to summon the terrier man but to no avail.

"Shall I go and get him?" I helpfully volunteered.

Welcoming the help, he sent me off. Dutifully I disappeared running over the brow of the hill — sadly I am still looking!

Another time with a huntsman proudly standing over a blocked earth, I tried to repeat the tactic, but he said: "No."

For one moment, I thought he suspected me, then he added: "It will be quicker if I go. You stay here and guard the earth."

He couldn't have made a better decision. As he galloped off into the distance, I unblocked all the entrances to the earth before running like mad in the opposite direction.

Much as I would have liked to have been there to see the fox escape it was necessary to go. As long as the fox could smell me outside the earth he would not have ventured out.

Escape he did, as other, irate supporters told me later, not realising I was the culprit.

Turning another hunt tradition against itself was a particularly useful trick I acquired. The weapon? The hunting horn, used by the hunt to direct the pack, summon riders, call up the terrier man and signal a kill.

Blowing the horn is devilishly hard to learn. It took me six months to master, but it was well worth the effort. After trying to practice at home to the disgust of my neighbours, I decided that the one place I could blow to my heart's content was at actual hunt meets.

I began to practice openly when I was out with groups of sabs. I had anticipated opposition, instead the hunt roared with laughter at my stuttering raspberries, but ultimately the joke was on them.

Once I had mastered the art, I was far more effective when operating undercover. Only the huntsman carrying the horn and those near him could know for certain that my calls were not genuine, the rest of the field followed quite happily.

Hounds are bred to hunt by scent, not sight. If they did hunt by sight they would "course" their prey and kill them far too quickly for the mounted field's purposes depriving them of a good day's gallop.

Because they hunt by scent, they run with their noses to the ground. Once they lift their heads they lose the scent, so it is a good sabotage tactic to distract them by blowing the horn, or holloaing.

Hounds are also prone to rioting. Like all dogs they can be victims of boredom. If foxhounds are taken to a covert and draw a blank they are prone to restlessness, so if a hare or rabbit pops up they may well chase them, just for the hell of it. Rioting often occurs near the end of a hunt. Tired foxes will often run through a field of farm animals or into gardens in a desperate attempt to lose their scent. When hounds follow foxes in this kind of situation they can easily encounter pet cats, dogs or rabbits, and in their unbridled enthusiasm, chase and kill them.



"Oh damn!...It's not the kill, only another blasted cat.

To combat this, hounds are trained to stop when certain calls are blown on the horn. Calls are also used to stop hounds when they are heading towards danger, such as a railway line or a main road. Also when they have switched their quarry, so that instead of hunting an exhausted victim they are after a new, fresh one.

Horn blowing is therefore a successful sabotage tactic but it must be used responsibly. In essence, the saboteur is taking the pack, an efficient killing machine, out of the control of the staff.

Only a few years ago, with no sabs present, the Vale of Clettwr hounds ran amok amidst a flock of sheep. In a short time, twenty six lambs were dead and many others injured.

There is also the matter of the welfare of the pack. Hounds are as innocent as the animals they chase and must not be drawn into danger.

Accordingly, HSA rules instruct that the horn should never be blown in a fashion that might lead hounds over main roads or railway lines, or anywhere where they might chase, injure or kill pets or livestock. A provoked riot should involve the hounds baying like mad, but actually chasing nothing.

Another attribute of horn blowing is the confusion it causes amongst hunt followers. Supporters often lose touch with the hunt and are found, straining to catch the faintest sound that might indicate the whereabouts of the pack. A blast on the horn is enough to have them galloping off.

I can remember having much amusement misdirecting riders of the Puckeridge and Thurlow Hunt all over the place in search of their elusive horn. Such confused riders were of no use to the hunt. Other weapons used against the hunt were padlocks and barbed wire for sealing gates, and fireworks like airbombs and rookscarers.

For gates, padlocks and chains are the most effective, but a cheaper method is barbed wire wrapped round and round and tightened by wire clippers.

I am sure the huntsman of the Cambridgeshire will remember one festive Boxing Day meet when he found every gate on his route safely secured. The subsequent delay can only have helped the foxes.

Rookscarers consist of bangers tied to a long rope so they go off every 20 minutes or so. They serve a dual purpose — to drive wildlife away and produce a noise so much like a shotgun that the hunt will call off the hounds.

Many times after such tactics were used I've heard the huntsman shout: "Some bastard is shooting in there," and invariably he pulled the hounds out believing, wrongly of course, that the hounds might be hit by stray pellets.

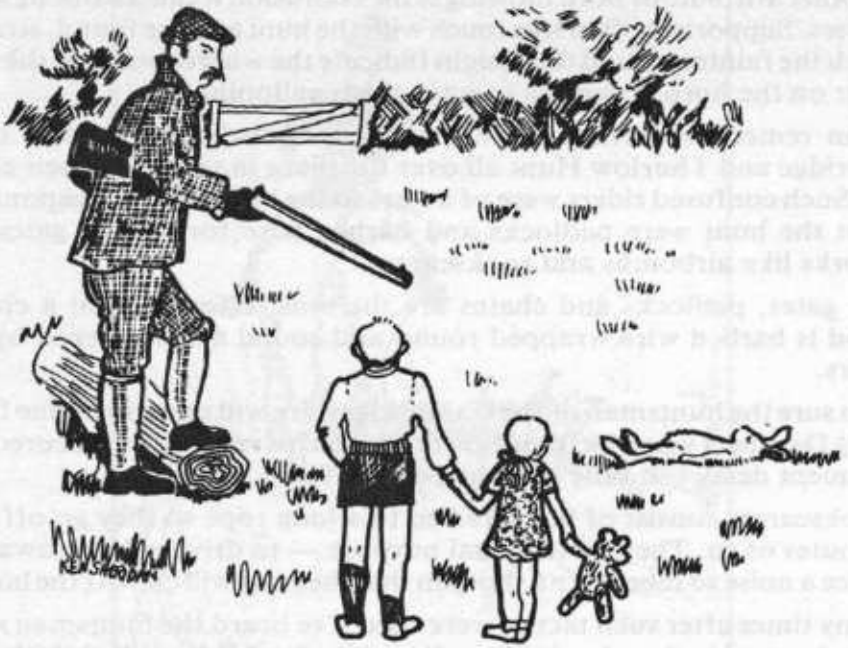
Naturally hunts employ counter measures. One method is to be so secretive and elusive that the saboteurs cannot find them.

Hunts appreciated that the saboteurs learned of their meets from their ads in "Horse and Hound," "Shooting Times" and local papers. Some immediately ceased advertising but that created another problem — even their own supporters did not know their whereabouts.

Others, notably the Enfield Chace adopted different tactics. At the meet, they would be openly friendly to the sabs but as soon as the hounds moved off they disappeared at breakneck speed. Keeping to woodland wherever possible they left no straggling riders to betray their whereabouts. It was a case of the hunters being hunted.

The other, most obvious counter attack available to hunts was sheer violence.

It had already occurred at hunt meets when sabs held banner demonstrations. Now, with sabotage becoming more effective, spoiling the hunters' fun, attacks on saboteurs began to happen during the hunt and were infinitely more vicious.



"Well, them's vermin lad." "What *is* vermin Sir?" "Vermin be rabbits and foxes and weasels and stoats and rats and squirrels and owls and hawks and crows and magpies and jays and cats and rooks and otters and some dogs and hares and some other things and I shoots 'em all for my master."
"What's left in the woods then Sir?" "Pheasants sonny, and the master shoots *them*."

CHAPTER TWO

THROUGHOUT the early seventies I "sabbed" as many hunts as possible, ranging the length and breadth of the country. Often I travelled with the headquarters group, at other times I operated on my own, using my motorbike and working in an undercover role.

After an early concentration on foxhunts I paid attention to the other bloodsports — hare hunting with beagles, harriers or bassets; hare coursing, staghunting in the West Country, and in summer otter hunting, which has since been replaced by mink and coypu hunting.

Beagling — hare hunting, takes place with the huntsmen and supporters following on foot. We sabotaged them quite openly by spraying to mask the scent of the hare, laying false trails, giving false "holloas" and by blowing horns. This necessarily entailed large groups of saboteurs running amongst

the hounds and supporters — a move which usually ended in the frustrated hunters resorting to physical violence.

Hares have a characteristic style of running in great circles. As they tire the circles become smaller and smaller until, at the very end of their tether, they run in a straight line.

Once, out with the South Herts Beagles, the hounds closed up on the hare after an hour of chase. Turning, the hare passed by us, pushed through a hedgerow and laboured across a muddy field. The pack was strung out and in full cry; when the lead hounds met her there was pitiful squealing and screaming, then it was all over. We dived into the melee, knowing it would do no good, but we felt we had to try.

The hunt supporters roared with laughter. The hare was torn limb from limb, dowsing the hounds with her warm blood. Grabbing the remains the huntsman thrust them in our faces — goading us. It was hard to remain calm.

Hares do not just have the hunt to fear — another "sporting" section of the community indulge in "hare coursing." A pastime so antiquated and barbaric that many people mistakenly believe that — along with cock-fighting and bear-baiting — it is already banned. Coursing of hares is one of the most clinical and cold blooded of all bloodsports.

In its best known form — static coursing, a line of beaters sweep the fields driving the hares before them towards an open grass field, selected as the arena.

Although many hares are being driven, care is taken to ensure that only one at a time breaks cover and runs onto the field.

Once the unsuspecting and tiring hare hits the open ground, she is chased on past a "hide," usually constructed of straw bales and camouflaged by greenery. Behind this screen lurks a man known as the "slipper," who holds two greyhounds straining at their leashes.

His job is to gauge the required start the hare is to be given — which according to rule books, should be 80 yards — before releasing the greyhounds.

It is then a straight test of power, speed and agility, between the hare and the greyhounds. The hare, being no match for the greyhounds straight line speed, has only one course of escape — to turn sharply, leaving them running on.

Without doubt Nature's perfect running machine — the hare can turn about in her own body length at full speed.

As she zig-zags across the field, the greyhounds quickly catch up with her, forcing her to turn and twist again. The dogs have distinctive collars, one red and one white, so that the mounted judge, galloping alongside, can award points to whichever dog turns the hare first. The dog with the most points wins.

Coursing authorities claim that the kill is of no consequence. It may be true that no extra points are awarded for it, but supporters make no bones about their lust for blood, as they cheer every one.

I attended my first hare coursing sabotage at the meet of the Oxfordshire Coursing Club at Stanton Harcourt on February 2, 1974.

At that time such sabotage entailed invading the coursing field and using smoke canisters, fireworks and gas-powered foghorns to scare the hares away. Since then the tactics have been refined to include beating over the whole area hours before the meet to drive the hares out of the area.

Observing that first meeting, about one in three hares were caught. Many suffered an horrific death.

The greyhounds grab the first piece of the quarry they can, often one dog has the back legs, the other the head, and a tug of war ensues.

Watching the hare being literally pulled apart is sickening. The hare screams pitifully, even more heart-rending as it sounds just like the noise made by a children's teddy bear.

"Pickers up" rush onto the field to intervene, but the dogs are difficult to catch.

Coursers' claims that death is instantaneous are ludicrous to anyone who has witnessed this kind of kill.

An even more prolonged agony — and a common one — for the hare is when a dog makes off with it alive in its mouth.

That first day I saw dogs run from the coursing field, the hare dangling from their jaws, alive and screaming, hotly pursued by owners and other supporters.

Needless to say, as in all other forms of hunting, hare coursers loathe outsiders with cameras. As Lord Kenyon, honorary secretary of the premier event, Waterloo Cup Coursing, succinctly put it: "We have a rule forbidding photographs of coursing. The ban was imposed to prevent these anti-bloodsport people from getting ammunition to use against us."

At another meeting of the Oxfordshire Coursing Club, at Shilton on December 6th 1975 I discovered that even a single protester can be effective. A major demonstration had had to be cancelled. Disappointed but undeterred I went along alone, planning to simply observe.

After watching two hares being torn by the hounds I was so incensed that I marched onto the field alone, and sat down in the middle.. At first the coursers, thinking I had made some ghastly error, approached me politely and said: "Look 'ere mate, you mustn't sit there."

When I shouted: "I'm on the side of the hare," their mood changed drastically to one of threats and abuse.

A strong deputation came over to "sort me out," but I was saved by the

arrival of a police inspector.

Whereas, at the previous demonstration sabs had been swiftly evicted by the police, this totally impartial officer pointed out to the irate coursers that I had every right to make a peaceful protest — and he stayed with me to make sure everything remained peaceful.

The coursers cursed, but eventually admitted defeat and moved to another field, where they successfully stopped me from following.

The sabotage of the major event, the Waterloo Cup held near Liverpool, commenced with an aerial attack. In 1975 the H.S.A. paid for a helicopter to circle overhead for nearly an hour, scaring the hares away for miles around. This coincided with a peaceful banner demonstration on the ground.

The following year we resorted to the more usual tactics, and on Friday, 13th February I was one of seven people arrested when, after four hares had been killed, we ran onto the field to try and stop the slaughter. Subsequently we appeared at Ormskirk Magistrates Court on the 4th July 1976 and were bound over to keep the peace for 12 months in the sum of £25.

In 1977 the Waterloo Cup was particularly brutal. On the second day 27 hares were killed out of 56 coursed and, as proof that it isn't only the hares that suffer, one greyhound was put down after a hard run resulted in a broken leg.

Not surprisingly when 130 sabs turned up on the third day (11th February) they were determined to end the cruelty. 70 ran on, of whom 37 were arrested and charged, and two reported for charge. Cognisant of my binding over I was forced to stay on the sidelines, but I was able to photograph the proceedings.

The resultant court case gave an indication of the measure of hunting influence on our legal system. Thirty-one were found guilty of "action likely to cause a breach of the peace" and fined. The H.S.A. was advised to appeal and application for legal aid was made in Preston Crown Court, to Judge W. H. Openshaw. All applications were turned down. Nevertheless, the solicitor acting for three defendants from Manchester, offered to act for nothing. Their appeal was held at Preston Crown Court before Judge Dewhurst, who upheld it without even bothering to hear any evidence on the part of the defence. Judge Openshaw was a member of the B.F.S.S., although he neglected to mention it at the time!

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Of all bloodsports, stag hunting was the one surrounded by the most mystique in the 1970's.

Undoubtedly, it is the most bloody and barbaric, one where the quarry once the pack has "locked on," has least chance of escape.

With red deer hunted in Devon and Somerset, and fallow deer in the New

Forest, the roots of the pastime are medieval, its followers clannish and insular. Supporters have fearsome reputations for violence and the whole method of the chase and the kill is ritualistic and primeval.

Many hardened supporters of foxhunting are opposed to stag hunting, yet it is still allowed to continue.

With the uncultivated habitat limited, and farmers keen to maximise their profits, there is a need to manage the numbers of deer. The one efficient and humane method of culling is by an expert marksman using a high powered rifle — a practice condemned strongly by the hunt. It's not so much fun!

In the West Country the hunt usually ranges over an area of thirty miles from start to kill. A seven or eight hour chase, which does not spare the horses or the deer.

Stag hunting differs from other hound sports in that selected deer are hunted. A hunt employee, known as a "harbourer" goes out the night before to locate the deer and select suitable stags for the chase — the fittest and strongest.

At the meet the following day, he reports to the Master and leads off to the deer. The most experienced hounds, known as 'tufters,'' are selected and sent in to find the chosen stag and start the chase.

As in the sabotage of hare coursing we found that one of the best tactics was to drive the quarry out of the area before the meet. For stag hunting that meant the previous night. The actual hunt covered such vast areas that scent masking and false trails were largely impracticable. Once again the hunting horn and false holloas were the most effective weapons for distracting the hounds and confusing the followers. At first the hunt came to every holloa, but they soon realised that they had saboteurs in their midst and were swift to take counter action.



Supporters in Land Rovers and on motorbikes drove at us across moorland and along woodland tracks. They blocked our cars in the narrow Devon lanes, preventing us from following. They threatened to overturn cars and to smash windows.

Violence was only just under the surface. They were tightly knit, suspicious of strangers, unbelievably callous towards wildlife and they were not going to let us spoil their "sport."

We never gave up or gave in. Once the hounds have run a deer to exhaustion there is little hope of saving it, but we did have small triumphs.

Like the day in September 1975, when the Devon and Somerset Staghounds chased a stag towards the League Against Cruel Sports Sanctuary at St. Nicholas Priory, near Dulverton.

We had tried all day to distract the hounds, but by late afternoon the exhausted deer was struggling through woodland on one side of the River Barle, heading for the sanctuary.

Twenty of us arrived and dashed over, warning the hunt supporters not to follow or they would be trespassing. On the riverbank Raymond Rowley, the then Chairman of the League, was warning the hunt off.

The riders were lining the riverbank trying to bar their victim from the safety of League land. As we advanced across the river to form a beat line to drive the deer to safety, the riders gathered around to stop us.

Through all the mayhem of whipcracking and shouting the stag reached the river and crossed to the League's side but, instead of staying within the safety of the sanctuary, he ran off upstream. However, we kicked up such a commotion and caused so much confusion that even though the hounds followed we delayed them long enough to enable the stag to get away. They did not kill that day.

As we became more successful at disrupting hunts, so it became noticeable that violence from hunt followers was escalating.

Confrontations really came to a head with otter hunting the oldest form of hound sport known in this country. Its history dates back 800 years.

Originally, it was practised in the genuine though woefully misguided belief that the otter was a pest. Fishermen complained that otters were killing salmon and trout. With this excuse to kill the species it seemed a good idea to make a "sport" of it as well.

As long ago as last century, naturalists realised that the otter population was dwindling and began to question whether killing them was necessary. Those who had studied the otter's habits discovered that far from causing harm, these creatures were beneficial to fishing. Otters prefer slow moving fish like pike and eels, both of whom consume large numbers of young salmon and trout.

Despite all the evidence hunters continued to pump out lurid stories of the damage otters could do, even going so far as accusing them of rolling in watercress beds! With their influence on the media, they convinced the nation that otters simply must be killed.

The truth of the matter was that otter hunting had assumed a vital place in the hunting calendar, filling the gap between the end of one fox hunting season in April and the beginning of the next in September.

Although it was well known that otters were falling victim in large numbers to pollution, such as that caused by DDT, and were threatened by the increased use of waterways, hunting continued unabated through the 1950's, 60's and well into the 70's.

By their own records the eleven otter hunts in England and Wales, killed no less than 1,065 otters between 1958 and 1963. As late as 1971 the hunts still killed 23, purely for fun.

In opposition to this crime against nature the H.S.A. staged a sit-in at the headquarters of the B.F.S.S. on January 2nd 1974. We demanded an assurance from the B.F.S.S. that no more otters would be hunted and killed. Far from giving any such assurance the hunters taunted us with the boast that otters would be hunted until the last one was killed, stuffed and mounted on a wall plaque!

It was not until 1978 in the face of bitter opposition from the hunt lobby within Parliament that the otter was given protection, but even then hunting was not actually banned. This anomaly allows mink and coypu hunting to continue, an unwelcome disturbance that will drive the otter to extinction.

Until 1978 we diligently sabotaged every otter hunt we could. These hunts were the most secretive of all. They hardly ever advertised their meets, so we were frequently involved in the most elaborate of ruses to discover their whereabouts.

Sabotage was a matter of spraying the banks ahead of the hounds to kill any scent of otter and walking with the hunters along the river banks in case they bolted an otter from a refuge.

If the hounds did find a scent we distracted them by horn blowing and false holloas. On occasions, other more drastic methods were employed. I recall one group of sabs, who, witnessing an otter under merciless attack by hounds, waded into the river to try and help, but without success.

At otter hunts we were inevitably in close contact with the hunt staff and followers and were therefore exposed to the very real risk of their violence. On several occasions when greatly outnumbered, saboteurs would end up being beaten up and thrown into the river.

The Border Counties Otterhounds were a particularly ruthless bunch of animal killers. They drew their support from the unsavoury ranks of foxhunt terrier men and badger-diggers, as well as coursing fanatics — in short the

most vicious elements in the spectrum of bloodsports.

The local equivalent of hunt saboteurs, the Mid Wales Wildlife Conservation Group, were very active and had persuaded many farmers and landowners to ban the hunt. They were also good at putting their case to the media and had whipped up a great deal of public opposition to otter hunting.

On Saturday June 19th 1976, seven of them were following the Border Counties, when they were set upon by twenty supporters of the hunt, anxious for revenge. Five were subjected to a violent ducking, while two of their children looked on. (Years later when on undercover work with the Three Counties Minkhounds, the replacement for the Border Counties, a supporter gleefully boasted to me that at least one saboteur had ceased breathing!) In addition one woman, a semi-cripple, walking with the aid of sticks, and an elderly man, were thrown down a 10ft bank into the river.

The response by the Hunt Saboteurs Association, was to hit back by drafting sabs from all over the country to that hunt in a major effort to prevent otters being killed.

Ninety sabs turned up on the following Saturday, June 26th at Llandinam, near Newtown, Mid Wales, but security had lapsed — the hunt were forewarned and also forearmed. They were out in force.

The clash came on the edges of a nearby lake when the hounds spoke to the scent of an otter and the army of sabs, myself included, moved in to confront the pack and the hunt staff.

Suddenly from the wooded slopes to our left, some fifty burly hunt followers, armed with heavy four foot staves, broke cover and charged at us. It was a totally unfair contest. On one side were the hunt, all burly young men armed and looking for a fight. On the other, the sabs, double in numbers, but all unarmed, pacifist by nature, and made up of two thirds women and children.

The hunt waded straight in, hitting people about the head and shoulders with their poles. The few sabs who did fight back were battered to the ground.

I was carrying my camera and quickly cracked off a few shots before being spotted. Knowing I had evidence that would put them in court, they cut off my escape. I was jumped on, knocked to the ground, my glasses smashed and the camera wrenched from my grasp.

I was given the Devil's alternative, give them the film or have the whole camera thrown in the lake. There was no choice, they got the film.

By the time the battered and bleeding saboteurs made their way back to the road the local police had appeared. We were a sorry sight. Men and women had suffered, there were broken jaws and broken noses, many of us had cut and bleeding faces and had to be taken to hospital. In contrast the hunt followers were unscathed, yet the police remained totally disinterested.

When asked if they were going to take statements the reply was: "We're only local police, we don't want to get involved."



'INCIDENT, OFFICER! WHAT INCIDENT?'

The hunt not only won the fight on the day, they also won the battle in the press, as they were in quick to complain that **they** had been assaulted and had merely defended themselves.

Simon Murray-Wells, Master of the Hunt, made his stance quite clear when he wrote: "You will not stop our sport; you have not yet felt the edge of our anger."

That day had a marked effect on the thinking of many saboteurs, myself included. The combination of merciless hunt violence, police indifference and sympathy shown by the media towards the otter hunters was a potent mix, driving young radicals to further extremes.

If the hunt could use extreme violence without any repercussions, then the opposition would clearly have to come in a more devious form — and with no holds barred. Our resolve to consider any measure in the fight against wanton cruelty was enhanced by our acquisition in 1976 of a bulletin from the Eastern Counties Otterhounds that included the following plea from the Master:

"Help me to kill a few otters this season and I think that next year we will shake the pessimists by showing just how many there are about. We have been keeping a low profile for too many years now, and there is nothing quite like a pack of hounds that is catching otters, to show sport every day we go out. I am taking steps to bring this about..."

CHAPTER THREE

FOR many years there had been low-key vandalism from hunters in response to normal sabotage. It started harmlessly enough with the hunt letting down our tyres. We countered by making foot-pump and spare tyre-valves standard equipment, and trying whenever possible to leave someone guarding the vehicles.

The stakes were raised when the hunt, aware that we used hired vans and would have to pay for damage to them, indulged in a spate of denting, scraping paintwork, smashing windscreeens, and putting sugar in petrol tanks.

With the police and the media showing a near total lack of interest in the combination of physical violence and vandalism by the hunt, the saboteurs had little option but to reply in kind.

Though sugar was put in fuel tanks the reply was also more subtle. Road signs were changed to direct people away from hare-coursing meetings and bloodsport fairs. Hunt kennels were visited at night and chains of rookscarers hung in their vicinity to keep the hounds and staff awake.

Hunt supporters took to following us and snooping around our homes — one of our leading members had his pets pitchforked by hunt followers.

Such actions engendered a great deal of animosity towards all connected with hunting. In 1976 the B.F.S.S. Country Fair at Deene Park near Corby was more than a little impaired when adverts were placed in many local papers announcing its cancellation, the bill for which was mailed to the BFSS!

Hunt balls were also valid targets because they raise a lot of money for bloodsports. They are vulnerable to sabotage as they are often held in marquees in the grounds of large country houses.

As many cars as possible would be immobilised by cutting the heads off drawing pins and pushing the remaining spikes into their locks or ignitions. The raiding party would then cut the main electricity cables leading from the house to the marquee. This plunged the revellers into total darkness and caused havoc.

The commandos encountered two problems in these raids, firstly the blinding flash which followed the cutting of the cable, destroying night vision. But, most hazardous of all, as they crept through the grounds of the mansions they had to avoid courting couples.

During one night attack in Suffolk in mid summer one raider almost fell on top of a near-naked girl. She mistook him for her lover who had gone off to fetch more drinks; it took all his willpower to spurn her advances and beat a hasty retreat.

As the seventies wore on, the hunt became increasingly violent and the sabs retaliated.

Nuisance raids on kennels were replaced by attacks aimed at saving wildlife by stopping the hunt, either by destroying tack or immobilising vehicles. Attack groups typically consisted of five or six people in two cars, well armed and carrying walkie-talkies.

There was never any pretence of looking for physical violence — the target was property vital for foxhunting — but if hunt thugs attempted to interfere, they would no longer be dealing with defenceless opponents.

Such an assault could be far reaching and devastating. I was engaged in an undercover watch at a cubhunting meet of the Essex Hounds in August 1976.

At the 7a.m. start riders and followers were there but the hounds were conspicuous by their absence.

Eventually a hunt supporter drew up to explain that all vehicles at the kennels had been immobilised. They had managed to repair one lorry to get the hounds away, but, a few hundred yards on, the water added to the diesel had taken effect.

The hunt had then phoned the Master and another stalwart supporter living nearby only to find that their vehicles had been treated similarly.

The Essex did not hunt that day. It was game, set and match to the fox.

Contact with other animal welfare groups made me think about other animal abuses; about vivisection, factory farming, the fur trade and whaling. For the first time, groups began to talk about applying the tactics used in hunt sabotage against all animal exploiters. Banner waving protests had been mildly effective, but many felt that aggressive, positive action was also needed.

So a new, militant more active welfare movement emerged, pledged to fight for the animals' cause at all costs.

The first night commandos to strike at vivisection operated under the name of the Band of Mercy, taking their name from the militant and very radical youth group of the RSPCA who operated during the last century.

The basic ethos of this modern Band of Mercy was to attack and destroy, but to harm no living creature either animal or human. Prime targets were, therefore, exploitation centres that were in the process of being built, before they had time to house any animals.

Hoechst Pharmaceuticals built a laboratory in Milton Keynes, where, despite strident opposition, they planned to undertake experiments on animals involving radiation. Whilst still under construction, the building was subjected to arson attacks in November 1973. As a result of this, the radiation experiments were abandoned, though other tests continue.

At other, finished premises, vans used to transport the helpless animals were the target, with the night commandos exposing themselves to great risk of capture in their determination to push them well away from buildings that might house animals before igniting them.

Boats used to slaughter the grey seals in the Wash were also attacked.

Attacks went on throughout the early seventies, but once arson was used the police took the matter very seriously. Vulnerable establishments had their security tightened.

In August 1974, at the O.L.A.C. complex at Blackthorn, nr. Bicester, a registered breeding place for laboratory animals, two Band of Mercy operatives, Cliff Goodman and Ronnie Lee were caught.

The police charged them for that incident and a whole string of earlier offences. A young man was also arrested and charged as an accomplice in the burning of a seal boat. At the subsequent trial, he admitted the charge, but his lawyer pleaded for mercy by claiming he had been led astray. He received a suspended sentence and was fined.

On March 24th, 1975 the other two pleaded guilty to fourteen different charges, including setting fire to vivisection laboratories still under construction, damaging vehicles used to transport animals for experimentation and seal hunters' boats in the Wash.

Cliff was defended by a solicitor who told the court: "Cliff Goodman is not a crank. He is basically an honest young man of integrity. There is a substantial body of opinion that takes the same view as he does."

Ronnie, a trainee solicitor, chose to defend himself. His statement to the court included the following:

"My intentions were to prevent suffering. I did not do it out of hatred and I am not sorry for trying to save weak and helpless animals from death and torture. I have not come to beg for mercy for myself. I ask for justice for those animals, creatures who are so brutally treated by the human kind."

Judge Kenneth Mynett sentenced them both to three years in jail.

CHAPTER FOUR

WITH the jailing of Cliff and Ronnie, illegal activities largely came to an end. Sabotage and banner demonstrations continued, but the night commandos had temporarily had their wings clipped.

Partly as a result of the Band of Mercy, newspapers had taken a renewed interest in animal exploitation and in the Spring of 1975, following months of background work by reporter Mary Beith, the "Sunday People" published the scandal of the Smoking Beagles experiments at I.C.I.

Fearing that proven links between smoking and cancer would cause the collapse of their valuable cigarette markets, the large tobacco companies were involved in a frantic race to produce a tobacco substitute. I.C.I. called their product, "New Smoking Material" or N.S.M.

To test it for safety they used beagles. The dogs were clamped into stocks and forced to inhale the smoke from up to thirty cigarettes a day. After three years, they were killed and post mortems carried out to gauge any ill effects.

The nation was horrified by the callous nature of these experiments. Man chooses whether or not he smokes knowing full well that if he does so he faces a risk of cancer. Why should animals pay for his follies? Particularly as the experiments were of dubious value anyway.

Dr. Kit Pedlar, Chairman of the R.S.P.C.A.'s Animal Welfare Advisory Committee declared: "It is well known that if smoke of any sort is repeatedly inhaled into the lungs, it will cause irritation. The tests cannot but prove anything else.

"It will take twenty to thirty years of close study on the effects on human beings before any true picture emerges. To subject dogs to such experiments, is unnecessary."

There was a massive outcry against these experiments and petitions demanded that they should be banned. Along with other animal welfare radicals, I wondered if the Band of Mercy would have reacted more militantly, if their leaders had not been behind bars.

For me, the situation altered dramatically when I learned, on Saturday June 4th, 1975 from an article in a local paper in Kent that the smoking beagles were to be killed at the end of the following week.

The time for petitions and protests was over. If the beagles were to live it was time for swift, decisive action.

I had just finished my university finals and consequently I was free to act. I made contact with some of our most trusted and experienced saboteurs who lived near to our target — the large I.C.I. complex in Cheshire.

On Monday, June 16th, I moved north. Destination, Alderley Park, Cheshire. The plan — to get some, or all of the beagles out.

The next day was spent doing ground surveillance in the fields and woods around the perimeter of Alderley Park. The whole complex was set in quiet countryside and despite the intimidating security of the main front entrance I found that there was an easy approach from the woods at the rear.

Making sure I was not seen, I climbed the perimeter fence and settled down in the undergrowth.

My job was to locate the dogs and take stock of security posts, fencing and alarms.

When I found the dogs, it was in broad daylight in the middle of a hot summer's afternoon. I had spent long, sweltering hours watching the comings and going of personnel and observing the buildings through binoculars. In the end the dogs made their presence known by their barking. They were housed in a low, brick unit, some distance away from the main buildings.

That day, the back door of the kennel block, the fire door, had been left open because of the heat. Making sure I was unobserved I left my hiding place and ran across yards of open space to the building.

I entered cautiously, peering around the door to make sure no one was inside. I found row upon row of metal kennels with a dog in each. There was a front concrete run and a back compartment to each kennel. The doors had locks, but when I tried one, it opened. Despite the available security, the staff were so over confident that they had become lax.

Just then I heard voices approaching along the corridor. Shutting the kennel door gently, I beat a rapid retreat and slipped back into the woods.

I decided to take immediate action that night. Operating in conjunction with a trusted colleague we planned our tactics. We would take the back route to Alderley Park, switching all but the car's side lights off as we approached, and drive some way into the woods for cover.

The only other person who knew of the conspiracy was our back up contact in the south of England. If we didn't report back to him on time he would know the plan had misfired and could alert the Press.

At 3a.m. we were safely in the woods parked about three hundred yards from the dog unit.

We approached stealthily. Using a screwdriver I levered the door open. It opened easily, but we held our breath anticipating alarms going off. Nothing happened.

We waited another ten minutes to see if any silent alarms had been activated. When no one came to investigate I went in.

My torch lit on the first dog in the row, Major, who cowered away in fright.

Gently I picked him up and took him to my partner waiting outside. There was a moment's panic when, like an idiot, I let the fire door close behind me. I fumbled with the screwdriver, forcing it open again.

Going back to the adjacent kennel I found another terrified beagle, who dashed into the back and forced himself, shaking, into the tightest corner.

Dogs are always likely to bite in this kind of situation, but there was no time for a formal introduction. When I had hold of him he calmed down. I took this second dog, Noddy, outside. It was then that the two dogs decided to take their own part in our adventure. As soon as they met they started to fight. It was as if they had spent their entire lives threatening each other through the mesh and now the blissful moment for combat had arrived. Nothing could have been so badly timed.

We had taken lots of leads, planning to build up a collection of dogs outside the unit, then walk them back to the car. But the dogs made that plan impossible, their only thought was to fight. Major simply would not co-operate when we were walking and Noddy fought to escape the lead.

We ended up carrying both dogs all the way back to the car which consumed a considerable amount of time. I wanted to go back for another couple, but we had problems. We could not leave them alone in the car as they would fight, my partner would have to stay with them.

This meant I was on my own to traverse the wire, get a dog, and ferry it back to the car. We had planned to get many out, now we would be lucky to get another one.

Every other dog would take time and jeopardise the safety of the two we had. It only needed one security man to pass by to ruin the whole operation.

The faces of the other beagles haunted me as we made the reluctant decision to pull out there and then. To this day I bitterly regret the fate of the dogs who didn't get away.

We left Alderley Park at speed, heading south. Once on the motorway we slowed, careful not to attract police attention by exceeding the speed limit.

We made one stop to make two telephone calls — one to our base to say we were on our way, mission accomplished. The other to the Press Association, who would make sure all newspapers told the British public of the beagles escape.

Then, we carried on uneventfully to our destination, where the beagles were passed over into safe hands.

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Ronnie Lee and Cliff Goodman were discharged from prison in March 1976. The early raids by the Band of Mercy and that by myself on I.C.I. had opened the eyes of animal welfare supporters. No longer need they stand

back helplessly while animals suffered.

In the absence of any co-ordinated political drive a new militant body emerged — the Animal Liberation Front. Their aim was the protection of wildlife, relief from suffering for the laboratory animal, and liberation for the captive animal. A whole host of raids were carried out on various exploitation centres.

Word filtered back to the radical animal welfare organisers that as a result the police took a particularly serious view of animal orientated crimes. It was rumoured that even Special Branch were involved.

However, one of the biggest problems facing the police was the attitude of their own officers, who are like anyone else when it comes to compassion towards animals. Called out to investigate A.L.F. raids at animal exploitation centres many realised, perhaps for the first time, the full extent to which animals are forced to suffer in modern society.

They found battery houses with hens living in near perpetual darkness, in tiny cages, upon piles of their own excreta. They entered laboratories to find blind rabbits, cats and dogs with their skulls split open to implant electrodes and living monkeys literally crucified in the name of science. I know that many felt more sympathy with the raiders than with the raided.

There can be only one real explanation for the dismal conviction record for A.L.F. crimes — that many of the police simply did not want to know. When they investigated "crimes" at hunt kennels, doubtless they found the hunt staff, as always, arrogant and ignorant and I personally am convinced that many simply turned a blind eye to what they saw.

It was this aspect that terrified the authorities. When the police themselves give tacit support to law breaking the possibility does exist to subvert society. To counter this the police were sometimes themselves put under great pressure to come up with "a result."

In 1977 there was a great publicity build up in the hunting press for the bi-centenary of John Peel's birth. Though he would have almost certainly hated it, John Peel, his name immortalised in song, is now credited with being the father figure of hunting. His grave at Caldbeck in Cumbria and in particular his headstone, is the shrine which attracts hunters from the length and breadth of the country to pay homage.

In fact, he was simply a misguided farming type, who honestly believed that killing foxes helped to protect his sheep. His form of hunting, on foot, aimed to kill, contrasted sharply with the modern decadent style in the Shires, where foxes are deliberately encouraged and even introduced for hunting. Despite this, modern hunts were determined to exploit the anniversary to the full.

In all the bloodsports magazines John Peel's achievements were exhalted. Time and time again his headstone was shown on TV programmes extolling his virtues and that of the tradition of hunting.

At no time was any attempt made to put John Peel's style of hunting into context with the modern one, even less the suffering of the fox. It was in this climate that people decided something should be done. Various plans were discussed ranging from destruction of the headstone to a banner demonstration.

The whole affair ended up going off half cock. A group was despatched in January but were unable to do more than break a tiny corner off the headstone. A large hole was dug over the grave and a stuffed fox's head — a hunt trophy — left, together with a note bearing the following poem:

John Peel, John Peel come blow on your horn
Come blow till your cruel heart turns blue
No rest for the thousands of foxes you've torn
But at least this one's got the last laugh on you.

The situation was exacerbated when someone untruthfully told the press that the remains of John Peel had been removed and thrown in a cess pit. This was the feature that caught the public eye.

The resultant storm of publicity put intense pressure on the local police. Cumbria only had two heroes — Donald Campbell and John Peel and here was one of them apparently despatched to the sewage works!

During routine checks at Forton Services on the M6, an alert police officer had noted a particular car as belonging to an anti bloodsport person. He was simply checking car number plates with the police computer to see if they were stolen. With the intense A.L.F. and H.S.A. activity at the time it was, and still is, the practice to enter all cars seen at demonstrations on the computer. The actual entry for this car was: Member animal liberation anti bloodsport supporter CRO TX 47 11.1.77. Refers.

The officer thought nothing of this at first, but when he learnt of the raid, he informed his superiors. Following up this lead the police quickly pounced on the owner and his friends, myself included. They raided my flat, searched everywhere tipping drawers out onto the bed, and they found my camera.

On the day of the raid, for which I was photographer, I had taken totally innocent pictures in neighbouring Workington. Although I could not see how they could connect that with the incident, I intuitively felt a nervous twinge. When asked for the film, I opened the camera back hoping it would be destroyed. Seeing my action one officer lunged forward and grabbed it from my hand.

I was almost successful. Only half of one frame remained intact, but it was enough. That half photograph showed two friends standing in a car park in front of a wall daubed with graffiti. There was also a green Fiat in the picture.

The work of the police after that was impressive to say the least. By blowing up that half frame and circulating it amongst their officers, they came up with the location — Workington. The graffiti was unmistakable, perhaps

for the first time the police were grateful for such vandalism.

Next, they concentrated on the number plate of the car in the picture. Although only partly visible, by meticulous analysis they came up with 12 combinations of numbers and letters — only one of these belonged to a green Fiat.

When they contacted the owner it turned out to be a lady who had been in Workington that day to book a holiday which subsequently, due to tragic circumstances, she had to cancel. Because of the nature of her visit she was sure of the date.

The police now had a case against me, it was entirely circumstantial, but they felt it was enough to charge me and my two companions. At Carlisle Crown Court we faced charges of criminal damage to the headstone and desecration of the grave.

I was of course involved to a degree and so should have pleaded guilty, but a lot of the evidence was "doctored" so I chose to fight it out, defending myself.

Following a trial of eight days the jury retired and subsequently brought in a verdict of guilty.

The judge ordered us to be held in custody pending sentence. Although we had recognised the possibility of imprisonment, the reality came as a shock. It hit us even harder as we had walked about as free men until that winter's day.

It was December 7th, the build up to Christmas. Hand cuffed and sitting in the prison van we could look out onto the streets milling with Christmas shoppers. We felt as if we had stepped out of the real world.

Our destination was Durham Jail, one of Britain's top security prisons, normally reserved for dangerous criminals and I.R.A. terrorists.

As we piled out of the van, hand cuffed together, four burly warders with Alsatian dogs stood guard. The dogs hurled themselves the length of their leashes, their teeth snapping only inches from our arms. It was an effective display.

Next came the indignity of the medical, before we were split up and scattered amongst new inmates and short sentence prisoners on A-wing.

My mind in a turmoil, I did not appreciate that the cell high up on the right side of the wing was one of the most coveted in the prison. It overlooked the maximum security E-wing, which held some notorious women criminals.

Regularly these women provided one of the most provocative strip shows outside of Soho — in exchange for the men doing their own display.

The first night was a depressing experience. The light was controlled from the outside, once it was turned out, we were in darkness until morning. There was no toilet, only the pot and when one small bowl is shared between three

men it pays to get in first.

It was also difficult to get used to all the night sounds of prison. Cell mates snoring, or talking in their sleep, distressed and unstable people shouting in their sleep.

After the first night the prison authorities in a welcome gesture of compassion, put the three of us "animal loonies" in a cell together. We were vegetarian and the prison went to extraordinary lengths to accommodate our diet.

In fact, prison has one of the largest proportions of vegetarians in our society. This is not because vegetarians are more prone to criminal actions, nor because animal welfare raiders are always getting caught, but simply because in prison vegetarians get better food.

I saw not only diet conversions, but also religious ones too. That there are a lot of practising Christians in prison reflects the fact that sitting in Chapel for an hour on Sunday is infinitely preferable to sitting in the cell.

For the first two weeks we were in a strange kind of limbo. We were convicted, but not sentenced. The judge had remanded us for reports and told us to seek legal help, so we had a whole series of briefings with solicitors and chats with probation officers.

The solicitor warned us to expect anything from a community service order to nine months imprisonment. The cell lawyers, or fellow prisoners, could not believe that we were there in the first place, on a first conviction for criminal damage amounting to the princely sum of £71.75. They and the prison warders were convinced we would be released.

On December 22nd we appeared before Judge A. A. Edmondson and stood there awaiting his verdict — nine months imprisonment. I was tempted to wish him a Merry Christmas too, but recalled the warning of a fellow prisoner that for a similar contempt he had had his sentence doubled.

We were returned to Durham and appeared before the Governor the following morning. We were told our earliest day of release — June 7th 1978.

Only two days before Christmas, the balmy days of the following summer seemed a long way off. I consoled myself with the thought that for us there was at the least the certainty of freedom, for millions of animals death is their only form of release.

CHAPTER FIVE

WE SETTLED down to accept our lot as best we could. We were split up from the cosy threesome and scattered about D-Wing. I was put in with a young lad who had a long track record of stealing cars.

The other cons found us hard to understand, and not only because of our strange southern accents. Their previous lives had been a training ground for prison. They had had convictions, warnings, approved school orders, detention centres, borstals, probation and community service orders before graduating to Durham.

Yet, there we were, plucked straight off the streets, not even held in custody before the trial, and plunged immediately into prison — all for £71.75 worth of damage. No wonder they could not believe it.

Before the court case, we had expected that in the unlikely event of conviction we might face a rough time in any of the northern jails, where John Peel was supposedly such a hero. Our fears were completely unfounded.

Other prisoners were very friendly to us, as if they welcomed someone different to talk to. During our whole time in Durham only two prisoners were against us, they said we should have got nine years instead of nine months.

Similarly only a few warders were hostile, then only in a joking manner. One, in charge of the wash house would shout out: "Look out, lads, here come the body snatchers."

Other warders made a point of coming to our cells to chat about animals, their protection, vegetarianism and our beliefs. They told us about their pets, and their sympathy for hunted animals. To a man they felt that it was futile our being locked away as we could achieve no useful purpose in prison.

Exercise periods were the highlight of the day. That Christmas, at Durham, it was bright and sunny, and the yard was well aspected, overlooked as it is by the Cathedral. It was laid to grass, but with concrete oval paths. The prison itself formed one wall, and the others, exceedingly high, were topped with razor wire — thin razor blades embedded in wire — which had the awesome reputation of being able to slice a man to ribbons.

At the four corners were concreted squares where officers with dogs stood on guard.

For exercise, prisoners were unlocked in strict rotation and there was no worse fate than to be forgotten. Great long lines would be formed up on landings, and on the shouted command "D-Wing for exercise" we would

wind our way down the stairs to the outside.

Exercise never took place in the rain, presumably because the officers did not like getting wet. For us it was not too bad, as we were short termers, but for people in for many years it must have had a strange effect to never feel the rain. We were not allowed to stop, and by tradition some of the paths were walked in a clockwise direction, others anti-clockwise.

At one side of the rectangle was a brick built toilet block. These were a haven because there one actually had time to perform the necessary function although officers made sure you did not take too long.

Doctors were another prison diversion. Prisoners were always going sick with all kinds of imaginary ailments, and the doctors were well versed in the traditional army cure for such malingerers — an injection in the backside.

There was also sadness and misery in prison. Two fears were ever present, that a loved one would run off with someone else, or that someone dear to you would fall seriously ill or die.

The rules only allowed prisoners out to visit the death bed of a blood relative or their funeral. While I was inside one man learned that his young child had been gravely injured in a road accident. It was tragic.

One abiding memory of Durham is of Paul McCartney's "Mull of Kintyre." That was in the charts all through my stay and seemed to permeate every cell in the building.

A much sadder memory concerned a young man whose cell was adjacent to mine on D-Wing. He was married with numerous kids, had a terrific sense of humour and seemed to have spent all his life in conflict with the law. He was very easily led into trouble and hated all kinds of authority.

He first came to Durham, remanded in custody on a minor charge. One of the rules that officers were strict in enforcing was getting up in the morning. When this lad failed to rise, an officer tipped him out of bed and in the following skirmish the officer was hit.

Ironically, when he went to court the lad was acquitted of his original charge, but convicted of assaulting the officer and jailed. To be in Durham for assaulting an officer is a serious predicament to be in. The other officers made his life a misery. After I left Durham to go to open prison I learned that he had been transferred to another closed prison and had nanged himself in the punishment block.

We were lucky, after a boring spell sewing mailbags we were given one of the plum jobs, working in the catering and cleaning division. Prisons only function at all thanks to the work of the prisoners. There are convict cooks, convict cleaners, convict barbers, librarians and gardeners all contributing to this subculture.

Working in the catering section we gained considerable freedom, our cells were seldom locked. This was valuable as we had previously been separated.

Most of the day was spent on our hands and knees scrubbing appointed landings or the main floor with a bucket, a green scourer, and a bar of soap.

At mealtimes we collected the food and served it out. We were always closely supervised to ensure we did not show any favouritism.

Our last daily routine was to take the soup and buns around in the evening. By visiting each cell, we were a vital link in the prison telegraph system. Nearly all prison information was transmitted through the catering division. In due course I was transferred to Kirkham open prison, near Preston.

Open prisons are worlds apart from closed ones. Kirkham, a former R.A.F. camp was a prison farm, where cons were housed in rows of open billets with twenty men in each. Every hut had wash basins, toilets and that almost forgotten luxury — baths.

The routine was to work through the day in one of the many greenhouses or the packing station. In the evening, we watched colour television, played table tennis or took part in other sporting activities.

The camp had an enthusiastic football team and the officers were able to arrange matches against local teams. Of course, ours always had the home advantage and a captive audience. On one occasion they even brought in a local police team — as expected the tackles went in hard on both sides.

I worked in the packing station, cutting eyes out of potatoes moving by on a conveyor belt. The work could hardly be described as interesting, but we had the freedom to talk and it was infinitely preferable to any mailbag shop.

Time passed surprisingly quickly. It was little different to the boarding school life of my youth. We had a film show once a week and even had the very first telephone installed for use by convicts in the entire prison system.

We were warned that calls would be regularly monitored, even so there were massive queues to use it, despite the dent it made in our small allowances.

The ethos of open prison is that you are on trust. Fencing is minimal, designed to keep people out rather than in. However, anyone who abused the trust and tried to escape, or was caught outside the wire was immediately returned to a closed prison and lost their remission.

People with a history of escapes or of violence were barred. Only those with the lowest security rating were allowed to go there.

At one time in my hut people did start to go out at night, slipping out to the local pubs. They came back reeking of booze, boasting of their romantic conquests. Inevitably they talked too much, were caught, and did the rest of their sentence behind closed doors.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of prison was the complete absence of any form of counselling to help prisoners not to return. The system seems only to be

geared to holding people, keeping them out of trouble until their release when they were waved goodbye. It seemed to cry out for someone to talk to the men, to try to help them go straight.

Eventually, my time came. On June 7th, 1978, I was given back my civilian clothes, a rail warrant to my chosen station, and shown to the gate.

My first task was to pick up the diary I had thrown over the fence the previous evening. Prisons are notoriously strict at confiscating diaries. I was determined that one day, mine would serve a useful purpose.

CHAPTER SIX

WAITING to board the train for home I realised how cushioned we had been from the rigours of the outside world. Now I was plunged back into the simple responsibilities I had forgotten, like buying food and washing clothes.

Throughout my time inside, prison officers continually warned me that I would never get work, that I had ruined my life. It was hard for an ordinary person to get a job, it would be hopeless for an ex-con. They could not have been more wrong.

I was released on a Wednesday and was in regular employment by the following Monday, thanks entirely to a close friend in the H.S.A., Alan Knight. He worked for a T-shirt printing firm in Brighton, and when he learned that they were looking for a full-time van driver recommended me for the job. I was still inside at the time, so he had to stall for a few weeks by saying I had to work out my notice!

I knew that I had been given a rare chance and threw myself wholeheartedly into the work, prepared to work all hours. It was always possible that my employers might find out my previous record and I wanted to get some good record of service under my belt first.

My return to animal welfare work started soon after my release. With plenty of time to think carefully in prison, it had dawned on me that our goals would not be reached by combat alone.

Short of a revolution, animals will only be helped by Parliament. It requires a groundswell of public opinion, a wave of anger based on sound, proven arguments to bring new legislation.

Forced into a critical analysis of animal welfare from the outside I perceived the movement as a broad front, embracing all ages and classes in society; encompassing people whose idea of action varied from writing letters to papers and M.P.'s, holding banner demonstrations, marches and hunt sabotages, to more direct approaches.

Forms of direct action such as hunt sabotage and protest marches against vivisection and seal culling, certainly fulfilled the role of attracting young people, people who felt a real need to achieve something and to be seen to do so. For them political action lacks any charisma, its wheels move too slowly.

With animal suffering ever on the increase there is tremendous pressure on newcomers to enter the realms of illegal activity to try and stem the tide. Before people embark on such roads they should consider all the angles. In the months before I was jailed I can recall many discussions as to alternative methods of attack. Removing animals from laboratories was all very well, it gave the vivisectors bad publicity by exposing what they were doing, but

the animals were easily replaced.

Arson and other destructive attacks on premises will certainly delay the infliction of cruelty, but will not end it. Moreover in the face of sustained criminal attacks, media and therefore public sympathy, had a tendency to favour those who had been attacked — the animal exploiters.

I felt that instead of night raids to cause damage, photographic evidence should be collected and released to the media. Directly or indirectly the public paid for the research, they had a right to know what was going on.

Such attacks have now been refined to near perfection by the Northern Animal Liberation League and other associated groups. It was one of their raids which recently exposed that pets really are stolen for vivisection. It is so easy to move on into totally illegal realms, becoming a hot-headed, no hold barred militant. The extremist will certainly catch the attention of the media and is of value to the cause, but we must remember that today's headlines are tomorrow's fish and chip papers.

I remember in the mid-seventies a plan being hatched to send a team over to Spain to disrupt a bull-fight by running on with banners. We knew it would near enough be a suicidal attack, with the bull, the matador or the crowd "accounting for" the team, but the plan was advanced to the point of getting passports and making travel plans.

Had it gone through and the group been killed, the incident would have made a few columns in national papers, loved ones would have wept over the coffins, but bull-fighting would still continue.

On the morning of October 4th 1971, the day of St. Francis, Patron Saint of Animals, Mrs. Olive Parry, housewife and mother knelt down in the churchyard of St. John's, Worcester, and ignited herself with paraffin. Her last message, with her when she died, read:

"I am Mrs. Parry. This is my last protest against vivisection and other cruelty inflicted on defenceless animals."

This, the supreme act of sacrifice was intended to draw public attention to the awesome burden of suffering inflicted on animals. That suffering still continues and Mrs. Parry is forgotten by all but her closest loved ones.

Publicity is very transient. If an A.L.F. commando took over the whole of Fleet Street and forced every national paper to concentrate solely on animal welfare issues for an entire week, it would still change nothing. People would simply read and say, "That's bad, but where's the T.V. page?"

After many years in which the full horrors of war and famine abroad have been brought to our living rooms by the ever efficient media, the nation is in danger of being desensitized.

I became certain that within the confines of my own specialist interest — bloodsports, the opposition would be defeated without recourse to illegal action. All that was needed was clever scheming.

I began to look outside the realms of hunt sabotage and militant action for ways of building the wave of public opinion that would bring political action.

I had lengthy chats with Dick Course, then Chairman of the League Against Cruel Sports, always a close friend, about the direction the movement was taking.

In the October 1974 election I helped Dick and others distribute 20,000 leaflets in the constituency of Marcus Kimball, at the time Chairman of the B.F.S.S., outlining the full extent of his bloodsporting interests. Compared to the previous election Kimball suffered a 13.6% drop in votes and a 36.1% drop in his majority!

In the 1979 election, L.A.C.S. and H.S.A. combined in support of Bob August, chairperson of the H.S.A., standing as Independent Conservative against Kimball — he cost Kimball nearly 700 votes. In the same year I joined the League.

The League had trundled along quite happily since 1924. By combining the future H.S.A. tactic of banner demonstrations with some political guile they were to a degree successful. Due notably to the determined opposition of one League stalwart, Gwen Barter, the practice of carted deer hunting in which tame stags were hunted by hounds, caught, then hunted again, was abandoned on the English mainland. The pastime still continues in Northern Ireland.

With the birth of the H.S.A. in the early sixties and its influence the League inevitably declined. The policy of buying up land to serve as sanctuaries for wildlife, particularly deer, was started; this proved to be very popular with the middle aged, but it could in no way halt the draw of young people to the H.S.A.

The League at the time was in the control of elderly conservatives who it was felt, had too much sympathy for the establishment. It was the H.S.A. that caught the imagination of youth. However, in the early seventies a slow drift began from the H.S.A. to the League. Within the League there was the inspiring personality of Dick Course, a man who had the vision to see, even at that time, that the only real future lay in the politica' drive. In addition Mark Davies, now Chairman, was doing excellent work in the League office, as its Secretary.

By the mid to late seventies matters at the League came to a head and there was an out and out power battle between the new militants and the established old guard. The old guard made the fundamental error of forgetting that a campaigning organisation is judged only by its achievements. Those who control it may say whatever they like, but it is their strength of mind, fire and determination to succeed that really counts in the eyes of the members. In the end Dick Course won his battle with almost embarrassing ease.

Accordingly it was a reborn League that I had joined, a League that had

regained its sense of direction.

In the autumn of 1979, I switched jobs, had a spell of stacking shelves in a supermarket then after a few months of that I went on a three week blinder. I had always fancied my chances as a photographer, and I eventually realised that if I did not make the opportunity myself, no-one else would. Russia had just invaded Afghanistan and photographers were streaming over the border, so I collected all my money and flew out to Pakistan.

Normally photographers are commissioned for such trips. I had nothing other than a vague promise from the Daily Express that they would look at my work when I returned. I had no contacts and knew no-one when I arrived in Peshawar, but I quickly made friends with the local guerrilla groups, the Mujahideen.

After two weeks, I linked up with a Mujahideen group that was due to cross into Afghanistan many miles to the north, near Chitral. Also in our group was the Middle Eastern correspondent for the Observer and a Swiss journalist. After many changes of plans that included the daunting prospect of climbing over snow covered peaks at an altitude where oxygen should be carried, we ended up crossing in to link up with a small supply group.

We were all dressed up as Pathans and were even taught a few choice phrases, should we be unfortunate enough to encounter a Pakistani border patrol. The trip into Afghanistan lasted only five days, though we covered a considerable mileage. We had the dubious pleasure of being involved in one battle that gave every indication of having been stage-managed for the benefit of ourselves, the Western press!

I found it somewhat grotesque that men were willing to kill and be killed to produce a few pictures and column inches in papers read by a society that cared little either for their cause or their fate anyway.

The most sickening story I heard concerned the shooting of prisoners by the Mujahideen. A group of Afghans sympathetic to the Russians had been captured. To prove how merciless the Mujahideen were and what a hard war they were fighting, the prisoners were lined up and machine-gunned for the benefit of a photographer, whose pictures of the event were subsequently published throughout most of Europe. When I asked the photographer if the men would have been shot had he not been present, he said, "Of course not." The horror showed on my face. "You're too sentimental," he said.

The other disconcerting feature of life with the Mujahideen is their fervent belief that they can only attain the Islamic version of heaven if they die in a religious war. This certainly explained their occasional use of kamikaze-style tactics, but it did nothing to ease the qualms of westerners travelling with them.

I came home from Afghanistan more than a little disillusioned with my fellow man. If there was any pleasant memory it was of the fact that despite the decadence and destructive nature of western civilisation man **can** tread

lightly on the earth.

In the mountains of the Hindu Kush the people live a life that, though undeniably hard, given the freedom to farm as they wish, can be perfectly adequate. They seemed to exist on a diet of the equivalent of two slices of bread a day and a glass of milk, and a piece of fish or meat every other day with the occasional fruit, yet they were tough and superbly fit. When we complained of the rigours of the heat, the march, and the weight of our rucksacks, one young lad picked up all three rucksacks and ran up the mountain side. No wonder our armies never conquered that nation.

Their animals were treated with compassion and consideration, they had to be, their well-being was their owners' well-being too. Like us, the Afghan enters the world with nothing and leaves with nothing, but unlike us he destroys very little in between — no pollution, no destruction;, harmony with the countryside. The young children that we found playing by a stream had the brightness of eye and the innate will to play the simple, human, games that western man, submerged beneath his technology, has long forgotten. In reality they had nothing, but in that they had everything.

On my return I attempted to sell my pictures, but only succeeded in gaining minimal payment from the Daily Express for my black and white portfolio. It was a paltry contribution to my £1,000 expenditure. Flat broke I went to work for my close friend, and now League colleague, John Hicks who, with his wife, Jo, managed Foal Farm Animal Sanctuary near Biggin Hill, Kent.

Foal Farm is an animal rescue centre, taking in all manner of unwanted or injured animals and homing them wherever possible. When I joined, the farm existed in the middle of an uneasy truce between the new enthusiastic workers and the old conservative committee. After many years of neglect by the old guard, the farm had degenerated into complete disarray, it was nearly submerged under a mountain of manure and rubbish. They saw that one way to cure the problem was to bring in young radicals who had the fire and determination to work countless hours each day, then, as soon as the farm was clean and running well again — get rid of them.

When it came to caring for the animals there was a kind of harmony between the factions where the cats, dogs and horses were concerned, but sadly total war over the other creatures. The differences were fundamental and I mention them because they are the essence of so many of the arguments that have continued within animal welfare.

To the committee, sheep, pigs and hens were food animals and it was dangerous to care for and love them, while their fellows were offered for sale in sandwiches and pies in the canteen. Instead of getting rid of the sandwiches and pies, they wanted to get rid of the animals. Wild animals such as foxes were considered vermin, and were unwelcome. The farm had a policy of homing as many animals as possible. Wisely the homes were checked before and after the animals were placed. Though countless numbers of animals were helped it was obvious to us that we were only



Mujahideen fighter, Afghanistan, 1980.

scratching the surface.

The problem of stray cats and dogs is now so massive that the R.S.P.C.A. despite homing thousands of animals themselves, have no choice but to humanely destroy some 2,500 of each species, every **week.** In the circumstances it is clear that there is a desperate need for spaying and neutering. This should be a free service, paid for by a Government tax on the profits of the pet food industry. It is disgraceful that it is left to voluntary animal welfare groups to do the best they can.

Work at Foal was often heart-rending, caring for the living cast-offs from an affluent society. There was Bud, a beautiful "Lassie" Collie with a badly set front leg. He was dumped at the end of the drive, tied to the barbed wire with a scrawled note attached to the boot-lace round his neck: "Bud 3 years old, please help."

There were the people who achieved the amazing feat of making a six month old golden retriever puppy, vicious. A near killer that would bite on sight. It took a great deal of care and close attention to teach that dog that not all humans were cruel.

There were also amusing incidents like the all too frequent ritual of hosing out the ducks. There were a considerable number of chickens, ducks, and geese roaming free range about the farm. To protect them from predators they had to be rounded up and locked away at night. The chickens were easily conned into their hutches by the lure of food. The cockerels made a run of it across the field and it usually required several rugby tackles to stop them, but the mallard ducks were the worst. They would take up residence under one of the wooden sheds, well out of reach and simply refuse to move. To shift them we had to bring up the hoses. A soft gentle spray and they simply preened their feathers. It took a good hefty jet before they tumbled out with much indignant quacking, they never really appreciated that it was for their own good.

Inevitably, when Foal Farm was on its feet the committee decided to step in. When the final power battle came, the radicals rallied round John and Jo. For a time, there even appeared to be a possibility that they might win, but the committee held the trump card. According to their constitution they could expel anyone who disagreed with them, which is exactly what they did.

John Hicks and his wife were sacked and their staff resigned in sympathy. The farm was handed back to its former custodians and there it remains.

Some months before the final curtain, I left to take up my position with the League. The possibility of this undercover operation had first been raised in November 1980 and after months of meetings and lengthy discussions I commenced work in April 1981, operating at first against stag-hunting in the West Country.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was April 28th, from a grassy hedgerow I looked across the grey, misty Devon fields, my binoculars trained on the pink coats of the huntsmen and tri-colour patches of the staghounds. Ahead of them, heading for cover in a wood was a small stag.

It was my first day out with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, in my guise as a full supporter. To mingle with the regulars I had adopted their way of dress and their way of talking. My car was covered in hunting stickers including the most important sticker of all, the British Field Sports Society roundel.

I wore the traditional tweed cap, and waxed ¾ length shooting jacket that is the prime indicator of the genuine hunt supporter. This "uniform" alone was one of the main reasons why so many hunting people accepted me.

My earlier hunting experience now came into its own, I knew the jargon and knew other hunts well enough to pass muster.

The one thing I lacked was staghunt stickers, which could only be obtained by attending the hunt and paying the "cap." This is collected before the meet by supporters with armbands, standing on all access roads. In return for a donation a day sticker is put on the windscreen of your car. Anyone who does not pay is severly hassled and their car is blocked. I collected my first staghunt sticker that day.

The staghunters and their supporters had gathered an hour before the meet. I arrived some twenty minutes before the off. I was friendly but avoided too much discussion as to my identity.

Lengthy conversations could have been dangerous, as I had not at the time decided on a false name, a false address and background. I was simply an observer. From past experience I knew that this gossiping time before any meet was a chance to hover and learn from other people's conversations.

That day, as in the days that followed, I listened to horrific tales of deer threshing about entangled in barbed wire, of stags swimming reservoirs only to be attacked by hounds as they emerged exhausted. I learned to hide my feelings and join in the uproarious laughter that followed.

When the hunt moved off I joined the long crocodile of motorised traffic that trailed after them. Cars, Land Rovers and motor bikes roared around narrow country lanes, for an occasional glimpse of the hunt and the stags.

It went on and on from morning until five in the afternoon, when I found myself with four cars and their occupants gazing over flat empty fields. Other supporters began to filter past us. I stopped one and asked where the hunt were. Pointing into the distance, he said: "They killed about 20 minutes ago, in the brook over there."

I jumped into my car and headed in that direction, but found my way blocked with double parked cars. I pulled hard into the left hand side and got out. I pondered about my camera. I had made a point of taking plenty of pictures at the meet and during the hunt saying I was a budding Jim Meads, a well known hunt photographer. Could I risk taking my camera in to photograph the kill on my very first staghunt?

Recalling the old ALF maxim "Once decided, it is as good as done," I ran ahead, camera at the ready.

I must admit though that seeing the alarming bunch of thugs gathered around the carcass, my heart did miss a beat.

I was a late arrival, they had already sliced up and shared out the liver to the following throng. Children were running everywhere clutching pieces of steaming liver, often in their bare hands, sometimes in handkerchiefs, or carefully wrapped in empty crisp bags.

As I arrived the huntsmen tipped out the stomach and entrails and were helping the dead stag to his feet to shake out the last remaining drops of blood. People looked menacingly at me when I aimed my camera and reeled off some shots, but no-one said a word.

With the stomach removed, the carcass was dragged aside and the hounds called to it, as their reward. Before they were allowed near the steaming intestines a strange, almost primitive ritual took place. Huntsman, Dennis Boyles, shouting and waving his whip over the remains, goaded the hounds into a frenzy, holding them back all the time. When they were judged to be sufficiently excited he stepped aside and allowed the hounds to tear at the stomach, ripping it to shreds in seconds.

In close-up to get pictures, like the rest of the supporters I was showered with blood and the foul smelling, part digested grass, the contents of the stag's stomach. My discomfiture clearly showed and the rest of the supporters laughed at me being caught in such a fashion.

Attention then turned to the main carcass. The skin on each leg was cut just above the knee and peeled back to the ankle. The ankle was then broken, twisted off and the resultant slot, or hoof, with a glove of skin was offered as a souvenir to anyone prepared to pay a small donation.

When all four slots were taken, the carcass was left to the inquisitive supporters. The hunt staff moved away to joke and chat with the Masters, accepting coffee, soup and sandwiches from other supporters. Those around the stag poked it and prodded it, examined its teeth to try and gauge its age, and pulled tufts of hair from it to tuck under the flaps of their caps. Some favoured hounds were allowed to move in on the carcass, to lick the blood off its legs, or stick their heads inside the torn belly and lap the blood within.

After about 30 minutes, the riders began drift away, the foot followers shuffling behind them. The carcass was left on the ground, I was told that

someone would come to collect it in due couse. I lingered to take a photograph of the dead stag with the supporters disappearing in the background and when they saw me most turned round and smiled, pleased at their success.

I followed the subsequent and last hunt at the end of April, but there was no kill.

Though it is called staghunting it does in fact vary throughout the year. From August till the end of October the big old males with the full spread of antlers — the Autumn stags — are hunted. Then from November to the end of February the females — the hinds — are hunted, usually together with their young calves. During March and April the Spring stags with their very short, newly formed antlers, are hunted.

This separation of sex and age range is in no way designed to help the deer. Red deer rut in early Autumn, during October.

AUTUMN STAGHUNTING

Autumn staghunting starts for the Devon and Somerset and Quantock packs early in August. The Tiverton, whose country covers the lowlands south of Exmoor, have far more problems with crops so they start considerably later, usually well into September.

The autumn stags are creatures of habit and accordingly are harboured. The harbourer employed by the hunt checks their location the previous night and reports on their whereabouts to the Masters at the meet. All the hounds are paraded at the meet and are then returned to a horsebox. Only five or six couple (10 or 12) of the most experienced hounds, known as Tufters, are selected.

The tufters are also the steadiest and the most responsive to commands. Once they are started on the selected stag they can be expected to stick to it and not to riot after any other deer. Their job is to find the deer and hunt him for some time. Once the deer has been running for a while he begins to emit a distinctive scent (caused by fear) which can easily be tracked by the remaining, inexperienced hounds, that form the bulk of the pack.

In August 1981 I returned to the West Country, and started the new season at the meet of the Quantock Staghounds at Volis Cross on August 19th. This time I was in a hired Ford Escort, which avoided the problem of having to use my own extremely recognisable car. Little happened that day of any interest other than my having a marvellous view of a beautiful stag running at speed through high corn. All that was visible was his head of antlers. Of course the tufters piled in behind him and together they cut a great swathe through the corn, which seemed ironic considering that the chief reason given for hunting deer in the first place is that they damage crops!

The day was hot, the scent was bad, and even though the main pack was

released, the hounds were never able to get on terms with the stag, and fortunately he escaped.

Next day I was with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, meeting at Potters Cross. I soon learnt that one of the biggest problems with staghunting was to find the meets. The country for the Devon and Somerset covers a massive area and it is possible to spend hours scouring Ordnance Survey maps looking for obscure crosses and gates. Unlike fox and hare hunts, staghunts more often than not, meet on the open moorland. The easiest solution was to phone the kennels and ask them for directions. Though these were usually readily given, one was vulnerable to being asked for name and phone number, so I was relucant to do so. The best way to find the meets was to ask the experienced supporters at the end of the previous one.

Again there was no kill, but the hounds stuck very close to the stag and pushed him extremely hard. He saved his neck by running through sheep foil to lose his scent, just north of the main A361 and then crossing this busy main road. The most interesting incident occurred when the trailing hounds entered the field of sheep. The sheep flocked together and charged the hounds putting them to flight, looking almost as if they were on the side of the stag. It caused astonishment to the staghunters; almost invariably it is the hounds chasing the sheep.

On August 22nd the Devon and Somerset Staghounds met at Mounsey Hill Gate, right in the centre of Exmoor. With the morning misty and wet I knew the scent would be good and when one of the Joint Masters, seeing that it was the turn of the doghounds, commented, "These are a right bunch of killers," it was clear that the deer were in for a hard time. The stag was quickly away. Riders were directed to try and prevent him reaching the safety of any League sanctuaries, and the main pack was laid on. The hunt progressed into the afternoon with the tiring stag twisting and turning. When he tried to run in amongst thick gorse and lie down for safety the hounds checked, but the riders moved in cracking their whips to evict him. Eventually in late afternoon the stag arrived near Marsh Bridge, west of the B3223. This tiny, winding, downhill road was soon completely blocked as the supporters strained for a closer look.

I parked and ran down the line of cars, hearing whistles and shouts from the river below. The stag was only just in front of the hounds. Then the traffic moved on and downwards towards Marsh Bridge. This isolated, seemingly innocent bridge, appears totally insignificant to tourists stopping to stare at the waters below, or to eat their lunches in the shade of the nearby trees, but for many deer it represents the end of the hunt and the end of their lives.

That summer's afternoon the whole area was packed solid with Land Rovers, cars, motorbikes, horses and milling followers. The hounds were heard baying frantically nearby, the horn was blowing triumphantly. It was all mayhem and confusion. No-one really knew where the deer was, only that it was approaching the bridge, along one of the small tributaries.

Supporters lined the bridge and peered over the hedgerows. I followed a group into a grass field adjacent to the tiny stream that formed the tributary.

The baying rose to a crescendo to herald the coming of the stag. I removed the lens cap on the camera, checked the aperture and shutter speed and noted with alarm that I had only a few frames left. Those closest to the trees lining the brook were holloaing, and screaming that the stag had passed them. The hounds were following through the undergrowth and on the grass alongside. The bridge ahead was too low for the stag to pass under, and with so much shouting and screaming on either side he was headed back.

He saw the hounds ahead and jumped left handed into the grass field where I was standing. I reached for the camera, but he had jumped back into the undergrowth before I could even focus. The supporters around me, many of them young kids screamed "We've got him now!" Hurriedly I changed the film.

I ran down the sloping grass, climbed through barbed wire and fought my way through the undergrowth surrounding the brook. The terrified stag crashed just passed me, antlers missing me by barely a few feet. I knew the end was near. The area of marshland was full of supporters and hounds, there was no escape. I circled right handed towards the bridge thinking that the kill would be there. Then the commotion shifted to an area behind me.

The hounds were now baying their blood-curdling cry of death. All hunting hounds will speak to a scent, and they will bay even more excitedly when they close on their quarry and can see it. Fox and hare hounds will go straight in and attack their quarry and for them the baying is soon replaced by ripping and tearing. Staghounds are different, fearing the stag's antlers they hang back, baying. The sound at such a time is chilling. The baying rises to a whole new pitch of excitement and the sound of some 40 hounds growling in this fashion is truly menacing. Once heard it is never forgotten.

Hearing this sound for the first time I fought my way towards it. Other supporters were struggling along narrow footpaths, but I knew that I had to be first. I went straight through the marshes and ended up wading up to my waist, camera held high. As I closed on the dreadful cries, my only fear was that it would all be over before I arrived. I knew that I could not help this stag, but if I could record what happened it would help others. I punched my way over and through some flimsy barbed wire, pulled aside some bushes and encountered a scene that haunts me to this day.

There was a small pool no more than 20 yards in diameter, surrounded by encroaching foliage. In the centre the stag was swimming frantically, with his head twisting from side to side, looking up and staring with fear. In the pool with him and swimming after him were the bulk of the pack, while other hounds stood on the margins of the pool baying viciously.

Knowing that seconds counted I swung the camera up, focused on the staring eye and captured the frame that I will never forget. One hound was

on the stag's back and 16 others almost on him. There was shouting and commotion behind me as other supporters arrived. Moving round the right hand side of the pool ahead of the stag they caught his antlers when he reached them. The hounds closed in, tearing at his flanks and back. The supporters tried to fend the hounds off kicking out and beating them back with their caps.

I cracked off some photographs, but unfortunately the head of the stag was concealed by the dense vegetation on the pool margins. The hunt servants arrived and I knew that it was time to make myself scarce with the camera. My experience with the Border Counties Otterhounds had taught me that hunting people will readily seize valuable pictures, and both they and I knew how valuable that photograph was.

I moved back as crowds of supporters swept in. It was difficult to make out what was happening, but eventually after minutes that seemed to drag on interminably I heard the crack of the pistol that indicated for that proud stag at least suffering was over. The stag had been dragged out onto the bank and the pistol pressed to its head.

After the kill, I felt safe returning to the scene because hunting people are less wary of dead animals being photographed. I adopted the attitude that I had only just arrived and they gleefully told me how they had caught him in the pool.

The ritual I then witnessed was unlike anything I had ever seen previously in all my hunting experience. The whipper-in had hold of the stag's antlers and was feverishly banging the head on the ground and screaming to the hounds like a dervish. The hounds responded by baying, barking and snapping. Blood, oozing from the stag's gaping head wound, was spraying everywhere.

It was gruesome and darkly satanic, a blood ritual designed to whip hounds and supporters up to a passionate intensity. When it had subsided a path was cleared through the undergrowth and the body of the stag dragged aside. There was a pause whilst a Land Rover was summoned to collect the body. In the delay curious children crowded round the carcass and some of the adults peeled off the tattered velvet from the antlers and gave it to them.

The Land Rover took the stag to a clearing at the top of a nearby hill. Dubious about following and not wanting to risk losing the pictures I had, I eventually trailed along behind them. There was the usual crowded huddle round the body whilst the liver was shared out.

I was surprised when the hunstmen wrenched the stag's mouth open and started fiddling with its teeth. I had seen supporters do this to the spring stag in April, I presumed to try and age it, but what was Dennis Boyles up to this time? The answer was not long in coming, taking out a pair of pliers he began pulling the teeth out. These 'tushes' are revered trophies sold to supporters to wear on neck pendants.

The last staghunt meet of that particular trip was of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds at Wheddon Cross on August 25th. The League have a sanctuary right in the middle of their woodland draw at this meet, and with increased patrols by John Hicks, the League Warden, the hunt have to be particularly careful. On that day they were also concerned to prevent the deer heading too far south, because of further League sanctuaries in that direction.

It was a scorching hot day and with the scent poor it seemed unlikely that the hounds would kill, particularly as the stag was content to run round and round the first draw. But eventually, late in the afternoon, the stag made the mistake of coming away from the protection of the woodland, crossed the main A396 at Sully Corner and was soon in dire trouble.

Once again I was caught up in streams of single file traffic on the narrow lanes. When all the cars stopped and the occupants ran on ahead, I did likewise. The action moved further downstream and three other supporters ran back to bring up their cars, I left mine where it was and ran ahead on foot. Vehicles could just squeeze by me, but it would certainly hold them up. I may be posing as a supporter, but there was nothing like a bit of inadvertent sabotage!

I was moments too late. Running alongside the woodland I heard a shot. The stag had come out of the brook and stood at bay in some slight cover — then it was all over. I returned to the car to find some mighty irate drivers behind it, but the usual profuse apologies were enough to convince them of my innocence. The carcass was taken right back to the original meet. I was there in good time to see and photograph all that happened. I had by that time made some good friends in the hunt and they were kind enough to hold back the swelling throng to enable me to photograph Dennis Boyles cutting up the liver.

After the hounds had been given their reward and the slots taken, they then went to work to remove the teeth. These were sold to a group of keen young children from the Pony Club, whom I also photographed. A middle-aged man then proudly shepherded forward his two young daughters and asked Dennis to blood them.

The practice of blooding children is a barbaric ritual. Its aim is to form a satanic bond between the new aspiring hunter, and his or her chosen sport. People are only blooded once in their entire lifetimes, but it is an initiation ceremony that is still regarded as essential by the old school of hunter.

When it is done in foxhunting it is traditional for the blood and faeces stained stump of the fox's severed brush to be daubed across the child's forehead and possibly down each cheek as well. The child is then given strict instructions not to wash the blood off.

In staghunting there is obviously no bloody brush, but after reaching inside the stomach to tip the contents out and cutting up the liver, the huntsman's

arms are running in blood from the fingertips to the elbows.

Knowing that there was a valuable picture in the offing I watched Dennis and prepared to act. I had anticipated some kind of formal ceremony and consequently when Dennis simply reached across, smiling, and dabbed each child on the cheek, I was too slow. However, when I asked one of the kids to pose for me she was happy to do so. The looks on the supporters faces in the background made it quite clear that they were aware of the potential danger of a blooded child being photographed, but I smiled disarmingly at them.

When I reported back to the League, Dick Course and the committee were well pleased with the photographs and I was instructed to continue the work, and to try and take some movie film as well.

I was back in the West Country on October 3rd at the meet of the Devon and Somerset at Cuzzicombe. It was a day of torrential rain and though the hunt were persistent, carrying on right up until 6.30 p.m., it was clear that the stag had the better of the hounds. October 6th found me with the Devon and Somerset at West Buckland with Ena Kendall from the Observer. Ena had glimpses of deer running hither and thither, but saw nothing of any consequence. There was no kill.

The next morning I followed the Quantock Staghounds from their meet at Seven Milestone, on the fringes of the Quantock hills. I had both movie and still cameras with me and was able to get some excellent film of the hounds rioting after young stags, known as prickets. The stag they wanted was most reluctant to leave the thick woodland of the first draw, but when he did he went away at speed towards Holford. The usual hectic chase ensued, with the stag at one point crossing the road some 50 yards behind my car, forcing other supporters to swerve to a halt.

The tufters were sticking tight and the scent was evidently good. The stag was viewed crossing a grass field heading towards Holford and he was clearly tiring. The full pack was then brought up in their trailer and released. Sensing that the end was near I sped round to the League's sanctuary at Alfoxton, just outside Holford. The stag never made it there though, instead he was headed in the village by a large group of followers and turned back in the direction from whence he had come. The supporters were muttering and cursing about the attitude of the villagers — some of whom had even had the audacity to order them out of their gardens!

The near exhausted stag returned through the Quantock Forest, but even that Forestry Commission conglomerate of undergrowth could offer no sanctuary. The scent was excellent and the hounds were screaming. On and on the chase went, columns of cars tearing through the forest, stop, look, race forward, stop, look, race forward, clouds of dust ahead and behind like the frantic forward rush of the allied armies after Alamein.

Out of the forest and on towards the village of Aisholt I found a small

group of supporters who told me that the stag was in the valley below. The hounds were baying frantically. I leapt in the car and screamed on down towards the reservoir. I was now well to the fore of the hunt. I stopped just past the bridge and ran back, with other supporters running in every direction around me.

Then there was that sound, the dreaded menacing baying of hounds that can strike at their quarry. I looked upstream from the bridge and saw the stag struggling pitifully in the mud. I whipped up the movie camera and through the viewfinder saw the last desperate struggles of the once proud beast.

The hounds were all around him, snapping, barking and biting at his flanks. With every struggle he sank ever deeper into the clinging mud. Vainly he twisted his great head to present the formidable antlers to the hounds, but to no avail. With the approach of a man from the left hand bank the pack cleared and the merciful shot rang out. The stag keeled over.

At that instant there was a jarring thud in my back and I was barged towards the river. My immediate thought was that they knew who I was, and anger was replaced by fear, but it was only other supporters sliding down the bank who had bumped into me accidently.

I regained my composure and ran upstream to photograph the stag being dragged away. It was hard enough to get the stag out of the mud, but then the supporters faced the awesome task of dragging him up a steep, heavily wooded bank, through brambles. Ropes were tied to either branch of the antlers and tug of war style teams formed to pull on them. With the stag dead I saw nothing wrong in helping.

Sweating and swearing we dragged the carcass to the top to a grass clearing that turned out to be someone's back lawn. Having helped with the work I felt that I had gained sufficient cover to enable me to move in and take some really close up shots of the cutting up. The heart when ripped out was so warm, I almost expected it to beat. It was given to the wife of the landowner, standing nearby holding a young child on her hips. The liver, the slots and the tushes were disposed of amongst the other supporters.

The following morning, October 8th, in pouring rain, I joined the Devon and Somerset Staghounds for their meet at Webber's Post. During the morning the stag managed to evade the hounds, but in the end they locked onto his scent and after brief circling, the stag ended up running to water at Luccombe, just south of Porlock.

I had lost contact with the hunt and was roaming ahead. Even by that time in my undercover career, I had learned from supporters that in such circumstances it is best to head for the nearest water. Some of the hunt refer to this practice derisively as "bridge waiting." Seeing a group of supporters crowding the riverbank I stopped and ran to join them. The stag was standing in midstream surrounded by half a dozen hounds. They moved in

at every opportunity snapping at his flanks. The bewildered deer was shifting his position, looking left and right, fearful of the baying hounds and the supporters who were laughing, pointing, and jeering.

One of the few supporters with a conscience began to scream for the gun — "Where's the gun, get the gun. For God's sake get the gun and put him out of his misery." But there was no gun. Most of the riders were far away up on the moorland. Normally four or five guns are out — some carried by riders and some carried in appointed vehicles, on this occasion there was none at the scene.

Shutting my mind off from the horror of it all, I shot some movie film and took some stills. After about five minutes, with a second wind, the stag came out of the water and ran upstream on the far bank. By now more hounds had arrived and their baying forced him back into the water. He ran upstream for several hundred yards, only to see approaching riders.

There was no escape. I had dashed frantically up and down the bank to try and keep up, but I was some 50 yards short when a group of supporters waded in and wrestled and manhandled the deer over in midstream. I heard no shot.

The carcass was taken to a nearby field for the ritual breaking up. This was notable for two incidents. Firstly, a vicious fight developed between the hounds, and secondly, the curiosity shown by a very young child towards the body of the stag. When children are indoctrinated at that age to killing, is it any wonder that staghunting continues?

No-one has ever been able to explain why stags run to water, but two theories spring to mind.

When deer are first found by the hounds, they go away with mighty leaps at tremendous speed, clearing 6ft fences with ease and making light of steep hillsides. Chased by hounds who are not bred for speed, but for stamina, the deer are worn down remorselessly, and when exhaustion begins to tell they inevitably run downhill. In the rolling valleys of Devon and Somerset there they will find rivers and streams.

It is reasonable to assume that the deer are intuitively aware that they lose their scent in water. Certainly, they would find the water soothing and cooling to their bodies, cut and torn from the rigours of a long hunt. Perhaps they even find a degree of security in mid-stream, up to their flanks in water, where they can use their antlers to ward off hounds that are out of their depth and have to swim.

The following Saturday, October 10th was a memorable day in the annals of cruelty. The Devon and Somerset had met at Morebath and their first draw was in nearby Skilgate Wood. The stag was away quickly heading east and there was a mad chase to keep up. Catching a brief glimpse of the beast I took some movie film of him running some 200m ahead of the hounds. At the time he was still fresh and was able to clear the hedges and fences with

ease. The chase went on and on, winding its way to the north and east. The stag ran in amongst other deer to try and lose his scent amongst theirs, but the hounds were not fooled. The rabble of car supporters moved ever onwards — no-one wanting to be stuck at the back of the traffic crocodiles.

The hunt headed towards Roadwater and Luxborough and it was expected that the stag would go to water at picturesque Kingsbridge Gorge.

I was with supporters crowding around a stream when a hunt servant galloped up excitedly and told us that the stag had been twisting and turning upstream, now he was coming and we should try to grab his antlers. It seemed foolhardy advice as those antlers are fearsome weapons, but the supporters were not dismayed.

Next, I heard some holloaing behind us indicating that the stag had crossed out of the river and circled round. I walked back to the car, knowing that I was then well behind the hunt. A supporter came up and asked who I was taking pictures for. I said for my own interest, and he said, "Oh I knew you weren't anti — because you've got a B.F.S.S. badge, I thought you might be working for the Horse and Hound!" I breathed a sigh of relief.

I drove towards Dunster and stopped to ask where the hunt was. I learned that the stag had just gone downstream with the hounds in pursuit. My sense of urgency was rekindled and I dashed on. Finding supporters at a bridge within sight of Dunster Castle I stopped. They told me that the deer had just been headed back upstream. By now it was 4.15p.m. dull and overcast. Grabbing the still camera I ran over the field beside the river.

I saw an old bridge with supporters crowding round, pointing underneath. The deer was standing under the bridge, with his back to the curved arch. There were just 2½ couple (5 hounds) baying him from either side. Again he had the wide eyed look of complete bewilderment. Here was a wild animal trapped, terrified and exhausted and all my fellow humans could do was laugh and gloat.

There was no sign of the hunt staff, anyone with a gun, or any other hounds. After a few minutes the stag moved upstream pursued by his five tormentors. He turned downstream and came back again to lie in the water under the bridge. The hounds moved in snapping at his flanks while supporters tried to beat them off. The deer ran off again upstream for the last time, a car follower with a gun arrived and there was the crack of a single shot. Much struggling ensued to get hold of the carcass in midstream. The time was 4.35p.m.

From Morebath to Dunster is some 20 miles as the crow flies. As deer and hounds ran it must have been more like thirty. That hunt had lasted some five hours. The stag's carcass was broken up in the usual manner in a riding stables at Timberscombe.

I was back in the West Country at the end of October for the last meets of Autumn staghunting. In August and September the stags are fit and

healthy after a summer of feeding, but by October the situation has changed dramatically. This is the time of the rut, and the stags are preoccupied — fighting for hinds, and defending their harems day and night. It is not surprising therefore, that when the hounds find them in late morning, they are already tired.

I was told by supporters that the end of October was the time to see kills and that if I was lucky I might see one of those rare celebrities, the stag that won't run! Sometimes the stags are so determined to defend their hinds that they simply put their antlers down and stand their ground. The riders having paid for a good gallop, do not pay tribute to a brave stag, but pull the hounds back and send the hunt staff in cracking their whips, to make the stag run. I was told of one such incident with the Tiverton Staghounds some three seasons back. The stag simply would not run. Apparently the hunt was stopped three times and he was given three chances of being whipped on. He went another field and stopped. The hunt gave him up as a bad job, shot him and went to look for another.

It was to witness an incident like that that I arrived at the meet of the Tiverton Staghounds on Wednesday October 21st. A lengthy hunt ensued with the stag twisting and turning in a vain attempt to hide amongst other deer, but in the end he was killed at about 4.30p.m. I had some excellent film of him running out of woodland some 20 minutes before he died, but even at that late stage I was unable to keep up on foot.

The next day was memorable, it was a meet of the Devon and Somerset at Pitcombe Head, near Porlock. Attempting to follow on foot I was left behind so I returned to my car and headed towards Exford. Descending the hill towards the river Exe I knew that something was happening, there was an air of excitement and urgency. I drove on until I heard the hounds. They were running and baying along the far hillside. It was difficult to pull in, in the maelstrom of horses and cars. Bumping up on the verge I grabbed the movie camera and dashed towards the river. The stag had clearly just passed upstream because the hounds were baying their cry of death. As I splashed and scrambled forwards the stag burst from cover on the far bank heading towards me, with the hounds in close attendance. I whipped up the movie camera. The stag ran past me barely 30 yards away on the far bank. To the left he was headed by riders and crossed into the stream with the hounds all around. He then ran back towards me on my side of the bank. I should have been fearful of being gored by the antlers, but at the time I was too concerned with keeping him in focus. As he went by I was low on film and I opted to do a lightning change and reload. He was headed on the right and ran back past me to the left. He returned and the hounds were all around him snapping at his heels and biting at his flanks. The hunt always swear that the hounds never touch the deer, but my film proves the lie.

As I was shooting I was aware of hunt servants to my right, ahead of the stag, one of whom was bellowing loudly, "He's a photographer from the

Daily Star, he's a photographer from the Daily Star, stop him!" and gesturing towards me. I carried on, knowing that the thugs were approaching.

The stag had passed me for the last time. As he crossed the river the hounds, supporters and riders moved in; he stumbled and fell, alone. He was wrestled and manhandled in the water, a shotgun brought up and the crack that signalled the end echoed the length and breadth of the valley.

The thugs were on me then and I thought that the best defence was to become really angry, "What kind of Fleet Street photographer would use a f..... movie camera to take still pictures?" I assured them that I was not working for any newspaper and that my film was for my own interest. They seemed persuaded. I filmed the carcass being carried back to be cut up.

Afterwards the hunt Joint Masters all tackled me, asking who I was and why I was filming. I used the same story, flashing my B.F.S.S. badge and they seemed convinced, but I knew that from then on I needed a proper cover story.

I did make one stupid mistake. A supporter had been chatting to me about my camera and lens and was so impressed that he wanted to take down details of the lens combinations. I reached in my top pocket and offered him my biro, and only remembered at the last instant that it had "League Against Cruel Sports — Help Write Off Bloodsports" written along its length.

I stopped with it in my hand and hurriedly put it back, saying — "That one doesn't work, I'll get you one from the car." It was a close shave.

There was another time when I pulled a film carton from my pocket, whilst standing among a crowd of supporters, and a bill fell to the ground. Fortunately I picked it up first. It was for vegetarian pizzas — not exactly the expected diet for the brutish, macho staghunting image.

To guard against similar incidents it became a habit to completely check the car and myself, inspecting every pocket and my wallet before every hunt. I could never tell when I might be giving supporters a lift, as I did on several occasions, and as one pre-check revealed a carrier bag blazoned with the name of a well known health food shop under the seat, and a League leaflet, it paid to be careful.

I decided to stick as close to the truth as possible — my Christian name would remain the same. No matter how proficient one becomes in the art of subterfuge, it is hard to shake the habit of a lifetime and ignore one's own name — or respond to someone calling to you across a crowded bar by a different name.

For my surname I chose Wright — appropriate because I was on the side of right.

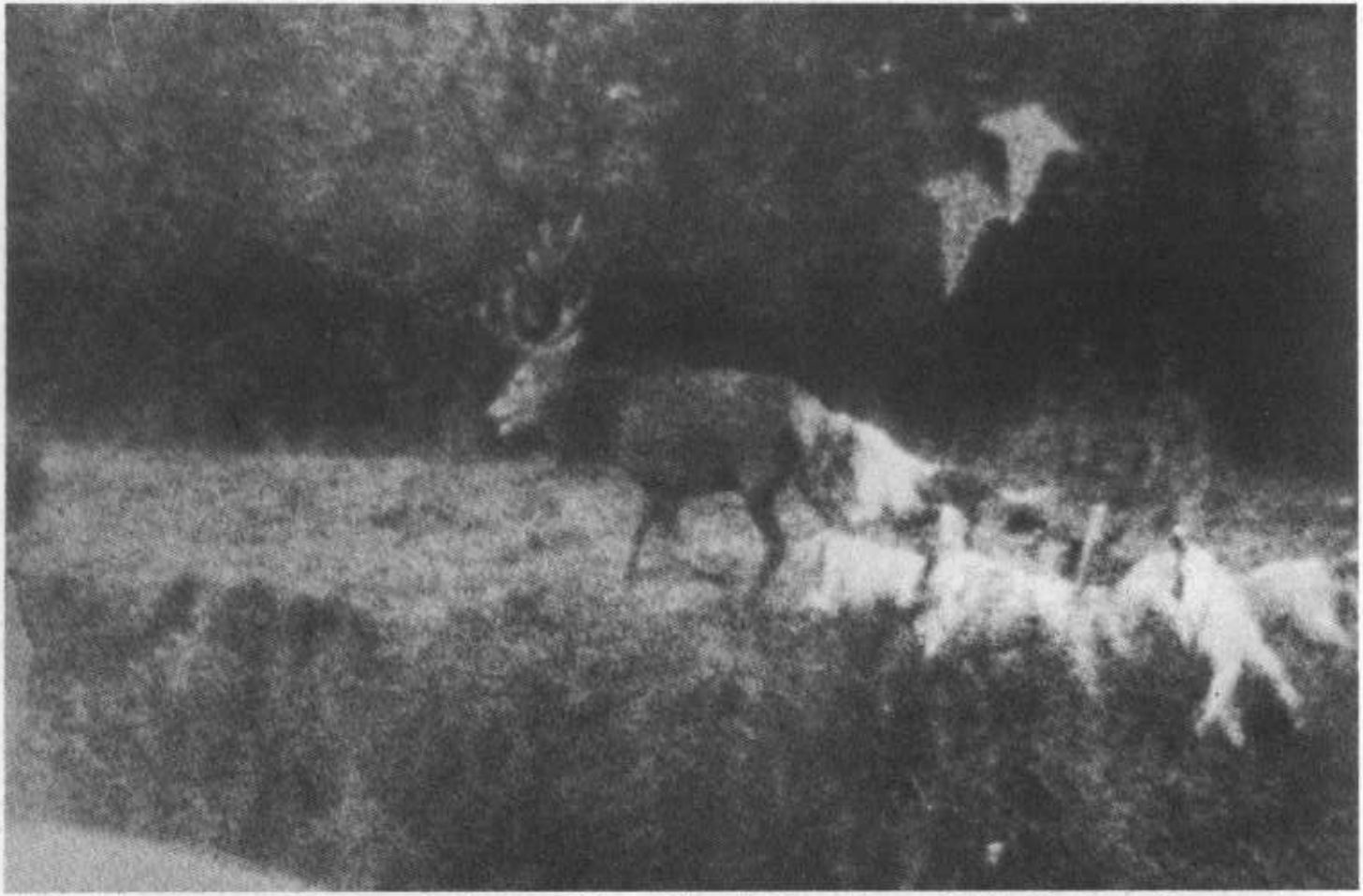
My cover story was simple. My father was an ex-army officer, with pots of money, and I was a wealthy young gent living in London, dabbling in



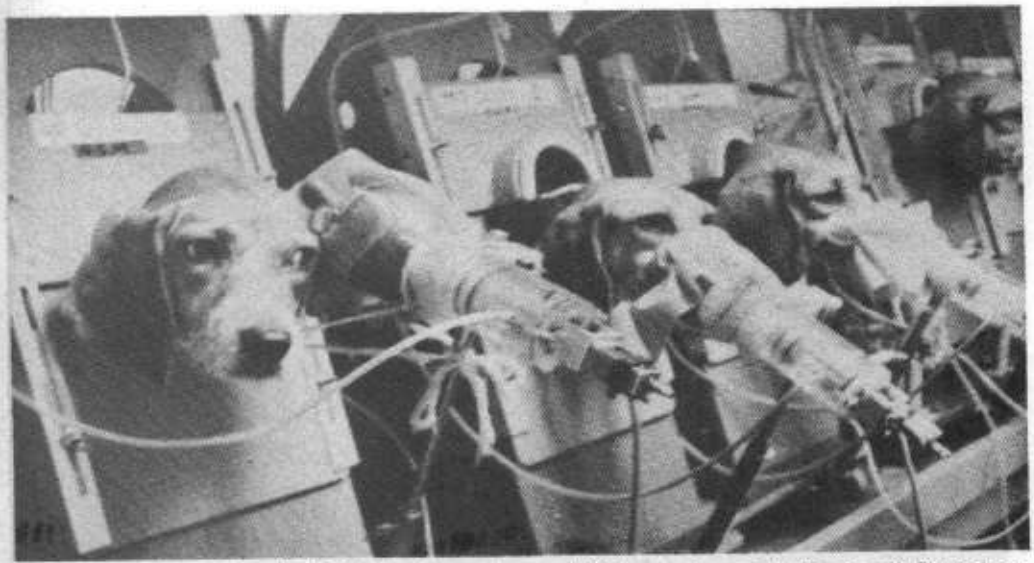
Extracting teeth from stag. Tiverton Staghounds October 30th 1982.



Selling stag's teeth as souvenirs to young supporters. Devon and Somerset Staghounds August 25th 1981.



Hounds biting at stag. The picture is of poor quality as it is taken from 8mm cine film. Devon and Somerset Staghounds October 22nd 1981.



Smoking Beagles in I.C.I. Laboratory. (Picture by courtesy of Sunday People).



The author and colleague with two beagles liberated from I.C.I. (Picture by courtesy of Sunday People).



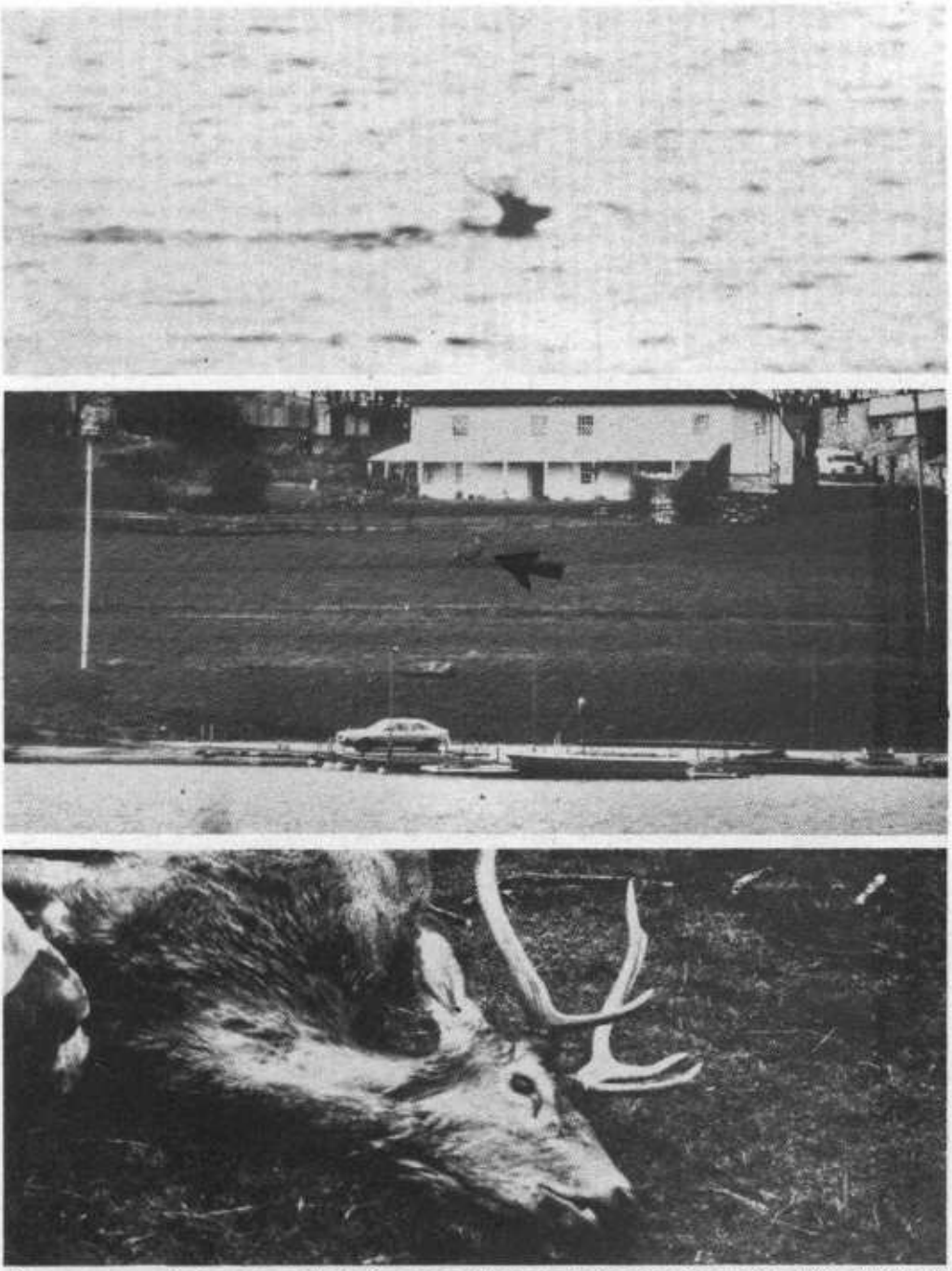
Laughing supporters leave their victim. Devon and Somerset Staghounds April 28th 1981.



With hounds tearing at his hindquarters the stag is shot. Tiverton Staghounds February 26th 1983.



The "thrills of the chase"? A bleeding, urine soaked fox is released to start the hunt, with the hounds some 50 yards away. Dulverton West Foxhounds January 3rd 1983.



Sequence of pictures showing top: hunted stag swimming Wimbleball Reservoir; centre: stag running on; bottom: a hound licks the blood from the stag's carcass. Devon and Somerset Staghounds March 18th 1982.



Huntsman Dennis Boyles poses in triumph. Devon and Somerset Staghounds October 29th 1981.

stocks and shares, with a passion for huntin', shootin' and fishin'!

I had two accommodation addresses in London. The first I gave to anyone who wanted to post letters or hunt literature to me. From there, the mail was posted on to the second, from where it was forwarded to me.

Once I had established my background I felt more confident to face any inquisitive hunt members.

On October 27th, the Devon and Somerset met at Culbone Stables, near Porlock. I did not see the kill, but two supporters who were returning told me the stag had been shot at bay, on a road in woodland just outside Porlock. They were quite upset and said: "It was terrible, I don't think we'll be coming again."

I could not question them without risking arousing their suspicions, but I found that a lot of car followers in ignorance, genuinely believe it is a clean kill. Faced with the grim reality they are deeply shocked.

Many car supporters rarely see a kill. Only the experienced followers, steeped in the ways of the hunted deer, anticipate his movements and make sure they are there when it happens. For them death and the following ritual is all important.

Staghunting is not all action — often it is long, drawn out and boring, crawling along country lanes not seeing a thing. The following day, October 28th, with the Tiverton Staghounds was like this. In torrential rain the tufters were only able to hunt spasmodically, and the day ended early with the hunt giving up without even getting the main pack out of the box.

The next day, the 29th, from the Devon and Somerset meet at Bratton Fleming, there was a short, sharp and bloody encounter. It was right at the end of the rut, a time when the stags are at their weakest. I had a brief view of the magnificent stag as he made a short excursion from one wood, before he turned back into it and headed back for Loxhore. By 1.30p.m. the hounds had closed right up on the tiring quarry. He battled through some woodland heading towards National Trust land at Arlington, from which the hunt are banned. There are also League sanctuaries in the area. Not to be outwitted and desperate to score again before the switch to hindhunting, the hunt decided to shoot him.

As the stag emerged from the woodland, on to the road, a man jumped out of a van and fired. The shotgun pellets smashed into the right side of the stag's skull knocking flesh and fur off, bursting his right eye and bowling him over. Rising shakily to his feet, the stag stumbled over the road through a hedgerow and in to the grass field below. The gunman leaned over the hedge and fired again. Once more the stag went down, but again his wounds were not fatal. He staggered up, carried on through a water meadow and trickling stream, and up into the cover of a small copse, followed by baying and barking hounds. Torn, battered, bleeding and half-blinded the tormented

beast turned to face the pack. The third shot rang out, the pellets striking the deer full in the chest and ripping through to the massive heart. The beast tottered, and fell dying into the pack. Even in death the stag inspired fear and the hounds backed away cowering. The small stream now trickled red with blood and the supporters, who had gathered in force, rejoiced.

The carcass was taken back to Bratton Fleming and subjected to the usual indignities in the scramble for souvenirs. I watched the supporters laughing and joking as they poked and prodded the carcass. Knowing the suffering that stag had endured it did nothing to enhance my faith in humanity.

For the one and only time during all my days staghunting, huntsman Dennis Boyles posed with a young female supporter by the head of the stag.

The last day of Autumn staghunting that year was on Saturday 31st October, when the Tiverton Staghounds met at Chulmleigh Beacon. At the meet two police officers had words with the master and we were subsequently warned to keep off certain farms. In that part of their country, the Tiverton are hated by the farmers and are banned from many areas. The hunt pay token heed to this by asking their followers to try and prevent deer heading for banned land, but in the final analysis they happily carry on — a point borne out by the fact that many farmers now have to mount shotgun patrols to protect their land from hunt trespass.

That day the hunt quickly found a stag and pushed him around down by the river Dart. I was running up and down the riverbank trying to see what was happening and had the infuriating misfortune to continually meet riders who had just seen the stag, without catching a glimpse myself. Close to the river it can be very difficult to detect the baying of the hounds, a sound very similar to fast flowing water tumbling over rocks.

A supporter told me that the stag was dead-beat and would not last long, so I opted to stay by the river, but that was a mistake. The stag somehow summoned the strength to come up out of the valley, clear the hill, and head north. He did not get far and fought his last battle in dense, matted undergrowth around a small stream just south of Brookland Farm. Just before he was shot he managed to deeply gore one of the hounds. I learnt this, when I saw a tractor trundling down the road with both victor (gored bitch) and vanquished (gutted stag) in the back.

The following year — 1982, I was out with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds from their meet at the Froude Arms, Anstey on Thursday August 26th. The hounds latched onto a very big stag that was clearly too heavy to go far and he was duly killed near Chain Bridge in Tiverton country at 2.30p.m. The notable thing about the cutting up was the presence of a whole team of French staghunters, who gleefully rejoiced in the kill. Seeing me taking pictures, they and a number of tourists asked to pose by the body and for me to send on their pictures.

Wednesday October 6th, found me with the Tiverton Staghounds at their

meet at Witheridge Moor. A stag was soon away and, with the scent good, he was tightly hunted by the hounds. At several points he was only just ahead as he ran near to and crossed the main road just west of Bampton. He circled back and when he was seen to swim the Exe in a reportedly dead-beat state, it seemd that the end was very near.

However, where were the hounds? From being hot on the trail at the top of the hill they were suddenly way, way, behind. Waiting supporters grew ever more frustrated as the chances of a kill appeared to dwindle. A few straggling hounds started to appear and there was a sickening thud as one hound was hit by a vehicle on the road. Eventually, after a delay of some 60 minutes other supporters arrived and we learned that the pack had fallen into a quarry. Many hounds had been injured, some with broken legs. Even so, the hunt tried to continue. The surviving healthy hounds were brought forward, but the stag had had too much of a start. Despite a prodigious effort the hunt eventually had to give up at 6.45p.m. in the approaching darkness.

The Tiverton Staghounds met at Chittlehamholt on October 9th and spent a boring day. The hounds repeatedly drew the covert in which two good stags had been sighted for three solid hours, but found nothing. Supporters stood at the hedgerows and gazed intensely through binoculars at nothing; I sat in my car, bored stupid, consoling myself that no deer would suffer that day. The hounds were taken on to draw the nearby woodland at Great Odam Moor, but that too was blank and at 4p.m. "home" was blown — with no action at all.

Hunting people are always keen to criticise a "drag" hunt, but one thing is certain — in that humane sport there are no blank days.

My last day of Autumn staghunting in 1982 was with the Tiverton Staghounds from their meet at Kissing Gate, Stoodleigh on Saturday, October 30th. The stag was quickly away from the first draw, heading towards the River Exe. I encountered some colleagues from the Three Counties Minkhounds and was grateful that I had had the foresight to use the same name and cover at both hunts, as they immediately recognised me.

The stag criss-crossed in woodland around the river, but it was plainly tired. The gun shot rang out at 3.00p.m. The river was wide and deep at that point and the carcass floated on down, to the consternation of the followers. By slipping and sliding on the far bank the young lads managed to guide it round obstacles and it was eventually pulled out when it stopped at a weir.

It was dismembered in the usual way on the riverbank and the teeth pulled out with pliers. One interesting feature of this episode was that a supporter asked for and was given the tail — he said he wanted to use it for fishing and the followers joked, "What are you going to catch — a shark?"

So ended my two years of Autumn staghunting — the type of staghunting that attracts the most support because of the spectacular spread of the stag's antlers, the near certainty of a hunt and, even more, the certainty of a kill.

The season is short, but with one or more of the three hunts out on four days of each week there is plenty to see.

During those two seasons I saw the hounds tearing at the flanks of stags, and climbing on their backs; I saw stags surrounded by hounds with the hunt staff miles away, messy kills necessitating more than one shot, children being bloodied and deer being whipped to make them run. However, the only unlawful aspect was the willingness of supporters to brazenly trespass on private property.

HIND HUNTING

By November 1981 I was an accepted follower, no-one was bothered at my stepping in to take pictures or asking questions. To put them more at ease I made a point of giving some of the innocuous pictures taken at various meets to eager hunt followers who featured prominently in them. I used this increased cover to great advantage during the hind hunting season, when female deer take over from November to the end of February as the staghunters' prey.

Hind hunting is particularly upsetting as it nears its close. This is the time when hinds, heavily in calf and unable to run, fall easy victims to the hounds. Often they have last year's calf at their heels as they try to escape. Refusing to abandon it they seal their own fate. The mother, her unborn and the calf carefully nurtured during the last few months are slaughtered. It is a pathetic and sickening sight, a grave indictment of the callousness of the hunt.

Less distinguishable than stags, it is hard for the hunt to select one hind and pursue her all day. If one runs into a wood and four come out the other side it is difficult to pick out the real quarry. Some of the supporters jokingly suggested that the hind should first be caught and painted red to make her easily spotted!

My first experience of hind hunting was with the Devon and Somerset from their meet at Twitchen on Saturday 14th November 1981. The first two creatures to pop out of the undergrowth were two beautiful stags. Hinds then came out in all directions and the hunt was on. Hinds will usually run as a group and often with their young from previous years. The first task for the hunt is therefore to split a hind from this family group and get her running alone.

On this particular hunt the pack screamed on ahead and after a frantic dash I ended up in that notorious killing zone — Marsh Bridge, with the hunt swiftly approaching. A group of five hinds and a pricket (young stag) came by. Three went on to the river and three circled away left handed. Not surprisingly when the pack arrived they split. There was some confusion collecting the hounds together but, when they had, they cast on again. This

time they put up a stag and a hind, running together. Both were hunted back towards Hawkridge and Tarr Steps, the famous tourist attraction.

Here the two split and the motorcycle followers were at fault, because they directed the hounds onto the stag. They roared away at great speed and by the time the hunt realised their error, checked and returned to search for the hind, darkness was approaching. Sadly however, the scent must have been good because they quickly picked up her line, pushed her on towards Shircombe and were close to her when, exhausted, she swung for Willingford Bridge. Mercifully, darkness intervened and reluctantly the hunt gave up soon after 5p.m.

When I commented to a keen supporter that, with the readiness of the pack to split, it was surprising that they ever caught any hinds, he explained the truth of the matter. With the rut occuring in October, the hinds in November although pregnant, are still very light and not in any way incapacitated. They remain difficult to catch until about Christmas time, but from then on matters change. By the end of February the kills are more or less certain. Hind hunting used to continue until the end of March, but when reports started to appear in the media of the most gruesome grallochs, (disembowellings) in which fully formed calves were cut from their mothers wombs, public outrage grew to such an extent that even the insensitive hunting people thought it wise to change their ways. Nevertheless, I encountered many hunt supporters who would like to see hind hunting continue for another month.

November 17th, I was out with the Devon and Somerset from Nutscale Drive, high on Exmoor, south of Porlock. The whole area swarmed with deer. I counted one herd comprising an old stag and no less than 20 hinds. The hounds got in amongst the hinds, splitting them up in all directions and at one point I saw them pressing one particular hind very closely indeed.

Against hounds, the hinds are particularly defenceless because of their lack of antlers. When baying stags the hounds hold back out of sheer fear of the awesome antlers, but even then if they can attack they will. I saw it happen. They will dart in to snap at his flanks and if hunt supporters are holding his antlers, as in the pool at Marsh Bridge, the hounds will even climb on his back.

Against such determined aggressors one can feel nothing but pity for the defenceless hinds. I have seen hounds lunge at hinds and although the hunt are usually very quick to put the hind out of her misery, if they do not, or cannot, the hounds will do the job for them. I have spoken to an eyewitness who described in graphic detail seeing a hind badly torn by hounds and, even worse, an incident when a hind made her way into dense undergrowth, closely followed by the entire pack. By the time hunt staff fought their way to the scene all that was left was her head and feet.

One feature of hind hunting that makes it certain that all manner of cruel assaults on deer will occur is the sheer fragmented nature of this form of

hunting. There are many hinds up on the moor and when they split in all directions the hounds often do likewise, following individual groups, having their own private hunt. Frequently at the end of the day I heard supporters drifting back from all directions reporting to the Masters that they had seen 2½ couple baying a hind here, or a couple baying a hind there. No-one has any idea, let alone any control over, what happens to the deer at such times.

That November 17th, deer were chased all over the countryside. Eventually a pregnant hind with her calf at foot was singled out by the hounds. Their progress was impeded by her concern for the calf, who was only just bigger than the hounds, and could not keep up.

Distressed, the hind stayed with the calf as long as she could, risking her own life. The calf broke away and I then saw the hind standing pathetically in a stream surrounded by hounds. She tried to run downstream, disappeared from my view followed by the baying pack, and was killed seconds later.

Soon afterwards I encountered a pick-up truck containing the carcasses of both calf and mother heading for a nearby grassy field for dismemberment. A supporter told me that the calf had been caught and killed soon after its mother. Both were cut up in the usual way, with the exception that the calf was so small that its slots were not regarded as worthwhile trophies and were left.

When the hounds started to worry (bite at) the body of the calf, supporters nudged it over to the hind with their feet and thus produced the embrace in death, which I managed to photograph. I found it hard to believe that grown adults could regard such a pastime as fun, let alone sport.

Hunting on the 18th and 19th of November was inconclusive, but there was an interesting day with the Devon and Somerset from their meet at Wheddon Cross on Thursday 26th November. For nearly two hours we watched hounds chasing various hinds in all directions, but all the time supporters had been aware of one particular hind hiding in the gorse on the far hillside. When it seemed unlikely that hounds would settle on any other, they indicated her presence to the Huntsman.

The full pack was taken up to her, but she sat tight until the last moment. However, when she did she move went like a bullet with awesome power and grace. In the first 200 yards, she must have gained 50 yards on the pack. Hedges, fences and even roads were cleared with ease. Such power is often the undoing of hunted animals, they expend too much energy too soon. The pack are happy to trail along in the wake speaking deliriously to the scent.

They are not bred to be fast. Lurchers would have brought the hind to bay, or more likely pulled her down within 500 yards, but that would have provided no fun for the followers.

The hind ran off in a massive circle about a mile in diameter, the supporters tracking her with their binoculars.

She then came right back to the very spot from whence she had started.

Instead of laying down in the gorse however, she repeated her very first movements carrying on round the circle. After about 50 yards she stopped, carefully retracing her steps, then broke off the circle at a right angle and disappeared at full speed over the hill. Had I not seen the manoeuvre I would have found it hard to believe.

Sure enough the hounds were fooled. They came thundering round the circle, back past the gorse and on for their second circuit. Sadly the supporters near me holloaed, shouted and gesticulated, and one ran to a nearby rider, who galloped on to tell the Huntsman that the hounds were at fault. The pack was stopped, brought back to the indicated spot and soon hit the right line off, following the hind over the hill.

That spoilt an excellent escape manoeuvre and highlighted the fact that the car and foot followers are by no means the innocent parties in a hunt that they often claim to be. Many a hunted animal that has successfully eluded the pack has had his whereabouts betrayed by an alert follower — another symptom of how the odds are stacked against the hunted.

Some inconclusive hunting ensued around the League Sanctuary at Pitleigh, with hounds running in all directions. The hind came to water at Sully Corner, where only a few months previous the Autumn stag had been killed. I had run on ahead and was waiting down by the river, when she came tip-toeing downstream towards me. She was not exhausted, but careful. She picked her way along the river bed for some hundred yards, then came out at right angles on the far bank and tried to go on up the hill, but was headed back by the car followers. There were no hounds in sight, but a few did appear after she disappeared downstream. They appeared to be gaining on her, so I followed by car. I came to a steep narrow lane, but halfway up encountered all the hunt vehicles coming down towards me.

I could not go on, had to go back, but knew that I had to do so quickly. The hounds were likely to be on the hind soon and if I ended up at the back of the crocodile I would see nothing. Accordingly, I reversed at some speed. The road was wet and covered in leaves and when I touched the brakes to swing into a gateway I merely succeeded in skidding across, putting the rear offside into one bank and the front nearside into the other. The road was completely blocked and I had all the hunt coming at me!

What a predicament for an undercover operator to find himself in. It became worse when I climbed out shaken and found that the impact had burst the boot open. I had ignored the boot when checking the car and a whole load of copies of "Cruel Sports," the League's newspaper were revealed. Hunt supporters were running to move my car so that they could rush on for the kill while there I was staring at a whole batch of L.A.C.S. magazines. If that boot did not close, I was done for. I banged it, banged it again desperately, cleared some mud from the rim and slammed it again. Mercifully it shut.

The hunt were all about the car and with six willing, burly men to help,

it was soon out of the way. I was temporarily out of action, whilst I levered the front wing off the tyre, but I was cheered up when I rejoined the hunt to learn that they had lost the hind anyway. She was one smart lady.

Monday 30th November produced an interesting day with the Quantock Staghounds from their meet at Dead Woman's Ditch, an obscure landmark high on the Quantock Hills. Hounds were put into the Quantock Forest and were quickly away. A hind was separated. The scent was excellent and all seemed well for the hunt. I whizzed round to the League Sanctuary at Alfoxton, expecting to find the action, but there was no baying, no horn — nothing. I found some bedraggled riders and asked them what was wrong. They explained that the Master had had a tiff with the riders and had taken his hounds home. The time was just 12.30p.m.

Conversation with the kennel staff back at the meet confirmed that the hounds had been running well but some riders, in their enthusiasm to lead, had galloped ahead foiling the line. When this was pointed out to them, instead of apologising they were abusive and hence the Master called it a day. Doubtless the deer were more than grateful for the presence of ill-mannered hunt followers.

For the meet of the Devon and Somerset at Scob Hill Gate on December 1st, I had a new weapon in my armoury — a motorbike. Experienced at being stuck in queues in the car, I saw a motorbike as a great asset. It was possible not only to by-pass the jams but also to whip round in an instant when the hunt changed direction and, furthermore, to go straight over the moors, right behind the pack.

With the motorbike I found that I had joined a most select band of hunt followers — the bike brigade. Because of their manoeuvrability they were always at the front, usually saw the stag killed and were always on hand to help the hunt.

My first day on the bike was inauspicious. I got lost on the moor, stuck in a bog and only with great difficulty did I rejoin the hunt in the late afternoon. They had changed deer by then and there was no kill.

The Tiverton Staghounds from their meet at Chain Bridge on December 2nd killed, but out of my sight. I made an error of judgement and was waiting at the wrong bridge. The following day with the Devon and Somerset at Morebath was a better day for observation.

Three hinds and a stag were quickly away from the first draw at Morebath Manor and went like rockets towards Shillingford. It looked as if the chase was on, but the hounds checked, then reversed course, hunting a young calf. They were stopped and taken on to draw near Skilgate Wood.

A hind was reported crossing the road towards Haddon Hill and Wimbleball Reservoir and the hounds were laid on. I saw the hunted hind running in company with another. When they both jumped into woodland and separated, only the lead hounds took the right line, the rest of the pack

switched to the fresh hind. The hunt switched to this fresh hind and pushed her south towards Bury. Hounds were closing as she went to water. When she came out and went up over Bury Hill she was only yards in front. She was now in the vicinity of the League Sanctuaries at Barlynch and Baronsdown and I was praying that she would make the right turn, but it was not to be.

She crossed the River Exe somewhere near Bury Castle and some desperate hunting ensued in the vicinity of Dulverton. A hunted animal has a repertoire of tricks to elude hounds, but this one was running out of them fast. Determined to keep up, the hunt followers, myself included, raced in circles into Dulverton and back again. On 50 yards, stop and listen, back 200 yards, stop and listen. From one bridge to another and back. Then, from a bridge near Dulverton, I saw the hounds stream across the grass bank, plunge straight into the river and swim across baying. Camera at the ready, I dashed down and heard the menacing growls of the death bay and I knew they must be looking at the hind. But there was no sign of her. She must have been there moments before and in her exhaustion stopped to rest. Now she was gone. A bitter argument as to tactics ensued between the Huntsman Dennis Boyles and his whipper-in David. Dennis took the hounds away towards Exebridge and I had just reached the village when I heard the shot ring out. The hind had been killed in the river, well away from the road.

That was Thursday, on Saturday December 5th after the meet of the Devon and Somerset at Aldermans Barrow, I ended up in a particularly good position ahead of the hunt. I was in cover by a river with the hounds coming baying downstream towards me. I expected at any minute to see the hind break cover, with the hounds around her, and I nervously adjusted the camera. At almost the last instant the hounds suddenly switched, turning off at right angles after a fresh hind.

It later transpired that this hind was hunted to Porlock, coursed down into the village, and trapped in a small children's playground. She was killed with a pistol when unable to jump the wire to escape, and her body was brought back to the Whitstones, a landmark high up on the cliffs overlooking Porlock Bay, to be sliced up. In the summer a popular tourist spot, in the winter the hunt lay claim to it. The carve up was as usual, the only feature of note being that by way of a joke Dennis blooded one of the elderly, if not positively geriatric, male riders.

Back in the area in the new year, the first hunt I attended was the Tiverton Staghounds on Wednesday, 20th January. It was a triumph for the deer, the hounds rioted and split, with the majority going off after a young stag.

The next day, Thursday 21st, with the Devon and Somerset at Horner near Porlock was an entirely different story. The hounds drew first around Webber's Post and then hunted a deer towards Cloutsham. I followed and she soon went to water but she doubled back, attempting to lose her scent in the snow on the banks. The hounds appeared disorganised and, even

though obviously heavy with calf, that hind escaped. Deer were running everywhere and the pack split completely, so that a whole variety of different hunts were taking place.

One group of hounds latched on to one hind and she was killed far to the south, at Larcombe near Exford. Another group pursued a lame hind and she was killed in Horner Water.

The hunt always make a point of saying that the **only** deer they kill are wounded and crippled, and that they are doing the herd 'a service' by putting them out of their misery.

Like every other hunt claim, this simply is not true. Aside from this kill, the Autumn stag that was killed at Dunster which had a clean bullet hole in one ear, and a hind killed by the Tiverton Staghounds in January 1983 which had a misformed hoof, were the only infirm victims I saw.

I no sooner learned of the killing of this lame hind than the hounds were in full cry again around Horner. In near darkness at 4.45p.m. a hind came downstream at Horner Water, with the hounds some 100 yards behind. Tragically it was too dark to film anything. The hind paused at the weir, looked towards me, and struggled out onto the bank. The pack streamed by me, their baying rising to a crescendo, echoing the length and breadth of the cold valley of leafless trees. The hind, stumbling on, cleared the first fence she came to, but at the second, burdened by the weight of the life within her, she collapsed exhausted into the barbed wire. The pack were on her. I heard no shot. The "sporting conservationists" who dragged her body back were spattered with her blood.

Three deer died that day. As they so rightly said — hinds are easier to kill after Christmas!

The meet of the Devon and Somerset from Mounsey Hill Gate on January 23rd 1982, was a demonstration in hunt perseverence. Deer were quickly found and the hounds settled on to three hinds that were separated from the herd. The hounds were checked and riders moved in with whips to separate one. A protracted hunt then ensued on either side of the River Barle with supporters able to see very little. In the afternoon the hounds latched on to a hind with a yearling calf. They separated the yearling off and killed it, then were taken back to draw for its mother, but without success.

As darkness approached I headed for the nearby killing zone, Marsh Bridge, and met up with an experienced supporter. An exhausted hind came down the riverbank towards us but, seeing us, veered away and ran up over the hill into the darkness. That manoeuvre probably saved her life. The hounds were just a few minutes behind, but they lost precious time picking up her change of direction.

With a gloomy murk descending, I thought that it would all be over and the hunt would give up, but the supporter assured me that it was still worth following. He had often heard of the Tiverton killing by the light of torches.

The Tiverton Hounds were known to be in the area having crossed the road north from their meet at Knowstone, in fact it was quite possibly 'their' hind and hounds that we had seen.

In total darkness we drove on around the bridges near Dulverton looking for the tell-tale signs of torches down by the water, but finding nothing. The whole scenario appeared to me to be totally ridiculous. I wondered what on earth we would find next, a huntsman wearing a miner's hat!

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In the 1982/83 season I spent most of the time foxhunting and beagling, but I did manage the occasional trip to the staghounds. On 1st January 1983, I was with the Tiverton Staghounds for hindhunting, meeting at the Fortescue Arms at Kings Nympton Station.

At the meet the hunt Master, John Lucas, asked supporters not to repeat any of the 'silly' behaviour of the previous time they had met in the area, as it had caused him a lot of work and gained a lot of bad publicity for the hunt. This was a reference to the much publicised incident near Chittlehamholt, in which supporters had wrestled a hind to the ground and stabbed her to death with a penknife.

Hounds were taken to draw Snydles Wood and a hind was quickly away westwards. Headed back by supporters, she joined up with another group of five. One of this group was split off by the supporters and the hunt continued. When the hind was seen to run onto a railway line only minutes in front of hounds it was thought that she would soon be caught, but thankfully she made it to a large wood from which the hunt is banned.

Hounds were then taken back to draw again near to their starting point. There was a long wait, but eventually fresh deer showed. I circled round in the traffic jams, through Kings Nympton and on the way back heard a shot from deep inside Kings Nympton Park — I was later told by hunt staff that the hind had been tangled up in barbed wire.

The carcass was brought out of the park to be dismembered by the bridge over the river Mole. I was cautious about taking pictures. One of the senior staff of the Shooting Times was present and I felt sure that by this late stage someone must be getting suspicious. However, suddenly a car and a motorbike pulled up on the bridge, people piled out of the car and hurled not only abuse at the hunt, but also rotten eggs and plastic bags full of mud!

The local H.S.A. had arrived. Though too late to save the hind they were in time to give me the perfect cover. Muttering about the 'bloody antis' I moved in, taking pictures freely. The supporters were totally distracted from me by the more obvious saboteurs. If they were annoyed at me for anything, it was for taking pictures of the dead hind and not of the hunt saboteurs.

On January 15th, possibly as a result of the sabotage attempt on January

1st, the Tiverton did not advertise their meet at Spurway Moor Gate and it took me some time to find them. Groups of hounds were running in all directions chasing numerous hinds and it became so disorganised that everything had to be stopped to get the pack back together again. From the restart a herd was quickly found and a very small hind was soon killed. This was the hind that had one of her back feet misformed.

January 20th found me at a meet of the Quantock Staghounds at a place called Warm Corner in the Quantock Forest. Hunting was inconclusive on and around Robin Uprights Hill and Holford and is only worthy of mention because of a comment from one of the supporters.

Late in the afternoon the hounds were baying, particularly excitedly and the supporter said that she thought they were 'hocking' the hind. The use of this term in these circumstances plainly indicates that the supporters know that the hounds will attack the deer.

The hind hunting meets from mid February 1983 to the end of the month were disrupted by a hard frost. I had hoped to take News of the World reporter Maureen Lawless to them, but they were all cancelled, or replaced by deer drives — barbaric practices that the hunt are always secretive about.

SPRING STAGHUNTING

With a summer and winter of staghunting behind me, the start of the 1982 season of Spring staghunting found me experienced in hunt tactics.

The younger males are hunted during March and April, and because they are not hampered by the rigours of the rut or by huge spreads of antlers that make passage through the undergrowth difficult, the chase usually lasts all day.

The Devon and Somerset, from their meet at Wheddon Cross on March 16th 1982, had protracted hunting in the snow on Dunkery Hill, eventually losing their stag, as did the Tiverton the following day from their meet at Swineham Hill. The next day, the 18th, the Devon and Somerset were more successful from their meet high on Haddon Hill.

The stag went away quickly, out through Bury, on towards Dulverton, then circled back over to Upton and swung round heading towards the massive Wimbleball Reservoir, which is banned to the hunt. I was with supporters on a hill beside the reservoir as they watched and described the action below, as the hounds closed on the tiring beast — "He's at the water's

edge, the hounds are going through the wire, he's in, he's in!" With that I ran for my car, did a "Le Mans" start to the accompaniment of a shower of dust and raced for the reservoir.

Seconds were precious. The hounds could be on the stag at that very moment. Foot to the floor, change, foot to the floor, change, foot to the floor, change, all anchors on, slide to a halt, grab camera and run. I ran and ran along a finger of land into the reservoir hearing the hounds baying like mad on the other side of the slight ridge. I ran up to climb over the wire and go over the ridge but paused to look round to see if any hunters had followed. The stag was behind me swimming strongly, near the middle of the reservoir some 200 yards away — I grabbed the camera and shot.

It is quite a feat for a cloven hoofed beast to swim a reservoir, particularly when it has run several arduous miles beforehand. Anyone who has tried to swim a couple of lengths of their swimming baths with their fists clenched will know just how useful the open hand is. I looked at the stag and felt immense sorrow. The great creature was striking out bravely in a determined effort to live. It was fruitless though, the hounds were taken around the reservoir by road, and were waiting for him.

An audience of supporters formed up ahead of the stag and when he eventually landed and shook himself down they jeered him on his way as he was forced to run for his life again. The pack were unleashed immediately I knew it could not last long. I turned back to the car and headed towards Luxborough, but I was well behind — it was all over before I arrived. I was told by an eyewitness that the stag was shot when he stumbled into a hedgerow and was unable to get through it, the time of death was about 3.30p.m. Just a few hours previously that stag had cleared all hedgerows with ease. His carcass suffered the usual indignities.

The meet of the Quantock Staghounds on March 19th was by invitation in Devon and Somerset country at the Ship Inn, Porlock. At the meet I sensed a great deal of suspicion towards me. I was in the discomforting position of being pointed out by the senior hunt staff, but nothing was said to me directly.

The selected stag tried every trick he knew to elude the hounds. From the Parks he went out at speed up onto the moor towards Lucott Cross then over to Holnicote and back to Porlock, before going out towards Culbone Stables Pub. Then towards the coast and back to Porlock. Knowing that he would by then be exhausted and looking to go to water, I waited by a likely stream in Porlock.

Some hounds arrived, but there was no sign of the stag. Then I heard the remainder of the pack baying as they ran the high ridge behind me. I came out from Porlock towards the sea at West Porlock. It always was a feature of staghunting that exhausted deer would, if they reached Porlock, often swim out to sea. They were either left to carry on swimming until they drowned, or were chased in boats, brought back to the shore and killed.

Nowadays, perhaps because of the bad publicity that such incidents attract, the hunt take measures to avoid it happening.

Nevertheless with the deer running strongly for the sea it looked likely to occur that day. I joined a long line of hunt cars parked just west of Porlock with the supporters all gazing intently up a grass slope towards a small covert. The hunt could be heard. Suddenly the stag broke out of the covert and ran towards us. Reaching the hedgerow separating him from the road, he began to look for a gap to pass through, but supporters running down the road shouted, heading him back.

He ran back up the slope and encountered the pack piling out of the covert towards him. Turning about, he ran towards us but now there was no spring in his step. He headed for the corner in the hedgerow some 100 yards in front of me, beside the road.

The hounds were right behind snapping at his heels. Motorcyclists ran forward over the grass to try and grab him. He reached the hedgerow and tried to clear it with one mighty, desperate leap. Earlier in the day, he would certainly have done so, but by this stage after some five hours of hard running, exhaustion had taken its toll. His front feet pecked at the hedge top, his whole body swung over on to the road and he never moved. His neck was broken in an instant. The keen hunters felt cheated.

Following that incident I spent two days with the Quantock Staghounds in April. The first day from the "Blue Ball," Triscombe on April 26th there was no kill, despite the fact that the hunt continued until 6.45p.m. The second day started from the "Carew Arms," Crowcombe on Friday 30th April and was more successful.

The stag was quickly away over Robin Upright's Hill, then ran over the moorland towards the League sanctuary at Alfoxton. Instead of staying in the sanctuary, he ran on to the peaceful village of Kilve, that had made the headlines earlier in the year after the bloody killing of a hind in the garden of a tea shop. Circling away from Kilve, I saw the young stag running on the edge of the moor in company with three hinds. Entering a tiny copse the three hinds ran on, while the stag doubled back. This manoeuvre split the pack, half going with the hinds and half returning with the stag. I anticipated that the stag would swing north towards a holiday camp and the sea and I headed in that direction. When he failed to do so I lost him.

When contact is lost at such a late stage in the hunt, as the hounds are closing in, it is best to go round to the known killing points. I visited Weacombe, Kilve, and Holford, three points where small streams come off the moor, but I found no sign. Later I was told by riders that the stag was killed on the side of Longstone Hill, high on the moor at about 2.30p.m.

Spring staghunting in the 1982/83 season was limited for me by my concentration on fox and hare hunting. The meet of the Tiverton Staghounds at Benley Cross on February 26th, by the date, should have been hind

hunting, but mercifully for the females it was changed to Spring staghunting. The reason was because the hounds had been inactive for about two weeks due to the frost. There are always slight problems entailed in switching the pack from hunting one sex to the other because of the difference in scent, so, after the long lay off, the hunt opted for the immediate change to Spring staghunting.

There was extra interest in this hunt because I was guiding in a reporter — Maureen Lawless of the News of the World. We had calculated that it might immediately blow either of our covers if she was seen in my car. Instead the League's Promotions Manager, Jim Barrington, a man with extensive knowledge of hunting was brought in to help.

We would stay completely separate and never talk. But they would stick close to me as I knew the back routes and the likely places for the kill to occur. At the meet the League's Sanctuary Manager, John Hicks, turned up to warn the hunt Masters to keep off the League's sanctuaries in the area.

Hounds were taken to draw woodland north of Affeton Moor and a magnificent young stag was soon away running down towards Chawleigh and the A379 near Eggesford Station. The hounds were well behind at this point, so far in fact that the supporters took over the hunting — they were on their hands and knees trying to slot the stag (follow his hoofprints). Other followers sighted the stag and the hunt veered away south of Chawleigh towards the bridge at Stone Mill. In the water the stag paused to gain a second wind, then headed out eastwards again.

Following in the wake of what was rapidly turning into a frantic dash, I encountered a menacing looking farmer on a tractor with a high powered rifle. He made clear his dislike for hunt followers. This is one of the many areas in which the hunt are distinctly unwelcome and the farmers will go to great lengths to protect their land. I would have dearly liked to have told the farmer exactly who I was and what I was doing, but I couldn't blow my cover.

We wound our way back towards the meet at Benley Cross and it seemed for a time that the hunt had lost the stag. Such an event may have pleased some of the followers, several commented on what a magnificent creature he was and that he should be left to breed to produce strong stock.

Sadly though there is no room for such sentiment in staghunting. The quarry was observed slipping away by an alert follower and betrayed by the white handkerchief raised to attract the hunt. The hounds closed in as the tiring stag headed for the wood from whence he had originally started. Knowing that the end was near I indicated to Jim and Maureen to stick particularly tight to me as I raced for the front.

We arrived at one corner of the wood just in time. The stag crossed the road in front and jumped the fence into the grass field with the hounds baying, barely 30 yards behind. I swerved to a halt, cracked off some

photographs and saw Jim and Maureen just behind me. Before allowing ourselves to be boxed in by the supporters that were flooding in I had to decide whether the stag would run on or, exhausted, die there and then. When he veered right handed into the woods I knew.

Gesturing to Jim and Maureen to follow I ran up the roadside. The blood curdling baying started, and I knew that the hounds were on the stag. The supporters were whooping with glee. I ran up the road and into the wood through the first gate. There was a deep muddy marsh that I had to wade through and my left wellington became hopelessly stuck. The baying was now reaching a crescendo. There was no time to attend to such minor problems, so I simply ran out of it, carrying on in my sock. I ran and ran and stumbled into a partial clearing. The stag was standing there alone, bewildered, and terrified. The hounds were all around him baying frantically and those to his rear attacking his flanks. To the right, one of the riders, now on foot, was snapping home the cartridge in the shotgun. I whipped the camera up, flash focussed and pressed the trigger at the instant I heard the bang.

The beautiful creature shuddered under the impact and fell dying into the hounds, who soon engulfed him. Careful to be inconspicuous (I did not want to lose that valuable picture) I slipped out of the wood back to the road where I found a group of yokels staring amusedly at the half submerged wellie protruding from the muddy pond.

I looked for Jim and Maureen but they had entered the wood from another direction. Maureen had been fortunate enough to witness the kill and Jim was there taking photographs.

Their eyewitness account of staghunting appeared in the News of the World the following Sunday week.

Earlier in February, when the hunting was impaired by frost, Jim, Maureen and myself went to rearranged meets of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds.

The first, on February 15th, was at Culbone Stables, a well known hunting pub on the coast, west of Porlock. We travelled in convoy to the vicinity of the meet but then, knowing that I was under suspicion, we separated, allowing the slow hound-van to trundle in between our cars.

I swung into the car park opposite the pub, to the glare of watching hunters. Joint Master Norah Harding approached me, "There's no hunting today," she said. "But I checked with the kennels and they directed me here." She was emphatic — "This is a private meet, we do not want visitors, will you please leave!" With that I apologised and drove off.

Norah then went over and welcomed Jim and Maureen. When they asked if they should leave also, she said, "Oh no, you're welcome. We just don't like him about as he takes too many pictures."

They soon realised that it was a Deer Drive, and understood then why the hunt were so secretive. Such shoots are always denied in hunting circles.

Hounds are used to locate the deer herds which are then driven forward towards lines of hunters waiting with shotguns. The shooting is hit and miss. Many deer limp away wounded to die in agony. That the hunt deem these drives necessary amply demonstrates their own inability to control deer numbers by hunting.

The following week, February 22nd, I went with my colleagues to another such drive organised by the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, starting from Court Place, Porlock, but again it was so secretive that I was made distinctly unwelcome.

I learned from Jim and Maureen that in the course of these two drives the hunters had gaily blasted away with shotguns at many deer killing several.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHILST in the West Country with the staghounds I also took every opportunity to follow the local packs of foxhounds.

My extensive experience as a saboteur taught me that foxhunting exists on three distinct levels. There is the glamorous image, the one that is portrayed in the books and articles that the hunters are so keen to distribute.

Then there is the side that is usually seen by the saboteurs and anyone else who is prepared to follow and closely observe. Though such observers will see hounds work and maybe even foxes killed the hunters will always behave in guarded fashion.

The third level is the true foxhunting, the inner sanctum of the sport to which only the most trusted supporters have access. This is the cruel, brutal, private conflict between huntsmen, terriermen and fox that takes place away from prying eyes, and out of sight of the mounted field.

I knew this savage reality lurked behind the glossy facade and I was determined to infiltrate, to expose it.

To gain access to the trusted minority I ran the gauntlet of searching questions. I had to draw on all my experience of hunting with various packs to produce an impeccable hunting pedigree to match the inner core of the hunting set who are born and bred to their sport.

Strangers are seldom welcomed with "Who are you?" but rather "Who do you hunt with?" Such diehards never move from place to place — they move from hunt to hunt!

Choosing at random a hunt as reference was no use as for any named hunt there was nearly always either a member of the hunt staff or a follower who knew something about it and could ask testing questions.

I found that my credentials as being a known follower of the local staghunts stood me in good stead. Acceptance to the inner circle was not a matter of being given a special pass that allowed me through where others were blocked. Rather, when I arrived, the hunt staff and terriermen would exchange nods and winks and carry on as usual despite my presence.

The best guide as to whether I was accepted was the attitude, not of the riders, but of the terriermen. The hunt riders expect their fun as much as anyone and if that fun depends on the fox being thrown live to hounds or released from sacks then so be it, but if the presence of a strange face means that none of this can happen they will happily put up with it, hide their

feelings and keep on smiling. Most riders are of course unaware of such goings on anyway.

For the terriermen it is different, they know full well what is required and make quite clear their displeasure if the presence of strangers constrains their behaviour.

I was able to gain the full trust of three West Country foxhunts — the Dulverton West, the Tetcott and the South Tetcott. At these hunts I was totally accepted. Their terriermen behaved as normal whereas at the other foxhunts I visited, the terriermen were far more guarded.

Safe in the inner sanctum I was not only allowed to watch, but also to photograph. I was able to record some of the most callous, calculated, cruelty imaginable.

Just as the staghunting calendar is divided up so is the foxhunting one, the difference being that in foxhunting it is according to the age not sex of the quarry. Foxhunting starts with the training process, the hunting of young cubs in the summer.

Cub Hunting

The process by which foxhounds are trained to hunt as a pack and to kill — cubhunting — is vital for foxhunting. It is however usually overlooked by those followers whose only interest is in riding and is always ignored by hunt enthusiasts in arguments.

The public are generally unaware of the tremendous turnover of hounds that occurs every year. Foxhounds are lucky if they last five hunting seasons in the pack. Each year the hunts kill many hundreds of hounds all of whom have to be replaced.

Recruits for the pack are given preliminary training when walked as puppies by keen hunt followers. They are entered to their hunting life in cubhunting so as to be settled in before hunting proper starts early in November.

To afford the longest time for training, cubhunting starts as early as possible in the summer, as soon as the corn is cut. Techniques vary according to the hunt country.

In some areas the coverts are "held-up" — a practice whereby a wood or copse, known to provide a home for a vixen and cubs is completely surrounded by riders and foot followers. The pack, a mixture of inexperienced puppies and older hounds draws through the covert and any foxes that try to escape are chased back.

Thus trapped the young cubs are easily caught. The hunt hope that the new puppies will be involved in the fury of the kill and the worrying of the carcass and will learn the art of hunting.

Cubhunting is also a means of training foxes. Those that are so petrified that they run in headlong terror are often allowed to go. The hunters judge that having learned to fear the horn and the baying of the pack those foxes will provide good "sport" when the hunt returns later in the season.

In other areas the terrain renders it impracticable to "hold-up" the coverts. Instead the hounds are simply cast forward, hunting in the usual manner, the only difference being that steps are taken to avoid prolonged hunts after old foxes.

Whatever the method cubhunting takes place when the scent is best — in the early morning or late in the afternoon before or after the heat of the sun.



Just one of the hazards in hunting a live quarry. North Cotswold Foxhounds.

I attended my first cubhunting in the full undercover role at the meet of the Dulverton West Foxhounds at Mockham Down Gate, near to their kennels on Monday August 24th, 1981. The start was at 7.00a.m.

The meet was certainly a picturesque sight with the new-born sun gradually gnawing away the mist that clung to the tall summer grass.

After a brief display the hounds were away. There was no question of "holding-up" the coverts, the pack were simply cast forward as normal.

Foxes old and young were running in all directions and it was not long before the pack locked on to one cub. As the hunt progressed I found it difficult to keep up on foot in the hilly terrain. I learned later that the youngster was quickly forced to ground, dug out and killed.

When I was next with this pack at Burcombe Hill near South Molton on

October 5th the passing of summer had enabled the meet to start at 10.00a.m. Hounds drew some woodland first and I had a good view of two cubs escaping, before the hounds settled on a third and pursued him south across the river.

When they returned I observed an old fox, way ahead of the pack, making his way through a flock of sheep on the opposite hillside. The fox took no interest in the sheep nor they in him. The owner of the land standing near to me remarked to other supporters: "It's amazing you know, we have plenty of foxes here, the sheep are in the open, yet we have never lost a single lamb to a fox."

This tiring fox took refuge in a badger sett that the landowner confirmed was unoccupied — and was left.

Two weeks later these hounds met at West Buckland, near Barnstaple. I knew the area having spent sometime following staghounds there. The day was foggy and exceedingly wet.

I spent much of the morning in a wood being drenched whilst the hounds chased foxes in every direction and readily changed from one to another. Changing quarry is a common fault of hounds, it greatly reduces their chances of catching anything as of course they tire.

To prevent it happening in foxhunting efforts are made to recognise the chosen victim. Some foxes are particularly dark, others light, some are large, some small and some have particularly white brushes, others not so.

On well-supported hunts conducted in open country where the fox can be viewed many times the hounds can be put right but there are a large number of small hunts such as the Dulverton West that operate in hilly, wooded country. On a good day such hunts may only attract 15-20 riders and about 20 car followers so there are few about to correct the hounds.

In the classic case of changing, the foxes run in relays. One fox runs off in a great wide circle, returns to where he started from, and goes to ground. A second, fresh fox then pops up, repeats the circle, and returns for either a third fox to take over or the first one to do a second circuit.

The result is that the hounds are run to exhaustion and catch nothing. Hunting pundits anthropomorphise on this, putting such behaviour down to superior vulpine cunning but the more likely explanation is the obvious one — exhausted foxes return to their homes and seek sanctuary underground whilst fresh foxes readily run if disturbed by the pack.

It takes a good hound indeed to lock onto the scent of one fox and mark him to ground when another fox is running in front of him — as with all dogs, hounds prefer the excitement of a chase to merely barking at holes.

All in all it was not surprising that the Dulverton West were changing foxes frequently that morning. Eventually a rider approached me searching for the terriermen as the fox had been marked to ground.

Exhausted, the fox had sought sanctuary in an earth and the hounds were baying to mark the spot. A fox running to ground is most unwelcome in hunting as the chief attraction of the sport is a high speed pursuit with the followers at full gallop.

Many hunts, particularly the more fashionable ones, will take precautions to prevent their foxes hiding. Before the meet the terriermen and others block all the known earths and drains in the area, often with fertiliser bags filled with rubble.

This practice has long been criticised by conservationists and naturalists as it disturbs other wildlife, particularly badgers, and all too often no-one bothers to unblock the earths at the end of the hunt.

With their fox to ground the hunt are faced with three choices. They can give it best and search for another. They can bolt it by leaving the holes open, putting terriers in to chase the fox out, or they can dig it out and kill it.

Knowing that the Dulverton West have a reputation for killing foxes below ground I clutched my camera to my chest and battled through the densely matted bracken to reach the scene. The hounds were digging furiously at the steep hillside with only the Master, Bertie Hill, and the Huntsman, Terry Beeney, armed with a small calibre pistol, in attendance.

The earth was soft and it appeared that the hounds might catch the fox themselves before the terriermen arrived, but they came, sliding down the bank with two Jack Russells and a whole battery of tools.

One terrier was entered to the earth and from his barking I knew he had located and trapped the fox. The top of the earth was dug away forcing the fox further and further back until his retreat was cut off by a well positioned spade. Terry then reached inside. The shot was muffled by the damp earth.

Bertie had been restraining the hounds but they now surged forward. The muddied and bloodied fox was dragged out by the scruff of his neck, blood streaming from the wound to his head, and thrown down the slope, soon disappearing beneath the melee of hounds. Terry blew the kill.

That was Monday October 19th, at the end of the week on Friday the 23rd the same pack met in the heart of Exmoor at the Royal Oak, Withypool and I savoured typical West Country hospitality in the form of a particularly large stirrup cup. This was one of those days when the foxes had the beating of the pack by running in relays. The hounds were heartily confused.

The following week, Friday October 30th, from another meet at Burcombe Hill it was a different story. Hounds drew first in woodland south of Holridge, but this time were unsuccessful.

They were taken further on and eventually found. With the scent excellent they pressed this fox hard and he only just made it to the sanctuary of the badger sett but, unlike at the previous meet here, the fox was not left. The terrier men arrived at the scene and every hole was blocked bar one. With

the prospect of a lengthy dig the hunt moved on.

As nearly always happens the riders lacked the stomach to linger and witness their adversary despatched, preferring instead to gallop off in search of other prey. Only the elderly Master, Fred Smythe, remained to supervise proceedings. A terrier was entered to the open hole and the fox quickly located.



Hounds mark an exhausted fox to ground. Dulverton West Foxhounds, October 30th, 1981.

Part of the standard hunt digging equipment is a long steel bar that is pushed into the soil at various points searching for tunnels. When a tunnel is pierced the diggers listen at the hole, straining to catch the sounds of the terrier and the fox fighting below — that is the old fashioned way of locating the adversaries. The modern method is to use electronic devices attached to the terriers' collars in conjunction with small loudspeaker boxes that bleep or click when held above the collar — a sort of underground sonar. The Dulverton West use both methods.

This fox was gauged to be trapped in a narrow passage that ran for some 10 yards. However, the terriermen were puzzled as, when a dog was put in at either end, it bayed.

When baying, terriers hang back from the fox and exchange barks and other threats and only attack when the opportunity arises. If a terrier is put to earth and encounters the backside of the fox however it will certainly attack, grabbing the fox's brush and trying to drag it out. The ensuing grunting and growling is totally different to baying.

If the terrier bays no matter which end of the tunnel it is put in it usually

indicates that the fox can turn round, but in this case the tunnel was too narrow to allow such manoeuvring.

The men chose one end, entered the terrier and dug the roof of the tunnel back and back, advancing towards the baying. The terrier was fighting — returning to the mouth of the tunnel to show the scars of combat — deep wounds to its nose and mouth.

When first exposed the fox had locked jaws with the terrier and was wedged to one side. A long spade was jammed in the tunnel behind him blocking his retreat. The brush was hooked with the iron bar and grabbed, pulling the fox forward on his back. The terrier was then pulled off and the live and panting fox pinned to one side with the spade.

The pistol was loaded and its long barrel pointed at the fox's head — as expected the fox bit it. The terrierman then thrust the muzzle forward into the fox's mouth cutting it badly.

By then the fox was helpless. It was held by its brush and both back feet. A second spade was thrust into its chest to prevent it biting at the hands that restrained it. It was then goaded with the gun muzzle.

The terrierman kept saying: "Want some food? Want some food? Get a mouthful of this!" and he would thrust the muzzle into the fox's jaws.

Eventually, he was careless and the fox nearly bit him. Retaliation was a single shot between the eyes. The carcass was pulled out and dumped on the grass bank in front of the Master who had observed the whole proceedings.



Fox "accounted for." Dulverton West Foxhounds, October 30th, 1981.

Thinking that the complex earths might hold other foxes a terrier was put in again and immediately bayed. This explained the mystery. All along there had been two foxes fighting back to back — hence the terriers baying at either end of the tunnel.

Twenty minutes was all that was required to deal with this second fox. It too was goaded before being shot — the iron bar and gun muzzle being jabbed into the terrified creature's face. The elderly Master had challenged me for taking photographs of these events but several of the terriermen recognised me from staghunting and vouched for me — I had entered the inner sanctum. With no hounds about to break up the foxes their carcasses were taken away in sacks.

That was 1981 cubhunting. The following year I again took an interest following whenever the staghounds were not meeting. On Friday August 27th 1982, I was out with the Dulverton West for evening cubhunting at 4.00p.m. at Worth Farm, Withypool. Ronnie Wallace, formerly of the Heythrop, now Master of the Exmoor Foxhounds, and his former colleague Tony Collins, now Kennel Huntsman to the Heythrop were both there.

Recognising them from days of sabotaging the Heythrop I had to be careful. Fortunately even though they looked straight at me they ignored me.

The hounds drew first in the immediate vicinity of the farm and were soon away after an old fox. Surprisingly, considering it was cubhunting, he was hunted. He dodged in and around some marshland before being marked to ground in a flooded hole beneath a hedgerow. The foot followers, terriermen and Huntsman Terry Beeney all gathered around. The riders went to look for another victim. When the terriers were first entered there were immediate sounds of fighting, then silence. We could smell the fox ourselves but despite extensive excavations no further trace could be found. They reluctantly had to give that fox best, presuming that it had either slipped away in the tunnel system, or possibly even crept away unnoticed through the dense cover of the hedge.

The day ended at about 7.30p.m. with no kill recorded — but the terriermen were confident that their dogs had gained sufficient hold on that one fox to injure it severely.

Early in October I switched hunts to follow the Tiverton Foxhounds at Queen Dart Cross on Monday the 4th. Connoisseurs of hunting regard this as being one of the sharpest packs in the country.

Huntsman Bob Street was on foot with his hounds when they drew through crops beside the Little Dart River. The pack stumbled upon one cub, and after a short chase he was killed. In my eagerness to gain a closer look I waded the river but only succeeded in filling both wellingtons, which retarded my progress, and gave the followers much amusement.

The hunt had 30 couple out — that is 60 hounds — they certainly were an impressive sight in full flight. It seemed a particularly uneven contest as

even an adult fox is little bigger than a cat. By contrast I saw only five riders including two hunt staff and about ten foot/car followers. Clearly for all its supposed quality this pack is poorly supported.

Hounds soon found plenty of foxes. One was marked to ground. I went to watch the dig but as it was my first time with this hunt the terriermen were very suspicious of me. I did not push my luck and only learned later that the fox was killed. With the abundance of foxes the pack readily split. Early in the afternoon some of the hounds were even more "naughty" when they rioted on a hare. Rioting is expected in hounds that seldom kill and are in consequence bored but this pack had killed six cubs just the previous Saturday, and one that very morning with another marked to ground.

The next morning, the Tuesday, I changed again to follow the Tetcott Foxhounds at Wainhouse Corner near Bude. I recognised many of the followers as being supporters of the Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds so I benefitted from their introduction. I was vouched for and accepted, unlike the previous morning.

Almost immediately a cub was put up from a field of kale and after a short chase torn to shreds. Hunts usually make a bee-line for kale fields as they are notorious for holding foxes. When drawing them the hounds make an amusing sight with only their tails visible except for when they rear up on their hind feet to see where they are.

After the kill the heavens opened and in the deluge that followed hunting was extremely slow. I foraged ahead and found a good vantage point from where I could hear the hounds working their way towards me. They bayed excitedly for a moment but instead of reaching me marked their fox to ground. I could tell because the baying was at a crescendo but stationary. As I had seen no terriers I expected the fox to be left but the Master, Peter Hunkin blew repeatedly on his horn as if to summon the terriermen so I drove round to see what was happening.

I arrived to find the riders disconsolately galloping up and down a grass field. They directed me to a small copse in the valley bottom where the foot followers were gathered.

Activity centred on a large badger sett and excavations were in progress. There were terriers present — one was to ground with Peter tracking his position by the bleeper on his collar. As Peter moved the receiving box over the ground it emitted various clicks according to whether it was above the dog, or not.

For all the keenness in the hounds who were biting and chewing the very soil the terrier was singularly unwilling — it kept coming out. This dog apparently belonged to a local. It did not impress Peter and he eventually sent someone back to the hound van for the two hunt terriers. When these arrived a small white dog was entered and quickly bayed the fox.

The dog was tracked as it forced the fox back in the tunnel. The roof was

dug off and eventually the fox was trapped in one corner, it could retreat no further. I knelt down and looked into the remaining tunnel. The terrier was barking and snapping at the bleeding, terrified fox which was pressed back into the furthermost extremes of its muddy tomb.

Spades were wedged in to secure the live fox and the terrier was pulled off. Peter took the gun, reached into the hole and fired. As the fox still struggled he thought he had missed so the gun was re-loaded but it was not necessary, those were its death-throes.

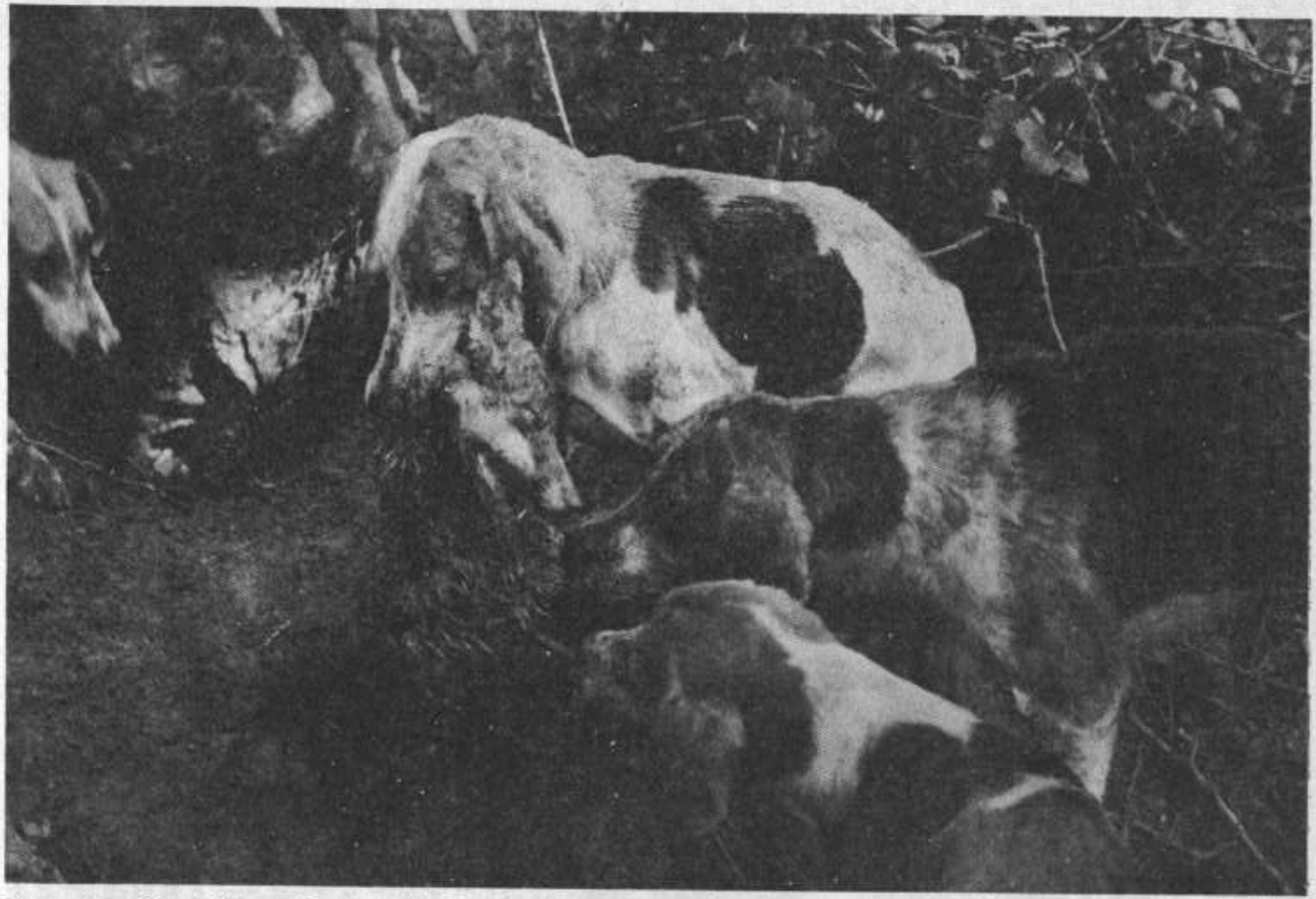


Hounds "worry" their victim. Tetcott Foxhounds, October 5th, 1982.

The torn carcass was pulled out. Peter held it and shook it in front of the hounds, whipping them into a frenzy of expectation. When they seized the body they fought over it and tore it to shreds. The brush, mask and pads of this old dog fox were rescued and kept as trophies — I later found them adorning the landowner's tractor.

That was Tuesday October 5th. Two days later on the 7th the meet of the same hounds at Morwenstow on the coast north of Bude was interesting for a reason other than a kill. Peter had hurt his hand so was relegated to foot following, his place being taken by Claud Harris his Huntsman. Claud spent most of the day at loggerheads with the 2nd whipper-in — Loveday Miller and the hunting suffered accordingly. With plenty of foxes about the pack split all over the place and when 2½ couple went missing I accompanied Peter and another supporter to the valley bottom to search for them.

The exertion of running down one slope and up the other had a marked effect on Peter's ability to blow the horn so he offered it to me. I was reluctant, fearing that my ability might make them suspicious, but then



The price of fun. Tetcott Foxhounds, October 5th, 1982.

decided that if tackled, I would explain that I had learned from a keen hunting friend. I was helping the hounds, not the hunt as, when the former riot and scatter, there is a very real risk of them being injured on the road.

So it was that with the Master's blessing a saboteur ended up blowing the horn to attract hounds! One couple did eventually turn up, looking distinctly sheepish.

We returned these to Peter's transit van and went to look for the others via a private garden in the valley bottom. The owner stormed out demanding to know what we were doing. Our explanation that we were collecting hounds merely stoked his temper — he was emphatic that he did not welcome the hunt as they had done a lot of damage in the past.

Out of hunting pink Peter was not recognised as the Master and such was the man's temper that he had no inclination to admit his identity. Peter muttered some excuses and we carried on. Our search proved fruitless. We rejoined the hunt to find that the hounds had made their own way back anyway. The day ended at about 2.30p.m. with no kill.

The next morning, Friday October 8th, I was back with the Dulverton West at Willingford Bridge, in the heart of Exmoor on a wet and overcast day.

The hounds ran well, pushing one fox out towards Worth farm, site of their evening cubhunting meet earlier, but then losing his scent when he ran the road. Finding again they quickly locked onto the fox. The scent was clearly good. He twisted and turned desperately trying to shake the pack. The hunt moved steadily back towards the meet and eventually a very tired fox was marked to ground in an earth near the curiously named Clogg's Down. As always nearly all the followers stayed in the warmth of their cars, sipping coffee, gossiping and waiting for something to happen. I went over to watch the dig.

I saw a huddle of men and found the hounds scrabbling frantically at the earth, located in thick dying heather about 30 yards up a steep slope from a stream. As usual one terrier was battling with and holding the fox. The roof of the tunnel was dug further and further back until the fox could retreat no more.

The victim could be heard coughing and grunting. I wondered whether he would be goaded as previously, but no, the terrier was pulled to one side and the fox shot. The body was hurled down the hillside for the hounds to fight over, a move that showered one terrierman with the still warm blood that spurted from the gaping wounds to the fox's head. His mates joked at his discomfiture.

The brush was rescued from the worry and the remains tossed into the stream. I was careful to observe where as I aimed to return for photographs. I helped with humping the tools back up to the Land Rover but then declined the offer of a lift to rejoin the hunt, offering the excuse that they might return anyway.

As soon as the Land Rover was over the brow of the hill and out of sight I crept back for photographs. The secret of undercover work of whatever form is to always appear to do the expected. It is certainly not expected that a genuine hunt supporter will wade around in a river to recover the torn body of a fox just to take a photograph. In doing so I knew that, if caught, my behaviour would take some explaining.

I was still searching for the remains when a Land Rover appeared on the slopes above me. I cursed, judged that I had been spotted, and crossed the river continuing up the opposite hillside as if I was following as normal. Fortunately the Land Rover went on and I returned and managed to take the required pictures.

I rejoined the hunt who were by then in hot pursuit of a fox between White Post and Moorhouse Ridge. I headed for Molland Common and late in the afternoon, when it appeared more likely that they would blow for home, the horn sounded the three short blasts that indicated that a fox had gone to ground, and that the terriers were needed.

Whilst the terriermen set off on a massive circle round by road I hiked straight over the moor and beaat them to the earth, sited at the base of a hedgerow. The hounds however had beaten us both and had dragged the fox out of the hole themselves. These hounds had always appeared likely to do this as I had previously witnessed them digging feverishly at earths.

They had even succeeded in taking the brush — quite a feat as taking this trophy intact usually necessitates ringing the bone with a knife at the base of the tail, forming a tight loop from string or the thong of a whip and drawing the brush back.

By the behaviour of the hounds Terry suspected that there was a second fox in the earth so the terriers were put back in and confirmed it by immediately baying. I crossed the hedge and found the hounds sitting like an impatient audience straining and staring at the hole.

The earth was shallow and the mud-caked fox was clearly visible. At one point it tried to escape but was barged back with spades. The terrier named Cricket, a notorious fox killer, was fighting with his adversary, both inflicting and receiving injuries. Periodically Cricket surfaced with deep cuts to his nose and mouth. After a while he gained a firm grip on a paw and the diggers dragged him back hoping that he would pull the fox out, but he lost his grip and ended up with only a mouthful of fur.

Terry summoned a hound and urged him into the hole to grab the fox but he refused. A second hound was called but, although keener, it too was unable to retain a solid grip. Cricket was entered again and after a further lengthy battle managed to gain a hold on the fox's throat. The sounds of the fox choking and gurgling were dreadful but the supporters merely cheered Cricket on "Get him! Get him boy!"

Terry had earlier boasted to me that Cricket could kill foxes in the tiniest

of holes by worming up beside their bodies until he reached the throat, then sinking his teeth in. From that I knew that the unequal contest could not last long. Soon all that was audible from the hole were the sounds of Cricket. The supporters judged that the fox, battered and bleeding was dead: Cricket was pulled back on to the muddied earth in front of the hounds, still locked on to the fox and the straining pack unleashed. No effort was made to check that the fox was dead and, more surprising, no effort was made to pull Cricket to safety. Many onlookers said that the terrier was lucky not to be bitten by the hounds in the ferocity of the worry.

When the hounds had finished I grabbed the remains. I expected Terry to order the carcass to be thrown into the hedge and I knew that the best way to find it again would be if I threw it, which I did. The hunt duly blew for home and I left with them but slipped back to photograph the shattered body, building up the dossier of vital evidence against the hunt.

I attended four more cubhunting meets in 1982. On October 27th I was with the Dulverton West at Croyde, a typically sleepy Devon village on the coast north of Barnstaple.

Though sunny, the strong wind made for an appalling scent. The hounds were unable to detect the line of a fox even when they crossed a field immediately after one. Consequently it caused some surprise when after a short, sharp chase they marked one to ground in some dense brambles.

The terriers were entered but despite a prodigious effort were unable to make any progress. The pack waited patiently straining to catch every sound



Concentration. Dulverton West Foxhounds, October 27th, 1982.

and were a picture of close attention. Eventually the hunt gave up, gave that fox best, and went to look for another without success.

The following morning, Thursday October 28th, I had an interesting time with the Eggesford Foxhounds meeting at Wixon Farm, Chulmleigh. Foxes were soon found in the woodlands lining the deep valleys adjacent to the farm but the hounds were distracted by deer.

At one point whilst I was with supporters on the slopes of a hill a terrified hind came towards us closely pursued by nine foxhounds. We let the hind pass, then stopped the hounds with a cacophony of shouting — quite the best I had heard since my saboteur days!

I learned that elsewhere a fox was pursued to ground, bolted by terriers, hunted again but lost. My informant said that, considering the number of foxes in the area, that one should have been trapped and killed, but apparently the diggers were suspicious that the terriers might be baying a badger rather than a fox so did not wish to trap anything.

He told me that terriermen have a great respect for the fighting qualities of badgers and that ordinary fox terriers would suffer a severe mauling if pitted against one. He said that though the hunt would certainly assist their dogs with iron bars and spades it would be a poor public relations exercise for them to set about killing badgers in that fashion.

I recalled the staghunt follower who had gleefully recounted in full lurid detail how a fox terrier had been skinned alive by a badger, and felt a trifle sick.

With helping the hind and discussing foxes and badgers I had momentarily lost touch with the hunt. I drove round and rejoined them as they headed south towards Chulmleigh. I opted to follow a man whom I recognised to be a keen staghunter.

On the fringe of a large wood named Parsonage we observed a hind and yearling calf running together closely pursued by a group of hounds.

We moved in to stop this riot. As the deer passed between us we were able to divert some of the hounds but not all — four couple still charged on across Horridge Moor towards Kings Nympton.

The Huntsman came by labouring in pursuit of his wayward flock and told us that other elements of the pack had marked a fox to ground in a quarry near the wood. I reached the scene too late, the fox was already dead, its body held in the terrierman's sack.

Sometime later, when the hounds were eventually gathered, the fox was taken out, the brush cut off and the pack given the remains. The hunt then blew for home, signalling the end of the day.

My last day's cubhunting with the Dulverton West was at Cuzzicombe Post on Exmoor on Friday October 29th. Hounds drew first a long combe out towards Molland but it was blank.

They were then taken to draw an area west of the meet. I accepted a lift with the terrierman. We arrived at the new location in time to see a fox driven out of covert by the pack, making a frantic dash up the surrounding grass slope with riders galloping desperately to head him back.

This was the nearest I ever saw to the practice of holding up coverts with the Dulverton West. Their inexperience at such tactics showed when the fox reached the hedgerow and was away.

Scent must have been appalling, for when the hounds were brought up they failed to hit the line even though cast on precisely the same route the fox had taken. Perhaps after being coursed by the riders the fox had lost its scent but the hounds persevered and were able to pick up the line on the plough on the other side.

Hunting was never brilliant though and to cap it all, from the enthusiasts' point of view, the one time hounds were on good terms and speaking well, Terry stopped them, thinking they were rioting on deer!

My last cubhunting of all was with an obscure little pack, the Mid-Devon meeting on Tuesday November 2nd at Caddiford Cross. Though the hounds tried hard, this part of their country is full of deer, and with plenty of foxes as well, the pack readily split — in the afternoon I found one couple completely lost on the road. The day ended at 2.15p.m., early because of their opening meet the following Saturday.

Already I had comprehensive pictures of cubhunting. Back in London they were locked carefully away in a vault for the moment we would present our evidence to the British public.

THE MAIN SEASON

Foxhunting proper starts early in November by which time the new entry of puppies have been entered and settled into the pack.

In the 1981/82 season I was concentrating mainly on deerhunting so I attended just four meets of the Dulverton West. Nevertheless, because I had been with them during their cubhunting and was a known follower of staghunting I was completely trusted — even to the point of being driven round in the terrierman's Land Rover.

My first meet was on November 16th 1981 at Stoke Rivers, near to the hunt kennels. In the bright sunshine the hounds and redcoats made a most picturesque sight as they picked their way along valleys whose sides were clothed in golden, autumn bracken. It was an excellent day for foxes as none was killed and few were even chased.

It was then that I first realised what an inefficient hunting pack the Dulverton West are. The hounds ran with all the eagerness in the world but

they lacked something in terms of forward drive and speed. They seldom kill foxes above ground — in hunting parlance they are not very sharp.

In fact in two seasons following I only once heard of them catching a fox fairly above ground. When asked, the supporters said that in their opinion it is because the Kennel Huntsman Terry Beeney is too "soft" with the dogs.

In most hunts there is a rigorous selection to ensure that the pack remains sharp but not too sharp. The aim is to breed hounds that work in a fashion that gives the fox a slight advantage in speed but no advantage in stamina — the ideal hunt being a brisk 40 minutes to an hour ending with the exhausted fox killed in the open, and the riders having a good gallop.

If the hounds are too slow through breeding, poor exercise or age they will be unable to press their foxes hard, will probably change foxes and most likely catch nothing, unless their quarry can easily run to ground.

The converse is equally a fault. If the hounds are bred with too much speed, being crossed with a sight hound such as a greyhound, they will be too fast, killing too quickly ever to be welcome in the hunting field.

Sight hound crosses, such as lurchers, kill a fox in a few hundred yards or lose him completely — either way there is no opportunity for lengthy gallops in pursuit.

It is clear that hound breeding and selection is a delicate balance. The subject is perhaps the one topic most frequently debated in hunting circles. There are differing approaches. In the most callous, as many puppies as possible are bred but only the best are kept. This new entry sets the standard for the rest of the pack. Any that are not up to it, through age or injury, are killed.

Other more humane hunts such as the Dulverton West keep their hounds as long as possible. Puppies are bred only to fulfil requirements and any surplus are drafted on to other packs, even to the other "sports" such as Minkhunting.

My next day with the Dulverton West was at Tarr Steps Post by the tumbling River Barle on November 27th. This was the day following my crash during hindhunting and I was delayed by the need to arrange repairs to my car.

I arrived to find the hounds thundering through the woods in full cry. They soon ran their fox to ground. The earth was almost inaccessible, located under a dense mat of brambles high on a steep slope that had us all scrambling and sliding to reach it. Sadly for the fox it was very shallow and he was quickly exposed and killed.

Hounds were taken on and, after a period hunting in the vicinity of Shircombe, the terriermen beckoned and gave me a lift to another dig-out. After a bumpy ride over farm tracks and through several fields we reached the scene — a badger sett on a hillside open from trees but shrouded in bracken.



Digging party pursues the terrified fox. Dulverton West Foxhounds, November 27th, 1981.

All the holes were blocked bar one through which the terrier was entered. Normally a badger sett is a difficult dig but this fox must have made an early mistake and backed into a dead-end because he was soon trapped.

I crawled closer hoping for film of the kill but though they trusted me there was something significant about this earth for they shielded it from my view. The gun was fired and Terry called the hounds forward to a position down the slope.

As he whipped the fox out of the hole and hurled it towards the hounds I commenced filming with the movie camera. I then saw, out of the corner of my eye, Terry moving up the slope holding a struggling object. While the terriermen laughed I turned in time to see him throw a live fox into the bracken. He then holloaed, shouted and blew his horn to attract the hounds. They wheeled about from dismembering the first fox and charged up the hill in hot pursuit.

The terriermen found it hilarious that Terry had been able to hold the struggling fox by the scruff of his neck and brush without being bitten. They told me that the fox had been "done" in the hole to ensure that he left a better scent but at the time I had no idea what they meant.

As everyone clearly expected, the hounds screamed away. The fox was desperately twisting, turning and jinking but the pack had locked on and they pressed him inexorably. Only the intervention of darkness saved him. Hunting people are always quick to convince the naive that the fox is either killed instantly or escapes unscathed but here was one that, though alive, was far from unscathed at the end. It had been bitten by the terriers and

"done" by the Huntsman.

After those two November meets it was nearly two months later that I joined this hunt again at Newtown Bridge near South Molton on January 22nd 1982. This was a rearranged meet, the planned one, a joint meet with the Eggesford, having been cancelled due to snow. Hounds were taken to draw woodland west of the B3226 and then across into Molland Wood. Once again I was offered and accepted a lift from the terriermen.

In time a fox was run to earth in a shallow hole in a dense forest. During the dig I could clearly see the terrified creature peering out of the tunnel, perhaps gauging whether to make a break for it, but at the same time backing further and further in. Eventually he could retreat no more and was stuck — backed up to the earth, grappling with terriers and wedged in with spades.

There was no escape. Once again the end was unnecessarily extended. Taking advantage of the privacy of the woodland the diggers jabbed their iron bar repeatedly into the fox's face before he was eventually shot.

The torn body was then tossed to the hounds and, when they had finished, the remains recovered and buried in the hole. The digging party then climbed back through the undergrowth towards the Land Rover and I was dismayed to see Anthony Adams standing by it.

Anthony, a former whip to the Heythrop Hunt was at that time Kennel Huntsman to the Exmoor but has since moved on as Huntsman to the Warwickshire. I recognised him immediately from my days operating as a saboteur against the Heythrop.

I took a deep breath and hoped for the best, fearful that if spotted I would be given a similar dose of the iron bar treatment. Fortunately he gave no hint of recognition but it strained chance to the maximum when we returned to the main road with Tony and myself huddled opposite each other in the back of the Land Rover!

Hounds drew on and soon put up a really big fox that gained some small revenge for his kind. He ran a massive circle about a mile in diameter before returning right to where he started. He then broke off the ring and left the hounds labouring on round for their second lap. That fox escaped.

The following month, on February 26th at Hawkridge, not far from Tarr Steps Post, was my last meet with the Dulverton West that season, but it was a most interesting and revealing day. Hounds marked their first fox to ground in a complex earth below one of those stone wall and hedgerow combinations that are so common in the West Country.

When the terriers were entered a really bloody battle ensued. Even the much vaunted Cricket came out streaming blood from his wounds. The fox was securely lodged, protected by boulders and the hedgerow stumps, and fought like a pocket tiger. The smallest terrier was put in but quickly came out again.

To "soften up" the fox the iron bar was thrust into the hole and waggled vigorously but still it gamely fought on. Eventually the riders became bored and the hounds were taken away to find another victim, leaving the terrier men to complete the job.

It took a good hour of solid digging and levering to manoeuvre out sufficient of the large boulders to uncover the fox, by which time the hunt must have returned to the vicinity as some of the hounds were back, attracted no doubt by the sounds of battle.

By then the fox was exhausted. Half immersed in mud, wedged in by spades and boulders, he was savagely attacked by the terriers. Defenceless, as the dogs tore at his head and ears. The only mercy he ever received was the burning crack of the close range shot.

It was difficult to extricate the body but after a good deal of heaving and tugging the diggers managed it. It was then revealed that the victim was a vixen. One of the terriermen rolled her on to her back, pressed her stomach and gleefully remarked that he could feel her cubs.

No wonder she had fought so tenaciously. She was defending both the life inside her and the home she had chosen. It is a common fallacy put about by hunters that they give foxes a close season to breed in, that they never hunt pregnant or nursing vixens. This vixen was killed on February 26th just a few weeks before she would be expected to give birth.

In many areas hunting continues well into April and, in some, even into May. Hunting is stopped not out of deference to foxes but rather in response to the state of agriculture, the state of the ground and quite possibly to the lack of scent in the summer heat.

In the final act some of the hounds moved in to worry the carcass of this vixen. When they had finished the torn remains were stuffed back in the hole and buried.

We then learned that the hunt were blowing for the terriers again. This time the fox had sought sanctuary in a very shallow earth on a steep wooded slope leading down to a river. We left the Land Rover at the top of the ridge and covered the considerable distance down to the earth on foot. Terry was at the hole and his whipper-in John Norrish (now with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds) was holding the hounds in check.

The terrier was put in and it was soon obvious that the dig would not last long. We could hear the two combatants bumping as they fought and jostled only inches below.

I prepared both 35mm and 8mm cameras. The roof of the earth, soft leafmould, was soon dug back exposing the brush and backside of the fox. It was a vixen.

She huddled ever deeper in the non-existent hole, desperate for protection. Her coat was beautiful, she can hardly have been pressed at all by the hounds.

Heavy with cubs she must have gone straight to ground.

Terry grabbed her brush and, taking care to wedge her in with spades to prevent her escaping, asked the terriermen for the gun. The word was passed from man to man but no-one had it. In the rush to the scene it had been left in the Land Rover way back at the top of the hill.

One of the young lads volunteered to fetch it but Terry said not to bother, that he would do it the old fashioned way. He turned to me sternly and said, "Don't film this, no pictures at all!" I was in no position to argue.

The hounds were positioned some 20 yards down the slope and the supporters gathered up the hill. The live and clearly pregnant vixen was drawn out by her brush and held struggling upside down. Desperately she kicked and twisted to bite at Terry's legs but her move was blocked by the iron bar.

Terry then whipped her up and, to the cheers of those watching, hurled her towards the hounds. Like a cat she span in the air to land feet first, but there was no access to mother earth — she landed amid the snarling pack. The briefest squeal and it was all over, she was torn limb from limb.

I bit my lip and swore that some day the nation would know. That was two pregnant vixens dead in one day both killed in a singularly brutal manner.

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Next season, 1982/83, the opening meet for the Dulverton West was at Yarde Down on the western edge of Exmoor on November 1st. It was a meet in thick, eerie fog.

From the first draw near Beara Hill the hounds quickly found and flew away on a screaming scent. In the dense fog banks the hunt soon lost the hounds and they, in turn, lost the hunted fox and split up after several others. Total confusion reigned. After much muttering and cursing the huntsmen eventually managed to gather a semblance of a pack and succeeded in pressing a fox hard enough to run him to ground.

I joined the terriermen in their Land Rover with the terriers Cricket and Mischief. Again there was a long hike to the earth. I arrived to find the usual digging party at the hole — Kennel Huntman Terry Beeney and Joint-Master Bertie Hill. Mischief was put in first and immediately bayed, then Cricket, the killer, was entered to get a hold on the fox.

The normal excavations began and the fox was trapped. When the arena was cleared and the fox exposed, it was seen to be locked in combat with Cricket and both were bleeding from their wounds. A spade was wedged between the two to separate them and Cricket pulled back.

At that instant the fox made a desperate bid for freedom surging forward. He was half clear of the earth before Terry stopped him by ramming a spade into his mouth, splintering his teeth.

A voice from the watching crowd enquired how the fox was doing. Terry replied with wry humour "He's biting on my shovel!" The gun was loaded and with the fox hopelessly trapped it was an easy task to clear the mud from the target area. The muzzle was pressed to the skull and further pain extinguished.

The carcass was thrown to the hounds and some supporters lingered until they had finished before moving in to claim the brush and pads.

After this opening meet I did not return to this hunt until after Christmas when I attended a Pony Club meet at West Molland, near South Molton on December 31st. As cubhunting introduces puppies to foxhunting so does the Pony Club introduce children. It is the vehicle by which youngsters overcome their natural inhibitions against killing animals for fun.

Despite the meet taking place during the school holidays only a few attended. Those that did must have ended up feeling that even if they are not moved by the humanity of draghunting at least it guarantees fun. It was a cold wet and misty day. The hounds split all over the place and the riders and staff were embroiled in total chaos.

As usual, I accompanied the terriermen. At one point we found the hounds hunting entirely on their own in dense fog. We stopped them, left one of the gallant Exmoor men standing in the pouring rain to guard them, then drove off hunting for the Huntsman. The day ended in mid-afternoon with no kill to my knowledge, though it was anybody's guess what the hounds were up to when all alone!

That was the Friday meet. The following Monday, January 3rd 1983, again with the Dulverton West, at Gunn on the Barnstaple side of the country, the meet gave every indication of being a similar washout. In fact it turned out to be one of the most dramatic of all.

There was torrential rain at the meet. Terry was suffering from a severe bout of flu, so instead of hunting hounds he accompanied the terrierman — Stan — and myself in the Land Rover. I was sad to learn that one of my favourite hounds, Gaylord, had been put down the previous day. This prompted me to ask Terry about the general age of the pack. He pointed out the two oldest, Primrose and Grasper, both 1975 hounds. Seven years is old for a pack hound, most are killed long before that.

From the meet we went for a stirrup cup to a nearby farm with the downpour continuing. Hounds were taken to draw woodland towards Hutcherton whilst we circled and waited by the woods between Harford and Birch. In time a rider approached down the steep grass slopes and told us that the fox was to ground in the same large complex where, a few days previously, they had killed three. We drove as near as possible but even so had a long climb to the earth taking with us the terriers Cricket and Midge. The riders had blocked some of the many entrances but Terry asked for them to be cleared. Midge was entered. On Terry's instructions, we kept well back

to allow the fox to bolt, but no fox appeared.

The earth was massive and the fox was constantly moving up and down the underground passages as the terriers engaged him in sporadic fights and supporters tried to help by listening at the various entrances. However, no sooner had the sounds of combat been confirmed at one site and digging commenced than it promptly moved to another.

The mounted field again became bored and galloped off to hunt elsewhere. The digging party were told that if they did reach the fox they should holloa and the riders would return.

Terry went to put Cricket in but, with that dog's fearsome reputation for killing, he wanted the bleeper collar used, to enable the dog to be tracked and the fox dug out before it was killed.

However, such devices commonly malfunction due to the abundance of mud and moisture at a dig and, despite trying several combinations of batteries, this one simply would neither bleep nor click.

So Cricket went in with no collar. He quickly bayed the fox and Terry rapidly dug down to the sounds of fighting. The fox was uncovered and Terry made a grab for the scruff of his neck but he was too slow, the fox bit his hand. Other diggers rallied to help and tried to prise the fox out of its partial tomb using the iron bar, but to no avail. The fox squealed like mad as the bar was levered against its body.

Cricket was barely visible. He was further down the tunnel, behind the fox, savagely attacking its brush and hindquarters. Under this combined assault the fox flopped over exhausted.

Terry said that with so little life in it they would, sadly, have to kill it (they had the gun to hand). But when, a few moments later, he prodded it with the iron bar and it snapped at him, he gained renewed hope.

The earth was further cleared and eventually Terry, jamming the fox's head back with his spade, managed to grab the scruff of its neck. He then pulled the struggling victim out grabbing it also by its brush.

Twisting the fox on to its back he bowed its head to its backside. Out of sheer fear the fox urinated, dousing its hind legs and brush. It was then dropped into a waiting sack held open by Stan and the others. "Call the hunt!" ordered Terry so everyone holloaed but, after five minutes or more waiting, neither hounds nor riders appeared. A youngster was despatched down the hillside to try and find them. The fox was grunting, kicking and struggling in the sack and Terry warned Stan to keep a tight grip on it.

Terry was in high spirits now and told the diggers to expect to see some real fun. He claimed that he had seen similar bagged foxes used many times by the Cheshire Forest Hunt.

The hounds were a long time coming. Stan was having great difficulty restraining the fox. When the pack did eventually appear, coming up the

grass slope beside the covert that contained the earth, I was terrified that, like the previous spring when the pregnant vixen had been thrown live to hounds, Terry would again bar me from taking pictures.

I hung back hoping to escape notice but, when spotted, I judged it would be best to go right in. I did so, but with camera concealed. I was near to Terry, with Stan higher up the slope holding the fox in the sack as the hounds, approaching from below, were urged on by the mounted field.

Terry shouted "Release the fox Stan! Release it now!" but Stan was fumbling with the knot around the sack. I moved towards him, my back to Terry, and prepared the camera. The hounds were closing rapidly yet the fox was still confined, so Terry called to his Joint Master Bertie Hill to check the pack. Eventually, after frantic efforts, the sack was opened and Stan shook the fox out.

The fox was alone, exposed, defenceless, and completely bewildered. It was muddied, wet, soaked in its own urine and had blood streaming from the wounds to its hindquarters and tail caused by Cricket. It shook itself, saw and heard the baying hounds just 50 yards behind and set off, still confused, up the hill.

This was the most important photographic evidence of the whole two years. Jeering footfollowers sent the battered fox on his way as the entire mounted field, including both Masters, hooting and screaming, galloped past me. They had all seen exactly what had happened.

The fox turned right-handed, desperate to return to its earth but was headed away by the terriermen. It tried again in a wider left-handed circle and managed to reach the wood, but as it crept through the undergrowth to its sanctuary the hunters moved in beating on foot to thwart it.

With every escape avenue blocked the fox swung about and set off towards Birch farm. Bleeding and soaked in urine, it emitted a scent that even the worst hounds in the world could track. On and on it went, twisting and turning as best it could but it had suffered crippling injuries. It made one last vain attempt to lose its scent on the road before being caught in a garden. In stark contrast to the fox, the field had had a most enjoyable run.

We had lost touch with the hunt and only learnt of the final outcome from Bertie Hill when we found the hounds back in their box at about 3.15 p.m. The hunt staff were immensely pleased with the day. They felt sure that catching their fox in the open would encourage the hounds and improve their drive.

Terry had earlier informed me that scared foxes leave no scent so I questioned him as to this incident. "Surely," I said "when the fox was in the sack it was terrified so why, when it was tipped out, did it leave such a strong scent?"

He offered two reasons: firstly that it was 'blooding' i.e. dripping blood

from the injuries inflicted by Cricket; secondly that it was soaked in urine.

I learnt that one or both of these factors are essential for the successful release of bagged foxes. Usually the fox will be 'blooding' anyway from the inevitable terrier bites but, if it is not, it is apparently the practice to cut it. As for urinating, the foxes are either squeezed or have their stomachs gently stood on to provoke this. Connoisseurs of this technique assured me that dog foxes and vixens differ in their willingness to oblige.

When we returned from the earth to the Land Rover I noticed that no-one was carrying the sack. I enquired of Stan as to its whereabouts. He exchanged knowing looks with Terry and told me that it had been dumped in the earth. Presumably it is poor hunting form for a hunt to be found with a sack reeking of fox, and full of fox hairs.

Following that meet in January I had just four more days with the Dulverton West, the first a fortnight later on the 17th at Hunstone Cross. Hounds ran well despite a poor scent and soon marked their fox to ground beneath a hedgebank.

The terriers were entered and Terry said that he could hear the grunts and growls as they battled with the fox.

This earth was immensely complex, consisting of both high and low level tunnels. When the terriers lost their hold the fox simply disappeared. True to form the mounted field became bored and galloped off leaving Terry and his eager team to finish the job.



Deadly duo. Kennel Huntsman Terry Beeney digs, watched by terrierman, Stan (right of picture). Dulverton West Foxhounds, January 17th, 1983.

A determined effort was made. New holes were dug and the bank probed at every likely site but there was no sign of Mr Fox. To facilitate a more aggressive assault the barbed wire fence was cut down but even so, after an hour's hard effort, Terry reluctantly had to give this fox best.

He assumed that the fox had either slipped away or else was laid up in some high level underground chamber that had inadvertently been blocked during the dig. Either way although the fox was alive it was certainly not unscathed — both the terriers had been bitten and the diggers were confident that they had inflicted similar injuries on their adversary.

We rejoined the hunt to learn that they had found two further foxes but both had escaped when the pack split. I overheard Stan describing to some riders in graphic detail the "great fun" that had been had with the bagged fox at Gunn. The only regret that they expressed was that they had not been there to savour it.

That was the Monday meet. Two days later on January 19th from the Foxhunters Inn at West Down, north of Barnstaple, the same hunt had a day of extremely fast hunting that was reminiscent of hunting in Leicestershire. The scent was excellent as the pack pressed their first fox extremely hard and were only thwarted when he ran onto land where hunting is banned.

Returning to the original draw they soon found again. This second fox went like a rocket towards Muddiford with the hounds screaming in its wake. There ensued the fastest hunt I ever saw with the Dulverton West. It was a very private battle fought out between fox and hounds. One against the many; wit and speed pitted against brute force and stamina. The battle ranged up and down the hillsides, over roads, through streams and back again; into sheep foil, over walls; in fact through nearly every trick in the fox's repertoire.

Struggling to pass through gateways the followers and riders were soon left far behind but the hounds coped all too well on their own. As the fox jinked, so the hounds checked, but they cast themselves forward and back and soon regained the line. On and on we sped for mile after mile. It was more like a staghunt.

We by-passed a massive plantation and were watching the hounds disappearing into the distance when Terry caught up with us, his horse lathered in sweat. He explained that the hounds had killed near the plantation but had immediately found again and were hunting another. He was ebullient because an eyewitness had told him that the fox had been bowled over in the open and had been squealing as it fought the hopeless fight with the leading hounds.

The hounds locked on to their third fox and with the scent excellent the end was virtually a foregone conclusion. When he went to ground he was dug out and killed, and home was blown. The horses were totally exhausted.



Kennel Huntsman Terry Beeney searches for the fox, assisted by terrierman, Dave. Dulverton West Foxhounds, January 19th, 1983.

Completing the week with the Dulverton West on Friday the 21st the hounds met at Lower Fyldon, again at the Barnstaple end. Scent once more was excellent. Despite embarking on a most ambitious circle the first fox, unable to elude hounds was forced to ground and killed. The most memorable feature of the dig was that, when the fox was shot, it was so totally entombed in mud that no man could pull it out. After much trying the full pack were unleashed to the task. They managed with ease.

My last day with the Dulverton West was some two months later on March 28th when the meet, though advertised at Twitchen was changed to Withypool Cross. I accepted a lift with the three terriermen, Stan, Roy and Dave. Hunting was brisk in the morning with several foxes about, one of whom was soon marked to ground.

By that time in my hunting career, after the minkhunting episodes, my cover was wearing exceedingly thin so it was an unpleasant surprise to encounter Barry Evans, a stalwart supporter of the Three Counties Minkhounds. He was immediately suspicious of me and voiced his doubts to other members of the hunt but no-one challenged me directly.

However the warnings were there. I knew I had to be extemely careful. Extensive digging was undertaken where the hounds had first marked but, with no sign of the fox, the hounds were taken on. They marked a second time in woodland and again the enthusiatic diggers went to work, led by Mr Evans, but again no sign of the fox,.

When a third mark late in the afternoon produced exactly the same non-result the hunt began to suspect that the hounds regarded it all as a game.

The technical pundits hypothesised on the possible manoeuvres of the fox, with the best suggestion being that it simply looked in each hole then ran on. Others more versed in the ways of hounds preferred the theory that the pack had learnt that if they barked at a hole for long enough Terry would spend half an hour with his head stuck down it!

That last meet completed my two year surveillance of the Dulverton West.

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The only other hunts where I entered the inner sanctum were the Tetcott and South Tetcott (thanks to my local connections). At all the others I was confined to the role of a casual observer, never able to follow for long enough to gain the trust of the terriermen and huntsmen. It was important though to try and find out what the other packs were up to and it certainly helped my cover to have the widest possible experience in hunting.

December 4th 1982 found me in hunting country a world apart from the West Country, namely the Ashford Valley Foxhounds at the Royal Oak, Iden Green, Kent, reckoned to one of the best hunts in the South-East.

There was a veritable gaggle of riders at the meet, nearly all more interested in the glamorous and social side of hunting. If the West Country brings out the killer instinct in hunting man, the South East nurtures the razzmatazz element.

The hounds were, as always, friendly and bouncy — innocent participants. Taken to draw south from the meet they soon had a fox on the move. When other foxes intervened the pack split in all directions, with enthusiastic holloaing and shouting adding to the confusion. The casual observer could have been forgiven for thinking that every saboteur in the country had arrived on the scene!

With a field of at least 100 riders all milling about, jostling to pass through gateways, progress was slow and damage to fields tremendous. The pack did eventually settle to hunt but there was so much chattering and gossiping amongst the riders that it was impossible to hear the hounds. It might as well have been a point-to-point.

Hounds were running and horses were galloping in every direction so I was quite astonished when, in the late afternoon, they did manage to run a fox to ground. As I expected, it being my first time with this hunt, the terriermen were hostile and secretive.

The car followers directed me to where the fox was to ground. I arrived at the wood to find all the riders and hunt staff gathered outside with the hounds. Pushing on through the undergrowth I encountered a motley collection of diggers including a couple of teenage girls, five young boys, five terriers and two larger mongrels.

The fox had sought sanctuary in a large complex earth. His tormentors appeared more intent on larking about and pushing each other into the earth than on despatching him humanely. Instead of blocking the holes as in the West Country, they put nets outside to catch the fox should he bolt. After fooling about for what seemed an enternity they finally gave up, firmly blocking all the holes before they left.

After the letter from that noted hunting authority, J. N. P. Watson published in the Field (October 26th 1982) complaining that it was common practice to block foxes in and leave them to starve I had half expected this to happen. I left ahead of the diggers but circled back and unblocked the two main entrances.

I was singularly unimpressed by my day with the Ashford Valley. Far too many of the followers were ignorant townsfolk who not only knew nothing about country ways or hunting but, even worse, had no intention of learning. To oppose cruelty it is not necessary to understand all the technicalities of its form, but those who support it do have a responsibility to gain at least a glimmer of understanding of what it entails.

The following week, December 11th, I headed way out west to the meet of the Banwen Miners Foxhounds at Llangennith on the Welsh coast near

Swansea. The hunting world always point to the Banwen Miners as being proof of working class involvement in hunting. Many miners are allegedly involved with this hunt. To assess the truth of this I observed the hunt both on the 11th and on their Boxing Day meet on the 27th at the Castle Hotel, Neath.

I soon learned that whatever may have happened in the past, today the hunt have little to do with the mining community. One Joint Master is an auctioneer, his colleague a solicitor. At the Boxing Day meet, which is the one time when all supporters may be expected to gather, I specifically asked to photograph a miner riding to hounds but none could be identified.

The Llangennith meet was most picturesque. I gained some typical hunting shots, showing all the glamour and none of the suffering. One of these was published by Horse and Hound on February 25th 1983. A fox was killed late in the day but out of my sight.

On the Boxing Day I did the usual trick of giving away photographs to gain the hunt's confidence, then gave one supporter a lift for the day and was rewarded with some valuable information. He confirmed the complete lack of mining involvement and recounted an interesting tale concerning the hunt a few seasons back.

He claimed that the hounds had rioted and attacked sheep near Banwen and, as a result, the pack was put down. He blamed this failure on the hounds not being walked amongst sheep as puppies but said that they had now cured the problem.

Between the two meets of the Banwen Miners I had a couple of days in the very heart of English foxhunting — Leicestershire. The first with the Fernie Hunt at Arnesby on December 15th and the second the following day with the Cottesmore at North Luffenham. The Fernie were seriously affected by the Co-op ban on bloodsports — losing a meet a week and a fifth of their hunting country. Leicestershire hunting is fast, both in terms of lifestyle and riding. The hounds have tremendous drive and the resultant pace makes following on foot a nightmare.

On both days high winds made for an appalling scent, and as a result I saw little hunting. The meet at Arnesby was enlivened when an elderly chap sporting a silk topper was thrown from his horse and did a perfect "flier" to land unharmed on his feet.

Before Christmas I returned to the West Country and had a couple of days with the Eggesford Foxhounds. Both the 22nd and the 24th were from Morchard Bishop. On both occasions the weather was atrocious but the hunt persevered, battling through flurries of snow and sleet. Scent was understandably poor so the foxes received a fitting Christmas present.

The new year brought a day I will always remember — January 18th 1983 — when the south Tetcott met on the coast south of Bude at Crackington Haven. This was my first day with these hounds but I was recognised as a



Hunt follower in characteristic pose. Fernie Foxhounds, December 15th, 1982.

follower of the other local packs so was accepted. It was a typical West Country pack — just eight mounted followers, two hunt staff and about six supporters' cars. The hounds drew first along the cliff top which appeared a bit dangerous but fortunately there was no incident. They then drew a large covert inland. I was assured that these hounds excel at drawing but it was very slow work.

It later transpired that one reason for the apparent hunt lethargy was that the owner of the covert had arrived in an irate mood saying that no-one had bothered to phone him for permission beforehand and that he did not want to see the hunt there again.

This inhibited the staff but, eventually, the hounds succeeded in putting up a fox and chasing him towards a nearby village. He crossed the valley and circled back towards his original covert. Completing the ring he continued on but the hounds were not fooled and they forced him to ground in the vicinity of the chapel at Flanders. The supporters knew this by the change in tone of the hounds.

It was about 3.30p.m. as I drove round and dashed down to the earth that was located amid scrubland and brambles, halfway up a hillside. There was a small group of two men and one woman digging frantically. The hounds were restrained by the staff some distance away. A terrier had been entered



Stag caught by hounds. Devon and Somerset Staghounds, 22nd August 1981.



Collecting trophies. Devon and Somerset Staghounds, 22nd August 1981.



Stag at bay in stream. Devon and Somerset Staghounds, 8th October 1981.





Curiosity. Devon and Somerset Staghounds, 8th October 1981.





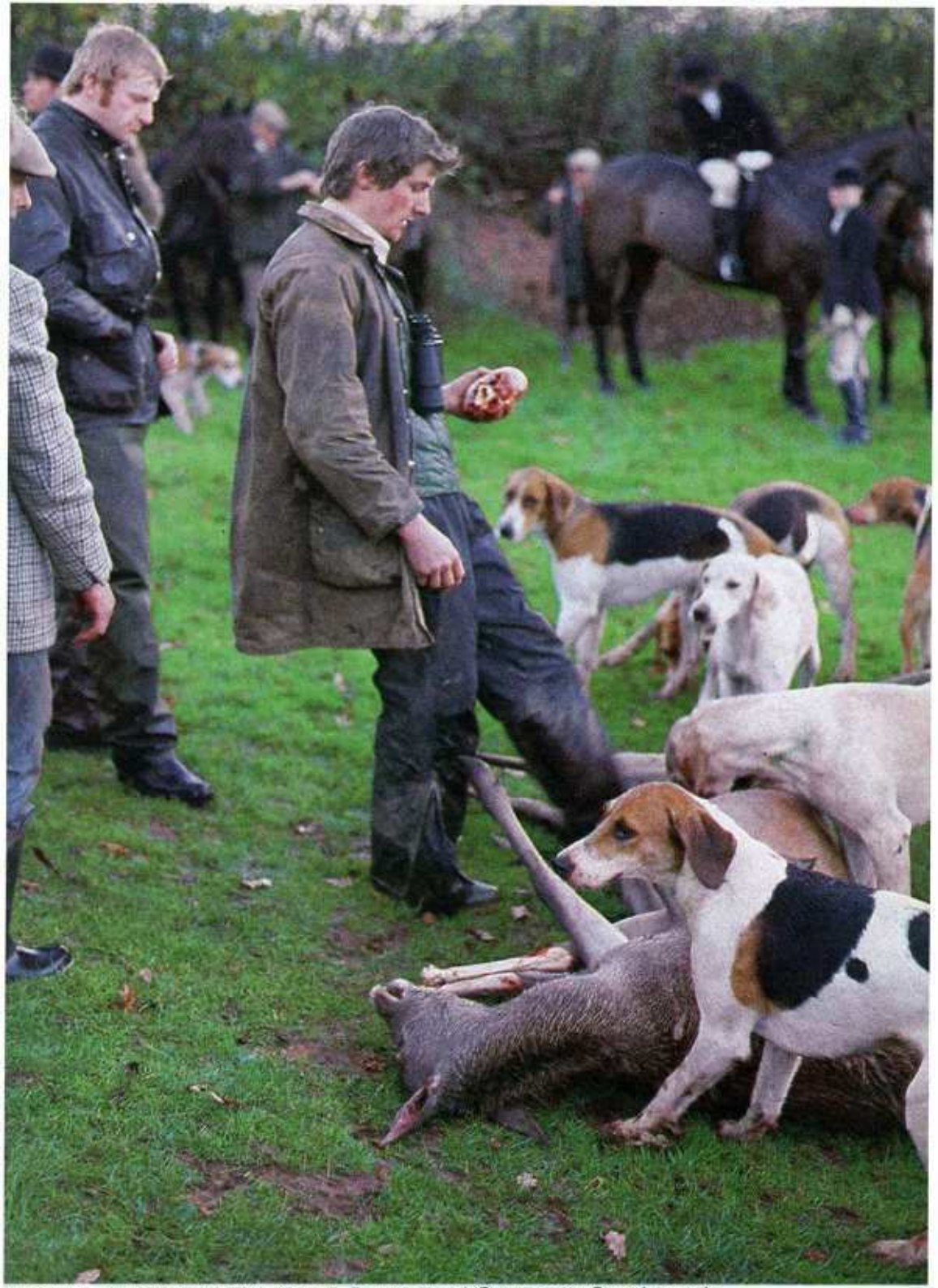
The bloody end. Quantock Staghounds, 7th October 1981.





ox dug out and killed by Dulverton West Foxhounds, 30th October 1981.





upporter clutches hind's heart. Devon and Somerset Staghounds, 7th November 1981.





Peter Cooper (Joint Master of Three Counties) holds dead mink aloft. Devon and Cornwall/Three Counties Minkhounds, 10th July 1982.



Ian Arnett taunts hounds with dead mink. Devon and Cornwall/Three Counties/Four Shires Minkhounds, 7th July 1982.



Greyhound with live hare. Waterloo Cup hare coursing, 2nd March 1983.



Mink bolted from drain. Devon and Cornwall/Three Counties Minkhounds, 10th July 1982.

and was being tracked with an electronic bleeper.

Gauging by the sounds audible from the tunnel the diggers cheerfully announced that the terrier was battling with the fox, forcing it further and further back. Holes were dug at positions judged as being above the combat but the adversaries always moved further along before the tunnel was exposed. The iron bar was used to probe for the tunnel pattern and another exit was found hidden below dense bracken. I was sitting, watching beside the first hole when I was startled by a fox tip-toeing out and creeping away into the undergrowth. He was a beautiful sight, his coat dry and immaculate.

He had clearly not been hunted. I said nothing but unfortunately the others saw him and called to the hunt staff.

A misunderstanding ensued. One of the diggers, thinking that the huntsman said to holloa, did so, and the whole pack rushed over. Surprisingly the hounds found it impossible to pick up the scent and most were still milling about when called back with much whip cracking and horn blowing. Everyone agreed that the hunted fox, the one they wanted, remained deep in the earth, locked in battle with the terrier.

The second terrier had previously been entered to the hole that the fox escaped from but had come out further on with its nose bitten, indicating that the terrified fox must have been hiding in some side passage. Seeing this the terrier lady was distraught. She reckoned that the fox must have been bleeding itself and consequently would have produced a good hunt. She was furious that the hounds had not been unleashed.

After further digging, clearing and probing, the nature of the earth was revealed. It was on a split level. When a second hole was dug the terrier was found with its backside facing out, having switched positions with the fox.

The dog was pulled clear and the tunnel roof excavated further, taking care to prevent the fox bolting.

This took time and with darkness approaching the staff left to take the hounds home. On and on the dig went until the fox was trapped and could be clearly seen, bright eyes peering out from the tunnel. The youngest lad took aim with the small calibre pistol. There was a mighty bang and clouds of smoke but he missed.

Unsure as to whether the fox had even been wounded he reached in to try and grab it with the badger-tongs but the fox, still full of fight, snapped at them.

Another terrier went in but was bitten and retreated. Then both terriers were tried. The fox was unable to battle with both. Whilst his attention was distracted by one the other savaged his head and side. By these tactics one of the dogs eventually gained a solid grip and he was pulled out, the diggers hoping that in turn he would pull the fox out, but he lost his hold. The Huntsman, Richard, then returned from putting the hounds away, to help.

The hole was enlarged even more. Whilst digging one of the terriermen said to me "You're not anti-hunt are you?" to which I inevitably replied "Of course not!" Satisfied, they then arranged Richard on one side of the exposed tunnel and the young lad on the other, one with a pick the other with the iron bar, both with the aim of clubbing the fox should it bolt. Wisely the fox refused.

Further investigation in the rapidly failing light revealed that the fox had retreated so far that it had squeezed and wormed its way under a large boulder, just one back leg protruded. The terrier lady grabbed this limb with the badger-tongs and tugged and heaved with all her evident weight. The fox squealed and yelped in response but would not budge. From the sounds it emitted the diggers judged it to be male.

Soon all vision was lost in the blackness of night. First matches, then gas cigarette lighters, were used to illuminate the scene. The tongs were levered and pushed, straining to gain a better purchase on the fox but without success. Next the earth was cleared in an effort to free the large boulder that was shielding the fox but the lighters ran out before this could be completed.

Darkness struck. Two of the men volunteered to trek the considerable distance to the hunt lorry to fetch a torch and did so, leaving Richard, the terrier lady and myself. The fox was held in the iron grip of the tongs. Far from gazing in wonder at the beauty of the stars I was consumed with feeling for this petrified innocent creature, a child of creation, that was yelping in agony just a few feet from me.

Two short, one long, two short, one long, not morse code but rather the pitiful whimperings, the grunt-grunt-griaow of this trapped fox, a sound that will haunt me forever. Terrier lady revealed the depth of her compassion by saying "Shut up! It's your own fault for going there!"

Eventually after what seemed like eternity to us and must have felt like it for the victim, actually about 20 minutes, the men returned. In the new light the Huntsman used the bar to lever against the boulder but it was pressed tight against the fox's abdomen. Everytime the boulder moved the fox screamed hideously.

It was painstaking work but by ignoring the fox and heaving, pushing and twisting, the stone was eventually removed. The gun was prepared. Devoid of cover the helpless fox was dragged into the torchlight by the tongs still locked onto its back leg. In a last gesture of defiance he turned to face his tormentors.

The quarry was torn and battered, bleeding from deep bites to his head, neck, and flank. The once beautiful coat was now wet, muddied and matted, but the eyes still blazed.

A terrific bang ended the suffering. The shot echoed in the chamber, and across the sleepy valley. Richard blew the kill — long haunting notes that hung in the chill, still air. The time was 6.20p.m., nearly three hours after



Lady Waechter (mounted, centre frame), Joint Master of North Ledbury Foxhounds, January 8th, 1983. Ian Coghill was her Joint Master but she dispensed with his services when he failed to fulfil her requirements.

that fox had first sought sanctuary below ground. Three hours of continuous fighting with one or both of the terriers, three hours of sheer agony, yet by no means unusual for a dig.

The hunts always claim that they kill foxes instantly.

The brush was taken and the shattered carcass returned to the hole from whence it had so reluctantly come, and buried.

That was January 18th. The following month I returned to the same pack, on the 12th, for their meet at Boyton. It was a freezing cold day and there were just 7 riders and 15 cars following. The first fox ran a large circle and tried to break off but his ruse was foiled when watchers gave the game away. The hounds were lifted and put on the right line.

With scent absent this fox managed to elude hounds but a second one was marked to a drain in the early afternoon. It was a long field drain ending at a small stream. The smallest terrier was entered some 50 yards into the field and the hounds held back, the aim being to bolt the fox out of the end overlooking the stream. The fox flew out, swinging towards the onlookers lining the riverbank.

Headed by these he swerved towards the river and tried to jump it. The hounds were released, both they and the followers were in full cry. Despite a prodigious leap the fox fell short of the far bank and plunged into the water. From the edge I saw him scrambling to climb out as the cry of the pack grew louder. Again and again he jumped up clawing at the overhanging brambles but with nothing to grip on he slipped back.

The full pack were baying from the bank and the fox helpless in mid-stream turned to face them. The hounds surged forward. As the leaders went in the fox twisted and bit the first one. There was a brief melee, a maelstrom of threshing and tumbling and it was all over.

The Huntsman joined the fray, wading into the river to recover the carcass. As the hounds, victors of the one-sided fight, came out I saw that one was bleeding badly from his ear.

The next month, March, I followed no less than six different packs of foxhounds, one of which the Dulverton West meeting at Withypool Cross, has already been mentioned. With the exception of this hunt and the South Tetcott on the 29th I was only in the role of casual observer. I lacked the time to gain their confidence.

On the 5th the Worcestershire Foxhounds met at the "Chequers," Crowle. This is one hunt that is regularly opposed by an efficient saboteur group and I was interested to see how they would react to strangers.

At the meet I soon ascertained that the supporters were similar in kind to those of the Ashford Valley — the gloss and glamour brigade. As with the Ashford Valley these hounds have a tremendous reputation but I saw little to justify it.

From the first draw a fox was quickly afoot. As happens often, the car followers, by organising the supporters, ensured that he was able to cross the main road which he did. When I questioned the wisdom of this, saying that it was risking injury to the hounds, particularly stragglers, no-one seemed bothered. The fox circled right-handed and crossed the nearby railway line, seconds before a train. Instead of being checked the pack was urged over in pursuit by the Hunt staff.

A while later I was standing in an open field photographing the Huntsman, John Creed, approaching on foot with his hounds. When he reached me he went completely berserk, screaming abuse, challenging my right to photograph him, and threatening me with every form of court action. Fortunately his anger rendered his thinking incoherent and I was easily able to evade the more dangerous questions.

When he left I had a word with some supporters and terriermen standing smiling nearby. They laughed and apologised for his outburst saying "Don't worry mate, John's been a bit funny in the head since the antis started bothering him!"

Doubtless huntsmen begin seeing antis behind every tree, the irony being that in my case he was exactly right! I left the hunt soon after, aware that even if they did run a fox to ground I would not be allowed to photograph anything.

Four days later — March 9th — a day with the Berkeley Foxhounds at Nympsfield was very interesting. At the meet the school opposite must have

come to a complete halt as the nuns marshalled their infant charges out to see the hounds. It was a pity that after the glamorous side they were not also shown the true fate of "All things bright and beautiful."

The first fox went to ground almost immediately and when it proved impossible to dislodge him they simply blocked him in and moved on. In due course I returned to unblock the earth. The second victim went away in a large circle with the hounds pressing him very hard. This pack has great drive and the scent was good. Returning to complete the circle the tiring fox only just made it to ground.

The terriers were entered and, after some digging and probing with the hounds watching intently, the fox bolted. According to hunting custom it is "sporting" in these circumstances to give the fox a short start known as "law." This ensures that the fox is not killed immediately and therefore gives the hunt more fun.

One would certainly have expected a prestigious hunt such as the Berkeley, of whom Prince Charles is a regular supporter, to conform to hunting tradition but they did not. The pack were released immediately and I gained a rare photograph of hounds and fox in the same frame. The fox dashed for some 200 yards before going to ground again.

Lengthy excavations ensued in the course of which the whipper-in disappeared up to his ankles. The end was almost inevitable — the fox was dug out and shot.

That was Wednesday, on Saturday March 12th, I was back in the same area with the Duke of Beaufort's Hunt, meeting at the Monument, Hawkesbury Upton. Rather than observation of hunting this was mainly to take photographs of the field, in particular the Duke himself and his staff, whose comments have done so much to aid the anti-hunting cause. It was the honorary secretary Major Ronnie Dallas who confirmed that foxes are encouraged for hunting by the comment: "If it were not for us building artificial lairs and keeping the foxes alive to hunt, they would become extinct and the whole balance of nature would be thrown out."

Apart from these mug shots that were easy enough to take at the meet the hunt was a complete fiasco. It was almost impossible to keep in touch with the hounds. Cars and Land Rovers headed in every direction and no-one knew what was happening.

By the time of the South Tetcott meet at Hornacott Chapel on March 29th, near to their previous meet at Boyton, the ring of suspicion was beginning to close in one me. The two-legged hounds had locked on so that, like the fox, I was being hunted. I had to be very careful.

The first fox found was probably saved by the intervention of two hares, one of which the pack chased. By the time the hounds settled to hunt another it had started to pour with rain.

I was near the village of Alvacott when I heard the hounds baying as they

ran down the hillside beside a hedgerow. I peered over just in time to see the last of the hounds disappearing out through a gap in the left hand corner of the hedge across the field. Almost immediately I heard the scampering of muddy feet and leaning further over saw the fox running down the slope on the other side of the hedge from me!

Protracted hunting then ensued between Eastcott and Bradridge Woods with blankets of dense fog periodically descending to confuse matters. The pack had a field day. Not surprisingly they split and were soon running all over the place. Foxes were numerous and when one passed near the group I was with the terrierman blew his whistle to summon the pack.

Regrouped, the hounds settled to this fox, pushed him on, and marked him to ground amid the pine trees of Bradridge Wood at about 5.00p.m. There was only one main hole and the terriers soon bayed the fox, but the first terrier entered was bitten deeply on the nose.

The fox was moving in a circular tunnel and it needed several holes to trap him. When I talked of taking a picture one of the men said "You're not an anti are you?" I was cautious.

The terriers were pulled out and the hole enlarged until the fox's brush was exposed. The whipper-in then grabbed it and pulled the fox backwards. One of his colleagues grabbed the fox's body with the badger-tongs. The fox was struggling as best he could. The whipper-in fired at him, at point-blank range but missed completely.

The petrified creature, still twisting and writhing, was further restrained by a hand on the scruff of its neck. So tight was this grip that the fox was soon gasping and gurgling for air. The victim was then stunned by a couple of light taps with the butt of a crop. A solid blow with the crop, the pick or the spade or, more obviously, a second shot would have brought a merciful death, but no such coup-de-grace was delivered.

The fox was still twitching and struggling when the whip dragged him away by his brush. He was taken out of the wood through what appeared to be a dried up canal and down towards some marshland where the hounds were waiting. Without further ceremony he was thrown to their waiting jaws.

My last days foxhunting was with the Eggesford at Lower Sutton Farm near Exeter on March 30th. Peter Goulding of the Shooting Times was at the meet so I was on my guard. With few foxes in that particular area the hunting was extremely slow and wide ranging. There are even fewer foxes now as one was killed near Morchard Bishop at about 4.00p.m. although I failed to see the end.

CHAPTER NINE

In the autumn of 1982, after spending the summer observing the minkhunting 'exploits' of two of my antagonists in the letters columns of many local papers — Ian Coghill of the Three Counties Minkhounds and Arlin Rickard of the Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds — I switched my undercover work to beagling, a sport I had always felt was particularly cruel as the hare is such a timid inoffensive, creature.

On October 16th 1982 I attended the opening meet of the Surrey and North Sussex Beagles at the Red Barn, Blindley Heath at 12.30p.m.

Beagle meets differ from other forms of hunting by usually starting in the early afternoon.

After my years of "sabbing" I knew that such hunting was a prime target for sabs, because huntsmen and followers are all on foot. As I had expected sabs were in attendance, but ineffectual as the hunt took place on private land and they were forced to keep to the roads.

There were very few hares about. The hounds drew on and on in open fan across the fields while the followers trailed in their wake, increasingly disconsolate as the rain poured down making a bitterly cold afternoon.

Once a hare was found the start was electric. The hounds had been shuffling along, sniffing intently. Suddenly the hare, after remaining crouched until the last moment, shot away like the proverbial bullet. The hounds responded with ecstatic cries and swerved in hot pursuit. The hare was soon out of sight and the pack settled down to hunt her scent. This is where the calculated cruelty comes in. All hounds are purposely bred for stamina rather than speed, and it is generally reckoned that a well-bred pack of beagles will take 90 minutes to run a hare to exhaustion, and kill her.

Lurchers would kill quicker, but the sporting ethos of beagling is that followers are able to have a good run and see the hounds work out the line of scent.

On this occasion the scales of fortune favoured the hare. The scent was patchy, and intermittent. The saboteurs were holloaing and blowing their hunting horns like mad from the road, distracting the hounds, but taking care not to attract them to danger.

The hunt finally ended when the hare ran through cattle foil, leaving the hounds baffled by the smell.

Soon after this welcome intervention I trod on a nail when climbing railed fencing. It ripped right through my boot, leaving me limping for the rest of the day. A second hare was found but, once again, was lost because of poor scent. The hunt staff persevered in a torrential downpour, but by 4.30p.m. when they found a field of mushrooms, it was too much temptation. The Huntsman blew to end the day and they consoled themselves by filling their hats with fungi.

The following week, October 23rd, I returned to the same hunt for their meet at Marsh Green, near Edenbridge. This meet had not been advertised so I had to phone the kennels. They would not tell me the meet and I feared pushing it too far in case they asked to phone me back (I was on my home number). Instead they gave me a Reigate number to try. I tried, but again a solid wall. The lady was most suspicious, said she would not tell me, and was adamant that she did not remember me from the previous week. I played my last card by asking for the number of the Huntsman Rodney Cooper, saying that I was sure he would vouch for me. I had made a point the previous week of chatting to Rodney, outlining my interest in taking "sporting" pictures. Sure enough he remembered and told me the location of the meet.

That day the hounds inflicted two lengthy, punishing, hunts on hares, but there was no kill. Hares typically run in circles, either clockwise or anti-clockwise. To start with, the circle may be of huge diameter but, as the hare tires, it gets smaller until eventually, when totally exhausted, she will break off the ring and run in a straight line.

For the first hunt the scent was a bit patchy, particularly over the plough. However there were plenty of followers dotted about the fields, eager to betray the whereabouts of the fleeing hare, simply by holding their caps or handkerchiefs in the air and pointing.

The hunted hare completed her first circle and began her second, but she was visibly tiring. A fresh hare popped up and briefly led the hounds away, but the staff were quick to whip them off and put them back on line. By then, the hunted hare had disappeared. Rodney took the pack into a farm, sniffing around the outhouses, but there was no sign. He even waded into an overgrown pond with them, thinking that she might be hiding in the reeds. Eventually, some two hours after she was first found, she was given best.

A second hare waited until the hounds almost tripped over her before bolting. When she did go it was with a stunning burst of speed. She had cleared two fields before the pack was even out of the first. The pursuit lasted an hour before she eventually shook the pack and the day ended with everyone exhausted at 5.15p.m.

That was October 23rd. A fortnight later I was back with the same pack for their meet at "The Bull," Chelsham, on the southern outskirts of London. I arrived some ten minutes after the 12.30p.m. meet and was immediately suspicious. There were no hunters, just a couple of car-loads of sabs, parked beside the green. I went to the pub to enquire, but the barman, clearly thinking I was a sab, said brusquely: "They've cancelled."

I waited. Soon two more supporters cars turned up. Neither knew what had happened, but one had heard that the hounds were due to start at nearby Warren Farm. After asking directions, we set off. As we passed the sabs they slipped into convoy behind us.

With them tailing us, we reached the farm and learned that the meet had been changed to the "Fox and Hounds," Tilburstow Hill. The sabs were lurking, waiting to follow us. I was worried. My cover was under great strain at that time for, despite all my pleadings, a sequence of myself talking about the "Smoking Beagles" had been shown in "The Animals Film" on Channel 4, the previous Thursday. If any hunter had seen that and recognised me, I was finished. I judged it just too risky to lead two car-loads of sabs to the hunt. I knew I had to either lose them or to direct them to "find us" later.

Turning to my hunting companions I suggested we split up and whoever was unfortunate enough to be followed by the sabs would sacrifice his hunting by leading them elsewhere.

I indicated discreetly to the sabs to follow me but even though I drove as suspiciously as possible, still they followed someone else. Had they followed me I could have explained the situation. As it was, they followed another fellow to a DIY store in Reigate, missed the hunt, and ended up cursing.

When I caught up with the hunt, the staff were well pleased to learn that we had led the sabs astray. My cover was strengthened considerably. Hounds had already put a brace of hares up from some woodland, but once again the scent was bad.

There were more hares here and hounds gaily chased them in all directions. At one point I heard frantic squealing coming from a hedgerow. I dashed down fearing it was a hound hung up in barbed wire, but one of the whippers-in beat me to the scene and emerged joking: "Just another bloody rabbit killed!"

Apparently this hunt had only killed one hare since they returned from their hunting festival in the Lake District. The light faded as the mist came down, and home was blown at 4.30 p.m. with just the unfortunate rabbit added to the tally.

I was anxious to see what really happens when hounds do catch a hare so the following week, November 13th, I opted to change hunts, following the Pevensey Marsh Beagles meeting at the Rother Valley Hotel, Northiam

at 11.30 a.m. It was a poor choice. The hounds drew over the flat marshes, through the crops, the hillsides, the hedgerows and even the coverts, but there was not a single sniff of a hare let alone a sighting. It was a complete and utter blank and left me wondering how beaglers convince any landowners that they have a necessary pest control service to perform.

Saturday November 20th was completely different. It was an invitation meet of the Surrey and North Sussex in Pevensey Marsh country, at the "Bulls Head," Boreham Street.

I arrived to find that there were sabs about. Knowing that they would come from the Brighton/Hastings area and might recognise me, I was a bit fearful. On this occasion there were plenty of footpaths so the hunt could not keep the sabs off the fields, but they did try. I opted to stay near the hounds as much as possible. One sab, eyeing my camera, asked who I was working for. Knowing the hunt were listening, I explained that I was freelancing with 'Shooting Times' in mind and that I was particularly interested to record any violence caused by the sabs — a comment which pleased the hunt enormously.

In fact the only pictures I gained were of hunters pushing and jostling the sabs. One sab realised what I was actually photographing and shouted across: "That's a good photograph for Shooting Times, that really shows hunt violence!" I stopped before the hunt became suspicious.

The hunt continued, but most of the followers missed all their 'sport' as they spent the whole time bullying the sabs to keep to the footpaths.

There were hares about and the scent was good. Clearly a climatic change had occurred in favour of the hounds. The previous Tuesday the same hunt had killed one hare outright and chased another until, terrified and exhausted, she opted to swim a river and was drowned. They had also killed the previous Saturday.

The hounds ran well, and locked on to a hare. However at a point beside a canal the sabs effectively distracted them — making so much noise that Rodney's instructions were inaudible. There was plenty of banter, but no real violence for the sabs outnumbered the hunt four to one.

Hounds then set off in another large circle. I cut across the diagonal with the followers and had just reached the brow of a hill, with the hounds in full cry on the other side, when the baying stopped abruptly. The kill was blown. I sprinted forward. The hare had been killed in a field of young cabbages. The hounds were milling about, scrapping over the remains. The triumphant supporters, flocking to see, trampled a large area of the crop — the perfect irony, considering that the prime reason for killing the hare is that she eats the occasional plant!

I tried to take photographs of the dead hare, but only splintered bones, blood and fur remained. Learning that it was my first hare kill, the supporters searched around, found the torn off tail of the hare (scut) and

awarded it to me as a trophy. To preserve it I was instructed to soak it in methylated spirits for at least three weeks. In fact, at the first opportunity, I tucked it back into the soil.

Hounds were then taken to where another hare had been viewed. They quickly picked up the line and were away at speed. I opted to follow Ian Cunningham, the Pevensey Marsh Hunstman, trusting in his knowledge of his own country.

The pack circled a hill and were returning towards us when they killed again. The hare had crossed a canal, was coursed down the other side and then caught. Proud of their two successes home was blown at 4.00 p.m.

On the long walk back to our cars we were accosted by an angry bunch of sabs, standing by their van and two cars. Some hunt supporters had let down six of their tyres and stolen the valves to prevent them being re-inflated.

One of the sabs tackled me: "If you want a picture for Shooting Times, take a picture of this damage and put it in your bloody rag!" It was too dark to even try.

Rodney and Ian then offered to lend the sabs a pump having first driven them to get some new valves. I offered to help as well, but they had it all in hand. Apparently the Pevensey Marsh have an agreement with the sabs not to cause this kind of damage to each other's vehicles (a wise agreement for the hunt to make as theirs are the most vulnerable.)

A week later, November 27th, I was back with the Surrey and North Sussex for a meet in their own country — at the "Hare and Hounds", Lingfield. Once again, sabs — this time from Surrey University — were at the meet and in attendance throughout the day. I had been so often linked with the appearence of sabs that when Rodney first saw me he asked: "You're not bringing these antis with you, are you?" I could only laugh and shrug the comment off. Fortunately I was able to repair the damage done to my cover by telling him that I had left a photograph with one of his staff, that I had taken of him earlier in the season at Marsh Green.

One young sab stayed with the hounds all day, but said nothing to reveal his true feelings and caused no trouble. As I had done many years earlier he was simply on observation to understand what happens. Hunters challenged him, bullied him, and ordered him to keep off private land, but he replied that he had paid his "cap", and produced the little cardboard fob to prove it. This baffled the hunt as they then felt morally bound to let him through and did so, but reminded him that he had to obey the hunt rules.

As we followed the hounds in a fan across the fields a hare popped up right in front, but so fast that I was unable to take a picture. She went off in a big circle and then returned. I was trailing in the wake when I saw her dart through a gateway moments before sabs reached the spot. It was a perfect chance to see the effectiveness of sabotage as the hounds were streaming in full cry only seconds behind. The sabs sprayed to cover the line and whistled

and shouted to distract the pack.

However, a pack at full speed has tremendous forward momentum. Though they checked briefly, perhaps for five seconds, they soon cast on themselves, picked up the line and carried on. For many hares such a brief respite may well not be enough, but for this one it was.

I ran and ran to keep up. The hare had crossed a stream and, when the hounds piled in after her, I thought the kill was imminent. Then a fresh hare intervened, the pack split, and Rodney chose wrongly, hunting after the fresh one, leaving a very tired hare to escape.

Realising his mistake, Rodney regrouped the pack to draw for her, but it was too late. As the afternoon wore on it became very cold and misty. Hounds were entered to one large covert from where immediately sounds of shooting were heard.

In the mayhem the pack split, some going with the Huntsman and the others with the whippers-in. The Huntsman returned to the main group of followers, succeeded soon after by the whippers-in, beaming with delight. Their hounds had chopped down a baby leveret. Although they only recovered a tiny ball of fur, they were certain the victim was a hare, rather than a rabbit. The hounds had worried it, whereas with a rabbit they merely kill and leave.

The following month, December, I ranged right across the country and the 18th found me out with the Warwickshire Beagles for their meet at the "Three Horseshoes", Wixford near Redditch.

This was the hunt of which Ian Coghill was Huntsman until he had unleashed a particularly vicious stream of invective on two committee members who, not surprisingly, failed to vote for him next time round! Nevertheless, I had been told that he still followed them and I hoped to meet up with him to watch how he really behaved. I also knew that I would meet other followers of the Three Counties Minkhounds and would have to be careful.

As I arrived, Loppylugs, who I met whilst minkhunting, rushed up shouting, "I'm going to murder you." I gulped, thinking he had spotted me on 'The Animals Film', but it was simply that he had a terrible photograph of himself and thought that it might upset my sensitive photographic tastes.

From the first draw a hare bolted almost immediately and the hounds piled after her straight into a field of sheep. The hunt cursed, knowing full well that they had been banned from that land. None of the uniformed staff dared go on to whip the hounds out, all they could do was stand meekly on the margins trying to call the pack out — rather like a man trying to discourage his big bouncy dog from rolling in his neighbours flower beds. The beagles thought it was all great fun, but the hunt eventually coaxed them out without the landowner being any the wiser.

As the day wore on large numbers of hares were chased in all directions, but fortunately all escaped. Though able to lock on to the scent the pack lacked the drive to push them hard enough. Late in the afternoon, at about 4.00 p.m., an amazing incident occurred.

The hounds were drawing the top end of a grass field when they put their quarry up. She shot away from the hounds and ourselves towards the hedgerow at the far end, where she stopped. In full cry the pack hurtled towards her. She sat up, ears pricked, and looked about. Then she was away, straight back towards the hounds. Attaining full speed in seconds, she hit the approaching wedge of canine venom head on. Darting left she missed the leader, swerved inside the second, accelerated back from the third and so on. Relying only on speed and stunning agility she carved her way through the entire pack. They snapped at her fleeing form, but without success. Through the pack, she was away and out of sight leaving the hounds in complete disarray as the leaders swerved about and were bowled over by those following.

The supporters scratched their heads, looked questioningly at their hip flasks and put it down to the hare being a "suicide jockey." I wondered whether, less anthropomorphically, she had leverets beyond the hedgerow, because apart from the first instant, she certainly led the pack away from it. The hunt drew on and on, in near total darkness casting by the light of the moon, but without success. She was gone.

After Christmas I switched to follow another hunt not far from the Warwickshire, the Wyre Forest Beagles, meeting at Coddington Cross, near Worcester on December 29th. Loppylugs was at the meet doling out half a bottle of sherry to the supporters. He gleefully informed me that this is one of the hunt's best meets.

From the first draw we soon found that there were very few hares about. When a rabbit was disturbed the hounds chased it eagerly and were only stopped with difficulty.

Talking with the followers I learned that hounds are first entered to the pack at above 18 months old, and that the oldest in this pack was seven years old. After seven, they are destroyed. I calculated that to mean an awful lot of perfectly healthy beagles killed each year — it is not only the hares that suffer!

Eventually one of the supporters holloaed a hare away. The pack set off in a wide right-handed circle. On and on the hunt went until the hare returned to her starting point. As if in a relay race, a second hare then popped up and took the hounds on, whilst the tired hare swerved inside on a much tighter line. The hounds gaily set off for their second lap. This second hare ran the same circle, but when she returned there was no other hare to help. The pack was gaining.

She set off on a second circuit, but in a much tighter circle. High up on

a ploughed hillside she was held up by a fence of chicken mesh. By the time she was through the pack was only yards behind. At the scene I heard a supporter who had witnessed her terrified, frantic efforts to get through, express sympathy for her. Returning to the starting point for a second time, again there was no help. She was on her own.

She broke off the circle and ran straight. Supporters were holloaing and shrieking in ecstasy, just as they do on a staghunt. I knew the end was near. She was coursed alongside two hedgerows and then dashed across a bare field towards a brook with the hounds inexorably gaining. I whipped up my camera. Seconds later she reached the brook, but never came out. The hounds piled in, a brief penetrating squeal and it was over. The remains were recovered in triumph and I took some photographs of the Master, Roger Colver, cutting the scut off. The time was 3.15p.m.

They drew on and had a brief hunt on a second hare, but she escaped.

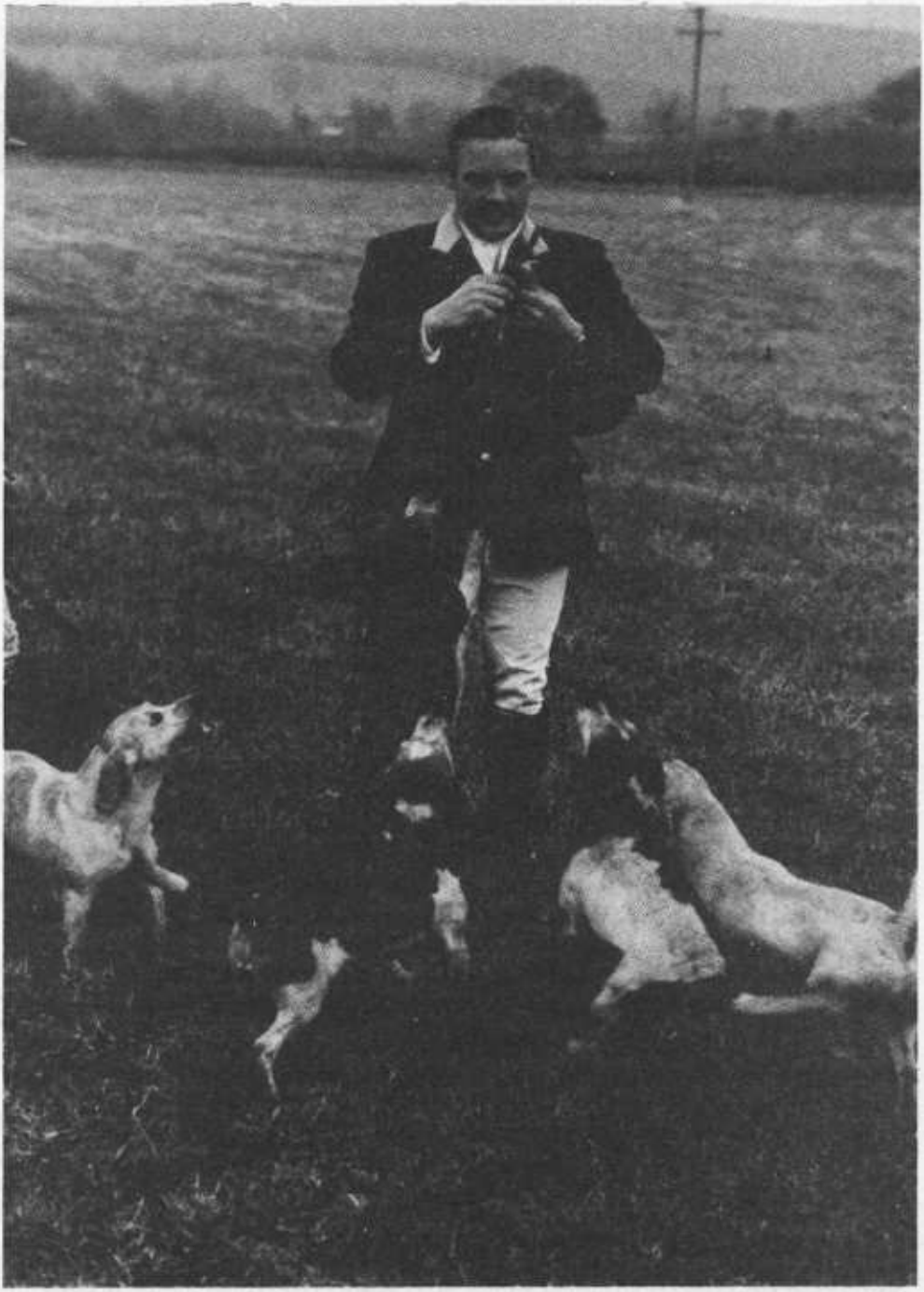
That was December 29th. In the New Year I was back with the Wyre Forest for their meet at Kinnersley Church on January 8th. On this occasion I missed seeing the kill. When the tiring hare ran round the left-hand side of a farm, instead of following, I tried to be clever and ran round the other way to lie in wait and photograph her head-on. She never made it, being headed by supporters early on in her circle.

Scorning a dense pine covert that might have saved her, she darted towards some buildings, and in the words of a smiling eyewitness, was caught, "under a cottage gate." My informant told how the staff had frantically bundled the hounds out of the garden, cleared up the remains of the hare and departed before anyone saw them. As he put it: "It really is better if the hares are killed in the open country, away from public view."

Finding a second hare and with the scent good the hounds hunted her closely, but just when it appeared that they would kill, again near buildings, the pack rioted and killed a rabbit.

In the course of that hunt I heard an interesting tale from the hunt treasurer, a lady who writes hunting reports under the pseudonym of "Elfin." The previous Wednesday, their hounds had marked to a hole in the base of a tree. Though cast in all directions there was no scent leading away. Then blood was noticed on one of the hounds. Looking into the hole the terrified hare was seen wedged in the topmost part, bleeding but still alive. The hounds had been able to reach and chew her hindquarters but she clung on desperately. No-one could reach her, but eventually one of the smallest hounds squeezed in and dragged her out, killing her. In "Elfin's" opinion, they did not like killing hares that way, as it was "not very sporting."

That was the 8th, on January 22nd I was with the Warwickshire for their meet at "The Bell", Cropthorne. I saw Peter Cooper, a Joint Master of the Three Counties Minkhounds at the meet, and he was a bit chilly towards me to say the least!



Master, Roger Colver, removes a trophy from the torn carcass of a dead hare. Wyre Forest Beagles, December 29th, 1982.

Later, walking around the fields I learned why. He tackled me brusquely: "Have you changed your address?" I could only say "No" with an air of puzzled innocence. He added: "Well Ian (Coghill) wrote to you wanting some pictures and had his letter returned by the Post Office marked 'Not known at this address'." I mentally cursed the Post Office as they were paid to forward my mail. My only escape was to explain that Ian must have written my address wrongly in some way. To add credibility I was able to truthfully say that Arlin Rickard had done the same, but it was still a bit thin — I had a distinct cloud of suspicion over me.

That day several hares were hunted to the brink of exhaustion but all escaped.

Peter's girlfriend, Rachel, invited me back for tea but, knowing I was vulnerable to close questioning about my address, I declined, even though in doing so I raised further doubts as to my sincerity as a supporter.

The following week, January 29th, I attended my last beagle meet in the area with the Wyre Forest at "The Bridge", Tenbury. This meet was the day after their Hunt Ball so they were all a bit jaded. In the crowded bar, I gave Roger Colver a photograph of himself that I had taken earlier in the month with his hounds outside Kinnersley Church. He was well pleased.

Leaving the pub the hunt vanned on to Whitton Farm. From "Elfin" I learned that Loppylugs had been in his usual form at the Ball, saying to her: "I can tell you are a woman when I'm dancing with you, but not when I see you out beagling!"

There were plenty of hares about that day, and the hounds ran with fervour in all directions. Eventually they locked onto one with distinctive pure white hindquarters. I learned that it was the descendant of an all white hare that had lived in the area some seven years previously. Evidently the hunt had had previous run ins with this one, as Roger made it quite clear that he was determined to catch her. With scent reasonable the hounds pushed her hard, then momentarily they lost her. The landowner put them right but only reluctantly. Talking to supporters it transpired that he did not really want to see her caught. He thought that it would, in some way, bring bad luck.

At that, most followers felt that in deference to his wishes the hunt should stop, but Roger persisted. Pursuit only ended when the pack rioted after a rabbit and lost the scent and, with little help from the supporters was unable to re-find it. By then the pace had been so fast that the hounds were well split. After much searching they were all found bar one. With no kill made, home was blown and the whole pack taken to look for this miscreant.

On the way back to the cars the supporters joked about the white hare and pondered as to its whereabouts. I opined that it was probably taking off its white trunks to give to the next hare that is hunted. Picking up the theme another supporter laughed and said that if the antis really wanted to succeed they should spray all the hares white!

My last beagling meet of all was some two months later with the Surrey and North Sussex at "The Plough", Lower Beeding, on March 19th, to finish their season. Michael Foot was due to speak at a public meeting the following Saturday, so just before the off the Master exhorted his followers to go along to this meeting to heckle him.

With a number of hares about the hounds were soon running. They locked on to one and pursued her into a small wood. The wood was promptly surrounded by a ring of supporters all eager to see the action.

However, their presence deterred the hare from bolting out. In a furious temper hunt staff stormed up and ordered them to move, saying that if they did not the hare would be "chopped down" in the wood, denying them any "sport."

They obliged, the hare bolted, and the hunt continued, but the scent cannot have been right, because the pack never got on terms. They changed hares frequently and eventually, as darkness approached, at about 6.00 p.m. home was blown with no kill recorded.

Basset Hounds

The idea of basset hounds hunting anything seemed ludicrous. With their short legs and long ears, I could picture them scraping their low undercarriage on any deep plough. Supporters follow on foot.

I attended my first meet, with the Leadon Vale Basset Hounds at Church Farm, Hardwicke, near Gloucester on February 5th expecting it to be really interesting. I had met two of the keenest followers of this hunt at the AGM of the Three Counties Minkhounds the previous Tuesday and they willingly vouched for me.

At the meet I was surprised to see two gentlemen in dog collars in attendance. They were a little perturbed when I took their pictures and notably absent when the action started — doubtless appreciating that it would be poor form to be recorded rejoicing over the death of one of God's creatures.

The hounds, with a small field of about 10, set off to draw. In the first half hour there were no less than eight hares running relays with the hounds. I could not believe they would catch any, but Hon. Sec. Dave Philpotts assured me that the hounds had tremendous stamina, and that would tell later in the day.

The hunt worked with the definite aim of scaring most of the hares away, so that, left with just a few, the hounds could push them really hard. Round and round the estate we whizzed. Of all the pack hounds I had met these appeared to be the most self-contained and single minded. They simply locked on to a scent and were oblivious to anything else. Dave recounted



Master David Mann, hounds and hare (arrowed). Leadon Vale Basset Hounds, February 5th, 1983.

how on one occasion a basset had been left out overnight. The following morning he was found still plodding round and round in circles looking for the hare.

At this hunt I took a rare shot of the Master, David Mann, running with his hounds to a holloa, as a hare jumped up right in front of the pack. It is very unusual to get the hunted, the hounds and the hunter all in one frame.

Early in the afternoon, the first hare was chopped down just out of my sight. I only knew they had killed when I saw the pack returning daubed with blood. I learned that, with the pack gaining rapidly, she had sought cover in a hedge. A fresh hare bolted, taking the hounds away, but the tired hare made the mistake of backtracking straight into the jaws of four hounds straggling along behind.

The hunt drew on anew. Soon we were running in circles again. Locking on to another victim the hounds pursued her in a left handed circle. She then tracked along the side of the Sharpness—Gloucester ship canal, headed slowly back over a field, and with the hounds gaining, made for a deep bramble shrouded ditch. I arrived to find Dave Philpotts and other supporters running up and down beside the ditch holloaing and screaming with glee. The exhausted creature desperately sought protection, crawling in the muddy water that lined the bottom of the ditch. The hounds pounced and fell on top, the briefest of squeals and she was torn to shreds. That particular hunt had been quite short, so the hunters assumed that she must have been tired, having been 'rattled' in the morning.



With two more hares added to the tally the hunt returns in triumph. Leadon Vale Basset Hounds, February 5th, 1983.

They drew on, looking for the third kill, but the followers were extremely tired and welcomed home being blown at about 4.00p.m.

A fortnight later, February 19th, I was back with the same pack when they met at "The Horseshoe", Brooms Green. The ground appeared hard after frost, but was soft underneath. Hares were about and great circular hunts soon developed. The day more or less ended though when the hounds and followers, in the enthusiasm of the chase, bolted a herd of young bullocks out of their field.

Some of the followers were all for carrying on, saying that the farmer should have put up stronger gates, but, to their credit, the staff stopped proceedings and organised a team to drive the bullocks back. The following month, March 26th, I was back with the same pack for another meet at Church Farm, Hardwick. This was their last meet of the season. I had to be very careful as they were extemely suspicious of me, particularly those who also followed the Three Counties Minkhounds.

I arrived after the start, to learn that the hounds had killed in their first field, chopping down one of a brace that popped up right in front of them. That brought their tally to nine brace. In the hunt that followed I took the opportunity to question some minkhunting supporters about Ian Coghill reporting the throwing of a live mink to hounds but, for reasons that will become apparent, they became very suspicious. One of them left in a great hurry, saying he had to phone his wife. Suspecting he might be organising a "farewell party" for me, I took it as my cue, made an excuse and left.

HARE COURSING

Hare coursing, a cold, clinical way of killing hares has, as its premier event, the Waterloo Cup, which takes place at Altcar, near Liverpool in the Spring.

The 1983 Waterloo Cup was scheduled for March 2nd—4th and I decided to attend to try and take some pictures. Knowing there are strict rules preventing photography I thought it wise to phone beforehand to get permission.

I phoned the B.F.S.S. with my cover story. They said I was probably too late (it was March 1st) and referred me to a northern based vet, James McWilliam, the Hon. Sec. of the Waterloo Cup Committee. At this point I felt that I was getting too personally involved and therefore was noticeable, so I decided to turn up unannounced.

I travelled north on the night of March 1st, opting to stay at a B&B at Southport — well out of the zone where combination of L.A.C.S. credit card and B.F.S.S. stickers might arouse interest.

Saboteurs had planned a big demonstration for the first day, so I expected the hunters to be even more jittery than usual. As it was, they had pre-empted

the demo by bringing the start forward one day. On Tuesday, 1st March, they had completed a total of sixty-six courses, avoiding any trouble, but also losing the bulk of their supporters because of their cloak of secrecy.

It was pouring with rain when I arrived on Wednesday 2nd, to learn that the event had been switched from the scheduled Withins to nearby Lydiate field. I moved across to join a long queue of cars to enter the arena.

It was a long hike from the road, so I offered a lift to one of the passing lads. He eagerly accepted, as did his two mates. They turned out to be beaters from the North Yorkshire Coursing Club — I prayed that for once my routine check of the car to remove all L.A.C.S. material had been sound. As the queue slowed and finally stopped the car gradually steamed up.

I glanced in the wing mirror and was mortified to see a group of friends wearing hunt saboteur T shirts approaching from the rear! They were bound to recognise the car, but would they appreciate that I had company — company of the distinctly heavy kind? If they were to give me a hearty welcome in all their sabs' outfits, that would be it.

I breathed again when they passed by without comment. When it came to paying the £5 entrance fee, the beaters said who they were so we all got in free.

Parking, I went to have a look at the coursing, but without my camera. I saw other people taking pictures, judged that it would be safe, and returned for mine. I was in time to see a hare jinking away in front of the greyhounds before it eventually escaped.

I stood amid a crowd of supporters on a long side of the coursing rectangle. A light, misty rain was falling. The hares were being beaten in from the left, past the slipper, the man restraining the two greyhounds, concealed behind a green lean-to structure.

Four more hares were driven in, of which only two escaped. Often, when being herded forward they would nearly reach the field, only to veer away at the last minute. They would then run off, meet the line of beaters and be funnelled back again. The net effect was that some of the hares had done a few circuits in the beating funnel before they even reached the coursing field.

When they hit the grass they were already tiring. As they passed the slipper he was supposed to judge whether they were fit for the course, and to give them the necessary start (80 yards according to the rule books). Hares that are sickly or weak are supposed to be left. The only ones I saw left in the two days were judged to be leverets.

In practice, as soon as the hare passed the slipper the crowd bayed like mad for the greyhounds to be released. Beer swigging supporters shouted: "Let the bloody dogs go! What's the bastard up to? Can't he see the f..... hare?"

When the greyhounds were released they quickly overhauled their quarry whose only escape was to jink left and right sharply. In one course a dog bowled the hare over. Over and over she tumbled, with fur flying, before darting off again to escape.

For the hare, surviving the first few turns was vital, as the dogs soon tired. Whereas pack hounds are bred for stamina, greyhounds are bred for speed — to outpace their quarry — but they cannot sustain full speed for long. The first kill was over the other side of the field, so I and the bulk of supporters saw little.

The second kill was different. Jinking and twisting the hare approached the solid crowd. There was no way through as the spectators roared the dogs on. She swerved away and was caught. One dog had hold of her shoulders, the other her back feet. She squeaked and squealed. The dogs tussled for possession and, in an instant, one dog won. As the mounted judge and pickers-up approached he ran off triumphantly, still clutching her by the shoulder. Still she squealed, and still the crowd cheered and jeered.

The dog circled round, nimbly avoiding the pickers-up. As he approached me, I captured the hare's terror in one quick photograph, before the dog came close to the crowd and was trapped. Firm hands wrestled the hare from its grasp, putting it out of its agony with a chop to the neck. The dog's owner ran up to congratulate his charge.

These five courses were the last that morning as a large group of sabs moved across in front of the beaters and refused to move. At that time there were about three hundred and fifty sabs to seven hundred coursers.

The police were reluctant to remove the sabs in their peaceful protest but the coursers were itching to get at them. Individuals passed amongst the coursing crowd exhorting them to violence. "Let's teach these student scum a lesson. Stand up and fight for your sport."

Under such intense whipping of tempers, the coursers did eventually react and charged towards the sabs, only pausing to rip out fence posts for use as weapons.

I thought that a repeat of the Border Counties incident at Llandinam was in the offing and moved across, camera at the ready. The thin blue line of four police officers, saved the day, halting the coursers' charge.

As the two sides closed, the coursers baited the sabs. One held the body of a hare killed only moments before above his head, shaking it to goad the sabs and swinging it around. The police ordered him to stop.

The sabs still refused to move. The coursers then made it clear to the police that unless they evicted the sabs the coursers would do it themselves. Forced to act, the police formed a beat line to sweep the sabs away. The sabs sat down.

The press, who had been with the coursers, rushed over to take pictures

and seizing this opportunity several coursers joined in the stampede, looking for a fight, but the police restrained them.

This went on all morning. At one point, the coursers succeeded in getting amongst the sabs and kicked and punched some of them to the ground. The police tried to keep the two sides apart and they eventually manoeuvred the sabs back to the road and held them there. The beat line then came in as planned, but there was only one hare left in the funnel. She escaped.

The coursers stopped for lunch to listen to a local radio debate between Dick Course, Executive Director of the League Against Cruel Sports, and Sir Mark Prescott, racehorse trainer and hare coursing addict.

In the afternoon, the beaters came in from the right hand side of the field. This time there were plenty of hares. At one point it was announced that there were six in the holding field. In that afternoon session, I saw about one in three hares escape. I observed that if they could survive about six turns, they were safe as the greyhounds tired so quickly. On several occasions the hare ran right off the coursing field pursued by the labouring greyhounds and with their cursing owners plodding along behind.

The day ended at 4p.m. after twenty courses had been run. Next day, March 3rd, was the day of the finals, held at the Withins. This time no sabs were in attendance, they had moved off to a nearby protest against the killing of baby seals in Canada. From early morning it threatened rain, but surprisingly it held off.

The first course started at 9.45a.m. with hares being driven in from the right and escaping through a screen of rhododendron bushes to the left. I soon appreciated that, on this massive field, it was going to be almost impossible to take any significant photographs. At Lydiate we could almost touch the greyhounds; here we were separated by a wide ditch and yards of open space.

A larger percentage of hares were escaping; only about one in five were killed. I was informed that this was due to the ground being waterlogged in the middle and the greyhounds slipping and sliding as they turned.

I saw several kills which included lengthy tugs-of-war. I could hear the hares screaming pitifully, like roughly handled teddy bears, but I was too far away to record their struggles on film.

Eager anticipation built up to the actual final. When it came, the supporters roared and cheered the dogs on. Desperately the hare turned every which way but when she made an error she was killed.

The last ceremony I photographed was the drunken celebration of it all as Cups and Plates were presented to the winners, while the broken remains of the hunted lay forgotten beside the arena.

CHAPTER TEN

MINKHUNTING is the summer bloodsport. It replaces otterhunting as the "sport" that fills the gap between the end of one foxhunting season in April and the start of the next in August/September.

Mink are an introduced species, originally brought over from North America to be exploited in ranch farms for their fur. When the fur market collapsed in the 1940's and 1950's many farms went out of business and owners simply released the mink into the wild.

Adaptable creatures they soon established themselves and began filling the riparian habitats that were increasingly vacated by otters.

Both mink and otters are mustelids, both have similar habits and occupy similar habitats. However otters are much larger — weighing 20 to 30lbs to the 3 to 4lbs of the mink — are much better swimmers, and are specialised predators.

The hunters were always hard put to justify the killing of otters on the grounds of alleged damage to fishing interests but, for the sport killing of the far less aquatic mink, the use of this excuse makes even less sense.

The marked decline in otter numbers that occurred in the 1970's forced the hunters to search for alternative prey. In much of the country mink were prime candidates. Where they were absent, as in East Anglia, the coypu, a South American river rat, likewise imported for its fur, was the selected target.

From the early 1970's, though still claiming the title Otterhunts, the hunts were in fact chasing and killing otters, mink and coypu, dependant on their location.

As outlined in an earlier chapter this continued persecution forced the otter into further decline, with the situation worsening to the point where the species was placed on the protected list from January 1978 when it became illegal to kill it. The killing for sport had continued right up until the last minute — certainly until the summer of 1977.

With it only illegal to kill otters, not to hunt them, the summer bloodsports were free to continue. All that was required was a change of name and a change of focus to either of the alternative prey — mink or coypu. Those otter hunts that did not switch resorted to the status of hunt clubs but were careful to retain control of their former hunting areas "pending a possible resumption of otterhunting."

During the passage of the Wildlife and Countryside Act in 1982 the Labour M.P. for Stockport North, Andrew Bennett, proposed an amendment that would have provided full protection for the otter. The powerful hunting

lobby recognised the threat to their interests, opposed the amendment, and it was lost.

At the same time the Minister responsible, Hector Monro, assured the House of Commons that otterhunting is illegal. However a Home Office briefing document, leaked to the League, makes it clear that, at the time, Hector Monro was well aware that otterhunting is **not** illegal.

Referring to Andrew Bennett's amendment this document says:

> "The amendment may also be intended to place a complete ban on otterhunting."

Following the League's exposure of such a blatant attempt to deceive the House, Hector Monro, a keen supporter of bloodsports, was sacked.

The main threat to otters, through the continuance of mink and coypu hunting, is from the disturbance of the habitat. To breed successfully otters require peace and freedom from harassment. There is also the very real risk of the hounds rioting and killing otters in the same way that foxhounds riot and kill cats.

*****

The first minkhunt I attended in my undercover role was on April 24th 1982. I had been following Spring staghunting in the West Country and, along with many others, drifted over to see this curious "new" sport.

The hunt was the Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, formerly the Dartmoor Otter Hounds, whose Master, Arlin Rickard, enjoys a reputation as a rising star in the hunting world. The meet was at the "Claycutters Arms", Chudleigh Knighton at 11.00a.m.

Sporting the full camouflage of staghunt and B.F.S.S. stickers I was made very welcome. As a courtesy I asked permission to take photographs and they were delighted to agree. There soon assembled a motley collection numbering some 20 or more followers, ranging from the roughest looking terriermen to young children.

The hounds were a similar mixture and included what appeared to be pure bred otterhounds, part otterhounds and pure foxhounds — I learned later that they were rejects from foxhunts. Typical hounds, they were big, bouncy and friendly and, with a mite of encouragement, would readily plant their paws on your shoulders and lick your chin.

Minkhunting, like otterhunting, takes place on foot. When the hunt moved off the hounds drew ahead on either bank and swam the river between. The whippers-in — one of whom is Arlin's wife Liz — ran ahead to ensure that the hounds did not forage too far forward and the followers split into two groups on either side and immediately engaged in earnest hunting conversations.

Arlin encouraged the hounds: "Try over, try over." He blew the horn, and waded backwards and forwards over the river, investigating any likely holes or holts. He took care to prod the river-bed ahead to assess its depth as many a riparian huntsman has been known to disappear up to his cap on encountering a hidden gully — to the delight of those watching from the sanctuary of the bank! Terriers, running loose in attendance, were frequently called forward to investigate when hounds sniffed at likely spots.

Aware of very real public concern, minkhunters claim never to hunt where there are any signs of otters. Yet on my very first day I found that there is a world of difference between hunt claims and the facts. In the very first draw a whipper-in called Arlin's attention to a fresh otter print, others were found nearby, yet the hunt still continued.

Compared to fox or stag hunting, minkhunting proceeds at a very sedate pace. Some hunts, the Devon and Cornwall being one, even find time to stop for lunch.

There were few mink about that day. When the heat of the sun had passed the hounds did speak briefly to an unknown scent. There was a surge of expectancy amongst the followers but short lived, nothing was found. Arlin suggested two reasons for this lack of activity.

Firstly that the water was too cold to hold any scent, secondly that they would only be able to hunt dog mink as the bitches were with young and at such times leave no scent. Having already witnessed pregnant vixens hunted, marked to ground, and thrown live to foxhounds I was sceptical about the latter point.

The following Saturday, May 1st, the same hounds met at Boyton Bridge near Holsworthy. Here I first met Belmont, a beautiful old rogue of a hound, drafted out of the Snowdon Valley Foxhounds for lack of speed — he had a lopsided gait caused by a misformed foreleg.

I soon realised that Belmont had a playful nature. Though vaunted by the hunt as being their best marking hound — that is, the hound most likely to find hidden mink — he appeared distinctly capricious and seemed to mark at any hole or tree-trunk for the sheer fun of seeing the staffs' agitated attempts to dislodge non-existent mink.

This was a more successful day for the hunt. Early on they found and destroyed a fresh nest containing green grass and rabbit fur. Soon after, the hounds marked to a hole in the bank that Arlin, after close examination, announced was occupied by a bitch mink and kits.

Oblivious to the supposed lack of scent on such creatures, the hounds and terriers bayed like mad at the entrance. With much hissing and spitting from within, the diggers endeavoured to enlarge the hole but, even so, it was too narrow for the terriers. The attack was switched to the roof at which they dug frantically, but this too was frustrated when the spade broke. All manner of implements were then directed at the entombed mink, without success.

Arlin then had a hunter's brainwave; cutting a long thin stick from a nearby tree he carved the end to a crude point. Inserting the point in the hole he rammed it up as if clearing a drain from Dover to Calais. He smiled when he encountered resistance, drew the stick back and rammed it viciously in, again and again, waggling it around. When he drew the stick out the end was smeared with blood, fur and flesh. Eagerly other followers rushed to have a prod and, by the time they left the scene, the mother and young were all stabbed and ripped to death.

The first open kill that I saw with the Devon and Cornwall occurred the following Monday when they met at "The Maltsters", Harbertonford, at the southern end of their country. Some of the pre-meet conversations in the pub were particularly interesting once the whisky had started flowing. There was much concern that, after two meets, the hounds had yet to kill. A supporter suggested that the new entry of puppies would really benefit if caged mink could be found and released in front of them.

This conformed with the traditional hunt view that inexperienced hounds should be encouraged by being unleashed on the most vulnerable quarry. Such a strategy in minkhunting was clearly inspired by the attempts by the Ministry of Agriculture to check the spread of mink using live cage trapping. These traps were used so that any otters, inadvertently caught, could be released unharmed, and any mink killed humanely.

It was certainly never envisaged by the Ministry that they could be used to ensure a steady supply of helpless victims for frustrated huntsmen. Sitting with the supporters I listened intently. Following the killing of the bitch and kits there was some discussion as to the merits of waiting until the mink family emerged.

Many held that it was a waste to kill a bitch whilst pregnant because it only added one to the tally whereas if they waited for a few weeks until she gave birth she and her offspring could provide "great sport" on the open river — as many as five might be notched up.

Clearly, in the interests of "sport," the minkhunters are happy to forget their public claim that, unlike other bloodsports, their sole intention is to eradicate their quarry.

As the drink flowed on, the tongues loosened. I mentioned to Liz Rickard how fortunate it was for their style of hunting that mink are now an established substitute for the otter. She agreed wholeheartedly.

When eventually we set off the hunt drew the river north from the meet with 8½ couple of hounds and an assortment of terriers.

Almost immediately the hounds spoke and the mink was sighted — a point confirmed by rather drunken cries of "Holloa!" The terrified creature swam up a short tributary away from the main river, landed, and ran alongside a hedgerow, darting amid the brambles with the hounds and followers in hot pursuit.

Turning about, it ran beside the tributary back to the river but was attacked by a terrier just short of its goal. The hiss and spit of battle was clearly audible but, for all the terrier's tenacity, the mink escaped, albeit with severe injuries. It flopped into the water with the hounds all around, whipping up a maelstrom.

Arlin was in, together with his whipper-in Graham Miles. The mink was struggling on the surface, incapable of diving. Arlin hooked the crippled creature out with his pole and held it up to bait the hounds. With a flick of its tail the mink twisted off the pole and fell into the waiting jaws.

The torn body was recovered and weighed (3½lbs) — the information being passed to the local Naturalists' Trust.

The hunt moved on in high spirits. Suddenly the frantic yelping of the hounds betrayed the presence of a live, electric fence. One hound in particular, a big white fluffy creature named Regent, did not like it at all and disappeared in double quick time.

After lunch a second mink was found near the main A38, a road crowded with holiday traffic. With the scent excellent, the hounds ran with fervour. The mink was repeatedly viewed as it darted in and out of the reeds. On landing it was so fast in the grass that the hounds seemed clumsy.

Backwards and forwards the quarry went within the short stretch of river that obviously constituted its home range. Soon the scent was hopelessly foiled by the hounds and supporters milling about in baffled pursuit.

Arlin pulled the hounds out to take stock of the situation, then cast them back. They spoke intermittently as they caught whiffs of scent but there were no further sightings.

They were about to call it a day when one of the elderly supporters, Jane Miller, a former Master of the Dartmoor Otterhounds, saw the mink curled about the topmost branches of a tree, gazing down!

Arlin called the pack and followers to the safety of one side and a barrage of stones and mud was thrown at the mink. Clinging desperately to the branches it sustained a few hits without moving, but eventually a particularly large rock dislodged it and it fell into the murky river. The supporters cheered.

The hounds sprang forward and followers waded in their wake. The mink dived. With 17 quadrupeds and many humans milling about, the river-bed was soon whipped up.

The mink took full advantage of this aquatic smokescreen. Like destroyers searching for their contact the hounds swam in patterns, but there was no sign. In such a confined area though, it was only a matter of time. Soon one of the best hounds — Prospect, marked at a hole in the bank. Arlin enlarged the shelter and exposed the mink, huddled against the muddy wall. A terrier grabbed it, the pack burst forward and it was all over. The mink was literally



Master and Huntsman Arlin Rickard, taunts hounds with a live mink. Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, May 3rd, 1982.



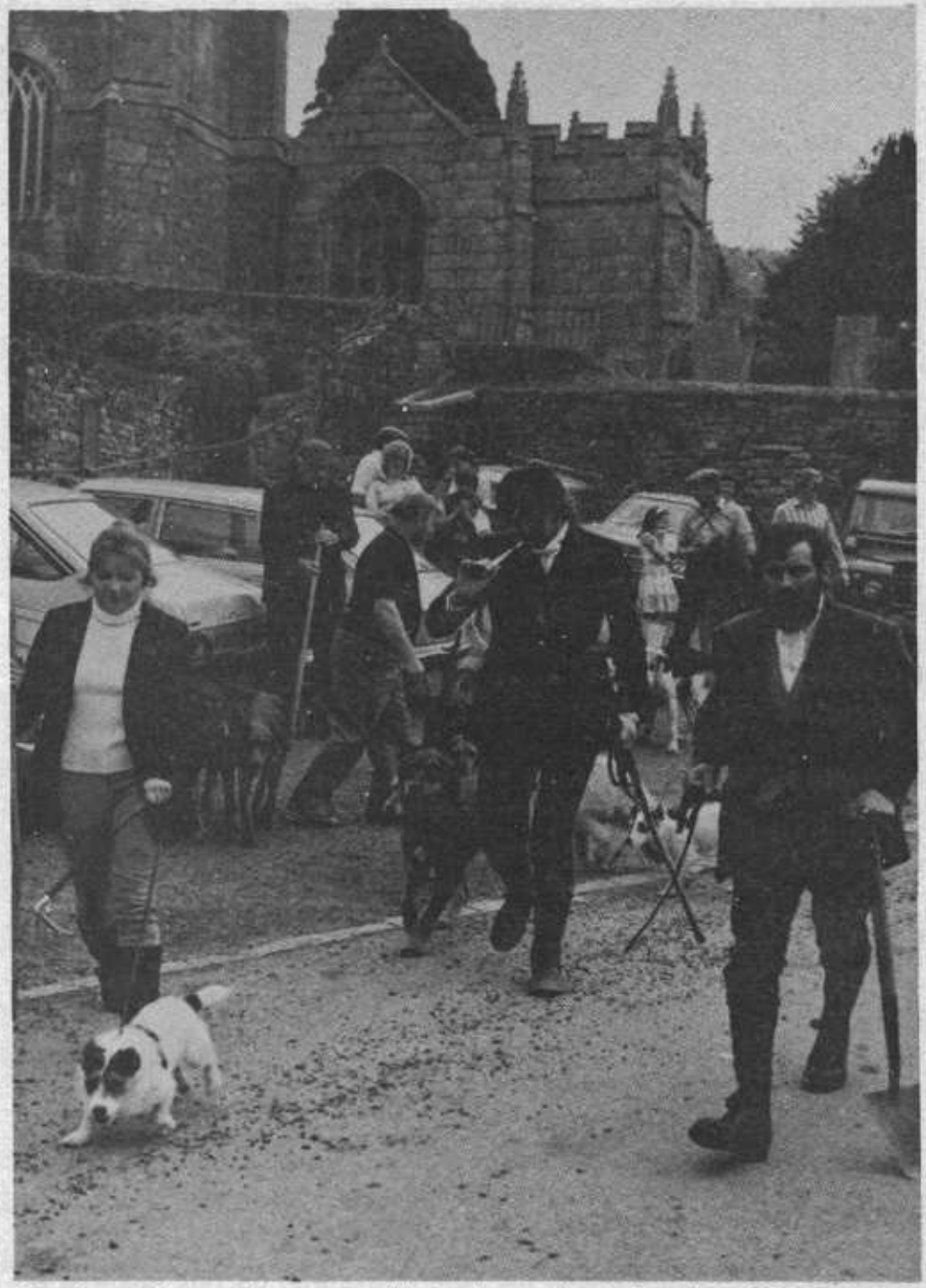
Supporter holds the tiny carcass aloft in triumph. Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, May 3rd, 1982.

torn apart but, conscious of the need to weigh the carcass, the hunters searched diligently for the remains. The largest portion recovered weighed 3¾lbs but, adding an estimate for the blood and guts that had been ripped out, the hunt claimed 4lbs.

That was the beginning of May. At the end of the month, the 29th, I was back with the same hunt for their meet at the "Arundell Arms", Lifton. Minkhunts claim to distinguish whether hounds are chasing mink or otter according to the length of the drag. For mink the drag is short, the quarry soon sighted, but for otters that roam over much larger territories the drag is longer. On this occasion the hounds hit a long, long drag in the afternoon, so protracted that many of the followers were convinced that it was an otter; but the hounds were not called off.

The supporters regarded it as great fun but the end of the planned draw brought the end of the day, even though the hounds were still willing to drive on after their unseen adversary.

The opening meet for the Devon and Cornwall was two days later on Monday 31st at the "London Inn", St. Neot. The hunt had no sooner commenced than the hounds spoke, a mink was sighted and, after a brief desperate "game" of hide and seek, a 2½lb bitch was killed. She sought



Moving off from the meet with terrier and spade to hand. Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, May 31st, 1982.

sanctuary amid dense brambles but, with all the followers about, simply ran out of room. Lunch was taken at the East Cornwall Hunt kennels with a liberal dose of Bell's whisky. Suitably fortified the hunt restarted and, after another short chase, killed a 3½lb dog mink. The torn and battered carcass was about the size of a hairy slipper. That day I first heard glowing tales of the exploits of Ian Coghill. His hunt, the Three Counties, are reckoned to show the best summer "sport" of all.

During June I attended four hunts. Following uneventful meets of the Devon and Cornwall at Fingle Bridge, Drewsteignton on the 12th and at Kismeldon Bridge, Bradworthy on the 14th I had my one and only day with the Culmstock Minkhounds at Black Torrington Bridge on the 15th.

This is another hunt with direct connections with otterhunting, the Master, Norman Bartlett, having been Master of the Culmstock Otterhounds for many years. This pack had a fearsome reputation for being vicious not only towards their natural quarry but also to anyone who dared to interfere. In 1964 four of its supporters were bound over to keep the peace following an assault in which a saboteur's jaw was broken.

Norman Bartlett was also Master of the Axe Vale Badger Hounds for many years. For all their cruel heritage, the hunt made an amusing picture, with Norman dressed in old-fashioned hunting garb, complete with bowler hat. After lunch the pack locked on to the scent of a particularly large mink. Try as he might he could not shake them. He ended up torn in half.

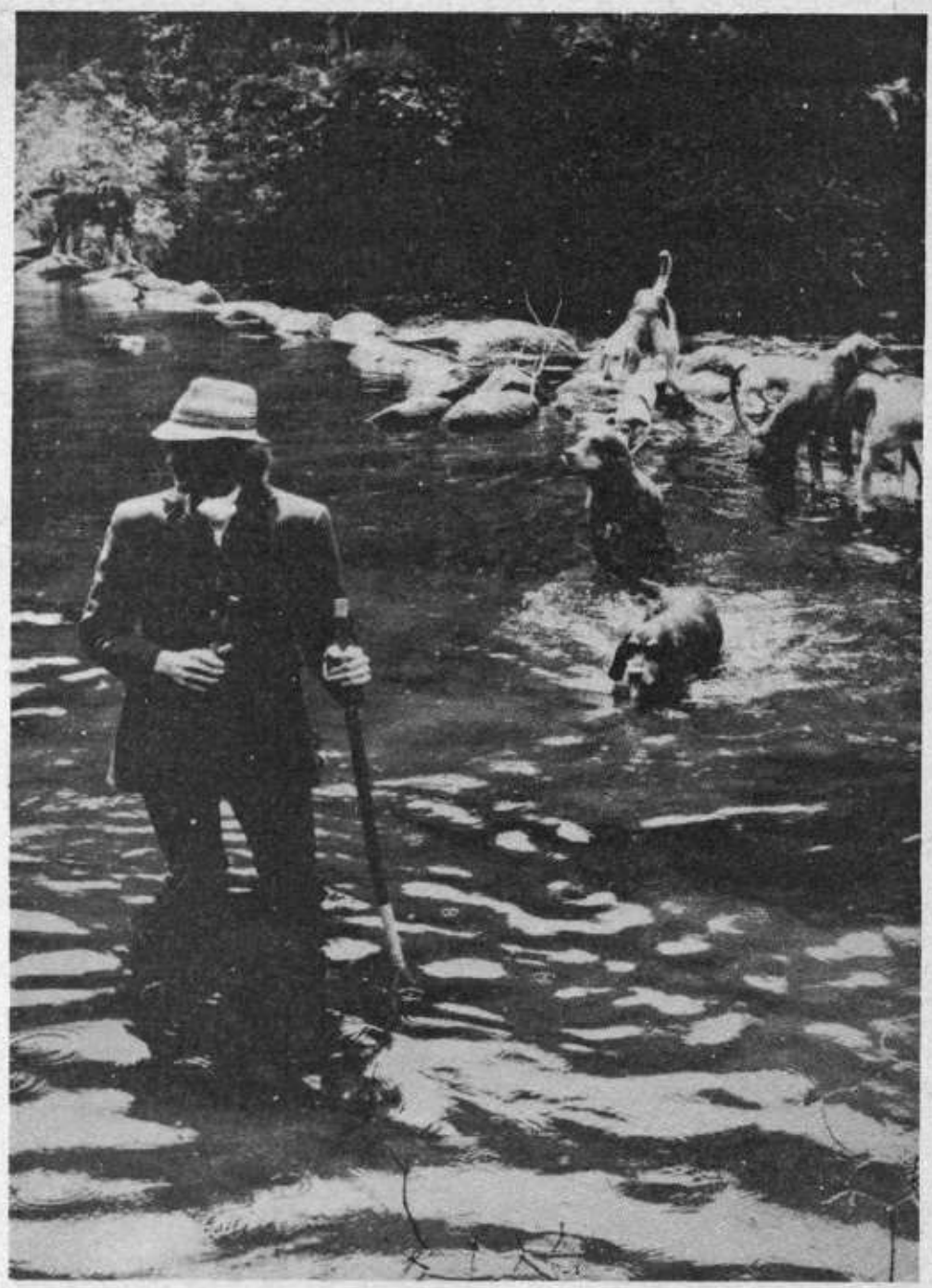
On Saturday June 26th at the "Bullers Arms", Marhamchurch, I was back with the Devon and Cornwall. I was offered and readily accepted a trip to see the Three Counties at a coming joint week. Arlin promised that I would gain some excellent pictures. The 26th was most interesting with a lengthy hunt after a very elusive mink. In their enthusiasm the whippers-in waded almost up to their necks to dig at likely hiding places.

The mink twisted, turned, and dived but there was no escape — there were simply too many hounds and too many people. When eventually caught, Charlie Harding, son of Norah, the Joint Master and leading light within the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, was proud to display the shattered remains for the camera.

JOINT WEEK

The Joint Week, Monday July 5th to Saturday July 10th 1982, involved three packs of minkhounds — the Three Counties based in the West Midlands and Welsh Borders, the Four Shires who operate just west of London, and the Devon and Cornwall.

The idea is simply a week long bloodsports jamboree with killing



The Summer Bloodsport. Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, June 12th, 1982.

interspersed with liberal drinking. Ian Coghill chose a week early in July because that is when the young mink first leave the nest and are easily found. I was assured that it was marvellous "sport" watching the hounds chase the struggling youngsters.

The week commenced on the Monday but I arrived with the Devon and Cornwall for the triple meet on Wednesday July 7th, at a small pub "The Cottage of Content" near Carey, by the River Wye. I turned up keyed up in the expectation of meeting Ian Coghill, my antagonist in the letters columns of many local papers, but he was not there. His own followers explained, with mirth that, unable to swim, he is none too keen on the wide and deep Wye.

The Devon and Cornwall hounds were late due to their Land Rover breaking down, so Ian Arnett huntsman of the Four Shires took charge of his hounds and those of the Three Counties.

It was a scorching hot summer's day with very still air. To start with, the hounds drew a small brook beside the pub. They soon spoke excitedly, ran briefly, then marked to ground, with the terriers just as keen. The Three Counties terriermen waded into the earth with great gusto and soon exposed, not a mink, but a quivering, terrified rabbit. The creature was seized and thrust in front of the jaws of one of the terriers that had bayed with such enthusiasm. The dog was clubbed for his error and the rabbit released.

The hunt returned to the Wye, drawing upstream first. The river was wide



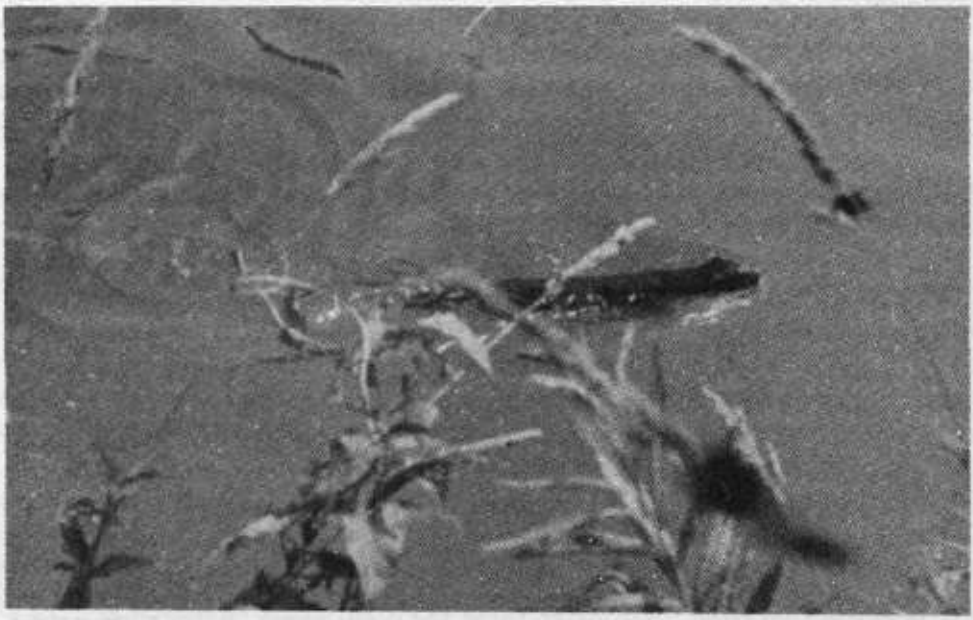
Habitat disturbance. Three Counties, Four Shires and Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, July 7th, 1982.

and clear, filled with weed flowing lazily with the current and banks shrouded by a tangled web of vegetation, ideal mink country.

The hounds quickly spoke and after a short chase killed, spoke again, ran a bit and killed again and then again. It was slaughter. When I questioned why the young mink were so easily caught one of the women laughingly explained that their fur was still too fluffy to allow them to dive properly. Able only to flop about on the surface it was an aquatic version of coursing. Whenever possible the torn remains were recovered, brought out and held aloft, goading the hounds to jump.

Around midday the Devon and Cornwall arrived. Arlin agreed to let Ian continue hunting the combined trio of packs. This veritable canine army, about 60 strong, soon spoke again and raced off upstream in pursuit of their tiny quarry. The pack headed for some islands in mid-stream and the supporters went to follow but, fearing the depth, they returned. Finding the scent of another mink the hunt dashed downstream in and out of the lush vegetation. This victim was white, and as such an added attraction but, for all their efforts, they could not catch him.

Returning, the hounds again set off for the islands. Anxious not to miss anything the supporters decided to risk the perilous crossing and, linking arms they waded over. Though forced by necessity to wade similar but much colder rivers in Afghanistan clutching cameras, I opted not to risk it this time as I had the whole week ahead, and water does not work wonders in cameras.



The quarry, a young mink, moments before it was torn apart. Three Counties, Four Shires and Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, July 7th, 1982.

On the islands the hounds set about the resident mink families, killing four youngsters very quickly, and scattering the remainder. Some passing canoeists paddled to the scene, attracted by the baying and whoops of glee, and gazed in amazement as grown men in fancy dress waded chest deep and uttered the most unearthly guttural screams. Hounds were called back to our side and the ensemble moved downstream with the hunt split — Arlin hunting when the pack were on our bank, Ian Arnett hunting the opposite side.

As the dipping sun brought a welcome coolness a small kit was disturbed from the vegetation on our side. It struck out bravely for the far bank. Mink are poor swimmers at the best of times but, when young, they are hopeless. The full pack left our side in excited pursuit and soon closed the gap. The Wye is wide so the race was long. It was soon apparent that some hounds were better swimmers than others — they pulled away. The mink struggled on with two hounds vying for leadership close behind. It was caught some 10 yards short of the far bank and disappeared as the eager hounds piled in.

Hunting continued on the other bank, then hounds chased another mink back over towards us. This mink was either a better swimmer or had more of a start as he won his race for life and immediately ran to ground under an enormous slate. The terriers were entered but without success. He would not budge.

Everyone was cleared from the line of sight of the hole and the covering slate rattled, stamped on, and thumped with spades. The resultant din forced the mink to bolt. It promptly dived into the river and swam downstream. Though only yards behind to start with, the hounds rioted after a rabbit, then lost the scent.

The day ended at 7p.m. with the hunters exhausted but well pleased. Though nine mink had been added to the tally, most of them babies, they were confident that plenty remained for a future date.

That evening the Four Shires returned home. I joined the Devon and Cornwall contingent and retired to the "Black Swan" at Much Dewchurch where we were all staying.

The next few days were a nightmare for me. We all slept in the Games Room at the back of the pub. Knowing that I have a habit of talking in my sleep I was afraid to close my eyes in case I made some incriminating reference in my slumbers.

Morning and mealtimes were another ordeal. Bacon, sausage and eggs were thrust in front of us at breakfast. Dinner saw the traditional British fare of Steak and Kidney Pie and Roast Beef being served.

It was the first time I had eaten meat for eight years. After such a long abstinence I found it sweet and sickly and had to fight an urge to vomit. Somehow I managed to look as though I was enjoying it as much as the others.

The meet the following day at Tregare Mill on the River Throssey was between the Devon and Cornwall and the Three Counties. Again Ian Coghill was absent so Arlin took charge.

The combined pack drew first a small runner (brook) behind the meet. The hounds soon spoke and, after a brief hunt, marked to ground. The terriers and diggers moved in excitedly but, rather than a mink, it was an indignant black cat which bolted! With a lot of horn blowing, shouting and whip cracking the hounds were stopped from further pursuit.

The hunt then turned about and returned past the meet, pausing for drinks to alleviate thirst caused by the intense heat, and headed on for the main river. Hunting was intermittent as the hounds repeatedly bayed, ran and stopped. Eventually after a considerable walk in the sweltering heat they suddenly marked at an old wood pile in mid-stream.

The supporters set about destroying this habitat with glee. Under the assault it was not long before the mink bolted and sought sanctuary high in the branches of an adjacent willow. It was clearly visible, peering down at its tormentors. Surrounding the tree the hunters hurled stones and rocks at their victim. When one supporter was nearly knocked out by an overthrow they appreciated the wisdom of all standing to one side.

One of the determined tree climbing huntsmen then put his talents to work and, from the highest branches, shook the tree like mad. As the branches whipped in response the mink clung on for dear life and hissed and spat defiance. After a battle of wits, lasting all of twenty minutes, involving much jockeying for position as the mink sought safety, the creature was eventually dislodged.

Tumbling from branch to branch it hit the ground with stunning force and stumbled rather than dived into the water. Urged forward the hounds piled in grabbing whatever they could including each others tails which, when black and wet, look distinctly mink-like. A brief squeal was clearly audible as the quarry was torn apart.

The hunt moved on and discovered a nest of kits. Slaughter ensued as three of the youngsters were added to the tally. The assorted remnants of 2½ of the 3 were found and the hunt wits suggested claiming two confirmed plus one very seriously injured. I found it difficult to laugh.

Drawing on, the hounds marked at another spot from whence a large bitch and her four offspring were seen to bolt. Pursuing the bitch first, the hounds, surprisingly, lost her. They then turned their attention to the more vulnerable youngsters. One sought sanctuary in a long drain. Despite desperate digging and poking with bars, cracking most of the drain, it could not be bolted, so was left.

The other three were not so fortunate, and were quickly found and killed. The death of one was particularly brutal. Flapping about on the water surface he was first bitten by the terrier most inappropriately named "Parson." The

bite, though not fatal, was clearly serious. It possibly severed the spinal cord as, streaming blood, the mink struggled on trailing its back legs and emitting plaintive squeaks.

A large chocolate hound named Kingfisher dived in and snapped at the youngster but not hard — it is believed that mink taste distinctly unpleasant to hounds, hence the unwillingness. With the arrival of the full pack a melee developed and the mink was torn apart, its brief life over.

The hunt regarded it as an excellent day with seven mink killed, again mostly youngsters, and the prospects for future "sport" good, as at least two mink survived. The next morning, Friday July 9th,, was my first meeting with Ian Coghill.

I was introduced by Arlin as a keen hunting man and photographer, and was accepted without question. The meet was at Trigate Bridge on the River Monnow with Ian Coghill hunting the combined pack of hounds.

The day, overcast and with rain threatening, was a welcome break from the previous heat. The whole hunt moved upstream by vehicle, the aim being to work back and finish at the meet. From the start there was a short excursion further upstream. Hounds spoke briefly. Both Arlin and I could smell the mink but when the hounds invaded an otterhaven Ian thought better of it, turned them and headed downstream.

The return was blank all the way to a certain bridge where the knowledgeable followers had predicted they would find, and sure enough they did. A youngster caught flapping about on the surface was attacked by the pack. It was bitten, but not fatally, so Ian clubbed it with his pole to finish it off.

Supporters informed Ian that another mink had been viewed swimming downstream so the pack was cast towards it. One of the young whippers-in, Steve Evans, impetuous and incautious with youth, waded forward and promptly slipped into a deep pool. He had to swim for it, managing to retain his cap if not his dignity in the process. One of the other followers with a camera found this hilariously funny and continued to do so until he too fell in, drenching his camera.

Soon the heavens opened bringing a deluge to drown us all. The hounds marked to a tree, from whence, despite all the hunters' enthusiasm, the mink simply would not budge. Frustrated they drew on and in a particularly deep stretch of the river, killed three more youngsters. Devon and Cornwall supporters holloa and scream like dervishes on sighting a mink but the Three Counties are far more reserved — emitting only a quiet tally-ho. In amongst these mink there were tally-ho's coming from every sector of the bank as the quarry panicked and scattered, but to no avail.

A few hundred yards further on the hounds disturbed a really large mink. Far from giving them the good run they expected he promptly disappeared into the heights of the nearest tree. One of the young girls volunteered to

climb after him. Dislodged, the mink fell to the bank but without injury, as it ran off at high speed and climbed another tree.

Hounds and followers crashed forward in pursuit. In my haste to keep to the fore I misjudged the bank and slipped into the river. It was deep, very deep. All that prevented the total immersion of myself and camera was Ian Coghill's outstretched crop, which I gratefully clutched.

Shaken from the second tree, the mink ran on, then further infuriated the supporters by climbing a third. This was ancient, with the height to match and, with the mink clinging to the very highest branches, I felt sure it was safe.

However the hunt were determined to see some fun. A supporter climbed to the precarious heights and dislodged the quarry. The hounds were held in check to give it a chance to run and it did so, but only briefly.

The mink was clearly tiring. The fourth tree it chose was a small willow. Shaken from there it jumped straight at me, head-high, I twisted back and sideways in avoidance and, in doing so, blurred what would have been a useful photograph, recording the creature's terror.

Two more trees were tried but, on being dislodged from the second, instead of breaking its fall on a cushion of low branches or landing in the river, the mink landed with a bone crunching thud on the hard ground. Stunned, winded or perhaps even dead it was engulfed by the pack.

What remained of the carcass was retrieved from the hounds and handed to Ian. The supporters gathered around him on the bank and formed a square box with their hunting poles held horizontally to keep the hounds back. Ian cut off the trophies — the mask, four pads, and tail and, after much twisting and tugging, the penis bone. It was always traditional in Otterhunting to cut out the latter and wear it as a tie or neck pin, so I was not in the least surprised to see the ghoulish practice carry over into the replacement "sport."

The hunt then blew for home, comparatively early for them — it was only 4.30p.m. The tally was five, again mostly youngsters. Back at the pub, by the meet, we had a long wait for the transport to catch up. As the hounds collapsed exhausted upon each other they were a picture of innocence.

The following morning, Saturday July 10th, the last of this joint week the meet was at "The Lamb", Stoke Prior, near Leominster, on the River Lugg. This time Arlin hunted the combined Devon and Cornwall and Three Counties packs.

At the meet I was the victim of an unfortunate experience that gave much amusement to those watching. I had opted for wellingtons in the hope of keeping my feet dry and was busy photographing the hounds when I heard a sniggering from supporters near me. Then I felt a spreading warm wet patch just above the knee. I moved sharply sideways and found that one of the hounds had marked me in the usual canine fashion — the evidence for which was rapidly filling my right wellie! Perhaps that hound had e.s.p. as to my real sympathies!



Hounds are as innocent as the animals they chase. Three Counties and Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds, July 9th, 1982.

In the first draw down the river Arrow to the junction with the Lugg the hounds were completely silent. They ran and sniffed, played and rolled, but could find nothing. At the junction Devon and Cornwall's Kindly spoke immediately and led the pack in a charge up the Lugg. It was about midday. Kindly is a hound with an immensely sensitive nose, so sensitive that she is often accused of babbling (a serious fault in which the hound speaks when there is no scent at all — the usual remedy is a bullet).

The other hounds spoke only intermittently, heading up the Lugg towards a railway line. There was no sighting of the mink, it was virtually all on Kindly's shoulders and most seemed willing to disown her. Certainly the Three Counties supporters were muttering that she must be stupid and should be put down and even Arlin was beginning to have doubts. But Kindly was right. Just before the railway Arlin's whipper-in Graham holloaed the mink.

At the railway bridge over the river the mink, a beautiful silvery brown creature, came out crossed to a small stream and went to ground under an old, partly exposed, tree root. As always in this joint week the Three Counties led the digging party. Ian Coghill rushed to the fore and rooted about under the tree but to no avail. The mink was eventually bolted by the terriers attacking from above. It dashed down the tiny stream, dodged the hounds and whooping supporters, and went to ground again. This time Ian and fellow Joint Master Peter Cooper went to work with spades. The terrified

mink bolted and, after another short sprint, found sanctuary in a really big earth. At last it appeared to be safe. Major excavations began, led by the Three Counties twins Peter and Rick May who do the terrier work for local foxhunts.

Deeper and wider they dug in the baking heat but, when half an hour had passed without success, they were left to continue the work. The hounds were taken on to try for another mink upstream across the railway line.

Two swans accompanied by three cygnets were viewed in mid-river ahead of the pack. The hounds were called out and the supporters moved in to scare the swans away with shouting, backed by a barrage of stones.

A breathless runner then arrived with information that the first mink had showed and was about to bolt. The hunt left the swans and returned back over the railway. The diggers were in a frenzy of excitement as they neared their objective. The mink bolted, popping out in full view of all, and headed straight for the stream where it was promptly lost again.

A lengthy search ensued, with the supporters wading in and probing the bank. Eventually the mink was sighted but, after a short dash, it disappeared into a narrow drain beside the railway bridge. With the terriers unable to enter it appeared as if the terrified creature had found a safe sanctuary. But minkhunters are very resourceful.

Ian Coghill acquired a long length of wire and by feeding it into the other end managed to poke and prod the mink until it bolted. Into the stream it swam along, landed, and went straight to ground. This time it was soon evicted and dived into the main river.

The hunt was really on. I accompanied Arlin on one bank with the bulk of supporters whilst, on the other, Ian had a team of Three Counties fanatics organised into a line beating the top of the riverbank to prevent the mink escaping to the adjacent cornfield. Their concern was not to protect the cornfield, the fringes of which they themselves trampled, but rather to prevent the mink reaching safety.

No longer was it a game of hide and seek, now it was truly a life or death battle of wits. The mink, a beautiful full adult, was one against the many, nature's perfection against two of the best hunting packs in the country. It was not the hounds but rather the vast mob of baying followers who were to finally tip the scales.

To the mink's advantage the river was fast flowing and murky. Thus when it dived, swam from one side to the other and landed to hide in the undergrowth its scent was carried down on the wash, causing the hounds to overrun.

Against this, the air that is trapped in the mink's coat on diving is gradually expelled forming a chain of bubbles visible on the surface. Just as, in earlier days, such a chain betrayed the whereabouts of many an otter so it does the mink. The supporters lined the banks searching for the bubbles, and holloaed

or shouted "Tally-ho!" whenever they saw them.

Time and again they put the hounds right. The mink crossed the river, diving constantly, backwards and forwards but there was no escape. Every time it tried to slip up the bank out of the river it was chased back with shrieks of glee.

As the hounds gained, so the quarry's dives were of increasingly shorter duration. Many times the mink was swimming on the surface when a hound leapt at it from the bank. The crash dives in response were only just in time.

Desperately the mink tried to return upstream to the sanctuary of the earths beside the railway but it was thwarted. The struggle moved downstream towards the junction with the Arrow. Again and again the sequence of dive, hide, and find, was repeated until at about 4.00p.m. the mink reached the Arrow, crossed the junction to the far side, and went to ground beneath a large willow tree.

The ever-enthusiastic diggers arrived and commenced massive excavations. Several times the mink was spotted but it simply would not bolt. The trench must have been all of 5ft deep before, at about 6.00p.m., excited holloaing and joyful whoops indicated that the quarry had gone.

The hounds were unleashed in frantic chase but then stopped when the mink was seen to be totally black. The dejected hunters realised that their quarry was still hiding in the earth. The black mink was allowed to escape, to provide "sport" on another day.

Digging restarted and, not long after, the silver/brown mink bolted, coming out like a bullet, diving in to the river and disappearing. This surprised and pleased the onlookers as usually animals that are bolted after a long dig and a long hunt come out very stiff and are all too quickly caught.

Arlin drew back up the Lugg. I had actually seen it go down the Arrow but nevertheless I assured Arlin that he was right, the mink had gone up the Lugg. This ploy was foiled though when there was a holloa from supporters standing in mid-stream down the Arrow. I said that I must have seen another mink. The last hunt now commenced with nearly forty hounds all on and in full cry.

The gallant victim went to ground in a small stick pile but was dislodged by supporters. It made a dash for the river but was caught by the pack a yard short. There was a brief skirmish with the mink hissing and spitting as it tumbled in battle, then it was all over. The time was nearly 7.00p.m. some 7 hours after Kindly had first spoken at the rivers' confluence.

The torn carcass was brought to our side of the river and held aloft in triumph by Peter Cooper. The mask, pads, tail and penis bone were removed. Months later the mounted mask was presented to Arlin in recognition of his "great exploits." The supporters enthused over the day's hunting. Many regarded it as the best since the "heady" days of otterhunting.

Hunting with Ian Coghill

Having been successfully introduced to the Three Counties and Ian Coghill, I keenly followed that pack. On July 31st I attended their meet at Pandy on the River Monnow. Five young mink were killed, most in the morning. Whenever possible the remains were recovered and Ian used them to bait the hounds. The idea is for the hounds to jump and jump again for the body so that when it is eventually thrown they will fight for it.

During the hunt one mink was so petrified that it completely lost its bearings in the shallow stream. I was standing ankle deep with a mob of followers when the mink swam directly towards me with the hounds in pursuit. As I tried to focus the camera it by-passed me to nestle between the boots of a uniformed hunt follower beside me. He tally-ho'd but only a whisper — and pointed between his legs. The hounds swung over, the mink darted out, there was a brief melee, and another was added to the tally.

Late in the afternoon the hounds had some fun chasing cattle on the riverbank. Sadly the bullocks failed to appreciate the frolicsome nature of the pack. In their panic two burst through their enclosure into the river ahead. Ian was furious as the hunt was held up whilst they were herded back.

In the pub afterwards the drink flowed freely. I learned that the Three Counties hounds riot frequently and that the new hounds Rockdove and Ringlet had killed a duck. The young whipper-in, Steve Evans, mentioned this to me. When he did everyone else hushed him saying: "That's not the sort of thing we talk about."

The following Saturday, August 7th, the Three Counties met at Upleadon Mill beside the River Leadon. The hounds drew first a small brook away from the main river. Two mink were found and quickly killed despite the fact that each sought sanctuary in a variety of trees. Hunting then came to an abrupt halt when an irate farmer stormed across the fields complaining that the pack had chased cattle into nearby cornfields. Followers, more amused than contrite, did little to calm his temper.

Eventually Ian placated him saying that they would take the hounds out, to allow him to bring the cattle back, and that the hunt would pay for any damage caused. Like schoolchildren caught scrumping apples, the hunt trooped back to the road to await events. A report came through that 19 cattle had trampled over two cornfields and caused a lot of damage.

Fearful of the implications, most of the supporters said that it was the farmer's own fault — that he should have had more secure fencing.

Ian assured them that the hunt was covered by insurance against just such an event and, accordingly, they had no worries. In his view the insurance company would fight it out with the farmer and he was confident that the latter would win nothing.



Joint Master and Huntsman, Ian Coghill, taunts hounds with a dead mink. Three Counties Minkhounds, July 31st, 1982.



Dutch courage? Three Counties Minkhounds, July 31st 1982.

The hunt returned to the main river by the mill in high spirits. A third mink was found and, after a short chase, killed. The hounds chased many others, but the quarry kept scampering up trees. One good sized mink was hunted for some time but, dash and vie as he might, could not escape. I observed hounds biting him, holding on briefly, and then dropping him back to the water. He bobbed his head up, then sank from sight.

The terriermen were convinced that he crash-dived and swam underwater to a hole in the bank. They frantically dug at any likely spot, but could find nothing. Ian cast the hounds upstream and downstream, but there was no sign, it was a complete mystery. Some onlookers became agitated and questioned whether the mink had been killed and his body carried downstream, but Ian thought not saying: "There is not a one in a million chance of a mink being killed by one bite from the hounds."

That view certainly tied in with the visual evidence I had recorded. Many mink were snapped at, then released to struggle on wounded, which in no way tallied with the hunts' claims to the public that hunted mink are killed instantly.

Backwards and forwards swept the hunt dragnet, but eventually they had to concede. The official record for the day was five mink found — three killed. The one that was severely bitten, but escaped, was not added to the tally.

The following Saturday, August 14th, a scorching hot day, the hounds met at the "Mason's Arms", Wichenford. The river was a small, twisting

brook of swift flowing muddy water, encompassed by a mass of tangled vegetation. The first two mink found escaped because the supporters could not track them through this jungle.

In minkhunting, perhaps more than any other hound sport, the followers play a vital role. Their observation of where the mink lands and scuttles off to hide, or the chain of bubbles as it dives, is necessary for most kills.

In the afternoon a third mink was found, but on a more open stretch. As usual it darted up a tree but was soon dislodged and pursued up and down the brook. It made the best use of available cover but, after a protracted chase, was finally cornered in a nettle bed. The supporters gathered, eagerly linking arms around the bed, in a manner akin to holding-up coverts in cubhunting; the hounds were put in. The mink ran to and fro and a sharp fight ensued, evidenced by much hissing and spitting, squeaking and squealing. One hound was badly bitten on his nose.

Amazingly the mink escaped and dived back into the water, but the pack was all around. The mink jumped out, clambered up and ran over a hound's back and was caught. The field waded in and the shattered body was recovered and brought to the bank in triumph. Ian cut off the pads as trophies before tossing the remains to the pack.

On the 21st the hunt arrived at the Temeside Hotel, Little Hereford, with expectations of an excellent day — there the previous year, though only travelling across three fields, they had found six and killed three, leaving a further three for breeding.

Unbeknown to the hunt, their plans for "sport" had been ruined. Others had responded to their scare stories concerning mink, and were trapping the species. The hounds set off, but only found a sniff or two. They half-heartedly marked at various drains, but there were no definite sightings. For the supporters it was a boring morning, enlightened only by passage through a private garden and orchard where they picked pockets full of apples.

On and on they drew, at one point clambering up and over a railway line, where moments before a train had hurtled by. Crossing a dual carriageway they encountered a riverbank populated by fishermen from the Birmingham Angling Association engaged in a contest.

In the old days of otterhunting, when hunting held sway, they would have trampled forward and any angler who protested would have been given an early bath — but times have changed. The very survival of hunting is now dependent on the support of anglers. To please the latter, the hunters simply packed up and returned home.

On the return to the meet, the senior staff engaged in earnest conversation concerning the way the previous year someone had apparently ruined the B.A.A.'s competitions by putting "cancelled" stickers on their advertisements.

In Ian Coghill's view the more this kind of sabotage occurred the better.

He said that if anglers could be drawn into a war with the antis they would be more likely to support hunting — many of his followers saw the none too subtle hint!

The following Wednesday, August 25th, there was a lawn meet at Caradoc House near Sellack, beside the River Wye. Such meets were a great tradition of otterhunting. The hounds made a very picturesque sight gathered in front of the palatial mansion. This was a joint meet with the Border Counties Minkhounds (the name that strikes fear in the heart of some old saboteurs). For me the wheel had turned half circle. Only a few years earlier I had opposed the forerunner of this hunt, now I was a "trusted supporter!"

The hounds drew downstream first, then reversed to head upstream towards Hoarwithy. As with the triple meet in July, the hunt split up with the Border Counties staff hunting hounds on the far bank and Ian Coghill taking charge when they were on our side. The first mink was uncovered on the Border Counties side, beneath a rotting tree stump. Dislodged, the creature struck out bravely towards us and dived. Mink find prolonged dives exhausting and when this mink surfaced it could only flail around but, with the hounds way behind, it had time for a breather. It found sanctuary under some rocks at the water's edge.

Eagerly the hunt servants moved in with iron bars and spades and destroyed this boulder bunker. Bolted, the mink swam upstream close in; from the bank we could see his tiny feet paddling furiously. The hounds swam and ran in pursuit. One leapt from the bank at the quarry, missing him only by the barest whisker as he dived. Surfacing, the mink was surrounded by hounds and caught. The carcass was retrieved and brought to the bank, where the familiar box of poles was formed. Ian cut off the pads, tail and head for trophies, distributing the pads and tail, but carefully tucking the bloodied head into his trouser pocket. The remains were thrown to the pack.

Finding a second mink on the far bank, a swimming hunt, that is such a common feature of the wide and deep Wye, then ensued. The mink was coursed across the surface in circles and figure-eights. As the pack closed in, it promptly dived, leaving the hounds totally bemused. The mink surfaced a few yards away and the process was repeated. It all gave much amusement to the followers who cheered the hounds on. In time, the dives were of shorter and shorter duration until the mink, exhausted, could dive no more, and drifted helplessly until it was caught.

A third mink swam powerfully backwards and forwards across the river and when tired found sanctuary in a drain on the far side. In the course of the to-ing and fro-ing some of the hounds on our bank ran riot and killed a rabbit. For a considerable time the hunters dug and dug at the drain, but without success. The mink was safely lodged so was left.

Following this mid-week meet I returned to the West Country to observe some summer stag and fox hunting, described previously. On Saturday, August 28th, I attended the meet of the Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds

at the "New Inn", Moreleigh. The first draw was downstream where the hounds perceived a whiff of scent, but there was no clear sighting. Proceedings came to an abrupt halt when the hunt entered land where, to say the least, they were unwelcome. The owner came out cursing and swearing, unleashing his dogs on us — the supporters turned back recounting in humorous, irreverent, detail previous confrontations with this gentleman.

Returning upstream we paused at Gara Bridge for a picnic lunch. From the restart the hounds spoke quickly and were soon hunting a mink in amongst some domestic ducks quacking about on the river. A man as concerned as Arlin Rickard over his public image might have been expected to stop, pull the hounds out and by-pass the ducks, but he did not. Instead the six feathered friends were terrified; in panic they scattered.

Speaking to the scent the hounds marked first at a hole then, driving on again, in some bushes in a dried up stream feeding the main river. Despite a diligent search no sign of the mink could be found. I was with other supporters watching the search when a large, black, woolly hound appropriately named "Satan" brushed past me clutching a brown and very dead duck. He had clearly lingered for an alternative "sport."

Arlin was amused, but immediately sought to hide the duck. He wanted to bury it or stuff it in the undergrowth, but one of the supporters begged him to let her take it home to cook. Finally Arlin relented and gave it to her, but with strict instructions to hide the body adding: "I cannot stress that enough." She stuffed the bloodied victim up her shirt, but when a friend arrived he concealed it in the poachers pocket in his shooting jacket.

Hounds drew again upstream, speaking to an intermittent scent, before they made a definite find on our side. The eager diggers rushed to assist and with great gusto smashed down a dead tree, forcing the mink to bolt. He dived, swam the river, surfaced on the far side, darted up beside a small stream, then returned to sanctuary in a drain.

The hunt, crossing by an adjacent bridge, put the terriers in. One battled with the mink and soon gained a grip. We could hear growls and grunts interspersed with hissing and spitting. When the terrier was drawn out by its hind feet, it drew the mink also. However, one whipper-in, a young lad, holloaed far too soon. The whole pack piled in on top of both terrier and mink. In the ensuing melee in the muddy water the hounds bit at anything and everything. One terrier was badly bitten and had to be taken for immediate veterinary treatment. Arlin waded in to recover the carcass for trophies, but there was little remaining.

That was Saturday August 28th. The following Monday the Devon and Cornwall met at the "Fox and Hounds", Eggesford, a famous hunting pub. From the very start, Arlin acknowledged that they had little chance of finding in the nearby river. It was the classic case of the hunters being hoisted by their own petard, as the salmon fishing there is much valued and the

fishermen, having regard for the scare stories concerning mink put about by the hunt, trap or shoot every mink they can. It was a repeat story of the blank day endured by the Three Counties when they met at the Temeside Hotel, Little Hereford on August 21st.

Optimistically the hunt set off, determined to make the best of it. There was no drag on the upstream draw, but going downstream there was the faintest smell. Once again "Satan" snatched another duck — emerging from the river well pleased with himself. But as he opened his mouth to adjust his grip the duck promptly flew off with much indignant quacking.

In the absence of mink the hounds understandably were bored, so when the leaders disturbed some fox cubs resting by the water's edge, the whole pack rioted. They flew on, swinging away from the river, high up into the tree shrouded hillsides, in full cry. On most foxhunts the staff are mounted and can keep up with their hounds, even if they cannot control them; being a leisurely mink hunt, everyone was on foot and it was in the full humid heat of summer.

The whippers-in found it singularly infuriating to battle through the hillside vegetation in the wake of their recalcitrant charges. There was an abundance of shouting, swearing and cracking of whips, but it was only when the scent was lost and the hounds tired, that they returned looking sheepish.

Heavy rain came late in the afternoon, boosting the humidity and the day ended at about 4.30p.m. a complete blank. At the "Fox and Hounds" afterwards there was a social gathering — a photographic evening. My contribution was to show slides taken during the joint week in July.

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At the end of that week, Saturday September 4th, I was back with the Three Counties meeting at Ketford Bridge on the River Leadon. This was the most significant day in all my mink hunt observations. As usual, Ian Coghill took charge. Hounds drew upstream first, made some brief contacts near some aged willows and spoke occasionally, but there was no confirmed view. The end of the upstream draw was reached in sweltering heat and the hunt turned about.

Persevering they drew on and on for four and a half miles with just the occasional sniff of mink to excite the followers but no actual sighting.

Just before Upleadon Bridge there was a short frantic burst of action after a mink that disappeared. Making nothing of it, the hunt returned to the bridge, the end of the draw at 4.00p.m.

It was early to finish and they were extremely frustrated after a day with neither "sport" nor a kill. To appease them Ian took the hounds back upstream for a last try.

With other supporters I paused at the bridge, but was soon moved into action by an outburst of raucous holloaing.

Running forward I learned that a mink had been sighted but was proving extremely elusive as it ran and swam up and down stream. It was a situation similar to that of the seven hour hunt at the joint meet with the Devon and Cornwall at Stoke Prior. To the mink's advantage the river was fast flowing and muddy and his scent was almost non-existent.

To the hunt's advantage the riverbank was open, giving the massed ranks of followers good observation — they could not have been more enthusiastic.

Just when it seemed the mink had won, the hounds marked him to ground. Bolted from his sanctuary, he swam downstream, ducking and weaving amid the rushes with the pack only yards behind. In their wake, the followers whooped and holloaed with ecstacy at this turn of events. Crossing the river, the quarry just made it to the safety of a hole with the lead hounds only inches from his tail. The pack bayed at the spot frantically.

One of the whippers-in, Peter May, who also does the terrier work for the Croome and West Warwickshire Foxhunt, and is a close friend of Ian Coghill's reached the scene. He put a terrier into the hole.

Hissing and growling ensued as canine and mustelid fought. Ian Coghill waded across the stream and stood with a small group of whippers-in and terriermen immediately above the hole, holding the hounds in check.

Peering into the hole, Peter said that he could pull the terrier out and, on Ian's advice, did so. As the foes had locked jaws when the terrier was dragged out by his hind feet he drew the mink out with him. Peter thrust the pair underwater to force them to break their grip.

Grabbing the mink immediately behind its head with his right hand, he held it triumphantly aloft for all to see. Struggle as it might, the victim could neither escape nor twist sufficiently to bite the hand that held it. The hounds bayed with feverish excitement on the bank.

Peter called "It's still alive Ian, what shall I do?"
To which Ian replied "Throw it up on the bank behind the hounds."

Peter complied with these instructions, hurling the mink up in a high arc to land on the grass behind the pack. Despite hitting the ground hard, the mink was up and running for its life but the hounds caught it before it had travelled five yards. It was torn limb from limb, and Ian blew the 'kill' triumphantly.

The hunt returned to Upleadon Bridge and Mill. Waiting for the hound van there was much laughing and joking about 'the flying mink' and Ian made a point of asking if I had recorded the incident on film. After my experience of losing valuable footage on previous occasions I was naturally evasive.

Keeping my own counsel, I resolved that one day the cruel abuse of that

mink, that had been clearly recorded, would be exposed to a very large audience.

The meet of the Three Counties at Newnham Bridge on the River Teme the following Wednesday, September 8th, was an interesting event coloured by a visit from a film crew. They were there to film hunting fanatic Jack Charlton for the minkhunting section of his TV series, 'Jack's Game'.

Knowing Jack Charlton's idea of "sport" I was not in the least surprised to see him out minkhunting. He went on record on a Tyne-Tees TV programme saying publicly: "I have a little book with two players in it, and if I get a chance to do them I will. I will make them suffer before I pack this game in." Clearly it is small wild animals that are now in his little book as he is doing his best to "do" them!

I soon learned that this hunt was to be stage managed for the benefit of the camera. Word was passed amongst supporters from the Master that the hunt would be quite happy to catch nothing, thus ensuring there would be no embarrassing revelations of the truth which might be filmed.

We were ordered to be very careful about holloaing. It was clear that no live mink would be thrown, everything was to be by the book — a welcome relief for the local wildlife.

The cameraman, with his equipment, was loaded precariously aboard a canoe and the whole charade proceeded. The hounds spoke occasionally and performed for low level camera shots. Eventually they hit a strong drag and, after a short hunt, marked at a large tree.

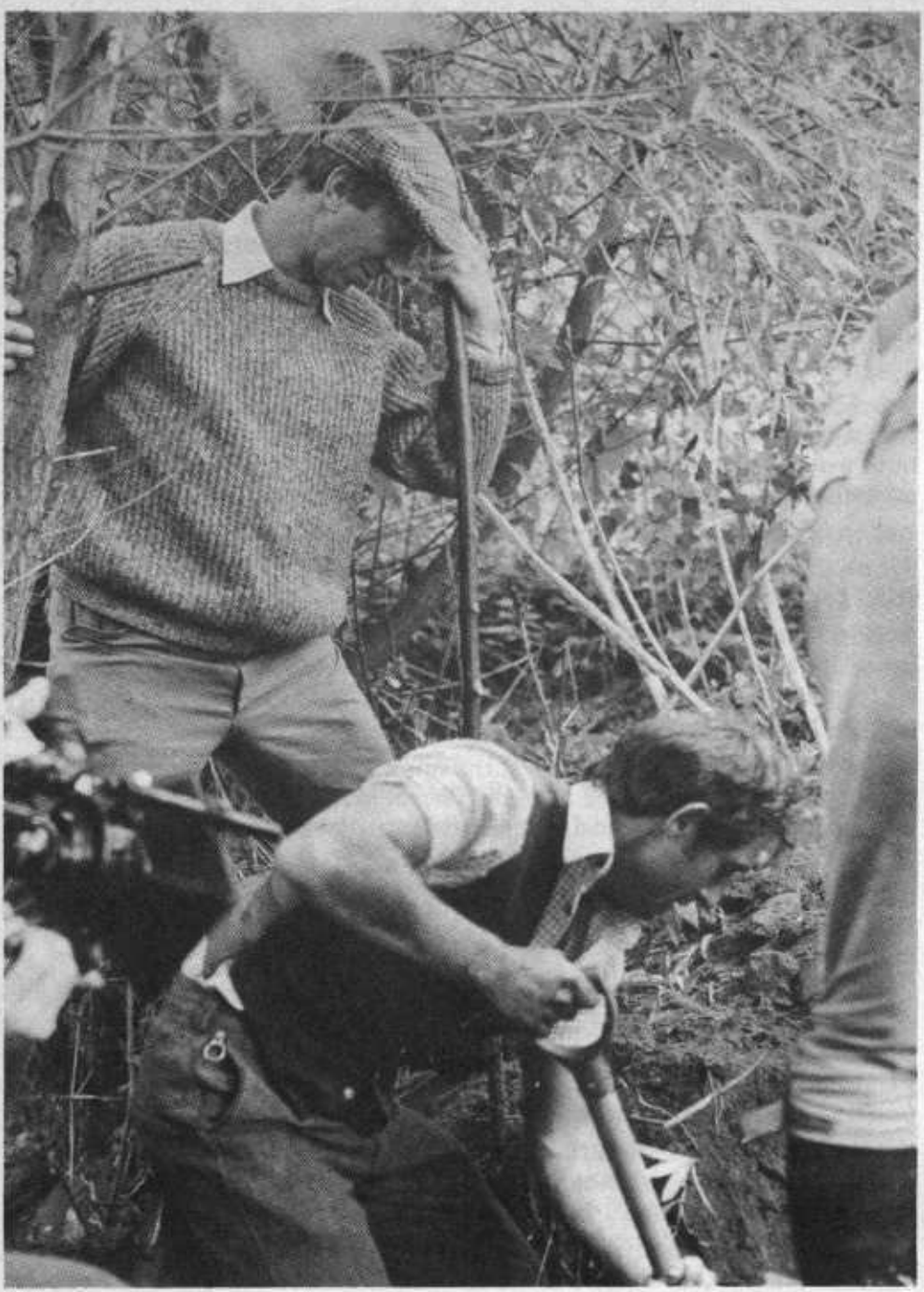
Coghill and Co were fearful lest the mink should bolt and be torn apart in midstream in front of the camera. They need not have worried. When it did bolt it ran a few yards and disappeared into a larger, more complex earth.

The ever enthusiastic terrierman, Peter May, moved in with spade and dog, and, to the delight of the film crew, Jack Charlton rushed to assist. Effusive swearing interrupted them, as the sound recordist came to grief in mid stream, soaking his equipment.

After an enthusiastic dig the mink was given best and the hunt carried on to draw again, but without success. At that point some of the hounds ran riot and Ranger killed a rabbit. Ian was none too bothered though as it happened out of camera shot. The day ended at 4.30 p.m. with no other kill, much to the relief of the hunt staff.

Three days later on Saturday September 11th, the Three Counties meet at the "White Hart", Maismore near Gloucester was to be another revealing day.

Hounds were vanned to the main river but the first draw was along a small brook leading from it. There were several mink about and the pack spoke almost immediately. They raced back towards us, circled, then streaked away into the distance with the exuberance so typical of hounds when they are first



Jack Charlton assists Peter May in digging for a mink. Three Counties Minkhounds, September 8th, 1982.

unboxed. Believing them to be at fault Ian stopped them and brought them back.

He was right. They spoke excitedly and this time marked at the base of a tree that happened to contain a hornet's nest. I was rather hoping the hornets might wreak vengeance on the hunters, but it was a hopeless fantasy.

The mink was sighted curled up in the topmost branches of a thornbush. With the hounds held in check, the bush was shaken, prodded and poked until the mink was dislodged. Tumbling down, it darted into a short drain, but was soon bolted to seek sanctuary in a beautiful old willow tree.

Higher and higher it climbed; so high that I though it must be safe. But no, a fanatical supporter climbed after him. This gallant gentleman shook the branches with all his might, but still the mink clung on. A long, thin stick was passed up and, using it like a billiard cue, the mink was potted off a branch.

Bouncing from branch to branch it was fortunately caught in a tangle of vegetation above the ground, beyond the reach of hounds. Evading them, he ran along a lower branch and disappeared into a hole in the trunk of another willow. Sensing a kill, the hunters moved in eagerly. They tried every conceivable tactic to dislodge it whilst the hounds watched and waited impatiently.

Peter Cooper tried to poke the mink from above with a stick whilst Rick and Peter May assaulted it from below. The terriers were put in at every angle and one hunt follower lent assistance by thumping the trunk with the flat of a shovel. Even when Rick May hacked at the tree with a hatchet the mink stubbornly stayed put.

The followers rapidly became bored, so Ian Coghill took the hounds off in search of another victim, leaving Peter Cooper, and Peter and Rick May under strict instructions to do whatever was necessary to bolt the mink.

These three hunting 'conservationists' then brought in the heavy equipment in the shape of a chain saw and a tractor — a formidable array of weapons to set against a creature weighing less than four pounds!

The chain saw started with a mechanical roar and, amid clouds of smoke, was put to work digesting the base of the willow, like cheese-wire through butter; slicing into the ancient tree with such vibration that eventually their petrified quarry fled.

A breathless runner arrived to tell us that the hunt had run another mink to ground downstream and they wanted to have some 'sport' with that first. They were unsuccessful though and returned, after a brief diversion when the pack rioted after a fox.

Our mink was by then high in another tree from which it was soon dislodged, only to run up a thorn tree. Now the trap was closing. The hole where it had remained hidden for so long was now blocked and there were





In desperate pursuit of a mink, hunters take a chain saw to a beautiful old willow. The Joint Master, Ian Coghill, is Conservation and Education Officer for the British Field Sports Society. Three Counties Minkhounds, September 11th, 1982.

supporters at every vantage point to drive it back should it make a break for the river.

Shaken from his perilous haven the mink ran along the bank above a stagnant slimy pool. Peter May, standing knee deep in the pool, made a grab for it, aiming to snatch it just behind its head. He was too slow, catching it instead halfway down its body. The mink twisted and sank its teeth into his hand.

The hounds were all around as Ian waded into the slime, clubbing them back with the butt of his crop. Peter thrust the struggling mink under the water and held it there. After a good few minutes he confirmed that the creature was limp and asked Ian what he should do.

On Ian's instructions the mink was laid on the bank, clubbed a few times with a crop to ensure it was dead and its body tied to the thong of a long whip. Whilst the hounds were held back, Peter Cooper dragged the carcass around the perimeter of the adjacent field.

Ian's idea was to give the hounds some excitement in the form of a mini drag hunt. The body was towed back towards the river and hidden in some bushes. Released, the pack ran the course well but went too far. When they could not find the corpse, they were stopped and encouraged, and eventually found their prize.

My filming of both the drowning and this curious drama clearly aroused the suspicions of one supporter. He spent the rest of the day warning followers about me. However Ian must have dismissed his doubts as no one directly questioned me.

Another couple of mink were found, but both escaped. One on a railway embankment, the other beneath some massive boulders. The hunt were happy to leave them for a future day.

That night, Peter Cooper made me very welcome at his home in preparation for the hunt's Wine and Cheese party at Cropthorne the next day. We drank whisky way into the night as Peter reminisced over the glories and excitement of otterhunting days.

The previous year's party had been a very drunken affair. I always tried to attend such functions in the hope of picking up some loose talk but 1982's was very sober and I left at 5.00p.m.

*****

In the course of minkhunting I was introduced to hunting festivals, when three separate species are hunted.

Diehard hunting fanatics follow various houndsports according to the seasons. For a few short weeks the sports overlap and, by tradition, at such times the true hunting type will follow as many different 'sports' as possible in one single day.



Ian Coghill. Three Counties Minkhounds Wine and Cheese Party, September 12th, 1982.

Hunters regard it as perfection to kill a fox cub in the morning, a hare at lunchtime and an otter in the evening — nowadays a mink or coypu.

These three styles of hunting overlap in September-October when the fox and hare hunting season is just underway and the more aquatic bloodsports are about to end.

With the decline in otterhunting, festivals also were in abeyance but, in the Autumn of 1979, they re-emerged when "Shooting Times" proudly announced that the county of Warwickshire was going to "Ring to the sound of a hunting festival."

Three packs of hounds — The Croome and West Warwickshire Foxhounds, The Three Counties Minkhounds and the Warwickshire Beagles had met at the Coventry Arms near Worcester at various times during the day.

The local sabs had turned up in force and, with the Three Counties Minkhounds largely made up of former followers of the Border Counties Otterhounds, the result could have been predicted. The sabs were attacked. Three needed hospital treatment for head and eye injuries, one was retained for three days' observation. To add insult to injury, the hunters overturned a sab's mini-bus and severed the brake pipes.

So it was with some interest that I decided to follow hunting festivals as part of my undercover work, and attended two festivals in 1982.

The first, on September 18th took place, again in the vicinity of the Coventry Arms. It started with a meeting of the Croome and West Warwickshire Foxhounds at Caddicroft Farm, near Worcester at 7.00a.m. Travelling from London I expected to be slightly late, but was further delayed by fog and arrived to find them drawing a particularly large woodland near the meet.

There were plenty of foxes about but, with the temperature steadily rising, the scent declined and there was no kill.

I left to attend the meet of the Three Counties Minkhounds near Peopleton at 11.00a.m. By now it was a scorcher of a day.

At the meet we learned that the sabs had been out with the foxhounds and that we could expect them to descend on us any time. As we meandered up the brook towards Crowle reports filtered back that there were sabs on the bridge ahead. I made a bee-line for Dick Whitlock, a keen supporter of the Border Counties Otterhounds, to discover his attitude.

Clearly relishing the prospect of a good punch-up he whispered to me: "We haven't given them a good sticking for years."

Innocently, I enquired "When was that then?"

He replied "Down at Llandinam. We were expecting them and we had hunt people come from all over the country. On John Bridge's (the

Huntsman) instructions the hunt staff took off their coats and really sorted them out. They had broken noses and broken jaws."

With little encouragement he told me more and more of the story I had waited six years to hear. The hunt had drafted in a sizeable contingent of rough-necks from the Blencathra Hunt — John Peel country — and a team of terriermen from Manchester, described by Dick Whitlock as: "Right tidy with their fists."

He confided that he had acted as decoy to lead the sabs away from the hunt by driving the hound van up into the mountains. Now, six years later, he and other followers eagerly anticipated renewing combat.

We reached the next bridge to find that it stank of antimate. There were six young sabs there and, while many hunters wanted to have a go, they were restrained. We drew on and on in the sweltering heat but it was not until the end of the draw, near the Coventry Arms, that the hounds hit a drag. After a brief sortie upstream the mink was viewed escaping in the opposite direction under the bridge.

I dashed back to look. I finished one film but, before I could reload, there was a frantic burst of holloaing upstream. I ran up to the road in time to see a tiny mink darting across a grass field with the pack in hot pursuit.

Hounds snapped at it, bowling it over, then lost it in the grass. It ran on but was hopelessly beaten for speed and, as the pack converged, turned to face them.

Truly at bay, it reared up on its hind legs, spitting defiance. As the lead hound, Candle, thrust forward he was bitten on the side of his nose. It was the last gesture of defiance. The pack descended and the mink was ripped to pieces — so completely that nothing remained as a trophy.

The hunt then vanned to another brook, while I left to go on to the meet of the Wyre Forest Beagles at Crowle at 4.00p.m. Late, I arrived to find the hounds already out drawing. Hares were running all over the place but, with the scent poor, the pack was not very effective.

These late afternoon meets are a kind of pre-season training to get the hounds in trim; they are the beaglers' equivalent to cub hunting.

Hounds changed hares frequently and did not catch while I was present. Supporters were disconsolate, complaining that the hounds were bred to be short in the leg, beyond the point of benefitting the "sport," simply so that the Huntsman, Roger Colver, could keep up.

*****

My last day's hunting with the Three Counties in the 1982 season was from their meet at the "Black Swan," Much Dewchurch on Saturday, September 25th. From the meet the hunt vanned to Wormbridge and set off, drawing downstream.

Turning about and hunting back towards Wormbridge they found in a ditch close to the bridge on the main Abergavenny road. The mink was sighted several times but there was little scent. The great difficulty was keeping the hounds off the road busy with holiday traffic.

Sally Whittall, a reporter with "Farmer's Guardian," was following to do a feature on minkhunting. When she asked me to do some pictures for her ("Nothing too gory") I agreed. But some followers were suspicious of her. One said to me "She's wearing a B.F.S.S. badge, but so could anyone. You have to be careful." I agreed wholeheartedly.

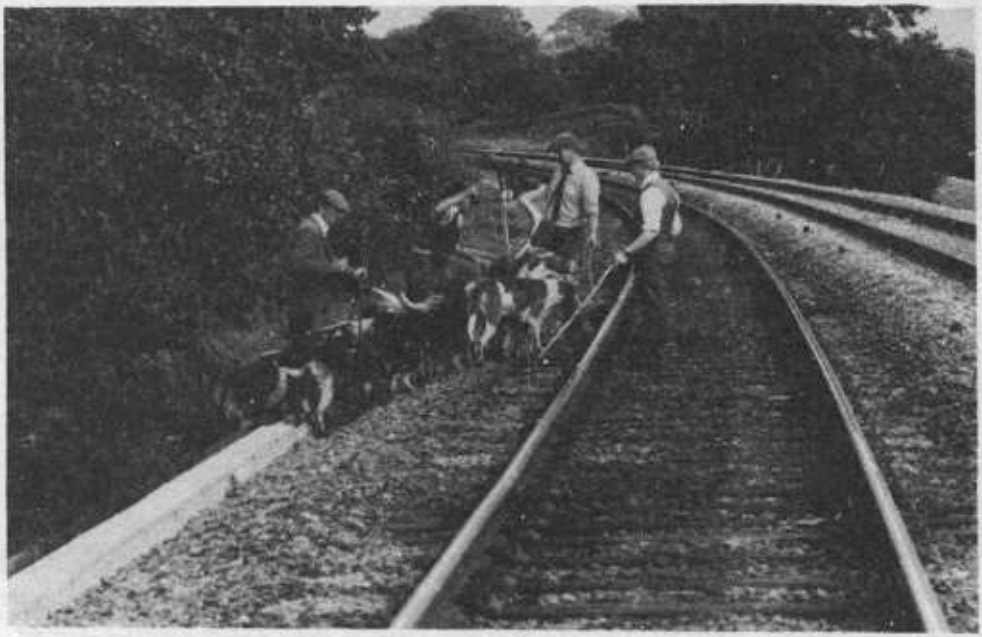
The mink was lost near the bridge, so the hounds pressed on towards Much Dewchurch. They crossed the railway line twice but the scent was cold. The day ended on reaching the pub at Much Dewchurch at 6.00p.m.

Here I learned that their total tally of mink up till then was 75.

I attended a second hunting festival a week later on October 2nd in the West Country. All three packs met at the "Bullers Arms", Marhamchurch, near Bude.

The first, the Tetcott Foxhounds, killed a cub. The second, the Marhamchurch Beagles, killed nothing and neither did the last pack, the Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds.

I attended only two minkhunts in the 1983 season. By then my cover had virtually been blown and I had to be extremely careful.



Leading hounds into danger. Three Counties Minkhounds, September 25th, 1982.



The two sides. The Author (left), Press Officer, League Against Cruel Sports and Ian Coghill (right), Conservation and Education Officer, British Field Sports Society. Three Counties Minkhounds, July 31st, 1982.

In the early days of my career as an undercover agent caution was all important as I compiled the dossier of evidence against the hunts. Now, after almost two years, with others taking my place, both I and the League felt that the time was drawing near when I could reveal my findings.

I began to take risks I could not have afforded before. For nearly two years I had been swopping verbal punches with an unsuspecting Ian Coghill in the letters pages of both National and local newspapers.

In my capacity as Mike Wilkins, Press Officer of the League Against Cruel Sports, I tirelessly attacked hunting in my letters. As Conservation and Education Officer of the British Field Sports Society, Ian Coghill denied any accusations that I made against hunting, protesting that it was all necessary and humane. Little did he realise that he was rubbing shoulders with his main antagonist, drinking with me at the bar and allowing me to film incriminating sequences of the kill.

Knowing that discovery was only a matter of time, my accusations in the press began to be more pointed, naming dates and incidents. The following exchange of letters appeared in the Northern Echo:

My letter published January 12th, 1983:

"Sir,

Your correspondent, and hunt apologist, Ian Coghill has spent most of his adult life hunting otters, so it is hardly unexpected that he has little knowledge of foxhunting.

Foxes most certainly are thrown live to hounds, are released in front of hounds and on occasion are crippled prior to release to reduce their chances of escape.

Even with the latest bloodsport craze — minkhunting — we receive reports of mink being thrown live to hounds.

If by way of New Year's Resolution hunting people made some attempt to understand the biology of their quarry we could hopefully look forward to all hunting being ended before the end of this year!

If Mr Coghill knew anything about fox biology he would know not to make the fatuous claim that foxhunting grants foxes a close season. Vixens give birth during March—April, and yet foxhunting continues well into April and in some areas even into May!"

Ian Coghill replied as follows on February 1st, 1983:

"Sir,

Mr Wilkins of the League Against Cruel Sports (January 12th) knows full well that live mink and foxes are not thrown to hounds, and it is disgraceful that he should attempt to mislead the public.

It would be splendid if I could use the columns of a newspaper as widely respected as the Echo to ask Mr Wilkins to name

Masters of fox and minkhounds who he alleged have thrown live foxes and mink to their hounds.
Unlike most other animal users and controllers, the hunting world has to operate in public and it is impossible that such behaviour would go unseen.
I challenge Mr Wilkins to name the Masters so that these serious allegations can be properly investigated. Let us not have a lot of historical nonsense, let's hear about people who are running hunts in 1983."

This debate was followed closely by the readers, but suddenly Ian Coghill dropped out of the issue. At that point he must have known that somehow we really did have information about the mink throwing incident.

It came further to a head, when Ian appeared at a public debate in Worcester, on Tuesday February 15th.

Representing the League, Dick Course, asked him if he had ever known of an animal being thrown live to hounds.

Ian Coghill replied, "No."

Dick pressed the point. "Have you ever known of a live mink thrown to hounds?"

Again, Coghill denied it, but now he was really worried. I calculated that it would not take long for him to put two and two together to remember my taking a film of the mink being thrown. But did that label me as a spy or merely a talkative fool?

*****

I endeavoured to stay as close to the hunt as possible to try and pick up any information available. The League had to know the extent to which B.F.S.S. Officers were prepared to lie to cover up such incidents as the mink throwing one.

After I had shown a suitably selected set of slides at the Three Counties A.G.M. on February 1st, 1983 (ironically the very day when Ian Coghill's reply in the Northern Echo was published) I was invited back to their Keepers Evening on March 11th to show some movie film.

On that very morning I learned from Horse and Hound that the Three Counties had "sacked" their terrierman Peter May. Clearly the hunt had held a "kangaroo court." They had "sacked" Peter May for what they described as a mistake when, in reality, it was Ian Coghill who had given the instructions who was responsible. Horse and Hound claimed that Peter May was the hunt's professional terrierman yet the hunt's own accounts show that no terrierman was paid.

I deliberated for many a moment on whether or not to attend that evening but realised that if I did not it would be an admission of my guilt, and I had to continue the project if at all possible.

The evening was very tense. Ian Coghill's manner was distinctly cool. He asked me if I had the film of the mink-throwing, and I replied that it was elsewhere but that I would bring it at the earliest opportunity.

Obviously I was under close investigation. I knew it was only a matter of time before my true identity was uncovered.

So it was that I only ventured to two more mink hunts. The first was on April 30th, with the Devon and Cornwall from their meet at North Tamerton, a small village just along from Boyton Bridge where I had been the previous year.

I was apprehensive at first, thinking that Coghill would have passed on some warning, but my fears were groundless.

The hounds drew towards Boyton first and soon encountered strong drag. Working up to this the pack marked at one end of a long field drain. It was too narrow to enter a terrier at the river end and they were equally unsuccessful when they tried the other end further up the field.

On occasion the mink would peer out of the exit overlooking the river. The hounds found it tantalising enough, but the supporters were beside themselves with frustration. One astute hunter then noticed a steady flow of water out of the drain and had the idea of damming the other end.

This was done with rocks and polythene until a veritable lake of water built up. The idea was that, when released, the surge of water would sweep the mink out.

In practice it failed because there was a break halfway along the drain and the water simply surged out to form a large puddle in the field.

Other ideas, like thumping the ground and digging behind the bank, were tried but to no avail. Arlin was soon bored and took the pack on to try for another mink, but one whipper-in, Graham, stayed behind to try his luck.

He lay flat on the bank overlooking the hole and began to talk to the mink. If I had not seen it for myself I would not have believed it. There he lay, chattering, hissing and spitting down the drain until, to everyone's amazement, the mink bolted.

The hounds were holloaed back and were soon in hot pursuit. After a long, long dive, when it was clearly visible in the transparent water of the stream, the mink emerged exhausted. In their enthusiasm the hounds snapped at the mink and each others' tails.

Some of their bites were accurate. The mink was crippled and struggling on the surface when it disappeared beneath thrashing canine jaws. It might have sunk, but Arlin hooked it with his pole and the carcass was hoisted up the bank where he hacked off the trophies.

Lunch was taken back at the meet. The hounds were then cast in the other direction but without much success. I left before the end, conscious of being asked a few pointed questions.

My last hunt, the end of this phase of my undercover work was with the Three Counties from their meet at Longtown near Hereford, on Saturday May 7th 1983. Heavy rain and swollen rivers caused them to move from the planned meet at Much Dewchurch.

I had arranged for the Hunt Saboteurs to attend in force. I had to put in an appearance myself if only to prove to them that the League are truly active in the fight against bloodsports.

A clammy silence descended over the crowded pub at Longtown when I entered. With difficulty some of the hunt tried to appear friendly as I threaded my way through the crowd and up to the bar, but they were poor actors. They were certain that I was the spy in their midst.

Inwardly quaking, I ordered a large scotch and used all my control to keep my hand steady as I drank it. I remembered the violence of the Border Counties. Loppylugs, the elderly and amiable supporter who had told me of the change of meet, was rebuked by Ian Coghill for doing so. The rebuke was pointed. Loppylugs had been my constant source of information during both mink hunting and hare hunting. He was terrified that I might reveal his indiscretions to his hunting friends.

When the hounds moved off I followed them, but within ten minutes some hundred or more saboteurs arrived in transit vans.

Ian stopped the hunt and summoned me to the front. I braced myself, expecting a confrontation. Instead he directed me to go ahead and photograph the sabs. Clearly he had worked out that this was not the time nor the place to unleash his thugs on me.

Later, in the face of a large contingent of saboteurs, he was forced to abandon hunting altogether and return to the pub.

In the early afternoon the police arrived and the hunt moved elsewhere. The sabs followed. Linked by C.B. radios they were able to keep in touch despite the police intervening to stop and search as many of their vehicles as possible.

Although that day was completely ruined for the hunt, their subsequent report in "Shooting Times" claimed that they had had little inconvenience and that they had even killed a mink!

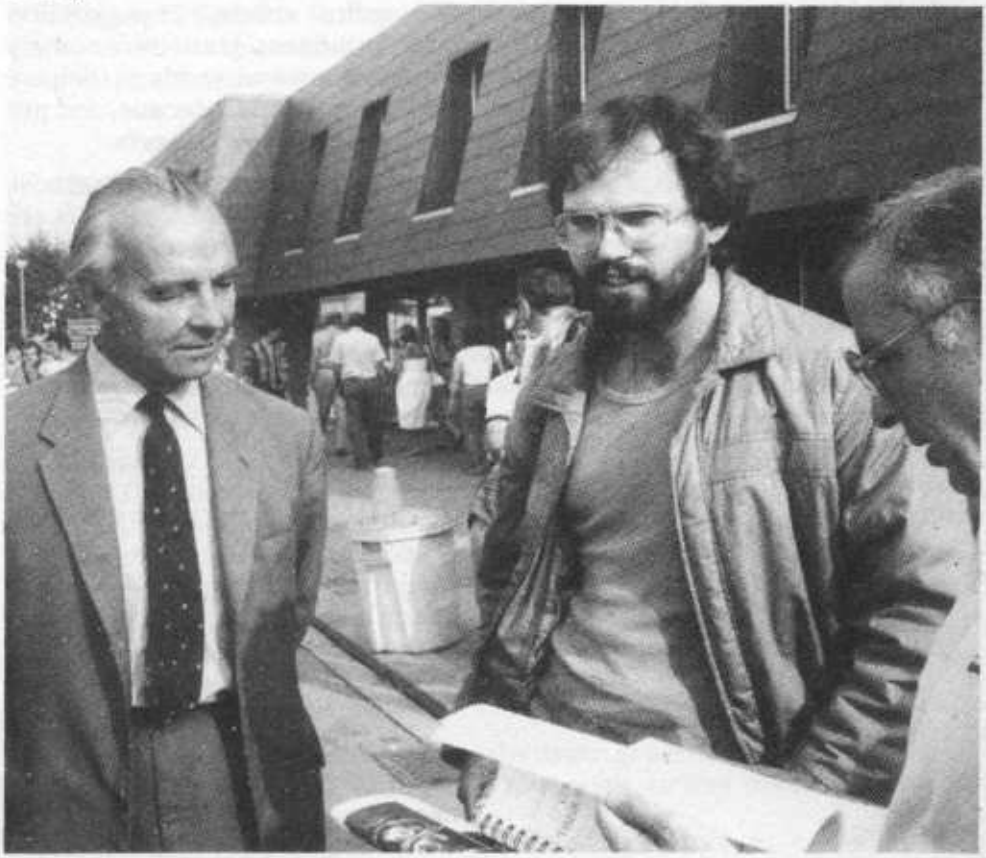
Whatever the truth, that hunt brought a stage of my undercover work to a close.

EPILOGUE

Towards the end of May 1983, Dick Course, Executive Director of the League Against Cruel Sports, received a call at his London office from the Sunday Telegraph's, features department.

They asked him if he knew that Mike Wilkins, whom the League employed as Press Officer, was really Mike Huskisson who had a criminal record and that furthermore he masqueraded at hunts as Michael Wright.

The call came just at the start of the election campaign, an election in which the League was known to be supporting the Labour Party because of their fine manifesto pledge to ban all hunting with dogs. Any smear campaign against the League at that vital time may possibly have affected the Labour Party.



"Mole" at work. The Author (right) discusses tactics with Major General Robin Brockbank CBE, MC (left), Director of the British Field Sports Society. Picture by courtesy of Stern

Thinking quickly, Dick parried the question. When the journalist pressed for a definite yes or no Dick simply said "If you believe the story go ahead and print."

The story never appeared. The General Election was held on June 9th and the Conservatives won.

Knowing that the information in the possession of the traditionally pro-hunt Telegraph was bound to surface again, the League acted swiftly. Information and evidence was supplied to the Times, Daily Mirror and News of the World and film of one mink being thrown live and another drowned was shown on ITN News and other TV programmes.

Some 5,000 negatives and transparencies and nearly 2,000 ft of movie film remains in stock as supporting evidence for this book. This was offered to the hunting authorities in early August but to date (November 1983) they have shown no interest.

Wild animals receive no legal protection against cruelty. This situation must be changed — it can only be changed by Parliament. Until this anomaly is removed I can only hope, most sincerely, that all who currently participate in hunting make at least an effort to look beneath the glossy facade, and put an end to the savage excesses of the terriermen and their cohorts.

The cruelty is there but, as the saying goes "There's none so blind as those who will not see." I estimate that at least 95 per cent of all hunt riders are only there for the thrill of a cross-country gallop. For them the pursuit of an artificial scent as in draghunting is surely the answer.

Finally, a short word to people entering the animal protection movement, eager to make a contribution. I have seen every phase of the fight to protect animals — from petition paper to Durham jail — yet my most significant contribution was to both see and capture the essence of cruelty through the lens of a camera.

GLOSSARY OF HUNTING TERMS

Account for:
Kill.

Artificial earth:
A fox den constructed by the hunt with the object of encouraging foxes to breed. According to Major Gundry, Joint Master of the Duke of Beaufort's Hunt: "Without artificial earths a number of hunts would have to disband."

At bay:
Said of a stag that, exhausted, has turned to face the hounds.

At fault:
Hounds which have lost a scent.

Bagman, Bag-fox or Bagged-fox:
A fox released when required for a hunt. The fox is taken in a sack or box and may be released into a covert, an earth, a drain or even simply an open field. This may be done days before the hunt, hours before, or even with the hounds in the near vicinity.

Bay:
Hounds bay when marking a fox to ground. An exhausted stag facing the pack is at bay and the hounds that bark at him are said to be baying him. A terrier facing a fox, badger or mink underground and giving tongue is also said to be baying.

Blank:
A covert is blank when it does not hold any quarry. A blank day is one on which no quarry is found.

Blood:
To daub with the blood of the slaughtered quarry the cheek of a new recruit to hunting (nearly always an infant) after his or her first kill. The person blooded is usually told not to wash the blood off. It also means giving young hounds their first taste of their quarry. A pack which is "out of blood" is one that has not killed for some time; while one that is "in blood" has recently killed several times in quick succession.

Bolt:
To force the quarry out of the drain or earth where it has sought refuge with the aid of a terrier, stick, or any other means.

Brace:
Pair (of foxes).

Break up:
A pack of hounds break up their quarry at the end of the hunt.

Brush:
The tail of a fox.

Cap:
Uniform for foot followers of hunting. Also a money collection made at the meet from those who are not subscribers to the hunt.

Cast:
Hounds spreading out in search of a scent; hounds may cast themselves or be cast by the Huntsman.

Charlie:
Name given to the fox by hunt supporters, derives from Charles James Fox the eighteenth-century politician.

Check:
An interruption in the hunt when hounds lose the scent (are unable to own the line).

Chop:
The quarry is chopped if it is killed by the hounds without giving the supporters any fun, i.e. before it had had the chance to run.

Country:
The area hunted by a particular pack of hounds.

Couple:
A pair of hounds. A pack is counted according to the number of couples, thus 35 hounds = 17½ couple.

Course:
Hounds course their quarry when they pursue them in full view; also the matching of two greyhounds against one hare.

Covert:
Any patch of wood, gorse or thicket where the quarry may lie for shelter (pronounced cover).

Cry:
The sound, or music, hounds make when running. Hence: in full cry.

Drag:
The scent left by the quarry on its nocturnal wanderings. Hounds 'drag' up to their quarry when they work out this stale line until they find him.

Draghunt:
A humane sport in which hounds pursue an artificial scent. This may be dripped from tanks either side of a saddle, towed behind a horse, or may be the 'clean-boot' of a running man.

Draw:
To search for the quarry with hounds.

Earth:
The lair, burrow or den of a fox.

Earth stopper:
An employee of the hunt whose job is to block the earth with tree stumps, fertiliser bags filled with rubble or anything to hand, while the fox is out hunting and thus prevent the fox seeking refuge there.

Enter:
To enter a hound is to start it on its hunting career.

Field:
The followers of a hunt.

Foil:
To obscure the scent of the quarry with some other scent. This may be caused by cattle or sheep running over the line or by horses, hounds and spectators milling about.

Harbourer:
One who advises the hunt as to the whereabouts and condition of suitable stags for hunting.

Head:
To head the quarry is to divert it from its original course.

Heel:
The reverse line of a scent to that taken, i.e. where the quarry has been.

Hold up:
To hold up a covert is to surround it with riders and foot followers so that cubs cannot escape during cubhunting.

Holloa!:
A loud, high scream or screech, given when the quarry is viewed (pronounced holler).

Law:
Of coursing, the start given to the hare before the greyhounds are slipped, 60 to 80 yards being the general rule. The start given to any quarry when bolted to ensure that it is not killed too quickly.

Lay on:
To put the main pack of hounds on the trail of a stag after the tufters have driven him from covert.

Line:
The scent trail left by the quarry.

Mark:
When hounds bay outside the earth, or drain in which the exhausted fox or mink has sought refuge, or in which it is lying.

Music:
The cry that hounds make when they are running.

Own the line:
Hounds which give tongue on a line are said to own the line.

Pad:
The foot of a fox. It is sometimes given to followers as a trophy.

Riot:
When hounds hunt anything that moves other than their proper quarry.

Run to earth:
To chase the quarry to a hole or drain. Also: to run to ground.

Sinking:
The quarry is described as sinking when it is running out of strength and weakening.

Slipper:
The official in hare coursing whose job is to let the greyhounds go when each has fairly sighted the hare and the hare has been given a suitable start.

Slot:
The foot of a deer, the track of a deer, or to track a deer by its footprints.

Speak:
Hounds speak or give tongue when they are on the scent or have struck the line.

Stern:
The tail of a hound.

Take:
Stags that are killed are "taken".

Tally-ho!:
A hunting cry that means "I have seen the quarry".

Tufters:
A staghunting term, refers to the small number of selected and steady hounds put into a covert in order to separate a stag from the rest of the herd and to drive him out from the covert for the full pack to hunt.

Velvet:
The network of arteries covering and nourishing the growing horns of a stag. It is very tender and bleeds easily if knocked.

To view:
To see the quarry..

Walk:
To walk a hound puppy is to take one into a farm or house in the country, after it has been weaned, and to rear it until it is ready to join the pack .

Whipper-in:
Assistant to the Huntsman. There are generally two, known as first whipper-in and second whipper-in. Usually shortened to "whip."

Worry:
Of hounds, to kill their quarry and tear apart the carcass.

DIARY

Hunts attended by the author in the course of his undercover operations:

1981

April 28	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Bicknor Bridge
April 30	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Aldermans Barrow
August 19	Quantock Staghounds : Volis Cross
August 20	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Potter's Cross
August 22	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Mounsey Hill Gate
August 24	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Mockham Down Gate
August 25	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Wheddon Cross
October 3	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Cuzzicombe
October 5	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Burcombe Hill
October 6	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : West Buckland
October 7	Quantock Staghounds : Seven Milestone
October 8	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Webber's Post
October 10	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Morebath
October 17	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Brendon Two Gates
October 17	Tiverton Staghounds : King's Nympton
October 19	Dulverton West Foxhounds : West Buckland
October 20	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : "Black Cock," Molland
October 21	Tiverton Staghounds : Van Post
October 22	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Pitcombe Head
October 23	Dulverton West Foxhounds : "Royal Oak," Withypool
October 24	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Comers Gate
October 26	Stevenstone Foxhounds : Duerdon Cross
October 27	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Culbone Stables
October 28	Tiverton Staghounds : Knowstone Moor Cross
October 29	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Bratton Fleming
October 30	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Burcombe Hill
October 31	Tiverton Staghounds : Chulmleigh Beacon
November 14	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Twitchen
November 16	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Stoke Rivers
November 17	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Nutscale Drive

November 18	Tiverton Staghounds : Edgiford Cross
November 19	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Bury
November 26	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Wheddon Cross
November 27	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Tarr Steps Post
November 30	Quantock Staghounds : Dead Woman's Ditch
December 1	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Scob Hill Gate
December 2	Tiverton Staghounds : Chain Bridge
December 3	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Morebath
December 5	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Aldermans Barrow

1982

January 20	Tiverton Staghounds : Chawleigh
January 21	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Horner
January 22	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Newtown Bridge
January 23	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Mounsey Hill Gate
February 24	Tiverton Staghounds : Rackenford
February 25	Quantock Staghounds : Dead Woman's Ditch
February 26	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Hawkridge
February 27	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Brendon Two Gates
February 27	Tiverton Staghounds : "Black Cock" Molland
March 16	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Wheddon Cross
March 17	Tiverton Staghounds : Swineham Hill
March 18	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Haddon Hill
March 19	Quantock Staghounds : "Ship Inn," Porlock
March 20	Tiverton Staghounds : Chittlehampton
April 10	Tiverton Staghounds : Holmingham Farm
April 24	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Chudleigh Knighton
April 26	Quantock Staghounds : "Blue Ball"
April 27	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : "Black Cock," Molland
April 30	Quantock Staghounds : "Carew Arms"
May 1	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Boyton Bridge
May 3	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Harbertonford
May 29	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Lifton

May 31	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : St. Neot
June 12	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Drewsteignton
June 14	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Kismeldon Bridge
June 15	Culmstock Minkhounds : Black Torrington Bridge
June 26	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Marhamchurch
July 7	Three Counties, Four Shires and Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : "Cottage of Content," Carey
July 8	Three Counties and Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Tregare Mill
July 9	Three Counties and Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Trigate Bridge
July 10	Three Counties and Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : "Lamb," Stoke Prior
July 31	Three Counties Minkhounds : Pandy
August 7	Three Counties Minkhounds : Upleadon Mill
August 14	Three Counties Minkhounds : Wichenford
August 21	Three Counties Minkhounds : Little Hereford
August 25	Three Counties Minkhounds : Caradoc House, Sellack
August 26	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : "Froude Arms," Anstey
August 27	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Worth Farm
August 28	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Moreleigh
August 30	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : Eggesford
August 31	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Mounsey Hill Gate
September 4	Three Counties Minkhounds : Ketford Bridge
September 8	Three Counties Minkhounds : Newnham Bridge
September 11	Three Counties Minkhounds : Maisemore
September 12	Three Counties Minkhounds : Wine and Cheese Party at Cropthorne
September 18	Hunting Festival : Croome and West Warwickshire Foxhounds : Caddicroft Farm, Three Counties Minkhounds : Peopleton, Wyre Forest Beagles : Crowle
September 25	Three Counties Minkhounds : "Black Swan," Much Dewchurch
October 2	Hunting Festival : Tetcott Foxhounds : "Bullers

	Arms," Marhamchurch, Marhamchurch Beagles : "Bullers Arms," Marhamchurch, Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : "Bullers Arms," Marhamchurch
October 4	Tiverton Foxhounds : Queen Dart Cross
October 5	Tetcott Foxhounds : Wainhouse Corner
October 6	Tiverton Staghounds : Witheridge Moor
October 7	Tetcott Foxhounds : Morwenstow
October 8	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Willingford Bridge
October 9	Tiverton Staghounds : Chittlehamholt
October 16	Surrey and North Sussex Beagles : Blindley Heath
October 23	Surrey and North Sussex Beagles : Marsh Green
October 27	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Croyde
October 28	Eggesford Foxhounds : Chulmleigh
October 29	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Cuzzicombe Post
October 30	Tiverton Staghounds : Stoodleigh
November 1	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Yarde Down
November 2	Mid Devon Foxhounds : Caddiford Cross
November 6	Surrey and North Sussex Beagles : "Bull," Chelsham
November 13	Pevensey Marsh Beagles : Northiam
November 20	Surrey and North Sussex Beagles : Boreham Street
November 27	Surrey and North Sussex Beagles : "Hare and Hounds," Lingfield
December 4	Ashford Valley Foxhounds : "Royal Oak," Iden Green
December 11	Banwen Miners Foxhounds : "King's Head," Llangennith
December 15	Fernie Foxhounds : Arnesby
December 16	Cottesmore Foxhounds : Pasture House, North Luffenham
December 18	Warwickshire Beagles : "Three Horseshoes," Wixford
December 22	Eggesford Foxhounds : Venn, Morchard Bishop
December 24	Eggesford Foxhounds : Mear, Morchard Bishop
December 27	Banwen Miners Foxhounds : Castle Hotel, Neath
December 29	Wyre Forest Beagles : Coddington Cross
December 31	Dulverton West Foxhounds : West Molland

1983

January 1	Tiverton Staghounds : "Fortescue Arms," King's Nympton
January 3	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Gunn
January 8	North Ledbury Foxhounds : "Wheatsheaf," Fromes Hill
January 8	Wyre Forest Beagles : Kinnersley Church
January 15	Tiverton Staghounds : Spurway Moor Gate
January 17	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Hunstone Cross
January 18	South Tetcott Foxhounds : Crackington Haven
January 19	Dulverton West Foxhounds : West Down
January 20	Quantock Staghounds : Warm Corner
January 21	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Lower Fyldon
January 22	Warwickshire Beagles : "Bell," Cropthorne
January 29	Wyre Forest Beagles : Tenbury
February 1	Three Counties Minkhounds A.G.M. : "Mason's Arms," Wichenford
February 5	Leadon Vale Basset Hounds : Church Farm, Hardwicke
February 12	South Tetcott Foxhounds : Boyton
February 15	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Culbone Stables — Deer Drive
February 19	Leadon Vale Basset Hounds : "Horseshoe," Brooms Green
February 22	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Court Place, Porlock — Deer Drive
February 24	Devon and Somerset Staghounds : Horner — Cancelled
February 26	Tiverton Staghounds : Benley Cross
March 2	Waterloo Cup Harecoursing : Lydiate
March 3	Waterloo Cup Harecoursing : The Withins
March 5	Worcestershire Foxhounds : "Chequers," Crowle
March 9	Berkeley Foxhounds : Nympsfield
March 11	Three Counties Minkhounds Keepers Evening : Defford near Pershore
March 12	Duke of Beaufort's Foxhounds : Monument, Hawkesbury Upton

March 19	Surrey and North Sussex Beagles : "Plough," Lower Beeding
March 26	Leadon Vale Basset Hounds : Church Farm, Hardwicke
March 28	Dulverton West Foxhounds : Withypool Cross
March 29	South Tetcott Foxhounds : Hornacott Chapel
March 30	Eggesford Foxhounds : Lower Sutton Farm
April 30	Devon and Cornwall Minkhounds : North Tamerton
May 7	Three Counties Minkhounds : Longtown

A factual account of "sporting" activities in the countryside.

Price £4.50

ISBN 0 9509284 0 2