



Setting the Woods on Fire

**We cast at dawn,
Sit and listen
Sometimes until the full moon glistens.
We may even stay
Till the next mornin's light
And the hounds return with
A victory on high.**

—Unknown

A nice cool night when there's a south breeze with a heavy dew on the ground, is a night when the houndmen can be found in the hills listening to their foxhounds "setting the woods on fire."

Mr. Leland Hays of Kirksville, Missouri is one of those men who has enjoyed the benefits of hunting. He was just eight years old when he got his first foxhound, and at 64, he has had hounds a long time! He was encouraged by Harry Farr who was his first school teacher. This was the same man who gave Leland his hound, hoping that he would take fox hunting up as a hobby, and he did. Leland's mom and dad didn't mind his having hounds as long as he took care of them. He did a fine job of it too. Back around 1924, the "houndmen" fed their dogs cornbread and mush and cracklings. Nowadays they are fed just plain dogfeed out of a can or bag. Mr. Hays does feed his hounds some raw meat, too. This feed does cost, but it makes no difference to a "true foxhunter." Mr. Hays hunted, back then, with many of the "old timers," such as Merl Bragg, Willard Cook, and many, many others.

Leland says a good foxhound has an arched back, good long ears that will reach around to the end of his nose, and one that stands on his toes. A good hound has "good feet" so that its feet do not get sore from running.

There are two grades of hounds, registered, and grade dogs. Registered dogs are those with "birth certificates," as Mr. Hays calls them, showing the dog's past generations from as far back as three to nine or ten generations. They didn't used to register cross-bred dogs, but they do now. In Leland's opinion, neither grade of dog is best, just as long as they "have something between their ears."

Leland recalls the times when they rode hunting on horseback and the hounds simply followed. They didn't have dog boxes or trucks to haul them in so the dogs were trained to follow. They would go straight to the hills, get off their horses, and set and listen to the hounds "setting the woods on fire." The hunters rarely hunted fox back then for an income; it was strictly for "pleasure." The fox furs brought \$2 to \$3 each then. This doesn't buy much now, but back then, as Leland recalls, you could buy a pair of overalls for 98¢, shoes for 98¢, and a sheep-lined jacket and a pair of insulated underwear for 98¢. Even though the money may have

been needed for the family, the hunters didn't kill the fox then because there were only about six in all of Adair County and there was nothing else to hunt because coyotes weren't even here yet. They only migrated in about 10 or 12 years ago.

A foxhorn was used on the hunts too. The horns were made by getting a cow or goat horn, hanging it up to let the core fall out, then shaping a mouthpiece which would be blown into to make a "hollow sound." They were used to call the hounds from the hunt. They are very difficult to blow. Leland says you just have to "get the hang of it."

There are several breeds of dogs. Some of them are Trig, July, Walker and Goodman, just to name a few. Leland's favorite, or his "No. 1 Choice," is the Walker. He says that, in his opinion, they have more strength and durability, and more "common sense," a good mouth, and speed. Leland likes a hound with a "high toned" mouth, and one that can be picked out of a pack of hounds when running. These dogs are favored highly.



Nowadays, foxhounds will run fox, deer, and coyotes. It is said that deer are "pests," and the hunters want their hounds to run either fox or coyote, and Leland says that "if they do run something besides these, I won't own them in the morning." You can tell what the hounds are running by the way they bark, or by the way that the game is running. A coyote runs a big circle, whereas the fox will tend to run a tighter circle. Leland says that for all he knows, the deer "just runs into the blue."

If the hounds get too close to the fox or coyote he runs into a "den." There are quite a few dogs that will not fight the game any longer. Mr. Hays gives the explanation for this as being not because the dogs are no good, but because there isn't any game that will run for a lengthy amount of time. They aren't supposed to destroy the game. It is also said that

a good hound will run anything, even deer, but they will not stay on it too long before they'll come back.

There are several hunting stories that Mr. Hays has told of, of when they were hunting and some funny "incidents" took place. As he recalls, "I gave one of my hunting buddies a sandwich that had liver-cheese on it, and used to there would be a thin slice of paper between every slice of meat when you bought it, so I left the paper on one half and folded my handkerchief and put it on the other half. Finally, after chewing on it for awhile, he said, 'Leland, I can't eat this damn thing, it's too tough.' This other guy, who was also with us, and I were about to die laughing, but he didn't think it was too funny, although it didn't make him mad.

"There were several other times that were rather 'memorable.' Once we were on a big hunt, and we always carried our big black kettle with us so we could 'attempt' to cook and make coffee or something, and anyway, the instant coffee in the jar had just come out and we had a jar of it and it was my turn to make the coffee. Well, instead of just putting two or three teaspoonsful in, I dumped the whole jar in. There wasn't anybody who would attempt to take the first drink because the smell alone was so strong that you couldn't stand to get near it.

"There were times when we did get kind of 'ornery,' like when a friend and I stole chickens out of a guy's peachtree. It was right by the window and that's probably what made us 'want' to try and get them because we weren't really all that hungry. Anyway, we got two big White Rock hens, het up some water, dressed the chickens and roasted them. About the time they were done, they guy we stole them off of came down there and ate them with us. We didn't get in trouble though. We just sat there and shook, afraid that he would stop eatin' and say something.

"Then, always, on the road home, we would feed our hounds out of milkcans that were sitting along the road to be picked up by the milkman the next day. We would just knock the lid off the can and pour the milk in it. Those were really good times back then.

"I still hunt today but it's not done the way it used to be. We use trucks and CB radios which make it more convenient to locate and hear the race. A good hunter also enjoys taking good care of his hounds."

A note from Leland: "I think that fox and coyote hunting today with a good pack of hounds is *top* entertainment for anyone. I also think if more young folks tried it, they would like it. Try it."



HOUND DOG NAMES

The names given hound dogs are colorful and unique. Many are named after their voice, which is one of the most important things about a hound, or named after their behavior, origin, movie or radio stars, or appearance. Here are a few of the more interesting hound dog names.

Southern Screamer—came from down South
Arky—came from Arkansas
Melody Moon—just a name
Dolly—Dolly Partin
Cornliquor—bought at "brewing time"
Moonshine—same as above
Bonnie & Clyde—gangsters
Muttie—was mixed breed (a mutt)
Mousey—would hardly bark
Flame—"set the woods on fire"
Bell—because of voice
Biner—was mostly white (albino)
Ranger—good hunter
Scout—wouldn't ever bark
Shotgun Sam—afraid of gunshot
Shylo—born in a silo

Story by Teresa Hays