

East meets West by Barbara Peterson

Tejon Hounds Inaugural Hunt WEEK- January 18th-25th

Masters Lynn Loyd and Angela Murray along with first flight master Mary Tiscornia traveled for our Amwell Valley Hounds annual Hunt Ball. It was a beautiful evening at the Blue Moon restaurant when it was suggested that some might want to join them on the first joint meet north of Los Angeles at the Tejon Ranch located in Lebec California. The ranch is 270,000 acres or 423 square miles of privately held land in which the Tejon Ranch Company holds. It has been in tack since 1843, changing hands only 3 times. This company pursues cattle ranching, orchards, crops, hunting of boar and elk and for the first time ever Coyote hunting on horseback. Tejon has many full time staff that operates the vast property. One of which, is Scott Neill from New Zealand and now the Master Huntsman with Tejon Ranch along with his new pack of hounds. Invited were the Red Rock Hounds, Santa Fe Hounds, Grand Canyon Hounds along with their Paradise Valley Beagles. In all, 75 riders joined in the inaugural joint meet hunt. Our group consisted of 7 riders and 3 spouses, 2 were large farmers in the New Jersey country side who enjoyed the agriculture practices in the area. We would ride incredible open slopes in the commencement of the Serra mountain range. It was as if you turned back time 100 years to see the vast amount of open space and lifestyle of those who operated the ranch.

We started our 8 day adventure with 6 days of hunting in this vast acreage. The running of coyote is an adventure as the coyote tends to run longer, straighter and much faster than the fox. When they are fatigued, rarely do they go to ground. The Tejon coyote had rarely been chased by mounted horses before and so our fun began.

Each day we were up at 6:00 am and met at the Equestrian Center by 7:00 am where the Red Rock hounds provided 20 exceptional horses for the riders. It was amazing to watch Angela and Lynn the Masters of the Red Rock Hounds; match the mount to rider, all with similes and a tidbit about each horse. Ready to load the trailers we were off 10 miles down the road to the first fixture. Tejon Ranch spans 40 miles on Hwy route 5. We traveled down the valley into the Grapevine area where orchards of pistachio trees, almonds trees, and miles of vineyards and berry bushes gathered in groves and vineyards. As we approached the Valley of the Grapevine area, the Old Headquarters South Fixture was closed in by the Tule fog traveling down the valley. As we were delayed by the fog, It was a good time to check our mounts and chat with all the gathering of various hunt members from around the country. The gathering of hunt members from around the USA were from California, Georgia, Nevada, New Jersey, Kansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Arizona and New Mexico.

East meets West became clear when we were off on our mounts and the ground was riddled with rocks, sage brush, holes and tundra causing each horse to find its own path. It became very clear that the horses knew how to handle their footing. Anyone who did not believe in their mount, found it terribly hard to ride. Trust your steed was the key for this hunt. Master Scott Neill the Huntsman for Tejon Ranch cast his pack in the fog only to watch them feather due to the conditions. As we continued south, the fog began to roll in again, so thick you could barely see the ground. The hounds found a fresh line of scent which allows them to get on terms with the coyote and they were gone and so was the huntsman. Losing sight of the hounds and huntsman the first flight riders' traveled fast through the sage brush trying to find our way. Lost in the white mist we looked for the pack for over an hour, off in the distance we heard the muffled sound of the horn blending in with the sound of cows, moving quickly to find our pack we ran into second flight. The fields were lost in the mist and so it was decided with impossible sight conditions to call it a day. Lunch was provided on the range; the hospitality of the Tejon Ranch staff

provided outdoor gourmet food and traveled with tables and chairs, our own porta-potty to each fixture.

Monday, Red Rock Hounds fixture was Old Headquarter North Fixture, out of the valley and into the slopes of the mountains used mostly by cattle grazing. We started off with a fast hot line fresh as could be, but the bit of wind lifted it up moved it and it rose well providing the fantastic pack of hounds a grand chase of scent. The pack ran close together, lead hounds knew their job, the hounds roared and took us straight up the side of the mountain. Horses so fit and keen that first flight had a long fast gallop of many miles. Leading first flight was Katy Mathews, from Amwell Valley hounds, who was on Master Angela Murray's horse. We came to a check, the hounds watered at an old well surrounded by a 1940 truck and second flight caught up. Lynn cast again, the hounds worked up a valley and down only to hit again. It was an all out run; the hounds stretched flat with powerful loins and sterns behind them, with their long sloping shoulders showing the wisdom of good conformation. The big chests allowed room for huge lungs and a heart girth. It was amazing to see horse and hound travel these mountain slopes like a well tuned Ferrari. We flew up and down the mountain the music filled the air. These hounds' sterns waving eagerly pushed over 4 lines for 3 hours. It was unbelievable. We all returned with our individual stories to share.

Wednesday Santa Fe Hunt joined us at the Edmonston Pump Plant Road fixture. We drove all rigs down long dirt road to an area where the ranch had 400 cattle in pens, preparing for spring shots and medical checks. It was like turning the pages back to the old west with cowboys on their ranch cattle horses, herding dogs and camp style kitchen near the pens. We mounted up and rode through the gate to the open foothills and valley of this grazing area. It was a fast ride as Master Terry Paine zoomed with his Santa Fe hounds around the valley looking for prey. No scent was to be found. We traveled around the valley and watched as his amazing pack moved through the open area. While out on the range, our support husbands [the New Jersey farmers] turned their attention to the old west and watched as the cattle herd broke through the holding gates. A stampede started down the valley toward the horse trailers. Within minutes the cowboys packed up the herd, and returned them to their pens. It was a sight to see, as the cowboys did their job well. Lunch was catered by the Santa Fe Hunt with beautiful table décor and fabulous food. Our new Master Cindy Nance had the great honor of celebrating her birthday on the range in style.

Thursday: Corporate staff, Brian Grant, Joint Master and VP of ranch Operations at Tejon Ranch hosted a tour of the ranch sharing long range plans and review of wildlife, plants and strategies for the future of the vast holdings. What a place,

Friday, we had a lovely day with Master Amanda Wilson, huntswomen for the Paradise Valley Beagles Pack. The fixture was in the valley of the St Andrea Fault. This area is known as the high desert valley, located in the southern end of the ranch. We traveled south about 10 miles on Route 5 to the 300th Street Road. The valley was wide and when pointed out you could see the St Andreas fault line along the lower part of the ridge of a small range [name]. I was worried that if an earth quake happened what would the ground do? *SHAKE- RATTLE and ROLL, I was told*

The black-tailed jackrabbit also known as the American desert hare, is a common and the Jackrabbit of the western United States. It is found at elevations from sea level to up to 10,000 feet. Reaching a length of about 2 feet, 12 inch ears and a weight from 3 to 6 pounds, they occupy shrub-grassland terrains. Hunting Jack Rabbit is hunting prey unlike the fox or coyote which are predators. The hare will survive more often than not if it is still and if it sticks to its warren. When you hunt a fox you hunt the scent line

which is so much stronger than the hare scent. Amanda Wilson's beagles pack had 3 sight hounds folded into the pack to help the Beagles have sight and focus when the Jack Rabbit popped from its warren. They found many in the sage tundra and brush. The jackrabbit when discovered would pop out and run in fast long circles. It was short spurt of energy but they had the ability to find safety quickly. It was a sunny beautiful California day; the hare provided good sport and keen movement.

Saturday, The Grand Canyon Hounds took us back to Old Headquarters South fixture, an area of open foot hills with cattle grazing along the ridge and orchard groves to the south. The day proved to be perfect for scent. If the ground is the same temperature as the air, the scent should be good, if the ground is cold, there won't be much scent at all. The wind was cool enough to keep today's scent low, but enough puffs to have the scent rise. Peter Wilson, huntsman of the Grand Canyon Hounds, started to draw the covert of the sage tundra in an area about a half hour ride from the gathering of trailers. The hounds fanned out quickly, he urged them on and they never took their noses off the ground. The hounds responded immediately to their huntsman and were willing to move on when asked. Peter allowed his pack to work the area slowing and again moving south. As he saw them gain confidence he provided time for the pack to do their work. Suddenly we heard two strike hounds speak, more drew to the area and conferred with the scent, the pack grew excited and began to scream. Abruptly, over to the left a coyote under the tundra popped up and began its run. The coyote is so elegant, quick and intelligent. To watch the chase up close was an unbelievable experience for the hunt field. The coyote ran its heart out and so the chase began again and again. We had many long runs on 6 visible prey, up and down the valley foot hills, the horses knew their game, used their hunches to steady full out gallops downhill. Never before had I witnessed hound work so exciting. Just when you think hunting can be predictable, something happens to make you understand a bit more of the role of the huntsman and the talent these hounds have in their sport. And to the coyote; these predators are fast, smart and have the ability to tire out the entire team of hunters, hounds and their steed. Nothing is more than exciting than 100 mile views of open space, 45 minute gallops and a glimpse of the prey you are chasing. This hunt provided a thrill of a life time.

Saturday night we were hosted to a lovely cocktail party at the Tejon Ranch Hacienda, a lovely home with two master sweets and living room, den library area with a large conference dining room. Paul Delaney, Master and owner of the Grand Canyon Hounds presented a slide show of the development of the Grand Canyon hounds territory and breeding program. This presentation was given at the MFHA whipper-in seminar. Their fixtures of 80,000 acre grazing pastures, they found it necessary to blend in a few Suluki hounds as a cross breed for the gain of more sight, speed and assertiveness in the ½ bred hounds. Folded into the pack these hounds helped push forward with sight and quickness, necessary for pursue of the coyote in this territory. The Grand Canyon Hounds were an amazing group of people who were friendly, generous and smart. Strong friendships had been made throughout the week and true respect from the East coast fox hunters, in understanding the difference in chasing coyote from fox.

Sunday was our last day to hunt, the fixture was down in the valley toward Grapevine, it did not look good as we were faced with the rolling in of the Tule fog which gets sucked in through the vast mountain range and covers the valley. We waited for over an hour for the fog to lift. The experienced Master, Scott Neil was patient. He was the huntsman and Master for 3 different packs in New Zealand, the Northland Hunt, Rototua & Bay of Plenty Hunt and Maramarua Hunt and finding his way to the Australian Ellerslie Camperdown Hunt. Every huntsman develops a pattern that suits his pack. They must use their voice and horn to let their hounds and the staffs have the ability to follow their direction. He made the call, 18 couple of hounds were waiting on the trailer. Hounds were released and Neil

thundered down the path where clods of earth were seen flying behind him. He cast his hounds and they worked their way up the side of the slope. We started up the hill to follow and the old man fog started to roll again, hard to see Master Neil moved on. The coyote hunting rush is incredible, every now and then something happens and you happen to be a part of it. I think that is what hooks us all. In the end it was a hard call, with no sight the day was called. With heartfelt so longs and a taste for more to come at next year's Tejon's Ranch joint meet. It is an invitation for all to enjoy.