

# Hunt Week

with the Whiskey Road  
Foxhounds  
in  
Aiken, South Carolina

Story and photos  
by  
Susan Whitfield

**W**e headed down to Hunt Week in Aiken, South Carolina, on the first of February at the invitation of our friends from the Whiskey Road Foxhounds. Hunt week is usually held the first Wednesday of February through the next Friday and draws about 100 fox hunters from up and down the East Coast and Canada. The weather was relatively mild here in the Washington, D.C., area this season, and except for a frozen December, we've hunted fairly consistently—but we still looked forward to the fantastic ground conditions and having a ball (and parties and tailgates) with our Southern friends. Personally, I don't find the drive from Middleburg, Virginia, to South Carolina tiresome at all. Not everyone has the opportunity to vacation with their horse. I throw in a dog to keep me company in the truck and a great book on my iPod and it's quite the getaway. Upon arrival it's first things first: I unload my horse, take off her blanket and watch her have a good, long roll in the warm, sandy paddock.

Our hosts showed us an abundance of Southern hospitality with a week



Meeting in Hitchcock Woods for a morning hunt

full of hunting, including many days out with the Whiskey Road Foxhounds and the option of doing the Aiken Hounds drag hunt in Hitchcock Woods on Saturday with a lovely breakfast following at the august Green Boundary Club. There are also nearby hunts that welcome capping, including the Why Worry Hounds in Windsor, South Carolina, and the Belle Mead Hunt Club in Thomson, Georgia. Hunting in the South varies from what we are used to up North in obvious ways: The ground is mostly sandy or a powdery light

dirt, and the terrain is flat and scrubby with lots of pine and even the picturesque cotton field, a far cry from our rolling green hills in Virginia. And the quarry in the South is just as likely to be coyote as it is fox.

We had some tremendous runs on two of the days I was out that lasted for almost an hour in both cases. Thank goodness for my surefooted mare, as I had my head down and eyes closed as we galloped full tilt down winding trails through and under low-hanging fir branches.

The author and Ray  
Moffett





Hacking to Hitchcock Woods

Dave Smith, MFH



Unfortunately, there were quite a few crashes on my last day out, with one horse getting caught up pretty nastily in barbed wire. But all in all it was a day of great sport and lots of fun.

The members of the Whiskey Road Foxhounds generously hosted lovely parties almost daily during the week rang-

ing from the Whiskey Road Hunt Ball at the Augusta Country Club at the beginning of the week to cocktails in big old homes to a great breakfast buffet served elegantly on flatbed trailers after a meet at a cabin by the river in Blackville, South Carolina. At this breakfast, on one of our last days, Master of Foxhounds Dave Smith commanded a live auction where members and guests bid for the privilege of naming the hound puppies.

The small town of Aiken is situated just off the famous Hitchcock Woods—a 2,000-acre parcel of land dedicated to horses and pedestrians owned and managed by the Hitchcock Woods Foundation. On our off-hunting days we would enjoy a hack in the woods riding along miles of professionally maintained trails with hundreds of inviting jumps in all shapes and sizes. Hitchcock Woods is fabulous for bringing along young horses or working the kinks out of the old ones with perfect footing that seemingly massages your horse's hooves. The Woods is also where

the Aiken Hounds meet and have their drag hunt which is an exhilarating couple of hours—especially if you've ever dreamed of steeplechasing. On the perimeter of the Woods, firm sandy roads (that our own Fairfax Hunt member Ambassador Marion Smoak had a hand in keeping unpaved) spindle off into tight neighborhoods of stables and beautiful old homes. I keep my horse Georgia down one of these roads at Red Barn Stable when I'm visiting because I think hacking to the woods from the barn is half the charm of being in Aiken, with all the activity of the fancy show stables, polo fields, race barns and carriages going by. And the cherry on the hack is that when you need to cross Whiskey Road, the "Stop Traffic" button is horse high!

We had quite a sizable group representing the Fairfax Hunt this year: mostly regulars who've been going for years including our Master of Foxhounds Ray Moffett, Ambassador Smoak (who was a state senator from Aiken) and his daughter Mary Frances, who is a friend of mine and who has a home in Aiken now (which works really well for me).

I'm safe in saying that we all feel welcome when we attend Hunt Week in Aiken, and we embark on our trip home reluctantly—making the drive north not quite as much fun as the ride down.

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Susan Whitfield is a member of the Fairfax Hunt. She lives with her daughter in Chevy Chase, Maryland. She is also a freelance photographer.