



The Middleburg Hunt

Hunting Guidelines

Fellow foxhunters:

The following is a summary of important foxhunting guidelines. They are common sense rules of safety, courtesy and the traditions of the sport we enjoy together. More detail can be found in many books, including *Riding to Hounds in America* by William P. Wadsworth, MFH.

These guidelines are not directed at any individual, nor do they apply exclusively to the Middleburg Hunt. They are meant to make the sport as safe and as much fun as possible. By maintaining the traditions of the sport, we will maintain its beauty and with a little luck, its longevity. The masters will be happy to discuss with you any of these guidelines. We hope that those who subscribe to the Middleburg Hunt will consider these guidelines when hunting elsewhere.

Landowners and Farmers: Without the generosity of our landowners and the tolerance of those who farm, there would be no foxhunting as we know it in Virginia today.

- Leave gates open that you find open. Close securely those that you find closed.
- Carefully circumvent any crop fields or fields that you suspect have been recently seeded. Following the field master will keep you out of trouble.
- Go slowly around livestock so as not to agitate them or make them run.
- Be extra careful around loose horses. They have a tendency to jump fences behind you. Know where they are at all times.
- Never set foot on lawns or closely mown areas such as the sides of drives and roads. Whenever possible stay to the drive.
- Please remember that foxhunting does not imply permission to trail ride. When not foxhunting specific permission must be obtained from landowners for cross country riding privileges.

Preparation:

- Before you go foxhunting you should obtain a Virginia Hunting license and current negative coggins test. They are required by law. Please keep them with you at all times.

- Each time you prepare to hunt check all tack to be sure it is sound and clean.
- It is always a good idea to call the hunt tape (540-687-8411) the night before hunting. The tape often gives details about the location of the meet, specific parking instructions and last minute changes.
- Make sure that you have prepared enough the day before so you will have plenty of time for the unexpected: the horse you can't catch, the truck that won't start, etc.
- Be on time. Once hounds are ready, it is time to move off. Leaving individuals to catch up on their own is unacceptable.
- If you are not a subscriber or would like to bring a guest, contact one of the masters for permission to hunt.

At the Meet:

- Check in with the field secretary. If you have fees to pay, have them ready so as not to take too much of the secretary's time. You must have a current negative coggins test either with you or on file with the Middleburg Hunt. If you have already signed a release form for the current season, have a coggins on file, and have no fees due, a cordial good morning will suffice. Our field secretary is an honorary position; your courtesy and consideration are much appreciated.
- The masters keep a mental list of who is hunting on any given day. Please make sure you find time to say good morning. This is also the time you will introduce a guest you may have brought to the meet.
- If you absolutely must warm up your horse, be careful not to interfere with others unloading or getting on their horses. Do not ride close to nearby coverts.
- Wherever we meet we are guests of landowners. It is inappropriate to clean out your trailer or van on land other than your own.

Hunting:

- When we strike off you should find the appropriate position with either the jumping or non-jumping group. Those with colors have earned the right to hunt in the front of the field. Those who are newer to a hunt or are guests, traditionally hunt toward

the back of the field. If you are a long time subscriber and have earned the right to hunt up front, it is courteous to afford others the same opportunity during the course of the day.

- Keep a safe distance between you and the horse in front of you. Never be close enough for your horse to touch the one in front.
- When jumping leave enough room for the horse ahead of you to make a mistake.
- If your horse refuses a jump, go immediately to the back of the field before attempting to jump again.
- If a horse or rider ahead of you falls, stop to make sure everyone is safe or that someone has the situation under control, then proceed thoughtfully to catch the rest of the field.
- When you hear “gate please” or “rail please,” take the responsibility yourself for the gate or rail, or make sure the word is passed to someone further back in the field.
- When gates are to be opened, members of the field should take their turns assisting the field master.
- When a gate is being held, hurry through the gate so as not to delay others. One or two people should stay with the volunteer holding the gate.
- When crossing streams or trappy areas follow the masters. Jump where the masters jump. They more often than not know more about the country than you do.
- If you see a hole or wire or some other danger, point to it as you go by and say “ware hole” or “ware wire.” Screaming will probably do nothing more than confuse people and hounds.
- Turning your horse is not a substitute for stopping in a straight line. In fact it is often dangerous. If you cannot stop your horse in a straight line, get more bit. If you still cannot stop him, get another horse.
- When hounds are running it has been said “the devil take the hind most.” Pass slower horses only

in a safe and open area. Remember, foxhunting is not a competitive sport. The only winners are those who come home safely; the only losers are those who spoil the sport for others.

- Do not offer unsolicited riding or etiquette advice in the hunt field. If you see a situation that you think is dangerous or improper, report it to one of the masters.
- Cellular telephones should be turned off and not used unless to assist with a medical emergency.
- If you wish to go home before the end of the day, ask one of the masters which way to return to the meet so as not to interfere with the rest of the day’s sport.

Hounds and Staff:

- If you hack to the meet, stay to the roads. Even if you think you know where we will be hunting, never go cross country.
- Never speak to or interfere with hounds in any way unless asked by one of the masters.
- When a group of hounds is behind you on a trail quietly move to the side to let them pass.
- When hounds are hunting or at a check, be quiet. Keep your voice low. Avoid rustling leaves. If you must pat your horse, do it quietly. If hounds are distracted, they may lift their heads and remove their noses from where they will do the most good.
- At checks, give the field master enough room so he or she can hear hounds or the horn.
- When you are on a trail and the field is changing direction, quickly get off the trail and turn your horse’s head in the direction of the oncoming horses, keeping your horse’s hind quarters away from those approaching.
- The staff works very hard and puts forth maximum effort to show good sport. It is tradition at the end of the day to thank them individually after hounds are safely back at the meet.

We would like to take this opportunity to say how much we appreciate those who subscribe to the Middleburg Hunt. You are a welcoming and friendly group, who never fails to make visitors feel at home. Your enthusiasm is matched only by that of our hounds. We are proud of you and look forward to many more happy days of hunting.

The Masters

**Jeffrey M. Blue, MFH
Mrs. John B. Denegre, MFH**