



HUNTING ETIQUETTE

Hunting etiquette, terms, language and signals

The major concern of people wishing to hunt for the first time seems to be a fear of wearing or doing the wrong thing. Whilst etiquette is important to ensure hunting has an acceptable public image, we hope that people who come to hunt will find us tolerant and helpful. We hope this guide will help you feel more comfortable and confident if you should choose to come out with us for your first experience of hunting. You will not remember all of it, but the more you hunt the more you will realise the reasons for a code of conduct.

As a visitor to the NCH what should I do before coming to a meet mounted?

The first thing to do is telephone the Hunt Secretary and ask if you may join the hunt for the day and check with him/her the amount (cap) you will be required to pay. You can also find out the best place to park and any other matter you are unsure of. He/she will want to help you so don't be afraid to ask questions. Also by "booking in" you can be informed of any last minute changes due to weather, farming problems etc.

Dress code

This is always a difficult one. The first rule is to be dressed tidily and respectfully. Turning out like "an out of work Hamburg seaman is unacceptable" (Master's description!). Clearly newcomers cannot be expected to wear full hunt dress but being tidy and appropriate to the conditions is the key. Similarly with tack. If you are decked out with tassels and Rhinestones you may feel a little out of place but any practical and sensible tack appropriate for the task at hand is acceptable.

During autumn hunting, it is correct for both sexes to wear "Ratcatcher" which in layman's terms is a tweed jacket. Technically this should be worn with brown boots and a bowler hat, but most followers now wear the same boots and head gear as for Hunting after opening meet. This is perfectly acceptable.

To be correctly dressed during hunting the following applies:

Gentlemen:

Black coat or scarlet with Primrose collar if you so wish once awarded the hunt buttons by the masters. Hunt Buttons are awarded entirely at the discretion of the masters for long service and helpfulness to the hunt. The masters write a personal letter awarding hunt buttons. Black coats should be worn with black buttons. These should be plain until awarded the hunt buttons after which the plain buttons should be replaced by the hunt buttons which are available via the hunt website (merchandise section). Scarlet should be worn with brass buttons and a Primrose collar. With a black coat buff breeches and black butcher boots are correct. With Scarlet, white breeches and mahogany topped boots are correct. A hunting stock should be worn with the pin placed horizontally for safety.

Ladies:

Much easier! Black or navy blue coats should be worn with black buttons, again plain until hunt buttons are awarded at which time the black collar should be replaced with a primrose collar. Lady Masters never wear red coats, only black, but do sport brass buttons rather than black ones. Ladies should wear buff breeches with plain black butcher boots. Hair should always be tied up and held in a suitable hair net. A hunting stock should be worn with the pin placed horizontally for safety. Ear rings and other piercings. Let's just not go there!

The numbers of buttons on your coat.

Subscribers = 3 buttons

Masters who don't hunt hounds = 4 buttons

Huntsman & whip = 5 buttons

In the event that the Hunt has traditional connections to an old aristocratic family and their livery then Huntsman & whip = 6 buttons. This is the case with the NCH given its history and connections with the Earls of Coventry who gave rise to the Coronet on the hunt button.

What should I have in my pockets?

The money for your Cap, a penknife, some baler twine and possibly some food. You may even consider carrying a handkerchief or a bandage for emergencies (traditionally the stock is used for this purpose). If you are a newcomer, or suffer from any medical condition, it is a good idea to carry a printed copy of your details so that we can help you should you have an accident. A mobile phone, for emergencies only, is acceptable but be warned reception in our country is patchy at best.

Going to the meet?

It is much more relaxing to allow plenty of time to get to the meet, as you are more likely to find a convenient place to un-box. Please do not park in gateways or opposite other boxes or vehicles. Where possible ensure vehicles are completely off the road (but never on mown verges) especially on narrow roads, and allow room for agricultural vehicles to pass. Never park in farmyards or around other farm buildings without the express consent of the farmer beforehand.

What should I do at the meet?

Etiquette demands that you should find the Hunt Secretary and offer him your cap, rather than waiting for him or her to approach you. Similarly you should say good morning to the Joint Masters (the correct greeting being "*Good morning Master*" even if you know them personally), whilst ensuring that your horse does not get amongst the hounds. In particular find out who is the Field Master for the day and keep behind him/her and obey his/her instructions. If hospitality has been provided at the meet, be sure to thank your host before you leave.

Is there anything special that my horse should wear?

If you know your horse is liable to kick it should wear a red ribbon at the top of its tail. If it is a young horse and you are not sure of its temperament it should wear a green ribbon. In both cases they should ALWAYS be kept to the back of the field. If the person in front of you is going through a gateway and has one arm behind their back you should be aware that their horse may kick if you crowd them. A ribbon does not exonerate you from taking responsibility for the actions of you and your horse.

Plaiting

It is traditional to plait ones horse for hunting. There should be an odd number of plaits with the poll plait making an even total. Hogging the mane is another option. The masters have let it be known that whilst plaiting is very smart, it is not compulsory. As a mark of respect horses should be plaited for lawn meets.

Is there anything I need to know about the hounds?

Do not assume that because your horse does not kick your dog at home that he/she will necessarily tolerate a pack of hounds. Even if he/she will, the huntsman does not know that and you will worry him if you get amongst the hounds.

Jumping Etiquette

At all times ride behind the field master. Do not attempt to jump if there is a hound anywhere near a jump. Give Hunt Staff priority and if you know your horse is a poor jumper let others go first. If your horse refuses, clear the jump quickly and let others go before you try again. This is most important because not only will you impede others, which is bad manners, but you will also hold up the rest of the field, which causes problems for everyone trying to stay up and together with the Field Master. Always meet a jump at right angles to avoid blocking others. When jumping hedges this is particularly important. Stay straight from at least 15 strides out so as not to impede others behind and adjacent. If you break a jump make sure it is stock proof before you go on (this is where you might need that baler twine) and ensure you report the breakage to a Master or Hunt Secretary. If you attempt a gate or wall and break it you will be expected to pay for it.

If someone in the field falls or a horse is hurt please stop to help. If required call for additional support and back-up. In all cases if someone needs to remount, wait by them to help their horse to stand still. If you see a problem is adequately taken care of please pass slowly and then continue on. This allows the rest of the field to keep up and prevents bottlenecks.

Do I have to jump?

Whilst we try to put in as much jumping as possible a lot will depend on the area being hunted and the ground conditions. There are nearly always easy ways round a jump and a number of people don't jump at all. There is usually someone to follow particularly on Saturdays when we try to have a non jumping field master. Be sure to find him/her at the meet. Never open a gate adjacent to a jump until after all the jumpers have gone. This is extremely dangerous, inviting jumping horses to dip out of jumping at the last minute.

Gates

If in doubt it is better to shut a gate than to leave it open. We have gate shutters (in ratcatcher with white arm bands) who follow the field but they cannot be relied upon to shut all gates left open. They are a safety net and not a guarantee that all gates will be shut. It is your responsibility to shut the gate or call back "gate please". In the event that riders behind are out of earshot a raised whip or hand is the method of communication. Do not leave the gate until you have heard "gate please" passed back or a whip or hand has been raised in acknowledgment. It is the duty of all members of the field to assist the Masters and hunt staff at gates. If you see them approaching a gate a word to the field master for consent to go forward is all that is required and then speedy assistance so as not to hold them up in their work. It is of course easier for children and young adults to jump off their mounts to help. Please bear this in mind if you fall into this category. If you do this repeatedly you are more likely to be awarded your hunt buttons!

Riding near or through livestock and farmland

When riding near or through livestock ensure you are between the stock and the fence and ride at a speed they will tolerate without getting upset. If stock bunch up in a corner, stop and wait for them to move out. You should not enter any field without the Field Master unless instructed to do so. Take particular care at gates when there is stock in the field. If you witness stock escaping make sure you tell the field master or secretary immediately.

If there is an option between a track/path and grass/planted crops always ride on the track unless specifically instructed to do otherwise.

The current system of subsidies and farm practices is complicated. Always be aware of instructions coming from the field master. "Single file" means exactly that and as importantly along the same line as the field master. Sometimes this may not be along the line you may expect. Under some stewardship schemes for example you may not be allowed to ride on the headland and the field master may require you to ride in single file between the headland and the cropped area. In the event you get left behind look for the line of the hoof prints.

End of the day

It is important to remember that without a huntsman and his hounds there would be no sport. A thank you goes a long way in helping these people feel appreciated, especially Hunt Staff who will probably be cold, wet and tired at the end of the day. It is traditional to say "Goodnight" at the end of your day.

Did you fall off, get shouted at?

Don't worry, we've all been there. It's all part of becoming an experienced horseman/woman!

General Etiquette

It is surprising how many people leave their manners on the ground when they get on a horse. Please thank cars for slowing down, wave cars on when you see the Masters wave them on and keep to the nearside if you hear the shout "car please". A smile and "good morning" to people on foot will help to dispel the myth that everyone on horseback is a snob and too good to talk to people on foot.

If you are a visitor or a new comer to hunting and this all sounds complicated and scary don't worry the members of the hunt aren't and will always be willing to help you. Never be afraid to ask for advice.

At all times remember that you are a guest of the farmer or Landowner and that without their goodwill hunting would not be possible.

The North Cotswold Hunt acts in a way consistent with the laws as set out in the Hunting Act 2004

Have fun, that's what you are there for, and we want you to enjoy yourself and come back again.

HUNTING TERMS, LANGUAGE AND SIGNALS	
Autumn Hunting	The early part of hunting from August until the Opening Meet usually on the first Saturday in November.
Babbler or babbling	A hound that speaks when it is not hunting is said to be a babbler or babbling.
Bitch	Female hound
By Invitation	This sometimes appears on the meet card of a hunt that has been invited to hunt in another hunt's country.
Cap	A daily charge to come out hunting
"Car Please"	Is shouted to tell the Field to keep to the left to let cars through on the road.
Cast	When the hounds are looking for the line. The huntsman may cast the hounds towards where he thinks the hounds will pick it up.
Check	When the hounds lose the line.
Couples	Hounds are counted in couples.(i.e. one hound, a couple, a couple and a half, two couples, etc.) Couples are also two collars linked on a chain and can be seen hanging on the hunt staffs' saddles.
Cur Dog	A canine which is not a hound.

Dog	Male hound
Entered	An entered hound is a hound that has done a season's hunting. An unentered hound is one that has not yet been hunting
Feather	Hounds are said to feather or be feathering when they have the line but are unable to speak to it.
Field	The mounted followers.
Field Master	The person in charge of leading and controlling the Field. Always follow the field master and never ride in front.
Foil	Any smell or disturbed ground which spoils the line.
"Gate Please"	Shouted backwards on going through a gate which should be closed. If this is not acknowledged by a raised hand shut the gate.
Gate shutter	A person specially designated to shut gates and mend fences. Sometimes wears a white armband. Even when these people are present you should shut gates where necessary.
"Good Morning"	The appropriate greeting at the meet.
"Good Night"	The appropriate salutation for the end of the day even if it was an Autumn Hunting morning which ended before midday.
Green Ribbon	Worn on the tail of a young horse.
Hand behind the back	Means this horse might kick.
Hand in the air by gateway	Signal to people coming towards a gate, but out of hearing, that the gate should be shut. The response to which should be to hold your hand in the air to show you have got the message and will shut the gate. If in any doubt shut the gate.
Heel	Hounds are said to be hunting heel when they hunt the reverse direction to the route of the quarry.
"Hold Hard"	Shouted by the Field Master to stop the field overtaking him/her.

Hot bitches	In season bitches.
Hound	All scent hunting dogs are referred to as hounds. It is the duty of mounted followers to keep out of the way of the hounds, not vice versa.
Huntsman	The man who hunts the hounds. There is only one huntsman on the hunting field per day, he may also be a Master, and he has absolute right of way at all times.
Hunt	A hunting day usually consists of 3 - 5 hunts, each hunt being 2 - 5 miles long. Sometimes incorrectly referred to as "runs" or "lines".
Hunt Button & Collar	Subscribers who have over a period of time gained knowledge and been helpful to the hunt may be awarded the hunt button and collars of the hunt. The buttons are black with the NCH letters and coronet. The collars are Primrose for Ladies and black for Gentlemen.
Hunt Staff	The people responsible for working the hounds. i.e. Huntsman and Whippers in. They may be Masters, amateurs or professionals.
"Kick on"	You may get this response when you make way for a Master or Huntsman at a gate or jump. It means you don't have to wait for him/her and should carry on.
Lawn Meet	A meet where refreshments are provided by someone, usually the owner of the property where the meet is taking place. This person should be thanked by everyone as they leave the meet. Good etiquette dictates that horses should be plaited for lawn meets.
Line	The scent left by the trail layers.
"Loose Horse"	Shouted when someone has fallen off and the horse is running away.
Master	Maybe a Joint Master. These are the people responsible for the running of the hunt and particularly

	for liaison with the farmers and landowners. They should have right of way at all times second only to the hunt staff.
"Master/Huntsman/Whip/Hound please"	This means give way to these people as they have a job to do. If it is heard on a road or a track everyone should get to one side, not line both sides. Always turn your horses head toward hounds when in proximity to avoid the risk of kicking a hound. A very bad crime.
"Master/Huntsman/Whip/Hound on the right/left"	This means the Master/Whip/Hound should be let through on the side shouted. The side corresponding to the direction of travel of the majority of the Field. This is not an instruction to hold your whip in a specific hand!
Mixed Pack	A pack consisting of dogs and bitches
Mute	A hound which hunts without speaking is mute
Opening Meet	The start of formal hunting.
Puppy	A hound which is new to hunting that season. It will appear fully grown.
Ratcatcher	Term used to describe the official dress for mounted followers during Autumn Hunting and consists of a Tweed jacket as opposed to a black jacket. Ratcatcher is also an acceptable form of dress after the Opening Meet.
Red Ribbon	Worn on the tale of a known kicker. These horses should be kept at the back of the field until they become educated and no longer need to wear a ribbon.
Riot or rioting	When hounds hunt something other than that which they are supposed to be hunting, they are rioting
Secretary	Usually the Honorary Hunt Secretary (unpaid) who deals with day to day inquiries from

	subscribers and those wishing to hunt on a daily basis. Visitors should seek this person out at the meet and offer to pay their cap to them.
"Single file please"	Shouted when the Field is required to ride in single file close to the fence boundary of a field in order to protect crops or sensitive grassland.
Speak or speaking	Hounds do not bark, they speak or are speaking when they are "on the line" (hunting a scent).
Stern	A hound's tail.
Subscriber	Someone who pays an annual subscription to hunt with a pack of hounds.
Walk	Hounds at walk, often known as Puppy Walking, is where whelps are sent to private homes, in minimums of two's, from the age of eight weeks until they get too big and boisterous for the walkers, at which point they return to kennels to learn how to fit in to the pack.
"Ware Hole/Wire/Glass"	Ware is often pronounced "War" and means beware. Therefore if you hear "War 'ole", or "Ware 'ole" it actually means mind out there is a hole in the ground coming up! Similarly any other hazard.
Whelp	A new born hound is a whelp and remains so until it come back from walk.
Whip in the air (usually by Field Master)	This means stand still where you are, not wait until you get level with the Field Master and then stop.
Whipper in (Whip)	The person who helps the huntsman control the hounds. This person has right of way at all times and will only give way to the Huntsman.