

# Hunting the Fox

The fun was in the chase back in the 1940s in East Texas.

Foxhunters are a dying breed. Seldom does one now hear of Walker foxhounds or people who run the fox. At one time in East Texas, however, foxhunting was a popular sport.

My father, Cecil Murphy, was an avid foxhunter in the 1940s and into the '50s. He usually kept four or five Walker hounds in a pen behind the house.

Tan-and-white dogs with names like “Done Gone,” “Lady,” “Sport” and “Flash” barked their desire to chase a fox every time they saw his pickup truck coming their way.

In the late 1940s, my father took me foxhunting quite a few times, and I discovered that the main emphasis was not treeing the fox, but listening to the dogs barking, hot on the trail of a fox.

Each hunter could recognize his own dogs' barks during the chase. He could tell which dog was in the lead just by the way it barked.

“Listen—Flash is in the lead now; hear his bark?” Dad would say. “Now that was Done Gone's bark. He's getting close to the fox.”

Foxhunting was fun; we would drive around in a pickup truck on the dusty backroads, following the dogs. Some hunters rode horseback.

One thing that was taboo: killing the fox. It could be chased again sometime. After all, it was the chase that mattered.

My father used to foxhunt with a traveling evangelist at least once a year. Brother B.B. Crimm would hold a revival at our church each year.

He always brought his own hounds with him in a trailer. After a night service, seven or eight local foxhunters would drive several miles out of town and let their foxhounds out. Then they would listen for the chase to begin.

One night, one of the foxhunters fell, slightly injuring his leg and letting out a string of profanities.

My father wondered what, if anything, the traveling preacher/fox-hunter would do.

Well, he stopped his horse, got down on his knees and prayed earnestly for the salvation of the curser. Nothing was said as he got back on his horse and continued the hunt.

Another time, the foxhounds, in hot pursuit, were close to some railroad tracks. The dogs were barking their signals to the listening ears of the hunters.

Unfortunately, a long freight train roared by, drowning out the barking.

The preacher cried out, "Curse that train, boys! I can't curse it, but you can!"

Gradually, a menace to foxhunting appeared on the scene—barbed-wire fencing. In the 1930s and '40s, there was a great deal of open range. But new landowners put up that barbed wire, and both dogs and hunters would get tied up in it, injuring both.

Open range and pasture became more rare as time passed. The time came when my father reluctantly gave his foxhounds away and hung up his foxhunting gear, tired of fighting the fences.

His two horns (top of page), used to call the dogs off the chase, now hang on my wall.

Today, Walker foxhounds are a rare commodity in East Texas, as is the sport of foxhunting.

Sometimes, when I drive through the backroads, I'm sure that I hear the sound of Done Gone barking and the sound of my father's horn calling the dog off the chase...sounds of a bygone era.

—Neal M., San Augustine, Texas