

## COUNTRY MATTERS



# The hunt is on and the quarry is... me

## NEWSHOUNDS

The dogs are loose and chasing a trail across the hills.

Tom Ough finds out what it's like when you are the prey

Being chased by bloodhounds and horse riders is supposed to make you run faster, what with the howling and the hoof-thundering and the realisation that your body may as well be a large and slow-moving bag of Pedigree Chum. And yeah, sure, being pursued you do get a thrilling, rhino-startling rush of adrenalin, as would any prey animal mindful of its own deliciousness.

But then – and I am speaking from recent and humiliating experience – the hills get steeper and the pain in your lungs goes from chasing-a-taxi-shortness-of-breath to Oliver-Hardy-trying-to-sprint-up-Everest.

Not that it matters, because bloodhounds, I had been informed, are much friendlier than foxhounds, and instead of mauling you when they catch you they just lick and cherish you instead. "There's nothing to worry about," I had told a friend the night before. "They'll just lick and cherish me." "That's what they told the foxes," he said darkly.

Mmm. Foxes. There is some overlap between fox-hunting and what I was setting off to do: both entail a mounted chase, led by dogs, of some kind of quarry, and both probably provoke similar excitement in their dressed-to-the-nines human participants. But the main difference – apart from fox-hunting's illegality – is that chasing a human quarry

"The dogs will just lick and cherish me," I told a friend. "That's what they told the foxes," he replied

does not end with a bloody death. Unless the quarry coughs up his intestines because he is that out of shape, but we will get to that.

When it is a human quarry, they call it hunting the clean boot. It is a term that distinguishes the chase from drag hunting, in which the dogs track an artificial scent that, earlier in the day, has been laid by a human. In both instances, the hunters tend to use bloodhounds, which are distant, friendly, droopy-faced cousins of foxhounds. Their intimidating name is apparently derived from their fine bloodlines, rather than their blood-thirstiness.

In summary, drag hunting and clean-boot hunting both seem like laudably benign alternatives to traditional hunting. It was this comparison that prompted Chris Packham, the TV naturalist who co-presents *Springwatch*, to tell his local hunt, the New Forest Hounds, that if they switched from trail hunting (which uses a genuine fox scent, often involves fox habitats, has been known to result in fox deaths, and has been observed by judges to look an



LOPHE CAMPBELL/LOZLIAN



awful lot like illegal foxhunting) then he would serve as his quarry.

Now it would be a huge shame if a national treasure such as Chris Packham were torn to shreds by ravenous hounds, so I was sent to try it instead. I asked the Four Shires Bloodhounds, a friendly group of clean-boot hunters who meet in the Peak District, if I could be their quarry, and by the following Sunday was nervously warming up on Hoe Grange Farm, Derbyshire, with horses milling around me and the howls of bloodhounds audible from a large trailer.

Standing beside me was Patrick Wright, a lean, 37-year-old personal

trainer who was dressed in the kind of very serious Lycra you might dress in if, say, you were about to flee from hounds over 20 miles of hills. This is exactly what he was going to do: Wright is one of the Four Shires' usual quarryies, and is so good at fleeing that sometimes they do not even catch him, even when he has run 12 miles just to get to the start of the hunt. All I had to do was keep up with him.

Under a grey sky, Wright was examining a map that had been handed to him by Chris Kane, the master huntsman. The role requires Kane, a thickset 57-year-old possessed of spotless white breeches and a forlorn truck of a handshaker, to devise a course for Wright to follow.

Today, as usual, the course was going to span 15-20 miles of precipitous Peak District farmland. The distance was split into several "lines", a term I took to mean sections, the idea being that Kane could stop the line and regroup the hunt when the terrain got dangerous. Only Kane and Wright get to see the map. After all, if the dogs saw it the whole exercise would be pointless. Wright and I had a short head start, and we set off along a muddy path. I immediately stumbled into a puddle so muddy that my foot sprang out of my trainer. Swearing, I squished

my newly muddy foot back into it and followed Wright into Hoe Grange's big green fields.

The farmer had removed the sheep, but had not reckoned on the plodding apparition of a lamb for the slaughter. White Wright was working hard to put the hounds off the scent, running in Keplerian orbit around my labouring frame, all I could muster was a geodesic line from my entry point of each field to the closest possible exit.

The wind shifted direction and suddenly I could hear the distant howling of the bloodhounds. "They'll have set off now," said Wright helpfully. More muddy fields, all of which seemed to be so steep as to be almost vertical. At the brow of the latest hill stood David Brown, who is the farmer who owns Hoe Grange, and a marshal with a quad bike. This was the end of the first line. I looked down and saw dogs swirling through a gate and into the bottom corner of the field like a swarm of bees.

By this point I was beyond exhausted. The dogs, 16 of them, galloped towards me. The riders, in similar number, followed. Soon they were upon us. Defeated, I held out my hand to the dogs for them to eat as an appetiser – and they stopped. Some of them rolled on the ground to have their bellies scratched, others came to be petted. Suddenly they were no longer a pack of starving wolves but a litter of merry puppies. I had shown myself to have the athletic endurance of a soufflé, and for this reason excused myself from the rest of the chase. Brown and I walked back to the farmhouse, and were soon followed by the hunters,

**ON THE RUN** Tom Ough tries to keep up with Patrick Wright, above, before being caught by the hounds, top left

truck of a handshaker, to devise a course for Wright to follow.

Today, as usual, the course was going to span 15-20 miles of precipitous Peak District farmland. The distance was split into several "lines", a term I took to mean sections, the idea being that Kane could stop the line and regroup the hunt when the terrain got dangerous. Only Kane and Wright get to see the map. After all, if the dogs saw it the whole exercise would be pointless. Wright and I had a short head start, and we set off along a muddy path. I immediately stumbled into a puddle so muddy that my foot sprang out of my trainer. Swearing, I squished



"I've been a vegetarian for 25 years and this is something I'm really happy to participate in"

who had curtailed the afternoon in the interest of safety.

I was not lying when I said it was windy; it had got so wild that the dogs could hardly hear Kane's shouts. This, at least, meant I could find out what it is like to be the hunter rather than the hunted. Fiona Dawson, a 40-something mother of two who often takes her children on the chase, explained the attraction to the sport.

She told me about the test of nerve that is jumping walls and fences, the pleasure of riding, and the camaraderie of doing something fast and furious and outdoors. And it is not a cruel sport either, give or take a gasping journalist: "I've been a vegetarian for 25 years and this is something I'm really happy to participate in," she said.

Wright told me that running as human quarry is "a highlight of my week. The land we run across is beautiful and the hunt is so much fun. I'm really happy to participate in," she said.

Another thing he likes is that the hunt helps train the dogs, which are owned by Lady Maggie Hattersley, senior master of the Four Shires and wife of Lord Roy Hattersley, the Labour peer. "Seeing them work together, hearing them call to each other and the way they respond to the hunt master is quite something to see and be involved in."

I can vouch for that, and for the excitement, toughness and kindness of this wholesome variety of hunting. But I could not keep it all for myself, and so I will therefore be leaving all future running to Wright.

**IN THEIR SIGHTS** Master huntsman Chris Kane on left, main; and the hunt in progress, above right and below



## The Telegraph • TRAVEL SOLUTIONS Cruises

**Baltic treasures and St Petersburg cruise**

16 days from **£2,169** for two

Sailing from London Tilbury on board Marco Polo. Returning to Hull. Departs July 25, 2020

Embark Marco Polo in London Tilbury and cruise north to Hull then east through the Kiel Canal to the Baltic Sea. Spend lazy days and sunny evenings relaxing on board. Step ashore to discover fascinating cities including Kiel, Tallinn, St Petersburg, Helsinki, Stockholm and Copenhagen, before returning to Hull.

Ports of call:  
Tilbury, UK – Hull, UK – Warnemünde, Germany – Tallinn, Estonia – St Petersburg, Russia – Helsinki, Finland – Nynäshamn, Sweden – Copenhagen, Denmark – Hull, UK

**What's included**

- ◆ 15 nights' accommodation on board Marco Polo
- ◆ Full-board arrangements, including full breakfast, lunch, dinner, afternoon tea and midnight snacks
- ◆ On-board entertainment as arranged
- ◆ Shore excursions available
- ◆ On-board prices in sterling\*\*
- ◆ The services of a friendly, professional crew and cruise staff

**Arctic and Greenland voyage**

22 days from **£4,449** for two

Sailing from London Tilbury on board Marco Polo. Departs July 4, 2020

Explore a landscape first found and inhabited a thousand years ago by Norse adventurers on their way to the New World, as Marco Polo cruises across the Atlantic to Greenland. Step ashore in Kiriwatti to see St Magnus Cathedral, or cross the island to gaze out across the historic waters of Scaapa Flow. Sailing on to Iceland, you will circumnavigate the Icelandic coast, discovering different aspects of the island's history and culture as you call at the fascinating ports of Kollafjordur, Eskifjordur and Akureyri.

Ports of call:  
Tilbury, UK – Kirkwall, Orkney Isles – Kollafjordur, Faroes – Eskifjordur, Iceland – Akureyri, Iceland – Tasilaq, Greenland – Narsarsuaq, Greenland – Sisimiut, Greenland – Kangerlussuaq, Greenland – Nuuk, Greenland – Qaqortoq, Greenland – Reykjavik, Iceland – Tilbury, UK

**What's included**

- ◆ 21 nights' accommodation on board Marco Polo
- ◆ Full-board arrangements, including full breakfast, lunch, dinner, afternoon tea and midnight snacks
- ◆ On-board entertainment as arranged
- ◆ Shore excursions available
- ◆ On-board prices in sterling\*\*
- ◆ The services of a friendly, professional crew and cruise staff

**JAMES BARCLAY**  
Persian, Oriental & Contemporary  
Rug Cleaning & Repairs

**HAND CLEANING AND ALL REPAIRS UNDERTAKEN**

- Sides & Ends Repaired
- Moth Damage
- Deodorising
- Holes & Tears Repaired
- Colour Run & Stains
- Re-piling Worn Areas

We collect daily in London and throughout England & Wales weekly. Please call for uplift and advice or bring rugs to our workshop.

**OUR STOCK**  
We carry an interesting selection of carpets, rugs and runners.

WORKSHOP & OFFICE  
14 Oliver Park, London,  
NW10 7JB

www.jamesbarclay.co.uk  
020 3174 2427

**Acorn Stairlifts**  
Regain the freedom of your home

**Stairlifts Installed next day**

- NEXT DAY install available
- For all types of staircase
- 365-day local service
- New or reconditioned
- Rent or buy

Our customers love us!  
★★★★★  
★ Trustpilot

**Which?**  
Trusted traders

**FREEPHONE 0800 422 0629**  
CALL NOW FOR YOUR FREE BROCHURE & QUOTATION

**A Crocodile Winter Garden means all-year-round enjoyment.**

Day or night, rain or shine, a Crocodile Winter Garden is a simple-to-erect, fully enclosed, all-British structure that allows you to bring the outdoors, indoors and benefit from your garden whatever the weather. Call us today and find out how Crocodile could design and install a bespoke Winter Garden for you.

\*Subject to terms and conditions.

Designed and Made in Britain

**FREE FITTING** 10 Year Guarantee

**CROCODILE** wintergardens

Call Freephone 0800011 22 00  
Or visit [crocodile.co.uk](http://crocodile.co.uk)

**TO ADVERTISE HERE**

**PLEASE CONTACT**

**BINA EDWARDS**

**0207 931 3639**

**0333 222 8510 and quote TUE** [telegraph.co.uk/tt-marco-2020](http://telegraph.co.uk/tt-marco-2020)

In partnership with **Newmarket Holidays**

Terms and conditions: \*Two-one-get-one-free discount applies to new bookings on selected cruises only. Book by March 31, 2020. For a limited time only. Based on passengers sharing a twin cabin. Discounts apply to all cabin categories. This offer may be withdrawn at any time. \*\*Payment of on-board accounts by card only. Please check online for latest prices and availability. A selection of cabin types are available at varying prices. Calls are charged at local rates. Prices are correct at time of printing. Supplement may apply for single rooms. Travel insurance not included. Holiday provided by Newmarket Holidays (Incorporated in England No 223876), AIDA 0782, a company wholly independent of Telegraph Media Group Limited. Terms and conditions apply. Visit [telegraph.co.uk/cruises](http://telegraph.co.uk/cruises). See the Data Protection Notice in this Personal Column.