

FROM 7000 TO 8000 FEET

Opening Day with Woody Creek Hounds



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Photos by Louisa Davidson



If you have never been to the mink and manure side of Aspen, or didn't even know it existed, you really should find time to spend a day with Patrick Scanlan's Woody Creek Hounds. Mr. Scanlan has a pack of primarily cross-bred hounds, which he hunts through heather and vale, just north of Aspen. You will see the mink coats here, as the landscape contains many large ranches and million dollar homes, but you won't find much manure, as the kennels and stables are something out of this world. Chaparral Ranch was the site of the opening day meet and if there is a more beautiful location for an equestrian facility, I haven't seen one.

Jane Hall, who was visiting from the Sir Watkin Williams Wynn-Wynnstay Hunt in England, arose early to be at the barn, where the finishing touches were being made to plait horses' manes. Forty riders were readying themselves and their mounts as 10½ couple of hounds were led from the trailer. Hounds were blessed by a local minister who was colorfully adorned amid a field of riders, complete with several in top hats and cutaway coats, and the hunt staff in their green livery.

We headed off for a hack towards Carbondale down a bike path, which laid testament to the encroaching development in this territory. Hounds were soon put into cover, as riders negotiated a drainage ditch and crossing of the road.

Not two minutes later, Whipper-In (hon.) Alex Gooding capped and the radio chattered with his announcement of "two coyotes heading up the mountain." Riders buckled their seat belts for a short

run up the mountainside. Most were thankful that it was only a short run, because while it was short in distance, horses jumped several drainage ditches across a hay meadow and then climbed straight up the mountain from 7000 to 8000 feet in elevation. All but the staff horses were already in lather, not fifteen minutes out of the box. Hounds lost and Mr. Scanlan stated the obvious, which wasn't so obvious fifteen minutes prior, "you need a fit horse to keep up with hounds in this country."

Messrs. Scanlan and Gooding dismounted and indicated that the hounds had put a coyote to ground in a den just overlooking the kennels. Horses were quite riled at this point after a good gallop across the vale. A banquet of breakfast fit for royalty awaited the riders at the barn and all were happy to have a beautiful day in this picturesque country atop the world. 

