

National Majestic Tree Hound Association

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During the past month we heard from Earl Sandlin of Booneville, Kentucky, Lucas Blackford of West Branch, Michigan, Chad McCauley of Loganville, Wisconsin, Robert Blackford of Shenadoah, Iowa and Greg Hart of Emmett, Idaho.

We welcome your news, photos and inquiries. Let us hear from you.

A warm welcome goes out to our most recent new members ... Lucas Blackford of West Branch, Michigan and Greg Hart of Emmett, Idaho. Thank you for your support; we appreciate it!

This month's historical feature is a 1944 magazine article titled "*The Making of a Coon Hunter.*" It was authored by Orville Porterfield.

The quietude of night suddenly yielded to a distant hound's "ow-oo-oob!" and three startled coon hunters leaped as one from beside a campfire. Charging in the direction from which the sound had come, they dashed recklessly into The Devil's Pocket, a timber known far and near for its ringtailed inhabitants. In their excitement the men had momentarily deserted little Roscoe, a boy on his first coon hunt.

Such neglect is of course understood by all true coon hunters. A sweet yowl from upriver, for instance, always produces a hog-wild expression backed by immediate footwork. Mm-m—Brother! There's just nothing like it!

But when the men whirled to look for Roscoe they found him close behind, barging through saplings and windfalls like a veteran, even panting in manly fashion. Thus, another boy had started serving a coon hunting apprenticeship under three dyed-in-the-wool night owls.

While listening to our tales of night hunts during the past years, the attentive Roscoe had become more than mildly coon conscious. If, he one day concluded, the sport were so colorful as we painted it, then he was dead set on cutting himself some of same. Accordingly he had pestered us until we gave him a trial.

By now the mournful wails of three hounds rode the crisp winds above The Devil's Pocket. Sasser, the dog that had found trail, was a Walker-bluetick cross, and would fearlessly tackle any creature that walked on all fours.

Next was Lady, a young black-and-tan bitch, with still a few things to learn about ringtailed tricksters. Be it sufficient to say, though, she was well worth the hundred "seeds" paid for her as she was one of these dogs that improve noticeably with each hunt.

Best of the three was old Drum; called old even though his age was under eight years. Young in action but aged in experience and escapade. His many scars told plainly that Mr. Raccoon often has a fighting chance. The left ear was now contorted like a surrealist rutabaga. He was a sturdy Bluetick, an open trailer and straight cooner, and a master in his field.

The dogs had turned their quarry and were bearing toward us. With something akin to shame we peered behind to ascertain the whereabouts of Roscoe. Running like a scared colt, he came lamming through a dense briar patch, an apt student of "coonology" if there ever was one.

"That kid's got something in him besides soda pop," said Carl McManus, the younger of my grown comrades. "And here I was thinkin' we'd have to tote him if we fetched him along."

"Right you are. That youngun is practical bustin' with talent," said Ollie Shelby, the old man of our group.

Abruptly the dogs chopped their notes shorter—the ol' tree bark! The four of us instantly threwed feet in the direction from whence the call had come. We found the dogs barking up a hickory. The flash of our searchlight exposed a coon sprawled in a fork near the top. Carl, always our climber, shinned up and easily shook him out. Somehow, as dogs often do, our pack inter-

fered with each other when the coon first landed, thus allowing the coon to put up a smashing fight before he was finished off. With the speed of a striking snake, this coon, a small one, stabbed here and there with bared teeth.

As usual, after a catch is made, we fired up our smokes while the hounds headed back into the dark wilderness to seek a new trail, and Roscoe hauled out a lunch his mother had prepared for his midnight lunch.

"Huntin' them babies ain't exactly like I thought it would be," he said. "I thought coons were too smart to go up hickories where you hardly ever find a hole."

"They are brainy," I explained. "But the way the hounds were moaning it out, this coon either had to go up the hickory or be nabbed on the ground. You see, he must have thought he could make it to a certain den tree in this neck of the woods." Roscoe nodded understandingly. Shortly, came again the melodic strains so comforting to the hound owner. The dogs had struck new trail, this time in the distant ravine sector of The Devil's Pocket. Chill breezes above the bottomlands brought mellow trumpet notes, and three men and a boy practically split pants enroute through the timber.

Fast as we traveled, however, the dogs for a time went out of hearing. But soon they came nearer to ravel and unravel, back and forth; putting their best efforts into this hard test throughout the ravine sector and beyond. Thus, two hours passed before the dogs treed up a huge basswood. Flashing a light, we noticed a hollow high up the tapering trunk,

"That settles that!" Carl said with finality. "And I'll bet the coon stays in his den a week straight after this ruckus."

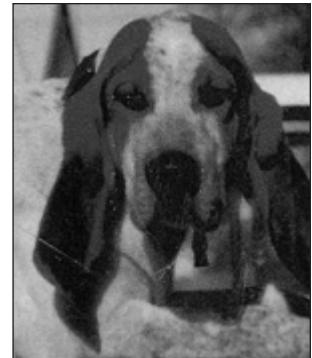
Reluctantly we sauntered away, in obedience of course to the law observed by all true raccoon runners—never molest a den tree. Fifty yards from the tree, Carl turned and idly flashed his spotlight among the top branches. "Hey!"

We whirled to have a look. Two very bright "stars" seemed attached to a swinging limb high up near the basswood's top.

Ollie raised his shotgun, glanced along the barrel and brought a huge coon rolling



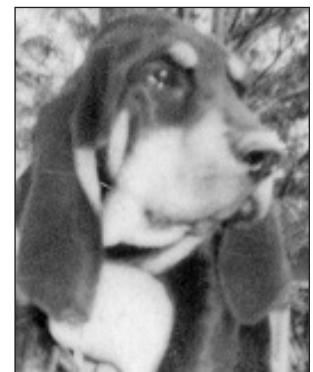
A 1944 photo that includes young Roscoe on his first coon hunt.



A nice 10 month old original strain Majestic male.



Smokey, an early prominent stud in the Majestic breed.



An excellent seven week old female Majestic pup

with a heavy load of 2's. And this "blackpatch" proved to be just about the most clever battler ever to come up against our dogs. Being so distant, he had escaped most of the shot pattern and the blast had only dislodged him.

Sasser, trying as usual to win the fight single-handed, took more than one share of punishment. With each flurry of hair and fur, coon and dogs inched closer to the creek bank. As they neared the brink, the under-bank caved in, dumping the whole kaboodle into Locust Creek. There, in a deep bend, Professor Coon proceeded to give his canine enemies a few lessons. He ducked them repeatedly. Then as they bobbed to the surface, he lathered them with facial keepsakes. But all were drifting downstream. Soon they were in the shallows, where Drum applied a neck hold that spelled "curtains" for the coon. In our locality this was an extra-large, full-furred coon of good color.

Silently I watched the creek's waters grow calm again. Then I glanced at Roscoe. "You better quit jumpin' now, son," I advised.

"But I feel like this inside—all shakey-like!" he argued.

"Coonitis" was surely giving Roscoe's emotions the down-beat. That boy would, come what may, follow night dogs as long as he could walk—his destiny was certain. Again we hauled out tobacco and lunches. Between puffs and crunches we speculated as to the reason the big coon hadn't entered the hollow in the bass-wood.

"Probably that hole ain't so big as it looks from here," said Carl. "May not be room in there to hide a good coon."

"Or," suggested Ollie, "maybe they was a sow coon in there and she jest wouldn't allow a boar to enter her door! And maybe she . . ."

We broke for the heavy timber. The cold air was bracing. Following the banks of Locust Creek we showed Roscoe the immense sycamore den trees leaning far above the rippling waters. A late moon exposed grotesque fingers among the tree tops. At a wide bend we paused. In the distance we heard the gabble of geese back on a river retreat, and near at hand the sharp splash of a diving muskrat.

Hours seemed to pass before Lady went "haywire" and treed a grinning possum up a tangle of grapevines. And supposedly she was a straight cooner!

Carl defended her. "She's first rate, and don't forget it," he said. "But let coon get scarce and she will possum. Lots of good hounds do this."

Just when we thought the hunt was over and when we had reached the thin woodland adjoining The Devil's Pocket, a canine version of "come and get him" jerked us about face, resulting in another frantic dash toward the dogs. But our haste was wasted. The dogs were trying to climb a great spreading elm, that for years was known as a used den tree.

"I'd just give a purty to know," said Ollie, "how many leetle coons have been borne in thet fine ol' tree. Can't see for the life o' me how any decent man could cut a den, knowin' it must take nigh a century to grow one."

Young Roscoe's mouth sagged as he listened to old Ollie's words of wisdom. With something akin to admiration I noticed that although the boy fairly dragged from tiredness, he was still interested plenty.

On the homeward journey he fell into deep natural sleep on the soft auto cushions. And he wasn't the only one who was dog tired. In front of his home we aroused him. Without comment he stumbled onto his front porch and stood there staring like an owl at camp meeting.

"That kid will think it over a long time before he ever talks himself into another coon hunt!" Carl declared, as I steered the car back into the street.

"And that's where you're dead wrong!" Ollie retorted. "Just listen to what he's shoutin'."

Little Eoscoe was calling repeatedly that he would again be all ready to go cooning, come evening.