

DEATH OF A STAG:

In the little village of Exford, the Devon and Somerset Staghounds meet. Many people condemn stag-hunting as cruel - but you won't find much support for that view around Exmoor. The Exmoor herds, the local men declare to a lot of damage to crops, and have to be kept down. It's the farmers themselves who ring up and tell the hunt secretary where the stags are feeding, and twice a week in the season, hounds set out from one village or another on a hunt which may take them 50 or 60 miles in a day. According to the time of year, they may be after hind or stag; for hind are not hunted while they are carrying or rearing young.

In some parts of England, following hounds is a rich man's game; but not in Devon and Somerset. Here, everybody joins in; on horseback, on Exmoor ponies, by car, cycle or on foot.

If scents are plentiful, a few hounds may stray, finding their way home, or being returned by farmers, a day or two later. Some people ask; if the herds need thinning, why not shoot them? But the Exmoor folk reply: that would be cruel. They move fast and are difficult to hit - but they may be wounded and then escape to die a lingering death. The hunt is more certain in its methods. When the Hunt finally corners a stag it is shot and killed before hounds can overwhelm it, so there is seldom any question of its suffering being prolonged.

Say the people of Exmoor; "Townfolk may criticize - but if there is a more humane way of keeping down the herds, and protecting the crops which keep the townfolk fed, we'd like to hear it". What do you think?