

FIRST HUNTSMAN TO BE TRIED FOR HUNTING WITH DOGS READY FOR  
COURT SHOWDOWN  
BY TRISTAN CORK

29 July 2006

The first and only huntsman to appear in court charged with breaking the ban on hunting with dogs will be in dock on Monday on the first day of his trial. Huntsman Tony Wright, 52, is being prosecuted in a private action by the League Against Cruel Sports, which claims he hunted illegally in North Devon in late April 2005.

The Countryside Alliance is supporting Mr Wright, who leads the Exmoor Foxhounds, at what is expected to be a five-day hearing.

Mr Wright will be in the dock at Barnstaple Magistrates Court and will deny a single allegation that he broke the Hunting Act 2004, within seven weeks of it becoming law in late February last year.

The league will present video evidence shot by hunt monitors Ed Shephard and Graham Floyd, who had been following the Exmoor Foxhounds all day.

The league presented its video evidence and witness statements to Devon and Cornwall Police, one of many such representations made to police forces across the West. The police and the CPS have so far yet to mount a prosecution on the basis of any evidence given to them.

It is understood the hearing will hinge on whether Mr Wright, as the huntsman in charge of proceedings that day, ensured that he had a trained and competent marksman within close range of any fox flushed out by the hounds.

Despite the ban, hunts are still allowed to use no more than two hounds to flush to waiting guns, as part of what hunts are now calling exempt hunting. But under the letter of the law, those marksmen have to be at close quarters, and there has to be no intention that marksmen are there simply to get around the hunt ban.

The Countryside Alliance is throwing its heavyweights at the case. Its communications director Tim Bonner will be present at the trial, and the joint master of England's premiere hunt, Captain Ian Farquhar from the Gloucestershire-based Beaufort Hunt, is expected to be called as an expert witness for the defence.

It is understood the court, which will be led by District Judge Farmer, will be told by the defence that the Exmoor Foxhounds found three foxes on April 29 last year. Mr Wright's defence is that the hounds were stopped quickly when two were found, and escaped the waiting marksman, and on a third occasion, a fox was flushed out and shot.

Alison Hawes, from the Countryside Alliance, said: "Somewhere in the region of 25,000 days' hunting have been carried out by around 300 hunts since the Hunting Act came into

force. Despite regular complaints, no public prosecutions have been brought against hunts. There have been no successful prosecutions of a recognised hunt.

"Tony Wright is the only person to be summonsed to face a private prosecution. It must be assumed the League Against Cruel Sport believes that this case provides the best evidence they have of a hunt breaching the Hunting Act."

A spokesman for the league said: "This is obviously a very, very important case. In our view, there was a clear breach of the Hunting Act and we're confident the court will see it the same way."

<http://www.westpress.co.uk/displayNode.jsp?nodeId=145809&command=displayContent&sourceNode=145792&contentPK=15020400>