

Posted by Parke Brinkley on 9/29/2014, 2:16 pm
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One of the major problems in the East is finding suitable grounds for evaluating the true performance of an all-age bird dog. Field Trial Hall-of-Famer Dr. Aubrey Morgan dreamed of a permanent home for the time-honored Virginia Amateur after the loss of the fabled Hawfield Plantation in Middle Virginia. As has been well chronicled in Dr. Morgan's nomination and subsequent election to the Hall of Fame, he found grounds in 1989 just across the Virginia border near Ahoskie, N. C. He started to work on these grounds immediately as time would permit.

Over time, Virginia Amateur had used both privately held and public grounds. Most recently, the Virginia Amateur was held at the Leggett farm near Danville, Va., until the farm was sold. At this point the board of directors of Virginia Amateur were offered the possibility of using Dr. Aubrey Morgan's Cuta-whiskey Farm at Ahoskie as a venue. Subsequently, Dr. Morgan made the offer to Virginia Amateur of making Cutawhiskey its permanent home. The membership was obviously elated and appreciative of this generous offering.

As with any undertaking, there is always the unforeseen. One of our biggest assets, as well as drawbacks, is that the grounds are located on the Coastal Plain, which means they are flat, cultivatable, and they can get very wet if we have torrential downpours, as is the case in many locations. Unfortunately some field trialers remember being pulled out in the early days of using these grounds for various events. There is a three-quarter mile farm road into the center of the grounds, which creates a safe environment for both animals, and participants, but has caused some difficulties when it has rained. However, no one has drowned.

Everyone who attends is made to feel welcomed, has always had lots of great food and great times. The trial is held at a relaxed pace, as directed by our bylaws to ensure time to socialize with family, participants, and friends.

Our goal at Virginia Amateur has never waived: To have the best one-hour Amateur All-Age field trial in the United States. With that in mind, improvements have been made, and are continuing. The roads have been packed with 250 cubic yards of coarse sand that mixes with the soil to create a well-drained driving surface. The new road was extensively tested by 2014 spring rains, and deficiencies were addressed across the summer.

The dam that takes you across the Cutawhiskey Creek to the back side of the grounds has been extensively repaired, and is safe for equipment, participants, and horses to cross. Numerous culvert crossings on the course have been installed to provide handlers and scouts with easy access across field edge ditches.

As noted by our grounds chairman and fellow member, Parke Brinkley, a number of habitat and wildlife management practices have been instituted at Cutawhiskey. A three-year burn rotation has been implemented in open areas to encourage natural reproduction of sericea lespedeza, ragweed, and partridge peas. The result has been excellent brood patches, where numerous wild-born quail chicks were sighted crossing open paths in the spring and summer of 2014. Significant acreage has been taken out of crop production and is managed within the overall habitat plan. After the fall crop harvest, a two-acre hard-packed parking area will be established to facilitate easy parking and turnarounds for trucks and horse trailers of any size.

In addition to multiple coveys of wild birds inhabiting Cutawhiskey, an additional ten coveys of 20 birds each were released in September across the farm. These birds had been flight conditioned in Dr. Morgan's 70-foot flight pen, where they also learned to dust in sand piles and use the metal trashcan feeders that would later be placed in heavy cover around Cutawhiskey. To supplement the trashcan feeders, over four miles of grain sorghum feed strips were planted for cover on field edges, where they will also provide ample seed into the winter months. Unwanted hardwoods have been cut out, and new growth sprayed, and sectional burning is providing desirable cover in piney woods areas. Plans for further selective timber thinning are evolving, and small grain crop rotations beneficial to wildlife are being negotiated with the leasing farmer.

The clubhouse has received notable upgrades, including a 60-foot pier and platform into the fronting lake, as well as additional seating and outdoor cooking facilities for the nightly suppers and cocktail parties held during Virginia Amateur. The new charcoal outdoor cooker will slowly smoke pork shoulders, East-Carolina style, whetting the appetites of hungry participants during the trial.

Members and officers of the Virginia Amateur are working hard to make this a trial that you will remember and look forward to, year after year.

Please come and join us in April (5-8). We promise fierce competition, a friendly atmosphere, and a fun time.

Thank you,
Skip Brown

Generally, it is bound by Rt. 561 to the South, Dupont Davis Rd. to the East, Cutawhiskie Creek to the north, and it's on both sides of William H. Vinson Rd. to the west.

