



## What is a Coon Dog?

A Coon Dog is a hunting hound specially trained to hunt raccoons. Coon hunting is an American sport dating from Colonial days and is held at night.

The first mention we have of hounds in America appears in the diary of one of the men of the Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto. He also mentions that the hounds were used for hunting Indians rather than fox, raccoon or rabbit.

In 1650, the Englishman Robert Brooke brought his pack of hounds with him. Thomas Walker of Virginia imported hounds from England in 1742, and in 1770 George Washington, an avid fox hunter, had hounds imported from England. These dogs were the foundation of the "Virginia Hounds", from which our present day English Coonhound developed.

The most popular breeds of Coon Dogs include the Black and Tan Coonhound, Bluetick Coonhound, English Coonhound, Plott Coonhound, Redbone Coonhound, and the Treeing Walker Coonhound.

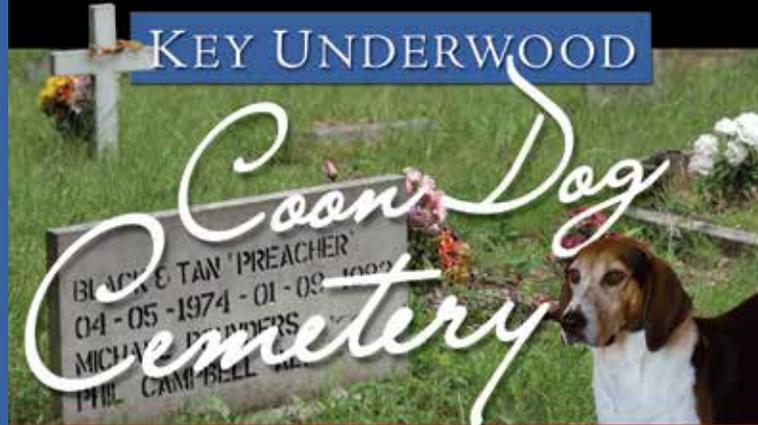
All can trace their heritage back to the English foxhound with the exception of the Plott Coonhound, whose ancestors were used for boar hunting in Germany.

All six breeds are registered with the U. K. C.

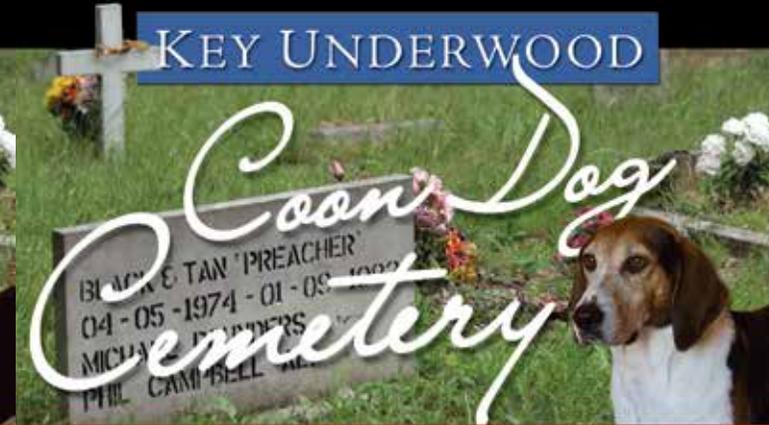
## Labor Day Celebration

Every Labor Day, a unique celebration is held at the Key Underwood Coon Dog Cemetery. The festive event includes old timey bluegrass music, a liar's contest and local barbecue by Bishop's Hawg House.

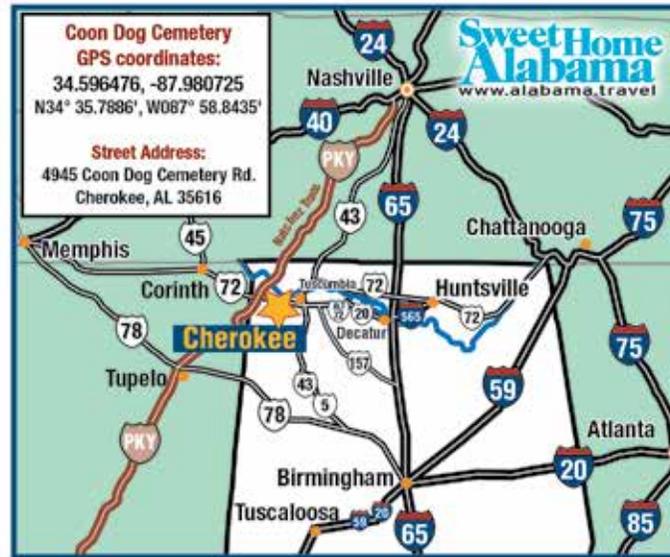
Admission to the event is free. For more information, call (256) 383-0783 or visit the calendar of events at [www.VisitShoalsAL.com](http://www.VisitShoalsAL.com).



Cherokee, Alabama



Cherokee, Alabama



Cherokee, Alabama is less than a day's drive from anywhere in the mid-South and the lower mid-West! Birmingham is only 95 miles southeast via I-65; Memphis is approximately 125 miles to the west via U.S. Hwy 72; Nashville is 100 miles to the north via the Natchez Trace Parkway; and Atlanta is only 250 miles east.

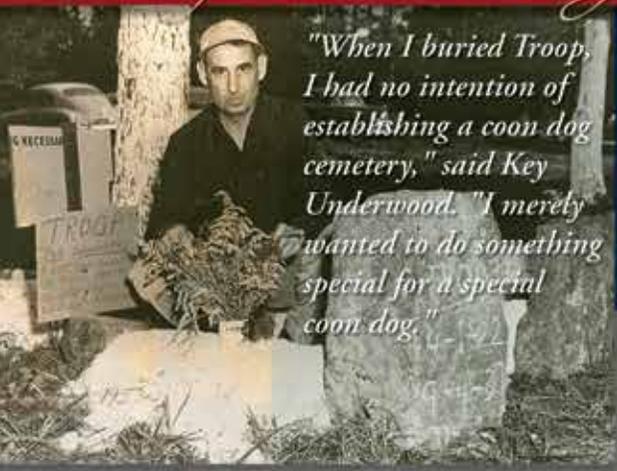
You can find the Key Underwood Coon Dog Cemetery 7 miles west of Tuscumbia off U.S. Hwy 72. Turn left on AL Hwy 247, and travel 12.8 miles. Then turn right onto Coon Dog Cemetery Road. The cemetery is 5 miles ahead on the left.

**Colbert County**  
Tourism & Convention Bureau  
719 U.S. Highway 72 West  
P. O. Box 740425  
Tuscumbia, AL 35674  
(800) 344-0783 / (256) 383-0783  
[www.VisitShoalsAL.com](http://www.VisitShoalsAL.com)



*A Southern Icon*  
Just off Natchez Trace Parkway and U. S. Hwy. 72

# The final resting place for more than 300 of man's best friend



In a small, grassy clearing, deep in the rich, thick wilderness of Freedom Hills, Key Underwood sadly buried his faithful coon dog, Troop. They had hunted together for more than 15 years. They had been close friends.

The burial spot was a popular hunting camp where coon hunters from miles around gathered to plot their hunting strategies, tell tall tales, chew tobacco and compare coon hounds. Those comparisons usually began and ended with Troop...he was the best around.

Underwood knew there was no place in the world Troop loved more than that camp. It was only fitting, he decided, that Troop spend eternity there. On that dreary Labor Day of 1937, Underwood said good-bye to his legendary coonhound. He wrapped Troop in a cotton pick sack, buried him three feet down, and marked the grave with a rock from a nearby old chimney. On the rock, with a hammer and a screwdriver he had chiseled out Troop's



name and the date. A special marker was erected in his memory.

Troop, who was half redbone coonhound and half birdsong, was known throughout the region as the best. He was "cold nosed," meaning he could follow cold coon tracks until they grew fresh, and he never left the trail until he had treed the coon.

Out of one hunter's devotion to his faithful coonhound was born the "Key Underwood Coon Dog Memorial Graveyard," which has become a popular tourist attraction and is the only cemetery of its kind in the world.

Other hunters started doing the same when their favorite coon dogs died. Today more than 300 coon dogs from all across the United States are buried at this spot in Northwest Alabama.

"When I buried Troop, I had no intention of establishing a coon dog cemetery," said Underwood. "I merely wanted to do something special for a special coon dog."

When columnist Rheta Grimsley Johnson interviewed Underwood in 1985, he told her that a woman from California wrote him wanting to know why he didn't allow other kinds of dogs to be buried at the coon dog cemetery.

"You must not know much about coon hunters and their dogs, if you think we would contaminate this burial place with poodles and lap dogs," he responded.

Some of the burial ground's headstones are crafted of wood, some of sheet metal. Others are not unlike the stones found in a "normal" cemetery.

But, of course, the names of the deceased are different and so are the epitaphs.

For example, listed among the dead are Patches, Preacher, Flop, Bean Blossom Bommer and Strait Talk'n Tex. And etched along with these names are tributes such as, "A joy to hunt with" and "He wasn't the best, but he was the best I ever had."

Hunter's Famous Amos — a hound that was named Ralston Purina's Dog of the Year in 1984, is buried here as well as several World Champion coon dogs.

Funerals at the Coon Dog Cemetery can be major events, attracting hunters and dog lovers from across the country.

In 2011, a funeral for a world-champion black and tan hound from Illinois, who had a fondness for eating doughnuts and watching cartoons with his six-year-old owner, attracted a crowd of over 400 people and a dozen or so coon dogs. Some of the mourners wore black, but many wore camouflage. The funeral procession for Shawnee Beaujolais stretched for more than a half-mile.

A funeral for a treeing walker hound from Pennsylvania attracted more than 200 mourners and media. His owner said burying White Hills The Merchant in the one-of-a-kind cemetery was the perfect way to honor and remember the champion hound.

