

Track & Search Dog Information for Handlers

Variable Terrain & Hard Surface Tracking

The amount and type of vegetation makes the task for the dog easier or harder as the dog will obviously have to work harder on hard ground.

Grass verges, brick paving, and pea gravel, wood chips, mulch, and grainy concrete, concrete slabs as these have weeds etc in between, bitumen, wooden planks all hold scent quite well. Ploughed land doesn't present a problem unless it has been freshly ploughed, however newly mown grass is extremely difficult for a dog to work.

As a person walks from one surface to another the vegetation, soil and the scent that it carries, sticks to the shoes and are then deposited on the new surface for a certain distance, which can vary according to conditions. This scent eventually fades away, but it gives the dog the chance to adjust to the elements of the new surface. The human factor, individual scent, stride, weight and size of shoe etc. remain all the time.

In the early stages of Variable Tracking Training keep on vegetated surfaces for about 75% and do all turns on vegetated surfaces. Variable Terrain Tracking Tests have this Ratio! Only introduce non vegetated surface turns once the dog is familiar with hard surfaces.

When starting out, very short steps by the tracklayer may help. Don't wear new shoes. Old shoes on rough surfaces may mean that tiny particles of material from the old shoes are deposited on the track which may be of help to the dog. Water can be sprayed along the track which will help hold additional scent.

There is a world of difference in the way an "Operational Tracking Dog" works than the Competition Tracking Dog. The sole purpose of the "Operational Tracking Dog" is to find the missing person as quickly & efficiently as possible. It matters little if it shortcuts the track or walks on the other side of the road following the air scent above the footsteps. However in Competition Tracking, we still need to keep the dog as close to the footsteps as possible while making allowances for the associated difficulties of the changes in terrain.

In training a shorter length of lead in means that you are in the position to notice very quickly if the dog has made a mistake and by gently restraining him you will keep him closer to the actual track. The length of lead has to be reduced if you are not in an open area.

The slope of the land may also affect a track. If the day is very hot, the air rises quicker so the dog may be higher up the slope than the person has walked. In cooler weather the opposite may be the case with the dog working below the line that the tracklayer walked.

If a tracklayer enters a stream, the disturbances made by the person will remain on the surface for some time and the dog will pick up on these and the human scent still in the air. If the stream is narrow [and it should be for our purposes] then the vegetation on the sides of the stream will be disturbed and the dog will pick that up.

If the tracklayer has jumped across a ditch, put the dog into the ditch and allow him to investigate.

If the dog wishes to cross a busy road, then you must tell him to wait until it is safe to cross over. This stopping of the dog should not discourage him, but if it does, encourage him to continue and he will learn to wait patiently for the all clear from you to start working again. It is good practice to stop your dog and rest him from time to time anyway.

The dog will need water more often when he is tracking on hard surfaces as he is working a lot harder. Always rest the dog when it is keen rather than tired, that way he will be even keener to restart once again. When stopping the dog, place him in a down position in a shady spot facing the direction he was working.

Remember the variety of surfaces the dog has to track on, the better the dog will be.

The Start:

One of the more difficult challenges involves stopping the dog once it indicates it has found the track in order to unclip the tracking lead from the fixed collar and then clip it to the harness and then restart the dog.

The highly motivated dog won't wish to stop, therefore it is suggested handlers practice placing the harness on the dog prior to it searching for the start and be very fast in removing the lead from the fixed collar and clipping it to the harness. Speed is the essence when the dog is highly committed to the track and some dogs may be difficult to stand still waiting for the handler to change the lead from collar to harness.

The dog that is highly motivated should pick up the scent within the 30 metre start flags without any problem, but if you normally walk your dog along the 'start line' as some handlers do for the Track 6 Tracking Champion Title, try teaching this method.

To begin with have the dog in harness; clip the tracking lead to a fixed collar. Ensure the collar fits well and does not slip over dog's head as it is working to locate the track.

Be sure you know where the track goes to ensure you accurately read the indications from the dog. Once you see an indication from the dog that it has located the track, quickly praise the dog and then call it to you using the long lead to guide it back to you, continue to encourage and praise it. Quickly remove the lead from the fixed collar and clip it to the harness. Take the dog back to where it showed indication of track and command it to track.

Be ready to move very quickly with the dog, because this kind of start & restart makes the dog really keen and they are likely to start tracking at a very fast pace. For the dog that does not wish to come back once it has located the track, try working it on a shorter length of lead and quickly praise and encourage it before bringing it back.

In Tracks 4 -6 where there is the possibility of people and vehicles around the start area the dog has to do this kind of start, as free quartering is not an option, so the on lead searching for the start will have to be taught regardless, and some handlers may opt for this kind of start for all of their tracks.

Free quartering is actually easier for both dog and handler provided the dog can be stopped without the aid of the tracking lead. To begin with Handlers may wish to start training using the on lead searching method and then graduate to the off lead free quartering method.

The reason we harness the dog before it commences to free quarter, is that the harness being put on tells the free quartering dog it is now working.

For the handlers that choose the search on lead method, they also need to put the harness on the dog in addition to the fixed collar. Because there are various types of harnesses [some of which are more difficult and time consuming to put on the dog, it is easier to simply swap the lead from the fixed collar to the harness without having to go through the process of harnessing the dog that is anxious to commence tracking.

Diversion or Cross Tracks:

The dog will fail if it continues more than 10 metres down a diversion track, so in training know exactly where the handler can very quickly say “**Leave!**”

This is where it is invaluable to have someone following up who can observe the dog's reactions to the diversion scent. Sometimes it is a mere glance in the direction, sometimes the dog will pause and take a few steps on the diversion track, whenever it does this, be ready to say “Leave!” or quietly praise the dog if it rejects the other scent.

Consistently working through distractions such as cross tracks makes them less difficult and less important to the dog. Make the end of the track so rewarding and so much fun that such distractions fade into insignificance.

Distraction Training.

Distractions can come in the form of other dogs or animals or other people, cars, garbage or food scraps. Birds disturb many dogs, especially the Gun Dogs while cats can be a huge problem to others.

When tracking in the streets, one of the biggest problems is the council trees and lamp posts which seem to have an abundance of animal smells left behind by other dogs when having their daily walk. The tracking dog may tend to stay at those places and often need an awful amount of coaxing to ignore the smells and continue working. Their concentration is severely hampered because of this.

Articles:

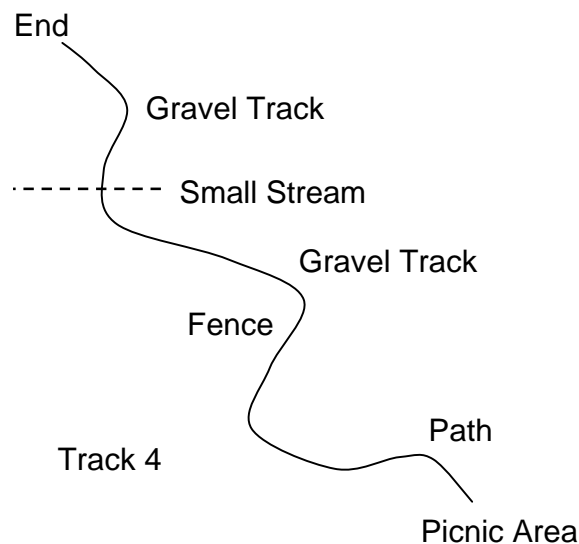
The type of articles used should represent the type of items as would be used and or dropped by a missing person. I.e. mobile phone, bunch of keys, wallet, glasses, asthma inhalers and so on. It is recommended marking these items “THIS IS A DOG TRAINING AID. PLEASE LEAVE IN POSITION”. Labels could be laminated and attached by means of Tie Wires. You will not fail if your dog doesn't indicate the articles but it is good for the dog to have these rewards along the track and your grading will improve if you have an indication.

The Meandering Style of Track:

Be careful when you lay this type of track to keep the track always moving away from you. The dog will very quickly learn to air scent should you have the track coming back on itself. This is especially true when laying Urban tracks when the scent is blown for considerable distances because of vehicular traffic and drifts between houses so that it is probable for a dog to pick up scent from a block away.

In the bush avoid too many little changes of direction as this will make it too hard to map the track. Remember to try to make the tracks as close as possible to that made by a 'lost' person.

For the person following up behind the handler on this type of track, know exactly where the track goes and make allowances for slight deviations from the track.

Example 1. A Meandering type of track**Tracklayers:**

Children are notorious for deliberately trying to confuse the dog for fun; they do not realize the problems they may cause. Be very precise in your instructions on the type of track you require.

Most of the tracks require aging for a period that makes it impractical to leave the track layer waiting at the end of the track, but if they have to return to the track be very careful how they leave and get back in position. This is especially important in Urban tracks. Never drive the tracklayer anywhere nears the track with the windows of the car down. Switch off the air conditioner, and if there is no other way to get back to the end, drive the same way the track goes. A certain amount of body scent will escape from the car even with the windows up.

Buildings:

Perhaps one of the hardest challenges facing your dog is working around buildings. Scent can be drawn up and deposited some distance away, especially when air conditioners are in use. Scent bounces away or deposits along buildings depending on many factors and much patience is required to let the dog sort things out. Be careful to shorten your lead around such areas as a dog on a long lead some distance from the handler can cause pedestrians to get a real fright if they come out from behind a building.

Busy Roads:

Obviously have a shortened lead in this situation and be careful when crossing a street to loop up your lead or take up the excess by draping it over your shoulder. Although there may be no traffic as you start to cross the road, a car can come upon you very quickly and the last thing you need is having a car run over your lead.

During the working of your track, your dog may indicate that the track crosses a busy road. Get your dog used to waiting; remember to look for signs from the dog that the track does indeed cross the road.

Stop your dog and wait for a break in traffic before attempting to cross – get across the other side as quickly as possible and then cast your dog on the opposite side of the road.

Working the Urban Track:

Like the Meandering type of Bush Track ensure that when designing the Urban track you try to keep your track consistently moving away from you rather than coming back on yourself [see example 2 of a good design for an Urban track]

Scent may blow a great distance from the track depending on how heavy the traffic is. Often a dog will work on the ‘wrong side’ of the road, follow a solid fence, or want to walk along the concrete edging on the road. Some dogs want to walk down the middle of the road & follow the white centre paint line, while others will cross from one side of the road to another, making it difficult if there is a turn and the dog is on the opposite side of the street.

Streets, unlike the tracks in the bush & paddocks are however easier for us humans to negotiate. Cast your dog around, covering left & right and straight ahead or going back if there is an indication of loss from the dog. Try casting on both sides of the road as well. Look for walkways, the dog may have missed one. The dog again depending on traffic may overshoot a greater distance than you normally would expect and you may have to go back. This is where streets are easier for us because we have an exact place to go back to.

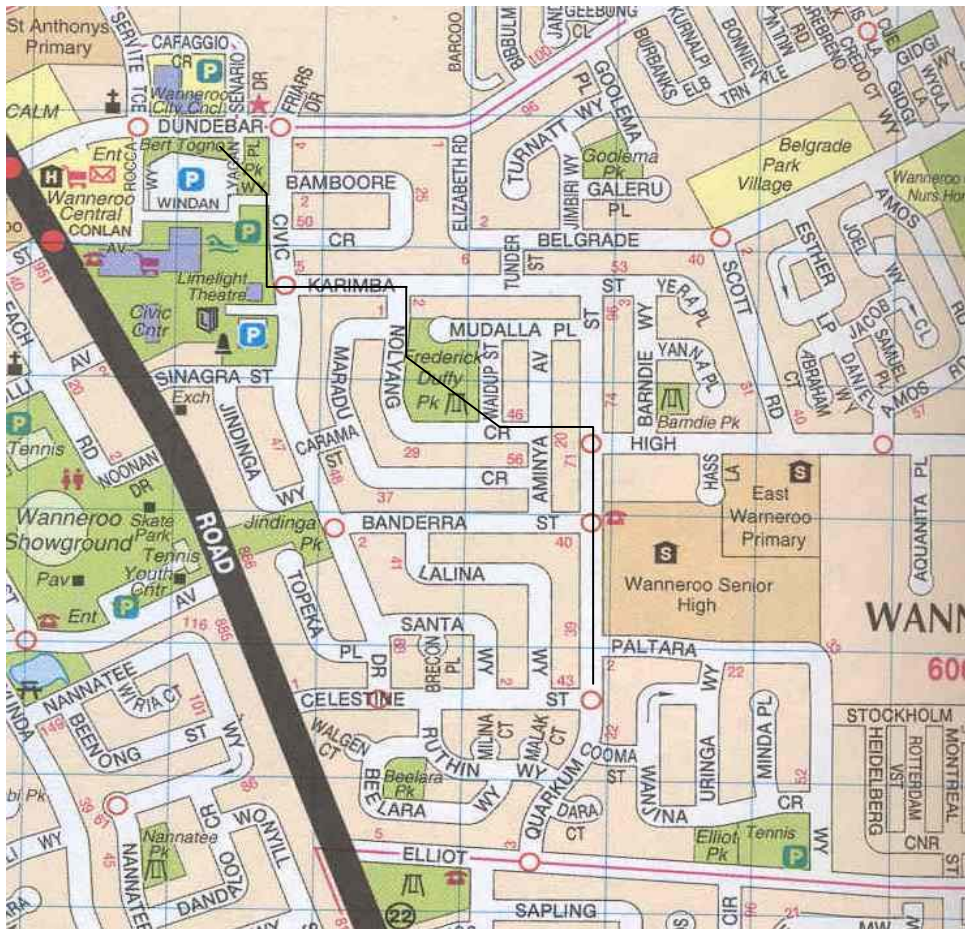
A dog may not show loss at all but continue on and then turn a block away and come back onto the track, and this is where the person following up is able to give the dog the opportunity to keep working knowing it can always get back on track if it continues in a certain direction.

In a trial situation remember that it is up to the discretion of the judge depending on the wind conditions at the time of judging to allow the dog to continue working even though it may not necessarily be following the actual route taken by the tracklayer.

It is therefore recommended that in training the dog is kept close to the actual track at all times to avoid the dog learning to air scent.

A mud map showing only the streets the tracklayer has walked in urban tracks is not sufficient as it will not help if the dog becomes lost and the person following up on the track has to find the actual track again.

Example 2. An Urban Track [note how the track keeps going away from the start]



The following Tracking Stages are designed to assist handlers in working towards completion of Track & Search Dog & Track & Search Dog Excellent titles which will commence in January 2009.

Any stage deemed unnecessary during training of the dog may be left out. In training ensure there is a high amount of play/rewards at end of the tracks to ensure the dog remains highly motivated to find the tracklayer and ignore the diversion tracks.

Stage 1

Test Situation	Response
Handler sets up exercise.	Handler to secure tracking harness & introduce scent article prior to search.
Dogs to be worked on long lead & tracking harness	
Tracklayer & 1 Diversion Tracklayer set 100m straight track with diversion Tracklayer making a 90’ turn 50m from the start & then leaving the track. Set up start as for present Track 6 [30 metres between flags] Leave in start flag.	Handler to know the direction of the track. Watch for signs of track indication from dog & be ready to praise and recall dog.
Handler introduces Tracklayer’s scent article.	Dog must hunt for track on lead & collar or by free quartering, & to indicate to handler once track is found. Dog is to be stopped allowing lead to be clipped to harness. Handler to follow track to its conclusion
WIND Conditions – must be light, Dog working with the wind behind them.	Dog maintains interest & works directly to the find ignoring diversion track.
TRACK SURFACE – vegetated	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.
Fairly Fresh Track	

Stage 2

Test Situation	Response
Handler is blind to setting up of exercise	Handler able to secure tracking harness & introduce scent article to the dog.
Dog to be worked by handler on a long lead & tracking harness.	
Tracklayer sets 500m track, with 4 turns, 30 minutes later the diversion Tracklayer follows the Track making a 90’ turn at approximately 100m from the start of the track & leave the track. Track 6 Start [30metres between flags] Leave a Start Flag]	Know exactly the direction of the track so handler can watch for signs of indication from dog & be ready to praise before stopping it to clip lead onto harness.
Handler introduces Tracklayer’s scent article.	Dog must hunt for track on lead & collar or by free quartering, & to indicate to handler once track is found. Dog is to be stopped allowing lead to be clipped to harness. Handler to follow track to its conclusion. Dog maintains interest & works directly to the find ignoring the fresh diversion track.
WIND Conditions –must be light with dog Working with the wind behind the dog.	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute
TRACK SURFACE – Varied	
30 minute old track [or as soon as Cross Tracklayer has finished the diversion track]	

Stage 3

Test Situation	Response
Handler to be blind to setting up of the exercise.	Handler able to secure harness & introduce scent article prior to search.
Dog to be worked by the handler on long lead & Tracking harness.	
Main tracklayer sets 800m track, with 4 turns One diversion Tracklayer follows track making 90 turn at approx. 50m.from the start of the track & a 2 nd diversion tracklayer crossing the track at right angles at about 200m after main Tracklayer has passed by.	Dog must hunt for track on lead & collar or by free quartering, & to indicate to handler once track is found. Dog is to be stopped allowing lead to be clipped to harness. Handler to follow track to its conclusion.
Handler introduces Positive body scent article and is shown PLS [place last seen]	Dog maintains interest & works directly to the find ignoring the diversion tracks.
WIND Conditions – Any	
TRACK SURFACE – Varied	
1 Hour delay	
Diversions tracks to be approx. of same age.	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.

Stage 4

Test Situation	Response
Handler to be blind to setting up of the exercise. No Start flag to be left.	Handler able to secure tracking harness & introduce scent article to the dog.
	Handler not to know exact direction of start of track.
Track length 800m –TRACK SURFACE – Varied	
1 hour delay	
Diversion track to be of same age as main Tracklayer. Diversion tracklayer to follow immediately after the main tracklayer	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.

Stage 5

Test Situation	Response
Handler to be blind to setting up of the exercise. No Start flag to be left.	Handler able to secure tracking harness & introduce scent article to the dog.
90 minute delay TRACK SURFACE - Varied	Handler not to know exact direction of start of track.
Diversion tracks to be approx. of same age	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.

Stage 6

Test Situation	Response
Handler to be blind to setting up of track	Handler able to secure tracking harness & introduce scent article to the dog.
Dog to be worked by handler on long lead & Tracking harness.	Handler able to secure harness & introduce scent article prior to search.
Main tracklayer set 1km – 1.5km track, with 5-6 turns, Two diversion Tracklayers to make decoy tracks of the same age, and then both diversion Tracklayers to leave the track.	Handler not to know exact direction of start of track.
Handler starts dog from unknown start point 20 m x 20 m area.	Dog must hunt for track on lead & collar or by free quartering, & to indicate to handler once track is found. Dog is to be stopped allowing lead to be clipped to harness. Handler to follow track to its conclusion.
WIND Conditions - Any	
TRACK SURFACE – Varied	
2-3 hour delay. Diversion tracks to be of same age	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.

Stage 7 Bush Night Track

Track should be blind to handler over varied terrain, in a rural or semi-rural environment. It should be approx. 800m. It should cross at least one paved or gravel road or stream. It may or may not follow a formed track, shall have at least 2 turns.	Dog should search for start of with lead already attached to harness. Handler to wear light attached to cap and the dog may have on high visibility jacket or LED light attached to harness.
The dog will be started from a 20 m x 20 m area.	
WIND DIRECTION -Any	
2-3 hours old track	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.

Stage 8 Bush Track

At least 1200m in length through varied terrain & vegetation. It should follow a dirt road or trail for a part of it, have at least 3 turns and generally meander as a lost person may do	Dog should search for start of with lead already attached to harness because of possibility of other persons or animals in area.
If the area is not subject to foot traffic, two deliberate fresh cross tracks laid by diversion bodies should be set just prior to handler working.	The dog should ignore the negative tracks and work directly to the end.
This track should start in a likely contaminated point such as a road-end. The exact start should be unknown to both dog & handler.	The dog should remain motivated throughout the track and be rested as deemed necessary by the handler.
WIND DIRECTION -Any	
TRACK SURFACE -Varied	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play.

Stage 9 Urban Track at least 800 metres

This track to be a variety of surfaces including tar-sealed Surfaces, pavement, grass and foot trails should follow a meandering pattern and have at least 3-4 turns.	Dog should search for start of with lead already attached to harness because of possibility of other persons/cars or animals in area.
It should include distractions such as parked cars, light vehicle & pedestrian traffic.	
The tracklayer should not be visible from the direction of the track, i.e. in a doorway or behind an obstacle	Care should be taken to keep dog on a shorter lead when in traffic and be on the look out for safety of dog should it attempt to cross a busy road
The exact start point of the track should be known to the handler i.e. a residential gateway, front door, or car door. The track should not cross a major road	Dog should show no signs of stress and work with any distractions. Dog maintains interest & works directly to the find.
WIND DIRECTION-Any	
2-3 hours old track	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.

Stage 10 Urban Night Track

Test Situation	Response
As for Stage 9	As for Stage 9
WIND DIRECTION-Any	Both Dog & Handler to have high visibility equipment.
2-3 hours old track	Handler to reward dog. Maintain play for up to a minute.

Lights should be used sparingly as not to impair night vision. It takes about 30 minutes to achieve full night vision, though eyes start to adapt after about 10 minutes. Anyone who has a head light attached, must be careful not to shine it into another person's eyes if they turn to face them. Either flick the headlight into an upward position or don't directly face the other person. Remember it will take another 10 minutes to readjust your night vision if you are temporarily blinded by another headlight shining directly into your eyes.