



Tracking Club of
Massachusetts

TCM

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www.trackingclubofma.com

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Welcome to Our Newsletter!

I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank Kari Lavalli for accepting the job as our new Newsletter editor. Being an effective editor of any publication requires a set of skills that only a relatively few people possess and from what I have learned so far, she is ready to do an outstanding job on our behalf.

I sincerely believe that this new Newsletter will become a tremendous educational & communication tool for all of us. It will blend educational topics about dogs in general; tracking related information; what the A.K.C. is doing for the sport; and eventually be a format that will enable us to discuss various tracking topics among ourselves. This newsletter belongs to all of us. Kari will need your inputs & support to be successful. Please send articles, questions for our judges, brags, and anything else relevant to her at klavalli@yahoo.com for submission.

To put today's T.C.M. club in perspective, let me highlight a few facts about our evolution:

-  T.C.M. is the 2nd oldest tracking club in the U.S. having started on May 26, 1978 with five people, including myself.
-  Our first president was Ruth Ridings and she held that post for over 20 years. She was truly amazing -- she earned T.D. titles on her two GSD by 1962, judged her first trial in 1963, and in 1976 was awarded the prestigious Dick D'Ambrisi medallion by the Association of Obedience Clubs & Judges for her dedication and contributions to the sport of tracking. Many of today's judges got their start under her guidance.



We are still guided by her principles today, one being that of introducing others to our sport. We were one of the first club's to publish a practical guide for training a dog for the T.D. & T.D.X. titles and it continues to be a good seller across the country.



In the early 1970's there was little interest in tracking nationwide, but as a club we had about 12-15 members who continued to advance the sport.



In the late 1970's when the A.K.C. thought about having a T.D.X. program, several T.C.M. members tried various ideas about what advance tracking should be. We then documented our results and sent reports to the appropriate A.K.C. officials.



T.C.M. held the first T.D. test in the U.S. as a recognized A.K.C. Tracking Club.



Since the mid-1980's, tracking tests and training techniques have become more refined and getting a tracking title at any level is still the goal of hundreds of exhibitors.



Our membership today is over 66 strong with a good financial base. We are known nationwide as an elite tracking club.

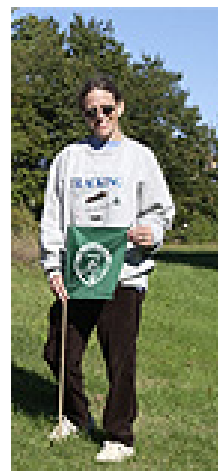
As a member of T.C.M. you are part of a well-respected heritage within the Sport of Tracking. I hope that you will continue to move the sport forward.

Art Tuiss
President



Meet Your Local Judges: Randie Meyer

I started tracking in 1976 with my first Belgian Tervueren, Glenoak Amanda of Echo Hill CDX, TDI, HC. I read a book by Glen Johnson, *Tracking Dog Theory and Methods* and became curious about this thing called tracking. There were no judges in the area and no one to work with me. I plunged forward and had a wonderful time working with my dog. I drove 5 hours to a certification match in New Jersey. It was sleeting and the winds were howling. Out of 7 participants, my dog was the only one to certify. A true honor as that dog was fabulous - the handler, well, not so much ☺. I then drove to North Carolina and passed my first TD test, first time out (I didn't hook my dog up correctly to the harness and half way through the track had to re-harness her up). I was a wreck, but again the dog pulled me through to the title. Since then I have put over 14 TD titles on dogs as well as one TDX title, and thankfully the dogs all helped me to improve my handling. In 1984 I became a TD Judge, under the watch of AKC Representative, John Bernard. The VST has become my absolute favorite venue in tracking: each and every time I go out with a dog they teach me something new about scent. It is an honor to have so many tracking judges actively involved with TCM as a resource to bounce ideas off of and to chat with them about things pertaining to our side of the fence. TCM is fortunate to have such an active membership who not only work and support club activities, but are always willing to lend a hand when needed, as well as being a truly enjoyable group!



Science Corner

Surprisingly, there are few scientific articles that attempt to understand the sensory world of the domestic dog, even though we humans know of their superior scenting skills and have developed many venues in which dogs can help us. Today's scenting dogs are used to find lost people, locate bodies and/or body parts, help find people in natural and man-made disaster sites, detect bombs and the people who made them, detect people smuggling in drugs or other illicit materials, and even ecologists are using dogs to locate the scat of various species to determine home ranges, distribution patterns, and the like.

This section of the newsletter will provide members with a review of the findings of the few studies that have been conducted on the olfactory capabilities of dogs in the hopes that we all can better understand why our dogs can do this marvelous thing called "tracking."

This first Science Corner article will explore the findings of Peter Hepper & Deborah Wells from the Canine Behaviour Centre of the School of Psychology at Queens University in Belfast, United Kingdom. In 2005, they published their findings on "How Many Footsteps Do Dogs Need to Determine the Direction of an Odour Trail?"

We all know that domestic dogs can track individuals (human or otherwise) and we employ this skill of theirs when we ask them to follow our trails in TD, TDX, and VST trials. However, few of us think about the directional cues provided in a trail as we start our dogs at a start point (the flag). Wild dogs will never encounter a "start" point when they are tracking prey. Instead, they will come upon the trail of the prey item by chance or by some search pattern in which they were engaged and then need to determine the direction they will travel to hopefully capture their next meal. It is not difficult to imagine that when an animal or human lays a trail on a vegetated surface, the weight on different areas of the footpad may differ and provide the dog with important information. For example, when we step in grass, our heels make a deeper impression in the ground than our toes. This will provide the dog with a stronger disturbance odor at the heel than at the toe and by comparing several footprints that differ in the timing of disturbance, dogs should be able to obtain directional cues. But is this really the case? Furthermore, what kinds of cues are available to a dog when the surface is not vegetation? What do they use to determine trail direction when we lay a track on gravel, compacted dirt, or concrete/asphalt?

Well, the second component of odor that dogs use is individual odor which is dispersed as skin rafts fall off of a living animal and is present as a contact odor from

Science Corner (cont.)

our shoes. Air currents (affected by both wind and air/ground temperature) disperse skin raft odor in very complicated ways. Odor disperses in a plume that is made up of filaments and patches separated by areas of unscented air and the dog must decode this erratic and intermittent information. One way in which dogs do this is by using “odor-gated rheotaxis” - moving upwind and casting in and out of the odor plume by using differences in odor concentrations detected by left and right nostrils. But what if there is no upwind information available to the dog? How then do they determine direction? Can they rely on contact odors (from our shoes/feet) alone?

Hepper and Wells used 21 wool carpeted squares, each labeled on the underside with a number, laid out in a straight line with the edges touching. The carpet was mildly damp during all trials. In the first experiment, one person laid a track, one footstep per carpet square, from one end of the line to the other in 2 year old hiking shoes (the shoes were covered with plastic overshoes on the approach to the first carpet square and again after the last carpet square). After aging for 60 min, a dog handler who was blind to the direction of the trail and a dog were brought to the line of carpet at a right angle. Each dog participated in 10 trials (each trial had fresh, never before used, carpet squares with 60 min aged tracks); for half of the trials, the track ran to the dog’s left and for the other half, it ran to the dog’s right. The tracklayer (who was not present in the same room as the carpeted trail) recorded the direction the dog turned and results were analyzed individually for each dog (6 dogs total) by comparing their score to that which could have occurred by chance.

In the second experimental design, track was laid on the carpet squares as before, but then the squares were randomly ordered via a randomizer computer program for each of the 10 trials per dog. Carpet squares were handled by rubber gloves and removable plastic was used on the flooring adjacent to the squares during the reordering of the squares to avoid leaving any additional odor cues. Although the carpet squares were reordered, heel-toe direction of the footprint on each square remained the same and ran in the same direction that the tracklayer walked. Dogs were tested as in the first experiment and their results were analyzed in the same manner.

In the third experimental design, track was laid on the carpet squares as in the second experiment, and squares were picked up and handled, but replaced in the same order so that the trail remained in its original walked pattern. In the final experiment, the tracklayer placed 4 layers of plastic overshoes onto their bare feet and then laid a track as in experiment one.

Science Corner (cont.)

In the first experimental design - track laid in an ordered trail and not subsequently handled - all dogs were able to determine the direction of the trail at a level greater than chance. Three of the six dogs tested determined the direction correctly 100% of the time; the remaining three dogs tested determined the direction correctly 90% of the time. Likewise, in the third experimental design - track laid in an ordered trail, handled, but replaced in the original order - all six dogs were able to determine the direction of the trail at a level greater than chance and all correctly determined the direction 100% of the time. However, in the case of the jumbled trail - track laid in an ordered trail, and then reordered during handling - all dogs performed only at the level of chance (30-60% correct directional choices). Likewise, in the fourth experimental design when track was laid without odor from shoes (but crushing ground disturbance was presumably present on the carpeting pile), the dogs were not able to determine the direction of the track at a level better than chance (30-70% correct directional choices).

Hepper and Wells then laid a track on 21 carpeted squares and removed squares from the ends of the line in pairs (i.e., to obtain 19 squares, #1 and #21 would be removed and replaced with blank carpet; to obtain 17 squares, #1, #2, #20, and #21 would be removed and replaced with blank carpet). Dogs were able to correctly determine the direction of trials when 5 or more footsteps were present (5, 7, 9, 11+ footsteps resulted in 90-100% correct choices by the six dogs). Dogs were not able to determine direction at a level better than chance when only 3 footsteps were present (30-60% correct directional choices).

So what does all of this mean? Well, for one, domestic dogs, like their wild counterparts, can determine the direction of a trail and they require a minimum of 5 sequential footsteps to do so. But what do they need in addition to the 5 footsteps to determine the direction of trails? They need both the cues from skin rafts that may disperse widely and erratically from the trail and they need contact odors from the bottom of the shoe touching the ground. Ground disturbance is not sufficient for directional information, nor are air dispersed skin rafts alone sufficient. While the mechanism underlying their ability to determine direction is still unknown, the authors suggest that dogs use a combination of the number of footsteps and a comparison of odor difference within those footsteps (the time difference between footstep 1 and footstep 2, 3, 4, and 5 that results in an odor difference).

Reference: Hepper, P.G. and D.L. Wells. 2005. How many footsteps do dogs need to determine the direction of an odour trail? *Chemical Senses* 30: 291-298.

Tracking Tips from Randie Meyer

General Tips - Do's and Don'ts

Throughout the years, I have observed numerous breeds of dogs track, problem solve, and watched the dogs try to get their handlers to follow them. I have seen teams that work in harmony together, with the handler giving support or encouragement when needed, dogs being patient when handler has to go through rough territory, etc.

There are a lot of theories about starting the beginning dog. Everyone uses what they feel works best for those they train. I use food on the track to start a new dog. I am rather insistent about this -- again because this is what has always worked for me and the groups I have taught. I also use food in articles to start to get the dog to work and indicate the article. I have tried using toys, playing crazy lady, and the like; however, the best success has come through use of food on the track for my dogs. Food provides that instant reward for the dog and often pulls the novice handler along the track allowing the dog to take command, which, ultimately, is their role on a track.

I know a lot of folks who down their dogs at the start. I say more power to you! My dog has already started working by the time he or she reaches the start flag. If I ask for a down at the start, I am, in fact, de-motivating my dog and telling him or her that whatever they were tracking into the flag is wrong. If a dog downs naturally without being trained then I stay with that. The same goes for articles. I do not ask my dog for a down at the article as he or she gives me some signal (which is different with almost every dog). Several of my dogs toss the article to me as they track by it! Some turn around and look at me, some sink lower into their harness.

Lately, I have begun to start dogs on hard surfaces with VERY inconspicuous articles. The difference in starting on hard surface is that you introduce a non-vegetated surface to the dog right from the beginning, thus eliminating having to go back and re-teach your dog surface changes. Transitions from non-vegetated surfaces to vegetated surfaces do not cause dogs any concern at all! However, I have seen dogs trained in vegetation first fail time after time at the point of a transition. Be still and be sure not to rush your dog through a transition -- give him or her time to refocus the way the scent has changed before continuing on. Never push your dog across a road, etc.

I recently imprinted a litter of puppies at five weeks old on old asphalt. It has been fun to watch these puppies all grow up to successfully use their noses and not bat an eye at transitions! All of my students with a huge variety of breeds have all had total success with this method!

Tracking Tips (cont.)

Handling Tips

Problems in tracking most always begin with the handler. If you do not think you can read your dog you are probably right! Get someone to video you and your dog on a track. It is truly amazing how the light dawns when the handler watches their dog in action. Dogs can give very subtle body language clues -- for example, a flick of the head, a leaning down into harness, a wagging tail, etc. These clues may be quick so the handler needs to watch for them closely.

Another area handlers have problems with is that they will not back up. If you are headed down a 10 degree hill (for example) and the wind is coming from behind you will the dog overshoot a corner? He well may! Then the poor dog has to push the handler back up the hill - something that no dog is comfortable doing at all! Handlers need to allow their dogs to cast behind them and check things out, and then if the dog pulls back up the hill handler should take a few steps in that direction (note a few steps - not a 100 yards!).

Some handlers believe in marking corners in training, something I forbid with my students! I don't care how well anyone thinks they can disguise the markers, the dog is far too clever not to detect them! Then handlers are puzzled on how come they cannot read their dogs on a blind track!

Your tracklayer must know where the track is! If they don't and you run into trouble you could plan on spending a world of time frustrated and have your dog quit on you. If your dog is pulling madly, head down and into the harness, go with your dog. Ninety-nine percent of the time the dog is right and the tracklayer has made a mistake (charting a right corner when the track really went left, etc). Tracklayers get yourself some 'fun' articles -- a plastic tiara with 'jewels', a bugs bunny character, a cloth flower with a smiley face, and the like. It's amazing to see how the dog reacts when the handler chuckles at an article!

Handling During a Trial

Numerous dogs have been whistled off for guiding. Yikes! Believe me I have seen all sorts of forms of this. Dogs pulling frantically at a corner -- handler holds fast because handler KNOWS the track doesn't go there (that's an easy one to see and you will hear my whistle for that!) Another one is to line up on the judges, pulling the dog or holding the dog with far too much restraint. Handler puts their back to judges and clearly 'holds' the dog from going a specific direction (geez do they think I am blind?). Some handlers think they can 'see' where the track goes -- so you see dogs moving along with lots of tension on the line and then suddenly the line goes

Tracking Tips (cont.)

slack, but the handler takes a turn in the field with no hint from the dog. You need to follow the dog, not the other way around. Rewarding the dog with water at articles was very popular for a while. Please remember who is in the driver's seat -- TRUST YOUR DOG AND DO NOT SECOND GUESS WHERE THE TRACK GOES!

You must train for anything and everything. Do not blame a failed track on 'geez my dog couldn't track through that manure on the field.' Get your dog onto manure; believe me they can work that problem out. Train in rain, train at night, train at dawn and early evening. Prepare your dogs for anything and everything, conditions, time, track age, passersby, etc. before you ask a judge to certify your dog. If your dog had a tough time on a track, the next track should be a 50 yard motivational track -- set your dog up for success, not failure! You can always go back and recreate a condition or problem on a track and I'll bet you the next time through the dog will not bat an eyelash at it!

Be Flexible and Cheerful

Sometimes things happen while you are running a track. Things come up that you cannot imagine happening. Handlers need to remember to give their dogs time to work out the problem. I've had huge things occur (hot air balloon landing on the leg of a track, horse and rider un-tacking on a leg and leaving the saddle on the leg, cars doing donuts on a corner of the track). In each and every case, it makes the dog a better tracking dog in the end. I am so grateful when something goes a foul on a track as I love to watch my dog work out the problem to then go on with success to the end article.

Finally, always take a moment at the end of the track to sit down next to your dog and tell them how great they are and what a fantastic job they did.

Wishing everyone good scents!

Randie Meyer



Joyce & Grover



Kari & Asta

Submit a training question for our member judges -- each newsletter will have a Training Tips section based on your questions!!!

VST Test, 30 May 2010

Our annual Variable Service Tracking Test was once again held on the beautiful grounds of the College of Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. The weather was sunny, breezy, and maybe a little on the warm side for the dogs.

Although the campus is really nice, we can only fit in 5 tracks. The test filled with one alternate. Three of the dogs made a valiant effort on the track, but no one passed.

Thank you to our Judges, Miles Garrod and Randie Meyer, who put a lot of time into plotting tracks that would give the dogs an excellent chance of passing. Thank you to our Tracklayers who did an excellent job of laying the tracks: Lori Hall (Chief Tracklayer) Phil Keating, Jane Taylor and Janet Steeger -- you guys are SUPER. Pat Gaugette provided a delicious lunch that was greatly appreciated by all.

I would like to add a special thank you to my Chairperson, Karen Oliver, for being the wealth of knowledge that she is, for cheerfully answering my (sometimes) stupid questions, and also for driving the judges and tracklayers.

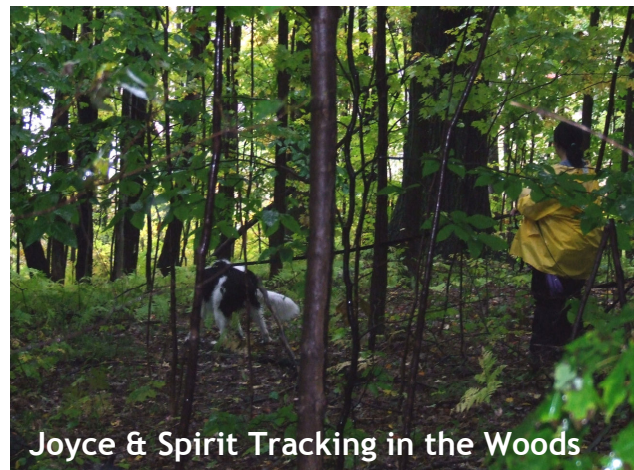
Happy Tracking

Donna Kiara

VST Test Secretary



Pam & Domino Tracking in the Desert!



Joyce & Spirit Tracking in the Woods

TD and TDX Tests, 2 May 2010

TCM held its spring combination TD/TDX test on Sunday, May 2, 2010 at the High Ridge Wildlife Management Area in Gardner, MA. We had 12 'X' entries and 6 'T' entries, including alternates. We ran 3 TDX and 4 TD tracks.

The weather was hot since summer made an early entrance in central Massachusetts this spring. To make things even more challenging, all the fields had been freshly manured, much to our surprise on arrival for plotting day.

"Oh well," as Randie would (and did!) say, "Get over it!" The judges and track layers went to work, and the tracks were ready on time Sunday morning. Unfortunately, the heat and delightful aroma (at least to the dogs) proved too much for our TD entrants as they tried their best under these very difficult conditions. None of our four TD teams got to the glove.

Our TDX entrants seemed much less distracted by the aromas but, starting later in the day, felt the full force of the high temperatures. Alas, all 3 teams heard the whistle too early, but continued on afterward with their track layers to finish their tracks.

Thanks to our valiant judges, Art Twiss, Mike Clemens, and Deb Brown. A special shout out goes to our track layers (Jane Taylor, Donna Kiuru, Peter Frykman, Lori Hall, Bette LeBlanc, Randie Meyer, Allison Vicuna, and Gail Kuncho) who braved the cowpies on multiple occasions to ensure the tracks were ready to run.

My special thanks go to our Chairman, Miles Garrod, who guided this rookie through his first time as trial secretary.

Phil Keating

TD/TDX Test Secretary



Phil & Hanna

TCM Upcoming Events

October 10, 2010 - TDX Test at High Ridge Wildlife Management Area, Gardner, MA (Judges: Art Twiss & Stephanie Crawford)

October 16-17, 2010 - Beginner Tracking Clinic at Top-of-the-Hill Farm, Ayer, MA with Miles Garrod

October 31, 2010 - TD Test at Top-of-the-Hill Farm, Ayer, MA (Judges: Miles Garrod & Deb Brown)

May 1, 2011 - Combination TD/TDX Test (Judges: John & Darlene Bernard)

May 7-8, 2011 - Beyond the TD Clinic with John and Darlene Bernard

Please join us for our club meetings at the Rueben Hoar Library on 41 Shattuck Street, Littleton, MA.

Also, please encourage your training buddies to join TCM. Membership rates are:

\$15.00 for Associate Member
\$20.00 for Full Voting Member



We need volunteers for help with the October tracking clinic and tracklayers for our October trials - this is a great way to learn more about tracking! Contact Pam Frattallone for more info.

Last Fall's successful TD teams!

