

1. Introduction

This book advocates and assists in combining trackers and handlers in the field. This book will also be useful for search managers in recognizing the value of combining these important **resources** under some circumstances. Past experience has clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of combining resources.

Missing Without Reason

It is a cold winter afternoon in the rolling hills of rural Virginia. AG, a 70-year-old male on medication for depression, cannot be found. Family and friends are contacted to mount an impromptu search effort. Later, an emergency call rings in the county's 911 center requesting law enforcement assistance. A tracker and an air-scent dog are quickly assigned to search around the point last seen. Just as they deploy into the field, the radio breaks squelch. The team must move to a new site where family members located a bottle of prescription medication. Investigations just determined it belongs to AG. Upon arriving at the new last known position, the search team sees several family members wandering around the clue. Nevertheless, the tracker locates one set of tracks that cannot be matched to the family members' shoe patterns. The track is sketched, photographed, measured, and sent back to base.

The tracker closely examines the tracks and determines a direction of travel heading north into the woods. The team's assignment changes to the new area. The air-scent dog takes the lead due to its ability to search a large area quickly. After 30 minutes of an open grid pattern the radio once again crackles into action. A hasty team a half-mile further north reports similar tracks. Base once again diverts the tracker and dog team to this new clue. The tracker quickly determines the measurements, shoeprint pattern, and age of the tracks match.

The tracker takes the lead and finds both the direction of travel and the trail. The team employs the leap-frogging tactic to follow the trail for several hundred yards. As they enter into an area with several dumpsters and a shed, the dog alerts. Teamwork and coordination allowed AG to be successfully located still alive in the shed.

This success only came about due to the previous training these two resources practiced long before this search. Over the years a set of guidelines gradually developed. This book is generic and does not in any way try to describe or define a **signcutter**, signcutting, a **tracker**, tracking, **air-scent dog**, **dog handler**, or **scent-discriminating**. From the author's research, it appears very evident that different regions have unique definitions, classifications, and terms, and these should be incorporated into a unit's working guidelines as necessary. Terms defined in the glossary appear in bold the first time they are used. These guidelines should be modified to the experience and skill level of the tracking person and canine team members. The author's decided to use the term *tracker*, in this book, to refer to the individual or team that finds or follows track or **sign** in the field (after a highly scientific social experiment). We asked a non-randomly selected eight-year-old what she called someone who finds or follow tracks. Her reply "a tracker," was rewarded with a cookie. Therefore, the term tracker is used throughout the text because it is the most generic term to describe someone willing to lay down in the mud at night and shine a flashlight at strange angles to see a tiny crease in a leaf. The term does not refer to the skill set or experience of this individual.

This book makes no attempt to decide the team leader: the dog handler, the tracking person, or another member of the team. This should be left up to either the team, the type of task assigned, local protocol, and/or base operations. There are many areas that utilize these disciplines differently. There are also many different schools of thought about the use of these resources. What is important is that both of these disciplines learn to operate together to assist each other in finding the lost or missing person. Common sense and teamwork must prevail.

It is highly recommended that any specialized resource, train with several different trackers or canine teams (air-scent and

tracking/trailing) before operating in a real world situation where someone's life may be at stake. Also, it is recommended that canine team members train with tracking personnel whenever possible. This is not only the best way but the only way to prepare for the field. All searchers make mistakes in the field and should learn from them, but try to keep those mistakes minimal and preferably make them during training.

This book does not cover the tactics utilized for signcutting and tracking a criminal suspect. These are different from the tactics normally known and used by **search and rescue** (SAR) personnel. Trackers should stay away from this type of task unless they are law enforcement or military personnel. It is also critical that trackers have been taught by and trained with experienced tracking teachers on the different signcutting and tracking tactics required and on the inherent dangers of tracking criminal suspects.

WARNING: If a SAR volunteer, it is highly recommended that you abort your task when it is reported and/or verified that you are searching for a criminal suspect. TRACKING PERSONNEL HAVE BEEN KILLED!

Assume that every **Point Last Seen** (PLS) or **Last Known Position** (LKP) is a possible crime scene and should be treated as such. Also, assume every search has the potential of turning into a criminal action. Indeed, any lost fearful subject may commit irrational if not dangerous actions towards a searcher. This is one of the inherent dangers of SAR. Avoid this danger by refusing to accept a task that is not recommended or when lacking proper training. Do not allow the "thrill of the chase" to override common sense and level of expertise!

This book attempts to address, on a limited platform, one of the many subjects in tracking that may have been overlooked. Hopefully this book will complement other tracking books, research, experience, and schooling. At the very least it should provoke thought and discussion.

The next chapter lays down the theoretical and statistical foundation of why management might choose to combine canine and tracking resources. Since the decision is often left up to search management, the chapter is largely written from their perspective. In order for field resources to work well together and gain trust they must understand the basic tactics each other use. Chapter Three discusses tracking awareness and tactics while Chapter Four explains canine resources and tactics. Next, Chapter Five brings together both resources by presenting information on how they can best communicate and work before, during, and after a field task. Unfortunately, a lot of resource information may have been learned through the movies. In order to dispel common myths and misconceptions, Chapter Six addresses tracking misunderstanding, while Chapter Seven tackles canine fallacies. The next two chapters present the skill sets that both of these search specialists should possess. While Chapters Ten and Eleven confront unfounded fears and concerns each resource may harbor. Finally, Chapter Twelve presents several exercises trackers and canine handlers may utilize for joint training.

Ultimately, the reader and user of this text determines if the information is of any benefit. The only way any book of this nature can be found beneficial and applicable is through time, use, and field testing.