

MORE TRAILING CHALLENGES



INDICATING OBJECTS

Having your dog locate objects during a search can make an entertaining change from simply following a trail. You might begin with a shorter trail that you know your dog is familiar with. The objects you use must bear the same scent as the one that you give your dog to smell at the start of the search.

There are various ways to explain to your dog what it is you want her to do, as described in chapter 2. Should your dog walk past the object, don't scold her, and don't pull on the leash either. Simply walk to the object and say something like: "Look what I found here! Did you overlook this?" She will not understand your words, but your tone should be enough to tell her that you feel sorry she has missed this opportunity. Any dog with the least shred of ambition will not want this to happen very often, and will try harder the next time.

Anyone who places too great an importance on object indication would be better off doing traditional tracking, training the dog to seek out disturbance to the ground, because, with scent trailing, depending on wind and type of ground, it may be that the scent is not present over the entire trail, in which case it will be difficult or even impossible for a dog to indicate objects that are too far from where she is searching.

WORKING WITH A FOREIGN TRAIL

Everything concerned so far with searching for scents can be applied to training your dog to search for a foreign scent also, but, in order to do this, you will need a helper. It would be ideal if this was someone who trains their dog to search for trails as well, and therefore knows what is important here, and you could lay out trails for each other. Of course, you can teach someone to be a helper, initially being nearby when they lay a trail, but not walking alongside. You should also agree on a common system to define direction changes, and I recommend that your helper lays the trail according to your system.

Then you will need objects that have your helper's scent, and this will be easiest to achieve if you use objects belonging to that person, and not just things he or she has briefly held in their hand. As before, start with simple trails and slowly increase the degree of difficulty.

What does your dog do and how does she act whilst following the new scent? Is she as motivated as when following your scent trails? In this respect, for the first time it may be advantageous for your helper to be someone that your dog knows well, but you should swop and change your helpers from then on.

By now you should be able to read your dog well enough to know where she is leading you on the search. You may want to ask your helper to deposit an object just after each angle, which will confirm that you

The quarry rewards the dog with tasty treats for finding her!





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are on the right trail. You should, however, not begin doing this until your dog is very secure in the search and finds the target nine times out of ten. If this is not yet the case, it is important that *you* know the trail well, so that you can either help your dog by giving her another whiff of the scent pattern, or by aborting the search and finding out why it went wrong. In the latter instance, you should lay out another, short and simple trail in order to finish the day with your dog being successful.

Experiment further with trail length and with various ground surfaces. Later on, you might ask a passing jogger to give you an item with his scent on it. This could be a fresh paper tissue, used to wipe his brow, and which you can put into your zip-locked plastic bag. He could do the same with a second tissue and drop it about two miles down the road (which you can then pick up). This is one way to relatively easily gain access to someone else's trail, although don't try this until you and your dog are sufficiently confident about following trails.

MISGUIDANCE

Misguidance is what we call other trails that cross the trail we are following, and which your dog should not be distracted by. If you have already included existing paths in your searches, you may have practised misguidance without realising it, as you can't know what other trails are also present on the path. If you really build up your trail practice step-by-step, this should not be a big problem anyway.

In order to increase your dog's confidence, and to better understand her abilities, you should deliberately include misguidance in the search. In this respect, it could again be advantageous if you know someone who trains their dog to follow trails, as you could lay trails that can cross at some point (see drawing opposite). The more acute the crossover angle, the more 'enticing' the misguidance is.

Let each dog follow their own trail. Are they misguided? Do they even hesitate at the spot where the two trails intersect? Do the dogs maybe follow the misguidance for a bit, only to return to search for the right trails again? Observe your dogs carefully: you will learn a lot.

Once this method works well you could again lay out trails that overlap at some point and let your dogs follow each other's trail. Do they more easily become misguided, and choose to follow a more familiar scent? Do not forget to lavishly praise your dog if she remains on the right trail, as this would be a terrific achievement.

To increase the difficulty, you could lay trails that cross over several times, at various angles. Begin the trails at the same point – possibly overlapping – separate later and then cross over again: there are no limits to what can be done – let your imagination run free! This type of training, where dogs work together, can be very enjoyable. And if the dogs have reached this level of experience, you will have reason to admire their olfactory abilities time and time again.

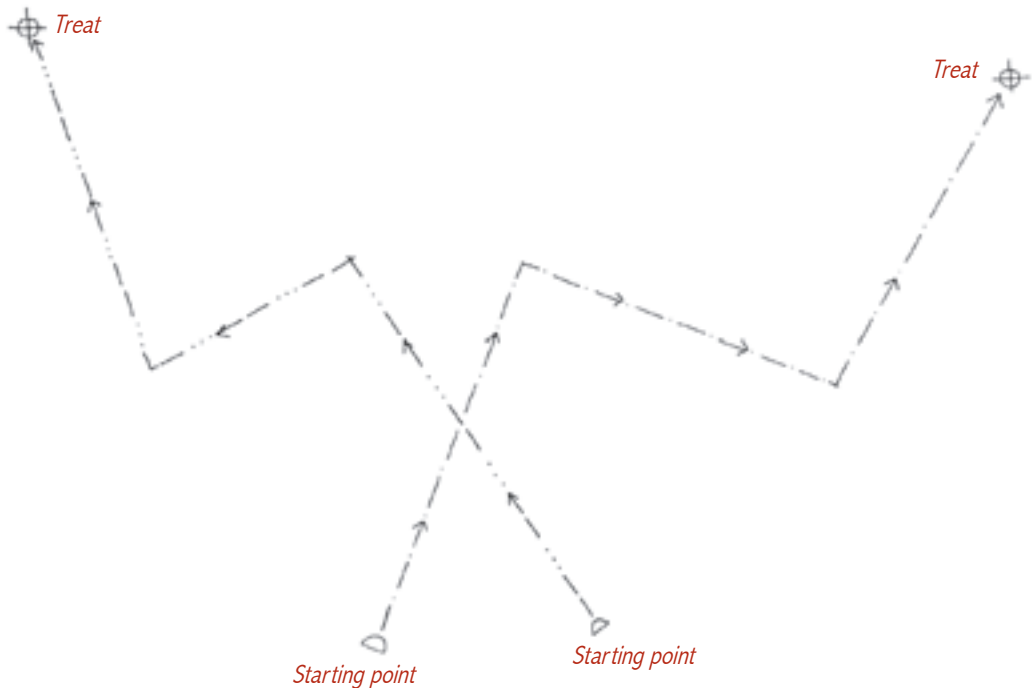
You could also try and lay out, or have laid out, a trail that crosses a deer pass. Will your dog stay true to the trail, do you think? If yes, this is definitely worth a reward. If not, you should repeat the beginner stages, as this is an advanced exercise.

OLD TRAILS

Until now we have had our dogs search for relatively fresh trails. The scent of a trail changes with age. Imagine a person dragging a tunnel of scent behind him: once he stops, the scent will spread out in all directions, initially in a ball shape. Once the person moves again, another 'scent tunnel' is created.

The olfactory particles that comprise the tunnel sink to the ground relatively quickly, and, after a while, all that's left of the scent tunnel is a trail on the ground. This scent trail is then subject to various weather phenomena. In warm weather the trail can again rise into the air. You may already have noticed that, in warm weather, your dog holds her nose higher than in cooler weather, and this is especially so with older trails.





Intense sunshine essentially burns the olfactory particles, making it difficult for your dog to find the right direction from what remains. This is particularly true on tarmac, as here the olfactory particles are exposed to sunshine completely unprotected. In grass they are better preserved, and moist weather will also preserve them, usually making it much easier for dogs to find trails. It is even possible that an older trail which has been exposed to intense sunlight could become clearer again due to light rain or morning dew.

A possible explanation of why this happens is the activation of bacteria. I have previously described how each dead skin cell that is shed by our body is infested with bacteria. If the weather is too hot and dry, the bacteria will shut down their metabolic activities, but they are able to restart them if it becomes more humid. In that case, more gases are created, which the dog can smell.

These changes to the trails affect the scent image, of course. Depending on the age of the trail, it may look very different, which will make it very difficult for your dog to follow. This is the challenge of an older trail, and various methods and opinions exist about how best to tackle these. Some trainers work with at least 4 hour old trails from the start, and once the dog has mastered these, younger trails can be used. This is a very good way to proceed if you have a dog that is very well motivated to search, and which does not need to be shown how you walked down the trail, pretending to place items along it. After this time period the trail has 'settled' and all olfactory particles have reached the ground, where the trail is best defined.

Most people begin with young trails, which are left lying for longer and longer later on, until the dog is asked to follow it. You may have to work in 5 minute intervals in order to do this successfully: once the first 20 minute trail is solved, you can increase trail age by five minutes each time. At the start you could also

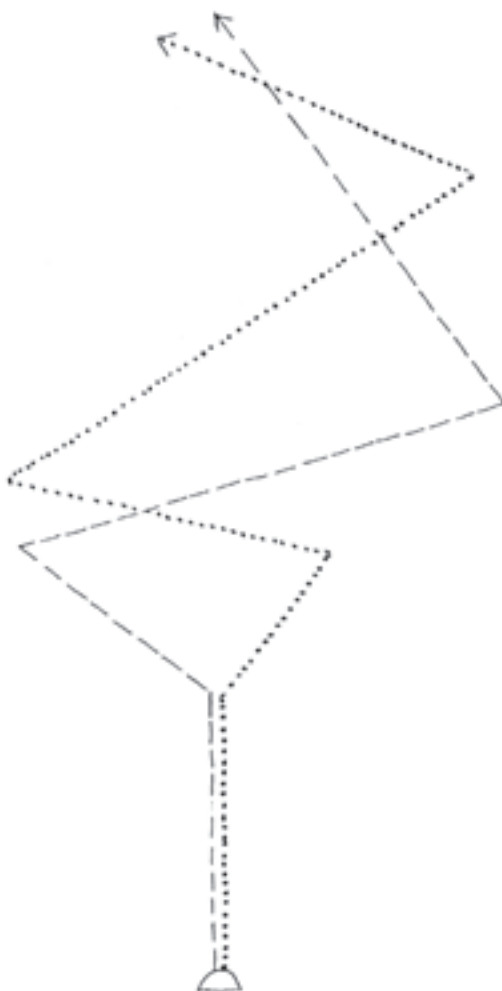


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experiment with longer intervals of time. If your dog has problems with these, simply return to the younger trail age and work towards older trails in even smaller intervals. How old can a trail be that a dog is still able to follow? Well, there have been reports of a dog that was able to follow a week-old trail, but, of course, it very much depends on weather conditions and the dog's training. Under these extreme conditions, breed could also play a role as the genetic traits the dogs have been born with are evident here. But even if you don't have a bloodhound, you can attempt an exercise like this one; even atypical breeds can achieve surprising things if they are trained well, step-by-step. Ultimately, it should really be the enjoyment that person and dog experiences that is the most important consideration.

FINDING PEOPLE

The principle of area scanning – used to train rescue dogs – is that a dog will scan an area for human scent



Common starting point

Young Ole is incited by his quarry to search for her.

