

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

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Arrogant.
Brazen.
Brash.
Cheeky.
Cocky.
Egotistical.
Presumptuous.

We humans are all of this and more, when we set out to teach a dog to track. He *knows* how to track. His nose is constantly working, whether it's figuring out which burrow the rabbit bolted down, or locating the bit of toast that fell off the kitchen table. Turn him loose in a grassy meadow, and his nose will immediately spring into action. Who's been here? What's that over there? Now *this* is interesting!

His nose feeds him far more information than his eyes. Watch him as he cruises the field, head low. He is clearly following scent trails.

He *knows* how to track.

What can you possibly teach him?

You can teach him to share this marvelous skill with you, to allow you to be there with him, contributing what you can, while he uses that amazing nose to follow a scent. And if you're successful at convincing him to let you join the fun, oh! what fun it is.

Most dog training depends on curbing a dog's natural instincts. You'd never succeed in obedience trials or agility competitions if you let your dog do each exercise the way he wanted to. But tracking encourages those instincts, a plus for owners who are turned off by the intricate rules and polished precision of most dog sports.

Anyone who lives with a dog knows he has natural abilities, instincts, behaviors. Some we enjoy. Wagging his tail, nudging us to be petted, fetching a tennis ball. Some, every bit as natural, are obnoxious in our constricted lives, like digging, barking, chewing, marking his territory.

Sniffing is no exception. It can be entertaining (when he finds the tennis ball you've hidden under the couch cushion) or appalling (when he abruptly gooses Aunt Edna in the crotch). Tracking takes this natural action and refines it, in much the same way that we channel other canine activities so the dog is more enjoyable to be with. Ask anyone who tracks his dog and you'll find a deep bond.

To a dog, tracking is all about fun things.

Things we would normally discourage. Sniffing. Pulling hard on the lead. Charging out at full power. When tracking, he not only gets to do all these fun things, but he gets rewarded for doing so! It's no wonder dogs exposed to tracking love it.

Tracking dogs sniff out gloves for praise and cookies. This is the same skill that dogs use to sniff out drugs, weapons, bombs, gas leaks, even cadavers. To the dog it's all scent work, whether the end product is a milk bone, a strip of leather, or a stash of cocaine.

Tracking is the only dog activity I know where you don't need tons of knowledge to be successful. Your dog already knows more about this than you ever will, no matter how many books you read or how many dogs you work.

If you feel dog events have too many rules, you'll love tracking. There are a tenth the rules of Newfoundland water or draft tests, one hundredth the rules of obedience trials.

Tracking isn't a matter of teaching. Rather, it's a matter of exposure. Expose your dog to enough circumstances and situations in his training, and he (and you) will learn through his experimentation. Tracking is the only activity I can think of where you can literally blank out and just hold onto the lead and follow, and it is entirely possible for the dog to earn the title you've been working toward.

Then why such a fat book? Because it's a lot more fun if you're an active, helpful part of the team. You'll get a lot more out of tracking if you have an idea what he's doing. And the more advanced you get in this work, the more you'll be able to actively contribute. Advanced tracking requires both members of the team to have their wits about them!

Please don't let the size of this book scare you. Think of this book as a cookbook. Basic cooking is very simple. And you don't need to master all the contents of a cookbook before you begin cooking. You can cook quite adequately using only small portions of the book. And some of the book you may never need. But if you get hungry for devils food cake, or your house guest from England requests a batch of popovers, the help you need will be within its pages. And if you really get turned on to cooking, there's enough content to keep your stomach purring for life.

Know what I like about tracking? We humans are so damned egotistical that we need to be taken down a peg now and then. Tracking encourages a