

healthy, modest ego. It quickly deflates the pompous. It teaches us humility. Swelled heads and control freaks don't last long as trackers. They can't handle the dog being in charge. And they can't stand knowing he's the brighter member of the team. Not to mention having it clearly demonstrated to everyone else in the vicinity!

Tracking forces you outdoors. And tracking knows no season. So you get into fields that change from month to month. The countryside is gorgeous blanketed in snow. It's equally lovely when the cherry trees blossom pink and white, when the sunny daffodils pop up in the field, when the lupine or bluebonnets are in full bloom.

Track in a field, and you may see hawks, deer, rabbits, coyote, fox. As society gets more crowded, tracking encourages you to find less populous places. It de-stresses a portion of your life.

Watching a dog's nose in action will amaze you. It is awesome to see a dog pick out a human scent and follow where that person has walked previously, through meadows and woods, across streams and through gravel, up cliffs and through gullies. There is not a lot in life that can fill one with awe. But watching a good-nosed dog can blow your mind.

Dogs travel through life on their noses as much as they do on their feet. In tracking, the dog follows a specific scent over an unknown course. It's akin to search and rescue, only it's much lower-key, for lives are not at stake. The human is a glorified follower, walking along at the end of the lead. But there is much for the human to learn to best help his dog. It is the joint learning, the sharing, the deep companionship that develops in field work, that makes tracking so addictive, and so euphoric, for dog and for man.

Tracking was introduced in the United States in 1930. In 1935 it became one of the exercises necessary to earn an AKC utility title. Nine months later it was separated from utility and stood on its own. Then you needed a tracking title before you could *enter* utility. That lasted roughly ten years. Now it stands separate from obedience.

While it seems strange to think of tracking as a requirement for a utility title, it did demonstrate that the AKC was confident that any breed could successfully track. And that has amply proven to be true. Go to a tracking test and you'll see burly rottweilers and dainty papillons. You'll see robust Danes and immaculate Lhasas. You'll see sleek whippets and frothy old English. And yes, you'll see Newfoundlands.

Do some breeds have more aptitude than others? Of course. That's what selective breeding is all about. Picture a greyhound and a basset. Both are dogs. Both can run. But there's a definite difference in speed and in grace. Scenting is like that, too.

Some individual lines within a breed have more aptitude than others. Some possess more instinct, more drive, a quicker learning curve. And while not every dog is genetically a great tracker, motivation allows you to create the desire to track in any dog who's physically able.

All dogs have a nose. All can ferret out scent. It is appalling stupidity to state that a particular breed cannot track.

Is the handler a factor in the dog's success? Absolutely. Patient trainers can work wonders with even the most recalcitrant dog. Trainers who are impatient and who have a quick flash point will show that bad temper rather quickly, and their dogs rarely become competent or happy trackers.

How can you tell if your dog has a gifted nose? House and park behavior is often a clue. Can he find the one piece of popcorn that fell off the counter? Can he immediately locate the tennis ball you lobbed into the pile of leaves?

How well his nose works is half the story. How he takes to learning is equally important. Does he love learning new games? Is he easy to motivate? Then training for tracking will be twice as easy, and success just about guaranteed. Even if his nose isn't the best thing to come down the pike since sliced bread.

If you haven't seen any aptitude in his day to day routines, don't despair. Start tracking, and that skill may surface with a vengeance. And another killer tracker is born!

In this book you'll find many methods for each aspect of tracking. I *strongly* advise you to consider each idea presented in light of your own experience with your dog. And, within reason, only do what seems comfortable to you.

Choose a method that makes you smile in anticipation, and that you can introduce to your dog with a positive attitude. If there's a suggestion here (or in *any* book) that seems wrong or that you are uncomfortable with or cannot seem to grasp, it will not work for you. Even if it works beautifully for someone else. The reason? Dogs are intuitive, and they *always* know your emotions and thoughts. If you're uncertain, your dog will pick up on that, and since you can't show him clearly and convincingly what you wish, he'll only get confused himself. If you're uncomfortable with the method, he'll pick up on *that*, and why should he conform to something that you obviously don't believe in and aren't doing with authority and confidence? You have to be confident for him to enter happily into something new. You'd never get your six year old to try summer camp if you weren't upbeat in your description and positive in your approach. One note of doubt in your voice, and forget it. He'll be glued to your couch all summer.

Well, have I whetted your interest? Then enough of this introduction. Let's get started!