



Search Tails

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MESARD

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Winter 2009

MESARD Newsletter



Happy New Years

Looking back at the 2008 search year

For MESARD this was a slow year for team deployments, even though Maine Warden Service registered over 400 searches. Most missing person cases are resolved quickly and don't require our services. MESARD was only called in on 19 but with those searches we logged over 16,052 miles and 1,169 man hours. Paul Magoon and Seeker had our only find for the year back in November, way to go Paul! The team remained very busy throughout the year with demos. The team participated in 16 demos for over 267 man hours and over 3,261 miles traveled.

Our hopes for 2009 besides lower fuel prices? Maybe a few more searches but....

"We'll be careful what we wish for."

Sneaky us, On October 19th at Paul's in Harmony, we held a surprise Retirement party after training for our training director, Debbie Palman. She'd retired as a Maine Game Warden in September and we wanted to honor her. What better way to say we care but with food and our great company. After stomping in the woods for the day, we gathered to roast Deb a bit, shower her with gifts and eat lots of good food. Again, Congratulations Deb.



Team training at Harmony



Deb's retirement party

Accidents do happen. At the end of October, Chip Wadsworth, while securing items on her property for winter, fell from a ladder and broke the heel of her right foot. She isn't one to ask for help on her farm but we all offered anyway and thankfully she took us up on a work weekend. Some members could work on a Saturday and for others, Sunday was better. So, November 2nd & 3rd it was. The first group on Saturday consisted of Jennifer F, Michele, Irene, Troy & Beth. They finished harvesting Chips apples for the winter. No need for a ladder with Troy around, no apple was going to stay on the tree long with him doing the shaking. This yielded 8-10 bushels of apples. What they didn't stow, Michele's young puppy Nya ate. Chip saw her devour 3 apples and was wondering how her stomach felt the next day...? On Sunday, Jay and his wife Brenda, Leslie and her husband Mark, Kelly and her daughter Kate arrived. Three cords of wood later, Chip's wood shed was full of split dry firewood. The work was easy when the neighbors brought over warm cookies and fresh Apple cider, it doesn't get any better. Chip remarked how enjoyable it was to have the team together to talk, laugh, eat and relax. We are usually in mission mode, whether it's training or a search. It was nice to just take a breath and enjoy the company.



Jay & Kate loading wood



Kate's a pro at wood hauling



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Our time to enjoy one another



Cold fingers Troy?



The hit of the Party, Jurassic Ice!



Nancy & Dan share a story



The "Infamous Mallard"

November's Northern Maine training was in Bar Harbor on the 9th. Dan gave a demo on how to properly handle a leg hold trap. This is Maine and it's trapping season. Thankfully it's very rare that one of our search K-9's get caught in a trap but it's helpful to understand how the traps work and what to do if your dog does step in one. Dr. David was also at Jennifer's to help the Northern teams work on cadaver. Thanks Doc!

Another team down and out with injury, Quoting Stacey Savoy, "I had a fluke basketball injury". After watching her husband Bruce play basketball we could understand him having that kind of injury, but Stacey? After Thanksgiving, she had ACL surgery which was a success and will be *Out of the Woods* for at least 6 months but we hope to have her back before summer. Leave the basketball to Bruce!

Congratulations to Paul Magoon and Seeker for their find on November 16. The day's plan was for Southern training at Spencer's in Freeport. Instead, teams went to Woodstock for a search. An abandoned vehicle was located that Friday and they called teams in late Saturday after the vehicles owner couldn't be located. Spencer, Paul & Jim conducted a hasty search late on Saturday in the location of the vehicle but with a storm and darkness the decision was to deploy the whole team the next day. Paul had a hunch about the area he'd done the hasty search in and wanted to be deployed in the same area the next day. This time they did a grid search and Seeker found the victim, deceased. With wind changes and improvements in weather, it made it possible for Seeker to work the scent and find the subject.

Also in early November, Michele, Debbie, Irene and Leslie headed to N.B. Canada to assist NB SAR and the RCMP in a missing person case. It rained the whole weekend and the temperature held at 33°F, it would have been better if it had snowed, they wouldn't have gotten so wet. The down side of the trip was Irene's dog Nikka had bloat and a torsion the Monday after she got home. Irene caught it quick and rushed her to Brewer emergency clinic for surgery. Nikka had a piece of bone wedged between her stomach and small intestine. She must have made a snack of a bone in Canada and wasn't able to dissolve it or pass it. We all learned from that experience the importance of the "LEAVE IT" command. Thankfully as of the New Year, Nikka is 100% and back to work.



Michele & Irene in NB

December means Christmas Party Pot Luck, which was held at Jennifer Fisk's home in Bar Harbor. We trained for most of the day. Why is it always so miserable at December's training? The temperatures were in the low teens, with a good breeze off the ocean. It doesn't really matter which direction the winds blows, it's an Island. It's always blowing off the ocean. We worked our usual; cadaver, air scent and tracking. Irene helped with the younger dogs with their obedience, of these, two completed their CGC that day. Congratulations to Kelly & Tycho and Dan & Aggie for passing the CGC. This is the first test the young dogs complete before they can start their certification in air scent. These two join Spirit and Maddy who had also completed the CGC earlier this fall. Look for these talented young dogs to start certifying this coming Spring. After we finished up the afternoons problems, we headed up to Jennifer's warm house and enjoyed all the great food everyone had brought. We look forward each year to Spencer's shrimp and Nancy's crab dip. **Continued on next page 3...**



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This year's hit was Jay's ice. It's not everyday you get to float a piece of Jurassic ice in your orange soda. After we had our fill of food and dessert we held our first ever Christmas Yankee swap. Everyone brought a small gift to share. This wasn't something we had to go out and buy. The rules were simple, something used, search or dog related. Something we didn't need, like or fit. This turned out to be a lot of fun. John & Tonya's gift had our safety in mind. Communications are paramount in the field. We work in very remote areas where radio and cell phones don't often work. Solution, "Patton Co. soup cans & string, including owners manual". Then Jay, another member with a sense of humor, took the word "used" to new heights. Jay's dog Maddy donated a stuffed Mallard Duck, much loved and still stiff with drool. This just made for great fun. Can't wait to see what the team cleans out their closets for next years Yankee Swap. A special thanks to Jennifer Fisk for hosting this event. We bring a mess but do leave behind leftovers.

Kelly hosted training out at Schoodic for the Northern group on January 10. It's always a wonderful venue for us and our dogs. The SERC facilities are safe and our training areas are easy to get to. Dr. David joined us late morning to help with cadaver. We were all thankful he chose the heated barracks to work in. The best sight was Chip who came in two boots. In spite of the limp, she managed to keep up with her new pup Wren. Congratulations to the team of Kelly & Tycho for successfully completing their trail test at this training. This is a hard working pair and we look forward to them being a deployable team in the near future. When we all had finished up and were heading home, the full moon was rising over Schoodic Harbor. The moon's reflection made the water look like liquid ice, stark, and uninviting. It just made the car seem that much warmer.



Chip, Jen and Chilli

Bruce & River,
"What a good dog"

January's Southern Maine training was held in Brunswick on January 17 with Jim Bridge as the host. They had a good turnout, with many northern teams unable to attend Schoodic where able to train this next weekend. With the split trainings every other month, it gives everyone a little more flexibility with what training they can attend. Cold and sunny was the order of the day for Jim's training, single numbers or low teens is all they could squeeze out of the sun but that's an improvement from the beginning of the week when Maine's temps got as low as -50 degrees in Big Black River in the north west corner of Maine, that's too cold! The usual was in order in Brunswick, tracking, air scent, puppy socialization and run-a-ways. Many from the team spent the morning doing their recertification's in CPR & AED given by the Bath Fire Dept. coordinated by Dave Hudson. Highlights of the day were Jim's warm Pea soup, Kathy getting misplaced in the woods and the case of the missing tracking flags. A good day spent.

Gear Review, MSR Lightening Snowshoes

Jim Bridge



Last winter I updated my snowshoes and was very pleased with how the new ones worked. They are metal with a plastic deck like many of the other brands of metal shoes but have a major distinction. Rather than using round tubes for the frame that will slide in the snow and on ice they use a strong metal vertical bar with jagged teeth along the bottom for traction. They also have two cross bars made the same way plus the standard crampons under the toe. The binding which worked well for me last winter is a sturdy rubber that has yet to freeze up on me and adjusts to different boots easily. The two biggest things I like best about them is that they are light and the vertical bar frame and cross members give great traction up and down hill as well while walking along the side of a hill. Last winter showed no wear other than some missing paint. They have a heel rest that will fold up for long uphill walks that I have not used yet. I bought mine at LL Beans but have also seen them at REI and MSR.

See the MSR web site for additional pictures: <http://www.msrgear.com/snowshoes/> They are expensive (\$250 – 300) but are sturdy and effective. JB

Trailing Work with Chris Weeks

By Cindy Attwood, DVM

Last summer, several members Of MESARD had the pleasure of participating in a series of Trailing seminars hosted by VSAR. Our instructor was Chris Weeks, Chris Weeks - began his working dog career in the early 90's, serving in the U.S. Marine Corps as a K9 handler and was assigned as the head trainer at Camp Lejeune during his last two years of service. From 1998 to 2007 he served as a Master Police Officer and K9 handler with the Raleigh NC Police Dept. During his time there he was assigned to patrol K9 duties as well as narcotics and explosive detection roles. Chris spent two years assigned to a narcotics interdiction unit with his dog. He worked for several years as a trainer for a private contractor training police K9's and their handlers for agencies throughout the country. Chris has been working since 2001 as a trainer of search and rescue dogs across the US. He has extensive experience in odor detection, both explosives and narcotics, as well as trailing dogs operations. He currently serves as an instructor for Jonni JOYCE Seminars and is employed as a police officer in New Hampshire.

Though I, myself, missed the first session, I understand that Chris lectured on scent theory and reading the environment, how dogs scent, on and off lead tracking, motivation/rewards and scent articles. In July we did review some of the exercises and "homework" assigned in May. One exercise was designed to help increase the dog's enthusiasm for "taking the scent" .I.E., identifying the scent on an article owned or handled by the track-layer as THE scent to follow. The Wheel exercise involves three or more handlers standing in a large circle, holding their own scent article (SA) and a handful of tasty treats. Each dog gets a turn inside the circle where it is called from one handler to the next. The handler holds their SA at there body with their treats carefully positioned behind the SA while calling the dog with an enthusiastic tone. The idea being that the dog comes to the SA, is given its command for "taking scent" and upon making contact with his nose is then praised heartily and given the food treat. The dog gets many repetitions as he is called from one handler to the next.

A second exercise which we worked on for the rest of the sessions was "Finding the Start". Fairly self explanatory: after presenting the SA, the handler brings the dog to the PLS and asks the dog to trail, so the dog must pick up the correct scent and determine the correct direction of travel from that point.

A third exercise was designed to start training the dog to work through a contaminated area. The exercise was set up so the dog could start in an uncontaminated area, work for a short distance then come upon an area where more than one persons besides the track layer had walked all through the area first, then the track layer had walked over the contamination in a relatively straight line. We started and ended most of these tracks in a more wooded area and did the contaminated piece in a grassy area in between. The contaminated area was not very wide, maybe 20 or 30 yards, so the dog was likely to succeed the first few tries and get rewarded with the trail getting easier before she found her subject.

The last exercise which we worked on in that second session was a scent discrimination exercise Chris calls "splits". Two people walk down the trail. Person A leaves their scent article for the dog and handler. Person A exits the trail at a 45 degree angle (early in the training, later that angle will increase [at the beginning]), ideally with the wind direction and goes off a short ways ~20 yards. Person B continues another 20 or 30 yards and goes off trail with the wind at a 90 degree angle. Once the dog is proficient at this (and the hope is that they'll fail a time or 2 so we know they're learning scent discrimination and not just "lucky") we can start to make it more challenging, changing the order of person A and B or the elapsed time, etc.

For the third session we reviewed and practiced what we covered before and then concentrated on urban trailing problems. Chris took us for a walk downtown and we walked around buildings and through alleys and out onto rail lines and out buildings and felt air currents and the temperature of the walls and talked about what effects the architectures and cars and air currents and vegetation and temperature changes had on did to the scent. I found it very worthwhile and helpful before actually watching the dogs work in the city.

For our fourth and last session we were each given **one** "real life" scenario. Each handler and dog team had a team of flankers to work with and Chris set up a trailing problem, either wilderness or urban, for the team to work out, using all of the tips we had learned and practiced. It was, for the most part, great fun and experience.

I found the sessions with Chris to be unique from previous seminars I had participated in. I have found the exercises which he had us do to be useful "building blocks" both for me and my dog and I would recommend him to any one interested in trailing.

Welcome “Winter Wren”



On the weekend of November 8th, Chip traveled down to Connecticut to pick up her new German Shepherd puppy. Chip was in a cast and still dealing with pain but her puppy was 8 weeks old and ready for her new home. The team encouraged her to get her puppy and deal with the difficulty of the cast, crutches and puppy underfoot when it came up. She agreed that a young puppy isn't that much trouble and puppies sleep a lot anyways (she hoped). She had received a grant from “Search and Rescue Foundation, Inc.” in early summer and took the time to research breeders before she chose Jody Potter of Windsor, CT. Jody breeds German Shepherds for the Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation. They are a non profit organization in Connecticut, training dogs for the visually impaired. The Fidelco dog is renowned and was created from Bavarian working lines. Characteristics of the Fidelco dogs are Intelligence, Temperament, Stamina and Stability. Those are also the traits that make a terrific search & rescue dog. This was going to be the last litter this particular female was going to have and at 8yrs old she was still going strong. She was in good health, without the host of GSD problems that plague the breed in their later years. This was one of the deciding factors for Chip in choosing this litter of pups.



As of the New Year, Chip's out of her cast and Wren is on the go. They have been out socializing and will start basic obedience classes soon. At 16 weeks, she's already nose at work and a pro at puppy run-a-ways. We wish this team a long and successful search career.



Leadership, Obedience, and Working Dog Teams

By Deborah Palman

I have read many articles about leadership and obedience and their relationship to dog training. They all mention the same ideas about dog packs, dominance and submission, etc. Until the last few years, I didn't fully understand how important the leadership of the handler was to the performance of working dog teams. A recent training session with some narcotics detection teams helped me to understand more about how the handler's taking or not taking a leadership position affects the dog's performance. Being a proper leader allows a handler to get the most out of a working dog and makes working, training, and living with the dog easier and more productive. I hope that my explanation of the subject can help handlers to understand why leadership and some sort of obedience training are essential to any type of working dog team.

What is Leadership in a Dog Team?

Dogs are "hard wired" or genetically programmed to exist in a pack. They are social animals that live in groups and establish a hierarchy within the pack. There are dominant dogs that strive to be higher in the pack and submissive dogs that are happy where they end up. There are pack leaders that all the dogs respect because they act in a calm and confident manner, help to establish order, and lead the pack to "good things" like food, shelter, security, etc.

In a human-dog pack, or K-9 team, the dog seeks to establish ranking. Some submissive and/or "naturally obedient" dogs will automatically submit to the handler and be attentive to the handler's moods and actions. These dogs require a fair and careful leader who does not damage the dog's motivation by confusing or correcting the dog unfairly. Other working dogs, especially those bred to do apprehension or protection work, tend towards the dominant side. Dominance does not always mean "handler aggression" or a direct, aggressive expression of fighting with the handler; it also means that the dog manipulates the handler. Some of the "nicest" or "sweetest" dogs are dominant, "world-class" people manipulators who have learned to get their own way without an overt fight.

A working dog handler has to take the leadership position in the pack. If they do not, a dominant dog will push to be the leader, and sometimes even a submissive dog will feel he has to take the leadership position because the handler does not. Often the submissive dog doesn't want to be leader, but dogs quickly sense a leadership vacuum and try to fill it. Alarm barking is an example of a dog that lacks confidence taking a leadership position. In alarm barking, the dog notices something and barks to alert the handler or other dogs because the dog doesn't feel confident enough to handle the situation himself. The dog is being a leader by alerting the rest of the pack that a possible threat exists.

Why Obedience Training?

Traditional obedience training teaches the dog simple behaviors like sit, down, stay in one place, come, and heel. Teaching these behaviors allows the handler to communicate to the dog how the dog should behave. Teaching behaviors that can be easily assessed for correctness of performance teaches the dog that if he complies with the commands, he will get a reward, and if he does not comply, there will be consequences. Consequences are usually that a reward is withheld, a reward is removed, or discomfort is applied to the dog. The commands and the methods used to teach basic commands also create a line of communication between the dog and handler.

Unlike people, a dog cannot act different than it feels. So, if the dog complies with commands willingly and without extra help from the handler, the dog becomes submissive to the handler in that context. In other words, if the dog complies with the command exactly as he has been taught, the handler is the leader at that point. If the handler keeps enforcing these basic commands in training, at work, at home and in many contexts, the dog will become submissive to the handler because the dog will be "internally" programmed to be submissive by complying with the commands. The real power of this leadership relationship is that the dog will be submissive to the handler when the handler cannot readily see or measure the results, such as in scent work. Thus, the tracking dog who is submissive to his handler will "get back to work" when the handler tells him to, and, over time and with training, learn to continuously follow the track and ignore distractions because the dog will understand this is what the handler wants. The narcotics detector dog will not be distracted by animal scents when working because he has been trained that his handler is the leader and his leader doesn't want him to sniff animals when he is looking for narcotics.

For patrol dogs, if they are programmed to follow the handler commands before they start apprehension training, apprehension "control work" becomes another obedience context with the bite equipment and decoy as the reward. Teams have problems with apprehension work when handlers think they are the leader but they are not. The handler is the leader when the dog complies nearly 100% with all commands in all contexts. Being the leader does not mean that the dog does good obedience on the training field but doesn't listen around the house, or jumps out of the car without a command when told to stay there. To really get and keep control in apprehension work, the dog must be 100% compliant in other contexts, or the handler's leadership is incomplete or eroding.

Establishing Communication and Leadership

Puppies and untrained dogs have to be managed carefully because handlers don't have a way to communicate with them. Training, informal and formal, establishes communication and leadership. The foundations of human-dog communication for training purposes are two signals, usually verbal. One signal tells the dog "what you JUST DID IS what I want" and one signal tells the dog "what you just did is NOT what I want." Like the "red light – green light" game kids play, these basic signals should guide the dog through training.

Dogs communicate non-verbally. They are genetically programmed to follow non-verbal signals before they notice verbal signals. The verbal "Yes!" and "No" signals need to be taught, and they need to be used consistently. The handler has to train himself to use these signals exclusively and be aware of how non-verbal signals (hand in the pocket to retrieve a ball, toys appearing, food treats being produced, etc.) affect training communication. Other non-verbal signals include facial expressions, body carriage, muscles stiffness, immobility, etc. Handlers need to be aware of what they are doing. This is why trainers who observe training are important to the team's learning process.

"Yes!" is established by pairing a reward with the signal. "No" can be taught by either making the reward or opportunity go away after "No," or by pairing the "No" with physical punishment. Making the reward go away or negative reinforcement is the best way to teach "No" and enforce commands because it doesn't involve physical pain or struggle. The handler has to convince the dog he is the one from whom all good things come, and that he controls all the good things and can take them away at any time if the dog does not comply.

Doggie "Good Things"

Handlers have control of many things they don't realize are valuable to dogs. If the dog is on lead, the handler controls where the dog goes and whether the dog has access to or gets closer or farther away from things the dog values. Doors and gates control access to good things. Doggie good things include obvious things like meals, treats, toys, apprehensions and play with the handler. Doggie good things also include less obvious things like a bush to urinate on, access to the outdoors, access to the indoors or a new place to explore, access to place to sleep, access to where meals are served, access to a car, access to another dog playmate, petting, the opportunity to train, etc. If handlers spend time watching their dogs, they will see what the dog values and wants. All these activities can then become a reward for compliance with an obedience command.

This is why basic obedience trainers stress that dogs need to learn to sit at the door to be let outside, wait in a crate or car before being allowed to get out, etc. It is not just to avoid accidents when the dog rushes by, but to impress on the dog that the handler is the leader. Each time the dog pushes by, or barks, pushes and rages at a door to be let out, the dog is taking the leadership position and, if the handler lets the dog out, the handler is being submissive to the dog. Asking for a simple sit or stay teaches the dog the command with a ready reward that can be produced (the dog is let out) or denied (the door remains shut or is closed before the dog can get out) according to the dog's actions. Getting the dog's compliance at the gate or door reinforces the handler's leadership in that context. Reinforcing the handler's leadership in many contexts eventually causes the dog to accept the handler's leadership in all contexts.

All dogs push their handlers for good things. They stare at the dog food bowl on the counter. They nudge their handlers when they want petting. They drop the ball on the floor or in the handler's lap when they want to play. If the handler always responds to these actions automatically without awareness of what the dog is doing, they are allowing the dog to be a leader. All they need to do to turn the situation into a leadership-enforcing situation is to ask the dog to do something for the meal, petting, or play. It can be as simple and quick as a sit, or a whole obedience routine. If the dog does not comply, the dog doesn't get what he wants. If the dog solicits again, the handler asks for a sit again. Eventually the dog will sit to get what he wants when he realizes he won't get it without complying. Handlers have to be aware of how the dog manipulates them and out-manipulate the dog.

What is Compliance?

In training, the dog gets a reward for compliance with the handler's commands. Exactly what is "compliance" depends on the dog's level of training. A beginning dog would get a reward for just sitting on command. An intermediate dog would have to show a faster sit and sit properly. An advanced dog might do a number of fast, correct sits to get a reward, and or sit fast and properly in the presence of strong distractions. What the handler expects of the dog depends on the context.

One rule of leadership is that the handler has to have some criteria or expectation that is consistent with the dog's level of training and stick to those criteria. If the handler knows the dog knows the command and rewards a lesser level of performance when the dog isn't really trying, then the dog starts to take over leadership. Dominant dogs will test their handlers. You can almost see them thinking "I won't sit today and I will see what he does about it." If no consequences result, the dog will think, "I don't always have to sit," and handler leadership will erode. The handler must always have criteria and must always resort to some sort of consequence if the dog does not comply. At the very least, the handler needs to give the "No" signal to put the dog on notice that the handler is aware of the refusal, even if the handler can't address the situation right then. To continue this article visit:

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