

Bloodtracking

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Equipment

You will need several pieces of equipment and supplies to train for blood tracking. These are a blood tracking lead, a blood tracking collar, spray bottles, two or three gallons of blood from a cow, hog or deer, surveyor's marker tape, a rug or towel, meat and a deer or deer hide.

The blood tracking lead is required to be at least six meters long. A lead any longer becomes a hindrance and makes it difficult for the handler to work with the dog. I recommend that you find a lead that is made of leather. Heavy nylon rope works. However, from my observations of other handlers that use nylon rope, it does not seem to slide around trees as easily and as it ages becomes more difficult to use. Leather seems to slide around trees and obstacles with much less difficulty.

The blood tracking lead should also have a snap that locks in place. If the snap does not lock in place the chances are good that as the dog tracks through the brush the snap will hit something and release the dog, ruining your blood tracking efforts and score.

The blood tracking collar should be wide and loose to ensure that you do not choke your dog as it pulls you through the woods on the blood tracking lead. The material that the collar is made from is not as important as the size of the collar. The collar should be 2 - 2 1/2" wide, be big enough to slide easily over your dog's head without unbuckling and then hang loosely from the neck.

Spray bottles are needed to lay the blood track. Use bottles with an adjustable spray pattern or shoot a stream of liquid. A straight stream is easier to control when laying the track and the spot of blood it produces on the ground is easier to see when you are working your dog.

Blood can normally be obtained from a butcher, once you explain what you are going to do with it. A single steer will yield 3-4 gallons of blood. After preparing this raw blood for the spray bottles you will have 2-3 gallons of usable blood.

When you get your blood it will come out of the steer as a liquid. Within a few minutes this liquid will turn into a large spongy clot of coagulated blood. To prepare the blood you must break this clot up. Using your hand, squeeze the clot into smaller and smaller pieces until you can no longer "grab" any more of the blood. Pour the blood through a vegetable collander and into a bowl to filter out the largest chunks of clot. The clots you catch can be thrown down the sink or thrown back into the bucket for more squeezing.

After you have filtered the blood through the colander filter it again through a clean dish rag. This will remove the smallest clots. If these clots are not removed the spray bottle will quickly clog up when you are laying the blood track. Pour the filtered blood into a spray bottle, about 3/4 full,

and place in the freezer. Any additional blood can be stored in plastic milk jugs and placed in the freezer.

Surveyor's marker tape is used to mark the blood trail. This makes training your dog much easier since it is easy to tell when he gets off the track. This allows you to watch and read your dog, instead of looking for blood as your dog pulls you through the woods.

Meat is the dog's reward for successfully completing a blood track. It is the only time he gets more than praise from you for performing a task. The meat does not have to be a T-bone, bologna or hot dogs work well.

For the purpose of training it is much easier to use a deer hide than a deer. Even a small deer quickly becomes heavy if it must be carried very far. It is also difficult to get in and out of a freezer if it has any size at all. However, a tanned deer hide has lost much of its smell, which is important to the dog's recognition of the game and incentive to reach the game.

A good compromise between the two is to use a green hide and a five gallon bucket. Wrap the green hide around the bucket and attach it with drywall screws through the wall of the bucket. This way you have the smell of the deer, the mass of a deer without the weight, and a handle to carry it with. This is also much easier to store in the freezer and takes up less room than most deer.

Laying a Blood Track

The blood tracking training begins by-marking the trail with the surveyor's tape. Do not be cheap with the tape. Tie a piece to a tree every five to ten yards if necessary. Your training will be much easier on you and your dog if you can clearly see the next piece of tape ahead of you and the one behind you. If your dog begins to wander off the track you will know almost immediately and be able to correct quickly.

Especially at first, do not put a lot of bends in the track. A straight line makes training a lot easier on you and the dog. As your dog progresses and the tracks become longer begin putting one or two turns in the track. Also avoid unnecessary hindrances such as thickets or down trees until later in training. Such places not only require turns, but also hold other smells that may be more enticing than the blood, such as songbirds and squirrels. As competency increases, start putting these hindrances in the track.

Begin the blood track by kicking up the ground debris in a two foot diameter circle. Spray this circle with several squirts of blood. Apply enough to cover the area of the circle, but do not saturate the area. Approximately six to ten squirts will be adequate. Each squirt should be a stream of blood, not a fog or mist. This is important, because it allows you to control the placement of the track and focuses all of the smell in one place. This forces your dog to follow a defined track.

Once the bed is laid start walking down the trail you have marked. Each time your right foot hits the ground put out one squirt of blood in front of you. In the beginning be consistent on where

you aim the blood. It also helps you read the dog and stay on the track if you pass every piece of survey tape on the same side of your body. This also reduces the chance of error when correcting or helping your dog. As training progresses, begin varying the distance you shoot the blood ahead of you, forcing the dog to concentrate and work for the track. Also, occasionally move the bottle so the stream is spread out along the line of the track, instead of a solid spot.

As training progresses and the tracks become longer, eventually reaching 400 meters, put in a second blood bed at approximately 200 meters down the track.

Training For The Blood Tracking

The training regimen for blood tracking varies from dog to dog. Some dogs take to it enthusiastically and without any problems. Others show little interest in blood tracking and need some additional training procedures, a lot of praise, and a lot of successful tracks to become a competent blood tracker. You cannot use force to teach a dog to blood track. It requires calm and concentration on your part. Similar to good water work, blood tracking is something the dog must want to do, in order to do it well.

Prior to beginning the training, introduce your dog to the deer hide or frozen deer. Encourage him to smell it. DO NOT let him pick it up, chew on it or play with it. You just want him to be familiar with it.

To begin blood tracking training lay a track approximately 50 meters long. Let it stand for 30 minutes. In the beginning distance and difficulty are not important. What you want to accomplish is teaching the dog to concentrate on the task at hand and ensure that this experience ends in complete success. If you are using a deer hide, then carry it with you and leave it at the end of the track.

If you are using a frozen deer or deer hide then put it out a few minutes prior to bringing your dog to the blood track. This is done to minimize the thawing of your deer which will reduce its usefulness as it begins to break down. Come in from the back side of the blood track or a path that is parallel to the track but some distance away. Do not leave another, fresher trail for the dog to get on.

Heel the dog up to a few feet short of the blood bed. Take the collar off the dog and slip the blood tracking collar, with the lead attached, over your dog's head. Never train without the blood tracking collar. The dog will quickly learn that the collar means blood tracking and help both of you focus on the task at hand.

Bring your dog up to the bed and give the down and stay command. Encourage the dog to smell the blood and the bed. As the dog shows interest start putting some excitement in your voice and praise the dog. I also like to say "blood, blood" at this time so the dog learns what it is I am looking for. This pays off later in training when your dog gets off the track or becomes distracted.

Keep the dog in the stay position and walk down the blood track approximately 15 meters. With your hand, rub the ground around a blood spot and repeat "blood, blood". Do not let your dog move from the stay position. However, do not be overly forceful if the dog moves. You do not want to discourage the dog from the blood in any way, but you do require obedience.

Go back to the dog, pick up the lead, and give the command to track. Do not let the dog lunge away. Keep a short lead and encourage the dog to go slowly and patiently. Read the dog. If it has its nose down and is obviously working slowly let out more lead. If the dog is having problems you may have to stay right with the dog and point to every spot of blood. Encourage the dog by repeating "blood, blood" occasionally, and give lots of praise in a subdued voice.

Keep the dog under control. It should walk, not run, down the track. The dog is required to calmly track. If the dog is pulling you through the woods and you must break a walk to keep up it may have its score reduced, especially if it isn't a picture perfect performance. Do not break the dog, however. While tracking it is expected to keep a tight lead. If the dog pulls to much just set your feet and let him drag your dead weight through the woods.

Watch the survey tape you have marked the trail with. Rely on the tape to determine if your dog is on the track rather than looking for blood. If your dog gets off the track give him a few seconds to correct himself. When the dog comes back to the track on his own give lots of praise and repeat "blood, blood". Do not stop the dog to give this praise, just keep on tracking.

If the dog is off the track and does not come back then give the whoa command. Drop the lead, leaving your dog on whoa, and go back to the blood track. Make a show of looking for the blood and act like you are searching. Go to where the dog got off the track and rub the ground near a blood spot. Then go back to your dog and heel him to that spot. Start the blood track again. Each time your dog gets off the track repeat this step.

When you and your dog reach the deer make a big show. Do not let your dog grab the deer. Make your dog sit and give him bits of meat for a reward. Each time you give a piece of meat say "blood, blood".

As training progresses you should learn to read your dog's actions. This will tell you what your dog is doing and thinking. This becomes very important at a test when there is nothing to mark the trail you are working. The following are general rules. If the dog makes a sharp turn then it has begun tracking something that has crossed the blood track, such as a turkey, rabbit or squirrel. If the dog starts tracking with its head up it has either lost the track or has winded something else. If the dog starts winding around trees and is not following a straight line then the trail has made a turn, which the dog missed, or the track has become sparse, which may require you to stop the dog and calm him. You may even have to find the track and help him line it out again or back track to the last place blood was seen and start again.

If a dog has problems with these early efforts on the blood track then you need to do a couple of things. First, do not lose your cool and get on your dog. This will set your blood track training back considerably, and may discourage the dog from ever blood tracking efficiently.

Second, when you lay the blood track, drag a duck behind you while you lay the blood track. This will encourage your dog to keep its head down and at least stay on the track. As the training progresses, start dragging the duck for ten steps and carrying it for ten steps. The dog will quickly learn to start following the blood and the intermittent duck scent will hold his attention. Shortly, you will not need the duck and the dog will know what the blood is all about.

As your training progresses start making the tracks longer in distance and time. Also begin putting in turns and hindrances, such as ditches and downfalls. Do not avoid the rain, as it often rains at test time. It isn't any fun training in the rain but it is even less fun failing a test in the rain.

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