



# FACT SHEET

## Delaware County Community Emergency Response Team Supplemental Training Series

### INTRODUCTION TO WILDERNESS SEARCH & RESCUE

#### Section IX—Tracking & Clue Consciousness

##### Qualities of a Good Tracker

- Patience
- An inquisitive mind
- Honesty
- Perseverance
- Good observation skills
- Honed senses
- Endurance
- Good field craft skills
- Mental and physical determination
- Knowledge of fauna and flora
- Curiosity

##### Definitions and Terminology

- Track or Print: An impression left from the passage of a person;
  - Complete
  - Partial
  - Identifiable
- Tracking: Following signs or tracks left by someone or something.
- Sign: Any evidence of change from the natural state that is inflicted on an environment by a person's passage.
- Sign cutting: Looking for sign in order to establish a starting point from which to track.

**DOCUMENT YOUR CLUES**—Facts are forgotten if they are not documented!

##### Clue Consciousness

- A major job of field personnel
- Today's approach to search is dependent on the detection of clues.
- There are more clues than subjects.
- Detection of clues reduces the search area.
- Good clue seeking is learned.
- This skill must be practiced frequently.
- Avoid forming an opinion and then gathering information to support that opinion.

- Know what to do when/if a clue is found before entering the field.
- Clue detection is based on a unique combination of the characteristics of:
  - The sensor (searcher)
  - The search object (subject or clue generator)
  - The environment

##### Clue Orientation

- Changing any variable could affect how easy or difficult an object is to detect.
- Effective sweep width is the term used to describe this measure of detectability.
- Sweep width.
  - A function of the combination of the three described characteristics.
  - A measurement of effectiveness.

##### Handling Evidence

- How field personnel handle evidence can have a significant impact on the
- outcome of the search and any potential investigation.
- Proper processing of discovered evidence is essential.
- As clues are discovered, they must be interpreted and acted upon.
- Clues must be handled in such a way so as to facilitate all search efforts and to preserve evidence for subsequent investigation.
- Plan for the discovery and processing of clues and evidence.
- The place to do this is at the assignment briefing.
- What to establish about the discovery of evidence at the briefing:
  - How should it be recorded?
  - How should it be protected?
  - Act on it or simply report in about it?
  - What to do if confronted with two trails?
  - How to manage discarded evidence?
- Situations where evidence may be encountered:
  - Crash scenes
  - Human remains
  - Injury/illness



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##### Crash Scenes

- Proceed with caution: Safety of personnel is paramount! – If the smell of spilled fuel is strong, approach from uphill and upwind. Stabilize the scene and mitigate hazards.
- Establish which subjects are alive and/or dead.
- Establish a security perimeter.
- Handle any evidence as determined in the briefing.
- Document, photograph, sketch, and protect all pertinent evidence.

##### Human Remains

- Even when circumstances seem obvious, often an investigation must ensue.
- Establish if subjects are deceased.
- Emergency care supersedes evidence protection.
- Observe the scene and look for clues, evidence, or indications of what might have happened.
- SAR personnel may be required to make a written statement.
- Do not search deceased for identification unless directed to do so by authority having jurisdiction.
- When possible, have a witness to activities conducted at scene.

##### Tracks or Prints

- Complete: The entire impression is visible
- Partial: Not visible in its entirety
- Identifiable: Whether complete or partial, it has at least one characteristic that differentiates it from others similar to it

##### Sign

- For signs to be of any use, they must be discovered.
- A walking person leaves sign approximately every 18-20 inches or over 3000 times per mile.
- The novice tracker may see plenty of relevant sign but disregard it as insignificant.

##### Sign Cutting

- Performed by traveling perpendicular to the direction of travel of the person being followed
- Looking for sign in a path that would intersect that of the person who laid the track
- Can substantially reduce the search area by detecting sign that indicates direction of travel
- Areas particularly good for finding signs:
  - Wet sand
  - Mud
  - Soft dirt
  - Snow

##### Track Traps

- Natural track traps or “cuttable” areas: Areas where you would find wet sand, mud, soft dirt, snow
- Manmade track traps are made by scraping an area clean so as to show sign easily.

##### Jump Tracking

- A form of tracking that involves finding a big, obvious footprint, then proceeding along the presumed direction of travel until another obvious track is found.
- Involves guesswork, luck, no skill and can be dangerous when a life depends on skillful tracking.

##### Step-by-Step Tracking

- A disciplined teaching system
- A tracker sees each step in sequence.
- Proceeds no further than the last visible track
- Uses stride to determine where next to look for sign
- Makes searchers of all type “clue conscious” and “track aware”



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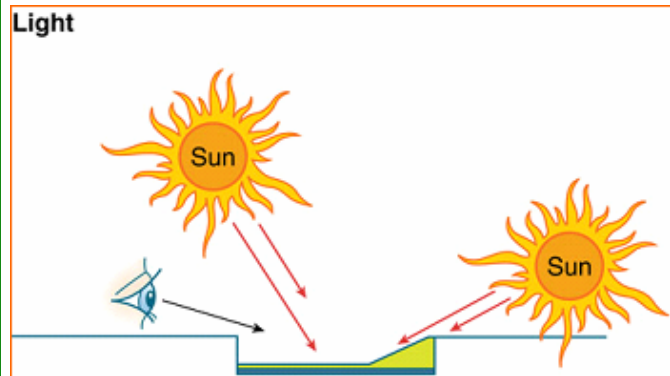
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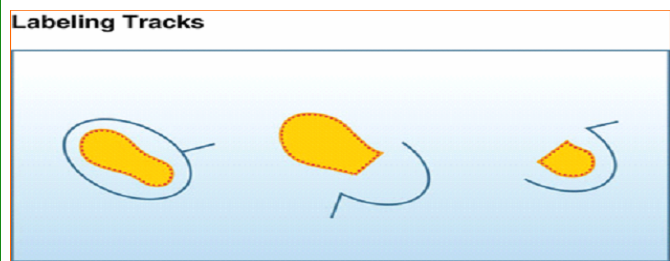
##### Light

- Tracking is an intensely visual skill, so light plays an important role.
- Tracking is far simpler when the light is of the proper intensity and from the right direction.
- When learning to track, using the sun properly is one of the most important things to learn.
- Tracks are easier to see when the sun is at a low angle.
  - Early in the morning
  - Late in the afternoon
- Low angle causes longer shadows that bring out the details of any depression on the ground.



##### Labeling Tracks

- Tracks should be marked in two ways:
  - Indicate whether they are right or left.
  - Circle them if they are full identifiable.
- Use the sign cutting stick to etch a semicircle to the rear of the track.
- By marking the last print, the tracker can immediately tell which (left or right) should be next.



### The Tracking Team

- A common approach is the three-person team or crew:
  - One Point Person
  - Two Flankers
- The three-person team setup offers several advantages.
  - Allows for consultation in difficult situations.
  - Builds confidence, reduced errors, and benefits students.
  - Allows rotation of the Point Person.
  - Allows the team to split up if several trails diverge.

### Tracking Crew

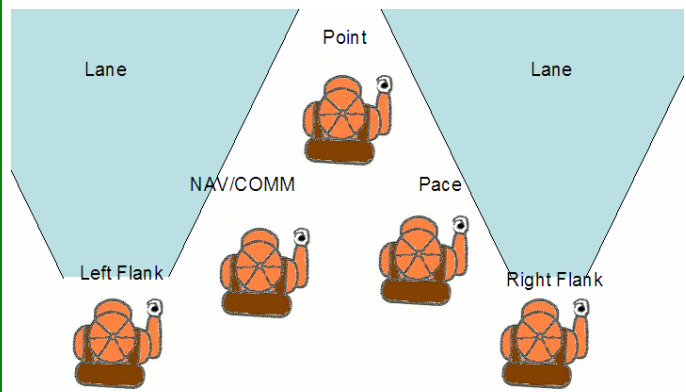
- The “flanking” crewmembers NEVER goes past the “point” person.
- Requires the ability to focus, concentrate, good eyes and patience!

### Point Person

- Stays just behind the last track found.
- Uses a sign cutting stick to search for the next track.
- Keeps flankers from obliterating signs by getting ahead.
- Coordinates efforts of team.

### Flankers

- Watch the side for incoming tracks that might confuse the situation.
- Watch for a sudden turn of the trail being followed.
- Help the Point find the next track being followed.





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Document your track data

- A. Length of print
- B. Length of Heel
- C. Width of Ball
- D. Width of Heel
- E. Distance between prints

