

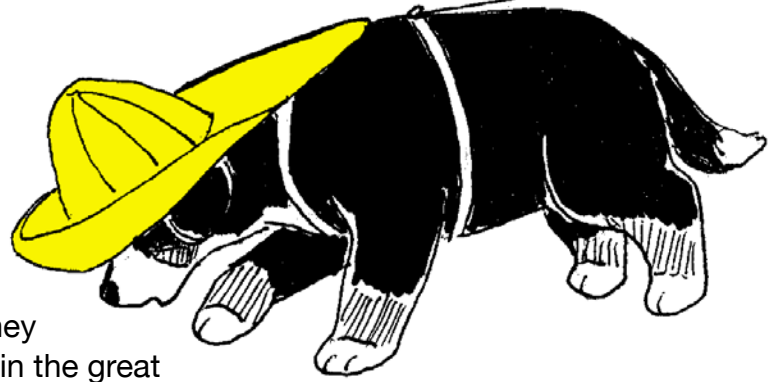
A Glimpse At AKC Tracking

by April Rifenburg

Tracking is a form of Scent Work

Tracking is a sport that Bernese love for they are using their scent discrimination instinct in the great outdoors. People love it as well, especially after they witness their Berner's enjoyment in using this uncanny ability. Tracking training eventually involves lots of walking and is a healthful activity for both ends of the leash. All dogs can track, and Bernese are especially good at it. And Bernese love to have a job to do!

The dog is taught to follow a human scent to find a "lost article" of that person, generally a leather glove or billfold. An AKC Tracking Dog (TD) title is awarded to dogs that pass at an AKC regulation test. To earn a TD, the dog is required to be certified by passing a regulation track with a judge. Then, the dog and handler must pass at an AKC tracking test. The requirements for a TD are that the track be 440 to 500 yards in length, have three to five right angle turns, be aged from 30 minutes to 2 hours, and that the dog indicate the article. The handler may not guide the dog in any way.



What does a spectator see at a tracking test?

- At an appointed time, the exhibitors draw for tracks in the presence of one or both judges. The draw determines the track order. Meanwhile, track layers are "laying" the tracks.
- On judges order, the handler and dog approach the starting flag. Most handlers usually put the tracking harness and line on the dog a short distance before this starting flag. The handler indicates the start to the dog, then commands the dog to begin tracking. Usually the command is "Find It" or "Go Find."
- For the TD track there is a second flag 30 yards along the track. As the dog searches for the track direction, the handler remains behind the start flag so as not to foul the track at this point in case the dog needs to be restarted. As the dog begins to pick up the track scent, his head goes down and he pulls into the harness. Off they go! When they pass the 30 yard stake, the two judges begin to follow the team a distance behind.
 - The dog must sort out a myriad of various scents and distractions to focus on the human scent trail he is following. When the dog reaches a turn, his head often comes up and he may need to search for the new direction. When he locates the new direction, his head will go down as he scents along the new leg. Wind and weather influence track conditions.
 - The handler follows behind his dog, holding the lead behind the marked 20 foot position. The line is up to 40 feet in length to allow the dog to search for the track if necessary.
 - If the dog indicates loss of track, the handler stands still especially if he knows he is on the track. This allows the dog to search in the correct area. The handler can back up if necessary using slack line. It is important that the handler knows where the track leg is behind him for such situations.

It is a very happy and emotional moment when the dog finds the article at the end of the track. The sport of tracking is a joy for dog, owner, judges, track layers, and all the people involved in putting on the test. There is nothing quite like it.