

TRACKING

“If you don’t know where the track is, how do you expect to help the dog find it?”

STEP I. Scent Pads **ONLY!**

Under PUPPIES, there is a contrasting plan to tracking then noted here. This one is the preferred method.

There are a variety of ways to begin tracking.

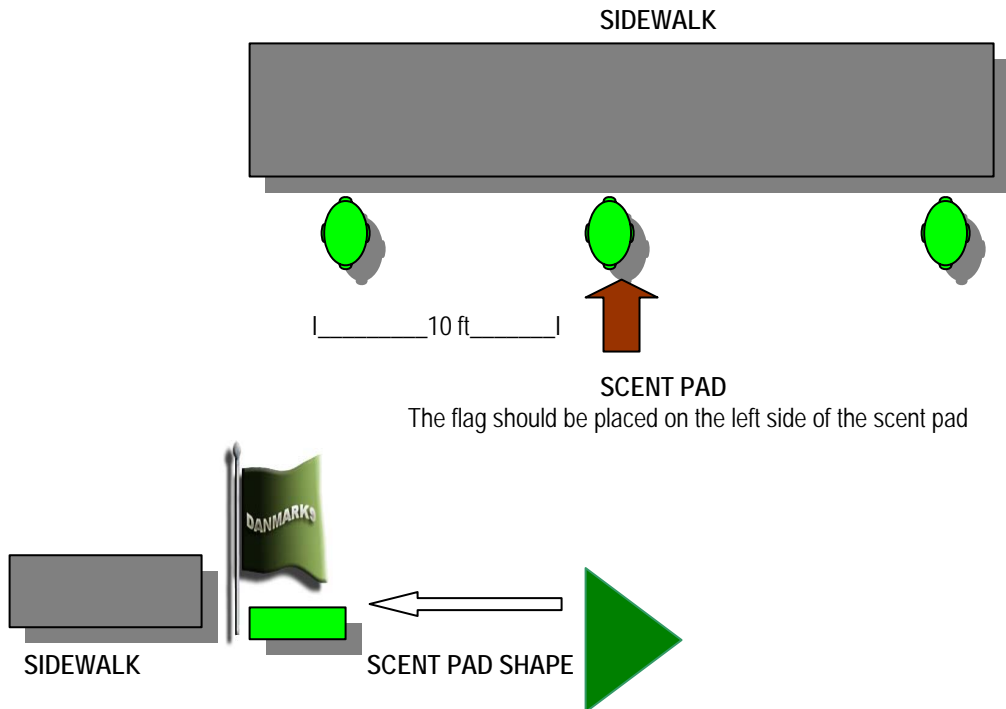
- Heavily scuffing of ground at start. Track laid with wind to handlers back
- Tracklayer shows dog toy and then lays the track, leaving toy at the end and returning to beginning
- Food placed in each footprint and large amount of food at the end
- Dog sees a person run off and within a few minutes the dog begins the track

After years of tracking exercises, I started to conclude that some of the program was incompatible with what I wanted to teach the dog. In most instances the dogs rarely cared about the start, they only wanted to get to the end.

My first objective is to teach the puppy that the (the scent pad) is just as important as what lies at the end. For the introductory lesson we do 3 scent pads. If the puppy does well we go to Step II.

SCENT PAD: 3
FLAG: One by each scent pad
FOOD: 3 pieces in each
DISTANCE: 6 -10 feet apart
EQUIPMENT: 6 foot lead

Ideally you would start where there is a sidewalk. This way you can step off the sidewalk and create the scent pads and then step back on without walking to the next place you are going to start.



The scent pad is about 18 inches across. It has been suggested that it should be in the shape of a triangle because the top half will 'funnel' the dog into the actual track, which you start in Step II. The corners of triangle also lend themselves as convenient points to place food.

FIRST PRINCIPLE. The Scent Pad defines the point in which the puppy should begin to work. The puppy should be allowed enough time to take a leak and settle down, BEFORE it starts training

STEP II.

You should not have to repeat Step I more than a couple times before the puppy will quickly recognize that numerous flags, set a short distance apart are where it wants to go. I do not recommend doing tracks into the wind, because it will bring the puppies head up. Using the wind to your back or training when there is as little wind as possible is better in the beginning; you should lay your tracks in lush grass. At this point, I do not recommend tracks laid in the snow or soil which would leave a well defined footprint. The dog will look for the footprints if it is available.

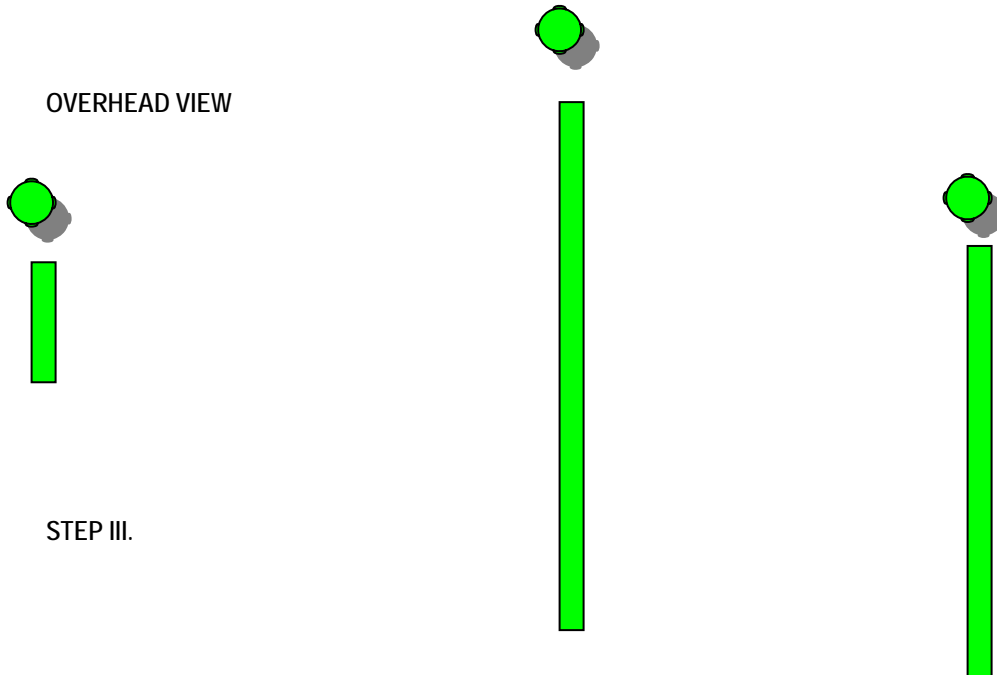
Step II is when you actual start with short tracks. Use the same setup as before, flags and scent pad with food. Preferably do this before the puppy's meal, not afterwards. Do this at least three times in a one week. If the puppy is doing well go to Step III.

- TRACKS: 3
- DENSITY: Scuffing
- FLAG: One by each scent pad
- FOOD: About every twelve inches
- DISTANCE: Variable lengths, maximum fifteen feet
- LEAD: Six foot
- AGE: 5 minutes



SECOND PRINCIPLE. We establish a routine what the scent pad means but we never establish a routine length for the tracks. One track may be long, the next one shorter, then the next two are long.

OVERHEAD VIEW



STEP III.

Increasing the track length and age of track. You will track at least three times in a week

TRACKS:3
DENSITY: Light scuffing
FLAG: One by each scent pad
FOOD: About every twelve inches
DISTANCE: Variable lengths, maximum thirty feet
LEAD: Six foot
AGE: 10 minutes

THIRD PRINCIPLE. Until you get to STEP V, try to evenly space the food drops. The puppy will quickly understand that tracking means food and is *expecting* the food drops to be only so far away. When I didn't follow this principle I could see the dog searching and if the next drop was too far apart, the head would come up. If I spaced them correctly, he would keep his head down and just about the time he might have raised his head, he found the next one.

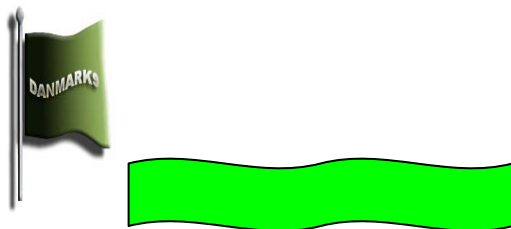
When to start to place them randomly, really depends on the puppy but you are looking for the head to mostly stay down and continuously searching. If the head keeps coming up, or the puppy stops and just looks back at you, while then he hasn't gotten the idea yet.

Tracking is best done under the guidance of an experienced handler. While food is a great incentive it can be overused or used too long. Our goal is to orient the puppy to the tracking scent and not the food.

STEP IV.

Increasing track length and age of track and adding a slight curve. You will be doing tracking three times this week.

TRACKS:2
DENSITY: Regular footstep
FLAG: One by scent pad
FOOD: About every two feet
SHAPE: Slight curves
LENGTH: 50 feet
AGE: 20 minutes



FOURTH PRINCIPLE. Control the puppies tracking pace in the beginning so you don't have to later. Do NOT allow them to run down the track. Yes, you can control their speed without losing their enthusiasm. It is for this reason that you use a short, 6 foot lead. You can use a six foot rope with a snap lead on the end if you want. If puppies I don't use a harness.

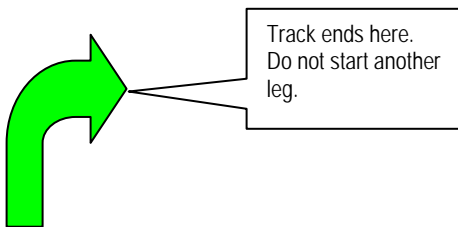
FIFTH PRINCIPLE. You could actually start your first lessons with the scent pads in your front lawn. After that I like to take them to a place that we will continue to go back to and I accomplish two things by doing this. First, the pup quickly learns what he is suppose to do when he arrives at the tracking field, urinate first and then it time to go tracking. Second, I will introduce the tracking harness at some point; because eventually I am going to take him away from the tracking field but continue to use the tracking harness as the 'cue'.

STEP V.

Increasing track length, age of track, wide arc for a corner.

By the time I get to corners, I am using little or no food. From the beginning, there should be excellent playtime at the end. How long? Five minutes. Trust me, five minutes is a long time to throw the ball. I introduce the corner is a wide arc and not a ninety degree angle. Some people teach serpentine tracks <http://siriusdog.com/articles/tracking-dog-k9-serpentine-tracks.htm> . If you do nothing but straight line tracks and then introduce ninety degree corners, the dog will overshoot them. By now the puppy should be working well at the end of the lead. You could go to the longer line. You will continue to increase the age of the track as well as the sharpness of the corner.

TRACKS:1
DENSITY: Regular walking
FLAG: One
FOOD: Random and minimal
DISTANCE: 75 feet
LEAD: six or twenty foot.
AGE: 20 minutes



TRACKLAYER

If you have used tracklayers then you will know most of what I am about to print.

1. Most the tracklayer that were gracious enough to help, were a great assistance. I only had one who could not follow directions and one who wanted to challenge the dog, so he made is own course after a couple legs.
2. Be SURE the tracklayer understands what you are trying to accomplish. Let them know that there will be a time that they can challenge both you and the dog but in the beginning is at the time. Many tracklayer are very interested in how the dog can actually follow their trail, so some are tempted to try and put just a little extra turn or backtrack in your best made plans.
3. On known tracks, make SURE the tracklayer knows where you want them to go
4. On unknown tracks, they should draw a short diagram. The more experienced the become, this isn't a necessity if you both know the area well
5. Debriefing is the most important part. At some point you will ask the tracklayer to do different things along a track, like stop, lay down, kneel so you can learn how the dog indicates when you comes across these points.

ALTERNATE BEGINNING

A common error in tracking is 'thinking' for the dog. I saw a video once, which allowed the puppy to follow short food tracks, without a harness or a lead.

With my next adult dog I am starting along those lines. Three, 3 foot stakes are placed in an open area. Flags are attached to the top of the stakes; a slight wind moves the flags attracting the dog's attention. At the base, food is placed at the three corners of a triangle-shaped scent pad. The dog does not see the setup with the stakes.

My dog and I then walk [no leash, no commands, and no directions] into the vicinity and once the dog sees the stakes, he immediately goes to the stake [because dogs are visually oriented]. He smells the area around the stake [to see if it is a scent post] and finds the food. After he finds the food drops at one stake, he simply moves to the next ones.

The next day we repeat the same procedure, two piece of food at placed at one corner and one at another, one corner does not have food. On the third day, I removed the flags but the stakes remain in the same general area, all three pieces of food are placed at the top of the triangle. NOTE. I remove the stake after each exercise because we are practicing this on my property. I do not want the dog to go to the stakes and not find any food.

On the fourth day, the stakes were cut in half but remain in the same general area. A short two foot track is laid, at each post. Two pieces of food are placed at the top of the triangle; the third piece is placed at the end of the track.

On the fifth day, stakes used, a short four foot track is laid at each post. One piece of food is at the top of the scent pad and one at 2' feet on the track and the last at the end.

On the sixth day, stakes used, three tracks, six feet long. Food is placed at the 2, 4 and end of first two tracks and toy at the end of the third track.

On the seventh day, stakes used three tracks. First track is four feet, second is ten feet, and third is four feet, food at the end of the third track.

In the succeeding tracks, the length is increase and the number of tracks is decreased. Once the tracks are over 20 feet, they begin to make a curve and straight lines of tracking courses, are temporarily dismissed. At the fifty foot mark the first long extended curve is introduced. A stake is added at the beginning of the corner and at the end.



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