

Ravens SAR Adventures; Day One!!
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Hello All,

It's been a while since we've "been heard from," and mostly been in read-only mode. Raven and I have been busy training, and with the additions of Rico, a PWD/BC cross, and Draco, another standard poodle, to the SAR schedule, I'm lucky I've been able to read anything! :-)



One thing I've finally learned, through all this SAR training, is that you really, no matter how much you want it to happen, cannot rush the training or maturing of a dog. That, I think is the hardest lesson I've had to learn.

After putting 2 years into Jo-Jo, and then her not making it, I had serious paranoia when Raven reached "that age" and I'm sure I did all the wrong things to try and make us successful, and it ended up working the other way.

Last October, I went to a seminar with the intentions of taking an evaluation for field certification, and I was so blind to the reality of things, that I was the one who screwed up royally. Raven read me so well, that he wanted nothing to do with the whole situation, and we ended up having a very bad week. :-|

In any case, on the positive side, I DID learn from the experience, and the wonderful thing about the SAR world, is that there are so many nice people who will help you no matter HOW bad you goof up, and I got some excellent advice and restructured our training program, and now I believe we're on the right road. :-)

Also, another factor I had to take into consideration is the Peter Pan Poodle Syndrome. He is a poodle....they grow up very slowly, and it doesn't matter one bit what schedule *I* had in mind for him, he alone knew his own personal growth schedule, and there was nothing I could do about it except be patient. :-) Oooooooo, that is so hard, but I think I finally understand. :-)

So, after 7 months of work, biting nails, kicking ourselves in the butt, etc, etc, Raven and I decided to test our newly honed skills at another seminar...in front of people, strange people....:-)

Check in was anytime after 5:30 Friday evening, so I groomed a few dogs that morning, and leisurely packed the van. It's amazing how much Stuff you need to take for just a

weekend. Especially shirts. For SAR people, we usually collect a new shirt every time we go to a seminar. Different groups that sponsor a seminar have shirts with cute or interesting SAR designs printed up to sell to seminar participants to make a few bucks for their group. Most groups are volunteer, non-profit orgs, and use the shirts as a fundraiser. I couldn't decide which shirts to take or not take....so I ended up with a whole, but small duffel bag full of nothing but my SAR t-shirts....just in case I needed to whip out a really cute one to compete with someone else who may be displaying a really awesome shirt that makes everyone envious. That's what the shirt thing is really all about. ;-)

The whole time I was packing the van, Raven paced and whined each time I went out the door with another armload. He knows exactly what's going on, especially when I pull my BDU pants (SAR pants) out of the drawer under the bed. He sticks his nose in the drawer and snorts and wags. :-)

I finally get everything loaded....well, okay, not EVERYTHING, because I KNOW I've forgotten something,(this time it was a mirror) but that's normal, so I don't fret over it anymore. :-) And we're off.

The hardest part of a SAR event is actually GETTING there. Searches are often waaay out in the boonies, and usually the good ol' boys that are running the search don't give clear directions for us Out of Towners. And, of course, there is NO cell phone service out there, so we can't even call if we get lost! Getting to the scene is a true test of a SAR team. ;-)

However, for this event, the directions were clear, road names were given and the distances were correct. All too often people who are giving directions don't know their right from their left, and have NO clue about how long a mile actually is. :-)The difficulty factor in me getting to the seminar site was basically due to Mother Nature.

Our state has had more tornadoes in the past two months than I can recall us having in the last TEN years! I get about 20 minutes down the road, and just pull onto the interstate when the bottom falls out, and the rain is coming down in a solid sheet, I swear. The winds are howling, and the clouds are swirling all around us, and everyone who is still moving on the road is going about 2 mph. I can't hear my radio above the sound of the storm, so I started singing hymns, to calm myself. I glanced back in the rear-view mirror, and the two dogs are just curled up and sacked out in their crates, oblivious to everything, including my white knuckles. It's amazing what you remember when adrenaline kicks in, because I actually remembered the words to all the verses of Amazing Grace. (not that that's impressive, the dogs were certainly not impressed with my singing voice, but neither am I) <and NO, there was NO howling in accompaniment!> VBG

After about 3 rounds of Amazing Grace and Jesus Loves Me, the rain slowed considerably, and we picked up the pace to around 50 mph again. Whew. It was a good thing that I couldn't hear the radio, because I would have heard that the tornado had

formed right BEHIND where I just came from, and was heading toward my house! Luckily, it was a minor one, and there wasn't any notable damage to residences.

We arrive at the camp about 6-ish, and I get out of the van to discover that my knees are jelly-like from the tension. I laugh at myself, and go check in for the seminar. It took about 10 minutes to fill out the paperwork, and as I started to go back to the van to let dogs out to pee, the bottom fell out again. Us Hoo-Mans ran for cover in the closest cabin, and the dogs had to wait. Nothing at all bothers Raven, but I was worried about Rico, my 7 month old Border Collie and Portuguese Water Dog mix. (hence, Porta-Collie - accidental breeding, not mine, but GREAT working drive he has!) Rico is deathly afraid of the vacuum cleaner, but thunder doesn't usually bother him. But it's different being in the van where the rain is probably amplified at least 3 times and the van was rocking in the strong winds. After about 30 minutes, the rain slowed to a sprinkle, and I ventured back out to the van and finally let the dogs out. I guess listening to all the rain fall must have had an effect, because they really had to GO! :-)

Then came the 30 trips back and forth from the van to the cabin to tote all the Stuff in and Make House. Two dog crates, a suitcase, cooler, water jug, sleeping bag, pillows, several small tote bags with clothes, towels, toiletries, dog paraphernalia and food, etc, were set up for a mini version of home for the next two and a half days.

I met some familiar faces and some new ones. Of course, Raven was the only poodle, and the place seemed to be disturbingly infested with Bloodhounds. There were several GSD's, an American Foxhound, (one breed I've never met before in SAR work) a Dutch Shepherd, a Malinois, a Tervuren, several Golden Retrievers and a handful of Labs and Aussies, and of course, the Hounds.

That evening we just sat around and chatted, introduced ourselves to each other and talked general SAR stuff. I fed the dogs, got a shower, and settled in for the night about 10:30.

The beds in the cabin were so small, (bunk beds) and uncomfortable, I KNEW I was NOT going to sleep for the next two nights. I tossed and turned all night, and just about 4 am I finally crashed, and then the alarm went off at quarter til 6, and it was a brand new day.

The new bed didn't bother Raven one bit. I found him sprawled out right in the middle of it, with my legs on either side of him and my feet cold as ice sticking out when I woke up. Glad to hear ONE of us didn't miss out on any beauty sleep. :-)

Stay tuned for Day Two, coming soon.

Michelle and the Ricochez Gang, including one BED HOG poodle