

Ravens SAR Adventures; Day Two!!
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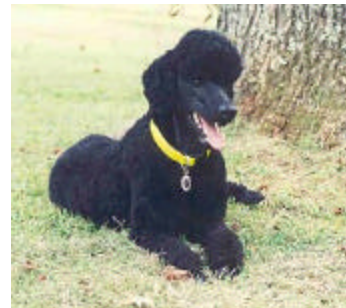
Saturday May 17, 2003

After I dragged myself out of the horribly uncomfortable bed, I staggered to the bathroom. The bathroom building was about 30 feet behind our cabin, and it was co-ed. Luckily, I remembered to pull on some pants before I went there. ;-)

It took me about 30 minutes to really feel awake, and during that time I walked the dogs and gave them a small breakfast. After they were settled in their crates, I went down to the mess hall for my own breakfast. I have got to say, that the food at this seminar was some of the best I've ever had at a seminar. Most of the time, the food is so horrible that no one wants to eat it, and we all end up losing weight by the end of it, so I can't really say that's a bad thing, just not enjoyable. :-)The camp cook had a gas burner/stovetop thingie right there in the building, and fresh eggs, bacon, sausage and biscuits came right off the griddle and onto your plate. Wow, the food alone as worth the trip. See how we SAR folks evaluate all the things that are really important? <VBG>

After breakfast, we had a brief orientation and broke into smaller groups for training. Our group instructor, Lee, had two Bloodhounds, Duke and General. The other dogs in our group were a Golden, a GSD, two more Bloodhounds, and then the poodle.

As usual, we got all the sideways glances, (remember most of these people are redneck boys, and if'n it ain't a Hound or a Shepherd, or even a Lab, it sure cain't werk! Especially Lee, the group leader, kind of avoided me and the poodle at first, but things were to change drastically when the poodle exploded into action.



We set up some problems to work at the camp first, sending out two Runners to hide for the dogs. The first dog to work was the Golden and his handler from Southwest Missouri. The Golden's handler, Kelby, was a younger guy, mid-twenties, and came with a bullet-proof attitude, if you know what I mean. He made the comment that he ain't never seen a poodle that could work. I just smiled and said nothing. Kelby sent his dog to find his person, and the rest of us followed to watch and learn. The dog had difficulties, but that's why we come to seminars, to get help and work through stuff like that. After about 45 minutes, he finally found the person with help, and then Liz, from Texas, and her Bloodhound, Annie worked the same problem. For those of you who have never followed a Bloodhound working, you really have no choice but to work at the dog's pace. And once a Hound gets on a scent, they take OFF! And the camp was basically carved into the side of a mountain, so UP we go, and nearly at a dead run. Boy oh boy why didn't I step up on my Nordic Trac usage this past month?! Annie found the person no

problems, and then the German Shepherd worked. By this time, my leg muscles were SCREAMING, and my boots seemed to weigh 50 pounds apiece. But, never let them see you sweat, right? Well, that was nearly impossible, because it was close to 80 degrees that day and the humidity was HIGH. After the Shepherd worked, it was the Poodle's turn.

Everyone else had worked their dog on lead, usually with a 30 foot line attached to the dog's harness. Raven always works off lead, for several reasons. First, he can range farther away from to find the scent, and second, I don't have to GO everywhere HE goes. It's a great way to work dogs for us fat, lazy people. :-)

There were several people veery interested in seeing the poodle work, especially the doubters. As I snapped on Raven's bell collar, I started getting that feeling I felt while driving here on the outskirts of a tornado.....and in my head started "Aaaamaazingg Grrraaaace,....."

The scent article was made from a piece of gauze 4x4, which Jeremy, our hider, had rubbed between his hands, and then breathed on and put in a ziploc baggie. I opened the bag, and as Raven stuck his nose in it to take the scent, I said, "Find him." With that command, Raven took off and made a huge circle around the field, and then headed straight up the hill towards the woods. I heard five jaws drop directly behind me. Hehehe, that's ma boy. :-)

Jeremy, our hider, had been up there for over 2 hours now, and each time a dog found him, he moved about 50 yards away to a new place. So that means his scent was dispersed over a wide area up there, with all of us walking through it each time a dog worked, it scattered and contaminated it even further, making it harder for a dog to work through and find the person.

Kelby, Lee and Liz followed me and Raven, and up the hill we went. Panting, huffing and puffing, tongue lolling out...not the dog, that's me. :-) By the time the two-leggeds reached the edge of the woods, Raven was already making a circle back to me to check in. All was well, so we went farther up the trail, Raven at least 30 yards out in front. He went out of sight for a minute or two, and we were still dragging ourselves up the hill. More huffing and puffing, panting, creaking and groaning. No, that's not the wind through the trees, that me doing all that creaking. :-) This time when Raven came back into sight, he made eye-contact and gave me The Look. I know him well enough now to know that the Look means he's found the person, and is trying to cheat on doing his refind alert. As soon as he had me eye-locked, he swung around and headed back the other way. I slowed down my walk, gratefully, and waited for him to come back. I knew he'd make another trip to our subject, and then come back to me. This time



he did come back and do his Body Slam alert, where both front feet hit me right in the middle, he bounces off my body and flip-flops in the air and lands going back the other way to lead me back to the person. I just have to remember NOT to search with a full bladder, to avoid public embarrassment. :-)

It took two more refinds before I finally got to the Hider, and Raven got lots of treats, praise and rubs. And I think our Doubting Thomas' were sufficiently changed of mind in their opinion of poodles in SAR. :-)

By then it was time for lunch, so we took a break. Although it was sandwiches, the ham was wonderful, the bread freshly made that morning, and the best part was the home-made brownies and Rice-Krispies treats! Diet, what diet???

After lunch, since there was a wedding scheduled at the camp that day, and we decided to be nice and not crash their party...darn it....we loaded up the dogs and went to a school campus to work.

Dover, Arkansas, is a nice little quiet town of under 1000, (okay, no tastless jokes about them all being related) and the elementary, middle, and high schools were all located in about a 3 block area. We arrived there, and Lee sent our two Hiders out again to "cook." Liz wanted a Car Trail to run for her dog. This is where a person gets in a vehicle and drives away, and the dogs can track that because of the way a vehicle is vented. It leaves scent along both sides of the road where the dog can find it, if they know where to look. :-)

So Jeremy got in his Blazer and went out the school drive, turned right, went two blocks, turned left, went another two blocks, turned left again, half a block and turned left into a parking lot which was directly across from where we were at the school. I had never seen a Hound work a car trail, so I followed....and again I wished I had been more vigilant with the Nordic Trac at home! But it was an amazing sight to see, they are so amazing to watch. Annie the hound found Jeremy with no problems, and we took the shortcut back to the school, across the field. :-)

Lee sent out Jim, our other hider, for another dog to find, and I said I wanted to try Raven on a car trail, too. We had never done one like that, so I said make it easy. After seeing some of the trails that these guys made, I don't think they know what EASY means! :-) So Jeremy got back in his car and drove out the school drive and turned left, went two blocks, turned left again, half a block and then turned right into a parking area behind the football field. The GSD worked the trail left by Jim, and I followed that one to watch. Thank God for Shepherds, they work more slowly and methodical than the Hounds. :-) It took about 45 minutes for Kata, the GSD to find, and all the while our own trail was aging. The age and condition of a track/trail is very important to the success of following it. And for the 45 minutes that Raven's trail was aging, it was also sitting in the sun and heat, which will disperse scent, and several cars had driven down the lane by the school, right over the trail we were to work.

I put on Raven's bell and vest, and gave him the scent. "Find him," and off he went. He circled around and headed out the school drive, and turned right. The wind was blowing that direction, and blowing all the scent down that way. But, as Raven went further, he realized that the scent got weaker and weaker, and so eliminated that direction as a direction of travel. Then he headed across the field towards where Jeremy had been previously for the Bloodhound's find. Again, he turned back when the scent faded out. Then, he turned left and headed out.

It was beautiful to watch. He zig-zagged across to both sides of the street, checking bushes, trees, culverts, hedges and anything else that might catch scent. We had gone a half a block when a car turned toward us. I called Raven over to me, told him Wait, and let the car pass. When it was safe again, I told him, "Where'd 'e go?" and Raven resumed searching just as nothing had interrupted him. I heard a slight buzz going on in the peanut gallery behind me as they watched him, but couldn't quite make out exactly what was being said.

We made it to the next intersection, and Raven continued on straight ahead, again zigging and zagging across the street. He'd go up onto front porches, and almost got into a confrontation with an Aussie Cattle Dog tied to one front porch, but he came when I called him off to get back to work. Then another car happened by, and I had to press the Pause Button again. After the car passed, I unpressed the Pause, and he was back to work again. No sooner had he gone about 10 feet, and another car. Pause....wait.....UNPause. We finally made it to the next intersection, and Raven was checking out every front porch at that intersection. There was very little vegetation in this area, so the porches were where the scent was collecting. He went down a little too far past the intersection and got nothing, so I called him back and told him to "cast back" and took him to where I know he had scent last. This time he crossed to the other side of the street, checked here and there, and picked it up and turned left. The wind was coming from the right, so Raven worked the far left side of the street, picking up on the scent. Just as we were almost directly in front of where Jeremy was parked, Raven's head jerked around so hard to the right, I thought he was going to get whiplash! He turned and ran straight to the Blazer, circled it, jumped up to the window to check, and then ran back to me and gave his Body Slam alert. BAM! Emeril's got nothing on the poodle, that's for sure! :-))He led me to the vehicle, and this time instead of going to the window, he jumped right up on the hood and looked in the windshield at Jeremy and barked, wagging his tail like mad. Again, lots of praise, treats and petting were handed out, and I sure needed it....OOPS, wait a sec, for the dog, not me. :-))

As we were walking back to the school, Kelby, Liz, Cindy and Lee said they were commenting on how good his obedience was when I called him off to wait for cars, and as soon as I told him GO, he was right back in the game again.

I thought that nothing else that weekend could top what we just did, but I was wrong about that. But, that's tomorrow's story. :-))

Back at the school, we checked and still had time before supper, so we all went up the road to the ballpark to work some more. I worked Rico this time, Raven was done for the day. He had worked great, and I was thrilled. It seemed as if all our hard work over the past 6 months had paid off. :-)After the other dogs worked, I let my boys have a good romp in the field. They played tug and destroyed another tennis ball. I think I'm going to buy stock in the Spalding company or something.

Back at camp, supper was fabulous again. Barbequed chicken on the grill, ham, string beans and potatoes, a green salad, pecan pie for dessert. And, home-brewed iced tea and hand-squeezed lemonade to drink. That does it, I'm never going home.

After dinner, we had a lecture on several SAR topics from a Police officer, regarding handling evidence, collection and obtaining scent articles, and search management techniques. In between all the discussions, I could hear a slight buzz about "that poodle" and people were being very nice to me. I'm guessing the talk was good. :-)

After a much needed shower, I crashed in bed. Tonite Raven would have to fight me for bed space, cuz I was TIRED! I don't think I moved the whole night, and when I got up the next morning, my leg was numb from sleeping on my side the whole time. His Majesty, of course, was again sprawled out comfortably, and yawned and blinked at my distress upon waking and finding myself almost unable to move.

I got up....very slowly..... and almost every muscle in my body was stiff. Today I would HAVE to run behind the Bloodhounds again to limber up. :-) I just hope there weren't any hills involved, or I was headed straight to StrokesVille. :-)

Stay tuned for Sunday's adventures.

Michelle and the Ricochez Gang