

Ravens SAR Adventures; Day Three!!
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I again dragged myself out of the bed, walked dogs and went down for breakfast. As I was finally waking up, and I felt the circulation returning, I realized that the way Raven had worked the day before was not a dream...it was for real. That alone just made my day, so I was in a good mood.

Breakfast was excellent again, fresh fruit, and hot French Toast right off the griddle and onto your plate. I'm going to take this guy home with me as a personal cook, I think.

Right after breakfast, we gathered into our groups again, and this time we were going a little farther into a bigger town to work at a park. When we got there, MY jaw dropped. This park was HUGE! There were probably no less than 200 people there, but it didn't look crowded because of the size.

We all pulled into a parking area near the far end, and it looked like it had just snowed. There were Cottonwood trees everywhere, and they "shed" little fuzzy things that look just like huge snowflakes. There were so many, that they were piled up along the edges of the grass like snowdrifts. And the breeze was so strong that as they left the trees, they floated around for awhile before settling, and it really did look like it was snowing.

Our group organized, and Lee, our instructor, sent out our Hiders. Liz wanted to work first with her Bloodhound, then the guy with the Golden, and then the Shepherd. I would work Raven after the Shepherd, but in the meantime, I worked Rico on some puppy tracks. He did very well, and by the time we were done with that, the Shepherd was starting to work the problem.



I rested while Raven and I waited our turn, and Liz, who had just run the problem with her Bloodhound, said there was a swinging bridge up there that her Hound would NOT go across. There was also a solid, arched wooden bridge that the Hound wouldn't cross either. I wondered how the Golden and the Shepherd did on the bridge, and what Raven might do. He's been on plenty of playground equipment, but this was bigger and wobblier than anything he'd been on. Raven is usually game for any type of obstacle, but one can never be too assuming about anything.

The Shepherd guy came back, and said the problem was TOUGH. Well, that didn't make me feel any better, because I had told Lee I wanted to work this problem blind. That

means I don't know where the subject is, I don't know how he got there, only that he's out there somewhere....and this park was HUGE.

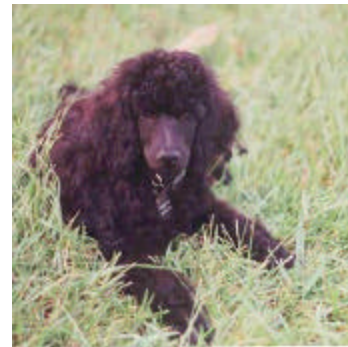
I snap on Raven's bell collar, present him the scent article, and he made his circle and off he went...in the right direction. I knew which direction the Runner had gone, because I'd seen him leave, and I knew that somewhere ahead of us was a swinging bridge that was freaking the dogs out. And that's ALL I knew.

Working blind problems really helps you learn to READ your dog, and it makes one a more astute handler. I knew that the park was way too big for Raven to air-scent to the victim, so he'd have to trail him,...follow the scent he left when he walked away. Trailing is not Raven's specialty, but he did learn how to do it when he was a puppy. That's why we start them all out on tracking, like Rico and Draco are doing now.

We are headed in the right direction, and Raven is making wide sweeps from side to side out in front of me. This is a beautiful Sunday morning, and there were LOTS of people in the park. That means LOTS of distractions for the dog to work through. Also, our subject had been out there between 2 and 2 1/2 hours, the "oldest" problem Raven has ever worked, and Lee did tell me that the distance covered would be between 1/4 and 1/2 mile, the longest we've worked also. Even with all that to work through, I felt really confident in myself and my dog, and I've never felt that before. It was great, and we worked the problem.

Raven was making his wide sweeps from side to side, and when he encountered a person, he briefly stopped to check and see if they were the person he was looking for. Nope, he sniffed and went on. He was very serious about his work, and it really showed. I was puffed up like a balloon. And not only that, but the hosting club was videotaping the dogs that weekend, so participants could order a tape of their dog working. This problem for Raven was being taped. :-)

We walked out about 200 yards, and Raven had scent-discriminated about 4 people so far. We came to the place where there were two tennis courts, an open area that led into woods, and straight ahead were more picnic areas. Raven swung out and checked the area to the right, then turned and headed down the grassy area between the tennis courts. I was still pretty far behind him at that point, so he came back from the tennis court area, and swung out front of me and checked that area. He turned and went back through the tennis courts again. By this time I had made it to that point, and he came back to me, I said, "Where'd 'e go" and Raven turned back to go through the tennis courts. At this point, I had no clue about where the subject had gone, so my only choice was to follow my dog. I said to Lee, "Well, he's gone down this way three times now, and told me No on the other directions, so I guess we'll go this way." I told Lee only to tell me if I got WAY off track, and he said nothing. We worked through the tennis area, and there were about 4 people standing around, watching those



who were playing tennis....or at least I think that's what they were doing. It looked to me like they were doing much more ball-chasing than anything. :-)

Again, Raven had to check each person to see if that was who we were looking for, and with no positive ID, we went forward. We traveled about another 200 yards, through another picnic area and came to a paved road through the park. Ahead of us I could see two bridges, the wooden bridge and the swinging bridge. The wind was coming directly from the right, and Raven turned right and went towards the wooden bridge. He got halfway over and stopped. I was waiting for him to make the decision on which way, and he turned around and came back, passed me and headed downwind, then turned across and slightly right towards the swinging bridge. He got halfway across that one, the wobbly-ness didn't faze him a bit....but there was something blocking his way. One of the people from another group that also came to work the park, was lying down right in the middle of the bridge. Raven circled back to check in, and I asked again, "where'd 'e go?" and he went right back to the swinging bridge and walked right over top of the girl, who was hiding there for a dog from the other group. Liz, Cindy and Lee, who were following us burst out with laughter. I told them that Raven doesn't often encounter an obstacle he can't conquer. :-) The girl, Jennifer, decided to stand up to let us pass the bridge, she didn't want four more people tromping across her back.

I'd never been on a bridge like that before, and it was REALLY shaky. And it was about 10 feet above the little stream that led down to the Lock and Dam that bordered the park. I was glad to get off it, and decided that I probably didn't want to go exploring canyons that had a few boards strung across a pair of ropes, but hundreds of feet above the rocks below. No thanks. :-)

We got safely off the bridge, crossed another grassy area and came to another road. Here Raven stopped and looked to the right. In front of us about 100 yards was a grassy area along the levee for the river. Then came the huge brick structure of the Lock and Dam, and to the right were two baseball fields with open grassy area behind them, and the levee continued behind that. To the right along the road were more picnic areas, and just the road that led out of the park.

This was the first time that Raven had actually stopped moving during the whole problem. I was puzzled, I had never seen this before. So, I made the one mistake I made during that problem. I said, "Well, I think he lost it, he's not moving." Lee said, "Actually, I think it just hit him right in the face." Okaaay, so now I have to figure that out.

We got to within 30 feet behind Raven and he started forward again. He trotted across the grassy area, and went to the edge of the levee and looked down towards the water. The banks of the river were lined with fairly large rocks of irregular sizes, to prevent erosion, I guess. Anyway, it looked like a huge rubble pile for disaster. Then, Raven disappeared over the edge. By the time I got over to the point where he disappeared, I looked down and saw that the bank was at least 150 feet down, and there were about six people down there fishing on the edge of the water. Raven had gone down to check them

out, and was on his way back up to me, climbing the rocks with the greatest ease and agility.

Lee was totally amazed. He said, "Now if that was MY dog down there, he's sure get stuck and break a leg or something." Well, we won't mention the fact that Bloodhounds aren't the most agile of dogs, but....:-)

Raven came back up and went forward towards the huge brick wall of the Dam. The wind was coming from the right, and I couldn't see the subject anywhere in that area, so I knew the L-shape of the Dam would be a huge scent pool. Raven went almost right up to the wall, and then turned right, and worked his way along the edge of the levee. We were traveling around the outside fence of one of the ballfields, and there was a grassy area about 50 yards wide between the fence and the levee. Raven continued forward, and we worked our way to directly behind the ballfield. There was a huge tree right in the middle of the grassy area, and Raven worked his way around the tree, and when he got on the downwind side of it, jerked his head around and went right up to the tree and looked up. His little tail started wagging 90 miles a minute, and then I looked up and saw Jim, who was about 10 feet above the ground, sitting on a limb of this tree. Whew! It really was a long problem, and I was starting to get nervous. We were running out of places to go, and I really didn't want to cross the levee with those rocks. I'm sure *I* would have broken an ankle! Liz, Cindy and Lee were all exclaiming about how well Raven did, and I was just totally numb between the ears. That was easily the MOST difficult problem we have EVER worked so far, and I was totally blown away. Raven got all his treats, praise and petting, and the whole way back to the vehicles I just floated.

And, Raven had to scent discriminate between no LESS than a dozen people to boot! But, I was proud also of myself, for not panicking, and trusting my dog. It is truly a great feeling to work as a team with your partner. Liz, who has a Hound, just exclaimed over Raven, and Lee said that Raven worked within about 30 yards of where the Bloodhounds went also. For Lee, Bloodhounds set the standard, so that was a HUGE compliment. Cindy, who was filming him working, was speechless. Come to think of it, I was too. :-)

After that, we broke for lunch. Since we were about 15 miles from the camp, we decided to go into town and eat at the Brangus Steak House. It was really good also. I had a steak salad, and saved a few pieces for Raven. Shhh, don't tell Rico, I didn't get him any. ;-)

After lunch, we went back to the park. The instructors set up new problems in new areas, and I watched several more dogs work. I worked Rico on some puppy tracks, but I was almost afraid to work Raven again. Sheesh, what more could we do that day? So, Raven ended up with the afternoon off, but Lee and Kim, another instructor, didn't get to work their dogs either, so we decided to do some work later that evening, after supper and that night's classroom lecture.

Supper again was great, pork chops, pinto beans and sweet taters. Peach cobbler for dessert, it was sinful how good it was. That evening's lecture was on first aid for working

dogs, given by a local vet. Since I worked 6 years as a vet tech, I sorta knew exactly what he was talking about. Many times through the talk, he would look at me for affirmation of what he said, like it mattered that I gave my opinion. That was nice, anyway. :-)

About 9 pm, Lee, Kim and I started to set up our night trails. I was to hide first for Lee's and Kim's Hounds. They both had two they were going to work. Jim was also going to hide for them. I laid the trail and picked a good spot to sit along the edge of the woods so I could see them until they got close to me. Again, this was back at camp, on the side of the mountain, so it was up the hill all over again. And it stil wasn't getting any easier. :-)

Since Lee and Kim's dogs were pretty advanced, even their "secondary" dogs, I had to stay there for awhile for the trail to age. I was there about an hour and a half...in the total darkness, in heavy woods where there were plenty of snakes, ticks, chiggers and poison ivy. And all but the snakes I managed to run into. I know that now, two days later. <itching madly as I type>Finally I saw the lights start moving, and I knew they were coming. I slipped back into the woods to find a good spot to hide, and I think I managed to find EVERY sticker bush in those woods. The part of the woods where I was there were no paths, so I had to make my own. I know that I will never be a fugitive, it's just too darn hard to run through all that brush and stuff. ;-)

Lee's first dog, General, found me pretty quickly, even though I tried to out trick him and circle back around, but that darn Hound just got faster and faster the closer he got to me. :-)

Then Kim ran her dog, Jackie, on the same trail, and found me even quicker, even though I had moved around a lot.

After the second hound had run, and we had been through pretty much the whole wooded area during this time, they asked if I would like to see the other dogs run. Jim was hiding out here somewhere, and the other two dogs would find him. So, I said, (weakly) sure. :-)Kim got her other dog, Reuben, harnessed up, and we were again off to the races. Up the hill again, and this time Jim had decided to go up the steepest part of the hill, over to the side, where there were no trees, and I had to literally climb up there using my hands and feet. As soon as I got to the top, totally winded, Reuben took off again, and here we go. Through the heavy brush, and one branch swept back and knocked my head lamp right off my head! By the time I found it and caught up to them, Reuben had already found Jim. Thank goodness, I was about to fall out.

Then we came down the hill again and Lee got out his primary dog, Duke. Duke is a 4 year old Bloodhound with MANY finds to his credit. Duke has quite a reputation, sorta like Ol' Red, in that country song. :-)

I took several deep breaths as Lee was harnessing up Duke, getting ready for the run. And then, off we go. Up the hill again, and up the steep part as well, through the brush, clear over to the other side of the woods, and back around, and to the other side again. Duke had made a big circle, and came back to the spot where Jim had been for Kim's

dog. I think we missed a turn some where. Lee got on the radio and asked Jim where he had gone. It turns out that Jim had gone across the field, down to the road, and was in the trees on the other side. So clear over to the other side we go again, out of the woods, down the field and across the road and finally found him.

It was about midnight now, and finally it was Raven's turn to work. Lee volunteered to hide for Raven, and I told him to make it short distance, it was really going to be something for Raven to work out the scent. All four of us had tromped all OVER those woods for the past three hours, and there was scent EVERYWHERE.

Lee went up the field and into the woods on the path, and I told him to just pick a spot and go off the track about 20 yards at most. About 5 minutes after Lee left, I got Raven and put on his snazzy blinking collar, so I could try to keep track of him. I gave Raven the scent and he made his circle and took off up the hill again. And, one last time, I took off running after him. He was so far ahead, I couldn't see the collar, and just walked slowly up the path I knew he'd gone. A minute later, I saw the blinking light heading back my direction, and a black blur whizzed by me, going down the hill. Then, the light came back up, passed me again, and went a little farther up the path. I walked up farther, and then the light blinked back down by me again, this time stopping to check Jim and Kim, who were watching him work. All our scents were really saturated in this area, and he was working his little tail off to find which one he wanted to follow. He kept narrowing back the area he was working, and finally picked a spot and went into the trees off the path. He milled around and came back out, checked Jim and Kim again, wagging his tail. I could tell he REALLY REALLY wanted the missing person to be one of them. :-) He went back down the path again, and acted like he wanted to go in there, so I told him to go check. I lost sight of the blinker, and just waited a minute. I didn't hear anything....then, suddenly, I heard Lee's voice praising Raven. Lee is a great dog praiser, he uses a happy, high and silly voice, even with his big ol' Hounds, and the dogs really like it. Keep in mind, Lee is about 6 foot 2, and about 200 pounds, a big guy, and he's getting silly with a poodle. If only I had the video camera now. :-)

I knew Raven had found, and I waited a few seconds for him to come and get me to lead me back into the subject. I didn't hear him moving, and then a few seconds later, Raven gave out a high-pitched bark. That surprised me, so I took a few steps toward the bark. Then I heard him coming through the brush, and he did the Body Slam and turned back to lead me to Lee. I was just about to turn around the last tree and he barked again. When I finally got there, I understood the bark.

Lee was hiding in an old pavilion sort of thing, and was lying across the rafters, which were about 6 feet off the ground. He could reach down with his long arm and touch Raven if Raven stood up on his hind legs. Raven has also been taught a bark alert, in addition to the Body Slam refind. If a person is concealed or trapped, or high up where Raven can't reach them, he will stay and bark. We teach this for dogs that work disaster, so they don't cross unstable rubble when they don't have to. So, Raven was deciding which alert to do, bark, because the person was out of reach, or refind, because he could see him. So, bless him, after really having to work hard to sort out all that scent and find

Lee, he actually couldn't decide which indication he wanted to give, so he did both! Now that is a smart dog!

I was happy once again, and amazed at how well we BOTH did. I felt more at ease than I ever had before. Lee made the comment to Kim, "That little dog will work his A** off!" And he was smiling when he said it. :-) Kim is their unit's training coordinator, and Lee had told her how well we did the day before, and also at the park, and Kim said she wanted to see him work, so that's why we set up the night stuff.

By this time it was after 1 am, and I was about to fall over. I HAD to take a shower, I felt like there were about a million ticks crawling on me, and there wasn't a dry stitch of clothes on me. The humidity level was so high, you could cut the air with a knife.

After my shower, I collapsed into bed. My cabin mate, Margaret, had been awake and waiting up for me the whole time. I was so tired, but also so excited that I had to share with her the events of the day. We talked for about another hour before I finally turned the light off, and then we still couldn't shut up, and talked for another hour before we both just finally konked out.

I did sleep very soundly for the 3 1/2 hours I slept, and was still up before Margaret's alarm went off. Even though I was exhausted, physically, mentally, and all other ways, I was still on a natural high over how well Raven did. I had our stuff packed up and the van loaded in record time.

The dogs waited in the van while I went down to breakfast. Again it was wonderful, although I was so tired I really couldn't enjoy it. We still had half a day of training to do this morning, and the certificates would be handed out at noon. I looked forward to one more fling.

Stay tuned for our next episode.....

Michelle and Raven