



EVADING DOGS AND MYTHS

By Michael Chesbro

Being tracked by dogs is a serious problem for an evader. Let me begin by saying that it is extremely difficult to evade a dog that has your scent and wants to follow you. The tricks seen in the movies to throw off a dog simply don't work.

Tracking dogs can be divided into two major categories: air trackers and ground trackers. The air tracker picks up your scent on the wind. Any hunter knows the principle of staying downwind of an animal he is stalking. The air tracker dog is simply trained to follow a particular scent, to locate that scent in the air, and to lead his handlers to whoever is giving off the scent.

The ground tracker picks up your scent from the ground and objects near the ground that you touch as you move through an area. The ground tracker dog will follow your specific path through an area, while the air tracker dog will seek its own path, working downwind from you, as it follows your scent on the wind. Dogs have a sense of smell that is thousands of times greater than that of humans.

Tracking dogs do not track you alone, however. They are accompanied by a dog handler and likely by other human trackers or searchers. An experienced dog handler with well-trained dogs can be very difficult to elude, especially when the dog handler is a tracker in his own right. The dog follows the scent while the handler/tracker looks for visible sign. If the dog loses the scent in some area, the human tracker may be able to pick up the trail from visible sign.

Dogs do have certain weaknesses that can be exploited by an evader. Dogs track best in cool, moist environments. In hot, dry, windy areas dogs tire quickly and often lose the scent they are following. Tracker dogs are pretty much restricted to working with one handler. Furthermore, tracker dogs are expensive to train and maintain, so they may not be generally available.

There are two major aspects to evading tracker dogs. As said previously, it is very difficult to evade a dog that has your scent and wants to follow you. So, first, you must make the dog lose

your scent, and, second, you must make the dog not want to follow you. Because tracker dogs work with a single handler, you must break down the trust between the handler and the dog and make the handler not want to follow you.

Techniques for Evading Tracker Dogs

- λ Cross obstacles that are difficult or impossible for the dog to follow. An evader may be able to scramble up a cliff (or rappel down) where a dog can't follow.
- λ Make several erratic direction changes. This does not particularly confuse the dog but may cause the handler to believe the dog has lost the scent.
- λ If evading air tracker dogs, move with the wind. This causes the scent to be blowing away from the tracker dogs, making it much harder to follow.
- λ Mix your scent with that of other humans. This may confuse the dog and slow it down.
- λ Snares, punji stakes, or several fishhooks spaced along a strong line woven through the brush along your back trail will often entangle or injure pursuing dogs. When the dogs are injured, they lose their interest in the pursuit.
- λ Set traps to stop the dog handler. Remember that a specific handler controls the tracker dogs. If the handler cannot continue the pursuit the dogs will have to stop with him. Even if the dogs are working free (not on a lead), if the handler is disabled the dog will have to be called back

Myths About Evading Dogs

- λ Hiding under water and breathing through a reed or tube. The best you can hope for is that the dogs will simply track you to the water's edge and become confused. However, dog handlers and other trackers accompany dogs. You have to be deep enough so that you can't be seen by the handlers (or by the dog itself). But if you are this deep you won't be able to breathe through a tube for very long. Furthermore, dogs have been known to locate bodies that are underwater.
- λ Sprinkling pepper or other irritant on the ground to "burn out" the dog's nose as it follows your scent. This has no effect on an air tracker dog and almost no effect on a ground tracker. The dog will detect pepper and other like scents long before it has the opportunity to snort any up its nose. In fact, if the dog does snort a little pepper it will likely just make the dog sneeze, thereby cleaning out its nose and letting it follow your scent more easily. An extremely heavy concentration of pepper on the ground might keep the dog from finding your scent directly under the pepper, but any amount of pepper you could reasonably expect to carry with you simply won't faze the dog.
- λ Covering yourself in manure or excrement. This does little more than make you smell like a human covered in excrement to the dog. Your human scent is still present and is not significantly masked by the odor of excrement.
- λ Tying plastic trash bags around your feet and legs to avoid leaving any scent. The only really effective way to cause a dog to lose your scent is to get off the ground in a car, on a bicycle, or in a boat. You must then travel a significant distance so that the dog cannot simply reacquire your scent on the ground a few hundred yards away.

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