



In the Field with a SAR Dog Team



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In the course of a SAR incident, you may be called upon to function as a member of a SAR dog team. In this role you may need to perform a number of functions so that the handler is free to observe his dog, interpret its behavior, and follow up on alerts. These include:

- **Navigate** – keep track of your position on a hasty or trail search, and maintain an accurate grid in a large area. This is important on trailing dog teams; air-scent handlers may want to navigate to manage their tactics.
- **Manage radio** and other communication.
- **Mark** – alerts and olfactory clues, on the map, in your GPS, and at the site – often including time and wind direction.
- **Search** – keep aware for visual, sound or smell clues as in any search. Human dog-team members make finds all the time!
- **Team leader** – Dog handlers have preferences whether the handler should be the team leader. When a handler requests a separate

team leader, fill that role. You may need to feel out exactly what the handler expects you to do in this role. Perform these functions smoothly to be an asset to the team, increasing its probability of detection, not hindering the performance of the dog or handler.

RULES FOR WORKING WITH SAR DOGS

- Ask handlers what they expect of you before leaving for your task. For example, they may want someone with both human and canine first aid/medical training. Let the handler know your capabilities.
- Handlers are in charge of tactics. They know how to position and work their dogs to their best advantage; you do not.
- Try not to get between handlers and their dogs as it obscures the handler's view of the dog's alerts; as the dog moves around, it's OK if it happens momentarily. The handler may want you a couple of yards behind the handler or off to either side; ask.

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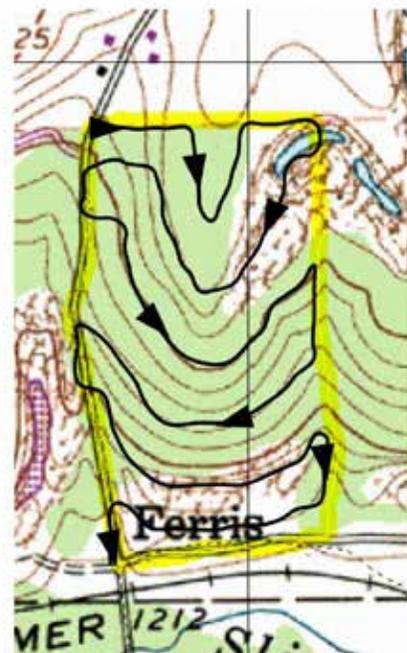
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- Don't talk to or pet dogs while they are working, and keep chatter to a minimum.
- Watch the dog when the handler cannot; if the handler is busy with his radio and the dog does something that seems important, let the handler know. If the dog makes a dash for the highway, warn the handler!
- A handler may want the team well-bunched as the dog wastes time herding separated teammates together. Others prefer the team more spaced-out for better search coverage.
- Be prepared to hold a handler's place. They may ask you to remain stationary on the grid or trail while following up a dog alert. This will ensure thorough coverage of the area, and is not an insult. Mark this spot and the dog & handler's direction of travel on your map or GPS, flag the position, and be ready to follow in if they signal a find.
- Be safety-conscious. A highway, hunter, or homeowner that may pose an inconvenience

to human searchers could spell death to a dog. Make the handler aware of hazards.

- Be a searcher. Look, listen, and yes, even smell. Use attraction if possible - many SAR dogs aren't fazed by you whistling or calling to the subject. If you detect something you would investigate on a non-dog search, do it, but let the handler know. In case of a find, be prepared to report the find to base, and to guide a rescue party in. If the handler makes a find when off your trail or grid, mark the trail/grid position well with flagging tape.



Air-scented Dog Team Search Track