

# *Setting Tracks and Laying Tracks*

Unlike other forms of dog training, successful Tracking training needs the help and teamwork of everyone involved. We all like to work tracks with our own dogs but in return we have to set tracks for other people. This can be pretty daunting at first, so the following article sets out a few hints and suggestions. The first is: have a small notebook and a pen.

Let us pretend that a more experienced handler has asked you to set (or lay) a track for their dog. It will be flagged – mapped tracks come much later.

You need to know (and don't be afraid to ask !)

1. The length
2. The number of corners
3. The number of articles along the track and if they are to be flagged
4. The time it needs to age
5. How the corners are to be flagged.

It is a good idea to write all of this down, at least the first few times you do it.

Before you start, make sure you have flags and a flag-bag, enough articles (remembering that you need one for the start and one for the end of the track) and also the dog's treat for the end of the track. Calculate the number of steps you need to take.

1. Go to the start and put in your start flag. Stand beside the start flag while you make a note of the time, then choose a corridor for your first leg, drop the start article and start walking.
2. Find a distant marker of some sort at the end of the corridor and head for it – this will keep you in a straight line.
3. You will need to count your steps as you go.
4. I find that putting in a flag every 20 to 40 steps (depending on how open the terrain is) works quite well.
5. After about 50- 70 metres, look for a corridor for a turn. Indicate the turn, usually with two flags. Unless you have been asked to put in an acute turn, turns should be 90 to 135 degrees.
6. Somewhere about the middle of each leg after the first, drop an article. If you have been asked to mark its position, use two crossed flags.
7. Keep going like this until you have covered the right distance, then look for a hide. Mark it with three flags and drop the last article and the dog's treat.
8. Then either sit in the hide and wait for the dog to find you or walk out and go back to the group.

If you are not needed to go back into the hide, you will be expected to follow up on the track and pick up the flags. This is a good chance to see other dogs and handlers at work, especially to watch the kind of indications the dog gives when it is on/off track and at corners.

If you are stuck, the Training Manual has some suggested plans for tracks.

Note that, apart from at the start, the tracklayer should not stop. When you are setting a track, stops usually can't be avoided but try to keep them to a minimum. When we stop (and if we shuffle or scuff the ground) we create a huge pool of our scent which makes it much harder for the dog to pick up the actual ground track. This is even more true on a windy day when the wind may blow a plume of the tracklayer's scent away from the actual track. On an "old" track, this plume will settle in hollows or under bushes and the dog has to work out that this isn't the track. So it is a case of "less scent is better".

# *Laying a Track*

If/When you are asked to lay a track for a trial, it is much easier. The judge will have already flagged the track; your job is to walk along the flags, picking up all flags except the first one and dropping articles where indicated.

Before you start:

You should be given a flag-bag and a “mud-map” of the track. Make sure it has the judge’s mobile number on it and that you have your phone with you.

You need to have 5 dark-coloured socks that have been in your pocket since before you left home. Your judge will ask to see these.

1. The judge or steward will take you to the start. Stand there for about 5 sec drop your start article then start walking. **Don’t pick up the start flag.** Look along the line of flags for the one after the ‘next one’
2. Walk at a steady pace, picking up every flag as you go. Try to pick up flags without stopping and put them in your bag. The less air scent you leave, the easier the track is for the dog who is working the ground scent.
3. Corners are indicated by two flags. Your map will tell you which way it goes. Try to see the first flag around the corner before you get there – then you can pick up the corner flags without stopping to look for the next flag.
4. Articles are indicated by two crossed flags. Drop an article directly underneath the flags, pick up the flags and keep going (all without stopping if you can).
5. When you come to the end you will need to either
  - Make yourself comfortable in the hide and wait for the dog to find you (make sure the flags are out of sight, too)
  - Or walk out to where you will be picked up, along the walkout flags. These flags are left in and only taken out when you go back into the hide. Your judge will tell you at what time to go back into the hide.

If the track has a cross-track, it will be flagged with either red & white or blue & white flags. Ignore them.

Your training manual has pictures of the various arrangements of flags and what they mean.