

Tips for Tracklayers

The "TRACKLAYER" is the person who hides for the dog to find.

FACT - 80% of the time, the difference between passing and failing is having a good tracklayer.

Following is a list of tips to help you be one of the "good" tracklayers :

IN PREPARATION -

Don't shower the night before or that day, and don't wear deodorant or perfume

You should have 3 or 4 articles, these are usually dark coloured mens work sox

The Judge will ask to inspect your articles on the morning of the trial to make sure they are of appropriate size and colour. Your articles should be placed next to your skin for a least 30 mins prior to commencing the track - I usually put mine on when I dress on the morning of the trial. If at all possible don't wash your articles between trials (I personally don't remember the last time I washed mine)

Wear warm clothes and WATERPROOF footwear - but don't overdress, it's usually warm walking along but is gets colder when you stop to hide. I take a back-pack so that my hands are free to pick up the flags, read the map and drop the articles

Typical back-pack contents: a poncho or raincoat, drinking water, tissues, a book to read & a waterproof sheet to lie on

If you are being a "tracklayer" - wear a watch

TRIAL OVERVIEW -

Scent disappears sufficiently overnight, so tracks for Saturday will be set out on Friday and Tracks for Sunday will be set out on Saturday. Everyone competing in the trial should help set out tracks

Usually two people set out a track, it is recommended that one of them is the steward for that track

The track must have the correct number of turns, and be the correct distance for the level of test. One person "steps out" the track in metres, hammering in the flags at about 50m intervals, the second person assists in carrying the flags and draws a map showing landmarks such as ant-hills, dead trees, etc to indicate where the turns have been made.

When setting out a track be aware that in the morning there may be fog - remember this when describing your directions on your map (that big rock in the distance may not be visible in the morning)

Take care when hammering in the flags, you should be able to see the next flag from the last one. Corner flags should be slanted in the direction of the turn, all other flags are to be vertical.

The map is important because if cattle cross the paddock in the night they could easily flatten the flags and make it difficult for the tracklayer to know where to walk. In this case they will rely on your map to keep them on the correct path.

On the morning of the trial the tracklayer will have articles inspected by the Judge, and be given a bag to carry to put the flags in (all except the start flag must be removed), and a copy of the map that was drawn when the track was set out. The Judge or the steward will take you to the start peg, show you on your map where you are to drop the articles, check the time you commence walking and watch you go on your way. Make sure you also check the time so you will know just when the dog is put on the track. Double check with the Judge/steward what time the dog will start (so you know for sure)

The map will indicate where you have to drop your articles, but if for any reason you miss dropping the article in the correct place, just drop it !!! - better to be in the wrong place than not at all because the dog must find it to pass. If you drop one too soon or in the wrong place, leave it there . . . NEVER go back, this will only confuse the scent for the dog to follow.

WALKING THE TRACK -

And off you go

Except in a track 7, you always leave the start flag in the ground so the handler knows where to start the dog, and you always drop an article at the start peg so the dog can "get the scent".

Keep your eye on the next flag and walk in a straight line towards it. If there is a clump of reedy grass, a dirt mound or a fallen tree limb in your path keep as straight as you can, don't curve around it - go straight thru the middle if you can. It is actually better to step on a fallen limb as your scent is an indication to the dog to go over the limb.

If you can't see the next flag, follow your map as best you can and hope that you find the next flag further along. NEVER go looking for the lost flag - this will only confuse the poor dog that is trying to track you ! The Judge won't know you did not follow the map exactly and he could fail the dog for going the wrong way (and he was only following you !)

It is VERY important to walk a normal pace, don't shuffle or stamp your feet - you will not be helping the dog, in fact you will be spreading your scent further away from the line of the track, making it harder for the dog to pick up the correct direction of travel.

It is VERY important that as you approach the next flag, pull it out of the ground as you keep walking - DO NOT stop to pull the flag out, because stopping will radiate your scent in a large pool around you and this will make it more difficult for the dog to continue in the correct direction of travel.

The corner flags are slanted in the direction you have to turn - same with them . . . DON'T STOP, pull them out of the ground as you continue to walk. Try to make your corners 90 degree clean angles - wide banana bend turns are not as easy for the dog to follow.

At the end of the track the "Hide" is indicated by two flags crossed over each other. Take these last two flags out and make your self comfortable, and wait.

The hide could be behind a tree (you can sit), in some bracken fern (you must lay flat), or anywhere necessary.

When you get to the hide check your watch so you know when the dog will begin on the track. Be aware that sometimes things get held up and so don't get worried if the dog isn't there exactly when you think it should be. Even if the dog fails along the way, the steward will always continue with the handler and dog until they find you (you won't get left out in the cold)

Be aware what time you expect the dog to find you and make sure you are hidden, still, and quiet. Do not move until the dog actually finds you. If you are not completely concealed or the dog is tracking off to the side and so his approach is crooked - you may be seen by the dog too early, and this could fail him.

Remember, a dog does not always see a stationery object, but a moving one is easy for him - so LAY STILL when the time is near.

When the dog finds you, make a fuss and tell him what a good dog he is, this helps him WANT to find the next person. As a reward, dogs are normally taken off lead to walk back to camp.

If the dog fails the test along the way, the Judge goes back to camp and the steward continues with the handler and dog until they find you, but still make a fuss (because he doesn't know it was a test).

Don't forget to get your articles back from the handler and/or steward.

If you are not sure about something - ASK the Judge or Steward if it's too late to ask . . . do your best.

Happy Tracking !