

## **TRACKING WITH YOUR ALASKAN KLEE KAI**

**Submitted by: Tammy E. Martin of Missouri**

Do you have a shy, timid and unconfident Alaskan Klee Kai? There is a non-competitive activity you can participate in that will increase your dogs' confidence. It will also improve the relationship you have with your dog. It is the sport of "Tracking". Tracking is a team effort, between the dog and their handler, to follow a scent of a person along an unmarked track, to find the missing article at the end of the track. It is a noncompetitive sport, not search and rescue.

I started tracking in April of 2003 with my Labrador Retriever, Graceful Ginger, TD. At this time my Alaskan Klee Kai, Shaatk' was a little over a year old. She was still very shy, timid and unconfident, even though I had her in various classes and socialized her for a year. As I trained Ginger, I watched her confidence increase. I also noticed the relationship between her and I was improving, we were becoming a team. When I was training in obedience, I had more focus and attention.

I decided to see if I could increase Shaatk's confidence through "Tracking". She is such a little "Miss Priss"; I did not know whether she would even go into the field. The first time I put her in the field, she was hungry and there is lots of food on the track. When she found the glove, she got the rest of her dinner. She was okay with that. She and I tracked six days a week for the first three weeks; it is part of the process of teaching them to follow a human scent. Right after we started tracking, she was not as shy and timid. She has begun to allow strangers to touch her, briefly. Every time we would go to the field and track and she would find the glove, she got more and more confident. She knew she could find the glove; she had no doubt in herself. Now, I have seen Shaatk's confidence increase tremendously, in the last eight months. It is not the same dog.

I remember the first time she came up to weeds that were three foot high, she is 12"; she turned around and looked at me as to say, "I am not going through there." I got her to go through them with lots of food and she does not even think about it now. She just starts hopping and looking for the end.

Just like any training, you have to keep them motivated. One of the ways to keep dogs motivated is to have fun. I enjoy tracking with my dog and my dog enjoys tracking with me. Shaatk' loves the attention she gets when we go track. She wants to please me. I have given her a job and she wants to complete that job. (Find the glove.) Do not let them get bored. Keeping her motivated is a challenge. I change what I do every time we go to the field. She never knows what we are going to do once I put the harness on her, except she is going to find a glove. Sometimes we work just short 35 yard tracks and do 5 or 6 of them and then the next time I will run a 450 yard track.

You can also play games with your dog. One of the games I play is really simple; it is called "Which Hand?" With food or a toy in only one hand, present both closed hands to the dog. Ask them, "Which one?" As you progress you may insist they touch with a paw or scratch lightly at the correct hand before receiving the treat. Or simply a nose bump. If they get it wrong show him the correct hand but DO NOT give the treat! Just try again.

The teamwork that has developed between her and I is great. Tracking has helped Shaatk' and I to build a very strong relationship. I have found that like Ginger, she now pays more attention to me in the obedience ring. Teamwork is built by learning to read your dog. By this I mean, knowing when your dog is on the track and knowing when your dog has lost the scent and needs some help. You also have to trust your dog to tell you where the track is. It builds their confidence, because they are leading and you are following. They learn quickly that you are relying on them to find the glove.

To train a dog to track is a process. Briefly, I will describe the steps. You start by laying short, double laid tracks with lots of food. Move to short, single laid tracks with food further apart. Then add turns, at first triple laid, to single laid. Finally, you will add up to five corners, age tracks up to three hours old and run blind tracks. Blind tracks are tracks that someone else lays and you follow your dog. This is where practice and trusting your dog comes in.

The basic equipment needed to track is: a harness, long line 40 feet (I use parachute cord with knots at 20, 30, 35, 38 feet), markers, flags, articles (gloves, socks, wallet, etc), food, and a belly pouch. I always have a water bottle on me.

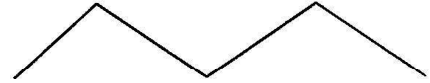
Tracking is an AKC event. The training club I am a member of issues an honorary tracking title. We have an AKC Tracking Judge as a member and she will run a mock trial for us. UKC does not have a tracking title you can earn. Shaatk' will be running her honorary track this spring. I did not teach Shaatk' to track for the title, my whole goal was to see if it would improve her confidence. I personally feel it has been a huge success for both of us.

## Simple beginning tracks.

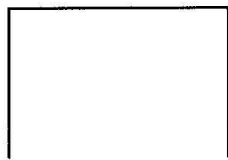
Top Hat



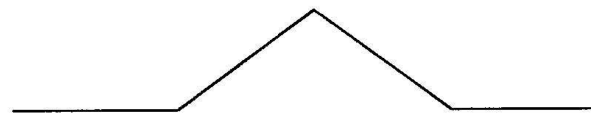
Zig-zag



Open Box



Simple track with two open turns



Track with acute turn



### Process of learning to track:

Short, double tracks with lots of food.  
Short, single tracks w/ food further apart.  
Add turns, at first triple lay corners.  
Add more turns, up to five.  
Age tracks, up to 2 to 3 hours old.  
Blind tracks.  
Problem solving.

### Equipment:

Harness  
Long line 40', knots at 20', 30, 35' & 38'  
Markers/flags/clothespins  
Articles: gloves, socks, wallets  
Treats.  
Belly pouch.

### Obstacles:

Animals, people, wind, terrain.

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