

Scent Articles

by
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In order to understand what a scent article is, we need to look at scent. Rather than turn to books or articles or present a theory. We felt it best to just write what we found in Case Law. The first court to rule what dogs follow was in the 1903 case of Brott v. Nebraska 97 NW 593. In this case The Supreme Court of Nebraska cited

"To get nearer and clearer view of the nature of the evidence erroneously admitted, let us consider closely what trailing is. The path of every human being through the world, at every step, from cradle to the grave, is strewn with putrescent excretions of his body. This waste matter is in process of decomposition, it is being resolved into its constituent elements, and its power to make an impression on the olfactory nerves of the dog or other animal becomes fainter and fainter with the lapse of time."

The Supreme Court of Nebraska went on to say dogs have the capability to scent discriminate.

"His method of trailing are simple and well understood. Particles of waste matters given off by the particular individual fall to the ground, while under going chemical change come in contact with the olfactory nerves of the dog, and produce an impression which he is able to recognize, as distinct and different from all other impressions."

Now that we have an understanding of what scent is, we can look at the scent article.

A scent article can be defined as something that has the scent of the subject you are looking for. With in the scent article heading, we will find two categories.

- The first category contains the "good scent article", which would be a scent article that only has or contains enough scent of the person you seek, that allows the dog to know whom to follow.
- The second category contains the " bad scent article", which would be a scent article that doesn't have the scent of the subject you are looking for, or has been contaminated with a competing scent that confuses the dog. This contamination could be from " residual" sources, scent falling from the air or transferring from another article, or "direct" meaning someone other than the person you seek touched the scent article.

Since the single most important factor in running a successful trail is the scent article. Caution and care should be given to choosing and collecting one. The collection of, and start from, a bad scent article will result in the dog having little chance to be successful. Remember, the only way we have to communicate to the dog what we want them to follow is the scent article. If we fail in that communication or miss-communicate our desire to the dog, failure will certainly follow.

From the first runaways, into article starts, as you cycle through the training process, use scent articles that have high scent retention. Such as hats, clothing or other items. With the dog's demonstrated ability and your confidence growing, the introduction of scent articles that require the dog to check more thoroughly or with greater focus are introduced. Your imagination can guide you at this point, from nails, to coins even something as creative as a toilet seat.

Although we can never know how much cross or masking odors are on scent articles, dogs either learn, or they naturally cut through those odors to find the human scent. We will introduce articles known to have masking odors on them, such as food wrappings, shotgun shells, and cigarette butts. We will also introduce fixed object scent articles like windowsills, door handles, and other objects that teach the dog not all articles will be presented from the ground or head level.

The key is to run many trails from a variety of scent articles, while keeping the dog focused on playing the game. You will soon discover your dog can be

counted on in almost any situation. Some things that your dog will face can never be trained for. One extreme case we encountered was having to use the body of a murder victim as a scent article in order to follow the murderer. I believe the dog was able to accomplish this feat, not from being an exceptional or rare dog, but through his exposure to many things and his desire to trail.

When you arrive on the scene of a callout, you will need to make an evaluation of each potential scent article. If the (PLS) Place Last Seen is the home of the victim, you will find numerous potential scent articles. If the call out is for a child, ask one of the parents or household members to come with you to the bedroom area. Gently question them about the perspective scent articles. Remember people are so used to touching things, they have no recall of it happening. If you ask if an item has been touched, they will inevitably reply "no". It is best to ask them more specific questions like how the potential scent article got in its current position, when was it last worn, who picks-up the room, and makes the bed. Find out if other family members frequent the room, do the children or family members share clothing.

If the room appears to have been thoroughly contaminated by searchers or family members the chances of finding a good scent article in the normal positions such as the bedding, clothing left on the floor, etc. has lowered dramatically. Try looking in secondary positions, such as behind and under the dressers and other furniture. You may find a good scent article trapped between the mattress / box springs and the wall. Consider shoes that can be positioned so the dog will be scenting from the typically uncontaminated interior. To lower the risk of an article of clothing that has potential, but maybe contaminated, turn it inside out. If it is an elderly lady, find out if she uses hair rollers? What about the hairbrush? Take your time, evaluate each article, remember a bad scent article will almost guarantee, an unsuccessful trail.

Some call outs will require you to create a scent article. You may want to preserve it for later use, such as a line-up. You may have multiple dogs responding to the call and need to create more scent articles from the original scent article. One widely used method is to place a sterile gauze pad in a position so the gauze pad is touching the original scent article. The scent from the original article transfers to the sterile gauze pad, their-by

creating two scent articles. Remember to be patient and give this transfer process time to work. We would suggest practicing collecting scent articles, just as you practice running your dog. When possible, while doing a scent transfer, open a gallon size baggy and place it like a tent over the gauze pad. Using the tent method will allow you to collapse the baggy from the outside to gather the gauze pad.

Another method that has been successful, is wiping the sterile gauze pad across the object to transfer the scent. Utilizing a gallon size baggy pull it inside out over your hand creating a glove. Grasp the sterile gauze pad with the "gloved" hand and wipe your object. While still holding the gauze pad, pull the baggy back to its original position. Your scent article is now protected and ready to use.

Treat every call out as a possible crime scene. Since your scent article may become evidence, log where and when you collected it, along with any other pertinent information. Consider starting a chain of custody for the scent article when you pass it along to someone else. Before making a swipe to collect the scent, make sure the object is not going to be checked for any latent prints that may be destroyed.

Never forget the value of a good scent article. To that end, always carry various sized packaging materials to protect and preserve the scent article. From a gallon sized baggy, to large paper or clear plastic bags, to a box to cover and protect a footprint.

The evaluation of the scent article doesn't stop when you collect it. As you run the trail, you must continue evaluating it, by judging or gauging the behavior of the dog on the trail. Compare it to the trails you have run in training and any previous cases. You also may use the information you have learned about the normal travel patterns of a lost or confused person, or the behavior pattern of someone in the circumstances at hand. Taking all this information you may be able to form an opinion about the scent article you used.

If your dog runs a trail that appears to mimic the pattern of a searcher, and not an Alzheimer victim, give it consideration before debriefing. The trail may not even be worthy of establishing the direction of travel.

We have observed dogs that trail a short distance. They appear to lose the scent, but not react in a manner consistent with a focused dog searching for the trail. The dogs did not display the posture and demeanor of a dog about to receive a reward for a job well done. They act like the trail just fizzled out?

Some dogs will trail a distance only to return to your starting area in a non-trailing manner, the same thing, like it just fizzled out? This isn't consistent with the negative I D.

The hardest ones to determine is when the dog trails a short distance, then appears to have lost the trail in terrain that may have effected the scent. The dog appears to be focused and is displaying good drive. Yet in training they never loose it this close?

Some will appear to be trailing back over their initial track, but the behavior, demeanor, and actions will not match those witnessed while practicing the backtrack exercise?

Carry through with your casting in any of these cases. There is too much at risk! The point is, when you see a change in the behavior pattern established through many trails, there is something that caused it. Could it have been your scent article?

What does your dog do when there is no discernable human scent present? Open a new gauze pad, place it in a baggy and scent your dog. Maybe a scent transfer will fail one day.

Try using a second dog from a different article. We have worked cases where three scent articles and dogs were used before we finally saw a behavior that allowed us to form an opinion about what happened on that scene. We made the call on what we felt happened, during debriefing and two weeks later were proved to be correct.

Don't be ashamed to tell the responsible agency, that you cannot give them a clear and concise opinion. Explain to them why! It is better to be honest than bluff your way through, or claim glory when you didn't make the call. Every honest handler runs cases when they just have to shrug and say, "I'm sorry I don't know?"