



Ocotillo Desert Southern California at sunrise.

During the hot time of the year we like to start working as soon as it's light. And we stop working the dogs when the ground temperature reaches 100°F.



Weather Guidelines for Clients

Our dogs are living creatures and weather, especially heat, can really affect them. Cool, moist conditions are best. The best conditions are not always possible due to the season or location of the project. We have adopted some standard working practices to help ensure the dogs are safe and we get the best possible results. Our dogs are athletes and our training program builds their endurance to extend the duration of time they can work. Each project has its unique set of circumstances.

A basic list of guidelines we subscribe to follows:

- The dogs' workday varies from 4 to 6 hours per day, depending on weather and conditions. A workday is not the same as "nose time". Nose time is the amount of time the dog is actively working.
- The dogs can cover anywhere from 2 to 10 acres per workday depending on what they are looking for, the weather, the terrain and the search strategy used.
- Our dogs typically work 3 days on and 1 day off.
- We stop working the dogs when the ground temperature approaches 100°F, or the dogs' internal body temperature reaches 104°F.
- Weather and ground temperatures play a critical role in the dogs' ability to locate scent. We monitor ground temperatures as this directly affects the availability of scent. Hot weather conditions, especially ground temperatures 85°F and higher, appear to decrease the scent available to the dog.
- In general, ground temperatures below 85°F work best for locating burials. The higher the ground temperature, the lower the probability of detection. Ideal ground temperatures are between 40°F and 85°F. The most desirable conditions are mist and light rain. Heavy rain is difficult to work in for both the handler and the dog. Standing water or flooded conditions may make it more difficult to pinpoint a burial as it can block scent or move it around.
- We do not work in rain heavier than a slight drizzle or on ground with standing water due to degradation of scent conditions.
- The safety of our dogs always comes first. For example, we do not work deserts at night in the summer due to the presence of rattlesnakes. We prefer that any electric fences in the area be turned off. Livestock and other animals, like loose dogs, can cause undue safety issues. At some locations we work the dogs on a long line for their safety.
- Each handler has their own personal protection equipment (PPE) including a hard hat, high visibility vest for themselves and a high visibility vest for the dog.

In addition to the ideal cool, moist conditions, our dogs have successfully worked projects in the following conditions:

- Hot, dry desert conditions (Southern California deserts)
- Cold, wet conditions (Alaska, although we have not worked in snow)
- Hot, humid, tropical conditions (Nikumaroro, Republic of Kiribati)

In some conditions it may be necessary to work a split day. In the desert we will usually start work as soon as the sun comes up and the rattlesnakes go away. We work until the ground temperature approaches 100° then quit until late afternoon, when the ground temp drops below 100°. We will work until dusk and the rattlesnakes come back out. Safety is always primary.



Measuring Ground Temperatures

Ambient air temperature and ground temperature are two very different things. An air temperature of 85°F can mean ground temperatures are near or over 100°F and an air temperature of 95°F can mean ground temperatures have reached 140°F depending on the ground color.

Our favorite measuring device is a compact Infrared Thermometer (on left) because it fits in your pocket.



Portable Shade

Keeping our Dogs Cool and Out of the Sun

Our cars are well equipped to keep our dogs safe, comfortable and as cool as possible. But sometimes our survey area is not conveniently close to our cars and we need to make a shady place to keep the sun off our dogs. We are limited to the length of time we can work the dogs in hot weather. By providing a shade area when none is available we can let the dogs rest and cool off.



Archaeologists and other people who work outside are good at providing for themselves with the things they need for the weather conditions. As dog handlers we have to make sure we have the human equipment as well as the things we need for our working dogs. Sometimes we have to get creative.



Shade can be very scarce in the desert in this picture we were lucky to have an ocotillo to provide us some shade. The rough sands of the desert can cause the dogs to wear their pads so thin that its too painful to walk. Dog boots are also sometime needed when cactus or thorns cover the ground.



Jasper says "Umbrellas also work to block the sun!"



Small pieces of shade cloth, a tracking pole, clothes pins and a bush work just fine.



A piece of white cloth, a chair and a tall gravestone.



Perhaps the best way to keep cool, however we rarely find sprinklers while working.

Arrow Shaft Straightener



On a project this summer in California, while working our dogs looking for human remains, our archaeologist and native monitor found this stone tool. It was explained as a tool to straighten arrow shafts. The wood was soaked in water, then heated, and the stone was used to straighten the arrow shaft. After we had the privilege of taking pictures of the tool it was carefully placed back in the ground and hidden.



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We are happy to talk with you about your project and
how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials.

Call, email, or check out our website.

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