



International Visitor Leadership Program U.S. Department of State



From left to right standing: John Grebenkemper with K-9 Kayle (ICF); Vesna Boskovic (Serbian Commission on Missing Persons); Vlatka Ivanka Cuk, (Croatian Administration for Detained and Missing); Maja Vasovic, (Serbian Commission on Missing Persons); Samira Krehic, (International Commission on Missing Persons, ICMP); Prenke Gjetaj; (Kosovo Commission on Missing Persons); Adela Morris with K-9 Jasper (ICF); and Amor Masovic; (Missing Persons Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kneeling Lynne Engelbert with K-9 Niku (ICF); and Ivona Paltrinieri, (Croatian Administration for Detained and Missing)

Closing the chapter on missing persons in the Western Balkan region

In September the Institute for Canine Forensics (ICF) received a US Department of State request to host members of their premier professional exchange program, the International Visitor Leadership Program. These members were from Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia. According to their request, the goal of this meeting was “to offer an opportunity to facilitate relevant global connections and the exchange of key ideas between the visitors and their American professional counterparts”. The Western Balkan representatives all work with organizations that are dedicated to determining the fate of missing persons lost during the various wars in that region, and to mark the sites of the victims of World War II and that post-war period. ICF was one of many other stops on their tour of discovery.

On October 12, Adela Morris with Jasper and Jett, Lynne Engelbert with Piper and Niku, and John Grebenkemper with Kayle, met with these representatives and their interpreters at the Purissima Cemetery near Half Moon Bay, CA. Purissima was purposely selected for demonstrations, as it contains both historical and recent “green” burials, similar to the Balkan region.

Adela gave a briefing on the history of Purissima, the “hazards” one might encounter (poison oak, etc.) and what we intended to demonstrate. The group headed up to the ~150-year old burials where we demonstrated our dogs working the old burials, specifically following cracks in the concrete and alerting on the burials. From there we proceeded down the hill where our visitors observed the dogs working the green burials, including the newest one that was only about a month old.

An interesting point came up when we were asked where our “laboratory” was. The group was expecting to see a building with scent wheels, etc., where we train our dogs. We explained that because we work in the real world that’s where we train our dogs, not in a sterile lab. We discussed how important it was to train at as many different locations as possible so the dogs know that they are supposed to work wherever they go, not just in one area. There was great interest in how we train our dogs, when we begin training them, and our continuing training.

Another topic of discussion was the use of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR.) It has been used in the West Balkans without great success. Many of the areas they need searched aren't accessible to GPR; and, in a lot of cases, they are attempting to locate mass burials. The GPR is indicating anomalies that turn out not to be burials, causing an expenditure of time, effort and money, excavating where nothing is found. We described how we work as a team with GPR operators with good results. We often work the dogs first, narrowing down the area to where the dogs are indicating possible burials, then they bring in the GPR to attempt to locate burial shafts.

Several members of the group indicated that they may be interested in working with us further to assist in the development of canine resources beyond what they are currently using. While we don't presently have an idea of what we can do to assist, we are hoping that we can develop a partnership and continue to work them in their efforts.

Adela and I were fortunate enough to have lunch with the contingent and continue our discussions. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with everyone and were honored to have been asked to participate in this program.

[Here is a link to the video](#) that the group shared with us.



Scent Flow

The Path of Least Resistance

Detection Dog Training 101

One of the first and most important things to learn when you start working a detection dog is how scent moves. Factors like: the history of the site, geography, foliage, weather conditions, etc., all affect scent's flow. It's the handler's responsibility to understand these factors and use that knowledge to develop a search strategy that gives the dogs the best chance to detect the target odor. As we work, we are constantly thinking about where scent would flow and stick, and adjusting our search strategy accordingly. We also combine our knowledge of scent with our dog's behavior/alerts, to interpret the findings for the client.

Different scents work differently. For example, live human scent is carried by air currents. From a dog's perspective, live humans give off a lot of scent and it can move a long distance from the person. Live-find dogs work quickly with their noses up to detect scent. We have found with old burials, the scent is often very slight and is right on top of the ground. If the dog's nose is up or if they are moving quickly (and exhale at the wrong moment) they can easily miss this subtle scent. Our training techniques ensure the dogs work with their noses down, and at a slower pace.

Strong winds can greatly affect the outcome of the search. I visualize it as putting the scent in a blender and sending particles everywhere. This makes it more difficult for the dogs to pinpoint the source or strongest location. It does not take long for the scent to settle again after the winds die down.

Scent Pools

Scent, like water, travels the path of least resistance. It collects in or on vegetation, holes, cracks, hollows, etc. When the area over a burial holds little scent, but the surrounding area does, this can create a "scent pool" away from the source that the dog must work through to find the source. We regularly set up problems to purposely create scent pools to try to mimic what we see in field conditions. In the picture above, Amiga is working thru the scent pool caught by a hollowed out tree. Now she has to continue to work to locate the source of the pool.

Cracks

I am always trying to envision how scent flows. Historic cemeteries that have been covered in concrete are a great way to observe how this phenomena works. Time and nature have made cracks and holes in the concrete. We find the dogs following the cracks and then alerting at the closest intersection of a crack and where the burial is underneath.

Cracks in dry earth are similar. The scent from old burials follows the cracks in the ground, including rodent and or insect activity, allowing the scent to flow to the surface. We either create or find the scenarios we want to understand. By observing dogs training on them, we learn what to expect in the real-world.



Fionn finding the scent in the cracks of concrete over the historic burials and alerting.



Asphalt

In 2010, we were asked if our dogs could find burials under asphalt. At that time it was something we did not have a lot of experience with, but we were interested in trying. We worked the area blind (i.e., without knowledge of the burial's locations.) The video below shows Rhea searching for the prehistoric burials. Several years prior to the video, some asphalt been removed, the burials confirmed, and the pavement patched. (You can see the newer patched areas of the asphalt indicating the location of the burials, but this was unknown

to us at the time of the search). All the dogs alerted, but each alert was along a crack near, but not on top of, the asphalt patch covering the burial.

Our experience shows us scent will escape through the cracks of old asphalt, or concrete; but, newly paved asphalt blocks the scent and it only rises where the asphalt meets the soil.



[Click to watch video](#)

Underground Utilities

Another interesting phenomena we see with scent flow is when a cultural layer that involves human burials is pierced for utilities. Underground trenches containing pipes, cables, utility boxes and power/light poles act as a conduit for scent. It moves scent both horizontally and vertically along the channel and comes to the surface in utility boxes, or other openings that access the utilities. It's like a scent freeway.

It is not unusual to see alerts from the dogs near underground utility boxes. These are alerts may be on scent that traveled along underground piping close to burials or where fragments of human remains may be present. An alert near utilities does not necessarily mean there are remains in that exact location. It's the handler's job to combine all this information and provide an interpretation.

~Adela~



Jett works the underground utility boxes following scent. The flags indicate the locations of previous alerts from the dogs who worked the site before him.

The Next Generation of Working Dogs



Annie, a Belgian Malinois, is taking a short break from working although I think she will be ready to go back to work as the puppies start getting teeth. She had 9 puppies on October 29th. All puppies were spoken for before they were born. Annie is one of our ICF dogs and also works for our local Sheriff's office (Canine Specialized Search Team) specializing in cold cases. Kris, her owner, plans on keeping one of the puppies who will also become a working dog.



Please feel free to pass our newsletter along to anyone who might be interested.

Check out our past issues on
our website -

[CLICK HERE](#)



(650) 503-4473 | info@ICFK9.org | www.ICFK9.org

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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Our mailing address is:

Institute for Canine Forensics
P.O. Box 620699
Woodside, CA 94062-0699

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