



Back Off Cow! It's Mine!



Intrinsic Drives

When you think of wolves, a picture of them hunting in a pack often comes to mind. We depend on the same intrinsic drives, especially the hunting drives, in

our dogs - only the goal of the hunt and rules have slightly changed. We ask our dogs to "hunt" with a human pack leader and we do not let them "kill" what we hunt, but we offer a substitution for the find.

Many old breeds of dogs that were originally bred for work are now being bred for other traits (size, temperament, looks) and we are seeing the original drives being diminished or lost. Even among people who train dogs for different kinds of detection work, not everyone agrees on the different kinds of drive, what ones are important to use, or use the same terminology. We all agree that a high drive dog is a key ingredient to a working dog. But what is a high drive dog? To understand what high drive is you must understand what the dog was bred for. Clearly a Labrador Retriever, Terrier, Border Collie and German Shepherd were all bred for different purposes and each have different drives and different strengths. Each of these breeds can make great detection dogs. But the common factor across high drive dogs of all breeds is that they persevere. They stay in the game and keep going in bad weather, when they are tired, and when it's been hours and hours and they still have not achieved their goal. The bottom line is a high drive dog is one who persists, even under adversity.

We select high drive dogs for just that reason. The work our dogs do is hard; they hunt for very little scent over long periods of time and sometimes in nasty conditions. Just working for a reward is not enough to keep a dog working through that. They have to have intrinsic drive. A strong hunt drive will ensure that the dog will keep looking for their target scent even without a moving target (like a wolf might chase a rabbit running away). Our working dogs must have a balance of small prey and hunt drive. A dog with over the top small prey drive can't focus and wants to chase everything that moves. This kind of fixation is the drive that is looked for in training a dog to chase geese away on golf courses.

Since our dogs are not allowed to touch what they hunt, we use a reward that gives them their drive satisfaction. A substitution is made after they find the target scent and they get what is most rewarding to them, to chase a ball or towel on a rope to simulate movement, leather tug they can engage with their handler. This reward is usually only associated or allowed when they work or train.

Wild dogs fiercely protect their kill, as it means survival to the pack. I was reminded of this when I saw Piper stand her ground as she was alerting on a source of human bones and a curious cow came by. She did not back down, she told the cow to get lost. Piper was protecting her modified "kill" from the cow. This training problem was not set up knowing the cow would come by, it just happened. Many people know Piper as the dog who wants to sit in your lap

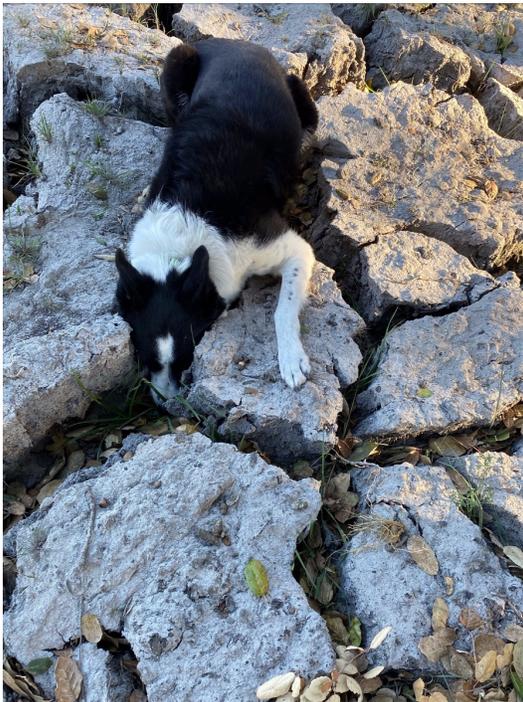
and kiss you, she loves babies and children, but when it comes to instincts she takes her job seriously.

~Adela~

Keeping Training Challenging and Fun

Unusual locations and different air flow.

Peg set this up problem in the dry mud that was dredged from a pond. As it dried it made deep cracks and provided an interesting opportunity to observe scent flow. All the dogs loved working it. The dogs would follow the scent moved by the wind currents, following the cracks until they found the source.



Scent Pools, not for the Timid

Scent is something we think about constantly. We (human and dog) strive to understand what it will do in various situations. Scent pools are one of the most confusing things we will ever work. Scent pools are sometimes like a cloud around the source, making it hard to pinpoint. There can also be a pool of scent away from the source's location.

By observing how the wind has moved the piles of leaves we can learn how the scent will move or where it will be most predominant.

Jasper circles a pile of

leaves that was made by eddies caused by the buildings. He is trying to find the source that is located at the corner of the building, but the scent is trapped in an eddy of leaves and wind.



Kris works Annie on a blind problem in a narrow alley, the predominant wind is strong and coming around the brown building and then entering the alley.

The source is located at the corner of the brown building, but the scent is pooling at the far end where the leaves are located behind Kris. Our dogs need challenges, so we create difficult problems for the handlers so they, and the dogs, keep learning. By reading her dog Kris figures out what the conditions are doing and how to get her dog in the right location so she can solve the problem. This was a very complicated scent problem.



Bodie, pictured above, is one of Annie's puppies featured in the January 2020 ICF newsletter. Nadene is no stranger to search work, she has been a member of Monterey County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team and worked many searches as a ground searcher and working overhead. We are excited to finally have her as one of our handlers for both ICF and our sister organization, CSST, our search group that partners with Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office. We are also very proud of them and their achievements despite this very trying year.

~Adela~

Holiday Surprise

I know this was a challenging holiday for all of us and hope you found a special way to enjoy it. Bodie and I had a very interesting surprise a couple days after

Christmas. Bodie is one of our newest dogs-in-training. He's just over a year old and a huge, rambunctious, goofy Belgian Malinois puppy. We spent the holiday in Southern California with family, and he was in need of a good, hard, play session. My sister and I went to the park and I decided to ask her to place a few sources for us so we could do a quick training session.

Now Bodie is still learning and I do not expect him to alert 100% of the time, so it was not too surprising when he alerted about two feet away from the source my sister had placed. I thought he was just not pinpointing the location. I called him back to me and sent him in again. Ugh! He alerted in the same spot again. I tried to hide my frustration as I walked over to see what he was "false alerting" on. You can imagine my surprise when I saw the end of a small bone sticking out of the leaves.

After lots of debating and quadruple checking with my sister that this was not one of the sources she placed, I placed a call to the local police station and explained what we found. I thought the bone Bodie found was a human metatarsal but was so scared to be wrong. I expected them to send an officer out to collect the bone and that would be it, but they put me in touch with an investigator from the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office who asked me to email a picture. She called back and asked if I could place something next to it for scale and send more pictures focusing on the ends. She said she thought it was a metatarsal but explained the similarities between human and bear bones. My sister had the brilliant idea of placing it next to a Chapstick, which was great because I was spinning out thinking how unlikely it was to find an extra bone while training. I was sure I would be embarrassed and bring shame to my team. Twenty minutes later, the investigator called back, said she was pretty sure it was human and congratulated Bodie on possibly making his first find! She said the Coroner's office was organizing a search and asked if I could stay for it.

Two days later, Bodie and I had the privilege of watching two Human Remains Detection dogs from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office, officers from the Los Angeles Police Department and the Coroner's Office investigator conduct a search of the area. While nothing else was found, it was such an amazing experience for us. It was an incredible validation to see the dogs focus on the area where Bodie found the bone and show interest in two other areas where he was also interested. I can't wait to continue training!

Nadene Torres
Handler-in-Training

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



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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.

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