

Wilderness Search and Rescue with Dogs

My name is Erick Allen and I live in Hendersonville, NC. I am currently training a puppy (Black Mouth Cur) for use as a Wilderness Search and Rescue K9 with the North Carolina Search and Rescue Dog Association (based in Enka, NC).

I need volunteers to help me train my dog “Boogie” for Wilderness SAR. For good training, it is crucial to have good volunteers. It seems to me that your members may be ideally suited to and interested in this sort of thing.

Training sessions consist of the following: A volunteer lays a track in the forest and plays the role of a “lost person” while the dog searches for the volunteer using tracking and air scenting. Typically the volunteer hikes to a location and stays in place until the dog locates them. Training time once on location is about 45 min’s- 1 hour. The time frame can be longer if the volunteer is interested in doing more. After laying the track, the volunteer may be asked to stay in place for anywhere from 15 minutes on up (depending on availability of the volunteer and the purpose of the training session). The lengths of the tracks may be anywhere from a few hundred meters to a few kilometers. Short time and distance commitments would be used with new volunteers and lengthened only as the volunteer was comfortable and interested in longer times and distances.

A few criteria are needed for a good volunteer.

1. Willing to follow instructions of handler (i.e., not try to “trick” the dog or handler or change the scenario). Each scenario is designed to address a specific issue for the canine and handler and the training session is designed with the target behavior in mind.
2. Comfortable being in the woods alone (while waiting for the dog to find them). This includes having correct clothing, water, etc.
3. Good orienteering and map skills (use of compass, topo map, GPS)
4. Good physical condition
5. Love of dogs! The volunteer will be asked to interact with the dog at the end of the training to reinforce the positive result of finding a lost person. It’s very important to have a volunteer who likes to play with a dog and doesn’t mind a dog licking or otherwise making affectionate contact with them. *NOTE: SAR dogs do not bite or attack the volunteer. This is not like police K9 tracking where the dog is trained to attack a suspect. Our dogs are trained to find a lost person and bring the handler to the lost person. If you know anyone in the WNC area who may be interested in assisting me (or any other members of NCSARDSA), please feel free to give them my email address. Thanks very much, Erick Allen Hendersonville, NC erickallen@bellsouth.net