



Institute for Canine Forensics

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Non-invasive Remote Sensing of Human Remains
Specializing in Historic and Pre-contact Burials

Joining Forces with the Idaho Chapter of the Oregon California Trails Association to Help Preserve History

Cagney was invited to participate in a field trip hosted by the Idaho Chapter of the Oregon California Trail Association. Cagney's mission was to sniff and locate a lost pioneer grave.

The ranchers who owned the land handed down stories about this grave for four generations. The grave marker was lost decades ago, but the family had a name and knew which pasture and general area. The rancher really wanted to know where the grave was located so he could protect it.

My role as Cagney's chauffeur was to drive her and open her truck and crate doors so she could meet and greet the rancher, his son, and the OCTA participants.

Once Cagney had sufficient time to meet everyone, stretch her legs, and find a stick, I gathered her up and gave her the search command. Cagney took off nose down and began to work. A short time later, Cagney located the edge of a scent pool and followed it to a spot where she sniffed more and then gave her final alert. We then stepped aside and let the GPR operator work. GPR indicated the grave was about 2 feet under the soil where Cagney had alerted. At that point, the area was identified with rocks and flags. The rancher was going to fence it off from cattle the next day.

Long-term plans for this site are to research for more information on Ira Jesse and to put up a plaque with his name and story.

Lori



Cagney worked first in an area where they estimated the grave might be according to oral history. GPR worked independently and without knowledge of where Cagney had alerted. After both were finished, flags were placed. The orange flag is Cagney's alert, and the two white flags are locations the GPR identified as grave.



Cagney posing with the GPR

Multi-disciplinary Approach

A multi-disciplinary approach of combining non-invasive techniques can dramatically increase confidence in the conclusion. In the case above, family history, GPR, and the dog's scenting ability combined gave a very compelling answer for the landowner.

Training Workshop

Selection and training of a dog is crucial to the success of an HHRD team. We generally choose dogs that have been bred to hunt or herd and have a good work ethic. When we bring a dog home, it becomes part of our pack. As the pack leader, we teach our dogs what to hunt for, guide them to the hunting

ground, and we reward them for finding their target. We call it a *cooperative hunt*.

Our training director, Ronda Bowser, conducts a workshop twice a year where the whole team gets together to work on new techniques and skills with respect to pack dynamics and cooperative hunting. The last workshop included working historic cemeteries, part of which was helping our upcoming young dogs get started working in cemeteries, improving handlers' timing, recognizing the point of discovery of the strongest odor, and getting the timing of the reward right.



Asher alerting at the point where he has found the strongest scent during cemetery training.

Many historic family plots have been covered with concrete. This was mostly done to protect the burials from vandalism, and it required less maintenance. Over time, as the ground shifts, the concrete degrades or gets damaged and cracks form. The scent from the burials rises to the surface, taking the path of least resistance, causing it to be more concentrated at the cracks. This is ideal

for teaching our dogs to locate the strongest concentration of scent. The "ah HA!" moment when they find it is called the *point of discovery*.



John watches his young dog, Kalli, as he discovers that the strongest odor is in the vase holder.



Cagney alerts in the depression where the odor is the strongest.



Lisa keeps Saoirse focused in a small area so she can find scattered teeth. Ronda picks them up as they are found.

Our workshop was 5 days long, with 3 additional days devoted to building the foundation for young or beginning dogs. One skill we worked on was detail searching. Some dogs, like Saoirse, tend to work very fast. At high speed, dogs cover a lot of ground during a single out-breath and can miss a source. In order to find small, close together sources, dogs have to learn the skill of narrowing their focus to detail search - slowing down, staying in a small area, and differentiating between multiple overlapping odors. At first, we only ask them to detail for short periods. Think about a child in kindergarten; they can't focus for long. Over time they learn how to focus for longer periods. The mistake many dog handlers make is asking for too much focus too soon; detail work needs to be slowly increased in length.



Lori and Cagney are doing a small source problem

Working on a long line is another skill that needs to be taught to a dog. This isn't something that comes naturally, nor would it be taught to a wild dog by it's pack. But we do different kinds of searching. We might be searching next to a

hazard (like a freeway) or through a museum's tightly spaced and delicate collections. So, we need to teach our dogs many different skills, including how to work in small areas, work in a controlled manner, and work on a long line.



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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 us out on Facebook or our website. (You can find past newsletters there, too.)

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

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