

# Blood Tracking Adventures

## by Jolanta Jeanneney

### DCA Newsletter, December 2007

I have no doubt that the fall is my favorite time of the year. No more hot and humid days which prevent us from working with the dogs. We live in north-central New York, surrounded by the Helderberg Hills, where strong winds and deep snow do not make winters dachshund-friendly either. But September and October can be simply gorgeous when maple leaves change their colors and the woods entice with a wonderful scent of wet, decomposing leaves on the ground. This is also when dachshunds get a chance of real work – tracking wounded deer and bear for hunters. Our deer hunting season opened this year on October 13 and it will close on December 18. John, who is a principal tracker in this family, has distributed cards advertising our tracking services in local stores with hunting supply, coffee shops and any places that might be frequented by hunters. Also, as members of Deer Search ([www.deersearch.org](http://www.deersearch.org)) and United Blood Trackers ([www.unitedbloodtrackers.org](http://www.unitedbloodtrackers.org)) we get referrals through these organizations.

Last Sunday (October 21) was beautiful with temperature over 75 degrees. Leaves were spectacular, at their peak of color. We were tracking a wounded deer for a hunter in Rensselaer County, an hour drive from our place. Just when we were coming back from the field, another hunter called. By pure chance, he was only 20 minutes from us and he could not locate a deer wounded too far back in the early morning. Dogs can usually track successfully deer with this type of wounds. Even though there might not be much blood to work with, the scent left by the deer from the stomach wound is quite strong. After we met the hunter, Steve, who led us to the hunting grounds, it was quite a surprise to see his friend Jeff there. Jeff is an avid and experienced bowhunter but he has never seen tracking dogs in action. He had a camcorder in his hand so the pressure was on.

We had Elli and her son Arlo with us. Arlo is a littermate to Henry Holt's Bear, Sherry Ruggieri's Auggie and Dixie and our Amy and Emma. He is now four and a half years old and we got him back last December when his owner could not keep him any longer. For a while we were thinking about evaluating him

and if he showed a good potential, re-selling him as a tracking dog. He was not worked at all by his previous owner but he was very promising as a puppy. We really liked what we saw last spring/summer in training on artificial lines, and also we have grown fond of him. Then this fall he finished his field championship with ease and three first places. We made a decision to keep him as we got attached to him; he seems very happy here and he is a hunting dog with a wonderful personality. Anyway, we decided to let him lead on his first natural deer call.

We started to track at 5:30 pm. The hunter showed us a short trail of sparse blood and Arlo followed it well. He was calm, tracked at a pretty slow pace and started to advance trail with a lot of confidence. Jeff thought that the deer must have veered off to the right but Arlo turned left to the field of golden rod. We did not see any blood but it is usually the case with a deer hit in this way. At this point we had no choice but to trust Arlo. The scent trail came very close to where our vehicles were parked. For a short time I had some doubts whether we were on a right track, but Arlo showed no hesitation. Jeff and Steve moved to the side, scouted the field ahead and saw that the bedded buck got up and started to move away. We saw the buck; his tail was down and his back was hunched up.

Arlo continued to track the cold scent methodically but then he hit the hot trail. It was not easy to handle Elli and trying to take pictures at the same time! When the dogs got on the hot line, they both opened and a quick pursuit followed.

The next 20 minutes were pretty hectic. Steve tried to arrow the deer, which bedded again, but unfortunately he missed. We got close to the buck several times but every time he would get up on his feet and run again. Even when we thought that he expired and Arlo jumped on him, deer got up, shook Arlo off, and ran again.

Finally Steve caught up with the buck again and put in another arrow. What an incredible will to live this deer had! Arlo, usually extremely possessive, pulled on the

buck's leg but was not overly aggressive. Perhaps having been thrown off the deer cooled his appetite for a direct confrontation.

Elli was very possessive of the deer so we let the dogs enjoy their find one at a time. Jeff and Steve were very happy with getting this deer. We got back home at 9 pm very happy with dogs' work. An e-mail from hunters was already waiting on our computer: "Steve and I wish to thank you very much for the exciting and successful search. The dogs worked amazingly well and Steve never would have recovered his deer without you guys and the dogs. You made a believer out of Steve and I with those dogs. Great way to end the day - don't you think."



It is going to be a memorable call, and I posted some pictures at <http://jola.smugmug.com/gallery/3693829>

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Two days later, we received a call from another distressed hunter. He arrowed a deer the previous evening at 5:30 pm. He was sure that the deer was shot in the stomach. We started to track at 10:30 am and John handled a two-year-old Bernie. It was a warm day, temperature around 70 degrees, and overcast sky. There was a good blood trail even though red leaves on the ground made spotting blood drops a bit difficult.

Bernie showed a good desire to track but he was too fast and not very focused. It was good to have a long blood trail to work with so we could actually evaluate Bernie's work as we were sure of where the deer went. After 150 yards of veering through the woods, the deer

went into patches of goldenrod. Bernie was pulling ahead, and he was not very accurate. When we ran out of blood line, we did not have much confidence about whether Bernie was on the right track. We searched and searched but could not see more blood. After one hour we decided to take Bernie back to the car and bring a more experienced Billy.

It was not an easy task for Billy to track through the terrain already trampled by three people and one dog. I was getting a bit discouraged as we could not find more blood and advance the trail. I could not believe that the deer, which was bleeding so much, all of sudden, would stop leaving any blood behind. While John was working with Billy, the hunter and I decided to look a bit to the right of the track - the only direction not explored yet. We were successful and found more blood at the edge of another goldenrod field.

We marked the blood and called John with Billy. This time we were very optimistic about finding the buck. This new blood trail was not disturbed by us or another dog and in the very thick cover Billy should not have had problems with following it. We were right! Now Billy was pulling with a great strength and he acted very sure of himself. Forty yards later (and two hours from the start with Bernie) we found the deer. It was a very sad site as unfortunately coyotes got there first! The damage was severe and the meat was not salvageable. It was a lesson that these days in our area a hunter risks losing a wounded or dead deer to coyotes if he chooses not to track at night. Billy got his reward by tugging on the deer and getting a piece of venison.



This deer call illustrates well how blood tracking relies on a partnership of handler and his dog. We found this deer thanks to Billy but on the other hand he would have a very hard time locating the deer by himself given the circumstances.

Pictures from this call are posted at <http://jola.smugmug.com/gallery/3702985>

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Laurel Whistance-Smith has been breeding dachshunds out of German bloodlines for at least 15 years. Last year she sold one of her puppies, Josy, to Christian Elwell, who is a big game outfitter in Alaska with a passion for hunting whitetails around and working with dogs. He spends late falls in Ithaca, NY. Recently he reported about his experiences in New Mexico.

“Hello Laurel, I’m in between trips for a couple of days and wanted to update you on Josy. What a dog. She had a ball this summer on my float trips. I got a life jacket for her and she rode on top of the gear while we floated. We had no trouble with bears this summer thanks to Josy. A three year old Brown Bear had been terrorizing rafters at the head waters of the trip. No one had had the opportunity to pepper it with bird shot and it was becoming quite cheeky. When it came into our camp one night Josy lit out after it and chased it over a mile down stream at which point it dove in and swam for the other side, not to be seen again. This was only one of the many times she kept our camp and perimeter free of bears. She has a zero tolerance policy for them.

The big news is the time we spent on the Vermejo Ranch in northern New Mexico. The ranch itself is over 900 square miles and is the largest of Ted Turner’s properties. It has the best elk hunting in North America. This year was the first year New Mexico has allowed blood tracking with leashed dogs. Josy) and I were invited to come down and see how we could do during bow season. Nothing like starting at the top. There were quite a few chuckles when people first saw the scurfy, short dog. A few people had heard of the breed, but no one really had any clue.

Our first call for elk was a gut hit bull we followed up 24 hours after it had been hit. We worked for six hours on hot, dry, rocky ground with almost no visible

blood. Almost three hours later, through lots and lots of fresh elk tracks, we found the bull. Amazing how she worked. She is so determined.

The last elk we found was also hit really far back. She lost the line in the middle of the track and took 45 minutes to figure things out before she began to tug hard on the leash. We would find pin drops of blood every 10 meters or so. After three miles she stopped and made a hard left and started going up hill. Two miles away we found the bull, a large 6X6 so it was 3.2 miles and 1200 feet in elevation gain. There is no way in Hell any human could have found either of these bulls.

As for the people that laughed. I think that there might be a little corner in northern New Mexico where the cowboys have dachshunds instead of heelers.

Season total on recovered animals is: three elk and one black bear – not bad for seven days”.

