



Johnna Jeanneny



Gordon Allen

wirehaired dachshund puppies

The author holding Clary von Moosbach.

 *Born to Track:*
 THE DOGS OF DEER SEARCH, INC.

By John Jeanneny

The hunter holds his breath as a buck walks in closer to his stand. His bow string is drawn, but just as he releases the arrow, the deer suddenly veers away. The arrow strikes the deer, but not in the intended spot. After due diligence in searching for the deer, but still unable to locate the animal or a strong blood trail, the hunter calls Deer Search, Inc. The hunter knows that a team of a tracking dog and handler will either find the deer, or determine, with a high degree of certainty, that it was not seriously wounded and will survive.

Deer Search teams have been helping hunters track and recover wounded deer and bear for nearly 40 years. What began in 1976 as an experimental research program to use leashed tracking dogs to find wounded big game, has grown into an official program that has successfully recovered hundreds of animals. The idea came from Europe, but had to be modified and adapted to conditions here. Initially, leashed tracking dogs were a hard sell. For years, DEC had successfully repeated the message: "Dogs and deer hunting don't mix." But the dogs proved



Mark Niad

Marc Niad holding his German jagdterrier.

themselves worthy, showing they could follow and locate their quarry, even when there was no visible blood trail. Ten years later, in 1986, the New York State Legislature passed a bill legalizing the use of leashed tracking dogs for finding wounded deer and bear, and a state license for tracking dog handlers was created.

The tracking dogs of Deer Search have been, and continue to be, the core of the program. But equally important is a close, working partnership between dog and handler. Sometimes this means “reading” your canine partner’s problem and helping him or her track in a particularly difficult situation, such as across a plowed field where there is little or no scent.

When the aroma of wild turkeys or fresh, healthy deer overwhelm the faint scent of a wounded-deer track that may be many hours old, handlers can steady their dogs and help them through the distractions.

Tracking wounded big game with a leashed tracking dog is a unique experience.

Over the years, many handlers have learned that it is deeply satisfying to succeed with a dog in a difficult search that neither team member could have normally accomplished alone.

Much of the early success of the program can be credited to the state’s first leashed tracking dog, Clary von Moosbach. A 22-pound, wirehaired dachshund, she educated her handler (me) and many hunters as well. I got a kick out of seeing the surprise on most hunters’ faces when Clary first hopped out of the truck. They were expecting a coonhound-sized dog, and clearly had doubts that little Clary was up to the task. But time and time again, Clary changed their minds as she successfully tracked and located the wounded animals.

As New York’s program evolved, dachshunds of the wirehaired variety became the most widely used breed. These dachshunds are registered by the American



Young wirehaired dachshunds exploring the great outdoors.

Kennel Club, and their ancestors are hunting/tracking dachshunds from Europe, where for generations they have been bred and used for finding wounded big game. Generally shorter in the back and higher on the leg than their American cousins, these European dachshunds were developed in Germany to work underground on foxes and badgers, and also to track in rough terrain.

Wirehaired dachshunds make excellent tracking dogs for several reasons. They have exceptional noses and so can learn to follow the “right” deer on a day-old trail. When there is no blood trail, they can track a particular deer by following the highly individualized scent left by the glands located between the cloves of the deer’s hooves. Wirehaired dachshunds



The author with “Tom vom Linteler-Forst” (one of his tracking dogs) on a wounded deer call.

also make excellent household companions who bond closely with the family, especially with their handler.

For some handlers, tracking becomes addictive and they move from using the multi-purpose dachshund to a breed specifically bred for tracking. In Deer Search, the second most popular breed among handler fanatics is currently the Bavarian mountain bloodhound (BMH). This is a 40- to 50-pound dog whose ancestry goes back to the early bloodhounds of the Middle Ages. They are half the size of today's American bloodhound and are much easier to handle on steep, slippery slopes and in briar thickets. The BMH has a bloodhound-class nose, and most of them bond closely with their handlers.

Rommel is a BMH who has the superior nose and cooperative attitude characteristic of the breed. In one

instance, Rommel and his handler Fred Zoeller tracked and found an exceptional buck 17 hours after it had been shot during rifle season. The hunter had been able to follow the deer for 300 yards before losing the trail in swamp water. The hunter called Fred in Cooperstown; the next morning the team began tracking from the site where the deer had been hit. By the time Rommel reached the swamp, he had assembled all the deer's scents in his consciousness and tracked through the water by following wisps of body scent on swamp grass. He located the dead deer on high ground on the other side of the swamp, enabling the hunter to use the meat.

Labrador retrievers have proven very effective deer trackers as well. Highly intelligent and cooperative, labs learn rapidly to stay on the "right" deer track,



Labrador retriever

Jolanta Jeanneney



A hunter with his deer that Rommel (a BMH) tracked across a swamp.

Fred Zoeller



Often used for hunting, German shorthaired pointers also make excellent tracking dogs.

which is actually the most challenging aspect of training. The problem with some labs is that they have been bred exclusively as easy-going house pets to the point that they have lost their instinctive “prey drive,” a trait inherited from the dog’s wolf ancestors, and essential for being a good tracker.

But good tracking dogs cannot be selected by breed, and across New York there are a number of different breeds that track successfully. Scenting power is very important, but intelligence and a desire to cooperate with the handler count for even

more. Versatile hunting dogs like German shorthaired and wirehaired pointers are proving themselves here, as they did in their country of origin. In southeastern New York, hunters are served by an outstanding German jagdterrier owned by Marc Niad. Miniature dachshunds of about 13 pounds are also finding New York deer, despite their small body mass that can be a handicap in cold, wet conditions. While beagles have not caught on widely in New York, one outstanding beagle named Mickey found 160 deer for his owner Tim Nichols.

Tracking wounded big game with a leashed tracking dog is a unique experience, and something that handlers do for free (unless they are a Licensed Guide who can charge a fee). The rewards come from knowing that you are doing the right thing: reducing animal suffering and preventing the waste of venison. New York’s program proved so

successful that 23 other states followed our example and legalized leashed tracking dogs.

To me, using leashed tracking dogs has been a way of life, and something I hope to do for years to come. I’ve found that tracking with my dog on the end of a thirty foot leash has made me more aware of his world of scent, and opened my eyes to a whole new dimension of nature.

Co-founder of Deer Search, Inc. in New York, **John Jeanneney** has owned and hunted with European wirehaired dachshunds since he brought his first dachshund back from Germany in 1965. Check out his website at www.born-to-track.com.

For more information on New York’s leashed tracking dog program, visit:

www.dec.ny.gov/permits/25020.html

For more information on Deer Search, Inc., an organization of volunteers who help hunters find deer wounded during hunting season, visit: <http://deersearch.org>



Andriel Nicolau

Nova, a German wirehaired pointer