

# Tracking Column

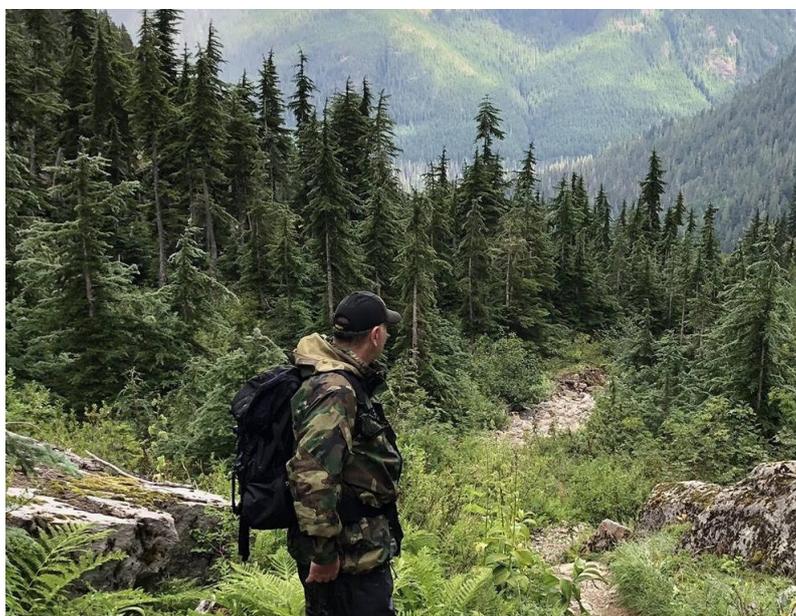
MAY, 2020

ISSUE N.10



THE WAY OF TRACKING © KYT WALKEN

**R O B E R T  
B R A D Y**



Bob is the senior tracker of the Snohomish County Tracking Team having over 28 years working with Snohomish County Sheriff's Office and Snohomish County Volunteer Search & Rescue. His introduction to tracking people began in 1991 when he was taught about its use to locate lost or missing people.

Bob attended formal tracking training through Universal Training Systems under the Sign Cut Division where he became certified as a tracker.

Bob continued his training through Universal Tracking Services where he advanced his training and certification levels. Bob achieved the Sign Cutter certification through Joel Hardin Professional Tracking Services. Bob's knowledge and experience have been gained from years of training and missions. He has over 5,000 hours of tracking experience with over 300 missions.

These missions involved Search & Rescue, Major Crimes and Tactical Tracking. Bob's tracking skills have been used by many agencies, including U.S. Army, Navy/Marines, Air force, FBI, ATF&E, Fire Marshals, NCIS, DHS, Fish & Game, U.S. Forrest Service, along with multiple Sheriff's Offices, SWAT, and Police agencies across multiple states in the U.S. as well as involvement in International tracking missions with U.S. Embassies in multiple countries.

Bob has documented formal mission reports or training records for individuals or teams noted above. Bob has testified in multiple homicide cases and qualified as an expert in giving an opinion or conclusion to help the court understand evidence, or to establish a fact in issue.

**1. Did your "carrier" as Professional Tracker start with a particular episode? Why?**

The episode was the transition from military life to the civilian life, but wanting to continue to utilize the skills I used in the military to serve my community. My journey with tracking began in 1991 when I joined the Snohomish County Volunteer Search and Rescue team. I had just left the military after serving two enlistments, and I wanted to continue using my skills to serve my community.

On one hand, the SAR unit was not as disciplined as the military like I had envisioned, while on the other hand the SAR units were free to organize its resources and skills to best serve the community quickly. After learning basic SAR search techniques, I realized the techniques were not very effective and was based on probabilities of detection at best. I performed on several search missions running up and down trails yelling the subject's name. I thought there had to be a better way to find a missing person. The leadership had sponsored a tracking class to anyone who was interested in learning another search technique so I was happy to attend. I had experience tracking predators, game animals and cattle from an early age growing up on ranches and farm land in central Oregon. The class was taught by a professional tracking school "Universal Training Systems" which was led by Ret. Lt. Col. Frank Heyl who had been a survival instructor for the military and private sectors and had a "Sign Cut" division that covered the skills of tracking humans. Joel Hardin, a US Border Patrol tracker was the chief instructor. Joel Hardin since then has formed several tracking schools, with the current one being Joel Hardin Professional Tracking Services (JHPTS). My first class was an eye opener on several levels. First, I thought I was already a tracker based on my earlier experiences tracking animals on the ranch. I was wrong. I was on my hands and knees studying the smallest details in each and every track as I moved along the line of sign. After two days in school working on the line of sign, over long days, I was amazed at what we learned and what we had followed and I realized I knew very little about tracking. I told Joel that at our current speed, our subject would be dead by the time we got to them. He then explained what the training objectives were. We were learning to see sign. That was the objective. Not to track the person at this point in training, but instead learn to see and recognize the sign step by step.

**2. In your personal path in Tracking you may have gained experience in completely different geographic scenarios. Which happens to be the toughest?**

I have tracked people in many different countries on missions or training under lots of conditions. When I first began learning to track, the toughest experience was learning to track in clear cut areas where the trees had been harvested leaving tough terrain to track in. I soon realized that tracking in the fine cheat grass in a high desert was more difficult. After gaining more experience I discovered that tracking over the lava rock fields in south eastern Oregon, then it was more difficult tracking on the baked earth in Wyoming during wind storms, tracking in high altitude of Peru, Tracking in the hardy jungles of the Philippines were then the toughest, then I realized the toughest tracking was tracking over asphalt. My epiphany came when I realized the actual toughest terrain is any terrain that a person has never gained experience tracking on before. The toughest terrain lives in the mind of the tracker. All terrain can be worked by a seasoned tracker once they overcome the contradictions in their mind.

### **3. Lessons from the past. Please recommend us a good book on Tracking you cherish!**

I have had lots of key lessons from my instructors, peers and students. Learning to be humble while pushing on with the skills of tracking. Set a personal tracking goal, and visualize where you will be as a tracker in 5 years. One of the questions I get often was how did I get so lucky to be involved on all the tracking missions and adventures. The answer is that it's not luck. Every tracker needs to put in the effort to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of meeting your personal goals as a tracker. You make your own luck by putting yourself in situations to be utilized. As an example, when asked for volunteers, I volunteered to serve lunch from the food truck to support the local SWAT team on an operation involving an auto theft ring. They were going to raid a facility that would take all day. Serving them allowed me to network and get my face known. This was in parallel with earning my reputation as a search & rescue tracker. As I operated on missions, I always turned in my report which was most often promptly thrown in the garbage when I turned my back. I kept networking and building my reputation. It takes years to build a solid reputation and only one second to ruin it. Eventually one of my reports made it to a sergeant who recognized its value and added it to their report which gave them kudos for turning in such an aggregate of supporting reports. I was then called by law enforcement to perform tracking on their case and, to them, more importantly, my reports for their cases. After a few missions and major crimes cases, they realized the tracking evidence gave them key information that was a huge piece of the puzzle that helped them solve cases. Today, most of my tracking missions are law enforcement cases for the Major Crimes Unit. I have one of the largest library's on tracking humans, my favorite book remains "Tracking: A blueprint for learning how" by Jack Kearney. There are several quality books on tracking that I can recommend, however this book is the absolute foundational book for new trackers to read. When I first bought the book in 1991, I read it cover to cover and highlighted lessons or points that I thought were valuable. After I gained experience I re-read the book and realized I missed key points and I highlighted them. The same the following year. After a few years the book was fully highlighted and well worn. I purchased several new copies over the years, and I have passed them out to trackers that show keen interest and the heart to become great trackers.

### **4. Your Tracking Kit is made of..**

My tracking kit is in a back pack and a box that I carry at times which can be downsized for the mission. Each mission is dynamic. For SAR missions, I carry the standard requirements that meet the expectations of the unit. For Tactical or Law Enforcement missions I carry the standard requirements per agency policy and expectations. In addition to the above, I carry a "pack vest" capable of holding water and basic supplies which include 1st aid supplies, high energy foods, sunscreen and insect protection, tracking stick, light source, biodegradable ribbon, notebook, pen, permanent marker, compass, GPS, FRS Radio, unit radio, small tape measure, camera, phone, footprint cards, rain gear, hat or headgear, sunglasses, watch, folding knife. Clothing should be appropriate for the mission, high quality footwear is foundational to successful trackers. When possible, trackers should carefully consider the type of power sources your equipment has to maintain functionality of electronic equipment. Having a common power source is best, such as all equipment using AA batteries will keep the power needs simple and easy to obtain from local sources. Most of the gear described will fit into a lightweight vest with zippered pockets. Avoid Velcro pockets.