

# Tracking Column

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THE WAY OF TRACKING © KYT WALKEN

## ANDY MARTIN



Andy Martin, former military and security contractor in high risk environment, has dedicated his life to conservation and antipoaching operations. He has a degree in biochemistry.

He is currently Executive Director and Chief Instructor for *Conservation Rangers Operations Worldwide*, a Non-Profit organization registered 501(c)(3) in the US, whose mission is to establish and train Rangers to set standard in the skills necessary to support, train, and supplement anti-poaching and conservation efforts worldwide.

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## 1. How Tracking can be successfully applied to any Antipoaching Operation and why?

There's no doubt that tracking (both animals and humans) is the single most important skill to any Ranger of the world. It's Rangers duty to protect the environment, and specifically an area assigned, from crimes such as poaching. Just like any other Law Enforcement operation, Rangers have two primary tasks: preventing crime and pursuing criminals. Both these activities involve tracking. Crime prevention starts with the control of the territory, achieved through constant surveillance; Rangers patrol vast areas looking for signs of human activities.

A mind attuned to tracking is able to detect and process those signs rapidly, in fact tracking has become a state of mind to most experienced Rangers. The tracks and spoor found need to be interpreted, if they are fresh and suggesting a criminal activity the "hunt" begins. I call this type of tracking "*intelligence tracking*", because its purpose is to find and collect informations, processing and report them to the HQ. Unless we want to rely on mere luck to intercept and arrest poachers, acquiring intelligence is absolutely necessary.

When it's too late to prevent a crime (such as a rhino killed for its horn), the slow pace of the "*intelligence tracking*" is not an option and a different approach is needed, i call it "*hunt tracking*": this approach is adopted when criminals are on the loose and speed is critical.

For example, when the carcass of a killed animal is found, poachers have already gone and the only way to apprehend them is to close the gap.

Speed is required as much as caution, because criminals may set up an ambush as a last resort to prevent the arrest, therefore the tracking procedures of the Hunt Tracking are adapted to fit the tactical needs of this type of operations.



But the AntiPoaching Units are also extremely proficient at tracking animals, since it's part of their job to surveil and protect wildlife. It's not rare to find blood stains close to animal footprints: even if the blood may be the result of a fight with other animals, it's necessary to find the animal and check if veterinary support is needed and whether the wound has been caused by a failed poaching attempt.

Despite all the technological innovations, it's safe to say that tracking is still the most practical and effective way to protect wildlife.

2. Does the South African approach to Tracking mainly influence your beginning in this Art?

When I observed the South African Rangers for the first time, I was impressed by their simple and effective approach to tracking: common sense, knowledge and dynamism made them the fathers of the modern tracking worldwide.

I believe their pragmatism inspired me so deeply that I would associate tracking to Science more than Art.







3. Your ordinary Tracking Kit for patrolling consists of..

A tape measure, a notepad and a pencils, a phone or camera, a flashlight.  
But honestly, only the tape measure is carried specifically for tracking purposes.

4. Can the S.A. method and the American Tactical Tracking method match together and provide remarkable successes in preventing poaching activities?

There are not many differences on the paper, but while the south african method was born, developed and optimized for military units operating in remote areas in Africa, the american army adapted the concepts to different environments and situations. This is, obviously, an over-simplification, but it's the easiest way to put it.

Since the poaching crisis hits Africa and Asia the most, my personal opinion is that the south african approach, which is somehow minimalistic, may be slightly more effective.

