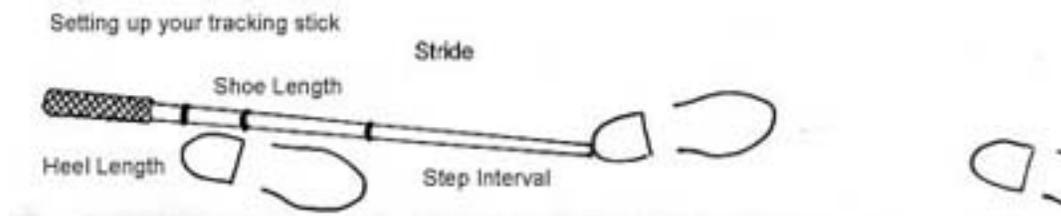


Tracking Stick and Step by Step Method

Most trades have their specialized tools, in tracking it is the sign cutting stick / tracking stick. It is hard to believe such a simple tool can be so effective. All the tool really does is to make you look, or focus your eyes where they need to be focused.

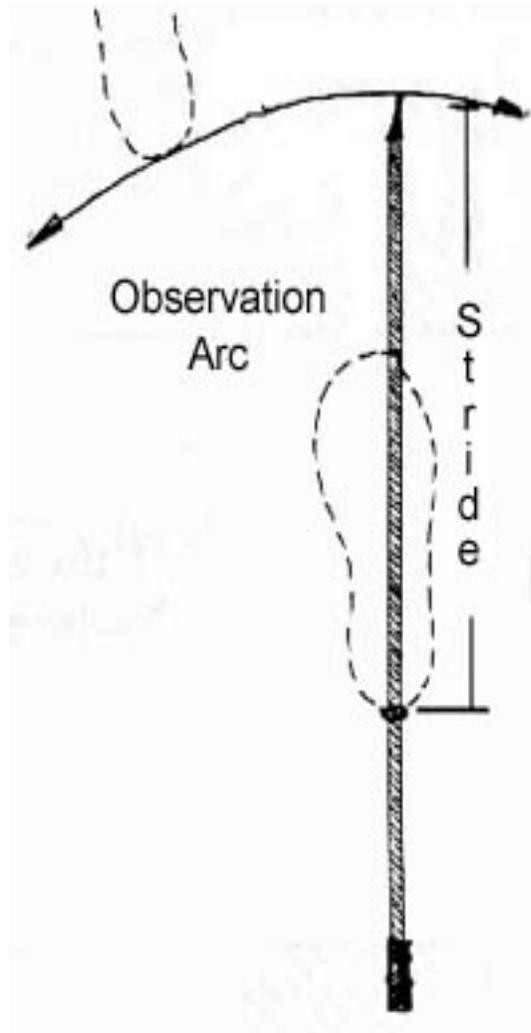
The Step-by-Step Method of tracking is stride based. That is, a Tracker get from one track to the next by determining stride (the distance from heel of the rear print to heel of the front print) then searching one stride from the last track found. This requires some sort of ridged measuring device to measure stride and a tracking stick works well for this.

The stride length is indicated on a tracking stick by placing an "O" ring or rubber band one stride length from the end, the marker is can then be placed at the heel of the last track and at the end of the stick pointed in the direction of travel. The end of the stick, then, becomes a pointer towards where the next sign of track is expected to be found. The stick causes the Trackers attention to be focused on a small piece of ground rather than a large area. Remember that trick about reducing the area you really have to search?

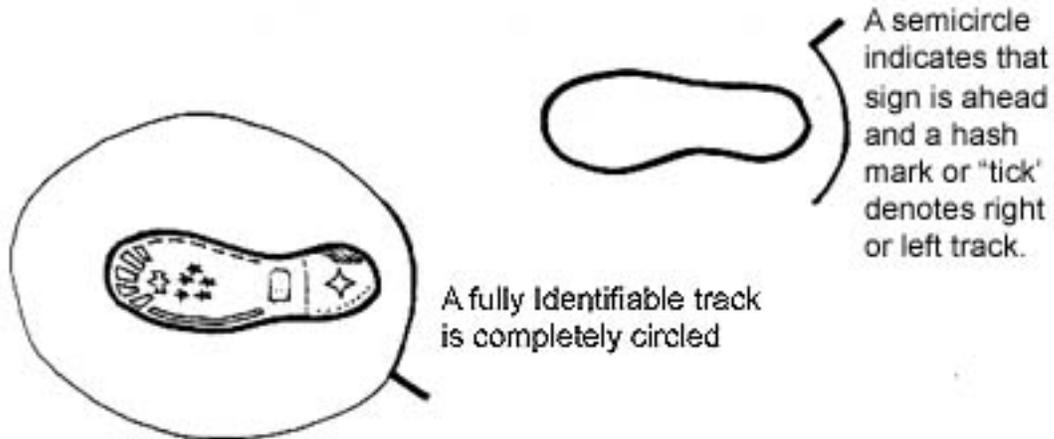


On the last print found, hold the stick so the stride mark is held close to, but above, the rear of the heel. Move the tip of the stick through the arc which covers the area where the next track should occur.

While sweeping the stick very slowly, study the area directly in front of the tip for sign. Take about 20 seconds to sweep from about 10 o'clock to about 2 o'clock, focusing primarily to the left for a left print (10 o'clock) or to the right for a right print (2 o'clock). Somewhere during the sweep the tip should point to the heel of the next print. It may be obvious or it may be difficult, but it should be there. If you don't find anything, make another sweep of the area even slower. Constantly be alert to the possibility that the subject being tracked may abruptly change direction or alter their stride.



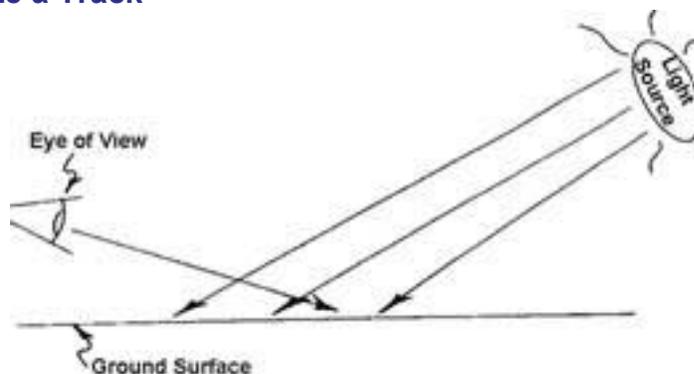
So now that you have found a print, drawn it, photographed it, measured it, set your tracking stick up and you set off starting to follow the track - I need to tell you that you need to label each print that you find.



Tracks should be marked in two ways, indicate whether it is a left or right track, circle them if they are fully identifiable. To mark the track, or partial track, start by using the tracking stick to etch a semicircle to the rear of the track. To a tracker, this arc should indicate track immediately ahead, STAY OFF. A short hash mark or tick is placed at the right end of the semicircle to indicate a right track, and a left mark for a left track. Fully circling the Identifiable track (That is, there is enough of a print visible to indicate shoe type, and sole pattern). This should indicate to other trackers this is the print they are following and try to preserve it as evidence.

Light Control to Visualize a Track

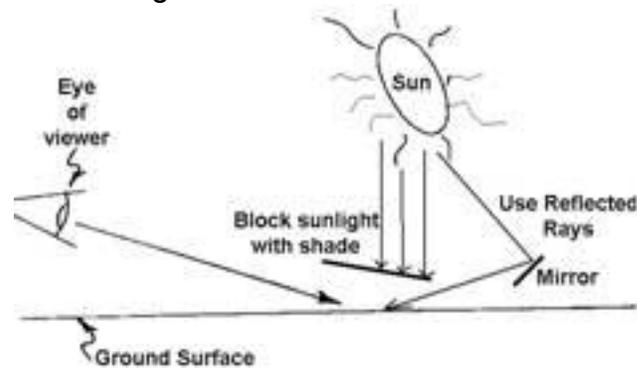
Tracking is best accomplished at night, when the near complete control of the available light is based on the tracker's flashlights and headlamps. Through low angle light impingement as is shown in the figure above, the track stands out clearly.



Tracking teams must often crawl on knees to keep the proper light angle and operate their tracking sticks effectively. Some members attach lamps to the tip of the tracking stick to allow low angle lighting while standing. If it were possible to track the subject with a vehicle, it would be best to place low angle lights on the front bumper.

To reduce eyestrain it is best to use only that light which is sufficient to locate the track. Lower intensity LED flashlights work well in reducing eyestrain and maintain night vision. On a brightly moonlit night, brighter flashlights may be necessary.

Tracking during daylight hours is a challenge. The bright light of the sun just about eliminates all shadows within the track that provides the contrast of the print. Daytime tracking is best in the early morning or late afternoon when the sun is at a lower angle creating more shadows. The tracker may have to reposition themselves generally facing towards the sun to see the shadows. The tracker may be able to control the lighting by using wide-brim hat to shade the track and use either a flashlight or the mirror from a compass to redirect the light as shown below



Miscellaneous Observations

Remember that tracks are only one part of tracking, other possible signs to look for are: Cigarette butts and candy wrappers, threads from clothing, dry mud from shoes, Water splashed on rock or soil, disturbed twigs, rocks and grass, or human waste material.

The searcher should place themselves in the place of the missing subject to estimate what the missing subject might do in the given situation.

Tracking Team

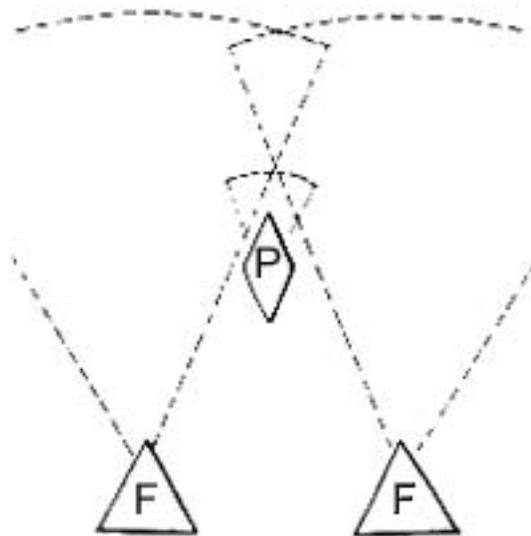
A common approach to following a track by the Step-by-Step Method is with three person teams.

The three-person team, comprised of a Point Person and two Flankers, has several advantages.

- It allows for consultation in difficult situations because three heads are better than one. (Sometimes). If you can convince another hard

head that what you are seeing is sign, then you are twice as likely to be right.

- When training it, builds confidence, reduces errors and benefits students by allowing a verbal exchange of the details of what is seen rather than just a mutual observation of a clue.
- It allows rotation of the Point-Person who is physically on the ground searching for sign. Point is a tiring position, especially when sign is limited.
- It also allows the Team to split up if several trails diverge. Any team member can call the team back together when one finds that he or she is on the correct track.



Point - Person Responsibilities:

- Stays just behind the last track found, uses the tracking stick to search for the next piece of sign, and marks the tracks as they proceed.
- Keeps Flankers from obliterating sign by getting ahead and whacks them with the tracking stick if they do.
- Coordinates efforts of the Team.

Flanker - Person Responsibilities:

- From an upright position, the Flankers watch the sides for incoming tracks that might confuse the situation.
- They watch for sudden turn of the trail they are following.
- They help point out the next track from their vantage point.
- They look for the other pieces of clues, broken branches, moved rocks, candy wrappers, cigarette butts, fecal material.