



Fall 2012

Annual General Meeting Issue

President's Message, Mike Neeland:

I'm sure most of you have crossed paths with me in the past. For those who haven't - I started tracking in the early 80s in the Cariboo. I stopped counting the professionally instructed classes that I have attended at 100. I have assisted in twice that many in house tracking classes over the years.

My tracking family extends from Alaska to La Pas Manitoba, to Logan Utah and most areas in between so you have lots of brothers and sisters.

I was elected President of BCTAS at the AGM on 22 September, from a host of applicants. My hope for the coming year is to continue to promote and instruct tracking in our local areas and all so to all levels of emergency services providers. We have had some success in that field lately but our task is just beginning.

It could be as simple as speaking with your local watch commander at the RCMP or Municipal Police detachment and providing him with a copy of the BCTA video available on our web site.

Your thoughts and ideas have real merit so let's hear them. The board is here to do your bidding.

Mike Neeland. Sign Cutter,
President, BC Tracking Association

VP's Message, Dwaine Brooke:

For those of you that don't know me, I am a tracker, BCTA instructor, member of Kamloops Search and Rescue, and now, Vice President of BCTA.

I think the BCTA has made tremendous advances this last year, introducing tracking to many novices around the province, fulfilling our commitment to National SAR Secretariat to train GSAR members to the Track Aware level.

I see our biggest challenge this coming year is keeping the momentum going while we still do not have any assurance that we will get another grant.

We need to finalize our standards for the advanced levels of tracking in BC which I believe will be a priority for the Training Committee in the next six months. They will have my full support and I will be promoting that we not lose our focus on tracking when developing those standards.

I know from personal experience, as many of you do, that tracking can be an effective tool for SAR groups to save lives in BC.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with suggestions on how we can represent you and be more effective on your behalf.

Dwaine Brooke
Vice President, BC Tracking Association

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Annual General Meeting

The Association Annual General Meeting was held Saturday, 22 September at the Vernon course. The full minutes of the Annual General Meeting can be found at the website > Members Only.

Elections were held for Executive and Regional Director positions as follows:

BCTA Executive and Directors 2012-13

President: Mike Neeland
Vice President: Dwaine Brooke
Secretary: Win Koch
Treasurer: Alison Rose

Regional Directors:

SE: Jerome Liboiron
Central: Kelly Carnochan
North NE & NW: Vacant
VI & SW: Kathryn Farr

Committee Chairs:

Membership: Peggy Shelley
Training: Kelly Carnochan
Communications: Win Koch
Policy: Dwaine Brooke

Contact information at:

<http://www.bctracking.org>

Regional Directors

The BC Tracking Association Society is still looking for volunteers to fill the positions of Regional Directors in several areas of the Province of BC. The duties include: liaising with GSAR training officers and trackers within the region, providing tracking training materials and advice, facilitating tracking training, assisting other Regional Directors and providing reports, as required. Directors are voting members of the Executive Board of Directors and play a major role in furthering Tracker Training in BC. Please contact us if you are willing to represent your area of the province!

Tracker Rewards!

The Board approved a \$500 tracker training reimbursement certificate to be awarded to a BCTA member in good standing, for submitting a 400-word (1 page) essay about what they personally have found most rewarding, challenging, interesting or revealing about their Tracker Training. The first prize reimbursement can be used to subsidize attendance at any tracking course of the winner's choosing – it doesn't have to be a BCTA sponsored course. Second prize will be a reimbursement certificate for one complementary tuition to attend any BCTA sponsored course. Third prize is a reimbursement certificate for a complementary three year BCTA membership.

All essays must be e-mailed in PDF format to training@bctracking.org and president@bctracking.org by 1 January 2013. The three winning members will be announced in April, at the beginning of the new Tracking Training Season! Winners will be announced and their essays will be published in this newsletter.

Training

Kelly Carnochan has replaced Bart Bjorkman as Chair of the Training Committee. Peter Wilson will be heading up reviews of the draft Tracker Training Standards, which are a deliverable under the SAR NIF Contribution Agreement.

This past quarter (July-September), courses were held in Comox, Vernon and Golden for 44 students, plus a course in Elkford during the last weekend in June for 13 students.

Fall courses are scheduled for Arrowsmith and Squamish, and in planning for Elkford. That will wrap up the fall training season. See the website www.bctracking.org calendar for details and registration information.

The Association now has two new Epson projectors and speakers which will be available for instructors both on Vancouver Island and the Mainland. The Training committee will coordinate transferring them as required for locations that can't provide the equipment.

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Memberships

Peggy Shelley will carry on her great work as Chair of the Membership Committee. Currently, we have 163+ members. This is a drop from the approximately 250 members we had in the spring due to fewer membership renewals. Approximately 80 memberships are for one year only, to take advantage of the discounted tuition cost and mileage reimbursement available, thanks to the SAR NIF funding which the Association received.

Special thanks to all those dedicated members who have sent in 3-year memberships!

Memberships are valid annually from 1 May through 30 April, and not pro-rated. Membership cards are now being issued by the Lead Instructors on registration at a course. This saves considerable time in mailing out the cards, and saves some costs.

Policy

Dwaine Brooke will carry on as Chair of the Policy Committee. They will be reviewing the current BCTA policies with a view to incorporating them into a single Policy Manual.

Based on the approved budget, and the results of the Gaming Grant application, the 2013 fee-for-service model or grant reimbursement model will have to be finalized. This will be done once the decision on the Gaming Grant is announced in December.

Communications

Win Koch will carry on as Chair of the Communications Committee, along with Ram Sudama as the Webmaster.

As well as being placed on the website and sent out via membership e-mails and Mike's Tracker Grapevine, course announcements and newsletters are also forwarded to EMBC and BC SARA for further distribution around the Province. However, the best communication is members talking directly to their SAR groups and local Public Safety and Parks officials.

As always, Tracker Tales from the members for this Newsletter are always welcome. This issue features the SAR Sill search near New Hazelton in July. Although the search ended without locating the subject, the experience of providing mutual aid and following up and reporting evidence is a good lesson for all Trackers and Searchers.

Finances

Alison Rose was elected to the Treasurer position. The annual financial Statement and the 2013 budget were approved at the AGM. Details are available on the website in the Members Only section.

The SAR NIF Contribution Agreement will end in March 2013. There may be a small refund of unspent funds to the National SAR Secretariat, but that amount will not be known until the final costs are in from the remaining courses.

The 2013 budget was presented with the two options: with and without a Gaming Grant. It outlines a budget for 10 planned courses for next year at a total training cost of \$60,000 - 9 In House Novice & Advanced, plus one Instructor course.

Correspondence

Discussions with Don Bindon, President BC SARA indicated the possibility of the BCTA obtaining liability insurance under the SAR group policy. E-mail from Ian Cummings, EMBC SAR Specialist, stated that SAR Training Standards will be reviewed, beginning with Swift water. In due course, EMBC will be reviewing the Tracker Standards the Association is preparing for the NSS.

Both EMBC and BC SARA were asked to consider officially recognizing the BCTA GSAR Tracker Certification, based on the Training Standards.

Correspondence and a telecom with Stan Robson, President UTS, clarified some training issues. It was recommended that an update of the 2009 UTS/BCTA agreement could be considered, to include Advanced Training.

Tracker Tales



SAR SILL July 2012

Submitted by Ole Edliq
SAR Volunteer since 1977
NSR Life member
CVGSAR Active Life Member.
BCTA Member

The search for a young American filmmaker believed missing in the Great Bear Rainforest of northern B.C. has been suspended. Twenty-six-year-old Warren Sill of Ohio travelled to the New Hazelton area earlier in the month to film a documentary on the Kermode bears — a rare subspecies of black bears that have white coats and are known as "spirit bears."

Police said Sill's vehicle had been left parked on the edge of the Seven Sisters Provincial Park at the entrance to the Whiskey Creek Trail since July 5.



The RCMP, along with Search and Rescue teams from around the province, began a massive air and ground search for nearly two weeks, but found no trace of Sill.

Sgt. Jeff Pelley of the New Hazelton RCMP issued a release Sunday night date July 22, 2012 to announce the search had been called off. He said "Further search efforts will be considered should further information be received that may assist in identifying other possible search areas."

When the search was launched police had said they were concerned that Sill wasn't an experienced outdoors man and his camping gear were still inside his car.

Sill is described as a white male, about five feet ten inches tall and weighing around 180 pounds. He has a medium build and short dirty blond hair.

SAR Task # 131640

Tuesday July 17. 12:08 hours a request for mutual aid was received at Comox Valley GSAR for strong volunteers to be able to hike in tough mountain terrain to assist in the search for a missing hiker who was in an area near Hazelton BC, intent on making a documentary about Spirit Bears.

Two members from Comox GSAR, along with several members from other Vancouver Island teams and the lower mainland answered the call for fresh volunteers to help search for the missing American, Warren Sill.

Seven SAR volunteers from Comox and the Lower Mainland gathered at the Comox Air Base where the RCMP fixed-wing aircraft was waiting to take them to Terrace. A rental vehicle was hired at Terrace Airport to transport the 7 volunteers to the search base. located between Terrace and Hazelton, below the Seven Sisters Park on HWY 16 at the Whisky Creek trail head (approx. 1-1/4 hour drive.).

Our group of seven signed-in with the usual *name, address, next of kin, phone contact*. There was no indication for the requirement to fill out for SAR Team Affiliation or SAR Member Qualifications. Our group of seven was briefed on current situation, including what progress had been made in the field to date.

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Briefing information indicated that a Forest Falling Crew tasked with clearing helicopter landing sites in the huge search area had come across two separate locations of possible human tracks with shoe size matching that of the missing American (shoe size 10-1/2). The track location had been flagged as well as the GPS location logged.

Search teams with dogs had been dispatched several areas days prior, but not to the area where the Forest crews had located the Human Tracks.

A three-person Team had been dispatched to one of the two human track locations via helicopter to a site called Blow Down Lake (more like a swamp than a lake). Members of the team had only track aware experience. Upon learning this, I identified myself as a member of BCTA with over 30 years of tracking experience. SAR managers learning this, asked if Marc Lyster and I could be ready to be transported to the designated Helicopter landing and pick-up site further down HWY 16 located in a farmer's field and flown to Blow Down Lake search area.

We asked that the team in field of Blow Down Lake tasked with checking out the human track hold their position until Mark and I arrived to join them.

It should be noted that the landing situation at Blow Down Lake indicated that it was more like a swamp masked with a mixture of tall grasses - in other words be prepared to get wet feet - and it was. For two days teams arriving at Blow Down Lake walked all day with swamp water in their hiking boots.

The first landing site chosen by previous search teams was an hour's wet crawl over logs and tall grass from where the first sign was located. Due to the difficult conditions, two of the other team members decided to return to Blow Down Lake helicopter drop-off site and return to SAR Base.

Finally arriving on solid ground, our team was split into two teams making sure each team had some track aware experience. It did not take long before I found human tracks located above Blow Down Lake. Two

sets were flagged and called into SAR Base with GPS location. These tracks were not forest service crew tracks as far as search base knowledge indicated, and not the tracks we were tasked to locate. In the meantime Marc had located the flagged Forest Service track location. Being careful not to disturb the area we headed over to where Marc was located.

A photograph was taken of the track in the mossy ground as per SAR base instruction. However the picture turned out to be unclear and not usable. I checked out the track which was a genuine human disturbance with part print size indicating shoe size 10-1/2, but not a useful prime sign since there were no lugs or sole markings due to the ground cover consistency.

Other human disturbance was found leading down the embankment towards Blow Down Lake. Also visible was a straight line in the tall grassy swamp area of the lake, indicating someone or something traveled part way out away from the embankment and through the tall grass.

Upon further investigation and consulting SAR Base about where the forest service crews had arrived at their flagged track location, we concluded that possibly the forest crew must have departed to a helicopter pick-up in the swamp, hence the sudden tall grass disturbance termination including several large and a few smaller human prints in the edge of the embankment. After having further secured the area, we requested helicopter pick-up at our current Blow Down Lake location.

Helicopter landed at our location and we were and flown out to the landing area, then transported back to SAR Base and provided Management with our findings. Supper was waiting provided by on-site food services vehicle via Salvation Army Prince George chapter - (very fine service, I might add).

Our team of seven departed SAR Base to New Hazelton for our overnight Motel location at 22:45 hrs. arriving 23:15

July 18, 2012: Sunshine with some clouds at higher elevation. Our group of seven

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departed New Hazelton 07:20hrs for Search Base arriving 07:45hrs to a scrumptious breakfast again provided by the generosity of the Salvation Army. Signed in. (Nasty mosquitos were everywhere.)

More searchers arrived including several RCMP volunteers and two Forest Rangers from Hazelton.

08:30 everyone gathered for a search update and briefing. This morning someone was assigned to gather search volunteer experience and qualifications, including having each searcher's picture taken.

09:00 the first assignments were being prepared with two teams of three assigned to depart ASAP to the helicopter landing area to continue performing sign cutting in the previous day's search area of Blow Down Lake.

This morning we encountered a new helicopter pilot apparently not familiar with the area. Coaching the pilot to our designated helicopter landing area took a while since he had placed himself on an old air strip further north west on the other side of the Skeena River.

Upon finally arriving, Marc went out to brief the pilot and the first search team of three departed for Blow Down Lake area landing on route to our previous days designated swamp location, our boots filled with smelly swamp water again.

Our two tracking teams gathered around to look at and discuss the merits of what was found the previous day. The two teams decided to work together to investigate further disturbance in the area to distinguish human disturbance from animal disturbance starting at the protected human sign found by the forest service crew above Blow Down Lake. Of the two teams only one had previous sign cutting experience and one Forest Ranger was very experienced with animal tracking, the other members had a little track aware experience or none at all.

Working from the protected sign, the sign cutter found evidence of human disturbance

with the pattern of a human walking away from the supposedly prime location. Each of these disturbances was marked using small pieces of flagging tape with the "Left & Right foot pattern visible". This pattern eventually became indistinct in front of a huge blow down of trees making sign cutting a challenge and a hazard. Two photos were taken of the signs



We re-grouped and made the decision to temporarily leave this area to examine other evidence found previously. At this time, the Forest Ranger with two members were asked to pursue the tracks we found the day before that were protected and marked on GPS. Our team of three were to pursue another supposedly human track location marked by the Forest Service Crew near the shore of the south east end of Blow Down Lake. This proved to be a challenge as the pictures clearly show.

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assignment July 17, also the sign cutting start of the Forest Ranger team.

Marc crawled his way through the stick and logs while I went down to the bottom of the grass covered swamp area where human disturbance was found by moving the tall grasses aside with the tracking stick to reveal mud transfer on top of grass and leaves. Marc located further disturbance at his location, and followed them to my location. At this point I turned around to look behind and noticed the flagging protecting the two tracks found July 17 part way up the embankment.



We concluded that we had now completed our assignment and closed our loop to this point to where the Forest Ranger team commenced their sign cutting assignment. The Forest ranger team returned to our location with the information that their sign cutting became inconclusive with difficulty seeing further human evidence given the forest ground consistency.

We encountered lots of Brown Bear, Grizzly, Deer and Elk tracks wherever we ventured to search. Most Bear disturbance was digging for grubs. Bear excrements was found and checked for food source or if there was any bone fragments.

When we finally managed to get to the flagged location, I checked the disturbance in the sandy area and consulted with other as to the viability of what was tagged as possibly human; this turned out to be another bear that had been through the area, and this was radioed back to SAR Command.

Our Team decided to return to our flagged human track location to attempt to locate the track exit on the other end of the blow down mass of trees. Part way back we took time out for a bite to eat and to talk about our lack of positive identification of our subject. While sitting on our log I discovered more disturbances nearby and the team decided to check them out further – turned out to be more animal disturbances. We then headed back to our original flagged area at the other end of the blow down side; this location was also close to the tracks found on our

After contacting SAR Base with our findings update, both teams were asked to return to base – pick up location Blow Down Lake swamp. Arriving at SAR Base to brief SAR Managers and to change to dry footwear from the soaked boots and socks we had been hiking with for close to 8 hours. Other teams were returning from the field with no clues, while other teams left for new assignments.

At this time, printed pictures of the subject in various poses and where he had been hiking in the search area appeared for teams to look at. SAR Managers had access to the subject's laptop computer where they found all his pictures downloaded. Having picture evidence of where the subject had traveled in the search area now became a race to identify the location of where the subject had been to take those pictures. Because each picture

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provided information as to date and time between each frame, management could then calculate the subject's travel time as compared to search teams that had been in those same locations. Could that information be used to gauge the subject's physical capability?

A search team comprising the Forest Rangers was dispatched into the field to identify one particular area from the subject's pictures along the Boulder creek area. This also provided team travel time to and from various locations back to SAR base and also where the Subject's vehicle was located.

One picture printed showed the subject's heels with big blisters from hiking with new hiking boots; this became a point of conversation amongst SAR members as to how far the subject would venture with those blisters.

Our team departed for New Hazelton around 22:00 hours.

July 19, 2012. Low cloud cover and light mist in the air. Group of seven departed Hazelton to Search base 07:20 arrived 07:45, signed in and enjoyed another hearty breakfast while the mist in the air became light rain.

Search assignments were prepared and various teams departed into the field on foot, via vehicles to further locations and via helicopter when the cloud cover allowed transport to higher elevations. This morning the tracking team was held back for a while, should teams in the field come across human tracks.

Eventually a tracking team was tasked with checking the opposite side of HW16 from search base and the subject's vehicle past the access to the helicopter landing site. Sign cutting team found what turned out to be track from previous search teams that had been tasked to look in the same area along the Skeena river embankment.

There were lots of animal signs meandering in and out of the bushes and undergrowth.

One old white T-shirt was tagged and called in to SAR Base including a questionable slide area that we flagged for further investigation that indicated someone had grabbed a low branch during decent. This was apparently checked by SAR base indicating a previous rope team had been in the area.

Completing our assignment we asked if the various buildings on the helicopter landing site had been checked. The answer came back that they had not been checked. Sign cutting team's new assignment became to check all buildings accessible and surrounding ground adjacent to Helicopter landing site.

The doors to various buildings were secured with bungee straps or tied shut with nylon rope. Barn doors were gaping slightly on both ends; only deer had been there. The team found a steep trail leading down the embankment behind the barn building, this we checked out and followed it down to the Skeena River while cutting for sign.

After our lunch break we scoured the river bank for sign and found none. We walked further along what became a vehicle track cutting for sign to where it would return to the HWY 16 on the south end of the farm field. We returned from where we came to the Helicopter site and walked out to and along HWY 16 back to SAR base and briefed Management on our sign cutting search.

New assignment: To cut for sign on the East side of Boulder Creek on the north east side of HWY 16. We were transported to what was supposed to be a road access to a trail leading to the East side of Boulder Creek, but we found only private farms with blocked entry and "keep out" signs. After checking with SAR Base on the viability of finding the access point we were asked to walk back along HWY 16 to the Boulder Creek Bridge and cut for sign along the area leading into the bush on the east side in case the subject had parked his vehicle there earlier and hiked into the bush.

Not finding any vehicle track on the ground leading onto the upper embankment, the

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team cut for sign along the upper embankment very carefully. Eventually found a disturbance (high sign - old broken branches) through the bushes that looked suspicious. Making our way through thick bush we found a narrow trail where human activity appeared to be recent. We followed this meandering trail for approx. 2 kilometers while cutting for sign; the trail became indistinct and impassable with fallen trees and thick thorny bushes.

One human track was found off the trail; with no visible sole pattern. This was flagged, protected, measured and called into SAR Base. No other off trail human tracks were found. We returned back along the trail, found the exit and/or entry point partly blocked by fallen debris and trees making the chance of finding the access on the East side of the Boulder Creek difficult.

We returned to the Boulder Creek Bridge and asked for vehicle pick-up. While waiting for p/u Sign cutter checked the other side of the bridge embankment to Boulder Creek and found no recent human sign only Deer and Bear tracks. We returned to SAR Base as the last Team returning from the field.

Briefing management on our findings of our sign cutting search, they indicated that the trail we found most likely was a secret trail used by mushroom pickers.

At this point it became apparent that the search for the missing subject may be about to be stood down as few vehicles were left at SAR Base.

July 20, 201 dawned partly cloudy and with the information the search has been stood down until further information on the whereabouts of the missing subject came to light. Searchers staying in Hazelton gathered at an open restaurant in town for breakfast. While having breakfast our SAR Managers gave the group a briefing, informing us the search was stood down and that the family of the subject would be notified and asked that searches refrain from discussing the search outcome for the time being in public.

Comments and suggestions on the search were invited before returning to our motel to check out and fly back to Comox.

In conclusion: Having found no solid clue of the subject's whereabouts or any personal items of any kind, it leaves me with the sense of regret that if skilled human trackers would be activated at the **beginning** of the search, before our important clues get spoiled, the chances of locating the subject would have been much improved.

