



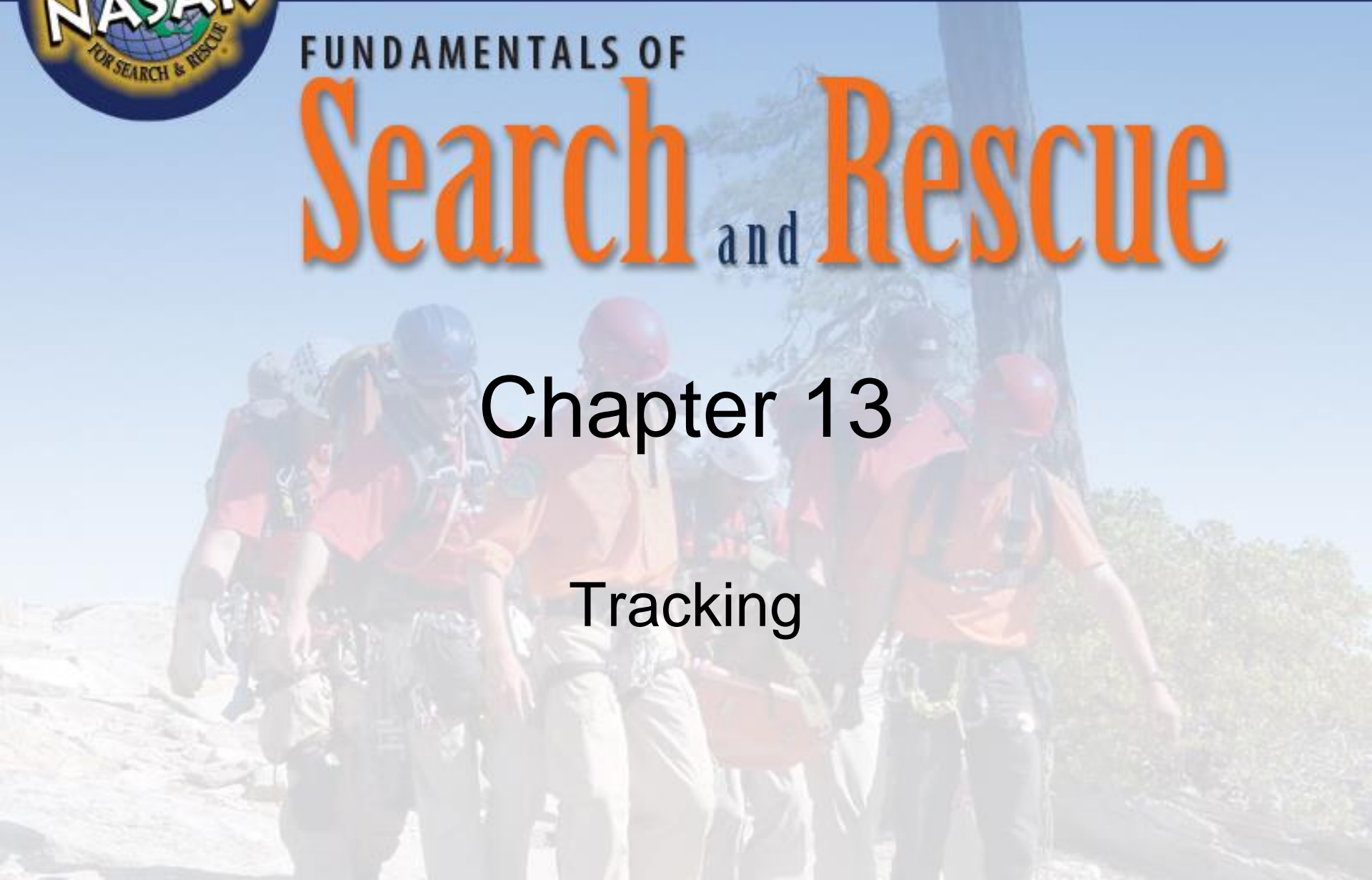
National Association for Search and Rescue

FUNDAMENTALS OF

Search and Rescue

Chapter 13

Tracking





Objectives (1 of 2)

- Define the following:
 - Track or print
 - Sign
 - Sign-cutting
 - Step-by-step tracking



Objectives (2 of 2)

- Describe the use of a tracking stick/walking stick in tracking.
- Describe the method of labeling a track.
- Describe the responsibilities of each of the members of a tracking crew (point, flankers).



Qualities of a Good Tracker (1 of 2)

- Patience
- An inquisitive mind
- Honesty
- Perseverance
- Good observation skills
- Honed senses
- Endurance
- Good field craft skills
- Mental and physical determination
- Knowledge of fauna and flora
- Curiosity



Qualities of a Good Tracker (2 of 2)

- Reading this material will not make anyone an expert tracker.
- An acquired skill that requires
 - Determination
 - Patience
 - A willingness to learn
 - Thousands of hours of practice



Definitions and Terminology (1 of 2)

- Track or print: An impression left from the passage of a person
 - Complete
 - Partial
 - Identifiable
- Tracking: Following signs or tracks left by someone or something



Definitions and Terminology (2 of 2)

- Sign: Any evidence of change from the natural state that is inflicted on an environment by a person's passage.
- Sign cutting: Looking for sign in order to establish a starting point from which to track



Tracks or Prints

- Complete: The entire impression is visible
- Partial: Not visible in its entirety
- Identifiable: Whether complete or partial, it has at least one characteristic that differentiates it from others similar to it





Sign

- For signs to be of any use, they must be discovered.
- A walking person leaves sign approximately every 18-20 inches or over 3000 times per mile.
- The novice tracker may see plenty of relevant sign but disregard it as insignificant.



Sign Cutting (1 of 2)

- Performed by traveling perpendicular to the direction of travel of the person being followed
- Looking for sign in a path that would intersect that of the person who laid the track
- Can substantially reduce the search area by detecting sign that indicates direction of travel



Sign Cutting (2 of 2)

- Areas particularly good for finding signs:
 - Wet sand
 - Mud
 - Soft dirt
 - Snow

Track Traps

- Natural track traps or “cuttable” areas: Areas where you would find wet sand, mud, soft dirt, snow
- Manmade track traps are made by scraping an area clean so as to show sign easily.





Jump Tracking

- A form of tracking that involves finding a big, obvious footprint, then proceeding along the presumed direction of travel until another obvious track is found.
- Involves guesswork, luck, no skill
- Can be dangerous when a life depends on skillful tracking



Step-by-Step Tracking

- A disciplined teaching system
- A tracker sees each step in sequence.
- Proceeds no further than the last visible track
- Uses stride to determine where next to look for sign
- Makes searchers of all type “clue conscious” and “track aware”



Bracketing (1 of 2)

- An occasionally acceptable method of interpolation between tracks
 - Can be used when the standard step-by-step approaches fail to produce
 - Meant as a stopgap measure that uses a predetermined stride to skip one step in sequence in order to find the next



Bracketing (2 of 2)

- Bracketing is “cheating” in relation to step-by-step method.
 - Involves moving past the last visible sign in order to continue the track
 - Not a license to jump track
- Should only be used infrequently
- You will never receive permission to do this.



Equipment for Tracking (1 of 7)

- Clothing
 - Should be appropriate for the terrain and weather
 - Should be durable to withstand dense brush and rugged terrain
 - Should promote comfort
- Broad-brimmed hat may protect eyes from the sun or shade tracks when the sun is high.



Equipment for Tracking (2 of 7)

- Walking or sign cutting stick
 - A must, especially for novice trackers
 - Should be light and durable
 - Approximately 40 inches long
 - Should have at least two “O”-rings or rubber bands on it for measuring distance and stride



Equipment for Tracking (3 of 7)

- Measuring device
 - Such as a tape measure, to measure print size or stride
 - Some attach a measuring tape to their stick.
 - Most simply carry a metal, carpenter's-type tape measure in their pocket.



Equipment for Tracking (4 of 7)

- Small notepad and pencil
 - Needed to record measurements and fill out track reports
 - A good drawing of a print will be indispensable.



Equipment for Tracking (5 of 7)

- Trail tape
 - Can be carried to cordon off evidence or sign or prevent the trampling of a good track
 - Plastic surveyor's tape works well.
 - Must be retrieved after it has served its purpose
 - Royal blue is the best color.



Equipment for Tracking (6 of 7)

- Flashlight
 - Can be important when light is not optimum
 - Obviously important aid to sight when on mission
 - Good artificial light source



Equipment for Tracking (7 of 7)

- Mirror
 - Can be used to redirect natural light low across sign when the sun is high in the sky

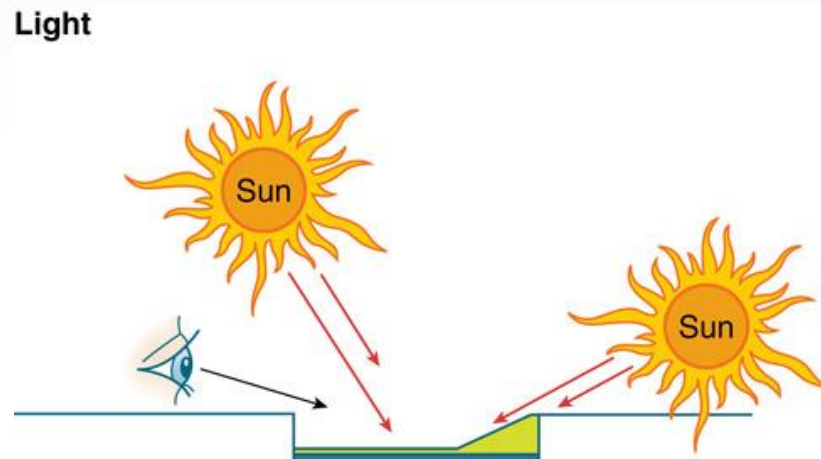


Light (1 of 2)

- Tracking is an intensely visual skill, so light plays an important role.
- Tracking is far simpler when the light is of the proper intensity and from the right direction.
- When learning to track, using the sun properly is one of the most important things to learn.

Light (2 of 2)

- Tracks are easier to see when the sun is at a low angle.
 - Early in the morning
 - Late in the afternoon
- Low angle causes longer shadows that bring out the details of any depression on the ground.



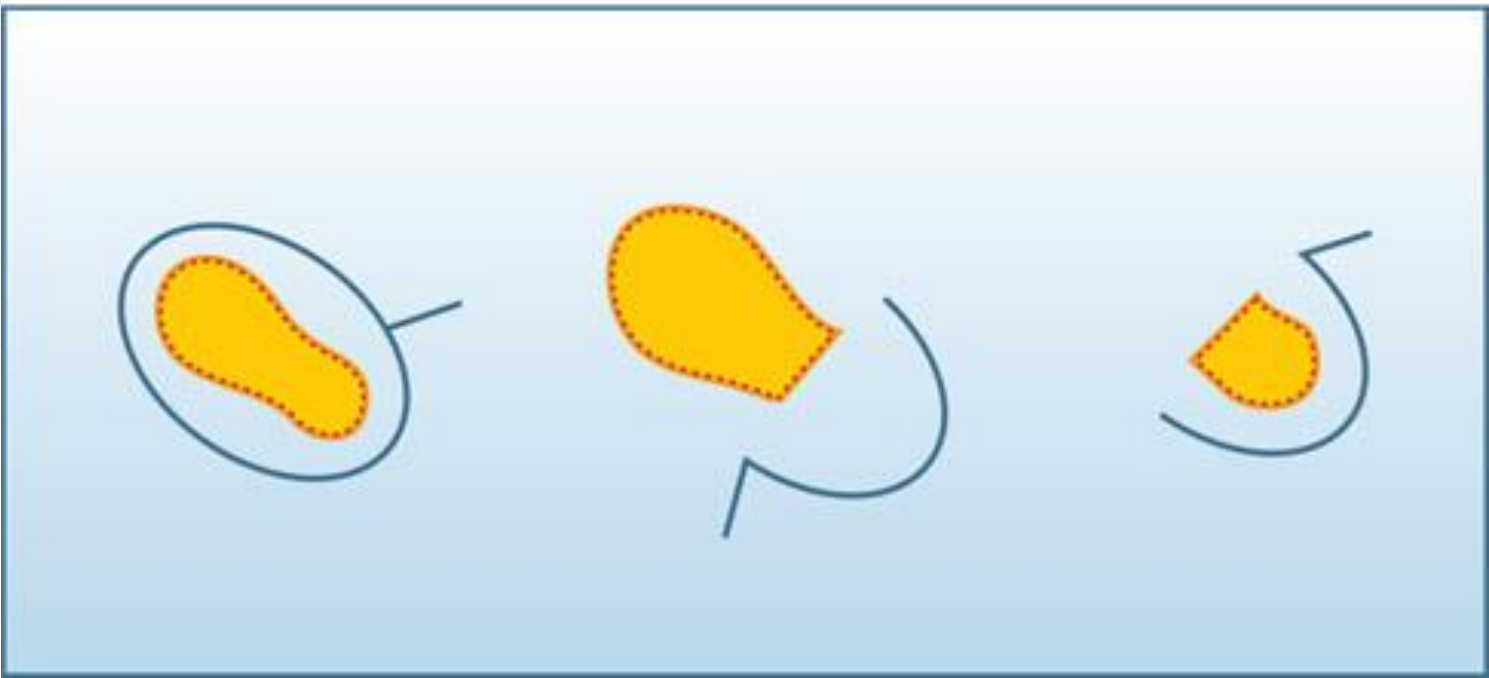


Labeling Tracks (1 of 2)

- Tracks should be marked in two ways:
 - Indicate whether they are right or left.
 - Circle them if they are full identifiable.
- Use the sign cutting stick to etch a semicircle to the rear of the track.
- By marking the last print, the tracker can immediately tell which (left or right) should be next.

Labeling Tracks (2 of 2)

Labeling Tracks





The Tracking Team (1 of 2)

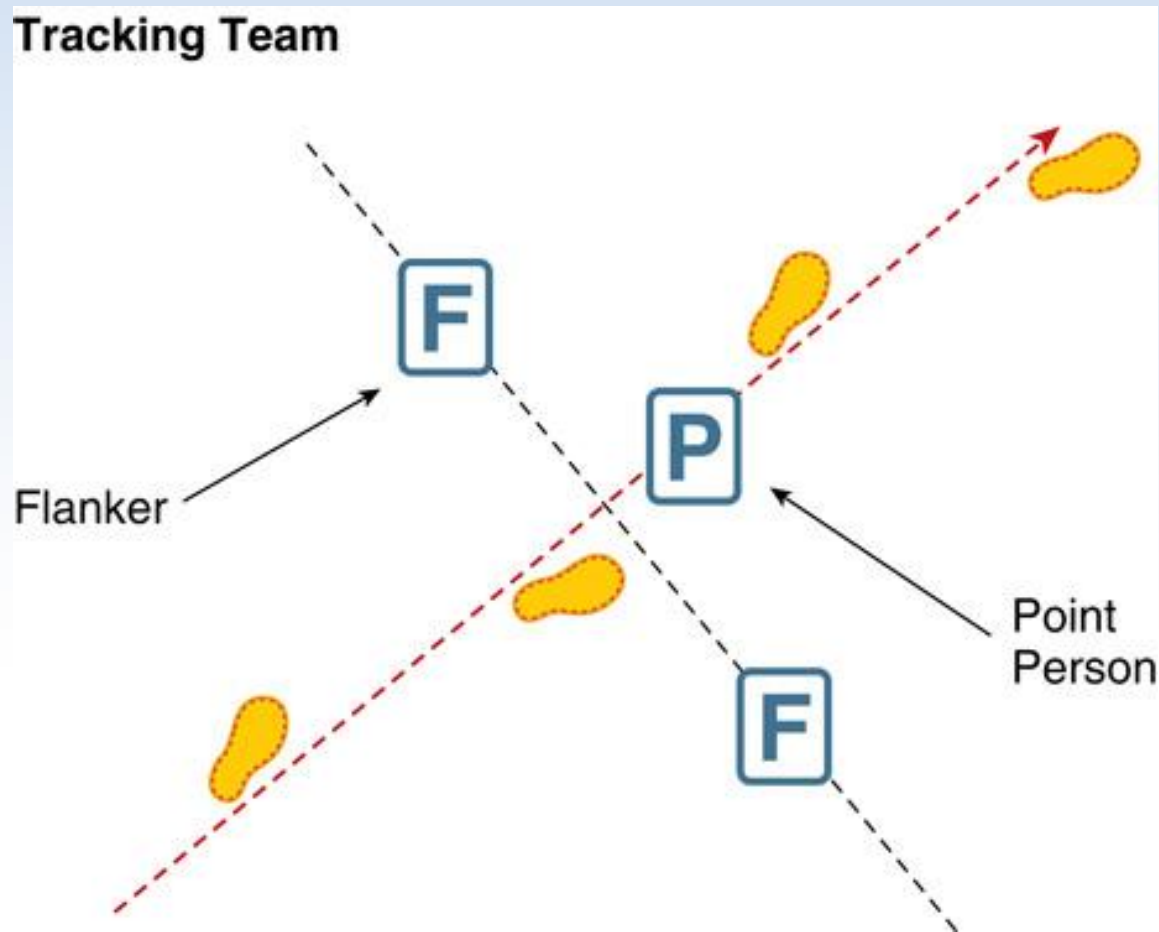
- A common approach is the three-person team or crew:
 - One Point Person
 - Two Flankers
- The three-person team setup offers several advantages.



The Tracking Team (2 of 2)

- Advantages:
 - Allows for consultation in difficult situations
 - Builds confidence, reduced errors, and benefits students
 - Allows rotation of the Point Person
 - Allows the team to split up if several trails diverge

Step-by-Step Method (1 of 2)





Step-by-Step Method (2 of 2)

One tracking team always stays on the trail, following it “step-by-step.”





Point Person

- Stays just behind the last track found
- Uses a sign cutting stick to search for the next track
- Keeps flankers from obliterating signs by getting ahead
- Coordinates efforts of team



Flankers

- Watch the side for incoming tracks that might confuse the situation
- Watch for a sudden turn of the trail being followed
- Help the Point find the next track being followed



Tracking

- Tracking cannot be performed all day without proper rest.
- For trackers to be effective they must rest at regular intervals
- They must also rotate through the Point position with other trackers.
- Searching while exhausted or fatigued is detrimental to the search effort.