



# Tracking with a Lappie

## *Tracking in the Netherlands*

**By Claudia Klaassen-Van Geet**

Hello, my name is Claudia Klaassen – van Geet and I live in Harderwijk (The Netherlands), and Chrissy has asked me to write an article about the search and rescue course I follow with my Finnish Lapphund Rowan.

Last year, Rowan (then 14 months) and I started the basic course of search and rescue work, at the Foundation Leonberger Search and Rescue Working Group (SLRHW) ... Leonberger you may think? ... yes, other breeds are permitted as well, but the nice thing is that the co-founders at the beginning also had a Finnish Lapphund. They are emigrated to Sweden a few years ago. But it's a funny sight to see such a "small" dog among those big Leonberger dogs.

Finnish Lapphunds are real working dogs, but that was not the reason I followed this course. My curiosity was raised mainly because Rowan's father, Tarmo (from Hans Wieten & Kati Pietiläinen) also followed this course. I wondered if Rowan was as good a tracking dog as his dad.

The first lesson was a theory lesson and we were introduced to each other (15 participants, 14 Leonbergers and 1 Finnish Lapphund). All the other classes are outside in the forest. The location is really great, in the forest (an army training ground) near the heath of Ermelo, lots of beautiful nature. Ermelo is located in the center of the Netherlands and the participants come from all over the country to follow the course. For me it's really next door, only 15 minutes drive, so that is a bonus ;-)

The lessons of the basic course are mostly divided into three elements; tracking, wilderness search and rescue and fetching / sorting.

With tracking, we first place a trail (people smell) in the forest. The first lessons you lay the track yourself and only go for a few meters. En route you lay down different small objects, then you tell the dog to sit at the starting point of the trail, next to a special pole where the scent is extra strong. You put the tracking harness on the dog and click the tracking line (long leash) on the

harness. On the command 'track' and by pointing the dog's nose to the trail, the real work begins. And then it's mostly relying on your dog, especially if you have not placed the trail yourself. When the dog has reached the object he has to indicate the object and then he has to lie down. It takes a few lessons before the dogs understand that he should indicate the object. At the end of the trail there is always a big reward; playing with his favorite toy and a cookie. On the first tracking lesson Rowan followed the trail immediately.



Wilderness search and rescue is a very different element of the course, but they definitely use their scenting ability. Somewhere in the forest there lies a "victim", if someone is standing then the dog should ignore him and keep scenting to find the person who is lying down. The dog has to find the victim, after the command 'forward' or 'search'. The whole area should be searched as quickly as possible, to finally end up by the victim. But first, they get a special rescue harness or vest and a bringsel (a



In the follow-up course (6 lessons) you go a step further; distances are longer, trails remain longer, trails are crossing, different environments, changing objects, a victim in a tree and more victims to be found.

We ended with a rescue exercise where two planes have crashed and the victims and various objects are scattered in the forest. It was our task to empty the forest in a line of 8 dogs. Great experience! If you have followed the advanced course, you can also participate in the plus days (6 lessons a year). Tarmo and Rowan now both follow the plus days. The plane crash was a plus day lesson and two Finnish Lapphunds found all the victims and objects that were in their path.

It's unbelievable how smart our Finnish Lapphunds are, especially with tracking when you have to rely on your dog. When you are told that your dog is really talented, you feel so proud of him!

leather tube, a dummy) hung on their collar. If the dog has found the victim, he has to put the bringsel in his mouth and then immediately return to his handler. By carrying the bringsel in his mouth the handler knows that the dog has seen a victim. Then the bringsel is hidden away and after the command 'where is the victim?' the dog will take you back to the victim so you have to follow. It all seems unreal, but really they can learn it!

My Rowan was a better tracker in the beginning. Now he does not always carry the bringsel in his mouth because if the victim has good cookies, he prefers to stay with the victim ... smart boy. But after a lot of training, he is a lot better at it now.

The fetching and sorting element is primarily intended to train carrying the bringsel and fetching toys better. In sorting, the dog has to pick your stick (that has your smell) from amongst other sticks.

In each lesson, we go a step further. We have also had to hike with a compass with a few assignments en route, take a course with obstacles and have a lesson in first aid for dogs.

In May 2013 we achieved our certificate for the basic course. In September 2013 we continued with the follow-up course. Rowan did very well and I found it very unfortunate that the nine lessons of the follow-up course flew. I also noticed that he really liked it. When I grab the backpack containing the course materials (which he knows well) and we get into the car, you can see it in his behavior. When we arrive at the location, he gets very excited. When I put his tracking harness or rescue vest on, he gets so excited that he begins to bark really high as a true Finnish Lapphund does ... and that really does not come close to the heavy bark of a Leonberger ;-)



Now that we have completed the follow-up course, we did the exam to participate in the alpha group. It was super exciting, but we have succeeded and can now continue the search and rescue course on a higher level! I am very proud of my Rowan and it is a beautiful sight to see a Finnish Lapphund in the alpha group of the Foundation Leonberger Search and Rescue Working Group.

At the moment Hans and I train together regularly, because the boys like it so much, they do it so well and it's fun! In January Voitto (also Hans Wieten & Kati Pietiläinen) started the basic course and he also has big talent. Next year there will also be two Finnish Lapphunds participating the basic course and who knows ... in a few years we might an all Finnish Lapphund training group.

