

The Tracker: as A Naturalist, Scientist, Practitioner, and Teacher

The role of tracker in society has always demanded quality performance. Trackers strived for excellence and feedback was immediate. A tracking error meant going hungry at best, death at worst. There was no magical method and luck was only fleeting. The tracker had to be naturalist, scientist, practitioner, and teacher. Trackers had to be good! The search for quality was, and is, the goal of trackers.

The first native trackers were naturalists and scientists. As **naturalists**, natives learned what tracks identified what species. They compared track sizes to determine which animal to track and hunt for supper. As **scientists**, they developed hypotheses of how to follow animals. Natives had to TEST their hypotheses everyday in the field. Their answer was either we go hungry tonight or we eat. Therefore, natives became great **practitioners** of their tracking skills. They learned quickly and, as **teachers**, they TAUGHT their knowledge to their offspring.

Tracking is a science and has been since the beginning of hunting. As a science, each technique is a **hypothesis** which must be testable. The goal of science is to disprove hypotheses and replace them with better working hypotheses that in turn will be tested. Once trackers identify a good working hypothesis, it is taught but still with the goal of testing during its use. Tracking scientists prove hypotheses wrong for the betterment of our science. Natives used the **scientific method** of disproving hypotheses and they taught the scientific method. Natives just didn't use the name "scientific method."

There were high quality native scientists and there were low quality ones. To the benefit of our species, the low quality trackers failed to pass their genes down evolutionary lines.

Today, the evaluation of tracking performance is more objective, but striving for quality is still of paramount importance. To assure quality, the practices and teachings of trackers can be judged against the "dynamite test." That is everything trackers do and practice must be "**TnT!**" -- **testable** and **teachable**.

A proposed observation or technique (here after referred to as technique) must be **testable** by other naturalists, scientists, practitioners, and teachers with better than random chance of success; that is the technique must work at better than gambling odds. Trackers must be able to **observe** and recognize the sign in a track or trail. Then they must be able to **replicate** and TEST the theory but most importantly **verify** its "truth." The criteria of being testable includes the ability to observe, replicate, and verify by most of trackers testing the technique. If a technique cannot meet these criteria, then it fails the test ability component of quality tracking.

For example, the reported success by Utah scientists of generating energy through fission, failed the scrutiny and criteria of being testable by other scientists. If, for example, a proposed technique of testing the sex of an animal by a mark in a hoof print agrees with the true sex but 10% of the time, then it fails because random odds would say that about half the animals are females.

Additionally, to be of practical use, a technique must be **teachable**. Tracking teachers **MUST** be able to get a high percentage of their students "seeing" and using a technique for a high percentage of the time. A technique lacks quality if people cannot see it, learn it, or use it. Regretfully experience has shown that trackers cannot get everyone seeing everything, but strive for **most** people being able to use a technique.

A second criteria for teachability is honesty of the teacher. Above all else, **teachers are honest!** Trackers do not teach techniques unproven in the tracking community without presenting them as hypotheses that should be tested. Teachers do not copy the works of others without acknowledging their work in a proper manner.

Inherent to the scientific method are the principles of classification. These were well understood by natives and followed a main principle: one-on-one, that is **one name for one item**. To have a functioning classification system, a name refers to but one object. For example, a bear is a bear and not a dog; a trot is a trot and not a gallop. A name referring to two items creates havoc. It did not do a native tribe any good to say the enemy were coming on horseback at a trot when they were coming at a gallop. Modern trackers must strive to understand what early natives knew -- the rules of classification, especially as those rules are applied in track identification and gait interpretation.

Trackers first observe tracks and trails as **naturalists** and classify what they see. From their observations, trackers formulate hypotheses and, **as scientists**, test their hypotheses. Trackers, **as practitioners**, use their skills and knowledge in the field for their enjoyment and often to fill their stomachs. **As teachers**, trackers honestly pass on their knowledge to others. **BE A QUALITY TRACKER**, my friends!

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