

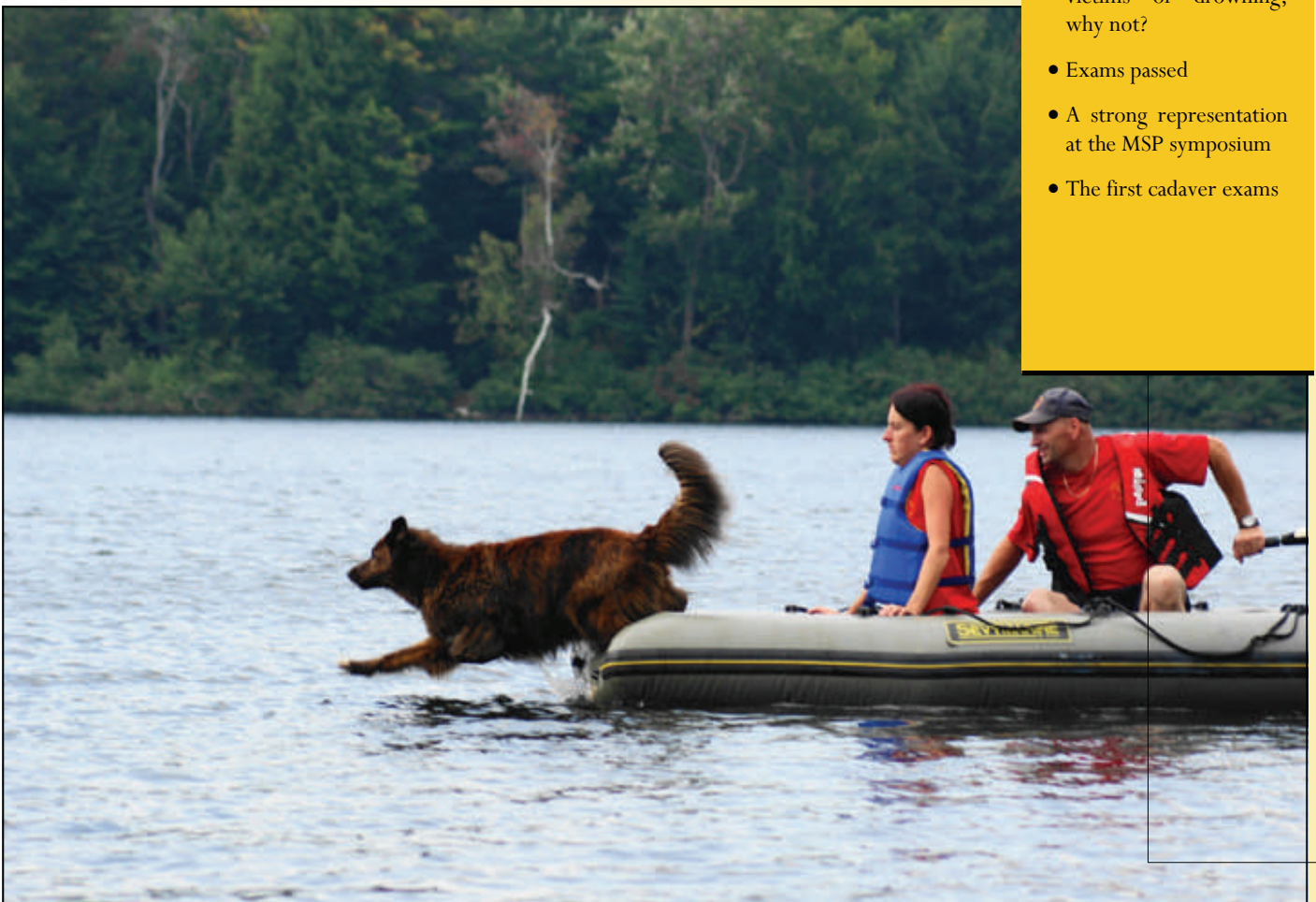
4 LEGGED RESCUERS

Year 2, Volume 4
November 15th 2009

USING DOGS TO FIND DROWNING VICTIMS

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- Exams passed
- A strong representation at the MSP symposium
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Translator: Robert Savage

Version française également disponible

Deadline for next issue: January, 15th 2010

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Avalanche search dogs

Obituary..

It is with regret that we learned of the recent death of Spirit, a young Rottweiler who was just 7 months old. Spirit was the dog of Gabriel Alexis of the **Groupe de Recherche et Sauvetage Memphrémagog.**

His death occurred accidentally during an endurance training session. He was hit by a car. He was particularly appreciated for his sociability.

Our sincere condolences to *Gabriel.*



USING K9 TEAMS TO FIND VICTIMS OF A DROWNING, WHY NOT?

In 1992, while a member of *Sauvetage Canada Rescue*, Carol Namur and her husband Art talked to me frequently about the use of dogs to search for the victims a drowning. I must admit that I was skeptical. For many years, I had been taught that to escape police search dog teams, a fugitive simply had to walk in a stream. On the other hand, I was very curious to learn and master this technique in order to reach my own conclusions.

In the summer of that year, I participated in a one-week training session, which included lessons in searching for a victim of a drowning. Marian Hardy of *Mid-Atlantic D.O.G.S.*, who was already an authority on the subject, was one of the instructors.

At the time, the Web did not exist and there was little documentation on the subject, so I was anxious to see it for myself. The few hours spent at the quarry in Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-lac were almost enough to convince me. What a sight to see Art Galarneau's Labrador Pathfinder completely submerge himself for long periods (like a duck) to find the source of the odor.

Background:

For the last 3 decades, our neighbors to the south call on K9 search teams to look for the victims of drowning. In the United States as in Canada, we find skeptics who deny that dogs can "smell through water", which we will discover further on. In fact, in the 1980's, the Americans began a huge study that proved to be conclusive.

How it works?

The human body is constantly losing molecules (flakes of skin, breath odors etc.), which the dog is able to detect thanks to an olfactory system that is distinctly superior to ours. Some of the molecules are soluble in water and others are not. The most volatile are lighter than water, which allows them to float to the surface. Once in contact with sunlight and other atmospheric conditions, they transform into a gas that is transported by convection and the wind.

Thus, it is wrong to say that dogs are able to smell through water. They pick up the molecules that float to the surface and are then transported in the air. Humans are known to possess about 5 million olfactory cells while the brain of a dog has more than 200 million. We should also understand that a "find" is rarely indicated directly over the source of the odor. This is why the K9 team does not entirely replace the conventional search methods but is a supplement to the means used to find the body of a drowned person.

Experience has shown that the movement of molecules in water, on the surface and in the air does not allow a dog to detect the precise location of the source of the odor. Repetitive alerts from a specially trained dog may allow the handler to delineate a relatively restrained sector and to have it inspected by divers or any other method that might be available. In this way, K9 teams can help the various interveners by allowing them to concentrate their efforts in smaller areas. They can also reduce the number of resources that are required

The training of the K9 teams must be done under the supervision of an experienced person. This will allow the handler to fully understand the reactions of their dog. The training is done in different stages.

Familiarization with the diver:

The first stage of the training must of course be the meeting between the dog and this person who has the silhouette of a human but also resembles a big frog. As well, this human breathes differently. The sound of the regulator can greatly intimidate the dog. Thus, the first encounters must take place on the shore and must be play based.

Familiarization with small watercraft:

There are different types of watercraft that can be used to search for drowning victims. For my part, I like the inflatable Zodiac type because it allows the dog to work with its nose close to the surface of the water. The dog must be completely at ease in the craft since he must be able to concentrate on his work. If conditions permit, it is preferable to use an electric motor in order

to avoid having the odor of the gasoline disrupt the dog's sense of smell.

Familiarity with swimming:

Even though most dogs learn to swim very quickly, we must assure ourselves that it is completely at ease in the water. This stage is critical. From a young age, the puppy must be familiarized with various waterways. He must be able to swim with its jaw below the surface of the water.

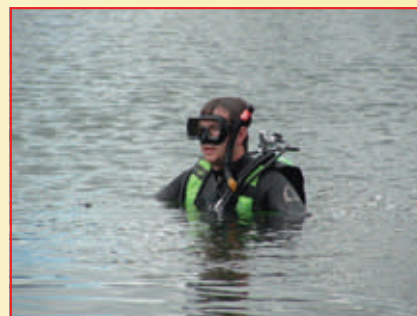
An odor can come from the water:

This stage is often neglected. Your friend must learn that an odor can come from the water. Some dogs like the Labrador will go so far as to submerge itself completely to try to find an object under the water while others will hesitate to get their head wet. I use a plastic container with small holes pierced in it in which I place nail clipper and a few small rocks so that it sinks to the bottom. The object is placed in progressively deeper and deeper water. This stage can feel like it takes forever, but it is very important.

The assistance of a diver:

An experienced diver is key to the training of the team. He must be able to help the dog to overcome its fears. Our group is fortunate to have three divers who are also dog handlers. They must gradually convince the dog to come to them.

The first exercises take place at the edge of the water. The diver calls the dog that is held by its master. The dog goes to the diver. He must see to it that gradually the dog swims to him. As a security measure, the dog should not wear a collar.



Sylvain Dumas

Working from the watercraft:

This is truly the last stage of the training. You must make certain that all of the other lessons are completely mastered. The training must be done progressively and under strict supervision. The dog's indication of a "find" is said to be "indirect" since, contrary to other search techniques, the discovery of a submerged body does not allow the dog to go directly to the victim. The handler must be able to recognize the changes in the dog's comportment that indicate that it is following a scent.

When the handler is confident in and at ease with an observed indication, he should have the diver, who is connected to the shore with a line, come to the surface. The diver should come up as quickly as possible. When he arrives at the surface, the diver should reward the dog with its favorite toy and lots of patting.

When the team is well trained, we can begin to use the smell of a cadaver that is blown to the surface using a "scent generator". Due to atmospheric conditions and the current, it is rare that a dog will give an indication directly over the source of the scent. This is why the use of an underwater camera or a diver is essential.



The dog's indication:

The types of indication given by each dog may differ greatly. The indication given by some dogs that are not very expressive may be difficult to catch and the handler must be very attentive. On the other hand, some dogs may go so far as to jump into the water, swim to the spot where the odor is surfacing and even go underwater in an attempt to reach the source of the scent. It is up to the handler to be able to recognize the alert no matter what it may be.

My experience has allowed me to observe that every handler would like their dogs to be good swimmers but unfortunately, such is not the case. While an alert can be improved, forcing the dog to jump into the water is not necessarily a good thing. The most important thing is that the handler is able to recognize his dog's particular

alert.



Bob Seney and Timber

The risks:

Before beginning the training on the water, the handler has a lot to learn.

He must be able to recognize the potential risks. He must be at ease navigating on the water. Being a good swimmer is certainly an asset. In our training sessions, everyone who boards a watercraft **must** wear an approved lifejacket. The pilot must now have a license to operate a pleasure craft.

The handler and the boat operator must be able to spot any dangers. Normally, lakes present fewer risks. Rivers and quarries on the other hand have particular challenges. The waters of a quarry are usually very cold which means that odors will have less of a tendency to come to the surface.

Before adventuring onto a river, we must identify its particularities. Studying the charts can allow us get a good idea of the dangers involved and of the places where a body can become lodged. An experienced rescuer must be able to identify these locations.

Thermoclines:

Wikipedia identifies thermoclines as "a thin layer of water that changes temperature more rapidly with depth than it does in the layers above or below. In lakes during the summer, warm water, which is less dense, will sit on top of colder denser deeper water with a thermocline separating them.

Because the warm water is exposed to the sun during the day, a stable system exists and very little mixing of warm water and cold water occurs.

Thus, it is possible that neither the odor nor the body will come to the surface of the water. As a person ingests water when drowning, the body increases in density and sinks to the bottom. Generally after 48 to 72 hours, the body starts to bloat with gas and begins to rise to the surface. It is possi-

ble that when the body "hits" the thermocline, it prevents the body from rising further. This situation occurs most often in quarries and deep lakes. The study of thermoclines is fascinating and can help us to better understand what happens to a body in the water.

A few years ago, my group was called upon to find the body of a man who had drowned in the Parent region in the Haute Mauricie. After some hours of searching, my dog Fetch gave an alert in a spot where the lake was about 40 meters deep.

The alert was confirmed by a second dog, Black, who was much more "expressive". The underwater camera could not reach these depths and our grappling hooks became hung that the body will probably never come to the surface.

A few months later, I testified at the courthouse in Laval to explain why I thought that the body would not resurface. My testimony helped the family to resolve the estate immediately which otherwise may have taken seven years.

Many will also remember a search that we did in Pierreville, in the region of Sorel. After the divers had gone by, a dog gave an alert in the area of a dock where the divers then found the body of the man who had drowned in the St. Francois River.

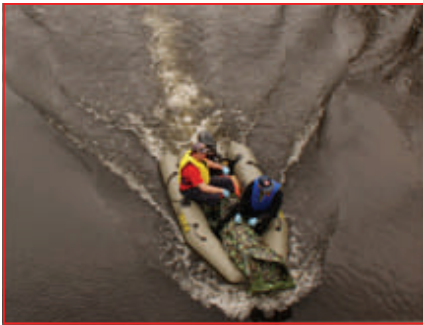
To date, *Sauvetage Canin des Laurentides* has been involved in seven searches for drowning victims and has found the body in four of the cases.

Searching for drowned persons using dogs requires a lot of equipment. Purchasing boats, motors (electric and gas) and diving equipment represents important purchases for a volunteer organization.



The availability of areas for training must also be considered. Access to lakes and rivers is often restricted. Many days of training are required for a team to be able to acquire the required competence.

Although there is still much to be done to prove the efficacy of dogs in this area, we are convinced that they are able to detect the molecules that come to the surface.



Unfortunately, the police, who would have the greatest need for our services, seem to be our main detractors.

We have never claimed that the technique was infallible, no more than all the other tools such as sonar, helicopters, and grappling hooks. However, we are convinced that K9 teams can be part of a collective effort to see that the families of those who have disappeared can complete their mourning.

« One thing is certain, it works »

I invite anyone who is interested to learn more on the method to communicate with me and to participate in one of our training sessions.

Guy Lapointe

SEARCHING FOR A CADAVER... TWO TEAMS PASS THE TESTS

As you probably read in the last issue, training in cadaver searching is very particular. The standards adopted by **Sauvetage Canin des Laurentides** are the same as those found throughout North America.

Even before the standards for certification were established, our teams were called upon to take part in operations that proved to be successful. Moreover, we continue to play an active role in some cases of unresolved disappearances.



Let me remind you that that the tests for certification take place in three sectors of 20 meters by 20 meters and that one of the sectors does not contain any source of odor.

Last September 2 teams from **Sauve-**

tage Canin des Laurentides, that of Bob Seney (Timber) and that of Gerald Marcil (Garot) made the effort after many hours of training with their dogs.

I was surprised to see how fast dogs have been able to find small pieces of approximately 2 centimètres² garment. I am convinced that without dogs, it would have been almost unable to find them.

Congratulations....

Guy Lapointe



Bob Seney and Timber



TESTS PASSED

The application of the canine standards of the **Quebec Association of volunteer search and rescuers** began last year after having been the object of many discussions. Even now, the level of difficulty of the tests remains a topic of discussion.



Marc Quenneville et K'os

Marc humbly admits that the exercise is not exactly a walk in the park. A lot is required of the handler.

Whatever the case may be, last September the 26th, Marc Quenneville and his dog K'os of **Sauvetage Canin des Laurentides** were the first since the establishment of the standards to pass the 800-meter hasty.

For the occasion, the evaluators were Yves Nadeau and Isabelle Comeaux of **AQBRS** and Gerald Marcil of **Sauvetage Canin des Laurentides**.



Lise Lachapelle et Voodoo

For her part, last September 13th Lise Lachapelle and Voodoo also of **Sauvetage Canin des Laurentides** tried their luck at the 400-meter hasty. After having spent a long time trapped in pitfalls, the team completed the test with remarkable success.

That was a demonstration by a very perseverant team.

Since the start of the year, Marc and Lise, a couple who share the same passion, have put in over 500 hours of training with their dogs.

Bravo to these two promising teams.

Guy Lapointe

K9 TEAMS WELL REPRESENTED AT THE CONFERENCE

Last September 18th, 19th and 20th in Saguenay, there was a conference on the volunteer in civil security organized by the minister for public safety in partnership with different organizations from the Saguenay.

Once again this year, K9 teams from all around the province were in attendance.



Gérald Marcil et Garot

September 18th was dedicated primarily to students who braved the rain to see several simulations. During the day, Gerald Marcil and his dog Garot of **Sauvetage Canin des Laurentides** put on about twenty demonstrations for the students.



André Gagnon et Picasso

Two other demonstrations took place on the Sunday. Michel Massouty of the group **RSCOK9** and his dog did the first demonstration while Gerald and Garot completed the day.

Everyone at the conference appreciated the work of our dogs who once again, stole the show.

This year, the K9 presence was even greater than last year. Almost every K9 group in Quebec was represented.

Nathalie Lavoie and Andre Gagnon of **L'Unité de Recherche et Sauvetage de la Haute-Yamaska** and their two magnificent golden retrievers Maika and Picasso drew a lot of attention.

Thank you to the organizers and see you next year in Quebec city. The bar has been raised.

Guy Lapointe

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