



SARDOC Prospective Member Information

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Welcome

First of all, welcome to Search and Rescue Dogs of Colorado (SARDOC). You've chosen to explore and/or pursue a very fun, interesting, challenging and rewarding endeavor for you and your dog. You don't have to have any previous experience with Search and Rescue or with training dogs. SARDOC and a fielding agency will teach you everything you need to know. The time commitment will probably be more demanding than you initially realized and the financial cost more extensive. SARDOC is a volunteer organization, so almost all of your expenses come out of your own pocket. The work is intense but doable. There may even be times you wonder what you have gotten yourself into and why this is what you have chosen to do. However, if this is your calling, you will find a way to make everything work and that the choice you have made to be worthy and noble.

Search and Rescue is also an amazing way to challenge your dog and help your dog reach its full potential (and you as well). Before you can even start training your dog for Search and Rescue you must first establish a close bond with your dog. That bond will only intensify as you progress in your training. You work as a team. So, the two of you have to have great communication and understanding of one another. You ultimately are the team lead, but your dog is the one who leads the search. There are times your dog will turn to you for direction and then times your dog will tell you to "go this way!" It is a true partnership that is difficult to describe until you experience it. But once you do, you will be hooked.

There are many resources available to the handler in training, the most important one being the experienced handlers within SARDOC (your other teammates). Once you have decided to join SARDOC, check with your Area Director regarding their implementation of a mentoring program and get on board as soon as possible. There are Standards, Task Books, Progression Evaluations, and Certification Tests to guide you through the certification process. However, you will not succeed unless you draw upon the knowledge and experience of our veteran handlers.

Certification is just one milestone within Search and Rescue. Many handlers have discovered once they have certified, they have just begun their training and education. Now they are in the real world, being called upon to participate in real missions. In that world there is an obligation for continuous improvement and competence. After all, at this point you are looking for someone's lost loved one(s), and you will want to be the best team possible. The good news is SARDOC provides the guidance, resources, and training to become that team.

SARDOC is not for everyone. Not all dogs and members are successful in SAR; roughly half of the people who start training dogs in SARDOC actually make it to certification. The most common reason for teams to drop out is that handlers find they don't have the time to keep up with the training requirements. Family, life, and career changes sometimes override SAR dog plans; handler or canine injuries can delay or end a team's career.

Being a SAR dog handler means getting called out at any time of day, going on searches even when it's inconvenient, long drives to missions. Making a find on a mission is rare- many team go their entire careers without one. Training never ends- you must maintain all of your skills and strive to improve, and you are obligated to help other team members with their training.

Introduction

Search and Rescue Dogs of Colorado (SARDOC) was formed in 1983 as the need arose for locating and standardizing search dogs and handlers throughout the state and surrounding region. By developing a formal set of Standards (particular guidelines for training and certification), search managers from different search and rescue organizations around the state have come to expect a known level of proficiency from both search dog and handler.

SARDOC is a non-profit organization run completely by volunteers and funded by donations. While many of you may have become familiar with disaster trained search dogs after the Oklahoma City bombing or the September 11th tragedies, SARDOC is focused on training and certifying *wilderness* search and rescue dogs – finding people lost in the backcountry. Each type of searching requires different skills from both handler and dog. The future of SARDOC will continue to be determined both by the energy and commitment of its volunteers and by the changing needs of law enforcement and search and rescue organizations in Colorado.

SARDOC is:

- A certification agency. We have a set of standards for operational search dogs, tuned to the specifics of searching in Colorado. Certification requires passing field and written tests. Teams are also evaluated informally throughout their training because we feel that one certification test does not adequately gauge the consistency, depth, or professionalism of a canine search team.
- A training group. We help each other train to reach, maintain, and go beyond our certification standards. We feel that working with experienced handlers is by far the best

way to learn to train a SAR dog team. We require all of our members to attend regional and statewide group trainings.

- A fielding group. We require all SARDOC members to also be members of a local SAR group, and they respond to searches as members of those local fielding agencies. But SAR and law enforcement agencies may contact SARDOC directly for canine search resources and we will dispatch qualified teams to those searches. This happens more often with specialty searches (avalanche, water, cadaver) or with large wilderness searches that extend into multiple operational periods.

Handlers and dogs (dog teams) are evaluated throughout their training. Once properly trained and tested, SARDOC certifies the handler and dog as a SAR team. This process includes passing written and field tests. Certified teams can then be fielded on missions. This may be done through the handler's fielding agency or through SARDOC. However, before SARDOC can dispatch qualified teams to searches, the appropriate law enforcement agency must request our assistance and resources.

How Do Dogs Find a Subject?

Scent. Watching a trained search dog is both fun and amazing. SAR dogs are trained to find people by their scent. Each human creates their own unique scent (imagine "Pig Pen", the dusty little Charlie Brown character!) that is influenced by diet, hygiene, environment, scented toiletries and other factors. SARDOC dogs are trained to "scent discriminate", that is, to search for the scent of the lost person (or "subject") while disregarding other human scent in the area. This is accomplished by always giving the dog a scent article (socks, hat, or other object) that smells like the lost person, prior to giving the dog the search command. (It is extremely important that scent articles are not contaminated (touched) by another person!!) Over time, SAR dogs learn to match the unique scent from a given scent article to the same scent in the field. SAR dogs also learn to clearly alert their handlers to the presence of human scent, leading them toward the area of stronger and stronger scent until they find the subject. The handler rewards the dog with its favorite toy or treat when it has found the subject. One of the most challenging aspects for the handler is to learn to predict how the wind, terrain features, and weather affect the distribution of scent in the environment – scent which is completely invisible to us as humans.

Sometimes, the human subject is not always found alive - one of the sad realities of search

work. Although the dog was most likely given a scent article from the “live” person, SAR dogs are still able to locate the subject, even if they are deceased.

Search Dog Disciplines

All SARDOC dogs must first certify in one of two wilderness search disciplines, trailing or airscent, prior to certifying in other disciplines such as avalanche and water. The training and deployment of each type of SAR dog is described below.

Trailing. Trailing dogs follow scent that has been deposited on the ground as a person walks through an area. This scent may not necessarily follow the exact footsteps of the lost person. Rather, the effects of wind and weather may move the scent particles, redepositing them into vegetation, rocks, or water nearby. The dog’s nose is typically near the ground while it is searching for scent. Trailing dogs, trained to scent discriminate, may be taken to the “point last seen” (PLS), the location where the subject was last known to be. This may be a trail junction, a vehicle, or other more general location. The trailing dog team will be used to determine the direction that the subject traveled away from the PLS and continue to follow where the subject has walked for as long as possible. In a similar manner, a trailing dog may be worked to attempt to pick up a trail from where a clue such as an article or footprint has been found during the search.

Trailing dogs may also be used to determine if a subject has crossed or turned off of a roadway or trail. In this manner they may help determine if the search area needs to be expanded. A scent article belonging to the subject must be preserved for the dog to do all of this so they may distinguish between the lost person and other hikers or searchers who have walked in the same area. Because scent dissipates and deteriorates with time, it is important to get a trailing dog on scene as soon as possible. In our dry climate a 24-hour-old trail is a challenge for the dog team to work. In good conditions (cool, moist, at night) a dog may be able to work a 48-hour-old trail, but the fresher a trail (the sooner the dog team is called to assist), the easier it is for the dog to continue to follow the scent through our mountainous terrain. Scent will be least detectable in the heat of the day so often a dog team may field in the evening, at night, or early in the morning for optimal scent conditions.

Trailing is a difficult discipline for the dog team to master since it requires intense concentration. To become a SARDOC certified trailing dog team, the team must be able to follow an unmarked

1¼ to 1½ mile long trail that is 18 to 24 hours old at minimum.

Airscent. Airscent dogs, on the other hand, are trained to detect scent that is carried on the wind from a human subject. Most dogs certify in wilderness search using this technique in our region due to the vast amounts of terrain that have to be covered while searching for a subject. Airscent dogs are typically worked perpendicular to the wind in organized grids to completely cover assigned areas. The dog checks the air for scent coming directly from the subject or clothing he or she may have dropped. When the dog detects scent, it is said to have an “alert”. An alert is a change in the dog’s behavior that is recognized by the handler. Scent coming off of a person is carried away from them on the wind, which disperses the scent into a cone that gets wider with distance. (Think of a plume of smoke coming off a smokestack). Airscent dogs learn to orient to the “scent cone” such that they follow the gradient of scent into the wind where the scent is stronger, until they reach the source at the subject. When the person is found, the dog is rewarded with its favorite toy or treat.

Airscent dogs are trained to scent discriminate when given a scent article, but they will also find all humans if no scent article is available. As long as a scent source could still be in a search area, airscents dogs can be used to find it. Since airscents dogs are assigned a specific geographical area to work on a mission, several dog teams can be fielded at one time. The search managers plot clues from several dog teams on a map. Alerts from different dogs in different areas can be used to triangulate where the subject is most likely to be.

Despite its challenges, airscents is an extremely efficient way to cover large areas on a search – far more efficient than human searches alone. To certify as an airscents team, a dog and handler must demonstrate endurance, strategy and navigational skills while finding a subject hidden in a 200 to 320 acre area, in a time limit of 2 hours.

Wind obviously affects the efficiency of both air scents and trailing dog teams. Handlers must know how time of day, terrain, secondary wind patterns and prevailing wind speed will influence their coverage of areas. For example, night winds are generally more stable than winds during midday. If a dog alerts and then loses the alert, the handler has to maneuver the dog back into a position where the dog can pick up the scent again. If this is not possible, the handler has to be aware of the wind direction at the time of the alert and look at the terrain to try to determine the possible area of the scent source. Experienced dogs often learn to get themselves back into a position to relocate the scent.

Search Specialties

Once dog teams certify in wilderness search, they may expand their search expertise to specialty areas such as avalanche, water, and cadaver.

Avalanche. Scent discrimination is not used for avalanche work. The dog searches for any human scent under the snow and will alert on the scent rising to the surface. Three dogs can cover in 4 hour's time the same area it would take forty probe searchers approximately 8 hours to cover. A well-trained dog should be able to detect a person 6 to 10 feet under the snow.

Water. Dogs are being used more and more in water search to narrow the possible search area for a drowned subject. As in avalanche work, the human scent rises to the surface and the dog alerts on the scent. Water search can be difficult as underwater currents, wind currents, and surface water currents can carry the scent. Dogs have detected subjects more than 100 feet below the water surface.

Cadaver. Dogs are utilized in the location of human remains, both above and below the ground. Dogs are trained to detect all phases of decomposition from recently deceased persons to skeletal remains. This specialty is often requested by Law Enforcement to aid in criminal investigations.

Search Dog Support Personnel

Because the handler is busy watching the dog, he or she needs a support person who is part of the dog team to handle the radio communications, navigational duties, and map work. Since the team is moving along at "dog speed", the support person is expected to accurately navigate primarily by terrain feature association. Another way of supporting the team is by helping to keep the dog hydrated; you may be requested to help carry water for the dog. In addition, a good support person will notice potential clues and watch for footprints, particularly with a trailing dog. There are a limited number of SAR dogs throughout the state, so the dogs are often requested to respond to other counties or surrounding states. Most handlers find an experienced, capable support person invaluable and will ask that he or she accompany them

out of county. Supporting a dog team on a mission gives a handler in training the kind of real-world experience that cannot be simulated in trainings. All dog handlers in training are required to become support certified before certifying in a discipline.

Training Considerations

As soon as a dog and handler are bonded to one another, training can begin; this may be as young as 8 weeks old. Adult dogs can be trained to do search work; however, their search career will not be as long as a puppy's since they are already adults. Handlers should consider this when thinking of training an older dog.

A frequently asked question is: "How do you train a search dog?" Whether starting with a puppy or an adult dog, it takes years of intense training to make a dog and handler "mission ready". Information on training steps are included later in this manual. Another commonly asked question is, "How long will it take to certify my dog?" This generally depends on how much time you put into the training. It can also depend on the breed of your dog (some breeds reach physical and emotional maturity earlier than others), how much experience you already have with dog training and whether you are already a member of a SAR team. Most dog/handler teams require two to three years to reach the level of skill where they are ready to take the SARDOC certification test, some will take longer.

All dogs that train with Search and Rescue Dogs of Colorado (SARDOC) start out with trailing, but may eventually switch to airscenting. Even if a dog eventually switches to the air scent discipline, trailing is an important foundation to have and one from which to build. You want to learn how to read your dog's "body language indicators" (BLI's). All SARDOC dogs should be able to follow a trail aged 2-4 hours even if they do not certify in trailing.

Most of the training that occurs at SARDOC is that of the handler. The dog has the nose for the work and uses its inherent hunt, prey, and play drive. The challenge is for the handler and dog to develop a consistent and reliable communication system. Handlers must train for hundreds of hours in order to learn to "read" their dog's particular behaviors and correlate those behaviors to the presence of the scent. In addition, the handler needs to learn how the wind, terrain, vegetation, and weather affect scent. Search dog training is a continuous education, we never stop learning.

The primary thing you are teaching the dog in the early stages of training is “the game.” The game is for the dog to find the lost person and get rewarded. Training a dog is not linear, dogs learn in a cyclical fashion. Some handlers suggest two motivational problems for each challenging one. Dogs (and handlers) learn through repetition. You really need to train your dog with your regional team on a regular/frequent basis. As mentioned earlier, keep a detailed training log and have thoughtful and clear objectives for each training. Search dog training is about learning, applying what you have learned, and becoming the best dog team possible. During the journey, don’t forget to enjoy the process and have fun with your dog!

Early Stages of Search Dog Training

- A large part of training a SAR dog is training the handler! We strongly recommend that you check out the “suggested reading list” at the end of this packet. Upon joining SARDOC some of these books are available to you from our library, but eventually you will probably want to buy the books for yourself as reference guides.
- The puppy or dog you are considering to train should have the primary characteristics of the working, herding, sporting, or hound breeds and be of sound physical structure and temperament, and of (or will be of) adequate size and strength to negotiate the terrain encountered in wilderness areas.
- We recommend that you start with a puppy or a dog less than three to four years of age. You have a higher probability of success with a younger dog but if your adult dog has the correct temperament, you should be able to train him or her. Puppies should be at least 8 weeks of age. Consider enrolling in a local “puppy kindergarten” class in order to properly socialize your pup and start training him/her in basic obedience. The key to successfully training a search dog is to develop a good working relationship with your pup.
- Expose your dog to different sounds, sights, smells, animals, people, terrain, weather conditions, and environments.
- Before starting any search training, start building a bond of trust and affection with your dog.
- Also determine your dog’s reward system. The reward for finding the subject should be one of the dog’s favorite toys or games. Most handlers find a particular favorite and use

it only for search rewards.

- Before coming to your first SARDOC team practice, contact the Area Director for that region or contact the person in charge of that practice. Typically, we ask that you come to several SARDOC practices without your dog; it is important for you to observe and ask questions, decide if you really want to commit to training a dog in SAR, and to learn about the first few steps in SAR dog training. It is very important that you plan out your training before actually trying it with your dog.
- We suggest that if distance and work permit, plan on conferring with an experienced SARDOC team member or attending your local SARDOC team practice as frequently as possible. At the practices try to observe as many other dog teams as possible. This will help you understand the different stages of training. Any time you attend a SARDOC training, **ASK THE HANDLERS A LOT OF QUESTIONS ABOUT TRAINING!** This is the best way for you to get a feel for the commitment that you are in for!
- **Note: You may attend SARDOC practices for 2-3 months without joining the organization. After that point, however, you must decide if you are going to commit to training your dog by formally joining SARDOC or else you may not continue to attend SARDOC trainings.** Mail the completed Membership Application Form along with the non-refundable application fee to the address on the form.

Skills required of all SAR personnel

- Plan on at least three years before you and your dog are certified as a SARDOC dog team. In the meantime you will be required to certify as a SARDOC Wilderness Support person. A Support person assists the certified handler on SAR missions by navigating and doing radio communications for the dog team. **To become operational as a Support person, and later as an operational handler, you must first be a fieldable member in good standing with some sort of fielding agency (search and rescue team, ski patrol, park service, etc.).** Going on missions as a Support person will allow you hone your search skills prior to fielding as a certified dog team.
- Map reading (navigation) skills are required of all handlers before they can be certified. Start learning or demonstrating them from the very start. Some handlers have spent years training their dogs only to discover their lack of navigation skills keeps them from being certified even though their dogs are ready. Ask the handlers in your area to tell you which topographic maps cover your training areas and bring your map and compass to all trainings. A SARDOC member will help evaluate your skills if requested.
- First-aid and CPR training are required of certified SARDOC support and handlers. This need not be done in the first six months of training, but do not put it off until certification. Course availability and costs vary from place to place. Contact your local American Red

Cross chapter for that information. We strongly encourage you to gain some knowledge of first aid for dogs too.

- You and your dog must be in good physical shape to effectively search in the Colorado wilderness. On search missions you will be hiking off-trail through miles of rugged terrain while carrying a heavy field pack, searching 8-12 hours per day. You must pass a physical fitness test in order to become a voting member of SARDOC. Your physical ability is tested again on all of the certification tests. SARDOC will not send a weak team member into the field to become a victim themselves. Develop a regular exercise routine and, during SARDOC practices, follow as many teams into the field as you can.
- Keep in mind that volunteering in search and rescue is expensive! In the first four to six months the costs are minimal: driving to and from practices (depends on distance), outdoor clothing (depends on what you already own), dog harness and leads, flags, SARDOC annual membership dues, and books you may choose to purchase. Before certification, the costs go up significantly. Driving to and from searches, extensive outdoor clothing and equipment, first aid courses, radio equipment, first aid supplies, and optional seminar attendances are costs you can expect to incur. These costs over time can easily reach into the thousands of dollars. Tax benefits may exist; check with an accountant.

Canine Etiquette

- Dogs should be on leash unless they are working off-leash or you have been instructed that you can let your dog off-leash to play. The amount of off-leash play and socialization time after practices varies from area to area. Ask other handlers about when and if you can let your dog off-leash at a SARDOC training.
- Your dog must not attack other dogs and must come when you call!
- Friendly dogs may become aggressive when toys are brought out in a group of loose dogs. Do not throw toys for your dog while other dogs are in the area.
- Bitches in heat should not be brought to SARDOC practices. Bitches in heat should not sit in cars during practice; they still distract the other dogs making practice ineffective for all members. This, of course, goes double for actual searches. We recommend that you spay or neuter your dog for effective search work.
- Sick dogs will not be allowed at any SARDOC practices. All dogs must be current on their vaccinations before attending a SARDOC training.
- You must always scoop your poop! Locations vary for SARDOC practices; often times they are held on public land, however, sometimes they are held on private land or in heavily used public parks. Training in these areas is a privilege. Set a good example for others by picking up after your dog.

What to do at a SARDOC practice

- Keep dogs on leash unless they are working.
- Dress for the weather.
- Have a scent article available. A scent article is a small personal article of clothing (e.g. a sock) recently worn by only you. Place the scent article in a Zip-lok bag with your name on it.
- Arrive at the meeting place on time.
- Sign in on the sign-in sheet and check out when leaving. Sign a liability waiver if you are not a member of SARDOC.
- Stay for the entire practice. Part of SAR is making sure all of your teammates are out of the field safely. Observe as many dogs as possible each practice – that is where you learn the most about search dog training. If you must leave early, notify the handler in charge of the practice.
- When you are the subject:
 - Ask if you don't understand where you are to go.
 - Take a radio if available.
 - Be prepared with clothes, supplies, etc to stay put for the duration of the dog's problem. For some exercises this may be several hours.
 - Stay put until found; don't move unless requested to do so.
 - When found, don't move until dog returns with the handler.
 - When handler is present help reward the dog.
- When going with a handler and dog as support or observer:
 - Do not get ahead of the dog or the handler.
 - Keep up so you can watch the dog work.
 - Ask questions if you don't understand what is happening.
 - Stay together.
 - Help reward the dog if requested by the handler
 - Debrief about what went right and what went wrong. Be honest.
 - Return to base quickly as some members of the group may be needed to work additional dogs. This keeps large practices moving.