



Search and Rescue Dogs of Colorado

Air Scent Progressions

Handler Name: _____

Dog Name: _____

	Date Completed	Evaluators/ Testers	Mandatory
T1 – Basic Direction of Travel			N
T2 – Turns			N
T3 – Simple Discrimination			Yes*
A1 – 10 acres			N
A2 – 40 acres			Yes
A3 – Simple Multi-subject			N
A4 – 120 acres			N
A5 – Hasty Multi-subject			Yes
A6 – Night			Yes
A7 – Certification Readiness			N

* The T3 should be attempted but it is not mandatory for an airscent team to pass this evaluation

These Airscent Progressions provide a series of search exercises that a team can use to measure their progress towards certification.

The Progressions are by no means a comprehensive training program. Between these evaluations, teams must incorporate a wide variety of variables (the Airscent Task Book has a list of such variables) and plenty of repetition in their training to make sure they become a well-rounded, reliable search team. It is very important to work with experienced handlers who can give advice as to when it is appropriate to introduce particular variables, how best to train on those new variables, how to overcome issues encountered in training, and how to determine when a team has mastered a skill to a repeatable, dependable degree. The progressions are not a race, avoid the temptation to jump from one to the next too quickly.

SARDOC members start their dogs in foundation trailing even if they want to eventually certify in the Air Scent Discipline. This allows a handler to learn to read their dog's body language indicators (BLIs) in a controlled setting, building a strong foundation between handler and dog, which in turn will make the transition to air scent much easier.

Some of the progressions (T3, A3, A5, and A6) are mandatory for all airscent teams. The others are optional but it is highly recommended that teams demonstrate all of these progressions, in the order shown, as they advance through their training. Handlers training their first SAR dog will find them particularly useful.

Guidelines for Scheduling Progressions

- Before setting up a progression, make sure you have really mastered the skills at that level. Review your training log with your Area Director and other experienced handlers. You will probably be training on problems beyond the level of the progression before you are really ready for that evaluation.
- For the recommended (not required) progressions, request the setup for that evaluation as far ahead as possible. The Area Director or the person in charge of that day's training will determine if the evaluation can be set up and demonstrated at a particular practice.
- You may do the evaluations A1-A5 in any order, however it is highly recommended that you do them in the order listed.
- The SARDOC Testing Coordinator will maintain a list of members who are qualified as Evaluators in each discipline. In general, anyone who is at least Operational Support and has passed a particular progression can be an evaluator for that progression level. Remember that the reason for doing these evaluations is to get helpful feedback from qualified, experienced handlers. Teams in training should strive to get a variety of experienced evaluators to observe and score the progressions.
- Requests for A6 (Night) Progression must be made through the **Testing Coordinator**. The Testing Coordinator will appoint the testers.

- After passing the A6, testees must request their Certification Test through the **Testing Coordinator** within 3 months, if at all possible. Exceptions will include dogs working avalanche at ski areas during the winter, for example.

Guidelines for Setting up Evaluations

- The handler must always ensure the safety and well-being of their canine partner by bringing the appropriate equipment and supplies needed and by allowing for adequate breaks.
- The time limit given for each evaluation may be adjusted at the discretion of the Evaluator(s).
- All evaluations are set up as single blind tests. The evaluator shall know the exact location of the subject(s) and be familiar with the search area.
- Evaluators have the option of calling a “no-test” if the conditions don’t allow the tested skills to be observed. (e.g. the dog immediately airscent to the subject) A no-test does not count as a failed attempt.

Guidelines for Reviewing and Reporting Evaluations

- These progressions are designed to help a dog team prepare for certification testing and fielding of their SAR dog. Honest feedback is a vital component of this process. Evaluators must give the handler a “yes/no” answer as to whether they have adequately demonstrated the skills required at that level. They must also tell the handler what they did well, what could be done better, and suggestions for further training (either to train before trying that progression again, or to work on as they train towards the next progression.)
- For the recommended (not required) progressions, evaluators may give either written or oral feedback. Use of the Airscent Progression Scoresheet is preferred but not required. The trainee should keep any scoresheets, maps, and other paperwork with their training log regardless of whether the evaluation was passed or not. Oral comments should be noted in the handler’s log book.
- For the required progressions, the appropriate scoresheets must be used (Trailing Progression Scoresheet for T3, Airscent Progression Scoresheet for A3 and A5, and Certification Test Scoresheets for A6 and A7). If the evaluation is “passed”, the evaluators must sign and date the scoresheet, and the handler must send a copy (with any maps or other paperwork) to the Testing Coordinator. The original copies should be kept by the handler with their training log.
- Any team that fails 3 evaluations at a single level should consult with their Area Director or other experienced handlers, to assess whether the team will be able to perform at that level and if so, to see what needs to be changed in their training program so they can get to that level. After making those changes, the team should back up to the preceding level and pass that progression, before attempting the failed level again.

- Not every team is cut out for search work. Repeated failures of evaluations should be taken as an opportunity to honestly review whether the team should continue their training.

A1 Air Scent Progression – 10 acres

Objective: The A1 Progression is designed to show that the dog team has basic understanding and skill level to search a small area independently by demonstrating the ability to read the dog's alerts and some interests. The handler should be able to apply basic air scent theory and work an appropriate grid pattern.

1. The dog team must locate by air scent a **single subject** in an area of **10 acres** (1/8 by 1/8 mile) in **fairly simple terrain**.
2. The time limit for the evaluation is **30-45 minutes** from time the dog is scented (excluding time for breaks and briefing). The time will be set in relation to the terrain and conditions.
3. The team will be given boundaries for the assigned search area.
4. The subject will be within the given boundaries.
5. A scent article will be provided.
6. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
7. It will be up to the dog handler to determine the best ways to work their dog. No input on how to work the problem may be offered by the evaluator or any observers until the completion of the evaluation.
8. How the handler applies their search strategy and works the area is as important to the outcome of the evaluation as the dog making a find. The dog finding the subject does not automatically mean the team passes the evaluation.
9. The dog must find the subject. Indicating the find to the handler in a pre-described, reliable manner is **preferred but not required**.
10. A topographical map with the boundaries of the area will be available. The handler must cover the assigned area, but **navigation and map work are not part of this evaluation**. The evaluator will function as a support person, answering any questions about navigation, boundaries of the search area, etc.
11. A map of the area including pertinent information shall be kept by the Trainee and a copy of all evaluation paperwork submitted to the Testing Coordinator after a successful evaluation.
12. One member qualified as an **A1 Progression Evaluator** will observe and make recommendations to the Area Director regarding whether the team has successfully completed the evaluation. Feedback for the handler is critical, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.

A2 Air Scent Progression – 40 acres

Objective: The A2 Progression is designed to show that the dog team has built on A1 skills and is now able to work a slightly larger search area. At this level the dog has to show a reliable, final indication behavior at the find. The handler should be able to deal with varying wind conditions, and be able to adjust their strategy if necessary during the search.

1. Before the evaluation, on the same day, the trainee will **demonstrate the dog's trained final indication** (for example, with a visual runaway using the evaluator as the subject).
2. The time limit for the evaluation is **45 minutes to 1 hour** from time the dog is scented (excluding time for breaks and briefing). The time will be set in relation to the terrain and conditions.
3. The dog team must locate by air scent a **single subject** in an area of **40 acres** (1/4 by 1/4 mile) in **varied terrain**.
4. The team will be given boundaries for the assigned search area.
5. The subject will be within the given boundaries.
6. A scent article will be provided.
7. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
8. How the handler applies their search strategy and works the area is as important to the outcome of the evaluation as the dog making a find. The dog finding the subject does not automatically mean the team passes the evaluation.
9. The dog must find the subject and indicate the find to the handler in the **pre-demonstrated**, reliable manner.
10. A topographical map with the boundaries of the area will be available. The handler must cover the assigned area, but **navigation and map work are not part of this evaluation**. The evaluator will function as a support person, answering any questions about navigation, boundaries of the search area, etc.
11. A map of area including pertinent information shall be kept by the Trainee and a copy of all evaluation paperwork submitted to the Testing Coordinator after a successful evaluation.
12. One, preferably two members qualified as **A2 Progression Evaluators** will observe and make recommendations to the Area Director regarding whether the team has successfully completed the evaluation. Feedback for the handler is critical, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.

A3 Air Scent Progression – Simple Multiple subject

Objective: The A3 Progression is designed to show that the dog team is able to search for a group of people without a scent article. It is important for the dog to have learned to keep looking for more people and reliably demonstrate final indication behavior for each find. The handler needs to be able to read the dog's body language to determine if all people in their area were located or if the dog needs to keep searching.

1. The dog team must locate by air scent **2-3 subjects** in an area of **40 acres** (1/4 by 1/4 mile) in **varied terrain**. The dog handler will not know the number of subjects placed in the area. Some of the subjects will be people the dog does not know and/or has not trained with recently.
2. The time limit for the evaluation is **1 to 1.5 hours** from time the dog is started (excluding time for breaks, rewarding the dog, and briefing). The time will be set in relation to the terrain and conditions.
3. The team will be given boundaries for the assigned search area.
4. The subjects will be within the given boundaries.
5. **No scent articles** will be available.
6. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
7. It will be up to the dog handler to determine how to search or research the area, to best work their dog, within the given time limit. No input on how to work the problem may be offered by the evaluator or any observers until the completion of the Evaluation.
8. How the handler applies their search strategy and works the area is as important to the outcome of the evaluation as the dog making a find. The dog finding the subjects does not automatically mean the team passes the evaluation.
9. The dog must be able to find the subjects and indicate each find to the handler in a pre-described, reliable manner.
10. **The handler will indicate when they feel all subjects have been found and give a probability of detection (POD).**
11. **The dog is required to find all of the subjects.** It must show that it is looking for anyone in the area, and is willing to look for other subjects after each one has been found. The dog may find any person in the test area, including persons not part of the evaluation. But it is still required to find all of the subjects placed by the evaluator.
12. A support person and a topographical map of the area will be available. The dog handler is responsible to communicate to the support person what information to put on the map and how to help him/her with navigation.
13. A map of the area including dog indications, wind directions, and other pertinent information shall be kept by the Trainee and a copy submitted to the Testing Coordinator after a successful evaluation.

14. One member qualified as an **A3 Progression Evaluator** will observe and make recommendations to the Area Director regarding whether the team has successfully completed the evaluation. Feedback for the handler is critical, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.

A4 Air Scent Progression – 120 acres

Objective: The A4 Progression evaluates the team's efficiency, and is designed to show that the dog team has successfully moved on to a larger area search and knows how to utilize a support person. The handler should understand a wide variety of wind patterns, scent pools, etc. They should be able to apply this knowledge to choose an effective search strategy, and adapt the strategy when appropriate. The dog and handler should show the endurance required for a longer search with breaks at appropriate intervals. To cover 100 acres per hour, the handler must use strategy, and read their dog's interests, to zero in on the highest probability section of the search area.

1. The dog team must locate by air scent a **single subject** in an area of **120 acres** (1/4 by 3/4 mile) in **varied terrain** with the subject in place at least **30 minutes** prior to the start.
2. The time limit for the evaluation is **1 to 1.5 hours** from the time the dog is scented (excluding time for breaks and briefing). The time will be set in relation to the terrain and conditions.
3. The team will be given boundaries for the assigned search area.
4. The subject will be within the given boundaries.
5. A scent article will be provided.
6. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
7. It will be up to the dog handler to determine the best ways to work their dog. No input on how to work the problem may be offered by the evaluator or any observers until the completion of the evaluation.
8. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
9. How the handler applies their search strategy and works the area is as important to the outcome of the evaluation as the dog making a find. The dog finding the subject does not automatically mean the team passes the evaluation.
10. The dog must find the subject and indicate the find to the handler in a pre-described, reliable manner.
11. A support person and a topographical map of the area will be provided. **The dog handler is responsible to communicate to the support person what information to put on the map and how to help him/her with navigation.**
12. A map of area including dog indications, wind directions, and other pertinent information shall be kept by the Trainee and a copy submitted to the Testing Coordinator after a successful evaluation.
13. **One, preferably two** members qualified as **A4 Progression Evaluators** will observe and make recommendations to the Area Director regarding whether the team has

successfully completed the evaluation. Feedback for the handler is critical, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.

A5 Air Scent Progression – Hasty Multiple subject

Objective The A5 Progression is designed to show that the dog team can perform an efficient hasty search for multiple subjects. It requires the handler to trade off the probability of detection against the speed of searching. The dog must still be able to search for subjects without a scent article, continue searching after making each find, and reliably demonstrate its final indication behavior for each find.

1. After the A3 evaluation, the dog team should **go back to working scent-specific behavior for several months**. Spending too much time on non-scent-specific training can diminish the dog's scent specific skills.
2. The dog team must locate by air scent **3-5** subjects in an area of **60 acres** (1/4 by 3/8 mile) in varied terrain. The dog handler will not know the number of subjects placed in the area. Some of the subjects will be people the dog does not know and/or has not trained with recently.
3. The time limit for the evaluation is **45 minutes to 1 hour** from time the dog is started (excluding time for breaks, rewarding the dog, and briefing). The time will be set in relation to the terrain and conditions.
4. The handler will be given boundaries for the assigned search area.
5. **The handler will indicate when he/she feels all subjects have been found, which areas have not been covered, and give a probability of detection (POD).**
6. The subjects will be within the given boundaries.
7. **No scent articles** will be available.
8. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
9. It will be up to the dog handler to determine the best ways to work their dog. No input on how to work the problem may be offered by the evaluator or any observers until the completion of the Evaluation.
10. How the handler applies their search strategy and works the area is as important to the outcome of the evaluation as the dog making a find. The dog finding the subjects does not automatically mean the team passes the evaluation.
11. The dog must be able to find the subjects and indicate each find to the handler in a pre-described, reliable manner.
12. The dog is required to **find more than half of the subjects**. It must show that it is looking for anyone in the area, and is willing to look for other subjects after the each one has been found. The dog may find any person in the test area, including persons not part of the evaluation. Persons not placed as subjects by the evaluator will not count towards the number of finds, nor the total number of subjects.

13. A support person and a topographical map of the area will be available. The dog handler is responsible to communicate to the support person what information to put on the map and how to help him/her with navigation.
14. A map of the area including dog indications, wind directions, and other pertinent information shall be kept by the Trainee and a copy submitted to the Testing Coordinator after a successful evaluation.
15. One, preferably two members qualified as **A5 Progression Evaluators** will observe and make recommendations to the Area Director regarding whether the team has successfully completed the evaluation. Feedback for the handler is critical, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.

A6 Air Scent Progression – Night

Objective: The A6 Progression is designed to show that the dog team is able to apply all previously learned skills to nighttime conditions. The handler and dog should be comfortable working at night. The handler should be competent at night navigation and travel, understand the wind patterns prevalent at night, and be able to apply efficient search strategies for those conditions.

1. The dog team must locate **1 subject** in an area of **80 acres** (1/4 mile by 1/2 mile) during **night conditions** (i.e. starting no earlier than 30 minutes after sunset). The subject will be in place at least **45 minutes** prior to the start.
2. The time limit for the evaluation is **1.5 hours** from time the dog is scented (excluding time for breaks and briefing). The time will be set in relation to the terrain and conditions. Extra time may be added at evaluators' discretion if the dog is still working well and the team is making progress in locating the subject.
3. The team will be given boundaries for the assigned search area.
4. The subject will be within the given boundaries.
5. A scent article will be provided.
6. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
7. It will be up to the dog handler to determine the best ways to work their dog. No input on how to work the problem may be offered by the evaluator or any observers until the completion of the Evaluation.
8. How the handler applies their search strategy and works the area is as important to the outcome of the evaluation as the dog making a find. The dog finding the subject does not automatically mean the team passes the evaluation.
9. The dog will be expected to find the subject and indicate the find to the handler in a pre-described, reliable manner.
10. A support person and a topographical map of the area will be available. The dog handler is responsible to communicate to the support person what information to put on the map and how to help him/her with navigation.
11. A map of the area including dog indications, wind directions, and other pertinent information shall be kept by the Trainee and a copy submitted to the **Testing Coordinator** after a successful evaluation.
12. **Two Air Scent Testers** will observe and make recommendations to the Area Director regarding whether the team has successfully completed the evaluation. Feedback for the handler is critical, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.
13. The two testers will be appointed by the Testing Coordinator.

A7 Air Scent Progression – Certification Readiness

Objective: The A7 Progression is designed to show that the dog team is ready to start the certification test process. This is a mock test, given under similar parameters as a certification large area test. This progression also evaluates the handler's ability to navigate without a GPS receiver.

1. The A7 will be set up in an area unfamiliar to the dog team.
2. The dog team must locate **1 subject** in an area of **160 to 240 acres** (½ mile by ½ mile up to ½ by ¾ mile) in moderate and varied terrain with the subject in place at least 45 minutes prior to the start.
3. The time limit for evaluation is **2 hours** from time the dog is scented (excluding time for breaks and briefing). The time will be set in relation to the terrain and conditions. Extra time may be added at the evaluators' discretion if the dog is still working well and the team is making progress in locating the subject.
4. The team will be given boundaries for an assigned search area.
5. The subject will be within the given boundaries.
6. A scent article will be provided.
7. All natural obstacles will be considered fair, with consideration given to safety of the dog, handler and subject while setting up the area. It is up to the dog handler to be able to read their dog.
8. It will be up to the dog handler to determine the best ways to work their dog. No input on how to work the problem may be offered by the testers or any observers until the completion of the Evaluation.
9. How the handler applies their search strategy and works the area is as important to the outcome of the evaluation as the dog making a find. The dog finding the subject does not automatically mean the team passes the evaluation.
10. The dog will be expected to find the subject and indicate the find to the handler in a pre-described, reliable manner.
11. A support person and a topographical map of the area will be available. The dog handler is responsible to communicate to the support person what information to put on the map and how to help him/her with navigation.
12. The handler is not allowed to use their own GPS on this evaluation. The support person will have a GPS and can verify coordinates when requested.
13. A map of the area including dog indications, wind directions, and other pertinent information shall be kept by the Trainee and a copy submitted to the **Testing Coordinator** after a successful evaluation.
14. One, preferably two members qualified as **A7 Progression Evaluators** will observe and make recommendations to the Area Director regarding whether the team has successfully completed the evaluation. Feedback for the handler is critical, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.

Certification Test

A dog team that has passed the A6 test should continue with their training in preparation for the Airscent Certification Test. The trainee should review the requirements for this test and train on any new variables until they feel confident they can pass, then request the test. The recommended time frame for requesting the Certification Test is 3 months. See the SARDOC Policies, SARDOC Standards, and SARDOC Membership Checklist for more information about the test, and its prerequisites.