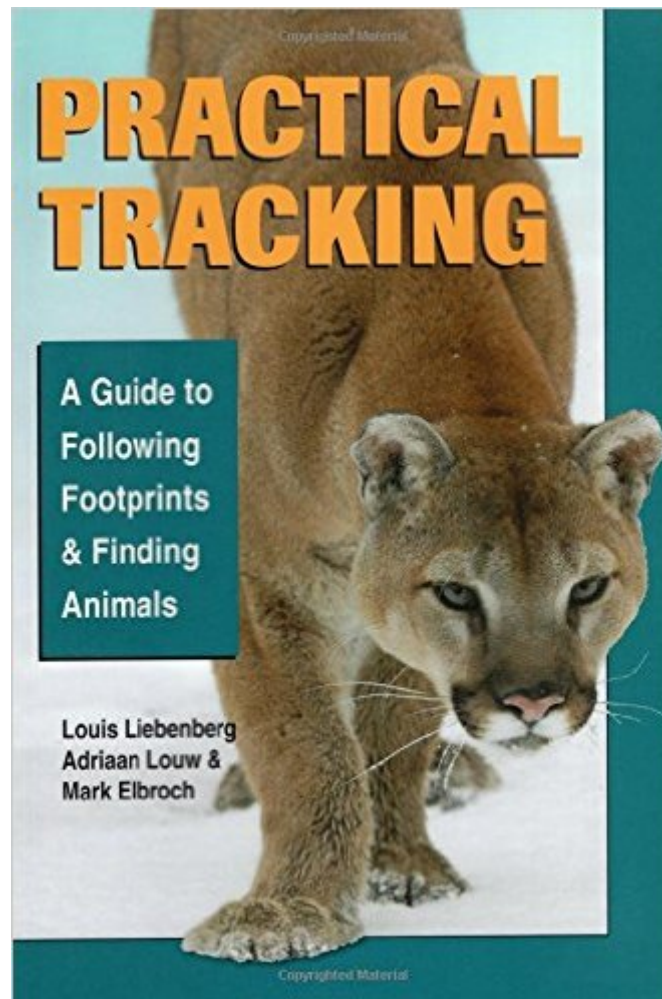


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Practical Tracking: A Guide To Following Footprints And Finding Animals



Synopsis

Techniques from international tracking experts applicable to any quarry and terrain How to follow and find elk, deer, bears, cougars, lions, elephants, leopards, rhinos, and cape buffalo Finding and identifying tracks and sign of an animal's passing is only part of the ultimate goal for serious trackers, hunters, and outdoorspeople. They want to follow the trail to reach the animal in question. This detailed guide teaches them how. Written by a trio of master trackers, it covers what to look for to discern an animal's pathway, what information tracks and sign convey, how to move through the wilderness to get in sight of the quarry, how to avoid dangerous encounters, and more.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you want to learn to trail animals, whether for ecological wildlife surveys, hunting, or just plain curiosity, nothing replaces "dirt time." But finally there is a book that supplements that dirt time, providing structure and greatly speeding up the learning curve. This is a book that both beginning and experienced trackers will find invaluable; another must have for your tracking or hunting library. The authors are excellent trackers themselves, but equally important, all have trailed animals in Africa with some of the best trackers in the world, and it shows in the insights they share. But this isn't just about tracking in Africa. The authors have tracked on other continents as well. Indeed, Mark Elbroch lives and writes in North America where he is the Initial Evaluator for the CyberTracker evaluations of tracking skills, and where he has authored or co-authored some of the most respected field guides available. As the authors write, "Remember--tracking transcends location, and if you do not recognize the name of some animal, do not be distracted from the overall

discussion. It doesn't matter what sort of animal you track, the concepts are all the same."

Consistent with that introductory comment, the book uses animals from both continents to illustrate the tracking principles they're teaching. So you get pages like 104 (the trail of hippos) right next to 105 (an American badger's burrow) when discussing spoor recognition. The topics covered are also varied, ranging from recognizing gaits and track patterns to anticipating spoor and making predictions to anticipating danger and safety, and many others. What I liked best were the first person stories interspersed throughout the book by the authors, providing personal insights into the authors' experiences. These stories, written in italics to separate them from the primary text, make the reader feel as if he or she is actually sitting with the authors beside a track or around a fire listening to them teach tracking through storytelling. It is amazingly effective and wonderfully interesting. Finally, the book explains the CyberTracker evaluation process, which includes both track and sign identification, and trailing. These evaluations are not only mirrors to an individual's skill and knowledge, but also an excellent way to learn, and should be considered by both serious trackers and hobbyists alike, as should this book. This is a book that is meant to be read and read again, as an invaluable compliment to time in the dirt. NOTE: The reviewer is a member of the San Diego Tracking Team, which does wildlife surveys based on tracks, scat, and sign, a hunter, and a certified tracker through CyberTracker Conservation. He has been fortunate enough to track with all three of the authors.

I can't think of three trackers I would rather listen to tell stories interspersed with the practical advice in this book unless it is Brian McConnell, who has two stories in the book as well. The stories are real, instructive and very entertaining. We learn from stories when facts don't stick, but this book is also rich in tracking facts. The chapter on gaits and track patterns is a very complete, well written and easy to understand explanation of how four legged creatures move and what those movements mean. The chapters on age and spoor recognition are chapters that are easy to digest and full of lifetimes of tracking knowledge. Then the book follows the tradition of master trackers in Africa into what they call speculative tracking, a term that will give a search and rescue tracker a heart attack, but is explained and illustrated completely in this book. The book describes field work in detail with lots of attention to safety. There is information on the habits and behavior of many animals which people could encounter in Africa, the US or any place in the world. This knowledge is not a Hollywood version but the real stuff based on field observations. It takes a long time to know a species of animal well enough to co-exist safely and this knowledge is passed along here. For trackers or hunters the chapters on stealth and safety are a must. Any kind of tracker from novice to

a forensic tracker would find this book useful and enlightening. I confess my first read concentrated on the stories as they couldn't be more entertaining. I am happy to add this book to my already full tracking library as it is refreshing, different and full of practical stuff.

Practical Tracking is laced with stories -- good ones by trackers with the depth of experience to know what a teaching tale needs: first, a sense of adventure, to draw attention; and then substance, to keep interest; and finally, a greater purpose, to leave the listener with the inspiration to follow through. These stories have all of the above. If you're drawn to stories like I am, I would suggest paging through the book and reading all the stories first (they're italicized for easy reference). They impart the spirit of the book, which you can then flesh out by going back to the regular text. It's chock-full of the kind of solid, practical knowledge you would naturally know if you grew up in a hunting culture. You'll find well-presented sections on foot and body structure, gaits, and sign aging. I'm particularly taken with the chapters that cover the qualitative aspects of tracking such as stealth, speculation, and sensory awareness. With the addition of this book, tracking field guides become ever-more-useful tools. If you are a beginner, I bet you'll find chapter 8, a mini course in learning to track, to alone be worth the cost of the book. Don't skip a single page if you have the passion to silently trail an animal, and when you catch up with her, to secretly part the grass and watch her. But why would stories be helpful to you as a tracker? I have found stories to be a good adjunct to teaching and learning tracking, and the authors seem to be in agreement. In fact, stories are used educationally in many subject areas. Ask a good teacher how she gets a new concept across to a struggling student and odds are she'll tell you she wraps it in a story. Additionally, we learn from stories throughout the day, whether they're in the form of advertising, news, books, or movies. Stories are so much a part of our lives that they may be the primary way we learn. And it appears that stories and tracking have a long-standing relationship. Archaeological evidence suggests that our pre-agricultural ancestors engaged in subsistence activities like those of today's remaining hunter-gatherer societies. If this is the case, our forebears would have returned from the hunt and told stories of their tracking adventures to eager novices gathered around the evening fire. They gained both inspiration and practical instruction, just as I did in full measure from Louis, Adriaan, and Mark's stories.

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