



**Pictured Left: Marine Veteran Freddy Osuna demonstrates the use of a tracking stick, used to microtrack by locating each individual track imprint.**

We were given seven minutes to investigate and interpret what happened in front of us within the square area laid out in the camp's sand volleyball court, having 15-foot sides. The area had been raked smooth providing a "tracking blackboard" in the ideal sand substrate. The only tracks observed appeared to be three different trails of people moving from one side of the square to the other. The closest trail looked relatively normal; the middle trail was also clear but something didn't seem right. The far trail was difficult to distinguish as the track pattern was more compact and the prints were deeper. We surmised that the nearest two trails were traveling in the same direction but the closest one ran for a couple of steps. The far trail looked different because that subject was skipping or hopping, we guessed.

When the volunteer subjects recreated their actual movements in front of us, we were in for an educational surprise! The closest volunteer did travel as we predicted. However, the middle trail looked different because the subject actually walked backward across the tracking pit. We should have noticed that the tread imprint in the ball of the foot was more clear and detailed compared to the heel pattern. A normal print impression is just the opposite because the heel plants first and the toe actual digs in and kicks material back into the tread area on the ball of the foot covering up the tread details. We also didn't notice that the stride and straddle of the far track was slightly shorter and narrower, in addition to the tracks sinking deeper. When the last volunteer slung his partner over his shoulders and trudged across the tracking pit, it became painfully obvious why the tracks in the trail looked deeper and closer to each other. We did better on the matching drill trying to pair up four different sets of boot prints and bare feet, describing the unique characteristics of each.

Before making us interpret the sample track scenarios, Osuna provided detailed explanations on the mechanics of track formation, track anatomy, and tricks like how to guess the dominant hand of the person making the track. He even showed us how to determine the true direction of travel from just one track imprint, regardless of how much of a pigeon-toed or duck-walker your subject is. These

fundamental concepts helped build the complete story of tracking. As Osuna explained it, tracks are like the letters of our alphabet, a series of tracks is more like a word describing something and a long trail is needed to form a complete sentence.

Osuna stressed the need to be singularly focused on looking for spoor at the same time you are zooming in and out with your perspective. He recommended using both "microtracking"- looking for signs of individual track imprints and "macrotracking"- when you zoom out and look for logical routes of travel and the subject of your search. Osuna explained that, since the eye is physically capable of detailed focusing only on an area the size of a quarter held at arm's length, we should only try to focus and concentrate on that small of an area when we search for clues and patterns. Most of us try to use too much peripheral vision and miss clues right in front of our field of vision. A helpful technique to train yourself is to use a flashlight with a tight beam and only search the area illuminated to "focus" your field of view, even during daylight hours. "You cannot catch anyone or anything by microtracking, but the better you are at it, the less you will have to do it," states Osuna.

Osuna also emphasized the need to increase your mind's library of images of the signs and clues to look for. This can only be done through experiences and practice. By the late afternoon, participants were able to track each other through washes, grasses, bare dirt, and rock fields by confirming that each track in the trail they were following was of the same age, type/shape, size, and pattern. By using quantifiable criteria like this, trackers can all speak the same language and develop credibility for using only solid evidence.

The workshop included countless other tips and admittedly nerdy nuggets, winding up with an evening evaluation of different types and colors of lights. Osuna clearly demonstrated that green light shone from a low angle can make track imprints stand out surprisingly clear on the darkest of nights. To get the same effect during the day, a mirror held at ground level can cast the same type of shadows on the details of the track.

The grand finale featured a multi-purpose fancy green laser leveler. Osuna demonstrated how it can be used to highlight tracks in the dirt, disturbances through grasses, and to point out the direction of

## Marine Veteran Passes on Tracking Skills to State-wide Search and Rescue Units

Text & Photos By Dan Groebner

Some veterans just can't stop serving their country. Freddy Osuna became a Marine as a young man, using his tracking skills to find enemy combatants and training fellow Marines in modern survival and tracking skills. After the physical toll from years of Marine Corps Infantryman and Scout Sniper Team Leadership assignments in active war zones led to an honorable discharge, Osuna transitioned to civilian life by founding Greenside Training, LLC (Greensidetraining.com) in 2010.

Greenside Training provides tracking workshops and outdoor skills training to Border Patrol, Department of Corrections, civilians, and dozens of Search and Rescue Units. Osuna continues to instruct military trainers in tracking techniques with the important objective of increasing the troop's safety and number of successful missions. His most recent role has been the United States Marine Corps School of Infantry East Combat Tracking Subject Matter Expert, and the US Army Combat Tracking Course Lead Instructor.

The first weekend in May found Osuna teaching the finer points of tracking at the 2015 Arizona Search and Rescue Conference held at the Salvation Army Camp near Heber. Osuna taught a 10-hour course filled with personal experiences, detailed interpretations of spoor (international for "sign of your subject"), enlightening exercises, nerdy facts, and practical tips that made everybody there a better tracker. It was immediately apparent when he began the workshop that Osuna has been passionate about reading the language of tracks in the dirt since his grandmother sparked his interest as a young Yaqui Native American growing up in the Tucson area.



**Participants from statewide Search & Rescue Teams, including Navajo County Search & Rescue members in-red, from left - Don Alexander, Joyce Alexander, and Mike Monahan, decipher tracks made in the sand during one of Osuna's exercises.**



Pictured above: Canine tracking teams undergo training to safely board and de-board the Department of Public Safety's helicopter during specialized training at the workshop. These are certified dogs that become more valuable when they can be airlifted to remote locations.

travel of the subject to other trackers in the group. The laser projected a straight green line that clearly extended out at least 100 feet and when waved back and forth across the ground surface, it "painted" each individual track along the trail.

To learn more about Osuna's philosophy and methods of tracking, pick up his latest book, "Index Tracking; Essential Guide to Trailing Man and Beast" (2011, Amethyst Moon Publishing, Tucson, AZ- paperback and eBook versions available). For more information on tracking and outdoor survival workshops, see the Greenside Training website at Greensidetraining.com.

Osuna made it very clear that his life's passion was his family, wife Amanda and their four children who live in southern Arizona. But following closely was his drive to share his knowledge on traditional and modern tracking techniques in hopes of helping others become more successful and professional trackers. He protected countless servicemen by sharing his knowledge during his active duty years and continues to train others in civilian life, especially search and rescue responders. How many lives has veteran Freddy Osuna saved? We're lucky to live in a country with dedicated veterans who continue to make this a better place to live.

This tracking class was just one of many courses offered at the annual Search and Rescue Training Conference. Other subjects included K-9 training, wilderness 1st Aid, helicopter training, backcountry navigation, ATV/UTV search strategies, discussion of unmanned aerial vehicles in searches, and use of horses. Search and Rescue Units from across the state were trained by full-time emergency response professionals. The Department of Public Service provided their Ranger helicopter and pilots for personnel training and to practice boarding and de-boarding search and rescue dogs and their handlers.

Every county in the White Mountains is in need of qualified and available volunteers to serve on the Search and Rescue Units. All search and rescue activities in Arizona are supervised by the local Sheriff's Department and all volunteer units operate under the invitation and direction of the local Sheriff. Regular training and time commitment is required. Contact your local Sheriff's Department for an application form or to ask questions. The Navajo County Search and Rescue Posse maintains a Facebook page.



Osuna now makes a living teaching others how to track.

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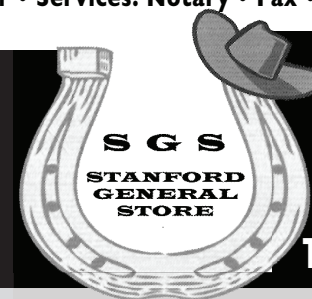
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