

Blood Trailing/Big Game Recovery Lesson Plan

Instructor Notes

This lesson introduces the students to the knowledge and skills needed to effectively recover big game animals. This lesson corresponds with a supplemental handout. Teach this lesson as part of a round robin with a small group (4-8) of students.

Teaching Methods Used in This Lesson

- Lecture
- Discussion
- Student hands-on activity
- Role-play

Materials Required

- 3D or 2D deer decoy, or deer hide, to simulate the dead animal at the end of the trail
- Bottle of fake blood (2-3 oz per course) (see **Addendum** for recipes)
- Bright and/or reflective flagging tape
- Deer hoof or man-made tool to make tracks in soil

Optional Materials

- Arrow shafts (2) with fletching only; no tips (optional)
- Deer hair

Station Set-up

1. Create a mock blood trail for a deer.

- Start the blood trail with the area of the shot.
 - use a bloody arrow, some deer hair if available, and some blood splatter
 - place arrow a few feet away to simulate a “pass through” shot
 - the trail could also simulate a deer shot with a firearm (e.g. deer hair and blood splatter, minus the arrow)
- Lead the blood trail away from the area of the shot with sign every 1-2 yards
- The blood trail should contain:
 - blood droplets
 - broken twigs
 - tracks
 - pooled blood
 - a deer bed
 - blood on shrubs/trees
 - gaps in the trail where blood/sign is lacking

- The length of the trail is location dependent, however, a trail of 20-25 yards is recommended

2. Place the simulated dead deer at the end of the blood trail. Place the deer behind a large tree or bush so that it can't be easily seen by the students until they are near it. This helps to prevent the students from rushing through the exercise and gives them some excitement when they find it.

3. For this lesson, have them assume the role of an active hunter and engage the students as if they have just shot a deer. This technique can instruct the students while having them participate. Have the students meet you 5-10 yards away from the area of the shot to start.

Part A:

Focus Activity

The purpose of the focus activity is to get everyone's attention focused on the lesson. Role-play and describe the scene of a hunt. For example, say: "you have a treestand set up over there, you've been hunting all morning, a deer has just walked into range, you take the shot, and now the real work begins."

Part B:

Objectives (1 minute)

State the learning objective to the students. "At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the basic practices for successful big game recovery."

Part C:

Teaching Method

Ask: "When does big game recovery begin? What can you do immediately to aid in recovery of the animal?" Discuss the following topics:

1. Carefully observe every movement of the animal after you shoot

- Make a mental note of where the animal was standing at the time it was shot
- Observe the reaction / body language of the animal when it is shot
- Observe the path the animal takes after the shot
- Make a mental note of the last spot they saw the animal
- Take a compass bearing and estimate the distance to the last spot they saw the animal
- Mark your tree so you remember where you were

2. Explain why they should wait for a period of time before trailing game

- Allows the animal time to perish

- Avoids spooking the animal if it did not go far (bumped wounded game are often unrecovered)
- Wait 30 minutes (if using a firearm), 1 hour (if using archery), or longer if unsure of the shot

Transition into having the students trail the deer by asking the students: "Once we've waited the proper amount of time, and we start looking for the deer, what types of sign should we look for?" After they give some answers, say "good, so let's take a look to see if we can find any sign."

Part D:

Student Exercise (20-30 minutes)

Note: One technique you can employ to ensure each student participates is to have them take turns finding sign. When a student finds sign, have them stay put while the next student looks for the next sign, and so on and so forth. However, this does tend to make the exercise take longer.

1. Take the students to the beginning of the blood trail and have the students look for sign.

Explain what each type of sign tells the hunter:

- The arrow
 - Amount and color of blood
 - Presence/absence of air bubbles in blood or presence/absence of hair
 - Presence of bile or presence of fat
- Blood splatter
- Hair
- Kicked up dirt and leaves

2. Have the students follow the sign. Explain key elements of finding sign and what it means:

- Blood up on vegetation
- Deer bed with pooled blood
- Sign other than blood
 - Broken branches
 - Dew line
 - Tracks

3. Explain how and why to mark sign they find:

- Bright, reflective flagging
- Toilet paper is biodegradable, but it's also white which can be dangerous
- Keep track of the trail
- Helps see path in the dark
- Allows an educated guess of direction of travel

Note: Have the students temporarily hang flagging, or some other marking material, as they find sign. Remember to take the flagging down after each group.

4. Explain the techniques for regaining the trail if sign is lost:

- Return to last point of sign
- Search outwardly in arcs/circles
- Look for downhill trails
- Wounded game will often follow the path of least resistance, especially toward water

Note: Discuss regaining the trail at a point along the blood trail where there is a gap between sign.

5. Once they find the decoy, explain to them how to approach a downed animal:

- From behind
- Away from its feet

6. Explain how to ensure the animal is dead:

- Check the animal's eyes
- The eyes of a dead animal are normally open
- Prod the rump with a stick, an arrow, or the muzzle of a firearm to see if the animal reacts

7. Explain to the students how to dispatch an animal that is still alive when found:

- Well placed lethal shot
- Ensure the shot is still legal/safe/ethical
 - Greater than 500' of an occupied dwelling
 - Greater than 150' from a road
 - During legal hunting hours
 - Property you have permission to be on
- If it is no longer legal/safe, contact an EPO for guidance

8. Explain that there are legal requirements that must now be met and the best ways to meet them:

- Tag the animal
- Where to put the tag
- How to keep tag dry
- Which animals in MA require a field tag

Students are not being tested at this stage; they are gaining new knowledge. Let the students follow the trail and find sign on their own. Your role as the instructor is that of a facilitator/coach to help the students follow the trail and learn the material.

Part E:

Student Summary/Wrap up (2 minutes)

Ask students to recall the important topics that were covered in the lesson. It is important for students to be able to verbalize these points. Use questioning strategies to flesh out answers.

- What should you do when you first shoot the animal?
- How much time should you wait before tracking?
- What sign do we look for and what might it mean?
- How do you regain a lost trail?
- How do you approach a downed animal?

Addendum

Fake Blood – Option 1

- Karo Syrup
- water (just enough to thin mixture to desired consistency)
- red food coloring

Characteristics:

- can mix to desired color
- shiny consistency
- holds color well
- readily available ingredients

Fake Blood – Option 2

- whole milk (or half and half)
- red food coloring

Characteristics:

- can mix to desired color
- “blood” has a high protein and fat content similar to real blood
- readily available ingredients
- can be lightened or darkened to simulate arterial or venous blood
- can be made frothy to simulate a lung hit
- has realistic color when dry
- does not hold up well in wet conditions