



# THE TRACKER

Monthly Newsletter of the Inland Empire Search and Rescue Council

June 2005

Volume 14 Number 6

## Laddie's First

Christine Stuehrmann, SAR Dog Team

I have been with the SBSD Search Dog Team for four years now, working hard (as we all do in search and rescue) to get myself ready for field deployment with my Wilderness Dog.



I purchased Laddie, my Golden Retriever, when he was seven months old from a family who knew he was way toooooo much dog for them! They are very happy (and relieved) that he has found a home where he can unleash his strong and energetic hunt drive.

We, on the Search Dog Team, are first and foremost Search Technicians as are all the Teams serving the Sheriff's Department. As you all know, each Team has its own special skills, expertise, and equipment. For the Search Dog Team, our arsenal of SAR gear includes a very special tool - our big hearted dogs! We not only have to purchase the best equipment for our work in the field, but that "equipment" is our living, breathing four-legged partner.

It takes a dog with very specific temperament qualities in order to be suitable for Search and Rescue work. They must be physically fit, mentally strong, "emotionally" stable and secure, confident, friendly with other dogs, friendly with people, and have an **extreme hunt drive** (this is the part that makes them difficult to have as house pets). Laddie has been in training since I got

him at seven months of age, but after taking our first of three tests (after a year and a half of training him) to certify for deployment, he ruptured his acruciate ligament. In simple terms, his left rear leg no longer was able to stay intact at the knee. Well, after being totally heartbroken over the diagnosis, and Laddie's possible very early retirement, I was assured by the surgeon that Laddie would be able to be back at work in about four months. Whew! What a relief!

After a few thousand dollars in vet/ surgery costs, I spent several months building up his strength and muscle tone to get back into training and finishing our testing. For those of you not familiar with the requirements for certification of a Wilderness SAR Dog, it normally takes about two years to achieve numerous obedience/training signoffs and the successful completion of three tests. Those tests are: #1. A Hasty Search which includes searching along an up-to-one-mile-long road and sending the dog with our directional control out 50 feet on each side to locate one lost subject, with one hour to complete the test; #2. A 40-Acre Night Search which includes searching 40 acres (in the dark!) to locate one lost subject with two hours to complete the test; and #3. A 160-Acre Endurance Search which includes locating two lost subjects (somewhere within 160 acres) with four hours to complete the test. We perform our tests without support personnel, doing all the work from forming our initial search strategy, performing map, compass, GPS,

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# What's New in Volunteer Forces?

Lt. Glenn Grabiec, Emergency Operations/Volunteer Forces

First of all, let me say thank you to all of you who participated in some of our latest out-of-county searches. I know it is a big commitment on you and your families to travel so far away. The other counties we support are grateful to have the assistance of the best SAR teams in the nation!

We have been busy here attending coordination meetings and updating evacuation plans for the upcoming fire season. We all know we could be very busy this fire season, so we need to be ready.

The team here has also been busy on many projects for the future. Projects such as improving the callout

process, finalizing the state and county SAR memorials, acquisition of the volunteer badges, bringing outside training to our department, finalizing the communications truck, and preventative SAR are just some of the things we work on daily.

One other area that we are focusing on is our interaction with the volunteer units. I had the pleasure of attending the Wrightwood Team's meeting and the Spring Valley Lake COP meeting last week. We plan on attending more of the meetings on a regular basis to hear from you directly on how we can best support you.

Thank you for all you do!

*Glenn Grabiec*

## Apple Valley Accolades

On Monday April 11, 2005 the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Apple Valley Posse received the California Police Activities League 2004 "Community Partner of the Year" award in Sacramento. Nominated by the California State Parks Police Activities League, the Apple Valley Posse was recognized for its contributions and support of youth throughout Southern California at annual events hosted by State Parks and California PAL since 1998.



# Forest Falls Tragedy

Shannon Kovich, San Gorgonio SAR & Valley of the Falls SAR

The Valley of the Falls Search and Rescue Team received one of those calls that all teams dread responding to, a child swept away by a fast moving stream.

On 052205 at about 2000 hrs, The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department



received a call for assistance by a frantic family member in the Community of Forest Falls, stating that their 6-year-old child was

missing. The child was at a relative's house playing with his cousins when he became



separated from the others, causing the child to think that his cousins had started to walk home. The road into the area had become covered

with about 5 inches of fast running water,

when the child started to cross the road; he was swept into the rushing water.

The Family members searched the area for about 30 minutes before calling the Sheriff. Search and Rescue members from the Valley of the Falls SAR Team and personnel from the San Bernardino County Fire Dept, responded to the area and worked the banks of Mill Creek from the point last seen to the Edison Intake at the mouth of the canyon. The victim's grandmother located the child in some shallow water about 1-3/4 miles down stream from the road crossing. The family summoned two members of the Fire Dept to help. CPR was performed on the child till Mercy Air 3 arrived on scene. The child was pronounced dead at the Loma Linda University Medical Center.

Due to the large amount of snow pack in the San Gorgonio Wilderness, the local streams are swelling with cold mountain water, and because of the large elevation change, the water is traveling very quickly down stream. This current situation with the stream level should continue for the next 2 to 3 months. With the large amount of people visiting the San Bernardino National Forest, the chances of additional injuries is high.

Types of searches like this one, involving children are especially hard on volunteers. We all have or know our own 6-year-old, and things like this always hit home. The department offers counseling to volunteers free of cost, to help deal with these types of traumatic situation. We see a lot of things in our line of work, and we all need to know how to deal with the trauma correctly. Stress can do incredible things to the body if not dealt with correctly.

Go home and hug your loved ones, and be careful out there.

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# Alpine Skills

Denny Wells, Victor Valley SAR

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Well, here we are at the beginning of summer and I'm finally getting time to write about our Alpine experience this winter. Have I put my winter gear away- NO. Not after being called at the La Quinta desert search to possibly go to Mt. San Jacinto, then there was Yosemite four weeks ago and the yet unfinished business at Mt. Baldy. I've been involved with Alpine certification for a number of years and when Sonny invited me to participate this year I jumped at the chance. First, it gave me a chance to see the complete "new" process for training and at the same time learn additional skills; second, it provided the opportunity to encourage members of my (Victor Valley) team to become certified.

This was a GREAT year. We had a record number of people taking the class for the first time and numerous others recertifying after years of no snow. Instructors really responded to the need with rewrites of the technical manual and taking up the extra teaching assignments when weather or circumstances changed the schedule. I'm not sure what kind of rain/snow dance Sonny performed, but it worked so well that some people were snowed in for one of our classroom training days. On our first test date I drove right up to the training site in my 4x4 and thought how thoughtful our leaders are. On the last test session we hiked over a four-foot wall of snow on the highway and then snow shoed into the same area.

I know that some of my members felt intimidated with all the technical information that was presented and the extra gear they were required to obtain, however, all were glad that they stayed through the process. When it was time to do the practical work, this is where the instructors really shined. The ratio of students to instructors was very good and there were usually teams of two or three instructors together to keep the day moving. Individual participants that had difficulty with

a particular technique were usually helped on a one to one basis and a "can do" attitude was present the whole time. Some instructors volunteered to work beyond the scheduled times to help students. What I heard over and over was that people weren't learning just Alpine skills, but concepts and techniques that could be used in many SAR situations.

There was terrific interaction between the various team members along with the multitude of instructors. We are very fortunate to have the wealth of knowledge and experience available to formulate our own instructing team. I hope that all who participated were able to go back to their team and give a positive report on the experience and will encourage others to participate next year. If you enjoyed the experience, write a short [article to your team](#) describing the training. You might leave out walking around the hills blindfolded at night, the hike up and around the mountain before pitching camp and getting up at first daylight just to leave a surprise. To all my fellow instructors, THANK YOU for making this experience possible for our Department and me.

And, I now have six members of my *Desert* team that are Alpine certified! 

# Rattlesnake Vaccine for your Pooch?

Mike Cardwell, Deputy Chief (retired) and SAR Tech II

**L**ots of questions are swirling around these days about rattlesnake vaccine for dogs. What is it? And is it effective?

The vaccine, technically called *Crotalus Atrox Toxoid*, is manufactured by Hygieia Biological Laboratories and distributed by Red Rock Biologics in Woodland, California. The U.S. Department of Agriculture granted a “conditional product license” last November, making the vaccine available nationwide while its safety and effectiveness is evaluated.

To be sure, *Crotalus Atrox Toxoid* doesn't make your dog immune to snakebite in the same way that a vaccination against an infectious disease often totally prevents illness.

Think of it this way: imagine your dog's (or your own) immune system as an ammunition factory. Each enemy invader (i.e., pathogen or biological toxin) requires a different kind of ammunition (i.e., antibody) to kill and time is needed to “tool up” the factory to produce each type of ammunition. A vaccination triggers the immune system to “tool up” ahead of time to produce the appropriate antibodies. Then, in case of a future invasion, the immune system simply has to flip the switch to begin making the correct type of antibodies to fight off the invaders.

Vaccinations work very well against disease-causing organisms because infec-

tious diseases almost always start with a tiny amount of the pathogenic organism that must reproduce over time (often days) to produce illness. When the immune system already has the ammunition factory ready to go, it can overwhelm the infection with antibodies quickly and kill it before damage is done.

But a snakebite is very different. Rather than a tiny amount of problem-causing material, the initial insult to the body involves a large dose of antigen – venom, in the case of a rattlesnake bite. Even when the immune system is prepared by previous vaccination, it can't produce antibodies fast enough to prevent damage caused by the venom. (That's why relatively large quantities of antivenom – consisting of purified antibodies produced in immunized horses or sheep – are so effective in treating serious snakebites.)

Red Rock Biologics' suggests that their vaccine, used in accordance with their protocol of annual boosters, will maintain an antibody level in a dog's blood equivalent to up to three vials of antivenom. This does not take the place of appropriate emergency veterinary treatment but is expected to mitigate the initial damage done by the venom while the dog is being transported to a vet and evaluated.

The theory seems sound and Red Rock Biologics has accomplished appropriate testing and field trials. They report an impressive safety record with no significant problems with impurities or allergic reaction to the vaccine.

One lingering concern is that the current vaccine is made from the venom of only one species of rattlesnake (the western diamondback or *Crotalus atrox*) and, thus, its effectiveness against the bites of the twenty or so other species of North Ameri-



See “venom” on p.6

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## Venom

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can rattlesnakes remains a question. (Human antivenom, for example, is made with the venoms of four species, carefully selected because they contain most of the two or three dozen toxic components found in North American pit viper venoms.)

In California, western diamondbacks are only encountered in the deserts of eastern San Bernardino, Riverside and Imperial Counties. The rattlesnakes most commonly encountered by SAR personnel and their dogs are other species (primarily southern Pacifics in the mountains and coastal foothills/valleys and Mohave rattlesnakes and sidewinders in the desert areas). It will be interesting to see how the current vaccine protects dogs against bites by these other species. To be fair, Red Rocks Biologics' states that they are working on vaccines to protect dogs against other rattlesnake species.

But with the skyrocketing cost of antivenom (now nearly \$1000/vial wholesale) and the inherent time lost while you figure out what's wrong with your dog, Red Rock Biologic's *Crotalus Atrox Toxoid* sure seems to be a cost-effective step in the right direction.

Editor's Note: Mike Cardwell can be reached via email at [mikecardwell@comcast.net](mailto:mikecardwell@comcast.net) with questions about this or other venomous bites and stings issues. The Red Rock Biologics website is found at [www.redrockbiologics.com](http://www.redrockbiologics.com).

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## Laddie

Continued from p. 1

communications with the CP, breaks for the dog, carrying not only our own water, but water for the dog, etc., etc., with our evaluators following along. Boy, can our dog's drink a lot!

Laddie and I reached Mission-Ready Status this passed December. On a Friday afternoon in April, 2005, while at work, I got the text-message call-out for deployment of live-find wilderness dogs (initially) in a mutual aid request from Riverside County for a missing woman in the Lake Cahuilla/La Quinta area. I have been on many searches thus far, but obviously without my own dog. I admit, I was excited, but nervous. We were to be at the command post in the desert at 0630 hours Saturday. Another early day!

Later that evening I was notified that I was being put on standby since the wind was howling out in the desert and the dogs were not being deployed as of yet. By Saturday evening, we were requested to bring both wilderness live-find dogs and human remains detection (HRD) dogs. Others on the Dog Team were now able to participate and I would not have to be on my first search with my own dog without any of my Team Mates. What a relief! I was very well aware that this was Laddie's first search since certification - not that HE knew that, nor would HE care! But I did!

Six of us went, two Wilderness dogs, two HRD dogs and the handlers. The missing woman was a physical therapist who visits patients at their homes. At 1100, she called her appointment to say she was lost and could not find the house. The patient gave her directions, but the woman never made it. The next day, Thursday, a hiker found her car stuck on a rock next to a dirt road in the desert. She had broken her ankle about six weeks ago. In her car was her cell phone, purse, water, work equipment, crutches, etc., but no car keys. How far could she go? Unfortunately, she has not yet been located

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# Calendar

For information or to submit an event, contact the editor at [editor@thetracker.info](mailto:editor@thetracker.info). Appearance of items in this section does not necessarily imply endorsement by the SAR Council or the County of San Bernardino. Call if you have any questions about a particular listing. To save space, persons to contact and numbers for multiple listings of *Department-approved training providers* are consolidated in one place at the bottom of this page.

## 2005

### April

#### Apr 16—Personal Vertical Skills Check-off

Hosted by West Valley SAR. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for information.

#### Apr 30—West Valley SAR 9th Annual Run for Rescue & Safety Fair

Visit [www.thetracker.info/calendar/FlyerRun&Fair05.pdf](http://www.thetracker.info/calendar/FlyerRun&Fair05.pdf) for more information.

### May

#### May 14-15—West Valley SAR Training

Rope Training. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for information.

#### May 18—IESARC Meeting

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

### June

#### Jun 4—West Valley SAR Training

Night ELT exercise. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

### July

#### Jul 2—Valley of the Falls SAR Pancake Breakfast and Raffle

Visit [thetracker.info](http://thetracker.info) for more information.

#### Jul 16—West Valley SAR Training

Rope rescue training. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

#### Jul 16-17 & 23-24—Technical Rescue Basics Course

Contact Mike Schlax at VFU ([mschlax@sbscd.org](mailto:mschlax@sbscd.org)) to sign up. A \$50 deposit is required.

#### Jul 20—IESARC Meeting

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

### August

#### Aug 12 & 13—Air Rescue Team Fundraiser

"Hollywood Bowl Style" concert in La Verne. Tickets are \$55.00, which includes food. Contact [stephen.miller39@verizon.net](mailto:stephen.miller39@verizon.net) for more information.

#### Aug 20—West Valley SAR Training

Rope rescue training. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

#### Aug 24—Central Mountain Rescue Annual Fundraiser, "An Evening at the Improv".

Visit [thetracker.info](http://thetracker.info) for more information.

### September

#### Sep 17—West Valley SAR Training

Search exercise. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

#### Sep 21—IESARC Meeting

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

### October

#### Oct 14-16—West Valley SAR Training

Map & Compass training. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

#### Oct 15—Personal Vertical Skills Check-off

Hosted by the Cave Rescue Team. Sheriff's Aviation in Rialto. Contact Mark Kinsey ([mkinsey@caverescue.net](mailto:mkinsey@caverescue.net)) for more information.

### November

#### Nov 19—West Valley SAR Training

Night scenario. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

### December

#### \*Course / Provider

BSAR / Vol Forces  
CMC Rescue School  
On Rope1  
Rigging For Rescue  
Ropes That Rescue  
TRBC, PVSC, NCRC / Vol Forces  
Mountaineering / Vol Forces  
West Valley SAR Training

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(760) 242-0855  
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[www.onrope1.com](http://www.onrope1.com)  
[www.riggingforrescue.com](http://www.riggingforrescue.com)  
[www.ropesthatrescue.com/](http://www.ropesthatrescue.com/)  
[ww26sar5@aol.com](mailto:ww26sar5@aol.com)  
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[boobali@gte.net](mailto:boobali@gte.net)

## Search Dog

Our Dogs are trained to work as a team WITH us, yet also must work independently from us, ranging far and wide, nose to the wind, seeking the slightest bit of human scent. Laddie worked in the desert's sand, rocks, impenetrable chaparral, and warming temperatures from 0800 to 1230. He worked along side Tessa, one of our Team's HRD dogs. I had never worked him along side another dog clearing the same area, but he knows his job! He could not care less that Tessa was there, and vice versa. He was going to find that lost woman who, in his mind, surely has his toy (the reason our dogs work so hard to find the lost subject)! He had plenty of breaks for water and rests, and worked hard, but in the end, it has been determined the missing person is not in the area. I sure hope her family gets some answers sooner than later.

As I write this story, my big-hearted Golden Boy is stretched out on the floor, at my feet, just waiting to get out there and do it again!

## Classifieds

Contact the Editor to place or remove any item.



**SBSD Commuter cups** with star and motto. \$16. Features generous 16 oz. capacity, stainless steel construction, double-walled insulation and fits virtually all auto cup or mug holders.



**SBSD Search and Rescue decals.** \$5. The decals are 3.5" X 3.5" and can be stuck on the outside of just about anything or on the inside of a window. The price is \$5.00 each and can be purchased by contacting SarDesertRun@aol.com or calling 760-369-9999.



**Earrings (1/2") \$10 and Lapel Pin/Tie Tacks (5/8") \$8.** Fund-raiser for Morongo Mounted SAR Team. For ordering info contact Kim Miller at millerkm@29palms.usmc.mil or call Kim at (760) 367-1148 or (760) 367-1148 evenings.

**SBSD Coffee cups** \$5. High-gloss ivory coffee cups with gold-colored SBSB star on the side is microwavable. Available at Volunteer Forces.

**SBSD SAR Pens** \$10. High-quality, refillable ink pens with SBSB star and "Search & Rescue" on side. Great gift idea! Available at Volunteer Forces.

**Custom SAR/Expedition Topo maps.** \$14.95. See the web site for full details!

**Garmin Offers NASAR Members Discounts.** NASAR has an agreement with Garmin to distribute its entire line of consumer GPS products and a handful of its aviation products to the SAR community. Join NASAR at [www.nasar.org](http://www.nasar.org), and shop the store at [www.nasar.org/garmin/default.php](http://www.nasar.org/garmin/default.php).

**Air Rescue Team.** The Air Rescue Team is selling T-shirts and baseball caps. To purchase them contact Diana at VFU (909-387-0641) or Helen at Aviation (909-356-3800). Go to [www.cafepress.com/helicopter2classifieds](http://www.cafepress.com/helicopter2classifieds) to purchase these items.

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