

VGP 101 Part 6: Blood Tracking

By Ken Dinn and Gary Hodson

As we go through this series on the VGP you should begin to get a picture of the relationship between the JGHV tests and hunting in Germany. Every German hunter **MUST** hunt with a fully trained dog, and that dog **MUST** have passed a test acceptable to the state where the hunter is licensed. Thus, there is a practical hunt-related reason for every element in the test.

The priority—for VDD in particular and German hunters in general—is ethical hunting. This includes making every effort to minimize the suffering of the game and to recover the game so that the meat, hide and horns/antlers can be used. The dog is there to ensure that happens. This ethical value is reflected in the JGHV tests with the particular emphasis on tracking and independent retrieving.

Due to proper management of habitat and predators, the numbers of game in Germany is considerably higher than in most North American regions. In the case of large game the Forester in each area tracks the amount of deer each year and tells the Revier owners exactly how many deer they must take to keep the ecological balance. The hunters must show proof of what they have harvested by presenting the antlers. At the end of the year if they have not harvested the proper number the Forester will hire someone to come in and complete the harvest, charging the expense to the Revier owner.

This leads us to blood tracking. German hunters are often tasked by the Forester with taking quite a few deer in their hunting area—as many as 50 to 100. All of the deer must be recovered. There are also many deer hit by vehicles on the roads. In this case someone with a trained dog is called in to blood track an animal that was not immediately killed. So there are many opportunities for the dogs to use their blood-tracking skills. As a result, some hunters train their dogs as specialists in blood tracking and test them through the more rigorous 20- and 40-hour blood tracking tests.

In addition to the deer, wild boars have become quite a nuisance in Germany and are hunted in large numbers. You may wonder what the hunters do with this amount of game. In Germany they are allowed to sell wild meat. Once a hunter has supplied family and friends, he can sell to the public. Vans often travel through an area to buy the game after a hunt and transport it to market or restaurants, where it is a desirable menu item.

Things are quite different in North America, but we have gradually been earning the right to legally blood track wounded deer in various provinces and states. As a result, the training for the blood tracking portion of the VGP has become much more meaningful to us.

BLOOD TRACK OPTIONS IN THE VGP

There are several options available to handlers for blood tracking.

Age of Track: The first is whether you want a day track (TF – Tagfährte) or an overnight track (ÜF – Übernachtfährte). The aging period for the blood on a day track is 2-5 hours, while the aging period on an overnight track is at least 14 hours overnight. The score on the day track is multiplied by a factor of 5, while the overnight track is multiplied by a factor of 8 to reflect the greater level of difficulty.

The next consideration is how the dog works the track:

Leash Work: All dogs **MUST** do the first 400 m of the track on leash. For most their track will end there at the carcass of a deer. This option is scored as mentioned above, depending on whether the track was TF or ÜF. Some handlers will take the opportunity to do additional off-leash work as either a Dead Game Bayer (Totverbeller) or a Dead Game Guide (Totverweiser). These dogs are released at the end of the 400 m leash work and allowed to work free along a fresh blood track to find the carcass that has been placed 200 m further on. The judges and handler remain where the dog was released and the handler cannot influence the dog. Dogs who work this way are given an additional score.

Dead Game Bayer: When the Bayer finds the carcass it is expected to immediately begin baying. The dog should call its handler for at least ten minutes and must not leave the carcass during that time.

Dead Game Guide: When the Guide finds the carcass it must immediately return to its handler and lead the handler to the carcass off lead. Traditionally the dog will carry a *bringse!*—a leather fob or piece of antler hung from its collar—in its mouth in order to indicate to the handler that it has found the deer.

BLOOD TRACKING PROCEDURES

The descriptions of the test procedures that follow are paraphrased from the test regulations—VGPO.

Each blood track will be laid in a fresh area of forest or dense brush land. The track may start in an open field, but no farther than 100 m from the forest edge. The track for leash work will be at least 400 m and will have two obtuse angles and one wound bed. The track may be laid either by dabbing or by dripping the blood. A maximum of 0.25 liters of blood can be used for the 400 m track. A day track will be aged 2-5 hours, while an overnight track will be aged at least 14 hours overnight. A hoofed game animal – preferably freshly shot – is placed at the end of the blood track. The carcass must be laid out at the end of the track in the open, not in a depression or behind a tree, etc.

The start and the direction of the track will be indicated to the handler by a broken twig. A sign will be posted indicating the track number, when it was laid, when the tracking began, and whether the dog would be doing leash work only, baying or guiding. All three judges will follow the dog during the leash work.

A 6 m (19 ft) leash is to be used at its full length. Failure to use the full length of the leash will result in a score of no more than “sufficient”. A correct collar is part of the tracking lead. Other collars must be removed during blood tracking. High visibility collars are allowed as additions.

The primary task of the judges is to identify those dogs that show the will to track and the ability to carry the track forward, and who are determined to find the track by casting backwards if they temporarily lose it. How the dog follows the blood track is important in the evaluation. For a “very good” score the dog should work the track calmly, confidently and with concentration. Excessive, unrestrained speed on the track lowers the predicate.

The handler can stop or lay the dog down temporarily to look for blood by himself. He can mark the spot where he observes blood. He can also help the dog by casting forward or backward, or by restarting the dog at the last place he saw blood. The judges will stay with the dog and handler throughout this time—even if the dog and handler have gone off the track without realizing it—in order to observe the work of the dog.

If the dog has deviated 60 m from the track at any point the judges will restart the dog from the place the handler last marked blood. The dog can be officially restarted twice during leash work. Each restart lowers the predicate. It is counted in favor of the errant dog if it corrects itself when off the track. Correction of the dog by the handler is not considered a restart; however, necessary, repeated corrections by the handler are considered a sign of unreliability of the dog and lower the predicate.

Behavior at the carcass: Once the dog finds the carcass it will be left there alone, unleashed. Two judges will hide out of sight downwind to observe its behavior; the handler and all others must remain completely out of sight. As soon as the judges have evaluated the behavior of the dog (no longer than 5 minutes) the handler can pick up his dog. It is not considered a fault if the dog leaves the carcass, but any attempt to eat or bury the carcass excludes the dog from further testing.

TRAINING FOR THE LEASH WORK

Note: There are already a number of good articles on blood tracking on the VDD Group Canada website and we will refer you to those articles where appropriate rather than repeat the information here. Unfortunately this might make this article seem a bit disjointed, but it will provide you with the most complete information.

There are a couple of points that need to be made right up front about blood tracking. The first deals with the common misconception that the handler just needs to hang on to the leash and the dog will drag him/her down the track to the deer. That may be. But that style will not serve you well when conditions are tough. What is required here is a dog that works at a slow, deliberate pace.

Another adjustment in thinking is the recognition that this subject is a team effort. Unlike other test subjects where the handler is not allowed to help the dog, with blood tracking you not only can, but SHOULD be helping the dog. There are a number of ways this might occur, as you will see later.

Like so much of the training we have talked about in VGP 101, the training for blood tracking begins early in the dog's life when you awaken the puppy's scenting instinct through exposure to a variety of scents in nature. The puppy should be taken to the woods and allowed to follow its nose, exploring all the available scents. Hopefully this will lead it to find and pursue some game.

Meanwhile, back in the yard... You can set up opportunities for the young puppy to follow a track to a reward. This might involve dragging a piece of food on the ground for the puppy to find and eat. At 8-9 months you can begin to drag dead game or a hide and leave a reward at the end of the track. Through these exercises the young dog learns to work with its nose to the ground.

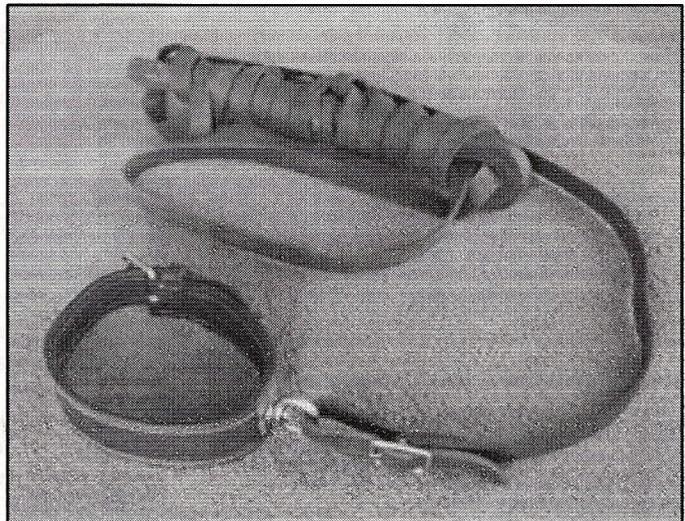
The next step is to begin more rigorous training with the method outlined by VDD/GNA member Marty Ryan. See the article **Blood Tracking Seminar** on the VDD Group Canada website that describes his method in detail. The procedures outlined in this article will take you through all the steps of training for the basic leash work.

Blood Tracking Seminar – Marty Ryan
Members > Resources > Training

As you begin this training, don't forget training basics. More than with any other subject it is important that the training for blood tracking be positive. This task requires intensive concentration on the part of the dog and you want the dog working willingly with you, not distracted by negative, forceful interactions.

Once you have completed the training outlined in Marty Ryan's article, you can set up for running the actual blood tracks.

Collar/Leash: The traditional blood tracking collar is approximately 1¾ inches wide and has a special swivel for attaching the leash. The leash is at least 6 meters, up to around 10 meters long. Other than the length of the leash, the type of collar and leash are not specified in the test regulations; however, there are good reasons to have the traditional items. The width of the collar, the swivel, and the stiff leather of the leash all facilitate the dog dragging the relatively heavy leash through tough cover, either at a test or in a real-life situation.



As mentioned previously, Lynda Krull of Hunters House plans to have these items available this spring (2011). Check her kennel website www.tapferenherzen.com for information, or you can contact her at lynda@krullodge.com. Hans Klein may also carry tracking collars and leashes. Contact him at hklein@hvc.rr.com. A German on-line resource that we hear good reports about is <http://www.bobi-versand.de/>. Look for tracking collars and leads under Shop > Liederhalsbänder & Lienen. We understand that the company has English speakers who could reply to your inquiries.

It is important that the blood tracking collar and leash be used only for that purpose. You want the dog to associate these items with the task. Bring the dog up to the start of the blood track on its usual leash, place it on DOWN and then replace the collar and leash with the blood tracking collar and leash. These cues are very important to the dog's understanding of what is required and should be religiously observed. Once properly rigged, the appropriately-trained dog will shift into tracking mode and put its nose to the ground on your command. Once the task is complete, remove the collar and replace it with the usual collar and leash. This ritual should be observed throughout training.

There is a nifty way to coil your blood tracking leash to make it easier to carry – see the example at the back of the VGPO booklet. While convenient, this is by no means required.

Blood: At the test the blood used on the track will ideally be deer blood that was either fresh or fresh frozen. For training, blood from any hoofed animal will work. In fact some trainers believe that it is better not to use deer blood during training because the scent of deer blood is so much stronger and the dog will thus perform better during the test than it did on the milder domestic blood. Gary has trained quite satisfactorily with goat's blood from our local butcher.

If you are collecting blood for use at some point in your training from a deer you have harvested, you may want to also keep and freeze pieces of the lungs. German trainers often place small bits of lung or other organ meat occasionally along the track to motivate the dog. Finding these bits also lets the handler know the dog is on the track.

Whatever type of blood you obtain, you will need to blend it to break up any clots. Gary uses a paint mixer attachment on his electric drill to blend the blood. Some people use a kitchen blender; others just run their hands through the blood. Do not add salt or other additives. It is not necessary and is not allowed at the test. After breaking up the clots, pour the blood through a cheesecloth filter to remove any remaining lumps and impurities. Then pour the blood into small containers (8-12 oz.) and freeze it for future use.

There are two methods of laying the blood: by dabbing and by dripping. To dab the blood, attach a small sponge (2-3" square) to the end of a stick. Dip the sponge in the bucket of blood and dab it on the ground at intervals. To drip the blood, use a squirt bottle with a small enough opening that you can control the volume of blood released. There are pros and cons of either method, so it is a matter of preference. Traditionally, Group Canada has used the drip method when preparing tracks for our tests.

Laying the Track: In the beginning it is important that you know EXACTLY where the track is. There are various ways to do this. Some people will staple a scrap of paper or stick a cotton ball periodically on trees along the track. Some will fasten marking tape along the way. Gary prefers to use hip-chain string because it follows exactly where he has walked as he dripped the blood and is evident anywhere along the path.

Hip-chains, also called string boxes, meter a fine cotton or polyester string so that surveyors can measure a distance and still have their hands free for other tasks. You tie the string to a tree and walk away. The string pulls from spool inside while the box tallies the distance using an odometer. You don't need to go to the expense of purchasing the string box. We bought just the string and simply cut a hole in the top of a round Tupperware box and fed the string through it. Of course the string should be collected and discarded when you have completed the track – an easy task.

Begin the track with a wound bed. This is made by scuffing the ground in a two-foot circle to remove leaves and twigs and then applying blood (two or more squirts or several dabs) to simulate where the deer might have lain down for a while. A second wound bed will be made midway along the track. This usually occurs at one of the required obtuse angles.

For early blood tracks you will want to drip or dab blood with every step. For later blood tracks you should cut back to a drip or dab every other step. That is, if you are right handed, drip or dab each time your right foot hits the ground. This is how it will be done at the test.

You should change the location of the track each time so that neither you nor the dog takes aspects of the track for granted. In the beginning you may want to follow existing paths in the woods, but soon

you should be covering ground that deer would cover. As always, you will start with short straight tracks and move to longer tracks with the required obtuse bends in them. Eventually you should have someone else prepare the tracks so that you have practice with doing them "blind". Believe us, that is an entirely different experience and can be quite disorienting. You will want to be familiar with that feeling.

Initially you will start out with short tracks that are aged briefly. To ensure that your dog will be able to handle whatever conditions exist on test day you should work up to longer tracks than the regulations require, increase the age of the track beyond what you plan to run, and eventually lay tracks in various weather conditions.

Carcass: A deer carcass (or similar hoofed animal) will be placed at the end of the blood track at the test. It is unlikely that this will be practical for you during training. Instead you can place a tanned deer hide at the end of the track. Introduce the dog to the hide in the yard. Then leave it at the end of the track, along with a food reward for the dog to find. It is a good idea to not feed your dog prior to training and use the meal as the food reward.

Take care not to cross the track when placing the hide at the end. You should bring it in from opposite direction to place it. You will probably not want to leave the food reward uncovered at the end of the track where other animals might get to it before the dog does. You can carry it with you or leave it in an enclosed container.

Working the track: VDD/GNA member Hans Klein has written an article that provides useful information on preparing and working the blood track. Some points will be included here, but you should refer to Hans' article for more detail.

<p>Blood Tracking by Hans Klein Members > Resources > Training</p>
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You should have a ritual (routine) at the beginning of the track that you follow precisely each time. Lay the dog down facing the start of the track. Remove dog's collar and replace it with the tracking collar. Uncoil and stretch out the tracking lead. Signal the dog to STAY; then go forward to explore the start of the track, searching for blood. Do this slowly and calmly. Take your time, even though you already know where the blood begins. This is cueing the dog to what is required next.

Return to the dog and take it up to the start of the track. Ensure that the leash runs down its chest and between its legs. The swivel on the tracking collar facilitates this position, which makes it more likely that the dog will work with its head down.

Point to a spot of blood in the wound bed area and give your command. The command should be unique to blood tracking, something you only use for this particular exercise; for example, FIND THE BUCK. As the dog moves forward on the track, feed out the lead until you are holding it toward the end. You will be expected to always be working toward the end of the lead and will be penalized if you are not. It is important not to use a short lead at this stage of training because you may unintentionally guide the dog. The dog may learn to rely on the cues you give through the short lead rather than use its nose.

As mentioned earlier, completing the blood track is a team effort between handler and dog. The handler has a role to play in finding and following the track and is actually expected to help the dog whenever necessary. This can happen in a number of different ways.

In order to do this you must be able to "read" your dog. That means knowing when the dog is on the track and when it is off, when it is sure of itself and when it is not. Both Marty Ryan and Hans Klein give good examples of indicators that will tell you this. You should be developing your ability to read your dog throughout your blood tracking training. This will take a great deal of focus and concentration on your part.

As you will have learned from Marty Ryan, if you know the dog is off the track you should stop. Let the dog search for the lost track and when it finds it begin to move forward again. Give quiet praise when

the dog is working well on the track. When it is off the track, calmly but firmly give the command to FIND THE BUCK. At no time should you be punitive in tone or action. Such behavior on your part will break the dog's concentration and may cause it to stop working.

During training you can practice what you will need to do in the test when the dog loses the track. Lay the dog down and appear to search for the track on your own. Then take the dog back to where it left the track. This is where you may want to shorten the lead by coiling it in your hand. Walk the dog in ever widening circles until the dog indicates it has picked up the scent. Then move forward again, feeding out the leash until you are again working near the end of it. The place a dog will often lose the track is at the obtuse angle where the track changes direction.

A hastily working dog is likely to fail in really difficult situations. For this reason the judges will mark such a dog down even if it achieves the goal. Your work with Marty Ryan's method should have produced a slow, calm, methodical style. However, if your dog is working in a hasty, disorganized manner, put it on DOWN for a few minutes. Do not reprimand the dog; simply calm it and give it some water if necessary. Then resume working in a slow, methodical manner.

There is a lot of judgment involved here. You must carefully balance between helping the dog and not hindering it. If you interrupt dog too much it will become confused and stop working for you. As you know from previous training, it is important to trust your dog's nose unless you have good reason to believe it is not tracking effectively.

You should carry water with you on the track. Hopefully the task will be completed in good time and you will not need it. However, on a particularly hot day or if the dog has been working the track for a long time, you can give it a bit of water to facilitate its scenting ability.

When you begin working blind tracks laid by someone else, you can practice "marking blood". People have different methods for doing this. Some drop a Kleenex on the ground; others carry clothes pins with flagging tape attached. The easiest way is to simply call out "BLOOD" loud enough for the judges to hear. This marking is important because if you get more than 60 m off the track the judges will take you back to the last marked blood for the restart. If you have not been able to mark any, the restart will be at the beginning of the track. A number of factors influence how easily you will be able to see blood along the track. Many handlers report they were so busy watching their dog that they did not see any.

Distractions: As you will recall from Marty Ryan's article, it is important to train for distractions. Anything can happen along the track – deer crossing, squirrels running up a tree; you name it, it can happen. The dog must learn to stay focused on the primary task. Marty gives you some good exercises to train for this.

When you actually run the test you should also beware of "distractions" of another kind. A few spectators can follow the leash work, but only if the handler and the judges have no objection. Think carefully about giving permission to spectators. Gary once had the experience of losing the track and having to backtrack in an effort to find it. Unfortunately quite a few spectators had followed close enough that they had contaminated the track he needed to work. It worked out okay in the end, but might not have.

There is no time limit per se for completing the leash work on the track. The judges will allow you and the dog to work until either you require a third restart or they decide that you are not able to take the track any further forward. However, taking an excessive amount of time will lower your score.

Behavior at the carcass: Training for the period of time that the dog is left alone at the carcass is based on a good DOWN/STAY. The dog should remain where you leave him until you give a release command. Once this is firmly established and practice with actual blood tracks has begun, Ken has a routine he follows that will accustom the dog to waiting at the end of the track. At the end of the track he feeds the dog as a reward, lays the dog down and walks away to a place where he can keep an eye on the dog. He then coils his tracking lead according to the example in the test regulations, which takes a while to do. By doing this each time you are training the entire tracking sequence and the dog is totally at ease with it at the test.

Blood tracking is a subject where it is important not to overdo the training. It is easy to sour a dog on the task. Once the basic training is complete and you are working actual blood tracks, once or twice a week should be sufficient.

There is nothing quite like reaching the end of the track with your dog and being congratulated by the judges with a hearty round of Waidmannsheil! It is even more satisfying to recover a wounded animal for yourself or another hunter. Most first-time handlers are satisfied to do the 400 m track on leash. Once you are adept at that you may want to increase the challenge by training a dog as a dead game guide or dead game bayer.

DEAD GAME BAYING/GUIDING

Dogs that have entered the test as a Bayer or Guide will do the first 400 m of the track on leash in the same manner as the other dogs. A wound bed is laid at the end of the 400 m and the spot is marked. When the dog, handler and judges reach this point at the end of the leash work they stop and wait while one judge lays an additional 200 m blood track using no more than 0.125 liter of blood. This stretch of the blood track is fresh, not aged.

The judge who lays this last stretch of track ensures that the carcass is placed properly and then hides in a nearby location where he can observe the behavior of the dog but the dog cannot detect him by sight or scent. He then signals the others to proceed.

At this point the dog is released from the leash and allowed to proceed free. The handler and judges remain at the second wound bed and the handler is not allowed to influence the dog in any way. The dog is expected to continue the track to the carcass and then proceed to either bay or guide. The dog must begin baying or guiding within ten minutes of being released. If the dog does not find the carcass it can be restarted twice from the second wound bed.



*The **Dead Game Bayer** must stay at the carcass once he has found it and must start baying within 10 minutes after arrival. The dog should call his handler for at least 10 minutes and demonstrate that he knows he must not leave the carcass. Baying up to 10 steps from the carcass is not counted as leaving, but if it goes further out of line of sight of the carcass the predicate will be lowered. Momentary silence of the dog to catch its breath or to look in the direction where it assumes its handler waits is not counted as a fault. The handler will wait until the judges have determined that the dog is sufficiently persistent with its baying.*

*Prior to the beginning of the blood tracking the handler of a **Dead Game Guide** must explain to the Senior Judge how he can detect that the dog has found the carcass and how the dog should lead him to the carcass. This explanation is binding and subsequent changes are not permissible.*

The Guide must immediately leave the carcass after finding it in order to return to its handler and to show him/her that he has found. It can do this by taking the end of the tracking lead or the bringsel attached to its collar into its mouth. It must then lead its handler to the carcass in free guiding.

The performance of the Bayer or Guide includes the finding of the game and the behavior at the carcass or the guiding to the carcass. To pass this subject it must have a score of at least "sufficient". A Bayer or Guide that fails to find the carcass or bay/guide appropriately must lead its handler on leash to the carcass with out a recall or it cannot pass the test.

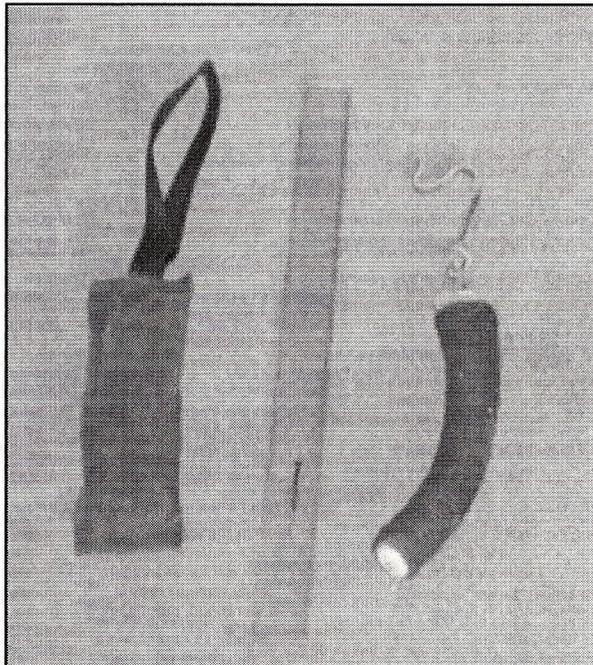
Training the Guide: To our knowledge Group Canada member Richard Felsmann was the first person to successfully pass the VGP with Totverweiser in North America. Look for Richard's article on how he trained for this event on the website.

Training the Bringselverweiser, Richard Felsmann
Members > Resources > Training

A bringsel is a leather fob or piece of antler attached to the dog's collar. When the silent dog finds the deer it flips the bringsel into its mouth and returns to the handler. The bringsel indicates that the deer is found and the handler should follow to recover it. Hans Klein says he was told that this retrieval method was developed during WWI as a way for the Germans to recover wounded soldiers from the battlefield without attracting undue attention.

Training the Bayer – Dead game baying should not to be confused with the voice displayed during Manner of Hunting – Spurlaut (scent loud) or Sichtlaut (sight loud). Those are instinctive behaviors. Dead game baying is an entirely different use of voice that is trained for a specific purpose. With Totverbellen the dog must not bark until it has arrived at the dead or wounded game because scent barking notifies the game that the dog is coming and then the chase is on.

VDD/GNA member Bryon Beaton trained his DD as the first successful Totverbeller in North America and describes his training method in an article posted on the Group Canada website.



The Totverbellen, Bryon Beaton
Members > Resources > Training

For another view of blood tracking, take a look at an article describing the VGP, 20-hour and 40-hour blood tracking tests that Gary and Sandy Hodson attended in Germany:

A German Blood Tracking Test – Gary and Sandy Hodson
Members > Resources > Training

If you are serious about blood tracking as more than a test subject, be sure to read John Jeanneney's book *Tracking Dogs for Finding Wounded Deer*. Jeanneney was the founder of Deer Search, Inc., and was instrumental in the legalization of leashed tracking in many US states. In addition to the usual training advice, Jeanneney describes how wounded deer behave differently depending on the location of the wound. He devotes two lengthy chapters to the various categories of wounds, the evidence for each kind of wound, the possible behavior and survivability of a deer hit in this way, and the best techniques for finding such a deer. These chapters include many useful photographs and diagrams.

Review: Tracking Dogs for Finding Wounded Deer
Members > Resources > Books and Videos