**Chapter 31: Shoreline Travel**

Shoreline travel, sometimes referred to as Country Travel is a method used to travel along roads that do not have a sidewalk. The guide dog team walks in the road along the left shoulder against traffic flow. We do this for several reasons. First, it makes the team more visible to oncoming traffic. Second, this allows the dog to visually see the traffic that will be moving closest to the team. And third, this follows the pedestrian rules of the road. There have been cases where a team has had to work for short distances along the right shoulder, but this needs to be specifically taught to the dog in that specific location. The dogs have been well patterned to working the left side of the road and will typically try to move back over to the left.

Not all roads are safe or appropriate to shoreline along. Granite Springs Road, for example is not safe for pedestrians to walk on. The road has little to no shoulder, cars travel at a high rate of speed and it is a hilly, windy road that does not give pedestrians or drivers a good sightline of each other. You will need to use your judgment when selecting roads that you would like to travel in. The roads we will be working along today are quieter side streets with limited traffic flow.

**The Shoreline Check**

Shoreline travel offers less tactile feedback to handlers than travel along sidewalks, so to make sure the team is the farthest point from traffic the team will need to do what we call “Shoreline checks”. This involves the handler doing a “Wait”, making a stationary left turn and prompting the dog, “To the curb”. The handler confirms they have reached the shoreline of the road by extending their left foot. The actual shoreline can vary. Most often it will be a grass line, or dirt, but along our route there will be times where it is an actual curb. The prompt, “To the curb” encompasses all of them. Up until this point when you have asked your dog for a change in direction, there has been a sidewalk, doorway, or other path to continue down. When you ask your dog for a left turn toward the shoreline, they may initially hesitate as there is no clear path to continue along. Make sure you are giving clear cues for the left turn. When your dog indicates the shoreline, be sure to acknowledge that they have completed the behavior by using genuine praise and/or food reinforcement. When you are ready to continue along the route, you only need to slide your left foot back slightly, cue your dog “Forward” and allow them to make a slight right turn as they continue to follow the shoreline. It is important not to “over turn” or pull the dog too far to the right, as that will bring the team closer into traffic and may confuse your dog or cause them to think you want to cross the road.

Many roads have a crown to them, meaning the center of the street is higher than the edges. Many cities and towns do this in order to help with drainage. If the road you are walking along has a high crown you may feel the road pitch to the side as you are walking close to the shoulder. If the road is suddenly level, you could be walking close to the top of the crown in the middle of the road. You should do a formal shoreline check to make sure you are farthest from traffic.

Handlers should check the shoreline more frequently along new routes, approximately every 15-20 paces. The three times a handler should check the shoreline are:

* When you hear oncoming traffic
* Anytime you are unsure of your position in the road
* Any time you have had to go around a stationary object such as a parked car in the road.

Going around parked vehicles will require the dog to bring the team away from the shoreline so it is important that the dog first indicate the parked vehicle by working up to and stopping just in front of the vehicle. You need to identify the object and why the dog has stopped. Often this can be done by gently reaching out in front of you and lowering your hand until you make contact to the bumper of the vehicle. You can even gently tap the bumper of the vehicle and praise your dog. Then, slide your left foot back and ask the dog for a forward command. You are letting the dog pick the best option around the vehicle, most often this will be coming to the right. Once the dog initiates the turn to the right, do a wait, then listen and assess traffic. When it is safe to proceed, tell your dog forward and continually suggest a left turn until the dog brings you back to the shoreline. Sometimes it is a single vehicle, sometimes more than one car parked alongside the road, sometimes it can be a vehicle with a trailer behind it like a landscaping truck, so it is important to continue to suggest the turn until the dog brings you back to the shoreline before you continue on.

**Indenting**

Indenting refers to the technique for crossing intersecting roads while traveling along roads with no sidewalks. Since there are no sidewalks, there are no down curbs to indicate an intersecting street. So, in this scenario the dog needs to follow the shoreline around the corner indenting onto the intersecting road. Once sufficiently indented (usually about 15-20 paces) the handler initiates a wait, then makes a right turn and an immediate “Wait” so they can assess traffic on the intersecting road. If it is all clear the team crosses the road to the opposite shoreline. It is important to make definite contact with the shoreline to confirm the dog has completed the crossing before turning right and indenting back onto the road you were originally travelling along.

If a team is working along the left side of the road, they sometimes come across a situation where the destination or a T-intersection is along the opposite side of the road. In these cases it is best to work past the T-intersection or destination for about 15-20 paces then stop, cross over and make definite contact with the opposite shoreline before turning right and indenting onto the T or turning to the destination. This technique gives you the most tactile feedback that you are closest to the left shoreline and away from traffic.

Guide Dog handlers who travel frequently at night on roads with no sidewalks should wear some sort of reflective jogging vest or jacket. The more visible the handler and dog can be, the safer they will remain.

**Landmarking**

Landmarking is teaching your dog to stop at an arbitrary point that they would not ordinarily stop at. Landmarking is slightly different from targeting because it usually does not have a tactile reference point such as a bus stop or a door handle. In the lesson today we will be landmarking a point along the route that will indicate a change in direction. The landmarks that you set should indicate some change in direction or have some significance along the route.

We use a technique known as a **back chaining** to help with this process. With back chaining the handler brings the dog to the desired destination or stopping location. The clicker is used to identify the landmark. The dog is given physical and verbal praise and food reward (I recommend multi praise/food reward before backing up). Now the handler backs up only a few paces and re-approaches. On the re-approach the handler should give a very light, “Hup-up” as the spot we are looking for is only a short distance ahead. If we command the dog using a firm “Forward” we will likely send the dog past the spot we are trying to teach. If the dog is hesitant, I suggest giving them just an extra moment or two as the dog is likely trying to figure out how or where they will earn the food and verbal praise again. When working with an instructor, the instructor may use a cue word or place their hand on your shoulder to indicate the exact stopping location. The student clicks, food rewards, then uses effusive verbal and physical praise.

The team should only increase distance from the landmarking point once they have had success stopping at a short distance. This allows the dog to build drive to that location. The praise and food reward helps to solidify that stopping location. Many times, there may not be a clear visual reference point to the dog and the dog is learning an obscure location, so many repetitions may be needed.

When setting a landmark in your home area you may need sighted assistance from a friend or family member to assure you are consistently marking the same spot.

**The “Over” Command**

The Over command is a more useful command if you have some residual vision; enough to see some contrast between the road and the shoreline. It can be a way to remind the dog to walk close to the left side but should not take the place of confirming the shoreline in the presence of moving traffic or after moving around parked vehicles. Handlers should use a light hand signal like that of a suggested left turn as you say the cue, “Over”. Once the dog has you back along the shoreline praise and continue.

Why do we say over vs suggesting left? Because if we were to suggest a left turn, we would be asking the dog to turn down the next available opening, in this case it would likely be a driveway.

So as a recap:

* Not all roads are safe to shoreline along; use your best judgement and assess if the road is a safe option for you and your dog.
* Do a formal Shoreline check whenever you are unsure of your position in the street, if you hear traffic coming toward you or when you have gone around a parked vehicle.
* Indent about 15-20 paces into the intersecting roads before crossing over. Work all the way to the shoreline on the opposite side of the road before turning and continuing out of the intersecting street.
* When setting landmarks, back-chain the spot, making sure to give the dog a little time to process as it is an arbitrary point and will take time for them to indicate.

<https://www.ny.gov/pedestrian-safety/additional-information-> “Pedestrians should walk on the shoulder facing oncoming traffic because it makes them more visible to motorists and helps them stay aware of traffic. Stay as far to the left as possible.”

*Updated September 2020*