

## Avalanche Dogs

**From an early age, these canines devote their lives to a specialized purpose: Find people who are buried in snow.**

*Kristopher Wardwell*

There is a flash of expression, a sudden charge of intensity, that indicates an avalanche rescue dog's intent. Patrolling the churned snow and debris of a recent slide, the canine's attention whips into focus. Its ears and eyes perk and point. And the handler knows enough to follow as the dog does what it does best.

Dean Cardinale, president of Wasatch Backcountry Rescue in Utah, refers to this phenomenon as the "head snap." "You just don't say anything to distract the dog at this point," he says. "You know he's on to something."

What the dog is on to is not immediately certain. It could be a buried glove, a ski, a snowmobile – any kind of artifact not meant to be covered in snow. It could be the human scent of a witness or a previous rescue party. Or with any luck, it could indicate the presence of a victim in need of emergency help.

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