

I have followed thousands of trails in leaves left by White-tailed deer. I can go out on any day on any ground in any weather and follow a trail until I spook the deer without me seeing it. My aim, though, is to use the trail to observe deer while they are relaxed, not alerted to me. I do know some ways to do that.

I know I have spooked them, because of what the trail shows them doing: looking at their backtrail (where I am), hugging the cover of trees and fallen logs as they move away from that position, coming together as a group at a safe place and more. The most experienced individual leads the group. In many groups of deer, that is the doe. Following the doe's tracks, I always see a yearling join her trail. This is how the juvenile sees what mom does to keep the group safe.

Every time the juvenile joins the doe's trail, I am reminded that living in the wild, as all of us evolved to do, required us to know how to use the landscape in the current weather to stay alive. Wild animals must always assume that the one(s) on the backtrail (me/us) presents a mortal threat; there is no margin for error. When the animal has experience, she can turn in an instant and lead her young to a safe place. Her choices, honed by time, are sharp as any razor, exact.

I am 66 years old, 20 years a professional tracker, one of the Northern Hemisphere's senior-most, and I know that, relative to the Traditional Master Trackers of the Kalahari whose lineage of skill is still unbroken, I am a juvenile tracker.

The trip I am making to Namibia in March is to get to them while they're still there and I still can so that I can pass the knowledge on.

CyberTracker, for whom I certify trackers, is represented in North America by TCNA (www.tracker certification.com), whose mission is "To Restore Essential Field Skills". I am very confident that with your assistance, our restoration can continue: the next generation of trackers here will know the wild to a depth that I don't, and all of their knowledge that has value will have been known to humans, in all places, from our beginning.

Thank you for your consideration.