

## SIGN CUTTING

- Q. Agent Soto, were you engaged in tracking and sign cutting activities on May 13, 1994?
- A. Yes, ma'am.
- Q. Explain how that came about.
- A. My partner and I had found tracks of a large group of individuals that we suspected of being marijuana smugglers. We were approximately 25 miles from the border on the Geronimo Trail. We were using 56-power binoculars made in Germany to scope out the area, when we saw two people, a man and a woman, leaning on the hood of a small red truck up ahead on the road.
- Q. What were they doing?
- A. Nothing in particular. It appeared they were simply talking. When the woman saw our vehicle, she straightened up immediately. The man then reached over and jerked a large bundle out of the bed of the truck and tossed it into the brush. We surmised that, by chance, we had discovered a smuggling operation in progress.
- Q. Then what happened?
- A. Well, these two individuals got into the truck and began to drive down the road away from us. We followed them in our Customs Patrol truck, which is a four-wheel drive vehicle with an emblem on each door. We put on our emergency lights and the red truck stopped almost immediately. When my partner and I walked over to the truck, we could see what appeared to be 5 bundles of marijuana on the bed of the truck in plain sight.
- Q. Once you observed the bales ... uh, bundles ..., how did you proceed?
- A. Well, we ordered the couple out of the truck and frisked them. My partner then handcuffed the two suspects and read them their rights in Spanish. I proceeded to the vicinity where the truck had stopped to examine that area. Approximately 8 – 10 feet west of the tire tracks, I found 5 more bundles in burlap sacks.
- Q. Did you then return to where your partner was holding the two individuals?
- A. No, I didn't. I saw some footprints ... what we call "sign"...that indicated that another person had been there and gave me an idea of which way h'd gone.
- Q. What "sign" or indication did you see?
- A. Well, besides the footprints, there were turned rocks that had been pushed down, broken limbs and some threads or fibers. I followed the "sign" from where I found the bundles. There were several footprints of one person in the dirt, and then the rocks were too rough, but I could see scuff marks and broken brush so I followed that sign to the east. In one spot, there were marks and scuff marks as though the person had fallen down, and rocks that looked out of place. About 100 yards from the original bundles, I found another bundle of marijuana. This was a "short" bundle, and it had a couple of blanket strips tied around it.
- Q. What ... uh ... is the significance of the blanket strips?
- A. Well, the "mules" that carry the marijuana sometimes cut blanket strips to tie around the bundle and to carry it like a backpack; other times, if they get tired, they drag the bundles by pulling the blanket strips. One of the ties in this bundle was stripped out ... I could see that someone had been crawling and pulling the bundle.