

# Expert in finding fugitives outlines Eric Frein manhunt approach



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1 / 17

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**T**he manhunt underway for homicide suspect Eric Frein employs techniques that one tracking expert says are as much of an art as a science.

High-tech gear can be useful as officers continue to comb the densely wooded stretch of Monroe and Pike counties. But more basic approaches, like slowly shrinking the search area, and getting some lucky breaks, often prove just as crucial in finding a fugitive.

"What these officers are doing is applying a craft," said Pat Patten, part of the search effort for Eric Rudolph, who evaded law enforcement officials for five years after the 1996 Olympic park bombing and other attacks across the South.

Patten, who now runs a school in North Carolina where he trains law enforcement officers on how to search wooded or rural areas, has been tracking headlines from the Frein manhunt. He offered a few insights on how such a search is performed, though he declined to be too specific to avoid undermining those attempting to flush out Frein.

The initial steps involve building a profile of the suspect, so officers know what they're up against, and setting up a perimeter in the area where they believe he may be. Any indications of where someone was last seen can greatly narrow down the area that needs to be searched, based on estimates of how far someone can travel in the time since they were spotted, Patten said.

Keeping a tight perimeter is a challenge, he said. In an ideal scenario, each person would be able to see another searcher on their left and on their right. But that's often not possible in a wooded area with difficult terrain.

In those situations, the search team must rely on those who know the area, Patten said. Park rangers and those from land management agencies can be extremely useful, pointing out local trails or other features that tend to be used for hiking — or hiding.

"The local knowledge of the area works for Frein, but it also works for the officers," Patten said.

The search team works to narrow the area they're combing, but slowly, both for their own safety and the limitations of moving through rocky or brush-filled areas. Patten recalled one point during the Rudolph search when the fugitive was sighted, but it took searchers hours to get to the remote area where a passerby had spotted him.

Even if it doesn't pay off immediately, Patten said that type of help from local residents is a crucial component. In the current search, state police have asked hunters to check any trail cameras they have set up for footage that might give a tip to Frein's whereabouts.

Similar footage provided an important clue in the case of a Utah man who evaded police for 10 years, Patten said. Troy James Knapp, a heavily armed survivalist known as "the Mountain Man," broke into dozens of cabins and lived off the supplies he found inside.

Surveillance cameras outside one of those cabins allowed law enforcement officials to identify Knapp and helped confirm a sighting that eventually led to his capture.

Other technology, like thermal imaging devices, can provide help too. But like more basic techniques, they have limitations, Patten said. Dense leaves like those still on the trees in northeastern Pennsylvania and even rocks heated up on a sunny day can hinder such devices.

Frein criss-crossing waterways throws search dogs off the scent.

At some point in a long-running search, organizers have to make a decision about using a plan to go get the fugitive. But those searching for Frein may have to be patient — Patten said a slow, deliberative tracking operation can go on for a long time before such tactics are used.

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