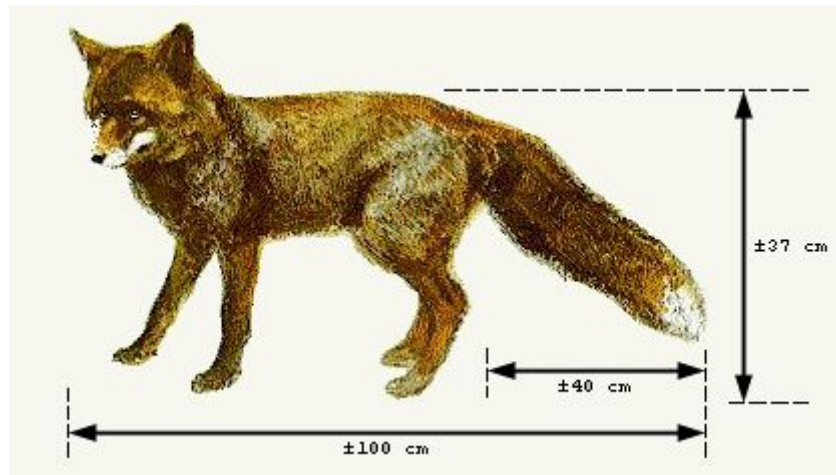


Earthdog –Inner Terrier by Charmaine A S Khatchikian







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All short and medium legged terriers are earthdogs. Terrier comes from the Latin word terra.

Noun earth; [land](#).

terrier¹

¹tɛrɪə/

noun.

a small dog of a breed originally used for turning out foxes and other burrowing animals from their earths.

So in this classification is the Border Terrier. It is time to find the inner terrier in your Border.

Earthdog trials are basically simulated tunnels where the dog has to crawl in a dark space and make negotiations to reach the quarry. It is a brilliant way to bond with your dog and gets you off the sofa and into the characteristic of this dog which is sadly losing all its characteristics. Fit for function. Is your dog fit for function?

Border Terriers were developed in the late 19th century for bolting foxes and keeping up with horses. What a great life. Time to revive the inner terrier.

Earthdog tunnels take many forms. They can be simple boxes that are laid on top of the earth or more refined subterranean tunnels. Their size is usually 18cm x 20cm. They can drop down to 16cm also.

The size comes from rib spanning. Foxes across Europe come in different sizes. Rib spanning used to be the old horse fair way of measuring a dog's ability to fit down a fox den. The measurement of rib spanning came from the literal horse fair method of measuring a horse by a man's hand, a man not a woman's hand, so bare this in mind please. A man's palm width was used to measure a horse from the ground to the withers and this was roughly 4 inches.

This now equates to 10 cm. So the measurement of rib spanning came about from a man clasping the terrier from behind, lifting the front legs off the ground and sliding his hands, thumbs meeting behind the elbow on point of shoulder to underside rib cage with index fingers. This rough guide came about and forms the idea of rib spanning. You will see it done at dog shows in various attempts to rib span. It is contentious. It is a rough guide to measure the dog's ability to fit down the den and get out.

Dogs need all sorts of other physical attributes to crawl well. One of them being good shoulders. The dog has to move forward on his haunches and it pulls itself into the den with its front legs. So the shoulders and forearm are very important. This is where good angulation of the shoulder is very important. A badly angulated or upright shoulder will hinder this movement. The forearm needs good muscling to give the reach and pull in the crawl. I use large hay bales for this muscling and pulling.

Next attribute is a good set of rear haunches. This is greatly aided by a lovely developed second thigh called the gaskin. It is located on the back leg and is above the hock or rear joint that moves the dog up and forward. This lovely gaskin helps with the push and adds speed. Mine get this from following my horses in the field.

Somewhere in the middle the ribs have a part to play. In this earthdog activity the ribs might have to turn a corner. An easy test you can do at home is to pick your dog up somewhere in the middle of the anatomy and balance the dog to see if it "rights" itself. Do this very quietly and calmly and do not frighten your dog. Your dog might think you are about to drop them so be careful and not too much height. In this exercise you can also see how flexible your dog is by turning its head to its ribs. A good earthdog has to be flexible and have a good length of rib so that it can turn around in the den if it needs to get out. This flexibility is fundamental to an earthdog.

My dog, Oliver, can jump over the fox in the den of 18cm x 20cm and turn around to make the fox turn and run back to the starting holding box. He has true instinct.

The Border Terrier's pelt is perfect for this earthdog work. The pelt is loose and flexible and allows movement, also giving protection.

Good tunnelling. So now you have your terrier and you are anxious to start earthdog, here are some home tips,

At home create a big pile of cushions and somewhere bury something inside a tin or container with air holes. Allow the scent to escape. In being an earthdog they are scent dogs. This is a simple exercise and will wake up the inner terrier. Then take the time to cut up some boxes. Litter the garden or the house with some taped up tunnels made out of cardboard boxes. You will see your inner terrier developing into a full scale hunter looking for more. Always baiting to make it worth while.

A bit of basic obedience is a help. I use a plastic container with biscuits inside that make a noise. I use it as a noise attraction and reward. It works well,

Now the time to find some dark spaces. Dogs are naturally curious so either get busy in the garden with some planks and measure yourself at first a metre run and encourage your dog to

pass through something perhaps larger than 18cm x 20cm. You need your dog to go on its haunches. You thought that the “frog” leg position was something of a joke? Well now you will find that the haunches come into use. The dog has to pass the tunnel on its haunches. A good age to start is after 12 months as competitions in Europe start at about 15 months. If you have access to old hay bales they are perfect for starting off tunnelling. I use hay bales and also planks. I cover the planks with hay bales to create a more simulated environment. Always baiting and rewarding. You can prop up some planks using breeze block building material against a wall and creating a tunnel that is two planks. If your dog is not happy about passing through then run a string down the tunnel with a piece of fluffy material or a fluffy toy. Then start to drag it to encourage a lure effect. It works.

Once you have got a straight line into perfection it is time to add a corner. Either two turns or one turn. At your own pace.

Corners are where a good length of rib comes into function and a nice loose pelt helps. This simple “U” shape is the basic shape for early earthdog trials. Once you have perfected the tunnelling on a simple shape then you might want to get adventurous and create some varied openings for your home made tunnel. You might want to try to disguise your opening and encourage your dog to search for the tunnel. This is achieved by land deposits and foliage. Release your dog some distance away and use tossed bait to find the tunnel. Always removing the collar.

If you have access to digging machines then you can create your own tunnel. But in doing this you must use liners. Tunnels can flood and ground can collapse. This is when dogs can be lost in the wild. Terriers are often lost and have to have electronic tracking collars that work well on underground earths. Fell and Moorland Clubs are there to dig out dogs. It is their instinct to run the dens but it is your heart that will be broken. Please take this seriously. Do not risk your dog’s life. Earthdog is a safe way for your Border Terrier to satisfy its inner terrier and you not having a broken heart. It is also an excellent way to prepare your dog for live fox contact.

Earthdog competitions are run all over Europe. They might be 15 metres, 20 metres in length. One level or gradient such as in Italy where the dens are 95 metres with a bivouac turn where the dog has to use its brains and follow the scent. They can be various shapes. From the simple “U” shape to more complicated shapes with various turns. Depending on the country there might be a caged scented quarry or no quarry but an aniseed drag scent.

The objective of earthdog trials is to keep the characteristic of terriers and give them the simulated opportunity to use their fit for function hunting instincts. On a personal level it is a great way to work your dog and a great weekend away. I work my dogs all over Europe. Both of my dogs are earthdogs and brush hunt dogs. They compete in competitions above and below ground. They are both champions in both disciplines and also beauty champions and International Beauty Champions.

If the country permits live quarry then it is usually gated. This means that there is no contact. The gates are dropped down and the dog has to be seen to “work” the gate. That is showing

natural hunting ability that if it was in a live den it would be able to survive and perform its function. This working the gate takes the form of developing the voice, good yapping and scratching and digging. In Italy the runs are 95 metres and in my experience they offer the best runs. They have underground runs that have gradients so the dog crawls up and down, simulated in live den, change of direction, use of scent, and no contact. There is a fox but it is not in contact. A dog will first run a den “vuota” that is empty only on scent. The foxes are held in secure metal boxes and are changed at every dog. It is highly and tightly controlled by a rigid set of rules run by the Italian ENCI Kennel Club.

Earthdog was started in America. They have Master levels and basic levels. Australia also runs earthdog. The majority of the European Union runs earthdog. It is a great way to compete with your dog. A dog anticipates a walk when it sees its lead. The purists will say the dog anticipates. But I do not see them at any digs or holding working certificates. This is the 21st century way to hunt with your dog. There are too many restrictions now. This is the perfect way to have a fit for function dog. I also compete with wild boar. This is also regulated as one toss of the head and it is the end of your dog. I do not do any hunting with badgers. Foxes have the most distinct smell and your dog will rise into its inner terrier as soon as it enters the earthdog area. It is this stimulation which is very rewarding for me as a handler. I turned two Bishop Auckland Border Terriers into international working championship stars competing in France, Italy and the Czech Republic.

Good yapping. Anyone interested in the yapping youtubes, they are there under Oscar Khatchikian border terrier earthdog, there are many movies of the trials. Anyone interested in workshops I have a set up on my farm lands in the EU. I keep horses and this is a great advantage to develop the yapping in your dog. The “good voice” is what was meant to lead the hunt to the quarry in vermin control.

Email jrasamuyr@gmail.com