

AWTA Working Certificates - Requirements

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It is important that AWTA members who apply for or sign as a witness on a Working Certificate (WC) application understand the requirements and that every requirement is totally fulfilled before expecting to receive the WC. On several occasions I have heard discussed that terrier work which did not qualify for a Jack Russell Terrier Club Natural Hunting Certificate (NHC) should be submitted to the AWTA for WC. The implication being that the work would qualify for an AWTA WC. Prior to 2005, terriers/dachshunds could earn only one AWTA WC. It was like earning a special title. In 2005, the current WC rules were established along with the awarding of multiple WCs per terrier and the earning of the Veteran Earthdog Award after a terrier had been awarded 10 WCs which included 3 different quarry and witnesses. I wrote the framework for the AWTA WC rules. They were discussed, improved, and approved by the officers and trustees. The rules are basically the same for both the NHC and the WC except for a couple of minor differences. Therefore, how can work that does not qualify for a NHC qualify for a WC? Well, it should not. The only differences between the rules for the NHC and the WC are that armadillo are allowed as acceptable quarry and the AWTA does not allow significant alteration of the earth to allow the terrier to enter without effort on the terrier's part, i.e., showing gameness to enter. The other difference is that to get an NHC the work must be witnessed by a JRTCA recognized working judge whereas the WC is signed to by a witness and the owner of the terrier/dachshunds and on submission of a detailed accounting of the work must be approved unanimously by the 5 AWTA trustees. Quite frankly, all AWTA members should be insulted by the implication that they are willing to certify certificates which do not meet all the requirements of the rules, cheap certificates. I know I fume a bit when I hear something said to this effect and I also quickly set the record straight. Having been a JRTCA working judge for many years and having written numerous NHC for JRTCA members over the years, I can assure all JRTCA and AWTA members, I use the same criteria for both certificates. The problem with both the NHC and the WC is not the rules but the inconsistency in the adherence to the rules. In this article, I would like to go over the rules and how they should be witnessed for the benefit of AWTA members who maybe signatory to a WC. It is important that all members understand the requirements and make sure all requirements are met before submitting or signing as witness to a WC. Let's all be sure every AWTA WC is a real tribute to the terrier who earned it.

The rules given below and how to meet this requirement in italics:

1. A WC is awarded only to dogs whose owners are AWTA Members in good standing at the time of qualifying work.
Only AWTA members and their terrier can qualify.
2. Accepted Quarry: The Certificate is issued to dogs that worked in a natural earth to the following quarry: woodchuck/groundhog, fox, raccoon, badger, aggressive opossum, nutria (coypu), armadillo and other quarry found acceptable by the Trustees on review of an application submitted by a member for earthwork done to that quarry.

I think this is self-explanatory, but I would encourage members to take advantage to submit applications to other quarry worked in the ground that presented a challenge to the terrier. I personally have WCs on two terrier who have worked mink in the ground on separate occasions. Both terriers incurred multiple bites from the mink as evidence of the challenge to the terrier and that the terrier was in fact face up to the mink.

3. Accepted Work: This does not include work in a drain or otherwise man-made earth. The dog must enter the earth without assistance or encouragement from other dogs on the ground. If the dog is actively marking a restricted or impeded entrance to an earth, removing a restriction, such as a stone or root, is allowed. However, no further assistance, alteration, or enlargement of the entrance to the den is permitted.

*This requirement is one that can easily be interpreted in very different ways and can lead to the awarding of WCs which are not in the spirit of the requirement. No assistance from another dog or person means that if there are two terriers on the ground and another terrier gets to the entrance hole first, it can't be pulled away so that a certificate can be written on the other. Also, if one terrier has entered and finds by marking the quarry but decides for whatever reason, it does not want to finish the job, a second terrier entered to complete the job does not earn a WC. The second terrier did **not** find on its own but was assisted by the terrier who found. This does not mean that the second terrier did not do a great job finishing things but just did not meet the requirement to find on its own. Additionally, the terrier who finds and quit the job does **not** earn a WC. All good terrier work does not always meet all the requirements and therefore, does not qualify for a WC. I have many times on a hot summer day had to use a couple of terriers to get a job done to keep any individual terrier from overheating. Pulling one terrier and replacing it with another to continue the work got the job done with great work from both terriers but neither terrier would qualify for a WC.*

Human intervention is another issue. Removing a large root or obstruction is one thing particularly if a game terrier trying to get in will break a tooth or injure itself. However, if a terrier is unwilling to enter an earth, altering the earth significantly by digging out the entrance and verbally encouraging or trying to gin up the terrier does not qualify for a WC. In the first place this might well encourage the terrier to face something it knows better not to do such as entering to skunk or something dead.

4. The dog must enter far enough to be completely out of sight when a person is looking down the hole.

This is self-explanatory. The WC is for work in an earth not hunting above ground which is what the HC (hunting certificate) is for so the terrier needs to enter sufficiently into the ground to be out of sight.

5. The dog must locate the quarry in the earth completely on its own without encouragement (dog or human). Simple verbal communication from the handler to the dog is allowed. Loud, frenzied, or excited verbal encouragement intended to work-up the dog is not allowed.

A terrier working in a natural earth is not a go to ground competition. Trying to gin up a terrier to enter is definitely not allowing the terrier to show its gameness on its own plus it is really the last thing you want a terrier to do to quarry in the ground, i.e., run fast into the jaws of a critter in the critter's home turf where it most likely has the advantage.

6. The use of locator collars is not a requirement, but it is recommended.

Safety first! I started digging terriers out of the ground before locator collars came on the scene and there are tricks I used to locate terriers which are no match for the locator collars.

7. The dog must work alone (only one dog in the earth), must work down to the quarry and cause it to bolt, or draw it from the earth. If the quarry does not bolt or is not drawn, the terrier or dachshund must work in a manner sufficient to allow diggers to locate and dig to the quarry. There is to be no doubt that the dog is/was right up to the quarry while marking or causing the quarry to bolt.

This is an important requirement that can lead to different interpretations and the lessening of the requirement particularly regarding a bolt. The terrier must cause the bolt and the witness must see the bolt. From experience I have had a terrier enter an earth and something immediately bolts. For instance, I had one of my terriers enter an earth and a fox apparently sitting at an entrance at the other end of the earth far from where my terrier entered bolted. The mere presence of activity at the earth caused the bolt. Certainly, the terrier did not cause it. The terrier was not even close to the fox. For a bolt to be caused by a terrier, there should be some evidence of the terrier being up to the quarry as the rule stipulates. The witness must also see the bolt and identify the quarry. Bolts often happen or suspected because there is a rustling or movement of brush, and no quarry is actually seen. This is not a qualifying bolt. Most qualifying bolts usually occur though not always after a confrontation between terrier and the quarry or the quarry bolts followed immediately by the terrier.

This brings up another point as to the witness. Often when hunting participants (owner and witness) are not always in visual contact with one another. In the case of a bolt, it is important and necessary for the witness to see it happen. As soon as 'game on' is brought to the attention of the hunt party, they should make their way to the earth; however, they may not have witnessed the terrier entering the earth on its own. This is one reason that I prefer if a terrier is to earn a WC, it be the only terrier on the ground or at least any other terrier on the ground is

far away, i.e., the other end of the field, on the other side of a ravine, etc. In my experience, no terrier can be forced to enter an earth if they are reluctant or unwilling to enter. Therefore, if a terrier is in the ground marking quarry and there were no other terriers around the earth, it is reasonable for a witness to assume the terrier entered on its own.

If a bolt does not occur then the terrier needs to be dug to right up to the quarry which is visually identified. It is hard to cheapen this requirement other than if the terrier does not stay at quarry until the job is completed.

8. A visual positive identification of the quarry is required. The terrier or dachshund must work by the above rules and another AWTA member must witness the dog's work.

I have been working terriers long enough that I remember the time before there was a visual requirement. Witnesses were smelling fox but not seeing the fox and signing off on a WC to fox. Also hearing a growl coming from the ground and saying raccoon. Well, an old skunk den can smell very similar to fox musk. A growl from an opossum and a raccoon coming from the ground sound very similar. This led to the positive visual identification requirement.

If the owner and witness go by the above guidelines for a terrier meeting all the requirements, then the terrier has earned an AWTA WC, one that should make the owner proud.