

A missing dog was trapped on train tracks in Wells. A drone helped find him.

pressherald.com/2025/06/05/a-missing-dog-was-trapped-on-train-tracks-in-wells-a-drone-helped-find-him

June 5, 2025



Truck ran home to his owners after becoming trapped in train tracks and found by Rob Russell, left, and Wells Police Officer Nicholas Cousins, right. *Photo courtesy of 2A TAC Air OPS Drone Services*

A beloved dog gets his leash caught on railroad tracks as a train approaches.

“[A rescue] involving a train that weighs thousands of tons and a dog being stuck on the track, that’s something out of the movies,” said Rob Russell, an FAA-licensed drone pilot, who helped find the dog after it went missing from its owner’s home in Wells.

Truck, a plott hound, a breed of hunting dog, went missing on May 31 after chasing a turkey into a wooded area, still dragging his leash. He eventually made his way to a Downeaster Amtrak line, where his leash got caught on the tracks, Russell said.

His owner reported him missing to Russell's company, 2A TAC Air OPS Drone Services in Barrington, New Hampshire. Russell often tracks and finds lost pets in Maine using various drones, one equipped with a thermal camera.

Russell prioritized Truck's case because the dog ran off, still dragging its leash, he said. Leashes can get stuck on objects like sticks, tree trunks – in this case, train tracks – trapping the dog.

"This [rescue] is pretty wild ... and the fact that Truck is alive is amazing," Russell said.

An Amtrak conductor called the Wells Police Department after seeing Truck lying in the middle of the track. The dog moved off to the side before the wheels of a passing train ran over the spot where Truck's leash was caught, severing it, Russell said.

Wells Police Officer Nicholas Cousins met Russell at the train tracks after the train went by and found the severed leash. Though the thermal drone missed the moment the train ran over the leash, it tracked Truck into a wooded area and tracked him in the direction of Truck's house for 20 minutes before the battery died. About 15 minutes later, Truck ran into his home, reuniting with his owner unharmed.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/LYSW8WVNAUQ>

Though the Amtrak conductor had called the police after seeing the dog, he did not know if Truck was safe until he came across Russell's Facebook post later that night, Russell said.

Finding dogs with thermal drones is a newer practice and is gaining popularity, Russell said. The overcast weather and intermittent rain helped in the search process because of the thermal technology, he said. Sunny weather could have caused too many heat signatures, blocking out any distinct warm bodies on the drone camera.

Russell said that although his drone helped track Truck most of the way home, the rescue was a team effort with the police department, the Amtrak conductor and Maine Lost Dog Recovery, which put the word out that Truck was missing. The organization often helps 2A TAC with rescues and helps spread awareness of missing dogs..

“It’s always a team [effort], whether you’re trying to find a missing person, or in this case, a beloved dog,” Russell said.

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