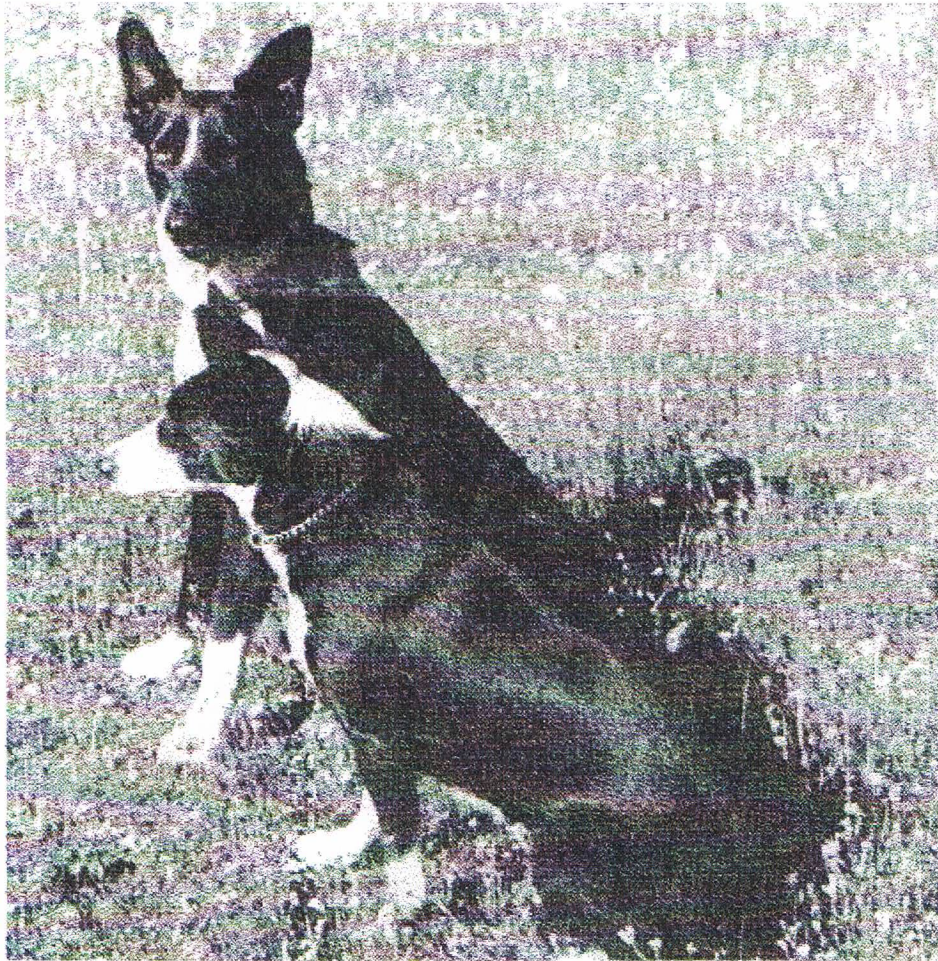


# The McNab Dog

*by Donna Seigmund and Alvina Butti*



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In the years we have worked with McNabs, I've often wondered if Alexander McNab truly realized what a helpful friend he imported from Scotland for work on his sheep ranch outside the town of Ukiah, California. We, the ranchers and farmers, up and down the coast and the great central valley of California, thank the McNab family over and over again. Because after over a century, the McNab shepherd is still working and is now even more popular with the cattlemen and sheepmen.

Many questions arise from all over the US of A about the origins of this dog. We have been fortunate in obtaining the following information, actually two histories. There has been little written about these dogs, but what there is available we are more than willing to share. Because we care, we try to keep the quoted word "*as is*". Please note our personal footnotes and take them only as our opinions; the reference footnotes, however, are from previously published articles, speeches, and letters.



The following are direct quotes from an article published by Al Testado, Times Sports Editor, entitled "*A Dog Detective Does a Scotland Yard Job*". A letter was written in 1955 by Robert W. Scott, son-in-law to John McNab, to Cliff Waterman who was rewarded in his efforts to obtain a history of a really fine working dog.

"The McNab Dog is truly a unique breed in that it is a native stockdog of Northern California via the Grampian Hills of Scotland. The first mention of this breed is in 1885 during the ranch and farming days of the young state of California. Alexander McNab came to the United States from Glasgow, Scotland in 1868 and settled on a large spread which is now known as the McNab Ranch. A year later he returned with his young family and a Border Collie <sup>1</sup>. In 1885, sixteen years later, he returned to Scotland for the expressed purpose of obtaining new sheep dogs. He purchased two Border Collies from the Grampian Hills of central Scotland named Peter and Fred.

Peter worked either lead or drive, while Fred was strictly a lead dog. These two, breeding with selected females <sup>2</sup>, originated in the United States, the line of McNab shepherds. The original stock was supported from time to time by importations from Scotland. Border Collies are of two varieties, long haired and short haired. The long haired type is particularly adapted to the severe weather of Scotland, but the dry, steep ranges of Mendocino County required a short-haired dog, both because of the summer heat but also on account of the burs, fox-tails, and stickers which are not picked up so easily by the short-haired dog. For these reasons, the importations by the McNab family have been mostly of the short-haired type....

A McNab differs markedly in appearance from the usual English Collie. The McNab is medium size, alert and cat-footed, has a black coat with white markings -- white muzzle with a white streak running up the head between the eyes, usually a white neck and chest, white tipped tail and one or more white feet. Its ears are medium sized and somewhat pointed; usually the upper half of the ear flops over. The tail is not bushy. These dogs have been bred primarily for performance in working stock--not for color conformation -- although experience has shown that the best performance usually is obtained from the original type." <sup>3</sup>

I think we also should include Robert Scott's remarks on the Kelpie in this same letter as they do bring up a relationship to the **McNab Dog's 2<sup>nd</sup> history**.

"McNabs should not be confused with the Australian Kelpie, which is a reddish-brown, short-haired dog of about the same size, but with fully erect ears and often with a bushy tail. The origins of the Kelpie seem to be in dispute -- once school of thought contends it is a cross between the Border Collie,



imported into Australia from Scotland, and the Dingo, or Australian wild dog; a second contention is that the Kelpie is a development, in Australia of the Scotch Border Collie, without the infusion of dingo blood; while still others state the Kelpie originated in the "Fox Collie"<sup>4</sup>, which was different in every way from the Border Collie. At any rate, if you see a Kelpie you will see immediately, primarily from its color, that it is not a McNab."

The second history of the McNab was given to me a few years ago. However, many of our older ranchers here in Northern Sacramento Valley of California have known this for decades. This history is called the Ed and Myrtle Brown McNab Shepherd History and was verified by a personal interview with Myrtle Brown.

"In the early 1800's, the Bruce McKinsey family left northern Scotland and settled in the Grampian Hills of central Scotland. They brought with them their stock dogs, the Fox Shepherds, the origin is not known, but have survived in Scotland for centuries. Alexander McNab was a neighbor of the McKinseys who raised the Fox Shepherds, and started the breed in the Grampian Hills.

Alexander McNab and his family left Glasgow, Scotland in 1868, came to the United States of America, and settled in California on the ranch known as the McNab ranch in Mendocino, California south of Ukiah. They brought one dog with them, but it died soon after they arrived. In 1885, Mr. McNab returned to the Grampian Hills in Scotland for the sole purpose of getting some of the dogs he was used to working (with). He purchased two dogs, Peter and Fred. He brought Peter back with him. Fred was left in Scotland to have his training completed, and was sent to America later. Fred was strictly a lead dog; Peter worked both lead and drive. These two dogs were bred to select shepherd females of Spanish origin which were brought to this country by the Basque sheep herders, and that cross was called McNab shepherds because Mr. McNab perfected this breed of stock dogs which would head or heel. The McNab is not a Border Collie.

John L. McNab was the son of Alexander McNab and became the sole owner of the McNab ranch south of Ukiah in Mendocino County. He made several importations in the early 1900's from the Grampian Hills in Scotland. One importation in about 1906 was a Red Fox Shepherd called "Clyde" -- later another red dog called "Ready" was imported, and that is the reason why occasionally there will be a red pup in the litter.

Ed G. Brown put in an order for a McNab pup in 1895. These dogs were so much in demand he didn't get one until 1915 when Mr. McNab imported a female with pup. She whelped three weeks after arrival, and Ed Brown got the pick of the litter. He named the pup "Jet". This pup was black with faint line of white up his face, white chest, and a small amount of white on his feet. So me



of these dogs have a wide strip up the face and a ring of white on the neck. Also, some will have brown on the legs and face, but they are mostly black.

They are never long haired, nor do they have loop ears or speckled legs <sup>5</sup>. Their ears are mostly pricked, some will tip at the top. The strain Ed Brown raised from "Jet" are the true McNabs as he never outcrossed on other breeds. This is not a pedigree but just a history of the McNab dog we raised and knew" --- Myrtle Brown.

As you read both of these histories you will see, as I did, several agreements in the "tellings" and also the interesting comments regarding the very near "probable" relationship of **Border Collie**, **Kelpie**, and **McNabs** via the "**Fox Shepherds and/or Fox Collies**".

As for working ability, the McNab is very cat-footed, very fast and agile. He generally is a more direct and forceful stockdog than his "cousin" the Border Collie, not as excitable as the Kelpie, and not as strong minded as an Australian Cattle dog. He is very easy to teach, giving you his alert attention and complete loyalty. He is usually a one-man (or woman), one-family dog, does not tolerate stray dogs, strange people or animals.

He is known throughout northern California as an avid hunting companion, deer, wild pig, squirrels, and rabbits. The dog is also known as a protector, what's his is his, and if you are his companion, everything you own is his to protect, your spouse, children, livestock, truck, ranch, boots and saddle.

The McNabs are recognized as working stockdogs and are registered through the **National Stockdog Registry** of Butler, Indiana. I hope this will help your in your questions regarding the versatile McNab dog. The Breeding and working of these fine dogs have been one of the pleasures of our lives here at our place, they are truly unique in their devotion and loyal companionship to our families.

## Footnotes

1. Personal comment: The name Border Collie was not officially used until after 1900, and then, used mostly for the trialling dogs on the border of Scotland and England.
2. Refer to second history - Spanish herding dogs.
3. Personal comment: description used as a standard by some breeders.
4. Reference: see 2nd history.
5. Personal comment: A few freckles on the legs are acceptable to some breeders.

## References

"The Collie in Mendocino", May 1894 issue, Overland Monthly, pg. 481 Lulu McNab.  
*"Hard-Workin' DOGS"*, January 1982. California, pg. 78 by Paul McHugh.  
*"The American Herding Breeds"*, March 1987. Dog Fancy, pg. 42, Linda Rorem.  
*Mendocino County Wool Growers Association*, speech, O. E. Chambers, son-in-law of John McNab. June, 1965.

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## Appendix A- Breeder Contacts

As of February 12, 1994, addresses and phone numbers of Alvina Butti and Donna Seigmund are as follows:

Alvina Butti  
 Butti's McNabs  
 84046 Lorane Highway  
 Eugene, OR 97405

Donna Seigmund  
 Seigmund's Border Collies and McNabs  
 21526 Hwy 299 East  
 Redding, CA 96003  
 Phone #: (916) 549-3324

Price per pup as of this date is \$300 plus shipping.

Started pups are sold according to amount of training applied and the ability of the pup to comprehend in the allotted time.

Breeding fees are \$300. Breeding agreements ad contracts are required.

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## Links

- [Tim Uckun's McNab Home Page](#)
- [Sarah sees America](#)
- [Herding on the Web](#)
- [Flyball Home Page](#)

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