

Hiking with your Dog

If you want your hike to be fun for you and your dog, please consider the following:

Are you both prepared?

Do you know where your dog is?

- A bell for your dog's collar plus dog's identification license rabies tag etc.
- An orange vest or collar during hunting season
- A whistle to use to communicate with your dog or if you get lost. (You will have to train your dog with yummy treats that coming to the whistle is better than chasing squirrels, deer, etc.)

Conditioning: are you and your dog fit enough for the planned hike?

- Know the elevation change of your hike. Short legged or less able dogs won't be able to handle rocky steep climbs.

Weather: heat kills dogs.

- Heat and humidity (regardless of whether your dog has enough to drink) can disable or kill your dog.

Route information: Do you know how long this hike will be?

- Don't plan a hike that significantly increases the difficulty or distances that you and your dog currently handle.

First Aid: are you prepared for personal and K-9 first aid?

- You'll need to carry wound management supplies (contact lenses saline bottle, sanitary pads and vet self-adhering wrap tape work great for people & dogs).
- Benadryl for allergic reactions to bug bites (people & dogs).
- Super glue for torn pads. Clean the paw pad with your saline, dry, and apply super glue while holding the tear closed. Hold till dry.
- Hydration: WATER & doggy electrolyte mixes
- You must carry enough water for both you and your dog. NEVER plan on your dog finding enough ground water to drink.
- Food: always carry high-energy food for both you and your dog

**Listen to your intuition! If something feels wrong, it is wrong!
STOP and figure out what's wrong.**

Stop the moment you feel that you or dog is not quite right. - whether it is health or confusion on the trail. If you are uneasy something is wrong. Now is the time to turn around so that no serious injury occurs. Don't wait till your dog is foot sore – you still have a long hike out.

Etiquette:

You are hiking with your K-9 friend to enjoy each other and the wilderness experience. Be sure you and your dog act as ambassadors, as well as stewards of, these beautiful places.

- ***Are dog's allowed.*** Check ahead of time to be sure dogs are welcome where you plan to hike.
- ***Your dog must be under control.*** Your dog shouldn't run ahead greeting strangers. Many people are very fearful of dogs. Or they have a dog. If your dog doesn't come when called, they should be on leash or dragging a long line.
- ***Bury or carry*** all poop (human or K-9)

If your dog isn't fully obedient off lead, then your dog should be on lead. Around every corner is an opportunity for you to meet another dog or animal. You need to be sure you have complete control of your dog. Period! Respect any requirement that impose leash restrictions.

Further thoughts:

More on conditioning your dog:

Just like you, conditioning means trying to walk on a steady basis each day on varying elevations, which is why I love walking the local trails with the hills. You can put in just a half hour or so on a daily basis and you get really good conditioning. Just being a weekend hiker does not always prepare you or your dog for long hikes on hard rocks – particularly in hot weather. Dogs wouldn't go hiking above tree line in hot weather on their own! *Search and rescue teams can not spend their precious time assisting dogs who would not be in distress except that their owners exercised poor judgment.*

Training specifically for hiking situations:

- Train your dog to relax for rest stops (even for a few moments). It is a good habit to get into and the dogs become more acclimated to the stop and go of things and are calmer. Teach a relaxed down that includes enjoying a snack and a drink of "baited" water. Baiting water means adding some doggy electrolytes to your dog's water making it smell yummy so he'll drink regardless of whether they need it or not. Because dog's don't sweat they can't cool efficiently. They need more fluids than their thirst will prompt them to drink. If you bait your dog's water do not let them over drink – it tastes so good they will drink it all!
- Play "find it" games on your daily hikes. Distribute kibble along stone walls, on boulders on top of downed logs and then send your dog to "find it". This teaches your dog to stay focused on your and not the great smelly outdoors. Keep in mind that dogs don't take walks for scenery – they are going to use their noses to "hunt". You want them to check in with you from their games to see what good games you have to offer. The "find it" game on a stone wall is so ingrained in my dogs that I can send them from a distance and even without any kibble at the wall they will wait until I catch up to them to the kibble on the wall. There have been many times (and my dogs work off lead on the trails) that a deer or fisher or moose or turkey have been right up ahead in our path (even at the infamous stone wall) and all dogs have waited to play the find game rather than give any chase to wildlife.
- My friend Nancy plays agility games on the trail. She asks her dogs to climb up on big boulders and then lay down to get their treat or to jump up on big logs and walk across them to get their treat. They love this game and will climb on boulders and look back to say "Aren't I clever? Where's my treat?" These games make hiking with YOU fun for the dog. Otherwise your dog will see you as the chauffeur who drives him to the woods to go hunting.
- Try hide and seek games. Start with your dog on a long line on the trail ducking off trail and standing like a stone behind a tree or shrub. Let you dog "hunt" for you. When your dog finds you, lots of treats and a big fuss. This will teach your dog to keep his eye on your and is good preparation for moving to off lead hiking in areas where that is permissible.

Resources:

HikerSafety: The Hiker Responsibility Code is the centerpiece of the **hikeSafe** program, and is a set of principles that all hikers can look to before they hit the trail. Check out their web site at

www.hikeSafe.com

Electrolyte supplements: www.hydrolyte.com

Best Hikes With Dogs by Lisa Densmore (2005) is great about telling you the difficulty of terrain for you and your dog.

Dog-Friendly New England by Trisha Blanchet.