

## Happy Trails

Safety first in the great outdoors

By Melanie Monteiro

Camping and hiking with your dog are two of life's great pleasures, provided your pooch is well suited to the particular excursion and you've sufficiently prepared for the trip. The most important factor to consider is whether you truly believe your dog will enjoy herself. Is she well socialized and confident in new situations? Is she controllable around other people and pets? Does she bark at or chase birds, squirrels or other wild animals? Will the weather be too hot or too cold to ensure her comfort and safety? Naturally, you can't predict the exact conditions of your adventure, but considering such matters might lead you to rethink or adjust your plans so everyone has a good time. Once you've decided it's a go, here are some before-, during- and after-trip tips to make the experience more enjoyable.



**Check the dog policies** at the campground and/or hiking trails you plan on using to determine whether there are any rules you're unwilling or unable to comply with. Learn about area hazards such as poisonous snakes, porcupines, disease-carrying ticks or waterborne parasites like giardia (the local ranger station is usually a good resource). Prepare in advance for potential mishaps by taking needle-nose pliers to remove porcupine quills, antihistamine for insect stings, or a sheet or nylon poncho to use as a two-person stretcher to carry an injured dog, and pack them in your dog's first aid kit. Locate the nearest

animal hospital at your destination in case of emergency.

**Confirm that your dog** is current on her rabies vaccine. If she's due for other booster shots, consider having a titer done first to see if they're really necessary. Make sure your dog is up-to-date on flea, tick and heartworm prevention if needed, and that her ID tags and microchip information are current as well.

**Trim your dog's nails** to prevent them from tearing on rugged trails. Depending on the climate, you may want to bring along other outdoor dog gear,

such as a jacket for cold weather or a cooling vest for hot weather. If you have a light- or pink-skinned dog, pet-safe sunscreen is also a wise purchase.

**Take water from home** or have bottled water on hand. Do not let your dog drink from streams or lakes, which can cause intestinal upset and the potential for ingesting bacteria or parasites like giardia. Other items to take include food and treats, toys, a collapsible dish, waste bags, a towel, any medications, a brush, first-aid kit, and an extra-long leash in case you need to tether her at your campsite. Decide where your dog will be sleeping and pack accordingly—a bed, soft crate, blankets or the like.

**If you're staying in a rented cabin**, look around for rodent bait and traps, a common discovery in vacation rentals that sit unused much of the year. Check the closets, kitchen and hidden corners and remove anything that can harm your dog. If you're camping in the great outdoors, make sure there's adequate shade and shelter at your site.

**On the trail**, beware of heatstroke if it's warm and humid. Provide frequent opportunities for her to drink water and rest, especially if she seems tired. Some dogs, in their desire to please, will over-exert themselves to keep up with you, so it's up to you to make sure she's not overdoing it.

**After your excursion**, give your pooch a once-over, checking her ears, face, body and feet for any foxtails, burrs or ticks she may have picked up along the way. Check her paw pads for cuts, burns or stickers. Give her a quick brushing to remove the day's dust and pollen. Then give her a well-deserved dinner, a belly rub and a good night's rest. A bedtime story is optional!

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