

Tips for having fun outdoors with dogs

By Peter Dickson

You and your dog want to get out in the woods and go camping. You've decided you want to bypass the boring campsites offered at the usual places and head off the beaten path. The backcountry, the hinterlands – call it what you want, but you'll need a few tips to make sure that you and your dog will have a memorable outdoors experience so far from home.

Leash or not?

Leashing your dog depends on his or her temperament and training. If your dog will stick close to you and come when you call, it might be all right to go without. But if your dog has a tendency to take off on its own, then obviously you'd better have it on a leash – one that's heavy duty enough to handle the rigors of navigating the terrain. Alternatively, you could try one of the newer models of electronic dog training collars. They're not intended to train a dog to perform a command that they don't already know, but rather to enforce ones already learned, enabling you to keep your dog close and under control.

Water: Do you have enough?

Water is heavy, weighing in at a little over eight pounds per gallon. You're going to need a lot of it yourself, and your dog – after running around the whole forest chasing chipmunks – is going to be thirsty. You might be leery about letting your dog drink out of the creek or that stagnant puddle, but really, they were made to do that kind of stuff. If you don't like the idea of letting your dog do that, haul in a few gallons. Bring some iodine tablets or a filter to purify the water.

Make sure shots are up to date

During the camping trip, your dog will be exposed to wild animals and animal feces which can carry parasites. It could be a squirrel, raccoon, possum or just a tick. Talk to your vet and make sure your pup is protected.

Make him carry his load

Hey, the dog can carry stuff too. They actually make load-carrying outfits for dogs. And why not? Some breeds haul sleds through the frozen north, so you can at least make them carry their own food and water. They'll understand.

Pack out poop

Some environmentally minded outdoors enthusiasts advocate carrying a pooper-scooper to pick up your dog's waste, so as not to contaminate the environment. This makes good sense if you're in an area frequented by other people, but if you're roughing it off the beaten path, isn't dog poop kind of environmentally friendly?

Above all, you know what's best for your dog. Use some common sense, and have fun.

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