

Hiking With Your Dog

Dogs with Wings Assistance Dog Society | April 2014

Dogs love walking and hiking outside just as much as you do. Next time you go hiking, bring your dog along so he can get some fresh air and exercise in the woods. Keep in mind that you'll need to make a few extra considerations so you, your dog, and fellow hikers have a good time in the woods. Use these tips when you take your dog on a day hike.

1. Keep a towel in the car for muddy paws.

Some dogs love nothing more than to get wet and muddy. It's all well and good to let your dog have his fun, but don't let him make a mess of your car's upholstery. Keep a few towels and rags in your car. When you arrive back at the trailhead, clean the mud off your dog before allowing him to enter the car. That way, you can let him romp in the woods without worrying too much about the mess.

2. Bring a water dish so your dog can hydrate.

You can easily drink out of a water bottle, but your dog needs a flat dish in order to drink and stay cool. You need to bring a minimum of two liters of water for yourself. Make sure to bring an extra bottle for your dog. Pack a flat dish or bowl that your dog can comfortably drink from.

3. Think carefully about letting your dog off the leash.

You may think the woods are a great opportunity for your dog to get some safe off-leash time without the danger of cars, but remember, you're sharing the trail with other hikers. Some of those hikers might not appreciate a loose dog. Think carefully whether it's appropriate to let your dog go without a leash on the trail.

Some people say that dogs should be leashed at all times outside the home. While this might make some people more comfortable, it certainly limits your dog's enjoyment of the wilderness and it may not be necessary. Use some common sense and discretion regarding whether it's appropriate to let your dog run loose.

4. Don't always assume other dogs have been trained socially...

...and almost more importantly, ensure you understand the socialization side of being a dog owner, so your dog is just that, social. If you find yourself on the leash heavily all the time with other dogs around, there might be some work to do – and you should start there before a wide open hike.

Remember, successful dog ownership and dog behavior starts with YOU.

On a secluded trail, you can usually let your dog off the leash without bothering anyone. On busier trails, you may be able to let your dog off the leash intermittently, but pay attention to passing hikers. If you hear big group coming, call your dog back and restrain him while the other hikers pass.

5. Be considerate.

Don't give anyone a reason to feel uncomfortable – large dogs can be intimidating to others, as they don't know the dog's character or personality. For crowded trails, it's good etiquette to keep your dog tethered. Consider your dog's behavior and number of hikers on the trail before letting your dog loose. Don't let a natural surprise on the path turn into dog aggression or an accident.

Always try to be the considerate dog owner, and learn the social side of a dog's upbringing. It will be a great benefit to you and your dog, and you can be a great team on any path. Enjoy your hike!

About Dogs with Wings:

Dogs with Wings is a leader in the international community of assistance dog training schools. The organization exists to serve people with disabilities. They work collaboratively, and in partnership with other organizations that provide assistance dogs to people with disabilities.

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