



SUBMITTED BY JOY FOREHAND

For hikers who love dogs, there's nothing more rewarding than hitting the trail with your four-legged friend. It's fun to watch your dog discover all the scents the forest has to offer as well as his awestruck stance when he sees his first deer, possum or other forest critters.

But along with that enjoyment come responsibilities that affect the health and safety of you, your dog, wildlife and other hikers.

Most hiking trails require dogs to be on a six-foot leash. Dogs are inquisitive, impulsive and "programmed" to chase. No hiker wants to watch helplessly as their companion disappears into the woods running after a deer, bear or other wildlife. IF found, most runaways have been spotted 10 or more miles from where the owner last saw their dog.

Dogs should be trained to walk on leash (either beside or in front of you) -- most trails / forests require dogs be on a six-foot leash. They should respond immediately to the command to 'come'.

In case you and your dog are separated, he should respond to a loud whistle -- the sound of the whistle carries much further than a voice command.

The sit and stay commands are essential for safety and control. They give the hiker time to evaluate the surroundings and determine which direction to go. A courteous dog sits patiently by his owner's side while other hikers pass by. If approached, jumping on or pulling towards other hikers is never appreciated.

Passersby on horseback require additional safety measures. A young horse, or one not accustomed to trails, can spook if something moves above its head. You and your dog should move quietly to the downhill side of the trail and remain in place while they pass.

Always pay attention if a dog "freezes" and refuses to move forward. He may sense or see a bear or rattlesnake in the path ahead that you will want to avoid. A dog's instincts are much keener than a human's.

'Pack It In, Pack It Out' is a great maxim

to follow -- that includes carrying out your dog's 'waste'.

Make sure you and your faithful friend are in good, physical shape for the hike. Bring food, water and first aid supplies for both of you. Let someone know when/where you are going and when you will be back. To keep you on your route, hard copy maps are a great back up for your cell phone.

Some great local hikes include (Google the name of the trail for directions):

Trail Distance Difficulty

Long Branch Loop Trail 2-miles Easy / Senior, kids & dog friendly
Fall Branch Falls ½-mile to falls Easy / Senior, kids & dog friendly
Swinging Bridge ¼-mile to bridge Easy drive / Senior, kids & dog friendly
(Take FS 816 to the parking area)
or 3-mile hike to bridge Moderately strenuous / Kids & dog friendly
Bushy Head Gap >>
Hatley Gap 10.2 miles Moderately strenuous / Kids & dog friendly

TIPS FOR THE TRAIL WHEN HIKING WITH DOGS