



Dog Scouts of America Backpacking Training

Backpacking

There aren't many instructions necessary for backpacking. If the dog will walk on a leash and wear a pack, the dog can do backpacking. Still, there are some things that you can do to help your dog if he is hesitant to wear a pack or is not in condition to hike.

GETTING USED TO THE BACKPACK:

Anytime the dog is asked to wear something new you want to create a favorable association with the new thing. This applies to a harness, a Dog Scout cape, or a backpack.

When first trying the pack on the dog, place it across his back like a saddlebag, praise him and give him treats. Once the dog is comfortable being in contact with the pack slip it on and connect the straps. Again, provide lots of praise and treats. Continue to increase the requirement until the dog is able to walk on a leash while wearing the pack.

Make sure the pack is as comfortable as possible for your dog by distributing the weight evenly between the two saddlebags. Consider 2 small bottles of water rather than one big one as water will be the heaviest item the dog is required to carry. Keep the pack balanced as the water is consumed by distributing between the 2 bottles.

GETTING FIT FOR HIKING:

Both you and your dog need to be in condition for hiking. If you have been living a sedentary lifestyle you likely can't go out and hike 6 miles right away. Neither can your dog. Start with a short hike and do gradually longer ones each time you go out. Don't let too much time pass between hikes or you will be starting your fitness journey over again each time you hike. Stretch your muscles before doing any physical activity. Lead your dog through some passive and active stretching before you start out on any hike, especially if the hike will be more physically demanding than the previous one.

THE IMPORTANCE OF 'LEAVE IT':

When hiking, your dog must understand that 'leave it' means 'do not touch, eat, molest or otherwise disturb it' whatever it may be. When working on 'leave it' for hiking, expose your dog to something he should 'leave', then don't make it at all fun for him. You can redirect his attention to you and reward the fact that the dog turned away and back to you. You could severely reprimand the dog while shouting "LEAVE IT!" to create a distasteful association with a particular object, but you will likely also create a distasteful association with yourself (as the punisher).

Event based corrections work much better. In these situations, the 'punishment', or unpleasantness comes from 'above' and never from you. You MUST make sure that your dog clearly understands that chasing wildlife, other dogs or people, barking or otherwise disturbing the environment is not acceptable before hiking. He should understand that listening to you is far more lucrative. Ensuring that the dog's understanding of 'leave it' is complete is critical since it could save his life on the trail!



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DANGERS ON THE TRAIL:

Before hiking, every handler must understand any potential dangers that might be present in the area. Knowing what poison ivy looks like may not be life saving in most circumstances, but it will save you from some extreme discomfort should you encounter it. By contrast, recognizing a foxtail could save your dog from a surgery required to remove it. It is critical to understand any potential dangers that may exist in the area where you will be hiking, including, poisonous snakes, dangerous animals, steep or slippery trails could be life saving for both you and your dog.

Back to poison ivy...this is a plant recognizable by its 3-leaf structure. All 3 leaves share the same stem. The leaves have a kind of irregular, jagged edge. Many plants resemble poison ivy, so learn to spot it on the trail. The same goes for poison oak or poison sumac if it is found in your area.