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Canoeing with dogs

May 10, 2010, By Cheryl Smyth, ARTICLE, ACTIVITIES

The gentle movement of paddles breaks the water's calm. In the lone canoe, a man and woman make their way across the horizon. Their dog is fast asleep, only waking occasionally to the sounds of birds flying overhead.

INTRODUCTION TO CANOES

'Tucker,' an eight-year-old Golden Retriever, joins his owners on their canoeing trips whenever possible. The popular pastime has been a part of Sherry and Bart's recreational life for 10 years. Being mellow, Tucker took to canoeing easily. When he travelled with them as a puppy, he always settled right away in the bow. Now, he lies in the stern where there is more room.

Many dogs are comfortable in a canoe once they've become used to its motion. In-depth training may not be necessary. Teaching your pet to stay in the unsteady boat while it is on land is one way to get him used to it. Another method is to start at the water's edge where one person can hold the boat still while another person positions the dog in it. In either case, enticing your pet with a treat can be helpful.

SAFETY FIRST

'Tia,' Nancy and Bob's seven-year-old West Highland White Terrier, has been included on most of her family's canoeing trips. She jumped out of the boat on her first excursion, getting a shock when she hit the cold water.

Nancy keeps Tia outfitted in a life jacket while in the canoe. Although Tia can swim, she doesn't have the endurance Tucker has. Nancy also likes that doggy life jackets come with a handle on the back, making it easier to grab Tia out of the water if she falls or jumps in.

A BALANCING ACT

A calm animal helps keep a canoe steady as any movement can cause it to become unstable and even dump. The size of dog also makes a difference. Tia, at eight kilograms (17 pounds), shifts the balance less than the 36 kilogram (80 pound) Tucker. There are canoes designed to be more stable and having one fully loaded increases its stability. No matter what the contents are or how the canoe is built, 99 per cent get swamped close to shore because of an excited dog eager to land.

LAND ROVERS

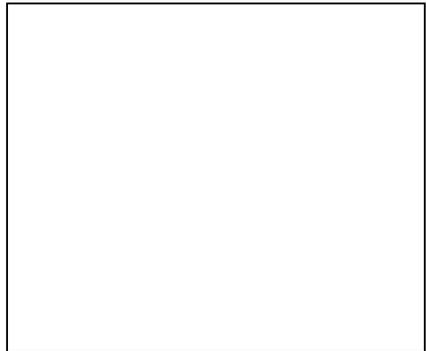
Whereas wearing a life jacket can keep a dog safe in water, attaching a leash can keep him safe on land. Letting a dog loose is only advisable if he has excellent recall, as some canines are prone to chase wildlife and can become unsuspecting prey for other animals, or get lost.

Other perils to be aware of in the backwoods include parasites and bacteria. Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that is contracted by drinking from contaminated outdoor water sources. Bart makes sure Tucker has the lepto vaccination, though he realizes Tucker could pick up something else from a lake or river such as giardiasis – an infection by the Giardia parasite.

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All Tucker's vaccines are up-to-date by the time they reach the backwoods, including heartworm preventative to protect him from the serious disease that can be contracted from infected mosquitoes. A well-stocked first-aid kit for minor injuries is always included in the family's baggage.

PACK LIGHT

Another aspect to a pleasant outing is keeping the load as light as possible – always a challenge for canoeists.

Humans can easily condense their food given the many options available, such as freeze-dried. In comparison, choices in dog food are limited. Dry is preferable since it is lighter than canned. Tucker carries some of his own provisions in his doggy backpack, with Sherry and Bart carrying the rest so that their pet isn't overloaded.

With careful planning, anyone who loves canoeing need not leave his or her four-legged friend at home. Dogs love to be with their family and typically love the outdoors, whether they're in the northern wilderness or on a river running through town.

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