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Preparing Your Pet for the Great Outdoors

By Jen Reeder

LeeAnn Craig will never forget an overnight raft trip on the Colorado River with her boyfriend and their Labrador mix Kelly. They pulled over to a beach for a hike and Kelly bolted to a stand of tamarisk. Soon the couple heard "rustling and crazy noises" because Kelly had found a porcupine—which left around 20 quills in her nose and front paws. Fortunately, Craig had pliers and a first aid kit.

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DR. PAIGE LORIMER, DVM, CVA, HIKES THE COLORADO TRAIL WITH HER DOG DEETS. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. PAIGE LORIMER.

"We just had to hold her down and (pull out the quills) because we still had another night on the river to go," Craig says. "Her poor little face was all bloody."

Hiking with dogs is normally a pleasure as long as owners are aware of the risks and they prepare for them, according to Lindsay Sjolín, DVM, and associate veterinarian at AAHA-accredited Prunyn Veterinary Hospital in Missoula, Mont.

Sjolín, who hikes frequently with her "mutt" Finnley, says her practice sees "quite a few" dogs that have been killed by porcupines. She said if possible, it's best to keep your dog calm and get them to your veterinarian because if the entire quill isn't removed, the tip can migrate.

"They can go into an eye, they can go through the body wall into a lung," Sjolín says, adding that sometimes anesthesia is needed to make sure there aren't quills in the dog's mouth.

Skunks are another recreational hazard, though more often at night. Owners can usually treat a dog that has been sprayed by a skunk at home with special shampoos, she says. If they've been sprayed in the face, flush their eyes (the eye flush for people with contact lenses works). If the eyes continue to be inflamed, see a veterinarian for prescription medicine, she advises.

For more information:

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) hiking safety tips: aspca.org/pet-care/pet-care-tips/hiking-safety-tips.aspx

Pet Kare Clinic's porcupine information: petkareclinic.com/porcupineinfo.htm

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Sjolin also recommends using a flea and tick preventive and, afterward, checking your dogs for ticks as well as their paws and ears for burrs, thorns and "cheat grass," also known as foxtails.

"It's kind of like with the porcupine quills: They tend to move in a forward direction instead of backing out, so the sooner you see them, the sooner you can get them out," Sjolin says.

How to prepare for outdoor ventures with your dog

According to Sjolin, it's important to keep your dog's vaccinations current, including those for leptospirosis, a bacterial infection from water tainted with animal urine. Keeping dogs under voice control is also key.

"You don't want them scaring off the wildlife," she says.

Randy Hampton, statewide spokesman for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, which manages 42 state parks in Colorado and about 900 species of wildlife, agrees. In fact, he suggests hikers keep their dogs on a 6-foot leash for the safety of the dogs, owners and wildlife.

Hampton says dogs can be hurt or killed by wildlife such as mountain lions and coyotes, or lead a charging moose back to you. Conversely, deer and elk can expend precious stores of energy when chased by dogs.

"Here in Colorado there's actually a law that dogs that are harassing wildlife can be shot by law enforcement officers," Hampton says, suggesting off-leash dog parks as a safer alternative.

Hiking safety and your dog

But many hikers prefer to have their dogs off-leash. Paige Lorimer, DVM, CVA, owner and veterinarian at AAHA-accredited Pet Kare Clinic in Steamboat Springs, Colo., typically hikes and snowshoes around 1,500 miles a year with her black Labradors, Deets and Walter.

"Considering how many people hike with their pets on a daily basis, there are relatively few problems," Lorimer says. "In general, hiking is very safe if you plan ahead, know where you are going and have a well-trained and socialized dog."

Common problems include cuts and punctures, overheating and injuries from overuse.

"Make sure your dog is in shape—no 'weekend warrior' stuff where your dog doesn't get any exercise all week and then you go on a 10-mile hike on the weekend," she says.

"Even on short day hikes, I take a small emergency kit consisting of dog booties, bandage material, Benadryl, hemostats (medical instrument used for clamping off a blood vessel) and antibiotic ointment. I always bring extra water, dog treats, a leash and poo bags," Lorimer says. "Make sure your dog has a collar on with current identification information and better yet, get your dog microchipped."

Ultimately, hiking with your dog can be very enjoyable. "It's mental and physical stimulation that keeps you and your pet healthy and happy," Lorimer says. "So get out there and enjoy it."

The bottom line: Ask your veterinarian if you have questions, and plan ahead.

Paige Lorimer, DVM, offers this recipe for a "de-skunker" formula:

- 1 quart of hydrogen peroxide
- ¼ cup of baking soda
- 2 Tbsp. of dish soap

Use a sponge to apply it to your dog and be careful around the eyes. Wait 10 minutes before rinsing thoroughly. Follow up with a nice-smelling shampoo. Note: Wait to mix the formula until you need it.



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