

Dog Scouts of America

Backpacking Training Instructions

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.

Any time you put something new on a dog (like a head collar), you want to create a favorable association with the new thing. When you first try the pack on the dog, place it across his back like a satchel and give him treats. Next, connect the harness straps and give treats. Next require that he actually WALK while wearing this apparatus (more treats).

To make the pack more comfortable for your dog, make sure you distribute the weight evenly between the two satchels. This can be done the easiest way by carrying two smaller water bottles, instead of one bigger one. By having two containers, water can be shifted from one side to the other to keep the pack perfectly balanced.

Make sure you and your dog are in condition for the hike you plan to take. At camp, we start with a short hike, and do gradually longer ones each day. Stretch your muscles before any physical activity, and stretch your dog's muscles with some brief exercise or some range-of-motion stretching.

Leave it means "Do not touch, eat, or molest it, as that behavior will NEVER be reinforced, and may even have dire consequences. The best way to teach this to your dog is to expose him to something he should "leave," then don't make it fun for your dog (the bar is closed). You can redirect his attention on you and reward the "good leave-it" (the bar is open!). You could also severely reprimand him while shouting, "LEAVE IT," to create a distasteful association with a particular object, however you will also probably create a distasteful association with yourself (as the punisher). The best punishments come from "above" (event-based corrections which the dog will not associate with the real punisher--YOU). You absolutely must get it through to your dog that chasing other dogs is not productive, and that listening to you is a far more lucrative proposition.

Poison Ivy is a plant which is recognized by its three-leaf structure. All three leaves share the same stem. The leaves have a kind of irregular, jagged edge. Many plants resemble poison Ivy. Learn to spot it on the trail, as you may have to point some out to your instructor to get this badge.

You must know the items required to be carried in the dog's pack: water, bowl, spare leash/collar, knife, compass, first aid kit, owner I.D., flashlight, and 3 clean-up baggies (you must demonstrate the ability to clean up after your dog).