

Backpacking With Rottweilers



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Dorianne Almann & UCDX North East's Full of Moxie, CDX, RE, CS, NEDDC NDD, BMDCA NDD, TT, CGC, TD1, HIC 3 legs towards GSMDCA NWPD

When you think of backpacking with your Rottweiler, you likely envision yourself carrying a pack loaded with supplies while your dog keeps you company. However, your dogs can help you with your load by carrying their own backpacks. Dogs have historically carried loads, but now they do it mostly in the name of sport.

Many breed clubs offer packing titles, but few are open to other breeds. Two clubs who allow other breeds to participate are The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America and Dog Scouts of America. The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club program features three pack dog titles earned by completing an increasing number of hikes. Dogs carry 20-30% of their body weight (dependent upon the title level) over an average of 8-10 miles per leg earned. Hikes

can range from fairly easy to quite difficult and can include slippery mud, loose rocks, steep inclines or deep snow. I am not familiar with the Dog Scouts program, so cannot comment on it.



Darla, Xena & Bill - Indian Stream, NH - near Canadian border



Photo: Kelly Nevin GSMDCA pack hike

Regardless of whether you are backpacking with your dogs for fun, as part of your lifestyle, or attempting to earn titles, it is vitally important that the dog is slowly conditioned both to wearing the pack and to carrying weights. Before beginning this conditioning program, your dog should have a physical by your veterinarian to ensure the dog is structurally and physically sound enough to participate.

The first step is to purchase a

well-made pack for your dog. My favorite for Rottweilers is the Wolf Packs Banzai pack. Mine are over 10 years old and are still in like-new condition! I also own a Wenaha pack and an Outward Hound pack. They are also good packs, but not the quality of the Wolf Packs Banzai.



Bill, Darla & Xena hiking in Pittsburg, New Hampshire, USA

The next step is to accustom the dog to both wearing a pack while hiking and teaching the dog to be aware of the pack's width when loaded. To do this, pack the backpack with balled-up newspaper. This gives the pack a fully loaded width without added weight.

Then you can gradually increase weight. Half-liter or one-pint bottles of water weigh approximately one pound. Take your time to increase weight to the level you will be using for your hikes. For recreational hiking, I like to keep pack weights to 10-15% of the dog's body weight. For working or titling hiking, 20% is common with 30% being the absolute maximum; 30% is not a weight I would consider for daily use. Even when working up to a pack title hike weight, I do not go above 15% body weight except for once-a-week practice hikes.



Bill & Xena taking a break in Pittsburg, NH

Work on increasing loaded distance just as slowly as you do weight, eventually working up to 6- to 10-mile fully loaded hikes once a week, with additional shorter hikes once or twice a week.

Remember, while you are acclimating your dog to pack wearing and weight, you need to be doing the same for yourself! A well-fitting and comfortable pack is just as important for the human as it is the dog.

ALWAYS make sure you carry a first aid kit, folding water bowl, Cordura dog boots (just in case) and more than sufficient water and snacks for you and the dog!

Editor's Note: Please visit the magazine's board for more information on backpacking or to ask Diane questions on this article.