

*A Bark In The Park -*

**The 48 Best Places  
To Hike With Your  
Dog In The  
Black Hills**

LUCINDA SCHUFT

*illustrations by*

ANDREW CHESWORTH



**Cruden Bay Books**

**A BARK IN THE PARK: THE 48 BEST PLACES TO  
HIKE WITH YOUR DOG IN THE BLACK HILLS**

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*“Dogs are our link to paradise...to sit with a dog on a hillside  
on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing  
was not boring - it was peace.”  
- Milan Kundera*

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## **Introduction**

Hiking with your dog in the Black Hills area will take you from the open, dry, windswept plains into the cool, pine-covered mountains with beautiful valleys that are home to large spruce trees and small streams. The Black Hills area covers southwestern South Dakota and into the northeastern edge of Wyoming. It is approximately 90 miles from the north to south and 60 miles east to west. I used the largest community in the region, Rapid City, as the starting point for access to the various parks, trails and interesting areas to visit. The Black Hills are located to the west of Rapid City and most areas I have described can be reached with a two-hour drive.

I have tried to describe each destination so as to illustrate the diversity of this region. The prairies around the Black Hills are grass and sage covered with minimal trees and brush. During the hotter months of the year they are not particularly inviting for man or dog, but in the colder, wetter seasons they are great places to get away from the snow in the higher hills. These higher elevations in the Hills are an upthrust in the Earth's crust that provide one last venue for mountain-type vegetation and activities as you go east from the Rocky Mountains. Beautiful canyons and valleys and mountain parks provide us with year-round access for having fun with our dogs.

Lucinda

## ***About The Organization Of The Book...***

Due to the size of some of the recreation areas in the Black Hills, I broke some of them into several individual entries for the purposes of this book. In these cases I focus on individual trails rather than entire parks in counties and towns. Some of these are:

### ◆ **The Centennial Trail**

This 111-mile trail was developed in 1989 as a monument to South Dakota statehood. Starting in the north on top of Bear Butte, a sacred mountain of the Lakota Sioux, the trail connects major recreation areas such as the Black Elk Wilderness, Fort Meade Recreation Area, Black Hills National Forest and Custer State Park before ending in Wind Cave National Park. Elevations range from 3,200 feet to 5,600 feet and the going can be rugged at times. The trail crosses many streams and gets close enough to seven lakes to give your dog a refreshing swim. The Centennial Trail is accessed from 22 trailheads that break the path into walkable chunks.

### ◆ **The George S. Mickelson Trail**

The rail line that the Burlington Northern abandoned between Deadwood and Edgemont in 1983 was built in 1889. It took workers just 255 days to lay more than 100 miles of track, build 100 wooden trestle bridges and blast four hardrock tunnels. This magnificent route was converted to a multi-use trail under the auspices of then-Governor George S. Mickelson and completed in 1998. The total length of the trail is 114 miles, spread across 14 trailheads, as it rolls from town to town. Much of the way the wide, crushed limestone path advances at a gentle grade of less than 4%. The Mickelson Trail mostly slips through National Forest lands where it is possible to get off and roam with your dog off-leash but when it passes through private land, travel is restricted to the trail.

◆ **Black Hills National Forest**

The Ponderosa pines grew so thick in this region that the Lakota Sioux knew these mountains as *Paha Sapa* - "hills that are black." After a series of forest fires in 1893 attracted national attention, a movement began to protect the supply of timber to Western mines, railroads and towns. In 1897, President Grover Cleveland established the Black Hills Forest Reserve and a year later the first ever timber sale on federal lands was held near Nemo. A decade later management was transferred to the Department of Agriculture and the Black Hills National Forest was officially born. Today there are more than 1.2 million acres of managed lands, including Harney Peak, the highest point in the Hills at 7,242 feet. There are 353 miles of trail in the Black Hills National Forest.

◆ **Custer State Park**

General George Armstrong Custer led an expedition of 1,000 men into the Black Hills in 1874 and discovered gold in French Creek, that flows through the park named for him. Custer State Park was created in 1919 and is the largest state park in the Lower 48 - 73,000 acres. Canine hikers can find any type of challenge here as trails ramble through wooded mountainsides and mixed grass prairies. Custer State Park is especially noted for its wildlife; the park symbol is the bison and its herd of 1500 animals is one of the largest in the world.

## ***South Dakota State Park Rules For Dogs...***

From April 1 to September 30 pets must be on a leash not longer than 10 feet in designated camping areas and when outside of camping areas under the immediate control of the owner and at least 200 feet from other park users or designated camping areas. From October 1 to March 31 leashes are not mandatory, however, a person must keep pet under immediate control. Pets are not allowed in any park building and are not allowed on designated swimming beaches. You are required to clean up after your pet.

## Maps

### *Where to Obtain Maps:*

Free maps for individual trails on the Black Hills National Forest may be obtained through the:

**Forest Supervisor's Office**

**24041 N. Hwy 16**

**Custer SD 57730-7239**

**605-673-9200**

The Black Hills Visitors Map is sold at all forest service offices. The paper version is \$6 plus tax and the plastic version is \$7 plus tax.

Other maps and information is available through the:

**Black Hills Parks & Forests Association**

**RR1 Box 190-WCNP**

**Hot Springs, SD 57747**

**605-745-4600**



## Hiking With Your Dog

So you want to start hiking with your dog. Hiking with your dog can be a fascinating way to explore the Black Hills from a canine perspective. Some things to consider:

### **Dog's Health**

Hiking can be a wonderful preventative for any number of physical and behavioral disorders. One in every three dogs is overweight and running up trails and leaping through arroyos is great exercise to help keep pounds off. Hiking can also relieve boredom in a dog's routine and calm dogs prone to destructive habits. And hiking with your dog strengthens the overall owner/dog bond.

### **Breed of Dog**

All dogs enjoy the new scents and sights of a trail. But some dogs are better suited to hiking than others. If you don't as yet have a hiking companion, select a breed that matches your interests. Do you look forward to an entire afternoon's hiking? You'll need a dog bred to keep up with such a pace - a retriever or a spaniel perhaps. Is a half-hour enough walking for you? It may not be for an energetic dog like a border collie. If you already have a hiking friend, tailor your plans to his abilities.

### **Conditioning**

Just like humans, dogs need to be acclimated to the task at hand. An inactive dog cannot be expected to bounce from the easy chair in the den to complete a 3-hour hike. You must also be physically able to restrain your dog if confronted with distractions on the trail (like a scampering squirrel or a pack of joggers). Have your dog checked by a veterinarian before significantly increasing her activity level.

### **Water**

Surface water, including fast-flowing streams, is likely to be infested with a microscopic protozoa called *Giardia*, waiting to wreak havoc on a dog's intestinal system. The most common symptom is crippling diarrhea. Algae, pollutants and contaminants can all be in streams, ponds and puddles. If possible, carry fresh water for your dog on the trail - your dog can even learn to drink happily from a squirt bottle.

### **Weather**

Hot summers do dogs no favors. With no sweat glands and only panting available to disperse body heat, dogs are much more susceptible to heat stroke than we are. Unusually rapid panting and/or a bright red tongue are signs of heat exhaustion in your pet. Always carry enough water for your hike. Even the days that don't seem too warm can cause discomfort in dark-coated dogs if the sun is shining brightly. In cold weather, short-coated breeds may require additional attention. In the Black Hills you may find some of the greatest hiking weather in the world on many days. However, you need to be aware of the threat of thunderstorms during many months of the year. These usually roll in later in the day and can be very severe with large hail, lots of lightning and heavy rains. They can occur several times during the course of a day from early spring into late fall. Winter storms are also a threat and blinding blizzard conditions or heavy, sudden snows can trap you. Be aware of the weather conditions whenever you head out for the day. Do not think that just because the sky is clear and the temperatures moderate you won't see a bad storm later in the day. Watch local forecasts.

## **Trail Hazards In The Black Hills**

If you are new to hiking in the Black Hills, there are a few things you should know to keep your journeys safe and enjoyable (listed roughly in the order of most likely to encounter to least)...

### **Ticks**

Ticks can carry diseases that affect you and your dog. To help combat ticks, wear long sleeves and tuck your pants into your boots. Avoid deep grass and bushes. Tick repellent for you and your dog is a good idea, and always check your dog's fur carefully before heading home. Ticks can be hard to spot on dogs with dark or long fur, but a simple comb can reveal any intruders. If you or your dog gets bitten, immediately remove the tick with fine-jawed tweezers. Try to grab the tick as close to the head as possible and pull straight out. Do not apply any oil before or after removal. If any part of the tick remains, or if swelling/itching or other complications develop, contact your doctor/veterinarian.

### **Fox Grass, Grass Seeds, Burrs**

There are many types of grass seeds and plant seeds that attach to animal fur for a ride as part of their seed dispersal mechanism. Some of these can be very hazardous to your dog if they go up a nose, grab on to the hair between the dog's toes and work their way into their leg, etc. Be sure to thoroughly check your dog after a hike for these seeds and burrs.

### **Poison Ivy**

In most areas the shiny plant with "leaves of three" grows sparsely but keep an eye on your dog. She will not be affected by the toxic plant but can pass it along to you.

🐾 **Rattlesnakes**

Rattlesnakes are found in every state in America; the vipers in these parts are most likely to be the Prairie Rattlesnake, found at elevations under 5000 feet. It is not a particularly aggressive animal but you should treat any rattlesnake with respect and keep your distance. A rattler's colors may vary but they are recognized by the namesake rattle on the tail and a diamond-shaped head. Unless cornered or teased by humans, a rattlesnake will crawl away and avoid striking. Avoid rocky areas, crevasses, caves, and areas where the ground cover (weed or grass) prevents you from seeing the ground. These are all places where snakes



are likely to hang out. If you hear a nearby rattle, stop immediately and hold your dog back. Identify where the snake is and slowly back away. If you or your dog is bitten, do not panic but get to a hospital or veterinarian with as little physical movement as possible. In many cases the Prairie rattlesnake might give "dry bites" where no poison is injected, but you should always check with a doctor after a bite even if you feel fine. Keep in mind that snakes fill an important function in the ecosystem; without them we would drown in mice and other rodents, so there is no reason to harm them.

🐾 **Mountain Lions**

These elusive big cats are extremely shy and are rarely seen. Mountain lions are fearful of humans but dogs don't frighten them. Still, they might view smaller dogs as prey - one more reason to always keep your dog close on the trail. They are nocturnal animals but if you see one, maintain eye contact, try to make loud noises and attempt to make yourself appear as large as possible.

🐾 **Old Mine Shafts**

There are abandoned mines all over the Black Hills and dogs have fallen down an uncovered shaft from time to time. Many are not marked, so be careful when straying from established recreation areas.

*How To Pet A Dog*

*Tickling tummies slowly and gently works wonders. Never use a rubbing motion; this makes dogs bad-tempered. A gentle tickle with the tips of the fingers is all that is necessary to induce calm in a dog. I hate strangers who go up to dogs with their hands held to the dog's nose, usually palm towards themselves. How does the dog know that the hand doesn't hold something horrid? The palm should always be shown to the dog and go straight down to between the dog's front legs and tickle gently with a soothing voice to accompany the action. Very often the dog raises its back leg in a scratching movement, it gets so much pleasure from this.*

*-Barbara Woodhouse*

## ***Low Impact Hiking With Your Dog***

Everytime you hike with your dog on the trail, you are an ambassador for all dog owners. Some people you meet won't believe in your right to take a dog on the trail. Be friendly to all and make the best impression you can by practicing low impact hiking with your dog:

- 🐾 Pack out everything you pack in.
- 🐾 Do not leave dog scat on the trail; if you haven't brought plastic bags for poop removal, bury it away from the trail and topical water sources.
- 🐾 Hike only where dogs are allowed.
- 🐾 Stay on the trail.
- 🐾 Do not allow your dog to chase wildlife.
- 🐾 Step off the trail and wait with your dog while horses and other hikers pass.
- 🐾 Do not allow your dog to bark - people are enjoying the trail for serenity.
- 🐾 Have as much fun on your hike as your dog does.

## Outfitting Your Dog For A Hike

These are the basics for taking your dog on a hike:

- ▶ **Collar.** It should not be so loose as to come off but you should be able to slide your flat hand under collar.
- ▶ **Identification Tags.**
- ▶ **Bandanna.** Brightly colored neckwear can help distinguish your dog from game in hunting season.
- ▶ **Leash.** Leather lasts forever but if there's water in your dog's future, consider quick-drying nylon. Retractable leads allow your dog to range up to 26 feet while you still maintain control.

🐾 *I want my dog to help carry water, snacks and other supplies on the trail. How do I choose a dog pack?*

To select an appropriate dog pack, measure your dog's girth around the rib cage to determine the best pack size. A dog pack should fit securely without hindering the dog's ability to walk normally.

🐾 *How does a dog wear a pack?*

The pack, typically with cargo pouches on either side, should ride as close to the shoulders as possible without limiting movement. The straps that hold the dog pack in place should be situated where they will not cause chafing.

🐾 *Will my dog wear a pack?*

Wearing a dog pack is no more obtrusive than wearing a collar, although some dogs will take to a pack easier than others. Introduce the pack by draping a towel over your dog's back in the house and then having him wear an empty pack on short walks. Progressively add some crumpled newspaper and then bits of clothing. Fill the pack with treats and reward your dog from the stash. Soon he will associate the dog pack with an outdoor adventure and will eagerly look forward to wearing it.

🐾 *How much weight can I put into a dog pack?*

Many dog packs are sold by weight recommendations. A healthy, well-conditioned dog can comfortably carry 25% to 33% of its body weight. Breeds prone to back problems or hip dysplasia should not wear dog packs. Consult your veterinarian before stuffing the pouches with gear.

🐾 *What are good things to put in a dog pack?*

Low density items such as food and poop bags are good choices. Ice cold bottles of water can cool your dog down on hot days. Don't put anything in a dog pack that can break. Dogs will bang the pack on rocks and trees when they wiggle through tight spots in the trail. Dogs also like to lie down in creeks and other wet spots so seal items in plastic bags. A good use for dog packs on day hikes is trail maintenance - your dog can pack out trash left by inconsiderate visitors before you.

🐾 *Are dog booties a good idea?*

Dog booties can be an asset, especially for the occasional canine hiker whose paw pads have not become toughened. Hiking boots for dogs are designed to prevent pads from cracking while trotting across rough surfaces. Used in winter, dog booties provide warmth and keep ice balls from forming between toe pads when hiking through snow.

## ***Outfitting Yourself For A Hike***

These are the basics for taking on any hike in the Black Hills:

- ▶ **Water.** Plenty of water for you and your dog. It is a good habit to keep an extra bottle in your car, in case you run out of water towards the end of the trail.
- ▶ **Sunblock.** The sun can be scorching in the summer, and higher altitudes enable sunburn to sneak up on you all the easier. Bright winter days can cause a quick burn from reflections off the snow.
- ▶ **First Aid Kit.** Simple items such as bandages and ointments for treatment in the field.
- ▶ **Insect Repellent.**
- ▶ **Food/snacks.** Especially for longer, more strenuous hikes.
- ▶ **Plastic Bags.** Useful for collecting trash and leftovers and keeping things dry.
- ▶ **Navigational Aids.** A compass and a map, preferably a topographic map, are musts on wilderness hikes.
- ▶ **Flashlight.**
- ▶ **Matches.** Keep in a waterproof container.
- ▶ **Emergency Clothing.** A light raincoat or warm coat/sweater may be appropriate.

It is also a good idea to bring a cell phone for emergencies. You may not have coverage everywhere, but it will probably be easier to make it to a nearby hilltop where you can get reception than going all the way back to your car. Another great item to have is a GPS (global positioning system) device. This pocket-sized computer can tell you exactly where you are at all times, and can be very helpful if you intend to leave the blazed paths to do some exploring on your own.

Some general precautions on the trail:

- ▶ Always let someone know where you are going and how long you expect to be out. Instruct that person to contact authorities if you are not back by a certain time.
- ▶ If you get lost, stay calm and stay put. Prioritize keeping warm and dry. Do not start off randomly - the closer you are to the trail, the easier it will be for help to find you.
- ▶ Get sturdy, high-quality hiking boots. These will help stabilize the foot to prevent sprains and may offer some protection against snake bites.
- ▶ Respect posted notes and ranger instructions. If they have closed a trail, it is probably for a good reason.

*“Dog. A kind of additional or subsidiary Deity  
designed to catch the overflow and surplus  
of the world’s worship.”*

*-Ambrose Bierce*

## ***Camping With Your Dog***

Many of the trail areas in the Black Hills have campsites right there, along with miles of hiking trails, so it is natural you might want to spend the night after a long day on the trails. If you decide to camp with your dog, here are some tips:

- 🐾 Camp only in areas that are approved by the U. S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the local government administering the campground / park.
- 🐾 Be sure your dog is wearing I.D. tags, and has all current shots.
- 🐾 Take along plenty of food and water.
- 🐾 Have private sleeping arrangements, and camp in a shady area.
- 🐾 Don't let your dog run loose in the campsite.
- 🐾 If your dog swims, make sure he has a way out of the water. Dogs can drown because they try to climb out a bank or ledge that is too steep for them.
- 🐾 Rinse off your dog with fresh water when you are done hiking and / or camping, and look for ticks and fleas.

## ***The Other End Of The Leash***

Leash laws are like speed limits - everyone seems to have a private interpretation of their validity. Some dog owners never go outside with an unleashed dog; others treat the laws as suggestions or disregard them completely. It is not the purpose of this book to tell dog owners where to go to evade the leash laws or reveal the parks where rangers will look the other way at an unleashed dog. Nor is it the business of this book to preach vigilant adherence to the leash laws. Nothing written in a book is going to change people's behavior with regard to leash laws. So this will be the last time leash laws are mentioned, save occasionally when we point out the parks where dogs are welcomed off leash.



# ***The Best of the Best...***

## ***The 10 Best Places To Hike With Your Dog In the Black Hills Region***

### **Blue Ribbon - Fort Meade Recreation Area**

Trailheads connect to the rugged Centennial Trail and lead into the backcountry of Fort Meade Recreation Area where there is plenty of running for your dog on the rolling grounds of the one-time cavalry post. You can choose from rambles through wooded lowlands or hill climbing through Ponderosa pine forests.

### **#2 - Mirror Lakes and Cox Lake**

A great place for canine hikers who chafe at the confinement of formal trails. Wide open fields and meadows are playgrounds for your dog and there is superb dog paddling in the spring-fed lakes.

### **#3 - Rapid City Off-Leash Parks**

The biggest city in the Black Hills maintains 1500 acres of parkland and several locations - Wilderness Park, the Braeburn Addition, and Robbinsdale Park - permit dogs to run off-leash.

### **#4 - Harney Range Trails**

Harney Peak is the highest point in America between the Rocky Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean and dogs can make the climb to the summit. Dogs aren't allowed on Mount Rushmore but you can see the back of the national monument from here.

### **#5 - Flume Trail**

This National Recreation Trail has a bit of everything for the canine hiker: scenic views, a variety of routes, a bit of history and lots of swimming available (at Sheridan Lake and Spring Creek). Dogs are allowed to hike the Flume Trail off-leash on National Forest lands.