

A Bark In The Park -

**The 45 Best Places
To Hike With Your
Dog In The
El Paso/Las Cruces
Region**

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Cruden Bay Books

for Chris and Cooper

A BARK IN THE PARK: THE 45 BEST PLACES TO HIKE
WITH YOUR DOG IN THE EL PASO/LAS CRUCES
REGION

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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

A few months ago, my husband Chris and my dad were visiting Albuquerque, New Mexico, the city where I lived for the first eight years of my life. As they drove into the Sandia Mountains, Dad told Chris that when he started agitating to take us kids hiking, he and my mother devised a rule: they wouldn't take us on really long hikes until we were at least six, old enough to handle the distance. "Jessica broke that rule!" Dad told Chris.

When I was just four, Dad and I hiked from the foothills of the Sandia Mountains to Sandia Peak and then down the other side of the mountain to Aunt Sandy and Uncle Al's house on the other side of the mountain. I remember vividly my mother dropping Dad and me off in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains and watching for the little splotches of orange paint that marked the trail. I remember stopping along the way to eat my mother's oatmeal chocolate chip cookies and drinking chicken bouillon at the top of the Sandias, among the pine trees, my dad having boiled the water on a tiny gas burner.

Dad was a geologist, so my brothers and I grew up camping and hiking in such cool places as the Badlands of South Dakota and Wyoming, hunting for fossils. We found something once, some pig's teeth, which Dad left for a scientist he knew at a museum. The lady at the museum gave me a small pink plastic purse with fake little girl lipsticks in exchange for the fossils. It didn't seem like a fair exchange to me.

We never took our dogs hiking. On occasion, they'd go on vacations with us, so they'd end up camping with us, but I don't remember any hikes when our dogs were "on the trail" with us.

We grew up as outdoors people, but never the kind of outdoors people that had a lot of money for fancy equipment. Geologists a) never have money, b) make do with what they've got and c) care more about rocks than camping equipment.

Who cares what you must sleep on as long as you can spend all day running around the mountain with little hammers? I'm not making fun; I'm a little jealous, actually.

A few years ago, when I was living in upstate New York and spending most of my time in the library as a graduate student in history, I decided I wanted to move back West, where I'd lived the first twenty-five years of my life. I wanted a dog and a Jeep Cherokee. I wanted to take my dog hiking all the time. I wanted to be one of those cool twenty-some-things who do a lot of rock climbing and have a well-behaved dog and a great SUV and live in Seattle.

I have the dog now - Cooper - but the SUV will have to wait. Cooper, Chris and I head to the hills in our handy-dandy Toyota Tercel. And Cooper is, fortunately, perfectly behaved off the leash! Hence, I'm always glad when I stumble onto BLM managed land and can let Cooper run wild and free. So now we live here in El Paso, Texas - hardly a cool city for young people, but it has its perks, among them the cost of living.

Cooper is, ahem, our child. We literally take him everywhere. Chris takes him to work almost every day. We take him hiking on weekends. Cooper, like any typical Yellow Lab under three years old, is either full-blast energy - running and leaping and uncontained (unless restrained by the leash, of course) - or sleeping on our bed, his favorite spot in the house.

I'd like to say that I had a systematic methodology for this book, but mostly, it was a good excuse to let Cooper tire out so he would behave at home. Also, it got me out into this land I love, the Chihuahuan Desert, which seems stark and barren to many people until they've lived here long enough to notice the little beauties along the way. Then I could dig around and find out about the history and geology that makes this place interesting.

One of my ulterior motives in writing this book was introducing Chris to the desert. Chris grew up in Massachusetts, then lived the cool twenty-something life in Seattle for four years before he married me. It has taken him a year to adjust to the desert, but he is beginning to see the subtle and stark beauty here, which is very different from the overwhelming, majestic, and very obvious beauty of the Northwest. At risk of alienating my husband, who thinks Seattle has the perfect weather, I think Cooper loves the desert southwest more than the wet northwest. At least, he never wanted to go out when it rained there, which is a problem considering how frequently it rains. He loves water, but not the kind that falls from the sky.

Oh, by the way, Cooper was named for Chris's favorite author, James Fenimore Cooper. Our next pet, when Cooper can handle a sibling, will be a black cat named - you guessed it -Poe.

-Jessica

"Happiness is dog-shaped"
- Chapman Pincher

Preface

The Land. This book is about taking your dog to hike in the desert, a stark land with little vegetation and fewer trees. To really appreciate the beauty of this land, stop looking at the landscape and notice the panorama: strange mountain shapes, layers of rock, plants that survive in the desert, and small creatures busy at work, such as ants carrying the husk of a baby lizard.

This region of the Southwest is dominated by the Rio Grande Rift or the Rio Grande Valley. For thousands of years, American Indians lived here in pueblos or caves, first as hunter-gatherers and then as farmers. In the El Paso region, archeologists believe that the Suma, Manso and Jumano Indians arrived around 1200 B.C. They survived by hunting animals, gathering nuts and berries, and farming. The Rio Grande, then a vast river, sustained these early agricultural efforts, as well as providing fish for the local diet.

Life changed in 1535 with the arrival of Europeans. The Spanish conquistador, Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, along with two other Spaniards and the Moorish slave Estebanico, wandered into the region where modern day El Paso and Las Cruces are today. They were traveling to fulfill Cabeza de Vaca's quest to know the land from Florida to the Rio de las Palmas. The travelers carried tales of this land to the Spaniards they met, triggering the conquest of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1598, the Spanish Conquistador Juan de Oñate arrived on the banks of the Rio Grande near present-day El Paso, straggling up through the Chihuahua Desert from Mexico City. The Rio Grande was the first water the conquistadors had seen in many days and they went crazy with joy. Two men drank until their bellies burst and they died, while the stream carried two horses away. The American Indians who lived here, the Manso, were friendly, so the Conquistadors sank to their knees in thankfulness and gave a tremendous feast, which, historians have argued, is the very *first* European Thanksgiving on American soil.

The Environment. To understand the geology of the Rio Grande Rift Valley, you must first understand the theory of plate tectonics. According to this theory, the upper part of the earth's crust is broken into twelve large, rigid plates. Several smaller plates are scattered among these twelve large plates. The plates are not stationary; rather, they move slowly about, combining with or breaking apart from other plates. Earthquakes and volcanic activity provide evidence for the movement of the plates.

The North American plate - which stretches from the mid-Atlantic Ridge to the Pacific Coast - has been drifting westward for hundreds of millions of years, widening the Atlantic Ocean. In New Mexico, two parts of the North American plate appear to be separating, creating the Rio Grande Rift Valley. This valley is similar to the Rift Valley in eastern Africa.

As the crust in the North American plate stretched, it thinned and cracked, creating faults. Along these faults, blocks of the earth fell to create a series of valleys and a series of mountain ranges, a topography known as Basin and Range. This topography begins along the Sacramento and Guadalupe Mountains and characterizes much of the West, including southwestern New Mexico, Arizona, and states to the North. The Rio Grande River follows a series of these valleys from Southern Colorado down through El Paso and on southward.

Distance To Drive To These Hikes

From either El Paso or Las Cruces, it takes from 30 minutes to one hour to drive to most of the hikes and parks included in this book. However, because there are so few people in the West, distances can be deceiving. For one thing, the interstate highway system gets you to a hike much faster than driving the same distance in the East or along California's crowded freeways. Yet, at the same time, many of the most solitary hikes in this book (like those on Bureau of Land Management land) are reached via desolate county roads or unimproved dirt roads. Though the distance may be shorter than a hike reached by the interstate, the actual driving time can be longer because of the access roads involved. A variety of hikes within (Western-style) reasonable distances are included. Also, to suggest a few canine hikes in non-desert environments, walks in the Gila (HEE-la) Wilderness and the Lincoln National Forest are in the book.

*"What counts is not necessarily the size of the dog in the fight
but the size of the fight in the dog."
- Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Cautionary Words To Carry Into The Desert

Hiking in southern New Mexico and west Texas means hiking in a desert environment. If you are unused to hiking in general, or used to hiking in mountainous regions or cool climates, you can easily find yourself in trouble unless you heed some simple common-sense precautions.

Avoid hiking in June or July


The optimum hiking period here is August through May. If you must hike in June and July, stick to the early morning or evening. Daytime heat is blistering, and it is dangerous to be out in direct sun exercising for long hours. Even if *you* can stand the heat, chances are your dog - with no sweat glands and only an inefficient system of panting to disperse body heat - can not. Although desert heat is dry, most of these hikes provide few, if any, trees for shade and little or no water for swimming or drinking. Hiking in this kind of heat may not only give your dog heat stroke, but she may burn the pads on her paws on the hot sand or scorching cement.

Bring plenty of water, no matter how cold it seems when you set out


The desert is dry, dry, dry, and it is unlikely you will encounter water anywhere along your route. If there are three of us (Cooper, me, and my husband), we carry two gallons of water for a 2-3 hour hike. Sometimes we drink it all, and sometimes we don't, but it is always better in the desert to bring more water than you need. If you have a big dog who drinks more than his share, get him a pack so he can carry his own water.

Be prepared for varying temperatures

The desert is an environment of extremes, which includes fluctuation in temperature. In the winter, the temperature can dip well below freezing at night, even reaching single-digit temperatures, and then climb to 60 or 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the day. Summer temperatures can dip to 50 degrees at night, seeming quite cool, and then reach over 100 degrees during the day.

 **Wear sunscreen and a hat**

Always, always.

 **Avoid arroyos, ditches, and washes when it is raining**

Flash floods occur in the desert after significant rainfall. Water cascades down from the mountains; arroyos that have been dry for years can fill to the brim within seconds. Though flash floods are rare, they occur without warning. *Please take this caution seriously.* Hiking in arroyos is perfectly safe when it is not raining, but forego hiking plans if it is, especially if you see thunderclouds and rain in nearby mountain ranges. Almost every year, somebody in or around El Paso dies in a flash flood. El Paso and Las Cruces receive less than 10 inches of rainfall annually, most of it falling during the month of August, when the desert monsoons hit.

 **Keep an eye out for rattlesnakes, scorpions, centipedes and black widow spiders**

I make this statement with caution, realizing that some folks will be scared of hiking in the desert because they are afraid of snakes. I want to emphasize one point, however: in all the weeks and months of hiking to research this book, and in all the years of desert hiking that I did growing up here with a geologist father, the only snakes, scorpions, or spiders I ever encountered were in my own backyard.


 **A word about rattlesnakes**

During the months of December, January, and February, rattlesnakes hibernate so you won't encounter them. During the summer months, they generally emerge only at night because they can't regulate their body temperature and the heat is too intense. During spring and autumn, however, you may see them during the day. Unless cornered or teased by humans, a rattlesnake will crawl away and avoid striking. If you are hiking in remote regions outlined in this book at any time other than winter, wear protective clothing. 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. Stick to trails and roads. It's always a good idea to buy


a snakebite kit at the local camping or sports store. If you encounter a snake, scold your dog severely (or use whatever method you normally use to train her.) Terry Chandler, a professional snake-avoidance trainer, lives in Las Cruces and will train dogs and horses to stay away from rattlesnakes. It is worth the \$50 he charges, especially if you like hiking in the remote places mentioned in this book, because your dogs will be “snake-broke” for life. He can be reached at (505) 382-5231.

 **Other animals to watch out for**

These include bears (especially in the Lincoln National Forest) and mountain lions. Steve Stochaj, who has worked on the Search and Rescue Team in Las Cruces for seven years, says bears will stay away as long as you make plenty of noise. Mountain lions are usually only a concern at night, but he suggests that you keep your dog close to you since mountain lions are afraid of people but not afraid of dogs.

 **Stay away from old mines**

As you hike in the mountainous regions, you may encounter old mine shafts. They are fragile, could collapse, and may contain toxic gases.

 **Hunting minerals or removing plant species from federally owned land or state parks is prohibited**

Although cacti may seem prolific out in the desert, many species are endangered, and thus, protected in their natural environment. Do not remove them. The penalties can be quite severe if you are caught.

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 region around El Paso and Las Cruces 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, such as a retriever or a spaniel. 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.

🐾 **Weather**

Heat and sun 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.

🐾 **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.

*"He is very imprudent, a dog is. He never makes it
his business to inquire whether you are in the
right or in the wrong, never bothers
as to whether you are going up or down
upon's life ladder, never asks whether you are
rich or poor, silly or wise, sinner or saint."*

- Jerome K. Jerome

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.** 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.

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 around El Paso and Las Cruces 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. Many trails in the desert, especially hillside routes, involve rocky terrain. In some places, broken glass abounds. 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.

"Dogs' lives are too short. Their only fault, really"
- Agnes Sligh Turnbull

The Desert Canine Hiking Kit

Even when taking short hikes it is a good idea to have some basics available for emergencies (as recommended by Dr. Mark Lennox, Crossroads Animal Clinic):

- 🐾 Bandage material, vet wrap, cotton padding. If your dog burns or abrades his paws on hot or abrasive surfaces, you can pad his feet so he can walk.
- 🐾 Antihistamine. If your dog is bitten by a snake or stung by a bee or wasp, give them antihistamine, about a milligram per pound.
- 🐾 Cortisone tablets or aspirin as an anti-inflammatory. Dr. Lennox recommends that you talk to your veterinarian about which anti-inflammatory to take along for your dog.
- 🐾 Needle nose pliers. Use these for plucking out stickers or cactus spines.
- 🐾 Your veterinarian's phone number.

*"If there are no dogs in Heaven,
then when I die I want to go where they went."
- Anonymous*

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.

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 I point out the parks where dogs are welcomed off leash.

As a general rule, dogs should be kept on a leash in all city and state parks. (You will be fined if caught violating this rule.) On land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (clearly indicated in each hike), you may let dogs off the leash unless otherwise indicated at the hiking trail itself.

"And sometimes when you'd get up in the middle of the night you'd hear the reassuring thump, thump of her tail on the floor, letting you know that she was there and thinking of you."
- William Cole

Difficulty Rating

I have provided a “difficulty rating” of between “1” and “4” for each hike. A 1 indicates that the hike is easy to reach by highway or city roads and easy to traverse. A 2 indicates that the hike is easy to reach by highway or city roads but provides a more strenuous hike. A 3 indicates that the hike may be difficult to reach, using dirt or other un-graded roads, but the hike is easy or moderate and easily done in a day’s trip. A 4 indicates that the hike may be difficult to reach and difficult to find and you should have an adventurous and intrepid spirit to attempt it.



An Important Website

The following link takes you to a website with links to various Department of the Interior Geological Survey quad maps of many of the hiking areas in this book. It is a great resource and if you plan to enjoy the hiking around El Paso and Las Cruces, you should learn how to read quad maps. You can view them for free at 125 dpi resolution, or you can order them at 250 dpi directly from the website:

<http://www.topowest.com/main.html>

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

The Best of the Best...

The 10 Best Places To Hike With Your Dog In the El Paso-Las Cruces Area

Blue Ribbon - Gila National Forest

America's first designated wilderness area features an incredible 3.3 million acres of unlimited canine hiking adventure. The variety of hikes include desert wilderness, forest lands, lakes, and aspen-covered peaks (reaching a height of 11,000 feet). The Mimbres Mogollon American Indians, who are known especially for their classic "black on white" pottery, left abundant evidence of their presence within the Gila, including spectacular cliff dwellings.

#2 - Lincoln National Forest

Your dog will find the home of Smokey the Bear much to her liking as well. There are more than one million acres in the Lincoln National Forest to explore, including desert canyons, cool pine forests and mountain peaks more than two miles high.

#3 - Rio Grande River

The levees running along the El Paso-Las Cruces section of the thousand-mile long international boundary that is the Rio Grande River are flat and wide and provide plenty of space for dogs to run around. This is easy canine hiking with plenty of opportunity to enjoy views of the mesa and surrounding mountain ranges.

#4 - Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

Still a developing recreation area, the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park offers an intriguing trail through the jagged Doña Ana Mountains but canine hikers can expand their day in this 960-acre park by heading for the hills as well.

#5 - Franklin Mountain State Park

With 24,000 acres of desert wilderness, Franklin Mountain is the largest state park entirely within city limits in the United States. Your dog can enjoy any length of romp through these billion year-old rocks.