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PAW'S CORNER

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By Sam Mazotta

Tips for hiking with your pet

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: How do I know if my 18-month-old dog is ready to tackle a moderate to difficult hike? I'd like to take "Tab" along on a hike in the White Mountains this summer. — Jack T. in Boston

DEAR JACK: Every dog is different, even energetic dogs that love to be outdoors. Plus, there are other factors to consider before taking your dog on a hike.

Energy level: Is your dog an outdoorsy type who loves to romp and play? Does he already take long walks with you (2 to 3 miles)?

Training: Does your dog respond well to commands? Importantly, does he come immediately when called? Is he well-trained to the leash or does he tug on it?

Socialization: How does your dog react around other dogs — especially strange ones — and people? If he's calm and friendly, that's a great sign. If he's defensive, reactive or aggressive, that's not good.

Health: Does your dog have any known health issues? Does he take medication regularly?

Tab sounds like a young, healthy dog, so the last factor may not be a problem at all. But you should evaluate his training, socialization and overall fitness before tackling a long, difficult hike.

He is at an age where you can start walking him longer distances. Younger dogs have hard limits on how far they can go because their bones are still developing. Start training for the hike by tackling shorter, easy trails in your area. Gradually increase difficulty and distance, and gauge how well he progresses.

Finally, check the rules for bringing dogs on trails in the White Mountains. Most allow them, but always on-leash and under control.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.