

Doing the Dog Paddle

by Sherry Ballou Hanson



Richard Ehrlich and Tobler enjoy a leisurely paddle in Ontario. You pretty much get the kind of experience based on the kind of Lab you have in the boat: calm and quiet, or a thrill ride.

Just because your Lab loves the water and you love your Lab doesn't necessarily mean that a kayak or canoe trip is going to be even sweeter with your furry pal tagging along. You first need to master the boat before taking your Lab, and the best way to do that is to take a lesson or three from a reputable outfitter. Even on a lazy river, you could run into what Lonnie Olson, founder

and director of Dog Scouts of America did. Once while canoeing she hit a "fast spot" on a river and capsized. Her Lab had to swim upstream against a strong current to get to back to Lonnie, but because of good training, the dog dug in and made the swim. And while kayaking with Lonnie another afternoon, the dog ran off into the woods trying to meet up with Lonnie downstream and gave her owner a fright.

Donnie Roaf often takes his yellow Lab, Zanzibar, kayaking in Scorton Creek in Sandwich, Massachusetts. Being an engineer, he thought to build a platform on the front of his boat for Zanzibar, but as he found out, "Trying to place a flat piece of plywood on an oval kayak doesn't work." So Zanzibar rides along in the cockpit with Donnie, sitting between his legs, and returning there all wet and happy after her adventures swimming, crabbing, and "horrifying other creek goers."



Barb Campbell and Richard Ehrlich are careful about where they take Tobler, making sure of the dangers in the area and leaving the dog home if necessary.

Needless to say, Zanzibar gets pretty hyper when she sees Donnie loading up the kayaks for an outing.

What to Buy

You need the right boat if you're going to take your Lab along, and according to Lisa Peterson, Communications Director of the American Kennel Club, that boat, for kayakers, is 14-feet with an open cockpit. Then your dog can sit between your legs facing forward and can even lie down. One of those sleek model kayaks with the small cockpit and fancy portholes is fine for a little Schnauzer, but as Lisa says, "An eighty- to one-hundred-pound Lab just will not fit in." Whether you choose an

inexpensive plastic kayak or something more sophisticated, be sure to get the open deck model. And pretty much any canoe will work.

It sounds like a strange suggestion for such a waterphilic breed, but get your Lab a life jacket, and be sure to wear your own. It should be a bright color, just in case the pooch goes overboard and bonks her head. Not everyone puts a life jacket on their dog, but it is a must if you're going into rough or fast water, or if the dog is a less experienced swimmer. Fast water with a dog in the boat is a no-no anyway, unless you are an expert. But maybe she likes to swim in the calm shallow river or creek, and you let her do so in shallow water with you in the boat alongside. The jacket will allow her to swim longer without getting tired, and if she were to tire, you could use the harness to help her into the boat. Lonnie's dog wears a harness, which she can use to help her out of the water, and a leash hooks onto the harness, never onto the collar.

What to Bring

A Lab's thoughts never stray far from food, and doggie snacks and water are a necessity for most paddlers who are traveling with their dogs. If you're camping overnight, you need a bag of his food in an airtight container to avoid nasty incidents with wildlife. Drinking water may be right in the lake or river where you are paddling, but then again, do you want your dog to get diarrhea or some

other awful affliction? And never allow your Lab to drink salt water or you will be guaranteed an unhappy dog with the runs.

Things can happen on trips, even day trips, so take along a first aid kit for the boat. And remember to include sunscreen for any pink pigment or bare spots on her face. Water reflects the sun's rays on the dog just as it does to you, so be thoughtful and protect her.

Last but not least, you may want to bring along some baggies to pick up after yourself, depending on where you are going. "Just go deep in the woods behind a tree and let nature work at it, or if you want to be tidy, bury it off to the side," says AKC's Lisa Peterson. But some



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Whether you choose an inexpensive plastic kayak or something more sophisticated, be sure to get the open deck model.

locations, islands in particular, may require you to carry out when you bring in; in that case bring resealable bags.

What to Keep in Mind

If your dog is not trained to stay in your boat on command, she will not know which side of the kayak to exit first if she sees a duck or another traveling pooch. And you could be in big trouble. “The Labrador retriever is a natural at waiting for the signal to retrieve a bird, so if you just give her a ‘sit and stay’ command in the kayak, she should stay put until you give her the release signal,” says Peterson.

Depending on where you take your next water adventure, keep in mind that all Labs like to play, so if you are tired of throwing a stick, bring along a toy for shoretime, especially if you are in a remote area. Don’t let the dog roam free, as there could be a wildlife encounter. Barb Campbell and her husband Richard Ehrlich of Ontario, Canada, kayak on Georgian Bay, but they do *not* take their two Labs, Mocha and Tobler, on those trips. *Blastomycosis*, a fungus infection, is rampant along some shorelines. The dogs are probably not happy about missing the trips, but they get to go in the big canoe when Barb and Richard head elsewhere for the day or camp overnight.

Camping is heaven for a Lab – all those fresh new

scents, the possibility of a nice rotten fish to roll in, chasing ducks and crabs, you name it. Lonnie’s Zanzibar loves to go crabbing, but all games have rules. And Barb, a wilderness camper, has some good suggestions for anyone thinking of taking the pooch on an overnight trip.

- Check the campsite immediately for broken glass, chicken bones, shards of tin cans, and other potentially dangerous trash.
- Bring something for your Lab to sleep on or she will try to dig her own hole. Barb and Richard use an old sleeping bag in their tent, though Mocha and Tobler are not above sneaking onto Barb and Richard’s sleeping pad if one of the humans gets up in the night! Don’t forget a towel or two to dry them off before they crash the tent.
- Don’t leave your dog loose at night or he may decide to duke it out with a skunk or a bear. If your dog sleeps outside the tent, tie him up.
- Consider putting a bell on your dog when she is roaming around during daylight hours; the hope here is that she will ward off any wildlife and avoid trouble all around.

Do your homework, brush up on your training, pack your bags... and have a great time!

