

To Bring Your Dog or Not to Bring Your Dog

12/5/2014



Learn where you can and cannot bring your furry friends, and why.

Dogs are often called “man’s best friend,” and many of us have canine companions who have wiggled their way into our hearts and lives, but when looking for a chance to hit the trails with your dog, it is important to remember where dogs are allowed, or not, within the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks, and important to understand why.

It is a common question: “Where can I go hiking with my dog?” Dogs are not permitted in nature preserve or wilderness areas that are managed for the benefit of local wildlife. However, there are plenty of park trails where dogs are allowed (on leashes, of course), including the Quail Hill Loop Trail in the City of Irvine.

The Quail Hill Trailhead, at 34 Shady Canyon Drive, marks the entrance to this fairly easy 2-mile trail through acres of open space at the foot of Quail Hill. This loop trail features a self-guided cell phone audio tour where hikers can dial in and hear naturalists explain important features along the trail.

Another good choice for dog-friendly trails are the regional parks operated by OC Parks. Irvine Regional Park and Peters Canyon Regional Park offer particularly great trails to explore with your dog. Leashed dogs are also allowed on Black Star Road in Silverado Canyon and on the paved paths and boardwalks at Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve and Crystal Cove State Park.

While many people would love to be able to bring their canine friends to share in

adventures on other trail systems on the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks, there are good reasons why dogs are not permitted on much of this protected land.

You might forget while snuggling with your 6-pound Chihuahua, but dogs are predators. Studies have shown that wildlife like bobcats, deer and other animals can become stressed when they smell an intruding dog, and will actively avoid places that a dog has marked. This can make it harder for wildlife to find food, water or shelter.

Scents left behind by domestic dogs, which can linger for days, can disrupt territorial gray foxes and coyotes that might be scared out of an otherwise appropriate habitat. Dogs can also scare away native birds, like the California Quail, from their nests, sometimes resulting in the death of young chicks.

It's not only the impact on the land and the wildlife, but the risk to your dog that makes this policy an important one. Dogs can pick up ticks along wilderness trails that can potentially carry Lyme disease and other diseases. Rattle snakes can also pose a serious problem to dogs, who might be more prone to investigate a rattlesnake than a human would be. And while dogs are immune to poison oak, they can easily rub against the plant and transfer toxic oils from their fur to you and your family.

Please enjoy the preserved open space of the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks while respecting the rules about restricting dogs (on leash) to appropriate and approved places. Sticking to dog-friendly trails helps local wildlife thrive.