

## Tales Along the Trails

**Trail running with your dog is an exciting adventure.**

*James Keldsen*

As the morning sun spread across the land, we were two miles into our run. The sun's warmth and fresh air were invigorating, and we picked up our pace. A new day was breaking, and the world came to life. Reflections of stately trees reflected off the lake through gaps in the fog. Stark white swans awakened from their night's sleep far offshore. Several small woodpeckers searched for breakfast on a tree's bark. It was another life-affirming experience courtesy of a trail run with my favorite running partner, Cub, a yellow Labrador Retriever.

Trail running with a dog is akin to mixing chocolate with peanut butter. Each is wonderful in its own right, but put them together and you reward yourself with something really special.

It is easy to argue that dogs make the best running partners: They are always ready to go, never complain, don't make excuses when feeling slow, and make you feel guilty when you try to justify letting a day's run slide.

Sheryl Krohne, DVM, an associate professor and head of ophthalmology at Purdue University's veterinary clinical science department, says that her dogs show true, unfettered love when they go trail running with her. "They aren't doing it to lose weight or stay in shape or get faster. It is just fun." That describes the perfect training partner.

Trail running has many benefits over other forms of running. The softer surfaces are easier on joints, vehicle dangers and exhaust are minimal, the views and solitude are mentally stimulating, and the list goes on. However, trail runners must become accustomed to running on uneven surfaces, across rocks, roots, and other trail hazards.

If your dog is a new running partner, it will take some time to adjust to running together. Krohne, who runs marathons for fun and has taken dogs on runs as long as 35 miles, recommends starting dogs out slowly with short runs, then gradually working them into longer runs. Every dog should have a veterinary checkup before starting a trail-running program.

The trail runner's fitness level and weekly mileage determine what type of dog is best to hit the trails with. However, there are some general guidelines. Krohne believes that giant breeds and miniatures are not well-suited for prolonged running. "Light-bodied dogs that have been bred for long distance use in hunting or working dogs are best." But there are always exceptions. Krohne knows of two Boston Terriers who were "serious long-distance runners." The key is to keep the running fun for both you and your dog.

You'll find running trails throughout the United States in national, state, and county parks. Hiking and bicycle clubs, rails-to-trails organizations, and metropolitan park districts work to convert abandoned railroads and other throughways to trails.

When out enjoying the trails, be a good representative of the dog-owning community. Obey posted trail rules, pick up after your dog, keep her leashed at all times, be considerate, and give way to other trail users. Time spent on the trails with your dog is time well spent.

James W. Keldsen is a member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America and enjoys many outdoor pursuits with his dogs.

For more information, visit [www.trailrunner.com](http://www.trailrunner.com).