Dogs make some of the finest hiking companions. Sadie hikes with her “driver” on the Yellow Aster Butte Trail.

The Northwest is blessed with so many places to venture in the outdoors—no matter what your skill level. And, for some, it’s so much more enjoyable when you have a four-legged companion to join you. The dogs I have seen on the trail seem so happy to be out roaming with their humans.

Having hiked for a number of years all around Washington and areas in British Columbia, my greatest enjoyment has been with my buddy Sadie. This was a she-devil golden retriever who, as a puppy, was a terror! But from her very first trip, being on the trail brought out her best. Taking to the trail meant the chance to be a dog—all that sniffing and exploring.

(Note: Sadie took her last hike in June 2007—she’s always with me in spirit.)

Hiking with a four-legged buddy is an all-season event, as long as you are prepared. Remember, dogs are subject to the same kind of environmental conditions that we are. Heat, cold, rain, snow, distance, elevation gain and terrain difficulty are all factors that need to be taken into consideration when you plan your trip. Sadie was a devoted companion (as is Gusto) and would do anything I asked of her, but sometimes that pushed her to the limits. Like the time I decided to do a trail run to the top of Mount Dickerman in August. Not real smart. She collapsed about a mile from the car on our way down. The combination of heat and insufficient water took its toll. We made it back fine, but I learned a lesson.

Some dogs are comfortable rock hopping and scrambling, but many are not. Sadie could climb higher and faster than I could, but I always worried about what would happen when she got to the top. Fortunately Sadie was quite confident on her feet and was cautious enough to pay attention. Not all dogs are able to do that—so know your dog’s limits.

Sadie (and Gusto) are water dogs so I always tried to plan a water route, especially during the summer. In the winter, the snow is an absolute treat. A dog’s fur is good protection, but short-haired, thin-coated dogs may not like the cold so much. Some people put “booties” on their dog’s paws in the winter or if they are taking them on rocky terrain. I don’t favor that approach, primarily because a dog’s paws and claws are their advantage and ability to grip the trail (or the snow and ice). Think about it:

Sadie’s Driver
Sadie’s Driver lives in Seattle, is a regular trip report poster at www.wta.org and spends many, many days hiking the Cascades and beyond, formerly with Sadie, and now with her buddy Gusto. She can be reached at sadie0925@yahoo.com.
You wouldn’t want to be on the ice without your crampons or Yaktrax. Dogs are the same way—they need traction. If you’re worried about snow getting between the dog’s toes, use petroleum jelly on the pad and between the toes. It works like a charm. Carry it with you if you need to reapply.

My four-legged buddies have traveled with me on a real variety of trips. There are lots and lots of trail guidebooks to help you find destinations and routes. Here are a few of our favorite hikes:

### Where to Play

**Relatively easy**

Off I-90 east of Seattle, there are lots of good choices. But note, north of I-90 in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, your dog should be on a leash. Trust me, you will be stopped by rangers (or disgruntled hikers who don’t enjoy dogs on the trail). Some trips to consider: Rattlesnake Ridge or, in the same area, Cedar Butte. There are also lots of adventures on Tiger Mountain—but since this gets so much traffic, I try to avoid the popular routes and head to the less-explored areas of Tiger. Talapus and Ollalie Lakes are relatively easy and good destinations almost any time of the year.

Fisher Lake. Another great U.S. 2 hike is Tunnel Creek to Hope and Mig Lakes.

**Moderate, statewide**

These involve a little more driving (if you live in the Puget Sound area) but are well worth the extra effort. Noble Knob and Norse Peak are just north of Mount Rainier. Near Mount Baker, try Welcome Pass, Excelsior, Hannegan Peak and Pass, and Yellow Aster Butte. Heading toward eastern Washington, Umtanum Ridge or Bird Song are great hikes. You also can’t go wrong with about anything in the Teanaway in the eastern Alpine Lakes region. Try Iron Peak (a fabulous place to glissade during the early spring), Miller, Hawkins, Fortune, Lake Anne or Navajo/Little Navajo, to name a few gems in the Teanaways.

**Difficult or more challenging**

Near Snoqualmie: Granite Mountain, McClellan Butte, Humpback, Silver, Kaleetan. Off the Mountain Loop Highway, Vesper and Sperry. For a real challenge, an ascent of Mount Adams.

There are so many places to go, and your 4-paw drive companion will thank you, whether you go 10 miles or 2 miles. The chance to get out away from pavement and people will be as good as any treat you could give your buddy!

—Sadie’s Driver
Few things match the pleasure of walking a mountain trail with your best friend, especially when that best friend is a sweet-natured, happy dog like Parka.

Since 1998, Parka has been my constant trail companion, joining me (and Donna) on nearly every hike—except, of course, the days we spent in national parks, where dogs are banned. With Parka as my inspiration, I launched The Mountaineers Books’ Best Hikes with Dogs series, and she assisted with all the field research on our own best-selling Best Hikes with Dogs: Western Washington—the inaugural book in the national series. With that book selling well, Parka went on to work as a model, selling a variety of dog products (from shampoos to canine packs and Therma-Rest dog beds) in catalogues like Early Winters, L.L. Bean and EMS.

For all her hard work as a trail-loving dog, though, Parka’s hiking life nearly ended before it got started. Just after turning six months old, Parka developed a limp. Our first vet—a specialist in hunting dogs and field trial champions—noted she had a genetic defect that left her with loose flaps of cartilage in her elbow joints. His recommendation: put her down and get a healthier pup.

Before we could say, “you’re fired,” we had a consultation with a new vet and a referral to a nationally acclaimed surgeon. That surgeon, Dr. Randy Ackers of Sun Valley Animal Hospital, performed orthopedic surgery to remove that defective cartilage in both front legs. He noted the joints would never perform at 100 percent, but that she should have a good, active life. Unfortunately, nine months later, we were back in Sun Valley having her rear legs treated for the dog equivalent of ACL tears—both tibias were misaligned with her femurs, leaving her with stressed knees. The cure: saw off the tops of the tibias, reposition them, and bolt them back into place (known as tibial plateau leveling).

So, before she was two years old, Parka had all four legs surgically repaired. Fortunately, her modeling career was doing well, and she paid for all that work herself! Even more importantly, the surgery was wildly successful. Within nine months of the last surgery, Parka was powering through 20-mile hikes and long, multi-day backpacking trips. Donna and I monitored her constantly, knowing that she was susceptible to injury and chronic arthritis in those weakened joints. While we kept an eye on her stride, we enjoyed hundreds of days on the trail with our best friend.

Dan A. Nelson
Dan is a WTA member, the former editor of Washington Trails magazine and author of Best Hikes with Dogs, Western Washington. He lives in Puyallup.
This winter, though, the day we feared came to pass. Parka’s persistent slight limp turned into a painful three-legged trudge. The thin band of scar cartilage that formed in her elbows was gone, worn to nothing. Those elbows now rub bone-on-bone, and her right elbow is a mass of bone spurs and torn tissue. Once a proud hiker capable of enjoying 20-mile days, she now struggles to get around the back yard on her own. Our constant trail companion is now a couch potato. She whines when she sees us carry our packs out the door, wanting to go with us. But she cries more when she tries to run to the vehicle to go with us. I can tolerate her whines of being left behind, but only because her cries of pain sear my soul.

At just ten years old, Parka is a retired hiker, fated to live her remaining days indoors, and her time left is likely measured now in months rather than years. She probably should have stopped hiking a season (or two) earlier to minimize the damage to those degrading joints. If we had shut down her hiking career earlier, she would have been miserable the last year or two, but she may have had less physical pain to deal with today.

Of course, that’s the dilemma all of us face: do we let our dogs (and for that matter, ourselves) go on enjoying the trail life as long as possible, even though it could mean a shorter life and more pain in the final days? Or do we retire them (and ourselves) early, giving more time at the end of life, but far less joy? Parka’s greatest joy in life is going where Donna and I go, doing what we do. She suffers pain in her legs today, but if we had kenneled her while we hiked, she would have suffered intolerable sorrow over those years. I had to make the decision for her, but I think she would agree: the quality of life enjoyed to date was far more important than having a few more months of restricted living down the road.

The life of an aging dog is in the hands of its owner, and each owner has to do what’s best for their companion. For the past decade, Parka has been my constant companion, my devoted hiking partner, and my very best friend. My dog, my friend, gave me her unconditional love and devotion. Now, it is time for me to devote myself to her, ensuring her last months are as comfortable as possible. After all she’s given me, I could do no less.

You’ve heard of multi-use trails... well, I have multi-use dogs. Whether I am hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing or snowshoeing, one or more of my dogs is likely to join me.

They are Inuit dogs—big, furry cousins of huskies and malamutes that excel at pulling heavy loads for long distances under extreme arctic conditions.

But my dogs lead a softer life. I tell them they are “working dogs,” but in reality they are my companions and my motivation for getting outside—I would rather endure wind, rain or cold than their guilt-provoking stares!

Our outings match the season and my mood. Sometimes I want a sedate walk—a short paved trail or our local arboretum. So I choose one “dog of the day” to accompany me on a leashed stroll. When all of us need exercise, I take the whole gang to a more remote area where off-leash dogs are permitted. I might hike or I

Sylvia’s Inuit dogs are active in all four seasons. In winter they pull sleds and accompany ski trips. In summer they hike and—pictured at left—pull a wheeled cart in the sand dunes of Oregon.

Sylvia is a writer and WTA member from Covington, WA.
might ride my mountain bike while the dogs pursue their own agendas, reading entire novels in all those smells of the woods.

These outings are generally more exercise for me than the dogs, so sometimes I turn the tables and hook my buddies to a dogcart. Their heritage comes alive, and they lean eagerly into their harnesses. They don’t even need a trail; my favorite place for carting is the Oregon dunes, where dog-powered vehicles are permitted in areas off-limits to motorized vehicles. I could spend hours on the dunes, ending the day with a sunset run along the beach.

Winter is my dogs’ favorite season. The first few spotty snowfalls, we just hike. The dogs enjoy the feel of new snow while I marvel at the scattered tracks—tiny, lacy trails interspersed with my dogs’ chunky paw- and nose-prints. As the snow gets deeper, I might get out the cross-country skis; if it’s really deep, snowshoes. But the best part of winter is dog sledding. Out come the sled and harnesses, and off we go. Our winter consists of a series of day trips and if I’m lucky, one or two overnight adventures, perhaps to eastern Washington or up into British Columbia. We might camp, or we might sled all day and then return to the comfort of a cabin or lodge at night.

Whatever the season, whatever the weather, I am grateful to my dogs for allowing me to explore and enjoy places I might otherwise never experience. ♦

What Are the Rules?

Rules for dogs vary from one land agency to another, but what doesn’t change is that dogs should always behave in a responsible manner. Even in areas where dogs are allowed off leash, your pet should always be under voice control—that is, that your dog will come when called. If your dog does not respond to your voice when you encounter another hiker on the trail, you should keep your dog on a leash. Here’s a rundown of some rules specific to certain lands across the state.

**National Parks** Dogs are prohibited on all trails in Mount Rainier and Olympic National Park. They are also prohibited on all trails in North Cascades National Park, with the exception of the Pacific Crest Trail. Dogs are also prohibited on beaches in Olympic National Park except at three locations: Rialto Beach 0.5 miles north to Ellen Creek; all Kalaloch beaches (from Ruby Beach south to South Beach); and the Peabody Creek Trail.

**National Forests** Dogs are generally permitted on all U.S. Forest Service trails. There are several areas, however, where dogs are not permitted or must be on a leash:

- **Enchantments and Ingalls Lake Trail** Because of heavy hiker use and the fragile ecosystem of these two areas of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, dogs are not allowed anywhere in the Enchantments Basin, and on the Ingalls Lake Trail (if you’re in the area, try the Esmeralda Basin Trail instead).

- **Alpine Lakes Wilderness and I-90 Corridor** There is much confusion about whether dogs are supposed to be on a leash on Forest Service trails in the I-90 corridor. According to the staff at the North Bend Ranger District, dogs must be on a leash on all trails within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in the I-90 corridor. On trails outside of the wilderness along I-90, dogs should be under strict voice control. The Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest website says that dogs must be on a leash anywhere within that forest’s portion of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. In the half of the Alpine Lakes within the Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest, dogs must be under voice control.

- **Washington State Department of Natural Resources** Most Washington State DNR trails, including Mount Si and Tiger Mountain, require that dogs be on a leash at all times.

- **Washington State Parks** According to the park website, dogs must always be on a leash. Dogs are not allowed at swimming beaches.

- **King County Parks** Dogs must be leashed on all King County trails, including Cougar Mountain Regional Park.

Rules and regulations can vary from trail to trail, so check at the trailhead for posted information. Or call the local ranger station: phone numbers can be found at www.wta.org and by clicking “Go Hiking” and “Ranger Station Info.”