

BACKPACKING WITH MY BOYKIN BEAU

What better way to celebrate my puppy's first birthday than for us to jump in the car, head to the North Carolina Tennessee border, throw packs on our backs, find the Appalachian Trail and go for "a walk in the woods." Since reading Bill Bryson's so named book several years ago, I have had a hankering to put my feet on the AT – that 2,175 mile trail that leads from Springer Mountain in north Georgia all the way to Mount Katahdin in Maine. All I needed was a traveling companion.

It took several years but I found one. He's one of Pat Watt's pups - a perky male Boykin Spaniel named Beau who, thankfully, didn't find the hunting fields interesting enough and so has come to live with me on the South Carolina coast. He arrived this September. With the leaves at their peak, an October trip to North Carolina seemed a great way to mark our first month together and the fact that he had generally learned to come when I whistled and not get out of sight too often – both commands that come in handy when taking a dog into the woods. Now his behavior on a leash is another story.

As Lowcountry types, neither of us knew much about "gaining altitude." This trip would require a bit of preparation. By the week of our departure we were running three to six miles a day and had even run the Cooper River Bridge - the closest thing to a mountain we could find. I had borrowed a tent, backpack, hiking pants and hand me down boots. And Beau had a brand new REI dog pack; we were ready.



I didn't know a backpack could be so cute, but that's the response we got every time we went running - he with his bright red pack strapped snugly on his back. Funny, no one ever told me I looked cute in my backpack. But forget looks – a dog pack is actually very practical. It's one thing to take a dog backpacking; it's

another to carry his food. A fit dog can carry twenty to thirty percent of his body weight. That meant Beau should be able to carry seven pounds or more. I would be struggling with every ounce on my back. Why not let him help out. And so he packed in the trowel, rope for hanging gear at night, his food, the leash and, as a special treat for working so hard, a cow hoof for gnawing when sitting around the campfire at night. What's funny is I think he liked wearing the pack. He never complained and always seemed willing for me to put it on him.



Our trip went off without a hitch. That is if you don't include getting lost several times both in the car and on foot; hiking in very cold, foggy conditions; and finding that as beginner hikers we were better at six miles a day than the eight miles I had estimated. With these minor adjustments it was a wonderful time. We camped on our own and with friends; spent nights in tents, hostels and B&Bs; and saw more beautiful leaves and vistas than I thought possible in North Carolina. A three hour, three-mile hike was from Hughes Gap at 4,000 feet to Roan Mountain at 6,200 feet was greatest challenge and the most exhilarating. It was straight up through spruce and fir forests and over giant boulders – only once did I have to give Beau a push up.

Beau's still got lots of puppy left in him as evidenced by the way he bounced up the trail – tail up and ears flopping and looking more like one of those notorious western jack-o-lobes than a dog. He absolutely loved being in the woods and only got spooked a few times. And boy did he sleep well. By seven at night he was out cold.

It's hard to imagine a better hiking companion than a dog, and Boykins have several advantages over other breeds. Namely they can handle the distance while also being small enough to fit in the tent

at night - they make a perfect "hot water bottle."

What's more Boykins look good in the woods. What a sight - Beau's dark brown body prancing down a forest path carpeted in colorful autumnal leaves. His soft, closely-cropped fur in perfect contrast to the dry, crinkly leaves; his warm, amber-colored eyes reflecting the yellow browns of the leaves all around, and he as close to laughing with delight as a dog can get.

So in Letterman fashion here are my "top ten" reasons for taking your dog backpacking or hiking.

10. Their scent keeps the bears away, or so I'm told.
9. It's much less humiliating to tell your dog to wait up than to ask a fellow hiker to slow down.
8. And when they have to wait on you, they patiently look back and watch, never saying a word.
7. They are happy going in any direction and don't complain when you get lost and have to retrace your steps.
6. They provide another pair of ears, but not another mouth.
5. They carry their own food and never complain that you forgot the salt.
4. They help clean the dishes and don't mind leftovers.
3. You can take lots of pictures of them and they don't worry about how they look.
2. Their presence keeps you from talking to yourself and feeling like you might be going a little crazy.

And the number one reason is that it's simply impossible not to enjoy yourself when they are so happy and always want to keep going. But watch out they'll get in the habit and so will you – a day without a good long walk will become impossible.

- By Madeleine McGee



Lady "Bug"

From: "Outdoors with Joey Mines"

I have always been a dog lover. I grew up in Hartsville, SC with a mixed breed Brittany Spaniel named Snoopy. This little dog was a great hunting dog that loved retrieving doves, ducks, and quail. She claimed the front seat of my Ford Pinto as her seat, even forcing some of my girlfriends to sit in the back!

After graduating for Clemson in 1978, my wife Betty and I moved to LaGrange GA. While watching the movie "Old Yella" one evening, we became so emotional that the next morning, we went out and bought a Springer Spaniel that we named Barney. Barney was a great house dog that gave us a lot of companionship for many years. Over the next 25 years, we had several more Springer Spaniels that were all wonderful dogs. One thing that I soon learned is that dogs are bred for dif-



ferent purposes. The Springers that we owned were all show dogs with long pedigrees, including being the descendent of a Westminster Dog Show winner. But they were not hunting dogs.

Four years ago, we added a cocker spaniel named Snickers to our family. This little dog is a great house dog with a wonderful spirit that brings a lot of joy to us. Snickers came along when our children were moving away from home to attend college. Anyone that has had the empty nest syndrome can understand the emotions of watching your children grow up. Snickers helped us through this trying time in our lives.

I have been blessed with a wonderful wife of 28 years, two great kids, and a career that has allowed me to travel all



Lady Bugs 1st plane ride to go pheasant hunting which will air in February on "Outdoors with Joey Mines".

over the world hunting and fishing. I host "Outdoors with Joey Mines" on Fox Sports Net South. In its 25th year of outdoor programming, reaching more than 35 million households, I have done over 750 shows.

Three years ago, I began searching for a Boykin Spaniel puppy. I was very fortunate to find Pat Watts and Hollow Creek Kennels in Leesville, SC. After several visits, it was time to pick up my new puppy "Lady Bug". Little did I know that this little brown "swamp possum" would touch my life in so many ways.

Driving home in my truck with my new puppy in the dog box on the seat beside me, everything was fine for about 2 minutes. Lady Bug started crying in her box, wanting to get out. This went on for several minutes until I gave in. When I opened the cage, she crawled to me and lay down in my lap. Five hours later, we arrived in LaGrange. Lady Bug and I bonded right away.

Since that first day, Bug and I have been best friends. Bug stays in the house with us and sleeps on the same pillow I sleep on. The first thing I see every morning when I wake up is little Lady Bug. I spend a great deal of time at home editing TV shows in my studio. Bug has her own editing chair that she sits in each day. I definitely have a shadow that follows me everywhere I go.

I would have been very content to play ball with Bug, edit TV shows, as well as travel around the country in my motor home with her in the seat beside me. But little did I know that the best was yet to come.

When Bug was a year old, I took her dove hunting for the first time. She absolutely loves to hunt! Bug picked up a limit of doves on her first trip and was the talk of the hunt. Over the past two years

Bug has been pheasant hunting with me several times and is now pointing the birds. This past December, Bug retrieved as well as sometimes pointed over 60 pheasants and chuckers while taping two shows at Primland Resort in Virginia. She is amazing! The shows that we filmed in Virginia will air on Fox Sports South in the next 3 months. Anyone interested can go to my web site www.joeymines.com for the show schedule.

I tape shows around the country in my motor home which has a picture of me and Bug on the back. During the spring and fall, I attend a number of outdoor shows with Bug at my side. She loves to be around people, and especially loves the Clemson Tigers and tailgating at the games during football season. We certainly have a lot of fun together!

Pat Watts and I have taped several shows with the Boykin Spaniels in the past three years and have plans for more shows in the future.

I feel very blessed to have Lady Bug in my life. She is an incredible dog! I highly recommend Boykin Spaniels for anyone looking for a wonderful companion at home or in the field.

Good Hunting,

Joey and Bug

P.S. Bug's favorite TV shows are "Outdoors with Joey Mines", "Law and Order", and "Days of Our Lives".

