

When Life's Not A Beach, Find One

Standing on the shore of the mighty Columbia River, I pitched an orange ball with all my not-a-softball-player strength. My sleek red-haired pitbull, Kelley, launched herself into the water with gusto. Fresh air, solitude, a dog, waves lapping at my feet, this was the kind of soul-soothing beach excursion I craved.

The call had come—unexpected—the day before in the middle of a bright summer afternoon. My 10-year-old son, our brindle pitbull Izzy (we have three, in assorted colors) and I were doing a little firsthand research on beach walking with dogs for this column. At Cannon Beach the air was warm, water was cool, and sand was hot. With Izzy straining at her leash, we navigated the throngs packing the stretch of coastline—swimmers, sand castle builders, sunbathers, toddlers dashing to and fro without so much as a glance in our direction.

I longed to let Izzy run free, but the crowds dictated a more conservative approach. Normally, this irks the hell out of me. But the heavens had deigned to grant us a clear blue sky scented with fresh salt breezes, and the sudden recovery from a long, dreary winter and spring made me feel magnanimous. I had no idea that clouds would soon darken the horizon.

"It's bad news." When I answered the cell phone, my little sister's voice was hushed and hard to hear, and my heart rate picked up. Our



petlandia

BY MARY MANDEVILLE, DC

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other sister had been diagnosed with breast cancer 16 months earlier and though she'd had good reports so far, my stomach dropped.

"She has a brain tumor."

We spoke for several minutes and I vaguely recall it involving shouted "no"s, kicked sand, a wide-eyed 10-year-old and a flat-eared pitbull pulling at her leash. Upon updating my son, he and I decided our afternoon was done, that we should get a bite to eat and head on home. By the time we pulled into Seaside for dinner, fog had rolled in out of nowhere and the sky had turned gray and ominous. Suddenly the 90-plus minute drive, complete with delays for roadwork, felt too heavy a price to pay for a less-than-hearty romp on the beach.

No denying, the Oregon coastline is magnificent, sea air and crashing waves replenish body and soul. But fine weather turns most ocean beaches close to Portland into leash-only kinds

of dog capers. If that's your thing—maybe you have a sweet little Shih Tzu whose needs can be mostly met at the end of a leash, or a Yellow* lab everybody thinks is Marley—then pack up your stuff and your dog and head off for a glorious time. Enjoy Ecola, or any other state park, where Oregon statutes require that dogs must be kept on a 6-foot lead at all times. Or hit the sand and surf at Cannon Beach, Seaside, Lincoln City, Tillamook or Newport, where leash laws are a tad less rigorous.

If, like me, you yearn for wide open spaces, long stretches of empty beach where you can dash into the edge of the receding tide, and a place where your well-mannered (or maybe not so much) dog can frolic as a free being, you'll need to search out a quieter spot. Manzanita is less crowded, so is Arch Cape or Rockaway. Here you can likely unclip your dog's leash and revel in the unbridled glee an emancipated canine will so easily share with you. Don't forget drinking water for your pooch, as the ingestion of too much salt water will result in a sort of purging from both ends that is more pleasant for everyone if avoided.

The morning after the call, I stood at river's

edge—alone as far as I could see in any direction. An easygoing breeze ruffled my hair. The cry of a fishing osprey sliced the silence. A wide sand beach spread out from Kelley and me in either direction, belonging only to us for the moment. Kelley hadn't had to trudge along captive to her leash, hobbled by my lumbering two-legged gait. We shared less time in the car and more time romping together as wild things.

Jogging up and down the shoreline with my pooch, I realized the most fabulous beaches for jaunts with canine pals are right underneath our feet—beaches that will ease the sting from life's sharpest arrows. The most brilliant dog park I've found in three states exists on the edge of our own town. Thousand Acres (at Exit 18 off Highway 84) is a designated off-leash dog park. It covers 1,400 acres, provides access to both the Sandy and Columbia rivers and offers chances for social interaction or complete solitude.

At the best of times, I hate to limit a dog to what she can experience from the end of a leash. At the worst of times, I need the company of a free dog whose joy is contagious. Beach outings to soothe a troubled soul and crack a wide canine grin await—right out our back door. ☐

Find MARY MANDEVILLE at antimotionchiro.com.

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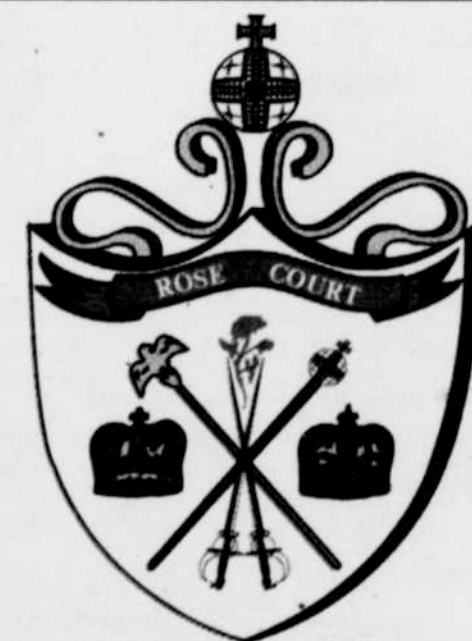
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