

The hills are alive...

...with owners and dogs as Your Dog's **Becky Kane** and Chinese Crested Dog **Henry** join like-minded people on an activity break.

Walking in the stunning South Shropshire hills.

If you're thinking of booking a holiday but don't want to leave your loved one behind (your dog, that is, not your partner, although they are welcome too!) then why not try a dog activity weekend? A heady mix of dog walks, agility and obedience, plus the chance to spend time with like-minded people and their dogs, awaited us on our 'barking mad' break in the stunning South Shropshire hills (as featured in the February issue of Your Dog).

Organizer Sue Robinson, a dog-loving PR consultant, came up with the idea for the weekend after attending a similar event for horses and riders last year and wishing there was something like it for dogs and their owners.

On arrival, she gave us all a chance to stretch our legs

after our journeys (from as far as Cornwall) and we soon found she had lined up plenty of experts and fun activities to keep us busy.

First up was a talk on nutrition by Fiona Campbell from dog and cat food manufacturer, Burns Pet Nutrition, with plenty of advice on keeping your dog in tip-top condition with a healthy diet.

Everyone then headed out to the woods just across from the hotel for an accompanied dog walk. The dogs had a great time running off lead together as if they'd known each other for years. With six Labradors and a Golden Retriever among the group, you can imagine the chaos when they reached the

muddy pond. Thankfully, we stayed

at a dog-friendly hotel where staff didn't mind some of the residents getting a little muddy!

In the evening, everyone had dinner together, a perfect opportunity to meet each other properly and learn a little more about everyone's dogs. On Saturday morning, after a good

sleep and a slap-up breakfast, everyone gathered in reception eagerly awaiting the morning's activities. We all headed over to the training centre in New Hall, Tickerton, to meet the day's trainers: Nick Jones for obedience and behaviour and Barbara Walker

and her assistant, Hilary, for agility. It was over to Nick first. He

"Don't want to leave your loved one behind then why not try a dog activity weekend?"

What did other owners think?

Everyone agreed with Becky that it was great to find a dog-friendly hotel, meet like-minded people and see the dogs getting on so well together. The group walks were particularly popular, but what else got the paws-up?

'I'd definitely do another'

Bronte Adams and George, a three-year-old Kelpie X collie from Market Harborough, Leicestershire:

"I thought it would be great socialization for George, as we only ever get to walk on our own. I really wanted to try agility and found George was a natural, so I'd like to continue this. I'd definitely do another dog weekend. It would be nice if there were various ones held around the country."

Bronte Adams and George.

Border Collie who rushes through doors, spins in circles and barks when meeting new dogs; Toby, a chocolate Labrador, and Ruby, a Golden Retriever, who both bound up to people and nearly knock them flying in an attempt to say hello; Honey and Poppy, two yellow Labradors with that age-old problem of selective deafness, especially when off-lead; and George, the Kelpie X Collie who sits all the time, even when asked to stand (that selective deafness is catching!).

Keeping it calm

Nick talked through some of these problems and gave demonstrations using the dogs on how to tackle the issues. Tilly, in particular, seemed a different dog after spending time with Nick and happily spent the rest of the lesson sitting very calmly at her owner's heels.

We also learned how to deal with pulling on the lead and Nick introduced us to the jingler, a device with bells that can be attached to the lead and uses sound therapy to interrupt unwanted behaviour. Honey got the chance to demonstrate her poor recall but behaved perfectly on the long lead with Nick, gazing at him admiringly.

Isn't it great how dogs always perform when they're not supposed to, just to prove us wrong?

After more guidance from Nick on teaching dogs manners, going through gates and doors after their owners and not jumping up, we moved on to the agility session with Barbara, who has 15 years' experience of running such sessions in her area. The course looked a little daunting, particularly for the beginners: four jumps followed by the flat tunnel, followed by the weaves, the straight tunnel, another four jumps, the dog walk, the seesaw, the weaves again, the tunnel again and then four more jumps to finish!

Honey was a natural and really got the hang of it straight away, thoroughly surprising her owner. Poppy was fantastic too. Henry loved it, especially the jumps (people thought he wouldn't make it over them, but he showed them!). Toby was a star. A regular agility-goer, he put us all to shame, even tackling the tunnel before we'd been shown that piece of equipment.

Nick Jones leads the training session.

Negotiating the dog walk.

'Ruby loved her first holiday'

Maureen Dunn and Ruby, a 10-month-old Golden Retriever from Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire:

"I wanted to take Ruby on her first holiday and thought the structure sounded great.

"I particularly loved the training and agility sessions, but the whole weekend was wonderful. Dogs are a bit like children on holiday — if they're happy, you're happy.

"I'm training with Ruby and learning all the time. I plan to get a jingler to try as a distraction method for when she jumps up at people.

"The only downside of the weekend was that Ruby will expect all this every time we go on holiday from now on!"

Maureen Dunn and Ruby.

The guests meet in reception.

Agility was a popular pastime.