

Inaugural Scotland Swissie Walk

After one false start – when the weather was forecast to be very wet, which would have been fine for the dogs but less enjoyable for the walkers – the first Scottish Swissie walk took place on Saturday 27 July 2013.

We met up in the car park and first introductions were made as until then we had not yet met each other face to face, or nose to nose in the case of the dogs. There were Swissies and other dogs and a range of humans (or “staff” as my Swissie likes to refer to me sometimes).

First we discussed pedigrees, who came from where and it was a pleasant surprise that not all of the dogs were related and we all live reasonably close to each other. This bodes well for the continued growth of the breed in Scotland. Carefully controlled and selected breeding is one thing that has attracted more than one owner to the breed. Especially people who have owned and loved and then lost, all too early, dogs of other breeds that have been less strict in their breeding programmes and have fallen prey to inherited diseases.

Inevitably as we were standing by the cars talk turned to vehicles and their suitability for Swissies. Although the GSMD is clearly a large dog they can be content in very small spaces if they think it's worthwhile – and getting to a walk is apparently worth curling up small for. Public transport too is generally fine for getting around with your Swissie although you do need to add extra time on journeys to allow for the inevitable approaches from people who are interested and impressed by the huge, strikingly marked and calm dog you have with you.

We set off, and immediately came to a halt as there was much peeing and pooping and checking out by the dogs as they got off lead and mingled. Thankfully a poop bin was located nearby so we didn't all have to carry the scooped poop too far. Not a delight but it's a small price to pay for clear paths and clean feet.

We passed the deer and highland cattle as we progressed towards the fishing pond. The dogs all raised their noses to scent the air for the livestock and went up to the fence to get a closer look at the huge cattle that stood at the fences but there seems to be a bit of an understanding between large animals and after a sniff and a look we all carried on.

Out of the, by now, quite warm sun we headed for the fishing pond. Swissies seem to cope well in hot weather, the puppies seemed a bit less able to regulate their temperature but all were more comfortable in the heat than the longer haired canines that were with us. Into the pond for a spot of paddling, chest high was as far as anyone was going in; others didn't even let their toes get wet. It seems that most Swissies are confident around water as they grow up but can be reserved initially – no bad thing. However if the temptation is good enough; if their human or a really good toy is in the water; they can give a confident swimming display. Mine will happily tow me along in the water behind him. After everyone was as wet and as cool as they wanted to be we carried on.

There were many others in the park, families with prams, people walking dogs, people picnicking, people fishing on the pond, ducks swimming and people out for lunch at the restaurant. Inevitably there were some minor misdemeanours – but now I think about it all involving my dog – maybe I should think about that! A family having a picnic were joined by a large dog who obviously fancied a

bit of their cooked chicken. He sat himself down at the end of their bench and waited – in vain – and was apparently struck deaf at the same time so did not hear me calling for him to return to the group. We met one group of Labradors and a Swissie (yes mine again) decided that this bunch was obviously big enough for some serious playing! His barks of encouragement were however just too loud for all and the Labradors walked away and left him to get a telling off for making so much noise.

We met a number of small children during our walk and some parents worry about the relative size of a Swissie when meeting a child – there were no issues. Children seem to love the opportunity to hag and cuddle such a large animal and the Swissies react well, as usual, by being calm and accepting that care must be taken. Some of the Swissies on the walk live with families with a wide age range of children and grandchildren and the breed seems well adjusted to behaving appropriately with only the occasional bound of exuberance breaking through.

Past the pond, another dip, and now on the return path through the trees. The younger dogs were beginning to tire, not surprisingly as they had been capering and running about constantly. As with any large dog a Swissie needs to have controlled exercise to make sure they grow up fit and healthy. They look so big its easy to mistake them for adults and to let them do too much too soon. They love to walk and to be with their families and will only reluctantly concede to tiredness. A few ostentatious “flopping down” dogs – the Swissie in general loves to show off – and we headed for the restaurant.

We settled down at the tables and all the dogs had a drink of water while we ordered food and drink. There were many admiring looks at the group from inside the restaurant as we enjoyed the sun and had some refreshment. Group photos were attempted – with very mixed results – you can view them on the Great Swiss Mountain Dog Club facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/125977794276565/?fref=ts>

As people started to make plans to get back on the road a couple of the Swissies definitely seemed to take a shine to each other and there was much flirting, cavorting and frolicking. Maybe the small number of Swissies in Scotland will be increased soon!

Back in the car on the way home – loud snoring was all I heard from the back. A good day out.