

# THE CAIRN TERRIER -- A DOG FOR ALL REASONS



Cairn terriers originated from the Scottish Highlands where they functioned primarily as vermin controllers. Scottish lairds kept packs of these hardy little dogs to rout fox, badger, otter, and other animals from their hiding places, often in the rock cairns after which these terriers were named. They often kept one or two as house pets, proving that this breed was both versatile and adaptable. This feisty terrier's double weather-resistant coat protected him from the inclement indigenous climate and thorny brush. Cairn terriers, Scottish terriers, West Highland White terriers, and Dandie Dinmont terriers share common ancestors. Each of these breeds has become quite distinct from the others. However, many people believe that Cairns remain closest to that original precursor, the Scotch terrier.

## CAIRN TERRIERS AS PETS

Cairn terriers are lovable, lively, independent, and intelligent little terriers. They cock their heads as they try to comprehend what you are explaining to them. They love to play, but if you are not in the mood, they will usually find something else to do.

Children love them, and in general, it's a mutual affair. One note: though tough and compact, rough young children and toddlers overwhelm them. But like some people, some Cairns are more tolerant than others. A reputable breeder can often make that judgment call.

Their appealing, shaggy appearance is easy to maintain with a good brushing once a week or so to prevent matting. Frequent bathing is unnecessary as it can strip the natural oils from the Cairn's wiry coat. Cairn terriers shed very little. A professional grooming (stripping, *not* clipping) about twice a year is all a typical pet Cairn needs.

Warning: Since they are pack animals, Cairn terriers thrive in each other's company. If you own one, don't be shocked if you end up with two -- or more!

## CONFORMATION

According to the official American breed standard, the Cairn Terrier "has the appearance of an active, game, hardy small working terrier of the short-legged class; very free in its movement, strongly but not heavily built . . ." Its back is of medium length, about one and a half times as its height at the withers. It has a hard weather-resistant double coat, pricked ears, and an alert and intelligent expression. The forefeet are larger than the hind feet.

The Standard states the ideal weight for a bitch as 13 pounds and for a dog, 14 pounds. Heights at the withers for bitches and dogs are 9½ inches and 10 inches, respectively. Recently bred Cairns often exceed these standards by as many as two inches. The dog should be well balanced, neither too leggy nor too low to the ground and in good muscular condition.

Cairns may be any color except white or pure black. Reds, wheatens, grays, and brindles of all shades, with or without dark masks and/or points, are common. Many Cairns, especially brindles, change color throughout their lives.

Cairn terriers can make great show dogs. If you like to compete, the show ring might be the place for you.

## **OBEDIENCE**

The Cairn terrier's inherent drive and hunting instincts can make obedience training challenging, but it is by no means impossible. Cairns understand your commands but often appear to need to assess the situation before they comply. Be firm yet gentle, but keep the training interesting and relevant for these higher level "free thinkers."

You'll likely see fewer Cairn terriers in obedience trial than some other breeds. Do not let this discourage you. Many have successfully completed AKC Obedience titles at all levels. If you have the time, patience, and willingness, this terrier's saucy personality and natural drive can translate into a wonderful obedience dog—with great attitude!

NOTE: Cairn terriers are proficient at learning tricks and are natural problem solvers.

## **AGILITY**

Agility is popular among Cairn terrier owners. Their shorter legs allow them to compete in lower height classes than the Border Collies, Australian shepherds and other more "traditional" Agility breeds.

Many enjoy the running, jumping, climbing, and especially the tunnels. As the popularity of dog agility has increased,

Cairn Terriers are participating more and excelling at it, too.

## **EARTHDOG TESTS**

AKC Earthdog Tests keep Cairn terriers in touch with their hunting heritage. Alongside other small terriers and Dachshunds, they attempt to prove that their natural ability as vermin hunter remains well intact.

In a non-titling introductory test, the dog must navigate an underground tunnel to reach its quarry (a caged rat) within two minutes and "worry" it for thirty seconds by barking, growling, whining, or scratching at it. The dog moves on through the more challenging Junior, Senior and Master Earthdog tests. Several Cairns have achieved the impressive Masters level.

Most Cairns (and their owners) love this sport.

## **THERAPY WORK**

The Cairn terrier's size, non-threatening appearance, natural persistence, and desire for interaction make it a good candidate for therapy work. Many have earned certification and have served in a variety of environments— hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and schools. Their abilities to draw out people and cheer them up have made important contributions to many lives.

## **TRACKING**

Tracking is about learning to communicate with your dog from the end of a 20 foot leash. This sport gets you out-- in good weather or in rain, sleet, and snow-- and into fields you never dreamed existed. You and your dog work as a team. There is nothing like finding that glove at the end of the track and sharing together the excitement and satisfaction of a job well done.

Cairn terriers with tracking skills have been used for drug searches and to detect land mines for the U.S. Air Force.

**For more information:**  
**Cascade Cairn Terrier Club:**  
[www.cascade-cairn.org](http://www.cascade-cairn.org)

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