

Primary Sources

In Praise of Sniff-Butt

By Kim Pearson

Goody Beagle here. You don't know me unless you have read my book *Dog Park Diary: the social round of Goody Beagle*. It's about my visits to my dog park and who I meet there and all the things we smell. It's a good book, and mostly true, but after it was published with all those great photos and all, I discovered that I have more to say about dogs and dog parks. In this article I want to talk about something you humans just don't get – smell. You humans make fun of us dogs because we sniff-butt, but if you learned this skill you'd probably be a lot happier. So maybe you should read this article.

First, let me say that I know you can never be as good as us dogs at smelling. Your evolution just doesn't support it. We dogs have more smell cells than you do, and a much bigger part of our brain is devoted to smell than yours. This is one reason why I feel sorry for you humans. You miss so much!

Now I know humans have good eyes. I've been told (by my human) that humans can see more colors than dogs, and farther than dogs. Well, maybe that's true, but so what? So you can see maybe ten times more colors than we can. But we can smell up to 100,000 times more smells than you can! Some say we may smell even a *million* times better than you. Just think about that every time you think humans are so cool.

We can smell the moods of dogs and humans, and even cats. We can tell if they are happy, sad, mad, anxious, or excited. We can smell the tiniest change in the character of the air outside. We can smell the ground and tell who has passed by and when, how old they were, if they were male or female, how they were feeling, what they ate for dinner, and if they were sick, healthy, pregnant, or looking for love. We can track missing persons by smell, find people buried under ten feet of snow by smell, smell underground mushrooms and dig them up, and smell drugs and explosives and tell you where they are hidden. When it comes to smell, no one on earth is better than we are.

An excellent place to find good, strong smells that tell you all about whoever you meet is their rear end. Humans, cats, and especially dogs have detailed messages waiting there for us to smell-read. A quick sniff-butt tells us more about a total stranger than you might know about your best friend or even your mother.

Some humans have compared our sniff-butts to the human habit of shaking hands. Well, sort of, but sniff-butt gives us more information, and is a lot more reliable. I don't think much of your human ways of finding out about each other. You shake hands with each other, but it doesn't tell you how the other guy feels about you. You say, "How are you?" and then don't listen to the answer. You say "Good morning" to each other even if it's raining and your breakfast was burnt and you stubbed your toe in the shower.

The strange thing from my perspective is that none of this tells you anything at all about the other person. Do you learn how they are feeling today? Do you learn if they're about to bite you or maybe if they'd like to go play a round of golf with you? Do you learn if they are sick or angry or pregnant? Do you find out what they want for dinner?

No you don't. But we do – when we sniff-butt.

But here's the problem. We dogs love – and need – to do sniff-butt, but you humans don't seem to like us doing it. Many of you seem to think we are doing something nasty. You try to "train" us not to do it anymore.

You need to know that this is not possible. We are dogs. The message I want to give you humans is to just let us be ourselves. Don't try to stop us from sniff-butt. To you, it looks funny or disgusting or bad mannered, but that's because you can't do it and you can't read smell messages, so you made up some silly rules for humans and then try to apply them to us dogs.

You know what I think? I think you find sniff-butt disgusting because you find your own rear ends disgusting. Boy, I just don't understand that at all. You don't find your legs or your arms or your ears disgusting, so why you hate your own rear end makes no sense at all to me. To dogs, rear ends are just rear ends – we don't have any judgments about them. My rear end is just as much a part of me as my eyelashes or my paws. I think you should just accept the fact that you have a rear end, and just like all rear ends, it smells.

So don't try to "train" us out of sniff-butt. We might stop for a minute while you're looking, but we'll be back at it as soon as you look away. We like to make you happy, but it should work both ways. If you want to make us happy, let us be dogs.