

## Backpack rating

It would be nice if there was a definitive, standard rating system for backpack trips. A system that covered all the factors, and which worked for everyone. But unfortunately there ain't no such system.

So here is a basic rating system. It is based on participant experience, # of days on the trail, elevation gain, daily mileage, and trail conditions. Following it are some factors that may affect the rating. It assumes that a participant is an outdoor enthusiast in reasonably decent physical condition.

***A: Participants may include beginning or 1<sup>st</sup>-time backpackers. Trip of short duration, typically 2-days / 1-night or geared for beginners. Moderate elevation gain, less than 1,000' per day. Daily mileage in single digits. Trails in generally good condition.***

***B: Participants should be strong hikers and have some backpack experience. Multi-night trips. Elevation gain of up to 2,000' per day. Daily mileage may reach double digits. Trails may range from good to rugged condition.***

***C: Participants should be strong hikers with considerable backpack experience. Multi-night trips. Elevation gain may exceed 2,000' per day. Daily mileage may reach double digits. Trails may range from good to rugged condition. May include off-trail or cross-country travel.***

The above provides a general guideline for the trip rating. The leader should consider other factors which can significantly alter the basic trip rating. Bottom line: It is ultimately up to the trip leader to determine the trip rating based on all the information that he or she has available.

### **Factors which can affect the trip rating: notice how many you can not directly control**

- number of days on the trail: more days = more food & gear to carry, heavier packs, rougher trip
- number of rest days: add to duration of trip, but also provide a break from trail rigors
- age of participants: generally younger means more resilient
- base elevation: even level travel is more taxing at elevation
- condition of trails: any deviation from trails in good condition can slow the pace and add to the difficulty; slick from moisture, small pebbles on steep downhill, early season ruts from horses on wet trails; tree blow-down; stream crossings; rocky trails; roots in trails
- cross country travel: generally XC travel is more rigorous than trail travel
- distance traveled over the duration of the trip: greater distance usually means more effort
- distance traveled per day: greater distance usually means more effort
- elevation gain: elevation gain is always more rigorous than level travel
- elevation loss: travel downhill under a full backpack can strain joints
- grade (steepness) of trails: Steeper trails are generally more taxing than level trails, regardless of whether the travel is up or down
- health or physical condition of participants: illness, injuries can slow person down
- pace: what may be comfortable for the leader may grind someone else into the ground
- time of day for the trail travel: travel in full sun, in very hot or very cold temperatures, when fighting a wind, or through the routine afternoon shower can add to the rigors
- time of year: affects the # hours of daylight, the average temperatures, the availability of water, the bug population, the weather; may also affect which of trip goals can be met
- weather: temperature / rain / snow / wind
- weight of packs & gear carried: typically pack weight increases with each day of travel; this may also be a factor for those participants who bring too much or unnecessary food