

# Introduction To Trip Pace

A, B, or C classified trips, average moving speed, and overall trip speed

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## All about Trip Pace--Part 1:

New CMC Members often ask: How do I know what kind of hike I can do? I am afraid I will not be able to keep up!

The short answer is: "Everyone needs to figure that out for themselves." Here's how to do that...

### Basic definitions.

The factor most overlooked when selecting a trip is "pace" or "average moving speed." Pace is average speed while actually hiking, **NOT** counting rest stops, lunch breaks, etc. You may be able to hike eight miles but can you do so going steadily uphill, stopping for just a few minutes every half-hour, at a speed set by someone else, at high elevation, off-trail on scree, and so forth? ("Pace" also can also be a measure of distance but that's for another time.)

In contrast, "overall trip pace" or "overall trip speed," is based upon "total trip time," which includes all moving time **PLUS** stops. A typical Difficult B hike (10 miles/2000') by a typical trip leader probably maintains close to a 2.0 mph pace or "moving average," with minimum 5 minute stops every half hour or so for clothing adjustments (short), water breaks (shorter still), and bio-breaks (longer).

Lunch breaks are typically are no more than 20 to 30 minutes, but will be considerably shorter if the weather is poor. Uphill moving pace may be a tad slower than average (say, 1.6 mph) and downhill a tad faster (say, 2.4 mph) with fewer and shorter stops but a good rule-of-thumb is to add 30 minutes per 1,000 feet of ascent.

To illustrate, that typical 10-mile trip with 2000' elevation gain probably will require...

Moving Time: 5 hours (10 miles ÷ 2.0 mph)

Stops: 30-40 minutes minimum (5-10 minutes × est. 6-8 breaks during the hike)

Lunch: 20 minutes minimum

Uphill climb: 60 minutes additional

Total time: 5 hours + 40 minutes + 20 minutes + 60 minutes, or maybe 7 hours total time trailhead to trailhead. That makes **overall average speed:** 1.4 to 1.5 mph (10 miles ÷ 7 hours).

Trip Pace: Moving Average Travel Speeds (mph)					
Casual		Moderate		Fast	
0.5 mph	1.4 mph	1.5 mph	2.4 mph	2.5 mph	3.0+ mph

Continued next month...

**Part 2 Last month we introduced the concept of “average moving speed” vs. “overall trip speed.” This month, we will look at what a trip pace classification means.**

**Just to complicate things: actual pace is relative depending on the hike classification.**

Although pace appears to be independent of trip classification, in reality "A" hikes are slower than "B" hikes, which are slower than "C" hikes, because typical members who sign up for these trips ("A", "B", "C"– rated hikers, respectively) are progressively faster. You likely never will see a "C" trip with "casual" pace listed even though there might be a steep ascent where everyone will slow down significantly.

When everyone on a hike is fast, the hike goes fast regardless of listed pace. But if one person can't keep up, some or all of the group will slow down to accommodate that person. That's part of CMC etiquette, especially for new members just figuring out what they can do, because “we've all been there.”

By the way, you don't need a matching hiker classification to sign up for an A, B, or C hiking trip but a leader may set prerequisites, such as “member must have completed WTS,” or “all participants must have climbed a 14'er in the last 90 days,” etc. but if your classification is lower than the trip's classification, the leader may check in with you prior to trip day, to make sure the trip is appropriate for you. You can shortcut that process and save the leader some time by emailing the leader your experience/qualifications when you first sign up. If you are a new member, your initial classification is as an A hiker and only YOU can change that. So, it's nice for leaders (and best for you) if you file a proper [Classification Change Request](#).

By the way, there is no member snowshoe classification system, so you may want to use the hike classifications as a rough equivalent: i.e. A Hike=Easy Snowshoe, B=Moderate, and C=Difficult. In contrast, ski trips, climbing trips, and other technical trips always require the member's classification to match the trip classification, unless the leader states otherwise.

### **What Pace Means in a Trip Description.**

Leaders will list a trip's pace as **Casual, Moderate, or Fast**. Most trip descriptions list trip pace as “Moderate,” but individual leaders will set a pace that suits the leader and every leader's pace varies within a range, meaning: “sometimes we'll go faster (e.g. on a flat, open trail) or slower (e.g. picking our way through an off-trail boulder field).”

"Casual" is rarely listed and is usually an emphatic statement by the trip leader that he or she intends to go slowly, and may make many stops. This may be used for some “New Member” trips and a few Over-the-Hill Gang hikes. Nature or wildflower hikes usually designate this pace and this perfectly proves the overall point. A flower hike's "overall trip speed" may be 0.5 mph while the leader's moving average speed or "pace" can approach 3.0 mph as the group moves from place to place, then stops for observation and commentary. In that case, the goal is to linger at many stops

rather than get to a summit, viewpoint, or other destination.

Continued next month...

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**Part 3. In Parts One and Two, we have defined the concepts of trip pace and overall trip speed. We also investigated what a trip description's pace might mean.**

**This month: So What Can You Do With This Information?**

**Start with this: What is your own natural moving average speed/mph on city streets? What about going up or down a hill? Again, use this chart to compare your own pace with leader-estimated pace, then imagine the addition of some or all of the factors listed at this end of this article:**

Trip Pace: Moving Average Travel Speeds (mph)					
Casual		Moderate		Fast	
0.5 mph	1.4 mph	1.5 mph	2.4 mph	2.5 mph	3.0+ mph

So, if you think an "A" hike will be too slow, and **most new members will think so**, try "B" hikes. Feel free to advise the leader that you are a new member still figuring out your pace. Anyone's trip experience will be adversely affected if they have trouble keeping up while the group is moving. It has happened to everyone. So, **do not hesitate** to let the group know if you need to slow down or stop to rest. Everyone has that experience from time-to-time. No one will think the worse of you.

Seasoned CMC members typically do not want to hike more slowly than they are able but they sometimes enjoy just a touch of challenge. Experienced members learn what pace they typically can do on an average day, and then seek out leaders and co-hikers who match that pace.

How do they do that? Every leader is different. On every trip, ask the people on that trip about other leaders they know who are comparable, faster, slower, more stops, fewer stops, etc. Revealing you are new to the Club will result in an outpouring of friendly advice. That's also the CMC way. Eventually, you will find a number of leaders whose paces and styles are just right for you.

Of course, as you hike more often, you may find yourself speeding up naturally as you gain confidence and conditioning!

**The pace at which you travel will be affected by these factors:**

### Factors You Can Control:

- Your personal fitness level
- Your core strength and physical balance capabilities
- If you started out well-rested or tired
- If you are consuming sufficient water and nutritional energy as you go
- The comfort and capability of your hiking boots
- Whether you know how to use hiking poles properly
- The pack weight you are carrying

### Factors Related to the Trip:

- The elevation at which you are moving
- How far you have already traveled today
- The steepness of the current climb/descent
- Whether traveling on-trail or off-trail
- If you are traveling across snow, ice, boulders, gravel, scree, talus, or mud
- The thickness of the vegetation you are passing through
- How often the group stops to rest

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