

Disabled Hikers

Building Disability Community and Justice in the Outdoors

Trail Rating System

The spoon rating is a system to identify how much effort a trail might take. The rating system is based in an understanding of spoon theory and offers a representation of how accessible a hike is and how much effort it may take with consideration for how replenishing the experience may be. You may think of it as a combination accessibility, difficulty, and quality rating. However, since each person's ability and energy level is different and can change from day to day, I cannot tell you how difficult a trail might be for you – only you can decide that. The spoon rating, in combination with the thorough information provided in the guides, is meant to help you decide whether to attempt a trail.

Spoon Rating System

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- 1 Spoon** = 0-2 miles, level and even with grades under 8%, paved, very easy to navigate, probably wheelchair accessible
- 2 Spoons** = 1-3 miles, short grades up to 12%, firm but unpaved surface with no obstacles, access takes a little planning, probably wheelchair hikeable
- 3 Spoons** = 2-4 miles, generally gentle elevation changes with short grades up to 20%, firm surface with minimal obstacles, possibly wheelchair hikeable
- 4 Spoons** = 3-5 miles, Prolonged grades of 10-15%; elevation changes over 500 ft or longer than .5 mile; soft surface with obstacles, requires advance planning or basic trail map reading
- 5 Spoons** = 5+ miles, Prolonged grades of 15-20%, elevation changes 1000 ft or longer than 1 mile, trail has many obstacles, requires extensive planning or navigation

Since so many trails listed as wheelchair accessible actually aren't and the effort they require can also vary (not all wheelchair users are the same), wheelchair accessibility is included as a factor, with the exception of trails that are fully ABA/ADA compliant.

Any one of the factors within each spoon rating can shift without changing the overall rating, and the rating can be adjusted a bit based upon how enjoyable the trail is otherwise. For example, a hike that would be 4 spoons but offers incredible vistas for the effort might be listed as "3 Spoons- with caution" because the experience will be restorative, thus possibly reducing the spoon expense. If there are ways to decrease or increase the spoons required, it will be noted.

Additional Information for Trail Guides

The following information is also important for disabled people in the outdoors. It is included in all of our guides.

Getting there/Location: Detailed directions and type of roadway, including how curvy, narrow, or bumpy. Information on available amenities (accessible restrooms, potable water, picnic areas) and number of accessible parking spots at the trailhead. Include public transportation options. Note if cell phone service is available.

Trail Design: Slope, width, and surface (“tread”) of the trail to include rocky/muddy/slippery places. Obstacles and barriers such as rocks, roots, or downed trees (include height above surface). Details on boardwalks, bridges, and stairs with length, rise, and grade if applicable. Note benches or other places to rest.

Elevation: Length, grade, cross-slope of every elevation change (even if it’s only a few feet) in addition to total elevation gain and lost. Include an elevation profile. If it is a loop trail, list the direction of the elevation change.

Segments and trailheads: If there are multiple trailheads, include detailed information for each segment with the access point clearly defined.

Difficulty: Difficulty ratings should be specific and as objective as possible. Be very clear about what easy or difficult means to you.