



## Considerations for Mountain Driving

Driving in the mountains has its challenges including driver fatigue and extra wear and tear on vehicles. Here are ten tips to make mountain road trips safer.

**Check your systems;** ensure that your brakes, windshield wipers, defroster, heater, and exhaust systems are in good condition. Ensure that your brake and transmission fluids are filled and have been changed within the interval recommended for your vehicle. Brake fluid, as it ages, takes on moisture and contaminants that lowers its boiling level. Frequent brake use can overheat the fluid and you can lose braking efficiency when it is most needed. Also check the tread on your tires and ensure that they are properly inflated.

**Slow down;** don't go down a mountain road any faster than you can go up it. Don't use your brakes to hold your downhill speed. Down shift to S or L - the only time you should step on your brake pedal is to slow while you are shifting down to a lower gear. Resist the temptation of zooming down a hill.

**Downshift to a lower gear;** keep an eye on the temperature gauge in your vehicle, and turn off the air-conditioning if it starts to overheat. If you need to cool the engine, find a safe place to pull off the road, park it and keep the car at a fast idle. Do not shut off the engine, and never remove a hot radiator cap. A faster way to cool an engine is to turn on the heater, but usually that option is a bit unpleasant for the driver.

**Right to the right.** Most mountain roads are narrower than Interstate highways. Some drivers have a tendency to hug the center line, but this driving technique is both unwise and irritating to other drivers. If you are hugging the center line, and another center-hugging vehicle comes around a curve from the opposite direction, both drivers may overcorrect and create a hazardous situation.

**Vehicles going uphill get the right of way.** Always allow plenty of time for passing vehicles to make it back to their lane. Keep in mind that higher elevations diminish a vehicle's available horsepower, and your car may not perform as well at 10,000 feet as it does at sea level.

**Three rules for unpaved roads;** check local weather and road conditions that may affect your drive. Slow down and take curves on a wider arc, unpaved surfaces provide significantly less traction. As always; let someone know your route and when you expect to return.

**Keep hydrated.** At higher elevations, insufficient hydration can lead to the onset of symptoms of altitude sickness. Even if they're mild, they can affect your alertness. Remember to carry extra drinking water and drink fluids throughout the day.

**Know the weather.** In the event that weather conditions deteriorate into fog, rain, wind, or snow, slow down, be more observant, and demonstrate extra road courtesy. If other drivers appear to be in a hurry, let them pass - it may be an emergency. If winter weather is a possibility, you should add special solvent to the windshield washer reservoir to prevent icing. It is a good idea to carry chains, an ice scraper, a small broom (for sweeping snow off the car), a flashlight, a hand towel, and a small hand shovel, in case you need to dig out around wheels parked in snow. It is also important to keep the gas tank filled. Sometimes, weather conditions require extended periods of waiting for roads to be cleared, and your vehicle's engine should not be shut off during these periods. If your vehicle stalls, stay with it; cars are much more visible in snow than pedestrians.

**Take frequent breaks.** Because navigating mountain roads can be more tiring than flatland driving, consider limiting travel on challenging roads to no more than six hours per day.

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