Chemin Montagneux (Mountainous Path)

A Changing Landscapes game for piecepack by Mitchell Allen
Version 1, January 13, 2003
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2 to 4 players – 60 to 90 minutes

Overview

Once upon a time, four civil engineers decided to hike up and down a famous mountain range in France. Unfortunately, they were better engineers than they were hikers, so they tried to make the adventure more interesting by terra-forming the rough mountainous ground into gently sloping paths. Using shovels, pickaxes and dynamite, the engineers slowly turned the mountain range into a beautifully sculpted landscape. Now, you can recapture the glory of those original engineers as they struggled to conquer the mountains.

Object

Trail-blaze a path and be the first to hike your way to the top of your own mountain peak. In the basic version of this game, no player can attempt to climb his peak until **all** peaks are visible.

Players

Two to four people may play. With two players, each controls two pawns and only one of those has to reach the mountain peak matching its color.

Setup

Turn the tiles grid side-up and place four in the center of the playing area. Distribute the remaining tiles (grid side-up) equally among the players. In the 3-player game, the player who winds up with six tiles instead of seven should take one of the four tiles from the playing area. (See Figure 1.) These tiles form each player's **stock**.

Distribute the 24 coins equally among the players. The values and symbols on the coins are not relevant in the basic version of this game.

Players decide how to choose their engineer (pawns.) Each pawn has a special ability associated with it:

Green (Crown)	It costs Green three coins to lower terrain, instead of the normal four.
Red (Sun)	Red can hike up or down two heights, counting it as one step. Cannot end on a ledge!
Black (Moon)	Black gets to take **all** the loose coins whenever he grades up a moon tile.
Blue (Arms)	When Blue hikes at least one step, he can take two extra steps.

It is up to the player to remember to use his "strong suit" when able.

Each player selects a pawn in the agreed upon manner and places it in one of the four inner grid squares. In the three-player game, discard the blue pawn.
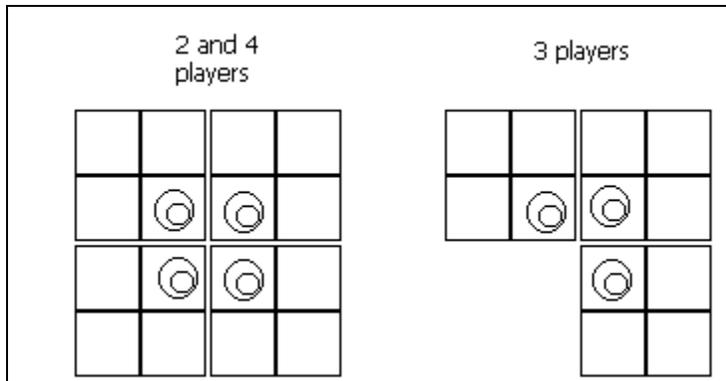
Figure 1 – Starting Layout

Play
Black always goes first. Afterwards, play proceeds clockwise. A turn consists of rolling all four dice and deciding whether to act on the outcome of the roll (**trailblazing**) or ignoring the roll and moving the pawn (**hiking**). At different times during the game, a player may find that he is unable to do either trailblazing or hiking. In that case, his turn is over.

Trailblazing
The highest roll on the four dice indicates what you can do to the existing terrain. Null is low and Ace is high. If two or more dice are equally high, the player can pick any one of them. The four trailblazing activities are **extending, grading, raising and lowering,** represented by the Crown, Arms, Sun and Moon, respectively. It costs one coin to extend, two coins to grade, three coins to raise and four coins to lower. Spent coins are set aside in a common area and may be reclaimed by hiking. The location of the pawns is irrelevant, except that you can't raise, lower or Grade an occupied tile. Here are the rules for trailblazing:

> **Green (Crown) Extend** a path by aligning one of your tiles edge to edge with an existing tile, such that no other tiles are touched. The tile must be placed facing the same side-up as it was picked up from stock and the edges must be flush (see Figure 2.) The existing tile may have zero or more tiles stacked on it.
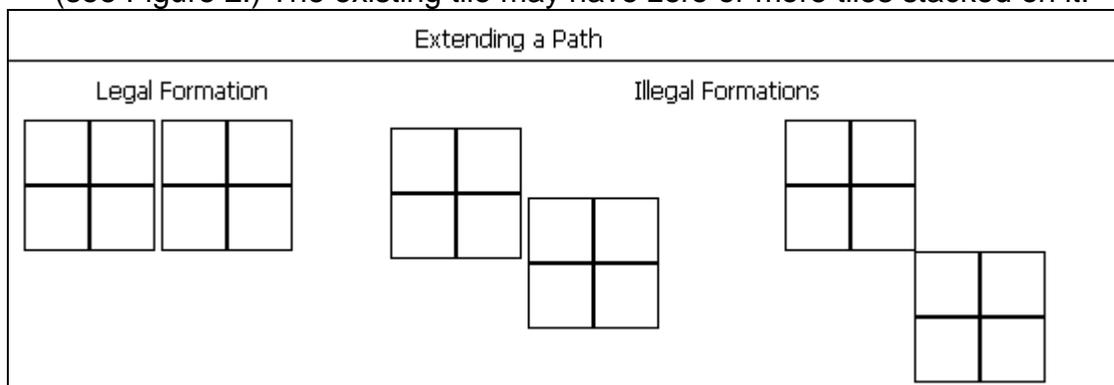

Figure 2

Red (Sun) Raise the height of an existing path or mountain by placing one of your tiles completely atop it, such that no other tiles are covered. The maximum height is four tiles and tile must be placed facing the same side-up as it was picked up from stock.

Black (Moon) Lower the height of an existing mountain (by removing the topmost tile) or a path (by removing any tile along the path) you may remove a tile so that a gap remains. You may not remove an ace that is face-up on a mountain. Return the tile **value-side**-up to your stock.

Blue (Arms) Grade an existing rough terrain tile by exposing its value-side. The only eligible tiles are those at the end of a path, or those at the peak of a mountain. Previously graded tiles cannot be degraded.

Once an Ace tile is placed face-up on a mountain (any pile more than one tile high), it cannot be raised or lowered. The only defense is to make the peak insurmountable – either surrounding it with gaps, or lowering the terrain to one tile around a 4-tile mountain. Such defenses are only delaying tactics, since players have to hike toward their own peaks eventually!

Hiking

Hiking serves two purposes: first, it brings players closer to their mountain peaks and second, it is the only way to earn coins from the common area. A hike consists of up to three steps. A step is grid square (representing rough terrain), one tile whose value-side is face-up (representing a smoother path) or one tile height (representing a mountain ledge). The Sun and the Arms have special steps as explained in the Setup section.

Here are the rules for hikers:
The number of steps taken plus the number of coins earned must equal three. Taking three coins means that the player has chosen to rest.
If the tile is graded (value-side-up), any number of pawns may occupy it simultaneously.
No hiker can pass through an occupied grid square (he must go around other pawns).
No hiker can cross a gap between tiles.
No hiker can climb or drop more than two tile heights. Not even the Sun!
No hiker can end his hike hanging on a mountain ledge. If a mountain is two tiles high, two steps must be taken up or down.
It is possible for all of the coins to be held by the players. When this occurs, a player who is unable to take the full three steps must trailblaze or pass his turn. The exception to this rule is that a hike that takes a player to his peak in one or two steps wins immediately.

Winning

Once all four aces are peaks of mountains, players hike toward their particular peak. During this hike, they may choose to delay an opponent with trailblazing tactics, using the normal dice rolling rules. The winner is the first player who reaches his peak during his hike. The hike must follow normal rules. In situations where no coins are available, the full three-step rule does not apply.

Variations
This game is open-ended enough for you to add your own variations. Here are some ideas:

Super Engineers
In this variation, players decide before the game whether to allow two or three terra-forming activities per turn. The top two or three values on the rolled dice determine which two activities to perform.

Pyrenees
In this variation, mountains can be up to six tiles high! All other rules are the same.

Coin Counters
In this variation, the value of the coins is taken into account. Therefore, during setup, give each player his own six coins. In the two-player game, each player has two sets of six. In the three-player game, discard the blue coins. During play, the number of coins involved in a transaction is the same as in the basic variation. However, the player must complete the transaction in such a way as to ensure that either the **lowest** value or the **highest** value of the coins in the common area has his suit. If this is not possible, then the transaction cannot be carried out and the player must pass his turn.

Super Hikers
In this variation, hikers can cross gaps and jump down from any height. A gap takes two steps to cross and must be completed in one turn. Any jump is counted as one step.

Peak to Peak
In this variation, the object is to be the first to place your "flag" atop two peaks. Hikers can race toward a peak as soon as it appears. To place a flag, the player must use one of his own suit coins from his stock. Consider it a non-recoverable expense!