

AMC

OUTDOORS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB

FALL WINTER 2026



NIGHT MOVES
Grooming powder in
the Maine Woods

BLUE HILLS TRACE
A Boston-area quest
for completion

**ADVENTURE
PARENTING
LODGE TO LODGE**

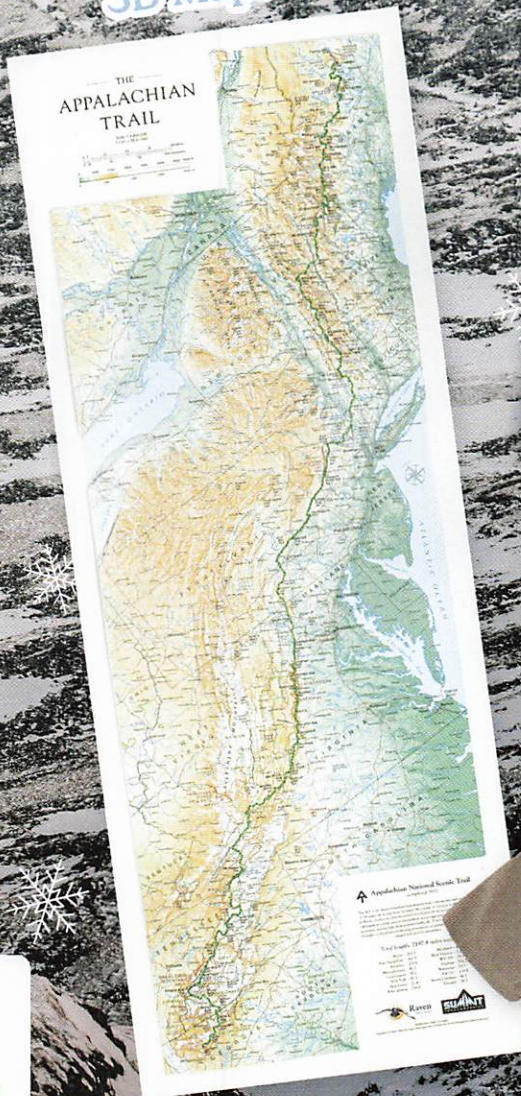




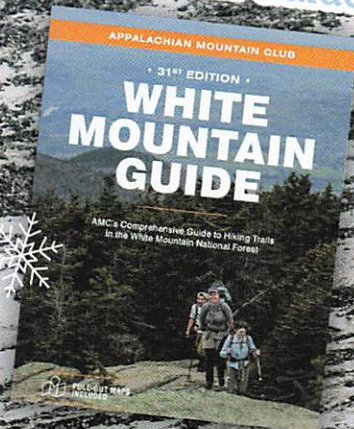
THE AMC
HOLIDAY WISH LIST

Bring the mountains home for the holidays

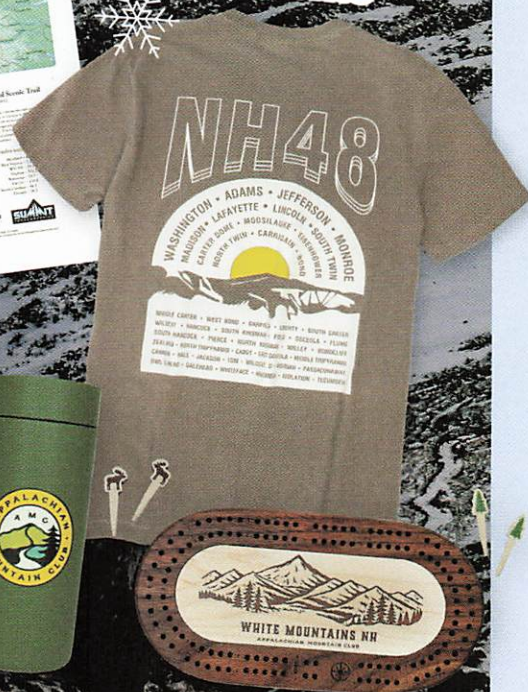
3D Maps



The White
Mountain Guide



Pack-sized
Presents



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• Photo by Parker DePond



An AMC 150 Relay participant approaches the summit of Mount Monroe, in New Hampshire's Presidential Range.

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AMC OUTDOORS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB

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ASSOCIATE EDITOR Matt Morris
CREATIVE EDITOR Amanda Garza
DESIGNER Marissa Wandrey
STAFF WRITER Isabella Marin
PROJECT MANAGER Alison Mendonca
PRINT MANAGER Nicole Chu

AMC Outdoors
 10 City Square, Boston, MA 02129
www.outdoors.org

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The mission of the Appalachian Mountain Club is to foster the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the outdoors.



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AMC OUTDOORS (ISSN 1067-5604, Volume 88, Number 2) is published biannually. 10 City Square, Boston, MA 02129. Periodicals postage paid at Boston, MA, and additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to AMC, 10 City Square, Boston, MA 02129.

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 Printed in the United States of America.

This magazine was printed from sustainably sourced materials, including AMC's own FSC-certified forest in the Maine Woods.





Dear friends,

Back in March, our community kicked off a milestone anniversary with an invitation to get outside. Starting in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park, we celebrated 150 years of AMC with a region-spanning relay. Each day, members met to hike, bike, and paddle across our region; exploring the landscapes we're proud to protect and handing off an AMC 150 pennant until it reached AMC's Medawisla Lodge, in northern Maine.

In all, the relay crossed twelve states and covered more than 2,000 miles. It was the kind of birthday party that only AMC could throw: audacious, fun, and welcoming to first-time participants, decades-long members, and everyone in between. And it wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of our volunteer leaders, members, and staff.

I had the privilege of joining multiple relay legs and was blown away by the community spirit permeating every stop. Together, we biked through the rain on Skyline Drive and dropped by the U.S. Capitol to encourage our elected officials to stand up for the outdoors. We did the ultimate urban hike through New York City as part of the Great Saunter, and I even had the opportunity to hike in the Presidential Range with our very own President's Society, and spend a day learning from natural resource professionals and culture keepers of the Penobscot Nation.

The 150 Relay truly epitomized who we are at AMC, an exclamation point on a century-and-a-half of adventure, advocacy, and stewardship. Now that it's in the books, it's time to look ahead to the next 150 years.

Our newest print edition of *AMC Outdoors* magazine is filled with stories from our community and previews the season just around the corner. Some of my favorite memories with AMC have come in the wintertime. Like so many of you, I can't wait for my annual lodge-to-lodge cross-country skiing adventure through the Maine Woods. Spending time in the quiet of the wilderness offers a chance to reflect on where we've been as an organization, and where we're going next.

Looking ahead to spring, I want to hear from you! How do you share a love for the outdoors with family and friends? Email us at magazine@outdoors.org.

Cheers,

Nicole Zussman

Nicole Zussman
President & CEO
Appalachian Mountain Club

Relay Reflections

The AMC 150 Relay was a celebration of community that brought together members, friends, and family from Virginia to Maine. Here are just a few of their reflections on how the journey tested their mettle, encouraged creativity, and strengthened their ties to the outdoors.



"When we first mapped the route, we focused on how to connect places, but the relay became far more creative and diverse than anything we imagined. For example, the Old Hut Croo Association transformed a relay stop at Pinkham Notch into a celebration of hiking, storytelling, trail work, and AMC history. It was a powerful reminder that the relay is as much about community and connection as it is about covering miles."

Mark Zakutansky,
AMC's director of conservation policy
engagement and AMC 150 Relay Route creator

"In early June, we held an event at the Noble View Outdoor Center in the Berkshires, a property close to our hearts, where 85 folks came together to greet cyclists passing off the pennant to our chapter. Although conditions were cold and dark, the day felt sunny as we connected with old friends and new in celebration of this historic milestone. Luckily, the skies stayed clear until the very end, when we were met with New England's quintessential springtime rain!"

Kathy Martin and Matthew Hart, chair and vice chair
of the Western Massachusetts Chapter



"During our first leg of backpacking, conditions were below freezing, and by the middle of the night it was ten degrees. The next morning was an early start, so I checked in on campers and found the group was in good spirits. Those in the hammocks were wrapped in insulated down layers and stayed plenty warm, while a first-time backpacker reported being a bit cold, but loving the whole thing. One of the campers had slept under a tarp and, even though they did not have much heat, were still cheerful."

Peg Barratt, chair of the Potomac Chapter



Extraordinary places don't happen by accident.



Before you reach the summit,
someone repairs the trail.



Before a habitat is protected,
someone advocates for it.



Before a child discovers nature,
someone leads the way.



Go further with a
gift that ensures
people and nature
can thrive together.



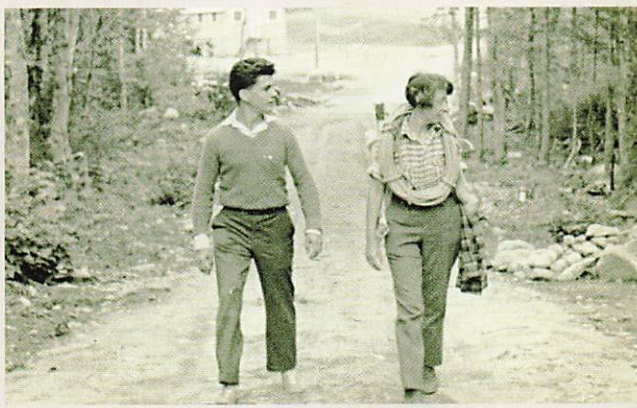
THE BEST ADVENTURES ARE THE ONES WE SHARE

Introduce your favorite
summits, waters, and woods
to the people you love with
the gift of AMC membership.



Give the
outdoors
this holiday
season!





Thelma and The Lead

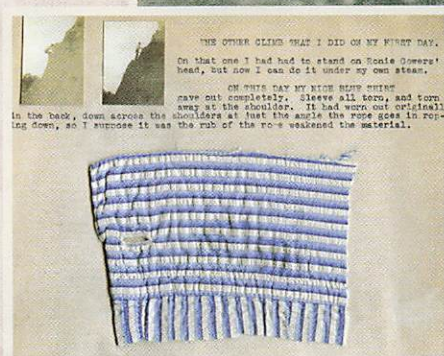
Becoming an "Appie" in the 1930s

BY BECKY FULLERTON,
AMC ARCHIVIST

In March 1929, Thelma Bonney arrived in Windsor, Vermont, for a job in the offices of a factory producing screw-making machinery along the Connecticut River. Almost immediately, something else claimed her attention. Mount Ascutney rose to the southwest, both a landmark and a companion. Before long, it was an infatuation.

On a clear Sunday in May, Thelma climbed Ascutney for the first time. The hike changed everything for her. Not long after, she moved to Waltham, Massachusetts and, in her words, "began my campaign to join the Appalachian Club."

On June 29, 1931, Thelma officially became an AMC member, launching more than a decade of near-constant adventure. Her time as an "Appie" remains vividly preserved in thousands of pages of typewritten and handwritten journals, accompanied by photographs, maps, letters, press clippings, excursion cards, notes scrawled on birch bark, and other small treasures. Thelma eventually bound her journals into six large volumes, titled *My Appalachia*.



They now reside in the AMC Archives, providing an incredible first-person perspective account of AMC in the 1930s. It's the story of how Thelma found her place in the club, making friends on her first camping trip, sharing meals with the gregarious skiers at Pinkham Notch, and spending a joyful week discovering Echo Lake Camp.

Most transformative of all was her introduction to the AMC Boston Area's mountaineering community—a tight-knit group who mentored her, challenged her, and welcomed her into their world. Under their guidance, Thelma grew into a skilled and fearless climber, scaling rock from Boston to Wyoming. On an



autumn trip to Katahdin in 1935, she was one of the first four women to scale an arduous route called the Armadillo. She writes little about the climb aside from it taking "an awful long time." Instead, she describes arriving atop the pitch at sunset, the group singing at the top of their lungs as they hiked out in the dark.

She climbed often and hard. One of the most telling artifacts in her journals isn't a summit photo or a map, but the worn cuff of her favorite climbing shirt, shredded beyond repair at Quincy Quarries in 1935 after just a few years of relentless use. It's a small detail, but a perfect one: proof of a life lived outdoors, shaped by community, curiosity, and the enduring pull of the mountains.



ADVENTURE PARENTING LODGE TO LODGE

BY CAM HELD,
MAINE THE WAY



They say parenthood is life's greatest adventure. That wasn't the reason we wanted to start a family, but the line appealed to me as a lifelong adventure seeker.

The excitement was tinged with anxiety, though—I've seen too many cases where parenthood quietly closed a duo's adventure chapter. Would that be us?

You get the better part of nine months to imagine the new version of your life, without any real understanding of how a child will change things. We spent last year on cross-country ski trips, backcountry powder days, big Alaskan rivers, and Maine islands—and on each outing, our conversation turned to 2026, with a kid in tow. Would this still be possible? A fun conversation over a pint—or a pint of N/A in Christine's case—but I was always left with a sneaking fear: were we lying to ourselves?

Elliot arrived in stick season, and we kept our schedules blank for three months. By late winter, the itch was back. I was afraid to name it at first—I didn't want to be the dad craving something outside this perfect family bubble. Then Christine said, "Do you think we could do an AMC hut trip up in the Maine woods?"

With a smile, I replied, "There's only one way to find out."

The access road is a mess—sheet ice, meltwater puddles, and the occasional muddy morass. Our Subaru chugs along in deep ruts left by logging trucks. Somehow, no peep from Elliot's car seat. Kiwi, our dog, is losing it—gravel roads almost always mean a trailhead in her world.

We pull into the AMC winter parking lot, where a corduroy ski trail winds out and downhill into the distance. First stop: the gear-shuttle shed. More gear than pre-dad me could've imagined for two nights out—small packs for us, a large bag for Kiwi and

Elliot (dog food, diapers, burp cloths, enough outfit changes for the worst imaginable rate of blowouts), and Elliot's pack-and-play. That crib would've been a bulky problem to haul ourselves. Huge thanks to the AMC's gear shuttle team for making the logistics feasible.

With the click of Elliot's seatbelt in the Chariot—our covered ski sled—a countdown begins: if we don't get moving very quickly, there's about to be a screaming infant. I drop my new backcountry Nordic skis into the snow with a splat. Christine is clipped in, camera in hand. Kiwi trots around with a stick lodged between her teeth. Even Elliot looks ready, twirling her pacifier as if to say, 'Ready when you are, Dad.'

And with a kick and glide, we're off.

The route to Little Lyford starts on the wide K-I Road and turns onto the Hedgehog Gate Trail—narrower, windier, skiers only. After a flat introduction, it climbs steeply. Pulling the Chariot



uphill is usually the issue—the added weight unseats my usual cross-country skis. But today, with the fish-scale pattern on my new skis and the slow, wet snow, I stride straight up the steepest gradients.

Elliot, unexpectedly, stays awake the whole way—squealing as Kiwi races past on a descent, and trees flash by. I usually call the Chariot her "nap machine," but today she's locked in. Maybe these tighter trails appeal to her; 90 percent of our skiing has been at the uninteresting Riverside Golf Course.

Right as our legs start to burn, the trail spits us out onto the groomed Upper Valley Road. One last turn, a sweeping descent, and Little Lyford appears.

"Seven miles down," I say as we high-five.

The hut staff has the woodstove cranking on our arrival—maybe too much for a day in the forties, but a treat to arrive at a toasty cabin. Soon the sun is low, lighting up the wafting woodsmoke overhead.

We grab heaping plates of butter chicken, rice, naan, and coconut lentil soup, and sit at a table of strangers. Before joining the conversation, we look at one another, smile, and clink two cans of Bissell Brothers Substance.

Elliot becomes the leading topic. "How old is she?" a woman from Montreal asks. "Three months," Christine replies. The older gentleman to my right, in his late seventies, seems less impressed. "Start 'em young," he advises, "that way they'll keep taking you to places like this when you're old." He nods, with a wry smile, at his grown son across the table.

I'd been to Little Lyford once before, in 2022, when an Arctic Blast brought overnight temperatures

"I'm hoping fifty years from now she'll be the one pulling me in on a sled."

barely above -30°F. Getting ready that morning, my icy ski binding shattered the moment I clipped in. I limp-skied to Gorman Chairback one-legged, falling on every descent, defeated by the time the gear shuttle picked me up.

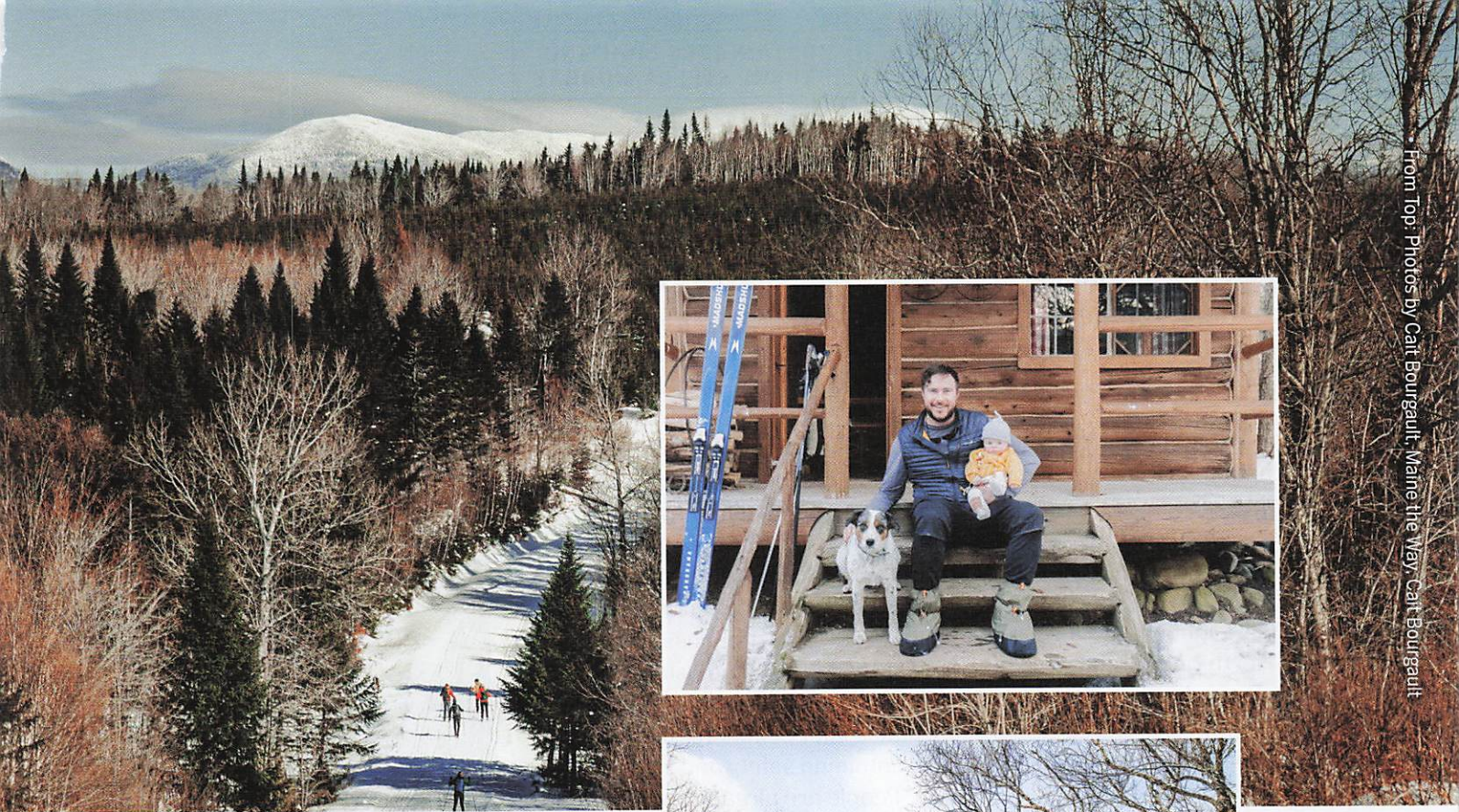
This morning is different. Milder temps, metal bindings I can trust. Today's challenge is the firm, dare I say icy, crust that formed when yesterday's slush froze overnight—everything has the slick sheen of an ice rink. We head out, bellies full of bacon, eggs, and maple syrup-soaked waffles. I'm fighting for grip on every climb, and the measured descents have given way to high-speed roller-coaster rides on metal-edged rails. Both parents grinning. Kiwi joyous. Elliot cooing.

We're moving fast, in a flow state. The big climb that broke me four years ago on one ski? We're cresting it before I realize where we are. The Lodge to Lodge Trail winds down through a forest of white pines and massive old hemlocks. Soon the bright expanse of Long Pond appears through the trees—Gorman Chairback.

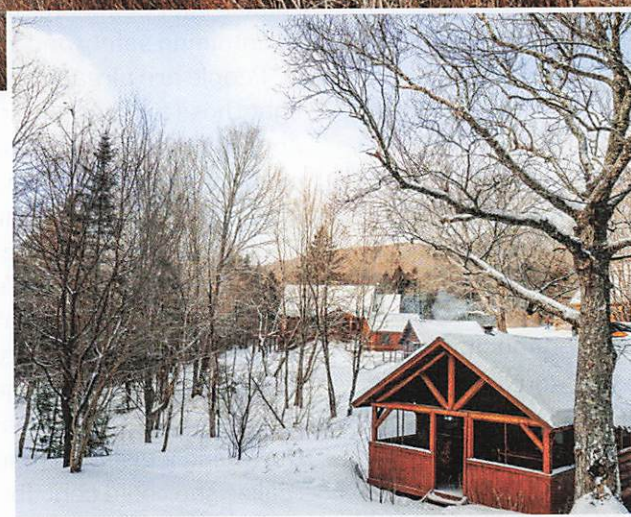
After a sauna and a Thanksgiving-spread dinner with new friends—Brooklyn architects, a newly engaged couple from Maryland, a retired Bath Iron Works engineer—Elliot yawns on my lap. We keep chatting. "Another beer?" one of the guys asks. Christine shrugs. "Sure. Thanks."

Success is a powerful drug, and it breeds complacency. New parents are especially prone—





From Top: Photos by Cait Bourgault, Maine the Way, Cait Bourgault



every success feels like a cue that you can relax the framework that helped create it. Elliot's bedtime is right around 7 P.M. Dinner at the AMC huts is at 6, but easily bleeds into the seven o'clock hour. The first night, we excused ourselves quickly and put her down. The following night, we got sloppy.

The tears come slowly, then turn to wails as Christine sweeps her from my arms and heads for the exit. I say goodnight and follow. I can hear the shrieks from outside.

There's no creature harder to get to sleep than an overtired baby. Feeding, rocking, singing—we try it all. Sometimes, patience is the only thing that works, and patience can be hard to find. The only redeeming thought: thank goodness the AMC huts are individual cabins and not shared bunkhouses.

Eventually, the last whimper gives way to still lips and closed eyes.

In the quiet that follows, I lie awake. The moon is painting the snow

outside in a ghostly blue hue. Christine, Elliot, Kiwi—all breathing softly.

It wasn't easy. There were blown-out diapers and midnight wakeups that wouldn't have happened at home, meltdowns that wouldn't have come to pass in the safety of a structured schedule. But there were also the highest highs—giggle fits on the bed, the wonder on Elliot's face as the forest whizzed past, the sense of accomplishment at the end of each day. A chapter that's too safe might never be difficult, but it can never offer the euphoria of challenges overcome.

If I can leave Elliot with any inheritance, I hope it's an undying curiosity for the world, a love of the outdoors, and a thirst for adventure. We're on the right path.

Hedgehog Gate Trail

★

Upper Valley Road

5.2 mi

★

Little Lyford Pond Camp

5.8 mi

In Search of Stars

How one AMC member put her professional skills to work for dark sky conservation

BY ISABELLA MARIN

With a name that means “star,” it’s no wonder that Stella Murray is drawn to the night sky.

When she joined AMC last December, Murray was looking for a way to connect with the outdoors beyond her neighborhood. Living in Boston’s North End without a car, many outdoor adventures felt out of reach. A single member webinar was all it took to connect a lifelong passion with a new mission.

Like many members, Murray was eager to get involved. At AMC’s volunteer opportunity webinar, she learned about the Conservation Action Network, a community of AMC advocates who take action to support policies that protect outdoor places and local communities.

Earlier this year, members of the network helped pass legislation in Maine requiring new and renovated public infrastructure to use dark sky friendly lighting, which reduces light pollution and glare.

It was a topic Murray knew quite a bit about. “It connected the dots for me,” she says. “This was something I could genuinely help out with.”

Murray is an architectural lighting designer for Landscape Forms, an exterior lighting manufacturer that offers dark sky friendly luminaires. She also serves on the Sustainable Lighting Committee for the Illuminating Engineering Society, where she helped contribute to responsible lighting guidelines used around the world.

Through her work, Murray has seen how artificial light at night affects ecosystems in ways many people rarely consider. Artificial light at night can lead migratory birds off course, interfere with human sleep cycles, and disrupt the natural behaviors of wildlife that depend on darkness to forage, navigate, and reproduce. Fortunately, simple changes, such as directing outdoor lights downward, choosing warm-colored lighting, and using timers or motion sensors, can significantly reduce light pollution while still maintaining safety and visibility.

“People are already enjoying the light these fixtures provide and may not even realize they’re better for the environment,” says Murray.

Because of her longstanding interest in protecting the natural night environment, AMC’s dark sky work, including its stewardship of an International Dark Sky Park in the AMC Maine Woods, had already caught her attention. Learning about the Maine legislation made her realize she could contribute her own expertise.

Now, she’s putting her expertise to work with AMC’s policy team by identifying examples of dark sky friendly lighting already in use across Massachusetts. By highlighting successful projects and sharing information about them, she hopes to make responsible lighting solutions feel more accessible to decision-makers, businesses, and community leaders considering similar approaches.

“The best thing that anyone can do is just reach out,” she says. “AMC is such a great support system, and they’ll help reroute you until you’ve



found concrete action items that you’re excited about.”

The work is far from finished. Murray is continuing to identify examples of dark sky friendly lighting, build connections, and explore new ways to support advocacy efforts in Massachusetts. Less than a year after joining AMC, she’s already helping advance a cause she cares deeply about.

“I now live and breathe dark sky,” Stella explains. “Volunteering with AMC was a way to not only focus locally but reach people outside of the lighting industry. Anyone with an interest in the outdoors can join AMC, which makes it the perfect place to further my passion and continue spreading the word.”

How To Take Pictures of The Night Sky

BY AMANDA GARZA

Photographing the night sky, or astrophotography, may seem like magic. You're capturing starlight that's traveled billions of light years! However, you just need a camera (DSLR or smartphone) that lets you manually adjust three things: its ISO, aperture, and shutter speed. Play with different combinations of these settings to capture the most clear and luminous images!



Shutter speed controls how long your lens shutter is open to light. Set it low, between 15–25 seconds. Longer exposures may capture star trails; as the earth rotates, stars appear to move!



Stabilize your camera using a tripod, or prop it up on a rolled-up jacket to angle it towards the sky.



Pressing the shutter button vibrates your camera and blurs the image during a long exposure. Instead, set a shutter delay of 2–5 seconds to allow your camera to stabilize before the shutter is released.



Turn autofocus (A/AF) off and set to manual focus (M/MF). Locate a bright star, zoom in, and adjust the focus until it looks clear.



ISO controls your camera's sensitivity to light. Set it high, around 1600, to pick up those precious glimmers of starlight. Higher settings may make images look "noisy" or grainy.



A camera lens' aperture (f-stop) controls how much light reaches the camera's sensor. Set it low, below f/4, to let in more starlight.

Now that you know the basics, it's time to grab your camera and find a clear, dark sky.

If you're at an AMC destination, you'll likely find fellow astrophotographers excited to share their own tips. I've learned so much from other photographers just outside Greenleaf Hut, our cameras focused on the moonrise over Franconia Ridge, and on the dock at Medawisla Lodge, with the Milky Way sprawling overhead. See you out under the night sky!

As AMC's creative manager, Amanda Garza documents the region's diverse landscapes and human connections, inspiring outdoor conservation with every image.

Discover the stillness of New Hampshire's peaks after the summer crowds depart. From snow-dusted trails to hearty meals by the fireplace, there is no better time to plan a weekend at the Highland Center, Cardigan Lodge, or Joe Dodge Lodge.



Find your winter escape today!

New Hampshire Lodges

 **Joe Dodge Lodge**
Jackson, NH

 **Highland Center**
Bretton Woods, NH

 **Cardigan Lodge**
Alexandria, NH

The background of the entire advertisement is a photograph of a winter mountain resort. In the foreground, there is a snow-covered parking lot with several picnic tables and scattered logs. Behind the lot are two large resort buildings: one is a multi-story green and brown lodge with a complex roofline, and the other is a long, two-story red building with many windows. In the background, a large, snow-dusted mountain rises, its slopes covered in a mix of evergreen and bare deciduous trees. A white outline of the state of New Hampshire is superimposed on the upper right portion of the mountain.

Crisp days. Cozy nights.

A Seat at the Holiday Table

For one AMC staff member, nothing beats Thanksgiving in the mountains

BY KAT ENGLISHMAN

Snow falls softly outside while a crackling fire casts a warm indoor glow. All around are cheerful families, gathering to share a hearty meal. This is a glimpse into a holiday stay at one of AMC's frontcountry retreats in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Most visitors to the lodges—the Highland Center, in Crawford Notch, and Joe Dodge Lodge, in Pinkham Notch—use them as basecamps for high country adventure, not holiday relaxation. But both facilities remain open for Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day. On Thanksgiving, they host buffet-style feasts, complete with all the fixings you'd expect. For Christmas, they bring guests together for a warm meal and cozy alpine overnight.

"The setting in the notches, surrounded by the peaks of the White Mountains, can't be beat," says Chris Thayer, AMC's senior director of external affairs. "Both places are a true retreat."

Thayer would know. His first AMC holiday came as a teenage Croo member, working at Lakes of Clouds Hut on the 4th of July. Thayer remembers standing more than 5,000 feet above sea level, watching fireworks go off in the towns below. These days, he and his family are regulars at both Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner.

Thayer recalls with special fondness a Thanksgiving a few years back, during which his party was treated to some early season snow. Looking around that night, he saw other groups of extended families and close friends, all basking in the moment together. This, he says, is the true reason he spends his holidays with AMC. Not having to do dishes at the end of the night is a nice bonus.

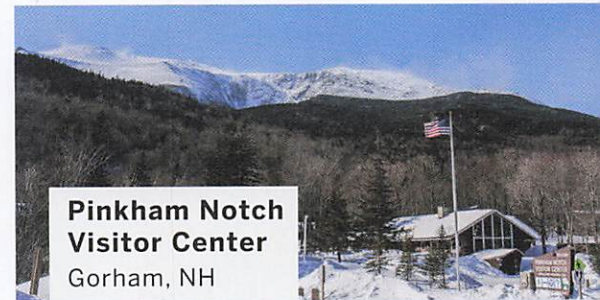
"Everyone should experience at least one holiday tradition at an AMC Hut or Lodge—mountain hospitality coupled with mountain magic!"

Thanksgiving Dinner

NOVEMBER 26, 2026



Highland Center
Bretton Woods, NH



Pinkham Notch Visitor Center
Gorham, NH

EXPECT:

Buffet service, mouthwatering roast turkey (of course), free activities for families.



Now accepting reservations for Winter 2026. Scan the code to book now.



NIGHT

In the AMC Maine Woods, grooming nearly 100 miles of ski trails means waking up early.

Chris Brooks starts his workday like many of us: a mug of coffee in hand while a machine boots up. The similarities mostly end there. For starters, it's two in the morning; the temperature nearing zero at Medawisla Lodge & Cabins in the forests of northern Maine. And the machine is a PistenBully 100, a snow groomer with a bulldozer-like front and a row of sharp blades, called a "tiller," in the back. The vehicle pushes powder forward, then out of the way, while the tiller tattoos neat rows of narrow grooves into the remaining snowpack. Brooks is here as part of a small team with a large task: grooming a vast network of cross-country ski paths across AMC Maine Woods property.

The trails include snow covered logging roads, wide and gently graded, and doubletrack that gives way to singletrack—the "intricate, more romantic trails," in Brooks' parlance. Some follow frozen streams to lowland ponds. Others rise to ridgelines. In all, the grooming team—four AMC staff, including Brooks—maintain 98 miles of trail, the largest groomed Nordic ski network east of the Mississippi River.

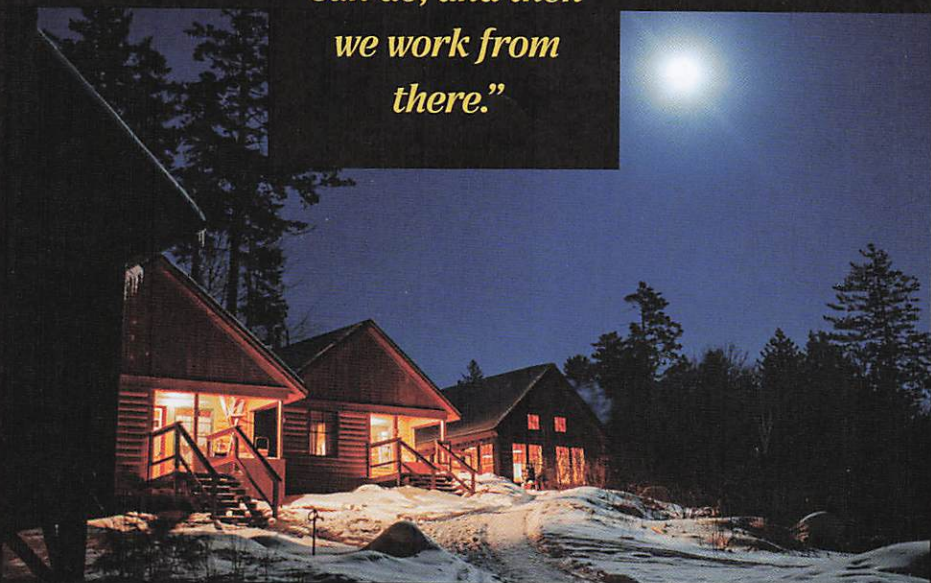
Ensuring each trail is ready for guests on every skiable day of the winter is a feat of logistics, technology, and adaptability. Weather in northern Maine is variable and volatile, capable of epic storms, sub-zero spells, and sudden warm snaps.

Vehicle-trapping snow drifts and mechanical troubles in the backcountry are typical of the job. So are unpredictable hours. A normal day for Brooks runs from

3 A.M. to noon. Other times, he'll start in the evening, around 10 P.M., and work until he sees the sunrise. These work shifts are dictated by the thermometer, as snow grooms best between zero and 25 degrees Fahrenheit, the precipitation report, and the number of guests at AMC's three backcountry lodges.

To get the job done, Brooks and his team depend on three kinds of vehicles: the PistenBully, for logging roads; a tractor, for medium-width paths; and

"Mother Nature tells us what we can do, and then we work from there."

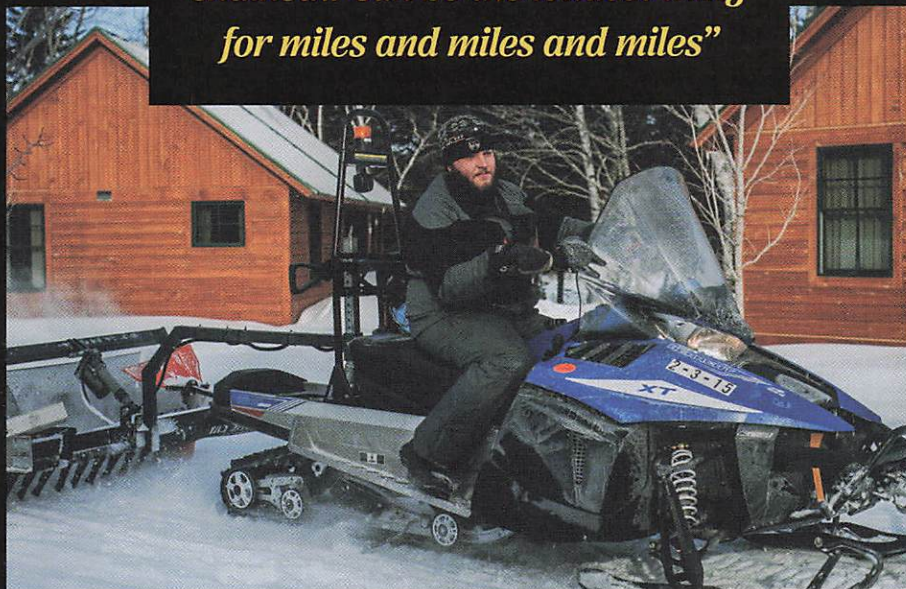


MOVES

Really early.

BY MATT MORRIS

“When it’s 2 A.M. in the woods, the chainsaw can be the loudest thing for miles and miles and miles”



snowmobiles, for windy singletracks. Dress codes vary by vehicle. The PistenBully has a heated cockpit, so Brooks strips down to a T-shirt and shorts—regardless of the outside temperature. Snowmobile days require a more extensive wardrobe: two pairs of long johns, jeans, full-body snowmobile bibs, at least one wool sweater, a dual-layer coat, thick socks, gloves, a neck buff, a balaclava, and a trapper’s hat with ear flaps. He’ll carry even more

clothes in the back of the vehicle, plus a med kit, extra water, and food. Groomers also come prepared with chainsaws and folding saws for fallen trees on the trail.

Interruptions aside, the work of the groomer is filled with silence and small, solitary pleasures. While the groomers are a tightknit group, bonded by their unique occupation, the trails are so extensive that they only occasionally cross paths. To fill the hours, some play podcasts, while

others try to learn new languages with Duolingo. Last winter, Brooks listened to the audiobook *The Lost City of Z*, a real-life adventure set in the Brazilian Amazon. (“Listening to them deal with the heat and malaria was a big contrast to the world in front of me,” he says.) He would also watch for wildlife: the slow breathing of a resting moose, the white-on-white camouflage of a snowshoe hare, the machine gun flapping of startled rough grouse.

The life of a Maine Woods groomer is not for everyone. The hours are arduous, and the trails are empty at night. While that’s an intimidating prospect for many, it’s one that Brooks savors. He and his partner recently bought a house together in the town of Monson, at the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail’s 100 Mile Wilderness. At work, he watches the sun rise behind the trail’s northern conclusion, Mount Katahdin. Uninterrupted boreal forest lies between those points, usually whited out by snow. Brooks says he wants to live in this forest for the rest of his life. Thanks to AMC, it’ll be there for all to enjoy for generations to come.



the rewards of repetition

why a group of longtime AMC friends are repeatedly hiking every trail in the Blue Hills of Boston

BY MATT MORRIS

When Joanne Newton finally retired, after decades of “busy jobs and craziness,” she knew she’d need a hobby. Curious if hiking could be her new fix, she joined an AMC outing in the Blue Hills Reservation, the 7,000-acre state park a dozen miles south of downtown Boston.

That’s where she met Bob.

Bob Vogel said he organized a bi-weekly hiking series with AMC called Trail Trace the Blue Hills. Each season, its participants tried to trek every mile of every trail in the reservation, about 125 miles total. They called it “tracing” and followed special routes, mostly designed by Bob, to avoid backtracking and repeating trails when possible.

That all sounded wild to Joanne. But Bob was just getting rolling.

Once a series was over, some hikers started. Bob himself had done the trace dozens of times. There was even a group dedicated to completing it in the winter.

“Well, I didn’t even know you could hike in the winter,” recalled Newton.

In the nine years since, Newton has completed the trace 25 times, eight of them in the winter. Trail Trace the Blue Hills is now in its 20th year. Its participants have collectively covered enough miles to circumvent the Earth’s equator three times over ... all without leaving the Boston suburbs.

Long before English settlers arrived in modern-day Boston, the land’s Native peoples named their tribe for the blue-hued slopes rising beyond the waterline: Massachusett, meaning “people of the

great hill.” Today, we know that the coloration in the hills is caused by the mineral riebeckite.

Bob Vogel began his Blue Hills journey in the 1990s, when he and his wife moved to the adjacent town of Randolph. By then, the 22 hills had been set aside by the state government for nature and recreation. The land around them, once country estates for Boston’s aristocrats, had been absorbed into the city’s sprawl.

Vogel started hiking in the Blue Hills simply because they were close. But what he found there blew him away. There were boardwalks over bogs and pathways atop ridgelines; abandoned quarries and active ski hills; forests so thick they blotted out the Boston skyline.

“It’s big enough that we can all have our favorite places in there,” said Vogel.

One day, Vogel was hiking the hills with his friend Bill Ruehl. When they stopped to rest, Ruehl plucked out his map and a pen.

“I was teasing him, asking if he was marking our route in case I couldn’t find the cars later,” wrote Vogel. “He said, no. He had always wanted

“Our favorite memories” are all the hard ones”

to hike all the trails, so he marked up the map whenever he came here.”

A few years later, in 2006, Vogel helped turn the idea into the first Trail Trace the Blue Hills series. Many of its participants came back the following season. And then the one after that.

Each year, about a million visitors descend on the Blue Hills Reservation. Most aren't compelled to explore every roadside connector and dead-end path. So, what's the draw for the completionists? And, once they've accomplished their goal, why start over? For many Blue Hills tracers, the project's joys come as much from camaraderie as scenery. They savor the opportunity to bond over many miles, even in tough conditions. Especially in tough conditions.

When more than 60 inches of snow hit Boston last winter, Trail Trace the Blue Hills continued apace. Hikers encountered drifts that buried trails and thwarted navigation. Usually, they were the ones making first tracks in their snowshoes.

“It didn't turn anyone off,” said Vogel. “I think it made everyone more serious about finishing.”



Now in their seventies, the two friends remain committed to their life outdoors. Bob is still the evangelist; sharing the Blue Hills gospel with new hikers, just like he did with Joanne nearly a decade ago. Together, they talk about tracing traditions like they're little secrets: a hike with conditions so tough, its participants now call themselves the 'frozen foot club' and have cookie parties for hikers who have completed their trace. These are the moments that define their years with AMC—celebrations of accomplishment, shared as a community.

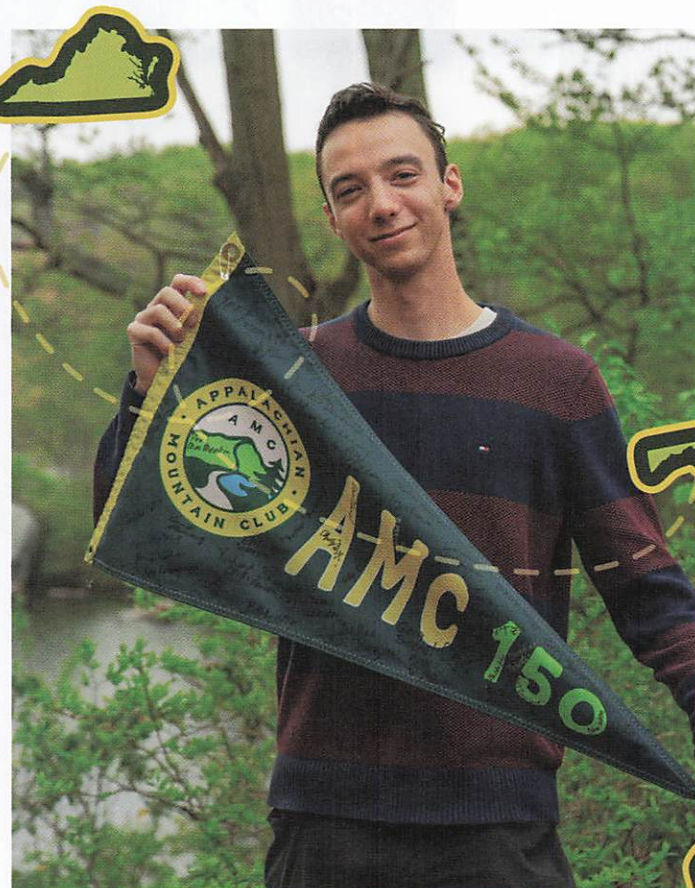
“I've made so many friends, all my really close friends at this point,” said Joanne. “It really is a life changer.”

5 Things I Learned On the AMC 150 Relay

PARKER DEPOND INTERVIEWED BY KAT ENGLISHMAN

PHOTOS BY PARKER DEPOND

Parker DePond, AMC's 150 Relay content and community coordinator, followed members and outdoor lovers from every walk of life with a camera in hand and an open mind from Virginia to Maine. Tasked with capturing moments ranging from tiny to mighty in scale, DePond also learned a few things along the way. Here, he reflects on his biggest takeaways, recounts stories, and shares his boots-on-the-ground perspective on AMC's future.



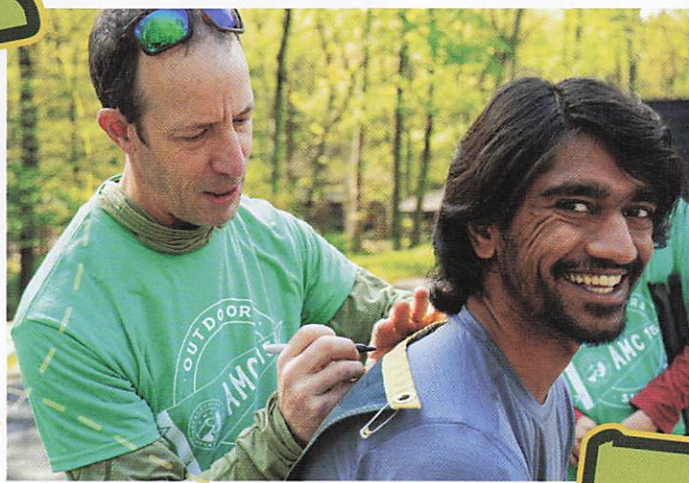
2 The Best Things Happen When You Live in the Moment

Everyday, I meet people I've never met before with the goal of earning their trust. Some of the best moments I've experienced came from conversations I never expected to have. When you stay present and embrace the unknown, strangers become storytellers, small interactions become meaningful memories, and the day unfolds in ways you could never have planned.



1 Everyone Has a Story Worth Telling

Looking back, I don't think any of the connections I made with people would have happened if I hadn't slowed down enough to be present. I tried to remember names, asked about favorite hikes, listened to career stories, and paid attention to the moments people wanted to share. The more I listened, the more I realized that the relay wasn't just about carrying a flag from place to place. It was about carrying people's stories with it.





4 Be Ready to Expect the Unexpected

On day three, nature had its own surprises in store. A powerful storm swept through, with winds strong enough to take down trees, forcing Shenandoah National Park's Skyline Drive to close. Instead of stopping the relay, the trip leaders quickly regrouped, rerouted the course, and kept everyone moving safely.

It was a reminder that time outdoors rarely goes exactly as planned. Sometimes, the best moments come from adapting, trusting the people around you, and finding a new path forward.

3 Lean on Community

North of Shenandoah National Park, a couple who had heard about the relay wanted to sponsor a section, and they opened their bed-and-breakfast (which usually hosts Appalachian Trail thru-hikers). A full spread of tea and homemade treats were waiting for us. No one had asked them to do it, they simply believed the relay was worth supporting.

Then, in Philadelphia, we were miles from the nearest bike shop when one rider's pedal stripped. A stranger working at a nearby business didn't hesitate: they walked to their car, grabbed a wrench, and handed it over—it was enough to keep the bike rolling for the rest of the day.

Time after time, people stepped forward to help with no expectation of anything in return. Every act of kindness reminded me that this relay moved forward because a community of people, many of them complete strangers only hours before, chose to carry it together. They believed in the journey, the people carrying the flag, and in what AMC represents.

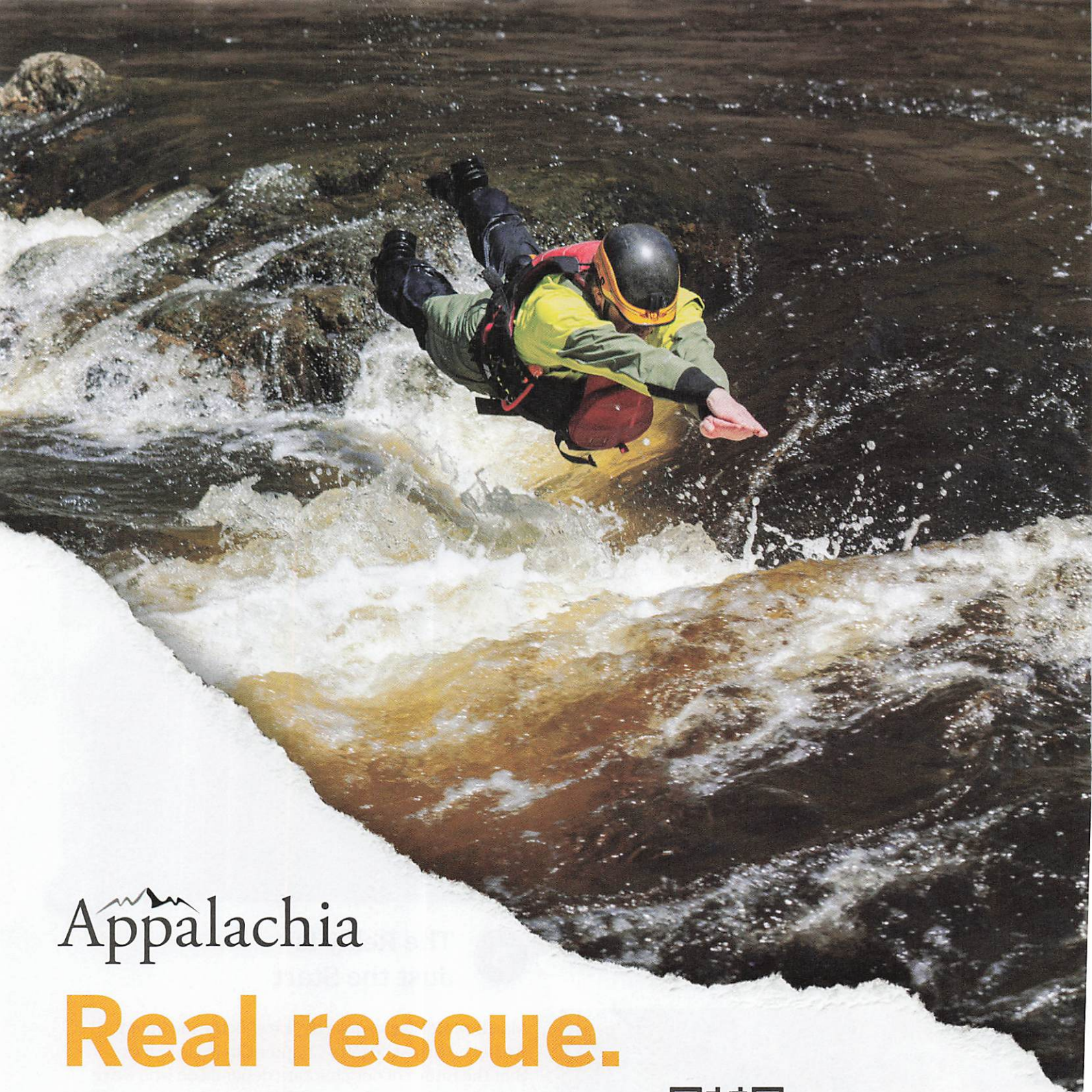


5 The Relay Is Just the Start

Matthew Hart, who goes by "Hew," is the incoming Western Massachusetts Chapter Chair. He knows that the future of our chapters depends on who we're welcoming in now. During the two days I backpacked with him in late May, I saw firsthand his commitment to building a thriving community for members in their twenties and thirties by creating opportunities, introducing them to others, and generously giving his time because he believes in AMC.

I think it's Hew and people like him who help carry the mission forward because they understand the next generation doesn't begin with a program or a budget. It begins by fostering community and relationships.





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• From top: Photos by Adam Nawrot, Paula Champagne

Activity Listings

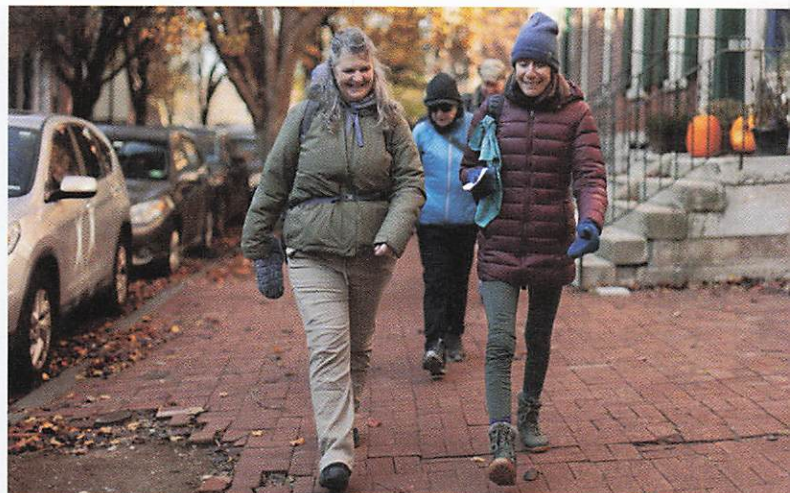
To explore all activities and sign up, visit activities.outdoors.org. New trips, volunteer opportunities, and workshops are posted every day!



Find the most up-to-date listings on the AMC activities page.

Your Adventure Your Way

Can't find the trip you want? AMC offers customized adventures. Email amclodging@outdoors.org for details.



OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Hope Valley, RI

October 16, 2026

Want to have a greater impact with AMC? This course on leadership responsibilities, trip planning, risk awareness, and so much more will be held at the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed facility. Presentations will be both indoors and outdoors. Water is available but please pack your own lunch.

FALL BACKPACKING AT ETHAN POND

Bartlett, NH

October 16–18, 2026

This three-day backpacking adventure traverses the foliage-filled Willey Range, in New Hampshire's White Mountains. On day one, we'll hike to the Ethan Pond Shelter via the Ethan Pond Trail. The hike to the shelter is approximately 3 miles, with about 1,400 feet of elevation gain. On Saturday, we'll summit three 4,000-foot peaks—Mount Willey, Mount Field, and Mount Tom—before returning to the shelter. Expect a rewarding weekend of hiking, fall scenery, and wonderful company in the White Mountains.



20S AND 30S HIKE: JACKSON AND PIERCE Carroll, NH

October 17, 2026

Join us for a fall hike to Mount Jackson and Mount Pierce. This will be an approximately 8-mile trip with 2,900 feet of elevation gain at a moderate pace. There are two short sections of scrambling required on the summit cone of Mount Jackson.

Full three-season hiking gear will be required, including appropriate footwear, a waterproof/windproof jacket, and warm layers. Keep in mind that mid October tends to feature cooler temperatures as we ascend.

FALL WALK AT MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY Cambridge, MA

October 17, 2026

Founded in 1831, Mount Auburn Cemetery offers space for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts to be surrounded by history. Our walk will cover about four miles over three hours. Participants should expect an easy pace with breaks to take in the flora, views from Washington Tower, historic headstones, and, of course, snacks.

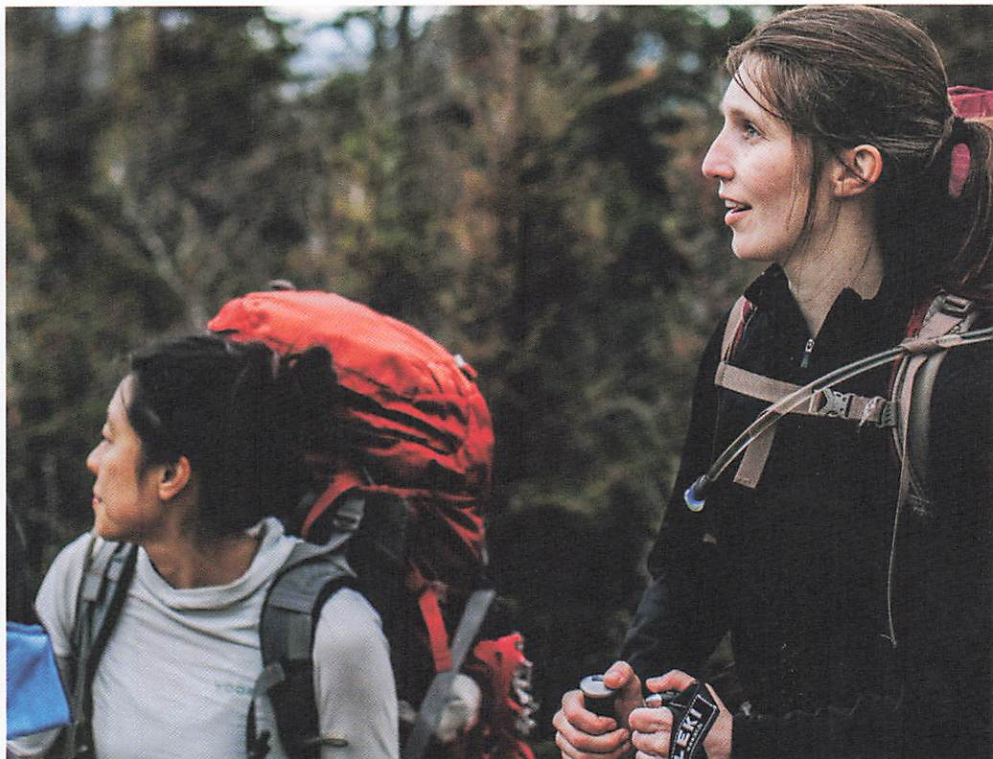
This walk is public transit friendly. There are also bike racks just inside the cemetery walls for cyclists.

WHITE MOUNTAIN DOUBLE: NORTH KINSMAN AND SOUTH KINSMAN Franconia, NH

October 17, 2026

Are you an experienced hiker who would like to continue your White Mountain journey? The “White Mountain Doubles” might be for you. This hike series features routes up pairs of nearby White Mountain peaks.

The North Kinsman/South Kinsman hike, the fourth in the series, is a 10.2



• From top: Photo by Paula Champagne, Corey David Photography

• Photo by Corey David Photography



mile out and back trek from Route 116. The first mile is quick, with limited elevation, followed by several miles of steep gains. Once we reach the summit of North Kinsman, it is another .9 miles of ridgeline hiking to the summit of South Kinsman.

NATURE WALK

Saltaire, NY

October 17, 2026

Take a gentle walk near Fire Island Cabin and discover the plants, wildlife, and dunes that make this national seashore so unique. This guided exploration invites guests to slow down, observe closely, and connect with the landscape.

This activity is free to guests at Fire Island Cabin. All other participants must pay a day fee.

FALL FOLIAGE DAY

Sloatsburg, NY

October 18, 2026

Join us for Fall Foliage Day at Reeves Meadow! Enjoy guided hikes, hot cider, leaf printing, and see Harriman State Park in all its autumn glory.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

Carrabassett Valley, ME

October 18, 2026

Join the AMC Maine Chapter for its annual fall trail work session on a 3.2-mile section of the AT. Help us clear blowdowns, clean water bars, and perform the basic maintenance that keeps this trail open to all. Please bring your own gloves, water, lunch, and appropriate clothing for a full day outdoors. We will have some tools available for those who don't have their own.



Find the most up-to-date listings on the AMC activities page.

• Photo by Parker DePond

FULL MOON HIKE AT BORDERLAND STATE PARK

North Easton, MA

October 27, 2026

Come and hike under a full Hunter's Moon. We will travel about 5 miles around 2 large ponds, mainly on wide and flat trails. Under clear conditions, the ponds and meadows are brightly lit and you can see the moon about 90% of the time. Sturdy hiking shoes are a must for the autumn conditions.

CADY BROOK WILDLIFE TRANSECT

Hinsdale, MA

October 27, 2026

A transect is a wildlife survey in which biologists and citizen scientists follow a set path, counting species as they go. We'll be walking near Cady Brook, an area with relatively few animals in recent surveys, but beaver, moose, and otter sightings in the past. We will be outside all day, for 4 to 5 miles of slow, off-trail walking. No previous experience necessary.

INDOOR ROCK CLIMBING

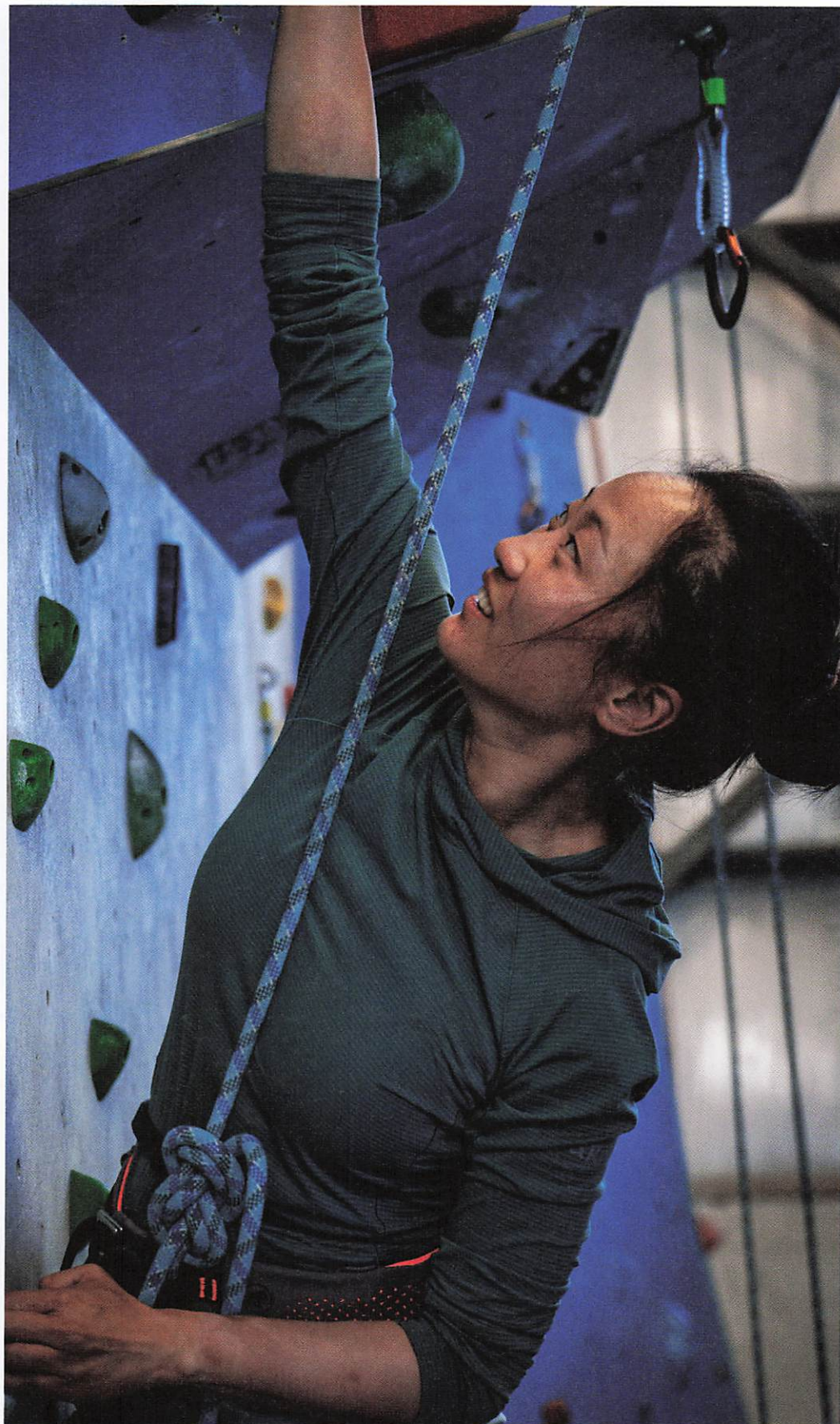
Tyngsboro, MA

November 5, 2026

Join the AMC-NH Mountaineering Committee for a social climb at MetroRock, in Tyngsboro. This is a great opportunity to connect with fellow climbers, find new partners, and enjoy climbing on lead, top rope, auto-belay, or bouldering. Climbers of all skill levels are welcome. Please note that MetroRock requires a belay check for anyone planning to top rope or lead.



Find the most up-to-date listings on the AMC activities page.



• From top: Photo by William Shoucair/AMC Photo Contest, Paula Champagne



ANNUAL MEETING AND CELEBRATION DINNER •

Norton, MA

November 7, 2026

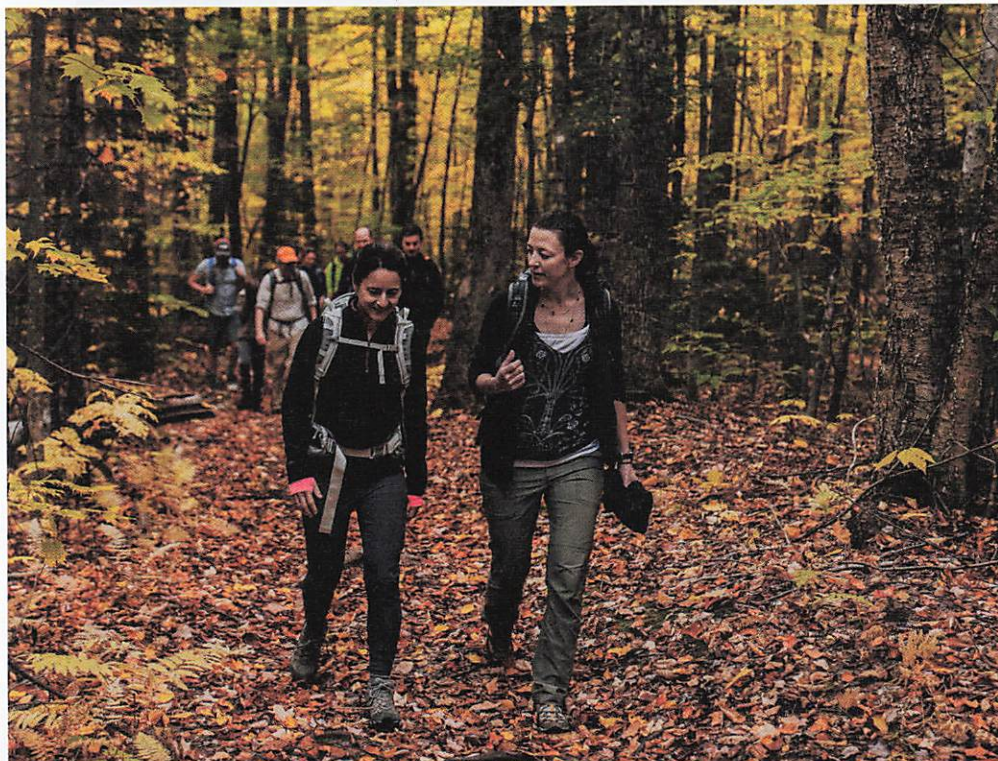
Get ready for an evening of friendship, celebration, great food, and inspiration as we gather for the 50th annual meeting of the Southeastern Massachusetts Chapter. Whether you're a longtime member, recent activity participant, or friend of the chapter, you are warmly invited to The Chateau, in Norton. Festivities begin with a social hour featuring free appetizers and a cash bar. Dinner will commence following the annual meeting and other chapter business.

This is much more than a business meeting! It's one of our chapter's most anticipated events of the year.

THE 20S AND 30S WESSELS SERIES: PISGAH STATE FOREST Hinsdale, NH

November 21, 2026

This hike is part of the Wessels Series, in which hikers in their 20s and 30s use Tom Wessels' *New England's Roadside Ecology* as a guide to talk about our region. We'll hike in Pisgah State Forest, in southern New Hampshire, while learning about grafting, the great New England hurricane of 1938, and old growth forest. We'll summit Mount Pisgah from the Kilburn Pond Trailhead, before looping along the Pisgah Ridge and down the Town Forest Trail. It's 5.9 miles in all, with approximately 1,030 feet of elevation gain.



INDOOR ROCK CLIMBING**Tyngsboro, MA**

December 3, 2026

Join the AMC-NH Mountaineering Committee for a social climb at MetroRock, in Tyngsboro. This is a great opportunity to connect with fellow climbers, find new partners, and enjoy climbing on lead, top rope, auto-belay, or bouldering. Climbers of all skill levels are welcome. Please note that MetroRock requires a belay check for anyone planning to top rope or lead.

YOUNG FAMILY NEW YEARS**Carrabassett Valley, ME**

December 30, 2026–

January 1, 2027

Come celebrate the New Year and with other young families! We'll be staying at the Maine Adaptive Outdoor Education Center lodge, just down the road from Sugarloaf resort, the Narrow Gauge Pathway, and Flagstaff Lake trailhead.

This offering is designed for parents and their children between the ages of two and six, but younger or older kids are welcome too.



• From top: Photo by Paula Champagne, Corey David Photography

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Slovenia

SCOTLAND

ITALY

SEASON/ACCESS

OVERVIEW

AMC High Mountain Huts
White Mountains, NH**

SS 9/21/26–5/28/27 (Carter), 10/18–5/28/27 (Lonesome); 10/19–5/28/27 (Zealand) 5/4–5/28/27 (Mizpah, Greenleaf).

8 huts spaced a day's hike apart along the Appalachian Trail. Meals and naturalist programs in full-service season. 3 self-service cabins offer access to snowshoeing, backcountry skiing, and cozy nights by the woodstove.

**Highland Center @
Crawford Notch**
White Mountains, NH

FS Year-round/road access.

Winter basecamp for XC or alpine skiing at nearby resorts or get into winter hiking, backcountry skiing, winter mountaineering or ice climbing. Free loaner gear from the L.L. Bean Gear Room.

**Joe Dodge Lodge @
Pinkham Notch Visitor Center
White Mountains, NH****

FS Year-round/road access; B&B, by-the-bunk rates also available

Ski the John Sherburn Ski Trail, Tuckerman Ravine, or Wildcat Mountain. XC skiing with winter hiking and mountaineering abound.

Cardigan Lodge
Lakes Region, NH

SS 10/17/26-5/13/27
FS 5/14-10/16

Cozy self-service lodge. Winter hiking trails and winter camping opportunities available.

**Gorman Chairback
Lodge & Cabins**
Maine Woods

Summer/Fall: 6/10–10/16
Winter: 1/7–3/13/27, Ski-in access only in the winter; road access rest of year.

Access by XC skiing in winter. Enjoy groomed ski and snowshoeing trails, a hot sauna, and a cozy cabin warmed by a woodstove at the end of the day.

Little Lyford Lodge & Cabins
AMC Maine Woods

SS: 5/20–10/16
FS: 1/7–3/13/27; Ski-in access only in the winter; road access rest of year.

Access by XC skiing in winter. Enjoy the longest XC ski network unbroken by a road on the East Coast with a stay at Little Lyford.

Medawisla Lodge & Cabins
AMC Maine Woods

FS: 1/7-3/13/27; 6/10-10/16
SS: 1/7-3/13/27
Year-round/road access.

All levels of XC skiing available on groomed ski trails direct from your front door. All meals prepared for you and a sauna available to warm you from the cold.

**The Stephen & Betsy Corman
AMC Harriman Outdoor Center
Metro NYC**

SS 5/10-10/16
Meal service available all season.

Closed in the winter.

Mohican Outdoor Center
Delaware Water Gap, NJ

SS Year-round; meal service available May–Oct.; family-style and buffet meal service available for groups of 10 or more.

Hub for hiking and paddling, steps from the Appalachian Trail and Catfish Pond.

Packwood, WA
augustcamp.org

Varies by location.

2027 dates to be confirmed. Four one-week sessions in July and August

Four one-week sessions; base camp with daily activities, campfires, meals included. August Camp is in the Western United States.

Cold River Camp
North Chatham, NH
coldrivercamp.org

1-6 person cabins; all meals, lodging, and daily activities.

Includes weekends in Spring and Fall.
FS Summer season: August

Located at the foot of Baldface Range. Week-long camp with daily guided hikes for varying ability levels. Emerald Pool is a short hike away.

Echo Lake Camp
Mount Desert Island, ME
amcecholakecamp.org

All meals; canvas wall tent on platform with 2-6 cots. Bath house, library, and rec hall.
FS Saturday-Saturday.

FS August 2027

Lakefront camp near Acadia National Park.
Weeklong camp with daily guided activities.
Hearty meals served family style daily.

Three Mile Island Camp
Lake Winnepesaukee, NH
threemileislandcamp.org

Lodge; 2 person cabins; dock; canoes; weeklong summer programs.

FS August 2027

Weeklong camp on a 43-acre island reachable only by boat on Lake Winnepesaukee. Daily activities with swimming and paddling are always an option.

FS: Full Service SS: Self Service

SEASON/ACCESS

OVERVIEW

CONTACT

ACCOMMODATIONS

SELF-SERVICE CABINS

High Cabin Alexandria, NH	Cabin w/bunks, small kitchen, woodstove; sleeps 12.	SS Year-round	Accessible from Cardigan Lodge; short hike to Cardigan summit. Excellent location for a winter backcountry ski trip.	Book at outdoors.org
Harvard Cabin Jackson, NH	Full kitchen, living area; loft sleeping for 24; electric lights; propane heat; outhouse.	SS Year-round	Located on Route 16 just 6 miles south of Pinkham Notch.	Email harvardcabin@gmail.com
Ponkapoag Camp Randolf, MA	20 cabins, sleeps 4–6 w/ woodstoves; ltd. number of tentsites in summer.	SS Year-round	Volunteer-managed camp located in the Blue Hills Reservation on a 230-acre pond, 11 mi. from Boston.	ponkapoagcamp.org
Knubble Bay Camp Georgetown, ME	Cabin w/bunkrooms, kitchen, sleeps 15; water; solar power; composting toilets.	SS Mid May–Mid October	This private cabin located on the water in Midcoast Maine makes a perfect base camp for paddlers and kayakers.	amckbc.org
Moose Point Cabin Maine Woods	Cabin with 2 bedrooms, a common room, kitchen, and screened-in porch.	SS 5/20–10/16	Located on Long Pond, this rustic, private cabin is reserved for exclusive use by a single party.	Book at outdoors.org
Mountain Brook Cabin Maine Woods	Two cabins with 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a full kitchen, and a living room. Sleeps up to 9.	SS 5/20–10/16	Private off-grid cabin located on remote Mt Brook Pond. Hike Gulf Hags or paddle out your back door.	Book at outdoors.org
Fire Island Cabin Atlantique, NY	Cabin sleeps 20 in 2 bunkrooms. Two private tents each accommodate 2 people: studio/ kitchen/library/classroom	SS Midweek, May–Oct.	Located on Fire Island National Seashore. Relax on the beach or learn to sail. Accessible by ferry.	Book at outdoors.org
Northwest Camp Salisbury, CT	Sleeps 6 people; nearby tent platform for 4 people.	SS 1/1–4/15; 10/1–12/31	Rustic log cabin, with tent platforms a short walk away.	Book at outdoors.org

SELF-SERVICE CAMPSITES

Beal Island Campground Georgetown, ME	Rustic campsites accommodate maximum of 30 people.	SS Mid May–Mid October access by boat only.	Coastal island; volunteer-managed rustic campsites. Beal Island is on the Maine Island Trail.	amckbc.org
AMC Backcountry Shelters & Campsites NH & ME	For accommodations, see outdoors.org/backcountrycampsites	SS Year-round; backpacking sites	15 backcountry sites in the White Mountain National Forest; fees collected at caretaker sites in summer; pay fee for Hermit Lake Shelters at Pinkham Notch.	No reservations; groups of 6+ use group notification system at outdoors.org/backcountrycampsites

INTERNATIONAL DINNER SERIES • JANUARY TO MARCH AT PINKHAM NOTCH VISITOR CENTER

Join us weekly in New Hampshire for an immersive celebration of global flavors and storytelling. Each week we spotlight a different country with a four-course dinner and lively lecture from an intrepid traveler.

The Right Age for Adventure

BY MATT MORRIS

As a young couple, Scott and Debbie Livingston were always on the move. He was a dedicated cyclist; she ran hundred-mile races. Together, they climbed New Hampshire's high peaks and backpacked the Vermont Long Trail. When they decided to have children, friends told them they'd have to slow their adventuring ways.

"We said, 'we're not going to let that happen,'" recalled Debbie. "We'll take them with us."

And so, nine weeks after the birth of their son, Shepard, the new family was on the move again—driving from their home in Connecticut to the Highland Center, in New Hampshire. After a night at the lodge, they planned to summit nearby Mount Pierce and sleep in the backcountry at Mizpah Spring Hut. The trip would be a test of how their lofty talk stacked up against the realities of parenting. It was also a response to a challenge.

"Andy Fallender, who was AMC's president at that time, took his son



up to a hut when he was 3 months old," said Scott. "So, we wanted to take Shepard when he was 9 weeks old."

On the morning of their ascent, Debbie, Scott, and baby Shepard awoke at the Highland Center to a range blanketed in snow. Nevertheless, they stuck to their itinerary. Debbie carried Shepard while Scott hauled their gear. To keep the newborn warm, they bundled him in a Gore-Tex snowsuit and swaddled him in blankets.

For the Livingstons, the trip was an indicator of what was possible. Two years later, they returned to the White Mountains to complete an even longer hut-to-hut trek. Shepard was a toddler, and could alternate

between short stints of hiking and rest time on his mother's back. Debbie, meanwhile, was six months pregnant with their daughter, Dahlia.

These days, Shepard is a sophomore in college, Dahlia a senior in high school. True to their word, the family has continued making outdoor adventure a priority in their lives. Scott cherishes photos of Shepard competing in a children's triathlon and Dahlia hiking Knife's Edge, on Katahdin, at 6 years old. This summer, the family gathered together to summit Mount Jefferson, the last mountain left in Shepard's quest to hike every 4,000-foot peak in New Hampshire.

For parents that want to get their children outdoors early, Scott and Debbie have some advice: start incrementally; put safety first; remember that while it won't be easy, it will be worth it.

"There's a lot of complaining, a lot of tears, a lot of pouting on the rock. But they learn. They learn how to persevere," said Debbie.

To that list, Scott adds one more. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

"The great thing with the AMC community is that there's so much collective experience. If you're curious about anything, just talk to other members," he said. "I hope that parents read this story, and they're like, 'We could do that too.'"



• Photos courtesy of Debbie and Scott Livingston



Slow down. Look up. See the Dark.

Just announced! Mark your calendar for 2027 so you don't miss the Northeast's brightest stars. AMC's signature night-sky event series returns for two unforgettable weekends.



October 10–8, 2027 • Medawisla Lodge & Cabins, AMC Maine Woods
December 17–19, 2027 • Highland Center, Crawford Notch, NH

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