

## New England

# Backcountry lodging available

By Jerry Harkavy  
Associated Press

**MOUNT WASHINGTON, N.H.** — The cone-shaped rock-pile atop the tallest mountain in the Northeast loomed clear and bright a mile in the distance as we approached Lakes of the Clouds Hut around midday. But within minutes, a cold wind ushered in a mass of clouds that completely obscured the view.

With Mount Washington notorious for fast-changing and unforgiving weather, the 92-year-old hut along the edge of the Ammonoosic Ravine is a welcome stopping point for cold, hungry day hikers craving a hot bowl of soup or a cup of tea or coffee.

For those planning to spend the night, Lakes of the Clouds offers hearty meals, clean, well-maintained accommodations and a young, energetic staff, or "croo," eager to share their knowledge of trail conditions, weather and the local flora and fauna.

Lakes, with 96 beds, is the largest, highest and most popular of the Appalachian Mountain Club's eight huts perched roughly a day's hike apart in the heart of the White Mountains. But the AMC's fabled hut system is only part of a growing network of backcountry accommodations that the 90,000-member club operates.

From spartan shelters alongside hiking trails to a handsome roadside lodge set beside the main highway that cuts through Crawford Notch, the AMC can provide sleeping quarters for roughly 2,200 visitors a night during the peak summer season when all facilities are open.

### Expanded accommodations

In recent years, the Boston-based club has expanded its accommodations to other backcountry locations, most notably Maine's North Woods. After acquiring 37,000 acres in the 100-Mile Wilderness, the club has taken over

sporting camps used by hikers, canoeists, fly fishermen, snowshoers and cross-country skiers.

Most facilities are in New Hampshire and Maine, but the AMC also has lodgings in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. While most are in the rural backcountry, at least two sites can be reached by public transportation from New York or Boston.

The nightly rates vary from as little as \$8 for use of a tent platform to \$135 per person for a private room with meals at Highland Lodge, although AMC members receive a discount.

The club's entry into the lodging business dates back to the late 19th century, after the AMC was founded in 1876 to promote recreation and conservation in the White Mountains. The first of the huts, Madison Spring Hut, was built 12 years later.

The eight huts, crown jewels of the club's lodging network, offer a range of views — all of them spectacular — and various levels of accessibility.

Lonesome Lake, on the side of Cannon Mountain, and Zealand Falls, at the edge of the Pemigewasset Wilderness, represent the easiest hikes and are most suitable for families with young children.

Galehead, in the Franconia Range, Mizpah Spring on Mount Clinton and Carter Notch, between Wildcat and Carter Dome, are reachable by a moderate hike. The most challenging are the three highest huts — Greenleaf, on Mount Lafayette, Madison Spring and Lakes of the Clouds — all above 4,000 feet.

While a handful of hikers have stayed at all eight huts in succession, the average visitor spends two to three nights in the huts. Such an itinerary enables hikers to spend a long weekend in the Presidential or Franconia range

without having to pack a tent, sleeping bag, camp stove, food and other gear in a backpack that can weigh 40 or 50 pounds or more.

"It's nice not to have to bring all that camping gear and to have good, warm meals provided," said Abby Chiverton, a medical student from New York who stayed at Mizpah and Lakes during a recent hike with her boyfriend.

An occasional backpacker, Chiverton also welcomes the idea of being indoors in the event of inclement weather. "The weather on Mount Washington is so unpredictable," she said.

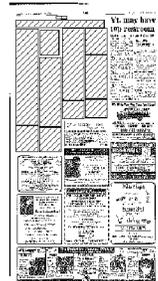
But those who prefer a more primitive experience — or who are on a tighter budget — can stay at the club's network of backcountry camping areas equipped with three-sided lean-to shelters, tent platforms or both. The campsites, most located along the Appalachian Trail near a spring, stream or pond, concentrate overnight use in designated areas, helping to protect the backcountry environment.

### Cooperative agreement

The club manages the campsites under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service and the Maine and New Hampshire state park agencies. Most of the huts are owned by the AMC on land leased from the Forest Service.

Another vacation option is the AMC's full-service camps, most of which are located along a lake or river, with rustic accommodations well-suited for families planning a weeklong stay. One popular site, Cold River Camp in Evans Notch along the Maine-New Hampshire border, offers cabins with fireplaces and kerosene lamps, indoor bathroom facilities with hot showers, and a central lodge with living and dining rooms.

The club also has nine cabin sites, including one on New



York's Fire Island that can be reached by public transportation from Manhattan. Ponkapoag Camp, minutes from downtown Boston by bus or train, has 20 cabins along the banks of a pond in the 7,000-acre park known as the Blue Hills Reservation.

Other rustic options include the four AMC campgrounds, including one on a coastal island off Georgetown, Maine, that is reachable by canoe. Campers are advised to bring their own drinking water. Another Maine campground, at Swan's Falls, is a popular launch site for canoeists along the Saco River.

While many AMC lodgings are rough-hewn structures with limited staff, volunteer caretakers or no one at all on site, Highland Lodge looks more like a high-end hotel set in the heart of the White Mountains.

Built at the site of the Crawford House, a 19th-century grand hotel that burned down in the early 1960s, the lodge offers some guest rooms with private baths, four-course meals and a list of 11 wines, and a common room with thick rugs, soft leather sofas and a huge granite fireplace.

Guests range from seniors looking to enjoy a guided nature hike along a nearby trail to Appalachian Trail through hikers taking a day off to wallow in unaccustomed luxury. To hardy folks who've been logging 20 miles a day, it's known as "taking a zero."

#### Venue for training

With the AMC's growing emphasis on education, the lodge was designed with classroom space that provides a venue for training in areas such as wilderness first-aid, leadership skills and

natural history.

Other lodges include the Joe Dodge Center at Pinkham Notch, N.H., at the base of Mount Washington; Cardigan in New Hampshire; the Little Lyford and Medawisla sporting camps in the Maine woods and the Mohican Outdoor Center in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area in New Jersey.

#### If you go ...

The Appalachian Mountain Club operates a network of huts, lodges, full-service camps, cabins, campgrounds and back-country sites in the Northeast. Prices range from \$8 for use of a tent platform to \$135 per person for a private room with meals at Highland Lodge in the White Mountains, N.H. Reservations: [www.outdoors.org](http://www.outdoors.org) or (603) 466-2727.