

“Even though we’re pretty close to civilization, night hiking makes you feel like you’re farther away,” Trotte says. Seeing only as far as the range of a headlamp creates the illusion of a greater wilderness experience. “You get the feeling that you’re hiking in the middle of the night on a multiday trip, even though you’re close to the road.”

While some hikers enjoy the way a full moon bathes an area in light, a new moon provides a wonderful opportunity for star gazing. So says Jules Papp, a member of AMC’s New York–North Jersey Chapter and lover of astronomy who leads new moon hikes in Harriman State Park. When it’s very dark, countless constellations stretch from one corner of the sky to the other.

Night hiking can create an “eerie sensation,” says Papp. When entering a valley, temperatures often become much cooler and the humidity rises. The resulting fog can add an element of spookiness.

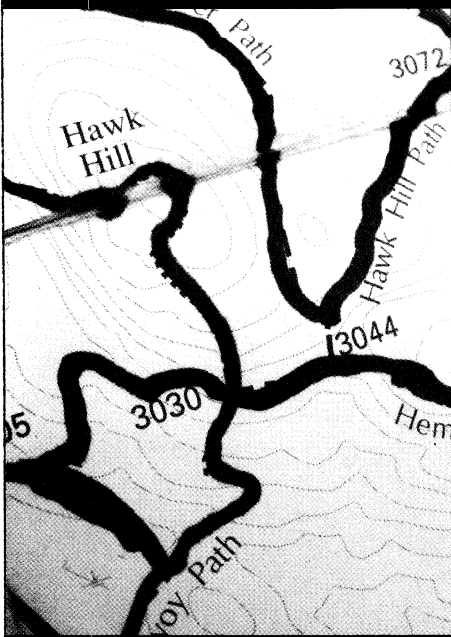
At AMC’s Joe Dodge Lodge at Pinkham Notch this past winter, Senior Interpretive Naturalist Nicky Pizzo led full moon snowshoe hikes. But unlike on many other night hikes, where headlamps are welcome—and sometimes required—using lights is strongly discouraged on these hikes, which Pizzo plans to conduct again next winter.

The lack of headlamps allows people’s eyes to adjust to the darkness, which takes 15 minutes. After 45 minutes, people can see a million times better than the moment they are no longer exposed to light. Once they have adapted, their night vision is as strong as that of deer or lynx and is superior to the night vision of rabbits, Pizzo says. People have the ability to see surprisingly well in the dark thanks to a chemical called rhodopsin, which the body produces in low-light situations.

“You can see a huge difference between what you can see during the day and night vision,” says Pizzo, who always brings

OTHER WAYS AMC HIKERS STAY OUT OF A RUT

From tracking every inch of a trail they’ve hiked to ending a day outdoors with a different fun activity, members of the Appalachian Mountain Club have found many ways to spice up their hiking lives. Here is a sampler.



Redlining trails

Members of the Southeastern Massachusetts Chapter meet every Thursday night from April through October at Blue Hills Reservation south of Boston to work toward hiking every one of its 125 miles of trails. Called Red Line the Blue Hills, the effort involves hikers marking a map of the Blue Hills with a red pen as they complete each segment. Like those on a quest to hike all 48 of the 4,000-footers in the White Mountains, participants enjoy this pursuit because it is about setting a goal and, with dedication, achieving it.

“Everybody loves a project,” says Cheryl Lathrop, the hike leader of Red Line the Blue Hills in 2008 and 2009. “People love this series. You can watch people walk

around with maps and pen in hand.”

Lathrop even created a website (www.amcsem.org/RLBHWS) at which she has posted a map, complete with red lines, to indicate which trails the group has completed. She also tracks the attendance of all the participants. When someone completes the final segments, it’s no surprise that it’s a bit of an event.

“Whenever anyone finishes, we always take a break and make a big deal about it,” says Lathrop, who finished in 2007, and is trying to hike every mile again. “A lot of us have a picture in which we’re holding up our map with all the trails all red. It’s kinda beaten up and it may have taken years.”

Red Line the Blue Hills has been so successful that last summer members of the Southeastern Massachusetts Chapter began redlining the 77-mile North–South Trail that runs from the Massachusetts–Rhode Island border to the Atlantic Ocean. They expect to finish this summer.

“We’re going to race into the ocean at the end of the hike,” says Lathrop.

Following clues

Two other goal-oriented ways to spice up hiking are geocaching and letterboxing, which are essentially treasure hunts. Most letterboxers get clues to where weatherproof boxes have been buried by visiting a website such as www.letterboxing.org. Others find clues that people spread through word of mouth or hide at outfitters. Each letterbox contains a journal in which a letterboxer will indicate with a personal rubber stamp that he or she was there and may also leave some comments.

Geocaching is a more high-tech treasure hunt that incorporates the use of GPS. Geocachers go onto a website such as www.geocaching.com to learn the GPS coordinates of weatherproof containers, or caches, that