

Cross-country ski-touring in the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) 100 Mile Wilderness, Maine

Organizing a ski-touring trip in the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) 100 Mile Wilderness can be confusing. This webpage therefore provides a summary of what we learned during our January 2024 trip.

Quick links

- 1. Overview**
- 2. The lodges**
- 3. Cabins**
- 4. Restrooms**
- 5. Meals**
- 6. Luggage transfers**
- 7. Transport between lodges**
- 8. The trails**
- 9. The Winter Parking Lot**
- 10. Shuttle from Winter Parking Lot to Medawisla**
- 11. Suggested North to South itinerary**
- 12. Packing list**
- 13. Additional Resources, including links to maps**

1. Overview



The Pleasant River Trail in the 100 Mile Wilderness

The AMC 100-Mile Wilderness offers an exceptional cross-country skiing venue, with over 100 km of trails that are seemingly groomed daily. The staff are very accommodating, the lodges are relatively luxurious, offering comfort in an off-the-grid setting, and the individual cabins are clean and comfortable. A particular feature of the AMC 100-Mile Wilderness is that you can ski from lodge to lodge, and the lodge staff will move your luggage for you, allowing you to explore a large area. I have searched for other places offering lodge-to-lodge ski-touring, but I have found nothing quite like it in North America.

2. The lodges



The main lodge of Gorman Chairback has an attractive location on Long Pond

The AMC operates three lodges in the AMC 100-Mile Wilderness, and a fourth lodge is privately owned. Each lodge consists of a main building, with a dining room, and a sitting room/library. A sauna is also available. The main building has electricity, where you can charge your devices. There is usually no cell signal or Wi-Fi in the lodges. The lodges have a small number of snow shoes that can be used free of charge.

- a. **Medawisla** is the northernmost lodge. You can drive to Medawisla, and it seems particularly popular.
- b. **West Branch Pond Camps** is privately owned, and thus not listed on the AMC website. Nevertheless, it should be considered as a potential overnight stop to break up the lengthy ski between Medawisla and Little Lyford Pond (~ 18 miles). It is possible to drive to West Branch. West Branch works with AMC on baggage transfer, so luggage can be moved amongst all the lodges (though you might want confirm this before booking. I have not stayed at West Branch, so my knowledge of this camp is limited).
- c. **Little Lyford Pond** can only be reached by ski or snowshoe in winter; either from another lodge or from the Winter Parking Lot.

- d. **Gorman Chairback Lodge** can also only be reached by ski or snowshoe in winter; either from another lodge or from the Winter Parking Lot. It is the southernmost lodge.

3. Cabins

Each lodge offers a variety of accommodation options, from small, two-person cabins, to 3, 4 or 5 person cabins, and larger “bunkhouses” that sleep around 14 people.

Note that the cost of an overnight stay is function of the size of the cabin (with larger cabins being more expensive) and the number of guests in the cabin. The bunkhouse is shared, and therefore the price per person is the same, irrespective of the number of guests, unless your group reserves the entire bunk house at a fixed price.

Most cabins have gas lights. ADA accessible cabins at Medawisla and Gorman Chairback have electricity for lighting.

Heating is usually provided by a wood burning stove, except ADA cabins, which have propane stoves. The stove was always lit for us when we arrived. It takes some care to keep a wood-burning stove burning during the night. This done by closing the dampers to only allow limited air flow (don't close the damper completely), and adding additional fuel every few hours from the generous supply of split wood provided in the room. Often a tea kettle or some other water vessel is available to place on the stove to add humidity to the room.



The wood burning stove provides plenty of heat, but does need regular replenishment.

If you are not familiar with a wood stove, you might want to do a little research before you go. Here is a YouTube video explaining the use of the damper in the chimney: <https://youtu.be/Jj5qNR1tuKg>. Each of the wood stoves on our trip was different, and some had a second damper below the main door of the stove (an option not illustrated in the video mentioned above). When working the stove, be very careful, as wood burning stoves get very, very hot, and touching any part of the stove can lead to a nasty burn.

4. Restrooms

Most cabins do not have on-suite restrooms. Restrooms are in the main lodge building at Gorman Chairback, and in a separate building at Little Lyford Pond. At Medawisla, there are restrooms in both the main lodge building and in a separate building, and in addition, one of the ADA cabins has its own on-suite restroom. The restrooms consist of showers and composting toilets.

A sauna is operated daily in the afternoons and evenings (bring a swim suit).

5. Meals

Three meals a day are provided, as part of your registration. The meals are simple, but hearty and delicious. The staff serve you for your first helping, but you can help yourself to seconds. They will accommodate gluten free, vegetarian, vegan, and dairy-free preferences if you let them know ahead of time. Guests eat at long tables, which is great for getting to know your fellow skiers.

After the evening meal, guests order a packed lunch, which is picked up after breakfast the next day. The options are a sandwich or wrap, with many choices for meat, cheese, salads, and PBJ for filling. Rounding out the meal are potato chips, fruit, a huge cookie and a generous helping of gorp, and so we never went hungry.

The lodges sell wine and beer for consumption in the lodge only, and it can be very enjoyable to share a drink in front of the fire before dinner.

6. Luggage transfers

The lodge-to-lodge skiing is underpinned by a very smooth operation of baggage transfer. On a morning when you are moving to a new lodge, you place your luggage in a luggage shed, from where the staff pick it up, and deliver it to an equivalent shed at your destination.

The luggage sheds are labeled to indicate the destination options. To be on the safe side, you should also label your bags with your destination. We brought our own luggage tags, but blank labels were available at the sheds.



Baggage transfer between lodges is provided using snowmobiles

Suitcases, backpacks or duffel bags seemed to be fine as luggage. AMC recommends placing your belongings in plastic bags inside your luggage, in case of wet conditions or blowing snow. Luggage is moved around in an open sled towed by a snowmobile.

The lodges serve alcohol, but if you bring your own alcohol to drink in your cabin, AMC recommends being cautious about liquids freezing and leaking, or worse, breaking the container and thus soaking your clothes. Supposedly, 80-proof liquor freezes at about -17° F, wine at about 20° F, and beer at about 28° F. Therefore, if you transport alcohol in your luggage, it is best to take spirits, and also to avoid glass containers.

7. Transport between lodges

It is also possible to reserve transport between the lodges. For example, since we felt the ski from Medawisla to Little Lyford Pond was too far for a single day's ski, and we didn't understand that we could stay at West Branch, we paid for a shuttle to take us to a point half way (which was West Branch lodge), and skied the rest of the way to Lyford. The initial plan was to take us by snowmobile, but in the end we went by truck, because it was cold and the truck was taking luggage anyway.

I believe it may possible to organize transport for yourself between the other lodges, too, if you need it. You would need to arrange this ahead of time, ideally at the time you book your cabins.



8. The trails

The trails are groomed, seemingly every night. Depending on the width of the trails, grooming may include corduroy and/or tracks for classic skiing.

Our trip was during the week, and we saw almost no-one on the trails. It felt like we were in our own private ski resort! It was only on our last day, a Friday, as we returned to our car in the Winter Parking Lot, that we saw a lot of people, who were arriving for the weekend.

As discussed in the Resources section below, paper winter trail maps are available at the lodges and also as pdfs online. KML files are also available online for use in mapping programs like Gaia GPS, etc. You should carry a printed map and download digital maps to be sure you know where you are going!

9. The Winter Parking Lot

The two main winter access points are Medawisla in the north, and the Winter Parking Lot in the south. You could probably also start at West Branch Pond.

Part of the road to the Winter Parking Lot is a logging road. It is plowed, but it can be slick and rough in places. It is shared with logging trucks, which have right of way. All-wheel drive, 4-wheel drive or studded tires is recommended. We drove our AWD SUV without any problem. However, unseasonably warm weather, especially rain, would make the driving conditions icy or possibly muddy, and difficult. Current road conditions can be found on the websites for Trail and access road conditions (see Resources section below).

The AMC baggage transfer system includes the Winter Parking Lot as one of the nodes.

10. Shuttle from Winter Parking Lot to Medawisla

The AMC can arrange a shuttle between the Winter Parking Lot and Medawisla to facilitate a ski trip that doesn't require a return to your starting point (see suggested itinerary below). The AMC contracts with Northwoods Outfitters, in Greenville, for this service.

11. Suggested North to South itinerary

It is possible to do a lodge-to-lodge loop, starting and ending at the same point, which could be the Winter Parking Lot, Medawisla or West Branch Camp. A popular alternative is to ski from north to south, or vice-versa, and to take advantage of the AMC optional shuttle to return to your vehicle. You could extend the north-to-south itinerary listed below by adding extra nights at any of the lodges. In 2024, we spent two nights at Little Lyford and really enjoyed it.

Day 1. Set shuttle. Meet at Northwoods Outfitters in Greenville at midday (must be pre-booked). Drive out to the Winter Parking Lot, and leave car there. Take the shuttle to Medawisla for overnight stay.

Day 2. Ski to West Branch (14 km, 9 miles) for overnight stay.

Day 3. Ski to Little Lyford Pond (14 km, 9 miles) for overnight stay.

Day 4. Ski to Gorman Chairback Lodge (11 km, 7 miles) for overnight stay.

Day 5. Ski to Winter Parking Lot (13 km, 8 miles).

12. Packing list

See also below, in the Additional Resources Section, AMC recommendations.

1. Ski equipment
2. Day pack for carrying lunch etc. on the trail
 - a. Water bottle (hydration packs and particularly the associated water lines tend to freeze)
 - b. Energy bars for emergencies
 - c. Headlamp and/or flashlight
 - d. Micro-spikes
 - e. Rain suit
 - f. Space blanket
 - g. Hand and toe warmers
 - h. Dark glasses
 - i. GPS (or phone)
3. Sleeping bag
4. Micro-fiber towel
5. Toiletries (soap is provided in the showers and at hand basins)
6. Charger for phone/GPS
7. Clothing for skiing
8. Clothing for relaxing in the evening.
9. Swimsuit for the sauna

13. Additional Resources (Look at these *before* you go as there is no internet or cell available when you are out there!)

(Links last checked 1/7/2025)

“Before you go” – This general overview for winter visit to 100 Mile Wilderness and lodges is a good general resources with links to maps, daily trail conditions, and packing lists:

<https://outdoors.my.site.com/amcknowledge/s/article/Before-You-Go-Maine-Lodges-Winter>

AMC summary description of lodge to lodge ski-touring in the 100 Mile Wilderness:

<https://www.outdoors.org/resources/amc-outdoors/destinations-travel/lodge-to-lodge-skiing-in-the-maine-woods-what-to-expect/>

Lodges (listed below from N to S)

Medawisla: <https://www.outdoors.org/destinations/maine/medawisla-lodge/>

West Branch Pond Camps (Private, and not an AMC lodge, but nevertheless is integrated into the 100 Mile Wilderness lodge system): <https://westbranchpondcamps.com/>

Little Lyford Lodge & Cabins: <https://www.outdoors.org/destinations/maine/little-lyford-lodge-cabins/>

Gorman Chairback: <https://www.outdoors.org/destinations/maine/gorman-chairback/>

Location maps and driving directions

Overview map showing lodges, main ski routes, and winter parking: <https://www.outdoors.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/WinterRoadMap.pdf>

Driving directions to Winter Parking Lot: https://www.outdoors.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Driving_Directions- Gorman-Moose Point Cabin-1.pdf

Driving directions to Medawisla: https://www.outdoors.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Driving-Directions_Medawisla.pdf

See below

Trail Maps for skiing

Paper maps

Free paper maps are provided at the lodges.

Digital maps (not georeferenced so cannot use it with a navigation program, like Avenza)

Medawisla region: <https://outdoors.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2023-Winter-Trail-Map-Medawisla.pdf>

Lyford, Gorman and Winter parking lot region: https://cdn.outdoors.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/06140347/2022-KIW_WinterTrails_Full_Final_LLPGCC-MPC.pdf

Digital maps for use with phone apps

A georeferenced version of hiking trails on the two maps is available for approximately \$7 from the Avenza Maps store. <https://www.avenza.com/> (Look for AMC Maine Woods 100-Mile Wilderness 12 Edition). However, since it has all of the trails, it is confusing for winter use.

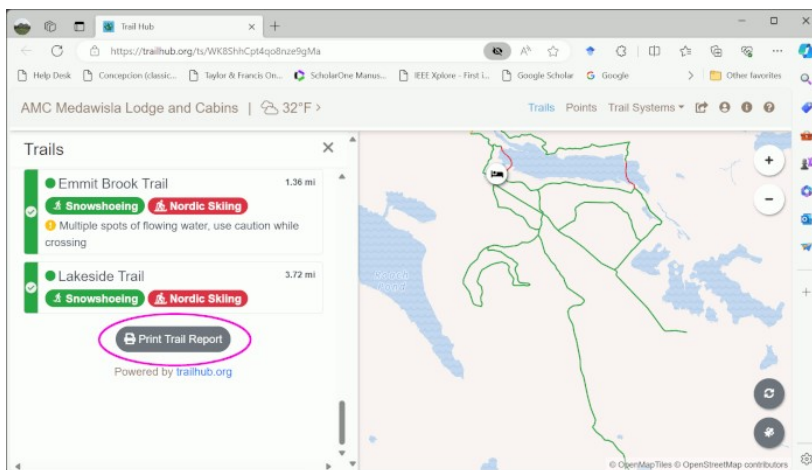
Rather than using the hiking map from Avenza Maps app, I recommend the Gaia GPS app, which seems to have good coverage of the trails. <https://www.gaiagps.com>. Since there is no cell service over most of the 100 Mile Wilderness, I recommend signing up for Premium membership, so you can download and save the maps to your phone. Premium membership currently costs \$4.99 per month. The free version of Gaia seems to cache the most recent area you have looked at, but that would seem to be a risky strategy.

Trail and access road conditions

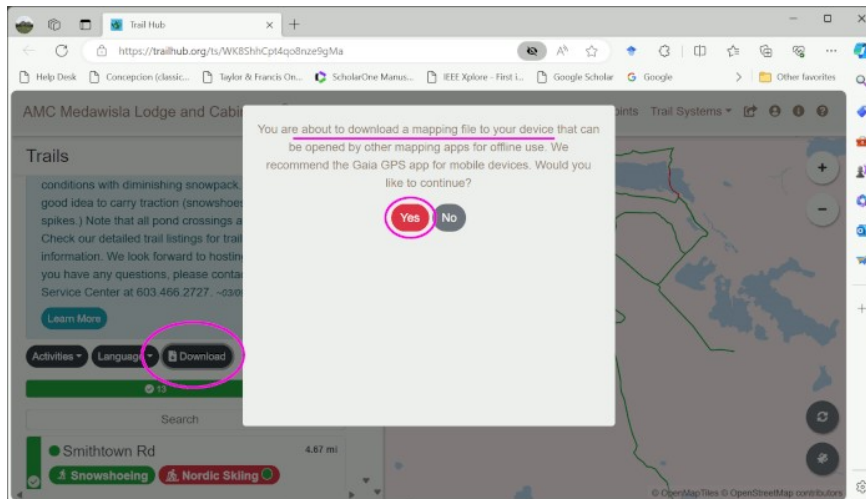
The AMC regularly updates a site with detailed conditions of individual trails as well as the Winter Parking Lot and Medawisla access road conditions:
<https://trailhub.org/ts/WK8ShhCpt4qo8nze9gMa>

Notes:

1. The above link takes you to the Medawisla information site.
2. Use the pull-down menu at the top, labeled **Trail Systems**, to access the pages for Little Lyford Pond and Gorman Chairback Lodge)
3. This site is useful because it is updates on a daily basis. However, bear in mind that there is no Wi-Fi or cell service at the lodges or out on the trails. Therefore if you want to use it during your trip, you would need to save pdf copy, by clicking on the **Print Trail Report** button, at the bottom of the list of trails.



4. You can also click on the **Download** button to download KML files, for importing the vector data (individual trails) into mapping apps on mobile devices as well as Google Earth, Gaiagps.com, etc.



Packing list

AMC Winter Hiking Essential Gear List (a rather general list for winter hiking and skiing):

<https://www.outdoors.org/resources/amc-outdoors/outdoor-resources/winter-hiking-essential-gear-list/>

(See also the AMC "Before you go" page, listed above, for useful summary information about packing for Maine lodges.)

Other sources of help

The AMC staff monitoring the help line are very knowledgeable and helpful. General information, questions and booking: (603) 466-2727, or amclodging@outdoors.org. Some people told us it is best to call them and book by phone so that they can answer all of your questions and check that you have everything covered, including transfers, shuttles, information on food allergies, etc.

Northwoods Outfitters: AMC contracts with Northwoods Outfitters for the shuttle, so if you have questions about the shuttle you could also call Northwoods directly.

<https://www.maineoutfitter.com/store/store.html>, 1-866-223-1380, info@maineoutfitter.com

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1/7/2025

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