munity Trail—or car. Not far away, both the Breakheart Reservation in Wakefield (get a workout running its hills, then take a dip in the lake, if it’s open) and the Rumney Marsh Reservation (boating, walking, and fishing) are also quick escapes into nature. From the salt marshes, zip over to Revere Beach, or check out other local parks and semi-urban shorelines—in Nahant, Winthrop, Boston, and Quincy.

It’s clear that the COVID-19 pandemic’s “stay-at-home” or “shelter in place” guidance has motivated “folks looking for new ways to engage with their surroundings and with nature,” Mass Audubon’s Gail Yeo reports, “and nature isn’t just out in the woods. It’s all around us, right by our homes and apartments—and we really want to help people recognize that.” Watching birds, insects, and squirrels, noticing their behaviors, playful interactions, and feeding habits—or measuring and monitoring the health of trees and plants—can easily be done in any local urban park.

The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) has local chapters throughout New England, including an active Boston-based group, that offer close-to-home hikes, walks, bike trips, and paddling adventures. AMC president and CEO John Judge, M.P.A. ’01, also recommends heading out to walk or bike on sections of the AMC-coordinated Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway, a system in progress that curves west of Boston, extending more than 230 dedicated miles from Newburyport and Plum Island to Kingston Bay, near Plymouth. (Find route details and maps for the greenway’s current components, many accessible by public transportation, at baycircuit.org.) The New England National Scenic Trail covers 215 miles across Connecticut and Massachusetts. In central Massachusetts, less than two hours’ drive from Boston, the 4.8-mile Erving Ledges-Hermit Mountain trail above Millers River offers panoramic views. Experienced hikers may enjoy the 1,240-foot Mount Lincoln route, in Pelham, or the easier, but rewarding, Royalston Falls.

Judge agrees with Yeo that “people are obviously chomping at the bit to get out.” Even earlier this spring, he reported, large crowds were arriving at trailheads, including many newer hikers ill-prepared for weather and climbing conditions. For those novices, he recommends learning more about outdoor adventuring online through AMC. But he also emphasizes that too many trekkers may cause irreparable damage to trails and threaten wildlife habitats and other ecologically sensitive environments that AMC is charged with stewarding. “We want people to get outdoors and connect with nature, at this time more than ever, and we believe people need it—it’s a shot in the arm spiritually, mentally, physically,” he acknowledges. “That said,” he adds, “we are working with the New England states, Maine and New Hampshire especially, to figure out how people can come up to Grafton Loop [38.6-mile backcountry hiking in the Mahoosuc Mountains] and Mount Lafayette and Franconia Ridge [Lincoln, New Hampshire] without the trails becoming like one of those clear days on Mount Everest where you’ve got people back-to-back waiting to summit.”

In an initial response to COVID-19, AMC closed its alpine huts for the first time in 132 years and its 12 summer-camping and cabin properties. But in late May, it opened reservations for these lodging sites: Gorman Chairback and Medawisla (in Maine), and the Highland Center at Crawford Notch, Joe Dodge Lodge at Pinkham Notch, and Cardigan Lodge (in New Hampshire). All were slated to start housing hikers as of July 1—with varying controls over food service and restrooms, and guest rooms occupied at half capacity. Judge does expect packed parking lots and streams of day-hikers, and therefore advises planning non-weekend excursions—or, better yet, opting instead for outdoor locales much closer to home, where the rewards of nature are often just as beautiful and restorative. “You can see some of the world’s most beautiful outdoors and wilderness,” he says, “right here in New England.”

STAFF PICK: A COVID-19 Day at the Beach

Sunscreen, bathing suit, face mask, tape measure. Check. Beaches in and around Boston this year are drawing lines in the sand by restricting activities and, in many cases, reducing access to prevent overcrowding.

All Massachusetts state beaches—whether along the coast or inland lakes and ponds—have reopened (for now), but require face masks and 12-foot spacing between non-related individuals, and limit groups to 10 or fewer people. “Passive” recreation—swimming, walking, sunbathing, and picnicking—is allowed; organized group sports are not. Check out Salisbury Beach State Reservation, and the lakes at Leominster State Forest and Hopkinton State Park or, closer to Boston, Mystic Lakes State Park, in Medford.

On Cape Cod and other coastal spots north and south of Boston, many municipalities, like Manchester-by-the-Sea and Gloucester, have opened beaches and parking lots to residents only, although Wingaersheek Beach offers some non-resident parking spots daily on a first-come, first-served basis.

New Hampshire’s ocean beaches are also open, and authorities have created larger pedestrian zones, through partial road closures and the elimination of parking spots, to accommodate the social-distancing requirements. In contrast to Massachusetts, however, New Hampshire allows only walking, running, swimming, and surfing—no tanning, napping, or picnicking. “This is not a time to drop your blanket and sit around,” according to Governor Chris Sununu: “We want people to be moving.”

—N.P.B.