en students pile into a van on a cold November night, headed to the New Hampshire Outing Club's cabin in Jackson, N.H., and a hiking trip in the White Mountains. They are men and women, freshmen and upperclassmen, seasoned hikers and newcomers who have never been on an Outing Club trip before. But once they are packed together in the van, none of that matters, for it is what they have in common—a love for outdoor adventure—that has brought them here. Michelle Desrosiers, a freshman marine biology major and a novice hiker, feels perfectly comfortable right away. There's not much social tension, she says, when you know that the next day you'll be “getting all sweaty together.”

New Hampshire Outing Club members have been getting sweaty together since 1911, when a group of undergraduate outdoor enthusiasts sought to reduce the pressures of academia by getting off campus and into the wild on weekends like this one, which happens to fall in the midst of midterm exams. One of the university’s most popular organizations, the club provides all kinds of outdoor adventures, from hiking, mountaineering, technical climbing and caving to snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, canoeing, kayaking and sailing. Affiliated with, but not funded by, the university, the club is one of 12 volunteer-run chapters of the Appalachian Mountain Club. Membership is open to everyone in the university community—undergraduates, graduate students, continuing-education students, faculty, staff and alumni—and the price of a trip provides transportation to and from, food and unlimited access to the club’s gear room. The club also owns and maintains two cabins, the one in Jackson and another at Franconia Notch, affectionately known as “Franky.”

Arriving in Jackson, the students collect their gear and, with the light of a few headlamps and flashlights, make their way in the dark up the dirt road that leads to the club’s small wooden cabin. They greet the cabin with the traditional club cheer, “Kah-ohh-wah!” and then hustle inside. Trip leader Corey Denton, a senior civil engineering major from Juneau, Alaska, and club president, says the origins of the cheer are obscure, but he suspects it evolved in part “to scare away any wild residents.”

The cabin in Jackson is just 24 feet square, with an open first floor and a loft above with what Denton calls “ancient, derelict UNH mattresses” that serve both for sleeping and sometimes, in the winter, for sledding. The cabin is beloved by club members new and old, even though it is beginning to show its age; the foundation is weak, and the walls are supported by cables. Propane serves for lighting and cooking, and mice-proof cabinets keep food safely stored. And, of course, there is a supply of games: tonight the students play Scrabble, cards and “Big Booty,” a group game that Desrosiers describes as “a good way to get to know each other by humiliating yourself.”

Another good way to get to know each other is to sleep squished together on the porch, which is what the group opts to do. It’s a clear night, and the appeal of stargazing outweighs the shock of the 20-degree air. Wrapped in sleeping bags and lined up, as Desrosiers says, “like a row of slugs,” they watch for shooting stars, “steam-roll” one another, tell scary stories of White Mountain legends and, finally, fall asleep.

The next morning they wake to the glare of the rising sun and the smell of egg sandwiches being cooked by Denton in the kitchen. The aroma lures most from their warm sleeping bags, but first-timer Lily Finnigan-Allen, a freshman studio arts major, is sent to roust out the lethargic with well-placed thumps. In the clear morning air, they don their boots, polypropylene clothing and daypacks, and set out for Mount Pierce.

The Outing Club still answers the call of the wild
By Shannan Goff ’03

Men and women of the Mountain answer the call of the wild Cannon Mountain.