

Becoming a Hike Leader -- Part III

Map & Compass

BY JOE D'AMORE

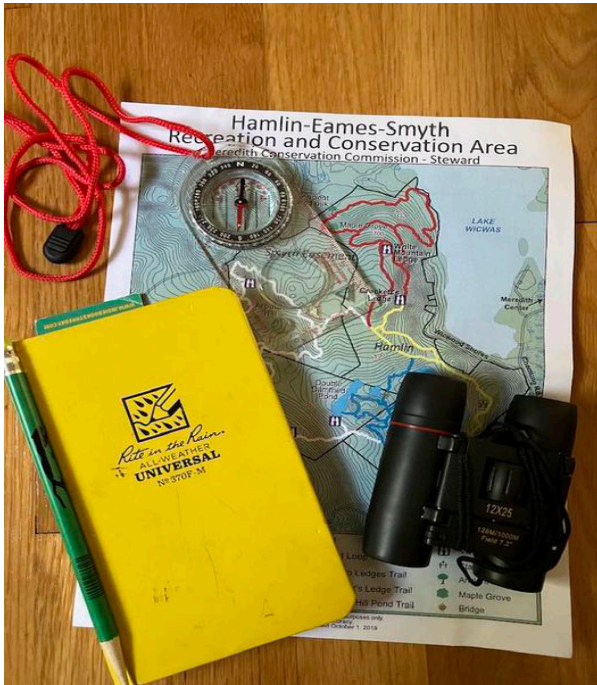


Photo Credit: Joe D'Amore

Per AMC's Mountain Skills Manual, "A map and compass make up two of the 10 essentials recommended for safe back-country travel, but they'll do little good if you don't know how to use them. Misuse could even turn a situation in which you're simply confused into one in which you're totally lost. The bottom line? Learn proper technique before your safety depends on it."

To gain these skills on my journey to becoming a Hike Leader I enlisted my Hike Mentor, Steve Zimmer, to tutor me on the ins and outs of navigating by compass and map. On June 21st Steve invited me to his home along with my hike colleague and terrific Hike Leader Andrew Papalegis for a "private", but official, map and compass lesson.

The course started at Steve's kitchen table and we spent one and one-half hours getting acquainted with the compass and learning about a lot of technical concepts such as "declination". (hint: Per the US Geological Survey the deviation of the compass from true north is an angle called "declination" or "magnetic declination").

We drew on maps using rulers and #2 graphite pencils. I reveled in the old-school aspects of this discipline. Steve is a highly experienced hiker and consummate leader. I've been on hikes with him and he always has a map and compass at the ready. He was passionate about imparting this concept to us.

After spending time at the kitchen table with him we plunged into the beautiful woodlands of the Hamlin-Eames-Smyth Recreation and Conservation Area. The sky was dark and rain poured in sheets. The bugs had the ability to bite through rain coats. Yet in this difficult condition, Andrew and I marveled as to how he could quite literally leave us in a dark forest

---off trail--- and challenge us to find our way out. We did. No rescue calls were made! Steve does not rely on electronic devices. Therein, is the most important lesson of all we learned: batteries fail, cell and internet connections can be spotty, but a good old map and compass with a pencil can navigate the path out of any wilderness.

As we were driving home, Andrew and I excitedly talked about our bushwacking experience. We felt a surge of appreciation for Steve and his tutelage and openly declared that we could never get lost in the woods again.

Let me conclude this report by suggesting you take a Map & Compass course a few times and practice it with commitment - on every hike - to be as skilled as Steve.

Leave your electronic devices at home in the process.

Joe D'Amore is chronicling his experiences and lessons on a quest to become a class 3, all season, hike leader.

Reflections Poetry

By Joe D'Amore

*On My Way To Chocorua
She sends her offspring with much fuss.
Gurgling rivulets, springs and brooks.
Cold streams to cross flow underfoot.
Put there by her to greet or stop us.*

*The watery source is finally found.
That mother's voice is oh, quite loud.
The plunging flows arrest the soul.
The quest to climb is not yet bound.*

*With bated breath, resolved to reach.
That rocky crown beyond the trees.
The limbs assaulted, senses blunted.
Roots, rocks and forest must all be breached.*

*Breathtaking views provide the prize.
Stark whispering pines and mountain etches.
Sun splashed and wind across our faces.*



*Encountering
Champney & Pitcher
Falls on the way to
Mt Chocorua by way
Champney Falls trail
from Kangamangus
Highway
Photo Credit:
Joe D'Amore*