



# NEW YORK - NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

## GUIDELINES FOR BLAZING TRAILS

Course Material, last updated 3/25/2022

### 1 INTRODUCTION

These guidelines were developed in 2015 for a workshop to give maintainers more information than was at the time included in the introductory trail maintenance class. The guidelines have since been updated and much of this information is now included in the latest [Trail Maintenance Manual](#) and in the [introductory trail maintenance class](#). This document provides somewhat more detailed information in some areas.

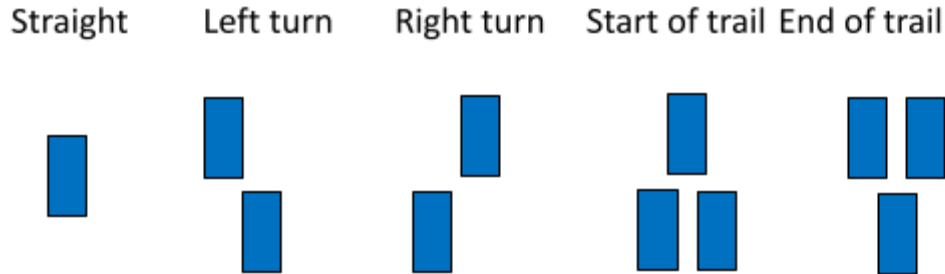
### 2 GENERAL RULES OF THUMB

- Follow the land manager's choice of paint or tag blazes and the blaze color and shape.
- Blaze in one direction and then in the other direction on the return trip.
- If you will be doing significant blazing, plan a separate trip just for blazing. If possible, go with at least two people so that one person can stay further back on the trail and direct the other person as to where best to place the next blaze.
- Do major blazing when leaves are on the trees (May through mid-October) if possible.
- Blazing needs to be checked during the year.
  - Do not simply keep replacing old blazes. Take a fresh, objective look at the trail each year; add or subtract blazes as the need arises.
  - Trim back vegetation obstructing view of the blaze
  - Check and replace damaged blazes
    - For tags, make sure the blaze is not flush with the tree. If the tree has grown so the blaze is now flush, replace the blaze or pull out nails slightly if you can.
    - For paint blazes, scrape and trim to size; repaint as necessary

### 3 PLACING BLAZES

- As much as possible, blaze large, healthy trees close to the edge of the trail.
- Don't blaze dead or downed trees; avoid trees with fungus, dead limbs, woodpecker holes, cavities, or thinning at the top of the tree.
- Whenever possible, avoid blazing rocks, especially flat rocks on the ground, since such blazes are not visible when there is snow cover. If there are no alternatives, blaze on the side of a large rock where it is easily visible and won't get covered by snow.
- Place blazes at about eye level. Blazes should be placed a bit higher if the trail is going downhill as it approaches the blaze or lower if the trail is going uphill.
- In general, a person standing at a blaze should be able to see the next blaze.
  - Not so close that you see multiple blazes at one time
  - Closer together on trails with less distinct treadway
  - Further apart on well-defined, straight woods roads
- Blaze trailheads clearly. Finding the beginning of a trail is often difficult for a user new to the area.
- Be sure blazes are clearly visible on both sides of road crossings or utility right-of-way passages.
- Trim back vegetation so it does not block the view of the blaze.

- Prefer the right hand side of the trail, but choosing a tree which has the best visibility to hikers is more important.
- Try to avoid blazing both sides of the same tree if there is a good alternative so you don't lose two blazes if the tree falls.
- On co-aligned trails (two or more trails using the same trail corridor), the blazes for the different trails should be one above the other, in the same order, on the same tree. Do not alternate placement. Long distance trails have their blazes on the top. The A.T. blaze has top priority, followed by the Long Path blaze, and then the others.
- Place a turn blaze, a double blaze with the upper blaze in the direction of the turn, at turns greater than about 45°.
  - If possible, blaze turns just before the turn, not beyond it, and place the turn blaze on the side of the trail in which the trail turns.
  - Place a confirmation blaze a short distance after the turn where it is clearly visible from the turn.
- Use a triple blaze at the beginning and end of the trail. A trail begins in the direction from which you approach it and ends where you finish at a trailhead or another trail.
  - At the beginning, there is one blaze on the top and two on the bottom. Think "A" for Approach.
  - At the end, there are two blazes on top and one on the bottom. Think "V" for Victory, as you finally made it!



## 4 PAINT BLAZING

- Choose the proper paint color from the [recommended blaze color chart](#).
- Assemble equipment needed in a bucket
  - Paint in small container
  - Spray paint (gray and brown)
  - Paint brush 1 to 1 ½ inch wide
  - Stencil of size of blaze you are using
  - Scraper
  - Plastic bag for wet paint brush
  - Rag
  - Map
  - Small container of water
  - Loppers, clippers, and/or a small saw to trim vegetation which may block the view of blazes.
- Paint the blazes
  - Spray out any blazes on trees you are not using
  - Scrape rough bark to have a relatively smooth surface, but don't scrape smooth bark trees.
  - Trace outline of blaze using stencil
  - Paint blaze
- Certain types and colors of paint may sometimes not cover well so that blazes are not clearly visible. If this is a problem, the blaze may be painted with white paint and allowed to dry and the colored blaze then painted over it. No margin of white should show around the edges of the final blaze. The colored blaze

should be painted on the same day as the white so trail users are not confused by seeing white blazes.

## 5 TAG BLAZING (PLASTIC OR METAL)

- Assemble equipment needed
  - Tags
  - Claw hammer
  - 2.5-inch galvanized common nails (sometimes called 8-penny or 8d)
  - A carpenter's tool belt with pockets for blazes and nails and a loop for the hammer is very convenient if you are doing a lot of blazing. Otherwise a bucket may be used to hold blazing supplies.
  - Loppers, clippers, and/or a small saw to trim vegetation which may block the view of blazes.
- Attach tag blazes with two nails
  - Use 2.5-inch galvanized common nails. Shorter nails may be used if blazing a post (nail it tight to the post) or very small trees. Roofing nails are no longer recommended since the heads break off easily. Aluminum nails bend, especially in dense wood or in cold weather.
  - Insert nails through the holes in the blaze before nailing to the tree.
  - Hammer the nails in about 1 inch, leaving about 1.5 inches exposed, to allow for tree growth. Otherwise the tree will absorb the blaze as the tree continues to grow.
  - Nails must be near the top and bottom on the blaze, never at the sides.
  - A few parks attach blazes with a single nail in the center.
- Some parks, especially in New Jersey, require tags but do not provide them. In such cases, maintainers fabricate them out of siding or flashing scraps and then paint them.

## 6 BLAZING TRAIL JUNCTIONS

Hikers often miss trail junctions and can become lost. When following a trail, hikers need some clear indication that another trail is crossing. The techniques below can help make intersections more visible. [These charts](#) have further information about blazing trail junctions.

- Wider trimming of vegetation at the junction is easy and can be very helpful.
- A sign, post, or cairn in the center of the junction provides greatest visibility, but can be costly and subject to vandalism. This may be appropriate for major or difficult to find junctions.
- Some parks use special blazing at intersections such as arrows or two or three horizontal blazes in the color of the crossing trail. There is at present no standard for this, but supervisors should know what is done in a particular park.
- It is helpful if the intersection can be located at a place with a large, well-placed tree which can support multiple blazes.
- Some parks number the intersections with a numbered tag at the intersection that correlates with numbers on a map. Numbers are also useful if lost hikers phone the park and say that they are lost and at a particular numbered intersection.
- Y intersections have special considerations.
  - If you are on the stem, mark as turns for the two arms.
  - If you are on one of the arms, mark as a turn with the blaze of the other arm.
  - Sometimes the two arms merge and become a joint trail. Make sure both blazes are shown on a confirming blaze on the stem close to the intersection.
- An intersection with more than two trails is a bad design. If it is necessary, the following approaches may be helpful:

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- Put a sign with arrows on a post in the middle of the intersection.
- Put up a map snippet showing the possibilities.
- Make sure all the branches have really visible confirming blazes or start blazes.
- Don't make it more confusing with too many turn blazes--make hikers stop and look for the way they want to proceed.
- If trails end here, place the end blazes a bit before the intersection to avoid having excessive blazes in the intersection.