



INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

KEEPING HIKERS ON THE CENTERLINE

DISCUSS TYPES OF USER-CREATED IMPACTS

Ask participants to think about their own hiking preferences. Discuss frustrations people may feel about steps that are too high, muddy areas of trail, places where it's uncomfortable or difficult to walk on the center of the trail.

According to recreation ecologists and the Center for Leave No Trace, it takes just fifteen times of passing over the same area vegetation to be trampled, creating a new path. Explore the importance of responding to early observations of user-created impacts and the implications for natural resource protection.

OBSERVATIONAL WALKING

See Yourself: During the course or as a "take home assignment," ask students to notice where they're walking when they're walking. Is there conscious or unconscious inclination to hike toward the outer edge of the trail? What observations can they make about where people choose to walk to make travel easier. After making mental notes, they share back their observations.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Squash the Shortcut

If training location allows for the opportunity to brush in a switchback shortcut, participants can go collect item(s) they think would best work to prevent future use of the user-created path. This gives everyone the chance to explain their selection before placing it and to observe how the pieces together discourage future use. If land manager consent is in hand before the course, instructor could lead the revegetation of the shortcut by moving other living shrubs in to the shortcut. Participants should be clear that revegetation only takes place with advanced consent from land manager.

Resetting Backslope

For a section of sidehill trail that has moved down slope due to erosion and trail creep, give each participant a pin flag.

Ask half of them to use their flags to denote where the inside edge (hinge) of the trail should be. Ask the other half to use their flags to denote where they think the top of the backslope should go.

After participants have made their selection, instructor could demonstrate using the handle length of a pulaski or mattock to determine the necessary tread width and hinge location. After celebrating the "closest without going into the Trail" pin placement, align more pins along the hinge and at the top of the backslope. Demonstrate tool handling, removal of duff as far away from the trail as possible, and then the removal of mineral soil to desired trail width. As participants begin their work, circulate to coach them on root removal, disbursement of soil, compaction of mineral soil that comprises the widened footpath, and checking for a slight outslope.

INSTRUCTION MATERIALS FOR COURSE

- **Field work and hand tools JHA**
- **Grubbing tools and Loppers**
- **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- **Pin Flags**
- **Shovel and Plastic grocery bags if cleaning or resizing fire rings.**

ESSENTIAL MAINTENANCE MODULE

KEEPING HIKERS ON THE CENTERLINE



LEARNING OUTCOMES

Understand types of user-created impacts.

Resetting the backslope of sidehill trail when it is "creeping" downhill.

Closing use-created trails.

Reporting braided trail or features suffering with "walk around"

Addressing user-created firerings.

The Appalachian Trail is a durable path intended for single-file foot travel. The width of the A.T. should be a minimum of 12" and a maximum of 18" in flat woodlands and 24" on side slopes. Trail maintainers help limit user-created impacts by monitoring for and addressing or reporting these items:

Trail Widening: When hikers walk outside of the treadway, they widen the area of impact by trampling trailside vegetation. Frequent trampling leads to soil compaction, and eventually a wider footpath. Trail widening is common in muddy areas.

Trail Braiding: When hikers walk outside of the footpath to navigate around trail features such as steps and waterbars to seek efficiency; this happens most often when the rise of the feature is too high and hikers are fatigued. Braiding also occurs when parallel paths are established in open areas when the original trail is too narrow or too difficult to see footing.

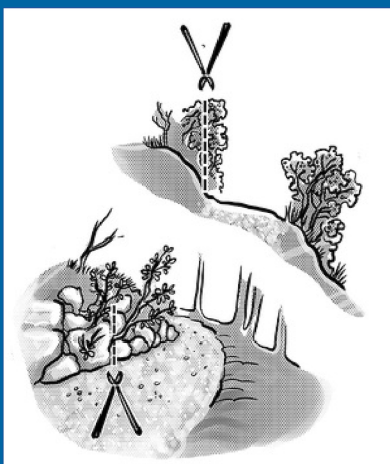
Trail Creep: This is the slow movement of the location of the trail to a slightly new alignment, generally on sidehill trail. It is most often seen where hikers avoid abundant vegetation growth on the uphill side of the trail and walk to the softer outside edge of the trail. Backslope that has sloughed into the treadway or excessive "root ladders" also pushes hikers toward the outside edge as they seek better footing. Trail creep can give sidehill trail an appearance of being convex.

Social Trails and Shortcuts: These paths, not planned by the A.T. club or the land manager, may offer more direct routes to vistas, campsites, or trailheads, and like shortcuts between the curve of a switchback, are almost always prone to swift erosion.

All of the use patterns above are driven by underlying causes that help inform appropriate solutions. These types of user created impacts tend to worsen when left unaddressed.



Trail braiding is discouraged here with upturned rocks outside the feature and a low rise for steps.



PREVENTION AND EARLY RESPONSE

Remove Debris:

Remove debris or obstacles from the footpath since blockages on the treadway or ill-suited footing sends hikers off on their own path.

Cut out small roots before they become big roots.

Keeping tread clear of vegetation:

Brushing vegetation in growth seasons, especially uphill of the trail since it tends to push hikers to the outside edge.