

Marking the Trail



Blazing Standards for the Appalachian Trail

Discuss the blazing guidelines from the student module. Which items resonate the most for them and why? Embrace opportunities to discuss the benefit of standards across the Trail for a unified experience.

Emphasize that the majority of blazing is refreshing existing ones rather than adding new ones.

Unpack things that cause questions, such as why a maintainer would stagger blazes rather than painting a northbound and southbound blaze on a single tree. There are two reasons: (1) hiker sightlines vary depending on the direction of travel, and (2) if that tree falls, two blazes are lost.

Discuss the challenges of this particular task, not the least of which invariably includes carrying an open container of paint. Allow time to share clever hacks such as a tote bucket, stencils, baggies for wet brushes, plastic jars (like old peanut butter jars) to carry paint, squirt bottles for paint, rags, etc. Bring a system you find works well.

Put it Into Practice

Provide the opportunity for participants to either walk the Trail with intention to observe blazing in place and/or refresh blazes. Demonstrate how scraping can help prepare the surface, if needed, and caution not to scrape bark off the tree or down to the cambium layer under the bark.

Pair participants and have them assign themselves so that one is the scraper and one is the painter. Let them deploy methods for painting the perfect blaze, whether using a stencil, marks on a paint brush, or other template.

If all participants travel to observe each pair work, everyone gets exposure to the full spectrum of possible approaches.

INSTRUCTION MATERIALS FOR COURSE

- Painting JHA
- Blaze paint, brushes, scrapers
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Templates or straight edge (optional)
- Bucket or tote for materials
- Additional blaze supplies of choice

HAZARDS & SAFETY

Help participants identify hazards associated with blazing.

Discuss that weather impacts more than safety since temperatures should be above 50 degrees and no rain in the forecast for a day so the latex paint can dry.

PAINT

A.T. Clubs generally provide paint to maintainers to use.

PRACTICAL POSSIBILITY

If course area has visitor-made stacked stones that may cause wayfinding confusion for other hikers. Take time to discuss and dismantle during the course.