



South Mountain Conservancy

South Mountain Reservation Stewardship, Advocacy & Public Engagement

SMC Trailkeeper Responsibilities and Assignments March 2019

Responsibilities

Trail Monitoring: Reports on the condition of the trail four times a year (by these dates, the start of each season: March 20, June 21, September 22, and December 20). Treadway, (erosion, surface stability), trail corridor (free of encroaching vegetation and fallen trees), blazes, and other conditions needing attention (e.g., trash accumulations and potentially unsafe conditions like leaning trees or dead trees close to the trail) should be noted.

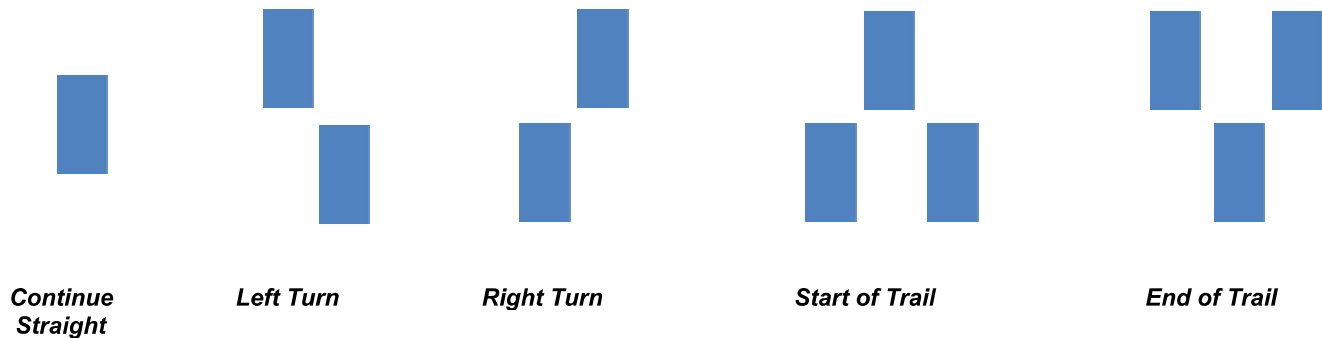
Trail Maintenance: Making sure the treadway is clean and clear by “brushing” the trail, trimming branches and pruning bushes and removing whatever will get in the way of a hiker. This usually requires for a narrow hiking trail a rectangular passage or corridor free of vegetation 2 to 3 feet right and left of the trail center line and to a height of 8 feet. (Trails that might be used for horses would require a 10 foot high clearance and would be wider.) Trash pickup is also included among the tasks.

Trail Blazing: Blazing should help a hiker see the course of the trail at any point on the path in both directions. The next blaze should be visible, generally, by facing away from the last blaze. Sometimes the next blaze can emerge if one continues some 10 to 15 feet beyond the last one. Good blazing requires that you assess visibility from both directions and being attentive to bends in the trail and obstacles to one’s line of sight; this sometimes requires trimming an errant branch. Line of sight in both directions can generally be achieved by blazing both sides of the same tree, but not always; at other times, two nearby trees, on the same or opposite sides of the trail, work best.

Blazes should be around five feet above the path level, that is, at or just above an adult’s eye level. They should be positioned on the tree, left and right, so they are centered as seen from the path some 50 feet away, not centered when viewed up close. This mistake is frequently made. Blazing should be sufficient, but not excessive; it should not seem as if we’ve painted the forest.

Turns are indicated when it the trail shifts more than 45 degrees and sustains the new direction for a moderate distance, or if there might be confusion because a divergent trail leads away. The conventions for turns are below. They should be “read” from the bottom up, as seen below. Optimally, they should be placed *before* a turn, around 10 to 15 feet away, but that is not always feasible.

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On most trails we use painted rectangles with oil-based, long-lasting epoxy paint. The sizes of a vertical rectangle, 2 ½" (the width of a dollar bill) by 5", or 3 x 6" are recommended. A template of flexible plastic can be made, but a 2" brush usually works well if the paint is applied attentively. If a two-color blaze is required, each color would be a square around 3 by 3 inches. (Let one color dry before applying the second!) Loop trails have a white circle of about 5 inches in diameter with a colored, centered dot of about 1 ½" (a good model is a CD disk). The Hemlock Falls Loop, Zoo Loop, and Mayapple Loops have these markings with centers of red, green, and blue, respectively.

Information on preparing the tree surface to better accept the paint by scraping (from Appalachian Mountain Club guidelines) is available. Scraping the bark until it is relatively smooth, especially for rough, barks, helps adherence and the ability to have a nicely defined blaze. Painting should be done when the surface of the tree, etc., is 50 degrees F or above.

Some trails have aluminum rectangles supplementing the painted blazing. The Lenape Trail (yellow blaze) has yellow tags placed 8 to 10 per mile and at major trail intersections. The Zoo Loop Trail (green dot) also has aluminum tags. Aluminum nails should be used with these tags and should not be nailed all the way; a ½" to ¾" gap should be left so the tree can grow and not engulf the tag.

In several places, we are also using colored aluminum disks with arrows to indicate an access trail to a particular trail. For example, from the Turtle Back picnic area, silver arrows with an orange background lead to the orange-blazed Turtle Back Trail. These medallions should be also attached at eye level with aluminum nails and a ¾ inch gap between them and the trees.

Over the last couple of years, the SMC has moved to oil-based paints over water-based, latex paints, though clean up is more challenging. These are *generally the epoxy paints by Benjamin Moore*. Water-based paints do not last as long on the trees and, when kept in our unheated shed, are not usable after freezing during a couple of winters. The paint colors we use are the following:

- White - Riccardi epoxy super enamel

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- Black - Riccardi epoxy super enamel
- Yellow - Riccardi epoxy super enamel 054
- Bright Orange - Riccardi epoxy super enamel 017
- Green (Apple Lime Cocktail) - Benjamin Moore 420
- Blue (True Blue) - Benjamin Moore 02066-50
- Red (Bulls Eye Red) - Benjamin Moore 2002-20

We have standardized the paint to be brighter, lighter colors which are more visible in dim light

Paint and supplies can be obtained from the Trailkeeper coordinator, if needed. These include paint, brushes, scrapers, small pails and paint thinner. Most of these supplies are donated by Ricciardi Bros. paint store, 1915 Springfield Ave., Maplewood. (If you patronize them, thank them for their support.) The Trailkeeper coordinator or the SMC chair can pick up the paints from that store, as needed. We keep most of these materials, except the pain to avoid damage due to temperature fluctuation, in the new shed.

The major responsibilities of the Trailkeeper program coordinator are:

- 1.) To maintain the list of trailkeepers and help arrange and run the annual breakfast.
- 2.) To make sure that the quarterly reports are filed. (Alltrails.com adds some possibilities.)
- 3.) To monitor problems (e.g., fallen trees) that are reported to the trailkeeper program coordinator and the SMC Chair (the chair notifies the Chain Saw Gang, the county, etc., as required), to check out problem areas.
- 4.) To generally be aware of the condition of trails and indicate to Trailkeepers when blazing needs improvement, minor corridor obstructions need to be addressed, etc.
- 5.) To train new trailkeepers on blazing, clearing trail corridors, etc., or find a mentoring, experienced trailkeeper to do this
- 6.) To make sure trailkeepers have sufficient materials for blazing and tools (SMC chair will help with this.)