

Massachusetts AT Management Committee

Guidelines for Maintainers

FPR, CAC et al 2/9/02

A maintainer's primary job is to keep the existing footpath open and free from hazards. It will require most likely at least three (and often more) trips to your section beginning in early Spring of each year. The initial visit in the spring is often used to assess the winter's damage and inventory large tasks that may require additional help. Heavy storms with high winds will likely also require a check of your section. If you do find tasks that are beyond your experience or abilities, let your Maintainer Coordinator know right away so plans can be made to clear the problem up in a timely fashion.

Most of your trail work will involve Brushing, Blowdowns, Blazing, and Drainage ("BBB&D").

Brushing--as Spring gives way to summer, young growth should be clipped back to provide a clear corridor four feet wide and eight feet high. In some locations--such as heavy Laurel growth--this may not be possible or desirable. Remember though, hikers often carry tall backpacks, and heavy rains will bend vegetation down, blocking the footpath.

In a few places in Massachusetts there are rare or endangered plants on the footpath. Your Coordinator will provide you with information to identify these plants and instructions on how to treat them--for instance, many plants thrive BECAUSE they are in a disturbed area and regularly cut back. Check with your coordinator to be certain.

Some sections of the AT in Massachusetts need mowing or cutting with a grass whip or "swizzle stick". Typically, large sections requiring a power mower are cut by Committee members using the Committee's heavy duty mower. If your section begins to need such work, contact your Coordinator. You are also more than welcome to help with the mowing too.

In the late summer, you may find that another round of brush clipping is needed, especially under power lines or other open areas.

All in all, it may take several trips to your section to complete all the work, depending on the specific type of plant growth or terrain in your section

Blowdowns--are trees that have fallen across the footpath. Small trees can usually be easily cleared with clippers and a bow saw. Larger trees (or groups of several trees that have fallen together) will require a chain saw. You must be certified to operate a chainsaw on NPS lands. In any case, do not operate a chainsaw alone in the backcountry. Notify your Coordinator about large blowdowns, and he or she will organize a work party to tackle the problem. Try and be as specific as possible about the location.

Blazing--AT blazes are white, 2 inches wide and 6 inches high painted on contrasting trees or rocks. Double blazes indicate an abrupt change in direction, upcoming trail intersection or road crossing. Double blazes are NOT needed for "routine" changes in direction as the trail winds through the woods--unless the footpath is unclear or easily confused with an intersecting woods road, for example. Do not over blaze. The AT footpath is generally pretty clearly defined. Before adding a blaze check in both directions, if another blaze can be seen in either direction, a new blaze is not needed. Remember, hikers use the trail in both directions--make sure it is equally well blazed for Northbound AND Southbound hikers!

A good time to REFRESH blazes is in the spring before summer growth has occurred. In the summer months, clip away any leaves or branches that may obscure blazes. A good quality exterior gloss latex paint is recommended. A 2" foam brush makes painting a nice, crisp blaze quick and easy. Mark the handle 6" from the end of the brush to gauge the length of a blaze. A squeeze bottle works well for handling the paint, and you can carry everything in a small plastic bucket. Some blazes weather more quickly than others depending on their location or the type of tree they are on.

Drainage--Running water is the enemy of the trail. Keep water bars cleaned out. Once in the early spring and perhaps again during the summer if they fill quickly. Pile cleared out dirt and debris just downhill of the waterbar to bolster the rocks or logs it is made of. Be certain that the drainage channel extends well off the footpath. Place other rocks or brush at the sides of the waterbar to keep hikers from walking around the ends and widening the trail. If waterbars have been destroyed, or you see other erosion problems, report them to your Coordinator.

Tools--It is probably most practical to own the basic tools: Clippers, Loppers, and Bow Saw. If you have grassy sections, a grass whip (or weedwacker) will be needed. Waterbars are easiest to clean with a hazel hoe or mattock. These heavy tools are available to sign out in the box outside the tool shed at the Mt Greylock Visitors Center, or at the AMC office in southern Berkshire County (address TBA). Rick Wagner is the Committee Tool Shed Supervisor, feel free to contact him or your Coordinator if you need help with finding or using tools.

Reporting--Once a year you will be asked to report your hours to your Coordinator. Keep track of the work you do and hours spent traveling and on the trail in a small notebook in your backpack or tool kit. It will make summarizing your work much easier at the end of the season. If for any reason you are unable to complete the needed work on your section, or would like some extra help, notify your Coordinator as soon as possible.

One final thought--when in doubt, ask. There are lots of other folks ready to help you out with advice and an extra pair of hands.

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