

## **Massachusetts AT Management Committee Guidelines for Trail Maintainers**

FPR, CAC et al Jan, 2011

A maintainer's primary job is to keep the existing footpath open and free from hazards. It will typically require three (and sometimes more) trips to your section beginning in early Spring of each year.

The initial visit in the spring is used to assess the winter's damage and inventory large tasks that may require additional help. The other visits are to cut back the growth of brush and small trees, and to keep drainages clear of debris. Every few years, blazes are likely to need repainting.

Should heavy storms with high winds pass through the area, a check of your section is highly recommended to assess any damage.

If you do find tasks that are beyond your experience, available time 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.

**Brushing**--as spring gives way to summer, young woody 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--the four foot width may not be possible or desirable. Remember though, hikers often carry tall backpacks, and heavy rains will bend vegetation down, blocking the footpath. Sections with an open forest canopy are likely to have lots of fast-growing brush that will need regular attention. Your Coordinator will let you know what to expect on your section.

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 string trimmer or grass whip ("swizzle stick"). Larger sections crossing open fields require a power mower, and are cut by other A.T. volunteers using a 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 mid and 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, terrain or access routes in your section.

**Blowdowns**--are trees that have fallen across the footpath. Small trees can usually be easily cleared with loppers and a brush saw. Larger trees (or groups of several trees that have fallen together) will likely need a chainsaw. You must be trained and certified to operate a chainsaw on the AT. 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. 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 by the heavy hiker traffic and your brushing efforts. Before adding a blaze check in both directions, if another blaze can be seen in both directions, a new blaze is not needed. Do be generous with blazes at stream and road crossings. Try and imagine you have never hiked this section before and see if you can find your way. Also, 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 late in 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 and is completely clear of debris. 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 have your own basic tools: Clippers, loppers, and a small Brush Saw or Bow Saw. If you have grassy sections, a grass whip (or string trimmer) will be needed. Sometimes a pair of heavy duty hedge clippers is helpful if you have lots of briars or fast-growing brush. Waterbars are easiest to clean with a hazel hoe or mattock. These heavy tools are available to sign out at the tool shed at the Mt Greylock Visitors Center, or at the ATC/AMC office in South Egremont, MA. Steve Schimpff is the Committee Tool Shed Coordinator, feel free to contact him or your Coordinator if you need help with finding or using tools.

**Reporting**--In the early spring, you will be asked by your Coordinator to go out on your

section and report any large downed trees or other obstructions. Reports are compiled and a “Blowdown Blitz” is planned every spring to remove any fallen trees that you will not be able to address before the end of May. Your timely report is critical to this planning effort.

Every November you will be asked to report your hours to your Coordinator. Keep track of the work you do and hours spent traveling to 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.

Also, while you are out, look around for changes in the woods or fields. Has someone created a new side trail? Are there signs of vehicular travel on the trail? Has someone been cutting trees or brush? Are there new signs or advertising that have been attached to trees? Again, report promptly with accurate location information. Photos are always helpful.

**“Trail Magic”**--This most often comes in the form of water, drinks or snacks left on the Trail, often near road crossings. Unless attended, is it technically trash or “abandoned property”. Use your best judgement about whether to remove it or not. If the container is empty, or trash is being scattered about, remove it and throw it out. If it is fresh, not creating a pile of trash or empty bottles, you may want to leave it in place--and feel free to help yourself to what is offered. Do let your Coordinator know about its location, so it can be checked in a few days to see if it has been cleaned up.

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