

RMC trail blazing protocol for volunteers

13 July 2014

Trail blazing is, after drainage and brushing, the third major part of RMC trail maintenance. For volunteer trail work, the most important goal is safety, then enjoyment, and finally helping the RMC. For trail blazing, wear clothing that you do not mind getting painted. Wear good footwear for safety. We will blaze only if no rain and no temperatures below 50° F are predicted in the next 24 hours.

The **blazing kit** is provided by the RMC with the following:

- small plastic bucket with handle to carry the rest of the kit
- 1-2 pints of paint of the required color (see below) in a sealable container, such as 16-oz. yoghurt container or plastic jar with a screw cap
- template for blazes: 2x6-inch aluminum flashing
- wire brush to scrape debris from the bark and improve paint adhesion
- 2-inch paint scraper to flatten ridges on trunks where a blaze is to be painted
- 1.5-inch disposable paintbrush
- small rag to remove paint around a blaze
- one or more plastic bags to carry paintbrush and other items having wet paint after blazing is completed

The **color of blazes** in the White Mountain National Forest depends upon the location of trail:

- Designated Wilderness areas – no blazes; Appalachian Trail – white; Trails connecting directly to the Appalachian Trail – blue; All other non-RMC trails – yellow; RMC trails not in the WMNF – orange

How to paint blazes – Trail blazing is most efficiently undertaken by teams of a painter, a spotter, and a brusher. The painter goes ahead on the trail looking for a good tree. The spotter stands at the previous blaze and helps the painter locate good trees. The brusher removes branches and other vegetation obscuring a blaze (if there are no obstructions, the brusher brushes elsewhere along the trail between the previous and current blaze).

Paint blazes about head height on trees that are not dead and that are next to the trail. Blazes should be clearly visible from the previous blaze and as far from the previous blaze as possible while still being visible. Generally only one blaze should be visible in one direction at any point on a trail.

The painter locates a spot on the tree for a blaze so that it will be most visible from the previous blaze and prepares the spot by wire-brushing and/or scraping an area for a vertical, two-by-six-inch blaze. The painter first holds the template vertically on one side of the spot and paints a small band up to the edge of template and then holds the template either at the top or bottom of the spot and paints up to the edge of the template. The painter completes the perimeter of the blaze on the other side and bottom or top and, finally, fills in the whole blaze. The goal is a vertical blaze that completely covers the bark and has clean, straight edges.

Paint blazes in one direction along a trail and then paint them in the reverse direction. This requires that teams set a turnaround time so that blazing can be completed in both directions. We emphasize painting as few blazes as possible, putting them on healthy trees, and making them neat, with sharp edges and corners. We do not rely on existing blazes, paint blazes on rocks, or use double blazes, as is sometimes done near trail junctions. If there are old blazes on the trail, try to scrape them off the tree.