

Guide for Avon Trail Workers



Introduction

When you volunteer some of your time and energy to work on the trail, you help achieve one of the most important objectives of the Avon trail Association – which is to build and maintain the Avon trail. No special skills are needed for routine trail maintenance; but there are certain recommended methods which you will need to know. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with this information.

What does being a trail worker involve?

Our association has our trail broken into 15 sections with varying lengths, with our Trail Captains having the responsibility for keeping the trail in good order.

This means that it is expected you do a few hours walking your section, a few times in the year and reporting back to the Trail Maintenance co-ordinator. Times recommended include early in the spring (April), early summer (June) and in the fall.

Trail Captains, along with other members, will find that an inspection of their trail, doing light weed trimming, and branch clean up, etc. will not take long. Always be on the look-out for ways in which the Trail can be improved. The better the job you do the more rewarding your experience will be and the lower the risk for the hiker.

The responsibilities of the Avon Trail Board of Directors:

- establish construction of the trail
- to ensure that the trail is in good working order by, establishing trail maintenance(TM) sections and Trail captains to keep the trail in good working order.
- assist the Trail captains by arranging for the Maintenance crew to perform any major maintenance task such as downed tree removal
- organize workshops for the purpose of training workers for TM
- maintain a comprehensive register of landowners whose property the trail accesses
- have authorized signs posted at all access points
- provide financial assistance for TM
- receive and analyze Trail reports for future actions

Liability

Liability and the management of risk are becoming increasingly important in TM.

1 – landowner's liability – landowners are protected by the provisions of the Occupiers' Liability Act, which says that individuals using a recreational trail in a rural area and paying no fee for its use, assume the liability for their actions onto themselves. The landowner has an obligation not to deliberately and knowingly create a hazardous situation with reckless disregard for the public's safety. For example they are not allowed to set traps.

Trail workers should be sure not to deliberately create any situation which might be construed to be hazardous, for instance placing rocks or logs across the trail to discourage bikers. Such actions could be detrimental to the landowner's and the Association's legal position.

2 - The Avon Trail carries a liability insurance to protect it from claims for damages incurred in connection with the use of the Trail. As an organization managing a recreational trail, the Avon Trail has a responsibility to do so in a responsible manner, and to act as a reasonable person would under the circumstances.

It is the Association's duty to adopt reasonable standards and to ensure that they are being applied on the Trail. Regular inspections and TM along the Trail are needed to demonstrate due diligence, with the TM work documented and filed. These actions reduce our exposure to insurance risk and claims.

Tools for trail clearing:

- 1 – pruning shears, both long and short
- 2 – saws – hand saws – pruning saws and bow saws
- 3 – brush cutter with hardhat and face shield
- 4 – shovels, rakes
- 5 – first aid kit, cell phone, work gloves

Our tool inventory is added at the back of this document.

Who gets to do the Trail Maintenance?

Trail Captains, along with other members, will find that an inspection of their trail, doing light weed trimming, and branch clean up, etc. will not take long. It is the hope that all members will join in with Trail Maintenance (TM). All are encouraged to join in with the Trail Maintenance crew. More hands make light work, and a more enjoyable outing for our hikers.

But...it is a requirement that no Member goes out on the Trail alone to do TM. It is a more fun atmosphere to have company and is also safer in case of emergencies. A team should consist of no less than two people going out together to work on a site, and then one of the team send in a report of this TM to the Trail Maintenance Co-ordinator.

It is also a requirement that due to the inherent risk involved with the brush cutter, only those persons trained on this by the Co-op Store personal will be allowed to use it. Any user will also be required to use the hardhat and face shield as this brush cutter is not meant to cut down weeds. Its purchase was based on the identified need to get control of the burdock, thistles and brambles that are a nuisance to our hikers.

So – any member is certainly invited to get in touch with the TM Co-ordinator to arrange for their training on any of our equipment.

If you are looking after a section of the trail, that needs more than your pruning, and needs the use of the brush cutter, all you need to do is to contact the TM co-ordinator who will call in the Maintenance crew to get out to your section and take care of what you can't do yourself.

Maintenance crew:

We have a maintenance crew to do the heavy work on the trail, for example; log removal which may need a power saw, or the brush cutter on areas with heavy weed infestation. Any member who would like to become part of the maintenance crew is encouraged to contact the TM co-ordinator, to arrange their training

We are always concerned for the safety of the hikers, and we are also always concerned with the safety of our trail workers. Your safety is our prime consideration during any work being done on the trail. If there is any activity which might endanger you as you are doing TM, then avoid doing it, report it to the TMC – and the TMC will call in the Maintenance crew.

Construction:

Stiles, bridges, boardwalks, and step construction are to be done in accordance with the Bruce Trail Guide for Trail Workers. As these projects are done according to a code provided by the Bruce Trail Conservancy, the Avon trail members are invited to be trained in this area.

How wide should the trail be?

The Avon trail is normally a single-file footpath, with a 2 ft (0.6 m) width, which should be solid, stable, and clear of obstacles. To prevent weeds from growing in too quickly, weeds should be cleared to at least 5 ft (1.5m). Keep debris well away from the trail so as not to encourage weed growth. While the 2 ft width would be ideal, trees and rocks are a natural part of the trail and would be considered exceptions, in creating the ideal footpath. Thistles, burdock, bramble and goldenrod are a nuisance for hikers and should be cut down later in the summer (late July).

Due to the aggressiveness of raspberry growth, Avon trail workers can either cut down or pull out the raspberries by their root. Pulling by the root does slow down the growth. Once the root is pulled, make an attempt to step down on the treadway to reinforce the soil. Do not pull out any plants by their root if the root is on a slope, whether the slope is on a hill or on the treadway itself, as this could cause the soil to erode onto the treadway.

Cutting down the raspberries in April, will mean another visit to the trail, late May and again in August.

Blazes:

Blazes are the key to finding the route on the trail. The blazes on the Avon Trail are to be 2 x 6 oriented vertically. White latex semi-gloss paint should be used on trees, while metal blazes should be used on posts. Maples, beech, iron wood are excellent trees to place blazes. Popular trees have a wax in the bark which causes the paint to peel.

To mark left turns – have two blazes – one above the other with the top one off set to the left. To mark right turns – have two blazes – one above the other with the top one off set to the right to mark the turn. The blaze on the main trail is white, while the blaze on the side trails will be blue.

General tips regarding the location of blazes:

Blazes should be about 1.5 – 1.7 m (5 – 5.5 ft) above the ground preferable on the right side of the trail. Trails on roads should be on the left hand side as the hiker is walking facing the oncoming traffic.

Avoid using the same tree for blazes facing both directions; should this tree fall, the trail then losing two blazes.

The frequency of blazes depends on the nature of the trail. A trail with a well defined treadway will need less frequent blazing than a trail needing more blazes due to the treadway with twists and turns, alternative paths or dense bush. The general rule is that, as you pass one blaze, the next blaze should be visible.

Remember, when blazing in early spring, that in a month or two, growth of the vegetation or leaves on the trees may cover your blazes. Trim back branches and vegetation in the vicinity of the blaze. Plan on hiking through the area with someone else in the lead to have fresh eyes view the blazing and foliage growth.

Removal of abandoned blazes:

When the route of the trail is changed it is necessary to remove all blazes marking the abandoned route. Methods of obliterating old blazes will vary according to the condition of the paint and what kind of tree or post the blaze is located.

It is preferable to scrape off blazes from fence posts, or trees with thick, scaly bark- avoiding scraping on a young or thick barked tree. Use another paint to cancel out the blaze such as a grey or a brown paint; remembering that painting out a blaze will have to be maintained as the second paint will eventually wear off, allowing the original white paint to show through.

Remember that the paint needs to be semi gloss latex paint, preferably to paint on with a brush 1 ½ in width about 5 – 5.5ft high on a tree with bark as smooth as you can find . Use a template, one made out of cardboard or wood with a 2 x 6 cut out. Metal blazes are only to be used on cedar posts.

While the trail may be obvious to you once you become familiar with its location, have someone not familiar with it, lead you along the trail, and take note of when they hesitate – as this would be a spot that blazing may be needed to avoid confusion on the trail.

Your confidence and competence with blazing will grow the more experience you gain. Try it first with one of the experienced hiking members, a Trail Captain, the Trail Maintenance Co-ordinator or someone from the maintenance crew to get the know how.

Clearing the trail:

Cut as high as you can reach – or up to 8 ft, if possible, remembering that we don't want to clear off the canopy of tree branches as this will allow too much sunlight and cause further weed growth.

Dealing with trees:

Cut branches at right angles close to the base of the branch, so the tree can heal its' wound and also not leave sharp points for a hiker to get caught on. Cut sucker tree growth at ground level – leaving the roots to stabilize the ground.

Dealing with windfall across the trail:

When a log falls across the trail, if it is less than 20cm above the trail, just leave it, as it is easy for the hiker to step over it. If it is greater than this, it should be removed by swinging it, or sawing it into two or three sections, or sawing it half way down, so that hikers have the easy step over it. The landowner may need to be contacted if the down tree is large, since many of the landowners harvest the lumber.

Wet areas on the trail:

Choosing the trail to steer clear of the wet area is the easiest way to deal with this. Warning the hikers ahead of time in the guidebook, that they could be experiencing a wet area, will help. Providing stepping stones are the most permanent solution, if they are readily available. Boardwalks are an expensive solution.

Using Turnpikes:

Turnpikes are using wooden logs outlining the trail, secured with angle iron or other trees, or stakes. These turnpikes would be heaped with soil or wood chips, to raise up the level of the ground in a wet area to allow hikers to pass providing the turnpike has a ditch along it for water to escape.

Side – logging:

Side-logging can also be used in an area where the trail narrows with a drop off close to the one side. Set up the side log on the side closest to the cliff and add branches to raise the height of the “railing”. Secure the logging with angle irons or stakes.

Signage

All signs, once approved by the Avon Trail Board, should be placed 8 ft up a tree or on a post at this height, backed by plywood and screwed into place with plastic screws.

...this information has been provided by the Bruce Trail Guide to Trail Workers.