

How to Read Trail Markers for Hiking in Pennsylvania

Trails in Pennsylvania may be marked in a variety of ways. Knowing the basics can improve your enjoyment of a trail experience.

Posts

These are perhaps the easiest hiking markers to see. Posts are erected with the trail name or next destination marked, usually with an arrow. Posts may be used to indicate distance traveled (generally called trail mile markers) or distance to a destination, or to show direction at an intersection.

Affixed Markers Hiking Signs

Some trails have metal signs affixed to trees which may or may not contain the trail name.

Other metal markers that you might encounter in Pennsylvania state parks or forests are boundary markers, indicating the edge of a park or forest. The marker will be on the outside edge of the property.

Paint

Blazes may be used to mark direction on a trail, indicate the type of trail, or could be used to indicate the trail on which you travel. In the latter case, most colors are coordinated to the map. For example, at Boyd Big Tree Preserve, the Janey Trail is red.

There are several methods used, but perhaps the most common is to use a small dab or rectangle of colored paint.

Color patterns or formations have meaning.

Straight: A single rectangle of paint or single marker means you are on the trail. Go straight.

Right: Two rectangles with the higher one to the right means go right.

Left: Two rectangles with the higher one to the left means go left.

Intersection: Two rectangles in a vertical line with another off to the left or right indicate a side (spur) trail going in the direction of the single rectangle. The main trail continues straight.

Start: Three rectangles that form an upward arrow indicate the trail starts and is going forward.

Finish: Three rectangles that form a downward arrow indicate the trail ends.

