

BRIGHT BLAZES ON TREE BARK MARK FOREST LAND BOUNDARIES

08/01/00

We have all heard the expression fences make good neighbors. I believe for the most part that is an accurate statement. Nowhere has this become more apparent to me than in my work as a forester. I have found few fences here in the Adirondack forests, but something just as significant.

I refer, of course, to tree blazed property lines. They are a line of trees on or near the property line delineated as such by blazes through the bark and preferably, painted a bright color. The reason for this is simple, the brighter the color the more easily they may be seen. One tip, however, is to never use yellow unless you want to attract unwelcome visitors. Yellow is the color universally used by the State of New York to mark its boundary lines.

Eventually and ideally, they terminate in a point known as a corner or point-on-line. Said corners or points should be marked as permanently as possible. I have found some interesting objects used as markers. They ranged from pointed stones to old bed rails. Iron pipe or rod is the usual choice of most surveyors, but concrete, granite or iron I-beams bearing nickel inscriptions grace most state and county lines. Piles of loose rocks surround most wood lot corners.

A word of caution is in order here regarding blazes. They are permanent mark and should only be placed on a tree by licensed surveyors. It is not only permissible to paint them, but desirable to preserve them. They should never be re-blazed or “freshened up,” as I have on occasion seen done. There is a good reason for this. At some point in the far future, should the need arise to resurvey the property, they can be used to prove the year they were made. The surveyor may box them out and down to the old original blaze to count the later growth rings to determine the year they were made. It’s one method used to prove authenticity of the original survey.

Much of our time as foresters is spent chasing boundary lines. This is a must if one is planning to mark trees to be selected for a timber sale. Despite what one may hear, boundary-line-marked trees should never be cut by either landowner. The old belief that you are entitled to every other tree is a fallacy, for obvious reasons.

Aside from well-marked boundaries making good neighbors, it deters trespassers. With timber prices at unbelievable highs, there are those looking for any excuse to help themselves to trees where there may be a question as to ownership. This is particularly true for nonresident landowners or anyone who does not visit the “back forty” on a regular basis.

Much of our forestry activities is being directed to boundary line maintenance and timber trespass.

Check and maintain your boundaries regularly. It may well be a worthwhile family activity. You say you have no boundaries to check or maintain? Hike along the many public property lines in the area and see where your curiosity leads you.

Want a good place to start? Buy a McKeever U.S.G.S. map, look in the upper northern portion where Lewis, Oneida and Herkimer Counties form a tri-corner. The property is jointly owned by the State of New York and John Hancock and open to the public.

Try not to get lost and if you find the monument before I do, put some flagging tape on it so it will be easier for me to find.