



## CHAPTER 7

# SIGNAGE FOR THE ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

Ice Age  
National  
Scenic Trail





In earlier times, Native Americans lashed the limbs of maple saplings or bent the entire sapling and tied it in place to mark a trail—thus leaving a sign for others. In traveling to the inland fur-gathering areas, French-Canadian voyageurs created “lop trees” to mark the portages and guide them through the maze of waterways. These early signs were a basic form of communication.

Just as the Native Americans and voyageurs used signs to find their way through difficult areas, today’s trail users rely on signs and symbols to find their way and to better understand the landscape around them. Signs identify and label facilities and points of interest. They warn hikers of dangers and unusual trail conditions. They educate hikers in the proper use of the outdoors and promote the protection of nature. Signs explain and interpret interesting natural and cultural features and management activities along the trail. They also list regulations and guidelines and serve to control unwanted or illegal activities. Most importantly, they direct the hiker by identifying the route.

Signs are probably the quickest and easiest way to leave the trail user with a positive impression. If the signs are of high-quality, well-maintained, and properly located, other trail problems which are harder to solve are often overlooked (e.g., wet areas). Signs are one of the easiest ways to increase the public’s awareness of and support for the trail.

Signs also meet other objectives:

- Provide positive exposure of the trail to attract more users.
- Educate the user about the trail through trailhead kiosks.
- Reassure the user that he/she is on the right trail and will not get lost.
- Control trail usage and educate the public for a safer, more enjoyable, environmentally friendly experience.

The public agencies and private organizations that manage segments of the Ice Age NST often use a variety of signing methods. However, for the Ice Age Trail to be recognized as a National Scenic Trail along its entire 1,200-mile route, signs and their locations must be standardized. Managing authorities (e.g. WDNR, Counties, etc.) and Trail Segment Leaders are urged to identify signing needs as part of the annual trail assessment process. An inventory of existing signs should be regularly updated. It is recommended that, as new signs are needed or existing signs need replacement, the uniform signing standards suggested in this chapter be followed.

Application of these standards needs to be balanced with aesthetic considerations to avoid over-signage. Each segment of trail should contain a limited “set” of signs. Existing “sets” should be evaluated to determine if they contain the essential elements or whether they over-burden the system and contribute to “sign pollution”. When replacing old or damaged signs, every effort should be made to place new signs back in the same locations, and not just add signs to the system.

For Ice Age NST purposes, signage can be separated into two categories: external and internal. External signs identify and provide information to the motoring public on how to reach the trail. Internal signage is directed toward the trail user. External or “highway” signs need to be coordinated with public highway agencies.



## TYPES OF SIGNS

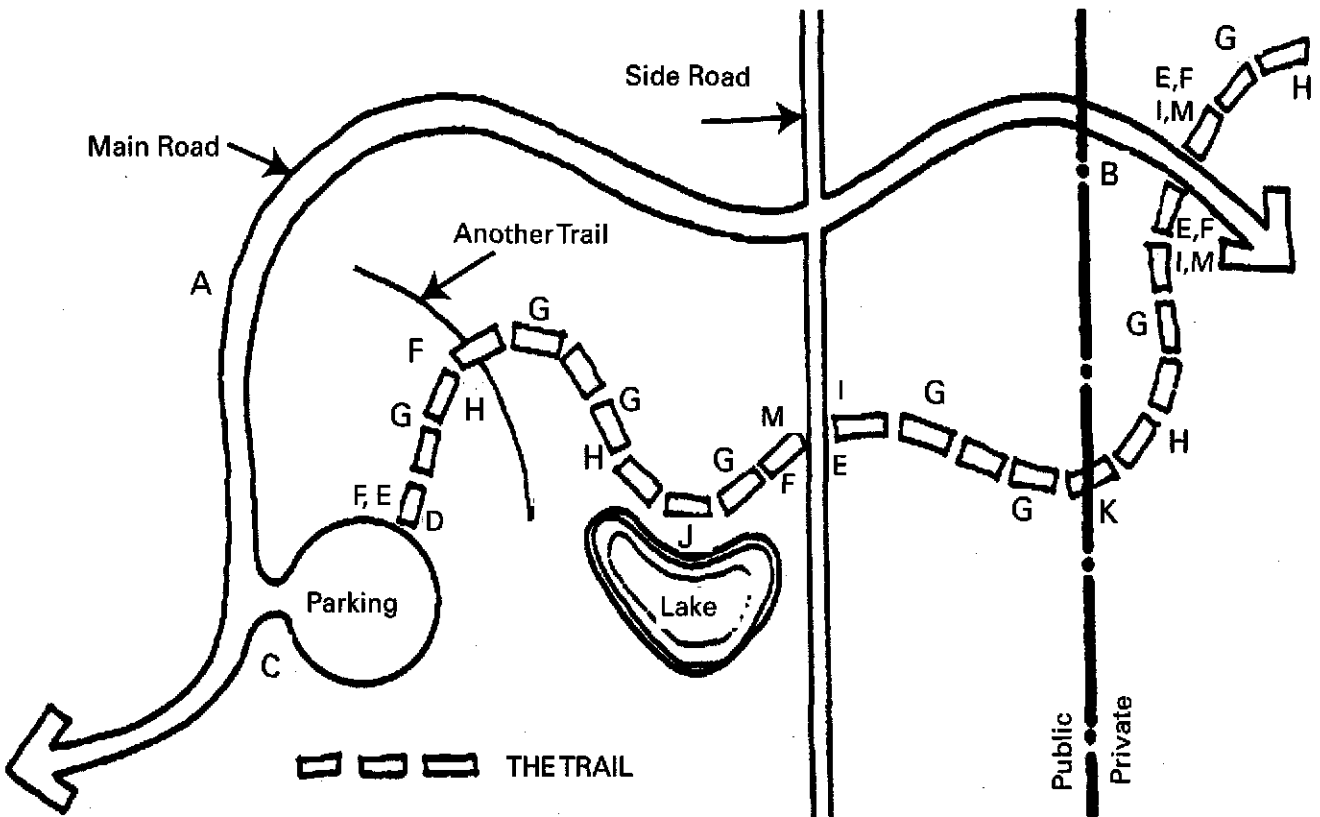
The following types of signs and markers will be discussed in this chapter. See Location of Signs diagram for their relative locations.

### External

- A. Highway Information Sign
- B. Highway Warning Signs

### Internal

- C. Trailhead Entrance Sign
- D. Trailhead Information Kiosk
- E. Regulatory (usage control) signs
- F. Route Confirmation Markers (trail logo)
- G. Reassurance markers (blazes)
- H. Direction change (arrows)
- I. Road Crossing signs
- J. Interpretive signs
- K. "Crossing Private Land" signs
- L. You-Are-Here signs
- M. Destination signs
- N. Boundary signs
- O. Adopter signs





As you can see, there is an amazing array of signs that could be used. However, primarily because of financial constraints, implementation of these standards will have to be phased in over a period of time. Health and safety signs should be installed first. Suggested priorities for internal signage are as follows:

**Primary**

Regulatory/Use, Route Confirmation, Reassurance markers (blazes), Direction Change (arrows), Road Crossing, "Crossing Private Lands"

**Secondary**

Trailhead Entrance, Trailhead Information Kiosk, Adoptor, Boundary

**Tertiary**

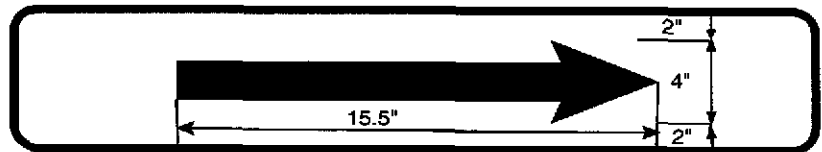
Interpretive, Destination, You-Are-Here Signs

**A. Highway Information signs**

These are the typical recreation-related signs seen along highways, with white lettering on a brown background. They can only be installed with the approval of the responsible highway department or agency that controls the road—such as the Wisconsin DOT. The Wisconsin DOT performs their own design work and has their personnel install these signs. They expect to be reimbursed for their efforts. Their cost per sign on state highways is approximately \$500. On freeway systems, because of the sign's size and materials, it is \$4,000-\$5,000 per sign.



36" X 20-1/4"



36" x 8"

The purpose of these signs is to direct motorists to trailheads and parking. The recommended wording is: *Ice Age National Scenic Trail* with a large arrow. Highway departments calculate the size of the sign based on the posted highway speed limit and the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). MUTCD is a nationally accepted signage system and is used by all of the involved highway departments in Wisconsin.



## B. Highway Warning Signs

There are two types of signs that warn motorists of people crossing the road. They are the Pedestrian Crossing and the Recreational Trail Crossing Signs. These signs are installed in advance of trail crossings where trail use and road conditions warrant. These signs are especially important where visibility is limited due to road curvature, vegetation, or hills.

The Pedestrian Crossing Sign is a standard MUTCD Warning Sign. They are diamond shaped and have black lettering on a yellow background. The Recreational Trail Crossing Sign is rectilinear with white lettering on a brown background. If these signs are needed, the highway department should be contacted for concurrence. They may or may not install them.



W11A-2  
30' x 30'

## C. Trailhead Entrance Sign



Trailhead Entrance Signs are installed at trailhead locations where parking is available. For the Ice Age NST there are two categories of trailheads: primary and secondary. Primary trailheads are generally located on major county trunk roads or state highways and accommodate five or more cars. Secondary trailheads are located on low traveled town and county roads, and provide parking for less than five cars.

At a primary trailhead location, the Trailhead Entrance Sign should be the standard NPS metal sign with white lettering on a brown background and read "Ice Age National Scenic Trail" with the trail logo on the right side. Because the NPS logo is on the sign, the trail segment that the Trailhead Entrance Sign is located on needs to be certified. The sign is generally 3' x 6' but depending on the site and

the managing authority, may be smaller. The sign is typically mounted on solid, well-designed wooden, stone, or combination support structure. Optionally, a matching metal segment name strip could be mounted underneath the main sign to indicate the trail segment name. If a name strip is used, the lettering and color should match the main sign. At secondary trailheads, the historically used wooden trailhead sign is acceptable.

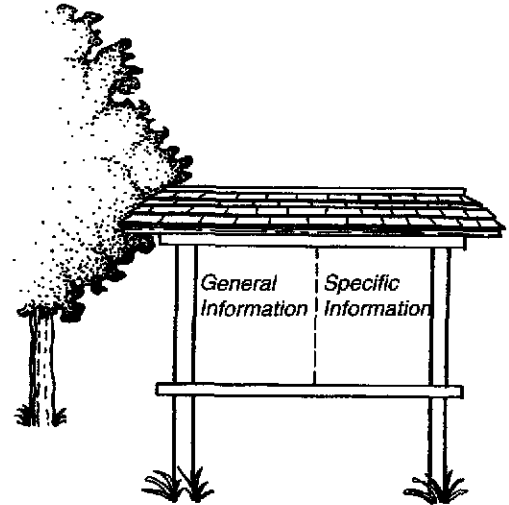
Entrance signs are usually two-sided and placed perpendicular to the highway, located just off the right-of-way and near the entrance road. This increases effectiveness in directing the user to the trailhead. However, because of site conditions, some entrance signs may be one-sided and placed parallel to the road. If the sign is placed in the right-of-way, a permit must be obtained from the responsible highway department.



There are many places where the trail begins at or crosses major roads, but there is no parking available for a trailhead. In this case Trailhead Entrance Signs should not be used because this would cause confusion to the motoring public regarding where to park. In this instance, the entrance to the trail from the road could be marked with a Carsonite or wooden post with an attached marker or decal identifying the trail. These should be placed parallel to the road. (See I—Road Crossing Signs).

### D. Trailhead Information Kiosk

A Trailhead Information Kiosk should be installed at all primary trailhead locations. This structure should be built within 50 feet of where the trail leaves the parking lot and should include a double bulletin board either on one side or back to back. A well-designed and maintained trailhead kiosk presents a variety of information and serves to reduce the number of signs along the trail.



On the double bulletin board, one display panel should contain general information about the trail, such as the NPS brochure. It should depict the general location of the trail in relation to other major landmarks.

The other panel should contain specific information about the trail segment, including local trail interpretation. A map should show the trail as far as the next trailhead in either direction. It should also include regulatory and safety information, information about temporary trail detours, and, if desired, an adoptor sign.



All kiosks should be weather-tight to either protect permanent information such as maps and regulations, or utilize weather/vandal resistant materials such as waxed poster board, fiberglass embedment, or other durable materials. Cluttering the kiosk with quickly prepared information on paper should be avoided. Frequent, regularly scheduled maintenance of kiosk displays is imperative for maintaining a professional appearance. Replace faded display materials as necessary, remove spider webs, dead bugs, accumulated moisture, and so on. Kiosks are good locations to install trail registers.

### E. Regulatory/Usage Control Signs

While kiosk information should maintain a primarily positive tone, it is recommended that trail segments have signs which show acceptable and unacceptable recreational uses at all access points such as trailheads, road crossings, junctions with other types of trails, etc. This is especially important where problems have occurred.

There are two options for regulatory signs. (1) Carsonite type posts with strip decals or





4" x4" treated wood posts with 3 ½ inch metal decals, or (2) larger format signs mounted on Carsonite or wooden posts—to be used where the standard 3 ½ inch wide vertical decals are not prominent enough, such as at busy trailheads or major road crossings. If certified, the regulatory signs should be placed directly below the Ice Age NST logo. The managing agency's emblem, i.e., WDNR, County, etc., may also be included under the regulatory decal. Decal designs may be selected from Carsonite's Travel Management Signing system.

In order to avoid over-signing, regulatory signs will emphasize the permitted use. On a particular segment where non-permitted uses are a problem, the international symbol for banning, the circle with a slash, can be added lower on the post to help control the problem. Further usage control measures, such as barriers or stiles, may have to be employed in those areas where the trail is subject to illegal use.

### **F. NPS Route Confirmation Marker (Ice Age NST emblem/logo)**

On NPS certified sections of the trail, the 3 ½" rounded triangle mammoth trail emblem/logo should be placed at all access points, road crossings (even drivable woods roads), and intersections with other trails. They should be located on both sides of all such crossings and intersections perpendicular to the trail. The trail logo should also be sited periodically along the trail route in both directions, approximately every ¾ to 1 mile. These markers are made of plastic or aluminum for nailing to trees and posts. They are also available in Carsonite decal format. In Carsonite format, they should be used in conjunction with mileposts—if mileposts are used—and the Carsonite usage strip decal at access points and road crossings. Once a segment of trail is certified, confirmation markers will be supplied by the NPS to the segment's trail managing authority.



The larger 9" emblem is typically used at trailheads, major road crossings, and other locations where more visibility is desired.

On uncertified segments of trail, the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation's Ice Age Trail logo (yellow with the State of Wisconsin and the trail in black) may be used in place of the NPS certification logo.

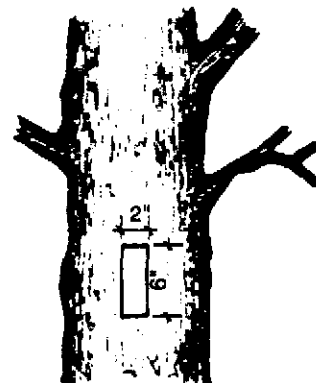
### **G. Reassurance Markers (Blazes)**

Reassurance markers are the paint or nail-on "blazes" used to indicate the trail and reassure hikers that they are on the right path. Since it is not cost-effective or desirable to use the NPS trail logo as the sole marker along the trail, reassurance markers (which are less costly and prone to vandalism) are used continuously between points where the official trail logo has been placed, even along road segments.



Place blazes carefully; the trick is to not over-blaze a trail to the point where it detracts from the natural surroundings and takes excessive labor to maintain; nor to under-blaze a trail where users may become confused. Well-defined trail sections with a distinct trail tread do not need to be marked as frequently as less-defined sections. Pay particular attention to marking intersections and road crossings. After an intersection or road crossing, place a reassurance marker a relatively short distance after the intersection or road (roughly 75 to 200 feet). Be sure to clearly mark sections where the trail is vague, where old paths cross the trail, or other areas where users might miss or stray from the trail. Be conservative and use discretion when placing blazes; it is better to improve the trail tread than to place more markers.

When determining where to blaze, trail developers should walk the trail from both directions, and not just paint a blaze on each side of one tree. Visually, the trail is different depending on which direction you are hiking. It is not desirable to have more than one blaze visible in either direction at any one time. Blazes are placed on posts or trees, slightly above eye level so that hikers can see them easily. In areas where the trail receives significant snowfall, blazes may be placed slightly higher. Care should be taken to avoid marking large or picturesque trees. In open areas, blazing should be on posts.



Painted blazes are more vandal-resistant than nail-on blazes, but may require more frequent maintenance. Edges and corners should be crisp and sharp. If paint is used, dripping paint, blotches, and over-sized blazes should be avoided. On rough barked trees, the tree will first need to be smoothed using a paint scraper, file, wire brush, or draw knife. Once the bark is smoothed, there are a number of successful paint-blazing techniques. Some trail maintainers paint free hand—using a 1-1/2" brush. Others use a stencil and apply the paint with a brush, sponge, dauber, etc. A high quality, glossy, exterior acrylic paint such as Sherman Williams Metalatex or Nelson Boundary Paint should be used for long durability. Spray paint is discouraged as it is more expensive and does not last as long. Neatness counts!

Nail-on blazes are more costly than painted blazes. If they are preferred, affix yellow blazes to trees using only aluminum nails, and do not pound them in all the way—leave approximately 1/4" between the back of the nail head and the bark. Vegetation should also be pruned from in front of the blazes to ensure visibility in all seasons. On private lands, the choice between painted or nail-on blazes should be determined by the landowner.

**Ice Age NST Blaze Standards** - Public agencies and private organizations which manage trails incorporated into the Ice Age NST route have established various methods of marking trails. Their blazes and other markings include a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. To achieve as much consistency as possible the following standards are preferred:

1. Both paint and nail-on type blazes should be 2" x 6" vertical rectangles. The 2" x 6" rectangular shape is large enough to be easily seen without being visually obtrusive and is the most universally accepted style of trail blazing. The 4" x 7" diamonds used in some areas are acceptable, but not preferred, and should be phased out whenever possible. As budget allows, the NPS may supply (limited) yellow plastic blazes to partners who choose to use them.
2. Throughout the trail, the standard colors are yellow for the Ice Age NST and blue for spur or access trails which connect to the Ice Age NST. Loop trails which incorporate the Ice Age NST, or longer side trails which connect to the Ice Age NST can be marked in a color of choice other than

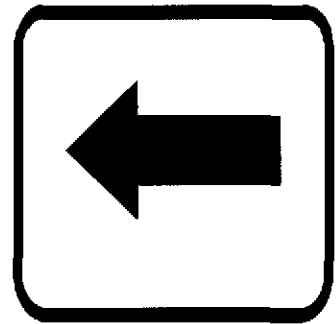


yellow or blue. The paint of choice is any high-quality gloss or semi-gloss exterior acrylic latex paint such as Sherman Williams Metalatex. Another source for paint is Nelson Paint, which is specially formulated to last on trees (Nelson Paint Company, P.O. Box 2040, Kingsford, MI 49802; 906-774-5566). The paint is Nelson's Boundary Marking Paint, brush-on type. It can be obtained from Forestry Suppliers, Ben Meadows, and other forestry supply sources.

3. In non-forested areas, blazes should be placed on wooden or Carsonite posts 4 to 5 feet above the ground. Typically, treated 4" x 4" posts or Carsonite posts are used if emblems or other signs/decals are to be attached. Round wooden posts are acceptable if a rasp is used to flatten the surface where the blazes, arrow, emblem, or signs are to be attached.

## H. Directional Change (Arrows)

These are necessary in places that require extra hiker alertness (e.g., *important turns, junctions with other trails, and other confusing locations*). They should be used sparingly so that they do not become meaningless or visually obtrusive. They are unnecessary at gradual turns and well-defined trail locations such as switchbacks. A reassurance marker should be placed so that it can be seen from the direction indicator. Signing for hikers coming from either direction should be done.



Arrows are the turn indicator of choice for the Ice Age NST. If Carsonite posts are used, the standard Carsonite arrow decal is acceptable (3" x 3" yellow on brown). If a directional arrow is nailed to a wooden post, the sign should be 4" x 4". The color of the arrow is the same yellow color as the blazes being used along the trail, on a brown background.

## I. Road Crossing Signs

Road crossing signs are composed of a collection of other types of signs found in this chapter. There are a number of reasons for their use. First, they alert the trail user to upcoming road crossings and where to find the trail once the road is crossed. They also increase the motoring public's awareness of the trail, and create a "look of continuity." At many road crossings, signing may be subtle if calling attention to the trail is not desirable. This is especially true where unacceptable parking situations could develop. Carsonite posts or treated 4x4 wood posts should be used at these locations, and where the trail crosses other significant trails, logging roads, or low speed township or county roads. Road crossing signs should include:

1. Trail logo.
2. Directional arrows if there is a short jog in the trail.
3. Regulatory/Usage signs.
4. Name of road being crossed.

The name of the road (4.) should be placed on the backside of the post facing the hiker, not the road. Use *I*" white vinyl lettering for this purpose. It can be found at local sign shops and, if desired,



custom made into a vertical format. The Ice Age NST decal and usage information should be placed on the side of the post that faces the road.

At major road crossings, it may be appropriate to add a 9" trail emblem. If used, these should be mounted on a post facing and parallel to the road at the edge of the right-of-way.

If information regarding trail identification (trail logo) and regulatory uses is considerable, and may visually overwhelm one post, trail developers should consider using an additional post to separate trail identification from regulatory uses.

## J. Interpretation Signs

The landscape that the Ice Age National Scenic Trail meanders through has an amazing story to tell about continental glaciation. However, interpretation is currently very limited and occurs primarily at interpretive centers located in a few of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve Units. Optimally, interpretation should occur at trailhead kiosks or in brochures rather than signs along the trail. This is because interpretive signs are a major investment in time and money, expensive to install and maintain, subject to vandalism, and can be a visual intrusion along remote sections of the trail.

However, there are sites where their placement is warranted. Whatever medium is chosen, all interpretive signing should be made to quality standards which complement and enhance the prominence and identification of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

There are three basic types of interpretive signage. They range from very simple to complex. They are Identification Signs, Interpretive Signs, and Wayside Exhibits.

**1. Identification Signs:** Identification signs are the simplest form of interpretation and are relatively inexpensive. They are routed wood signs with only one or two words that label features (and occasionally dates) along the trail. These features may consist of lakes, landforms, historic sites or public/private land boundaries. Besides identifying a significant feature, they also allow the hiker to find their own location on a map in relation to what they are seeing. It is desirable to use identification signs for sites listed on destination signs.

Examples of appropriate signs are:

Camp 6, Wood Lake, Parnell Esker, Whitewater Lake, and Holy Hill

These signs should have 1-1/4" blue letters coated with clear varnish on 4" wood boards. Paint color should match the blue color used for spur access trails.

The other two types of signage, interpretive and wayside exhibits, should not be installed without a coordinated interpretive plan, which may involve the formation of an interpretive planning team. Complete details of the interpretive planning process can be found in the 1995 Handbook—*National Scenic and Historic Trails-Wayside Exhibit Guidelines* available through the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation or NPS Ice Age NST office. This handbook also contains detailed information on the content and design of Wayside Exhibits. With long, linear sites such as the national trails, the importance of continuity in design is perhaps much greater than in a small, consolidated park. Using

