



INKLINGS

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

Winter 2012, Volume 12, Issue 1

Current Project List

- **Michigan Department of Natural Resources**
Interpretive Plan,
Milliken State Park
(through Smith Group/JJR)

- **Bloomington Parks and Recreation (IN)**
Bloomington High School
Interpretive Sign
B-Line Trail

- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**
Interpretive Exhibit Mgmt.
Ft. Harrison SP

Interpretive Signs
Pokagon State Park, CCC
Camp, Trine Fen

Chain O' Lakes State Park,
Schoolhouse

Charlestown State Park, Por-
tersville Bridge

Lost and Found

Making your trails easier to navigate

It was a muggy, July day. The terrain was hilly and heavily forested. The sun shone through the humidity, making the sky a milky white. I was hiking one of the longer trails, hoping to finish it before the afternoon heat. I had a trail map.

About ¾ of the way along the long trail, a trail marker directed me around a pond. The trail then exited the forest into an open field, partially planted in corn. At that point, the trail petered out. I scanned the landscape for a reinforcing trail marker, but there was none. I walked the perimeter of the large field hoping to find where the trail picked up again, but completed the circle without finding the trail. I back-tracked to the last trail marker and retraced my steps thinking that I'd missed a marker, or veered off the main trail. Again, I ended up in the open field.

By this time, the sun was high and I had no water. With the trail map, I could gauge roughly where I was. Without knowing precisely where I was, however, going cross-country to get back to my car could take me miles out of my way.

How did I feel? As I back-tracked the several miles I'd already hiked, I was frustrated and angry. I could imagine, however, that others at that same juncture may have felt fear. What about parents with small children, or older adults, thinking that they were almost done with the trail only to find that they had to turn back? Would they have made it? Probably, but their experience at the property would be remembered as being unpleasant and anxiety-ridden.



Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs addresses our human needs starting with the most fundamental and moving up to higher and higher levels. Each level of need must be met before advancing to the next. The most fundamental needs are the physiological: air, food, water, for example. These must be met first.

The next level up is the need for safety and security. Only when an individual feels personally safe and secure can they move to the next levels which are Love/Belonging and Esteem.

Feeling lost on a trail traps a visitor at the need for safety and security level. They aren't enjoying themselves. They are frustrated and anxious about the outcome for themselves and those they are responsible for. Resulting behaviors may include never visiting the property again, telling others not to visit, or writing angry letters.



INKLINGS is available in pdf format. To get on the pdf list, contact lise@interpretiveideas.com



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Interpretive Ideas

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Trail orientation must go beyond a trail map or orientation sign at the trailhead. Here are some suggestions to make your new and existing trails easier to navigate:

1. *Get input from someone unfamiliar with the trail.* Property employees are familiar with trails and can't see them through the eyes of a first-time visitor. Ask an acquaintance or volunteer, unfamiliar with the trails to hike the trail system. Where were trail markers confusing or absent? Where could a trail marker be placed, reassuring people that they are on the right track?



2. *Provide trail markers from both directions.* Don't assume that visitors are walking a trail in one particular direction. Trails can sometimes be well-marked from one direction, but confusing if hiked from the opposite direction.

3. *Reinforce direction after a break.* If there is a feature to be crossed such as a field, or creek bed, place a trail marker clearly visible on the other side where the trail resumes. Do this from both directions.



4. *Provide "You Are Here" maps at critical junctions.* This prevents people from making a wrong turn. It also helps them mark their progress, easing anxiety.

5. *Provide markers where the correct route is vague.* If there is a pre-existing or unauthorized trail crossing the primary route, mark the correct route with a trail marker.

The same trail marker from opposite directions. Orientation markers should be visible from both directions.

Reinforcing the route direction lets hikers know that they are on the right track. It allows them to move up the Maslow pyramid and enjoy the family time, outdoor experience and physical challenge.



You Are Here maps placed at trail junctions help people orient and mark their progress.