

Marking trails is a blend of science and art. Armed with guidelines that included instructions for how many paces before and after a curve a trail marker should be placed and formulae for determining maximum and minimum distances between markers, Michele and Joe Dombrowski took a walk on the Domain Perimeter Trail. In just two weeks the Dombrowskis installed over 2,000 2"x4" reflective aluminum blazes as replacement for the painted trail markers.

As to how the Head Women's Lacrosse Coach and the Sewanee Athletics Equipment Manager came to be found clearing and blazing trail, one need look no further than COVID-19. This spring some employees of the University found themselves unable to perform their work duties, such as coaching student athletes, and volunteered for redeployment to help colleagues in other areas.

Though recruiting and other tasks are important to Michele's position, she was acutely missing the two hours daily spent outside on the field. The ability to be outdoors on the trails was an opportunity she couldn't pass up. Joe and Michele were eager to pitch in on Domain maintenance efforts and each brought unique skills and perspective to the trail blazing project.

"Joe, heavily involved in cross country running, knows the Perimeter Trail really well and, in possession of a very mathematical mind, he took to the science and measurements of the trail blazing guidelines," said Domain Manager Nate Wilson. "Michele, however, admits to occasionally getting turned around in the woods. She did a great job of saying, 'You know, if I was in the woods, this is what I'd look for.'"

Together, the Dombrowskis nimbly injected human perspective and intuition into the math of the guidelines to excellent effect.

"Sewanee's trails bring joy to our students, community, and visitors alike," said John Benson, Director of Sewanee Outdoor Program. "You can clearly tell that someone who loves the trails put up the new trail blazes. There are just enough for the trail to be clear without distracting from the beauty of being in the woods."

Michele and Joe have turned their attention and the mathematical art of blazing trail to marking the secondary trails. We and they look forward to sharing the results of their redeployment efforts with you the next time you are on trail in the Domain.