

Dowsings: Opening the Doors to Marker Tree Purpose

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Introduction

Heretofore, our methodology for documenting a Marker Tree was to measure the GPS coordinates, measure the direction of the pointer, determine the species, measure the tree circumference 1-2 feet above the ground and get a high quality picture of the tree. Further, if feasible, we usually make an assessment of what the tree is pointing toward if we can see a spring, a trail, a stream crossing, etc. This is still required but now there are more steps using the dowsing rods.

Prior to the use of dowsing rods, our criterion for accepting a Marker Tree was that it had to be at least 20 inches in diameter and bent below about 6-7 ft. above the ground. All others were excluded based on the assumption the tree was too young or too high to have been bent by Indians. That criterion is now out. The new criterion begins with the dowsing rods and finishes up with recording the data mentioned in the first paragraph.

With the dowsing rods held out horizontally in front, the researcher begins the assessment of the possible Marker Tree by asking the rods if a Marker Tree exists in the near vicinity. If the rods rotate to the yes position, then the follow up question is “In what direction is the Marker Tree?” The rods will then rotate and point directly to the Marker Tree. This is your first qualification that the tree is authentic. If the rods answer no to the existence of a Marker Tree, then you stop and move on.

The second qualification is to determine if there is an underground stream of water under the tree by using the rods to locate the water boundaries on either side of the tree. If there is water, then the tree is an authentic Marker Tree. Now you record all the data on the tree as originally required.

Lastly, the assessment now begins to determine the tree’s purpose. Standing near the tree with the dowsing rods, you proceed to ask a series of questions. The questions to ask are: “Is this Marker Tree marking a trail?”; “Is it marking a grave?”; “Is it marking a spring?”; “Is it marking a stream crossing?”; “Is it marking a ceremonial place?” and so forth. When the rods rotate to the yes position, you have your answer. As you work through the options, the rods will generally rotate backwards for all no answers. If the tree is marking a grave(s), then there is more work to be done which will be explained in another report to be issued soon.

Not every one of the Mountain Stewards researchers have been trained in dowsing at this time so those that have not will have to continue with the old criterion. Those that have the gift of dowsing can now shift to the new criterion for assessing the Marker Trees.

Example Marker Trees with their Purpose Determined

These trees have been assessed in the last 2 months and are examples of Marker Tree some of which would have been excluded from the database based on our previous criterion.

Marker Tree #1

This is example of a tree that would have been excluded previously. This tree is 15 inches in diameter (too small) and bent too high up (about 10-12 ft.) However the rods confirmed it a Marker Tree. The purpose of the tree is marking an Indian trail. The trail is located uphill from the tree and when you stand on the trail and look toward the tree it is at eye level so easy to see. Had it been bent a few feet above the ground, it would have been lost in the understory of the forest and not seen from the trail.



Marker Tree #1

Marker Tree #2

This tree has two verticals attached to a long horizontal arm. This is a grave pointer for two graves located in the direction of the pointer arm. The grave marker trees or Burial Trees are special trees and will be dealt with in a separate report.



Marker Tree #2

Marker Tree #3

This is a typical tree configuration that often is determined to be marking water. However, while there is a small stream downhill from this tree, the tree responded yes to the question that it marked a grave which was located just along the pointer direction.



Marker Tree #3

Marker Tree #4

Marker Tree #4 is very similar in

configuration to Marker Tree #3 but its purpose is that of a spring pointer which is located downhill from the tree.

Marker Tree #5

This again is a typical single pointer tree whose configuration has been documented a hundred times at least. This tree is pointing to a small stream nearby which on first inspection would assume to be its purpose. But not so! The tree dowsed as a grave pointer for a single grave.



Marker Tree #4

Marker Tree #6

This tree is something of an oddity in that it has a goal-post configuration. There are a number of trees with this configuration but rarely seen. For some years, we thought they were marking a boundary location. One of the spectacular trees of this configuration is believed to make graves from a major battle between the Creeks and the Chickasaws. This goal-post tree is however marking a major Indian Trail and marks both directions of trail.



Marker Tree #5



Marker Tree #6



Indian Trail Marked by Goal-Post Tree

Marker Tree #7

Marker Tree #7 is a configuration seen not very often in that the tree is bent upwards at a 45 degree angle and then bent 90 degrees to that direction. This tree downs as a pointer for a stream or shoal crossing area. The tree is near the Flint River in GA and was also determined to be on a trail which was not obvious in the area of the tree.

Conclusions

Our conclusions are there is no set standard Marker Tree configuration that we can put a forever standard purpose designation on. The only true way to determine purpose is to ask! Over time, we may collect enough data on the trees to come to some general conclusions about the purpose of each configuration. However, there appears to be variability in configuration based on the person doing the bending. Jerry Wolfe, Eastern Band Cherokee Nation elder told us once that he believed there were specialists who were hired to do the tree bending and each one of those may have had their own standards. Dr. Jefferson, Southern Ute Nation elder said almost the same thing about interpreting the trees. He said, "You would have to know the family to understand what they were creating in bending a tree to be able to interpret its configuration."



Marker Tree #7