

Beat the Bounds ^[1]

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by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 2006

To "beat the bounds," or "do procession," meant walking the boundaries of a property and, in ancient times, striking certain places with a rod in the presence of witnesses. In the American colonies, landowners would walk the bounds of their property showing their sons (or others) its limits. Notches or blaze marks on trees would be recut if needed. Parish bounds were also so determined. This practice is mentioned in England as early as 1570, and in North Carolina it was established by an act of the Assembly in 1703 by direction of the [Lords Proprietors](#) ^[3]. The act read: "Inhabitants of this Government shall some time in the month of April next & from thenceforth in April Every Four Years Meet as Many of the Neighborhood as Conveniently come and go in procession and Remark the Lines of the Land belonging to Each person of the Neighborhood under penalty of Forty Shillings to be paid by the Delinquent to the Use of the Poor of the Neighborhood." The practice was continued into the twentieth century, especially for forested tracts.

References:

J. R. B. Hathaway, ed., *North Carolina Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 3 (1903).

David M. Walker, *Oxford Companion to Law* (1980).

Additional Resources:

The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia, 1901 ed., s.v. "procession," "processioner," "processional."
<https://archive.org/stream/centurydictiona06whit#page/4746/mode/2up> ^[4]

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From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[8]

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