

ANIMAL
TRACKING

TYPES OF ANIMAL TRACES AND QUESTIONS TO ASK

ANIMAL TRAILS AND PATHS

Animal trails are places where animals move frequently enough to make a visible path. Trails can be wide or tiny.

- ▶ Look at that the shape of the trail. Is it...
 - ... U shaped? Animals with short legs and wide bodies make U shaped trails. (Raccoons, rabbits, armadillos).
 - ...V shaped? Animals with long legs make V shaped trails. (Deer, cats, dogs)
 - ...A complete circle. (Some animals make tunnels through grass. You can tell how big the animal is by how big the circle is)

- ▶ You can also look along the trail for more clues like scat or fur caught in thorns or fences.

ANIMAL FOOTPRINTS (TRACKS)

Close investigation of footprints can tell you a lot. Experienced trackers can tell species, age, and sex of animal from its footprints. Here are some general questions to ask of any footprint.

- ▶ Look at these details in the footprint. Are there:
 - ... Toes or hooves? Hooved animals include deer, horses, cattle, etc.
 - ...Claws? Animals with long claws might use them for digging. Cat prints generally show no claws.
 - ...3, 4 or 5 toes?. Different families have animals have different numbers of toes that show up in the track.
 - Try to estimate the overall size of the animal from looking at its prints. How long is its body from tail to nose? How tall does it stand off the ground? What animals live in your area that are that size?

ANIMAL
TRACKING

TYPES OF ANIMAL TRACES AND QUESTIONS TO ASK

GENERAL ANIMAL SIGN

When I look at animal sign, I ask myself two questions:

- ▶ *If I wanted to make something look like this, what tools would I use? (Would I use a hammer and chisel? A shovel? A sledgehammer?)*
- ▶ *Once I know what tools I would use, then I think of what animals have body parts that work like those tools? (Woodpeckers beaks are like hammers and chisels, skunk claws are like shovels, etc).*

HOLES AND BURROWS

Animals dig holes for lots of reasons. It may not be possible to tell who dug a hole, but often you can figure out why the hole was dug.

- ▶ Look for these details in a hole:
 - ... How deep is the hole? (is it only a few inches, or does it go way down?)
 - ...Does it look like anything was removed from the hole? (Sometimes you can see or feel where the acorn was buried.)
 - ...Any claw marks or scrapes?
 -Does the hole look recently dug, or is it old? (Look for leaves, spiderwebs, etc.)

