



Tracking

Tracking animals is both a science and an art: measurements and clues can help to carefully distinguish which animal made the track, and then determine what the animal was doing. A series of paw prints in the snow or dirt are alluring signs of an animal that was recently in that same place. Scat tells not only what animal happened along that trail, but also what the animal was eating and possibly where it had been.

The Basics



Elk



Raven



Bobcat

Finding tracks can be exciting, for it tells you of what was recently in the area. Figuring out just what left those tracks can be a challenge. Here are some hints to learn how to track:

To begin, look for clearly defined tracks. Fresh snow and mud are often good substrates for tracks. Are the tracks large or small? How many toes does each track have?

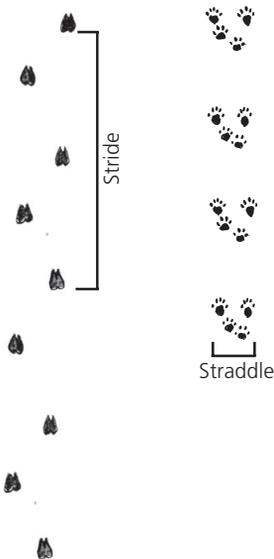
- 2-toed tracks are often deer or elk;
- 3-toed tracks may be birds;
- 4-toed tracks could be rabbits, cats

(mountain lions, bobcats), and dogs (foxes, coyotes),

- 5-toed tracks are weasels, skunks, and beavers; and
- tracks with 5 hind toes and 4 front toes are mice, voles, shrews, chipmunks, squirrels, or porcupines.

It often helps to record the tracks you see to learn them better. Take paper and a pencil, a tracking guide, and a ruler with you. If you find tracks you don't know, measure, sketch, and photograph them for later study.

Patterns and Gaits

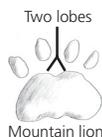


Once you have found a clear track, follow the trail of tracks to understand how the animal is moving. You may see specific patterns like a tail drag or a meandering trail. To help identify the animal, measure the distance of the stride and straddle.

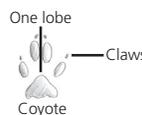
Dog-Cat Group. About 90% of the time dogs and cats walk or trot, leaving a pattern like this:



To distinguish between dogs and cats, look at the number of lobes: cats have two and dogs have one. Coyotes, foxes (except the gray fox), and domestic dogs usually leave claw marks, while mountain lions and bobcats do not.



Mountain lion



Coyote

Squirrel-Rabbit Group. The larger hind feet of these animals land in front of their forefeet when they bound or gallop, leaving a distinctive pattern:



Jackrabbits have the longest stride, followed by cottontails, squirrels, and other rodents.

Tiny-Track Group. These tiny tracks often do not have any details but rather look like little dots in the snow or mud.



Shrews have the smallest tracks of this group, with a straddle of less than 1 inch, while voles and mice have a straddle of 1.5 in or more, and chipmunks 2-3 in. Mice and shrews often leave tail drag marks between their tracks.

Scat and Other Clues

Look for other clues to identify the animal, including scat and vegetation marking.

You may also find other clues like burrows or dens to help identify the tracks.



Herbivore scat

Herbivores such as deer, rabbits, and rodents tend to leave small scat that is uniform in texture, often called pellets. The size of the pellets can help differentiate species.



Carnivore /Omnivore scat

Carnivores and omnivores like coyotes usually leave larger scat that contains hair, bones, and seeds. Mountain lions, bobcats, and skunks have scat with blunt ends, while coyotes, foxes, and weasels have tapered ends.

Using your skills of detection and this guide will help you get started tracking. With practice you will be able to identify a wide range of tracks and patterns. You may need more information, obtainable from the following guidebooks:

Scats and Tracks of the Desert Southwest by James C. Halfpenny, 2001.

Stokes Guide to Animal Tracking and Behavior by Donald and Lillian Stokes, 1986.

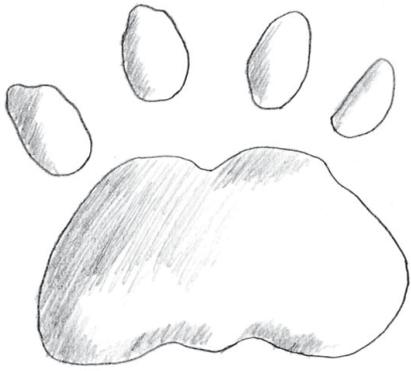
Vegetation markings may include claw markings on tree trunks or broken stems.

A Field Guide to Animal Tracks by Olaus J. Murie, 1974.

Most common tracks in Great Basin National Park at 1/2 their normal size.

Large Tracks

Mountain lion
(*Puma concolor*)



Front: 3.5 x 3.6 in
Hind: 3.25 x 3 in
Walk stride: 36 in
Scat: 4 x 1.25 in

Largest 4-toed track in the park; note the two lobes in the paw and lack of claws



Bobcat
(*Felis rufus*)



Front: 2 x 2.1 in
Hind: 2.1 x 1.9 in
Walk stride: 20 in
Scat: 3 x 0.8 in

Very similar shape to mountain lion track, but much smaller



Coyote
(*Canis latrans*)



Front: 2.5 x 2.35 in
Hind: 2.25 x 1.9 in Trot stride: 39 in
Scat: 3 x 0.6 in

Note the one lobe characteristic of the dog family and the claw marks



Gray Fox
(*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)



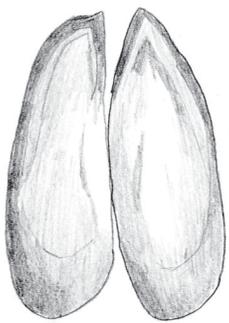
Front: 1.8 x 1.6 in
Hind: 1.7 x 1.6 in
Trot stride: 24 in
Scat: 2 x 0.6 in

Track has one lobe of dog family but no claw marks; kit and red foxes usually do have claws



Medium Tracks

Mule Deer
(*Odocoileus hemionus*)

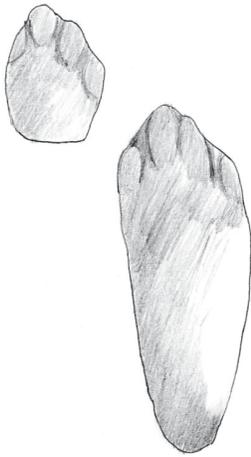


Front: 3.25 x 2.6 in
Hind: 3.1 x 2.5 in
Walk stride: 36 in
Scat: 0.3 in

Elk tracks and scat are the same shape but about 50% larger



Black-tailed Jackrabbit
(*Lepus californicus*)



Front: 1.5 x 1.2 in
Hind: up to 4.8 x 1.4 in
Gallop stride: up to 10 ft
Scat: 0.3 in

Cottontail tracks and scat are very similar



Porcupine
(*Erethizon dorsatum*)



Front: 1.7 x 1.3 in
Hind: 2.7 x 1.7 in
Walk stride: 17 in
Scat: 0.5 in

4 toes on front foot, 5 on hind foot; tail drag is often present



Squirrel
(*Spermophilus* species)



Front: 1.5 x 1.0 in
Hind: 2.0 x 1.6 in not including heel
Bound stride: 25 in
Scat: 0.2 in

Similar pattern to rabbits but smaller



Striped Skunk
(*Mephitis mephitis*)



Front: 1.5 x 1.25 in
Hind: 1.9 x 1.4 in
Walking stride: 12 in
Scat: 5 x 0.75 in
5 toes with long claws; omnivore; scent can be a clue



Small Tracks

Weasel
(*Mustela* species)



Front: 0.5 x 0.6 in
Hind: 0.6 x 0.7 in, not including heel
Gallop stride: 8-30 in
Scat: 1.5 x 0.1 in
Carnivore with 5 toes, little toe seldom seen in tracks



Chipmunk
(*Tamias* species)



Front: 0.5 x 0.4 in
Hind: 0.7 x 0.6 in
Bound stride: 7 in
Scat: 0.1 in
4 toes on front foot, 5 on hind foot; straddle is 2-3 in



Pocket mouse
(*Perognathus* species)



Front: 0.4 x 0.4 in
Hind: 0.5 x 0.4 in
Bound stride: 8-10 in
Scat: 0.2 in
Indistinct tracks; may be dormant for colder periods in winter



Mouse
(*Peromyscus* species)



Front: 0.3 x 0.3 in
Hind: 0.4 x 0.3 in
Bound stride: 8 in
Scat: 0.1 in
Gallops over snow with strides up to 4 ft that look like tiny squirrel prints



Vole
(*Microtus* species)



Front: 0.3 x 0.3 in
Hind: 0.4 x 0.3 in, not including heel
Trot stride: 6 in
Scat: 0.1 in
Found near wet areas; usually trots, not bounds like the other small track makers



Shrew
(Various species)



Front: 0.25 x 0.2 in
Hind: 0.3 x 0.2 in, not including heel
Bound stride: 2 in
Scat: 0.2 x 0.1 in
5 toes on each foot; straddle <1 in; tail drag sometimes obvious

