



# Native Animal Tracks

## SITE ACTIVITY

### What Can Be Learned?

This activity encourages careful observation while on excursion. Students learn about identifying animal footprints and discover which animals use the area you are visiting. A lot can be learned about an animal simply by looking at the prints it leaves behind.

Many Tasmanian animals are nocturnal or crepuscular, so students may be able to piece together a picture of what occurred in the area overnight.



Tasmanian devil tracks

### Materials Required

Plaster of Paris  
 Plastic cup or container  
 Spoon for mixing  
 Water in a bottle  
 Biscuit cutter/cardboard ring, or similar (not essential, but it helps to contain the plaster when poured)  
 Footprint identification sheets (available from the Parks and Wildlife Service) - you may wish to laminate some of these  
 Laminated individual animal footprint cards of the species particular to the park (pick six animals, make five of each, no names on them)

### The Activity

Animal footprints can be seen particularly where there is damp sand or earth; especially along 'animal corridors' - these are the paths through vegetation that animals regularly use to get from A to B.

If on camp - you can also place your own flat tray of wet sand in a spot where you think animals pass by, and leave it overnight.

What animals do the students think live in the national park? The list might include: wallaby, Tasmanian devil, possum, wombat, platypus, pademelon, native hen, among others...

### Introductory activity - 'Find Your Mates'

\* Have everyone sit in a circle with their hands behind their back. Place an animal footprint card (prepared by teacher or by students in class as an activity) in each person's hand. When you say the word, the students are allowed to look at their card and must find their 'mates' (to make a group of five who have the same animal footprint).



Precious Parks E-Set suited to lower secondary students.

\*When they have found their 'mates', and are sitting down. Ask the students to look at their footprint. How do they think their animal walks (the gait)? Can they guess what kind of animal they are?

Is it a 'digger'? They often have noticeable claws.

Is it a 'hopper' (macropod)? They have larger, elongated rear feet and small front paws, when they are hopping you will only see the rear paws, if moving slowly you will also see the front paw marks.



Bennetts wallaby track

Is it a 'climber'? Possums, for instance, have an opposable thumb (like a human thumb), which allows them to grip onto branches.

Impersonate the animal gaits - Mimic the way some animals walk (you and/or the students) will also aid the identification process! The Tasmanian devil is famous for its unique, and awkward-looking gait.

Give each group a footprint identification sheet so they can identify which animal they are.

### Plaster Casts

This activity works best with a small group.

Look around for prints. When an animal print is spotted, try to identify it using the identification sheet.

Are you able to tell if the animal was moving fast or slow? Where do you think it was going?

Choose the best prints to make a cast of.

Mix up some plaster of Paris in the cup with some water until the consistency becomes pour-able, like yoghurt.

Place one of the rings around the footprint and pour the plaster carefully over the print.

\*\* NOTE: The plaster takes approximately one hour to set. You may wish to do this activity early in the day, or move off to another activity before coming back to pick up the cast.

### Additional activities:

Choose an animal and produce your own sketch of their set of footprints. (Research can be undertaken with: Tracks, Scats And Other Traces, Triggs B, Oxford Uni Press, Oxford, 2003.)

Display these next to a picture of the animal. Write what you have learned about the animal from its prints.

Photocopy or print animal footprints onto paper, material or an item of clothing. Dab the paint/fabric paint carefully over footprint stencils with a sponge.

HINT: Stencils for printing can be made by cutting the footprints out of clear plastic sheets - such as those used for binding or overhead projectors. Footprints can be photocopied onto overhead projector sheets, which makes it easy to cut them out with a scalpel.



### Precious Parks E-Set - Site Activity

E-Sets are an Electronic Environmental and Educational set of notes for teachers

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

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