

inSTALLations

February 2009

Tracing Tracks Who's been here?

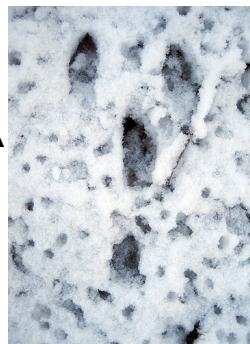


The snowy season is the perfect time to look for tracks. There are many animals we may never see face to face,

but their tracks and trails assure us of their presence. There are some important measurements to consider when trying to identify the owner of a print in the snow.

The **stride** is the distance between the prints of a walking animal. When this distance is small, it suggests a shorter animal. Deer and adult humans have larger strides than a fox or house cat. The **straddle** is the width between the prints. A roundish animal, such as a raccoon, will often have a wider straddle than a slender animal like a weasel. A **leap** measurement tells you the distance between sets of four prints made by a hopping or bounding animal.

The pattern of the prints can also give you important information about which animal passed by. Is it hopping or leaping? If so, it may be a rabbit or rodent. Does the back foot fall in the same, or nearly the same, place as the front foot? This could indicate something in the cat, dog, or deer family. A bounding pattern suggests a weasel, while a wide, zigzag pattern points to a more squat animal such as a raccoon or skunk.



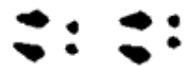
Helpful Hints



If a print has four toes in a semi circle around a heel, it may be a feline or canine. Feline prints typically do not show claws

because they are retractable. Canine tracks nearly always show nail impressions.

Squirrel prints usually register in groups of four. The two larger feet appear side by side at the front of the track, while the smaller, front feet are side by side at the back of the track.



Rabbits also register prints in groups of four. Often, however, the smaller prints are one in front of the other rather than side by side.

These tips are just the beginning of figuring out who left their tracks behind. A track guide can help you expand your knowledge.

Visit the Information Desk for program information.