

# ISLAND KIDS



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## Collect And Save Animal Tracks

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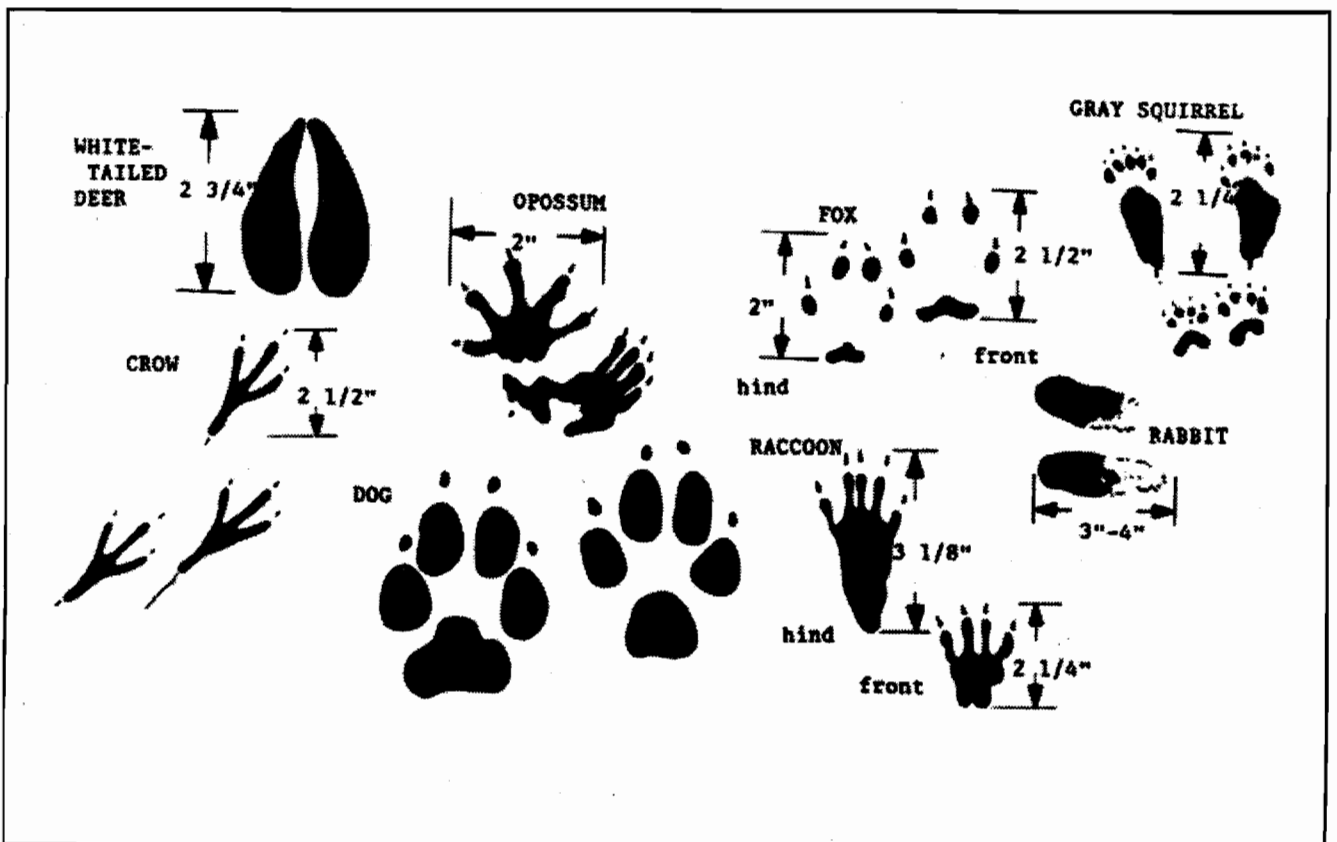
As you walk through the forest, you may see tracks left by animals as they went for water, gathered food or explored their surroundings. These tracks tell a story. They can tell you who was there, what they were doing, and they may even tell you what happened along the way. Tracks are like a diary that tell of an event. Native Americans, in order to obtain food and protect themselves from predators, had to be able to read the stories told by the prints left behind in the soil.

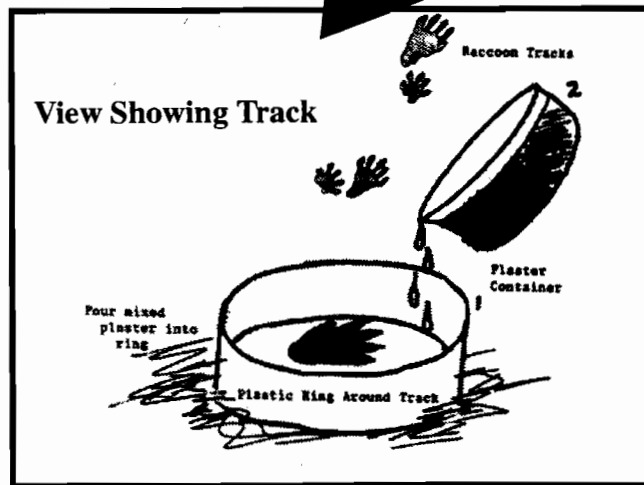
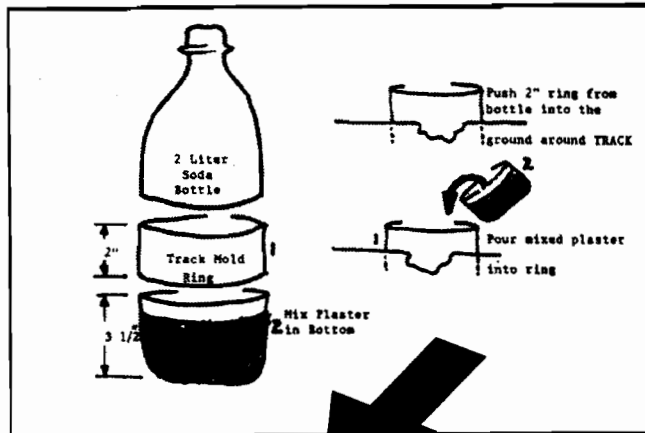
Can an animal track tell you about an animal? Think about all the animals that might live in the area where you find a track. If the track is small, it was probably not made by a large animal. On the other hand, small animals do not leave behind large prints. Using the process of elimination, try to figure out what size animal made the tracks. Check all the features of the track like the arrangement of toes, the number of toes and whether or not claw marks showed up in the track. Animals that drag their tail may leave a tail mark as part of

the track. The distance between each footprint may even tell you if the animal was walking, hopping or running.

You can start a collection of animal tracks by making plaster casts of animal tracks that you find in the soil. Plaster is a chemical that turns into a cement-like material when it is mixed with water and is then allowed to dry. Plaster poured onto a track will fill the indentations that the animal made in the soil. When dry, this plaster cast of the animal's print can be removed from the soil and saved.

You will need to bring with you on your search for animal prints four things: plaster, water, a mixing container, and a mold to hold the wet plaster in the track area. Water can be carried with you in a canteen or in a plastic soda bottle. Another two-liter soda bottle can be cut to form the plaster mold and mixing bowl. Holding the bottle on its side, measure up three inches from the bottom of the bottle and cut a mixing bowl from the bottle (see figure). Now measure up another two inches and





cut around the bottle again. This two-inch-high cylinder will be your plaster mold (see figure). When you find a track you wish to save, press the two inch section of the soda bottle down around the track. Mix and pour plaster into the mold until it is one inch deep. As the plaster dries, it becomes hot. This happens because of a chemical reaction that is going on in the plaster. Once it is hard, you can remove the track from the soil and the form. Brush the loose soil from the plaster cast. You now have a permanent copy of the animal's footprint.

#### Plaster Mixing Instructions:

Half-fill the bottom three-inch section of soda bottle with water. Add dry powdered plaster and keep adding plaster until it begins to float on top of mixture. This wet mixture is ready to pour.

