

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

January 2004



Animal Tracks

Winter is often seen as a time of inactivity when all the animals are asleep or have moved further south.

You may not often see any animals but evidence that they have been here is everywhere. Tracks are left behind by all kinds of animals. Learning to identify them can make a winter walk even more enjoyable.

Tracks will tell you who was there, what they were doing, and even how many might be around.

Learning to identify tracks can be a challenge as they don't always look like those in a book. Tracks can look different on different substrates (sand, snow, mud, etc.). They will also change depending on what the animal was doing.

Animals also leave behind other signs that they have been in an area. These could include such things as droppings or scat, remains of food, claw marks on trees, trails, turned stones, etc. You can also look for these as you walk along your favourite trail.

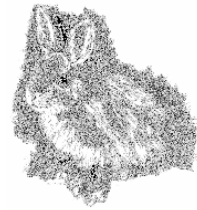


So enjoy this winter and get outside and discover the world of animal tracks!



Did you know?

That the feet of Snowshoe hares act like snowshoes and allow them to float over the snow.



That the feet of White-tailed deer sink deep into the snow so they travel along packed trails called runs.



That muskrats often drag their tails when walking and this can be seen in their tracks as a line through the tracks (called tail drag).



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Identifying Tracks

To identify tracks you will need some basic equipment:

- Tape measure
- Good field guide or key
- Magnifying glass



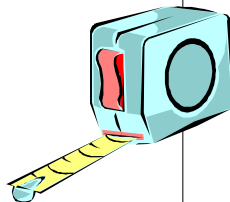
Just head out to your favourite winter hiking spot and find a set of tracks.

You will need to get close to the track so some water-proof winter gear may be in order.

First you want to ask yourself what does it look like? Mammal, bird, cat, dog? See if you can't eliminate a few possibilities.

Next you want to determine the trail pattern, i.e. the pattern a set of tracks makes. It can be bounding as in mice, 2-2 bounding as in weasels or alternating as in fox.

Next you want to measure the trail width (from the outside of one track across the trail to the outside of the other track).



These two steps should identify the tracks of most species of animals that are found in Manitoba. If you need more information you can measure the stride (from toe to toe), the track length (from heel to nail), and the track width (widest part of track). By measuring all of these aspects of the tracks you will be able to identify the track maker.

Knowing what the animal is doing can also help identify the tracks as speed can affect the tracks. Was the animal running, walking, standing, stalking prey, etc.

Common Tracks



Come out to Oak Hammock Marsh and join us for a snowshoe walk and we will help you discover what kinds of animals live in our marsh in the winter.

