

### Activity 3

## ***Taking a Print Cast in the Snow!***



*Activity adapted from method developed by Louise Forrest in Field Guide to Tracking Animals in Snow*

**Time:** Set aside 2 hours for the activity. Once the skill is learned, it only takes about 20 minutes to actually make a track the next time in the field.

### **About**

You will learn how to take a plaster cast of a wildlife track in the snow! A plaster cast allows you to maintain a record of your sightings, get a better look at a track, or bring home a track you don't know!

### **Materials**

- Spray bottle that sprays a fine mist of water
- Ice cold water
- Plaster of Paris
- Cardboard ring (cardboard strip that is held together with a paper clip)
- Mixing container
- Stirring stick
- Paper towel and container to set cast in

### **Instructions**

1. Heavy wet snow is the best for making a snow track plaster cast. Casting in soft powdery snow is near impossible- do not attempt as it will prove frustrating for you!
2. The temperature must be below 0°C.
3. Either find tracks from wildlife in your local area where you like to track or else practice making these casts from your own prints or a pet's prints.
4. Put ice cold water in the spray misting bottle.
5. Spray the inside of the track with a mist of water and around the track. Let it freeze. Do a second misting of water to make the ice crust thicker. You are better to do fine mist layers letting them freeze between instead of trying to spray too much water at once. Too much water will crush the track/melt it.
6. Place a ridge of snow around your track to keep the plaster in the track or else place your cardboard ring around the track. Be careful not to put pressure on the track or push snow into it/push the edges in on it.
7. Mix up your Plaster of Paris and COLD water. You want it to be like thick pancake batter that will still flow into all the areas of the track. This is where your experimenting with this activity is needed. You will need to figure out what thickness of Plaster of Paris works best for you.

8. Remember though, that water needs to be cold going into the Plaster of Paris or else it could melt the track (you may need to add snow to it to cool it).
9. Gently pour the mixed up plaster into the track getting it into all parts of the track and overflowing it a little bit.
10. Wait for the track to set (20 + minutes).
11. Carefully lift the plaster cast out of the track and wrap it and place it in the box. Likely it will need to set a little more before you can work with it and handle it.
12. Once this 'negative cast' is set you can further preserve it by spray clear coating it if you do not wish to make a positive cast of it
13. See Activity 2 Plaster Casts of Tracks for instructions on how to make the reverse print (positive mould as you have the negative one from the field)
14. Be sure to label your track cast well. On the flat side write the date, where the track was found (place, habitat), and then any information about the track's owner (species?, family?, male/female?).

### **Discussion/Questions**

- Why is this useful?
- What type of prints do you hope to cast this year?
- What did you find hard about this technique?