

COMMON ANIMAL TRACKS NEAR THE GUY L. GOODWIN EDUCATION CENTER

The sandy roads near the nature center, as well as dusty or sandy areas among vegetation, record the tracks of numerous animals that forage, hunt or travel here. Look for some of these patterns. PLEASE WATCH FOR TRAFFIC and BE CAREFUL OF VEGETATION which has been painstakingly planted here.

Kangaroo Rat

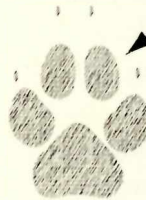
Sweeping curves with its long tufted tail, the kangaroo rat hops about at night looking for seeds to eat and to cache. Look for tracks on either side of the tail mark; the "K-rat" often hops on its two hind legs like a kangaroo does. Can you find places where the rat has stopped to dig a small hole?



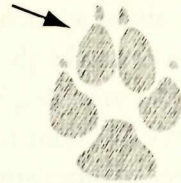
Detail. Giant K.R. has 5 toes but usually 4 are visible. When running fast, the whole foot doesn't come down.

Coyote

You can often find coyote tracks in the vicinity. They are four-toed tracks and can be distinguished from domestic dog tracks by the size of the inner toes (see drawing) and the very regular track pattern. Usually coyote tracks are found in a trotting or walking pattern. Looking at where you find coyote tracks, what do you think the animal is doing here?



COYOTE

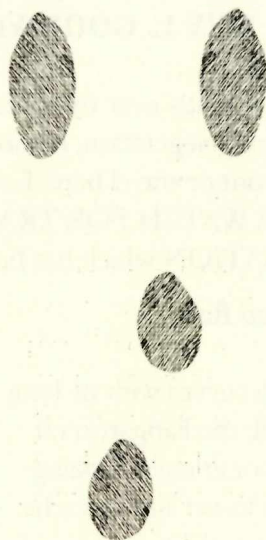


DOG

A domestic dog's inner toes are bigger and deeper, a coyote's smaller.

Rabbits

Many tracks of both black-tailed jackrabbits and cottontails can be found, and some tracks may be quite fresh since both kinds of rabbit are often out during the day. Tracks are very similar, but cottontail tracks are smaller than jackrabbit tracks. Both typically form a hopping pattern as shown here, but with increasing speed the rabbit will stretch out its pattern. Can you find where a rabbit hopped and then stopped? -- or began running, pushing off strongly with its feet and claws?



Typical hopping pattern for rabbits. Tracks stretch out with increased speed.

Kit Fox

This small canid is only half the weight of a common housecat, so the tracks are also very small. Look for four-toed tracks about an inch wide, with claw marks showing. Kit foxes live in underground burrows and hunt for kangaroo rats or other small prey. Can you find a few tracks?



Note 4 toes. Furred foot causes track to look soft. Look for claw marks out front.

Ground Squirrel

There are a couple of different species of ground squirrel on the Carrizo Plain. Look for galloping patterns of tracks crossing the road. Since these rodents are out during the day, you may see the animal making tracks. If you find tracks, can you see if they emerge from or go into a burrow?



Pattern resembles rabbit, but look for 5 toes on the hind foot (top tracks in this illustration).

Raven

These large black birds are often seen in pairs or in small to large groups, and have been observed nesting in the vicinity of the Education Center. They often forage on the ground for carrion or other food. Can you find both walking and hopping tracks?



Raven tracks are almost three inches long.

Lizards

Numerous lizard species scramble around during the daytime. Often you will find a tail drag, and the toes are pointed outward. If you find tracks, can you tell which way it was going?

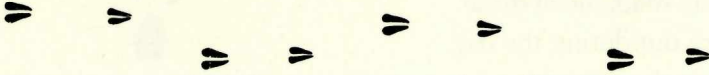


Tail drags don't always show in a lizard track. Usually the pattern is alternating.

WHO WALKED ACROSS THE CONCRETE?

Naturalists have simulated the tracks of local animals as though they walked across the visitor center walkway.

There are two sets of Pronghorn tracks, in a trotting gait. Pronghorns are on the Carrizo; look for them in different areas along the valley floor..



A walking pattern of Kit Fox curves across the walk.



Two sets of Kangaroo Rat tracks cross the cement. Note that the tail leaves a mark when the rodent moves slowly, then lifts up into the air when it hops faster.



Impressions were made with plaster of paris replicas of the animals' tracks to resemble actual tracks as much as possible while still providing longevity in the concrete surface.

Couldn't the animals have really walked across the cement?

We wish! But the pronghorn, kangaroo rats and kit fox would all have had to time their appearance within the space of fifteen minutes before the cement hardened too much!

What stories can you read from animal tracks?

Push your thumb into the soil. Imitate the motion of a fox's foot walking. Then imitate the motion of the foot pushing off in a run. Now you see how the speed of the animal is reflected in a track. So is every other motion an animal makes: a coyote sniffing the ground, a rabbit suddenly taking off, or stopping to scratch behind its ear. These are the subtle stories most often visible -- ones which bring you into the mood and personality of the animal as though you see it before you!

This flyer was prepared by Jim Lowery using images from his book *The Tracker's Field Guide* (Globe Pequot Press 2006). For information about tracking classes contact him at EARTH SKILLS, 661-245-0318 or www.earthskills.com.