

# **TRACKING YOUR NEXT MEAL -**

## **A FIELD GUIDE**

By Texhand

## **Preface**

This guide was developed with information gathered through my own study and research, a great deal of time spent in the field, and personal observations. This data was gathered while I lived Eastern Canada, so some animals are notably absent. These include such wildlife as elk, caribou, mule deer, antelope, grizzlies, sheep, alligators, etc. Updating the information to include these other species is on my list, but I have no definite timeline.

I will not even attempt to claim that it is in any way a complete and total reference manual, it is not. What it is, is a guide to provide some basic information to build your own knowledge upon.

Please use the information contained within to facilitate your own exploration of the fun and fascinating world of animal tracks and sign.

I hope you enjoy using this guide as much as I enjoyed compiling it.

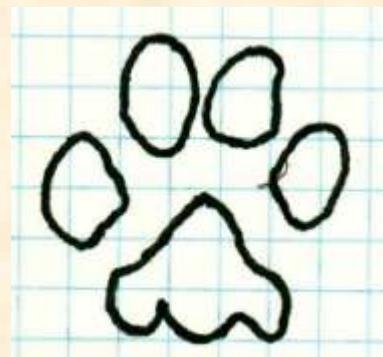
-- Pete

## Cat Family

Front



Rear



4 toes front

4 toes rear

No claws showing

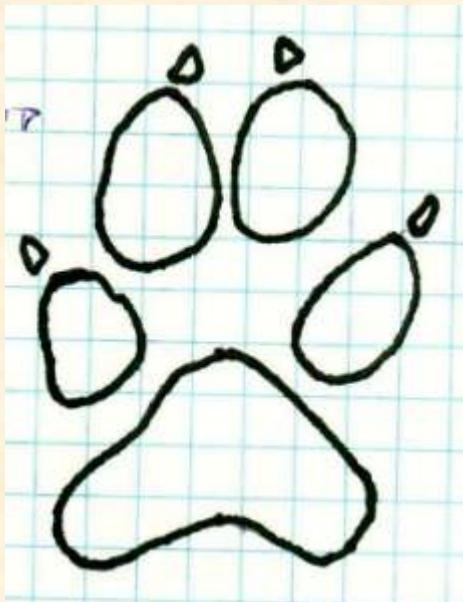
Diagonal walkers

Direct register

<u>Animal</u>	Front Foot		Rear Foot		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
House Cat	1 1/2	1 1/2	1 3/8	1 3/8	3	7	12-40
Bobcat	2	1 7/8	1 7/8	1 5/8	5	10-13	15-45

## Dog Family

Front



Rear



4 toes front

4 toes rear

Claws showing

Diagonal walkers

Indirect register

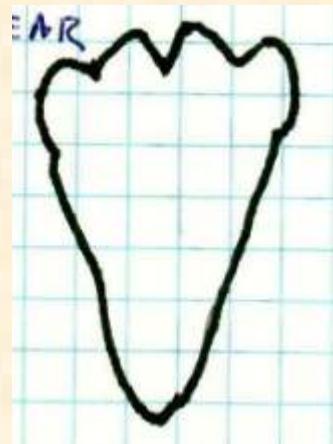
<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Red Fox	2 3/8	2	2 1/8	2	4 1/2	10-14	18-36
Gray Fox	1 5/8	1 3/8	1 1/2	1 1/4	3 3/4	8-12	18-36
Coyote	2 5/8	2 1/8	2 3/8	2	5	13-16	16-50

## Rabbit Family

Front



Rear



4 toes front

4 toes rear

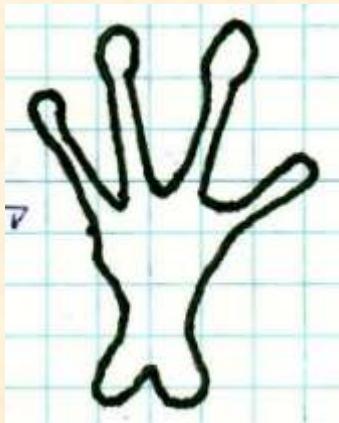
Some claws showing

Gallopers

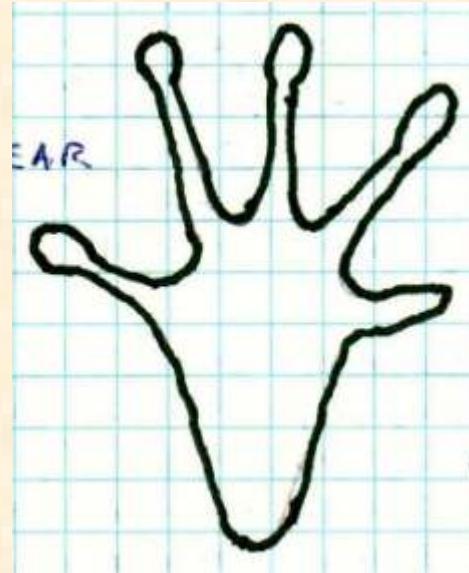
<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Snowshoe Hare	1 1/2	1 1/8	3	2	8	10-12	36-84
Cottontail	7/8	5/8	2 3/4	1 1/8	6	7-12	15-36

## Rodent Family

Front



Rear



4 toes front

5 toes rear

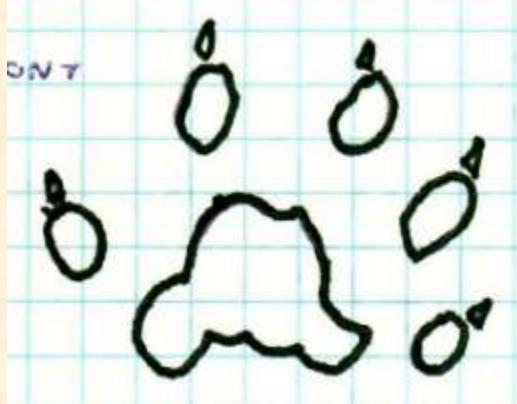
Some claws showing

Gallopers \ Pacers

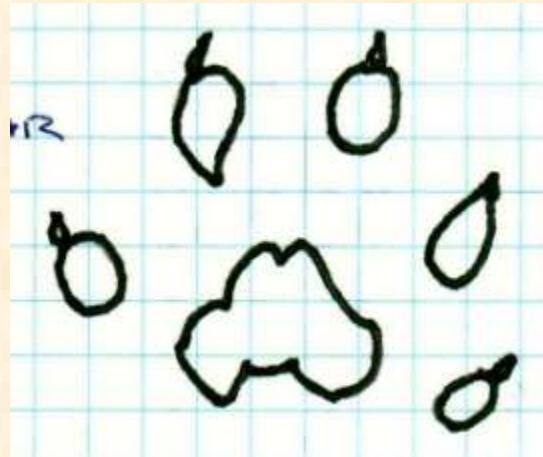
<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Meadow vole	3/16	3/16	1/4	1/4	1 1/4	1 1/2-1 1/2	1 1/2-4
House mouse	1/4	1/4	5/8	3/8	1	2 1/2	4-6
Whitefooted mouse	1/4	1/4	5/8	3/8	1 1/2	2 1/2	4-6
Norway rat	5/8	3/4	7/8	7/8	3 1/8	2 1/2-5	5-8
Chipmunk	1/2	1/2	1 1/8	3/4	2	4-7	7-9
Red squirrel	1/2	3/8	7/8	5/8	4	5-9	9-30
Gray squirrel	2	1 3/8	2 5/8	1 1/4	5	10-15	16-38
Woodchuck\ Marmot	2 1/8	1 7/8	1 5/8	1 3/8	5	6-8	12-20
Porcupine	1 3/4	1 1/4	2 1/2	1 1/2	8	6-10	10-24
Muskrat	1	1	2	2	3 1/2	3-6	7-15
Beaver	2	2	5	5 1/4	8-11	4-6	7-24

## Weasel Family

Front



Rear



5 toes front

5 toes rear

Some claws showing

Bounders \ Pacers

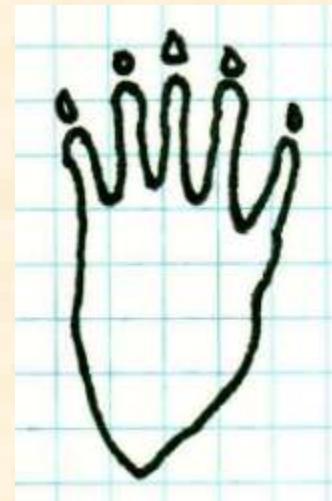
<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Shorttail easel	3/4	3/8	1	1/2	2 3/4	7-12	12-16
Least weasel	3/8	1/4	5/8	3/8	1	6-8	8-12
Marten	1 3/4	1 3/4	1 3/8	1 5/8	5-6	6-9	10-23
Mink	1	1 3/8	1 1/8	1 1/2	3	9-20	20-30
Fisher	3	3	2 7/8	2 5/8	4-8	12-18	19-30
River Otter	2 5/8	3	2 7/8	3 1/8	6	15-18	18-30
Striped Skunk	7/8	1 1/8	1 1/2	1 1/2	7-9	5-8	10-18

## Raccoon

Front



Rear



5 toes front

5 toes rear

Claws showing

Pacers

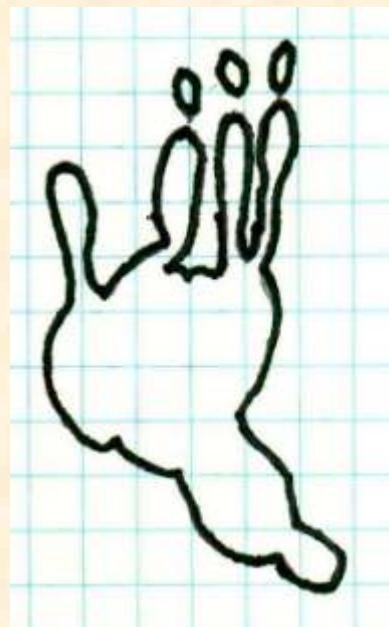
<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Raccoon	3	3	3 $\frac{3}{4}$	3 3/8	8-10	12-16	16-18

## Opossum

Front



Rear



5 toes front

5 toes rear

Claws showing

Pacers

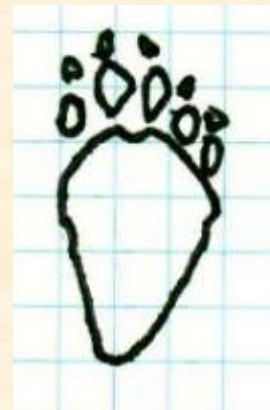
<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Opossum	1 7/8	2	2 1/2	2 1/4	6	7-10	10-15

## Bear

Front



Rear



5 toes front

5 toes rear

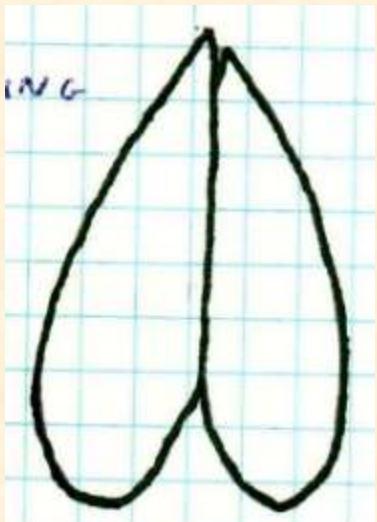
Claws showing

Pacers

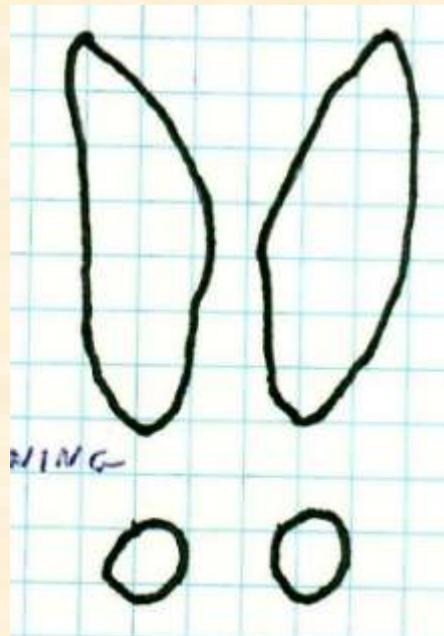
<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Black Bear	4 1/2	4	6 7/8	3 1/2	14	18	24-60

## Deer

Walking



Running



Front hoof

Rear hoof

Diagonal walkers

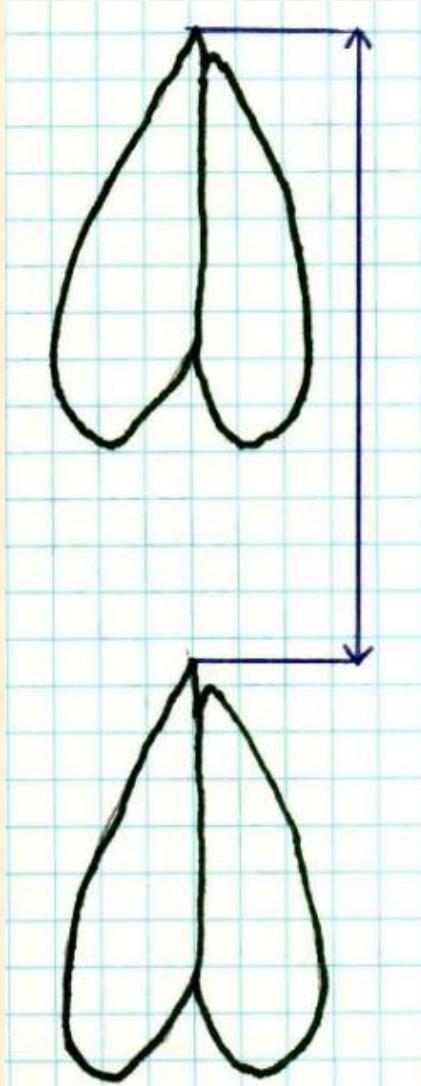
Indirect register

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Front Foot</u>		<u>Rear Foot</u>		<u>Trail Width</u>	<u>Stride Length</u>	
	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Slow</u>	<u>Running</u>
Whitetail	3	1 7/8	2 5/8	1 1/2	6	18-21	72-108
Moose	6	3 1/2	5 5/8	3 1/2	9-10	30-33	96-120

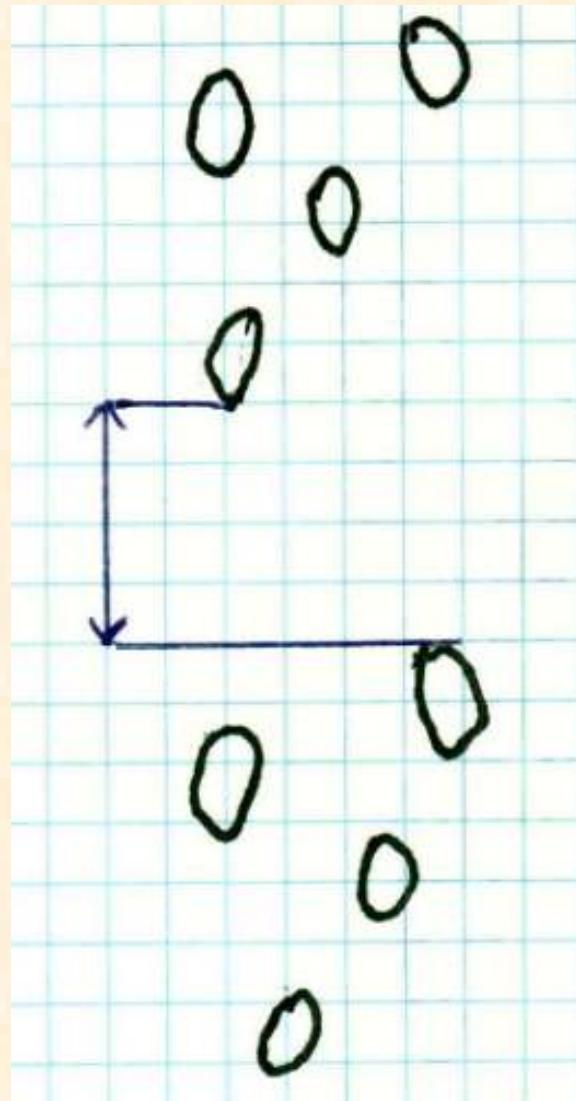
## **Measuring Stride**

Measurements should be taken from the bottom of the track depression.

Pacers \ Diagonal Walkers  
(excluding claws)

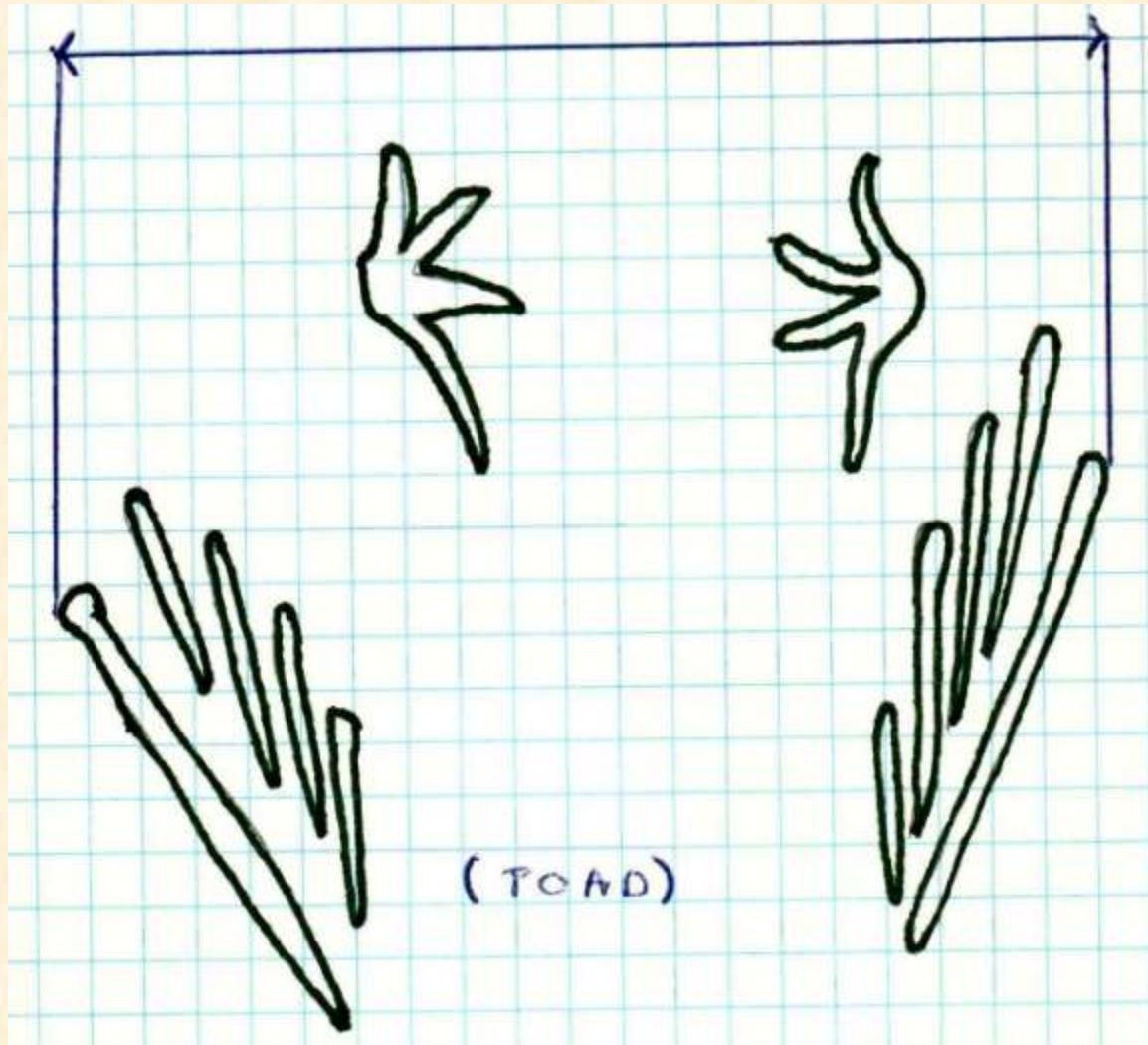


Binders \ Gallopers  
(excluding claws)



## Measuring Trail Width

Measurements should be taken from the bottom of the track depression.

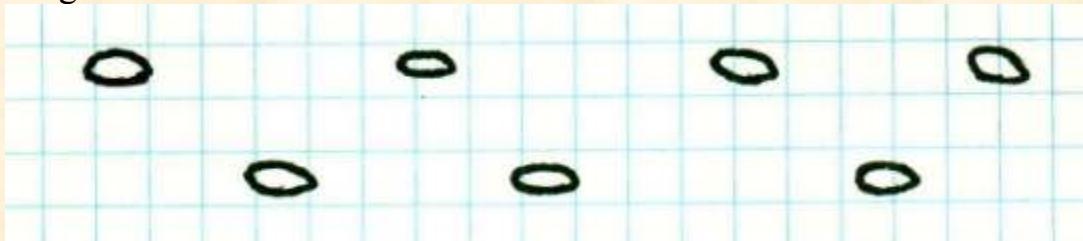


Distance between outermost prints in any one pattern.

## Track Patterns

Direction of Travel →

Diagonal Walkers:



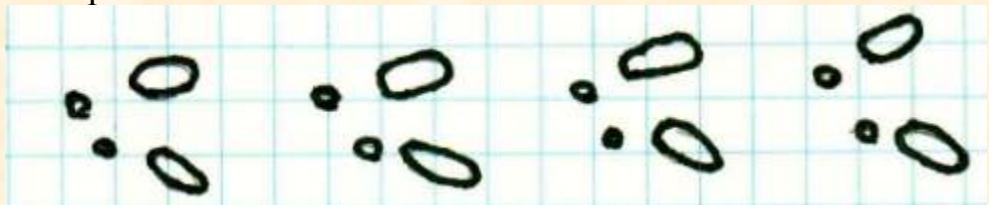
Pacers:



Bounders:



Gallopers:



## **Sex Determination**

For most any animal:

- Males tend to walk more on outside of hind feet.
- Females tend to walk more on inside of hind feet.
- This pressure difference more prominent in heel but is often very slight.

For diagonal walkers only:

- Males hind feet register inside of front feet.
- Females hind feet register outside of front feet

Always check several good, walking prints before making decision.

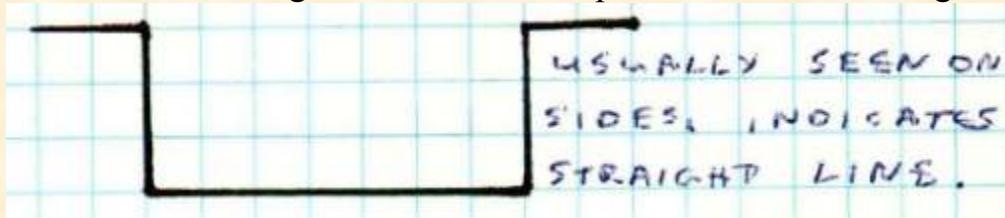
## Pressure Releases

There are two types of pressure releases:

Indicator - Identify animal, sex, age, weight, etc.

Fluctuating - Identify actions such as turns, jumps, hesitations, etc.

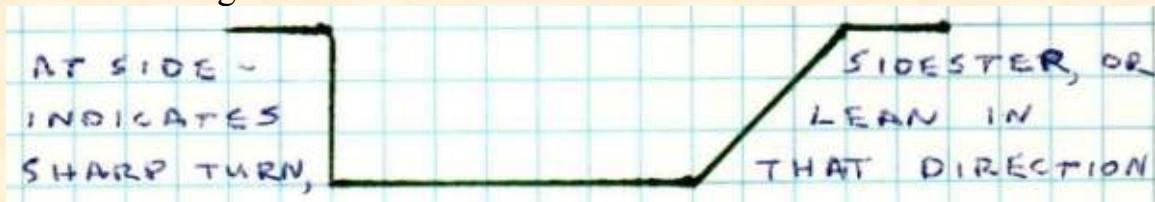
1. Cliff: A vertical edge where soil is compressed downward at a right angle.



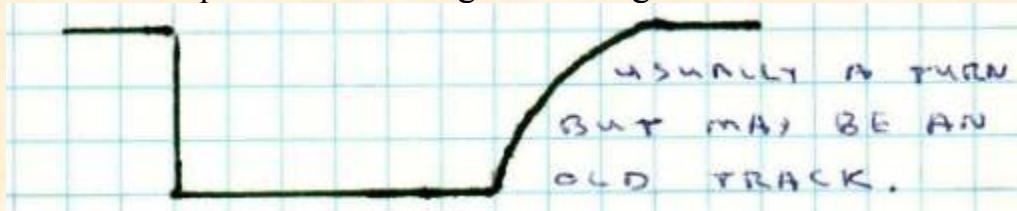
2. Overhang: Inward sloping cliff (>90deg). Common with hooves.



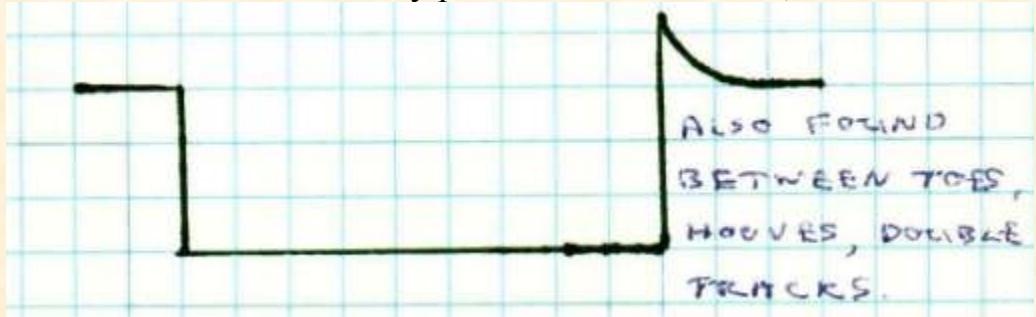
3. Slope: A straight edge angled (<90deg). Usually where foot entered and exited and longer in direction of travel.



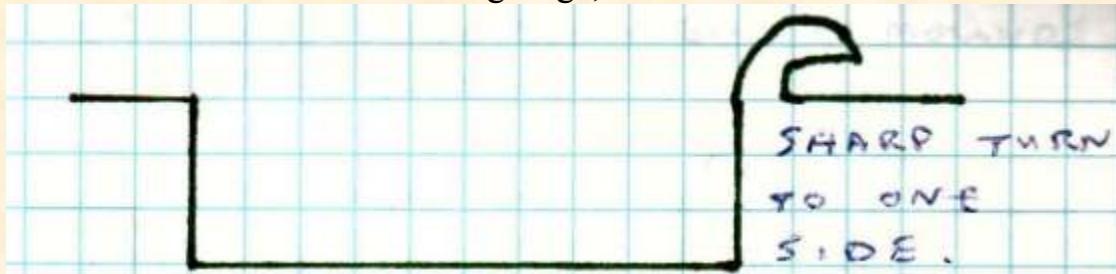
4. Rounded Slope: A rounded edge at <90deg.



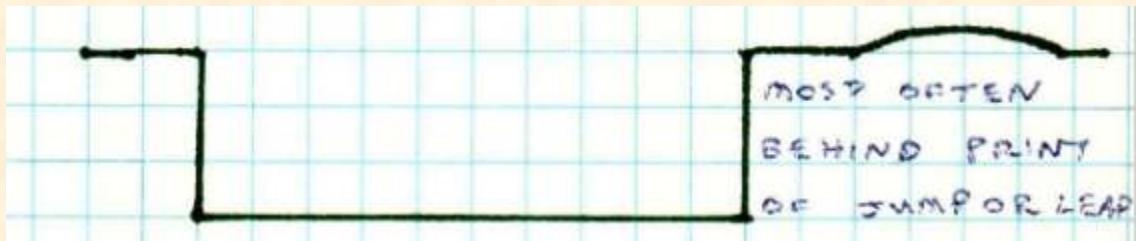
5. Ridge: A sharp edge lifted above surrounding terrain. Usually with a cliff and mound. Caused by pressure exerted to soil, as in a turn.



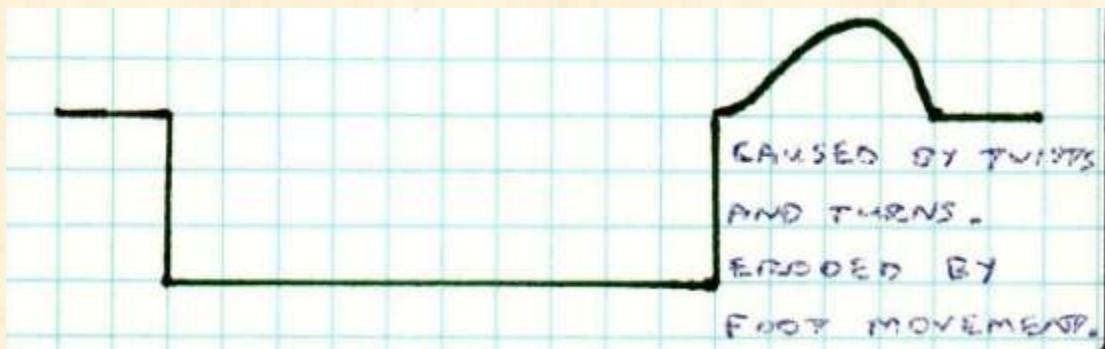
6. Crest: Inward or outward curving ridge, sometimes wave-like.



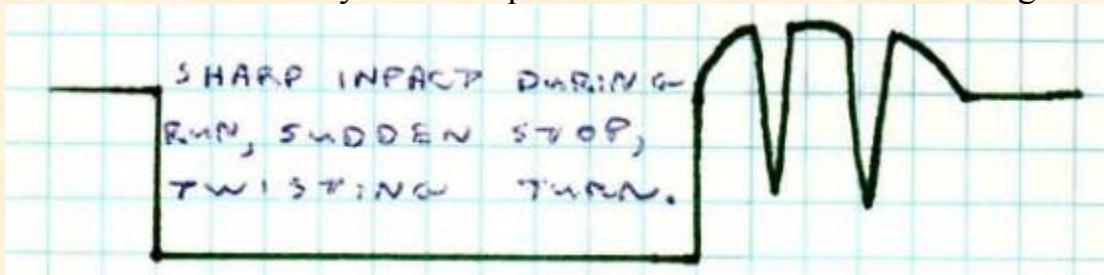
7. Dome: Smooth shallow hill outside print. Indicates general pressure both downward and in the direction of the dome.



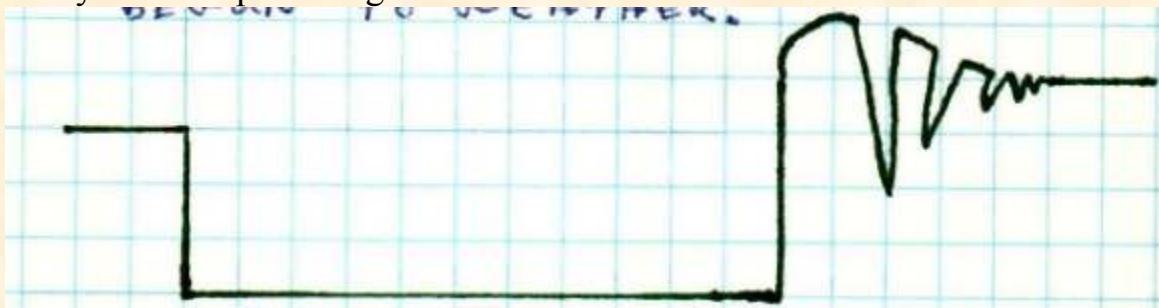
8. Mound: Prominent hill inside or outside print. Usually accompanied with crevasses.



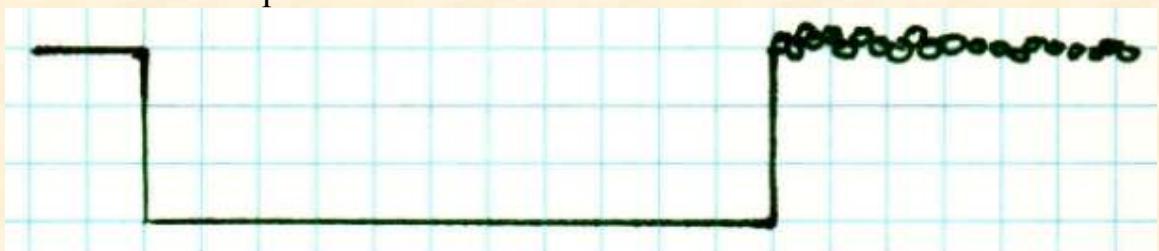
9. Crevasse: Crack in ground outside track. Extreme and sudden pressure downward and sideways. Accompanied with mounds and crumbling.



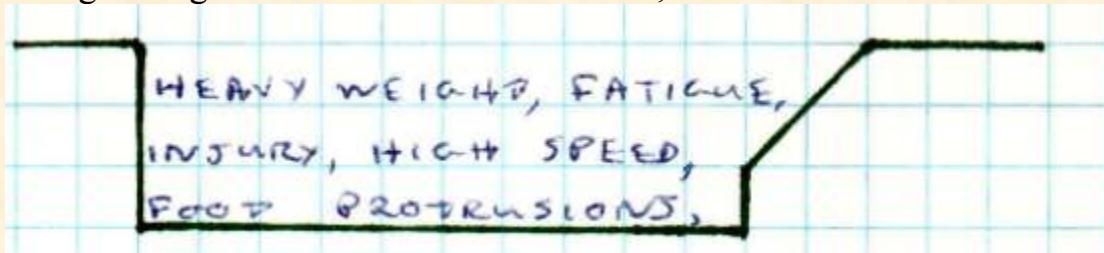
10. Crumbling: Small chunks of soil broken or fallen. i.e. crevasse under heavy stress or peaks begun to weather.



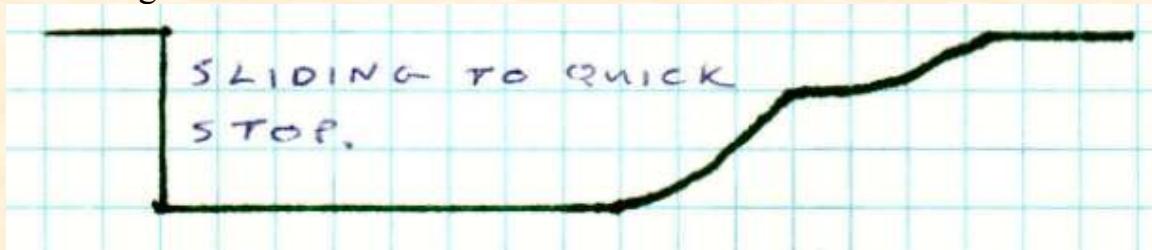
11. Plume: Dirt spreading out for some distance beyond track. In front indicates fast gait. Behind indicates rapid acceleration. Circular around indicates sudden pivot.



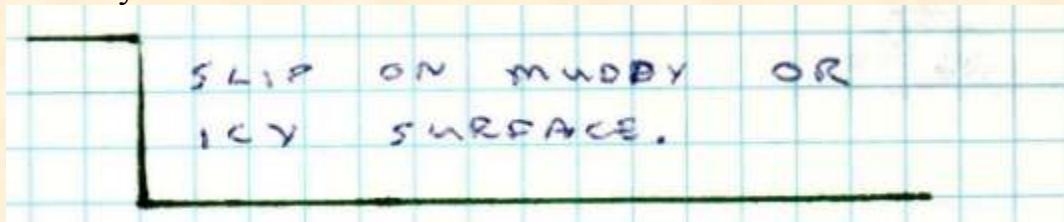
12. Gouge: Drag mark at front or back of track,



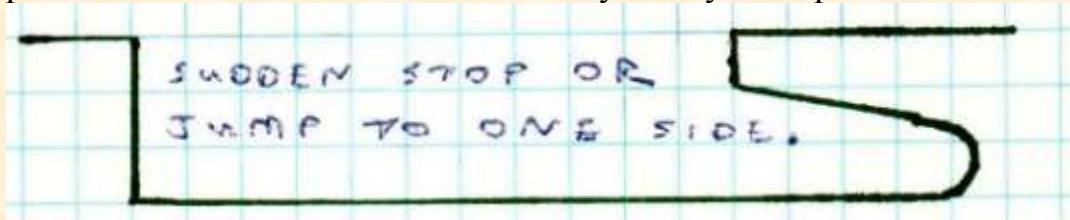
13. Slide: Gouge marks made by intentional skid. Often accompanied by mounding.



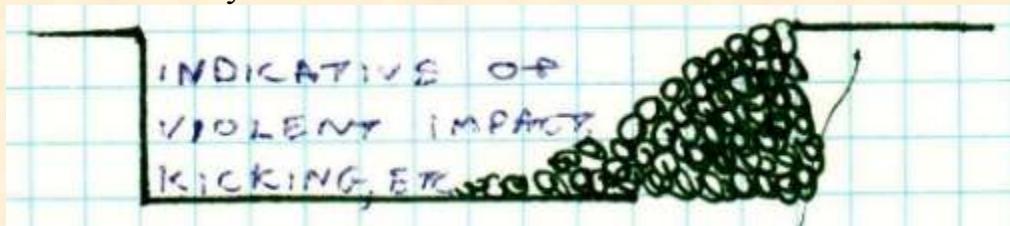
14. Slip: Gouge marks made by unintentional skid. Next track either show recovery or fall.



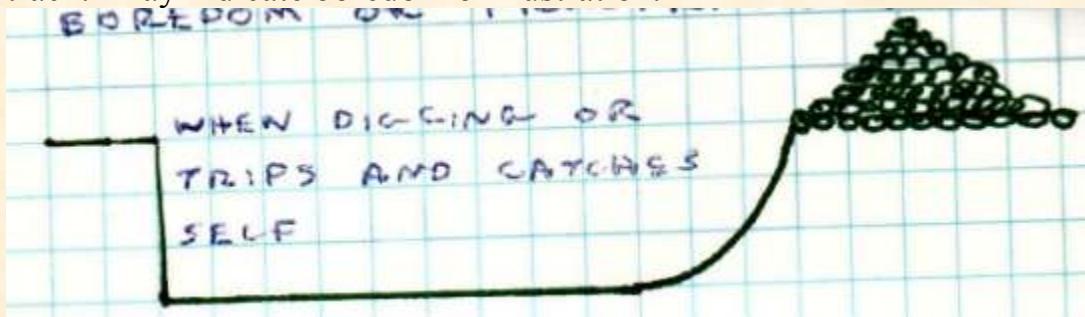
15. Cave: Large indentation on inside wall of print indicating extreme pressure downward and inward. Usually left by front part of foot.



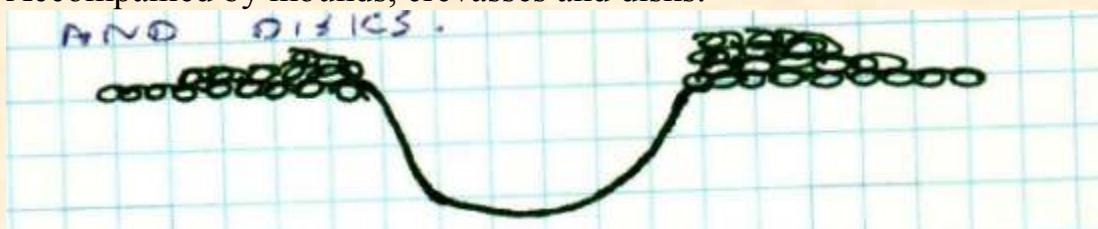
16. Cave-in: Pile of rubble left after collapse of ridge, cave, crest, etc., after foot taken away.



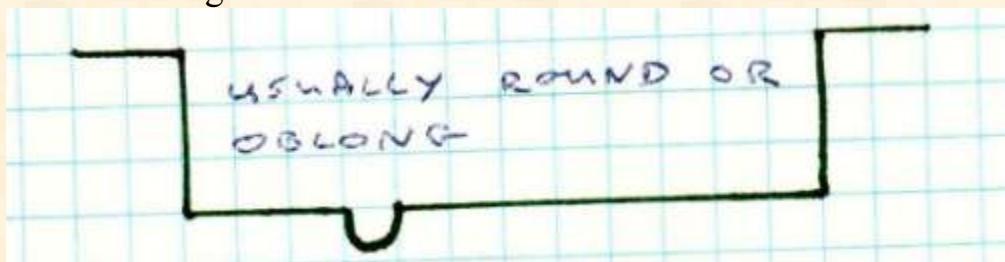
17. Shovel: Dirt has been scooped up and dropped in a pile just outside track. May indicate boredom or frustration.



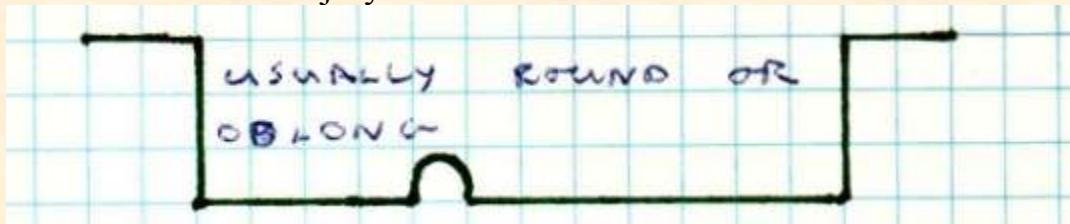
18. Explosion: Dirt thrown out of track by sudden, sharp impact. Accompanied by mounds, crevasses and disks.



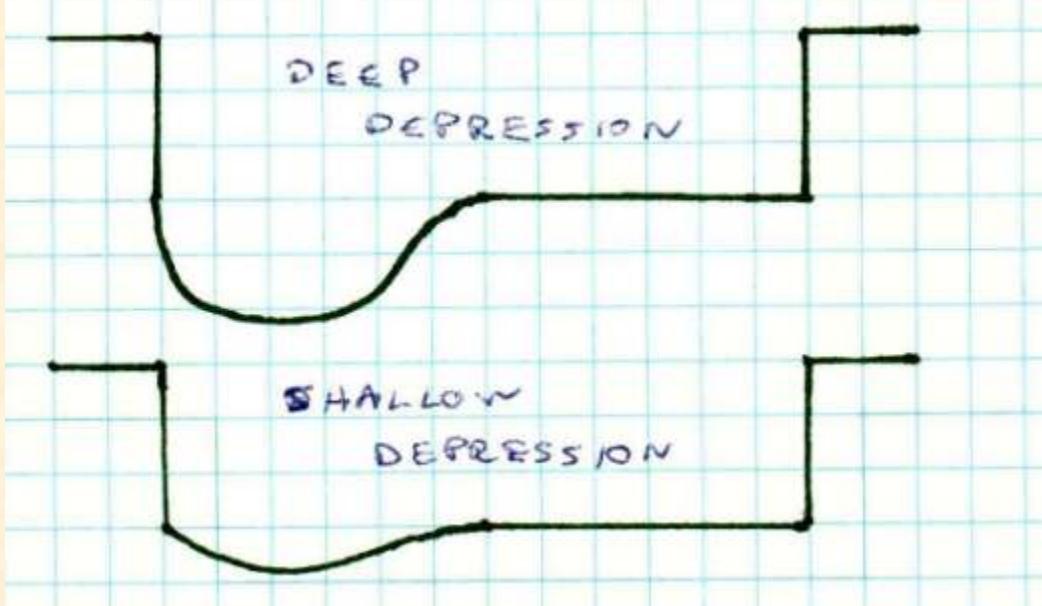
19. Pock: Tiny indentation within track caused by protrusion on foot. Indicative of growth or abnormalities.



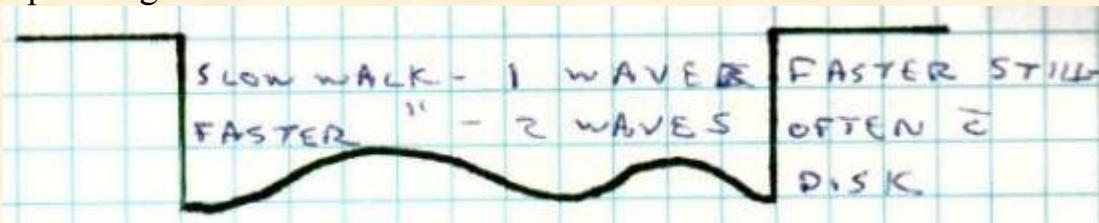
20. Reverse Pock: Tiny protrusion within track caused by indentation in foot. Indicative of injury.



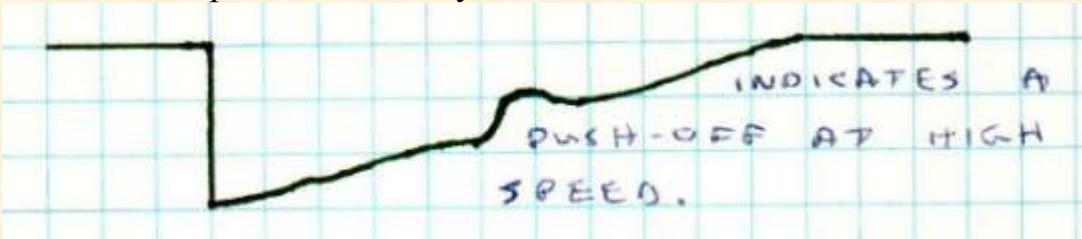
21. Depression: Any area in bottom of track deeper than average depth of track. Indicates where animals put weight during phases of step and indicating different body movements.



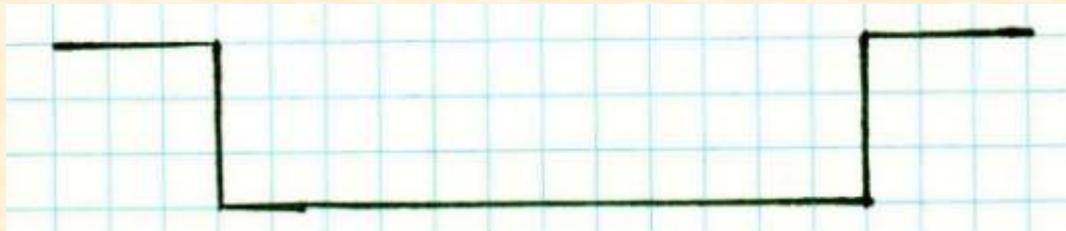
22. Wave: Undulation in the bottom of track caused by simultaneous spreading and forward motion of foot.



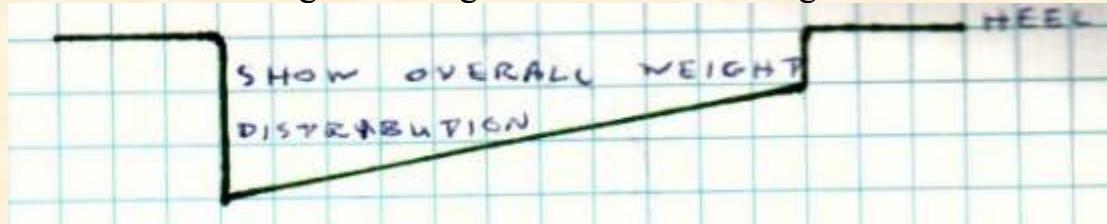
23. Disk: Relatively large patch of soil compressed, lifted, and dislodged from normal position. Usually round or oval.



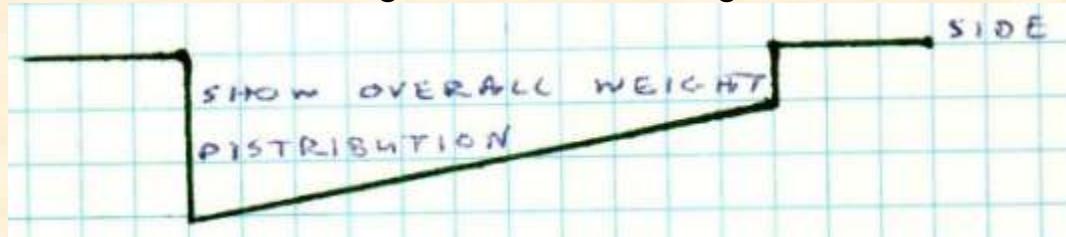
24. Flat: Relatively flat and featureless part of trail. Used as a reference to read other track features.



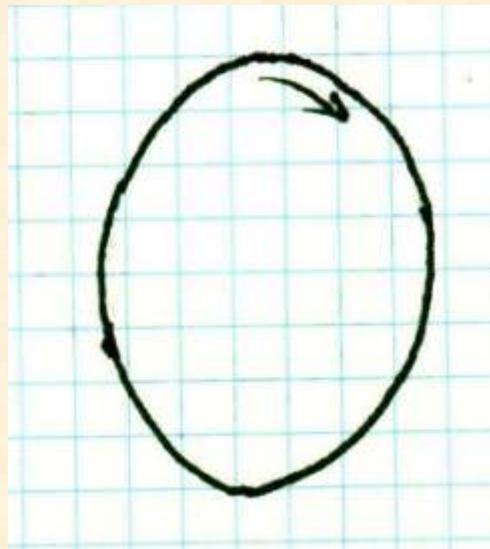
25. Pitch: Overall lengthwise angle of track relative to ground.



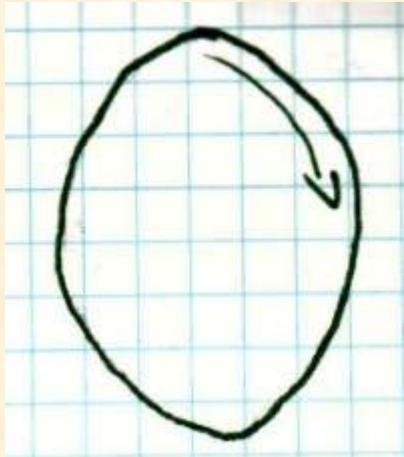
26. Roll: Overall lateral angle of track relative to ground.



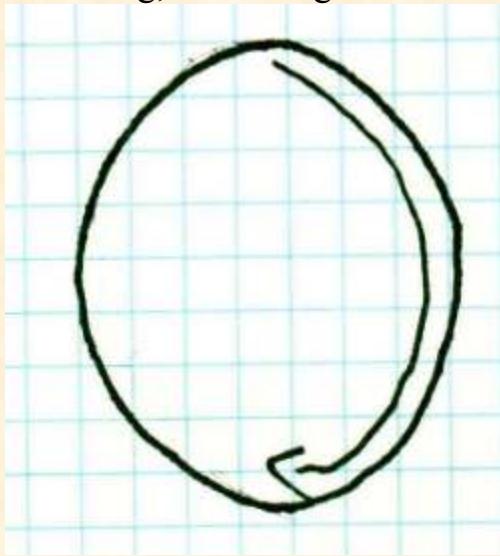
27. Twist: A turn between 0 and 45deg, leaving a smooth arc in the soil.



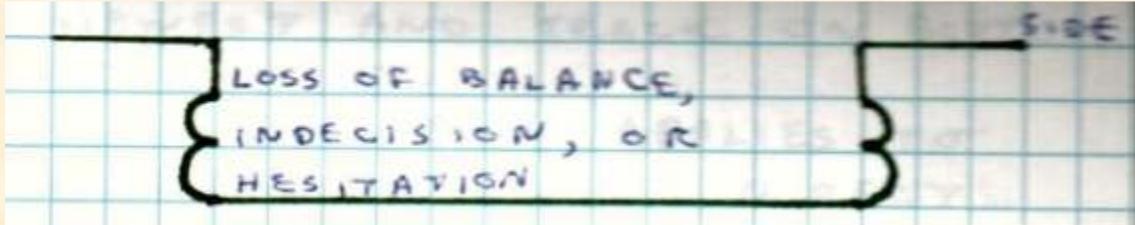
28. Pivot: A turn between 45 and 90deg, usually leaving a smooth arc with a mound.



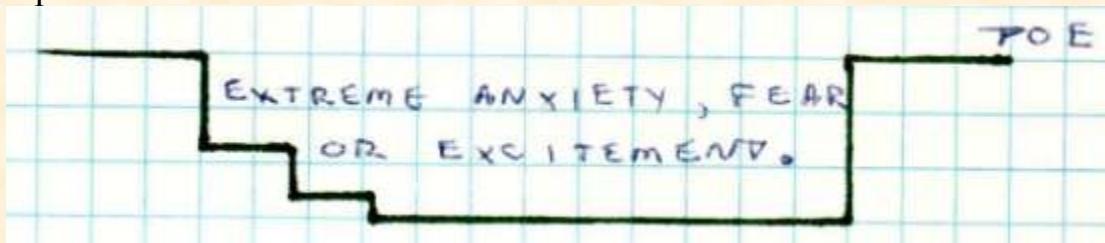
29. Spiral: A turn between 90 and 360deg, usually with considerable mounding, crevassing and crumbling.



30. Wobble: Widening and deepening of track caused by repeated sideways movement of foot.



31. Stutter: Lengthening and deepening of track caused by repeated and rapid forward movement of foot.



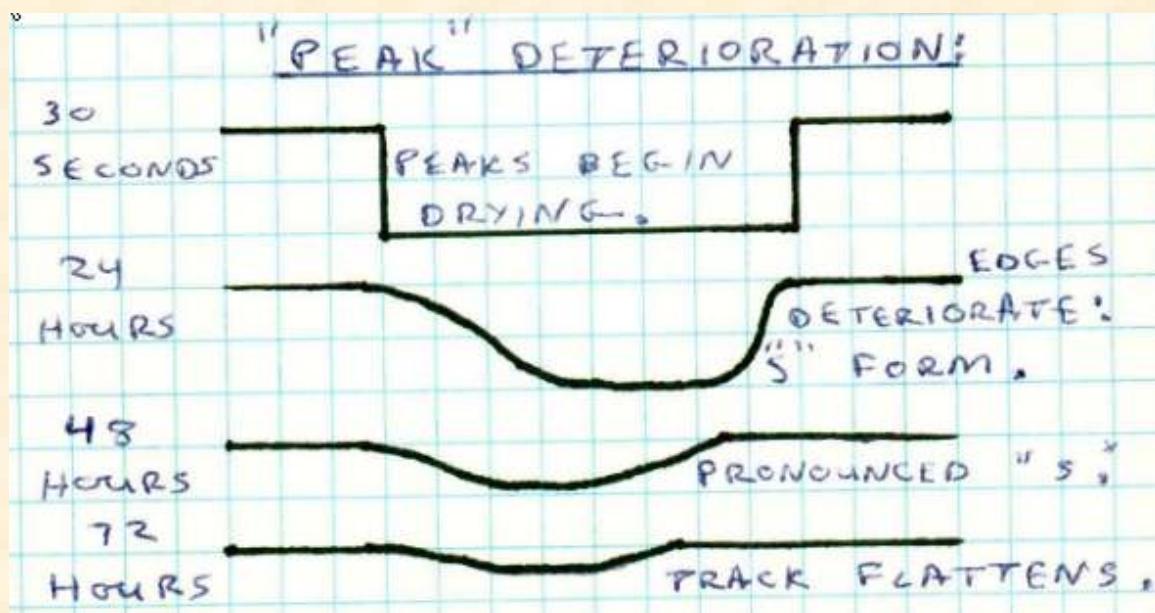
## Rules for Aging Tracks

### Rule #1:

Track on top is newest and track on bottom is oldest. This applies to diagonal walkers, direct registering animals, and smaller animals who step in larger animals tracks.

### Rule #2:

You can tell how old a track is by how worn it is. Edges move toward middle under effects of time, weather, and gravity.



### Rule #3:

The harder the soil, the slower the peak deterioration. In extremely soft soil (wet sand) actual track size increases. In hard soil, (clay) actual track size decreases.

#### Rule #4:

Tracks exposed to weather erode much faster than those protected.

- Wind: Round tracks tend to wear evenly in steady wind, where blocky tracks wear quite unevenly.
- Rain: Tend to seep in walls of track, causing crumbling and creating “island” in middle of track.
- Temperature: Rapid increase causes drying and cracking. Increased humidity causes faster degradation. Freezing causes hardening and expansion. Thawing leaves cone-shaped depression.

## **Other Signs**

### **Vegetation:**

Look for broken leaves, stems, sticks, twigs, matted grass, gnawings, bitings, and rubbings. Also, be on the look out for hair.

### **Scat:**

Scat tends to be soft and mucous-lined on the outside. Mucous usually lost within 1-2 days.

Dries gradually from inside out:

Soft and wet on inside = Fresh

Dry on inside = Old

Powdery on inside = Very old.