



TRACKING ANIMALS WITH BUDDY BISON

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of the largest American black bear research locations in the world. The species is the most common bear in North America and has a very misleading name—they can range in color from black to gray and even cinnamon brown

One of the most common ways naturalists locate and identify black bears is by the tracks they leave behind. With over 500,000 acres in the park, it can be difficult to know where the bears are at any given time. By observing animal tracks, naturalists are able to determine if the bear has passed through the area recently and in which direction it's going.

Learn to identify an American black bear track on your own! Make your own stamps of three different predators found in Smoky Mountains National Park using the guidelines on the following page.



American black bear

VOCABULARY

Animal track: an imprint left behind in soil, snow, or mud by an animal walking across it. Animal tracks are used by naturalists to identify animals living in an area.

Predator: an animal that lives by killing and eating other animals.

Naturalist: a person who studies or is an expert in natural history. Some examples include zoologists and botanists.

MATERIALS

- * sponges
- * paper
- * paint
- * scissors
- * markers
- * paint brush

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Draw your animal tracks on a sponge using the guidelines on the following page. If you don't have a sponge large enough for the black bear, just make it as big as you can!

2. Trim the pieces of the sponge around the track as needed. Make sure you don't separate the toes and claws from the rest of the track.

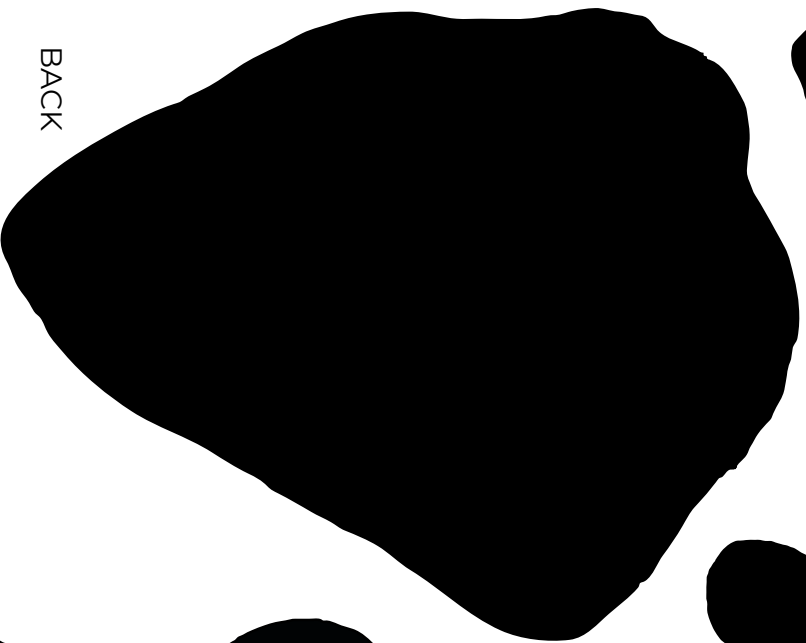
3. Dip paintbrush into paint, then carefully paint inside the track on the sponge. The paint coat should be thick enough to leave behind a track when you stamp it onto paper.



Ready for more? Try making two black bear tracks with clay. Once they've fully dried, try leaving tracks behind in dirt or mud outside. Imitate with your hands how you think a bear might walk. Do you think animal tracks in the Smoky Mountains are usually complete, perfect prints? Why/why not? Discuss with a friend or adult.



BLACK BEAR



BACK

Although the adult black bear has a much larger track than other animals in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, it can be tricky to tell the difference between a smaller, younger bear and other predators.

How else might you tell the difference? What other unique features do you notice about the black bear tracks?



FRONT

COYOTE

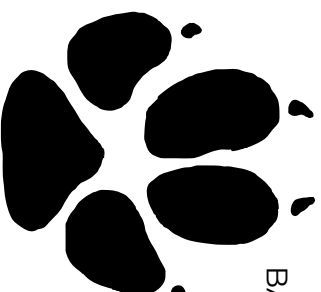


FRONT



BACK

RED FOX



BACK



FRONT