

Casting with wax

This method gives excellent detail but will not work in snow.

Choose a sharp deep track and carefully remove loose dirt and twigs. Using a strip of cardboard, make a little fence around the track about 2 cm. high. Now drip wax from a lighted candle into the track and out to the cardboard fence, until the wax is at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cm. deep everywhere. When the wax is hard, dig out the track and surrounding soil with a trowel. Brush away any loose soil, pack the fragile wax track carefully and take it home. This is actually a model of the foot of the animal that made the track.

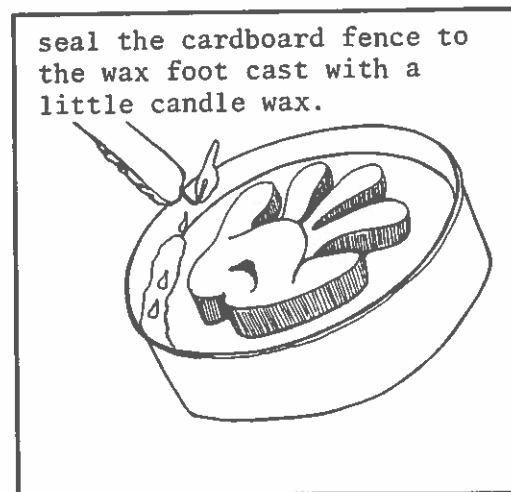
To make a model of the track, remove the old cardboard fence and place the wax foot side up on your working surface. Make a new cardboard fence around the wax foot and seal it to the foot with a little hot candle wax around the edge. (see illustration). This fence must be at least 2 cm. higher than the highest part of the wax foot. If you want to remove this cardboard later, grease it with vaseline before sealing it to the wax track cast. Finally, pour plaster of paris mixture into the mold, to the top of the cardboard fence. When the plaster is hard remove the wax by melting it out with a pistol-type hair drier or a small torch. Now you have a permanent, professional model of an animal track.

Text by Debra Burlison

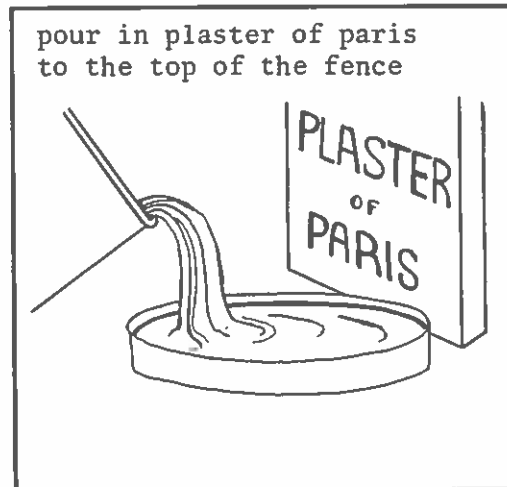


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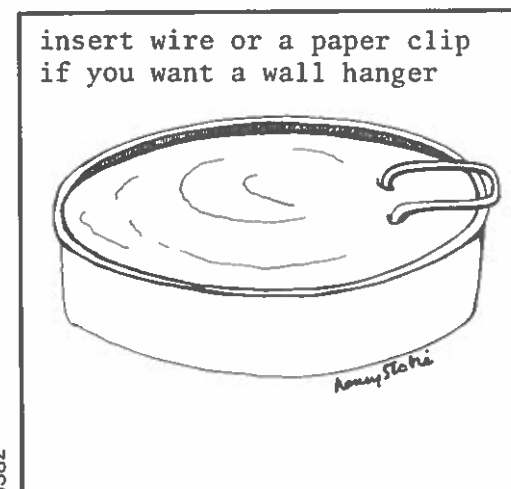
Making a plaster track model from a wax track cast



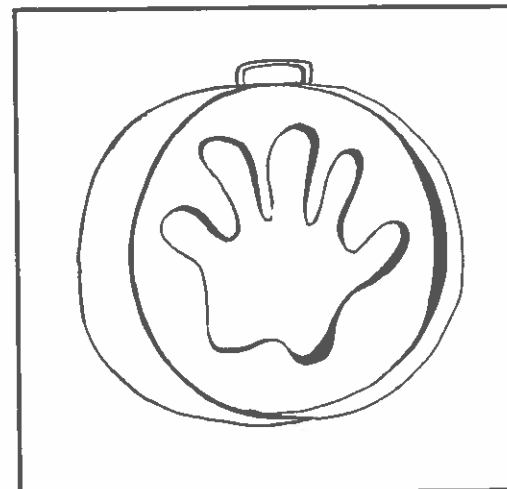
seal the cardboard fence to the wax foot cast with a little candle wax.



pour in plaster of paris to the top of the fence



insert wire or a paper clip if you want a wall hanger



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Animal Tracks

Animal tracks can be cast in the field by pouring either wax or plaster of paris into the track impression. A wax track cast can be used later to make a plaster model of the track impression. A plaster track cast leaves you with a model of the foot that made the track.

Wax track casts usually give more detail than plaster casts, but plaster can be used even in snow. The wax method of track casting is described on the back page.

Casting with plaster of paris

We often carry the powdered plaster in a double plastic bag. Take an extra plastic bag for mixing, and you will need a supply of water.

Choose a track with sharp edges and a deep impression. Carefully remove twigs or leaves from inside the track. Use an eye dropper to remove any water in the track.

Put some plaster into the mixing bag, then add water and mix by squeezing the bag. Good plaster should look like whipping cream. It does take practice to judge the amounts of plaster and water needed. Pour the plaster mixture gently into the track. When it becomes firm (usually about half an hour) dig out the track and the plaster. It will take several days in a warm place for the plaster to cure, so put the track cast away and don't handle it too much. Later you can safely brush off loose dirt. This gives a plaster model of the foot that made the track.

If you want a plaster model of the track impression, press your foot model into a tray of wet mud or clay, then use the wax method described on the back page.

Tips about plaster

Small tracks (bird or squirrel, for example) should be poured an extra centimetre deep for strength. Make a cardboard fence around the track to contain this extra depth of plaster.

In wet snow, sprinkle the track with plaster powder first, and let this set for several minutes. In dry fluffy snow, first spray the track with water (plastic windex bottles give good spray) and let this freeze before adding plaster mix.

Plaster mixed too thick won't fill all the nooks and crannies of the track. Plaster mixed too thin will be a long time hardening and cracks easily when dry. Plaster mixed to the consistency of whipping cream works best.

When casting in below freezing temperatures, the plaster may freeze a bit before hardening. If the cast is then put in a warm place it will first thaw a bit before drying, so handle with care.

Animal Tracks

