



PALEONTOLOGY AT HOME

Learn how trace fossils are formed and make your own!

Materials

- 1 cup of salt
- 2 cups of flour
- 3/4 cup of water
- Mixing bowl
- Miscellaneous household objects
- Paint (optional)

Procedure

- Mix salt and flour together in the bowl.
- Gradually stir in water.
- Mix well until it forms a doughy consistency.
- Take the dough out of the bowl and knead with your hands until smooth and combined.
- Find some things in your house with interesting textures. Try to think of what a future scientist could learn from them!
- Press them into the dough to make a trace fossil, or an imprint of them!
- If you want to harden your salt dough trace fossils, allow it to air dry or bake it in the oven at 180 degrees. Once completely dry and hardened, you can paint it!



*While most of us think of bones when we hear the word "fossil," another important kind of fossil is a **trace fossil**. Trace fossils are markings left behind by a creature that are not the animal's body, such as dinosaur tracks!*

Image credit: Scott Catron

Results

You've made a trace fossil for future scientists to study!

Why?

Sometimes, ancient animals like dinosaurs leave marks on their landscape, with their feet, teeth, or in other ways. When the conditions are right, these markings are **fossilized**, or turned to stone. When paleontologists, or scientists that study ancient animals, see these trace fossils, they can learn more about how the animal lived. For instance, with footprints, they can learn what size groups they lived in, whether they migrated with seasons, if they raised their young, and more! What could a future scientist learn about you from your trace fossil?

To learn more about ancient life, check out our fossils in the *Natural History* gallery or visit our CTI Giant Theater and watch *Dinosaurs of Antarctica*.