

USING TRACK AND SCAT REPLICAS

Questions and Answers

1. How can I attach track replicas to wood or other materials? Track replicas are often used to make tracks in sand boxes and other displays. Since Acorn Naturalists' replicas are made with vinyl material, glues designed for vinyl applications should be used. We suggest first thoroughly washing the track with detergent soap and warm water. After drying, roughen its flat side with medium or coarse sandpaper. Then sand the surface to which the track will be glued. Apply glue according to the manufacturer's directions. Finally, nail small carpet tacks through creases in the track into the wood. Washing, sanding, gluing and tacking to wood should make for a lasting bond.
2. Where can I get vinyl adhesives? Vinyl adhesives generally come in metal tubes and are advertised for use "repairing pool liners, spa covers, rafts, and similar materials." Locally, hardware stores offer a compound called VynaBond, but we also have seen similar compounds under a number of different trade names.
3. With respect to the negatives (molds), what kinds of material can I use to fill in the mold to make my track replica? The mold material we use is extremely resilient—you can use just about anything in it. We have experimented with both plaster of Paris and PerfectCast (similar to but stronger than plaster of Paris and available from Acorn Naturalists). Other materials can be used as well. In all cases, once the material has set up, remove the cast and wash out the mold.
4. I want to make track impressions in concrete along a pathway. Can I use track replicas to do this? This is something of an art form, and we recommend that you experiment before laying your final path. Different batches of concrete set up at different rates, and if you press in a track too early, it will be "mushy" and lose definition. If you press it in too late, you will not be able to make a deep impression. Also, to avoid creating potential trip hazards, avoid placing impressions in a locations on a path that receive heavy foot traffic. Acorn Naturalists offers hard-resin track replicas in addition to flexible vinyl ones. These hard casts work well for making imprints in sand, mud, or concrete.
5. Are the replicas durable enough for outside use? The replicas we offer will not be damaged by rain, mud, or even freezing weather. Instructors often "seed" trails with scat replicas and then have students look for and identify them during hikes. Because naturally occurring scat can contain pathogens, real scat should not be handled without special precautions.
6. Is it possible to manufacture custom replicas of tracks, scat, or fish? The answer is yes, but developing a "master mold" that can be used for production of replicas is a costly process. The raw material for these master molds is very expensive. We can make custom molds of just about anything, but the "start-up" costs are high (averaging \$500.00 for the initial master mold, depending on the size and complexity of the cast). Unless you need a professional quality mold, we recommend experimenting with making your own plaster casts out of PerfectCast, also offered by Acorn Naturalists.