

Otter Signs

Fact Sheet



Otter footprints are very easily identifiable. Both the front and the back paws show all five digits, a large metacarpal pads and carpal pads that are placed further back. The claws are short and stocky and often don't register on the substrate, but when they are they're difficult to separate from the pads. The digits are oval in shape, when the claws show, they become more elongated and tear-shaped. Sometimes the smallest, fifth digit will not be obvious.

The webbing will be present only on very soft substrate such as silt, fine sand and some types of snow.

On the whole, the adult front paw appears elongated and is about 90 x 54mm for a bitch and 90 x 69mm for a dog.

PATHS - Otters use routes when travelling on land, which can be hundreds of years old. The paths can be very distinctive and obvious. When vegetation dies down in winter and spring, paths become less obvious. Other animals use these paths and otters use other animals' paths, such as deer and sheep, which can confuse the situation.



DRYING PLACE - This is an area, normally around a metre in diameter, above the high tide mark in grass, bracken, heather or other rough vegetation. Otters like to clean and dry their fur when they leave the sea or fresh water. They do this by rolling, and rubbing their fur on the vegetation. In doing so they wear down a favourite place, scuff it up and generally disturb the vegetation

SLIDE - This is where otters tend to come down a steep bank, often grassy, which, when the weather is very wet becomes muddy and slippery. Otters then, instead of walking down, slide down on their tummy. Slides can also be found in snow conditions.

HOVERS - These are lay-up sites where otters rest in shelter out of the weather, between foraging periods or other exploratory outings. They are often found close to the shore or in cover not far inland. Hovers vary in size and type, they could be a dry ledge under a rock, a small cave, a hollow under a fallen tree or roots and can be man-made structures such as ruined boats or buildings.

