



Product Review: Science on a Tracking Expedition

This past summer, as I gathered ideas and resources for the current school year, I knew I wanted to improve last year in two main areas – Geography and Science. I was aware it would take a bit of preparation, and a good deal of “stick-to-it-tive-ness”, but with just a bit of forethought, I was certain I could make weekly hands-on activities available for my kids in both subjects.

The curriculum we use has weekly Science experiments scheduled, but Meredith and Kenny always want more. In fact, they’ll stick around in the schoolroom all the live long day if there is something to “do”.

That is EXACTLY why I was delighted to get [The Young Scientists Club 2010 Catalog](#).

As an aside, am I the only one that pores over catalogs with post-it tabs, my syllabus, my calendar and a Sharpie?
No? Good.

If you’re not already familiar with it, The Young Scientists Club has been around for over a decade. Their catalog states their clear and simple mission: “...to engage boys and girls around the world in an educational science adventure that lasts a lifetime by offering quality, science-related products that will fascinate them with the wonders of scientific discovery and spark their interest in future scientific endeavors.”

THAT is a mouthful.

Let me paraphrase in the words of my 7 year old when the three kits we ordered arrived in the mail:

“Cooooool! Can we do them RIGHT NOW?!”



The first kit I chose is a new addition to their Nature Series, [Science on a Tracking Expedition](#).



The purpose of the kit is to introduce Young Scientists to the field of animal tracking. The kit is well packaged and fully loaded with *most* everything you need; animal track molds, plaster of Paris, a paintbrush, sand, two bowls, a tracking game and poster, stickers, popsicle sticks, a measuring cup, watercolors and most importantly, the instructions!



Meredith carefully unpacked the box, making sure nothing was missing, while Kenny immediately set about identifying the track molds with the animal track poster.

Matching Animal Prints

The Instructional Guide is a very nice, glossy, catalog-like manual. The kids and I decided to begin with Activity 1: Matching Animal Prints. This required the poster, animal track molds, watercolor paint with brush and a cup/glass of water.





Kenny did the same with his Wild Turkey animal mold. They continued until all 8 animal tracks were stamped on the poster.

Matching Animals to Their Tracks

The next activity was simple, but my kids adore stickers, so they were all over it.



Two sticker sheets are included in the kit, so both of them had an entire sheet of stickers to themselves – which is a rarity in the world of multiple siblings.



Slowly.
Carefully.



Each animal sticker was peeled from its sheet and stuck in place next to its matching track.

Making Animal Casts

With the poster done, the kids were ready to pour dirt, mix things up and make a mess!



Grabbing the small bag of sand, Meredith measured it per the instructions and placed the requested amount of sand into one of the two bowls provided.



Sprinkling a small amount of water over the sand to moisten it, Meredith made sure all the sand was sufficiently moist before handing the bowl over to her brother.



Kenny pressed down on the animal tracking mold with all his might!



We were all pleased to see the animal tracking mold made a decent impression in the sand.



Pushing that aside, Meredith measured the appropriate amount of plaster of Paris and poured it into the second bowl.



Kenny did the same.



After adding water Meredith quickly stirred the plaster of Paris and water with the provided popsicle stick until it was smooth.



Then, she poured the mixture into the animal track imprint already formed in the sand in the first bowl, setting the bowl aside for the cast to dry.

At this point I realized we needed several more popsicle sticks and bowls because the plaster of Paris hardened in the bowl and it would be difficult to stir up a second, third, fourth, fifth, and so on, batch to finish all the remaining molds.

The kids and I stopped to scramble for the craft drawer for popsicle sticks and the kitchen cabinet for leftover party bowls and we were quickly back in business!



Kenny began his second animal mold with Meredith running outside to gather more dirt.



There was plenty of plaster of Paris, and with a new bowl of dirt from outside, plenty of dirt. Meredith and Kenny mixed, pressed, stirred and poured until they were done.

Two Days Later...

We waited all night for the plaster of Paris to dry, but it wasn't happening. The next day we traded in our Science Experiment for Six Flags over Arlington and thought nothing of Black Bears or Striped Skunks for a full 24 hours.

However, right after we finished up school today, Kenny and Meredith wanted to flip over their casts and see if it worked!



After lifting the cast from the dirt, they were both disappointed to see nothing but a flat surface. I encouraged them to softly brush away the dirt, layer by layer.



And they did.



Bit by bit the cast appeared.



A raccoon cast.



Meredith's Wild Turkey cast.





Kenny's Great Blue Heron cast...and several others.



As they uncovered the casts, the kids placed them on the poster next to the stamped print and the sticker of each animal the tracks and casts represent.



“These look like FOSSILS!” Kenny exclaimed a few times.



They really were impressed and couldn't wait to show Jeff when he came home from work.

“Where was Emelie during all this” you ask?

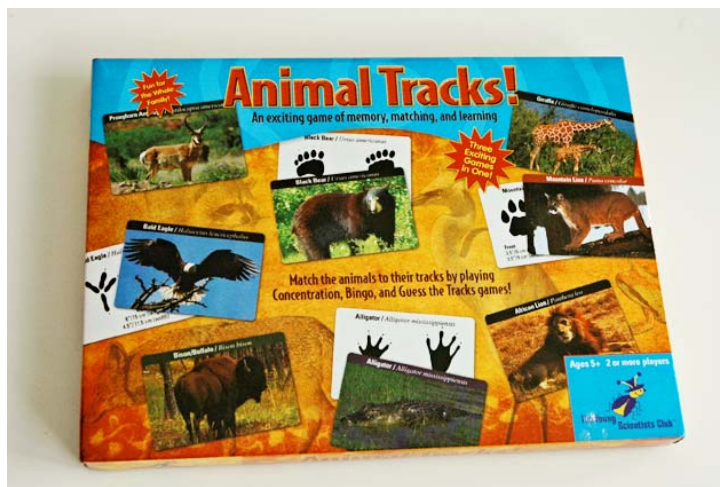


Losing her mind.
We're not sure she's found it yet.

Animal Tracks Game



Science on a Tracking Expedition also comes with an Animal Tracks Game.



If you're are interested, the same Animal Tracks Game is also sold independently of the kit.



Just so you know, the cards included in the kit are not of the same thickness and quality as the cards you will find in the Animal Tracks Game. I have both, and as you can see, there is definitely a difference in the paper's weight.

I will probably laminate the set that came in the kit and give them to another family to use because I prefer the thicker, hardier cards.

There are 80 cards (both in the kit and in the independently sold game); forty of them are beautifully photographed animals and the other forty are black and white illustrations of the front and hind paws of the same animals.

Three games can be played with the cards – Concentration (we call it “Memory”), Bingo and Guess the Tracks. My kids prefer playing Memory.



After spreading them out all over the school table, Kenny ponders his first move.



Of course, the first few turnovers, unless one is really lucky, are hardly ever matches.



Meredith finds a “Domestic Cat”.



And then, she finds the tracks to match it!



Kenny finds the Mountain Lion.



Meredith finds a Wild Pig.



Weird things happen that I can't explain...



And the game winds down to a close with fewer and fewer cards on the table.



Here they were almost at the end, with "pairs" stacked neatly on both sides.



But wait! Something is amuck.
The last two cards don't match.

Hmmm...are these wild cards?

Heh heh

WILD CARDS

BWAHAHA!

I kill me.

Okay, pulling it together now.

I am really very happy with the Science on a Tracking Expedition kit. While I haven't joined the The Young Scientists Club Subscription Program, I do have two more of their kits (Solar Energy to the Rescue & Back In Time With the Dinosaurs) scheduled into our school calendar. Both of those are part of the popular Magic School Bus Series. I think the kids will get a kick out of them too.

Are you at all familiar with the Young Scientists Club? Do you pre-schedule your hands-on activities or just look for them as you hit that point in your curriculum? Tell me what YOU are doing or what you have PLANNED to do!