

Awareness Quiz by Tamarack Song

Spring is one of my favorite times for tracking – right along with summer, autumn, and winter! The lengthening days and warm breezes, together with the smell of new life, have a narcotic effect that draws one outdoors and renews the passion for traipsing the wilder places.

Every season has its tracking benefits. At this time of the year in the south and west, many animals have already given birth, so they are busy laying tracks all over the place as they scramble to find food for their young. In the north, frost is leaving the newly-exposed ground, which leaves it soft and impressionable – perfect for holding the imprints of passing animals.

And every season also has its tracking challenges: the lush vegetation or dry conditions of summer can make trails hard to find, autumn's leaf litter can disguise tracks, and blowing winter snow quickly erases track details.

A challenge in all seasons is to decide which way to follow an animal track, or even which direction to take in order to find track. That is the focus of this column's questions, which you'll find at the bottom of the page.

And now for the responses to the question I posed in last issue's column:

How does fallen snow tell direction?

“Pay attention to the way the wind has swept the snow into drifts. If you know the direction from which the storm entered the area, the drifts will point you in that direction,” says Evan Cestari, and John Calabrese states the same. Katie Doyle notes that “the sun will melt the snow on the north side of a meadow more than on the south side,” and Luke Brault suggests to “pay attention to which direction the snow comes from and what side of the trees or other objects it sticks to. Look for consistency,” he adds. “The south sides of things will be rounded and more melted than the north,” contributes John Calabrese.

[Tmailto:JAY.BEAUDOIN@domtar.com](mailto:JAY.BEAUDOIN@domtar.com)<mailto:tamarack@teachingdrum.org>amarack's **comment:** These are all good direction indicators, which are quite reliable when there is no sun or we find ourselves without map and compass. I've made a study of this topic and have come up with over two dozen ways that snow gives direction. Here are a few others: looking closely at the snow, it is often possible to see the penetration of the sun's rays from the south; snow will slide first off conifer branches on the sunny south side of the tree; a tree's snow shadow will lay opposite the direction from which the storm came; crusted snow often indicates a southern exposure, and fluffy snow, a northern exposure.

Thanks to John, Evan, Katie, and Luke for your great input. Following are a couple more stumpers to give your brain cells a good workout. Don't worry about whether or not you have the perfect answer; what is important is that you are engaging in the process of discovery, which helps to awaken your innate tracking skills. Please send your answers to “Quiz” at tamarack@teachingdrum.org <mailto:tdrums2@newnorth.net> or Teaching Drum Outdoor School, 7124 Military Road, Three Lakes, WI 54562.

New Questions:

1. If you come upon an open valley in the Forest, would you walk down or across it in order to find the most animal tracks?

2. Which way would you follow a set of tracks in order to learn the most about the animal, and perhaps even see him?