



## "Winter Tracks"

Have you ever been walking in the woods, or out in your yard, and seen what looks like tracks from some form of wildlife that had been visiting? Some are easier to identify than others. Some are just a partial print, but then sometimes you are able to see those that are as clear as the nose on your face.

Certain conditions make it easier to view paw or hoof prints, such as; after it rains, or my favorite, after it snows. Anytime it snows here in the mountains, no matter how cold it may be, I bundle up, grab my camera, and take a trek through the woods to see what I can find.

But then sometimes I don't

have far to go! Recently I was awakened about 1:30am by the sound of banging on my kitchen window. After getting out of bed, with flashlight in hand, I began to investigate what was making the noise. I discovered that the bird feeder hanging by my kitchen window had been knocked down and was not visible from where I was standing. Knowing that whatever it was that decided to rudely awaken me so early was probably out in my yard enjoying the birdseed in the feeder, I decided to wait until the morning to see if I could figure out what it was that had knocked it down.

After a little while and after going back to sleep, I was once again awaked by the same sound, bang, bang, bang, this time against my dining room

window, I immediately shined the flashlight at the window and could see the feeder swinging back and forth. I looked around and could see nothing around that may have caused it. So once again I decided to investigate this in the morning.

After daylight broke, I went out in the frigid morning air to see what had so rudely awakened me during the night. I searched around for the feeder that had been knocked down, and discovered it in several pieces about 30 feet from where it had been stolen. There were multiple teeth marks which led me to believe it may have been a bear. I looked around on the ground below the window area where it had been hanging and surmised the following:

***One: I realized it had to***

*have had a reach of about five feet to knock the feeder down*

*Two: that it had left several paw prints on the ground and on the kitchen window. Muddy, large prints were visible and were identifiable as either a bear or South Eastern Puma. If it were a puma, this would have been the second time one had been around my home in the past year.*

Numerous deer tracks are always visible in the woods around my cabin, along with squirrel, raccoon, and chipmunks. I have seen many bear wandering about through the woods, but unless it had been raining, or snowing, the bear tread so lightly on the ground they seldom leave tracks. It is amazing that creatures that weigh between one-hundred and fifty, to

five hundred pounds, could walk so lightly that they leave very little evidence that they have been around.

So make it a plan in the future, especially after a light snow, to look around and see what critters may have been around your home. Contact me through my website if you are able to take photos of these, whether you are able to identify them, or not. And if not, I will attempt to shed light on what had been walking through your yard.

