

Imagine the excitement of discovering a real dinosaur footprint trail! Harness children's fascination with dinosaurs to extend their knowledge and understanding of the world about creatures from the past. The tactile dinosaur footprint stones open up many avenues for investigation, both indoors and outside.

Fossil footprint find

Did you know that a few lucky children have discovered real fossilised dinosaur footprints? The children in your setting could experience a similar thrill of discovery as they uncover a mysterious dinosaur footprint trail. To create this, simply roll out some play dough over the floor of a tray and use one or two of the stones to make a trail – perhaps with some leaves or other natural materials loosely covering the trail, for the children to look under.



- What animal could have made this footprint trail?
- Tell the children how large the footprints would be in real life – now what animal do they think it might be?
- What do the children notice about the shape of the feet?
- What might the dinosaur have been doing? Looking for food – or maybe escaping from a bigger dinosaur?
- A trail outside in sand could lead to a plant or bush, with a dinosaur figure hidden behind it – can the children spot the dinosaur as they carefully peep through the leaves? Be careful that the dinosaur doesn't notice you tracking it – it might be hungry!

- Children will enjoy making their own footprint trails in play dough or sand, developing their fine motor skills as they learn how much pressure to apply to get a clear print.
- If you type 'dinosaur footprints' into a search engine, you'll find plenty of images of real fossilised dinosaur footprints for children to look at.

Dig and discover

Budding palaeontologists will love digging for the stones in sand or soil – which is great for imaginative role play, and developing investigative and fine motor skills:

- Provide everything a palaeontologist needs to get into role: sun hat, spades, sieves, buckets, magnifying glasses, different-sized brushes, soapy water, clipboards, and even a tent.
- Encourage children to brush any loose sand or soil off the stones and examine the fine details – such as the dinosaurs' horns, teeth or claws.
- Children can record their findings by taking a rubbing of the stone footprint using a wax crayon, or by pressing it into clay to create an impression.
- Alternatively, you could use the stones as part of an outdoor dinosaur scavenger hunt, along with dinosaurs figures – do any of the stones show the same dinosaur as the figures?



Dinosaur detectives

With dinosaurs, there's so much to talk about and investigate – even for children who are experts already!

- Sort the stones by different characteristics – this could be what the dinosaurs ate, or how many toes they had. (Dinosaurs with three long toes were probably able to run fast on two feet.)
- Match the stones to dinosaur figures, or to printed dinosaur pictures.
- Encourage children to think about any questions they have about these dinosaurs, and research the answers together in a book or on a child-friendly website – maybe the children want to know how fast they could run, what they ate or whether they lived in groups.



Big feet!

To give children an idea of how impressively big these animals were, you could copy one of the simpler footprint shapes onto a large piece of paper, at the right scale – for example, a Triceratops and Tyrannosaurus rex's feet were about 1m (3 feet) long.

- Talk about how small the children's feet are in comparison – you could even draw around their feet inside the dinosaur footprint and see how many fit inside it
- To take the activity outside, you could draw the footprints to scale with chalk on a hard surface – children will love jumping from one footprint to another or pretending they're tracking a huge dinosaur!

Get talking – useful words

Palaeontologist, uncover, fossil, predator, prey, hunt, track, carnivore, herbivore, past, extinct

Books about dinosaurs

Stomp, Chomp, Big Roars! Here Come the Dinosaurs! by Kaye Umansky

Harry and the Dinosaurs series by Ian Whybrow

Tyrannosaurus Drip by Julia Donaldson

The Girl and the Dinosaur by Hollie Hughes

