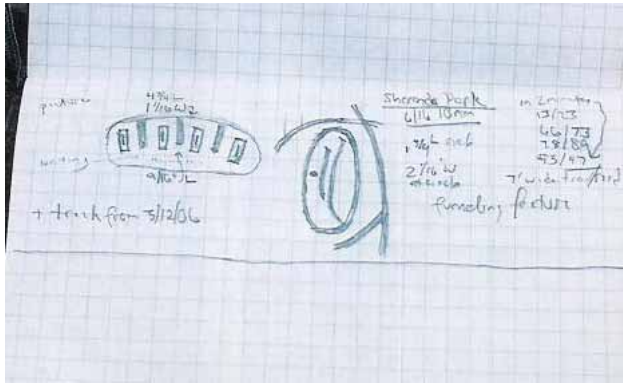


How Many People Does It Take to Trash The Track Line? By Mark Gleason (SARTI)

You often hear that too many people have been tramping over the PLS, and that all of the tracks related to the subject have been trashed. But precisely how many people does it take to trash the subject's footprints?

I was at the local park, picked three sets of tracks that were interesting, and proceeded to draw the most identifiable features in two of the three. The left photo below from my field journal depicts these two features. The tracks began to enter a 7 foot wide, 40 foot long dirt road (right photo). The road section is bordered by dense vegetation. The tracks were entering from the top.



I was sitting by the top left of the road making the drawings when I heard an approaching sound...sort of like a stampede of wild horses. Within the next 3 minutes, 97 day campers entered the road from the top right and proceeded down the road. "Hey, search and rescue dude, what are you doing?" was asked by a number of the campers. I've learned that it is good to wear a SAR t-shirt when tracking. It helps explain what I am doing, and often starts some interesting conversations.

The fine dust on the road rose into a cloud as the other kids sang camp songs. I thought that it was probably time to find some other tracks to follow. These tracks were definitely trashed by the campers, who were all over the road. Do the math. How many footfalls do you imagine fell on this short stretch of road?

I walked down the road to see what the passing horde did to the track line. To my surprise, and as you can see from the representative photos on the next page, the 97 day campers actually missed a number of tracks. It was quite amazing. I counted at least five clearly identifiable examples of each track in this narrow 7 foot by 40 foot stretch of road. (Note: the top photo is slightly distorted due to my attempt to fit it on the page)

I was showing these photos to my son. He offered that, perhaps, the day campers were walking together in a natural cadence. He said that people in closely packed groups tend to walk in each other's steps naturally, as a means of avoiding tripping over each other. Perhaps this is why they missed these critical spots. Not a bad explanation from a video-game playing teenager.



So, there you go! How many people does it take to trash a track line? Is it ever too late to try? We know it is never too late. But now I have a great story to make my point with.