






## Stick-Drag Game

 CORE ROUTINES	Questioning and Tracking, Expanding the Senses, Listening for Bird Language, Mapping
 CHILD'S PASSIONS	Chasing, Following Mysteries, Playing Detective, Role-Playing
 BOOK OF NATURE	Mammals and Birds
 NATURAL CYCLE	East: Inspire and South: Focus
 INDICATORS OF AWARENESS	Agility and Aliveness, Inquisitive Focus, Common Sense

### Primer

Human hunters long-ago used a special type of hunting, called Persistence Hunting. Scientists say this represents one of the oldest forms of hunting, but it's also one of the riskiest. If someone has not trained well enough, they could die. Basically, on a very hot day, you chase after an animal for hours until it overheats and collapses. I once saw a video of an African San Bushman tracker and hunter do this. He waited for a very hot day—over 110 degrees Fahrenheit—and then went out tracking in the sandy lands. He picked up the very fresh trail of one of the biggest animals they hunt—a kudu. He jogged after the tracks until finally he saw the herd of these huge beasts. Then the chase was on.

He started jogging after them. Soon it became apparent which one was the weakest and most vulnerable and he followed that one. The sun got hotter and as he chased this animal, barefoot, across the hot sand, hour after hour passed. Often the Kudu would get so far ahead he would have to track as he ran along. For five hours he ran and ran, never stopping for a break. Then the tracks began to show that the animal was getting tired and soon enough the sweating hunter stood eye-to-eye with this handsome animal who cannot sweat like us humans, but whose hairy body keeps all the heat locked up inside, until they overheat. After more than six hours, the hunter had done it. He then used his spear to kill it and took its meat back to his people. When he returned, there was singing and feasting.



Some biologists say this form of hunting helped humans evolve. Today humans have such hairless bodies—and the capacity to sweat—as well as the mode of walking on two feet, rather than four like nearly all the other mammals on earth. Four-legged animals move much faster than two-leggeds over short distances—like the sprinting cheetah, or the deer that bounds away into the forest after you spook it. However, at lower speeds two legs work much better for long-distance running, stamina running. Humans have even been known to hunt cheetahs in this same manner and beat horses in 100-mile races—out-running them over a long distance. Scientists from different specialized areas, including genetics, archaeology, and biology theorize that Persistence Hunting helped determine the biology of all humans, having originated in similar savannas of Africa. Some people also say that our ability to read—to see a shape or symbol and instantly match it up with complex ideas and images—came from thousands and thousands of years studying tracks and hunting animals on these African savannas. Interesting to think about, huh?

Now, put all those same human abilities of tracking, running, and sweating to the test. I will be the 800 pound Kudu, and you will be the persistence trackers. Do you think you can track me down?

## *How-To*

**Set-up.** Lead into this game using the story above or with a similar scenario/story, and then explain that you will only have a two-minute head start; while they close their eyes and ears, you take off running.

**Dragging a Trail.** As you run, you will drag a stick behind you on the ground, making sure to leave a noticeable trail in the ground. This game plays most easily in a sandy location, but it can also be played in forests or fields: just make sure you have a sharp-point on your stick and apply enough pressure to leave a trail. Also, make sure the stick is sturdy or else it might snap on you. You might want a partner to help out. Stick-dragging leaves me hunch-backed and cramping as I run along, not the most comfortable way to run.

**Tactical Evasion.** Give a crow call to let participants know it's time to start chasing. Continue running, even after they begin tracking you, and go on as long as you desire or until you feel truly exhausted, as in the scenario. As you drag the stick, occasionally make trailing challenging: go over some rocks or hard-packed dirt for a bit before returning to soft, easy-to-track soil. You can make this really fun for your participants by looping around behind them,

crossing back over your trail right by you as they follow with a shock. Or, if you can't take anymore running—where you “collapsed.”

## *Inside the Mind of t*

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This activity also provides a hunting hunt, allowing people to experience the thrill of this game. This game also fosters their food and those that are

Trailing someone for a long time and thinking about the When I have done this exercise, I imagine a bird's eye view of a stick-dragger might have given bird-language, so they track the bird disturbance you create

## *Alternatives and Ext*

**Repetition.** You can play this game for years, gradually making the game to see better and follow tracks

**Role Reversal.** You can let participants play a completely different yet incredible

**The Real Thing.** If large mammals tend to be a common prey source

**All Six Arts.** This game is a challenge, and the complementary



crossing back over your trail, or going in a circle and hiding so that they walk right by you as they follow your trail, eventually hiding and surprising them with a shock. Or, if you want to build up their confidence—and you just can't take anymore running—sit tight until they track themselves straight to where you “collapsed.”

### *Inside the Mind of the Mentor*

This activity can get people really excited about tracking. Something magical and exhilarating happens when you follow a set of tracks to the very animal that made them, even if it's group leader. Also, the heavy stick-drag provides easy success and confidence with tracking. For beginners and novices alike, this can open up the world of tracking to them, making it real, meaningful, and accessible.

This activity also provides a genuine simulation of the adrenaline-pumping hunt, allowing people to connect with this ancient part of our humanness. The thrill of this game sometimes stays with people for a long time to come. This game also fosters empathy for animals, both those that hunt for their food and those that are constantly threatened by being hunted.

Trailing someone for a long time across a landscape gets people noticing and thinking about the lay of the land in ways that they haven't before. When I have done this exercise as a tracker, my mind automatically starts to imagine a bird's eye view of a map of the land as I try to anticipate where the stick-dragger might have gone. You can also emphasize the involvement of bird-language, so they track you not just the dragging stick track, and notice the bird disturbance you create in each moment.

### *Alternatives and Extensions*

**Repetition.** You can play this game repeatedly over the course of months or years, gradually making the stick drag more and more subtle as people learn to see better and follow tracks better.

**Role Reversal.** You can let participants be the Kudu, which provides a completely different yet incredibly vivid experience.

**The Real Thing.** If large mammals in your area are seasonally hunted, pretend to be a common prey species—elk, bear, wild pig, or deer.

**All Six Arts.** This game is an excellent lead-in to the study of animal trailing, and the complementary studies of track identification, gait and behavior

