What am I looking at?

**Soldier Crab (aka hermit crab):** These tracks are hard to distinguish from sea turtle hatchling tracks given their similar size and presence of a shell drag. One characteristic that sets them apart is that the shell drag is often not in the center of the track. The crab’s large claw often leaves a wider mark to one side of the shell drag than the legs on the other side. The hermit crab’s shell drag is usually very distinct.

**Ghost Crab:** These crabs scurry on the surface of the sand without dragging their shell. These tracks are usually wider than hatchling tracks. The key feature to look for is that there is no shell drag, only marks in the sand left by their pointy legs.

**Sea Turtle Hatchling:** Hatchlings typically emerge from their nest in a group effort, however, there may be some that make the journey sooner or later than the majority of their siblings. Ideally, hatchling tracks will emerge from the nest site with a straight trajectory towards the ocean, but artificial lights may cause disorientation in some areas. As the hatchling crawls towards the ocean, it leaves behind a shell drag, which is then partially covered by its rear flippers.

**Hints & Tips:** Trace the track back to the origin—if it wanders around the beach and vegetation, it is likely a crab and if it ends at a nest depression, it is likely a turtle. Ghost crabs do have burrows in the sand, but they are much smaller and more of a tunnel than a nest depression.

The center line of a hatchling’s shell drag will be equidistant to the edge of the flipper on either side. The center line of a soldier crab’s shell drag to the outside edge is often greater on one side.

Are there many or is it the same individual roaming around?

Do the tracks travel straight to the waterline? Crabs will often travel this trajectory, but look for multiple tracks with the same trajectory.

Is there a very distinctive shell drag that appears to have been the last body part that swept across the sand? This is likely a crab. The shell is often the last thing to touch the sand, erasing some marks left by the legs. Hatchlings will disrupt their own shell drag with their hind flippers in the process of crawling.