

A two-tenths of a mile walk to the mailbox at the end of the farm lane, 1056 feet down a gravelly sand (or a sandy gravel) track doesn't sound like a recipe for much adventure. And yet, there is always something to see, hear, or experience on that short walk.

Out our gate and circling the north curve of the horses' round pen with a little turn to the left and it is a straight shot to the mailbox. The one hundred and forty feet on the west side of the hay barn is sometimes avoided—if it is raining or snowing—by going through the building instead. Usually, though, it is pleasant following the west wall of the hay barn down through three gates—almost always open—past the garage and the other house, and down the main lane to the road.

But, that sandy lane reveals to me a lot about the nighttime occupants of this farm. We aren't the only beings to call this piece of land "home." Some of the other residents seem to be here only at night, while others trod the lane back and forth, across and around, both night and day.

Today, for example, I saw raccoon tracks, an almost daily occurrence. I believe they come every night to make sure we haven't left the chicken tractor door open for their convenience. And, we have not. The hens are safe so far this summer.

An opossum had traveled the lane, too. We sometimes see them around the barn, and they, too, have nothing against chicken or eggs for a tasty meal.

The Canada geese had crossed the lane, and the sinuous trail of a snake disappeared in the grass at the edge of the track. And a snapping turtle not only left its mark; it was still in sight, slowly making its way to the little pond in the field.

I walk carefully, though I am not a follower of Jainism, and try not to disturb the small mounds of sand brought to the surface by those little ants I have heard called "pavement ants." Apparently, they are a bother to some people, but I just step lightly and watch where I am going and try to avoid crushing the little creatures or their creations.

Black Kitty, the stray neighborhood cat that we seldom see at the barn this time of year, has also been here regularly on his route, though, because I see his tracks. He comes and checks his food dish now and then, probably when the hunting hasn't been satisfactory.

There are always whitetail deer tracks crossing the lane, too, and as is usual for this time of year, I notice that a tiny fawn has accompanied its mother from the West Field to the East Field.

Once in a while a track tells me that a coyote has ventured partway up the lane, but we have never had one of those canines around the farm buildings.

And watching over all of this life is the little kestrel falcon that sits on the power line that crosses the lane.

These are just some of the signs that the animal population leaves on "our" lane. I wonder if some of them sniff a bit at the muck shoe tracks or the print of a running shoe and wonder what those foreign creatures have been doing on their lane.