

## Bushprints Jewellery – the Design Process

My aim is to make a piece of jewellery that reflects the animal's footprint and is sympathetic in shape and design to the animal track. I want to provide tourists, travellers and animal lovers with a permanent memento of a unique experience; coming across an animal in the bush, watching it eat, rest, snort, scratch, whatever.

Every time I design a piece it becomes an

adventure. The research often reveals unusual facts that give me fond memories of a particular animal. For instance, research into the echidna taught me that originally, museums in Europe mistakenly displayed the hind foot back-to-front. You can see why when you observe the animal walking. And I loved finding out that echidnas are loners, roamers and escape artists who can even shimmy up the inside of drainpipes!



**An echidna called Queenie – the picture shows the toes on her hind foot pointing backwards**

The next part of the process is to identify an iconic footprint of the animal I'm researching. Then I have to draw it into a silhouette that

is easily recognizable yet simple enough to be cut out of precious metal in a small enough size without losing its substance or shape.

Once I have the design of the footprint as realistic as possible, I photocopy it many times and design a shape around it which I feel is most sympathetic. Then I make the piece in silver, refining the design until I am satisfied.

The actual piece always has a slightly different appearance to a flat drawing. I also have to think about things like weight, not only because of the use of precious metal but also the pull on one's earlobes!



**A stylised design of the footprint; the final silver pendant; a sketch of an echidna from a picture**

The final design stage is to draw a picture of the animal and cull all the facts I've learnt about it to a few short observations to go on the sleeve of the box. The hardest part is deciding what to leave in and what to leave out.

been prepared in a standing posture with the toes spread, so were perfect footprints, if not recognisable tracks. Walter pressed these feet into a soft substrate (if I recall correctly it was pink Play Doh), and sent me photographs of the results, along with a lot of interesting facts about the Wedgetail Eagle.

Two of the most challenging designs I've done to date are the Wedgetail Eagle and the Saltwater Crocodile or 'saltie'. The Wedgetail Eagle flies, so their footprints are not often seen. The crocodile does walk on sand and mud, but the tail dragging behind the feet make it a messy, rather indistinctive track. These aspects are not conducive to obviously recognisable prints, but the animals are so iconic to Australia that they had to be included in the range.

I've been given very generous and enthusiastic support from conservationists, wildlife researchers and enthusiasts.

A resourceful man of science by the name of Dr Walter Boles (from the Australian Museum) helped me with the eagle. He used eagle feet they had preserved at the museum for educational activities. These had



**Eagle print in play-doh – kindly supplied by Dr Walter Boles (with my clarifying pen-lines)**

The search for a crocodile track also provided some wonderful experiences. I first met Chris Parker (then working at Ballarat Wildlife Park.) Chris not only lifted his shirt to show me the Wedgetail Eagle claw scars on his chest, he also happily held a thrashing young crocodile named Eric in his hands so I could photograph its feet. Sadly the photographs were not usable. Eric, despite being half my size, scared me with his vigorous thrashing; my frantic



**“Saltie” footprint cufflinks**

backpedalling combined with his wild movements made for very out-of-focus pictures. But Chris’s enthusiasm and interaction with wildlife was a wonderful thing to experience.

The man who rescued me from having to rely on my poor photography is Dr Alan Britton (at Crocodilian.com), who sent me a number of photos of croc tracks in the mud.



**Chris Parker holding Eric**



**Eric’s back foot**

Perhaps this is the best part of what I do; the support and knowledge sharing I have experienced from so many wildlife enthusiasts, sanctuaries and stockists. There are so many, far more than I can give credit to. Because of their conservation efforts, the animals I love continue to exist, and I am able to continue to do what I love.