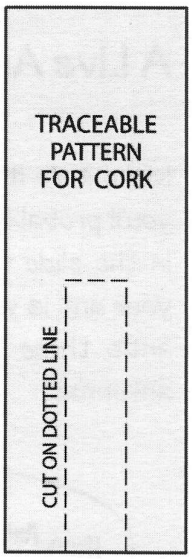
Making a Slide Trap

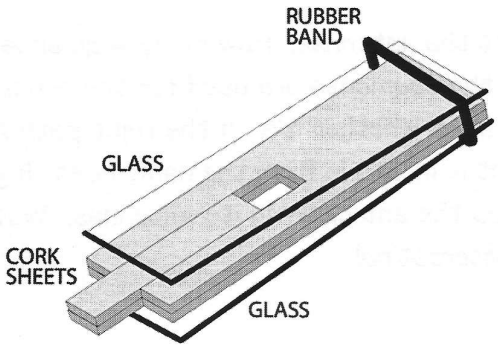
A slide trap is useful for viewing live insects up close without hurting them, or dead insects without touching them.



What You Need: your pocket microscope, 2 glass slides, 2 tiny rubber bands, forceps, 2 sheets of cork. You provide a pair of scissors and possibly a jar or insect net for catching the bugs.

Building Your Slide Trap:

First, cut slots out of the cork rectangles following this example. Keep all pieces.



Now make a sandwich with the glass slides on the outside and the cork sheets on the inside. Hold your sandwich together with the tiny rubber bands. The cork tongues you cut can now slide in and out to make room for the insects.

For thicker insects, use two layers of cork. For thinner insects, like small ants, use one layer.

Viewing Live Insects

Start with the slide trap open: top slide off, cork tongue most of the way out. Gently pick up a harmless insect and drop it into the slot in the cork. (Check with your parents - some insects bite or sting.) Quickly cover the insect with the top slide and put on the rubber bands. Now push in the cork tongue until the insect is trapped in a small place, but not squished. When you are done viewing the insect you can put it back where you found it.

With the microscope light on, use your microscope to look through the slide trap toward a light or the daytime sky. This will give you an excellent view of the creature, and from two sides! Don't look at the sun; that's dangerous.

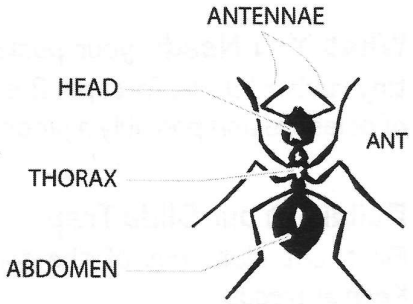
Viewing Dead Insects

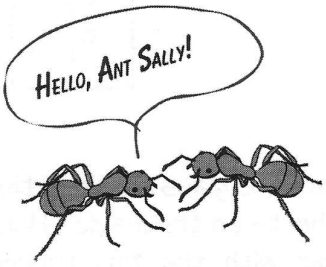
To observe a dead insect without touching it, just use the forceps to place the insect in the trap. Some live insects move too fast to be placed in the trap. To kill them without damaging them for viewing, put them in a jar in the freezer. Ask permission first!

Some Interesting Things to Look At In Your Slide Trap

A Live Ant

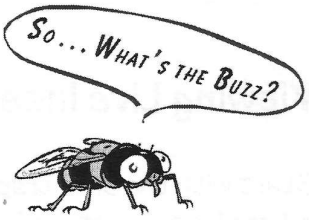
Make sure it's not the kind that bites, because you'll probably have to use your fingers to put it in the slide trap. Use one layer of cork unless your ant is very big. Of course, you will see the ant's three body segments, six legs and two antennae.





Look more closely at the antennae. How many segments do you see? Some of the segments are used for the sense of smell! An ant can smell whether it's on the right path and whether another ant it meets is from the same nest. If you are lucky you will see the ant cleaning its antennae. Watch this carefully. It is interesting!

A Fly (Deceased)



Don't touch it; it could have germs. Use the forceps to put it in the slide trap. Use two layers of cork.

A fly in the air may look like a buzzing blob, but under the microscope you can see the three distinct body segments. Is a fly revolting or beautiful? Check out the fly's hairy body, multi-faceted eyes and iridescent wings. (Iridescent means reflecting colors where there are no colors, as soap bubbles do.) What do you think of the fly?

In their basic form, insects have four wings, but the fly has only two. What happened to the other two wings? They have been turned into club-shaped balancing bars. Can you see these clubs behind the wings?