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How Do Ants Find the Way?



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One Ant, One Crumb

Mina spotted one black garden ant beside a crumb from a fallen red berry. No ant parade followed it. No tiny leader waved a flag. Mina stayed on the path with a grown-up, hands safely away, and wondered, "How will the other ants know where to go?"





An Invisible Message

The ant picked up a bit of berry and headed toward its nest. As it walked, it left tiny amounts of a scent signal called a pheromone along the ground. People cannot see this trail. In our picture, turquoise dots are only a diagram overlay that helps us follow the invisible route.

Antennae Find the Trail

Near the nest, other ants swept their antennae close to the ground. Their antennae sensed the pheromone. At a fork, one route had the scent signal and the other did not. The ants turned onto the scented route and headed toward the berry crumb.

TALK ABOUT IT

Which route will the ants' antennae detect?





A Stronger Team Route

Ants carried berry bits toward the nest, then returned along the useful route. On each trip back, more ants added pheromone. A route with a stronger scent was easier for nestmates to follow, so the quiet line of ants grew busy in both directions—without one ant giving orders.

> **TALK ABOUT IT**
> More returning ants can add pheromone and strengthen a useful trail. True or false?

When the Message Fades

Soon the berry crumb was gone. With no food to collect, fewer ants returned and the old scent was not renewed. Pheromone fades over time, so the trail became harder to follow and the ants searched elsewhere. Mina smiled from the path. Many tiny scent signals had made one remarkable team route.



Check your wonder

1 **How do ants detect a pheromone trail?**

- **A.** With their antennae
- **B.** By seeing a bright line
- **C.** By hearing the ground call

2 **What can make a useful ant trail stronger?**

- **A.** More returning ants add pheromone
- **B.** One ant draws a permanent map
- **C.** The berry makes a visible road

3 **Why did the old trail fade after the berry was gone?**

- **A.** Fewer ants renewed it, and pheromone fades
- **B.** The trail became bored
- **C.** The ants erased painted dots

ANSWERS 1-A 2-A 3-A

1. Correct. Ants sweep their antennae near the ground and sense the pheromone. 2. Yes. Repeated returning trips add more scent to the route, making it easier to follow. 3. Exactly. Without ants adding fresh pheromone, the temporary scent signal faded.

THE END

Put your child in this story

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