Making Your Own Custom Feet

The process of making your own foot stencils is reasonably simple, and the possibilities are endless: your own feet, your baby's feet, different types of shoes, different animals, alien feet...

The file format needed is a 32-bit image that includes an 8-bit alpha (or transparency) channel.   The TIFF file format is recommended as one that is known to work well. TIFF files can be in many different formats, however, so you need to make sure that your TIFF files are in exactly the right format.   You should consult the manual of your image editing application for information about how to produce such an image; since there are many image editors out there, it's not possible to give a set of directions that will work for everyone.

The alpha channel supplies the transparency information that determines what the "outline" of the foot is, so for most foot stencils, it is the only channel with any interesting information in it — the 24-bit RGB channel is typically completely black.   More sophisticated stencils can contain information in the RGB channel that will affect the appearance of the feet, but that gets very complex and is not recommended for those starting out.

BigFoot uses the graphics engine from Aquatint to produce the different foot-coloration effects it creates.   A longer tutorial on the intracacies of stencil-making can be found in Aquatint's manual at http://www.sticksoftware.com/software/AquatintManual.html, in the section on Stencil-making.   It includes step-by-step instructions using GraphicConverter (one popular image-editing application that works fairly well for stencil-making).   The longer tutorial is not included in this distribution because it is quite large, due to the images included in it.

Once you have made your foot images, you can put them at ~/Library/BigFoot (~ being your home directory; you might need to create the ~/Library/BigFoot folder if it doesn't already exist).   They will then appear as choices in the pop-up menus that you get when you click on the foot image wells in BigFoot's preferences panel.   If the stencils are well-formed, all of BigFoot's display options should work with no further work on your part; consider it magic!

This distribution should include images called "leftTheropod.tiff" and "rightTheropod.tiff" that you can look at as an example of how to make your own foot images.   They are the feet of a type of dinosaur, and were created by Armin Briegel (armin@briegel.de), the German localizer for BigFoot 2.0.   They are typical foot stencils, in that their RGB channel is completely black, and the information about the outline of the feet is contained in the alpha channel.   Apple's Preview.app is a good program to look at these stencils in; many older programs will display only black, because they do not correctly interpret the alpha channel information.   Just put them in ~/Library/BigFoot and they will be available to you as foot choices.

With luck, this brief description will get you making your own foot stencils!   If you make stencils that you think are worthy of being publicly distributed, feel free to send

them to us at feet@sticksoftware.com, and they may be included in a future release of BigFoot, or in a separate distribution.

- Ben Haller (bhaller@sticksoftware.com)