

ACTIVEfamily

MAGAZINE

Serving Southeast CT and South County RI

Your Guide to Fun, Healthy Activities, Ideas, Books, the Arts, Games and More!

How Do I



Letterbox?

Wanna go on a real treasure hunt? Check out letterboxing! Combining the best of several kinds of fun...exploration, navigation, deciphering...letterboxing gets you outside and using your smarts to find "treasure": (1) the box (You did it! Congratulations!) and (2) camaraderie with a slightly secret, slightly ancient society of passionate "stamping up" aficionados. Stamping up happens when you open the box and use the provided stamp and ink pad to mark your journal and then mark the box's logbook with your special "signature" stamp, thus joining the league of other successful seekers.

Letterboxing started back in 1854. A Victorian gentleman stashed a bottle with his calling card in it at Cranmere Pool in remote Dartmoor, England. Other walkers found the bottle and left their cards too. This modest beginning eventually raised letterboxing to a national pastime in England. Today there are thousands of letterboxes hidden in Dartmoor National Park alone, and tens of thousands more scattered across England. When The Smithsonian ran an April 1998 article about the Dartmoor tradition, love for letterboxing here in the States began to grow. Now there are troves of letterboxes hidden all over the US...in parks, cities and forests...and enough here in

Southeast CT and South County RI to keep you hunting for years!

Here are the basics you need to know about letterboxing:

Clues

Clues are the directions to the letterbox. They start you at a readily-found location then direct you through a series of steps to find the letterbox. Generally, the box is well hidden so it can't be found by the casual observer. Before you set out, you may wish to locate a trail map of the letterbox area to help guide you. Here are two great sites to get you started with clues: www.letterboxing.org and www.atlasquest.com. Check out *Been There, Love That* on page 3 for information about letterboxing in Connecticut State Forests.

Essential Tools

- **Rubber Stamp** ~ pick a favorite one from a craft store. You can also make your own! Check out www.letterboxing.org/kids/ for easy to do instructions.
- **Ink Pad** ~ so you can stamp the letterbox logbook with your favorite color.
- **Pen or Pencil** ~ to record facts (weather, date, companions' names) and interesting notes about your experience finding the letterbox. It's appropriate to record such notes in the box's logbook.

- **Journal or Sketchbook** ~ to record all the fabulous stamps you'll collect!
- **Compass** ~ most letterbox clues don't require one, but you may wish to brush up on your compass skills anyway and take it along. It also serves you well when doing more advanced letterboxing.

When You Find a Box

What fun! It's a grand moment and you deserve to cherish it. Here's a bit of information and etiquette to guide you:

- Letterboxing is an environmentally friendly activity. The water-tight box (usually a food storage container) should be accessible without having to damage nearby vegetation, rock formations or animal habitat. You may have to push some leaves or sticks around or lift a rock though.
- When signing the letterbox logbook you can use your own name or you can use a special made-up trail name ~ it adds to the fun and mystery.
- If you're in a public area with passersby, make sure they don't see you retrieve the box. It's possible somebody might not respect it.
- Carefully re-wrap contents and place them back in the box as you found them (or better if need be). Bring extra ziplock bags in case you find a box with worn out packaging. Place the box back in its hiding place and leave it as you would wish to find it.

Create Your Own Letterbox

Once you've had a taste of hunting for letterboxes, you may wish to create your own box; visit www.letterboxing.org/faq for instructions and good luck!