



Penn Laurel Girl Scout Council

PLGSC Leadership Weekend – January 31, 2003

Adventures in Letterboxing

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This handout available online at <http://www.letterboxing.info/PLGS/>

Letterboxing Basics

Every letterbox includes:

Rubber stamp and log book in sturdy waterproof container (often in zip loc bags).

May include a certificate for the first finder, pre-addressed postcards to be sent to the planter, ink pad, pencil or pen, "About letterboxing" flyer, your e-mail address.

Your letterbox kit should include:

Your personal journal and stamp

Pencil or pen

Ink pad (or several), or water-based markers

Paper towels (some damp in baggie) for cleanup (no baby wipes!)

Extra baggies to repair any weather-damaged letterboxes you find

Compass

Also consider bringing or wearing:

Sturdy hiking footwear

Gloves (for turning over rocks and reaching into dark places)

First aid kit

Drinking water & snacks

Choose a "trail name."

Your personal stamp should reflect it.

Finding a Letterbox

Letterboxing North America has clues to 7,000 letterboxes on its Web site:

- <http://www.letterboxing.org>

You'll find letterboxes hidden in parks, libraries, stores – anywhere imaginable!

Difficulty ranges from easy "drive-by" boxes to those requiring 20-mile hikes.

- "Know before you go!" so you don't get pushed beyond your limits.

Many require a compass – know how to use it!

- <http://www.learn-orienteeing.org/old/>

Don't be disappointed when you can't find a letterbox – enjoy the quest, not the result.

Making & Decorating a Journal or Log

Record your finds in your personal journal.

A sturdy blank book (with unlined pages) works well.

Each letterbox needs a log; you can either:

1. Adapt a store-bought pad:
 - Strathmore 4" x 6" sketch pads
 - 4" x 6" spiral bound index cards (use blank banks)
 - Memo pads with unlined pages
 - Then replace or decorate the covers as desired.
2. Or make your own from scratch:
 - A variety of simple bookbinding techniques can be used, either simple or fancy.
 - <http://www.letterboxing.info/links/?id=86>

Making a Personal or Letterbox Stamp

Purists prefer hand-carved over store-bought stamps.

Carving isn't as hard as you might think!

Carving materials

1. Vinyl or plastic erasers:
 - Available at dollar, discount or office supply stores.
2. Soft block material (Speedy-Stamp, MasterCarve):
 - Available at crafts stores.
3. Fun Foam:
 - 1/4" thick variety sold at crafts stores as door hangers.
Works well for images without a lot of detail.
 - 1/8" thick variety sold in sheets.
Can be cut with scissors and glued on a mount (great for younger kids).

Choose or create an image

1. Draw directly on the stamp surface.
 - Remember that text must be mirror image!
2. Or transfer to stamp surface with tracing paper and pencil.
3. Some photocopiers produce copies that can be transferred using an iron.

Carve the stamp

X-acto knife works fine for many letterboxers.

Other carvers like a Speedball linoleum cutter.

Work slowly and carefully, and don't start with a finely-detailed or small stamp for your first efforts.

Primary rule – don't undercut the image.

Two approaches to carving:

- Negative image (easy with a lino cutter)
- Positive image
- Can be combined in one image

Great tutorial on carving:

- <http://www.geocities.com/rscarpn/Lb/Docs/Carving>

Mount your stamp

Optional, though offers durability and ease of stamping.

Mount on sealed block of wood with image on top for nice-looking end result.

- <http://www.letterboxing.info/articles/00000012.shtml>

Planting a Box

Find an appropriate hiding place

Ideally, should be obvious to someone who's looking for it, but out of sight of passers-by.
Should be protected from the elements as much as possible, such as:

- Hollow of a tree
- Old stone wall
- Beneath a formation of boulders

Get permission from land manager if necessary.

Create a Clue

Simple approach:

- Use a combination of paces, compass bearings and landmarks to guide visitors to the hiding place.

More creative approaches:

- Create a puzzle which must be solved in order to figure out the directions.
- Write the clue in verse.
- Embed the clue in a story, such as a work of historical fiction.
- Tie the clue to the natural environment (tree or plant identification, geology).

Make sure your landmarks are unique!

- That "V-shaped tree" may look like a good landmark, but seekers may see dozens of similar trees.

Consider seasonal conditions and ever-changing nature:

- A "bushy plant" may not be bushy year-round.
- A rotting log on the ground will turn into mulch, a dead tree may fall in an ice storm.

Publish Your Clue (If Desired)

Distribute clue sheets to friends,

Or publish online (such as at the LBNA Web site) to make available to others.

Maintain Your Letterbox

Check on it periodically.

Finders may send reports to help you know when maintenance is required.

Keeping Track of Letterboxing Adventures

Letterboxers maintain a personal "PFX" count

Counts Planted, Found & Exchanged letterbox stamps

Example: "P23 F46 X04"

Many letterboxers use their journals as a diary of their quests.

Observe Principles of Outdoor Ethics & General Safety

- "Leave No Trace" when hiding or seeking a letterbox.
- Be aware of outdoor hazards (spiders, poison ivy, bears, snakes).
- Be smart about outdoor safety (don't hike alone, be prepared for the unexpected).
- Don't hide letterboxes in ecologically-sensitive areas.
- Don't letterbox near railroads, cliffs or other potentially dangerous areas.
- Don't letterbox in security-sensitive areas.
- Do label outside of letterboxes so that inadvertent finders won't consider them potential threats.
- Don't letterbox in National Parks (it's not permitted).
- Don't letterbox on private property without permission.

Benefits of Letterboxing

- To build teamwork skills
- To learn to identify trees, plants, other natural elements
- To improve outdoors skills
- To provide a creative outlet
- To learn about history
- To have ample amounts of fun!

More to Learn!

- Hitchhikers
- Cuckoo Clues
- Personal Travellers
- Mystery letterboxes
- Virtual letterboxes
- Postal letterboxes

For More Information

Letterboxing North America

<http://www.letterboxing.org>

LBNA Talk List

<http://groups.yahoo.com/letterbox-usa>

Silent Doug's Letterboxing.Info

<http://www.letterboxing.info>

The Letterboxer's Companion

Book, by Randy Hall, 2003.

Upcoming Letterbox Gathering

Sunday, February 29, 2004, 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Green Lane Nature Center

Montgomery County (north of Philadelphia)

Classes (for all ages), special letterbox hunts, pot luck lunch, and more!

<http://www.letterboxing.info/events/>

Letterbox Stamp Gallery



Spring Chick



Silent Doug



ScoutDogs



Silent Doug



Turtle McQ



Chuck & Molly



Turtle McQ



*A Bone For Fido
Spring Chick*



ScoutDogs



Silent Doug



Der Mad Stamper



Silent Doug



Der Mad Stamper



Spring Chick



Spring Chick



*KOO KOOSE
Silent Doug*

Carving Practice



