



Letterboxing on Girl Scouts of North East Ohio Property

Activity Overview

The purpose of this packet is to provide information about the exciting hobby of Letterboxing. For Girl Scout Brownies and older, it expands further on the Brownie Letterboxing badge. For older girls who are interested in this fun activity, it has the information you need to get started. The clues to all Letterboxes on GSNEO property can be found with your Camp Coach.

What is Letterboxing?

Letterboxing is an intriguing “treasure hunt” style outdoor activity. Letterboxing is a hobby that had its roots in England in the mid-1800s. In its modern configuration, the participant carves (or purchases) a rubber stamp which says something about herself, and obtains a small notebook and a stamp pad. Using clues available at gsneo.org, you can head out to find a letterbox.

Once a letterbox is found, you will find a rubber stamp and a small book. The finder stamps the box's stamp into her book, and stamps her stamp into the box's book -- replacing everything as she found it. GSNEO has a list of all Letterboxes located at Camp Timberlane, Camp LedgeWood, and Camp Sugarbush. For more information on the Letterboxes found at our camp properties, you can ask your Camp Coach or contact the Program Dept. by emailing programs@gsneo.org. All Letterboxes on GSNEO property are not to be publicized on any websites, as they are intended for Girl Scouts only.

What is the history of Letterboxing?

Letterboxing is said to have started in England in 1854 when a Dartmoor National Park guide, James Perrott of Chagford, left a bottle by Cranmere Pool with his calling card in it as an invitation to those who found the bottle to add theirs. Eventually, visitors began leaving a self-addressed post card or note in the jar, hoping for them to be returned by mail by the next visitor (thus the origin of the term “Letterboxing;” “letterbox” is a British term for a mailbox). This practice ended in time, however, and the current custom of using rubber stamps and visitor's log books came into use. It caught on in the US in 1998 after an article in Smithsonian magazine.

Who hides them?

The letterboxes that are available at GSNEO properties are hidden by other troops in North East Ohio.

What should we watch out for?

This is an “at your own risk” activity. Whatever could happen while you're out hiking could happen when you are Letterboxing. You could fall, **get poison ivy, get stung, get cut, etc. Don't do** something dangerous just to get a box. If you think it is dangerous, step back and go for another. Be aware of your surroundings. Some letterboxes are camouflaged. Never touch anything like that without an **adult's permission. You should not have to dig to find a box**, and you should respect the environment, whether man-made or natural. If you have any doubt about your ability to get the cache safely, skip it and choose another cache to seek.

Activities

The five steps of the Brownie Letterboxing badge involve:

1. **Getting started with Letterboxing**
2. **Find your own stamp**
3. **Practice solving clues**
4. **Search for a letterbox**
5. **Make a letterbox**

This is a great way to divide up learning about Letterboxing, so we will use that general model here and expand on it.

1. Get started with Letterboxing

The first step in preparing for your adventure involves practicing your finding skills. Have a trusted adult hide pieces of candy or trinkets around your meeting location. Once they are hidden, have your adult provide verbal or written clues to help you find the treats! Once you have practiced with an adult, split up into pairs and hide objects for your friend to find.

2. Find your own stamp

Stamps are an important part of Letterboxing. You use your own stamp to mark a special book in the letterboxes you visit, and stamp your friends books as well! Stamps can be store bought or home made. If you would like to make a stamp, make sure that you have adult supervision and receive help when needed. An easy way to make a stamp is by cutting a shape from craft foam and gluing it on a piece of wood.

Make sure that you as a troop create a stamp that will be left in your letterbox. This stamp will be kept in your troop's letterbox for other girls to use.

3. Practice solving clues

Some letterbox clues tell you exactly where to go, and some are more mysterious. Get better at solving clues by learning to write them. Think of something that you use everyday, and write a poem about it! Here is an example:

My tip is pointy,
My bottom is soft,
I help you to write,
But not at night!

What am I? (a pencil)

Once you have written your poem, pass it off to a friend to see if they can solve it.

4. Search for a letterbox

Going on a Letterboxing adventure is the fun part! Search gsneo.org or talk with your Camp Coach for a letterbox or two to go after. Remember, safety is our number one goal!

5. Make a letterbox

The final stage in the Brownie Letterboxing badge is to make a letterbox. Before making and placing a letterbox on GSNEO property, there are a few things that you need to remember:

- All troops who wish to place a Letterbox must have completed or are working towards their Letterboxing Badge.

- All troops who wish to place a letterbox on GSNEO property must receive approval from Girl Scouts of North East Ohio. To find the Letterboxing/Geocaching Application, visit gsneo.org
- All letterboxes must be clearly labeled.
- **Letterboxes must not exceed the size of a child's shoe box.**
- Letterboxes and geocaches hidden on GSNEO property are for Girl Scout use only.
- Letterboxes left of GSNEO property are not the responsibility of any agent of GSNEO.
- All Girl Scout Troops are reminded to follow all GSUSA Safety and Activity Checkpoints.

Letterbox Types

- Traditional Box- A normal letterbox, hidden and uses clue to find it.
- Mystery box -These are usually traditional boxes, but these "mystery" boxes have vague starting areas, no starting areas, no descriptions, no clue -- any number of things to make the box extremely hard to find.
- Bonus Box -The clues for these are usually found in a traditional box as an extra one to find. Usually planted in the same area as the traditional that hosts its clue. Clues can be distributed in any way.
- Word of Mouth Box (WOM) -The clue is given by word of mouth, or typed up, but a Letterboxer can only receive the clue from the planter.
- Cuckoo clue -A clue without a home. The clue is hidden in another letterbox (similar to clues for a bonus boxes), but the Letterboxer that finds the clue is expected to move the clue to another nearby letterbox. The cuckoo clue typically contains directions to limit how far the clue should travel to find a new home.
- Hitchhiker - A traveling letterbox, it is placed in a traditional letterbox for another Letterboxer to find. When found, it is stamped just like a traditional letterbox, but is then carried by the Letterboxer to the next letterbox they find and then left in that letterbox for the next finder. The hitchhiker's stamp should also be recorded in the host letterbox's logbook, and vice versa.
- Cootie- Much like a hitchhiker, except instead of being carried from letterbox to letterbox, a Letterboxer passes it to another Letterboxer. It can be passed in a Personal Traveler, or planted on another Letterboxer or their unattended bags on the trails or at gatherings. Most people are subtle about planting them—but not all.
- Flea- Like a combination of a hitchhiker and a cootie. Either put in a traditional letterbox, like a hitchhiker, or put it on a person, like a cootie.
- Limited time Box- letterbox that has only been planted for a short amount of time. (A few days or a week, any time length the planter wants.)
- Circle poem- A circle poem is a kind of 'art' letterbox developed in Britain. There are one hundred planned boxes, each of which contains a rubber stamp circle poem by the Scottish poet and artist, Alec Finlay. These are sited at locations around the world, and each has its own nominated keeper.

Terms

- Letterbox: A hidden stash whose location is found only by following clues. A traditional letterbox contains, at minimum, a rubber stamp and logbook. A letterbox's contents are usually packed in two sturdy zip lock plastic bags, and then placed in a waterproof container to protect from the elements.
- Clue: The key to finding a letterbox. A clue can be created in many different formats: in rhyme, as a riddle, as a story, with pictures or cartoons, or as directions with paces or compass headings. The only limit is your imagination!
- Clue sheet: A printed copy of clues to one or more letterboxes.

- Step: A single footfall - approximately 30 inches. Some clues incorrectly use the word pace is used to mean a single step, although a pace should only be used to mean "two footfalls."
- Pace: Traditionally, a pace is two steps - approximately 5 feet, and most Letterboxers use that definition.
- Letterbox series: Two or more letterboxes planted as a group.
- Hitchhiker: A letterbox with no permanent home. A hitchhiker is carried by a Letterboxer from one box to another, where it is left for the next visitor to find.
- Cootie: A small letterbox that is passed surreptitiously from Letterboxer to Letterboxer. Cooties originally began as an activity for kids at Letterboxing gatherings, in which kids recorded their thumbprints in a cootie and secretly passed it along to another child or adult. Cooties have evolved into a very small letterbox that can be hidden in a pocket or backpack of another Letterboxer, and thus travel from individual to individual.
- Microbox: A very small letterbox, sometimes in a container as small as a film canister.
- Litterbox: A letterbox that has been abandoned by its owner.
- Spoiler: Any information posted to a Letterboxing discussion group (or any other public location) that interprets clues, provides extra hints or otherwise helps give away the location of a letterbox, thereby spoiling the enjoyment of the search for others.
- Trail name: Most Letterboxers adopt a "trail name" which they use to sign letterbox logs. These sobriquets reflect some aspect of the **Letterboxer's** personality, and can be humorous, light-hearted or straightforward. Personal stamps usually reflect this name, as well.
- Rubber stamp: Rubber stamps are used in Letterboxing in two ways. Letterboxers have their own personal stamps, usually hand carved or custom created for that particular Letterboxer. Each letterbox also has its own stamp, which Letterboxers record in their personal journals.
- Hand carved: A rubber stamp that has been created from scratch with a knife or other carving tool.
- Personal journal: A Letterboxer's private book used to record the rubber stamp impressions of letterboxes she has found. A Letterboxer's journal might also include personal stamps exchanged with other Letterboxers, as well as event stamps.
- Logbook: Also known simply as a "log." A book included in a letterbox to record visitors to that box.
- Box in, bag out: A principle of Letterboxing aimed at helping to maintain the natural environment in which Letterboxing takes place. It's a good habit to carry a trash bag with you as you letterbox, in order to pick up any trash you find along the way. If all letterboxes would practice "Box in, bag out," it would have a significant impact on the outdoors. Leave No Trace.