



**History of Letterboxing** Letterboxing started in Dartmoor, located in the southwest corner of England

The year was 1854, and a Victorian guide named James Perrott placed a bottle in the wildest, most inaccessible area on Dartmoor, England, along the banks of Cranmere Pool. In it, he included his calling card so future visitors could contact him and leave their own calling cards. Little did anyone know, this small act would become the hobby we now know as letterboxing.

A hike to Cranmere Pool in 1854 was anything but a simple walk in the woods. This area regularly receives over 100 inches of rain each year, and the peat acts as a sponge making travel through the soft, wet ground a severe challenge. The easiest access point required a nine mile, one-way hike through this difficult terrain, and the low, undistinguished profile of Cranmere Pool meant that hikers could easily miss the pool even if they found themselves within a few hundred feet of it. Those who made it to Cranmere Pool were justifiably proud of their accomplishment and

recorded their accomplishment by including their own calling cards in the bottle. Needless to say, not many people picked up James Perrott's calling cards in those early years.

In 1888, a small tin box replaced the original bottle. Visitors left self-addressed postcards and the next person to visit the letterbox (except if it was a same-day visitor) would retrieve the postcards and mail them back from their hometown. By April 1905, another upgrade was in order—particularly a means by which the increasing number of visitors could record their attendance. For the first time, it included a logbook, and a zinc box replaced the tin box.

The first suggestion for a rubber stamp appeared in the logbook on July 22, 1907 by John H. Strother who wrote, "Reached the pool at 7.10pm, misty day with cool breeze, and would suggest that a rubber stamp, something like the post office stamps for postmarking letters or rubber stamp for putting the address at the top of a piece of notepaper be provided and kept here. If this were done it would be proof that cards posted had really come from Cranmere." The letterbox finally reached the point as we largely know it today as a box containing a logbook and a rubber stamp.

Letterboxing stayed a mostly Dartmoor-only tradition until April of 1998 when the Smithsonian magazine published a small article in the United States about this oddly British hobby found on the moors of southwest England. Many people read the article and loved this treasure hunt concept wishing it was a bit closer to home. A few readers, however, found each other through means of the relatively new Internet and decided to take matters into their own hands by hiding letterboxes for each other in the United States.

Through this effort, Letterboxing North America (LbNA) was born. By 2001, over a thousand letterboxes spotted the United States covering all 50 states. Letterboxers traveling to international locations started to plant letterboxes around the globe from Aruba to Zimbabwe.

Atlas Quest made its debut a few years later in 2004. Ryan Carpenter, an unemployed software engineer, started with the idea of allowing letterboxers to create a virtual online logbook to show off all one's finds and plants. Things often do not turn out as planned, and he ended up creating the city search making it easier than ever to find clues for letterboxes from around the world.

Source: [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com)



## Letterboxing 101



### What is Letterboxing?

Letterboxing is NOT the same as geocaching. A geocacher will use a GPS, and when they find the cache, they will sign a log, then if there is room in a cache, take a trinket and leave a trinket. Letterbox stamps sometimes go missing, because they are mistaken for take-able trinkets, by geocachers who think they've found a geocache. Both hobbies are fun – but they have different rules to follow.

Letterboxing is an intriguing pastime combining artistic ability with "treasure-hunts" in parks, forests, and cities around the world. Participants seek out hidden letterboxes by cracking codes and following clues. The prize: an image from a miniature piece of art known as a rubber stamp—usually a unique, hand-carved creation.

Letterboxers stamp their discoveries in a personal journal, and then use their own rubber stamp, called a *signature stamp*, by stamping it into the logbook found with the letterbox, perhaps writing a note about the weather or their adventures in finding the letterbox.

1. Look up a city to find if there are letterboxes to be found in that city or nearby.
2. Print out clues for finding those letterboxes, or view on device.
3. Read through the clues. Some are straightforward and fairly easy to follow. Some require research. *Some contain codes that need to be "cracked" first, so the clues can be translated into English!*
4. Gather your COMPANION (you should never letterbox alone!) and your letterboxing supplies: Signature Stamp, Stamp Pad, a pen, and your personal logbook. (Bottle of water, compass, gloves, walking stick, flashlight, -- binoculars & camera are handy when muggles (strangers who might observe you searching) are around – you can quickly pretend to be doing something else.
5. Go letterboxing! It's a great way to get out & explore with your family.

**Watch out for *Muggles*?** This term originally comes from the Harry Potter series of books, I'm told. Basically, they refer to the uninitiated – in this case, non-letterboxers (aka, *noxers*) who might be present: someone else on a hike, or our enjoying a park, or walking down the street (depending on the location of the letterbox).

**What to do if a Muggle comes along?** Well, first of all, if there are other people present, who are not part of your letterboxing group, find something else to do. If people notice you poking around, say, in the bushes – they might go investigate after you leave, and then the letterbox might not be there for the next letterboxer who comes along.

**So what do you do?** Pretend you're doing something else, until they're gone – stop and tie your shoe, sit down and have a drink of water, pull out your camera and pretend to take pictures, pull out your binoculars and bird watch.

**What to do when you find a letterbox?** First of all, don't let anybody else in your group yell out, "I found it!" Remain calm, and take the box away from its hiding place. A picnic table, a rock to sit on, someplace in the shade...etc. You get the picture.

**In the box you'll generally find:**

- A rubber stamp
- A logbook
- Each of these will likely be enclosed in a plastic bag, inside the letterbox. These help keep the contents clean and dry.

**You will have brought with you:**

- Your signature stamp (a thumbprint will work, in a pinch)
- Your stamp pad
- Your logbook
- A pen

**In your own logbook:**

1. Stamp an impression of the letterbox's stamp into your logbook.
2. Write the date, the name of the letterbox, who planted it, city and state (both where that letterboxer is from and where you found the box), who you were letterboxing with that day, and any memories you want to record about the experience.

**In the letterbox's logbook:**

1. Find the first blank page, and stamp your signature stamp on it. Put the date, sign your trail name (a name you select to use in place of your real name), and the city and state you live in. Brief comments are also appreciated. ("Beautiful day!" "Great hiding place" "Love the stamp!" "Thanks for planting this letterbox." "My first find!")
2. If you have other people letterboxing with you, try and fit as many signature stamps as possible on the same page. This way, you all get to stamp-in, but the logbook will last longer by not getting filled up so quickly.

**What next?**

1. Return your logbook and signature stamp to your bag.
2. Put the letterbox's stamp back into its bag (if separate).
3. Put the letterbox's logbook back into its bag (if separate). Place both into the outside bag, if applicable.
4. Reseal all bags, put them inside the letterbox, and reseal the letterbox so the contents are safe from nature.
5. Watch again for Muggles...
6. Re-hide the letterbox where you found it. (In rare cases, you may need to return it where the clues state it should be.)
7. Cover the box with dry leaves, dirt, or bark, if appropriate, to help hide it from non-letterboxers. A fellow letterboxer calls this "*Blessing the Box*".
8. Follow any further directions found in the letterbox clues and/or return on your own, to where you began your letterboxing journey.
9. When you arrive back home, **LOG YOUR FIND online**, either at [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com) or [www.letterboxing.org](http://www.letterboxing.org), or BOTH. Some letterbox planters list their boxes in both places, while others prefer one over the other. In time you will learn the preferences of your local letterboxers. A few actually have their own websites for clues.

☺**There will be several times you WON'T find a box – Enjoy the journey.**☺

Additional Tutorials can be found at: <http://www.atlasquest.com/tutorials/>

**Letterbox while you travel!** If you are going on vacation, whether by car or by plane, you can do a letterbox search in the areas you're passing through and the areas you're vacationing in, and expand your horizons while getting outdoors and seeing places you might never have visited otherwise.

**Happy Trails! Box'n Dox'n & Team Awesome Pants!**