

# A New Kind of Treasure Hunt

**It's creative, active, and fun for the whole family**

by Maggie Spilner

Do your kids slink between the sofa cushions when you suggest a walk? Try a treasure hunt instead, and watch them desert their Play Stations.



About 5 years ago, a new, informal treasure-hunting sport called letterboxing migrated to the US from Great Britain. The object of the hunt is to find letterboxes, which are usually hidden in natural areas such as parks. Inside the box you'll find a notebook, a unique stamp, and a stamp pad. Stamp the notebook inside the box with your personal stamp. Ta-da! You were here! Then stamp your own letterboxing notebook with the stamp you find in the box. Nearly 4,000 boxes are planted across the US and in Canada--that's a lot of stamps to collect.

Another way to enjoy letterboxing is to create and hide a box of your own. Then write up clues so others can find it.

## On a Quest

Some letterboxes are placed along a single route, and you can find several in one afternoon. Many of the clues will give you an estimate of how far you'll have to walk. Give yourself at least 30 minutes per mile when traveling with children. Remember:

You're out to enjoy the scenery and each other's company. Here's what you'll need:

**Clues to an existing letterbox** You can find loads of them online (such as [Letterboxing North America](#)). Or get some families, or your church, scouting, or other community group, to set up boxes and share clues with each other.



**Compass** Some clues recommend using one.

**Personal rubber stamp and stamp pad** It can be handmade or store bought. The idea is to use the same stamp on every quest so others will begin to recognize you when they see your stamp in a letterbox notebook. You may want to create a family stamp too.

**Map** A good safety idea if you're going to an unfamiliar area.

**Walking gear** Comfortable off-road shoes, water bottle, healthy snacks, walking poles, fanny packs or backpacks for cameras or extra clothing, whatever makes outdoor adventuring more comfortable, safe, and fun for you and your family.

## Create Your Own Box

Explore various sites to find a good location for your box. Create clues that will lead people to it. Clues can be simple and direct or mysterious and poetic. Write them down, then follow them again to make sure they work. Have some friends test your clues before you share them with others. Your letterboxes and clues can be something you share only with family and friends, or you can put them on the Web for the whole world to enjoy. Here's what you'll need:

1. A plastic container with a tight-fitting lid.
2. Plastic bags that lock shut to ensure that the contents stay dry.
3. A small notepad to register stamps--art-supply-store quality is best.
4. A unique stamp that commemorates your letterbox. It's fun if your stamp somehow reflects the area where it's hidden.
5. A community to share your clues--either online or with a private group, such as scouts or people in your

neighborhood. You could even plan a block party, and have everyone set up a letterbox. Then post the clues, and let the quest begin!



### Don't Forget

- Put letterboxes back where you find them. If a box is missing, report it, so it can be posted as such or replaced.
- Respect the environment, and honor the "leave no trace" wilderness policy. Ask permission whenever possible before placing a box, even on public land.
- Don't dig your letterboxes in or make them hazardous to find, such as placing them where someone might fall.
- Stay off all private property.

### A High-Tech Hunt

If you have a child who has a Game Boy growing on the end of his hand, or you love high-tech gadgets, try geocaching: the 21st-century treasure hunt that uses a satellite-assisted, cell phone-size compass called a Global Positioning System (GPS). Prices start at about \$100. Simply enter your location and the coordinates of the treasure (cache) into your GPS, and it will tell you in which direction to walk and how far to go.

*Former Prevention Walking Editor, Maggie Spilner, is the author of Prevention's Complete Book of Walking. She is currently organizing walking trips, lecturing, and working on a new walking book.*