Clue #1 At the wooden bridge directly behind the Nature Center building begin your journey by heading northwest toward the habitat of the New York State bird, the Eastern Bluebird. If you are headed in the correct direction, you’ll soon pass a camp with a log shack on the left and a little further beyond that a small stand of Eastern White Pine trees on your right.

Clue #2 Follow the trail in either direction until you reach a sign that means the outer boundary. Follow this trail past black raspberry bushes and parallel to an old stone wall until the trail ends a “T”.

Clue #3 On your right will be a man-made nesting site of a small common songbird—the black-capped chickadee. If you take a right turn onto the yellow trail you will soon reach another fork in the road. The next clue will direct you which path to take.

Clue #4 In the spring and early summer, follow the trail that has the most May apples growing along the left side of the trail. (May apples are small umbrella shaped plants.) In the fall and winter follow the trail to the southwest of a large flat rock. You’ll know you’ve chosen the correct path if you pass a large basswood tree with multiple trunks on your left and a blue blaze or two.

Clue #5 At the next fork in the trail take the high ground—also called the Onondaga Escarpment (formed by glaciers thousands of years ago). Continue up, up, up the “hill of till” until you enter the forest of tall and stately trees! Carry on a short distance until you reach yet another “T” in the trail.

Clue #6 From this intersection follow the trail to the right. Pass through the opening in the old stone wall and a knobby looking tree. This is a great place to look for fossils, but please don’t take any souvenirs. In the spring you will travel past many wild leeks and May apples. Keep walking during any season until you find a place to sit. You’ll know you have found the correct place when you have found “more questions than answers”.

Clue #7 After sitting for a while, continue on the trail a very short distance until you come to a “Y”. Bear to the right and head down the hill. Be careful as loose glacial till can make your footing a little tough. At the bottom of the hill you’ll pass through another stone wall. Cross the wooden bridge as you continue your journey on the trail that twists and turns over exposed bedrock.

Clue #8 Once you have navigated out of the forest you should find yourself in an open meadow called an oak opening. Stop and admire the small chinquapin oak trees that grow here. You’ll also find a boulder with a hole large enough for swimming—if you’re a mosquito larva.

Clue #9 Just past the swimming boulder take the trail that heads left back into the forest. You should still be on the Geology Trail and see green blazes on the trees if you are headed in the correct direction. Once in the forest, along the trail you will find a fallen oak tree that has been cut in half. How old is this tree and how can you tell? Once you count the rings and decide the age of the fallen oak, keep hiking until you find yourself in an “unusual valley.”

Clue #10 Have a seat on the bench if you need a rest. Otherwise, keep going and feel free to learn about the geological history of this area along the way. At the four-way crossroads, keep true (go straight) and persist along the valley floor heading east-northeast.

Clue #11 When you start to rise in elevation you’ll want to look for a stone wall running north and south. Across the trail from this wall is a large boulder that is sometimes called “skull rock”. Stand at its base facing downhill and walk about 12 paces. Stop and turn right. Under a rock ledge is a pile of unusual rocks and the letterbox.

Clue #12 Please be sure to hide the letterbox in the same location when you are finished. A little further down the trail you’ll be back to where you started.

Cover photos courtesy of Robert Dudzic, Lloyd Heath and Melissa Marszalek
WHAT IS LETTERBOXING?

Letterboxing is an outdoor hobby which mixes elements of treasure hunting, navigating, art and puzzle solving. A waterproof box is hidden in a beautiful, remote or interesting location. Inside are a logbook and a carved rubber stamp. The person hiding the box writes directions or “clues” to its location, which often involves map coordinates or compass bearings from landmarks. Hunters take the clues and attempt to find the box. Once located, hunters take their own personal rubber stamps and stamp the logbook inside the box. They use the stamp from the box to mark their own personal logbooks. In this way they are able to keep a record of the boxes they find and the logbook from the box records all the visitors who found it.

HISTORY OF LETTERBOXING

Letterboxing began in England when a guide named James Perrott hid a bottle in a remote area at Cranmere Pool on the moors of Dartmoor in 1854. In the bottle, he left his calling cards so that future hikers who found the bottle could contact him and leave their own cards. Overtime, a tin water-proof box replaced the bottle and visitors began leaving self-addressed postcards or letters inside, hoping these would be mailed by the next visitor (hence the name “letterboxing”). Clues to boxes were passed around by participants or published in an annual catalogue. Eventually logbooks and rubber stamps replaced postcards in the containers to help record visitors’ accomplishments in finding the locations of the hidden boxes.

Letterboxing came to the United States in 1998 after an article was published about the hobby in the Smithsonian magazine. Intrigued by the story, groups of people began hiding letterboxes throughout the country. Websites and forums sprang up for people to share information and as a result, the American version of letterboxing relies more heavily on the Internet to distribute clues to box locations. It also became more popular in America to hand-carve a rubber stamp to use as your letterboxing identity.

HOW TO USE A COMPASS

Hold your compass flat in your palm so the Base Plate is level and the Direction of Travel arrow is pointing straight away from you.

The Magnetic Needle, called “Red Fred,” is painted red on one end and white on the other. The red portion shows you which direction North is. Turn your body while keeping the compass straight in front of you. You’ll notice that as the compass moves, the needle continues to point the same direction, North.

To find your direction, turn the Degree Dial until the directional point you want (North, South, East, West) lines up with the Direction of Travel Arrow. Holding the compass steady, turn your body until the Orienteering Arrow and Magnetic Needle are lined up. When this happens, you are facing the direction you want. An easy way to remember this is that the Magnetic Needle is called “Red Fred” and he wants to be in the “Shed” (red portion of Orienteering Arrow). To get “Red Fred” to the “Shed” you must move your body while keeping the compass steady until the two line up. Once “Red Fred” is in the “Shed” you are facing the direction you want to go.

GLOSSARY

Bearing: Direction, especially measured from one position to another using land or star reference lines.
Blaze: A trail marker, often painted on a tree or other landmark.
Coordinates: Set of numbers used in specifying the location of a point on a line, on a surface, or in space.