

WELCOME TO ORRA PHELPS NATURE PRESERVE!

The Orra Phelps Nature Preserve was donated to the Saratoga Land Conservancy (now Saratoga PLAN) in 1996 by Mary Arakelian, niece of Dr. Orra Almira Phelps.

Dr. Phelps was a well-known naturalist with a passion for birding, hiking and collecting plant specimens from around the Adirondack region. Among her many accomplishments, including service as a navy physician during WWII and being a geology teacher, she authored several nature guidebooks and journal articles in publications such as the Adirondack High Peaks.

The land that now makes up The Orra Phelps Nature Preserve was a long-time family treasure where Dr. Phelps enjoyed solitude, conducted family nature walks, and endeavored to preserve rare plant species of New York State.

Now permanently protected by Saratoga PLAN, this preserve honors Dr. Orra Phelps' legacy and can be enjoyed by visitors as they travel throughout wetlands and woodland habitats, across boardwalks and down trails, and up and over hills where large old growth trees tower overhead.

What is Letterboxing?

Letterboxing is an old English tradition dating back to 1854 where people began leaving a self-addressed post card or note in a jar, hoping for them to be returned by mail by the next visitor. Today we've adapted this English tradition and put it to use on Saratoga PLAN's nature preserves and trails. Each preserve has a letterbox ranging in difficulty for participants and gives each type of adventurer an exciting opportunity to explore our preserves and have fun while doing so. When you find the letterbox, you can feel free to take a postcard, and mail it back to us with your comments about your journey. You can also take the stamp from within the letterbox and mark your PLAN Preserve Passport on the appropriate page. Once you have collected at least five stamps (or listed three species observed during each visit) stop by PLAN's offices in Saratoga Springs for a FREE Saratoga PLAN t-shirt!

We hope you enjoy your letterboxing experience on this preserve. Interspersed within the clues *in italics* are natural history observations and hiking information for those interested, for example:

All year round the stream that runs through this preserve, The Little Snook Kill, is flowing. Come visit any time of year and enjoy the sounds and beauty of this tributary.

LETTERBOX CLUES FOR ORRA PHELPS NATURE PRESERVE

Whether you're walking, running, or skipping:

- 1. Start your journey at the trail head with the kiosk on your right, this is the white trail.**
- 2. Following the white trail, you will come to your first intersection with a trail breaking off to your left. Stay straight on the path you have been on.**

In the springtime red efts can be found on this path. These bright orange creatures are the juvenile stage of the eastern newt, and are frequently seen near small lakes, ponds, and streams or near-by wet forests such as this one!

- 3. After the trail shifts slightly downhill it will flatten out and you will come to your second intersection.**

Did you notice the 2 white trail markers just before this intersection on the right side of the trail? Whenever you come to double markers like this, it signifies a turn in the trail.

- 4. Take the trail to the left, which is a continuation of the white trail.**
- 5. The trail will now begin to curve and head downhill towards a tree with red markers. Veer right just before this tree onto the blue trail.**

During the spring, skunk cabbage grows abundantly around these waterways. This deep purple wildflower with bright green leaves grows in swampy, wet areas of forest lands. This unusual plant sprouts very early in the spring and has an odd chemistry that creates its own heat, often melting the snow around itself as it first sprouts in the spring.

- 6. Following the blue trail you will cross over a boardwalk.**

If you're looking for a nice place to take a break and enjoy the quiet of the woods, wander over to the nearby bench.

- 7. Walking along the blue trail with the stream on your left, watch the right bank of the stream for a very large, round boulder. Once you're standing above it, turn around – you've gone too far.**

While the woods might not mind who comes and goes, it is still important to respect private landowner's boundaries. Please be sure not to trespass past Saratoga PLAN boundary signs when visiting PLAN preserves. ☺

- 8. ...Heading back the way you came, you will see a PLAN boundary sign. Once you reach this sign, turn to the left so that you are looking up a steep incline.**
- 9. Can you see two tall trees straight ahead that come together at their trunks? Go to them, and begin your search for the letterbox!**

GREAT WORK!

We hope you enjoyed your letterboxing adventure at the Orra Phelps Preserve. Please return the letterbox as you found it, and head out the way you came in. If you have time, enjoy the other trails.

Thank you! - Your Friends at Saratoga PLAN

The mission of Saratoga PLAN is to preserve the rural character, natural habitats and scenic beauty of Saratoga County so that these irreplaceable assets are accessible to all and survive for future generations. To learn more, please visit us at www.saratogaplan.org.

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