



WELCOME TO THE BARKERVILLE TRAILS!

From 1881 to 1956, a passenger and freight railroad operated between downtown Saratoga Springs, Saratoga Lake, and Schuylerville. Today, the Bog Meadow Trail in Saratoga Springs, NY is an off-road path situated on that very same railroad bed and was one of Saratoga PLAN's earliest accomplishments. This two-mile path, great for warm season walks and cold season snowshoeing, is a favorite among nature lovers. The Bog Meadow Trail is owned by the City of Saratoga Springs and maintained by the generous supporters of Saratoga PLAN.

What is Letterboxing?

Letterboxing is an old English tradition dating back to 1854, when people began leaving a self-addressed post card in a jar, hoping for them to be returned by mail by the next visitor. Today we've adapted this English tradition to use on Saratoga PLAN's nature preserves and trails. Each preserve has letterbox clues ranging in difficulty and gives each type of adventurer an exciting opportunity to explore our preserves and have fun while doing so. When you find the letterbox, feel free to write us a note in the logbook with comments about your journey. Use the stamp inside the letterbox to 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!

LETTERBOX CLUES FOR BARKERSVILLE TRAILS

1. Begin your hunt at the trailhead kiosk – just a few steps from the parking area. As you leave the kiosk notice the trees' very rough, coarse bark. You'll walk through a small grove of them.

*These black locust trees (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) are common first colonizers of abandoned farmlands. Black locust has exceptionally hard, rot resistant wood. Butterflies, bees, and even hummingbirds favor its flowers. As you continue, you will see many signs of the agriculture that took place on this property.*

2. As you pass through the next grove, look for the trees with the smoothest bark. These stand in striking contrast to Black Locust.

*These smooth grey bark trees are American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). This shade-loving species is common on dry upland sites. Its beechnuts are favored by a host of animals including bears. You'll see a number of trees with cankers on the trunk. This is a result of beech bark scale disease – an exotic blight introduced to North America in the 1920s. The disease weakens the tree and shortens its lifespan. Roughly 3% of trees are resistant.*

3. Pass through a stone wall – another field mark of the land's agricultural history.

It took considerable effort to build a stone wall – 20 feet a day was average. Walls typically served as stone dumps to clear fields for crop production, or as fences to keep animals in, or out, of crop fields. A wall frequently served both functions.

4. As you pass under a powerline, examine the next section of woods for its many fallen trees. Do they seem to point in the same direction?

Because of the forest edge here, formed by the road, weakened trees fall with the prevailing winds (west and north). Fallen trees are broken down by a variety of fungal species. They form critical habitat for invertebrates, insects, salamanders, and small mammals. A healthy forest is a messy forest.

5. When you have a utility pole on your left, note the trees with PLAN trail markers on your right. Also notice the trees with shiny yellow bark close to the road.

*The trees with the markers are red maple trees (*Acer rubrum*) – quick colonizers of wet ground. The other tree with the bark that peels in shiny ribbon strips, on the edge by the road, is yellow birch (*Betula allegheniensis*).*

6. As you leave the roadside, you come to another stone wall. Here, look for a yellow birch growing in close companionship with a tree whose bark is best described as “burnt potato chips.”

*This new tree is black cherry (*Prunus serotina*). It is common in old fields and abandoned agricultural areas. On account of the stonework, it is right at home among the remains of previous land use.*

7. From here, to find the letterbox, you need to follow this stone wall off trail, passing a black cherry, and a large bounder. When you come to red maple with three trunks, look for a large stone with a flat top. It’s a good place to sit and imagine life on the farm, and it is among these stones you will find the letterbox.

This site was part of the farm operation. It was probably a paddock of sorts, for cows, and there may have been a barn here as well. Look for piles of small stones on the edges of these walls. These stones were cleared from the paddock, or perhaps from an area of row crops nearby.

GREAT WORK!

We hope you enjoyed your letterboxing adventure! Please return the letterbox to where you found it. From here, trace the wall back to the trail and continue on your adventure! Watch for the impressive six-stemmed red oak, just a few minutes away!

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.

Please return the clues to the kiosk. Thank you!