

Welcome to Ballston Creek Preserve!

These 33 acre preserve in the Town of Ballston, New York contains approximately 1 mile of rugged trails, and is best known for its incredible views overlooking a Great Blue Heron rookery.

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:

This trail gives you access to a Great Blue Heron Rookery. A rookery is a colony of breeding animals, most often birds. This rookery is an amazing place to experience wildlife, beauty, and the benefits of land conservation all at once in a respectful way that educates and inspires. After you find the letterbox, follow the remaining directions to enjoy access to this rare sighting.

LETTERBOX CLUES FOR BALLSTON CREEK 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.**

There are many species of Woodpeckers in the preserve. Keep an eye out for large, excavated holes in the trunks of trees. These are created by Pileated Woodpeckers.

- 2. Follow the white trail until you come to your first intersection, where the trail crosses a power line. The trail will cross under 2 rows of telephone wires and will continue on the other side of the wires as it turns into a wider trail.**

As you cross from one wooded area to another, notice the mowed, open area under the power lines. The change in vegetation (plants) also indicates a change in the critters that inhabit the area. This cleared path acts as a corridor for pollinating insects. It also serves as hunting grounds for raptors, who perch on the edges of the forest to spot prey in the low grass.

- 3. As you approach the stone wall, notice the large tree on the right side of the trail. How would you describe the bark?**
- 4. Take Pat's trail, continuing straight, still following white markers.**
- 5. Pause at the intersection with two trail signs for Pat's Trail and Sven's Loop. These 2 trail signs are the originals that Pat and Sven Peterson, the land's original owners made themselves.**

*Notice the tree that the signs are on. This smaller tree is the same species that you observed at clue 3. The pieces of peeling bark are called **plates**.*

- 6. Sven's Loop heads to the right (maybe on your way out you can take it?!) Stay straight on Pat's trail as it crests a small hill.**
- 7. Stop at the tree with trail signs for Heron Loop and Pat's trail.**

Does the long peeling bark look familiar? This shaggy-looking tree is called a Shagbark Hickory! As you noticed from previous clues, these trees are all over the preserve. How many you count on the way out?

- 8. Now for a new tree species! Up ahead, just off the trail, look for two tall, large trees side-by-side. Go take a closer look to see how this bark is different than the Shagbark Hickory. You might also find something special!**

These giant trees are Oaks. Oaks produce acorns which serve as vital foods for squirrels, deer, mice and birds – like woodpeckers!

GREAT WORK!

We hope you enjoyed your letterboxing adventure at the Ballston Creek Preserve. To head back to Eastline Road, head back the way you came, making sure to return the letterbox as you found it before doing so.

If you'd like to see the rookery, continue in the direction you were going on Pat's Trail (the rookery isn't far!) Follow the trail down to Ballston Creek as it curves and leads you to a red bench. Feel free to take a rest here, as you look out over the wetlands and creek. Looking up in the trees sticking out of the wetlands, you will see large nests; this is the rookery!

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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Thank you for generously funding the Passport Program!