

## SOULE HOMESTEAD LETTERBOXING TOUR

Welcome to the Soule Homestead Education Center!! You are now standing on rich land that was once used as a hunting ground by the Wampanoag Indians, later as a dairy farm by descendants of the Pilgrim George Soule, and it is currently being leased from the town of Middleboro as a working organic farm and agro-ecology education center. The Homestead consists of 120 acres of beautiful fields, forests, wetlands, and gardens. It includes a large barn and a private residence farmhouse that were built around 1830. The Homestead also has an educational classroom for adults and children, a visitor's kiosk and office space. Many farm animals also live on the farm. This simple letterboxing tour will introduce to the area immediately surrounding the buildings, and lead you to a hidden letterbox with a wonderfully custom-designed rubber stamp inside.

To begin, step inside the old barn and get a feel for the rural life that existed here up until the 1980's, when the dairy farm industry began to decline and the farm was sold to the town. This barn was once home to 120 Holstein cows, but now it mostly holds many bails of hay taken from the surrounding fields, sheep, two bunnies named Chocolate Chip and Belle, and 2 goats, Ursula and Rocky, on very wet and cold days. Also, look for swallow nests. Additionally, look for wooden pegs in the beams, 2 hatch doors on the floors that were used to drop the hay down to the lower level, and old tools displayed on the walls by the barn door.

Step out, with the barn to your back and look for the old silo that once held grain for the cows. The path you must follow brings you to the silo. The classroom, visitor's kiosk and office await your descent. Feel free to stop in, check out the classroom, take a look at upcoming programs and say hello to the friendly office staff. The many sheep and 2 goats, Ursula and Rocky, grazing in the field, catch your attention. They are not what you seek and are probably best observed from a distance since sheep are very shy and tend to run away if you get too close.

The large metal gate at the end of the dirt driveway peeks your interest and you let yourself through, closing the gate behind you. To the right is a beautiful wetland area full of cattails, goldenrod, jewelweed, Joe Pye weed, wild chocolate mint, thistles, Queen Anne's lace, and many other seasonal wildflowers. It is also a great spot to look for birds and insects. Continue down the grassy path until you come to a hay maze on your right, and see how long it takes you to get to the center!

Once you've found your way out of the maze, head back on the path you have already trodden towards the farm buildings. On a new road you will go behind the barn, and pass through an orange gate closing it behind you. Look left at the construction of a new solar heated classroom, kitchen and bathroom facility. Continue walking keeping the new construction on your left, when you reach the parking lot turn right and face the poultry barn.

Going left around the poultry barn, you will travel. Take note of the many types of chickens, then the ducks and finally the geese. Be forewarned, geese are the only animals on the farm that may nip you, please keep your fingers off the fence! At the back of the poultry barn look for the impressive pile of compost. This is used by the community gardeners. Look around some more to view the beautiful community gardens! Maybe you'd like to start one! Note the greenhouse used by one of the organic farmers to get an early start on growing his crops. Continue all the way around the poultry barn but this time walk past the front door towards the picnic tables, which is a lovely spot for lunch, and take note of the old farm equipment. Past the picnic tables and old farm equipment is an open lawn space used for folk concerts during the summer months. In the same area is a very large disease resistant elm tree.

The farmhouse across the driveway catches your attention, look for a very rounded boulder that looks like a helmet. Be careful crossing the parking lot! Right next to the boulder is a very impressive maple tree, which you will find the letterbox that you seek.

Please return to the barn!