

Middlesex Fells Letterboxing and Passport Program **Panther Cave Treasure Hunt**

Trail head

Parking area across the road from Gate 8, on South Border Rd, Medford.

*Note, this trail can be a little steep and rocky in places. It is recommended that you take this hike when the weather is dry, and the trails won't be icy.

Directions to the letterbox

1. The start of the Cross Fells Trail is marked with a blue blaze on a large oak tree. In early fall, you'll find an abundance of asters on both sides of the trail. *There are 27 species of asters native to Massachusetts, in varieties of white, purple and blue; the appearance of these flowers is one of the first signs of autumn in the Fells!*
2. Heading into the forest, the trail soon forks. Go right to follow the blue blazes.
3. Go left at the second fork, again following the blue blazes.
4. As you crest the first small hill, you'll see an oddly shaped oak tree on the right side of the trail. The trunk curves downward and then up again. *What could have caused this?*
5. You will soon come to a T in the trail. Follow the blue blazes to go right.
6. Continue straight on the trail and you will soon come to an intersection with a sign for Middle Rd. Cross Middle Rd and go straight up the hill to continue on Cross Fells Trail.
7. As you continue along the trail, keep an eye out for little saplings of White Pine on either side of the trail. *Pine trees can be identified, in part, by counting their needles. The needles of White Pines are found in bundles of five.*
8. Veer right to stay on Cross Fells Trail, where it briefly joins with the Skyline Trail.
9. You will soon reach a sign for Panther Cave and Skyline Trail. Go right, to get on Skyline Trail, which is marked by white blazes (you will be getting off of Cross Fells Trail, which is marked by blue blazes).
10. Looking down the hill in the direction you are going, you'll see a large fallen oak tree that is decomposing. *Fallen logs create habitat for all kinds of little creatures, including many species of insects (like beetles) and invertebrates (like worms), as well as fungi. Fungi are very important "decomposers" in forest ecosystems. Imagine what our world would look like without any fungi!*
11. Continue along the trail, cresting a small hill with exposed rock. Here, the trail veers right and is marked by white blazes on the rock.
12. Go left at the next fork to stay on Skyline Trail.
13. Crest another hill with exposed rock, which is again marked with white blazes. You will see a sign for Panther Cave on the right. Go left to continue on Skyline Trail, heading downhill.
14. Reaching the bottom of the hill, you'll find Panther Cave on the right. *Panther Cave is a great spot to stop and explore, and snap a few pictures!*
15. On the trail that encircles Panther Cave, find a sign that says South Border Rd Gate 6. Facing the sign, you'll see a large oak tree. Walk toward it (about 13 steps) and then around it.
16. Standing behind the oak tree and facing away from it, walk straight ahead for 10 small steps.
17. To your right you'll see a large boulder with a ledge jutting about 8 inches off the ground. Walk toward it and find the letterbox hidden beneath the ledge.
18. **Stamp your notepad and leave your mark (a signature or stamp of your own) in the notebook.**
19. **Please leave the box exactly as you found it for the next adventurer to find!**

20. Return to sign that says South Border Rd Gate 6 and facing the trail and go left. You will soon see a wooden sign nailed to an oak tree that says Middle Road. Continue along this path.
21. You will soon come to a fork and another (very visible) sign that says Middle Road. Go right at the fork to follow Middle Road.
22. After about 10 minutes you will come to another fork and a sign for Cross Fells Trail. Go left. The trail will be marked with both blue and green blazes.
23. Go left at the next fork to stay on Cross Fells Trail, marked by blue blazes.
24. Go right at the T to stay on Cross Fells Trail, and this will take you back to the parking area.