

Pentatonic Scales for the Banjo

The minor pentatonic scale includes five notes 1, b3, 4, 5, b7 and then back to 1 which creates an interval pattern of:

m3, Whole, Whole, m3, Whole

Where "m3" represents a minor 3rd or 1 1/2 steps (3 semitones).

Here's an example using the G major scale:

G Major Scale	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
Scale Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

G Minor Pentatonic	G	Bb	C	D	F	G
Scale Degree	1	b3	4	5	b7	1

Figure 1 below shows the five patterns or "boxes" on the banjo fingerboard.

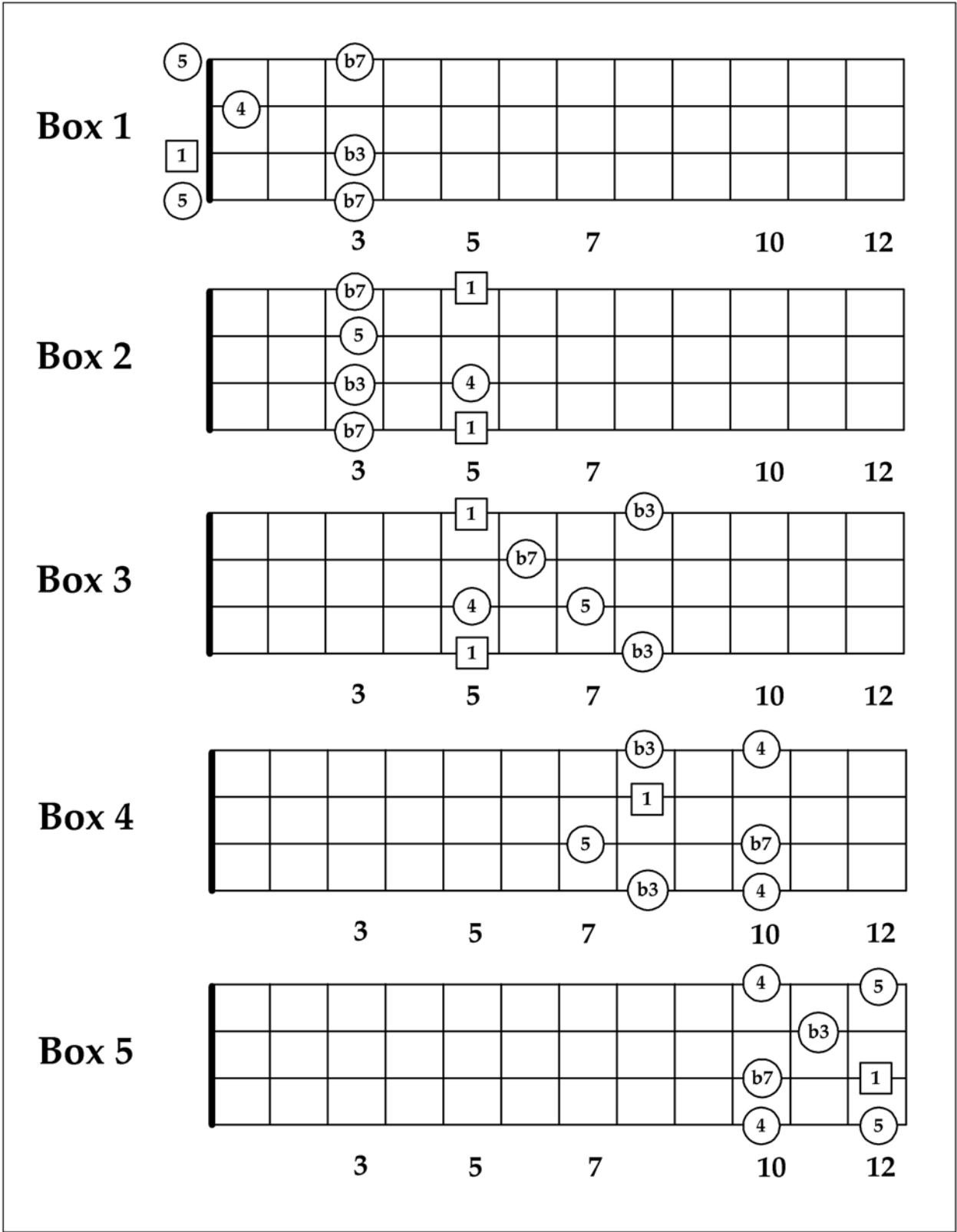


Figure 1: Five Minor Pentatonic Boxes

The major pentatonic scale includes five notes 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and then back to 1 which creates an interval pattern of:

Whole, Whole, m3, Whole, m3

Here's an example using the G major scale:

G Major Scale	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
Scale Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

G Major Pentatonic	G	A	B	D	E	G
Scale Degree	1	2	3	5	6	1

Figure 2 below shows the five patterns or "boxes" on the banjo fingerboard.

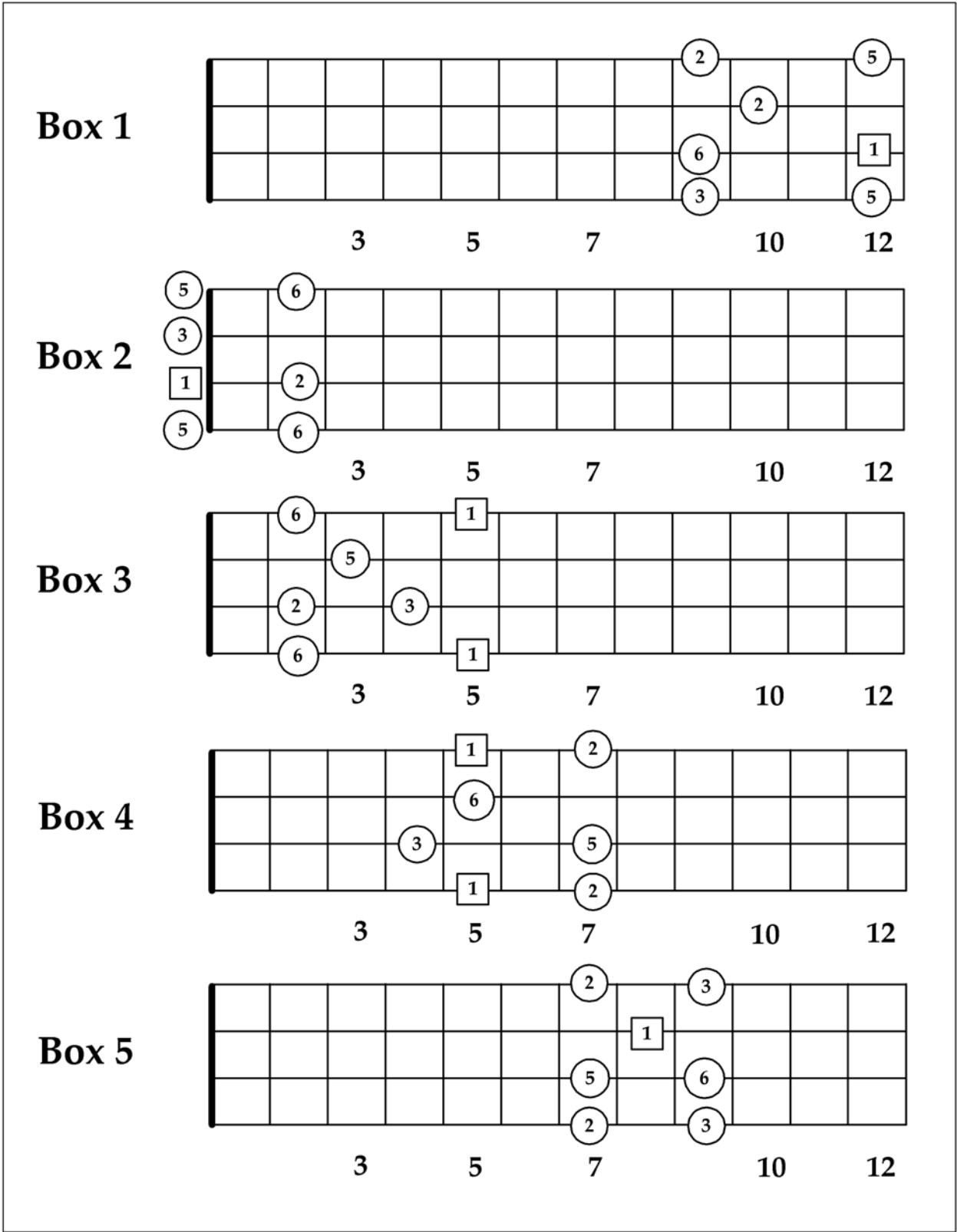


Figure 2: Five Major Pentatonic Boxes

Interesting side note:

The fretboard pattern for each numbered box is exactly the same between minor and major scales. You just have to move a minor pentatonic pattern **down** three frets to get the corresponding major scale. Just keep in mind where the root is.

Note: I couldn't move Box 1 down by three frets, so I moved it up nine frets.

If you know the major patterns but not the minor ones, just move them **up** three frets and you will be playing minor pentatonic scales. Again keeping in mind where the root is and emphasizing it.

Why does this work?

Well, think about it this way. We are not talking major and "relative" minor. We are talking major and "parallel" minor scales that have the same name. So, how does 1, b3, 4, 5, b7, 1 become 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 1 by moving it down three frets on the fingerboard?

The following tables should help:

G Major Scale	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
Scale Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

G Minor Pentatonic	G	Bb	C	D	F	G
Scale Degree	1	b3	4	5	b7	1
Shifted Down Three Frets Becomes	E	G	A	B	D	E
Scale Degree	6	1	2	3	5	6

Doing the same thing for a major pentatonic except shifting it **up** three frets becomes.

G Major Pentatonic	G	A	B	D	E	G
Scale Degree	1	2	3	5	6	1
Shifted Up Three Frets Becomes	Bb	C	D	F	G	Bb
Scale Degree	b3	4	5	b7	1	b3

OK, time for a cold one!