

Fun Facts about the Property along Talcott Mountain in Avon

- The first tower on Talcott Mountain was built In 1810 by Daniel Wadsworth, the founder of the Wadsworth Atheneum. When he died in 1848, the property on the ridge was acquired by David C. Collins who, along with his brother Samuel Collins, established an axe manufacturing business that eventually became the Collins Company in the Collinsville section of Canton.
- Subsequent to Wadsworth's and Collin's ownership, the Bartlett Tower was built in 1867 by Matthew "Henry" Bartlett and his nephew Charles A. Kellogg, both of Avon. Charles, son of Bela Crocker Kellogg, was the grandson of Avon Congregational Church's first pastor, Bela Kellogg.
- Mark Twain and the Reverend Joseph Twitchell, pastor of Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford, hiked the 8-mile roundtrip to the Bartlett Tower many times.
- After the property was sold, the Bartlett Tower was taken down in 1890 and, in 1914, Gilbert Heublein constructed the tower that stands today. The first elevator in Connecticut was installed in the Heublein Tower. Gilbert F. Heublein started a business (Heublein Inc), that sold pre-mixed cocktails and eventually other products including A-1 Steak Sauce, liqueurs, beers, and Smirnoff Vodka. Gilbert also was a founder of the Hartford Club.
- Residents with property along Nod Road at the base of Talcott Mountain in the early 1800's included, among others, Ashbel Webster and Elijah Miller, and in the mid 1800's to late 19th century included Chester Woodford, Miles Sperry and Amasa Woodford, all farmers whose cows grazed on the hillside. Stone walls along the Garvin and Maher trails are evidence of the land cleared for pasture.
- Chester Woodford lived to age 107. As a young man, Chester was a traveling clock salesman who was arrested in Illinois for selling clocks without a license. He was represented in court by Abraham Lincoln who won the case on the basis that the clocks were assembled in Illinois.
- Ashbel Webster and Bela Crocker Kellogg were among noted abolitionists in Avon
- Miles Sperry was the father of Franklin Sperry for whom Sperry Park in Avon is named. In the 20th century, the Miles Sperry property was owned by Maynard and Marjorie Hazen. Maynard, along with Clark Durant, were bankers in Hartford who established the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving in 1925. Marjorie donated the land in 1963 to be used as open space for recreational purposes (now known as Hazen Park).
- In the mid-20th century, there was a Girl Scouts camp that Marjorie Hazen referred to as "The Three Bears" as well as a cabin the Boy Scouts used for winter camping. The foundation of that cabin is visible about 40 yards off the Hazen trail.
- Having contributed in 1819 to build the Avon Congregational Church that stands today at 6 West Main Street in Avon, Elijah Miller refused to rent a pew—rather, he brought a chair with him and sat in the aisle!
- There was a wagon shop at Nod Corners in the early-to-mid 1800's (intersection of Route 44 and Nod Road). In recent years, at least one artifact found at "Tinker's Midden" on the Garvin trail is a tool used in the caring of horses that dates to the mid-19th century.
- In 1892 and 1932, there were untimely deaths on the mountain that raised suspicion. The one in 1932 was an axe murder where the killer confessed. The other a most unusual discovery of a man burned to death in a shed, found in a reclining position with his arms folded across his chest. That case remains unsolved.

Daniel Wadsworth (Thomas Sully, "Daniel Wadsworth," 1807. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art)--



Joseph Twitchell and Mark Twain in 1905 (Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library).



Jean Clemens Phot. Apr. 1905
J.H.T.

Mark Twain

Bartlett's Tower 1867—1890 (*Friends of Heublein Tower*)--



Heublein Tower early 20th century (*Friends of Heublein Tower*)--



Chester R. Woodford House of 1850 (*Historic Buildings of Connecticut*)--

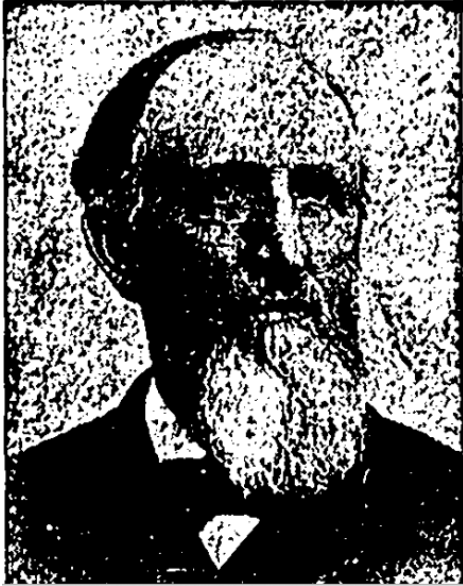


Joseph North's Blacksmith's Shop at Nod Corners, now the "Forge Room" at the North House (*Clinton Hadsell photograph, Avon Collection*)--



"NORTH'S BLACKSMITH SHOP, 1911." Built in 1832 by Joseph North, this building still stands as the Forge Room of the Avon Old Farms Inn. Blacksmiths made shoes for horses and oxen, repaired and sharpened farm implements, put iron on wagon wheels, and did other work. (Clinton Hadsell photograph, Avon Collection, courtesy of Doris Miller.)

Matthew Henry Bartlett--



Gilbert F. Heublein--



Robert Hoe--



History of Land Traversed by Metacomet Ridge trails in Avon, Connecticut

The Metacomet Ridge trails in Avon Connecticut maintained by the Avon Land Trust can be accessed from two different trailheads. One trailhead is at Hazen Park on Hazen Drive and the other is on Nod Way. The discussion below talks about the history of the land on which is located the Hazen Park trail to the Heublein Tower followed by discussion of the history of the property on which is located the trails accessed from Nod Way, including the Skyline, Garvin, Maher and Spring trails. The Metacomet Ridge trails in Avon run along the western slope of Talcott Mountain and are east of present-day Nod Road.

The Talcott Mountain ridge and its first inhabitants

Talcott Mountain, also known as Avon Mountain, is part of the Metacomet Ridge that is about 100 miles long, running from Branford Connecticut at its southern end to just south of the Vermont border. The ridge consists of volcanic basalt (known as trap rock) that surfaced when the land faulted and tilted up toward the west due to continental rifting. The Metacomet Ridge in Avon marked the dividing line between the Tunxis-Sepous tribe to the west (encompassing most of present day Avon) and the Sicaogs to the east.

Origin of the name Nod

The first farmers living in the northern part of Farmington referred to it as the “land att Nod”. One theory is that the word “Nod” is a derivation of the Indian word “noadt” meaning “far, far off” as the word “nod” was a term used by Tunxis Sepous settlers to describe lands that were distant from their

homes. Eventually, Nod became known as the Northington section of Farmington before it became the separate town of Avon in 1830.

Maps

There are a number of maps dating to the 19th century that indicate who owned the land on which are situated the Metacomet Ridge trails. Available printed maps include an 1855 Hartford County map published by Smith, an 1869 Hartford City and County map published by Baker & Tilden and an 1884 map of Hartford and Vicinity published by Albert A. Hyde & Co. There is also a hand drawn map at the Avon History Room at Avon (CT) Public Library that is not dated, but likely dates to the mid-1800's as it shows homes consistent with the 1855 map, including, among others, Chester R. Woodford's home at 215 Nod Road. Also valuable is a map drawn by Dorothy Anderson included in Mary-Frances MacKie's book "Avon Connecticut: An Historical Story" that shows the homes of Avon identifiable from the 1830 census, including those along Nod Road.

Brief history of the Heublein Tower

Before getting into a discussion of the history of the Metacomet Ridge property in Avon, it is helpful to understand a bit about the history of the adjacent property to the east on which the Heublein Tower is located. In 1810, the founder of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Daniel Wadsworth, built a summer home along the ridge he called "Monte Video" along with a 55-foot high wooden tower he allowed the public to use to enjoy views of the Farmington River valley. After a gale blew down that tower, he built another wooden tower that was 65 feet high in 1840. When Daniel Wadsworth died in 1848, the property passed to David C. Collins who, along with his brother Samuel Collins, established an axe manufacturing facility that later became the Collins Company in the Collinsville section of Canton.

The second tower burned down between 9:00 PM and 10:00 PM on the evening of July 19, 1864 and many residents of Hartford looking west could see the tower engulfed in flames. After the second tower burned down, David Collins' widow decided to sell the land and the property passed to Matthew H. Bartlett of Avon (commonly known as Henry Bartlett). Partnering with his nephew Charles A. Kellogg, Henry constructed a new tower in 1867 that was located about where the pavilion stands today (which is about 200 yards south of the Heublein Tower). A well-known geological feature to visitors of Bartlett's tower in the 19th century was a columnar basalt "postpile" feature known then as "Mohegan Monument" which is still visible today. This 30-foot column stands apart from the rest of the cliff about 25 yards west of the pavilion. The Bartlett tower is the one that Mark Twain and his friends, the Reverend Joseph Twitchell and author Charles Dudley Warner, often hiked to from their homes in Hartford (about an eight-mile round trip).

When Bartlett sold the land in 1888, the new owner, Robert Hoe, a manufacturer of printing presses from New York, tore down the tower in 1890. Gilbert F. Heublein bought the adjacent property along the ridge just to the north of Hoe's property and, in 1914, constructed the Heublein Tower that stands today. Henry Bartlett went on to construct another tower on the Metacomet Ridge but located just south of the village of Tariffville as that town had a train depot that was easier for visitors to get to.

History of Hazen Park property encompassing the trail to the Heublein Tower

The land east of Nod Road in the approximate area of Hazen Park has had a number of owners over the years including what is described as “Woodford property” on the hand-drawn map. Further up the mountain along the ridge, the property was owned by Daniel Wadsworth, then David C. Collins, and finally Matthew “Henry” Bartlett as discussed above. Including the area now known as Hazen Park, down the mountain from the Bartlett tower on the east side of Nod Road was property owned by Miles Sperry in the mid-to-late 19th century which later was acquired by Maynard and Marjorie Hazen. The following discussion tells the story of Chester Woodford, Miles Sperry, the Hazens and Henry Bartlett.

Chester Randolph Woodford

The original Woodford to settle in the North District of Farmington, which later became the town of Avon, was Joseph Woodford Jr. who first settled along Nod Road in 1666. Joseph was a member of the original Northington Church in 1751 which was located at the western end of what is now Reverknolls Drive.

The Woodford farm and farmhouse at 215 Nod Road in Avon was built c. 1850 by Chester Randolph Woodford (1814-1921), a dairy and tobacco farmer who lived to the age of 107. He was the great, great, great grandson of Joseph Woodford Jr. Chester was the first farmer in Avon to grow tobacco, eventually constructing 16 tobacco sheds along Nod Road. Prior to being a dairy farmer in Avon, as a young man, Chester was a clock salesman and was arrested in Illinois for selling clocks without a permit. In need of legal counsel, Chester came upon the office of a struggling young lawyer trying to build his legal practice—a man named Abraham Lincoln. Abe won the case successfully arguing that the clocks Chester was selling were assembled in Illinois. Abe earned praise among the bar for his defense of Chester Woodford and, as a result, his reputation and his practice grew. Abe also won Chester’s vote for president in 1860 even though Chester had become good friends with Abraham Lincoln’s rival Stephen Douglas. Chester recalled that Douglas once told him that he could “get more votes with whiskey than he could with five dollar bills.” As to Chester, when asked how he managed to live so long, he was quoted as saying: “If you wish to live long, keep your mind free from worry.”

On the hand-drawn map, the land right across Nod Road from Chester Woodford’s farm up the mountain is referred to as “Woodford property” and at one point relatives of the Woodford family owned almost all of the land in Avon that is east of the Farmington River and north of Route 44. On the map, that tract of land encompassing much of what is today Woodford Hills Drive, shows a “pond” and, just east of that uphill, a “spring.” When the Woodford Drive housing development was created, the engineers buried underground the stream that led from the spring to cross under Nod Road. It is also possible that the pond and spring may have been located in Hazen Park which is just north of Woodford Hills Drive. If so, it may be that the wetlands on the Hazen Park trail (where the boardwalk is) was once a pond and what we refer to as the well that is just above the boardwalk was once a spring.

During winter, it was noted that the Woodford farmhands would fell trees from Avon Mountain for lumber which was used to build tobacco sheds as well as other farm buildings and equipment. The trees that were harvested were sent to Moore’s Sawmill in Bloomfield (which has been in operation since 1875) to produce the lumber and Woodford Farm once had as many as 16 tobacco sheds. This is consistent with photos from the turn of the 20th century of views looking west from the tower of a landscape largely cleared of trees.

Miles Sperry

In the late 18th or early 19th century, ownership of the land occupied by Hazen Park today passed from the Woodfords to the Sperry family before it was owned by Maynard and Marjorie Hazen in the 20th century. Miles Sperry, who lived from 1778 to 1859, was the father of Franklin Sperry of whom Sperry Park is named. Miles Sperry's home was at 232 Nod Road, at the base of Hazen Park. The adjacent land to the north of Hazen Park (what is today the Ridgebury Road development) once had a small apple orchard in the early to mid-20th century.

Maynard and Marjorie Hazen

Hazen Park was donated by Marjorie Hazen in 1963 to be used as open space for recreational purposes. Marjorie's husband, Maynard Hazen, along with Clark Durant, were bankers in Hartford who established the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving in 1925. A police firing range was once located in what is now Hazen Park and there was a cabin up the hillside which served as a Girl Scouts camp that Marjorie Hazen referred to as "The Three Bears".

The Boy Scouts also camped on up the mountain in Hazen Park which served as a winter camp until at least 1969. The scouts would sleep upstairs in the cabin and the troop leaders slept downstairs where they maintained a roaring fire in the large fireplace. The foundation of this cabin still exists and is filled with rainwater. Just to the north of the cabin was a clear field on the hillside that was used for sledding.

Henry Bartlett

As noted above, Matthew H. (Henry) Bartlett constructed the Bartlett Tower in 1867. Henry was the brother-in-law of Bela Crocker Kellogg who was the son of Bela Kellogg, Avon Congregational Church's first pastor. Henry was the uncle to his business partner, Charles A. Kellogg (who was Bela Crocker Kellogg's son). By way of history, in 1817, while Avon was still the Northington section of Farmington, there was a split in the Northington church, and the majority of members chose to build a new meetinghouse in the west of town, now known as the West Avon Congregational Church. Those in the minority went on to build the Avon Congregational Church. In 1818, the first meeting of the Avon Congregational Church was held at a Tavern owned by Preserved Marshall until the church edifice could be constructed. Marshall's Tavern was located on the southwest corner of Nod Corners. Bela Kellogg was installed as the church's first pastor at the inaugural service in the Avon Congregational Church sanctuary on September 7, 1819. Henry was known throughout his life as being a genial and loving person who invited the public to see the beautiful views from the Talcott Mountain ridge.

History of property encompassing trails accessed from Nod Way

In the early 1800's, the land now occupied by Woodford Hills Drive and Hunter's Run consisted of property owned by Elijah Talcott Miller, Amasa Woodford and Ashbel Webster. Later, in the mid-19th century to early 20th century, land on the west side of Nod Road and east of the Farmington River that had been owned by Amasa and his descendants was purchased by Joseph Alsop and became Wood Ford Farm. Other parts of the land where the mountain trails are located were owned by Joseph Leland, Isaac Carrier, and Joseph North with Elijah's house later acquired by his son Edward Sheldon Miller and Isaac's house passing to his son David Carrier. Below is the story of Ashbel Webster, Elijah Miller, Amasa Woodford, Joseph Alsop, David Carrier and Joseph North.

Ashbel Webster

In 1841, Chester Woodford acquired land next to his farm on the eastern side of Nod Road, south and east of today's Pickin' Patch farm, from Ashbel Webster. Ashbel had owned the land since at least the early 1800's. In 1840, Chester married Harriet Webster, Ashbel's granddaughter. And, indeed, the hand-drawn map lists the land that today includes the Skyline, Garvin, Maher and Spring trails as being the "original Webster property". Ashbel Webster, along with the Bela Crocker Kellogg were among 15 men from Avon who were noted abolitionists. The cows of Chester Woodford (and, before him, Ashbel Webster) likely would have grazed all along the west side of the Metacomet Ridge in Avon as there is evidence that neighbors used this land as pasture as well. A number of stone walls to contain the cows are visible today, particularly on the Garvin and Maher trails.

Elijah Talcott Miller

Down the hill from the original Ashbel Webster and Chester Woodford property, the Nod Way trailhead is located on land that is either on or close to a farm once owned by Elijah Miller. On the map depicting 1830 Avon homesteads included in Mary-Francis Mackie's book, a home on Nod Road about a quarter mile south of Chester Woodford's house is identified as being the home of Elijah Talcott Miller. This homestead, situated about 1/2 mile north of the intersection of Nod Road and Route 44 (Nod Corners) was built by Elijah about 1789. Elijah was the grandson of Captain Jonathan Miller the first Miller to have settled in what was known as "Lee's Nod" in 1745. For a time in the 1830's, Elijah owned the Tally Ho Tavern that later became the old Avon Hotel located in a building across from the Avon Congregational Church where O'Neill's Chevrolet dealership is today.

Mary-Francis Mackie's book notes an amusing story about Elijah Miller who, in 1819, contributed \$500 to the construction fund of what became Avon Congregational Church in East Avon after it split from the Northington church that is known today as West Avon Congregational Church. Upon completion of their new meetinghouse, the congregation of Avon Congregational Church decided to rent pews. Elijah responded: "Damned if I'll give \$500 to build the church and then pay to sit in a seat on the Sabbath Day." So Elijah brought his own chair and sat in the aisle throughout the service!

Amasa Woodford

Amasa Woodford was the great, great grandson of Joseph Woodford, an early settler of Farmington and the great grandson of Joseph Woodford Jr., one of the first settlers of what became the separate town of Avon. He was the uncle of Chester Randolph Woodford. Amasa, who was one of the men that led the drive to incorporate Avon as a separate town in 1830, owned the land that is now the Blue Fox Run golf course as well as property across the street to the east, of what is now Hunter's Run. The building at 45 Nod Road that stands today was Amasa's house.

Joseph Wright Alsop IV

In 1905 the house at 45 Nod Road was acquired by Joseph Alsop who ran it as a gentleman's farm. In recognition of the farm's history in the Woodford family, Joseph named his business "Wood Ford" farm. In the early 20th century, Joseph served as a member of Connecticut's House of Representatives and State Senate and later served as a First Selectman of Avon. He was married to Corinne Robinson Alsop, niece of President Theodore Roosevelt and a leading suffragist.

David Carrier

The estate of David Carrier notes that the land along the west side of the mountain east of Nod Road was used as pasture for cows. In 1902, David Carrier's son Burton committed suicide in what is known as King Phillip's cave that is along the cliff just north of the Heublein tower. Legend has it that Metacomet (known derisively by colonists as King Philip) watched Simsbury burn to the ground from the cave on March 26, 1676 when his warriors attacked the town during King Philip's War. Metacomet was the son of Massasoit, the Wampanoag chief who helped the pilgrims who first settled in Plymouth Mass in 1620.

Joseph North

Joseph North operated a blacksmith's shop at Nod Corners in what is now the North House, just south and east of Amasa Woodford's house at 45 Nod Road. The North House (formerly Avon Old Farms Inn) has a "Forge Room" which dates to the time the building operated as Joseph's blacksmith's shop. The 1855 map confirms that the building was owned by Joseph B. North in the mid-1800's with the blacksmith's shop added in 1832. Joseph was a descendent of John North who arrived in Farmington in the 1630's. Nathaniel North, grandson to John and great grandfather to Joseph, built the North House in 1757.

Other businesses at Nod Corners

Joseph North was not the only one to operate a blacksmith's shop at Nod Corners in the early 19th century. In the early 1800's, Julius R. Woodford and Luther Woodford also operated a blacksmith's shop there. As noted above, in a separate building located at Nod Corners, Preserved Marshall operated the Marshall Tavern from 1796 to 1843. Historical records also make mention of horse barns at Nod Corners in 1843 ("best barn and horse sheds on East side of Highway"). In addition, in the inventory of the estate of Gamaliel Sperry, it is noted he had a wagon shop at Nod Corners in 1863. In recent years, at least one artifact found at Tinker's Midden on the Garvin trail is a tool used in the caring of horses that dates to the mid-19th century.

Suspected Murders on Talcott Mountain

There were two notable untimely deaths on Avon Mountain over a 100 years ago, one in 1892 and the other in 1932.

Burned to death or murdered?

On Tuesday, April 18, 1892, a man thought to be a laborer who was working on improvements to the reservoirs along Farmington Avenue in West Hartford, hiked to the Heublein Tower carrying with him a trunk of his possessions. Late in the day, just before nightfall, he was found dead in a barn that had been badly damaged by fire, his arms folded across his chest in a peaceful repose. He was discovered by Augustus Solari who lived about a mile south of the tower and who saw fire engulfing two barns as well as some sheds that were located on Robert Hoe's Talcott Mountain Ridge property. In 1888, Robert Hoe, a wealthy businessman from New York who manufactured printing presses, purchased the property from Matthew Henry Bartlett. In this case, the police were perplexed with how a man could burn to death without an apparent struggle. An April 25, 1892 Hartford Courant article does not mention if an autopsy was performed and noted that there was some speculation that the man could have been murdered.

Robert Hoe was never implicated but was the type of person who had trouble getting along with others, including his own family members. In 1891, two of his daughters married in a double ceremony at St. Marks church in New York without informing their parents. He made every effort to prevent Gilbert Heublein from building the Heublein tower on the adjacent property to the north even going so far as to cut down trees and use dynamite to block Gilbert's access to his property. Hoe Pond, along the ridge about 250 yards south of the tower, is named after Robert Hoe. In any event, the mysterious death of the laborer on Robert Hoe's property is a crime that remains unsolved.

The axe murder

Sometime after midnight and before dawn on Saturday January 30, 1932, a quarry worker and night watchman named Joseph Kapinos was murdered by Bolish Maskaitis in the shack where Joseph lived on Avon Mountain, having received three axe wounds to the head before the killer set the shack ablaze. Maskaitis owed Kapinos \$700 and it is believed the men got into an argument when Kapinos refused to settle the debt for less than he loaned. Kapinos told Maskaitis he needed the money for plans he had to buy a farm in Poland where his family was from. Despite his modest income, Kapinos had saved quite a bit of money and decided to use his capital to become, in essence, a loan shark, lending money to a number of co-workers and friends.

In response to Maskaitis's pleadings for leniency on the debt, late in the evening, just a few hours before the murder, Kapinos sat back in his chair in his shack and played the harmonica. Gustave Muller, superintendent of the Atlas Sand and Stone quarry, discovered Kapinos' body at 6:45 AM the next morning along with fresh blood stains and footprints left in the snow. The axe was found nearby. In April 1932, Maskaitis confessed to the murder and was sentenced to life in prison.

Dunning Sand and Gravel in Farmington began in 1917 as the Atlas Sand, Gravel and Stone Company, formed by Stewart Dunning and James Miller. While their quarry today is on Brickyard Road in Farmington, at one time they had quarry operations on the east side of Avon Mountain in West Hartford, right along the Avon-West Hartford town line abutting Route 44.

Former Avon Land Trust Board members for whom ALT mountain trails are named

Henry E. "Harry" Spring (1937-2012) was a long-time Board member of the Avon Land Trust and served on several Town of Avon environmental commissions and boards. He was an avid animal lover and later in life helped to get the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook federally designated and protected as Wild and Scenic. The bench located at the start of the Harry Spring (red loop) trail is in memory of Harry.

Robert P. "Bob" Garvin (1921-2000) and his wife Sally Coombs Garvin (1925-2001) were active for many years volunteering their time for the Avon Land Trust. Bob and Sally were both charter members of the Avon Historical Society. Bob was an Avon Land Trust Board member in the 1980's and had a lifetime love of nature and was dedicated to conservation. Among other activities, Sally volunteered for many years staffing the town history room of Avon Public Library. The Garvin (white loop) trail includes a spot known as Tinker's Midden where you may find old artifacts left there. According to local lore, it was a place in a hollow along the 13-mile spine of trap rock that runs from Farmington to Simsbury where a tinker worked.

Ruth Desmond Maher (1918—2007) taught at the old Towpath School in Avon and served for several years as the editor and writer for the Avon Land Trust Newsletter. In spring, along the eastern edge of the Maher (blue) trail, there is a picturesque stream with cascading water.

Tom Morganti is a veterinarian with Avon Veterinary Clinic in Avon and the Skyline trail that runs north from the Garvin trailhead to the Hazen trail has been named in his honor. Tom helped establish a number of the mountain trails and served for many years on the Avon Land Trust Board. He is a co-founder of A.I.D., a pet vaccination and treatment program for pets of HIV-positive persons. [On a large oak tree on the Garvin trail there is a plaque installed by Tom with a dedication to former members of the Avon Land Trust including Alex Morganti, James Morganti, Greg Bombard and Mark Volinsky.