

April 18, 1989

Land trust clears new trail in Somers

Views of valley to reward hikers

George Grant of the Four Town Land Trust had expected his pathfinders to be a bit more down-to-earth.

The work party of trust members gathered one February day to begin clearing a hiking trail through the brush on a 55-acre hill in Somers. The 2-year-old trust, founded to preserve farmland in East Windsor, Ellington, Enfield and Somers, acquired the donated parcel, its first, in 1988.

Most of the party met at the head of the future trail. Two members waited for the rest on the other side of the hill, though. Those tenderfeet spent most of the afternoon wandering through the woods and shouting the names of the other volunteers.

"Despite the fact they were searching for us and we were there, they were unable to connect and ended up going home in frustration. It's too bad when a sincere effort turns out that way," wrote Grant, land trust president, in his newsletter, *Landmark*, "but it was amusing in retrospect."

For his second work party April 8, Grant got accord. Seven people actually showed up in one place with rolled-up shirtsleeves — Donald Smith of Somers; and from East Windsor, Grant, Tex Mulnrite, Albie and Donna Grant and their two kids, Nyssa, 7, and Phoebe, 4 — and everyone, even the kids, worked for about three hours. Albie Grant is a third cousin of George Grant.

First they cleared parking spaces for five cars off Stafford Road near the Massachusetts line, removing tin cans, an old washtub, stuff that wouldn't tempt a scavenger.

That was easy. The trail up to the



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ridge was steep, though. Trudging toward the ridge, they cut around rocks, uneven ground and patches of brush. The hardest part was figuring out where to put the path. The hill was steep, so they were forced to design a zig-zag route.

But they weren't complaining.

"When you pick up your yard, it is something you have to do and it becomes drudgery," Grant said. "This is something you volunteer to do."

The distance from the parking lot to the lookout is 2,000 feet as the crow flies; the altitude at the lookout point, 670 feet.

The panorama at the summit is about 180 degrees east to west. Yes, there'll be sunsets, said Grant, who spotted greenhouses, a water tower and the Springfield power plant in the wide-angle view.

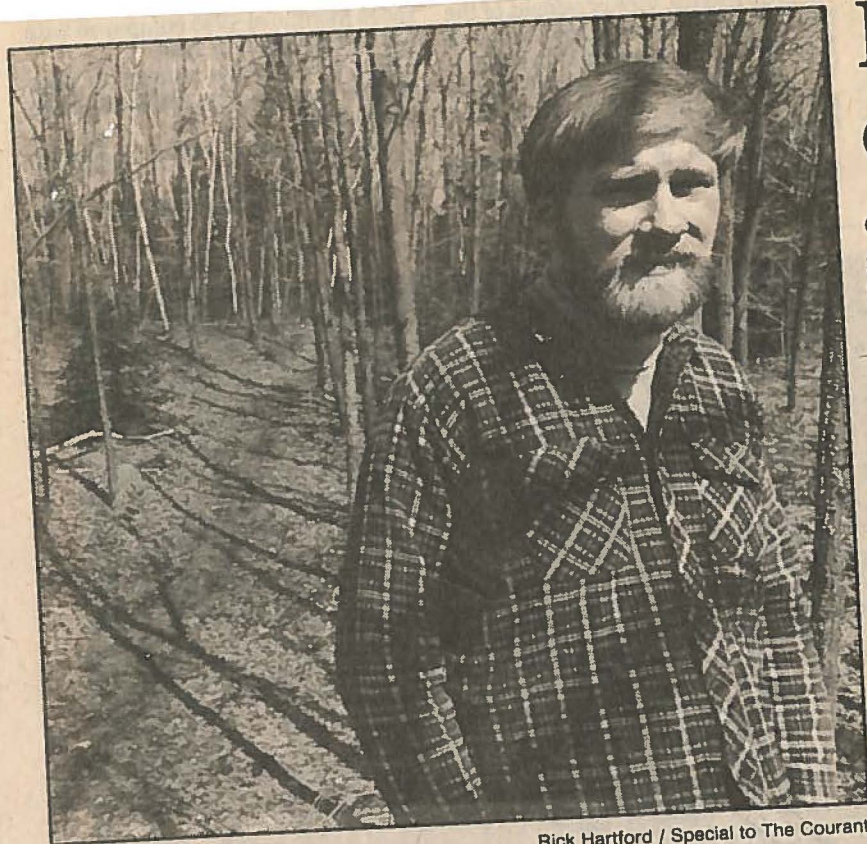
"The view that sweeps over the Connecticut Valley is a reward for all your climbing," Smith said.

He saw signs of deer. Buds hinted of the flowers to come. And it was fun, looking over the land and talking over the chore that remains before the June dedication: marking the trail.

What's more, there's lore to this land. While standing at the top, Smith told the children that a

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Land trust members clear path in Somers



Rick Hartford / Special to The Courant

George Grant of East Windsor, president of the Four Town Land Trust, stands on a new trail cut on a hillside in Somers by trust members. The trail was cleared on property donated to the trust.

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Somers farmer once picked 600 arrowheads from the flats of his nearby land.

It is said that there is a path that goes from the depths of the Somers parcel to the Rhode Island shoreline. That may be more rumor than fact, said Smith, but native Americans did inhabit Somers woods in the winter and the Connecticut River Valley in the summer.

Those were the days before residents knew what the phrase "back to nature" meant. About 15 years ago, Smith said, the town's conservation commission picked the Scantic River Valley watershed and Rattlesnake Ridge as the most significant landscapes to save.

Smith said he feared that motorcycles would tear up the vestiges of a washed-out roadway on the other side of the hill. But erosion is the least of the land trust's preservation problems.

"The real challenge is a depressing gravel pit that is chewing into the mountain. You can see the owner contemplating how much traprock he can get out of there. Then, there's a developer who may be waiting to flatten the land. It's too bad."

This makes it urgent for trust members to increase their acquisitions.

Smith said the April trail-cutting was a feat, and Grant, who described himself as an unemotional person, had to agree.

"I take things in stride. But I certainly was feeling an accomplishment as we got up to the top."

While walking down, Grant realized this was his first trail-clearing. Leaves still carpeted the trail, and he wondered whether he should rake them. He said he couldn't have predicted how complicated it would be to get a trail into condition.

Grant said he would never take trails for granted again.