Here in the north Boulderfield, Edwin and Nellie once spent a day “wandering among the glacial rocks of the wooded Boulderfield beyond Old Cabin Hill hunting for the site of our only fragile fern. We find the spot again, close to the remnants of the fallen trunk of a chestnut tree.”

Upon their arrival at Trail Wood, the Teales were thrilled by the variety of ferns on the property. They promptly invited Farida Wiley of the New York Museum of Natural History, who in 1936 had published Ferns of Northeastern United States, to visit and complete an assessment of Trail Wood’s ferns. She arrived on September 3, 1939, and identified 23 species of fern and “one a variety [though] not [a] species – the Incised Christmas fern.” At least one later survey by Wiley brought the number to 26 species by 1973.

Farida was someone to whom Edwin felt close kinship. Like him, she had no formal training as a naturalist. Even though her education ended with high school upon the death of her parents, her 1986 obituary in The New York Times, pointed out that “Although a similar career now would require academic training, Miss Wiley taught not only at the American Museum but, over many years, at Pennsylvania State College, the Audubon Camp in Maine and a New York University branch on Long Island as well.”

Edwin, with degrees in public speaking and English, likewise had no formal training as a naturalist, yet he was, by the mid-twentieth century, one of the foremost naturalists of his day. Lacking any formal training in entomology, he had served as the president of both the New York and the Brooklyn Entomological Societies. This reflected the possibilities for the self-educated naturalist during the first half of the twentieth century. Even Roger Tory Peterson, the Teales’ close friend and first invited guest to Trail Wood, had become the most prominent American birder of his day although he possessed only a fine arts degree.

Edwin Way Teale maintained long-time friendships with Wiley, Peterson, and a host of other significant natural historians and writers of the twentieth century, including Rachel Carson, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Hal Borland, Dorothy Freeman, Joseph Wood Krutch, Richard Pough, Rutherford Platt, and many others.

Although now a nature sanctuary, the land at Trail Wood retains many remnant signs of previous agricultural and industrial use. It is speculated that the largest boulder in north Boulderfield with protruding metal rods was in the process of being mined for the many stone tunnels under the railroad bed which allowed local streams to continue flowing.

Kiosk Locations

1. Monument Pasture
2. Brushpile Study
3. Starfield Pasture
4. Nellie’s Summerhouse
5. Teale’s Writing Cabin
6. Seven Springs Swamp
7. Grand Junction
8. Beaver Pond
9. YOU ARE HERE
10. North Woods

Trail Wood
The Edwin Way Teale Memorial Sanctuary

The Trail Wood Kiosk Project was made possible by: Hollis Declan Leverett Memorial Fund, The Last Green Valley, University of Connecticut and Willimantic Rotary.

A former railroad line runs through the sanctuary known as “The Air Line”–advertised as a straight line between New York and Boston by the New York & New England Railroad, which operated from 1873 to 1893. One of the most famous trains on the Air Line was “The New England Limited” or the “Ghost Train.” Created to attract wealthy travelers, luxurious Pullman cars were painted white with gold trim, and the staff wore white uniforms. The service started in 1891, but ended in 1895 due to the cost of cleaning the white cars. In 1898, the New York, New Haven & Harford Railroad took over the line.

The railroad was in service until the hurricane of 1955 washed out many railroad bridges. Already on shaky financial footing with the emergence of the automobile, the railroad did not repair them. For some years a few short freight lines continued to run until the railroad ceased all operations. The railroad bed is now the CT DEEP Air Line Trail, owned by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection as a state linear recreation trail for pedestrian, bicycle and horse traffic. More information at: www.ct.gov/deep/airlinetrail