ecological importance of the forest with the developer who agreed to allow Swift to talk with Sweet Water Trust, a Boston-based foundation focused on protecting large tracts of forestland. Sweet Water Trust, in turn, directed Swift to The Nature Conservancy, which he approached in the spring of 1995 about possibly protecting the land.

In August, the developer agreed to sell the property for several hundred thousand dollars, but allowed a very narrow window of time to raise the needed funds. His plans to log the forest would go forward if payment in full was not quickly delivered by September of that year. An anonymous, last-minute donation enabled the Conservancy to secure an eleven-month contingency option.

The creation of Sheldrick Forest is a remarkable and classic example of grassroots conservation. It became a rallying point for land preservation in southern New Hampshire. A flurry of contributions and fundraising events — walks, bake sales, concerts, poetry readings, and raffles — showed incredible dedication to the cause. The Conservancy was able to raise the full purchase price by April 1996 — four months earlier than the deadline.

From 1897 to 1994 this forest was owned by the Sheldrick family. Under their stewardship large sections of the forest had been left undisturbed for more than 190 years. Unfortunately, after the last member of the family passed away in 1994, the property was purchased in December of that year by a developer who intended to fully exploit its economic value — not just for timber, but also for the forest's ecological importance — rather than for preservation. Swift was awed by the size, diversity, and age of the trees in Sheldrick Forest, which he described to the Boston Globe this way: “I think this is a jewel. As much a jewel as climbing to the top of Mount Monadnock.” He discussed the

forest including the Forest Society's more than 1,000-acre Heald Tract. These large and unfragmented forests provide breeding habitat for interior forest nesting birds like wood thrushes, ovenbirds and scarlet tanagers, along with uplands, streams and wetlands for wide-ranging mammals like black bear and moose to find food, shelter and cover.

The forest has a broad diversity of tree species in a wide array of ages including hemlock, beech, black birch and red oak, as well as white pine — some over 200 years old. The topography has stories to reveal about the area's glacial history (try walking along the esker on the Laurel Ridge Trail). Stone walls, mountain laurel, streams, vernal pools and old lanes enrich the forest and provide further insights to the preserve's natural and man-made history.

Signs of wildlife, too, are perceptible to the observant visitor. Barred owls can often be heard (and sometimes spotted) nesting in the trees in early spring. In winter, look for tracks left behind by white-tailed deer, red fox, bobcat, black bear and fisher. Many bird species, such as pileated woodpecker, saw whet owl, ovenbird, scarlet tanager, wood thrush and a variety of songbirds call the forest home throughout the spring and summer.

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HELEN'S PATH — 0.4 miles
This is the main trail into the heart of the preserve—the valley of large trees along Morgan Brook. The trail has one moderately steep section and drops a total of 45 feet in elevation.

Beginning at the kiosk, enter the forest near the northeast corner of the parking field. After passing through a stone wall, start a mild descent through an old hardwood-conifer forest to the junction with FLIGHT WAY at 0.1 mile. Descend through a moderately steep section with large white pine, pass a forest glade (on the right), and cross an old stone-lined road at 0.2 miles. Continue straight and descend slightly. The next small brook is the edge of a meadow and then another small brook at 0.3 miles. Cross another stone wall. Enter the valley and its stand of large hemlocks, pine, and oak at 0.5 miles. Pass the junction with SWIFT WAY and continue past a vernal pool and through the valley toward the west side of Morgan Brook and another 0.1 miles to connect with both MARGARET'S MEANDER and CHARLES DAVISSON TRAIL.

MARGARET'S MEANDER — 0.65 miles
This loop trail explores the carved glacial deposits in the northwest corner of the preserve. Following some undulating changes of grade, its two moderately steep sections are separated by a short, flat section.

The trail begins and ends at the junction of HELEN'S PATH and CHARLES DAVISSON TRAIL. If traveling clockwise, this trail follows the ridge line above and to the east of Morgan Brook and offers nice views down the valley of Morgan Brook. Both ends of the trail have a brief moderate climb or descent to get up onto or off of the ridge. The ascent is more gradual from the north.

One end of this trail leaves CHARLES DAVISSON TRAIL just after it crosses Morgan Brook. From there it begins a gradual climb through a mixed forest with a mountain laurel understory. The trail descends to an intersection with the SWIFT WAY.

FLIGHT WAY — 0.5 miles
This trail provides easy access to the upper reaches of the Morgan Brook valley and provides a direct route to SWIFT WAY and HEALD CONNECTION. The trail has moderate levels of elevation change.

One end of the trail begins at the kiosk in the northeast corner of the parking field. Descend gradually into the valley; cross Morgan Brook at 0.1 mile and continue down the old wood roads and stream a short distance before cutting right. Cross a small stream and descend gradually into the valley. Cross Morgan Brook at 0.4 miles and then turn south, cross a small stream, and continue into a mature forest with beech. Meander through a valley with signs of past timber harvest before crossing onto another glacial ridge with large pines and passing above a steep slope of hemlock forest (to the north). The trail then begins a gradual climb to the junction with LAUREL RIDGE TRAIL.

LAUREL RIDGE TRAIL — 0.20 miles
This trail follows a ridge line above and to the east of Morgan Brook and offers nice views down toward the south. Both ends of the trail have a brief moderate climb or descent to get up onto or off of the ridge, but the ascent is more gradual from the north.

One end of this trail leaves LAUREL RIDGE TRAIL just after it crosses Morgan Brook. From there it begins a moderate climb through a mixed forest with a mountain laurel understory. The trail descends to a small brook at 0.1 miles and then travels down a moderate slope on the river bed to a stone bridge. Cross the bridge and begin a gradual climb through a mixed forest with a mountain laurel understory. The trail descends to an intersection with the SWIFT WAY.

SWIFT WAY — 0.60 miles
This trail provides an alternative and more gradually sloping avenue into or out of the heart of the preserve. It goes through an old pine grove and a young pine flat and crosses Morgan Brook on a stone bridge.

One end of the trail begins along HELEN'S PATH in the valley of large hemlock trees. From here, cross Morgan Brook and head southeast, following an old woods road along the base of a slope. Follow a moderate uphill to the junction with CHARLES DAVISSON TRAIL at just under 0.1 miles. Continue gradually up slope through a young hemlock grove to arrive at the stone-lined road and the junction with CHARLES DAVISSON TRAIL at just over 0.1 miles. Continue downhill to the junction with SWIFT WAY at 0.15 miles. Descend gently to the Stone Bridge and then follow the glacial ridge, and then descend off the ridge to cross a small stream in a mature forest with beech. Meander through a valley with signs of past timber harvest before climbing onto another glacial ridge with large pines and passing above a steep slope of hemlock forest (to the north). The trail then begins a gradual climb to the junction with LAUREL RIDGE TRAIL.

CHARLES DAVISSON TRAIL — 0.85 miles
This trail explores the large trees, mature forest, mountain laurel, and stone-lined road of the preserve's northeast corner. It travels mostly level terrain and has only gradual elevation changes.

One end of the trail is at the junction of HELEN'S PATH and MARGARET'S MEANDER. From this point, follow an old woods road through a mixed forest dominated by hemlock and mountain laurel, and turn right to cross Morgan Brook. Continue along the old wood road, and begin a gradual climb to the junction with LAUREL RIDGE TRAIL at 0.05 miles. Continue a gradual climb in a stream valley at 0.15 miles, and continue along the old wood road and stream a short distance before cutting right. Cross a small stream and travel along the edge of a meadow above the Stone Bridge and Route 101, and enter a stand of large oak, pine, and hemlock at 0.3 miles. Then turn south, cross a small stream, and travel along a mixed forest with beech. Meander through a valley with signs of past timber harvest before crossing onto another glacial ridge with large pines and passing above a steep slope of hemlock forest (to the north). The trail then begins a gradual climb to the junction with LAUREL RIDGE TRAIL.

HEALD CONNECTION — 0.90 miles
This trail connects the Sheldrick Forest and its trail network with that of the Heald Tract. The trail is fairly level, sloping gently down toward the south. Begin from SWIFT WAY and head southeast through an open young pine forest. Climb a bit more, travel along the edge of a meadow above the Stone Bridge and Route 101, and enter a stand of large oak, pine, and hemlock at 0.3 miles. Then turn south, cross a small stream, and travel through a mature forest which can be observed in contrast to the young forest (harvested c. 1985) on the abutting property to the east. Turn west at 0.5 miles and travel along the old Holt Road—lined with stone walls and mountain laurel—and punctuated with stone culverts. The trail then ends in a hemlock stand with SWIFT WAY.

Please note: For your guidance, the trail directional signs throughout the preserve use a diamond symbol ( ) to show the quickest route back to the preserve entrance and parking lot.