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For many Yale students, East Rock Park represents a chance to escape papers, exams, social obligations, and the other stresses in their lives.

Lots of student groups make consistent use of the park. The Yale Cycling team bikes through it, the Yale Outdoors club runs there at night once a week, and the Freshman Outdoor Orientation Trips program holds an annual event for its new leaders on the road that winds up the mountain. Still, few students have a sense of the park's history, or know the man whose job it is to make the woods and summit clean and safe for the Yale and New Haven communities.

During his long career, Barvir has become an icon in the neighborhood. "They keep telling me I'm a damn legend in town. I feel like Yogi the Bear or Bozo the Clown. I don't have a last name anymore. It's Ranger Dan. Ranger's my first name; Dan's my last."

That job falls to East Rock Park Ranger Dan Barvir. The park is Barvir's life. Barvir said he feels lucky not to have a wife, so that he can be "married to the park" instead. To those who live in the East Rock neighborhood, his devotion to the park has become his identity and residents said they cannot think of the park without thinking of him as well.

"He's a great park ranger," said Terry McCool, park ranger at Lighthouse Park. "He's been contributing to East Rock with his programs for years. He's almost synonymous with that park." Barvir's responsibilities vary from cutting back branches that block the trails to maintaining the ranger station and other park facilities. He offers public programming like nature hikes and private programming such as educational courses for elementary schoolchildren.

The job comes with surprises, as well. Once or twice a year, Barvir said he works with the police to evict homeless people who are found living in the park. Four times over his 26-year career, he has stumbled across human corpses.

Barvir said he knows many locals consider him a symbol of the park, and something of a character.

"I don't have a last name anymore," he joked. "It's Ranger Dan. Ranger's my first name, Dan's my last. It's a little scary sometimes, actually."

SNAKES FOR DINNER

Barvir's lifestyle might seem peculiar to some, but compared to past inhabitants of East Rock, Ranger Dan is a conventional guy.

In the early 1800s, Elias Turner moved to the summit of the mountain. According to the book "Exploring East Rock Park," he left New Haven to buy a piece of land before his wedding day, and returned to find his fiancée dead and to learn that the purchase of the land had been a fraud. Distraught, he moved to a hut on the top of East Rock, descending to the city only once a week to deliver herbs and vegetables he had grown. Turner was rumored to enjoy eating black snakes seasoned with salt and pepper for dinner.

After Turner froze to death in 1823 alone in his hut, **Elizur Hubbell** (ME# 1814) built a stone structure called the Mountain House, which he advertised as a “pleasure resort.” Despite the inclusion of a bowling alley, the vacation spot closed in 1848.

Next, Charles Smith and his wife assumed the role of caretakers of the top of the rock in 1850, but both were murdered by a New Haven local.

Their demise made way for the arrival of Milton Stewart, who charged 10 cents — at gunpoint — to any person who wanted to see his view, and constructed a 40-foot sailboat so that he would be prepared should God again flood the Earth. Ultimately, the boat was filled with flowers and used for landscaping.

In 1884, the City of New Haven seized the summit property from Stewart for \$13,000. One hundred years later, Ranger Dan took control of the mountaintop — and the rest of the 425-acre park.

“We don’t own it,” he said of himself and his fellow rangers. “We take care of it for next generations. And that’s been part of my philosophy as part of handling this park: making it liveable for the humans, the plants and the animals. I don’t necessarily rate the humans as high as the other two.”
