



AROUND THE PLACE

February 2015

The short days of midwinter tend to be our in-drawing time, a time to catch up on indoor projects. Winter's cold and snow have been largely absent this year. We know that most of the rest of the country has been battered by snow, ice, and severe storms, but those storms have gone around us here in eastern Nevada. We have had a few minor snow 'events' – perhaps a dusting overnight, or a few inches on the ground – and we have had some gray days which hinted at something besides clear weather. But so far at least, our winter has been exceptionally mild and very dry.

By this point in the winter, the mountain ranges that ring our valley are usually covered in thick blankets of snow at the higher elevations, but not this year. When we look up at our mountains, we see mostly gray rocks and bare slopes.

Not only do our fields and meadows here at Home Farm have no snow, the ground isn't even frozen in

most places. The gophers can easily dig their tunnels, and their tell-tale mounds of dirt are everywhere. And in protected places near walls and woodpiles, we can find tiny patches of new grass, and several beds of iris are growing green shoots.

The deer that usually spend much of the winter here on our property, lounging in the yards or grazing in the meadow, are absent, probably because it is so easy for them to find abundant forage higher up the mountains. Good browse isn't covered by snow this winter.

There is a lot of bird activity around. The magpies fly in chattering flocks from tree to tree around the Main House and garden, the owls hoot softly from the pine trees near the Centrum, and groups of pinyon jays wheel from one end of Home Farm to the other, accompanied by shrill cries and noisy flapping of many wings. Along our telephone

poles the ravens sit watchfully, sometimes accompanied by hawks or eagles. One recent group included a bald eagle on the highest post, with five or six ravens arranged on either side on the wires.

The fruit trees have received their winter pruning to help promote abundant summer fruit, but we worry that these sunny days and relatively mild nights may encourage them to bud out several months too early.

The lack of cold weather has been a boon to our woodpiles, which are lasting much longer than they would in a normal year. And the dry winter has allowed work to progress on the drainage project begun on the north side of one of our housing units. In years past ice, snow, and roof melt have formed a mini-glacier which grew all winter long, making footing treacherous by the front door. A sort of French drain has been designed to prevent the ice from building up, and work on it is almost finished, although we may have to wait a while to test it out.

The holidays passed quietly here, since quite a few of our residents were gone during this time. However, we had a lovely dinner to celebrate the beginning of the New Year, and earlier in December we marked the 80th birthday of Val Taylor, long-time resident and corresponding secretary of the School.

The housekeeping crew continues to keep an eye on guest facilities and community spaces, and meets weekly to clean, organize, and prepare rooms as needed. Others check the outdoor faucets and vulnerable pipes regularly to make sure they are running freely, and do the regular minimal maintenance on the School's water system.

We have been pleased by the response to our fundraising letter, and we thank you for your continued support of the School and its programs. Although summer seems far away, we are already planning for many events. Summer seminar classes have been firmed up, along with a tentative schedule. We are meeting regularly to design our new intern program, which we hope to implement in April. And as spring nears, we are keeping several other important projects in mind, such as rebuilding the garden fence.

On the first morning of this New Year, Frank Burney passed on in St. George, Utah. Frank lived here at Home Farm in the late seventies and also for the past thirteen years before moving this past fall to southern Utah for health reasons. We will remember Frank for his ability to fix almost any motor or appliance, his sense of humor, and his curiosity and passionate desire to know more about the teachings of the School.

Susan Wetmore
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SCHOOL OF THE NATURAL ORDER
PO BOX 150
BAKER NV 89311

Phone: 775-2334-7304 Email: sno@sno.org Website: <http://www.sno.org>
