



AROUND THE PLACE

February 2016

At first, this winter seemed to be a repeat of last winter, that is to say, basically a “no-show”. November and December were fairly mild, at least until Christmas.

But since then, we’ve had three good snowstorms, the most recent one during the last two days of January. This storm brought about two feet of snow which, thanks to high winds, drifted to three feet or more. The snow plow truck which the school purchased a couple of years ago has certainly proved its worth. We are grateful to Leo Weese for the hours he has put in operating the snow plow, making our roads passable and plowing around the Main House so we can move more easily from place to place. Dan Hathaway’s new snow blower has been put to good use, too, getting walkways cleared and making areas close to cars and buildings more accessible. Of course, the snow has given us lots of exercise as we shovel out around vehicles and clear snow from porches and steps.

The viewscape around Home Farm and Snake Valley is spectacular, with most objects covered by curving heaps of snow. The snow on mountains across the valley serves to highlight the lines of the rocky striations so they are dramatically evident. In

addition to the beauty of the snow, the inability to easily move anywhere gave us three or four days of cozy inside time.



Our Thanksgiving holiday brought together friends, family, and neighbors for a delicious dinner in a lovely setting. Much of the food we ate (Brussels sprouts, squash, potatoes) was grown here. The tables were set with linen tablecloths, silver candlesticks, and our good china. The tables were elegantly decorated with juniper boughs and dried flowers. Vitvan used to say that Thanksgiving was one of his favorite holidays (July 4th being the other) because it was a truly American holiday, and our Thanksgiving celebrations here have special memories for many of us.

The first week in December brought the pond project to completion, removing the cattails and dredging out some of the silt that has been deposited over the last 50 years or so by the spring-fed stream that empties into the pond. Baker Ranches' backhoe and front-end loader spent about a week here, and by the end of that time the cattails had been pulled out and the silt had been deposited along the length of the north pasture fence line. The pond is now restored to its original size, truly a pond again rather than a bog-in-the-making. We should be able to maintain this with some minimal yearly maintenance.



With almost no orchard fruit this year, the deer have not shown up as they have in the past. Instead of the usual 15 or 20 deer wintering nearby, we've seen perhaps four or five grazing around the place. We have also seen and heard from the coyotes that den on the southern end of the property. It sounds like several adults and some juveniles, but coyote calls can be misleading.

In late fall, three rescue cats arrived from the animal shelter in Denver. They have made themselves quite at home around the Main House area, and although timid at first, have gradually leaned to trust us. We are hoping that Marsha, Lucy, and Mr. Tibbs will discover that mice, ground squirrels, gophers, and packrats make very tasty meals for cats.



The paw prints left in the snow by Mr. Tibbs and the others are distinctly theirs, and so much tinier than another set of paw prints seen around the garden units this winter. Those prints have been identified as mountain lion tracks. Although mountain lions usually prefer higher elevations among the trees, this is not the first time that these large predators have made a path through Home Farm.

Even though the ground is covered with a thick blanket of snow, we know that spring isn't too far away. The seed catalogs are arriving, some of the fruit trees were pruned right before the heavy snows arrived, and our time of in-drawing will make way for a new burst of energy as the days lengthen bit by bit.

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