Permaculture Homestead

My wife and I want a small permaculture designed homestead with enough land for some chickens, horses, and a small orchard.

Posts published on June 4, 2025, from homesteadorbust.tgenedavis.com. Printed on June 4, 2025 using Print My Blog

Finding the Farm

March 14, 2014
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: buying land, dirt, farm, hobby farm, land, real estate, sage

I've been dreaming of buying my own chunk of dirt for almost 20 years. You'd think that growing up in a rural community I'd be thinking, "Hey! Why don't I start a farm?" But really, I just wanted somewhere to stretch out and have a few apple trees.

Originally, I was thinking of buying a piece of land back in my home state of New York. I watched real estate there in the mid 1990's. I found several multi-acre chunks of land for very reasonable prices. I fantasized about purchasing one, then I watched land prices inflate beyond my ability to purchase more than a small bit of an acre.

So, I settled on a small suburban lot in Utah and put in a garden. Not quite a hobby farm, but I got plenty of experience dealing with bugs and weeds. My dream of land wasn't crushed, just deferred.

A few years ago, I determined that I wanted a hobby farm with a small orchard, and chickens, rabbits, and ducks. I decided I wanted to grow and eat my own food. So, I began looking at land, again.

This time, I looked at land around Utah. I wanted something with seasons (other than hot and really hot.) I also realized I needed to keep my "day job," so I needed something close enough to home that I could drive there on one tank of gas. Those requirements

narrowed down my search to northern Utah, southern Idaho, and southwestern Wyoming.



A beautiful eight acre lot in Bear Lake County that we wanted to buy.

Probably my favorite location is Bear Lake on the Idaho side. The land there is reasonably priced. The weather isn't too cold—actually it's very similar to the New England village I grew up in. The land is already cleared and well used for pastures and farming. I love the whole area.

Doing a little planning and dreaming, I realized I need between 1.5 and five acres. I'm not looking for a full-blown farm, just a nice small hobby farm. The parcels that size up in Bear Lake County are reasonably priced and absolutely perfect for what I want to create.

Unfortunately, I'm not a rich man. The reality of having a daughter in college, and three more on their way to college or trade school means reasonably priced land is still out of reach. What I need is some dirt cheap dirt.

So, I looked around some more. I've been looking at property in the region for several years, and knew how to find land. I also knew I'm not getting any younger. If I look too many more years, I'll be a grandfather.

Weird.

Finally I settled on a dirt cheap piece of dirt … and sage. Not exactly the pastoral lands of Bear Lake, but we have to work with what we have. I can afford the land, and I still have a strong back. My wife and I expect to sign for the land within the next few days.

Wish us luck!



The piece of dirt and sage we could afford. It's not much, but it's ours.

Buying the Land

March 29, 2014
Categories: Off Grid Living, The Homestead
Tags: buying land, farm, hobby farm, loan, off the grid, ranch, raw land, water, well

We got the land!

My wife and I signed for it, and the county recorded it. We're the proud owners of 79 point something acres of dirt and sagebrush. It's actually closer to 80 acres, so I'll probably call it 80 instead of 79 acres most of the time.

Funny, I was looking for just over one acre to grow some fruit trees, and all we could afford was 80 acres. All the 1+ acre parcels we looked at were four to ten times more expensive than this 80 acre parcel. Life works out that way sometimes.



The ranch measures 1/2 mile by 1/4 mile. It totals nearly 80 acres. It's a real fixer upper.

We ended up paying the incredible price of only $9,000 for all 80 acres. Now let us be real. Without water, the land isn't even worth that much. Putting in a well will be risky, because the water may not be usable, and the cost of the well will be many times the cost of the land. I have faith it will all fall into place.

Getting a loan was tricky. Banks don't like to give loans on raw land, and this land is as raw as it gets. You won't find any electric lines, water lines, gas lines or paved roads within miles of the land. Anything we build there will be *off the grid*. Somehow, developing land off the grid sounds appealing to me.

When buying raw land, the standard options are to take out a loan against your other assets such as your home; have the current owner finance the land; or pay cash. After discussing the issues with getting a loan from a bank, our realtor suggested we let him find a private financier.

Private financing has tradeoffs. On the upside, the paperwork can be reduced to a single page in some cases—like ours. On the downside, the interest rates can be higher with a quicker payoff required than a bank financed loan. For such a small loan, a quick payoff and a higher interest rate don't sound like they'll hurt us much.

We finally settled on private financing and made an offer on the land. He used our tax return as our 33% down payment, and spent part of a pleasant afternoon taking care of details at the title company. Then, we celebrated with dinner at Golden Corral.

So now that we own the land, calling it "the land" or calling it "the property" seems odd. It's a hobby farm—very early staged hobby farm—but calling it "the hobby farm" in casual conversation seems awkward, too.

I presented the naming problem to my wife while we were on vacation at Bear Lake this last weekend. She and the kids came up with many ideas, such as Midnight Ranch, Sagebrush Ranch, and Da Ranch. Bridget finally suggested "Dove Ranch", because the land is located on Dove Creek Hills Road. We made a lot of jokes about it sounding pretty close to Da Ranch (with da sagebrush and da rabbits and da dirt). However, we liked Dove Ranch and kept the name in the end.

Dove Ranch it is. Now all we need is one of those big ranch signs.

Exploring Dove Ranch … Part I

April 1, 2014
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead
Tags: buffalo grass, clay, Colorado pinyon, exploring, grass, hat, jacket, land, moon, pasture, property, sagebrush, sand, stars, sunrise, wind

Lots of Personality

I am excited to turn the piece of sage and dirt that we've bought into a beautiful hobby farm. First, I need to learn more about it. I've looked at the land, of course. However, there's a lot I don't know about Dove Ranch.

Isn't land, just land? Well, … when you're cruising by in a car at 65 mph, it's easy to think that land is just land, but when you get up close land gains personality. For example, the soil types on Dove Ranch are drastically different across the property. It is pure clay in some sections, and pure sand in other spots.



The view from the southwest corner of the property, looking out over Park Valley toward the mountains on the Idaho border.

Finding Dove Ranch is an adventure all by itself. The original listing only listed a GPS location. I typed that into Google Maps and began my research from there. I had little idea what the dimensions of the ranch were. After lots of research, I discovered that the GPS location was on a parcel number indexed by the county the ranch resides in. I spent hours figuring out what parcel number the GPS location corresponded to.

After figuring out how the county referenced the land, I tried using the county's software to see the property on a satellite photo. I kept getting frustrated because I couldn't get the county ArcGIS software to zoom in close enough to see the parcel, … until it dawned on me how big the parcel was.

I was zoomed in fine. I'm just not used to seeing that much land at once. I realized that the parcel is bigger than the whole subdivision I currently live in. At that point, I felt a little overwhelmed by what I was committing to take care of.

That piece of dirt and sagebrush we've bought is big. It is nearly 80 acres. To put that into perspective that even a city guy like me can understand, eighty acres, in this case, is half a mile by a quarter mile. Walking the perimeter of the property is a walk of 1.5 miles. When dodging all the sagebrush and drop-offs, walking the perimeter of the property can easily take an hour.

Not only is that big, turns out it's full of personality, too.

Cold Mountain Winds

I had visited Dove Ranch just twice, and only managed to get to two of its four corners. (Did I mention it's big?) I wanted to visit all four corners in one day. Better yet, I wanted to walk the entire perimeter of the property in one day.

I chose to make my third visit to Dove Ranch on a mild windy morning in the middle of March. I packed up some supplies, including water and my warmest winter jacket the night before, so I could leave whenever I woke up in the morning.

I arrived before sunrise. On the long, barely maintained dirt road out to the property, I had to step on the brakes three times: once for a jack rabbit, and twice for two different kangaroo mice. I've never seen kangaroo mice before. They looked like fuzzy baseballs with a massively long tail hopping around the road in front of the headlights. Lucky for them my brakes work well.

I used my cellphone as my GPS, but the maps are from Google Maps. The problem I face out at the ranch is that there is no cellphone service, so I get my position just fine, but unless the maps happen to be cached, I have no maps. That makes finding the property extra fun, because all sagebrush looks the same to me. Eventually, I plan to mark the corners of the property with fence posts or signs so I can easily recognize them, but that is still in the future.

Upon parking in the dark, I stepped out of the car to find out the mild windy morning I had left was much less hospitable at 5400 feet with no trees or other windbreaks between me and Nevada, Idaho or Wyoming. And that coat and hat I brought proved

very ineffective against the mountain winds. I hopped back in the car and enjoyed the stars, moon and eventual sunrise from behind windproof glass.

The wind never did let up, and proved very uncomfortable for my entire exploration of the property. I will need to invest in some better protective gear for future excursions. Also, I am going to need to construct a windbreak for the property. I believe Colorado Pinions should grow nicely (though slowly) up in that area. There are quite a few stands of Juniper, and they have a similar range. Constant wind with no trees won't be much fun.

Besides getting to know our land, I want to find out what I can grow up there. I envision beautiful pastures for a couple of horses. As I stated in an earlier post, I'm not a rich man. I cannot put in a well, yet. I need to find grasses and trees that can handle the terrain.

Colorado Pinions and Buffalo Grass should both do well in the area. There are also other plants—bushes, grasses, and trees—that should do well in that area. I was happy to run into some native grass hidden away under some sagebrush. If grass can already handle the place, there is some hope for my dream of tree-lined pastures.



Turns out there is already grass on the property, but it's hidden away under clumps of sagebrush where grazing cattle and game can't get to it.

I spent several hours looking around the property, and had quite an adventure exploring the 22-acre wash and an old road leading to a mysterious unidentified circle that I could see from space, but not from the ground.

I managed to visit three of the four corners of the property, and have to agree with my wife that the best place for a cabin would be on the upper side of the property. For now, my work on improving the land will stay at the lower edge of the property that I can get to easily.

Check out part II and part III for more of my adventure exploring my future hobby farm.

Exploring Dove Ranch … Part II

April 8, 2014
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead
Tags: cattle, exploring, herd, mystery, pipes, Planning the Homestead, road, sage, sagebrush, trough

Mystery of the Forgotten Road

I have a newly bought ranch that my wife named Dove Ranch. When I look at it with my eyes, I see lots of dirt and sage. However, when I close my eyes I see tree-lined pastures with a couple of horses grazing. I see a chicken coop, rabbit hutch, and a duck pond. I see myself playing my guitar on the porch of a farm house while the sun sets.

Then, I open my eyes and see all the work left to do.

First on my list of tasks is getting to know my ranch. I've been over a lot of the terrain, but that sage is thick. To give you an idea of how much sage there is, if I walk into the sage, some of which is waist high, for about twenty feet, I can no longer see the dirt road. It vanishes. If I did not have my car as a reference point, I could get lost out there in a matter of minutes.

I have turned to looking at satellite photos of the ranch to help me get to know the land. Satellite images show things you can't see from the ground. There are several old roads that don't appear on modern maps that crisscross the ranch.

It is fun to look at these old roads and guess what they were used for, and by whom. One old road I found on the satellite images appears to head west off the property to a strange round shaped object that sits next to an odd rectangular object.

I zoomed in on Google Maps as far as I could, but had no idea what the two objects could be. My initial guesses where a silo of some sort and an abandoned school bus or van. The thing is, I never saw anything like that out at the ranch. Like I said, that sage hides a lot more than you'd think.

No good mystery should go uninvestigated, so I determined to find that old road and follow it out to the mysterious objects. One issue I have out at Dove Ranch, is that there is no cell service. That means using my cheap GPS app is not an option. The GPS part of the app works, but the images disappear, even when I try caching them.



Most of this road was not visible from the ground, but if you got in just the right place with just the right shadows, you could almost make out the old ruts.

I move around mostly by memory when I'm at the ranch. I used my memory of the satellite photo, and looked around until I finally found the old road. It doesn't look like a road from the ground. The sagebrush was so high, I don't think my little Nissan

Sentra could take that road. By standing in just the right spot with just the right lighting, I could barely make out that a road *might* have existed at one time.

It was so overgrown with sagebrush, I really questioned whether that road was only in my imagination. Following it, I reasoned, would either lead me to the mysterious objects seen in the satellite images, or it wouldn't. If the objects were at the end of the "ruts," then it was a road.

Walking the road was quite challenging. Guessing where the ruts were would have been easier with a divining rod than with my eyes. Finally, just over the property line of Dove Ranch, I came to the first of the mysterious objects.



The earth appears to be moved into a semi-circle to capture runoff for cattle or game to drink. While interesting, it's not on our land, so I'm not going to worry about it.

It was a bank of dirt. It was lower in the center than the surrounding terrain. The dirt formed a three to four foot high wall around the ditch in the form of a semi circle. It

almost looks like a dry watering pond for livestock. I'm guessing a rancher could look at this and say what it is for, instantly. Either way, it definitely was not a silo.

So where was the mysterious rectangular object?

I did not see any remains of a van or old school bus. I climbed the dirt wall of the ditch and looked around for mystery object number two. I finally found it hiding out in the sage.



Cattle watering trough to the side of the retention pond.

The strange object I saw from space was not nearly as large as I had imagined it. It was a simple watering trough. Some wood cross bars kept it from blowing away, and some plastic pipes were in it.

It doesn't look very old, but I question whether either the ditch or the trough are still in use. The dry grass around the trough has not been trampled, or grazed on. I can't imagine the grass surviving a visit by even a small herd of cattle.

So, I solved my mystery of the old road and the odd objects, but still am left wondering when they were in use, and who used them. Also, those pipes hooked to the trough must lead somewhere, but I don't know if they go under my property or originate from another direction. There are no easements for pipes across my property, but I still don't want to make enemies with a neighbor by accidentally busting their expensive piping while farming or building out on the ranch.

For all the exploring I had already finished in my visit to Dove Ranch, I still had the most fun exploring yet to come. In Part III of my Exploring Dove Ranch series, I explored the wash. A wash looks like a dried stream bed, but it is actually just nature's drainage ditch. However, I had never had my own wash before, and was anxious to see what it was like.

Exploring Dove Ranch … Part III

April 10, 2014
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead, Wildlife
Tags: bones, clay, cougars, coyotes, erosion, fox, rattlesnakes, ravine, runoff, snakes, wash, water

Bones, Tracks, and the Empty Wash

I planned on visiting all four corners of Dove Ranch. I only managed to visit three corners. I got distracted by the 22-acre wash that cuts down the center of the 80-acre ranch. So, I gave up my quest for visiting the last corner of our ranch for the thrill of seeing what the wash looked like from inside.

I had two concerns for investigating the wash. First, I needed to be careful not to fall over any of the drop offs. There is no cell service out at Dove Ranch, so if I fell and broke my leg, I'd be in serious trouble. No one would come to the rescue, probably for well over a day or longer.

My second concern was rattlesnakes. It was a nasty cold and windy day, so I was hoping reptiles wouldn't be out and about, yet. I'd be amazed if I never see a rattler out on the ranch. There are plenty of kangaroo rats for them to dine on, and the terrain is stereotypical of their habitat. Again, if I got bit out there with no cell service, I'd likely die before anyone knew I was missing.



Most of the wash that runs through our property is not as dramatic as this section.

I began my exploration of the wash by looking for a way down into it. Six to eight foot drop offs seemed common at some parts of the wash, but eventually I found my way down.

Down in the wash, I finally had relief from the terrible wind and chill I had put up with all day. I wore my winter coat, scarf, and hat, but my city clothes were no match for the cold wind up at Dove Ranch. The wash finally made my trip pleasant. Shelter from the constant wind also persuaded me that exploring the wash was a better idea than finding the fourth corner of the property.

There was no water down in the wash, despite the early time of the year. That tells me that this wash is *not* a seasonal stream, it is really just natures drainage ditch. It probably only sees water during rain storms. Looking at the depth of parts of the wash tells me that it is probably uncrossable when it rains.



From this view, the dessert grasses give some perspective to the depth of the wash.

I was happy to see no rattlers down in the wash. However, I still found signs of animal life. I found some fairly well preserved paw prints leading way from the wash in some dried mud. The prints weren't too big, but it reminded me that I could run into a cougar

or coyotes out here. I kept alert to my surroundings. I definitely did not want to become lunch for a predator.



Paw print reminds me that I'm not alone on this property.

Looking at the animal tracks leading away from the wash, they definitely were not made by a jack rabbit or a kangaroo mouse. The gait did not look big enough to me to be a coyote. I wondered if it was a fox. I wouldn't mind seeing a fox. I did not want to run into a couple coyotes, as one of the folk singers I used to listen to was eaten alive by

a couple of coyotes. She died later at a hospital, after they had tried to make a meal of her.

No, I definitely didn’t want to run into coyotes.



This trail of prints reminds me that I'm not alone out here. I keep my attention on my surroundings so that the native wild life doesn't turn me into a statistic.

I found a leg bone from what I think was a steer down in the wash. Even under a rancher's supervision, this terrain can be deadly. Any situation that could kill a steer could kill me, so I had yet another reminder to be cautious.

I found evidence that the wash already destroyed a home. I'm guessing this hole was just part of something's home which got washed away. However, I know some types of birds make their home in walls of washes, so it might have been the home of one of those birds.



This hole in the side of the wash looks like a former home of some animal that got destroyed by erosion. I don't get too close while snapping some shots, because an unknown new dweller may be at home.

I explored down stream first. I had seen from the elevation maps that there might be some sort of drop off in the ravine itself, but that turned out to be wrong. The depth of the wash actually decreased and the walls were not so pronounced as I approached the eastern edge of the property.

I decided it was time to go to the other edge of the property by following the wash. The walk was windy, so I probably trekked half a mile. But, I did not have to dodge sagebrush in the wash—just walking on sand. It was a pleasant walk.

When I got closer the the western edge of the ranch, the wash barely had any walls, and became more difficult to follow, mostly because there were so many little tributaries that drained into the wash.

Finally, the wash opened up into a surreal landscape of smooth clay covered with soil pillars topped by sagebrush. Turns out Dove Ranch isn't just a piece of dirt and sage. It's a piece of dirt, sage, and clay!

I wonder if this area was scared by a fire, and then destroyed by a heavy rain. This is common in this part of the country. A fire comes through an area, and then without plants to hold the soil, the terrain is cleared of soil by erosion from rain. That is certainly what seems to have happened here. Only the spots that still had surviving sagebrush did not get washed away.



Soil towers dot a clay landscape. Sagebrush roots are all that hold together the last of the topsoil that erosion has not yet claimed.

This serves as a big warning about erosion in the desolate land. I must *not* rip out the sage brush until I have something ready to replace it. Otherwise, I could see massive loss of soil. It isn't conjecture. I've seen evidence of it happening in the past.

Overall, I feel my initial exploration of Dove Ranch was a success. I found more than I knew existed on it. I still have a lot to learn about this land. I look forward to getting to know it better while I create my ranch out of the dirt, sage, … and clay.

Growing the Colorado Pinyon Windbreak … Part I

April 15, 2014
Categories: Trees and Shrubs
Tags: Colorado pinyon, pinus edulis, seedlings, windbreak

Experimenting on the Seeds

My previous experience exploring Dove Ranch on a blustery winter's day proves one thing. We need a sturdy windbreak around our ranch. The problem is finding something that grows out there. Dove Ranch only averages nine inches of rain per year. Not many windbreak worthy trees survive off that kind of rainfall. However, it turns out one type of tree not only grows fine off that kind of rainfall, but also bears nuts that sell for a good price. That tree is known to live for many hundreds of years. Of course, I speak of the Colorado Pinyon.

Colorado Pinyons, also known as *Pinus Edulis*, are the perfect match for Dove Ranch. Nine inches of rain per year, suits them just fine. They grow up to 60 feet in height, and have a spread of about 15 feet. They are a slow grower. A Colorado Pinyon can take 80 years to reach 10 feet in height, so this is a windbreak that my kids or grandkids will enjoy more than me.

I bought 500 seeds, and proceeded to try and sprout all of them. I didn't know if any would sprout. With acorns, you can do the float test. That means, you put them in some water, and if they float, they're no good. Only sinkers are alive. I tried the same test with my 500 pinyon seeds and they all floated. That worried me, but pinyons are a dry climate tree, so I was willing to try to sprout them anyway.



A small handful of Colorado pinyon seeds, also know as pinus edulis seeds.

Pinyon seeds need cold stratification before the seeds are willing to sprout. The cold actually changes the seed so that water can get in and the seedling can get out. The seller said they kept the seeds chilled, but I didn't know if the seeds would be ready.

My approach for sprouting pinyons involved soaking the seeds with repeated rinses for 48 hours followed by nearly two weeks of cool moist conditions. Storage for those two weeks can take place in a damp sand in a ziplock bag. I actually didn't have any sand handy, so put a damp paper towel in the ziplock bags to keep the air humid.

After the first week, I started seeing cracks in some of the shells. By the end of the second week, I had some obvious sprouts and lots of other seeds that looked like they were considering sprouting. In all, I had about half of the 500 seeds begin to sprout.

Turns out the float test does not work for pinyon seeds. Good pinyon seeds float, too. Even some seeds that had sprouted floated.



I let this pinyon sprout get too big before planting it. They grow up so fast!

A big problem I ran into with my approach to keeping the seeds moist was mold. Mold is not necessarily bad, as it kills bacteria. But, I rinsed the seeds thoroughly whenever it appeared to get rid of it. I even did a very mild rinse with one part hydrogen peroxide (as sold in pharmacies) and 9 parts water. I rinsed that off quickly, so I wouldn't damage the sprouts more than necessary.

After two weeks, my biggest concern was where to plant my pinyon sprouts. Some of the more vigorous sprouts were already nearly too big. I was afraid they'd die because I hadn't planted them yet. I finally decided to try to plant them in deep cell plug trays—the kind you plant grass plugs in.

Sadly, amazon.com has a lousy selection of some items, and deep cell plug trays turns out to be one of those items. However, I found greenhousemegastore.com has an

excellent selection of all sorts of products, including deep cell plug trays.

I decided to try the combination of SureRoots 50 deep cell plug trays with holes, 1020 trays, and 7″ vented humidity dome for 1020 trays. The combination fit snuggly together. Having holes in the plug trays keeps the roots from rotting. The humidity dome keeps the soil moist so the seeds will sprout. The 1020 tray catches water, so my carpet won't get ruined.



SureRoots 50 deep cell plug tray with holes; 1020 tray; and 7" vented humidity dome for 1020 tray. All from http://www.greenhousemegastore.com/

I filled the cells with a mix of one part gardening sand, and two parts Miracle grow potting soil. I wanted a sandy soil to simulate the ground I'll plant the sprouts in. Also, sandy soil is closer to the native soils of Colorado Pinyons. Filling up four plug trays with the mix took a lot of soil/sand mix. Four plug trays emptied my entire bag of soil and most of my bag of sand.

The next step was planting the sprouts. I carefully dug little holes in my plug cells and planted the sprouts root down just under the surface of the soil mix. I was very careful not to damage the root, especially the tip of the root. Damaging the tap root is very bad for plants like pinyons that require a strong and deep tap root to get water and survive.



Planting Colorado pinyon sprouts in deep cell plug tray.

I only saw signs of life in about 250 of the 500 seeds I tried to sprout. I put the seemingly dead sprouts in a ziplock baggie, and placed them back into the freezer. My hope is that those 250 ungerminated seeds merely suffer from a lack of cold stratification. I will try sprouting them again in 60-90 days. I planted all sprouts below dirt, but still saw some poking out of the soil within another couple of weeks. A very small percentage have made it to what I consider the seedling stage of development. Probably only one percent. Still, I think the rest will catch up, it's just a matter of patience.

In Part II of this article, I go into detail (with pics) of the sprouting seedlings.

Growing the Colorado Pinyon Windbreak … Part II

April 17, 2014
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: Colorado pinyon, pinus edulis, seedlings, windbreak

Emerging of the Seedlings

I planted my Colorado pinyon sprouts in my trays, and waited for anything to happen. I've grown a lot of trees for a city guy, but never have I tried to grow hundreds of seedlings at the same time. This is brand new territory for me. However, I need thousands of pinyons for my wind break, and growing my own trees from seed is the only affordable option.

After about a week, I started seeing soil bulging and my first seedlings emerged from below ground. I've included a series of images showing the stages of the seedling getting out of the ground, the needles emerging from the seed casing, and the needles nearly pushing the seed casing off the plant.



If you look closely, you can see the future needles beginning to work their way out of this seed topped seedling.

It's beautiful to see the first needles on my first Colorado Pinyon seedlings. I had some serious doubts about buying the seeds, but they came through for me.



The future needles are clearly visible on this Colorado Pinyon seedling trying to cast off it's seed casing.

It takes all my will power not to try to help the seedlings get out of their seed case. I know I shouldn't, because that is more likely than not to harm the plant. I feel for the little seedlings in their struggle to be free.



This seedling's future needles are expanding like tentacles from a squid in it's efforts to break free from it's seed casing.

Now that I know that I can trust this seller's stock of pinyon seeds, I have purchased a couple of thousand more seeds. I did the math, and figured that even if I have a 100% germination and survival rate, I'll need almost 900 seeds to plant around the perimeter of Dove Ranch. From my little experiment, it looks like I can expect anywhere from 25% to 50% germination rate, and probably a much smaller survival rate. So, I'll probably need several more thousand seeds beyond what I have already purchased to plant my windbreak.

I plan to have the seedlings ready to plant in September. I'll plant those by the road on the northern edge of Dove Ranch. I'll walk the property edge with the rest of the seeds I've purchased sowing them by hand directly into the soil.

The prevailing winds on Dove Ranch appear to be from the west, so I'll start by sowing the Colorado Pinyons along the western edge of the property. One of my farmer friends told me that plants that get morning light do best. So, I don't want them to get shade

when the sun comes up. Also, I don't want the little seedlings to get eaten or trampled by cattle or game wandering through the ranch. That means, they need to be off the game and cow paths across the property, preferably hidden way from the hungry eyes of livestock and game.

I'll plant the unsprouted seeds I bought just under the edge of sagebrush—to keep them out of the game paths and trampling hazards—on the southeastern side of the sage to give them morning sun and afternoon shade until they get big enough to survive desert heat.

Like many of the experiments I plan for Dove Ranch, this one will take a few years before I know whether it is successful. Keep checking back for more updates.

Adding Landmarks

May 3, 2014
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead
Tags: cattle, driveway, road

I have a newly purchased 80-acre piece of dirt, sage, and clay. I have a vague idea of turning it into a sprawling hobby farm with orchards, ducks, rabbits, chickens, mini angus, and horses. I don't have any equipment, except a shovel and gloves. I don't have any vehicles, except an old Nissan Sentra with 100,000 miles on it. I don't even have water on the land, … yet.

Anyone in their right mind would say, "I'll get started when <insert excuse here>." However, I learned a long time ago, don't put off work just because you don't have everything you need. So, I'm getting started, now. It'll be slow going with the wrong tools, but it will be going.

My first task is figuring out what my first tasks are. Obviously, I can't take on any tasks that require a water well. Planting a garden or orchard are out. I can't take on tasks that require moving big objects to the ranch. Borrowing, buying, or renting a compact tractor is out. However, I can take on tasks that can be accomplished with hand tools and hard work.

Turns out there are quite a few things that I can do on the ranch without water, power tools, heavy equipment, or electricity. First off, I may be odd this way, but all sagebrush looks exactly the same to me. I need landmarks to orient myself with. There's task number one. Give myself some landmarks.

Marking the edges of the property where the roads come on to the land is first up. I have one Box Elder County maintained dirt road that goes through the north edge of the property and one unmaintained Federal BLM road that comes into the north part of the property that joins up with the county road.



I placed reflective orange boundary markers on each side of the three spots where roads enter Dove Ranch.

Every time I drive down that county dirt road, I have to use GPS to figure out when I have arrived. Like I said, all sagebrush looks the same to me, and that's all there is to see out there. So marking the edge of the property along the road would have an immediate benefit. I can stop guessing when I've arrived.

I found myself some bright orange reflector stakes at Lowe's and used those as my markers. Finding the edge of the property along the roads was a little tricky. I was able to use a combination of the county's property maps, Federal survey markers, and GPS for two of the entrances to the property. I think those two are pretty close to accurate—maybe within inches.

For the third property boundary, I had to go off just GPS and Google Maps. That one might be several feet off, but on such a large property, it won't matter much. I'm planning to keep all my work more toward the center of the north end of the property, so a few feet on the east side won't be a big deal.

I put a total of six orange stakes in, one on each side of each road at the property boundaries. I walked to the locations, though I was tempted to drive to them.

I was a little nervous walking too far from my car. This visit there were a lot of livestock roaming around up there. I've had farmer relatives who have drilled into my head exactly how dangerous one ornery bull can be, so I kept an eye on the locations of myself in relation to the cattle.



I placed two red reflective driveway markers, and began clearing a new driveway.

Every time I've visited the ranch, I've had to park on the side of the county's dirt road. I have no cleared driveway onto the property. Eventually, I'll put in a farm house with a driveway. I obviously can't build a house, yet. However, a driveway sounds like the perfect shovel-only task.

I started by putting in a couple of red driveway reflectors like you'd find in any typical suburban neighborhood. (I can't help but wonder what the local rancher will think when he drives by those reflectors seemingly in the middle of nowhere.) Next I cleared my first twenty square feet of sagebrush at the entrance of my new driveway.

I did think far enough ahead to bring a saw with my shovel. Removing sage brush isn't too terrible. It is slow, but definitely doable without any special equipment.

At this point the cattle were getting closer to me, so I moved my car to right in front of my new driveway-in-the-making. I figured, if I needed to, I could shelter in the vehicle.



The blurry black blob is a cow with her calf watching me at Dove Ranch.

After getting a start on the driveway, I decided to plant a few pinyon seeds. (I'm holding off on planting my pinyon seedlings until later this year.) I used my shovel to pry open the soil, and dropped three seeds into each hole. I kept to the area within a hundred feet to each side of my new driveway, and across the street from the driveway. From my earlier experiments, I know the seeds sprout about one third of the time, so with three seeds in each hole, I think there is a likely chance that a tree will sprout most places I planted the seeds.

I guess my next task is obvious. I need to finish the driveway. After I create the driveway, I need to fence off an area to keep my work (and myself) away from the livestock roaming the property.

I'm excited for my next visit to Dove Ranch. Just the little work I've done, so far, has me excited to do more.

Scratches, Scorpions, and Coyotes

May 19, 2014
Categories: The Homestead, Wildlife
Tags: coyotes, driveway, scorpions

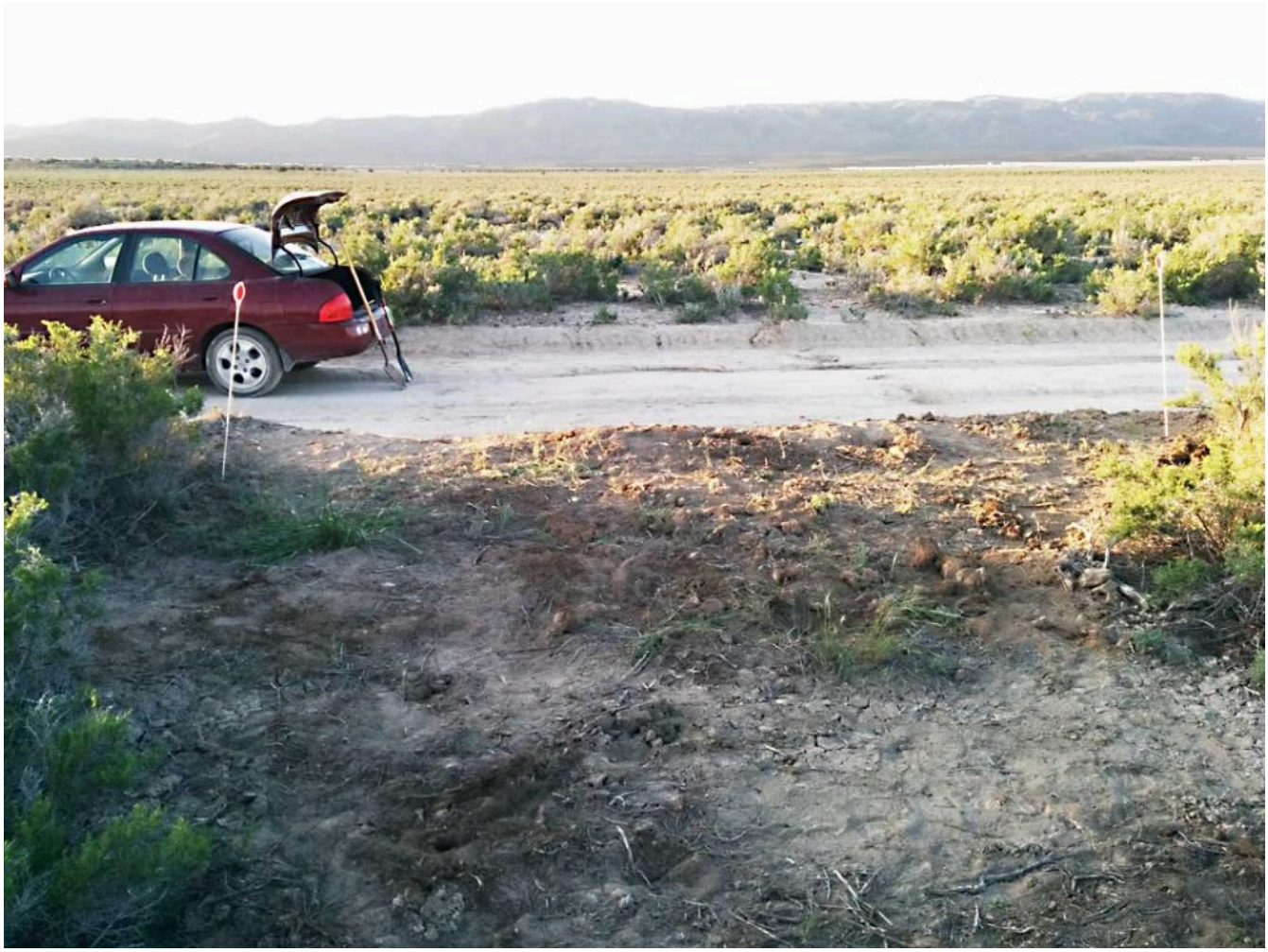
My first scorpion said “Hi!” to me out at Dove Ranch on Saturday. It was a small tan one, probably 2-3 inches long. I’ve never seen a scorpion here in Utah, but knew they were around. I’m just glad I saw him before he saw me.

It took a few hours before it dawned on me that I missed a great photo op. Instead I gently moved the scorpion about a hundred feet from my work-site with a shovel. He took that agitated, I’m going to get you pose for the whole trip. In the end, neither of us killed each other.

I think we bonded. ; –)

I drove the entire way to the ranch this time with my GPS turned off. I found the little turnoff from the main state highway with no problems, and knew when I was to the ranch because of the markers I’d put up at the edge of the property. Finding the beginnings of the driveway was easy too, because of the bright red reflectors I marked it with on my last trip.

My goal for this trip was to remove enough sage from the beginnings of the driveway that I could park on the property instead of the road. I removed some sagebrush last time, but not enough to notice. This whole trip was dedicated to starting that ranch road.



I finally have a short driveway on Dove Ranch.

Turns out removing sagebrush is backbreaking work. I used my shovel to explore the bushes before ripping / digging / sawing them out. I wanted to make sure there were no rattlesnakes hiding out in any of them.

Diamondback rattlesnakes are deadly, and can get to be six feet long. Many scorpions are not deadly. They're stings are more like bee stings. Rattlesnakes are all deadly. If you don't get anti-venom, there's a good chance you will die.

Dove Ranch isn't near a hospital. There isn't cellphone service. There isn't even a police station within an hour and a half drive of the ranch.

Nope. I don't want to happen across a snake up there. Number one rule up on the ranch is don't get bit by a rattlesnake when alone.

I struggled to get all the sagebrush cleared down to the dirt in my new driveway, and nearly broke my shovel doing so. It bent all kinds of ways I'm sure it shouldn't, and it made a few creaking and cracking noises that couldn't have been good. Next trip, I'm going to bring my crowbar and see if that lets me rip the bigger bushes up by the roots.

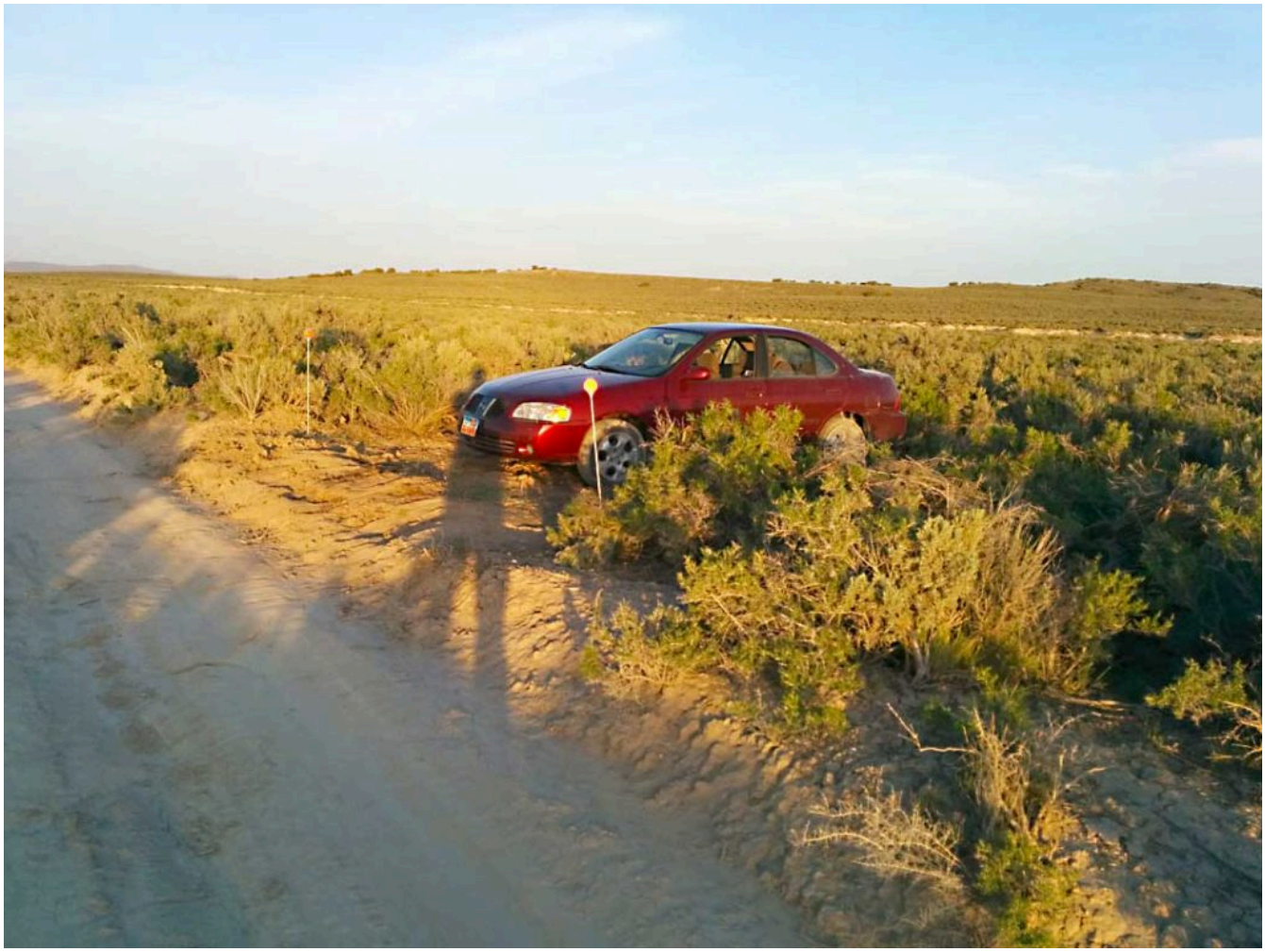
I managed to get scratched up pretty good removing the sage. The bushes have pointy bits all over. I'd even call them thorny. I'm at the very beginning of the process of putting my blood and sweat into the land.



I scratched up my left arm pretty good on the sage I was removing.

The area was pretty quiet when I parked my car and got to work. Eventually, the birds and other noise making critters decided that I wasn't a threat, and it got pretty loud with all the chirping and other odd sounds. It may look empty up at the ranch, but there is a lot of unseen wildlife.

Finally, I managed to finish removing enough sagebrush that I could park my little Nissan Sentra on the property. The bottom scraped the dirt, because there isn't a good grade at the entrance of my new driveway. I'll fix that little by little.



I parked on my own driveway up at Dove Ranch for the first time in May of 2014.

While I was taking a few pictures to prove I had accomplished something out on the ranch with the car in the new driveway, I was treated to a pack of coyotes yipping. They seemed excited about something, and all started yelping together. I counted at least four or five yipping at the same time. They were close, maybe a quarter to half a mile away.

Maybe mom and dad coyote were bring food back to some pups. That would explain the noise. It did unnerve me a bit. Two hungry coyotes working together can kill an unarmed human. My number two rule is, don't get eaten by anything up on Dove Ranch.

Over all, it was a successful trip. I got a lot of sagebrush removed, and had a few exciting events to spice up my time on the ranch. It will be a bit harder to make myself go up to the ranch these next few months. Summer brings a lot of yard work at my house. But, I'm sure the urge to go work up there will overpower me again soon enough. There's a lot of work to do on that driveway.

Home Garden

May 27, 2014
Categories: Gardening, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: beans, Colorado pinyon, corn, peas, pumpkin, squash, strawberries, Three Sisters, zucchini

My desire to own and run a hobby farm spring from my love of gardening. My children, wife, and I maintain a garden that spans much of our back yard. Even with that much space for the garden, we never have enough space for all the types of seeds that we want to plant.



We did much better with our peas this year.

This year, we finally had success with our pea patch. We will be harvesting our first peas later this week. In the past we planted the peas in May, but the weather here in northern Utah gets hot quickly, and peas hate the hot dry weather.

After talking to my father-in-law and doing research on the Internet, I discovered that peas do well growing in mild snowy weather, if they are still small. So this year, I sowed my seeds in March and let them grow in the frosts and snow when most garden plants die. It turned out to be a great plan, as you can see from the picture above.

I read about the three sisters approach to growing corn, beans, and squash last fall. I've been trying to it all winter, and now that spring is here with summer fast approaching, I finally get to give it a go.

The three sisters method comes from time tested Native American Indian farming techniques. Essentially, you plant corn on mounds. When the corn gets to be about four or five inches high, you plant pole beans around the corn. A week after the beans sprout, you plant squash around the edges of the mounds.

The three sisters, beans, corn, and squash, work together. The beans provide nitrogen enriched soil to the corn and squash. The corn provides poles for the beans to grow up. The squash provides shade to the soil for the corn and beans. The squash, being thorny, provides the beans and corn protection from raccoons, deer and other critters.

For squash, I'm going to use zucchini and pie pumpkins. I'm just using sweet corn and regular pole beans for the other two sisters. I figure the first two or three years will fail, but you never know. Sometimes we succeed first try. I'll get plenty of pics at different stages.



My daughter has the knack for growing strawberries. My attempts at growing strawberries always fail. Glad to see someone in the family has had success.

My daughter's strawberry patch is taking off this year. We've had to cut it back, so it doesn't claim the rest of the garden, while she visited her grandparents in New York. I teased her that they look like zucchini they're so huge.

She keeps bringing in handfuls of nearly-ripe strawberries. She places the nearly-ripe strawberries in to plastic sandwich bags. Having the strawberries in the enclosed space preventing free flow of air makes the chemical that ripens them work faster. They usually ripen overnight or within just over a day. I guess that trick works with a lot of fruit.



My Colorado Pinyons seedlings are still plugging away.

My Colorado Pinyons are still growing. I've had to make sure they don't get over watered. They love sun and dry soil. Everything else in my garden begs for some shade and water, but those pinyons look great when I make sure the soil dries out on them and they get lots of hot direct sunlight.

I still have about 32 of the pinyons growing from the original set of seeds I tried sprouting. I hope to plant them this fall, just before it gets cold and wet up at Dove

Ranch. I don’t know if I will need to transplant them this summer into something bigger than the deep plug trays I sprouted them in. I’ll figure it out as I go along.

Cheap Sprinklers

May 29, 2014
Categories: Gardening
Tags: irrigation, sprinklers

Know your sprinklers. Sometimes you can look at a sprinkler in the store and know at a glance the limitations of the design. Other times, you need to try the sprinkler out before you learn what it is good for.

Take, for instance, the cheap sprinkler pictured below. It cost under $3 (US). Looking at the design, I thought it held promise. My old sprinkler is wearing out, and get's stuck sometimes. I thought that I'd give a newer one a chance. Testing the new cheap sprinkler out, it seemed to give great coverage when used on a small area.



You get what you pay for when it comes to lawn and garden sprinklers.

I figured I'd give my three dollar sprinkler a try at watering my garden. It looked like it gave good coverage. When I shut it off before I went to sleep, the entire garden looked wet.

After a night of dry wind, I got a better idea of the sprinkler's performance. I took a look out the window this morning and saw the sprinkler's coverage lacked uniformity. However, it made pretty designs in the dirt. Too bad, that wasn't the goal.



The wind blew all night, and in the morning it was obvious what areas had been watered properly.

The sprinkler probably would do fine for a small flower patch, but over wider areas, it appears the saturation isn't good. I think I'll stick to my old sprinkler for now.

Cacti and Posts

June 1, 2014
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead, Wildlife
Tags: cacti, prickly pear cactus, scorpions, t-posts

My wife, Bridget, visited Dove Ranch for the first time this last week. We have planned several trips together, but work or other commitments got in the way every other time. I was pretty excited to show her around the place.

Once again, this visit was filled with firsts. This was her first visit, we drove t-posts for the first time, and we saw our first prickly pear cactus on the ranch. Luckily, we still have not seen any rattlers on the ranch.



I didn't think that prickly pear cactus could survive the freezing winters up at the ranch. Guess I was wrong.

I looked all over for another scorpion. I wanted to take a picture of one, since I missed my chance last time around. Unfortunately, I didn't see one. I'm wondering if scorpions hide out in the sagebrush during the day. Guess I'll find out if I run into more while clearing my driveway.

I warned my wife to bring jeans to wear up at the ranch. The brush up there is covered in thorns, and I knew she didn't want her legs all scratched up. She intended to bring some jeans, but in the rush to leave, forgot.

Her solution—creative as always—was to tie bandanas around her legs to protect them from the brush. For the most part it worked, and it provided comedy relief. We made a lot of jokes about how they looked like 70's leg warmers.



My wife, and her leg protection, posing at the southeast corner of our ranch.

I finally brought a measuring wheel up the Dove Ranch. I want to plan out the first phase, but need accurate measurements if I'm going to make a map of where I want my orchards and vineyards. Finally, I have some measurements I can trust. Google Maps and the Box Elder County website were just not cutting it for planning purposes.

Using a compass, binoculars, and the measuring wheel, I found the corners of the odd-shaped 7-acre chunk of land that is going to be the first phase of our ranch. There is one corner that I want to double check. I'll check that one from the road with a compass and binoculars on my next visit. At some point, I'll have some surveyors come out and mark the property accurately.



I drove my first t-posts on this trip to Dove Ranch.

We drove t-posts to mark out the fence-line for phase 1. Bridget drove one to see what it was like, then gladly let me drive the other six t-posts. I'm going to get in pretty good shape if I drive a lot of these things.

After we figured out where we wanted the fence-line, Bridget wanted a look at the wash and southern end of the property. (Remember, we're a couple of suburbanites use to considering .18 acre lots as big.) While we spent an hour hiking around the wash, and up to the southeast corner of the ranch, Bridget's most common question was, "Is this still our property?" And my most common answer was, "Yup."

There are a whole bunch of little gecko-like lizards on the ranch. They're extremely hard to get pictures of, but I managed it this time. One of them posed for me under a sagebrush. I managed a couple of good pics before he scampered deeper under cover.



One of the fast moving lizards had to take a breather, so I took advantage of it to take his picture.

Overall, it was a great trip. Bridget and I stayed up there a couple of hours longer than we had intended, because we had so much to do. I've finally been to all four corners of the ranch. We also finally have some fence-lines planned out.

Our next steps are: 1) more planning, 2) continuing work on the driveway, 3) clearing sagebrush from the fence-lines in preparation for my installing the fence.

I'm planning to clear the fence-line and install all of the fencing in phase one by hand. With the corners of phase one marked out, I'm feeling like some small progress has

been made on Dove Ranch. Still, I'm realistic enough to know I have a lifetime of work ahead of me up on the ranch.

Cougar in the Brush

June 3, 2014
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead, Wildlife
Tags: cougars, driveway, fence, jack rabbit, suncatcher, t-posts, wind chimes

I was up in northern Utah today, so took the opportunity to visit my ranch. I wanted to double check one of the t-post's positions from the other day. I wanted to make sure it was really on my property according to my GPS. Not that I doubt my use of a compass, but … well … I doubt my use of a compass.

Today was the hottest day of the year. It is only June 2nd, and already it hit 91 degrees. Even though there was a steady wind at the ranch, I was swarmed by flies and wasps whenever I stood still. It wasn't that bad last week. I think it is because we were there earlier in the morning, and it was a cooler day. I'll have to plan my work on the ranch for cooler times of the day to prevent bug annoyances.

I know it sounds a bit silly, but I've always wanted wind chimes. I've wanted a good loud set of wind chimes, but didn't want my suburban neighbors complaining about the noise. No one's going to complain up at Dove Ranch, so I indulged myself. I'll probably buy more chimes and sun catchers for the ranch. I love wind chimes and sun catchers.

After placing my first set of chimes, I hiked back to the t-post that was worrying me. My GPS showed it to be firmly on my property. That put my mind at ease. Even though none of my neighbors up there seem to actually visit or improve their land, I don't want to be a jerk or inconsiderate by placing fencing on their land.

I began the hike back to my car, when I ran into a game trail with tracks all over in the dust. The tracks that stood out the most to me were some cougar tracks. Finding what looked like fresh cougar tracks in the dust unnerved me a bit. I didn't have any bear spray or even a shovel with me. If I ran into a hungry cougar without any way to defend myself, I was in real trouble.

I made a beeline for my car. I figured I could grab my shovel and safely work some more on my driveway. I really wanted that shovel in my hands.

I was about 15 feet from my car when one of the bushes between me and the car shook violently. I hoped I had just scared a jack rabbit, but figured I'd play it safe, and made a large semicircle around the bush until I was back at my car with a shovel in hand.

I seriously doubt it was a cougar in the brush, but now that I know cougars roam my ranch, I need to be more careful. I'm cautious of coyotes, but one cougar can be very deadly. And this time of year, cougars are still feeding young ones. They need lots of meat.

Back at the car, I felt a little safer. I had a shovel, and could always retreat into the vehicle. I got back to work on the grading at the entrance to the drive.

I tested my work before I called it a day. I can now pull in and out of the driveway without scraping the bottom of the car. I wasn't up there for long, because I had to go pick up my daughter from her college activities. Still, I got work on chimes, a post, and the drive finished. I had quite an adventure for such a short visit.

Three Sisters, Baby Pinyons, and Savings

June 14, 2014
Categories: Gardening, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: apple trees, beans, brushcutter, corn, fence, pumpkin, savings, zucchini

The next tasks I have at my hobby farm are all related to clearing sagebrush. I have to clear about half a mile of future fence line. I need to clear several hundred feet of driveway. Also, I need to clear the spot I am going to start testing buffalo grass varieties and drip systems on apple tree saplings.

That adds up to a lot of very slow backbreaking work. That got me looking into brushcutters. Even a wimpy brushcutter could finish all that work in just a few visits to the ranch. Whereas, it would take well over a year of visits for me to do all that work by hand.

Alas, (very dramatic) I can't afford a brushcutter. The low-end brushcutter and saw blade that will do what I need is over $300. I'm broke from monthly payments for the ranch, so $300 is out of the question. However, I came up with a plan.

Today would be the perfect day for working up at my hobby farm, but I'm holding back. Instead, I'll take the gas money I would have spent on the trip, and put it in savings. I'll keep skipping trips to the ranch and set aside the unspent gas money, until I have the money for a cheap brushcutter and saw blade attachment. That way I can afford the brushcutter.

In the mean time, there is plenty of gardening (call it farm prep/practice) and other ranch related work I can do from home. I'll just have to control my urge to drive off to work on the land. Not easy, but I think I can.

In the mean time, I have the corn for my try at three sisters gardening well underway. The three sisters approach involves planting your corn. Then, when your corn is a few

inches tall, plant pole bean seeds around the corn. The corn will act as the pole for the beans. The beans provide nitrogen for the soil, making it richer soil. Then when the beans are underway, plant squash such as zucchini or pumpkin around the mounds of corn and beans. In theory, the pokey squash plants ward off animals that would love to graze on the beans and the corn.



Time to plant the pole beans around the corn.

As you can see from the corn pic, I have one of those real gardens that need constant weeding. I'll weed the corn before I plant the beans. I figured that I would give the beans a jumpstart by soaking them for several hours before planting the beans. I will plant four seeds around each corn stalk.

I am still working on growing Colorado pinyons to use as a windbreak at my fence line. There is pretty much no information on how to grow Colorado pinyons from seed out there on the internet, so I'm constantly making guesses and doing experiments.



We transplanted ten of the pinyons into pots, and left the rest in the plug trays.

My latest experiment is to see if transplanting the sprouts I have to bigger pots would give them an advantage over the ones left in the deep plug trays. It turns out at about an inch or two inches tall, the root system is not developed enough to keep the soil together during a transfer. Most of these baby pinyons essentially got pulled up by the roots from the plug tray, and then planted bare root in their new pots.

I may need to wait two to three years to plant these trees on the ranch. I expected the root system to grow much faster than this. I'm not use to growing trees from seed, so maybe all trees have slow developing root systems. I wouldn't know.

Pretty soon, I think I'll start working on growing buffalo grass plugs. I'll need those this fall. Like I keep saying, there's plenty of work to do for the ranch, even when I can't get up to the ranch.

Searching for Drought Tolerant Trees

June 29, 2014
Categories: Trees and Shrubs
Tags: Arizona cypress, bur oak, Chinese elm, Colorado pinyon, drought tolerant trees, lacebark elm, ponderosa pine, sea buckthorn, seaberry, Utah serviceberry

Trees to Experiment With

Dove Ranch doesn't get much rain. In fact, the Salt Lake Valley gets twice as much rain as Park Valley where the ranch is located. That doesn't mean trees can't grow at the ranch, but it does mean they need help getting started. A lot of trees can survive up there as long as they get extra water until they are established. There are a lot of trees that can handle low water environments, but fewer that can handle winters, too. So, my search for Park Valley friendly trees has been slow. Still, I'm having some success. Here is a list of some interesting drought tolerant trees I've been researching for possible planting on Dove Ranch.

Colorado Pinyon (Pinus edulis) – Colorado pinyons can thrive off even less water than the Junipers that already populate Park Valley. When they're small, they might get eaten by the cattle that graze across the land, but I'm still planning to hand plant a couple of thousand seeds this fall all over the 80 acre ranch. I'll draft my wife or kids to help out. These trees are slow growing, but shouldn't need any special attention to grow in Park Valley. Best of all, the pine nuts they will produce many years from now are delicious. (I ate a few of the seeds, just to make sure I liked the taste.) These trees live for hundreds of years, but are slow growers. I have to accept that I might never see these trees get very tall, but my kids might.

Arizona Cypress (Cupressus arizonica) – I'm very excited about this one. It only needs 10″ of rain annually. It should grow nicely up at the ranch. It isn't extremely cold tolerant, but should handle winters up there nicely most years. These trees start dying if exposed to below -13 degrees Fahrenheit. That should be rare even in Park Valley. Park Valley usually stays above 10 degrees even in January.

Lacebark Elm aka Chinese Elm (Ulmus parvifolia) – These are one of the useless, but pretty trees I plan to test out. They are good for shade, but the wood will poison meat if it is used for smoking it. They don't produce any fruit or nuts. But, they have the coolest looking trunks you will ever see. They get a camo design going in the bark. I love it. Lacebark Elms are faster growing than Bur Oaks, but they need 16″ of rain annually, instead of just 15″. I'm pretty sure I can get them established and keep them alive until I get a well up at the ranch.

Bur Oak (Quercus macrocarpa) – These oaks produce massive acorns, when watered regularly. When given as little water as you see at Dove Ranch, they become stunted and more of a scrub oak. They need about 15″ of rain annually, so a little more than I see up at the ranch. However, they should be easy to get established and keep alive until I get a water well up there. I'm looking for trees that need no supplementary water, or only one visit from me per month. Bur Oak should work well in the area I'll be setting up first.

Utah Serviceberry (Amelanchier utahensis) – I've lived in Utah for nearly 30 years, and never heard of these fruit bearing trees. They look a bit like Russian olives, so I may have seen them many times, and had no clue what they were. No one I've spoken to so far has heard of them, either. However, they only need 12″ of rain annually once established. I'll try out 1000 seeds, and see if I can get them growing up at Dove Ranch.

Seaberry aka Sea Buckthorn (Hippophae rhamnoides) -Sources claim they need at least 20″ of rain annually to get established, and that they can survive on a lot less once established. Dove Ranch only gets about 9″-12″ inches per year, so I'll plant these seeds on the ranch and see what happens. I'll also plant some at my house in pots and see if I can get them to grow before planting and babying them along. I only have 100 seeds, so I may need to get more seeds to do any real testing. The trees come in male and female varieties. The males send up shoots to spread to new locations. The females produce the berries. Also, these trees absolutely hate shade, even when small, so all sagebrush needs to be cleared from areas I plant them.

Ponderosa Pine (Pinus ponderosa) – Ponderosa pine grow to be huge, and only need 15″ of water annually once established. They grow to over 200 feet tall at maturity, and 6 feet in diameter at the base. They live for hundreds of years, too. Obviously, I wouldn't

live to see any get that big, but it would be cool to know someone may look up at the massive tree someday and say, “Wow!” I’m guessing there are other trees I should be looking into. The Utah Serviceberry totally caught me off guard. If anyone has any suggestions, please leave a comment below!

Websites to check out …

The Weber Basin website has a nice, though very incomplete list of plants that can handle low water conditions.
http://www.weberbasin.com/conservation/index.php/publications/plant-lists-a-searches

The Utah.gov site has a nice list of drought tolerant trees and plants. They like to call it “water-wise”, I suppose in an effort to shame people into not planting anything regional plant snobs look down their noses at. I find the term “water-wise” extremely offensive, personally. It has too much “New Speak” stink about it.
http://waterwiseplants.utah.gov/default.asp?p=PlantInfo&Plant=90&Cart=

This is a very nice link for finding trees that might work in my area. I see trees missing from the list when I search, but it does have a nice selection.
http://lyra.ifas.ufl.edu/NorthernTrees/NorthernTreeSelector.swf

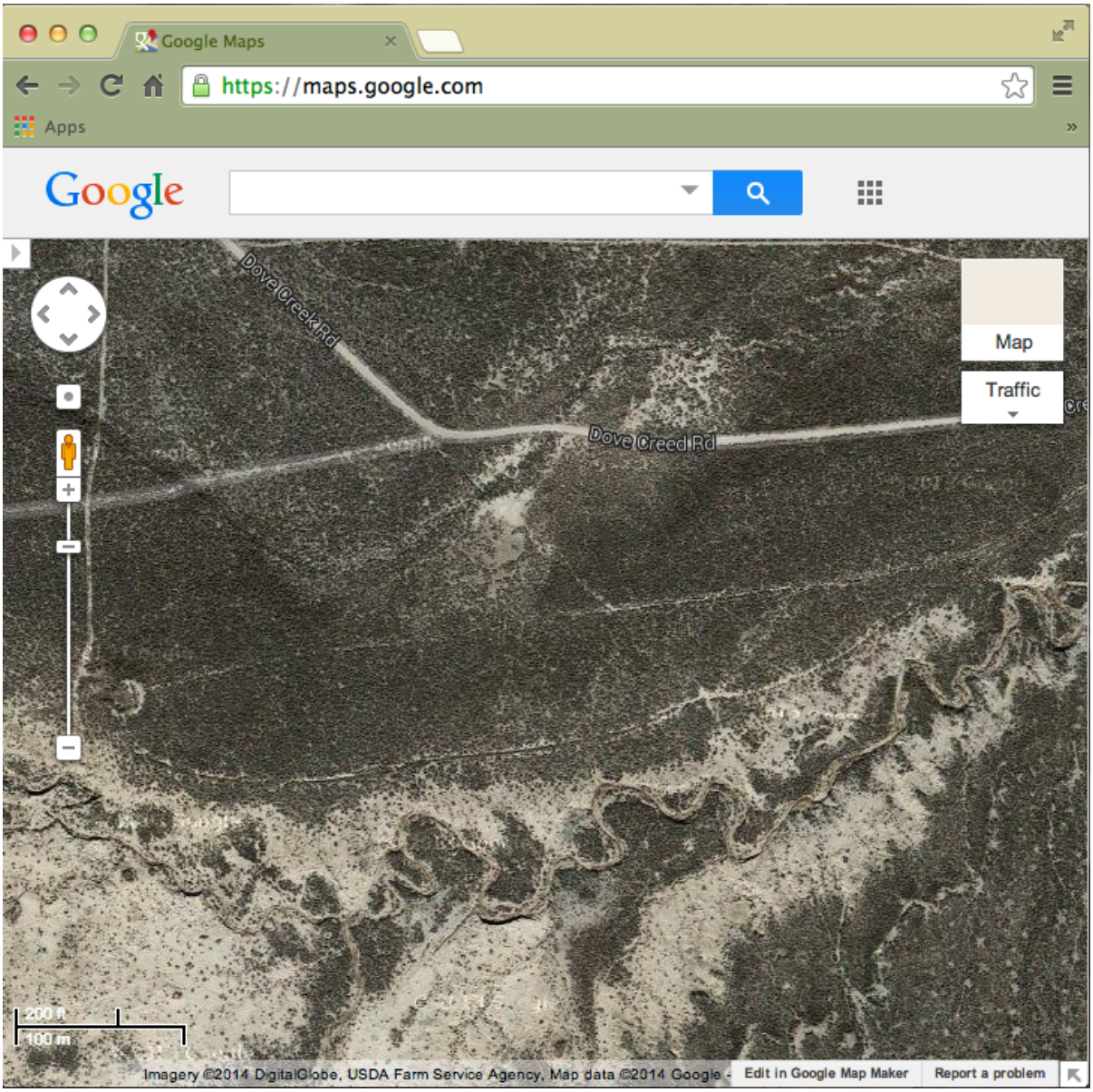
This might be a nice place to get tree seeds. I haven’t ordered from them yet, but the selection and information isn’t bad. http://www.datreestore.com/index.html

I absolutely love the Arbor Day Foundation. You can order tiny trees from them, too. However, I’d only do that during cold parts of the year so the trees aren’t killed in transit. http://www.arborday.org/

Is It a Road?

July 13, 2014
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: driveway, fence, historical maps, maps, road, trails

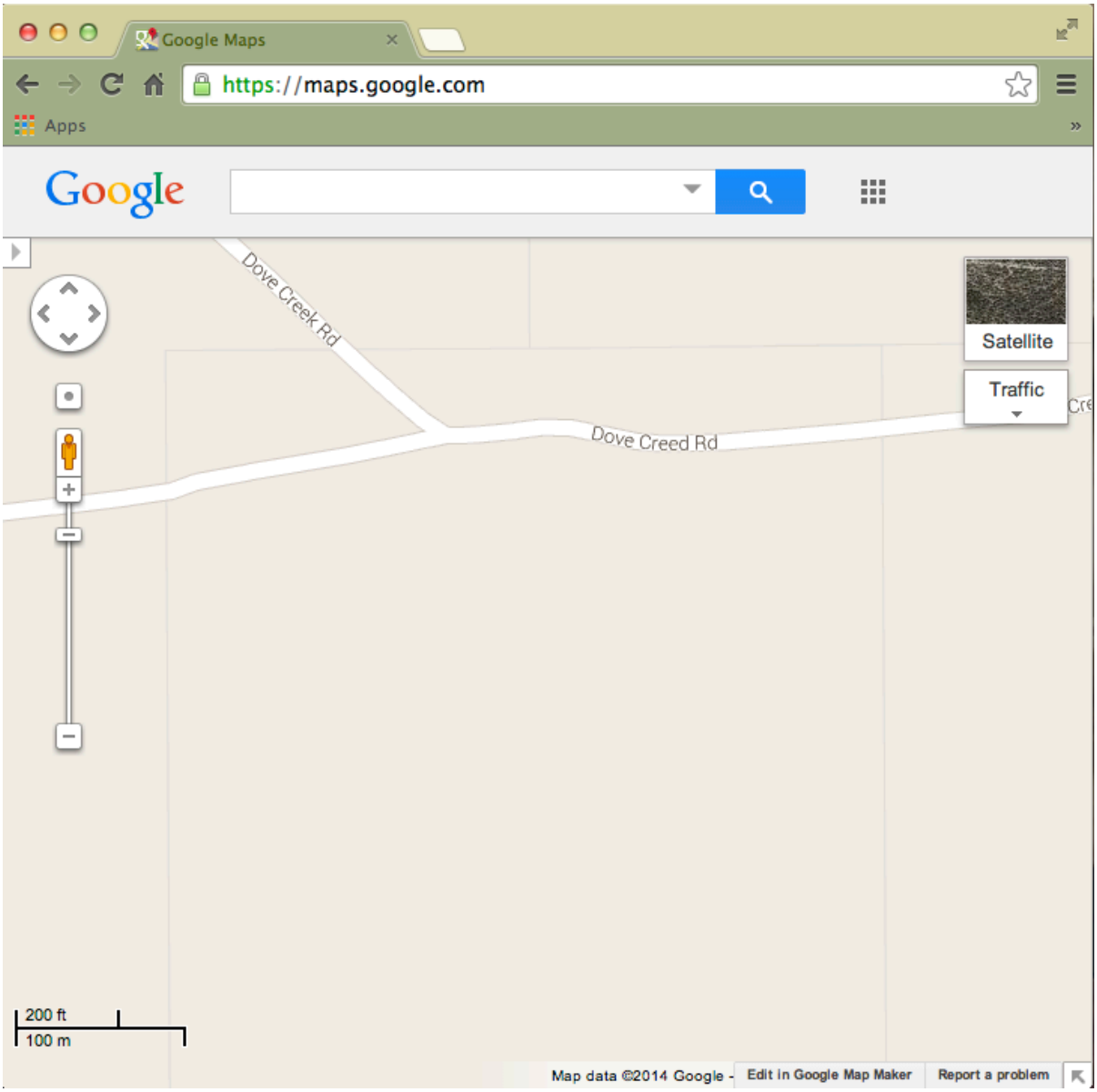
The dirt road touching the northern end of my land is obviously an actual road (barely) maintained by the county or state. It even has a name, Dove Creek Hills Road, though the maps seem to have three or four variations on the name. Satellite pictures show the remnants of several four-wheel drive trails across my property. Google Maps shows a road branching off the main dirt road, and heading out the northwest corner of my property. Other less reliable maps show a bunch of other potential road configurations on my land.



Satellite pictures of my land show several potential roads across the ranch.

Which of the trails and roads historically found on my hobby farm are actually official roads, and which are put in by ranchers, but are not really roads? If I fence land and it turns out that I've stretched fencing across an actual road, then someday the government could come along and rip up my fence and other land improvements, or worse yet, fine me.

In short, I've had a terrible time figuring out what is a road and what is not a road on my land.



Google Maps shows just two roads on my property.

From the ground, the only road besides the main dirt road that looks like it was ever seriously used, is the road that heads off west from the north end of the ranch. However, the entrance to that road is very overgrown. Even knowing it is there, I used to miss the road altogether when I'd drive onto the property along the main road. I keep vacillating between the ideas of blocking the old road with a fence or clearing the section of the road that is on my property so adventurers can find it more easily.

Finally, I came across some historical government maps of the area. Since the government—at all levels—are the only ones that really get a say in where my fences go on my property, I figured I'd stick with them to make my decision about the roads through my ranch.



The dashed black lines are four-wheel drive trails across my land on the 1954 map.

Looking as far back as 1954, only two roads cross my land. It appears they don't even qualify as real dirt roads. They were more of jeep trails. In fact, until the newest government maps appeared, they called the roads "jeep trails." Sometime between the 1970's and the early 1980's, the main road through my ranch got improved all the way to dirt road status. However, the road leading off to the west is still officially a 4WD trail.



One main dirt road, and one four-wheel drive road cross the northern end of my ranch on the 1991 map.

Now that I've looked at 60 years of government maps, I can ignore most of the old roads shown by the satellites, but I can't ignore the 4WD trail heading to the west. After I finish putting in my driveway, I'll clear that 4WD road to make it easier to spot by anyone passing through Dove Ranch. I'll also keep my fencing from blocking the road.

Update: I've done some searching on recent BLM and other federal maps, and the old 4wD trail is no longer recognized as a road or trail on those maps. Also, the county

appears to have claimed the main road going through my ranch, but does not recognize the old 4WD trail heading to the west from my ranch. So, I guess now it is just a glorified driveway.

The Brush Blade and the Driveway

July 17, 2014
Categories: The Homestead, Wildlife
Tags: brushcutter, driveway, inchworms, magpie, sagebrush, seaberry, Utah serviceberry

Not every experiment ends in success. Ask Edison. So, I shouldn't find my latest spectacular failure that surprising.

While preparing a blog entry about sprouting seaberries and Utah serviceberries, I discovered plenty of new ways to make mold and mildew. Overall, it was a spectacularly slimy failure.

I shall take the remainder of my seaberry and serviceberry seeds, and plant them on the ranch. If Mother Nature wants to give me a hand, they'll sprout next spring. If not, then I'll have given the seeds a proper burial.

Now, on to more success filled adventures.



Our neighbor's cat is a little too friendly.

I started my day by kicking the neighbor's cat off the dashboard of our van. He's a beautiful cat, but a little too friendly for his own safety. We always have to check around our vehicles to make sure he's not taking a nap behind the back tires before pulling out of our driveway.

I took my daughter up to Dove Ranch for the first time, this trip. None of my boys have seen the ranch, yet. I'll start bringing the boys up when I have some work that is safe for teenagers and younger children to help out with.

Having discovered that removing waist high sagebrush with a mere handsaw and gardening shovel to be slow going, I invested in a cheap brushcutter with a nice brush blade. It took me a few paychecks to save up half the cash. The rest I put on credit. (I know. Awful habit. I'm working on it.)



I started this visit to Dove Ranch with less than 15 feet of completed driveway. Esther posed in the center of the drive, to give some perspective.

I worked on the main driveway on previous trips. The driveway was less than 15 feet long when I got to Dove Ranch, this trip. I had high hopes for the brushcutter's speed. After giving my daughter a quick tour of the ranch, I tore into the sagebrush with my new toy.

I can't complain about the brushcutter's power. It's a Stihl FS 90 with handlebar grips and a brush blade. It's their entry level brushcutter, but still gets the job done.

At the dealership, I was silently mocking the facemasks they sold as an unnecessary upsales. After taking more chunks of wood in the face than I can remember, I'm thinking it would be wonderful to buy a facemask to go with the brushcutter.

Looking closer at the brush I was removing, I found tons of gray and green inchworms. I've always loved inchworms. They may cause me problems later, but I just love how

they walk by folding over double with every step.



Looking close at the brush I was cutting, I found tons of green and gray inch worms. This is one of the green ones.

I took a break from cutting brush to snack on some Funyuns. I opened my Funyuns and all the flies buzzing my head disappeared instantly. I don't know if that should worry me. Either way, I still love Funyuns.



I saw a magpie on the ranch.

We saw our first magpie up at Dove Ranch. I've always considered magpies to be beautiful, so I'm very happy to see them in the area. The magpie rested on one of my t-posts and got a good look at us before flying off. Maybe, he wanted some of my Funyuns.

After several hours of work, I extended the driveway to 60 feet long. I still need to take out a lot of the stumps with a shovel, but it's definite progress. For comparison, my home driveway is 35 feet long. Even with all that work done, I'm still several hundred feet from completion of the ranch's drive.



My daughter, Esther, is that small dot at the far end of the newly cut 60-foot driveway.

I'll call the brushcutter experiment a success. It makes up for my sprouting failures. When we finally got home, we were greeted by the neighbor's gray cat. I opened my van door, and there he was, looking for a good petting.

Planting Blanket Flowers at the Ranch

July 28, 2014
Categories: Adventures, Gardening, The Homestead
Tags: blanket flowers, cattle, Dove Creek Hills Road, doves, driveway, Ruby Pipeline, semi-arid

We planted lots of tree and flower seeds hoping they sprout and thrive up at Dove Ranch. However, nothing says instant gratification like planting living growing things in plain view. I'm starting with four small blanket flowers.

I can't remember where I heard about blanket flowers. They're a great match to the semi-arid climate at Dove Ranch. Supposedly, they can live off of 10 inches of rain per year. The ranch gets an average of 9 inches per year, so I'll need to water them a few times during the summer. Also, grazing animals, such as deer and hopefully cattle, hate how they taste.



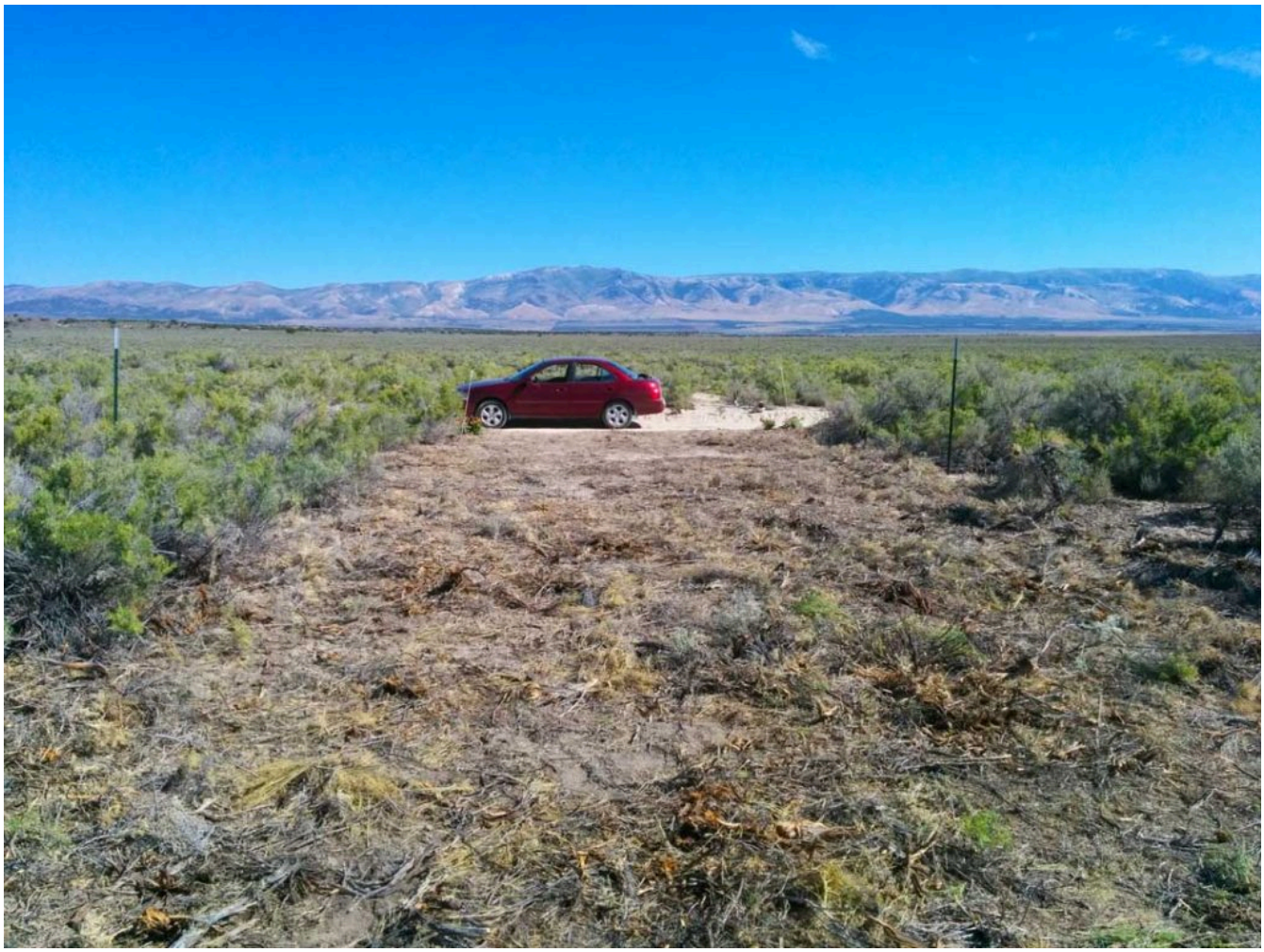
Two newly planted blanket flowers at Dove Ranch

I bought four potted blanket flowers. They are a mix of Arizona Red Shades and Mesa Bicolor. Honestly, I can't tell much of a difference between the two. Though they definitely stand out next to the tan dirt and khaki green sagebrush.

This is my first big experiment with keeping plants alive on the ranch. I'm planning to experiment with growing lacebark elm trees next. I'll plant two with olla's (for drip irrigation) and deer fencing at the driveway entrance come this fall.

Talk about flies everywhere! I wish I had brought along some Funyuns to experiment with as fly repellant. Luckily, they weren't as annoying when I had my brushcutter going.

I managed to finish clearing the 60 feet of drive that I did last time, and expanded it by another couple of feet. I still need to rake off debris and remove stumps. I'm also nowhere near completing the length of driveway I've planned for the first phase, but I can feel good about making progress.



Still plugging away at the driveway. It's now about 62 feet long

After I spent a couple of hours working on the ranch, I got adventurous. Instead of driving north back to the main highway, I turned south exploring the other end of Dove Hills Road. I'm not too worried being out in the middle of nowhere with no cellphone access. I always bring a case of bottled water to the ranch so that if my car breaks down, it will be an annoyance rather than a life-and-death situation.

In the vain of always believing the grass is greener elsewhere, I had imagined that on the other side of the hill my ranch is on, that maybe you could look out over the Great Salt Lake. I couldn't be more wrong. The terrain was rugged rocky hills. Mostly, the view was nothing different than my view from Dove Ranch. The mountains and hills were different, but no grandiose view of the lake as I had imagined.

I was surprised by a couple of things I saw. First, the land on Dove Ranch was by far the best for farming and pastures. Second, I saw I wasn't alone. I counted four lots within view of the road that had structures—two trailers, one flat-bottom touring boat with a canopy, and a metal shed.

Amazingly, I saw my first dove along Dove Hills Road. I couldn't get a picture of it, as I was driving and it was flying away, but now I can tell people there are actually doves out there.



I was a little surprised to find a sign at the southern end of Dove Creek Road. It ends on a very rarely traveled dirt road several miles from the paved road.

It was also nice to see an actual sign marking the south end of Dove Hills Road. It has notably less bullet holes than the one on the more traveled north end of the road.

The south end of Dove Hills Road ends on another much better maintained dirt road several miles from the highway. I immediately noticed all the seemingly empty tree cages along the road. All they had growing in them were weeds.



Ruby Pipeline Reclamation

I was mystified by all these little tree cages with tiny desert plants in them, until I tracked down some signs explaining them. All those tree cages filled with weeds are part of the Ruby Pipeline reclamation project. The company comes through and buries a whole bunch of pipes, then they come back through and plant native plants (mostly weeds) to try to match what was there before they damaged the land.

I can't wait to get up to the ranch, again. I want to see if the blanket flowers survived. I also want to get some more work done on the driveway.

Making an Olla for Tree Irrigation

August 17, 2014
Categories: Trees and Shrubs
Tags: cistern, drought tolerant, irrigation, lacebark elm, ollas, watering

My wife wants tall shade trees on Dove Ranch. The semi-arid conditions allow specialized trees to grow wild. Native trees, such as Colorado pinyons, are slow growing and short. I think she will appreciate some taller drought-tollerant shade trees, like lacebark elms.



Some of the bits and pieces needed for making a custom irrigation olla.

I don't have a well for irrigation, or money to put in a well; and the ranch is nearly three hours from my house. So, watering any trees I plant can only consistently happen once or twice a month during the hottest parts of summer. Traditional drip irrigation or even sprinklers are not possible.

After tons of research, I came up with using large homemade cistern-like ollas to establish my trees and keep them alive until I can do a real irrigation system.

An olla (pronounced *oh-ya*) is a thin-necked unglazed clay pot. Using a brilliant African technique of burying most of the pot and filling it with water allows the low tech equivalent of drip irrigation. If the pot is unglazed, the water soaks through the pot into the soil in a controlled slow fashion. The plant roots seek out the pot and wrap themselves around it, taking water as needed.

The big question is, “Will the tree’s roots develop properly being irrigated with an olla? It took me forever to find research on this very question, but I found it. I wish I still had the link, but it is buried somewhere in Google.

It turns out that from university tests in southern deserts that the tree’s roots do wrap around the olla. However, other roots like the taproot still form correctly. In their tests, the ollas were only needed for a couple of years to get the trees established.

I plan on keeping the ollas until I have a proper well and irrigation system for the ranch. I’m still sticking to trees that survive with little or no supplemental water. In reality, ollas are great for warm climates, but freezing water during cold winters tend to destroy clay pots like ollas. So, the ollas may not survive more than two winters despite my grandiose plans of using them for several years.

I need big ollas, because I need a large reservoir of water to keep the tree happy when I’m away. I figure a week or two without water during the hot Utah summer won’t kill a drought-tolerant tree that had all winter to get established. However, I want to make the water last as long as possible, so the olla needs to be big enough to act like a cistern.

I first looked into buying ollas locally. I found few-to-none at the garden centers in my area. The ones I found were far too small for my needs.

Next, I looked into buying ollas off the internet. Not too surprisingly, big clay pots are heavy and prone to breakage. Almost no one ships ollas, and the few that do have to charge a fortune. Even if I went ahead and bought some, they would likely break before

I got them. (I've seen many delivery guys who think package delivery is a game similar to lawn darts or horseshoes.)

Luckily, you can make an olla from common clay pots. This approach is actually a bit cheaper than buying pre-made ollas. Clay plant pots are everywhere, so I didn't have any trouble finding parts that I needed.



You can see the holes in the bottom of these unglazed pots that I'm turning into an olla.

When making an olla for irrigation, always use unglazed pots. Glazed pots don't allow moisture to seep into the soil. That defeats the whole purpose of olla irrigation.

The surfaces of the pots need to be clean and free of dirt for assembly. The pots I bought looked dirty, so I cleaned them up before beginning. A short stint at the outside faucet had them looking like new in no time.

We'll need a hole in the top for filling the olla with water. However, we need the hole in the bottom plugged up, so the water doesn't drain out uncontrollably. I chose to plug the bottom hole with caulk. I placed a paper towel under the hole, and then filled and sealed the hole. The paper towel will disintegrate harmlessly during use. Wax paper under the whole allows for easier removal of the paper, if you find the paper towel embedded in caulk too troublesome.



We don't want all the water to drain out at once, so the bottom of the future olla needs sealing.

I don't really trust my caulking job, so I sealed the seal at the bottom of the pot with some spray paint. I figure that if the caulk has some holes, I can depend on the paint to finish plugging them up. I kept that paint off the sides of the pot. After all, I want the sides to remain porous.

Next I painted the inside and outside of what will be the top of the olla. I plan to leave an inch or two of the olla out of the ground. That is the part I painted. I used white paint to reflect the sun. I don't want the water to get warm and evaporate. I want it to feed my tree. Also, I'm hoping the paint will help preserve the part of the olla exposed to the elements.

When the paint had dried enough, I glued the two halves together with goop. I may add some additional caulking at the seal, in a few days, to strengthen the seal. The final result is an olla that is better than your typical store-bought olla for irrigation.



My first fully assembled olla from two clay pots.

One final touch. Find a rock and place it over the hole in the top of the olla. Otherwise, the water filled olla turns into a mosquito breeding ground. Nothing makes outdoor activities more unpleasant than mosquitos.

I’m still looking for a nursery that sells the variety of lacebark elm I want to plant on the ranch. Once I’ve found it, I’ll go to the ranch, clear a spot near my wind chimes and plant my tree with my olla near by.

Hickory Smoked Steak with My Gas Grill

August 20, 2014
Categories: Cooking and Food
Tags: grill, smoked, steak

Taking a needed break from dealing with garden and ranch, I decided to play with my brand spanking new smoker. My wife let me buy a metal insert for my gas grill that I can put various types of wood chips in to make them smoke and flavor the meat I'm grilling.



I managed to stand my smoker on edge for the photo.

I'm a diehard charcoal grill kind of guy, but I have to admit gas grills are fast and easy. They even make it easy to grill in the middle of the winter. So, despite missing my

charcoal grill flavor, I've been using a gas grill all summer.

I've heard that using a smoker with the proper chips can make up for the lack of charcoal in my grill. Of coarse, this bold claim needed testing.

I found a V-shaped smoker box on Amazon sold by Charcoal Companion. It's made China, but the reviews were very good, so I thought I'd give it a try. It turned out to fit perfectly down in my Weber grill.

I purchased a bag of hickory chips, and soaked enough to fill my smoker half way. I soaked them in water for the first try. If the chips aren't soaked for at least 30 minutes, they just catch fire instead of smoking. We want to maximize the smoke coming off the chips, so wet chips in the smoker are essential. Before placing the chips in the smoker, I drained off the water.



If the chips aren't soaked in a liquid, they will burn instead of smoke.

I placed the chips in the smoke box while the grill was cold. I placed the smoke box under the grate in the center of the grill, and after closing the box and replacing the grate, I turned on the grill to high.

When the grill got to 500 degrees fahrenheit, I turned off the side burners and only left the one in the center going. I kept the temperature in the grill between 300 and 400 degrees fahrenheit, and cooked the steaks slowly for about an hour.



I placed the chips in the smoker while the grill was still cold.

I used a completely unseasoned and unmarinated steak, so I could see what kind of flavor the hickory smoke gave the meat. I also made sure no meat was grilled directly above the smoker. I flipped the steak a few times, and also turned on the side burners to low during the last bit of grilling.

The flavor of the steaks was delicate, not overpowering. They definitely had a hickory flavor to them. Bridget still used some steak sauce with hers, because she wanted a bit more flavor. I think next time, I will season the meat a bit to go along with the smoking.

The thing that surprises me is that the hickory aftertaste lingers. It's been a couple of hours since I grilled and ate, and I can still taste the hickory flavor. It is very pleasant.

I have to admit, this is comparable to charcoal grilling. I'll be using my new toy next time I grill.

Tiny Giant Sequoias

September 5, 2014
Categories: Trees and Shrubs
Tags: Colorado pinyon, drought tolerant, giant sequoia, irrigation, ollas, seedlings

I have wanted a 300-foot-tall sequoia growing in my yard since I was little. I'd dream about everyone on the block looking up and seeing the tree growing into the clouds from our yard—just like *Jack and the Beanstalk*, except a tree. Of course, I conveniently ignored that realizing that dream would take a thousand years, … and I might not be around to enjoy the experience.

That's okay. I don't give up just because reality says I can't succeed. I'm now an adult, and plan to plant some sequoias, anyway.



Here I am with my wife who is sporting a rather fashionable sequoia bouquet

I did some research on sequoias and redwoods, and discovered that full-grown giant sequoia (Sequoiadendron giganteum) have lived through summers like the ones at Dove Ranch for thousands of years and don't seem to mind them. I'd expect most varieties of redwoods or sequoias to die in those conditions, but my hunch is that the Sequoiadendron giganteum can handle the tough conditions at Dove Ranch.



My son, Pierce (age 12), did the majority of digging necessary for burying the ollas and planting the Giant Sequoia seedlings.

I can't afford to buy large trees for the ranch. I'm still paying it off. So, I'll have to stick to cheap seedlings. The trick is getting the giant sequoias seedlings past the tiny stage.

I managed to find a seller of giant sequoias at giant-sequoia.com. I bought ten seedlings for a reasonable price, and had them shipped using 2-day FedEx. The

weather was not too hot, so they arrived without dying. I planted eight of them in pots to watch closer at home, and took two to the ranch.

The young seedlings need water. I'm not at the ranch much, so I have made myself a couple of large ollas for irrigation purposes. My son, Pierce, helped me dig holes deep enough for the ollas, and then we went ahead and planted our Sequoiadendron giganteum seedlings.



This is the other Giant Sequoia seedling that I planted. Behind it is the olla I am using to irrigate it.

The top whole of the ollas need covering, or they become mosquito breeding grounds. The simplest way to cover the ollas' openings is with rocks. I failed to bring rocks to cover the holes at the top of the ollas, so we looked around a bit for some native

materials to use. Finding rocks on the lower part of the ranch proved difficult. It is a sandy loam that seems completely devoid of rocks.



The first Giant Sequoia planted on the ranch. Pierce dug the hole, and I placed the olla and the seedling.

We found some rocks big enough to cover the holes in the ollas, eventually. The trick was to find some big enough they would not fall in, but small enough that their weight did not damage the ceramic pots I used to make the ollas.



My daughter, Esther (age 18), lending moral support as I fill an olla using a very heavy water container and a funnel.

I filled the ollas with water from two seven gallon water containers I brought with us. Turns out that seven gallons of water in one container is heavy. Holding the containers

still enough (even with the help of a funnel) to fill up the ollas gave my arms a great workout. My arms were pretty sore by the time I was done.

While Pierce and I took care of planting the two tiny giant sequoias, my daughter and wife took care of planting the four Colorado pinyons we brought with us.



My daughter carefully planting a Colorado pinyon on the ranch.

I broke down and bought two nursery grown Colorado pinyons for the occasion. Colorado pinyons are very slow growing trees, and I'm an impatient guy, so I figured I'd jump start my pinyon forest with something larger than my pinyon seedlings.



One of two nursery grown Colorado Pinyons that Esther and Bridget planted up at the ranch.

Two of the pinyons they planted were seedlings I sprouted earlier this year. I decided they would enjoy living on the ranch more than living in a pot in my backyard.



One of the Colorado Pinyon seedlings that I sprouted, making its new home at Dove Ranch.

After we planted the six trees we brought with us, we snacked and took a break to catch our breath. We finished the day by sowing over a 1000 Colorado Pinyon seeds. We were all pretty exhausted by the end of the day.



A small handful of Colorado pinyon seeds, also know as pinus edulis seeds.

I'm not sure how many more times we'll get up to the ranch before cold wet autumn weather makes the road out to my ranch impassable. I still hope to get the Utah serviceberry seeds sown, and the seaberry seeds sown before winter sets in. Even though it is early September, I'm already in a race against winter.

I Nearly Died Last Night

September 27, 2014
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead
Tags: common hackberry, coyotes, death, giant sequoia, irrigation, lightning, sunset, thunder

The title says it all. I just about died up at Dove Ranch last night. My heart raced for two hours afterward. This is the first time I've ever been glad to leave the ranch. That barely passable dirt road out of the ranch has never seen a little Nissan Sentra take it so fast.



I saw this rainbow looking out from Park Valley toward Snowville.

Normally, I look forward to escaping to my ranch after a long work week. It doesn't have any structures, fences, or tall trees. The ranch is nearly raw land, but working on

improving the land with my own two hands gives me something to easy tensions out of my soul.

This week's goal included watering my two tiny giant Sequoia, filling in a pothole with corse gravel, and planting a 1,000 common hackberry seeds.

The weekend's forecast included rain on Saturday, and more rain on Sunday with a chance for some snow in places near my ranch. The road out to Dove Ranch is barely passable for low-clearance city vehicles like my Sentra when it rains. So, I was forced into going up to the ranch right after work on Friday.



Sunset with thundershowers rolling in near Rosette, Utah.

I left for work at 5:30AM so I could escape just after 3PM. With Friday traffic, it took me until 7PM to get out to Rosette where my 80-acre ranch is. This time of year, that's sunset.

I rushed through filling the ollas and fixing the pothole. Even so, the sun set before I had time to plant any of my hackberry seeds.

Rain fell to the south, west, and east. Black clouds obscured the sky above. It was getting dark, but I didn't drive four hours just to water plants and fill one pothole. However, I also knew that once it was dark with clouds and rain, I could lose my direction in seconds.

Have I mentioned the 10-foot-tall cliffs on my ranch? Losing your direction in the dark at Dove Ranch is bad. Very bad.



When it gets dark out in the wild areas around Dove Ranch, lights on the mountainsides and stars are the only points of reference.

I decided to plant my tree seeds by broadcasting them. (That's fancy agro-talk for throwing them and praying they sprout, anyway.) I made the rule that if I felt one drop of rain, I'd head for the car and get back to the paved road.

I took a flashlight and compass with me for safety. Just before throwing my first few seeds, I heard something howl in the direction I was walking.

Maybe, it was a wolf. Maybe, it was a coyote. It didn't matter. Every turn of the flashlight had me looking for glowing eyes in the blackening waist-high sagebrush.

I finished "planting" the hackberry seeds without delay. I couldn't see the car, but still had the outline of mountains to navigate by. I knew the general direction of the dirt road. I set off wandering toward what I felt must be the road or the car.

Crack!

There was no space between seeing the lightning and hearing it. I saw the lightning come straight down toward my head to within a hundred or so feet, then arc directly over my head, and I assume back up to the clouds behind me. At that moment, I realized I was the tallest thing within four square miles.

I ran for the car.

I saw and heard several more lightning strikes, all closer than a mile in distance, before I got to the car. I pretty much dove into the car, with the rain now pounding down. Here I was in the car, realizing I am *still* the tallest thing within miles, and I'm at the epicenter of a suddenly active thunderstorm.

Thunder cracked close to me every few seconds.

Wonderful.

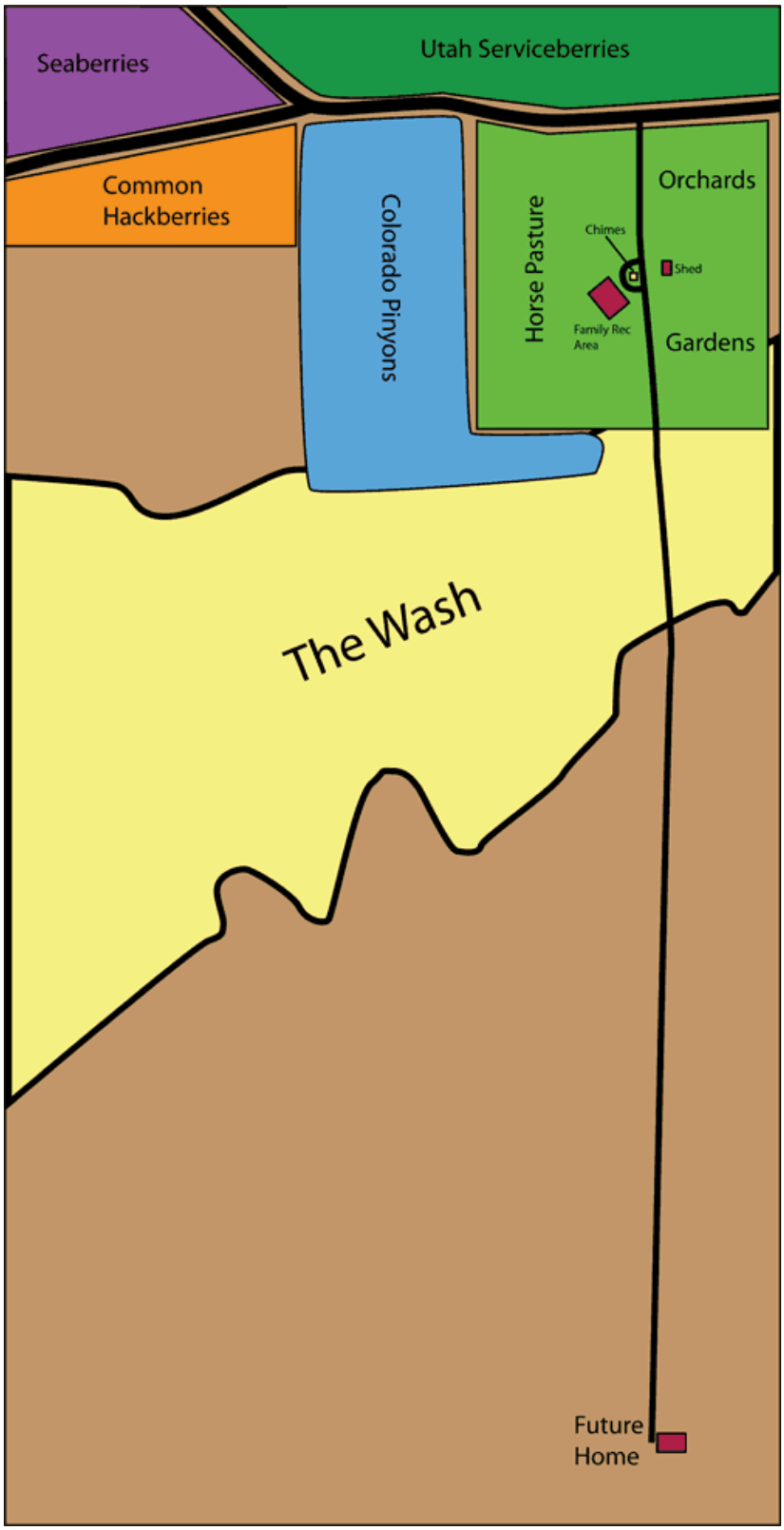
I fled. I kept my head, but I fled. The storm came in from the south, and my exit road headed north. I decided to outrun the storm, and I did. I took the two miles of rough road in minutes. Once, on the pavement, I didn't stop trying to outrun the storm until I found myself surrounded by trees, houses, and mountains—anything tall enough to draw lightning away from me.

State of the Ranch

September 28, 2014
Categories: Gardening, The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: buffalo grass, Colorado pinyon, common hackberry, driveway, maps, orchard, pasture, road, Roadcrest, seaberry, shed, Utah serviceberry, wash

Winter comes on quickly in Utah's high country. I won't make it up to Dove Ranch many more times before the snow falls creating impassable conditions on the unmaintained roads. Then I won't see my ranch for four-to-six months while I wait for snow to melt and roads to dry.

My goal is to complete a fully off-the-grid farm that provides enough for my family to survive comfortably on, and some extra produce to sell at farms' markets. It's time to assess my family's first six months of work on the ranch.



Current plans for my 80-acre homestead (2014)

Above, I have a map of the ranch with planned areas, as of now. The ranch is situated at 5100 feet above sea level on the north side of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Dove Ranch is a quarter mile wide by a half mile long. Roads enter the ranch from the north, northeast, and northwest edges of the property.

A twenty-plus acre wash runs down the center of the ranch. The land to the north of the wash is a nice sandy loam and mostly flat. The land to the south of the wash is gently sloped toward the Dove Creek Hills, and slightly rocky.

I started with raw land. As the description from the property listing stated, the land is "only good for sagebrush." I disagree. I believe there are several varieties of trees that I can get growing out on Dove Ranch.

I've found the trick with growing anything out on the ranch is the rabbits. They nibble down anything remotely green under six inches in height. It may turn out that I need to cage every tree I ever plant as a seedling out there. If so, I'll do it.

This winter, I'm experimenting with literally over 5000 seeds of trees that should be able to survive, even on the small rainfall that the area provides. The trees include seaberry, Utah serviceberry, common hackberry, and Colorado Pinyon. I have planted them in the areas shown on the map, though I am allowing the pinyons to bleed into other areas.

The importance of these trees is that they provide a source of food, both edible berries and nuts. They provide a windbreak from the nearly constant wind. The trees also provide something other than me for lightning to hit. (See my last post, "I Almost Died Last Night".)

I planted seeds instead of trees, because I don't have a lot of money. I'll be putting my wife and daughter through college while paying on the ranch. Money is tight so seeds will have to do.

There is a real chance that rabbits will go through and eat every single sprouting seedling. That's why I planted so many at the same time. I'm hoping that the sheer number of seeds will overwhelm their predators—the rabbits.

I have added alfalfa and lentil seeds to the mix. I will also add buffalo grass and roadcrest wheat. All of these should handle the area well, and hopefully distract from the seedlings sprouting next spring. I'll be honest, though. I doubt more than a handful of trees will survive to maturity.

The seven-acre plot I plan on fencing off will have a family recreation area, a shed, orchards, gardens, and horse pasture. A driveway will continue through the fenced area, across the wash, and up the side of the hill to the distant-future house site.

Pretty much none of the fenced area is finished. I have a 60-foot drive cut out, and 6.5-foot t-posts marking the corners. I also put in the wind chimes, because I like wind chimes. They give me a visual and audible reference point in the endless sea of sagebrush.

Serendipitous Detours

October 10, 2014
Categories: Adventures
Tags: Cache Valley, Eden, James Peak, Liberty, Logan, Morgan, Wasatch Back, Wasatch Front, Willard Peak

I'd gladly stay forever in the green fields and mountain valleys embracing Logan.

For those unfortunate enough to need to leave Logan and the beautiful Cache Valley, the highway heading south forks just outside the city. The lesser tread road follows Highway 89 out to Heber and I-15. The more trafficked road heads deeper in to the suburbs and farms of the Wasatch Back.



Southern Cache Valley is an unusually green section of Utah found along the Wasatch Back.

I picked up my daughter from school at Utah State University in Logan recently, and found myself on an unfamiliar strip of road that should have been Highway 89. We realized quickly that, while talking, we had followed traffic down state road 165 instead of taking the right fork toward Heber.

I have always looked for a chance to drive from Logan to Liberty and on to Morgan. These towns all lie along the Wasatch Back, each in their own green valley, well away from the freeways and big touristy locations. Not looking forward to the rush-hour traffic awaiting us on the other side of the mountains, we decided to just go with the wrong turn and see where it took us.



The road between Willard Peak and James Peak is in far better shape than the road out to Dove Ranch, but it's still pretty rough.

I have to admit, we successfully missed rush-hour traffic. However, I wasn't expecting quite the adventure we found. I honestly thought the road between Logan and Liberty

would have some pavement. Still, the grading beats the job they've done on the county road out to my ranch.



Expect cattle and wildlife in the road between Logan and Eden.

Instead of slowing down for rush-hour traffic, we slowed down for cattle, switchbacks and boulders in the road. The dirt road wound for about 12 miles through the mountains between Willard Peak and James Peak. The northern section of the road led mostly through scrub oak and other typical Rocky Mountain verdure.



Looking out at the rolling hills above Liberty makes me forget that we're actually at the top of the Wasatch Mountain Range.

Farther south, the forests give way to rolling mountain hills. Our road came to a T that I did not remember from the maps. We took a chance and turned left. After all, it was a left hand turn that brought us on our serendipitous detour, we might as well keep to the left.



The view down into Liberty is a dangerous distraction from the winding cliffside switchbacks leading down into the valley.

Finally, the road came out above Liberty and Eden. The switchbacks leading down into the valley proved quite exciting, as massive dump trucks came the other direct and appeared at surprising moments as we rounded switchbacks. The most exciting involved a dump truck hauling a trailer around a very narrow switchback, and me throwing the car into reverse, spinning my wheels on dirt and gravel as I backed to the inside of the switchback, successfully avoiding crushed death.

We survived our adventure. We found ourselves on pavement in no time, and the rest of the trip down to Morgan held only paved roads. Ultimately, our adventure only cost us about half-an-hour extra travel time—definitely worth the memories.

A Break from the Ranch

October 23, 2014
Categories: Adventures, Family Happenings
Tags: Arches National Park, Dead Horse Point, dutch oven, Green River, vacation

We took a break from home and ranch life, and visited southern Utah during the first week of August. Moab is pretty expensive, so we found a KOA in Green River, and rented a campsite. We found Green River much more affordable than Moab, and within reasonable travel time to many scenic locations.

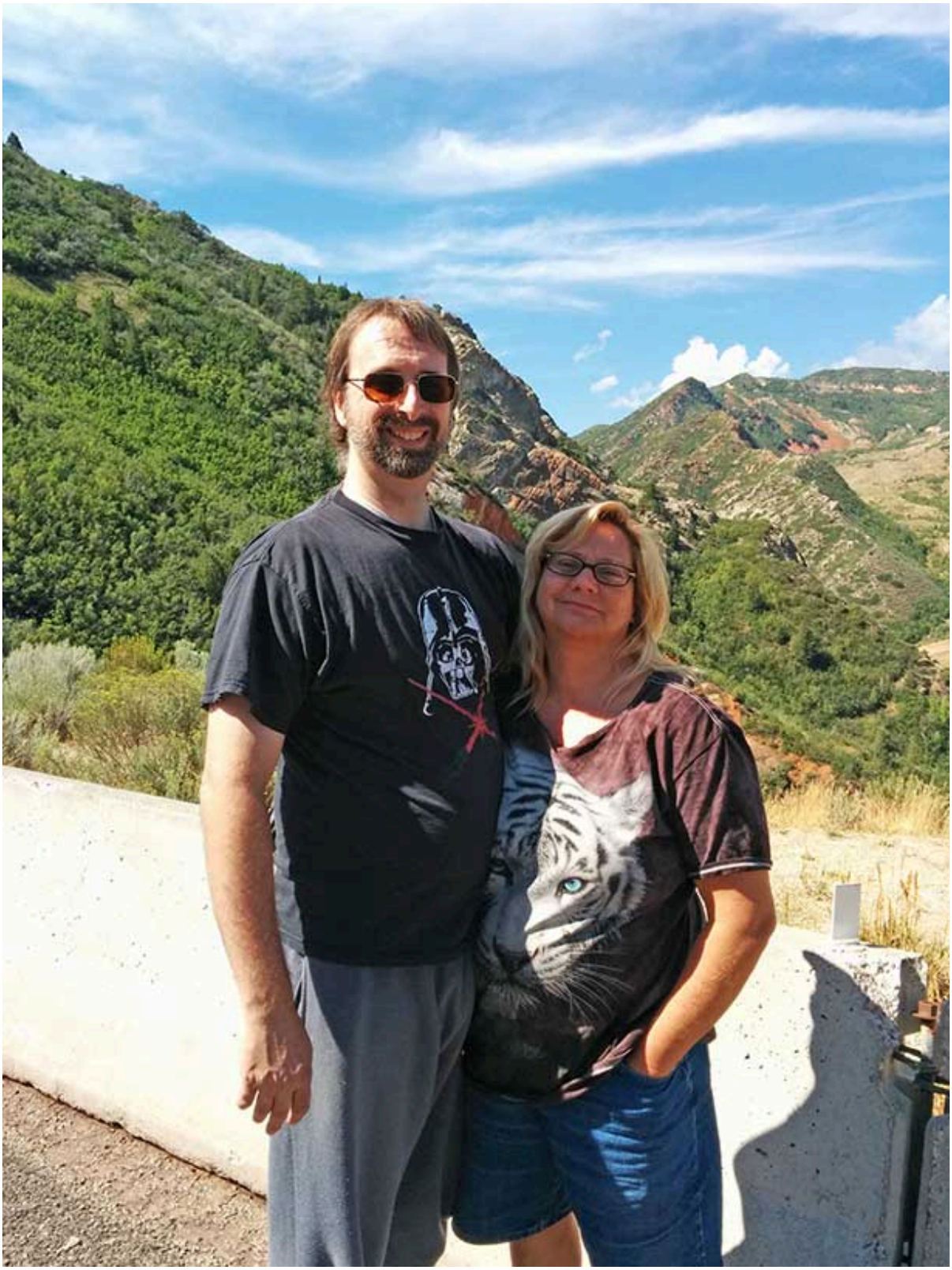


Ancient rock art near Delicate Arch in Arches.

Our main destination of choice was Arches. However, we could have just as easily gone to Capitol Reef or other parks.

I drove south down scenic Highway 89 to get to I-70. Just past Spanish Fork, we stopped at Thistle. Back in the 1980's there was a massive mudslide that blocked off a canyon just below the town of Thistle. Normally, that would be a minor inconvenience. In this case, one of the main rivers (creeks by eastern standards) that feeds Utah Lake flowed through this canyon. Soon that natural dam filled with water,

submerging the town. The government drilled a tunnel through the natural dam to release the water behind it, but it was too late for the town.



Bridget And I At Thistle Mudslide Overlook

After many hours of scenic views, we eventually made it to Green River. The KOA in Green River is a bit dusty, but nice as campgrounds go. They have showers, a pool, and even a playground for younger kids.

We decided to do hot dogs over a fire for dinner, mainly because the kids begged us to let them roast their own hotdogs on long metal forks. We had to watch the youngest one closely to make sure he didn't get burned, but everyone stayed safe.

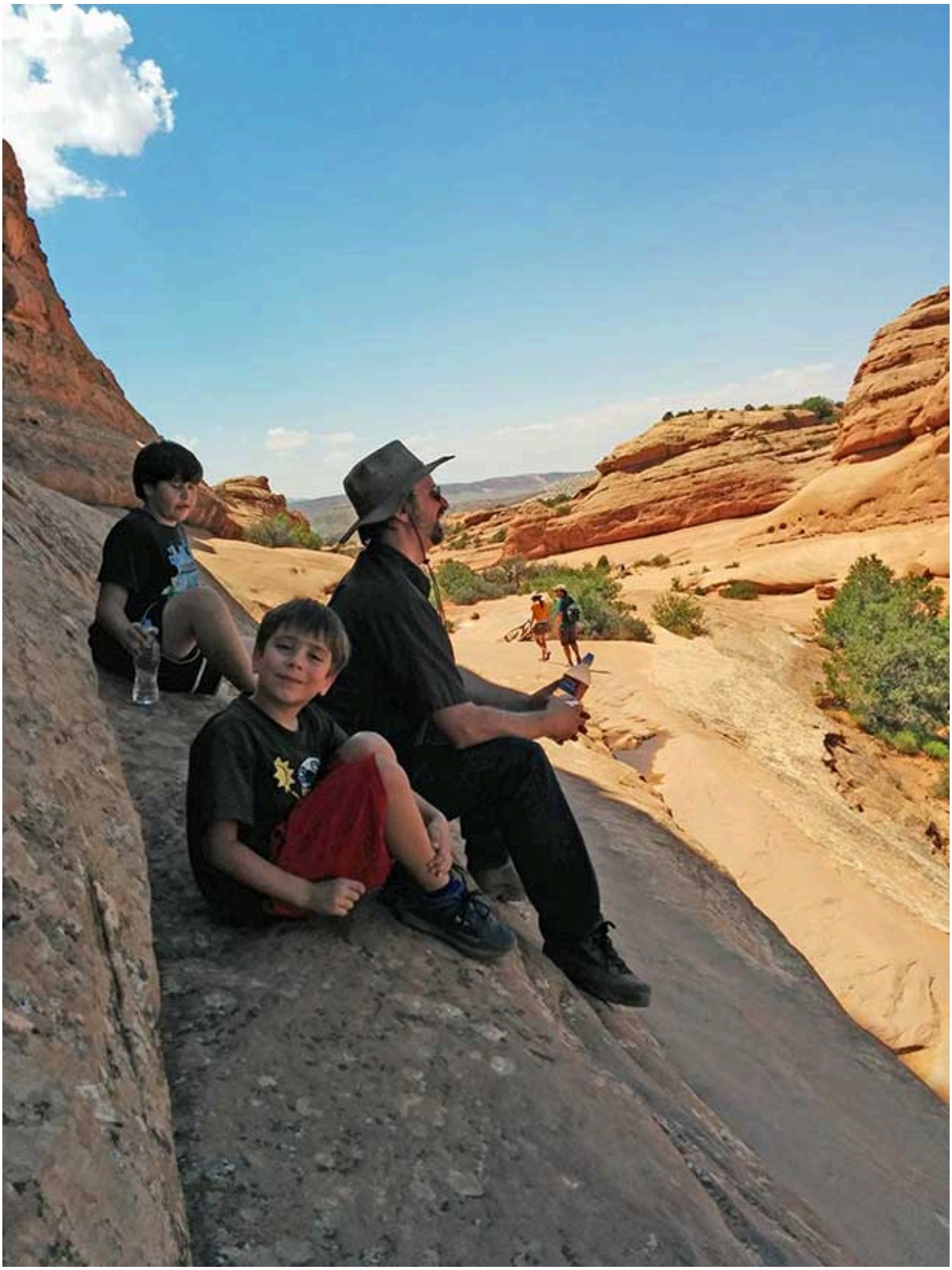
Our youngest, Grant, loved the ants at camp and very excitedly tracked down all the the ant hills he could. Then he had his sister take picture after picture of the ants and their homes.



My youngest son, Grant, was facinated by the ants at our campsite in Green River.

Camping at a Koa is cheating. We had wi-fi for the entire campout. The bandwidth was good enough, I probably could have streamed a movie. Mainly, I just checked email, tweeted, and browsed the internet.

Our one must-do event was hiking to Delicate Arch. We did our hike first thing on our second day. It was a hot one. I believe temps were in the 100's. You dehydrate very quickly in those kinds of temperatures in the desert, so we brought plenty of water.



Pierce, Grant, and I took a much needed break and hid from the sun, just before reaching Delicate Arch.

The hike to the arch is nearly all uphill. As soon as we had some shade from the mountain, we took advantage of it. Hiking to the arch in the early morning or during cooler seasons is a good idea. Of course, we hiked it during the hottest month at the hottest time of day.



Grant did the long hike to Delicate Arch in 100+ temperatures without much complaint. We all drank massive amounts of water to stay hydrated.

After spending a few hours in Arches National Park, I splurged and took the entire family to McDonalds. I wanted air conditioning with an ice filled soda, and I got air conditioning with an ice filled soda. The cashiers had a pretty hard time taking our orders, as they were all native Asians, and there was a slight language barrier, but eventually we had almost everything bought and paid for.



Very Back: Delicate Arch;
Back: Esther, Bridget;Front: Pierce, Grant, Chance, Me

We needed ice for camp, so Bridget got two bags of McDonalds ice. The outside of the bags read, “M-ice,” so Bridget shouted across the restaurant to me, “I’ve got the mice!”

A few of the patrons chuckled. Though, I'm not sure any of the employees understood what she said.



After buying some M-Ice at McDonalds, my wife shouted out for everyone to hear, "I got the Mice!"

Back at the camp, Grant insisted on flames in our fire (mostly charcoal), so I got flames going with some wood I reluctantly bought. We did Bridget's dutch oven chicken, rice, and cream of mushroom soup recipe. It was fantastic, as usual.



Dutch oven chicken on campouts is one of our family traditions. Bridget and I have been cooking it since we were engaged.

That night, after dark, Bridget and Pierce nearly stepped on a skunk that came through camp. Luckily, it ran off. Not so luckily, it ran toward Chance and Grant who did not know there was a skunk heading straight for them. We shouted a warning, just in time. Fortunately, we avoided a very smelly night.



We camped in Green River for our Moab trip. We did cheat though. Camp had showers, a pool, electricity, and flush toilets.

While we were getting our camp ready to leave for another day's sightseeing, Grant found a blue tailed lizard. It was a Western Skink. After terrorizing it with our cameras for a bit, we let it run off into the bushes and grass.



This Western skink wandered into the KOA at Green River. My boy, Grant, spotted it roaming about camp.

Besides Delicate Arch, Bridget and I wanted to show the kids Dead Horse Point. That's not too far from Arches. The sign for the turn off was missing, so we had to be extra watchful not to miss the road when driving toward Moab.

Just before reaching Dead Horse Point, we saw a giant dust devil swirling away in the distance. It was over by the white building in the photo. That building was far bigger than a house, just to give you perspective.



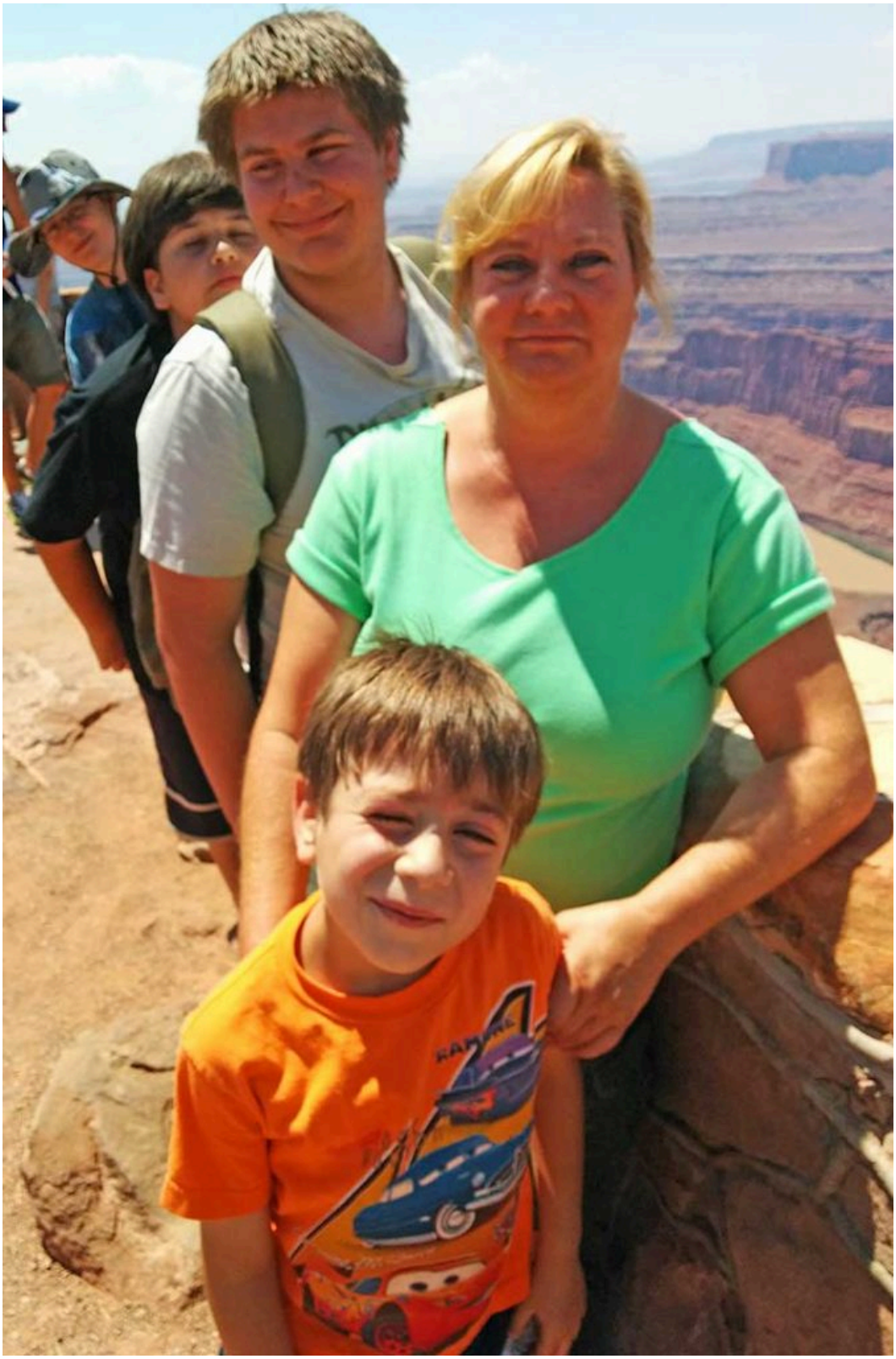
We saw a massive dust devil a few miles away from Dead Horse Point.

Bridget and I first visited Dead Horse Point back before any of our kids were born. I find the view just as spectacular as any along the Grand Canyon. The park is run by Utah state, but the federal government wants to forcibly take it from the state. We'll see what happens there.



Bridget and I first visited Dead Horse Point before any of the kids were born. I believe it's prettier than the lookouts in Canyonlands.

The family wandered around Dead Horse Point for a while, and then it was time to get off to Canyonlands. Canyonlands is just down the street, so to speak. I was hoping there would be a way through Canyonlands over to Capitol Reef, but there isn't. We didn't have time to drive the long way round, so introducing the kids to Capitol Reef will have to wait.



Front to back: Grant, Bridget, Chance, Pierce, and Esther.

Canyonlands and Dead Horse Point are north of the Grand Canyon along the same river system. The Green River joins the Colorado River which flows through the Grand Canyon. The whole area is beautiful.



The Green River way down there at the bottom of the canyons.

While resting at Canyonlands, I got to watch a few ravens looking for any food the tourists drop. Mostly, people are good about not leaving scraps for the wildlife, but the ravens must find some, because they hang around any tourists they can find.

The ravens around Canyonlands are massive, as birds go. The one in the photo was probably knee high to me, and I'm nearly 6'2". He has his beak open in the picture, because he is hot and panting. Panting is the only way to get rid of the excess heat his body built up. It was over 100 degrees that day, so I can imagine a pitch black bird in full sun would get uncomfortably hot.



The picture doesn't do the raven justice. He was huge. Maybe even knee high.

As it got later in the afternoon, we decided to head back to Arches and eat a picnic dinner at Devil's Garden. Technically, we never made it to Devil's Garden. We stopped at a really nice picnic ground about a quarter mile from there.



We stopped for a picnic dinner at Arches. If I had known they had grills, I would have brought some charcoal, hamburgers, and hotdogs.

We ate at a beautiful area surrounded by red cliffs. The tables were hidden in the trees. There where even stations for barbecuing. If we had known about the barbecues in advance, we could have brought some hamburgers to grill.

Bridget took a few of the kids, and hiked back into the canyon after the meal. I would have liked to go, but I needed to rest. I was pretty worn out from the earlier activities of the day.



Bridget took the kids for a short hike in the canyon after our picnic dinner at Arches.

After dinner, we went back to the KOA. Even with showers in the KOA, our tent and was getting a bit rank by the last day. (I blame the tent, but we all know it might have been the inhabitants of the tent.) We were tired, and occasionally irritable. We all looked forward to getting home.

One of the highlights of the trip were the Cars—Mator and Lightening McQueen, to be specific. We drove by Mator on the way to Green River, but I didn't feel like swinging back to get a pic. Then, out in the middle of nowhere, we ran into Lightening McQueen. Of course that meant we had to get pictures of both.



We happened upon both Lightning McQueen and Tow Mater on our trip, several hundred miles apart.

We got our pictures of Lightening, and then on the way back home, I followed Highway 89 until we found Mator. Then I cut over to I-15 and we made good time getting home.



The first time driving past Tow Mater, we didn't stop for a photo, but after running into Lightning McQueen, we had to drive back to get a photo of Mater.

You can't visit Green River without visiting the giant water mellon. It's at the mellon museum across from the KOA. I'm guessing it is used in parades.



Across from the KOA we camped at was the Green River mellon museum, complete with one 10 foot tall watermelon.

Overall, we had a good trip. We ate some Green River mellons, found famous Cars, and saw more red rocks than we had seen in years. Hopefully, we can get down to see Capitol Reef next time.

Sorrow in Parting

November 2, 2014
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: buffalo grass, driveway, giant sequoia, grass, Planning the Homestead, Roadcrest

Winter weather caught up to Dove Ranch. The weatherman forecasts snow later today. That means, I won't visit my little chunk of Earth until the end of March, 2015. Those five months will pass slowly for me. I love working the land, even if my labors won't be obvious for a few more years.

In semi-arid lands, late autumn and early winter are great times for planting grasses and trees. The relatively wet weather, though cold, is perfect for their root systems to get established. The more established their root systems are before the horribly hot summer months, the better chance they have of surviving.



The RoadCrest wheatgrass seed is on the left, and the Buffalo Grass seed is on the right.

My final goals for this year were to plant a couple of more things before snow set in, and finish roughing out my driveway. I took my son Pierce up to Dove Ranch with me a couple of Saturdays ago. The extra set of hands meant I could work on cutting the driveway while he worked on sowing grass seed.

I got a lot of sagebrush cut, but did not have time to clear out stumps or rake the driveway. However, I have a pretty wide walkable path back to the the wind chimes and looping around them. I'll have to accept that I won't finish the driveway until the middle of next year. I can live with that as long as I am making positive progress.



My son and I stopped off for a byte to eat in Tremonton, Utah before heading back into the city.

I have two types of grass I want to test out for use in lawn and pasture on the ranch. Any grass that I grow up there has to serve double purpose. The grass needs to be good forage material, and it needs to fill in a lawn well. Some types of grass grow in clumps, so the field and lawn would be lumpy and hard to walk across. Other types of grass spread well by runners, so they make a much better lawn grass.

Both types of grass that I chose to test are suitable for lawn and pasture. One is Buffalo Grass and the other is RoadCrest wheatgrass. The RoadCrest is a native of Utah. The Buffalo Grass is native to the Plains States.

The seeds, as you can see at the top of this post, are quite different. Also, the Buffalo Grass seed instructions said it should be planted, rather than broadcast. That translates into a lot of work for me, or in this case, my son.

There have been a few frosts on the ranch in the last month, and that wiped out the insect population. Less insects means the seeds we plant and broadcast have a lot better chance of growing than becoming bug food.

This last Thursday, I visited the ranch one last time for the year, all by myself. I was racing the sun, because it sets so early this time of year. I finished planting and broadcasting the Buffalo Grass and RoadCrest in my pasture's test areas. I also broadcast a bit of the Buffalo Grass to see if it really needs to be planted according to the instructions. I'll know next spring if either grass can survive the weather, soil, and rabbits.



I planted five giant Sequoia seedlings in the wash, before winter set in.

My Thursday trip also gave me the chance to plant five of my remaining giant Sequoia seedlings. I have the nagging feeling that those and other trees, once established, can survive life in the wash. A lot of water comes down through that wash, even during the

summer. If there is water under the ground anywhere on the ranch, it is going to be down in the wash.

Each round trip by foot into the wash with a potted tree and filled watering can was about a quarter mile. I only had two hours of sun, so I was in a great hurry to plant all five trees.

One of the problems with property as big as Dove Ranch is that if you set anything down, you might never see it again. Don't lose your car keys out there in the sagebrush. It's a long walk home. I had to keep close track of my shovel, hammer and other equipment that I did not carry with me on my treks to and from the wash. I don't think I lost any thing.

One wonderful surprise was that down in the lower sections of the wash, I found moist soil just under the surface. As you can see in the picture above, the soil dug up while planting the giant Sequoia seedlings is a nice wet brown color.

I kept all of the seedlings out of the direct path of runoff. However, higher water flows will definitely wash over them. I also learned my lesson about rabbit grazing after the loss of two sequoias and four blanket flowers, so I placed metal cages and an anchor rod to protect each seedling.

It has rained since I went up to the ranch on Thursday, and it's been pretty windy. I've spent a lot of time daydreaming about the five little giant Sequoia establishing themselves in the wash. I can't wait until next spring. I'll spend my first trip looking around for the five trees to see if they were washed away, blown away, eaten or if they survived their first winter on the ranch.

Update: Eventually all my sequoia died. As close as I can tell, sequoia need high humidity to thrive. It doesn't matter how much you water them. If their needles dry out, they die.

Honeydew … Water Killer

November 9, 2014
Categories: Family Happenings
Tags: bottled water, cats, Honeydew

From bed last night, I heard a loud crinkling sound going on for 15 minutes. My first thought was, “What is Honeydew doing this time?”

Honeydew is my stalker. She follows me around like a puppy, and somedays won’t let anyone else look at her let alone pet her. It can be annoying, but it’s also endearing. When she’s causing trouble, it’s a good thing she spends huge amounts of time trying to win my favor.

Anyway, I couldn’t keep my eyes open, so I figured I’d deal with whatever she was doing in the morning.

Morning came and I found the cause of all the loud crinkling. My cat, who is a Maine Coon Siamese mix, had attacked and successfully killed an entire flat of bottled water. Many of the bottles had been completely crushed. Others bled purified water from claw and canine punctures they sustained.



My naughty cat, Honeydew, returning the scene of her crime.

Honestly, I don't know what the water did to my cat, but it must have been an awful offense to justify utter destruction. Honeydew, for her part, was very proud of her work. She rubbed against me constantly while I surveyed the damage. It was kind of impressive work for a cat.

I couldn't get mad at her. She adores me. She constantly follows me around like a puppy, and cries whenever a door keeps her away from me. This is the cat that will wait for hours under my bed for my wife to leave the room, then comes out and hops up next to me as soon as she sees that I'm all alone. She's a cute and fluffy stalker.

I've heard that Maine Coons love playing with water, but I'm guessing no one has had quite this experience before. In the process of puncturing no less than a third of the bottles, she also completely shredded the plastic wrapping. It may turn out that she punctured more bottles that just happen to have rolled in a direction that prevented them from draining. I'll probably have to throw away the whole lot of bottled water, just to be on the safe side.

When I came out this morning, the water was all over the place. Luckily, I keep everything important up on a raised floor, and the basement drain is literally just to the left of the water. Everything dried up by this evening.

Bad kitty!



This is about the last crime I would have ascribed to my cat.

Now, I'm deciding what to do about the rest of my water bottles. I need the water for my trips up to Dove Ranch. I want easy access to it, so I can pack the van quickly. However, the cat's proven she's more than capable of destroying my water supply in 15 minutes.

Having water on hand in case of an emergency is a nice, too. Whenever there's a problem with the water supply (which happens even in our urban areas), the first thing to disappear from stores is the water. And heaven forbid that the massive earthquake geologists keep claiming Utah is way overdue for happens.

We need water on hand.

No. I'm going to have to find a way for the water-killing cat to get along peacefully with the remaining bottled water. I might try placing the water in some sturdy bins and stacking them.

I have to admit, she does look cute examining her handiwork.

Pear Tomato Seeds

November 15, 2014
Categories: Gardening
Tags: pear tomato, seeds, tomato

Small as a cherries, yellow as summer squash, and shaped like a pears—they're pear tomatoes. Great in salads, or by themselves. You can't go wrong with pear tomatoes.

My father-in-law found a bunch of pear tomato seeds in storage. They collected dust for about eight-to-ten years. Rather than throw them out, he decided to plant them and see what happened. Turns out, tomato seeds can survive for around a decade and still sprout.

He expected the seeds to be duds, so lucky for us, he ended up with way more seedlings than he needed. My wife gladly gave the young pear tomato seedlings a home at our house, and we found ourselves with our first pear tomato patch.



Pear tomatoes are fantastic for salads. Just drop a handful of them on top of a bowl full of greens for a very classy look. Like cherry tomatoes, they taste great in salads.

I grow heritage tomatoes that I harvest for seeds, so we worried about cross-pollination. Crossing pear and regular tomatoes could ruin the seeds from both crops.

We picked a spot as far from our regular tomatoes as possible in our yard, and planted the pear tomatoes there.

We loved our first crop of pear tomatoes, so I looked into the cost of buying pear tomato seeds, and they are quite expensive. I decided to harvest my own seeds. I did it in a similar fashion to regular tomatoes, and tried growing them the next year from our own seed.

Two years have passed, and I can say harvesting them the same way you harvest regular tomato seeds works. Our seeds grew just fine. No problems at all.



Cut the pear tomatoes in half, and gently scoop the seeds out into a bowl with a thumb.

Harvesting the Seeds

You can harvest your seeds and still eat your tomatoes, so start by washing the pear tomatoes. After separating the seeds, you can throw the meat in a salad or other dish.

Next, slice the pear tomatoes in half with a nice sharp tomato knife. I usually leave a slight bit of the tomato halves connected, so that I don't have to pick up every half individually. It feels like I'm cutting the work in half that way.

(Very punny, I know ; –)

Use a thumb or finger to scoop out the seeds and any pulp that comes with the seeds into a nice glazed or glass bowl. You can use the tomato meat however you want, including just popping the tomatoes into your mouth. Make it a working snack.

Now for the tricky part. Dump the seed pulp into an old *clean* pickle jar with a lid, and fill it with water until it is 3/4 of the way filled. Place the jar in a room-temperature place out of the sun. I usually just stick it by my dish drainer.

You let the seeds sit in the jar of water and pulp for three-to-five days. The liquid will ferment and mold slightly. The first time I tried harvesting tomato seeds, I made the mistake of letting them dry out on a paper towel. I ended up with a moldy mess that could not be separated from the paper towel. That's because I didn't know about letting them sit in a jar of liquid.

Letting the seeds mold slightly in a jar of liquid is a vital step. The mold kills diseases that could infect next year's crop. This step disinfects the seeds.

Occasionally, shake up the water-pulp-seed mixture, don't forget to let out the built up pressure from the fermentation and mold. I doubt the jar will burst from the pressure, but I like to be careful. Shaking the seed mix will result in the seeds separating from the pulp. The good seeds will sink and the moldy bad seeds and pulp will keep floating.



After draining the moldy water from the jar of tomato seeds, let them dry out in a ceramic bowl.

Finally, drain off all the undesirable seeds, pulp, mold, and water. You're left with seeds and a little moist pulp. Spread out the seeds in the bottom of a ceramic bowl and let them dry out.

While they are drying (and you can expect this step to take a day or so depending on the humidity) stir them occasionally to break up the seeds. You will still have a lot of seeds stick together and to the bowl, but breaking them up a little while drying makes the final step easier.

Finally, when the pear tomato seeds are dried, scrape them out of the bowl with a metal spoon. Then, take the seeds that are still stuck together between your thumb and forefinger, and rub them gently until they come apart. A little prying with fingernails might be necessary, too.

If you make the mistake of drying the seeds on a paper towel, they will stick to the paper, and just rip the paper when you try to separate the seeds from the paper. That's why I use the ceramic bowl.

Storage and Seed Selection

Place your seeds in a regular envelope and store them in a dry dark place. Remember to label the envelope with type of seeds, and the year you harvested them. The seeds will likely still germinate eight-to-ten years from the time you have harvested them—maybe even longer. Who knows.

Seed selections begins with selection of the nicest tomatoes. You don't want poor stock in your seeds. I usually make up a few categories, and pick the nicest pear tomatoes in those categories. Then, I harvest seeds from the tomatoes that grew with traits I liked.

My normal categories are: disease and bug free, size and shape, and peariness (appealing dimensions.) If I find tomatoes that excel in all three categories, great. If not, I pick pear tomatoes that excel in at least one category. The goal is to allow the good traits to spread to the next generation of tomatoes.

I save several seeds from multiple years, and then plant mostly the latest year's seeds, but I mix in some seeds from former years to help the tomatoes remain true to their origins. Mixing generations of seeds, also, potentially preserves desirable traits that did not make it into the newest year's seeds.

Good luck with your pear tomato seeds!

Saffron

November 29, 2014
Categories: Cooking and Food, Gardening
Tags: bulbs, flowers, giant sequoia, saffron, spices

Talk about one little mixed up plant. Saffron crocus, known for its culinary offering, comes to life in the fall, tries growing all winter, and then yawns and goes dormant by the end of spring.

Ever heard of summer? All the other plants have, but not saffron. What do you do with such a rebellious flower? Turn it into the world's most expensive spice, of course.



My saffron crocus bulbs look pretty much like every other type of crocus bulb. They have started sprouting roots and stems in the few days I've had them. That's not surprising since this is the time of year they normally sprout and have a flower.

I checked a grocery store, just this last Wednesday, and they sell saffron (in the spice section) for about $10 per 1/2 gram. That comes to $567 per ounce. To give you a

comparison, silver sells today for $15 per ounce. Eight years ago, gold was selling for $552 per ounce.

I want to try cooking with saffron, but am averse to eating something that sells for prices similar to gold. I've bought some pricy meals in my life, but saffron's out of my league. However, if I grew the flowers and harvested the spice for years to come, then I'm all for that.

Last week, I bought my first 25 saffron crocus corns. I have no idea how the seller got them to stay dormant up until shipping, but they arrived looking dormant. A few days later, they were sprouting all over the place. I had to stick them in dirt quickly, or lose my plants.

Now, I can grow my own saffron. Saffron, AKA "red gold," takes over 4000 flowers to produce one ounce of the famous spice. I'll have to live with the product of 25 plants until I propagate more.

Once harvested, saffron needs drying. Store the dried saffron filaments (technically called stigmas) for at least a month to bring out the flavor. Keep saffron (the spice) in a cool dark place to keep it from spoiling. Storing is a small metal tin is customary. Saffron stays good for cooking for about two years.

Plant saffron corns, giving them 4″ of space between plants. Plant them at a depth of 3″-4″. I had leftover pots that I usually start my tomatoes in. I settled for planting one saffron bulb per pot. Then, I put my empty looking pots by the pot that holds my last unplanted giant sequoia. I figure the saffron can keep my little giant sequoia company during the long cold winter nights.



I put my saffron crocus bulb pots by my giant sequoia seedling for the winter. Notice the giant sequoia is looking a bit brown now that it is November. I'm told that is normal for the first few years.

At the rate the saffron corns started rooting, I expect them to break the surface of the pots either this week or the next week. Hopefully these plants can really survive winter. I honestly have my doubts, but I'm willing to give them the chance. Though, I might chicken out, and put the pots in my cold frames.

This time next year, I'm hoping to cook with saffron.

Bare Root Trees

December 4, 2014
Categories: Trees and Shrubs
Tags: lacebark elm, soil

I buy most of my trees online and have them mailed to me. I research my trees thoroughly, and then get very particular about exactly the type of tree I buy. I also like to buy small trees in bulk, and then let them grow before planting them on my ranch. I love getting trees by mail.



Trees ordered by mail are mailed bare root, when the tree is dormant.

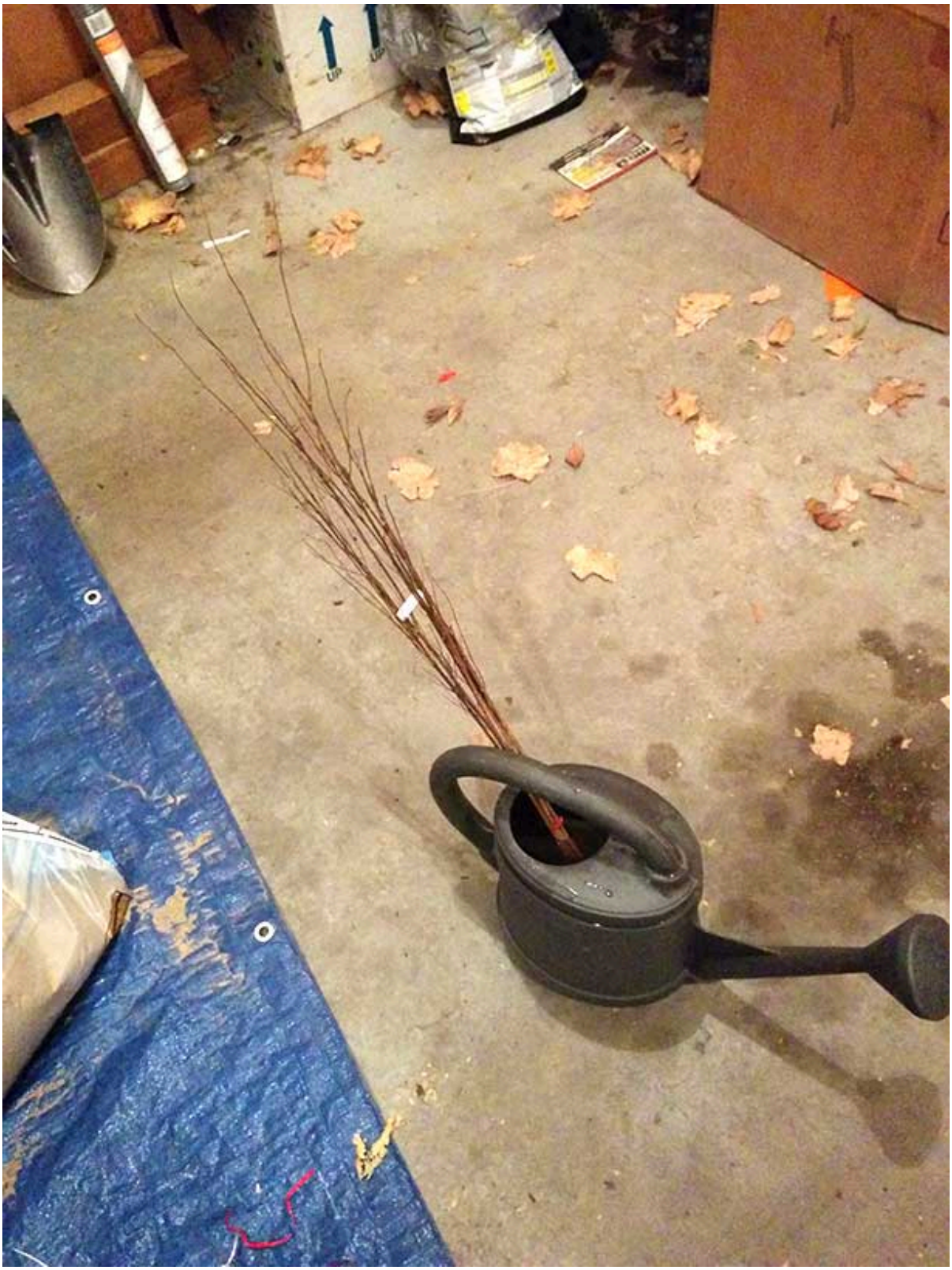
I ordered ten lacebark elms back during the summer. Trees ship when they go dormant. So, I had to wait for December to receive my lacebark elm shipment.

If you have never had trees shipped to you, expect them to come without many (if any) branches. The supplier will remove most of the dirt, and add cardboard or gel to hold moisture, then wrap the roots in plastic. It is extremely important that the roots never dry out before replanting. Dry roots equals a dead tree.

When they mature, lacebark elms gain a surreal camouflage pattern across their bark. Their bark is beautiful. Established lacebark elms can survive off around 16″ of rain per year. That's less than I get at the ranch, but not too much off. Lacebark elms are a nice drought tolerant tree.

Plant trees that come in the mail, immediately. Trees don't like travel, and really don't like being separated from soil for long periods of time.

The soak your trees' roots before planting. I gently remove the cardboard, sand, and gel that the trees shipped in. Then, I use my watering can to soak the bare roots. If this results in a clogged watering can later, I just backwash the watering can to remove blockages.



Soak your bare root trees as soon as you unpack them.

Every dedicated gardener has their own favorite soil mix. I like to start with Miracle-Gro garden soil, and mix it will all purpose sand to to get a sandy loam that most of my favorite trees love. I usually mix them at about three parts garden soil and one part

sand. The resulting soil drains well, and holds together fine for replanting the tree, once the trees roots grow around in the pot.



Soil is cheapest by the yard, and delivered in a dump truck, but I don't need that much, so I just buy bags of garden soil.

I am very careful about the sand I use for planting. I don't want to kill my trees by planting them in sand that has chemicals in it. I never use sterilized sand, bleached sand, playground sand, or sandbox sand. Usually the all-purpose sand will mention that it is suitable for landscaping. I have had good success with Quikrete's all-purpose sand, so I stick to using their sand.



Sand that I mixed with my garden soil for planting my bare root trees.

Once the trees are planted, water as needed to keep the soil moist. Keep those roots wet even during winter months. Trees go dormant, not into suspended animation. They still need water during winter months.

I bought the trees during the summer, so had to wait several months for them to arrive. The 12 trees I planted took me a few hours to plant, if you include buying supplies, and mixing the soil. Now, I need to wait for spring to see if my lacebark elms survived the ordeal. I basically am spending a full year on each tree, before I know if it's alive. Now you know why nurseries can get away with selling short stubby wilted trees for $45 or more.

Santa Visits Dove Ranch

December 13, 2014
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: Colorado pinyon, common hackberry, seedlings

Snow and rain greeted my December insanity, today. My daughter and I decided to risk one more trip to Dove Ranch. On typical years, the road to Dove Ranch is impassible by December. A snowmobile or a big truck with chains might get out there, but not my little Nissan Sentra. The dry and warm weather inspired me to attempt a normally impossible visit.

I decided Dove Ranch needed a visit from Santa this year, and Santa was bringing Christmas trees—little ones.



Here's a festive deer for the holidays. The restaurant even made one up to look like Rudolph, which was cool until it dawned on me that that meant Rudolf was shot and mounted.

This week, I bought 25 common hackberry seedlings and another 25 Colorado Pinyon seedlings from High Mountain Nursery in Draper, Utah. Yes, I've planted seeds for both on the ranch, but you know what they say, "A seedling in a cage is worth two seeds under the brush." (Oh come on, … someone must have said it.)

I have a near perfect record of killing off pinyon seedlings in my care, so planting these seedlings as soon as possible in rabbit proof cages up on the ranch seemed wise. I spent Friday night making quarter-inch wire mesh cages for seedlings, then packed up my Sentra with all the supplies I normally take to the ranch.

I woke up at 4:30AM and checked the weather maps. Rain and snow covered everything from my house to the ranch, but my reading of the map made me think the snow and rain would finish before we got there. I made sure we had a couple of good

digging shovels in the car along with good winter gear, and we left on our foolish journey.



One tree in wet fields and clear skies in the distance.

I've never seen a Christmas season in Utah as warm as this one. Normally, we see snow off and on from the end of October, with the snow sticking by early December. Here we are two weeks out from Christmas, and seeing temperatures in the 60's. If I had any vacation time at the day job, I'd have taken it and visited the ranch when the temperatures reached 64 degrees.

No such luck. The massive rain storms in California this week decided to move inland, and a branch of them headed for Utah bringing colder weather with them.

We drove up over mountain passes with snow falling, and rain falling everywhere else we drove. We traveled through three hours of snow and rain, and finally found clear skies just a couple of miles from the ranch. It was our own little Christmas miracle.

The barely-maintained dirt road out to the ranch was slick. I had to use care not to slide into one of the foot-deep ruts, but we made it.



We watered all the common hackberries and Colorado pinyon seedlings we planted, just to make sure the roots don't dry out before the next rain.

Upon reaching the ranch, we checked the condition of all the trees. I've been dying to know the condition of my tiny giant sequoias. They all look brown, but feel pliant, like they should. I'm hoping the brown coloring is their way of hiding from predators during the winter months. I even found a couple of new green shoots on two of them. All the trees seem to be doing well enough for their first winter in the wild.

We managed to plant nine new pinyon seedlings and three hackberry seedlings. It is interesting to note that the common hackberries (like most trees I'm used to) fill up the entire tube with roots. The Colorado Pinyon sends down multi-inch tap root that doesn't spread roots until it has reached the depth of several inches. That explains why

the Colorado seedlings hate growing in pots. They just don’t have the depth of soil they need to start getting established.

Homesteading

December 25, 2014
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: hobby farm, Homestead, Planning the Homestead

Homesteading is a lifestyle. Homesteading is simple living. Homesteading is eating food raised or grown with your own hands on your own land. Homesteading is home-baked bread and fresh eggs. Homesteading is a shelf full of canned fruit picked from your own fruit trees. Homesteading is a warm fire on a cold night. Homesteading is that dream of something forgotten by modernity.

Homesteading starts with some land, vivid dreams, and lots of persistent work. The goal of achieving some level of self-sufficiency on your own parcel of land, begins with finding a homestead. Zoning, home owner associations (HOA), and environmental laws make many parcels of land unsuitable for homesteading, even if they have water and good soil.

Another consideration when choosing a homestead is work. It would be nice if homesteading paid large amounts of cash, but for most of us homesteading involves taking on a mortgage. Homesteading won't be any fun if you spend most of your waking hours on a bus, or train (or in a car) instead of at your homestead. Unless you are already self-employed with a job that does not require locating near a large city, your homestead must be within reasonable commuting distance to work.

The size of your homestead does not need to be large. With modern intensive gardening and farming techniques, tens of thousands of dollars of food can be produced on less than a fifth of an acre. I think most homesteaders look for one to five acres of land, though some buy much larger or smaller depending on their finances.

Homesteaders—you may call them hobby farmers or smallholders—are a self reliant bunch. Homesteading often includes raising small animals such as chickens, ducks, sheep, goats, pigs, or rabbits. Often horses or cattle are thrown into the mix. Feeding

animals gets pricy if you don't produce your own feed, so homesteaders often have fields for raising feed. A common technique is to offer a local farmer use of a field in exchange for a portion of what is grown for use as feed on the homestead.

Orchards are also a staple of homesteading. Some homesteads come with pre-planted apple, peach, cherry, or pear trees. If you have the luxury of planning your homestead's orchards yourself, look into varieties of fruit that ripen at varying times of the year. With a little forethought, your homestead can have fresh fruit from June until October instead of tons of fruit in the fall with nothing any other time of the year.

Homesteading and gardening go hand-in-hand. Gardening takes a lot of practice. The beginning homesteader should have patience. Don't give up if your homestead's garden doesn't produce much food the first few years. It's okay. There is a learning curve. Homesteading is fun, if you're not too hard on yourself while learning how nature works.

Homesteading requires a wide range of skills. Homesteaders will do some home improvement one day, (right after feeding the chickens), and perform sales at a farmers market the next (right after turning over the compost.) Homesteading is an adventure of hard work born of dreams.

Canning Peaches

January 22, 2015
Categories: Cooking and Food, Off Grid Living, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: canning, peaches

Years ago, I planted a fruit cocktail tree—one of those trees that grows lots of different types of fruits. I managed to kill it off, except the roots. The roots shot up a beautiful peach tree. This last fall it finally had a full crop of peaches.



The peaches on our tree in early October.

I had all my family help pick our peaches and bring them into the house. Once we saw all the peaches together, we knew we couldn't eat them all by ourselves. They'd definitely go bad before we ate them all. We decided to give away a few to neighbors

and friends that said they wanted some, but that still left us with about a bushel and a half of peaches. That's a lot of peaches.



We ended up with a pile of peaches on our kitchen island.

We decided to can our remaining peaches. I naively figured I'd make an afternoon of it. The afternoon turned into a late night, and didn't take care of even half the peaches.

It turned out that even though the peaches tasted great, they were not quite ripe enough to get the skins off. We blanched the peaches to loosen the skin, but that had little affect. We ended up spending massive amounts of time peeling slimy blanched peaches by hand.

Some of the pits willingly came out of the peaches when cut, but again, having picked the peaches too early, the pits of most of the peaches were firmly seated in the meat of the peach.

I initially thought I'd need to pressure cook my quarts of peaches to can them properly, but found from studying a few books on the topic that peaches are best canned in a hot water bath. Their acidity makes the hot water bath canning possible. Less acidic foods do need canning in a pressure cooker.



We canned out peaches with a hot water bath.

Modern stoves don't play well with canners or other large pots. Flattop stoves are especially bad at pressure cooking, because they can't guarantee continuous heat. Other stoves have burners that are too small. The solution we came up with was using a large high-quaility hotplate to heat our pressure cooker (or other large pots.)

Everything seemed to turn out all right with our canning, so I put the jars of peaches down in the basement for the winter. Finally, we decided it was time to try out our canned peaches. We ate our first quart of peaches in mid January. I admit I was nervous eating food (even canned food) that had sat on the shelf for almost four months.



After 3 1/2 months we ate our first quart of canned peaches. They tasted fresh and sweet.

The peaches tasted great!

We learned a few things from our first experience in canning peaches. Firstly, don't pick the whole tree in one go, and then think everything will go easy in canning the peaches. Canning the peaches, and especially taking the skins off, takes time. We should have only picked as many peaches as we needed for one or two batches of canning.

Hot water bath canning is pretty easy, but the pot I used barely covered the jar lids when full. I had to stand right by the hot water bath, constantly adjusting heat and water levels to prevent the boiling water from getting all over the stove, or falling below the level of the jar lids and ruining the canning process. We've since then found a better deeper pot to do future hot water bath canning in.

We're looking forward to another season of peaches next fall. I feel a little more prepared to deal with the peach harvest this time.

Paying off Our Ranch

January 22, 2015
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: buying land

Owning the ranch debt-free is my first improvement to the ranch. Sadly, I may never live to own my own home. The house we live in has a 30-year mortgage on it, and looking at the men in my family, I probably won't live to see it paid off. During my lifetime, the bank will likely always own the chunk of land I currently sleep on. That would be a depressing thought, but if I pay off the ranch, I will finally realize the dream of owning my own land.



I sold my Nissan Sentra to pay for my homestead.

My wife and I went into a lot of debt for education and related costs. We need a lot of work in the financial part of our life. Even though we are still facing ongoing education costs for children and my wife, we can still work toward debt-free financial freedom in little ways.

Like I inferred above, my first concern financially is our ranch. We have an undeveloped 80-acre ranch that our entire family absolutely loves. I'm already planting and tending native trees on the ranch. I'm planning for a well, pastures, gardens, and orchards on seven acres of the property. Eventually, my wife and I want to build a home on it. For now it is a great weekend getaway, and potentially a future homestead. Someday, we'd like to use it as a extended-family recreation spot, too.

In times of financial hardship, what good would our ranch do us, if someone else has a lien on it? During financial difficulties, we'd lose our ranch.

I've spent a lot of time considering how to pay off the remaining loan on our ranch. The main options when paying off any debt are to cut back on other expenses, get a second job (make more money), or sell something. Luckily, we got our land for a great price, so the outstanding loan has not been huge.

After weighing all my options, I realized that we have three cars and only two drivers that need vehicles at home. We've been playing musical cars all winter, making sure none are left idle or on the street for too long. It's actually been pretty annoying to keep track of whether each car is getting driven enough to prevent a dead battery.

I decided to sell one of my cars. We need the van, as it is the only vehicle our entire family can legally fit in. The trick was deciding which of the two cars to sell. I'm absolutely in love with my Sentra but our Altima looks like a beater, even though it probably has another 50,000 miles of life in it. I went back and forth for all of December. It was a very difficult decision.

I finally decided to sell the Sentra. It hurt to sell my favorite car, but I got over the pain pretty quickly, because I was able to sell it for almost exactly what I owed on the ranch.

Immediately after the cashiers check had cleared, I got a payoff quote for my land loan, and sent off the check. Now my wife and I own our ranch free-and-clear of any liens. We still have a lot of debt to deal with, but at least one little bit of land is actually ours.

Peach Tree Pruning

February 3, 2015
Categories: Trees and Shrubs
Tags: fruit trees, peaches

Pruning fruit trees isn't hard, but I always seem to put it off until winter is nearly over. I finally got around to pruning my peach and other fruit trees. Last year, I didn't make time for them until they already had leaves and fruit growing on them. This year, I showed them more attention.

I have a peach, two pears, two apples, and a cherry tree. The peach is my most productive tree, so I try to take good care of it. Check out my canning peaches post to see the massive amount of fruit I get off my peach tree.



I pruned this tree last year. Honest, I did.

I've heard peach trees don't need as much pruning after they mature, but my peach gets bushy every year. Maybe when it's older it will call down. Believe it or not, I prune it back severely every winter or spring and it still comes out looking like the above photo by autumn.

I try to do my pruning after hard frosts have killed dangerous insects. This year, we haven't had much of a winter. It's been more of an extended spring. I'm sure most of the fruit-tree-loving insects haven't died.

My precautions against fruit tree pests include pruning after the insects have died off, as I've mentioned. Also, I never (and this is very important) let fruit rot under or around my fruit trees. Allowing dropped fruit to become breeding grounds for bad insects is just asking for a devastated fruit harvest. Even composting happens away from the garden and fruit trees. Any bug or fungus infested fruit or vegetables end up in the garbage. An ounce of prevention is worth gallons of fungicide and insecticide.

I check for fallen fruit whenever I mow my lawn. There's typically no reason to make special time to check for fallen fruit. I just work it into my regular schedule. The one exception I make to this rule, is I always check for fallen fruit after heavy wind storms.

The goal of pruning is to open up the tree to airflow and sunlight. Air flow allows quick drying of your fruit when it rains or is irrigated. Dry fruit resists disease much better than damp fruit. Plenty of light helps keep the fruit dry and encourages proper development of your fruit.

When pruning peach trees or other fruit trees, you want to balance out the tree. Encourage branches to grow at or near 45 degree angles. Remove branches that will shade other branches, too much. Downward growth and vertical grow (except for the trunk) should be the first to get pruned. Don't let your tree get too tall, or you'll need a big ladder to get to the fruit. Remove dead and diseased branches, too. After making the easy pruning choices, then go back and figure out what if any other branches need removing.



I chopped a lot of growth off my peach tree, but it will all come back over the spring and summer.

Clean up after pruning. You don't want dead or diseased branches rotting under the peach tree.

One new tip I learned last year from experience. Typically, you want to remove a third of the fruit from the tree right after it appears, so that the remaining fruit grows large and healthy. However, pruning off a third of the tree branches doesn't do the job of thinning the fruit on the tree. You need to remove a third of the fruit growing on each branch, not just chop off a third of the tree's branches while pruning.

One final tip, after pruning, I spray down the tree with a combination insecticide / fungicide. The wounds the tree receives from pruning are susceptible to insects and disease, so I try to give it a little extra protection right after I'm done pruning.

Well, my tree is pruned in plenty of time for spring. I expect it will do as well as last year. I look forward to an October harvest of peaches.

Update: Peach trees will grow out horizontally faster than the branches gain thickness needed to support the weight of their peaches. Remember to prune length of branches, if the branches won't be thick enough to support the weight of the peaches it produces.

Growing Potatoes in Buckets

April 2, 2015
Categories: Gardening
Tags: potatoes

Potatoes require less water than most plants in a typical garden. You really need to make sure that you don't rot the potatoes or cause fungus on the plants. I like keeping the watering down to about once per week. However, doing so when planted with water hungry plants is nearly impossible.

My solution is growing potatoes in tall sturdy buckets. Potato buckets allow complete control over water, sun and weather. And, repurposing buckets as potato buckets is a great use for old pales left over from grinding wheat into flour.



Place the sprouting potato in the prepared bucket.

Unfortunately, just sticking dirt in buckets and throwing a potato in is not enough. Potatoes need good drainage. Water that works its way down to the bottom of the bucket must have somewhere to go. Otherwise, the potatoes will rot before harvest, the plants will likely die.

First, drill a few holes in the bottom of the buckets for water to drain out of. Second, place a few inches of coarse gravel in the buckets. Third, cover the gravel with a porous cloth such as you can find at garden centers. Finally, place a few inches of rich garden soil on top of the cloth.

The potato buckets are ready for use. You can get the buckets ready in the fall for use in the spring. But, considering they are just going to have dirt and rocks in them until the first potato is placed in them, you can prepare them any time of the year, or even years before they get used. I happened to have mine sit in the garage for a few years before I had the time to use them.

Potato plants don't like freezing or near freezing temperatures. However, potatoes seem determined to sprout as early in the winter as possible. Always try to keep your potatoes in cool, dry, dark places to discourage them from sprouting too early. I usually keep my potatoes in a closed cardboard box in my basement.

Potatoes sprout from their eyes. The sprouts are not considered safe to eat. They also use the potato for their nourishment, so are undesirable in potatoes you want to eat. Also, if the potato sprouts get too big, too early in the winter or spring, your plant will die before the weather becomes warm enough to sustain potato plants.

You can slow down potato sprouting by simply breaking off the sprouts where they contact the potato. According to some older farming books I've seen, you can get away with this trick up to three times before the potato is planted.

To start your potato bucket, place the sprouting potato on the dirt in your bucket. Technically, you only need one sprout per bucket. So, a lot of people slice the potato so that a potato chunk with one sprout is placed in each bucket.

Once placed on the dirt in your bucket, cover up the potato (or slice of potato) with several inches of dirt. The sprout should be completely covered. There is no need to water your potato at this point. Put a lid on your bucket and place your potato bucket in a cool dark place and check it every week. Do not let your bucket freeze by leaving it outside. I leave mine at the back of my garage where it won't freeze.

When the sprouts make it to the surface of the dirt in the bucket, cover them with a few more inches of dirt. Keep performing this trick, until your dirt is at the top of the bucket.

Now that's all good in theory, but in reality you might forget about your potatoes for a few weeks like I did. The sprouts actually managed to push the lid off one of my buckets. Luckily, they were in my dark garage so they did not go all leafy or green on me.



Don't ignore your potatoes for too long.

In my case, I covered the stems with dirt, very gently. The stems will break if you're not gently. I managed to break only one stem. If it is early in the year as it was for me, the soil you use may be frozen into chunks. Try to use soil that is thawed, even if it is cold. On cold days, leaving your soil in the sun will often thaw it out, even if the shade has snow.



Keep burying those potato stems, so they remain roots.

Once you have the potato sprouts above the edge of the buckets, they need sun. However, keep them out of the frost. I always move my potato buckets into my garage on cold nights or even cold days.

Remember, the potato plants are a lot more forgiving of no light than of freezing temperatures. A day or two without light won't kill them, but one good frost or freezing rain will kill them. My general rule is: keep the plants inside unless it is 44-degrees Fahrenheit or above outdoors.



Don't over water your potato buckets.

Once the potatoes are growing leaves, I try to water them once per week, or more if the weather demands it. Give them plenty of sun, and don't over water them.

When the plants die off, harvest the potatoes by dumping them out. It will be the easiest potato harvest you've ever had. A good sized pale can provide 40 or more pounds of potatoes.

Also, if you are gentle, you can dig around in the soil and harvest young potatoes for eating during the growing season. Remember to be gentle. The plants will often grow new potatoes to replace the ones you harvested early.

The nicest part about growing potatoes in buckets is that you can start growing and start harvesting potatoes earlier than in a traditional garden.

If you forget to move your plants inside and they get killed back, don't give up. The plants I grew this year were accidentally exposed to a frost and died back to the stems, but as you can see from the photo above, the leaves grew back after careful pampering.

I am looking forward to a nice potato harvest this year. Good luck with yours!

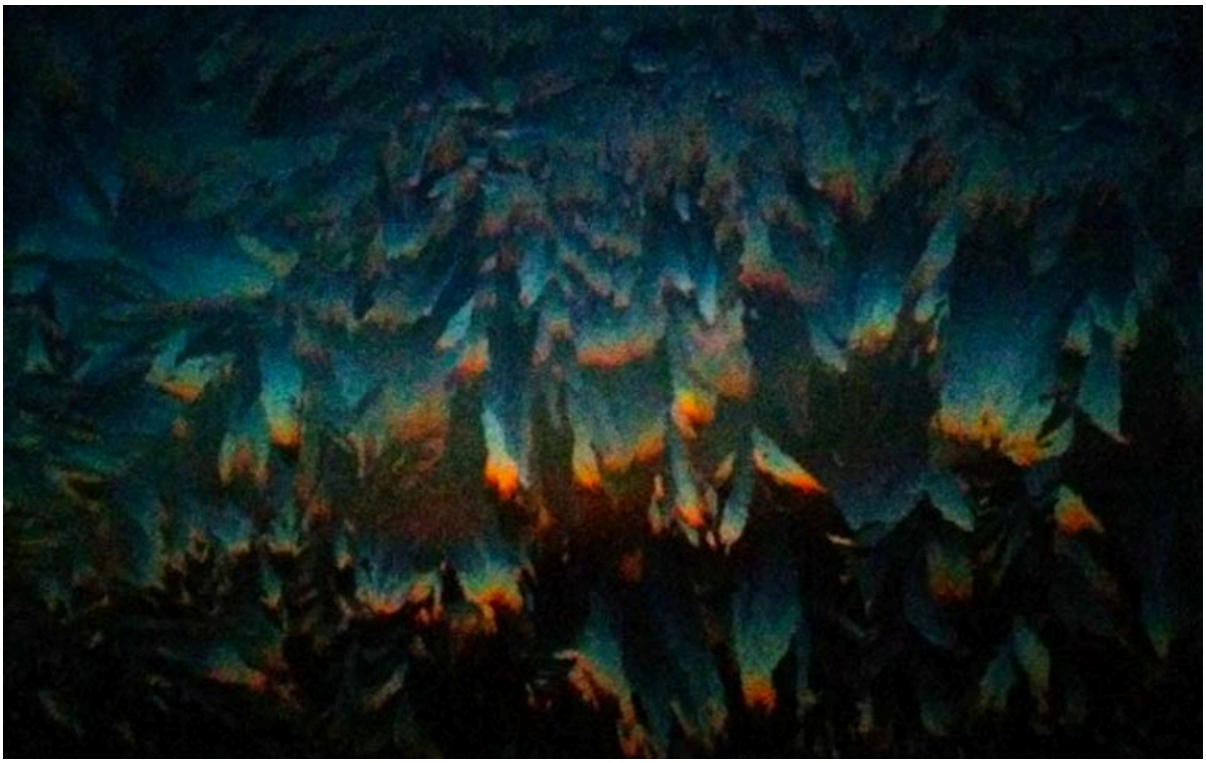
Van Camping

April 6, 2015
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: camping, Colorado pinyon, seedlings

I've threatened to camp up at our ranch since Bridget and I bought it last year. I took Good Friday off from work this last week, and my wife suggested that she and I go van camping up at Dove Ranch.

I agreed.

She arranged for the younger children to stay with a relative, and we prepared to dare the fridged weather of high country Utah in late winter.



The sunrise through iced van windows was beautiful.

We have had an unusually dry and warm winter. Of course, the weather decided to turn cold again just in time for us to go on our excursion. We passed a field coated in ice that

a farmer had meant to water on the way up to the ranch. The ice was still there the next day when we left.



It might be a little too cold to water the fields.

As usual, I almost drove by Dove Creek Road that our ranch is on. You'd think that I'd stop driving by it at some point, but I keep missing it. This time I had a good excuse. Someone, whether state, federal or county government (or maybe a rancher) had installed a barbed wire gate across the entrance of the road. I would never have recognized it, except for the sign at the entrance.



Dove Creek Road's northern sign. It's been shot at a few times.

When my wife and I first saw the new barbed wire gate, it was getting dark and we thought that some spiteful person had put a fence across the road. I was just about to

get my tin snips out and show them what I felt of their decision, when I noticed it was a gate, not a fence.

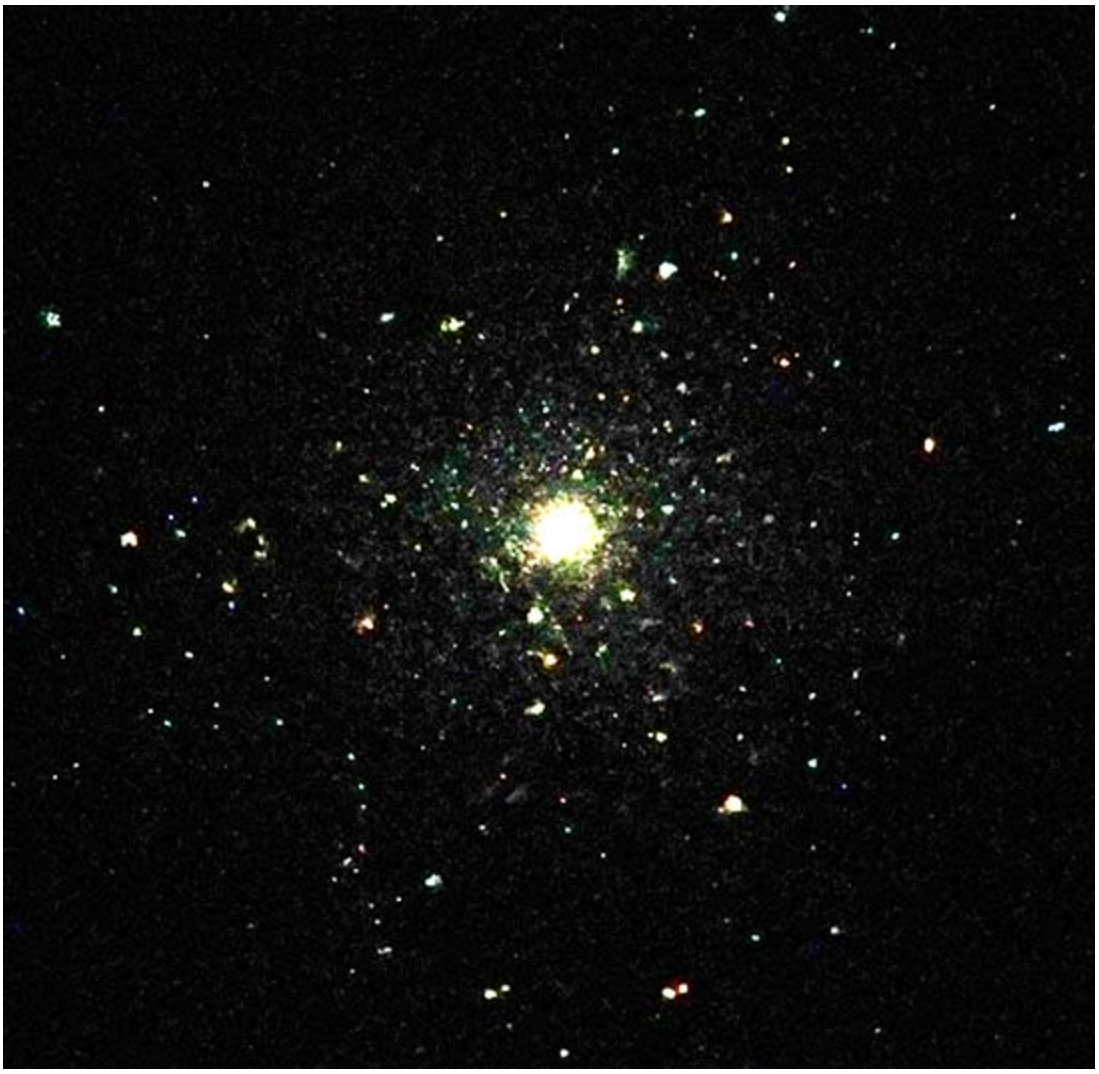


A new barbed wire gate graces the entrance to Dove Creek Road.

Normally, with a barbed wire gate, you just lift the top loop of barbed wire off the side-post, and you can move the gate out of the way. This gate had so much tension on it that you couldn't do that. Luckily the creator of the gate realized how much tension there was and added a small log attached to the post with some barbed wire to use as a lever when opening the gate.

The first attempt I made at opening and closing the gate I needed help from my wife, but by the second attempt, when we were leaving the next day, I had figured out how to close the gate by myself. It still took a lot of upper body strength, and a little dexterity, but I closed it.

One of the real risks with this type of fence, is that you can rip open your clothing on the sharp barbs, or worse yet, slip and slit your own wrist on the barbs. I was extremely careful, as we were about an hour's drive from the nearest doctor or emergency room.



The moon through the icy windows of the van.

We got to the ranch just after dark. It was already very cold—probably below freezing. I still had to go around with a flashlight and look to see if any of my trees were alive.

What I saw didn't look good. As far as I could tell, all my trees were dry and brown. I spent much of the night wondering why I even bothered planting trees in such a forsaken environment. I was very depressed about the death of all my trees, but held out a little hope for better news during daylight.

Bridget and I set up camp in our van. We moved everything edible to the front seat, and our Colorado pinyon seedlings to the dashboard. Neither of us thought attracting

rabbits, scavengers or predators to our campsite by leaving food out for them was a good idea.

We stayed surprisingly warm all night, even though the temperatures in the van were well below freezing. We had a queen-sized mattress, fleece blankets, and a winter sleeping bag. The cold weather was no match for our preps. However, the moon was so bright, through the windows of the van, that Bridget had a hard time going to sleep.

Toward dawn, the inside of the van windows iced up. The moon was now on my side of the van. Shining through the ice, the moon surrounded itself with a multitude of sparkling ice-crystal stars. It was beautiful. I completely understand why some cultures used to believe the stars were ice crystals in the night sky.

Looking at dawn through the ice was fantastic. You can see the results of dawn in the picture at the beginning of this post. As beautiful as the dawn was, what we really wanted was a warm bathroom with flushing toilets.



Three trees survived the winter drought.

Bridget and I slept in. That's something our kids never let us do at home, but they weren't camping with us this time, so we took advantage of it.

We hiked around to all the spots that had trees planted last year, and found three trees alive. So, at least all our work from last year was not wasted. We had a few surviving trees, and the work on our driveway is still there.



Our first selfie of the year at Dove Ranch.

After warming up and eating some breakfast, we watered the remaining trees. I then got to work planting some new seedlings. I brought many more seedlings that we had time to plant.

While I was planting the tree seedlings, a man drove up on a dirt bike. We chatted for a few minutes. He was out checking the water for the cattle grazing the area. In his words, “It looks like you’re making a lot of work for yourself there.” He’s right, but chasing dreams is often like that.

It’s all a new learning experience for us. I planted five more Colorado pinyon seedlings in places similar to the ones that allowed the previous trees to survive. Hopefully, we can learn from the mistakes we made in 2014, and have more trees survive the 2015 summer and winter. We’re feeling positive about it.

Cold Frame Tips and Tricks

April 11, 2015
Categories: Gardening
Tags: cold frames, seedlings, tomato

The first few years I grew tomatoes, the plants got big enough that the little tomatoes would form, and then the hottest days of summer would hit. When it gets into the 90's and 100's in Utah, my tomatoes always stop growing. They don't start growing again until the weather drops to the the 80's in the late summer and early fall. As a result, I would not see any tomatoes ripen until just about the first tomato-killing frost.

I thought about jumpstarting my tomatoes by sprouting them inside under grow lights in late winter or early spring. However, growing plants under electric lights seems to be against all my gardening instincts.

My second option was buying or building a small greenhouse. We have strong winds in Woods Cross, so I'd need to spend some money to have a greenhouse that wouldn't collapse or blow away. The price was just too much for me.

Finally, I learned about cold frames. Cold frames are mini knee-high greenhouses. I realized that Cold frames were the tomato seedling growing tool I needed.



Start your growing season a month early by using coldframes.

Many people choose to build their own coldframes, to avoid expense. A combination of old windows, and a few boards can result in a beautiful and solid cold frame.

I wish I had those skills. I went with manufactured cold frames by Jewel. They're fairly strong and have lasted me several years. They required some assembly, but not more than I felt comfortable with.

I love my cold frames. However, learning to use them properly took years of experimentation. Cold frames don't automatically ensure quicker or earlier growing seedlings and plants. I lost a lot of plants to my early ignorance.

The placing of cold frames is the first step to proper use of cold frames. Cold frames need sun all day. That sounds easy, but if you set up your cold frames in the summer, the shadows cast by houses, trees and fences are very different than in the early spring when you want to use your cold frames. It is very easy to place your cold frame in full sun when setting it up, and find that it only gets partial sun (or no sun) at a different time of year.

I had a farmer friend of mine explain several years ago that plants that get morning sun do better than plants that only get noon or afternoon sun. I've found this true for plants in cold frames, too. If you need to select a location from several that only get

partial sun, favor the location that gets the earliest morning sun. The plants will love you for it.

When setting up your cold frame, find (or create) a spot with level ground. Pots, plants, and bottles used for temperature regulation will tip over on even small slants. Make the area for your cold frame as flat as possible.

A great way to level ground for your cold frame is to take a tiller to it to break up sod and packed dirt. Then go at it with a garden rake. Leveling freshly tilled ground is child's play.

Cold frames promote plant growth in early spring. This is great for your potted plants and seedling trays. Unfortunately, it is also great for every weed or blade of grass ever sprouted in the dirt under the cold frame. Before finalizing the position of your cold frame, lay down a few layers of weed blocking cloth. It won't prevent all weeds, but it might slow them down for a season or two.

Anchoring a cold frame to the ground is very important to keep it from being destroyed by windstorms. Before anchoring your cold frame, make sure it is squared properly. Crooked cold frames prevent lids from opening and shutting easily, and in the worst cases, the top windows won't open or shut at all. The easiest way to ensure a cold frame is square is by putting the lids on and closing them up. Having the cold frame fully assembled squares it the quick and easy way. Check that the top windows open and close properly before anchoring the cold frame to the ground.

Never place your cold frame under tree branches. Even though the slanted sun of spring may hit the cold frame all day, the cold frame will constantly be covered with bird droppings and anything your tree sheds during its spring pollination process. Clearing the top windows of the cold frame will become a full-time job. Watch out for those tree branches.

Mound a couple of inches of soil around the edge of your cold frame. This keeps cold night air from seeping under the bottom of the cold frame. This also slows down harmful seedling-munching bugs and mice from getting to your sprouts. An inch or two of dirt is usually enough insulation around the bottom of the cold frame.

If you are like me, you're busy. However, on days that warm up quickly in the spring, you need to open up the top windows of the cold frame to avoid frying your seedling and plants. We've all got into a car that was left out in the sun. Cold frames warm up just the same way as a car in the sun. Warm air is good for your plants, but hot air kills them.

I've found having a self-opening window helpful on those days I forget to vent my cold frames. It is a seedling saver. Good automated vent openers do not require batteries. They are heat activated, and well worth their cost. Forgetting to open your cold frame even one time can destroy weeks of hard work.

Remember to keep the plants in your cold frame well watered. They will dry out quicker than plants in your yard or house. The cold frames will stay warmer than your house, and have full sun. Soil in pots and seedling trays in the cold frame will dry out quickly.

Regulating temperature in the cold frame helps your plants. The corners of your cold frame are most susceptible to extremes in temperature. At night, the corners get the coldest, and at noon the corners get the hottest.

Two easy tricks for keeping temperatures from reaching extremes at noon and midnight in your cold frame involve bricks and water bottles. I like to line the corners of my cold frames with sunlight absorbing bricks. They absorb excess heat in the daytime, and release that heat when it is needed at night.

I usually place several bottle of water in my cold frames, too. I repurpose old soda bottles and orange juice bottles—cleaning them and filling them with water. After filling the bottles with water, I spray paint them black to encourage absorption of heat from light. I place the bottles evenly around the edges of the inside of the cold frame on my bricks. The corners are the first place I put the bottles and then evenly space the rest along the longer sides of the cold frame.

Just a note, … I don't use old milk jugs for my cold frames. The reason is that the plastic they use in milk jugs becomes brittle after about six months to a year, then cracks or splits. I've found pop bottles and juice bottles to be longer lasting.

No matter how hard you try to prevent it, harmful bugs will get into your cold frame. You never see those bugs, but you always see your dead seedlings in the morning. Putting poison on young plants inhibits their growth and often kills them. The solution I've found is to spread a thin layer of bug killing powder under the plant pots and seedling trays. It turns out that the harmful bugs often hide out under the trays and pots during the daytime. Setting the pots and trays on the poison often wipes out the harmful bug population in the cold frame.

Finally, when the nights are warm enough, take your top windows off the cold frame. When the nights are warm enough, the cold frame's work is done.

All that information represents years of experimentation. Hopefully, you get something useful out of it. If you like this post, remember to share the link!

Bunny Cam

April 15, 2015
Categories: Adventures, Off Grid Living, Trees and Shrubs, Wildlife
Tags: Chinese elm, common hackberry, cottonwoods, coyotes, jack rabbit, swales

I've nicknamed my trail cam, the "Bunny Cam". It is unbelievable how many rabbits are in the sagebrush by the Dove Hills. You can't walk a straight line without stepping on one every three hundred feet.

I recently retrieved my trail cam from its second stint documenting the events that pass on my ranch while I'm not there. I shouldn't have been too surprised, … rabbits happen. It took pictures of rabbits running; rabbits sitting; rabbits eating; rabbits socializing, and rabbits drinking after the rains. Rabbits, rabbits, rabbits.



Technically, they're jack rabbits. They seem to love it up on Dove Ranch.

Yup. Lots of rabbits up at the ranch.



There are an unbelievable amount of rabbits on the ranch.

I like seeing this many rabbits hopping around the ranch. In the unlikely event that I was stuck on my homestead with no other source of food, I'd easily have enough rabbit meat to feed my family. Jack rabbits can have diseases and parasites, but if you cooked or boiled it thoroughly, my opinion is that that would kill anything icky in the meat.

The rabbit disease issues usually occur during the summer, and are caused by ticks, so when ticks have been dormant for a couple of weeks, the rabbit meat is usually good. If you are forced to eat rabbit meat when ticks are active, then make sure you don't get any blood and guts on exposed skin before boiling or thoroughly cooking the meat. That won't be 100% guarantee of safe meat, but you'll stand a better chance.

My trail cam caught other activity in the clearing. It's not all rabbits. I caught my first coyote on camera. I have been hoping to catch one on camera for a while now, but this is my first one. I was starting to wonder if someone had killed them off in the area, or they had moved to a different range, because I haven't been hearing them yelping up in the hills or down in the wash this year.



This coyote looks a bit on the lean side. I'd think he'd be fat with all the rabbits to eat.

I'm guessing this is the same coyote crossing the camera multiple times.



The coyote seems to know rabbits hang out in this clearing, but isn't having much looking for them

I only saw these three pictures of a coyote on the ranch during the multiple weeks that I had the camera in this location. I feel pretty lucky to have caught it on camera.



The rabbits came out to play about one hour after this coyote left the clearing.

The camera also got a visit from a bird.



This bird finds the trail cam interesting.

On our last visit, my daughter and I began work on a modified swale in the wash. There is far too much water running through the wash to do a normal swale. Our intent is to slow the flow of some water, while not interfering with the natural runoff.

On this visit, we discovered the jack rabbits loved our work on the swale. It must be less dangerous to get a drink out of the swale than the raging river running by the swale.



The jack rabbits loved drinking the water that pooled in the beginnings of our swale.

Even in its beginning stages, the swale must be working. By far, the muddiest place on the ranch in our recent visit was the swale. Supposedly, once fully finnished, I should be able to plant fruit trees on the downward side of the swale. I've seen it done on YouTube, so it must be true ; –)

I've been extremely excited about the wash after discovering how wet some parts of it are just a few inches under the sand. I figured I'd give a few trees a try—including a cottonwood, a Chinese elm, and a common hackberry.



I actually worry that there might be too much water in the wash for my common hackberry.

One of the hackberries from earlier this year has survived the summer heat. I find the hackberries slightly less hardy than the Colorado pinyons, but the hackberries seem to be able to survive the harsh conditions out at Dove Ranch. I plan on planting more of them as I learn tricks for keeping them alive.

We're trying something new with our planted trees. I'm adding wood chips in and outside the cages to keep the ground moist. From what I've been studying on swales, I think that lots of organic material is a key to healthy, fast-growing trees.



Chinese elms have the camouflage style bark that I love.

Unfortunately, I damaged the roots to my Chinese elm pretty severely while planting it. I don't expect it to survive. We'll see on the next visit.



Cottonwoods are native to Utah washes, so I'm hoping I can get a stand of them to grow in my wash.

I admit that getting a Cottonwood to survive on its own at Dove Ranch is a long shot, but I have high hopes. Besides, if I get it to survive, my wife (who absolutely loves Dove Ranch) can't tease me anymore about having no trees on the ranch.

I bought a cottonwood to take up to Dove Ranch with me a few days before my trip, and the hot weather had killed it within 2-3 days. So, Esther and I stopped by the nursery for a new one on the way to the ranch. The big question is, *Will this cottonwood survive even until my next visit?*

Update: The Chinese elms are both doing great after their first year at Dove Ranch. Although, the rabbits keep nibbling off any leaves they can get to.

Secret Life of Honeydew

May 18, 2015
Categories: Adventures, Family Happenings, Wildlife
Tags: cats, Honeydew, trail cam

I finally broke down and bought a Bushnell Trophy Cam. Decent trail cams are a little on the pricy side (for me anyway), so I had to wait almost a year to buy mine. Even waiting a year, I still had to buy a two-year-old model, … used.

Before dropping the camera somewhere on my ranch for a few weeks, I want to learn to use it. It makes no sense to set up the camera, spend two or three weeks getting all excited to see what I can see, and not have any pictures to show for it. That would be a huge disappointment.

So, I picked my first victim, … Honeydew—the cat that stalks me constantly. Wouldn't we all like to know the secret life of Honeydew? I placed my trail cam near my office door, knowing that that is her favorite place to wait for me.



The first victim of my new trail cam was my stalker cat, Honeydew.

Before setting up my Bushnell trail cam, the first challenge was figuring out where to get a manual. (Did I mention it was used? Yes, ... yes I did.) Luckily, Bushnell has PDF's of manuals on their website. *Thank you Bushnell!* The trick was finding the correct manual for my camera. With a little help from Google, I finally found my Trophy Cam manual.

I was very surprised at how many batteries the Bushnell Trophy Cam takes. My model can take up to 12 AAA batteries. Honestly, I didn't have nearly that many batteries on hand. I looked everywhere, and only found eight new batteries. I was really worried that I would have to go to the store and buy a huge community-sized pack of batteries to use my new toy.

After reading the manual, I realized eight batteries would be fine. Luckily, you can get away with less than a full complement of batteries. Not all the slots have to be filled. However, when they are filled with high-quaility batteries, the camera can function for months in the wild.

I was very pleased to see my camera offers time lapse photography, on top of motion sensor photography. I set it up to take pictures ever 15 minutes, and three pictures every time it is activated by motion sensors.

the Bushnell Trophy Cam also offers video with sound, but I honestly don't have any interest in video.

Every time I'm away from Dove Ranch, I wish I could get some idea of what happens out on the land when I'm not there. I have burning questions that I just can't spend enough time up there to answer.

How much water comes down that wash during normal rainstorms?

My gut feeling is a lot of water; possibly a dangerous amount of water. Eventually, I want to put in a drive to the other side of the wash. Knowing what kind of water volumes come through that wash are absolutely essential if I'm ever going to build a house up there.

How much water comes down the other less noticeable wash?

There are two runoff areas through the north end of Dove Ranch. I need to know where I can safely put a well. If an area floods *ever* during heavy rain, I don't want a well there, because the surface water could get into the well and contaminate the ground water. That would be very bad.

What animals come down the trails when I'm not there to see?

I want to know if it is safe to bring my children around for camping trips and family outings. I've seen cougar tracks up there. I constantly hear coyotes making a ruckus around the ranch. What other nasties live up there, and how common is it for them to come across the land.

Back home with my experiments, …

I captured plenty of pics of Honeydew waiting for me at my office door. She spends a lot of time on her side or on her back looking under the door at me. She even left me a hairball, though I had the shutter speed set wrong, so the the photo evidence of that is thankfully over exposed.

I need a little more practice with the trail cam to get the settings correct, and the angles just right. Framing the picture takes a little practice, even on a trail cam. I have to admit, though, the night photos (black and white) and the day (color) photo quality of the camera are top notch.

I got some decent pics of Honeydew.

Yes. If Honeydew were a person and not a cat, I'd be rushing out to get a restraining order against her. But as it is, she's just a cut little cat. Her favorite hobby just happens to be me.

Turns out, the secret life of Honeydew is quite boring.

What a Mess!

May 31, 2015
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs, Wildlife
Tags: Colorado pinyons, ladybugs, trail cam, wash

With cattle grazing and extreme weather across the area, I was prepared to find a mess on my latest visit to Dove Ranch. Once I've fenced off the seven acres I plan to improve, it will be easier to control some of the damage that goes on up there. Fencing off the land is still a few years off, though.

I've planned a trip up to Dove Ranch ever since my wife and I did some van camping up there back at the end of March, but right after that trip, it started raining. And, it kept on raining. We've had increbibly wet weather for Utah, so visiting the ranch just hasn't happened.



Looks like a massive gust of wind managed to blow down my wind chimes.

The problem is that the road out to the ranch is barely passable for a normal city vehicle on good days, and I'm not sure how many days it would take me to get unstuck if I went up there when it's rainy and muddy. (I'm not kidding about the "days" to get unstuck.)

The rain finally stopped. So, I made it up to the ranch on Saturday. We had some pretty extreme rain for Utah, so I figured I'd find a few things amiss when I got to the ranch. I was right.

I found the first thing amiss when I was packing for the trip. Honeydew once again had expressed her disdain for bottled water. If that cat wasn't so totally in love with me, I'd probably get angry with her.

Up at the ranch, I noticed little bits of destruction all over after parking my van. My first task was to walk around and survey the damage. Some of it looked like wind and water damage, and several bits looked like cattle damage.



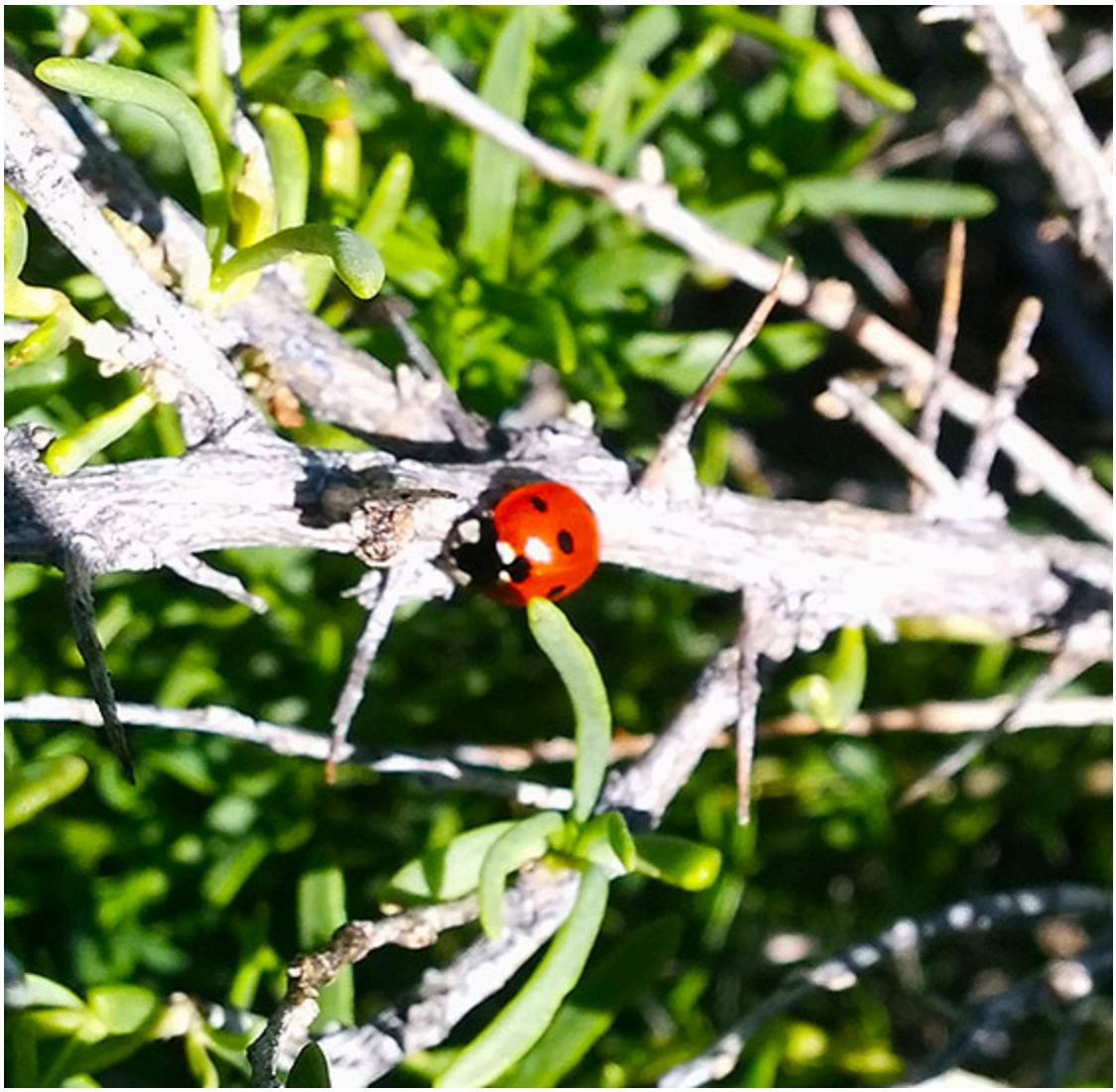
Mud and some puddles still dot the ranch after weeks of rainy weather.

I found my wind chimes on the ground in a tangle. It must have taken some pretty violent wind to pull that off. Several of the nearby reflectors where pushed over in the same direction, too. It looks like a massive gust of wind hit that spot, taking out the wind chimes and the driveway reflectors I've put in.

Luckily, that was all fixable.

I found a few of my tree cages kicked over. I think cattle kicked them over while walking by. Unfortunately, the cage protecting one of the remaining three living trees from last year was among the cages damaged. That allowed the rabbits—there are tons of rabbits up there—to eat the tree. Rabbits seem to hate seedlings as much as my cat hates bottled water.

So now, I'm down to two surviving trees from last year up at the ranch. The good news is that one of the trees has new growth on it. I think that I've shown that if they can survive the rabbits and cattle, Colorado pinyons are perfectly capable to surviving in the Park Valley area of Utah. I do have great doubts about whether I can get these trees to survive the cattle grazing, though. I've noticed that trees don't seem to grow anywhere near the cattle's water troughs.



I was surprised to find a ladybug in the sagebrush.

I took time while I was up there to plant seven more trees. I reused some of the old cages to protect them from the bunnies. I planted mostly Colorado pinyons, but also a few hackberries. I have a total of 13 living trees up there that I know of. There could be some sprouted seedlings off in the sagebrush, but I won't see those for several years, if they survive. Currently, I have ten pinyons and three hackberry seedlings.

One of the my biggest plans for this trip was placing my trail camera. I loaded the camera up with 12 fresh AA batteries. Supposedly, it can run for 11 months off a full complement of good batteries. I placed it in a safe spot overlooking the wash.



I placed my trail cam overlooking the wash.

I've been told by several people that there are deer and antelope roaming the area, but I have my doubts. I've never seen anything that big on the ranch, and it's pretty wide open. I think I'd have noticed.

I am hoping to catch some pictures of the water that comes rushing down the wash. I think it already got a picture of a owl or hawk that lives in the wash wall. I'll be patient and let the camera sit there (hopefully) undisturbed for the next month, and then post the results here. I'm pretty anxious see what it spots.

Kestrel Chicks, Prickly Pear Flowers, and Dust Devils

June 13, 2015
Categories: The Homestead, Wildlife
Tags: ants, Colorado pinyons, common hackberry, flowers, kestrel, prickly pear cactus, trail cam

My daughter and I started this visit to Dove Ranch by checking on the trail cam I left up there on my last visit. I had pointed the trail cam down into the wash at a small cliff with a nesting kestrel.

The first thing I noticed was that the cliff face had collapsed. The rains earlier this year undercut the cliff by a couple of feet, so I wasn't surprised to see soil fell into the runoff area.

My big question was, *What happened to the nest?*



The cliff wall of the wash collapsed in the last couple of weeks revealing the kestrel nest in it. Likely there were more chicks than these two before the collapse. It is also possible that one of the parents was lost in the collapse.

I climbed down into the wash, and looked where the nest had been. There were two healthy looking chicks sitting in a nest. The cliff luckily had taken only the hole to the nest, and not the nest itself. Only two chicks remained, so it's like that buried under the dirt are a couple of dead chicks, and maybe even a dead parent. But, at least one parent must be alive and helping the chicks, or they wouldn't look so healthy (unless the collapse happened within the last 24 hours.)



Close up of the kestrel chicks nesting in the wash's cliff wall.

Even though the loss is sad for the kestrels, I figured I'd take advantage of the exposed nest and reposition my trail cam to face into the nest. Hopefully, I'm documenting a happy ending for the remaining two chicks. I'd hate to download the pics from the trail cam and find them slowly dying.

There is so much unknown. I could be documenting the last hours of life for two helpless kestrel chicks. The trail cam is activated by movement, so the memory card may completely fill before the chicks mature and leave the nest! What if I didn't set up the camera properly in the first place and don't get any shots of the action?

Most troubling is that to get a good shot of the nest, I had to place the trail cam right in the path of water running through the wash. There is a very real chance that a small flash flood could wash away my trail camera!

It's like Christmas for an adult. I admit it. I'm really hoping to end up with 32GB of kestrel chick photos spanning the six weeks it takes them to leave the nest. I'm excited.

Back at the driveway I've been flushing out, Esther and I found truck tracks all the way to the reflectors at the circle. At some point in the last two weeks, a truck drove up the driveway. I'm afraid all they found was my set of wind chimes in the center of the

unfinished turnabout. I'm sure they're wondering what these wacky city folk are doing making so much work for themselves.



Some waist high grass is growing in the driveway I'm constructing at the ranch. This gives me hope of having pastures up there at some point.

One of the great finds we found on the ranch this time was some waist-high grass. I've said for a while that I want a nice horse pasture on the ranch. This proves getting grass to grow up there is possible. We just need to fence off an area to keep the cattle from overgrazing the land.

We also found two inches of new growth on the last of the older Colorado pinyons we planted last year! Almost all the pinyons and hackberries I've planted this year have survived. The one exception is a hackberry seedling that was stripped bare by ants.

So now, I need to add ants to my list of critters that keep that ranch looking dessert-ish. Rabbits are horrible, of course. Also, later on, I expect to lose trees to grazing cattle. I've still never seen any deer or antelope on the ranch.

We planted 11 more hackberries and pinyons around the road through the ranch. That makes a total of 24 living trees on the ranch. They're all very small, but I'm patient. I probably won't plant any more trees this year, but I'll probably walk the perimeter of the ranch spreading tree seeds in the sagebrush sometime in mid-to-late fall.

There is a very real chance that I have some trees from seed I sowed in the sagebrush last year. I won't even know they exist for several years, until they grow taller than the brush. I have learned that the only way to keep the rabbits from nibbling down seedlings is to have them growing under the sagebrush where it is too hard for the rabbits to bother getting to them.



The whole prickly pear appears to be about to flower. This was the only flower on it today, though.

The prickly pear on my ranch are starting to bloom. It is absolutely beautiful. I'll leave them alone. I doubt I'll ever be interested in harvesting their fruit or eating the pads. That's painful and a lot of work, between the spines and the seeds, but I like looking at

the flowers. Besides, the prepper in me does realize prickly pear can serve as a food source in a pinch, as long as you have the right tools for the job of harvesting them.

We watered all the trees, as is normal on our visits. The trees are all native to that type of climate, but to get established, they'll need supplemental water for two to three years. Now we need at least 10 gallons of water to water all the trees. Next visit, I'll bring 15-20 gallons of water, just because I like drenching the ground throughly. Life gets busy, so you never know when it will be a month or more between visits.



We get constant dust devils on the ranch. This one was about 1/2 mile away, and is several hundred feet tall.

There was no shortage of excitement on our visit. I managed to sprain my ankle, less than five minutes into our visit. I can walk on it, just barely. I've been using a crutch off and on since getting home.

Also, we had tons of visits from dust devils. At one point I counted five different dust devils surrounding us. I even snapped a few cool pictures of a dust devil that was hundreds of feet high.

I'm looking forward to seeing how those chicks are doing on my next trip. Also, we'll see if we lose anymore new trees to ants. (Sheesh, ... ants of all things!) Now that we're done planting for the year, I'll focus on improving that driveway, and getting a camp site ready for our family's use.

Kestrel Chicks' Life and Death Struggle

July 19, 2015
Categories: The Homestead, Wildlife
Tags: cliff, falcons, kestrel, nest, trail cam

I finally downloaded the 2500 pictures my trail cam took in the wash on my ranch in northwestern Utah, so I can give some updates and more information about those kestrel chicks nesting at my ranch. In fact, I'll show the entire kestrel nestling experience.

I first noticed the nest was occupied back around May 30, 2015 at 9:09 AM. I was fist positioning my trail cam to look out over part of the wash on Dove Ranch, and noticed a kestrel fly out of a hole in the cliff face. The trail cam timestamps pictures. That's why I know the exact time.



June 8, 2015 part of the wash cliff collapsed killing the male kestrel and at least one, but probably two or more kestrel chicks.

By the morning of June 8th, rubble started appearing off to the left side of pictures in the trail cam. I'm guessing the cliff had started to collapse. At 2:24PM on that same day, the cliff finally gave out.

The big question was, what happened to the kestrel nest. From the pictures I collected, I never saw more than one parent, and only two chicks. It's very possible that the male parent and at least one (maybe more) chicks died in the collapse. The female kestrel and two chicks survived, but the kestrel chicks were now exposed to predators and the elements, as most of the nest was gone.



On June 13, 2015, I found the cliff's collapse had exposed the kestrel nest.

On June 13th at 10:34AM, my daughter and I returned and discovered the exposed nest. The two remaining chicks look freshly hatched, and may have hatched before or after the cliff face collapsed.

I decided this was a once in a lifetime chance to photograph kestrel chicks in their nest, being raised. Plus, I really wanted to find out what would happen to the kestrel chicks, so I moved the trail cam to a new position.



The cliff wall of the wash collapsed in the last couple of weeks revealing the kestrel nest in it. Likely there were more chicks than these two before the collapse. It is also possible that one of the parents was lost in the collapse.

We took a few pictures of the nest, and left the trail cam to document the fate of the chicks. The kestrel chicks were fed regularly by a female parent, and started growing out of their down.



Parent with kestrel chicks.



Female kestrel's wing and tail color patterns.



The kestrel chicks definitely don't stay still in that nest unless they see a threat. They're constantly moving around.



The kestrel chicks slowly lost their down for feathers.

On June 21 at 1:51PM, there was another cliff collapse. The cliff gets undercut by runoff water, and so becomes unstable with nothing supporting it from the bottom. It was a cliff collapse that kill a parent and chick(s) earlier. Living in a cliff may protect the kestrel chicks from predators, but it can be deadly when it gives way.



Yet another cliff collapse. You can see the dust obscuring the kestrel nest.

Luckily, the chicks survived again. The cliff collapse was close, but not the section with their nest. The cliff under their nest was undercut by runoff, but had not yet collapsed.



The parent seems to be coming less by this point in the chicks maturation. Maybe, they are eating bigger meals, so need less visits.

We found the chicks doing just fine on June 24. We were visiting the ranch to water our trees and play a little Wiffle ball. We, of course, did not know about the recent cliff collapse. Even so, we were worried for the chicks and wanted to know their final fate.



The single-parent kestrel appears to be staying away from the nest more. One kestrel doing the job of two parents has to be wearing on her.

At this point, my trail cam is lucky to catch the parent kestrel on camera even once per day. Maybe the parent is just out hunting for the chicks constantly, but one parent doing the job of two parents has to wearing on the kestrel. I think the kestrel just isn't coming back to the nest as often. If the parent finally stops coming back before the chicks are mature, that will spell doom for the chicks.

On June 26 at 10:49AM, the male kestrel chicks starts experimenting with its wings. At first, I thought a predator was attacking the chicks, then I realized how old the chicks were. It has nearly been 30 days since we spotted the chicks. They're getting ready to leave the nest.



The little kestrel chicks aren't little anymore.

After the male kestrel tried his wings, the two chicks stand in the opening of their nest realizing the world is bigger than their current small home.



The chicks are realizing that they don't have to stay in the nest anymore.

Within just 21 minutes, the female kestrel chick is testing her wings. It is just a matter of time before they leave the nest, now.



The female chick tries out her wings.

Once the chicks realized they had wings, they started testing them at the nest's opening, both day and night. It didn't take long for the two chicks to decide the nest was too cramped for their new lifestyle.

In the early evening of the June 27, just 28 days after we discovered the collapsed cliff and exposed nest, the first of the two chicks left the nest.



All alone now, the last kestrel chick is only hours away from leaving the nest.

In early evening of June 28, the second chick gets up the courage, or just gets lonely, and leaves it's home of the last 30 days. Both kestrel chicks were successfully raised by the single mother kestrel.

I never had the heart to dig through the pile of dirt under the collapsed cliff to determine exactly how many chicks there had originally been, or if a male parent was buried there. Eventually, the runoff washed away all evidence of the life and death struggle that played out from late May to late June of 2015.

Water in the Desert

July 20, 2015
Categories: Off Grid Living, The Homestead
Tags: irrigation, Qumran, rain, runoff, wash, water

When most people think of desert, they think of Death Valley, where it doesn't rain during some years. These same people refer to the Wasatch Front, where I make my home, as desert. We get 20 inches of rain per year. That's about half as much as most places that are covered in thick forests.

I'm always impressed by the amount of rain and snow we get even in our dry years in this area. Still, most people call it a desert. It is true that we have to manage our water more than areas with higher rainfall, but we also pipe tons of water to other states. So, we as a state obviously have more water than we need.



Our local park became a small lake, complete with kayakers during a recent hail storm.

I care about water in the “desert,” mostly because of my ranch. Dove Ranch only gets about 9-10 inches of rainfall per year. However, that number does not represent the additional amount of water on and under the land. Still, I have to work with what I have access to, and for the past year it has only been the 9-10 inches of rainfall.

What can you do with 9-10 inches of annual rainfall?

To answer that question, I look at the Qumran community that existed on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. (Dove Ranch is on the northwestern side of the Great Salt Lake.) Even by the most conservative estimates, 20 people lived in Qumran at any given time. Some well-reasoned estimates put the population of Qumran at ten times that size.



Qumran received four inches of rain per year and thrived for almost 200 years before wiped out by a Roman army. (Photo used with permission. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Qumran_L30_scriptorium.jpg)

Qumran received approximately four inches of rain per year. Some years it received no rain at all. On average years, Qumran received half as much as Dove Ranch, and yet it had a permanent population much larger than I ever would want on my ranch.

I think a thorough study of the water capture, use, and retention techniques used at Qumran, could teach me a lot about how to use the water on my land. Luckily, Utah has very friendly laws relating to the capture and use of runoff water, as long as it is not interfering with constructive downstream use by the larger community. You have to actually have a use for the water, and not just be monopolizing it for resale.

So, first I have to realize that 10 inches of rain falls on Dove Ranch each year. That alone, if properly used is 40 inches of water for 20 acres of land. Let that sink in. That's enough water to irrigate crops and trees on almost three times the amount of land I intend to develop.

That's all theoretical, of course. But, it gives a starting point for figuring out the potential of my currently sagebrush choked 80-acre ranch.

I know the amount of water falling on my ranch each year, but I have wondered about the amount of water under the ranch and how much watch runs across the land each year. On my latest visit to the ranch, I lucked out and drove right into a local cloudburst. About one hour of rain fell upstream and on my ranch itself. That's not a lot of rain, and most of it was light rain, but I finally got to see the runoff on my ranch.



One hour cloudburst at Dove Ranch that was not in the forcast.

The runoff event came as a surprise to me. I was several hundred feet away from the wash, tending to my Colorado pinyons. I heard the gurgling sound of water, and decided to go and investigate. It was potentially deadly because of the wet, slick clay banks surrounding the wash, but I got the best view of water on my ranch that I could have ever imagined.



The wash filled up with water in a mini-flash flood.

The water running through the wash was about 10 feet across and several inches deep. I was hoping for this kind of runoff through my ranch, but I didn't know for sure. This is very exciting.



This runoff (or small flash flood) was caused by just a short cloudburst. I can only imagine the result of normal snowmelt, or a multi-day storm.

From what I've seen of rainfall during this drought year, I expect this kind of runoff during one-to-three months during a normal or wet year Spring thaw. Normally, a lot of snow builds up in this area. (At least in the mountains that provide runoff through my ranch.) I'm more excited than if I had found gold on my property.



Water can be found at the end of the rainbow on Dove Ranch.

With how valuable water is in the desert, especially to me on my ranch. I can begin to make jokes about gold really being found at the end of rainbows in the form of water in the desert.

How to Get Rid of Rabbits

July 25, 2015
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs, Wildlife
Tags: cottonwoods, eagles, jack rabbit

We have a plague of rabbits at Dove Ranch. I've spent lots of time figuring out how to get rid of rabbits that destroy anything I plant on my land. Seriously, the rabbits look like cuddly bunnies, but there are so many of them that nothing green is safe from the rabbits. That leads to erosion, and a lack of trees and grasses.

Many people walk around in the sagebrush out near my ranch and shoot rabbits for sport. I don't like the idea of killing a rabbit and then wasting the meat. However, these rabbit likely have parasites and disease, so it wouldn't be safe to eat them. So, taking up rabbit hunting is out of the question.



The rabbits destroy everything I plant at Dove Ranch, unless I put metal cages around the plants.

I'm not exaggerating on the destruction these rabbits inflict on the land. Last year I planted blanket flowers and my first trees without cages, and the stupid rabbits nibbled them all to pieces. I also broadcast pounds of drought resistant grass seed up there. I ended up with lots of grass growing this spring. And again, the rabbits destroyed everything that grew.

Now I'm to the point that I realize I can't get anything done on that land unless those rabbits are brought under control. As a result of the rabbit overpopulation, the only success stories I have so far are trees living in metal cages. My number one priority is how to get rid of rabbits off my land.

The problem is that the area is perfect rabbit habitat. There's plenty of brush from the rabbits to hide under and bed down for the night. That protects them from being spotted by coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats and other land predators that would consider rabbits nice treats.

What I need are some eagles or other large predators that can spot these hopping terrors from the skies. Unfortunately, there are no trees (because of the rabbits). A lack of trees discourages eagles and other eagles and other airborne rabbit killers from hanging out on the ranch, so the rabbits are safe for now.



Rabbit's eyes glow here, because they are demonic landscape-destroying devil bunnies.

You can't walk a straight line through my property without scaring up a rabbit every few hundred feet. You can't just call pest control to exterminate them either, because they'd just move back in from the miles of rabbit habitat that surrounds my land. Rabbit bait, rabbit traps, or any other standard means of killing the rabbits won't work permanently either, for the same reasons. New ones will just move on in.

What I need is a permanent rabbit deterrent. That's were my wash comes in. Now that I know how much water runs through that wash, I know I can grow some tall trees down there. The most likely tall trees to survive out in this arid area are cottonwoods.

I have several cottonwoods I've planted in my yard in Woods Cross, and they grow naturally in Utah. I could probably get away without watering them ever. There are many cottonwoods growing near my house that don't get any extra water.

The most important features about cottonwoods is that they'll grow tall very fast, don't mind extremes of flood and drought, and big birds like rabbit-eating eagles like to perch and nest in them.



The most destructive force on my ranch isn't lightning, fire, cattle, coyotes, or drought. It's the rabbits. They destroy everything green.

So my rabbit solution is to make the ranch a nice place for airborne rabbit-killing predators. Nothing says rabbit deterrent like making habitat for my own air force to take the rabbits out. I won't need rabbit traps or any poison for the rabbits. I'll just turn them into bird food.

So the question is, will the eagles or other large predatory birds move in if I can get a cottonwood or two to grow in the wash. I see large predatory birds making due with wooden fenceposts and electric poles all the time out in that area. I don't have any doubts that a few tall trees would attract them.

One obvious question is, how long will the trees take to grow. The cottonwoods that I planted in my yard are about 30-40 feet tall, and that only took them about ten years. That's okay, as I've always looked at Dove Ranch as a multi-decade project that one of my kids will have to finish.

Update: Since writing this entry, I've caught some of the flash flooding in the wash with my trail cam. I was also right about cottonwoods doing well in the wash, if I can keep the rabbits away from them.

Pioneer Trees

August 22, 2015
Categories: Adventures, Family Happenings, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: bison steaks, Brigham City Temple, Maddox, Old Hickory Sheds, pioneer trees

I want trees on the ranch. Obviously, a ranch that was described in the real estate listing as “good for nothing but sagebrush” is a challenging environment for trees. I’ve done a lot of work investigating the most hardy pioneer trees that can survive in the drier areas of Utah.

But I’ll get back to pioneer trees in a moment.

My wife and I just celebrated our 21st anniversary. We took a trip up to Brigham City for dinner and a little sightseeing. We both love Brigham City, and might even move there in the next few years.



My wife and I were married in the Salt Lake City Temple, but we weren't near Salt Lake on our anniversary, so we stopped by the Brigham City Temple, instead.

For our anniversary dinner, I suggested we try a different place than our norm. She was up for it, so we tried out Maddox, a steakhouse that served buffalo steaks. (That's American Bison, just to clear up any confusion.)

Neither one of us had ever been to Maddox, so I called them up in the morning, and made reservations just in case they were busy. That turned out to be a good idea. The wait was about 30-45 minutes for people without reservations. We only waited about five minutes with our reservation.

By the way, buffalo steak turned out to be very good. It's leaner than regular beef steak, so needs to be cooked on the rare side to avoid drying out. We both loved the steaks.

After dinner, we visited the Brigham City Temple. We were married in the Salt Lake City Temple, but we were nearer the Brigham City Temple, so that's the one we visited

after dinner.



I want a cabin up on my ranch, but will settle for a shed. This is the model I have been window shopping for.

Our final stop on our anniversary dinner tour was a visit to Old Hickory Sheds, also in Brigham City. I've been eyeing these sheds for a while, because you can rent to own, and they deliver them fully built. Unfortunately, I'm making two car payments at the moment, so buying a nice shed like the one in the above photo is out of the question. However, I can dream of having a comfortable retreat/office up at Dove Ranch, even if I can't afford it yet.

So, back to pioneer trees. On my last visit to the ranch, my daughter and I planted a cottonwood. They are wonderful pioneer trees here in Utah. They grow fine in Woods Cross, just north of Salt Lake City, even without extra water.

Dove Ranch receives about half the water that Woods Cross receives. Still, with the amount of water in the ground down in the wash I had high hopes.

You can check out the photo of my daughter by the freshly planted cottonwood here. Our big question was, will this tree survive without water for a week or more before our return visit.

Good news. The cottonwood is still alive.



The cottonwood survived its first ten days without water up on the ranch. It shed most of its leaves, but the remaining ones look fine. We're very excited at this little bit of success.

Cottonwoods, like many drought tolerant trees, shed leaves and branches when they are short on water. It's hard to tell in this photo, but the leaves still remaining on the tree are healthy. Considering the cottonwood did not have any supplemental water for

ten days of dessert heat and exposure right after coming from the nursery, I'm pretty excited. it survived without any rooting in the surrounding soil.

The lacebark elm (Chinese elm) that I planted on my last visit didn't die either. The rabbits got to the exposed portions and chewed them off, but the tree itself looks healthy.

The hackberry we planted in the wash with bark chips around it is doing fantastic. I think it looks healthier than when we planted it. Hackberries, like cottonwoods, also shed leaves when they don't have enough water. So, we shouldn't have been surprised to find one of the hackberries we thought was dead has new leaves on it. That makes a total of three confirmed living hackberry seedlings on Dove Ranch.

We had one more anniversary up at the ranch. We have our first one-year-old Colorado pinyon! Now that's exciting. It even has new growth on it, so it is adapting well to the ranch. We've learned a lot about how to make trees live up there without drowning them in water. I expect a lot more survivors this time next year.

Killed by Coyotes

September 5, 2015
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: cottonwoods, coyotes, Geoff Lawton, Greening the Desert, mulch, permaculture, Taylor Mitchell, wood chips

I thought the coyotes were large birds of prey swooping along the landscape. The coyotes moved so smoothly and fast across the landscape—up and down the slopes of the wash—that I had no idea they were coyotes until one of them stopped to watch me.

I respect coyotes. They are beautiful, intelligent, and powerful.



As long as he keeps a healthy distance, I don't mind the coyote watching me.

(See my last post for closeup photos of the ranch's coyotes.)

I used to fall for the line, "They're more afraid of you than you are of them." Then in 2009, coyotes ripped apart and began eating Taylor Mitchell (one of the folk singers I listened to.) She died at the hospital a few hours later.

Any nature documentary lover has seen and heard stories about animals that have never (or rarely) seen humans before walking right up to humans—even walking up to hunters with riffles. The naive animals have no idea how dangerous humans can be.



Everywhere I look on Dove Ranch, I find bones and skulls. They range from rabbit sized to cattle sized.

However, humans have become so detached from nature. Now, we are the ones walking up to dangerous predators with no concept that they eat raw flesh for ***every*** meal. We've become the naive woodland critters.

As I said, I respect coyotes. They are awesome hunters and survivalists. I also respect them enough to keep my distance and encourage them to keep their distance from me and my family.

Normally, I take my daughter on outings to Dove Ranch. She's 19 and old enough to be a big help with the work. However, she's accepted a calling as a Christian Missionary to Japan for 18 months, so I won't have her around to help for a while.

My eight-year-old wanted to come to the Dove Ranch with me today, but lost interest when I told him I was leaving at 3AM. He'll probably come up with me next time. He loves it up there.

From our current house, it is a 2 1/2 hour drive to the ranch. I usually gas up when I reach the last town with a gas station. Then I drive another hour and a half over the mountains and out into the sagebrush.

Today, I arrived before dawn and discovered that it's definitely getting closer to winter up there. I didn't bring a coat and forgot my sweatshirt and scarf. Luckily, I had my hat to keep my ears warm, even if the rest of me was freezing.

Since I can't do much in the pre-dawn and it's not exactly safe to wander around in the dark up there by myself, I emptied the contents of my compact SUV and took a nap.

I woke up to a perfect dawn. I ***cold*** perfect looking dawn. I really should have taken a picture of it, but wanted to enjoy it in the here-and-now rather than enjoy it via a picture several hours later. Some moments weren't made for photos.

I was freezing when I got out of my vehicle, so decided to carry a couple of bags of wood mulch out to the wash and check up on my cottonwood. That physical labor warmed me right up.



My cottonwood certainly isn't bushy, but it's healthy after a month at the bottom of the wash.

The cottonwood looks pretty much like it did last time when my daughter and I checked up on it. I have a feeling it will do just fine down there in the wash. In ten years or so, I'm hoping to have a few good perches for eagles, so they can do a little rabbit hunting on my ranch.

It is funny that when I first mapped out Dove Ranch after buying it, I thought of the wash as this wasted chunk of destroyed land taking up the center third of my property. Now that I realize it has the most water of any area on the ranch, my perspective has changed quite a bit.

I still admit that a massive amount of damage has occurred to my land from unchecked erosion. I need to address the erosion problems on the ranch, or it will destroy the area completely.

I've been doing a lot of research on techniques for containing and preventing erosion, and have come to the conclusion that the techniques of permaculture would do the most good on my land. I'll get into that more in future posts.

In the mean time, if you want to see the power of permaculture, check out "Greening the Desert". Geoff Lawton used standard permaculture techniques to turn several acres of Jordan desert into a green oasis. If the techniques can work there, then I can only imagine what they can do for Dove Ranch.

Grant at the Ranch

September 28, 2015
Categories: Adventures, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: cottonwoods, erosion, Geoff Lawton, spiders

I nearly walked through two massive spiderwebs at Dove Ranch on my latest visit. Grant, my eight-year-old son, kept saying over and over, I'm glad you're leading the way. I would have walked right into those spiders."

I don't blame him for worrying about the spiders. The spiders were as big as his nose, and probably would have ended up on his chest if I hadn't warned him.



Grant and I nearly walked into two massive spider webs.

I'm surprised there aren't more spiders up there. I would have expected to see a host of webs up there during the summer when there are all those flies and other bugs flying

around constantly. I can't explain why the spiders finally began to appear now that many of the insects have been killed by the cold nights.

All my boys wanted to go up to the ranch this weekend, but I could only take one. I brought Grant, because he has been begging me for months. I wanted to take him while Esther was still here, but this last weekend was the first time I managed it.

Grant is growing, but still shorter than much of the sagebrush up on Dove Ranch. I'm used to the area, so don't get turned around anymore. However, he isn't used to the area, and can't even see the horizon from some places. He must find the ranch to be a mystical place, especially with me telling stories about my adventures every time I get home.

I kept Grant close during the entire visit, especially after seeing the three coyotes on my last visit. It was later in the day, so seeing coyotes on this visit was unlikely. We spotted some rabbits, but luckily nothing more dangerous than rabbits.

I still kept Grant close, and told him what to do if we spotted any coyotes. I'm sure some people would love to spout stats about how rare coyotes attacks on humans are, but I'd prefer my boy not become another stat. We also kept an eye out for cougars and cougar tracks, even though I haven't seen any cougar tracks since last year.

Grant loved seeing the cottonwood that his sister and I planted over a month ago. It's still alive, but lost most of it's bark chips and mulch to erosion. I estimate the water in the wash must have got waist-deep in some areas for the mulch around the cottonwood to have eroded.



The water in my wash must have reached waist high in areas to have washed away the mulch by this cottonwood.

Assuming the weather in northeastern Utah has remained unchanged for thousands of years, the amount of erosion I've seen in my wash over the last year is highly disturbing. The wash should be much deeper if this kind of erosion has been happening for thousands of years.

One of my main priorities is stabilizing the ground in and around the wash to prevent further damage to the land. That is why I planted my fist cottonwood down in the wash. If I can get it established, it will thrive down there. Cottonwoods are native to sandy wet soil found in Utah's washes.

We did have some sad news while visiting Dove Ranch. We lost a few more Colorado pinyon seedlings. All the ones with mulch or bark chips around them were fine. However, we must have lost three or four more seedlings. I think the cold weather at nights got them. If I had had bark chips around them, or mulched them properly, I think more would have survived.

We spent most of our time watering the remaining trees. I brought a back of bark chips to put around trees, too. Grant and I both put on gloves to spread the bark chips around.

The gloves were made for adults, so it was fun watching Grant try to use the gloves. They totally dwarfed his hands. He didn't seem to mind.



Grant was excited to see the cottonwood we planted over a month ago.

I'm hoping to bring my son Chance with me on my next visit, and not just because he can help drive. I want to mark off the northern boundary of the wash so I know where I can start working on healing the land.

I'm excited to start experimenting with the permaculture techniques up on Dove Ranch. There's tons more water than Geoff Lawton had to work with in "Greening the Desert". My biggest challenge will be to heal the erosion damage that has been happening for the last several decades.

Update: That cottonwood Grant is standing next to must be on top of a water plume or aquifer, it did so well in 2016.

Hunting Season at Dove Ranch

October 19, 2015
Categories: Adventures, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: acorn, barbed wire gate, bur oak, coyotes, hunter orange, hunting season, Roadcrest, survey

My prediction that the barbed wire gate at the entrance of Dove Creek Road would be taken down during hunting season came true. It looks like someone in a big truck hit it. Even one of the wires is snapped.

Ba-bye!

I always hated that gate.



The former barbed wire fence at the entrance to Dove Creek Road back before a hunter ran into it.

Barbed wire gates are cheap to make, but one slip, and you slit your wrist wide open. Even with gloves and long sleeve shirts, I ended up drawing blood on more than one occasion. I just didn't want to be "that guy". You know. The guy that can't handle opening and closing the gate.

As best as I can guess, some hunter was probably looking for deer, and not watching the road in front of him. He hit the gate from the inside, then had to back up and untangle his truck from the wires. I'm sure he lost a lot of paint in the process.

On my latest trip to Dove Ranch, I brought my oldest boy, Chance. We took the Forester, and as usual, had no trouble navigating the road. I'm sure there are a few places I could get stuck if I really tried, but with very little effort, we never bottomed out and never even had a rock scrape the vehicle. I don't like having to make a car payment again, but I can't complain about the vehicle itself, even used with 50k miles on it.

We ended up working for five hours before we ran out of daylight. We are both very sore now. Even though most of the time was spent walking, we had to carry water and wet mulch and do digging. Any time I go to Dove Ranch I end up getting a good workout.

Every year in mid-September, I go by the library in Salt Lake City and get a sandwich bag full of fallen acorns before the cleaning crews send them to the dump. The acorns are from bur oaks which produce 1-2 inch long acorns. These are seriously big acorns. It is my goal to get some oak trees growing naturally on the ranch, and these are just the acorns I'm looking for.

Since it's been an annual tradition of mine to sprout (and kill) oaks, I figured I'd take a new approach this year to mix it up a bit. Chance and I waded into the thick sagebrush at the bottom of the gully that comes into the northwest part of Dove Ranch, and planted all the acorns from downtown Salt Lake City there. We started by digging a big hole and added plenty of wood chips in the bottom of the hole. Then we put dirt in the hole, followed by the acorns and more dirt. Over the hole we put more wood chips and a steel cage to keep the bunnies away. Also, I'm hoping the cattle will stay out of the thick brush. They usually don't like it. I'll check next spring and see if any of the oaks sprouted.

Grant has brought home tons of acorns from the neighbor's yard, so I'm going to plant those in a similar way next time I visit the ranch. Right now they're in a sandwich bag in the fridge. I'm sure his Mom will be glad to see the acorns out of her fridge.

I was glad I thought ahead and brought hunter orange clothing for my boy and I to wear. Chance and I saw a constant stream of hunters driving by the ranch on Saturday. I feel a little bad for them. There aren't any deer down by the ranch. I'd have noticed it. Maybe the snow in the winter would drive them out of the mountains, but there hasn't been any snow up there yet to scare them this far into the desert.



I've never seen so much traffic up at the ranch. Hunters drove by more times than I can count.

The trees are mostly all doing well. In fact, the cottonwood in the wash has new leaves growing. I don't think anyone has told it that it's supposed to lose its leaves in October. Maybe we took it away from it's mommy and daddy trees before they could have the autumn-time-is-time-to-sleep talk.

It's funny, my wife hasn't teased me once about having no trees on the ranch since we planted the cottonwood.

🙂

Chance and I tried finding the western edge of the property through the wash using a compass. That turned out okay. I think we were off by about 100 feet. Not bad considering we were only using a compass and tracking the edge of the property for about a quarter mile. I double checked our work using the county GIS and Google Maps. We did pretty good, I'd say.



If you know how to read surveyor maps, this thing has my ranch's address on it.

I've been wanting to experiment with permaculture techniques out on the west end of the wash. However, we got scared off by howling coyotes. I think we found their den. These aren't small coyotes either, so I didn't want them coming over a knoll before we

could react. Coyotes are pretty dangerous if you corner them at their den, especially if they have pups. So, Chance and I decided to leave the area.



We saw lots of these coyote tracks all over by the coyote den.

I don't really want to kill the coyotes, anyway. They take care of some of the rabbit issues we have. I just don't want them getting ideas about expanding their diet.

I'm doing another roadcrest grass seed experiment this winter. I've seen experiments by farmers where they put a layer of woodchips over areas that don't grow grass well, and it results in thick grass, so I wanted to give something similar a try. I put down some of the grass seed, and then put mulch over it to protect it from blowing away and/or drying out. We'll see what happens.

Update: According to the boundary survey I had done, Chance and I were off by a few hundred feet after about a quarter mile.

Bunnies of the Wash

November 8, 2015
Categories: Adventures, Trees and Shrubs, Wildlife
Tags: acorn, cottonwoods, permaculture, wash

I set up my trail cam for two months in the wash at Dove Ranch hoping to capture some really cool pictures of rushing water. The best flood came and went with a single raindrop (or maybe splashed drop) in the center of my trail cam's lens. I can see some really nice water levels at the edge of the pictures, but nothing in the center except the blur of a water droplet.

There were two other good rain storms, but one happened at night and the other happened with my camera facing the wrong way. So all-in-all, my trail cam earned its nickname of "The Bunny Cam" by capturing twenty really nice pictures of jackrabbits.



A jackrabbit checking out the running water down in the wash at Dove Ranch.

My most recent visit to Dove Ranch was to plant my second Cottonwood, and plant Grant's acorns. I don't hold out high hopes for the acorns, but I've been surprised more than once. I'm taking the wait-and-see approach.

The second cottonwood is about half way to hibernation. (Okay. Trees go dormant, not hibernate. Don't tell my cottonwoods, though. They think they're hibernating.) It's lost it's highest leaves, but still has the lowest leaves.

The trick of planting in a place like Dove Ranch is finding water. I need that second cottonwood to have water right away. So I thought it over and decided on a test. I would turn over a shovel-full of sand. If the ground was damp, then that is where I would plant the cottonwood. It took three tries to find damp soil.



I have planted a second cottonwood in the wash. Cottonwoods love Utah washes, so I expect it to do well once it is established.

If you look in the background of the photo, you might recognize the old kestrel nest from earlier this year. I hope they come back to the ranch, but that nest won't work for them again. The wall of the cliff has eroded too much.

All three of the trees I planted in the wash this year appear to be doing well. I never thought when I bought Dove Ranch that the greatest threats my efforts would face would be from cattle and rabbits. I thought lack of water would be the biggest threat. Don't get me wrong. Lack of water is a big challenge, but not as big as rabbits and cattle. The places I've planted trees in the wash all are chosen because cattle are unlikely to bother the trees.



Looking north from the Dove Hills side of the wash, you can see some of the erosion that I have to bring under control.

Since I had a few extra minutes, I explored the south edge of the wash a bit. I knew from old terrain maps and just common sense that there was a lot of potential for

erosion damage on that side. The Dove Hills are to the south of my ranch. That means about a mile of runoff I need to worry about destroying that land.

I'm planning to implement permaculture techniques to mitigate erosion damage. According to case studies I've read, you can literally stop a 100-year flood event by proper use of permaculture. Not only does it protect your land, but also improves your neighbors' lands too. Unfortunately, the technology is only about 50 years old, so isn't well known in many circles, yet.



The days are getting shorter, and the snow is creeping down the mountains toward my ranch.

It was well below freezing when I got to the ranch. I put on a hat, hooded coat, sweater, scarf and gloves, and still got so cold I had to get back into the vehicle to warm up. Luckily the air was dead still. It was so quiet that I could barely hear anything except the material in my coat crinkling as I walked.



Summer's definitely over. I found frost on my trail cam when I recovered it.

As with last year, I'm sad that my time at Dove Ranch is coming to a close. Unless we have a warm dry winter again, I won't be able to get my vehicle to the ranch for much longer. It is supposed to snow a couple of days this coming week, and who knows how much will fall up at the higher altitudes like Dove Ranch.

Kerosene Heat for the Cold Dark Winter

January 6, 2016
Categories: Off Grid Living
Tags: Heat Mate, HMN-110, kerosene, natural disaster, wick

I recently read a posting by a survivor of Hurricane Sandy. He described half-mile long lines for fuel, power outages, and fear. He learned like never before how close we civilized people are to the same primal life our ancestors lived. He expressed the fear he and his neighbors had that if the utilities had not been restored before winter, that they would have suffered severely with no way to heat their houses.



Heat Mate HMN-110 kerosene heater

Times are good here in the USA. We have a good infrastructure, and good support networks for families that fall on hard times. History shows us that bad things happen, sometimes to entire countries, and often you can't see them coming until they do. For anyone living in a place with severe winters, a disaster of country-wide scale could be deadly.

Even smaller disasters, like severe earthquakes, or a multi-day ice storm could knock out power, and that means no heat. No heat means frozen pipes and frozen pipes means no culinary water. Even a small heat sources that does not need electricity could save you from thousands of dollars of cold related damage, and in extreme cases a heat source might save you from death.

Being interested in being prepared, I wanted to have a way to heat my house even when the power was off. I grew up with two main alternative heat sources: wood and kerosene.

Unfortunately, burning wood is illegal these days. Not completely illegal, but regulated so much that even if you have everything set up for burning wood and your power goes out, you might be risking a heavy fine or even jail for simply trying to stay warm the same way billions of people have always tried keeping warm, ... by burning wood.

Wood really is the ultimate storable heat source, but not usable under current societal and regulatory restrictions. I naturally turned to my second alternative heating source that I grew up with. Kerosene.

Kerosene burns clean. If it is good, new kerosene burned in a modern heater, it can be burned indoors without much if any odor. Most places don't have regulations preventing you from using it whenever you want to. It won't keep a big house toasty, but when used properly, it is safe and will keep pipes from freezing. Obviously, nothing is guaranteed, but many people including myself swear it is the best alternative heat source for emergencies.

I looked at several models of kerosene heaters and ended up buying the Heat Mate HMN-110. I've owned two of them. I'm pretty happy with the purchase. It isn't a high end model, but it works and it is easy to take apart when the wick needs replacing.

There are a couple of rules for using kerosene heaters. The first rule is always give your heater plenty of air. If the heater is not getting enough air, it will create carbon monoxide instead of burning properly. (This is true of your regular home furnace too, by the way.)

To give a kerosene furnace enough air, make sure you don't surround it with boxes or furniture. Find the draftiest place in your room or house to place it. Many people place their kerosene heater near their fireplace with the flue open, or by the fresh air intake for their regular furnace. Even though it might seem counterintuitive, cracking a window slightly open in the room you use it in, might not be a bad idea.

Whatever you do, never burn a kerosene heater in a room with the door closed. For example, more than one person has thought it would be a good idea to keep their bedroom warm by firing up their kerosene heater and closing the bedroom door. They get nice and warm and then die in their sleep.

Second, use new, undyed, K-1 kerosene. Most states have it. However, K-1 kerosene can be used in diesel trucks as an illegal cheap, untaxed alternative to diesel, so some states force a red dye additive to be added to the kerosene. That makes it burn less clean.

Also, kerosene doesn't store long term. I know this from my own experience. I've had poor experience storing kerosene in hot sheds over the summer. Usually metal containers that seal up nice and tight store kerosene the best.

Old kerosene tends to break down and absorb water from the air. Running old kerosene through a good fuel filter helps, but doesn't fix it up as good as new. The most common way to deal with old fuel is to run it through a fuel filter made for kerosene and then mix it with newer kerosene to freshen it up. With a little trial and error, you can get this to work pretty well for using older fuel.

I like to keep one five-gallon metal kerosene container around and then fill up my empty cans just before the cold season. I can mix the months-old kerosene with the newer kerosene to burn in the winter, then I fill up one can at the end of the season and store it out of the sun and heat until the next winter.

I've found that one gallon of kerosene will burn for about 20 hours in my kerosene heater. My goal in having kerosene around is simply to keep the pipes from freezing in the event of a worst-case natural or man-made disaster, so I fill up a few cans of kerosene at the beginning of winter, and then burn it through the colder parts of winter to keep my basement warm.

Kerosene should only be stored in cans designed for fuel. In the USA, dark blue cans that say the word kerosene on them are available. It is very important to NEVER mixup kerosene with gasoline. If you accidentally fill your kerosene heater with gasoline, the person lighting it will likely burn to death and maybe burn down their house, too.

In addition to extra kerosene, I like to keep an extra wick around. Bad kerosene, or water in your kerosene, can clog up your wick permanently. Wicks aren't terribly expensive and it's a good idea to keep an extra one around just in case you need it.

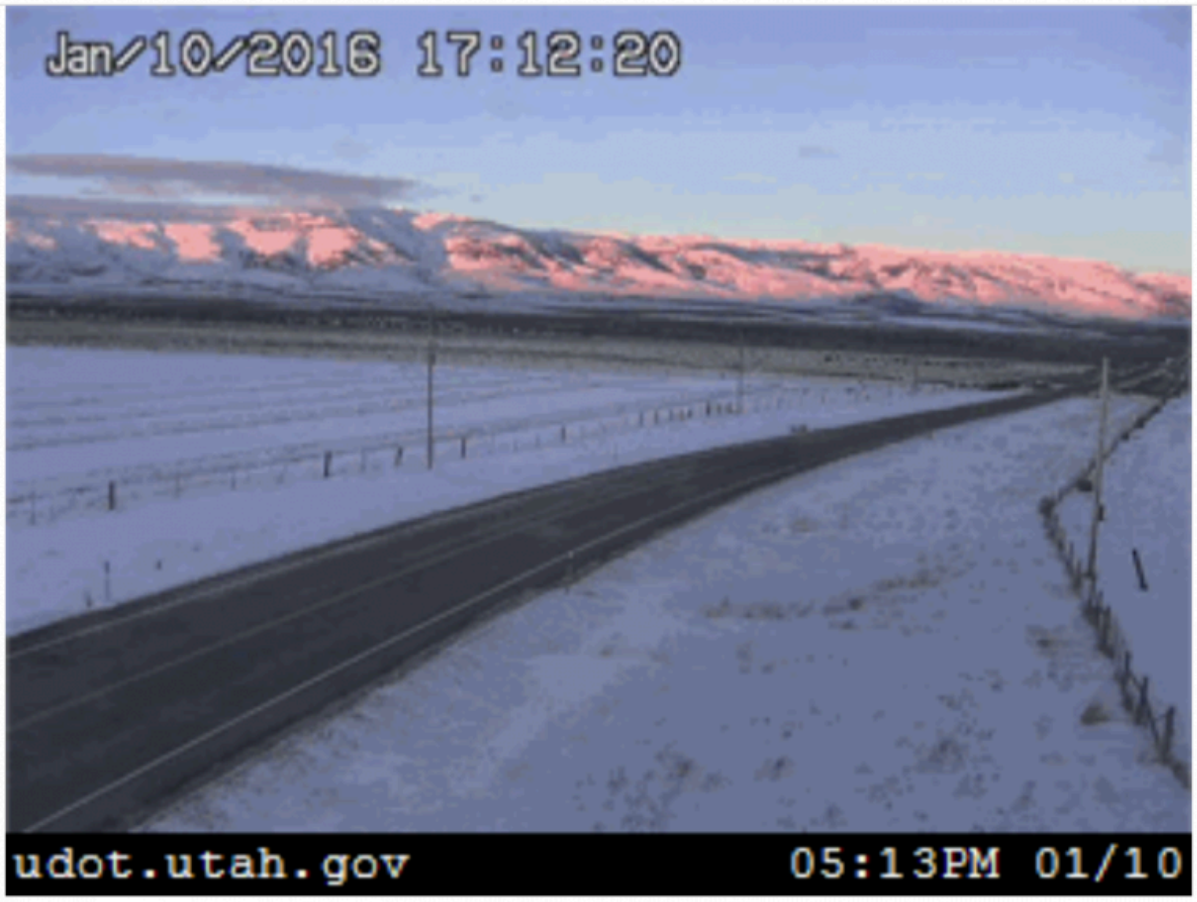
So to sum things up, kerosene is a great alternative heat source for preppers. However, you need to be serious about taking precautions to only fill it with kerosene, and give the heater plenty of air so it burns properly. Also, a carbon monoxide detector wouldn't be a bad idea, just to be on the safe side. Remember to read your kerosene heater's instructions and follow them!

Thank You UDOT

January 10, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: autumn, Colorado pinyons, Dove Creek Hills Road, Rosette, snow, snow pack, spring, UDOT, Utah, Utah Department of Transportation, weather, winter

I can't wait to visit Dove Ranch next spring. I already have tons of work I want to do, and every weekend that I have an extra eight hours, I wish I could go up there. However, Dove Creek Road that runs through my ranch is unmaintained even though it is a county road. That means there is zero snow removal. Also, it means there are plenty of places you can get a vehicle stuck for months on end in the winter without anyone coming by to give you any help. Still, I just can't wait to get up there when the snow melts, and the road dries enough to be passable.

My dilemma, … I have to drive a six-hour round trip in the spring just to find out if the snow has melted enough that I can get to my ranch. I'm a pretty busy guy between working on my fiction blog, my shogi app, and my writing app (Note: I've retired the writing app.) Oh yeah, and don't forget 40+ hours per week on that pesky day job. Six hours for a wasted trip to find out Dove Creek Road is still unpassable is not my idea of a great Saturday outing.



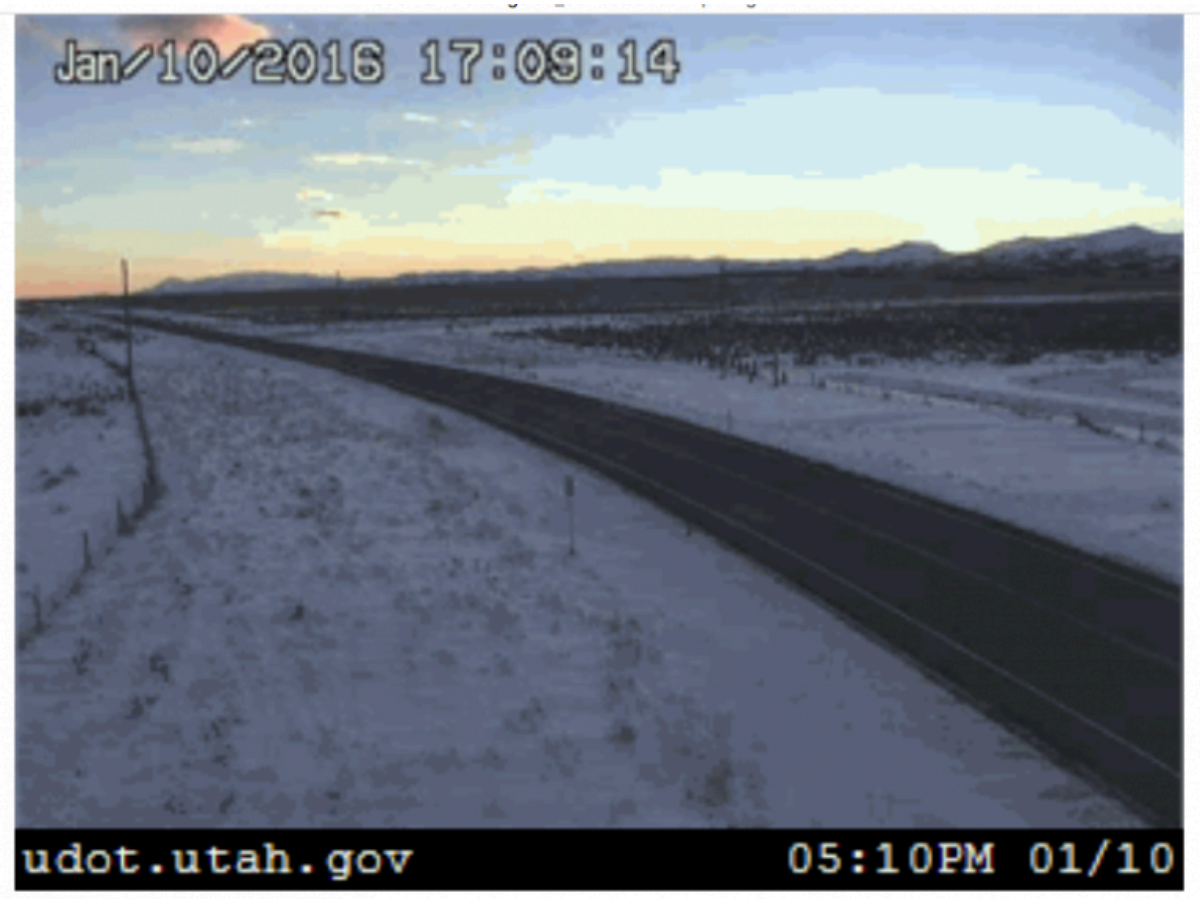
A winter sunset on a remote stretch of state route 30 near Rosette.

Spring snow melt isn't the only time snow is an issue. In the autumn, I base my last trip to Dove Ranch by whether the snow has come down to 5000 feet in Rosette, Utah. But, I can't know about the snow in and around Rosette without doing the six-hour round trip drive. I don't know anyone in the area that I can call up and ask for snow totals and weather updates.

Not knowing snow totals and snow pack status is partly why I lost so many of my pinyons last winter. I didn't know that the ground was bone-dry up at the ranch in November and January. My seedlings died of thirst during the winter that should have had snow covering the ground. If I had known about the lack of snow on the ground, I could have popped up there and given the seedlings some water to hold them over until the next winter storm. But I didn't know, because I can't afford six hours if I'm just turning around and coming home without doing anything useful.

One option I thought up was to buy a trail cam that interfaces with cell phone services. My cell carrier doesn't have connectivity up in Rosette, but one of the bigger carriers

does provide service way out there. I have been considering changing to the cell service provider that works up near Rosette, Utah, just so I can set up a webcam on Dove Ranch to allow me to check up on the weather conditions.

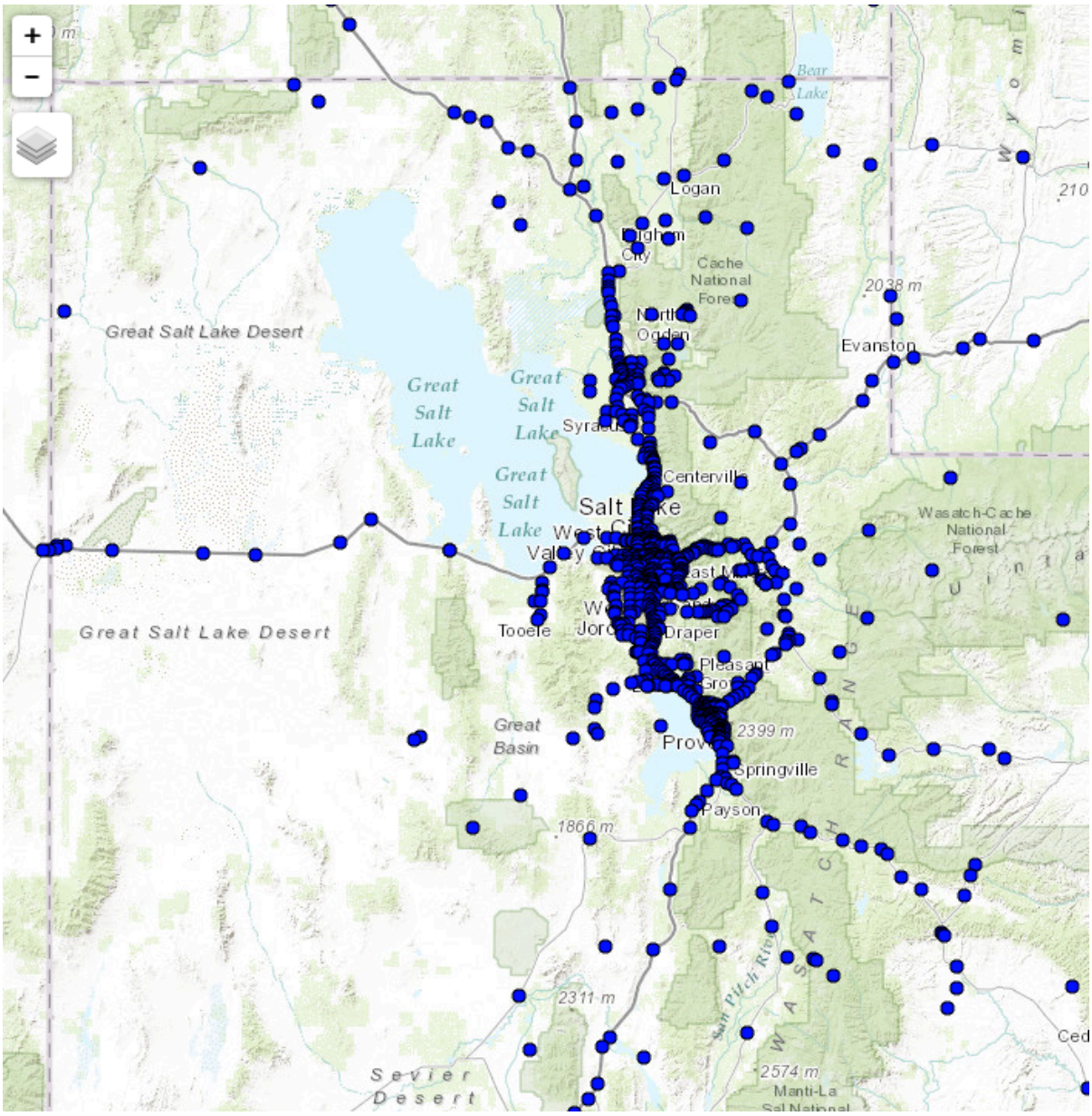


A winter sunset on a remote stretch of state route 30 near Rosette.

I recently found the solution to my problem. Luckily, I didn't have to go to drastic measures like buying an expensive trail cam or switching cell phone providers.I found a web site that lists tons of public webcams around the western United States. And as it turns out, one of the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) webcams is literally less than a mile from Dove Creek Road.

The chances of a public webcam being so close to my ranch are incredibly small. The next closest camera was over fifteen miles away. The actual entrance to Dove Creek Road might actually be less than half a mile from the camera. The camera is that close. The camera literally points at the entrance of Dove Creek Road, even though it is a bit too far to see the entrance. I couldn't have asked for a better setup.

The webcam site is www.wrh.noaa.gov, in case you want to use it for any of your road trips. It's turned out to be handy for checking road conditions when I'm doing family vacations near Bear Lake, too. The only catch is that you have to check many of the remote cameras during daylight hours, because there aren't any streetlights to light up the camera shots at night.



http://www.wrh.noaa.gov provides maps of webcams all around the western United States.

The site has blue dots showing the position of webcams. All you need to do is mouse over a blue dot to see the latest picture broadcast by the local webcams. Clicking on a blue dot pops up a new window that shows the latest pick from the webcam.

Edible Nitrogen Fixing Trees

January 29, 2016
Categories: Trees and Shrubs
Tags: cherry silverberry, Colorado pinyons, common hackberry, desertification, drought-tollerant, goumi, Great Salt Lake, Lake Bonneville, nitrogen-fixing, oleaster, permaculture, pinus edulis, pioneer trees, sea buckthorn, seaberry, Siberian pea shrub, Utah serviceberry

I've been getting more into permaculture and how it can reverse desertification. Much of the world has experienced expanding deserts while losing grasslands and forests. The Great Basin has experienced desertification on a massive scale over thousands of years. The Great Basin contained one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world, surrounded by forests filled with wildlife. Lake Bonneville, as the lake is called, was bigger than many modern countries. Now all that remains is the Great Salt Lake, salt flats, deserts, and some forested mountains.



Goumi berries (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Elaeagnus_multiflora)

Halting Desertification with Permaculture

My interest in permaculture stems from my desire to heal damaged ecosystems. We can get into all kinds of arguments about what is and what is not a damaged ecosystem. I consider any ecosystem that is unfriendly to humans to be damaged. That probably stems from my belief that once Earth was more friendly to humans than it is today. I also firmly believe that through proper management, nature and humans can get along symbiotically, if humans take the initiative in healing damage and get out of the way when nature is healing itself.

I suppose there are probably limits to the permaculture-induced transformation of an area like Dove Ranch. Dove Ranch sits in a semi-arid region just above the old lakeshore of Lake Bonneville. In many areas of Dove Ranch, the top soil has eroded or become salted. Permaculture can heal both salted ground and eroded topsoil. However, growing a hillside full of sugar maples is likely out of the question. Improving the soil

and growing an edible forest until I'm ready for other uses for my land is not out of the question.

After observing and studying the land, the first two steps to improving land with permaculture are, 1) the introduction of on-contour swales, and 2) planting of nitrogen-fixing trees and shrubs. The swales hug the contour or the terrain, preventing more erosion damage and other runoff-related damage by slowing the flow of rainwater. Slowing the flow of runoff also encourages healthy ground water plumes that plant life depend on during rainless weeks.

After creation of swales, the uphill side of the swales are planted with nitrogen-fixing plants. Nitrogen-fixing trees and shrubs are typically pioneer plants that can handle extreme weather and soils. They act as natural fertilizers, preparing the land to host less hardy plants. In addition to adding nitrogen to the soil, nitrogen-fixing plants also add organic material on top of the ground fostering topsoil creation. Often, pioneer plants are called invasive when introduced to ecosystems that no longer need their help. However, when placed in extreme environments, they heal damaged land.

Affording Swales and Plants

Swales present a problem for me. I don't have the equipment or time to dig proper swales over my 80 acres. Contour-hugging swales could add up to many, many miles of ditches I'd have to dig by hand. If you want to get a feel for what it would be like to do even a small swale in virgin soil, try taking a digging fork to a section of lawn and prepare it for a garden. After creating just a five-foot by five-foot garden your whole body will ache. You'll also have a new found respect for any farming ancestors in your family tree.

Swales are mostly not going to happen, for now. So, I'm skipping to number two on the list—nitrogen-fixing plants. I can't afford regular planting of pre-grown trees and shrubs. That would be pricy, require watering to get them established, and probably get eaten by rabbits or cattle before they grew very large. I know all this through two years of painful experimentation.

What I can afford, monetarily and time-wise, is planting from seed. Planting from seed is cheap enough that I can literally plant 1000's of seeds for the price of planting one or two pre-grown trees. When you plant thousands of seeds, you can let nature help by naturally selecting the seeds that are genetically fit for your land. Instead of forcing a few select potted plants to grow where they don't want to, you can let nature select the plants that will grow without aid.

In regular permaculture, any pioneering tree or shrub that fixes nitrogen is considered for the first stage of planting after creation of swales. Edible plants are introduced after the nitrogen fixing plants. I decided to combine these two steps and only consider drought-tolerant, nitrogen-fixing trees and shrubs that also bear edible fruits or edible legumes.

Protecting the Trees and Shrubs

You can't just stick seeds in the ground at Dove Ranch and expect them to survive the harsh weather and grazing animals. I've spent some of my last two years on Dove Ranch learning where grasses, clovers, dandelions, and other plants grow successfully.

Any edible plant establishing itself on the ranch requires protection. They tend to grow near the trunk of thorny brush. Rabbits and cattle don't seem interested in risking a prick to the nose, even for the most tasty plants. In addition, brush provides protection from the weather until the plants are established.

Edible, Drought-Tolerent, Nitrogen-Fixing, Pioneer Plants

Keeping the semi-arid environment, edible, and nitrogen-fixing requirements in mind, here are the trees and shrubs I think might survive up at the ranch. I have relied heavily on pfaf.org. They had a great site for tracking down plants for edible landscapes. Unfortunately, the site seems to have disappeared.

Goumi or Cherry silverberry (Elaeagnus multiflora)

The goumi is drought tolerant and fixes nitrogen like the other trees and shrubs on this list. The fruit ripens in July. I know less about the goumi than the other plants in this list. I'm not 100% sure it can handle Dove Ranch, but I'm willing to let it try.

Autumn Olive (Elaeagnus umbellata)

This large shrub, or small tree, ranges from Japan to the Himalayas. The red berries ripen in late November. It hates shade and loves dry soil. It may find a place it likes up at the ranch.

Seaberry – Sea Buckthorn (Hippophae rhamnoides)

Seaberries are found all over the world, and famously grow in the Himalayas. The fruit can easily last over the winter (sometimes on the branches) when it dries. If you follow my blog, you might remember that I've already sown some seaberry seeds. I'm planning to sow more now that I have a better understanding how to get them to survive.

Siberian Pea Shrub (Caragana arborescens)

The pea shrub produces legumes. It flowers in May and the seeds ripen by September. All through that period, you can eat flowers, pods, or peas from the bushes. The flowers, young pea pods, and peas are edible. We're not talking a great taster, as it is pretty bland, but it works well when served with the right spices.

Oleaster (Elaeagnus angustifolia)

Oleaster fixes nitrogen. It is very drought tollerant. And most importantly, the fruit and seed are edible. The fruit ripens in the fall, and must be fully ripe before eating, or tastes awful.

Sowing Tree Seeds

I'll look into planting those tree seeds as early as I can in the spring. With any luck some of them will get started this year.

I'm also planning to sow some more Colorado Pinyons. I've had some success with them in the past two years. They don't fix nitrogen, but they're Christmas trees, so I can't get enough of them.

In the past, I've also sown or planted hackberries and Utah serviceberries. I may plant more of those in the future, but I don't believe either of those are nitrogen-fixing, and they definitely don't have the wow-factor of Christmas trees, so they'll have to wait.

Dead of Winter

February 21, 2016
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: bug out location, trail cam, water

I love my weekend trips to our ranch in north western Utah. However, during the winter the roads become impassible. The county's dirt road running through my ranch is mostly unmaintained. So when it snows, it becomes muddy and completely impassable.

We have plenty of activities as a family, even without trips to the land. Bridget and I decided to take out two older boys to The Pie for pizza. The Pie is the best pizza joint in Utah. It is a basement restaurant up by the University of Utah. We always love going there and have take our daughter a few times, but never took the boys. So, now they have have been introduced to real Pie pizza.



My wife and my oldest boy at The Pie. We felt it was time to introduce my two older boys to the best pizza in Utah.

But back to talk about the ranch ; –)

Last year was unusual in that there was very little snow. That meant I had full year access to the ranch. My wife and I even did some van camping up on the property in

February.

This year there was a more normal amount of snow, so I haven't dared go up to our land. Some parts of Dove Creek Road get pretty muddy even after a normal rain storm. Winter melt makes those muddy patches much worse.

This week, the snow melted due to some unusually warm weather. Also, now that I have that camera just up the road from Dove Ranch, I knew that most of the snow was gone up in Rosette, Utah. I decided to throw caution to the wind and go spend some time at the ranch.

I've regretted not leaving my trail cam up on the ranch all winter so I could catch pictures of the runoff and spring budding of plants and trees in the wash. Also, I had more tree seeds that I wanted to get spread out over the lower section of the ranch so some could start sprouting this year instead of waiting until next spring.

I've been pretty sick the last few weeks, so I didn't think I'd even feel well enough for the trip. I finally felt well enough to travel in the early afternoon. So, I packed up a few necessities like bricks to help get me unstuck if I encountered a lot of mud.

I got to the head of Dove Creek Road around 4PM. I noticed that someone fixed up the damage from that truck hitting the gate. The gate wasn't closed though. I'm sure it will need closing when they start letting cattle graze the area in another month or so. I figured I'd leave it alone. The local ranchers know better than I do what needs to be done with the gate.

The road turned out to be very muddy in spots. I really wondered if I'd even make it in without getting stuck. I'm driving a Subaru forester with all wheel drive and pretty good clearance, but I was worried. I sank axel deep in mud in several places and was only inching forward through the muck.

Getting stuck for several weeks in knee-deep mud was not part of my weekend plan. No cell service and many, many miles from any help, … I realized at about this time that I'm still as foolish as a teenager, sometimes.

Luckily, I made it out to the property.



February in north western Utah gives new meaning to the "dead of winter."

I finally understand the phrase, the "dead of winter." It was dead looking. Everything that is green in the spring and summer was completely dead looking at this time of

year. I saw plenty of rabbits out there hopping along. Luckily for the rabbits, I don't enjoy killing for sport. Even killing rabbits that are plaguing my ranch isn't something I do.

I saw someone had been up there in the last few months. There were spent shotgun cartridges on the ground that I did not recognize. Someone has been up there shooting.

I spread around my tree seeds. I hand-placed many of them close to the trunks of the thorniest bushes I could find. I know the only grass, clover, and dandelions I've found to survive up at Dove Ranch have been by the trunks of bushes and brush that the rabbits and cattle don't bother.

I trekked down into the wash and found the two cottonwoods undamaged by rabbits, or other animals. I think they will do well, if they survive the cattle grazing. My experience is that the cattle hate most of the wash. The ground is uneven, and that makes it a scary place for the cattle.

There is a somewhat permanent runoff stream down in the wash this time of year. I expected there would be, but I wanted to see it myself.



Runoff creates a semi-permanent stream on the ranch this time of year.



If we ever need to live at the ranch the surface water at the ranch could come in very useful even though it isn't constant.

I left my camera down in the wash, pointed at one of the cottonwoods, and the stream. If I set it up properly—and that is always a big "if"—I'll have a nice time lapse set of pictures showing spring runoff and everything getting leaves over the course of the spring.

I did manage to drive out of the ranch alright. It was a little worse than driving in, because it was uphill. I don't think I'll pull a stunt like that one again. I have too many responsibilities to get myself stuck out in the middle of nowhere. I could get myself out given enough time, but I'd really hate to freak my family out by not showing up for a night or two.

Watch for Children and Pets

April 27, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: barbed wire, fence, posts, signs

I bought the first of several caution signs that I plan on placing around the future fence line up at Dove Ranch. It took me a while to find one I like. It says, *Caution: Watch for Children and Pets*. It's made for the weather, and it is pretty big, so that it will be noticeable. Of course, it is also reflective, so it catches headlights well. I thought when I first saw the sign that it might be too big, but then when I put it on a 6-in x 6-in x 8-ft post (a small one by ranch standards) it looks small. Also, out on that huge expanse of open space, it will look even smaller. So, I guess the sign will be about the right size.

I will place the first caution sign so it is noticeable when people are driving down the county road from the north as they pass through my land. It's about time for a sign. A lot of people come through the ranch hunting—mostly coyote and jackrabbit, I think. I have zero problem with that, but I want them to realize they can't just take sound shots without a risk of hitting a human or pets. I'll place my post and sign just inside what will be the future fence line.



My staging area is starting to accumulate the tools and equipment I'll need for my next trip.

I bought a used 2010 Subaru Forester this last year. I love that it is all wheel drive and has a pretty high clearance—one of the highest ground clearances of any of the compact SUVs that I could afford. I would have never made it in and out of the ranch with any of my previous vehicles this last winter. The Forester was a real life saver.

This is leading somewhere, … I promise.

One of my biggest concerns about putting in a fence at Dove Ranch is that I don't have a big truck to transport the posts with. The very minimum that I can get away with is 8-ft posts. They really should be 10-ft, but I'll have to settle for 8-ft with a bag or two of concrete in the whole. The problem is that our van really shouldn't try to take that road unless it is perfectly dry, and the Forester isn't big enough to carry 8-ft posts.

Well, I *thought* the Forest wasn't big enough to carry 8-ft posts.

It turns out that if you arrange and fold the seats just right, and remove the front seat's passenger side head rest, the Forest can easily carry 8-ft, maybe even 9-ft posts, with the hatch fully shut. This discovery means that I can start putting in my fence this year.

Speaking of fencing, I've started putting together specs for the fence I'm putting in. Initially, I plan to place a fence along the south side of the road, just outside the county easement. For now, I'll also keep the fence from crossing the federal road. The federal government maps seem to be removing that road, but I don't trust them to not change their mind about whether it is or is not a road, so I'll keep treating it as though they have an easement for the immediate future, even though I don't think they consider it to be a road any more.

Anyway, back to barbed wire fencing specs …

- I'll keep the fence about 5-ft high. That is shoulder-high for me.
- I'll keep using 6 1/2-ft t-posts and pounding them in 1 1/2 feet.
- For terminal posts, I'd like to use 8-in x 8-in x 10-ft posts, but I can't get those in town, and don't have a truck to transport them. So, I'm going to have to settle for 6-in x 6-in x 8-ft terminal and brace posts for now. I'll have to replace them later on, but you do what you can, and then fix it later when you have to. Since we only see cattle up there for a couple of months per year, and there are many of them, I think I'll get away with the thin terminal posts for the immediate future.
- I'll use a bag of concrete in the holes with the terminal posts and the brace/stretcher posts.

- I haven't decided which method I'll use for bracing the terminal and stretcher posts. I'll figure that out pretty soon.
- I'll space the t-posts about 1 post ever 13-ft. That's two lengths of the 6 1/2 foot t-posts I'll be using. That makes it easy to measure distances because I just have to use the t-posts for measurements instead of carrying around a measuring tape or a specially cut stick/pipe for measuring.
- Stretcher (aka brace) posts should be placed every 100-ft to 150-ft or at inflection points in land. I'll keep them about every 100 feet.
- For my fence, I'm planning to use 4 strands of barbed wire 12-in apart.
- The barbed wire needs to be 12 1/2 gauge or stronger.
- When putting up the fence, first put in the terminal posts and stretcher posts and their supports. Then using a tight string as a guide, pound in the t-posts.
- When running the barbed wire, run bottom, then top lines and then two middle lines

I'm not going to attempt to fence the full boundary of the ranch until I have time. I'll just fence a few acres for now. That should give me a good workout this summer and maybe into next summer. And, it will give me a little space to set up a shed and get some trees growing without cattle trampling them as I've had happen in the past.

BLM Blocks Road

April 30, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: BLM, Dove Creek Hills Road, road

It appears the BLM has blocked Dove Creek Road and ripped out the road sign. They also posted a No Trespassing sign indicating they do not acknowledge a public easement.



The BLM has ripped out the Dove Creek Road sign. This is very disturbing.

This caused me a lot of stress. I finally decided to write the county asking for their intervention. Today's email to the county reads in part as follows.



The BLM has ignored the county's easement by fencing Dove Creek Hills Road, and placing a No Trespassing sign. They are indicating that no public easements exist.

> This weekend, I visited my property with my son and was greatly disturbed to find a fence with a "No Trespassing" sign has been erected across Dove Creek Road, and the Dove Creek Rd sign has obviously been ripped out of the ground with the aid of some heavy equipment.
>
> I have included pictures in this email showing the damaged sign, the fenced road, and maps with green arrows indicating the location of the blocked, "No Trespassing" sign, and destroyed road sign.
>
> My family, as well as other property owners in that area depend on that road to access our land.

Update: A few days after contacting the county, they responded that the No Trespassing sign would be removed from the county's easement, the road sign would be replaced, and the gate would be replaced with a cattle grate. I greatly appreciate their intervention.

Growing Grass

May 1, 2016
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: chimes, fence, Roadcrest

I finally braved the rain and went up to my property. I left several tasks unfinished from my last visit. As always, I was anxious to see which experiments with my tree planting had succeeded. I also wanted to get to work on my fencing, and replace the cheap chimes I had with better quality ones.

My biggest surprise it turned out was the patch of bark chips with Roadcrest Crested Wheatgrass seed under them sprouted. I've got a small patch grass growing up at Dove Ranch. It doesn't look like much, and I won't be the least bit surprised if the rabbits nibble it down to nothing, but it's growing.



Roadcrest Crested Wheatgrass sprouting in April up by Rosette, Utah.

The best part about the Roadcrest Crested Wheatgrass is that it is native to this part of the Great Basin. It handles the drought conditions of summer by going dormant, and then wakes up again when it gets wet and cool. If I can get a patch established, it should keep coming back year-after-year.

I chose Roadcrest over other varieties of native Crested Wheatgrass for several reasons. Roadcrest spreads by root as well as by seed. That means the rabbits won't prevent it from spreading by nibbling off all the seeds. Also, the descriptions I've read of it made

it sound most like normal lawn grass. I have actually seeded my home lawn with it and Roadcrest seems to work well in my normal lawn. The last thing I wanted was a grass that grows in lumps like a lot of native grasses do. I haven't had any problems with that in my lawn.

Supposing I feel this Roadcrest experiment succeeds, then my first large scale project with grass will be getting a recreation area sprouting along with a camping area. My wife and kids are demanding camping trips to Dove Ranch until we can afford a cabin, so I might as well make the camping trips pleasant for everyone.

In other news, my oldest boy and I put in the "Caution: Watch for Children and Pets" sign. I positioned it so it would be seen by drivers coming in to my property from the north. It should be especially visible to anyone driving after dark with headlights on.



My oldest boy Chance (shown here) dug most of the hole for the caution sign.

We anchored the sign with a bag of concrete. I think we'll have to anchor all the posts we put in with concrete. The soil is so sandy that I can't imagine the posts staying put otherwise.

I like how the sign turned out. I'm going to put another one near the drive way.

My boy and I measured locations for stretch posts and temporarily pounded in t-posts to mark the locations. I wanted them placed every 100 feet, and set in just over 30 feet

from the center of the road. According the county zoning and regulations, the road has a 30-foot easement from the center of the road on either side, so I'm setting the fence a couple of feet outside the easement just to make sure I'm okay.

We put up the new chimes and retired the older ones. These are supposed to be higher quality chimes than what we had up at the ranch before. They have a 10-year guarantee. Nothing's going to test them like the wind up in the Dove Creek Hills.



New chimes brighten up the place.

I chose Grace Note Chimes because of their 10-year guarantee, and all the testimonials I found for them online. The set I got sounds pretty good on the first day of their service. We'll see how they fair after a few months of the harsh weather.

When ever I visit Dove Ranch, I start by checking every single tree I've planted. Checking all the seedlings and other trees requires a walk of about a mile or more.

Checking on the trees is a great way to stretch our legs after driving for a couple of hours straight.

The ranch is about 5000 feet above sea level, and it's in northwestern Utah. That means it stays cold longer than much of the Great Basin. And that also means that the leaves don't show up until late in the spring.



The cottonwood my daughter and I planted is getting its leaves.

I was very happy to find most of my Colorado pinyons had survived. Also, I had leaves on a hackberry, an elm, and one of my cottonwoods. I expect more of the trees to get leaves in a week or two. According to my research, all of those trees are enough of extremophiles that they should be able to withstand the tough conditions at Dove Ranch after they're established in two or three years.

I'm already excited for my next visit to Dove Ranch. My three big projects for the summer are working on the fence-line, clearing a camping area, and getting the area ready for the future shed.

Barbed Wire Pipe Fence

May 17, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: barbed wire, barbed wire pipe fence, pipe fence

I've been torn between doing a traditional barbed wire fence with wooden posts and a barbed wire fence with pipe for posts. Pipe is going to cost a lot more, but if some idiot starts a brushfire up near my ranch, a pipe fence will survive far better than a fence put together with wooden posts.

Brush fires are a real possibility at Dove Ranch, and could easily undo a year or two of fence work in a matter of minutes. Yeah. I've talked myself into doing a barbed wire pipe fence. The problem is that even though they're common in this part of the west, finding documentation on how to do them is not well documented. So, I've taken it on myself to put together some documentation on how to do them while putting together my first 100-ft section of barbed wire pipe fence.



Barbed wire pipe fence I used as an example.

My unique requirements for building my fence are that all parts need to be light enough that I can move them myself, and small enough to fit in the 9-feet of cargo space I can squeeze out of my Subaru Forrester. Traditional wooden posts are barely at my limits for carrying by myself, and fitting in my Forrester. Pipe for a fence is actually much easier for me since I don't have the ability to haul around a trailer full of wooden posts.

My biggest concern is what size of pipe should I use as terminal posts. I stressed over this for months, until I realized that if I fill the pipe with concrete, a 2 1/2-inch or 3-inch pipe will easily handle the stresses of being a terminal post. I'd love to see a test on this, but I suspect that a 3-inch pipe filled with concrete is going to have more strength (not to mention fire resistance) than a 8-inch wooden post.



Rail end cups attached to brace bands to allow another pipe to act as a support for the pipe post.

I know how to connect barbed wire to a wooden post, but wrapping barbed wire directly around a pipe seemed like a formula for slippage. I realize that stays would

help a lot, but still it bothered me. I don't want to have to adjust the position of the barbed wire every spring in addition to other standard maintenance.

After some research, I figured out that I could just use brace bands to connect barbed wire. That also have the benefit that the barbed wire won't rub off the galvanization from the pipe. In dry areas like Utah, rust isn't a huge concern, but the longer the pipes last, the better.

Another concern was, how do you connect support posts to pipe? I realized that I just need a rail end cup that hooks to the brace band's bolt and then set the end of the support in concrete.

Overall, a pipe barbed wire fence is looking very doable. I just need to figure out if I want to order parts online or if I can find what I want locally.

Designing the Barbed Wire Pipe Fence

May 18, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: barbed wire, barbed wire pipe fence, pipe fence

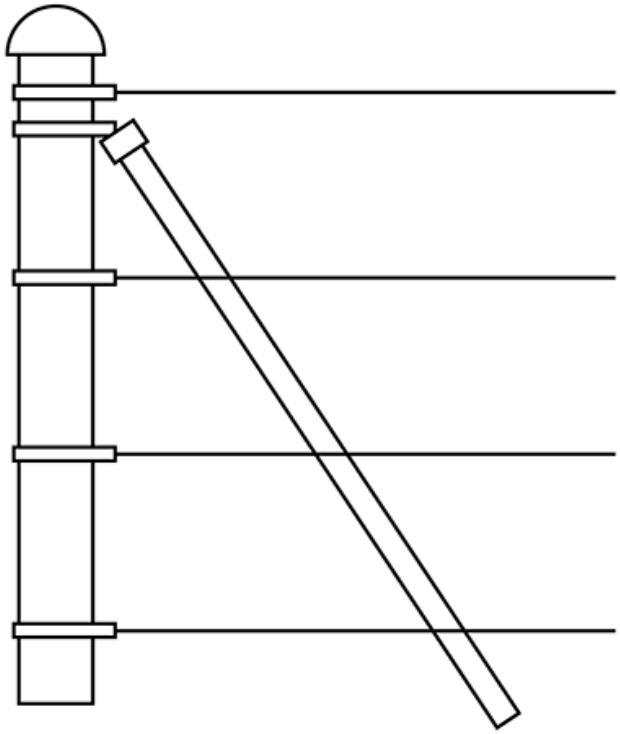
Dove Ranch sits in the middle of open range land. What that means is that it is my responsibility to keep cattle off my land, not the cattle owner's responsibility to keep the cattle contained. I've determined I want an all metal fence instead of a metal fence with wooden posts, mostly because of the brush fire risk in Utah. Finally, I realized what I wanted for my ranch is a barb wire pipe fence.

Think of a barb wire pipe fence as a hybrid of chainlink fences and barb wire fences. They're a little pricy, but very sturdy and fire resistant. Barb wire pipe fences aren't really documented well on the internet. I've searched for months for information, and I finally had to just go look at some to figure out how they're done.

What I really could have used when I started thinking of creating a barb wire pipe fence was a good set of diagrams with part lists. I'm sure someone that works in the industry could have figured this out in less than a minute, but I'm a newb, so it took me months to figure out. When I started looking at them last year, I didn't even know the metal posts were simply sold as "pipe." I did mention I was new to this, … right?

Terminal Pipe Post

1 Post
1 Post Cap
1 Rail End Cup
1 Support Post
5 Brace Bands
5 Nuts and Bolts
Barb Wire
Concrete Mix



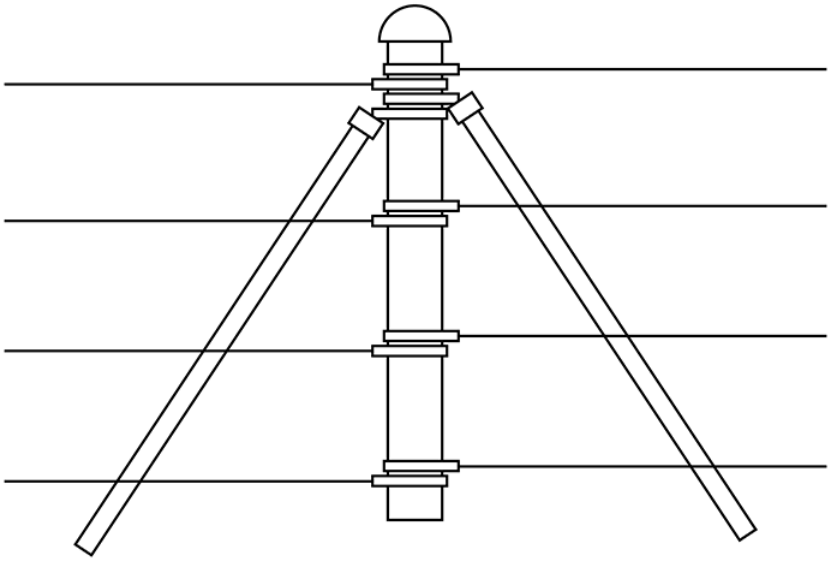
My first challenge was finding a place that could supply all the parts I needed for a barb wire pipe fence. Since cattle may be pushing up against it, I needed some parts that were sturdy enough to slow them down. Nothing is going to stop a determined bull that wants to cross a fence, but a fence that will keep lazy cattle out would be nice. Oddly, Home Depot in downtown Salt Lake City doesn't specialize in agricultural grade pipe.

I finally came across Hoover Fence online and with the help of their picture catalogs found all the parts I needed. Having them deliver just one pipe is very expensive, so the more pipe ordered at once, the better deal on the shipping costs.

I plan on keeping the terminal posts and the actual gate construction separate, so the terminal posts by the gate will give an extra 3 feet on either side for me to construct the gate. In other words, if the gate is a total of 12 feet wide, then the space between the terminal posts at the gates will be 18 feet.

Brace or Corner Pipe Post

1 Post
1 Post Cap
2 Rail End Cup
2 Support Posts
10 Brace Bands
10 Nuts and Bolts
Barb Wire
Concrete Mix



Here are the parts I'll need, not including the parts for any gates, fence stays, and the many bags of concrete mix. I'll deal with gate construction after I've finished the fencing. I wouldn't have minded the larger 6-inch terminal and corner posts, but there is no way I'm dealing with posts that weigh 150 pounds all by myself. The 75 pounders are going to be hard enough to move and set without injuring myself. Besides, once they are filled with concrete, 4-inch posts will be plenty strong and heavy.

4″ x 8′ Terminal & Corner Pipe Posts … http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage82.htm

3″ x 8′ Brace Pipe Post … http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage82.htm
2 1/2″ x 8′, Pipe Supports … http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage82.htm

2 1/2″ Rail end cups … http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage3.htm

5/16″ x 1 1/4″ NUT AND BOLT … http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage13.htm

Beveled Brace Bands (several sizes) … http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage2.htm

Post Caps … http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage4.htm

12.5 Gauge All Aluminium Barbed wire ...
http://www.hooverfence.com/catalog/cpage56.htm

Concrete Mix ... will buy locally as needed

Fence Stays ... won't worry about buying until main fence is done

I intend to fence approximately 1600 feet facing the roads, and an additional 1800 feet to enclose the future homestead area that I intend to develop into orchards, horse pastures, vineyards and recreational areas. There will be three gates giving access to the enclosed area.

I estimated the price for my full fencing project and it comes out at just over $10,000. So by virtue of cost alone, the barb wire pipe fence has to be a multi-year project. I plan to order parts as I have the money and time to install them.

Early Marriage

May 21, 2016
Categories: Family Happenings
Tags: City Creek Canyon, just married, marriage, struggles

My wife and I went to a birthday dinner at one of our favorite restaurants (Rodizio Grill) a few weeks ago and just happened to drive by our first apartment on the way home. Bridget pointed out that we don't really have any pictures of our first apartment, so we stopped, pulled out our cell phones, and went crazy taking pictures.



Ezizabeth-House was the first apartment Bridget and I lived in over 20 years ago.

Bridget and I had our first apartment in the Elizabeth-House. We are doing okay these days, but started out married life making barely above minimum wage. We got a discount at the Elizabeth-House for helping the manager collect rent for the apartments. Even with the discount, we could just barely afford the rent. The Elizabeth-House is at the mouth of City Creek Canyon just a block or two from Temple Square in Salt Lake City. At the time, it was a popular, but run-down area of the city. A couple of years after we moved to City Creek Canyon, they came through and turned the parking lots into parks and brought the creek above ground. It was a beautiful renovation of the area.

Of course once the area was fixed up, everyone raised their rents. We were forced to move to a more dangerous and very run down area farther to the south just so we could afford rent. Our second apartment literally had acid running down the wall of one of the bedrooms, and a constant breeze blowing in from the sewer lines that wouldn't allow the kitchen cupboards under our sink to stay closed. They would blow open immediately after we closed them. Anything in the apartment refrigerator went moldy in two days flat after being open. No exceptions. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was in that apartment that I ended up with scarlet fever, and nearly died of it.

We have been married for about 22 years now. We're now a middle-aged couple with four kids. We're slowly watching the children approach the stage of life we were at when we lived at the Elizabeth-House. I wouldn't give up the memories of our early struggles for anything. The memories of the difficult times are precious to me, but honestly … I hope we never have to go through that again.

Grant’s Big Adventure

May 22, 2016
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: compost, cottonwoods, trail cam

First the bad news. The oaks never sprouted, and the rabbits ate my experimental grass patch. Now that we have the bad news out of the way, the rest of the news is fun and positive.

Both my older boys were on camping and canoeing trips with the Boy Scouts, so my youngest boy and I planned a day at Dove Ranch. He loves going there, and I planned a few fun activities to make it memorable. The biggest surprise for him was listening to an audio book that he’s been wanting to read for over a month. The book was ***Bunnicula Meets Edgar Allan Crow***, in case you’re interested. The book was just the right length to listen to the whole thing while were out of cell coverage of my favorite radio streams. The book made the five hours of driving much more pleasant for both of us.



I have no idea what these pink flowers we found at Dove Ranch are. They're beautiful.

It rained all night and much of the morning in northern Utah. On a normal day, I would have canceled the trip because of the heavy rain. I hate dealing with Dove Creek Road when it is muddy. I just don't want to get stuck up there. I always bring tools I can use to get myself out of the mud (eventually) if I need to, but I've had friends stuck in mud on back roads before, and they've given me too many details of the hours of backbreaking work necessary to get yourself unstuck for me not to take getting stuck in the mud very seriously.

However, my 9-year-old has been looking forward to this trip all week and been begging me to take him for months. There was no backing out. I know the Forester to be pretty dependable even on muddy back roads, and have faith that prayers for safety will be answered.

We headed out with the rain still pouring down, and the radar maps showing it was just as bad up at Dove Ranch. About 40 minutes from the ranch, the rain stopped and there were breaks in the clouds. I ended up doing a little fishtailing on Dove Creek Road, but we got through okay.



Grant (age 9) standing by the grass in my driveway. I really need to mow my driveway.

The first surprise for us up at the ranch was that the driveway was grown over with knee-high flowers and grass. It wasn't so thick that we couldn't walk through it, but it didn't look a thing like a driveway. It's pretty embarrassing to be honest. I've already committed to bring my brush cutter next visit so I can take care of the overgrown drive.

I will point out, the land was sold to us as "good for nothing but sagebrush." Other than some small, scraggly grass hidden away under sage brush, I'm not sure we saw any grass on the land during the first year. My kids tell me there wasn't even a blade of grass up there before I started trying to grow it. I have a photo proving that's not entirely true. However, I'm definitely seeing a lot more grass recently. It's definitely not a green pasture yet, but grass is now all over the areas I've been working on improving.

I've been working on building up a compost pile at my ranch. I plan on using the rich organic material in my permaculture experiments. Mostly, it consists of grass clippings, sticks and other biodegradable yard waste. I've got a fairly large compost pile already, and in my suburban yard, it would look huge, but every time I see it out there in the massive open spaces of northwestern Utah, it looks so tiny.



Everything, including my compost pile, looks so small in the wide, open spaces of northern Utah.

For anyone looking to duplicate the feat of creating a compost pile somewhere other than at your residence, let me warn you. Even in plastic bags, rotting lawn clippings are likely to be one of the nastiest smelling things you ever have in your vehicle with you. If you have a trailer, you'll be spared the experience of smelling it constantly when transporting it.

Another warning about compost piles. Things like living in them. Yellow jackets and rats love compost piles. That's part of why I don't have one at my house, only at my property where it can't do me any harm.

As soon as we got to the ranch and unloaded the smelly compost from the Forester, Grant and I visited all our project sites. Many of the tree seedlings are doing well. A hackberry and the Chinese elm are both alive and thriving. Both of the cottonwoods down in the wash now have leaves.

The cottonwood Esther and I planted looks like it is loving life with all the growth it is seeing. I expect its roots spread quite a bit during the winter and spring. I'm not sure it will need supplemental water this summer, but I'll give it some anyway until it's been in the ground for three years.



Esther's cottonwood is doing spectacularly well down in the wash. Hopefully, it survives its first long, hot, dry summer.

One of our activities for this trip was setting up the trail cam with fresh batteries. We're hoping to get some cool pictures to share. The last few months didn't have any newsworthy pics. Mostly bunnies. As an experiment, I'm leaving the field scan feature off and just doing motion sensor pics this time. I don't think I've ever got a picture worth sharing from the scan feature, only from the motion sensor.

Grant and I explored the wash for a while, and then did a little work clearing plants from the driveway. After we finished working, I let Grant target practice with his slingshot. I was surprised how far he could shoot rocks with that thing. On the way home, we stopped at a restaurant for a late, but fun, father-son lunch.

Camping at Dove Ranch

May 30, 2016
Categories: Adventures, The Homestead
Tags: brushcutter, camping, Chinese elm, cottonwoods, driveway, vacation

It's hard to find a campsite during Memorial Day weekend. It seems like a everyone wants to go camping. My wife and I got around this challenge by camping on our own land. By camping on our own land, we didn't have to deal with noisy neighbors, except the coyotes. We enjoyed the stars in a way you can't when near light pollution. And I can honestly say, I've never seen Mars look as red as I did Saturday Night.



We finally created our first campsite at Dove Ranch.

Bridget and I have talked about creating a campsite at the ranch for years. Creating a campsite is time consuming and when you start adding in extras like picnic table, fire

pit and other amenities, it gets pricey too. I've been so focused on other tasks, that I hadn't created a campsite yet.

We decided that the best way to find time to create a campsite was to go on a camping trip there, and create the campsite before setting up a tent. Well, ... it took three hours of back breaking work by our entire family, but we now have a temporary campsite. Honestly, it was better than many of the public and private campsites that we've spent time at.

We arrived at Dove Ranch slightly after 3PM. I brought my wife and three boys. (My daughter is still in Japan serving as a Christian missionary.) Even with the five of us working, I was starting to think it would get dark before I got the meat on the grill.

I did manage to get most of the meat cooked while my wife and kids set up the tent, and unloaded the van. However, the last batch of chicken needed to finish in the dark. We had one package of chicken that I couldn't see to cook. I'll have to grill it now that we are home.

Bridget and I agreed, we'll want to get a permanent cemented-in picnic table and fire pit. I'll probably get one of the permanent cemented-in grills too. We want to stick with things that can't walk off while we're away. Most people are honest, but not all are.

The two immediate improvements that I'd like to make are a couple of hooks to hang our solar lanterns on, and at least a temporary picnic table to set food on. Both the table and the hooks for lights would have come in very handy on our vacation.

I have to say, camping with a campsite was much more fun than the van camping that my wife and I previously did at the ranch.

After creating the campsite, I was in no shape or mood to do other chores. However, I planned out planting six trees and putting up another signpost. I must subconsciously love self punishment, or something.



Grant (age 9) holding the second caution sign.

The ground is starting to dry out for the summer. That means digging two-foot deep post holes is not that easy, now. I did manage to do it for the latest “Caution: Watch for Children and Pets” sign. I thought my back and arms were going to give out, though.

I’m going to have to dig many postholes for the fence that I’ll start in a couple of weeks. I expect it will be pretty difficult labor. This kind of work is why I don’t bother visiting the gym during the summer. I get plenty of exercise working around the home and ranch.



New Chinese elm in the wash.

I'm not sure what I was thinking when I brought six trees to plant. (To be honest, I was thinking that I wanted to get these trees out of pots in my yard, because I'm sick of mowing around them.) Planting six trees doesn't sound like a lot until you realize you have to bring water, cages and mulch with you on the quarter-mile round trip walk to the wash. Then it starts to get time consuming and tiring.

I planted two Chinese elms and four cottonwoods. The cottonwoods are the clippings I took from my own tree just this last winter. Both types of trees seem to do well in the wash. Both cottonwoods and the Chinese elm I planted last year came back this spring

with no problem. The hackberry I planted in the wash last winter died. I think it might have been too wet for the hackberry.



Even in May, the wash is still a bit muddy.

I am always surprised by how wet it stays in the wash. I don't have running water down there all the time or even most of the time, but I do have lots of wet sand. I often wonder if there is an aquifer running under the wash.

Overall, the Memorial Day weekend vacation was fun. We got a lot of work done, and made a lot of good memories. We'll have to find excuses to do some more camping trips to Dove Ranch.

Clearing the Fence Line

June 7, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: brushcutter, cottonwoods, fence, fence line, Summer

We had our first week of 90 degree temperatures to start out June, and no large rainfalls are on the horizon. That's very typical for northern Utah. Even when we have rain and snow during the Fall, Winter, and Spring, you can expect long, hot dry spells during the summer.

Up in the Rosette, Utah area near Dove Ranch, you can expect just over 10 inches of rain per year. Permaculture allows that to be used to the max, but even with modern techniques, if you don't have a well, you need to do a lot of planning for dry, hot weather.

When I'm working at the ranch during the summer, I drink tons of water. It is so easy to get dehydrated. On the plus side, there is almost always a breeze (even if it is a hot one) while I'm working my land.



This rabbit was hiding from the sun under a bush right by my car as I worked.

You can ignore what the calendar says. Summer typically begins in June and ends in September in Utah. Several hardy trees can handle it, and that's what I'm sticking to as I plan out Dove Ranch. So far, I've had my best luck with cottonwoods, Chinese elms, Colorado pinyons, and hackberries. There's a few other types which I expect to have good luck with once I get the chance to properly test them.

On my last visit, Chance and I planted those cottonwoods and Chinese elms in the wash. Luckily, I managed to surround them with mulch. Whenever you plant a tree somewhere as harsh as northwestern Utah, you need plenty of organic material surrounding your trees and in the soil to keep moisture from evaporating instantly.

Once the trees get established in the wash, they'll be fine. These are hardy trees that can handle summer heat. Also, there is plenty of moister in the sandy soil under the wash. The trees just have to be established enough to have roots that can reach the water they need.

When I planted those two nursery-grown cottonwoods, the shock of direct sunlight, dry soil, and no daily waterings made them drop all their leaves. This is a natural defense mechanism of the cottonwood and doesn't mean it is dead. It just means the tree is worried it will lose too much water and die. I've found that if you are patient and keep watering cottonwoods that were shocked that their leaves will grow back. You just have to convince the tree that it isn't going to die by giving it regular water and keeping the rootball moist until it recovers.

I was a bit concerned that the trees might have had too much of a shock from being transplanted. I was especially worried about my cottonwoods, because I grew them from clippings I took last winter. They were must branches on the cottonwoods in my yard until a few months ago.

Anyway, I made it up to the ranch this weekend brimming over with concern for my newly planted trees. I have to give the new trees water enough to survive the summer. Their roots are far from established, and the cottonwoods are still figuring out what roots are. After the trees have been there for a winter, their roots will have found a little more moisture in the wash, but they're still pretty tender at this point.

I'm happy to say that all the trees are doing well. The Chinese elms show some signs of nibbling by the rabbits, but I think they'll survive. I gave them all a nice watering and wished them well for the next couple of weeks. I'll have to arrange a day to go up and give them more water, if we don't see any rain hit the area.

I actually keep a close eye on the Doppler Radar for the area of the ranch, so I usually know if any rain came through.

After I took care of watering, I found that the camera I had pointed at a hole in the ground and moved it out to an area of the wash that I've never had it in. I was a little freaked out retrieving the camera, because I'd swear I saw a snake tongue flick out of the whole while I was moving it. I guess I'll know when I see what the camera has picked up, if anything.

I'm hoping i can find the camera again when I go to retrieve it. It really blends in well, and I'm not too familiar with the area of the wash I put it in. That would be pretty

funny if I spent a long time finding it.

I'm actually very careful with tools and other items when I'm up at Dove Ranch. It is such a big piece of land, it is very easy to casually set something down and have little, or even no hope of finding the tool or item again. I restrict placing tools and supplies to just a couple of locations so I don't lose them.



I'm cutting the fence line I marked off with t-posts. If you look really close, you can see the next t-post in the distance.

I'll be getting parts for the fence pretty soon. I can't order the whole fence, yet. It's a bit too expensive to get all at once. I do have the budget to get a start on the fence, though. I'll probably do a few hundred feet along the road to start with this year.

First thing is first. I need to clear the fence line. I marked off some of the fence line using t-posts. I started by cutting the first hundred-foot section that I'll experiment on. I kind of did a rough-cut of the line now, and then next visit, I'll cut out some of the trunks and rough-cut more of the fence line.

I forgot my face mask this time. I don't recommend cutting thick brush with a brushcutter without a face mask, gloves, and a long sleeve shirt. I had to make due with my sunglasses, hat, and earplugs this time. ALWAYS USE EYE PROTECTION. It's a good thing I had on my eye protection. I had a rather large branch bounce off the center of my glasses. It would have blinded me if I hadn't had eye protection.

As always, I can't wait to get back up to the ranch and work on it. Sadly, weekends only come once a week.

Hiking the Dove Creek Hills

June 13, 2016
Categories: Adventures
Tags: camping, Dove Creek Hills, flowers, hiking, prickly pear cactus, sego lily

Bridget and I decided to hike the Dove Creek Hills. The goal … get to the highest peak in the Dove Creek Hills above our little ranch.

Sounds simple.

As the crow flies, the highest peak is only two miles from our campsite and only 500 feet higher than our ranch. In the real world of game trails, foot-high ant hills, and sagebrush, two miles is more of four to six miles of forcing yourself though brush and trying not to twist an ankle. It’s very difficult travel.



Simple plan ... Start at Dove Ranch and hike to the top of the Dove Creek Hills. Yeah. Sure. Sounds simple.

We got to Dove Ranch around 10PM. The sun had set earlier, so we had to use headlights to set up camp. I remembered to bring two new posts to hang our lanterns from. Having two solar lanterns hanging from posts was a big help. They're not as powerful as normal house lights, but they're not bad for camping.

We hadn't eaten dinner yet, so Bridget and I were both starving. I grilled up some kabobs for dinner while my wife set up the tent. Setting up the tent while grilling can easily result in dust all over the food. We avoid the dust problem and had a great dinner some time around midnight.

What we didn't avoid was all the moths that joined us because we left our van's headlights on while setting up camp. I think every moth for miles paid us a visit. We

were still getting moths out of our van the next afternoon.



We ran into many prickly pears in bloom.

We had a good sleep on our air mattress (Yeah. That's cheating, but it was a lot softer than the ground.) Luckily for us, the next day was overcast and windy. It made hiking much more pleasant. Just to be on the safe side, we took four bottles of water each and decided we'd head back if we ran low on water. With the wind and cloudy skies we didn't need as much water as we brought on our hike.

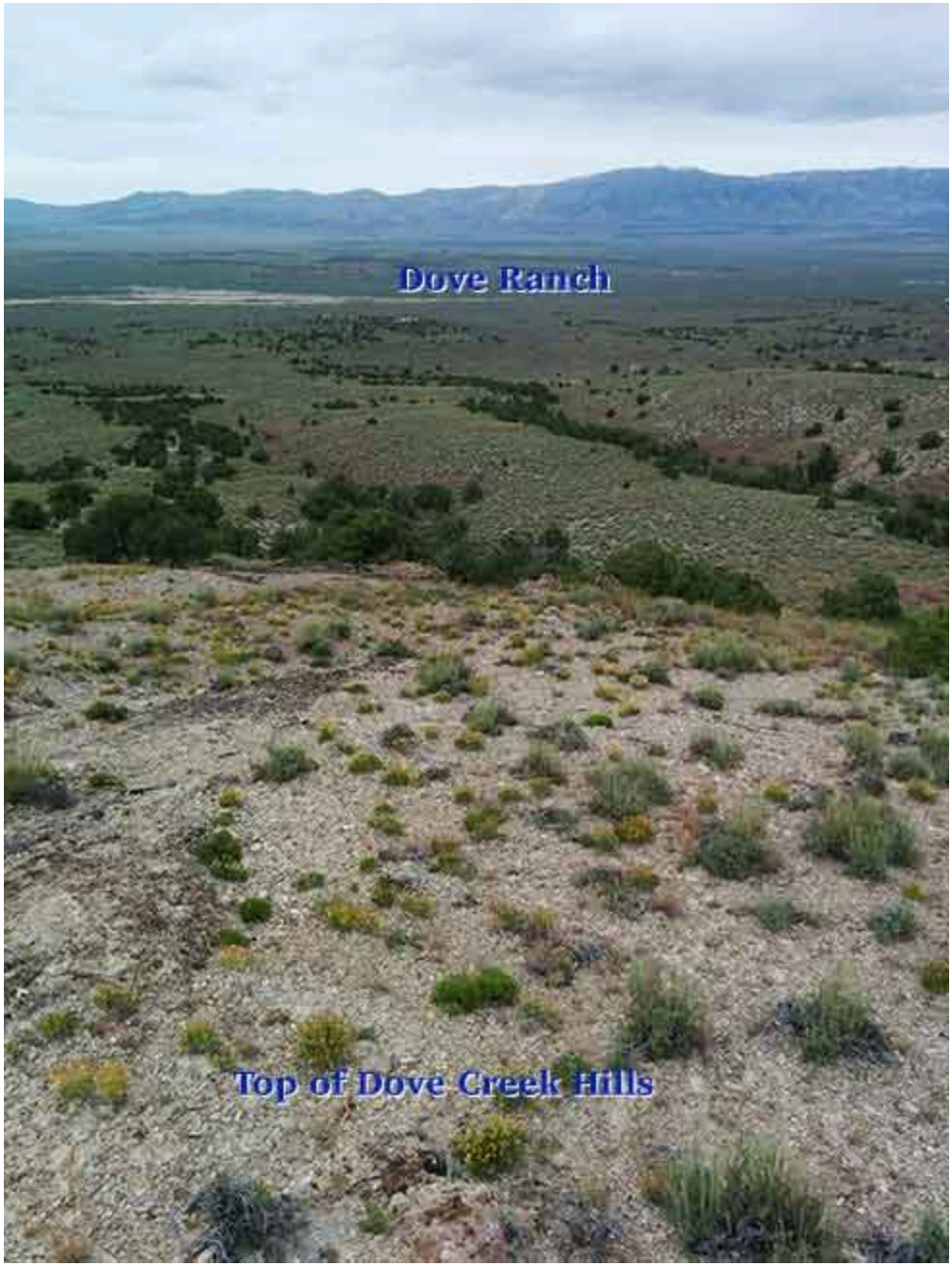
The hike was great. Many of the prickly pears on the ranch were in bloom as were many other types of flowering plants. Bridget took pictures of most of the flowers. We must have seen ten different types of flowers on our hike. I'm thinking of doing a post on just the flowers if I have time. The trickiest part will be identifying all the flowers.

We had several surprises hiking up the Dove Creek Hills. One of my favorites was finding fields of grass mixed in with the sage. It gives me hope for my ranch. I want to convert several acres to fields even before I have a well. Seeing natural fields in the area convinces me that I'm not wrong about the possibility of fields at the ranch.



We walked through quite a few fields of grass while make our way to the peak.

We finally made it to the peak after a good two hours of hiking. It was a beautiful view. I would have liked staying up there for a while, but we started to feel rain drops, so headed straight back. After my experience with the lightning storm up there, I wasn't interested in getting caught on the mountainside in the rain.



View of the ranch from the top of the Dove Creek Hills.

On the way back, we ran into a patch of sego lilies. Sego lilies are the Utah State Flower, because so many lives were saved from starvation by eating their bulbs back in the 1800's. I had never actually seen a sego lily before, but Bridget knew what it was instantly. I'd love to grow some sego lilies on my property, but the rabbits would kill them right away.



Sego lilies are the Utah State Flower, because so many lives were saved from starvation by eating their bulbs back in the 1800's.

If you approach Dove Ranch from the southeast, the wash is surrounded by eight-foot cliffs. You can't cross the wash from that direction. We found it easy to get too far off to the east while hiking back to the campsite. Luckily, we could see the van and tent for

most of the way and corrected our course quickly. When we finally were approaching the wash, I saw the top of the cottonwood Esther and I planted last year before I actually knew we were at the wash. Seeing that cottonwood sticking out above the sagebrush was one of the best parts of the trip, for me. Some day, I want those cottonwoods to be visible from the road. If they keep doing well, they will stop the massive erosion I've seen in the wash, and be a beautiful addition to the property.

We made it back to our campsite just as the rain began to fall hard. We did what any brave outdoorsman and outdoorswoman would do, and hid in our van hoping the rain would stop.



We made it back to camp from our four hour hike just before the rain hit.

It didn't stop, so we packed up the wet camp and went home, at which point the rain stopped.

My Fence Came

June 18, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: barbed wire pipe fence, fence, pipe fence

As I've mentioned before, I'm constructing a barbed wire pipe fence at Dove Ranch. I ordered the first set of parts from Hoover Fence online, not because they were cheap, but because they had all the parts I needed in just one location (their web site.)



My barbed wire pipe fence has arrived!

I'll also be the first to say they weren't the fastest. I order one month before it arrived. However, the convenience of having all the parts on one easy-to-use web site cannot be overstated.

I thought about doing a traditional barbed wire fence with thick wooden posts, but they are so heavy and big, I wasn't sure I could get them up to the ranch by myself. The metal pipe is just as strong, not susceptible to fire damage or rot. Also, I can fill them with concrete to make them stronger.

I'm really anxious to get started on the fence, right away. My wife was teasing me that if I'm not home when she gets home tonight, then she knows I couldn't resist going up to work on my fence.

Unfortunately, I don't have time to work on the fence today. I have way too much work I've ignored around the yard. I'll settle for checking to make sure all the parts I ordered fit properly.

Setting My First Terminal Post

June 21, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: Colorado pinyon, fence, pipe fence

So my wife told me I couldn't go up to Dove Ranch this weekend, because I've been up there every week for the last month. But I got all this new fencing material, and it's like a new toy. You can't just go two or three weeks without playing with a new toy.

So, yeah, she relented and I went up while she was working. The kids were all out of the house for the day, so it was a solo trip. Sometimes, it is nice to do a solo run to Dove Ranch.

For such a remote location, Dove Ranch and Dove Creek Road keep changing while I'm not looking. When I went to water the trees this weekend, all the mulch I had put around three or four trees had been swept away. That means water at least knee deep and likely closer to thigh deep came through the wash.

I have no idea when a flash flood will come through the wash or what kind of rain triggers it. I would have thought a flash flood would have come down on the day Bridget and I did the hike up the Dove Creek Hills, but I checked and none came. I can't seem to catch flash floods with my trail cam. They never trigger the motion sensor, or their is fog or raindrops on the lens when flash floods come. I'm dying to get some good pictures of flash floods in the wash, but it's really hard to capture them on camera.



Looks like Dove Creek Road is getting a shiny new cattle guard.

The other change is someone has dropped off the pieces of a cattle guard at the entrance to Dove Creek Road. I never know who is making the changes. It could be the county, or the BLM, or maybe even the state. I'm guessing the barbed wire gate is going away and we're getting an upgrade to a cattle guard soon. I look forward to not dealing with the fence again. Also, it will be nice for the hunters in the fall. Maybe this year there won't be a fence for one of them to crash into.

I'm really excited to see the cattle guard going in.

Someone dropped a load of dirt in one of the notoriously muddy locations on the road, just recently. I don't even dare take that chunk of road during the wet seasons. I think you could get a full-size pickup stuck in there when it is really muddy. I'm glad to see that improvement to the road.

I also hear rumors (from the the guys at the county) that we'll be getting a new sign for Dove Creek Road. I thought it would be in by now, but maybe they're going to do it after the cattle guard.The old sign was ripped out. I'm guessing the BLM ripped it out, but I don't know for sure. It's really hard for my wife to find the road without the sign. I can find the road without the sign, even in the dark, but I understand not being able to find the road without a little extra help if you don't know the area that well.

So anyway, back to the purpose of my trip.

I really had to water the trees bad. I just planted those trees in the wash, and the other trees have only been there a year (with one exception) since I planted them.

I sadly report that I may lose a few of the trees from last year. Those Colorado pinyon seedling have a horrible time getting established. It seems that one the Colorado pinyons get to about a foot tall, they have few problems tolerating the weather, but when they're only a couple of inches tall they're still too delicate.

One the bright side, the one Colorado pinyon I have from 2014 is still going strong. It lost most of its original branches, but now has lots of new growth. If it makes it to the fall of 2017, I'm going to cut it off from supplemental water and see if it can thrive on its own. It may be my first successful tree up at Dove Ranch.

I took up one of my 4-inch pipes to set in concrete. The ground is getting real hard with all this heat and lack of rain. However, I managed to set my first terminal post 26-inches deep with 160 pounds of concrete. Once I have the support post hooked up to it, and set in concrete, it should be plenty strong enough to keep cattle out. Nothing will keep a determined cow or bull out, but it will be a good enough deterrent for most of them.



My first terminal post is set in 160 pounds of concrete to a depth of just over two feet.

I'd love to say I set more than one post, but I only have enough carrying capacity in my Forester to bring up one post, two bags of concrete and ten gallons of water. I can bring a little more, but not much. However, if I'm consistent about setting one pipe post per trip, I'll have the first 700 feet of fence done by this winter.

I realized on one of my recent camping trips to the ranch that the reflectors I put up to mark the driveway get farther and farther apart over the 200 feet of driveway. I brought my measuring wheel with me on this trip so that I could correct that. Now, they stay 17 feet apart. I feel much better about that. Eventually I plan to put a nice wooden fence on the sides of the driveway, and it just wouldn't do to have that crooked, now would it.

We've entered fly season at the ranch, so I don't think I'll go for any more camping trips until there has been a nice hard frost. Flies aren't as bad as the mosquitos in Woods Cross, but I still hate them. Flies and mosquitos are two of the reasons that I find summer to be my least favorite season.

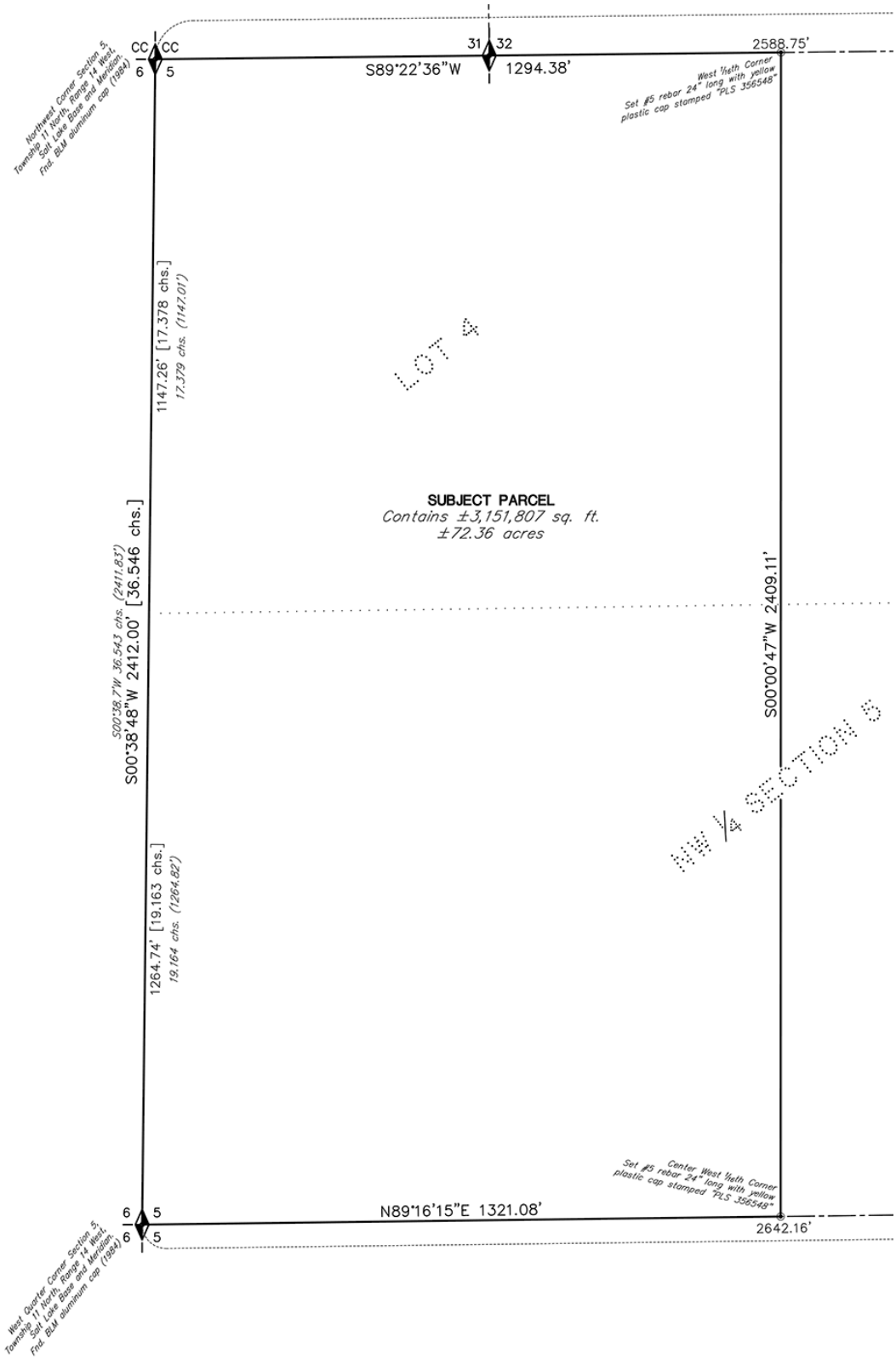
Boundary Survey

July 9, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: BLM, Dove Creek Hills Road, fence, fence line, survey

I'm working on a fence, but haven't known exactly where the property boundary is, so I've been looking into getting a boundary survey done. I figured a survey of my 80 acres would be as expensive as the property was. That has scared me away from getting the survey done. However, I really needed a survey if I am going to put up a fence along the property line.

I ended up finding Boundary Consultants. I liked their website, and they sounded like they had a lot of experience, so I asked for a quote. David Hawkes quoted me $2500 for the survey and said he could have it done within a week. He included the boundary survey and line stakes every 100 feet, so I would know where I could put my fence.

That quote happened to be exactly what I had saved up, so I went ahead and had them do it. I needed the peace of mind a survey brings.



Bridget and I paid for a survey of our property, so we'd know where to put the fence.

I admit, I was so excited to finally have a survey done of Dove Ranch that I could hardly sleep at night. I was like a little kid waiting to unwrap his Christmas presents. I haven't been this excited about a purchase since buying the ranch back in 2014.

Now back to reality.

Surveys are like playing slots. Sometimes you like the results you get, and sometimes you don't. It isn't the surveyors fault. It's just that property boundaries and sizes aren't fully known until you do the survey.

Boundary Consultants got my survey done as quickly as they said they would, and for the price they said they would. They also got the line stakes placed, which was the thing I wanted most.

The good news was that all my trees I've been pampering are fully on my property. There was one my daughter and wife planted back in 2014 that I was a bit worried about, but even it is properly inside the parcel boundary. That was a huge relief. That tree has sentimental value, so I want it to be mine.

The bad news is that the eastern boundary of the parcel is actually about a 100 feet farther west than I realized. I was expecting at worst, maybe 40 feet. I wasn't expecting 100 feet difference. The result is that I only have 72 acres, not closer to the 80 acres the county thought I had.

I asked Dave over at Boundary Consultants a little more about the survey, and he explained ...

The dashed line shows the correct breakdown of the Section. Because your parcel abuts the Township line all error in the Township are lotted along the north and west lines of the Township. That is why you don't have 80 acres. You actually own Government Lot 4 and the Southwest Quarter of the Northwest Quarter of the Section but for ease of description and because most laymen don't understand the lotting your description is to the West Half of the Northwest Quarter of the Section. Essentially the same thing just stated different.

Sadly, I did understand that ... after reading it four or five times.

I admit, I was a bit in shock at instantly losing seven acres from my lot. Of course, I wanted to make sure it wasn't a mistake. So, I independently verified the eastern boundary using a previous survey I knew about. That survey agreed with Boundary

Consultants to within a few inches, so I felt better about the accuracy, and just accepted my lost acres. I take bad news better when I have a second opinion that I trust. Besides, it's far better knowing the eastern property boundary now than a few years after putting in multi-thousand dollar fence on someone else's property.

Boundary Consultants is going to file the mylar of the survey with the County Surveyor, so it's all official now.



The Dove Creek Road sign is back up. It's been abused, and looks terrible, but at least my wife can now find the road again.

Of course, before I sent off the check for the survey, I wanted to verify it in person and walk the property's boundary. I did it the psycho way, of course. I drove up right after work. During the summer I can get away with doing that because it stays light into the

night. During late fall, winter, and early spring, I can't get up there before it gets dark on work days.

It was good to see that the sign is back up that someone, *cough* *cough* BLM(?) *cough*, pulled out of the ground. It looks even worse now that it's been shot ***and*** ripped to pieces. At least it's back in place. My wife couldn't find the road without that sign.



Lower Dove Creek Road now has it's own cattle guard instead of a barbed wire gate! I've mentioned how much I hated that gate.

I was very excited to see they installed the cattle guard at the north entrance to Dove Creek Road. The significance of that is that there will never be another gate blocking the road. I couldn't be happier about that. I have a few permanent scars from the barbed wire gate.

I managed to get to Dove Ranch by about 6PM. That gave me plenty of time to walk the perimeter.

The first thing I noticed about the line stakes on the boundary was that those florescent ribbons the surveyors tie to them are really bright. I could see almost a quarter mile of the them in a row. It was pretty incredible after experiencing losing sight of my 16-year-old boy at just 200 feet distance when trying to figure out the boarder ourselves.



It's pretty cool to see my future fence line for the first time outside my imagination.

I decided not to do anything but walk the future fence line. I had to be to work early the next day, so I didn't want to delay coming home any more than I had to.

I started at on the norther boundary just opposite of my driveway, and walked clockwise around the property. It was kind of cool, because I could still see the surveyors' bootprints. They walked the same direction as me.

I saw that the surveyors had found a third government survey cap I hadn't known existed. They're the pros and it shows. Also, they put in stakes next to all the known markers in addition to the two caps that they added for the two eastern corners.



The three aluminum caps were placed by a government surveyor a few decades ago.

I liked what I saw, so I mailed off the check. It was money well spent.

My next step is to go around the perimeter of the parcel and pound in t-posts to more permanently mark the boundary in distances I can use when putting in the fence. I

know from experience that survey stakes tend to not weather winters and other natural/manmade events very well. I don't want to have to pay for another boundary survey of that land just to finish putting in my fence a few years from now.

One more thing to note, I have a friend that recently went through a boundary dispute with a neighbor, and she warned me that if a fence is on the boundary instead of completely on your own land (including the concrete post footings), then legally it is a shared fence even if you paid for it all by yourself.

In light of that information, I'll make sure the fence at Dove Ranch is set at least eight inches into my property so I retain full legal ownership of the fence.

Catching Up With Esther

July 10, 2016
Categories: Family Happenings
Tags: Esther, Japan, Jesus Christ, missionary

For those that have noticed that my oldest child, Esther, hasn't been showing up in the homestead blog recently, that's because she's in Japan serving as a Christian missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints for 18 months. So, she didn't suddenly decide she hates Dove Ranch, and she didn't get eaten by coyotes. She's been busy sharing her testimony of Christ on a 24/7 basis.

Since she's a little over half done serving as a full-time missionary, I figured I'd post a few of her pictures and emails that she gave permission to share. So the rest of this post is filled with pictures and letters home from Esther.

Enjoy!



Even in Japan, Esther loves cats.

NOTE: I'm putting the dates with the emails, but the pictures are randomly sprinkled through this post and don't always match up with the dates or places mentioned in the letters.

SEPTEMBER 10, 2015

Konnichi wa Minasan!

Welcome to the Missionary Training Center (MTC), where they toss you head first into arctic water and shout "Swim!" (Not literally. My little brother was very upset to find out there was no sea at the "Empty Sea".)

Within a half hour of arriving, my guide dropped me off at a class room full of only Elders and a teacher speaking Japanese. The teacher greeted me in Japanese, and then kept speaking Japanese for 3 hours straight. I responded to questions best I could using the dozens of vocabulary words written across the chalkboard. More students trickled in, including a couple more Sisters. I didn't meet my companion until after that 3 hours of class when she sat next to me right before the Welcome Devotional (which was in English, thankfully).

(For anyone unfamiliar with LDS Missionaries, the men are called Elders and women missionaries are called Sisters. We always travel in pairs with our assigned companion.)

Now that I've recovered from the initial shock, I'm loving the MTC. I can understand our sensei (teacher), Wilcox Kyodia, when he speaks Japanese–after he repeats it the third or fourth time. And I'm constantly resisting the urge to respond in Spanish.

I love my classmates/district. We've only known each other a week, but they feel like family. There's Ence Choro (Elder) breaking out in dance moves, Molina Choro chatting away with Wilcox Kyodai in his fluent Japanese and congratulating us on your clumsy sentences with "You got it!" in his Bolivian accent, Wilcox Choro letting Molina Choro massage his scalp and feel how fuzzy his National Guard buzz cut is. Then there's Collet Choro, Arscott Choro, Lima Choro (from Brazil), Kenny Shimai (Sister) and Miyazawa Shimai (half-Japanese).



Esther with her first companion and roommates at the MTC

My companion is the best. We're the perfect match. She's from California, ran cross country in highschool, and speaks fluent sarcasm. When they announced the practice time for the MTC choir, we both scribbled it down, and we jammed out to primary songs while cleaning for our service project.

At one of the many devotionals, our branch president told us a analogy we can apply to the MTC, and really any time in life. Before they lay their eggs, eagles build a nest on the highest cliff they can find. The eagles raise their chicks hundreds to thousands of feet above the ground. When the baby eagles have learned to fly, their parents take them to the edge of the nest and shove them over the edge. While Baby Eagle is plummeting toward the earth and wondering why Daddy just killed them, something amazing happens. Natural instinct takes over. The eaglet's wings start flapping. Then they learn to coordinate their wing movements. Soon they're counteracting gravity, then flying, then soaring. With their new found flight, the baby eagles return home safely.

When ever life feels out of control, remember–you're not falling; you're learning how to fly.

Thanks for all the emails and letters! I'll write again soon!

-Davis Shimai

NOVEMBER 8, 2015

Konnichi wa Minasan!

I can officially say I`ve pulled an all-nighter – 26 hours from Salt Lake City, UT, USA to Fukuoka, Japan with lots of stops in between. (By the way, one of the flight attendants from SLC to LAX was a Nihonjin (Japanese). And yes, he did get a Japanese copy of the Book of Mormon.)

We spent two nights at the Honbu (Mission Home), which is in the basement of the Fukuoka Temple. We ate our meals directly beneath the celestial room. The Mission President said we wouldn`t get our first area assignments until Wednesday night. Instead, we got our first taste of dendo-ing (tracting) our first afternoon in Japan. I paired up with Packard Shimai who showed me what to do. We talked to everyone we passed. I had no time to think. I definitely didn`t understand everything, but I knew enough Japanese to usually follow what people were saying and I was able to share my testimony with nearly everyone that stopped.



Sakurajima Volcano near Esther's first area.

The Mission President bought us dinner at a fancy Japanese restaurant (sorry, can`t remember the name). The Nihonjin Sister across from me spent half the meal teaching me the proper way to hold chopsticks. Most of the food made it to my mouth.



Another view of Sakurajima Volcano.

Thursday, spent 4 hours on the bus coming to my new area – Miyakonojo, Japan! It's a lot more rural than Fukuoka, but there's still a bit of a city. It reminds me a bit of Logan, actually (minus the oriental trees, signs written in Kanji, and all the cars driving on the wrong side of the road). My trainer, Mills Shimai, has been here over a year. She loves anime and video games, played band in high school, and amazing at taking the time to truly love people. She's teaching me how to bike in a skirt (which is still going about as gracefully as my chopstick experience) and having me try all the weirdest Japanese treats. (The strangest so far was a soda we cubes of gelatin floating in it).



Esther, her companion, and a neighbor's children.

Everything's going great, even if I still don't know exactly what I'm doing. I love the Miyakonojo branch, Mills Shimai is a patient teacher, and I`m so happy to be sharing the gospel. I'll get the hang of the rest of it soon enough.

Ikimasho!

-Davis Shimai

PS- Sorry about any weird typos. This keyboard is funny...



Picture from Esther serving in Japan.

NOVEMBER 25, 2015

Konnichi wa Minasan!

After teaching our cake making class to church members and their friends, Mills Shimai and I shared a message from President Utchdorf about gratitude. I can now testify that home made pumpkin pie is even better than store bought. I hope the Nihonjin appreciated the American dessert as much as me.

The Lords truly leads His work. I've seen more miracles than I can count this past week. One of these miracles was meeting Katauchi-san.

The first day we met her she extinguished a cigarette on her doorstep halfway through our introduction. Every time we asked her a question about what she believed, she just laughed said "Wakaranai" (I don't know). She said we could meet again but we didn't think much of it. Most return appoints fall through.

Tuesday, the day of Katauchi-san's return appointment, we had specialized training with Kaicho (the mission president) in Kagoshima. I felt like I was back in the MTC for Sister Collinsworth Sunday classroom visits. We talked about faith, changing our mindset, and expecting miracles. On the train ride home Mills Shimai and I decided to expect those miracles. We decided to ask Katauchi-san to be baptized.

We taught Katauchi-san on her doorstep that night. I doubt she understood much (especially the parts that I stuttered through in Japanese), but we could tell she felt something special. Mills Shimai asked her to be baptized. She said yes.

God lives. He answers prays. And He'll perform miracles when we need them.

Thank you for all your emails! I'll write again soon.

-Davis Shimai



Picture Esther sent from Japan.

DECEMBER 6, 2015

Konnichi wa Minasan!

Sunday night tracting is the worst time to get hungry. You can't buy a snack from a 7/11 (yes, they have those in Japan, on nearly every corner) and you just want to crawl into a futon and fall asleep. Two Sundays ago, biking down the dark streets, I silently prayed that I could find something, anything, to eat.

We knocked on door after door. None of the doors stayed open long. Finally, on the top floor of an apartment, we found someone who wanted to talk. Ueno-san said we could come back, but he refused the Book of Mormon we offered. He said he didn't feel ready for it.

He stopped us before we left and asked, "Do you like yogurt?" Five minutes later Mills Shimai and I were each downing a bottle of yogurt in the parking lot.

We tried to contact Ueno-san again, but no one ever answered. Mills Shimai and I planned our third and final attempt for last Friday. No one answered. Weeks' worth of mail still stuck out of the mail slot in his door.

We went back to our bikes. Just before I unlocked mine, I heard Mills Shimai call "Ueno-san?"

Ueno-san stopped halfway up the stairs, turned, saw us, and ran back down. We asked if he needed help carrying his giant armful of pottery and bags up to his apartment. He just shook his head and told us to teach him the lesson right then and there. He still wouldn't accept a Book of Mormon ("Those things cost money to print") but he said he'd read it online.

Ueno-san still wouldn't let us help him carry his bags after the lesson. He had us put the church chirashi (flyer) in his mouth. He's a self-reliant kind of guy.

I'm so grateful to be a missionary in Japan. I've met so many awesome people here. I'm still working on the language, but you don't have to speak perfect Japanese to be someone's friend.

I know God and Jesus Christ live. They love us. They hear every prayer, no matter how simple or seemingly unimportant. I know Heavenly Father will never tiring of answering your prayers.

Matta raishuu!

-Davis Shimai



Picture from Esther. Seafood is a big part of Japanese meals.

JANUARY 1, 2016

Konnichi wa Minasan!

Count the Miyakonojo Branch Christmas Party a success! Lots of sushi and birthday cake, making new friends, and piano playing. I did end up playing piano for all 12 Christmas songs, but with Mills Shimai's help. We played a duet with Mills Shimai playing the left hand and me playing the right. Good thing I have a left handed companion.

I never realized playing the piano at the Christmas Party would make the branch members so happy. They spent the entire next week thanking us. After the party Tao Shimai, the branch president's wife, gave us each a bear hug and squished our cheeks. Moriyama Kyodai set up a time for his friend to do lessons with us.

In Japan, New Years (or "Shogatsu" in Japanese) is even bigger than Christmas. Everyone visits their parents house for a week-long celebration. Nearly all the branch members invited us to celebrate New Years with them. Last night we had a party at the church for all the branch members who couldn't celebrate with family. Mills made pizza and another Black Thunder Cake (at Soares Choro's request).

As part of the Shogatsu celebration, the Elders, Mills Shimai, I helped Shinko Shimai make mochi. We steamed pots of rice over an outdoor fire, poured it in a stone bowl, and smashed it with a giant wood hammer. Make sure to check out the pictures.

The last month's been crazy–stressful, exhausting, and discouraging at times, but with lots a fun and inspiring moment's too (Like Tao Kaicho interrupting Christmas Party Choir Practice with an improv dance to "Angel's We Have Heard on High". Yeah, it was pretty great.) Things don't always work out how you planned or hoped, but they do work out. God is very aware of our struggles. He's always there, whether we see Him or not. I know He loves you and with give you the comfort and aid you need if you only ask.

Have a Happy New Years!

-Davis Shimai

PS-I won the race to 2016 😛



Esther with her third missionary companion in Japan.

JANUARY 31, 2016

Konnichi wa Minasan!

I knew something was up when Mills Shimai handed me the church key.

Sabushi happio ga arimasu… Mills Shimai and Soares Choro transferred! Mills Shimai went to Kureme to train her third missionary, and Soares Choro finally got his “real city”–Fukuoka.

While I waited for my new companion, I spent all of Thursday (transfer day) in a foursome with the Nagatomo couple and Rodriguez Choro. The Nagatomo fufu recently returned from a mission to the Fukuoka Temple. They happily spent the day playing missionary.

After driving to the bus stop with Soares Choro's red suitcase hanging out the trunk and the other smashed between the front seat and our laps, we used the church's Eikaiwa room for morning studies. We learned Japanese grammar from the Nagatomo fufu for a few hours, then spent the rest of the day practicing as we visited Suzuki Shimai in the byooin (hospital) and ate sushi and wasabi. (Don't eat wasabi. It's a trap.) Twelve hours with the Nagatomo fufu worked wonders for my Japanese.

Then came my new companion–Johnson Shimai! Johnson Shimai loves soda and constantly offers me treats from her endless supply of Oreos and chocolate Kisses. Instead of "good bye" she says "ai shite imasu yo!" ("I love you!") to everyone, even the post man. I've never seen Nihonjin (Japanese people) smile so big.

I can't wait for the rest of the transfer. Heavenly Father true knows the people here in Miyakonojo, and He's in the details in their lives. When we trust in Christ, everything will work out for our good. Prepare for great things to happen in Miyakonojo!

Mata raishu!

-Davis Shimai

FEBRUARY 21, 2016

Konnich wa Minasan!

After a 3 week visit to her daughter in America, Shinko Shimai is back in Miyakonojo! Johnson Shimai and I visited her last P-Day. She told us all about her newest grandbaby and how her grandchildren kept saying a weird English phrase — "Holy cow!"

Johnson Shimai and I still haven't figured out how to use "the awkward hour" between P-day and volleyball. We tried taking a shortcut from Shinko Shimai's home to an area we picked that morning. But, as usually happens with shortcuts, we got lost. I told Johnson Shimai we only had 15 minutes until volleyball. "Just a few houses," she said.

Those "few houses" became one house surrounded by a forest-like garden and wooden African statues. The woman who answered didn't even let us introduce ourselves. "Gaijin-san! Chotto mate." ("Foreigns! Just one second.").

Her husband came out, smiled, and showed us to his library-shed. From a pile of texts he took a Book of Mormon, all marked with sticky-notes. He then showed us the paper were he'd written the missionary's name. "Elder Strickland gave it to me," he said in English.

He gladly set up a return appointment. And we ended up teaching most of the lesson in English.

Every time we put forth our best efforts, God gives us miracles. I know Heavenly Father knows each of us individually. He knows our struggles, our concerns, and our needs. Heavenly Father is very aware of our lives, and is always guiding us, even when we don't notice it.

Mata raishu!

-Davis Shimai



In addition to teaching people about Jesus Christ, Esther has had some time to do a little site seeing.

FEBRUARY 28, 2016

Konnichi wa Minasan!

We found 3,000 yen ($30) laying on the sidewalk last week. We stopped our bikes, gathered it up, and tried to find the owner. It didn't belong to the mail truck driver

parked on the curb, and none of the nearby shops had opened for the day. Just before we gave up, a passing biker did a double take and slammed on his brakes.

I recognized him–Asahi, a friend I met at the Christmas party last year who's practically fluent in English. He asked what we were doing and we told him about the money. He pointed down the street and said, "Let's take it to the police station."

With Asahi as our translator, we gave the police the 3000 yen and filled out some reports. We ended up telling the police (and Asahi) a bit about why we are missionaries in Japan. Before we left, Johnson Shimai gave all 3 policemen a firm handshake and an "Aishiteimasu!" ("I love you!)

We told Asahi more about Jesus Christ and invited him to see us sing at church. His bike broke Sunday morning, but he wanted to come bad enough that he took the train. He stayed all 3 hours and loved it! He's going to start taking lessons this week.

Nephi wrote that God will always provide a way for you to accomplish the things He commands. I know that's true because I see it everyday. Because Heavenly Father loves us, He always sends the strength and comfort we need. It may not be the way we expect, but He always answers our prayers.

Have a great week!

-Davis Shimai



A picture from Esther in Japan.

APRIL 11, 2016

Konnichi wa Minasan!

Guess what? The Suwa family came to church! First me and Mills Shimai, and now Johnson Shimai, have been working with them since Christmas last year. Yesterday, Suwa Shimai and 4 of her 6 kids came to watch General Conference. (Which was amazing by the way. If you haven't seen any part of General Conference yet, you should go watch it right now.)

As a missionary you have a front row seat to life's greatest miracle–watching a heart change. Suwa Shimai changed from considering the gospel a burden to seeing Christ's teaching as a blessing. Armi and AJ–2 Philippine teens living in Miyakonojo–opened their heart to the Restoration as we taught them about Joseph Smith's experience on Tuesday. Masatoshi, who originally wanted nothing to do with religion, happily said the closing prayer at his last lesson.

I love serving as a missionary. I still feel like I'm stumbling around, but Heavenly Father helps me at every step. We see miracles every day. I know it's because Johnson Shimai and I just keep trying our hardest, even if our hardest means we've swam half way across the river before realizing there's a perfectly good bridge 100 feet upstream. (Thankfully not literally...yet).

I know that Jesus Christ is our Savior and loves each of us individually. As we live His gospel, as we put our trust in Him, we'll find joy now and in the eternities. So keep doing the small things. Keep trusting God. You are His child. And He loves you.

Have a great week! Mata raishu!

-Sister Davis



Yes. Esther loves all the cats in Japan.

APRIL 18, 2016

Konnichi wa Kazoku & Tomadachi!

Don't worry, I'm safe and sound after the earthquake. Our mission president is in Kumamoto right now helping where the earthquake hit the worst. It was a bit of a roller coaster in Miyakonojo too, but no damage to property or people. Just exciting. We had 2 really big earthquakes–one right before bedtime during daily planning, and other in the middle of the night–and a bunch of aftershocks. A few seconds before each earthquake reached us, a siren came from our cellphone. The siren probably scared us more than the actual earthquake. We hid under the table/in doorways, but even if we hadn't we would've been fine.

Other news: Johnson Shimai is training! Which means there's a 99% chance that I'm transferring to a new area. We Skyped into her Trainers Training yesterday (normally we would have taken a bus to Fukuoka, but the earthquake destroyed the highways). I'm going to miss Miyakonojo so much, but I'm satisfied with the work I've been able to do here. We've changed Miyakonojo from an area with literally zero investigators to a branch with more investigators than we can sit by in church, four people with baptismal dates, and half a dozen more investigators considering it. I love the members here. They're the greatest. I trust them and Johnson Shimai to take care of my friends.

I love doing missionary work and sharing God's love with the people in Japan. Even though all the people I met in Miyakonojo will be baptized after I leave, I'm so grateful for the opportunity to help them this far along the path. It was worth every struggle to give them the love and hope the gospel brings.

Matta Raishu!

-Davis Shimai



Esther in Japan with her fourth companion.

APRIL 24, 2016

Konnichi wa Minasan!

And my new area is... Iwakuni! (or "Cliff Nation" if you want to translate the kanji). I took a bus, a plane, a subway, another bus, and a train to get here. Now I'm in a four man apartment with Sister Sundell, Sister Luszak, and Sister Healey (my new companion!) teaching an English branch next to the American base. There's a Japanese ward too. Since it's 40 minutes away in Yanai, the sister missionaries have only visited on special occasions.

Our first day together, Sister Healey and I decided we wanted to make better relationship with the Japanese ward, so we called Elder Brower (our district leader) to arrange travel plans and took the train down the coast to Yanai. We sat in on their Young Women's class and mingled with ward members afterwards. The Yanai ward mission leader, Sakamura Kyodai, seemed really happy we came.

It was rough leaving Miyakonojo and all my friends, especially Johnson Shimai. I spent the first few days feeling homesick for Miyakonojo. But I know I will love Iwakuni too. It's a beautiful city built on a forested mountainside with giant rivers flowing into the ocean. The ward members are fantastic. Most have really thick Southern accents. I'm not sure if I'll ever get used to having 3 military sergeants staring at me from behind the pulpit, but I'll happily eat Sister White's pumpkin muffins every Sunday morning.

I don't know all the reason why I came to Iwakuni yet, but I know God always puts us where He needs us. I'll just keep working hard, trusting Him, and sharing His love with His children in Iwakuni. I love Jesus Christ's gospel. It's given me so much hope and peace in my life. I can't wait to share it with the people here.

Mata raishuu!

-Sister Davis



Lot's of views of the ocean in Iwakuni.

MAY 8, 2016

Konnichi wa Minasan!

An awesome marine named Jorge was baptized in the ocean this week. I was only there for one of his lessons, but I'm so excited for his after-baptism lessons. He's had the most amazing testimony and faith I have ever seen.

Have a Happy Mother's Day!

– Davis Shimai

MAY 22, 2016

Konnichi wa minasan!

With such nice weather of course we had to have Weekly Planning on the beach. We parked our bikes by the pier, climbed along the retaining wall, and ate mint icecream bars covered in Crunky chocolate while looking over the sea. I may have gotten bored while Healey Shimai made phone calls, so I may have jumped onto the sand to gather

seashells and skip rocks on the ocean. And Healey Shimai might have hung up, kicked off her shoes, and started picking up sea glass. But responsible missionaries doesn't spend 45 minutes in the middle of Weekly Planning playing on the beach, so you didn't hear it from me.

Will Junkai-ing (companion exchanges) with Sundell Shimai, we found a new area of houses tucked away in the hills. I went back with Healey Shimai a few days ago to knock on some more doors. We found an older man working on a fence and stopped to talk. He turned out to be a Buddhist priest who was completely fluent in English and reads the Bible occasionally. His wife (who also speaks English) came over after a few minutes. We ended up teaching the Ozaka fufu about the Restoration, temples, and eternal marriage in his son's driveway. We left them with a Book of Mormon and are going back on Saturday to teach them more.

But Sunday was definitely the highlight of the week. We traveled by Bullet Train to Fukuoka to meet the Apostle, Elder Cook, and hear him speak. I felt so much from him, along with our mission president and Elder and Sister Yamashita. It was so uplifting and reminded me why I'm here–because I love my Heavenly Father and I love the people I get to teach.

Have a great week! Matta raishu!

-Davis Shimai

Sent From my IPad
I blame all typos on autocorrect



Another picture from Esther in Japan.

JULY 4, 2016

Yano san Got Baptized!

Konnichi wa Minasan!

Sorry for the late email. We had a Zone P-Day at the beach in Tokuyama and it threw off our schedule. We had lots of fun playing capture the flag and making a crab zoo. I think the understaffed McDonald's had a heart attack when 30 Americans (plus a few Japanese and a New Zealander) walked through the door.

Both Healey Shimai and Hilke Shimai got sick this week, so I was inside a lot. All Wednesday I did phone-dendo (calling former investigators) while Healey Shimai slept through a fever. No one wanted to meet again, but it was actually pretty fun practicing Japanese over the phone. When Sister Pedersen found out Healey Shimai was sick, she brought over a giant dinner, cans of chicken noodle soup, and Oreos.

Being kept inside, I had lots of time to study and think. I took the chance to read from Our Heritage and Jesus the Christ. I really enjoyed being able to refresh. As I read, the Spirit came and gave several needed promptings.

I know Heavenly Father is there. He hears every prayer, even the smallest plea whispered in your heart. Don't ever worry. He has a plan for everything. Just keep doing the right thing and trust in His timing.

Matta raishu! Ganbatte ne.

~Davis Shimai

Water in the Wash

July 16, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: flooding, wash, water

I finally got better pictures of water in the wash with times. It looks like a good flash flood type event causes flooding in the wash for about one hour, and takes another few hours to completely drain. This is extremely important to know, because I need to slow the erosion happening or the damage to my land is going to end up being a hundred feet deep instead of the current 10 feet deep. I need a good idea of how much water I'm trying to slow down, if I'm going to be successful in stopping it from devastating the arid land on my ranch.

My current efforts at planting trees adapted to life in the wash seems to be very successful. I almost feel like the first cottonwood Esther and I planted doesn't need supplemental water, and hasn't even been in the ground for a year yet. I'm hoping the tree roots stabilize the ground in the wash and help slow the flow of the runoff.

So without much more commentary, here's the pictures of Dove Ranch's mini flash flood, and a jackrabbit for a sense of scale.



A rabbit hanging out at the wash a couple of days before the rain event. Mostly the rabbit gives a sense of scale to the pics.



The rain event began with several minutes of hail. Obviously, upstream the hail is more of a rain.



Within a couple of minutes, you start to see a trickle of water in the wash.



After four minutes pass, the trickle of water is now a stream.



Fifteen minutes after the hail began, the water is becoming a little two dangerous to cross.



Twenty-seven minutes after the hail, the flow of water peaks.



The peak water flow continues for a good six minutes before subsiding. The rain has long since stopped, but the water keeps flowing.



An hour after the rain event, you still have a good amount of water flowing through the wash.



Two hours after the rain event, the flow has subsided quite a bit. Note the rabbits have come by for a drink.



Three hours after the rain event, the flow has become a trickle.



By morning, only mud is left.

So that's a pretty typical flash flood at Dove Ranch. It deposits a little water into the ground, but strips tons of silt off the ranch. Not a fair trade by any standard.

Utah Coyote

July 17, 2016
Categories: Wildlife
Tags: chipmunks, coyotes, jack rabbit, mice, ravens, trail cam

Finally, after sifting through tens of thousands (no exaggeration) of trail cam photos, I finally have a great picture of a Utah coyote. I got some pictures of them in the past, but this is the first one that I consider good. The only way I could top this is if I managed to take a picture one capturing a rabbit.



This Utah coyote may as well have posed for my trail cam. I couldn't have asked for a better picture.

So, if you couldn't tell from my last post about the flash floods in the wash, I retrieved my trail cam from Dove Ranch. The last time I left the trail cam at Dove Ranch, I really

didn't get any great pictures. This time, I got the time lapse of the flash flood, and I got lots of animal pictures.



Major fail. Grant and I were trying to point the trail cam at the top of the sign so we could get some pictures of cool birds. I didn't aim it very well, so all I got was a picture of Grant and I walking away from the trail cam.

So the trail cam traveled around a bit on this stay at Dove Ranch. It takes a little explaining.

First, Grant and I decided to point the trail cam at the sign so we could catch pictures of the birds sitting on the post. However, I pointed the camera too low.

As if to rub it in, a big bird sat on the trail cam two different days with its tail feathers blocking the lens. Thanks big bird!



This bird is rubbing it in that I didn't get any pictures of the top of the sign post by sitting on the trail cam.

After we had a few pictures of the post, we decided to see if a snake lived in this new hole in the ground that I spotted. We pointed the camera at the hole, and got lots of pictures of rabbits, birds, mice, and chipmunks hanging out at the hole. It was a very popular hole, though I think I saw the mice in and out of the hole more than birds and chipmunks, so I decided it must be a mouse hole.



I saw this bird in the hole multiple times. I'm not sure what it was up to.



The chipmunk showed up, but the mouse didn't go away. I have to wonder if they are sharing the hole.

I saw the mouse at the hole more than anyone else, so I've decided it is a mouse hole.

Finally, I moved the camera down to the wash were I caught hundreds of pictures of rabbits.



It's unbelievable how many rabbits live on Dove Ranch.

Luckily, I also caught pictures of ravens, the flash flood and the coyote. Overall, these last few months, the trail cam did a good job for me.



A small flock of ravens showed up in the wash.

Theft at Dove Ranch

July 31, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: chimes, grill, signs, theft, wind chimes

Sad news. My ranch was robbed. They took everything including the driveway reflectors. The chimes, the garden hooks, the solar path lights, and even the caution sign have been stolen.

The theft of the caution sign especially bothers me, because my children or other family members could end up shot accidentally by hunters with that sign gone. That is a very big deal and dangerous for my family.

I have pictures of the items below if anyone happens to see these items on Ebay or somewhere and realizes they are stolen from my ranch, please call the Box Elder County police.



Stolen this last week from my ranch.



Stolen this last week from my ranch.



About 20 of these, stolen this last week from my ranch.



Stolen this last week from my ranch.

Honestly, I feel very hurt by this theft. The actual value to replace these items is only $200-$300, but it really isn't about the money. This is about an invasion of my space, and with the sign gone, a potentially deadly situation for my family.

I really hate to be "that" neighbor that has the locked fence, security cameras, and no trespassing signs, but now I'm forced in to it.
You have to wonder how bad a person's life must be when they feel they have to steal cheap, used driveway reflectors. When they hit rockbottom, I hope someone's there for them. It's going to be an awful time and place for them.

American Badger

August 4, 2016
Categories: Wildlife
Tags: badger, trail cam

Just when I thought that Dove Ranch couldn't surprise me anymore, I ran into this image while clearing off my trail cam. It's an American badger. I guess this one is really a Utah badger, because he comes from Utah 😉



American badger caught on my trail cam in northwestern Utah.

Plugging Away

August 28, 2016
Categories: Family Happenings
Tags: family

I'm still working on the boundary fence at Dove Ranch. The first step is making sure fall and winter storms don't destroy and remove all traces of the survey I paid for. I feel I got a pretty good price on the survey, but it will all be wasted money if I don't get t-posts in marking the boundary. So far, I have about 2/3 of the boundary line marked.

As soon as I get the boundary marked with something more permanent than wooden stakes, I'll get back to installing the fence I've already purchased. I'm not sure if I can get is all done before the first snow. Also, I have to deal with hunting season. Orange clothes will be needed for safety in the coming months.



A nice thunderhead visible from my backyard this summer.

It’s been a pretty standard summer, but it’s coming to an end. The boys are all back in school. My daughter is still in Japan.

One funny incident, … we got a surprise cupcake delivered for my daughter's birthday. It was from some ladies at church. I found that humorous because they might not know she is in Japan serving as a missionary. They may have been trying to reach out to her and let her know they would love to see her at church again. They'll have a bit of waiting to do before she's visits church with the family, again. 😉



Esther's Birthday cupcake. I've been threatening to put it in an envelope and mail it to Japan for her.

Chance is loving his job that he got at the beginning of summer. He's working at a machine shop, fabricating metal parts. He doesn't program the machines, but he does the simpler manual labor that needs doing.

Pierce killed another bike. The frame busted. The wheels and rest of the bike are fine. The frame just snapped. That tells me it was a piece of junk bike. If he had been doing anything harsh enough to bend the wheels, maybe I'd think it was the boy and not the bike, but a bike frame should NEVER snap in two.

Bridget is back in school again. She isn't the biggest fan of school, but she wants that nursing degree. I would love to have a nurse in the household. I've known people whose lives have been saved just because a family member happened to be a nurse.



The owl was part of a bird presentation given at Grant's Cub Scout Pack Meeting. He loved the birds.

Grant had a great time at scouts this week. They did a Pack Meeting with a bird presentation. He got to pet and hold several birds of prey.



Grant got to actually hold the hawk with the help of the presenter.

I'm hoping to have some great badger pictures coming up soon, when I retrieve the trail cam from the ranch. I may remove it from active duty for hunting season. Most hunters are courtious and respect people's property, but every group has its bad apples. I'll probably bring it home on the next trip and keep it home until the hunters are gone for the season.

Roads Become Gullies

September 3, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: erosion, maps, road

If you've followed my blog for a while, you might remember a few posts where I try to determine where old roads run on my property. I have one official county road through my property, and one 4-wheel drive federal road that connects to that road. Even though I can trace those roads back 80 years or so, they weren't the first roads on my property.

From satellite photos, I can see the remnants of other older roads that must have gone through my property over 100 years ago. I managed to capture one in the correct light and get a picture of it in my my post, "Mystery of the Forgotten Road."



One of the old forgotten roads through my property.

The last year, I've been wondering if this road really was a road, because when you get to the eastern edge of my land, it only looks like a gully. So is it a road or not a road? How can a road be a gully?

Well, … I've been reading Let the Water Do the Work by Bill Zeedyk and Van Clothier and they explain that across my part of the USA, many of the old wagon trails have allowed water to collect and flow fast and freely without any meandering. This unhealthy landscape behavior ultimately results in a gully or wash from the erosion that it causes.

So, my mind can be at ease. The road is a road, and it's destroying my land to create a gully.

Yeah. That puts my mind at ease.

sigh

But at least I have a better understanding of what is happening to my land. Now I can correct it.



This badger is actually walking down a gully resulting from an old neglected road through my property. I'm working currently on preventing further damage to my land from the presence of the old road.

I have detected two roads that have turned into eroded areas. One is obviously older than the other. I'm guessing that the original was created, and then became two eroded to use. Then the second parallel road was created and once again became too eroded to repair. So finally, the county put in the third road parallel to the two older ones. Hopefully, they keep this one in better repair so it doesn't end up damaging the land as well.

Jackrabbits Live in Holes

September 3, 2016
Categories: Wildlife
Tags: jack rabbit, trail cam

There is soooooo much bad information that gets passed around by “experts”. It makes it hard to be sure what you are reading is accurate.

Recently I was told that jackrabbits do ***not*** live in holes. I’ve found that not to be the case. Jackrabbits have no problem living in holes. I can’t say whether jackrabbits always live in holes, but I can say I’ve documented at least one jackrabbit living in a hole.

So for all those believing jackrabbits don’t ever live in holes, here’s a set of pictures showing a jackrabbit going into his hole. I have plenty more, but I figured three different sets of pictures backing me up would be enough.



Jackrabbit running into his hole.



Yet another set of pictures showing a jackrabbit running into his hole.



And a third set of pictures showing a jackrabbit running into his hole.

So, hopefully this settles it. At least sometimes, jackrabbits live in holes. Feel free to argue with the next expert that tells you jackrabbits don't live in holes, because they can, and this one does.

Lots of Coyote Pictures

September 3, 2016
Categories: Wildlife
Tags: barbed wire pipe fence, coyotes, fence, fence line, pipe fence, survey, trail cam

I'm making good progress putting in permanent t-post up to mark the location of the boundary survey at Dove Ranch. I walked the boundary on my last visit, and counted 23 t-posts still needed.

For those not familiar with a boundary survey, the surveyors put in wooden markers and stakes. They aren't nearly as durable as a metal t-post, though. In fact, about four or five of the markers they put in this summer have already fallen out. I doubt many of wooden boundary stakes will make it through the winter, so I've been putting in more permanent 6 1/2 foot t-posts along the boundary.

I've put in over a mile of t-posts, so I'm pretty excited to be down to only 23 left. When I finish, I get to do the hard part. I get to install about a mile and a half of barbed-wire fencing.

I've already got a start on the line posts and end posts. They get set two feet in the ground with concrete for stability. Not an easy task. I haven't managed to do more than two in a day, yet. Obviously, it would go faster if I used heavy equipment, but I want to do it by hand, because I find it to be great exercise and a great stress release.

I'll keep everyone up-to-date on the progress of the boundary t-posts and the fence. Once the fence is underway, I can start on the keyline swales and other improvements to the land.

I was hoping recently to capture a few more pictures of a badger on my land. Unfortunately, he did not cooperate. I did manage to get several coyote and a bird picture with the night camera on my trail cam. Hope you enjoy them!



Trail cam picture of coyote hunting at night.



Trail cam picture of coyote hunting at night.



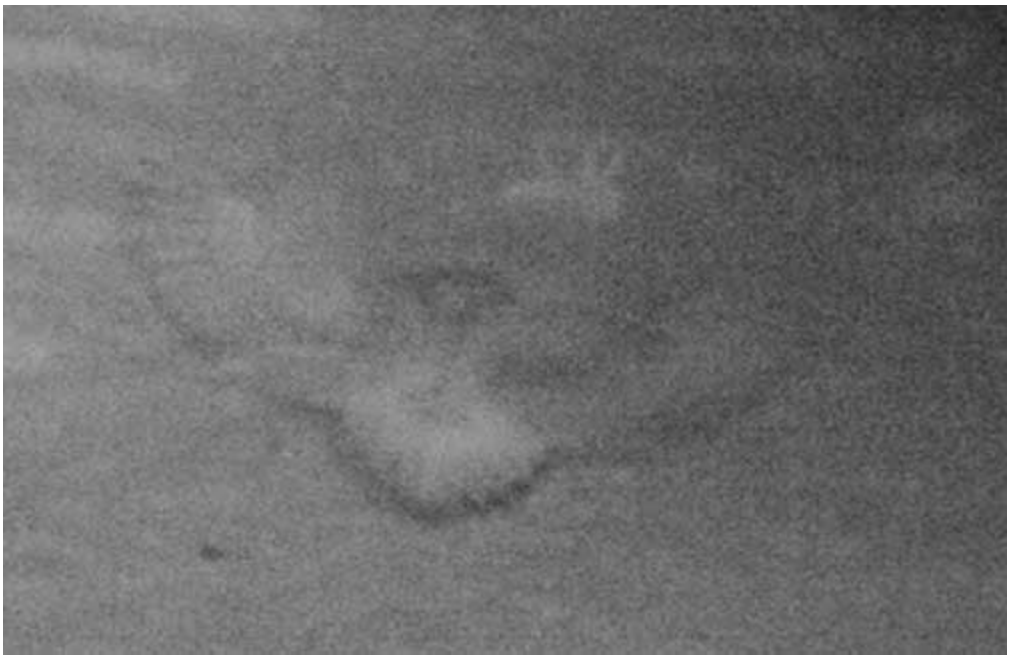
Trail cam picture of coyote hunting at night.



Trail cam picture of coyote hunting at night.



Trail cam picture of coyote hunting at night.



I'm not sure what type of bird this is, but his wingspan is way bigger than a jackrabbit.

Autumn Brought Rain

September 24, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: Colorado pinyons, cottonwoods, Homestead, rain, water

I don't yet live on my homestead. I live several hours away in the city, so that I can work a "normal" job. So, just to water my trees and shrubbery, I have to plan a whole day around the trip to my ranch.



All summer, I've had to water every week. It's been a dry and hot summer. Luckily, the dry spell broke with the coming of autumn. I've still wanted to go to the ranch, but I've restrained myself, because the gas and supplies get pricy.

I've learned a lot about my land over the last few years. I've learned what can live up there, and that rabbits will kill anything they can get to. I have to protect all my trees until they're too big for the rabbits to chew up.

At least one of the trees is established enough that I might cut off the water at the end of next year. It's a Colorado Pinyon that somehow has survived the cattle, rabbits, drought, cold, heat, and me.

Even though it has only been there a year, one of the cottonwoods I planted looks like it might be ready to cut off, too. I think it found an aquifer to sink its roots into. I've found signs of aquifers all over the wash, and a few places on the side of the hill. I'll keep on giving this cottonwood extra water when there hasn't been any rain, but it is doing too well to be caused just by my watering.

Finished Marking the Boundary

October 2, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: fence line, survey

I was starting to wonder if I'd finish marking the boundary line of Dove Ranch with t-posts before the snows hit. It really worried me, because it costs so much for a survey. I didn't want to have to survey the land again when the boundary stakes all fell down and got lost in the brush.



Chance helped me pound the last of the t-posts marking Dove Ranch's boundary line.

I had 23 more t-posts to pound in, and miles of walking across raw land, just to get the t-posts to their positions. I knew I couldn't do it alone. I figured it would take me at least two or three move visits to the ranch to pull it off.

I was very happy when Chance (my oldest boy) offered to help me out with the physical labor. The entire time we were doing the work, he kept referring to me as “old man”, but I’ll point out that I still ended up carrying three more posts than he did

😉

Either way, we had a great time, and got a great workout. Our arms were killing us last night when we got home, but it is done.

Marking the boundary line for the property is done!

Now I can focus on fixing the erosion issues and putting in the fence. I’ll also bring as much compost as I can stand the smell of up for improving targeted areas for planting trees.

Only One Road

October 5, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: BLM, Dove Creek Hills Road, road

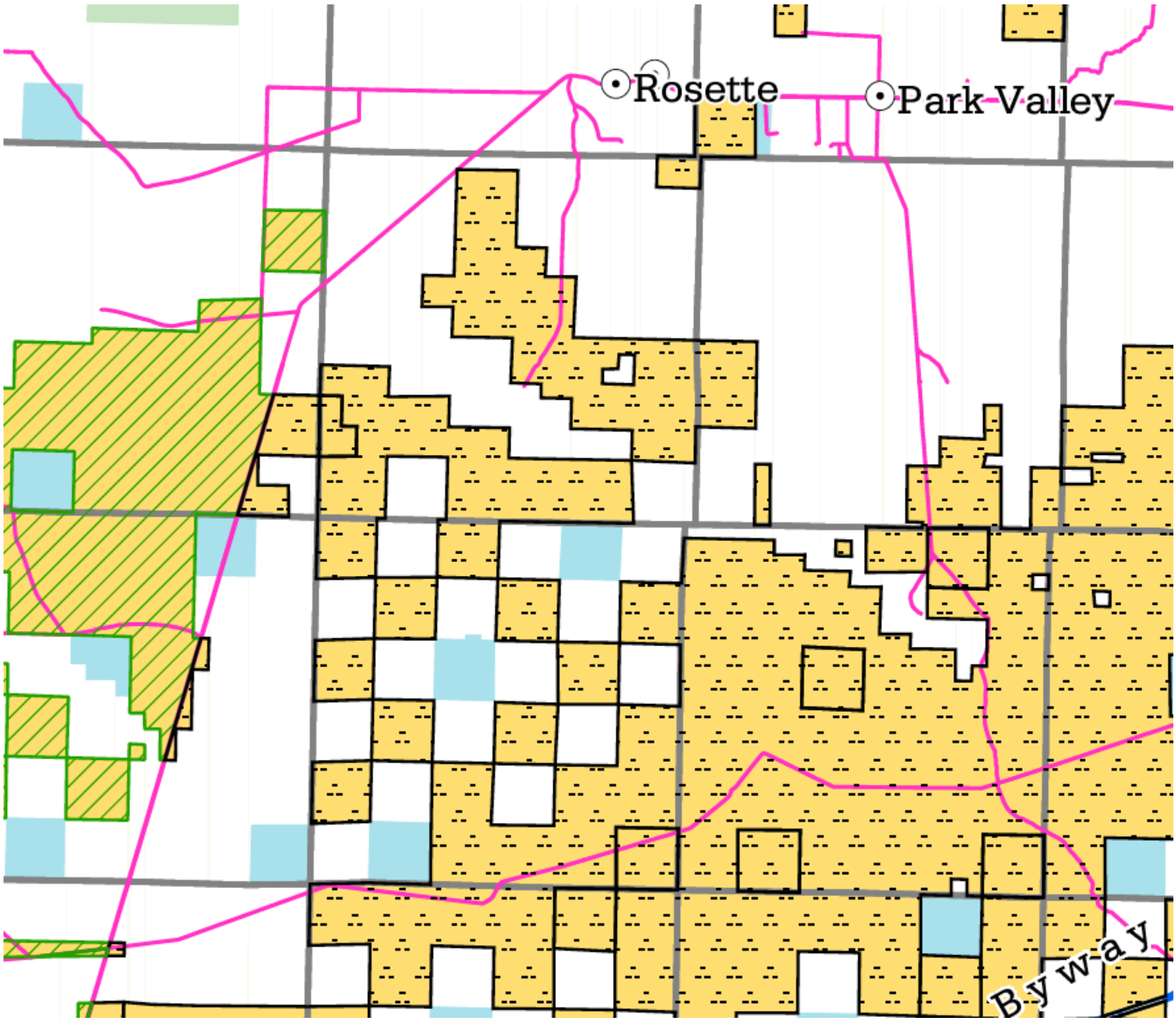
I've come to a realization recently. Box Elder County only claims one road through my property. That is Dove Creek Hills Road. The BLM is in charge of the other route that once was a road through my property, and as far as they are concerned, it isn't a road. In fact, they have been posting "No Trespassing" signs indicating not only is it not a road to them, no one is allowed on their property. (The BLM's action of blocking roads on to their property, and posting "No Trespassing" signs has been documented in earlier posts on this blog.)



The BLM has ignored the county's easement by fencing Dove Creek Hills Road, and placing a No Trespassing sign. They are indicating that no public easements exist.

What that means to me is, that extra road is really a driveway. There is no longer an easement there, and I'm the only one that has used that driveway in decades. With no public easement—I've checked up-to-date county and BLM maps—I'm responsible for injuries and actions taking place on that driveway.

I'll have to fence it to avoid potential lawsuits. All easements across that land have been relinquished by the BLM and county according to their current publications.



The current BLM map shows no official trails or roads through the area of Dove Ranch.

Here's the original PDF with legend:

[Government Land In Box Elder County, Utah]

Biggest Acorn

October 16, 2016
Categories: The Homestead, Trees and Shrubs
Tags: acorn, bur oak

I love oak trees, and I absolutely love acorns. Acorns are just soooo cool. So, when I finally get my homestead going, I want a few oak trees. Since I'm in dreams-come-true mode, let's make the oak trees bur oak trees, because they produce the biggest acorns.



Bur oaks, also called Mossy Cups, are some seriously huge acorns.

Bur oaks are drought tolerant when they get established, and the acorn size is absolutely huge. As an added bonus, the foliage turns red in the fall. I love read leaves!

Now, those in the know, know that acorns are edible when prepared properly. The problem with raw acorns is that they have tannin in them. Tannins are great for tanning hides and production of ink, but aren't really good to eat, and taste horrible.



Here's some bur oak acorns next to some regular acorns for a size comparison.

The trick to preparing acorns for eating is to first get the tannin out. Do this by shelling and dicing the acorn. Then boil them and drain repeatedly until the water is clear. An alternative to boiling is putting them in a water bag and submerging the bag in flowing water, such as a clear stream, for several days.

After you get the tannin out of your acorns, bake them on a cookie sheet. You can add some salt at this point, if you want. Use the processed acorns the same way you would any other nuts.

I collected these acorns at a local library that has several bur oak trees. I took the caps off and placed them in my freezer. I'll pull them out in a couple of months and plant them in some sand soil in pots to sprout them.

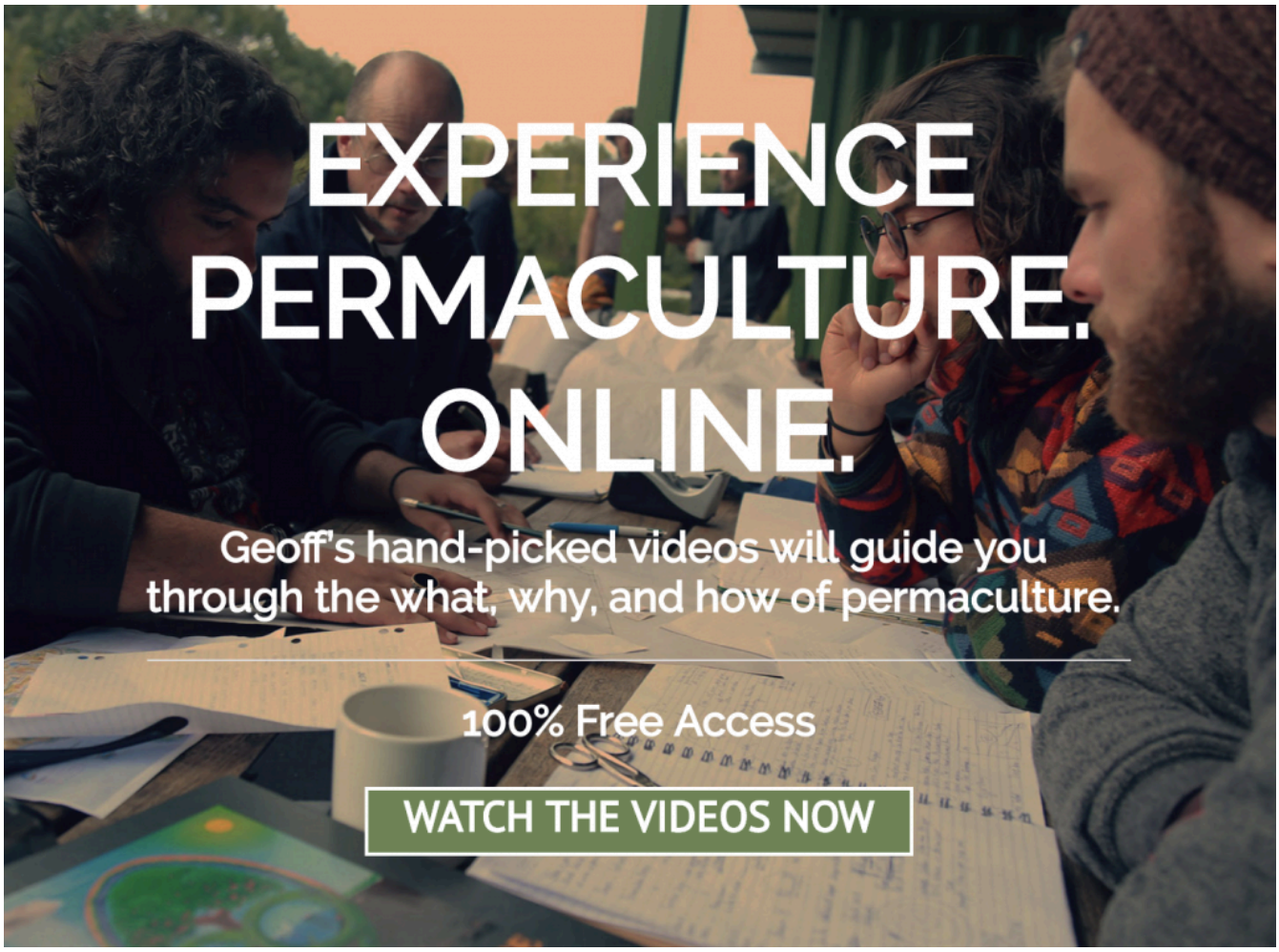
The problems I've seen with sprouting bur oaks from acorns in the past is that they don't like being transplanted. Another issue is that the bur oak hates being potted. It wants to be in the ground so that it's tap root can grow.

Unfortunately, I can't plant these in their final location, because I don't know where that location will be.

Online Permaculture Design Course

December 30, 2016
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: Geoff Lawton, PDC, permaculture, Permaculture Design Course

I've decided to take the leap and enroll in the PDC 2.0. That's Geoff Lawton's current online Permaculture Design Course. The permaculture course starts today, and is exactly what I want to help me plan fixes for the two acres of flood plain that have completely lost all topsoil and vegetation at Dove Ranch.



Geoff Lawton is absolutely my hero of the permaculture world. I'm excited to be enrolled in one of his classes.

It was a hard decision to take the class, despite the years I've wanted to. Normally, his classes are taught in-person, in Australia and take weeks or months. For obvious

reasons, I can't quit my job, drop all family responsibilities and fly to Australia, even to learn from one of my permaculture heroes. However, I can do online courses.

First, I had to come up with the $1000 for the course. That took a lot of careful self-examination of my finances and corner-cutting. I made a list of things I've been paying for that I could (somewhat painfully, in some cases) live without. I only needed to include one item that family bulked at, and I pointed out that if they really felt it was necessary to keep, they were welcome to pay for it.

Second, time is a real factor with this course. Geoff Lawton has said we'll have six months instead of the regular three months to complete the course material, but even with the slower pace, I'm buried. I work a day job, and have hours of work associated with studying for my day job, too. Also, I also have a business I'm trying to get off the ground, and that requires as much free time as I can spare. In addition to that, I have yard work, work at Dove Ranch, family/children, and my wife has "requested" that I finish a bedroom in my unfinished basement before my daughter's return from Japan.

This all adds up, but taking this PDC is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Despite my other time constraints, I really need to make this work. So I decided to go for it and figure out the time issues as I go.

Wish me luck!

Week One of the PDC

January 6, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: Bill Mollison, Dove Ranch, Geoff Lawton, permaculture, Permaculture Design Course

I've been through the first week of course work for the Online Permaculture Design Course taught by Geoff Lawton. I found it was a good thing that I've been studying permaculture on my own for so long. My previous permaculture studies helped me understand a lot of the more abstract theory that the course starts out with.

Since this is a pretty big investment for myself and my family, financially speaking, I decided to make the most of it and study Bill Mollison's Permaculture: A Designers' Manual along with the course. Also, I decided to take it up a notch and also listen to Bill Mollison's original 1983 permaculture design course on MP3 while driving to and from the day job.



Bill Mollison, the father of permaculture.
(Photo by Nicolas Boullosa – http://www.flickr.com/photos/faircompanies/2196171642/, CC BY 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18933888)

For those that aren't familiar with Permaculture, Bill Mollison is one of the two founding designers of the movement. I wouldn't say that they're ideas are unique, but having all their knowledge gathered into one movement to improve the planet down to the garden level is unique and brilliantly put together.

As I mentioned above, this permaculture course is being taught by Geoff Lawton who famously said, "All the World's Problems Can Be Solved in a Garden." Geoff Lawton is one of Bill Mollison's more widely followed students. There are some other famous-in-permaculture-circles students, but Geoff is probably the most widely followed.

I tend to see Geoff as taking Bill's efforts to spreading permaculture design to the next level. Geoff has refined and expanded on Bill's concepts. He has taught, designed, consulted, and practiced permaculture for 30 years. His most famous video is Greening the Desert, but any of his course work if far more detailed and helpful than that short video.

So my thoughts after the first week?

I'm going to focus on that two acres of floodplain that I have up at Dove Ranch. I really feel this course is going to flush out concepts and knowledge that I used to think I understood. I'm really learning that I've only scraped the surface of permaculture with my past studies. I'm kind of humbled by starting to learn what I didn't know that I didn't know.

Permaculture Guilds

January 22, 2017
Categories: Cooking and Food, Gardening
Tags: basil, comfrey, compost, fennel, guilds, lavender, lettuce, nasturtium, peas, permaculture, Permaculture Design Course, rosemary, rue, tomato

My takeaway from the Online Permaculture Design Course this week is the use of guilds. Guilds are groups of plants and/or animals that work together. Often, a guild contains a central element such as a specific tree and then other elements are gathered around it to assist the central plant or animal. The goal is to assemble components that help each other in some way. The more ways components help each other, the more likely the guild will work out. Look for large numbers of connections between elements.

One interesting element to use is **comfrey**. It works as a good green manure by using its deep roots to pull minerals up to the top layers of soil. Comfrey really needs balancing with other composts though, because it breaks down into a sludge instead of a nice granular compost.

Another useful element is **fennel**. Depending on the variety, it can be used as a herb or a vegetable. It attracts predatory wasps. **Dill** also attracts predatory wasps. Dill, of course, is a popular herb. Predatory wasps will help out with pest problems in fruit trees.

Also, **rosemary, lavender, and rue** work well near fruit trees to confuse pests with smells that prevent them from noticing the fruit tree.

I really want to give the guilds mentioned in class a try. A lot of plants we often use together in the kitchen also grow next to each other very well. I've never tried to grow **potato and peas** together, but I'm going to now.

Also, I need to try the guild of **tomato, basil, lettuce, and nasturtium**. I had never heard of nasturtium before, so I had to look it up. The nasturtium flowers have a peppery taste, and the young leaves are also edible. Nasturtium is so easy to grow that it is considered a weed in many warm regions. However, nasturtium is a great addition to salads. Guess what is going to be in my salads this year!

Flooding Near Dove Ranch

February 11, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: cabin, camping, Dove Ranch, flooding

A dam burst about 60 miles from Dove Ranch this week. The little Nevada town of Montello had some serious flooding. Also, I believe UT-30 is closed at the Nevada state line, because of the road being washed out in multiple places on the Nevada side.



Plenty of snow up near Dove Ranch, even though the temperatures have been warm.

As you can see from the pic, the snow is still pretty deep up near Dove Ranch. That is despite the last week having temperatures in the 50's in northern Utah. I'd say there is plenty of chance of more erosion at the ranch. I'll know when I get back there in the spring.

I have been considering putting a campsite and cabin down in the upper part of the wash, but after watching the flood footage from just 60 miles away from the ranch, I've changed my mind. There is a dam a few miles up stream of the ranch. If it ever gave out, the wash would become a death trap. Even the area we've been camping could become deadly.

I'm going to follow the advice of my wife and put our future cabin up on the hillside. Obviously, there might be a mudslide someday, but I feel safer on that minor slope than anywhere in the floodplain.

Update on the Permaculture Design Certificate Course

February 26, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: permaculture, Permaculture Design Course

I'm almost half way through the Permaculture Design Certificate course. I'm on week 9 and it is a 20 week course. I love the course, but two months in, I'm starting to look forward to finishing it. I can tell from my changes in perspective that this is likely to change my life forever.

In addition to the normal course material, I'm reading the 550 page manual by Bill Mollison, and listening to Bill's 70 hour 1983 course on MP3. It's interesting to see the major differences in personality and teaching style from Bill Mollison to his most-well-known student, Geoff Lawton. They are very different personality-wise and teaching-style-wise.

Between the book and two classes (current online one and the 1983 MP3 one) I've already learned tons relating to management zones, patterns, plant-animal guilds, tree placement, earthworks, and permaculture related legal, economic and social networks. I had no idea what I didn't know about permaculture.

On a funny/interesting note, I was listening to the the 1983 course this week and Bill M. mentions Yeoman's so-far unproven keyline design theory. Of course, Geoff Lawton and other Permaculture Design Certificate holders have proven Yeoman correct over and over again since 1983–most famously Geoff Lawton turned several acres a few miles from the Dead Sea into a forest garden on almost no well-water and then left it alone for a decade and came back to show it was still there even when mismanaged.

Lawn Flowers

March 5, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: crocus, Easter, lawn

The crocuses are coming up in my lawn. It's funny when the little girls in the neighborhood go around picking them off my front lawn and their mothers are horrified that their children are picking them. The parents are so worried that I'll be upset.

I don't mind. That's why I planted them in my lawn. It's cute to see them as excited as my kids were when they were that age.

I realized years ago that crocuses (croci if you like) blend in perfectly with lawns and they add a great splash of color in March, just before things get green at Easter time. It's easy to plant them in existing lawns without any noticeable damage to t he lawn.



Crocuses make a great addition to lawns.

I've added several varieties to my yard to give my lawn splashes of purple, yellow, and white. Also, many varieties of crocus are edible, but not all are, so don't go eating their bulbs unless you know that that particular one is not poisonous.

One note, crocuses don’t seem to do well if they don’t get full sun. So plant them in patches around your yard where they will have mostly full sun, especially in March when the snow is starting to thaw a bit.

Permaculture and the Homestead

March 16, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: buying land, cottonwoods, permaculture, sage, sagebrush

I intend to use permaculture to create my homestead. I want a small homestead where I grow my own food and enjoy working the land. I also want to improve the land I am not using in a natural, water-wise way that doesn't encourage more desertification and erosion.



My wash does not currently have the native biodiversity that permaculture can design into it using typical permaculture techniques. Cottonwoods are native to Utah washes, so I'm introducing a stand of them to grow in my wash.

My dream property would have under five-acres of land. After years of looking at land, I finally bought 72-acres in early 2014, not because I want that much land, but because I could afford it and not the smaller parcels I was interested in.

The land I ended up purchasing was described in the real estate listing as “good for nothing but sagebrush.” However, after seeing what permaculture design has done to far worse chunks of dirt, I’m willing to give it a go, even though I have limited time and money.



The piece of dirt and sage we could afford. It’s not much, but it’s ours.

This piece of dirt and sage will make a great permaculture demonstration site.

Before Permaculture at Dove Ranch

March 16, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: Geoff Lawton, permaculture, Permaculture Design Course

Geoff Lawton emphasized in the Permaculture Design Certificate course that I'm taking, that you really want to have as many before shots as possible when applying permaculture to land, so that you can see the progress made over time. So, in keeping with that strong suggestion, I've taken a few pictures that are typical of the ranch, now.



This is our modest driveway in 2017 with my Subaru Forester parked in it.



This is the majorly eroded flood plain down in the wash. This is pre-permaculture in 2017, looking south along the west property boundary.



This captures a view of the 2017 snowmelt running off on the north side of the floodplain looking south before I've applied any permaculture design to the eroded muddy mess.



Using permaculture I intend to introduce dryland trees and erosion control methods to the wash. This is known to create water plumes and often creates natural springs where there were none in the past.

Water Rights Course

March 16, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: permaculture, water

I want to put a well on Dove Ranch at some point. I've tried figuring out Utah's water laws and have failed for the most part. Then I found out that there is a Water Rights course offered by the Utah Division of Water Rights and the Rural Water Association of Utah. I decided, this would complement my permaculture training nicely, so I'm going to sign up for it.

water rights brochure 2017

If anyone else is interested, you can sign up online at www.rwau.net

Permaculture Quickstart

March 26, 2017
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: Bill Mollison, Geoff Lawton, John D. Liu, Mark Shepard, permaculture, Permaculture Design Course

Permaculture? Is it swales? What on earth is a swale?

Swales are a dry-climate, tree-growing system. Permaculture may use swales, but that is a small, small part of permaculture.

Permaculture is often described as “Permanent Agriculture.” However, Permaculture is better described as “Permanent Culture.” That includes:

1. Earth care
2. People care
3. Returning surplus

Permaculture transcends politics, religion, and country. You can throw a prepper, a tree hugger, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a capitalist, and a communist into the same permaculture class and have them all walk away determined to use the knowledge they gained in their individual pursuits. In fact, I’ve seen that happen.

Permaculture includes growing food and fuel sustainably; healing the planet using scientific based design of towns, cities, and farms through natural controls; use of ethical financial systems; and encouraging social and cultural traditions that keep the system propagating long after we have left the permanent culture to our grandchildren.

And permaculture techniques can be profitable.

I've collected a list of videos to get a good start on the earth care portion of permaculture, because that is a nice starting place.

Greening the Desert

"Greening the Desert" showed Geoff Lawton's success at taking a salted barren desert plot near the Dead Sea, and turning it into an oasis using permaculture and a fraction of the water normally needed. The demonstration site still exists many years after the funding ran out.

Mark Shepard on Restoration Agriculture

Permaculture by a profitable farmer. Mark received his Permaculture Design Certificate from Bill Mollison about 10 years after Geoff Lawton did. He has made an incredible success of permaculture techniques, showing that it isn't just nice, feel-good theory.

Hope in a Changing Climate

John D. Liu documents permaculture techniques to turn a desert into a green paradise. John is a close associate of Geoff Lawton, so you will often see their names together. The term "Permaculture" is never used in this film, but you will quickly recognize the methodologies when compared to the Permaculture Designers Manual.

The Permaculture Designers Manual in One Hour

Bill Mollison's 500 page Permaculture textbook in one hour as presented by Geoff Lawton. You could easily spend a lifetime studying just one chapter of Bill's manual, but this is a good, quick overview of the text.

Back At It

February 14, 2021
Categories: Family Happenings, The Homestead
Tags: chickens, children, house

Since my last post, I've changed web domains, changed jobs twice, had another child volunteer as a Christian missionary (Latter-day Saint), had a child nearly die of T1D, raised five chickens, and seen my daughter get married.

Life's been busy.



We have five chickens we raised from chicks–ISA Browns and Golden Comets.

Now my wife and I are working on a huge upgrade. We're under contract to buy a 1970's house and homestead near Dove Ranch. (The travel time to Dove Ranch will be cut by 66%.) My day job let's me work from literally anywhere in the world, so we've decided to sell house we've lived in for 15 years, and move to a 1-acre house out in the countryside.

I love our current home, but we couldn't turn down the opportunity for an acre of land in a beautiful rural area.

NOTE: Turns out that this homestead had some issues the inspection uncovered. We found a better homestead, though.

We Made the Leap

July 31, 2021
Categories: The Homestead
Tags: Homestead, land

The pandemic and shortages it brought pushed us over the edge. My wife and I decided it was time to build or buy.

We love Dove Ranch and would have loved to build there, but after we saw the vandalism and ridiculous thefts that occurred there, we decided we needed to live somewhere with enough neighbors to look out for each other. I still have plans to improve Dove Ranch and use it for recreation, but not building a house.

That led us to question what is the ideal location. We searched all through 2020 and part of 2021, and almost bought a place in Stone, Idaho. That place had too many problems with it, so we expanded our search and landed in central Idaho.



Our not-so-new homestead in central Idaho.

We still have to deal with out own version of traffic, but it's just not the same somehow.



Still dealing with traffic, but it doesn't seem the same since I left the city.

So the 7-acres is a bit degraded and the house has seen better days, but we learned enough from Dove Ranch and our other experiences to know what we could do to improve a homestead

Here’s the backyard (back corner of the 7-acres), for reference.



Looking back at the house over the pasture.

We’ve got a lot of work ahead of us. Wish us luck!

Homestead (Idaho)

August 20, 2024
Categories: The Homestead

Yes. We made it to the homestead we've talked about most of our marriage. However, that was just the beginning of the work. I'll get into that in other posts.

I have a few notes for my own memory.

- Small scale flood irrigation from wells with water near the surface seems to be a better alternative than sprinklers or drips. Flood irrigation wipes out many pests, including ants and mice. It results in better soil hydration, and better seed germination. Also, you get far less water evaporation, and the excess water ends up right where it came from after filtering down through the soil. Sprinklers are a massive waste of water, because surface area is directly related to evaporation rate.
- Plant potatoes 12″ down directly in the soil for best harvest and largest potatoes.
- Radishes and zucchini are deer resistant.
- Get another watering trough to use as a raised bed and plant blackberries in it. This will contain their spreading.
- Plant garlic at 4″ depth and 7″ spacing between plants.

Kerosene Heaters and Accessories

October 2, 2026

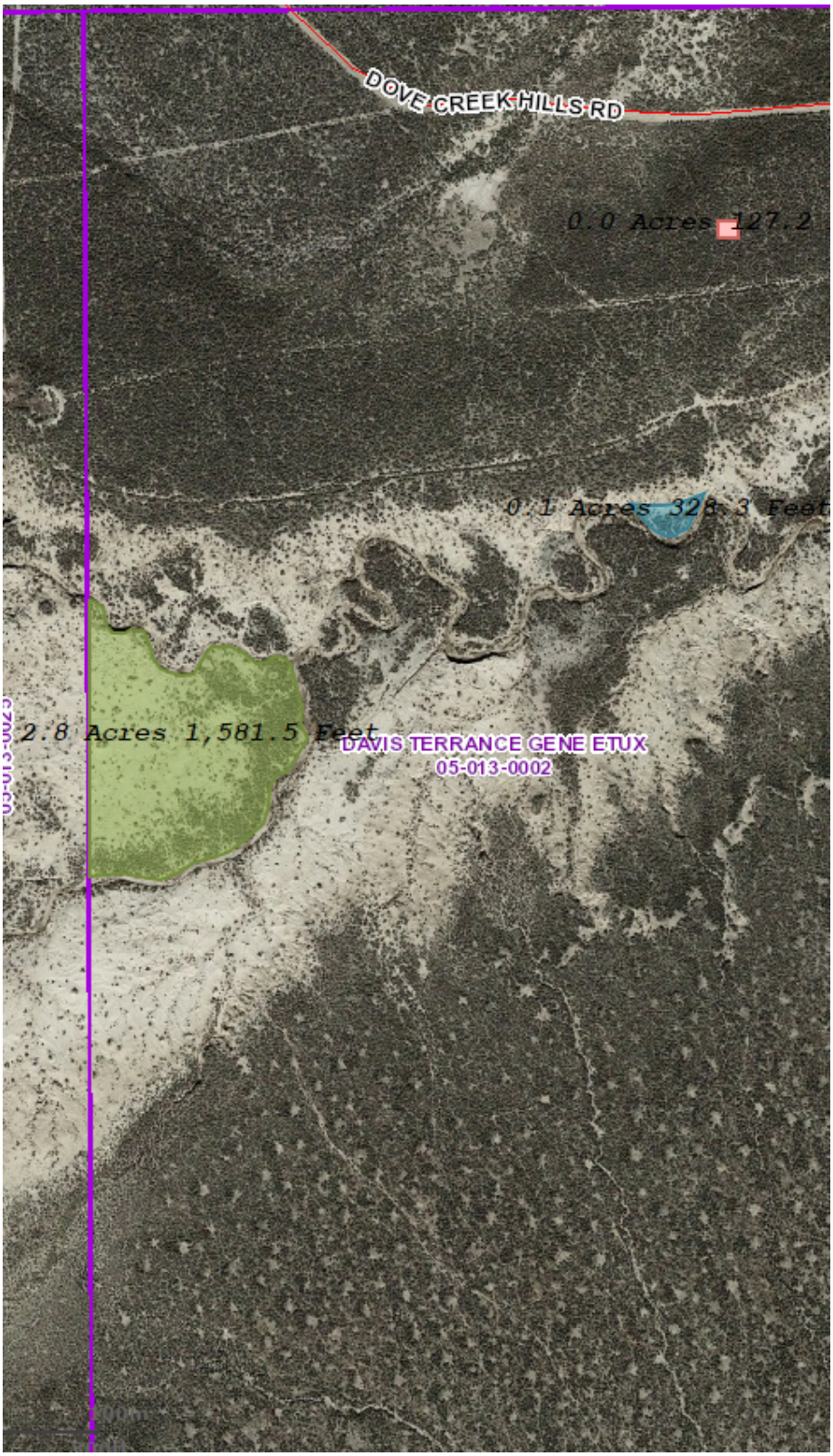
Categories: The Homestead

Stopping Erosion at Dove Ranch

November 28, 2116

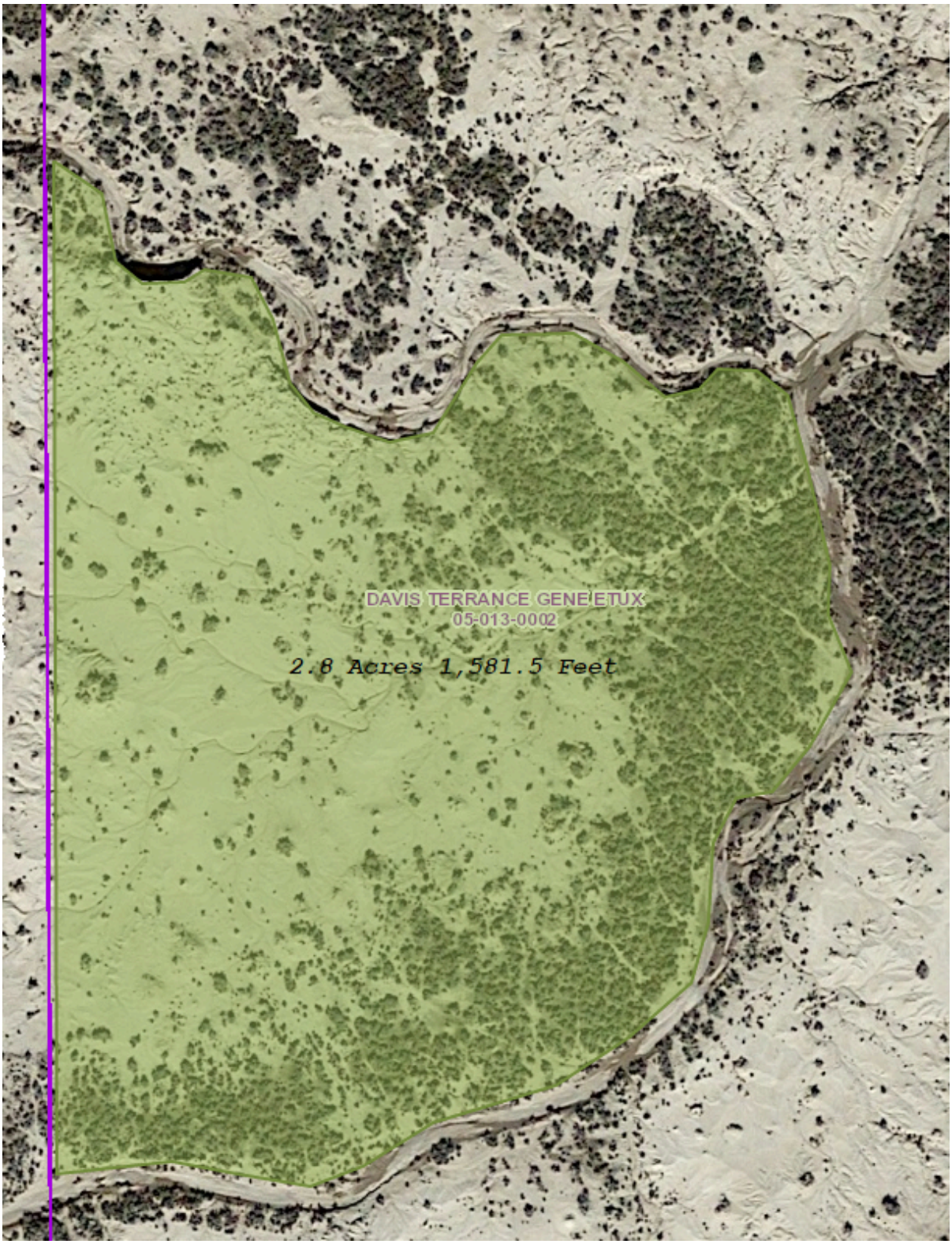
Categories: The Homestead

What I’m working on…



Areas I'm working on improving.

Where I might work ...



This is the area of worst erosion on my property. I'm working to improve it first.

and stuff..