



(Taken on one of Andy's hikes last January.)

Merry Christmas from New Mexico!

Andy:

Another year has sped by and both Jean and I are still here. As the doctors say- "you're doing well (for your age)".

We've had a busy year. We got our first fruit crop since the fire with at least one apple on five different trees and cherries on both of the Montmorency trees. (Think a few-not bushels!!!) No sign of the plums, pears or apricots yet. The old greenhouse has not yet been fixed up and I get yearly reminders of the reasons one needs a greenhouse to grow crops up there. Last year the mice and birds got all the tomatoes and this year the hail did the job. Kaitlin and Torben have offered to subsidize a new greenhouse that will be located close to the house itself. We are in talks with our architect to see if one can be constructed within our budget.



The burned evergreen trees continue to rot and weaken and as a result there are lots of trees blown down after each windstorm. Somehow, they aren't all gracious enough to fall elsewhere than across the roads so I get to keep in practice sawing up and removing trees. (As a passing comment-if you need a saw for light work the new battery operated ones are now powerful and long lasting enough to be your best bet.

They are lighter and quieter than the gas powered ones and will go nicely through soft wood trees even over a foot in diameter.) Unfortunately the dead trees also don't respect the fences around the fruit trees so we also get to keep our fence repairing skills honed.



Last summer Kaitlin and Torben fixed the fence around the fruit trees by the old greenhouse (I “supervised”) and this fall another tree fell in almost the same place. Luckily there is nothing to entice the critters in there during the Winter, so one doesn’t need to fix fences in the snow!



A major disappointment to me is that the walking around there just plain sucks. Many trees have fallen across the trails and roads, the prickly bushes (called locusts by those who don’t have to fight through them) and nettles have grown up like mad and due to the lack of ground cover right after the fire there are washouts everywhere so walking just isn’t much fun. The “Guardians of the Forest” in cahoots with the USFS have obtained a legal ruling that prevents any repair of the infrastructure so things are rapidly going from bad to worse!

I continue working on electronics that is supposed to automate, control and optimize the use of the solar power (both electric and hot water) that we now have in abundance now that all the trees are going/gone. The new batteries are working out very well-we have all the power we can use now without worrying. (Matching the load to the source really works-duh.) This year I completed the temperature control for the batteries. The underground battery house gets quite cold in the Winter so it is useful to keep the efficiency near the optimum by controlling the battery temperature. So far it has run perfectly for a couple of months so we should be through with any early failures and into the flat portion of the bathtub failure curve.

We are also well into a simplification of the solar hot water heating system-enough is done that I’m very pleased with the results. It has improved the efficiency about the same as raising the outdoor temperature by 20F. The remaining problem concerns ease/speed in eliminating the large amounts of air that must be removed from any drainback system when it is started. We’ll tackle that problem next year since I’m using the system now.

There are a couple of folks who have purchased properties on “our” ridge recently who look as if they might actually stay for a while. One of them is willing to work and get things done—a necessary characteristic up there. Most people seem to think that “they” just do things and are totally astonished that “they” don’t exist. I need to remind them that governments are tax collecting organizations, not service providing organizations. The only government types we have seen at our place are assessors and inspectors. Up in the hills they are more trouble than they are worth!

Jean:

I’m continuing to have fun writing my daily blog at cheerfulmonk.com and going to my Silver Sneakers exercise class on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. I’m the little old lady in the middle of the second row.



Again, Merry Christmas, everyone!