

You Can Get Here from There

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I was outside when a woman called our business. Just as I took the cordless phone from my belt and answered, one of my roosters crowed. "I hear chickens," she said. "You caught me in the vineyard, up the hill from the chicken coop," I replied. "Ooh," she breathed, "You are living the life we all dream about." Our lifestyle is possible because Bob-O and I have our land.

A Place in the Sun

That started me thinking. How do people find their renewably powered dream homes, their places in the sun? I have heard a lot of stories from many people. While all are interesting, some are downright fascinating.

Bob-O and Kathleen use a GPS to locate a corner marker for their "barony."



I have to warn you that I am not going to actually name the places I am writing about. After all, people chose these places because they wished to be off the beaten path—you might even say obscure. If you want to find a little piece of earth (and sun, with possibly water and wind) of your own, it is up to you to choose a methodology for finding your place, or allow chance to open a door of opportunity for you.

I've already related in detail how Bob-O and I came to find our very rural land. It began with a tree falling on Bob-O and breaking his leg, in two places. It ended with us buying our house and both acquiring jobs in the bargain (HP96 and HP97). We call it our land barony.

Instead of relying on fate, many people actually go looking for a place to live their remote renewable energy (RE) lifestyle. There are several unusual ways to go about it, some of which are discussed below. The most common way is through a real estate agent.

A Realtor Runs Through It

Up here on the creek, we call the spring thaw "Realtor weather." This is when local real estate agents load up prospective clients into SUVs and drive them out to whatever acreage is for sale at the time. They have to use SUVs because all the roads still require four-wheel drive.

Spring is beautiful here. The hills are green. All the creeks are running hard. The effects of brush fires from the last year have been softened by new growth. New wildflowers are blooming every day. This has enticed many an unwary dreamer into buying what they think is a charming location.

Not many newcomers are prepared for the summer's brutal heat, the rattlesnakes, dry creeks, vicious star thistle, and unimproved roads. Then there's the fact that our whole county is open range. If you don't want cows in your yard, you have the right to fence them out. If they break down your fence, you have every right to repair it—all at your own cost, of course.

Then comes the winter. The roads quickly deteriorate into slimy mud trails. Water lines freeze. The mountain pass to town can close at any time. I've known a wintertime trip into town to take two days, though it only takes about one hour in good weather. In fact, when you give directions

around here, you always state how long it will take to get to a place, instead of the mileage, as in: "Happy Camp is two hours downriver, with dry pavement." Without dry pavement, all bets are off.

In spite of the apparent adversity of life beyond "Realtor weather," a few hardy souls actually end up loving everything about this place. These folks are our neighbors.

In the Dark

I was at the SolWest Renewable Energy Fair last July. One evening, as a group of us ate in a local restaurant, the woman next to me told me how her parents had found their dream locale. This is such a great story, I can't resist including it here.

Her father was a commercial airline pilot. For the last ten years of his flying career, he noted the darkest places in the United States that he flew over. Then on his vacation time, he and his wife would go check them out. They picked a beautiful little valley that I am familiar with. The mother is a concert musician and feared she would have to give up playing with a group. But no, she found a local group of musical peers, and is quite happy.

Tortilla Stop

I wrote to a friend who lives by that same town, and I told her this story. She had an even better story about a neighbor of theirs who had a peculiar method of determining his perfect place to live. She swears this is true. He put a tortilla on his car antenna and drove until someone asked him what it was. There he settled.

Dog Days

My brother, Mike, lived in a small town in the mountains of Colorado. One of his buddies left his home in the eastern United States and started driving. He wasn't really sure what he was looking for. When he drove into this small mountain community for the first time, he decided that it was the place for him. There on Main Street, the local town dogs were sleeping in the potholes. Obviously, this was a town with a slow pace of life.

Horse Cents

We have friends who are horse crazy. Once, when one of their horses was lame, they went to a commercial stable to ride. After spending an afternoon riding in the hills around the stable, they came across what appeared to be an abandoned ranch, aged and in disrepair. That evening, while having a beer with the stable hands, they found out it was for sale. Now they ride their horses on the same trails, but they own them. They put an RE system in first and will use that to build their new house. For want of a horse, their land was found.

Lost & Found

Are there coincidences? Or is there such a thing as joss or kismet? Serendipity? People have told me that while looking for a piece of land, they got lost. While "lost," they happened across the land they ended up buying. I am a

great believer in events happening for a reason. Of course, we are not always privy to that reason.

Born to It

Some people are lucky enough to be born in the area they want to live. Bob-O's son, Allen, is indeed one of those people. He was born in the back of a Rambler station wagon, on a mountain pass, in a blizzard. I don't know your definition of a blizzard, but around here it is when the snow blows sideways, hard and cold.

Allen was lucky enough to have the very same doctor who delivered his mother there to deliver him. The doctor knelt on the open tailgate. Allen's grandmother stood behind him, bracing his feet on her thighs. She held her jacket open as wide as she could to keep the snow from blowing into the car. A snowplow drove up and pulled over. The driver rolled down his window and called to Grandma Nancy, "What's going on? You guys need any help?"

"No," Grandma Nancy shouted back over the storm, "We're just having a baby!" The doctor quipped later that he felt he should have put the elevation on the birth certificate. It was 2,859 feet. Allen's roots remain intertwined with the big Douglas firs in the Salmon River Mountains.

Is there a right way or a wrong way to look for your place in the sun? Absolutely not! Although all roads do not lead to your special place, one does. Just watch out for the ruts.

Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is planting this year's garden at her land barony in northernmost California. c/o *Home Power* magazine, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520 •
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