No Sun, No Fun

There are many kinds of adventures for Surveyors. Their profession is not sedate. However, for the last 22 years we have been following the Canadian Geese south for the winter, staying three months and then heading home and vowing never to survey in the snow again.

For various and sundry reasons our finances collapsed, and we had to stay home this winter in our North Idaho Homestead House, built in 1897. We not only had to save money, we had to make money, so we have been surveying in the snow. I am 76 and Linda is 72. Here is a story from our forced adventure that we just sent to our children and thought that you might enjoy.

> "You should have seen your mother and I slogging in the snow yesterday looking for one of our client's corners..."

» CHAD ERICKSON, PS

Typical December scene taken of the Erickson North Idaho Homestead house

You should have seen your mother and I slogging in the snow yesterday looking for one of our client's corners. Using control, we landed at the theoretical point for a monument set in 1993. It was 25 feet from where the owner thought that it should be, so, I was afraid that my calculations might have been off. It fell in a barbed wire fence, right at a T post, so the metal detector did us no good. Besides, the rocks were magnetic. On top of that, our newfangled magnetometer, which will find a rebar at a depth of 24", refuses to work in sub-freezing temperatures, even with a heat pad stuck to it.

The fence was half buried by a slide that came down the creek years ago, with rocks weighing up to 80 pounds. There was only three feet of the post sticking out of the ground, so we could not pull the post. So, on blind faith and in six inches of snow, 28°F, freezing hands and feet we dug and dug, rolling the stones out of the hole. Linda said that I should shove the digging bar down alongside the T post and loosen it up. I did, and while she was looking away I pulled the post out. When she turned back she was surprised, but not as surprised as I when, after moving a half dozen shovelfuls of dirt, our clam shovel hit a rebar[1], and we soon saw the top of the rebar. We were down about 24," to original ground level.

1 22 years ago, on our first snowbird trip south we saw a clam shovel at a garage sale in Yuma, AZ, and knowing that we were going to be on a Sea of Cortez beach the next day, we bought it, for 5 bucks, or something like that. We never found any claims, but we also never took the clam shovel out of our truck either. Eventually we used it more and more in our surveys, until finally, we no longer carry a regular shovel. Which brings up the question, "How do we instinctively know when the clam shovel is prying against a rebar?" A. The shovel is so narrow that the pressure is localized. B. Rebar don't "give" and have a jagged feel. And C. Rocks are invariably angular or rounded and the shovel tends to slip, but not with a rebar. Anyway, it's weird.

I took Linda up the mountain on our four-wheeler to the truck to warm up our hands and feet. I had brought the Ryobi heat gun, and we had our gloves and boots warmed up in no time. We put our hot gloves and boots back on and like a miracle our feet and hands were warm, and we were good to go.

It was about 3:15 when we went back down to survey the found monument and set the last monument. By the time we tied the found monument it was getting dusk. I turned the angle to set the last monument and at 150 feet we hit a dog hair thicket of snow-covered young trees. I walked in front knocking the snow off the trees so the snow would go down my neck and not Linda's. I knew the point would be near the fence but not where on the fence. I picked a likely spot, and like the scene from Sandlot, told Linda to hold the range pole there next to the fence. It was getting so dark I knew we would only get one chance, and we didn't want to ever have to go back down in that

Chad and our client Jose Cruz clowning around. Location is Green Valley, Arizona. 2015

timbered canyon again. I could not see Linda through all the trees. Then I moved the gun down to the ground level and could see the red of the range pole near her ankles and got a good focus. After focusing, I slowly moved the gun back up and, at the only hole in the brush, I saw the prism through the falling snow.

On the radio I said, "Don't move," and using a set up that was an hour old, took the measurements and told her to put a nail with a ribbon in the hole where the prism pole had been. Then I closed the horizon, looked at the numbers I had written and found that the angle checked perfectly and as for angle error, using the "1 minute at 300 feet equals 1 inch divergence rule", found that we were within a foot for angle.

I checked the distance and amazingly found that we were only 8" off for distance. Close enough, we could make the small move to the true point using a compass and tape. And that was it. It was too dark after that to do anything but load up and thankfully ride the four-wheeler out of there. We will have to go back down again, but just to drive the monument.

It had been a suspenseful, lucky day, and when we got home last night we lit up the wood stove and cuddled and cuddled under a blanket on the recliner for hours. Then we dug out Linda's brand-new winter boots that she has had for years and years and had vowed never to wear. They fit and look real good now. We bought some hand warmers at Dale's Cash Way and they work real well also. Four-wheelers, Heat guns and hand warmers, guess that you can teach old dogs new tricks.

NEXT YEAR—FLORIDA KEYS ■

Chad Erickson PS has been surveying since 1970; using chain and transit for the first four of those. After his Land Surveying degree he performed original township surveys in Alaska. He is licensed and operates boundary survey firms in Idaho and Arizona.

Photo taken by Chad Erickson near the Florida Keys. February 2021