

Rural Living

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For the purposes of this article, rural living means somewhere between the suburbs talked about in Urban Living but not quite to the point of wilderness survival or camping. However, with the over development of land, this is disappearing in many parts of the country. Fortunately, there are still many places in the Empire along the numerous parish and county highways and byways. The payoff in privacy and peacefulness can be well worth it. If you are accustomed to the purple haze of the nighttime city sky, you will be amazed at the detail and majesty of what the stars look like without light pollution! Some of the communities of rural Amerika can be very kindhearted people, if not a bit nosy and gossipy. If you get a good legal spot, you will not have to worry about city or suburban covenants telling you you cannot have your broken down car in the front yard or be able to paint your house purple.

Rural living does come with drawbacks other than limited services, though. Almost all the vast tracts of land are owned by somebody. You either need to own this outright, get permission, or simply be able to avoid notice. The nearest supplies which were as simple as a quick Wally World run in a city or suburb may be an arduous miles-long trek. You may also find services such as internet, cable, and in some places electric and water to be limited. Living out in the sticks can also leave you very isolated compared to being even in a small city (which actually some folks may consider an advantage!)

Rural survival can work if all this sounds like your cup of tea. Be willing to research and reach out following leads. Do not being dissuaded by dead ends and rejections. It is very possible to find some old hippy or soft heart with a patch of unused land. You could to be able to set down a shack in the back 40 with maybe some bee hives or a garden! We knew a drifter who did this once he got to Hawaii and he is still living there by selling honey every few months and eating from his garden. Unlikely? Who knows. But - maybe your story awaits here, too.

Rural Housing

Just because you are out in the boondocks does not mean there is a lack of rentals. Rentals still exist, but are much further apart and less numerous. Rural trailers, rooms for rent, sheds, cabins, and even work-for-rent ranch and farm deals can usually be found in the newspaper of the nearest major city or state newspapers. Sometimes even craigslist can be given a go as internet begins to spread in even some of the more isolated areas. Be sure to follow our advice in Urban Living about apartments, leases, landlords, and roommates. Bad deals and slumlords are out in the sticks, too. You can get screwed even worse than the city by being stuck way out there with a very high rent and maybe a choice of 2 to 3 jobs or sometimes none for dozens of miles!

There are no homeless shelters but the woods of the highways and byways and what ever lean-to you may be able to build. Rural stealth camping will be covered later, if you find yourself without shelter in the middle of nowhere.

Truck stops usually maintain showers and lounges for a small fee to use. Some even have bars or cheap rooms for rent or a rest lounge with a couch for tired folks, if someone seems nice or is down on their luck. No one will usually have an issue with you car dwelling for a certain period of time, but be careful. In times past (and some would say to this day) these places have been hotbeds for drugs and prostitution because of frequent traffic from well paid truckers and travelers.

It is very possible to find abandoned stables, storage sheds, barns, shut down mills and factories, and even abandoned military installations in the spaces between civilization. However, just like squatting in an urban environment, always check for signs of recent activity and traffic to and from and into the structure. Even stuff way out there can be checked into by land owners or even other squatters from once a year to once every week or so!

Communes and Compounds

While there are examples of urban communes and housing shares, the majority are located in rural areas and small towns. The types of communes vary very widely. Many are based on some sort of theme like a religious belief, sexual orientation, lifestyle, political beliefs, and pretty much everything under the sun. Some advertise openly on database sites and others are only spread through word of mouth.

If you want to try this out, make sure you do research into that particular community's requirements. Some have rules where EVERYTHING must be shared meaning your car could end up being driven by everybody and your road laptop could end up in the community computer lab with little say so. Some go further with sharing than that where even wives and husbands are shared. Some may have no sharing at all and you will be frowned on as a leech if you do not buy your own food and provide for yourself. If you occasionally partake of herb or drink a bit, you may want to check into this too. Many places may either encourage or strictly forbid these things. If you are just traveling through while on an epic adventure, make sure they are cool with that. Some communes may want more permanent commitments while others actually love to get free spirits for the tales of unusual places.

Make sure your political beliefs match. You will not get along with an ex-convict white supremacist sanctuary showing up with "Eracisism" bumper stickers on your car or if you are black. Nor will you be very welcome if you are a guy and try to drop in on a Wiccan ultra-militant lesbian feminist ranch. We at STW encourage you to avoid narrow minded zealots of any type! Be careful also that while there are sincere communes out there, some egotistical folks may be using it to keep people there for their own source of followers and henchmen to cough up money and labor. Be prepared to leave at any sign of brainwashing, physical or mental or sexual abuse, and avoid any place that "locks" you in. Even out in the boondocks with no car, you always can travel if you have two functioning feet.

More on communes is under Community Centers and Communes in our Fight section.

Stealth Camping

While most all of rural land is owned by someone, many people own so much land that they cannot possibly patrol it all or merely keep land for investment purposes and visit it rarely. In most places standing common law is that short term camping is explicitly permitted anywhere that the land is not posted with no trespassing signs. The homeowner can find you and demand you leave immediately but must allow you to pack up, they can ask the police to prosecute you for doing any actual damage including littering so keep it tidy. It is very possible to obtain a small dull colored tent or hammock and camp in forests quite a ways behind trees off of rural highways. One place to do this on interstates as they tend to have many cop cars but they never seem to pay attention to the trees set up to absorb the highway noise. Very important is to make sure your tent is not visible from the road. Make sure you avoid camping near briar patches near water sources as these tend to be areas that attract guerrilla pot farmers. You do not want your tent slashed by some pig thinking your tent is a base camp for a huge pot grow! Be particularly mindful of leaving valuables around during hunting season. Try to avoid camping in plots of woods within earshot of inhabited buildings or trailers.

If you are lucky, we have known folks get away with this for months. It probably is not the best solution for sheltering, but if you are biking cross-country or are just sick of squatting in a city, this can be fairly safe if common sense is used. Set yourself up with a farm job, a bike, and near a rural truck stop or general store and you are in for an adventure.

Now, if you are fortunate enough to have a car, you will probably be more limited in secure spots. Getting past barb wire fences and getting through ancient locked gates probably is not the safest place for the car. Recent car tracks or a strange car on the land is a sure giveaway and can lead irate landowners armed with high-powered rifles to your location, just remind them of your legal camping rights and then leave as asked. Neither is just leaving your car parked alongside a road as rural county cops regularly put tow notices on cars that look to be abandoned. Stealth camping is best done with a bicycle or small motorcycle that can be walked up into the hidden screen of woods with you. Consider tarping over your bike since the reflectors really stand out and people might come looking for the shiny abandoned stuff in the woods.

By all means, if you are stealth camping, remember the "stealth" part in camping. Walk light to avoid leaving visible trails from the entry point in the woods directly to your camp, try to follow an established trail or road and branch off from there. Do not be a total slob and leave the land littered with garbage like water bottles, discarded clothes, and cigarette butts, this will get you busted if they are looking to punish you for camping. Keep your voice down as sounds can carry further than you think in the woods. Try to use a camp stove, but if you must build a wood fire, keep it small, infrequent, and short-lived leaving no trace afterwards, most of all don't start brush or forest fires, also think wind the wood fire smell carries as does grilling meat and cigarettes. Avoid overuse of flashlights, mobile phones, and computers as sometimes this can be seen from outside the woods for much further than would be liked - even from a bored county cop surfing porn after sundown from the side of the road on his 3G laptop!

For more detail into camping, read the Camping article also in Free Shelter.

Creative Construction

If you have either permission from some kindhearted soul or manage to own a slither of land, you suffer none of the ordinances of the city nor stupid "community covenants" that plague some suburbs. This means you can be really creative with your shelter. Some of the wilder ideas that we here at STW have come across, we will share.

Recycled Sea Shipping Container

Super strong and designed to be waterproof, the standard 24 and 40 foot shipping container can be made into a house by cutting holes for and installing a door and windows. It is cheaper for a company to sell a well-used container than to scrap and recycle it. If you plan to use it as a home or barn you will have to address ventilation and insulation issues, otherwise you will face condensation problems. Strength is mostly in the stacking direction, twisting or loads against the walls like from burial may cause structural failure.

Straw Bale

Straw bale is one of the easiest, simplest, cheapest ways to build either a full size house or hut. For a small structure all you really do is create walls out of hay bales, staggering them like giant bricks, and add a waterproof cover, sometimes coating the outsides with concrete, mud, leaves, or wood to keep the walls dry. This is not necessary. With properly placed support beams, the house will stay safe through wet times and rain. Straw also acts as an insulator. If you will be living in a very cold or windy area with an abundance of hay, we would suggest doubling up walls. A small sleeping hut consisting of straw bales, freight pallets to support the roof bales, one or more large tarps for wind and weather protection, and rope or fiber tape to secure the tarp could be made for a very low price, don't forget to save a few bales for a raised bed or floor so you won't lose body heat to the cold ground. Ask at the feed or hardware store if they offer cheap or free delivery out to your building site.

Yurt

For a few grand a decent sized yurt can be purchased. The mountain peoples of China, Mongolia, and even part of Afghanistan use yurts for mobile housing. A canvas roof, round wood walls, and a smoke hole or plastic skylight are normal features. A quality yurt will last up to ten years in a damp climate and longer in a dry one.

Much information about yurts (yrts or gers) is online. Some links for building plans can be found on these sites:

- chaingang.org/yurtquest/links.html
- chaingang.org/yurtquest/yurtp.pdf

- <http://www.bioregions.org/pdfs/GerOwnersPamphlet.pdf>
- <http://www.tiny-house-living.com/yurt-plans.html>
- <http://www.nmt179.com/resources/yurt-plans.html>
- <http://www.currentmiddleages.org/tents/>
- <http://www.livingintheround.org/?tag=yurt-plans>

Ferro-cement

Ferro-cement is an extremely strong, easy-to-deal-with material. Not to mention cheap, and ferro houses can take just about any shape, making them easy to hide in places the pigs would never think. Below is a free e-book about ferro. Very informative.

- <http://ferrocement.com/casa-contents/contents.en-ferroHouse-web.html>

Greenhouse

PVC tubing arches and UV resistant plastic make for an acceptable shelter and an excellent source of food for under \$100. These are most effective in low wind areas which have mild winters but become unbearable to live in in summer. Black plastic sheeting over the soil and a perforated garden hose under the sheeting allow irrigation and conservation of water slits in the plastic allow plants to grow. Twine hanging from the arches can be used to hang overloaded cucumber and tomato plants.

See Farm It

Mobile Homes

The mobile home often elicits snickers and jokes with heavy racist and classist overtones when mentioned. Of course, this may be part of the CorpGov marketing machine scaring people into buying/renting overpriced and over-sized houses financed with adjustable rate balloon mortgages. There is no shame in a manufactured home. The quality is comparable to the contractor built houses found in most Amerikan subdivisions. A word of caution though, be very careful reading the contract and loan, there have been many cases of 'gotchya' clauses which include overpriced land leases, surprise fees, or even repo/eviction clauses for failure to pay on time these are less common when choosing to use your own piece of land and paying cash for the house.

One advantage of a mobile home is it can be moved if needed, but not on a regular basis. You are going to need to find someone with the proper flatbed truck, crane, and equipment to move it to a new prepared site. Be careful and get an inspection before buying as the mover is usually not responsible for a house that falls apart during moving due to rot or abuse.

Purchased used single wide mobiles are sometimes as cheap as three to six months of minimum wage earnings plus transportation costs. Beyond the trailer park style single wide homes there are also double, triple, and even larger designs that many would think were built on site. Some commercial trailer park sites charge for the lot, but this is usually much less than apartment rent. Also, be aware that most mobile homes are not as secure as regular homes in inclement weather such as tornadoes or hurricanes. Have a disaster plan in mind for the small chance of this happening.

School Bus

Even if it will never run again a school bus is still a possibility for shelter; tow it to your site put it on blocks and remove the seats. The upsides are a reasonably large living area and potential for relocation. A bus cabin is real cleanup problem when you vacate, it will also invite police attention so place this option towards the bottom of your list.

Interesting Rural Places

The spaces between cities can be as diverse and filled with interesting places and people just like any city. Below are a few examples that some of the contributors at STW have run into during travels.

Slab City

You could always park in Slab City (4 miles outside of Niland, California) and call that home. Not many resources of any kind. You need to buy water and solar is about the only way to get cheap electricity. Mild winters but flaming hot summers.

Immigrant Labor Camp

If you happen to appear somewhat browner skinned, most rural WASP's will look right through you if you play to their expectations, taking on Latino laborer dress and keeping your mouth shut can work as great camouflage. Migrant labor camps are usually provided for workers as part of their pay. Conditions are often sparse to tragic as CorpGov and independent farmers just want to make a buck, these are usually not the place to look for shelter unless you look and speak like a native of the lands south of the Rio Grande and are in a very tight situation.

Black Mesa Navajo

The Native peoples of Black Mesa, AZ run a program for outsiders to come and live and work with a family or an elder. You will be expected to perform physical labor, and drugs and alcohol are strictly forbidden. They ask for a commitment of at least a few weeks, but shorter or longer stays can be arranged. Visit blackmesais.org/cultural_sen.html or email blackmesais@riseup.net

Wilderness

See Backpacking and Camping

Adverse Possession

In Free Land we describe acquiring abandoned property legally by squatting for a defined period of time. This is an excellent way to gain a good shelter and useful private land, you can even sell it later, this doesn't work for public land.

Guides

Remote Areas Development Manual

Search <http://eric.ed.gov/> for the "Remote Areas Development Manual" it is the pocket size book that gives you almost every DIY technique to build a well run farming village.

Peace Corps Building Manual

Visit the website http://home.comcast.net/~kellyjmorris/build_docs.html which has a free download of the Peace Corps Construction Manual which teaches how to make block and brick construction with minimal concrete or local soils, it also covers digging wells. Like military manuals the Peace Corps publications are written under government contract with your taxes and are in the public domain, feel free to print, bind, and even sell these books.

Magazines

Back in the 1970's the big back-to-the-land magazine was *The Mother Earth News (TMEN)*. Many back issues are sought-after for their still relevant information and DIY projects (They also sell CD-ROM archives of many of their projects and articles from the 1970's, considered to be TMEN's heyday). In 1986, they were bought out by New American and changed much of the magazine's demographics to suburban types. In 1990, much of the editorial staff left and founded *BackHome Magazine* ("Your Hands-On Guide to Sustainable Living"), which maintains the rural emphasis of the original *TMEN*.

There is another publication; *Backwoods Home Magazine*. While it does have some good information on homesteading, some of the editorials often have a conservative libertarian bias and sometimes veer into conspiracy theory-land.

Another magazine, again with a similar name, is *The Backwoodsman*, which has heavy emphasis on primitive living and wilderness survival. It fittingly uses "The Magazine for the Twenty-First Century Frontiersman" as it's motto.

All four of these publications maintain websites and sell collections of their past articles and projects, either in book or CD-ROM format.

- BackHome Magazine: <http://www.backhomemagazine.com/>
- Backwoods Home Magazine: <http://www.backwoodshome.com/>
- The Backwoodsman: <http://www.backwoodsmanmag.com/>
- The Mother Earth News: <http://www.motherearthnews.com/>

Another good publication on self-sufficient living is *Countryside & Small Stock Journal*, which started in 1973 when *Small Stock Magazine* (founded in 1917) merged with *Countryside* (founded in 1963). It's more of a network of homesteaders than a slick publication, so you will have access to lots of useful information.

- <http://www.countrysidemag.com/>

The Energy Self Sufficiency Newsletter was published for only two years (2005-2006), but the editor, Larry D. Barr, saw fit to archive all the issues on-line as .pdf's. You can download each issue separately, or in a bunch (46.4 Meg) as either .zip or .tar.gz formats.

- <http://www.rebelwolf.com/essn.html>

Original Rural Living

If you are considering moving to the country, especially as a group, you are talking about farms and farmland. There are some farms for rent, and occasionally a family that has to be away for a year or two will let you live on their farm if you keep the place in repair. These can be found advertised in the back of various farming magazines and in the classified sections of newspapers, especially the Sunday editions. Generally speaking, however, if you're interested in a farm, you should be considering an outright purchase.

First, you have to determine in what part of the country you want to live in terms of the climate you prefer and how far away from the major cities you wish to locate. The least populated states, such as Utah, Idaho, the Dakotas, Montana and the like, have the cheapest prices and the lowest tax rates. The more populated a state, and in turn, the closer to a city, the higher the commercial value of the land.

There are hundreds of different types of farms, so the next set of questions you'll have to raise concerns the type of farm activity you'll want to engage in. Cattle farms are different than vegetable farms or orchards. Farms come in sizes: from half an acre to ranches larger than the state of Connecticut. They will run in price from \$30 to \$3000 an acre, with the most expensive being prime farmland in fertile river valleys located close to an urban area. The further away from the city and the further up a hill, the cheaper the land gets. It also gets woodier, rockier and steeper, which means less tillable land.

If you are talking of living in a farm house and maybe having a small garden and some livestock for your own use, with perhaps a pond on the property, you are looking for what is called a recreational farm. When you buy a recreational farm, naturally you are interested in the house, barn, well, fences, chicken-coop, corrals, woodsheds and other physical structures on the property. Unless these are in unusually good condition or unique, they do not enter into the sale price as major factors. It is the land itself that is bought and sold.

Farmland is measured in acreage; an acre being slightly more than 43,560 square feet. The total area is measured in 40-acre plots. Thus, if a farmer or a real estate agent says he has a plot of land down the road, he means a 40-acre farm. Farms are generally measured this way, with an average recreational farm being 160 acres in size or an area covering about 1/2 square mile. A reasonable rate for recreational farmland 100 miles from a major city with good water and a livable house would be about \$50 per acre. For a 160-acre farm, it would be \$8,000, which is not an awful lot considering what you are getting. For an overall view, get the free catalogs and brochures provided by the United Farm Agency, 612 W. 47th St., Kansas City, Mo. 64112.

Now that you have a rough idea of where and what type of farm you want, you can begin to get more specific. Check out the classified section in the Sunday newspaper of the largest city near your desired location. Get the phone book and call or write to real estate agencies in the vicinity. Unlike the city, where there is a sellers' market, rural estate agents collect their fee from the seller of the property, so you won't have to worry about the agent's fee.

When you have narrowed down the choices, the next thing you'll want to look at is the plot book for the county. The plot book has all the farms in each township mapped out. It also shows terrain variations, type of housing on the land, location of rivers, roads and a host of other pertinent information. Road accessibility, especially in the winter, is an important factor. If the farms bordering the one you have selected are abandoned or not in full use, then for all intents and purposes, you have more land than you are buying.

After doing all this, you are prepared to go look at the farm itself. Notice the condition of the auxiliary roads leading to the house. You'll want an idea of what sections of the land are tillable. Make note of how many boulders you'll have to clear to do some planting. Also note how many trees there are and to what extent the brush has to be cut down. Be sure and have a good idea of the insect problems you can expect. Mosquitoes or flies can bug the shit out of you. Feel the soil where you plan to have a garden and see how rich it is. If there are fruit trees, check their condition. Taste the water. Find out if hunters or tourists come through the land. Examine the house. The most important things are the basement and the roof. In the basement examine the beams for dry rot and termites. See how long it will be before the roof must be replaced. Next check the heating system, the electrical wiring and the plumbing. Then you'll want to know about services such as schools, snow plowing, telephones, fire department and finally about your neighbors. If the house is beyond repair, you might still want the farm, especially if you are good at carpentry. Cabins, A-Frames, domes and tepees are all cheaply constructed with little experience. Get the materials from your nearest military installation.

Finally, check out the secondary structures on the land to see how usable they are. If there is a pond, you'll want to see how deep it is for swimming. If there are streams, you'll want to know about the fishing possibilities; and if large wooded areas, the hunting.

In negotiating the final sales agreement, you should employ a lawyer. You'll also want to check out the possibility of negotiating a bank loan for the farm. Don't forget that you have to pay taxes on the land, so inquire from the previous owner or agent as to the tax bill. Usually, you can count on paying about \$50 annually per 40-acre plot.

Finally, check out the federal programs available in the area. If you can learn the ins and outs of the government programs, you can rip off plenty. The Feed-Grain Program of the Department of Agriculture pays you not to grow grain. The Cotton Subsidy Program pays you not to grow cotton. Also look into the Soil Bank Program of the United States Development Association and various Department of Forestry programs which pay you to plant trees. Between not planting cotton and planting trees, you should be able to manage.

Steal This Wiki

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