

How To Live Off Grid For Under \$3,000

2018-08-12 04:10:03 By Bill White

Many of us dream of living off the grid, but a few brave souls actually manage to do it.

Such is the case of Jill Redwood, a bit of a pioneer and environmentalist, who has been living off-grid for 35 years in East Gippsland, Victoria, Australia.

Jill is a bit of a hermit and knew that she wanted to live a hermit lifestyle when she was only five years old. But it took a number of years for her to realize that dream. But in 1983 she was able to begin realizing that dream, buying the 15 acre piece of land she now calls home.

It took her eight years to build her home, which she was able to do for less than \$3,000. While building, she lived in a bark hut with a dirt floor, which still stands today. Even though she doesn't live in it herself, it serves as her "guest home" for people who want to stay with her for a while.

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Jill had never built a house before, but likened it to building chicken coops and goat sheds. All she had to do is "follow the recipe," much like baking a cake. Her home is made of cut timber offcuts from the saw mill, laid over a pole barn type framework. The wood walls are chinked with a mixture of cow patties and lime, just like settlers would have done a century and a half ago.

Actually, much of what she does harkens back to those days, where people lived a simpler life and were much more self-sufficient than we are today. There are no electrical lines going to her home, no phone lines and no city water. What sewage she has is gathered in a chamber pot and buried; she doesn't even have what we would call a regular outhouse.

Much of her home looks old; not because it is, but because she's a perpetual packrat. She's always collecting odds and ends of things, thinking that they will be useful someday. Since she rarely goes into town anymore, much of that was probably gathered back when she lived amongst other people, before buying the property she has built her home upon.

She says "it's amazing the things you can find people throwing out", collecting those things and repurposing them. Most of what she owns has been attained that way or bought second-hand. She doesn't let anything go to waste.

In this she is like our ancestors as well. There wasn't a garbage problem back in the 1800s, because people reused everything. The burlap sack from the potatoes became a towel. The crock the butter came in was refilled with more butter. Canning was mostly done in jars, which could be used over and over again. Little became waste, as it could always be used for something.

Living Off Grid

While Jill Redwood lives off grid, she's not totally out of touch. A large solar array provides her with power for the things she needs. This includes her computer and internet connection, which allow her to work part-time as a freelance writer. It doesn't take a whole lot of hours to make the roughly \$80 per week that she needs to meet her needs. While she recognizes that her off grid lifestyle is a bit

extreme, she also thinks that most people could get by with much less, especially much less waste.

The power generated by her solar array also provides lighting at night, allows her to run a radio and use her food processor. When the sun has been unusually bright, she can even run her washing machine, "a real luxury" which saves her from having to wash her clothes by hand.

All the power in her home comes either from the sun or from burning wood. Passive solar heating provides her with part of her heat, while her large, cast-iron wood-burning stove finishes the task. She also cooks on that stoves, as well as allowing the boiler in it to provide her with hot water.

Jill has two water sources she uses, rainwater capture and the nearby stream. One of the major costs in building her home was the purchase of the corrugated metal for her roof. But this also provides an excellent way to capture water, which goes into a cistern behind her house. Water can also be pumped into that cistern from a small water wheel, which she can raise up out of the water when she doesn't need it. The water from that stream is so clean; she doesn't even need to purify it.

Almost all of the food that Ms. Redwood eats comes from her garden and orchard. She can't understand why more people don't grow their own food, preferring it to the processed food in the supermarket, which she disdains. Everything is fresh, providing an extremely healthy diet, which she attributes her superb health to.

She also keeps chickens and goats, providing her with eggs and milk. She is also able to make her own cheese from the goat's milk. At times, she has so much food that she sells some of it at a roadside stand, allowing people to pay on the honor system.

Much of the rest of what she grows is canned and put by to get her through the winter. She makes her own jams, pickles, juices and sauces, as well as drying fruit. Looking at the pictures of her garden, I'd say she's an excellent gardener. In this, she has already managed to provide for herself what most of us struggle to do.

There are a few exceptions to this though. On her rare forays into the city, Jill buys olive oil, flour and chocolate, a few basic necessities. Other than that, the garden dictates what she has on her menu. She even manages to eat from her garden in the wintertime, when most people think that there's nothing growing.

<https://vimeo.com/109995031>

Surrounded by Animals

While Jill enjoys the hermit lifestyle, she's really not that much of a loner. She's just your typical introvert, who doesn't like crowds of people. But she doesn't seem to mind being surrounded by crowds of animals and has over 60 animals living with her on her property. In addition to the chickens and goats, she has dogs and horses, who seem to be her best friends.

One of the advantages to her animal friends is their faithfulness. She's never had a breakup with an animal. They're always honest and they don't come with the emotional baggage that humans do. It is much easier for her to form lasting relationships with those animals.

A nature lover, Ms. Redwood quickly became disenchanted with society, as she saw how it was destroying the things that she loved. This led to her desire to become a hermit, living in a place where

she can enjoy the forest and the animals.

One big lesson that I think we could all take away from looking at Redwood's lifestyle, is that like the American Indians, he lives in harmony with nature. You could almost think that she was part of it. While her house and other things are clearly tools of man, she is very much in touch with the world around her. Things that might be a struggle for others are merely everyday for her.

Ready for Any Disaster

While there is nothing to indicate that Jill Redwood is a prepper or survivalist, she is definitely a survivor. This woman probably wouldn't even notice if a TEOTWAWKI event were to happen, as it wouldn't affect her at all. As long as she could continue getting clean water from her river and raise fruits and vegetables in her garden, she would go on living, just like she does now, as if nothing had happened.

This is another lesson that I think we can all take away from her homestead. A large part of the reason why Jill is able to live such a comfortable life on so little is that she has simplified her life. She doesn't need a lot from the city, so she rarely goes there. She doesn't feel that need to be constantly buying.

Most of what Jill needs, she either grows herself or makes herself. She has a small workshop, with basic tools in it. Obviously, those tools were enough to allow her to build her home, plant her garden and make her outbuildings. I imagine that if we were able to look around a bit, we'd find a whole lot more than she has made herself.

Her scavenging has served her well also. Rather than buying things, she uses what others no longer need. There is absolutely no sign of poverty of any sort in the pictures I've seen of her home, yet just about everything in it came to her used. She is a woman who has learned how to use things well and is content to live that sort of a lifestyle.



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