

After the Bug Out

We all know that bugging out and being ready to bug out, is an important part of prepping.

I've seen countless articles about building a bug out bag through the years, along with countless lists about what to put in them. Most of those are pretty similar, but they all seem to have an item or two that the author of that list thinks is important to have, and which others have ignored.

Which of us doesn't want to have that proverbial cabin in the woods, someplace we can take our family to, when everything else falls apart? For that matter, it would be nice to have that cabin, even with everything going good. Who doesn't need a place to get away to? But having it set up to be a survival retreat, when everything else goes south, definitely makes owning that cabin more than worthwhile, even if we don't get to get away every weekend.

The tricky part about that isn't so much the cabin, that's just expensive. It's stockpiling the cabin, making sure it's ready to use as a survival retreat. It's hard to stockpile supplies in a remote place and even harder to make sure that those supplies are secure. So even while bugging out, our minds would be filled with questions of how we'll find the retreat, once we get there.

Then there's the indomitable bug out vehicle. If I had a dollar for every fancy tactical vehicle or tricked-out truck I've seen pictures of, I might be able to afford buying one of those beauties for myself. But I have to go with what I drive; which is really what most people use.

So, assuming you can afford it all, you buy yourself that little cabin in the woods, the fancy bug out vehicle and build bug out bags for your family. Then, the inevitable day comes, a disaster strikes and you bug out, leaving town before they

call a general evacuation and making it to your bug out retreat. Even then, it probably took you two or three days to get there, between roads being blocked with traffic, difficulty in finding fuel and trying to avoid people by going off-road whenever possible.

The question is, what are you going to find, once you get there?

What Will You See?

One of the big problems with owning such a retreat is keeping it safe from harm. Any property which is left unguarded is likely to attract attention. While some people will be satisfied with taking a look and seeing it locked, others will see that shiny new lock as a challenge. They'll want to see what's inside that might be worth their while. If anything, that desire will be even stronger during a time of crisis, than it would be otherwise.

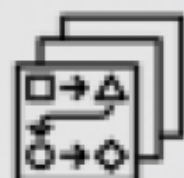
It's one thing if someone gets into your cabin and spends the night there; but it's something else entirely if they start stealing things from you or even clean out your stockpile of supplies. For that matter, there's always the possibility of someone having taken over your cabin, claiming "squatter's rights" to it. Even if there is any law enforcement around, it will be hard to get them out to your place and even harder to get them to do anything. They may just refer you to the courts, especially if they're already overwhelmed with the situation.

Arriving at your retreat is a touchy time; one to be approached with caution. Rather than just driving up as if everything is fine, I'd recommend scouting it out from the protection of the woods first. If everything looks okay, then that scout can call in the troops, while remaining hidden as a sniper, in an overwatch position.

If anyone is there, expect a confrontation. The question is just how bad that confrontation becomes. That will depend in part on how tough the intruders are and how tough you can make them think you are. I don't think this would be the time to walk in acting like the neighbors just dropped in for tea. On the other hand, I wouldn't go in with guns blazing either. You want to go in with the confidence and authority that's due you as the owner, ready to deal with whatever you may find.

SIMPLE STEPS FOR A SHTF PLAN

So you can be ready for anything.



1 PLAN NOW

The best time to prepare is before an emergency.



2 ASSESS WHAT HAPPENED

Get as much information about the current situation as possible.

3 COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Make sure they're ok and decide if you can pool together to set up some neighborhood security



4 MAKE SHELTER IF YOU BUG OUT OR SECURE HOME

Whether you are bugging out or bugging in, you need to set up and establish safe shelter.

5 KNOW HOW LONG WILL SUPPLIES LAST

Use your inventory to make a plan for water and meals to see how far you can stretch it.

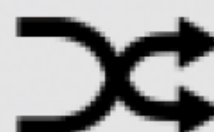


6 HAVE BOOKS ON SURVIVAL SKILLS

They can show you how to start a fire, filter water, and more.

7 KEEP YOUR PLAN FLEXIBLE

Events can change rapidly, so you want to be ready to make changes on the fly if necessary.



That probably means going in with guns in hand, even if they're not pointed at anyone. After all, you want to be ready, but not necessarily antagonistic. If there's anyone there, you want to get them to move along, not become the first residents to start your own boot hill.

Of course, there's an even worse possibility; that someone has burned down your cabin. While I personally don't think that likely, accidents do happen and people do cruel things. I merely mention it as a possibility to be considered, just like we consider everything else that can go wrong.

Let's Back Up a Minute

What you find when you get there begins long before your arrival. It even starts long before your need to bug out. Much of what you find and what condition you find it in, is going to depend on how well you prepared your survival retreat for that eventuality.

Knowing that you're going to be leaving your retreat unguarded should be a major factor in the design and construction of your retreat. While it is basically impossible to build a structure that can't be broken into, there are a lot of things that can be done to make it more difficult. Make your cabin hard enough to get into and there's a good chance that it will be left alone.

What I'm talking about here goes way beyond locking windows and installing deadbolts. While those are important for keeping a burglar from breaking into your home; they're not likely to do much in this situation, where there are no neighbors to hear breaking glass. If you want to keep people out of your survival retreat, you're going to need things like iron bars and extra-heavy locks.

Even with making your survival retreat as secure as possible, there's no guarantee that it will keep a determined thief out.

So you'll want to make sure that any survival gear and supplies are stored in a way as to make them even harder to get to. Go ahead and put some food in the cabin, to act as bait, but hide everything else someplace more secure. What sort of more secure?

- Finding a nearby cave and turning it into your root cellar, preferably with a hidden door that is also armored.
- Using a 20' shipping container as a supply room, assuming you can get one in there. The locking system makes breaking in very difficult, especially if you use four different sorts of heavy-duty locks, so that they can't use the same trick to get them all open.
- Burying your supplies in a series of caches around the site; splitting things up, so that even if they find one or two, you'll still have plenty more.

Getting supplies to your survival retreat and securing them may actually be a bigger task than building the shelter itself, especially if you bury supplies in caches. But if you don't do something that drastic, how can you be sure that everything will be there when you return?

Once You've Arrived

Okay, so you've arrived at your survival retreat, made sure that nobody had taken it over and kicked out the field mice who set up housekeeping in your bed. Now you can just lean back and relax, right?

Wrong.

The first thing you're going to want to do when you arrive and make sure that your retreat is still yours is basically the same as setting up camp on the trail. You'll need to make sure that your shelter is snug and dry for the night, make sure you

have enough fuel to burn and start a fire. Then you'll need to make sure you have water or haul it from your nearby water source and fix yourself a meal, before turning in for the night. You'll probably need some rest by then.

Don't forget to lock the door, check everyone's guns and have a defensive plan in place, just in case you get attacked that night. While the chances of that may be slim, you won't be the only ones bugging out. How do you know that nobody followed you from your home, knowing or guessing where you were going? Even if they didn't follow you, you don't need someone stumbling on your cabin and deciding to take it from you either.

From this point on, you're in survival mode. It doesn't matter how much supplies you have or how well you left your retreat prepared; if you felt a need to go to your survival retreat, then you have to assume you're going to be there a while and that you're going to have nothing else but your wits, your knowledge and whatever you've got stockpiled at your retreat to help you survive.

While there will be much to be done, one of the top priorities is being prepared to defend your retreat. If you're bugging out, you have to assume that others are too. While it would be nice to think that everyone has someplace to go and will leave you alone, that's an unrealistic expectation. Chances are good that someone will find you and you don't know if they will be friendly.

Think through the different ways your retreat might come under attack and how you would defend it. Are there things you can do to make it more defensible, like dragging some deadfalls into place, to use as a defensive barrier? Do you have or can you create a defensive position that's up high, giving you an advantage over the attackers? Is there somewhere safe, like a root cellar under the cabin, for non-combatants to hide out while a fight is going on?

It would be a good idea to start out the next day by taking inventory. Hopefully you've kept a running inventory all along, so what you're really doing is making sure that everything you thought was there is actually there. People will steal anything, firewood and rain barrels are no exception.

The main reason for taking that inventory is actually finding what might have been stolen. If something is missing, then it will be necessary to come up with a way of replacing it or of doing what that item was supposed to do, in a different way. If rain barrels are gone, then do you have other containers that can be used or does that leave you having to haul water from the stream? If firewood has been taken, how long will it take you to cut more?

You should have a pretty good idea when you get there of how long you'll be there. After all, bugging out because a hurricane is coming isn't the same as bugging out because of a breakdown in law and order. Even so, never assume that you'll be able to go back when you planned. Things might change.

What I mean by that is don't decide you're on a vacation and just live off your stockpile. Rather, try to live as much as you can, as if you didn't have that stockpile. Go fishing for dinner, rather than eating food that you have stored. That way, the food you have in your stockpile will last longer.

Keeping in mind that you might be there for a while, it might be necessary to cut some more firewood. Families who use wood for the normal means of heating their homes typically go through four to six cords of wood per winter; and that's good hardwood, not softwood. While a little softwood is useful, especially for starting fires, it doesn't hold as much energy density as hardwood does.

Finally, start thinking about the long-term. How are you going to continue feeding yourself? Did you bring seed along to

garden with? If so, the sooner you can get some seed in the ground, the sooner you'll have fresh vegetables to eat. As with fishing, that will make your stockpile last longer, providing much needed energy to your family.

What's the End Game?

One big question that must be answered is what's your end game? I realize that can't be answered now, because we don't know the reason why you're going to bug out to your survival retreat. But if you ever have to, that's got to be part of your thinking. Are you going to be moving there permanently, because you have no other choice? Is the bug out merely temporary to avoid a current disaster? That's something you're going to have to be thinking about from the beginning, so that you can plan accordingly.

There are few disasters that are so severe that they will cause a permanent or even semi-permanent collapse of society. But they do exist. Except in those situations, it makes more sense to plan on returning from your survival retreat when it is safe to, than to spend the rest of your life there. Even if you would be perfectly happy living out the rest of your life in the woods, that doesn't mean your family would be. Who will your children marry and where will they live?

We humans are social creatures. That means that being in relationship with others is just about as essential to our long-term survival as having enough water to drink. While we may be able to survive a few months or even a few years by ourselves, for society to continue, we need to gather together with others, building community and birthing the next generation.