

Establishing a safe haven

“A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself;
the simple pass on and are punished.” — Proverbs 27:12

“Several nineteenth-century philosophers referred to people who emerged from hiding after a national emergency as ‘the remnant’. The remnant’s role, these philosophers felt, was to provide intellectual horsepower for national reconstruction.” - The Modern Survival Retreat by Ragnar Benson

A primary element of any emergency preparedness plan is the establishment of a safe haven. This haven should be located a place where one can quickly go to in the event of war, natural disaster, governmental collapse, or other unexpected catastrophe.

The traumatic events of the past six years have already convinced many Americans that emergency preparedness and a well-stocked hideaway is a godsend in disaster situations. Since 2000 we have witnessed two fraudulent Presidential elections, a major attack on 9.11.2001, the subsequent rise of American totalitarianism, the U.S. invasion of the Middle East, massive hurricane destruction in the Gulf Coast States, the dismal failure of U.S. emergency services, a catastrophic Tsunami in Indonesia and Thailand, world economic instability, the militarization of China, rapid devaluation of U.S. currency, the effects of global warming, increasingly extreme weather, energy price gouging, the emergence of West Nile Virus, SARS and now Bird Flu in human populations.

You’ve got the idea. If natural and man-made disasters continue this escalating trend of frequency and severity, and statistics indicate that this is indeed the case, a well-stocked sanctuary may become essential for one’s personal survival.

Expect the best, but plan for the worst

In the unlikely event that worse-case scenarios unexpectedly cease, the sun comes out and birds begin to sing tra-la-la... having established a safe haven will continually insure one’s peace of mind, and, as a bonus, provide an ideal destination for weekend getaways and extended vacations. Creating a safe haven is a win-win situation.

It is best to establish a safe haven apart from one’s full-time residence, especially if the residence is located in or near an urban area. If an separate haven is not feasible, do whatever is possible to enhance your home’s levels of emergency preparedness and self-reliance.

The best havens are in rural or semi-rural areas, preferably near organic farmland, abundant water, and natural resources. Cities become death traps in times of natural disaster or pandemics.

Buggin’ Out

If at some point you are forced to evacuate your home, have complete emergency kits, camp gear, and supplies for 30 days packed and ready to grab-and-go. Make sure that your car’s gas tank is always full, and have a couple of 5 gallon gas cans filled and ready as well.

Always have escape routes to nearby rural areas plotted and mapped out in case of emergencies. Make sure all family members are aware of the destination, and know how to get there in case they become separated.

An ideal haven should be no more than a few hours travel from one’s home, and as already mentioned, should be located in a rural or semi-rural area. Rural areas are rich in natural resources : food, water, fish, wild game and firewood.

Your sanctuary should be well-stocked with food: canned and dry goods, medicines, bedding

and have a reliable source of pure drinking water. The actual structure should be weather-tight, have a renewable source of heat, be securable, and most of all; be discretely located and safe from intruders.

A good sanctuary comes in a variety of forms. It can be a RV, camper, travel trailer, boat or other mobile accommodation (with a good place to park it near suitable natural resources). It can be vacation cabin, a rural farmhouse, or other permanent structure. It can be a well-developed campsite, a temporary structure made of local materials, or even a dry and snug cave decked out for camping.

Regardless of the form your haven takes, the important thing is to establish and secure it in advance of real emergencies. If you wait until trouble starts to start seeking sanctuary, it will be too late. When major disasters strike, millions may be searching for safe places to run to, and the competition will be fierce.

Although it may seem like a good idea initially to “go it alone” in times of trouble, when the rule is “every man for himself,” the reality is that solitary survivalism works better in theory than in actual reality. When faced with extended periods of emergency, the support of a cooperative community infrastructure becomes essential. “No man is an island in himself.” We need each others skills, resources and companionship to get through really hard times.

So I repeat: A personal haven should be located in a stable agricultural community of small family farms, and entrepreneurs. It should in a state, county or town that has opposed the Patriot Act. (<http://www.aclu.org/safefree/resources/17102res20040610.html>) It should have access to essential natural resources, and have a robust alternative economy. Finally, the best place for a haven is one that has few policemen, and even fewer lawyers.

Get the heck out of unsafe areas!

It is essential that individuals living in major urban centers, near military bases, prisons, nuclear facilities, oil refineries, or other strategic military targets locate and establish safe havens far removed from these vulnerable areas. In the event of natural disaster or totalitarian takeover one can evacuate to their haven, and wait out the hard times in relative safety and comfort.

If possible, it is best to leave the cities behind permanently. Urban areas will quickly descend into living hells if predicted worse-case scenarios actually come to pass. No one will want to remain in the cities when food and water run low, or a major epidemic breaks out. By then it will be too late to flee. Mandatory quarantines, travel restrictions and fuel shortages will restrict the evacuation of urban residents. Remember Hurricane Katrina?

So if you can move permanently to a rural community, do so now. It takes time and a lot of effort to find a suitable place, relocate, integrate yourself and then fully adapt to the rural lifestyle. But it may be the best choice available.

Locating a Safe Haven

How can readers locate a suitable rural area for establishing a personal haven? Which areas are safe and supportive? Which places should be avoided?

Many factors come into play when searching for the “perfect” refuge. Such a search takes diligent research, and finding the perfect area can be a real challenge in these times of overpopulation and inflated property values.

The following strategy will help you to begin this quest. The materials and resources you will need are:

- A good general map of your region that shows typography, roads, cities, rivers, bodies of water, etc. A ideal one would be a National Geographic Map of your region.
- A selection of supplementary maps such as *National Geographic's: Natural Hazards on*

North America (N.G. July, 1998), *The Shaping of a Continent* (N.G. August 1985), *Living on the edge* (N.G. April 1995) or *Precious Resource Water* (N.G. November 1993, etc. These excellent maps are easily found in used book stores. A good online Hazard map resource is Richard Fleetwood's archive: <http://members.aol.com/rafleet/hazmaps.htm>

- A compass for drawing arcs and circles.
- A ruler and calculator for figuring mileage.
- Color markers, pens, and plenty of Post-It Notes.
- Internet access / library access

Directions:

1. On the general map of your region, draw compass circles (in red ink) 100 miles in diameter from the center of major urban areas, prisons, nuclear facilities, military bases and ports. You don't want to establish a haven inside of any of these circled areas.

2. Make a list of potential small towns and rural communities outside of the circled red areas. These should be within a few hours travel time from your home. If you have friends or acquaintances in these places, all the better as they can help you get established.

3. Use www.ePodunk.com. and www.hometownlocator.com to evaluate the small communities. These sites provide in-depth information databases on more than 40,000 communities around the country. Their listings include geocoded information about census data, demographic and income data, parks, schools, libraries, hospitals, airports, hotels, environmental conditions, local newspapers, media outlets, employment, maps, coordinates and aerial photos. These are excellent resources for evaluating potential havens. Circle likely locations on your map in green ink.

4. Use the internet to access the ACLU master list of States cities and communities have banned the enforcement of the Patriot Acts.

<http://www.aclu.org/safefree/resources/17102res20040610.html>. These are good places to consider relocating to, as they indicate a more enlightened local government and populace. Outline these states, counties and towns on your master map in blue ink.

5. Go online and study the Red/Blue/Purple state/county maps of the 2004 Elections: (<http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/PurpleAmericaPosterAll50.gif>). The blue states and counties are good places to consider relocating to. Outline these places on your map in blue.

6. Locate areas where organic farming is popular. Research towns that host thriving farmers markets, Food COOPS, Natural food stores, community currencies, alternative energy and progressive governments.

7. Calculate the population size, then divide that by the total number of police + lawyers for each of the potential sanctuary locations. The lower the ratio of cops and lawyers to the population, the more independent, self governing and civilized the local populace is likely to be. The inverse is especially true for communities that host State and Federal Prisons and military bases.

8. Analyze areas of potential natural and manmade hazards in your proposed haven locations: volcanic, seismic, tornado, tsunami, winter storm, forest fire, drought, etc. and note these on the master map. Use specialty maps to identify these hazards. Pay close attention to coastal areas. These are great places to live, until a tsunami strikes.

9. When you have chosen potential locations for your haven, plan a vacation/road trip to visit these places. No amount of research can compare to actually visiting a place, talking to locals, and getting the flavor of a community. Make sure to visit the local public library, food COOPs and health food stores. These will tell you a lot about the vitality, and sustainability of a community.

TIPS: Use Post-It notes to mark specific features on the master map. Your finished master map

should help you to choose several possible locations for establishing your safe haven.

When researching your haven, be discrete. Try to avoid leaving a paper trail that could lead others to your secret haven. Keep the existence of your haven secret to all but a choice few. When evacuating to the haven do so quietly. Do not tell anyone outside of your immediate family, and make sure that they keep quiet about it as well.

While you are visiting your prospective haven, begin by establishing a friendly rapport with locals. But don't tell them that you intend on moving there. Locals often have a "visit, spend your money, and then go home!" attitude about strangers and tourists. Let them be surprised when you are already relocated.

An ideal community probably doesn't exist, but there are many out there that will meet the majority of one's essential needs. If your rural neighbors are friendly and helpful, all the better.

Summarizing the process

To successfully establish a private, independent and sustainable haven, choose the location carefully. The haven site should be positioned well above sea level, flood plains and rivers valleys.

The sanctuary should not have an actual address, or hard wired phone lines for security reasons. An anonymous cell phone, such as can be had from Cingular *Go-Phone* is better, but can theoretically still be traced to your location. One registered in a proxy name is a good solution.

An ideal haven must fulfill certain requirements. It should be at least 100 miles from an urban center, military base, prison, etc. It should have: a year-round source of potable water, a garden area, good solar access,. There should be decent access to the place, via public roads and easements. It should be discretely located for maximum privacy.

Dependable transportation should be fueled and ready to go at all times, especially in times of impending crisis or rumored evacuations. Emergency kits and supplies should be pre-packed, and located near the vehicle for quick loading. When it is time to go, there will be no time to waste. Make sure to rotate your consumable supplies every three to six months.

Stock your haven with basic necessities: food, water, kitchen, propane, kerosene, vitamins, medicines, first aid kits, bedding, clothing, radio, laptop, air filters, water storage and filtration, self defense items, emergency power system (and backups), recreational books, videos, laptop, games etc. Make the facilities as discrete, secure, self-reliant and as well stocked with supplies as your time and money allow.

Map out several routes to and from your haven. Drive these escape routes for practice. Record the times and fuel consumption, etc. Stockpile extra fuel and make sure that your transportation is ready to go in an emergency. Pull together emergency travel kits, stocked and be ready to grab on short notice.

Once you are occupying your haven, keep security in mind. Use different routes for traveling to and from your haven. Always check for unwanted snoops and visitors before entering or exiting. Coming and going at night, and in the early morning is a good strategy. If locals get curious about you, have a plausible alibi ready and be able to back it up.

Establishing a safe retreat is a source of great comfort and security in uncertain times. Once safely relocated to your sanctuary, you can live there comfortably, until the emergency has passed.

A haven is excellent insurance in the event of worse-case scenarios. Even if it is never needed for an emergency, if disasters never materialize, you will still have established a first class retreat, getaway or vacation spot.

Creating the haven

If you do not have access to a vacation cabin or other established hideaway, then it becomes

necessary to locate a suitable location and create one to fit your needs. One can adapt an existing structure, or build one from scratch.

As mentioned earlier, a refuge can be mobile such as is possible with a trailer, RV or a boat; all of which usually have life support systems built in. By adding a couple of solar panels, batteries, and a water catchment system, one's mobile refuge can be enhanced considerably, thereby increasing self-reliance, comfort and utility. Mobile refuges are easily fitted out, and offer good cover stories; "Just on my way to bible camp sir." or "Just traveling through Canada to Alaska officer." If your mobile hideaway gets discovered, or the location becomes too popular, you can always move to another. Boats have the advantage of not needing a road to travel on, but these days are prone to getting frequently boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard.

If the haven is stationary (unlike a boat or a trailer), you must have a suitable location to place it on. A piece of land can be purchased, rented, or borrowed (or squatted upon as is done throughout Canada and Arizona). Squatting rights can also be acquired in trade for care taking, or for other services rendered.

Alternative architecture and recycled building materials

There are many ways to construct a temporary or permanent refuge dwelling using locally available materials. Options include: cob (straw, sand and dried cattle dung), rammed earth, stack wood and straw bale construction. All of these methods can be investigated by Google-ing the terms online.

I personally love the Yurt. It is a lightweight, portable, and sturdy round structure. Yurts can be constructed primarily from recycled materials. They are quite cozy year-round if properly insulated, and with a good source of heat.

In the Pacific Northwest where I live, alternative architecture was very popular in the 1970s-1980s. This was before local building codes grew to the thickness of phone books.

Alternative structures were often constructed of locally produced or recycled materials. Many of the styles are well adapted for the construction of a small cabin or refuge. Variations include: traditional stone and timber, dwellings covered with cedar roofs and shingles, insulated yurts, domes, straw bale homes, cob construction, stacked wood construction, tree houses, boat houses, and many other variations. As most of these dwellings were designed and created on limited budgets by the residents themselves, the successful ones bear close scrutiny.

The best examples of local alternative architecture share certain design criteria. They are built from readily available and inexpensive materials, and fulfill the functions necessary for health, safety, and comfortable use. Many of the materials are recycled, such as beams and planking, doors, hardware, and windows. Others materials such as stone, clay, limestone, sand, gravel, straw and cedar are available locally and in abundance.

As windows, doors and roofs are the primary areas of thermal loss in a home, these should be well constructed and insulated. Windows should be impact resistant, have double pane glass, and be well sealed. Insulated shades and curtains can be added to the inside of the windows.

If rain water catchment is to be used as part of the water system, make sure the roofing materials won't contaminate the water. Enamelled steel, ceramic and concrete tile roofs seems to be the best. Asphalt shingles are the worst because they contaminate the catchment water with oil and tar. A roof washer (pre filter system) should be used prior to the water flowing into the cisterns or barrels. See the author's roof washer design in the chapter *Pure Water*.

Catchment water should be stored in underground concrete or stone and mortar cisterns, or in food grade opaque plastic barrels. Catchment water should always be filtered prior to drinking.

Doors to the haven should be thick wood, sturdy, heavily hinged, and weather-stripped. They should always open outward. Don't use ordinary glass in the doors: use plex, lexan or double pane glass with wire mesh for durability and security concerns.

Heating, propane and electricity systems need to be designed with safety in mind. All

materials should be appropriate, in good repair, and all precautions should be taken with their use.

My favorite alternative construction method is a combination of cob and straw bale construction. This method was used to construct a temporary building and sustainability exhibit that our *Navigating Our Future* organization hosted at a local County Fair.



Cob and straw bale building with rainwater catchment system.

There are cob cottages throughout the British Isles that are hundreds of years old and still inhabited. An excellent free straw bale construction manual in Acrobat .pdf format can be downloaded from Amazon Nails: <http://www.strawbalefutures.org.uk/pdf/strawbaleguide.pdf>

Another superb underground dwelling is the Sannish pit house. These are quickly constructed and would be an excellent choice for a refuge. I saw one reconstructed at the Provincial Museum of British Columbia and have been fascinated with this design ever since.

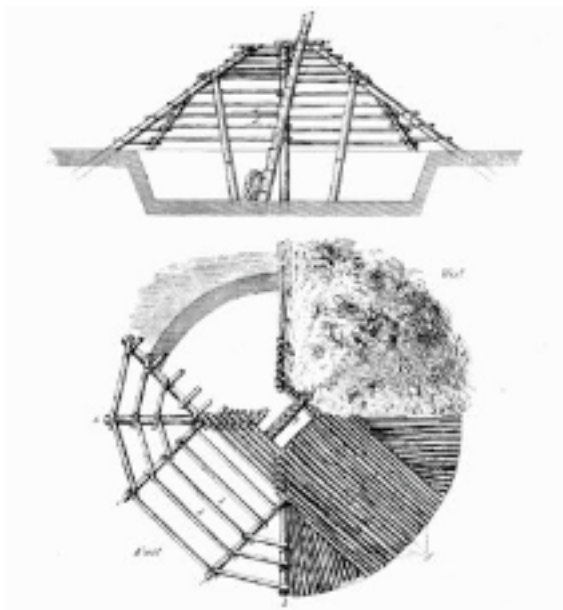


Illustration: Pit House Cross Section by Archaeologist James Teit / 1890s - courtesy American Museum of Natural History

Underground dwellings can be warm, snug, invisible from the air, fireproof and easily concealed. These structures work best when built on higher ground with good drainage. They should be constructed on south facing slopes (except in the southwest).

When going subterranean, make sure that there is adequate flow-through air ventilation, heat, and light. Conceal the air vents and stovepipes as well as possible.

An RV or travel trailer can also be parked beneath a hastily constructed underground (dugout) shelter. This protects, insulates and conceals the RV. The dugout can be roofed-over with local logs and recycled lumber, waterproofed with tarps, and then covered over with soil. When a ground cover is grown on the top, the structure blends into its natural surroundings and is virtually invisible from the air. The front should be framed out and covered with clear plastic or recycled windows for light. This helps to regulate the inside temperature. Landscaping using local flora can help to camouflage the entrance.

Make sure there is an alternative exit such as a short tunnel out of your underground haven. This makes a good emergency exit, and also facilitates ventilation.

Another excellent and low cost haven can be constructed for \$1500 or less by using recycled building materials: Jeff Milstein's 10' X 10' summer house with two sleeping lofts. The design was featured in Family Circle Magazine in 1980, and was reprinted in *Lester Walker's The Book of Tiny Houses*. Milstein's Summer House is constructed from bolt-together 4' X 8' wall panels. So it can be assembled quickly, and easily moved. Another great source on tiny houses is: <http://www.tinyhouses.net/directory.html>

When building a haven the design needs to be well constructed, and how shall I put this politely?... also adhere to the basic laws of physics. By designing and constructing a haven yourself, it can be tailored to fit your specific requirements. But it should invariably be sturdy, rainproof, well insulated, and safe.

A primary Bauhaus School design maxim states that: "Form follows function." This means that any structure that one designs (the form) should fulfill the needs (function) of the inhabitants. In other words: What we design and build should function well and provide for all of our basic needs. It must be able to shelter us from the weather, provide sleeping, cooking, and bathing facilities.

The haven to have good air circulation, a well vented wood stove for heating and a propane stove for cooking. Other options may include passive solar space heating, and a solar hot water system.

It should have good natural lighting, and a combination of electrical lights and kerosene lamps. There is nothing worse than a cold dark cabin for months on end.

The kitchen area needs to be a well equipped, and capable of preparing meals, dehydrating and canning garden and orchard produce, as well as for dressing out fish, poultry. There needs to be a good double basin sink for washing dishes and cleaning up.

A sanctuary should have a good solid roof, double pane windows for lighting, a simple water system (with filtration) to deliver H₂O to the kitchen and bathroom, as well as drainpipes. There needs to be a self-contained electrical system that meets the basic needs of the inhabitants, preferably with both a primary and an alternate source of electrical power. Example: photovoltaics (with battery storage) and a small backup generator. There should be a work area with a solid table, tools, spare parts, materials and supplies, everything that will be needed to service and maintain the facility.

The haven should be secure, with strong doors, locks and thick Plexiglas or Lexan™ windows for security reasons. It is good to have a clear view of all approaches to the haven, so you can see who's coming, and make sure the coast is clear before departing. Wireless security

cameras are getting so cheap that one might consider getting one to keep an eye peeled outside of the haven. I saw a \$68 dollar system at Costco last week that included a color LCD screen, and a mini camera with night vision.

Safety systems such as first aid kits, smoke alarms, fire extinguishers need to be installed, and kept up to date.

Parting thoughts

In these uncertain times a well constructed, discrete and secure sanctuary can foster peace of mind and security. It can also be a life saver. A well-stocked refuge in a safe rural location is the best insurance that money can buy. It can provide for your families needs in a time of crisis, and facilitates self-reliance and sustainability.

If worse-case-scenarios do occur, a haven is the best insurance you can have. It provides a safe place to live until the crisis passes. If we are lucky enough to never experience a natural disaster or man made calamity the haven also makes a great summer hideaway and vacation spot.