

Making Ripples

Homesteader's Guide to Finding Land

by Amanda Bancroft

"Could you shed some light on your land search process? We are searching for affordable land, but feel we are over our heads because we have no experience investing in land, the legalese can sound like gibberish, we don't want debt, and are hoping to avoid building codes in a location that's a good cultural fit with an economy that could support us long-term." -Simone

"Are there good places somewhat near Fayetteville where one would look for raw land to build, where there aren't building codes? I have spent a lot of time looking at online listings, but you really don't get much from that..." -Daniel Hodgson

Finding raw land can seem like a quest for the fountain of youth, particularly if you're searching for land across the country or state. It's much better to move to an area first, renting a house in the country and feeling out your options before buying land. Everyone's method is a bit different, but there are some tips that can help just about anyone.

I've gleaned most of my knowledge from [Country Property: Dirt Cheap](#) by Ralph C. Turner. One of his best tips is selecting the city you want to live closest to (where you work, where your kids go to school, etc) and using that city as the center, draw a circle around it on the map with a radius of the maximum distance you're willing to commute into town. Hypothetically, your dream land will exist somewhere within that circle. Turner's most unique strategy was canoeing down a river, selecting interesting plots he passed, and looking up details on the property, even contacting the owner to see if they were willing to sell!

Strategies for Finding Cheap Rural Land

- put "wanted to buy" ads in the local newspaper
- search the classifieds in several area papers and weekly shoppers
- visit the assessor's office to find land on aerial maps and verify ownership
- make a list of your ideal land features
- visit local brokers to compare listings
- get a topographical map to show unpaved roads and terrain
- drive around rural areas talking to everyone you see
- make a flyer about what you're looking to buy, posting it at gas stations
- attend rural auctions and gatherings of farmers (such as church)

Some readers do recommend using a realtor to find land, and checking online listings, despite the disorganized, generic appearance of some websites. This is tricky when you want to build sustainably or do something alternative, but if you remain consistent and assertive, you might find a realtor who supports your values. It's much better to hire an expert in the field who knows the legalese and paperwork process, avoiding issues in the future.

Tips aside, I believe that the best factors in determining success are the non-tangible ones: determination, critical thinking, a solutionary mindset, genuine curiosity for life, and appreciation for non-monetary resources such as social capital.

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