The "Bug Out" Bag or "Grab" Bag.

Matt S June 14th 2016.

The "Bug Out" bag or "Grab" bag is an essential item to have if you are seriously considering emergency or disaster preparedness. So what is a bug out bag and why should you consider having one or more?

I have no idea where the concept of the bug out bag came from (or "grab bag" as we are likely to call it here in New Zealand), but rest assured at some time someone was caught up in an urgent disaster/emergency, and figured out afterward that it would have been useful to have had some basic emergency survival items ready at hand.

There is a small mountain of information out there on "Bug Out" bags however YOU the reader are going to have to decide what you are going need for your particular situation. It will be useful to take in to consideration budget (what you can afford), availability of items, your climate, how far you work and travel from home and your local laws.

You may be able to put a bug out bag together from things you have around your home at little or no cost or you may be able to do something a little more elaborate depending on your circumstances. My suggestion is that you keep it reasonably simple as it is a means for keeping you alive and able to survive for a few days. If you go any bigger you will either need to do some serious time at the gym or consider pulling a small trailer behind you.

What is the "bug out" bag intended for?

In my opinion it is useful to have one or more bug out bags close by and ready to "grab" in case of emergency. Here in New Zealand we have earthquakes and volcanoes and on occasion, tsunamis. We have quakes on a regular basis, and some of these quakes have been big and devastating. The thing is that we don't
know when these quakes will occur. We may get some warning with volcanoes and possible warning with a tsunami but we may have to move in a big hurry to get away from the danger. If you have a bag that you can grab quickly and bug out with it may save your life. If you have a family then it may be worth considering a bag for each member and the necessary items you may need for each family member. If you have children, especially young children, you may need to ensure a supply of disposable nappies (diapers) and disposable moist wet wipes. Also it would be good to consider a spare supply of medication for those taking this on a regular basis, or needing emergency medication for any allergic reactions, asthma etc.

You are going to have to decide what you can afford for your bug out bag but rule of thumb is that should only really be to get you through 1 to 3 days of an emergency situation. If you need to consider a longer period of survival you may need to look at a more comprehensive plan for survival and well...... that's going to be another article and topic for another time.

So what are the important things that you must have in your bag?

Here are the things that are firstly essential for maintaining life, they are Water, Food, Clothing and Protection.

Water - this item is essential but it weighs quite a bit, and can take up some room in your bag, I would suggest maybe 2 - 4 litres minimum in plastic bottles (glass is better for you but it breaks). Try to locate a clean supply of drinking water if you can. You may want to include a small dropper bottle of household bleach, to purify drinking water you need to add 2 drops per litre (hence the dropper bottle). If you do include bleach in your bag, make sure it is well sealed, maybe inside a couple of small ziplock/sealable bags because you don't want this stuff leaking in your bug out bag.

Food - Food can be relatively simple and inexpensive to put in your bug out bag but you must be aware of expiry dates if it is not long life food. A good cheap source of emergency nutrition would be nut bars. These can be purchased in New Zealand for a few dollars a box and have around 5 to 6 bars per box. Each bar has around 200 calories and they have a shelf life of around 1 year. If you have around $15 to $20 dollars to spend you can buy a brick of long life food blocks that have around 400 calories per block and usually have 9 blocks which can support you for up to 3 days. You can always throw in a few packs of 2 minute noodles, they don't have much nutritional value but they are light and easy to pack and will stave off hunger (throw the flavour sachet away as they are mostly salt and will make you thirsty and dehydrated).

Clothing - The clothing you take with you will be what is on your back at the time and the need to have some good footwear and a warm jacket if likely to get cold. I always have a rain jacket and a small umbrella and a warm sleeveless vest when I go to and from work. If you can put a spare waterproof raincoat and a woollen
jersey/sweater/sleeveless top in your bag that will help to keep you warm if conditions are wet and cold (cotton is useless for keeping you warm in wet conditions) I keep some spare knickers (underwear) and socks in my bag also, a shirt and long trousers would be good if you have room. Put your spare clothes in plastic bags to protect them from the damp, fold them flat or in tight rolls held with rubber bands or elastic straps. I keep a small disposable plastic poncho in my bag as well. Large plastic rubbish bags can also make a good temporary rain protection and can keep the contents of your bag dry if necessary. It may be good to look at the footwear you have also. A good possibility are rubber work boots known as "gummies" or gumboots in New Zealand. They may be known as Wellingtons in other parts of the world. These boots are not going to win you a glamour competition but they have some superior advantages in an emergency situation. They are easy to put on, they are waterproof and warm with the right socks and they are very durable (not the cheap ones though) New Zealand makes a very good brand of gumboot (Skellerup Redbands). They are really awesome value for money and reasonably comfortable to boot (pun intended). They currently retail between $70 to $85 NZ dollars. I have had two pairs of these in the last 25 years and am still on my 2nd pair.

**Protection** - The protection you choose will depend on where you live in the world and the laws that govern what type of protection you can legally have however some of this may go out the window in an emergency disaster situation. In New Zealand we are only able to carry a knife in public if we have a good reason for doing so, I suspect having a knife in a bug out bag would be acceptable. In New Zealand handguns, mace/pepper spray and stun guns are illegal. If your laws allow a handgun and or pepper spray this may be useful. If an emergency disaster situation occurs you will need to be very mindful that people can become unpredictable and dangerous under stress, and they may try to take your stuff or worse, so you need to be ready to defend yourself. I would include a torch in this section under protection. If you have a good sturdy metal LED torch this could be a good club if it has a long enough handle. A torch may be used to temporarily blind someone so you can get away. If you do not have the resources just a simple kitchen knife will do the job, however make sure it has been sharpened. Protection also includes protection from the elements so a small tarpaulin that will cost a few dollars be easy to pack in your bag. A small length of fine rope could be a good option to have to hold the tarpaulin in place also.

It may also be useful to have an extra bag particularly if you have small dependent children with extra disposable nappies and we wipes etc, a few small jars of baby food also and a couple of spoons to go with it and some paper kitchen towels for the spills etc.
So we have discussed the basic things you need (in my opinion) and will now look at **some extras that may be useful** and can afford them.
Matches and or a cigarette lighter may be a useful addition if you have the ability to start a fire as an additional means of staying warm. Cash is a good thing to have also as you may have the ability to use it to buy additional water and food, but don't tell people you have it in your bag. A hat and gloves may also be a good addition and you could stash those in the pockets of your warm jacket. MRE's or Meals Ready to Eat are also a good option if you can afford them. They are around $17 per pack here in New Zealand from the online army surplus store. They have plenty of food in them and could provide rations for a day if used wisely. Medications may be optional (or not in the case of medications that you must take to keep you alive) Have extra puffers for asthma, heart meds, pain relief meds, severe allergic reaction meds, insulin in a cooling bag etc. A First Aid Kit is also high up on the list of things you may want to include. You can get very simple kits for a few dollars or you can include some band aids or make up your own with a few bandages and wound covers. A Small Pop up Tent may be useful as well as they are light, pack away easily and can be carried on your shoulder or strapped to your bug out bag. They can be purchased online in New Zealand for as little as $25 and they beat messing round with a tarpaulin, although I still recommend you keep the tarpaulin for extra waterproofing. A small battery or dynamo operated Radio may be good to have to check out any emergency broadcast instructions in your local area. Some of these devices even have the ability to charge a mobile phone. Things like lip balm, medicated alcohol hand rub, soap and a small towel. Wet wipes, toilet paper (this one could almost be on the must have list LOL), local area topographical maps, a spare mobile phone (an old one that still works will do), sun glasses, reading glasses, a packet of sweets, a tooth brush and some tooth paste, a comb/brush.

Okay the list could go on and I probably have not included some things that could be there, and there may be other items you will include, however this list may cover most things that will eventuate in a few days to keep you alive and a little comfortable.

There will be another instalment on the "Bug Out Bag" at some point soon where I will discuss putting together a bug out bag that will help you survive weeks if not months.
http://survivalcache.com/bug-out-bag/
http://bugoutbagacademy.com/free-bug-out-bag-list/