

Homesteading is a lifestyle choice for American sawmiller

Homesteading is the act (and often, art) of creating a productive and self-sufficient home, and it has made Robert Wells a free and happy man.

Robert and his family have been full-time homesteaders since 2018 when they moved to a rural area in North Carolina. They love living on their remote farm rearing chickens and pigs, growing their own vegetables and hunting deer and squirrels. The Wells family have also constructed barns and other structures with lumber sourced from their woodlot.

Many homesteaders express deep satisfaction with their standard of living and feel that their lifestyle is healthier and more rewarding than more conventional patterns of living. Robert's family is no exception.

Reminisces Robert: "I've always looked up to my Great Grandfather Graham. He always seemed like a man's man and I remember seeing films and pictures of him winter logging with horses. I was amazed every time I got to hear the tales."

Robert has enjoyed an interesting career. He joined the American Army in 1992 and a few years later started working as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician as part of the Bomb Squad and presidential protection detail. Robert served on missions abroad to North Korea, China, Iraq, the UK, and India, plus a few other United States Secret Service missions he isn't at liberty to talk about.

After nearly 24 years serving in the army, Robert retired and started thinking about creating a simpler, more fulfilling life in the woods for his family.

"As a child, I loved being in the forest where it was quiet and I was away from everything," Robert remembered. "I guess I chose to become a homesteader because of what I experienced doing military service. I was traveling the world and living in developing nations, where I encountered more happiness than I do with my former suburban American neighbours. I felt I needed to get away from what the first-world "normal" is."





In preparation for their move to the countryside and new life, the family started learning skills in becoming self-sufficient, such as bread baking and soap making. “My four children go to school but I consider state education to be very basic.

Here at home, we teach them all manner of truly important skills: budgeting, cooking, sewing, canning, hunting, teamwork, logging, home maintenance. The list goes on.”

As a true homesteader, Robert wanted to be able to produce lumber from the trees on his property, for building structures and other projects. So Robert began to research the purchase of a portable sawmill.

Robert explains how he arrived at the JP: “Larger is always nicer but we strive hard to conserve resources and “right-size” everything we own. We are just as careful not to underbuy as we are to overbuy equipment and I expect it to last a very long time so we buy quality. I was convinced the Peterson was the right mill style for us and the JP is the perfect size for our needs. Looking back after a year and a half of operating our JP, I know we absolutely made the right choice. We can harvest very small trees, something that would not be possible with a bandmill.”

“Every time I’ve contacted Peterson I received top-notch customer service... just incredible”

When asked what made him chose a swing blade, Robert says: “My first experience with portable mills was at a show featuring bandsaw manufacturers Hud-son, Wood-Mizer, and Norwood Mills. I researched bandsaw mills for three years to find the best fit for our needs but all of them seemed labor-intensive and limited in capacity. My worn-out shoulders and joints wouldn’t have endured in the long run. We also needed lumber for construction, not just slabs.”

Then Robert heard about Peterson Portable Sawmills and discovered how a swing blade operates. “Once I learned about how the Peterson operates I liked that it created dimensional lumber straight off of the mill. No cants, no turning, no resawing, less labor. Knowing that I’d probably operate the mill alone at times I wanted a physically easier machine to operate. I also liked the capacity over any bandmill I could afford for the homestead.”

MILLER FEATURE



The first project they completed with the JP was to saw lumber for an elevated tree house which would protect their cats from wild coyotes. “My son Matthew and I mill poplar and cherry logs three to four times a week. The logs are from our own 43 acres (17 hectares) of land and the timber is used for all kinds of projects,” said Robert.

The JP has been used to cut lumber for vegetable garden beds and a decorative feature wall for their kitchen. Their current big project involves building an animal shelter to house some goats. The goats will primarily be kept for vegetation control as they live in an overgrown forest of pioneer species.

Two years on, the family are well on their way to becoming fully self-sufficient. “We do not yet use solar or wind-generated power but may get solar power in the future. At present, we try to use as little electricity as possible and are well prepared to make do without electricity completely, so there isn’t much motivation to go solar.”



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“What I enjoy most about the JP is its intuitive mode of operation. I am still learning the intricacies of various wood species but I feel like I get just a little bit better and more efficient with the JP each time I use it. It’s actually a fun and rewarding machine to operate and I always look forward to working with it.

“What I enjoy most about the JP is its intuitive mode of operation”

As far as standout features on the mill go, I truly appreciate the blade. I cut A LOT of yellow poplar which is very gentle on the circular blade. I don’t have to worry about bands breaking or needing replacement five times a day while working. The carbide teeth are still very sharp and I haven’t had to dress them in a few months. I know that sounds crazy but I’m getting good shavings when cutting that don’t lie. I do have two blades in reserve though. The Briggs & Stratton engine merely sips gas and a tank lasts me several hours when cutting. I love that.”

And Robert has this to say about the company behind the machine: “Every time I’ve contacted Peterson I received top-notch customer service... I never experienced this with any other company, anywhere... just incredible.”



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