

# INTO THE WILD

The Official Publication  
Of  
The Middle Earth Reenactment Society  
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*The Road goes ever on and on  
Down from the door where it began,  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can...*

Mae Govannen!



Back in 2010, I joined an online forum called “Middle Earth Ranger Forum”. It was started by a fellow named Andy with the vision of recreating Tolkien in the most plausible and accurate way one could. The forum would serve as a resource for these activities as people from around the globe gathered to recreate the world of Middle Earth. Some of us on the forum began to delve deeper and deeper into the material culture of Middle Earth

going to great lengths be as accurate as we could and as faithful as we could be to the books. Whether it was myself learning that Hobbits wore socks and shoes, or someone else writing an essay on pipe weed and its use amongst Men in Wilderland etc... the idea was to always be in search of that which makes a world feel lived in and used. This we felt separated us from LARP, COSplay or other fantasy based groups. We eventually felt that those of us who wanted a deeper experience needed to create a group outside the forum. A group that could be more standardized and follow a stricter code of conduct if you will. Thus, the Middle Earth Reenactment Society came into being. Not to be a group that was overly exclusive but a group that required a higher level of effort. A group where foam and cardboard swords would look out of place and where duct tape had no friend. A group of people willing to learn and be taught.

It is important to understand that standards is nothing to shy away from. In fact it is something that should be embraced. It is by these standards that improvement happens. If everyone was allowed to interpret Tolkien however they choose we'd have a pretty wild looking group. With standards we can hone in on the details, great and small and by doing so make things look fairly consistent with each other so that all the Rangers look like they came from the same village, or all the hobbits look like they all just spent an evening in the Green Dragon etc.

If you are new to this idea of standards and guidelines, please don't be intimidated. Those of us who have experience will be happy to lend a helping hand. We all started off with some horrid gear, but through study and research of historical textiles and equipment, we were able to apply that knowledge to Tolkien and by doing so achieved a level of realism unparalleled in the recreation of a fantasy world.

This quarterly publication will serve as a resource with articles by some of the best Tolkien interpreters and some of the best first hand experience you will find. Expect to find articles on textiles, equipment, weapons and camping, along with how-to's and dare I say scholarly essay's on various aspects of Middle Earth's material culture.

Thank you,

-Jake

# CONCERNING PIPE-WEED IN WILDERLAND

By Austin Hollis (Udwin)

Background: my persona of choice is that of a Man living along the banks of the Anduin in the period between the Quest of Erebor and the War of the Ring. I was giving thought to the question of whether or not this fellow would be a practitioner of the art of smoking pipe-weed and so wondering if I should include a pipe in my gear for this persona. Of course it'd be easy to just say Yes, since smoking (in the pre-Columbian world that it is) is one of the things that makes Middle-earth distinct, setting it apart from other medieval-ish settings. However, I like to overthink things and take a Scholarly-Primary-Documents-Living-History approach to Tolkien.

For me to be able to confidently say a late Third Age Anduin Man was a smoker of Leaf would require evidence of three things:

- 1) existence of the plant in the area,
- 2) knowledge of cultivation of the plant, and
- 3) knowledge of the art of smoking it.

The first two could possibly be combined into 'means of obtaining leaf' should the land turn out to be unsuitable for cultivation.

Unfortunately, there are too many big gaps in the Wandering Days for me to be comfortable making assumptions regarding Stoorish proto-Hobbits and pipe-weed around Anduin, (especially since there's nothing to suggest the plant was known to grow wild north of Rauros).

From what I can tell, the Stoors originated in the Anduin Vales in the first third of the Third Age. They then moved (centuries after the Fallohides and Harfoots, perhaps 1300 TA at the latest) through the High Pass west into Eriador, some settling in the Angle but mostly in Dunland. The rise of Angmar (1300-1400s TA) caused the Angle-Stoors to go south to Dunland where some stayed (Nazgul later searched their deserted settlements for signs of the Ring), while others went back east to their original Gladden homeland. Deagol & Smeagol, descended from these returning-to-Gladden Stoors, pop into the history around 2400 TA--270 years before Tobold Hornblower.

With all that in mind, I want to ignore Rhovanion for a moment and focus our three requirements with regards to Eriador:

Meriadoc's research in Herblore of the Shire concludes that pipeweed grew as a weed in Gondor but "came northward from the lower Anduin", probably "carried up the Greenway" to the crossing at Bree. From here Tobold encountered it, brought it to Longbottom (existence: check!) and grew the first true Leaf in 2670 TA (cultivation: check!). Finally, Merry then suggests that from its epicenter at Bree, smoking was "spread in the recent centuries among Dwarves and such other folk" (smoking: check!).

Now, the idea that the art of smoking Leaf began at Bree is especially intriguing to my inquiry. Let us remember that Bree lies on not only the North-South road which linked Arnor and Gondor, but also the East Road from Ered Luin across Eriador to Wilderland and Erebor. Combined with the above suggestion that the art of smoking was spread by Dwarves and other travelers, I think it is not unlikely that a village of Men living along the Great River near the Forest Road would have come in contact (sometime during the 300+ years between Toby's Leaf and the War of the Ring) with some merchants or traders (Khazad likely) who smoked.

Therefore, it's believable that a common Man at this time/place could have been exposed to the art of smoking (third requirement: check!). Now we just have to figure out what he smoked, and where he got it.

So, could the Gondorian 'westmansweed' be found east of the Misty Mountains at slightly-north-of-Shire latitudes? Meriadoc seems to think not--while it grew "abundantly in Gondor", "it is never found wild [in the North]". Although his very next sentence claims that it "flourishes only in warm sheltered places like Longbottom", I cannot tell if this is referring to the wild or cultivated variety. I suspect the latter, and think it would be safer to say that, given what we know, pipe-weed would not be growing wild in the upper Anduin Vales.

Therefore: could it be intentionally grown there? I'm afraid that while the deep Misty-foothill valleys on the west bank of the River would provide plentiful 'sheltered places' with well-drained soil, such locations would be ill-suited to cultivating Leaf, which requires full sun to grow (the sun, as it sinks behind the Mountains, would leave such an area in shadow the latter part of the day). The east side of this "green vale" might fare better, as the plain between the river and Mirkwood would receive more sun, and while I believe the area is stated to be rather flat, (lacking the shelters in which pipe-weed "flourishes"), I have seen modern tobacco successfully grown exposed in flat areas.



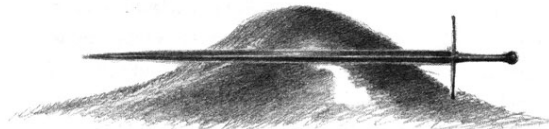
Can the plant be found—either wild or cultivated—in the upper Anduin valley? Not wild I think; possibly cultivated. If it could, for some reason, not be grown here, the next question presents itself: what options might a Man of this area have for obtaining pipe-weed to smoke?

Here I draw a blank. We know Longbottom Leaf was sent along the North-South road to Saruman at Isengard, but if there is any reference to pipe-weed going East along the road towards Dale, I cannot think of it. The Shire-Saruman arrangement always seemed distinctly under-the-table, and Aragorn states that "neither goods nor folk have passed (through the lands between Rohan and the Shire) for many a long year." The East Road, however, seemed a bit more 'open' to me in terms of trade, especially after the Quest of Erebor.

If there are no other known examples of the Shire engaged in exporting pipe-weed, I suppose the "Dwarves, Rangers, Wizards, or wanderers" who smoked must have been limited to refilling their smoking-pouches when passing by Bree? Or is it possible that the Bree hobbits (the true discoverers of smoking, after all) did some business in exporting Leaf to the East?

If we go back for a moment and assume that the eastern Vale between the eaves of Mirkwood and the River is in fact suited to growing Leaf, where would one acquire the seeds (as it does not grow wild there, remember)?

Knowing that Bilbo passed east to Dale one final time following his Disappearance from the Shire, I wonder if he might have brought seeds to Wilderland? More likely, I think, are the "light boats" known to have traveled between Wilderland and Osgiliath until shortly before the War of the Ring. As pipe-weed grew wild in Gondor, perhaps an enterprising individual—with prior knowledge of smoking and some knowledge of the herb—could have been a part of one of these ventures, and returned to his Rhovanion farmstead bearing seeds or a sample of that esteemed plant?



# THE CONTENTS OF SAM'S PACK

A brief analysis by Jake Book

I've long been fascinated with the accoutrements found in one's pack. Often called "hard kit" these items are essential to wandering the wilds of Middle Earth. We know from Tolkien's writings that Hobbits didn't travel outside of the shire much so for all of us recreating the wee folk, it is important that we don't all try gearing up like we are on our way to Mordor to destroy a magic ring.

So when did Hobbits travel? Traveling to visit family, going to Bree and driving pigs to market were probably common reasons for travel. We also know that "beating the bounds" was also common in which a Hobbit sherrif would sort of patrol the border of his respective farthing.

What does one carry with him? There are a few descriptions of Sam's pack contents. They are as follows:

*"Sam eased the pack on his shoulders, and went over anxiously in his mind all the things that he had stowed in it, wondering if he had forgotten anything: his chief treasure, his cooking gear; and the little box of salt that he always carried and refilled when he could; a good supply of pipe-weed (but not near enough, I'll warrant); flint and tinder; woollen hose: linen; various small belongings of his master's that Frodo had forgotten and Sam had stowed to bring them out in triumph when they were called for."*

-The Pack contents of Samwise Gamgee described during their final moments in Rivendell, Lord of the Rings, Part 2 : The Fellowship of the Ring Chapter 1 : Many Meetings.

*"...Sam was a good cook, even by Hobbit reckoning, and he had done a good deal of the camp-cooking on their travels, when there was a chance. He still hopefully carried some of his gear in his pack: a small tinder box, two small shallow pans, the smaller fitting into the larger; inside them a wooden spoon, a short two-pronged fork, and some skewers were stowed; and hidden at the bottom of the pack in a flat wooden box a dwindling treasure, some salt."*

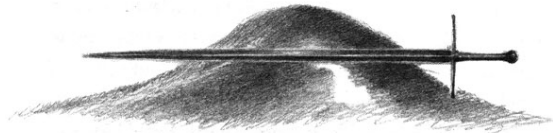
-The Gear of Samwise Gamgee described during their time in Northern Ithilien, The Lord of the Rings, Part 2: The Two Towers, Book IV, Chapter 4: Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit.

In the first description I find some interesting items the chief of them being "woollen hose". Hose is a very old word for "stockings" or "socks". It is my belief through these texts and others that Hobbits wore shoes and socks when traveling. Tolkien himself writes of Bilbo:

*"There is in the text no mention of his acquiring of boots. There should be! It has dropped out somehow or other in the various revisions - the bootings occurred at Rivendell; and he was again bootless after leaving Rivendell on the way home. But since leathery soles, and well-brushed furry feet are a feature of essential hobbitness, he ought really to appear unbooted, except in special illustrations of episodes." Letters, p35.*

Other items such as flint and steel would be essential to any Hobbit and would have most likely been carried even in non traveling situations as a means of lighting ones pipe.

As one looks at the Hobbits camping kit, the key to it all is simplicity and functionality.



# THE ESSENTIAL BEDROLL

By Gregory Lammers



So what we have here, is a bedroll system that has solved several key issues for me.

- 1) Canvas tarps are REALLY heavy, and aren't perfect water barriers.
- 2) Strapping bedrolls to quivers works...but isn't as comfortable/modular as it could be. Can't carry enough for 10-14 solid days on the go.
- 3) A short, tight bedroll as seen in one of my last articles is REALLY stiff...bounces a little bit, and the weight isn't distributed well.
- 4) Haversacks get in the way a lot for me, and aren't removable without taking off everything that's on top of them, etc. Not simple, not easy, not quick.
- 5) CAPACITY. The yukon pack has it, but it just didn't feel right, or work well with my new quiver. Haversack gave it to me, plus all the above problems.

So what do we do?

Let's break it down from complete camp setup, into a bedroll.

This is a 5'x7' oilcloth tarp purchased from Jake Book and his dad's sutler business. I snagged 4 yards at \$12 a yard. Best deal on this stuff I've ever seen, and it is BY FAR the most superior of the material I've ever come across. Get this: IT DOESN'T IGNITE. It burns, but it doesn't roar up in flames. More like a candle wick. May not be 100% period in oil content, but I'll trade that for not burning to death in my sleep. Moving on:

What I've done with it is the smallest shelter option. We've got a 2 1/4-foot wide groundcloth section, folded under a 4 3/4-foot (ish) shelter section. This means that not only will falling rain be wicked away and sheltered from, but downhill-draining rainwater will then run under the tarp, and not soak my stuff. The tarp can, of course, also be spread out to make a spacious 5x7 lean-to, which I would use primarily when I have a log downed that can be used to prevent water from running under me, etc. Lots of options, including modified diamond flies, a-frames, or simply folding it over me in a pinch, etc. are also possible, despite its small size, which is for one main purpose: Weight. Huzzah for Ye Olde Tautline hitch!

So that's the shelter portion. Let's move on to sleeping arrangements. I wear a wool melton cloak, which is a modular part of this; it can be additional insulation from the ground, additional all-around wrapping, or a pillow in particularly warm weather. That being said, the real workhorse here is my new Italian Military Surplus blanket, seen in the photo of Shadow taking over my sleeping space. This sucker is huge, dense, and super-warm. It's a vintage 60's-ish blanket...they're fairly common on ebay, for around \$55-60, but well worth it. Here, I have it folded, so there's a layer over me, and a layer under me, plus the wool cloak under all of that for insulation. Lastly, of course, I have my wool-lined linen fitted hood, which serves essentially as a cinched mummy bag. No air leaks here.



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Next on the list: Food capacity. Now, in a standard bedroll, the only way to carry things inside is to increase the diameter of the bedroll...often awkwardly and exponentially. To keep it as narrow as possible, I've decided to start rolling it MUCH wider than I used to, which keeps it more flexible, and lets it wrap naturally around my body, so it rides closer...you know, like I said in my last bit on these: "High and tight to the body." In addition, I've come up with this cute little invention for dry goods that I like to call a "bean sock", made just for being rolled into the central core of a bedroll.



Here, you see the bean sock containing red lentils (ignore the technicolored-ness...they turn oatmeal brown when cooked. I'd stick with the green ones, except the red ones cook nearly 2 1/2 times faster, so red wins.) We also have my bean boiler from backwoods tin, some hardtack, and small golden potatoes, which are NOT rolled into the bedroll.



This is the bean sock, fully loaded, on top of a hand-stitched small linen snapsack, which contains my boiler, about twenty hardtack, ten days' worth of small potatoes, and still has room to spare. Now, a snapsack alone wouldn't solve the issues the haversack has...it'd essentially be in the same place, which is why THIS snapsack is instead an integral part of the bedroll itself. Take off the bedroll, the snapsack comes right along.

I feel it fits period reasonably well enough, though the setup itself doubtfully exists in actual history, but it REALLY fits the look and feel of middle-earth. Far more important, though, is that having a loaded snapsack on the front of a load-bearing strap evens out the weight a little, so I'm not constantly being tugged on from the back. The whole thing weighs about 15 pounds (the blanket alone is 5.5 pounds, and there's a pound and a half of lentils in that bean sock...) which is quite manageable. In my modern frame pack I can easily double that for a weekend, and this is designed for a fortnight, so a major win there, for sure.

So all in all, I'm very pleased, and can happily say that after WAY too many revisions, I'm actually gonna stick with this one for a good long while.

## REVIEWS

Books, Accoutrements, Weaponry, Clothing etc...

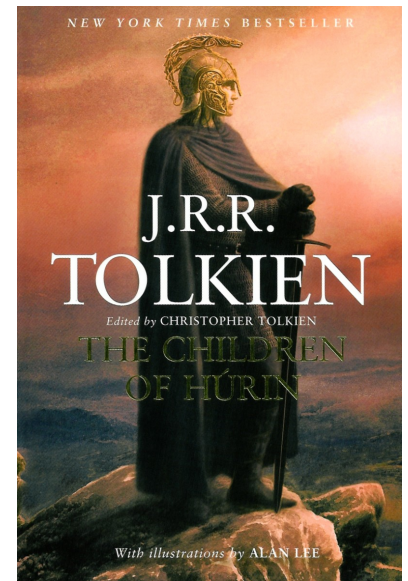


### The Children of Hurin, by J.R.R Tolkien

Edited by Christopher Tolkien

This is a great book and I have enjoyed it highly. For those of you that have read The Silmarillion and found it hard to get through with all it's hard to remember characters and timeline, I would recommend giving Children of Hurin a read. Easy to follow along and more centered on a story rather than the forming of a world, it offers a wonderful glimpse into the early days of Middle Earth and it's major characters. Tolkien at his best.

Jake Book



*If you would like to submit a review please send them to :*

*jbook46 @ gmail .com*