



Edge of the Wild

VOL I Issue 3

Fall 2016

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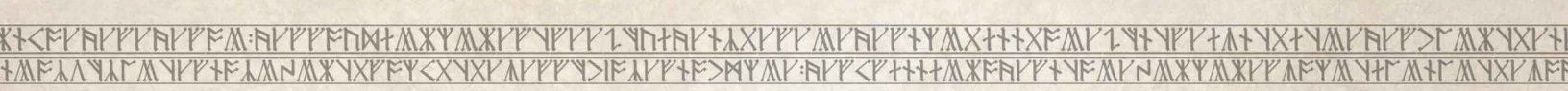
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From the editor:

Welcome to the Fall 2016 issue of Edge of the Wild. This journal is the attempt of the Middle-earth Reenactment Society to create the premier source of information dedicated to 'living history' style interpretation of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth.

In this issue we continue our presentation of member-created content. Within you will find deep textual dives into the material culture of Middle-earth, reviews of historical replica gear, and help crafting the kit for your own journeys into the wild places of the world.

Thank you for reading! ✨



Trekking the Autumn woods

Autumn in Middle-Earth must, for certain, be a very exciting time... particularly for those of us who “live” in the North, in and around the Shire. Bearing in mind that in this modern age, fall is still considered the harvest season, and largely encompasses most allowed hunting seasons, there must be good reason for the timing. For so much of our hobby’s activity to exist within a three-month span is a testament to the wonder that is Autumn.

12 Blotmath, 3014

The days grow shorter, turn colder, and preparation continues apace. Stocking these outposts is hungry work, but all the more important with winter coming.

Standing dead trees have become easier to spot now that the leaves have fallen. I have felled several to add to waning woodpiles; others must split the cuttings as time allows, lest I fall behind and not finish. Jars of fats for our lamps have been sealed, and structures appear to be sound.

This year’s apple harvest has been particularly bountiful. Aside from the typically prolific orchards within the bounds of the shire, several patches along the East road to Bree have proven themselves worthy haunts, and they are particularly sweet.

Hawks and others have begun moving south; I see them in the morning. Still before they have awoken, the woods ‘round about these posts come alive. The deer bed down late, but move very early. They are wary and difficult to close on like always, but this year’s population has been such that I have still managed large stores of meat. I found that stalking them in a gentle rain not only hid my musk, but muted my footfalls on the otherwise crisp leaves as well; notes for the future. The squirrels are working madly; I keep my eyes up for trees they enter to find large stores of edibles.

If we had the means, carts travel daily between the Shire and Bree near to overflowing with provisions for trade; carrots, potatoes, flour, ripe, round cheeses, mushrooms...and I know for certain that I smelled fresh pipe-weed headed southeast on a cart bound for the fords, but to where? Dwarves travel East and West, though with more urgency than before, and less propensity for trade on the open road; they carry no trinkets, but rather heavy wools, furs, and various livestock. I imagine they toil for many of the same reasons as I do.

Once the outposts are stocked, I will have need of mending my clothes, such as they are, and will clutch what remains of them greedily about me until the opportunity for new fabric makes itself available. Perhaps the dwarves will stop for fresh red meat, and consider a trade. I know I long for fresher food after weeks of salted pork on the road.

Still other work is to be done. The northern stretch of the green-way has not been watched for near a fortnight; someone must go. This may fall to me, for reasons of resupply regardless. If it does not, I would imagine ... [remainder indecipherable]

It never ceases to amaze me at how alive our community becomes during the fall. Like the woods, fields, and little rivers we call our homes-away-from-home, our own interests come alive, and I believe this is no coincidence. That which is required to subsist in these environments comes to its peak in the fall, and so do (and should!) our own efforts. Be sure that you do not miss out on what fall, and the wonderful outdoors, have in store for you this season. ✨



Better Visualizing the Anduin Culture

by A Hollis (Udwin)

While the Mannish culture in the Anduin river valley is described by Tolkien with comparatively greater detail than that of other groups (such as the northern Dunedain, for example), many holes still remain for us to reconstruct through the practice of 'living history'. After all, as Tolkien himself wrote, "I am more conscious of my sketchiness in the archeology and [technical details] than in the economics: clothes, agricultural implements, metal-working, pottery, architecture and the like"; "I visualize with great clarity and detail scenery and 'natural' objects, but not artifacts" (Letters, No. 154 and 211).

In this article, I will discuss an aspect of our 'reconstructive' pursuits that I feel is often overlooked, yet which I feel can greatly help create a true sense of depth in one's impression: the use of a 'design language' for decoration of utilitarian objects. Throughout human history, cultures have been seen to decorate even their most utilitarian objects (such as spoons or pottery) to add 'visual interest', and as we in this hobby/sport/lifestyle endeavor to present believable, grounded, and realistic interpretations of Middle-earth cultures (mythic-prehistoric though they may be), I believe this is a very important element to consider.

Before we set out, it is important to remember that while the specific details of our individual cultures or personas may differ, the procedure I utilize below can be applied broadly by all. Although I will be focusing on the late Third Age culture of Men in the Anduin vales, I will do my best to provide examples relevant to other groups in the course of this piece.

My first step is to ascertain what concrete details — or other characteristics that may influence a 'visual language' — are known about a culture, and for this, a quick reread of any source material, my notes, and a glance at an atlas usually suffices.

For a very few cultures, Tolkien actually provides de-

tailed examples of 'artifacts' which can be analyzed, such as his Numenorean tiles and textiles, or collected First Age heraldic devices:

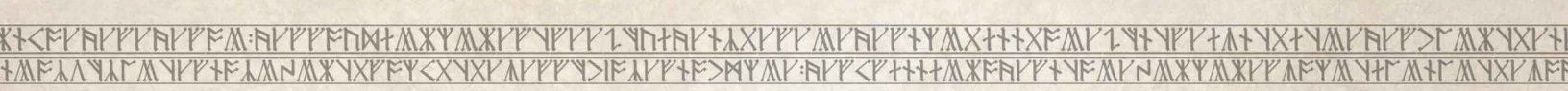


Artifacts of Numenor



First Age Heraldry

In the case of the Anduin culture, The Hobbit Chapter 7: Queer Lodgings is the primary source (via Bilbo's firsthand experience) for most of what we know, and from this source we can infer that the Northmen's culture seems to revolve around animal husbandry (for wool, dairy, meat, and likely draught-power), apiary (beekeeping), and trees (oaks are most prominent, which would allow for acorn harvesting in addition to building materials). Additionally, trade seems to have



played a part in their economy, as in Lord of the Rings II:9 we read how “light boats” from this region formerly traveled downriver to Gondor, presumably to trade.

Along these lines, Tolkien outright summarizes hobbit culture in the Shire when he writes, “Growing food and eating it occupied most of their time” (LR, Prologue), and so one might expect naturalistic and agriculturally-derived motifs to be common in their art. Likewise, it is readily apparent that the culture of the Riddermark (‘Rohan’) revolves almost entirely around equine husbandry, and so we would expect to see their unique design language incorporate horse motifs throughout (a detail which I feel Peter Jackson’s interpretations captured exceedingly well).

In Queer Lodgings, we also see one of Tolkien’s few described ‘artifacts’ in this or any sphere: one of Beorn’s sheep brings a white tablecloth “embroidered at the edges with figures of animals”. This tells us that embroidery is practiced by Men in the area (though I have a very hard time picturing the giant Beorn embroidering in his free time), and that animals are a common motif. While Tolkien omits any more specific details, there are many animals associated with the Anduin/Mirkwood region, and any of these would be appropriate decoration: sheep, eagles, cattle, horses, dogs, bears, wolves/Wargs, deer (red and white), rabbits, squirrels (black), butterflies (ditto), spiders, and of course, extra-large honeybees.

Beyond animals, what else might contribute to a visual language for decoration? Let us consider Tolkien’s preference for depicting natural landscapes, as geography can play a significant role in influencing a people’s ‘mental landscape’. The land of the Beornings is dominated by three major features: the Misty Mountains to the West, the forest of Mirkwood to the East, and the Great River Anduin between these. Combining these influences, I think that riverine, alpine, and arboreal motifs would be acceptable (conjectural, though supported by the text) for decoration of items from this cultural sphere.

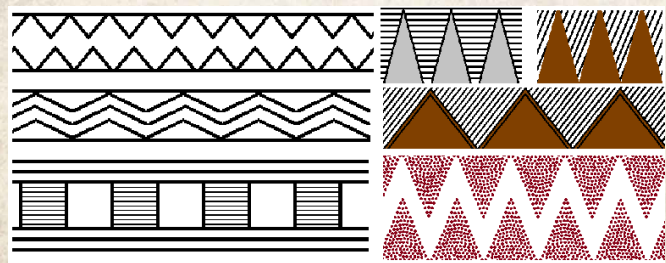
Following this logic, I would expect the design language of the elves of northern Mirkwood to also make frequent use of arboreal (repeated vertical motifs reflecting the trunks of Mirkwood’s beeches and oaks?) and possibly more sinuous/riverine ‘Art

Nouveau’ patterns, reflecting the swift-flowing Forest River. This seems supported by the Doors of Durin – designed by the master craftsman Celebrimbor – which we might use as evidence that Elvish designs do make use of such styles.

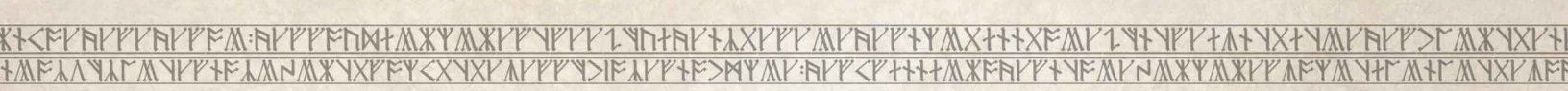
After identifying appropriate/possible design influences, the next question is one of style – how would an actual artifact from this culture really be decorated? To lend credibility to my interpretations, I like to take inspiration from cultures from the areas where and when Tolkien’s stories ‘took place’ – northwestern Europe of “about 6,000” years ago (Letter No. 211), and specifically the Nordic areas, as Britain seems firmly analogous to the Shire/western Eriador.

As a result, I have had to become fairly familiar with the pre-Roman groups (and their artifacts) who may have inspired Tolkien’s writings. While metal tools may have been fairly limited in the Anduin valley (“...there were no things of gold or silver in [Beorn’s] hall, and few save the knives were made of metal at all”), the late Third Age as a whole – with its widespread metallurgy – is quite unlike the European Neolithic, so I usually extend my search through the cultures of the Chalcolithic and as far as the Bronze Age, while trying to stay on the BC side of things; as a result, my interpretation of Anduin culture can roughly be summed up as Neolithic lifestyles/materials and Bronze Age fashion, improved with the addition of high-quality dwarvish iron.

For most groups during these periods, the dominant decoration style is purely abstract and geometric, though anthro- or zoomorphic images are known (especially in rock art). Once I have identified a particular culture (Ertebölle, Linearbandkeramik, Beaker people, &c.) from the place (if not the time), I then use various print and digital resources to find examples of artifacts from which to draw motifs and patterns, such as the following ceramic designs (not to scale):

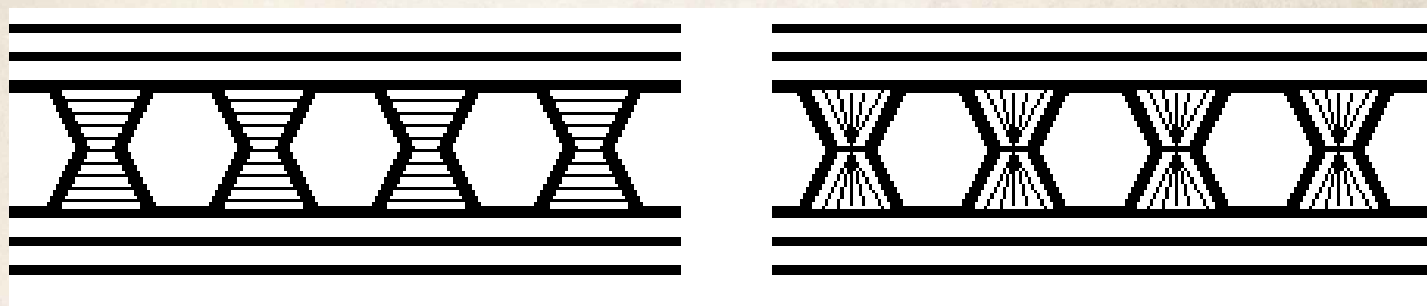


Beaker People motifs



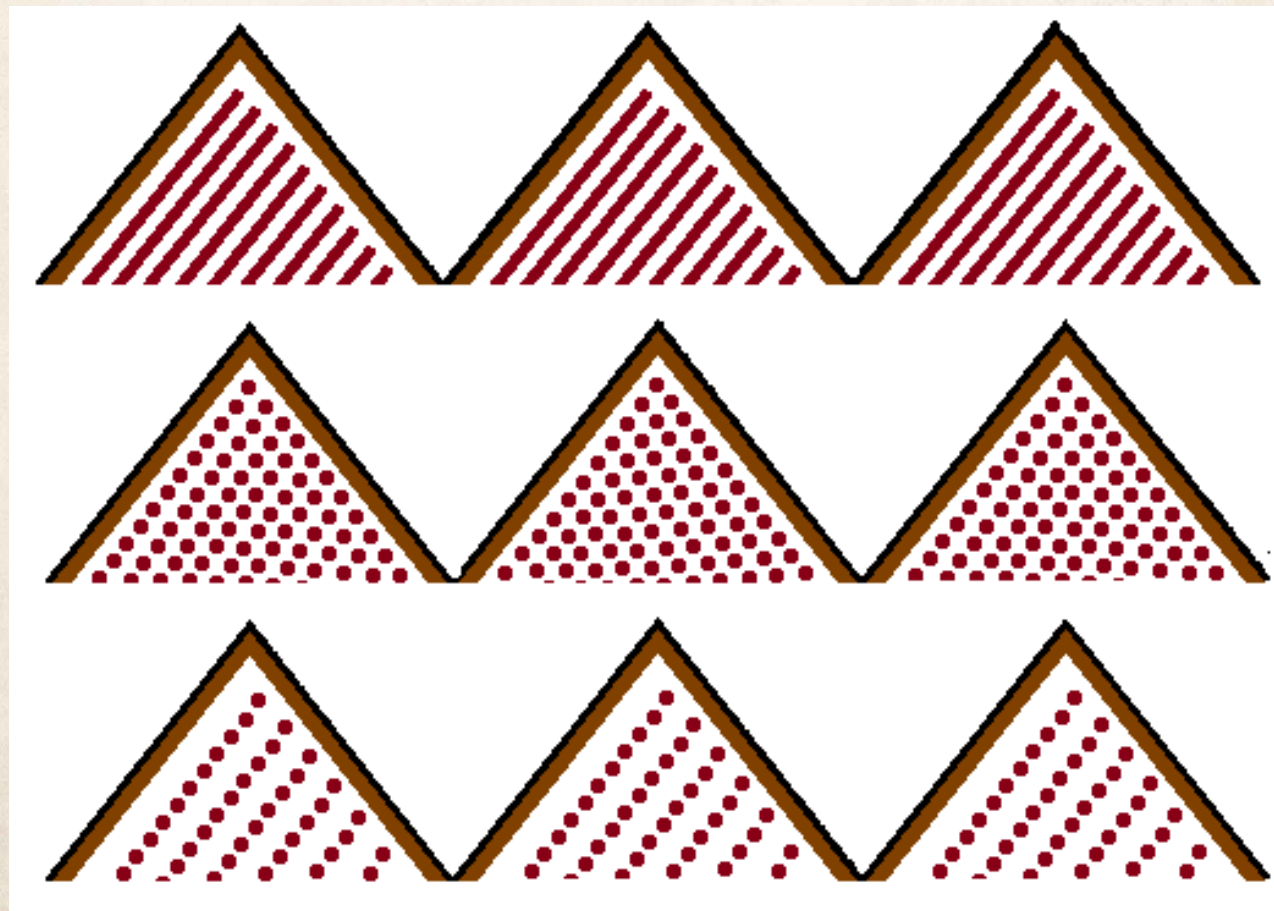
Studying these patterns gives me an idea of a basic ‘palette’ from which to create my own designs.

In the case of the Anduin Vale, I would expect the sublime natural geometry of honeycomb (or designs based around the number six) to play a large part in the decorations of the ‘racial Beornings’ at least, if not the later regional culture as a whole:



Beorning honeycomb motif

For those Men who live in villages nearer to the Misty Mountains, I imagine triangular ‘mountain’ designs like these might be common in their decorations:



Beorning mountain motif

To conclude: I hope that the preceding article has been of some use in explaining my method of better visualizing one of Tolkien’s cultures, and hopefully will inspire you in your own continuing efforts to deepen your interpretation of Middle-earth! ✨

Kit Review: Backwoods Tin and Copper

by Gregory D Lammers (MERP handle Greg)

Five years ago this fall, I had the pleasure of meeting and trekking with Ranger Forum member 'Odigan' for the first time. We had a wonderful time, and I went home with my mind full of new ideas for the future. One thing I simply could not get my mind off of was the lovely little copper pot he had cooked his food in over the weekend. This fateful event led to my current and present love for the craftsmanship and products of Bob Bartelme, proprietor of Backwoods Tin & Copper.



"We can't begin life at Crickhollow with a quarrel over baths. In that room there are three tubs, and a copper full of boiling water. There are also towels, mats and soap. Get inside, and be quick!"

- Meriadoc Brandybuck, The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring; Book 1, Chapter 5: A Conspiracy Unmasked

Thanks to this and a precious few other references, we not only know that copper existed and was used

in craft in Middle-earth, but we know at the very least that Hobbits in the shire understood how good it was at conducting heat, and used copper for heating their bath water. There are no direct references for cooking with copper within the pages of Tolkien's writing (though it is commonplace in recent history), so it must be up to your own discretion as to whether or not copper cookware fits your impression. The interesting thing is small tin-lined copper boilers seem to be a modern invention based on the technology of the Colonial era, rather than copied off documentable

originals, so if these wonderful little cooking pots belong in any reenactor's kit, I daresay none have more claim to them than Middle-Earth-ers.

What my comrade had carried on our first jaunt together was a tin-lined copper "corn boiler", one of various sizes offered at Backwoods. A few years later (far too long, in retrospect), I got my name in the queue for one of my own; his smallest iteration of the boiler, named a "bean boiler" in his catalogue.

The wait was not over-long, and (having price-shopped around a fair bit) I can safely say that his price point is at the low end of copper & tin wares for historical purposes. However, the quality, as you'll see, is not low-end.

I am the proud owner of three pieces by Backwoods Tin. I own a well-loved tin-lined copper boiler, a lined copper Gill cup, and a small copper oiler, so we can take a look at virtually all aspects of the craftsmanship available in his line of product.

Backwoods Tin & Copper boasts an expansive line of boilers, pots, mugs, 'muckets', and the like, many with options. All of these pieces sport a bail, handle, or other similar movable wire attached with brass ears and are attached with hand-riveted copper:



The tin lining on all copper cooking vessels (Fig.2) is hand soldered, lead free, and has its own beautiful texture:



Most of his pieces have several seams which are folded against each other and soldered in place :



Small tool marks are typically visible, and occasional smudges of solder peek through the creases, which speaks "handmade" far more to me than some manufactured versions I have seen elsewhere. I have never had a leak in any of these seams, nor seen any hint of the structure being compromised; they are solid.

Some of his more ornate pieces, such as the Gill cup, have beautiful rolled copper edges, which show some real craftsmanship. Out of the box, this tiny cup was (and still is) absolutely stunning.



All of his pieces ship bright and polished, but over time will develop a beautiful patina, as my boiler has. Time spent over hot coals can, and will, blacken parts of the exterior, but can be wiped off fairly easily if desired (the clean lines running vertically are the result of a recent pot of oats boiling over). If you accidentally boil your pot dry and the tin lining begins to separate, Bob offers a very economical re-lining service for his pieces. I have taken advantage of this once recently, with excellent results.



Bob also accepts custom requests, including some engraving as well as completely custom pieces. I have been absolutely 100% satisfied with every product I have seen or owned from his shop, and will never hesitate to recommend his business to anyone. ✨

Contents of the Dunedain Need Wallet

by Jennifer C (MERF handle Elleth)

In the last issue of Edge of the Wild, I detailed the construction of a need-wallet based on Tolkien's descriptions. For those first coming to the topic, let us look again to the contents described in the text:

"Though it was a long journey, each of the Dúnedain carried in a sealed wallet on his belt a small phial of cordial and wafers of a waybread that would sustain life in him for many days – not indeed the miruvor or the lembas of the Eldar, but like them..."

-Unfinished Tales, Part III: The Third Age: *The Disaster of the Gladden Fields*

The basics

According to the text, we must at least have waybread and a cordial. My experiments with both are detailed on the middleearthragers.org forum – to date I have settled on an unleavened bread of ground oat flour with currents for the former, and a brandy cordial containing both nettle leaf and seed for the latter. Recipes for both are given in this issue.

The bread is stored in a waxed linen pouch, sealed with an embroidered flower:



My intention was to have a pouch shape that was easily resealable by folding the mouth down. In practice, I have found that the resulting long narrow shape of the pouch is poorly suited to cakes of baked waybread, as they can get stuck deep inside beyond the reach of fingers and need to be broken to fish out: I intend to make a new version with a much wider mouth in the future.

For my cordial, I spent hours looking for the perfect container. I have yet to find perfection, but did come across a remarkable period container: 19th c. earthenware inkwells!

They're about the right size, and quite cheap even today! Although hobbits somehow have access to cork stoppers (*"Smash the bottles and burn the corks!"*) I opted for a more medieval period solution – my husband was kind enough to quickly turn a wooden stopper for me:



The inkwell is a decent enough solution for the time being, but even the smallest I could find is a tad fat too fit well in the wallet. Thus at some point I will probably commission a small blown glass vial sized to fit a bit better.

Anything else?

Given the nature of need-wallet – *“a life preserver – a last hope thread of survival held in reserve to the last”* as I thought it – I did want to add a few more last-ditch emergency supplies.

The most obvious one is fire. Although a proper fire kit is elsewhere in my possessions, this was one place I wanted a bit of extra insurance. Thus I’ve included two tiny waxed linen pouches containing charcloth, tow, and pitch. Aside from the hot-burning contents, the waterproofed pouches are themselves effectively large flat candle wicks. Anything to increase the odds of going from spark to warmth.



Craft it Yourself: Restorative Cordial

1 cup(ish) brandy

¾ cup (ish) whole oats

1 Tbsp Basil leaf

1 Tbsp Nettle Seed

2 Tbsp Nettle Leaf

Crack the oats in a mortar and pestle or herb grinder, but do not reduce completely to flour. Mix all elements into the brandy and store in a dark place, making certain all dry elements are covered by the brandy. Shake the mixture at least once each day for six weeks.

At the end of six weeks, strain the oats and herbal matter, reserving the liquid. A bit of oat flour and nettle seeds may remain: this is to be expected. Add honey to the mixture at a ratio of 2 parts tincture: 1 part honey.

In a small leather pouch is bit of English flint and a backup firesteel, one edge sharpened into a last ditch blade. In addition I've added a small hemp of waxed hemp cordage with a single fish hook. It could be pressed into service as a snare, as a fixed fishing line, or just to more securely lash a couple shelter branches together. It's not much, but it was a trivial addition in terms of size and weight.



Craft it Yourself: Oat-based waybread

2 cups oat groats ground to
coarse flour
1 ½ cups powdered milk
6 Tbl spoon honey
dried currants to taste

Mix all ingredients and bake at
350 degrees for about half an
hour. Turn over, and bake
again another 30 minutes - you
want an end product that is
slightly toasted on the outside
and very dry.

Check out the "Crafts and
Skills" forum on MERF for
more recipes!

I'd originally toyed with the thought of adding a few other items – a bandage perhaps – but I had already packed the wallet quite tight, and decided enough was enough.

I am sure the secondary components will shift a bit in the future as I become more adept at what I am doing – but I remain quite happy with the project to date.

I just pray this traveler never truly has need of it. ✨

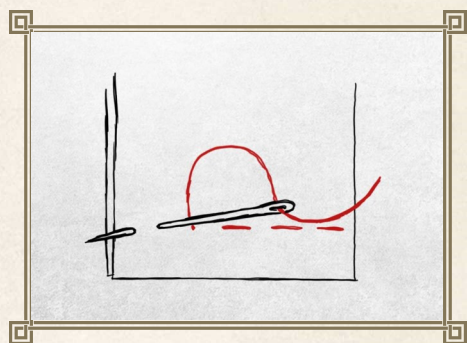


Introduction to Historical Sewing

by Jack Horner (MERF handle Caedmon)

In the last issue, I introduced several stitches used historically and ranked them by how common they are in the archeological record. This article will cover the two most common stitches found, the running stitch and the hem stitch. I will generally cover a single stitch or technique per article, but here I cover two: partly because one stitch is so simple, but also because these two stitches together can be used to sew and finish an entire garment. (not that I would do so)

Before we get started, remember how to arrange your pieces. Generally you will want to sew with the right sides of the fabric together. This means that the outside of your fabric faces in.

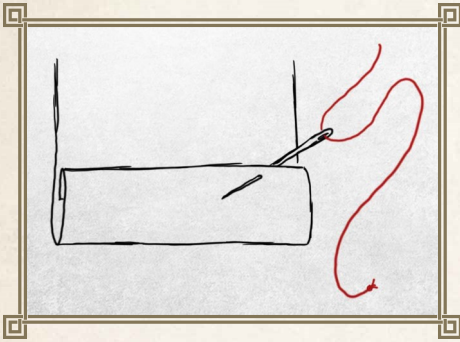


Stitch 1- The Running Stitch

The running stitch is the most simple stitch there is. Start by knotting the string on a threaded needle. Stab through your layers, and draw the needle all the way through. Now pick a stitch length and pass the needle in and out down the line you wish to stitch. That's it. You can finish by stitching in place a couple items, or by adding a knot at the end.

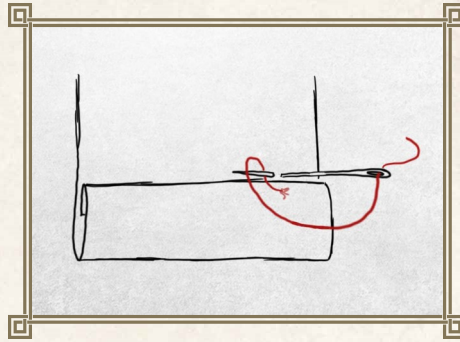
Stitch 2 - The Hem Stitch

The hem stitch can be used to finish the bottoms and sleeves of garments or to help finish the interior seams of garments. There are many variants of hem stitches, most notably the locking hem stitch, standing hem stitch, and rolled hem stitch that I will cover in a future article. The hem stitch usually starts with the edge of the fabric being folded in on itself to avoid fraying.



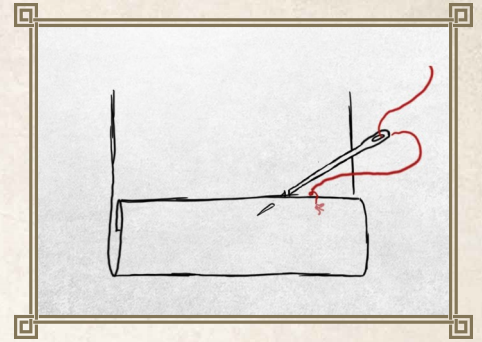
Step One:

Like the running stitch, Start by knotting the string on a thread-
ed needle. Stab through your
layers, and draw the needle all
the way through.



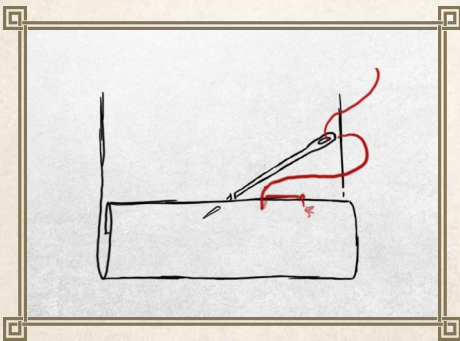
Step Two:

Stab through the outer cloth,
pick a few threads and bring it
back through and lock the stitch.
Pull through.



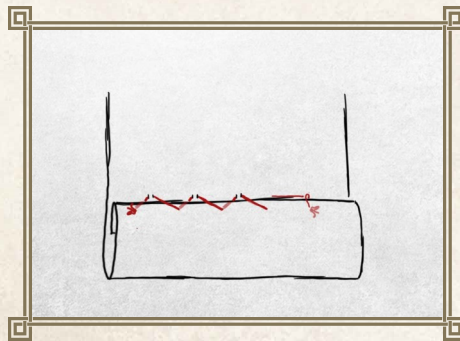
Step Three:

Move your needle 1/4 to 1/2
inch over. Stab through the out-
er cloth, pick a few threads and
bring it back through, and then
pull through the inside of the
folded cloth.



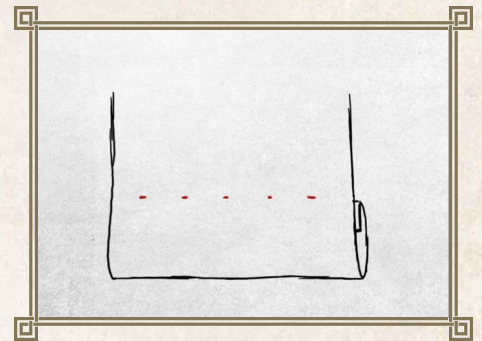
Step Four:

Repeat as needed.



Step Five:

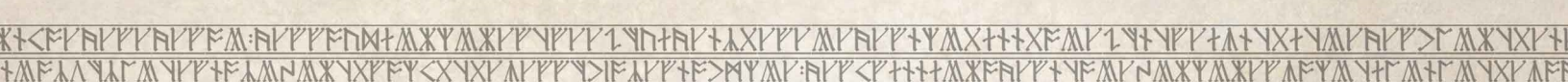
Finish with a knot. This is what
the finished stitch will look like.



And the finished stitch from the
other side.

The next article will cover the overcast stitch, and if I
have room, the back stitch.

Happy sewing. ✨



Old Took's Night

Oh! I love the coming of Old Took's Night
as I will be quite a sight
in my old husk coat and battered hat
you know where I'll be at!

No thank you dear for cakes and pies
in the fields is where my quarry lies
tall yellowed stalks of kernelled gold
to honor one hobbit bold!

The Old Took went this very night
into a place full of dangers and frights
and there he found a pretty thing
that made his greedy heart sing!

Away he ran with his treasure
wealth beyond what he could measure
and then he heard the terrible roar
coming from behind a secret door!

Out came a troll, one, two, three!
away the Old Took did flee
back to the fields of the Shire
but his hobbit legs did tire!

He looked and looked for a place to hide
and he found a cornfield big and wide
in a cornstalk hid his treasure fair
and himself in a scarecrow's wear!

Three trolls came a-looking
Three trolls went a-cooking
For the Old Took didn't hide as well
as that treasure did in that corn bell!

Now, on this very night
that treasure still holds its golden light
in a cornfield not that far away
the Old Took's greed holds sway!

Go look for it if you dare!

The Middle-earth Reenactment Society:

Who We Are and What we Do:

The Middle-earth Reenactment Society is dedicated to the furthering of J.R.R. Tolkien cultural studies, within the framework of 'historical' reenactment. We exist to recreate the cultures of Middle-earth in both form and function, and to mold ourselves into peoples fitting to associate with and live as these fully-realized cultures.

A part of the online Tolkien re-creation community found at **middleearthrangers.org**, the Society publishes an online periodical titled 'Edge of the Wild', showcasing new research, methods, materials, and instructional articles, and meets throughout the year at various sites deemed 'wild' enough to still capture the reality and imagination of the wild lands envisioned within the pages of J.R.R. Tolkien's works. ✨

The Road Goes Ever On: highlights from our hikes

