



## Volume 2, Issue 2: Summer 2017

### FROM THE EDITOR:

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Welcome to our Summer issue! During this season of both shade and sun, opportunities abound for deepening one's immersion into Tolkien's legendary world.

Whether your interests lie in learning more about Middle-earth's equines, trying a delicious recipe, vicariously experiencing an immersive journey by foot, or are considering taking your impression in a unique direction, it is our hope that the following pages will appeal to all!

Inspired partly by Bilbo's midsummer visit to Beorn's homestead, we have devoted this issue to exploring aspects of two related cultures of Northern Men, each notable for a special relationship with our fellow non-human animals. Too often, those newly interested who find their way to these kinds of pursuits ('woods-walking' *a la* Tolkien) assume that the only avenue available to them is to portray one of Tolkien's *Rangers*. It is hoped that our showcasing of these different cultures will help reveal the great many other opportunities that exist for one with a mind to getting out of the armchair and into the wild lands!

Thank you for reading!



*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 members of these fully-realized cultures. A part of the [middleearthbrangers.org](http://middleearthbrangers.org) Tolkien re-creation community, the Society publishes the online quarterly periodical 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 Tolkien's works.*

*To receive future issues of Edge of the Wild sent directly to your inbox, please email [middleearthreenactmentsociety](mailto:middleearthreenactmentsociety@gmail.com) at gmail dot com to be added to our mailing list!*

# Pick a Persona: Beornings and Eorlings

A. Hollis

In this installment, I will continue to brainstorm potential persona ideas to explore, this time for two related groups of Northmen, the Beornings of the Great River valley, and the Eorlings of the Mark (Rohan). Naturally, there is no reason the following ‘occupations’ could not be practiced by a single individual, as we do not know to what extent these cultures experienced a marked division of labor, but they are provided to give suggestions to help direct one’s generic persona into a more developed one. (Unless otherwise noted, all Beorning references from *The Hobbit*, Chapter 7: *Queer Lodgings*.)

-One activity Beornings are thrice depicted doing is aiding travelers (1), and Gloin reports that they are responsible for keeping open both the Fords across the River and the High Pass across the Mountains (2), therefore, either a **Ferry-man** or—for a more adventurous impression—a **Travelers’ Guide** or **Scout** seem justifiable options for interpretation.

-After being introduced to Elvish *lembas*, Gimli compares it favorably even to the honey-cakes of the Beornings, who he claims are “the best bakers”(3), and bread and flour show up on other occasions. From this, a **Baker** would be exceptionally suited to a Beorning persona—perhaps even using an earthen *beehive* oven!

-The key ingredient in Beorning baking is of course, honey, and so a **Beekeeper** would also be a natural and excellent choice, using the bell-shaped skeps made of straw.

-We are also told that Beorn’s table was lit by “two tall red beeswax candles”, so a **Chandler** might prove an *enlightening* addition to a Beorning impression. (See this issue’s *Trekking Tips* feature for a variety of possible uses for beeswax you might try on the trail!)

-The honey and grains used in baking could be put to a more potent use by a daring interpreter, who might portray a **Brewer**. We know that mead was drunk in the area, and given the presence of wheat for baking, beer may have been as well.

-Given the stated fact that few things in Beorn’s hall (“save the knives”) were made of metal\*, and that Beorn’s tableware (drinking bowls and spoons, at least) was wooden, it seems that a **Woodcarver** would make a superb impression, perhaps working in a style reminiscent of a Nordic ‘green woodworking’ tradition.

\*This statement, combined with Beorn’s extremely simple clothing (a sleeveless, knee-length, brown woolen tunic) should make this culture an attractive option for the Middle-earth reenacting novice, as assembling a ‘kit’ along such lines requires neither extensive sewing skills nor expensive metal hardware.

-Expanding on the woodworking angle, if we recall that Beorn’s chairs, while rustic, had “wide rush bottoms”, an element of **Basketry** may be included in a persona to add an extra layer of craftsmanship.

-Additionally, we know that the Men of the Anduin were armed with “great bows of yew”(4) and Beorn had spare bows to lend Thorin’s dwarves, so a **Bowyer** likely existed in some of the Beornings’ villages.

-Also referred to by the Eagles was the keeping of sheep (5), therefore as in the case of most of Tolkien’s Mannish cultures, a simple **Shepherd** persona is always a solid choice. These sheep would provide woolen garments—such as the sleeveless tunic worn by Beorn—once processed and woven by a **Weaver**.

-In terms of architecture, in addition to wooden construction we are told that Beorn’s hall and outbuildings—consistent with depictions of the other Northman cultures we will see—are thatched; as such a **Thatcher** might be an interesting trade to research and demonstrate.

-Finally, the travelling rations given to Thorin’s dwarves by Beorn include “red earthenware pots of honey”, and we might assume that such vessels are made by a local **Potter**, likely (based on the culture’s more ‘primitive’ depiction) of coiled construction.

Next we will turn our attention to the grasslands and dales north of the White Mountains, and the equine culture of the Rohirrim. Unfortunately, as we only visit the land during wartime, we do not get as full a view of its people and crafts as we have of other cultures.

-As with all Mannish groups, a **Shepherd** or **Herdsmen** is always a solid choice (1); we are told that such men will live with their herds in tents even in winter!

-We read that even the Deeping-Coomb before Helm's Deep was home to many homesteads, destroyed by the approach of Saruman's army (2), and the use of "corn" in their poetry suggests that they, like other Men, are **Farmers** of grains.

-As evidenced by the "richly carved" columns inside the Golden Hall of Meduseld (3)—the Rohirrim have a strong tradition of decorative **Woodwork**. Indeed, given the frequent references to ash spears wielded by the Eorlingas, a demonstrating interpreter with access to straight-grained wood and a shaving-horse would have his work cut out for him!

-Additionally, within Meduseld hang "Many woven cloths", upon which "marched figures of ancient legend" (4). These could be created by a skilled **Weaver** or through **Embroidery** (if we picture a narrative textile like the Bayeaux "Tapestry"). Such a craftsman could also be responsible for creating the many banners carried by the Rohirrim in battle.

-Like the other Mannish cultures, the Golden Hall is known for its characteristic thatched roof (5), which would be quite the large undertaking for a team of lucky royal **Thatchers**!

-In Theoden's court a single reference is given to wine (6), which was also found in Isengard (7). While the source of these is unknown, they may indeed have been made by a Rohirric **Vintner**. However, much more likely is the brewing of beer or mead by a **Brewer**.

-Finally, as the Rohirrim are illiterate—"...wise but unlearned, writing no books but singing many songs"

(8)—it seems appropriate that a **Bard** or **Minstrel** would be the perfect persona for a musical or lyrical individual. After all, it was "a forgotten poet long ago" who created the Lament of the Rohirrim, which "men still sing in the evenings" (9); and the apparent highest praise in their culture is to be remembered in song (10).

In our next issue, we will round out our coverage of the Northmen as we turn our attention to the northeast of Middle-earth.



Beorning references:

- (1) Unfinished Tales Pt III Ch 4
- (2) Lord of the Rings Bk II Ch 1
- (3) LR II:8
- (4) TH Ch 6
- (5) *ibid* .

Rohan references:

- (1) Lord of the Rings III:1
- (2) LR III:7
- (3) LR III:6
- (4) *ibid*
- (5) *ibid*
- (6) *ibid*
- (7) LR III:8
- (8) LR III:2
- (9) LR III:6
- (10) LR III:7; V:6





## Try These Trekking Tips!

Beeswax is a very useful material, but often we find ourselves carrying more than we really need. Candles are very useful tools, but we often pigeonhole them as single-purpose items. Packing a humble hand-dipped beeswax candle such as this can serve many purposes, all at once, without taking up extra space.



- Light the candle with your tinder bundle during damp conditions to keep the flame burning in the event that the fire does not light immediately.
- Use it for light in caves and other small places when a torch is not practical.
  - Rub the butt end on waxed fabrics to touch up waterproofing.
  - Pull your sewing thread across the bottom to wax it before use.
  - Drip wax from the lit wick end to seal letters and maps.

For what other purposes have you used beeswax on the trail? Send us your tips and suggestions, or join the discussion yourself, at [middleearthbrangers.org](http://middleearthbrangers.org)!



As seen from this Beorning assemblage, a discriminating and consistent use of motifs, textures, materials, and methods can do much to help create the illusion that one's kit truly comes from one's chosen culture.

# TWICE-BAKED HONEY TRAIL CAKES

G. LAMMERS

*"This is what he promised to do for them...he would lade them with food to last them for weeks with care, and packed so as to be as easy as possible to carry—nuts, flour, sealed jars of dried fruits, and red earthenware pots of honey, and twice-baked cakes that would keep good a long time, and on a little of which they could march far. The making of these was one of his secrets; but honey was in them, as in most of his foods, and they were good to eat, though they made one thirsty."*

(The Hobbit, Chapter 7: Queer Lodgings).

## DRY INGREDIENTS:

2.5 cups whole wheat flour

½ cup white sugar

Dash of Salt

1 tsp baking powder

## WET INGREDIENTS:

4 tbsp honey

2 large eggs

¼ cup unsalted butter

1 tsp vanilla extract

## BAKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 350° Fahrenheit. Mix the wet and dry ingredients separately, beating the wet mixture thoroughly to blend in the honey (this takes some elbow grease...or a Dwarven lightning-powered mixing device.) Slowly stir in dry ingredients until dough forms.

Once all are combined, form into four-sided cakes. Plan their size around a waxed linen bag or similar pouch for trail carrying. Bake for 25 minutes on a cookie sheet, then take them out and cool them completely. After they have cooled, lift them off the cookie sheet, shift them to the side, and then bake again for ten minutes on each side (turning once). Once cooled, they won't keep for as long as Lembas, but unrefrigerated can easily manage a week and a bit, and are delicious. ✨

*Editor's note: As this recipe includes sugar, it is not strictly authentic to Middle-earth standards. With some trial and error, you may be able to increase the amount of honey to maintain a similar level of sweetness—bearing in mind that more honey will require more flour. Or, you may opt to leave out the sugar altogether, keeping the rest of the recipe as is, remembering that for most of human history, sweeteners have been both precious and costly.*





# Out of Edoras

E. MEULEMANS

## Historical Types of Horse

Tolkien tells us little of the physical characteristics of his horses aside from the rarity of their colour, but when he does, they are overwhelmingly described as “great,” or “swift,” and rarely much else. “Big,” “tall,” and “wild” make a couple of appearances each, while the few other adjectives are singular instances. Again, this practice makes these few adjectives stand out, and though brief, give us some clue as to the differences in horses found in Middle Earth. Breeds, as we know them today, simply did not exist until the Renaissance, and prior to this horses were divided by type, based on their most effective roles:

Type	Role	Description	Old English
<i>Courser</i>	Hunting, racing	15.0-15.2hh, 900-1000lbs	N/A
<i>Destrier</i>	Heavy cavalry	15.0-15.2hh 1000-1200lbs.	<i>Eob</i>
<i>Palfrey</i>	High quality riding horse	Preferred by ladies & nobility Sometimes gaited	<i>Friphengest, steda, blanca,</i>
<i>Rouncy</i>	General purpose riding horse	14.2-15hh, 700-900lbs.	<i>Hors, radhors, hengest</i>
<i>Hobby</i>	Light Cavalry	~14hh and 800 lbs.	N/A
<i>Sumpter</i>	Pack animal	Horse or mule	<i>Ealfara, seambors</i>

Of these, only one type is mentioned by name in The Lord of the Rings, that being the *palfrey*. As Arwen's procession enters Minas Tirith, she rides “upon a grey palfrey,” beside her father Elrond(1). Later, while traveling, Frodo and Sam also encounter Galadriel “upon a white palfrey”(2). Given Tolkien's fondness for language, I have included the Old English words associated with these types, and it is no surprise that we sometimes see these horses called *blanca*. While this does not always necessarily translate to “white,” it is the word reserved for the mounts of heroes and even Gods. The use of *Mearh* (*Mearas*) should also raise an eyebrow, for while not always necessarily indicating “mare,” this was chosen perhaps for the association with greatness. The “*eob*” prefix used by the Rohirrim also becomes even more indicative of the intentional variation between groups of horses and cultures. As for pack animals, we know that “goblins eat horses and ponies and donkeys,”(3) so having both horses and donkeys, mules may certainly exist in Middle-earth, though are never mentioned.

The Medieval horse was also quite a bit smaller than its later predecessors who were selectively bred to be larger, but horses will naturally and rapidly revert to a relatively small size by modern standards. While film and television regularly choose very large horses for their visual impact, historical artwork correctly portrays straight-legged riders, their feet nearly touching the ground, on what today would be considered ponies (Figure 1). While the image of fierce warriors riding to battle on short fuzzy ponies may seem comical now, their foes at the time were certainly not laughing.



Image from the Harley Psalter, 11th c.

## Modern breeds of Middle Earth Equines

While today we still use Types to describe some horses (i.e. Hunter/Jumper), we typically rely on breed names as a point of description and comparison. Given that, I will lastly offer my interpretation of the types of horses and ponies Tolkien was portraying, using modern breeds as a model. These comparisons are conjectural and subject to change, but I hope they will offer a springboard for further discussion on the generally fixed view of horses in Middle-earth.

## The Horses of Rohan

When the Fellowship encounters Éomer and the Riders of Rohan, their horses are described as “of great stature, strong and clean-limbed; their grey coats glistened, their long tails flowed in the wind, their manes were braided on their proud necks... very swift were the horses of Rohan.”(4)

The portrait Tolkien paints here has always evoked for me the Irish Draught, or the crosses thereof known today as the Irish Sporthorse. This breed was developed to fill a similar need that yielded the Morgan Horse in the United States; for a farmer to have a horse strong enough to pull plow or carriage but also light enough to ride. As part of this requirement, the feathering common to draft breeds was bred out, so as not to constantly attract burrs, and thus they are quite frequently described as “clean legged.” Standing between 15.2 and 16.3hh, these horses are not really considered a draft breed despite the name, and are renowned for their athleticism and stamina. As sporthorses in jumping and eventing, they frequently have their manes braided, and because of their sure-footedness, intelligence, strength, and courage, they served heavily as artillery horses in WWI.

No doubt then the Irish Draught was some inspiration for the horses of Rohan? If we consider the horses lent to Aragorn and company by Éomer, there is revealed perhaps even a more likely candidate for the Rohirrimic horse. While Hasufel is given only the merest mention as “a great dark-grey horse,” the horse given to Legolas – Arod – is specifically noted as being different. “Smaller and lighter” than Hasufel, but also “restive and fiery,” this immediately brings to mind the image of an Arabian, or perhaps a Barb-

type horse, a hardy foundational breed. Possibly then, having such horses, the Rohirrim have crossed this lighter, “fiery” horse with something akin to an English Thoroughbred, to produce what is known as an Anglo-Arab. Carrying 25-75% Arab blood, the Anglo-Arab is another attempt at creating a sound, all-around horse of good temperament and intellect, combining stamina and speed. These horses also come in around the 16hh mark, come in all colours, and were used heavily as cavalry mounts historically, including WWI. With their origins in England but coming of age in France, the Anglo-Arab is also poetically symbolic of Tolkien's own wartime experience.

With their larger than average height and weight in Middle-earth, these horses would necessarily be part of an extensive and ongoing breeding program which the Rohirrim could provide (5). Both breeds may be grey, in varying shades, but also occur in all solid colours, including black. As Éomer tells Gimli, “...the Lord of the Black Land wished to purchase horses of us at great price, but we refused him, for he puts beasts to evil use. Then he sent plundering Orcs, and they carry off what they can, *choosing always the black horses*: few of these are now left.”

## The Mearas

I hesitate to liken any known breed of horse to the *Mearas*, for they are quite plainly not simply horses but much more. Like Alexander The Great's *Bucephalus*, the *Mearas* are given attributes far beyond the intelligence and physical ability of most ordinary horses. We know that Shadowfax is faster still than the horses of Rohan, as even Théoden's horse Snowmane could not match his pace: “only a swift bird on the wing could have overtaken him.” In appearance, we commonly associate them with the Andalusian, and if we did not before, Peter Jackson's films have cemented this image.

I would like to throw a wrench in this, however, and offer an alternate portrayal. One which reaches back into history to one of the oldest known breeds: The Akhal-Teke. Known by many names, this is the famed Turkmene horse which ranged across Central Asia and Persia even so far as 3,000 years ago. They are a racing type, not overly tall (~15hh) and very

lean, but with a number of unique characteristics which I feel make them an excellent candidate for the *Mearas* in spirit.

-They are famously known for their gleaming metallic coats, which can include silver.

- Having a hot and wild temperament, they are often known to bond to one rider alone.

- Their recorded feats of speed and endurance are legendary and unequalled by other breeds (6).

Claims that the Turkmene horses could cover 80-100 miles a day for several consecutive days compares favorably with Shadowfax carrying Gandalf from Edoras to the Shire in six days, a distance of some 600 miles (7). Gandalf and Pippin's mad-dash from Isengard to Minas Tirith where Shadowfax managed an estimated 120-140 miles a day for four days (8) may be stretching things a bit, but accounts do record such feats of distance in a single day (9).

Were these the breeds Tolkien had in mind when he put words to paper? I don't know that anyone can answer that with certainty, but they were all well within his purview. I have limited us here to breeds which we can still examine, but in light of Tolkien's understanding of history, I must point out one excellent option that might trump some of these choices. The Nisean horse is an extinct breed of the Ancient world and, "...the handsomest, fit only for mighty rulers. They are splendid, running swiftly under the rider, obeying the bridle willingly, with ram-nosed heads carried high, and streaming golden manes"(10). In the end, we have but passages as these, and like the horses of Middle-earth, they weave a tale out of myth and into legend.



## Notes and References:

(1) The Lord of the Rings, Book VI: Chapter 5.

(2) LR, VI:9.

(3) The Hobbit, Chapter 4.

(4) LR, III:2.

(5) *ibid*: "...the Horse-lords had formerly kept many herds and studs in the Eastemnet..."

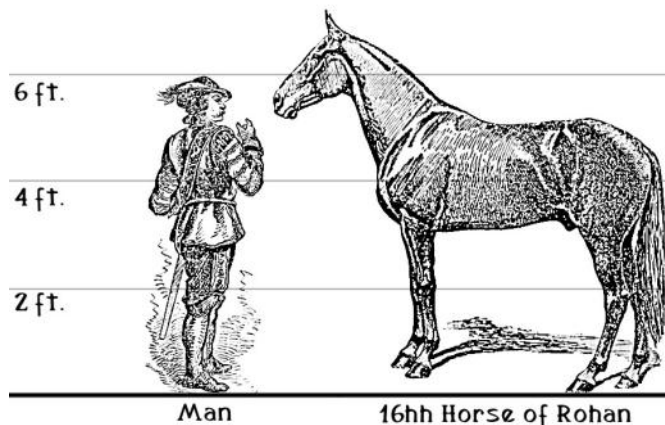
(6) Among these was the 1935 journey of twenty-eight riders on Akhal-Tekes and crosses, from Ashgabat, Turkmenistan to Moscow, Russia. They all covered a distance of 2,600 miles (600 of which was desert) in 84 days, or an average of 31 miles a day, every day.

(7) LR, Appendix B: Gandalf departed Edoras on 23rd of September and arrived in Hobbiton on the 29th.

(8) Fonstad, Karen Wynn. The Atlas of Middle-earth. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991. pp. 159

(9) "The Turkomen also trained their horses to a sort of triple called trapatka in Russian. At this gait they would cover 200 versts, or about 133 miles, on their raids." Jankovich, Miklós. They Rode into Europe. New York: Charles Scibner's Sons, 1971. pp. 99

(10) *Ibid*. pp. 44, quoting Oppian's *Cynegeticon*.





## Society Highlights

Few have opportunities to meet and travel again and again with the same group of wanderers, but in our part of the world, our luck has held now for six years of adventuring.

This summer found four companions—a Man of Lake-town, a Dúnedain Ranger of the North, and a Beorning, plus a trusty hound—with ample time enough to experience some new lands, cross the edge of the Wild once again, and get in some long-overdue trail time. Total mileage breached twenty-three miles over varied terrain, including several prairies, grasslands, and dense stands of forest both deciduous and coniferous. Water was repeatedly sought out and obtained from natural sources, as were plentiful blackberries and mulberries at the peak of ripeness. Two days and nights were spent in the wilds, including cooking over open fires, sleeping in open-faced shelters, excellent conversation, and a rollicking thunderstorm, which made for a most enjoyable, truly adventurous journey over hill and under dale.



Good fellows, footsore yet eager.



Sweat-soaked garments left to dry in the noonday sun after a morning's march.



An evening's well-earned meals,  
hot off the fire.



Our newest (future) member!