

EDGE OF THE WILD

THE PUBLICATION OF THE MIDDLE-EARTH REENACTMENT SOCIETY

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FROM THE EDITOR:

Greetings, and welcome to *Edge of the Wild* for the spring of 2020!

In the spirit of this season of new beginnings, in this issue we are getting 'back to the roots' of our chosen pursuit: recreating the common peoples of Middle-earth through the form of 'living history'. In the popular culture, Tolkien's works are often associated with long stretches of nothing but *walking*...and while this is not exactly *incorrect*, there is (of course) much more to adventuring than walking alone!

In this issue, our members have come together to share their individual insights and methods for travel in the wild. With Tolkien's general "sketchiness" towards everyday details in mind, it is worth pointing out that these are simply *our* interpretations based on the needs of adventuring, filtered through our research into historical methods of foot travel.

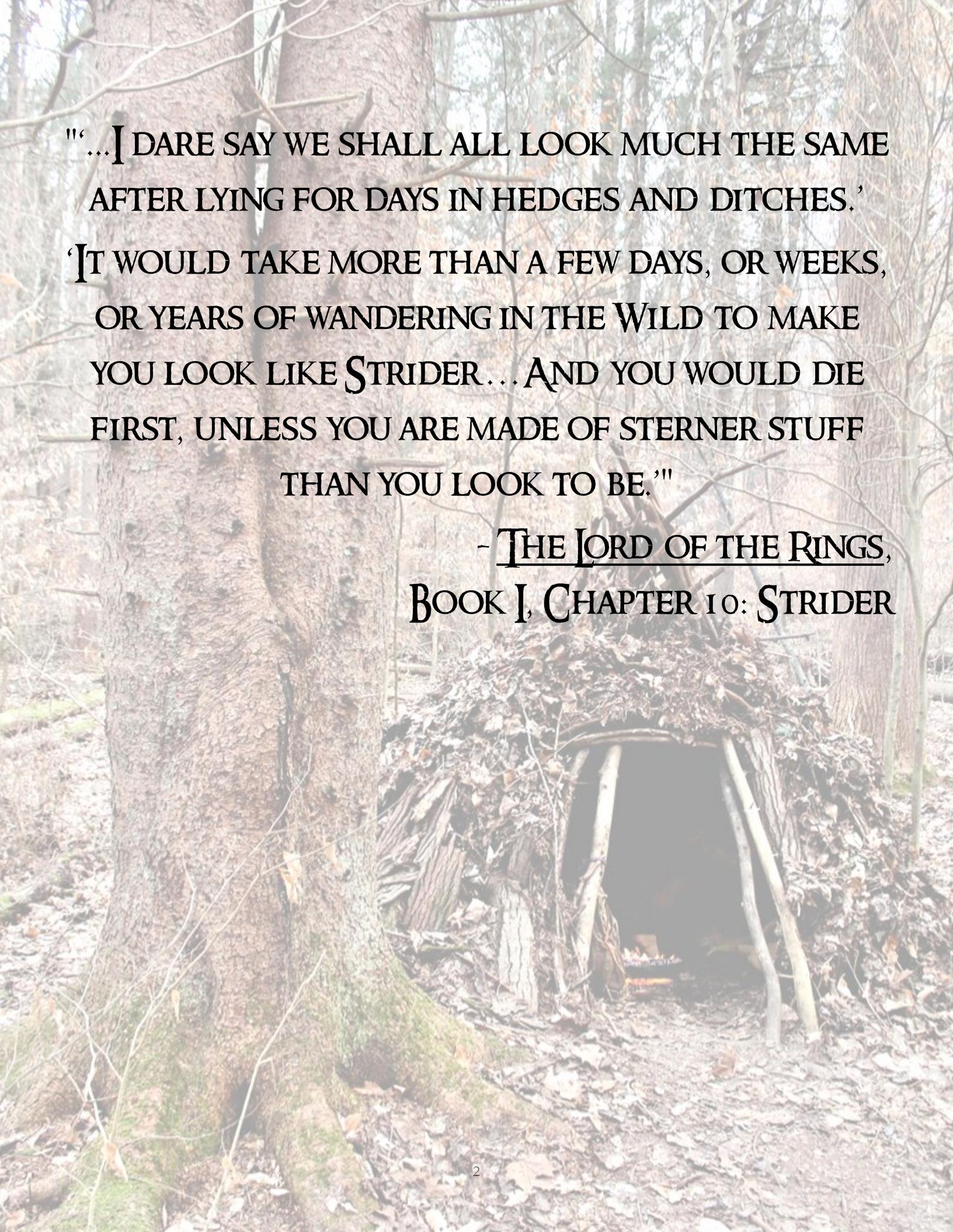
We hope you will enjoy, and we thank you for reading!

-a. hollis

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A rustic shelter made of sticks and leaves in a forest. The shelter is built with a frame of vertical sticks and is covered with a thick layer of dry leaves and twigs. It is situated in a wooded area with many trees and fallen leaves on the ground. The lighting is soft, suggesting an overcast day.

"...I DARE SAY WE SHALL ALL LOOK MUCH THE SAME AFTER LYING FOR DAYS IN HEDGES AND DITCHES.'
'IT WOULD TAKE MORE THAN A FEW DAYS, OR WEEKS, OR YEARS OF WANDERING IN THE WILD TO MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE STRIDER... AND YOU WOULD DIE FIRST, UNLESS YOU ARE MADE OF STERNER STUFF THAN YOU LOOK TO BE.'"

- THE LORD OF THE RINGS,
BOOK I, CHAPTER 10: STRIDER

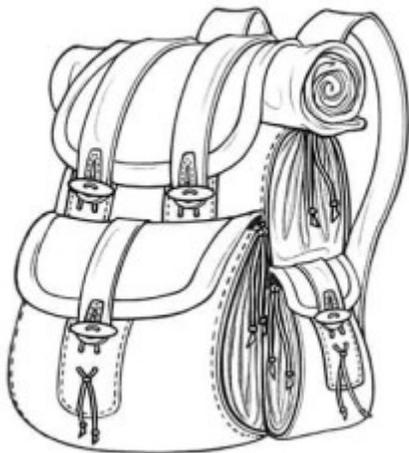
The Essentials--Packing Options

G. LAMMERS AND A. HOLLIS

Unless you are simply out for a stroll around the homestead, being able to carry gear on the trail is a critical part of a successful trekking experience. Most often, the initial focus when getting into any form of reenactment is clothing or weaponry, but these priorities often come with regrets later. Being able to carry your food supply, water supply, cooking gear, spare clothing, bedding, and tools in a comfortable and functional way will always mean the difference between a miserable and a wonderful experience in the wilds.

For the sake of clarity, we're going to separate the basic forms of gear-packing we recommend into two groups: *Packs* and *Rolls*. Most of these will serve similar or identical purposes, but some feel more appropriate for different cultures, or fit specific references in the text for certain personae.

To begin, we have a standard: the **backpack**.



Backpacks have been fairly consistent throughout much of history. They sport two shoulder straps, often cinch at the top with ties or a drawstring, and sometimes come with a flap at

the top which can be used to secure a rolled blanket.

Backpacks are by far the most comfortable means of carrying the largest quantities of gear in an organized fashion, even when not involving modern suspension systems and load-bearing waist belts, which would not fit in our period. Within Tolkien's works, we have concrete references to the use of backpacks by both Hobbits and Dwarves, though that in itself does not exclude other cultures.

The basic soft backpack can be given more support with the use of an external wooden frame, which have been used in our Primary World for at least (and likely much longer than) 5,000+ years, as demonstrated by Ötzi the Iceman's bent hazel frame-pack.

Similar to, but different from, the backpack is the **Pack Basket**.



While we have no direct references in the text, basketry *was* practiced throughout Middle-earth, and pack baskets are prevalent through several applicable periods and cultures in history that

suggest that they might also be at home in Middle-earth. They are carried exactly like a backpack, but rather than a fabric body closed at the top, they have a rigid woven structure much like a basket, with a large open top.

Capable of carrying large loads on their two shoulder straps (or with a single burden strap/tumpline), they typically don't have a means of closing, and so might benefit from a water-repelling tarp to wrap the contents in, such as an oilcloth groundsheet. Pack baskets would be fitting for a variety of travelers or merchants along the Great East Road, or for local use around town, such as in Bree Dale, or any of the Gondorian or Rohirric settlements.

Honorable mention in this category goes to the colonial-era **Haversack**. Originally used by soldiers to carry their field rations, a haversack may have one or two large pockets, and is typically worn slung about the body over a shoulder on a single strap. A haversack packed with soft items allows it to conform to the user's body, making it quite comfortable if worn high and tight. Their main disadvantage is that due to their single strap, haversacks tend not to stay in place as a backpack or pack basket would while moving, and often swing around to the wearer's front (usually at inopportune times).

Last in the 'pack' department is something quite different, known as a **Snapsack**.



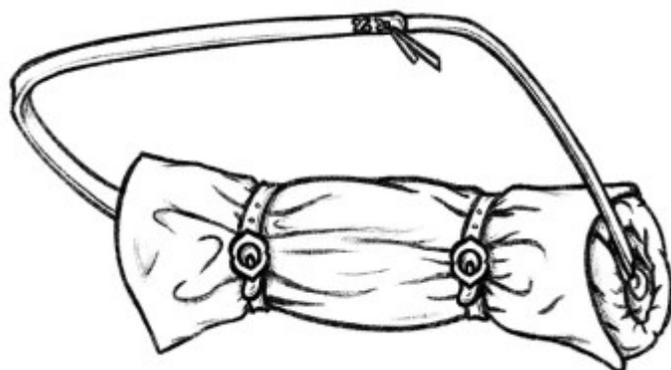
A snapsack is a fabric tube that can open at both ends: tied or sewn shut at one end, and tied at the other or cinched with a drawstring.

They tend to be narrow, and so are relatively comfortable riding against the body in a variety of places. Historically they often had a built-in strap, but they can also be hung from a separate tumpline or even the strap of another piece of kit, such as an arrow quiver.

Snapsacks tend to be quite a bit smaller than other packs, so their capacity encourages packing light and carrying other kit creatively in additional, separate configurations. Snapsacks are particularly fitting in Dúnedain Ranger impressions, but could be used by many cultures of Middle-earth.

Next we will move on to **rolls**, which focus on carrying gear within a blanket, cloak, or shelter tarp/groundsheet.

When using a backpack or pack basket, one option that might function well alongside your pack would be a standard **Bedroll**, which may not actually contain anything but the blanket itself.

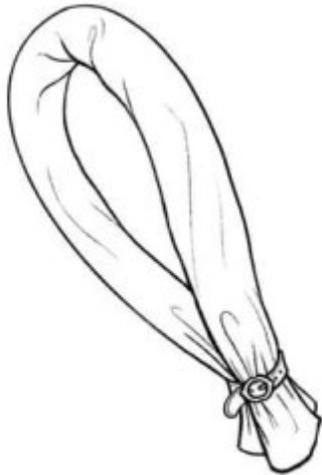


Typically, a blanket is made into a roll roughly the shoulder-width of the user, and then secured beneath the top flap of a backpack or haversack, or lashed down to the top of a pack basket. Small items can be contained within, but these may be time-consuming to access.

The standard bedroll can also be hung on a separate tumpline or shoulder strap, but these

short rolls are stiff and can be uncomfortable when carried in certain configurations.

A more specialized version of the bedroll is known as a **'horseshoe roll'**:



Seen often in historical military contexts, its use also found its way into early 1900s Boy Scout handbooks and camping circles. In this configuration, the blanket and/or tarp is rolled lengthwise to form a long roll, which is then bent in the middle so the two ends meet, similarly to a horseshoe. A belt and buckle or piece of rope can be used to hold the two ends together, and then the whole roll is slung over one shoulder and worn across the chest. Inside the roll can be carried a variety of items, from food to spare clothing to tools, but anything you need to reach will likely require at least part of the roll be opened up. Horseshoe rolls are soft-sided and wide compared to straps, so they can be quite comfortable to carry, but just like anything else can become cumbersome if not packed carefully.

If you find that carrying a rolled blanket (in any form) is too unwieldy, don't forget that the only functional difference between a cloak and a blanket is that one is used specifically while sleeping! A wool blanket, pinned around you and your gear, can do great double duty as a 'matchcoat' and plays well with most methods of gear carry.

We hope this information will assist you in getting started with planning an efficient system for getting yourself and your necessities from doorstep to destination in comfort!!



Special thanks to [M. Sheridan](#) of the [Misty Mountain Rangers](#) for his fantastic pack artwork!

“Sam eased the pack on his shoulders, and went over anxiously in his mind all the things that he had stowed in it...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; ...flint and tinder; woolen hose; linen; various small belongings of his master's...he went through them all.

'Rope!' he muttered. 'No rope!...You'll want it, if you haven't got it.'” - LR, Bk 2:Ch 3

*** “...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...”**

- LR, Bk IV:Ch 4

The MATTRESS-STYLE GROUNDsheet

B. HOLMES & G. LAMMERS

Groundcloths and shelter tarps are often carried by travelers to quickly avoid weather from above or moisture from the ground when laying down. Both are quite useful, and sometimes can even be a part of the same single piece of fabric. Still, even with a moisture-proof groundsheet, there is nothing to insulate the body from the cold hard ground, which will sap away body heat through such direct contact.

To alleviate this problem, the experienced trekker seeks out natural insulation with which to pad themselves from the ground. Green pine boughs or fallen needles are legendary for their relative comfort and insulating properties, and fallen leaves are usually plentiful and can also work well, though they must be piled quite high initially due to how much they can compact once laid upon.

Once a pile of leaf litter or similar material is made, the groundsheet is typically laid over it, and the traveler wraps up in a blanket and lays on top. While the construction and execution seem simple enough, we personally have struggled with maintaining this natural mattress through an entire night on many occasions. Depending on whether you are a side- or a back-sleeper, or whether you sleep still or tend to move around during the night, you may have difficulty keeping your mattress 'together' beneath you. If you are a side sleeper who moves during sleep, you may wake in the middle of the night to find your leaf litter has 'wallowed' out from under you and is now strewn about!

The solution is a groundsheet that is effectively a mattress 'tick', which—for those of you unfamiliar with traditional mattress construction—is a man-sized pillowcase made of groundsheet material. It may also resemble a sleeping bag in length and shape, being stitched all the way around with only one narrow end left open, but its purpose is not the same. Rather than laying down inside the bag, the bag itself is actually stuffed with whatever material is available:



The benefits of this are twofold: obviously, the mattress material cannot be dispersed so easily beneath a jostling sleeper. In addition, the actual gathering of the materials is much easier, as multiple trips filling a blanket with leaves need not be made since it can all just be shoved inside the tick. Since it should be made of a moisture-proof material, this form of groundsheet can then be slept on regardless of how wet or dry the leaf litter is with no issues, and then at the end of it all a blanket or other bed-roll can still be rolled up inside it like any other traditional sheet or tarp. It's definitely worth giving a try on your next outing! ✨

SOCKS & GLOVES REVIEW

G. LAMMERS

This year I acquired three pieces of knit wool for winter use: A pair of mittens and a pair of socks from [Bethlehem Trading Post](#), and a pair of fingerless gloves from [Jas. Townsends](#).

The socks from Bethlehem Trading are excellently made, and fit very well. They were very warm on a sub-zero overnighter, and significantly elevate a historically-minded kit in a behind-the-scenes sort of way.

The mittens were of similar construction to the socks, and so were of a high quality and tightly knit. I will say that they seemed a little large for the size I chose, but the thumbs fit perfectly so felting/shrinking them is likely not an option. I ordered mediums and they came in a bit loose-fitting, but they served me well nonetheless.

The fingerless gloves from Townsends are a still tighter knit than the Bethlehem Trading goods, being of a much thinner yarn to start with. They are inherently less warm due to their fingerless nature, but they allow for a greater range of dexterity while performing in-camp tasks, and are well-suited to a trekking persona.

The goods from Bethlehem Trading are admittedly a bit on the expensive side, but all are ultimately well worth the cost in providing authentic means for keeping the outer extremities warm in the cold months of the year. ✨



COLD-WEATHER SLEEPING TIPS

a. hollis

Sleeping comfortably in the wilds in winter can be tricky and requires some preparation...try these tricks to help you stay warm!

-Mittens are superior to gloves for warmth. You may lose finger dexterity, but being in contact with other fingers around them will keep your hands warmer.

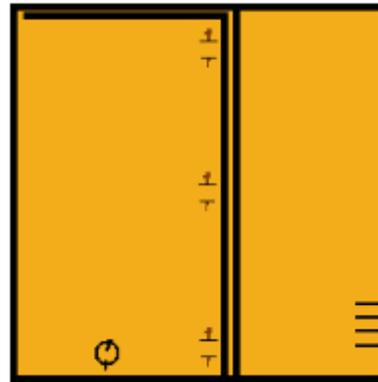
-While you should always take pains to avoid sleeping in damp clothing, when sleeping in a wool blanket, sometimes less clothing is more (for the same reason as mittens) - use your body heat to your advantage! (This is actually borne out by 18th century colonial sources: *"Till this Night I had always lain in my Night-Gown, but upon Tryal I found it much warmer to strip to my shirt & lie in naked Bed with my Gown over me. The Woodsmen put all off, if they have no more than one Blanket to lye in, & agree that 'tis much more comfortable than to lie with their Clothes on, tho' the weather be never so cold."* The Dividing Line Histories of William Byrd II of Westover, 414.

"Now we are going to sleep in the open air, no other covering than the Heavens and our Blankets, and it is very cold and freezes. But we have got a good fire. ... Slept very little last night Mr. Rice tells me it is because I did not take off my clothes." The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1775, 61-62.

-If you want your fire to last through the night, drink a big cup of warm broth or water before bed. Then, when you have to pee in the middle of the night, *don't hold it!* The energy your body spends holding it in can reduce your ability to maintain temperature, and you may even notice an increase in shivering. Relieve yourself, then get your blood pumping by doing some high

steps (for cold legs or feet), pushups (for cold arms/hands), or jumping jacks (for full-body warmth)...and stoke up the fire!

-One advantage of a metal or enameled canteen is that they can be heated near the fire before bed. Inside your blanket, the high thermal mass of the water can be used to keep your hands or feet warm for hours!



-With a good source of ground insulation, I only need to sleep on one quarter of my blanket. The other 3/4 are pinned together along the sides with large locust thorns and an iron brooch. This gives me two layers of blanket above me and produces a warm 'sleeping bag' that is fairly easy to get into and out of throughout the night.

-Your ability to handle the cold will get better with time spent out-of-doors. Your second or third night sleeping on the ground will almost always be more comfortable than the first, so acclimate ahead of time! ✨

(For more tips on this subject, see my previous article "Keeping Warm in Winter", published in [Edge of the Wild Volume I:Issue 4](#))

3RD AGE 'CAREER TRAVELER'

Pictured:

- Pack basket
- Hatchet
- Spare woolen hose
- Haversack with sling & brooch
- Wool blanket
- Heavy wool tunic
- Hemp rope
- Gourd canteen

Not pictured:

- Change of clothes
- Corn boiler and dry goods (in haversack)
- Firestarting kit
- Sewing kit
- Pencil, parchment, & map
- Trail rations

While not seeming so, the packbasket can be very convenient and versatile. While it can neither expand nor reduce in size, it is very good at protecting delicate or oddly-shaped items, and makes organizing simple. Loading and emptying can be done without having to fumble with folding or tying, and quickly stuffing it full after breaking camp makes no difference to how it carries. In camp it provides a handy catch-all to put things so as to not misplace them—especially in the dark—and it makes collecting firewood a simple task.

3RD AGE BEORNING:

Pictured:

- Wool blanket
- Frame pack
- Canteen
- Sleeping mat

Not pictured:

- Spear
- Fire, hygiene, sewing, and fishing kits
- Spare clothing
- Regional map
- Cookpot, food canister, and spoon.



This kit relies on natural materials available to a common Beorning in the Vales of Anduin—aquatic plants, sheep’s wool, and hazel wood, but also dwarvish ‘trade goods’ like a metal canteen. The roomy backpack is supported by a bent hazel frame that allows bulky items like bedroll and sleeping pad to be attached to the outside. This pack arrangement leaves the arms unencumbered and ready to defend with spear or bow.

3RD AGE DÚNEDAIN RANGER:

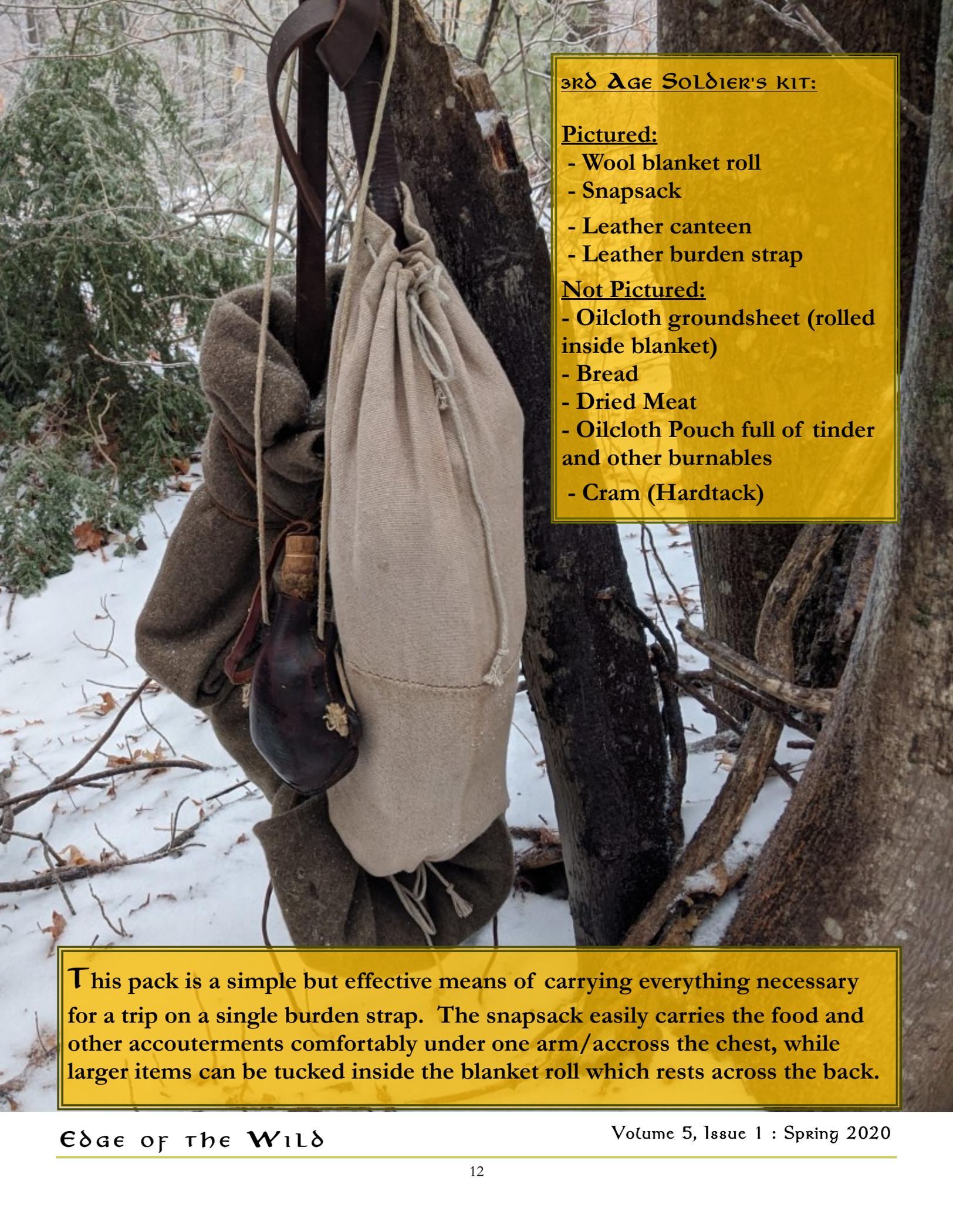
Pictured:

- Cloak
- Blanket roll in leather case on shoulder strap
- Waterskin
- Bow, quiver

Not pictured:

- Foodstuffs (rolled inside bedroll)

Very lightweight and mobile, this setup relies heavily on dry goods, and plans for very little (if any) cooking while out and about. The cloak can be worn on the move or slung over-the-shoulder in a horseshoe roll, which adds potential for additional stowage of gear, if necessary. The blanket case protects from weather and allows easy stowage of tools tucked in the ends should the need arise.



3RD AGE SOLDIER'S KIT:

Pictured:

- Wool blanket roll
- Snapsack
- Leather canteen
- Leather burden strap

Not Pictured:

- Oilcloth groundsheet (rolled inside blanket)
- Bread
- Dried Meat
- Oilcloth Pouch full of tinder and other burnables
- Cram (Hardtack)

This pack is a simple but effective means of carrying everything necessary for a trip on a single burden strap. The snapsack easily carries the food and other accouterments comfortably under one arm/across the chest, while larger items can be tucked inside the blanket roll which rests across the back.

3RD AGE DÚNEDAIN RANGER:

Pictured:

- Yew bow
- Quiver with arrows
- Waxed linen snapsack (on quiver strap)
- Oilcloth pouch containing tinder-box (on quiver strap)
- Waterskin
- Wool cloak
- Groundsheet

Not pictured:

- Foodstuffs (inside snapsack)
- Trail tools (inside snapsack)

A lightweight and unique custom pack, this setup revolves around the quiver strap bearing the burden of the edible necessities and tools necessary in the wilds. Minimalist in nature, the cloak and groundsheet serve as the bedding, but natural shelter is relied upon rather than a tarp. There are few creature comforts, but a focus on long times spent afield.

ABOUT US

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 middleearthrangers.org Tolkien re-creation community, the Society publishes the online periodical Edge of the Wild, showcasing new research, methods, materials, and instructional articles, while meeting 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 subscribe to the newsletter and receive future issues of Edge of the Wild sent directly to your inbox, contact us at Middleearthreenactmentsociety@gmail.com or find us on Facebook as ['Middle-earth Reenactment Society'](#).

To apply for membership, please send a head-to-toe portrait photo and a detailed description!



This winter, two of our members risked the weather to challenge themselves in an overnighter during a deep freeze that plummeted well below freezing, in 100% natural materials, historically-based garments, and book-accurate gear.

You can [view their adventure in Wilderland here](https://tinyurl.com/ttfwu43) (tinyurl.com/ttfwu43)