

The Middle-earth Rangers' Handbook

A Newcomer's Guide to Tolkien Reenactment

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INTRODUCTION

Mae g'ovannen, mellon! (Well met, friend!)

SO YOU WANT TO BE A RANGER!

Welcome to our favorite hobby/obsession! We're sure you can't wait to jump right in and become a Ranger of Middle-earth, and we are excited to welcome you into our ranks - but some people have told us they find getting started a little intimidating. Well not to worry! We have put together this handy guide-book to outline a series of easy, straightforward steps to help start you on your journey! But first, perhaps we should cover a little basic information about "what-it-is-we-do."

WHAT IS A RANGER?¹

Of course this is the first, and most important question we should ask. When you hear the word "Ranger," what comes to mind? Solitary, mysterious wanderers, road-weary and weather-worn, dressed in earthy greens and browns? Grim travellers with cloaks about their shoulders, their eyes shadowed by deep hoods, swords at their sides, bows in hand, and quivers of arrows slung upon their backs? If this is what you imagine when someone says "Ranger," you're not alone! The word "Ranger" has historically applied to many vastly different individuals, groups, and organizations, yet when most people think of Rangers in a fantasy setting, a fairly uniform image comes to mind.

...But where did this image come from?

As with so many modern fantasy archetypes, it is easy to trace the origins of what we call "Rangers" back to J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy. In Professor Tolkien's writings, the Rangers, or Dúnedain (an Elvish word meaning "Men of the West"), are a secretive race of Men living in the lands of northwestern Middle-earth. They appear as ragged travelers, wandering the wilds for purposes unknown, secretly keeping watch over the various scattered settlements of that kingless country. Despite their shabby, threadbare appearance, these mysterious nomads were descended from an ancient and noble race of men - the Numenoreans - who once ruled over two great kingdoms in Middle-earth: Arnor in the North and Gondor in the South. In *the Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien first introduces the Rangers through a character called Strider - a suspicious, rough-looking Dúnedain from the North who, over the course of the series, is revealed to in fact be Aragorn son of Arathorn, the rightful heir to the throne of Gondor.

Thus, the Dúnedain Rangers (and their southern cousins, the Rangers of Ithilien) were the progenitors of the modern Ranger archetype. Just like the many other fantasy rangers that followed, the Dúnedain of Tolkien's world were described as dressing in cloaks, hoods, and masks, in earthy hues of green and brown, fighting with swords and bows, and being

¹ For a more detailed exploration of this topic, please see **APPENDIX A: What is a Ranger (Extended)**

exceptionally skilled woodsmen. Therefore it is plain to see that it is to these Rangers we owe our understanding of the term today.

So we all agree on what a ranger is, but now it's time to address the next big question...

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A RANGER?

First, it is probably necessary to define what “being a ranger” actually means, in the context of this hobby. Mostly, we describe what we do as “Middle-earth Reenactment.” That is to say, we are trying to apply the principles of serious historical reenactment (in varying degrees) to Tolkien’s fictitious world of Middle-earth. This, of course, differs from typical historical reenactment and living-history because the cultures, geographical locations, and time periods we seek to recreate never actually existed. In some ways, this peculiarity allows us considerable freedoms which ordinary historical reenactors do not enjoy, but it also creates a number of unexpected new challenges that would not occur if we were portraying people and events from the real world. One way or the other, we try to be as faithful as we can to what we believe is a realistic portrayal of the Rangers of Middle-earth.

What this actually boils down to, in terms of precisely *what we do*, is a little different for everyone. Some people just want to dress up and attend relatively casual events like renaissance festivals and LARP functions. Others choose to organize primitive, full-immersion hikes and camping events. Yet others embark on long-distance treks, packing only the most Tolkien-authentic supplies and gear. One way or the other, we all make some sort of effort to *get out there* in our kits.² and live the Ranger lifestyle in whichever way we enjoy most.

Well now that we know exactly what it means to be a Ranger, the next and final question we have to ask is...

HOW DO I BECOME A RANGER?

Embracing the “Ranger lifestyle” might seem challenging at first, especially for those who have never done anything quite like it before - but don’t let it intimidate you! It is true that many people who get involved in this hobby have backgrounds in historical reenactment, renaissance faires, cosplay, tabletop role-playing games, and live-action role-playing games - but you certainly don’t have to. Anyone from *any* background can get involved; all you need is a love for fantasy and the outdoors, a sense of adventure, some basic clothing to look the part, and some rudimentary skills to help you participate safely. As you become more involved, you will likely acquire new and higher quality gear, build upon your knowledge and experience, and

² “Kit” is a term used by reenactors to describe their historically based clothing and other various accoutrements, including such items as cooking equipment, weapons, camping gear, etc.

improve your personal set of ranger skills, but it's easy to take care of the basics so you can get out there having fun! Remember: *no one starts as an expert*, and no one becomes one overnight. It's a process. But it doesn't have to be a boring or difficult one! Don't let anyone intimidate you because they have had more time or resources to perfect their skills and gear than you have. Just go at your own pace, and remember to have fun!

So let's get started!

CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED

If you've decided that you're ready to take the plunge and start assembling your kit, you might be wondering where to start. While the activities you want to participate will direct what equipment you need, this list of basics is a suggestion of what pieces of gear to prioritize if you are starting from scratch. If you have participated in other forms of reenacting, SCA, LARPing, renaissance faires, or the like, you may already have some of the items on this list³.

1. Shoes. Yeah, I know that shoes aren't very exciting, but Rangers range, and if you want to go ranging, you need to think about your feet. Getting some footwear that is comfortable and looks the part is going to require investment, especially if you're aiming for Strider's "high boots of supple leather", so I think it's worth considering just ripping the band-aid off and getting some early in the process. If you happen to live near some like-minded folks, there's a reasonable chance that someone will have a tunic or cloak to spare that you could borrow, but it's less likely that someone will have a good pair of shoes in your size. Even if you decide to go for something a little less dramatic than tall boots (chukkas and winnigas make for a budget-friendly option that won't draw focus), it's worth thinking about shoes early on – you don't want to be prepping for your first trek and find that the only shoes you have that won't destroy your feet are your fluorescent gym sneakers. When in doubt, prioritize function over form; low-quality costume footwear is a dangerous gamble, and can lead to serious problems if it comes apart or injures your feet.

2. Tunic. With decent shoes and a tunic, you can hide a lot of modern items that you may need to temporarily include in your "in progress" kit if you want to get out in it early on - modern pockets and base layers are easily covered up. Tunics are readily available online, but a tunic is also a great sewing project if you want to start making your own gear. There are tons of tutorials out there, and if you have access to a sewing machine, it can be done in an afternoon. Avoid loud colors, shiny metal studs, zippers and snaps, and too much bright, shiny trim. Plain, Medieval style tunics (or SCA "t-tunics) are great. Poet shirts can work in a pinch, but anything with too much "poof" may look a little out of place (unless you're portraying a Hobbit). Try for dark, muted colors; browns and greens are ideal, but dark blues and reds can also work, and so can black (in moderation). Most folks have a plain leather belt in their closet or dresser, and while it shouldn't be a permanent part of your kit, it will serve to belt your tunic in the short term.

3. Cloak. Rangers are consistently described with cloaks, and it really is an archetypal part of the fantasy look. As with tunics, cloaks are pretty easy to find online, but are also relatively straightforward to make. A good wool cloak can also supplement a blanket in cold weather and stand in for one in warm weather.

4. Canteen. So once you have your shoes, tunic, and cloak that you can wear with a nondescript pair of modern pants and a belt, you are undoubtedly eager to get out in the woods!

³ Some costume pieces acquired for other activities may or may not be suitable for use in backwoods conditions, depending on the materials used in their construction. For more information on this topic, see **APPENDIX B: FABRIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADVENTURING KIT.**

While you'll need more gear for Ranger-style camping, day hikes are a great opportunity to test what you've put together so far and get comfortable in it. For both day hikes and longer treks, hydration is critical, and that's why I've listed a canteen as the first piece of hard kit. Whether it's a day on the trails or a day at the local Renaissance Faire, nothing spoils the look like a plastic water bottle.

5. A good knife. I personally think a good knife is a necessity at all times, but it is especially important to carry one out in the woods. There are many factors to consider when picking a knife (stainless vs. high carbon steel, type of grind, blade shape, full or hidden tang), and there are many people on the internet who will tell you what type of knife is the "correct" or "best" bushcraft knife. My advice is to find a knife that is durable and that you feel comfortable using.

6. Pouches. Once you start thinking about switching from day hikes to more extended treks, you're going to need to think about carrying a lot of small pieces of gear. The pockets of the modern but nondescript pants you're wearing are fine for your phone, keys, wallet, etc., but when camping, you'll probably find yourself wanting to keep more things close to your person, and pouches are a good place for things like...

7. Flint and steel (fire-making kit). I'm sure some folks will disagree with this being earlier on this list than some of the later items (or maybe with it being on the list at all), and Tolkien does mention matches, but I think primitive fire-making is an important skill to work on. The sooner you get some flint and a striker and some charred material, the sooner you can start practicing!

8. Tarp. Longer treks require shelter, and tarps seem more Ranger-esque than tents. Oilskin makes for a lightweight tarp, but it's expensive. Heavy-duty canvas tarps are treated to be water-resistant and flame-retardant, but they're heavy. Canvas dropcloths are inexpensive, but usually require some additional work to make them more water-resistant. Depending on the tarp and set up, a ground cloth might also be necessary.

9. Blanket. A wool blanket could have been number 8, but I gave a tarp the edge because a cloak was number 3, and for warm nights a cloak may be sufficient. If you plan on camping on public land where building a natural shelter may be frowned upon, you may want to get the tarp before the blanket. If you are able to build natural shelters for sleeping, you may want to invest in a blanket before a tarp. The tarp and blanket really go together, though.

10. Weapon(s). Some folks will disagree with weapons being last, but hear me out. Yes, Rangers are warriors. Yes, they are (I believe) universally described as carrying swords (sometimes in multiple pieces, but still a sword), supplemented with bows and spears. Yes, the swords and bows and spears are what draw a lot of folks to the idea of Middle-Earth reenacting in the first place. Swords and bows are expensive, though. For a half-way decent sword, you're looking at \$100-200. \$200 could pay for a sword, or with a little savvy shopping you could probably get shoes, a tunic, and a cloak, all of decent quality for the same price. For the \$300-\$500 you would probably need to pay for a good (not excellent, but good) sword, you could probably get everything else on this list. Bows can be had for a little less (maybe \$150 for an

inexpensive traditional bow and arrows), but you can get a little more “bang for your buck” if you put that money elsewhere.

CHAPTER 2: SOFT KIT (GARB)

As mentioned in the introduction, “kit” is a term used by reenactors to describe their historically based clothing and other various accoutrements, including such items as cooking equipment, weapons, camping gear, etc. Garb (a term more commonly used in the SCA and LARPing communities) is referred to as “soft kit” because it is, well, soft! It’s made of pliable materials - usually woven cloth or, in some cases, leather.

Soft kit, by the layer

In our day to day lives, most of us will wear multiple layers of clothing. On warm days, this may just consist of two layers - underwear and a top and bottom or a dress. On colder or wet days, we add more layers on top of those to adjust to our environment. Unfortunately, some people approach soft kit as costuming and only consider the outermost layer of their clothing. Multiple layers of kit allow you to adjust your clothing to suit whatever environment you might find yourself, taking it from costume to modular survival gear!

For more information about material considerations for the various layers described here, see Appendix B: Fabric Considerations for Adventuring Kit.

First Layer – Undergarments, designed to keep you comfortable and your outer clothes clean.

- **Undershirt/tunic** - This garment should be simple, lightweight and made of a breathable fabric such as linen.
- **Socks/Stockings** - Some kind of sock or stocking is usually advisable. Cotton knit socks are a reasonable option in warm weather, but a better option is wool, or wool/synthetic-blend hiking socks.
- **Drawers, etc.** - Ordinary modern undergarments are fine, but many are made of cotton. If wearing modern undergarments, it may be advisable to opt for something water-wicking insulating, designed for exercise or outdoor use. However, if you want to go the extra mile, a pair of loose “boxer” style drawers with a drawstring waist, made of a soft handkerchief linen, would do the trick nicely.



Linen undergarments based on 13th century examples

Second Layer – Basic clothing, designed for comfort and function in the wild.

- **Tunic** - A medieval style tunic a good choice for an outer shirt. “[M]ales, especially in northern parts such as the Shire, would wear breeches, whether hidden by a cloak or long mantle, or merely accompanied by a tunic” (Letter 211). Tunics were generally simple in design, with rectangular bodies and sleeves, round or keyhole necks, and sometimes triangular gussets sewn in for extra room to move. Tunics of this type were generally knee-length or longer. The skirts can be split up the front and back, on the sides, or not at

all. Generally, these are made to be slipped over the head like a t-shirt, but they can be made to lace, button, toggle, or otherwise fasten up the front as well. Outer tunics can be made of a number of materials. Lightweight wool is probably the most versatile, but heavier wool is good for colder times of year, and mid-to-heavy weight linen works well for warm weather.

- Belt** - A good, sturdy belt is one of the most important aspects of a ranger's clothing. Leather belts are the most common, but belts woven from hemp, cotton, linen, or wool can be used. Some belts popular in the Middle Ages had decorations in the form of studs, metal plates, etc. but such shiny ornamentation may be a little too eye-catching for the preference of some rangers. Belts can be left with a long "tail" to be passed through the buckle and then wrapped and tied around themselves, as seen in the image to the right. Otherwise, you will probably need a belt with some kind of strap-keeper to prevent the loose end from flapping around and getting in the way. Some people like to wear multiple belts. This can be handy if one of these belts is a dedicated sword-belt, or weapon belt of some kind, because then the weapon can be removed without the need of removing one's main belt, which may have pouches, etc. attached to it.



1. Buckle the belt

2. Tuck the tail up and under



3. Pass the tail through the loop

4. Pull the knot tight

- Trousers/hose** - There has been a fair deal of debate over the years regarding what kind of leg coverings a ranger should wear. In letter 211, Tolkien stated that "males, especially in northern parts such as the Shire, would wear breeches, whether hidden by a cloak or long mantle, or merely accompanied by a tunic, but this is a somewhat vague description, as the term "breeches" has historically applied to many different styles of garment. As a newcomer, it may be best to simply choose a pair of linen or wool pants that are simple, comfortable, and durable.

Boots and Footwear

- When the Professor describes the footwear of inhabitants of Middle-earth, he most often describes his characters as wearing **boots**. Aragorn wears "high boots of supple leather that fitted him well" (Book 1, Chapter 9), and Gandalf is also described as wearing boots (Book 2, Chapter 3). Both Gimli (Book 2, Chapter 4) and the Eastfarthing hobbits (Prologue, Chapter 1) are described as wearing "dwarf-boots". In fact, the only member of the Fellowship described as not wearing boots (besides the barefoot hobbits) is

Legolas, who “wore only light shoes, as he always did” (Book 2, Chapter 3). Unfortunately, these descriptions are rather vague.

- When discussing the clothing of Middle-earth in Letter 211, Tolkien refers to the illustrations Pauline Baynes created for *Farmer Giles of Ham*, stating that she drew her inspiration from medieval manuscripts and that “the style seems to fit well enough.” While he makes clear allowance for regional and cultural differences, in this letter Tolkien seems to suggest that in general, clothing of Middle-earth appeared similar to that of the Middle Ages. Footwear of the Middle Ages was typically of a **turnshoe** construction, so a turnshoe boot is a good footwear candidate for a Middle-earth ranger!



Michael Sheridan's modified turnshoe boots

- Comfortable footwear is a necessity for safety, so if you do not feel that you can move safely in smooth leather soles or if you have physical limitations that require you to wear shoes that provide more support than turnshoes, please consider sacrificing a bit of authenticity for insoles or crepe rubber soles.

Third Layer – Over-garments, designed to tie everything else together, and to protect you & your clothing.

- **Cloak** - A cloak is probably the single garment most commonly associated with Middle-earth, and Fantasy worlds in general, and while many cloaks in Fantasy media are shown with attached hoods, this was not the case in the Middle Ages. Medieval cloaks typically did not have an attached hood – the hood was a separate garment. This allowed for the two pieces to be used separately, as conditions required. A good wool cloak can be quite an investment, but can be a powerful tool for fighting off the wet and cold.
- **Hood** - A medieval style hood is an extremely versatile outer garment, and Tolkien describes them specifically at several points in his stories (“‘Now we are all here!’ said Gandalf, looking at the row of thirteen hoods — the best detachable party hoods — and his own hat hanging on the pegs.” - *The Hobbit*, Chapter 1: An Unexpected Party). A hood that is separate from a cloak can offer protection from the sun and rain, and can help keep the upper body warm without being as hot or cumbersome as a full cloak. There are many slight variations of hood design, but the most basic hood should consist of a small capelet that lays over the wearer’s shoulders and upper chest, and a basic hood of a square-ish shape. Wool is best, but linen may be more comfortable in warmer weather.

Additional garments

There are many other types of garments that may be appropriate for Middle-earth rangers. These additional layers, while not necessarily essential to a Ranger impression, can increase the functionality and visual impact to your soft kit!



- Cordage
- Container
- Cover

While it is likely your hard kit will consist of more than five items, it is important that it contain items that fill all of these functions. The challenge is to make sure that these requirements are not only met, but met by items that a Ranger of Middle-earth might be carrying!

Cutting tools

While swords may be the first sharp object that comes to mind when one thinks about Rangers, they are not very good for chopping wood or butchering game. A good knife is essential for camp tasks, and a hatchet or tomahawk is helpful for larger cutting chores.



Combustion

Fire is critical for anyone spending an extended amount of time in the wild. Fire boils water and makes it safe to drink, provides heat and light, and helps to keep animals (or worse!) at bay. While Tolkien mentions that hobbits use matches, flint and steel are probably the most appropriate fire-making tools for Rangers.

True flint and steel firemaking utilizes a shard or flint or other hard stone (such as quartz) and a forged steel striker to create a spark, which is caught on charred material and used to ignite fine tinder, such as dry grass or bark. The term “flint and steel” is sometimes used to refer to creating sparks by scraping a ferro-rod or firesteel with a knife, but this is a modern firemaking method that is not appropriate for Middle-earth reenactment.



Cordage

Cordage is useful in a wide range of applications, from pitching a tarp or lashing poles for a natural shelter to making snares and traps or rigging up a bear bag to protect your food. It can be helpful to carry both rope and cords. Rope should most likely be made of natural fibers, such as hemp, manila, or sisal, but there are some synthetic ropes that are designed to look and

work like natural ropes while possessing a much higher working load. Cords can be hemp, sisal, or even leather lacing, but paracord (while useful) is best avoided.

Containers

There are two types of containers to consider for bush carry - canteens and cook pots. Even if you only plan to participate in day hikes, or even just jaunts at the local Renaissance Faire, you will need a way to carry water, and nothing spoils a good kit like a plastic water bottle. Leather bottles/costrels and waterskins are probably the most documented forms of canteens in Middle-earth, but wooden, ceramic, or even some styles of metal canteens would not stand out.

Cook pots are good for boiling water to kill harmful microorganisms, but also preparing food. Cast iron is probably the most easily available option, but it's very heavy, as is ceramic cookware. Copper and tin cookware is lighter and fits the Middle-earth aesthetic, but can be more difficult to source. Aluminum will do in a pinch, as it doesn't call too much attention to itself, but should eventually be replaced.



Back row, left to right: leather costrel, stoneware flask, gourd canteen. Front row, left to right: round wooden canteen, metal flask, converted Bota bottle



Back row, left to right: Lodge 8" steel skillet, Back Country cookpot with bail, stoneware cookpot. Front row, left to right: Stoneware Oven (without the lid), copper bean boiler from Backwoods Tin and Copper

Cover

The first component of cover was addressed in the Soft Kit section - that's right, your first layer of cover is your clothing! Appropriate clothing is important for maintaining core temperature, but your level of comfort can be increased with the addition of shelter. A good wool blanket is important on a cool night, and a tarp (oilskin or treated canvas) can be used to create a sheltered microenvironment by trapping heat and keeping out rain. Bedding made from

fallen pine needles and leaves will keep you off the cold ground, and natural shelters can also be constructed from branches and leaves (if you are trekking in an area where that is allowed).



From right to left, a Tentsmith's oilskin tarp, untreated canvas tarp (dropcloth), and heavy-duty canvas tarp (treated for water and fire resistance) set up in various shelter configurations.

Other Essentials

The 5 c's are a good place to start when gather hard kit items, but there are additional items to consider, such as first aid supplies, food, navigational aids, and means of communicating with the modern world, to name a few. Many of these may be modern items, but they are necessities, so if possible carry them in a Middle-earth appropriate bag or pouch, but definitely carry them!

Carrying Hard Kit

On the subject of carrying things, once you assemble your kit, you'll need a way to carry it! Shown from right to left are a bedroll and portmanteau on a single shoulder strap, a modified Roycroft packframe, and a bedroll and swag bag. Some other potential pack styles include

horseshoe blanket rolls, haversacks, knapsacks, veshmeshocks, yukon packs, and Otzi-style pack frames. All of these



carry methods have been used successfully by members of the Middle-earth ranger reenactment community at one point or another, but the best carry style for any given individual will depend on the specific gear being carried, the terrain it is being carried through, and the body of the individual carrying it. Experimentation and practice is critical for determining what carry method is right for you!

CHAPTER 4: GETTING OUT THERE

Hopefully you now have some idea of what a Ranger might wear and what a Ranger might carry, but kit alone does not a Ranger make! It is important to invest in learning the skills necessary to use and maintain your kit, especially if you are interested in spending time out in the woods. Aragorn is described by Gandalf as “the greatest traveller and huntsman of this age of the world” and while Aragorn also describes the Dúnedain as hunters, he specifies that they are “hunters ever of the servants of the Enemy”. The men of Bree believed the Rangers to have “strange powers of sight and hearing, and to understand the languages of beasts and birds.”

While most of us will never be as skilled as Aragorn himself, these descriptions give us an idea of what we can strive for. Basic bushcraft skills⁴ such as appropriate campsite identification, shelter construction, primitive firemaking, campfire cooking, blade maintenance and use, knot tying, navigation, and plant identification are relatively inexpensive to learn and will make you more competent and comfortable in the woods. Hunting, trapping, and fishing, as well as game processing, are also good skills to develop, but can require a bit more financial investment in the form of licenses, classes, and equipment. Martial studies such as HEMA (historical European martial arts) and archery can also improve your impression, but classes and equipment can be pricey and hard to find.

If this seems intimidating, what was said in the introduction bears repeating: *no one starts as an expert*, and no one becomes one overnight. Pick a few skills that interest you to start with, and practice, practice, practice! Learn from and share what you know with others. Just as your kit will evolve, your skills will improve with time and effort. Middle-earth reenactment should be a journey, not a destination, and who better to journey with than a Ranger?

⁴ For a guide to basic bushcraft skills, consider reading “Bushcraft 101” by Dave Canterbury. Much of what the book covers can be gleaned from online sources, but it can be helpful to have an overview of the subject in a single source.

APPENDIX A

WHAT IS A RANGER?

The first mention of Rangers in Tolkien's work is as follows:

[In] the wild lands beyond Bree there were mysterious wanderers. The Bree-folk called them Rangers, and knew nothing of their origin. They were taller and darker than the Men of Bree and were believed to have strange powers of sight and hearing, and to understand the languages of beasts and birds. They roamed at will southwards, and eastwards even as far as the Misty Mountains; but they were now few and rarely seen. When they appeared they brought news from afar, and told strange forgotten tales which were eagerly listened to; but the Bree-folk did not make friends of them.

The Fellowship of the Ring, LoTR Book 1, Ch 9, At the Sign of the Prancing Pony.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's world of Arda, the **Dúnedain** (or "Men of the West") are a mysterious race of Men living in the wild lands of northwest Middle-earth. On the surface, these Dúnedain appear as ragged travellers, wandering in the wild, hunting and trading at times with the inhabitants of the scattered settlements of that kingless country. It was the people of these lands who first began to call them "Rangers." In reality, however, the Dúnedain are descended from the last living Numenoreans - a tall, noble, and extremely long-lived race, very close in many respects to the Elves, and much beloved of Eru Ilúvatar (the "God" of Tolkien's universe). However, the Numenoreans displeased Ilúvatar, and he punished them by destroying their island home to the north-west of Middle-earth, sinking it beneath the sea. The remaining members of this ancient people were scattered across the lands, setting up two kingdoms: Arnor in the North, and Gondor in the South. It was from Arnor that Isildur came - the famous hero who cut the ring from Sauron's hand, thus ending his reign of darkness. But when Isildur was slain at the Disaster of the Gladden Fields, losing in the process the One Ring, the line of kings was broken, and Arnor faded into ruin.

From this ruined society, the Dúnedain arose. Now a nomadic people, they ranged out across the wild lands, keeping secret watch over the various peoples settled there, protecting them against unseen evils lurking about them. Aragorn remarks the following to Boromir during the Council of Elrond:

Travellers scowl at us, and countrymen give us scornful names. "Strider" I am to one fat man who lives within a day's march of foes that would freeze his heart or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so. That has been the task of my kindred, while the years have lengthened and the grass has grown.

The Fellowship of the Ring, LotR Book 2, Chapter 2, The Council of Elrond.

During the War of the Ring in the 3rd Age there was also a group of men called Rangers in Gondor, specifically in the forest of Ithilien. The Ithilien Rangers were neither as secretive nor as far-flung as the Dúnedain of the North, but were, rather, a specialized military branch that functioned as part of the Gondorian army. They operated as guerilla fighters to strike the Enemy from secret positions within the forest. These Rangers were led by Faramir - the son of the Steward of Gondor, and Boromir's brother.

So does this adequately answer the question "*what is a ranger?*" Well... perhaps not entirely. Rangers have been absorbed into popular culture through fantasy roleplaying games, literature, and more recently, video games - all of which owe a great debt to Professor Tolkien for introducing the concept of the "Ranger" into the modern fantasy genre. From this source, over the last few decades, it seems the concept of the fantasy Ranger has coalesced, congealed, fermented, and formed into a distinct idea - a widely understood collective impression, if you will. In most cases, that impression seems to be roughly as follows: a fantasy Ranger is generally a capable fighter and outdoorsperson, who spends a great deal of time travelling in the wild (particularly, but not exclusively in the forest). They are usually human, but in some cases outside of Tolkien's works they may be of other species, such as Elves or Dwarves, or even Halflings. They usually dress in earth-tones of greens and browns, but sometimes in black, or brighter colors. They are almost always highly skilled in archery, and often in sword combat (but not always - John Flannagan's Ranger's Apprentice novel series being a notable example of rangers who rarely use swords), but more importantly, they are always skilled trackers and hunters. Rangers are not generally depicted as warriors wearing heavy armor and charging into battle to the sound of horns and drums; instead they prefer to go quietly, staying in the shadows, and ambushing enemy forces from secret places known only to them. And occasionally, as mentioned in Tolkien's original description, they can speak with birds and other animals in ways others consider preternatural, or even outright magical.

Tolkien may, himself, have been influenced by many different sources when he created his concept of the Ranger. For instance, the king's foresters of Medieval England, who were tasked with patrolling the rural countryside against poachers and law-breakers, bear more than a passing resemblance to the Rangers of Ithilien. On the other hand, Robin Hood and his merry band of outlaws - the very antitheses of the royal foresters - could also have left their mark on the Professor. And then, of course, there were the famous Rogers' Rangers of the American colonies during the French and Indian War, who were a specialized branch of the British army dedicated to reconnaissance and stealthy attacks on outlying targets - as well as Knowlton's Rangers of the American Revolutionary War, who were the early ancestors of the modern US Army Rangers.

One way or the other, it seems the concept of the fantasy Ranger is here to stay, and it certainly bears an attractive mystique. In these modern times, which can so often feel stifling, mechanical, and altogether unheroic, it is easy to fall in love with the idea of these mysterious wanderers, sleeping under the stars, hunting for their food, and defending the helpless against the many evils that lurk in the wild lands beyond the edges of civilization. There is a nobility there, which goes beyond a mere adventurous spirit. As Faramir put it: "I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend."

APPENDIX B: FABRIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADVENTURING KIT

There is a dizzying array of fabrics available out there, but most materials available at your basic fabric store can typically be divided into three categories – those made from natural fibers, those made from synthetic fibers, and natural/synthetic blends. Some examples of natural fibers include cotton, linen, wool, silk, and hemp. Commonly found synthetics are polyester, rayon, and acrylic. Blends can have varying amounts of natural and synthetic fibers, with a few combinations being cotton and polyester, linen and rayon, and wool and acrylic. Depending on the percentage of each fiber type found in the cloth, blends can have a range of characteristics.

When selecting fabrics for your adventuring gear, it is important to consider a few important questions. How does this fabric burn? Does it repel water? Does it breathe? Does it retain heat well? Is it comfortable? Is it durable? Depending on what layer of clothing you are making, the answers to these questions may vary in importance, but should all be considered.

Fire - When primitive camping, fire is a very important resource, but it can also be a dangerous one. If an ember lands on you, what you are wearing can make a big difference in the outcome. As a general rule, most synthetics available from a fabric store are not safe for use around fires. Polyester and acrylic typically do not catch fire easily, but once they do, they melt. Natural fabrics vary a great deal in how they behave when set on fire. Cotton, linen, and hemp will ignite, but burn instead of melting. Wool and silk are naturally fire-retardant. They will burn slowly if held in a flame, and will self-extinguish after being removed from the fire. Leather is also considered fire-retardant. Blends will behave based on what they are composed of. A high-wool, low-acrylic blend will be fairly safe for use around a fire. Army blankets are typically 70-80% wool and are considered fire retardant. A linen-rayon blend may be harder to ignite than 100% linen, but may melt if ignited. For use around fire, I typically prefer an outermost layer of wool or leather, although silk would work as well.

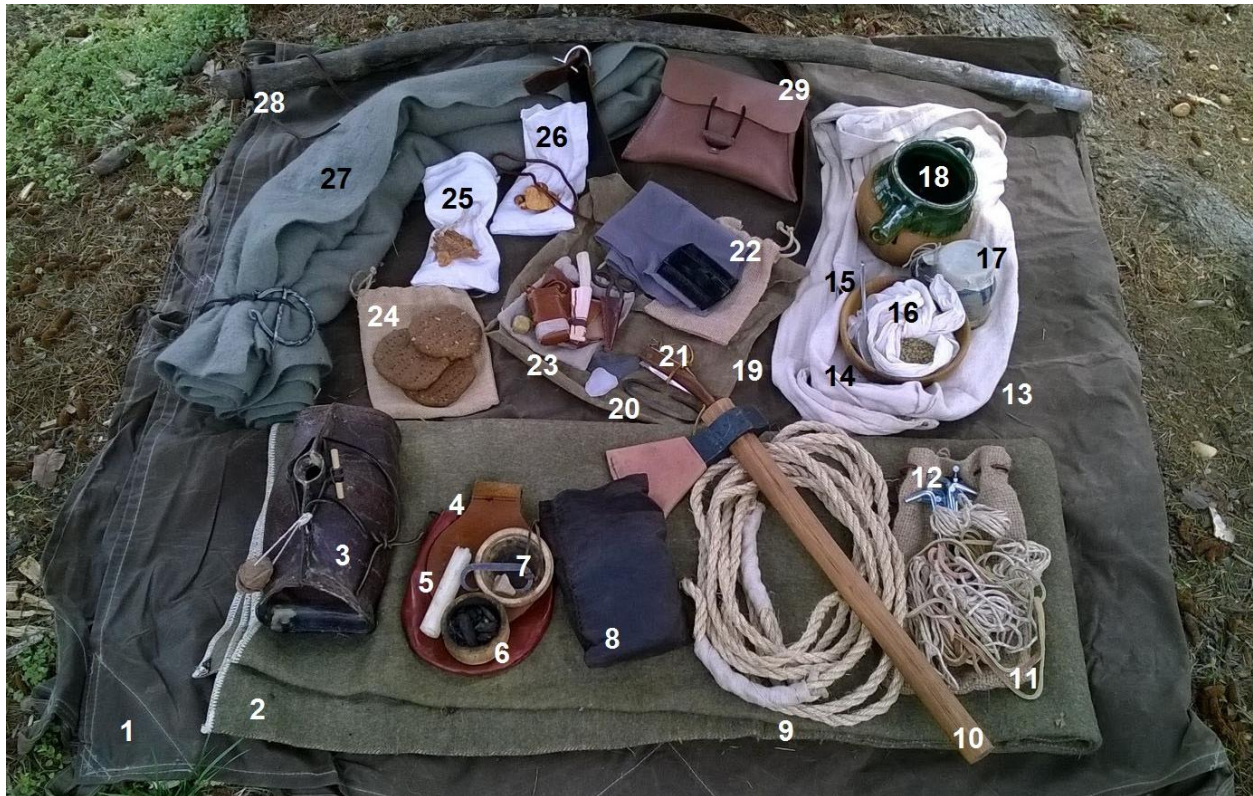
Water repellency/Heat retention - It's easiest to discuss these two things together, since cold and wet often team up. There are some very good synthetic materials for shedding water and retaining heat, but those are usually found in sports gear and are not easily available by the yard. The average synthetic material from a fabric store may repel water well, but will not retain heat very well. Natural fibers again vary in respect to how they perform in cold and wet conditions. There is an expression in the hiking/camping/survival community – “Cotton kills.” This is because cotton readily absorbs water and does not retain its insulating properties when wet. However, there are cottons available that have been treated for water resistance. These can usually be found in the form of military surplus, and are used in military tents and gear. Linen can absorb water, but may not feel damp until it has absorbed up to 20% of its weight. It does not retain heat especially well, however. Silk retains heat well, but also absorbs moisture. Leather

varies in water-resistance, depending on how it was processed (suede, full-grain, brain-tanned, etc.). It may initially repel water, especially if it is oiled, but if the water soaks into the leather it dries slowly. Wool repels water, especially if it still contains some lanolin, and retains 80% of its insulation ability when wet. Again, wool tends to be my pick for an outer layer when considering these factors.

Comfort/"Breathability" - Comfort is going to be a matter of personal taste, but a big factor in comfort is breathability. Does the fabric wick sweat away and allow some air flow? Again, there are some excellent synthetics out there in this respect, but again, they tend to be hard to find by the yard. 100% polyester or rayon from the fabric store is not going to breathe, so you will boil in your own sweat on a hot day and freeze at night because the moisture will be trapped. Due to cotton's ability to absorb water, it tends to retain moisture instead of wicking it away. Linen, however, is excellent at pulling moisture away from the body. Wool does not wick very well, but it does allow for some air flow. Depending on how fine the fibers are, wool can be somewhat scratchy against the skin. Most commercially available leathers will not breathe, but brain-tanned deerskin does. When it comes to comfort, my favorite combination is wool over linen. I've even seen people refer to this combination as "medieval air conditioning," since the linen pulls sweat away from the skin and the wool allows it to evaporate.

Durability - The durability of a fabric typically has more to do with how tightly woven and long/thick the fibers are than what fibers are used. Coarse, heavy-weight linen is going to be tougher than handkerchief linen, and a wool suit doesn't wear as hard as a wool army blanket. Leather tends to be very durable.

APPENDIX C: AN EXAMPLE OF HARD KIT FOR AN OVERNIGHT TREK



1. 8'x8' oilskin tarp
2. Wool blanket
3. Costrel
4. Belt pouch
5. Candle
6. Tinderbox with charred punkwood
7. Flint and steel
8. Tinder bag with cedar and birch bark
9. Rope
10. Polled tomahawk
11. Cordage
12. Modern steel tent stakes
13. Convertible snapsack
14. Wooden bowl
15. Pewter spoon
16. Lentils
17. Ceramic mug with waxed linen cover
18. Ceramic pipkin
19. Waxed linen scrip
20. Spare flints and steel striker
21. Folding knife
22. Hygiene kit
23. Sewing kit
24. Honey and walnut hardtack/cram
25. Jerky
26. Almonds and dried apples
27. Rectangular cloak
28. Walking stick
29. Emergency modern supplies pouch

While the above is an example of kit carried on an overnighter, the items carried for any particular trip will need to be chosen based on the local environment, weather, laws, and the needs and skills of the individual on the trek. Modern first aid, water treatment, and communication devices should always be carried.