



*Bits of the Wilderness*TM

Into the Mountains

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Published by Tabletop AdventuresTM, LLC
www.tabletopadventures.com



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Bits of the Mountains


01. Fluffy white clouds dot the azure sky. The track, after crisscrossing bare rocky slopes, turns and heads into a tree-filled valley. Intense sunshine is glaringly bright on the pale rocks, and the air warms. The path is steep, rough and edged with jagged rocks on all sides. Ahead, rich velvet-green grass beckons below broad open stands of aspen and pine. The round bright green leaves of the aspens rattle in a light breeze. A small river leaps noisily down a series of bright rapids along the stony slope.
02. You come around the mountain and see the charred remains of a small wooden building. The pungent odor of burned wood still permeates the surroundings. The frame of the building can still be seen, but three walls are gone. The remains of the roof lie scattered in pieces on the dirt floor. Everything is blackened and scarred with damage. The far wall has a large hole through which the sun is shining. Shards of colored glass litter this area; though the pieces are dirtied by ashes, you can see that the majority of them are blue or white, with a few pieces of various other colors.
03. The trees around you are tall and straight, rising with the mountain. As you make your way along you come to a strange sight. One lone tree appears to have been struck by lightning, or some other fiery force. It is split down the middle, though its trunk still stands, and it has burn marks all along its surface. [If the tree is examined closely:] When you approach the tree you notice that there is a hole in the trunk, and you can see something sitting inside. [If someone reaches inside the trunk:] You reach in and pull out a jug of what appears to be some sort of liquid. One quick sniff tells your senses that the jug is full of something strongly alcoholic [a very strong whiskey].
04. A slight movement catches your attention as you pass by. The leaves on a nearby tree are dagger-shaped, in a pleasingly deep green color, and they are motionless in the still air. Yet one leaf is twitching feverishly, for no obvious reason.
05. The day is bright and clear, and a gentle breeze blows at lower elevations. Atop the mountain that rakes the sky above you, a glistening veil of crystalline ice and snow is driven over the ridge. As wind gusts over the crest, the spindrift billows upward in great curls to catch the sun. As quiet as it seems from where you stand, the snow blowing off the divide above suggests that the high country is far from calm. [Passes, cols, and other low points can accelerate mountain winds to double their normal speeds as they funnel through the gaps. Spindrift is a good indicator of substantial winds at the crest of a divide.]
06. Walking around a large tree you stop dead in your tracks, looking straight into the eyes of a full-grown moose. The entire mountain range seems to become deathly still and quiet for what must be an eternity as the moose looks at you with dead black eyes. Then, suddenly it bolts and runs off at an angle to your path. Though it looks clumsy as it runs away, it is obviously a powerful creature.
07. The rocky path winds through the trees. It is difficult to see through the heavy foliage and branches. As you round a bend, giant stone structures come into view straight ahead. Stones taller than a person are stacked one on top of another, formed into a structure several stories high. Clearly these stones are not naturally formed this way, but there is no indication of who might have built it or why.
08. The pines recede as you enter a small field of grass, prickly weeds and yellow wildflowers. The tangy scent of the flowers tickles your nose. Beyond the field is a placid azure pond that mirrors the tall green trees on the far shore. Two triangular peaks push toward you on the surface as their counterparts push toward the blue sky above.



pattern, increasing the distance to travel, though making the rise more manageable. The trees have become sparser here, though tough shrubs and other alpine plants are still prevalent. The path rises some distance before teetering into nothingness, its construction forgotten or perhaps abandoned. [Plants and trees encountered in the area can include foxtail pine, devil's club, houseleek, larch, and arnica (which is known as a pain-relieving herb).]

43. *Waterfall*

The air is light here and difficult to catch in your lungs; headaches are common and the icy air is occasionally painful to breathe. Blood rushes through your ears – well, it sounds like that, but the sound continues for longer than seems possible. Eventually you realize that the noise is external rather than internal. It comes



from somewhere else, somewhere above you. When you look up to see what the disturbance can be, you feel a few drops of water on your forehead. The noise is from a waterfall, still far away but obviously powerful; it seems to be directly ahead of you. The path continues and you follow it as you must. The noise of the splashing water waxes until it drowns out all normal conversation. [If animals are present:] Your animals become nervous and skittish, tossing their heads. They require careful handling before they can be persuaded to continue. [The waterfall can be a peril or simply be close to the path. If it is a peril, then it should not be too dangerous unless its course has been changed for malevolent purposes, for the path would not have been wrought from the mountain so close to a dangerous phenomenon.]

44. *Overgrown Terraces*

The massive networks of vines and creepers on the mountainside do little to hide the fact that it was terraformed at some point. They hang like leafy curtains over the edges of each terrace, giving the mountain an oddly hairy look. Underfoot the ground is soft and loamy. In places you can see food plants competing for sunlight against the rampantly growing vines, evidence that someone used this area for cultivation in the past. When you look around you can see similar titanic staircases cut into neighboring slopes, though they are mostly overgrown as well. Wide swathes of gray and brown stone devoid of green shrubbery show where rockslides or floods scoured the mountain clean. [Terracing mountains to provide fields was a practice common to pre-modern mountain-dwellers in the Andes and parts of China, and probably other places as well.]

45. *Wayhouse*

As the mountain path continues to wind its way around the endless rock, thoughts of mortality are never far away. Falling off an icy precipice, breaking a leg and starving, attack by some fierce mountain tribe sneaking up from below the ground or giant eagles swooping down from above all seem equally possible. Off the trail, into the woods a few



Adventuring in the Mountains

by Dr. K. H. Keeler

Creating Distinctive Mountain Ranges

Interesting mountains are much more than just very large hills with a higher frequency of encounters. Do we make our mountain ranges very different from other terrain so that people get the feel of mountains? If your characters were suddenly teleported into the mountains would they be able to tell which of your world's mountain ranges they were in just from your description?

In the real world, anyone who has been to the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachian Mountains in North America realizes that the characteristics of those ranges are very different. And these ranges also have a different feel than the Swiss Alps or the Atlas Mountains of Northern Africa. Even among the Atlas Mountains there is a dramatic difference between the High Atlas and the Saharan Atlas ranges.

What follows is Tabletop Adventures' offering to help the Harried Game Master make creative and distinct mountain ranges for his or her game for the enjoyment of all. This article is specifically designed to get you thinking about your own mountain ranges. You can read through the material until you get an idea that sparks your imagination, or (if you are in a hurry or want complete mountain ideas) you can use one of the Mountain Terrain Kits at the end and go with that. Whatever method you decide to use, we hope that this article will help you create vivid imagery and hours of fun as you consider... Mountains!

The Overlord

A Bit about Mountains

Mountains are found throughout the world. They are built by uplifting when great landmasses collide, by volcanic action, or by both at once. Mountains reach great heights and then erode away.

Mountains are Barriers. 1) Mountains form barriers to rivers. Often a continental divide runs along a mountain range, with rivers on one side running east or south to one ocean and on the other side running west or north to a quite

different ocean. 2) Mountains form barriers to rain. Large air masses drop the water they are carrying as they rise. Over the summit, the descending air masses are dry and can only make the land drier. This can produce rain forests on one slope and desert on the other. 3) Mountains are barriers to animals and plants. Species common on one side may be totally absent from the other. Alternatively, a species may split into two varieties, with, for example, black leopards on one side and white leopards on the other. Most important: 4) Mountains are barriers to commerce. Goods, animals and people cannot move over an area of mountains as easily as most other land. If there is a good pass, then commerce will be deflected to this one route. If not, travelers and haulers must detour around the mountains.

Mountains Environments are Different. Climbing into the mountains, the adventurers encounter environments not found in the plains or forests below. Temperatures drop steadily with increased elevation. The growing season gets steadily shorter. Mountains generally form zones—montane, with moderate altitude forest; subalpine, with high elevation trees; and alpine, above the tree line. The zones are broad if the slope is gradual or narrow if the slopes are steep. Drier mountains have much the same zones as wet ones, but the number and identity of the plants and animals (and monsters) may be different.

Mountains are Dangerous Places. For gaming, mountains are wonderful places to adventure. The elevational changes make getting places difficult. Lack of settlement facilitates the presence of large wild animals or monsters and there are many hazards to mountain travel, ranging from avalanches to flash floods.

People of the Mountains

The natives of mountains can be anything from barbarians to ancient civilizations. Traditional elves may live in the forests and dwarves mine the rock. Bandits, 'mountain men' hunting in isolation, prospectors seeking instant wealth, trappers with their bundles of pelts, druids worshipping among the great trees, herders of sheep or goats, and hermits praying in mountain caves might all be encountered.

Mountain areas can be farmed, usually by terracing the hillsides to create relatively flat ground. However, soil is produced slowly and easily erodes away on slopes. Mountains start off without soil and develop it only over centuries, while soil increase is opposed by erosion. The



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Bits of the Mountains - Cards

The following pages contain a series of cards for in-game use. The cards contain the Bits descriptions in an easy-to-use format. These cards can be mixed and matched with other Tabletop Adventures fantasy Shards and Bits products.

*** Permission is granted to photocopy Bits of the Mountains Card pages for personal use. ***



Into the Mountains 01

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