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Mileage in Middle-earth

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Mileage in Middle-earth

Abstract

Discusses conversion of leagues into miles, illustrated by examples of some travels reported in Middle-earth.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Settings—Middle-earth—Geography

League in Middle-earth

by Marcella Juhren

I wondered whether the following conversion of leagues into miles, for some of the distances in LOTR would be of interest. Some folks have expressed frustration that so many distances were given in leagues.

Looking up "league" in the biggest dictionary I could lift, I found that it may mean a variable distance of one to four miles. Using the scale in miles on the map, I concluded by trial and error, that Tolkien's leagues are somewhere between 3.1 and 3.5 miles. I put it at 3.2.

If this is so, then the walk of Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli after the captured hobbits, - 45 leagues from Tol Brandir according to Eomer, - was 144 miles. I doubt that Eomer allowed for the walk northward, over the first ridge of the Eryn Muil, north again for more than a mile, and over the second ridge by a water channel. My guess is 52 leagues or 166½ miles. This would be 55 miles a day, with packs and halting to look at the tracks -(just about the bounds of possibility according to the record of the Cleveland Hiking Club, whose hikes are in similar terrain. 60 miles a day, unburdened, is okay but it's keeping it up that's tough.)

The whole distance before the three rejoined the hobbits was 200 leagues, according to Gimli (II Balentine p. 207), or about 700 miles. Presumably this included the way to Edoras and thence to Orthanc, and they of course had horses from Fangorn to Edoras and back to Orthanc.



Boromir's journey from Minas Tirith to Rivendall was 400 leagues or 1280 miles. He lost his horse at Tharbad and walked the rest of the way. He may have have cut across country, but if he took the Greenway and the Great East Road (as he may have done, not knowing the country), he would have walked five to six hundred miles.

The walk from the Morannon around the mountains to the crossroads below Minas Morgul, was about 100 miles, which the hobbits traveled in three or four days. if it was four days, that would make their speed at about 25, or 26 miles a day. In Moria the hobbits could walk 20 miles or somewhat more, without a rest. There Gandalf reckoned on doing 40 miles or better, in three or four marches apparently with brief rests between, but paying little attention to day or night.

((Marcella is a recently retired Botanist from the University of California. She has done work both at UCLA and Berkeley. She is very interested in Conservation, and is presently preparing a longer article on "The Ecology of Middle Earth."))

MLJ