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Where Did The Dwarves Come From?

Abstract

Speculates where in Middle-earth the various dwarves who arrived at Bilbo's house at the beginning of *The Hobbit* actually came from, and what they might have been doing prior to that meeting.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Dwarves; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*

Where Did The Dwarves Come From?

Williams A.S. Sarjeant

In the plethora of Tolkien scholarship and amid the rich resources provided by Christopher Tolkien's publishing of his father's papers and notes, there are few matters that have remained unexplained or examined. Yet I believe I have identified one; where did the dwarves come from, when they arrived on Bilbo's doorstep for that unexpected party at the beginning of the chronicle of *The Hobbit*?

Most readers may have supposed that their sequential arrival, singly or in groups of two or four, was a design by Gandalf to ensure that Bilbo was not overwhelmed by the arriving of a single large party of twelve dwarves — a parallel, in other words, to their orchestrated arrival at the hall of the ferocious Beorn. But not so. On that occasion, the dwarves, Gandalf and Bilbo had been adventuring together; the sequential arrivals were carefully timed to fit the successive stages in Gandalf's tale of those adventures.

In the case of dwarves' arrival at Bilbo's house in Hobbiton-across-the-Water, this does not apply; it is evident that the dwarves had *not* been together beforehand. Balin, noting that Dwalin's green hood is hanging on a peg, says: "I see they have begun to arrive already." He knows, then, that the other dwarves are coming, but he has not been with them. Fili, upon hearing the next ring of the doorbell after his own arrival, mentions that he and his brother had seen four other dwarves on the road behind them; clearly they had travelled separately.

Moreover, by the same time Bilbo opened the door to them, there four have been joined by a fifth dwarf, who must have travelled there separately. Who was this? Oin and Gloin were also brothers and may well have come together to Bilbo's hobbit-hole. As for Dori, Ori, and Nori, their names are alike enough to suggest that they were also brothers, but this is nowhere stated. All that we learn of them is that they were remote kinsmen of the great Thorin Oakenshield. Perhaps it was one of these three who came along to Hobbiton.

Clearly the dwarves had not been told to which hobbit-hole in Hobbiton they were coming, though directions to a hole would surely have been readily comprehended when dwarves spend so much time underground. Instead, it was identified for them by the secret mark on the door which Gandalf's staff knocked out — the mark advertising the services of the burglar, or was it the "Expert Treasure-Hunter"? The dwarves, then, had known what mark to look for but had not known where to find it. Moreover, Thorin began his speech with the words: "We are met together in the house of our friend and fellow conspirator, this most excellent and audacious hobbit..."

Yes, the house with the secret mark was a prearranged meeting-place; but the dwarves were *meeting* there; they had not been together beforehand. Instead they had come there separately, from different places. Where, then, were those places?

In the appendix to *The Return of the King*, it is recorded that, after the great battle of Azanulbizar in which the orcs were defeated only with great loss, Dáin Iron foot led the dwarves back to the Iron Hills; but

... Thrain and Thorin with what remained of the following (among whom were Balin and Gloin) returned to Dunland, and soon afterwards they removed and wandered in Eriador, till at last they made a home in exile in the east of the Ered Luin beyond the Lune. Of iron were most of the things that they forged in those days, but they prospered after a fashion, and their numbers slowly increased. (p. 357)

Moreover, we learn that

... [Thorin's] people were increased by many of the wandering Folk of Durin who heard of his dwelling in the west and came to him. Now they had fair halls in the mountains, and stores of goods, and their days did not seem so hard.... (p. 358)

Thorin did not remain in those halls, however. Instead, he roamed eastward at times, perhaps to visit Dáin Iron-foot and his folk. It was at Bree, on March 15, 2941 of the Shire-Reckoning, that Thorin met Gandalf and jointly planned their second meeting at his own halls in the Ered Luin. From this meeting stemmed the quest that began with the gathering in Bilbo's house and ended, and least for Thorin, Fili and Kili, with the Battle of the Five Armies.

We may reasonably suppose, then, that Thorin travelled to Hobbiton directly from his hall in the Ered Luin. It may well be also, that the cousins Bifur, Bofur, and Bombur travelled with him, certainly all four fell through Bilbo's door in a single heap!

What, though, of the other eight dwarves? Some or all of them, it appears, had not been living in comparative luxury in these halls beyond the Lune, but had instead been earning a living elsewhere and by harsher means. In brief wrath, Gandalf said the them "Just let any one say I chose the wrong man or the wrong house, and you can stop at thirteen and have all the bad luck you like, or go back to digging coal." They had been digging coal, then; but where? Not in the northern Ered Luin beyond the River Lune, surely; had that been so, they would have gathered

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account originally published in the *Bookseller*, 19 Aug. 1988 (see "An Inklings Bibliography," *Mythlore* 65). [WGH]

Wynne, Patrick, and Carl F. Hostetter. "Verbs, Syntax! Hooray!": A Preliminary Assessment of Adunaic Grammar in *The Notion Club Papers*. *Vinyar Tengwar* 24 (July 1992): 14-38. [Tolkien]

Sauron Defeated, the ninth volume in The History of Middle-earth which includes much new material for the study of Tolkien's invented tongue Adunaic (or Adûnaic), is the basis for Wynne and Hostetter's extensive essay. The authors admit, however, that their effort barely scratches the surface of the subject. A supplemental dictionary compiled by Hostetter and Wynne, incorporating all Adunaic material currently published and in part based on the research of Taum Santoski, was published in *Vinyar Tengwar* 25 (Sept. 1992): 8-26. [WGH]



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and travelled together to Hobbiton. Might it have been in the southern Ered Luin, between Eriador and the coastal realm of Harlindon? Perhaps; yet this seems to me unlikely, for the Ered Luin (though offset by the great fault that gave the Lune its passage to the ocean and formed the Gulf of Luin) certainly constituted a single range of mountains. If there was coal in the south of that range, then probably there would be coal also in the north. Even if coal seams cropped out only in the south, surely the dwarves mining them would have been close enough to their northern brothers to share in their relative prosperity and live equally comfortably?

Of the other hills surrounding the Shire, we may rule out the White Downs, clearly formed of chalk and impossible as a source of coal. The Tower Hills, then? Yes, perfectly feasible; we are told nothing of their geology. The tower of Elostirion, once the tallest of the White Towers and housing a *palantir*, had long since fallen into ruin and the hobbits had not yet settled the lands about. Yet we had no direct indication of mining there.

The Hills of Evendim, north of the Shire, can surely be excluded. They formed part of the Lost Realm of Arnor and we are given no indication that dwarves ever inhabited that realm, before or after its fall.

Instead, let us look within the bounds of the Shire itself for the places where coal might be mined. Dwarves were familiar enough in the Shire; they were frequent travellers on "the Great West Road" which "ran though the Shire over the Brandywine Bridge" and which, from the maps, seems equally to have been called the East Road. (No

doubt its name depended on the direction upon which one was travelling!) They came to the central Shire, then, certainly from eastward or westward and perhaps from northward, though not usually from southward. The arrival of "Strange dwarves of different kinds" from that direction occurred only as the shadow of Mordor grew.

Were there coal seams cropping out in the Far Downs that, lying between the White Downs and the Tower Hills, for so long marked the Shire's western boundary? It seems possible, but we have no evidence either way, or indeed to show whether the Far Downs were inhabited.

Another, and perhaps likelier, possibility is that those coal mines were situated in the unnamed group of hills lying north of Scary, in the northern part of the East Farthing. The map of "A Part of Shire" in *Fellowship* shows a quarry there, which might have been for building-stone but might also have represented opencast mining for coal. The village name of Brockenborings is also equivocal; where those boring hobbit-holes or might they have been mine adits?

Wherever they came from, it is clear that the dwarves gathering in Bilbo's house arrived there from several different places — the places where they were living and working — and that some of them, at least (though not Thorin or fat Bombur) had been living, and working, hard; hard enough, maybe, to tempt them away on so desperate a quest. We may note, indeed, that most were pretty tough and agile. The exceptions were the dwarves who had come with Thorin from the comfortable halls in the Ered Luin: Bifur and Bofur, clumsy enough to tumble into Bilbo's door on top of Thorin, and Bombur, whose general unfitness for the journey was to be so evident in Mirkwood.

Yet, after all, I am left still wondering; where did the dwarves come from?



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