

## Mt Karazaluk

*Report by Zelman Demetrios for the Stromphe Herald.*

This is a sparsely inhabited region, dominated by the high, rugged, inhospitable and almost impassable band of mountains to the north. The largest, highest and most forbidding of these is Mt Karazaluk – cold, little vegetated, and a source of water – much of which sinks into the Moor below.

South of these behemoths are ranges of jagged hills, with few human inhabitants, but a number of humanoid villages await the unwary traveller. The Black Dwarves of Khasos Dondal brood in their underground mansions and mines, a dark Necromancer weaves his ghastly incantations in a tower at Wyvern's Rest – some comedian named that!

Then there is the dense deciduous forest of Kristinos, home to sweet innocent critters, and some bigger not so sweet animals – and even a few monsters and undead creatures, no doubt creations of the Necromancer (He Shall Never Be Named – actually his name is Quintus Johannes Ambulator). There are few paths through it, and none is truly safe.

And at last to the coast – a noisome miasmatic mishmash of scrub, fen, march, bog and quicksand, euphemistically called the Loroulios Moor. Beware the Will-o-the-Wisps and other ghostly lights, and mostly the rapidly descending pea soup fogs, that cause many animals and humans to fall and drown in one of the many watery traps there. The birdlife is terrific though – a real twitcher's heaven. At least there is a pleasant little monastery in its midst, dedicated to the Storm Lady. Unfortunately, their prayers seem to be adding to the general bogginess of the moors, as well as bringing the unheralded mighty thunderstorms to lash the coast.

The west is not a great deal better – the Tranise Stream meanders through a stinking swamp, periodically flooded by salt water. A broken bridge spans the stream here, and an inn, the Forkbridge Inn, runs a barely functional ferry for traffic to and from Lakiopie in the east, and Leonder in the west. This road, although designated a 'main road' is more like a churned up track in this region. This is why most trade goes by sea, why naval superiority is so important in southern Artemisia and why smaller nations such as Lakiopie can still compete with others for the lucrative Leonder markets.

Mysterious barrows of long dead chieftains, a massive stone circle, almost complete, and the tower of the mad old sorceress, Zuzzanna the Rodent Lady (so called because of the number of mice she has as familiars), are further tourist attractions. Actually, the sorceress is fairly benign, and has many detailed maps of this and many other regions in Artemisia and beyond.

Along the road to the east is the last comfortable dwelling before entering, and after leaving, Lakiopie, a small nation of farmers, shepherders, foresters and seamen, under

the benignly neglectful rule of Prince Iosphios Laitoun. This sprawling place, Ralfyrem House, has all the conveniences for the adventurous travellers, right down to truly haunted rooms (extra price). It was named for a flamboyant business man who made his money from manufacturing indoor games. What a nonsensical rumour!

Finally, there is the euphemistically named Unquiet Sea – a treacherous rocky coast, wild weather and powerfully destructive breakers. Shipwreck Coast would be a better name. Unquiet is such an understatement! All shipping must go much further out to sea, risking the occasional deadly squall. It still beats travelling on that road.

And there we leave it, dear friends – my advice is, use a boat. I have a good friend in the industry I can send you to – very good price. Or even better, stay at home. Trust me.

Zelman