

Snakeden Hollow

Snakeden Hollow is a large, roughly town-sized, ruined, former settlement in the midst of a vast, tropical swamp, known locally simply as Great Swamp, on Lizard Isle off southern Alarius. It lies around seven degrees north of Nibirum's equator. The "Hollow" name derives from its location, over and around a series of low hills surrounding the minor Leech Stream, one of innumerable small watercourses and pools scattered throughout the swamplands. Tropical jungle trees are present in places among the lower plants, shrubs and tall reeds of the Swamp, and do particularly well over parts of the somewhat drier hills hereabouts, without ever forming wholly impassable tracts of true jungle. The vegetation generally is sometimes restricted further by the presence of the numerous stony ruins.

The ruins are chiefly of finely-dressed, pale brown sandstone, anciently well-constructed, for all many have since collapsed to rubble thanks to the ravages of time. In parts, only overgrown hummocks like small hills or tumuli, are all that can be seen of such former structures, with occasional fallen stones or segments of wall poking through the vegetation. Elsewhere, vague flatter areas hint at former buildings or yards, perhaps where there were less-substantial structures originally. Some places have survived remarkably intact, however, a few by luck, more, notably those around the Undercroft to Aerial districts in the map's west-centre, thanks to later repairs by the locals. Such repairs are commonly of a notably cruder character than the original construction. Similarly, there are paved-road remnants in places, often in short stretches and patches only, commonly with potholes, ragged edges and missing stones. Those old roads in the vicinity of Temple Hill are in somewhat better condition, and are more easily identified as such.

Some of the ruined to more intact stone structures bear carvings as old as themselves, showing long-necked, serpentine Lizardfolk as the dominant humanoids. These folk are similar in appearance to the modern Lizardfolk who still dwell here, and who claim ancestry from those earlier inhabitants. The modern folk though build primarily timber, reed and stone-and-turf round-houses that are very different in form and character from the earlier rectilinear stone ones. Seventeen congregations of such Lizardfolk are illustrated on the map, most of those as hut-groups up to small-village size, for all some house little more than an extended family clan. Several groups have made use of the nearby ruins as well, occasionally exclusively-so, the largest of which settlements is based in the Undercroft area, where live the folk who look after the subterranean cave system beneath Temple Hill, and its great serpentine Hydra that the folk of the Hollow regard as a deity. This subterranean Undercroft and the Hydra are detailed by a separate Atlas map and notes.

The Snakeden Lizardfolk are commonly taller than is usual for such beings, largely thanks to their serpentine necks and heads. Most are otherwise typically tailed-humanoid in general form, although some are more fully serpentine in shape, while still retaining humanoid arms and hands. Such more-serpentine folk are commonest in the Temple Hill area. Their scale-colouring is usually in the green-yellow range regardless of their form.

Notable features are described in the following text in alphabetical order by their mapped labels. Many of these elements were chosen, adapted and allocated randomly from tables in two Raging Swan Press books, the "Dread Thingonomicon" and "Dread Laironomicon".

Labelled Place Notes

Aerial: An outlying, small, more intact, domed stone chapel, just north of the Undercroft district, near a crossroads, this has carvings which suggest aerial serpentine creatures were once favoured here, such as wyverns, flying snakes and dragons. It is home to an extended family group of notably tall, priestly, very long-necked, serpentine Lizardfolk. They are all of well-above average height, partly hence the place-name. Pride of place inside the old chapel is given to a large, solid silver circular shield, now somewhat age-worn and a little grimy, which has a winged serpentine draconic design on it. The shield hangs high on the wall behind the old main altar. Also preserved here in a special, small, aromatic cedarwood chest are nine meteoritic iron nuggets, sufficient to be made into a good-quality longsword blade (or several smaller blades of total equivalent size). These have a further power, as having been passed through the gut of the great Hydra at some past time, the metal has become infused with its powerful stomach acid. In the hands of an especially skilled metalworker, such a blade or blades will become enchanted weapons, capable of doing additional acidic damage with every strike. Anyone other than such an expert will have severe problems even working the iron at all, as meteoritic iron can be notoriously difficult to reshape.

Dead Wood & Dead Wood Hill: Set at the southwestern foot of the easternmost small rise, Dead Wood Hill, this is a hamlet-sized hut-cluster of Lizardfolk, near a brook at the edge of Great Swamp. On the southern slopes of the Hill above the settlement is an old burial ground, now disused and largely overgrown, some of whose stone grave markers can still be found easily. These have various forms, including those of figurative

Lizardfolk carvings, and statues in the round, and there are indications many more such old burial plots once covered the whole Hill, for all few others away from the mapped zone remain identifiable still. There is a persistent scent of rotten wood across the Hill. Most of the surviving statues and markers have faintly-glowing lichens in their deeper recesses, which can give the whole place an eerie, spectral air on moonless nights. The vegetation all seems perfectly sound and healthy, so where the scent of rot originates is unknown.

Dragon Park: Much of the southwestern side of the main part of Gravel Hill near the map's centre was once paved and open. The paving was done with large, carefully-cut and laid hexagonal stone slabs. Many are missing, and the underlying gravel packing is quite worn and often overgrown. Some has been removed for use elsewhere at the Hollow, along with part of the missing paving slabs, some of which can be found in the neighbouring Lizardfolk hut-clusters, notably that also called Dragon Park, and at Hartland. The best-preserved hexagonal paving lies nearer and alongside the more intact stretch of the old roadway by the Park's southern edge. Scattered ruined structures are present in places around and on this great paved area, notably towards its southern-centre, which was a former well-house. Sharp-eyed visitors may notice curious glyphs or signs cut into selected paving slabs, looking as if carved by different hands at various times. Mostly, these are too worn to be read or deciphered. By the old roadway are two large, tall, stone statue plinths. Whatever was once on the more easterly plinth has been removed, or possibly destroyed (there is a lot of rubble on and close to this plinth). The western plinth's statue, while weather-worn and indistinct of feature in detail, is that of a huge, lion-bodied, folded-wing, sphinx-like creature, with an "S"-folded, thick, serpent's neck, and a large serpentine head. Locally, it is known as "The Dragon", hence the place-names here. The largest hut at the Dragon Park settlement has a single, large hexagonal paving slab in the middle of its floor, which has a carving of a similar serpent-sphinx creature, drawn in profile striding right to left, with head and neck raised, wings folded. Each corner of this slab bears a different single glyph. While weathered, the slab is in much better condition than those perpetually exposed to the elements on the hillside above.

Element: A group of Lizardfolk huts surround a small pond just north of the Leech Stream in the swampy hollow at the map's centre. Substantial ruins lie to its southwest, across a minor brook, and a mostly intact building still stands near a stretch of old road a similar distance to it northeast. The interior of this building has several rooms whose walls have worn, flaking, colour-painted mural designs showing stylized serpentine Lizardfolk engaged in a range of everyday activities. All the folk painted thus have bright red head-crests that continue down their necks to their upper spines. Apparently now unused and unoccupied, the building is revered by the locals as if it were a temple (it isn't). While closer to the Sitting God settlement, the folk from Element tend it, while those from Sitting God will not even cross the roadway to approach the place without leave from those of Element. Part of one outer wall in the building has minor gaps and holes in the stonework, many of which seem to have been deliberately built-in originally. When the wind blows from the southeast, these holes create a range of sounds from low moans through musical notes to painfully high-pitched shrieks (for Humans), depending on the wind's strength.

Farside: One of the larger Lizardfolk hamlets here, this lies on the edge of Great Swamp by a brook north of Temple Hill, and southwest of the west end of Gold Hills in the map's northwest. The swamp reeds around it are prized for their strength and durability, so this is where many of the woven baskets, screens and small boats found across Snakeden Hollow, and sometimes beyond, are made. The smaller huts here are all quite low, one of which is supported by a 6-foot long (1.8 metre) iron pole. This pole is in remarkably good condition, as it is really a magical Dwarfen quarterstaff that once belonged to a monk.

Freshwater: This hamlet surrounds a small, circular-plan, old stone shrine, with a square, low-walled plaza to its southwest, by the west end of a more intact stretch of roadway along the north side of Temple Hill. In the middle of the paved plaza is a circular pool of freshwater. The shrine and plaza are in a relatively good state of repair, despite their obvious age, and are used as the focal point for the settlement. The water is, perhaps magically, always fresh, for all there is no sign of what deity or deities may once have been revered here. There is though a great serpent carved in low relief, as if coiled and facing forwards, high above the shrine's entrance from the plaza, which doorway and serpent face directly towards the pool. The place is home to many small red and yellow striped poisonous snakes that seem to occur nowhere else in Snakeden Hollow. They rarely attack humanoids unless threatened.

Gold Hills: A great many ruins are scattered over this largest group of low hills in the northern part of the Hollow, mostly hidden away by the jungle woodlands, excepting a few places. The name derives from the fact that occasionally, fragments of gold, silver, or sometimes even gemstones, may be found among these ruins. From time to time these may wash-out into the brooks nearby, although it is very rare for a more intact ancient

artefact to be recovered this way. Rumours still circulate locally of the golden armlet, intricately-etched with designs of windblown leaves, that had an inscription inside it too worn to be read, the most recent such object to have been discovered complete. The settlement leader at Platform now owns it. Careful examination could suggest the inscription may have been in Elvish characters.

Gravel Hill: Named for the gravel often quarried here for use elsewhere, found at the formerly paved area of Dragon Park on the main Hill's southwestern slopes, this largely wooded upland extends in a narrowing, low ridge to, and a little beyond, the map's south-central edge. The settlement of Dragon Park is on part of this ridge, and a few ruins and old roadways can be found elsewhere among Gravel Hill's vegetation.

Great Swamp: As noted earlier, this is simply the local name for the vast swamplands surrounding the Hollow, which extend for immense distances far beyond.

Hart Hill: This small hill lies near the south-central map edge, west of the brook separating it from the low ridge extending south from the bulk of Gravel Hill. A worn-out old road crosses it, and there are some stone ruins over and near it. The jungle across its northeastern half overlooking the brook is especially plagued by disease-carrying flies for some reason.

Hartland: A hamlet on the southeastern bank of Leech Stream in the valley north of Hart Hill and west of the Dragon Park area on Gravel Hill. A brook runs through it, as does the remains of an old road, although if there were once any crossing-points for the watercourses here, they have long-since been washed, or rotted, away. The settlement is one of the more populated sites in the area. Its village leader has some minor magical powers, and bears a magical wooden staff with a tip made of a translucent blue crystal, in which faint yellow motes dance. She also wears a ring like a band of living, heatless, writhing flames that dance across her finger, radiating light like a candle. On command, this ring can be used to shoot small fiery missiles at a nominated target.

Hollow Town: A trio of huts by the northern foot of Gravel Hill, alongside the south bank of Leech Stream, this settlement is home to an extended family of Lizardfolk. Its name likely derives from it being close to the east edge of the central swampy area, surrounded by the low hills that help give the Hollow its name. The family members each wear a necklace made from pieces of onyx and at least one tooth from an angelic creature, all heirlooms of very great age and non-local provenance. If worn by a creature favouring positively-aligned deities, these necklaces emit a profound aura of sadness. They would be valuable to a collector, sage or mage not so affected by such things.

Holloway: Largest of the hut-settlements at Snakeden Hollow, this lies by the north bank of Leech Stream in the swamps of the map's northeastern corner, quite distant from the Hollow itself. It is though on the route of the Stream that some may follow when approaching from further east. There are still a few scattered ruins nearby, west of the village, and it is a good place to pick-up rumours from across the region as well as from the Hollow. The Lizardfolk here use long spears and javelins with barbed tips, decorated with colourful feathers, and bound with equally bright snakeskin strips. They take great pride in each crafting their own weapon decorations in this manner.

Leech Stream: Well-named, as a great many leeches live in its waters, some of which have been known to leap up to snatch larger flies or even small birds as they flit over its surface. The Stream is sluggish, weedy and not wide, making it often hard to tell where its banks lie amid the surrounding swamp.

Marshmont: North of the northeastern Gold Hills, by a brook on the edge of some jungle which is just south of the most northerly hill at the Hollow, on the map's north edge, this hamlet includes a fairly intact, old, domed, small temple building. Other, more ruinous, and commonly overgrown, ancient structures are nearby. Although this temple is still used as a house and store by the locals, there are great cracks over its ceiling, and some fresh rubble on the floor inside shows it is fairly unstable. Loud sounds inside would be liable to cause a more substantial collapse. The stone altar has a single, foul-smelling, large candle burning on it, in the middle of a pool of wax that covers almost the entire altar top, and runs down its sides, the "Eternal Flame", which the locals constantly maintain and replace when the old candle is almost burnt-out. For all the air is quite still within the temple, this candle flame always dances as if in a strong breeze. A ceremonial, ancient, dragon's head metal mask hangs on the wall above and behind the altar. Both mask and altar appear to be original features of the temple. Local belief holds that so long as the candle burns, the fane here will endure, regardless of how unsafe the building seems.

Old Temple: By far the largest single structure at Snakeden Hollow, this is a huge ruined building set on a paved platform atop Temple Hill. The Temple's structure is little more than a heap of stone rubble now, covering much of its former internal floor. That floor at least remains relatively intact, if damaged from all the collapsed stonework over it. Off-centred towards the southwestern corner of the Temple Hill platform, the northern Temple wall remains leave a wider part of the platform on that side, and to its east. There are two still reasonably complete, equally ancient, stone obelisks on this eastern part of the platform, one each to either side of a similarly ancient, steep, stone stairway that leads down the cliff-face to the Undercroft surface district. Each obelisk is around 60 ft high (18 m), with the cliff of a similar height. The more substantial part of the Temple walls that still stand are roughly 12 ft tall (3.5 m) in places. None of the former pillars are intact within the wall lines. The stairs and platform by the obelisks continue in-use at times for ceremonies, and are kept in better repair than the rest of the Old Temple as a result. What few sculptures and wall-carvings remain in good enough condition to identify, show serpentine Lizardfolk and those of creatures with winged, leonine bodies, serpent necks and heads, comparable to those found at Dragon Park, often in poses of reverence towards a great, serpent-bodied, many-headed Hydra. Some of the Temple rubble is unstable, and could collapse further if investigated, especially if parts were to be moved incautiously. It is not clear why there is so little vegetation growth over the former Temple site.

Platform: Named for the raised, paved area in a jungle clearing among the central Gold Hills, this hamlet is set in the jungle east of that paved area. More overgrown ruins are nearby, though none so substantial or relatively intact as the actual Platform. The raised area is large and rectangular, reached by a fairly sound small set of stairs from the southeast, although parts of the supporting and surrounding stone wall have partly collapsed, notably on its southwestern side. It is roughly 3 ft (1 m) above the general surface around it, with the surrounding wall some 2 ft tall (60 centimetres) above the paved upper surface. A circular area of paving in the centre of this top surface has shaped yellow slabs forming a remarkably well-preserved floral design, as mapped, or perhaps a floral-seeming sunburst. A path remnant leads northwest from the direction of the nearest ancient road line to the foot of the Platform's steps. There is no indication of the Platform's original purpose. It is now used, like the open ground nearby, for stretching and preparing animal skins, which often festoon the place. See also the Gold Hills notes for the unusual golden armband worn by the Platform settlement's leader.

Puddle Hall: Surrounding a brook-fed pond deep in the Great Swamp towards the east-central map-edge, this is a Lizardfolk village. The swamp nearby is notable, indeed notorious, for its pools of thick, quicksand-like mud, the water in which carries disease. These are more than deep enough to drown adult-sized Humans and many smaller creatures. The villagers have set-up sharpened stakes in places, their tips smeared with filthy, black, diseased paste from the mud holes in such a way that outsiders are liable to find themselves "guided" directly to one or other of these deadly pools. The locals are naturally familiar with the safe routes to and from their village, and there are guides who know these routes at both Dead Wood and Ring nearby as well.

Ring: A smaller swamp settlement, Ring lies by the southeast bank of a brook north of Dead Wood Hill, east of most other Lizardfolk hamlets in the area. The huts form a semicircle, perhaps how its name came about. The folk here are mainly crocodile trappers, who use the skins to make magically-effective hide armour. Hides in various stages of preparation are strewn about the place as a result. The armour includes crocodile bone and wooden reinforcements, some of which are magical charms. The latter are typically attached to the neck and shoulders. Waterproofed buckets and vats containing quantities of urine for preparing the hides are also much in evidence, and the smells associated with this activity always pervade the air nearby.

Riteangle: South of the Undercroft district is an extensive area of stone ruins that run down to the north bank of Leech Stream and along the south side of Temple Hill, mostly lying alongside a pair of old roadways that cross one another near the Stream. In the southwest angle of the crossroads is a generally intact, large, seated ancient statue of a stately, serpentine Lizardfolk figure in a tiara-like crown. While weather-worn, it seems to have been kept clear of encroaching vegetation, and is remarkably imposing. Its careful preservation is associated with the relatively unobtrusive reverence the locals have for it, treating the figure as if it were a temple statue. However, no one seems to know who or what the figure represents. Parts of the rubble, ground and low vegetation in this area show spiralling patterns, and signs of having been - probably repeatedly - flattened by something huge and heavy. This area of ruins is where the great serpentine Hydra from the Undercroft caverns often frequents. Despite its repeated passage through here, it has clearly avoided the seated statue completely, which may explain why the locals favour it. Those passing by it, especially following the route between Undercroft and Shaman Cross, commonly make at least a subtle saluting gesture

with one hand towards it. There is a general belief that doing so will bring good fortune and/or preserve them from the close attentions of the Hydra themselves.

Shaman Cross: South of Leech Stream at the western foot of Hart Hill, is this village-sized collection of huts, surrounding part of the old roadway whose line runs south brokenly from Undercroft and Riteangle, without any actual crossing point on the Stream itself beyond a vague ford. The track continues further south towards the map edge past a couple of heavily-overgrown ruin heaps. This is where those who tend the great Hydra in the caverns below Temple Hill receive much of their early priestly training. The most southerly overgrown ruin near the last paved road section towards the map border (about 120 ft, 35 m, from the nearest hut) is used at times for vision quests, and has a concealed entrance, beyond which inside are cleared, low, curling passageways, crawlspaces and a chamber used for this purpose. Its interior always has a smell like wet dogs. The priestly leader at Shaman Cross wears a long, ceremonial scarlet robe, with billowing sleeves that have orange and yellow flames embroidered on them, which run up to the shoulders. More such flame patterns extend upwards from the hem. Concealed pockets in the garment hide a range of small items, some of them magical, which the priest may use to enhance their appearance or activities. Other priests here wear less-elaborate, undecorated red robes, while the trainees wear none.

Sitting God: A small settlement in the northern ruins of Snakeden Hollow, just south of the Gold Hills. The roughly square area occupied by those living here is bounded by three old road lines, to the southwest, southeast and northeast, and the line of jungle vegetation in the Gold Hills to the northwest. There is a substantial collapsed building northwest of the huts, a sizable mastaba-like, fairly intact, building to their northeast, and a much smaller, square building near the junction of the two old roads to the south. This latter structure forms part of the occupied houses for Sitting God. Alongside it is a huge stone statue of a seated figure, similar in size and overall form to that at Riteangle, except that here, the seated Lizardfolk form has five serpentine heads and necks extending from where the single neck would be usually, atop its torso. It is considered an ancient deity of uncertain affiliation hereabouts. The statue is well-preserved, if age-worn, and is maintained by this community as an important focal point. Ancient interments were once made in the mastaba, some of which remain more or less intact, although the main chamber inside is almost filled by a gigantic earring in the form of a great grinning skull, that of a fanged Human, made of gold, silver and brass. The building, or at least that chamber, must have been constructed around it, as the sole doorway is far too small for this object ever to have passed through. Its weight is commensurate to its vast size. While loosely tended by the Sitting God folk, this building is only rarely entered, and never used. The settlement's leader bears a 6 ft long (1.8 m), thick, wooden staff that has the power to turn sticks nearby into venomous serpents for a time. Its woodgrain is strongly twisted into spiralling patterns around it, like a wrung-out wet sheet.

Steps: Occupying the next road-bounded region northeast from Sitting God, Steps takes its name from the loosely ziggurat-like, stepped stone, slightly crumbling, structure in this little village. An old stone pathway leads to the foot of the steep steps that rise about 10 ft, 3 m, to its first raised level, with a second stairway of similar form and height up to the level above that, on top of which is a small, 10 ft high, stone building. This upper building houses a beaten-bronze bell that hangs from an iron frame. Faint, now illegible, mouldings decorate the bell, which is suspended above a low, ancient altar-stone. The bell is equally old and fairly fragile, so is sounded only on special occasions, and then gently, using the softened beater by the altar. Ceremonies here are rare, usually no more often than every few years, although they attract many folk from the whole of Snakeden Hollow and the swamps beyond when they do. Along with this structure and the huts, there are numerous old stone ruins in the vicinity, some heavily overgrown like piles of vegetation, as well as two mostly still complete properties on the northern side, which serve as more village houses, turned into inns when the festivities take place. The village leader, a priest who leads the ceremonies, wields a magical mace as their staff-of-office. Its iron weapon-head has the form of a white-painted serpentine Lizardfolk skull, whose paint has been deliberately chipped and discoloured in places to make the skull look mottled and diseased.

Temple Hill: Westernmost, and tallest, of the hills at the Hollow, several important places cluster on, around and beneath it, along with lesser ruins, and jungle woodland over much of its northern half.

Undercroft: Heart of the settlements at Snakeden Hollow, and a place with enough intact ancient buildings to not require additional huts for housing. The best-preserved old roads run through it as well, for all they really lead nowhere further any longer. Undercroft forms the largest village here too, especially as it also includes the caverns where the great Hydra spends most of its time, below Temple Hill, a place also known as the Undercroft. There are two cave entrances to this underground in the 60 ft cliffs (18 m) on the east side of Temple Hill, with a great stone stairway built out from the cliff-line that leads up to the obelisks, platform and

Old Temple on the Hill's flattened summit. Priests form the leaders here, as the Hydra is revered, attended and feared as a living deity by the Hollow-folk, together with their assistants, guards and ordinary villagers. The Hydra and many of the priests use the southern cave entrance to access the subterranean Undercroft, while the attendants, guards and worshippers use the northern one, with its less direct approach from the surface settlement. A small, truncated-pyramidal structure by the southern base of the cliff-stairs contains various ceremonial items and regalia for use in ceremonies on the surface, atop Temple Hill, and in the subterranean Undercroft. It is always guarded, as some items are valuable, and a few are magical. There are also numerous Hydra-flattened surface ruins in the southern part of Undercroft, extending to Riteangle and along the south side of the Hill, including spiral-form patterns created by the Hydra's serpentine motion across the ground. A large part of the priestly routine is ensuring the Hydra remains calm, well-tended and well-fed - and preferably within the underground caverns. The surface ruins here are a constant reminder of what may happen if this peace is not preserved. The priests here favour purple or red robes for use on ceremonial occasions, and also wear armour beneath those, particularly when dealing directly with the Hydra.