

## Dendorlig Vale

In the southeastern foothills of the Mount Dendorlig massif of western Malajuri, is this hidden and almost-forgotten secluded valley. It was once home to a much more extensive population of, predominantly, Gnomes and Halflings, that helped support and feed the underground city of Dendorlig Hall (mapped separately in the Community Atlas). For reasons no one now recalls, or so they claims, both Hall and Vale were abandoned for centuries, and became lost and forgotten to the descendants of the folk that once lived here. Rediscovered in the last decade, the Hall has been partly reoccupied, along with some of the former settlements in the Vale, the latter sometimes built on or near older ruins and remnants. Other lost places across the map may yet await rediscovery, and some places marked by burial mound and henge symbols, for instance, may be what they seem, or merely the more obvious features of still-lost settlements. Much of the area away from the Laiwater river, its main tributaries, reclaimed settlements and farmlands, is wild, trackless and dangerous to the incautious, particularly over the hills and jungle tangles of Elfont Forest and Bell Woods. Much of the valley land is good for a wide range of crop and livestock agriculture, the mainstay of most Vale settlements, though the rising land to both south and north of the river is poorer growing country, notably in the often steep, craggier and much higher, lands towards the map's northern edge, where the true mountains of Dendorlig begin. The only larger settlement outside the Hall is the town of Weyland's Garden, and consequently, the folk of Dendorlig Vale are collectively referred to sometimes as the Garden Gnomes, regardless of whether they are Gnomes or Halflings. Named places on the map are described below.

### Places of the Vale

**Arnburrow Spike:** There are three known substantial stone monoliths in the Vale, of which this is the southwestern one. The others are Lost Needle and Waxy Stump. Each has been carved with four flat faces running up the column, meeting in a sharply-angled pyramidal point at the top. Each flat face is about 8 feet broad (2.4 metres) at the base, tapering slightly towards the top, which is some 50 ft (15 m) above ground level. For all it is set within the northern edge of the Elfont Forest, nothing grows on the monolith, which is made of the same curiously orange native stone as the other pair, some kind of crystalline igneous rock, probably a type of granite. Its top can be seen through and above the jungle canopy from the hills to its north particularly, although it is much less easy to find once in the jungle itself. There is no carving on it to suggest who made it, when or why. Rumour has it a ghost is associated with the Spike.

**The Barrows:** As noted in the introductory comments, not all the burial mound symbols are necessarily actual burial sites on the map. However, those shown near this label, between the henge east of Dendorlig Hall and the burial mound markers east and southeast of Palm Spring, southeast to the henge by Waxy Stump, actually are old burial grounds. Once, these were the places where many folk of the Vale were brought for burial after their deaths. Some of the barrows remain obvious, others have become simply overgrown mounds or hummocks, with still more lost beyond occasional worn, often barely recognisable, stone grave markers, scattered among the undergrowth of the hills and dales here. There are especial concentrations of still-obvious burial sites at, and close to, both henges. Now that folk have returned to the Vale, fresh interments of the deceased have begun in these ancestral burial grounds. Although some of the originals may contain grave goods, and others may be quite elaborate structures inside their artificial hills, the leading Dendorlig royalty (kings, queens and their consorts) were mostly buried within the Dendorlig Hall complex, rather than outside here. Beyond those parts closest to the Hall, Palm Spring and Stumpy End, few of these old barrow-lands have been re-explored, so much about the area remains to be discovered.

**Bell Woods:** For all residents of the Vale treat Bell Woods and Elfont Forest as separate, in reality, they blend together into one some way south of the map, as a fairly dense jungle that steadily fades into a far more extensive region of scrubby tropical vegetation further south still. The canopy of Bell Woods is somewhat stunted compared with more typical Malajurian jungles elsewhere, and many trees have distorted, gnarly trunks, with scarcely any trees reaching the commoner heights that might be expected. Folks here say this is in-keeping with the physical stature of the native humanoid denizens. There are many dangers in these places, both from creatures and some of the vegetation, albeit not everything is quite so inimical.

**Codford Hill:** In the southwestern corner of the map, deep in the Elfont Forest jungle, and near the confluence of two lesser watercourses, this is an ancient mound of some size, with fallen masonry showing through the dense undergrowth across it in places. It looks very much like an artificial hill, if not quite so pyramidal in form as its icon may suggest. It fills a substantial area overall, if one whose extent is hard to determine. Protracted investigation may eventually indicate it was once a large settlement, maybe of city size, and likely Gnome-built. There are a few alignments of same-species trees, perhaps indicative of parts of an old street layout, for example, and one sizeable, irregular patch of ground a little south of the near-central "hilltop", where nothing grows, and only bare soil or rock shows on the surface. Rooting around in this area for long may infect those involved with an ancient illness, long dormant here, and generally believed either mythical or extinct.

**The Cone:** Another artificial mound, though one of more plausibly pyramidal form, and not nearly so large as Codford Hill, can be found in the higher hills towards the southeastern quarter of the map, north of Bell Woods, not far from the henge at Egbury. While badly ruined and quite overgrown, there are enough surviving stone carvings to indicate it was once probably a large temple of some kind, as several ancient Gnome deity figurines, all quite formally, and stylistically, sculpted, are apparent, along with some fragmentary text slabs. One of the more intact roofed chambers is in use as a tiger's lair now. On darker nights, a broad, double line of luminous mushrooms suggests an old pathway that wanders over the lower areas near The Cone, seemingly going nowhere. Another smaller "cave" higher up the rubbly hill contains a large blue stone that has no markings. It radiates a magical aura, and touching it under certain circumstances may grant an unusual piece of knowledge to the toucher; a talking bird, able to converse intelligently in Gnomic, can provide clues to this, should the GM require. There are ruins of what was probably once a small town or village west of The Cone (shown by the burial mound marker) where further religious carvings may be uncovered, towards the headwaters of the stream mapped there.

**Dendorlig Hall:** This is the entrance to the large, subterranean, former Gnome town or city which has recently begun to be reoccupied, and which is the subject of a separate Atlas map.

**Dozing:** Last stop on the trail west of Weyland's Garden, north of Minty Grove, by the northern branch of the upper Laiwater, this is a farming hamlet of Gnomes. It has been established only recently, with the farmlands nearby still fairly slight and not firmly-fixed, with fences and stone walls, rather than planted shrubs and hedgerows separating the fields, for instance. It is one of the more isolated settlements in the Vale, and outsiders, particularly if not Gnomes, tend to be regarded with suspicion. The woods north of the settlement have been managed into the form of a crude, dense, high, thorny hedge, as prowling creatures sometimes creep down from the wilds in that direction. The place-name in no way reflects the people's general alertness here! There are a number of ancient burial mounds north of Dozing, which have a different form to the common Gnome-style ones in, for example, The Barrows. That to the northwest, between the upper Laiwater's tributary streams, is magnetic, and will deflect compass needles and lodestones in the vicinity. Why is unknown. It has two separate stone doorways, both sealed, and the barrow has an overall circular plan. One doorway lies on its northwestern side, the other is to the northeast. Those burial mound markers northeast of Dozing indicate several mounds that are abnormally long and fairly narrow, usually with a single, elaborately-decorated, stone doorway at one or other narrow end. Most are aligned east-southeast to west-northwest, though there is no apparent preference for which end may have the doorway. The decoration is often very worn, and obviously ancient, and is of flowing interlace forms when clear and sufficiently preserved. One barrow has runes on its

doorway in three different scripts, although each is too worn to be properly read fully. Some individual runes look to be of a very ancient form of Gnomish, and it has been suggested by those who have examined it, that the writing may indicate this to have been the tomb of a saint.

**Egbury:** Not far southeast of The Cone, also among the steeper hills in the southeastern part of the map north of Bell Woods, this is an elaborate double bank and ring ditch, the two concentric, in a grassy valley close to the tributary stream that begins by the ruins west of The Cone. The central area of this henge forms a low domed hill, with a standing stone circle along the top of the innermost bank surrounding it. Three larger standing stones support a flat capstone on the top of the central hill, looking a little like a small, open-plan cave. Outside the outer bank and ditch, on the south side, is a small stone doorway (two upright stones and a horizontal lintel, with a flat slab door inset behind this frame), in the side of a low mound. While very difficult to open, this doorway leads to a subterranean, descending, stone-lined passage to a large stone-built chamber directly, if some distance, below the hilltop "cave". In this hidden chamber is a carved stone totem of a creature like an octopus with bat wings, a dragon's hindquarters, clawed legs and tail, sitting upright, facing the entrance passage. There is a magical aura about the totem which grants those in this chamber protection against inimical magics while they remain there.

**Elfont Forest:** As noted under the Bell Woods entry, these two large areas of dense jungle that extend over and beyond the southern map's edge are really part of the same larger tract. Aside from the named features here, described separately, see also the Bell Woods notes for more information on the nature of this part of the jungle.

**Halfway:** Much of the Laiwater's floodplain in the central portion of the map is good agricultural land, with scattered farmsteads all across it, chiefly where the field symbols lie. Halfway is a hamlet near a bend on the river's southern bank, that helps support the nearby farms on this side of the Laiwater, as well as being sited roughly halfway along the trail between Weyland's Garden and Minty Grove. There is a turning in the trail to the southwest to Wylee here in addition. The streams along the trail are fordable in both directions for most of the year. At Halfway itself, there is a small market held every eight or nine days, which occasionally attracts unusual traders from beyond the Vale, stopping over on their way to one of the other markets elsewhere here. There is also a blacksmith's and farrier on the east side of the settlement, as the area is notable for producing the finest breeds of the sturdy Dendorlig ponies used for transport and haulage work. Even on non-market days, the place can be quite busy thanks to travellers using the trails. At the trail junction, in the angle to its west, stands a dolmen made of three pink granite monoliths supporting a large, flat, grey sandstone capstone. It is under and around this monument that the Halfway market is held. It is locally known as the Market Table. Halfway's population is, of course, roughly half and half Gnome to Halfling.

**Hat Tip:** Situated astride the road north from Weyland's Garden to Dendorlig Hall, this hamlet serves as a way-station for the frequent travellers passing to and from the Hall, as well as to support the substantial agricultural farms here and south to the Garden, south of the end of the long lake on the Laiwater's Dendorlig branch tributary. Most folk hereabouts are Halflings, though the date palm groves north of Hat Tip are chiefly run by Gnomes. In addition, there are unusual, low, silty-looking, partly grassed-over mounds north of the settlement, which are dug out over time, the material carted away to be used as fertilizer for the fields across the Vale. It is these which have helped name the place, or in fact revive the name, as with Palm Spring further north along the river, both settlements were originally set up to handle and process the effluent generated from the sewers of Dendorlig Hall, helping the treated waste to become reusable as a valuable source of agricultural manure. Although the Hall currently produces far less of this than in its ancient heyday, parts of the community here and at Palm Spring are closely involved with this important task. The long lake is partly artificial, used as an extended treatment and settling pool, from which the silt that collects towards the downstream end is regularly dredged, forming the silty mounds of the Tip. One untouched grassy mound a little northeast of the hamlet and the stands of trees towards The Barrows hills, is actually an ancient tumulus. The locals avoid it, as it is said ghosts from the distant past will come out to haunt those who venture near it for too long.

**Knook:** The only one of the Vale's settlements not reliant on agriculture, although some pony breeding does happen in the area, this hamlet is about midway between Weyland's Garden and Stumpy End, though on the opposite side of the Laiwater from both places. It relies mainly instead on hunting and fishing (the latter notably in the small lake on the river close to the settlement). Its population is almost entirely Gnomes. There is also a brewery here, which takes advantage of the curious large circles of different flowering plants that grow apparently quite naturally on the nearby grasslands. They need little tending, and the flowers produce a fascinating range of beverages. While these floral circles are one of the sights that will catch travellers' attention along the trail through Knook, such folk need to be aware too that concealed hunting traps are often placed close to the trail as well. One of only two bridges in the Vale, and the only one that crosses the main Laiwater channel, is situated along the track between here and Stumpy End, recently re-made in wood, set upon far more venerable, yet still reliable, stone abutments and a mid-channel pier. Note that both "k's" in the settlement's name are pronounced.

**Laiwater (River):** Although only the main channel is labelled, all the tributaries of it are considered simply part of the same river by the locals, differentiated from it in conversation either by the nearby settlement, or the general direction of the valley in which a given stream lies. It is the only river to flow through the Vale. The three other rivers that flow off the southern and southeastern map edges are not named hereabouts at present, if indeed many locals even know they exist. Other than the small lakes along various of the Laiwater branches, only the main, labelled, channel is navigable in parts by small boats, between roughly Halfway to the ford south of Weyland's Garden, then from some way downstream of that ford to the bridge by Stumpy End (where there are again shallows), and finally from below the bridge to off the map's east side. Edible fish and other small water creatures are plentiful along most of the river, together with many kinds of water plants and bankside shrubs.

**Lost Needle:** By the headwaters of the northwestern tributary stream off the north branch of the upper Laiwater are some jungly woodlands mixed with lower-growing shrubs, towards the rising slopes of the foothills into the Dendorlig massif. Amongst both, by the more northerly of the two streams here, is another of the great orange stone monoliths of the Vale, nearly identical in size, form and nature to Arnburrow Spike (as detailed earlier). Lost Needle is easier to see from a distance in the Vale nearby, however. In fine weather, it can be seen from atop a low rise on the northwestern side of Dozing, for instance. It is not certain if its current name may derive from its form, or the fact the barrow mound between it and Dozing has strange magnetic properties sufficient to deflect a compass needle (see the entry for Dozing for more details). Strange lights may be seen sometimes in the area around this monolith.

**Minty Grove:** The second-largest settlement in the Vale, the population here is a mix of Gnomes and Halflings, with somewhat more of the former presently. Agriculture is the primary activity in and around the village, with many stands of date palms by the Laiwater east from here to Halfway, as well as crops, timber stands, and an apple orchard, mainly set in the lands between the northern and western upper Laiwater streams, west of the village proper. Trails from here cross both Laiwater branches at fords, heading east to Halfway on the south bank, and eventually, past many more farmsteads, to Weyland's Garden on the north bank of the main Laiwater channel. A trail fork northwest of the northern channel's crossing leads to Dozing. Minty Grove has a regular market, on a different day to that at Halfway, a general store that caters for the locals' needs in between times, and a tavern, "Shiny Home". Near the settlement, a maze of hedges, ditches, stone walls, fences and the waterways provide more than adequate defences against creatures of the wild, while armed border patrols in the timber woods west of the fields cover the more open approach in that direction.

**Palm Spring:** Northernmost of the Vale's settlements, and the first stop on the road south from Dendorlig Hall, the hamlet's modern name derives from the stands of date palms here, arguably more important for produce than the smaller area of crop fields east of the road, in one of the valleys among the northern

Barrows hills and burial mounds. Once known as "Perfume Glade", the place also serves as the initial collection and treatment area for the sewage out of Dendorlig Hall, which key task occupies a good proportion of the folk here (who are mostly Gnomes). After its first purification, the sediment enters the long lake between here and Hat Tip for further treatment and settling, before being finally dredged out for reuse at Hat Tip (see that hamlet's notes for further details). Palm Spring is a fair distance from the rest of the Vale, and a shop here helps cater for local needs, as well as those travelling frequently to and from the market and other activities at Dendorlig Hall. There are a couple of local curiosities, unrelated to the proximity of burial sites in The Barrows (about which the locals have no qualms, as another common trade here is the preparation of dead bodies for proper burial, and the arrangement of suitable sites). One is that there are some exotic trees here, typical of northern cold temperate woodlands, found to the north of the settlement, and which are treated as welcome and honoured visitors. The other is that working the soil in the fields among The Barrows hills often turns-up unusual crystals of clear or coloured transparent minerals. While not gemstones as such, fine specimens are sometimes taken as lucky charms, and may be gifted to deserving visitors accordingly. A rare few of these crystals have mildly magical properties.

**Ring Dyke:** Far from the returning Gnome civilisation of Dendorlig Vale, towards the west-central map edge, and itself perched on one of the low foothills of the main Dendorlig massif, this is a somewhat simpler ancient monument than that at Egbury, detailed previously. Here, there is just a single circular bank and ditch henge, in whose raised centre is a ring of standing stones, all of a rather rough, natural-looking, grey sandstone, several of which have fallen over, or been pushed flat. In the middle, on the highest part of the hilltop, stand three larger grey sandstones, two uprights with a third across their top as a lintel, looking like a large, open gateway. There are a few shrubby trees on the hill, all below the bank and ditch, with only grasses growing over the central, encircled, area. One circular band of grass surrounding the central trilithon at a short distance from it, is a darker green in colour, and under the right conditions, mushrooms grow over parts of it. Beneath the full White Moon, a magical forcefield dome rises to prevent access to or from the henge from the top of the ring-bank. It is invisible, and fades only once the Moon is setting.

**Rollingstone Camp:** Towards the northeastern edge of Elfont Forest, hidden and largely overgrown by the jungle (the middle upper tributary of the southern upper Laiwater channel leads towards the sheltered dell in which it lies), this is a long-forgotten, ancient, open-air temple site. It was once a henge, whose encircling bank and ditch have been levelled by centuries of jungle growth, leaf fall, and weathering. Inside it are several pink granite monoliths, former standing stones, all now heavily overgrown and mostly toppled-over, along with four sets of trilithon stones, one at each cardinal point within where the old ditch lay. Again, these are well-hidden among the foliage, where they still stand upright at all. However, there are luminous engraved signs of unknown type on many of the stones, which gives away their presence, even in the gloom below the heavy canopy in daytime, which is how the Gnomes have become aware of the site.

**Stumpy End:** Easternmost of the new settlements in the Vale, this hamlet takes its name from the nearby monolith of Waxy Stump. Its population is almost exclusively Halflings. It is likely there was an earlier settlement here, as there is an old, ruined, overgrown tower in the river angle just east of the houses here now, and the place is also notable for a natural rock arch in its middle. The rock is a native pale grey sandstone. The ruined tower is avoided, as it is said to be haunted. There is a shop here too, and the folk are generally welcoming of visitors. Trails east from Weyland's Garden north of the Laiwater, and Knook south of it, join together in a small square by the rock arch. The way to Knook crosses the Laiwater by a wooden bridge built on much older stone abutments and a central pier. There are orchards, and farmsteads are scattered by the fields that stretch from here back to Weyland's Garden north of the river, and indeed beyond. The burial mound marker south of Stumpy End indicates the overgrown, crumbled remains of an old, forgotten, former small settlement in the lee of one of the higher hills in that direction.

**Waxy Stump:** At the eastern end of the hills and burial mounds of The Barrows is the third great orange stone monolith of the Vale. While originally a near-twin to those of Arnburrow Spike and Lost Needle, this one was apparently broken by some explosive force, such that only a roughly 10 ft high (3 m) segment remains upright. The rest of the ancient obelisk lies buried by undergrowth and foliage to the Stump's northeast, broken into several segments where it fell. Much like the overgrown tower at Stumpy End, local rumour has it that this site too is haunted. The henge nearby to the northwest, a simple, single bank and ditch circle with half-a-dozen standing stones in a ring some way inside it, is surrounded by numerous circular burial mounds, all very old. Jungle woodland surrounds this henge area southeast right to the monolith.

**Weyland's Garden:** Earliest of the restored Dendorlig Vale settlements, and currently the largest, of town size, the Garden rests on the north bank of the Laiwater near where the Dendorlig branch tributary enters from the north. The town is surrounded by a wooden palisade, with a gate out towards the road to Dendorlig Hall to the north, the track west to Minty Grove, and the Laiwater ford crossing to the south bank. Another gate faces east, and the track to Stumpy End. Over the river are more trails, west to Halfway and east to Knook. Weyland's Garden is thus the heart of the Vale's Gnome and Halfling communities above ground, surrounded on all sides by farmland and farmsteads. Oddly, only the Dendorlig branch tributary is bridged here, a restored, old brown sandstone construction, just west of the settlement. The town has a central market square, in the middle of which is a very ancient standing stone carved with a series of concentric ring shapes over parts of it, forming no especial pattern. The rock is the same kind of orange granite from which the three great monolithic pylons of the Vale are made, Arnburrow Spike, Lost Needle and Waxy Stump. There is a Dwarf metalworking family here, who do some blacksmithing from time to time, as well as making weapons and armour. A mill with an attached bakery is on the southeastern side of town, where a leet runs off the Laiwater through a pair of water gates to run the waterwheel, which is owned by Halflings. Another Halfling family runs a good-quality tailor in town, and there is also a Gnome-run apothecary and a sizeable general store. The market is held about every ten days, with traders often covering the markets at Dendorlig Hall, Halfway and Minty Grove too. There is a tavern as well, "The Crazy Kettle". The Mayor of Weyland's Garden is responsible for the welfare of all the Vale's communities, involving the King at the Hall only in the most serious of matters. Other than a handful of Dwarfs, most of the populace here is a fairly even mix of Gnomes and Halflings.

**Wispy Nook:** Although marked by a henge icon near the southern edge of the map, a little northwest of Bell Woods, and appearing somewhat like one on the ground, with what could be an unusually large, circular bank and ditch, some visible stone fragments poking through the undergrowth inside it, and an area of distinctly rough, uneven terrain, this is actually the remains of a lost, ancient town, set in between a couple of tributary streams for a river whose main course flows south off the map edge, all surrounded by hills. One clue that this may not have been a prehistoric monument is the presence of extensive remains of palm groves in the vicinity, more palm trees than would be ordinarily expected, even with the proximity of the Bell Woods jungle. A surprising number of crows make nests here regularly, sometimes in the trees, sometimes in the small, rubbly "caves" of the former settlement's remains.

**Wylee:** Southernmost of the Vale's current settlements, this hamlet is set in the hills south of the main Laiwater channel, near a small lake along its southern tributary branch, which has helped provide good growing conditions for crops east of the river. A trail wends north out of the hills and through farmlands to Halfway to the northeast. The settlement is predominantly comprised of Gnomes, with some Halfling farmers chiefly living outside the hamlet itself. The folk hereabouts are generally welcoming, and pride of place in the settlement is given over to a large tavern, "The King's Stop". This has an excellent Halfling bard to help entertain all-comers, and the inside is decorated with many fishing trophies, all said to have come from the nearby lake. Aside from crops, timber is grown and cut here, there are a few fruit trees, some hunting is carried out, and a lot more fishing, which is very much a common pastime locally. In addition, the burial mound marker in the hills east of Wylee is really a small, trial, silver mine. The lakeside is a good spot to find healing herbs in season.