

Ivan's Keep

Hex 505

Towards the western edge of the Scrublands on the southeast bank of the River Kline is this village-sized settlement, from which a road leads over the ford 25 miles (40 kilometres) west to Ljungby Village (Hex 005), that also forks north to Bruga's Hold (Hex 403), 15 miles, 24 km, away. A third road leads northeast to Toresk (Hex 805), 17 miles, 27 km distant, and beyond. From time to time, marauding bands of Goblins and Kobolds are apt to attack the village, thus most places are strongly-built, and there is the eponymous stone Keep on the village's northeastern side. A stout timber palisade on an oval earthen bank, The Great Fence, encompasses the current settlement. At least the bands of attackers often end up squabbling among themselves more than assaulting the village, so it is rarely seriously threatened. The northwestern part inside the palisade, called West End, has the older, more run-down, properties in general, including a rather seedy flophouse, The Royal Dagger Inn, that hosts a subterranean pit-fighting chamber. To the south is the Market Square and Southside, with better-maintained properties to its north and northeast, including some workshops. In this northern part are a couple of reasonable hostelries, The Filthy Bard Tavern (which is less-welcoming to non-locals) and The Frog & Wheel Inn, whose cellars include some very ancient tunnels. "Boot & Hammer", also in this district and a particularly notable establishment, is a high-quality, high-price, glassblower. Around the Market Square are a few more shops, including "Noble Carlsby", an exotic-creature taxidermist, "The Stout Toad", selling spices, rare seeds and exotic powders, and "Corner Storehouse", an apothecary, inside which mysterious shadows move oddly, like dark stains. The Square itself is quite large, despite the need for housing space within the palisade, as it doubles as a muster area, where the militia can collect and be trained. Everyone here, and in the surrounding farms, bears arms at all times, to be prepared. There is also an illicit black market operating in the settlement, part of which is a front for kidnappers from The Shimmering Cult, which has its hidden base at the Crystal Cathedral in Lightning Ravine (Hex 1002, around 40 miles away, 65 km, to the northeast). The Cultists are always on the lookout for lone travellers and others unlikely to be missed, during a raid, for instance. (From the Shadowdark RPG's random tables, the settlement is Neutral, its northwestern district is Slums, the north & northeastern area is the Artisan district, with the Market district in the south. Both The Filthy Bard Tavern and Frog & Wheel Inn are Standard taverns, and the glassblower's is a Wealthy shop.)

Public wells are available at five separate locations (two in Market Square), plus a sixth in the Keep, to reduce reliance on the river during an attack, and in winter when the river often freezes over. The curiously symmetrical oval of the palisade on its earthen bank sometimes attracts comments from newcomers to the place. The bank was originally raised using powerful magics by the Great Archdruid of the Dark Sentinel Druids, whose main temple is at The Savage Fane (Hex 611) nearly 40 miles south of the Keep. He abhorred straight lines on the ground, while also favouring symmetry. This also helps explain why only part of the low hill the settlement is now situated upon lies within the palisaded bank, as the northeast wall of the Keep was used as the starting place for the bank's circuit. The timber palisade, gate-towers and walkway, were later additions, using timber mostly from Bruga's Hold. Such a huge amount of tree-cutting may have angered the Druids, as some have suggested this as the reason for the continued Goblin raids from the south. No one here has a better explanation, or knows where they come from, certainly. However, they may come instead at the urging of the Druids' arch-rival, sorcerer Hiloshrinne Six-Finger from his base at Doraine Circle (Hex 710), not far northwest of The Savage Fane. The Kobolds probably come from their camp by Denen Arch (Hex 903), 25 miles, 40 km, to the northeast, possibly at the instigation of The Shimmering Cult. A few old, low, ruined and overgrown building remains from parts of the more extended former settlement here can be seen still to the south, although most of the ruins were cleared long before, with their materials reused to construct the current village. The palisade walls are patrolled regularly by day and night, with the gates closed at sunset each day, opening again only at dawn, so long as there is daylight. In the winter's perpetual darkness, the gates are opened only on request, so long as no threat is apparent. Most properties here have at least one upper storey as well as their ground level. The fortified Keep is three storeys high, with a smaller fourth storey tower in the middle of its roof, forming the highest lookout point. The wooden gate towers are each effectively three-and-a-half storeys tall, due to their lookout flat roofs with battlements, while the palisade walls and walkway are about one-and-a-half storeys high similarly, although the banks the walls are set on are around a further half-storey tall too. The great chimney of the glassblower is three storeys high, another obvious feature of the place even from a distance.