

# JOURNEYING TO THE VOLCANIC HILLS

Considering that the region is completely landlocked, travelers have three choices when deciding how to reach the Volcanic Hills – by land, by Underground Highway, or by air.

## BY LAND

Those travelers originating in the Western Lands, Seven Kingdoms, Desert Kingdoms and regions thereabout, are well-advised to journey along the Wilderlands Road all the way to the Citadel of Hadran, the largest military installation in the Kang Empire. From there, one can travel the Emperor's Road, a network of roadways winding through the Empire. The Emperor's Road is heavily patrolled and relatively secured by Kang warriors, and it is well-maintained by crews of Vajra engineers. However, one should expect to pay considerable fees for travel permits and tolls.

The Emperor's Road winds north and south through the Greylands and relatively close to the Eastern border of the Volcanic Hills. The Sauran cities of Sathra and Sathir are within reach, and are recommended starting points for venturing into the hills.

## BY UNDERGROUND HIGHWAY

A labyrinth of caves, caverns, subterranean rivers and lakes, and carved tunnels snakes its way below the surface of Talislanta, and is known as the Underground Highway. The Gnomekin of Durne have surveyed it from the Seven Kingdoms to the western border of the Volcanic Hills.

Traveling the Underground Highway is not something to pursue without considerable deliberation. Satada prowl the black passageways, eager to use their capture-bows and make slaves of explorers. Other, even more foul beasts, sit gibbering in the darkness. Natural hazards include flash floods, cave-ins, and aberrant or flammable pockets of gases.

## BY AIR

Those journeying via windship could conceivably enter the Volcanic Hills from any direction. Assuming, however, the vessel is not assaulted en route – aerial predators infest the skies surrounding the region in unusual numbers, possibly due to the strong, hot winds. Batranc are notorious for attacks on windships here, and more than one sky captain has fled with tattered sails and terrified crew. Perhaps even more frightening are the opteryx roosting near the tops of active volcanoes. These creatures consider windships to be akin to floating eggs – tasty morsels with fragile shells and soft, juicy centers.

Predators are not the only threat a windship must face. Aberrant winds from the Shadow Realm and frozen blasts from L'Haan often mingle with hot air masses swirling about the Volcanic Hills, causing storms of tremendous fury. Winds from the Volcanic Hills may even carry flaming cinders and debris.

The shrewd captain plots a course for a civilized settlement or city, and encourages passengers to complete the journey overland. Assuming one can acquire the necessary permits to fly a windship within the Kang Empire, suitable cities there include Hadran, Kang-Tu, and Karang.

An especially daring or well-paid captain might consider flying over the Kang Empire, across the Greylands, and then to the Sauran settlements of Sathra or Sathir. Be forewarned, however, for the local inhabitants may react in a less-than-enthusiastic manner to both windships and foreigners.

## ARRIVAL

Assuming one is not traveling the Underground Highway, the destination becomes apparent from a considerable distance. Like pustules bursting from the pockmarked skin of the world, rows of angry red volcanoes loom on the horizon. From their fiery throats, long tendrils of night-black smoke lick the sky like slow, sensuous tongues. Heavy, grey-green clouds hang low in that sky, their bellies glowing crimson from the fires below. The shadows they throw down blot out much of the light of the twin suns, causing an eerie, perpetual twilight.

As one draws nearer, the Volcanic Hills affect more than one's sense of sight. Soon, the traveler hears low grumblings of thunder and the almost mechanical screeching of shifting earth, the result of small earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The hot wind brings the foul breath of volcanoes to the traveler's nose – a smell of acid and sulfur and ash.

## Encounters in the Volcanic Hills

Use this table for encounter ideas or roll 4d20 to select a random encounter. Subtract 10 for northern encounters. Add 10 for southern encounters.

Roll	Encounter
4	Aggressive vorl
5	Aamanian pilgrims
6	Rolling fog bank
7	Lone Aamanian warrior-priest
8	Dried husk of a corpse
9	Ambitious pyromancer
10	Lake of volcanic glass
11	Swirling storm of flaming cinders
12	Mated pair of land dragons
13	Sauran obsidian artisans
14	Rune-inscribed obelisk
15-16	Sudden volcanic eruption
17-18	Ambushing Raknid warriors
19	Landslide of hot ash
20-21	Slow-moving lava flow
22	Hidden cave opening
23	Erupting tower of rock
24	Field of sedge
25	Chasm appears suddenly
26-27	Raknid workers
28-29	Visible side trail branches off
30	Clumps of wireweed
31	Steaming well or hot springs
32	Raknid hive
33	Xambrian wizard hunter
34	Nesting drac
35	Field of obsidian shards
36	Hungry draconid
37-38	Geyser of hot fumes and steam
39	Unleashed earth demon
40	Kang mining party

(continued)

Once within the region, one not only sees and hears and smells the Volcanic Hills, the wayfarer *feels* the place in one's skin. A profound sense of foreboding may overcome the traveler. It is as if all things in this land live a slow, languid existence, and yet are frantic to remain calm as something powerful slumbers – something that at any moment might awaken to shake the world.

## TRAVELING WITHIN THE VOLCANIC HILLS

Much like the magma flowing beneath it, the terrain shifts and changes dramatically and often. Volcanoes both small and large erupt suddenly, triggering lava flows, earthquakes, and avalanches, all of which alter the face of the land. Towers of jagged rock might push up from below like stone fingers, chasms may open wide and deep, and rivers of fiery lava may change course seemingly at a whim.

### ROADS

To say there are roads in the Volcanic Hills is misleading. What one finds are more akin to wilderness trails than roadways. These trails result from the movements of Saurans, either on foot or mounted upon land dragons, traveling between settlements. One finds particularly well-beaten trails near Sathra and Sathir, the two Sauran cities.

Like other features of the land, roadways change often. A trail may simply end at a chasm or against the newly-risen rock wall of a cliff.

### Encounters in the Volcanic Hills (continued)

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Encounter</u>
41	Discarded ancient silver disc
42	Relentless ravenger
43	Fragment of huge broken glyphstone
44	Solitary vasp
45	Scattering of firegems
46	Cavorting pyro demon
47	Fortified Kang outpost
48-49	Deep rumbling noises
50	Glimpse of floating manse
51-52	Minor earthquake
53	Hunting opteryx
54	Invisible cloud of noxious gas
55-56	Kang raiding party
57	Lurking vasp
58	Lone tarkus
59	Trail ends in a rock cliff
60-61	Sauran war party
62	Small herd of striders
63	Acid rain and black lightning
64	Satada hunting party
65	Stand of flickerpine trees
66	Flock of batranc
67	Sauran youth with dragon icon
68	Unattended land lizard steed
69	Roving duadir
70	Discarded obsidian weapon
71	Caravan bugs
72	Crude red iron shield
73	Patch of bramblecup lichen
74	Band of Rajan cultists
75	Saurans herding land lizards
76	Orgovian traders
77	Sauran settlement
78	Djaffir merchants
79	Roaming herd of durge
80	Devious black magician

## MODES OF CONVEYANCE

A well-trained mount, such as an equus, aht-ra, or strider, is undoubtedly the best mode of travel for a single rider within the Volcanic Hills. Saurans prefer to ride land dragons fitted with iron-plated battle towers. These lumbering behemoths serve an obvious offensive function in warfare, but also act as moving shelters against aberrant weather and predators when traveling.

## HIRING A GUIDE

Considering the inherent dangers of the place, a stranger to the Volcanic Hills would do well to hire a trustworthy guide. At the Sauran settlements of Sathra and Sathir, one has favorable chances of locating such a person. Djaffir and Orgovian merchants frequent these cities, and their caravans travel into the interior of the region to ply their wares among the Sauran clans. Even Saurans themselves have been known to act as guides.

## NATURAL HAZARDS

In addition to major events, such as large volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, travelers should beware localized natural hazards. These include events on a lesser scale and in a smaller area. Most of these hazards are preceded by rumbling and shaking or the screeching of scraping stones or sudden bursts of steam, and the wary individual should seek shelter quickly.

Geysers of steam or smoke and hot ash or lava spray can erupt from the smallest fissure and are common examples of localized natural hazards. Landslides of ash and pumice-stone are another. Depressions in the earth filled with heavy, noxious gases, which may upon occasion be colorless and odorless, pose a threat as well.

## Erendor's Way

A wide, rugged trail snakes its way through much of the Volcanic Hills, particularly to the north. This ancient roadway proceeds with fits and starts and dead ends, and is completely wiped away in many sections due to lava flows and landslides. What set this trail apart are its road markers – obelisks of grey stone inlaid with glowing green runes.

It is commonly believed that the legendary Erendor of Elande placed the pillars and inscribed the runes, which are purportedly written in a secret cipher that only the ancient magician can decode. It is thought that the obelisks mark the path and the runes reveal how to avoid the snares protecting his hidden sanctum – the fabled Caves of Erendor.

To this day, no one has been able to read the runes or successfully follow the obelisks. The maze of caverns and its supposed cache of Archaen artifacts remain lost.

## WEATHER

Above the Volcanic Hills, the suns of Talislanta seldom shine with their full brilliance. Even at midday, the light can shift from normal daylight to the darkness of midnight in a blink as clouds and winds of smoke and ash swirl above. Such winds become dangers themselves when moving swiftly and bearing hot debris.

Storms here typically carry acid rain accompanied by flashes of mundane lightning and magical black lightning. The dreaded Black Wind may also blow through the valleys and crags of the Volcanic Hills, and some accredit its arcane forces of transformation to the creation of the Sauran species ages past.

## SEEKING SHELTER

The wise traveler keeps one eye toward spying shelter while traveling through the region. Predators, natural hazards, and aberrant weather strike suddenly, and are all good reasons to have a sanctuary within swift approach.

One might seek shelter in caves or lava tubes and beneath overhangs of stone or pumice. Shallow fissures, chasms, and sinkholes should be used only as a last resort due to the dangers of poisonous gases and shifting earth.

