

The Duergar – The Dwarves of Simonside Hills

Near the Northumberland town of Rothbury rise the Simonside Hills. Popular amongst walkers with their vistas of Northumberland National Park and beyond, it's easy to feel a sense of solitude and a separation from the work-a-day world there. But perhaps, just perhaps, it may be wise not to be too isolated here. For according to local myth and legend, small humanoid creatures known as the Duergar await unsuspecting travellers, and their intentions may be much less than honourable.

It is thought the Simonside Hills may have been viewed as something of a sacred location through the ages. Burial cairns are to be found in the area as well as cup and ring rock carvings. This, despite the fact that there has been a lack of any significant habitation or settlements found. It appears people visited the hills for specific reasons. Or, conversely, may not have lived there for specific reasons!

The tales of malicious little dwarves go back some time. These creatures are associated with Will-o'-the-Wisp like lights in the night. Their purpose seemingly to lure unwary or tired travellers with the promise of rest or sanctuary, only to lead them over some rocky crevice or ravine, or mire them in some marsh or bog.

Tales of the Deurgar have been recorded in 19th and early 20th century texts. In one story a traveller finds a small hut in which to rest. Sitting by a small fire he is then accompanied by a small humanoid figure. After spending the night in this strange company, morning finds the hut and the dwarf gone but finds the traveller on a rocky precipice inches from his demise. Another story sees a Ye Olde Skeptic set out to prove the falsehood of these creatures. Pretending to be mired in some bog he finds himself surrounded by a hoard of these malicious little blighters, fighting them off until the morning light sends them back to from whence they came, and he is able rescue his situation and flees.

The origin of the word Duergar is thought to be derived from the Norse word "dvergar", meaning dwarf. Maybe Norse myths were trans-located to an area also seen as harbouring the supernatural or which fed superstitions. Or maybe what was found there was eerily familiar to that found in the homelands!

So if you happen to visit the area and go walking - enjoy the peace, the solitude and the views. But keep your wits about you. Enjoy the local myths; just don't become part of them!