

Revision of Mount Gundabad's history

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This article aims to rectify some chronological and historical discrepancies between Tolkiens writings - most notably the twelfth volume of the History of Middle-earth series: The Peoples of Middle-earth - and ICE's Mount Gundabad campaign module. It also covers events related to but not directly concerning Mount Gundabad or the original module. The following abbreviations are used in the text:

- GG: *Goblin Gate and Eagle's Eyrie* campaign module by Carl Willner, ©1985 by Iron Crown Enterprises
LoME III: *Lords of Middle-earth Vol. III: Hobbits, Dwarves, Ents, Orcs & Trolls*, ©1989 by Iron Crown Enterprises
LoTR: *The Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien
MG: *Mount Gundabad* campaign module by Carl Willner, ©1989 by Iron Crown Enterprises
PoME: *The Peoples of Middle-earth* by JRR Tolkien (edited and published by CR Tolkien), ©1996 by HarperCollins Publishers.
All page references to PoME in this article apply to the HarperCollins Publishers edition 1997.
UT: *Unfinished Tales* by JRR Tolkien (edited and published by CR Tolkien), © 1980 by George Allen & Unwin Publishers Ltd.

In his 1989 campaign module *Mount Gundabad*, Carl Willner proposes a continual orcish habitation of Mount Gundabad since the end of the First Age. While being suitable for the time, Christopher Tolkien's publication of the HoME series has provided us with much additional information on many topics of Middle-earth. Of special importance for Mount Gundabad is the twelfth volume *The People of Middle-earth* (published 1996). It gives us much new insights about the Dwarves of Durin's folk and their relations with the Northmen from the First throughout the Third Age. Here we learn that Mount Gundabad was the Place of Awakening for Durin and therefore sacred to his tribe. Moreover it tells us that the Orcs only later occupied it, thereby founding the special enmity of the orcs with the dwarves of Khazad-dûm. It seems that on two occasions the orcs controlled the Longbeards' awakening place in the Second Age: *Gundabad was re-taken [during the course of the War of Sauron with the Elves], the Ered Mithrin infested and the communication between Moria and the Iron Hills for a time cut off.* (my emphasis, PoME p.305). The fact that Gundabad was retaken by orcs around S.A. 1700 implies that it was in their possession at least once before. There is one chronological evidence for the further historical development in PoME on p.301: "*Mount Gundabad...and its occupation in the Third Age by the Orks of Sauron...*" (my emphasis). This passage explicitly states that the orcs who began the continuous orcish occupation in the Third Age were in the service of Sauron, obviously after Sauron's re-emergence around TA 1000. Additionally Appendix B of the LoTR tells us that around TA 1300 "*Orcs increase in the Misty Mountains and attack the Dwarves*". This reference combined with the PoME reference and the general development in the northern parts of the Misty Mountains led me to the decision of coordinating the lasting capture of Mount Gundabad with the founding of Angmar.

In PoME we also learn that "... *the Dwarves of different kindreds were in communication, and in the early ages often held assemblies of delegates at Mount Gundabad.*" (PoME p.301).

Since the Dwarves awoke in the First Age, the plural "ages" implies that the Dwarves held Gundabad in the First and Second Age (otherwise there would be no need for a plural). Accordingly Mount Gundabad must have been in dwarvish hands for nearly the whole First and Second Age.

The two references mentioned above indicate that Mount Gundabad was only constantly occupied by orcs during the Third Age. Earlier occupations must have been brief (relatively speaking). This influenced my decision to let the orcs rule Mount Gundabad only a total of about 320 years in the First and Second Age combined (although this occupation had far-flung consequences—see the timeline).

In this context the founding of the orc-stronghold at Goblin-gate is placed in the Second Age, in the wake of Sauron's capture of Mount Gundabad. In UT we learn in the story about the disaster at the Gladden Fields that the main body of orcs that ambushed Isildur in TA 2 were "*The Orcs of the Mountains*" (UT, p.273). Goblin-gate fills the role as the main orcish base in the Misty Mountains during those times when the *yrch* are expelled from Gundabad quite well.

Additionally, the statements that Mount Gundabad was occupied for a time by Dwarves of Thelór's tribe (found in LoME III as well as in MG), the fifth dwarven tribe according to LoME III, must be corrected in light of the new information provided by PoME. LoME III suggests that all dwarven fathers awakened in Khazad-dûm (cf. LoME III p. 43), a view that must be firmly rejected according to the information provided by PoME. Instead the fathers awoke in four, sundered places:

"The first [the awakening place of the Firebeards and Broadbeams - the tribes of Nogrod and Belegost] had been in the north of the Ered Lindon...the second [awakening place of Durin of Khazad-dûm] had been Mount Gundabad...The other two places were eastward, at distances as great or greater than that between the Blue Mountains and Mount Gundabad: the arising of the Ironfists and Stiffbeards, and that of the Blacklocks and Stonefoots." (PoME p. 301).

This statement makes it clear that the places of awakening for the four remaining tribes must be placed somewhere in the east and south of Middle-earth, preferably near to their later mansions because "...they [the dwarves] were loth to migrate and make permanent dwellings or 'mansions' far from their original homes, except under great pressure from enemies or after some catastrophe such as the ruin of Beleriand..." (PoME p. 301). The latter statement gives the GM flexibility to place dwarven mansions at some distance from their original homes while being true to Tolkien (though the cause for such migrations has to be great indeed).

Summing it up, the elements of "Thelór's tribe" residing in Gundabad have to be eliminated. Some kind of embassies from other dwarven tribes might be present here, but there is no evidence for any other than Durin's tribe living in significant numbers here.

The name 'Gundabad' itself is thought to be of Khuzdul origin (PoME p.301). All these new insights make it necessary to revise the history of Mount Gundabad and environs presented by Carl Willner.

First Age

On the site of Durin's awakening the First Tribe of the Naugrim builds a city to remind them of the important events that have taken place here. It is the first major settlement of Durin and his house. After a couple of years the bulk of the tribe moves southward to the site where Durin chose to make his permanent home. This settlement is called Khazad-dûm, Hadhodrond in the Grey-elven tongue. Gundabad retains only a portion of his former population, but it is counted as the most sacred place of the Longbeards (Durin's tribe) and revered accordingly.

In terms of practical use the city is an important link between the capital at Khazad-dûm and the settlements in Erebor, the Ered Mithrin and Eryn Engrin. Therefore it flourishes despite its lesser population compared to other dwarven mansions.

- 520 After the defeat of his last remaining enemy kingdom (Gondolin), Morgoth turns his thoughts on securing a stronghold for the future destruction of all other enemies of his domination. He deems Gundabad a prime candidate which opens a road from the Northwest into Rhovanion and beyond. He entrusts his most capable underlings with the mission
- 527 After seven years of preparation his forces are ready and march against the dwarvish citadel. As a means of securing the place after its capture, the Evil One's general has with him the Ulûkai, an evil artifact crafted by Morgoth and possessing some of his foul spirit.
- 529 In the second year of the campaign, the Dwarves are decisively defeated and Mount Gundabad taken. The Naugrim however are able to conceal and seal their sacred halls before the orcs breach the defenses. Soon after the capture, construction of the Chamber of the Ulûkai begins.
- 541 The orcish chieftain Mukarg is made ruler of Mount Gundabad when the majority of the forces are withdrawn to Thangorodrim to halt the invasion of the Host of Valinor in Beleriand. With skill he is able to ward off any dwarven attempts to re-conquer the city.

Second Age

- c. 40 Knowledge of the Ulûkai is lost with the violent death of Mukarg and his orcs when the Dwarves re-take their city. It does however act as an attractor for evil entities. Consequently, trouble with evil creatures never really ceases for the Dwarves of Mount Gundabad in the future.
- c. 10-250 The Dwarves have to fight great numbers of fleeing orcs from the remnants of Morgoth's armies. Hereby they make alliance with local mannish groups (PoME p. 302f.). The ferocity and persistence of the orcish attacks upon this region is partially caused by the influence of the Ulûkai. After the defeat of the Orcs the region is safe again but the power of the Ulûkai is an underlying menace waiting to be re-activated at the right moment.
- c. 250-1693 The alliance of Durin's Folk and their Northman allies flourishes. The Hithaeglir south to Lorinand, the Ered Mithrin, Erebor and Eryn Engrin are Dwarf-territory whereas all adjacent lands (Vales of the Anduin, lands south of the Ered Mithrin and west of the Eryn Engrin) are considered lands of the mannish allies (PoME p.323). The Men provide foodstuffs, husbandry, animals and mounted warriors while the Dwarves contribute their marvelous works of craftsmanship, finished products and the finest heavy infantry. The relationship sometimes even grows into friendship between the two people (PoME p.303). In SA 1693 the War of Sauron and the Elves begins and Sauron dispatches a considerable force of orcs to secure the northern routes over the Misty Mountains. Leader of this host is the brilliant orcish general Skorg. The skill of Skorg combined with a few sorcerers dispatched from Sauron soon give him complete control of his forces and forms the mass of goblins into a quite capable and effective fighting machine. The relative vicinity of Sauron wearing the One Ring further motivates the Orcs to an unheard-of discipline. Seeing the strength of the Northman cavalry Skorg is also given the service of a sizable force of mannish cavalry from territories under Sauron's control. Prepared in this manner he marches to battle with the Dwarf-Northman alliance. The latter have mustered their forces as well and meet their foes in the field rather than waiting for them to come and forsaking the initiative.
- 1694 The first year of the campaign sees only a few minor clashes while both sides try to outmaneuver the other. The only major engagement is inconclusive and doesn't change the tactical situation.
- 1695 Sauron invades Eregion. Gil-galad sends Elrond to Eregion. In the North the war becomes a stalemate. Sauron's forces, headquartered in the eastern Eryn Engrin wait for their chance to crush the well-organized defense.
- 1696 Skorg recognizes the importance of better intelligence and sends out scouts to prepare for the great assault he knows will come. The whole year passes with the preparations.
- 1697 Finally Sauron is able to decisively breach the elven defense in Eriador. Eregion is laid waste. Death of Celebrimbor. Elrond's army is caught by Sauron's forces and in danger of being overwhelmed. Just in this moment a dwarven army from Khazad-dûm accompanied by Elves from Lorinand fall upon Sauron's rear. Elrond perceives his chance and is able to extricate his forces from Sauron's encirclement (although with heavy losses). Furious, Sauron turns towards the Dwarves and defeats them in a few minor engagements. Their host is able to retreat to Khazad-dûm with only minimal losses. The gates of Moria are shut. Elrond retreats with remnants of the Noldor and founds the refuge of Im-ladris.
To enable this attack upon Sauron's army Durin III of Khazad-dûm is forced to thin out his forces in the North. Skorg perceives his chance and attacks with great strength. Because of his thorough planning, treachery and sheer numbers he is able to overwhelm the defenders in a great battle at the Narrows between Greenwood and the Ered Mithrin. The

remaining Dwarves retreat to the main citadel at Mount Gundabad with the remnants of their allies' forces while the remaining Northmen (mostly the old, women and children) are scattered throughout the land. The siege of Gundabad is begun.

- 1699 In the west Sauron overruns Eriador. At Mount Gundabad Skorg is able to gain access into the city by means of a secret passage revealed by a traitor (the name of this Dwarf is cursed among the Naugrim and not known to other races). The valiant defenders are slain to the man. The holy halls of the Naugrim are so well protected by enchantments and clever craftsmanship that the orcs are unable to enter them. These protective measures were undertaken for just this worst case when the war began. Skorg appoints himself as Ruler of the North. The Ered Mithrin and Hithaeglrir are secured by the founding of Orc-strongholds along all strategic locations. The most prominent of these new orc settlements is Goblin-gate at the High Pass above Imladris.
- 1700 Tar-Minastir sends a great navy from Númenor to Lindon. Sauron is defeated at the Lune and then again at Sarn Ford and Tharbad.
- 1701 Sauron is driven out of Eriador: The Westlands have peace for a long while. The orcs still rule in Mount Gundabad however. Skorg is able to ward off all dwarven counterattacks. The reason behind this is simple: Mount Gundabad being the only major conquest not lost after Sauron's defeat in Eriador is strengthened by the Dark Lord with what forces are left at his disposal. The ancient dwarven alliance with the Northmen is gone beyond revival with the destruction of most mannish settlements and the killing of their inhabitants (PoME p.305). This situation let the Dwarves constantly plot for revenge against the goblins. They start reconnaissance missions instead of fruitless assaults. Though they suffer dire casualties the Dwarves are able to establish communication with slaves of the Goblin King. This gives them a quite good picture of the situation in Mount Gundabad.
- 1750 In order to show his power Skorg orders the building of a new gate as the main entrance into Mount Gundabad. This is later known as the *Drake Gate* (see MG¹). The old dwarven entrance is abandoned.
- 1930 Skorg dies. He is the only orcish ruler of Mount Gundabad to die non-violently. After his death he is entombed in the dungeon complex of the Ulûkai (see MG). Constant power struggles over his succession weaken the Orcs' strength.
- 1932 Perceiving their chance, Durin's tribe assembles his forces and an army from Khazad-dûm marches northward, surprises the Orcs and is able to breach the defenses by the intelligence gathered about the orcish installations in the past and aided by a revolt of the orcs' slaves. The remnants of the Orcish population retreat to the surviving orc-holds in the Ered Mithrin and wait for a chance to re-claim Mount Gundabad. The Crypt of Skorg remains undetected however. Once again is the site of Awakening of the Longbeards in dwarvish hands. The orcish infestation of the Hithaeglrir and Ered Mithrin cannot be removed completely though. There is a price however: As we are told in the *Silmarillion* the Seven Rings of the Dwarves influence their wearers in an evil way (though not according to Sauron's original intentions). This is also true for Durin's Ring. The power and wealth of Khazad-dûm reaches unheard-of heights in this time but the Naugrim become jealous and reclusive. Additionally their number begins to dwindle. Slowly at first but it is felt nonetheless (LotR, Appendix A). From that time onward Mount Gundabad is still revered as a sacred site but its garrison remains relatively small because of the King's decision to use his resources primarily otherwise (clearly an effect of Durin's ring). They remain vigilant however and are able to repulse any attacks the orcs make. The new orcish installations (like the Drake Gate) are sealed and/or demolished as far as possible to re-establish the original dwarven character of the place.
- The rest of the Second Age Mount Gundabad remains in dwarven hands though the influence of Durin's Ring in Moria and the Ulûkai in Gundabad erodes the Naugrim's strength in Gundabad over the years and enables the orcs to hold other settlements (e.g. like Goblin-gate). There are still meetings of delegations of all the dwarven tribes in Gundabad, though a bit less frequent than in past times.
- 3429-3441 The War of the Last Alliance weakens the orcish strength in the northern mountains seriously. Their remaining crack troops are killed at the disaster of the Gladden Fields. The northern lands are free from the orc menace for long years although they cannot be evicted totally from the Mountains. The power of Durin's tribe is also weakened through the losses in the war (even though they did not participate with their full force).

Third Age

- 1-1300 With the power of Arnor stagnating (and waning after the split of the kingdom), Gondor being focused on the sea and its own empire and the Dwarves' numbers dwindling, Durin's tribe becomes ever more centered at Moria. Mount Gundabad is still revered however and attracts constant pilgrimages but ever fewer Dwarves are willing to live there (certainly because of the underlying evil influences already mentioned).
- since ca. 1100 Due to the weakening of the garrison most of the outer structures in Gundabad are sealed to compensate for the lessening numbers of warders available. The rising power of Goblin-gate makes communication with Moria much more dangerous for the inhabitants of Mount Gundabad.
- spring 1267 A capable Goblin-king in the person of Balcog emerges in the Ered Mithrin, comparable even to Skorg. Having amassed a great number of orcish warriors (and supported by the Nazgûl-Lord on his quest to found the realm of Angmar) he attacks Mount Gundabad in force during the summer but is unable to take it in the first place. He is able though to prevent any message from Gundabad to reach Moria thereby preventing any relief from the dwarven metropolis. Being aware of their hopeless situation, the Naugrim begin to fortify and hide the sacred places with all the skill their best craftsmen can muster to prevent the holy halls being defiled by the orcs once Gundabad falls.
- autumn 1267 The few remaining defenders are hopelessly outnumbered and know it's only question of days now before the ancient dwarven city will fall, relief being out of reach. After the final installation of the seals they prepare for the last battle and die to a man in the defense of their sacred citadel.

- 1268 When news of the fall of Mount Gundabad reach Khazad-dûm (the head of the dwarven commander is sent to Moria with an insulting message to the king), desperation grips the Naugrim. The king decides that he lacks the strength to muster a full-scale assault on a well-prepared orcish fortress (probably a misjudgement due to Durin's Ring mixed with the realization of the emerging Witch-king's strength in the North) and so he contends himself with an oath to hunt orcs forever. He also places an obligation on his descendants to re-claim Gundabad should they ever have the strength to do so. From this time onward Mount Gundabad is inhabited by the orcs. The orcish installations of the Second Age (e.g. the Drake Gate) are repaired or re-constructed and expanded by new ones. The seals of the Dwarves in Gundabad are so effective that the Orcs are unable to breach them for a very long time (finally they are able to open a few of them; each GM should take his pick according to his campaign). The most sacred sites are so cunningly hidden that they remain undetected throughout the whole orcish occupation.
- 1268-1280 Having secured the northern pass over the Misty Mountains, the Nazgûl-Lord is able to array his forces for the final stroke against any opposition in his realm-to-be. The dwarven fortress of Barazbizar (Carn Dûm) is taken 1274 (see OH-Website , *The Fall of Carn Dûm* by Jeff Erwin²). The orcish king at Mount Gundabad is made an official ally of Angmar with the establishment of that realm. Until 1280 all opposition is crushed and the realm of Angmar secured.
- 1268-1974 Mount Gundabad serves as the principal orcish citadel in the Hithaeglim. Their strong position makes it impossible to evict the goblins from their fortress. Gundabad's strength is used extensively by the Witch-king in his wars against the successor realms of Arnor.
- ca. 1300 Orcs increase in the Misty Mountains and attack the Dwarves (LotR, Appendix B). Their great success at Gundabad makes the goblins bold. The Misty Mountains (and especially the northern ranges) again are a dangerous ground to travel from this time on. The strong positions of the orcs in Goblin-gate and Gundabad, backed by Angmar shatter any hope of the Naugrim on reclaiming their ancient halls.
- 1976-2790 Even after the fall of Angmar the orcish citadel is strong enough to remain unconquered and a threat to all Free Peoples in the North: All orcs who were able to flee from the battlefields of Eriador found refuge in Gundabad; strengthening this last stronghold.
- 2740-2748 Gundabad participates in the incursions into Eriador, though the Goblin King does not allow himself to send his full force to these (for him) probing attacks.
- 2794-2795 At the onset of the War of the Dwarves and Orcs Mount Gundabad is besieged by the combined host of Durin's tribe and detachments of all the other dwarven houses. After a one and a half year siege the dwarves force their way in and slay every orc they can find. Much of the treasure as well as the majority of the females and imps is secured through secret passages though (MG). Durin's tribe leaves a garrison behind, intent on holding their ancient city after one and half millenia of orcish occupation. Immediately measures are undertaken to repair the damage to the old dwarven installations. The intact seals are not re-opened because of the war and its yet inconclusive outcome.
- 2799 After the battle of Nanduhirion, the detachments of the other dwarven houses return home. Thráin realizes that the weakened strength of Durin's tribe after the bloody war (and especially the final battle) is not sufficient to hold Mount Gundabad against future orcish attacks (the greater rate of reproduction of the orcs will replace their losses in a short time), and especially against orcs who have dwelt there for centuries and built dozens of secret passages still unknown to the Dwarves. He contends himself with repairing all the broken dwarven seals, checking on the integrity of the unbroken ones and destroying as much as possible what might be of value for the orcs.
- 2805 Thráin and his son Thorin leave Gundabad together with the dwarven garrison and make their homes in the Ered Luin. They block every entrance they know of as best as possible. Feeling ashamed at the loss of Gundabad the king's thoughts wander to Erebor and the treasures lost there; he has lost the ancient citadel of Gundabad but the "minor" halls at Erebor should be reclaimed during his reign for sure!
- 2842 The dwarven measures are so effective that the orcs are able to decisively breach them only after more than thirty years. Gundabad is once more an orcish stronghold. When news of the re-occupation reach Thráin this leads to his final decision for embarking on the journey to Erebor and re-claiming this mansion from Smaug. His quest ends with the dwarven king's capture by Sauron in TA 2845 and the loss of the last of the Seven Rings.
- 2941 Bolg leads the host of Gundabad to near victory in the Battle of Five Armies, but is ultimately defeated. Gundabad is severely weakened, leading to an only supporting role in the War of the Ring.

Fourth Age

After Sauron's fall Gundabad could be permanently retaken by the Dwarves given the general decline of evil influences. It is up to each GM to decide if and when this happens. The Fourth Age information in MG and GG might be a good starting point for such a scenario. The following information is compatible with *The Heirs of Elessar and the Fourth Age in Other Minds, Issue #9*.

- 70 Reconquest of Gundabad by a great alliance of Men and Dwarves. The Wizard Radagast plays a pivotal role in detecting an evil influence here. Elladan and Elrohir are instrumental in locating and removing the Úlukai from its ancient resting place.
- 325-29 In the Second War of the Dwarves with the Orcs, Gundabad is an important staging and supply point for the Naugrim's forces. It ends with the reconquest of Moria.
- 925 With the emergence of Durin VII a last era of glory begins the Dwarves as well as Gundabad. Within the next 10 years, the last remnants of orcish pockets are cleaned from both the Misty and most of the Grey Mountains.
- 1399 Warriors of Gundabad take place in the storming of the last orc strongholds in the eastern Ered Mithrin. In the following centuries, the Dwarves take less and less part in the affairs of men. The time has finally come for the Naugrim to make place for the Secondborn.
- ca. 2150 Last contact with the Dwarves; presumably in the Gundabad area.

After T.A. 1267 Mount Gundabad is (nearly) constantly occupied by the Goblins for the remainder of the Third Age and early in the Fourth. The layouts and locations in the *Mount Gundabad* supplement can be used. Of course one has to add the original dwarven layouts (for reference and adventure-related purposes). This can be achieved through original design or the use (and adaptation) of dwarven layouts from other RPG supplements. RPG supplements from other companies and games (concerning dwarves) may be used as inspiration. The author found Columbia Games' HârWorld adventure supplement *The Lost City of Kiraz* appropriate for this task. In fact some of the ideas for the timeline above were inspired by this supplement.

¹ But at least the interior design has to be adapted: in MG, the main entrance is protected by a maze. While this may hold adventuring potential, it is absolutely unsuitable for the main entrance to a city and has to be adapted to something more fitting.

² <http://www.otherhands.com>