

HEXCRAWL

As part of my essay on game structures in roleplaying games, I specifically discussed the basic structure of the hexcrawl:

- (1) Draw a hexmap. In general, the terrain of each hex is given as a visual reference and the hex is numbered (either directly or by a gridded cross-reference). Additional features like settlements, dungeons, rivers, roads, and polities are also typically shown on the map.
- (2) Key the hexmap. Using the numbered references, key each hex with an encounter or location. (It is not necessary to key all of the hexes on the map.)
- (3) Use (or design) mechanics which will let you determine how far the PCs can move while traveling overland. Determine the hex the PCs start in and track their movement.
- (4) Whenever the PCs enter a new hex, the GM tells them the terrain type of the hex and triggers the encounter or location keyed to that hex: The PCs experience the event, encounter the monsters, or see the location. Initially a core component of roleplaying games, the hexcrawl structure slowly faded away. By 1989 there were only a few vestigial hex maps cropping up in products and none of them were actually designed for hexcrawl play. 2nd Edition removed hexcrawling procedures from the rulebooks entirely. It wasn't until Necromancer Games brought the Wilderlands back into print and Ben Robbins' West Marches campaign went viral that people started to rediscover the lost art of the hexcrawl. During my discussion of game structures, I mentioned that I had been developing and playtesting a robust structure for hexcrawling. Since then I've received several requests to share my rules for hexcrawling. Although still very much a work in progress, over the next few days I intend to do exactly that.

DESIGN GOALS

Before we get to the actual hexcrawling, however, I want to take a moment to clarify what my design goals were (and are) for this project.

First, I wanted a structure which would hide the hexes from the players. Although I find the abstraction of the hex extremely convenient on the GM's side of the screen (for tracking navigation, keying encounters, and so forth), I'm of the opinion that it has negative effects on the other side of the screen: I want the players interacting with the game world, not the abstraction. Therefore, the hexes in this hexcrawl system are a player-unknown structure.

Second, building on that, the structure is explicitly designed for *exploration*. The structure, therefore, includes a lot of rules for navigation, getting lost, and finding your way again. It's built around having the players constantly making new discoveries (even in places they've been before).

Third, the system is built around the assumption that every hex on the map will have at least one keyed location. And note that I said "location", not encounter. Traditional hexcrawls will often include hexes keyed with encounters like this one (from the Wilderlands of Magic Realm):

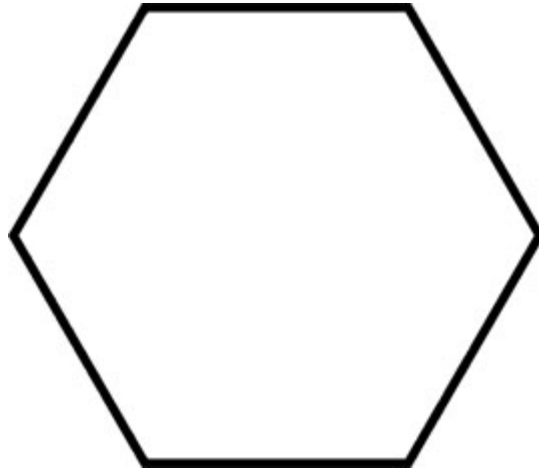
A charismatic musician sits on a rock entertaining a group of Halfling children. He sings songs of high adventure and fighting Orcs.

While this system certainly could be used with such keys, my intention was to focus the key on content that could be used more than once as PCs visit and re-visit the same areas. (Particularly useful for an open gaming table.) In other words, the key is geography, not ephemera.

Fourth, to support all of these goals (hidden hexes, exploration, reusable material) I wanted to introduce uncertainty into whether or not the keyed content of a particular hex would be experienced (instead of automatically triggering the content when the hex was entered). Furthermore, I wanted a rich system for generating encounters (in order to both create content and to replace the ephemeral hex keys I had eschewed). I accomplished both of these goals by creating a unified, streamlined system of encounter checks.

WILDERNESS TRAVEL

HEXES



1 Hex = 12 miles (center to center/side to side) = 7 mile sides = 124 square miles

WATCHES

A watch is the basic unit for tracking time. A watch is equal to 4 hours.

Determine Time Within a Watch: To randomly generate a particular time within a watch, use 1d8 to determine the half hour and 1d30 to determine the exact minute (if necessary).

SPEED AND DISTANCE

ON FOOT	10 ft. / 3"	15 ft. / 6"	20 ft. / 9"	30 ft. / 12"	40 ft. / 15"
1 Hour (Walk)	1 mile	1.5 miles	2 miles	3 miles	4 miles
1 Hour (Hustle)	2 miles	3 miles	4 miles	6 miles	8 miles
1 Watch (4 Hours)	4 miles	6 miles	8 miles	12 miles	16 miles
1 March (8 Hours)	8 miles	12 miles	16 miles	24 miles	32 miles

Consult the table for movement per hour, per watch (4 hours), or per day (8 hours).

Hustle: A character can hustle for 1 hour. Hustling for a second hour between sleep cycles deals 1 point of nonlethal damage, and each additional hour deals twice the damage taken during the previous hour of hustling. A character who takes any nonlethal damage from hustling becomes fatigued. Eliminating the nonlethal damage also eliminates the fatigue.

Mounts: Mounts carrying riders at a hustle suffer lethal damage instead of nonlethal damage.

March: A character can march at walking speed for 8 hours between sleep cycles.

Forced March: For each hour of marching beyond 8 hours, a character must make a Constitution check (DC 10, +2 per extra hour). If the check fails, the character takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. A character who takes any nonlethal damage from a forced march becomes fatigued. Eliminating the nonlethal damage also eliminates the fatigue.

Mounts: Mounts carrying riders in a forced march automatically fail their Constitution checks and suffer lethal damage instead of nonlethal damage.

MODES OF TRAVEL

Normal: No modifiers.

Hustling: Characters are assumed to be moving quickly in any watch during which they hustle. Navigation DCs increase by +4 while hustling.

Tip: For each hour that characters hustle during a watch, you can simply add their movement per hour to their total movement for that watch.

Cautiously: While moving cautiously, characters are purposely being careful. Movement is made at 3/4 normal speed. The chance for any non-exploratory encounter is halved. (If a non-exploratory encounter is generated, there is a 50% chance it doesn't actually happen.) Navigation DCs are reduced by -4 while moving cautiously.

Exploring: While exploring, characters are assumed to be trying out side trails, examining objects of interest, and so forth. Movement is made at 1/2 normal speed. The chance for encounters is doubled.

Note: It is possible to move cautiously while exploring. Apply all rules for both modes of travel (including both movement modifiers).

Foraging: While foraging, characters move at 1/2 normal speed but can make a Survival check once per day. On a successful check, the character has gathered enough food and water for one day. They can provide food or water for one additional character for every 2 points by which the check result exceeds the DC. The DC is determined by the terrain type.

TERRAIN

The type of terrain modifies the speed at which the character can travel.

- **Highway:** A highway is a straight, major, paved road.
- **Road:** A road is a dirt track or similar causeway.
- **Trail:** A trail is like a road, but allows only single-file travel. A trail in poor repair requires a DC 12 navigation check to follow.
- **Trackless:** Trackless terrain is a wild area with no paths. +2 to Navigation DCs.

TERRAIN	HIGHWAY	ROAD/TRAIL	TRACKLESS	NAVIGATION DC	FORAGE DC
Desert	x1	x1/2	x1/2	12	20
Forest (sparse)	x1	x1	x1/2	14	14
Forest (medium)	x1	x1	x1/2	16	14
Forest (dense)	x1	x1	x1/2	18	14
Hills	x1	x3/4	x1/2	14	12
Jungle	x1	x3/4	x1/4	16	14
Moor	x1	x1	x3/4	14	16

TERRAIN	HIGHWAY	ROAD/TRAIL	TRACKLESS	NAVIGATION DC	FORAGE DC
Mountains	x3/4	x3/4	x1/2	16	18
Plains	x1	x1	x3/4	12	12
Swamp	x1	x3/4	x1/2	15	16
Tundra, frozen	x1	x3/4	x3/4	12	18

CONDITIONS

CONDITIONS	SPEED MODIFIER
Cold or hot climate	x3/4
Giant terrain	x3/4
Hurricane	x1/10
Leading mount	x3/4
Poor visibility (fog, darkness)	x1/2
River crossing	x3/4
Snow cover	x1/2
Snow cover, heavy	x1/4
Storm	x3/4
Storm, powerful	x1/2

Poor visibility also increases the DC of navigation checks by +4 and forage checks by +2.

OPTIONAL RULE: ACTUAL DISTANCE TRAVELED

The distance cited on the tables is the average distance traveled. The actual distance traveled is 50% to 150% (2d6+3 times 10%) of that distance. Characters can ascertain the actual distance traveled with a successful Survival check made at the Navigation DC of the terrain. On a failure, they assume the average value of the distance traveled.

Note: The purpose of this rule is to make accurate mapping more difficult. (You could actually adapt a similar rule to dungeon exploration in order to make accurate mapping of the dungeon environment more difficult, although the resolution time involved might be prohibitive.) Take 10 is an option, so experienced explorers will never have any problem accurately gauging how far they've traveled.

TRACKING HEXES

Movement on the wilderness hex grid is abstracted. In order to determine if a party has left a hex, you must keep track of their progress within the hex.

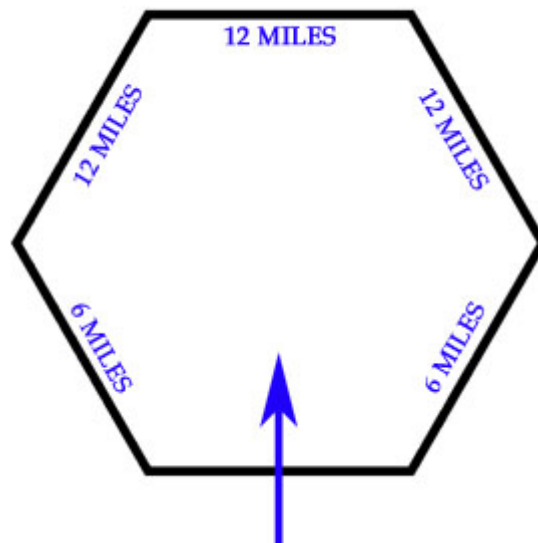
Starting in a Hex: If a character starts movement within a hex, it requires 6 miles of progress in order to exit any face of the hex.

Optional Rule: You can choose to bias a starting position. For example, you might see that a river flows near the western edge of a hex. If the PCs start traveling from that river, you might decide that it only takes 2 miles to exit through the hex's western face and 10 miles to exit through its eastern face.

Crossing Hex to a Far Side: It requires 12 miles of progress to exit a hex through one of the three faces on the opposite side.

Crossing Hex to a Near Side: It requires 6 miles of progress to exit a hex through one of the two nearest faces.

Back the Way We Came: If characters deliberately double back along their own trail, simply reduce their progress until they exit the hex. If they leave back through the same face through which they entered the hex for any other reason (by getting lost, for example) you can generally assume that it takes 6 miles of progress to exit the hex unless circumstances suggest some other figure.



NAVIGATING THE WILDERNESS

In general, you can either navigate through the wilderness by *landmark* or you can navigate by *compass direction*.

NAVIGATING BY LANDMARK

Generally speaking, it's trivial to follow a road, river, or any other natural feature of the terrain. It's similarly easy to head towards any visible landmark. The landmark or terrain feature will determine the route of travel and there's no chance of becoming lost, so you can simply track the number of miles traveled.

IDENTIFYING LANDMARKS: If the PCs are unsure of a landmark but have had previous experience with it, it may be possible to identify it with a Survival check at the DM's discretion. The accuracy and detail of the identification will depend on prior experience.

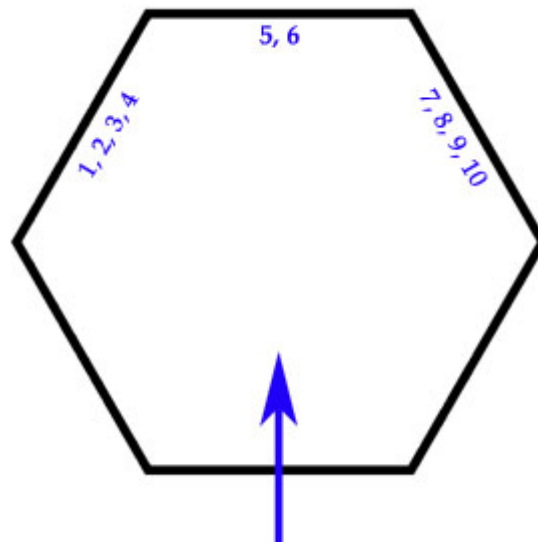
Example: A ranger is passing through the woods when they encounter a river. If it's a river they've walked up and down before, the Survival check might let them confirm that it is, in fact, the Mirthwindle. If they're less familiar with the region, the check might tell them that this is probably the same river they crossed earlier in the day – it must be taking a southerly bend. If this is the first time they've ever seen this river, the Survival check won't tell them much more than "this is a river".

NAVIGATING BY COMPASS DIRECTION

Characters trying to move in a specific direction through the wilderness must make a navigation check using their Survival skill once per watch to avoid becoming lost. A character with at least 5 ranks in Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) pertaining to the area being traveled through gains a +2 synergy bonus on this check.

BECOMING LOST: Characters who fail the navigation check become lost and veer away from their intended direction of travel, as indicated by a 1d10 roll on the diagram below. When lost characters exit a hex, they will exit through the face of the hex indicated by the die roll.

Note: Characters who are lost remain lost. In the new hex neither their intended direction of travel nor their veer will change.



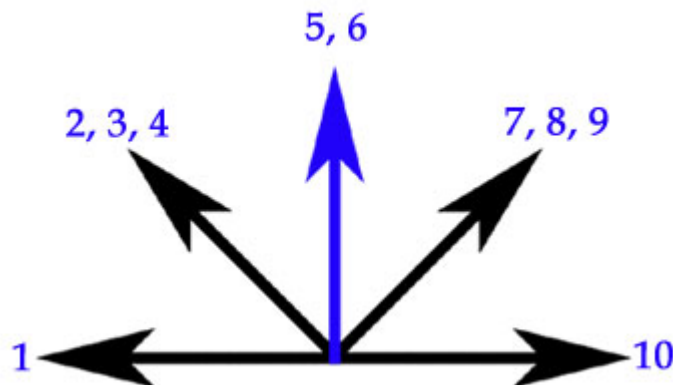
If characters who are already lost fail another navigation check, their veer can increase but not decrease.

Example: A lost party is already veering to the left when they fail another Navigation check. A roll of 1-4 on 1d10 would cause them to exit two hex faces to the left of their intended direction, but any other result would not change their veer at all.

ALTERNATIVE VEERS:

Absolute Degree: Roll $(1d10 - 1d10) \times 10$ to determine the number of degrees off-course.

Compass Direction: Roll 1d10 and consult the diagram below. (The blue arrow indicates the intended direction of travel.)



USING A COMPASS: Compasses grant a +2 bonus to navigation checks. In addition, they automatically eliminate veer at hex borders even if the user doesn't recognize that they were lost. (Even if you don't recognize that you ended up off course, the compass constantly reorients you towards your intended direction of travel.)

LOST CHARACTERS

Recognizing That You're Lost: Once per watch, a lost character can attempt a Survival check against the Navigation DC of the terrain to recognize that they are no longer certain of their direction of travel.

Characters who encounter a clear landmark or unexpectedly enter a distinctly new type of terrain can make an additional Survival check to realize that they've become lost.

Note: Some circumstances may make it obvious to the characters that they have become lost without requiring any check.

Reorienting: A character who realizes that they've become lost has several options for re-orienting themselves.

Backtracking: A lost character can follow their own tracks (see *Tracking*, below). While tracking allows them to retrace their steps, they must still recognize the point at which they went off-track. If a character is successfully backtracking, they may make a Survival check each watch (using the Navigation DC of the terrain). If the check is successful, they'll correctly recognize whether they were previously on-track or off-track. If the check is a failure, they have a 75% chance of reaching the wrong conclusion.

Compass Direction: It requires a Survival check (DC 12) to determine true north without a compass or similar device. On a failed check, randomly determine the direction the character thinks is true north.

Setting a New Course: A lost character can attempt to precisely determine the direction they should be traveling in order to reach their desired objective by making a Survival check (Navigation DC of the terrain + 10). If the character fails the check, they immediately become lost. Determine their direction of travel like any other lost character.

Conflicting Directions: If several characters in a single party all attempt to determine the correct direction of travel, make their Survival checks secretly. Tell the players whose characters succeeded the correct direction in which to travel, and tell the other characters a random direction they think is right.

FINDING LOCATIONS

The difficulty and complexity of finding a specific location within the wilderness varies depending on the character's familiarity and approach.

VISIBLE LOCATIONS: As described under Exploration Encounters, some locations are visible from a great distance. Characters within the same hex as the visible location (or within a certain number of hexes, as indicated by the key) automatically spot a visible location.

ON ROAD: If a location is on a road, river, or similar trail, then a character following the road, river, or trail will automatically find the location. (Assuming it isn't hidden, of course.)

FAMILIAR LOCATIONS: Familiar locations are those which a character has visited multiple times. Characters within the same hex as a familiar location can be assumed to automatically find the location. (Within the abstraction of the hexmapping system, they've demonstrated sufficiently accurate navigation.) Under certain circumstances, characters may also be considered "familiar" with a location even if they've never been there. (Possibilities include possessing highly accurate topographic maps, receiving divine visions, or using certain types of divinatory magic.)

Note: If characters are flailing about in their efforts to find a familiar location – by repeatedly "missing the hex", for example – the DM can decide to treat the location as being unfamiliar until they find some way to reorient themselves.

UNFAMILIAR LOCATIONS: Unfamiliar locations (even those a character has been to previously) are found using encounter checks. Characters spending time to specifically search a particular area enter exploration mode. They make no progress towards exiting their current hex, but the DM continues making the necessary encounter checks (to represent the result of their search).

If the party is looking for something specific that they suspect might be in the area, the DM may allow a third check each watch for that location and only that location. (Any other encounter indicated is ignored. Obviously if the location they're looking for isn't in the current hex you can skip this check – they are, after all, looking in the wrong place.)

Note: The extra check represents their ability to narrow their search based on the information they have available. If they don't have enough information to narrow the search, don't make the extra encounter check. Alternatively, if they're somewhat familiar with a location the extra encounter check may be employed and any success used to indicate to them that they're not in the right area.

ENCOUNTER TABLES

ENCOUNTER CHANCE: Check once per watch. The time at which an encounter takes place during the watch can be determined randomly (see Watches).

CHECK	PER WATCH	PER DAY
1 in 1d6	16%	66%
2 in 1d6	33%	91%
1 in 1d8	13%	57%
2 in 1d8	25%	82%
1 in 1d10	10%	46%
2 in 1d10	20%	73%
1 in 1d20	5%	26%

BORDER ENCOUNTERS: % chance in a hex bordering on a different region of rolling on that region's encounter tables.

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTERS

Exploration encounters only occur during watches in which the characters are traveling or otherwise exploring the area. They do not occur during watches in which the characters are resting or otherwise stationary.

LOCATION: This exploration encounter indicates that the characters have encountered a keyed location within the hex. Most hexes have only a single keyed location. For hexes with multiple keyed encounters, determine the location encountered randomly. (Some locations may have occurrence probabilities.)

On Road/River/Trail: The location is on a road, river, or trail. Parties traveling along the road, river, or trail will automatically encounter the location. Parties not on the road, river, or trail will usually not encounter the location.

Visible: The location is large enough or tall enough to be seen anywhere within the hex. Parties entering the hex automatically spot the location. (If a distance in hexes is given, then the location can be seen from that many hexes away.)

Hidden: The location is difficult to spot. When this encounter is generated, make a second encounter check. If an encounter is not indicated, the location has not actually been found. (If the party is in exploration mode, make the second check twice.)

% LAIR: The percentage listed is the chance that the creature is encountered in their lair. If the creature is encountered in their lair, the encounter is considered an exploration encounter.

Note: This check functionally generates a new location for the current hex (the lair of the indicated creature type). Over time and thru play, this encounter system will continue to add new content to your hex key (helping to fill the vast, howling emptiness of a typical hex).

% TRACKS: The percentage listed is the chance that the creature's tracks are found (not the creature itself). Tracks are only found as an exploration encounter. Characters must make a Survival check at the appropriate DC to notice the tracks. Tracks are usually 1d10 days old. DMs can determine where the tracks lead (although they'll usually circle back to the creature's lair in both directions).

Note: Check to see if the encounter is tracks. If it is not, then check to see if it's a lair. If it is not, then it's a wandering encounter. Notice that these additional checks will substantially reduce the odds of a night time encounter (when the party is not on the move).

SAMPLE ENCOUNTER TABLE

Encounter Check: 1 in 1d8

Border Encounters: 50%

Encounter Type (1d20):

1-10: LOCATION

11-20: OTHER

1d20	Encounter	% LAIR	% TRACKS
1-3	Lizardmen (hex A10, A13)	30%	50%
4-5	1d2 tree trolls (hex C13)	40%	50%
6	Adventurers	10%	75%
7-9	Ghouls (hex A12, E9)	20%	50%
10-12	Zombies (hex E9)	25%	50%
13	Bat Swarm	20%	5%
14	Jungle Bear (hairless, use black bear stats)	10%	50%
15	Carrion crawlers	50%	50%
16	Giant leech	Nil	Nil
17-18	Orcs (hex B7)	25%	50%
19	Wild boars	Nil	25%
20	Tyrannosaurus Rex	Nil	50%

Note: I indicate hexes which are already keyed as potential lairs for this creature type. This can inform the nature of wandering encounters and/or suggest a potential origin/terminus for tracks.

SPOT DISTANCES

This is a useful cheat sheet I created for understanding what characters can see in the wilderness. In practice, sight lines will vary quite a bit (due to hills, forest canopies, and other obstructions), but I've found it useful to have some reference points and rules of thumb.

HORIZON: The horizon is 3 miles away at sea level.

NEIGHBORING HEXES: Passing through the center of a hex, neighboring hexes cannot be seen. If the path is biased, the nearest hexes can usually be discerned (depending on terrain).

MOUNTAINS: Mountains can be seen from 6 hexes (75 miles away).

ELEVATION: Distance to the horizon in miles is the square root of (feet above sea level x 1.5 feet). Add the height of tall objects to the viewer's. Atmospheric haze will eliminate the ability to see even the largest objects more than 3-5 hexes away.

Height	Horizon
Halfling	2 miles
Human	3 miles
10 ft.	4 miles
25 ft.	6 miles
50 ft.	9 miles
100 ft.	12 miles (1 hex)
400 ft.	24 miles (2 hexes)
1000 ft.	39 miles (3 hexes)
1500 ft.	48 miles (4 hexes)
2500 ft.	60 miles (5 hexes)

Terrain	Encounter Distance
Desert	6d6 x 20 feet
Desert, dunes	6d6 x 10 feet
Forest (sparse)	3d6 x 10 feet
Forest (medium)	2d8 x 10 feet
Forest (dense)	2d6 x 10 feet
Hills (gentle)	2d6 x 10 feet
Hills (rugged)	2d6 x 10 feet
Jungle	2d6 x 10 feet
Moor	2d8 x 10 feet
Mountains	4d10 x 10 feet
Plains	6d6 x 40 feet
Swamp	6d6 x 10 feet
Tundra, frozen	6d6 x 20 feet

WATCH CHECKLIST

This checklist pulls all of the preceding material together into a [clean procedure](#). Simply follow the checklist for each watch, and you should generally find running the hexcrawl to be smooth sailing.

WATCH CHECKLIST

- **DIRECTION AND MODE OF TRAVEL**
- **ARE THEY LOST?**
 - If they are not following a landmark or trail, make a Navigation check.
 - If they are lost, determine veer. If they are already lost, veer can be increased but not decreased.
- **ENCOUNTER CHECK**
 - Determine time within the watch (1d8 for the half hour).
- **TIP:** If encounter occurs before last half hour of travel, use travel by hour to determine progress before the encounter occurs, then jot down the number of hours left in the watch.
- **DETERMINE ACTUAL DISTANCE TRAVELED**
 - Roll $2d6+3 \times 10\% \times \text{Average Distance}$.
 - Make a Navigation check see if they accurately estimated their distance traveled.
- **TIP:** If their progress would cause them to leave a hex during a watch *and* that would cause their terrain type to change, calculate progress by hour. When they reach the hex edge, note how many hours are left. Then you can reference the new hex, calculate the new average distance, and continue marking progress.
- **HEX PROGRESS**
 - It takes 12 miles of progress to exit one of the hex's 3 far faces. It takes 6 miles of progress to exit on the hex's 3 near faces.
 - Changing direction within a hex will result in the loss of 2 miles of progress.
- **LEAVING A HEX**
 - Determine new hex (by applying current veer to their direction of travel).
 - If they were lost, make a Navigation check to see if they recognize it. If they do, they can attempt to reorient. If they do not, veer accumulates. (Note: Using a compass automatically resets veer at the hex border even if they don't recognize that they were off course.)

DM'S WORKSHEET

This worksheet may not be the prettiest thing you've ever seen, but I designed it for tracking key information while running a hexcrawl and I've found it to be useful. The sheet is broken down into several parts.

HEX TRACKER: The left column is a hex tracker. Write down the current day and watch in the left hand column (for example, 3-1 is the first watch on the third day), then mark the hex the party is currently in and their intended direction of travel. Add information on veer if the party gets lost and use the check boxes to mark off progress.

When you run out of check boxes, the party has left the hex. Reference their intended direction of travel and veer to determine what hex they've entered and write that down in the next row. Repeat.

ENCOUNTER LIST: In order to save time, I'll pregenerate encounters and write them down here. Use left hand column to note what day and watch the encounter will occur during, write the encounter you generate in the center column, and indicate if it's a lair or tracks encounter (if necessary). If you generate a location encounter, just write LOCATION in the encounter box.

MARCHING ORDER: Below the encounter list there's a graphical depiction of a dungeon corridor that you can use to write down the party's current marching order. (It works as well in the wilderness as in the dungeon, of course.) The worksheet was designed for the original 1974 rules, so it gives enough space for 3 people to march abreast down a standard 10'-wide corridor. If you're using a rule system that only allows for 2 people to march abreast, adjust accordingly.

WATCH LIST: Below the marching order we have a watch list. This basically assumes that the party travels for two watches per day and then rests for four watches. Write down the characters standing guard during each watch in one of the boxes.

PARTY'S BASE MOVEMENT SPEED: Fairly self-explanatory. Figure out who the slowest member of the party is and jot down the appropriate values here.

SAMPLE HEX KEY

When designing my hexcrawl, as I mentioned at the beginning of this series, I key every hex on the map and every key entry is a location (not an encounter). The distinction between a "location" and an "encounter" can get a little hazy if you stare at it for too long, but in practice it's usually pretty obvious: If your key reads "an ogre walking down the road", then the next time the PCs pass along that road the ogre would presumably be gone (particularly if they killed it). If your key instead reads "an ogre living in a shack", then even if the PCs kill the ogre the shack will still be there.

Of course, one might argue that the PCs could do some quick demolition work on the shack and make it disappear, too. (That would be an excellent example of staring at the distinction for too long.) But the general point remains: You're looking to key permanent geography, not ephemeral events.

What follows are several examples from the actual hex key I use for my Thracian Hexcrawl. The goal is to demonstrate the range of different key types that I use, so let's start with the shortest:

K16 – HONEYCOMB CAVERNS (Secrets of Xen'dik)

No detail.

This one's pretty simple: I've grabbed a pre-existing adventure (in this case selected from the *Secrets of Xen'drik* sourcebook) and plugged it straight into the hexcrawl. If the PCs encounter this hex, I just yank the book out and start running it.

I've actually been doing less of this recently because I've reached the point where I find the existing layout and presentation of adventure modules too frustrating to run on-the-fly even when the actual content is good. (They tend to bury way too much information into the middle of lengthy paragraphs.) But I digress. Here's another simple one:

K13 – RUINED TEMPLE OF ILLHAN

See hex detail.

In this case, the location was too detailed to include in my primary hex key. Much like the published adventure, I'm telling myself to go look somewhere else for the details: In this case, a separate file folder in which I keep separate documents for each hex like this. (The rule of thumb here is that if it takes more than one page to describe the place, it gets a separate detail document.)

The details for the Ruined Temple of Illhan were previously posted here on the site.

A3 – ORLUK TOTEM

A giant statue, worn by weather. Depicting an elephantine beast of prey with black- and yellow-striped fur. (An orluk.) The yellow and black stone is not painted, but rather two different types of colored granite which have been quarried and then shaped to take advantage of the quarried strata.

This is an example of what I think of as a "landmark". Sometimes these landmarks are more involved or have hidden features to them, but generally they're just single

points of interest distinct from the surrounding wilderness. Regardless of their other characteristics, they're almost always useful for PCs trying to orient their maps.

N15 – RECENT FOREST FIRE

Landscape is scorched. No foraging is possible in this hex.

Another short one. This is basically similar to a landmark, but it covers a vast swath of territory. (In this case, an entire hex.)

C2 – WYVERN SHAFT

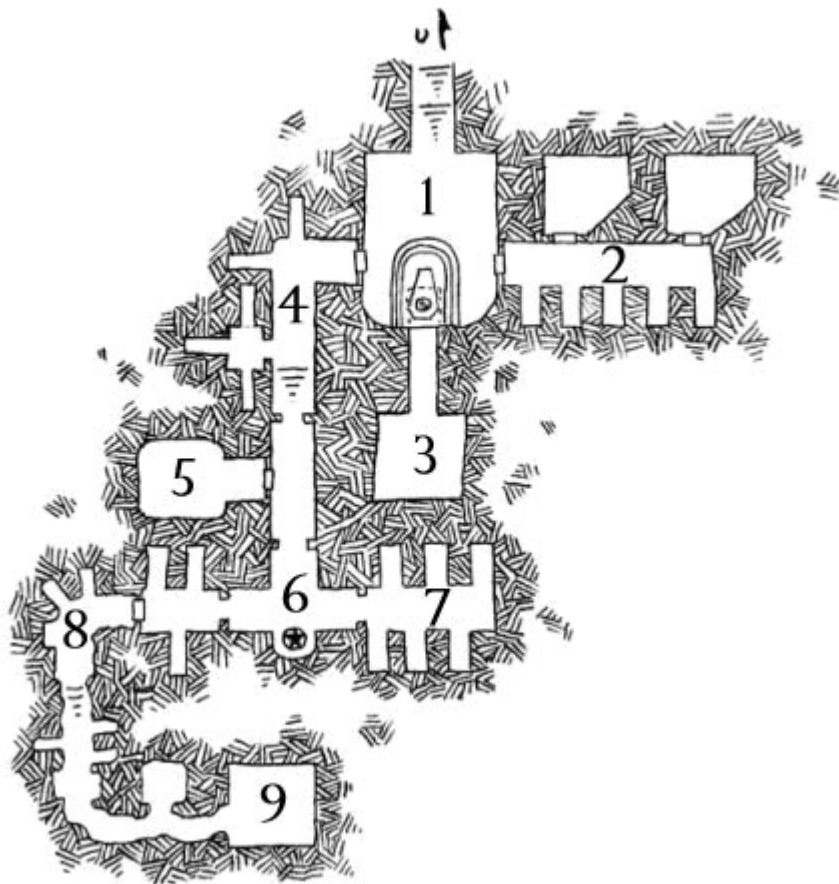
60 foot deep shaft that serves as the lair of a wyvern. The wyvern has dug an escape tunnel that emerges from a hill a quarter mile away.

WYVERN: Has a large scar on its left side from a spear wound; has preferred to stay away from intelligent prey ever since.

TREASURE: 7,000 sp, 5 zircons (50 gp each)

A simple monster lair. I usually don't bother with maps for this sort of thing: It's easy enough to improv any smaller complex of a half dozens rooms or less. (Assuming there's nothing radically unusual about them, of course.)

F15 – SKULL ROCK (on river)



A rock shaped like a skull thrusts out of the river. Crawling through the mouth leads to a crypt.

AREA 1: Mummified red dragon's head (huge). Breathes flame that fills most of the room. Secret entrance to treasure chamber under the head.

AREA 2: 5 wights (50% in lair), no level drain but paralyzing strike. The two rooms off this area have been pillaged.

AREA 3 – BURIAL OFFERINGS: 3000 gp, 3 golden spinels (200 gp each)

AREA 4: Trapped hallway. Arrows shoot from wall and alchemist's fire from nozzles in the ceiling. (Room to the left has an incense burner in the shape of a squat, fat man worth 7000 cp.)

AREA 5: Wight, no level drain but can detect magic, life, and invisibility at will. (Sniffs out magic and lusts for it.)

AREA 6: Bas relief skull. Insane. Asks incredibly bad riddles ("What flies in the air?" "A bird."), but then blasts those who answer with 1d6 *magic missiles* regardless.

AREA 7: Slain wights.

AREA 8: Staked vampires.

AREA 9: A lich has been chained to the wall. Arcs of purple electricity spark off him in eternal torment.

Notice the "on river" designator next to the key title. That indicates that the location is on the river flowing through this hex on the map: If the PCs are following the river, they'll automatically encounter this location.

The map here was taken from Dyson Logos' website. His site proved invaluable for stocking my hexcrawl, and there are a lot of other bloggers offering free maps out there.

This sort of fully-keyed, "mini-dungeon" represents pretty much the upper limit of what I'll handle in a key entry before bumping it into a separate document.

FOUR DOCUMENTS OF THE HEXCRAWL

Organization of campaign material is always an interesting topic for me, and I don't think there's enough discussion of actual, practical methods. (As opposed to the idealized theoretical stuff you usually see published in advice books.) Although I'm constantly learning new tips and techniques, I've also found that no two campaigns ever use the same methods of documentation: Even similar scenarios will often have unique characteristics that benefit from a different approach.

In the case of my Thracian Hexcrawl, I maintain four "documents":

(1) THE HEX MAP: This is 16 hexes by 16 hexes, for a total of 256 hexes. (If I had to do it again I would either go with a 10 x 10 or 12 x 12 map: Coming up with 256 unique key entries was *a lot* of work. But I had some unique legacy issues from the pre-hexcrawl days of the campaign that resulted in a larger map.)

(2) THE BINDER: This contains the [campaign key](#). It includes 2 pages of background information (current civilizations, chaos factions, and historical epochs),

8 pages of random encounter tables (one for each of the six different regions on the map), and a 100 page hex key.

(3) THE FOLDER: Each document in this folder details a single location. These are locations with a key that takes up more than a single page and/or any location which requires a status update (because the PCs have visited it and shifted the status quo).

(4) CAMPAIGN STATUS SHEET: This document is updated and reprinted for each session. It's responsible for keeping the campaign in motion. At the moment, the Thracian Hexcrawl campaign status sheet includes: A list of current events in Caerdheim and Maernath (the two cities serving as home base for the PCs); a list of empty complexes (which I reference when I make a once per session check to see if they've been reinhabited); the current rumor table; details about the various businesses being run by PCs; and the master loyalty/morale table for PC hirelings. Of these documents, the most difficult to prep is, of course, the hex key itself (along with the folder of detailed locations). I spent two weeks of hard work cranking out all of those locations. But the up-side of that front-loaded prep is that, once it's done, a hexcrawl campaign based around wilderness exploration becomes incredibly prep-light: I spend no more than 10-15 minutes getting ready for each session because all I'm really doing is jotting down a few notes to keep my documentation up to date with what happened in the last session.

DESIGNING FROM THE STATUS QUO

My general method of prep — particularly for a hexcrawl — is to originate everything in a state of "status quo" until the PCs touch it. Once the PCs start touching stuff, of course, the ripples can start spreading very fast and very far. However, in the absence of continued PC interaction things in the campaign world will generally trend back towards a status quo again. (This is something I also discussed in *Don't Prep Plots: Prepping Scenario Timelines*.)

This status quo method generally only works if you have robust, default structures for delivering scenario hooks. In the case of the hexcrawl, of course, I do: Both the rumor tables and the hexcrawl structure itself will drive PCs towards scenarios.

The advantage of the status quo method is that it minimizes the amount of work you have to do as a GM. (Keeping 256 hexes up in the air and active at all times would require a ridiculous amount of effort.) It also minimizes the amount of prep work which is wasted. (If you're constantly generating background events that the PCs are unaware of and not interacting with, that's all wasted effort.)

It's important to understand, though, that "status quo" doesn't mean "boring". It also doesn't mean that literally nothing is happening at a given location. For example, the status quo for a camp of goblin slavers isn't "the goblins all sit around". The status quo is that there's a steady flow of slaves passing through the camp and being sold.

STOCKING THE HEXES

I've mentioned before that my Thracian Hexcrawl consists of a 16 x 16 map in which every hex has been keyed with geography: That's 256 hex keys. Several people have asked me how I did that. Here's the first secret: When you're prepping material for yourself, polish is overrated. (Details are also overrated, with the proviso that *essential* details and *awesome* details should always be jotted down.)

For example, consider the Skull Rock mini-dungeon I posted in [Part 8](#). If I were writing this dungeon up for someone else to use, I'd probably take the time to mention how wet and slick the stairs leading down into area 1 are (due to the river above); the damp moistness in the air of the first chamber (providing a slight haze that can be burnt away dramatically by the flames of the dragon head); and the way that dampness gives way to a chilled condensation that hangs in glistening drops from the rough hewn walls as you descend into the dungeon.

But since I'm just prepping this for myself, I don't need to write that down. Trust your own voice as a GM. During play, based on your intrinsic understanding of the scenario and the environment, it will provide the logical and evocative details necessary to flesh things out.

And by placing that trust in yourself, you can save yourself a ton of prep time. (Something like Skull Rock would take me seven or eight times longer to write-up if I took the time to include and polish all the details.)

#0. HAVE A MAP

Today I'm just going to be talking about stocking hexes. Before you can do that, though, you need the map you'll be keying.

First, figure out how big you want your map to be. Having worked with a 16 x 16 map with 256 hexes, I've concluded that (a) it's bigger than it needs to be and (b) it requires a ridiculous amount of prep work. So I recommend that people start with a 10 x 10 or 12 x 12 map: 100 or 144 hexes are substantially more manageable and the map will be more than big enough.



Second, place the home base for the PCs in the center of the map. (This way they can go in any direction without immediately riding off the edge of your prep.) Third, grab a copy of Hexographer and lay down your terrain. I recommend large blocks of similar terrain, which can then immediately double as your regions. (Remember that any individual hex is *huge*. Just because you threw down forest as the predominant terrain type doesn't mean there can't be a lot of local variation within it.)

I also recommend having two or three different types of terrain immediately adjacent to the home base: If the PCs go north, they enter the mountains. If they go west, they enter the forest. If they head south or east they're crossing the plains. (It gives a clear and immediate distinction which provides a bare minimum criteria that the PCs can use to "pick a direction and go".) Fourth, throw down some roads and rivers. You're done.

#1. BE CREATIVE, BE AWESOME, BE SINCERE

Before we get into any tips, tricks, shortcuts, or cheats, first things first: Do some honest brainstorming and pour some raw creativity onto the page. The neat ideas you've been tossing around inside your head for the past few days? Everything your players think would be cool? Everything you think would be cool? Everything you wish the last GM you played with had included in the game? Put 'em in hexes.

Then think about the setting logically: What *needs* to be there in order for the setting to work? What do you *want* the setting to have? Get 'em in hexes.

Bring your creativity to the table. And make sure everything you include is *awesome* because life is too short to waste time on the mediocre or the "good enough".

Finally, throughout this entire process be sincere. I think it's really important to stay true to yourself when you're doing design work: You have a unique point of view and a unique aesthetic. Even when you're bringing in inspiration or material from other sources, apply it through your own perspective and values.

#2. JUMP AROUND

It can be useful to start at hex A1, go to hex A2, and then systematically proceed on through the A's before starting the B's.

But if you're working on A3 and you get a cool idea that belongs on the other side of the map, don't hesitate: Jump over there and key it up in hex F7.

This is not only useful from a practical standpoint: It also feels great when you get to column F and discover three-quarters of the hexes have already been filled.

#3. STEAL

Okay, you've filled a couple dozen hexes, but now you're starting to run out of ideas. What next?

Steal.

If you're reading this blog, I'm guessing you've got a stack of modules that you've collected over the years. Go pull your favorites off the shelf and start plopping them down into your hexes.



By simply expanding the distances between locations in [B2 Keep on the Borderlands](#), for example, I was able to fill six hexes: The Keep, the Caves of Chaos, the Mound of Lizard Men, the Spider's Lair, the Raider Camp, and the Mad Hermit's Hollow.

Additional locations in the 'crawl include [Caverns of Thracia](#), [The Sunless Citadel](#), [S3 Expedition to the Barrier Peaks](#), [G1 Steading of the Hill Giant Chief](#), [B3 Palace of the Silver Princess](#), [Temple of Elemental Evil](#), [Gates of Firestorm Peak](#), [L3 Deep Dwarven Delve](#), [Return to White Plume Mountain](#), [DLE1 In Search of Dragons](#), and [Forge of Fury](#). (Quite a few of those supplied multiples hexes.) Plus stuff from the [Book of Treasure Maps 1 & 2](#), [Book of Ruins](#), [Touched by the Gods](#), [Supplement II: Blackmoor](#), [The Book of Taverns](#), quite a few [Onegames](#) products, and [The Secrets of Xendrik](#).

Having 20+ years worth of collecting to fall back on is nice, of course. But even if you don't have that kind of gaming library, you can find a ton of stuff online for free. And I did: The [One Page Dungeon contest](#) is basically an all-you-can-eat smorgasboard for this sort of thing. [Dyson Logos](#) has oodles of gorgeous maps. I also pulled a ton of great stuff from [Rust Monster Ate My Sword](#).

#4. STEAL MORE

No, seriously, go steal stuff. Pillage and loot with wild abandon.

For example, I own an almost complete run of *Dungeon* magazines. Not every *Dungeon* adventure is appropriate for keying a hex, but a lot of them are location-based (or contain locations that can be ripped out).



For example, let's flip open *Dungeon* #65.

(1) "Knight of the Scarlet Sword". This adventure details the Village of Bechlaughter and the magical silver dome in the center of the village which serves as home to a lich. Use the whole village or just use the dome.

(2) "Knight of the Scarlet Sword" also contains the Caves of Cuwain — the tomb of a banshee. Another location that can be used as a key entry.

(3) "Flotsam" is a side trek featuring a couple of pirates who pretend to be legitimate merchants; they lure people onto their ship by offering legitimate passage and then rob them on the high seas. Not hex key appropriate, but what if the PCs found this ship — and its weird, seemingly crazy crew — just sitting in the middle of the forest. Might be workable: Make it a witch's curse or a strange haunting. Or just crazy people.

(4) "The Ice Tyrant". Heavily plotted adventure, but you can start by ripping out the fully-mapped Lodge and placing it along any convenient road that needs an inn.

(5) "The Ice Tyrant". Also contains a map for a Sentinel Tower occupied by evil dwarves.

(6) "The Ice Tyrant". Finally, the Keep of Anghanor — guarded by a white dragon and containing a bunch of bad guys.

(7) "Reflections". A side trek involving a cavern where a will 'o wisp has imprisoned a gibbering moulder.

(8) "Unkindness of Raven". Location-based adventure triggered by stumbling across Crawford Manor while wandering through the wilderness. Plop it in.

(9) "The Beast Within". Location-based adventure triggered by stumbling across a werewolf's cottage in the wilderness.

And there you go. One random issue of *Dungeon* and you've got 9 hexes keyed.

Pick up a dozen issues and you could probably key a full 10 x 10 hex map entirely from the magazine.

#5. IMPROVISED RANDOM GENERATORS

Okay, we started by filling the map with every ounce of creative thought we had. Then we started recklessly stealing everything we could lay our hands on. But we're still staring at empty hexes. What now?

Now we need to get our creative juices flowing again by rapidly injecting fresh ideas that will break us out of the dried-out box our thinking is currently trapped in. There are a lot of ways to provide this stimuli. A simple one I used was to simply roll on a wilderness encounter table and then combine the result with a treasure generator. For example:

(1) Roll 1d8 to determine a column on the AD&D "Sub-Arctic Conditions" encounter table. I rolled a 6, so the result is "Mountains".

(2) Roll 1d100 with a result of 65. That's a giant owl. According to the *Monster Manual*, giant owls appear in groups of 1d4+1. I roll and generate a group of five owls.

(3) Giant owls have a treasure type of "Q x 5, X". I roll on those treasure tables and I get 1 miscellaneous magic, 1 potion, and 1 gem. Rolling on the sub-tables I get a black pearl (500 gp), a *potion of human control*, and an *amulet of life protection*. Okay. The hex I'm looking at is in the Old Forest, so let's try something like this:

N7 – TREE OF THE ELDER OWL

A giant tree, over 80-feet wide at its base and towering several hundred feet in the air. Around the base of the tree are a number of strange carvings, intermixed with primitive pictures of owls.

CALL OF THE OWL: Anyone performing an owl call near the base of the tree will cause a hidden door to open, allowing passage into the hollow center of the trunk.

COUNCIL OF OWLS: Within the tree, four giant owls sit on perches. For an appropriate tribute, these owls can each cast *augury* once per day.

UPPER EYRIE: For a much larger tribute, the Council will have the supplicant remove their arms and armor. Then one of the owls will clutch them by the shoulders and fly them to the upper eyrie where they will be placed before the Elder Owl.

THE ELDER OWL: The left eye of the Elder Owl has been replaced with a black pearl (500 gp) and he wears an *amulet of life protection*. The Elder Owl will answer questions as per a *commune* spell, but he is also completely enamored with physical beauty: If someone of particular beauty (Charisma 16+) presents themselves, he will use his *potion of human control* in an attempt to enslave them. Now we can move onto the next hex. Using the same procedure I generate a herd of woolly rhinos. They aren't interesting, so I skip them and roll again. This time I get a gynosphinx with 4,000 platinum pieces, a *potion of plant control*, a *bag of beans*, and wearing a platinum belt studded with six black sapphires (worth 3,000 gp). What do you make of that?

#6. SPIN-OFFS

Regardless of how you're stocking a hex, you should keep your mind open to other locations that the current hex suggests.

For example, you've got a necromancer in a crystalline spire who's served by a bunch of goblins he's charmed by writing arcane runes on the inside of their eyelids and then sewing their eyes shut. Where'd he get the goblins from? Maybe there's a village of them living nearby. They protect a tree that bears a single, bright red fruit each year. The fruit has magical properties and each year the necromancer comes to claim the fruit and take away goblin slaves.

Or you're keying a grotto that a bunch of bandits are using as a hideout. Turns out these bandits have longbows of remarkably high quality. This is because they're trading with a one-eyed troll who lives in a cave that can only be accessed through a green crystal which thrusts up through the forest floor: Lay your hand upon the crystal, say the magic password, and the crystal becomes intangible. The troll is a master bowyer.

#7. WALK AWAY

Finally, be willing to walk away from the project and take a break: Watch a TV show. Read a book. Flip through some unrelated game manuals. Power up the PS3. Give your brain a chance to breathe and your creative batteries a chance to recharge.

This is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a comprehensive catalog or definitive technique for keying a hexcrawl. It's just what I happened to do while keying the Thracian Hexcrawl.

AT THE TABLE

This will be the final installment in this essay series. My goal here will be to describe the actual process of what I do at the gaming table while running a session of my Thracian Hexcrawl. I'm not entirely sure how useful it will be, but I'm hoping it will provide some sort of insight.

This post is going to be an attempt to provide an abbreviated, annotated record of actual play from my hexcrawl campaign. The goal is to show what I was thinking, the decisions I made, the procedures I used, the tools I exploited, and so forth.

SETUP

An hour or so before the game is scheduled to start, I'll set up the table. I sit at one end of a long dining room table. I place a TV tray to the left of my chair and another TV tray to the right of my chair. Then I pull out the box that I keep all my Thracian hexcrawl material in.

On the TV tray to my right I place the Binder that contains the campaign key and the Folder which contains the documents detailing individual locations. There's a second folder which contains a DM screen, the four pages of reference tables that I paperclip to the DM screen, a copy of the campaign map, and several

copies of the [DM's worksheet](#) I designed for hexcrawling. I place the worksheet on the table in front of me. I place the DM screen on the TV tray to my left. And I conceal the campaign map behind the DM screen.

Next, the rulebooks: I have several copies of *Volume 1: Men & Magic* that I place in a stack on the table for the players. I take my copies of all three OD&D booklets and place them in a stack behind the DM screen to my left.

I also have a stack of graph and hex paper, including several "communal maps" that have been drawn by the players. These are placed on the table.

I also have a stack of three folders: One for blank character sheets, one for living characters in the campaign, and one for characters who have died. I place these folders on a counter off to one side of the room. (I rarely need to access them, so it's easiest just to have them out of the way.)

I print out a copy of the Campaign Status sheet for the current session and also place it on the table in front of me.

I grab my dice bag and pull out the dice I need: 2d4, 6d6, 6d8, 2d10, 2d12, 6d20. 6d6 for *fireball* and *lightning* bolt damage. 6d8 because it means I can roll an entire day's worth of encounter checks in a single go. 6d20 because I can simultaneously roll an entire mob's attack rolls. (The 6d20's are selected in three pairs of matching colors because it allows for easy grouping for mixed types.)

BEGINNING OF THE SESSION

As players arrive, I pull their character sheets out of the appropriate folder. Many players need to choose which of their active PCs they're going to be playing.

Two things happen at this point:

1. I make a rumor check for each primary PC (not for hirelings). There's a 1 in 3 chance for each PC that they'll receive a rumor. (The current rumor table is part of the Campaign Status document. It's generated based on the activities of PCs in previous sessions and by randomly generating hex numbers and creating rumors based on the contents of the generated hex.)
2. I make a morale check for each hireling employed by the active PCs. On a success, the hireling continues adventuring with their employer. On a failure I use a system based on the OD&D reaction table to determine the hireling's action: They might automatically leave their PC's service or demand an additional bonus of some variable amount. (Usually nothing happens because the players have learned to keep the morale of their hirelings high.)
3. I keep a master list of every hireling in the campaign — including their current loyalty and morale values — in the Campaign Status sheet.

While I'm doing this, the players are generally getting prepared for the adventure. This includes:

1. Discussing what their expedition is going to be.
2. Buying equipment.
3. Hiring hirelings.
4. Any other business they might need to attend to while in town.

If they go looking for hirelings, I have a simple system I use to determine how many hirelings are currently available for service in town; what classes they are; and what level they are.

STARTING OUT

While the players are wrapping things up, I'll grab my 6d8 and roll them: Virtually all of my regions use a 1 in 8 encounter check. Each roll, therefore, represents a full day's worth of encounter checks (since there are six watches in a day). By reading the dice left-to-right as they fall, I can very rapidly determine which watches in the day have an encounter. Since I don't yet know where the PCs will be on those days, I can't generate the specific encounters (which are region-dependent). But on [my DM's worksheet](#), I can write down the Day/Watch when encounters will be happening. By generating three or four days worth of encounter checks up front, I can simplify my workflow once the PCs hit the road.

(Note, however, that if I know at this point that the PCs are going to be heading in a direction which will almost certainly have them traveling through a given region for a lengthy period of time, I can also go ahead and generate full encounters at this point.)



In this case, the PCs are in the city of Maernath, located in hex O6. Maernath is an old city-state in this setting. It was here long before the Duchy of Thracia began pushing east in recent years (establishing the Keep on the Borderlands and the logging village of Caerdheim to the south) and the City Fathers occasionally chaff against the "authority" of the newcomers. Although the early adventures of the PCs were based primarily out of Caerdheim (which was near the [Caverns of Thracia](#)), an increase of interest in the Palace of Red Death to the north led to an increased number of expeditions being mounted from Maernath. Those expeditions resulted in various PCs gaining a lot of lore about the area surrounding Maernath and that, in turn, spurred even more expeditions here.

The PCs leave town along the road heading south. They're lightly encumbered (12" movement) and they're traveling along a road through open plains, so they can travel 12 miles per watch. Maernath's position within hex O6 is *biased*, so it only takes 4 progress to exit the hex. They're aiming for the river, which is *on the road* right on the border of the hex (so they obviously have no difficulty finding it). Their goal is to follow the river into the Old Forest (in hex P7), so now I'm going to look ahead: Their course along the river takes them through the *near side* of the hex (6 miles away) into hex P6 and from there they will then pass through the near side of hex P7 (another 6 miles). Although they've left the road, they're still traveling through open plains and the river provides enough of a track that they're still traveling at 12 miles per watch.

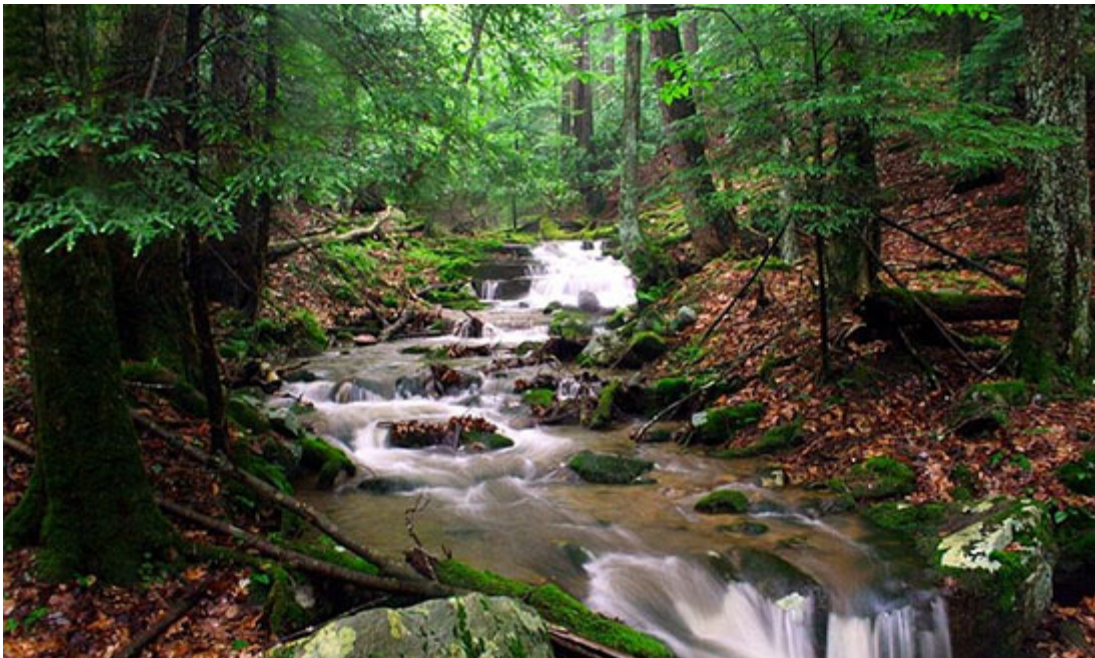
Total it up:

4 miles (Maernath to river) + 6 miles (O7 to P6) + 6 miles (P6 to P7) = 16 miles Which means they'll arrive at the edge of the Old Forest a little over an hour into their second watch. This is notable because, looking at my DM's worksheet, I can see that the second watch of the day has an encounter. I can *determine the time in the watch* by rolling 1d8. The result I get is a 3, which basically means the encounter is scheduled to take place just as they're reaching the edge of the Old Forest.

1. First, there's a 50% chance that the encounter will be the location keyed to the hex. I roll the dice and it is not. (If it had been and they were traveling through open country, I would flip to the location key and they would have that encounter. In this case, however, they're following the river: Unless the keyed encounter for this hex was *on the river*, they would not encounter it. That would either result in no encounter happening despite the check or they might experience an encounter connected to the keyed location. For example, the keyed location for P6 is Orkam's Hole, which is inhabited by a family of basilisks, so they might spot basilisk footprints in the muddy banks of the river.)
2. If the PCs are in a hex bordering another region (and they are), there's a 50% chance that they'll get an encounter from the other region instead.
3. I roll a 13, so that's exactly what's going to happen.
4. I flip to the Old Forest encounter table and roll. The result I get is "Slimes", which has a sub-table which generates Gray Ooze. The slimes don't have any % chance of being a Lair or Tracks encounter, so I can skip that step.

Given the confluence of all the factors involved, I'm going to have the Gray Oozes appear just as the river passes beneath the boughs of the Old Forest. They'll be draped down from the tree branches above the river like some kind of horrific spanish moss.

INTO THE OLD FOREST



After the PCs have dealt with (or avoided) the Gray Oozes, they'll be able to continue along the river. It's a medium forest and their speed is going to drop by 1/2. They had 8 miles of movement left in their second watch, so they'll be able to gain 4 progress through hex P7.

Three miles along the river, however, they come to a tree on the south bank of the river with the Dwarven letter "mu" carved into its trunk. They're familiar with it. In fact, one of the PCs left it here as a marker: Gordur, a powerful orc stronghold, lies several miles due south from this spot.

This, however, is not their goal. They continue along the river for another mile and then make camp for the night. The next day, they continue another two miles until they find a similar tree with the Dwarven letter "thod" carved into it. This marker was placed due north of the [Crypt of Luan Phien](#). The crypt is their ultimate goal and so now they turn south, away from the clear navigational marker of the river and into the depths of the Old Forest.

At this point, they need to start making Navigation checks. Epicaste, a hireling rescued by the dwarf Aeng from the Caverns of Thracia, is the group's best navigator, so she steps forward and takes point.

1. It's a medium forest, so the [Navigation DC](#) is 16.
2. Epicaste blows the check. (Possibly because Delmhurst, another hireling, keeps second-guessing her.) I roll 1d10 to determine the group's [veer](#). With a roll of 8, I determine that they're veering to the right. Instead of heading due south into hex P8 (which is where they want to go), they're going to end up in hex O8. When does that actually happen? Well, they entered hex P7 from due north. Whether they're leaving into hex P8 or O8, they're still

exiting through the [far side](#) of the hex. So they need to rack up 12 progress to exit the hex. They'd gained 4 progress in the hex during their second watch; they'll gain another 6 progress in their third watch of travel (the following day), and they'll enter hex O8 about midway through the second watch of that day. I've also generated an encounter for the second watch of the second day, so once again I generate a random time and determine that the encounter will be taking place after they've entered hex O8. This is particularly important because this time the encounter I generate *is* a location encounter, so I flip to the key for O8:

Me: "Towards the waning hours of the day, you enter a small clearing. Criss-crossing branches grow into what appear to be houses with walls of woven moss."
Aeng: "I don't remember this."

Delmhurst: "I think the thousand-year dummy has gotten us lost again."
It turns out the strange houses are empty and abandoned. It's getting late in the day, so the PCs decide to make camp here for the night. They'll try to backtrack their trail the next day and figure out where they made the wrong turn.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

And that's basically all there is to it. With a [strong key](#) and a [clean procedure](#), the hexcrawl will flow naturally in response to the explorations of the PCs, drawing them deeper and deeper in to the mysteries of the wilderness.

Although this is the final essay in this series — and the end of my thoughts on hexcrawls (at least for the moment) — there will be one final installment containing system cheat sheets for hexcrawling.