

THE  
BONE MARSHES



HEX-MAPPING ADVENTURE  
FOR ALL LEVELS

BY DAVID SCHIRDUAN

# THE BONE MARSHES

A hex-mapping adventure. Light on combat, this adventure is about exploring a burning marsh.

**Writing, Layout**  
[David Schirduan](#)

**Editing**  
Lauren Schirduan

**Cover Image**  
[Zoltan Tasi on Unsplash](#)

**Playtesters**  
Andrew Armstrong,  
Ian Greulich, Josh Moore,  
Ronak Raithatha

**Maps made with Hex Kit**  
Tiles by [Cecil Howe](#)

**Inspiration**  
[Hot Springs Island](#)

**Made with Gdocs**  
**HEADER:** ALEGREYA  
**Body:** Alice  
**Numbers:** Arial

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## GOAL:

- Map a safe route** between the marked hexes and bring it back to Azimech within 3 days.
- Record** discovered threats or valuable resources.

## LENGTH:

Each hex is fairly simple; the bulk of the adventure is designed around navigating the entire marsh, rather than spending a bunch of time in each hex.

During playtests, several people commented on how “board-gamey” this adventure felt. This is intentional. The Bone Marshes exist to provide something different.

For a shorter adventure (2-4 hours) ignore the Random Encounters (pg. 3) as well as the mini-dungeons (pg. 7). Otherwise most groups should be able to complete this adventure in 2-3 sessions.

## THE TWIST

**The inner ring of the marsh slowly rotates around the Central Spire** once per day. Driven mad by the eternal daylight, a Spirit Guardian of the marshes is attempting to set things right by rotating a section of the marsh.

The PCs will notice the rotation immediately, since the edge rotates at 6ft per second! A deep groove has been carved into the earth along the edge, and nothing can prevent it from spinning; rocks split, trees uprooted.

**This is the main challenge of the adventure.** How can they map a safe and reliable route through a flaming, spinning marsh? Any solution is acceptable as long as Azimech receives detailed instructions that she can pass along to caravans travelling through the area.

If the PCs can fly/teleport, Azimech should stress that the route they come up with must be useful from a “boots on the ground” perspective. “Fly across the marsh” isn’t possible for most caravans and traders.

## GETTING LOST

It’s gonna happen. When it does, remind the players that if they find some kind of high ground they can see the Central Spire from any hex; it’s the only landmark that can be seen from anywhere in the marsh.

## THE HOOK

Strange flyers have begun appearing all over the town (or village or wherever the players are). At first, just a few appear in a nearby tavern, but then begin spreading all over. Hundreds of sheets paper over the area.

Show the PCs the handout. Anyone who tears off a piece and eats it is transported to Azimech’s camp.

Azimech greets them with excitement, exhaustion, and a little confusion: “Thank the Sweet Mother you’re here! I just stumbled across this flaming disaster a week or two ago. Or three, I don’t know. I’m trying to stop it, but I need supplies and a bath. Where is everyone else? I sent flyers across the entire realm! Or so I thought... ”

Over the Bone Marshes, daylight is eternal. Azimech discovered this phenomenon a few weeks ago. The sun rises and sets as normal, but it’s constantly daytime; sun or no. This scorching daylight has set the marshes ablaze.

A caravan of supplies is on its way, and more scholars should be arriving soon to help.

Azimech needs a caravan-friendly route mapped through the marshes before they arrive in **3 days**. She’ll pay extra for notes on threats or valuable resources.

**Note:** Fixing the normal day/night cycle and stopping the fires are beyond the scope of this adventure. But they might be the focus of a future adventure...

# THREATS

Stats provided are for OSR games, but all creatures listed are common enough in most systems.

## CATTAIL BANDITS AC: 11 HP: 12 Dam: 1d6+1

Familiar with the marshes, they will use the environment against their targets: trip them in the mud, throw muck water, etc. They wear light armor, but are quick on foot and familiar with moving through marshland. Cloaks have a cattail symbol burned in.

## "DEAD" CROCODILE AC: 10 HP: 65 Dam: 1d10-2

Giant crocodile, as long as a school bus. Can thrash and attack multiple targets. Attacks quickly, but travels slowly.

## GIANT SPIDER AC: 10 HP: 15 Dam: d6

In addition to its bite, the Giant Spider will attempt to knock down climbing PCs and dash them upon the rocks. Will not travel far from its nest, even to pursue threats.

## KING SWURMP AC: 16 HP: 45 Dam: ?????

Attacks like a Swamp Pudding. When reduced to less than 20 HP, the Swurmp takes on humanoid form and casts spells like a wizard. Spell damage defaults to (2d10 take highest)

## SWAMP PUDDING AC: 14 HP: 25 Dam: none

Immune to piercing weapons, the pudding is more liquid than solid: sloshing all over the place. It doesn't attack as much as swirl around and try to choke opponents.

After a successful attack the PC is CHOKED. On the Pudding's turn or the affected PC's turn, he or she can make a CON save to escape.

While CHOKED, any failed attacks made against the Pudding deal  $\frac{1}{2}$  damage to the PC. The choked PC is reduced to half of their current HP (rounded down) after each failed CON save.

# RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Roll two 6-sided dice and add together. If either die matches the Timekeeper die the PCs suffer an encounter:

## 2 - CATTAIL BANDITS (D6+1) *Stats on the left*

## 3 - CATTAIL BANDITS (D6+2) *Stats on the left*

## 4 - CATTAIL BANDITS (D6+3) *Stats on the left*

## 5 - FIRE ELEMENTALS (2) AC: 13 HP: 20 Dam: 1d8

If combat lasts longer than 5 rounds the fire elemental will disappear, leaving behind a blaze that will consume the entire hex in 12 hours.

## 6 - LOST SCHOLAR

A bad teleport has stranded this scholar. Roll another encounter to see what is about to attack. The scholar requests a map from the players. Awards artifact.

## 7 - STIRGES (D20) AC: 14 HP: 1 Dam: 1d4-2

A giant mosquito-like bug, any damage a Stirge inflicts is added to its max HP. If a Stirge reaches 5 or more HP, it flies away satisfied.

## 8 - SWAMP PUDDINGS (2) *Stats on the left*

## 9 - SWAMP PUDDINGS (3) *Stats on the left*

## 10 - TREANT AC: 14 HP: 60 Dam: 1d10+2

Engulfed in flame, this Treant resembles a weeping willow. It stumbles around, desperately trying to douse the flames.

Unless killed or doused within 5 rounds, the Treant will ignite the entire hex with its antics. Suffers 5 damage at the beginning of its turn.

## 11 - TREANT AC: 14 HP: 60 Dam: 1d10+2

Same as above, but resembles a large oak tree.

## 12 - WILL-O-WISP (D6) AC: 12 HP: 20 Dam: 1d6+2

A tiny ball of glowing light that fears fire. As an action it can turn invisible until it attacks. Its lightning attacks will chain to nearby targets.

Each electrical attack has a 5% chance to start a blaze nearby. If this happens the will-o-wisp will flee the area.

# 9 MARSH ARTIFACTS

*Cut out, let each PC pick one at start. Award the rest when appropriate.*

## CHARRED CANOE

It floats about 6 inches above the ground and can carry 2-3 people or an equivalent amount of stuff. Sinks when over water. Movement is about as difficult as paddling/pushing a normal canoe through the water.

## CATTAIL CLOAK

Blends in with the marsh grass and pluff mud. If the wearer lays down with the cloak over them, they will not be noticed unless accidentally stepped on (5% chance).

## TANKARD OF CATTAIL WATER

Blessed with swamp magicks, this tankard spills an infinite stream of fresh, cool water.

## BLEACHED BONES

A complete human skeleton covered in runes. Follows commands as best as its bones will allow. Each word of a given command will consume the next largest bone. Eventually it will be unable to move.

## CINDER SHUNT

An armband with crystal spikes running along the inside. The wearer can absorb flames and release them later. For every square mile of flame absorbed suffer -5 to max HP. When the flames are released max HP returns to normal.

## MOSQUITO CUP

Pouring clean water into this chalice creates a magical field that repels all insects. The field extends far enough to encompass 5-6 people.

## SWURMP EGG

When consumed you can command any mass of insect(s) smaller than yourself. Lasts until you next eat.

## MOSSY COMPASS

Points to the nearest source of freshwater: (Damp Cave, Sunken Keep, or Central Spire)

## STONE BOOTS

Any liquid surface the wearer walks on turns to stone.

# ROTATION SCHEDULE

*Cut out and keep in view for easy reference.*

## DOTTED BORDER:

Whenever the PCs cross the dotted border be sure to describe the **rotating section**. The disc spins at about 6ft/second along the outside edge, grinding rocks and trees.



# HEX DESCRIPTIONS

## HEX TITLE

**object** [details, smells, sounds]

Longer description and details about potential interactions.

### SECOND/THIRD/WHATEVER VISIT

Things have changed. Check the box to remember to use the new details. Actual time passed between visits doesn't matter.

## FOR SIMPLICITY:

- It takes 4 hours to travel from the center of one hex to the center of another.
- Interesting stuff is in the center of each hex.
- Any downtime happens in 4-hour chunks.  
If you want to break it down and get more specific with time and distance that's your prerogative.

## AZIMECH CAMP

**Faded tent** [simple, in disrepair, filled with maps]

Azimech is a weak mage but she's taken command of the situation. Gives orders like an old sergeant. She explains the mission, let's the PCs pick out an artifact, and gives them the blank map and Timekeeper.

## BOULDER GEODE

**Large boulder** [halved, contains purple crystals]

**Strange runes** [primitive map, circles, sun imagery]

This boulder powers the spinning inner ring. Other half exists in the Inner Ring . At 4pm the two halves connect and the cycle starts again. If crystals are broken the spinning stops. Source of incredible magical power, valuable to any mage.

## CATTAIL GROVE

**Cattails** [tall, fuzzy plants, grouped close and thick]

A grove of cattails covers most of this hex. A random encounter occurs every time they walk through.

## DESPERATE TRADERS

**Stuck wagon** [both oxen trapped, wheels submerged]

**Caravan unloading goods** [husband and wife, 2 guards]

**Dry salty marsh** [tall grass, no wind, thick salt smell]

**Crouched bandit** [failed stealth, 6 bandits, ambush]

Traders bringing goods to Azimech's camp. Reward PCs for helping fight off the ambush, request an escort to camp. They left ahead of the main caravan and got lost almost immediately. Been wandering for a day or so.

## EAST CORNER

**Solid ground** [small trees, shrubs, flowers]

**Fresh Breeze** [sweet scent]

A small reminder of the beauty outside this burning muck.

## FLAMING BOAT

**Abandoned Boat** [large, faded paint, aflame]

The blaze is just beginning to spread.

### SECOND VISIT

Unless put out earlier, the fire now covers this entire hex.

## GHOST ISLAND

**Dry dirt** [flowering plants, berries, safe]

During the morning: nicest place in the marshes.

During the evening: ghosts of marshland creatures harass any who rest here. Won't attack directly, but prevent any rest.

## HELLSCAPE

**Raging flames** [tall, searing, spread quickly, entire hex]

## INDIGO SALT

**Salt deposits** [strange blue color, unique taste, edible]

## JILTED LOVER

**Halved Weeping Willow** [split from leaf to base, shades area]

At 8am the two tree halves are connected and this hex snaps back in time to when it was a lush forest.

## KING SWURMP

**Muddy Clearing** [garden party, mud tables, mud plates]

**Swurmp** [swamp elemental, ooze of mud and grass]

He celebrates the "muddy era". Invites PCs to join him. Mud pies, grass cakes, etc. If he learns that the sun won't stop becomes angry and demands they stop it.

*For those who haven't spent much time in a marsh:*

**Pluff Mud Sucks.** Less like a muddy puddle and more like half-dried cement. No matter how tightly your shoes are tied, they will be yanked off and sunk. When locals get their boat stuck in pluff mud, they just leave it because pluff mud never lets go.

**Salty Muck Water.** Don't drink it, don't let it seep into your clothes, or get into your backpack, or get in your scabbard, or soak your shoes, or...you get the idea. It's gross salty muck that leaves a film of gunk when it dries.

## LAST HERON

Bird [large, majestic, white silver, slight glow]

Green grass [lush, beautiful, welcoming]

Blesses the oldest PC. That character immediately knows about all surrounding hexes, but can't talk until tomorrow. After the heron leaves all the grass yellows.

## MOSQUITOES EVERYWHERE

Dry salty marsh [tall grass, no wind, thick salt smell]

Hungry mosquitoes [can't rest, bugs everywhere]

## NIGHT MOUSE

The sky gradually grows darker the closer PCs get to the Night Mouse, as if the sun were setting. Hard to find, like a normal mouse in most ways. Magical and valuable.

## OIL WELL

Oil [aflame, mixed with water, spread around a large area]

If the fire is put out: an excellent source of crude oil.

## POINTING BONES

Tree [bone white, looks like a hand pointing towards Spire]

## QUIET FROG

Quiet [stunning, eerie, can't hear anything but low croaking]

This entire hex is blanketed with quiet. All anyone can hear is the low croaking sound coming from....somewhere. If they carefully track the source they find a normal-looking pink frog. Killing it removes the blanket of silence from the hex.

## RAZED ASHES

Cinders [charred ground, ashes, small fires]

Nothing else remains here.



## SUNKEN KEEP

The full map is on pg. 7

### THIRD VISIT

**Roaring fires** [fortress burns, bandits try to douse]. The entire keep is covered in fire; hex impassable.



## DRIED LAKE

"Dead" crocodile [40 feet, ridges above mud, stench]

Despite appearances this crocodile is very much alive. It waits, completely still until players approach, then attacks.



## GEODE BOULDER

Large boulder [halved, large, contains purple crystals]

Strange runes [primitive map, rings, sun imagery]

Other half in **B**. When they connect the rotation begins anew.



## GRASS HUT

Hut [simple, comfortable, well-maintained]

Halved Weeping Willow [ancient, shades area]

A wizened old druid named Garnet lives here, tending her garden. "Soon this entire region will be char and ash. But there is hope. Take this gem, toss it into any large water source, and I'll be able to draw it forward and quench the flames."

### SECOND VISIT

**If the PCs tossed the gem into a water source:** Garnet kept flames from spreading. Offers thanks and an artifact.

**Otherwise:** The tree and the hut are ablaze; Garnet is nowhere to be found. The hex is impassable.



## FLAMES

Raging flames [tall, spread quickly, impassable]

This entire hex has been burning since the beginning, and continues to burn. With some magical protection they can find d6 Fire Elementals feeding the blaze.



## DAMP CAVE

Charred marsh [ash crunch, glowing stumps]

Tunnel [side of hill, damp, cool air, dark]

The cave leads to the freshwater Underground River. Riding the current can lead to the Spire or the Sunken Keep.



## CENTRAL SPIRE

Rock spire [towering, plants growing rapidly nearby]

The spire can be seen from any high ground in the marsh. The full map and area is on pg. 7

# THE SPIRE

A cut-away view of the Spire. At the top a Guardian Spirit overlooks the marsh, hoping the spinning will restore night. It won't.

## Bleached Bones

**Bones** [picked clean, bright white]

**Piles** [bones, carefully arranged]

The Guardian Spirit has collected all the bones it finds in the marsh and brought them to the entrance. A memorial of sorts for the dying.

## Underground River

**Ripples** [strong, noisy, splashing]

**Pools** [dark navy]

Freshwater Underground River leads to Damp Cave, Sunken Keep.

## Spider Nest

**Silk** [large blob, thick, quivering]

If disturbed by climbers, 2d6 large spiders swarm to protect the nest.

## Manic Guardian

**Alcove** [outcrop, lookout, dry, hot]

A Guardian Spirit hides in top. It flinches away from the sunlight and leans against some damp moss in the corner. Weak, semi-corporeal, doesn't hear questions.

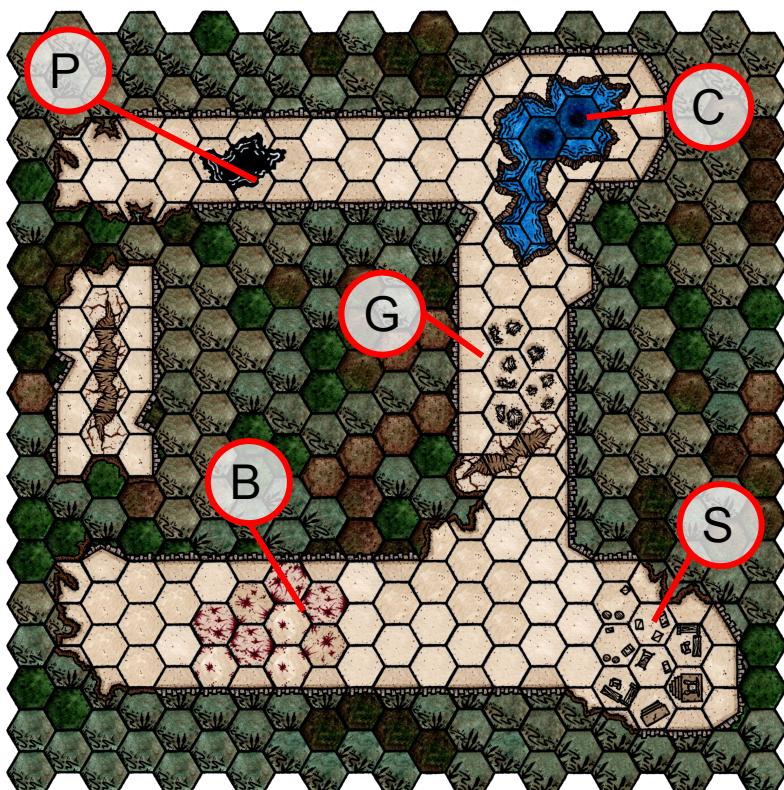
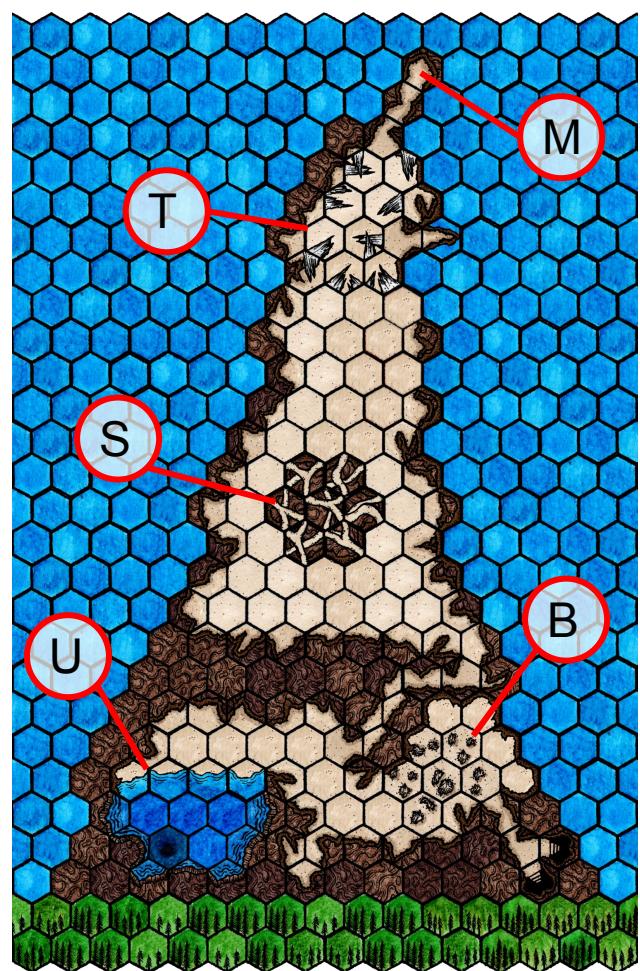
*"The day burns the night away.  
Take me to the cool and calm."*

If dipped in the Underground River, recovers its strength. Will answer questions. The guardian attempted to use the boulders to restore the day/night cycle. Offers to help Azimech (but is unwilling to leave the Spire).

## Teeth

**Spikes** [shards of rock]

Frayed and pointy, a hazard for anyone climbing to the top.



## SUNKEN KEEP

Most of the keep has sunk into the marsh. Trivial to enter, more difficult to avoid bandits. Roll 2d6 on table when they enter a new area.

## Butcher Blocks

**Blood** [dried, splattered]

**Butcher tools** [meat hooks, tanning racks, knives]

They keep it bloody so animals (and people) will avoid the entrance.

## Sleeping Quarters

**Sleeping bags** [tattered]

**Lockers** [rusty locks, simple]

**Curtains** [thick, dark]

The only place to sleep during the constant daylight.

## Gap

**Holes** [everywhere, unstable]

**Crevice** [deep, split]

**Boards** [rotting, wobbly]

## Collapsed Rampart

**Ladder** [shaky, leads down]]  
**Underground River**

Crumbling hole above Fresh-water Underground River (leads to Spire, Damp Cave).

## Pudding Swamp

**Rampart** [covered, cool]

**Swamp Pudding** [Resting]

The Swamp Pudding recently moved into the area, and the bandits usually just ignore it. Any bandits nearby argue about whether to fight or ignore it.

### Dice Result

### Bandits

### Supplies/Loot

1	3 sleeping, 1 cooking	1 Random Artifact
2	5 focused on a card game	5 rations and camping supplies
3	4 loudly arguing about pudding	2 rations, 1d100 gold
4	1 alert; can call 1d10 more bandits.	2 large barrels of water. Barrels have a cattail symbol burned into them.
5-6	No bandits	No Supplies, just empty boxes and bags

