

**There and Back Again  
Of Elves, Black Riders and The Lord of the  
Rings in New Zealand**

**By Lori Lindgren Voorhees**

We drove to a fern forested area, where Peter Jackson filmed the Elven princess Arwen and her entourage departing Rivendell for the Grey Havens to sail away from Middle Earth in “The Return of the King.” Here, Arwen has a prophetic vision of the son she and Aragorn will never have if she leaves. As we stood on the pine needle forest carpet among the ferns, listening to the wind rustling the trees, we imagined the solemn voice of Arwen’s father Elrond intoning, “the last journey of Arwen Undomiel.” But it was not to be her last journey, for Arwen turns her horse around and returns to Rivendell.

On to Cavallo Farms, where, prior to the filming of “The Lord of the Rings,” owner Chris Rutten operated a horse boarding and care business. Rutten and his assistants worked with 50 high-strung former race horses, desensitizing them to smoke, the noise of battle and frenetic activity on the sets. He also trained the stars in horsemanship for three to four months prior to filming. Rutten himself rode as a Black Rider (one the nine Ringwraiths, specifically the Witch King of Angmar) and as the stunt riding double for Viggo Mortensen. The Black Riders faces were blackened and wore voluminous hooded costumes that afforded virtually no peripheral vision.

A chilling scene in “The Fellowship of the Ring” occurs when Frodo shouts to his fellow Hobbits, “Get off the road!” as he senses the imminent approach of the ghoulish Black Riders who seek the One Ring for the Dark Lord Sauron. This site is not located on a country lane near Hobbiton as one might expect, but is found right in Wellington in an urban park on Mount Victoria. As we rounded a bend on the dirt path, we were plunged into by deep shade created by trees overarched the path, forming an eerie tunnel. Standing there, we expected to meet Black Riders mounted on huge black steeds, sniffing for the One Ring through the folds of their black hoods.

The following morning we drove to the outskirts of Wellington to tour the Stansborough woolen factory. The sheep have been bred to achieve the signature shade of Stansborough gray, used for the Fellowship's Elven cloaks. The factory produced 1000 meters of fabric for the films. Recently, Stansborough supplied woolen fabric for the costumes worn in "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

Richard Taylor, master weaver, demonstrated the 19<sup>th</sup>. century machines used to weave the fabric for the films and the factory's retail outlet. Only six such machines remain in commercial production worldwide; only five people alive today know the technology.

The stately private residence of Fernside in the Wairarapa region, built in 1924, is only accessible by private tour. Our guide was Mike Hurrell, Fernside's former gardener, who greeted us dressed in a "Ranger of the North" costume complete with sword. Hurrell wore this costume to the 2003 world premiere of "The Return of the King" in Wellington, where he managed to obtain Orlando Bloom's and Andy Serkis' autographs on his sword.

Two opposing scenes were filmed at Fernside's lake and its surroundings: one of poignant parting and one of murder. It is Lothlorien in "The Fellowship of the Ring," where the Elf queen Galadriel clad in shimmering white waved farewell to the Fellowship as they paddle away in elven boats. A white bridge constructed as part of the set still stands.

The second scene gave "The Return of the King" its dramatic opening sequence, sketching the history of how Gollum came to possess and later to be possessed by the One Ring. In a sequence that moves quickly from bucolic tranquility to horror, Smeagol and his relative Deagol, river Hobbits, are shown fishing from a boat. A large fish on Deagol's line pulls him overboard, and while underwater, he spies a gold ring on the river bottom. He grasps it, pulls himself up onto the shore and is admiring his prize when Smeagol demands it "because it is my birthday, and I wants it." When Deagol refuses to hand it over, Smeagol strangles him in cold blood, thus beginning his transformation into the creature Gollum. We gazed down at the worn patch of grass where the character Deagol lay lifeless.