

Zipf and the Leithag Mark

by Henrik Grönberg

This gazetteer contains notes on the small town of Zipf in northeast Stirland and the fief in which it is located, the Leithag mark. The article is inspired by (and hopefully consistent with) works of – Alfred Nuñez Jr (notably his gazetteers and maps) and Natascha Chrobok's excellent *Monasteries of the Old World*, as well as *Sigmar's Heirs* by Black Industries/Green Ronin.

As there are plenty of plot hooks in both *Liber Fanatica III* and the *GM's Toolkit* by Black Industries/Green Ronin I have not included any in this article.

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Introduction Generalities

Zipf is a small town in the northeast of Stirland, located on the Praager Strasse trade road. Zipf is situated two days' south of the fork where the small river Melk empties into the River Stir. The town is perched on a small rise on the eastern bank of the Melk, and overlooks a ford that the town garrison is charged with safekeeping.

The two main sources of Zipf's meagre wealth are agriculture from the surrounding farm lands and timber shipped down the Melk. Proceeds from travel on the Praager Strasse, (e.g. road and gate tolls, various other taxes and the earnings of its artisans and inns) comes a close third.

Zipf is home to approximately 300 souls, including the Margrave of the Leithag Mark and his household, a few noble families, several artisans and a few prosperous farming families who spend the winters in Zipf rather than on their farms in the Leithag hills. Well removed from 'civilized' settlements like Wurtbad, Zipf's townspeople are tainted by tradition, conceit, and the typical slowness of speech associated with small settlements in Stirland.

And yes, they prefer their ale hot.

Praager Strasse

Praager Strasse winds its way from the Stirhügel in central Stirland, across the River Stir and north into Ostermark. Here, the trade route meanders through the Bleak Moors, makes a

stop in Bechafen and continues all the way to the city of Praag in Kislev. Over the centuries, the rulers of Zipf have ensured that caravans using the Praager Strasse must pass through their town, offering the opportunity for taxation and business.

Consequently, travellers from as far as Kislev and Nuln are common in Zipf, and the town boasts several coaching inns and other establishments catering to travellers.

History

The Leithag Mark originally included all of the lands between the Hundsheimer Wald, River Stir, Haunted Hills, and Sylvania. The area was once inhabited by the Fennone tribe before the rule of Sigmar. In the years following the crowning of Sigmar as Emperor, the Fennone leader Fraomar ruled eastern Stirland for a brief period. The capital of his kingdom was located roughly where the village of Langwald is found today.

Over the centuries, the Margraves of Zipf have divided the eastern parts of the Mark into separate baronies: Enzes-Eucken and Langwald. The purpose of this division was twofold: to reward loyal servants with titles and land, and to create a barrier between Zipf and the County of Sylvania.

In the years following the Great Plague of **1111**, a host led by Grand Prince Mandred von Schilderland of Reikland engaged the necromancer Vanhal in the barony of Langwald. Still today, dark legends retell the horrors of the battle, and of the shallow resting places of those who fell in the carnage.

A trading post at the ford of the River Melk was established in the 13th century. After the Great Flood in **1512** Zipf gained both importance and size, partly due to increased travel along the Praager strasse, and partly because of the demand for timber to rebuild what the flood had destroyed.

During the invasion of the Vampire Count Vlad von Carstein in **2010**, the eastern parts of the Mark were devastated and the Margrave was slain along with his entire family. In the years following, the northeastern portion of the Leithag Mark was gifted to the Sigmarite Order of the Anvil by the Elector Count of Stirland.

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During the campaign against the Vampire Counts that ended in the battle at the Grim Moors in **2121**, Zipf was used as a supply station for the Imperial Army. Several present day families are in fact descendents of the soldiers who remained behind when the army moved on, and rusty weapons and armour worn by their ancestors adorn the walls of their homes.

Places

Surroundings

North of the town is the Hundsheimer Wald, a deep and dark forest covering the lands between Zipf and the River Stir. The low hills surrounding the town are dotted with farmsteads. A few of the farmers own small townhouses in Zipf, which they use when visiting Zipf's biweekly market, or as shelter from Stirland's harsh winters. At times, especially during the (often harsh) winters, evil things emerge the shelter of the woods to find food among the settlements to the south.

Overview

Zipf is encircled by a stone wall between 6 to 12 feet tall. The wall hasn't been well maintained, apart from the stretch around the Margrave's Residence. The wall is topped with half a dozen watchtowers, but these are manned only in times of unrest.

Three gates lead through the wall; the North, East and West gates. There are at least two more entries through the wall: a small, hidden postern door at the end of a tunnel leading from the Margrave's Residence, and a small hole in the northeast corner leading into one of the homes in the small shantytown.

Zipf is not large enough to be divided into districts, in fact only a handful of the streets even have names. Houses are generally half-timbered, and the more affluent ones around the Burgplatz and the Margrave's Residence are whitewashed.

Zipf's most notable buildings are the Margrave's Residence, the Melktower and the Town Hall.

Gazetteer

In the northwest corner of town, among the homes of petty traders and their warehouses, is a shabby tavern known simply as '*Nieden's*'. Frequented by Zipf's 'working class', the tavern's owner Jurgen Nieden serves hot ale, roast chicken and chauvinistic jokes in an atmosphere unwelcoming to strangers. Outsiders managing to blend in will find Nieden and his patrons to be an infinite source of rumours, anecdotes and profanities.

The most prominent feature of Zipf is the manor of Margrave Otto von Mecklenburg, locally known as '*The Residence*'. It is by far the most impressive (some would say the *only* impressive) building in Zipf, and is one of the town's few stone buildings. The Residence contains rooms typical for a mansion of its size, including half a

dozen bedrooms, a dining hall, a library and servants' quarters.

Beside the Residence is a *Garden of Morr*, where many of Zipf's former notables rest eternally. Common folk are buried in the larger cemetery half a mile to the northeast. Travellers may find it odd that the Margrave's residence overlooks the Garden of Morr, particularly those who are unaccustomed to the traditions of eastern Stirland, or who underestimate the impact of nearby Sylvania on Zipf's inhabitants. But in these lands, it has been proven over and over again that keeping a watchful eye on the dead may save one's life.



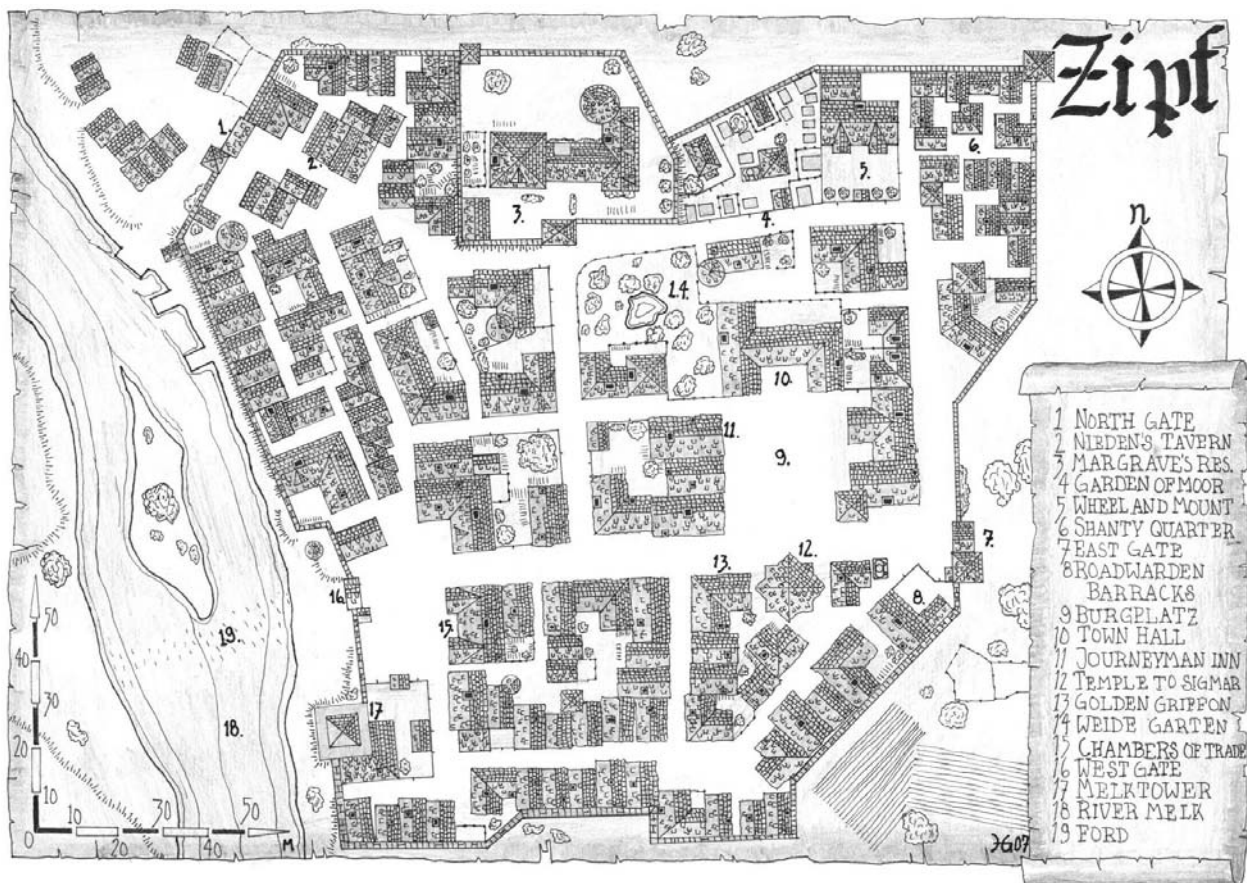
- The Garden of Morr -

The coaching inn '*The Wheel and Mount*' is located between the Garden of Morr and the shanty town. The inn boasts lodgings for about twenty people in a large dorm, eight small double rooms, a coach-house and stable, and not much else. It is a place for travellers arriving late and leaving early, and neither the accommodations nor services give patrons cause to linger.

The northeast corner of Zipf contains a small *shanty town* with roughly a dozen derelict cottages, occupied by the poorest of Zipf's inhabitants. Hunger is barely kept at bay by donations from the Temple of Sigmar and other benefactors. Physically able inhabitants compete for menial jobs offered daily or even hourly by town officials and other citizens. At least one young wench has turned to prostitution in order to feed her children.

The *Burgplatz* is the largest square in Zipf, surrounded by half a dozen well-kept three-storey buildings, including the town hall to the north. The square hosts a biweekly market (Markttag and Angestag) and is also used for celebrations, proclamations and executions.

Overlooking the Burgplatz is the *Town Hall*, a two-storey building housing the offices of Zipf's administrators. Several of the houses surrounding the hall are owned by senior civil servants.



Immediately to the west of the Town Hall is the *Weide Garten*, a small park with willow trees growing around a tiny pond. The *Weide Garten* was designed to improve the view from the Residence and adjacent manors. Unbeknownst to most of Zipf's inhabitants, the pond is an ancient spring holy to worshippers of Rhya.

To the annoyance of some of the (self)-important persons in Zipf, someone is regularly taking nightly baths in the pool in the *Weide Garten*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is Berthe Pommer (described below) who ritually cleanses herself in the pool.

South of the *Burgplatz* on the *Praager Strasse* is the local *Temple of Sigmar*. In good condition, the temple competes with the local cult of Rhya and Taal for the piety (and offerings) of the townspeople. The local Priest of Sigmar, Father Mankau, is described below.

The '*Journeyman*' is the largest inn in Zipf, run by the Ostermark immigrant Emil Plotz. Located on the *Burgplatz*, this inn is where the small upper class goes for lunch and dinner, and Herr Plotz is on good terms with most of Zipf's high society. A few rooms are available, but Herr Plotz is very selective when deciding who stays at his establishment (he has a reputation to think about!). Food and accommodations are of *Good* quality at the *Journeyman*.

The *barracks of the Roadwardens* are located just inside Zipf's East gate. The building contains an

office, a common room, armoury and a dormitory, as well as a stable.

Overlooking the ford is *The Melktower*, a 25-foot tall watchtower of stone that doubles as the headquarters of the Watch. The *Melktower* houses offices, stables, an armoury and holding cells.

Just north of the Westgate, on the east bank of the River Melk, is a *Shrine to Taal*. During the spring-flood the shrine is sometimes submerged in water.

The '*Golden Griffon*' is a small inn owned by Father Meier, a former Priest of Sigmar. The *Griffon* is austere and affordable, but patrons are expected to accompany Father Meier to services in the Temple of Sigmar every morning. The inn caters mainly to monks and visitors en route to the Monastery of Steinbachtal, and sees little other business unless the neighbouring inns are full.



Residents

Aristocracy

There are three noble families in Zipf: the von Mecklenburgs, the Tetzels-Siepfes and the Hockscharzers.

Otto von Mecklenburg (Margrave): Age 62, White hair, piercing eyes.

The Mecklenburg family's shallow roots in the Leithag Mark were planted through an old martial tradition. Otto's ancestor Herbert had served as an officer in a Mercenary Company under the Elector Count of Stirland some 80 years ago, and although he came from the village of Mecklenburg tied to the Freistadt of Pfeildorf in Wissenland, Herbert was rewarded for his service with the Leithag Mark.

Otto is slightly overweight but still in good shape despite his age. He frequently wears an ornate but antiquated broadsword; an heirloom and self-proclaimed badge of office.

Otto is generally respected among the townspeople, although he tends to favour those with martial inclinations.

Gertrud Tetzels-Siepf (Noblewoman): Age 73, thin and manicured. Long white hair and expensively dressed. Gertrud is arrogant and demeaning to commoners, and her tongue has only sharpened with the years. She lives in one of the manors overlooking the Residence and the small park.

Gertrud is an aging, souring widow who abhors the 'foreigners' (von Mecklenburgs), sincerely believing her family are the rightful rulers of the Mark. Unlike the von Mecklenburgs, Gertrud's family has deep roots in Zipf, and she takes every opportunity to remind others that the town's name is derived from her father's family name. Gertrud is growing desperate to make her dim-witted nephew Friederich the next Margrave, before she passes away. She may even go as far as to hire someone to assassinate the current Margrave.

Freiherr Leopold Hockscharzer (Nobleman): Age 68, obese, thick white hair and beard. Leopold is almost perpetually drunk and slow of speech and thought even when sober.

Leopold's two daughters are married (one lives in Marburg, the other in Wurtbad), his son is a captain in the Imperial Army and his wife died over ten years ago. What is left to do except drink? Leopold spends his days either at the *Journeyman* or in the company of Gertrud Tetzels-Siepf, responding to her perpetual complaints about the 'foreigners' in Zipf with well-placed nods and exclamations.

Bureaucracy

Both the town of Zipf and the Leithag Mark are ruled by the Margrave of Zipf. Day-to-day routines are managed by several officials and their scribes, with the Margrave only interfering

in more important matters, especially contacts with nobles in neighbouring lands. Zipf's bureaucracy counts less than a dozen, including a few scribes and aides.

Gustaf Helfrich (Steward): Age 48, overweight but carries it well, well-kempt.

As Steward, Gustaf is only responsible for the Margrave's personal household, including bodyguards and servants. He has no formal authority over the town bureaucracy. Nevertheless, Gustaf has a tendency to intervene in most matters and make every official incident his own personal business. This causes no small measure of annoyance among the officials in Zipf, but they fear Gustaf's close ties with the Margrave. Consequently, most people try to conduct their business in Gustaf's absence.

Rudger Fahler (Bailiff): Age 53, overweight and ruddy. Usually well-dressed and accompanied by his clerk Norbert.

Herr Fahler embodies most Stirlanders' image of their Tax Collectors: he is perceptive, relentless, and totally heartless. The townspeople keep track of his whereabouts and avoid his ever watchful eyes.

However, Herr Fahler is driven by a noble motive: to ensure the safety of his compatriots and the citizens of the Mark. But safety costs money, a lot of money, which is why Rudger pursues his work so relentlessly. Constantly feeling misunderstood and lonely, Rudger seeks comfort in the arms of Hedwig Kuntz (see below).

Peter Gehwailer (Captain of the Watch): Age 43, facial scarring, stern, slow to anger.

Peter is a former Mercenary charged with the small number of Watchmen guarding Zipf. He fought in the Storm of Chaos up north only a year ago. Peter secretly harbours Ulrician tendencies, which if revealed, would be nothing short of treason in the eyes of most Stirland officials.

Clergy

Father Mankau (Priest of Sigmar): Age 52 but his harried face adds ten years to his appearance and his posture is poor. Short and slender. The father is low-spirited but generally trusted among the townspeople.

Father Mankau feels abandoned by the Church of Sigmar in general and the Monastery of Steinbachtal in particular, although he rarely voices this outside a small circle of friends. Mankau's sermons are generally well-attended, despite their gloominess. He has been in love with Berthe Pommer (see below) almost all his life, but never dared to express his feelings.

Jonas Holzkrug (Priest of Morr): Age 52, tall, portly and bearded. Jonas has a tactful sense of

humour which is useful when he offers consolation to the bereaved.

Jonas is the resident Priest of Morr who cares for the dying and the dead of Zipf and the surrounding area. Despite the size of his parish, Jonas tries to visit the bereaved personally in their homes. He is assisted by two part-time Initiates, one in Zipf and the other in Krispl. There is little love lost between Jonas and the Church of Sigmar, for he believes the institution contributes to his chores, but Jonas has been friends with Father Mankau since childhood.

Berthe Pommer (Priestess of Rhya): Age 43, slender and well-kept. Berthe is friendly and thoughtful but armed with a sharp tongue and quick wits.

Living in the shanty town in northeast Zipf, Berthe is not only a Priestess of Rhya but also a midwife and 'healer'. Born and raised in Zipf, Berthe is still considered one of the most attractive women in town. Berthe has had love affairs with more men than she can remember, especially those passing through town, and has gained a reputation for being promiscuous. Despite Berthe's lifestyle (or perhaps because of it) she has never married and has no children of her own, although she sometimes takes in orphans. Berthe never holds ceremonies inside the town walls, but instead brings her flock to some place in the surrounding countryside.

Others

A small selection of other townspeople in Zipf.

Werner Junghans (Trader): Age 33, short and bearded. Werner is usually neatly dressed and welcoming in a professional manner.

Werner runs a general store with the aid of his wife and a clerk, selling all types of tools and similar equipment. Many of Werner's patrons are travellers passing through. He tries to give the impression of being well-travelled himself, but actually Werner has been outside the mark only thrice (once to Marburg and twice to Enzesburg).

Steffen Grau (Bodyguard): Age 32, short and lean. Steffen is normally armed with a mail shirt, shield and sword, but he is also an excellent Bowman.

Steffen is a former Mercenary who now works as bodyguard and guide along the Praager Strasse. Steffen also serves occasionally in the Margrave's personal guard, and knows a thing or two about Zipf, its inhabitants and surroundings. Steffen is also a very good flutist.

Unknown to everyone in Zipf, he reluctantly acts as a scout for a small band of outlaws based in the outback south of the Mark. He is sometimes intimidated into helping his comrades to waylay those he pretends to safeguard. However, he is looking for a way to free himself of the outlaws' influence, perhaps

by bringing them in open conflict with a band of hardened adventurers.

Hedwig Kuntz (Woman of ill repute): Age 19 but looks almost ten years older, Hedwig would be a beautiful blonde if not for the weight of her misfortunes and occupation.

Born in Zipf and raised an orphan, Hedwig has never enjoyed much happiness in her life. A month ago she noticed a bulge in her belly, but it's grown too fast to be a human baby. It is only a matter of time before one of her 'patrons' (including Rudger Fahler and Friederich Siepf) notices Hedwig's unnatural pregnancy, and when that happens her fate is not to be envied.

The Mark and Beyond

Leithag Mark

The Mark ruled by the Margrave in Zipf stretches from the Hundsheimer Wald in the north to the southern slopes of the Leithag hills in the south, and from the River Steyr in the west halfway to the town of Steinbachtal in the east.

The Mark encompasses four larger villages besides the town of Zipf: *Gablitz* in the west, *Krispl* in the east, *Leogang* near Zipf and *Thierbach* in the Leithag Hills. Many single farmsteads and cottages are also spread throughout the Mark.

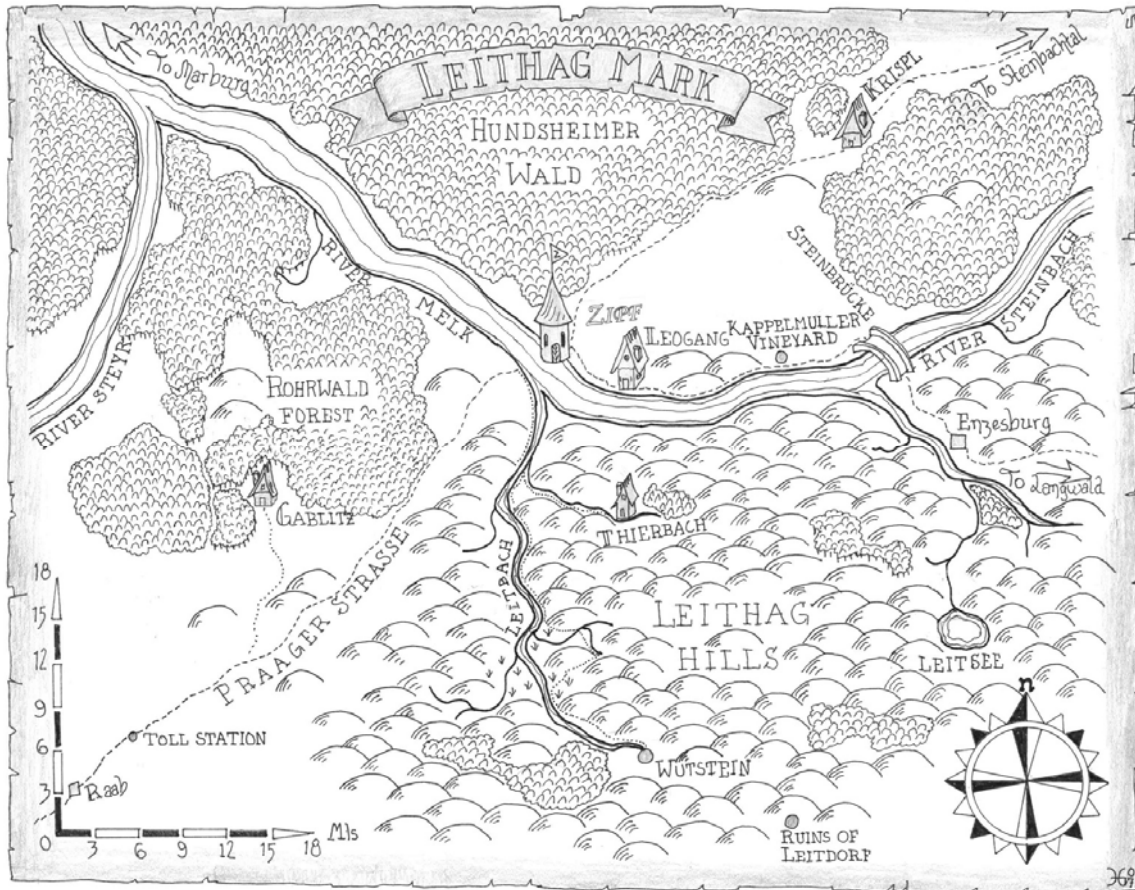
Gablitz is built on the southern outskirts of the Rohrwald Forest, a few hours journey off the Praager Strasse. Its inhabitants live secluded lives and they are unaccustomed to visitors. The meagre incomes of Gablitz are derived from crops, hunting, and coaling.

Krispl lies on the Praager Strasse, just on the border with the Domain of Steinbachtal (see below). Apart from a toll station on the Praager Strasse and a rather decent coaching inn ('*Spinning Spokes*'), *Krispl* offers little of interest. The villagers live mainly from the crops grown in the surrounding farmlands.

Leogang is situated on the road between Zipf and the Barony of Enzes-Eucken. *Leogang's* local potentate is Herr Kappelmuller, the owner of the nearby vineyard.

Thierbach is located in the northern part of the Leithag Hills, along a small stream emptying into the larger Leit. The inhabitants of *Thierbach* mainly live on sheep farming and they are locally acknowledged as sturdy folk. Positioned on a hilltop and surrounded by a low but massive stone wall, the village has served as a strongpoint during invasions by bandits, beastmen and horrors from Sylvania that have plagued the region for centuries.

Village	Pop.	Wealth	Source	Militia
Gablitz	74	1	Agriculture	8c
Krispl	59	1	Subsistence	6c
Leogang	42	1	Subsistence	5c
Thierbach	47	1	Subsistence	5c



Downstream from Zipf along the River Melk are several small *sawmills*, producing timber and logs that are shipped down the river to Marburg and sometimes onwards to Wurtbad.

A small *Vineyard*, Kappelmüller, is located upstream along the River Melk, not far from the village of Leogang. Kappelmüller produces a barely drinkable (but cheap) semi-sweet white wine, common throughout the Leithag Mark but unheard of elsewhere.

In the rolling hills to the south, along the small stream called the Leitbach, lies the *Monastery of Wurtstein*. A few years ago, control of the monastery was transferred by the Sigmarite authorities in Wurtbad to an Order of Templars of Sigmar called the ‘Crimson Brethren’. The Brethren’s mission is to patrol the Leithag Hills and the lowlands extending to the south and east. Since their arrival, the area has been almost entirely free of bandits and other dangers, although rumours hold that the Crimson Brethren are somewhat excessive in their use of violence in Sigmar’s name.

In the southern part of the Leithag Hills are the *Ruins of Leitdorf*. Destroyed during one of the undead invasions from the east, it is rightfully regarded as a cursed place.

Father Mankau has recently come across information about of a Sigmarite artefact kept in the ill-fated village’s shrine. He has become obsessed with sending people there to investigate whether the artefact may still lie somewhere in

the ruins, hoping to impress the brethren in Steinbachtal if it is found.

Neighbouring Lands

The Leithag Mark is bordered by many other political domains. In the north, covered by the deep forest of Hundsheimer Wald, the border to the Barony of Marburg is ill-defined, with the exception of the area along the River Melk. So too is the southern border ambiguous, for the region south of the Leithag Hills is a desolate tract of undesirable land.

About two days’ journey northeast along the Praager Strasse lies the Monastery of Steinbachtal, where the Elector Count Leopold Unfähiger was elected Emperor after the passing of Magnus the Pious. The *Domain of Steinbachtal* is ruled by the Abbott of the Monastery and has been for about 500 years.

The monastery and surroundings are described in Natascha Chrobok’s *Monasteries of the Old World*, available at the Strike-to-Stun website.

To the southeast, separated from the Leithag Mark by the rivers Steinbach and Melk, is the small *Barony of Enzes-Eucken*. The fief is ruled from the village of Enzesburg by Baron Leonhard Eucken. As the name suggests, Enzesburg was once a small town whose heyday is several hundred years in the past. The town was destroyed in 2010 during the invasion by Vlad von Carstein’s undead minions, and the descendants of victims claimed by the Vampire

Count now eke out a living in a village built atop the ruins of the ill-fated town.

The *Barony of Langwald* lies yet further to the east, and does not border directly on Leithag Mark. Baron Erich von Langwald rules the Barony from the village of Langwald, perched on the eastern slopes of the Leithag Hills. The Barony lies uncomfortably close to Hunger Wood and the cursed province of Sylvania. Langwald nominally controls the lowlands between the Leithag Hills to the west, Hunger Wood to the east, the Haunted Hills to the south and the lands ruled by the Abbott of Siegfriedhof to the north. In practice, this vast, sparsely populated valley is given over to outcasts and worse.

Approximately two days' journey downstream from Zipf, the village of *Marburg* is situated just where the River Melk joins the vast waters of the Stir. A thousand years ago, Marburg was a booming town, but the Great Flood of 1512 changed the face and fortune of Marburg forever. Large portions of the harbour and the wealthy northern district were swept away by the waters. Almost a third of the town was undermined and collapsed into the river. The town would never recuperate, and is today given over to pigs and those dreaming of the days of yore. The border between the Barony of Marburg and the Leithag Mark runs roughly halfway between the two main towns, where the River Melk is joined by, and renamed, the River Steyr.

To the southwest, the Mark borders on the Barony of Halstedt. The small village of Raab, situated on the Praager Straase, serves as a border settlement between the two fiefs and also marks the last stretch of the Praager strasse patrolled by Roadwardens from Zipf.



- River Melk and the Hundsheimer Wald