



TWO DAYS & THREE HUNDRED KNIGHTS

MORDOR. WINTERFELL. NAKUSP?
MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE
ANACHRONISM ARE ARMoured UP AND
BATTLE-AXE BOUND FOR UPPER ARROW LAKE.

BY GALADRIEL WATSON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF PILSNER



SWORDS THUNK AGAINST SHIELDS. Arrows zing from crossbows. Armour clatters and glints under the relentless blaze of sun. Two groups of knights ram into each other, sweating and yelling and grunting, determined to win this field of parched, knee-high grass for their kingdoms. It's the August 2015 long weekend. But to look around, you might think the year 1600 had not even dawned yet. Alongside 1,500 spectators, I roam the field between Kuskanax Mountain and Upper Arrow Lake only a few-minutes drive from the village of Nakusp, British Columbia. Some attendees watching the fanfare have dressed the part, pulling out medieval Halloween costumes, and others have looked up tunic patterns online. And then there are the serious participants.

These are the folks who live and breathe the Middle Ages—at least at events like these. The Nakusp Medieval Days has drawn about 325 of them, members of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). It's their passion, and self-appointed duty, to put on medieval re-enactments with the goal of living out the fantasy of this exciting historical period. And to simply have fun. For half a century, SCA members have studied



ARMOUR ALL THE KOOTENAYS FALL WITHIN THE GREATER KINGDOM OF "AN TIR," WHERE LONGSTANDING TRIBAL RIVALRIES AND DAILY DE-LIMBINGS RAGE ON. TO HELP END THE VIOLENCE, PLEASE SEND AN EMAIL TO KING EIRIK DAEGARSSON AND QUEEN DRIFINA ULFGARDSOTTIR INSISTING THEY STOP THE MADNESS. THE CASTLE JUST GOT WI-FI.



"WE NEEDED AN EVENT TO REPLACE THE NAKUSP MUSIC FESTIVAL."

—DANIEL ABRAHAM, EVENT ORGANIZER



and recreated the traditions, arts and skills of pre-17th-century Western Europe. The society has 30,000 members worldwide and has divided the "known world," primarily North America, into 20 fictional kingdoms, where they put on events each year. This weekend's draw is the annual battle between two such kingdoms: Avacal and the Principality of Tir Righ, a region within the Kingdom of An Tir. While both of these fantasy regions extend into British Columbia—from Saskatchewan and Alberta for Avacal, and Northern Washington for Tir Righ—it's the first time they've duked it out in the Kootenays.

As the centuries-old battle rages, I wander past the archery range, then past vendors selling bows and arrows and wooden pails, and also participants balancing on wooden blocks engaged in a dusty game of tug-of-war. At the rapier demonstration, pantalooned participants parry and thrust, "like The Three Musketeers," the rapier host explains.

While it's SCA members like these who draw the crowds, it's Nakuspian Daniel Abraham who was the impetus behind the festival. Originally from Golden, British Columbia, Abraham moved to Nakusp from Prince George in 2013 and got involved with the local economic-development board. "We needed an event to replace the Nakusp Music Festival," he says, which ran yearly from 2004 to 2011. "There was no marquee event in town."

He had seen medieval re-enactments as a university student, which led him to approach the SCA. "That's how it started," he says, "a curious email." That snowballed from interest on both sides, to two employees hired by the Nakusp Medieval Society to help administer the festival through a WorkBC Job Creation Partnership, to 55 volunteers.

Many local businesses broke sales records over the weekend, but more importantly, the SCA has committed to returning, despite the scorching heat. But not scorching enough to deter the fellow draped in armour made of animal pelts, with the sweat on his forehead glistening in the sun. Meanwhile, the knights continue to circle and advance, circle and advance, in an act of sheer dedication, while I retreat to my air-conditioned truck.