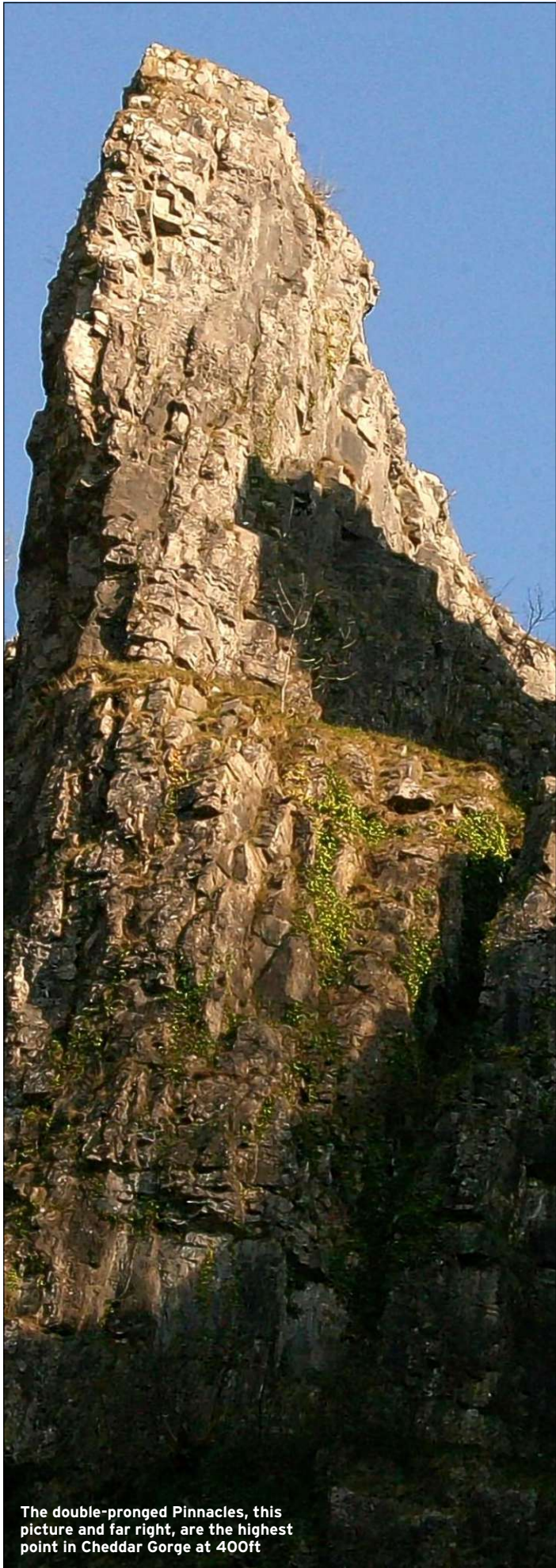


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The double-pronged Pinnacles, this picture and far right, are the highest point in Cheddar Gorge at 400ft

Ian Mat concludes our feature on The Lord of the Rings, which teased a little-known fact about author JRR Tolkien spending a pleasurable visit at Cheddar Gorge. And true “Ringers” – devout fans of Tolkien’s work – may even have solved our riddle: “A box needing a key, lunar gold inside is hid” by deciphering the dwarven runes at the top of the feature which translated into “Each paragraph is a first step towards the answer”. The first letter of each paragraph spelt out the word honeymoon.

MAN AND MYTH

“The host turned away now from the road to the Fords of Isen and bent their course southward ... Still some miles away, on the far side of the Westfold Vale, lay a green coomb, a great bay in the mountains, out of which a gorge opened in the hills. Men of that land called it Helm’s Deep.”

Here is the first description of the mythical location in JRR Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. But down here in Somerset, we call it Cheddar Gorge.

Exploring the South West beauty spot under the disguise of fiction, the writer that spawned a “legendarium” described it in *The Two Towers* as “crowhaunted cliffs” rising like mighty towers, “shutting out the light”.

Replacing the tourists and takeaways that gate the gorge with



A goblin drawn by Oscar Wright 20 years ago



Helm’s Deep, as it appears in the film

Photo: New Line Cinema

Uruk-Hai orcs and an unassailable bastion, the writer sets the scene for the Battle of the Hornburg, so-called because of the mighty trumpet inside the fortress to rally defenders “to war from caves beneath the cliffs”.

Enjoying his honeymoon at Cheddar Gorge in March, 1916, the Oxford scholar went on to base his epic battle there.

And the fact that continues to surprise recently resurfaced in a new book called *Literary Somerset*. Author James Crowden has chronicled how the county inspired many literary greats, such as Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf and John Steinbeck.

Noting the importance of Cheddar Gorge during a Sandy Toksvig show on BBC Radio 4, he said: “I had no idea Tolkien had a connection to Somerset. He actually had his honeymoon in Clevedon. If you look at the date of it, it’s just before April, 1916 – before he’s sent to the western front and fights in the Somme.”

Devon-born Crowden continues: “He did not let on where specific locations were, but he did in this case. He must have gone on a charabanc ride, which was the thing to do in those days at Wookey Hole and to Cheddar Gorge. This then becomes Helm’s Deep and the Crystal Caves and this must have struck his imagination.

“Battling during the Somme he had these rather beautiful memories of his honeymoon in Clevedon and the Cheddar Gorge.”



JRR Tolkien

An epic battle that nearly decides the fate of Middle-earth ensues on March 3, 3019, in *The Two Towers*. Heroes Aragorn the Ranger, Legolas the elf, Eomer, nephew of the King of Rhodan, and Gimli the dwarf arrive at Helm’s Deep just before the siege.

Clouds brimming with rain and lightning hang over the skirmish, that eventually sees the heroes and the human army driven further into Helm’s Deep by sorcerer Saruman’s orcs, before a timely counter-attack from Gandalf and reinforcements.

Keeping an eye out for invaders before the battle, Legolas comments he does not like Helm’s Deep. But Gimli finds the stony valley to his liking, praising its good rock. In fact, he likes it so much he later returns to the valley’s Glittering Caves and founds a dwarven colony.

A sharp-eyed critic noted the significance of the Glittering Caves at Helm’s Deep and began corresponding with the writer in 1971.

Glad to confirm the critic’s suspicions in *The Letters of JRR*

Tolkien, the author reveals his passage was based on Cheddar’s caves and written after revisiting there in 1940, “still coloured by my memory of them much earlier before they became so commercialised”.

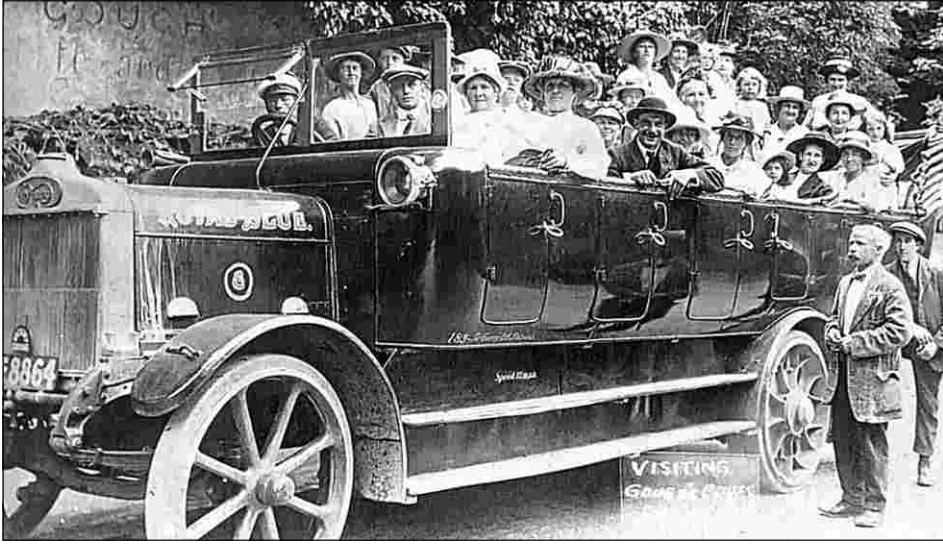
A lot has changed in Cheddar Gorge since Tolkien’s honeymoon 94 years ago. If he could see it now, would he have his host of heroes stop at the “green coomb” just beyond Westfold Vale, or would they keep riding?

■ In last week’s feature, readers may remember it started with Lesley Wright, a Glastonbury shop owner and Ringer who revealed to *The Hobbit* director Guillermo del Toro that some Tolkien landmarks were based on locations from his life.

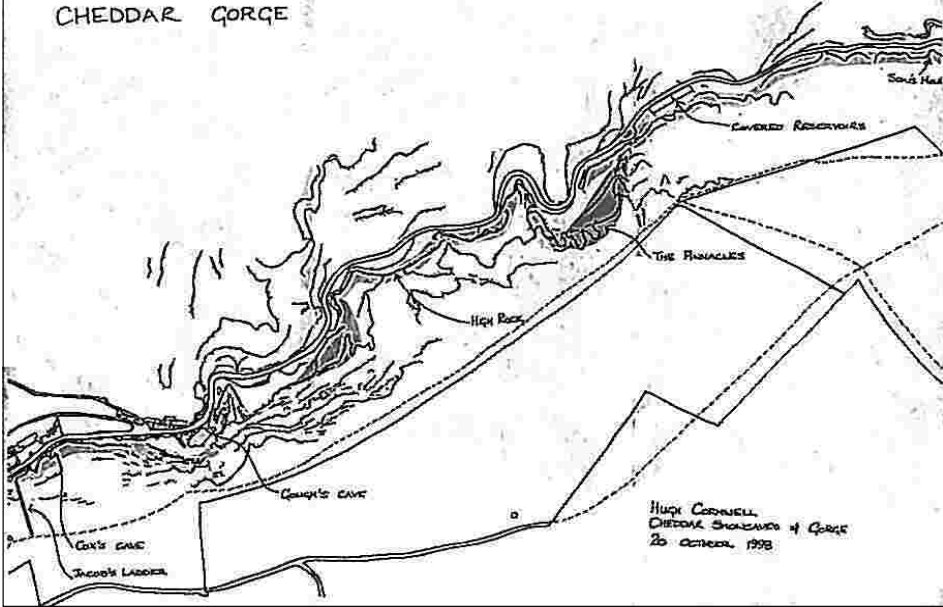
Now the mother of *Hot Fuzz* director Edgar Wright is set to be an extra when shooting starts on the much-delayed movie in New Zealand. How life and fiction come full circle is a rare, pleasing experience for some – an idea summed up by Hobbit Bilbo Baggins with the haunting phrase: “There and Back Again.”



Cheddar Gorge, the inspiration for Helm’s Deep in *The Two Towers*



Tolkien and his wife may have taken a charabanc ride to the gorge during their honeymoon in 1916



A hand-drawn map of Cheddar Gorge

