

The Ranger: Alternate Class Features

Introduction to the 'Versatile' Ranger

For quite sometime now there has been mention by various members of the WotC team about the possible release of a set of 'alternate class features' for the ranger. Such a release has been much anticipated by those long seeking a compromise of between the only officially recognised version as found in the *Player's Handbook* (often deemed to be lacking in flexibility and/or power) and the *Unearthed Arcana* revised version from 2016 (which addressed some concerns people had with the core class and Beast Master subclass, but in so doing raised others).

I do not propose to wade into the long running debates between those who are content with the *Player's Handbook* ranger, and those who find it in some way underwhelming or lacking in fun. What I will say is that both of the aforementioned groups are well-populated. Many like it, and many do not. The challenge has always been how to address the issues raised by the latter without spoiling the fun of the former.

In November 2018, WotC creative director Mr Mike Mearls worked on a set of alternative class features in two of his Happy Fun Hour online streams, and made a great deal of progress addressing a lot of concerns held by many in the 5e Ranger Community. As it stands now, there is simmering hope that these could be formalised in a forthcoming release of *Unearthed Arcana*, or perhaps on the DM's Guild or D&D Beyond.

In the meantime, this set of alternate features of the Ranger class, which I'm calling the **Versatile Ranger**, is based largely on what was drawn up by Mr Mearls, with limited inspiration from previous *Unearthed Arcana* and a light touch of homebrew in one or two places.

It is important to emphasise that by making these alternative features available, it does nothing to preclude or make obsolete the *Player's Handbook* version. Why is that important? It's clear that the game's designers (quite understandably) don't wish to diminish the core *Player's Handbook* class, and lot of people do enjoy it as is. But for those who do not, this set of additional options would allow them to improve their playing experience while preserving balance and not stepping on the feet of those who are quite happy with the existing official version.

For each optional feature, the source of the material is provided at the start of the entry, as per the following key:

- Player's Handbook ("PHB")
- Unearthed Arcana Revised Ranger 2016 ("UA-RR")
- Unearthed Arcana Modifying Classes 2015 ("UA-MC")
- Mike Mearls Happy Fun Hour 2018 ("HFH")
- Homebrew elements ("HB")

Any class features not mentioned here remain unchanged from the *Player's Handbook* class version.

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Thanks to everyone who contributed, especially veteran ranger Mr George Sutherland Howard, whose comments and inspiration were truly helpful and appreciated. Constructive comments are still very welcome, as this version will certainly benefit from the views of the community and the improvements those comments will inevitably bring.

The Versatile Ranger

Favored Enemy

(Source: HFH) You study a creature, making it as your quarry and analyzing with a careful eye. Your study allows you to anticipate the creature's moves, making it easier to anticipate and counter its tactics.

As a bonus action, you can designate a creature you can see within 100 feet of you as your favored enemy. Alternatively, when you attack a creature, you can choose the target of the attack as your favored enemy. Regardless of how you designate a favored enemy, you can use this ability once during your turn. The target remains your favored enemy until you use this ability again.

You gain advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect your favored enemy and Wisdom (Insight) checks to determine its motives. You also gain advantage on all checks made to discover and follow its tracks.

Once during your turn, you can make a melee or ranged weapon attack against your favored enemy. You gain a number of uses of this ability equal to half your ranger level (minimum 1) and regain all expended uses when you complete a long rest.

Starting at 6th level, you gain advantage on all saving throws made against your favored enemy's spells, abilities, and effects.

Starting at 14th level, once during your turn if you miss a weapon attack against your favored enemy you can make an additional weapon attack against it.

Alternate Feature: Favored Enemy

You may either select this version of Favored Enemy, or the version of the feature as detailed on pg 91 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Natural Explorer

(Source: HFH) Your bond with nature is heightened by time spent exploring and navigating the natural world. Choose a ranger skill in which you are proficient. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses it.

In addition, you choose one type of favored terrain in which you have gained particular experience: **arctic, coast, desert, forest, grassland, mountain, swamp, the underdark, or urban**.

You have advantage on all ability checks to avoid becoming lost while in your favored terrain. Additionally, you gain the following benefits based on that terrain type:

Arctic

You gain resistance to cold damage.

Coast

You gain a swim speed equal to your speed.

Desert

You gain resistance to fire damage.

Forest

If you are proficient with the Perception skill, your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses it and when determining your passive Perception. If you are not proficient with Perception, you become proficient.

Grassland

Your speed increases by 10 feet.

Mountain

You gain a climb speed equal to your speed.

Swamp

You gain resistance to poison damage and are immune to disease.

Underdark

You learn Undercommon. If you do not have darkvision, you gain it with a range of 30 feet. If you have darkvision, you instead gain "blindsight" with a range of 5 feet.

Urban

You learn one humanoid language of your choice. If you are proficient with the Investigation skill, your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses this skill, as well as when determining your passive Investigation. If you are not proficient with Investigation, you become proficient with it.

You choose additional favored terrain types at 6th and 10th level.

Alternate Feature: Natural Explorer

You may either select this version of Natural Explorer, or the version of the feature as detailed on pg 91 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Fighting Style

Presented here is a new option that Rangers can select for Fighting Style class feature.

Whirling blades

(Source: HFH) When you engage in two-weapon fighting while wearing light or no armor, you do not expend your bonus action and add your ability modifier to the second attack. You can still gain the benefits of two-weapon fighting only once during your turn.

Gift of the Wild

(Source: HFH) At 2nd level, as an alternative to the ranger's Spellcasting feature detailed in the *Player's Handbook*, you may instead receive the Gift of Wild class feature, choosing one of the options for it below. Additionally, you gain the use of **Bush Medicine** as class feature as part of Gift of the Wild.

Gift of the Wild Option 1: Mighty Slayer

(Source: HFH) Some rangers develop enhanced tactical acumen and physical prowess to achieve astounding feats of martial skill. If you select this option, see details for the Mighty Slayer in the next section.

Gift of the Wild Option 2: Wild Companion

(Source: HFH) Some rangers develop a bond with the spirit of Nature in the form of a wild beast, and further strengthen that bond by tapping into the inherent magic of Nature herself. If you select this option, see details for the Wild Companion in the next section.

Bush Medicine

(Source: UA-MC) As part of the Gift of the Wild class feature, you gain the ability to create and apply healing salves and poultices as a form of bush medicine. You can spend time gathering and preparing wild plants, herbs etc. to create healing salves and poultices. Items that you create cannot be applied by anyone but you, and lose their potency after 24 hours if unused. Application takes 1 minute, thereby expending its use, and the recipient regains a number of hit points equal to 1d6 (or 1d8 if inside one of your favored terrains) for every three levels you have in this class (rounded down) + your Wisdom modifier.

Once you obtain 5th level in this class, your poultices can also be used to replicate the effects of a *lesser restoration* spell.

You can create a number of healing salves and poultices equivalent to your Wisdom modifier (Minimum 1). You regain all uses of this ability after a long rest.

Primeval Awareness

(Source: UA-RR, PHB) Beginning at 3rd level, your competency in the wild allows you to establish a link to the beasts and land around you.

You have an innate ability to communicate with beasts, and they recognize you as a kindred spirit. As an action, through sounds and gestures, you can communicate simple ideas to a beast and can read its basic mood and intent. You learn its emotional state, whether it is affected by magic of any sort, its short-term needs, and actions you can take (if any) to persuade it to not attack. You cannot use this ability against a creature that you have attacked within the past 10 minutes.

In addition, through your connection to the land, you can use your action to focus your awareness on the region around you. For 1 minute, you can sense whether the following types of creatures are present within 1 mile of you (or within up to 6 miles if you are in your favored terrain): aberrations, celestials, dragons, elementals, fey, fiends, and undead. This feature doesn't reveal the creatures' location or number. You cannot use this ability again in this manner until you complete a short or long rest.

Primeval Awareness and Spellcasting

If you opted to retain the ranger's Spellcasting class feature, you must also use the version of Primeval Awareness as detailed on pg 92 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Ranger Archetype

(Source: PHB, HFH) At 3rd level, you choose an archetype that you strive to emulate. Your choice grants you features at 3rd level and again at 7th, 11th, and 15th level.

Some archetype features work differently with Gift of the Wild and Wild Companion class features, as detailed in the next section. (Otherwise please consult the archetypes detailed in the *Players Handbook* and *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*).

Vanish

(Source: PHB, UA-RR) By 14th level, you have become a master of swift, stealthy movement and ducking in and out of cover. You can use the Hide or Dash action as a bonus action on your turn. Also, you can't be tracked by nonmagical means, unless you choose to leave a trail.

Vanish for Spellcasters

If you opted to retain the ranger's Spellcasting class feature, you must also use the version of the Vanish feature as detailed on pg 94 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Gift of the Wild Option 1: Mighty Slayer

(Source: **HFH, HB**) At 2nd level if you selected this feature as your Gift of the Wild, you gain the ability to use your tactical acumen and physical prowess to achieve astounding feats of martial skill.

You gain the ability to use martial exploits, fueled by special dice called martial dice. You gain uses of martial exploits based on your ranger level, as shown in the Martial Exploits table, and regain all expended uses when you complete a long rest.

You can apply the benefits of only one exploit to any given attack. If more than one exploit applies to an attack, you select which one to use.

Martial Dice. Your martial dice are d6s. At 9th level, your martial dice turn into d8s and at 13th level, your martial dice turn into d10s. Starting at 17th level, when you roll initiative and have no martial dice remaining, you regain one martial die.

Some exploits require a creature to make a saving throw. The DC for such a save is 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier.

Martial Exploits

Ranger Level	Uses
2-3rd	3
4-6th	5
7-9th	7
10-12th	9
13th +	10

With this feature, you learn the Adamantine Bones, Crippling Blow, and Masterful Strike exploits:

Adamantine Bones. You focus your mind and grit your teeth, pushing aside pain and drawing on wellsprings of energy that blot out the pain of your wounds.

During your turn, you can expend a martial exploit to gain temporary hit points. You gain temporary hit points equal to 5 times your proficiency bonus.

Crippling Blow. You take careful aim at your foe's head or other sensitive point, unleashing a brutal attack that knocks the target senseless.

When you make a weapon attack, you can expend a martial exploit when you hit with a melee weapon attack. You increase the weapon's damage by a number of martial exploit dice equal to half your proficiency bonus, rounded up. The target of the attack must make a Constitution saving throw. If it fails, its speed is reduced to 0. At the end of each of its turns, it can make a Constitution saving throw to end this effect.

Masterful Strike. You strike with overwhelming strength and accuracy, battering aside your foe's defense to deliver a deadly strike. When you make an attack, you can expend a martial exploit and roll a number of martial dice equal to 1 + your proficiency bonus.

If the attack misses, you learn the target's AC and can use the result of one or more martial dice of your choice as a bonus to your attack roll, possibly turning the miss into a hit. Any remaining dice are used as a bonus to your weapon's damage roll.

Gift of the Wild Option 2: Wild Companion

(Source: **HFH, UA-RR**) At 2nd level if you selected this feature as your Gift of the Wild, you establish a bond with a wild companion that is no larger than Medium and that has a challenge rating of 1/4 or lower.

Your companion uses your proficiency bonus rather than its own. In addition to the areas where it normally uses its proficiency bonus, your companion also adds its proficiency bonus to its AC and to its damage rolls, as well as to any saving throws and skills in which it is proficient. Its hit point maximum equals the hit point number in its stat block or five times your ranger level, whichever is higher.

Starting at 5th level, the beast's attacks count as magical for purposes of overcoming resistances or immunities.

Companion's Bond. Your animal companion receives a number of benefits while it is linked to you, but loses its Multiattack action, if it has one.

The beast acts as you wish, using your initiative count. Your companion understands your speech, and you can intuit basic concepts and statements as long as you can see or hear it. If you are incapacitated or absent, the beast acts as you wish.

Like any creature, it can spend Hit Dice during a short rest to regain hit points. If brought to zero hit points then you roll death saving throws for it as with a PC. If your animal companion is ever slain, the magical bond you share with its nature spirit allows you to return it to life. With 8 hours of work and the expenditure of 50 gp worth of rare herbs and fine food, you call forth your companion's spirit and use your magic to create a new body for it. You can return an animal companion to life in this manner even if you do not possess any part of its body.

Your companion also receives certain benefits for as long as it is linked to you.

- While traveling through your favored terrain with only your companion, you can both move stealthily at a normal pace.
- When you gain the Land's Stride and Feral Senses features at 8th and 18th level respectively, the benefits granted also apply to your companion.

Your companion shares your alignment, and has a personality trait and a flaw that you select. Your companion shares your ideal, and its bond is always, "The ranger with whom I am bonded is a beloved companion who has my full trust and protection."

Alternate Archetype Features

Gift of the Wild

With Gift of the Wild, the following ranger archetype features work differently for you. (Ignore this section if you opt to retain Spellcasting as a class feature.)

Gloom Stalker Magic / Horizon Walker Magic / Monster Slayer Magic

(Source: HFH) Starting at 3rd level, you gain the ability to cast a spell of your choice from the relevant Spells table in the archetype description found in XGtE. Your ranger level must be at least equal to the level listed alongside the spell. Once you cast a spell in this way, you cannot cast that spell again until you complete a long rest.

Beast Master

(Source: HB) Starting at 3rd level, you gain the ability to cast a spell of your choice from the Beast Magic table. Your ranger level must be at least equal to the level listed alongside the spell. Once you cast a spell in this way, you cannot cast that spell again until you complete a long rest.

Beast Magic

Ranger Level	Spell
3rd	<i>Beast Bond</i>
5th	<i>Beast Sense</i>
9th	<i>Conjure Animals</i>
13th	<i>Sending</i>
17th	<i>Awaken</i>

Hunter

(Source: HB) Starting at 3rd level, you gain the ability to cast a spell of your choice from the Hunter's Magic table. Your ranger level must be at least equal to the level listed alongside the spell. Once you cast a spell in this way, you cannot cast that spell again until you complete a long rest.

Hunter's Magic

Ranger Level	Spell
3rd	<i>Ensaring Strike</i>
5th	<i>Pass without Trace</i>
9th	<i>Conjure Barrage</i>
13th	<i>Guardian of Nature</i>
17th	<i>Commune with Nature</i>

Wild Companion

(Source: HFH, UA-RR) If you selected the both the Wild Companion class feature as your Gift of the Wild, and Beast Master as your ranger archetype, then the following Beast Master archetype features work differently for you (in addition to the Beast Magic feature listed in the previous section under Gift of the Wild alternate features).

Ranger's Companion

You do not gain the Ranger's Companion archetype feature.

Improved Wild Companion

At 3rd level, your beast companion's challenge rating can be 1/2 or lower. If you opt for a companion with a challenge rating of 1/4 or lower, you can increase one of your companion's ability scores by 2, or you can increase two of its ability scores by 1 each.

Your animal companion gains proficiency in two additional skills of your choice, and becomes proficient with all saving throws.

For each level you gain after 3rd, your animal companion gains an additional Hit Die and increases its hit points accordingly. Whenever you gain the Ability Score Improvement class feature, your companion's abilities also improve, as governed by the normal rules.

Also at 3rd level, you gain proficiency with the Animal Handling skill, or if already proficient, your proficiency bonus is doubled for ability checks you make that use that skill.

Exceptional Training

You do not gain the Exceptional Training archetype feature.

Beast's Defense

From 7th level, your companion gains advantage on all saving throws as long as one of you is within sight of the other.

Share Spells

You do not gain the Share Spells archetype feature.

Agile Defense

At 15th level, whenever your companion receives damage from an attack (or other source of damage requiring a Dexterity saving throw) from an attacker or source that it can see, it can use its reaction to halve the damage taken.