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Georgia

TOURIST GUIDE



TUSHETI TOURIST GUIDE

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TUSHETI

Tourist guide

SLAVOMÍR HORÁK



DEDICATIONS

To my daughter Maruška, without whose love to Tusheti this book might not have existed.

To my wife Olga and son Vláda for their patience.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the world of this tiny book which aims to provide tourists with essential information on Tusheti, i.e. a magic distant tip of Georgia enclosed by the main Caucasian mountain range on one side and politically isolated by the Russian (Dagestan) border on the other side. The region is neither large nor can it offer the highest permanently snow-covered peaks of the Caucasus. Yet, the spirit of the local landscape, its amiable and hospitable inhabitants, and their traditions certainly deserve our attention, all the more as it is being increasingly discovered by tourists from different corners of the world.

The herein published information comprises facts from respective available literature and mainly several years of personal contact and discussions with many local people who have long been good friends of mine. Being well aware of how unfair it is not to mention many of them, I still would like to express my sincere gratitude to the closest ones. These are mainly the Idoidze brothers Nugzar and Anzor, who opened my eyes in Tusheti and raised my passionate interest in the region. During the first years of my „studies“, those by my side were also Anzor Gogotidze, the former director of the National Park, and his rangers and colleagues, who were always ready to oblige us and our volunteers with assistance and technical support. Recent years were marked with cooperation with Zaza Lagazidze, the director of the Tusheti Protected Landscape, and his

colleagues. Undoubtedly, without the support provided by the two mentioned organizations the hopefully good work we did every year in Tusheti would have never been possible. Last but not least, let me mention Teona Kizilashvili and her willingness to set off any time towards the utmost parts of Tusheti. You would not be reading this book had there not been her great efforts. In addition to the above mentioned I am grateful to Vojtěch Kubec, the leading Czech expert on Georgia and the Georgian language, for proofreading this text and moderating its romantic spirit. He was the one who guided us to the unsurveyed corners of Georgia and unexplored contexts of Georgian and Tushetian history. The colleagues and partners to the project played a crucial role as they finally persuaded me to publish this text in paper. I now feel obliged to thank more than a hundred volunteers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia who contributed to the development of the region with their diligent and often invisible work.

Dear reader, I wish you as pleasant stay and exciting experience in Tusheti as many others had before you. Should you be, in contrast, opening this book to revive the memories of your Tusheti travels, let me hope this book brings you some more details that you might not have noticed.

Slavomír Horák
Tbilisi, June 2018



BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT TUSHETI

Geography

The Tusheti region extends beyond Abano Pass (2,962 m a.s.l.), north of the main Caucasian ridge, which geographically locates it in the Northern Caucasus. Most of the mountain ranges in the region are formed by relatively homogenous loamy slate which breaks into slaty layers. This serves as the main building material in the traditional Tusheti architecture. At the highest elevations we may find remains of unique glacial formations affected by Quaternary glaciation. The landscape is characterized by deep river valleys formed by erosion.

In its western part, Tusheti is separated from the historic region of Khevsureti – Pshavi by the Atsunta Ridge (with its peak Mt. Amugo, 3,839 m a.s.l.) and strategic passes Atsunta (3,431 m a.s.l.) and Borbalo (Andaki, 2,887 m a.s.l.), lying at the foot of Mt. Borbalo (3,294 m a.s.l.), which is considered sacred by Georgian highlanders. Apart from the road through Abano, the southern side of the ridge may be accessed on paths through Sakorne Pass (2,835 m a.s.l.) to Pankisi Valley or through Samkinvostsvi Pass (3,167 m a.s.l.) to the valleys of Stori and Pankisi. The northern border with Chechnya and Dagestan is delimited by the massive Tusheti Ridge with the highest peaks in the region – Mt. Tebulosmta (4,492 m a.s.l.), Mt. Komito (4,261 m a.s.l.), Mt. Danosmta (4,174 m a.s.l.) and Mt. Diklosmta (4,285 m a.s.l.). In the east, the region is enclosed by the Batsibutsi Ridge (inaccessible frontier zone) leading from Mt. Diklosmta to the south along the Vebo Ridge and the adjacent peaks Mt. Khelta (3,188 m a.s.l.) and Mt. Oncha (3,304 m a.s.l.), dominating the entire area above Oreti Lake, and Mt. Shaviklde (3,578 m a.s.l.) and the hills lacing the border towards Abano Pass. Pirikiti and Gometsari valleys are separated by the passable Makratela Ridge with its peak Mt. Tsiva (3,380 m a.s.l.). In addition to the path along the Makratela Ridge, there is an important hiking path through Nakaicho Pass (2,903 m a.s.l., in Tushetian dialect “*ghele*”), which connects the villages of Pharsma in Pirikiti and Verkhovani in Gometsari.

Tusheti is divided into three main river valleys (frequently referred to as “gorges”) distinguished by substantial elevation differences. For example, the plateau of the central village of Omalo is embraced from three sides by deep river valleys. All three rivers are tributaries of the Tushetian Alazani and are called the same name Alazani. However, each tributary has its own respective attribute (the name Alazani apparently relates to the main river in general). The Pirikiti Alazani River begins below the abandoned village of Hegho near Girevi as a confluence of the Kvakhidis Tskali and the Narovanis Tskali (in some resources also called the Larovanis Tskali), which originate below the slopes of Mt. Amugo. This river flows through the entire Pirikiti Valley with its villages of Girevi, Pharsma, Chesho and Dartlo, and meanders behind the village of Chigho through a deep gorge down to the confluence with the Gometsari Alazani River below the abandoned village of Ageurta. The main tributary to the Alazani – Gometsari Alazani – springs at the foot of Mt. Borbalo and finds its way through the virtually deserted Alaznistavi Valley (the Alazani spring area, once significant summer grazing land with light shepherd dwellings) to the confluence with the Tsovatis Tskali (passing through the important Tsovata Valley) before Verkhovani. From here the Gometsari Alazani flows into an inhabited area below the villages of Verkhovani, Jvarboseli, Iliurta, Dochu, and Gogrulta. Passing deep under the villages of Gogrulta and Dochu, it meets its right tributary the Ori Tskali (transl. “Two Waters”, with its spring beneath Samkinvostsvi Pass). Chanchakhovani (Khisos) Alazani originating at the foot of Mt. Shaviklde is another tributary flowing into the Gometsari Alazani river beneath the village of Khakhabo. A small but significant left tributary called Chabalakhi flows into the Chanchakhovani Alazani near a ranger station. The main road from the Kakheti region passes through its valley. The valley surrounding the confluence of the three mentioned Alazani Rivers is named Chaghma (not a hydronym but a name relating to the community inhabiting the valley). Formed by the confluence of the three above

mentioned Alazani Rivers, the Tusheti Alazani River flows to Dagestan, where its name changes into the Andi Koysu (Ghandighor in Avar), and after meeting the Avar Koysu River (Avarghor in Avar) empties into the Caspian Sea as the Sulak River.

Population

The Tusheti population is formed by approximately 48 original villages. Most inhabitants show pronounced Tusheti regional identity and still use their vigorous Tusheti dialect of Georgian. The entire Tusheti region is divided into four main subregions – the valleys of Chaghma, Pirikiti, Gometsari, and Tsovata with their local identities. The geographical borders of these valleys are logically delimited by individual river basins. Sometimes, the valleys comprise only a single commune (*temi*), while we may find more communes in other valleys (see below). Located on the slope between the Gometsari and Pirikiti Alazani valleys, the village of Omalo in the commune of Chaghma is the central and most strategic place. Keselo Hill with its reconstructed clan towers dominates the village and its large surroundings.

Tsovata, located in the valley of the River Tsovatis Tskali, tributary to the upper Gometsari Alazani, is a specific ethnical subregion of Tusheti. The local villages were once inhabited by Tsova Tushs (in some resources referred to as the Bats people, by their ethnonym – *Batsav* in singular and

Batsbi in plural). In contrast to other Tushs, somehow incorrectly generally called the Chaghma Tushs, Tsova Tushs preserved their own language. The Tsova Tush language, i.e. the Bats language, is part of the Nakh group of Caucasian mountain languages, along with Chechen and Ingush (additionally, Kist dialect is sometimes also distinguished as a specific language in Pankisi Valley). According to the medieval Georgian Chronicles known as the Kartlis Tskhovreba, Tusheti and its neighbouring regions from Khev and Pirikiti Khevsureti to the borders of the land of Didos were originally part of Durdzuket, a country dominated by the Vainakh (Nakh) tribes, i.e. ancestors of today's Chechens and Ingush, Pankisi Kists or the mentioned Tsova Tushs. Nevertheless, in the early Middle Ages the descendants of the legendary forefather Durdzuk got under the influence of the Georgian state and missionary work of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Groups of people speaking Georgian apparently used to migrate to the territory of Durdzuks as well. As early as the Middle Ages, the Georgian identity and language successively prevailed in most of the land of the Durdzuks (including Tusheti), which thus became integral part of the present territory of Georgia. The social organization of Durdzuks was disrupted by raids of Genghis Khan at the beginning of the 13th century. While other parts of Tusheti only retained toponyms pointing at a strong influence of Nakh (Vainakhs), the commune of Tsova has preserved its own specific Nakh language until today. In this respect, Chechens characteristically



Tsova – Tushs



Atsunta pass trail

give the name of Batsoy to the entire Tusheti community while they divide the actual inhabitants of Tusheti into „Georgians“ and „Ours“ (i.e. Tsova Tushs). Despite their differing language, the Tsova Tushs consider themselves inseparable part of the Georgian nation and the Tusheti subethnical group. With other Tushs they share their traditions and history and enjoy long-lasting bonds of brotherhood. Since the 30's of the 19th century all the Tsova Tushs have been settled in the Alvani lowland (today's village of

Zemo Alvani in Kakheti), where they successively blended into the Georgian language environment and their own Bats language was on decline. Although the official resources mention about 3,000 native speakers of Bats, only several tens of them can speak the language fully (mostly the oldest generation) and as their main means of communication. Hence, Tsova Tush is one of the critically endangered languages.

PERMANENT POPULATION OF TUSHETI (except lowlands) based on census

1897	1926	1959	1989
4,074	1,618	543	101

Source: Vachtang Jaoshvili, 1996, pp. 130 and 170.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE POPULATION OF TUSHS AND BATS

Year	No. of inhabitants (households)	of which Tsova Tushs (households)	Note/Source
1831	N/A(951)	1,531(278)	Batsav. com 2007Blaramberg 1834
1873	5,103 (1,113)	1,571 (270)	Radde 1878
1886	5,707 (1,167)	1,533 (337)	Topchishvili 2007
1908	N/A	1,904	Batsav. com 2007
1931	7,279 (1, 857)	N/A	Makalatia 1932 (incl. Kvemo and Zemo Alvani)
2003	8,375*	3,200	Census Kvemo+Zemo AlvaniEthnologue. Languages of the World

* Based on estimates by F. Mühlfried, the total number of people identifying themselves as Tush (incl. inhabitants of other villages in Kakheti, inhabitants of Tbilisi, and Tushs living abroad) is approximately 12 thousand (Mühlfried 2014: 34).

LIST OF VILLAGES IN INDIVIDUAL SUBREGIONS

Chaghma

Commune (*temi*) Chaghma – Omalo (central village of the commune), Kumelaurta, Tsokalta; Diklo, Shenako, Ageurta (deserted), Bochorna;

Commune (*temi*) Chanchakhovani – Khiso, Shtrolta, Zhvelurta, Chiglaurta, Natsikhari (originally central village of the commune), Khakhabo.

Pirikiti

Commune (*temi*) Aghma (Upper Pirikiti) – Pharsma (central village of the commune), Girevi, Baso (deserted), Dakiurta (deserted), Nakurdurta (deserted), Hegho (deserted), Chontio (deserted);

Commune (*temi*) Samtsikhe (Lower Pirikiti) – Chigho, Dartlo (central village of the commune), Kvavlo, Danu, Chesho.

Gometsari

Commune (*temi*) Gometsari – Jvarboseli (central village of the commune), Verkhovani, Alisgori, Bikuurta, Gudanta, Koklata, Vakisdziri, Vedziskhevi, Dadikurta (deserted), Tsikhino (deserted),

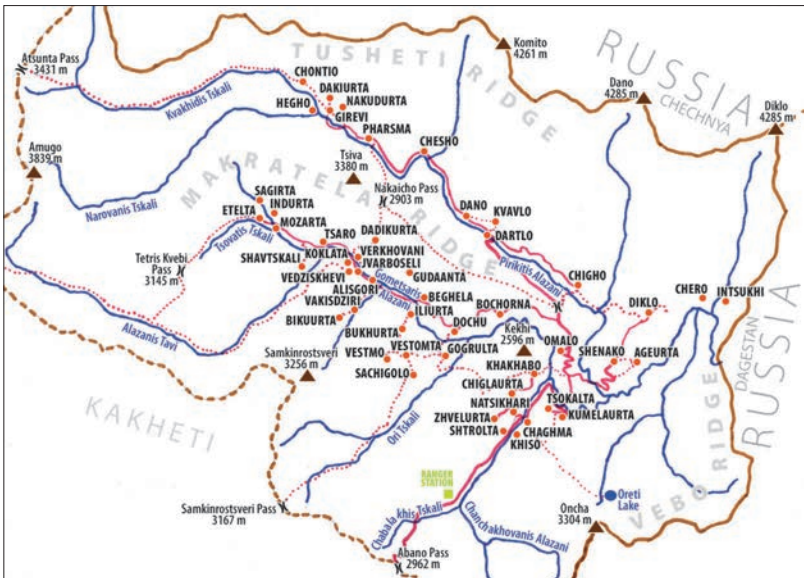
Commune (*temi*) Khurtsurta – Iliurta (central village of the commune), Bukhurta, Beghela, Dochu (Beghela and Dochu are sometimes listed within the commune of Gometsari)

Commune (*temi*) Ivanaurta – Gogrulta, Vestmo, Vestomta, Chirdili (deserted), Sachigolo, Sabue (deserted)

Tsovata

Tsaro (originally central village of the commune), Etelta, Indurta, Sagirta, Mozarta, Shavtskali (all deserted)

(source: http://www.dzeglebi.ge/mxareebi_qalaqebi/tusheti/tusheti_zogadi.html)



Map of main villages in Tusheti

Nature

FLORA AND FAUNA

Tusheti is one of the regions with high biodiversity and one of the most significant protected areas of the entire Caucasus. Its natural

landscape mainly encompasses forests (generally coniferous) and montane meadow habitats, subalpine scrubs, and subalpine and alpine grasslands, alpine screes and rocks. The region is characterized with a diverse vertical structure with elevations from 1,500 to 4,492 m a.s.l. We may find sheer drops, rocky cliffs, and

mountain massifs rugged by deep river valleys of the Tusheti, Pirikiti, and Chanchakhovani (Khisos) Alazani. The Kakheti side of the main ridge before Abano Pass is typical with its prevailing broadleaf forests composed predominantly of the Caucasian Hornbeam (*Carpinus caucasicus*) and Oriental Beech (*Fagus orientalis*). The Babaneuri Nature Reserve is home to the rare Caucasian Elm (*Zelkova carpiniifolia*).

Higher in Tusheti the forests are mainly coniferous with predominating pine (mainly the Caucasian Pine – *Pinus kochiana*). The lowest parts are locally home to floodplain forests with alder and willow trees (e.g. along the Pirikiti Alazani between Omalo and Shenako). These areas are characteristic with tamarisk (*Myricaria bracteata*). In contrast to neighbouring Khevsureti and Pshavi, the settlement structure in Tusheti is still predetermined by its farming activities with prevailing pastures and some dispersed fields (e.g. in Lower Omalo). Grazing has significantly influenced the landscape character. Many forests were felled down in the past and erosion had a great impact on soil. The processes of deforestation and soil erosion began to cease in the 50's of the 20th century when the inhabitants resettled in lowlands and sheep breeding largely diminished. When the repopulation of the area began in the 70's and 80's of the 20th century, the erosion processes reappeared, currently representing one of the main environmental threats to the region, particularly in Gometsari Valley.

We may find a large number of endemic species in the local flora (up to a quarter of all plants are endemic to Georgia or Caucasus), such as the Tushetian Dog-rose (*Rosa tushetica*). Hay meadows of Lower Omalo and extensive pastures in Ghele Pass, traditionally managed by shepherds and farmers, abound with plant diversity particularly when flowering from June to September. Worth mentioning are the Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*) or in other places the rare Red-Flowered Viper's Grass (*Echium russicum*); abundant are various species of orchids – the Bug Orchid (*Orchis coriophora*), Greater Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*), and others. The second part of summer is marked with blooming gentians, in



Iris (*Iris sibirica*)



Viper's Grass
(*Echium russicum*)



Bug Orchid
(*Orchis coriophora*)



Daphne (*Daphne glomerata*)



Rhododendron (*Rhododendron caucasicum*)



Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla albana*)



Fragrant Orchid
(*Gymnadenia conopsea*)



Burnt Orchid
(*Orchis ustulata*)



Gentian (*Gentiana djimilensis*)

particular the Cross Gentian (*Gentiana cruciata*). Among the occurring rare species we may mention the eye-catching tall Caucasian Lily (*Lilium monadelphum*) with its yellow flowers that can be seen, for example, along the path leading down from Ghele to the Pirikiti Alazani river. Strolling in the vicinity of Lake Oreti, at high elevations of Tsovata Valley, or in other places of northern slopes (typically at 2,400–3,000 m a.s.l.) we will be astounded by impressive fields of rhododendrons (*Rhododendron caucasicum*). For the production of Tusheti tea (herbal infusion), the local people harvest the Horse Mint (*Mentha longifolia*, in Georgian *pitna*) or thyme (*Thymus sp. div.*, e.g. *Thymus collinus* or *Thymus caucasicus*, in Georgian *begkondara*, in Tusheti dialect shortly called *kondara*).

The local forests are dominated by the Caucasian Pine (*Pinus kochiana*, syn. *Pinus sylvestris*, var. *hamata*), which together with rowan (*Sorbus caucasigena*, syn. *Sorbus aucuparia*) in some parts still forms the original virgin forests. Such pine forests gradually merge into mixed forests and birch stands at higher altitudes (typically 1,700–2400 m a.s.l.). Three tree species listed in the Red List of Georgia occur here – the Radde's Birch (*Betula raddeana*), Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*).

Among fauna noteworthy is the Bezoar Goat (*Capra aegagrus*, see the photo) which is an unwritten symbol of the Tusheti National Park and may occasionally be observed from the viewpoint on site called Kue below Omalo. Nevertheless, due to the incrementing traffic these very shy animals may very rarely be spotted (they are capable of recognizing any movement at a distance of several kilometres). Their natural habitats are steep forested slopes. A more widely occurring but still rare species is the Eastern Tur or East Caucasian Tur (*Capra cylindricornis*) living in the highest elevations; among large carnivores we should mention the Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*), Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*), or the Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*). Being hunted by poachers, these predators are rather shy and avoid contact with humans; we may rarely find bear tracks by a river. Rare bird species include the Caucasian Black Grouse (*Tetrao mlkosiewiczzi*) and above all the Caucasian Snowcock (*Tetraogallus caucasicus*). Both of

these Caucasian endemics are very rarely seen despite their characteristic mating calls. Although the latter is strictly protected, its trophy is still considered a proof of excellent hunting skills. In summer it often shares its home with the Eastern Tur at high elevations of about 3,000 m a.s.l. while in winter it migrates to lower parts in river valleys. Flying over the Tusheti valleys we may more often observe birds of prey, mainly the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) or the Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), which usually feed on dead or weakened sheep.



Bezoar Goat. Source: IUCN.org (<https://www.iucn.org/content/wildlife-viewing-georgias-tusheti-national-park>)

NATURE CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGY

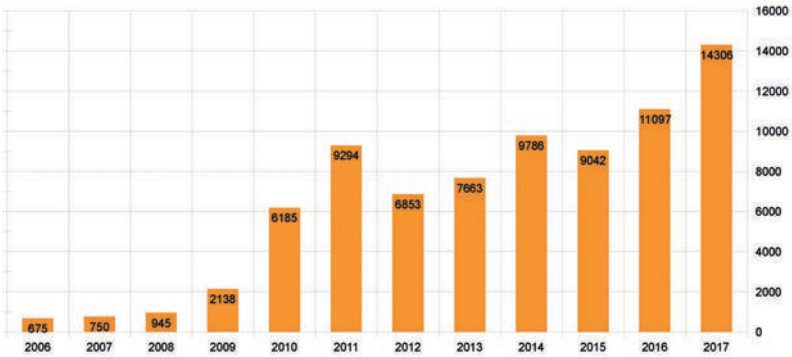
Nature conservation is guaranteed through three types of protected areas – Tusheti National Park (76,004 ha), Tusheti Nature Reserve (10,881 ha), and Tusheti Protected Landscape (31,517 ha). As various organizations are responsible for management of individual areas, the actual administration process is complicated. The National Park and the Nature Reserve are under control of the Agency of Protected Areas, i.e. an agency of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture based in Tbilisi, while the Protected Landscape is managed by the Akhmeta Municipality.

The most severe environmental issues involve intensive sheep grazing in a number of areas (which directly links to vast erosion of mountain

slopes) and fast development in tourism. Between 2008 and 2013, the number of tourists rose from 2 thousand to 12 thousand, which is a threshold of sustainability in the given territory (see the chart below). This results in an increased number of accommodation facilities (total 50 guest houses as of 2016), higher motorized traffic levels, and issues with water resources and waste management. There is a plan for certain regulation measures, among others introduction of an entry fee for visitors (implemented in 2018), which should be used for infrastructure development and nature conservation in Tusheti. The traffic is still limited or self-regulated by the actual condition of the access road to Tusheti. In 2016, however, the authorities promised investment in order to improve the condition of the road to Omalo, and there are negotiations currently being held as to construction of a new access road connecting Pankisi Valley and Gometsari, which might lead to a further unsustainable influx of tourism and severe negative impacts on fragile subalpine and alpine habitats and endangered species.

Despite being a mountain region with numerous watercourses, in some parts, the water resources in Tusheti are on the verge of insufficiency. This is mainly true in Upper and Lower Omalo, which are more distant from any water resources. The water has to be acquired from the surrounding hillsides and, with respect to the incrementing tourism, its lack already brings along consequences. The basic sewerage system built between 2012 and 2013 is already seen as insufficient facing the rising number of tourists. The growing visit rates force the guest houses and hotels to install washing machines and build bathrooms and restrooms, thus producing large volumes of waste water.

The each day higher number of visitors manifests itself in the growing amount of waste with prevailing plastic (PET, plastic bags and other packaging) coming from guest houses and shops selling goods packaged in such materials. Owing to this increasing number of both domestic and foreign tourists we may see dumping sites as simple landfills appearing close to villages or even on slopes above rivers. This waste severely pollutes the soil and the mountainous environment, disregarding the durability of



Visitors in Tusheti. Source: Tusheti Protected Landscape, Tusheti National Park

certain waste (plastic, glass). In 2017, the region purchased the first two vehicles for waste collection. Nevertheless, no real system of waste collection or installation of waste containers in villages has been introduced yet. In fact, the vehicles provide the only existing (and expensive) way of waste collection as there is no space for its management in the region (whether proper landfills or incineration facilities).

History

ORIGIN OF TUSHES

The origin of the Tusheti inhabitants is still somehow unclear. An amusing legend says that once upon a time, there appeared a pregnant woman on the top of Borbalo Pass. She had been expelled from her native village and thus gave birth to her three sons in this pass, which lies on the border of four historic regions, Kakheti Pankisi Valley, and the mountain regions of Pshavi, Khevsureti, and Tusheti. Each of her sons rolled down the hill to a different valley, i.e. Pshavi, Khevsureti and Tusheti. This is where the locals derive their origin from.

In fact, Tusheti usually served as a refuge for people fleeing from other regions persecuted or escaping from a number of threats (oppression, tax, crime, or blood feud). Local names frequently of Vainakh origin give evidence of the area having been inhabited by the Vainakhs (predecessors of nowadays Chechens and Ingush, related to Dagestani nations) who had better access to the region than the Georgians

from Kakheti Valley. The Soviet historiography often depicts Tushes as directly linked to Vainakh (Nakh) tribes, which (supposedly along with the appearance of Christianity) adopted the Georgian culture and language. Only Tsova Tushes (Bats people) retained their original Bats language. According to certain theories, the actual name of Tusheti and the ethnonym Tushes may refer to the Ingush name *Tusholi* (goddess of harvest and fertility).

With no regard to any legends, the Tushes represent a mixture of descendants of numerous ethnical and subethnical groups which found shelter in the mountains and formed local villages and communes. Acceptance of newcomers in the commune gradually became an important rite, usually a result of a year-long process, held at ritual places most important for the community.

FRAGMENTS OF ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL HISTORY OF TUSHETI

The first traces of settlement in Tusheti were dated with certainty to the Bronze Age (12th–9th century BC). Nonetheless, the region may have been inhabited even a thousand years earlier. Archaeological findings from the Bronze Age are rather scarce accidental discoveries of bronze artefacts. First inhabitants of Tusheti probably settled down in central plateaus of Lower Omalo and Shenako, where findings involve graves and other artefacts from the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age. The region seems to have served as a centre of mineral resources extraction. Some of the mentioned artefacts are exhibited in the Visitor's Centre in Lower Omalo; others may be



Archaeological excavations

seen in the ethnographic exposition in Keselo or in the National Museum of Georgia in Tbilisi.

The earliest written mentions of Tusheti come from Greek geographer and historian Ptolemy, who writes about a region where "... between Mount Caucasus and Mount Keraun there live the *Tusks* (author's note: i.e. Tushs) and *Didurebs* (author's note: i.e. the Didos – Dagestan nationality neighbouring with the Tushs, parallel ethnonym of the Tsez)". Tusheti appears to have been already part of the Kingdom of Kartli (Iberia) founded by King Pharnavaz in the 3rd century BC. Pharnavaz's son Saurmag was Durdzuk after his mother and found temporary shelter with Dzurdzuks during the uprising of Kartli magnates. First penetrations of Georgian ethnic groups in the land of Durdzucs apparently date back to the period of the Kingdom of Kartli. Armenian geography from the 7th century, presumably written by Anania Shirakatsi, also localizes Tushs in their current territory. The 8th century in Tusheti was marked with the dominion of Tsuketi eristavs (dukes settled in the area of current north-eastern Azerbaijan). Only partly successful attempts of Christianization were probably made around the 8th–9th century

when Tusheti was ruled by dukes of Pankisi (Pankisi Duchy was then part of the independent Kakheti Kingdom). Until the period of formal Christianization Tusheti served as one of the main refuges for pagan highlanders called *Mtielni* – according to the Georgian Chronicle (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*) Tusheti was refuge for those fleeing Pshavi and Khevsureti to avoid Christianization. This thesis is supported by a number of analogical names in Tusheti and Khevsureti (e.g. Khakhabo). Pilgrimages of Khevsurs to Tushetian shrines (pre-Christian) were still recorded in the 50's of the 20th century. Certain shrines in Tusheti were actually owned by Khevsurs and the architecture of some towers particularly in Pirikiti Valley also proves the Khevsureti influence. From the 10th century the Tusheti region was formally under control of Kakheti bishops with their pastoral administration based in Alaverdi. Nevertheless, no church as such was built there during the entire period of the Middle Ages.

At the turn of the 14th century, Tamerlane's military campaigns brought the most severe disaster for medieval Tusheti. It was probably the only time in its history when the Keselo castle in today's Omalo was conquered and completely burnt down. The traces of the fire may still be seen in the basements of its towers. Due to the raids the region got partly depopulated. On the other hand, this quickened the process of construction of clan defence towers.

MODERN HISTORY OF TUSHETI

From the 16th–17th century, Tusheti was facing raids from Dagestan and Chechnya. In defence, the Tushs got their clan towers built (as was the case of other mountain nations in the Caucasus). Incongruously, these were frequently built by builders from the northern Caucasus. However, the records on these events are of a rather general character relying on secondary sources and often even contradict. Military events thus mainly remained in Tushetian myths and legends. Raids and attacks from both sides were not the only type of contact between the Tushs and Dagestan nations. People from Dagestan used to sell their goods in Omalo and other Tusheti villages while Tusheti livestock and wool had their market in the neighbouring parts of

Dagestan. In the 16th century, Christians fleeing from other parts of the northern and southern Caucasus due to Islamization found their refuge in Tusheti. The Georgian Chronicles Kartlis Tskhovreba state: *“The name of Christ was forbidden but in the remote mountain regions of Tusheti, Pshavi, and Khevsureti.”*

From the 16th century, the Tushs searched their winter home on the other side of the Central Caucasian Ridge. As recorded, King Levan (1520–1574) gave part of the Alvani pastures at the foothills to Tushs, who built the current villages of Kvemo and Zemo Alvani and Laliskuri. *“Howbeit, the Pshavs, Khevsurs, and Tushs had not been subdued to the kings of Kakheti before. The king Levan subjugated them not by force but he promised their sheep could graze with no hindrance in Kakheti. Then he sent offerings to the Cross of Lasha in Tianeti [author’s note: main Pshavi shrine of Lashari] and from that time, they provided him with army and paid their tax.”* (Vakhushti Bagrationi: *Aghtsera sameposa sakartvelosa* [Description of Kingdom of Georgia] – Kartlis Tskhovreba IV, Tbilisi, 1973, p. 573). In the 17th century the Tushs gained their land for ever. The tradition says that as the loyal subjects of the king the Tushs excelled mainly in 1659, when Georgia was seized by the Persian Army ready to displace tens of thousands of people to Persia. Under the leadership of famed Zezva Gaphrindauli, the Tushs took part in the fight against the Persians and played a substantial role in the battle of the Bakhtrioni fort, where Georgian insurgents defeated the Persian garrison. Thus, the Persians led by Salim Khan had to retreat temporarily. On the other hand, not only the Tushs searched their refuge hiding from the Persians in the mountains. This was also the case during the raids by Agha Muhammad Khan at the end of the 18th century.

Tushetian legends also reflect other significant events referring to the heroic character of the Tusheti warriors. When in 1754–1755 Kakheti was invaded by the Avar ally of the Ottoman empire Nursal Beg, the Tushs successfully attacked their positions and managed to thwart their plans to join the Dagestan territory with the Ottoman regions by occupying Georgian mountains and valleys.

LEGEND ABOUT ZEZVA GAPHRINDAULI’S HORSE

Having seized the Bakhtrioni fortress, the King of Kakheti wanted to endow with gifts the highlanders who had won the war. Legend has it that the Pshavs were given Shiraki [author’s note: a steppe area near the border with Azerbaijan] while the Tushs, advised by Zezva, wished to be granted such lands that his horse Lurja would gallop at a time. However, the horse was so exhausted after the battle that it galloped too fast through the first several villages and then stumbled and fell dead to the ground. It was buried with great honour and its grave in Takhtibogiri has been venerated by the Tushs until today. Anyone who wishes a long life to their horse or seeks success with horses, particularly the Tushs, Khevsurs, and Pshavs, comes bringing their offerings. No one passes the gravestone on their horse without dismounting and drinking to the souls of the horse and its master, hero Zezva.

Based on Virsaladze, E. B.: Gruzinskiye narodnyye predaniya i legendy. Nauka, Moscow, p. 178.

However, the Tushs themselves made their living at the expense of the inhabitants of Kakheti. This was one of the reasons why, in 1781, King Erekle II issued a regulation delimiting the rights of the Tushs to pastures to avoid disputes with other Kakhetians: *“The Tushs graze their herds in Kakheti. With God’s help they grew in numbers and so did their livestock. Let them hence grow further with the help of God. Howbeit, in the villages of Kakheti where they graze their livestock they outrage, steal and rob the temples and commit other malicious acts pestering the other villages. Herein we hence declare the following: The land for their sheep is Lopoti Valley, Alvani, and Pankisi, let them graze their livestock in these three places. The Pshavs claim their right to Pankisi, to which they have none, as the land belongs to the Tushs. Should they need more grazing land in these three areas, let them graze two herds at a time (400 sheep) behind the villages but no more than that at any time. They*

shall not steal or do any violence. We have sent an order to all villages to only graze two herds at a time. Should they let more sheep graze, this shall bring deserved punishment upon them. Should the Tushs not adhere, they shall be maltreated and slew by the others, and thieves shall be put to the sword. Therefore, let the Tushs know that they shall not graze more than two herds in each of the villages and they shall not do any bad or they shall be treated as we said.” (Dedimov: V vysokogoryakh Kavkaza, Moscow, 1931). Yet, still in the half of the 19th century, there used to be mutual attacks between the Tushs and Dagestan highlanders, the Pshavs, or the Kists from the surrounding valleys.

TUSHETI AND TUSHS IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY

The first half of the 19th century in Tusheti was significantly marked with the Great Caucasian War (1834–1859), in which the Tushs, the Pshavs and the Khevsurs in their majority sided with the Russian Empire against the Caucasian Imamate. On the other hand, the Tushs had their interest in retaining the traditional trade and cooperation

with their Muslim neighbours, who used to sell their goods in Tusheti. Simultaneously, the Tushs partly used to cross the borders driving their herds through the Dido territory. The legates of the Muslim leader Imam Shalim held their diplomatic negotiations towards alliance of mountain nations with Shamil. Imam sent repeatedly his armies to Tusheti and Khevsureti. At the end of 1836, the army under the command of Adlan burnt to the ground the village of Diklo and besieged Shenako (see the *Legend of the Castle of Love* on page 54). The legends of Tusheti (see the *Legend of the Pharsma Tower*) also mention the unsuccessful raid of Murtaza Khan between 1841 and 1842. In the 40's and 50's of the 19th century, i.e. at the time of the culminating Caucasian War, Tusheti villages were attacked and burnt down several times – particularly Diklo and Shenako (1846), Pirikiti Valley (1848), and Chaghma Tusheti (1850). Tusheti suffered the greatest aggression in 1852, when all three valleys of Chaghma, Gometsari and Pirikiti were invaded. Several legendary Tusheti names of that epoch have been preserved. For example, Shete Gulukhaidze

THE LEGEND OF THE PHARMSA TOWER

There is a legend relating to the Pharsma Tower which tells a story of heroism of a Pharsma woman named Tino and her daughter Kakho. Murtaza Khan, ally of Imam Shamil, did not pay attention to the words of the Tushs, who had told him he would not defeat the Pharsma people. He gathered a huge army, brought a cannon along and set off to punish the Tushs for their alliance with the Russians. The first tower on his road was the one in Pharsma. Murtaza apparently could not conquer it and thus decided to blast it away. He ordered his soldiers to bring a kettle for distilling chacha and they threw a pinch of gunpowder in it. Having filled up the kettle the enemies began to pull it towards the foundations of the tower. However, Tino, who was hiding with her daughter Kakho in the tower, soaked her scarf in oil, set it on fire, and threw it in the kettle. The kettle blew up killing all the soldiers around. Tino, grasping a sword, jumped down the tower

and thrust herself into the rows of enemies. She was followed by her raging fellow men and soon backed by people from other villages and communes. The access points to Pharsma saw an unprecedented battle and Murtaza was forced to retreat. On his way to Tusheti in Kachu Pass, he had ordered his men to throw a stone each in a chosen place to form a heap. On his way back he ordered the remaining men to take a stone each from the heap, which nearly remained untouched as most of his men had been killed by the Tushs. The cannon they seized was at display in the village of Chesho until the 30's of the 20th century when scientists transported it to the museum in Telavi. This event gave birth to a new term in the Tusheti dialect – “pharsmistaoba”. i.e. merciless slaughter.

Based on Giorgi Tsotsanidze: Ot listopada do listopada. Kavkasiuri sachli (Caucasian House), Tbilisi, 2008, pp. 11–12.

Basic Information about Tusheti

was depicted in the famous portrait by painter Niko Pirozmanashvili as a hero who took Imam Shamil captive and served to scare and deter the Avar and other children of highlanders.

Merely two marginal villages at the border between Dagestan and Tusheti were considered part of Shamil's Imamate. Despite this, in other parts of Tusheti people sometimes used to pay a tax on each house to Shamil. The Russian Government sent their deputies to the region and generously supported the Tusheti territorial army. Along with the Pshavs and Khevsurs, the Tushs took part in the final destruction of the Caucasian Imamate. Tusheti tradition has it that it were the Tushs under the command of Shete Gulukhaidze who chased Imam Shamil out of his last bastion fort Ghunib.

Upon the end of the Caucasian War and stabilization of the region under the Russian rule, the frequency of raids from Dagestan

diminished, apart from occasional thefts of livestock or horses. Greater military events occurred during the Russo-Turkish War in 1877, when Ottoman propaganda was spreading along the northern Caucasus and certain mountain communes declared a holy war upon Russia.

In the 19th century, the inhabitants of Tusheti regularly began to migrate to lowlands (temporarily, sometimes even permanently). This also was a result of the Tsar Government policy, which allowed highlanders to gain land at foothills, in fertile Kakheti. Nevertheless, the imminent reasons were natural disasters and epidemics – for example, one village in Tsovata Valley named Sagirta was destroyed by a flood and landslides in 1830. Other villages were hit by plague outbreaks. First villages were depopulated in the westernmost part of Tusheti due to these disasters. The Tsova Tushs came first

SHETE GULUKHAIDZE

Shete Gulukhaidze was the son of a humble and poor peasant from Chaghma Valley who was famed as an excellent gunman. One day he had a quarrel with his uncle and killed him. To avoid vendetta from the relatives he and his wife fled to Khevsureti where he soon died. However, his wife Sabeda gave birth to a son and named him Shete. Her desperate position made her return in secret to Tusheti where she lived at her sister's house. However, she died soon leaving her son with his aunt. Shete grew into a strong man and an excellent gunman holding his father's gun. His life was still marked with his father's crime putting him under threat of being killed by the relatives of his granduncle. Nonetheless, the avengers abandoned the blood feud and Shete could freely move around the mountains and hunt. He became a famous hunter recognized in the neighbourhood. Yet he longed for more fame and began to take part in raids to neighbouring Dagestan. He soon gained a reputation of one of the greatest enemies of Didos and people of Dagestan in general. His house was getting filled up with hands he had cut off as trophies of his enemies and even

innocent highlanders. He could not fully sustain his family only participating in raids, though. In search of bread he joined the Russian Army in Kakheti where he demanded remuneration for hand trophies from Russian officers.

Apart from the raids in the neighbouring Dido and other Dagestani villages, Shete also participated in defending Tusheti villages, including the legendary defence of Shenako in 1837 (following the destruction and burning of Diklo). This was the fourth of six legendary victories of Shete over the Dagestani people. *"There were 70 of us in two towers, 40 of which were old men, women and infants. The day broke. One of the Didos stepped forward and with his mocking voice spoke: "Give us all your women and we shall spare your lives... We may have more women." These words unleashed a fury in me. I approached the window and yelled out: "I am Shete Gulukhaidze, I am here and you have nothing to do here around us but tread down the snow". Then I fired and the shameless giber dropped dead. From that moment my gun would not seize. The Tushs had been being besieged for three weeks already. There was hunger, no water and we*

with the process of dual farming, i.e. summer pastures in the mountains and a winter base in the village of Alvani at the foothills. They were soon followed by other Tushs. At the turn of the 19th century, at least half of the Tusheti population „nomadized“ in this manner. This was mainly the task for men since these, under the principles of the Tusheti way of life and social structure, were supposed to graze sheep. The Tusheti dialect hereby adopted new terms, such as *Kakhuarebi* or *Tushuraebi* (i.e. people who ascend for winter to the Kakheti lowlands and those who remain in Tusheti, respectively). In the restless period (last at the time of the ruling Mensheviks between 1918 and 1921) of growing raids of Kists to Tusheti (and vice versa), a number of villages remained abandoned all year long (as was the case in the most distant parts of Tusheti – Chontio, Dakiurta, and partly Girevi).



Tushs from Chigho



Shete Gulukhaidze

were running out of ammunition. The Didos were ready to set the towers on fire and their chief Biga would approach me and yell: “Well, we have you in our trap, you old wolf. We shall roast you like a ram now. And hence I responded: Hey you cub, let me see at least your nose, stick out your finger and you shall see whom you have the honour to be facing. Biga dared stick out his finger. I aimed and fired. First I could hear a short faint cry and

then a long loud laughter. I would think I had missed and the scoundrels were jibing me. But it turned out I had shot off Biga’s finger and he saw himself being mocked by his own soldiers.” Meanwhile, reinforcements came from Kakheti and the Didos had to leave Shenako ashamed.

Shete was hated in Dagestani and Dido villages. The local people used to scare children with his name. A legend says that once a Dido woman could not pacify her child and began to scare him with Shete. By coincidence, Shete was in the village at that time. When the child did not calm down, the mother stuck his head (some stories mention a hand) out of the window and shouted: “Shete, take him”. Shete suddenly hopped in, cut off the child’s hand, and hung it in his house among many other trophies.

At his blessed age Shete still took part in raids to Dagestani villages to steal horses, sheep or cattle. It is said he used to be rewarded by the Russian Government for his service on the frontier.

Based on various legends, Karpov, Yu. Yu.: Vzgljad na gortsev, vzglyad s gor, Saint Petersburg, 2007.

Basic Information about Tusheti

In his book of travels around Tusheti, Kakheti, Pshavi, and Khevsureti in 1841, Zubarev mentions that the main occupation of Tushs was sheep breeding and trade with highly valued wool used for production of rough fabric called *shali*. His estimates talk about herds of 100 thousand sheep (70 thousand today), about 4,000 cows and 2,000 horses. As to crops, Tushs

mainly grew barley, wheat, and rye. Milling grain in watermills represented a significant income for many of them. Watermills were located in the upper parts of water streams and their number was estimated at 175 in the half of the 19th century. A great number of farmers from Northern Kakheti used to come to these mills (Zubarev 1841).

Based on statistical data from 1886, there lived 5,708 inhabitants in 49 villages. An average family had about five members, i.e. 2–3 children. The current sources talk about approximately 8,000 members of the Tusheti community. The census from 1926 registered 5,383 Tushs, 1,738 of which living in the mountains in summer (time of census) and the rest living in the lowlands. Since shepherds from Kakheti Valley (except Alvani) and those from steppes near the border with Azerbaijan were not counted in the census, we may presume the total population of the Tushs was about 1–2,000 higher.

Number of Tushs based on census from 1873

(Radde, Gustav: Die Chews'uren und ihr Land — ein monographischer Versuch untersucht im Sommer 1876. Cassel: 1878.)

Tusheti. Total 5, 103 inhabitants (2,548 men and 2,555 women). Total 1, 113 households.

Pharsma. Total 550 inhabitants (290 men and 260 women). Pharsma 46 households, Baso 7, Girevi 24, Dakiurta 17, Nakudurta 5, Chontio 27, Hegho 7.

Dartlo. Total 526 inhabitants (251 men and 275 women). Dartlo 43 households, Dano 24, Kvalvo 16, Chesho 11, Chigho 27 (of which 1 Kist and 1 Khevsur household).

Omalo. Total 716 inhabitants (354 men, 362 women). Omalo 36 households, Ageurta 7, Bochorna 31, Diklo 21, Sabue 2, Chrdili 4, Shenako 42.

Natsikhari. Total 575 inhabitants (282 men, 293 women). Natsikhari 6 households, Zhvelurta 11, Kumelaurta 17, Khakhabo 22, Khiso 29, Tsokalta 10, Chiglaurta 14, Shtrolta 7.

Jvarboseli. Total 565 inhabitants (270 men, 295 women). Jvarboseli 32 households, Alisgori 7, Bikuurta 6, Vakisdziri 12, Vedziskhevi 10, Verkhovani 16, Gudanta 11, Dadikurta 14, Koklata 3, Tsikhe 5.

Indurta. Total 809 inhabitants (413 men, 396 women). Indurta 191 households (most people living in lowlands).

Sagirta. Total 717 inhabitants (372 men, 345 women). Sagirta 79 households, Tsaro 26, Etelta 48 (most people living in the lowlands).

Iliurta. Total 645 inhabitants (316 men, 329 women). Iliurta 25 households, Beghela 23, Bukhurta 6, Vestmo 14, Vestomtá 10, Gogrulta 19, Dochu 31, Sachigolo 8.

The Soviet Government manifested itself in Tusheti mainly from the second half of the 20's of the 20th century and complied with the Soviet policy towards small mountain regions and highland communities. Basic infrastructure, mainly schools, was built in Omalo and later in several other larger villages. The first school was opened in Omalo in 1928 and was followed by five more in Tusheti villages in the 30's (Mühlfried, Florian, 2014, p. 55). Under the leadership of Sergi Makalatia and Giorgi Bochoridze, first scientific research projects

relating to ethnography and history of the Tushs were conducted (Makalatia 1933; Bochoridze 1993). Emancipation of women and prohibition of the religious cult were also one of the goals of the Soviet Government. While women's rights were quite well observed as they could perform various types of work around the house on their own (because their men were grazing sheep in the mountains), religion was mainly supposed to be overcome through secular education. The process of collectivization in the 30's affected Tusheti particularly by prohibiting private

property (farmers only could keep 10 sheep, 5 cows, one horse, and a donkey or a mule). Nevertheless, Tusheti traditional farming apparently transformed into collective and state farming considerably fast. With respect to the need to graze sheep in pastures, no violent changes, such as demonstrative mass slaughter of livestock, took place.



Adam Bobghiashvili

More severe control of the mountain area was carried out during the Second World War. In contrast to other Caucasian nations (Chechens, Ingush, so called Meskhetian Turks), the Tushs avoided being deported. When the Soviet Union was attacked by Germany, Red Army units were sent to the region. Traces of their camps built against the alleged progress of the German Army and against the uprising under the command of Adam Bobghiashvili may still be found in form of depressions in Omalo, below the Keselo castle and on the sacred hillock. As locally perceived, for the sake of eliminating the backwardness and reactionary symbols and under the pretence of the progress of the German Army in 1942, the regime gradually destroyed a number of historic sites. One of the most severe losses was the destruction of Tusheti towers in Omalo or removal of the Stone Court in Dartlo, which was reconstructed as late as the beginning of the 21st century.

Apparently the most significant interference in the lives of Tushs, their traditions and dual farming split between the lowlands of Kakheti and the mountains of Tusheti, came at the turn of the 40's of the 20th century. This period was characterized with propaganda emphasizing advantageous life in the lowlands and hard life in the mountains. It said that dual farming obstructed the development of life in Tusheti. The real aim was to acquire total control of the mountain nations and the Caucasus. The people were forced to abandon their homes in the mountains and get accustomed to living in the lowlands all year long. The Georgian Soviet Government established agrarian colonies "with prospects" while people from regions "with no prospects" (i.e. also from Tusheti) were supposed to help industrialize the country. Thus, most villages in the mountains were depopulated, the houses dilapidated, and pastures abandoned and not grazed any more.

In the 50's, the inhabitants of Tusheti were forcibly expelled to the lowlands and a "standardized" village was established in Alvani. Omalo and other mountain villages were classified as "with no prospects" for future life and were supposed to be deserted. Although the basic infrastructure (such as schools, medical centre, or pharmacy) remained untouched, the people resigned to provide for any maintenance and proper supplies. At the end of the 50's, the school was closed down for pupils whose parents had permanent residency (*propiska*) in the lowlands. Despite the above-mentioned, people still used to return to Tusheti in the 60's, at least during religious holidays. It was when unofficial organizers of these events (called *shultas* in the local dialect) were annually appointed again. Yet, until the 70's the traditional Tusheti customs were on decline; the new generation did not know the life in the mountains as it used to be, with all its peculiarities, traditions, and rites. People forgot about the clan-based division of land, the differences between fields, meadows and pastures blurred. Moving sheep breeding to Kakheti also caused an ecological disaster for the lowlands that lacked rainwater supplies. The grazed slopes on the Kakheti side of the mountains were more affected by landslides. Moreover, the life in the lowlands and a more

intensive interaction with other inhabitants of Kakheti led to adoption of the local traditions. On the other hand, the ancient Tusheti dialect has been preserved, along with the peculiarities of the religion and the shrines, thanks to the annual rites held in Kakheti and Tusheti alone.



Omalo in 1970

The Georgian Soviet Government showed its interest in resettlement in the mountain areas of the Caucasus at the turn of the 60's and, little by little, the people were returning to Tusheti. In the 60's, it was not illegal any more to leave for the mountains and take part in religious festivals and perform rites. The process of resettlement in Tusheti was popularly depicted in the cult Soviet movie *Mimino* (i.e. "Falcon", or more precisely "Sparrow Hawk", 1977), which, however, contains a number of inaccurate ethnographic facts. The feature documentary *Shepherd of Tusheti* (Tushi Metskhvare, 1976) is more authentic, starring non-professional actors – shepherds. Appointment of Eduard Shevardnadze as the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party in 1972 became a symbol of Tusheti renaissance. He frequently visited Tusheti and supported the construction of the road that finally connected Omalo and Kakheti for motorized transport in 1981. In the 80's, there was a library in Omalo, as well as a medical centre provided with air medical services, a telegraph station (a remarkable landmark dominating Lower Omalo), and a nursery school. Tusheti was electrified at the

end of the 80's. A project of a new boarding school was launched but never completed due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and due to its proximity to the sacred Tsasne forest at the access road to Omalo. As a foothold for the army in the heart of the Caucasus, Tusheti had a potentially strategic character for both the Georgian and the Soviet Government.

POST-SOVIET TUSHETI

The fall of the Soviet Union represented another blow to the region. Until then relatively generous subsidies for Tusheti were discontinued, along with electricity supplies, road maintenance, or veterinary services in farming. Successively, the schools were closed down (the last pupil left in 2006), the medical centre was cancelled, the telegraph and helicopters died away, the state and collective farms were dissolved, the trade ceased, and the people were not given their pay any more. The existing economic system of local wool supplies mainly to the Soviet Army collapsed. The shepherds lost their traditional grazing land in Azerbaijan and Russian Dagestan. Upon the election of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, when Georgia was passing through the period of its actual non-existence as a state, the inhabitants of Tusheti and Alvani formed units of home defence protecting local communities against predatory raids of field commanders from the remaining territory of Georgia. The situation further aggravated with the war in neighbouring Chechnya. Russian aircrafts violated Georgian air space over Tusheti and in some parts interceptors and bombers dropped excessive ammunition. A considerably significant event was establishment of a monitoring point in Tusheti by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The mission succeeded in conducting several humanitarian and development projects in the region and providing for occasional helicopter connection with Kakheti. In 2006, however, the village council in Omalo was cancelled within the process of centralization in Georgia. The council had served as a self-governing body of Tusheti and maintained a sporadic unofficial contact with its neighbours in Dagestan. Both formally and informally it strived to sustain Tushetian traditions, negotiate with state bodies, and

maintain contact with traditional partners in the Northern Caucasus. Nevertheless, within the administrative reform in Georgia, all the respective powers were delegated to the Municipality of Akhmeta, where Tushs are negligibly represented. The crisis of relationships with Russia after 2003 (in particular following the expulsion of Russian spies from Georgia in 2006) entirely eliminated the hitherto existing off-the-record contact between Tusheti and Dagestan. In 2008, many Tusheti men participated in the war in South Ossetia (Giorgi Antsukhelidze being one of the heroes of modern history). Importantly, the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church Ilia II visited Tusheti in 2010 in order to support the influence of the Church in the mountain regions. It is estimated that approximately 12,000 people professed their Tush identity in 2013 (Mühlfried, Florian: op. cit. , p. 34).

Old Tushetian traditions have largely been forgotten, though, and a return to Tusheti and its old and often dilapidated houses was rather a return to a weekend house than anything else. Only the beginning of the 21st century saw first attempts of a systemic approach to development of tourism. The national park was designated and, with the support of generous grants from abroad (and initiative of several local inhabitants), some of the historic monuments were reconstructed, above all the old clan towers Keselo in Omalo. With the help of partners from the USA, the national park was furnished and a large tourist information centre was established. Since the end of the first decade of the new millennium, Tusheti has been experiencing a significant growth in tourism, having welcomed 12 thousand official visitors in 2016 (plus estimated 3–4 thousand unregistered visitors).

DESCRIPTION OF TUSHS (1834)

Based on: logann Blaramberg: Istoricheskoe, topograficheskoe, statisticheskoe, etnograficheskoe i voennoe opisaniie Kavkaza. 1834, pp. 388–394.

The Tushs neighbour with the tribes of Mychkyz (i.e. Chechens) in the north, with the Didos in the east, with the Pshavs and Khevsurs in the west, and with Kakheti in the south. The territory of Tusheti extends over an area of 35 versts in length and 35 versts in width, which is about 1,200 square versts.

The Tushs are divided into four main groups: I. Tsova, II. Gometsari, III. Chaghma, and IV. Pirikiti. The regions of Gometsari and Chaghma are the largest and it is where the Tush elders are usually selected from. The two other groups are mainly formed by the Kists, who came to settle in Tusheti long ago.

Tushs speak Georgian, their language being complemented by a number of words borrowed from other languages. The inhabitants of Tsovata and Pirikiti also speak a Kists dialect. All Tusheti is home to 962 families populating total 46 villages.

Clothing in Tusheti is sewn by women and is nearly equal to Georgian clothing differing in minor details.

Tusheti weapons are rifles, kinjals, swords, pistols, and even spears. Tushs are brave with a military spirit but rough and little civilized. In spite of this, they do not stick to their neighbours' habits of thefts and attacks but are hardworking and lead a happy life. They purely defend themselves against Dagestan and other enemies. Should any of the Tushs behave cowardly during the fights, he would only be allowed to eat from a dog's bowl and could not sit at the table with his fellow tribesmen. Breaching forbidden contact between the sexes is very rare. If a woman is subject to sexual violence, she shall commit a suicide and the offender is condemned to death and killed by his own people.

Before confinement the woman shall remain secluded from others. No one may approach her upon the birth of the child, only a few old women may bring her food. She may return from seclusion with her newborn 40 days later.

When a man dies, the entire territory declares three days of mourning. This is the time when all people refrain from any joy or entertainment. On the third day all relatives and friends pay last tribute to the deceased. When the funeral ceremonies finish, bareback horse races are held. The most valuable belongings of the deceased are brought on a top of a high rock where they wait as a prize for the winner of the race. In fact, the winner gets the most valuable thing while the others choose from the rest as they come to the finish.

As well as other Georgians, Tushs practice Orthodox Christianity and strongly adhere to it. Their priests are ignorant of the creed though and know very little about church services. They honour their churches.

Tusheti abounds with steep hills where the people come to worship Prophet Elijah [these are in fact shrines dedicated to various saints/deities] bringing cows and sheep as offerings. They pray and bow to the ground to worship these rocks as they believe they might fulfil their dreams. They ultimately believe all what their priests say. The Tushs who live closer to the tribes of Mychkyz are not that rough and their language and religious projections have changed with regard to their interaction with other tribes.

Once it was the Tushs who formed the units to protect the kings of Georgia as they enjoyed a reputation of brave people loyal to their lords.

In the past, Tushs were not growers at all because their land in the mountains is not favourable for such livelihood. They lately began to manage small pieces of arable land located on hillsides and in ravines. They grow garlic, barley, or millet, but with low yields. All their wealth is in livestock, particularly in sheep. They own about 2,000 horses, 4,000 cows, and 100,000 sheep. A single herd counts about 500–1,000 sheep, while more herds are sometimes joint counting 4–5 thousand animals. Pastures in Tusheti valleys are favourable and, in winter, the shepherds drive their

herds to the vast steppe plains in Karaiaz, in the vicinity of the village of Samukhi [author's note: Samukhi is another name for Eldari steppe near Dedoplistskaro; Karaiaz is actually located somewhere else where Tushs never drove their livestock]. This is why they are so loyal to the state. If they protested against the state, it could close their access to winter pastures.

In Kakheti, the Tushs exchange cheese and wool for grain, wine and other goods. The Tartars bring up to two thousand poodi of salt each year. The goods are traded in the Alvani Field, lying close to the river Iori [in fact Alazani]. For a unit of wool the Tushs usually get three units of salt. Their women produce soft flat shoes, felt, cloth, sacks and bags – these not for sale but only for their own need.

Since Tusheti is a mountainous region and hardly accessible for any means of transport, the inhabitants use horses and often mules loaded with their goods.

Tushs elect their commissioner from among significant princely or noble families of the Telavi area (in Kakheti) and the government gives them right of vote. Since the times of Georgian kings they have been really satisfied with some of the Georgian families, in particular with the noble family of Chelokaev [i.e. Cholokashvili]. Not only Tushs but also Pshavs elected their commissioner from the same family. As far as severe disputes among Tushs are concerned, these are to be settled in the Alazani or Miravali Field, where elders and the commissioner meet for judgment. Criminal deeds are subject to judgement in Telavi.

(orig. transl. from Russian into Czech by Slavomír Horák)



Lowland-type house in Khiso

Architecture

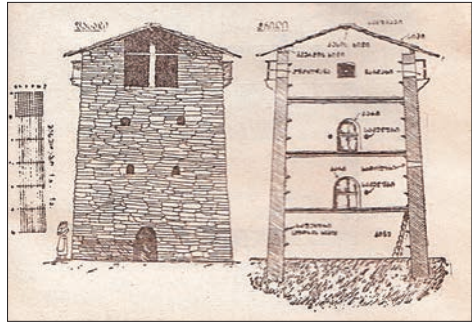
Architecture in Tusheti is diverse and mainly involves remnants of clan defence towers from the 17th–18th century, rural buildings from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, and shrines that can hardly be dated. Archaeological findings from a more distant past only include graves, remains of shrines or petroglyphs. The architecture generally resembles that of the surrounding regions of Khevsureti and Pshavi in today's Georgia or Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan in the Northern Caucasus, where Tusheti geographically belongs. In some villages we may even find preserved churches, namely those from the Orthodox Mission built in the 19th century.

CLAN AND DEFENCE TOWERS

Clan towers represent one of the fundamental types of Tusheti architecture, as is the case in other parts of the Caucasus. These could serve for dwelling or defence, or both at the same time. The layout was typically square and symmetric and the towers reached the height of minimum three, but mostly four or five floors. Tiny narrow windows were used for ducting smoke from open fires and mainly as loop holes in time of menace. The walls were usually smoothed as not to allow for any climbing and no wooden parts could stick out of the tower to prevent setting the tower on fire. The main entrance was commonly at the height of the first floor while livestock had access at the ground. In case of defence, these openings were blocked by a huge special stone from the inside.

We differentiate two types of towers in Tusheti (see the pictures). In the valleys of Pirikiti and Chaghma there are mostly stand-alone slender tall towers of 5–6 floors topped with a pyramidal roof. Use of simple mortar provided for rigidity and slenderness of the tower (in contrast to other types of towers which were built dry stone). Bracket projections (analogues of machicolation in Western Medieval architecture) were placed on the top floor under the roof for defence. This type of towers, also characteristic for Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Khevsureti, mainly served for defence and may be found, for example, in the villages of Dartlo, Kvallo, Chontio, or Girevi.

Towers of the second type were built on a larger foundation and were typically smaller (3–4 floors) but more robust. They have a saddle roof, again featuring machicolation on the top floor, although not necessarily on all sides. The towers were built using a dry stone technique with no use of mortar. This architecture you may primarily see in the Gometsari region, while the most significant landmark of the type called Fort Keselo (the word Keselo means “strong”) is to be found in Upper Omalo. It is located on a hardly accessible hill protected from one side by a steep drop to the Gometsari Alazani and from the other side by a steep hillside over a small plain with the today's village, where some little remains of the fortification have been preserved. Under the ground there is a 120 m long tunnel that used to serve for water supply (ruined and not accessible today). There used to be similar forts in Tsovata



Two main types of towers in Tusheti

Valley and stand-alone towers also in other villages in Chaghma and Gometsari valleys. These towers were practically impregnable and the only way was to let the defenders starve and steal the livestock that the tower could not hold.

The ground floor or underground space (*bashte*) was determined for storage or livestock (in some cases even for mothers giving birth), while other floors (*shua* – middle floor with a kitchen, *zedashua* – upper floor) served for the family. The top floor (*cherkho*, typically only for men) was meant for defence and observations. Individual floors were built of wooden beams placed on the inner projections of the tower. No wooden part could stick out of the tower to prevent the enemies from setting it on fire. The floors were typically made of clay, except the ground floor, which was composed of stone tiles. Each floor had open fire in the centre (*kera*), which separated the men's area from the zone for women. As men spent most of their time out of home, their section was less in use and thus served for male visits or other purposes.

Tushs began to move to their new comfortable houses as late as the half of the 19th century, when the situation in the Caucasus stabilized. The architecture of such houses was influenced by Kakheti lowlands. It respects the local construction materials – stone and timber. The houses usually have two floors with a stone foundation. Despite mortar being used as bonding material today, the traditional technique was dry stone. The flat stones were sometimes decorated with petroglyphs. The ground floor is commonly used for stables and

for storage, today even for a kitchen and food supplies. The upper floor is built on wooden beams with wooden flooring. It is mainly a place of living and individual rooms are open to a wooden veranda, traditionally decorated with ornamental carvings. The roof is also made of wooden beams covered with slate. The ridge of the roof is traditionally weighted with white stones. Upper Omalo, Dartlo, and Diklo have become typical villages with prevailing constructions of this kind. The architecture contrasts with the fortified village called Dzveli Galavani ("old walls") and in tourist guides referred to as Dzveli Diklo, which lies on the promontory above the Tusheti Alazani (about 2 km on a yellow trail). The tradition of carefully selecting the place for the construction of a new house was still followed in the 19th century. Such a place could not be "stained" with bad events or evil spirits. Last but not least, an important role played the dream the future owner of the house had having spent a night on the spot.

SHRINES AND OTHER PLACES

Apart from towers and dwelling houses, shrines *khati* (in Georgian literally "icon"), *salotsavi* ("place of prayer"), or *jvari* (literally "cross"), represented key constructions in the villages. The actual difference between individual terms is not explicit as more names are often used for a single structure. The term *salotsavi* is generally used for any sacred place in the village and its surroundings. The terms *khati* and *jvari* are used for several types of shrines with particular architecture and point at two main attributes



Khati

(icon and cross respectively), which are not present in many of the traditional shrines, though. Other attributes include a banner, a bell, or a candle (Mühlfried 2014, p. 71). There usually used to be several shrines in a village. These were mostly minor stone structures with a niche on one side for an icon or candles. Some shrines are further decorated with horns of the Caucasian Tur or the Wild Goat, with white stones, or images from mythology. They hence represent a mixture of Christian saints (Mariamtsminda in Omalo, Giorgitsminda in Pharsma, etc.) or their names refer to pre-Christian deities (Iakhsari, Karate, Kopala) (Grigolia 1939, p. 21). Besides serving as a place of festive ceremonies, offerings, prayers, and other rites, they also witnessed initiation ceremonies welcoming new members in the community, in some cases also settlements of disputes within the village, or even welcoming foreigners. Most of the shrines are not accessible for women during their period (young girls and elderly women could theoretically visit the place but Tusheti women usually avoid this). The rule also applies to

tourists. In other areas you may find sacred places devoted purely to women, but these are mostly more remote from common tourist trails (e.g. Tursiekhi in Omalo).

From the 19th century, the Orthodox Church built churches in the region making efforts to spread its influence to the mountains. These churches may be found today in the upper part of Omalo, in Shenako, Iliurta, or Natsikhari. The church in Dartlo is ruined but still considered a sacred place (*salotsavi*). The church in Bochorna has been reconstructed.

On the peripheries of some villages, there used to be places serving for meetings of elders or for settling disputes and accusations (*saphrindao* or *sabcheo*). One of such places has been reconstructed in Dartlo. Meetings of representatives of all the villages in Tusheti were held in main secular or sacred places in Tusheti. Among secular places we have to mention Ghele in the pass between Omalo and Dartlo, while the key sacred shrine of the region is Lashari above Chigho.

Tusheti mountains are characteristic with local migration in summer and winter. In winter time, when the people were not jeopardized by raids, they moved to their winter homes (*boslebi*, literally “cowshed”) on plains and hillsides. The houses were built on plains close to fields or pastures and lacked any major fortification. They are mostly abandoned and ruined today (e.g. Lashkaraulta on the hillside opposite Gogruлта). Some of the *boslebi* were later transformed into villages (e.g. Lower Omalo) and some are still partly used (Shenako). In summer, the Tush migrated to safer and well-fortified villages.



Saphrindao in Dartlo

List of Tusheti Shrines

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TUSHETI MAIN SHRINE

- 1) The shrine of Lashari (ღაშარის ჭვარი) in the village of Chigho

I. PIRIKITI VALLEY

A) Samtsikhe commune (სამციხის თემი)

a) Chigho

- 1) The shrine of Kavtar Khagiri (ქავთარ ჭავჭავის საღვთავე)
- 2) The shrine of Karate (კარატის ჭვარი)
- 3) The shrine of Holy Mary (მარიამწმინდა)
- 4) The shrine of Tevdore (თევდორეწმინდა)
- 5) The niche of Kavtar, Sajare (ქავთარის ნიში, საჯარე)

b) Dartlo

- 1) The shrine of Iakhsar (იაჰსარის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Lord Maghaloeli (ბატონი მაღალოელის ხატი)
- 3) The shrine of Karate (კარატის ჭვარი)
- 4) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატის ჭვარი)

- 5) The shrine of Holy Mary (მარიამწმინდა)

c) Kvavlo

- 1) The shrine of Khakha (ხახა)
- 2) „Between the crosses“, the shrine of St. George (ჭვართშუა, წმინდა გიორგის ხატი)
- 3) „By the jvari“ (ჭვართანა)
- 4) „By the place for the drosha“ (სადროშაშენი)
- 5) „By the place [used for] ending of the fast“ (მარხვასაჰსნეღთანა)

d) Dano

- 1) The shrine of St George of the Mountain of the [Water] Spring (წმინდა გიორგი წყაროგორისა)
- 2) The Ashto shrine of Archangels Michael and Gabriel (აშტო მიქელ-გაბრიელ მთავარანგელოზი)
- 3) The shrine of Karate (კარატის ჭვარი)
- 4) The New Shrine (ახალი ჭვარი)

B) Aghma commune (აღმის თემი)

a) Chesho

- 1) The shrine of Michael-Gabriel (მიქელ-გაბრიელის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Kopala the Hero (გმირ-კოპალას ხატი)
- 3) The shrine of St George (წმინდა გიორგის ხატი)
- 4) The shrine of Iakhsar (იაჰსარის ჭვარი)

b) Pharsma

- 1) The shrine of Karate (კარატის ჭვარი)
- 2) The shrine of St Theodor (წმინდა თევდორეს ხატი)
- 3) The shrine of St Nino (წმინდა ნინოს ხატი)
- 4) The shrine of St George (წმინდა გიორგის ხატი)

- 5) The shrine of Sagintskaro Spring (საგინტყაროს ხატი)

c) Girevi

- 1) The shrine of Tsiete (წიეთეს ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Holy Mary (მარიამწმინდის ხატი)
- 3) The shrine of Azikuri family (აზიკურების საღოცავი)
- 4) The shrine of Kopala (კოპალას ხატი)

d) Chontio

- 1) The shrine of Madoli (მადოლის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Tursiekhi (თურსიეხი)

e) Hegho

- 1) The shrine of St John the Baptist (ივანე ნათლისმცემლის ხატი)

II. CHAGHMA VALLEY

A) Chanchakhovani commune

(ჭანჭახოვანის თემი)

a) Khiso

- 1) The shrine of St George of Khakha (ხახას წმინდა გიორგის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Karate (კარატე)
- 3) The shrine of Khakhmati (ჭაჭმატის ჯვარი)
- 4) The shrine of Chikhale (ჭიხალე)
- 5) The shrine of Lekovani (ლევოვანი)
- 6) The shrine of Tursiekhi (თურსიეხი)

b) Shtrolta

- 1) The shrine of David Mukhrovani (დავით მუხროვნის ჯვარი)
- 2) The shrine of Giorgi Balaurti (გიორგი ბაღაურთისა)
- 3) The *sadekao* (stand, post) of the Khevsurs, „the shrine for the Khevsurs“ (ჟევსურთ სადგეჟო, საჯევსურო)

- 4) The shrine of St George of the Spring (გიორგი წყაროთავისა)

c) Zhvelurta

- 1) The shrine „for the Khevsurs“, the shrine of Khakhmati (საჯევსურო, ჯაჭმატი)
- 2) The shrine of Karate (კარატე)
- 3) The place by the Upper Shrine (ზეჯვართანა)
- 4) The shrine of the Lord Between-the-mountains (ბატონი შუამთიერის ხატი)

d) Natsikhari

- 1) The shrine „for the Khevsurs“, the shrine of Khakhmati (საჯევსურო, ჯაჭმატი)
- 2) The shrine named after Khakha (ხახას სახელობისა)

e) Chiglaurta

- 1) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატის ჯვარი)
- 2) The place for the sacred banner – *drosha* (დროშათ საბრძანი)
- 3) The shrine of the cows (ძრახების საღოცავი)
- 4) The shrine of Karate (კარატეს ჯვარი)
- 5) The shrine „in the middle of the flat field“ (შუვაკე)

f) Khakhabo (Khakhabu)

- 1) The shrine of Kerelovani (ქერელოვნის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Trinity of Kekhi (სანება კეხისა)
- 3) The shrine of Michael of Khogori (მიქელ ხოგორისა)
- 4) The shrine of Trinity (სანების ხატი)

B) Chaghma commune (ჩაღმის თემი)

a) Omalo

- 1) The shrine of Archangels Michael and Gabriel (მთავარანგელოზის მიქელ-გაბრიელის ხატი)

- 2) The shrine of Holy Mary (მარიამწმინდის ხატი)

b) Shenako

- 1) The shrine of Lord of Kurekhi (ბატონი კურეხელი)
- 2) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატის ჯვარი)
- 3) The „shrine of garlic“ (ნივრის ხატი) [shrine shared with Diklo]
- 4) The niche of Lashari (ღაშარის ნიში)
- 5) Shenako’s Trinity shrine (სანება შენაქოსი)
- 6) The shrine of Holy Mary (მარიამწმინდის ხატი)
- 7) The niche of Karate (კარატის ნიში)
- 8) The shrine of Tsasne (წასნეს ხატი)
- 9) The shrine of Trinity (სანების ხატი)
- 10) The shrine of Tamar (თამარის ხატი)
- 11) The dry stone wall [kore], „for throwing down of men“ (კაცების გადასაგდენი ყორე)

c) Diklo

- 1) The shrine of Bichekhi (ბიჭების ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Karate (კარატის ჯვარი)
- 3) The shrine of Trinity (სანების ხატი)
- 4) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატის ჯვარი)
- 5) The shrine of Tursiekhi (თურსიეხი)
- 6) The shrine of St George of Didkalto (დიდკალთოს წმინდა გიორგის ხატი)

d) Kumelaurta

- 1) The shrine of Khakhmati (ჟაჟმატის ჯვარი)

e) Bochorna

- 1) The shrine of St George (წმინდა გიორგის ხატი)

- 2) The shrine of Khurkhi (ჟურჟვის ჯვარი)

- 3) The niche of the first Sunday after Easter (კვირადაცხოვდის ნიში)

- 4) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატითონი)

- 5) The quartz stone [khinchrikva] atop Bochorna (ხინჭრიკვა ბოჭორნის თავისა)

III. GOMETSARI VALLEY

A) Gometsari commune (გომეწწრის თემი)

a) Alisgori

- 1) The shrine of Lord Iakhsar (ბატონი იაჟსარი)
- 2) The shrine of Karate (კარატიონი)
- 3) The shrine of Holy Mary (მარიამწმინდის ხატი)

b) Dadikurta

- 1) The shrine “by the Cross” of Batontsvareli (ჯვართანას ბატონცვარიელის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of the Angel (ანგეღობთავი)
- 3) The shrine of the “tower-climbing” Angel (კოშკიცილოცავი ანგეღობის ჯვარი)

c) Jvarboseli

- 1) The castle of the sacred banner – drosha (სადროშე ციხე)
- 2) The shrine of St George of Khitana (ხითანას წმინდა გიორგის ჯვარი)
- 3) The shrine of Holy Mary, Mary Mother of God (მარიამწმინდა, დედა მარიამ ხვთიშობელი)
- 4) The shrine of Ber-Baaduri (ბერ–ბაადური)
- 5) The shrine of St Theodor atop Jvarboseli (თევეღორე ჯვარბოსღის თავისა)

d) Koklata

- 1) The seat of the Cross (i.e. Deity) (ჯვარსასხღომი)

- 2) The shrine of Javakhe (ჯავახე)
- 3) The shrine of Karate (კარატე)
- 4) The shrine of Khakhmati (ჯაჯმატი)
- 5) The shrine of the Lord Archangel (ბატონი მთავარანგელოზის ხატი)

e) Verkhovani

- 1) The shrine of Karate (კარატიონი)
- 2) The shrine of St George of Khakhmati (გიორგი ხახმატისა)

f) Gudanta

- 1) The shrine of Trinity (სანება)
- 2) The shrine of Trinity atop Gudanta (სანება გუდანთის თავისა)
- 3) The shrine of Sakheo (საჯეო)
- 4) The shrine of Khakhmati (ჯაჯმატი)

g) Bikiurta

- 1) The shrine of the Archer (იხრიეღის ხატი) [shrine shared with neighbouring Vakisdziri]

B) Ivaneurta commune

(ივანურთის თემი)

a) Dochu

- 1) The shrine of St George the Swarthy, of Kopala (წმინდა გიორგი შავგვრემანისა, კოპალას ხატი)
- 2) The niche of Khakhmati (ხახმატის ნიში)
- 3) The niche of Karate (კარატეს ნიში)
- 4) The shrine of Holy Mary (მარიამწმინდის ხატი)

b) Gogrulta

- 1) The shrine of „Upper Khakha“ (ზედჯაჯა)
- 2) The shrine of „Lower Khakha“ (ქვედჯაჯა)
- 3) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატის ჯვარი)
- 4) The shrine of Karate (კარატის ჯვარი)

- 5) The shrine “by the castle” (ციხეთანა)

c) Sachigholo

- 1) The shrine of St George (გიორგი წმინდის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of Khakhmati (ჯაჯმატი)

d) Vestomta

- 1) The shrine of Jesus the Saviour (იესო მაცხოვრის ხატი)
- 2) The shrine of the Carefree Archangel (ღალ-მთავარი ანგელოზი)
- 3) The shrine of the Mother of God (ღვთისმშობლის ხატი)
- 4) The shrine „for the Khevsurs“ (საჯეგსურთ)
- 5) The shrine of Sakhare (საჯარე)

e) Iliurta

- 1) The shrine of Karate (კარატეს ჯვარი) [shrine shared with Bukhurta]
- 2) The shrine of Mtsvaki Hill (მწვავის გორის სარცავი)
- 3) The shrine of “Court of Cross” (ჯვარისკარის ხატი)

f) Bukhurta

- 1) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატი)

g) Vestmo

- 1) The shrine of Khakhmati (ხახმატიონი)
- 2) The shrine “by the Cross”, of Mother Holy Mary (ჯვართანა, დედა მარიამწმინდა)

IV. TSOVATA

a) Mozarta & Indurta

- 1) The shrine of Kopala (კოპალა)
- 2) The shrine of St John the Baptist (ივანე ნათლისმცემლის ხატი)
- 3) The shrine of Mary Mother of God (მარიამ ღვთისმშობლის ხატი)

- 4) The shrine of Old Trinity (ბერძნული სამების ხატი)
- 5) The shrine of St George (წმინდა გიორგის ხატი)

b) Tsaro

- 1) The niche of Old Trinity (ბერძნული სამების ნიში)

PETROGLYPHS

On the walls of the houses, on towers, or sacred constructions, we may find engraved graffiti and stone inscriptions – petroglyphs. These mostly depict mythological characters or events. In some places, such as Dartlo, we may also see Arabic inscriptions or common life scenes (hunting, farming, etc.).

Yet, most of these are scenes from Tushetian mythology, frequently representing the duality of the world, very typical for the traditional (and modern) Tushetian culture. Symbolic are images of a person with the arms wide open and precisely halved. Being present in many places it mirrors the division of the world. We may repeatedly see the motif of Saint George on his horse and protective God's hands. Images of circles also symbolize our world, whether jeopardized by chaos from outside or protected by God's might (hands, a horse rider)



Petroglyphs in Dartlo

Tusheti religion and philosophy

Prior to defining some of the principles of the Tusheti society that might concern visitors, it is important to understand their cause. The Tusheti system of traditions and various social customs arises from an elaborated system of creeds and mythology of Tusheti and mountain nations of the Caucasus in general.

Although Tushs are Orthodox Christians, namely practitioners of the Georgian Orthodox Church, their creed is largely syncretic with merging Christian and pre-Christian elements and marginally Islam under the influence of the neighbouring Muslim communities (similar creeds were professed by the neighbouring Khevsurs, Pshavs, and, until the 19th century, even by highlanders from Ingushetia, Chechnya, and previously certain areas in Dagestan). Based on the key denomination of a shrine or deity (*jvari*, literally “cross”, the Czech Caucasologist Václav A. Černý promoted a term *jvarism* for such religion).

Christianity as such formally spread in the region in the 8th–9th century. Until then the people in the region worshipped various deities that had descended on earth in certain places where we can usually find shrines, churches or places with strong energy. Following the Mongolian raids in the 13th century, the mountainous areas were secluded from lowlands and the people partly reassumed their pre-Christian customs, which, however, already incorporated Christian saints and monarchs (above all Queen Tamar).

The term *jvari* as such (besides its Georgian meaning as a “cross”) frequently denotes energy, light or deity which symbolize victory or fulfilled prayers. *Jvari* has its own God's children (*ghtishvili* in singular form) who have human features. The *ghtishvili* fights evil demon (*devi*) in order to hand the gained earth over to people (Kiknadze, 1996). In this system people are servants of God (*saq'mo*) and only the chosen ones (*kadagi* in singular form) can speak for *jvari*. Simultaneously, the *ghtishvilis* keep order and defend against Chaos (Kohoutková 2008, p. 29). These God's sons involve pre-Christian heroes of Tusheti mythology, such as Karate, Kopala, or



Mythological image from Pharsma

lakhsar, Jesus Christ named hero Kviria, Virgin Mary, and other Christian saints, mainly Saint George, Saint Nino, and saint kings and queens, above all Queen Tamar and her son Lasha Giorgi. Still, the Christian origin of the names is mixed with pre-Christian substance. All the deities have their dedicated shrines (*khati*) all over Tusheti, often located in areas of previously worshipped pre-Christian deities. The shrine of Lashari, named after Queen Tamar's son Lasha Giorgi, located in the vicinity of Chigho, is the most significant shrine of all Tusheti. *Khati* represents a dwelling place of *jvari*. That is why the shrines are only accessible for the chosen ones and the *ghtishvilis* only appear in the presence of the selected guards of the shrine (*khelosani*) since the world of God and the world of humans may not easily be interconnected. Without help people can neither find the place of dwelling of *jvari* (i.e. the place where a shrine – *khati* – is to be erected). The *ghtishvilis* never appear in front of the people directly in their real form but they act indirectly through various types of manifestations (fiery balls and similar). The place of *khati* may be indicated by a bird, or a chosen or possessed person (*mkadri* or *kadagi* respectively).

The Tusheti religion and mythology are strongly influenced by dualism with emphasis on harmony of two opposite principles. There is Order on one side, being kept through harmony between the rational and spiritual world. Any violation of this harmony may result in Chaos. This implies the traditional rigorous division of the roles of men and women in the Tushetian society (apparent also in other Northern Caucasus mountainous nations). This explains

why, for example, women (or “impure” women, i.e. in their period from their youth to menopause) have no access to shrines (*jvari*) in order not to defile the sacred land. Such defilement could disrupt the connection between *khati* that protects the community and the heaven. Shrines for women (*khati*) are also frequently dedicated to pre-Christian deities, e.g. Tursiekhi or Samdzimari. The latter is a typical representative of religious syncretism in Tusheti (and generally in mountainous) mythology. Legend holds that this was a daughter of the king of evil spirits (*kaji* in singular form) whom Saint George took to wife and installed her among gods. For this reason, Samdzimari is being associated with both pagan and Christian traditions. Among women she is worshipped as an enchantress (sometimes good, sometimes demonized) and a foreteller, while the results of prayers to her may turn out to be largely uncertain.

Dualism is also manifested in the view on life of man or in the creation, existence or end of the world. All is concisely depicted in one of the petroglyphs in Pharsma, interpreted by Tusheti ethnologist Nugzar Idoizde. There are two heads on the left of the image symbolizing multiple levels. The upper head may refer to the male principle, the good, or heaven (the upper world), angel, rationality, mountain areas, or consciousness. The lower head refers to the female principle, the evil, the hell (the lower world), the devil/dragon, emotionality, lowlands, or subconsciousness. As the heads are of approximately the same size, they represent harmony of the otherwise opposite principles. The locals perceive it as efforts to reach balance

between a man and a woman and equally clear distinction between their roles. Men, for example, traditionally did not look after livestock while women did not graze sheep.

Despite the above mentioned, both principles interacted as shown in the first intersection of both symbols. In farming, males and females traditionally used to meet during field work carried out jointly. In Tushetian games men used to “fight” women and such interaction gave rise to new life fundamentals and new worlds. In one of the games, women were allowed to kidnap a man from another village and request ransom. This event was concluded with a common feast of both villages at the cost of the kidnapped. During festive events men and women would also run around and even fight, which also typically ended with affirming the mutual friendship at a common feast. It may have resulted in a rite of establishing brotherhood during feasts and on festive occasions. Similarly, men and women interacted during dance events. Although they danced without touching each other, there was a symbolic blend of the sexes.

As the two opposed principles clash (good-bad, man-woman, rationality-emotionality, heaven-hell, etc.) they generate energy that, among others, gave rise to our world (symbolized by the target). Finally, life also comes into existence by interaction between the worlds of men and women. This energy may give life while its disappearance, on the contrary, may lead to Chaos and the end of life or the world. Life (i.e. interpreted as Order) ends with the appearance of the forces of Chaos (in the image the forces are characterized by a symbol located out of the lines and beyond framework of our world). The harmony between the physical and spiritual parts of man is disrupted. The world may see its end in an equal manner when penetrated by the forces of Chaos. The end of the world is symbolized when the two lines intersect for the second time and come into disorder.

Despite being part of the world and influenced by its duality, man can actively distort it. In a small ethnographic museum in one of the towers of Keselo upon Upper Omalo, you may find a quotation by a local from 1934, when the first plane flew over Tusheti. The statement of

the humble shepherd implies that rationality may prevail in man, which may lead to disturbance of the harmony in a strongly dualistic world. There is a prediction of potential abuse of technical inventions or significant predominance of the reason over the spiritual or emotional side of life. This can further lead to Chaos and even a disaster, which people are capable of causing to the world and themselves.

Individual parts of the dual world are not entirely separated but there are a number of connections between them. For example, Tushetian philosophy mentions a cult of *ekhi*, which materializes the connection between the lower and our world. This connection is portrayed as grass growing from soil in spring. Its roots still stay underneath the ground (i.e. in the lower world) while the stalks grow above ground. The cult of *ekhi* also relates to the annual cycle of driving sheep to the mountains (our world) in spring and back to the lowlands (symbol of the lower world) in autumn. Among other reasons, this is why the mountain areas of Tusheti have always been considered sacred, representing an ideal world. *Ekhi* may be both good (giving life) and bad (evil spirits of the lower world). In practice, the evil spirits may obstruct finding a lost thing in our world. To symbolically discontinue the link between the two worlds when looking for the lost thing, we may bundle a turf of grass and weight it with a stone (symbol of imperviousness). The lost thing should appear somewhere in a while.

The sun is also one of the pre-Christian symbols with its important place in Tusheti philosophy and, in the practice of cult, also in the year cycle. The God, represented by the sun, dies every year and is brought to life again each winter solstice in order to come to the earth surface again in form of grass in March (around the spring solstice, which corresponds Persian influence). Summer festive events of *atnigenoba* thus symbolize seeing off the God of the Sun on his death way towards the end of the cycle. In spring, on the day of the spring equinox (i.e. return of the sun), women bake sun-shaped pancakes and put them behind the window to absorb the energy of the new sun.

Code of behaviour

Tushetian philosophy, religious traditions and mythology imply a number of practical rules and code of behaviour towards each other and towards guests and foreigners. Every visitor to the region should be well acquainted with these rules and respect them. In practical life, it mainly involves the **division into male and female principles**. It is not appropriate to get offended about some of the restrictions for women and it is useless to give the locals lessons on gender equality. Men and women are equal to each other as understood in Tusheti dualism; however, their life roles are perceived as two distinct principles. The following lines thus give a brief survey of the most significant traditions, restrictions, and directions that also apply to tourists. If visitors adhere to these and behave appropriately when reminded of the breach (although unintentional), they will be treated as respected guests. Nevertheless, should anybody violate the local principles and traditions, still being under the protection of the village they cannot expect any warm approach.

SACRED PLACES

In a number of places in Tusheti we may come across sacred places, often small shrines (*khati*), but also churches or their remnants. With regard to the above-mentioned division into a female and male principle in Tusheti mythology, these shrines are also determined only for men or women. Around villages we can primarily find shrines for men. Hence, women shall not

approach these in order not to defile the place and not to disrupt the harmony between the two dual principles, which would lead to Chaos. The shrines may merely be approached by girls before their first period or women after menopause. Due to the complexity of these rules, female foreigners are advised not to approach these shrines at any case. If a shrine is fenced, this shall not be accessed by anyone but knowledgeable servants of *khati* (*khevisberi*). One of the notable places that women should not get closer to are the **ruins of the church in Dartlo** or a small **shrine on the ridge of the Keselo castle upon Upper Omalo**. It is also prohibited to remove anything from the shrines, whether offerings or any other items freely placed inside or even in the vicinity. These offerings are inseparable part of the shrines and property of those who the shrine was dedicated to.

SEGREGATED SEATING FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Such segregation used to be unequivocal while today we may see men and women sitting at one table, even though frequently at different sides. The rigorous division of tables into those for men and those for women may be seen during traditional events, such as weddings, funerals or remembrance of the deceased, or at banquets during religious festivals. It is unconditionally indispensable to respect the place being given by the hosts. Without particular consent, women may not visit the men's part of the banquet (and vice versa). This behaviour would be considered disruption of the dualistic harmony.



Holy place signs in Omalo

MENSTRUAL CYCLE

During their period women shall not appear in places of food storage, in breweries (typically a small structure located in the village, in Upper Omalo next to Hotel Omalo). In such time, the woman shall not appear at any public gathering or in a church, even if she were generally allowed to approach (e.g. the church in Upper Omalo).

PORK MEAT

Pork meat is considered impure by Tushs (probably under the influence of the neighbouring Muslim tribes and since pig breeding in the mountains encompasses higher risks). In spite of the fact that pigs are kept and consumed in Tusheti villages of Alvani or Laliskuri, the Tusheti mountains are considered sacred and pure (symbol of our world) in contrast to the impure lowlands. In the past, Tushs even used to change their shoes made of pig skin for any other material when entering Tusheti through the pass. Those were left there and recollected on the way back.

HOSPITALITY

Visitors will enjoy people's hospitality in any parts of Georgia but hosts are particularly warm in Tusheti. The locals understand a visit as a good sign. This is why guests would greet "*Aka mshvidoba*" (peace to this home) when entering the hosts' house. The hosts would respond "*Ghmertma mshvidoba mogtses*" (let the God give peace to you). A toast to peace is then one of the main parts of the meeting. A guest, especially from a foreign country, may be

perceived as a particularly powerful blessing and the level of hospitality may correspond. It is hence desirable and polite to accept the invitation but it is not needed to remain with the hosts for long. Time is valuable in Tusheti as in any other part of the world and as such is usually respected (see *Banquets and toasts* below).

RIDING HORSES IN VILLAGES

Hospitality also relates to riding a horse through a village. If you rent a horse, it is a good custom (although not always strictly followed) to dismount before entering the village. Nobody considers a horse rider an enemy or a sign of a threat today, but the local guides still commonly adhere to this tradition. The rule may not apply to the locals who are at home in the village and are well known to the others.

BANQUETS AND TOASTS

As is the case in other Georgian regions, Tushs follow the traditions of toasts (*sadghegrdzelo*) and receptions (*suphra*). Traditional subjects of toasts are meeting new people, ancestors, nature, or Tusheti as such. Some toasts are to living persons, above all recognized inhabitants of the village, to guests, or to women. Foreigners usually make a mistake of trying to finish the glass in one gulp as is expected from the main person at the table. It is usually accepted when you only drink a part or even symbolically. Despite this, some toasts are to be "no heeltaps" (particularly those to ancestors and women), which is preset by the leader of the banquet (*tamada*).



Reception: „© Shalva Alkhanadze. On the Road to Tusheti (1955–75). Courtesy: Tbilisi Photo Festival“

Festivals and rites

Festivals play an important part in the life of Tushs. Traditionally, they delimited certain periods in the farming cycle and used to have a considerable religious undertone. During the Soviet period of the 50–70's of the 20th century, when most of the Tushetian population remained in the lowlands even in summer, summer festivals stood for the main motives for the return to the mountains. At present, annual celebrations serve for renewal and affirmation of mutual relationships in the village and, in some cases, e.g. in abandoned villages of Tsovata, they are a unique opportunity for gatherings in the mountains. In contrast, winter festivals are rather celebrated in a Georgian style or are celebrated in lowlands in various modified forms.

ATNIGENOBA

This festival is the most important and, for tourists who come in the right time, also the most visible one in the summer season. Traditionally, it was celebrated before the beginning of autumn work (haymaking, preparations for winter), 100 days after Easter. The entire festival takes about two weeks and takes place on different days in different villages. The main festive day is preceded by several weeks of preparations. In each village there is one person responsible for the organization (*shulta*), selected by the community for the entire year and also working as a servant at the shrines (*jvaris kma*). His main task is to brew beer (*aludi*) for all the festival and prepare the banquet. The brewery is considered a sacred place and is not accessible for women during their period (i.e. only young girls and elderly women are allowed to enter). *Shulta* usually has several people at hand. The spiritual part of the festival is provided for by the guard of the shrine – (priest of local syncretic religion called *khelosani*) who carries the banner out of the shrine, blesses the cauldron with beer and performs religious tasks. Until the 19th century, these guards often came from the neighbouring Khevsureti and moved to Tusheti for the festivals. A few days before the festival, *shulta*, his helpers and more significant men in the village meet at



Dgheoba celebration in Omalo

a sacred place to sacrifice a sheep or a ram. During this rite men stay awake, pray and toast. Loud calls of “*stskalobdes*” (“Let the God bless the work”) are heard from the place. This call actually accompanies the entire festival. The blood from the sacrificed animal has purifying effects. That is why, on some festive occasions a Christian priest makes a cross on the foreheads of the believers with his finger dipped in the animal’s blood.

On the main day of the festival (*dgheoba*), there is a joint prayer held at the shrine or local churches (Omalo, Shenako, Iliurta, etc.). It is when invited monks and priests appear in Tusheti. The feast climax is the afternoon reception (*suphra*) prepared by *shulta*, his family and other helpers. In Tsovata, they call the feast *dadaloba*, which is probably a compound word from Bats term “*dal*” (“God”) and Georgian suffix *oba* (among others standing for “event”). This part of the festival – the feast – may be seen by visitors most often and part of Tushetian hospitality is to invite even unknown guests to the table. The meat from the sacrificed animal is a must on the banquet table whether roasted or, more frequently, boiled (*khashlama*). Women (in some cases also men) bring their musical instruments, and toasts are alternated with music and dance. *Tamada*, the chief of the banquet, determines the set of toasts

(*sadghegrdzelo*) and possibly gives the floor to others to have their own toast. The second day after the main banquet the feast is usually ended with another reception, for which *khinkali* are prepared (*khinkaloba*).

Horse races are integral part of celebrations in many communities. They are attractive especially in valleys where riders cross the rivers (Girevi, Tsovata). Horse races in Omalo are usually part of festival *tushetoba* (see below). Traditional *korbeghela* is held in other places. During this rite men from the village make a circle, holding tight their waists or shoulders. Other men jump on them forming a human pyramid and the circle turns around towards the village shrine, accompanied with religious songs.

OTHER FESTIVALS

Zezvaoba. The festival is held on the last Saturday of May in Zemo (Upper) and Kvemo (Lower) Alvani. It commemorates the famous battle at Bakhrioni in 1659 and brave Tush hero Zezva Gaphrindauli. In the past the festival was celebrated at the time when sheep were driven from winter pastures in Shiraki steppes near borders with Azerbaijan to their summer pastures in Tusheti. A horse race (*doghi*) is held as main part of the event. It follows the track of Zezva's horse Saghiri from Takhti Bogiri, i.e. the place where the horse died, to Kvemo Alvani. The actual race is preceded by ritual commemoration of deceased ancestors (*dalaoba*) of Zezva Gaphrindauli at Zemo Alvani. Here, horses and riders are blessed within rites. Riders will drink a cup of wine or beer and symbolically pour a draft of the drink on their horses, which also get symbolic grain and a small textile flag tied on their rein as a blessing. Only horses marked with the flag may take part in the race. Then, riders move to Takhti Borigi to honour Zezva's horse, the moment being accompanied with another *dalaoba*. This is where the race of about 4 km in length starts. For more details on the festival you may refer to the website dedicated to Tsova Tushs (<http://www.batsav.com/pages/zezvaoba.html>).

Tushetoba. This traditional festival of all Tusheti has been celebrated since the 90's. In the last years, it has been held in about the middle of August and has been changed into the Day of

Shepherds (*metskhvaris dghe*). It is an artificial festival not based on any Tusheti tradition and is partly organized by the Akhmeta Municipality and the Tusheti Protected Areas Administration in Omalo. Horse races (from Lower to Upper Omalo) are also usually part of the festival, along with archery, musical performances (traditional and modern music), production and sales of traditional products and souvenirs, tug-of-war, and sometimes also competition in making *khinkali*, etc.

Mariamoba. The holy day of Virgin Mary is celebrated at the end of August (28 August in the Georgian calendar). In general, all August is dedicated to the cult of Virgin Mary in Georgia. It is a national holiday commemorating the ancestors. Tusheti churches usually hold a mass on that day. The month of August was also considered the best day for agreeing marriages and weddings as such. The traditional cycle understands it as one of the most difficult periods related to haymaking and sheep shearing.

Alaverdoba. Despite not being a purely Tushetian festival, this September event in Alaverdi is one of the most significant for Tusheti people. Its origin is linked to the founder of the local monastery Joseph of Alaverdi, one of the 13 Syrian ascetics. It used to be celebrated on 3 November. When King Levan brought a part of the holy cross from Jerusalem in the 16th century, the holiday was changed to 28 September (a day after the Feast of the Cross). It also commemorates the martyrdom of the Kakheti Queen Ketevan, who was tortured to death for her creed when captured by a Persian shah (detailed descriptions by catholic missionaries in Persia have been preserved). In the time of Alaverdoba, shepherds usually drive their herds from Tusheti to Shiraki plains in south Kakheti and pass close to their homes, i.e. Alvani and Alaverdi. Alaverdi also was a point where Tushs, Khevsurs, Pshavs, Kakhetians, Armenians, or Muslim Kists would meet. The festival related to exchange of information and today still existing traditional lively market. Many people, including owners of guest houses, have recently been coming back to the lowlands from the mountains, where they spent the summer season. Local wineries are being opened in

Alaverdi and its surroundings and the monastery organizes a wine competition. As a recently established tradition (since 2008), newborns are baptized in large numbers by the Georgian patriarch.

Giorgoba. The holiday of St. George is celebrated in spring and in autumn. The autumn celebration (23 November in the Georgian calendar) is more important, though. In the traditional Tusheti year, the festival represented a split of the year in farming, i.e. the real end of autumn work and beginning of winter. The Tushs would then move to their winter homes (*boslebi*). In the cycle of sheep breeding this period was marked with mating. The organization of the feast was the task of *shulta*, who was responsible for brewing beer and organizing around food, which was cooked by all villagers. Any daily routine work was prohibited on that day.

Mzebudoba (solstice). The sun was worshipped as female deity. Tushs believed that on 6 December (according to the Julian calendar) the sun crept to its nest and if it found a lamb there, it would leave the nest again on 9 December. On that day, women would bake ritual pastry (*machkati*) and decorate the dining table with these, along with a jug of ritual wine (*zedashe*), pancakes, and a pan with *khavitsi* (curd cooked with butter). A candle plays its indispensable role warming up the melted butter to let the aroma ascend towards the sun. Otherwise, the day was filled with common work. The day after solstice, people began their two-week fasting while meeting relatives and neighbours to savour *khinkali*.

Tseltsdobebi (New Year's holiday). New Year's holiday was preceded by two weeks of fasting, rest and spiritual contemplations, or commemorations of ancestors. A *nate*, having the same responsibilities as *shulta* during other festivals, played an important role. People used to bake New Year's bread in forms of various animals and New Year's pancakes called *kotori* ("for Christ on his way"). The housewife would bake small pieces of bread with a hole in the middle. In support of weapons, these were left in the men's part of the house in a number corresponding the number of all males in the family. At the side of the fireplace, a figure of an

angel was placed as a patron of the fireplace (*ghomlis deda* – "mother of the oven"). On the New Year's morning, the woman carried special tiny bread for the local spring (*tskaros kveri*), submerged it in the water and asked for happiness and success. During the holiday, neighbours and relatives visited each other, while in the evening all the community enjoyed together. *Nate* and his helpers (*makalatebi*) brewed beer and prepared the banquet table for all. The evening was decorated with music, dance, and games. In 1837, the villages of Shenako and Diklo had a very sad New Year. The winter was extremely dry with nearly no snow and both villages were attacked by the Didos (see details on the pages 18 and 54).

Didmarkhva (great fasting). The fasting before Easter comes after three Sundays of *markvashemoi*. Legend has it that the third week in January was a week of evil spirits and devils (*kdini*). At present, the week of evil spirits is not remembered in Tusheti as there is no one to be harmed. The next two weeks after *kdini* are dedicated to Shrovetide feast. The last week in January is a meat week (*khortsieli*) and the first week in February is a cheese week (*kvelieri*). Both weeks are accompanied with rich feasts and rites. Some days, all work is prohibited in order to avoid any death or misery. At the end of *kvelieri* (Saturday), i.e. the last day before fasting, the people celebrated the departure of winter. For women, the time of fasting was the time of weaving or knitting. Nearly all cows were already calved. Approximately in the half of fasting, people remembered their dead, usually within their close families.

Otsoba (also **Khargae**). A festival celebrated on 25 March (based on the old Julian calendar) related to initiation of farming work. At the time, first men were moving from the lowlands to the mountains, bringing news from people who had spent the winter there. Farmers began to bring out their oxen to plough the fields (*ugheldeba* – "harnessing in a yoke"). A number of signs or events pointed at how rich in harvest the year would be. The end of ploughing and seeding was accompanied with a small celebration when people asked for good harvest.

Easter (*aghdgoma*). The holiday is associated with celebration of Christ's resurrection and the

end of the seven-week long fasting, particularly appreciated by children. At Easter time people would meet at the shrines dedicated to St. George (*Giorgitsminda*), especially in Lashari (Pirikiti Valley).

Tskhvarmoe (return of sheep to Tusheti). The period is a celebration of a definite return of spring to Tusheti. At the start of May, first shepherds come back to Tusheti with their sheep. Women in all villages tidy and prepare refreshment for known and unknown passersby in form of fresh *kotori* (pancakes with cheese), *erboankva* (crushed grain mixed with butter) or vodka (*araki*). Husbands and sons return to their families and married men may satisfy their sexual desires for some time.

Amaghleba (Ascension Day). The feast is held on the 40th day after Easter. As well as in other parts of Georgia, people decorate their festive tables for the dead and the Tushs visit cemeteries where, as part of the rite, they share a few drops from their toasts with the dead ancestors. This time the sheep were finally driven to the region and people who had spent the winter in Kakheti were coming from the lowlands. The people who had spent their winter in Tusheti moved from their winter homes (*boslebi*) to the villages.

Music

Tusheti music is traditionally characterized with minor scale and long melodies, accompanied with pipes (*salamuri*) or string instruments (*panhuri*). Accordion, which has been present since the 19th century under external influence,

is today inseparable part of every celebration. It is mainly played by women, generally being the carriers of the music culture in Tusheti. In contrast to other parts of Georgia with prevailing polyphone male music, Tusheti, Khevsureti, and Pshavi melodies are characterized with a single-voice or maximum two-voice structure performed by both female and male singers. Besides panegyric songs, in Tusheti we may mainly hear funeral songs or songs chanting the ancestors (the most famous being “Dala”, whose unison male choir commemorates the ancestors, e.g. in the time of Zezvaoba).

Several folk music bands are known in Tusheti (Keselo and others). You will have a chance to see these at official festivals (*tushetoba*). Tusheti melodies and their modifications have recently gained popularity in Georgian pop-music. Lela Tataraidze is one of biggest regional celebrities who sings local melodies as well. Ra Lamazia Tusheti (“How beautiful Tusheti is”) is a very popular song.

Tushetian cuisine

Tushetian cuisine was traditionally based on products of sheep breeding and small (and little fertile) fields. Meat, milk and derived products (whether from cows or sheep) are elemental. Among milk products Tusheti is typical with its salty cheese maturing in sheep skin (*gudis kveli*) as one of the symbols of the Tushetian cuisine. It was traditionally kept in bags made of inverted sheep skins, which imparted a specific flavour.

In contrast, the yoghurt typical for lowlands



Keselo music ensemble during Tushetoba



Aludi brewing

(*matsoni*) is not much popular in Tusheti and is rather produced by shepherds in the mountains (during the milking period). Elemental in cuisine are wheat and other cereals, which are used to make bread (*puri*), curd/cheese pancakes (*kotori* – see the picture on the left) and dumplings filled with chopped meat (*khinkali*). Compared to other regions in Georgia, the Tusheti *khinkali* have a thicker dough skin and may sometimes be filled with potatoes. Nevertheless, they are mostly prepared with meat, onion, herbs and other seasoning. They are shaped to symbolize the sun. Pancakes called *kotori* are known as *khachapuri* in lowlands. They are filled with young salt-free cheese or curd, topped with clarified butter, and rank among the typical products of the local cuisine. They are commonly a bit oilier and smaller than those in the



Kotori

lowlands. Among milk products we shall mention *khavitsi*, i.e. curd mixed with clarified butter. When solid again, it becomes a great source of energy for shepherds in a form that can be stored and carried along.

Nearly all food is commonly seasoned with local herbs, forming a distinct character of the local cuisine. Coriander (*kindzi*) is the traditional basic ingredient in Georgia and Tusheti, whether picked in its natural habitat or grown in the gardens. As extras, people also have bites of other fresh herbs while eating their main course. Importantly, pickles are made through the process of lactic acid fermentation in salt (e.g. fermented flowers of a scrub called *jonjoli* – bladdernut originating in lowlands), popular are also sweet preserves.

A typical local drink is *araki*, a kind of brandy, mostly made from distilled grape pomace (*chacha*). Nonetheless, distillation of cereals used to be more common. Grapes cultivated in Alvani are brought here, too. Home-made beer (*aludi*) is a festive drink traditionally made from mountain barley and wild hops. It is brewed for religious occasions in dedicated buildings where women in their period are not allowed. Delicious are herbal infusions, above all those of mint (*pitna*) and wild thyme (*kondara*) sold in guest houses as the “Tusheti tea”.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Weather

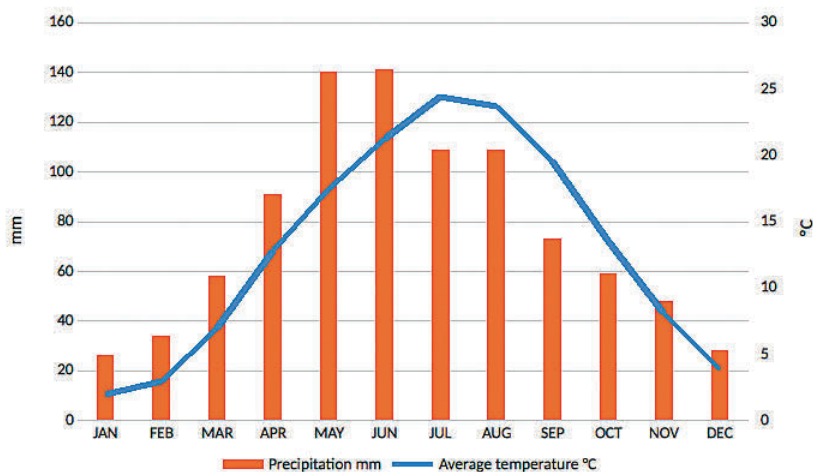
Tusheti has a typical mountain climate with short summers (July–August) and long and freezing winters. In summer, the weather is highly variable with the sunshine quickly changing into storms or rainfall. Despite the summer months being rather richer in rainfall considering all year precipitations, there may not actually be many rainy days (commonly 4–5 in a month). Heavier rains lately come in the second half of August and are often accompanied with landslides. July, on the contrary, is rather dry and

stable, while we may expect fruitful rains in May and partly in June. In any case, you should have appropriate gear when visiting the mountains in summer (waterproof jacket or raincoat, quality boots and tents). The winter tends to be dry but you will have to count with a thick snow cover.

For weather forecast you may use the Norwegian meteorological services searching Omalo (<https://www.yr.no/place/Georgia/Other/Omalo/>), Girevi, Dochu, or Verkhovani. Nevertheless, take into account that neither these services are 100% reliable.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
Average temperature °C	1.9	2.9	6.9	12.8	17.4	21.2
Average precipitation mm	26	34	58	91	140	141
Average precipitation days	4	4	5	7	9	8
	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Average temperature °C	24.4	23.7	19.6	13.5	8.1	3.8
Average precipitation mm	109	109	73	59	48	28
Average precipitation days	5	5	5	5	4	4

Source: Accuweather.com, Yr.no.



Average temperatures and rainfall in Omalo

Transport to Tusheti

Tusheti is apparently the most remote place in Georgia accessible on a low quality road only with a 4WD vehicle and merely in summer (approximately from May to October depending on snow conditions). BBC rates the road among the most dangerous roads in the world (this statement shall not be overestimated but it still is quite a demanding travel especially for those who suffer from vertigo). If bumpy roads generally cause you motion sickness, you should consider taking appropriate pills or other medication. As promised by the Georgian Prime Minister in 2016, there should be a new road to Tusheti built in the near future.

Regular drivers on this road are peculiar men and the rule of no alcohol behind the wheel certainly does not apply here. On the other hand, only very few accidents happen here, which are usually caused by drunken inexperienced youngsters gambling with their lives. Do not be surprised then if your driver greets someone on the road or has a glass of wine or chacha with them.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The way from Tbilisi to Omalo will take about one day when you use public transport and a 4WD vehicle. A direct drive from Omalo to Tbilisi is ideally to last about 5 to 6 hours.

From Tbilisi (Ortachala Station) you can take a marshrutka to Alvani, a large village inhabited by the Tushs (best in the morning for the price of GEL 10), or only to Telavi (GEL 8). A shared taxi to Telavi or Alvani costs GEL 10 per seat and leaves from the Isani underground station. From Telavi to Alvani, you can use a taxi or another marshrutka.

Here drivers are waiting to offer a ride to Omalo. There is a common fixed rate of about GEL 200 per car of 4 seats or GEL 300 per Delica for a ride Alvani – Omalo. The way from/to Pirikiti (Dartlo, Chesho, Girevi, etc.) or from/to Gometzari (Dochu, Jvarboseli, Verkhovani) will cost you GEL 250–300 per a jeep or GEL 350–400 per a Delica. Cars usually leave fully occupied (or you have to pay for all seats), i.e. about GEL 50/person. The price from Telavi to Omalo is usually GEL 240 per a four-seat jeep. You can rent a car in Tusheti for the price of GEL 100–150 per day depending on the distance (you will virtually always pay for the way back).



Road from Abano Pass



Two cars on the road to Omalo

LIST OF DRIVERS IN TUSHETI

- Kote Arshaulidze: 557 70 22 99 (Omalo)
 Levan Ichirauli: 598 16 29 29 (Omalo)
 Mamuka Kindolauri: 577 37 84 14 / 593 53 17
 96 (Omalo)
 Murad Ichirauli: 557 12 77 22 (Omalo)
 Kakha Tatrulaidze: 557 71 97 77 (Omalo)
 Paata Arshaulidze: 558 79 72 22 (Omalo)
 Dato Idoidze: 593 76 91 35 / 599 06 79 99
 (Omalo, Delica)
 Vazha Kardlidze: 599 77 55 43 (Omalo)
 Panto Kardlidze: 558 94 12 00 (Omalo)
 Dato Akimidze: 599 76 05 54 (Omalo)
 Besik Elanidze: 599 11 89 93 (contact him on
 Viber) (Omalo)
 Adamo Mozaidze: 591 70 38 32 (Girevi)
 Gogi Azikuri: 592 803 202; 599 772 598
 Aleks Iitiuridze: 592 002002 (Mirgvela)
 Soso Bakuridze: 599 10 02 19 / 551 14 24 43
 (Chigho)
 Zezva Elizbaridze: 555 64 80 54 (Jvarboseli)
 Irakli Mouravidze: 574 22 29 88 (Omalo)
 Eldar Idoidze: 551 13 88 87
 Simon Idoidze: 598 28 16 76
 Baghatur Zviadauri: 599 310 366
 Soso Akimidze: 598 38 84 45
 Irakli Natsvalaidze: 599 20 54 51
 Khvicha Chvritidze: 599 90 53 37

YOUR OWN CAR

Whether you decide to drive your own car or rent one, it should certainly have a higher ground clearance and a 4-wheel drive (although a good driver can get you to Omalo with a Ziguli). There is no petrol station in Omalo so you need to fill up the tank or even add some extra cans (a standard petrol station is located at the exit from Telavi and a smaller petrol station may be found in Kvemo Alvani when coming from Alaverdi). When driving an SUV, you have to count with 20–30 % of the tank, which gives you a chance to reach Omalo and make a few small trips (Shenako, Dartlo) or one longer trip (to Girevi or Verkhovani). In some places (Tsovata) it is essential to consider responsibly the water level at the crossing point and the capacities of your vehicle.

OTHER MEANS OF TRANSPORT

You can even try hitchhiking from Alvani. Some people do manage but it is a lengthy process as cars are usually fully occupied all the way from Alvani. Occasionally, you may meet trucks whose drivers will be glad to give you a lift, despite being very slow (still, a ride in the bed of a truck on local roads is an exceptional experience). In 2010, there was a plan to introduce a seasonal air line Telavi – Omalo. However, it was cancelled after its inauguration flight and its profitability is doubtful. Virtually most of the tourists cannot afford hiring a helicopter despite this being available (from Tbilisi to Omalo, the flight takes one hour). In winter, there are regular helicopter flights between Alvani and Omalo, and Telavi and Omalo, but these are reserved for the locals.

Accommodation

Development in accommodation in Tusheti villages has recently been experiencing a boom. Virtually every village has a guest house to offer; in 2017, Omalo provided accommodation for about 15–30 people in each of its 20 guest houses. You can pay for a room only (no board) for about GEL 30–50. Each meal will cost you about GEL 10. There are even more luxury hotels where you are charged about 100–120 GEL for accommodation with half or full board. For the list of accommodation see pages 70–76.

Camping (pitching a tent) is for now allowed in all Tusheti with no particular places determined. You should only refrain from camping close to sacred places. In Omalo, they already installed a “no camping” sign on a hill in 2013. In other places you shall avoid camping in the vicinity of small shrines.

Catering

You may have a meal in a guest house even if you have your own tent. A single meal (breakfast, lunch or dinner) costs about GEL 10. If you need to buy food supplies, see the following chapter *Shops and souvenirs*. Many guest houses are titled “Cafe” and apart from dinner you can order tea, coffee, beer, wine, or chacha.

Shops and souvenirs

Lower Omalo has two shops selling staple long life food and other basics; sometimes you can get fruits and vegetables or local cheese. A bakery that was opened in Upper Omalo in 2015 sells fresh bread (*puri*, GEL 1) every morning, or cocoa muffins (GEL 1). Homemade wine or chacha (of varying quality) and bottled beer are available in every shop and guest house. Many other accommodation facilities also have a “Shop” sign, but the assortment may be limited to alcoholic drinks or possibly some most basic food. On the other side, you can buy homemade cheese from shepherds.

Many shops, hotels or guest houses offer hand-made woollen socks and gloves with traditional patterns. Somewhere (Hotel Tusheti Tower) they sell felt wall rugs (*teka*) with motifs from mythology.

Entrance fee (pilot introduction)

The Czech Development Aid in a cooperation with NGO CENN is planning to introduce the pilot phase of the voluntarily based entrance fee for tourists in 2018. Visitors would be kindly asked by the staff of the Tourist Information Point (located on the road to Tusheti) to contribute to the maintenance and development of the



Cheese storage



National Park Visitor's Centre

Tusheti tourist infrastructure. The recommended entrance fee is GEL 10–20 and may be paid either by cash or to the transparent bank account.

Visitor's Centre

The Visitor's Centre is located in a forest below Lower Omalo at the access road to the village. You can get a map of Tusheti and information on accommodation. There are boards informing you about the history, traditions, cuisine, or fauna and flora in Tusheti. The Visitor's Centre is

managed by the Tusheti National Park (<http://www.tusheti.ge>) which intends to have an English and Russian speaking person available at all times. Adjacent to the Centre you can use the services of a private hotel and a small café offering some basic meals.

Horse rentals

Until today, horses have been absolutely indispensable in local farming and many men and women can ride them very well. Equestrian tourism has recently thrived and you can rent



Horse race in Omalo



Horse near Diklo

a horse in several places in Omalo and other villages. If you contact a guest house, you will get a helping hand. There is a fixed rate of GEL 40 per horse and day (you may rent for half a day, too). A guide is required even for smaller groups at a price of GEL 50. One guide will be provided for a group of about 10 people, i.e. more guides for larger groups. You are not asked about your riding skills but generally expected to manage the horse somehow on your own. Nonetheless, the guides know that not all tourists are experienced riders and usually walk slowly.

CONTACTS TO GUIDES AND HORSE OWNERS

Zviad Bughridze: 595 333 432 (12 horses)

Gorgi Aptarauli: 598 79 75 72

Temur Ivachidze, tel: 598 28 93 89 (15 horses)

Irakli Gogotidze, tel: 551 18 33 15

Tengo Bashinuridze, tel: 599 54 06 51

Gocha Rainauli, tel: 557 70 30 80

Khvicha Bukvaidze, tel: 557 53 36 36

Temur Shabalaidze, tel: 598 17 99 78

Plato Antaidze, tel: 551 44 46 33

Jarji Rainauli: 598 89 24 37

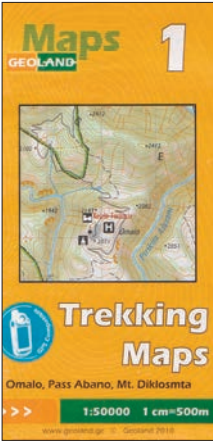
Lasha Khabaidze: 598 22 92 39

Maps

The best maps are those produced by company Geoland and may be purchased in their own shop in Tbilisi (<https://www.facebook.com/GEOLAND.GARMIN/>) for GEL 10 (see the map on the left). In Tusheti National Park you can get a basic map of Tusheti, which lacks details and thus results useless for hiking. It still can help you get generally oriented in the region. In 2017, the Tusheti Protected Areas Association published a map at a scale of 1:55,000 (GEL 2), which is also available at the Visitor's Centre but does not show any tourist trails (see the picture in the middle). You can also make use of old Soviet maps at a scale of 1:100,000 and sometimes 1:50,000. The shop in Alvani (named "Tourist maps Tusheti") sells newer maps on Soviet grounds, which also provide fair orientation (see the picture in the middle). In 2017, the Czech Development Agency, in cooperation with the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic and Krkonoše National Park, published an orientation map with tourist trails (available at <http://tushetipl.ge/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ruka1234.jpg>).

Telecommunication

Mobile phone signal. In Omalo and its surroundings (Dartlo, Pharsma, Diklo, Shenako, Iliurta, or Dochu) you will probably use provider



Tusheti map Geoland



Tusheti map APA 2017



Tusheti map local

Magti, preferred by most of the local people (<http://www.magticom.ge>). Other main providers (Geocell and Beeline) have minimum coverage compared to Magti. Beeline usually has the strongest signal in Omalo and its close vicinity but non-existing signal outside the village. Geocell does not even cover Dartlo, for example. Remember to have sufficient credit before leaving to the mountains as you will not be able to get any there (GEL 10 is usually enough for basic Internet needs and several calls or messages home).

Public Internet connection. A Wi-Fi network was installed in Tusheti in 2017 and may be used in Abano Pass, Omalo, and other places. It is not

fast but enough for basic browsing. More guest houses offer wireless connection each year (e.g. Hostel Gometsari in Verkhovani).

Electricity supply

Most of the guest houses in Tusheti and many family houses have been electrified with solar panels thanks to the project of the Czech Development Agency. High input devices (including a mini boiler for coffee) are not suitable while low input electronics, such as mobile phones, GPS, or camera batteries, may be charged with no issues.



Solar panels installed by the Czech Development Agency in Tusheti



PLACES OF INTEREST

UPPER OMALO AND KESELO

The clan towers on Keselo Hill are the most significant example of the Tusheti defence architecture. Their foundations date back to the 15th–16th century after the period of Tamerlane's raids. They were commonly inhabited in summer, when the locals were most threatened by raids from neighbouring Dagestan (mainly by the Didos, frequently mentioned in local legends) or from Chechnya. The towers were maintained until the 19th century. When Shamil's resistance was suppressed in 1859 and the Russian power in the Caucasus was stabilized, their maintenance lost any sense and the inhabitants of Omalo gradually moved to more comfortable houses which today form Upper Omalo (see the picture from 1886 above).

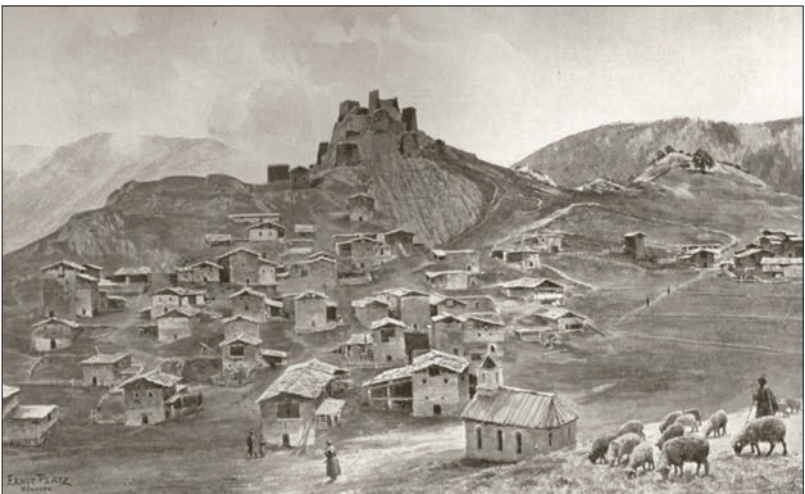
The towers successively dilapidated. The Second World War meant their epilogue as the Red Army mined them and blew them up (you may still find holes as remnants of the dugouts of the Soviet garrison). The official argument for the destruction of the towers was the concern over advancement of the German Army, which was still relatively far, though. The real reason apparently was to eliminate one of the main symbols of Tusheti so as to allow for smoother forced transfer of local inhabitants to the controlled Kakheti. The event may also be

associated with the uprising under command of Adam Bobghiasvili.

Under the auspices of the Keselo Fund and with the support of the Dutch Bradshaw Foundation, seven of the towers (two in 2012–2013) have been reconstructed since the year 2000. The archaeological findings from 2013–2016 apparently show foundations of another building. One of the towers houses an interesting ethnographic museum (keys from the museum available from Nugzar Idoizze in Hotel Tusheti Tower; entrance fee GEL 5, the guide speaks Russian).

In Omalo you can visit a local church from the 19th century (regularly open in summer and accessible for women). Church services are held sporadically; the priest is mainly present at the time of the Tushetoba festival. Below the castle of Keselo you can find a small brewery (with an information board) where they have been making beer for religious festivals until today (remember, women in their period and foreign women in general are not allowed to enter).

A hillock dominating the village is a sacred place where women have no access. Local legends say that spiritual powers arise from the earth and heavenly powers descend here. A rumour goes around that a mysterious light appears from time to time above the hill. Legend has it that the



Omalo in 1880s

Places of Interest

Dagestan Army built a camp there one day in order to besiege Keselo. One of the Keselo defenders saw how the enemy's commander was walking on the top of the hill. Hence, he took

his cross-bow and shot him dead with a single shot. Deprived of their commander, the army retreated.

LEGEND OF THE SACRED HILLOCK ABOVE OMALO

Once there came the large Dagestan Army towards Keselo. The locals hid themselves in the towers and the enemies began to plunder the villages and feast. The enemies' zurnas (horns) and drums echoed in the tower. On the third day the Dagestani naib (commander) in his white coat came up the hillock and fearlessly potted about. One of the defenders, however, called at one of his fellow warriors:

"Mika! Charge your khirimi (weapon) with

twice the amount of gunpowder as it might reach the hill." Mika charged the gun as advised and with a single shot from the fort he killed the naib on Karate Hill. The commander's death was traditionally a bad sign for the Dagestani. Thus, they ceased fire at once, loaded their commander's dead body and retreated.

(Tsotsanidze, Giorgi: Ot listopada do listopada. Kavkasiuri sachli (Caucasian house), Tbilisi, 2008, pp. 15–16).



Meeting in Ghele

GHELE

A sacred place on the pass between Pirikiti and Gometinari. Members of communities used to meet in the meadows to deliberate on important issues in Tusheti. Today, the place is an important crossroads of tourist trails to Omalo, Dartlo, and Chigho. Marvellous alpine meadows above the pass invite you for a walk.

DARTLO

The village of Dartlo is about 3 hours of walk or 1 hour of drive from Omalo. It can mainly attract

you with its original houses from the 19th century, mostly with their unique stone roofs (often substituted by metal sheets in Omalo), vastly reconstructed in 2012. The place is also characterized with its distinct towers, rather slender, resembling those in Khevsureti or Ingushetia. The "Stone Court" (*saphrindao*) located behind the ruined church (that women were not allowed to approach) was restored in 2010 with the help of Czech volunteers. The place was used for deliberations on important issues in the community and for settling any local disputes pursuant to customary law. Today, it is

*Dartlo*

considered a unique landmark of its kind, the only one existing in the Caucasus mountains. Above Dartlo we may find the fortified village of Kvavlo, where the locals defended themselves from the raids by Dagestani and Chechens. The village is almost entirely abandoned today. Still, it preserves a typical character of the defence towers of Khevsureti-Tusheti.

CHIGHO AND LASHARI

The village of Chigho is half way between Dartlo and Diklo. Lashari, the main Tusheti shrine and a place of gatherings of Tushetian communities, is just above the village.

AKOCHIS TSIKHE (CASTLE OF LOVE BETWEEN OMALO AND SHENAKO)

Off the road between Omalo and Shenako there is a solitary tower sometimes nicknamed the Castle of Love. It has been associated with a legend about true love, a Tushetian couple, counterparts of Romeo and Juliet (see below). This is an appealing one-day trip from Shenako (from Omalo the trail cross over the bridge in a bad condition). There is a red tourist trail (marked in summer 2018) leading to the castle from Shenako. The trail from Omalo is partly marked as well, however, with regard to the

current condition of the old footbridge to Shenako it is officially not recommended (the route is still passable at your own risk, though). When you take the turn from the main road, a partly reconstructed path will lead you for about 3 km through the forest to the tower. A tree by its entrance was named Maruška by Czech volunteers (see the legend below). From the fort you will have a view of Pirikiti Alazani Valley between Omalo and Shenako.

*Akochis Tsikhe*

LEGEND OF THE CASTLE OF LOVE

Towards the end of the 18th century, there lived a boy and a girl in Shenako. They loved each other but their families would not approve of their eternal love. As they showed no respect when warned by their elder relatives, they were both expelled from their villages. Nobody was allowed to help them but they still managed – they built a tower on a hardly accessible promontory above Pirikiti Alazani Valley. They grew crops and the boy hunted for animals. The fire they lacked in the beginning was secretly brought by an elderly woman from Shenako. When the villagers got to know, they expelled the woman as well (as a gift for the lovers to be looked after). The couple lived in the place since then and had four children (author's note: some versions talk about three children), brave sons. On a summer day (author's note: presumably the raid in 1837) the Dagestani plundered and burnt down Diklo and Shenako, and killed all the men. Only the mentioned four brothers from the Castle of Love survived. They managed to chase out the army of thousands and returned to the village. There they established their new clans and today's inhabitants consider themselves descendants of theirs. The tower is deserted today, except some occasional visits of passersby.

ABOUT A SAVED TREE IN AKOCHIS TSIKHE

Just by the tower, there is a tree that was originally supposed to be felled down within reconstruction work as it cast shade onto the tower entrance. Then a five-year-old Maruška, a daughter of the head of the Czech volunteer team, shed tears for all the already felled trees and begged: "Such magnificent trees and you are cutting them down, not leaving a single one. Let at least this one survive." All the present agreed that Maruška was right and that the stately pine tree would not obstruct the view of the fort. Since that time, the people call this tree "Maruška" (pron. Marushka).

SHENAKO AND DIKLO

The road from Lower Omalo leads past a former post office and a telegraph station, then down the hill towards Pirikiti Alazani Valley and again up to the plateau. Shenako is about 6 km far from Omalo. When approaching the village of Shenako, you will first recognize the currently abandoned houses scattered all over the hillside that used to serve as winter homes and cowsheds. The new church from the 19th century, built when the Orthodox Mission came to Tusheti, dominates the village. It was reconstructed within the efforts made by the locals and is used for sporadic church services. The route (a field road passable for cars) will lead you further past the old Shenako to Diklo. Pay particular attention to the shrine in the centre of the village of Diklo as women are not allowed here. Diklo opens a beautiful panoramic view of the border ridge between Georgia and Dagestan.



Shenako church

Walking about 30 min from Diklo you will find remains of an old village called Dzveli Galavani (today named Dzveli Diklo as well). It was completely deserted in 1837, burnt down by Imam Shamil in revenge for the Tushetian support to the Russian Empire. Although not much remained of the village, it uniquely illustrates the character of Tusheti fortifications from the 17th to the 19th century. You may come across Georgian border guards here. As there is a sheep pen nearby, beware of shepherds' dogs. Two more villages are located beyond the ridge. These are under Russian control (despite being in the territory of Georgia) and are inhabited by Dagestani Didos.

LEGEND OF THE ROCK OF LOVERS

A rock called Tsumberekhki rises firmly above Diklo. A local legend tells a story of Bero, a young boy from Diklo, and Tsum, a girl from Kumelaurta. One day, Bero gets seriously ill with high fever. The people of Diklo would lay ice on his body but this would only melt. Finally, the locals got tired and Bero was made to leave the village. He climbed high in the mountains, reaching

the glaciers, where he changed into a frozen rock. When Tsum learnt about his fate, she decided to set off to the mountains in search of her beloved. When she found him as a frozen rock, she sat by his side. Once, when the mass of ice melted down, there appeared two smooth tall cliffs at the place where they had sat. These are said to be the remains of the two lovers, Tsum and Bero.



Dzveli Galavani

From Diklo you may continue over the ridge following the red trail to Chigho and further on a yellow trail to Dartlo (about 6–8 hours of walk). Then, you can return to Omalo or follow the route to Khevsureti. From Shenako you can take a short loop on the forest trail (red signs lead to the main Shenako–Omalo road) to the abandoned village of Ageurta.

PHARSMATA

A village between Cheso and Girevi, it is dominated by a clan tower with the reputation of the most solid tower in all Tusheti (see the legend about its construction). Its history is inherently linked to the Tusheti legend of heroine Tino, who defended Pharsma and Tusheti from the raids of Murtaza Khan in 1841–1842 (see page 17).



Pharsma tower



Hegho towers

The Girevi and Pharsma towers are said to have been constructed by famous builders, a father and his son. Pharsma was suffering from hunger that year. The inhabitants of Girevi cherished their builders generously while those in Pharsma could not. The son then said to his father:

"I shall not keep my promise given to the people of Pharsma as they feed me bad food".

"And what do they feed you? the father asked.

"Flour churned with milk" was the son's response.

"And what do they feed themselves?"

"They feed themselves what comes to their hand".

"You see, my son. They feed themselves worse and give better to you. They treat you the best they can. Do not betray your word", said the father.

The builder fulfilled his promise.

GIREVI

Girevi is the first and the last inhabited place (in summer) when coming to or leaving Khevsureti through Atsunta Pass, respectively. Several interesting villages may be found in the surroundings – Dakiurta (high above Girevi) and Nakudurta (short way up the hill) with their houses and towers. Girevi itself retains a perfectly preserved defence tower of the

Khevsureti type (see the picture on the right), which neighbours a ruined dwelling tower. There is a nice view of the source of Pirikiti Alazani Valley, the confluence of the rivers Narovani (left) and Kvakhidis Tskali (right). The promontory above the confluence (you will have to wade through the river Kvakhidis Tskali) preserves the remnants of the village of Hegho. Higher on the hillside you may see a burial place with tombs still containing human remains and shrines. From Hegho there is a way through Narovani Tskali Valley to Narovani Lake.

KHAKHABO

According to a legend, a man from Khevsureti resettled here, establishing a village. Today, it is a typical place inhabited by only a few families and mainly comes back to life during religious festivals in summer time. There are remains of a tower (Khakhabos Tsikhe, see the picture). The



Khakhabos Tsikhe

village is a good starting point for a trip to Gogruhta over the ridge. Visitors are recommended not to go up Mt. Kekhi, rising over Gometsari Alazani Valley and dominating Upper Omalo. There is no marked tourist trail and there are two shrines inaccessible for women, one on the way near the place called Kerelovani and the other at the top.

DOCHU

A characteristic village below the road between Omalo and Verkhovani is a starting point for trails in southern Tusheti (Ori Tskali Valley, Gogruhta, a trail to Khakhabo). Taking a path from the road a splendid view of the village and Gometsari Alazani Valley opens in front of you. Above the village you will pass by an 8 m high waterfall.

ILIIURTA

One of the villages above Gometsari Valley (turn from the main road) that can be a starting point or the end of the trail to Gogruhta and Khakhabo. The main landmark in Iliurta is the preserved Orthodox church of St. George that still keeps the register of inhabitants (see the image).

TSOVATA

A specific group of nowadays deserted villages in the valley of the river Tsovatistskali (tributary of the Gometsari Alazani) encompasses settlements of Indurta, Sagirta, Tsaro, and Etelta. The Tsova Tushs (in some resources named the Bats, based on their ethnonym *batsbo nah*) distinguished from the other Tushs (Chaghma Tushs) with their own tongue (more details on



Iliurta church

Tsova Tushs on page 8–9). The abandoned villages have their distinct atmosphere. Tsaro with its preserved tombs guards the entrance to the valley while Indurta, Sagirta, and Etelta lie in the valley completely enclosed by the mountains. Tsova Tusheti is also a starting point for the traverse to the valley of the Alazanistavi, the spring area of the river Alazani. You can plan a trip for a single day or more from Jvarboseli or Verkhovani. The summer Dadaloba festival is a traditional annual event that revives the dead villages. The only possible way to get there today is on foot. The road for cars was blocked in 2017 by landslide several hundred meters behind the ford, behind the village of Jvarboseli. It thus results more convenient to go further up the stream and use the footbridge (unmarked trail), which means, however, to climb several meters up a loose slope of a hillside.



Tsovata Valley



TOURIST TRAILS



Tourist sign

This chapter aims to provide you with tips on various circular trails in Tusheti and its neighbouring regions. It seeks to lead you to the most interesting places in the region. The lengths are only approximate and may be combined from short one-day trips (from Omalo to Shenako/Diklo or Dartlo, Shenako to the Castle of Love) to several-day treks. Some of the less known trails are described in a guide by Nasmith, Peter: *Walking in the Caucasus. Georgia*. 2nd edition. MTA Publications, London, 2013, pp. 127–145. In 2016–2017, a basic network of tourist trails in entire Tusheti was marked (see map on the flyleaf of the book)

From Tusheti to Khevsureti

Trail: *Omalo–Dartlo–Pharsma–Girevi–Atsunta Pass–Ardoti–Mutso–Shatili*

Duration: *about 5 days, depending on the weather. From Omalo follow red marks, and then take yellow to Girevi.*

This is a classic trek preferred by most visitors to Tusheti. The journey starts in Omalo towards

Dartlo (approx. 3 hours). You may take a shortcut following red marks across the meadow called Kue beneath Upper Omalo to Ghele Pass (approx. 1 km beneath Omalo you will find a switchback on a meadow towards the Kue viewpoint. There is a signpost and the trail is marked, just head up the slope to get to the forest path). Between the two valleys (Gometsari and Pirikiti), there is Ghele Pass, a significant meeting point of all communities and villages in Tusheti. From here, follow the drive path to Dartlo (marked yellow), where you can ascend to the fortified village of Kvalvo following red marks. The next day, continue from Dartlo to Chesho and Pharsma, and to Girevi on the main road (alternatively from Kvalvo to Chesho you can use partly marked trail through the village of Dano). You can find a guest house for a night or just a meal in any of the three villages. In Girevi, you have to register with frontier guards (a sign in the centre of the village will direct you), which is a required formality. On the third day, the trail will take you through the right valley (viewed from Girevi) to



Girevi tower

the abandoned village of Chontio, and the day usually ends with a sleep-over beneath Atsunta Pass (at 3,340 m a.s.l.). The fourth day is the most demanding as you will have to traverse Atsunta Pass. If anxious enough, you may also climb the nearby Mt. Tebulosmta (4,492 m a.s.l.), which lies on the border with Russia. The ascent is tough and takes all day setting off in the pass (only possible under favourable weather conditions and if you manage to cross the screes). Behind the pass, the path falls sharply though the nearly abandoned village of Ardoti (with a fort), towards the ruins of towers of the fortified village of Mutso (ascent to the village is highly recommended). You can get refreshment in the village and there is a newly opened guest house. The hike from Mutso to Shatili takes about 3 hours. In Shatili you are offered accommodation, meals, and there is a shop where you can buy basic supplies. Every Thursday and Sunday there is a marshrutka from Shatili to Tbilisi. You can get a car to Korsha (beneath Barisakho) for about GEL 120 (guest house available – manager Shota Arabuli will welcome you even if you decide to sleep in your own tent and may open a small local museum in a nearby tower for you). There is a morning bus transport several times a week to Tbilisi from Korsha and Barisakho respectively. The village of Roshka, lying above Korsha, is the starting point for the traverse to Juta and to the foothills of Mt. Mkinvartsveri (Kazbegi).

Through the valley of raids – from Pankisi to Omalo

Trail: *Omalo (Pankisi Valley, 753 m a.s.l.) – Mt. Oritsveri (2,930 m) – saddle beneath Didgverdi (3,117 m) – saddle Samkinvrotsveri (3,167 m) – Oritskali Valley – village of Gogrulta (1,859 m) – Dochu – Bochora – Omalo (Tusheti)*

Duration: 5–6 days

This trail is an option if you want to get to Tusheti without a car. It is more demanding as to orientation because you have to traverse several saddles (GPS highly recommended). The first day starts in Omalo in Pankisi Valley (do not confuse with Omalo in Tusheti) leading you through the woods and later in meadows and on a scree up the ridge. The second day you will continue along the ridge, ideally to get to the foot of Mt. Didgverdi. This part of the trail requires good orientation skills. On the third day the trail follows to the saddle of Samkinvrotsveri, the gate to Tusheti. Further on, the trek gets easier regarding orientation. It brings you to the valley of the brook Ori Tskali (“Two Waters”), past a summer sheep pen. On the fourth day you could reach the village of Vestomt or Gogrulta. The fifth day you need to get to the village of Dochu (the bridge was pulled down in 2017, you will have to wade through a strong stream) or



Gogrulta village



Lower Omalo

continue from Vestomtā to Iliurta. From either Dochu or Iliurta you can reach Verkhovani – Omalo road. Optionally, you can get to the village of Khakhabo from Gogrulta following red marks through the pass and continue to Lower Omalo.

Omalo by the old telegraph station). From where the path drops rapidly down the hill you will descend to a switchback, where you will have a view of the Castle of Love. About 200 m below the switchback, there is an unofficial path

From Omalo to the Castle of Love

Trail: *Shenako – Akochis Tsikhe and back Omalo—old bridge on the way to Shenako—Castle of Love (Akochis Tsikhe) and back*

Duration: *approx. 5 hours*

The trail starts at the guidepost indicating direction to Omalo. It is first marked yellow and red (red marks since summer 2018). The trail splits in the first more pronounced bend. The red path goes down to the river and up to a small rocky clearing, from which there is a right turn off to Akochis Tsikhe. The main path to Omalo penetrates into the forest and sharply drops towards the river. Theoretically, you could even reach Omalo on this path but the bridge is in a very bad condition.

In the opposite direction, you can follow red marks from Upper Omalo and further yellow marks heading to Shenako (signpost in Lower



Old bridge on Omalo–Shenako route

through the forest marked with two stripes. The trail has not been fully marked yet (as of 2018). You will go down the path to the bridge and then about 400 m up the path. You will come to a turn-off and on your left there opens the view of Pirikiti Alazani Valley (the path marked straight will further join the main road to Shenako).

WARNING. The old bridge across the river is in a bad state. The National Park Administration does not recommend using this bridge and you may only undergo the trail at your own risk. It is still possible to pass over the bridge but with much caution since the wooden boards and beams may be rotten (the steel construction from the 30's of the 20th century is still sturdy enough).

Whether you are coming from Shenako or Omalo, the footpath leading from the turn will take you most of the time through the forest and sometimes over boulder fields, right to the ruins of Akochis Tsikhe.

Classic small Tusheti circuit

Trail: *Omalo–Shenako–Diklo (Dzveli Galavani)–Chigho–Dartlo–Omalo*

Duration: 3 days

A trek that will show you the typical beauties of

Tusheti in brief. The first day starts on a yellow marked path from Lower Omalo, over Shenako, to Diklo. From Omalo–Shenako road you may deviate to an unofficial trail to the Castle of Love (about 3 km longer, see trail tip above), and then continue on a red marked lane to Shenako. Or, as an option, you can descend on the road to the bridge and about 1 km behind the bridge turn right, which will lead you to Shenako through the deserted village of Ageurta (red marks). Next 5 km on yellow marks will lead you from Shenako to Diklo, or you may use a footpath instead of the road (longer but more interesting). The red-marked lane is right of the ridge, while the yellow drive mostly leads you through plains with meadows. Accommodation is available in Diklo. The nearby ruins of the fortified village of Dzveli Galavani are certainly worth paying a short visit (yellow marks). The second day is meant for the traverse between Diklo and Dartlo, following the red trail, which begins at the junction not far from Diklo, on the road from Shenako. Subsequently, you will go up to the pass above Diklo, then descend to the water stream, and once more ascend to the village of Chigho. Below Chigho the red changes into yellow, which you will follow along the newly built road above Pirikiti Valley with its abandoned sheds. From Dartlo there already is a road (yellow marks) first back to Ghele Pass and then further following red marks to Omalo.



Diklo village



Dochu village from Omalo–Verkhovani road

Tusheti à la carte

Trail: *Omalo–Dartlo–Chesho–Pharsma–Nakaicho Pass–Verkhovani–Jvarboseli–Dochu–Bochorna–Omalo; may be combined with the trail above*

Duration: *about 4–5 days (count with about 2 days more if visiting also Shenako and Diklo)*

This trail will lead you to the traditional and also less known areas of Tusheti, as well as to Shenako and Diklo. Thus, you will see all main beauties of the region. The best is to set off from Omalo to Dartlo (about 3 hours) – the shortcut is described above in the trek to Shatili. It is fine to make a trip up a little ridge to the fortified village of Kvavlo. The following day you may continue from Dartlo over Chesho to Pharsma (with a preserved tower). There is a bridge across the Pirikiti Alazani below the village. The path will guide you further up to Nakaicho Pass (2,903 m a.s.l.).

A descent from the pass over deserted Dadikurta to Verkhovani takes about 2 hours. Here you can find accommodation in a tower (see the picture on the right), in a local guest house on the bank of the Gometinari Alazani, or a bit further in Jvarboseli. The trail from Verkhovani to Omalo following yellow marks is about 20 km long. On your way you can have a stopover and spend a night in the village of Dochu (the view of the village from the road is one of the most fascinating in Tusheti; see the picture on the left).



Verkhovani tower

Alternatively, you could establish your base in Verkhovani and explore the villages in Tsovata Valley. You can also take a right turn from the road near Beghela up the hill to Iliurta and follow red marks over Vestomta to Gogrulta and further still on the red lane to Khakhabo (see the trail below).



Apakurta pastures on the way from Khakhabo to Gogrulta

Along the ridges above Gometsari Valley

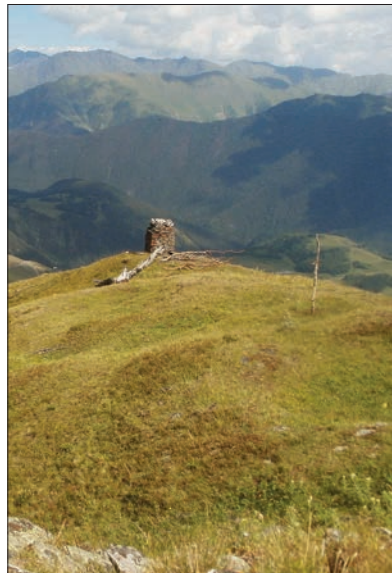
Trail: *Omalo—Ghele Pass—Makratela Ridge—Nakaicho Pass—Verkhovani—Iliurta—Gogrulta—Khakhabo—Omalo*

Duration: *about 4 days*

The trail passes through the less known parts of Tusheti with amazing views of Gometsari Valley and partly Pirikiti Valley. Start it in Omalo towards Dartlo, sticking to red marks. In Ghele Pass where the path to Dartlo drops down the hill and where the red trail turns down to Chigho, you have to leave the marked path and proceed up the ridge. You will probably spend the night on the ridge or in Nakaicho Pass (about 15 km from Omalo). In need of water you will have to descend further along the ridge. The following day will take you down from the pass to Verkhovani (for accommodation options in the variant with Tsovata, see above). From Verkhovani it is possible to follow yellow marks until the guidepost “Iliurta Road”, where the red lane turns up the hill to the villages of Iliurta, Vestomtá, and Gogrulta (possible sleepover in a guest house in Gogrulta). At the periphery of the village there is a sacred place (Mariamtsminda).

The red trail follows down to the bottom of Oritskali Valley (Two Waters), where you will have to wade across the river and ascend to former sheds (*boslebi*) of Gogrulta (Lashkaraula,

see the picture). Continue further towards the ridge through the pastures of Apakurta. On your left side you will see sacred Mt. Kekhi where access is restricted (shrine, see the picture below). Behind Sanarovani Pass the marked lane takes a left turn and leads you down through the meadow of Shantlovani (an open meadow on a slope; transl. from Georgian – “wetlands”) into the village of Khakhabo. The red lane continues further from Khakhabo down the valley to the river where you will go over a restored bridge and further mount the hill through woods and a meadow to Omalo.



Mt. Kekhi summit with khati (2596 m)

Oreti Lake

Trail: *Omalo—Visitor's Centre—Tsokalta—ascend along the ridge to a summer sheep pen—Oreti and back*

Duration: *This option will take about 1.5 days (the best is to spend the night directly by the lake). The trail is ideal on a horseback as a single day trip and is marked red since summer 2018.*

From Omalo you will go along the road, passing the turn to the Visitor's Centre. As you approach the end of the Lower Omalo plain, you may take a field lane right close to Hotel Omalo. You will continue down the footpath to the bridge (shorter way avoiding the dusty road). Behind the bridge, follow the arrow to the left to Kumelaurta until you come to the first major turn. Here, turn right up the path and after 300 m you will get to a meadow in the vicinity

of the village of Tsokalta (no need to go the village). At the end of the meadow you will find a path steepening up the ridge. The demanding ascent will take you to another meadow along which leads a path. You will continue through the forest to another meadow with a sheep pen (beware of dogs if sheep pen in use). From here, the lane heads up again. From the trees go to the alpine meadows and follow the path up the stream. Crossing the stream you will see remnants of an esker (glacier ridge) dominated by Oreti Lake above. Under favourable conditions and enough water you may even have a swim. You can also put up a tent for the night or enrich your trip with an ascent to one of the peaks above the lake, or further mount about 200 m of altitude up Mt. Oncha (also marked as Encho in most maps), the frontier peak about 4 hours walk from Oreti (3,304 m a.s.l.). You will have to return the same way.



Oreti Lake



CZECH REPUBLIC
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

0U-201-UC

CZECHS IN TUSHETI

Apart from several travels in more distant past, the records mention exploration journeys to Tusheti in the 70's of the 20th century, when a renowned Czech anthropologist Petr Skalník visited the region. Jan Černík researched the identity of the Tushs in the 90's.

In the new millennium the Czech Republic has implemented several more significant projects in Tusheti, which considerably enhanced the locals' awareness of the Czech Republic. Among such projects we shall name mainly the following:

Energy from renewable resources for protected areas

(<http://www.czechaid.cz/en/projekty/electrification-of-remote-areas-tusheti/>). This is presumably the most visible project in the entire region. The project of the Czech Development Agency allowed for installation of solar panels in all three villages of Tusheti. Until then financially demanding and environmentally doubtful energy generators were substituted by practically permanent supply of electricity thanks to solar batteries. A solar system for hot water was supplied within the next stage of the project.

Preparation and implementation of the management plan for Protected Landscape Tusheti

(<http://www.czechaid.cz/en/projekty/implementation-of-selected-measures-of-the-management-plan-for-the-protected-area-tusheti/>). It is provided for by the Czech Development Agency, Krkonoše National Park, and other organizations. An interview with Jakub Kašpar, the deputy director of the Krkonoše National Park Administration responsible for the project

implementation, is available at the audio archive of radio Český rozhlas.

Water supply and waste water management in Omalo

Provided for by the EU Mission in Tbilisi, the project was initiated by a Czech member of the Mission team.

Development of mountain areas. Support of the traditional livelihood systems in Tusheti

(<http://www.czechaid.cz/en/projekty/support-of-the-traditional-livelihood-systems-in-tusheti/>). In 2014, Caritas Czech Republic aimed their work at enhancing trade with Tusheti potatoes and wool (project financed by the Czech Development Agency). Both products are among the basic and traditional sources of livelihood for the Tusheti population. The trade with these commodities was rather complicated, though, due to a lack of storage place and absence of any means of transport that would supply wool to the lowlands. At present, potatoes from Tusheti appear to be most appropriate for the local market. The project also focused on mapping complementary economic activities and farming techniques in Tusheti (beekeeping and others). In the area of wool production the project aims at enhancing the quality and establishing a cooperative way of production.

First aid in Tusheti

(<http://www.czechaid.cz/en/projekty/improvement-of-first-medical-aid-services-in-omalo-tusheti-region/>). The project of the Czech Development Agency from 2016 aimed at enhancing the quality of medical services in

Tusheti. Financial contribution was used to provide the local surgery with basic equipment (a defibrillator, a ventilator, a tonometer, a wheelchair, a stretcher, etc.) and an ambulance car for Tusheti. Two years after the implementation of the project we may state that it has been exceptionally successful with a long-term benefit. The basic investment was a start-up for further financing of maintenance of the medical centre in Omalo, salaries for medical staff, and advance in medical care in Tusheti in general, in an extent unseen in the post-Soviet period.

Forest inventory and sustainable forest management in the Protected Areas of Tusheti

(<http://www.czechaid.cz/en/projekty/forest-inventory-and-sustainable-forest-management-in-the-protected-areas-in-tusheti/>). The project of the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology, Mendel University Brno, Czech Republic, addresses the issues of sustainable management of forest ecosystems.

Help-camp Tusheti

(<http://tusetie.webnode.cz>). Since 2010, volunteers from the Czech Republic, promoted by Klub Hedvábná stezka (<https://www.hedvabnastezka.cz/help-camp/>) have been coming every summer time for about two weeks. So far, approximately 120 volunteers have already contributed doing various tasks – from carrying material (stones, wood) to reconstruction of bridges or marking tourist trails.



LIST OF ACCOMMODATION IN TUSHETI

Omalo

OMALO 2005

Owners: Mikheil Otiuridze, Giorgi Ichuaidze

Tel. 599 67 22 43, 599 29 37 56

Rooms (beds): 6 (13)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: cooking and degustation of traditional dishes with always free drink

Languages: Russian, English

LASHARAI

Owners: Vepkhvia Rainauli, Nato Rainauli

Tel. 551 44 00 07, 555 645 254, 551 01 26 21

Rooms (beds): 10 (24)

Price: GEL 35 (bed only), GEL 80 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 90 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: high standards, café, driver (Valeri Rainauli, tel. 598 28 99 53)

Languages: Russian, English

SARGIRI

Owner: Phati Mishidze

Tel. 555 30 02 21, 599 77 55 43

E-mail: hotelsargiri@yahoo.com

Rooms (beds): 9 (20)

Price: GEL 30 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 2 meals)

Services: additional lunch GEL 10, local museum, carpets, Tushetian cuisine degustation and cooking show, certified guide, drivers (Vazha Kardlidge, tel. 599 77 55 43 and Panto Kardlidge, tel. 558 94 12 00)

Languages: English

TUSH TOWER

Owners: Nugzar Idoidze, Tsiala Idoidze

Tel. 599 27 22 65, 599 11 08 79

Rooms (beds): 11 (25)

Price: GEL 30 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 70 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: authentic Tushetian architecture,

guided tour to Keselo museum, folk music live performance, driver (Dato Idoidze, tel. 593 76 91 35, 599 06 79 99)

Languages: English, Russian, German

SHINA

Owner: Natia Bakuridze

Tel. 595 26 20 46, 597 17 07 07

E-mail: hotelshina@gmail.com

Web: www.shina.ge

Rooms (beds): 11 (25)

Price: GEL 50, GEL 80 (2 meals only), lunch GEL 12, dinner GEL 20

Services: high standard rooms, traditional architecture, driver (local tours)

Languages: English, Russian

TEVDORE

Owner: Mamuka Kindolauri

Tel. 551 18 30 90, 593 53 17 96

Rooms (beds): 8 (18)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: traditional cuisine and hospitality, driver (Omar Kindolauri, tel. 593 22 52 76)

Languages: Russian, English

KAMSURI

Owner: Gela Bakhturidze

Tel. 595 54 41 11, 558 75 84 78

E-mail: gelabakhturidze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 7 (20–21)

Price: GEL 30 (bed only), GEL 70 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: transportation from Tbilisi directly to Tusheti

Languages: Russian, English

TUSHETI TRAVEL

Owner: Soso Babulaidze

Tel. 599 23 11 32

E-mail: s_babulaidze@yahoo.com

Rooms (beds): 11 (30)



Autumn in Omalo

Price: GEL 30 (bed only), GEL 70 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 80 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: horse riding tours and guides, remote location outside the village, pine and birch forest stands, traditional cuisine, souvenir shop

Languages: Russian, English

VISITOR'S CENTRE OMALO

Owner: Makvala Melaidze

Tel. 599 10 45 90

E-mail: mmelaidze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 7 (15)

Price: GEL 40 (bed only), GEL 70 (3 meals)

Services: cafeteria, Visitor's Centre gallery, information, guides, camping places and hostel type rooms, panorama viewpoint nearby

Languages: Russian, English

JAVAKHE

Owner: Paata Arshaulidze

Tel. 558 79 72 22

E-mail: javakhe@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 9 (22)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: sauna, driver

Languages: Russian, English

TSASNE

Owners: Muradi Ichirauli

Tel. 557 12 77 22

E-mail: muradichirauli12@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 14 (34)

Price: GEL 20–30 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals), one meal GEL 10

Services: traditional dining room, balconies on every floor, great view of Omalo valley, youth hostel atmosphere, driver

Languages: English, Hebrew

OLD OMALO

Owner: Kakha Tatrulaidze

Tel. 557 71 97 77

E-mail: kaxa.tatrulaidze@mail.ru

Rooms (beds): 8 (20)

Price: GEL 35 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 70 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: driver

Languages: Georgian

SAGRILA

Owners: Zurab Mouravidze, Maia Bakhtarishvili

Tel. 598 54 05 45, 598 54 53 45

E-mail: giorgimouravidze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 3 (9)

Price: GEL 30, GEL 40 (B&B service), GEL 50 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals, GEL 10 one meal)

Services: fresh vegetables (own greenhouse in Omalo), open all year round, hiking and horse riding tours (own guides), driver (Irakli Mouravidze, tel. 574 22 29 88)

Languages: English, Russian

ELISABETH

Owner: Elisabed Ichirauli

Tel. 555 02 01 71

E-mail: tamar.tsomikuridze@yahoo.com

Rooms: 12

Price: GEL 20 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: local products (dairy from own farm), souvenir shop, interactive cuisine and food workshops, driver (Levan Ichirauli, tel. 598 16 29 29)

Languages: Russian, English

KESELO

Owner: Nani Arshaulidze

Tel. 577 47 21 11, 598 94 12 70

E-mail: narshaulidze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 7 (18)

Price: GEL 30 (bed), GEL 60 (2 meals), GEL 70 (3 meals).

Services: practical lessons of Tusheti cuisine and cooking show, bonfire, souvenir shop

Languages: English, Russian

TISHE

Owner: Eteri Markhvaidze

Tel. 599 90 53 37

E-mail: inga.chvritidze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 4 (15)

Price: GEL 15–20, breakfast, vegetarian dinner GEL 10, dinner GEL 5)

Services: shop with wide array of goods, information centre, laundry/shower (GEL 5), WiFi code (GEL 1), volunteer help for bed and meal, driver

Languages: Russian and English

Girevi

TEBULO

Owner: Marina

Tel. 592 803 202, 599 772 598

Rooms (beds): 4 (14)

Price: GEL 30–40 (incl. 2 meals)

Services: outdoor café, barbecue, driver

Languages: Russian, English

GIREVI

Owner: Adamo Mozaidze

Tel. 591 70 38 32

E-mail: dveshaguridze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 5 (20–22)

Price: GEL 20 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: horse riding tours, cheese making



Girevi

workshop, jeep tours, bonfire and barbecue, driver

Languages: Russian, English

Pharsma

BASO

Owner: Nodar Idoitze

Tel. 599 54 1941

E-mail: guesthousebaso@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 4 (8)

Price: GEL 30 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: convenient stay for horse riders heading to Khevsureti over Atsunta and to Gometinari over Nakaicho Pass

Languages: Russian, Spanish

Chesho

JIKI

Owner: Eldino Jangulashvili

Tel. 599 58 58 39

E-mail: ejangulashvili@yahoo.com

Rooms (beds): 12 (22–24)

Price: GEL 20–25 (bed only), GEL 40 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 50 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: the guesthouse is situated in a former clan tower

Languages: Russian, English, French

Kvavlo

KVAVLO

Owner: Besik Gatsiridze

Tel. 591 01 26 90, 599 68 76 90

E-mail: hotelkvavlo@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 6 (13)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: traditional Tusheti house in the picturesque village above Dartlo, stunning views

on pastures and the mountain range in the front, local cuisine, local vegetables and dairy products, driver (tel. 599 687 690)

Languages: Russian, English

Dartlo

DARTLO

Owners: Rapho Cadzikidze, Marika Otiuridze

Tel. 598 24 64 05, 598 17 49 66

Rooms (beds): 6 (17)

Price: GEL 30 (bed only), GEL 45 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: horse tours (own horses and guides), dairy products from own farm (cheese, butter, milk), horse guide and a driver (Dato Tsadzikidze, tel. 598 35 10 33)

Languages: Russian, English

SAMTSIKHE

Owner: Besik Elanidze

Tel. 599 11 89 93 (Viber)

E-mail: Bes.el@posta.ge

Web: www.samtsikhe.ge

Rooms (beds): 13 (37)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 70 (incl. 3 meals), 1 meal GEL 10

Services: horse riding tours and jeep tours, bike rental service, spacious restaurant complex at the entrance to the village, overlooking a stream, driver (the owner)

Languages: Russian, English

KETO'S GUEST-HOUSE

Owner: Keto Idoitze

Tel. 599 748 762

Rooms (beds): 8 (20)

Price: GEL 20–25 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals), lunch GEL 10, dinner GEL 15

Services: location apart from the village, iconic view of Dartlo all the time, mixed cuisine with fresh meals, driver

Languages: English, Russian



Chigho

TUSHURI SAKHLI

Owner: Dato Akimidze

Tel. 599 76 05 54

Rooms (beds): 2 (12)

Services: Tusheti cuisine, driver (the owner)

Languages: English

Chigho

CHIGHO

Owners: Soso Bakuridze

Tel. 599 10 02 19, 551 14 24 43

E-mail: sosobakuridze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 5 (15)

Price: GEL 20 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals), GEL 10 a meal

Services: horse tours (own horses), cosy remote place out of busy Omalo, beautiful alpine pastures and mixed forests full of berries and mushrooms, driver

Languages: Russian, English

Mirgvela

MIRGVELA

Owner: Aleks Itiuridze

Tel. 597 06 60 00, 599 63 61 03

E-mail: mirgvela@yahoo.com

Rooms (beds): 10 (25)

Price: GEL 25–30, breakfast/lunch GEL 10, dinner GEL 15

Services: located at the crossroads of Pirikiti and Gometsari valleys surrounded by deep forest, a single guest house. At the same time you find yourself in seclusion of Tushetian mountains and still well provided and informed because of the two main highways running into different directions to Gometsari and Pirikiti valley. Hiking, horseback and jeep tours are planned and organized, driver (tel: 592 002 002).

Languages: English, Russian

Shtrolta

LOELI

Owner: Lamzira Gotaidze

Tel. 599 21 81 39

E-mail: Hotelloeli@yahoo.com

Rooms (beds): 5 (15)

Price: GEL 60

Services: hiking tours to Oreti Lake. Local dairy products and vegetables from own greenhouse, peaceful, clean environment, spring water, traditional interactive games, driver.

Languages: Russian, English

Khakhabo

KEKHI

Owner: Giorgi Bakuridze

Tel. 557 143 907

E-mail: Gio.bakuridze@gmail.com

Rooms (beds): 4 (9)

Price: GEL 20 (bed only), GEL 40 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 50 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: view from every room. Hiking tours to Mount Kekhi, Omalo.

Languages: English

Dochu

KRUISKARI

Owner: Usuph Torghvaidze

Tel. 599 28 56 47

Rooms (beds): 7 (12)

Price: GEL 25–30 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 2 meals)

Services: the only guest house in Dochu, a historical village with traditional architecture considered as the most beautiful village of Gometsari Valley.

Languages: Russian, English

Gogrulta

LILLY HOMESTAY

Owner: Sokrat Bakuridze

Tel. 595143487

Rooms (beds): 4 (8)

Price: GEL 50–55

Services: the only family staying in Gogrulta in summer months, the village is difficult to reach (on foot, horseback), exceptional location with beautiful views of Gometsari Valley, authentic hospitality

Jvarboseli

JVARBOSELI

Owners: Bela Elizbaridze, Zezva Elizbaridze

Tel. 555 40 19 15, 555 64 80 54

Rooms (beds): 5 (13–14)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 60 (3 meals)

Services: excellent location at the end of Gometsari Valley, great views on the river Alazani and villages of Jvarboseli and Verkhovani, riding and hiking tours, driver (the owner)

Languages: Russian, English

Verkhovani

LAMATA

Owner: Anzor Kritiuli

Tel. 599 700 378, 824 924 022

E-mail: tushetiguesthouselamata@mail.ru

Web: www.lamata.ge

Rooms (beds): 6 (12 +5)

Price: GEL 20 (bed only), GEL 60 (3 meals), GEL 20 one meal

Services: accommodation in a traditional Tushetian house and a real defence tower from the 16th–17th century (the highest in Tusheti). Folk music evenings with *suphra*. Hiking tours, local ethnography museum.

Languages: Russian, English

Diklo

DIKLO

Owner: Gulnazi Khelaidze

Tel. 599 77 53 72

Rooms (beds): 5 (11)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: souvenir shop, traditional interior and design with a balcony. Local cuisine.

Languages: Russian, Spanish

Shenako

SHENAKO

Owner: Elene Gagoidze

Tel. 558 63 97 22, 599 48 18 12

Rooms (beds): 5 (14)

Price: GEL 30 (bed only), GEL 60 (2 meals), GEL 70 (3 meals)

Services: Tushetian cuisine. All products local because the owners spend whole winter in Tusheti and have cattle and greenhouses, a nice view from the guesthouse balcony, where guests can have a peaceful evening after a day's walk.

Languages: English

OLD TUSHETI

Owner: Eldar Bukvaidze

Tel. 558 27 20 06, 598 77 33 69, 557 67 02 24

E-mail: Gocha_tel@yahoo.com

Rooms (beds): 5 (14)

Price: GEL 25 (bed only), GEL 50 (incl. 2 meals), GEL 60 (incl. 3 meals)

Services: the owner Eldar Bukvaidze plays all musical instruments at hand and is a great singer of traditional folk songs. There is also a small interesting museum in the guest house and a sample collection of healing local plants. You can accompany the owner to the nearby woods and find out more about mushrooms and herbs in a single hour than you have known the whole life.

Languages: Russian, English



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Links

Tusheti Protected Landscape (<http://tushetipl.ge>)

Tusheti.ge (<http://www.tusheti.ge/>) – Tusheti National Park and travel agency with information on Tusheti

<http://www.batsav.com/> – a web page dedicated to Tsova Tushs (the Bats)

<http://www.alazani.ge/Tusheti-tushuri-simgerebi-side3.html?georgian-folklore> – selection of folklore music from Tusheti (downloadable in MP3 format)

<http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/georgia/index.php> – Tusheti People and Keselo Foundation (web pages of Bradshaw Foundation, which helped reconstruct the tower in Keselo)

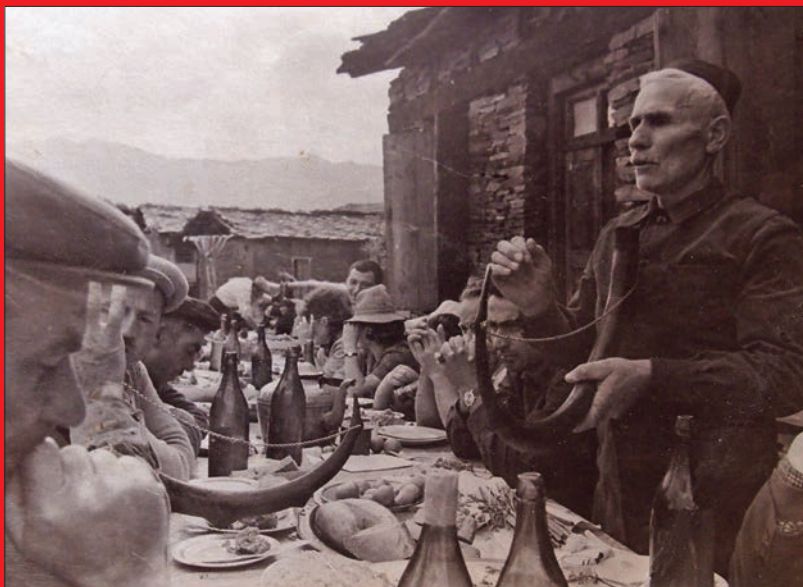
<http://transcaucasian.blogspot.cz/2007/09/old-photographs-of-batsbis-in-tsovata.html> – old photos from Tsovata

Movies

Mimino [Sparrow Hawk], 1977.

Tushi Mecchvari [Tush Shepherd], 1976.

Dzveli Tusheti [Old Tusheti], undated.



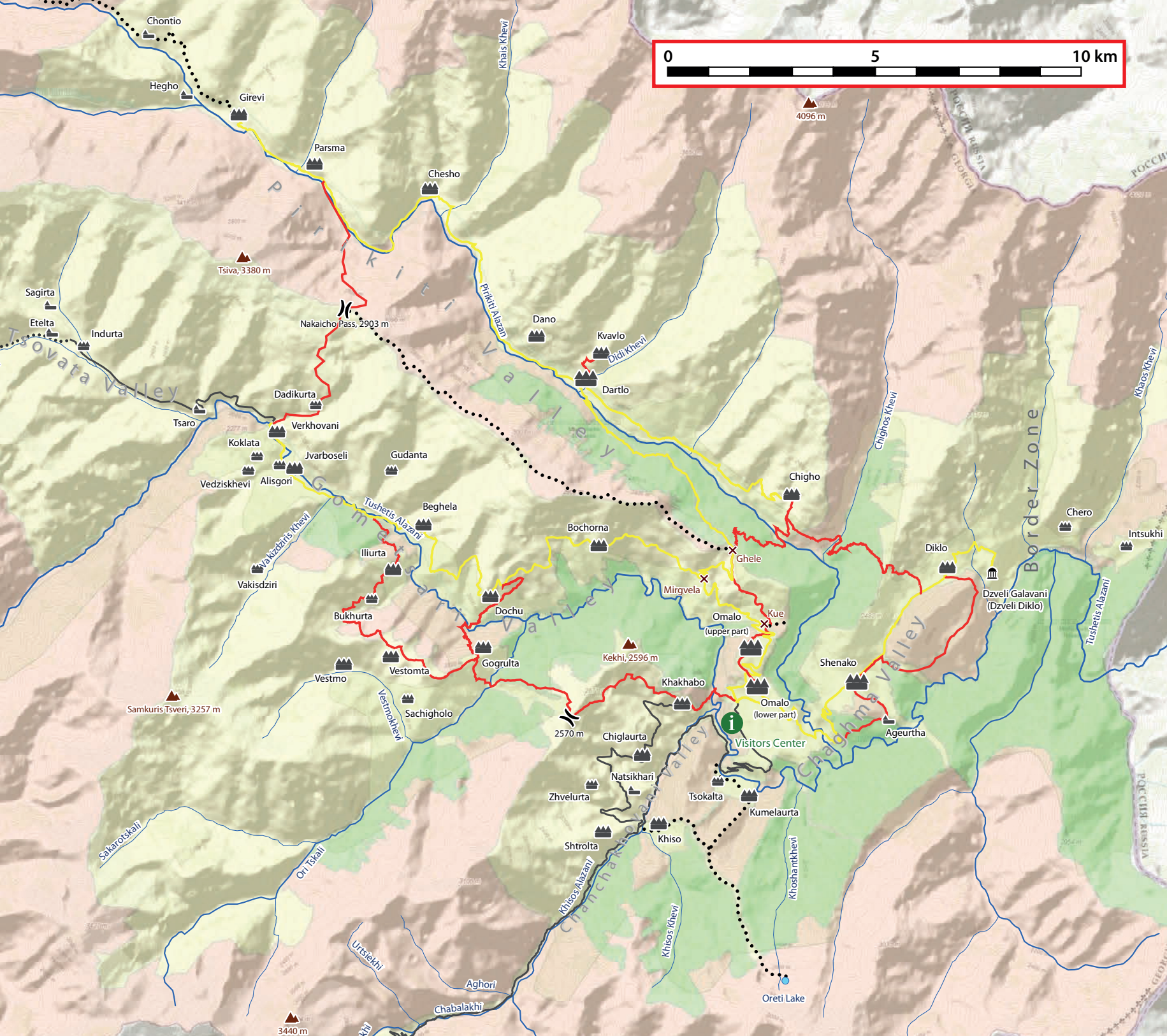
Tamada in Shenako



Korbeghela

Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), swisstopo, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

	Monument
	Thermal Springs
	Information Center
	Village
	Tourist shelter
	Ruins
	Mountain (incl. altitude)
	Pass
	Hiking Trail (not marked)
	Hiking Trail
	Road other road infrastructure is overlapped by tourist trail colours in the map
	River
	Tusheti National Park
	Tusheti State Nature Reserve
	Tusheti Protected Landscape



USEFUL TERMS

Alaverdoba (აღავერდობა). The biggest Kakheti festival held at the Alaverdi monastery at the time of autumn migration from summer pastures in Tusheti to winter pastures on the border with Azerbaijan. Celebrated 28 September.

Aludi (აღუდი). Tushetian variant of beer brewed from hops in a dedicated building (located in almost every village). Access to the brewery restricted for women in their period.

Araki (არაყი). Alcoholic drink made from grains, often also refers to brandy in general or *chacha*.

Atnigenoba (ათნიგენობა). A series of festivals beginning on the 100th day after Easter and held during two weeks in all villages of Tusheti. Traditionally, the events preceded the beginning of summer-autumn work. They are organized by *shulta* (may be more than one in larger villages), who is responsible for brewing beer (*aludi*), banquets, etc. In larger villages the festival is accompanied with horse races, games or ritual ceremonies (*korbehela*).

Boseli (ბოსელი). Literally cowshed (plural form *boslebi*), winter home

Chacha (ჭაჭა). Brandy made from grape pomace served on any social occasions (encounters, feasts). See also "Araki".

Jvari (ჯვარი) name of a mountain shrine, literally "cross".

Ghele (ღელე). Pass

Khakhmati (ხახმატი, also Khakhmati Giorgi ხახმატის გიორგი). Name of one of the main Khevsureti shrines. Dedication to the patron of warriors was popular among Tushs as a number of Khakhmati shrines in Tusheti prove.

Khati (ხატი). In Georgian language "icon", understood as a sacred place, a shrine

Khelosani (ხელოსანი). Guard and servant of the shrine (*khati*).

Khevisberi (ხევისბერი). One of the guards of a shrine, typically chosen from among local elders. Frequently also considered a political leader of the community.

Khutsesi (ხუცესი, also dekanozhi, დეკანოზი). Spiritual guard of a shrine who performs usually religious rites in the shrine during festivals.

Kakhet-tushetoba (კახეთ-თუშეთობა). Traditional migration of Tushs from the mountains to the lowlands and vice versa.

Kopala (კოპალა). A legendary hero from the mountains of eastern Georgia who got his fame by expelling enemies and the ungodly. He is worshiped as a deity in many shrines around Tusheti dedicated to his name.

Korbehela (ქორბელევა). A magical rite performed during the Atnigenoba festival that is based on pagan traditions (see the picture, Makalatia, S.: Tusheti. Tbilisi, 1993, p. 202). Five men

stand in a circle holding each other's shoulders while other five men stand in the same circle on their mates' shoulders forming a human pyramid. This pyramid turns in a circle accompanied by singing, moving towards the village shrine (*khati*). The circular movement represents the sun moving in the sky (see the picture).

Kotori (კოტორი). Pancakes stuffed with curd or cheese, possibly with potatoes and cheese, which is a Tusheti version of *khachapuri*.

Kvevris gvino (ქვევრის ღვინო). Wine from *kvervi* (large vessels buried in the ground), traditional way of aging wine in Georgia.

Lasharis Giorgi (ღაშარის გიორგი). The main shrine of Tusheti above the village of Chigho, a hypostasis of the Pshavi shrine Lashari, is dedicated to St. George, patron of warriors

Lotsva (ლოცვა). Prayer

Mimino (მიმინო, in Georgian "Sparrow hawk", incorrectly translated as "Falcon"). A Soviet legendary film (starring famous Georgian actor Vakhtang Kikabidze) about a pilot who flies from Kakheti to Omalo and dreams of large passenger aircrafts. When his dream comes true he begins to long for his return to Kakheti and flying a helicopter to Omalo and back.

Sadghegrdzelo (სადღეგრძელო). A Toast.

Salotsavi (სალოცავი). General denomination of a sacred place.

Stskalobdes (სწკალობდეს). Literally "Let the God bless (the work)". Traditional exclamation mainly in the time of festivals accompanying toasts and feasts as such.

Sopheli (სოფელი). Village.

Sophel-bosloba (სოფელ-ბოსლობა). Seasonal migration between the summer and winter homes in Tusheti.

Suphra (სუფრა). A reception held on various occasions (celebrations, weddings, welcoming guests), usually of several or many courses with toasts (*sadghegrdzelo*), managed by *tamada*.

Shulta (შულტა). A man representing the village in the time of a festival. Responsible for organization, receptions, brewing sufficient volume of beer (*aludi*) and getting a *tamada* for the banquet.

Tamada (თამადა). The toastmaster sitting at the head of the table having toasts or possibly delegating those to other people.

Temi (თემი). A commune in Tusheti (and Georgia in general) based on the people's common local and clan or communal identity.

Zedasho (ზედაშე). Blessed wine (or any other alcoholic drink) used during rites, festivals or other celebrations.

Zezaoba (ზეზვაობა). Spring festival in the time of driving sheep from the lowlands to the mountains. It is dedicated to Tusheti hero Zezva Gaphrindauli.

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