



FROM KHATLON TO THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

A Companion to Historical, Cultural, and Natural Sites



Contents

Introduction.....	1
Structure of the Book.....	2
Brief History of Bokhtar Region.....	4
Ajina-Tepa Buddhist Monastery, Wakhsh District	8
Jallolidini Balkhi District.....	10
Kofir Qala	11
Dusti District.....	13
Khoja Mashhad Mausoleum and Madrasa.....	15
Nosiri Khusraw District	17
Chiluchor- Chashma	17
Qabodiyon District.....	21
Takhti Sangin	21
The City of Kulob	25
Danghara District	28
Mausoleum of Khoja Shaiq Balkhi	28
The Mausoleum of Mawlono Obiddin.....	29
Sites in Wose District.....	30
Khoja Mumin Salt Moutain	30
Sites in Baljuwon	34
The Fortress of Miri Baljuwon	35
The Mausoleum of Shah Ne'matullahi Wali (Zarobi).....	36
The Mausoleum of Mawlono Qutbiddin.....	37
Sites in Muminobod District.....	40
The Mausoleum of Shohi Khomush	41
Khowaling District.....	44
The Mausoleum of Sultan Huwaisi Qarani.....	44
Sites in Shamsiddin Shohin District.....	46
The Mausoleum of Imam Ja'far Sadiq	46
The Mausoleum of Yormuhammadi Wali	48
PART 2: HERITAGES OF THE ROOF OF THE WORLD	49
Introduction.....	50
Darwoz.....	52
The Town of Karon.....	53
Wanj District.....	55
Fedchenko Glacier	55
Grum-Grzhemaylo Glacier	57

Rushon	58
The Fortress (Qalai Vamar)	59
Bartang Valley	62
Lake Sarez.....	64
Durumkul Lake	69
Garm Chashma.....	71
Qah-Qahha Fortress	73
The Spring of Bibi Fatima-i Zahro.....	74
The Fortress of Yamchun.....	76
Stone Calendar in Yamg Village	78
Budhist Temple, Vrang Village	80
Peak Engels & Meadow	81
Murghob (Eastern Pamir)	82
Khargushi Junction	82
Bulun-Kul Lake & Geyser	84
Yashilkul	85
Lake Zorkul.....	87
Grotto Shakhty	90
Shorbuloq Observatory, Murghob District	91
Aqtash Qarokul Junction.....	92

Introduction

Tajikistan is turning into one of the most attractive destinations for tourism in Central Asia. Its unique and unexplored historical, cultural, and natural sites in different parts of country are the main assets for promoting tourism. While built environment, cultural the natural sites remain favorable destinations, limited attempt is made to highlight their specific destination attractiveness. Tourist companies, organizations, and individual authors, involved in promoting tourism in the country are making serious efforts to market destinations to the external and internal visitors. However, the general representation of the heritage for tourism is often based on the visitor's impression, and exploration of the sites, and their coverage of the well-known facts about the sites. Despite all these good attempts, there many sites in the country which ubiquitous cultural and historical features, their strategic location, and destination attractions are not explored. Destination attractions for tourism, include the unknown details of history, culture, living milieu, the activities, the market, the events, around the sites. The attractiveness of each destinations plays better role in pulling the visitors than that of the values of the support facilities and services. It is pretty much the case in Tajikistan that the famous historical, natural, and cultural sites are marketed among the visitors.

Considering the need to add more sites to the tourist itineraries in Tajikistan, promoting them further among the local and external visitors, this companion or guidebook attempts to introduce some the unknown heritage sites in the country. It also highlights the unexplored features of some other well-known, historical, and natural sites.

The heritage sites, which are explored in this guidebook are located the Khalon province, and in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). The list of these sites was approved by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan. The information presented on these sites is taken from the research project on 'Creation of Information Repository of the Natural, Historical and Cultural Sites'. The grant for this research project was provided by the International Development Association of the World Bank Group (WBG) to implement the Tajikistan Rural Economy Development Project (REDP). The project was conducted by the University Central Asia (UCA) in partnership with experts from universities and institutions in Tajikistan. The UCA would therefore acknowledges the contribution of the researchers to collect and analyse data of the historical, cultural, and natural sites, in Khalon, and the GBAO.

Structure of the Book

The companion to the historical, cultural, and natural sites in Khatlon, and the GBAO consists of two parts. Each part in turn includes sections about the sites in the districts of these provinces. Part one of the book explore the sites in Khatlon province. Geographically, the sites in Khalon are situated in two directions: Bokhtar, and Kulob regions. Sites located in Bokhtar direction will be explored first. The sites located in the districts, city, and towns of Kulob region are visited next.

The sections in the second part of this companion will take the readers to the discovery of the sites located in the districts of the GBAO. Following the road linking GBAO with the rest of the country the companion will first present information about the sites located in districts of: Darwoz, Wanj, and Rushon, and followed by Shughnon and Roshtqal'a districts. Having discovered these the readers will travel to the sites located in upper part of the GBAO in the districts of Ishkoshim, and in Murghob (Eastern Pamir).

It should be noted that the information provided in this companion differs from the common guidebooks, which focus on the detailed practical information about the sites, including itineraries for visitors, information about the visas, permits, airflights, routes; prices of the hotels-homestays, travel, medical and safety information.¹ This practical information change regularly, with the changing socio-economic, political, and cultural situation in the country. Most of the information, directions, services, and prices have changed in tourism industry have radically changed with the outbreak of the COVID-19. The tourism sector, which was heavily dependent of the flow of outside visitors to Tajikistan, almost halted. Numerous hotels, transport and other services that were directly boosted by tourism stopped functioning. For this reason, there is a need for a fresh economic assessment, and update on the structures, services, and prices in the field of tourism.

Unlike many practical travels guide the description of the unique natural, cultural, and historical features is not general in the present guidebook. It is rather the ubiquitous and attractiveness features, unknown stories, natural properties, architectural and historical details, which are highlighted in this guidebook. It is hoped that this companion serves well for guiding visitors not only to the beautiful scenery in Khatlon, and in GBAO, but to let them dive into the reach history, which connects past with present. The companion, includes, legends, maps of the districts, location of the sites, and photos of the sites.

¹ See the example of one of the recent detailed guidebooks on travelling in Tajikistan by Sophie Ibbotson, Claire Blackmore and Behruz Boev, *Tajikistan: The Bradtd Travel Guide* (Buckinghamshire, 2020).

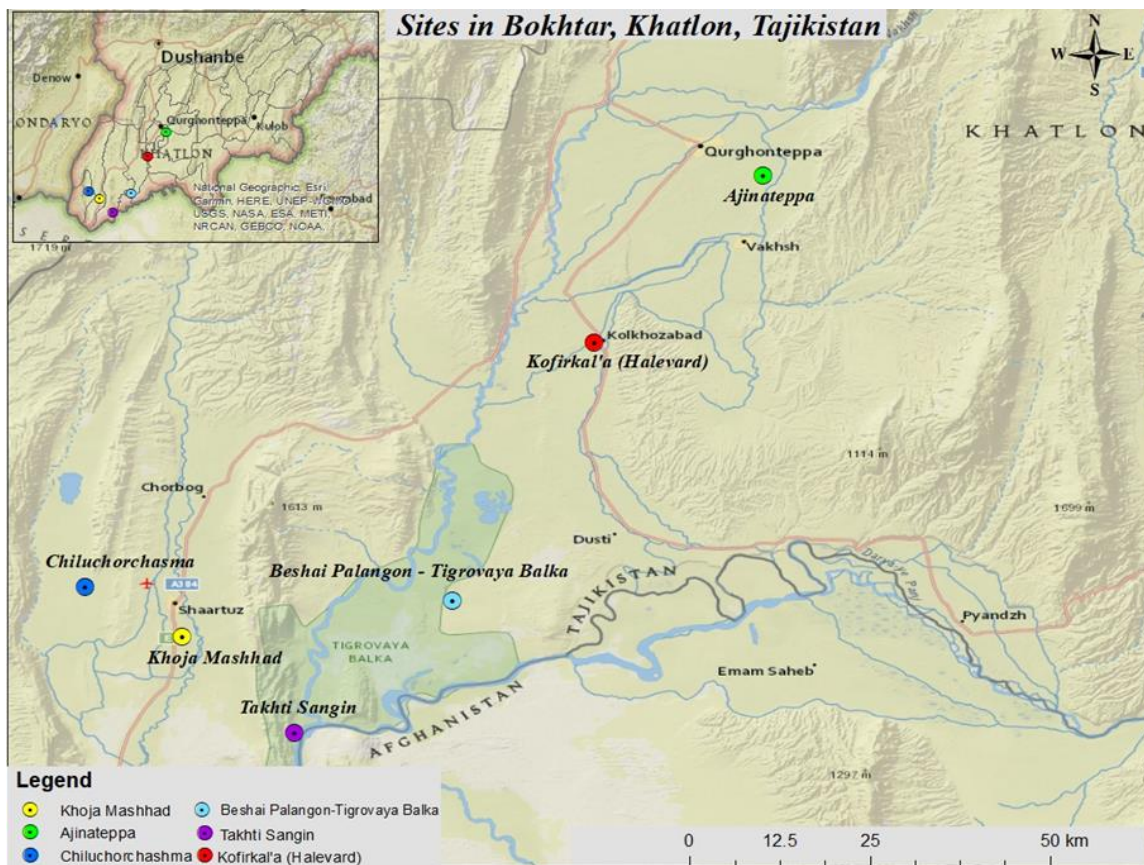


PART 1: HERITAGES OF KHATLON



Brief History of Bokhtar Region

The historical region of Bokhtar, formerly known as Qurghon-teppa province within Tajikistan is not only known as the place for the growth of fine cotton, for its vineyards and orchards, but is a mosaic of the historical, cultural, and natural heritages. Visitors travelling to Bokhtar city, and its surrounding districts would find themselves exploring the ancient towns, temples, mosques revealing the traces of encounters of civilizations, (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam). Travelers would enjoy resting near the beautiful springs with healing properties, and natural reserve, where rare animal species, (gazelle, jackals, porcupines, wild boars), and rare plants such as wild apple, pistachio, almonds, and tugais).



Archaeological research reveals that the Wakhsh valley (present territory of Bokhtar city and nearby areas) was populated at the end of the Lower Paleolithic era. Surviving archaeological remains from the valley date back to the middle of 1st millennium BC. The area, at that historical period, is believed to be part of the Wakhsh district, which was one of the 27 domains of Tokharistan. In historical geography the area is referred to as northeastern Bactria. The present territories of Bokhtar and adjacent areas become part of the Graeco-Bactria kingdom in the III-II centuries BC. From the I century BC to the III century AD the Kushan Empire, took over the place. Bactria was known also as Tokharistan and became famous for

its large cities, developed culture, and magnificent works of art. Buddhism that originated in India in the 5th-4th centuries BCE had spread to Central Asia from the second half of the first century of AD. It reached its peak in Bactria when the region became part of the Kushan Empire (II-III centuries). From that time on, professional architects, painters and sculptors were most likely converted to Buddhism in this area. The existence of the Ajina-Teppa temple in present Wakhsh district, and Kofir Qal'a in the former Kolkhozobod (present Jallolidini Balkhi district testify that this area in the past was the center of spiritual conversion. These and other parts of the present Tajikistan were conquered by the Arab invaders in 8th century. Later it become part of the Samanid territory, the first Tajik and Islamic dynasty in Central Asia. From 11 to 12th century the Turkic Muslim Seljuq dynasty ruled over this area. It was namely between 9th and 12th centuries that Islamic cultural and educational institutions such as madrasa and maktab flourished in Central Asia.

By the end of 18th century, the valley became part of the Emirate Bukhara. The Emirate of Bukhara itself became a protectorate of the Tsarist Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century. It was at that time that Russian explorers informed about ancient and medieval sites, temples, mosques, and madrasas in the area. The Wakhsh Valley considered an archaeological zone, and dozens of its sites became subject to extensive archaeological investigations in the Soviet period. The survey of the monuments started in 1950s and continued till the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The main and largest city in the Wakhsh Valley is Bokhtar. Formerly known as Qurghonteppa, the city emerged and developed due Soviet collectivization and cotton industry development in Tajikistan. It was a cosmopolitan Soviet style city, home to dozens of ethnic groups, including Slavs (Russian, Ukrainian), German, Tatars, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, Greeks, Uzbeks. Bokhtar is connected through main high road to Dushanbe, Kulob. The high road passing Bokhtar connects Tajikistan to Afghanistan via the bridge in border district of Panji Poyon. Bokhtar has an international airport which receives flight from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. The Termez-Bokhtar-Yavan railway runs through the province. Highways connects Shahritus, Jayhun, Jallolidini Balkhi, Jayhun, and other towns and district with the cities of Bokhtar and Dushanbe. Currently Bokhtar is the largest city in the southern Tajikistan, and the third largest city in the whole country. The number of its population of is above 110,000.



The landscape of Wakhsh, Beshkent and Shahritus are not spaces for historical and cultural monuments, but also for the vibrant life in its towns and villages. The population of these areas' masters of folk crafts and production. They are actively engaged in weaving, sewing, types of embroidery (*gulduzi and zarduzi*), jewelry production, leather production, wood working and metalworking, blacksmith). The rich tradition of *gulduzi* is represented through the various patterns and styles such as *guli zinda*, *gul ba gul*, *sadbargdor*, *kosador* and other fashion and styles.

The cuisine of the area is rich and composed national dishes known as *kalama*, *takhmol* (types of thin bread with many layers), *oshi burida* (homemade dumplings), *oshi palou* (steamed rice), *kurutob*, and *shakarob* (vegetable salads, cottage cheese, butter, and thin breads with many layers) *mantu* (dumplings), soup (any kind) *sharbat*, porridge, *shirravgan*, *nishoista* (milk dishes), which give a special taste to the guest.

Residents grow a bountiful harvest of strawberries, which are ranked first in the country for their taste. Agriculturally rich lands in the district allow the farmers to harvest healthy and organic food, such as local wheat and grain, which is milled in the traditional water mills. Various types of fruits are dried, canned for both local uses, and for export. Various types of bread (*chappoti*, *kulcha*, *hasfatir*) made of local wheat, juice or made of the fruits are sold in the market, canteens, and restaurants located in Bokhtar and the centers of the district. These types of food represent the rich national cuisine in this part of Tajikistan. These sites are located in former Qurghonteppa province, present districts in the Bokhtar region in a wider geographical area of the Wakhsh Valley. The valley is an archaeological and natural zone. It is also an agriculturally developed area as has scenic natural landscapes. The following pages will provide detailed information about historical, cultural sites such as:

- Ajinateppa in Wakhsh district
- Khoja Mashad (Shahritus district)
- Kofir Qal'a (Haleward) (Jallolidin Balkhi district)
- Takhti Sangin (Qabodiyon district)

Natural sites of:

- Chiluchor Chashma (Shahritus)
- Tigrovaia Balka (Jallolidini Balkhi, Jayhun and Qabodiyon districts)

Ajina-Tepa Buddhist Monastery, Wakhsh District

The ruin of the Buddhist cloister of of Ajina-Tepa (Devil's Hill) is located in the southwestern part of Kizilsoy village in the Wakhsh district of Khatlon province. This ancient monument is situated 12 km north of the Bokhtar city (former Qurghonteppa). The site is approximately 85 km far to the south of the capital city Dushanbe and around 53 km away from Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan in the opposite direction. An approximate elevation of the site is 430 meters above sea level. In a wider geographical context, Ajina-Tepa is located in a valley within the lower stream of Wakhsh river surrounded by mountains almost on all sides.

History

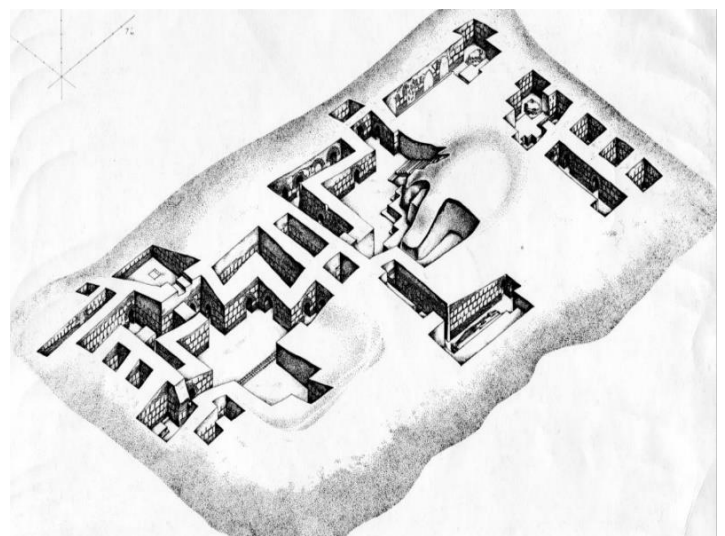
Ajina-Tepa monument is a synthesis of the traditions and images of Indian art and the local Bactrian- Tocharistan heritage. These masterpieces of art show how Buddhist artistic creativity reached its peak in Central Asia in the 7th-8th centuries. Some archeologists are of view that the



monastery was destroyed in during the spread of Islam into the area from c. 750 AD onwards. Recent archaeological interpretations refer to the fact that the abandoned sites may have gradually decayed, rather being deliberately destroyed.

Architectural Features

The Ajina-Tepa complex functioned around the seventh and eighth centuries AD. It was a typical Buddhist building with the size 50 x 100 m, combining two monasteries: the Vihara monastery and the Sangharama, the place where the Buddhist monastic community lived. It had two parts: the southeastern monastery and the temple halves. It was a renowned religious centre for the Buddhist monks. The Buddhist monastery of Ajina-Tepa had a special room, where a painted clay colossus lied on a pedestal.



The Reconstructed View of the Site (Litvinsky and Zeimal, 1971)

Pilgrimage and worship in Medieval Ajina-Tepa

When the monastery was in use, pilgrims, monks, and laymen first made a ritual tour around the most



Process of offering food to the altar

sacred part of the stupa and left various donations here. Then the procession walked around the premises of the fence, which were in twilight. The lamps, which were in the hands of the visitors, helped them to see the details of the paintings and sculptures dedicated to the spiritual life of the Buddha. Canonized postures, clothing, facial expressions of Buddhas, bodhisattvas - all of this made a great impression on the believers. Statues of Buddhas, some of which reached one and a half of the human height, as well as their small statues,

accompanied the visitors all the way. All of the artistic decoration of the premises made an indelible impression on the pilgrims, exciting them to admire and strengthened their faith in Buddha.

Sleeping Buddha

During many of excavation large numbers of diverse and spectacular artefacts were discovered in the site.

The final collection of artefacts from the site included over 600 art works, over hundred sculptures, fragments of large sculpture groups, and a large numismatic collection (about 300 copies of copper coins). Most of the artefacts were taken to the state Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg after the excavation.

The most impressive and best known of the Ajina-Tepa findings was the giant horizontal statue of Buddha, also known as Buddha in Nirvana, which was located in the eastern corridor of the monastery. It was discovered in 1966. Parts of the statue's clothing was polychrome when it was discovered. The statue was made of clay. It was around 1,500 years old and almost 13 metres long. This statue is considered to be largest clay Buddha in Nirvana anywhere in the world and one of brightest Buddhist relics in world culture.



Sleeping Buddha of Ajina-Tepa. (Source: www.silkadv.com)

A long and difficult path was passed before the restoration of the statue was completed. In September 2000, the statue was placed in one of the halls of the Tajik National Museum of Antiquities. This statue is considered the largest in Central Asia after the destruction of the statue of Buddha in Bamiyan (Afghanistan) at the beginning of 2000 by the Taliban.

Travelling to the Site

The site can be easily reached by car travelling from the city of Bokhtar. The city itself can be reached by buses, minibus, private taxi from the capital city of Dushanbe. Bokhtar is located 100 kilometres (62 mi) south of Dushanbe. Bokhtar is the largest city in the southern Tajikistan.

Jallolidini Balkhi District

The district of Jallolidin Balkhi is situated in the Wakhs Valley, and is bordering with the districts of Kushoniyon, Wakhsh to the north, with Farkhor district to the east, and with Dusti, Jayhun, and Panj districts to the south. Visitors travelling to the district would be amazed to learn about the history of the district, starting from Haleward to Kafir Qala, as well as learn about its development in the Soviet period. By visiting the small and pretty museum at the centre of the district visitor watching = picture reading short reports visitor can gain a fare knowledge of the history of the area. The museum has also artefacts which were recently found in Kafir Qala. Two more historical fortress: the Laghmonqala, and Sanad Qala (1-2) are located in the district, which needed to be explored.

Kofir Qala

Kofir Qala is located at the western outskirts of the centre of Jaloliddini Balkhi district. The district is located 32 km far from the city of Bokhtar, which is the center of Khatlon province. The citadel of Kafir Qala was reportedly built in 1-3 century and functioned till the 8th century. According to historians, Kofirqala was the administrative centre of Wakhsh region during the Middle Ages. In



historical sources, this place is known with the name of Halevard, Helovard, Halavard and Halovard. The word Halevard consist of two connected words, i.e., ‘hale - scattered’ and ‘vard – palace (like a red flower)’. This conclusion about the name of the city was due to the fact that a poorly preserved pottery was found there during archaeological investigation. The Arabic inscription on this potter contained the word Halvard. Chinese Buddhist missionary and monk Xunguang travelling from India to China through Central Asia at around 644 of CE referred to Halevard as an administrative centre and flourishing Buddhist city in the Wakhsh province. The Arabs seized the city and destroyed Buddhist deities. They named site as the fortress of infidels, i.e., Kofir Qa’la and even attached to the water channel that runs near the fort. It was called *Korif -kanal* (the channels of the infidels).

Archaeologists believe that the city of Haleward was completely destroyed during the second Arab invasion and that its inhabitants fled. At present Haleward is an official name of a council of villages (*jamoati dehot*) in the Jalloliddin Balkhi district. Haleward was a medieval city and administrative center of the Wakhsh province at the time Kushans. Since its destruction in the 8th century the city and citadel of Haleward was almost forgotten. It came into the surface with the archaeological excavation of the Wakhs Valley in the Soviet period.

Architecture of the Site



The building of this fortress was a square area surrounded by walls and trenches. High towers were built on all four sides of the retaining walls, which were used for surveillance. This city of Haleward consisted of citadel, city, suburb, and cemetery. The western parts of the city were connected by a road that divided the city into two parts. Houses of nobles, and riches, offices existed in one part. Houses of the ordinary, and poor people existed in the other part of the city.

Haleward was a fortified city surrounded by a thick defensive wall. It was also surrounded by a ditch, which was filled with the water. To the right, the city gates had a bridge, which was lifted at night, and during the attack of the enemy.

A huge citadel existed in the northeastern corner of the city. The citadel was an architectural complex which housed, ceremonial, residential and religious (Buddhist) buildings associated with the life of the ruler. The citadel was connected with *shahristan* (city) through a transition bridge. A small Buddhist temple which was inside the palace is a manifestation of the construction skill in Tokharistan. Archaeologist discovered many artefacts in this site. The important and interesting discovery in Kafir Qala are the wall painting such as the fragment of the image of the Buddha's head, fragment of the seated Buddhas, fragment depicting human hands, lotus flower, fragment with the image of an animal walking to the left, number of sealings and stamps, stamped ceramic relief of the donor, child, and servant. These artefacts suggest that Kafir Qala is the richest site to represent the material culture of Central Asia, in particular Tokharistan in the medieval period. These designs and decorations were made for urban fortifications and magnificent walls, arches, trumpets, arches, and domes.

Travelling to the Site

The ruins of Kofir Qala are located not far from the centre of Jallolidin Balkhi district. This site can be easily reached by travelling on the route connecting Dushanbe-Dusti. Visitor can also travel to this site via the same route coming from Jaihun district. The road to travel to Dusti town is very good and open all year.

Dusti District

Tigrovaia Balka Nature Reserve

The Reserve is located in southwestern Tajikistan, in the desert between the Wakhsh, Panj and Kofarnihon rivers on the Afghan border. It currently covers an area of 49,786 hectares.

The reserve is located mainly on the border of Dusti, Qubodiyon and Jaihun districts of Khatlon region. Its administrative center is located in the territory of district, located at a distance of 8-9



km from the district center. The part of the left bank that enters the Kashkakum sands is up to 530 m high. The highest point of the reserve is the Khojakoziyon Mountains, the height of which ranges from 1000 to 1200 m. Its main entrance is in the northern part. It is 7km from the centre of Jallolidini Balkhi district to the entrance of the reserve, which is located in the southern part of the district. The the area of more than 4,000 hectares of reserves consists of reservoirs and lakes. There are 20 lakes in the reserve.

History of the Natural Reserve



Inside the Natural Reserve (Source: Internet)

Tigrovaya Balka State Reserve is the largest nature reserve in the country. It was established on November 4, 1938, by the order of Soviet government. The Tiger Forest Reserve is the first state nature reserve in Tajikistan. In 1938 its area was 50 thousand hectares. In 1945-1946, the area of the reserve was reduced to 7,000 hectares, and in 1951 its area was increased to 27,000 hectares.

However, as a result of land reclamation in the Vakhsh Valley in 1953, its territory was reduced by 21,000 hectares. Then, according to the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR from May 9, 1959, the reserve area was set at 41,000 hectares and it was transferred to the Forestry Committee

of the Tajik SSR. The reserve has 45 species of wild animals, 214 species of birds, 8 species of snakes and There are five species of lizards. The Amu Darya leptonos fish is found in the reserve and is found only in Asia, in the Amu Darya River basin, and in North America, in the Mississippi River basin. In addition, the reserve has 19 other species of fish, such as there are squid, squid, gambus, and so on. As mentioned above, in the 30s of the last century, due to the development of the Vakhsh Valley, the area of the reserve decreased. As a result of this complexity the the natural ecosystem has declined in the territory of the reserve. Due to this, the number of tigers, gazelles, gazelles, mountainsheep (urial), Tajik tazarv, reed cats and other species has significantly decreased.

The Turanian tiger was last recorded in the reserve in 1953. The climate of the reserve is considered to be continental and arid. In winter, air masses and temperatures are formed by the influence of arctic, and in summer, the characteristics of the tropical climate prevail. The average annual temperature is +14, +17 degrees, the coldest month (January) +2 and 0 degrees, the hottest (July) +28 +48 degrees. The period without frost is 250-310 days and the temperature reaches + 10 ° C 200-250 days. Summer begins in May and lasts until mid-September. Temperature depression prevails during this period. The highest temperature in July, sometimes reaching + 46-48 degrees. Winters are mild and short. The hydrological network of the reserve consists of the Panj, Vakhsh and their tributaries.

Travelling to the Site

The Beshai Palangon Reserve can be reached by train, taxi and car from Dushanbe and Bactria. From Bactria, visitors can take a car or taxi to Jilikul. The entrance to the sanctuary is located 7 km from Jilikul district. The reserve also has a museum where tourists can learn about the history of the reserve and its ecosystems. Due to restrictions and prohibitions, the researchers in this project were unable to enter Tigrovaya Balka. This site was closed to visitors and researchers. We tried to get permission from the local and republican authorities, but the place was closed due to the seasonal birth of the species. Therefore, the researchers took only photos outside the area, and in front of the gates of the sanctuary.

Sites in Shahritus District

There are various forms of the heritage which attracts visitors to the area. Visitors can take a cultural and historical tour to explore other mausoleums, and a natural spring of Chiluchor Chashma in the district. The mausoleum of, Khoja Mashad, Khoja Durbod is located in the territory of Khoja Durbod village in the territory of the same jamoat, where Khoja Mashad is located. Khoja Mashad architectural complex was one of the largest *madrasas* in Central Asia in the medieval time. Khoja Durbod is square

building, which walls are made of small bricks and masterfully decorated in the unique styles of *taqdartaq* and *nijvon*. Due to its design differs from other monuments in the district due to its decoration and use of architectural techniques in constructing its towers and dome. The use of unusual architectural techniques in constructing this building reflects the peculiarities of the local building art. Another historical monument in this area is the mausoleum of Khoja Sarboz, which construction dates to 11th-12th centuries. This mausoleum is located in the Lolazor village. It's made of raw bricks. Although the dome of the mausoleum is destroyed, it seems to be one of the largest domes made of raw brick in Central Asia. The other mausoleum is named Tillo Halloji. This is an architectural monument from the 11-12 centuries. It is located in Ayvoj village of Shahritus district. The mausoleum is made of raw brick. The dome of the mausoleum is destroyed, but it is a reminiscent of the pre-Islamic fire temples of Central Asia. Tourists attending the cultural tour in the district would enjoy watching the beautiful arched roofs are located in the deep rectangular towers (with the odd-shaped towers) of this mausoleum. Shahritus is a naturally rich area. A monument to a mountain goat (Parmashoh) was erected recently at the gates of Shahritus district, which reveals that wildlife is one of the attractiveness of this destination.

[Khoja Mashhad Mausoleum and Madrasa](#)

The madrasa and mausoleum of Khoja Mashhad or “Double mausoleum” are located in the village of Sayodi village of the village council (jamoat) of Talbak Sadridin in Shahritus district. It is located 6 km south of the village of Shaartuz in the direction of the village of Ayvaj, on the bank of the Kafirnihon River. The madrasa of Khoja Mashhad is about 150 kilometers south of Dushanbe about 25 kilometers from the Uzbekistan and Afghanistan borders. It is part of the Silk Roads Sites in Tajikistan that was nominated to be a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2013.



Legend has it a wealthy Islamic missionary Khoja Mashad from Iran travelled to the area and opened a madrasa there. He built the entire madrasa out of his expense and was buried near the building. A mausoleum was erected to him century later. According to the local legend the architectural complex (madrasa and mausoleum), both appeared in one night due to the miracle Allah. It is widely believed that the famous Tajik- Persian writer and philosopher Nasir Khusraw Qubodiyoni (b.1004) studied in this *madrasa*. Archaeologists, report that the *madrasa* was built in IX-X centuries AD. The building of the *maqbara* (mausoleum) was added to the complex in the XI-XII centuries.

Architecture of the Monument



The complex is connected by two domed buildings, which are made of baked bricks. The mausoleum, mosque located to the north and south of the porch. The walls of the mausoleum are made of baked brick. Parts of the other walls of the *madrasa* were also made of bricks that were broken during excavations. The total area of the *madrasa* is (68 x 48 meters). There are two round towers in the southern corner of the façade of the

arched statue. The buildings of the *madrasa* consist of two parts. It has entrance, which connects it to the two attached buildings. It faces a terrace that has a dome. The roof of the buildings is a dome-shaped and the dome has windows at the top. The walls of the buildings are square. At the top they form an arch-like shape consisting of eight angles. A semi cone-like shaped roof covers the walls. The ceiling was painted with white chemicals (calcite) during the IX-X centuries. The ornamented pattern design was also made during this time. The mausoleum part of the complex consists of two buildings with a round dome.

The eastern mausoleum was built earlier (IX-X centuries). The domes of this architectural complex are visible from afar. The area, and interior design of the building allow visitors to see its structure from the base to the dome. The light which enters through the window, gives the building a solemn and luxurious look. All parts of the buildings are built out of baked bricks. The government of Tajikistan have attracted domestic and foreign investment to reconstruct this complex. Khoja Mashad stands as a magnificent piece of Islamic architecture in Tajikistan and embodies the spiritual and material culture of the people of the area.

Travelling to the site

The main route which takes visitors to Khoja Mashad complex is automobile road from Shahritus. Visitors can take a shared local taxi from Shahritus which



takes pilgrims this sacred burial place. Tourist companies organize driving tours from Dushanbe to Shahrituz and Qubodiyon to visit Khoja Mashad and other sites. Shahritus is an attractive destination for travel to a land of sunshine.

Nosiri Khusraw District

Chiluchor- Chashma

Chiluchor Chashma is one of the remarkable freshwater springs in the Khatlon province. It is located on the right bank of the Kofarnihon river and is 12 kilometers to the west of Shahritus district. This is a well-known spring, and mausoleum in Nosiri Khusrav district of Khatlon region. The site is located at 230 km south of Dushanbe. Geographically the spring is within Beshkent valley, which was a lifeless steppe in the past. The valley turned into a flourishing land with cotton and wheat farms, and fruit garden when the Soviet constructed an irrigation channel there.

According to the findings of the Soviet archaeologist the site of Chiluchor Chashma, dates back to the Mesolithic period. Arab chronicler visiting Central Asia in 12th century noted about the existence of a well-known source in Qubodiyon, which had a healing water. Russian and Soviet historian noted that this spring was one of most reserved and visited area in the Qabodian region. It was a flourishing oasis in the Bishkent valley. The families of religious leaders such khojas and shaykhs have settled around the site, received gifts from the numerous pilgrims. They have also served as tax collectors for the local and

regional rulers. The descendant of these shaykh is serving as the keeper of the site, and custodian of the nearby shrine.



A legend is spread among the local people about the appearance of this spring. The legend is about a mythical figure Bobo Qambar, who was the horseman, and the head of the stable of Hazrat Ali, the fourth rightly guided caliph of Islam, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. Bobo Qambar was wounded in Badakhshan during the battle with the infidels. While suffering from the pain he dreamt of a place with Forty-Four Springs. However, none among the troops knew the location of the Forty-Four Springs. To find these springs the army of Hazrat Ali divided themselves into groups to search the springs. One of this group reached the province Qubodiyon and found a small oasis with forty-four springs. The body of Bobo Qambar was buried there, and Hazrati Ali came to pray on his grave. Since that time the grave of Bobo Qambar became a place of worship and pilgrimage from near and far places. Another popular story about the origin of these springs is that Ali came to preach Islam to this valley, but the nearby river dried up. Then Ali cursed the river and named it Kafirnihan (the place where unbelievers hide). Ali reached the present place of Chilu



Chorchashma and prayed to God to send water to his troops. He struck the ground with his hands and five springs of water came out of the place of Hazrat Ali's fingers.

Natural Features of the Site

There are forty-four springs in the site. Seventeen of these springs have therapeutic and healing features/ The first group of spring with healing features are called Muyin springs. Traditionally, people cut and throw the hair of their children near these springs and wash them. They believe that diseases such as headache would disappear after this action. on their beliefs and convictions and cut them here with good intentions. On the edge of this spring there is an old willow tree, which is believed to have lived for more than a thousand year. It is mentioned that in 1980 the tree was listed in the Guinness Book of Records.



The second group include springs, which are called nasal springs. People with nosebleeds use it. These springs are a great source of water. The third group includes four springs, which are used for treating, flu



in respiratory and other human organs. The fourth group of spring are used for bone diseases. The fifth group of the springs used to treat malaria sufferers. Despite the fact that the springs are located at a distance of 20-25 cm from each other, they have distinct characteristics. Scientists have analyzed these springs separately and proved that one is useful for osteoporosis and the other for malaria. A re-examination using 144 glass-test tubes determined exactly that the property of water in these springs actually differs from each other. The sixth group of the springs (include 4 springs) are good for digestive purposes. The other two springs offer cure for high blood pressure and headaches. Those with high blood pressure use it. Another spring is beneficial for spores (whites) and vetligo disease (body spots). This is unusual water and will heat up to 49 degrees from January 11 to 29. Constantly, every year in January the spring dries up and reopens in May.

The other four springs are called (*murod*) goal. Local people take stones from this spring for a long time. When they reach the goal, they put the stone back in its place. Thus, the five large springs which come out from the hill, in turn split into 39 smaller ones. The water of the springs forms a channel 12-13 meters wide, in which “sacred” fish (various species of the Marinka genus), as well as trout, live. The spring is full of different spishes of fish.

This natural and sacred site is one of the attractive destinations for locals and foreigners visiting the area. Local people strongly believe it is healing properties and come to bath there. There is a separate place for bathing for women, and for men. They also come to pray for their health, make wishes, and sacrifices. The site is also a wonderful place to take a refuge from the hot weather of the desert areas of Bishkent. Visitors drink the water and have a picnic under the plane, and poplar trees in the orchard around the tree. The garden around the site is full of fruit trees.



Travelling to the Site

Chilu Chorchashma can be easily reached through the main highway of Dushanbe-Shahritus. It would take a half-hour drive for a minibus from Shahritus. Usually the mini-bus travels to the site several times a day, and frequently on weekends. Taxis can be also hired from Bokhtar directly to the site.

Qabodiyon District

Takhti Sangin

Takhti Sangin is perhaps the most famous ancient site in Tajikistan. It is situated 34km far from Qabodiyon district at the confluence of two tributaries of Amudarya (Oxus): the Wakhsh and Panj rivers. The origin of the site is traced back to IV century B.C. The total area of this site is 75 hectares. Takhti Sangin is mentioned among the nine sites that Tajikistan had nominated for the list of the World Heritage, developed by the UNESCO.

History of the Site

Takhti Sangin was one of the urban sites that had functioned from 4th to 3rd centuries. The architecture of this town was an embodiment of Persian and later Hellenistic culture. This ancient city was surrounded by walls and its central street was paved with stone. Two monumental buildings: the Oxus Temple and the large administrative building were functioning as the centre of the worship, and office existed in the centre of the city during the Graeco-Bactrian period. This city was founded in a strategic geographical location, and trade route connecting Kunduz (present Afghanistan) to the oasis of



Qubodiyon. A Silk Road caravan route coming from Takhti Qubod another fortress in the vicinity followed Kafirnihon river connected the oasis with the Hissar valley and went further in the north-eastern direction to China. Takhti Sangin was located at the place where the rivers and the mountain provided natural defenses. This town flourished as an administrative, trade, and worship centre with a beautiful Zoroastrian temple in the Achaemenid period. It is assumed that the Kushans seizure the area in the year 130 BC and gradually destroyed during the site.

Archaeology of the Site

There was a strongly fortified citadel in this ancient town. The excavations inside the citadel revealed a monument of Temple of Oxus. The temple was built in the III century B.C. and was used until the III-IV centuries. Most of the historians put forward an idea that this palace was built for the God of Vakhsh-Oshkho's river. A four-columned White Hall existed within the temple. Its walls were 5 meters high. The White Hall was surrounded with corridors from south, west, and north. The entrance of the White Hall was on the eastern side. The White House was flanked on both sides by symmetrical rooms (*ateshgah*), fireplace. The sacred fire was kept in the White Hall and the portico. Several stone



altars which were made according to the Hellenistic tradition. There was a portico with two rows of columns, in front of the entrance. The portico was surrounded with rooms from the south and the north. One of these rooms had an entrance to the *aiwan* (summerhouse). A temple yard existed on the eastern side of the portico. Later the portico was separated with the thick brick walls. The columns of the temple were six meters high and based on the stepped

pedestals and resembled to the columns in the beautiful cities in the ancient Athens. The high columns of the temple were decorated and there were statues fixed on special pedestals. Fragments of sculptures found in the temple once adorned the building and its treasury. Some sculpture such Marsya playing the flute deserve special attention. A Bactrian named Atrosok (whose name translates as "burning with sacred fire") ruled the place the II century BC and left an inscription in Greek one of the stone, which means, 'by a vow Atrosok dedicated himself to Oxus'.



Dedication to the god of Oxus by the Bactrian named "Atrosokes". 200-150 biennium BC. Preserved at the National Museum of Tajikistan. Source:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/9549670@N05/24437843333/>

Archaeology of the Site

Like many historical sites located in the Wakhsh Valley, Takhti Sangin become the object of extensive archaeological investigation starting from the Soviet period in the 1928 to the recent investigations in between 2010 and 2014 and the last investigation in 2020. The result of the extensive investigations in Takht Sangin and its surrounding area amount to more than 5 thousand items. The works of arts that were



Chariot Wheel: British Museum

discovered in the site include: a) metal (gold, silver, bronze, iron), ivory, alabaster, stone, glass, and clay; b) types of weapons arrowheads, javelins, swords, daggers, etc. Items made of ivory also and include handles of knives, swords, sheaths, and relief pictures. Some of the discovered items from this site are kept in National Museum of Tajikistan, some in Archaeological Museum of the Institute of History of Tajikistan, others in Bokhtar city museum, and in Qubodiyon district museum.

The history of how the treasures from Takhti Sangin there reached the British Museum is an interesting odyssey of treasure and heritage representing Eastern Iranian, and Achaemenid, and Greek traditions. The treasure that was discovered by residents in the 19th century sold it to the Indian merchants. The caravan of merchants was raided by the robbers on the road

from Kabul to Peshawar. British political officers, and archaeologists bought these pieces from the robbers and later bequeathed them to the British Museum. Findings from the Oxus Temple such as incomplete model chariot, are displayed at the British Museum now. Takhti Sangin with its reach Oxus Treasure reveals the rich pluralistic, and tolerant living environment in which the ancestors of the Tajik- the Eastern Iranians the Sogdians, Bactrians, Parthians, Sakas, Tochars encountered with Greeks, Kushan- Yuezhi, and Hephthalites encountered at various times.

Travelling to Takhti Sangin

The site can be reached by hitchhike or taxi from Qabodiyon. It can be also easily reached by a taxi from Shahritus. The main travel route to the site is the automobile road linking Bokhtar to Qubodiyon. Qubodiyon is one of the best destinations for beaches and for religious tourism, for excavations. The best and interesting trip Takhti Sangin would be a tour from Dushanbe to Bokhtar to



Shahrituz, and Qabodiyon district. The short description of this route would Dushanbe -Bokhtar - Shahrituz (Chiluchor Chashma). After having a rest in this spring visitor can take the route to Takhti Sangin. From this ancient city they can transfer and take a route of Shahritus - Sayod, where the Khoja Mashad complex is located. From Khoja Mashad they can travel through Sharitus - Qabodiyon -Bokhtar - Dushanbe.

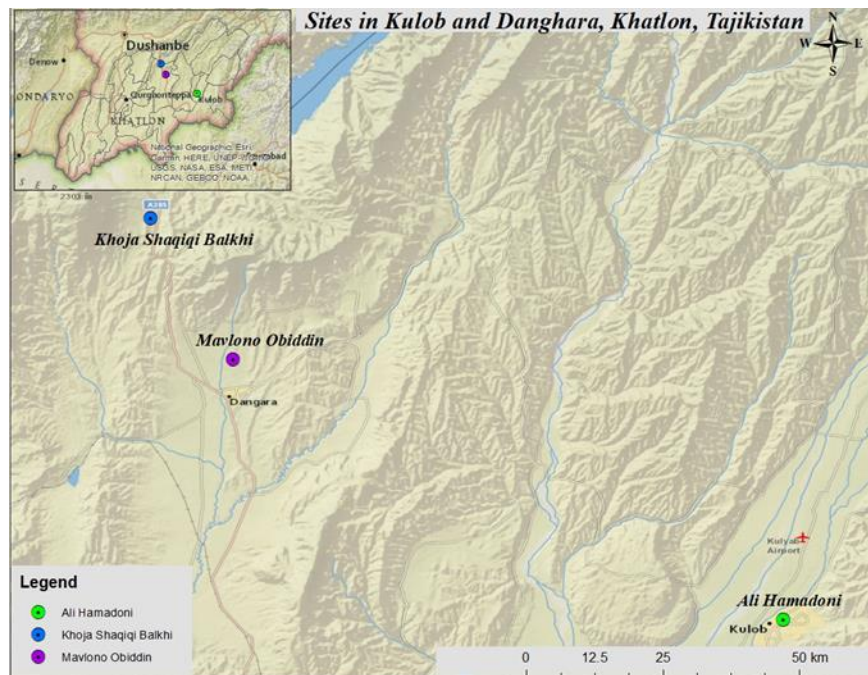
The City of Kulob

Kulob is the second largest city in the Khatlon province in southern Tajikistan. It is the cultural and historical centre of the former Kulob province. The historical province of Kulob is home to many ancient and medieval sites, including palaces such as Hulbuk, Munk, Bubakon, Tandircharogh, Iskandara, Langar, Maranda, which are known in Central Asia in IX-VII centuries. As a town located on trade road Kulob came to prominence by the XV-XVI centuries. At this time chroniclers mention about the defensive capabilities of the Kulob fortress against the attack of the army of Shaybanids Uzbek dynasty. Subsequently, Kulob became part the Bukharian emirate.

The ruins of the medieval fortress and town now exist at the suburb of the present Kulob city. In the Soviet period Kulob received the status of the city in 1934 and became the administrative center of the new province. The city developed fast with new buildings, factories, institutes, and hospitals. Automobile roads were built to different districts of the province.

New roads, which were built according to the international standards in the years of Tajikistan's independency, had shortened the travel distance between Kulob and Dushanbe, the districts around it, and connected it to the GBAO. Located at this highroad, Kulob is gaining its medieval status as the connecting point for Silk Road from historical Khutalan Badakhshan. Visitors can reach Kulob by using the taxi, bus, or travelling through the narrow railway from Bokhtar, the capital of Khatlon province. Kulob international airport offers flights to Russia and other countries in the former Soviet Union.

Tourism infrastructure in the city of Kulob has improved significantly in recent years with the construction of dozens of modern hotels, and restaurants. Visitors coming to Kulob would enjoy watching Mir Said Ali Hamadoni's mausoleum and museum, the monument of an unknown person, and visit another museum dedicated to the 2700 Anniversary of Kulob city.



Mausoleum of Mir Said Ali Hamadoni

The mausoleum of Mir Said Ali Hamadani (1314-1384), the great Tajik-Persian poet, philosopher, and scientist is located in Ismoil Somoni square. It is nearby the shops, the Hotel Khatlon, and the Kulob Monument which was constructed in 2006 to commemorate the 2700 anniversary of the city.

History and architecture

The mausoleum was built by the disciples of Mir Sayid Ali Hamadoni. He was a famous Sufi Muslim saint from the city of Hamadon in Iran. Initially, two rooms and two domes were built. There is an empty room with a window (to the direction of Mecca) behind the gate of Mir Said Ali Hamadoni's tomb. People call it *masjid* (mosque). This room is used for collective prayer since 1954, when Soviets destroyed the mosque of the community near the grave of Mir Said Ali



Hamadoni. The mausoleum consists of domed rooms connected by a corridor. It has entrances from the



west, north and east. The scholar is buried in the first room. The second room is a place for contemplation and prayer. Three more rooms on the east side of the site were built afterwards. Another room was built on the southeast side of the building as a mausoleum for Sayid Muhammad, the son of Mir Sayid Hamadoni. The whole complex consists of eight rooms, six-two side doors, twelve tombs of various sizes, and four prayers room.

This mausoleum is decorated with a golden dome and meticulous brickwork and surrounded by a beautiful flower garden. Mir Said Ali Hamadoni is highly revered as one of the great poets and Sufi saints among the people of Tajikistan. After living there for ten years in his city Hamadoni moved to the city of Kulob, where his son Sayid Muhammad was born, and his daughter Mohi Khuroson married to the local young man. Hence, Kulob became a home for this famous Sufi saint, and the ties between him and local people become stronger. The government of Tajikistan invested a considerable amount of money to restore the mausoleum. His birth anniversary was held in 1995, and international symposium was held in 2015, to commemorate his 700th anniversary. He is revered great national and historical figure. His picture and lines of poetry are printed on the 10 Tajiki Somoni banknote.

Travelling to Kulob

Visitors travelling to Kulob or passing through the city cannot avoid paying homage to the mausoleum of this great figure. They can take a walk from the main bus station, pass through the main bazaar, watching the 2700 anniversary of the Kulob monument, enter the Kulob Museum and walking on the Ismoil Somoni square to reach the beautiful gate of the mausoleum of Hamadoni. The mausoleum is surrounded by Pushkin and Hamadoni street from the left and right.

Danghara District

Dangara district has dozens of cultural and natural sites, including the Zoli Zar fortress, the Shahidi Dangarai Bolo fortress (Martyr Upper Dangara); sites of Hazrati Sabzpush, Sangtup, Chila Mazor, Hazrati Khoja Zinda, Hazrati Mullo Tohiri Balogardon, the stone settlement of (*Dahani sag*) (Dog's mouth) and *Gahworasangho* (Cradle stones). Contemporary attractive destinations in the district include, Sanglokh observatory, museum of the Founder of Peace and National Unity, the Leader of the Nation, President of the Republic of Tajikistan. In recent years, a full-fledged tourism infrastructure and service ranging from transport, to hotels, teahouses (*choi-khonas*), banks, shops, markets, clinics, hospitals, theater, palace of culture, sport center, and beautiful alleys were built according to the international standards in the district.

The exhibitions of the variety of folk crafts products, embroidery with flowers, embroidery with gold thread, embroidery of a narrow quilt, carpet weaving and souvenirs are products attracting tourists. Danghara is known throughout Tajikistan for its rich nature, vast grain lands and as an exporter of wheat. Driving on the highroad which passes through the steppes of Danghara, tourists can admire the wave of red tulips in spring. In summer they would enjoy watching the golden weaves of the wheat fields in the steppes.

Mausoleum of Khoja Shaqiq Balkhi

While travelling from Dushanbe to Kulob, visitor can pass the village of Khoja Shaqiq, now Sebiston. There is a beautiful mausoleum located on the hill of this village at a distance of 2 km from the main road. The date of the construction of mausoleum is not known, but it was built to honor the famous Sufi saint Khoja Shaqiq Balkhi.



The Life Story of Khoja Shaqiqi Balkhi

Abu Ali Shaqiq ibn Ibrahim Balkhi is credited as one of the outstanding Islamic scholars. His name is mentioned in several *tazkiras* (biographies) of the saints, according to which he had studied under famous Sufi scholars, visited Mecca and Madina. Khoja Shaqiq had many followers and nurtured in them the confidence, contentment, piety, and tolerance. Shaykh Shaqiq was murdered around 809 -810, while travelling from Khatlon to Washgird, (present Sebiston) in Danghara district. The mausoleum was restored recently by compassionate

entrepreneurs. It consists of a porch, an underground corridor, and a small round room with six towers of different sizes made of baked bricks. Khoja Shaqiq (currently Sebiston) village is located 85 kilometers away from Dushanbe. A dusty road, which goes through the tombs leads to the mausoleum. This is an attractive destination for pilgrims.

The Mausoleum of Mawlono Obiddin



The mausoleum of Mawlono Obiddin is an historical monument located the south-eastern part of the Korez village of Dangara district. The building of the mausoleum was destroyed in 1940s, and its bricks were used to construct a bathhouse for the *kolkhoz* (collective farm). The remains of a tomb made of baked bricks were find inside the mausoleum. It also consists of an underground, and above- ground tombs. The above tomb has a square

shape and a canopy, 150 cm high. The mausoleum consists of two parts: a shrine and a tomb. The inner shape of the tomb is eight cornered and is supported by a wall. There are four tombs, which are made of bricks, in which Mawlono Obiddin and his relatives are buried. The shrine consists of a small pedestal. The mausoleum walls are plastered, and the floor is paved with bricks. The mausoleum of Mawlono Obiddin is located near the center of the Danghara district. Visitors can travel for 6km from the centre of the district to reach to Korez jamoat, where the site is located.

Sites in Wose District

Khoja Mumin Salt Mountain

The salt mountain of Khoja Mumin is located in the south of Tajikistan, 25 kilometers southwest of Kulob the shore of the Yakhsu River in Vose district. Khoja Mumin in shape resembles a giant dome, towering 900 m above the surrounding plain (absolute height 1332 m). It is visible from kilometers away. The residents of Tajikistan know this mount very well seeing its name on a box of table



salt produced from there. The area of salt marshes is 600 hectares, and its volume is 55 km. The thickness of salt reaches 200-240 m. According to experts, the salt reserves of Khoja Mumin are about 40-50 billion. The depth of the salt rock is still unknown. The famous Venetian traveller Marco Polo (13th century), who visited the site: ‘As long as the world exists, the salt of this mountain is enough for the population of the globe.’

Legends about Khoja Mumin



There are many legends among the people about the secrets of this mountain. According to the most experienced residents of the area, the first miracle of this site is the way to reach the top of the mountain. This climbing path changes and no one has ever climbed a mountain and gone down the same path twice. Visitors who do not believe in this miracle have to climb this mountain. Legend has it that a nobleman named Khoja Mumin asked his brother Khoja Sartez for the salt, and he refused to provide it. Khoja

Mumin then raised his hand to God and begged to turn him into a mountain of salt and relieve the people from this need from this time till now people come to worship and prayer at Khoja Mumin's shrine.

The Nature of the Khoja Mumin Mount Salt

The fauna of Khoja Mumin mount differs from the surrounding areas. Dozens of species of birds (squirrels, falcons, crows), mammals (squirrels, mountain sheep), poisonous snakes and various species of invertebrates live here. Unfortunately, in recent years, the mountain landscape has changed dramatically. Mountain flora, especially juniper, oats, almonds, pistachios, and onion plants are being destroyed. Several plants include tulips, black currants, cumin, saffron, mountain onions, hawthorn, tremors (glue) are included in the Red Book.



Khoja Mumin is famous for its musical caves; passages washed out by underground rivers and streams form such a unique structure of a natural organ that visitors can hear polyphonic and multi-tone musical works. Khoja Mumin is one of the most important recreational sites. In particular, watching caves, salt bottles, amazing peaks give a person energy. Thus, Khoja Mumin is rich in mineral and biological resources, and their rational use and protection

are

Travelling to the Site

Khoja Mumin can be reached by a car travelling from Dushanbe to Wose district. The regular transport to Khoja Mumin is a bus service Kulob-Wose, or hitchhike or taxi from Kulob.

Hulbuk Fortress

The medieval town of Hulbuk is located in southwestern Tajikistan, in the Kulob region. It is situated 7 kilometers southwest of the district of Wose, in the center of the village of Qurbonshahid. Hulbuk was the main city of the Khutalan (present Khatlon) as was reported by the Arab geographers. It even had a Friday Mosque. Hulbuk flourished as the center of trade and travel in Khutalan under the rule of Bajurids, who were the vassals of Samanids. Trade roads connecting Bukhara to Badakhshan and India passed through this medieval city. Much of the city was burned during the internal fighting and rebellion. The ceramic materials, and coins that were found in the palace during excavation date back to the end of the ninth and middle of the tenth centuries. Subsequently, Khutalan and Hulbuk were seized by the Turkic rulers of Central Asia after the fall of the Samanids. The destroyed city never recovered, and the nearby Kulob emerged as a centre. Present Hulbuk covers an area of about 70 hectares, most of which is occupied

by modern buildings. Only a few fragments of the ancient history of the settlement have survived. After a long reconstruction, this archaeological complex was opened to all visitors in 2006.

Architecture of Hulbuk

Hulbuk is the palace which construction dates back to the IX-XI centuries. The contours of the several hills, ruins of other



cities can be seen from the top, where the palace was located. It may have been the case that the inhabitants of the Khutallan used various types of visual signaling, warning their neighbors to inform its residents about the danger of enemy invasions. Excavations of Hulbuk revealed that it was designed proportionally. The citadel of ancient Hulbuk has a rectangular shape and was divided into two parts. The southern part had powerful defensive high walls. The northern part of the citadel occupied a much larger area, but its walls were much lower than the southern ones. The vast courtyard divided the entire complex into two parts. The courtyard was surrounded by the of columns, behind which there were living



and utility rooms. The walls overlooking the courtyard were decorated with painted carved *ganch*. The monumental facade of the palace (northern part) with a ceremonial, solemn entrance in the form of an arch resting on two powerful pylons opened into the courtyard. This entrance probably existed all along, but the palace itself was overhauled at least twice.



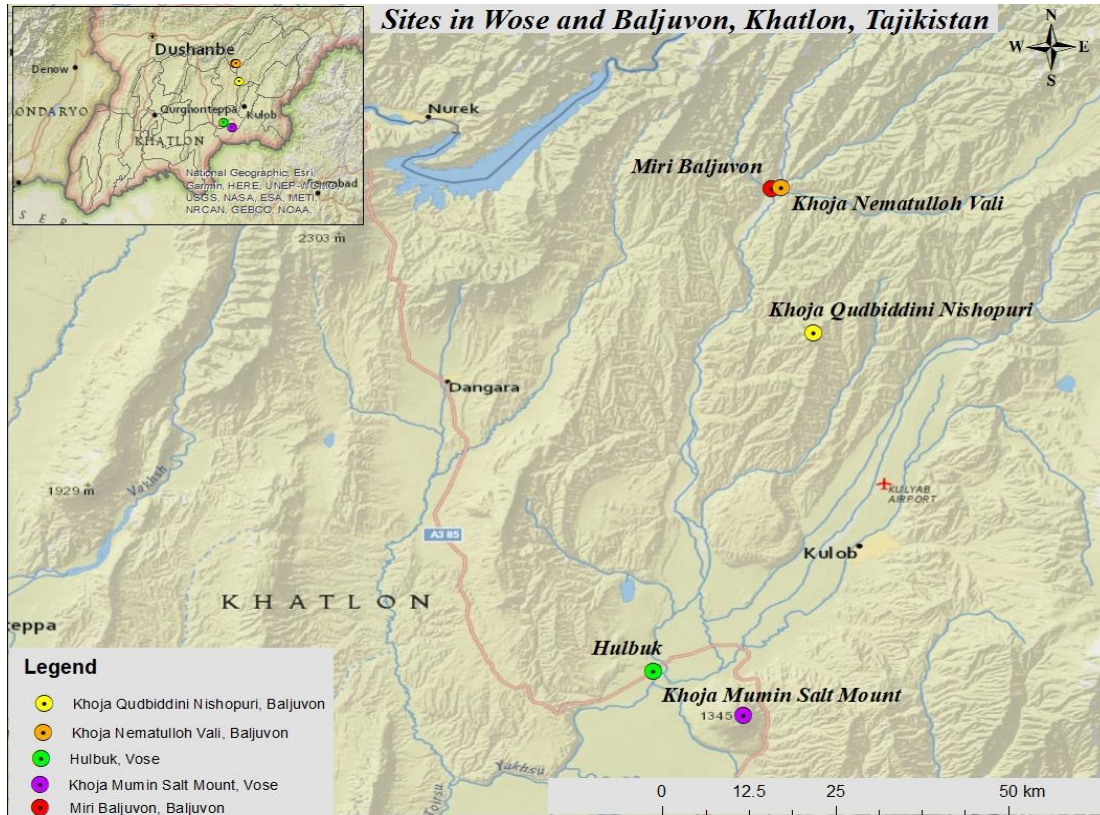
The original layout of the palace was asymmetrical axial composition. There was a corridor behind the entrance leading to a domed vestibule with four niches. Two symmetrical halls were located on either side of it, and the third rear entrance led to a vast courtyard surrounded by a gallery of columns. A slightly raised brick pavement ran along the edge of the walls. The entire courtyard was carefully paved with baked bricks. The layout of Hulbuk palace resembled to that of Central Asian *madrasas*. Fragments of a portal made of fired brick with a calligraphic inscription in Arabic were found in Hulbuk. One of the distinct architectural features of the Hulbuk Palace was its highly artistic carved decor, which was in no way inferior to the decor of Arab palaces located in the capital cities. Fragments of carved ganch were found in Hulbuk, which attest to originality and beauty of the local art school.

A newly built museum was built opposite to the fortress, where artefacts, including household utensils, glass and ceramic dishes, women's jewellery, ceramic and bronze pots, jewellery, coins, historical books, and other stone tools are displayed. The museum provides education tours for students, scholars to the palace.



Sites in Baljuwon

The territory of Baljuwon is rich with touristic attractions, natural sites, and historical monuments, including the Fortress of the Mir (16th-19th centuries), Chorbogh Fortress (Middle Ages), Tup-khona (artillery room), (1st-6th centuries BC), Dektur (18th-19th centuries), as well as stone Age settlements. To promote tourism in the district the Sari Khosor Tourism Center and Balkhiyon Tourism Development Centers were established recently. There are around 200 springs, which are invaluable natural resources, and destinations. The Sari Khosor Waterfall is a unique natural monument which is located in the Pushti Boghi area of Mulokoni village of the (*jamoat*) village council Sari Khosor. Baljuwon district is 175 km away from Dushanbe, and 127 km far from the city of Bokhtar, and 69 km from the city of Kulob. The district is located at the altitude of 1400-1500 above the sea in the southeast part of Khatlon province.



The Fortress of Miri Baljuwon

The Miri Baljuwon Fortress is located on the hill in the Baljuwon district. The fortress is located in the village and jamoat of Baljuwon and is built of baked red brick and consists of a large dome and two small domes. There is an entrance from the front part of the castle, with a carved wooden door with an arch design. The fortress itself is unfinished and consists of two carved wooden doors with stairs leading from the back of the castle to the upper part of the domes of the building. The centre of Baljuwon is visible from the yard of *Qala* (fortress) Baljuwon. The castle is located within the village of Baljuwon at the edge of a high terrace (60-70 meters) and on the right bank of the Surkhob River. In this section, the field is cut into two rocky peninsulas. According to the descriptions of visitors of the early twentieth century, there was a castle on one peninsula. On the other side of the peninsula there were residential and communal rooms.

Architectural Details of the Fortress

The main information gathered about the fortress were gathered at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. This fortress was built at the top of the hill in the 18th century. From this strategic place entire town of Baljuwon could be watched, and its population would be alarmed from the external threats.

The fortress was located on three levels, and the court of the ruler (*mir*) was situated on the top two levels. The levels were four meters above each other. Household and other additional buildings were located on the earthen platform at the lower level. The entrance to the fortress was from the western side or wing of the location. All of the buildings in the lower level, which did not have a window, played the role of fortification. There was a terrace above these fortified rooms. There were rooms for soldiers on the third level. A protection wall with watching towers was built from the fortress and prolonged along the slope. The way to climb to the fortress started from the Talkhak river passing or diagonally cutting the lower platform. The corridors are graveled and survived in some parts of the building. There was a caravanserai at the bottom of the slope, where residential buildings exist at present.

History of the Fortress

The fortress had witnessed the rise and fall of several rulers since its construction approximately at the end of the 17th century. Dozens of these rulers known as *beks* or *mirs* made the fortress their residence. In 1888 the fortress of Baljuvan was seized twice by the local rebels rising against the despotic ruling of the Emirate of Bukhara. In national history, this uprising is known as the ‘Uprising of Wose’, as the rebels were



headed by a brave peasant Abdul Wose, who seized the strategic fortress of Baljuvan and expelled the representative of the Emir of Bukhara, i.e., the *bek* from there. Baljuvon can be reached through the highway road connecting Dushanbe, Danghara and Temurmalik. In recent years, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has significantly reconstructed this road in accordance with the international standards. This central road is the best route to travel Baljuvon and from there to the castle. Another way for tourists to reach Baljuvon is from Kulob to Baljuvon and Khovaling. Tourists can also travel from Bokhtar via Danghara.

The Mausoleum of Shah Ne'matullahi Wali (Zarobi)

This mausoleum is located on the banks of the Baljuvon River between the Sari Mazor and Toyir rivers, in the village of Sari Mazor of the village council named after Safar Amirshoev in the Baljuvon



district. The building of the mausoleum has a rectangular shape and is made of burnt square tiles. The interior is currently plastered. The portal is arched, with strict proportions. The side walls are divided into three shallow niches, in the centre of which are lancet windows. There is a park with an old pane tree, believed to have been 600 years old. There are a large number of graves in the garden, which belong to the saints' relatives, students, and

followers. The mausoleum has not been fully studied, but its construction dates back to the XIII century. While cleaning the area the workers can still find fragments of pottery. The mausoleum is named after the famous Persian poet and founder of the Sufi order Shah Nematullah Wali (1330-1249). Its construction dates back to XIII-XIV centuries A.D.

The Story of Shah Nimatullahi Wali

Born in the city of Kirman (Iran), Nimatullah travelled extensively to different parts of the Islamic world, including Mecca, Medina, Transoxania (Samarqand). He returned to his native city to establish a khaneqah in Mahan, Kerman. His teachings spread throughout Iran, India and Central Asia with followers coming to visit him. Shah Nimatullah's spiritual teaching encouraged everyone to seek the Truth, or path to God. He welcomed everyone who was rejected by other Sufi masters and tariqa. Nematullahi order spread from Iran to India, and Central Asia. Shah Nematulloi Wali died in 1430-1434. Shah Nimatullah Wali is treated with the utmost respect and faith by the people in Khatlon and Badakhshan as a Sufi saint and scholar. The shrine and a mausoleum of Shah Nimatullahi



Wali was built for him in his native city of Kirman. The mausoleum in the Baljuwon district of Khatlon attests to his popularity among his followers. Both of these magnificent and prosperous shrines become a special place of pilgrimage for the followers of Sufism as well as for ordinary visitors. Visitors can reach this site travelling by car from Dushanbe. When reaching Danghara the car can turn towards the road connecting Danghara and Baljuwon.

The Mausoleum of Mawlono Qutbiddin

The mausoleum of Mawlono Qutbiddin is located about 30km away from the centre of the district of Baljuwon. It is situated in the southern part of the district, in the Olichadara village of the village council of Degtur. The mausoleum was built in the XVI century but has turned into ruin. It was repaired in 2003 and catches the views of every visitor coming to the Baljuwon district. They make a pilgrimage to the mausoleum of Mawlono Qutbiddin who is believed to be of the holy figures in Islam.

Architecture of the Fortress

The wall of the mausoleum is constructed from high-quality baked bricks. There is an arched, semicircular entrance in the center of the building. The entrance is decorated with carved double doors. Its windows are arched and decorated with wooden bars. However, the roof building is not repaired well. Due to the bad road, it is difficult to travel to this mausoleum. It



should be noted that most of the surrounding residents and the community do not have sufficient information about this mausoleum and personality.

The area of site, including its surrounding garden is more than 1 hectare. There are two tombs inside it. These tombs are covered with green cloth. The ceiling of the mausoleum is made of wood and painted in different colors. The courtyard of the mausoleum was separated by an iron fence, and in the courtyard of the mausoleum there was a room with a corridor of about 3 to 5 meters, which is in a very dilapidated condition. According to the construction of this room, it is known that it is the residence of the guard of the mausoleum and the cemetery. Inside the room, a broken clay pot was found, and it turned out that the pot was found in the same cemetery.



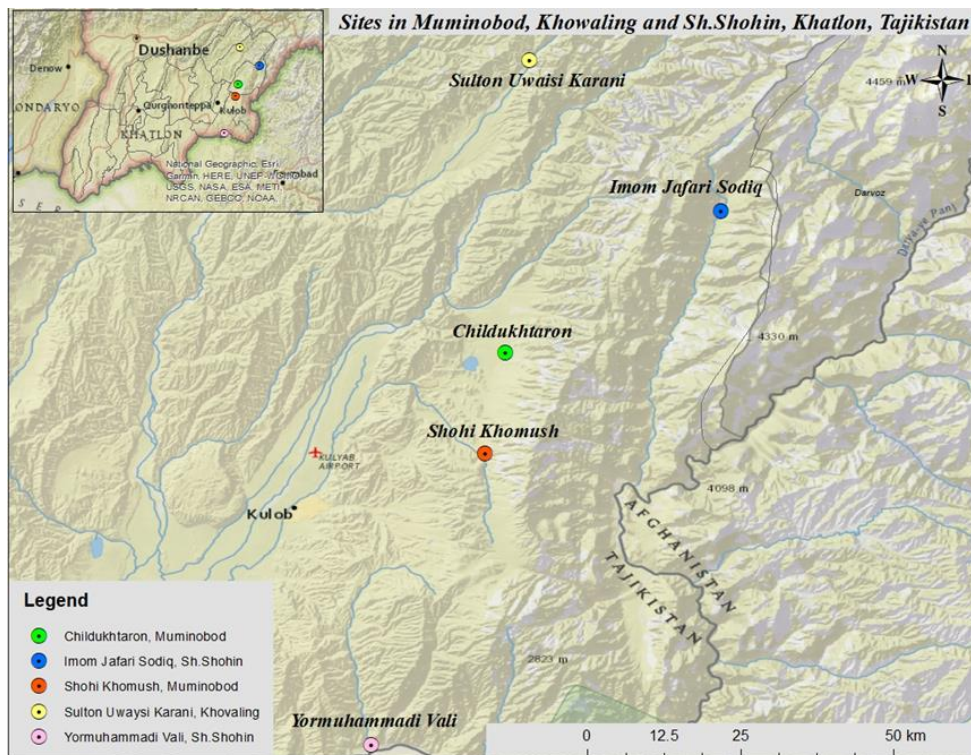
The mausoleum is attributed to Khoja Qutbiddin Yahya Nishopuri who has lived in between XIII-XIV centuries in Iran and Central Asia. It is believed that this wise man traveled from Nishapur, Iran to Baljuwon in Khatlon, where he died and was buried. A masoleum was constructed for him around 16th century. Since then, the mausoleum became the place of pilgrimage, and worship for the local, and visitors.

Travelling to the Site

The mausoleum of Mavlon Qutbuddin Nishopuri is located in the southern part of the center of Baljuwon district, in the village Olichadarai bolo. It is 5 km far from the centre of Jamoat of Safar Amirshoev, and some 14 km away from the district center. It can be reached by traveling through damaged road from the town of Baljuwon to the *jamoat* of Safar Amirshoev. It is located about 14 km away from the center of Baljuwon district, and 5 km far from the center of Jamoat of Safar Amirshoev. Jeep tours can be organized for sightseeing in the location. Tourist can enjoy observing traditional way of farming, wildlife, and fields around.

Sites in Muminobod District

Muminobod district has rich tourist resources and is suitable for the development of mountain, sports, ethnographic and ecological tourism. Healing springs and herbs, clean air, and mountains allow visitors to enjoy the beauty of nature and get acquainted with historical monuments as part of a new historical and ecological tour. There are numbers of cultural institutions such as the Palace of Culture, the Rural House of Culture, the Traveling Club, the National Theater, the Children's Music School, a Literary Treasure. The population are engaged in developing traditional and indigenous crafts, such as weaving (hosiery, carpet weaving), sewing (chakan embroidery, feather making, headwear embroidery, flower embroidery, bed linen embroidery, gold thread embroidery, pattern embroidery, plate making, cradle making, furnace making, blacksmithing, jewelry products and other forms of crafts. The talented cooks the Muminobod district can masterfully prepare a variety of national dishes, including: (*qalama, oshi burida, oshi palav, umoch, oshi tuppa, qurutob, mantu, shirbat, shirbirinj, shirravghan, shakarob*), and other national dishes. The district is famous for its extremely fresh climate and natural lakes, which are suitable for swimming and rowing, which is unique in Khatlon. The flora of the district is rich, which enables the population to prepare medicines out of the flowers.



The Mausoleum of Shohi Khomush

The Shohi Khomush mausoleum is located in the village of Langari Kalon of Muminobod district. The construction of this mausoleum dates back to the XIII-XIV centuries. It is attributed to the legendary figure Shohi Khomush, who appears in many traditions in the Badakhshan and Kulob. Written sources indicate that he was born in the Iranian city of Isfahan in



1066 and studied under the renowned Sufi shaykhs. The missionary travelled to the area of Shughnan in Badakhshan, married the daughter of the local ruler, and then travelled to Khatlon, where he also intermarried with the families of local rulers. He has reportedly died in the present Muminobod district, where his shrine is located.

Architecture of the Mausoleum

There is rectangular firmware of arch between them. This kind of design in the mausoleum resembles a workshop gallery of the classical period of the XI-XII centuries, which is transmitted in this case to a decorative reception. It looks like a triangular imposed in the middle portion, laid out with raw bricks.



The mausoleum has two rooms. The first room performed the function of the surrounding hall of *ziyarat-khana* (pilgrimage room), and the second was a *gurkhana* (a burial chamber). Most of the researchers tend to consider that this mausoleum was constructed in the XVI-XVII centuries. The main view of the mausoleum, which has one entrance, faces east, and is decorated with a pedestal. The front part obscures most of the view and has long protrusions on either side of the entrance. The square shape of the tomb has been

expanded due to the four arches that it has. One of the arches is located around the east. It connects the tomb with the shrine. The other two arched crowns are decorated with star bars. The dome of the tomb

rests on eight pillars. There is a tomb under the burial ground. The height of the tomb is 2 meters, and it has a velvet cover. Three bodies lie in open brick coffins in the tomb. The walls of the burial ground are built away from the walls of the tomb. Archaeologists have unearthed an underground chamber at the entrance to the mausoleum, where the remains of Shoh Khamush and his brother are housed inside two tombs.

There is a large and magnificent mosque of the same name, located next to the mausoleum of Shohi Khomush, which is decorated with the unique carvings of the local masters. Magnificent pillars, carved with original hand-carving, colorful and beautiful beams charm and win the heart of visitors/ Each of the delicate patterns and sculptures, with the elegant language of art, reflect on the rich national form of art.

The shrine of Shohi Khomush and mosque is located in Muminobod district. Visitors can reach to the site easily via the road connection Dushanbe -Kulob and Muminobod. The distance between Dushanbe and Muminobod is 232 km. The distance



between Kulob and Muminobod 40 km. Visitors travelling to the shrine, will have to stop on this main road at the first junction which lead to Langar village.

[Childukhtaron Mountain](#)

One of the most beautiful natural places in the south of Tajikistan is the Childukhtaron Mountain. It is located in the Muminabad district of Khatlon region of Tajikistan, about 250 kilometers south of Dushanbe. Childukhtaron mountain is located 28 km north of the center of Muminobod district near Dashti village. It is made up of pyramidal rocks up to 60 m which was eroded by longwinds. There are many legends about this mountain, which show the



heroism of 40 girls against foreign invaders. This site attracts visitors due to its extraordinary beauty and

the poetic name of Childukhtaron, which is translated as the Forty Girls. In fact, every pyramid-shaped rock is a statue of the goddess of beauty, a symbol of purity and patriotism for every spectator.

The Legend of Childukhtaron

In the ancient times, foreigners invaded Khatlon, enslaved men, women, boys, and girls and sold them to distant lands. The heroic men defended homeland and fought valiantly against the enemies. It was a fierce fighting, in which men and women, and even the most beautiful peacocks of this land, defended



their borders. Eventually, the enemy prevailed with great force, and the unarmed and helpless population fled to the majestic mountains. At that time a group of girls, who were constantly defeating the main force of the enemy, could not withstand the intense pressure of the bloodthirsty and cursed enemies and took refuge in the mountains. The

enemies aimed to capture the girls alive. When the girls saw that they cannot save their honour and chastity, they prayed to God to not be taken as hostage. The prayer of each one of them is answered by the Almighty God. By the command of this Creator, all beings, girls each turned into stone while standing. Since that time these stone statues are revered as the symbols of purity, freedom, patriotism, pride, and honor. The journey to Childukhtaron is not particularly difficult, but the one-way journey will take about a few hours from Muminobod district to Childukhtaron.



A taxi can be hired from Kulob travelling to the center of Muminobod district. To drive further visitors will need a jeep or all-terrain vehicle, which is worth renting for the whole day. Different tourist groups offer tourist service, taking them not only for a tour but rest, and have a taste of national dishes, including *oshi burida*, *dughob* (local yogurt), *chapoti*, fruits and fresh salads.

Khovaling District

The Mausoleum of Sultan Huwaisi Qarani

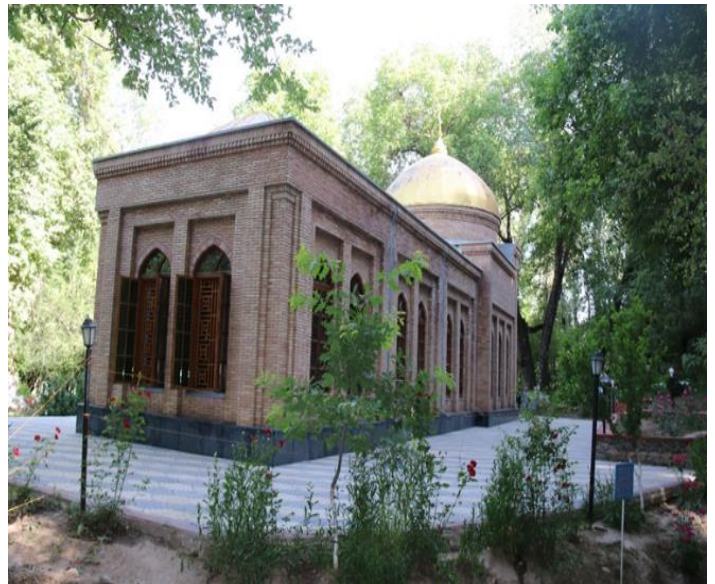


The ancient land of Khovaling has for long captivated the hearts of the visitors with its beautiful nature, cultural and sacred historical sites. Some visitors travel to Khovaling to relax and drink water from the clear springs of this place, while other make a pilgrim to pray in the sacred places.

One of the such site and sacred, which for many years have become a special place of pilgrimage is the shrine and mausoleum of Sultan Huwaisi

Qarani. It is located in Hazrati Sul-ton village, and is 17km from the town of Khovaling. Apart from this mausoleum, several places, shrines in the Islamic world are associated with Huwaisi Qarani. Considering the spiritual and natural significance of this site, its attractiveness for the visitors from all over Central Asia, the government of Tajikistan restored the mausoleum, and developed it as one of the most attractive site in the country.

Uwais ibn Amir al-Qarani is a popular early Islamic figure, whose right deeds and piety was highly praised by the Prophet of Islam. He is revered through Islamic world, including Central Asia. The people of the village of Hazrati Sul-ton name their children in honour of this mythical figure as Sultan, Mazor, or Mazori. The narratives about his life are the examples of respect for parents, young and old people, as well as kindness.





Sultan Uwais Qarani was a simple camel rider. He had great faith and respect for Prophet Muhammad. However, he could not meet Prophet, due to taking care of his sick mother. The Prophet admired him for taking care of his mother and being kind to all people. It is said that when his sick mother asked for a water, he stood with a cup of water beside her bed till she woke up. He waited for his mother, till the skin of his hand was torn off. The Prophet Muhammad bequeasted that his shirt should be given to Uwais

upon his death. According to the legend spread among the local people nearby the shrine, prior death Hazrat Sultan bequeathed to his followers that they should load his coffin on a white camel, and wherever the camel sleeps his body should be buried there. The camel slept in and awoke in seven places, but finally stood in the present place of Mazor. Five springs come out of the camel's footprint and muzzle, which are now called the springs of (*Shifo*) Healing, (*Murod*) aspiration, (*rahmat*), blessing (*Magfirat*) forgiveness and *Ganj* (treasure). The mausoleum of "Sultan Uvaysi Qarani" was built in 1992 by the local businessman. Visitors pay silent homage while standing nearby the tomb and can buy a bottle of water of the string, sold there.

Travelling to the Site

This village is located 18 km far from the town of Khovaling. The site can be easily reached by travelling on the road connecting Dushanbe to Danghara and Khowaling. It is located 207 km away from Dushanbe. From the center of Khowaling district visitors can hire taxi at Khovaling Shared Car Terminal to travel to the site.



Sites in Shamsiddin Shohin District

Shamsiddin Shohin district was called as Terayzamin in the past, meaning land of the wind or north prior to the establishment of the Soviet government. In the Soviet time the area was turned into a district named Shuroobod. The nature of this district is rich, and full of beautiful mountains and valleys, ravines and, steppes and gullies, stones and rocks, springs, streams, and rivers. Each of these places has its own fairy tales. The Mount of Emom Askara is one of the attractions of this district, as it also stands like a huge rock that covers large area.

Shamsiddin Shohin is a district with a contrasting nature and climate. If on one side it is spring, on the other side it is still winter. On the one side of the district, farmers are planting, and on the other, they are reaping. For instance, if in Bahoraki village of Sarichashma area, they harvest barley then in Safedob Terai village, they just cultivate it. The district has great potential for the development of different forms of tourism, including cultural tourism, pilgrimage, ecological tourism, mountaineering, and especially hunting tourism. It is also known as the land of talented and cultured people. One of the most popular traditional oral music of the Tajik people is the *falaki roghi*, which is performed by the singers from this district. Historical monuments, healing springs, high mountains, beautiful natural landscapes, rare animals, and the reservoir of 'Dashti Jum' are the best attractiveness of this destination.

The Mausoleum of Imam Ja'far Sadiq

One of the wonderful architectural and sacred sites in the district is the mausoleum named after the Sixth Shi'a Imam Jafar Sadiq. This mausoleum is located in the Hazrati Emom village, at the Bolodara in Dastijum area of this district. The mausoleum consists of a small tower entrance with an area of 1.8 square meters and two rooms. A shrine with an area of 16.96 square meters and a tomb with an area of are located there.



Legend about the Shrine of the Imam

Locals believe that the mausoleum existed for several centuries, from the time the people settled in the Dara and Dashtijum. There is a legend about the appearance of this tomb and shrine. Once upon a time an old and pious man in the village saw in his dream Imam Ja'far (the sixth Shi'i Imam). The Imam told to the old man 'O man, I am the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, and I have been lying in this coffin in the middle of the road for many years. Animal pass over me and I am very upset about this. Please move my coffin to a safer place.' In the morning, this righteous man, gathered the villagers and told them about his dream.



He showed a special place to the people, who dug the way to reach to the grave. When they tried to lift the coffin from the grave, they could not pull it out. They brought many pairs oxen and tied up the coffin and tried to pull it out, but they could not. When the righteous old man saw this, he told them to be patient so that he could see what was happening. The pious man again dreamt Imam Ja'far, who told him: 'Only a pair of blue bulls from a certain village can pull my

coffin. When those bulls take my coffin out leave them free to go wherever they want and bury me wherever they stop. In the morning, the old man told this dream to the people and they brought blue bulls, which pulled the coffin and brought it to the place where it is now buried. The village where the shrine is located is called Hazrat Imam Jafar Sadiq, or in short - Hazrati Emam.

Travelling to Mausoleum

Traveller easily reach to the centre Shurobod district through the newly constructed road from Dushanbe. They can stop in the place where a small road departure from high road to Dashtijum. The nearest road to travel to the village of the Hazrati Emom is through the Dashtijum. The place where the tomb associated with the six Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is located in the upper part of the gorge and is called Bolodara.



The Mausoleum of Yormuhammadi Wali

The mausoleum of Yormuhammadi Wali is one of the unique architectural monuments in the village of



Bahoraki Sarichashma, Shamsiddin Shohin district. The mausoleum of Yormuhammadi Wali consists of rooms built in different periods. Shaiykh Yormuhammad Wali was a Sufi saint, who lived in between 13th- 14th centuries. This holy man had a special reputation and high status in life and was revered in the mountainous areas of Khatlon as well as part of northern Afghanistan. According to a written source, Shaykh Yormuhammad Wali died in 1378. Therefore, it can be said that the building of his

tomb was built in the XIV century. The third and fourth rooms, as well as a shrine, and a prayer hall were built later.

All views of the mausoleum, including the main view, which is superior to the others are decorated with a P-shaped letter. In addition, the display has long rectangular recesses designed for inscriptions. The entrance door and its sides were decorated with decorative arches. The mausoleum is made of baked bricks. All rooms are domed; the domes of the tombs of the *shaiikh* and his son are larger and occupy a central position in the complex. All rooms are connected by doors. Rooms that were built in the southern part were without ceilings. The front of the central room has a tall head and a larger, deeper entrance. The mausoleum has 2 entrances, 2 corridors and 6 rooms. The *shaykh* is buried with his son inside the mausoleum. The stones around the tomb are coloured.

Road to the mausoleum

This site is located on the Tajik-Afghan border, and is difficult to reach. One way to get there is from Kulob via Wose district. It takes about 3 hours to reach this area from Kulob. Another road to this area goes from Shamsiddin Shohin, (Shurobod). However, the site is too far from the



main road. The road leading to this place is in a very bad condition and damaged by rain.



PART 2: HERITAGES OF THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



Introduction

Known as the Pamirs, or the Roof of the World, the Gorno- Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) of Tajikistan is an area with a unique historical, cultural, and natural site. These sites range from ancient fortress built on the Silk Road on the shores of the famous Oxus River, to that of temples, shrines, hot springs, and crystal-clear lakes, and to some of the highest road pass, and peaks in the world. As administrative unit the GBAO was formed on the 2nd of January 1925 by the Soviet government. The newly administrative unit was established by considering the specific cultural, linguistics features, ways of living of the inhabitants of the Pamirs, as well as the geographical and strategic location of the area, bordering with Afghanistan, China.

At present the GBAO borders with the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to the north, with the People's Republic of China to the east, and with Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the south. In terms of an area, the GBAO is the largest province of Tajikistan, covering 44.5 of its territory. However, it is the least populated province of the country. The numbers of its population are approximately 226, 000. Geographically, the GBAO is remotest area of Tajikistan and is mainly connected to Dushanbe and the other parts of Tajikistan, and to the north with the city of Osh (Kyrgyzstan) through the Pamir Highway. This highway was constructed at the end of the 19th century, and mostly during the Soviet period. Airflight between Dushanbe and Khorog (center of the GBAO) exists but is not regularly used due to the changing weather conditions.

Administratively, GBAO is divided into the city of Khorog, and seven districts: Shughnon, Rushon, Roshtqala' Ishkoshim, Murghob, Darwaz and Wanj. Geographically, the region is divided into two parts: the Western, and the Eastern Pamirs. The territory of the Western Pamir is mainly covered by mountain ridges and peak, including the Ismoil Somoni (7495). The largest glaciers of Central Asia, such as Fedchenko, Grum-Grizhimaylo are located in this part of the Pamir and serve as the main source of the water for the tributaries of Panj. Valleys in the Western Pamir are located at the altitude from 1500 meters to 3000 above the sea. Western Pamir has a contrast in nature, weather, and climate. The weather in the places such as Darwoz is hot, the climate is mild and nature is rich, allowing the growth of every kind of fruits, including pomegranate. Going up to the parts of Rushon, Shughnon and Ishkoshim district the weather becomes colder, the climate dry, and the land less fertile and not suitable for the growth of fruit trees.

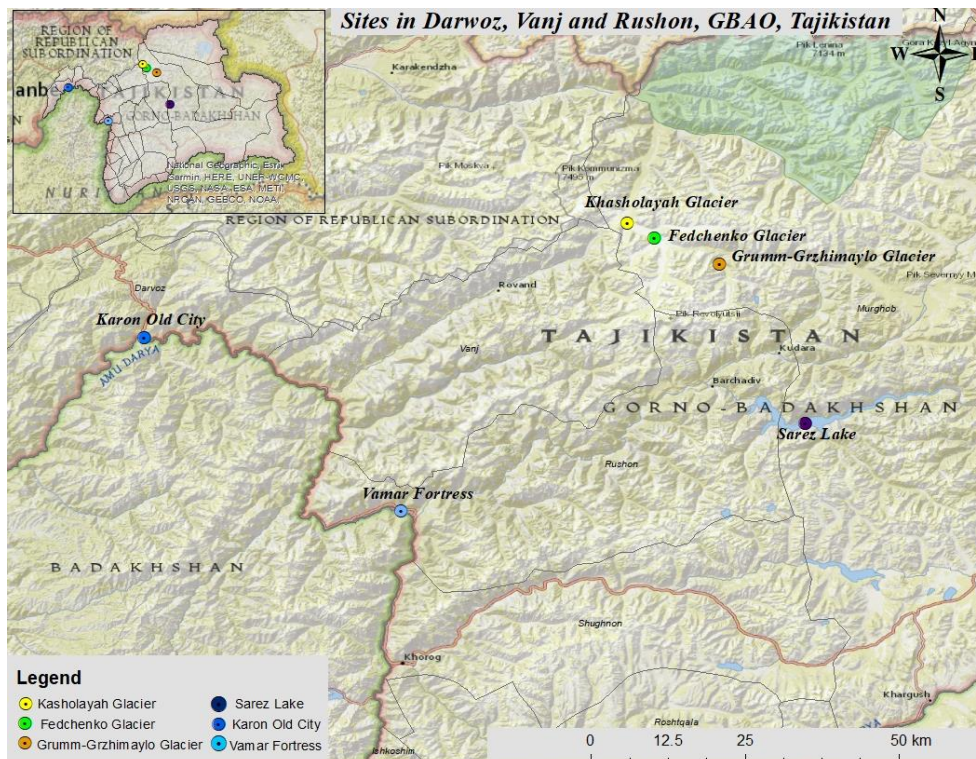
The climate, nature and weather in the Eastern Pamir radically differs from the Western part. Eastern Pamirs or parts of the GBAO mainly consists of alpine deserts, where annual temperature fluctuates. The

weather is usually cold, and winters are harsh and long in the vast steppes Murghob districts, and the upper parts of Ishkoshim, Shughnon, and Roshtqala' districts. Eastern Pamir is a mosaic of lakes of different origins and properties. The largest Karakul, and attractive lakes such as Zorkul, Bulunkul and Yashilkul are located there. Archaeologically Eastern Pamir is rich with caves, graves, which origin dates back to the paleolithic period. In their turn the medieval fortress, sacred natural and cultural sites in the parts of Western Pamirs (Rushon, Shughnon, Wanj and Darwoz) attests to the traces of rich practice defense, and governance, worship, and trades that has flourished in the Pamirs.

The GBAO is home to people who speak different ancient Eastern Iranian languages (Wakhi, Shughnoni, Rushoni, Bartangi, Roshorvi, Yazgulyami and Rini. The majority of the population of the Murghob district are Kyrgyz speakers, and the population of Darwaz, and Wanj district speak a specific dialect of Tajik language). The inhabitants of each district of the GBAO have inherited rich intangible cultural heritages, expressed through music and dance, tradition of wood carving, scribing, weaving, blacksmith, carpentry, healing through herbs. Coupled with beautiful natural landscapes, ancient and medieval sites, the availability of tangible and intangible forms of heritage makes GBAO as the most attractive destinations for the visitors in Tajikistan.

Darwoz

The historical district of Darwoz is a gate to the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous oblast. The territories of historical Darwoz are now divided between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Prior the Anglo-Russian division of the Pamirs, these territories were controlled by the ruler of Darwaz known as *shah*. The centre of Darwoz is the town of Qal'ai Khumb. This town was originally built as a small fortress in a garden by the King (Shah) of the independent Darwoz region approximately in 15 centuries. Since then, it has served as an administrative centre of the rulers of Darwoz. In the Soviet period, this town became the centre of Qalai Khumb district within the GBAO. In recent years this small town has turned into a flourishing place with the construction of several modern buildings, including the five-star Karon Hotel, small industrial enterprise, and sewing factory. Visitors arriving from Dushanbe, Tawildara, and Khorog need to rest and eat at the canteen next to the central bridge. They can watch from the bridge the superb view of the Obikhumbov river running from Saghirdasht valley into the Panj River. A bridge over Panj is located 5km away in the village of Ruzvai. There is a bridge connecting Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Hiking in and around the town of Qalai Khumb, as well as in the nearby villages such as Yoged is one of the most attractive activities for tourists.



The Town of Karon

The ancient town of Karon town is located at a distance of 8.5 km from the centre of Darwaz district, and above from the village of Ruzvai at an altitude of 1700 meters above sea level on the mountain Zogik. Karon is a naturally inaccessible and protected area. Due to its size and grandeur, scholars speculate that in the past it was a royal city and a place of nobility, where the king, his relatives, troops, demons, and servants lived.



Historical sources mention the existence of the town of Karon city in medieval times. However, this site was not known as a historical and cultural heritage, and tourist attraction until recently. In 2012, Tajik and Russian archaeologists have unearthed fragments of a five-story fire temple, water and wind temples, a windmill, a fragment of the book (presumably Zoroastrian sacred book of Avesta) there.

Archaeology of Karon



Archaeologists had divided the city into four sections and proposed the existence of a playground, a fire tower, a water temple, and public buildings, and a royal *dizh* (palace) in its flat section. Each of these parts of the building embodies the rich art and ancient architectural tradition of Darwaz. The architectural design of the ruins of Karon is similar to some of the buildings in the Central Asian region. There were family quarters buildings in the second section, in the north, in the area of the lower Verchi.

There was a burial ground, a place for carcasses in the upper Verchi. The remains of three thrones made of large stones for the burial of men, women and infants exist there.

The *dizh* (royal palace) is situated at an altitude of 300 m above the water level in the centre. The fourth section is called Dashti Manora and is located in the southern part 300 m below the *Dizh*. The tower, named *Panjmanor* are connected to the central tower. As the *Panjmanor* (five-tower) symbolically stood on a cross-shaped platform, the cross was a symbol of sun and fire. Such conclusions about *Panjmanor* attribute it to the Zoroastrian building. The coin of Kushanian King Kanishka III and fragments of vessels probably dating back to the time of the Kushans were found on the eastern tower. A medium-sized copper coin from the 5th-7th centuries BC was found on the south wall of the central tower. A fire altar with a hollow in the middle exists along with the tower. The magnificent building, and unique building of the Temple of Water, is located sixty-five meters far from *Panjmanor*. Its' walls were probably made of broken volcanic rocks with wood and clay. There is an altar on the floor, and a stone tablet is placed on the top. This is considered the oldest stone tablet in the surrounding area. According to the local and native archaeologists, the Old Fortress playground meets all the standards of *Chavgonbozi*, the national game, (the ancient play of equestrian polo) among the Tajik people. Archaeologists have also discovered a remain of an observatory in the town of Karon.

Travelling to Karon



The ancient town of Karon can be easily reached from the flourishing town of Qalaikhumb. From the centre of Darwaz visitors can head east towards Khorog, wherein 5 km away they can find a small wooden sign directing them to the hills. It is on this hill that the recently discovered and the advertised town of Karon is situated. Visitors travelling to Darwoz from Khorog can reach Karon city after driving for 6 hours on the most damaged sections of the Pamir Highway.

Wanj District

Fedchenko Glacier

This largest valley and mountain glacier in the world is in the northwest of the Pamirs. It starts from the northern slopes of the Yazglom Range and reaches the eastern slope of the ridge of the peak of the Academy of Sciences. It is 77 km long, 1700 to 3100 m wide, and 1000 m thick in the middle. The glacier has many branches. The highest point of the glacier is 4200 m. The river of Seldara flows from beneath the glacier. The hydrometeorological observatory is working



in the glacier at an altitude of 4200 m. Fedchenko is formed by the northern slopes of the peak of the Paris Commune (6350), the peak of 26 Baku Commissars (6848 m) and the north-western slope of the peak of Independence (formerly the peak of the Revolution) (6940 m).

It receives ice from dozens of tributary glaciers. Its meltwater forms the headstream of the Surkhob River and the Amu Darya. The glacier was discovered by the famous researcher of Central Asia, entomologist, and traveller Vasily Fedorovich Oshanin (1844-1917), who headed expedition named the 'Imperial Association of Friends of the Natural Sciences'. This expedition included topographer G.E. Rodionov and the botanist M.J. Nevsky and Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko (1844-1873). Fedchenko died later in the Alps mountains. Oshanin dedicated this pioneering discovery after his friend, Fedchenko, by stating:



“The Kyrgyz call it simply Sel, which means a glacier. Therefore, it was necessary to give it some name and I dedicated this to the memory of Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko. I wanted to express by this, albeit to a weak degree, my deepest respect for the wonderful scientific works of my 'unforgettable friend, to whom we owe the clarification of so many dark questions about the geography, and natural history of Central

Asia. I wish that his name would remain forever associated with one of the greatest glaciers of the Central Asian highlands. I wish this because Alexei Pavlovich was particularly interested in the study of glacial phenomena. Let the ‘Fedchenkovsky glacier’ in the distant future remind to the travellers, the name of one of the most gifted and zealous explorers of Central Asia. Fedchenko Glacier is the main source of moisture in Tajikistan. The drainage basin of the glacier covers 1537 km² and feeds the Muksu river, a tributary of the Wakhsh, and the Amudarya rivers.

Attractiveness in Fedchenko

Despite the high altitude, low temperature and rarefied air, many travelers from all over the world try to conquer the Fedchenko glacier, called as the pearl of Tajikistan. It seems that ice absorbs mountains in the centre of the glacial region, where glaciers originate in the non-melting snows. Spilling wide, the ice forms a giant plateau, among which, like islands, the highest peaks of mountain ranges are issued. Fedchenko glacier is the



dream place for those who love to challenge the wild nature with camping and picnic at the base, hiking and trekking, and skiing from the top of the slopes.

Travelling to Fedchenko

Travelling from Dushanbe to Khorog, visitors and tourists can diverge from the Pamir highroad in the place where Wanjob flows into the Panj River. Visitors need to turn at the checkpoint at this place and follow the narrower, but the better road leading to the town of Wanj. They can have rest in the centre of the district, where several shops and bazaar, ATM are available. To travel to the glacier, a taxi should be hired from the district centre to reach Upper Wanj (Wanji Bolo). Wanj is well-known for its beautiful and fertile lands, fruits, in particular apple and nuts. Reaching Poi Mazor, the last village traveller can go further towards the glacier. The other routes to the Fedchenko glacier are from Bartang Valley. Also, the glacier can be reached from Yazgulyam valley, Tanimas valley (Kok jar), and Belandkiik valleys. Many trekkers visit Tajikistan for climbing the Fedchenko Glacier. Usually, the trekking season starts in September and one tour lasts for 25 days. The visitors should have good fitness because they will carry their part of the food, equipment, and personal belongings.

Grum-Grzhemaylo Glacier

The Grumm-Grzhemaylo is a valley tree-like glacier in the central Pamirs in Tajikistan. It is located at the base of the Revolution Peak and on the slopes of the Yazgulem ridge. This glacier is the second-largest glacier in the Pamirs after the Fedchenko glacier. The Grumm-Grzhemaylo glacier is located in the Tanymas valley, in the Pamirs. The glacier is 37 km long, with an area of 142.9 sq. km, the height of the end of the tongue is 3,610 m. The main mountainous knot and the main glacier of the region lie to the south of the Tanymas valley, directly adjacent to the ridge of the Southern group of the Fedchenko glacier.

The Grumm-Grzhemaylo glacier flows down from the northeastern slope of the Revolution peak (6940), the first third flows to the east, and then turn to the north. A short but full-flowing stream from the glacier flows into the Tanymas River, a tributary of



Bartang River. The glacier receives eight large tributaries to the left from the Vysokaya Stena ridge and three smaller tributaries to the right from the Kholodnaya Stena ridge. The largest left tributaries are the

Upper Muzkulak, the Maly Muz-kulak and the Lower Muz-kulak. The glacier was discovered in 1887, by Russian explorers. It was fully examined in 1928, and in 1948, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR, at the request of the Geographical Society of the USSR, assigned the Muz-Kulak glacier the name of the pioneers Grigory Efimovich and V.E. Grumm-Grzhemaylo, who discovered this glacier in 1887.

Travelling to the Glacier

Travelling to the bottom Grizhimaylo visitor would enjoy the pristine nature of the area. The first trek path to the glacier starts from the village of Poimazor in Wanj district. The village of Poi Mazor (Foot of the Shrine) can be reached by car. From there tourists can go by pack transport or work on foot with a guide and stop at a nearby Khrustalnyi geologists' settlement. From there they take the exit to the Medvezhy glacier and follow the paths to moraine pocket of the Grumm-Grzhemaylo glacier.

The next trekking route to the glacier is from Pasor village in the upper Bartang valley near the Khafradzara, from where visitors can trek to Grumm Grizhimayo. This trek is approximately 60 km long (round trip). It ends at a point with a stunning view of the glaciers.

Trekking route to Grum-Grzhemaylo from Khafradzara (Pasor village)- Rushon district In recent years, the Grummm - Grzhemaylo glacier area turned into the most visited mountain area in the Pamirs. It is drawing visitor's attention with its high passes and peaks. The snow-white glaciers and pristine nature make this area a unique place for mountain tourism and sports.



Rushon

Rushon district with its centre, the Vamar town offers a beautiful scene to the visitors travelling on the narrow and damaged automobile road from Darwaz, and from Khorog. Visitors reaching Vamar can rest, at the centre and continue their travel either on Pamir Highway or turn left at the *razvilka* (junction) which goes to the remote Bartang valley. There is a beautiful and important shrine named Shoh-Tolib in Vamar. The shrine is surrounded by beautiful plane trees and is located on the top of the town at the bank of

Vamardara (brook). There is another shrine named Ostoni Sayyid Jalol on the other side of Vamardara. Visitors come to pray and take a rest at these places, to drink the cold spring water. Touristic activities in Vamar can range from hiking to Vamardara, watching the panoramic views of the flatlands of Rushon from there. They also include walking along the bank of the Panj River near the fortress.

Bartang valley is a part of Rushon district and is home to the most hospitable people, who offer bread and tea to every passerby. Rushon is home to the wonderful and famous singers, who in each village entertain the guests with lively traditional Pamiri music and dance. They organize traditional folk musical performances both inside their beautifully decorated houses, and outside, in their small gardens. Watching folk dance, and listening to traditional music and singing, is itself a spiritual journey to the isolated, beautiful, and undisturbed life.

Observing traditional ways of cooking, gathering the harvest of wheat, threshing it, constructing houses provide a glimpse into how human beings adjust themselves to living in harsh living conditions. Adventure and wildlife activities can be combined with boat riding, camping rock and mountain climbing in the valley, as well. Hiking, climbing, visiting shrines, observing traditional ways of living, enjoying the hospitality of generous, naïve, and friendly people are the best activities in the valley. On the whole Rushon district with its beautiful, remote, and small villages, shrines, peaks, and lakes is one of the most attractive destinations in Tajikistan with the preserved natural beauty and cultures.

The Fortress (Qalai Vamar)

Qal'ai Vamar (Vamar Fortress) is located in the southern and western part of the town Vamar, at the bank of the Panj river. The town of Vamar is the administrative center of the Rushon district and is situated in the flat area formed at the confluence of the Bartang, and the Panj river on the border of Tajikistan with Afghanistan. Qalai Vamar is considered one of the oldest splendid historical monuments



in the Rushon district of the GBAO. In the past, it has served as a headquarter, stronghold and residence of the different rulers. The fortress occupied territory of 1.5 hectares. The walls of the fortress were strengthened by quadrangular towers with loopholes. The entrance to the fortress was from the western



side. The walls of the castle were made of stone laid on clay masonry. To consolidate the wall, logs were laid along the outer and inner edges after 50-60 cm. The height of the walls is 6 m, the thickness is 7 m at the base and up to 3 m in the upper part at the top. There were houses, occupied by gardens in and outside the fortress. The wooden parts inside (doors, platbands, columns, etc.) were decorated with rich carvings. This description of the fortress differs from the information provided by local inhabitants.

According to their story, the construction of the fortress continued for three years. There were 3 gates, 1 lobster, two underground bays, and an underground water trench and pipe, bringing water to the castle from the River Panj. It should be mentioned that this trench of water still exists. The Soviet and Russian soldiers buried a damaged tank there to serve as the trench. The underground pipe of water is damaged. The height of the wall of the castle was 60 feet, the width of the walls was 7 meters. The garden was decorated with more than 100 species of trees. There was a large square area, in the courtyard of the palace. This area was called Rigakmidon (the sandy square). This square was used for celebrations, including music and dances, and sports (wrestling and horse riding that took place during weddings, and the Nawruz festival.



The castle of Qal'ai Vamar (Olufsen, p. 81)

Archaeologists date back its construction to the XIX century, while the scattered information presented in local sources such as *Tarikhi Hokimoni Vamar* (The History of the Rulers of Vamar) mentions that it was built some centuries earlier. According to the legend mentioned in the local sources, the Vamar fortress was built during the lifetime of a wondering and legendary Darwish, the Shoh Tolibi Sarmast, whose shrine also exist in the same village. The castle was renovated later. Perhaps a smaller fortress

existed in this place before the construction of a larger citadel, by the local (*mir*), the ruler Sulaimonkhon in 1843. In the beginning, the fortress mainly served for defensive purposes.

Built at the junction of two rivers, in a flat area, and appropriate zone for controlling routes on Silk Road linking Rushon to Shughnon, and Bartang, the town and fortress of Vamar had an eventful history. Since its construction, it is served as a residence, and resting place for local kings, and military rulers from Shughnon, Rushon, and Bartang. The Afghan armies continuously invaded and raided Shughnon and Rushon, prior to the Anglo-Russian delimitation of the Pamir in 1895. The agents of the Afghan army had temporary stayed at this strategic place. After the division of the territories of the Pamirs in the period of Great Game, from 1895 to 1902 the Bukharian representatives turned Vamar fortress into their residence. In 1902 the Russians expelled the representative fo Bukharian emirate from the fortress and established them headquarter there. The Soviet government used this fortress as the office of the first *sel'sovet* in 1920s and early 1930s. Gradually, the Soviet border unit was installed there, and the soldiers turned the castle into ruin. In the post-Soviet period, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan allocated funds to repair the walls of the castle. However, the restoration is not completed, and the fortress remains an abandoned place, which territory is closed by the fence.

Travelling to Rushon

The town Vamar is located on the Pamir Highway connecting Khorog and Dushanbe. The road to Vamar comes also from Bartang valley. In the Soviet period the town of Vamar has a small airport that received regular flights. Mountaineer alpinists, geologists, and other explorers used to take took a flight from Dushanbe to Rushon, and from there to Yazgulom, Bartang. This town can be also used as a base camp for visitors planning trips further to Sarez lake.

Bartang Valley

Bartang is a valley in Rushon district of the GBAO. Geographically, the narrow valley starts from Rushon and widens in its upper part reaching the Eastern Pamir. The road to the Bartang valley diverges from the Pamir Highway at the Vamar *Razvilka* (junction) and heads to the valley. The Bartang River flows through the valley.

The Nature of Bartang Valley

Bartang is one of those destinations where both local and international travellers, scientists and lovers of adventures and nature can enjoy, traditional ways of living, marvelous views of nature, landscapes, sincerity, and hospitality of the people. Geographically the valley can be divided into two parts, the lower, and the upper. Villages in the lower part of the Bartang are



located on the narrow shores of the river while the valley widens in the upper part with vast steps and villages. There are sharp differences in the weather and nature, between the two parts of the valley. The nature and climate in the lower part of the Bartang allow to grow mulberry, nut, apricot, apple, and other kinds of fruits. Fruits cannot be grown in few villages in the upper Bartang, while the land there is suitable for cultivating barley, and wheat, and potatoes in the vast lands. Animal husbandry includes raising cattle (sheep, goat, cow). Some households are also engaged in beekeeping, as well as poultry.

Touristic Attractions in Bartang Valley

The remote Bartang valley has become one of the attractive touristic destinations with the numbers of the shrines, petroglyphs, lakes, and streams. The small village of Jizev, is considered as one of the most attractive natural destinations for the tourist. People live in Jizev without access to electricity and automobile road, in harmony with beautiful nature, crystal clear lakes, and surround trees.

Various forms of shrines and other sacred places exist in Bartang valley. Some of the shrines are just a collection of round stones, laid over each other on the top of a flat stone, others are huge and old juniper trees, and cold springs named after holy figures. The horn of ibex is usually placed in the shrines. There are stones inside some shrines which bear the imprint of the palms and footprint of the holy figure in Islam, Imam Ali. Tourists interested in the culture and history of the Bartang valley would enjoy



visiting the shrines near the springs, trees, and meadows in almost each of the villages. The ruins of many fortresses in the villages of Roshorv, Nisur and Sawnob suggest how the brave people of the valley defended themselves from the invaders in the past. A usual apple tree that gives fruit twice a year must be seen by the visitors when passing the Nisur village. Reaching the Sponj village at the centre of Bartang visitors can enjoy watching the petroglyph sites in the gorge of Khabarwif. The Khojai Nurridin shrine perched on the rock above the Basid village attracts visitors walking through the village. The shrine of Khoja Nurridin is covered with beautifully carved wooden beams, placed on the wooden pillars on the open façade.

Lake Sarez

Known as a sleeping dragon or a piece of blue jewellery-the famous Sarez Lake is located in between Eastern and Western Pamirs, the Rushon district of the GBAO. The length of the lake is 55.8 km. It is an absolute surface height of 3,263 m: maximum width of 3.3 km, and a maximum depth of 500 m. The name of the lake comes from the village of Sarez which the population migrated to the different parts of the GBAO, to other villages in Bartang valley, and in Ghund valley.

History

In February 1911 a powerful earthquake destroyed the beautiful and agriculturally rich village of Usoi in the Eastern Pamir. The Usoi dam was formed out of huge rockfalls that blocked the flow of the Murghob river. The village Usoi with 302 population was buried under the debris of the rocks, and by October 1911 the lake swallowed the village of Sarez. Its population migrated to other villages in Bartang, and to Ghund valley in present Shughnon district. Over the years the level of the water and the length of the lake increased.



According to the legend the people of Usoi lived in luxury and had bad manners. They were not God fearing and therefore were punished by an earthquake. These myth about the Sarez, and the appearance of other lake in Pamir are similar in content, but they remind people to maintain integrity, hospitality, belief and live-in harmony and peace with nature in the hazardous mountainous areas.

Several mysteries are making Sarez lake attractive to both, scholars, and visitors. Russian and other European explorers visiting Sarez before 1911, reported that there was a lively village with several households, which economy was maintained by animal husbandry and farming. In the Soviet period, a systematic investigation of the lake was conducted with a huge investment from Moscow. In post-Soviet Tajikistan, miscellaneous data were accumulated about its potential hazards, such as the gigantic flood caused by right bank landslide. The magnificent and unusual landscapes like theatrical scenery, combined with the dramatic history of its origin, its hazard, incredibly intrigues travellers. Thousands of tourists from all over the world come to this inaccessible region of Central Asia to see the famous lake, considered the blue pearl of the Pamirs.



Routes to the Sarez Lake

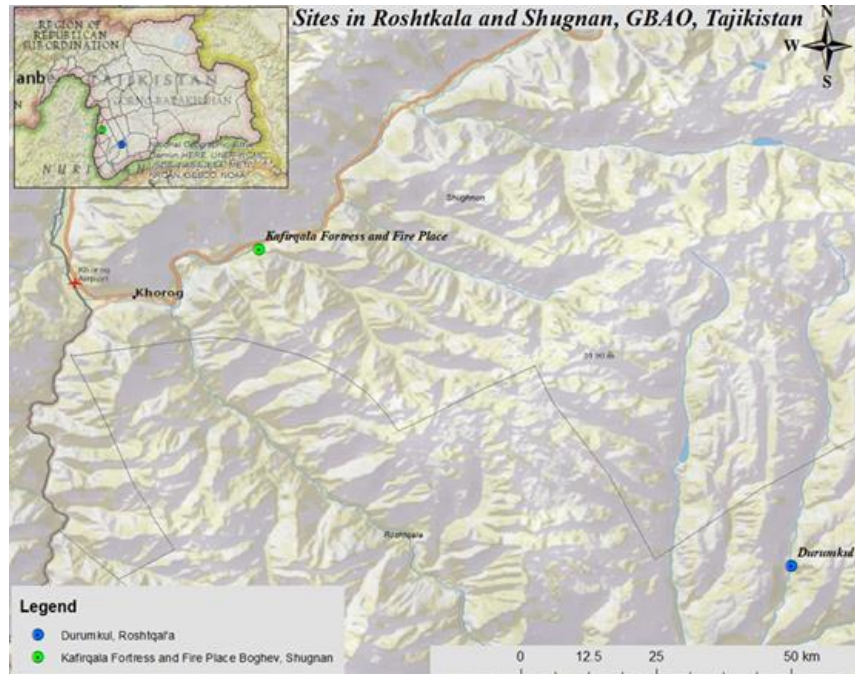
Few routes are leading to Sarez lake. The first and most popular route starts from Barchidev village in Upper Bartang valley, located 200 km from Khorog and 140 km from Rushon district centre. The car road goes until village Barchidif and from there a trek can be taken to the lake. Normally it takes 9-10 hours to trek to reach Sarez. The trek goes along the Murgob River and reaches the vast, natural Usoi dam.

Underneath this dam, the beautiful village was buried in 1911. Visitors can continue trekking, hiking around the lake to Irkht, where the meteorological station is located. They can also use the boat to cross the Sarez lake or stay at night camping at the shore of the lake. They can also continue trek further up along Langar river to Wukhinch (name of the pasture) and pass long the Uchkul (three lakes) and over Langar pass or Chapdarkul lake and reach at the Bulunkul or Bachor the villages of Shughnon district.

The second hiking or climbing route to Sarez can be taken by lovers of adventure and trekkers from Bulunkul, Bachor or Bardara villages. The routes from these destination merge in Wukhinch (name of the pasture) and from there it descends to Irkht and Sarez lake (shown on the map with blue. The third and very least taken route comes from the Murghob side along the river Murghob that leads to Sarez.

Shughnon & Roshtqal'a

The largest district of the GBAO is full of memorable, exotic historical, natural, and cultural sites which have unique attractiveness. The heritage sites in this district range from medieval fortress, temple, and shrines to in villages to that of house museum of the hero of Tajikistan-Shirinsho Shotemor, the spring and the statue of Nasir Khusraw in the village of Porshinev. One of such sites is the Kofir Qal'a fortress and a fire temple associated with it.



Roshtqal'a District is located in the south-western part of the (GBAO). It stretches along the river Shohdara between two narrow mountainous range. Unlike other district of the province, Roshtqal'a does not have an international border, but internal borders to the north with Shughnon, to the south with Ishkoshim, and to the east with Murghob districts the center of the district is about 30 km south-east of Khorog. There is a fortress in the centre of the districts, which name means 'Rosh Qal'a' (Red Fort). The fort was built around Roshtqal'a town, the district capital, is about 30 km upstream from Khorog. The name means 'red fort'. Its ruins are visible from the centre. Natural and historical heritages in the districts include the famous shrines of Shoh Burhon in Tusyon village, and Jawshangoz valley. The inhabitants of Shohdara valley (Roshtqala district) are known for their tradition of hospitality, performing traditional dances and songs. These activities can be observed by tourists in almost each village in the valley.

Kofir Qal'a and Fire Temple,

The site of Kofirqal'a and fire temple is located in the village of Boghev, of the jamoati of Suchon in Shughnon district. It is located on the rocky ridge above the village of Boghev on the right shore of the river Boghevdara (left tribute of the River Ghund). Kofirqal'a is an archaeological complex, which consist of four fortresses, three of which are fully excavated. The highest fortress on the top is located at the altitude of 2390 meters above sea level. It is visible from the village of Boghev.

Structure of the Fortress and the Fireplace



The fortress is located on the flat area. Its walls consisted of a square tower and two round towers. There was an arched watchtower at the end of the wall in the eastern part of the citadel. There was a square room at the centre of the citadel which was used by the ruler. This fortress served as a place for worship. Temples of fire worshipers were built here, the remains of which have

survived to this day. These fire temples are located on two small areas, one on the top and another at the bottom. They were built in the shape of a circle. A round fireplace was built in the middle. Unlike other temples in Shughnon, the distinctive feature is that they are built in the shape of a circle. The fire temples were open and did not have a roof. This is one of the distinguishing features of the Pamir temples from the famous Zoroastrian temples. Three types of ceramics were discovered inside the fortress, some of which belong to the Kushan period, the other to the Hephthalite era, and the third to the Middle Ages.



A caravanserai existed near this fortress, which suggest that trade routes from the east Sariqol (China) passed through this area and went to the fortress of Barpanja in Shughnon (wuluswoli) of present Afghanistan. The Kofirqala was in very convenient place that controlled the caravan route. From the top of this place the guards were setting fire, which thick smoke spread to the valley to alarm the inhabitants about threat of the enemy. During

irrigation and harvesting, the locals instructed someone to watch the road from the top of the fortress. The population of the valley Suchon was often enslaved and declined. The Muslim army called named this fortress Kofirqal'a because the inhabitants of the valley took refuge in the fortress and refused to become Muslims. According to the story of the villagers the caliph and Imam Ali rode his horse Dul-dul, captured the fortress, and summoned the population of the place, to engage in honest labor, live faithfully and peacefully. A nearby shrine is named as Shohi Wiloyat (named after Imam Ali). Some researchers suggest that the word Boghev comes from the ancient Aryan word 'Baga', meaning 'place of worship of God' or a 'temple of God. Similarly, the name of Shrine Istanbul is a modified form of 'Oston-pul', meaning "bridge of the shrine".

Travelling to Boghev

Boghev village can be reached easily from Khorog. Visitors need to stop after passing the school in the village of Boghev. They can turn right and follow the narrow about 1-2 km, to arrive at the foot of the fortress. There is a small footpath leading to the common cemetery of the village. From there they can climb to the hill where the fortress is located.



Having climbed the hill, they can explore its ruins, including the temples of fire. The village can be also reached from Murghob by travelling through Pamir Highway. People can travel to this area with private cars, public transport,

Durumkul Lake

Durumkul lake is located approximately 80km to the east of Khorog, and 38 kilometres from the centre of Roshtqala district. Durumkul is situated at an altitude of 3345m above sea level. The lake was founded when the streams of Durumdara and Shokhdara rivers were blocked by the earthquake. The climate in Durumkul is semi-arid. The length of the lake is 3.5km, width is 200 – 300m and a maximum depth is 45m.



Legend of Durumkul

In the past, there was a village of Lujdir in this place, most of which population had lived in luxury, and were non-believers. One day a poor man came to the village, but the villagers were making fun of this strange *dervish*. Only an old poor woman offered him refuge and hosted with goat' milk. While drinking the milk, the derwish told the women that she should leave the village on that evening and climb mountaing and do not aware the people. The old woman took her goat and climbed to the top of the mountain. In the morning she saw that the village was turned into a lake When an old woman woke up in the morning, she sees a lake instead of her village Lujdir village was under mudflow and Sejd was underwater. There was another village further down, where a rich Kyrgyz man named Tursun lived there with his forty sons. The only thing that Tursun and his sons were occupied was robbery. This village also went underwater as a result of earthquake.

The place which the old woman climbed, is now named after her as Gawarzhir (the stone of Gawar). Beside the Gawarzhir, there is the stone which resembles a cock. According to the tales Gawar climbed to the mountain in the evening. In the morning, the village went underwater, and it was a cock inside a

wooden plate that was swimming towards her. The cock climbed to the cliff and turned into a stone. This is the sign and consequence of the people's bad deed and mistakes that their village was turned into a lake. There are three shrines in Durum village. One of them is called the shrine of Shoh Abdoli Vali. This shrine consists of two caves, where, according to legend, *Imom Muhammad Bokir*, the fifth Imam in Shi'a Islam, had taken a refuge.

There is the road that passes a small and mediaeval fortress in Shoshbuvad. There is trekking route that goes from Shoshbuvad over the Vrang pass to Wakhan. The road then climbs to Jawshangoz valley, offering visitors the first glimpses of Peak Karl Marx (6723m) and Peak Engels (6510m).

Fauna and Flora of the Lake

The flora of the steppe land where the lake is located is not rich, and is filled by wormwood, half-shrubs, gray teresken, rose-flowered wormwood. The nature and climate of the lake can be characterized by long and harsh winters, short summers, late vegetation of herbaceous vegetation, the absence of trees and shrubs. This kind of harsh nature put animals in difficult living conditions. Himalayan snowcock, snow vulture, bearded vulture, golden eagle; mammals represented by long-tailed marmot, red pika, and silver vole are the birds which permanently live in the area. The Siberian ibex and its companion, the snow leopard, are also found here. The fauna of insects of these places is also poor. The lake has plenty of fish and is attractive for fishing.

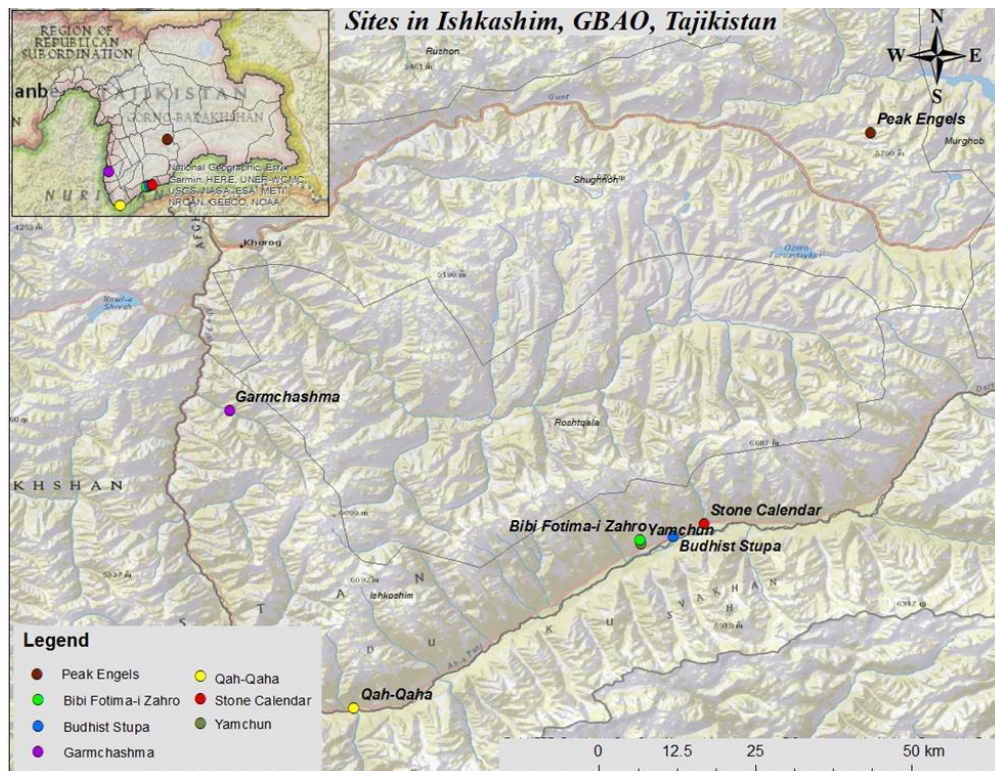
Travelling to the lake

To reach Durumkul visitor can travel to the site via the road connecting Khorog and Roshtqala. Durumkul can be also reached by trekking from Vrang village in Ishkoshim. There is the road that passes a small and mediaeval fortress in Shoshbuvad. There is trekking route that goes from Shoshbuvad over the Vrang pass to Wakhan. The road then climbs to Jawshangoz valley, offering visitors the first glimpses of Peak Karl Marx (6723m) and Peak Engels (6510m).



Ishkoshim

Travelling from Khorog to Ishkoshim visitors will be amazed at the succession of unique natural monuments along the ancient Silk Road along the famous Panj River. These heritages include fortresses, temples, and natural sites which have witnessed the traces of the various civilisations, and religions (Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Islam), trade that had flourished under the empire of (Kushans, Ephtalites, Arabs), traces of Chines, Russian, and Soviet empires, tombs attributed to the famous personalities of the Islamic world, sacred and hot springs, rich mountains. Most of these monuments are located close to each other on the highway connecting Khorog to the centre of the district of Ishkoshim, and villages.



Garm Chashma

The first destination located on the highroad between Khorog and Ishkoshim is Garm Chashma (literally meaning hot spring). The spring is located at the elevation of 2529 meter of the sea in the same village. The spring water contains sulphate-carbonate, chloride-hydrocarbonate and sodium-siliceous elements. The average annual temperature of the site is 6.70 ° C in summer 160 ° C and in winter 6.60 ° C. The hottest weather in the village 35 ° C, the coldest is 32 ° C. The spring emerges into the surface as result of the deposition of white limestone. A high hill has formed, reaching in places 7-35 meters in height, 1,500 meters in length and 35 -45 in width.



The village itself has a beautiful nature. In spring and summer, many patients from different regions of Tajikistan and neighboring countries come here for treatment. There are small caves with dry white limestone inside, which is used as medicine. The caves were discovered as a result of excavation and removal of dry limestone at the foot of the spring hill.

Legend of Garm Chashma

This spring is of natural origin and has hot medicinal water. For the first time the spring was explored by Russian mineralogist in 1928. However, travelers visiting Pamir at various points of history mentioned about this hot spring. It is not known when the spring was discovered. According to a legend, there a dragon in this place. A nobleman named Puri Shoh killed the dragon. To wash his bloody clothes, he strokes the sword, and the water sprang from there. Puri Shoh washed his clothes and sword and disappeared. Since then, this spring exists, and people were starting to settle around it, and turned into a sacred shrine for pilgrimage. The Soviet government built a sanatorium in 1957 at the site of the spring, which received patients for treatment of the skin, eyes and other diseases from different parts of the empire. There are few hotels, and guesthouses functioning at this thermal spring Garm Chashma, which serve for external and internal visitors. It is the most well-known balneological resort of Pamir. The curative properties of Garm Chashma mineral water are recognized far beyond the country.

Travelling to Garm Chashma

Garm Chashma is 48 km far from Khorog, and 7-8 km far from the high road connecting Khorog to Ishkoshim. The road has a gentle slope, so all brands of cars can pass here, but it is a difficult road for cyclists. The spring can be easily reached by taxi, or local minibus going from Khorog to Ishkoshim. The visitors travelling from Murghob, can reach the sanatorium, take a high road passing through Khargushi junction to reach Ishkoshim and Khorog. Apart from using sanatorium tourist can hike to



Source: Internet

Kuhi La'l (Ruby Mountain). It will also take them three days of mountain hiking from this site to Wezdara village, in Roshqala district. Similarly, they can hike from this village to Bodomdara. Another hiking route will take them to Darshai village of Ishkoshim district.

Qah-Qahha Fortress



The fortress of Qah-Qahha is located at the elevation of 2642 meter above the sea level. The fortress is located on the natural cliff at 125 meters above the left shore of the Panj (Oxus) river. It is 115km located away from Khorog, and 5km away from the centre of the Ishkoshim district. It is built on a huge rock by using local stones and mud. These fortresses controlled the movement of the caravans coming from India to Hindu Kush, and Wakhan, and then going the Eastern Pamirs of China. The fortress is built of stone and clay. The length of the fortress is

675 meters from the west to the and 220 meters from the south to the north and from south to north 220 meters. The fortress consists of 56 round towers, which had served as watchtowers. The large size of the bricks of the fortress testifies that this fortress was built in the ancient times. The walls have many holes and places from where arrows can be shot. This is complex architectural planning consists of three parts (citadel and two open grounds). Judging by the shape and forms of the bricks, discoveries of the piece of

pottery, researchers established that the construction of the fortress continued during the reign of the Kushans. Most researchers, based on folk legends, had also attributed the fortress to the "*siyahpush*" (black weavers).

Legend about the Fortress

According to the legends, the ruler of this fortress was a huge man named Qahqaha. They were two brothers and two sisters. Qahqaha ruled in this fortress, and his brother Zangibor ruled in Yamchun and Isor fortresses. One of his sisters Zulhumor ruled in the fortress near Yamchun, and another sister Zulhasham ruled in the fortress of *Siyahpushes* in Wakhan of Afghanistan. These *siyah-pushes* (black weavers) were all non-believers and oppressed local people. The Imam Ali arrived with his



sons, Hasan and Hussein as merchants and entered into the fortress with the help of Qahqaha's servant Mubashir. It is believed that Ali and his two sons won in all of the contests between the wrestlers in this fortress. Hence, he invited the ruler of the fortress to become Muslim. Qahqaha refused this offer, and Ali killed him in a battle. After this battle, some of the inhabitants of the fortress accepted Islam. Those who did not accept the new religion left to Kofaristan (place of the unbelievers).

Travelling to the Site

The fortress of Qahqaha is situated on the main road connecting Khorog to Ishkoshim district. Visitors travelling to the site can take a taxi or join the shared public transport going from Khorog to Ishkoshim every day. The fortress can be also reached by travelling from Murghob to the centre of Iskashim. Ishkoshim is a border town connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan via a bridge.

The Spring of Bibi Fatima-i Zahro

The Spring of Bibi Fatima-i Zahro is situated in just a short distance from Yamchun village of Ishkoshim district at the elevation of 3,025 meters above the sea. It is 83 km away from the center of Ishkoshim district and 200 km away from Khorog. The Bibi Fotima spring's location is miraculous. The hot spring is surrounded with a small forest and crystal-clear water coming from the glaciers. By opening the door

to the hot spring, a huge statue of a woman appears, consisting of her breast, her womb, and her sleeves. From her sleeves, the water goes, while the womb is an aisle to the spring. By entering the womb, a cave with water appears, in which people usually have different feelings. Some describe it as a terrifying place with a completely different atmosphere that not everyone can tolerate. Others describe it with goose bumps over their body, while others cannot enter it at all. However, it is believed that the one who could enter it, needs to recall his wish and by thinking about it, should try to take the tiny stone. If she succeeds and finds the stone, her wish will surely get realized. Mostly barren women go through these steps to fulfill their life with children and increase their fertility. The water contains microelements such as lithium, nickel, bromine, molybdenum, and radon. Bibi Fatima -i Zahro hot spring contains no chalk, and the water is crystal clear.

Legend about the Spring



Except its healing properties, the Bibi Fatima is popular and sacred among local people, tourists, and Muslims around the world because of its connection with the family of prophet Muhammad. There are different legends about the origin of this spring, which are all related to the daughter of prophet Muhammad, Bibi Fatima-i Zahro. The first story is about fighting between Ali and the rulers of the fortress of Yamchun, Qah-Qahha,

and Isor. It is believed that after this fighting Ali wanted to clean his sword and stuck it in the ground - just then hot water gushed out from the hole. Bibi Fatima then came to the bank of the spring and unfolded her sleeves to wash them; thus, the spring got similar to sleeves.

According to another legend, a woman with her child walks through this place, which at that time was deserted. The child cries loudly because of being thirsty, while the woman could not find a drop of water. Bibi Fatima observes all this scenario and hits her stick into the ground, after which water appears, making this place livable. Although there are various legends, all of them tell a story of Bibi Fatima's power, making the hot spring sacred and attractive. The Bibi Fatima spring has a strong potential for medical tourism. The healing water is effective for digestion Treatment, liver, biliary, joints, bones, orthopedic, urological, and gynecological illnesses. Mostly, women visit this sacred place, as it is believed among local people that the Bibi Fotima Hot Spring increases women's fertility. The pools are in good condition. The Bibi Fatima-i Zahro can be reached by taxi or local minibus, travelling from the district center or from Khorog.



The Fortress of Yamchun

This fortress is located in the northeastern part of Ishkoshim at the end of the village of Tuggoz, and the village of Yamchun near the small river Vichkut. It is 178 km far from Khorog, and 72 km far from the Ishkoshim town. The fortress of Yamchun is located at an altitude of 3164 meters above sea level.

The fortress consists of three large parts. The first part is located at the very bottom, just above the village



of Yamchun on the northern edge of the mountain. The entrance gate to the fortress is located here. The second part - the middle part of the fortress, is located on a slope and is fenced on the south and west sides. This area of the fortress prolongs 450 meters from north to south. There are round gates and towers within its walls. The third part of the Yamchun fortress is located at the top, which has a triangular shape. It is also called a citadel where the rulers lived.

The fortress was built of stone and large size of bricks. In certain places, the height of the wall has been preserved up to 9 meters. The fortress has nine circular checkpoints. The fortress was built on a place

where two mountain streams Vichkut and Yamchun flow from both sides. It seems that a natural hill with deep slopes appeared in between these rivers as a result wind and rain. It is almost impossible to reach to the fortress from the river sides. The fortress is located on a strategic hill and is considered one of the largest fortifications in the entire Wakhan. The fortress has an attractive look from surrounding. The western part of the wall, which descends from the citadel is around 800 meters long. The southeastern part of the wall is 400 meters. The length of the eastern wall of the citadel is 200 m, and the size of the western wall is 175 meters. There are 26 towers in the second part of the fortress, and 7 towers in the third part. Construction of Yamchun dates back to 3-1 centuries BCE. Fortresses such as Yamchun defended and regulated the movement of the trade caravans through the great Silk Road.

Legends about Yamchun Fortress

There are many legends among the inhabitants of the village of Ishkoshim about the Yamchun fortress. According to one of these legends an unbeliever king named Isor Zangibar was the ruler of Yamchun, He was the brother of Qahqaha who ruled over another fortress. When Hazrati Ali (the fourth of Caliph of Islam) arrived in the area he destroyed Qahqaha. Ali had sent a message to Zangibar should surrender and convert to Islam. Zangibar refused Ali's offer and prepared for a battle. Ali defeated Zangibar and he run away. While fleeing Zangibar collided into a withered horn of a giant emerald that pierced his chest. After this battle the population Yamchun and nearby fortresses, and villages became Muslim.



Travelling to Yamchun Fortress



Yamchun Fortress is located on the Khorog-Ishkoshim-Murghob highway. Public transport: minibuses, private cars travel daily between Khorog and the center of Ishkoshim district and from there to Yamchun village. Visitors will have to cover another 8 km of uphill or 4 km of straight road to the top. The road to the castle may be best traveled by private car. Tourists can also visit the castle on their way to Murghob on the way to Ishkoshim district.

From the top of the fortress tourists can watch the panoramic view of both sides of Wakhan, divided between Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. They can also explore the ruins, and deep dive in the history of the ruins.

Stone Calendar in Yamg Village

The stone calendar is in the Yamg village of about 500-600 meter off the main road connecting Khorog to Langar. It is located at the elevation of 2805 meter above the sea level. This stone was laid by the famous Badakhshan scholar Muborak Wakhoni (1833-1903) to measure the arrival of Navruz (new day). A genius like Muborak spent his entire life from in his native village of Yamg to study and invent. These activities represent the tradition of learning, development of skills, and invention among the people of Badakhshan. The stone calendar of Sufi Muborakqadam consists of four sign or pointer stones put in one row toward the sun at different intervals. The first stone is in his yard. It has a hole and called '*oftobbin* - meaning seeing the sun'.



On the arrival of Nawruz, at the sunset one sits on his knees near beside the *oftobbin* stone and watches through the hole. Through this hole, one looks at the second stone that is fixed on the hill like a window and called (*amalkhona*) - meaning application'. Looking through the hole of the window of the second stone into the third stone (consisting of two vertical stones and laid 5 meters further. It is called (*darwoza*) meaning gate, and forth stone called (*chillasang*) meaning ringtone, laying 200 meters away. At the point when the sun crosses the straight line of *oftobbin*, *amalkhona*, *darwoza* and *chillasang*, then one could accurately determine spring equinox day (21st of March), the arrival of Navruz. Apart from the solar stone calendar, there is other stuff like a house, (*chila-khona*), a place for meditation for forty days, a solitary



sell built by Sufi Muborak-i Wakhoni, and the house museum which was named after him by the villagers. The museum has more than 550 exhibits and it consists of few rooms. It has a *peshwoz* (open veranda of the Pamir house), the entrance and ceiling of which are decorated with carved inscriptions and drawings. Objects such as a carpet weaving machine, tools of

hunters and livestock breeders, traditional clothing, and women's jewelry are displayed in the museum. Mubarak's own written work, his notes on chronology, and his own version of local calendar are preserved in one of the corners of the museum. The musical instruments of Muborak Wakhoni, created by his blessed hands, are of great interest.

Travelling to Yamg

The village of Yamg is located on the main road connecting Khorog with Ishkoshim region. The village can be reached by shared taxi, jeep, from Khorog or Ishkoshim. Tourist activities in this village can include visiting the calendar stone, the house museum, a walk through the picturesque Yamg village on the banks of the Pyanj River. It can also include visiting shrines, relaxing at home, watching dances, and listening to traditional music are very interesting for tourists.

Budhist Temple, Vrang Village

The Buddhist temple is in the Vrang village at an elevation of 2805 meter above the sea level. The distance from Khorog to Vrang is 170 km, and from the centre of Ishkoshim district, it is 69 km. The architectural form of this monastery is very interesting. It consists of five square buildings built on top of each other like stairs. The temple is located on a hill and is visible from the village. Looking from



the hill, the whole village of Vrang, and surrounding villages are visible, both on this side of the river and on the other side of the river (Afghanistan). This is a very convenient place to watch the beautiful scenery of Wakhan. The stupa is entirely built out the local stone, and the first and second walls, which are located at the bottom, are slightly plastered. According to the archaeological investigations, the area where the temple complex was located, is surrounded by a fence. The foundation remains there. The length of this wall was 180 meters, the width is up to one meter. Two towers were built at the two corners of the wall.



One is conical (in the north-east) and the other is square (in the south-east). Besides, two semi-circular squares have been built outside the wall near the east wall. The wall had two entrances. One is on the southeast side at the corner of the east wall, the other is the north entrance in the middle of the north wall. Both entrances had doors that remained intact. The south-eastern entrance had two doors. The

Buddhist temple is located about 55 miles from downtown Ishkoshim, on a rocky outcrop near the village of Vrang. Tourists can reach to this place by traveling from Khorog to the center of Ishkoshim district.

From there they can taxi and other rented cars to the village of Vrang. Passengers can also visit the Buddha Temple at Vrang while travelling along the Murghob and Ishkoshim.

Peak Engels & Meadow

Peak Engels is located in the central part of the Shohdara in the south-west of the Pamirs in Tajikistan with a height of 6,510 m. The peak was discovered by the Russian explorers at the end of 19th century and named after Empress Mariya (wife of Emperor Alexander III Maria Feodorovna). In 1954 the Soviet alpinist climbed it and later it was renamed in the honor of communist theorist, Friedrich Engels. It is a peak with sprinkling of snow even in the summer times. There are not even lichens and mosses in the alpine glacial zone, on the rocky walls (in the nival belt). Grasses grow in the lower part of the Kishtijarob gorge, where the base camps of mountaineering expeditions are set up. There are only vole mice, ground squirrels and insects in the gorges, as there is not grass for large animals in the gorges leading to the peak.

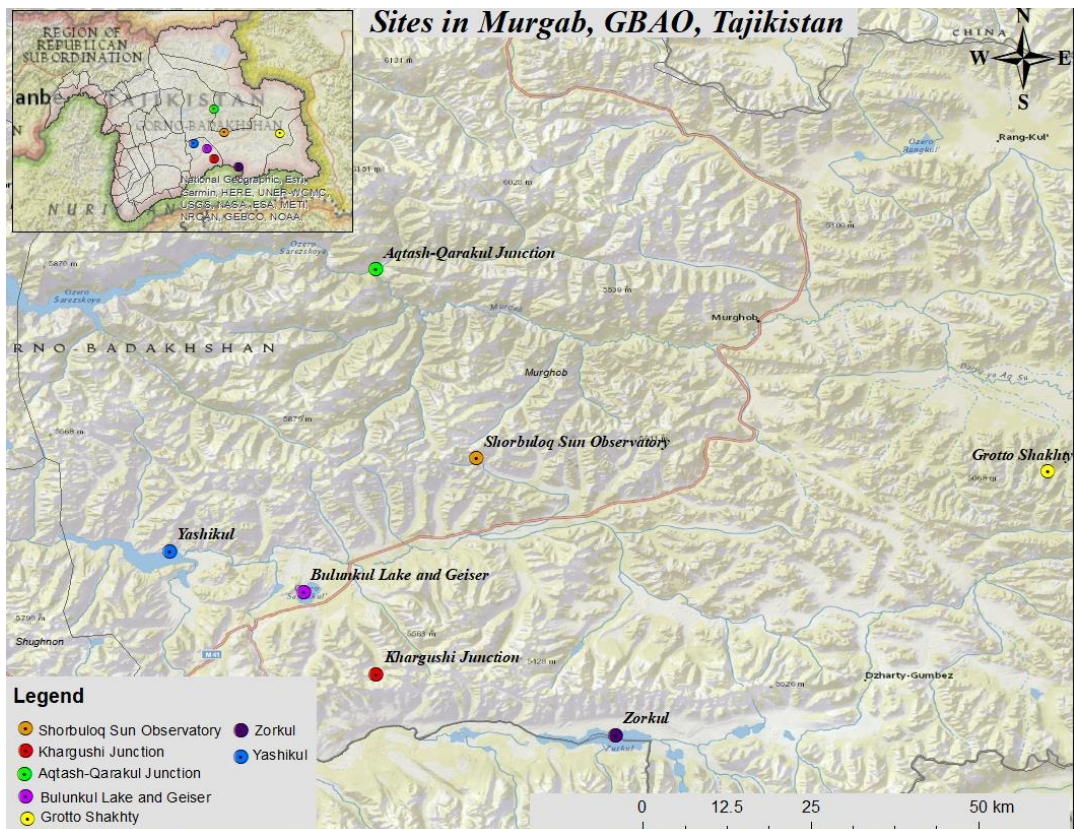


(Peak Engels and the Meadow: Source Internet)

Ways to reach to Peak Engels

Engel's peak could be reached from the Zong village and Dirch village of Ishkoshim. The road to the peak Engels peak starts from Zong village. Zong is in the south-east from Khorog in Ishkoshim district (Wakhan valley). The distance from Khorog to Zong is 217 km and from the district center 115km. From Zong village, visitors can walk through the meadow to the Marx and Engels base camp, where they can enjoy watching Peak Engels.

Murghob (Eastern Pamir)



Khargushi Junction

The Khargushi Junction is located at the altitude of 4,091 to 4,344 above the sea level. It is a strategic point in linking Eastern and Western Pamirs. The highroad which goes from Langar village of Ishkoshim to the Alichur village of Murghob district passes through this junction and steppe. It is approximately 212 km far from Khorog (center of GBAO) and 110 km far from Murghob. This pass or junction also marks the natural border between the settled areas and vast steppes of the Eastern Pamirs, where nomadic lifestyle prevails. The junction serves as a crossroad, as there are four roads going through

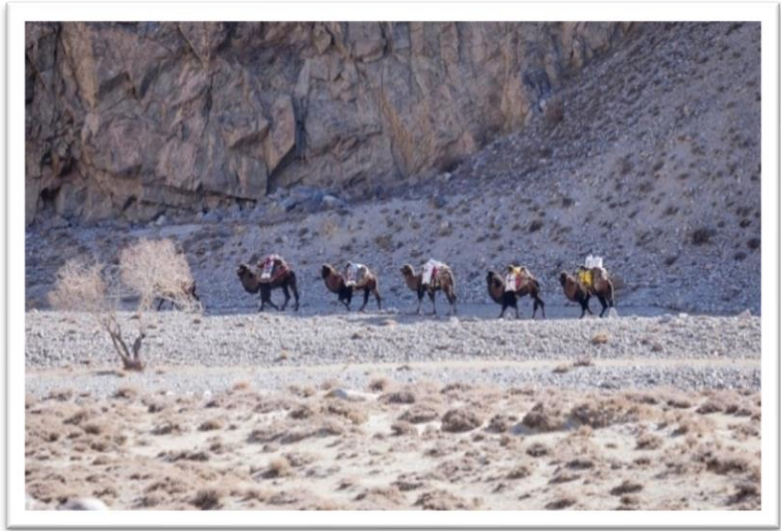


it. Road from Murghob, from Zorkul, from Ishkoshim and from Shohdara. “Dasht-i-Khargoshi”, a steppe near the junction, is a twenty miles long flat desert

Weather and Nature

The altitude of 4000 m makes the weather there harsh, cold, windy, dry, sharply continental and characterized by sharp seasonal and even daily temperature fluctuations. Due to rain, heavy snow fall, avalanches, and cold weather, the road

is usually closed from October to June. Khargushi steppe is an alpine lifeless desert without any flora or fauna, except the thorns. However, shepherds still graze the flock there in the pastures. The graze usually includes sheep, goats, and cows. The road leading to the pass is full of gravel, rocks and rough, yet travelers find it interesting and excitement to pass this



challenging junction. It is steep, and it gets passed through the remote areas of Pamirs.

Travelling to Khargushi

The famous Silk Road passed through this junction. Khargushi pass allowed caravan from Afghanistan and India to reach to China. In the years of the Great Game the agents of both Russian, and British empires passed this junction to investigate Pamirs. The Soviet constructed high road through this pass, allowing them to provide supply to its border districts in Ishkoshim. The junction can be reached by travelling from Ishkoshim. It can also be reached from Murghob district, and from Roshtqal’a district. Usually, tourists pass it while they are travelling to one of these destinations.



Bulun-Kul Lake & Geyser

Bulun-Kul is located in the eastern part of the Alichur valley of the Murghab region at an altitude of 3700 m above sea level. Lake Bulunkul has a tectonic origin with a length 1.5-2 km and width - 200-500 m. The lake is mainly fed by the Koytezak river, but, in addition, numerous springs flow into it, located along the banks lakes. The total area of the lake is 5.5 km², the maximum depth is 2 m, the transparency of the water is more than 1 m, the air temperature in the lake area reaches 18-20° in summer, and 25-30° in winter.



The view of the Lake Bulunkul

Bulunkul is considered as the coldest place in Tajikistan. In winter, the cold temperature reaches there from 57 to 60 degrees cold. According to the legend the lake was formed during the flood that occurred due to the mistreatment and disrespect of the locals to the *awliya (saint)*- a man close to God. Only one woman invited him to her house as a “God guest” and shared her meal with him. As a result, she was saved from the flood by walking on the water surface. In Soviet Period this lake was converted into the



fishpond and many different types of fished were thrown there for reproducing. This changed the ecosystem, and in the summer large flocks of mountain birds fly here. Bulun Kul is located in the harsh highlands of the Eastern Pamirs. This is usually a place for the growth of teresken, wormwood and cushion grass. There are springs and shrines around the water. The hot and thermal spring ‘Sasik bulok’ is situated 7 km away from Bulunkul village. It

serves as a kind of laundry place for the locals of Bulunkul. During the Soviet time, one small house was built there which is destroyed now. Bulukul can be easily reached on the highroad connecting Ishkoshim and Mugab districts. The road conditions are not that good, but the site is accessible.

Yashilkul

Yashilkul is one of the beautiful lakes in the Eastern Pamir. The length of the lake is 25km, its width is 4km, and its depth in some places reach 50 meters. The name of the lake is taken from Kirgыз language and means ‘Green Lake’. The water temperature does not exceed more than plus 14 degrees Celsius. It has crystal-clear water. The lake came into existence when the flow of Alichur river was blocked. The length of the obstruction is more than 4km with a height of 100-110m high. The Alichur River originates in the eastern part of the Pamir and flows into the Yashilkul. It is the shallowest stream in the eastern part of Yashikul. A vivid green spot distinguishes the place where the river waterfalls into the lake.

Legends about Yashilkul



Once upon a time this place was ruled by an unbeliever (*kafir*) king. There was a pious man working in his court. This man had two beautiful daughters, named Rano, and Gul. The king liked these girls and waited for the moments to take them away from their parents. He deceived the poor man by lending him money, which the poor man could not pay back. At the end the king took his daughters instead of the money. The man was

in despair, but he had dream which directed him to go to a certain place to find a person name Murtuzo Ali and seek some help from him. He travelled to distant lands to meet Ali and explained his grief to him. Ali accompanied the poor to the court of the king. Ali disguised his identity and asked the poor man to sell him to the king. The king had three demands for freeing the man’s daughter. Ali responded to all of these demands. The first demand was to bring the skin of the dragon (*azhdahor*), the second condition was to build a water canal, the third condition was to bring two lions from the wild forest. Then the king announced the fourth condition which is to bring the head of ‘Ali. At that moment ‘Ali revealed his identity and struck the king with his sword *Zulfiqar* and freed the man’s daughters. The kingdom of unbeliever king had flooded, and the lake emerged. The Tajik population living in Murghob also call this lake Sumankul. According to another story a girl named Suman met a young boy and they fall in love.

They made a promise to each other that they will marry and live together until the last minute. However, Suman was about to be married to another man by force. Suman took a horse and ran away. Local men tried to catch her, but Suman jumped into the lake and disappeared. Since then, this lake is called Sumankul.

There is a hydro sulphury thermo spring called Issik Bulak near the shore of this lake. The spring is surrounded by dilapidated mud made structures (probably shrines or mausoleum). Locals consider it sacred. One of these small muds made structure has a catchment pool to get water from thermal spring. The shores of the lake are steep, rocky, made of granite-gneisses, inaccessible in places, often along the water there are scree and boulder moraine. Its water is clean and transparent, with greenish color. The water



temperature is around 8-10 degree in summertime. There is not that much organic life in this lake. There are two types of fish living in the lake such as marinka (*Schizothorax intermedius*) and capital char (*Nemachilus stoliczaki*). The Yashilkul shores are almost uninhabited, apart from some birds and yaks. Yashilkul is suitable place for fishing, climbing, and for sightseeing, visiting nearby stone circles and several Saka (Scythian) burial sites. Traces of ancient mining settlements (probably from the 11th century AD) also exist in the area. The remains of a *caravanserai* (or tombs) and a hot spring Sumantash (Bekbulat) are visible at the eastern end of the lake. Trekking route from this lake can take visitors to the village of Bachor in Ghund, and to the village of Bardara and to the Lake Sarez in Rushon.

Routes to Yashilkul

Yashilkul can be reached both via car road and trekking/hiking routes from various destinations. It can be reached from Murghob driving for 100 km via Pamir Highway (M41) and then taking a detour to the right side through the dirt road around 45-50km leading to Bulunkul village and then Yashilkul. The other means to reach the site is from Khorog driving through the M41 road for 150 km passing Koitezak Pass detour on the same place as can be done from Murghob side, reaching Bulunkul and Yashilkul lake.

Lake Zorkul

Lake Zorkul is located in the eastern Pamirs between Ishkoshim and Murghob on the border of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It stretches from the east to west for 25 km and covers an area of 87,700 hectares. The territory of the lake is 38, 9 square kilometers, it is located at an altitude of 4125 meters above sea level. The lake is 33 km long and 23 km wide. The Muzkul River flows to the south, and the Qaradjilga River flows to the north of the lake. The



lake takes its water from glaciers. The Pamir River flows out of Zorkul into the Pyanj River. Thus, Lake Zorkul is one the source of the Amu Darya River (Oxus River).

This lake is also known as Victoria. British officer who in 1838 traveled to discover the source of the Oxus. named the lake after Queen Victoria of Great Britain. Hence Zorkul is not only a beautiful natural place but is also a historical place. It is a place where the Great Game for the divisions of the borders of the Pamirs was played 1895. The Zorkul Reserve was established in 2000 to preserve the unique natural complex of the Eastern Pamirs and to protect mountain geese. These and other rare species were listed in the Red Book of the Republic of Tajikistan. In 2001, Lake Zorkul was included in the list of wetlands covered by the Ramsar Convention. In 2006, the State Committee for Environmental Protection and Forestry of the Republic of Tajikistan nominated the Zorkul Nature Reserve for the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Zorkul State Reserve was formed on the basis of the existing Zorkul Nature Reserve in 2000.



Map of the Zorkul Nature and State Reserve

Nature of the Lake Zorkul and its Surroundings

The lake is fresh, full of fish and waterfowl. The main fish species inhabiting the Zorkul Lake and the Pamir River are pseudo-osman. The largest colony of the mountain goose (*Anser indicus*) is located on Lake Zorkul, where up to 250 pairs of birds' nests. In the spring Lake Zorkul is covered with a thick layer of ice and is inaccessible for migratory birds. Starting from August to October tens of thousands of water birds will find food and rest here. In summer, birds of the northern hemisphere live here (various ducks, crustaceans, gulls, terns, etc.). There are more than 15 species of mammals. There is an island in the middle of the lake, which is named as the 'Edelweiss Island'. There is a full-fledged plantation of Edelweiss plants, hidden among the rocks in this island. Interestingly, the blooming time of the edelweiss coincides with the release of the eggs of the Osman fish

The reserve is home to Marco Polo, the rarest breed of mountain sheep in Central Asia and the world. The reserve is also home to such rare species of animals and birds as red wolf, brown bear, Tibetan snow leopard, white dove, and others. The mountain goat of Central Asia known as Pamiri *arkhar*, hare, wolf, fox, silver bird and snow leopard are typical inhabitants of the Zorkul Nature Reserve. Red wolves, argali, tigers, brown bears and other animals and birds are protected by the state as they are listed in the Red Book of the Republic of Tajikistan. The relief of the reserve consist of the wide sand and gravel valleys.

This reserve was formed to protect the animal, in particular the rare species of mountain geese, and to combat poaching, the disappearance of argali and other animals. The plantation of the lake is really poor, and trees are completely absent. Cushion plant are the main type of the alpine type of vegetation. Some types of sedges: round, black head, and others are common in the lake.

Zorkul Lake is considered as one of the best tourism destinations in Tajikista, offering a range of choices for tourists. The most popular activities among tourists are fishing, jeep trip, hiking, yak riding, exploring wildlife, pastoral lives, relaxation in the yurts of the local shepherds, and walk along the shore of the lake. An unforgettable memory for tourists is to watch the starry sky, the Milky Way, which can be seen while sleeping in a tent on the slope of Lake Zorkul.

Routes to the Lake

Zorkul lake and its environs are part of the Zorkul Nature Reserve, which is located 388 km from Khorog to Murghab (along the Pamir Highway) and 340 km from Khorog in the direction of the Wakhan Valley. The main routes to the Zorkul Nature Reserve go from Murghob, and from Ishkoshim districts through the highways.

Grotto Shakhty

A natural cave containing painting (petroglyphs) drawn with red colour on huge rock attracts visitors travelling to Murghob, Eastern Pamir. The Grotto Shakhty is considered as the oldest rock paintings in Central Asia, which exist at an altitude of 4,200 meters above sea level. The site of the Grotto Shakhty paintings is located 40km to south-west off Murghob, and 300km to the east off Khorog city. The cave has an open entrance and faces to the east and is dry inside. It is seven and a half meters wide at the entrance and six meters deep. The cave was formed due to tectonic fractures. There are seven paintings in the centre of the cave, four of which are preserved to this day. These images were taken at the level of the southern wall of the peninsula at a height of 1.6–2 m above ground level. They are all painted in a natural red colour.



A closer look at the image reveals that a man with a mask of a bird is hunting a wild boar. Yaks and bears are depicted along with it. Spear arrows reaching the bodies of the yaks are visible in the images, which reveals the art and magic of hunting. The paintings on the Shakhta Cave were first discovered in 1958. According to the findings of this recent expedition, the images of Shakhta cave are very similar in style to the Palaeolithic images found in France.

The main reason for the survival of these images, paintings on the rock in the arid climate of the Eastern



Pamirs. Russian archaeologists have dubbed this cave with the word 'Shahta' to make it easier to Russian pronunciation. In fact, the word *shakh* means a rock in the Tajik language or a big stone in the Shugni -one of the Eastern-Irani Pamiri language.

Travelling to the Site

Shakhty Cave site can be seen reached with a day trip from Murghob. Visitors who are

travelling on the Pamir Highway connecting Murghob and Khorog should turn into remote gravel track after 40 km. This road will finally lead them to the site of petroglyphs or as known Shakhty Caves. They are located in the Cheshtebe a V-shaped valley valleys with an arid landscape with very few landmarks.

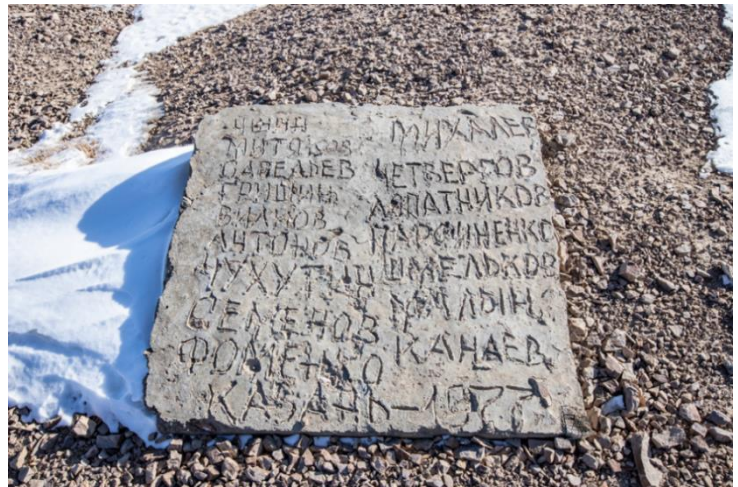
Shorbuloq Observatory, Murghob District



The observatory is located at an altitude of 4370 meters above sea level. At that time, the observatory belonged to the Pulkovo Astronomical Observatory of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). It was one of the most important research observatories in the entire USSR. This observatory was built considering the specific climate of the territory Eastern Pamir.

It was built by a number of professionals, whose names are still preserved on one of the memorial

plaques. It was originally named the Pamir Astronomical Expedition of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. The expedition was organized by two institutions - the Pulkovo Astronomical Observatory and the Space Research Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. When Tajikistan gained sovereignty, the observatory functioned under the Institute of Astrophysics of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan named after S. Umarov. It is designed to observe the cosmic rays. Shorbuloq Observatory was established to observe the movement of Sun at the highest point in the former Soviet Union.



The location of the observatory allows astronomers to observe all objects of the northern hemisphere and objects of the southern hemisphere. From 1992 until recent years, the observatory was in disrepair, and its telescope was completely out of order. The government of Tajikistan is attempting to make investment to repair and restore the telescope. The site of Shorbuloq attracts the attention of tourists with its amazing landscapes. From the panoramic tower, you can enjoy the view of the mountain peaks of Chinese Xinjiang, Kongur and Muztag-Ata, if,

of course, there are no clouds on the horizon. Although the observatory does not work after restoration, in the future it may become objects for astro-tourism. Tourists interested in astrophysics (physicists, astronomers).

This place is unique for observing the northern celestial hemisphere. The point is in the favorable climate



of the Eastern Pamirs, characterized by a large number of cloudless nights, high transparency, and dry air. At the moment, the observatory is abandoned. Shorbuloq observatory is located in the Murghob district, at 310 km off the Khorog-Murghob highway. The observatory can be reached by rented vehicles from Khorog, Murghob or the village of Alichur. Tourists can also travel to the site by bicycle. They can travel to this site via following routes: Murghob-

Shorbuloq (along the Pamir highway) or Khorog-Ishkoshim -Shorbuloq.

[Aqtash Qarokul Junction](#)

The Aqtash-Karakul junction is located at 95 km of the Murghob-Karakul highway and connects the Bartang valley with the Murghob foothills. At this intersection, tourists can enjoy the beautiful scenery of the southern shore of Lake Qarakul (Black Lake in Turkish). The junction is located 25 km from the village of Qarakul. The lake is the largest natural reservoir of Tajikistan that exist at the altitude of 3900m of sea level. It is 33km long and 23km wide. The big island -ridge, extended from north shore to the south, divides the lake into two parts: shallow-eastern and deep water -western. Its deepest point is in the western part which is 230 m. Up to the end of XIX century, the north part of the island was linked with shore through the narrow isthmus. Now this isthmus has disappeared. Few small rivers such as Qarajilga, Qaraart, and Muzkul fall into the lake but none of them flows out of this salty lake. An interesting feature of Qarakul is that the shores of the lake lie on ice. The ice is even rooted at the depth of the lake.



Qarakul is the most deserted part of the Pamir. There is the least precipitation, nearly twenty millimetres per annum. The water level in the lake is not dark (as its name says) but ultramarine, blue, greenish, depending on sun's light refraction that falls on the surface of the water. The village of Qarakul is located on the eastern shore of the High Pamir Road. The population of this village are Kyrgyz and mainly engaged in animal husbandry. A well-known Markansu valley is located few kilometres away from the lake. The meaning of the word Markansu is translated as the 'valley of a whirlwind', others as 'valley of death'. More precisely it would be 'dead water'. It is there that well-known archaeological site 'Oshkhona' of Stone Age (VIII century B.C.) exist.

Nature of the Lake

The nature in Qarakul and its surroundings area is harsh and severe but at the same time it is beautiful with its primordial, feature. The water of the Qarakul lake is bitter and salty, and few fishes can be found there, which are usually eaten by the birds. The shores of the lake are high altitude deserts. Only in a few places near the water, there is a sedge, buckwheat, and some variety of glassworts. There are different ecosystems such as marsh, peat bogs, water meadows, pebbly beaches, and sands around the lake that provide conditions for many types of birds live in that area. Visitors can watch bar-headed geese, Tibetan sand grouse, yellow-billed chough, Caucasian great rose finch, white-winged snow finch, ruddy shelduck, Himalayan vulture and saker falcon on shores of the lake. Snow leopards and Marco Polo sheep can be also seen nearby the lake. The lake is frozen for five months from December till April. The high altitude

and the cold, arid conditions of the Pamir make the climate of the nature extreme. The average winter temperatures are around -20 degrees but can get down to -45 degrees.

Travelling to the Site

The site is located on Pamir Highway and can be reached by travelling from Khorog to Murghob and from there to the village of Qarakul. The lake can be reached from Osh via the Pamir Highway. Visitors can travel to the area from Bartang valley.



Selected Readings on Heritages in Khatlon and the GBAO

1. Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg. *Minstrel Poetry from the Pamir Mountains* (Leiden, 1997).
2. Ibbotson, Sophie, Claire Blackmore and Behruz Boev, *Tajikistan* (Chesham: Bradt Travel Guides, 2020).
3. Litvinsky B. A. *History of Buddhism in Central Asia Outline*. (Moscow, 1968).
4. Litvinskiĭ, B. A. 'Ajina-Teppe' *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/7, pp. 703-705;)
5. Litvinsky Boris 'Kafir Kala' *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. XV, Fasc. 3, p. 336 and Vol. XV, Fasc. 4, pp. 337-341. September 15, 2009. Available online at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kafir-kala-archeological-site-in-tajikistan>
6. Middleton R & Thomas, H. (2012). *Tajikistan and The High Pamirs: A Companion and Guide*. Hong Kong: Odyssey Books & Guides, 2012.
7. Olufsen, A. *Through the Unknown Pamirs*. (London,1904).
8. Stein Ariel. *Mountain Panoramas from the Pamirs and Kwen Lun*. (London,1908).
9. Gordon, T. E. *The Roof of The World: Being the Narrative of a Journey Over the High Plateau of Tibet to The Russian Frontier* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing. 2010).
10. Wood John, *Narrative of a Journey to the Source of the River Oxus* (London: John Murray, 1841).
11. Yule Henry. *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Book 1/Chapter 32, 1903.