



Qarun Pass (4873m) © all photographs Matthieu Paley



KHUNJERAB

Where Ibex Live and Snow Leopards Roam



NWFP Wildlife Department
Government of NWFP

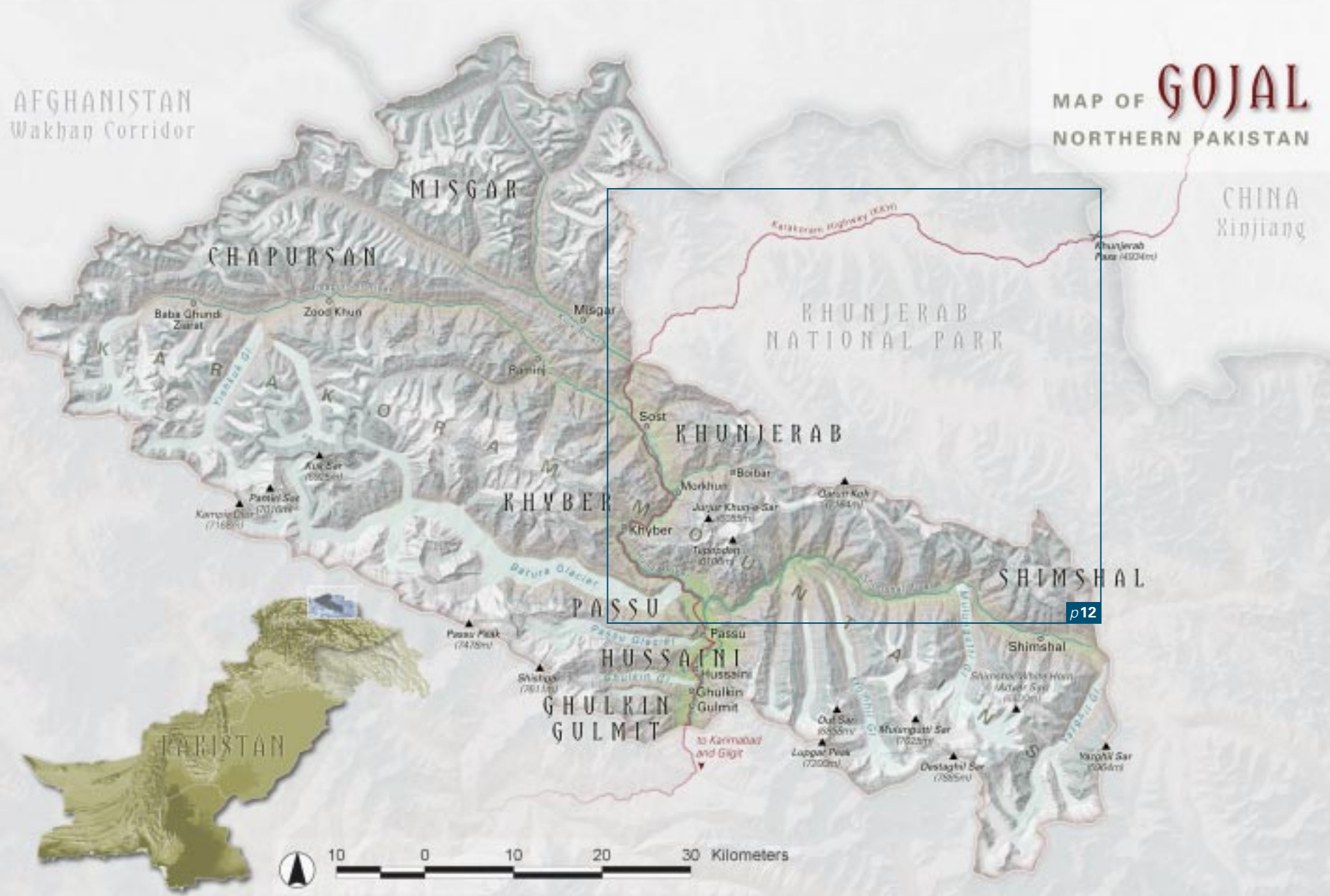
NA Forestry, Parks and Wildlife Department
NA Administration



AFGHANISTAN
Wakhan Corridor

MAP OF GOJAL NORTHERN PAKISTAN

CHINA
Xinjiang



p12

all maps by Mareile Paley. Produced with the help of WWF GIS-Lab, ESRI and ERDAS imagine



ANYONE WHO CONSCIOUSLY OBSERVES THE
EXponential DESTRUCTION OF WILDERNESS
BECOMES ALMOST AUTOMATICALLY AN
ADVOCATE FOR THE NATURAL WORLD.



George B. Schaller, "Stones of Silence"

KVO* FACTS

location Gojal, Upper Hunza, KVO* is comprised of seven villages located between Passu and Sost

largest town Sost

public transport any transport on Karakoram Highway going between Passu and Sost

KVO settlements Sost, Nazimabad, Sartiz, Gircha, Jamalabad, Morkhun, Galapan (from north to south)

accommodation Sost (several hotels and guesthouses), in other villages paying guests can be accommodated on request

supplies best to buy all your trekking food in Sost

population 306 households, 3775 people

indigenous language Wakhi

indigenous wildlife snow leopard, Himalayan ibex, red fox, wolf, Himalayan snow cock, rock partridge, blue sheep

common plant species juniper, willow, poplar, wild roses, seabuckthorn

* (Khunjerab Village Organization)

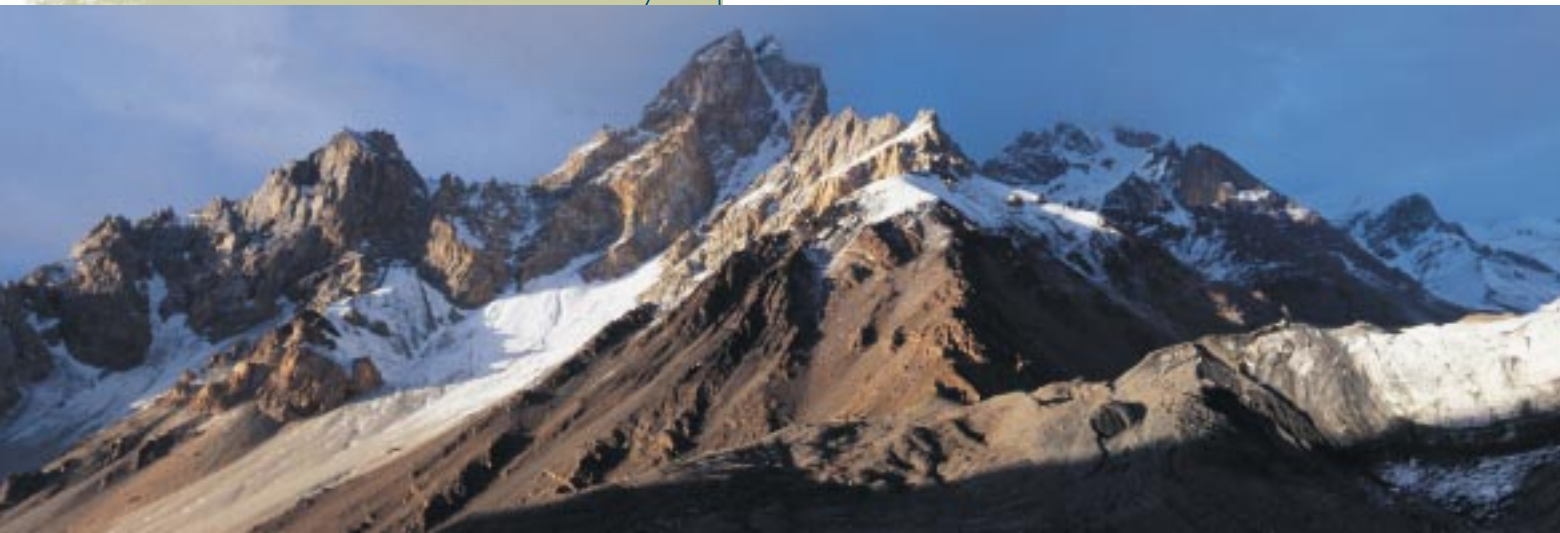
View over KVO area from Sor (looking north towards Khunjerab Pass)

INTRODUCTION

The people in this area have learned to live in harmony with nature. For them the conservation and protection of their environment is an important factor for their own survival.

The Khunjerab area comprises a large part of northwestern Gojal all the way to the Chinese border. Part is under protection of the Khunjerab National Park, which was established in 1974. The rest of the area is shared by several communities and includes villages, pasture land and a vast expanse of narrow valleys, steep mountain ridges, peaks and glaciers. In order to protect and conserve the natural treasures lying within this area, seven villages have joined in 1989 and created the Khunjerab Village Organization (KVO). In collaboration with the Mountain Areas Conservancy Project (MACP) initiatives have been started to support the conservation of wild species, which include ecotourism and a community based trophy-hunting program.

Through these conservation efforts, the KVO area today, is probably the best place to observe wildlife, especially the Himalayan ibex, in its natural habitat. In addition to already popular and established treks, such as the charming Boibar Valley, a range of rarely visited



Wind helps to separate the unwanted stalks from the wheat grains.

In Morkhun's handi-craft (or "thaskari") center, local Wakhi women produce a variety of tradition-inspired items, such as woollen hats, embroidered bags and jewellery. Tourists are welcome to visit the center.

areas can be discovered by the more adventurous. The area is particularly interesting for researchers as little of the local flora and fauna has been studied in depth. For those interested in local culture and history, the villages of KVO welcome visitors to experience Wakhi customs and traditions. A variety of forts, old watch towers and ancient mosques tell the stories of times long past. Whatever your interest, however long you like to stay—visiting the magnificent unspoiled nature of KVO will greatly enrich your experience in northern Pakistan.

Traditional wheat storage. In the ground the grains remain dry and don't germinate.



The inhabitants of all seven villages comprising KVO are of Wakhi origin and despite the region's proximity to the KKH many customs and traditions still remain intact. Events have shaped each village in a slightly different way. Sost today is a busy trading hub, due to its position as the first Pakistani town after China, while other, smaller villages have remained mostly unchanged. Though independent from each other, the creation of KVO now connects these places and just like their resources, the people of KVO share much of their history and culture...

Fresh water pool in Gircha.

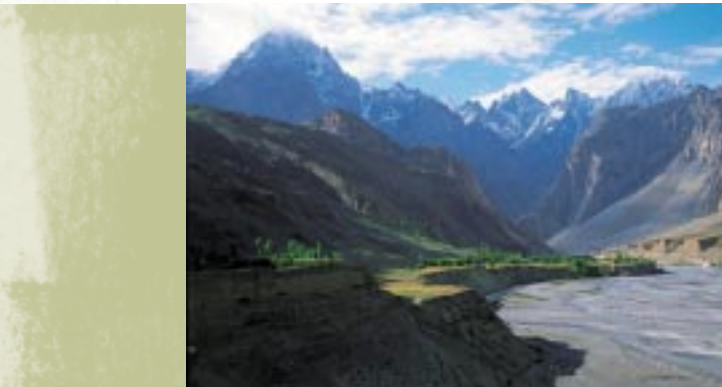


GIRCHA VILLAGE

Serenely perched on a ledge between the KKH and the Hunza River, the small village of Gircha is often passed unnoticed. Once an important and prosperous place, most of the village was washed away by a massive soil erosion some 50 years ago and people were relocated to neighboring Jamalabad, Nazimabad and Sost.

Today, Gircha is a peaceful little spot and ideal to get an insight into the traditional Wakhi way of life. Abounding with well-tended fields and fruit tree orchards, the village disseminates an atmosphere of a simple, natural way of life, still unaffected by tourism. Locals go after their work, children play in the natural water pond, young girls wash clothes by the river...

In Gircha you can visit the old village mosque of Ghulam Ali Shah, a descendant of the region's first settler Baba Sufi. The mosque had to be



relocated at least three times due to soil erosion and exhibits some fine examples of traditional woodcarvings.

Gircha has no guesthouse, but it is easy enough to find accommodation in Morkhun or Sost.

AVGARCH, "THE HOUSE OF WATER"

The historical settlement of Avgarch lays in the picturesque Boibar Valley and can be reached by a jeep road starting from Jamalabad. The name Avgarch is derived from the Persian words for water 'ab' and 'kerch', meaning hut. According to local history, the site used to be a grassy campsite with a small hut by a clear spring, hence the name.

The first inhabitants arrived several centuries

to Galapan, Gircha, Sartiz, Jamalabad, Morkhun, Nazimabad and Sost, all of which comprise the KVO area today.

Apart from the old fort with its watchtowers (*kungras*) and the mosque of Ghulam Ali Shah (which is said to be 800 years old), the village and its surroundings invite to be explored. An old juniper tree, Baltar Yarz, is another popular attraction for the visitor. Many legends and tales



The house of Baba Sufi

It is commonly believed that the first settler in the KVO area is the legendary Baba Sufi who came from Afghanistan traveling along the Amu Daria (or Oxus) River. He is said to first have settled in Sost, but soon moved to the more secluded and secure Boiber Valley where he made Avgarch his permanent home.

Today, the old houses of Baba Sufi can be visited in Sost as well as in Avgarch. Especially the Avgarch house of Baba Sufi gives good examples of the traditional architecture of the time and old wood carvings can be studied.

One beam in the house shows the carved outline of a hand – supposedly done by Baba Sufi himself.

The Avgarch Fort was built as a defense post against Kyrgyz invaders who roamed in Hunza until the mid 19th century.



ago from the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan, where they settled in the relative seclusion and security of this side valley. As the population grew, people spread out and moved downvalley

spring from this mighty tree and scientists believe it to be the oldest living tree in Gojal, dating several thousand years.

WILDLIFE & NATURE

For the local population living in harmony with nature is essential for their own well-being and survival. Modern developments – the KKH, the arrival of tourists, easy availability of supplies are a constant threat to this long-standing harmony. The people of the KVO area understand the need to conserve their natural resources and are aware of their responsibility to do so. Many have given up hunting and have instead found a new role as wildlife guides and conservation specialists.

THE KHUNJERAB NATIONAL PARK

Adjacent to the KVO area is the Khunjerab National Park. Created in 1975 on the recommendation of wildlife biologist Dr. George Schaller it is Pakistan's third largest national park. The primary purpose of setting up the park was to provide protection to the endangered Marco Polo sheep, which is only found in this area in Pakistan. The park is also famous for its snow leopards. Some reports say that it might contain the highest density of these endangered wild cats in the total Himalayan ecosystem. Siberian ibex, widely distributed and abundant in the park but absent from neighboring China and blue sheep can also be seen in the park. Trekking and wildlife watching tours in the national park can be arranged through KVO.



This giant juniper tree in Avgarch is several thousand years old and is the oldest living tree in Gojal.



Khunjerab National Park as seen from KKH.

The Himalayan Ibex is, apart from several bird species, the easiest animal to observe in the wild. Their numbers have risen steadily in recent years and they can often be seen early in the morning drinking from clear mountain streams.



WILDLIFE IN THE KVO AREA

■ SNOW LEOPARD (*Uncia uncia*)

This endangered wild cat can still be found in the mountains searching for prey. Chances of actually seeing the elusive animal exist in winter when the snow leopard's prey species descend from the higher elevations due to the snow.

■ HIMALAYAN IBEX (*Capra ibex siberica*)

Being the most common ungulate species in the KVO valleys ibex can easily be sighted during trekking. Large herds are found even on the lower slopes (especially early in the morning), making for good photographic opportunities from the road (KKH).

■ RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

A nocturnal animal, the fox is most frequently spotted in the evenings.

■ WOLF (*Canis lupus*)

Wolves share their habitat with the ibex and have made a come-back in recent years.

■ MARCO POLO SHEEP (*Ovis ammon polii*)

Once believed to be extinct, this beautiful animal with its unique, massive horns, can occasionally be spotted in the Khunjerab Park.

■ HIMALAYAN SNOW COCK (*Tetra gallus himalayensis*)

This big bird is common to the area and can be photographed while trekking. It is easily identified by its striking sound.



Often only tracks prove the existence of the elusive snow leopard.

How to spot wildlife

Seeing wild animals and their behavior in a natural environment is a unique and rare experience. It requires patience, a trained eye and most of all an understanding of the animal's behavior. Going with a local hunter or trained wildlife guide will give you the best chances to see wildlife, but the weather and season also play a big role:

- winter is generally better than summer
- dusk and dawn are the times when wildlife moves down from the mountains to the watersheds
- bad weather (rain, snow) also prompts a move to lower altitudes

Presently KVO employs seven trained wildlife guides. Equipment like binoculars and spotting scopes can be rented from the local conservation committees.



ECOTOURISM

ECOTOURISM in the Kvo area

What to do?

IN VILLAGES/ON HIGH PASTURES

- be considerate of the local culture
- wear appropriate clothing. Locals usually love to see foreigners wearing *shalwar kamiz*
- ask permission before taking photographs, especially of women or religious places
- if you want to give a gift or a donation, hand it to a responsible, respected person, such as a schoolteacher or community leader
- when offered local food be humble and thankful. You can share some of your own food in exchange

WHILE TREKKING

- dispose properly of all your garbage. Burn paper, collect plastic, flatten tins and carry them out. Hiding garbage under a stone is not an option!
- leave your campsite in the state you found it
- use gas or kerosene for cooking. If you need to use wood, leave a donation for the village
- choose toilet sites at least 50m away from your camp and from any river or water source. Dig a toilet pit for larger groups
- avoid toilet paper if possible. Use water instead
- be an example to your guides and porters by following and explaining these guidelines and their reasons

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The term ecotourism has, in recent years, become a popular slogan used by tour operators all over the world. Yet, what exactly is ecotourism? In a nutshell, ecotourism could be defined as ecologically, environmentally and socially responsible tourism. The main aims of ecotourism are to protect and preserve nature and to help provide the means to do so (financial and educational) by directly supporting local communities. Other aspects, such as the sustainability of local culture and history also form part of this low-impact approach to tourism.

Looking at the negative impact mass-tourism can have on native culture and environment, ecotourism is a sensible alternative. Instead of traveling in large groups, consider taking the trip with only a few like-minded people. A simple consideration such as this can already result in a multitude of positive effects. In small villages, the communities can easily accommodate a small group and the need for building large hotels can be limited. A trip for a large group will most likely be organized by an outside tour operator. By taking local guides and porters you will have a chance to get a genuine insight into the life of local people and you will directly contribute to their welfare. Activities, such as wildlife watching are much easier to conduct and have a much better success rate when traveling in a small group.

Those are only a few examples of how ecotourism can be employed and directly benefit the area you are visiting. More guidelines are given on the side bars. It is up to you alone to follow these guidelines to minimize the impact of tourism. As an ecotourist you are not just a visitor; you can play an active role in helping to conserve nature and to form a better understanding between people of different cultures.

KHUNJERAB VILLAGE ORGANIZATION (KVO) COMBINING EFFORTS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The Khunjerab Village Organization was founded in 1989 and is governed by an executive body of 22 members, consisting of three members from each of the seven participating villages. KVO is registered with the local government since 1995. The aim of the organization is to involve the local communities (male and female) in valley-level decision making regarding resource use and matters of socio-economic development.

There is a great degree of social harmony among the KVO villages, which greatly facilitates the successful and equitable sharing of profits and resources. KVO acts as a proactive social forum to help guide and motivate its community organizations (village organizations (VOs)/ women's organizations (WOs)) for a variety of development initiatives, including ecotourism development and a successful trophy-hunting program. Other objectives of KVO take in improvement of primary education, provision of basic health facilities, infrastructure development and wildlife conservation.

During the last few years, KVO has played a significant role in introducing community based conservation efforts as well as in collaborative management of the area's resources. Major achievements include establishing linkages with governmental and non-governmental organiza-

tions, implementation of community development schemes in partnership, setting up an efficient mechanism for wildlife conservation, and strengthening the communities' financial resources through sustainable use of natural resources.

The initial creation of VOs and WOs was introduced by AKRSP (Aga Khan Rural Support Programme). This was a first step towards bringing people closer and towards a general understanding of the concept of collective efforts on the community level. The creation of KVO, where several villages share their ideas and resources is the next step towards a sustainable future. Further support is given by allowing KVO access to technical, intellectual and financial assistance of AKRSP and other donor organizations, which, in return results in raising awareness and capacity building on the local village level.

As a tourist, you can help to support and maintain the combined efforts of these villages by hiring local guides and addressing any questions you might have directly to members of the conservation committees.

GENERAL

- try to travel in small groups
- hire local guides and porters
- support the local community by buying local products and handicrafts directly from the people

What not to do!

IN VILLAGES/ON HIGH PASTURES

- do not wear shorts or tight fitting shirts
- don't hug or kiss in public

WHILE TREKKING

- don't disturb wildlife by making unnecessary noise
- don't hunt or kill any animals or pull out any plants
- never leave any garbage (esp. candy wrappers, cigarette butts...) on the trail or at campsites
- don't use wood for cooking. If you need to use wood, collect dry branches from the ground – never break fresh branches!

GENERAL

- don't pass out any gifts, such as candy, pens or even money to children. Instead, give your donation to a responsible adult or school
- don't carve or write your name on stones, trees, etc.

TREKKING in the Khunjerab area

Rates and Fees

GENERAL TREKKING FACTS

guides are always paid per day for every day they spend with you. This also includes rest days. A guide should have a licence and his responsibilities include hiring and supervising of porters, route finding, organizing transport etc.. A guide usually only carries his own equipment.

porters are paid per stage. A porter carries up to 25kg not including his own equipment. On treks above 5000m the load should not exceed 20kg. Porters are paid 1/2 stage for rest days.

wapasi (return) is paid to porters at half the stage rate. Wapasi is paid when the trek ends in a different place and the porter returns to his point of origin unloaded. If the return is via public transport, the transport cost should be paid, but no wapasi.

FEES IN KVO (as of summer 2003)

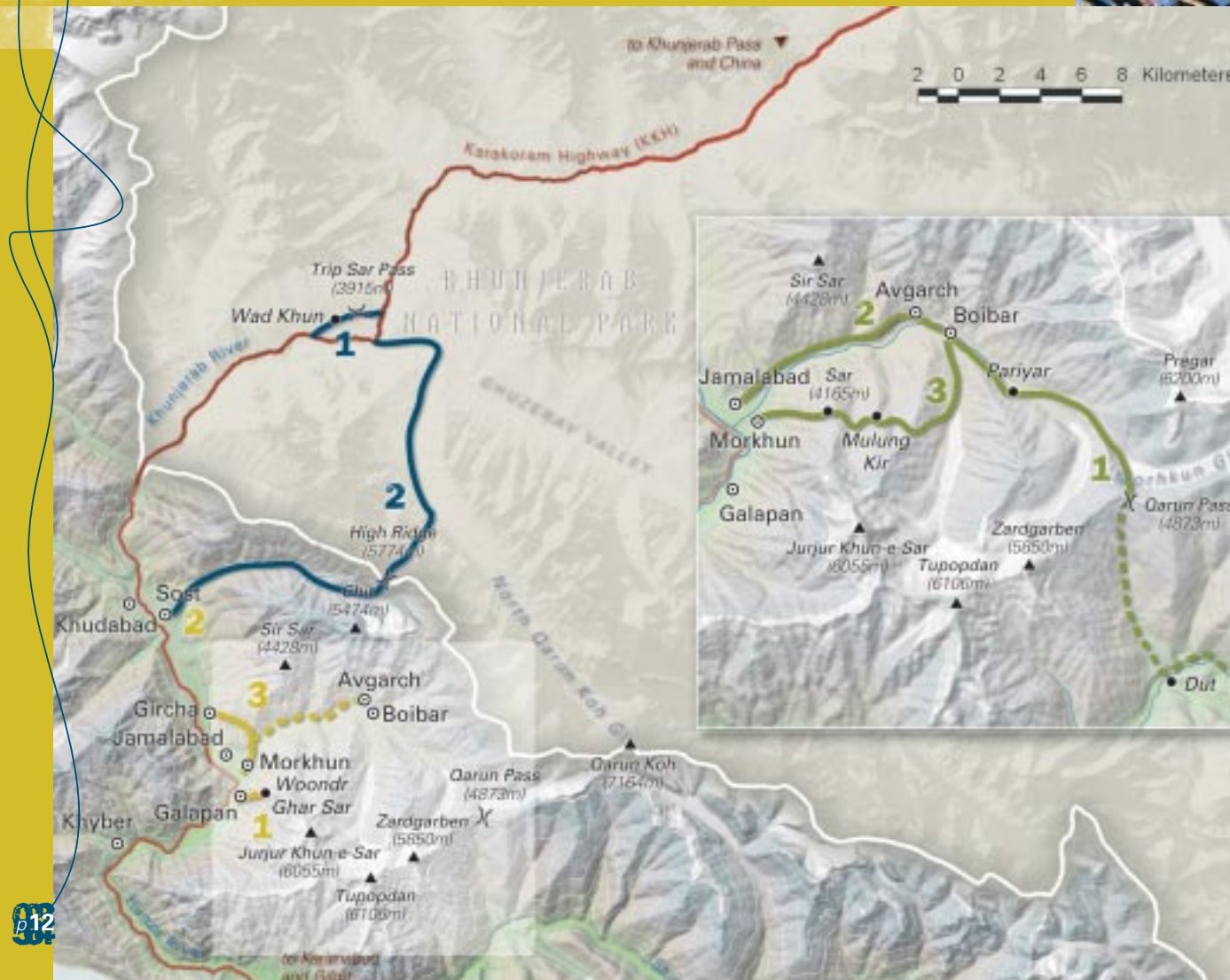
guides 1-3 clients: 600Rs/day, 4-6 clients: 900Rs/day, 7 or more: 1200Rs/day

porters 270Rs/stage

yak safari (for riding) 600Rs/day

yak (for carrying loads) 270Rs/25kg/stage

ALWAYS DISCUSS FEES & STAGES BEFORE LEAVING ON A TREK!



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Trekking routes shown on this map are approximate only and should not be used for navigation.

KHUNJERAB TREKS

There are many relatively unknown treks in the Khunjerab National Park. Most are technical and demanding.

1 WAD KHUN
1 or 2 days
moderate
highlights

Wild mint growing along the river gave name to this grassy place with abundant spring water. The trail starts from the KKH.

- summer pasture of Morkhun shepherds
- trek up to Trif Sar Pass (3915m) and see "Silk Route Stone Piles" (see story below).
- scenic view over Khunjerab River & KKH
- plenty of wildlife including ibex, ram chakor and ferrel donkeys.

2 SOKHTER RABAD
5 - 6 days
demanding
highlights

This round-trek leads through the Khunjerab Park and back to Sost. The trail starts 17km from Sost where the Ghuzherav Valley meets the KKH.

- ideal for camping and observing blue sheep in their natural habitat
- see the rarely visited north side of Qarun Koh Glacier
- cross over a high ridge (5774m) into Shikarzhervav Valley

View into Bar Khun Valley from the KKH



A trip to the Khunjerab pass

The Khunjerab Pass (4934m) is Pakistan's highest motorable pass. While people traveling between Pakistan and China inevitably cross this lofty border, it is definitely worth a look, even if you don't plan to go onwards into China.

The easiest way to see the pass is go by hired vehicle. The winding route follows the Karakoram Highway and soon the rocky canyons and steep cliffs open up to breathtaking scenery of grassy slopes and rolling hills. On the way to the pass you will pass through the Khunjerab National Park. The park entrance fee is US\$4 of which 80% goes towards KVO's conservation efforts. The round-trip from Sost takes about 3 hours. Alternatively, motivated tourists can attempt the ever-steepening road to Khunjerab Pass by bicycle and there are a few relatively unexplored trekking possibilities.

For any trek inside the national park, you must take a guide. Trekking in the park gives plenty of opportunities to observe wildlife. Please respect their natural habitat and pay special attention to proper behavior (see pg.11/12)

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On top of Trif Sir Pass, two distinctive piles of stones can be found. It is said, that once the commander of an army passing through on its way to battle asked each of his soldiers to put a stone on a pile. On their return, each soldier was asked to again pick a stone from the pile and put it aside. The number of stones left in the pile hence revealed how many soldiers had died at war.

BOIBAR TREKS (selection only)



Moonlight trekking

As everywhere in northern Pakistan, the light of the full moon in the mountains is a sight not easily forgotten.

Its mystic shine illuminates the glaciers and snow covered peaks, pastures and meadows reflect the moon's eerie glow. Something touches the soul and the world seems at peace.

With an experienced guide you can easily turn some of the easier treks described here into a full moon experience. And even if the idea of trekking through a moonlit night doesn't appeal to you, camping on a high pasture on a full moon night might just be as rewarding...

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1 QARUN PASS (4873m)

2 - 3 days Starting from Boibar, where the jeep road ends, this trek was once the only way into Shimshal.
moderate

- highlights**
- pass through virgin juniper forest
 - great camping and wildlife watching possibilities at Pariyar meadow
 - visit the spring of Qardma Ja
 - close up views on Qarun Sar (7164m)
 - possible extension of trek by crossing over Qarun Pass and into Shimshal

2 JAMALABAD TO BOIBAR

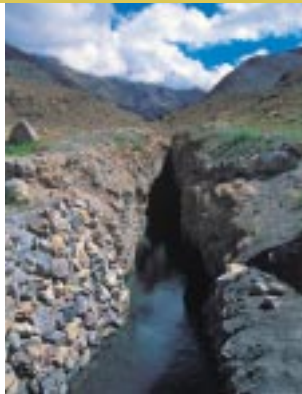
3 - 5 hours This trek is for people who like to explore on foot what others do by jeep. An splendid alternative to reach Boibar from the KKH.
easy

- highlights**
- visit the shrine of Shah Shams
 - stop over in Avgarch and see the area's oldest juniper tree.
 - enjoy the views of Tupopdan (6106m) from Boibar

3 MULUNG KIR

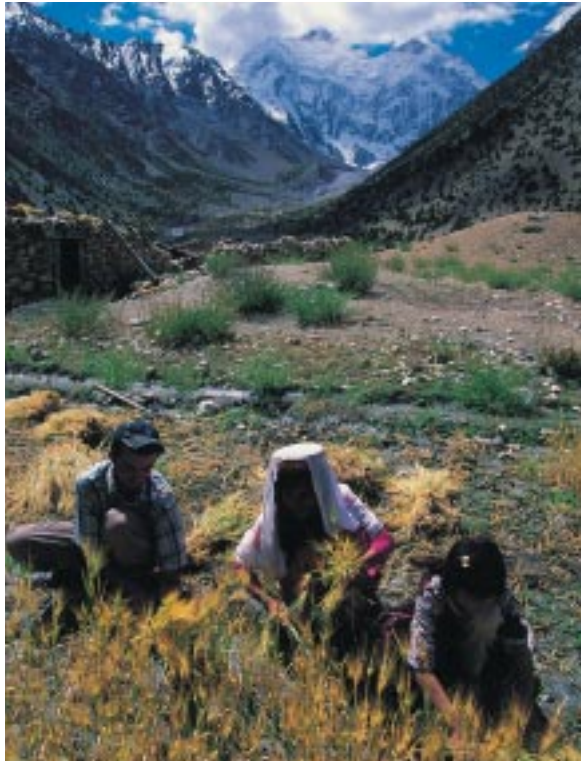
3 days A trek venerated for its scenic views. It starts in Boibar, soon giving way to stunning views over Avgarch.
moderate

- highlights**
- camp at shepherd's huts
 - from the viewpoint of Sar (4165m) you have a complete view over KVO and beyond (Chapursan and Misgar Valleys)



Sost irrigation tunnel

Boibar fields with the fantastic backdrop of Tupopdan peak (6106m)



OTHER TREKS

The treks described are relatively short. Ask your local guide if you are interested in longer treks. Many routes can be combined.

1 GALAPAN PASTURE

2 days The lush Woondr Ghar Sar pasture invites to spend at least one night and enjoy the fantastic views over the Khunjerab area.
moderate

- highlights**
- Galapan shepherds bring their cows to this pasture
 - relatively steep, but flat ground for camping and fresh spring water is available

2 SOST TUNNEL

day trip More an excursion than a trek, the Sost irrigation tunnel is an exceptional example of local engineering. Supported by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and carried out by the villagers of Sost, the rock tunnel was dug in 1980 without the help of major machinery. Combine your visit with a stroll around Sost's surroundings.
easy



Boibar Village (left), Jurjur Khun-e-Sar (middle), Morkhun (right)

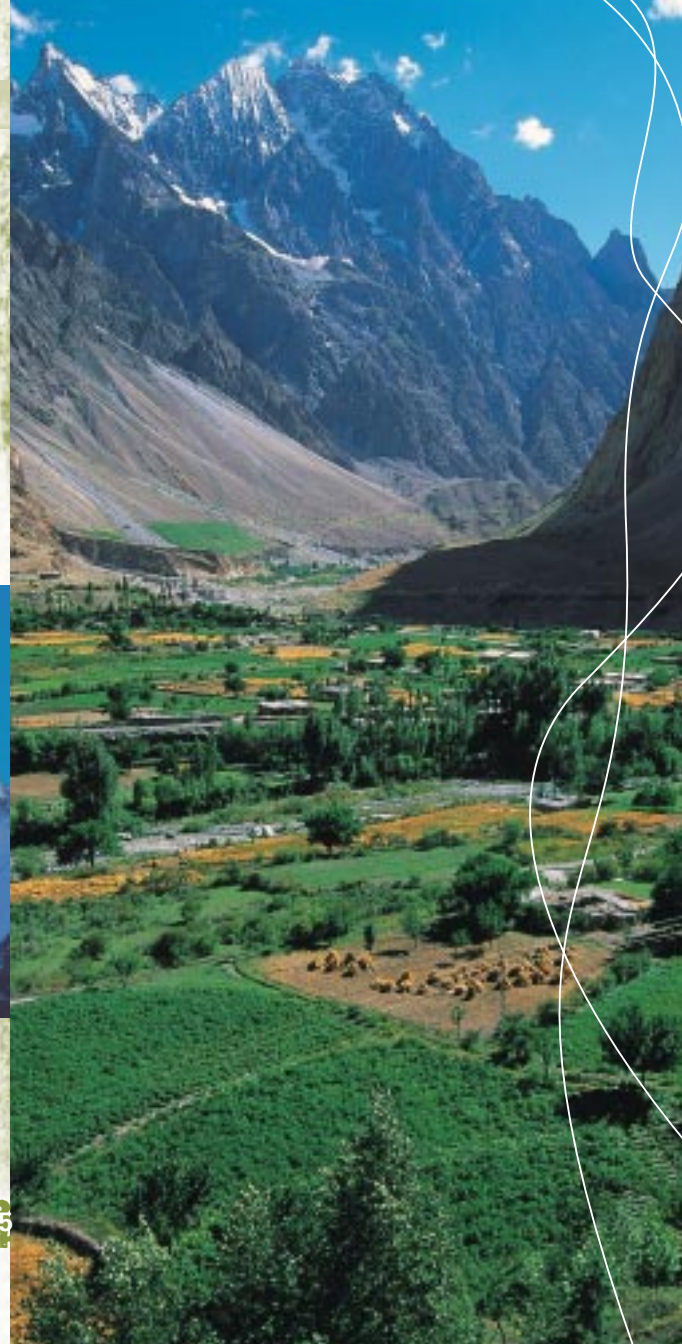


3 SIR TREK

4 - 5 hours This short trek combines a visit of Gircha's summer pasture with fantastic views over the KKH and the KVO area.
easy

- highlights**
- nice views on Jurjur Khun-e-Sar (6056m)
 - end either in Morkhun or Avgarch
 - take plenty of water

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FOR MORE INFORMATION...

About MACP

The *Mountain Areas Conservancy Project* (MACP) is a seven-year project funded by GEF/UNDP. Its aims are the protection of biodiversity of the Karakoram, Hindu Kush, and western Himalayan mountain ranges through community-based conservation efforts.

The project believes that the long-term conservation of natural resources is not possible without the active participation of the local communities, who should take on the role of local custodians of their environment. MACP helps organize, educate and empower these communities, creating an in-house capacity at the grass-roots level. The project interventions range from planning, organizing, awareness raising activities to helping communities accessing resources and sustainable use demonstrations. In addition, MACP helps molding government policies for participatory conservation in order to help communities establish conservation endowments as sustainable financial mechanisms. These funds are managed by the communities themselves and are based on profits made from ecotourism activities, such as limited trophy hunting, medicinal plants ex-situ and in-situ conservation, wildlife watching safaris or trekking. This approach enables and motivates the communities to provide better facilities to tourists, for maximum enjoyment. This novel approach has now been replicated in most parts of the mountain valleys in Northern Areas.

MACP operates in four designated areas in northern Pakistan, totaling a zone of 16,300 square kilometres. Two of these areas (the Nanga Parbat and Gojal Conservancies) are in Northern Areas and two (Tirichmir and Qashqar Conservancies) are located in NWFP.

For more information on MACP, please refer to the sources on this page.

There are a number of organizations, professionals and individuals whose help and expertise made this publication possible. We tried to give the most accurate and up-to-date information possible, but please always consider that prices go up and that "The only constant thing in life is change". Help us to make this change as smooth and positive as possible by being a responsible ecotourist.

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USEFUL WAKHI WORDS AND PHRASES

Wakhi is the native language of all villagers in Khunjerab and is spoken throughout Gojal. This language section is by no means complete or in depth, but it might help to bridge the gap between you and the people whose home you are visiting. Make an attempt to just learn a few basic words and your efforts will be highly regarded and appreciated.

ENGLISH	WAKHI
How are you?	<i>chizole?</i>
I'm fine.	<i>bidurte</i>
What's your name?	<i>ti nunge chiz?</i>
My name is ...	<i>zhu nunge ...</i>
Where are you going?	<i>kumeret takhk?</i>
I need ...	<i>marey ... bokor</i>
I am thirsty.	<i>weskim vitk</i>
I am hungry.	<i>merzim vitk</i>
Sit down.	<i>nezd/nezdid (pl.)</i>
Drink tea.	<i>choi pev</i>
Eat food.	<i>shapik yao</i>
Yes	<i>yan</i>
No	<i>nei</i>
Go!	<i>chow</i>
How much/many?	<i>tsumr?</i>
What?	<i>chiz?</i>
When?	<i>tsogdar?</i>
Where?	<i>kumr?</i>
Who?	<i>kui?</i>
Why?	<i>chizer?</i>
this/these	<i>yem</i>
here/there	<i>drem/drar</i>
right/left	<i>rost/chap</i>

NUMBERS

1 <i>yi</i>	8 <i>hath</i>
2 <i>bui</i>	9 <i>nao</i>
3 <i>troi</i>	10 <i>thas</i>
4 <i>tsabur</i>	11 <i>thas yiu</i>
5 <i>panz</i>	12 <i>thas bui</i>
6 <i>shath</i>	20 <i>wist</i>
7 <i>hub</i>	100 <i>yisad</i>

ENGLISH	WAKHI
ahead	<i>terperit</i>
behind	<i>tertsabas</i>
in front	<i>perit</i>
near	<i>qarib</i>
big/small	<i>lup/zaqlai</i>
a little	<i>safkek</i>
good/bad	<i>baf/shak</i>
beautiful	<i>khushrui</i>
cold/hot	<i>suur/thin</i>
day/night	<i>ror/naghd</i>
today	<i>woodg</i>
tomorrow	<i>piga</i>
yesterday	<i>yezi</i>
bridge	<i>skord</i>
cloud	<i>witish</i>
fire	<i>rakhnigh</i>
flower	<i>spregh</i>
house	<i>khun</i>
mountain	<i>koh</i>
rain	<i>mor</i>
stone	<i>gar</i>
sun	<i>yir</i>
trail/path	<i>videk</i>
water	<i>yupk</i>