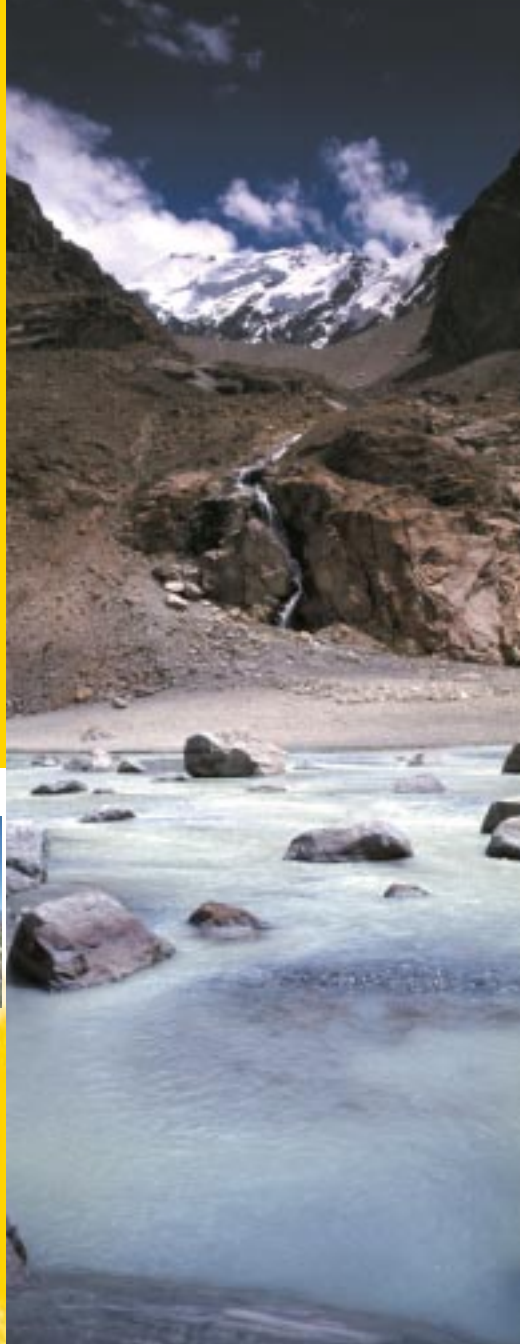


Spring water pond in Murkushi © all photographs Matthieu Paley



# MISGAR

Trekking along the Ancient Silk Route



NWFP Wildlife Department  
Government of NWFP

NA Forestry, Parks and Wildlife Department  
NA Administration



AFGHANISTAN  
Wakhan Corridor

# MAP OF GOJAL NORTHERN PAKISTAN

CHINA  
Xinjiang



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

“

ABOVE MISGAR TWO TRACKS TAKE OFF LEADING INTO CHINESE TERRITORY. AS THE TRAVELLER CLIMBS UP TO THE PASSES ON THE FRONTIER, HE GAZES OVER AN EXPANSE OF SNOW AND ROCK...HE HAS REACHED THE SOLAR PLEXUS OF THE MOUNTAIN SYSTEM OF ASIA, BAFFLING AND ALMOST REPELLENT.

”

Col. R. C. F. Schomberg



## MISGAR FACTS

**location** Gojal, Upper Hunza, northern-most valley before China

**nearest town** Sost, Gojal

**public transport** 1 x day (to/from Sost)

**main settlements** Misgar Village

**accommodation** Misgar village (simple guest house, camping possible)

**supplies** buy all trekking food in Sost, guesthouse will serve simple meals

**population** 145 households, 1227 people

**indigenous language** Burushaski

**indigenous wildlife** snow leopard, Himalayan ibex, red fox, wolf, Marco Polo sheep, Himalayan snow cock, rock partridge

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



*Misgar Village (looking northwest towards Afghanistan)*

# INTRODUCTION

Hardly any valley in Gojal holds such jewels of history and is yet so little explored as Misgar. About 15km northwest of Sost, Misgar is the last permanently inhabited valley in Gojal with passes leading to China and Afghanistan. This strategic location bestowed on the area an important role in history. In the late 19th century, during the time of the *Great Game*, Misgar marked the last outpost of the British empire and served as a busy dispatching and telegraph station. Long before that, however, Misgar had already been a notable trading hub: the wide and snow free Kilik and Mintaka Passes were frequently crossed by pilgrims and traders coming from China along the ancient Silk Route.



*Misgar Village in summer (left).*

*The idyllic pasture of Retschi is mainly used for growing grass to feed the animals in winter (right).*



Today, remnants of the Silk Route and the British occupation can still be seen, making Misgar a historically fascinating place to visit. Interesting is also the fact that Misgar's population is Burusho, an exception in the usually Wakhi-inhabited Gojal. Again, the explanation can be found in history. Until the mid nineteenth century Misgar, originally a Wakhi settlement was periodically inhabited and raided by Kyrgyz nomads coming from the Wakhan. The Mir of Hunza, having an

interest to secure the territory leading to Afghanistan and China ordered a few of his man to drive out any intruders and to permanently settle in Misgar.

Misgar village is set in a beautiful mountain environment of verdant, well-tended fields and clear streams irrigating the terraces and flower-covered gardens. The treks along the ancient trading routes, leading north to the Kilik and Mintaka Passes are equally attractive and could be rated as some of the easiest trekking in northern Pakistan.

Despite its great potential, tourism in Misgar is still relatively young. Due to its sensitive location the valley didn't open its doors to foreigners until 1999. This leaves many valleys and passes in Misgar still unexplored and offers great opportunities for virgin mountaineering expeditions.

However, this also means that Misgaris are still fairly unaccustomed to dealing with foreigners and you will have to bring your own equipment and experience when attempting any unexplored trek. Please be aware of your role as a foreigner while visiting Misgar as you will set examples for your fellow travelers. Treat the locals with as much respect as they treat you by complying with their culture and traditions. Misunderstandings can easily be avoided by clearly stating your needs and expectations and by making sure all arrangements, including fees and stages are agreed upon before you leave on a trek.



## Border issues

*Both Kilik and Mintaka Passes lay in sensitive border areas. Trekkers are allowed to go up to the passes, but **it is not possible to cross into China** from there! Guards patrol the Chinese side and any tourist attempting an illegal crossing would be immediately arrested.*

*It is important to know and respect this regulation as otherwise Misgar could quickly be closed again for foreigners. To help making sure that these wonderful and historical treks have a sustainable future, it is advised to take a local guide or porter with you.*

*You should also register with the army checkpoint in Kalam Darchi fort to avoid any unnecessary complications.*

*The Misgar post office still dates from British times.*



Opposite page:

*Looking down on the sinuous Gul Khwaja Uween Glacier near the Mintaka Pass*

# HISTORY & CULTURE

*According to Misgar's elders the present era of the valley's history began in 1844 when twenty-three men from Hunza went up to Mintaka to secure the territory leading to China on behalf of the Mir of Hunza. Long before that, however, the area was known to the travelers and traders of the Silk Route and later, during the British occupation Misgar became an important outpost. Today, life in Misgar seems peaceful and quiet, but the relicts of history still stand witness for the area's turbulent past...*

*For centuries the people of Asia have been using traditional water-operated mills to turn their grain into flour. This mill lays on the village's main road and can easily be visited.*

## MISGAR VILLAGE WALK

The best way to get a closer impression of Misgar village and its surroundings is to spend some time walking along the water channel, skirting the village's northern side.

From the channel you get a stunning panoramic view over the village with its pattern of houses and fields. Birds are common in the shrubs and trees along the channel - it's worth taking binoculars.

After passing through some fields, the channel joins the main road again near the hydroelectric power station built in 1987. From there you can follow the

road up, passing the bridge, to visit the old post office, which was built by the British during the Great Game.

Turning back south, past the river, you will soon come across a small stone hut housing a traditional, water-fed flour mill. Further down you will see the small shrine (or *astan*) of Pir Aktash Sahib, a local saint. Decorated with ibex horns and colorful flags it is hard to miss. After the shrine you will pass Misgar's old and new Jamat Khana, respectively. A visit to the Jamat Khana as a non-Ismaili is only possible if you are explicitly invited to do so.

Finally, towards the entrance of the village you will have reached your starting point, the water channel, again. The whole round trip will make for a leisurely walk of about three hours.

## TWO HISTORICAL PASSES

Misgar's territory encompasses two historically significant passes leading into China – the Kilik and the Mintaka Passes. While both passes are relatively low (Kilik 4827m, Mintaka 4726m) and mostly snow free, each pass has its own claim to fame in history.

The more western situated Mintaka Pass was the more strategic of the two. It offered the shortest route into China, which was of interest to the Mir of Hunza who held trade relations with the Chinese. He also used the Mintaka

Pass for raids into Chinese territory, which was the basis of Hunza's claim over parts of the upper Pirali district of Taghdumbash Pamir.

After British occupation in 1891, again, easy access to China, now to strategically important Kashgar, was the key advantage of the Mintaka Pass. In more recent times, actually right up to the construction of the Karakoram Highway over the Khunjerab Pass in the 1970s, Misgar was a busy hub for trade between China and Pakistan. The main route taken, was once again, the Mintaka Pass. The broad trail to the pass, demarcated with large rocks and boulders, is today a visible reminder of these busy times.

Caravans and traders coming from China and Afghanistan via the ancient Silk Route favored the broader Kilik Pass. Glacier free and grass-covered it provided enough pasture land for the horses, yaks and camels of arriving caravans and domestic animals alike. Still today, the area around Haaq and Sad Buldi, near Kilik provides some of the best grazing for the Misgari's livestock.

Early tombs of Kyrgyz nomads who periodically occupied the region and a series of ancient rock carvings, dating from Buddhist times, let assume that the passes had been known to travelers, pilgrims and traders for a very long time.

*The broad trails leading to the Kilik and Mintaka Passes visibly illustrate the importance the area once held as busy trading hub.*



## Last frontier outpost

*Misgar had not long been established when the British became interested in the region, hoping to establish a defensible frontier against the advances of imperialist Russia. In 1892, the British invaded Hunza, causing Mir Safdar Ali Khan to flee over the Kilik Pass into China. Thus, Misgar became the farthest outpost of the British empire.*

*Being also the closest outpost to Kashgar – an important site during the Great Game, when Tsarist Russia and Britain were haggling over Central Asian borders – Misgar soon became a busy junction. In 1916, the post office was built and a telegraph line to Gilgit was extended. Mail runners carried dispatches between Misgar, Tashkurgan and Kashgar over the Mintaka Pass.*

*The post office still stands in its original setting and is in use to this very day.*

# ECOTOURISM

## ECOTOURISM in Misgar

### 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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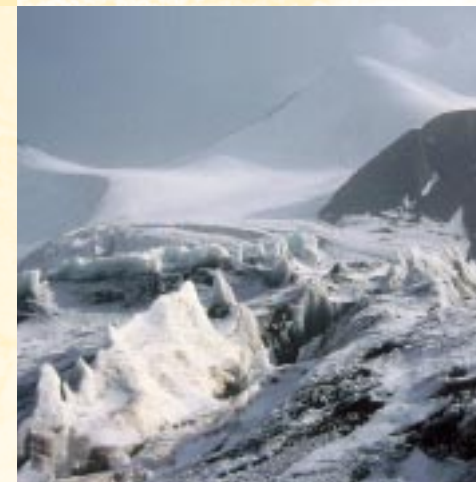
p8

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.

*In order to sustain and conserve Misgar's natural beauty, it is absolutely essential to encourage and support low-impact ecotourism.*



#### 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 Misgar

Edelweiss, almost extinct in Europe, still grows in abundance in the Wodwashk Valley.



## SILK ROUTE TREKS

(These are Misgar's most popular treks. Much of the area is still unexplored and a challenge for the motivated adventurer.)



### 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 license 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 MISGAR (as of summer 2003)

**guides** 1-3 clients: 800Rs/day, 4-6 clients: 1000Rs/day, 7 or more: 1100Rs/day

**porters** 250Rs/stage

**donkey** (for carrying loads) 250Rs/25kg/stage

**ALWAYS DISCUSS FEES & STAGES BEFORE LEAVING ON A TREK!**



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

#### 1 KILIK & MINTAKA PASSES

**5 - 6 days each round trip**  
**6 - 7 days for combined trek moderate**  
**highlights** ■ trek along the ancient silk route

#### 2 WODWASHK VALLEY

**5 - 6 days demanding**  
**highlights** ■ abundance of wild flowers in summer  
 ■ reach glaciated Wodwashk Pass (5400m)  
 ■ with some luck you can see ibex, marmots, golden eagles and even snow leopards  
 ■ great variety of landscape



Reaching Wodwashk Glacier; Murkushi Pasture; Haaq summer settlement below Kilik Pass

- camp under old birch trees, along clear mountain streams and springs
- see shepherd's life (Kilik Trek)
- extremely scenic
- take more time and explore some side valleys on day trips

- experienced mountaineers with equipment can attempt to cross over the pass and into Hapuchan Valley and return via Kilik route. Heavily crevassed and steep right after the pass. You must also bring equipment for all your guides and porters.

### Relics of the past

Amongst the earliest travelers along the Silk Route were the pilgrims. A succession of Chinese monks, including Fah Hian, Sung-Yun and others made their way over the Wakhan passes to ancient Ghandhara (Swat), to receive holy Buddhist scriptures and eventually bring them back to China and Tibet.

Whether those early pilgrims passed through Misgar is not clear; clear, however, is that a series of petroglyphs near Kilik, depicting horse riders, hunters, ibex and Buddhist swastikas, show evidence for the long and diverse human usage of this area.

On the butte above Murkushi, a whole graveyard of old Kyrgyz tombs can be visited and stands as yet another reminder of Misgar's long and fascinating past.

# 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 (Trichmir 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.*

## Contacts

### FOR TREKKING INFORMATION, please contact:

In Misgar village tourists can contact the *Mukhi* of the local jamat khana for assistance.

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*Burushaski is the native language of all Misgaris and is mostly spoken in Hunza. 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.*

### NUMBERS

1 <i>han</i>	8 <i>altambo</i>
2 <i>alto</i>	9 <i>huncho</i>
3 <i>usko</i>	10 <i>torumo</i>
4 <i>walto</i>	11 <i>turmahan</i>
5 <i>tsundo</i>	12 <i>turmaalto</i>
6 <i>mishindo</i>	20 <i>altar</i>
7 <i>thalo</i>	100 <i>tha</i>

### USEFUL BURUSHASKI WORDS AND PHRASES

ENGLISH	BURUSHASKI	ENGLISH	BURUSHASKI
How are you?	<i>be hal bila?</i>	ahead	<i>yar</i>
I'm fine.	<i>shua ba</i>	behind	<i>iljiyakal</i>
What's your name?	<i>gwik besan bila?</i>	in front	<i>yaryakal</i>
My name is ...	<i>ja eik ...bila</i>	near	<i>asir</i>
Where are you going?	<i>am nicho?</i>	big/small	<i>uyum/jot</i>
I need ...	<i>ja... zarurat bila</i>	a little	<i>pitwan</i>
I am thirsty.	<i>je oüyaba</i>	good/bad	<i>shuwa/gunekish</i>
I am hungry.	<i>je chamineba</i>	beautiful	<i>daltas</i>
Sit down.	<i>kaoru</i>	cold/hot	<i>chagurum/garurum</i>
Drink tea.	<i>chai mine</i>	day/night	<i>gun/thap</i>
Eat food.	<i>shapik shi</i>	today	<i>kulto</i>
Yes	<i>awa</i>	tomorrow	<i>jimale</i>
No	<i>beya</i>	yesterday	<i>sabur</i>
Go!	<i>ni!</i>	bridge	<i>bash</i>
How much/many?	<i>be rum?</i>	cloud	<i>qurunsh</i>
What?	<i>besan?</i>	fire	<i>pfu</i>
When?	<i>beshal?</i>	flower	<i>asqur</i>
Where?	<i>amulo?</i>	house	<i>ha</i>
Who?	<i>men?</i>	mountain	<i>chish</i>
Why?	<i>bes?</i>	rain	<i>haralt</i>
this/these	<i>ise/itse</i>	stone	<i>dan</i>
here/there	<i>kole/ele</i>	sun	<i>sa</i>
right/left	<i>doyum/gayum</i>	trail/path	<i>gan</i>
		water	<i>tsil</i>