Magnificent Glaciers & Mighty Peaks

© all photographs Matthieu Paley
PASSU IS MAGNIFICENTLY SITUATED, IN A COUNTRY WHERE NATURE HAS DESIGNED EVERYTHING ON A NOBLE AND LAVISH SCALE.

Col. R. C. F. Schomberg, “Between the Oxus and the Indus”
PASSU FACTS

**Location:** Gojal, Upper Hunza, on the Karakoram Highway

**Main Settlements:** Passu, Janabad

**Public Transport:** Any transport on the Karakoram Highway going between Aliabad and Sost.

**Accommodation:** Several small guesthouses in Passu, guesthouses and hotels in Janabad.

**Supplies:** Best to buy all your trekking food in Sost, Aliabad or Gilgit.

**Population:** 98 households, 880 people.

**Indigenous Language:** Wakhi

**Indigenous Wildlife:** Snow leopard, Himalayan ibex, red fox, wolf, Himalayan snowcock, rock partridge.

**Common Plant Species:** Juniper, willow, poplar, wild roses, seabuckthorn.
With the completion of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) in 1978, the previously inaccessible maze of high mountains, glaciers and hidden valleys which make up the Karakoram Range, suddenly opened its doors to the world. An area of unspoiled mountain beauty with rugged glaciers, unclimbed peaks and pristine wildlife, Gojal, the region north of Hunza, has since become a popular spot for ecotourism.

Passu village with its small rural Wakhi community lays in the heart of Gojal. Passu’s idyllic location near the winding Hunza River, with a backdrop of mighty glaciers and some of Gojal’s highest peaks, makes the village an ideal base to explore the spectacular landscape. From Passu one can visit an eclectic range of natural and cultural sights in all directions. The adventurer will be fascinated to see the Batura Glacier’s impressive ice floes up close, while the researcher can spend months at a time studying the rare alpine flora and fauna of the area. A mountaineer can attempt to scale the majestic peaks of the great Batura Wall, while the leisurely traveler can relax in one of Passu’s comfortable guesthouses and enjoy the view across the valley.

In short, Passu has something to offer for everybody and through their well-organized system of local guides and porters the people of Passu are eager to show you their culture and to share their passion for the mountains surrounding them.
As it is the case with so many of Gojal’s villages, Passu’s location is a fragile one. Wedged on the bit of tillable land between the icy tongues of two big glaciers and the lapping waters of the Hunza River, the area is prone to landslides and erosion, even today. According to Passu’s elders, the early settlement was once home to some 300 households before most of the prosperous village was submerged, forcing the population to leave and to migrate back to their places of origin in Central Asia. Later, Passu was resettled by a man named Quli, who is today generally recognized as the great ancestor of the majority of Passu’s population.

One can still see parts of “old Passu” in two areas today. One is on the small island in the Hunza River, where a few broken walls can be found. The other is an elevated piece of land in the middle of lower fields — an impressive example of the power of destruction of landslides in this region.

For a long time and even after the British invasion of Hunza in the late 19th century, the Wakhis of Gojal were subjected to heavy taxes and forced labor by the Mir of Hunza. His tax collectors were wildly despised for their arrogant and hostile attitude. In 1940 a group of Wakhis finally stood up and demanded tax relaxation and the appointment of Wakhi tax collectors. The demand was denied and instead an attempt was made by Mir Ghazan Khan to return the British urged the Mir to consider his people’s request. Reluctantly, the ruler granted amnesty to the returning Wakhis, lowered some taxes and removed his unpopular tax collector. The people of Passu still remember this event with pride as their active involvement in the uprising resulted in great benefits for Gojal at large. The consequential reduction of taxes and forced labor held until the final abolishment of the mirdom in 1974.

Tracing back a true history of a number of clans and tribes in these areas where written records do not exist is a daunting task. Maybe, with our logic-demanding minds, we should be less obstructed by the lack of facts and the contradiction of stories heard, but open our hearts and ears to the beauty of old legends and allow ourselves to be mesmerized by the stories and oral accounts of the elders…

As Odob Khan was a villager of Passu and a relative of Mir Ghazan Khan. It was Odob Khan’s initiative and idea to put forward the request of tax reduction, probably counting on his relations with the Mir.

As his request was denied it was he who lead the uprising and urged his people to flee China and in his house that most of the planning and discussions over the matter took place.

As a result, more than 100 people fled from Passu with plans to go to China over the KKH Pass. In Mingal, they decided to inform the British authorities about the situation and arrest the instigators of the petition.

The house of Odob Khan

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The house of Odob Khan can be visited, but as Odob Khan’s descendants still live in the house it is important to do an appointment and show the necessary respect.
As in many cultures, very few of Passu’s festivals have fixed dates. The exact day of celebration of many festivals depends on several factors, such as astrology, the weather and the Islamic calendar. If you want to attend a specific festival it is best to ask around for the exact date.

**PASTURE LIFE NEAR ICE AND SNOW**

Immediately behind Passu, the white snout of the Passu Glacier gives the village its trademark backdrop. On cloudless days one can follow the ice band up until it merges with the yellowish, glacier-fed streams of Passu Peak (4741m) and Shishpar (1810m). Hidden deeper in the folds of the mountains laying the massive Batura Glacier, one of the largest in Pakistan. Embraced by eternal ice and snow to the west and the mountains laying the massive Batura Glacier, one of the largest in Pakistan, Passu is a true paradise, year in, year out, lead their precious goats, sheep and yaks for grazing. It is here, that the villagers of Passu, per year, in year out, lead their precious goats, sheep and yaks for grazing. It is here, that the villagers of Passu, year in, year out, lead their precious goats, sheep and yaks to the high pastures. As in many cultures, very few of Passu’s festivals have fixed dates. The exact day of celebration of many festivals depends on several factors, such as astrology, the weather and the Islamic calendar. If you want to attend a specific festival it is best to ask around for the exact date.

**FRESH FROM THE PASTURES**

As in all Wakhi societies, the pastures are the domain of women and children. Apart from sending the livestock, a lot of time is spent milking the goats and sheep and preparing a range of fresh dairy products, many of which are delicious and rarely to be found in the villages. Some of the fresh milk is turned into pai (yoghurt), merek (cream) and rogun (butter), which are often offered to visitors together with freshly cooked chapattis.

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ECOTOURISM in Passu

What to do?

IN VILLAGES/ON HIGH PASTURES

- Wear appropriate clothing. Locals usually dress in traditional dress and it is grateful to respect their culture.
- Leave your garbage where you found it. If possible, take out what you brought in.
- Avoid throwing garbage out of your campsite.
- Avoid using toilet paper if possible. Use water instead to flush your toilet.
- Be an example to your guides and porters by following and explaining these guidelines and their reasons.

WHILE TREKKING

- Choose suitable toilet sites at least 50m away from your camp and from any other water source. Use a toilet pit for larger groups.
- Avoid throwing garbage out of your campsite.
- Be an example to your guides and porters by following and explaining these guidelines and their reasons.

While trekking

- Avoid throwing garbage out of your campsite.
- Be an example to your guides and porters by following and explaining these guidelines and their reasons.

Dig a toilet pit for larger groups

Your toilet site should be at least 50m away from any water source and from your campsite. It is important to dig a pit for larger groups.

Avoid throwing garbage out of your campsite

Try not to leave your garbage lying around.

Be an example to your guides and porters

When trekking, be an example to your guides and porters by following and explaining these guidelines and their reasons.

What not to do?

IN VILLAGES/ON HIGH PASTURES

- Don’t wear too short or tight-fitting shirts.
- Don’t wear shorts or tight-fitting shirts.
- Don’t hug or kiss in public.
- Don’t wear shorts or tight-fitting shirts.
- Don’t wear shorts or tight-fitting shirts.

WHILE TREKKING

- Don’t hunt or kill any animals.
- Don’t leave any garbage.
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- Don’t use wood, collect dry branches from the trees etc.
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Trekking routes shown on this map are approximate only and should not be used for navigation.

TREKKING in the Passu area

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 PASSU (as of summer 2003)
- Guides 1-3 clients: 600Rs/day, 4-6 clients: 900Rs/day, 7 or more: 1200Rs/day
- Porters 310Rs/stage (each porter pays 1% of their fee into the village development fund managed by the Passu reform Panel (PRP) yak (for carrying loads) 1300Rs/60kg/stage

ALWAYS DISCUSS FEES & STAGES BEFORE LEAVING ON A TREK!

TWO BRIDGES WALK
- Probably the area’s most popular day walk, this trek brings you from Passu to Hussaini via two rickety suspension bridges fashioned of wood and wire (see picture right). For the return you can hitch a ride on the KKH.
- View on Passu and KKH from the opposite side of the Hunza River.
- Reward yourself with a dip in Hussaini’s hot spring (September to May).
- Combine the trip with a visit to Borit Lake near Hussaini.
- Crossing might be impossible for anybody experiencing vertigo!

YUNZ
- The Yunz Valley connects the Passu and Batura Glaciers through an easy and scenic trek with great glacier views.
- Visit Passu Lake formed in 1989 as a result of the retreating Passu Glacier.
- Possible side trip to Zart Sar (+1.5hrs) for panoramic views across the Hunza Valley.
- Bring sufficient water!
- Return to Passu via KKH.

JANABAD PLATEAU
- For those with little time this loop trek offers not only great views, but also a glimpse on the mighty Batura Glacier.
- Plan for a picnic on the flat plateau.
- Walk along the cliff face high above Batura Glacier and see a glacial river emerging from a case in the ice.
- Steep descent to China Camp.
- Return via KKH.

DAY TREKS

- 4 - 5 hours
- Easy
- Highlights

1. TWO BRIDGES WALK

2. YUNZ

3. JANABAD PLATEAU

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Glacier crossing

Most treks in Gojal will at some point or the other involve a glacier crossing or at least walking along the moraine of one. The smell of adventure or the belief to have sufficient experience causes a few trekkers each year to attempt a glacier crossing on their own. Unfortunately some of these attempts end in accidents and loss of life. In the past the government made the local communities responsible for such accidents, even though often the trekkers insisted on going alone. Therefore, please, for your own safety and out of respect for the locals,

**DO TAKE A LOCAL GUIDE** with you for any glacier crossing. Glaciers shift and move, stones fall, new crevasses open up… a local guide will know the easiest and safest way across and you can concentrate on enjoying the scenery instead of worrying about the route.

**LONGER TREKS**

This section describes treks of 2 - 3 days. For more possibilities as your local guide or tour operator.

1. **AVDEGAR (3900m)**
   2 - 3 days
   moderate
   **Highlights**
   - good possibility of seeing ibex
   - great camping and stunning views on Shispur (7611m), the Batura Valiil and other high peaks
   - cross the famous suspension bridge
   - bring enough water for the steep ascent
   - possible extension of trek to the top of the ridge (plan an extra night)

2. **YASHPIRT**
   This trek is most interesting in summer when the Yashpirt pasture is inhabited by Wakhi women tending their livestock and preparing delicious dairy products.
   - see shepherd's life
   - cross Batura Glacier
   - many possibilities to extend the trek

3. **PATUNDAS**
   For the crossing of the highly dangerous Passu Glacier it is essential to hire an experienced guide.
   - the effort of the steep ascent is rewarded with spectacular mountain views
   - Patundas alpine meadow makes for some beautiful camping
   - visit Ghulkin shepherds during summer

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**GUCHESHAM**

There are two options for reaching Guchesham, Passu’s high pasture, as the Batura Glacier can be crossed at different spot. This makes for a nice loop, taking in both sides of the glacier.
   - enjoy Wakhi hospitality on the pastures
   - possible extension of trek to Kambar Dor base camp or cross into Chapursan via the newly opened Yuthe Gha Pass

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**PASSU PEAK BASE CAMP**

This trek leads via the alpine meadows of Patubas to the base camps of the snowy summits of the Passu Massif.
   - rest and relax on Patundas and enjoy the superb views
   - camp by the Upper Passu Glacier where you will be surrounded by 7000-meter peaks, including Passu Sar (7478m) and Shishpar (7611m)

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**WERTHUM PASS**

This trek should only be attempted by well acclimatized trekkers. It serves not only as a connecting route into Chapursan Valley, but also provides great possibilities for interested mountaineers. Ask in Passu for more details on the peak options around Werthum Base Camp and Shirin Maidan Glacier.
   - the remoteness and difficulty of this trek offers good wildlife watching opportunities
   - spend a night by the stunning blue lake near Shirin Maidan
   - cross the technical Werthum Pass using ropes, ice axes and crampons. Make sure your porters and guide have adequate equipment, including sunglasses and warm clothing

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**SOST IRRIGATION TUNNEL**

View on Passu and KKH from Avdegar (top)
Patubas Glacier (below)
Shishpar Sar and Shishpar (next page top)
Shishpar Glacier (next page bottom)

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**MEDIUM TREKS**

(THIS SECTION DESCRIBES TREKS OF 2 - 3 DAYS. FOR MORE POSSIBILITIES AS YOUR LOCAL GUIDE OR TOUR OPERATOR)

1. 
   2 - 3 days
   moderate
   **Highlights**
   - good possibility of seeing ibex
   - great camping and stunning views on Shispur (7611m), the Batura Valiil and other high peaks
   - cross the famous suspension bridge
   - bring enough water for the steep ascent
   - possible extension of trek to the top of the ridge (plan an extra night)

2. 
   3 days
   moderate
   **Highlights**
   - see shepherd's life
   - cross Batura Glacier
   - many possibilities to extend the trek

3. 
   3 days
   demanding
   **Highlights**
   - the effort of the steep ascent is rewarded with spectacular mountain views
   - Patundas alpine meadow makes for some beautiful camping
   - visit Ghulkin shepherds during summer

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1. 
   3 - 4 days
   moderate
   **Highlights**
   - good possibility of seeing ibex
   - great camping and stunning views on Shispur (7611m), the Batura Valiil and other high peaks
   - cross the famous suspension bridge
   - bring enough water for the steep ascent
   - possible extension of trek to the top of the ridge (plan an extra night)

2. 
   4 - 5 days
   demanding
   **Highlights**
   - see shepherd's life
   - cross Batura Glacier
   - many possibilities to extend the trek

3. 
   7 days
   technical/demanding
   **Highlights**
   - the remoteness and difficulty of this trek offers good wildlife watching opportunities
   - spend a night by the stunning blue lake near Shirin Maidan
   - cross the technical Werthum Pass using ropes, ice axes and crampons. Make sure your porters and guide have adequate equipment, including sunglasses and warm clothing
The Mountain Areas Conservancy Project (MACP) is a seven-year project funded by GEF/UNDP to help protect the conservation 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, which play a very important role in the conservation of their environment. MACP helps organize, educate and empower these communities, creating an intensive culture 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 demonstrations as well as the project examples help to bridge the gap between you and your efforts will be highly regarded and appreciated.

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