...BUT IT IS HIGH UP AMONG THE LOFTIEST MOUNTAIN SUMMITS, WHERE ALL IS SHROUDED IN UNSULLIED WHITENESS, WHERE NOTHING POLISHED DARES POLLUTE, THAT THE VERY ESSENCE OF SUBLIMITY MUST BE SOUGHT FOR. IT IS HERE INDEED THAT THE GRAND AND BEAUTIFUL UNITE TO FORM THE SUBLIME.

Sir Francis Younghusband
SHIMSHAL FACTS

location Gojal, Upper Hunza, on the Karakoram Highway
nearest town Passu, Gojal
public transport 1 x daily
main settlements Sheghdi, Fermanabad, Aminabad, Central Shimshal, Khizarabad, Sholalaksh, Bandesar
accommodation Shimshal village (simple family guesthouse, campground)
supplies best to buy all your trekking food in Sost, Aliabad or Gilgit
population about 1400 people
indigenous language Wakhi
indigenous wildlife snow leopard, blue sheep, Himalayan ibex, red fox, wolf, Himalayan snow cock, rock partridge
common plant species juniper, willow, poplar, wild roses, seabuckthorn

View on Shimshral village, looking west towards Shimshal Pами
Accessible only through a narrow, barren gorge opposite Passu across the Hunza River, one might be surprised to find out that Shimshal covers the largest territory within the Gojal region of Hunza. From its western reaches bordered by the Hunza River, Shimshal area extends as far as Baltistan to the East and its northern Khunjerab River demarcates the frontier with China. Following the glacial Shimshal River, which separates the Ghuzherav and Hesper Mustagh ranges of the Karakoram mountain system, upward, the rocky valley gradually widens. After what used to be a two days’ hike along a treacherous path, a jeep-road now leads over a multitude of remarkable hanging-bridges to the cultivated fields and green terraces of Shimshal village.

Shimshal’s friendly farming and herding community is entirely comprised of Wakhi speakers and due to the valley’s remoteness and difficult accessibility, much of their traditional Wakhi culture has remained intact. Just as centuries ago, Shimshalis lead a simple life dictated by the seasons and the nature around them. Well adjusted to their high altitude life, with summer pastures lying as high as 4800m, Shimshalis also have a reputation as excellent porters, mountain guides and mountaineers many of whom have scaled 8000m peaks.

The diversity of Shimshal’s landscape, including flower-covered meadows, pastures, high passes, glaciers, unclimbed peaks, rocky canyons and barren mountain ranges is a pristine paradise for trekkers and adventurers. Researchers and wildlife enthusiasts can arrange for special treks to observe ibex, blue sheep and other indigenous species in their natural environment. For the culturally interested a trip to the Shimshal Pamir, Shimsha’s summer settlement or an invitation to one of Shimsha’s unique traditional festivals, such as the yak race of Woolio can become an unforgettable experience.

The terrain, the altitude and the often-challenging treks might make Shimsha not one of the obvious and easy tourist destinations, but therein lies its uniqueness and charm. To this day, Shimshas remains one of the few unspoiled and genuine trekking destinations in our world. Help us to keep it that way.
Shimshalis tend more livestock per capita than any other Hunza community and most of their income comes from the sale of yaks. Shimshal’s vast pastures cover about 2,700 square kilometres and provide grazing for 900–1,100 yaks and thousands of sheep and goats. Pastures lie in high altitudes where life is simple and hard. In Wahki communities livestock is cared for by the women. This makes Shimshal’s high pastures a lively and colorful place to visit and tourists are welcome to experience the busy summers in Shuwerth, Shimshal’s main summer pasture. Every morning, flocks of sheep and goats are driven across the grassy plains for grazing by young girls and boys. They return for sunset, the time when it gets busy in Pamir. Goats and young yaks are being rounded up for milking, a task for the older women. It is fun to see them fetching the young baby goats to match them with their mothers, while extracting the milk with skillful hands.

If you visit Pamir, you will most likely be invited to taste some fresh pai (yogurt), rughan (butter), merek (cream) or qurut, a special mountain cheese. Enjoy!

The people of Shimshal have a strong feeling of identity which is rooted in their history and expressed through their lively Wakhi culture. The first settlers to this remote valley are estimated to have arrived some 400–500 years ago. At that time Shimshal was under the rule of the Mir of Hunza who sent criminals and society outcasts to Shimshal for punishment. It is also known that he hired the tough Shimshalis to raid caravans arriving from China. The Shimshalis themselves have their own story of their origin...

The story of Mamu Singh

Some four hundred years ago, Mamu Singh was sent to the Wakhan to find a new ruler for Hunza as the last one, Gurgo, had been killed by his brother. Mamu Singh did not find a ruler, but instead fell in love with a girl. After his return to Hunza he begged his father, the Wazir, to let him go back to the Wakhan and marry the girl, but his wish was refused. Finally he could not bear it any longer, returned to the Wakhan and married the girl. The young couple, as they could not go back to Hunza, settled in Avgarch. But the area was not safe and often raided by Kyrgyz, so Mamu Singh decided to look for a better place. One day, he climbed Qarun Pass and from the top looked down and saw a lush valley—Shimshal! Slowly, he and his wife moved up the valley and near today’s village of Shimshal, Mamu Singh discovered a spring, an old water channel and a small hut. People have lived here before, this must be a good place, decided Mamu Singh.

Eventually, the couple was blessed with a son, named Sher. Sher grew to become a strong young man. On a hunting trip he discovered a flat grassy area—Pamir. However, Kyrgyz had settled in Pamir and claimed it as their land, but Sher saw it as his own property. Sher and the Kyrgyz decided to resolve the conflict with a polo game. Sher had no horse, so he had to play on a yak against the Kyrgyz on their fast horses. Nevertheless, Sher won the polo game, the intruders left and since then, the pastures beyond Shimshal Pass belong to the people of Shimshal.
One of Shimshal's most interesting and unique festivals is the yearly yak race of Woolio. The festival stems from an old story of a runaway yak having found a place of "eternal happiness" near Woolio, an area not far from Shuwerth. In Woolio stands a big rock, which, according to the legend, drips with ghee. Opinions are split whether one can still extract ghee from the rock or not, but the rock of Woolio is today an astan, a holy shrine for the people of Shimshal, and marks, once a year, the finishing point for this unusual race.

The day of the festival is spent preparing the yaks by decorating their hair with colorful twine and oiling their horns with ghee. Every household brings some flour, butter or other food to the community kitchen, goats are slaughtered—a big feast is prepared. Everybody is invited. While the food is being cooked, the brave ones go off for the race. It takes about 30 minutes to reach the finishing line, but winning is not so important. It is the singing and dancing, the cheers of the crowd and the happy faces, which really make Woolio an unforgettable experience.

If you are around, you will be welcome to join and any donation (towards some meat or for education, etc.) will be greatly appreciated.

KUCH - THE SHIMSHAL TRANSHUMANCE

Every year, in May, the communities of Shimshal gather their livestock and load up to 50 sturdy yaks with flour, tea, sugar and other supplies. For the women and children it's time to say goodbye to their husbands and fathers and to their homes in the village. For several months they will be living high up on the pastures—it is time for Kuch!

For the next three days women as old as 70 and little kids barely able to walk will climb up the steep cliffs and follow the narrow paths, which lead to Shuizherav. Thousands of sheep, goats and the sure-footed yaks will follow them to Shuizherav, the first summer settlement below the Shimshal Pass.

Here, the women will meet the shpun, the tough winter shepherds, who cared for the yaks up on the isolated pastures for six cold months. The shpun can now turn over their responsibilities to the women and the reunion is being celebrated with a festival called Mergichikh. After a month in Shuizherav, the women now finally move up to Shuwerth—the domain of women and children, a place of happiness and renewal.

Witnessing the Shimshal Kuch will be an unforgettable experience for any tourist!
What to do?

IN VILLAGES/ON HIGH PASTURES

• wear appropriate clothing. Locals usually
  wear trousers (below the knees) when in town,
  especially of women or religious places
  • wear clothes that are suitable for the season,
    keep a responsible, respected person, such as
  • keep your campsite clean – never break fresh
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Riding a yak is a rather unusual activity for most people. You might be surprised to find out how comfortable this type of "transportation" can be. Yaks are generally gentle animals, used to being around, and directed by humans. A local will always lead the yak and make sure you are comfortable and safe. There is nothing scary about riding a yak – on the contrary: A yak safari could be the final touch of your adventure in Shimshal!

And if you are daring enough... why not participate in the yearly Shimshali yak race of Woolio (see pg 9)?

### MULUNGUTTI GLACIER
- Even a sleepless day on top of a glacier for people with not much time. You can wake, or drive along the road to Farmanabad from where the trail starts.
- glacier crossing
- stunning views of Destaghil Sar (7885m)

### KHUNJELAHKSH SAR
- Spend a day or two exploring the beautiful meadows perched high above Shimshal village.
- abundance of wild flowers in summer
- see Adver Sar (6400m), also called White Horn, Shimshal’s trademark mountain rising in front of you
- excellent panoramic view of Shimshal valley

### ZARDGARBEN
- A steep ascent into a narrow canyon leads you to one of Shimshal’s most beautiful camping sites.
- fantastic rock formations, yellow cliffs
- wide, grassy meadow – perfect for a rewarding picnic after the hike
- starting point for many of the longer treks

### YARZGIL GLACIER
- As the first of a series of glaciers, the Yarzgil trek gives ample opportunities for exploration. This 2-day trek can easily be extended into a much longer one.
- see Shimshal’s closest summer pasture and visit the shepherds
- guide needed for glacier crossing
- see other glaciers, such as Khurdopin and the Virzherav Glaciers and many snow-covered peaks.

### SHORT TREKS

**FEES IN SHIMSHAL** (as of summer 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 - 3 clients</th>
<th>4 - 6 clients</th>
<th>7 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>guides</td>
<td>800Rs/day</td>
<td>1000Rs/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porters</td>
<td>300Rs/stage</td>
<td>300Rs/stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yak safari</td>
<td>500Rs/stage</td>
<td>500Rs/stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yak</td>
<td>300Rs/25kg/stage</td>
<td>300Rs/25kg/stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fees are per day per person.*

**Guidelines:**
- Guides and porters are paid per stage 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, fixing camps, looking after transport etc. A guide usually only carries his own equipment. Porters are paid per stage. A porter carries up to 50kg not including his own equipment. On treks above 5000m the load should not exceed 25kg.

### Yakk-e-dee-yak

Walking is a rather unusual activity for many people. You might be inclined to find out how comfortable this type of "transportation" can be. Yaks are generally gentle animals, used to being around, and directed by humans. A local will always lead the yak and make sure you are comfortable and safe. There is nothing scary about riding a yak – on the contrary: A yak safari could be the final touch of your adventure in Shimshal!

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TREKKING

TREKKING lakes about 30 minutes before Shuwerth.

welcome to camp below Shimshali Pass by the
do not camp close to the settlement!

Shimshal hospitality. However, as a courtesy to
life on the pasture and to enjoy the
Any tourist is welcome to visit Shuwerth, to see

TREKKING

TREKKING TANG/UWEEN TRAIL (this section describes a selection of treks of up to six days)

MODERATE TREKS

SHIMSHAL PAMIR via Tang Trail

3 days (OW)

moderate

highlights

3 - 4 days

TREKKING (one-way)

SHIMSHAL PAMIR via Uween Trail

3 days

moderate

highlights

1. SHIMSHAL PAMIR via Tang Trail

Trekking the old route to/from Pamir. This way leads to Shimshal's oldest summer pasture.

2. SHIMSHAL PAMIR via Uween Trail

Travel the old route to/from Pamir. This way leads to Shimshal's oldest summer pasture.

LUPGAR SAR BASE CAMP

Explore this rarely visited valley, which leads to Shimshal’s oldest summer pasture. As the pasture can be reached in less than two days, this trek is a good alternative if you don’t have the time to visit Pamir.

SHPODEEN PASS

A challenging and exciting loop trek. Ropes, crampons and mountaineering skills are necessary.

LONGER TREKS

Shimshal is a trekkers’ paradise and offers ample opportunities for longer, more demanding treks. This is just a small selection.

1. MAI DUR PASS

A technical long-haul trek connecting Shimshal with Baltistan on Nanga Parbat base camp.

2. BOISUM & CHAFCHINGOL PASSES

A great alternative for the motivated to tackle the Karakoram area from the Mai Dur Pass.

3. SHPODEEN PASS

A challenging and exciting loop trek.

4. SHIMSHAL PAMIR via Tang Trail

via Uween Trail

via Tang Trail

via Shpodeen Pass

SHIMSHAL PAMIR via Tang Trail

Shpodeen Pass

Shpodeen Pass

Shpodeen Pass

Shpodeen Pass

Tang/Uween Trail

Tang/Uween Trail

Pamir Mai Dur Shimshali Pass

or take it further!

Shimshal’s trekking and mountaineering potential is exceptionally rich. Every year local and trekkers open new passes and scale previously unclimbed mountains. Often come for climbing and even skiing expeditions. Some of these demanding and extreme possibilities are listed below:

- technical long-haul treks connecting Shimshal with Baltistan or Nagar Valley

- technical long-haul treks connecting Shimshal with the Karakoram Highway. Ropes and mountaineering equipment are required.

- several river crossings

- flower carpeted rolling hills

- several rock climbing possibilities (you will have to bring your own equipment and experience as Shimshal is still rather untamed with this sport)

- peak possibilities (some easy to access and familiar to local guides, many technical and unclimbed)

If you are interested in undertaking any of these activities, it is essential to take local guides. They can help you plan, organize and ensure your safety. Fees for such specialized expeditions will have to be discussed on a case-to-case basis.

- or take it further!

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The Mountain Areas Conservancy Project (MACP) is a seven-year project funded by GEF/UNDP. Its aim is to protect the biodiversity of the Karakoram, Hindu Kush, and western Himalaya mountain ranges through community-based conservation efforts. The project believes that the long-term conservation of mountain areas 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 increased 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 mobilizing government policies for participatory conservation in order to help communities establish conservation mechanisms as sustainable financial mechanisms. These funds are managed and the communities themselves and are based on profits made from ecotourism activities, such as limited trophy hunting, medicinal plants etc. in-situ conservation, wildlife watching safaris or trekking. This approach has been replicated in most parts of the mountain valleys in Northern Areas. 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 greatly regarded and appreciated.

Contacts

FOR TREKKING INFORMATION, please contact:

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