



WALKS IN NUBRA / 4

HARGAM TO YARMA

Walks in Nubra



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Front Cover: Village Stupa, Hargam.

FOREWORD

Royal Enfield has always called out the Himalayas as its 'Spiritual Home'. The pursuit of exploration, woven into its DNA, has led motorcyclists to traverse the challenging yet rewarding terrain of the region for decades. And within the Himalayan region, Ladakh has evolved into a rite of passage — the diverse communities, and the rich natural and cultural heritage offering the ideal setting for adventures and memorable experiences.

Over time, word of the region's allure has reached far and wide, ringing in a flourishing tourism economy and, with it, the risks of overtourism, particularly in spots like Pangong Tso and Hanle. Within the Nubra Valley, white rolling sand dunes are arguably the main attraction and what often remains overlooked is the cultural life and heritage sites in these areas, which are dotted by monasteries and stupas, caves and pre-historic rock formations, teeming with art and beauty for the travellers to explore. Jointly with LAMO, we believe one of the ways of experiencing a destination is by exploring facets and documenting sites that people may miss out on. By encouraging exploration beyond the beaten path, our ambition is to alleviate pressure off of regions at risk of being exploited, as well as provide the local community with an additional source of livelihood.

As part of our partnership with LAMO and the local community of Ladakh, we present these Walk Booklets that put to paper lesser-known sites and pieces of history around the Nubra Valley region. These publications will offer a starting point for the mindful explorer who wishes to experience the essence of the region and contribute to the Himalayan communities residing here in a meaningful way. In line with Royal Enfield's broader social mission of partnering with 100 Himalayan communities, the project aspires to support local families and youth who have mapped out significant heritage sites and cultural practices, and are trained to guide travellers through the routes compiled within this inventory. This exercise is our attempt to build a network of sustainable and mutually enriching connections between travellers and the Himalayan communities, with the pursuit of sustainable exploration at its centre.

Bidisha Dey
Executive Director
Eicher Group Foundation

WALKS IN NUBRA

‘Walks in Nubra’ is conceptualised as an alternative experience to discover the region, in a more sustainable way. The walks will guide you off the main roads and onto well-treaded pathways, through narrow lanes and into open fields and up mountain trails. Here you will encounter weather beaten rocks inscribed with centuries old petroglyphs, shrines dedicated to protective deities, graveyards of long-forgotten travellers on the ancient Silk Route and ruins of early settlements. You will also venture into the more familiar monasteries and mosques, as well as community spaces and sacred water-bodies. Stories from the past, of flying hermits and demon kings, will unfold as you explore villages along the banks of the Siachen River.

Nubra is a region with a rich and varied culture, and with a long history. It was an important place on the Trans-Himalayan trade routes, and the village of Charasa was once the King of Ladakh’s winter capital. Music, folklore, crafts such as weaving and basket-making were common here and, in some areas, continue to be. Vernacular architecture had regional influences, richly carved wooden balconies and screens can be seen alongside kitchens adorned with brass and copper utensils and densely painted interiors of Buddhist temples.

These walks have been composed and written up in consultation with local community members, and many of the researchers who worked on them were from Nubra. The idea behind this was to hear knowledgeable voices from the area, bring in stakeholders and engage with the younger generation to enable them to discover and understand Nubra’s rich heritage and the importance of safeguarding their legacy. For this we thank all those who worked with us to make the walks here possible, and remain indebted to them.

Much of the information gathered was oral and is being written up for the first time. While there may be variances in oral accounts and dates, to the best of our knowledge, we have tried to be as accurate as possible. As memories fade and events are forgotten, this documentation will be valuable for future generations. Over the years Nubra has also changed, with old buildings being pulled down for new, concrete structures and an increasing network of roads that makes going off the beaten track so much harder. But as the past continues to integrate with the present, and you walk through this terrain, try to imagine a different time.

WALK BOOK 4

CONTENTS

HARGAM	11	NYUNGSTED	119
TAKSHA	21	DZONGSA	129
SASOMA	31	YARMA	137
CHANGLUNG	41		
HENACHEY	49		
TONGSTED	59		
KUBET	69		
YENCHU	77		
AYEE	85		
ARANU	95		
KHIMI	107		

77°45' 77°30' 77°15' 76°45'

34°45'

34°30'

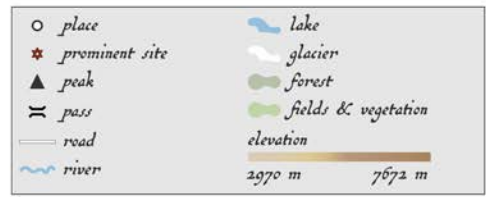
34°15'



NUBRA

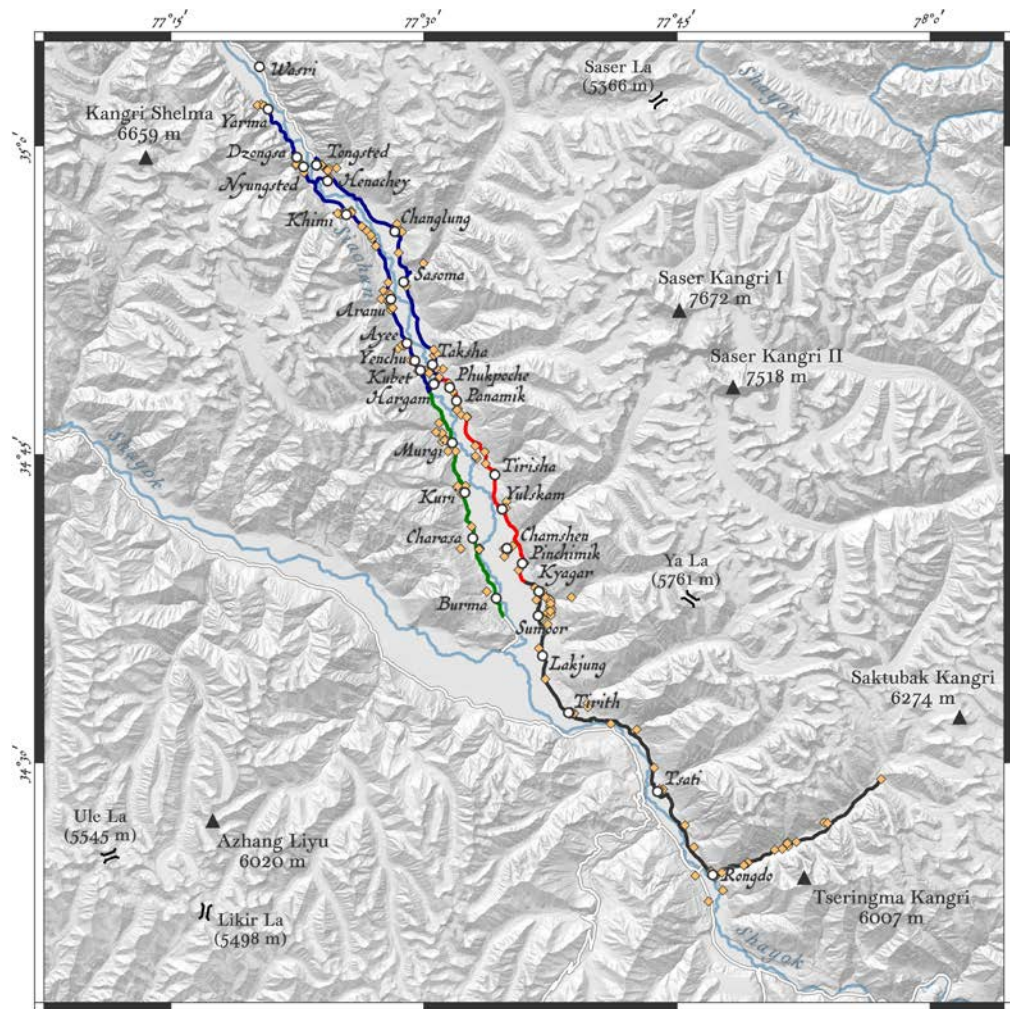
ལུབ་རྩེ།

Featuring Central Nubra



Location of Nubra in the Himalayas





WALKS IN NUBRA AND POINTS OF INTEREST



Featuring Four Beautiful Walks



○ place	— walk 1	— road
▲ peak	— walk 2	— river
⌘ pass	— walk 3	
◇ point of interest	— walk 4	

Location of Nubra in the Himalayas

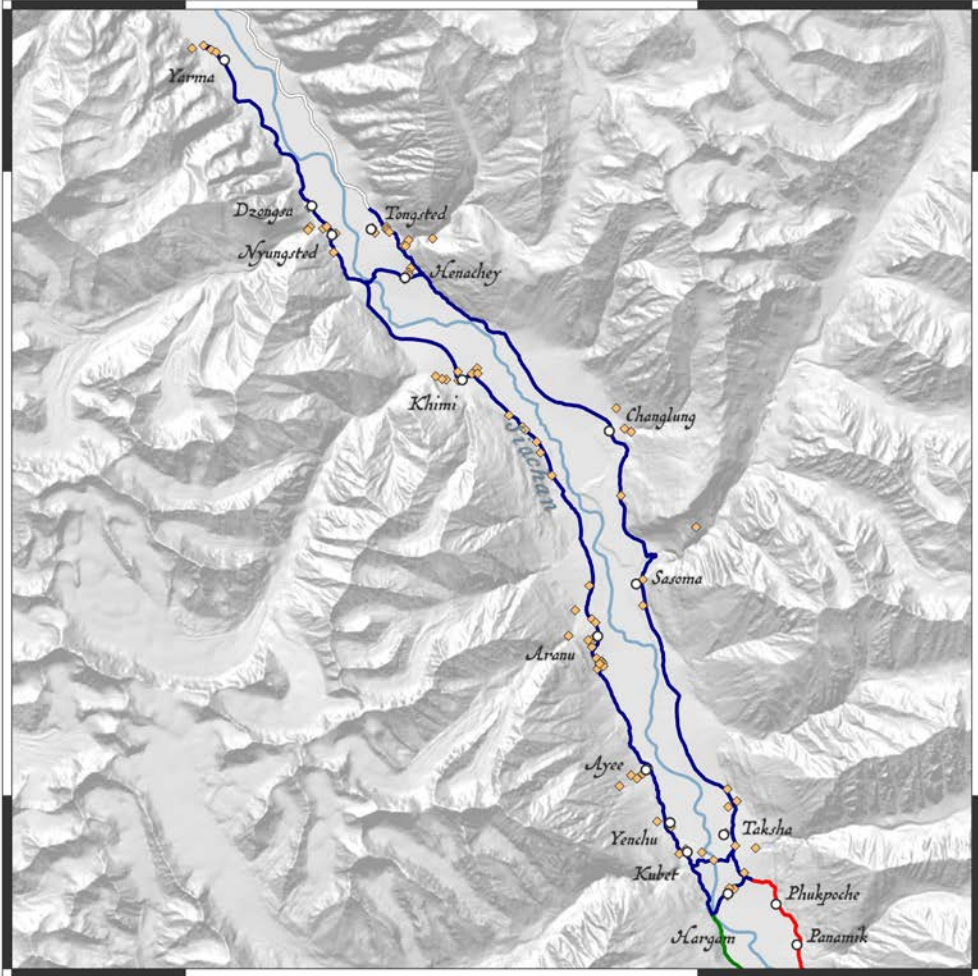


77°20'

77°30'

35°50'

36°30'



WALK 4 AND POINTS OF INTEREST



Margoan to Yarma

0 2.5 5 km

- place
- ▲ peak
- ⌋ pass
- ◇ point of interest
- road
- river
- walk 4

Location of Walk 4 in Nubra





HARGAM

ཧར་གམ།

HARGAM

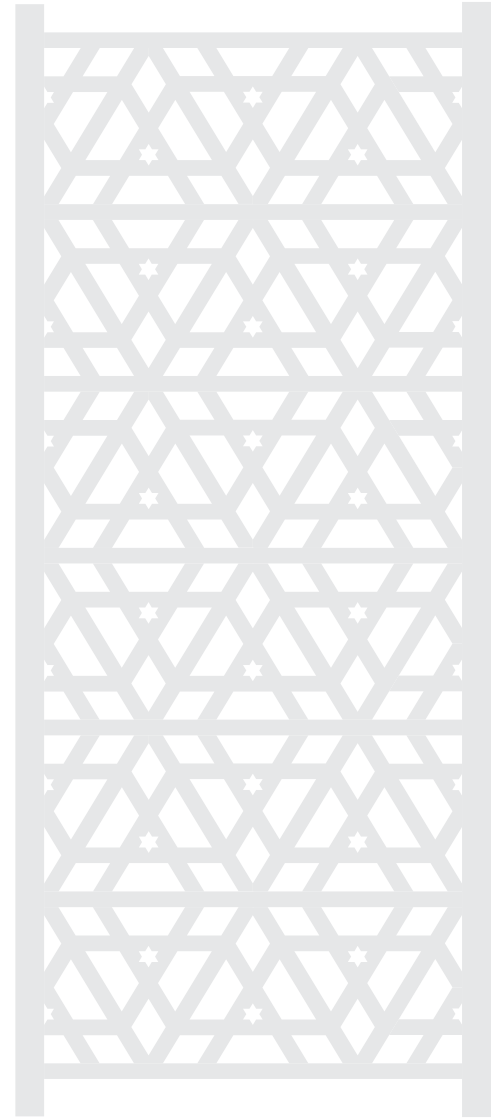
Hargam is an important transit point for villages on the other side of the Siachen River. There are two bridges here, one is a new concrete one that allows vehicular transport to pass, and is known as Kubet Bridge. The other is a wooden suspension bridge, locally known as the *Phurdumchan Zampa*, that can only be crossed on foot. The village was an important rest stop for traders coming in from Central Asia as it is also not too far from the town of Panamik, which is two kilometres away.

Local narrative says that the name of the village was originally 'Har-Gang', derived from the house name of one of the first families who settled here. Over time, it became known as Hargam. Today, there are 11 households in Hargam, and they represent a mix of Buddhist and Muslim families. The village has a rich legacy of music, and this can be traced back to the 18th century, when people from Baltistan migrated to Ladakh. They also reached Hargam, and it is said that one of the musicians from Baltistan was allotted a piece of land in Hargam as a reward for his outstanding talent in music.

MAP REFERENCE

HARGAM

1. Hor Romkhang
2. Noom Tsering and Tsewang Puti
3. Khangchenpa Heritage House
4. Mosque
5. Lama Dorjey Dadul Lhato





HARGAM

ཧར་གམ།



0 250 500 m

	mosque		path/track
	mane wall		river
	lhato/altar		stream
	muslim cemetery		built-up area
	historic house		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Hargam walk book listing



1. HOR ROMKHANG

As a transit point for trade caravans from Central Asia, Hargam has many stories about the Horpa (as traders from Central Asia were called), and many Hor words have entered their daily conversations. To reach Nubra, the traders negotiated long treacherous routes, crossing the Karakoram pass to reach Ladakh, at times costing them their lives.

Hor Romkhang is a cemetery, located on the way to Kubet bridge, it lies at an intersection point on the right side of the road. Many Horpa are buried here, but one grave stands out as it is larger and at a height when compared with the others. This is said to be the grave of a child, whose father was a prosperous trader from Central Asia. Known as Ishan Bhai, the term 'bhai' was added to his name as a sign of respect, it is said that Ishan Bhai decided to stay back in Hargam after tensions started developing in Central Asia in the 1940s, especially following the Chinese takeover of Sinkiang. He married Halima Bano from Partapur village on the other side of Nubra Valley, and they had nine children. One of them died while still quite young and his grave referred to here. Another of his children, Stanzin Deldan, continues to live in Hargam in the family home.



2. NOOM TSERING AND TSEWANG PUTI

Amongst the first families that settled in Hargam, the Khangchenpa and the Khargogpa are widely acknowledged for sponsoring many of the religious buildings in the village. This particular *mane* (prayer) wall, with two stupas on one end, is said to have been sponsored by members of the Khangchenpa family, namely the couple Noom Tsering and Tsewang Puti, whose names are inscribed on a large stone slab here.

Thought to date from the late 1600s, there are more inscriptions of names of people on other stones, but many of these are no longer legible as they have eroded over the years or more recently been whitewashed with lime. These are probably names of donors or names of people to whom the sacred structure is dedicated.



3. KHANGCHENPA HERITAGE HOUSE

This is a two-storey, mud and stone structure, and belongs to one of the first families that settled in Hargam, the Khangchenpa. It probably dates to before the 18th century, as it is said to have existed before the people from Baltistan, in particular the musicians, were settled here. A heavy downpour in 2015-16, damaged parts of the house, and compelled the villagers to move the temple to the community hall in order to save it. Here they added a room on the upper floor to enshrine the statues and other contents of the temple.

The temple has statues of Guru Padmasambhava, Buddha Shakyamuni, and Manjushri. One statue in particular, that of Chushigzhal, the eleven-faced Avalokitesvara, was built after the auspicious birth of the 11th child in the family. The statue was commissioned by Tsering Stobgais, the father of these children, who was highly spiritual. He later gifted his house, with the temple and half of his land, to his eldest son Lobzang Nurbu; this was before the rain that destroyed the house. Lobzang in turn, donated the temple to the community and his large land holdings to Spituk Monastery.





4. MOSQUE

There is a mosque located in the compound of Muhammad Ibrahim's home, and though built on private land, it is open to all devotees. It is a one-storey structure with three rooms. Ibrahim believes the mosque dates to the early 1700s, the main prayer hall was built then, and the two adjoining rooms are later additions.

The *mihrab* in the room marks the direction to Mecca, and another niche has a sacred walking stick (*assa*)

placed within it. Hanging in the prayer hall are several prayer mats that are offerings from pilgrims returning from Hajj.

There was once a renowned fakir (religious ascetic) who lived and meditated here. At the time he was here, many Muslims from various parts of Ladakh would come to pay their respects to him.



5. LAMA DORJEY DADUL LHATO

Hargam's protector deity is called Lama Dorje Dadul, and the *lhato* (shrine) dedicated to him is located on the left side of the main road while walking towards the village of Taksha. Though surrounded by rocks, it is easily visible from the main road. Earlier the *lhato* was located on the roof of the Khaunpa old house, but with the house's deteriorating condition, the villagers decided to move the *lhato* to its current position.

The *lhato* is made from mud bricks, and has been painted white with red corners. Placed on the top of it is a bunch of Juniper branches that have been tied together by a *khatag* (sacred white scarf). The care and rituals connected to the *lhato* are carried out by members of the Khangchenpa family. Villagers do not participate in all the rituals held during the year, but on the 11th day of Losar (New Year in Ladakh), they all gather for the annual ritual where the contents of the *lhato* are renewed.





TAKSHA

ཏཱ་ཁ་ཤ།

TAKSHA

Taksha is one of the first villages traders and travellers from Central Asia would encounter when they crossed the high passes of Saser La and Laskya. Many of them rested here, camping for days after the long and treacherous journey, before moving on to Leh. The village had ample space to camp, as well as grass and alpha-alpha fodder (*ol*) for their animals.

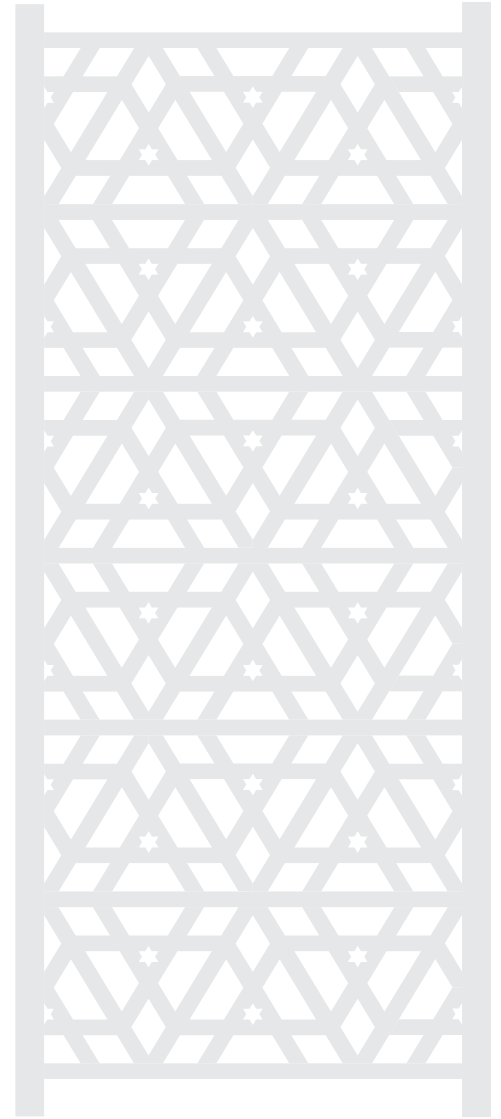
It is today one of largest villages in the Siachen belt area. Initially, there were only 14 households and over the years, that number has grown to over hundred. The village's name is derived from '*Staksha*', the name of a medicinal plant available in the area. Archery was once a very popular sport here, as targets (*ben*) are found outside almost every house in the village.

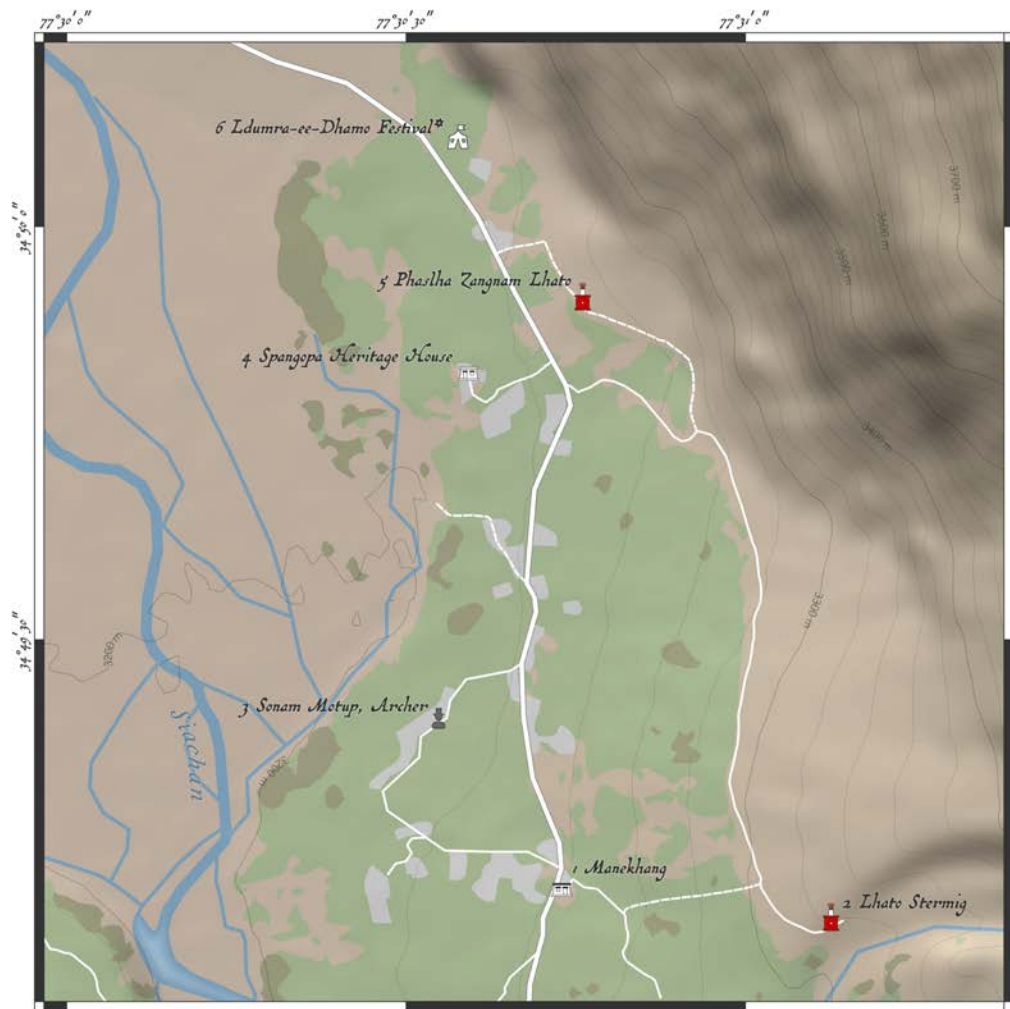
Taksha also has a long association with music in Ladakh, much of which was derived from the sounds of nature. The Eurasian or Oriental Skylark, commonly known as the 'Musician of Birds' (*Cho-nga-ma*, *Cha-Chogomo*, or *Cha-Chogarmo* are local names), would migrate here during spring and leave by autumn. Its melodious calling has inspired several well-known tunes in Ladakh, the most renowned being the 360 tunes of traditional *Lharna* music. Sadly, a chemical spray used to kill pests in the fields since 2012-13 has led to the disappearance of the birds, and they are a rare sight today.

MAP REFERENCE

TAKSHA

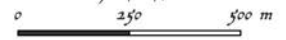
1. Manekhang
2. Lhato Stermig
3. Sonam Motup, Archer
4. Spangopa Heritage House
5. Phaslha Zangnam Lhato
6. Ldumra-ee-Dhamo Festival





TAKSHA

ཐག་གཞི



	temple		path/track
	lhato/altar		river
	historic house		stream
	artisan/artist/resource person		built-up area
	festival		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Taksha walk book listing
 *venue and dates vary



1. MANEKHANG

A mountain, called Rigo Phak-Itas, overlooking the village was considered inauspicious. To counter its harmful effects, the villagers built this *manekhang* (community prayer hall) with a clear view of the peak. Built in the 1800s, it is the first building along the main road, and is a two-storey structure with eight rooms. The temple is located on the upper floor, and there is a staircase from the exterior of the *manekhang* which leads to it. The temple contains statues of Manjushri, Vajrapani, the four-armed Chanrazig, Jo Rinpoche, Guru Padmasambhava and Amitayus Buddha. There is a wooden stupa in

the chapel, and a hand-written scripture of the Bum text done on hand-made paper (*podshog*).

The courtyard (*sungchos-rawa*) is used for religious teachings and other community activities. Outside the *manekhang*, there is a *mane* (prayer) wall and a stupa.

The land for the *manekhang* was donated by the Gongmapa family and others from Taksha village; today it belongs to the Onpo (astrologer). However, due to some internal dispute, it is no longer used for community rituals. There is now a new *manekhang*, built in the early 2000s, at a short distance ahead of the old one.



2. LHATO STERMIG

This is the shrine (*lhato*) for the protector deity of Taksha village, Stermig Gyalpo. It is located on the slope of the hill facing Taksha village, on the right side of the Hargam stream. The *lhato* stands on a foundation made from stones and mud, and the shrine above is made with sun-dried mud bricks and has been painted red. A bunch of Juniper branches are held together by a *khatag* (sacred white scarf), on which '*ki ki so so lhar gyalo*' ('may the gods be victorious') is written.

The offerings and renewal of contents for this *lhato* is done in spring, the day coincides with the first day that water is released into the fields to mark the start of the agricultural season in the village. These rituals are conducted by the Khangogpa household, a practice that has been in their family for generations.



3. SONAM MOTUP, ARCHER

Archery has a long history in Ladakh, where skill at the art was not only a valuable tool for defence during battle, but the bow and arrow were also important ritual implements. Sonam Motup is now over 60 years old, he is a passionate archer and has won many medals representing Taksha, in competitions held throughout Ladakh. He is also widely known for his art of making the traditional bow and arrow. Wood for the bow and arrow was sourced locally, from Poplar and Willow trees. The feathers on the arrow, also called fletching, are made from found wings of the eagle or owl. The string in the arrow is made from cow hide.

Sonam is extremely knowledgeable and has a lot to share about the significance of the bow and arrow and the importance of having a set at home at all times. For example, there are specific death and marriage rituals that are performed where an arrow is the main object. Traditionally, women are not allowed to practice archery nor are they allowed to hold or touch the bow and arrow. In reference to this, Sonam narrates an episode from the Kesar saga wherein a woman violated this norm and this led to the defeat of Kesar's army in the battle. However, this is changing in Ladakh now and many women are taking up archery as a sport.



4. SPANGOPA HERITAGE HOUSE

The Spangopa are one of the prominent families in Taksha, and their large house with many fields around it is an indication of their prosperity. Much of their fortune, it is said, was acquired from the trade between Central Asia and Ladakh. They, like other big families in the village, earned revenue from the traders who used to camp on their land and in their courtyard, and from the grass their animals ate. The large stretch of land behind their home is their grassland (*olthang*), and it was here that the traders' camels and horses would be left to roam. Remnants of their interaction with traders

from Central Asia are visible in their home, in the form of carpets from Yarkand or brass and copper utensils on the shelves in their kitchen.

The house is a two-storeyed structure, built in the vernacular style in the late 1700s, though some of the rooms on the upper floor are new additions. Artisans and craftspeople from Turtuk were specially brought in to do the woodwork in the house, especially the design of the façade, and to paint the interiors. The house also boasts a large wooden balcony (*rabsal*). The current woman of the family, Dolker Tsering, is a well-known *perak* (turquoise-studded headdress) maker.



There is a hanging of a sheep skull, tied to several sticks with thread, on the southern and western walls of the house. These are called *gnam-mgo* or *sa-mgo* depending on their location, above or below the ground respectively. They are a common feature on some of the older houses, often placed on the façade when families face numerous, unprecedented deaths or illnesses amongst their livestock. Rituals are held to ward away the negative influences, and these sheep skull crosses are hung on the outer walls of the house. The one on the Spangopa house is a *gnam-mgo*, and indicates that, in the past, the Spangopa family may have faced some misfortune with their livestock.



5. PHASLHA ZANGNAM LHATO

This *lhato* (shrine) is located on the slope of the hill facing Taksha village, it is towards the end of the village. The *lhato* is dedicated to the protector deity of the Spangopa family, known as Zangnam Gyalpo. It stands on a foundation made from stones and mud. The structure of the *lhato* is made with mud bricks and has been painted red. On the top are a bunch of Juniper branches, tied together by a *khatag* (ceremonial white cloth). There are rituals conducted at the *lhato* before Losar (New Year), by the head of the Spangopa family Tundup Tsesphel. Rituals include replacing the Juniper branches and the *khatag*.



6. LDUMRA-EE-DHAMO FESTIVAL

This is a government sponsored archery festival, annually held in the month of September. It first started around 2012-13, with an emphasis on encouraging young adult girls to participate and take up archery. A workshop is held before the festival, to teach archery, before a competition takes place between all participants at its culmination. Currently, it has been incorporated into the 'Khelo India' sports campaign scheme of the Government of India. With many women now participating and taking up archery as a sport, where once they were forbidden from doing so, this has paved the way for women's empowerment.



Photo Courtesy: Puntsog Dolma





SASOMA

ས་གསོ་མ།

SASOMA

Sasoma, as the name suggests, is a relatively new village – *sa* means land and *soma* is new. However, this nomenclature can be a bit misleading, as there are ancient petroglyphs in the vicinity of the village and it played a significant role in the trade from Central Asia.

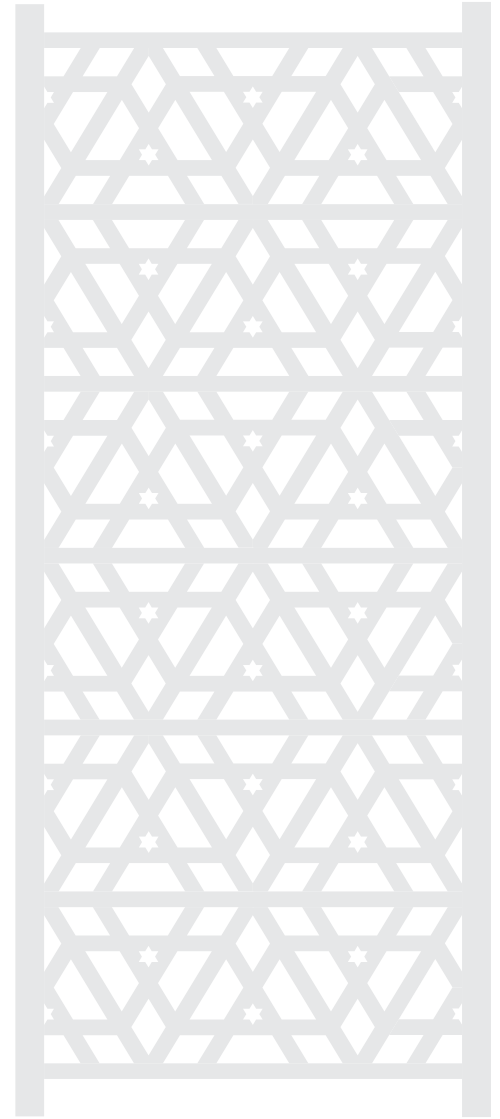
The first family to have settled here came from Khimi village, from across the Siachen River, with others coming from Aranu and Kubet. It is said that they were settled here by Samstanling Monastery, to tend to their agricultural land. This number has now grown to eight households. They are almost equally divided between Sasoma Yogma (Lower Sasoma), and Sasoma Gongma (Upper Sasoma), there is a stream between these two areas. Today, the Indian Army has established itself on large portions of Sasoma's land and Ladakh Scouts has built a small Buddhist temple at the beginning of the village.

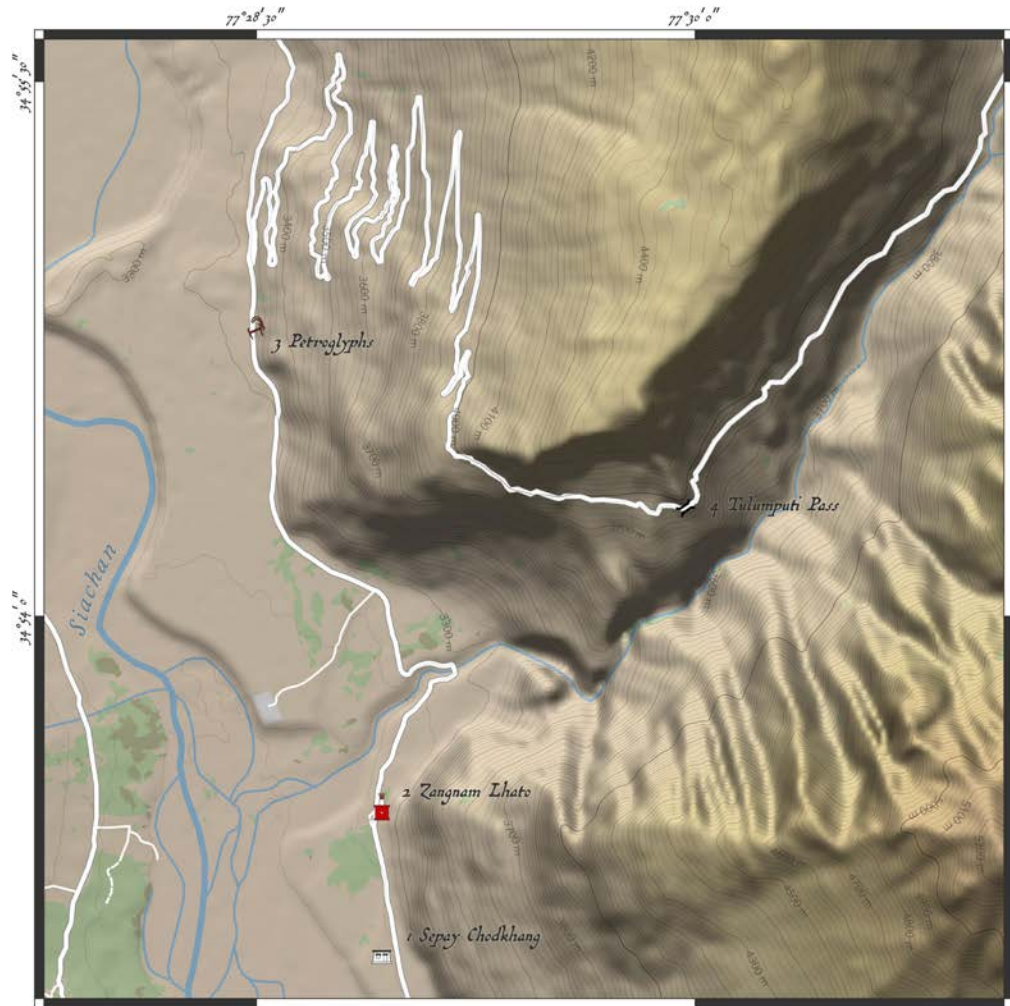
In spite of its small size and population, Sasoma played an important role in facilitating the trade from Central Asia. There are three routes from the Nubra Valley to Central Asia – the first is via the Siachen Glacier, the second is from Changlung village and the third from Tulumputi pass. The third one falls between Sasoma and Changlung, and the task of clearing a path here was given to Ali Hussain, a well-known architect from Chushot village near Leh. This was in the early 1900s, when the cross-border trade was still important. Ali Hussain composed a song that traced his journey from Chushot, over the Khardong Lha pass and includes the construction work. Remnants of this historical route can still be seen, though most of it has been destroyed during the construction of the roads.

MAP REFERENCE

SASOMA

1. Sepay Chodkhang
2. Zangnam Lhato
3. Petroglyphs
4. Tulumputi Pass





SASOMA

ས་གསོ་མ།

0 250 500 m



	temple		river
	lhato/altar		stream
	petroglyph		built-up area
	pass		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)
	path/track		

Numbers and names follow Sasoma walk book listing



1. SEPAY CHODKHANG

It is a common custom in the Indian army to build places of worship, such as a Buddhist or Hindu temple, near their camps so their soldiers have a place to offer prayers. In the 1970s, there was a division of Ladakh Scouts stationed near Sasoma and they built this Buddhist temple. The villagers call it 'Sepay Chodkhang'; *sepay* is derived from the Hindi word for soldier (sepoy). The temple is located just before the entrance to the village, on the left side of the road while going towards Changlung. It is a one-room structure with the door on the southern side. The walls are constructed from steel jerry cans that have been stacked one on top of the other, and then plastered with mud. The outer walls are white washed, and the roof is painted black. The altar has figures of Buddha Shakyamuni and Guru Padmasambhava; they were donated by members of the Ladakh Scouts army who were stationed here. In front of the chapel, there is a boulder on which small stones are kept. Part of the boulder, along with the stones, is painted red. This could be a dwelling place for some spirits, probably wrathful ones as indicated by the colour red. The army no longer resides here, but remains of their quarters can still be seen on the western side of the chapel, behind some thorn-bushes. Now, the villagers of Sasoma look after the temple.





2. ZANGNAM LHATO

The village protector deity is Zangnam Gyalpo, and its shrine (*lhato*) stands on a big boulder near the entrance gate to the village, this is left of the main road while going towards the village of Warsi. The *lhato* is thought to be built in the late 1800s, around the time the first family from Khimi village moved and settled here.

The *lhato* is a square structure, made with mud bricks and wood, and this has been painted red. On the top there is a bunch of Juniper branches, tied together by a white cloth. On the 9th day of Ladakhi Losar (New Year), the villagers gather here to participate in the rituals for the consecration of the shrine, these are conducted by the Motup Khangsar family.



3. PETROGLYPHS

Along the main road, a little past the army check post, there is a petroglyph site at the base of the hill. There are around four groups of large rocks, and each of them is covered with petroglyphs. A large part of these consist of the ibex with humans in various poses showing different actions. Another, which is probably unique to Sasoma, is representations of the camel – an animal with humps can be seen. These are in various sizes. It is widely known that the double-humped Bactrian camel was extensively used as a pack animal and for transport on the route between Central Asia and Ladakh. These images probably refer to that. There are also some images of various mascoids visible on the rocks. Some of these carvings can be said to date to the Bronze Age.



4. TULUMPUTI PASS

There are three routes from the Nubra Valley to Central Asia – the first is via the Siachen Glacier, the second is from the Laskya Pass a little after Changlung village and the third from the Tulumputi pass which comes between the villages of Sasoma and Changlung. The third route was constructed roughly a hundred years ago, in 1924, by Ali Hussain, a well-known architect from Chushot village near Leh. It was quite an incredible feat in those days, as it involved cutting through the rock surface of the mountain. Later, Ali Hussain composed a song that traced his journey from Chushot, over the Khardong Lha pass and includes the construction work. The first part of the song is reproduced below:

*On an auspicious day,
I set out for an obligatory task.*

*On an auspicious day,
I, Ali Hussain, set out for an obligatory task.*

*May I be successful in my task, O Lord,
May the task be accomplished, O The Mighty One.*

*On reaching the top of Khardong La pass,
My horse neighed.
From the top of Khardong La pass,
My village, Chushot, can be seen down below.*

*There is but no use of the sight,
As I cannot go back,
There is no use looking back with longing as I, Ali,
cannot go back.*

Ali Hussain also built Koyak bridge in the 1930s, the purpose of building this bridge was mainly to transport materials for constructing the pass. *Charas* (hashish), was an important commodity of trade on this route, and the construction of Tulumputi pass allowed larger quantities to be brought in from Central Asia. There are also numerous petroglyph sites along the route, which probably indicates that this was a well-travelled route.

There is one turn along the route that is known as 'Mentok Yangzin', this is named after a friend of Ali Hussain's called Yangzin who was from Phukpoche. It is said that when Ali Hussain finished the construction, Yangzin came to him with an offering (maybe a *khatag*), and described his work as being as perfect as a flower (*mentok*).

Remnants of this historical route are visible, though most of it has been destroyed during recent construction. In 1984, a black-top road was built parallel to this one and through the Tulumputi pass. It has been widely used by the Indian Army, especially to reach vital border posts such as the Daulat Beg Oldi.





CHANGLUNG

ཕྱང་ཕྱང་།

CHANGLUNG

The village of Changlung was established by an Amchi (local medicinal practitioner), from Aranu village sometime in the early 19th century. The Amchi owned agricultural fields in Changlung, and decided to move here and build his home near them. The five households currently living in Changlung are all descendants of that Amchi.

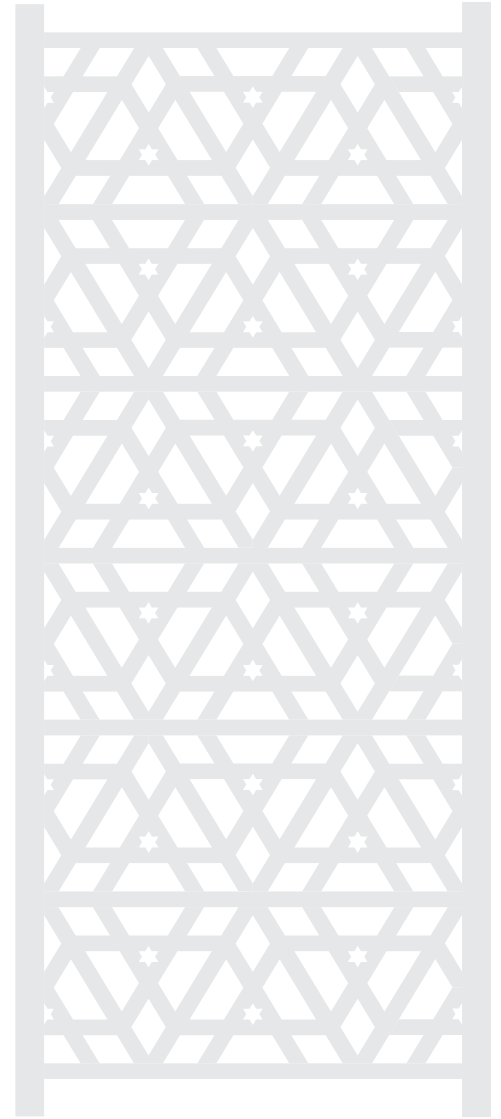
The village is located after crossing the stream at Sasoma. Changlung is considered to be part of the larger village of Yarma, which is nearby, and they both share the same *goba* (chief). The villagers here share kinship ties (known as *phaspun*) with those in Yarma, and take part in each other's wedding celebrations or help out during funerals. This is also extended to households in Aranu and Sasoma.

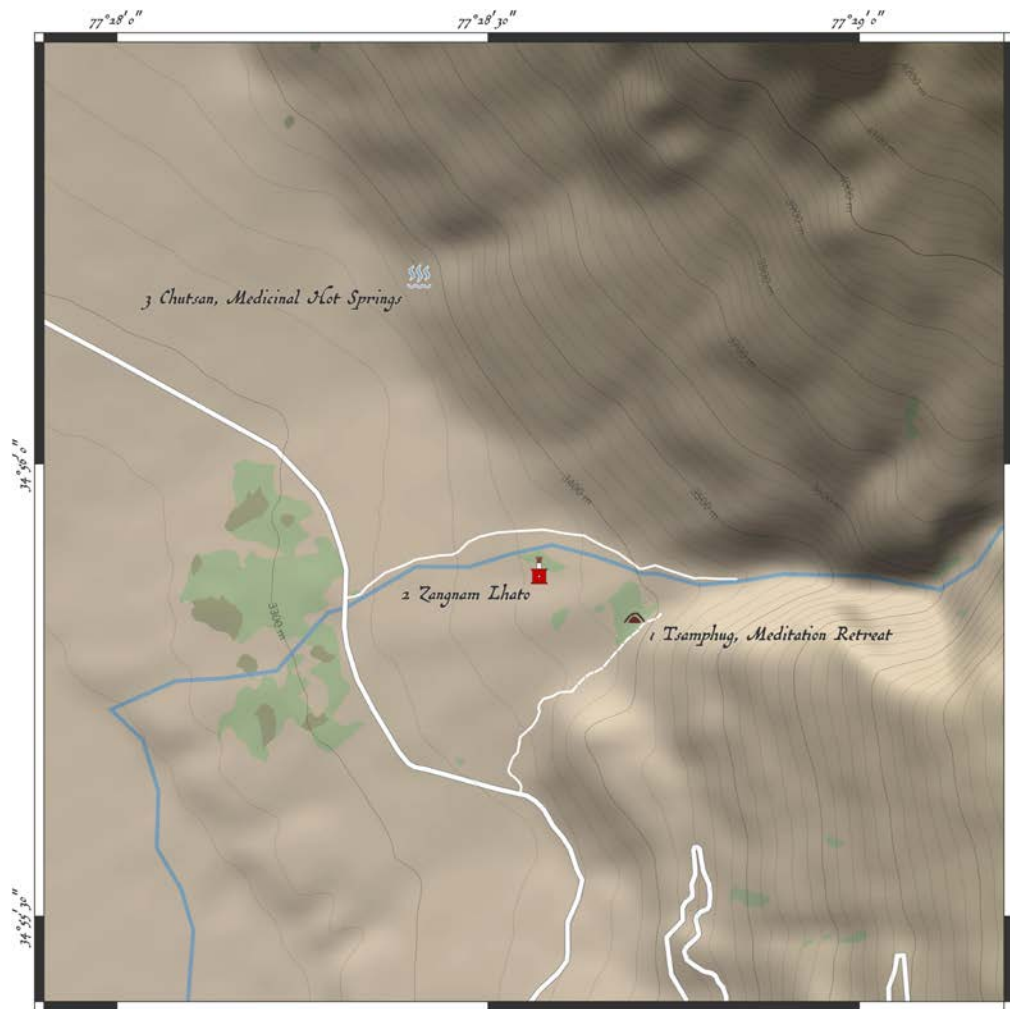
A graveyard near Changlung held many graves of traders from Central Asia, as well as Balti labourers from western Ladakh. One grave in particular is spoken about and called *Hormay* Romkhang, 'grave of a Central Asian woman'. In 1984, a road was constructed through the cemetery and the graveyard was destroyed.

MAP REFERENCE

CHANGLUNG

1. Tsamphug, Meditation Retreat
2. Zangnam Lhato
3. Chutsan, Medicinal Hot Springs





CHANGLUNG

ཇམ་ཇམ་ཇམ་ཇམ་



	meditation cave/house		path/track
	lhato/altar		stream
	spring		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Changlung walk book listing



1. TSAMPHUG, MEDITATION RETREAT

Set in the midst of trees, and at a slight distance away from the village, towards the north-east, is a meditation retreat. It was built by the villagers for a hermit named Trungrampa Lobzang Stanba, a resident of Changlung, in the late 19th century. The hermit was an accomplished Buddhist Tantric master, who helped the villagers take care of the water crises they had been facing for a long time. On the request of the villagers, he conducted elaborate prayers and rituals, and solved the drinking water crises by increasing the quantity of water from the nearby spring. In return for his help, the villagers built him the retreat.

The retreat is a one-storey structure with three rooms, out of these two have been constructed more recently. On the roof of the older room a stupa is visible, there are also more stupas behind the retreat. While the retreat is seldom used these days, the villagers consider this a sacred place and on special occasions they make offerings here. They also circumambulate the place as a sign of respect.



2. ZANGNAM LHATO

The village shrine (*lhato*) is dedicated to their protector deity, Zangnam Gyalpo. It is located on the lower slope of the hill facing the village, on the right side of the main vehicular road while driving towards Tongsted village. Villagers state that it was probably built around the same time as when the Amchi from Aranu first came to live in Changlung.

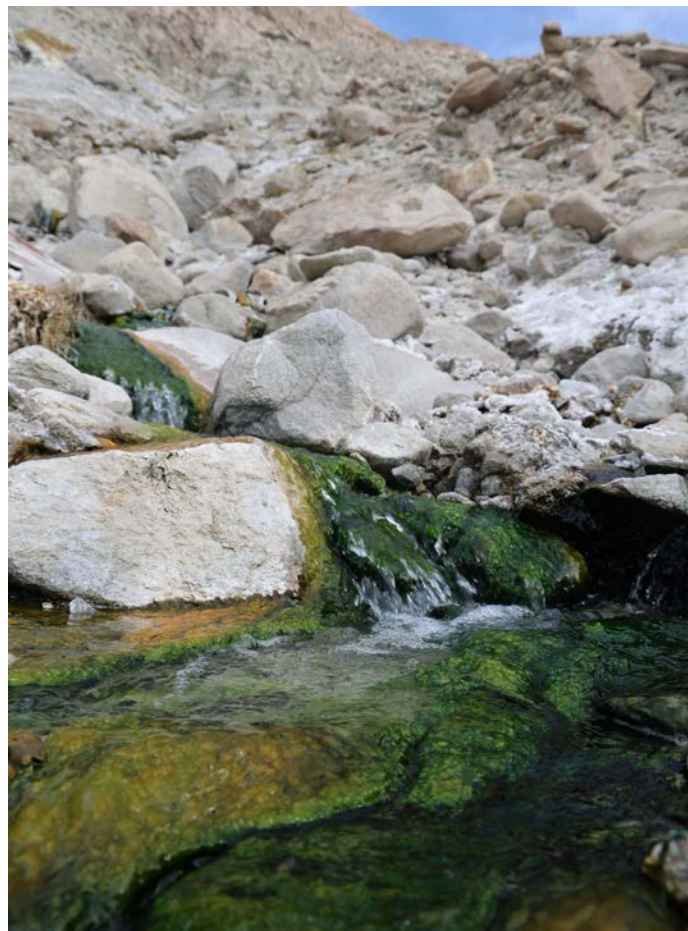
The wooden door has an image of Mahakala (the God of Protection) carved on it.

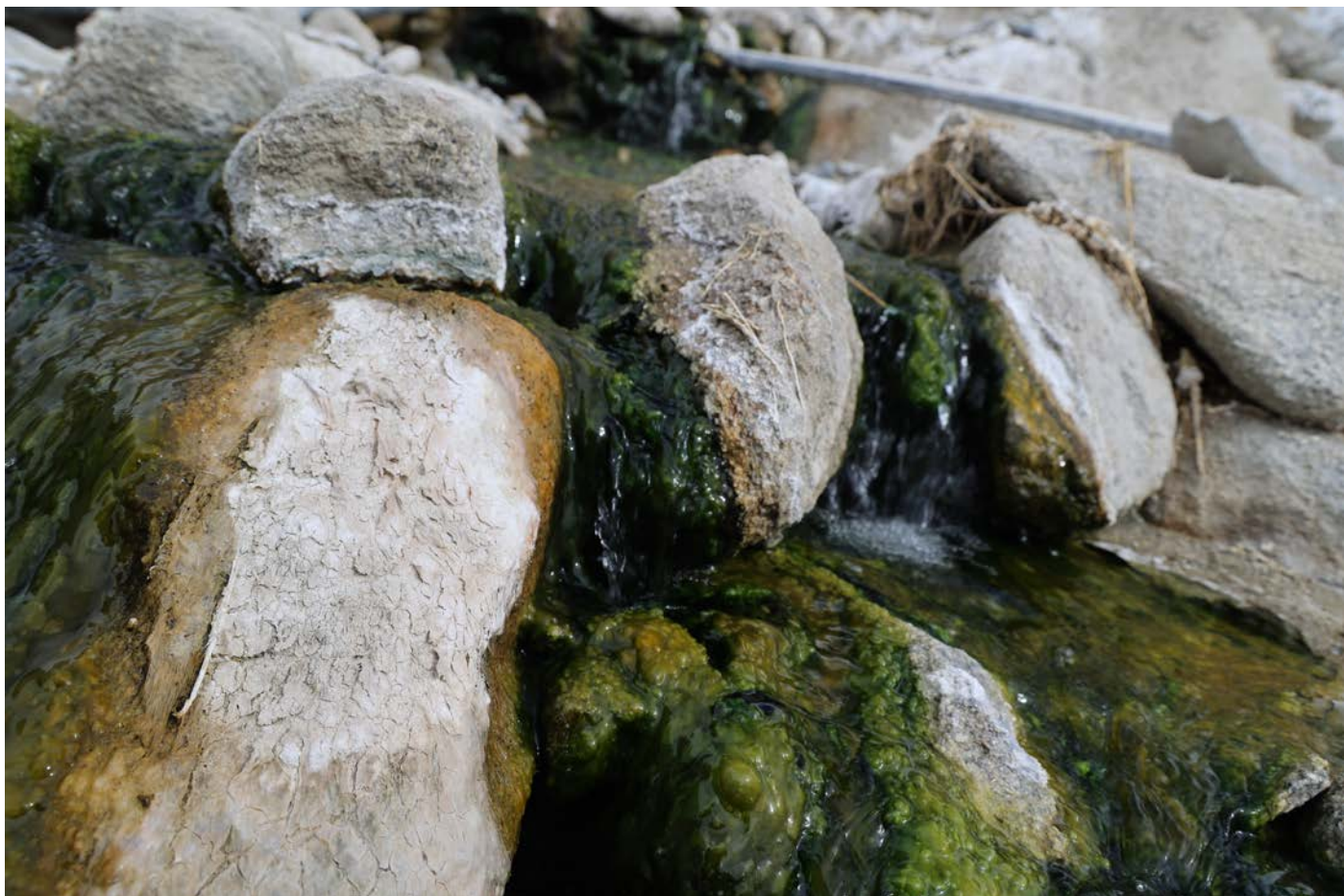


3. CHUTSAN, MEDICINAL HOT SPRINGS

There are two medicinal hot springs at a roughly 20 minute walk from Changlung, on the slope of the hill facing the village. They are known as *dze-me chutsan* and *muzi chu*, and are said to heal skin diseases, stomach and respiratory ailments. *Dze-me chutsan* in particular was said to help cure leprosy, which at one time was fairly widespread in Ladakh.

The water has a high mineral content and so cannot be drunk. During winter, the villagers divert the water from one of the hot springs to the village and use it for washing. In summer, they mix this water with that from the stream and use it for irrigation. This helps when there is a shortage of water in the glacial stream.







HENACHEY

དབྱེན་གནས་ཆེ།

HENACHEY

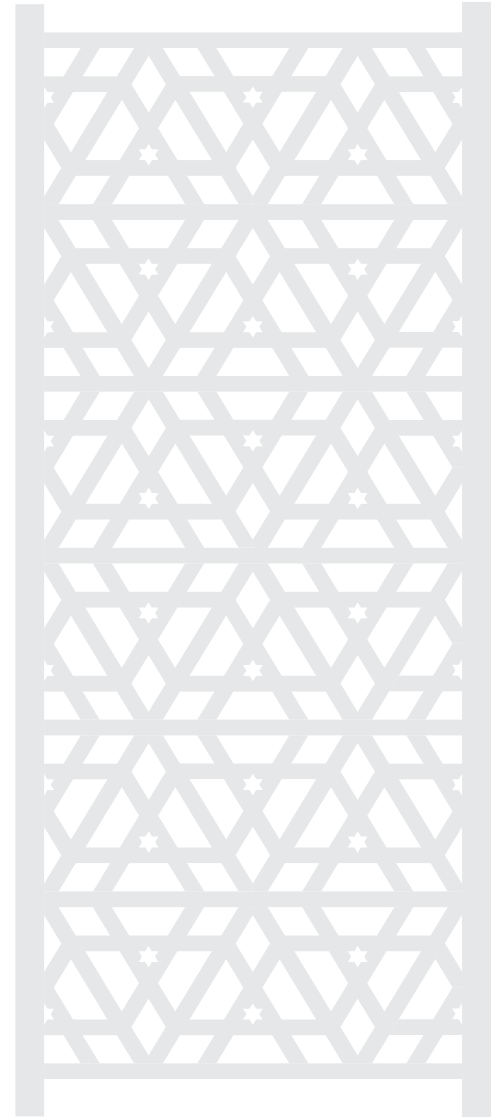
After Changlung, there is a long stretch of uninhabited land and at the end of it the small village of Henachey is located. Its somewhat secluded location is reflected in the meaning of its name, spelt '*En-gnas-che*', where *en* means isolated and *gnas* a settlement. The village was first settled by three households, namely the Chopa, Khangchenpa, and Khatopa. This number has now grown to 13 households. The villagers share the water from the stream with Tongsted, on the opposite bank.

The landscape in and around Henachey is dotted with stupas and *mane* (prayer) walls, most of which are said to date from the 18th century, during the reign of the Ladakhi King Deskyong Namgyal. An inscription on a round stupa (*mane gonkhar*), is presented as evidence of this. The presence of these religious structures could indicate the spirituality of the place or that they were built as punishment by people the king penalised for breaking the law; similar structures were built at Charasa also. Some villagers thought they were constructed by an influential individual, as a religious offering and to seek merit.

MAP REFERENCE

HENACHEY

1. Chopa Heritage House
2. Skurgyal Sheno
3. Manekhang
4. Phaslha Rudung Lhato
5. Chorgok or Khargok-dza



77°24' 0"

77°24' 30"

34°58' 30"

34°58' 0"



HENACHEY

དབུལ་གནས་ཆེ།



0 250 500 m

	temple		path/track
	chorten		river
	lhato/altar		stream
	sacred tree		forest
	historic house		fields & vegetation
	road major		contours (20 m)
	road minor		

Numbers and names follow *Henachey* walk book listing



1. CHOPA HERITAGE HOUSE

At the turn of the link road that goes towards the *manekhang*, there is an old two-storey house that belongs to the Chopa family. Built in the late 1800s, the Chopa were among the first of the three families to settle in Henachey village. It is said they are part of the extended Zimskhang family from Kyagar, and this house was built by a member of that family known as Sonam Tashi.

Built in the vernacular style, the house has six rooms, with sheds (*tangra*) for the animals on the lower floor. The house has both a summer and winter kitchen, ample storerooms and a small temple.



2. SKURGYAL SHENO

This is the shrine (*lhato*) of the village's protector deity, Skurgyal Sheno. Unlike other villages, where the shrine is commonly a built structure, here it takes the form of a large Juniper tree. A *khatag* (white ceremonial scarf) is tied around its branches and there are dedicated spaces marked out for ritual offerings and butter lamps. The horns of various animals, particularly the ibex, are placed on the branches of the tree. There is a big *darchen* (prayer flag) in front of the tree.

The Juniper tree stands next to the village's *manekhang* (community prayer hall). On the 3rd day of Losar (New Year) celebrations, the reconsecration ceremony is performed at the shrine and the *khatag* is renewed along with the prayer flags. The sanctity of the shrine is maintained at all times, for instance, its branches are never cut and fallen twigs or leaves cannot be picked up.

Near the tree, are some petroglyphs depicting human figures and the ibex. There are also scripts including Brahmini and Tibetan carved on some of the nearby rocks. This suggests that the site may have been considered sacred long before the villagers settled here.

3. MANEKHANG

This community prayer hall (*manekhng*) was built in 1860 by Meme Tashi of the Khangchenpa family. The land belonged to the family and on completion, they donated the building to Samstanling Monastery; they also sponsored the making of the statues on the altar. Lama Tsultim Nima of Samstanling Monastery was invited to inaugurate the hall.

The design of the building followed the same pattern as that of the *manekhngs* in Kyagar and Khimi villages, partly because the masons who constructed the buildings were brothers. It is a two-storey structure with eleven rooms, and some of the walls are painted with Buddhist deities. The altar has statues of Amitayus, Shakyamuni, Guru Padmasambhava, Avalokiteśvara and three statues of *Rigsum Gonbo* Bodhisattvas.

The Khangchenpa family had a long and close association with Lama Tsultim Nima, and amongst their most valuable possessions are some of his personal belongings such as a cup and saucer, hat and shoes. There is a large Poplar tree in front of their house, and members of the family recount how it sprouted from the spot in the ground at which the Lama threw his shoes upon. The tree is now quite large and has a dense outgrowth of

branches. It is considered sacred and the head of the family regularly makes offerings (*sangs-sur*) to the tree as they believe that the subterranean spirits (*klu*) reside within it. In 2022, a large branch of the tree fell off and the family thought that was inauspicious. They asked Chogon Rinpoche, a Buddhist Master, about it and he told them to seek absolution by making an offering at Yarma Gonbo Monastery.



4. PHASLHA RUDUNG LHATO

Not far from the *Chorgok* and petroglyphs, there is a small square structure that is the village shrine (*lhato*). This *lhato* is dedicated to the Khangchenpa family's protector deity, Phaslha Rudung. It is said that this deity (*lha*) came from the area of Changthang, in eastern Ladakh. Earlier the *lhato* was located in the Khangchenpa's old house, but with the deteriorating condition of their home it was decided to shift it to its present location. This shift took place some 20 to 25 years ago, and villagers say this was done in consultation with the deity.

The present structure is made of mud bricks and has been painted red. There is a bunch of Juniper branches, tied together by a white cloth, on the top. On the 3rd day of the Ladakhi Losar (New Year), everyone from the village gathers here to participate in the annual consecration rituals.



5. CHORGOK OR KHARGOK-DZA

North of the *manekhang*, on the left side of the main vehicular road that goes towards the Siachen Base Camp, there is a field of large rocks. Most of these are brownish-red in colour and have petroglyphs inscribed on them. There are drawings of the ibex, human figures, square and circular shapes amongst others. Amongst these large rocks are some ruins, which some villagers said it was of a stupa, others claimed it was of a fort.

The site is believed to be many generations old, and is considered a sacred place by the community. For instance, stones cannot be taken from here for construction and other purposes. This could be because of the ruins of stupas here or claims that sacred treasure is buried here.







TONGSTED

ཐོང་སྐོད།



TONGSTED

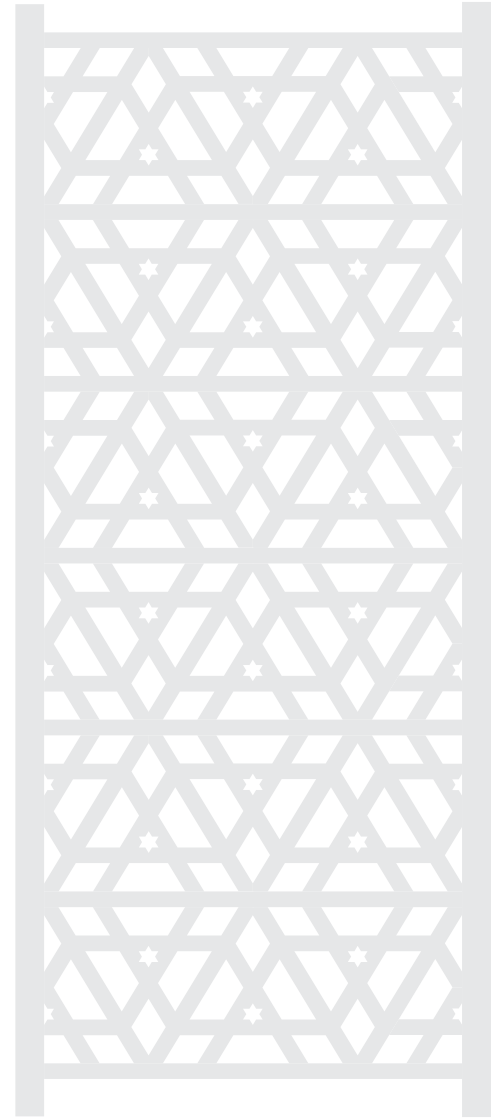
This is one of the last villages before the Siachen Glacier, and is at a short distance along the road from Henachey. A stream is a natural boundary between the two villages. The village's name is derived from two words – *tong* meaning family or household, and *stod* refers to the upper valley. This is because the first few households to settle here were positioned at a slight elevation. Over time, the village came to be more commonly known as 'Tongsted'.

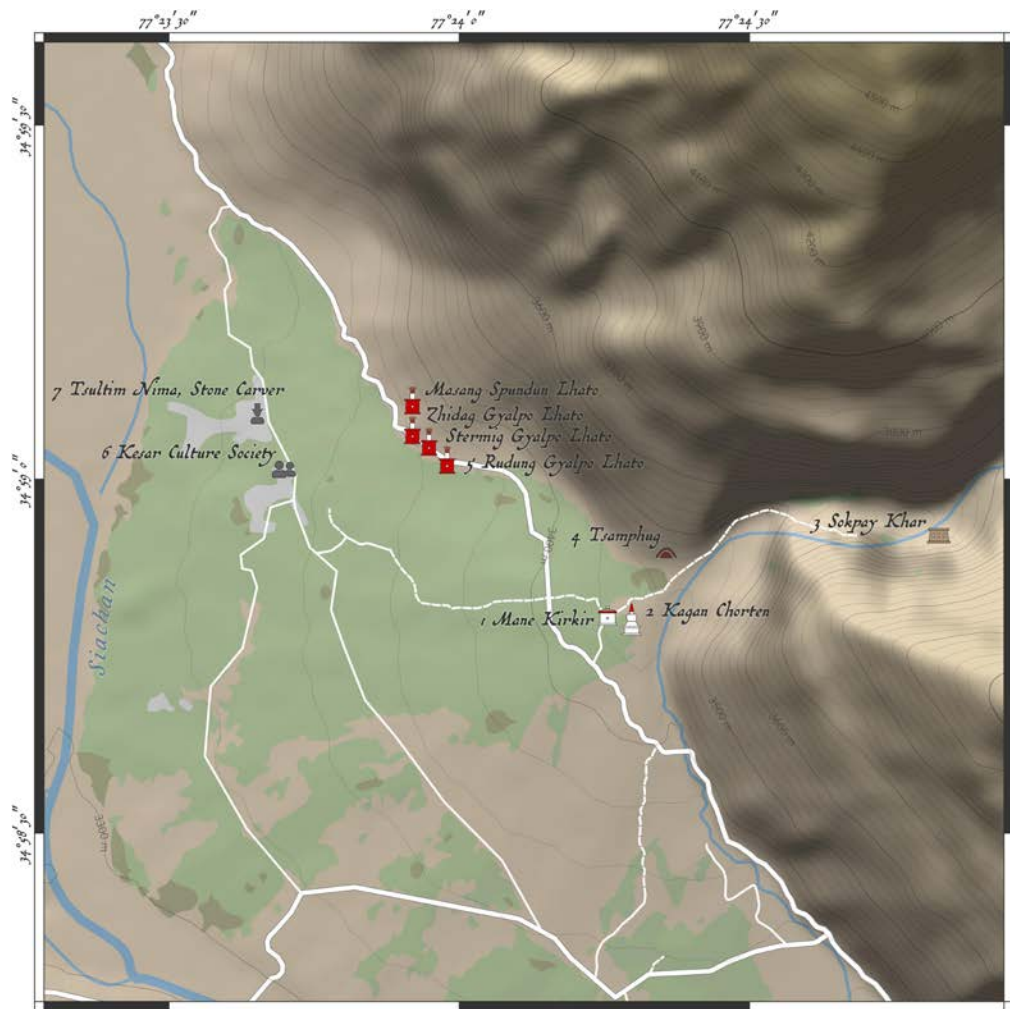
Tongsted has grown from a village of roughly seven households to the current count of 40. Set among the majestic Karakoram mountains, the views from here are stupendous. Apart from farming and herding livestock, the villagers here are avid archers. Rock and ice climbing are more recent sports that have entered their lives. Non-Indians are not allowed to visit Tongsted because of its proximity to the army's base camp that leads to the Siachen Glacier.

MAP REFERENCE

TONGSTED

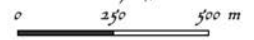
1. Mane Kirkir
2. Kagan Chorten
3. Sokpay Khar
4. Tsamphuk
5. Cluster of Lhatos
6. Kesar Culture Society
7. Tsultim Nima, Stone Carver





TONGSTED

ཐོང་སྐོར།



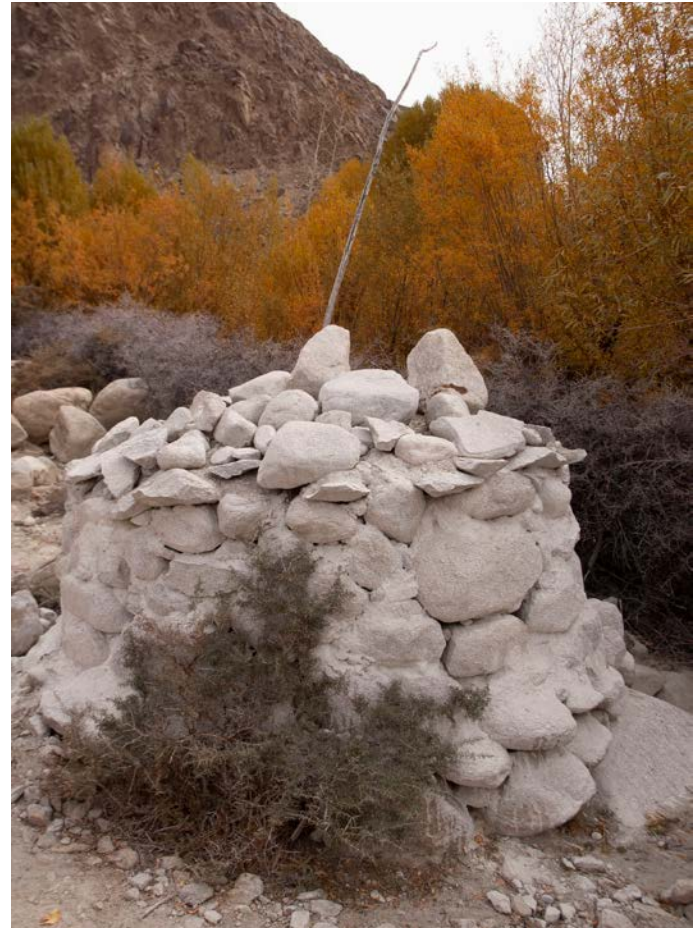
	meditation cave/house		road minor
	chorten		path/track
	mane kabum/mane kirkir		river
	lhato/altar		stream
	palace/fort/watchtower		built-up area
	self-help group/society		forest
	artisan/artist/resource person		fields & vegetation
	road major		contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Tongsted walk book listing



1. MANE KIRKIR

This circular (*kirkir*) mane (*prayer*) wall is on the road leading to the village of Warsi, along a smaller pathway on the right. The *mane* wall is built entirely with stones and mud mortar, and is white washed. Placed on its upper surface are flat stones with mantras (prayers) inscribed on them in Lantsa script. Said to date from the 1700s, some of the stones could be more recent additions.



2. KAGAN CHORTEN

Tongsted village has three stupa gates (*kagan chorten*), two of them are said to have been built by Meme Sonam from the Sasoma family, sometime in the 1700s. Meme Sonam was an astrologer (*onpo*), who was also an expert artisan and architect. He was fondly referred to in the village as '*khaspa jigspo*', a person who can excel at anything he chooses to do.

It is said that Meme Sonam was once summoned to Basgo village, in Sham region, by the king of Ladakh. The construction of the famous Chorgyal stupa there is attributed to him. The king later challenged him to display his skills in astrology in a competition with other villagers. Meme Sonam won; it is also said that at one point during the competition he made dough effigies move on their own.

This stupa acts as a gateway, and everyone who passes underneath it receives blessings. The ceiling is painted with images of various Buddhas and at the centre is the mandala of Buddha Amitayus. On the adjoining walls, there are paintings of other Bodhisattvas. This stupa was restored by the Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation (HCHF), in collaboration with the villagers of Tongsted, in 2021.



3. SOKPAY KHAR

Attacks and raids from neighbouring villages and marauding bandits was once common in Ladakh. At times like these, villagers would take refuge in the mountains surrounding their homes. If these attacks were more frequent, then they would build forts to protect themselves. In a valley above Tongsted, along the left side of the main stream which flows into the village, there is a large rock and the ruins of walls are visible around and on this. The villagers call this *khargog* or *khar nyingpa* (old fort), some called it *Sokpay khar* (Mongolian fort).



4. TSAMPHUG

On a hill above the village of Tongsted is a meditation cell, tucked away in a cave between two large boulders. It is attributed to a hermit called Tsampa Geylong, who is said to have first meditated here. Many people have used this since him, as they find it an ideal place to practice meditation. More recently, the villagers have added two more cells to the original structure. A *thangka* (scroll painting) of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara hangs in one of the cells.



5. CLUSTER OF LHATOS

Heading towards the Siachen Glacier, via the main road, there are several *lhatos* (shrines to protective deities) located in a cluster towards the end of the village. These include the village *lhato*, as well as several that are of protective deities for individual households.

The first one amongst them is the *lhato* dedicated to the Narmopa family's protector deity, Rudung Gyalpo (upper left). Beside this are two more *lhato*'s that are family protector deities, one is Zhidag Gyalpo (upper right) and the other is Masang Spundun (bottom left). The village *lhato* is dedicated to the protector deity, Stermig Gyalpo (bottom right).

The *lhatos* are all small square-shaped structures, and on the roof there are bunches of Juniper branches tied together with a *khatag* (white ceremonial scarf). These are renewed once a year, generally around Losar (New Year).



6. KESAR CULTURE SOCIETY

The Kesar saga is a popular legend of a god-like king and his heroic deeds. It is widely recited from Mongolia through Tibet and Ladakh. The narrations, sometimes told by professional storytellers, can take up to weeks or even months to finish the whole story. With the introduction of new forms of media, these recitations of the Kesar saga are less common.

In 1994, the villagers of Yarma initiated an effort to revive these storytelling sessions. They set up the Kesar Culture Society and perform various scenes from the saga throughout Ladakh, and have also had the opportunity to perform in Bhutan and Nepal.



7. TSULTIM NIMA, STONE CARVER

The art of stone carving, with an emphasis on the inscription of *mantras* (prayers), on stone is not that commonly practiced in Ladakh nowadays. In an effort to revive it, in 2018, an initiative was started by the Councillor of Yarma village and the instructor was Sonam Wangdus from Khimi village. Out of the ten men trained, Tsultim Nima is the only one that continues to practice this art. He can now skilfully engrave mantras such as 'om mani padme hum' or 'banzar pani hum' amongst others on the flat surface of soft stones.

In addition, he has learnt to make the *Rigsum Gonbo* (three auspicious stupas) that are placed above the entrance door of houses for veneration and blessings as people pass under. His tools consist of a *zongbu* (a sharp pointed shaft of metal) used to make the designs and letters with the help of a small hammer. The best stones for this come from Agyam village.





KUBET

ཀུ་བཱེད།

KUBET

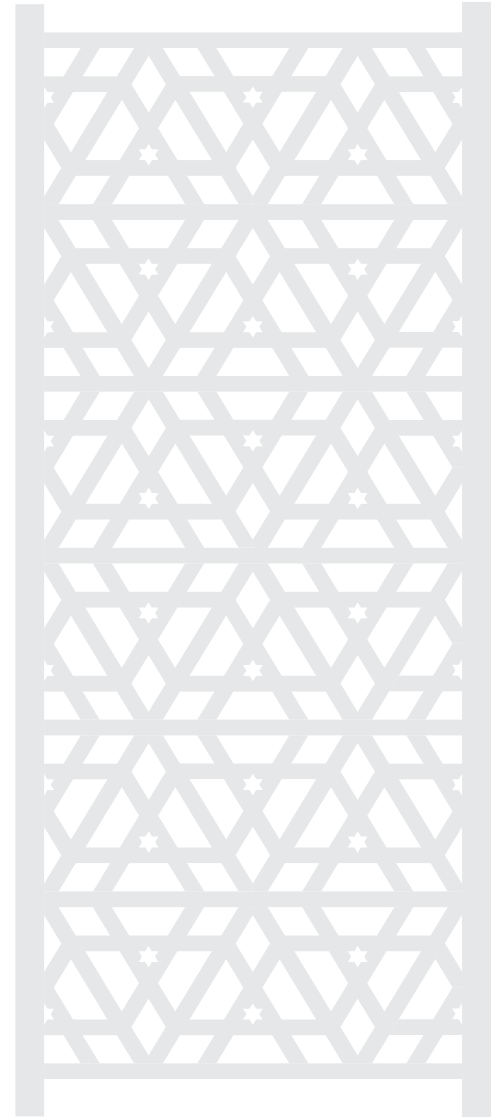
Kubet is the first village after crossing the stream at Hargam. It has grown from a village of five households to over 30 now. The place is well-known for the gold once found near its river banks, as well as the raw material out of which the popular stone pots (*dolthok*), once widely used in Ladakh for cooking, are made. While it is many generations since gold was last collected here, the remnants of equipment once used to procure and sieve this precious metal can still be found in some of the old homes there. It was mainly men from Baltistan that would come here in search of the gold, but a flood once led to the destruction of the river bank and this made it harder to find it, so they stopped coming.

Oral history states that the name of the village was originally ‘Kumutha’, derived from a medicinal plant available in the surrounding region. Another interpretation for the name is that it is derived from the name of a nearby hill called ‘Kuet’ in the high pastures (*phu*) above the village. Most of the stones used for making the *dolthok* also come from this hill.

MAP REFERENCE

KUBET

1. Phurdumchan Zampa
2. Chortenchen House
3. Onpo, Tsering Nurboo
4. Tong-nge Mane





KUBET

ཀུབེཏི



0 250 500 m



Numbers and names follow Kubet walk book listing



1. PHURDUMCHAN ZAMPA

Old, wooden suspension bridges that are used only for pedestrian traffic are gradually becoming a rare sight in Ladakh. Most of them have been removed and replaced by new concrete and steel bridges. Kubet is exceptional, in the sense that the old bridge has been maintained alongside the new one. It is made from logs of the Poplar tree, now tied together with metal ropes though in the past these ropes would have been made from goat and yak hair. It is popularly known as Phurdumchan Zampa, which means a 'bridge that sways' (*phurdumchan* means to sway, bridge is *zampa*). The bridge connects Kubet and Taksha villages.



2. CHORTENCHEN HOUSE

This is one of the first residential houses in the village, said to date from the early 1700s. It is located towards the lower part of Kubet, along the Siachen River, and from here panoramic views of the villages of Taksha and Hargam are possible. The house acquires its name from the *chorten* (stupa) positioned above the gateway to the courtyard; this is a *kagan* (gateway) stupa. The Chortenchen house is a two-storeyed structure with nine rooms, the lower is built with stones and mud mortar and the upper floor with sun-dried mud bricks. The family now resides in a new house nearby, but the temple in the old house has not been moved and continues to be used.



3. ONPO, TSERING NURBOO

Hailing from a long line of descendants, Tsering Nurboo comes from a family that has an extensive association with astrology in Ladakh. Now 84 years old, Nurboo initially worked for the army and on retirement started studying and practicing traditional astrology.

He studied and received his training from his father, who was an established traditional Astro-Science practitioner (onpo). He recalls that when his father showed no inclination to continue the family's tradition, his grandfather admonished him and sent him to Lakjung village to learn from a master onpo there called Skalzang.

Onpos essentially serve the community with their deep knowledge of Tibetan Astro-Science, they are consulted before making important decisions related to agriculture, such as when to start sowing, or setting the date for a marriage. They are also consulted when births or deaths take place, or when natural calamities befall a village.



4. TONG-NGE MANE

This is a cluster of monumental stupas, not far from the ruins of the village's old settlement. There are five stupas, five circular *mane* (prayer) walls and three rectangular *mane* walls. The site is considered as a highly sacred one, this is largely because one of the stupas contains the relics of Buddha Kassapa (Sangyas Odsrung). Amongst the *mane* stones placed on top of one of the *mane* walls, there is the mention of the name of one of the kings of Ladakh, Tsewang Namgyal. There were two kings by the same name in the Namgyal dynasty, one in the 16th century and another in the 18th century. The inscription does not indicate which king is being referred to, so villagers say this stupa (and by extension the group) could date from either century. Another *mane* stone has the name Stanzin Dolma carved on it, it is probably that of one of the sponsors of these religious structures. The villagers recall that at one time the fame of these stupas had spread throughout Ladakh and had even reached Tibet. Before 1959, when monks from Ladakh would travel to Tibet for religious teachings, they would be asked about them and especially about the one that contains the relics of Buddha Kassapa. Today, pilgrims come from different parts of Nubra to visit this site and specially to perform circumambulations around the stupas for gaining religious merits





YENCHU

དབྱེན་ཆུ།

YENCHU

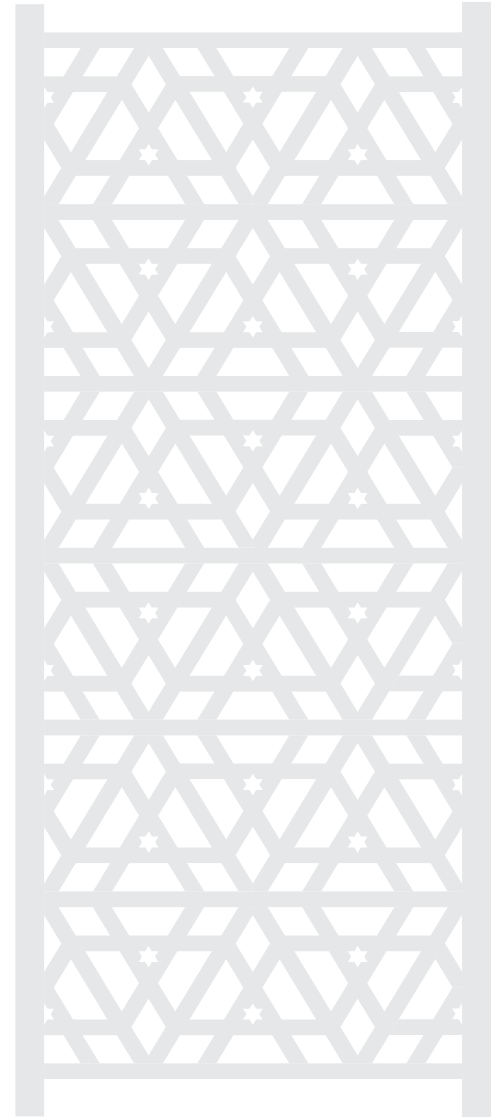
Yenchu or *Enchu* refers to a secluded area where there is a water body (*en* refers to secluded or isolated and *chu* is water). This reference is to a spring, in the valley near Yenchu, whose water is used for drinking and irrigation by the residents of the village.

Yenchu is a small hamlet, between Kubet and Ayee, with only three households. The area surrounding the village is lush and green and in spring there are many wild rose bushes in bloom.

MAP REFERENCE

YENCHU

1. Mane Sungjon
2. Chorten Sumtsek and Mane Wall



77°29' 00" E

77°29' 30" E

77°30' 00" E

34°55' 00" N

34°49' 30" N



YENCHU

དབེན་ཅུ།



0 250 500 m



	temple		river
	chorten		stream
	mane wall		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)
	path/track		

Numbers and names follow Yenchu walk book listing



1. MANE SUNGJON

On the hill facing Yenchu, there is the well-known Mane Sungjon, which is said to date from the early 1700s. Set against the mountain, the path to reach here is slightly uneven, but the location is considered very sacred by the villagers as it represents all the three elements associated with the Buddha: body (*sku*), speech (*sung*) and mind (*thugs*). The statues represent the *sku*, the prayer wheel represents the *sung* and the stupa represents the *thugs*.

It is a one-storey structure with three rooms, made with sundried mud bricks and stone masonry. The door opens directly into the *dukhang* (assembly hall), and on the altar there are statues of the four-armed Chanrazig, Chushigzhal and three protector deities. There are two rooms adjacent to the *dukhang*, one is the kitchen, and the other a room for brewing *chang* (barley beer). The temple falls under the jurisdiction of Hemis Monastery.

On the left of the altar is a wooden prayer wheel which is run by water, and near the entrance there is a Changchub stupa. The prayer wheel is highly venerated and it from this that the place derives its name '*sungjon*' (speech or to speak). Local folklore says that the prayer wheel once spoke to a hermit, and other stories recount how it was once heard chanting the compassion man-

tra of Avalokiteśvara '*om mani padme hung*'. It is also claimed that a hand-turned prayer wheel, belonging to one of the kings of Ladakh, Jamyang Namgyal, was placed inside the wooden prayer wheel as an offering, but there is no way to confirm this.





2. CHORTEN SUMTSEK AND MANE WALL

Along the main road that goes to Ayee village, there is a group of stupas and a *mane* (prayer) wall on the left side of the road. They are located right in front of the house of the Yenchu Yogmapa family, on land that belongs to them. These structures are owned by the Yenchu Yogma family but are maintained and regularly whitewashed by the community along with the other religious structures in the village.

One stupa in particular, is unique in style and does not appear to belong to any of the eight different types of Buddhist stupas commonly seen in Ladakh or Tibet. It is a three-storeyed (*sumstek*) structure with small window-like openings on its façade, on all three levels. It is made of stone and mud masonry and has been whitewashed. Some of the villagers referred to the structure as *Khangbu Tsikpa*, a house (*khangbu*) like stupa with inner rooms or walls (*tsikpa*). No information is available about the age or date of this structure.







AYEE

ཨ་ཡེ།

AYEE

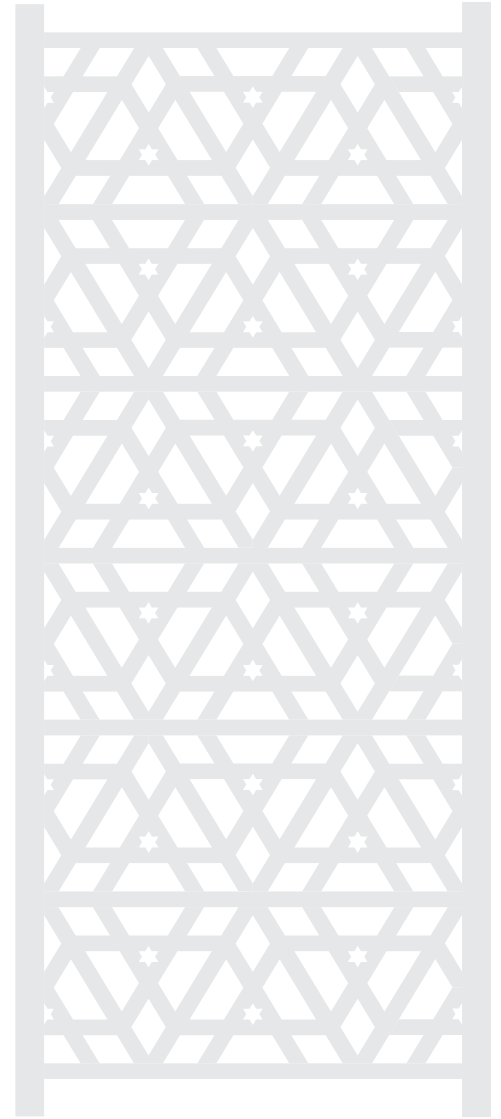
Ayee is said to be an exceptionally beautiful village, lush and green. It is this attribute that has led to the village's name 'Ayee' which in the Ladakhi language, is an expression of something beautiful. Residents of Ayee commented that people passing through the village would exclaim and appreciate its beauty. Another interpretation for the name, is that it is derived from the word *yae*, where *ya* means upper or ahead. Initially the village was located on the higher slopes of the mountain, slightly lower than a meditation cave that is there, before it moved to the more flat areas below the mountain. Ayee is said to be rich in minerals and crystals such as *rindi* (lead) and *dangzung* (shilajit), as well as *kwat* (quartz).

Originally, there were four households in Ayee – Khangchenpa, Gonbopa, Tongdunpa and Kutipa – they share a strong bond with each other, celebrate Losar (New Year) together and make common offerings of water from their springs, namely Chumburma and Tamburma, and to their protective deity Gonbo Charok Dongchan. The self-emanated deity is on the hill facing the village. This hill also has a retreat in a cave, called Tsamphug Sergi Bumtsang. It is believed that a great Yogi called Lama Pirang Ralchen built this retreat by disguising himself as a bee, for it was not humanly possible to build at such a steep height. The retreat has the *Zhi-thro* mandala painted on the walls. A set of seven pebbles on the hill slope known as *Shakma-dun* and a Cedar tree are other sacred objects in the village. For water, Ayee relies on the spring in Yenchu. It is claimed that a descendant of the Khangchenpa family singlehandedly toiled to build a canal, diverting the water from Yenchu to Ayee in the 16th century. He was rewarded by the villagers and his fields received 'two water turns' (*chu-res*) for irrigation, which was quite an honour given the water scarcity the village always faced.

MAP REFERENCE

AYEE

1. Gonbopa Old House
2. Khangchenpa Chodkhang
3. Phalha Zangnam Lhato
4. Shugpa, Sacred Juniper Tree
5. Balti Tong
6. Tsamphug Sergi Bumtsang

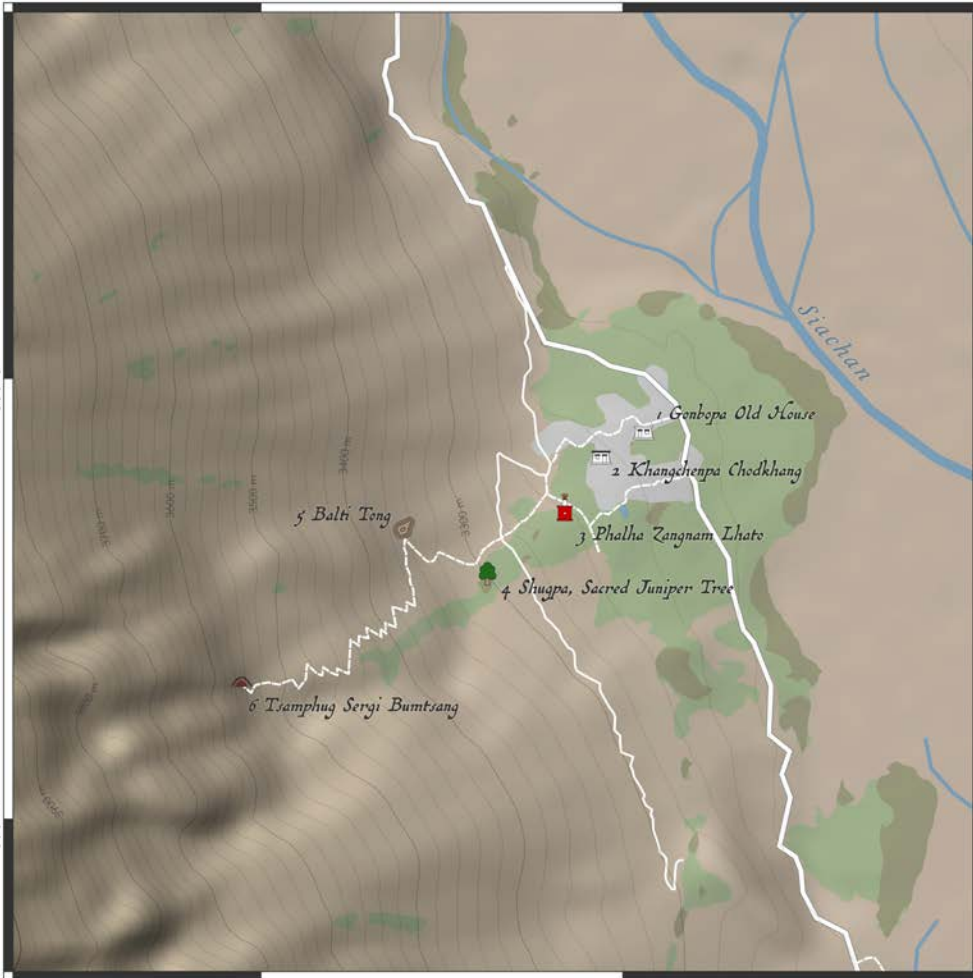


77°28'30"

77°29'0"

34°50'30"

34°50'0"



AYEE ཨེའི



0 250 500 m

	temple		path/track
	meditation cave/house		river
	lhato/altar		stream
	sacred tree		lake/pond
	historic house		built-up area
	natural resource		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Ayee walk book listing



1. GONBOPA OLD HOUSE

According to revenue records, the Gonbopa family are one amongst the first four families that settled at Ayee. Their house is said to date from the 1700s, it is a two-storey structure with the chapel on the upper floor.

A large courtyard around the house has a pole holding prayer flags (*darchen*) in the centre and is surrounded by two Changchub stupas, there is also a prayer wheel nearby. The statue of Guru Padmasambhava in their chapel is considered especially sacred. Family members narrate a night when there was a heavy downpour, and the roof of the chapel collapsed. They rushed to move the statues, as most of them were made of clay. However, the statue of Padmasambhava could not be lifted, it was as if it had suddenly gained tremendous weight. Sensing the deity's displeasure at being so hastily moved, the family head offered it incense. Suddenly, the statue became light again and was easy to move.



2. KHANGCHENPA CHODKHANG

The Khangchenpa are also amongst the earliest families to settle at Ayee, and their chapel dates from the late 1600s. It is a single-storey structure, and has wall paintings of various Buddhist deities. The Khangchenpa family played a role in the village's affairs, and next to the chapel there used to be a large room where villagers would gather for community prayers.

As a result of its dilapidated state, the family built a new chapel, beside the old one, in 2010. However, soon after the move, there were several incidents where misfortune occurred in the family. After consulting a lama, they were told that the statues had been shifted without their consent. So a ritual was held to pacify the statues, and gain their forgiveness and approval.



3. PHALHA ZANGNAM LHATO

A short distance from the sacred Juniper tree, there is a *lhato* (shrine) on the right side of the road. This *lhato* is dedicated to the protector deity, Zangnam Gyalpo. This is not a village *lhato*, but belongs to a *phaspun* (group of patrilineal families related through kin). All the members of the *phaspun* gather at the *lhato* to perform rituals, these are generally carried out by the Khangchenpa family.

The *lhato* is a small square-like structure, made with mud bricks and is painted red in colour. There is a bunch of Juniper branches on the top, tied together by a white cloth. During Losar (New Year) rituals are held to renew the contents of the *lhato*.



4. SHUGPA, SACRED JUNIPER TREE

There is a most majestic, though unusual, Juniper tree at Aye, where the branches on one side are dry and gnarled, and the other is green and leafy. Legend has it that one year, in the 16th century, the tree suddenly dried up. On consulting an oracle, the villagers were informed that it indicated some harm would befall the King Jamyang Namgyal. When news reached the King, he ordered the tree to be axed and sent three of his men to carry this out. The moment their axe hit the tree, blood started spewing out and, horrified, they stopped striking it. Failing at their mission, the men returned to Leh but it is said they went missing and never reached the town. That same year, the King was diagnosed with leprosy. On consulting with monks, he was told it was because he had hurt the sentiments of the *sadak* (spirits of the land) at the villages of Hemis Shukpachan and Chemde, and the spirits inhabiting this tree.

Realising the tree's power, the King later visited Aye and made offerings to the tree. As a token of appreciation, he gifted land to the oracle who was from the Khangchenpa family. To show their gratitude to the tree, every spring the villagers perform a ritual and make offerings to it.



5. BALTI TONG

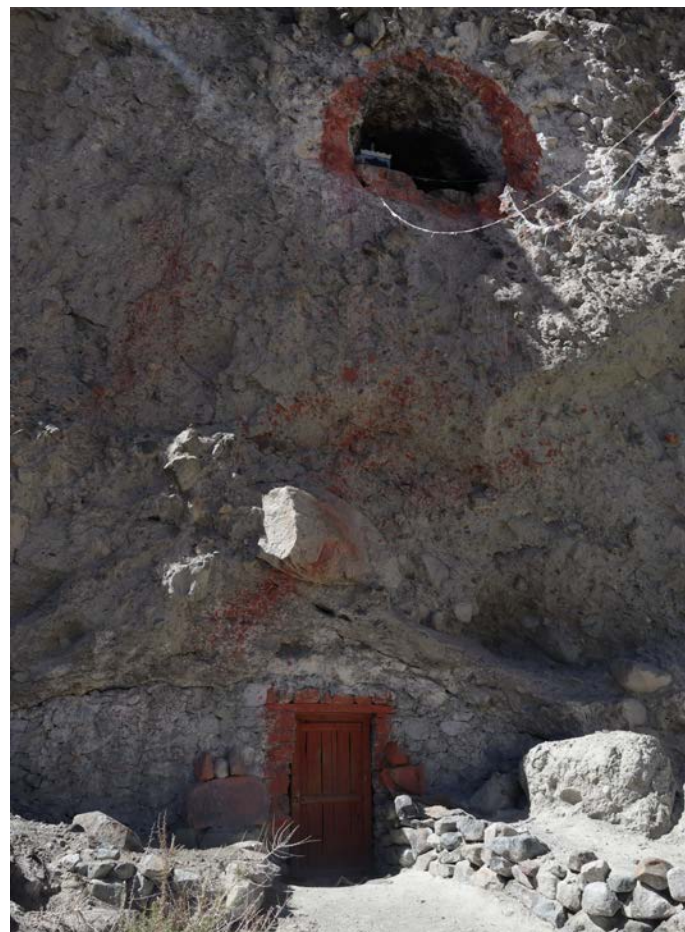
Along the path leading to the meditation cave, there are the ruins of an earlier settlement. The walls, made by stacking flat stones, is all that remains of these structures. The settlement is referred to as 'Balti Tong' as it is said that people from Baltistan (now in Pakistan) used to come here to harvest a mineral called *rindi* (lead), and they lived in these spaces. Another belief is that this may have been the site of the first settlement at Ayee, before the villagers moved lower down to its present location. Living at a height was always advantageous in the past, especially when attacks or raids from neighbouring villages was fairly common.



6. TSAMPHUG SERGI BUMTSANG

The Siachen valley has several meditation caves, this one is said to date from the 13th century and similar to the meditation caves of Dzongsa and Warsi it is connected to Lama Pirang Ralchen. It is thought that he first built the structure around the cave, or that it already existed and he restored it. He was followed by another renowned hermit called Tsampa Norbu, who was also considered to be Lama Pirang's reincarnation. The cave continues to be a popular retreat for devotees, though it is challenging as some meditators claim to hear the voices of guardian spirits (*zhi-dak*).

The cave is located on the mountain facing Ayee, and it takes about an hour to reach from the village. A small door, painted red, leads to the cave and within this a two-storey structure exists; both levels are connected by a wooden ladder. The lower floor is dark and there is not much here, but the upper floor has one room used for both meditation and as a kitchen, there is a clay stove (*thab*) here, and a toilet beside it. Light comes through a large opening in the cave, and from here the village of Ayee is visible. Outside the cave is a large stone slab and beside this stones of different sizes, these are used to strike the slab and through the different sounds made the meditator communicates with the villagers below.





ARANU

ཨ་ར་རུག་།

ARANU

Aranu is situated on the banks of the Siachen River, it is the first village sighted when crossing the Tulumputi pass. The village itself is distinctly divided into two parts, one called *gongma* (upper) and the other *yogma* (lower). Initially there were 15 households in the former and five in the latter. That number has now grown to 50 and 20 respectively.

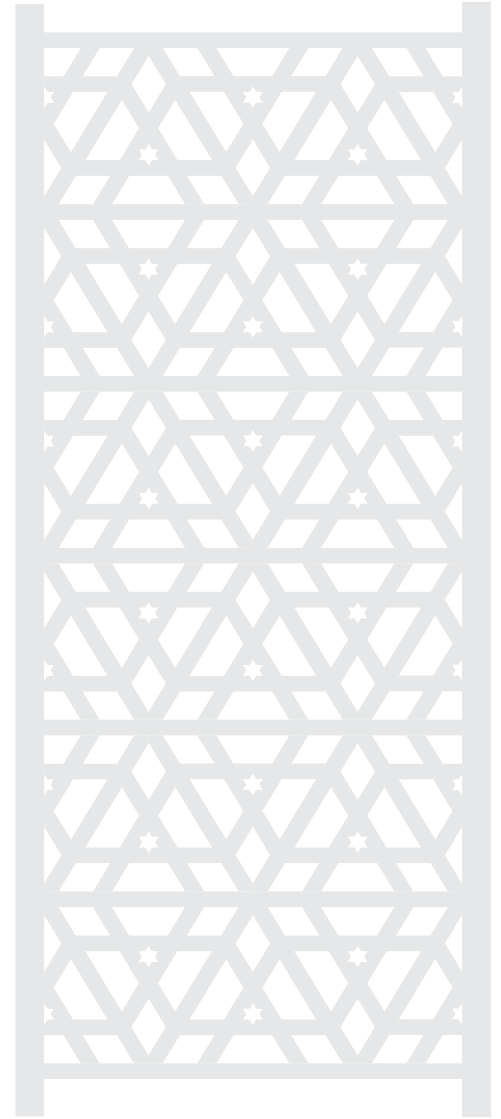
The name 'Aranu' is said to be the result of two naturally formed letters – 'Ah' and 'Ra' – on nearby rocks, in the Tibetan script. Another interpretation of the name, is that when the legendary King Kesar was returning after his victorious battle in Horyul, on seeing the first village from the Tulumputi pass he cried out '*Arey Nub Ki Yu!*'. That later became 'Aranu'.

The village is rich in folklore and one story talks about a high lama called Utayana who visited the village. He saw an old woman, carrying a baby on her back, ploughing and sowing the seeds in her field with great labour. Out of compassion, the lama used his mystical powers and sowed the seeds at one go. In remembrance of this, the villagers ritually enact *gyastor* (sowing seeds at once) at the start of the sowing season.

MAP REFERENCE

ARANU

1. Khangchenpa Old House
2. Yogmapa House
3. Lhuchang, Juniper Tree
4. Ayapa Old House
5. Village and Family Lhatos
6. Tsetan Motup, Stupa Restorer
7. Chorten Sumtsek
8. Maney Patak
9. Sacred Juniper Tree
10. Watchtower, Piu-chan
11. Mystical Imprints

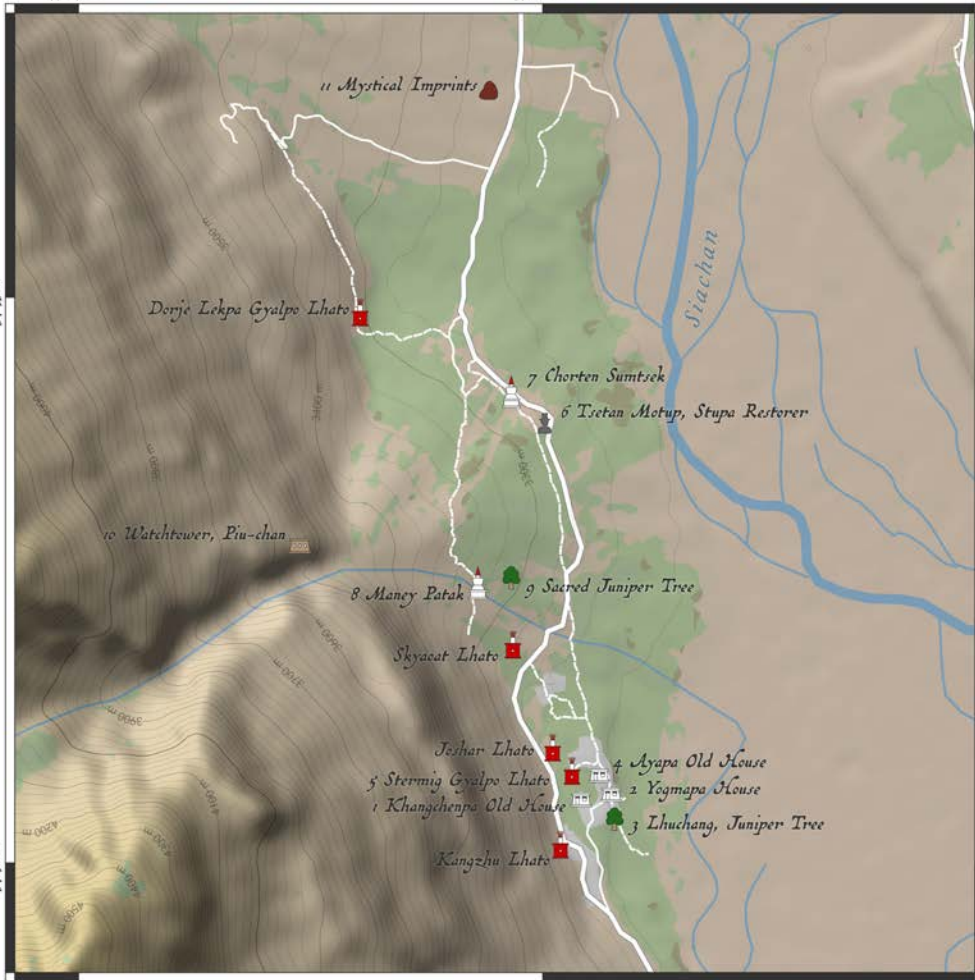


77°27' 0"

77°28' 0"

34°59' 0"

34°54' 0"



ARANU

ཨ་རན་ཀུ་ཤ།



0 250 500 m

	chorten		road minor
	lhato/altar		path/track
	sacred rock/mountain		river
	sacred tree		stream
	palace/fort/watchtower		built-up area
	historic house		forest
	artisan/artist/resource person		fields & vegetation
	road major		contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Aranu walk book listing



1. KHANGCHENPA OLD HOUSE

The Khangchenpa family home is a two-storey structure, with the chapel located on the upper floor. Family members say they were told that the house was built in the 1800s by Tsering Sampel. It was often used by lamas and other spiritually inclined people as a place for a retreat. In fact, the Khangchenpa family built another home, not far from here, for themselves and let their old home remain as a retreat. Though the house is no longer used, the chapel is still there. It contains a statue of the eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara along with a wooden Changchub stupa, and a prayer wheel.



2. YOGMAPA HOUSE

This is probably one of the oldest known structures in the village as it dates from the early 1600s, and though now not in a very good condition the building is still revered because it once held the family's chapel. The house belongs to the Yogmapa family and is located on the left side of the main road while going towards Aranu Gongma. In 2021, the family built a new house and moved there. At this time, they also shifted the contents of their chapel, which includes clay statues of Manjushri, four-armed Avalokiteśvara, Buddha Shakyamuni, and Tara.



3. LHUCHANG, JUNIPER TREE

A tree nearby, also belonging to the Yogmapa family, has been designated as a *Lhu-chang*. It is believed that the tree is inhabited by a spirit of the subterranean world called *Lhu Tolba Nagpa*. This tree can also not be disturbed or any of its branches removed, even when they fall, as then some misfortune or illness would occur. Every month the Yogmapa family makes offerings to the tree, to appease the spirit that lives within it.



4. AYAPA OLD HOUSE

This is another of the old houses where the chapel is still in use, though the family has moved to a new house nearby. The two-storey building dates to the early 1600s, and is a fairly large structure with seven rooms. The chapel, located on the upper floor, has clay statues of Dorje Sempa, Manjushri, Buddha Shakyamuni, Jo Rinpoche and Guru Padmasambhava. There is also a wooden prayer wheel here. Members of the family come here every day to light butter lamps (*chodme*), and once a month they offer incense (*sang*) at the chapel.



5. VILLAGE AND FAMILY LHATOS

Aranu has many *lhatos* (shrines for protector deities), for the village as well as for individual households. The *lhatos* are similar in structure, a cube-shaped form made from mud bricks and generally painted white. On the top they have a bunch of Juniper branches tied together by a white cloth or a *khatag* (ceremonial white scarf). Most of these *lhatos* have their contents, such as the Juniper branches and white cloth, renewed during the month of Losar (New Year).

The village *lhato* is located in Aranu Yogma, it stands on a large boulder a little after the Government School (upper left). The *lhato* is dedicated to Stermig Gyalpo, and the villagers make offerings of incense here every month.

At a short distance, in the compound of the Mirponpa family is the *lhato* of their protector deity Kangzhu Gyalpo (upper right). Not far from here, in the grounds of the Yogmapa family, is their *lhato* dedicated to their protector deity Joshar Gyalpo (lower left). Not far from here is another *lhato*, it belongs to the Khangchen-pa family and is for their protector deity, Skyaoat Gyalpo (lower right). It is located at some height, on a large boulder, and is reached by a wooden ladder.



6. TSETAN MOTUP, STUPA RESTORER

The region of Ladakh is dotted with stupas, most of them built for meritorious acts and others hold the remains of revered individuals. These structures are largely built from mud, and over time they deteriorate and need attention. Restoring them is also in itself considered an act of gaining merit.

Tsetan Motup is a stupa restorer, he received his training in 2019, from the Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation (HCHF). He says that to date, he has restored over 100 stupas throughout Ladakh. Initially it took him and his co-workers 15 days to restore one, but now they work faster and can do one stupa in a week. Since most of the stupas they restore are heritage, they ensure they use only the same local materials.



7. CHORTEN SUMTSEK

Opposite the Maney Patak is a unique three-storeyed stupa. This is just at the start of the Aranu Gongma village. It is a three-storey, staggered structure, where the levels decrease in size from the bottom to the top. The stupa is highly revered by all the villagers, and some claim that there is a belief that has been passed on for generations that this stupa contains some relics of the Buddha, specifically his teeth. Thus, circumambulating it is considered especially virtuous.



8. MANEY PATAK

Adjacent to the stream, on the left side of the main road, there is a cluster of stupas and *mane* (prayer) walls, locally known as Maney Patak. This is generally seen as a reference 'to the end of something', and here it is thought that there were once 108 stupas and the Maney Patak marked the end of the line. Villagers can often be seen circumambulating all these structures.

The site contains 12 Changchub stupas, one Kagan stupa, two rectangular *mane* walls and one prayer



9. SACRED JUNIPER TREE

wheel amongst other smaller structures. At the front of this cluster is a *Digshag Mane*, with the *Digshag* prayer inscribed on it, which is said to have been shifted to this place in 2012, though it is not known from where. The Kagan stupa, located in the centre of the group is said to have been built by a lama called Urgain Tsewang. The villagers say that this lama lived in the 1970s so it probably dates from that time. The prayer wheel is said to be built by Ngawang Tundup from the village in the 1980s.



There is a large Juniper tree in Aranu Yogma, that is said to be over 800 years old. It lies within a fenced area and belongs to the Yogmapa family. The tree is considered sacred (*Ihar-chang*), and villagers recount a story told about an elderly woman who once attempted to climb the tree to collect its sap. Unfortunately, she fell and died. Since then the villagers have stopped taking even the fallen branches from the tree, which they used earlier as incense, for fear some misfortune may befall them.



10. WATCHTOWER, PIU-CHAN

Nubra was once known to have a string of watchtowers, these were primarily to be able to view imminent dangers in the forms of attacks by raiders or impending floods. From their parapets, the villagers would burn torches and through the smoke produced they would send messages across the valley to alert the people. Now, very few of these watchtowers exist or if they do then the walls have crumbled leaving only the foundations visible.

The tower in Aranu is two-storey high and would warn villagers of attacks by raiders coming from across the pass at Saser La. There was also a watchtower at Saser La, and the one at Aranu would relay the message on seeing the one at the pass. The message would then go from Aranu to Tirisha, followed by Burma and other villages in the valley. Villagers recalled once that in 1925 a smoke alarm was sighted at the Tulumputi pass and then relayed through Aranu to other villages, conveying that the Khomdan Glacier had burst. Everyone panicked and ran from their homes, but it turned out to be a fire made by a trader from Central Asia, to warm himself.



Photo Courtesy : Quentin Devers

11. MYSTICAL IMPRINTS

Imprints on rocks in Ladakh are of footprints of holy lamas or kings, and sometimes their vehicles. This one is of the hoofprints made by the legendary King Kesar's horse Skyangjung Yarpa, as Kesar was on his way to Horyul.

Nearby, another rock, has the imprint of a *damru* (hand drum). This is said to belong to a mystic who left his drum on a stone here.





KHIMI

ཁྱི་མི།

KHIMI

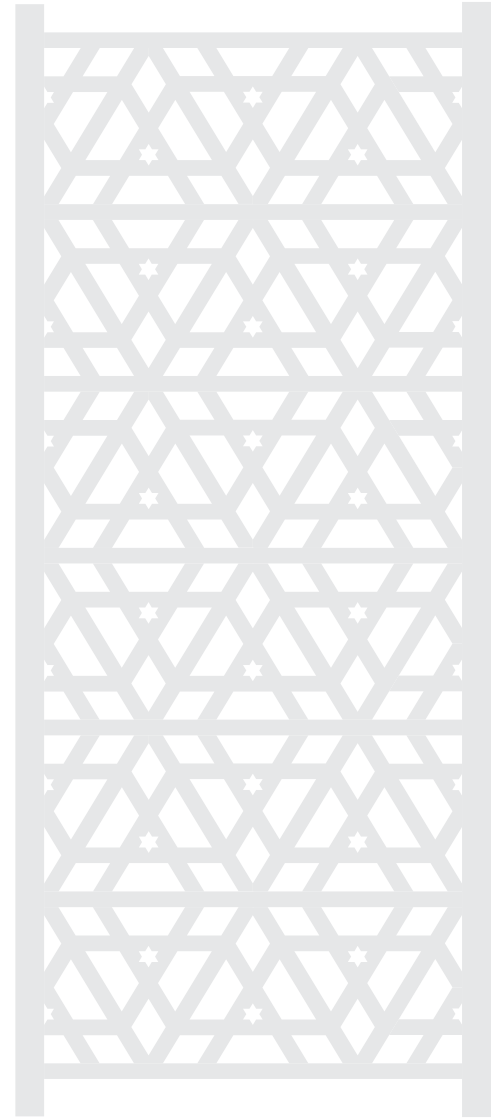
An old song titled '*Khimi Tokpo*' describes the village as *Skyidmi-ling*, a place of joyful people. Over time, *skyidmi* has become Khimi. The village is a half-hour drive from Aranu.

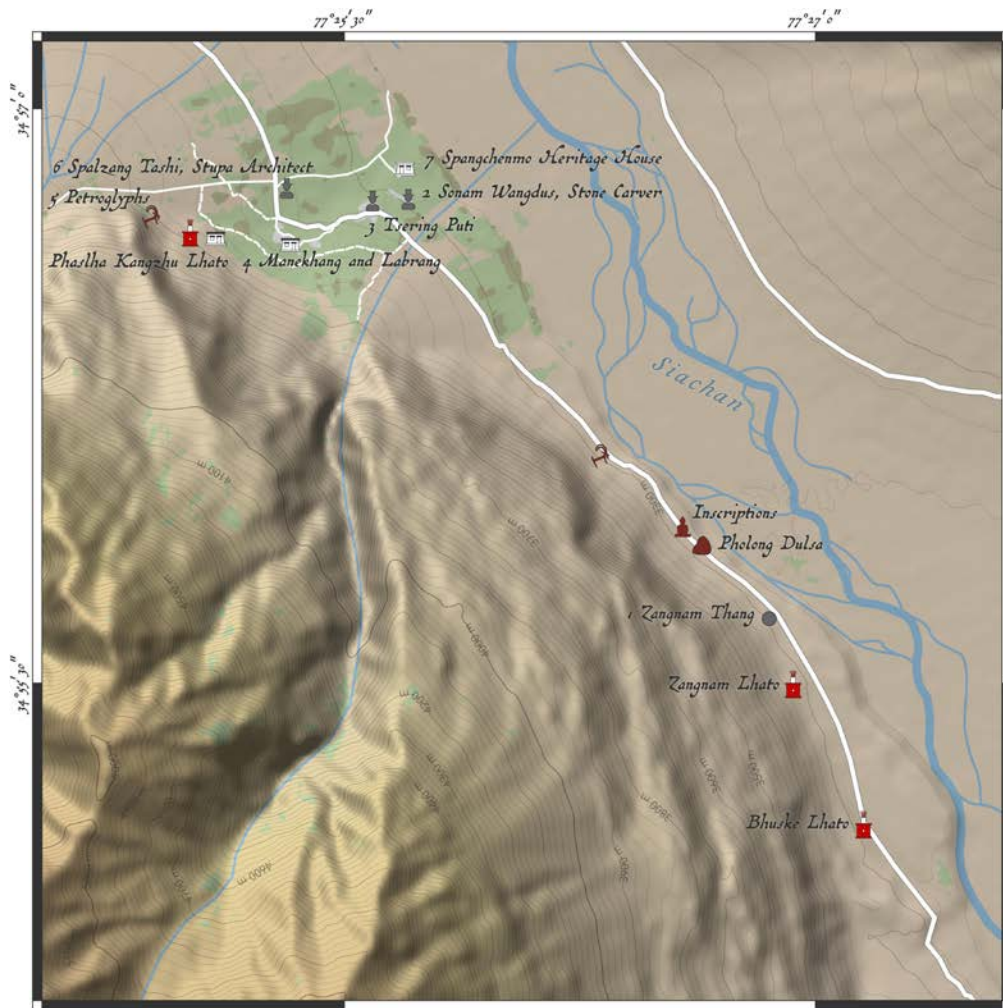
In Ladakh, the distribution of the water irrigation system is at times indicative of a village's history and growth. Khimi initially had five households, and this can be seen from their rights to water for their fields. Today, that number has grown to twenty. Some part of the agricultural lands in the village belong to Samstanling and Yarma Gonbo Monasteries, the villagers who cultivate them give a percentage of the yield to the monasteries.

MAP REFERENCE

KHIMI

1. Zangnam Thang
2. Sonam Wangdus, Stone Carver
3. Tsering Puti
4. Manekhang and Labrang
5. Petroglyphs
6. Spalzung Tashi, Stupa Architect
7. Spangchenmo Heritage House





KHIMI

ཁིམི



0 250 500 m

	temple		road minor
	lhato/altar		path/track
	rock carving/statue		river
	petroglyph		stream
	sacred rock/mountain		built-up area
	historic house		forest
	artisan/artist/resource person		fields & vegetation
	historic site other		contours (20 m)
	road major		

Numbers and names follow Khimi walk book listing



1. ZANGNAM THANG

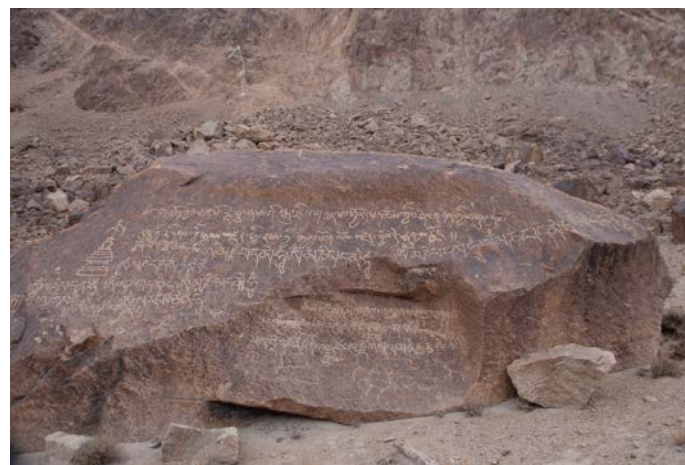
While going from Aranu to Khimi, there is a vast stretch of open land and this has several rock inscriptions, petroglyphs, self-emanated Buddhist deities and altars (*lhato*) of village protectors amongst other sites. The *thang* (flat stretch of land) gets its name from the altar of the protective deity Zangnam (upper left). Perched overlooking the village, Zangnam was one of seven siblings who came from Yarkand to Nubra. One settled in Tirisha and another in Koyak, one went as far as Sakti near Leh and the whereabouts of the others are not known. They were powerful and used their spiritual force for the village's benefit, over time they came to be venerated. The villagers make regular offerings here and it is said in the past these consisted of an eight year old boy or a colt or filly. This has now been replaced by offering a heart-shaped effigy made from flour and painted red.

Not far from here, there is the 'Bhuske *Lhato*' (upper right). Parents come here to find out the gender of their unborn children, and the probability of them following a spiritual path. This is done by picking up a handful of mud from a deep burrow at the base of the *lhato* and examining it for white, black or yellow strains of hair.

White hair means a son will be born, black a girl, and yellow a monk or nun.

Zangnam Thang is also dotted with a number of stone piles locally called *thegor* (lower left). It is believed that these stone piles are the resting places for dead souls, as it provides them shade during their afterlife journey. Travellers, traders and pilgrims, as well as local shepherds have built these large *thegors* over the centuries.

There are a number of petroglyphs (lower right) in the area, as well as rocks inscribed with Buddhist mantras. There is also a large boulder with a hole that passes through it, popularly known as '*Pholong Dulsar*'. Being able to crawl through the hole and emerge on the other side, is said to be a sign of a person's good character. It is said that only good people can pass through the hole, while bad people get stuck in it. Villagers narrate stories about large built men easily passing through, while their skinny counterparts fail to do so.



2. SONAM WANGDUS, STONE CARVER

Mantras, inscribed on stone, are a common sight in Ladakh. They are said to bless the landscape around them, and the people who walk through it, and also bring merit to the maker. Sonam Wangdus has been inscribing mantras on rocks and small flat pieces of stones for *mane* (prayer) walls, for a long time now. His most trusted tool is the *zongbu*, a sharp pointed implement with a short handle. His most important work so far has been for a *mane* wall close to Zangnam *lhato*.



3. TSERING PUTI

Music and songs are popular throughout Ladakh. Through them stories emerge on the region's history, topography, important events and personalities. Tsering Puti is an avid singer and many of the songs she relates are from the folk genre, and are about her village Khimi or important historical events. Her favourite is a song called 'Khimi Tokpo', it was written by a woman called Tsering Kunzom, who was a member of Khimi's Khangchenpa family. The words reflect Kunzom's ecstasy towards the pilgrimage she made to the sacred peak of *Kangri Shelma*, located upstream from Khimi's glacial waters. The song begins with praises to her parents.



Khimi Tokpo

*My father is like the glacial peak on the right,
My mother is like the turquoise lake in the north,*

*My brother is like a fresh yak butter offering,
The girl, myself, is like barley nectar.*

*Oh, magnificent tokpo (stream) of Khimi,
When we friends cross it, the stream is like a small canal.*

*Stream of Nyungstet is like a vast land,
As we friends cross it, the stream is like a vast land.*

*As we reach the top of the pass of Serpoling,
Looking back from there, we see 100 fellow beings.*

*As we reach the top of Serpoling pass,
We see our motherland below,*

*We see the small village of Skitmiling below,
As we reach the top of the pass of Dogsar la,*

*We friends run wild on the lush meadow,
We, the youth, run wild on the lush meadow.*

*As we reach the top of the pass of Chagtsal gang,
With the right hand we offer the milky water,*

With the left hand we offer the white shell bangle like water,

*As we reach the high Shelmar peak,
We prostrate 360 times before it,*

*As we prostrate 360 times,
Our bodily sins are cleansed and our minds are relieved of suffering.*

*As we reach the top of the pass of Tharbaling,
We friends hop like ibex,
We, the youth, hop like ibexes.*

*As we reach the top of the pass of Chapo-zea,
We friends float like soaring eagles.*

*As we reach the top of the pass of Yangma Chupdun,
We friends run in a string like fashion,*

*As we reach the open plains of Skorapa Babsa,
We friends separate like the chicks of a mother hen.*

4. MANEKHANG AND LABRANG

At the foot of the hill, towards the upper side of the village, is the old *manekhang* (community prayer hall) of Khimi. It is a two-storey structure, built sometime in the 1800s. The land for the building was donated by the Khangchenpa family and the construction was funded by Lama Tsultrim Nyima; Sonam Jordan of the Zimskang family laid the foundation stone. Tsering Stampfel of the Spangchenmo family was the chief mason. The *manekhang* contains intricate wall paintings of Guru Padmasambhava, Buddha Shakyamuni, four-armed Avalokiteśvara, eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, Gyalwa Dorje Chang, Milarepa, Je Tsongkhapa and his two disciples and many other Bodhisattvas and scholars of the Drukpa Kagyu sect. The chapel also has statues of Buddha Shakyamuni and Manjushri.

Next to the *manekhang* is the *labrang* (monastic quarters) of Hemis Monastery, and it is said that Lama Stagtsang Raspa, founder of Hemis, stayed here when he visited Khimi. The village now has a new *manekhang*, on the left side of the road while going towards Yarma Gonbo, and villagers said they built this because they found it difficult to access the old one. Not far from the old *manekhang*, there are two Changchub stupas. Behind the *manekhang* are some ruins, which the villagers refer

to as *khar* (fort), where in the past people used to run to hide in when robbers or bandits attacked their village.

Within the compound of the *manekhang* is the *lhato* (shrine) of Phaslha Kangzhu. This is the family protector deity of the Khangchenpa family. The shrine has a bunch of Juniper branches on the top, held together with a *khatag* (ceremonial white cloth). Every year, during Losar (New Year), they are renewed and rituals are held to appease the deity and request blessings for the coming year.



5. PETROGLYPHS

Not far from the old *manekhang*, at the base of the hill facing the village, is a group of rocks on which several petroglyphs have been inscribed. The rocks are brownish-red in colour, which heightens the visibility of the images on them. The petroglyphs largely consist of drawings of the ibex, other animals that are hard to distinguish the species, as well as several of humans in various stances and performing actions such as hunting. Most of these petroglyphs date to the Bronze Age. Unfortunately, over the years, erosion of the rocks with the force of the wind and rain, has led to many of them gradually fading away.



6. SPALZANG TASHI, STUPA ARCHITECT

Spalzung Tashi is a stupa architect. He first learnt the art of building stupas in 1990, from a senior monk from Diskit Monastery called Lobzung Nurboo. He recalls his first meritorious act was constructing a stupa as per a diagram provided by the lama. In 2007, he participated in a stupa architecture workshop held by the Himalayan Cultural and Heritage Foundation (HCHF), and learnt the importance of restoring stupas in the traditional manner and not using cement. His most important work to date has been the restoration of the large stupa in Shey village, near Leh. He has also restored several old stupas in Hemis, and built some 80 new ones in various parts of Ladakh.



5. SPANGCHENMO HERITAGE HOUSE

In the centre of the village is the Spangchenmo house, a two-storeyed building that dates to the early 1700s, though some rooms were added in the 1970s. The chapel in the house has intricate woodwork, both on the exterior and interior, and there is a path around it that allows the residents to circumambulate the room. There are statues of Buddha Shakyamuni, Avalokitesvara, four-armed Chanrazig and Guru Padmasambhava on the altar, as well as some *thangkas* (scroll paintings) on the walls.

Around the house there is a spacious compound and on one side there is a *Rigsum Gonbo* (three stupas), built to ward off evil coming from the direction of a mountain opposite it. The mountain is somewhat in the distance, across the Siachen River, and only the summit can be seen. The villagers call it *Riwo Phag-Itas*. Around the corner from the house is the village's threshing place (*yulthag*), and it is said that the *Rigsum Gonbo* also protects it from evil. Right outside the Spangchenmo house, there is a stupa and a prayer wheel. These structures also belong to the Spangchenmo family, the prayer wheel was built in 1994 and the stupa in 2000, as acts to gain merit.





NYUNGSTED



NYUNGSTED

A little ahead of Khimi is the village of Nyungsted, the entrance is marked by several Willow trees. A legend narrates that once upon a time, a hermit from Tibet, on a visit to Nubra, standing at a height in Henachey village and looking in the direction of Nyungsted prophesied that a settlement would arise here. Many villagers believe that at that time the village was a *ba-yul* (hidden land), that over time revealed itself. Initially, there were four houses in Nyungsted and this number has now grown to 14.

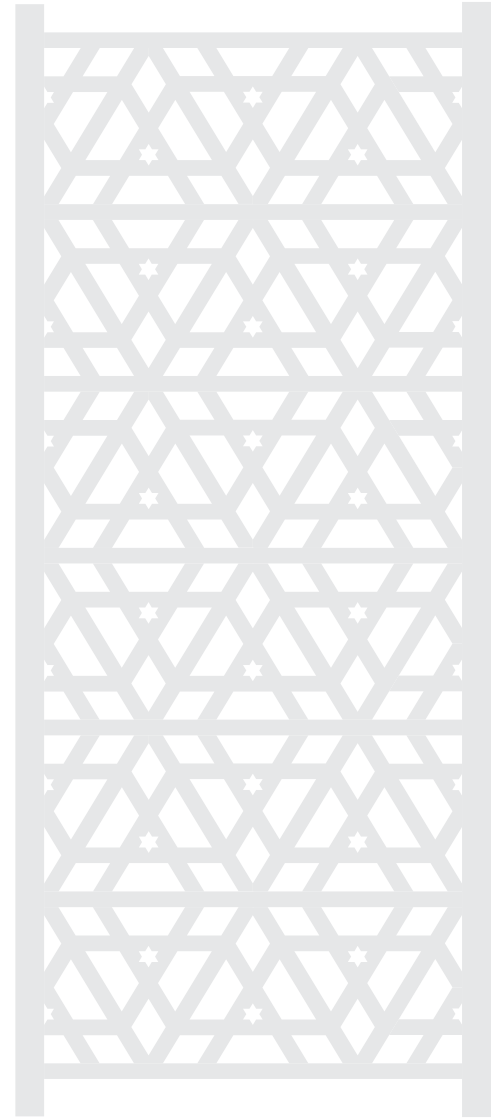
The word Nyungsted is derived from two words – *nyung* meaning small or little in quantity and *stod* meaning upper. Another interpretation of the name is derived from the village's location as it falls on the pilgrimage route to Yarma Gonbo Monastery. As an act of merit, the Khangchenpa family used to keep food, on one of their gateways, for the pilgrims passing through. Items such as roasted barley flour or dried cheese. The gateway still exists. It is said that after eating the food, the pilgrims would praise the household for their generosity, and the village got its name from *nyung* meaning to taste and *stod* to praise.

Several stupas and *mane* (prayer) walls are spread throughout the village, a sign of the place's spiritual life. Apart from worshipping built structures, they also revered those in nature. One important one is a mountain high in the upper valleys of the village, called *Kangri Shelma* (meaning glasslike). The pilgrimage to the mountain starts from Nyungsted, and many villagers who make the journey recount wonderful stories of their trips there.

MAP REFERENCE

NYUNGSTED

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Potpay Romkhang | 126 |
| 2. Tsewang Nurboo, Artist | 127 |
| 3. Onpo Urgain Rigzin, Astrologer | 128 |
| 4. Chakmen Lhato | 129 |
| 5. Shukpa, Juniper Tree | 130 |
| 6. Tsampa Norbu Mane wall | 131 |



77°22' 30"

77°23' 0"



34°59' 0"

34°58' 30"

NYUNGSTED

ཉུང་སྟེད།

0 250 500 m



	mane wall		path/track
	lhato/altar		river
	sacred tree		stream
	buddhist cemetery		built-up area
	artisan/artist/resource person		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Nyungsted walk book listing



1. POTPAY ROMKHANG

This is the site of a grave of a Tibetan man, *potpay* refers to a person from Tibet and *romkhang* is grave. He is said to have been a robber from Tibet. Legend goes that one night, an elderly woman was grinding barley flour at the village's *ranthag* (watermill). The Tibetan robber and his accomplice came to steal from her and she cursed them. It is said that one of them died instantly, while the other got scared and ran away. When the other villagers saw the dead body in the morning they took it to a place called Tsewang Khug and buried it, the grave can still be seen.

Raids from Central Asia and Tibet were common in these areas and other parts of Ladakh. To protect themselves from the looting and plunder, many villagers would build their homes in higher areas from where they could look out at the valley, or have secret hiding places they could run to when the raiders came. Ruins of some of these sites can still be seen in the mountains surrounding Nyungsted.



2. TSEWANG NURBOO, ARTIST

Tsewang Nurboo is another renowned stupa maker and restorer from Nubra. He received his formal training in 2007 at a workshop held by the Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation (HCHF). He is also a sculptor and makes the raised designs and patterns that adorn a stupa. These primarily consist of flowers and clouds, the snow lion and the eight auspicious symbols (*tashi stakgyat*) of Buddhism. His son is also a painter and sculptor.



3. ONPO URGAIN RIGZIN, ASTROLOGER

Onpo Urgain Rigzin has studied the Tibetan lineage of Astrology called *Dorjay Tak*, which comes from the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism. This training came to Ladakh via Padma Thinles, a Tibetan tantric master and an acclaimed astrologer of this lineage. It is said that he left Tibet during a difficult period for followers of the Nyingma sect, and came to Ladakh where he founded the first Nyingma monastery at Takthog, near the village of Sakti. He had many students who learnt astrology, amongst which was an ancestor of Onpo Urgain. This makes Onpo Urgain's practice an unbroken lineage which has continued for generations. Apart from his work as an astrologer, Onpo Urgain is also an accomplished historian and he has written a work on 'The Religious and Cultural History of Nubra' (*Nub ra'i gnas bshad*).



4. CHAKMEN LHATO

Right before the bridge, on the left of the road is a *lhato* (shrine), this is dedicated to the Khangchenpa family's protector deity called Chakmen Gyalpo. Every month the family members offer incense (*sang*) here, and during Losar (New Year) they renew the Juniper branches and *khatag* (white ceremonial scarf) that hold them together.

The cubicle like structure stands on a foundation made of cement bricks, and both have been painted in red. On the front side of the *lhato*, there is a small window that contains a mask which is the representation of Chakmen Gyalpo, around it a *khatag* is placed as an offering. Prayer flags surround the *lhato*. Chakmen Gyalpo is said to be a powerful protector deity, and his image is also said to be visible in a self-formed (*rangjon*) one, on the surface of a mountain facing the village.



5. SHUKPA, JUNIPER TREE

A little further down, on the right side of the stream is a majestic Juniper tree. It lies within an area fenced off with thorny bushes on one side and a metal fence on the other. In front of the tree, there is a *lhato* (shrine) and a *Rigsum Gonbo* consisting of three Changchub stupas. The *lhato* is dedicated to the village's protector deity Tsering Chednga.

Unlike most other *lhatos*, where the annual rituals are held during Losar (New Year), the ones here are held in spring, to mark the beginning of the agricultural season. Further, during the ritual of *Bumskor*, where the scriptures known as *Bum* are taken around the village to bless and bring prosperity to the community, the first ritual offering of the texts are made at the Juniper tree. From here, the *Bum* is taken to the village of Dzongsa and also first offered to a tree there associated with the legendary Lama Pirang. It is then taken around the villages of Dzongsa and Nyungsted.



6. TSAMPA NORBU MANE WALL

On the left side of the stream, amongst several thorny bushes, is a *mane* (prayer) wall. All the stones on this wall have the same prayer inscribed on them, 'a A sha sa ma ha', which is specifically recited for the removal of sins. The prayer is said to be so powerful, that even a glance in its direction is said to be enough to forgive one's sins.

The villagers call the *mane* wall 'Tsampa Norbu Mane' because they believe a man by that name built it sometime during the 18th century, probably as a barrier to protect the village from floods from the nearby river. Tsampa Norbu was also the name of Lama Pirang Ralchen's reincarnation, so some villagers think it may have been built by him. The location of several *mane* walls in Ladakh are said to be positioned such that they act as barricades to protect villages from flood waters.





DZONGSA



DZONGSA

Not far from the village of Nyungsted is the small hamlet of Dzongsa, a glacial stream separates both the villages. According to the villagers, there were originally two families in Dzongsa, and this number has grown to six households today. However, one interpretation of the village's name reveals that there may have been as many as 100 households in this village once, but a flood came and most of them perished apart from the two families mentioned above. This legend exists because in the local language, a hundred units is referred to as *dzong*. Further evidence given is the presence of several ruins of stupas and *mane* (prayer) walls, as well as the foundations of what are presumed to be people's homes.

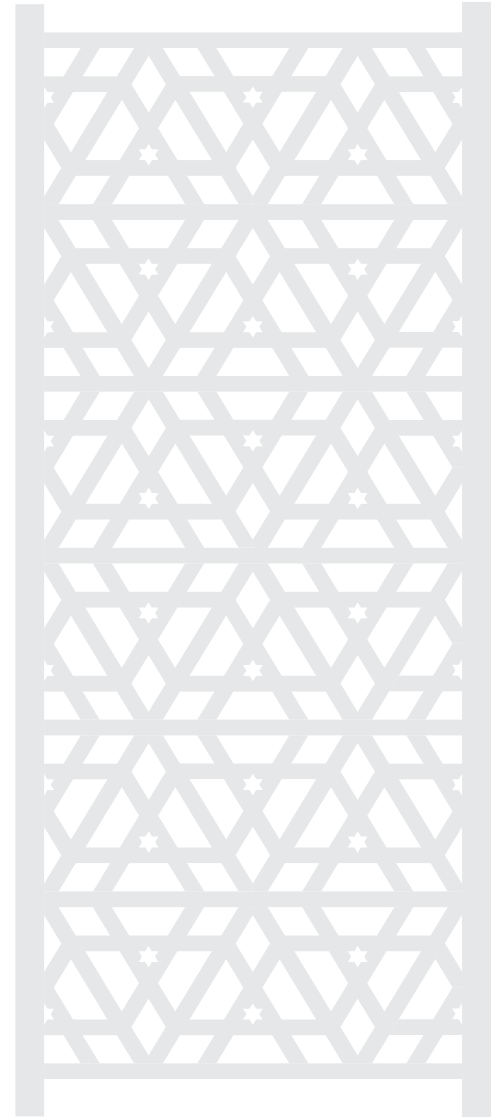
Another interpretation regarding the name of the village is that it acquired this from a meditation cave situated in the upper valley of the village, where *dzong* means cave and *sa* is place.

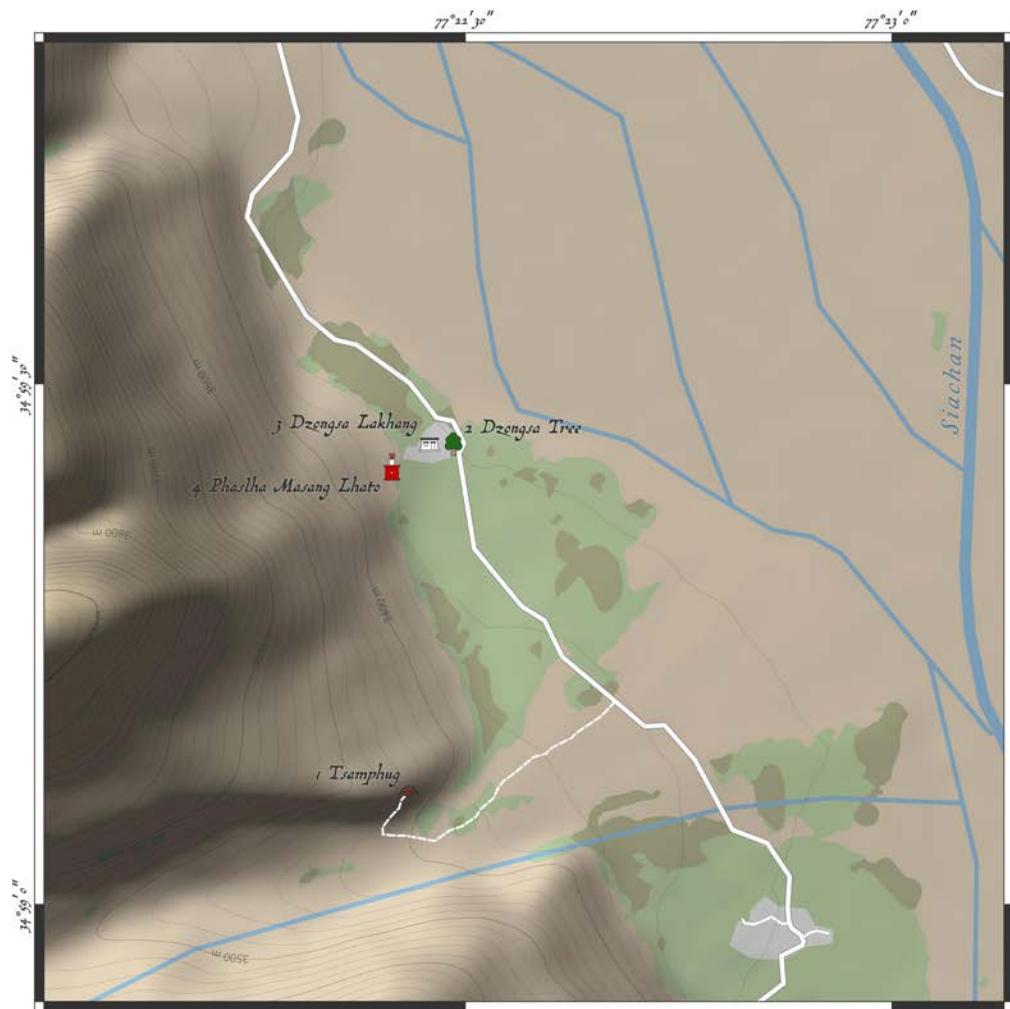
Dzongsa is particularly associated with the legendary Buddhist monk Lama Pirang. He is said to have been born into the Yogmapa family here, and his reincarnation, Tsampa Norbu, came from Tibet and spent his last years in the village.

MAP REFERENCE

DZONGSA

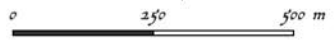
1. Tsamphug
2. Dzongsa Tree
3. Dzongsa Lakhang
4. Phaslha Masang Lhato





DZONGSA

འགྲོ་ལོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་



	temple		river
	meditation cave/house		stream
	lhato/altar		built-up area
	sacred tree		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)
	path/track		

Numbers and names follow Dzongsa walk book listing



1. TSAMPHUG

A twenty-minute walk uphill from the village leads to the meditation cave of Lama Pirang Ralchen, it is said to date from the 13th century and was later renovated in the 1700s. His reincarnation, Tsampa Norbu is also believed to have meditated here and the current layout of the cave, with separate rooms, is attributed to him. Local legends narrate that when Tsampa Norbu first came to Dsongsa the existence of the cave was not known, but he, being a reincarnation of Lama Pirang's knew that it was there. He started digging at the present location with help from the villagers, and eventually they found the cave.

The entrance to the cave is made with mud bricks and has a low wooden door. A flight of stairs leads to another cave positioned above it. It is thought that maybe the lower cave was used for meditation during summer and the upper one in winter. Both spaces had dedicated places for cooking, though now a traditional clay stove is only visible in the lower cave. The upper cave has a Changchub stupa and a square, elevated platform on which the meditator sat. The stupa is said to have been built by someone known as Meme Lama from Nyungsted village about 200 years ago. Some villagers from Nyungsted and Dsongsa believe the stupa contains the

relics of Tsampa Norbu, and his possessions such as his *damaru* (hand-held drum), *drilu* (bell), *pecha* (scriptures) and *phurpa* (ritual dagger).

On the wall facing the elevated platform, there is a rock formation of a lion facing down and with its mouth open. This is similar to a protector deity known as *Singdongma*. The villagers believe that this formation of the deity appeared naturally while Tsampa Norbu was meditating with his back against this wall. There are some papers pasted to the wall whose cursive Tibetan writings are unreadable now behind the heavy coatings of limestone.



It is said that these may be letters addressed to Tsampa Norbu from Tibet, where he was born.

This cave is culturally very significant for the people of Nubra and it is carefully maintained, and prayers are regularly offered here. During Losar (New Year) they are cleaned and whitewashed. Followers are also encouraged to come and meditate there and in recent years many monks as well as lay people, mostly from the Yarma region, have meditated here for days or months.



2. DZONGSA TREE

Lama Pirang was born in Dzongsa, and as he was leaving for Tibet to study Buddhism he pointed to a tree planted by him in front of his home and exclaimed that the tree would survive only if his spiritual learnings were successful. As the tree grew and flowers blossomed every summer, his family knew his education was progressing and that he would fulfil his words. Over time, the tree grew old and parts of it fell. Later his descendants built a stupa at the site. In 2000 this was replaced by a new stupa built by Spalzang Tashi of Khimi village. A portion of the old tree trunk is still visible.



3. DZONGSA LAKHANG

Among a cluster of old houses is a small temple (*lakchung*), it is commonly known as Dzongsa's Lakhang. It is said to have been built from the remaining building materials after the construction of the Yarma Gonbo Monastery.

This is a small two room, single-storey building. Inside are wall paintings and statues of powerful Buddhist deities, as well as religious books. It is said that originally there was only one room, but that Tsampa Nurbu added a second one. There is a story about a bird called *cha-shang* that once brought some treasure to the temple that is highly valued by the village. Once when they were asked to hand it over to Samstanling Monastery, in lieu of taxes some members were unable to pay, they refused.



4. PHASLHA MASANG LHATO

Built as recently as the 1990s, this *lhato* (shrine) is dedicated to the Gongmapa family's protector deity Masang Spundun. It lies just behind the Khangbu Yogma house, at the base of the hill. The small square structure is made with mud bricks and has been painted red in colour. Juniper branches, held together by a *khatag* (white ceremonial scarf), are positioned on its upper surface. During Losar (New Year) rituals are held to renew the contents of the *lhato* and the Juniper branches and *khatag* are changed.





YARMA

ཡར་མ།

YARMA

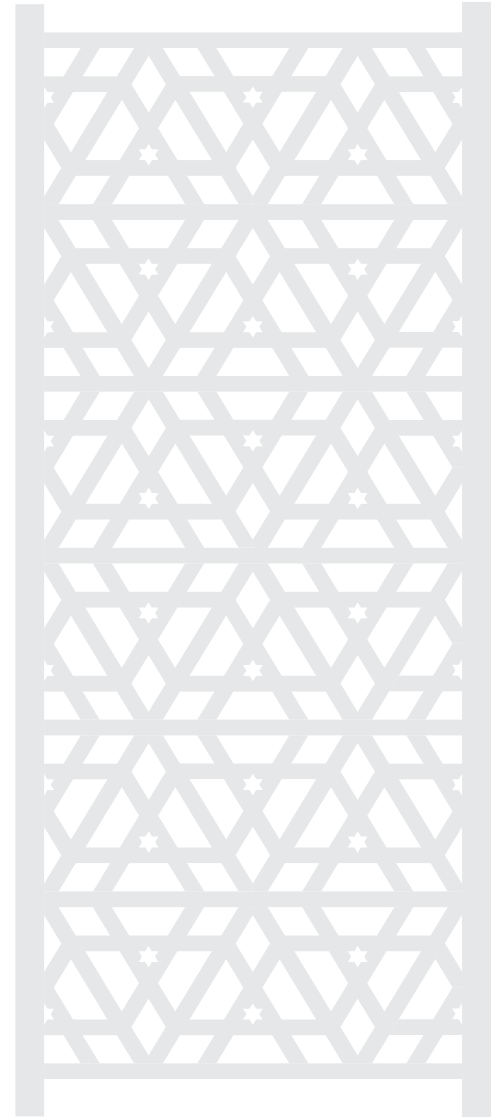
One of the last villages on the left side of the Siachen River, after crossing Kubet bridge is Yarma. The name 'Yarma' is derived from the self-formed rock formation of the four-armed Mahakala, Yarma Gonbo, the Buddhist deity of protection, that is found here.

Another interpretation for the village's name is that it was originally called '*Ya-ma*', this was derived from the presence of two self-emanated letters from the Tibetan alphabet, *ya* and *ma*. Yet a third interpretation recounts that once a hermit, or a traveller, was passing by this area and upon reaching somewhere on the road between Khimi and Nyungsted, when the path started to go uphill and become more difficult, he turned around and exclaimed that it would be good to go back down rather than continue uphill. So, the place came to be known as 'Yarma' (*yar* meaning upwards and *mar* meaning lower or downwards).

MAP REFERENCE

YARMA

1. Chakmen Gyalpo Lhato
2. Yarma Gonbo or Gonpa
3. Tsamskhang
4. Sacred Mountain or Gonbo Rangjon

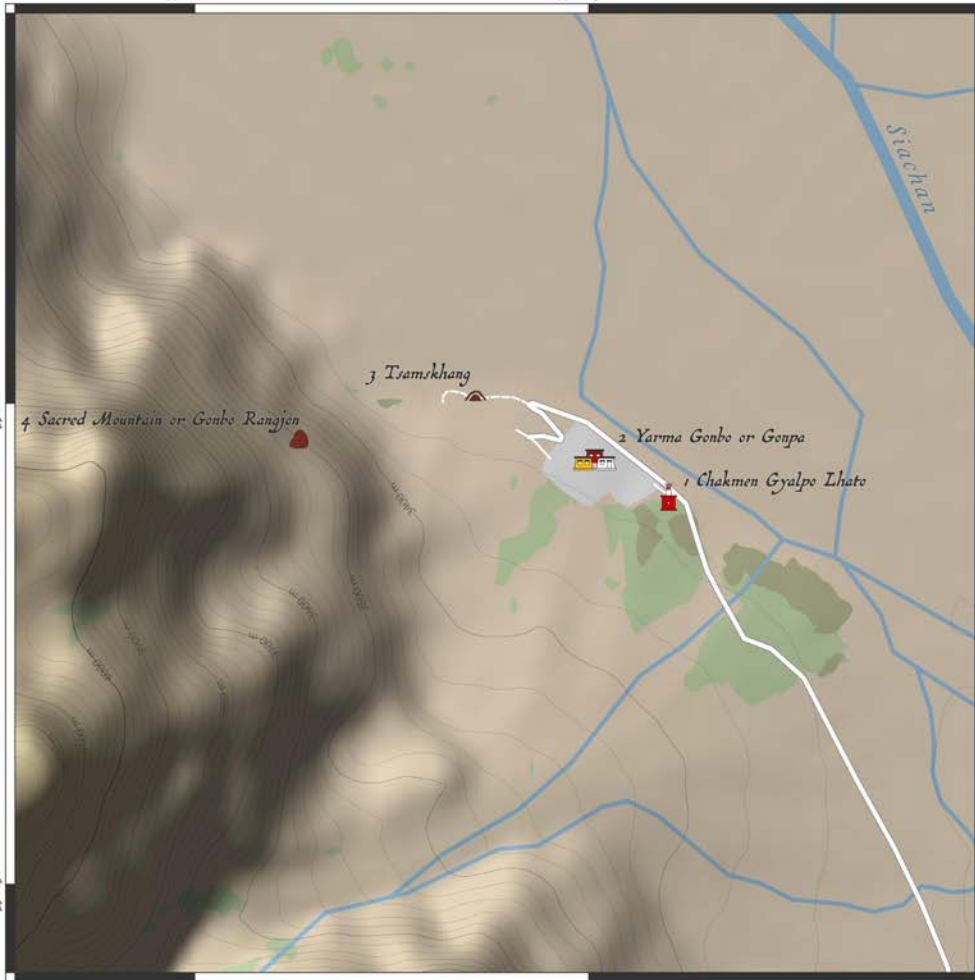


77°20' 0"

77°20' 30"

35°24' 0"

35°13' 30"



YARMA

ཡར་མ།



0 250 500 m



Numbers and names follow Yarma walk book listing



1. CHAKMEN GYALPO LHATO

While walking towards the monastery, there is a Kagan (gateway) stupa that leads to the monastery, a *lhato* (shrine) and two *mane* (prayer) walls. The *lhato* is dedicated to the protector deity, Chakmen Gyalpo. A space within the *lhato* reveals several stones, stacked one on top of the other. Many of these have carvings of various Buddhas. A mask of Chakmen Gyalpo is also here.

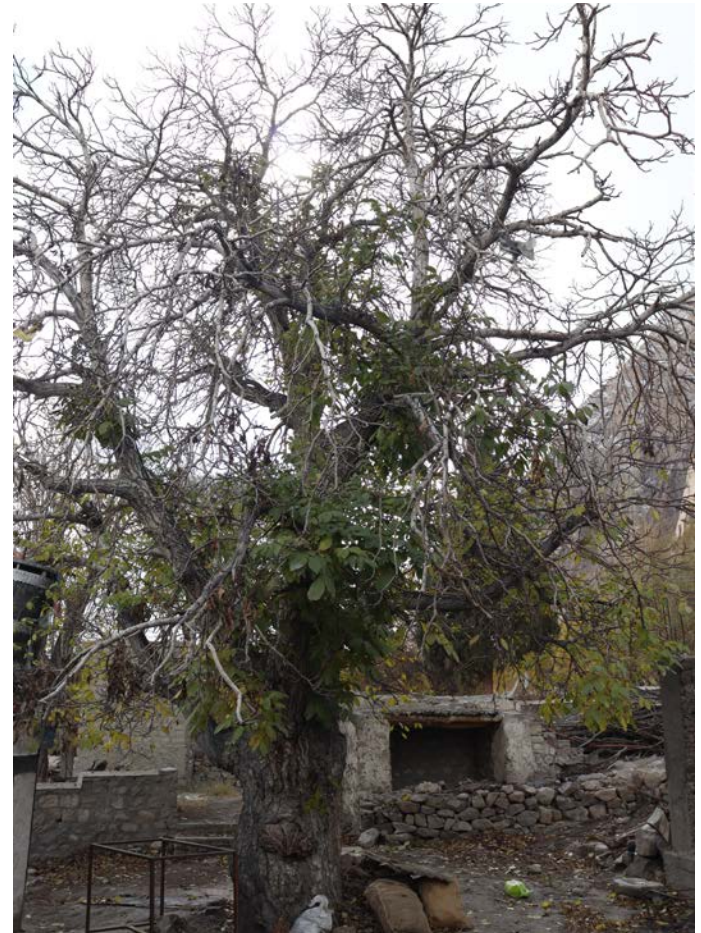
The two *mane* walls behind the *lhato* are conjoined. The flat stones on the wall have inscriptions of 'om mani padme hung' and several more in the *Lantsa* scripts. Amongst these inscriptions, there is a stone on which names of some individuals are mentioned, such as Stanzin Chosdup and Gyaltzen. There is also a line that mentions that this *mane* may have been built for the long life of Agu Tundup, his parents and extended family.



2. YARMA GONBO OR GONPA

Lama Pirang is said to have come and meditated at the base of the sacred mountain (*Gonbo Rangjon*, see text below), in the early 14th century. There is a small one-room structure still here and it is believed it may have been built by him for this purpose. It is said he also built a small prayer room beside this, and this was later converted into the current monastery, which today comes under the Drukpa Kagyu sect.

The monastery has two chapels (*dukhang*), one of which is relatively new. The older one, which is located in the centre has statues of the four-armed Mahakala, Guru Padmasambhava, eleven-faced Avalokitesvara, Gyalwa



Gotsangpa and his two disciples Yangon and Urgyain, Gonbo Charog-dong, Paldan Lhamo, Chakmen Gyalpo, Amitayus, Buddha Shakyamuni, and Lama Staksang Raspa amongst others. There is a stone dais of Gyalwa Gotsangpa and on it, the year 1258 has been inscribed, perhaps indicative of the year his disciples came and revealed the images in the sacred mountain. More recently, a finely carved wooden prayer wheel was added near the entrance of the chapel, it was made by Tsewang Phuntsog of Kubet village.

A side room, off from the main chapel, contains several scriptures; the monastery has the entire texts of the Kangyur and Tengyur. There are wall paintings here of the various protector deities and the lineage of the Drukpa Kagyu sect, as well as those of the six and four-armed Mahakala. In the middle of the room, there is a huge statue of Guru Dudjom, who is believed to be a deity of war. There are also clay masks on the walls, which are used in the annual mask dance (*Yarma Ltungshag*) festival held at the monastery. This is held on the 5th day of the first month in the Tibetan Lunar Calendar, usually coinciding with the month of March.

It is believed that underneath this monastery, there are the dead bodies of a hundred men and their horses. The route through Yarma was part of the Trans-Karakoram

trade and several traders from Central Asia used to travel through here. Once, a deadly disease befell a large group of traders when they were crossing the pass. Their bodies were brought to Yarma and buried at the site of the present monastery. Some villagers claim that the monastery was built over their bodies, for the peaceful release of the souls of these dead men and horses.

A few new rooms have been built around the monastery, a school was started here in 2007 for the monks and many of them serve as classrooms. The young monks are taught until the fifth grade, and from here they go to Hemis Monastery for further studies or the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Choglamsar.

There is a huge walnut tree beside the monastery, as well as several apricot trees around the place. It is said these saplings were bought from a Balti trader called Ghulam Mehdi, many years ago. The trees are identified as 'Mehdi *starga*' (walnut) and 'Mehdi *chuli*' (apricot). The approach to the monastery is through a Kagan (gateway) stupa, built more recently than the monastery, perhaps in the 19th century. This allows everyone passing through it to be blessed before they reach the monastery. The roof is painted with images of various Bodhisattvas such as Buddha Shakyamuni and Guru Padmasambhava.



3. TSAMSKHANG

This one-room structure is also associated with Lama Pirang and the two disciples of Gyalwa Gotsangpa, Yangon and Urgyain. It is said that they meditated here. Inside the room, there are some stone inscriptions of Buddha Shakyamuni kept on an altar, as well as some old scriptures and many butter lamp offerings.

Outside the meditation room, there are several *mane* (prayer) walls that are believed to be quite old and are built entirely with stone. There is a ruin of a stupa also, just adjacent to the meditation house. It is claimed that most of these structures may have been built during the time of Lama Pirang or the two disciples or later. There are other *mane* walls in the vicinity that are also old and may have been built by the villagers.



4. SACRED MOUNTAIN OR GONBO RANGJON

Yarma is a popular pilgrimage site in Ladakh as it has many self-emanated images (*rangjon*) of Buddhist deities, such as the four-armed Mahakala, Guru Padmasambhava, and Avalokiteśvara, on the steep slopes and rocky mountains surrounding the village. It is said these were first revealed in 1258 by Urgyain and Yangon, two disciples of Gyawa Gotsangpa, a Buddhist tantric master of the 11th century. Apart from the images of Buddhist deities and saints, there are those of a *srinmo* (demoness), *Rigsum Gonbo* (three stupas), and animals such as monastic pet dogs (*gon-khi*) and yaks (*gon-yag*), and a golden fish (*sernya*).

Many of these images are found on the mountain behind Yarma Gonbo Monastery, a five minute walk from it. On the opposite mountain, across the river, there are self-formed depictions of some particular scenes from the epic of the legendary hero-king Kesar. Both mountains are considered sacred.



GLOSSARY

This includes common Ladakhi words that appear frequently in all walk books.

Ama	Mother	Chagzot	Manager of a monastery
Amchi	Traditional doctor	Chali	Blanket made of goat and/or yak hair
Archog	Deconsecration	Chak	Prostration
Bab	Tax	Chamba	Future Buddha, also known as Maitreya
Bagston	Marriage ceremony	Changchub Chorten	Stupa, symbolizing Buddha's enlightenment
Balu	Bear	Chang	barley beer
Bamo	Witch	Changthang	Northern Plains
Bayul	Hidden land	Chanrazig	God of Compassion, also known as Avalokiteśvara,
Bo	Measuring cup, 2 litres	Chansa	Winter kitchen
Bok	Cloak or cape	Chadpe mane	Stupa built as a penalty
Bugzhal	Cymbal	Chodkhang	Chapel or temple
Bum	Buddhist text (literally 'hundred thousand')	Chodme	Butter lamp
Bumskor	Act of taking Buddhist texts around the fields for blessing	Chorgok	Stupa that is in ruins
		Chornga	Gong
		Chorten	Stupa
		Chotrul Chorten	Stupa symbolizing miracles performed by the Buddha

Chu	Water		chapel, in a monastery
Chugshigzhal	Avalokiteśvara, depicted with eleven heads	Dungsten	Funeral stupa containing relics of a saint
Chuli	Apricot	Dzod	Store
Chura	Large basket	Gelugpa	One of the sects of Tibetan Buddhism
Chuskor Mane	Prayer Wheel turned by water	Goba	Headman of a village
Chutsan	Hot spring	Gomang Chorten	Stupa, symbolizing Buddha's first teachings
Daman	Drum		
Darchen	Large prayer flags	Gonpa	Monastery
Daru or Damaru	Drum, held in the hand	Gos	Robe, Clothes
Do	Meeting point of river and valley	Gya	Hundred
Doksa	Upper pastures	Gyanak Ichagris	Great Wall of China (pattern)
Dolthok	Stone pot	Gyastongpa	Buddhist text
Drangyas	An offering made of dough	Gyathab	Decorated metal stove
Drilu	Bell	Gyelong	Buddhist monk
Dru-thral	Tax, paid in grain	Kagan Chorten	Stupa gate
Druk	Dragon	Kagyur Lhakhang	Library
Dukhang	Assembly Hall or main	Kangyur	108 volumes of text, Buddha's teachings
		Khangpa	House

Khar	Fort or palace		protector deity
Khargog	Ruined fort or palace	Lhu	Spirits of the water and earth
Kharmon	Royal musician	Lhubang	Shrine dedicated to <i>Lhu</i>
Khatag	White ceremonial scarf	Lonpo	Minister
Khulu	Yak wool	Losar	New Year
Kirkir	Circle, circular	Ltanmo	Festival
Komnyer	Person in charge of monastery	Lung	Valley
Kushu	Apple	Mane	Prayer
Labrang	Monastic living quarters	Mane Kambum	Circular prayer wall
Lacha	Wax	Mane Lagskor	Prayer wheel, small and held in the hand
Lakshes	Craftsman	Mane Tungchur	Prayer wheel, large
Lchangma	Tree	Manekhang	Community temple or prayer hall
Lchangra	A grove of Willow trees		
Lha, Lhamo	God, Goddess	Manthang	Long prayer walls
Lha-lchang	Sacred tree	Marpo	Red
Lhabab Chorten	Stupa, symbolizing Buddha's descent from heaven	Member	Lamp
Lhagchung	Shrine or temple	Mentok	Flower
Lhardag	Caretaker of a deity	Meto	Torch, made with fire
Lhato	Altar or Shrine dedicated to a	Mikha	Bad mouth

Mokham	A drum beat		deity
Mul	Silver	Phat	Sack
Naktsur	Type of natural dye	Phey	Flour, roasted barley
Nambu	Woollen cloth	Pholongs	Rock
Namgyal Chorten	Stupa, symbolizing Buddha's victory over illness	Phu	Pastureland in the upper valley
Nyangdas Chorten	Stupa, symbolizing Buddha's ascent to nirvana	Phurpa	Ritual dagger
Nyerpa	Male community representative, manager	Piuchan	Knoll
Nyingmapa	One of the Sects of Tibetan Buddhism	Podshog	Handmade paper
Onpo	Astrologer	Pul	Bicarbonate of soda
Pabu	Shoes, short boots	Rabsal	Balcony, wooden
Padspung Chorten	Stupa, symbolizing Buddha's birth	Ragan	Brass
Pecha	Texts	Ral	Goat hair
Perak	Turquoise-studded headdress	Rangjon	self-appeared or self-formed
Phaspun	Group of families who worship the same protector	Ranthag	Watermill
		Ri	Hill or mountain
		Ri ter-ter	Rolling hill
		Ridag	Deer

Rigsum Gonbo	Three stupas representing Avalokiteśvara, Manjushri and Vajrapani (Bodhisattvas of compassion, wisdom and power respectively)	Shang thag Shukpa Singe Skampo Skarma	Nose bleed Juniper Tree Lion Dry Star
Ringmo	Long	Skerag	Belt
Rinpoche	Incarnated High Lama	Skorlam	Circumambulation path
Rong	Valley	Skudung Lhakhang	Relic shrine
Rta	Horse	Skurim	Rituals
Sa	Land	Snas ig	Religious text
Sa-thral	Tax for land	Soljong	Community rituals
Sadaq	Spirits of the land	Sojong	Spiritual retreat
Sangs	Incense or smoke offering	Soma	New
Ser	Gold	Spon	Artist, painter
Sergar	Goldsmith, also metal craftsman	Srinmo Srubla	Witch Harvest festival
Serthod	Golden hat	Stangyur	Buddhist text, 225 volumes
Shak	Plaited twigs plastered with mud	Starga Ster	Walnut Treasure
Sham	Lower Ladakh	Stodthung	Short sleeveless woman's

	jacket	Tsele	Hut of plaited twigs
Sum	Three	Tsemo	Top of a mountain, peak or summit
Surna	Wind instrument		
Tangra	Shed for animals	Tsepo	Basket
Thagsha	Loom	Tso	Lake
Thakpa	Rope	Tsogspa	Association or Society
Thang	Field, open plain	Tsugthul	Blanket, made from wool
Thangka	Scroll painting	Yarkhang	Summer kitchen
Thap	Stove	Yogor	Felt cape
Thigma	Tie-dye design	Yul	Village
Thral	Tax	Yul lha	Village protector
Tibi	Hat	Yundum	Swastika
Tokpo	Stream	Zampa	Bridge
Tsa-tsa	Miniature stupa	Zang	Copper
Tsakhang	Relic house, where miniature stupas are kept	Zhabjes	Foot print
		Zhugthis	Seat or throne
Tsamkhang	Retreat cell	Zimchung	Rinpoche or high Lama's residence
Tsamphuk	Meditation cave		
Tsan	Mountain dwelling spirits, also demons	Zimskhang	Noble house

CONTRIBUTORS

MAPPING THE CULTURE AND HERITAGE OF NUBRA, LADAKH

This project set out to research and document the cultural practises and historical sites in Nubra's Siachen Belt, and disseminate the results through an 'Inventory Catalogue' and four 'Walks in Nubra' booklets. The project relied heavily on oral narratives and local knowledge, as much of the culture and history of this area was being documented for the first time. Local community members were involved with the project and interviews were held with key resource people from the area, village elders and artisans amongst others. The project team consisted largely of researchers and trainees from Nubra.

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Principal Researcher, primarily focusing on the 'Inventory Catalogue'. He has a PhD in Buddhist studies from Delhi University, and is the founder of the Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation (HCHF). He is an independent researcher and cultural activist, specializing in the preservation of cultural heritage, and is the editor of 'Heritage Himalaya', a biannual magazine dedicated to the cultural and natural heritage of the Himalayas.

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Designer for both the ‘Inventory Catalogue’ and ‘Walks in Nubra’ booklets, he is LAMO’s Creative Director. He has a BFA in Applied Art from the College of Art, Delhi, and a foundation in Design from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. In 2004, he set up Digital Mine, and specializes in drafting for buildings and graphic design; he is also empaneled by the government.

SONAM ANGCHOK

Photographer for both the ‘Inventory Catalogue’ and

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LOBSANG SAMDUP

is from Panamik Village in Nubra. He has an MA in Buddhism from the Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath. He is currently studying for his PhD at Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, West Bengal.

“This project helped me to understand the culture and history of Nubra.”

STANZIN NAMKHA

is from Wakha, in Kargil district. He has a BSc Hons in Zoology from Hansraj College, Delhi, and is currently studying for a MA in Folklore and Culture Studies from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). Stanzin assisted with the photography for this project.

“Nubra project was such a beautiful learning opportunity for me. It made me realize how interdependent even our cultural practices are and how a loss of one will lead to the loss of the whole.”

STANZIN SPALBAR

is from Kuri village in Nubra. He has a BA and MA in history from Punjab University.

“This project made me realise how beautiful and rich my culture is. I learned many interesting stories about my ancestors and which they have proudly carried through the generations. Now it’s time to keep this tradition alive in every possible way.”

TONDUP NAMGAIL

is from Kuri village in Nubra. He has a BA in Arts from Eliezer Joldan College, Leh. He has an interest in photography.

“During this project I got an opportunity to explore my region like never before and heard many different stories, myths and facts about Nubra valley which I was not aware of.”

TSERING LHADOL

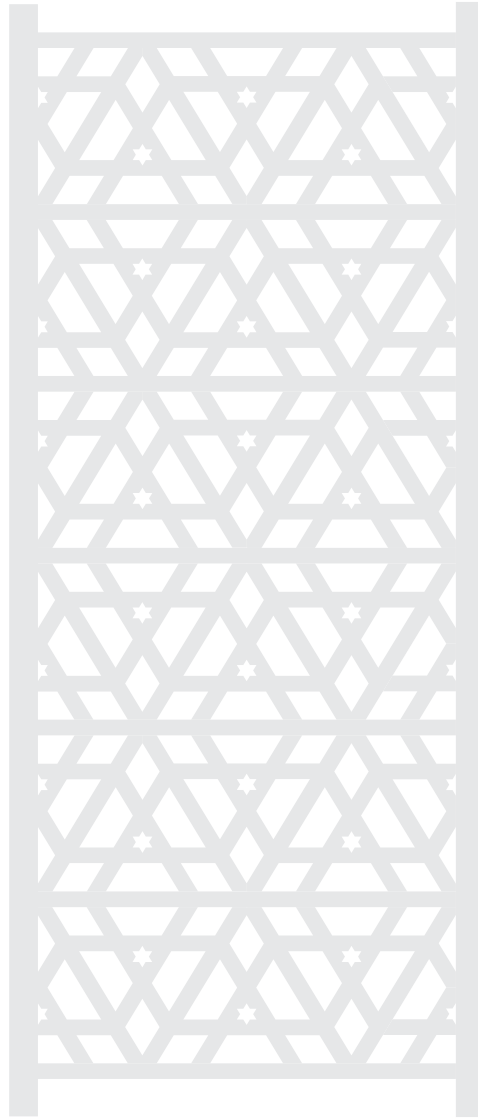
is from Tiger village in Nubra. She has a BA in Arts from Punjab University, along with a diploma in Travel and Tourism. She is working with one of the Self Help Groups (SHG) in the Siachen belt.

“I discovered a lot of new places and sites, and learnt about customs and traditions I did not know about. This project is great for anyone working in the tourism industry who would like to expand their knowledge.”

TSERING PALMO

is from Tiger village in Nubra. She has a MA in Political Science from Delhi University and is currently studying for a B.Ed. She is also working as a Bhoti language teacher at Lamdon Model School, Sumoor.

“I visited so many new places, many of which were unfamiliar to me, and learning about the history and culture of these places has been incredibly moving. My understanding of my heritage and culture has expanded as a result of this project.”





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ORGANISATION