



Great Himalayan Trail Preparatory Study

Tsum Valley, Gorkha District



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International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

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Great Himalayan Trail

Preparatory Study

Tsum Valley, Gorkha District

Internal report for limited distribution

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NOTE

The Tsum valley was a restricted area until it was opened for trekking in 2008, and there is little information available on the area. The information in this document was compiled by Sonam Lama, whose home is in the Tsum Valley, while serving as an intern at ICIMOD in 2007. The information is still preliminary and remains to be authenticated, but we hope it will provide a useful starting place for those hoping to encourage intrepid trekkers who wish to break new ground and visit this little known corner of the Himalayas. Any feedback would be very welcome, and will be used to update the present limited distribution document.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank Sonam Lama for the meticulous work carried out in documenting his home ground, and to express my gratitude to the ICIMOD colleagues Basanta Shrestha, Rajan Bajracharya, Deo Raj, and others, without whose assistance this document could not have been prepared.

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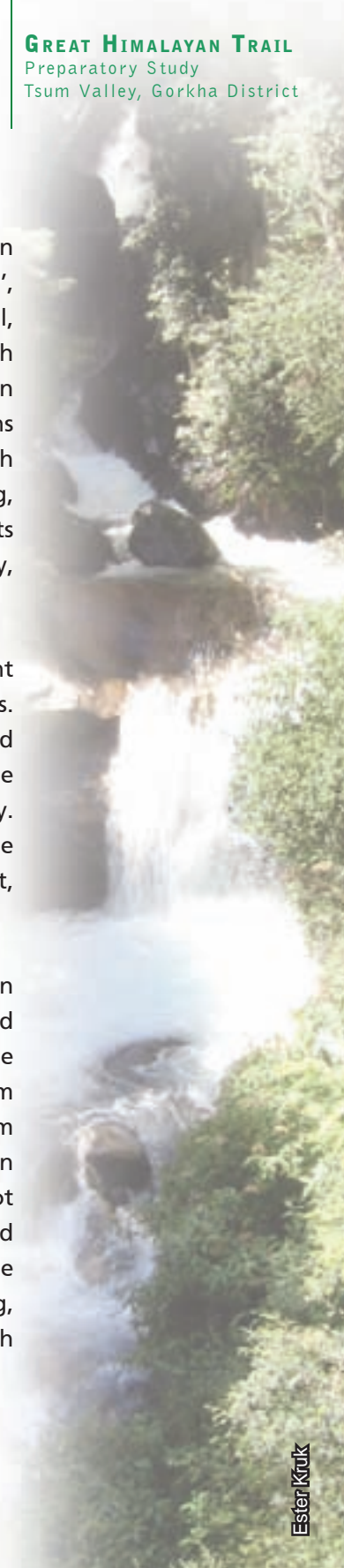
Kamal Banskota PhD
International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

TSUM VALLEY

The Tsum Valley is a sacred Himalayan pilgrimage valley situated in northern Gorkha, Nepal. 'Tsum' comes from the Tibetan word 'Tsombo', which means vivid. Against the majestic backdrop of the Ganesh Himal, Sringeri Himal, and Baudha Himal ranges, this serene Himalayan valley is rich in ancient art, culture, and religion. The local people are mostly of Tibetan origin and speak a unique dialect. Trails are strewn with artistic chortens and lined with mani walls made of thousands of stone slabs carved with drawings of deities and inscribed with prayers. The famous Kyimo Lung, a pilgrimage circuit in the central Trans-Himalaya, is well-known for its centres of learning and meditation. This circuit traverses the Tsum Valley, the Manaslu area in Nepal, and southern parts of Tibet.

The Tsum Valley has a long history of Buddhism. The Buddhist saint Milarepa is believed to have meditated in the caves of these mountains. Traditionally, the valley was a culturally distinct geographical area called 'Tsum Tso Chuksum', which means thirteen provinces ruled as a single territory. The ancient remains of the Tsum kingdom are still visible today. Due to its remoteness and inaccessibility, this sacred valley and its people have been bypassed by mainstream development for centuries. As a result, the unique culture of this valley has remained intact.

The valley is drained by the Shiar Khola, which originates from the western glacier of Ganesh Himal and east and southern glaciers of Sringeri Himal and meets the Budhi Gandaki at Nyak. It is approachable via two routes: one passing through Chumchet and another from Lokpa (see Map of Tsum Valley on pages 12-13). Both routes involve steep ascents of over 1500m from the valley floor. The valley is uniquely rich in wildlife, especially in ghoral and tahr, which congregate in herds of 50 to 200. Hunting is not permitted in the Tsum Valley. The valley also boasts some unique and historic monasteries, including Rachen Gumba and Mu Gumba, which lie on a pretty plateau nestled in the lap of the valley, and Gumba Lungdang, situated at the base of a conical hill against the main slope of Ganesh Himal.



GEOGRAPHY

The Tsum Valley is ringed by the Baudha Himal and Himal Chuli to the west, Ganesh Himal to the south, and Sringeri Himal to the north. East of the valley, across the Shiar Khola, stands a dense blue, mixed pine forest, starting at Lokpa. The valley is bounded by three high passes, the Ngula Dhojhyang (5093m) to the east, Thapla Pass (5104m) to the west, and Yamdro, also called the Humlung Pass, (5326m) to the north.

The Valley is part of the extensive valleys of the Inner Himalaya. It is popularly known as the 'Hidden Valley'. The pronounced aridity and broad open profiles of the valley, also called Bhot or elevated valley, is reminiscent of Tibetan landscapes.

The altitude of the Valley ranges from 1905m at Lokpa to over 5093m at Ngula Dhojhyang on the Tibetan border. It lies between latitudes 28° 20' 14.6" N and 28° 36' 47.7" N, and longitudes 84° 57' 18.8" E and 85° 11' 35.6" E.

CLIMATE

The Tsum Valley has four distinct climatic zones: sub-tropical (between 1000m and 2000m), cool temperate (between 2000m and 3000m), sub-alpine (between 3000m and 4000m), and alpine (above 4500m). Temperatures vary widely between these zones. Winters are harsh (October to March); temperatures in the cool temperate, sub-alpine, and alpine regions drop below freezing and snowfall occurs for up to six months. Below 3000m (sub-tropical and cool temperate regions), summers are comfortable with daytime temperatures between 22°C and 34°C. However, summer temperatures in the sub-alpine and alpine regions rarely go above 10°C.

The monsoon falls between June and September, the rest of the year being mostly dry. The average rainfall is around 1900mm per annum. The southern part of the valley is generally wetter than the upper valley. Clear skies during October to December and April to June provide magnificent views of the surrounding mountains.

PEOPLE

The people who live in the Tsum Valley are mostly Tibetan-speaking Mongolian people, who inhabit the high valleys along the Budhi Gandaki and Shiar Khola. They are often referred to as Bhote or Bhotia. Bhotes have adopted Tibetan culture and lifestyle due to their proximity, trade, transhumance, and cultural ties with Tibet. The highest dwellers live at an elevation of 3510m at Mu Gumba.

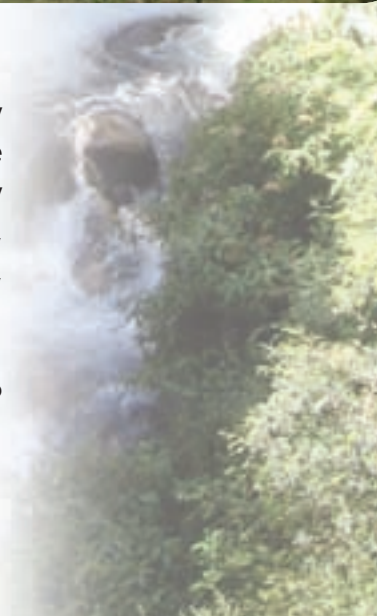
History has it that a group of nomads called Tamba Setto migrated to the Tsum Valley from Bichour in Lamjung District. They were joined by the Bu Phaujyas, who migrated from Tibet. With this influx came Buddhism and the way of life practised in the Tsum Valley. The Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya sects of Tibetan Buddhism revere these remote Himalayan valleys as *Beyul*, the hidden valleys of culture that uphold religious values that no longer exist in Tibet.



RELIGION AND WAY OF LIFE

The people of this region base their faith and beliefs on Buddhism. They worship Gautama Buddha, Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), and some bodhisattvas (people nearing enlightenment or Buddhas-to-be). They burn butter lamps in monasteries, believe in the reincarnation of lamas, decorate their monasteries with prayer flags, build mani walls along paths, visit Buddhist pilgrimage sites, and play Buddhist instruments.

Typically, Tibetan Buddhists send their second son and daughter to monasteries to become monks and nuns.



The people of the Tsum Valley never slaughter animals, even as a sacrifice to the gods. Some households practise polyandry and are often better off economically than monogamous households, as the practice prevents the fragmentation of family property, especially land, among brothers.

The inhabitants of the Tsum Valley believe that people live for several days after death. Many rituals are performed to remove the sins of the deceased and prepare their spirit for the next birth.

Faith healing by Lamas is popular and the local people also rely heavily on Amchis, or herbal medicine practitioners. People seldom fell trees and never keep them dirty, as they believe that Gods reside in them. This is a remnant of the Bon religion, a shamanistic religion that preceded Buddhism in the area.

FESTIVALS

Many festivals are celebrated throughout the year in the Tsum Valley. Several mask dances and rituals are celebrated in local gumbas, and there are numerous festivals preserving the valley's century old practices.

Losar

The most prominent festival is Losar (Tibetan New Year), which is celebrated for 15 days during January/February. The people of the lower Tsum Valley celebrate Losar earlier than the upper Tsum people.

Dhachyang

The second most important festival is Dhachyang (the Horse Festival). Dhachyang is celebrated in December/January by holding horse races and is especially dedicated to the welfare of people. Every settlement in the Tsum Valley celebrates Dhachyang on a slightly different date. Horses are richly decorated and the riders clad themselves in traditional attire and wear elaborate jewellery. While only men participate in the horseracing, women join in the dancing and singing in the evening.

Saka Dawa

Saka Dawa is an important festival marking the auspicious occasion of Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. It is celebrated in May by praying to Lord Buddha. Some devotees also fast during this time. Rituals are performed at local gumbas, monasteries, and nunneries.

Faning

The festival of Faning is celebrated to mark the attainment of internal energy. It is believed that energy can be gained from any food, including water. Fanning is celebrated in mid-August by having nutritious and delicious food.

MOUNTAINS

Ganesh Himal

Ganesh Himal is a sub-range of the Himalayan mountain range. It is located mostly in north-central Nepal, but some peaks lie on the border with Tibet. The Trisuli Gandaki Valley on the east separates it from the Langtang Himal. The Budhi Gandaki Valley and the Shiar Khola Valley on the west separate it from the Sringi Himal and the Mansiri Himal (and Mt Manaslu, the nearest 8000m peak). The range lies about 70km north-west of Kathmandu. Despite having no peaks over 7500m, the Ganesh Himal enjoys great vertical relief over the nearby valleys.

Yangra (Ganesh I)

The highest peak in the Ganesh Himal range is Yangra (Ganesh I), which is 7422m.

Ganesh NW

Ganesh NW, also known as Ganesh II or Ganesh III, has the most spectacularly steep relief, being closest to the Shiar Khola.

Mount Ganesh

Mount Ganesh rises to a height of 7422m. The entire panorama of this peak is best seen from Elung Chuli at Chhekam (2975m). This is the northern



face of the Ganesh Himal range. Majestic views of Mount Ganesh can also be seen from Chhule and Nile and from the hilltops around Burji.

Stringi Himal

Elung Chuli provides the closest northern view of the Stringi Himal and its glaciers. The entire Stringi Himal range lies in Central Nepal, just south of the Tibetan border, between the Shiar Khola Valley in the east and the Tom Khola/Trisuli Gandaki Valley in the west.

Chamar

The highest peak in the Stringi Himal range is Chamar (7187m), which is about 90km north-west of Kathmandu and about 25km east of Manaslu. Although low in elevation among the major mountains of Nepal, Chamar is exceptional because of its steep rise. It rises 5500m from the Tom Khola/Trisuli Gandaki confluence for a horizontal distance of about 13km.

Manaslu Range

Elung Chuli also provides an unending view of the Manaslu range. Although Manaslu cannot be seen, its southern ranges can be clearly observed, starting from Himal Chuli (7893m) and Baudha Himal (6672m) to the south-west.

HIGH PASSES

Ngula Dhojhyang

Ngula Dhojhyang is a scenic pass located above the snowline at an altitude of 5093m. The landscape is moraine and rocky, and avalanches can often be heard. From the pass, a Tibetan village can be seen about a kilometre inside Tibet and a motorable road, which leads to the Tibetan town of Kyirong. Ngula Dhojhyang is very windy. In summer, the pass is clear and pleasant.

Thapla Pass

Thapla Pass is located at an altitude of 5104m and remains partially covered with snow and glaciers. On the western side, a small Tibetan village can be seen amidst green fields, beside a treeless ridge. There is a pillar marking

the boundary between Nepal and China. There is no water available here. The main trail leading to Tibet branches off at Kalung Valley. The northern branch goes to Humlung Pass, Ngula Dhojhyang Pass, and beyond. The western trail goes to Tibet through Thapla. Both trails follow streams. The western trail follows the Thapla Khola, which is joined at different places by four major streams, the Emdu Khola, Pangya Khola, Domarken Khola, and Chhemdo Khola.

Humlung Pass

The trail to the Humlung Pass splits into two after crossing the Yamdro Khola. One branch follows a stream north to the Humlung Pass and is very difficult. It takes about eight hours for tourists to reach the pass (four hours for locals). The pass is impossible for yaks, naks, and chauris to cross, and people can only cross it in summer. About an hour from the bridge is a lonely, solitary place called Jonali, at an altitude of 4122m. Jonali is a good place for camping, with enough land to set up tents. After Jonali you reach Dhursa (4323m). The trail to Dhursa is very steep and narrow. It takes about three hours from Dhursa to reach the pass.

RIVERS, LAKES AND WATERFALLS

Rivers

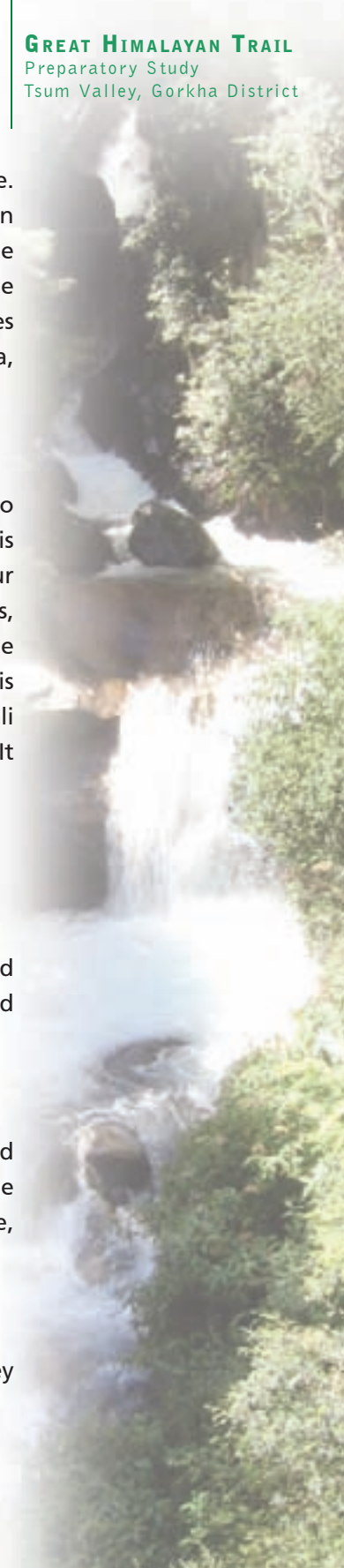
The main rivers in the Tsum Valley are Lungdang Khola, Shiar Khola, and Sarpu Khola, all of which originate from glaciers in the area and are fed by numerous tributaries flowing from glaciers.

Lakes

There are a few lakes in the Tsum Valley, but the approach trails need to be developed before they can be put into the tourism circuit. Some lakes with potential to attract tourists are Chho Syong-Mu, Khungyu Lake, Chho Lungyu, and Yamdro Lake.

Waterfalls

Travellers encounter a number of beautiful waterfalls in the Tsum Valley as the Shiar Khola carves a narrow and v-shaped valley.





Chhuyang Chhenmo

Chhuyang Chhenmo falls about 350m in a single spectacular step, freezing in the winter into a long icefall.

Saki Lungba Chhuyang

Saki Lungba Chhuyang falls about 500m in four to five steps, forming a cascade of waterfalls. It also freezes over in winter and the sound of breaking ice can be heard in nearby settlements in the spring as it thaws.

Samba Tingding Chhuyang

Samba Tingding Chhuyang is one of the most beautiful falls in the Lower Tsum Valley. It is located at Ripchet, but can be seen and heard from the Chumling-Chhekam trail.

MONASTERIES AND CAVES

One of the most unique attributes of the Tsum Valley is its monasteries. They are strong religious institutions, which not only educate monks and nuns, but also preserve the centuries-old art, culture, and traditions of the valley.

Rachen Gumba

Rachen Gumba (nunnery) was established in 1905 AD. It houses approximately 80 nuns belonging to the Ngak-pa sect, which does not allow animal slaughter. The main Lama is Zopa Rinpoche. The nunnery is situated in the Shiar Khola Valley in the foothills of the mountains bordering Nepal and Tibet.

The main nunnery is a whitewashed mud building around a central courtyard, with a richly painted front door. Rituals and folk dances are



performed in the courtyard in front of the main hall. There are separate areas for retreat and for guests. Lines of cedar trees and the wide, open landscape lend the nunnery a feeling of sacred solitude and peacefully co-existence with nature.

The nunnery houses a complete set of Kangyur block prints from Tibet, printed on both sides. There are also life size statues of Avalokiteshwara, Guru Padmasambhava, Tara, and Buddha Amitabha, and stupas made of gold and silver alloy. There are one thousand clay, moulded statues of Avalokiteshwara, a brightly coloured, carved throne and pillar, and a large prayer wheel. The interior is richly painted with murals about Buddhism and its history. The ceilings and beams are decorated with images of dragons, birds, and other animals.

Every month, on the day of the full moon, tormas (pyramids of dough) decorated with butter and flower petals are offered in the monastery. Deities such as Phola, Khola, and Chusin are worshipped. Tara is worshipped from September to November, during which time the nuns are invited into the villages for ceremonies.

Mu Monastery

Mu Monastery was established in 1895 AD. It is headed by Lama Sherab Dorje Drukpa Rinpoche of the Drukpa Kagyu sect. The monastery is ten hours walk from Chhekam in the Tsum Valley and is situated at an altitude of 3510m.

The monastery has been undergoing restorations since 1998 and new buildings are now being constructed for the monks. The monastery houses religious books, including Kangyur, a life size statue of Avalokiteshwara, and images of Guru Padmasambhava and Tara. Some of the most striking objects in the monastery are the statues of Buddha Amitabha. There are two special occasions celebrated in this monastery: Ngyungne, which is celebrated in September/October by fasting for world peace, and Yarne, which involves the reading of sacred texts and rituals.

Campsites and clean drinking water facilities are available for tourists.



Dephyudonma Gumba

‘Dephyudonma’ means the meeting of people to begin to shine the light. It is one of the oldest monasteries in the Tsum Valley and is situated in the rugged mountains between Central Nepal and Tibet, a two-hour walk from nearest villages of Chhule and Nile.

The history of this monastery is directly associated with the dawn of Buddhism in the valley. Nomads who had migrated to the Tsum Valley requested a Lama from Tibet to establish the Gumba. Once there were 500 monks and nuns. However, these days, only a few nuns retreat in this monastery. The monastery is run by Lama Serap of Nile Ladrang from the Kangin sect. The nuns perform regular meditations, annual rituals, and alternate fasting.

There are a few campsites and drinking water facilities.

Gumba Lungdang

Gumba Lungdang is a serene nunnery of the Kangin sect set in the middle of a dense coniferous forest on the northern slope of Ganesh Himal. It is five-hours walk from the nearest village of Dhumje in Chumchet VDC.

The monastery was established in the early 20th Century after a rigorous journey by a blind person (*Lung* means blind; *dang*, difficult access). It was renovated in 2000 AD to construct the main hall and add a few apartments for nuns. The main Lama is Lama Serap.

Close views of the Ganesh Himal range and a spectacular panorama of Baudha Himal, Himal Chuli, and the Manaslu range makes this nunnery not only an important religious and cultural asset, but also a magnificent viewpoint. Ganesh Himal Base Camp is only a day’s walk from the monastery. Various special occasions are celebrated including Ngyungne in June/July and November/December, Chhechu in July/August, Dupa Chhesie in August/September and Dashain Tupchen in October/November. Clean drinking water, sanitation, and campsites are available in and around the monastery.

Piren Phu

Piren Phu (pigeon cave) is one of the most sacred caves in the Tsum Valley. It is located at the foot of a rugged cliff near the village of Burji. Milarepa, the famous Tibetan saint, was believed to have meditated here. Local legend has it that Milarepa used to disguise himself and beg in nearby villages. One old woman treated him badly by giving him half a piece of buckwheat bread. Later, her field became half barren. Even today, amidst the fertile land of Burji, there is a small plot that remains barren.

There are two separate gumbas attached to the rocky cave, which house life size statues of Avalokiteshwara, Buddha, Tara, and Milarepa. Bearded vultures, crows, and Himalayan danphe-monal ride the thermals below the cave. Beautiful views can be seen of the Shiar Khola, Rachen Gumba, the mountains, and settlements amidst vast agricultural land.

A few years ago, renovation works were carried out to refurbish the cave. Richly painted Buddhist murals, excellent artistic scripts carved on stones, long prayer flags, and significant Buddhists paper scripts make this cave one of the most important socio-cultural asset in the valley.

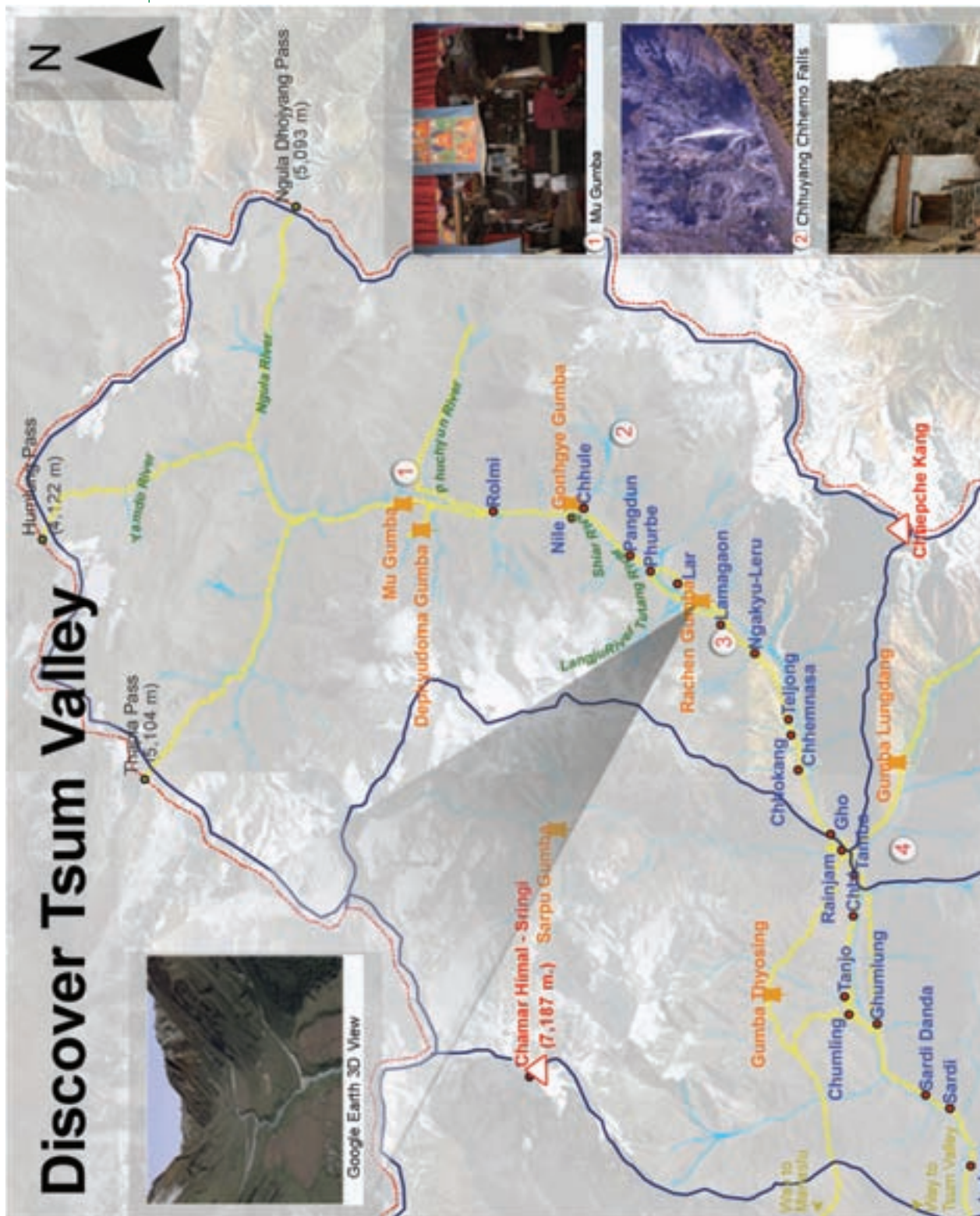
MANI WALLS, CHORTENS AND KAANIS

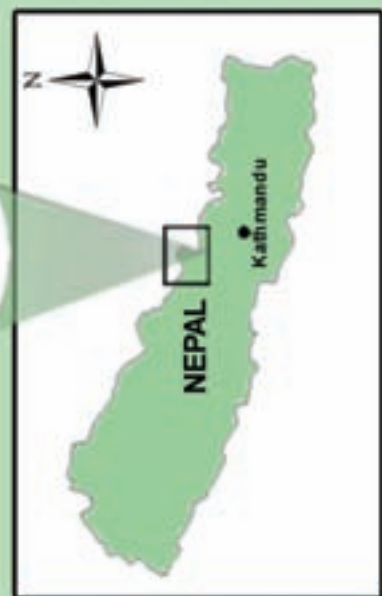
The Tsum Valley is extremely rich in cultural assets. As well as gumbas, the valley is dotted with mani walls, chortens, mani-cum-chortens, prayer wheels, lungta, and kaanis.

Mani walls are long walls made of stones carved with mantras. The longest mani walls (over 250m) are at Dzong and Phurpe. The main purpose of these mani walls is to ask the gods to look after travellers and to protect settlements.

A chorten is a Buddhist religious monument also known as a stupa. Chortens are a distinctive feature of the landscape in the Tsum Valley. They are erected to ward off evil spirits from places that are identified









as thresholds (confluences, bridges, mountain passes, etc.) or to commemorate the visit or death of historic figures, lamas, or relatives. About 72 chortens and 50 mani-cum-chortens have been recorded on the trail.

A manilakor is a cylindrical shaped prayer wheel made of wood and leather. Sacred mantras are inscribed on them, such as 'Om Mani Padme Hum'. Manilakors are generally placed around the circumambulatory paths of mani walls. Individual, larger prayer wheels called

manitungyur are housed in local gumbas.

Kaanis (also called gateway chortens) are placed at entries to villages for travellers to walk through. There are about 20-25 kaanis strategically located in the valley.

Lungta (prayer flags and piles of stones) mark the tops of the main passes. Together with mani walls, chortens, and kaanis, these structures protect settlements from bad and evil spirits.

HANDICRAFTS AND LOCAL PRODUCTS

Tsumba (the local inhabitants of Tsum), especially the women, spin and weave yak wool to make tan (woollen mattresses), chuktu (woollen blankets), carpets, and chuya (woollen kimonos). Baskets are made from bamboo for household use. Other items made in the valley include wooden masks, wooden teacups, dhagen (a musical instrument), pong (wine carafes), wooden drinking glasses, karuwa (wooden jugs), wooden mortar,

and wooden kitchen implements. Although most of the handicrafts made are for home use, some are gradually appearing in local markets.

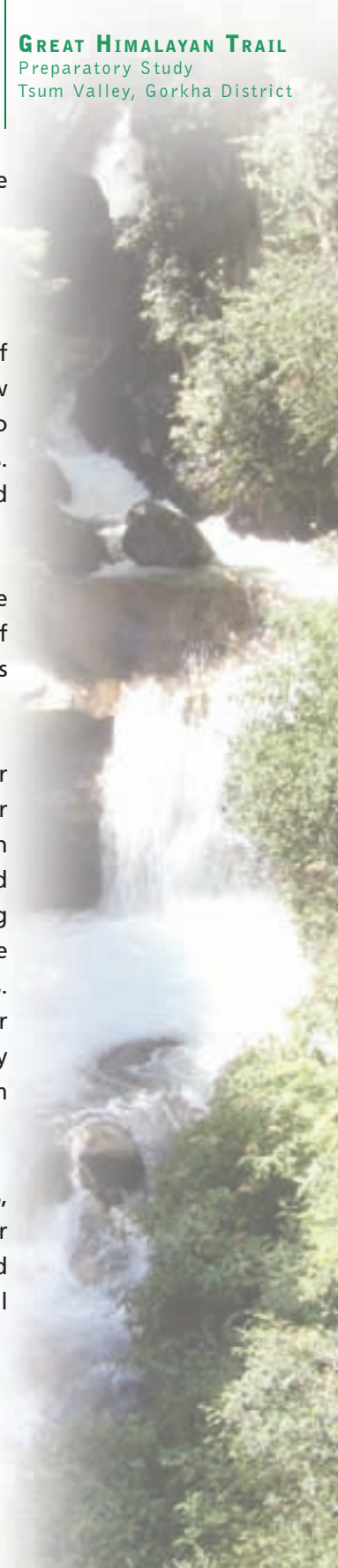
FLORA AND FAUNA

Wildlife in the Tsum Valley is rich and diverse, inhabiting a mosaic of habitats. There are 33 species of mammal, including the elusive snow leopard, musk deer, ghoral, Himalayan tahr, and blue sheep. There are also over 110 species of birds, 11 species of butterflies, and 3 species of reptiles. There are approximately 2000 species of plants, 11 types of forests, and over 50 species of medicinal plants.

The cool temperate zone (between 2000m and 3000m), also called the life zone, is more comfortable for tourists. The cool temperate region, east of the Shiar Khola, en route to the Tsum Valley, contains dense coniferous forest.

The sub-alpine zone (between 3000m and 4000m) is characterised by fir trees (*Abies spectabilis*) and spruce (*Picea smithiana*). The upper Shiar Valley near Rachen Gumba is unique, containing forests of Himalayan larch (*Larix himalaica*), a rare tree which is restricted to central Nepal and adjoining valleys in Tibet. This tree turns golden yellow in autumn, standing out among the dark green pines and firs. Oaks and rhododendrons are common in the Lower Tsum Valley in the Ghala Chuli and Mathang forests. The rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboretum*) is Nepal's national flower and blooms in spring in a range of colours including pure white, creamy yellow, pink, maroon, and scarlet. Other species like the campanulatum are seen in great profusion during early May.

The alpine zone lies above 4000m, where trees give way to dwarf junipers, dwarf rhododendrons, and birch forest. Humid areas have a large number of rhododendron species, while arid areas are dominated by juniper and small cushion plants. Grassland areas are often enriched by colourful alpine flowers, such as primula, potentilla, geum, and iris.



MEDICINAL PLANTS

Table 2: Medicinal Plants		
Common Name	Latin Name	Use
Yarcha gunbu	<i>Cordyceps sinensis</i>	A strange plant, found only in the alpine region of the Himalayas, which grows out of the anterior end of a caterpillar. It is used as a tonic and aphrodisiac.
Jatamasee (Spikenard)	<i>Nardostachys grandiflora</i>	Used to treat hysteria and heart palpitations.
Kutkee	<i>Picrorhizara scrophulariiflora</i>	Roots are used as a stimulant and appetizer, particularly in Ayurvedic medicine.
Kumaki (Moha Bhiringaraj Oil)	<i>Onosma maharangee</i> / <i>O. Emodi</i>	Used to produce black hair dye and to cool and nourish the hair. Commercial name is Miha Bhringol.
Timur (Nepali Pepper)	<i>Zanthoxylum armatum</i>	Timur is used as a spice all over Nepal.
Jimmu (Aromatic Leaf Garlic)	<i>Allium hypsistum</i>	Used as a spice.
Chiraito	<i>Swertia chirayito</i>	Widely used in Ayurvedic and local medicine as a multi-purpose tonic, for stomach aches, asthma, as a laxative, and more.
Padamchal	<i>Rheum webianum</i>	The root of this herb has laxative properties and is used widely in Tibetan and Chinese traditional medicine.
Panch Aunle (Ground Orchid)	<i>Dactylorhiza hatagirea</i>	The small tuberous root of this orchid is considered very potent as a tonic. It is one of the most expensive herbs in the Himalayas.
Gurjo	<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>	Used to treat stomach ache, as an anti-pyretic, and as an aphrodisiac, among other things.
Seabuckthorn	<i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i>	The fruit of this plant is used in traditional medicine and to make juice, pies, and jams. It is considered to be very nutritious.
Amla (Embalic Myrobalan)	<i>Embalica officinalis</i>	The amla fruit is highly nutritious and medicinal. A principal source of vitamin C in traditional medicine, it is one of the three components of the famous Ayurvedic medicine Trifala.
Silajit		Silajit is an exude form of milestones with high repute as an Ayurvedic medicine, it purifies blood, strengthens bones, and increases bone marrow.
Dhupi (Juniper)	<i>Juniperous sp.</i>	Used as incense in monasteries.



TRAIL TO MU GUMBA AND NGULA DHOJHYANG

The Tsum Valley can only be accessed by foot or by a 35 minute charter helicopter flight from Kathmandu. The trail to Ngula Dhojhyang is the main trail into the valley and is part of the larger Kyimo Lung (or Beyul Kyimulung) circuit, which circles the Sringi Himal along the Nepal-Tibet Border. The trail to Ngula Dhojhyang is also the main trail to Rachen Gumba and Mu Gumba, making it a popular pilgrimage trail.

The trail starts at Arughat in Gorkha district, a day's bus journey from Kathmandu. Arughat is connected to Kathmandu through Gorkha Bazaar, Trisuli Bazaar, and Dhading Bensi. Trisuli to Arughat has no motorable road, but there are seasonal road connections from Gorkha Bazaar and Dhading Bensi to Arughat.

The trail follows the winding Budhi Gandaki River. It takes a week to reach the Tsum Valley from Arughat on foot. The flat elevated valley provides magnificent vistas of the Ganesh Himal (7422m), Sringi Himal (7187m), Himal Chuli (7895m), and Baudha Himal (6672m) peaks.



Table 1: **Suggested Itinerary to Ngula Dhojhyang***

Origin	Destination	Travel Time
Kathmandu	Arughat (by bus)	10 hours
Arughat	Liding	6 hours
Liding	Maccha Khola	5 hours
Maccha Khola	Jagat	6 hours
Jagat	Ekle Bhatti	3 hours
Ekle Bhatti	Chumling**	6 hours
Chumling	Chhekam	5 hours
Chhekam	Rachen Gumba	4 hours
Rachen Gumba	Mu Gumba	4 hours
Mu Gumba	Ngula Dhojhyang	3 hours

* Details of the trail and facilities can be found in Annex 1

** First stop in the Tsum Valley

Attractions along the Trail

Shiar Lookout

Shiar Lookout overlooks the spectacular Ngak cliffs, which line the Shiar Gorge. At the bottom of the gorge flows the roaring Budhi Gandaki. The lookout is an hour's walk from the junction of the trail leading to Manaslu.

Lokpa

This is the first village as you enter the Tsum Valley. Before the construction of Philim-Chhekampar trail, the path to Chhekampar used to pass over the mountains through the village of Anga Serjong. Some settlements have emerged along parts of this trail. The local people are farmers and grow potatoes, gucchi mushrooms, and soya beans.

Sardi Gorge

The Sardi Khola meets the Shiar Khola about 200m downstream from a wooden bridge. The alder-covered banks of the river provide a peaceful noon resting place or overnight campsite under overhang cliffs. Across the bridge, the trail ascends to Sardi Danda.

Sardi Danda

The old trail to Sardi Danda ascends through dense forest with many varieties of rhododendron. From Sardi Danda, on a clear day, you can see eastern views of the Sringi Himal range.

Ghumlung

Ghumlung is the name of the forest where the old trail meets the new trail. From Ghumlung the trails lead to Chumchet village, Chyata Khola, and Ripchet, a settlement of about 50 households. The trail affords spectacular views of Baudha Himal (to the west) and Ganesh Himal (to the east).

Lungbhu

Lungbhu is situated at the base of a vertical cliff along the Dhamja Khola. It is scenic, wide, and open, making it a good place to camp the night.

Chumling Tanjo

From Tanjo, on a clear day, you can see Baudha Himal (6672m) and Ganesh Himal VI (Lombo). Tanjo has three monasteries: Panago Gumba, Mani Dhungyur, and Gurwa Gumba. There are also several good campsites, but there is little drinking water. There is a telephone service, health post, and plenty of campsites at Chumling Tanjo.

Nyauri Dobhan

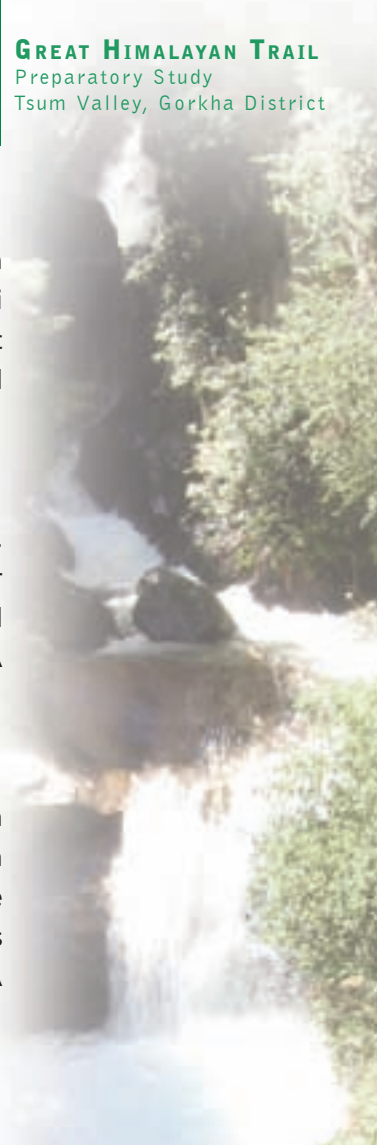
Nyauri Dobhan is the confluence of a local stream and the Shiar Khola. About two kilometres north of the confluence is Dhumje, where the river from Gumba Lungdang and the Shiar meet. There are about 15 log and timber houses near the confluence, surrounded by agricultural land. A past avalanche made Nyauri Khola a deep rocky canyon.

Rainjam Dobhan

Rainjam Dobhan is the confluence of the Shiar Khola, which flows from the east, and the Sarpu Khola, which flows from the west. From Rainjam Dobhan you can see the Ganesh Himal range. Along the Sarpu Khola there are several good campsites. When the snow is not melting, the water is clear and potable. The main vegetation is alder, blue pine, and poplar. A wooden bridge was recently built across the stream.

Rainjam Gho

The village of Rainjam Gho has a newly constructed pagoda-style stupa, which houses a large prayer wheel, locally called manitungyur. The settlement consists of seven stone houses with roofs made of pine shingles. Across the Shiar Khola is a dense forest of pine, silver fir, and oak. The very strenuous ascent to Chhekam begins at this village.



Chhekam

Chhekam village is situated on flat land and consists of two settlements, Chhekam and Paro. From the valley, the Ganesh Himal range can be seen directly to the south where it provides spectacular views of the Baudha and Himal Chuli peaks to the south-west. Some households in this village practise polyandry.

Jhong

In the past, the village of Jhong was used as a fort to protect the valley from invaders from the north. There are many ruins of houses at Jhong. At present, there are only nine households living in the village. Along the trail from Jhong are long mani walls-cum-chortens, followed by pastures.

Ngakyu-Leru

Ngakyu-Leru is situated about two to three kilometres from Chhekam. This beautiful village is a compact settlement with narrow alleys uniquely walled by firewood. The main trail passes through the heart of the village.

Lamagaon

The trail from Ngakyu-Leru crosses flat and spacious fields, which stretch along the west bank of the Shiar River. There are several mani walls and kaanis along the wide trail. The agricultural fields are well protected from animals by high stone walls. From this village the trail divides to Rachen Gumba and Burji.

Burji

The village of Burji lies in Chhekampar VDC. This village contains a famous Milarepa cave, called Piren Phu, where Milarepa's footprint can be seen. The Langju River runs besides this village. Across the river and the Langju moraine lies the spectacular Chi-phu monastery constructed on the edge of a rugged mountain. The trail to the monastery is difficult and undeveloped.

Rachen Gumba

Rachen Gumba is one of the largest nunneries in the Tsum Valley, with 80 nuns currently studying. (See Chapter on Monasteries and Caves for more details.)

Lar, Phurpe and Pangdun

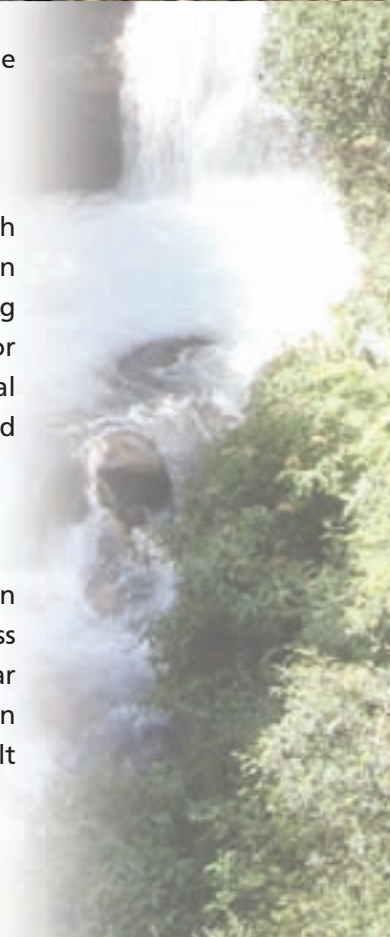
These three neighbouring settlements are collectively known as Paling. Just before the village of Phurpe runs the Khungyu Khola, with its three water mills and wooden bridge. A trail goes to Burji from here and meets the eastern trail at Lamagaon. The eastern trail crosses the stream over a wooden bridge at Lamagaon. About 30 minutes walk from Phurpe is Pangdun from where a large glacier can be viewed to the west.

Chhule

On the way to Chhule the path crosses a small hillock called Polgang with panoramic views to the south and north of the upper Tsum Valley. Ten minutes walk from there in the middle of the trail is a stupa with glancing eyes and a gilded pinnacle. Old women come from nearby villages for morning and evening prayers. There are flat, large, and fertile agricultural fields with standing crops of wheat, buckwheat, potato, mustard, and amaranth. This area suffers from massive deforestation.

Nile

This is the last village heading north in the upper Tsum Valley. Nile is on the western, sun-side of the Shiar Khola, about 20 minutes walk across from Chhule. From a distance, Nile appears to be an island in the Shiar Khola. The valley is fertile and has large houses. The village seems to be an old settlement. According to the local people, one of the houses was built



by Newari people, and it is believed that Newari people used to inhabit this valley. The trail continues to the right of the Shiar Khola and crosses the stream by a wooden footbridge to Rolmi. From Rolmi, Mu Gumba is about three kilometres uphill to the north-west.

Mu Gumba

The trail gradually ascends to Mu Gumba, the largest monastery in the region. Mu Gumba is located at the highest and farthest point in the Tsum Valley. On the way to Mu Gumba, Rikang Gumba can be seen on the other side of the Shiar Khola and is about four to five hours walk from Rolmi. Also in the area are Dheron Gumba (Dhephyudoma Gumba) and Chhosyang Tal (lake), about two to three hours walk uphill. It is possible to see and hear avalanches across the gorge, tumbling down the mountain to the Shiar Khola.

Phrang

This stretch of the trail from Mu Gumba to Kalung is steep and slippery, particularly in the rainy season. This difficult part of the trail is 20 minutes walk from Mu Gumba and has mudslides every monsoon, hence the name Phrang. There is a large birch forest across the river.

Mijam

Mijam is about 40m above the confluence of the Thapla and Shiar Kholas and about one and a half hours walk from Ngula Dhojhyang. People from Mu Gumba come to this area to collect fuelwood.

Kalung

About 200m above the confluence of the Thapla and Shiar Kholas lies a valley with big terraces called Kalung. From Kalung you can see the Thapla River, Ganesh Himal range, and a spectacular view of the Tsum Valley. Kalung is located on flat land with big terraces that are believed to have been agricultural fields in the past. The flat pastureland is full of marmot burrows and there is no vegetation except for small thorny bushes. Many yaks, naks, and chauris graze in the valley. Large patches of birch forest can be seen on the west side of the Shiar Khola and Thapla River. Some chortens and mani walls are also present in the area.

Chhanchhu

Chhanchhu is about one and a half hours walk from Kalung and has good pastures for yaks, naks, and chauris. Yak owners give salt to the animals and tend the herd.

Bhanjyo

Bhanjyo is the name for the confluence of the Yamdro and Shiar Kholas. From Bhanjyo you can see the Ngula Dhojhyang pass. Small glaciers can also be seen. The landscape is full of thorny alpine bushes. This is the area between the tree line and the snowline.

Ngula Dhojhyang

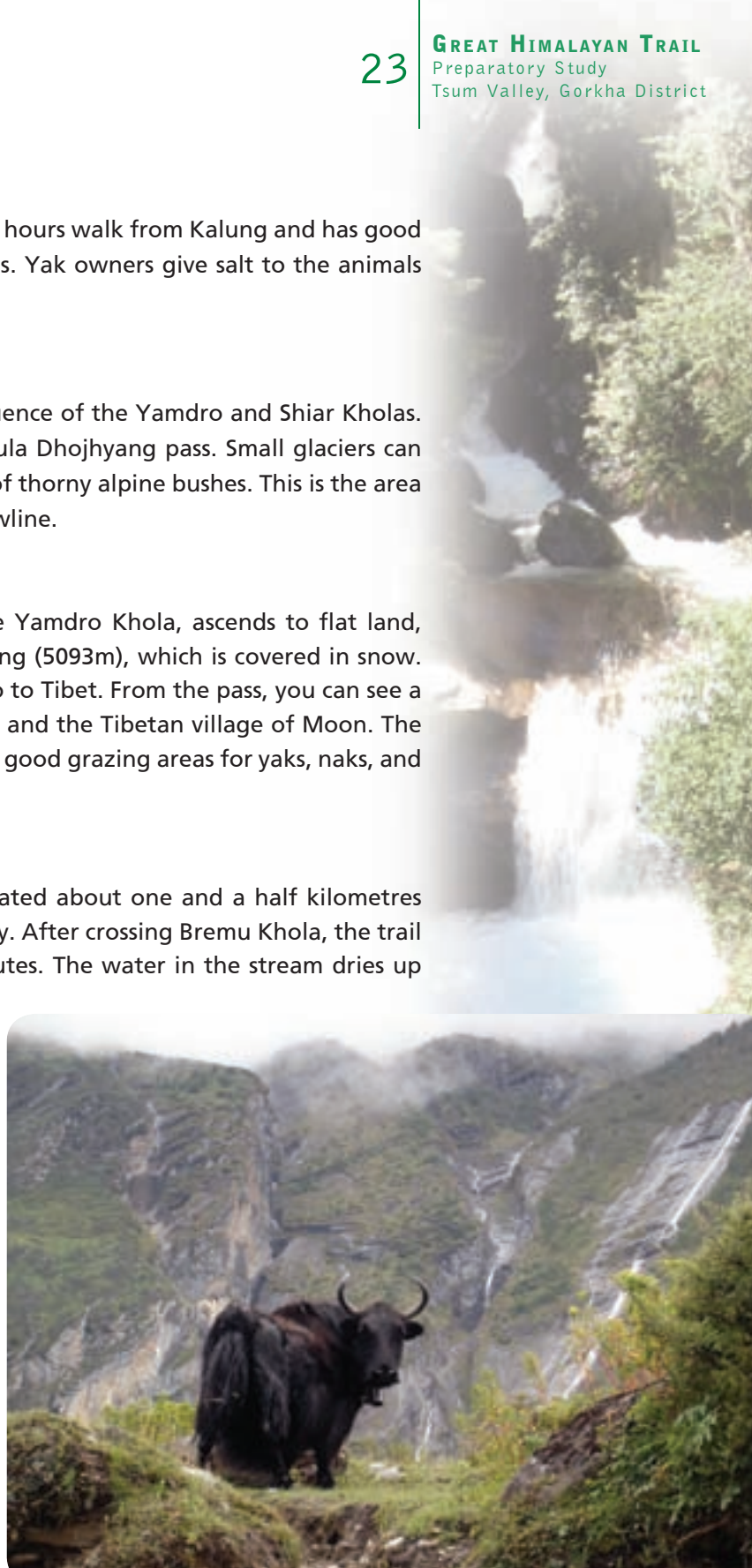
The trail from Bhanjyo crosses the Yamdro Khola, ascends to flat land, and then climbs to Ngula Dhojhyang (5093m), which is covered in snow. The local people use this pass to go to Tibet. From the pass, you can see a big flat steppe on the Tibetan side and the Tibetan village of Moon. The area is home to blue sheep and has good grazing areas for yaks, naks, and chauris.

Bremu Khola

Bremu Khola is a small stream located about one and a half kilometres from the cross trail at Kalung Valley. After crossing Bremu Khola, the trail climbs vertically for about 15 minutes. The water in the stream dries up in summer and is full of snow in winter. The area is heavily grazed by yaks, naks, and chauris. It is a good place to rest and relax in the daytime, but does not have enough space to camp.

Tapkyarong

Tapkyarong (also called Lhungpa) is about two kilometres west of the Kalung Valley. It is a wide-open steppe suitable for camping. A nearby stream provides good



drinking water. There is a depression nearby that may once have contained a glacial lake. Juniper and sunapati are the main vegetation.

Terha

Terha is a small open area with a chorten and a man-made bluff on the corner. This is an ideal viewing point for glaciers and moraines in the Chhimdo Himal across the Thapla Khola. There are spectacular views of Ngula Dhojhyang pass, the deep gorge containing the Thapla Khola, and the surrounding mountains, making it a great rest stop. However, there is no drinking water, making it unsuitable for camping.

Chhekya

Chhekya is a long undulating valley that spreads from east to west along the Thapla Khola. The area is spectacular and good for camping. It also has access to drinking water. Chhekya has good grazing grounds and is frequented by yaks, naks, chauris, and blue sheep. The local people come here in summer to collect yarcha gunbu (*Cordyceps sinensis*) and other medicinal herbs, while grazing their yaks, naks, and chauris.

GANESH HIMAL CIRCUIT

The trail to Ganesh Himal Base Camp starts from Dhumje, a five-day trek from Arughat. You can also fly to Dhumje by charter helicopter.

Expedition teams use this trail to climb Ganesh Himal, while other tourists are attracted by the beautiful peaks. The trail also goes through Gumba Lungdang, which is considered to be the most important pilgrimage site in the Tsum Valley.

From Dhumje, it takes three days to reach the base camp. Gumba Lungdang is one day by foot.



Attractions along the Trail

Raijam Bridge

Along the trail to Ganesh Himal is a wooden bridge across the Shiar Khola called Raijam Bridge (2395m). After the bridge, the trail continues south-east and passes through Dhumje.

Dhumje

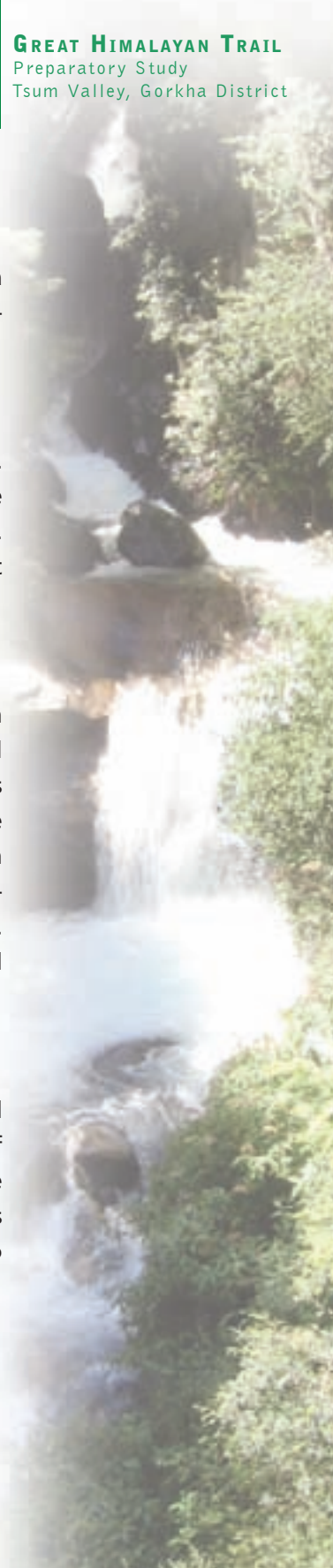
Dhumje has wide flat land, good for cultivation. Barley is the main crop. The village itself is small, with about eight houses and adjoining cattle sheds. There is only one small spot where a couple of tents can be pitched. There are a lot of gnats and flies, so visitors are advised to carry insect repellent.

Thothong

After Dhumje, the trail leads steeply up to Thothong, a viewpoint from where dense pine forest trees can be seen opposite the Ganesh Himal range. It takes two hours to walk from Dhumje to Thothong. From this viewpoint, the village of Chumchet can be seen towards the west in the lap of the Sringi Himal, as well as the settlements of Tanjo and Raijam Gho. Summer sheds for chauris and cattle can be seen, as well as the tri-junction of the Shiar Khola, Gumba Lungdang Khola, and Sarpu Khola. When the sky is clear, you can also see the Baudha Himal (6672m) and Himal Chuli (7893m).

Lapche (Deurali)

The next viewpoint is Lapche, which is marked by mani walls and windhorses (prayer flags) blowing in the cold wind. There are views of the roaring Lela Khola across to Gumba Lungdang. Ganesh Himal can be seen in the east and the village of Chumchet in the west. The trail passes through dense forests of rhododendrons and ferns. There is no place to camp, nor is there any drinking water.



Kevlung

Fifteen minutes walk from Lapche, at 3000m, is a chorten, from where you can see Gumba Lungdang in the north-west. Several chauri sheds can be seen amidst the dense forest. This is a good resting place. There are two other chortens along the trail at 3092m and 3186m.

Gumba Lungdang

Gumba Lungdang is a five-hour walk from Dhumje. It is the oldest monastery in the valley, established 33 years earlier than Mu Gumba. There are about 16 houses scattered along the terraces, occupied mostly by worshipers and nuns. Originally, the place was built for both monks and nuns. However, the monks and nuns married each other. The head monk was disappointed and left for Kyirong, never to return. Currently, there are fifteen nuns and one monk.

Pangur

Pangur is about 15 minutes walk from Gumba Lungdang through dense, mixed coniferous forests of pine, cedar, and different coloured rhododendrons. The usufruct rights to graze animals on these pastures remain with the people of Ripchet. Yaks have been known to be killed by snow leopards here. Pangur is a good place to camp, with a grand view of the Ganesh Himal range.

Palla Khola

From Palla Khola, Ganesh Himal Base Camp can be traversed as a circuit by following the main trail. The other trail descends to the stream called Pallako Khola. From Palla Khola, the trail leads to Nachhemu Khola.

Nachhemu Khola

Nachhemu Khola rises from Ganesh Himal. There is a log bridge across the stream. This area is a complete wilderness and has old and dense mixed forest of birch, spruce, and pine. The trees in this forest are tall and areas under the forest canopy are mostly covered with sphagnum moss. The trail passes through dense forest to reach a small open area with a chauri shed in the middle.

Thangjung

The trail continues up through the dense forest and reaches an open area called Thangjung. Thangjung is flat with two temporary sheds for chauri herders used during summer. The vegetation here is quite different, including willow, juniper, and spruce.

Chaijopang

Chaijopang is an open area used as a summer pasture for chauris and yaks. It is situated at an altitude of 3669m along the main trail leading to Ganesh Himal Base Camp. Chaijopang is a good, flat camping area, close to water.

Tokpa

Near Ganesh Himal Base Camp is a flat area called Tokpa, spreading east to west along the creek. It is surrounded by alpine and riverine meadows, and is defined by a valley on the south-west and a lateral moraine and ridge on the north-west. The whole alpine meadow appears to be 700–800m long and about 50–100m wide. Tokpa is a good place to camp.

Ganesh Himal Base Camp

Ganesh Himal Base Camp (situated at an altitude of 3888m) can be reached after a gentle ascent of an hour and a half from Tokpa. Base Camp is demarked by glaciers with house-sized boulders and a few scattered chauris sheds. From here, in the lap of Ganesh Himal, a glacial lake called Kangthang (mountain ground) can be seen. Kangthang is oval in shape and covers an area of about one hectare. The water from this lake gives rise to the Prangmar Khola.

Parche Kharka

From Ganesh Himal Base Camp, towards the north, lies a long moraine, which has to be crossed in order to reach the trail to Gumba Lungdang. About a two-hour walk downhill is a pasture that is ideal for camping. Sheds scattered around the area can be used as shelter for porters.



Syathang Sangu

After Parche Kharka, the trail leads downstream to a temporary log bridge at Syathang across a stream originating at the Ganesh Himal glacier. This stream has to be crossed again at Supathang.

Palla Khola

The trail again passes through Palla Khola at an altitude of 3328m, providing a scenic resting place. After an hour's walk, the start of the circuit is reached and the trail merges with the main trail to Gumba Lungdang.

Nyauli Khola Bridge

On the return from Ganesh Himal Base Camp, you do not have to pass through Raijam Gho again. Instead, you can walk along the south side of the Shiar Khola and across the Nyauli Khola. The Nyauli Khola Bridge has recently been repaired and a new trail is almost complete on the other side of the stream.



Annex 1: Trail to Mu Gumba: Itinerary and Facilities en Route*

Origin	Destination	Elevation (Metres)	Travel Time			Facilities En Route					
			Hours	Minutes	Mode	Lodges	Tea Shops	Camp-sites	Tele- phone	Police Station	Health Post
Kathmandu	Arughat	600	10	00	Bus	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Arughat	Shantinagar	597	-	30	Foot	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Shantinagar	Arkhet	627	-	30	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Arkhet	Ghumaune	-	-	25	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Ghumaune	Kyorpani	-	-	30	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Kyorpani	Soti	720	-	25	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Soti	Armala	766	-	25	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Armala	Khursani Danda	865	-	15	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Khursani Danda	Liding	865	-	7	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Liding	Lapu Bensi	861	1	50	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Lapu Bensi	Khani Bensi	940	1	18	Foot	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Khani Bensi	Machha Khola	927	1	5	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Machha Khola	Khorla Bensi	960	-	55	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Khorla Bensi	Tatopani	989	-	35	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Tatopani	Dobhan	930	1	-	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Dobhan	Syaule Bhatti	-	1	-	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Syaule Bhatti	Yaru Phant	1371	1	33	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Yaru Phant	Jagat	1400	1	05	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Jagat	Salleri	1388	-	20	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Salleri	Ghatte Khola	1474	-	45	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Ghatte Khola	Philim	1600	-	55	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Philim	Chhekur	1631	-	35	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Chhekur	Ekle Bhatti	-	-	05	Foot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Ekle Bhatti	Lokpa	1905	1	55	Foot	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Lokpa**	Sardi	1821	-	45	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Sardi	Sardi Danda	2015	1	-	Foot	No	No	No	No	No	No
Sardi Danda	Ghumlung	2038	1	30	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Ghumlung	Chumling	2220	-	50	Foot	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Chumling	Tanjo	2222	-	20	Foot	No	No	No	No	No	No
Tanjo	Chhi	-	-	30	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Chhi	Tamba	-	-	30	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Tamba	Rainjam	2350	-	45	Foot	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Rainjam	Gho	2485	1	-	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Gho	Chhemnasa	2730	2	-	Foot	No	No	No	No	No	No
Chhemnasa	Tejong	-	1	30	Foot	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Tejong	Chhokang	-	-	20	Foot	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Chhokang	Ngakyu-Leru	-	1	-	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Ngakyu-Leru	Lamagaon	-	1	-	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Lamagaon	Rachen Gumba	-	-	20	Foot	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Rachen Gumba	Lar	-	-	20	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Lar	Phurpe	-	-	25	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Phurpe	Pangdun	-	-	30	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Pangdun	Chhule	-	-	10	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Chhule	Nile	-	-	20	Foot	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Nile	Rolmi	-	-	55	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Rolmi	Mu Gumba	-	1	-	Foot	No	No	Yes	No	No	No

* (indicative, the information has not been fully verified)

** First village in the Tsum Valley



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