

LEGENDS
TRAIL



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EUROPEAN UNION FOR ARMENIA



Legends of the Legends Trail



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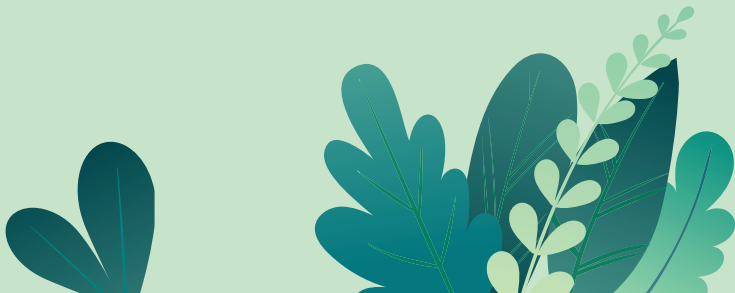
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Legends of the Legends Trail

EU4Tourism: Outdoor adventures on the historic trails in Syunik



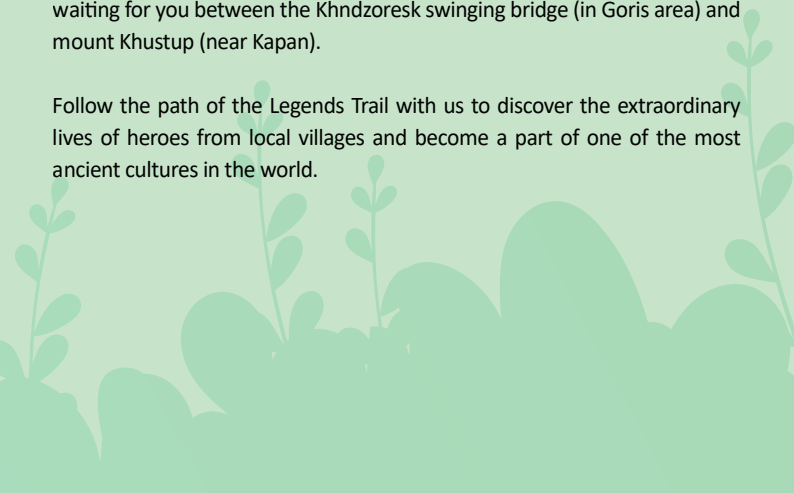
INTRODUCTION

Have you ever thought about escaping the crowds and living adventures somewhere far from the fast pace of the modern world? This book will take you to a fascinating journey through time and space to the historic region of Southern Armenia.

Well-hidden right behind any corner, one could spend weeks wandering around high mountains and deep gorges, abandoned villages, caves, bridges and ancient monasteries while living with the locals and eating only bio-products from their gardens.

More than 200km of unspoilt nature and famous Armenian hospitality is waiting for you between the Khndzoresk swinging bridge (in Goris area) and mount Khustup (near Kapan).

Follow the path of the Legends Trail with us to discover the extraordinary lives of heroes from local villages and become a part of one of the most ancient cultures in the world.



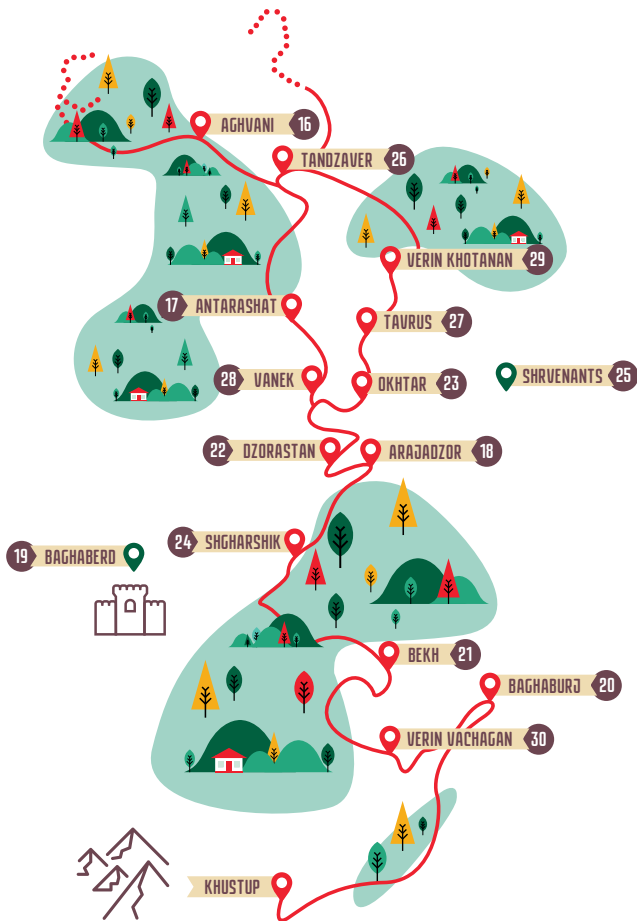
Goris and Tatev Communities



- LEGENDS TRAIL
- CONNECTION BETWEEN GORIS/KAPAN AREAS
- 📍 LEGENDS TRAIL VILLAGES
- 📍 NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES



Kapan Community



1

Akner



The Mountains of Mediation

A quarrel had ignited hostility between two brothers, however they needed to work together in order to harvest grass to use for the winter months in the mountains.

Refusing to speak to each other, once lunch time came, the elder brother called out.

“Hey, Mountains, tell him the food is ready!”

The younger brother replied,

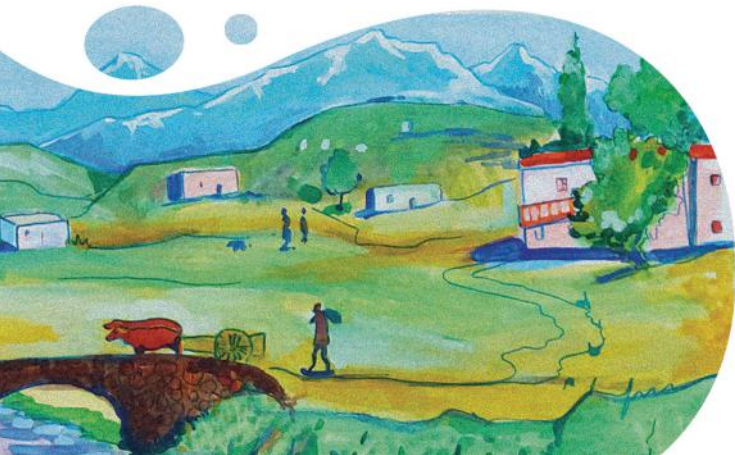
“Hey, Mountains, tell the yeller that I already ate my share. He can have what’s left.”



2

Bardzravan

The village of Bardzravan, surrounded by ancient settlements, is one with a long history. Some authors agree that Bardzravan is the village of Yeritstumb, mentioned by the historian Stepanos Orbelian, in his book “The History of Syunik”.

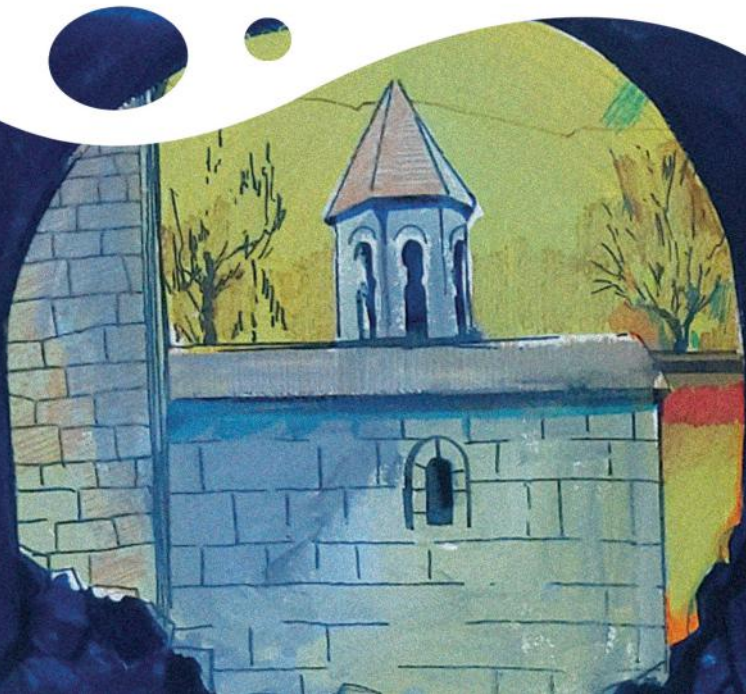


Many folktales about the origin of the village's name survive to this day. It is assumed that the village owes the name Yeritstumb to the three hills or mounds located nearby. The word yerits translates as "three" from classical Armenian, while the word tumb means "mound". These mounds acted as holy places where many ancient rituals were performed. More recently, clay coffins containing the corpses of two adults and two children were discovered during excavations. It is believed that these graves are around 2500 years old. According to other sources, the site was named Yeritstumb because it originally belonged to a religion minister ("yerets" in Armenian), and was later transformed into a village. Meanwhile, yet another legend claims that due to the central location of the village in relation to other settlements, earned it the name Yeretstumb. In this case, "yerets" stands for "huge, central, preferential". It is said that in previous times Bardzravan was a bustling village, surrounded by forests, arable land, and seven watermills. The village was well off, which became a reason for frequent invasions. According to one account, there was a time when the village was inhabited by Kurds, earning it the name Kyordak, later Armenians returned to the village.

Over time, many of the villagers moved to nearby settlements for various reasons. But many newcomers have also migrated to the former Yeritstumb. For instance, in 1866 eight families from Shinahayr, one family from Tatev and several families from Khoy villages relocated to Bardzravan. It is said that a soldier named Zohrap who moved from the village Khoy, built several defense buildings in the village.

3

Goris



The Legend of Zangezur

The army of Amir Timur approached Syunik. To save his land and his treasures, one of the princes of Syunik came to the enemy's camp and introduced himself to the great conqueror, "Amir Timur, the almighty conqueror, I have come to serve you." Timur asked how the prince planned to serve him.

The prince replied, "Every time when the enemy enters the territory of Syunik, the bells of Tatev monastery ring. This is how the news of approaching danger spreads across the region. If you cut off the bells, you will be able to conquer this mighty land." Amir Timur promised to

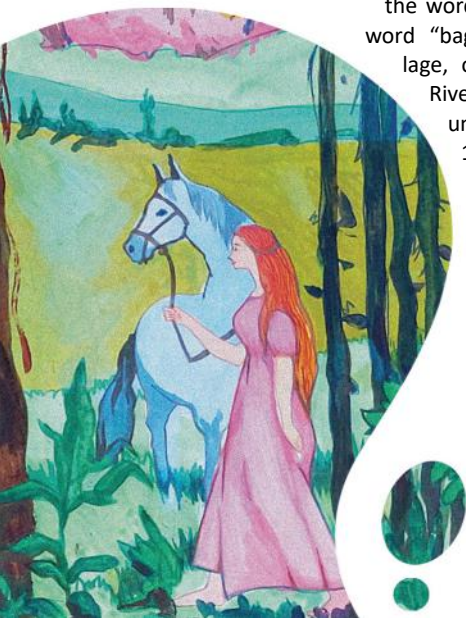
endow the traitor with land and wealth and ordered his men to secretly enter the monastery at night and put the bell tower on fire. At sunrise, the army of Amir Timur entered Syunik.

The priests of the monastery woke up and headed to the bell only to see it burned. Witnessing the tragic scene, they said, "Zangn izur e," which translates to "the bell is in vain." Since then, the region of Syunik is known as Zangezur.

4

Halidzor

Halidzor is famous for its historical buildings. Accounts left by Araquel of Davrij and Catholicos Abraham II mention a monastery called Tanahat situated in the forest facing Halidzor. This monastery no longer exists; however, older residents of the village still know that there is a “place for a pit” in the forest. Paki translates as a pit; the word possibly derives from the word “bagin”(altar). In Halidzor village, on the right shore of the River Vorotan, stands a monument, which states that in 1265 a man named Grigor built a stream there.



Moreover, near the Khachin Khut church, there is a khachkar with a record which states that Grigor had also built a church near the new monastery of Amaru, which survives to our day.

Harsnadzor is in the gorge of Halidzor. There is a legend that explains the origin of the name Harsnadzor.

The prince of Caucasian Albania, Varaz Trdat Yerets, had a daughter named Shahandukht. She was of spellbinding beauty, and the Torgomyan family asked for her hand in marriage. Leaving her parental home, the princess set out to her new dwelling.

When the graceful princess, accompanied by her escorts, reached the peak of the towering rock, they were suddenly attacked by a group of armed men.

The legend tells of a letter written by Shahandukht: "I, the sinner and servant of Christ, was on my way to the Torgomyan family's dwelling, to be wedded to their prince. Our path stretched across the border of Baghq and over the top of the cliff. Suddenly we were met by Ismaelites, who had heard of my beauty and wished to abduct me. With their sharp swords, they defeated our cavalry. Instead of dying at the hands of foreigners, I decided to die in the name of Christ by throwing myself off the cliff. I recalled Saint Hripsime, crossed myself and with my horse jumped off the rock. With the help of the mighty wind and the divine presence, I descended into the chasm safely. Standing there in awe and humility, I gave my thanks to the one who saved me, and in this sincere place, I gave myself to Christ. I vowed to never leave that place. I have built a chapel here where I live an ascetic life. My parents and the Torgomyan princes had begged for me to return to the worldly life, but my will was unshakable. I called the bishop of Syunik and handed him all my belongings, one half of which was intended for the poor, while the other half was to be donated to the holy church." According to this legend, the canyon was called Harsnadzor.

5 Harjis

Harjis is a very old village. In 839 CE, Harjis was already listed in the estate documents of Bishop Davit of Syunik as a village taxed by the monastery of Tatev. On the eastern side, the village is surrounded by volcanic hills – Halidzor Tapa (hill), Mets Tapa (big hill), Kaytsaki Harvat-sats (lightning struck), Shinahuyri Tapa, Khar Tapa, Choban Tapa, Shish Tapa, and Khutisi Tapa, among others. A big towering rock that leads to the Gorge of Vorotan is located on the south of the village.



The only way from Harjis village to the Vorotan Gorge lies through the western slope of this giant rock. It is said that Harjis was on a major trade route and many caravans used to pass along this road. People remember this trade route by the name of Aghi (salt), as it is said the road was mostly used by salt merchants. A caravanserai, now known as the Broken Caravanserai, was built for the travelers. A similar caravanserai is located in the Selim mountain pass, which presumably was linked with the Aghi route. The canyon on the eastern side of Harjis was inhabited by foreign tribes, who used to pasture their cattle in the plentiful fields. In winter, they journeyed to the Vorotan Gorge. The valleys where the tribes lived were called Verin Kirder (or Verkin Kurdlar) and the one located in the Vorotan Gorge was known as Nerkin Kirder (or Nerkin Kurdlar). The bridge located in the Vorotan Gorge is known by the name of Krdik. It was built by a Kurdish prince of Syunik in the 8th century. Nearby, one can find the ruins of King Alan's palace; a ruined church is also located nearby. The following words are inscribed on a stone near the church "Picturesque and flourishing Alan...1324". One legend states that the tribes living in Verin Kirder wished to take Harjis, but were afraid of its courageous village head. One day, they invited the village head over and got him drunk. In the morning, the village head saw Harjis engulfed by flames. The man died of a stroke caused by the shock. Only one girl survived from the whole village.



6

Hartashen



The Lasti Holy Place in Urghunishen (Azatashen)

The holy place of Azatashen (Urghunishen) is located on a plateau. Later cemeteries were built around it. It is said that a bard named Ashot was the first person to be buried there. The trees surrounding the place are more than a thousand years old. Nobody has ever dared to cut those trees as they are considered holy as well.

The holy place was built in memory of a courageous woman. Many years ago, a young man was murdered. Brothers of the deceased decided to take revenge by burning the enemy houses at night. Enraged, the inhabitants of the burned houses came to the village and demanded that the brothers give themselves up. However, the brothers went into hiding. In turn, the angry people abducted a young woman whom they refused to return until the brothers gave up. To save her dignity and the brothers' lives, the woman threw herself off the cliff. While falling, her dress tangled up in tree branches. Thus, the woman remained hanging and soon drew her last breath. When the villagers found out about the incident, they took her body out of the canyon. Then they buried her near at the slope of Lasti and planted trees around her grave.

Thus, the revenge story came to its end. But the deep admiration for the woman's decent deed remained. The holy place acquired such unimaginable power that many want to lay to rest nearby. It was believed that by burying their relatives at the cemeteries nearby, their souls would be under the protection of the great woman.

7

Qarahunj



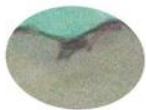
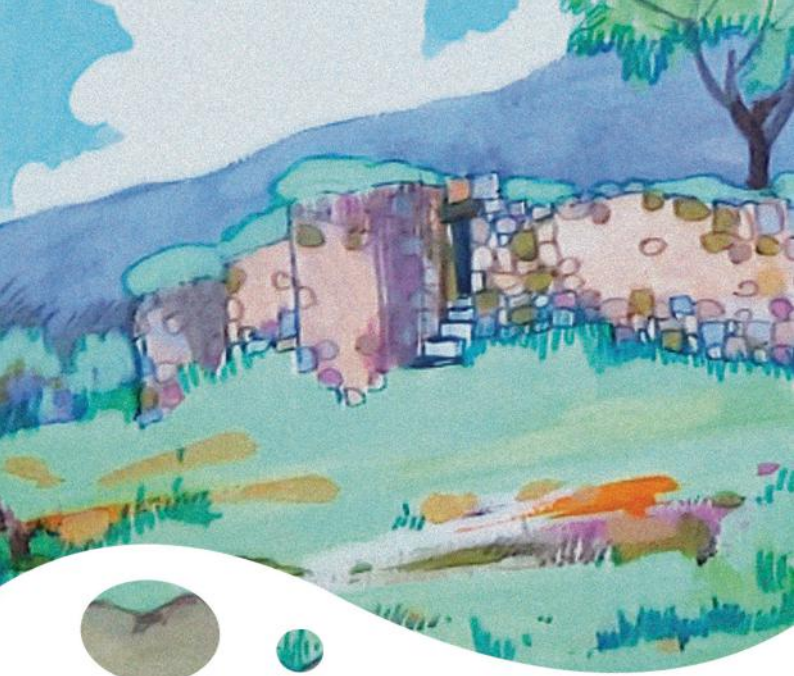
The Legend of the Stone of Seven Cradles

The Karahunj village is encircled by a massive rock rampart from the north. The rock is a huge stony structure, curving at its base. A waterfall, more than ten meters in height, crowns the village.

During the years of collective farming, villagers used the territory for storing hay bales, traces of which can still be found. People have lived in these remote places since the beginning of time. The “stone of seven cradles” remains there as proof of this. The southern side of this huge basalt rock is decorated with cave paintings and undeciphered inscriptions.


Up to this day, an interesting story is told about the stone. During the mass deportations organized by Shah Abbas, many Armenians ended up in Persia. In order to evade the deportations, two brothers came to Karahunj. Recovering from the hard journey and the loss of their loved ones, the brothers first settled in the remote caves. Later, both brothers married and built a hut at the edge of the village, where their seven children slept in seven cradles. One day after a horrifying sound, the hut was crushed by a big falling rock. Since that day, the place was called the Stone of Seven Cradles.





8

Khndzoreshk



According to the 13th-century illuminator Martiros, the village Khndzoresk has existed since the 10th century. Storytellers and historians account that its place name derives from the word khndzor, which means “apple”. Thus, the name reveals that in ancient times this territory had abundant apple gardens.

According to other sources, the village Khndzoresk was the central defense village in the past. In ancient times, Persians used to visit Syunik for hunting. The canyons of Syunik were full of wild boars even the coat of arms of noble families of Syunik were decorated with images of wild boars. But Khndzoresk is also famous for its streams. The most famous one is the Stream of Nine Children. Once there lived a family there. The father of the family died during a war so his wife was left to take care of their nine children. The stream is carved in the shape of female breasts. To drink from the stream, one must bow. Another famous stream is Aknaghbyur located in the center of the village. The stream was covered by a cavern which collapsed but was soon rebuilt. The water reached the village thanks to four-kilometer-long clay pipes.

Khndzoresk has thirty-five streams on its territory. The village has fourteen districts, which were divided by dikes stretching along the canyon. Every district had its streams and behind each stream a story hides. Many songs have been written about the streams of Khndzoresk.



9

Khot

Many traditions and historical facts are associated with the village of Khot. The village was founded in ancient times; it was considered a settlement by the fourth century BCE. It was Babik, son of the Syuni prince Andok, who regained the village from King Shapur during the latter's foray into Syunik, and assured its protection.

Gor and Gushan, two Persian brothers, were accompanying Babik on his mission. In return, Babik endowed Gor the settlement of Khot, which was one of the most picturesque territories of Syunik province. Legend has it that the village moved several times. Locals claim Khot was once further up the Mataghakhach cliff, near the huge tree known as Brchneni and the sanctuary with the same name.

According to a different account, the village was destroyed by Amir Timur during his conquest of Tatev. Only one person, who hid in a remote cave, managed to survive the massacres. Forty grains of wheat kept him alive for forty days. Later, he survived eating grass. And that is how the place name Khot, which translates as grass, originated.

From ancient times until today, the village of Khot has had many names, which as peculiar historical facts share a new perspective on tradition and the present day. The territory of this canyon village was noted for its unusual construction – the roof of one house was another villager's yard. It is said that such construction served as a prototype for today's Bird Nests district in Goris. One can still find many ancient caves in the village, where traces of hearth and home remain. If attentive enough, by looking at the walls of the cave one can tell how its inhabitants supplied the cave with light or where they stored their dishware. Later, thanks to the arched houses built in the village, Khot gained its current unique image.

10

Nerkin Khndzoresk



Two brothers from the village of Nerkin Khndzoresk worked in a city in Turkmenistan. The older brother was driving the city bus, while the younger one was selling tickets to the passengers. It's said that the brothers were inventive like all the villagers of Khndzoresk working abroad. The younger brother was marking passengers' backs with chalk so he could differentiate between those who paid and those who did not. It is said that later the lawful passengers were voluntarily turning their backs to receive the mark. Thus, there was not a single passenger in the city who did not pay for transportation.





11

Shinuhayr

The Legend of the Virgin Hripsime

On the western side of Shinuhayr at the edge of a deep canyon, stands the Hermitage of Virgins. The hermitage is surrounded by a five-meter-high wall and is now half-ruined. It was built in the 1670s and was a key place in the spiritual and cultural life of Syunik. Its location at the center of the settlement is not a coincidence. Hermitages were usually built in remote places, in order to keep the hermits away from the hustle of worldly life. Thanks to its location, this hermitage was one of its kind. It was an all-girls school which also served as a hermitage for virgins. It is said that 80-150 girls studied at the Hermitage. The story of the Virgin Hripsime is still told to this day. Her disappearance remains surrounded by mystery. The strict readers of the hermitage started suspecting Hripsime's frequent absences. They followed the girl and witnessed how with the skill of a mountain goat she came down the rock and reached a remote canyon. There she stood in the arms of her beloved. That was her escape from her bleak reality. There, in the heart of nature, she gave herself up to love freely and completely. While at sunrise, she quietly returned to the Hermitage. Upon her return, she was humiliated, beaten up and called impure. Days later, Hripsime disappeared again. This time forever. Did she drown herself from shame or did she go back to enjoying the pleasures of earthly life? Nobody knows. But the story is told to this day.



12

Svarants

The Legend of the Yayji Mowgli

Svarants is as old as the village of Tatev. Many historical monuments can be found on the road leading from the peak of Mount Aramazd, in the Zangezur Mountain Range, to the slopes of Tatev. One monument in particular catches the eye. It is a sculpture that depicts a wolf feeding a child.

83-year old Garnik Arshakyan, who is a teacher by profession and an elderly inhabitant of the village says that he knows a couple of stories about local “mowglis.”

“One such mowgli came from Harjis. She was nurtured by a bear,” tells Garnik. “On a sunny autumn day, when the harvesting work reached its peak one of the villagers left her baby alone in a hammock. Back then, many bears populated the territory. Now there are only a few. A panther had stolen the cubs of a feeding mother. Its breasts full of milk, the bear noticed the little girl and quietly started feeding her. The hungry child greedily drank the milk. Then the bear took the baby and disappeared into the forest. Nine years later, two hunters shot down a bear in those places. Suddenly, they were attacked by a little beast-like creature with tangled hair. The hunters caught the little girl and brought her to the village. Soon the news spread throughout the region. Hearing the story, a woman from the village of Yayji (now Harjis) came to see the girl. It turned out that it was her long-lost daughter. Only the woman could calm the girl down. The girl’s name was Yayjik and she never learned to speak. That is how the place name Yayji was born.



13

Tatev



The Devil's Bridge

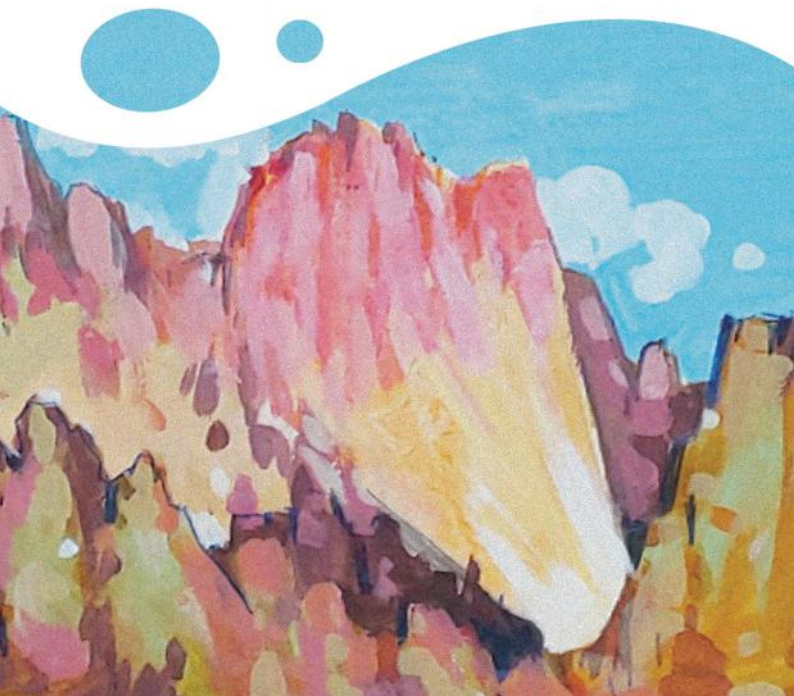
The Devil's Bridge is a natural bridge on the River Vorotan. It was formed from the sediments of mineral waters known as travertines. Beautiful stalactites and stalagmites can be found near and under the bridge.

There are numerous stories regarding the origin of the bridge's name. Some say that it earned its name because of the many drowning cases that occurred nearby. Others believe that it is because it appears less water flows under the bridge than flows out, this strange effect was attributed to the devil. However, this actually results from diverted mineral waters that fall from above and flow down through the stones. Several pools have formed under the bridge, filled with the healing mineral hot springs flowing underneath. In ancient times, the Armenian elite frequently traveled to this region to enjoy healing baths during the summer months.

Centuries ago, locals could not explain the geological processes that shaped this natural wonder, therefore they considered it to be the devil's work and that is how the name Devil's Bridge was born.

14

Verishen



The Copper Cliff

The Copper Cliff is located on the eastern slope of the village Verishen. The cliff is beautiful thanks to its location and its unique copper color. Legend has it that the cliff received its color from the golden, silver, and copper jewels hidden inside. It is said, that when the village was struck by enemies, the villagers dug up a big pit near the cliff and hid all their belongings there. For centuries the different metals gave the cliff its unique copper color, which became the reason behind its name. It is also believed that besides the big pit the villagers also created a tunnel. Every time when the village was invaded, the villagers used the underground tunnel, which led them to the Bird Nests district. From there, they proceeded to the Tsakeri Dzor (Canyon of Holes) and sheltered in its caves. The tunnel had another route which led to Sindara canyon, from where people fled to Bayandur. Later, the tunnel was shut down and forgotten. But it is said that one can still find its traces. According to another legend, the Copper Cliff was once a fortress. It was as strong as copper and that is how it earned its name.



15

Vorotan



The Village Vorotan

Legend has it that once the territory was occupied by a beautiful Armenian village. It was surrounded by rocks and forests inhabited by various species of snake. The villagers were killing many snakes for no good reason. The snakes wanted to be freed from human cruelty but didn't want to abandon the warm territory. They told the Queen of the Snakes all about the situation. She was a winged snake ornamented with vivid colors. She gathered all the snakes from Araqs and Kur and ordered them to attack the people of the region. People were forced to leave the canyons and relocate to the plateaus. The snakes governed the territory until one day the territory was struck by an unbearable heat. Most of the snakes died while others relocated.

For a long time, neither snakes nor people lived in the canyon. But soon they found a way to coexist. Since that day, the snakes and the people of Vorotan live in peace and harmony. This legend is told by the people of Khot, whose old settlement was located on a mountain slope facing the River Vorotan.

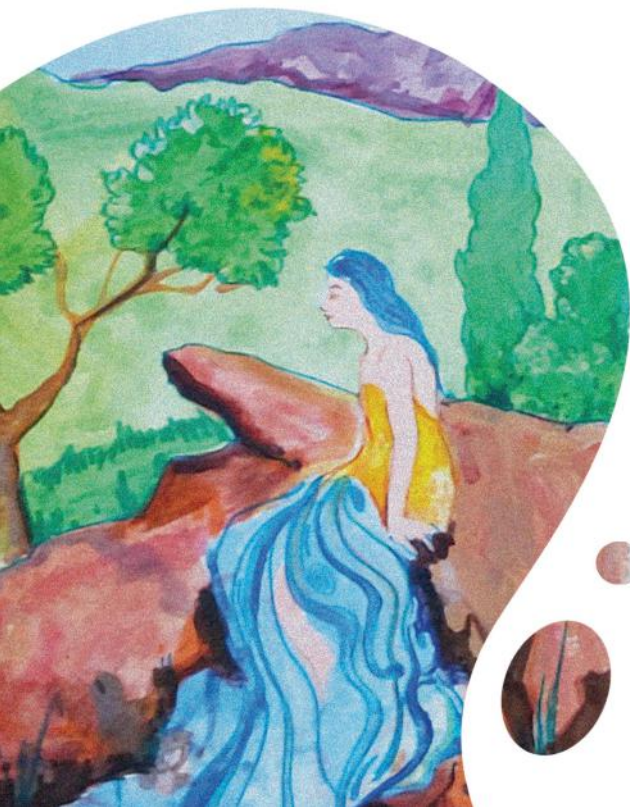


16 **Aghvani**

The Harsnadzor area is among the most picturesque places of the village of Aghvani. The place serves as a recreation zone for the locals. There is an interesting folktale about Harsnadzor. The territory has often been under attack by its foreign neighbors. The enemy would usually plan its attacks during national holidays and events, thinking that the Armenians would be too carried away with celebrations and would be unable to protect their land. Once, during a wedding, raiders attacked the village and attempted to abduct the bride. In order to preserve her dignity, the bride jumped off a cliff. However, thanks to God's mercy, the air puffed the bridal dress up like a parachute and helped her land safely. Since that day, the territory is called Harsnadzor. Aghvani is surrounded by alpine meadows and trees making it a perfect place for tent camping.

17

Antarashat



The Church of the Wind

The Church of the Wind is located on a hill facing the village of Antarashat. There is an interesting legend about the church. The church received its name thanks to the peculiar shape of a nearby stone: The wind makes an echoing sound when passing through the navel-shaped hole in a stone, or “portaqar”, near the church. It is said that women who touch the portaqar with their navel will be cured of infertility. Moreover, ones who manage to pass through the hole of the stone are honest people who will live a long life, while those who fail to come through are dishonest and will live a short life.

Tapasar

The mountain plain of Tapasar is at a height of two thousand meters above sea level. According to research and local stories, traces of water animals can be found around the plains. The legend has it that this territory was once covered by water. Later, the waters withdrew and opened a wonderful view with caves, alpine meadows, and stones with traces of aquatic life imprinted on them. A khachkar dating back to the 17th century still stands on the mountain. Shepherds and the villagers of Antarashat continue lighting candles at the holy place.



There are two Girl's Fortresses in the Kapan region. One is located in the village of Tsav, the other lies between Arajadzor and Shaghrshik. Both fortresses are associated with legends with a common theme - women's self-sacrifice.

18

Arajadzor

The Legend of the Girl's Fortress

One legend states that during the Mongolian invasions the inhabitants of Arajadzor and Atchanan, led by Prince Sahak of Syunik, were hiding in the Girl's Fortress.

The Prince had a beautiful daughter named Anush. Hearing of her beauty, the Mongol Khan wished to possess her. However, Anush was well hidden behind the inaccessible walls of the fortress and the defenders were striking the Mongols with stones and arrows from the battlements. Seeing this, the Khan came up with a cunning tactic. He sent an envoy to Prince Sahak asking for Anush's hand in marriage. In return, he promised never to return to the fortress and to leave Armenians in peace forever. However, he also threatened to slaughter everyone inside if his demand was not met. Prince Sahak faced a difficult decision. The bread supplies were finished and his people were starving. Finally, he declined the offer; with his faith in God, he chose the path of struggle. But the hunger was growing – more people were dying from starvation than on the battlefield.

"I am the cause of all these deaths," thought Anush. The following day, in front of the defenders and the attacking forces, she threw herself off the cliff. The Khan ordered his men to find the girl's corpse. The Mongol soldiers searched the valley, but failed to find the body. Discouraged by the prolonged siege and the loss of Anush, the Khan withdrew from Atchanan.

Little did he know that the leafy forests that spread below the cliffs had kept Anush safe in their branches. The legend says that since that very day the fortress has been known as The Girl's Fortress.

19

Baghaberd



The Fortress of Baghaberd

The fortress of Baghaberd is one of the most inaccessible of the Syunik region. It has served as a military post since the 4th century, and is surrounded by the canyons of the River Voghji.

This location oversees the historical town of Kapan and offers protection in case of attack. During the Kingdom of Syunik, the fortress became the seat of kings. Following the invasion of Kapan, the fortress also housed many treasures and manuscripts from Tatev Monastery.

It took sixty-seven years after the conquest of Kapan for the enemy to win Baghaberd, and only by deceit. The fortress had only one entrance,

with a tall watchtower overlooking the gate. The rampart was constructed in such way that an invading army found itself facing a vertical rock mass. The passage to the citadel could only be entered only in one or two rows. A watchtower guarded this narrow road as well, making Baghaberd one of the strongest fortresses of Syunik. This was achieved partly by the skillful use of the surrounding territory, and by the robust construction techniques. The rampart complex was built in three stages and the walls and the pyramids of the fortress are composed of three layers of basalt and rocks. The Baghaberd fortress retains a unique military and architectural value today.





20

Baghaburj

The Baghaki Kar

Many historical accounts survive about the Baghaki stone or Baghakaqar Fortress of the Syunik region. Some people mistakenly believe that the Baghaki Kar fortress is the same as Baghaberd. These are two different defense fortresses located on opposite sides of the Voghji river, 700-800 meters apart. Starting from the 4th century, the fortress captured the attention of medieval historians. In fact, the fortress of Baghaki Kar was built as an entrance to the fortress of Baghaberd. Without conquering the first, it was impossible for the enemy to reach the second. It is said that the two fortresses were connected to each other by a chain; thus, messengers could transmit necessary information. Thanks to its vitality, the image of this chain is embedded in the memory of generations. Historical records reveal that the fortress was under constant attack. However, it was heroically defended by closing off the road to the Baghaberd fortress. Inside the fortress was a monastery with the same name. Treasures and manuscripts were kept at the monastery. The legend has it that in the courtyard of the monastery a brave warrior woman is buried. She was a skilled archer and led the defense of the Girl's Fortress. The historians of Syunik believe that the enemy managed to conquer the fortress in 1126. The church was robbed of its treasures and the manuscripts were destroyed.

21

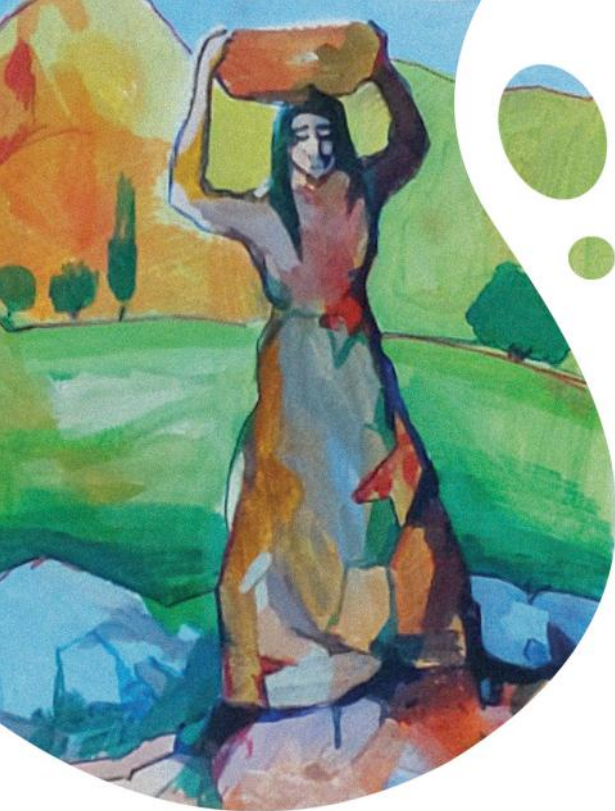
Bekh

Many records and folk tales survive telling tales of Halidzor Fortress. It is believed that the fortress was a hermitage of forty nuns and a few monks, where many manuscripts were copied. Because the territory is naturally protected, the hermitage was repurposed to serve as a fortress during the embattled time of Davit Bek. It was unusual then for a place of a spiritual significance to be turned into a military post. After the reconstruction, the former monastery complex had a unique appearance.



The Fortress of Halidzor

Today, both a citadel and a church are found in the four-cornered fortress. On the territory of the fortress, one can also find the remains of round defensive towers. The two-floored buildings inside the impenetrable fortress together form a single defense system. A secret passageway that leads to the River Voghji was discovered during recent fortress renovations (2007-2009). Objects of historical, archeological and cultural significance were also found during the restoration. These objects help paint a vivid picture of life in the 17-18th centuries. The fortress constructed an elaborate clay pipe system to access water from distant rivers. Some of these pipes are now on display in the geological museum of Kapan. The fortress contains two churches. One of the churches was probably built on the site of an earlier pagan temple, due to the remains of pre-Christian ornaments embedded in its walls. Pre-Christian relics are scattered across the territory in great numbers. The second church, dedicated to St. Minas and built with polished stones, is located in the citadel. Khachkars from different periods are installed on the walls of the church, they even ornament the upper part of the windows. Inside the church, on the dome, fresco traces can still be seen. The citadel had a stable, cabinets, halls, a kitchen and observation posts. The site is full of engravings and khachkars from different periods, and a cemetery with etched gravestones occupies the territory outside the citadel. Halidzor Fortress is a promising place for further archeological excavations.



22

Dzorastan

Like many villages of Kapan, Dzorastan was built near a forested area. During times of danger, the dense forests sheltered the people of nearby villages. There are several mountains surrounding the village including Tamkasar, Tsak Kar, Harakar. The legend has it that giants used to organize their weddings on these surrounding plateaus. According to the legend, what we now see as mountains are the giants caught in a circle dance and frozen by the gods. However, there is another interesting story about Harsnaqar. It is said that high up in the mountains there was a region populated by Armenians. There lived a modest and beautiful girl, who married into a noble family. In a traditional Armenian family, when a girl was just wed, she could not appear in front of strangers without a headscarf. One day, the girl was doing laundry without her scarf. Suddenly the door opened, and her godfather came in. The girl screamed from shame, and tried to cover her head with the water trough and begged God for forgiveness. "Either turn me into a stone or let me descend underground," screamed the girl. God heard the cries of the young bride and turned her into a stone sculpture. On the side of the mountain, one can still find this sculpture called Harsnaqar ("hars" means "bride" and "qar" means stone).

23

Okhtar

Syunik is not only famous for its monasteries, fortresses, and courageous commanders, but also for its rich variety of folktales. One such folk tale details the love story of a beautiful girl named Syune and a king named Senekerim.

Various sects, which rebelled against the teachings of the church, spread in medieval Armenia.

The legend has it that Syune

was from one such sectarian

family, living during the reign

of King Senekerim. Syune's

rebellious father was sentenced

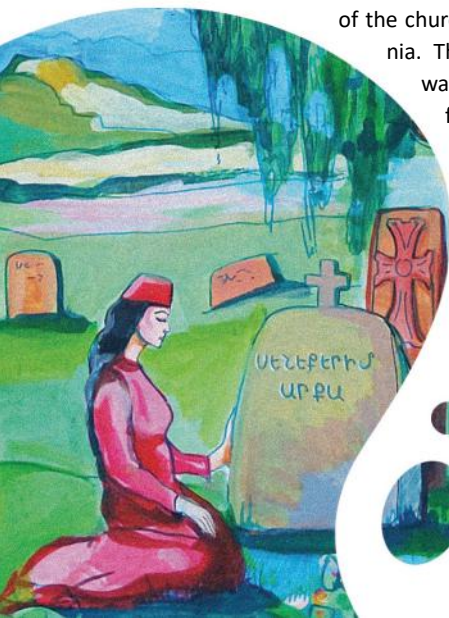
to death by the king. On that day,

Syune vowed to take revenge

and started chasing the king,

for Syune was a skillful

archer and horse rider.



Senekerim and Syune

Once when the king and his entourage were traveling from Baghaberd to Tandzaparakh monastery and then to the hermitage of Bekh, his horse was struck by an arrow and the king injured his shoulder. The guards chased down the archer and found out it was the beautiful Syune from the sectarian family. The Bishop Grigor and Queen Shahandukht insisted upon the death sentence for Syune, but the king was charmed. Despite his injury, the king was struck by the story that motivated her deed. He was also taken aback by her beauty. He freed Syune from captivity and gifted her a sword that he had received from Prince Sevada; Syune also fell in love with the king.

Senekerim and Syune could not keep their condemnable love secret. Rumors spread and reached Queen Shahandukht. It is said that the lovers met in an oak garden on the shore of the River Voghjaget. But soon their happy days came to an end, when Senekrim was murdered by an enemy prince. Syune swore to take revenge. In disguise as the maidservant, Syune entered the enemy army. However, they discovered her identity and guessed her intentions, as they had also heard about the love story of Syune and Senekerim. Nevertheless, they set her free. Syune leaves the enemy's camp, but soon falls into captivity again. Fighting in defense of the Girl's Fortress, between the historical village of Shekq and today's Dzorastan, the famous warrior girl falls into the hands of the enemy. Later on, they set her free once more. She decides to spend the rest of her days at the royal grave of her beloved. But she was murdered on that very same day, embracing the grave of her beloved.

Up to this day, the people of Syunik recall the brave and free-spirited girl who, despite the odds, remained true to her values and her love. Nobody knows where Syune is buried; aside the king or...?



24

Shgharshik

The Legend of Gandzasar and the Bear who Guards Treasure

A peculiar sculpture is located close to Andokavan and Shgharshik, perched high above the road on a rock. The copper sculpture depicts a bear holding keys in his mouth. The bear was considered the keeper of the forests and symbolized the might of the mountains.

There are many folktales that the bear guarded the road leading to Gandzasar Gorge, and in his mouth is the key to all the treasures of Armenian land.

These tales are of a time when the descendants of the forefather Hayk were living on Armenian land, constantly under attack by invaders. The defenders tried to find a safe hiding place to keep their treasures. Their search brought them to Syunik. There, on the slopes of Kaputjugh, they found the perfect hiding place. Since that time the place has been known as Gandzasar (gandz means treasure, and sar means mountain). It is also said that the rocks surrounding the gorge are the ancestor giants, still guarding Armenian land. Another interesting story explains how Gandzasar got its name. Centuries ago, the Armenian King Artavazd hid his treasures from the Roman army in the Baghats mountains, and built a fortress nearby. A violent battle between the Romans and Armenians took place and the invaders conquered the fortress, but failed to find the treasure. Many have tried to find the treasure ever since, but in vain. An easier to discover treasure of the region is its breathtaking nature. At the gorge leading to Gandzasar stands the proud bear protecting every treasure on the land of Syunik.

25

Shrvenants

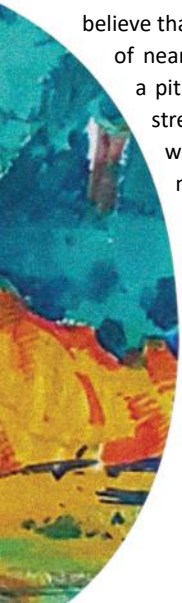


Mangi Chkhur

In the upper part of Shrevenants village, there is a beautiful place known as Mangi Chkhur (meaning Mangi pit). However, the origin of the name Mangi remains unknown. Some believe that a villager named Mangi (Mangasar) inspired the name. Mangasar wished to establish a garden and therefore dug holes to obtain water. The only water he could find was dirty in color and unsuitable for irrigation.

Later, the territory became known for this healing mineral water rich in sodium, iron, calcium, and famous for its hydro-carbonate composition. The villagers also call it sour water. Even during the summer heat, the water remains cold, while in the winter it does not freeze. The villagers

believe that the sour water is connected to the underground waters of nearby Verin Khotanan village. The stream is located inside a pit surrounded by a dense forest. The soil surrounding the stream has an orange hue colored by the iron and sulfur-rich waters. The locals remember how the villager Aram Ohanyan, who governed the village for thirty years, used to say that whoever drunk from the sour stream would become a president. The last village headwoman, Armine Manukyan, jokingly remembers that during the eighteen years of her life in the village she never tasted the Sour water. However, once she did, she became the headwoman of the village. Not far from the stream, on a vast and empty territory grows a lonely walnut tree. Locals and tourists enjoy spending time in the shade of the giant tree.





26

Tandzaver

The Churches of Tantzaver During The Soviet Era

The village of Tantzaver occupies a territory as high as 1200-1500 meters. Dense forests and alpine meadows rich with beautiful flowers surround Tantzaver. It is spread across the southwestern slopes of the Bargushat Mountain Range. The village is among the oldest villages of Kapan Region. One can find many Christian monuments in the village.

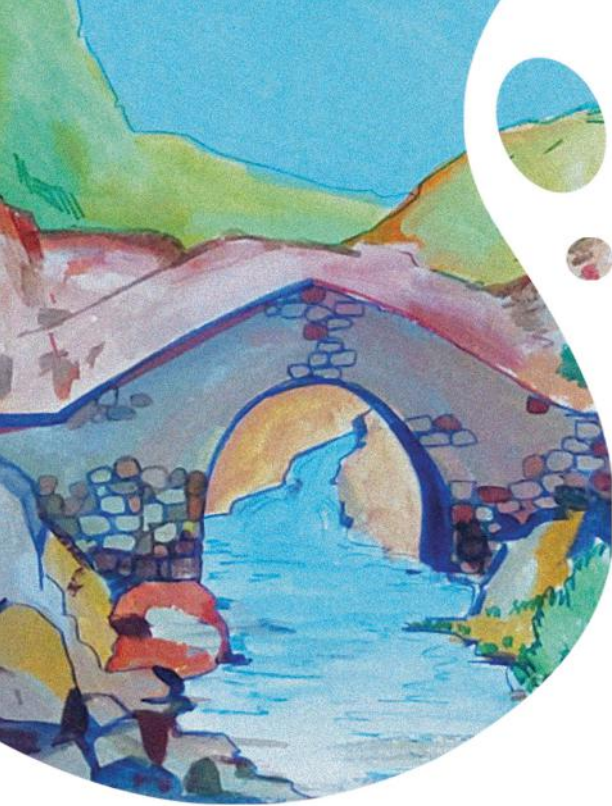
The Church of the Mother of God, built in 1705, is the hallmark of the village. The church is a three-nave basilica. During the Soviet years, the church was used as a grain reserve while the stones from nearby medieval cemeteries were either destroyed or utilized as construction material. The ruins of a 15th-century church, St. Stepanos, are located in Tantzaver. According to local lore, in the 1930s the Soviet government was demolishing churches. The chief of the Tantzaver's kolkhoz, that is the head of the village, demolished the church of St. Stepanos. With the stones of the destroyed church, he built a new house and a cowshed for himself. Locals say that the man and his house were cursed by God ever since. Everybody living in the house died, leaving it forever empty. One can still find this half-ruined house in the village. Many avoid it because it is said that the place remains cursed.

27 Taurus



According to tradition, daring fellows from Iran and Armenia used to wrestle with each other. Once, Iranian men were staying as guests at an Armenian house. During the hospitality meal, one of the Iranian giants asked an Armenian woman to gather all the daring men of their village. Ready to fulfil his request, the woman accidentally hit one of the men's feet. The Armenian woman was so strong that she broke the giant's foot. Observing the strength of the woman, the Persian men imagined the immeasurable strength of Armenian men and ran away.





28 Vanek

The Bridge of Atchanan

Among the most famous monuments of Kapan region are the ancient bridges noted for their compelling architecture. Elderly villagers still tell stories about the road leading from Baghberd to Tatev. Ruins of buildings and bridges remain on this famous route.

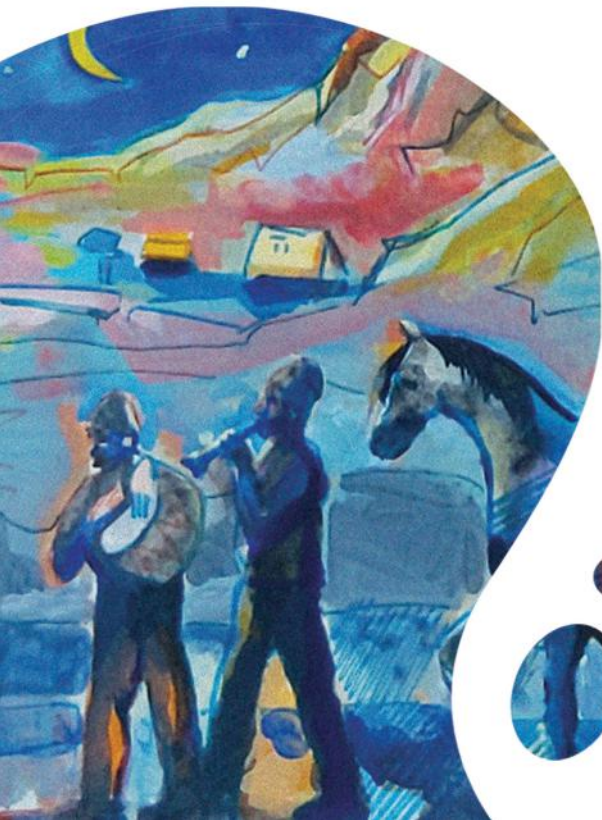
In medieval times, it was a branch of the Silk Road connecting Gandzak to New Julfa. At the beginning of the 18th century, a bridge was built on the Atchanan river. It is located at the outskirts of the settlement, near the ruins of an older bridge dating to the 11th century. It was built from polished basalt stone of red and blue hues. The base of the bridge was assembled from cobblestones. A record written in Persian is etched on the eastern side of the bridge. Elderly people tell that another record decorated the southern side of the bridge. The arch of the bridge probably collapsed and was buried in the silt. The eastern etching can still be read. It quotes a famous Persian poem which goes like this:

“This place and order will remain for many years to come, And outlive my death, the body turning into earth...”

In folktales, the bridge is known variously as the King’s Bridge, Khan’s Bridge and Kolkhoz Bridge. But the most interesting name is the Catholicos’s Bridge. The construction of the bridge coincides with the date the Persian Shah appointed Moses of Khotanan, who became the Catholicos of Armenian Apostolic Church.

29

Khotanan

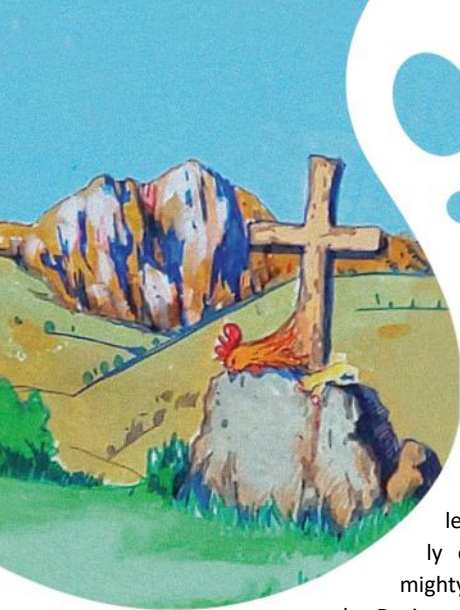


The Battle with the Wolf

In the 1940-1950s a well-built young man by the name of Avag Balasanyan lived in the village Khotanan. His fellow villagers remember him as someone with keen eyes and ears. In 1946, an unusual incident happened in the village. Later, it turned into a legend. It was the harvesting season when the villagers armed with sickles and scythes move towards the upper part of the village to the territory known as Karki occupied by plentiful pastures and dense forests. Suddenly the villagers are attacked by a huge enraged wolf. Later it was found out that the injured wolf had come from Nakhichevan, attacking people along the way. One of the villagers is torn to pieces by the wolf, while others end up with serious injuries. Only Avag and his friend Hakob remain intact. Hakob tries to convince Avag to run away. But Hakob refuses because their two sons were following them. "If we run away, the wolf will kill our children. We better stay and fight," says Avag to his friend and attacks the wolf. The struggle was very tense and lasted for about half an hour. Eventually, Avag brought the wolf down and pulled out its tongue.

Following that incident, Avag goes through a period of inner turmoil. For a long time, he stays in the hospital, recovering from rabies. Later it becomes known that everybody bitten by that very wolf had died. Avag's son Seyran jokingly remembers that a dog died after biting his father. Avag lived for eighty-five years and enjoyed the utmost respect of his fellow villagers.

Years later, his sons installed a monument at the place of the battle. This field has become a peculiar place of pilgrimage for the people of Khotanan.



The village of Vachagan is famous for its holy places. One such place is Kham Khach, on the shore of the River Vachagan, on the road leading to Khustup. The elderly of the village believe in the mighty energy of the place to this day. During summer, villagers used to gather their belongings and animals and settle in the mountains. Kham Khach was a mandatory stop along their path.

30

Vachagan

There, elderly women performed unique rituals. With their gazes aimed at Mount Khustup, they prayed and offered sweets and coins to the Khachin stream. Only then, they continued their journey.

Rima Nurijanyan from Vachagan, mentions Kham Khach in her memoirs. “The elderly believed in the power of Kham Khach, the adults followed their example while the children simply enjoyed the rituals.” The women of the villages used to come off their horses and mules and approach the cross one by one. They kissed it, prayed near, put white coins on the stone and lighted a candle at the top of the cross. Then they left in silence. For the sake of keeping the tradition, their children were obliged to do the same.

People gathered at Kham Khach for other reasons as well. For instance, to make sacrifices to God or in times of drought. When the harvest was destroyed by drought, women used to pray collectively at the place. As part of the ritual, they also burnt green grass and then poured water on the cross. In contrast, when the harvest was spoiled by heavy rains, the women prayed and lighted a fire at the Kham Khach. Frequently, the weather did change its course and people believed it was a consequence of their magic rituals. The elderly, who believed in the power of the place climbed there on foot. Four times they circled the cross, prayed and then made a sacrifice. The head and the feet of a sacrificed rooster were placed on the stone, and the blood of the animal was used to paint a cross on the forehead of the person for whom the sacrifice was made. Later, the meat of the animals was cooked and divided into seven portions. Each portion was put into lavash, given to children who took it to the houses of the elderly and the diseased. The latter gratefully accepted the offering.

AFTERWORD

And so our little tour into the secrets of the Legends Trail has ended but there are plenty left to be told. Accessible most of the year, Southern Armenia is surprisingly easy to discover. Without visas, vaccinations or permits, almost anyone can become a modern Indiana Jones, helping to fight unemployment, rapid depopulation and dangers of dependence on the mining industry. HIKEArmenia and Transcaucasian trails will be your main information sources but you can also find much more in the Map-guide, to be published by Cartisan and by following Legends Trail pages on Facebook or Instagram.

Brought to you by People in Need NGO in cooperation with ARK Environmental NGO within the “EU4Tourism: Outdoor adventures on the historic trails in Syunik” project funded by the European Union in Armenia, Legends Trail connects regions and communities, empowers people to contribute to the sustainable development of their homeland and creates opportunities for community-based tourism.



