



**WALKS IN NUBRA / 1**

**RONGDO TO KYAGAR**

# Walks in Nubra



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Front Cover: Koyak Lhato, Tirith.



# FOREWORD

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

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

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

Bidisha Dey  
Executive Director  
Eicher Group Foundation

## WALKS IN NUBRA

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

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

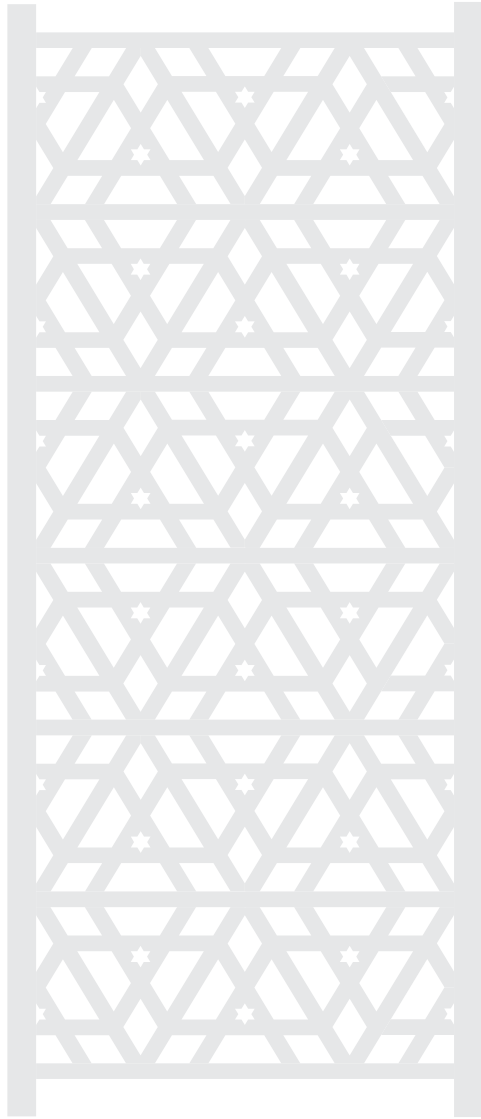
These walks have been composed and written up in consultation with local community members, and many of the researchers who worked on them were from Nubra. The idea behind this was to hear knowledgeable voices from the area, bring in stakeholders and engage with the younger generation to enable them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

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

# **WALK BOOK ONE**

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<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	<b>104</b>



77°05'

77°30'

77°55'

78°20'

34°55'

34°30'

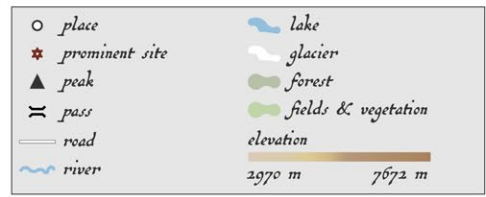
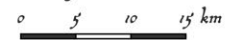
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# NUBRA

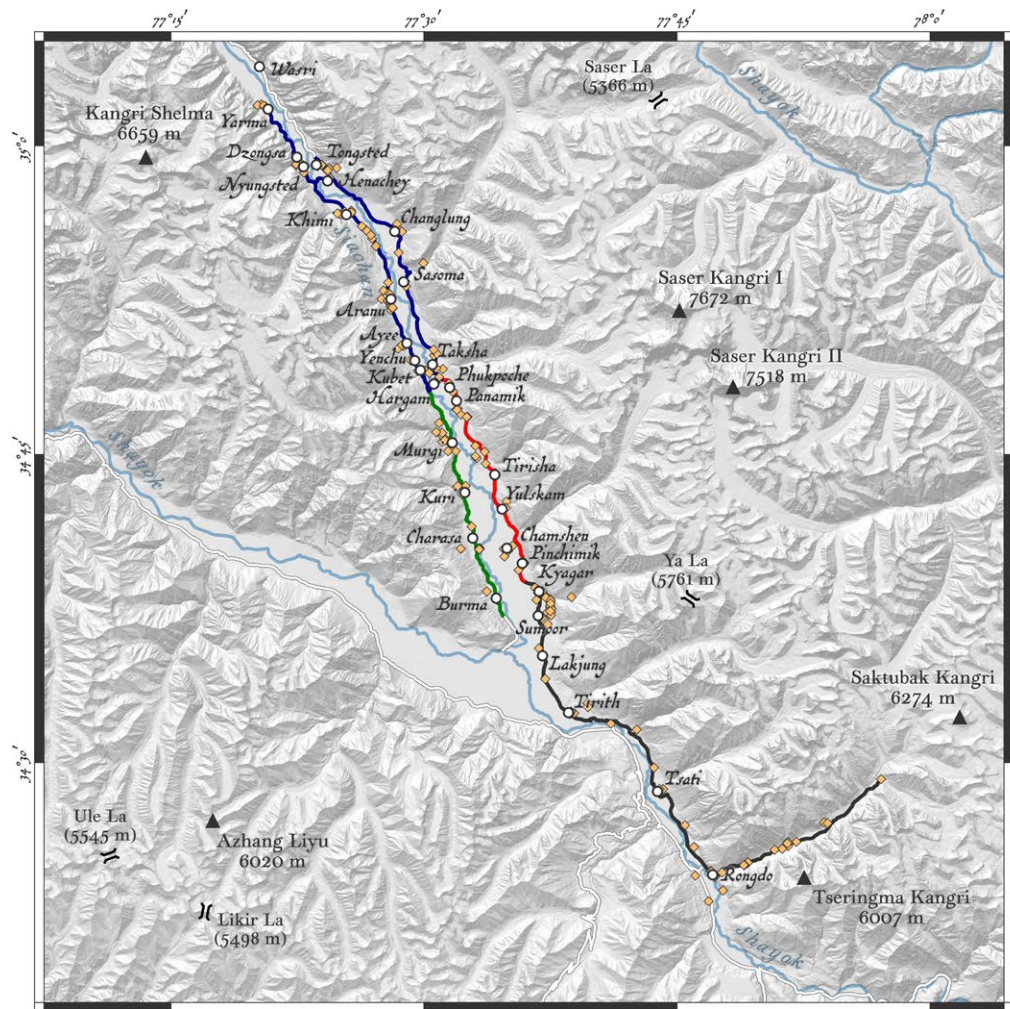
ལུབ་ར་ཀི

Featuring Central Nubra



Location of Nubra in the Himalayas





# WALKS IN NUBRA AND POINTS OF INTEREST



Featuring Four Beautiful Walks

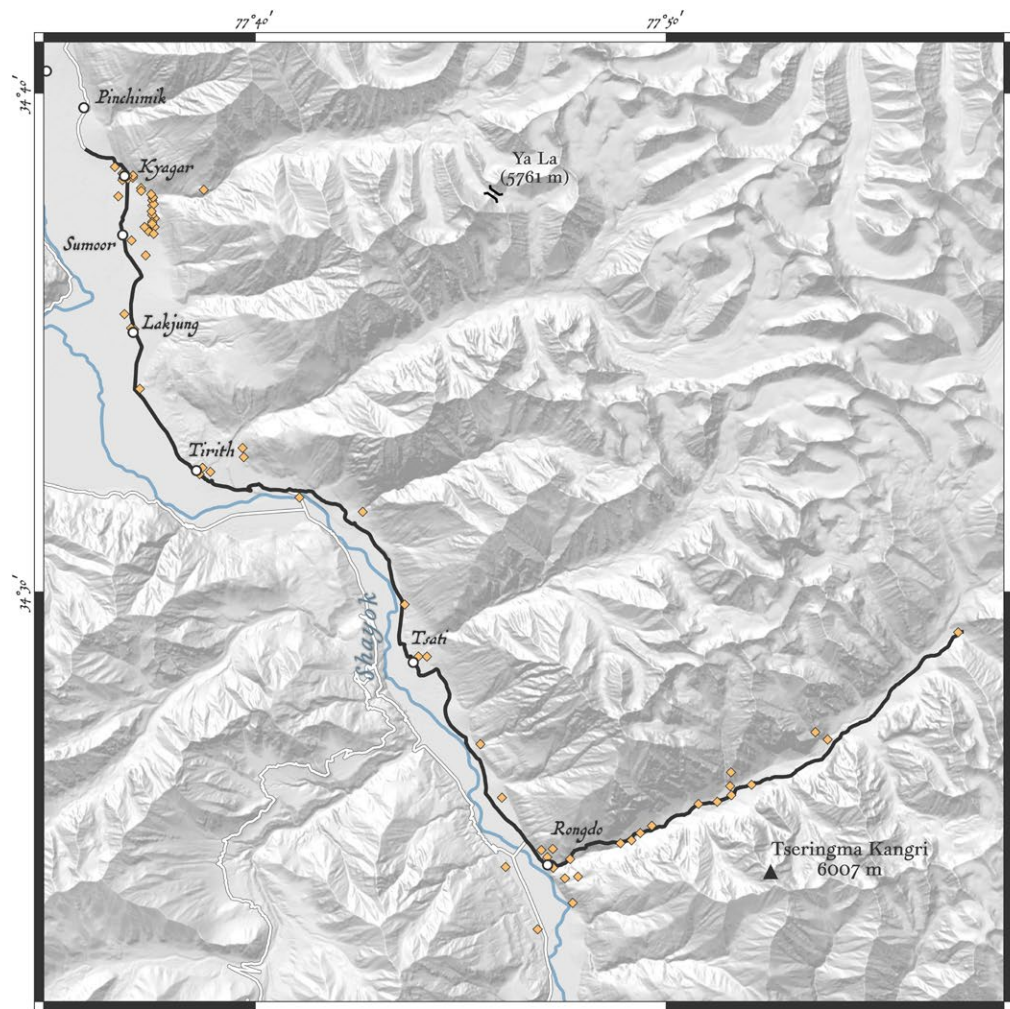


○	place	—	walk 1	—	road
▲	peak	—	walk 2	—	river
⌘	pass	—	walk 3	—	
◆	point of interest	—	walk 4		

Location of Nubra in the Himalayas

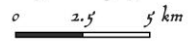






# WALK 1 AND POINTS OF INTEREST

Rongdo to Kyagar



- place
- ▲ peak
- ⌋ pass
- ◇ point of interest
- road
- ~ river
- walk 1

Location of Walk 1 in Nubra





# RONGDO

རོང་མ་དོ།

## RONGDO

Rongdo is one of the first villages one encounters when beginning this series of walks in the Siachen side of Nubra Valley. It is at Rongdo that the Shayok River comes down and meets the flat plain of the valley. This is alluded to by the village's name 'Rongdo' which is derived from two words – *rong*, meaning valley, and *do*, referring to the meeting point of river and valley.

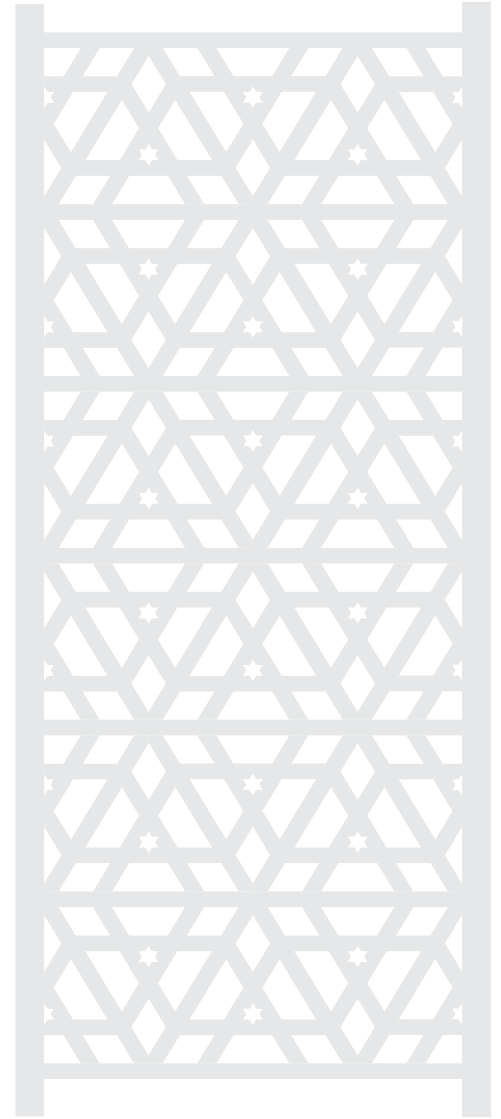
It is believed that two brothers, from Khardong village which is near the Khardung La pass, first came and settled in Rongdo and as their descendants multiplied the village grew to its current size. The ruins of a fortification are discernible on the mountain facing the Shayok River, it is believed that this was located here as it was not immediately visible to attacks from raiders.

Rongdo is well known as a repository of Ladakhi folk songs and almost every member of the community, including children, have a good grasp of the songs and they sing these together on many occasions.

# MAP REFERENCE

## RONGDO

1. Rudgo and Mane Walls
2. Takbu Nakpo
3. Thewor Mane
4. Dung Sngonpo
5. Lhato of Lhab-tsan Dorjey Barva
6. Tso-rasa
7. Balu Pholongs
8. Stanba Yangphel Tsamskang
9. Rongdo Monastery
10. Snas Ig
11. Doksa
12. Naga Raksha, Sacred Waterfall
13. Rongdo Chutsan



77°30' 0"

77°35' 0"

34°36' 0"

34°35' 0"



RONGDO

རོང་དངོ



0 1 2 km

	monastery		natural resource
	meditation cave/house		spring
	rigsum gonbo		waterfall
	mane wall		road major
	lhato/altar		path/track
	rock carving/statue		river
	petroglyph		stream
	sacred rock/mountain		glaciers
	palace/fort/watchtower		lake/pond
	historic site other		forest
	boulder		fields & vegetation
			contours (20 m)

Numbers and names follow Rongdo walk book listing



# 1. RUDGO AND MANE WALLS

Along the main road that leads to Rongdo, just before reaching the village, there is an open alluvial fan and within that a lone boulder. This area is called Rudgo. On the boulder there are rock carvings, three figures of horses can easily be discerned amongst other markings that are not so clearly visible.

A little further down, opposite the village, are two *mane* (prayer) walls. Both are built on the mountain's slope, one in an area called Osay and another in a place called Sa Worong. Both these walls are said to have been built in the early 18th century. It is said to be auspicious to circumambulate both the walls before setting out on a long journey.

About a 30 minute walk from this site, is an area called Naktsur Thang. Naktsur is Black Alum, and is used as a mordant to ensure colour fastness. The mineral is found in caves here, and at one time was used all over Ladakh when dyeing woollen cloth. It is also used as an ingredient in traditional medicine.



## 2. TAKBU NAKPO

There is a stream that cuts through Rongdo, almost dividing the village into two equal parts.

After Rudgo, on the right side of the stream, the path leads straight to a small hillock called 'Takbu Nakpo'. Here, there is an interesting petroglyph site with many of the rock carvings scattered amongst the large boulders. The carvings are mainly of zoomorphic figures, primarily ibex, deer, and a leopard, along with several spiral shapes.



### 3. THEWOR MANE

There is a group of three *mane* (prayer) walls and a stupa, on the right side of the stream, near the Government School. These were sponsored by Tashi Tundup in memory of his father, Sonam Stobgyas, in the late 18th century. His mother, Garmo Tsering, and wife, Tsering Yangskit, also supported him.

At the site here, there are three rectangular *mane* walls and one 12 feet high Changchub stupa. A Changchub stupa symbolizes Buddha's enlightenment. The stupa is made of stone and mud brick masonry. The rectangular *mane* walls are made of dry-stone masonry. The flat prayer stones on the walls are said to have been mostly carved by Khamba Sonam Gonbo, and they consist of the six syllable mantra of Avalokiteśvara in Tibetan and Lantsa scripts.

These monuments mark the end of the right side of the village, and from here there is a bridge to cross the stream to reach the other side of the village which is larger and has more buildings. From here also the path leads up to the high pastures, where villagers take their livestock to graze, and there are many more heritage sites.





## 4. DUNG SNGONPO

After crossing the bridge, one of the first sites here are of two fortified ruins that date to the 15th century. The first is in an area known as Kongkha Gongma, and consists largely of structures made of stone with mud mortar, of which only low walls are still standing.

The other is at a place known as ‘Dung Sngonpo’, literally meaning ‘blue knoll’, as there is a bluish tinge to the stones used in its construction. It is said that the fort belonged to a queen named Yubzur-ma and hence it is called Yubzur-ma Khar (Fortress or Palace of Yubzur-ma). The fort is strategically located in Rongdo, towards the east of Nubra valley, and may have functioned as a defence post in the past from possible attacks from the east.

At the foot of the hill, lies a *Rigsum Gonbo*, a structure containing three stupas that represent the three Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara, Manjushri and Vajrapani. The *Rigsum Gonbo* is visible in the lower right hand corner of the bottom image. This is a mud brick structure and was built by Lobzang Tsering, in the early 19th century, as a meritorious act for spreading universal peace.



## 5. LHATO OF LHAB-TSAN DORJEY BARVA

Opposite Dung Sngonpo, amidst some old ruins, there is the altar (*lhato*) of the village protector deity called Lhab-tsan Dorjey Barva. It is constructed from mud and stone masonry, and the structure is painted red. Every year, on the 11th day of Ladakhi Losar (New Year), the villagers perform a purification ritual at the altar.

From here, the walk gradually progresses towards a series of stupas of varying sizes.



## 6. TSO-RASA

Along the way to Rongdo's *phu* (the upper valley), there is a rock art site. There are two large boulders with ibex figures carved on them. A little further along the way, at a site called Tso-rasa there are more carvings, one is of a stupa with two dots. While the stupa appears to be older than the dots, they give the figure an anthropomorphic feel. Adjacent to this rock is a tall tapering boulder, it is identified as *Srinmo Zimsting*, 'lamp of a witch'.

Not far from here are old and abandoned grain bins. The villagers recall that their forefathers used these bins for storing barley that they grew in their fields in the upper valley (*doksa*) during the summer.



## 7. BALU PHOLONGS

At a distance of roughly 15 kilometres away from the village, there is a boulder with the paw print of a mountain bear and hence it is called 'Balu Pholongs' (*balu* is the word for bear, *pholongs* for rock).

Not far from this rock there are a number of other boulders that have petroglyphs, these are mainly of ibex, deer and horses, some with riders on them. The rocky mountains, on either side, are known for having self-emanated images (*rangjon*) of various Buddhist deities. This area was once a major grassland, providing pasture to the villagers livestock. This is evident from the existence of abandoned *lhas*, pens for animals.



## 8. STANBA YANGPHEL TSAMSKANG

This is a meditation cell, said to be built in the 16th century and used by a hermit called Stanba Yangphel. It is a one-room structure and is rather precariously perched on a large boulder, which stands amidst a grove of trees. At one time the cell was accessed by a ladder made of stone with mud mortar, but that has collapsed over the years. On the upper portion of the boulder, there once was the *lhato* (altar) of Zangnam, the protector deity of Rongdo, but this has now been abandoned.

The meditation cell is located in an area called Kipti, where there is also the presence of an earlier settlement. It is said this was a halting point for villagers when they migrated with their livestock to the higher pastures (*doksa*) in summer, and returned in autumn before winter set in. There are also some ruins of old stupas visible here. There is a glacial stream below this, which was the source of water for the people when they lived here.

Walking on up after the meditation site, there are several more *mane* (prayer) walls and stupas; the path ends at the Urgain Namdoling Monastery.



## 9. RONGDO MONASTERY

The Urgain Namdoling or Rongdo Monastery was built by Lama Zangpo from Chemde Monastery in the late 19th century. This is said to have been built on the site of an earlier monastery that was washed away by a flood. According to a rock inscription found on the east side of the new monastery, the old one was built by an ascetic known as Namkha Gyaltsan in the early 16th century.

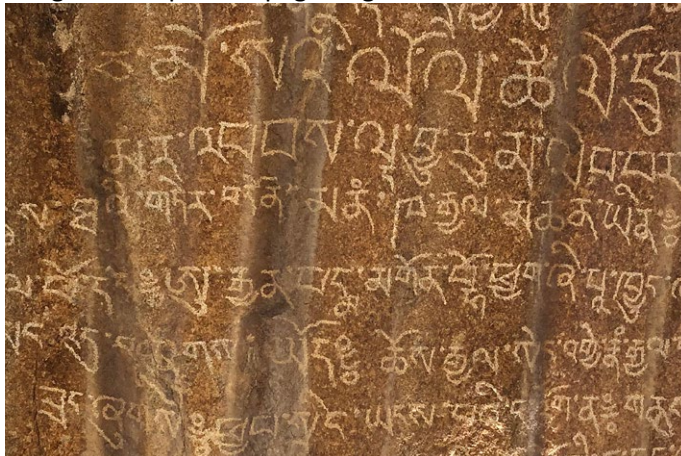
Lama Zangpo was assisted in the construction by Sonam Rigzin from Takthok Monastery, who was an artist (*spon*) and did the wall paintings. The monastery is a one-storey, stone and mud mortar building. It consists of the main temple and six adjoining rooms. The statues in the temple are of Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Rinpoche, and Avalokiteśvara along with the Dharma protectors. It also contains wall paintings of *Ltungshak* (thirty-five Buddhas), four-armed Mahakala, and various Dharma protectors and Bodhisattvas.

The monastery is a five hour walk from Rongdo village. There are no fixed timings for the monastery; ask at the village for the key, it is with the caretaker monk.



## 10. SNAS IG

This is a rock inscription with religious texts (*snas ig*), that also mentions the history of the monastery at Rongdo. It is located in the upper part of the valley, on the east side of Rongdo Monastery. The inscription is made on a large brown-coloured boulder, and is said to date from the 16th century. It mentions that the monastery was established by a yogi called Namkha Gyaltsan, he also founded a monastery in Khungru. The text also mentions the presence of several other deities and dharma protectors that can be seen in the valley, most of these are self-formed emanations on rock surfaces, making Rongdo an important pilgrimage destination.



## 11. DOKSA

This is where the village's summer pastures are located, a relatively wide open plain with several historical structures spread throughout it. One of the first of these is a group of stupas and *mane* (prayer) wall, associated with the 16th century hermit Stanba Yangphel. There are four Changchub stupas and one rectangular *mane* wall. While the stupas are all built with stone and mud mortar, the *mane* wall is with dry stone masonry. On top of the *mane* wall are flat white stones on which the mantra of Avalokiteśvara is carved in Tibetan and Lantsa script.



## 12. NAGA RAKSHA, SACRED WATERFALL

Another long walk uphill from the village, through the grasslands of Doksa, is the site of a spectacular waterfall. The walk to reach here takes approximately seven hours, but the sight of the water cascading down from a height of 70 feet is well worth it.

This is a sacred waterfall, known as Naga Raksha, or more locally as *Lhui Gonbo*, and is an important Buddhist site. Behind the waterfall, on the smooth rock surface, the self-emanated figure of the deity Naga Raksha is visible. Along with this, there are many other self-formed Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that can be seen at the site and also along the path leading to the waterfall. It is for this reason that many Ladakhis journey here for pilgrimage.



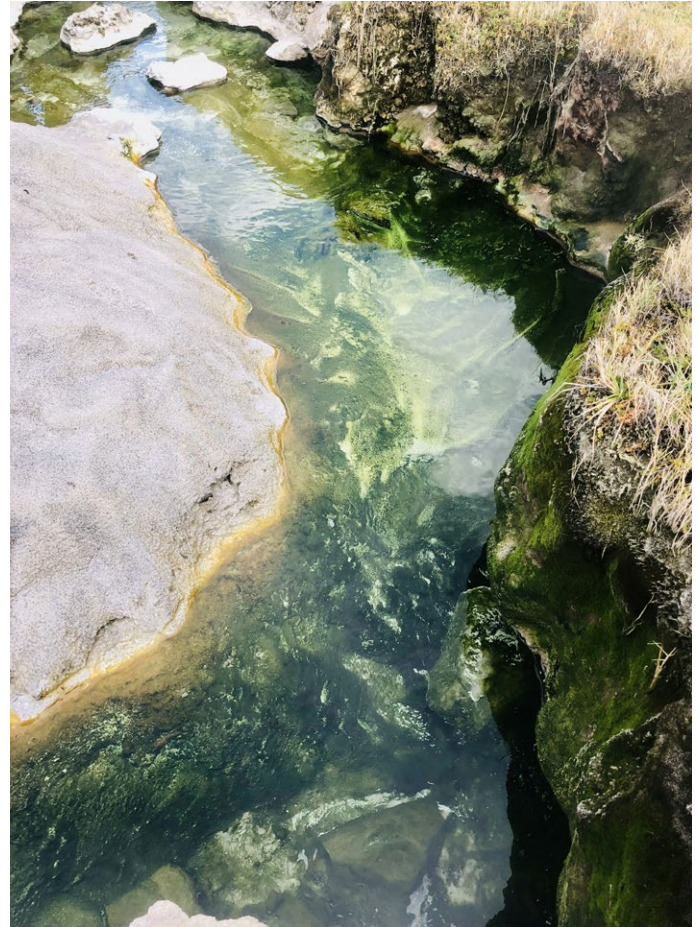


### 13. RONGDO CHUTSAN

Rongdo's most valuable natural possession is its hot spring called 'Rongdo Chutsan', this is situated in the upper valleys surrounding the village, at a distance of roughly 50 kilometres from it. The walk is steep and takes a good part of the day, at least eight to nine hours.

There are seven hot springs here and it is believed the water here is capable of curing up to 360 different kinds of illnesses and disease. Sulphur is a major content of these springs. The main benefits of these hot springs are for curing illnesses such as loss of appetite, arthritis, skin rashes, weakening of muscles, obesity, and headaches. For some patients, it is beneficial to take a dip in one of the hot springs and for others, on the advice of an amchi (local medical practitioner), they can drink it. However, excessive use of hot springs without consulting an amchi is not advisable, as it can have a negative impact on the body. The amchi also always includes the intake of traditional medicine along with the hot spring treatment, as they believe that will enhance the power of the water.

The hot springs of Rongdo are believed to be very effective, according to people who have benefitted from their use, and are widely visited by people across Ladakh.





# TSATI



## TSATI

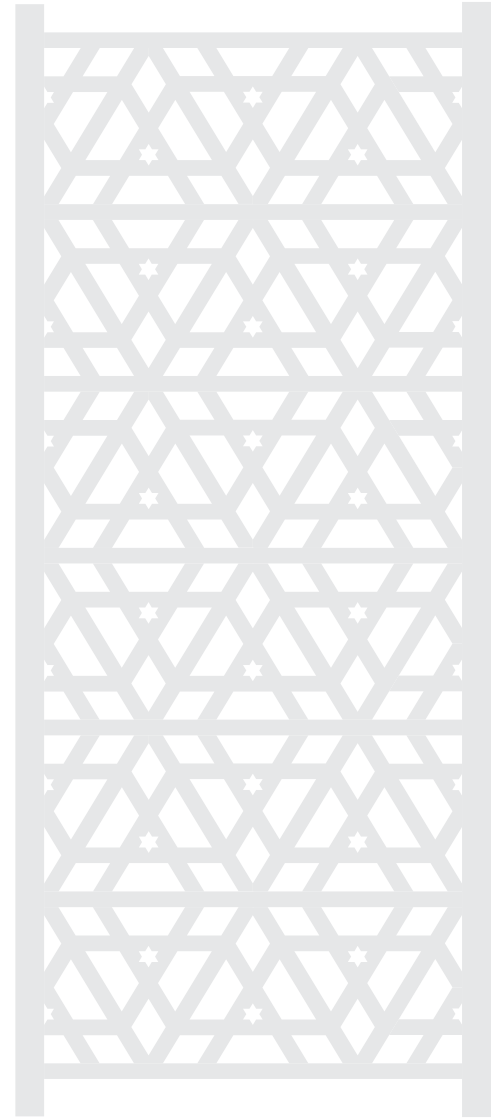
The Khardong La pass is the main entry point to the Nubra Valley. Descending the pass, and crossing the Shayok River, the first village on its right bank is Tsati. Several houses can be seen amidst thick tree cover and bushes. A natural hot water spring, located slightly above the village is said to give it the name 'Tsati'. The word is a combination of two words *tsa* (hot) and *ti* (water; though the Ladakhi word for water is *chu*, this is said to be a pre-Buddhist term derived from the ancient language of Zhangzhung). Villagers say this refers to a hot spring that was here once and attracted visitors, including patients, from all over Ladakh. According to a local myth, an old lady was annoyed at the presence of so many people and in order to stop this she 'burnt incense on dog excreta' (*khirkyag gi sangs*) – this results in a negative practice to bring something to an end.

In 1929, the Khomdan Glacial Lake outburst is said to have changed the landscape here. Elderly villagers recollect that they were told that the flash flood caused by the lake outburst washed away many homes in the village, reducing the number of houses from around 100 to the present 34 households.

# MAP REFERENCE

## TSATI

1. Manekhang
2. Motup Gurmet, Folk singer
3. Limestone Reserve, Kartsi Kung
4. Petroglyphs



77°42' 0"

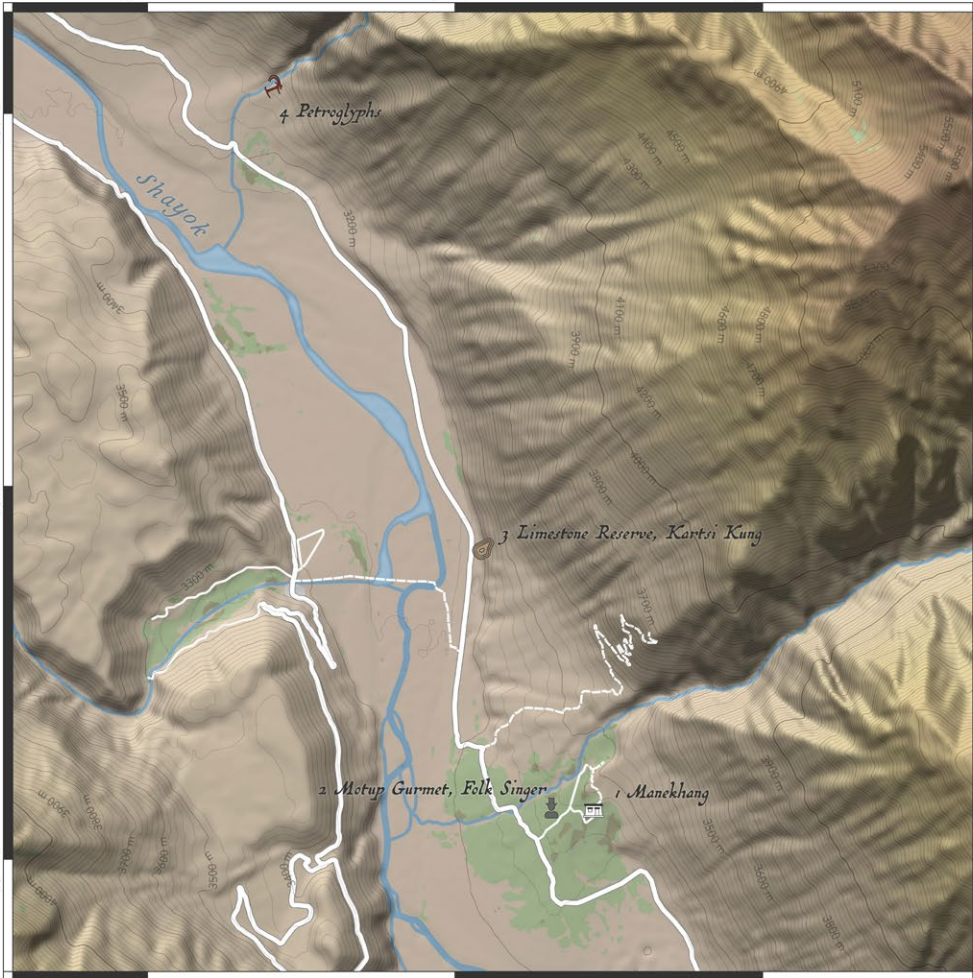
77°43' 30"

77°45' 0"

31°31' 30"

31°32' 0"

31°34' 0"



# TSATI ཚཱི



0 1 2 km

	temple		river
	petroglyph		stream
	artisan/artist/resource person		built-up area
	natural resource		forest
	road major		fields & vegetation
	road minor		contours (20 m)
	path/track		

*Numbers and names follow Tsati walk book listing*



# 1. MANEKHANG

The walk starts at the community prayer hall (*manekhng*). It was first built in the 19th century by Zangpo, a monk from Rongdo village during the time of Lama Tsultim Nyima, who founded Samstanling Monastery in Sumoor village. However, the building has undergone renovations multiple times, hence only parts of the old walls and main hall can still be seen. Further renovations and additions were being made to the building in 2022-23, when the research for this walk book took place.

Monks of Samstanling Monastery perform the prayers and rituals organised by the villagers at the *Manekhng*. The prayer hall houses several scriptures and scroll paintings, and important deities such as Avalokiteśvara, Yamantaka, Guru Padmasambhava and Je Tsongkhapa, a 14th century Buddhist master and founder of the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.



## 2. MOTUP GURMET, FOLK SINGER

A prominent folk singer and flutist, Motup Gurmet has many talents. He is a proficient carpenter and is also known for making *chornga* (drums used in monasteries). Motup learnt this skill from Sonam Nurbu, from Rongdo village. The wood from Willow trees, and sheep or goat skin are the raw materials he uses for making these religious instruments. Motup recollects that songs and music intrigued him since childhood, as they are not only soothing and enjoyable, but also provide information about the landscape, culture, and history of the region.



### 3. LIMESTONE RESERVE, KARTSI KUNG

Located on the right side of the main road, while driving towards Sumoor, is the limestone reserve known as '*Kartsi Kung*'. It is a short walk from the road. A wooden door now blocks the entrance, but the villagers say they have been collecting limestone from here for centuries. This has been a key source for people from Nubra, and other parts of Ladakh, as limestone was commonly used for whitewashing the exteriors of built structures. However, with the availability of synthetic quick lime in the market, the extraction of limestone from this reserve considerably decreased and now it is seldom used.





## 4. PETROGLYPHS

A 15 minute walk from the main road, the hill is filled with boulders of various sizes inscribed with petroglyphs. It is said this is part of a long chain of petroglyphs that exists all across the Ladakh region. This series of petroglyphs continues beyond Tsati village towards Tirth.

The naturally polished brown and slightly soft surfaces of these rocks suited the drawing of motifs, figures of animals and handprints apart from distinctive birds and lizards. Motifs of the mascoids at the site are considered to be from the Bronze Age period and other depictions from the Iron Age period.





# TIRITH

ཏི་རི་ཏི་

## TIRITH

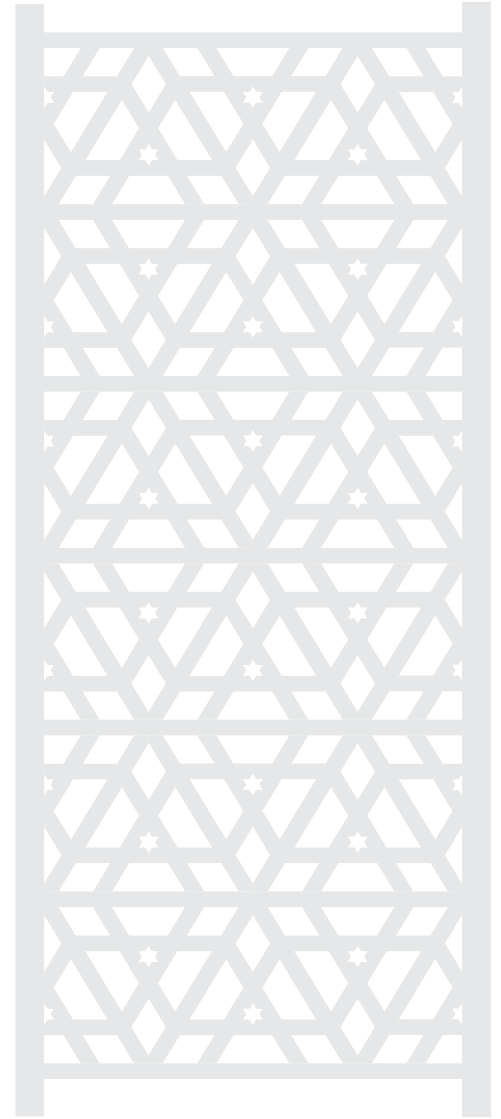
After crossing the Koyak bridge, over the Shayok River, Tirith is the first village one encounters. Its location on the wide banks of the Shayok River gives this small village an expansive landscape along the river. It is the entry point to the Siachen belt on the right side of the Nubra Valley, and from where the confluence of the Shayok and Siachen Rivers can be seen.

The village has a mix of new and old houses, interspersed with stupas and other heritage sites including an ancient rock carving of Buddha. Many villagers believe that the name 'Tirith' is a Central Asian term, but Onpo Urgain Rigzin, a popular writer and astrologer, who resides there says, 'the word Tirith is derived from the rolling hills (*ri ter ter*) surrounding the village'. He believes the hills (*ri*) contain rich treasures (*ster*). At one time there were only nine families living in the village, but today, that number has increased to 45. Osay Khar is the village *phu* (upstream mountain pasture), a lush green pasture with a glacial stream where villagers take their livestock for grazing during the summer months.

# MAP REFERENCE

## TIRITH

1. Koyak Bridge
2. Koyak Gyapo Lhato
3. Tirith Chamba
4. Manekhang
5. Kharpon Heritage House
6. Kagan Chorten
7. Gongmapa Heritage House

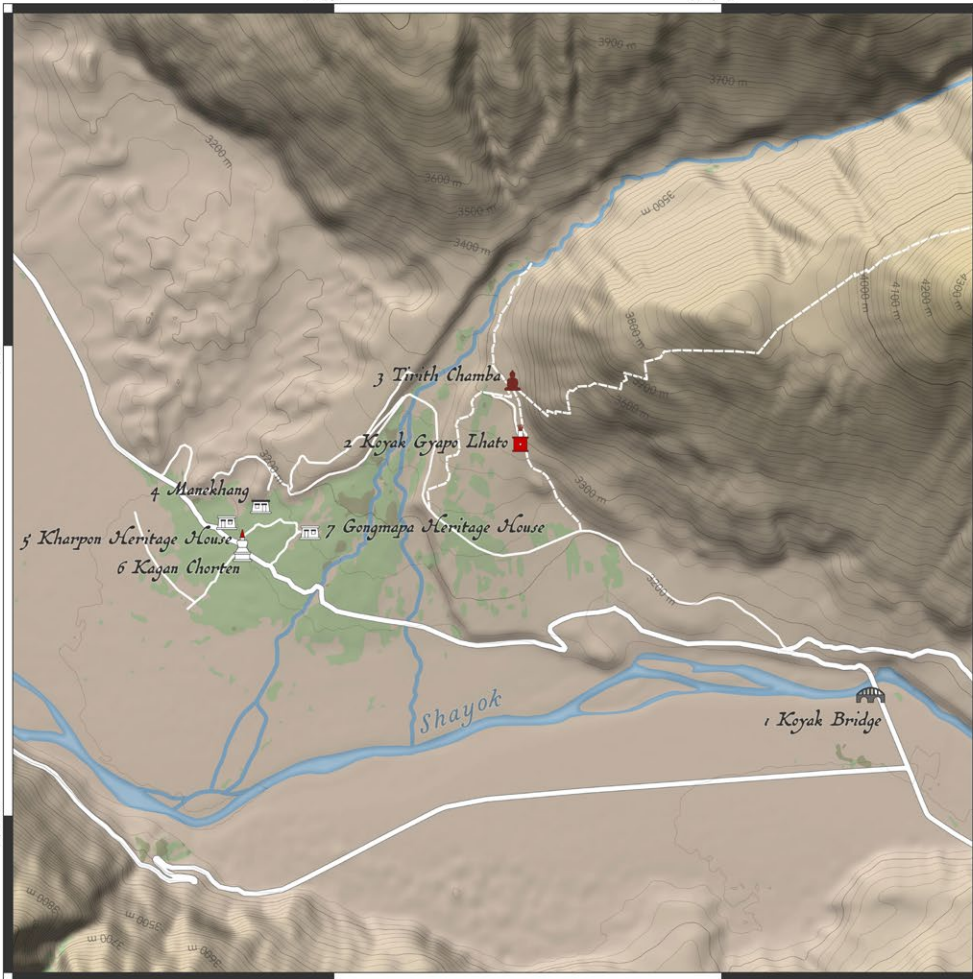


77°39'0"

77°40'30"

34°33'0"

34°31'30"



# TIRITH

ཁི་རིམ་

0 250 500 m



	temple		path/track
	chorten		river
	lhato/altar		stream
	rock carving/statue		built-up area
	historic house		forest
	bridge		fields & vegetation
	road major		contours (20 m)
	road minor		

*Numbers and names follow Tirith walk book listing*



# 1. KOYAK BRIDGE

The walk into Tirith begins from Koyak bridge, which crosses over the Shayok River. This bridge connects Nubra's Siachen belt with the rest of Ladakh.

The ruins of the old bridge now lie beside the new one; it was reconstructed several times. Oral accounts say that the bridge was first built in 1899, specifically to ferry goods to Central Asia as from here it was easier to connect to the village of Sasoma and onwards to the Tulumputi Pass that led there. This was probably a wooden bridge suspended by thick ropes. However, there are some accounts that say the bridge was first built in the 1930s, by a Kashmiri engineer with the help of a mason from Chushot called Ali Hussain, who also helped build the Tulumputi Pass. They said earlier boats make out of cow hide (*kowa*) or wood were used to ferry goods, animals and men across the Shayok River.

Then, in the 1960s, the old bridge was repaired by the engineer Tsering Sangrup, the chief mason on the project was Ghulam Hassan from Bogdang village. Born in Udmaru village but later shifted to Bogdang, Ghulam Hassan is widely known in Nubra for his astute and wise sensibilities while assisting in building projects in spite of having no formal education. His most well-known project was the airfield at Thoise in 1961, that helped the

Indian army secure its borders with China and Pakistan. The bridge was built by the villagers of Tirith using stone, wood and bricks. They did not use cement and instead used innovative techniques, such as using burnt limestone to hold the bricks and stones together as this has a cementing effect.

In 1979, a new bridge was built from steel by the engineer Phuntsog Namgyal Jora, and is for vehicular traffic. The old bridge was dismantled, but the arched entryway still stands. The wooden beams were reused to make a bridge in Turtuk village.



## 2. KOYAK GYAPO LHATO

Just before the Tirth Chamba mentioned as No 3 in this walk, there is an altar (*lhato*) dedicated to the Gongmapa family's protector deity, Koyak Gyapo (upper image). This deity is one of seven siblings, who were all protectors, that were said to have migrated from Central Asia many centuries ago. The most powerful among the seven siblings is Zangnam, this deity's altar is located at Khimithang in Nubra.

In the 1980s, construction of a vehicular road above the Koyak Lhato led to its being shifted atop an adjacent hill. The ruins of the old *lhato* can still be seen, see lower image. This was to respect the sanctity of the altar and to avoid displeasing the deity. In the past, it was said that people were even reluctant to ride their horses while passing the altar and so they would dismount. They had heard stories of traders being thrown off their horses when they passed the *lhato* without dismounting, such was the power of the Koyak Gyapo. A popular folk song 'Koyak Namstod Thonpo' is dedicated to this deity and similarly Koyak bridge was named after it. The rituals related to the *lhato* are conducted by the Gongmapa family.



### 3. TIRITH CHAMBA

Within the village environs Buddhist rock carvings are considered an auspicious sight and also a sign of protection and blessing. In Tirith, there is a large rock with several carvings of Buddhist deities. The largest of these is Maitreya (also known as Chamba, the Buddha of the Future), as well as Manjushri, Buddha and other smaller figures of Buddhist deities.

The site is dated to between the 8th to 13th centuries. A local myth considers these images on the rock as self-formed (*rangjon*). However, another myth talks about a mystic residing here and that he worked on the *rangjon* carvings, making them more pronounced and visible. In addition, he built a shelter over the rock to protect the images from rain and wind. He built a small room beside the rock carvings to store items such as butter, but this is now in ruins. The carvings remained unfinished though, due to his untimely death.

This place was also used in former times for storing food such as butter. More recently, the villagers dismantled the ruins of the remaining walls and roof and built a raised platform in front of the images. This now allows them to easily view the images, perform prayers and make offerings to them.





## 4. MANEKHANG

A little further down the road before the Kagan Chorten, there is a two-storey old building called *manekhang*. This space is the traditional gathering place for the community and it is here they perform religious activities and rituals, including offering of prayers and recitation of the scriptures. The villagers say the house dates from the early 18th century and was built on a piece of land donated by the Tsatipa family at their request. At the time, the Gongmapa family also offered their land in response to the community's appeal to families with large land holdings in the village. Since building the *manekhang* is considered a very virtuous deed, both these families had wanted to undertake this meritorious work. Thus, a draw was held and the Tsatipa family won. In exchange for their generous contribution, they now have the honour of receiving prayer services at their home from the monks of Diskit Monastery.

The *manekhang* is a two storeyed structure and the chapel (*dukhang*) is located on the ground floor in the central area. The building has one large imposing wooden balcony (*rabsal*), similar to the Kharpon house, but this is not enclosed. The entrance to the building has the four cardinal kings (*Gyalchen zhi*), painted on either side of the doorway. Within the building are

wall paintings of the Buddhist deities Ltungshag (35 Buddhas), Jigjed (Yamantaka), and Shakyamuni Buddha. There are statues of Tara, Avalokiteśvara and Guru Padmasambhava. Other artifacts include *thangkas* (scroll paintings) and scriptures, many of which were contributed by a monk from the Gongmapa family, who brought them from Tibet. The building is open to the public on auspicious occasions such as the 10th, 15th, and 30th day of every month of the Tibetan Lunar Calendar.

A new *manekhang* was built some 20 years ago, and is currently used by the community. Some of the statues from the old *manekhang* were shifted to the new one.



## 5. KHARPON HERITAGE HOUSE

Almost in the centre of Tirith village, there stands the home of the Kharpon family, which was built sometime between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, there are some villagers who say it could be older. The Kharpon family of Tirith are descendants of the Kalon family of Kyagar who had shifted from Leh and settled in Kyagar.

The house is said to have been specially built for Tsering Lhanzom, one of the family's daughters, after she expressed her will to become a nun. However, soon after she was married into the royal family of Matho, and her wish to become a nun was never fulfilled. She gave birth to the third incarnation of Rizong's Sras Rinpoche, who went on to attain the most coveted Galdan Tripa, which is the highest title of the spiritual leader of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, the first and only monk to have received this position in Ladakh. After this, the house remained abandoned for many years. However, it is now being used by the current members of the family and is in fairly good condition.

The house is a three-storied structure with many rooms including a spacious winter kitchen (*chansa*), living room

and chapel; as well as the bedroom of the lady of the house who once lived here.

One of the most striking features of the house is the imposing enclosed wooden balcony (*rabsal*) on the third floor. In the past, balconies in Ladakhi houses were considered prestigious, and often the status of the household could be determined by the number of balconies their home had.



## 6. KAGAN CHORTEN

A little after the Kharpon house, is the Kagan Chorten. It is in the form of a stupa gate (*kagan*). It was built by a resident of Udmaru village of Nubra, a few centuries ago. Walking under the stupa you can see the weathered wall paintings of the mandala of *zhi thro tamba rigs gya* (100 peaceful and wrathful Buddhist tantric deities), representing the purified elements of the body and mind. Some years ago, the villagers raised funds so that they could undertake conservation work of the stupa. Beside the stupa there is an enclosed prayer wheel.



## 7. GONGMAPA HERITAGE HOUSE

Gongmapa heritage house is amongst the oldest structures in the village, it is said to have been built in the 15th century. Though no longer inhabited because of its ruinous state, it was once a large and stately home, indicative of the wealth and status the family once enjoyed. At one time, the house must have been a fine example of vernacular architecture having several rooms including summer and winter kitchens, a brewery, store rooms, animal sheds, and chapel amongst others. It was decorated with wooden carvings above the windows and screens in the balconies. The courtyard of the house has small shrines, such as a *lhubang* and *tsakhang*, a single stupa and a group of eight stupas called *Deshegs-rgyad*.

The Gongmapa family has a long history of trade across the Trans-Karakoram route. The popular folk song 'Koyak Namstod Thonpo' is often thought to have been written by an ancestor of the family who was involved in this trade. Highlights of the song, that allude to this, include mention of the family's protector deity Koyak Gyalpo, as well as mention of a special variety of apple (*ambar kushu*) that is owned exclusively by this family.







# LAKJUNG

ལེགས་ལཱ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

## LAKJUNG

The village is located a few kilometres from Koyak bridge, about a kilometre or two away from Tirith. The name ‘Lakjung’ refers to prosperity and well-being, and the villagers say that in earlier times the village used to be thriving with around 100 households living on either side of the Tepla Khar and it was a prosperous village. Unfortunately, the Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) of Khomdan Glacier in 1929 led to the considerable erosion of the village contours reducing it to the current size. Villagers say that the flood caused the widening of the river, as before it they were able to easily hand things over to each other from one side of the river to the other. This compelled several households to migrate to Hundar, Sumoor, Tirith and other places in Nubra. There used to be around eight to ten households, this number has now grown to forty.

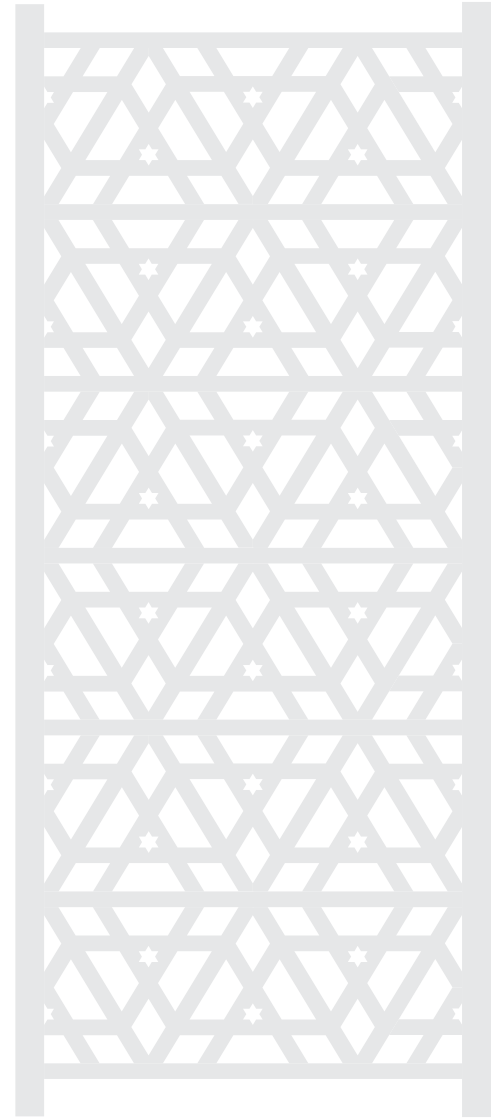
Lakjung is popularly associated with the mythical tyrannical ruler Cho Bongskang-chan, his name literally translates to ‘a chieftain with donkey-like hooped feet’. He was eventually murdered by the people of Nubra as they could no longer deal with the atrocities he put them through.

Pilgrims visit Lakjung to pay their respects to the *rangjon* (self-formed rock formation) of one of the eight manifestations of Mahakala (*Gonbo*, the Buddhist God of Protection). It can be found in the upper pasturelands of the village.

# MAP REFERENCE

## LAKJUNG

1. Tepla Khar and Cho Bongskang-chan
2. Onpo Chapel
3. Mane Ringmo and Mane Soma
4. Mosque
5. Khangpa Chenmo and Ruins of the old village





77°38' 0" E

77°37' 0" E

77°38' 0" E

34°34' 0" N

34°34' 0" N



# LAKJUNG

ལཀའུང་གཞི་རྒྱུད།

0 250 500 m



	temple		path/track
	mosque		river
	mane wall		stream
	palace/fort/watchtower		forest
	ruins		fields & vegetation
	road major		contours (20 m)
	road minor		

Numbers and names follow Lakjung walk book listing



## 1. TEPLA KHAR AND CHO BONGSKANG-CHAN

Opposite Lakjung, on the hill facing the village, there is a monastery. Some parts of it have been rebuilt, but other older structures are still visible. It is a two-storey structure and the main *dukhang* (chapel) is located on the upper floor. Beneath the chapel there is evidence of rooms with relatively thick walls and small, narrow windows. There are also unique features such as smoke chimneys made from mud. This makes the villagers think that Tepla Khar was originally a residence, or a palace, before it became a monastery. It is said that one of the last descendants of the family migrated to Central Asia leaving no heir behind to take care of the family property, and over time the villages converted it into a monastery.

The monastery enshrines stucco images of Guru Padmasambhava in two manifestations that include Guru Takmar and Chagdor. A smaller statue of Guru Padmasambhava, was offered to the temple by Aye Khangchenpa family of Diskit village. This statue originally belonged to the Khangpa Chenmo family of Lakjung village. The shrine has murals of various Bodhisattvas and *thangkas* (scroll paintings), some of the murals are said to be *Lhaskal* (dedicated to deceased

members), as they have names of people written below them. The paintings are said to have been made by one of the *komnyers* (monastic caretaker), who lived at the monastery.

Near the Tepla Khar there are two sets of *Rigsum Gonbo* and two Changchub Chortens. At some distance from the palace is a stone structure that resembles a person bending forward; the villagers associate this with the old lady mentioned below in the story of the mythical King Cho Bongskang-chan.



Tepla Khar is also said to be the fortress or palace of the mythical chieftain ruler Cho Bongskang-chan. He is said to have been born in Udmaru village but eventually settled at Lakjung. It is claimed that his body was made of wax (*lacha*), apart from his feet. These were hooped, similar to ungulates. He was wise, but extremely cruel to his subjects. He once ate an eight-year-old boy to punish the community for not being able to make him a pair of shoes that fit his hooped feet. This was because they were not able to see his feet, so his size was unknown. An old wise lady devised a way of obtaining his footprint, she cleverly spread a layer of ash on the ground before the entrance to his toilet. After observing his footprint, she told the shoemaker that it resembled the hoof of a donkey. Thus, villagers were able to make him a perfectly fitted pair of shoes. This incident also gave him his name Cho Bongskang-chan, 'a chieftain with donkey-like hooped feet'.

His cruelty knew no bounds. One day he noticed that a mountain peak in front of his palace blocked the morning sun. Cho Bongskang-chan ordered his subjects to flatten the peak. The villagers went with shovels and pickaxes, and toiled hard day and night to break the peak. An old wise lady seeing the unbearable pain the villagers were going through uttered '*ri go tu le sang mi go tul nang gyal*' ('instead of crushing the peak, it is better to crush

the man's head'). The villagers then conspired to kill the chief. They dug up a hole and filled it with thorns and wood and put a carpet over it. They then invited the chief for a grand feast. As he took his seat on the carpet, Cho Bongskang-chan fell into the hole. The villagers then threw fire torches (*meto*) into the pit, knowing that he feared fire because he was made of wax, and burnt him alive. Some villagers said that as evidence of this, in the past some of their elders said they found the tools used to flatten the peak. The annual *Meto* (fire torches) ceremony during Losar celebrations, that is still held is reminiscent of this event. This is still seen at Tirisha.



## 2. ONPO CHAPEL

The chapel is on the upper floor of a two-storeyed building that belongs to the Onpo family. It is said to have been set up in the 1800s by an astrologer (*onpo*) called Skalzang who came from Sakti to Nubra as a caretaker monk of Onpo Monastery in Sumoor village. After marrying a local woman, he settled at Lakjung. Marriage is common among tantric Buddhist practitioners, including *onpos*. His descendants now live in Lakjung as well as different parts of Nubra, and many of them still practise astrology, however, this practice has stopped in Lakjung.

The chapel enshrines sacred texts *Bum Puti Churug*, which were annually taken out for the community's holy procession of *Bumskor* around the village. This has now stopped. Other religious artefacts in the chapel include *thangkas* (scroll paintings), from Tibet, as well as stucco images of Guru Padmasambhava, Je Tsongkhapa and a wooden Changchub stupa.

The Onpo chapel has a rather forlorn look now as it is seldom visited, about 30 to 40 years ago elderly villagers remember how the place used to be bustling with activity on a daily basis with people coming to make offerings and perform rituals.



### 3. MANE RINGMO AND MANE SOMA

Opposite the Onpo chapel, there are ruins of an old *Mane Ringmo*, long prayer wall (upper image), that is said to have been constructed along the old Trans-Karakoram trade route. The *mane* (prayer) stones on this wall were shifted by the villagers to a new wall, near the village mosque, which they built some 23 years ago (lower image). While the older wall is built from mud and stone masonry, the new one is constructed from cement. The new wall has a large prayer wheel at one end, and around the other three sides of the wall there are smaller prayer wheels.

The villagers said that with the construction of new roads, the old *mane* wall had become too far for daily circumambulation. Therefore, to allow for continued use of the *mane*, the villagers shifted it to the current location, right along the main road. While transferring the prayer stones, the villagers performed rituals to purify the new space.

Traditionally, it is said that prayer walls essentially served as barriers especially at the time of floods. Travellers and pilgrims also benefited from these walls as landmarks and a source of merit as they circumambulated these sacred structures.



## 4. MOSQUE

The mosque in Lakjung is a relatively new structure, it was built in the early 2020s. There are eight Muslim families residing in the village, at the time of the first settlement it was said there was one Muslim family. In the absence of a mosque in Lakjung, they would go to offer prayers at the mosques in Sumoor or Diskit. However, it was felt that a mosque was necessary especially for the convenience of the Muslims who lived in the village, as well as for Muslim visitors or officials who came to the village and so the community designated the piece of land it now stands on. The village community has also given a small piece of land to build a cemetery nearby.



## 5. KHANGPA CHENMO AND RUINS OF THE OLD VILLAGE

The village of Lakjung is said to have grown to 200 households from the initial eight that first settled here. Then the Khumdan Glacier burst in the 1920s, and a large part of this settlement was destroyed. Many households shifted to the present current location of the village, nearer to the slopes of the nearby mountain, and some left Lakjung and settled in other villages in Nubra. The ruins in this vast open area that was hit by the flood are still visible, the debris of collapsed walls and scattered stones, a sign that a settlement once existed here.

Amongst the ruins, one home that is much spoken about is the Khangpa Chenmo house. They were an aristocratic family and the daughter, Shema Tsetan, married a Muslim musician called Ustad Ghulam. They had no children, and so adopted a child called Bhumo Tundup. Some years later, the couple left for Central Asia and decided to settle there. Before leaving, they entrusted their properties to Bhumo Tundup, saying they would come back from time to time. But soon after China took over Sinkiang, the borders closed and the trade routes stopped and so they were probably not able to return. Their lands and fields are now taken care of by Bhumo



Tundup's family members, to whom the care of their lands was entrusted.

It is said that the house was large and had an elaborate chapel, it was widely known among the people for its grandeur as well as its sacredness. After the flood, the house was destroyed and what remained of the contents of the chapel were divided between their family members. Some statues came under the care of the Kagapa family in Phukpoche as well as the Ayeekhangchenpa family in Diskit, who are descendants of this family.







# SUMOOR

གསུམ་ཡུར།

## SUMOOR

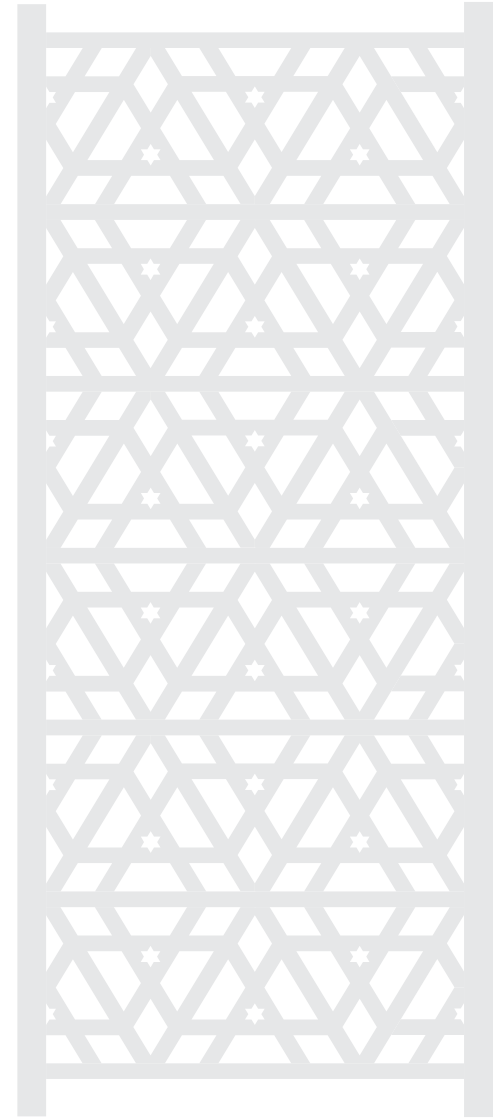
Sumoor is one of the largest villages in the Siachen belt, both in terms of area and population. However, the village itself has shifted location almost three times, perhaps because of flooding or other natural calamities or because of raids from Central Asia in the past, no one was very sure. But one interpretation of the village's name is derived from these moves – *sum-yul* (three-settlements). The village was first said to be at Sogmag Khar, the ruins of this fortified settlement on the top of a hill are still visible. The second was at Khampa Tong, near the present power house, and the present village is the third settlement.

Another explanation given for Sumoor's name is its identification as a place where three water canals (*sum-yur*) meet. This refers to the channels bringing water in from Chamshen via Kyagar, Lakjung and Sumoor's own stream (Sumoor *tokpo*). Sumoor is one of those rare villages in Nubra where traditional practices such as an Amchi (practitioner of Tibetan medicine), Onpo (astrologer), Sergar (metal craftsman) and folk musicians can still be found.

# MAP REFERENCE

## SUMOOR

1. Ghulam Mohammad, Musician
2. Tsetan Dolma, Agriculturist and Weaver
3. Phuntsog Angmo, Teacher and Lyricist
4. Colonel Chewang Rinchen Museum
5. Ldorapa Family, Home to Traditional Crafts
6. Tsering Stobgais, Metal Worker
7. Mosque
8. Self-Help Group
9. Manekhang
10. Onpo Monastery
11. Larjei Heritage House
12. Lhatsas Heritage House
13. Zhugthis and Kagan Chorten
14. Home of the Village Protector, Awahati
15. Samstanling Monastery
16. Rock Art



77°37'0"

77°38'0"

34°58'0"

34°37'0"



# SUMOOR

གསུམ་ཡུལ།

0 250 500 m



	monastery		artisan/artist/resource person
	temple		road major
	mosque		road minor
	chorten		path/track
	lhato/altar		stream
	rock carving/statue		built-up area
	sacred rock/mountain		forest
	palace/fort/watchtower		fields & vegetation
	historic house		contours (20 m)
	self-help group/society		

Numbers and names follow Sumoor walk book listing  
\*location not fixed



## 1. GHULAM MOHAMMAD, MUSICIAN

Hailing from a family of musicians from Sumoor, that traces their ancestry to the 18th century, Ghulam has been a professional musician most of his adult life. His only son has, unfortunately, opted for more commercial professions connected to tourism and is at present a taxi driver. Perhaps this is because of the stigma associated with the musician community throughout Ladakh, where they are treated as “lower caste” in spite of their art of music being so rich in content and complex.

Ghulam is called to perform at weddings and other social events all over Nubra. He remembers some 30 songs by heart, and regrets the disappearance of many traditional tunes as they are no longer in demand today when he performs. In addition, with the decline of royal and aristocratic patronage, music genres such as *Raag* and *Mokham* are no longer sung.



## 2. TSETAN DOLMA, AGRICULTURIST AND WEAVER

While in Ladakh some people are moving away from traditional practices, there are others who make efforts to ensure they are maintained and continued. Tsetan Dolma is one such person. She is both an avid weaver and also works diligently in her field, striving to grow a variety of vegetables she can sell. While her farming activities occupy her in the summer, in the winter she can be seen working at her loom. Both occupations generate an income for her, and she is proud of that.

Tsetan learnt to weave at the age of 12, she remembers there was a government scheme under the Watershed Development program which had a provision to revive traditional crafts and train rural artisans and so she took this opportunity to learn. Later, she joined a year-long training program for weaving, under the Indian Army's Sadbhavna (goodwill) project. This improved her skill at the art tremendously; she was offered a job at the Government Handloom Department which she refused. Instead, she decided to launch off on her own and availing a government subsidy, she acquired a loom (*thagsha*). Tsetan prefers to work from home, as this allows her to take care of her children and family. While in the past weaving was more of a male

occupation in Ladakh, except for among nomadic populations, women have now also stepped in. Most weavers used to make woollen fabric for clothing (*snambu*), blankets (*chali* and *tsug-thul*) and floor coverings. Now, women such as Tsetan also weave shawls.



### 3. PHUNTSOG ANGMO, TEACHER AND LYRICIST

A woman pedagogue, a song writer, composer and singer, Phuntsog Angmo is all of these. She is widely known for her popular songs on themes such as education, the natural beauty and landscape of Nubra, social and state functions, and religious devotion amongst others. One such song on education ‘*yong thugu tsangma, lobta la chen*’ is widely recited across generations, all over Ladakh. It reads like this:

*Come children let us go to school,  
Let us educate ourselves at school,  
Let us become experts through education,  
Let us become experts like Gandhi and Nehru.*

*Come children let us educate ourselves to become brave,  
Let us become Jhansi and Subhash,  
Let us go around the earth,  
Let us make friends with those from east and west.*

*Come children let us go to school,  
Let us become big “man”,  
And then visit the moon as guests.*

Phuntsog Angmo was born in 1944 and is from the Stakray Shakma family of Sumoor village; she is Colonel Chewang Rinchen’s younger sister. She was the first woman from Sumoor to go to school and get an education, she taught Bhoti language in government schools.



## 4. COLONEL CHEWANG RINCHEN MUSEUM

Colonel Chewang Rinchen is probably one among few Indian soldiers who has received the Mahavir Chakra twice. He was born in in 1931, in the Stakray Shakma family of Sumoor, and from a young age was an active and courageous child. He was a student in Leh when India's independence in 1947 took place. Upon hearing of Nubra's sensitive position he joined the force called 'Nubra Guards'. He was only 17 years old at the time, but fought bravely and valiantly to defend the country, and together with a few volunteers, they managed to successfully block Pakistan's intrusion. For his bravery, in 1948, he was awarded the Mahavir Chakra, becoming the youngest recipient of the award at the time.

Chewang Rinchen then joined the Indian army and during the 1962 war with China he fought with the 14 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles. For his participation in this war he was awarded a Sena Medal. In 1964, he was granted a permanent commission in the regular Indian army with the rank of Second Lieutenant. By the time the 1971 war with Pakistan took place he was a Major and led the 'Dhal Force' against Pakistan in Baltistan. His unorthodox techniques, based on guerrilla warfare, resulted in the capture of Turtuk. For his contribution

and bravery, he was awarded the Mahavir Chakra for the second time. He retired from the services as a Colonel in 1984, and passed away in 1997.

In 2019, the museum was established in his memory, it was set up by his family and the Army. His family home was converted into the museum and it now displays his medals and awards, archival images, wartime objects and instruments, amongst other artefacts.

Visiting hours for the museum are from 10 am to 5 pm.



## 5. LDORAPA FAMILY, HOME TO TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

It is rare to find a family in Ladakh today where all the members are involved in the production of local crafts, more so because other professions such as working in tourism or joining the army, have a more attractive pull. In the Ldorapa family, Phuntsog Tsewang, now 88 years old, his son Tsering Phuntsog and Tsering's wife Dolma are all practicing artisans.

Phuntsog Tsewang makes a range of textile products from sheep wool and goat hair, including ropes, blankets, and sacks in different sizes. But what he is most known for are the shoes he makes, locally known as *pabu*. They are made with leather soles and woollen uppers, and have a tie-dye (*thigma*) design around the base and embroidered patterns of small flowers or geometric shapes.

Following his footsteps, his son Tsering Phuntsog is passionate about tailoring and learnt from a master tailor called Baba Ghulam. He learnt to make Ladakhi style dress such as the *gos*, robes for men and women. As well as the *bok* and *yogor* (capes) for women, and the *stodthung* (short sleeveless jacket women wear over their robe). He also makes Ladakhi hats such as the *tibi*,

and the *serthod* (golden hat, largely worn at weddings). Tsering says that over the years he has observed changes in dress patterns and design influences that come in from other regions. Embroidery from Yarkand, and dragon (*druk*) motifs from China and Tibet. The male robe has become more fitted, while the earlier looser style allowed easier movement. At the same time, the art of natural dyeing using local plants such as the wild rose, is not practiced as often these days.

Tsering's wife Dolma is no less talented than her husband and father-in-law. She makes Ladakhi baskets (*tsepo* and *chura*), in varying sizes from local plants available in the village. Weaving them tightly together so that they can be used for carrying produce, such as vegetables, or sold to visitors.

Together, their home is a local crafts centre. They procure all their raw materials locally. And have their own flock of sheep, goats and cattle.







## 6. TSERING STOBGAIS, METAL WORKER

The art of working with metal was at one time widely practiced in Ladakh. Now, that has also declined. These artisans were known as *sergar* (where *ser* means gold, though they worked with other metals as well). They were proficient in working with gold, silver, brass and copper. And made a wide range of items that included jewellery, traditional stoves (*thap*), agricultural tools such as sickles, picks, axes, and spades.

Tsering Stobgais is a practising metal craftsman, his family has a history of serving Samstanling Monastery as a craftsman (*lakshes*) as well as the residents of Sumoor and nearby villages. Stobgais usually procures his raw materials, such as brass, copper and iron from Leh. Or his clients bring in their own raw materials. His tools have not changed much over the years, and include goat-skin bellows to keep the fire burning, hammer, stands and moulds. He has noticed recently there has been an increasing demand for the *gyathap*, the metal stove decorated with patterns of the dragon (*druk*), lion (*singe*), swastika (*yundum*), and Great Wall of China (*gyanak-Ichagris*). These stoves are also embellished with semi-precious stones such as turquoise.



## 7. MOSQUE

The mosque is located almost in the centre of Sumoor, not far from the *manekhang*. It is a single-storey one-room building with a small dome and *mihrab* (niche in the wall that indicates the direction of Mecca) inside. The exact date of its construction is not known, though it could be sometime in the 19th century; in 1990 the mosque was restored. Around the mosque are ruins of buildings, which villagers say were once homes of the first Muslims who settled in Sumoor. The Muslims in Sumoor follow the teachings of the Sufi Saint Noorbakshi. A lamp (*membar*) inside the mosque is believed to have healing powers, for example, to cure infants with fever.

There are a few stories connected to the origin of the mosque, one links it to a Balti queen called Thri Gyalmo who was married to a Ladakhi king. She is said to have fallen while crossing the Digar La as there was a windstorm at the time, later she succumbed to her injuries. Mysteriously, her body was found at Sumoor, at the site of the present mosque. It is said the mosque was built by Apo Ali, a Balti carpenter from Thale region of Baltistan. He had gone to Kyagar to do the wood work of the Zimskhang Gongma house, and was passing through Sumoor at the time. He liked the place and decided to

settle there; he is said to be the first Muslim to settle there and the Muslim families living in Sumoor are said to be his descendants.

Another story about the origin of the mosque is about a woman traveller from Baltistan named Khatoon, who vanished while performing *namaz* (prayers) at the site of the mosque. The ground where she prayed was then considered sacred and the mosque was built over it. Some thirty years ago, while renovating the mosque, it is said that the skeletal remains of a human body were discovered and there was some speculation that these could be Khatoon's remains.



## 8. SELF HELP GROUP

In early 2000, under the Government of India's Watershed Development Scheme, several Self Help Groups (SHG), were established in Ladakh, including Nubra. They received several incentives and subsidies from the government, as well as training in specific crafts or marketing skills. These SHG's impacted women's livelihood, encouraging them to become more financially independent. They also brought women together, to share time with each other, whether singing folk songs or praying and attending monastic teachings.

Lhatsas Lukhar Tsogspa is amongst the oldest of these SHGs and has 15 members today. Together the group makes baskets, boots, woollen toys, knitted garments, and also performs cultural shows for tourists. Their products are kept at hotels and guest houses, and sent to exhibitions outside the region. Another group called Dalai, set up in 2006, specialises in weaving pashmina and wool shawls. Yet another SHG group is called Loday Colour, set up in 2011 by the Handloom Department. The members of this group were trained in traditional tie-dye (*thigma*), through a six-month training program. All the groups work with local produce, especially the fibre of camels, goat, sheep and yak.



## 9. MANEKHANG

Sumoor *Manekhang* (community temple) is located on the right side of the link road that leads to Samstanling Monastery, next to the mosque. It was built around the same time as the *Kyagar Manekhang*, roughly the early 1800s, and followed the same architectural plan. However, in early 2000 it was rebuilt and now the similarity between the two structures is lost.

The *manekhang* is a two-storey structure with the main temple on the first floor. There are statues of Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, Vajra Sattva, Manjushri, Guru Padmasambhava, Shri Devi, Tara, as well as various *thangkas* (scroll paintings) of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and Dharma protectors. There is a large courtyard, with a prayer flag, where villagers gather when community prayers are held. A *Rigsum Gonbo* is visible above the main entrance.

There used to be a prayer wheel inside the compound of the *manekhang*, and was said to be rotated by water. During the rebuilding, it was moved outside to its present location on the right side of the road. The prayer wheel is made of wood, and is said to contain thousands of the Buddha's Six Syllable Mantra of Compassion.



## 10. ONPO GONPA

The Onpo Gonpa (or Astrologer's Monastery), is in many ways a shrine dedicated to the tradition of astrology practiced here. The foundation for the building is said to have been laid by Lama Rigzin in 1814, following which the building was constructed by Onpo Tashi with the support of the prosperous Zimskhang family of Hundar. Hence, the Onpo based here works for both Sumoor and Hundar.

The current Onpo is Rigzin Dorje, and the profession is hereditary, passed down from father to son. Rigzin was taught in the religious art of astrology from his father Tsultim Nurbu, who is also adept in Tibetan medicine. Tsultim, in turn, learnt from his father Onpo Wangdus. Now, 87 years old, Tsultim considers his family profession as worthy and essential for carrying forward the faith, though it involves hard penance. This consists of the completion of *thun zhi* (intense practice for many months), which includes 1,00,000 prostrations (*chak*), offerings, and recitation of prayers.

The building still retains its original character, within a spacious courtyard that has a pair of stupas and a *tsa-dkhang*, a room dedicated for offerings of miniature clay images of deities and stupas. Interestingly, there is a

retreat room underneath the main prayer hall where it is claimed, the late Sras Rinpoche from Rizong, who is also the head Lama of Samstanling Monastery, meditated. This is a private shrine and follows the rituals and rites of one of the oldest sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingmapa order.

The protector deity of the shrine is called Dorje Takpostar. The wall paintings in the prayer hall are quite unique, and are known as Drupa Kagyad, they include the deities Jamspal Sku, Padma Sung, Yangdak Thug, Dorjey Yontan, Phurba Thinles, Mamo Posang, Jiksten Chostod, and Yang Zhi. On every 10th day of the month (called *tsechu* according to the Tibetan Lunar Calendar), the Onpo performs a ritual called *khampa*, followed by an offering to the deity the next day.

Sumoor has one of the last few practicing onpos; in the villages of Lakjung, Pinchimik, Tirith, and Chamshen, all the onpos there have stopped practising. Thus, the residents of these villages make offerings at the Onpo Gonpa of Sumoor. Rigzin Dorje says that at one time he used to make home visits, but with so many more villages to cover now he is no longer able to do that. As a concession for the significant role he plays in the community, villagers absolve him of his customary village duties. However, Rigzin fears that the tradition may

not survive for much longer as the younger generation is least interested to learn and continue it. He feels that discontinuation of this practice will disrupt their traditional way of life. There is, however, a ray of hope, in the introduction of this knowledge system in the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies (CIBS), at Choglamsar.



## 11. LARJEY HERITAGE HOUSE

Set amongst a lush orchard of fruit trees, and not far from Samstanling Monastery, this is probably one of the oldest inhabited homes in Sumoor. It is said to be roughly 300 years old, and has all the attributes of the vernacular architecture of the region. It is a large three-storey building with elaborate woodwork and richly decorated interiors, especially the temple. The structure has the typical features of a Ladakhi house: the temple (*chodkhang*) on the uppermost floor, summer kitchen and living quarters on the first floor, and the winter kitchen (*chansa*) and animal shed (*stongra*) on the ground floor. The temple was restored in 2018 by LOTI (Leh Old Town Initiative). At the centre of the altar is the eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, along with stucco images of the Medicine Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava amongst others. The temple also houses several *thangkas* (scroll paintings), volumes of Buddhist scriptures called *Gyud-zhi* that pertain to the amchi practice. One of the main rituals called *Smanle Dochog*, dedicated to the Medicine Buddha, is regularly performed in this temple.

The Larjeypa family still lives in their ancestral home. The family has been associated with the traditional amchi practice of medicine for generations, and the

house is often referred to as 'Larjeypa Amchi House'. The current owner, Rigzin Tundup, is now 60 years old and proud to carry on his family's legacy. He studied both with his late father and at the Tibetan Medical and Astro Science Institute in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, and acquired the degree of BTMS (Bachelor of Tibetan Medicine Science).

The courtyard outside the house has several sacred structures including stupas, *lhubang* (altar for subterranean spirits), and *tsadkhang* (relic house). The family also owns an independent retreat cell (*tsamskhang*), a little above the courtyard.







## 12. LHATSAS HERITAGE HOUSE

This is an important house in Sumoor as it was the home of the Second Sras Rinpoche and his wife, who was popularly known as Abi Icham. She was from the Zimskhang family of Hundar. Since monks seldom marry, and monasteries do not allow women to stay overnight, the house was built for Sras Rinpoche and his wife. The house was built not far from Samstanling Monastery, on land belonging to it, by Skalzang, the *chagzot* (caretaker) of the monastery in the early 1800s. Since they had no children, after their demise the house remained in the care of the family who served them. It acquired the name 'Lhastas', which roughly translates as 'heavenly abode'.

The caretaker's family continues to live in this house, though they have to meet certain obligations to Samstanling Monastery. These include giving a part of their annual crop to the monastery, and also vegetables and fruits to the monks on important occasions such as Losar (New Year).

The house has three storeys and consists of around ten rooms, including a temple (*chodkhang*). In recent years, the house has developed cracks in the walls and the roof has weakened, and is in urgent need of conservation.



### 13. ZHUGTHIS AND KAGAN CHORTEN

Not far from the entrance to Samstanling Monastery is a stupa gate (*kagan chorten*). On the other side of this is a pair of boulders; it is said that Lama Tsultim Nyima, the founder of Samstanling Monastery, often rested here while on his way to the monastery. Later, masonry work was added and the boulders were fashioned into a *zhugthis* (seat or throne).

It is said that Lama Tsultim Nyima, and later the Second Sras Rinpoche, would often sit here as the area was peaceful and green, and with a stream nearby. Sometimes they would hold sermons here or devotees would come to receive their blessings. Nowadays, stopping here during the holy month of *Tangpo* (1st month of the Tibetan Lunar Calendar) has become a pilgrimage of sorts with great religious significance. However, the new road that has been built in the vicinity, replacing the old pathway, has diminished some of the sanctity of this place and the gatherings that used to take place here.

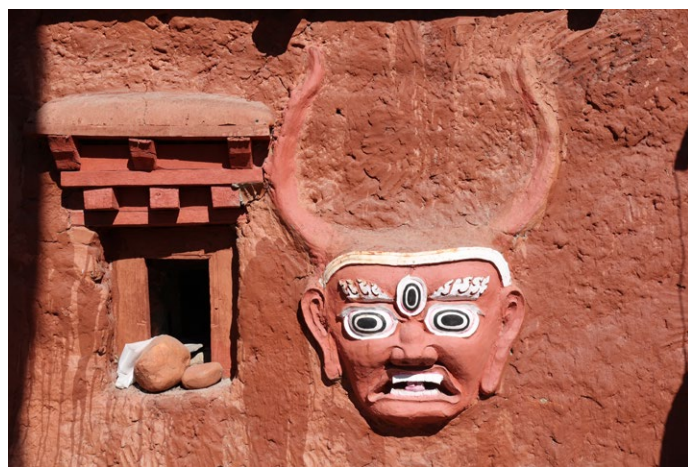


## 14. HOME OF THE VILLAGE PROTECTOR, AWAHATI

Not far from the entrance to Samstanling Monastery, under the shade of a large Juniper tree, is an altar (*lhato*) dedicated to Awahati, the protector (*yul lha*) of both Sumoor and Kyagar villages. The altar is a single room structure, made with mud brick and plaster, and is painted red. Juniper branches, tied together by a white cloth, are placed on top of the building. On the front side of the red-coloured structure is a small window containing a mask.

It is said that Awahati was an ordained monk who had completed his studies in the *Genyen Donba* (Buddhist precepts), because of which he is always pictured in a red robe. His image is also painted on the entrance wall of Samstanling Monastery.

The Lharje family serve as the *lhardag* (caretaker of the deity), of the *lhato* and it is said they have been following this practice for the last few generations. Each month, purification rituals are performed and offerings made at the *lhato* by the *lhardag* and the villagers. They also perform special consecration rituals for the altar on the 10th day of the 4th month of the Tibetan Lunar Calendar.



## 15. SAMSTANLING MONASTERY

This large and imposing monastery is situated in the upper part of Sumoor, from here the view extends as far as Charasa Palace in the west and Diskit Monastery in the south. On the hill above the monastery there are the ruins of a fortress known as Sogmag Khar. The monastery is used by villagers from both Kyagar and Sumoor, and both communities perform duties towards the monastery.

The monastery was founded by Lama Tsultim Nyima in 1842. He was from Saspol, a village in the Sham Valley of Lower Ladakh, following a divine revelation foretold by the Panchen Lama, one of the supreme masters of the Gelugpa order of Tibetan Buddhism. The land the monastery was built on was donated by Sonam Jordan, a devout Buddhist from the aristocratic Kyagar Zimskhang family. It is said that Sonam had deep faith in Lama Tsultim Nyima and was honoured to be able to offer his large estate full of trees, including apricot and apple, and through which a glacial stream passed. Many villagers also contributed materials for the construction, as well as their time and labour. After Lama Tsultim Nyima, the Second Sras Rinpoche served as the abbot for many years before his Parinirvana in 2022.

The monastery is made up of a cluster of buildings, some are double storeys, others are three. In the late 19th century, a monk named Samstan Chosphele added more rooms to the existing structure. Today, Samstanling contains several temples including the Chamba Lhakhang (Maitreya Temple), Gonkhang (the temple dedicated to protector deities), and Skudung Lhakhang (the temple of relics). It has two Assembly Halls, an old and a new one (Dukhang Nyingpa and Dukhang Soma respectively). There is also a library (Kagyur Lhakhang), the personal rooms of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Gaden Tri Rinpoche, as well as the monks' quarters.





## 16. ROCK ART

Along the left side of the road that leads to Samstanling Monastery, amidst the ruins of several stupas, is the rock carving of a standing and crowned Buddha. It is difficult to discern which manifestation of his this is, because of the advanced stage of decay and also the rock is broken in half. Villagers believe it to be Maitreya Buddha (Future Buddha).

Most rock statues in Ladakh are found along historical trade and pilgrim routes. Right from Dras in Kargil District, across Leh and to Nubra Valley. While some of them date to as early as the 7th or 8th centuries, others such as this one date to a later period. This particular standing rock image is assumed to be from a slightly later period.







# KYAGAR



## KYAGAR

Kyagar is one of the largest villages in the Siachen belt, with over 150 households. It is widely known as much for its architectural heritage, as it is for the contributions of two of its most celebrated residents. They are Lama Tsultim Nima and Kaga Sonam Jordan of Kyagar Zimskhang, who are responsible for the establishment of Samstanling Monastery as well as several other good deeds they have done for the village.

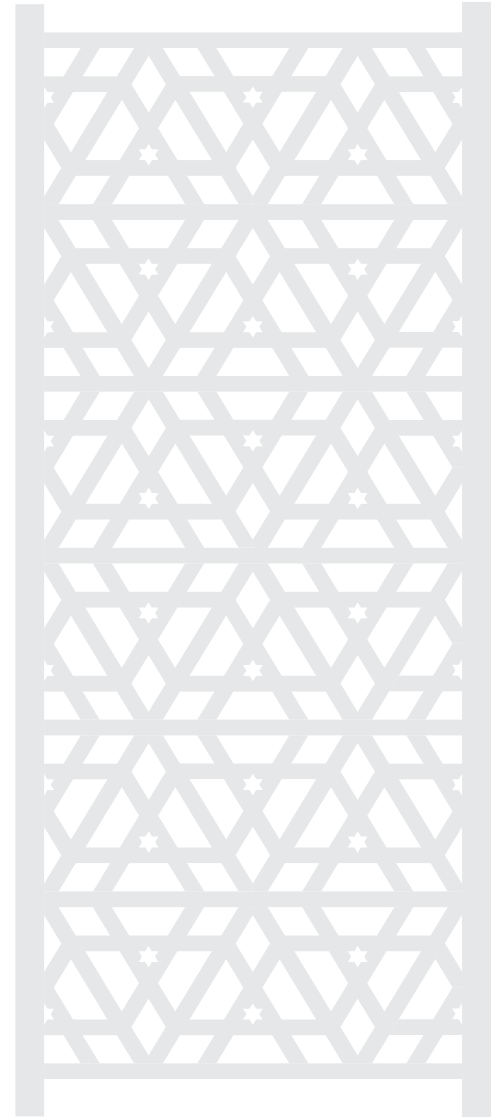
Kyagar's destiny is also tied in with the floods that have repeatedly hit the village and resulted in its story of shifting locations. It is said their ancestors first lived near the foot of the mountain now overlooking the village, as this location protected them from frequent raids from Central Asia. This place was called Kharyok. After a flood hit them here, they shifted to a lower site called Maskalak. Unfortunately, it too was a flood prone area and this compelled them to move still further down to their current location. Evidence of this consists of scattered debris from earlier building materials, and in one site graves were found below the ground. The last flood took place here in 2014, and destroyed one of the village's oldest houses, the Zimskhang Gongma, along with many other structures including stupas.

Earlier representations of Nubra Valley depict the region as being located on the body of a giant witch (*srinmo gangskyal*) lying on her back, with Kyagar positioned at her centre, on her naval. Thus, earlier references to the name of the village were *Sket-kar* (white waist) or *Lte khar* (naval palace). The allusion to white comes from a thin white strip that runs across the village, between the mountains on either side, this is said to be her waist.

# MAP REFERENCE

## KYAGAR

1. Charu Monastery
2. Ldo Mane
3. Chadpe Mane
4. Zimskhang Gongma
5. Rewey Odzer, Self-Help Group
6. Manekhang
7. Mane Ringmo
8. Zimskhang Yokma
9. Kanggyokspa House
10. Sonam Joldan, Stupa Architect
11. Seyab Markalak Labrang



77°36' 0"

77°36' 30"

77°37' 0"

77°37' 30"

34°58' 0"  
34°58' 30"



# KYAGAR

ཀྱ་རྟ་རྩེ

0 250 500 m



- |                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| monastery                      | road major          |
| temple                         | road minor          |
| chorten                        | path/track          |
| mane wall                      | river               |
| sacred rock/mountain           | stream              |
| palace/fort/watchtower         | lake/pond           |
| historic house                 | forest              |
| self-help group/society        | fields & vegetation |
| artisan/artist/resource person | contours (20 m)     |

Numbers and names follow Kyagar walk book listing



# 1. CHARU MONASTERY

Located a short distance away from the main road that leads to Samstanling Monastery, this place was built under the advice of the 9th Panchen Lama in the early 19th century. At the time, a disease broke out in the village and many young children were dying. Unable to fathom the cause, or the cure, a monk from Kyagar, called Gonbo, went to Tibet to seek the Panchen Lama's advice. He told him to build a shrine at a site from which one could see nine villages, not only would this be auspicious, it would also prevent the spread of the disease that was taking so many young lives. In addition, the Panchen Lama gave him some strands of his hair and advised him to spread these all over the village. Gonbo did as he was told and from these strands a bushy plant with a purple-coloured flower sprang up, called *shing-tig*. It is believed that this plant, other than Tibet, can only be seen in Kyagar in Ladakh.

The monastery is dedicated to Gyalwa Tsongkhapa (founder of the Gelugpa order of Tibetan Buddhism) and is owned by Diskit Monastery. It is a one-storey building, set amongst several trees and thorny bushes, and has five rooms. Inside are statues of Je Tsongkhapa and his two disciples; it is said that the statues contain beads made of the nose-blood (*shang thak*) of the Panchen Lama.



## 2. LDO MANE

Just below Charu Monastery lies a large sacred boulder, on which the Buddhist mantra '*Om Mani Padme Hum*' has been inscribed. References to the origin of this rock are more mythological than factual, with some villagers claiming that it flew in from Tibet. However, a more realistic version of the story is that the mantra was probably inscribed by Tibetan pilgrims passing through the area. Nubra has many sacred sites and was frequently visited by Buddhist pilgrims from Central Asia and Tibet. It could be that one of these pilgrims made the inscription as a sign of their faith.



### 3. CHADPE MANE

A cluster of stupas below the Zimskhang are resolutely called *Chadpe Mane* ('stupas of punishment'). In the past, one way of punishing criminals was by making them build stupas as a way of absolving their sins and gaining merit. Though the word *mane* does not refer specifically to stupas, it is used here as a general reference to the prayer walls alongside the stupas on which flat stones carved with religious inscriptions are placed. Stupas are normally filled with religious items, the wealthy are more generous in their offerings and those not so well off do their best. The villagers say these stupas are

not abundantly filled, indicating the makers were not prosperous. It is believed that most of these stupas were built during Sonam Jordan's time, in the late 1700s; he had a strong influence in the community and most probably also maintained law and order.

There are roughly 35 stupas here, 32 of them are in the Changchub style, one is a Namgyal Stupa and one a Gomang. There is also one Kagan 'Gateway' Stupa. They are all built with mud brick masonry and whitewashed with lime. Every year, at Buddha Purnima, the villagers whitewash the stupas. They also regularly circumambulate the stupas in an attempt to gain merit.



## 4. ZIMSKHANG GONGMA

Perched at a height overlooking the village, this is one of the most imposing homes in Kyagar village. It is built on the same mountain range, and roughly at the same height, as the monasteries of Charu and Samstanling. Called Zimskhang Gongma, the current resident Namgyal Angmo claims that it was built in the late 16th century. The house is associated with Sonam Jordan, one of her ancestors, who is well known for his pious deeds in the village and the donation he made of the family's land for the construction of Samstanling Monastery. In the late 19th century, the family moved to a new house but still come here intermittently and also continue to use the temple.

Built along the rocky face of the mountain, the house must have been fairly large and palatial at one time. While the foundation of the house is made of stone and mud mortar, the first floor is constructed with mud brick masonry.

Unfortunately in 2014 it was hit by a flood and a section of its right side was damaged and parts washed away. The house is now left with seven rooms, and two of its four wooden balconies (*rabsal*). Fortunately, the kitchen and temple remain intact. The family continues

to use the temple, and invites monks from Samstanling Monastery to perform their annual *skangsol* ritual here. The room is richly decorated with wall paintings on three sides, and there are statues of Buddha and the Dharma Protectors.



## 5. REWEY ODZER, SELF HELP GROUP

Several Self Help Groups (SHG) have been set up in Nubra since the early 2000. Rewey Odzer is one of them, and it started with seven members, all women, in 2006. The women are skilled knitters or weavers, making baskets, woollen socks and hats amongst other products that they sell. Apricot jam is another one. They also perform Ladakhi traditional dances and sing folksongs, for cultural programs for visitors to the region. They participate at festivals in Kyagar as well as Hundar and Diskit, taking their products to sell there as well.







## 6. MANEKHANG

Community spaces for religious gatherings are a common feature in Nubra. Kyagar's *Manekhang* was built by Sonam Jordan of the Zimskhang family in the early 19th century for the sole purpose of performing community rituals (*soljong*).

The building has eight rooms and two *dukhang* (temples), one of which was more recently built. The older *dukhang* is located right at the centre of the building and contains various statues, including Avalokiteśvara, Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Padmasambhava, Dupthop Thangstong Gyalpo and Palden Lhamo. There is a separate enclosure for the protector, Chamsring. Surrounding the *dukhang* is a row of small prayer wheels and this allows devotees to circumambulate the temple while turning them. There is also a big prayer wheel, which used to be rotated by water.

The newly built *dukhang* contains statues of Avalokiteśvara with thousand arms and eyes, Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Padmasambhava, and 21 Taras. On the outside, at the entrance, there are small prayer wheels under a wooden roof, along with three stupas located on the right side of the *manekhang*.

Behind the *manekhang* there are three small Juniper trees. Circumambulating the *manekhang* 13 times is considered auspicious by the villagers, and meritorious as it is said to be equivalent to 10,000 mantra recitations. The main *soljong* performed here takes place in the 1st half of the first month of the Tibetan Lunar Calendar. Villagers gather in the *manekhang* to chant mantras and turn prayer wheels driven by wind (*lungskor*), water (*chuskor*) and hand (*lagskor*), they purify themselves of mental and physical afflictions of Samsaric existence.

It is believed that the powerful protector deity Chamsring's face changes colour as a sign of things to come, for instance, if it becomes red it is a warning of an imminent problem in the village. This then prompts the villagers to seek antidotes from a high lama to subdue the danger through prayers and rituals. This powerful deity was earlier housed in the Zimskhang family's temple, but in order for more people to have access to it the statue was moved to the *manekhang*. It is believed that once a member of the *Zimskhang* family pinched the nose of the deity asking for a solution to low fertility among the community, which left an indentation on the deity's nose.



## 7. MANE RINGMO

Religious structures were often established by people to gain both individual merit, as well as share it among members of their community. Sonam Jordan of Zimskhang family was an exceptional man, who did much to foster both these notions.

Extending through the centre of Kyagar, he built this long (*ringmo*) prayer wall (*mane*) that measures almost 311 metres in length. On the wall there are hundreds of flat stones with mantras inscribed on them. A richly painted *Rigsum Gonbo* (representations of the Bodhisattvas

Avalokiteśvara, Manjusri and Vajrapani), is painted on the walls of an enclosure at the start of the *mane* wall, elevating the sanctity of this site.

It is said this *mane* wall became a landmark on the Trans-Karakoram trade route, with many traders and pilgrims looking out for it. It is also built at a site where many roads intersect, thereby connecting several neighbouring villages. The *mane* wall was renovated by the community around two years ago.



## 8. ZIMSKHANG YOGMA



Much of the history of Kyagar village revolves around the Zimskhang family, they were aristocrats and had large land holdings including the two palatial homes in the village. Unlike the one in Gongma, this one is still inhabited. It is an imposing three-storeyed structure, dating to the late 18th century, with a wooden balcony (*rabsal*) on the third floor. The lowest floor has animal sheds including a large stable for horses. Many of the rooms have Juniper tree trunks as pillars. The highlight of the house is the large kitchen with a clay stove (*thab*) in the centre and surrounded by shelves laden with copper and brass utensils. The kitchen is often used by Kyagar's women's Self Help Group (called Rewa Soma) to display their artisanal products and host tourists (see pages 88-89).

During the Dogra rule in Ladakh the family was responsible for collecting taxes in the village, wherein households had to pay in cash or kind a part of their agricultural produce, loan their animals and even provide labour to the Dogras. At one point, when the villagers fell short, then the family had to step in and make up the difference. This resulted in heavy losses for them, and one of the family member's, Sonam Targais, is said to have gone to the Maharaja's court in Jammu to fight for justice, saying the losses were incurred because of the long and arduous journey involved in transporting

the goods. It is said he was poisoned, under mysterious circumstances, and eventually died.

There is a stupa here. It is said that one of the reincarnations of Lama Tsultim Nyima was born in the Zimskhang family, unfortunately he passed away at the age of eight and the stupa was built in his memory.



## 9. KANGGYOKSPA HOUSE

The Kanggyokspa house belongs to the only Muslim family living in Kyagar, and is said to have been built at the same time as the Zimskhang, making it roughly 400 years old. It is an exceptionally attractive two-storey building, with ten rooms and a large kitchen on the first floor. The kitchen is splendidly adorned with several utensils, including kettles and plates from Yarkand. There is also a spacious open room within which are slender wooden pillars and pelmets, forming a square. This was said to be used as a reception room to hold private audiences and was called ‘Diwan’.



The current residents recalled how a long time ago their forefathers were Buddhist, and then became practicing Muslims after a government patwari (revenue official), during Dogra rule in Ladakh, married a daughter of the family. He was from Kashmir, and had come to Nubra on official duty along with his two brothers. All three of them ended up marrying women from different villages in Nubra and settled here. It is said the one who settled in Kyagar built this house, which has a blend of local and Kashmiri woodwork, next to his wife’s family’s main residence. Over the years, this home became a popular community space and several events were hosted here, including village meetings and marriages.



## 10. SONAM JOLDAN, STUPA ARCHITECT

Stupa building is a specialised craft, and Sonam Joldan of Kyagar village has been constructing and renovating stupas for over a decade now. Sonam has never received formal education and before becoming a stupa builder, he was a carpenter. He learnt the art of stupa building at a workshop conducted by Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation (HCHF), and then worked in Shey for a while, apprenticing with stupa builders there. Earlier, he said he used to feel sorry for himself, that he could not read Buddhist scriptures, but now with his knowledge of stupa building he feels content that he can contribute to his community and gain merit through this practice.

Today, he is one of the most well-known stupa architects from Nubra in Ladakh. He recalls, that till now he has built and renovated more than 180 stupas in places as far away as Hanle in Changthang, in eastern Ladakh, and Lamayuru in Sham valley, in the western part of the region.

In the past, stupas were built with local materials such as mud and stone. Though cement and concrete is now more widely used both for building new stupas and for fixing old ones, Sonam stresses the need to use materials

such as mud and stone. He says this allows the stupa to deteriorate and then it can be renovated, the act granting merit to the maker.





## 11. SEYAB MARKALAK LABRANG

This small, but elegant, structure was the summer retreat of Lama Tsultim Nyima. It is said he often resided here before the construction of Samstanling Monastery. The building consists of one large room with a long covered veranda running in front of it with three slender wooden pillars. The house dates to the early 1800s, the land was also donated by Sonam Jordan of the Zimskhang family along with the land he donated for the monastery and now belongs to Samstanling. Unfortunately, today it is in quite a poor condition.

The area where the house is located is called Markalak, and there is a group of seven Changchub stupas nearby. The reference to the word 'Seyab' is a little ambiguous. Villagers said the house was constructed by someone called 'sahib', who was an official of sorts, and later it came to be known as 'seyab'.

Till the 1960s a grand festival was held here called 'Gaye'. It was organised by the monks of Samstanling Monastery on their completion of the one-month long prayers called *yarnas*. Many people, from all over Nubra, would gather here to attend it.



# GLOSSARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# CONTRIBUTORS

## MAPPING THE CULTURE AND HERITAGE OF NUBRA, LADAKH

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

### **SONAM WANGCHOK**

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

### **PADMA LHAMO**

Principal Researcher, focusing on the 'Walks in Nubra' booklets. She has a BA and MA in History from Delhi University. In 2023, she received her PhD in History from Punjab University. Padma is currently Assistant Professor at Government Degree College Nubra.

### **TSETAN TONYOT**

Research Associate, focusing on the 'Inventory Catalogue'. He has studied at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies (CIBS), Choglamsar. He completed his undergraduate and graduate studies there in Comparative Philosophy, in 2022 he received his PhD from CIBS becoming the first student from the Institute to successfully receive his doctorate.

### **TENZING PALMO**

Research Associate, focusing on the 'Inventory Catalogue'. She completed a Master's of Liberal Studies degree with a concentration in Sociology and Anthropology from Ashoka University in 2022. Tenzing is currently a Field Researcher with the Centre for Pastoralism.



## RIGZIN DOLMA

Research Associate, focusing on the ‘Walks in Nubra’ booklets. She has a BA in History from Delhi University, and is currently studying for a MA in History from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

## HENK THOMA

Cartographer for both the ‘Inventory Catalogue’ and ‘Walks in Nubra’ booklets. He has a background in physical geography and environmental science. He is an avid trekker, likes motorbiking and swimming, and has great concern for the culture and nature of Ladakh.

## AARON DEVA DANA

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

## SONAM ANGCHOK

Photographer for both the ‘Inventory Catalogue’ and

‘Walks in Nubra’ booklets. He is the Media Officer at the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation. Angchok has done a certified course on Cinematography and Film making conducted by the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune.

## TASHI MORUP

Associate Editor for ‘Walks in Nubra’. He is Projects Director of the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation, Leh. His areas of research include the environment (especially water and glaciers), the impact of development and tourism mainly in Leh town, and music. Tashi has a postgraduate in Mass Communication from Punjab University, and a postgraduate in Journalism from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

## MONISHA AHMED

Editor for both the ‘Inventory Catalogue’ and ‘Walks in Nubra’. She is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation, Leh. She is an independent researcher, writer and curator whose work focuses on art practices and material culture in Ladakh, as well as other areas of the Himalayan world. Monisha has a DPhil in Social Anthropology, from Oxford University.

## TRAINEES:

### LOBSANG SAMDUP

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

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

### STANZIN NAMKHA

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

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

### STANZIN SPALBAR

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

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

### TONDUP NAMGAIL

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

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

## **TSERING LHADOL**

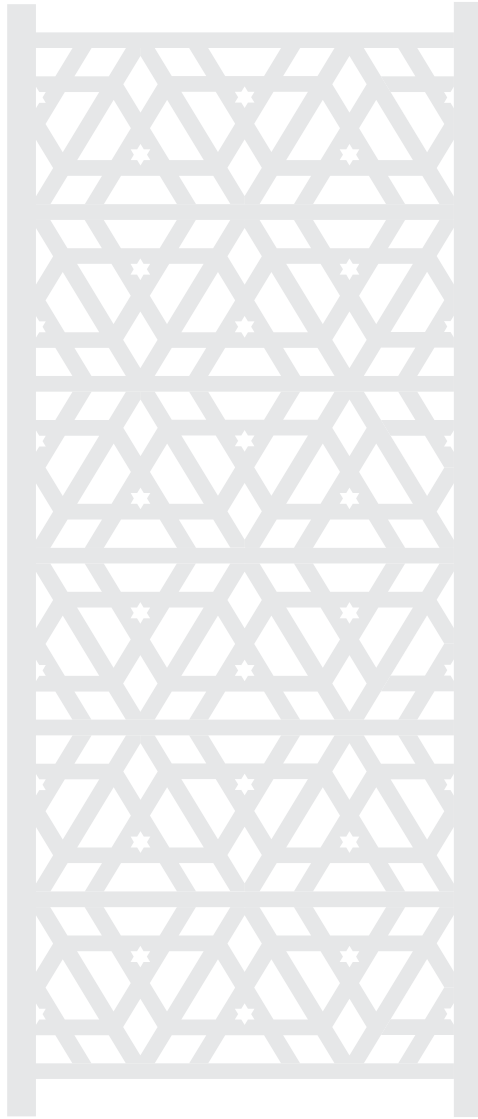
is from Kyagar village in Nubra. She has a BA in Arts from Punjab University, along with a diploma in Travel and Tourism. She is working with one of the Self Help Groups (SHG) in the Siachen belt.

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

## **TSERING PALMO**

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

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













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