



Transcaucasian Trail Association  
Annual Report  
2019

# Introduction

In 2019, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the Transcaucasian Trail Association was able to make important contributions to the development of the Transcaucasian Trail in Armenian and Georgia, while continuing efforts to find partners and begin work in Azerbaijan.

The TCTA's mission is to develop, promote, and maintain the Transcaucasian Trail in order to improve access to the region's diverse cultural and natural heritage and encourage its preservation, benefiting local communities and trail users through the development of sustainable tourism.

We carry out this mission through direct support to the Transcaucasian Trail NGOs of Georgia and Armenia, as well as through our own activities to develop the capacity of these local organizations and to support and coordinate their work and the work of our other partners. In 2019, the TCTA's activities included:

## **International Volunteer Programs**

Continuing an annual international volunteer program that has made important contributions to the development of the trail in Armenia and Georgia, the TCTA recruited volunteers to participate in trail crews in Svaneti, Georgia and South Syunik, Armenia.

## **Support for Fundraising Tours**

The TCTA promoted fundraising tours in Georgia and Armenia, helped to recruit participants and provided administrative support for the four hiking tours, which raised more than \$25,000. This money was granted to the local NGOs to support trail development in Georgia and Armenia.

## **Direct grants to local NGOs**

In addition to grants supporting the International Volunteer Program and the fundraising tours, the TCTA granted an additional \$8,000 to the TCT NGO of Armenia and \$3,000 to the TCT NGO of Georgia to improve the capacity of the organizations and continue trail development.

## **In-kind support for professional development and exchange**

The TCTA supported professional development for members of the TCT Georgia team including wilderness medicine training, participation in the EarthCorps, a Seattle-based conservation leadership program, and a trail auditor training hosted by Green Flag Trails in Greece.

## **International promotional events and media**

The TCTA was able to support the promotion of the trail at events in Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and Seattle. In addition, the TCT received significant media attention, including being named one of TIME Magazine's 100 Best Places to Visit in 2019.

# Developments in Georgia in 2019

## Trail development

In 2019, trail crews returned to the existing 140 kilometer section of trail from Chuberi to Ushguli in Upper Svaneti. These crews improved a key alternate route from Khalde to Ushguli and did maintenance and marking on the 83 kilometers from Chuberi to Mestia. Three international volunteer trail building camps were held in Svaneti, with fourteen volunteers from five different countries. Two Georgian Youth Leadership Corps sessions were held with 10 participants from different regions of Georgia.

### ***Trail work between Khalde and Ushguli***

The TCT NGO of Georgia identified the alternate route from Khalde to Ushguli as a priority for work in summer 2019. Because of the ongoing construction of the road to Ushguli (which gets very dusty in the summer) and the vastly increased hiker traffic from Mestia to Ushguli, the hiker experience along the “main route” of the TCT has become less pleasant, increasing demand for the alternate route among self-sufficient backcountry hikers. Meanwhile, the unmarked and previously unmaintained Karetta Pass travels through spectacular wilderness areas and offers stunning views of Shkara, the highest mountain in Georgia. While this path is significantly more demanding, it has been growing in popularity and there are already hundreds of hikers taking it each summer. As such, improving the safety of this section was deemed a priority.

Trailwork here focused on two main projects: building a new bridge to replace the existing bridge, which was in severe disrepair and somewhat dangerous to cross, and brushing the lower section of the trail on the Khalde side to make it easier to find and follow the trail.

Prior to starting work, Georgian-speaking members of the TCT team visited Khalde and nearby villages to explain the project idea and seek input. Several residents were initially skeptical, but all involved quickly came to express support for the idea. Over several weeks, the TCT Georgia team developed a strong relationship with the residents of Khalde. Unfortunately, shortly after the bridge was completed, a few residents from further down the valley cut down the bridge. Afterwards, the TCT Georgia NGO held meetings in these villages to understand why this happened. They learned that there was previously unexpressed fear that improving the Karetta Pass trail would divert tourists from the existing track and cause those businesses to lose income.

This setback provided a useful lesson in understanding mindsets and how to communicate the TCT’s vision in areas where tourism has already begun to see significant growth. Residents expressed strong loss aversion and the expectation that any changes to the existing path—which has allowed them to improve their livelihoods—would be a negative change for their

businesses. In their experience, hikers only pass through in one direction and stay for one night. The idea of improving trail infrastructure more broadly to facilitate day hikes and staying in a village multiple nights-- for example, allowing people to take a day hike deeper into the Khalde valley and return to a guesthouse in Iprali-- is an unfamiliar concept. In addition, there is limited awareness of the different kinds of hikers (i.e. guesthouse-to-guesthouse hikers versus backcountry campers who will take more difficult alternate routes, or hikers who would do a loop and use both trails). It proved challenging to convince residents that while some people will camp regardless, and we should make the trails safe for them to do so, improving a difficult backcountry section is unlikely to disrupt business as the majority of hikers will continue to take the easier routes and stay in guesthouses. These concepts may prove an ongoing challenge to communicate and will require particular care and attention in the future, especially when working in areas where trails and tourism are already established.

The majority of the community around Khalde showed a great deal of anger about the bridge being cut down, and the response within Svaneti more broadly and the Georgian national media was very sympathetic. Nevertheless, the TCT Georgia NGO decided that it would be prudent to redirect their energy to other parts of the trail for the remainder of the summer and to return only when requested.

Despite this substantial setback, the trail crews in Khalde nevertheless still made meaningful improvements on the Khalde trail. The trail had previously been nearly completely overgrown and difficult to find. In July 2019, crews heavily brushed the first few kilometers towards the pass, making the trail much easier to find and follow.



The Jokhadze family in Khalde

### ***Trail work between Chuberi and Mestia***

In September, the third crew of international volunteers made major improvements (brushing overgrown paths and benching a walkable path in landslide terrain) on the 27km section between Chuberi to Nakra. They also re-blazed the section from Chuberi to Mestia according to the new Georgian trail marking standards, which made a significant improvement in the ease of following the trail.

## **Georgian Youth Leadership Corps**

In 2019, with support from the TCTA , the TCT Georgia NGO continued its project to develop future conservation leaders in Georgia and potential crew leaders for the TCT. The Georgia NGO hosted two sessions of the Youth Leadership Corps for 10 days each, training 11 young adults (ages 18-25) in outdoor leadership, sustainable trail design and maintenance, crew management and basic first aid for the outdoors. These crews made improvements on 5 kilometers of trail around Nakra and Kichkhuldashi, including fixing a bridge.

Living and working in remote areas while working on conservation projects is a well-established way to develop leadership skills in young adults while instilling in them the value of conservation and service. While the leadership development provided by such conservation corps is valuable in itself, there are other important benefits to training young people in trail building and conservation work. As Georgia's system of protected areas and national parks grows, it will need a growing cadre of workers with experience in land management, trail building, and crew management. In addition, the Transcaucasian Trail project will be expanding the number of trail crews working to build and maintain what will eventually become a 3,000 km+ trail network connecting the protected areas of the Caucasus.

The 2019 program had a high retention rate. From these 11 participants, 6 came back to join trail crews in Lagodekhi in the fall, and 2 joined the TCT Georgia team as assistant crew leaders later in the summer and fall.



TCT Youth Leadership Corps members with Valeri Vibiani in Kichkhuldashi

## First project in Lagodekhi National Park

In early 2019, the TCT NGO of Georgia began exploring the potential for work in Lagodekhi National Park, an important protected area in Eastern Georgia bordering Azerbaijan. Following discussions with the leadership of Lagodekhi protected areas, the TCT Georgia NGO identified the Machi Fortress Trail as a valuable “starter” project that would provide an opportunity to demonstrate their work and build a relationship with the park administration. This trail is not directly on the planned TCT, but will be an optional side trail to an interesting historical monument (a ruined fortress that was used between the 7th-17th centuries). It is also entirely in the managed reserve, meaning that approval for work is easy to secure (as opposed to the strict reserve, which requires more formal governmental approval). The Machi Fortress trail is one of the “easiest” in Georgia and is a popular destination for more elderly tourists, but it still has several steep and tricky sections including river and stream crossings. As such, it is a prime example of the poor accessibility of trails in Georgia, and improving it provided valuable assistance to the park.

Over four weekends in October and November, Giorgi Jmukhadze (Project Manager and Crew Leader) identified priority sections for work and organized weekend volunteer crews with a total of 18 participants. These crews brushed 5 kilometers of trail (for both human and equestrian use), benched 100 meters of a particularly steep and narrow section of trail, built two new 4.5 meter bridges for stream crossings, and fixed a 9-meter bridge over a large river. This project played a major role in strengthening the Georgia NGO's relationship with the park administration, thereby laying the groundwork to return in spring 2020 and to begin work on sections of the Transcaucasian Trail in Lagodekhi.

## Study Abroad

The development of a Svaneti-based study abroad program for university students from the U.S. (Human Geography in the Caucasus) was shelved after several months due to a lack of interest from students. The program could be revived by a motivated professor or someone else with a strong network in the academic community and ability to attract students.

## Professional Development

### ***Partnership with EarthCorps for leadership development***

In 2018, the TCTA supported Giorgi Jmukhadze in his participation in Earth Corps from June to December. EarthCorps is an outdoor leadership program in Seattle that brings together US and international volunteers to learn about environmental issues, trail building, and land management while working on conservation corps crews in parks throughout the Puget Sound region of Washington. In 2019, Giorgi returned to serve as Leadership Development Coordinator, Project Manager for work in Lagodekhi, and crew leader for the TCT's Youth



Leadership Corps in Georgia. He has since played an important role in identifying and developing more conservation leaders in the Caucasus.

In 2019, based on this success, the TCTA supported Vakho Chkhitaui in his participation in EarthCorps. Vakho is from Gori, Georgia, a small city west of Tbilisi best known for being the birthplace of Stalin. Vakho volunteered with the TCT in Svaneti for the entire summer of 2017, where he displayed great enthusiasm for trailwork and interest in learning about natural history and conservation. He returned in 2018 to work with the international volunteer crews as Assistant Crew Leader in Zeskho. In Seattle, Vakho worked on several trail building and maintenance projects, including bridge building and technical trail construction with drainage and rock walls. He gained experience leading crews and teaching volunteers trail building techniques. He returned to Georgia at the end of 2019 and will be bringing his skills back to the TCT Georgia NGO as a crew leader and project manager in 2020.

Based on the success of Earth Corps partnership thus far, the TCTA plans to continue supporting at least one promising participant from the youth corps to attend per year. In addition to supporting participants from Georgia, the TCTA aims to expand this support to Armenia and Azerbaijan in future years.



Vakho Chkhitaui in Seattle

### ***Wilderness medicine for professional development***

In April 2019, the TCTA supported Giorgi Jmukhadze to attend a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) course taught by instructors from NOLS Wilderness Medicine in Flam, Norway. WFR certification is a widely recognized industry standard for outdoor professionals. Courses run 9-10 days and provide practical training in managing a wide variety of medical situations in remote backcountry environments. For the TCT, having WFR-certified crew leaders is an important safety measure given the limited access to medical care in many locations of trail

work. With this training, Giorgi was able to serve as primary crew leader throughout trail work in 2019. We will continue to train crew leaders in wilderness first aid, which we view as important to the safe development of the trail, as well as the development of better first aid and risk management capacity in the Caucasus in general.

### ***Green Flag Trails training***

From October 4-11, two members of the TCT Georgia team (Sopo Bagauri and Giorgi Jmukhadze) attended a Trail Auditor Training on Kythera Island, Greece. Kythera Hiking and the Kytherian Foundation for Culture and Development invited trail managers and trail specialists from across Europe to join the first International Green Flag Trails – Trail Auditor Training offered by the World Trails Network. Training was conducted by Prof. Leon Hugo – Green Flag Trails Founder. The Green Flag Trails system is a method for auditing and certifying that trails meet certain criteria based on their intended usage and ensures that information about the trail matches reality. Sopo and Giorgi were certified as trail auditors and will use what they learned to contribute to developing standards for Georgian trails, including the TCT.

## **Fundraising**

### ***Banff Film Festival***

In September, TCT Georgia hosted the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour in Tbilisi for the second time, with the support of the TCTA and a dedicated crew of volunteers. Banff is the world's premiere film festival about mountain ecosystems, sports, cultures, and this was the second time the TCT Georgia team has hosted the festival. More than 180 people attended the event, and local sponsors donated a variety of raffle prizes to give away. The event created an important opportunity for exposure within Tbilisi's Georgian-speaking outdoor community and a valuable space to gather and connect with fellow mountain lovers. Based on the non-financial benefits of this event as well as the potential for the festival to continue to grow, the TCT Georgia NGO plans to host Banff again in 2020.

### ***Svaneti fundraising hikes***

In August, a small team (Paul Stephens, Sopo Bagauri, Dato Khergiani, Nick Baigent) lead two fundraising hikes in Svaneti. The two groups included 17 paying participants plus a journalist from GEO Saison magazine in Germany. The groups hiked across Svaneti using infrastructure developed by the TCT and stayed with local families, demonstrating the benefits of the trail to local communities. The tours raised more than \$15,000.



## Developments in Armenia in 2019

In 2017 the TCT NGO of Armenia published a 3-year roadmap, identifying two parallel strategies to establish a border-to-border trail across Armenia by 2020, thus realising the TCT vision within the scope of Armenia:

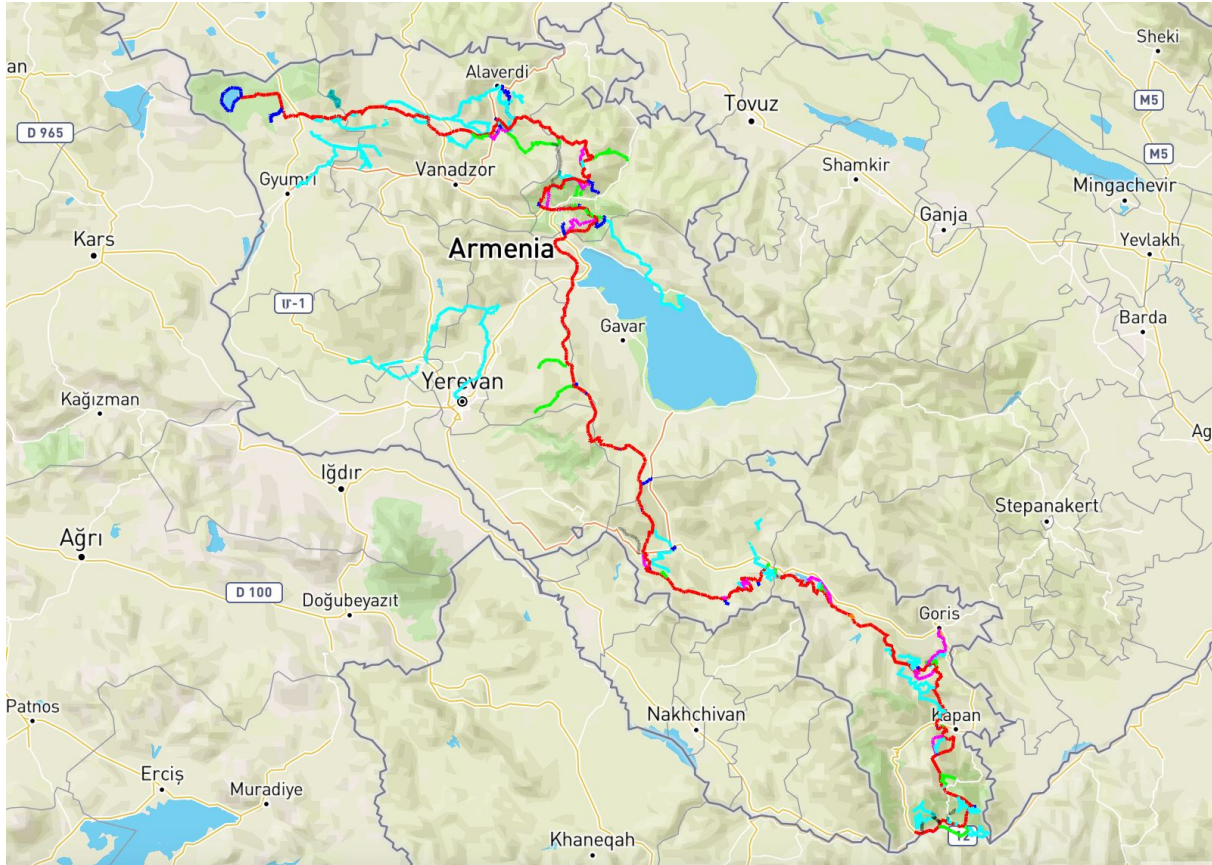
1. Incorporate the TCT into existing and proposed trail development projects in high-potential hiking destinations, and
2. In parallel, rapidly develop connections between these destinations through remote mountainous areas.

The TCT NGO of Armenia reports that at the end of 2019 both strategies have proven fruitful, and that **a viable border-to-border trail across Armenia has indeed been established.**

Five hiking 'destinations' on the route are now well-developed (the Debed Gorge, Dilijan National Park, southern Vayots Dzor, the Vorotan Canyon, and Kapan), and connecting routes between them have been thoroughly explored, mapped, and made available to experienced hikers for testing.

## Developing a Master Plan

The Armenia team began the year with a border-to-border route design approximately 70% complete, and set the goal of bringing this number up to 100% by the end of 2019. To that end, the team spent a further 28 days on trail scouting missions across the country between April and October, connecting the final missing link in the route at the end of autumn.



This route is made up of 797km of connected trails, split into 88 stages, all of which are considered passable in their current condition by an experienced trail user with no prior knowledge of hiking in Armenia, given appropriate guidance and preparation. As proof of concept, three independent foreign hikers completed this route during the summer of 2019.

Additionally, there are 290km of side routes to trailheads and points of interest, bringing the prototype trail network's total distance to 1,087km.

All trail scouting missions involved the collection of detailed GPS tracklogs, as well as trail audits composed of written notes and photographs.

**This database represents a Master Plan for the complete Armenia stage of the TCT.**

From it, individual projects for every component of the trail's development can be extracted, from maintenance to signage to resource creation to stakeholder engagement – not to mention the planning of actual hikes.

A key step for the NGO in 2020 will be to formulate a roadmap for the coming years based on bringing this design to fruition.

## Route Development

A series of successful scouting missions took place across the country and throughout the year, including:

- The various territories of Lake Arpi National Park in Shirak province,
- The Akhurian floodplain and gorge in Shirak province,
- The northern slopes of the Pambak range between Shirak and Lori provinces,
- The Dzoraget valley between Kathnaghbyur and Stepanavan,
- The Debed Canyon, Karinj village and the Marts river valley in Lori province,
- A new connection from the Tavush–Lori border to Dilijan National Park,
- Semyonovka to Sevan in Gegharkunik province,
- Historical trails between Arpa and Noravank in Vayots Dzor province,
- Sections of the upper Vorotan River valley between Spandaryan and Sisian in Syunik province,
- Multiple additions to the historic trail network in the Vorotan Canyon, and as far as Goris, and
- An outline of a historic trail network to be developed in the eastern portion of Arevik National Park.

The trail audit data has been processed and added to our database, and can be explored interactively using the links above.

## Volunteer Trailbuilding Camp, Syunik

From June–August, a small-scale international volunteer programme took place in and around Tatev Monastery in the Vorotan Canyon of Syunik province. This programme was incorporated into the “Revival of Ancient Trails in Vorotan Canyon” project by Trails For Change NGO (TFC), with co-funding from the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity in Tourism, the Globetrotter Foundation, and Mr Hovhannes Ispiryan. TCTA coordinated the recruitment of five international volunteers and provided funding for their participation through a grant to TCT Armenia, which subsequently sub-granted the same sum to TFC.

## Narrative Summary

The trails developed under this initiative were based on preliminary scouting work done by TCT Armenia and TFC in 2018. A follow-up audit and design phase followed in June 2019, followed by 8 weeks of mixed international and local volunteer crews participating in 7-day blocks in group sizes from 5 to 14 people.

The programme for each group followed the established model of induction, training, supervised work and review established in 2016–2017 by the TCT volunteer camps in Svaneti and Dilijan.

Additionally, an educational component for local participants was included, which covered first-aid, environmental, technical and cultural topics.

Trail work was based on current international best practices for sustainable trail design, construction and maintenance, and quality controlled as such:

- Tread width: 0.8-1m (3ft)
- Outslope: 6-7%
- Average gradient: 7-8%
- Maximum gradient: 15%

Technical work not suitable for volunteers, including bridge renovation and slope stabilisation, was carried out by TFC's professional trail crew after the volunteer programme finished. The project concluded with the installation of blazes, signposts and trailhead information boards.

## Results

Additions to the TCT network include 3 new routes totalling 24.4km, and 2 rerouted existing trails totalling 4.5km, for a total of 28.9km of new hiking experiences around Tatev village. Achieving these results involved the construction of 1.5km of new tread, rehabilitating 11.4km of historical trails, renovating two footbridges, building 25 stone steps, designing and implementing one specially reinforced retaining structure, and constructing ~50m of rock retaining walls.

Marking and signage was conducted according to a newly-finalised guidance document prepared by the State Tourism Committee of Armenia based on input from TCT, TFC and other local trail development organisations over the previous two years.

Finally, digital route data and photo/video media assets were also collected for future use in publicity materials and informational resources for this section of the Transcaucasian Trail.

## Stakeholder Alignment

This project was designed and implemented in close collaboration with leading members of Tatev community, the bishopric of Tatev Monastery, the RA Forest Service, the RA State Tourism Committee. Additionally, the routes developed were chosen to complement the parallel trail development projects of People In Need NGO and WWF Armenia, with the goal of creating a unified trail network in the Vorotan Canyon and the wider region of south Syunik. This cooperative approach will continue into 2020 as the focus moves from infrastructure to publicity and the development of complementary services to support trail tourism in the area.

**A full report for this project is available on request.**

## The “Pipe Trail”

The TCT guides’ experience leading the supporters’ trek in Vayots Dzor in October highlighted an urgent need to address safety concerns on a short section of the route lovingly referred to as the “Pipe Trail” (due to a large water pipe crossing its path). Hazards included unstable scree, a steep side-slope gradient, and no means of crossing the pipe except by climbing over it.

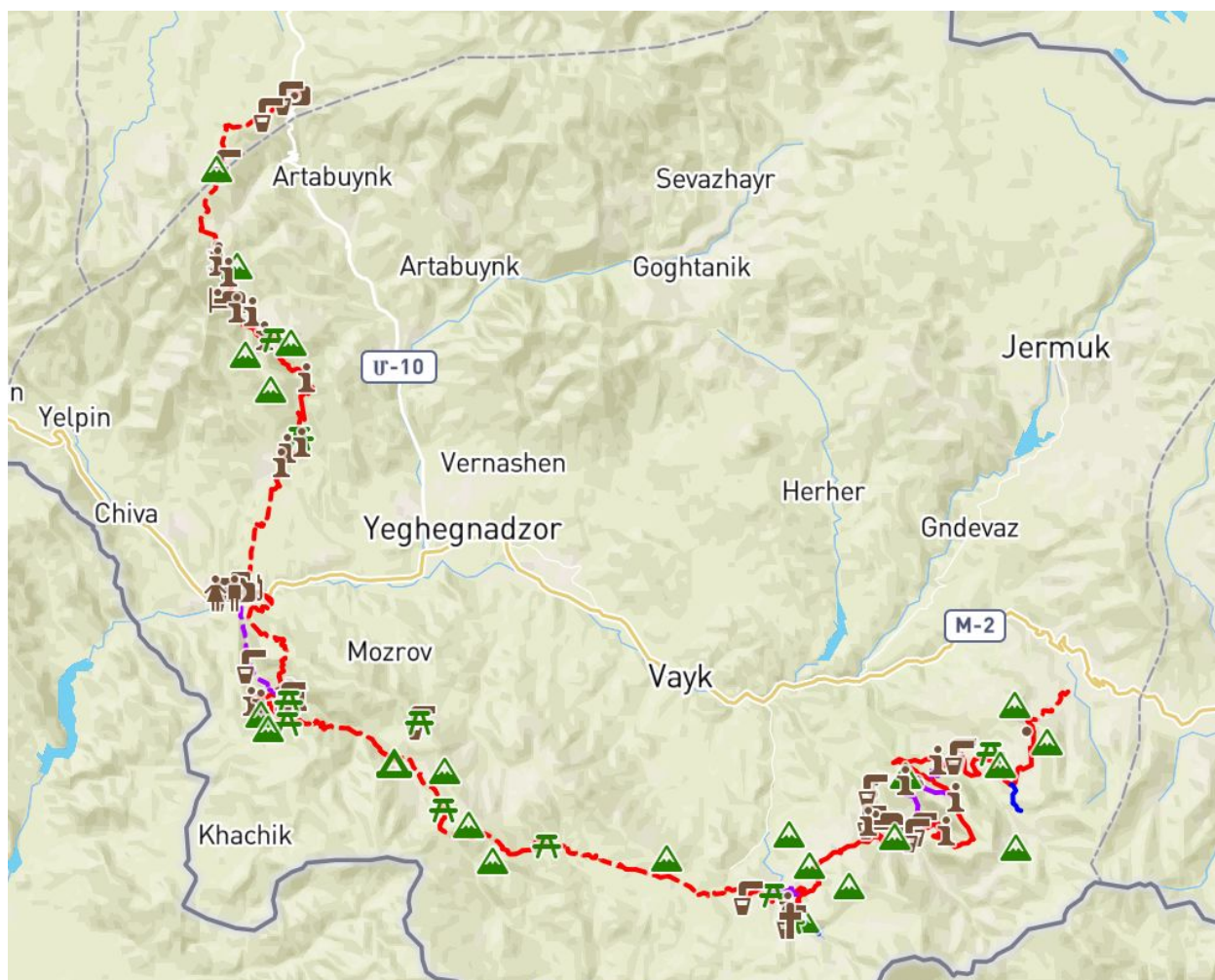
A new alignment was laid out in detail in November 2017 as part of the “Vayots Dzor Multi-Day Hiking Trail Design” project in Vayots Dzor that year, but in this particular location we were unable to secure funding to complete the construction phase of the work.

Following the principle of using funds raised through our supporters’ treks to improve the trails on which they take place, the TCT Armenia NGO decided to commission a small project to construct the new 580m trail segment across the hazardous scree slope surrounding the pipe. At the same time, a 940m connection between Nor Amaghu ruined village and the Arpa Protected Landscape entrance barrier was rerouted away from the paved road, and basic maintenance carried out on the 2km historic trail between the so-called Jafar Grove and Gnishik village. This work was carried out by a crew of 3 between 25th November and 6th December 2019.

While some of the route remains to be blazed and signposted, the completion of this small but important project effectively raises the entire 125km route through Vayots Dzor to our baseline standards of safety, sustainability and aesthetics.

## Vayots Dzor Trail Guide

This year also saw the launch of an online trail guide in English for the Vayots Dzor stage of the Transcaucasian Trail in Armenia, which connects to the southern end of the Gegham Mountains stage and covers 125km between the Selim Caravanserai and the village of Ughedzor. The guide includes 4,317 words of written trail notes and background information, a digital interactive map of the route, and downloadable routes for GPS units and smartphones. It can be viewed here: <https://transcaucasiantrail.org/en/hike/vayots-dzor-armenia/>



## Hiking Maps of Dilijan National Park and Vayots Dzor

Following a successful TCT-supported crowdfunding campaign by Cartisan in fall 2018, the official launch of the Dilijan National Park hiking map was held on 27 April 2019 at the HIKEArmenia storefront in Yerevan, attended by members of the TCT community, as well as donors, journalists, and representatives of the State Tourism Committee of Armenia.

The map has since been on sale at multiple locations in Yerevan and Dilijan since launch, as well as in specialist European map stores, with an estimated 480 copies in circulation at the time of writing. USD \$120 has been donated to TCT Armenia thus far as a result of a 5% profit share arrangement with Cartisan.

In November 2019, the second map in the series was launched, produced using the replicable workflow developed during the creation of the first map, and covering the trail network developed in 2018–19 around Martiros, Gomk, Kapuyt and Artavan villages in Vayots Dzor province.

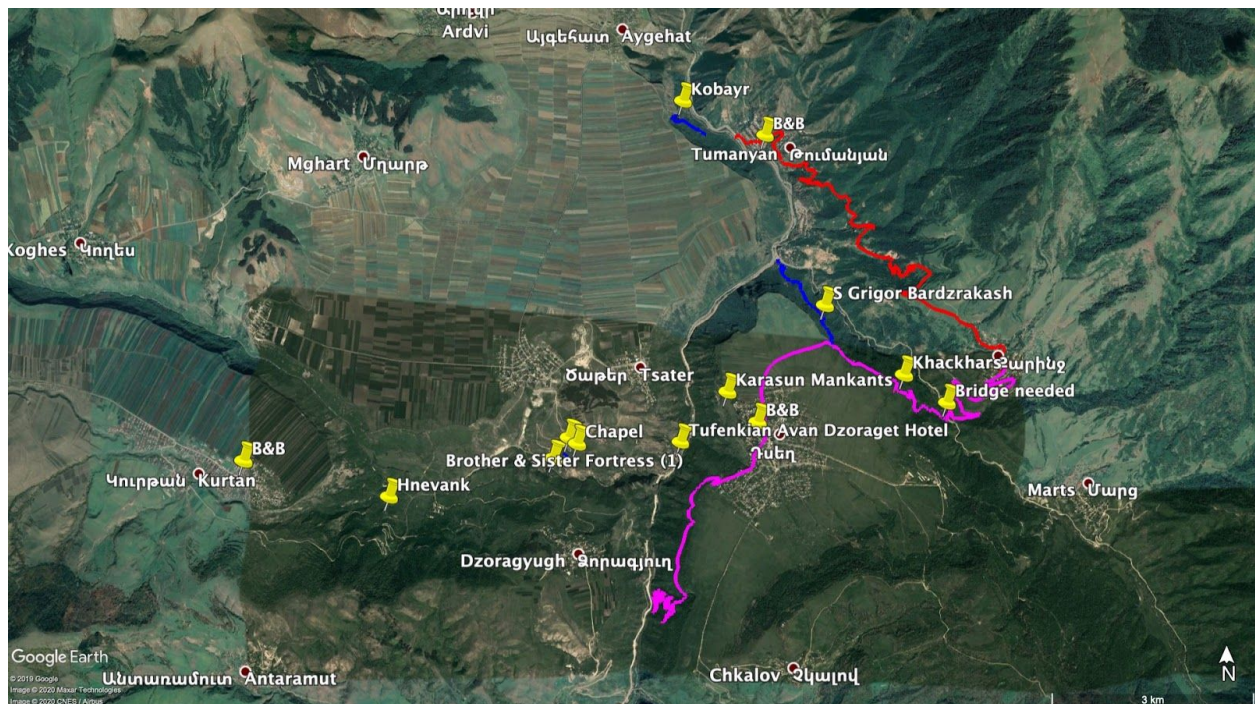


The map was printed at a smaller sheet size and locally in Yerevan, Armenia, reducing the printing and shipping overheads and the time to market. Copies are now on sale at the HIKEArmenia storefront in Yerevan, with plans to expand availability in 2020.

## WWF & HIKEArmenia Trail Development Partnerships in Lori Province

The latest incarnation of the Barev Trails volunteer programme, funded by WWF Armenia and implemented by Trails For Change, saw a network of existing trails maintained and marked around the village of Dsegh in Lori province.

Building on this work, HIKEArmenia commissioned additional work to connect Dsegh with the neighbouring village of Karinj and the small town of Tumanyan in the Debed Gorge.



The basis for this work was a “Four Gorges Trail” concept note and map, scouted by TCT Armenia in the spring and subsequently shared with HIKEArmenia and Trails For Change. This proposed network would form a 3–4 day loop hike, largely on historic trails and connecting three major monastery sites, in the region of Lori province where four river gorges intersect – the Debed, the Pambak, the Dzoraget and the Marts.

As well as representing perhaps 50% of the original Four Gorges Trail concept, the developed routes now comprise a stage of the current main TCT route through Lori province, and parts of a

preferred future alignment which is dependent upon a challenging construction project being completed in the Dzoraget gorge.

## 2019 TCT Armenia Thru-Hikes

This year saw **three successful thru-hikes of the TCT in Armenia** in its current form, firstly by British mountain guide James Stearn in May–June and secondly by German hikers Claudia Kiso and Melanie Mattauch in June–July.

### Fundraising Trek: Dilijan National Park (June)

Seven international hikers joined our inaugural fundraising hike of the year, covering 85km over 5 days through Dilijan National Park and raising nearly USD \$5,000 for the NGO.

Based on their experiences running the same trek in 2018, guides Ashot and Vazgen improved on the original itinerary by making adjustments to daily distances and start/end points. The group were also able to test new accommodation options that have opened since the previous trek, specifically the ‘Vanatun’ guesthouse adjoining Haghartsin Monastery. Expenses were slightly higher than budgeted, which will be taken into account when planning a repeat in 2020.

### Fundraising Trek: Vayots Dzor (October)

Our second fundraising hike of the year took place on the newly-published route through Vayots Dzor. Eleven international hikers covered 90km over 6 days in the company of guides Ashot and Vazgen, raising over \$9,000 for the NGO, and with unanimously positive feedback from participants.

### Bikepacking Armenia (September)

As a side project over the last several years, NGO President Tom Allen has been developing a mountain-biking version of the Transcaucasian Trail in Armenia. In 2019 he invited members of the international bikepacking community to join him in testing the route. Over 18 days in September, the group of eight riders covered some 750km between Lake Arpi and Meghri, riding in a self-supported fashion, with remote logistical support from TCT Armenia Vice President Ashot.

The group collectively raised USD \$3,869 for TCTA through the Donate.ly online fundraising platform. This amount will be incorporated into TCTA’s grants to TCT Armenia, and used in 2020 for the purpose of blazing remote connecting routes between developing ‘trail destinations’ in Armenia.

## DroneDeploy Sponsorship

The Armenia team are pleased to have secured a 1-year partnership with DroneDeploy, a California-based startup company developing drone mapping software for industrial and commercial applications, who also operate a nonprofit programme called 'Drones For Good'. This partnership provides us with free-of-charge access to their enterprise platform, as well as technical support and a direct point of contact with an account manager.

**For a look at how we have been using the software, see the blog post [“How Drone Mapping Technology Is Helping Us Build Armenia’s First Long-Distance Hiking Trail”](#).**

## Impact Hub & Izmirlian Foundation Fellowship

In December 2019 the TCT Armenia NGO was awarded a place within the Izmirlian Fellowship program, which aims to support social entrepreneurship initiatives by providing free desk space at Impact Hub Yerevan and access to mentoring and training opportunities to carry out a specific project within the 6-month timeframe of the fellowship. Our application was based on spending at least 50% of our staff time developing the 'Regional Trail Clubs' project in the first half of 2020. We wish to thank the Izmirlian Foundation and Impact Hub for their generous support!

## International Press & Media

Armenia and its hiking trail network has been lucky enough to receive praise in several respected global media outlets this year, including:

- Condé Nast Traveler, December 2019: 20 Best Places to Go in 2020 (#1: Armenia)  
<https://www.cntraveler.com/gallery/best-places-to-go-in-2020>
- Forbes.com, October 2019: Hiking Armenia’s New Transcaucasian Trail is a Beautiful Way to Immerse Yourself in Armenian Culture  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/breannawilson/2019/10/11/hiking-armenias-new-transcaucasian-trail-is-a-beautiful-way-to-immense-yourself-in-armenian-culture/>
- TIME.com, August 2019: Transcaucasian Trail is One of the World’s Greatest Places  
<https://time.com/collection/worlds-greatest-places-2019/5654151/transcaucasian-trail-caucasus/>
- Bloomberg, April 2019: Why You Should Go to Armenia Now, in 15 Inspiring Photos  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/photo-essays/2019-04-23/armenia-travel-guide-churches-brandy-mountains>
- Porter Magazine, February 2019 (print edition): Trail of the unexpected  
<https://www.net-a-porter.com/>

## Armenia Trails Expedition

Another noteworthy publicity exercise this year was a social media influencer visit under the name “Armenia Trails Expedition”, funded and organised by HIKEArmenia and co-hosted by World Trails Network chairman Galeo Saintz.

This project involved taking invitees from target countries on two fully-supported multi-day hikes on sections of the Transcaucasian Trail which were co-funded or developed by HIKEArmenia; one between Khachardzan and Dilijan, and a second from Martiros to Artavan. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences on the trail with their social media audiences to form a coherent real-time narrative of the group experience.

TCT Armenia Vice President Ashot co-guided the first of these hikes in Dilijan National Park, and president Tom visited and camped with the group during their Martiros–Gomk hike.

## TCTA Fundraising and promotion

### Europe events, March

In March, the TCTA supported the promotion of the TCT at ITB Berlin, the world’s largest travel industry trade show. Paul Stephens and Tom Allen traveled to Berlin where Tom presented the history of TCT development in the region to a group of travel industry professionals, and Tom and Paul met with a number of tour operators and organizations including the Via Dinarica and the Adventure Travel Conservation Fund.

The ITB Berlin event was followed by a presentation at the House of Armenian Culture (Maison de la Culture Arménienne) in Paris, where we promoted the upcoming fundraising tours in Armenia and sold the recently released maps of Dilijan National Park. The event was organized and supported by a Dilijan 2018 tour participant, Muriel Clark. Finally, we also presented the TCT to a small group of OSCE staffers and others at a private event in Vienna.

### Seattle event, December

In December 2019, the TCTA held a private fundraising event in Seattle, Washington. The event was organized and hosted by a small group of Seattle residents who had learned about the TCT while participating on a tour in Georgia led by Paul Stephens and who wanted to give their own time and resources to support the TCT, led by Patricia Rothwell, who hosted the event at her home. The event was attended by approximately 60 people and raised over \$11,000 to support the TCT’s Youth Leadership Corps programs.

# 2019 Financial Statement

## **Income**

Donations	\$64,256
Tour fees	\$61,697
Volunteer fees	\$13,603
Other income	\$753
 Total income	 \$140,309

## **Expenses**

Operations	\$30,444
Grants to Armenia NGO	\$31,725
In-kind grants to Armenia NGO	\$1,207
Grants to Georgia NGO	\$13,940
In-kind grants to Georgia NGO	\$24,465
 Total Expenses	 \$101,781