

Transcaucasian Trail Notes: Guba - Gusar, Azerbaijan

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The TCTA strives to provide accurate, current information as to trail conditions and the trail route. However, actual trail conditions may be different, and such information may not be accurate or complete. Trail users are urged to consider all the information available from other sources and to heed local advice when available. Trail users are ultimately responsible for all decisions as to the trail routes, trail conditions, weather, and safety.

In addition to the hazards posed by steep terrain and mountain weather, hikers should be prepared for difficult route-finding and challenging trail conditions, the possibility of washed-out bridges and dangerous river crossings in high water, aggressive dogs guarding sheep and cattle, giant hogweed, and frequent summer thunderstorms with extremely intensive periods of lightning. Access to emergency medical care and search and rescue is not always available.

QUICK FACTS:

Total Distance: 102km (84km + 18km side trail)

Elevation Min/Max: 1,270m / 2,660m

Elevation Gain/Loss: +6,364m / -6,247m

Status: Open & partly marked

Marking Type: directional signposts, red & white painted blazes, some unmarked sections.

Emergency Services: 112, 113

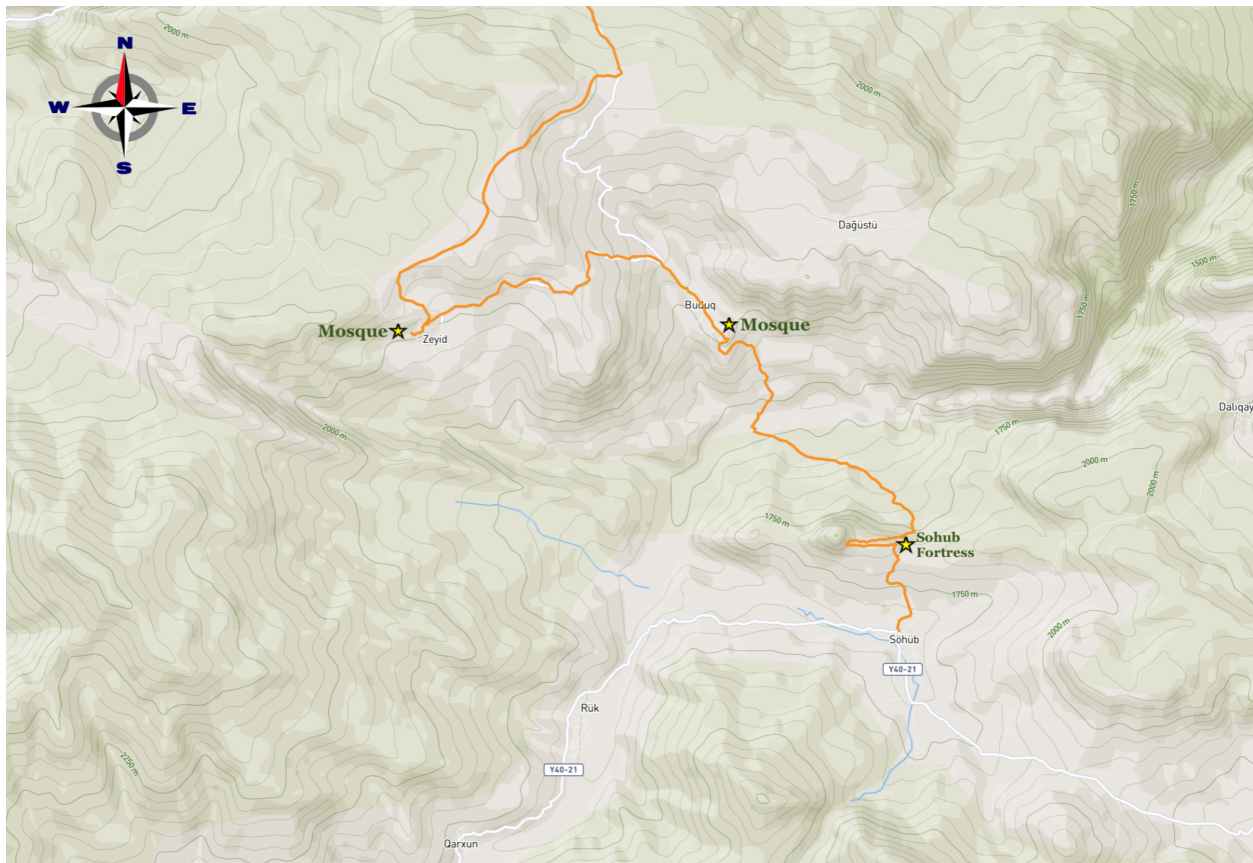
Trail Notes

Note: This trail from Guba to Gusar incorporates an additional extension to Khinalig, where the future TCT thru-hiking route will likely connect from the south (and which is worth a visit in its own right). The route and its sections may be hiked in either direction, although the suggested path may be most optimal for the shape of this route.

The main 84km route of this section stretches from Sohub to Quxur. At the mid-point in Griz, a 18km side trail diverges west toward Khinalig. This route towards Khinalig will likely be part of the main TCT thru-hiking route in the future, but will currently serve as a side trail.

To return from Khinalig to Griz and continue onwards toward Quxur, you can either return back the same way you came on foot (adding an additional 18km and 1,096m elevation gain to your total distance), or take a taxi back to Griz.

In Quxur, you can end your hike there, or add a small additional loop by returning to Laza via an alternate route (adding 23.5km and 1,401m elevation gain to your total distance). Note that in order to take the alternate route from Yergi Kek to Laza, you will have to request permission from the Defense Ministry, at least two weeks ahead of time.



Sohub – Budug (Söhüb – Buduğ)

8km, +669m/-552m

To get to Sohub, you will need to take a Niva or UAZ from Quba. You may find a car in Quba's district center, or call 0503187398. The road is 60km, and will take about an hour and a half. Prices may reach 70-80 AZN.

This route is not marked, and the trail is not clear throughout the entire hike.

Water: There are no sources for water replenishment during this section. Be sure to stock up beforehand in Sohub so as to avoid dehydration, especially in the warmer months.

Food and lodging in Sohub: Sohub is a small village, and does not host a market nor a guesthouse. It is recommended you arrive from the city of Guba, where there are various hotel options, and markets and the bazar where you may stock up on food.

Food and lodging in Budug: There is no market nor guesthouse in Budug.

Starting in Sohub, leave the village by following jeep tracks to the north of the village. You will climb up for about a kilometer, until coming upon perpendicularly running jeep tracks. Follow east a bit, and locate the trail leading up to the Sohub fortress from the south side of this hill.

Nearing the top, you will head west, then wrap back eastwards to descend the hill from the northside.

After the descent, the path is not clearly defined but continues northwestwards. This route is the remnants of an old road, and the rocks that had defined it are still visible and mark the way for hikers.

At **kilometer 5.5**, you will have to drop into the river bed, and cross the river. After the river, follow the wide set of animal paths. After a kilometer, these reach a clear path that takes you up to the village of Budug through a rocky ascent.

There is no guesthouse nor market in Budug. You may set up camp here, or continue 4.4 km to Zeyid.

Budug – Zeyid (Buduğ – Zeyid)

4.4 km, +374m/-130m

This section between Budug and Zeyid is a fairly easy hike and follows jeep tracks the entire way.

Water: There are no sources for water replenishment during this section. Be sure to stock up beforehand so as to avoid dehydration, especially in the warmer months.

Food and lodging in Zeyid: Zeyid is a small village, and there is no market. The navigation leads to the home of Xumat Eyubova Yusif qizi, who hosts visitors, should you choose to stay at a guesthouse.

Leave Budug through the north side of the village, taking the jeep tracks heading northwest. Continue upwards. At kilometer 2, you will come to a fork. Keep left (south). Follow the route, and be sure to not stray off onto intersecting roads and animal paths.

There is no market in the village of Zeyid. You may set up camp or stay at the home of Xumat khanim.



Zeyid – Grizdehne (Zeyid – Qrızdəhnə)

14 km, +370m/-1,119m

This route is not marked, but follows a dirt car road for the majority of the track. The last 11 kilometers are rapid descent, and there are no trees to offer shade. Be sure to stock up properly on food and water.

Water: There are no sources for water replenishment during this section. Be sure to stock up beforehand in Zeyid so as to avoid dehydration, especially in the warmer months.

Food and lodging in Grizdehne: Qrızdehne hosts many tourists, and has various restaurants and a small market throughout the village. There are hotel and guesthouse options.

- Panoramic Hotel: 055 588 80 99
- Mezahir Guesthouse

Head north out of Zeyid and take the tracks leading up to the grass road above. Once you have ascended onto the jeep tracks atop the climb, turn right (east), and continues down this road.

At **kilometer 6.5**, the navigation strays off the main jeep tracks, onto a parallel trail. The path re-joins the main jeep track about 1.5 kilometers later. The roads that split along the route usually converge.

Near **kilometer 8**, after the rejoining of tracks, take a left (south) at the following fork and head southwards. Follow the jeep tracks, and descend into Grizdehne, entering the village from its southeast side.

Grizdehne – Griz (Qrızdəhnə – Qrız)

12 km, +1,149m/-339m

This is an old route that has been used for generations by the people of Griz and Grizdehne for travel between their two villages. It has been developed and marked by the Azerbaijan Tourism Board.

Starting from Grizdehne, the first part of this hike takes you through a forested section before coming to a steep, rocky climb up to the top of the canyon. Be sure to come prepared with any tools necessary for keeping your balance. Following this section, the hike to Griz offers spectacular views of the Jehennem Canyon without significant elevation change.

Water: There are no sources for water replenishment for the majority of this section, so be sure to stock up beforehand in Grizdehne. There is one spring along the route, located and marked just before Griz village.

Food and lodging in Griz: There are no markets nor restaurants in Griz, but there are several guesthouse accommodation options:

- Mehdiyev Farhad: 0504899393
- Allahyarov Shaig: 0504478593
- Bunyatov Gulbala: 0553208374

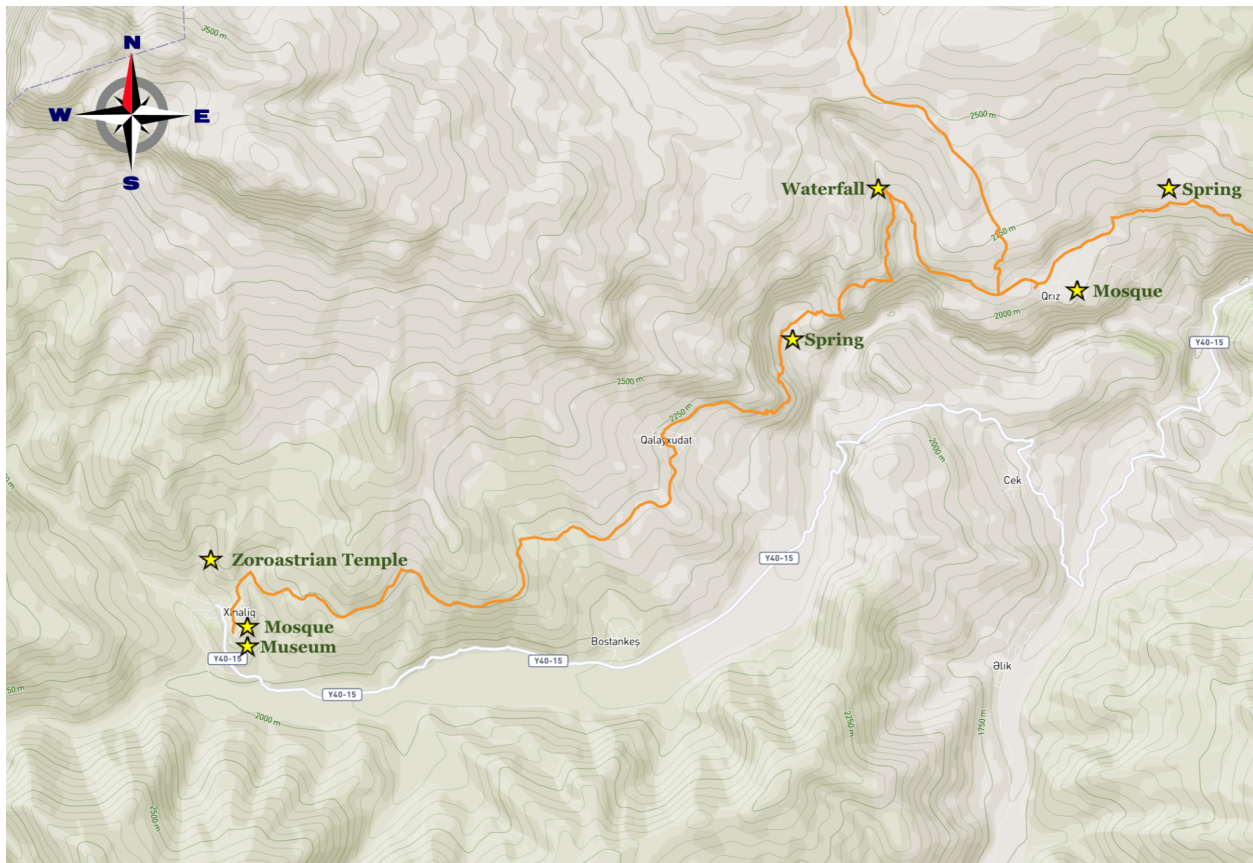
Taking the asphalt road out of Grizdehne southwestwards, stray off the car road to the right (west) onto the forested trail, about 150 meters after Panorama Hotel.

After a bit over a kilometer, you will begin a 2 km steep ascent. This rocky section will require caution and attention.

Nearing the top, continue up the grassy trail. You will come to an area called Khak Kek, where the road splits. Head left (south), and follow along the canyon-side trail for 6 kilometers, until you reach the village of Griz. There is no market here, but you may set up camp or stay at one of the listed guesthouses.

From Griz village, you may take an out-and-back side trail to Galaykhudat and Khinalig (18km one-way or 36km round trip).

While this trail will likely be incorporated into the main thru-hiking route across Azerbaijan, it currently serves as a side trail. We highly recommend spending the extra day or two to visit this unique part of northern Azerbaijan.



Griz – Galaykhudat (Qrız – Qalayxudat)

10 km, +862m/-667m

This section has been developed and marked by the Azerbaijan Tourism Board. It follows a clear path, and passes through the Gurgur waterfall and along the edge of the canyon. There are no trees to offer shade in the summer, and the trail may be wet and snowy in the colder seasons, so make sure to dress appropriately and bring plenty of water.

Water: You can ask the villagers for water before leaving the village. There are springs in two places along the route. The first water source is the small river you cross after descending into the Kokosh gorge. The second water source is another small river in the Kokosh gorge about 7km from the start, however this water becomes thick with sediment during rain or snowmelt.

Food and Lodging in Galaykhudat: There are no restaurants nor markets in Galaykhudat. You may visit a guesthouse for food and lodging.

- Sultanov Gurbat: 0504227682
- Elchin and Akif

You will leave the village of Griz heading eastwards; follow the trail markers pointing to Galaykhudat. At around **kilometer 2.5**, you will begin to enter a small cavern. Take caution of slippery rocks, but be sure to peer inside and enjoy the Gurgur waterfall spilling into a clear emerald pool. After the waterfall, continue along the trail, southwards, along the canyon. At **kilometer 4.5**, turn right (westwards). At **kilometer 5.5**, you may venture out about 50 meters for a vista of the canyon, and then continue westwards.

Follow the trail markers and GPS tracks where the trail is overgrown with grass. You will come upon a car road at **kilometer 8.5**, which you can choose to follow, or stay along the trail, into the village of Galaykhudat.

There is no market, but local villagers have opened their homes for food and sleep for travelers.

Galaykhudat – Khinaliq (Qalaxudat – Xinalıq) 8km, +359m/-429m

This is an easy, straightforward hike that follows along a car road. It has been marked by the Azerbaijan Tourism Board.

Water: There are no springs directly on the trail in Galakhudat village, but you can ask locals for water. During the walk, you will cross a small river which can serve as a water source.

Food and Lodging in Khinalig: There is a market in the village, that can serve tea and limited food options. There are various guesthouse options.

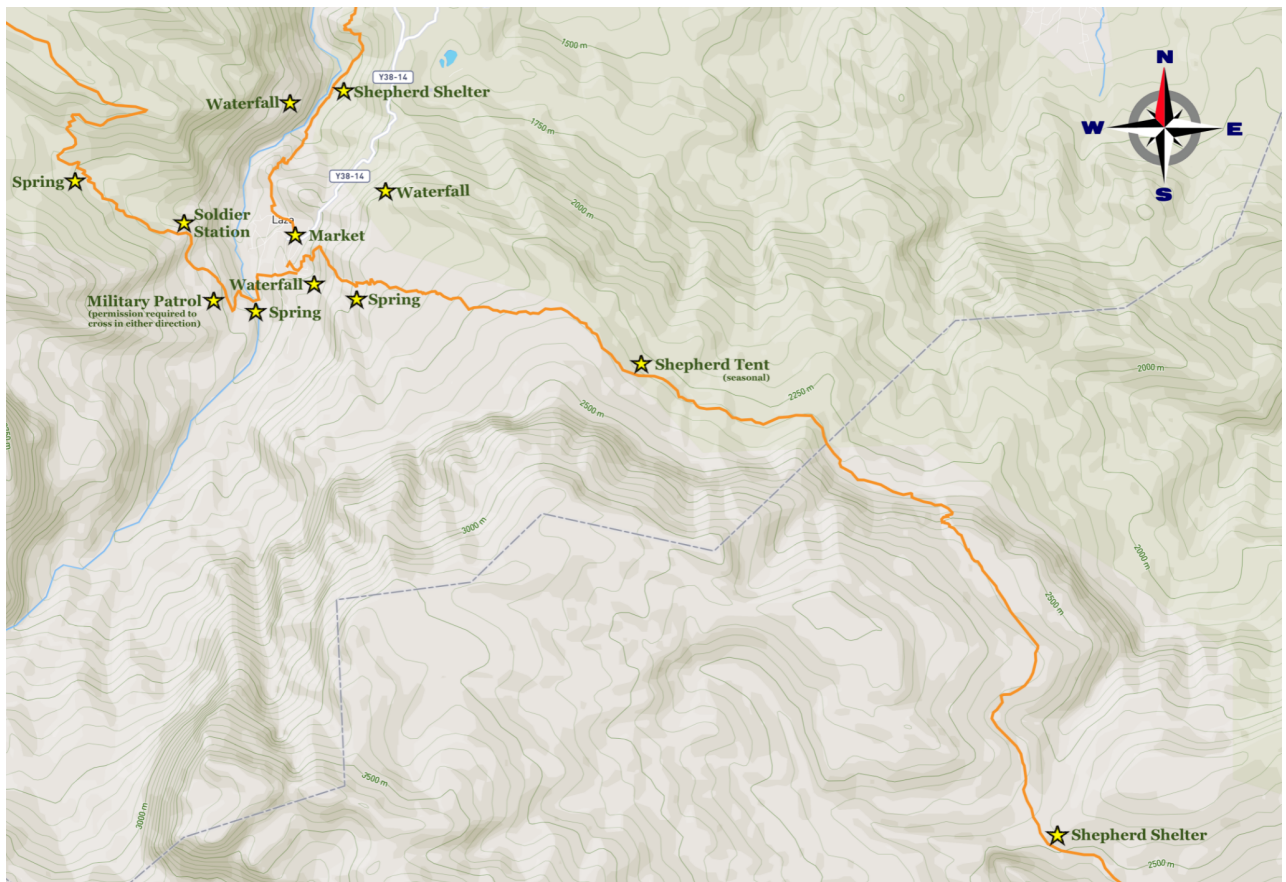
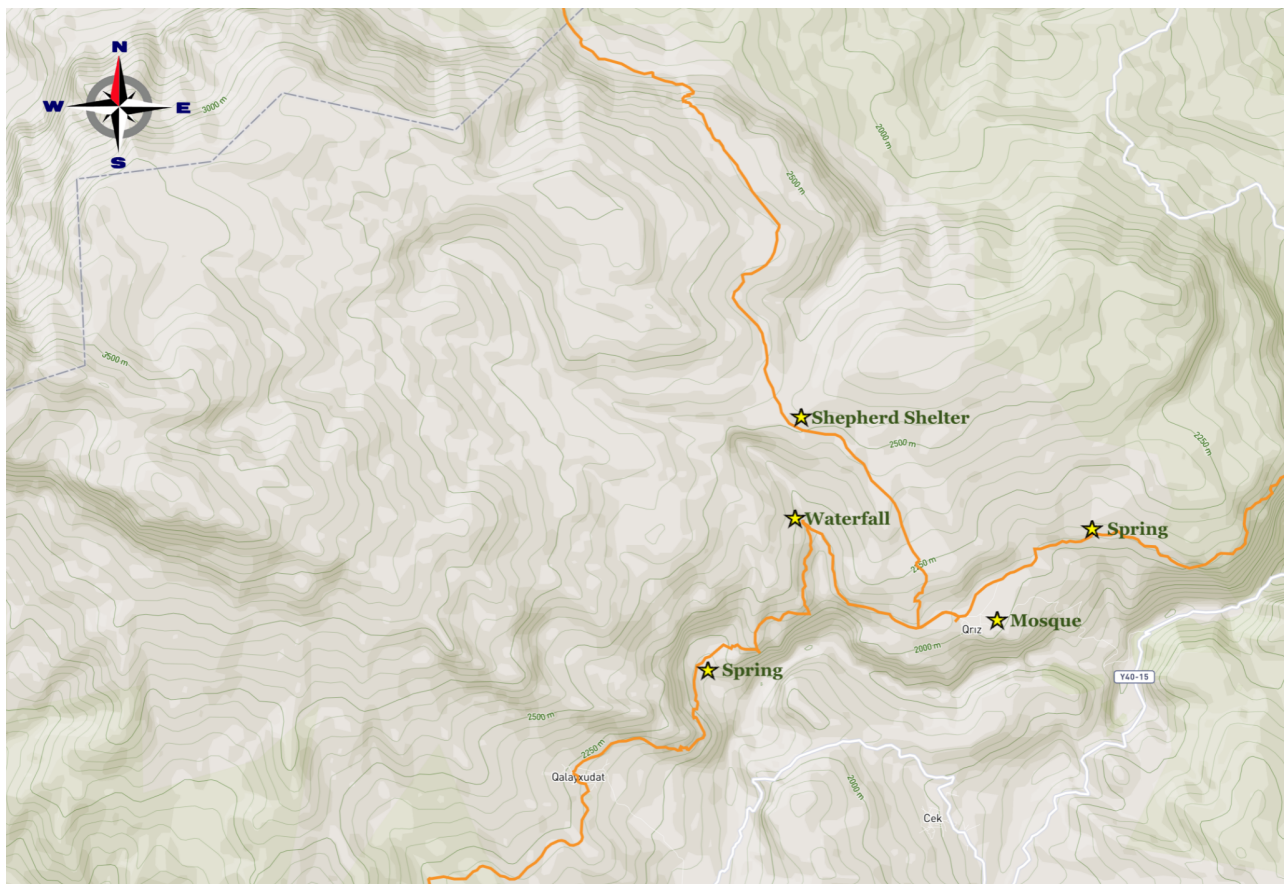
- Lalayev Zaur: 0518309720
- Rahman Sarkarov: 0709486647
- Agayev Elnur: 0509654926

Leaving from the south side of Galakhudat, follow the signs leading to Khinalig. After the village, follow the trail and ascend for about a kilometer. You will come across a wide car road leading to Khinalig. Follow along the road, taking note of the terraced mountains to the left side.

After about **6 kilometers**, you will approach Khinalig village. Cross onto the car road that leads into Khinalig.

You will find a market which serves tea and some food, and plenty of guesthouses here.

To continue along the main route, you may return to Griz via the same route on foot, or take a return taxi from Khinalig to Griz.



Griz – Laza (Qrız – Laza)

19 km, +869m/-1,207m

This is a fairly long hike, and there are a few steep descents (although there is no huge sudden elevation change for the majority of the hike). After leaving Griz, there are no markings, and at times no trail, although the direction of the route is straightforward. You will come across the Azerbaijan Tourism Board's sign posts when nearing Laza.

Water: There are no sources for water replenishment for the majority of this hike section. There is spring running to your left (south) as you approach Laza, near kilometer 17. Be sure to stock up beforehand in Griz.

Food and lodging in Laza: There is a guesthouse and market, as well as cafes, in the village of Laza. Coming from Griz, you will arrive from the southern side of the village, where there are cafes near the Qosha waterfalls. A 10 minute walk to the other side of the village, from which the following route will begin, will take you to the Laza market and guesthouse

- Laza Guesthouse: 0506596000

Leave Griz from the north end of the village, and take the car road west. After a bit over half a kilometer, take a right (north) at the fork. Continue along this car road – the highest altitude road built for cars in the country! Following this route, you may come across two or three more shepherd shelters and tents.

Nearing **kilometer 3.6**, you will stray off the car road, and head north following jeep tracks. Follow northwest and arrive at Mikhtikan plateau. The area here is grassy and the track is not well defined. Follow to the northwestern edge of the plateau, and take the trail to descend.

At the bottom, head west along a wide, vast field of green and rocks. You will continue along here, westwards, for about 8 kilometers. There is no continuous trail, but the direction is clear. A flat spot along this long field may be a good place to set up camp if you would like to stop for the day.

At **kilometer 16**, there is resort construction going on that covers the trail. Although this route will be redirected in the future, hikers may walk through (with caution) in the direction of their route.

There will appear a trail heading back to Laza. Follow the path. On the descent into Laza, there is a spring flowing down to your right. Fill up on water if needed, although you will be approaching the village soon.

Down in Laza, there are a few teahouses/restaurants if you wish to rest and replenish. While here, take a look at the Gosha Waterfalls.



Laza – Yergi Kek (Laza – Yergi Kek)

12km, +1,305m/-603m

*This path has been developed by the Azerbaijan Tourism Board. The route begins in Laza, and climbs up to Yergi Kek, one of the highest-altitude villages of Azerbaijan. In either direction, you may diverge off the path for a visit to Kuzun. This is the eastern route to Yergi Kek, which is the main route. An optional alternate route that can be used to form a loop (but requires **extra permission**) is described below.*

The route is marked throughout and offers spectacular views. There are some fairly steep ascents, and the general lack of trees may make it more difficult to cool down in the hotter seasons.

Water: You can fill up your water bottles from springs in the yards of local villagers. There is a spring just below Laza Market, and another about 2 kilometers from Laza, which you will see as you pass through the trees in the Gusarchay river valley. If you stop by Kuzun, you can fill your water bottles from springs in the yards of local villagers, as there are no public springs in the village.

Food and lodging in Yergi Kek: There are no restaurants nor markets in Yergi Kek. Elshad, a local guide, opens his home to guests. He can also lead your hike to Laza and/or Quxur.

- Elshad: 0708844007

This track begins in the village of Laza, where there is a market and guesthouse. This trail has been marked and developed by the Azerbaijan Tourism Board; there are plenty of signs along the path. Follow the trail markers from near the Laza Market to get onto the trail. You will begin a short rocky descent and come by a small creek. Follow along the valley, and make sure to check out the Ekiz waterfalls rushing down the canyon to your left.

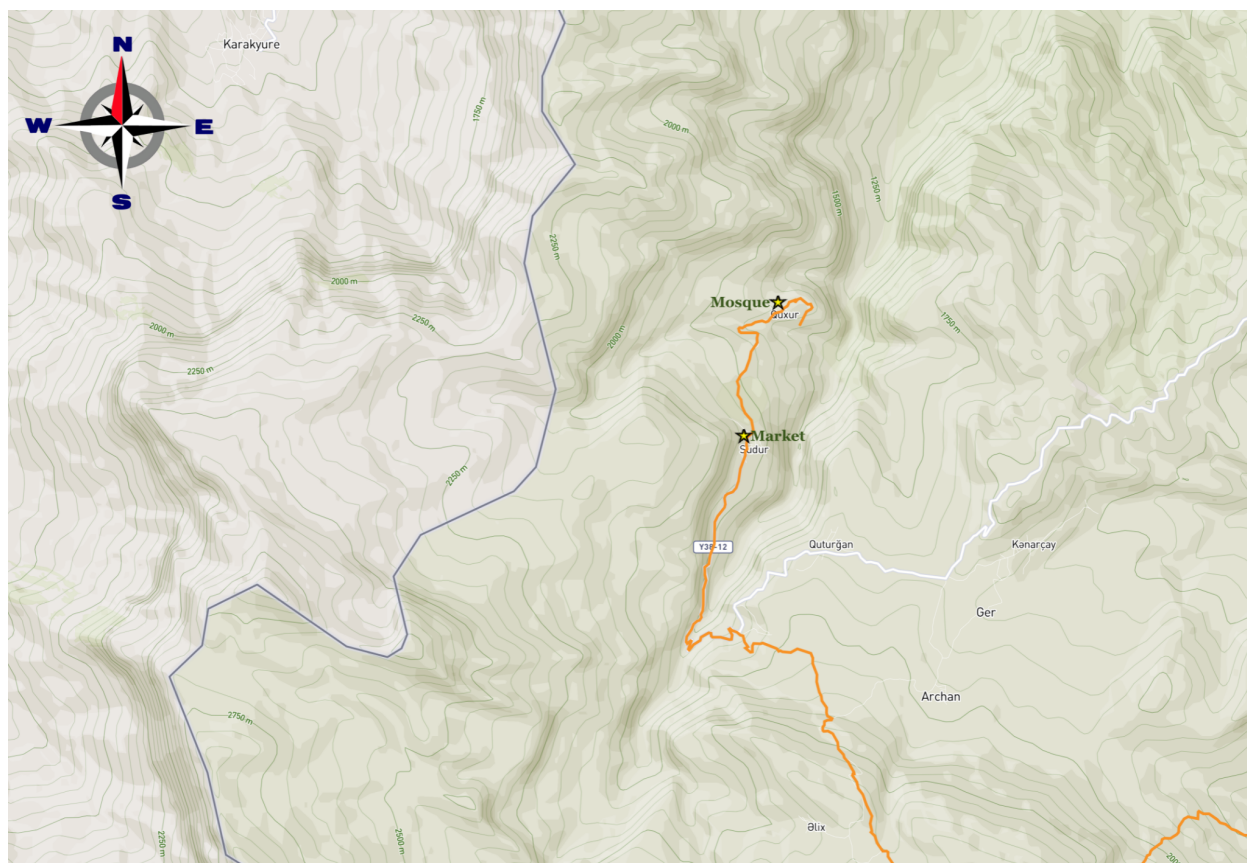
You will come across a shepherd shelter. To pass, open the wooden gate, and make sure to close it behind you. Afterwards comes a steep ascent, leading you to the top of the ridge, offering panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and canyons.

Around **kilometer 5**, the path will diverge. Take a right if you wish to visit the village of Kuzun, keep left if you are going directly to Yergi Kek. The directions below continue left, towards Yergi Kek.

About 500 meters down, you will cross a bridge over the river. At the next trail marker, follow the direction left (westwards) towards Yergi Kek. The road will be a mix of trail and jeep tracks. Around **kilometer 8**, there is a spring where you may fill up on water.

Hikers may take a grass-trodden path to the left of the jeep tracks. Be sure to try to stay single-file so as to reduce harm done to the wildflowers. Around **kilometer 10**, you begin a steep ascent up to Yergi Kek. There will be a shepherd shelter to the right of the route if you wish to make a stop. Make sure to stop and look behind you. What you see beyond is Dagestan!

You will come out onto a road that leads you to the village of Yergi Kek, one of the highest-altitude inhabited areas in Azerbaijan.



Yergi Kek – Gukhur (Yerği Kek – Quxur)

14km, +407m/-1,201m

This final section is well worth it for the views of canyons and the Samur River, and the 8th century mosque ruins in Gukhur. You may do this as an out-and-back hike (although do note that the return trip is an ascent the entire way), or you may take a taxi back to Yergi Kek. If you wish to return by car, organize with Elshad (see above for number) for a car to pick you up near Gukhur and take you back to Yergi Kek.

The hike itself is not too challenging, as it is a gradual descent. You should stock up on water and food for the day, as the cafe along the way (closer to Gukhur) may not be operating. There is a small market in Sudur village along the way. Along this route you will pass through a few villages, along magnificent canyons, and over the Samur river.

The hike from Yergi Kek to Gukhur is not too challenging, as it is a gradual descent. It is 14 kilometers long, and you should stock up on water and food for the day, as the cafe along the way (closer to Gukhur) may not be operating. There is a small market in Sudur village along the way. Along this route you will pass through a few villages, along magnificent canyons, and over the Samur river.

This route mainly follows jeep tracks, and is easy to follow. Out of Yergi Kek, head north and take the jeep tracks heading northwest.

At around **kilometer 5**, you will steer off the main road to the tracks to the left (westwards). The tracks disappear for about half a kilometer, but the direction of the path should remain clear. Continue to the visible car road going through the upcoming village.

You will pass by the small village of Takar. Continue out of the village by following the car road south. After winding back north, make sure to take the road that continues west, and you will arrive at the Samur river. Take a bridge across the river and continue north.

You will cross through Sudur village, where there is a small market along the route. Near **kilometer 12**, you will be able to see the village of Gukhur atop the mountain ahead. Make your way up there and take a look at the pirs (Islamic holy spots) and old mosque remnants along the way.

Continue past the village and wind around the edge of the canyon for some incredible panoramic views. Behind (south) is a giant “hogweed corridor”, atop which is a field with wild strawberries, which you may indulge in mid- to late- summer. You may return to Yergi Kek by foot, or meet a driver in Gukhur if you have arranged a car.



Yergi Kek – Laza (alternate return route)

9.5km, +200m/-845m

As a last optional hike, you can take an alternate route from Yergi Kek back to Laza (which is a good central point to end your trek, where you can easily get to the center of Gusar and back to Baku, or elsewhere). This route is slightly shorter (by 3 km) and offers new landscapes and views of Laza.

If you wish to take this route, you will have to request permission from the Defense Ministry, at least two weeks ahead of time.

Leaving from the southwest side of the village, follow the jeep tracks going southwards. You will wind down and may come across intersecting car routes, but make sure to stay on the road that you are on. You will pass by a soldier station, where you may be asked to show your permission. Follow down the car road. Nearing Laza, you will come across another soldier station, where you will need to show your permission to cross.

Follow into Laza – you will be on a different side of the village from where you started. This part of the village that sees more tourists due to its proximity to the waterfalls. There are a few teahouses/restaurant here if you wish to rest and replenish.