

Becho Valley (Village Mazeri) to Mestia



Shepherds' Huts

OVERVIEW

Distance: 21 km

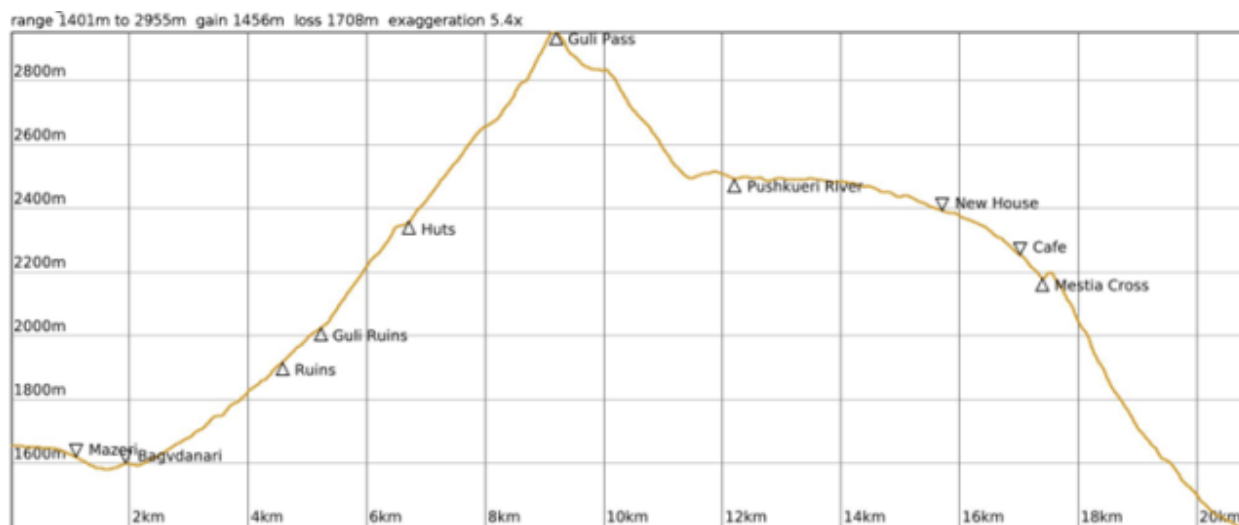
Approximate Time: 10 hours (longer when there is snow)

Elevation Gain/Loss: 1627 m / 1806 m

Difficulty Level: Difficult

Max/Min Altitude : 2954 m / 1401 m

ELEVATION PROFILE



ROUTE DESCRIPTION

The route from the Becho Valley to Mestia can be done by fit hikers in one long day, but you might consider camping on either side of the pass for a more enjoyable hike.

From Mazeri village, walk south on the main road 200 meters and look for a blue sign pointing to a turnoff on the left towards the village of Bagvdanari. (Just after the turnoff is a white sign indicating the town limit of Mazeri, and across the street is a market that is a good place to stock up.) Turn left on the road (you'll see a white directional sign indicating the way) and walk up the road to Bagvdanari. After passing a few houses, turn right at the intersection in the center of the village, and cross the Gulichala River (this branch is a small stream and barely noticeable). About 100 m beyond the river, turn left onto a well-marked footpath with red and white blazes.

Follow the path as it ascends along the left side of the more powerful branch of the Gulichala, passing primarily through meadows at the edge of the forest towards a cluster of ancient ruins. Right before you reach the ruins, a white sign will point the way up the hill. The prominent jeep tracks end in the meadow right beyond the ruins, but you can clearly see tracks leading up the

hill. You will pass new construction on your right as you head up towards the ruins of Guli. The ruins offer a couple camping spots and a resting place overlooking the meadows below. From the ruins, the path continues steeply up through meadows on a footpath, and on a clear day, Guli Glacier and the massive peaks of Ushba will come into view. After 1.5 km, you will reach a cluster of four shepherds' huts, where a side trail towards Guli Glacier begins. (See Guli Glacier Side Trail notes below for details.)

From the huts, make a sharp right, and you will see a white directional sign pointing up the hill. From here, a GPX track will be useful due to the number of cow paths intersecting the trail. Continue following the trail and red and white blazes up the mountain, and beware of cow paths leading similar directions but remaining at the same elevation along a ridge. Continue following the blazes, and eventually you will go up through patches of blueberry bushes and rhododendrons. Continue going up along the trail until you reach a small vegetation patch. The trail goes through this patch and leads north of the pass. It turns back towards the pass, and soon you will see two blazed metal posts. From the second post, the trail to the pass is clear. Continue on until you reach the ridge, and you will see signs indicating Guli Pass a little south of you. Go to the signs, and you will see the trail following the ridgeline south toward Mt. Gul. Early in the season (before July), you are likely to run into patches of snow near the pass, as it is quite high at 2954 meters.

Follow this trail for approximately 1 km until you reach the saddle and another sign indicating the routes to Mestia and Mt. Gul. (See Mt. Gul Side Trail notes below.) Descend west from the saddle with caution—the trail is steep, and the rocks may move under your feet. Follow the red and white blazes down the mountainside until the grade levels out and you find yourself on the clearly trodden path. The route is well-marked, and once you reach the ridgeline, there is only a single, distinct track to Mestia.

Halfway across the head of the valley, the trail meets the headwater of the Pushkueri River, which is steep and can be powerful. Early in the season, it is covered by a snow bridge, which should be crossed with great care. You will cross both branches of the river, and from there, the trail continues clearly along the ridgeline to the far side of the valley.

After you have curved southward and reached the ridge, you will meet a dirt road with a sign pointing south to Mestia and north to Koruldi Lakes. (See Koruldi Lakes Side Trail notes below.) Turn right for Mestia. A hut and a newly constructed house will be visible. Continue south and downhill along the road, and soon a cluster of buildings, one of which is a cafe, and the Cross Over Mestia come into view. Descend until you reach the Cross Over Mestia and a viewing platform from which you can look down on Mestia and across to the mountains beyond.

From here, you can reach Mestia by one of three ways.

Option 1: Although this is the longest of the three options, it is the easiest and not nearly as steep as the other two. Turn left on the road and follow the blazes down the dirt track. After about 1.3km, you will see a yellow directional sign pointing to Mestia via a trail on your right. Don't follow that sign. This "trail" has been heavily eroded down the middle by mountain streams, and is neither easy nor pleasant to trod. Instead, stay on the dirt road another kilometer until you see a red and white directional sign and small wooden house on your right. This time, follow the sign to Mestia and leave the road. Continue on the dirt/stony path until you reach a gravel road. Turn left, and the road will lead you straight through the town of Lanchvali to Mestia. Once you reach Lanchvali, the road curves to the right, past numerous guesthouses and house museums. You will arrive on the main road of Mestia near Credo Bank. Turn right to reach the town center.

Option 2: This trail is quite steep and difficult to hike when muddy. Just north of the Cross, a path (which is easier to see later in the season) leads down the hill to the left of the road. Follow this path through the meadow until you reach the forest. From here, the path descending the mountain is clear, but rather steep. The trail is marked with red arrows and red and white blazes, but they are more visible if you are ascending, rather than descending. As you descend, the trail turns from a forest trail to a stony trail that can be slick, so watch your step. You will pass two rocks marking the elevation (2041 m and 1871 m), and about halfway down the mountain, you will cross a small clearing with a view of Zuruldi Ridge and Mestia in front of you and Mt. Laila to the right. Continue down the path until you reach an intersection with a painted sign. From here, you have two options to reach Mestia.

Option 2.1: Continue straight on the trail, and soon you will see a short trail on your right leading to a church. Just past the church, the trail descends to meet a larger gravel road with a yellow sign pointing the way up to the left on a different path to the cross. The gravel road leads straight through the town of Lanchvali to Mestia. Once you reach Lanchvali, the road curves to the right, past numerous guesthouses and house museums. You will arrive on the main road of Mestia near Credo Bank. Turn right to reach the town center.

Option 2.2: Turn right on the trail, and continue descending. Turn left at the house with the fence, and follow the switchbacks as a meadow with numerous cow tracks comes into view. The trail will lead you down to a stream, and turns sharply left just before the stream. From here, the path hugs the stream until you reach Mestia. Pass by the paved road and another dirt road on your left, and turn left at the third road, before the stream crossing. Follow the road down to the town center, turning left at the junction, and arriving on the main road right across from Basis Bank.

SIDE TRAIL TOWARDS GULI GLACIER

This trail does not reach the glacier itself, but ends at the moraine before the glacier, passing by a memorial to the alpinists who have perished while attempting to climb Mt. Ushba. From the huts, take the path around the hut to the far left, and you will see a clear trail along the ridgeline. Follow the trail, cross the stream, and continue along the ridgeline for another 650 m until the trail turns sharply up the mountain. The trail remains relatively easy to follow along the way, but beware of numerous other paths nearby leading in different directions. When you reach a small stream, follow it, keeping it on your left, and crossing above it to a large meadow. Here, the trail can be difficult to see, but know that you are going up the mountain. At about 2650 m, the trail becomes easy to spot again, and it continues ascending sharply until a patch of vegetation with a stream beyond. Cross a small branch of the Gulichala River (more like a stream and easy enough to do on foot), and continue along the trail towards the ridge of stones ahead of you. In a short while, the trail begins to ascend rapidly, and ends at the memorial. The trail itself does continue on along the side of the mountain, but it is quite rocky in parts and unclear after a couple hundred meters. Therefore, it is highly advisable to turn back at the memorial. Return to the TCT along the same route.

SIDE TRAIL TO MT. GUL

The route to the summit of Mt. Gul is relatively short (approximately 30 minutes) and makes for a nice side trip on your way to Mestia. From the sign at the saddle, continue straight on the trail up the mountain. The trail will meet a rocky patch, but the rocks are secure and easy to navigate towards the summit. After the rocks, you will see a trail winding up past the summit, but turning back around and leading you to the summit, where you will find a cross and a lovely view of Ushba, Laila, and other surrounding mountains. Return to the main trail the same way.

SIDE TRAIL TO KORULDI LAKES

If you turn left at the dirt road, you will see both a well-worn jeep track and a walking path going left and due north which lead to the Koruldi Lakes. The three lakes are small and not too spectacular in and of themselves, but they do make a lovely, peaceful camping spot with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains. It's approximately 1.6 km and another 350 m of elevation gain to the lakes. Return to the TCT along the same path.