



TRANSCAUCASIAN TRAIL

TCTA 2024
Annual Report

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear friends of the TCT,

If there's one thing I've learned in my five years leading the Transcaucasian Trail Association, it's that no year is ever simple in the Caucasus. Whether it's the constantly shifting geopolitics of the region, new repressive policies against NGOs, or simply the formidable natural barriers of raging rivers, landslides, and tangled forests: there's always something keeping us on our toes.

And yet, for the eighth year in a row, we've made steady progress toward our vision of a long-distance trail that benefits communities and nature across the Caucasus. We built new trail sections, brought together volunteers from around the world, and celebrated the remarkable diversity of this region. As I reflect on 2024, I'm filled with gratitude for this remarkable community of hikers, supporters, volunteers, and partners who made it all possible.

Together, we've turned the ambitious vision of the TCT into a reality that thousands of people can enjoy. Here are just a few highlights from the past year:

- We expanded the Caucasus Conservation Corps into a 5-month exchange program, bringing together participants from Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan to build trails, gain conservation skills, and forge friendships across borders.
- We mapped several new trail sections in Azerbaijan, bringing us closer to a continuous route across the South Caucasus.
- Volunteers from around the globe contributed over 1,000 hours to trail building and maintenance, demonstrating the incredible energy of the TCT community.
- We supported hikers on journeys ranging from single-day explorations to multi-month thru-hikes, sharing the beauty of this region with adventurers from all walks of life.

When we first broke ground on the TCT in 2016, a fully interconnected trail network was just a dream. Now, eight years later, that dream is a reality in progress—one that inspires exploration, fosters cultural exchange, and supports both community development and nature preservation.

Looking ahead, we expect more twists and turns. No year in the Caucasus is complete without them. But no matter what challenges arise, we're excited to complete the final links in the route, grow the TCT community, and continue using the trail as a force for positive change. From supporting local businesses to preserving fragile ecosystems to connecting people across borders, the TCT is so much more than a path—and it's come so far because of you.

Whether you donated, volunteered, hiked, or simply shared the TCT story, you've helped build something extraordinary. Thank you for being on this journey with us— and we hope to see you on the trail in 2025!

Happy trails,
Meagan Neal
Executive Director
Transcaucasian Trail Association



How is the Transcaucasian Trail positively impacting the Caucasus?

“ —

First and foremost, ecotourism development. We have beautiful nature and mountains and diverse ecosystems, all of which have great potential for adventure tourism. People need well-designed trails to explore these beautiful landscapes.

Another important aspect is economic development. Local communities can greatly benefit from the trail because they can generate income by offering accommodation, food, or guide services to hikers. Trails have a long history of connecting communities, and the TCT does a really good job in this regard because most of the TCT goes through villages. This allows hikers to interact more with local people and spend more money in the villages, putting money into the local economy.

Hiking trails also support biodiversity and conservation. Many trail crew participants and volunteers from the city initially don't know how digging in the dirt or cutting back branches that block a trail can help ecosystems. Sustainably planned trails like the TCT help prevent erosion and concentrate hiking traffic on designated paths to avoid trampling sensitive and fragile ecosystems and wildlife habitats. Trails can also connect fragmented habitats. The TCT links 25 protective areas in the South Caucasus region, and that promotes ecological connectivity.

- Ia Iakobashvili, TCT Georgia Partnerships Manager



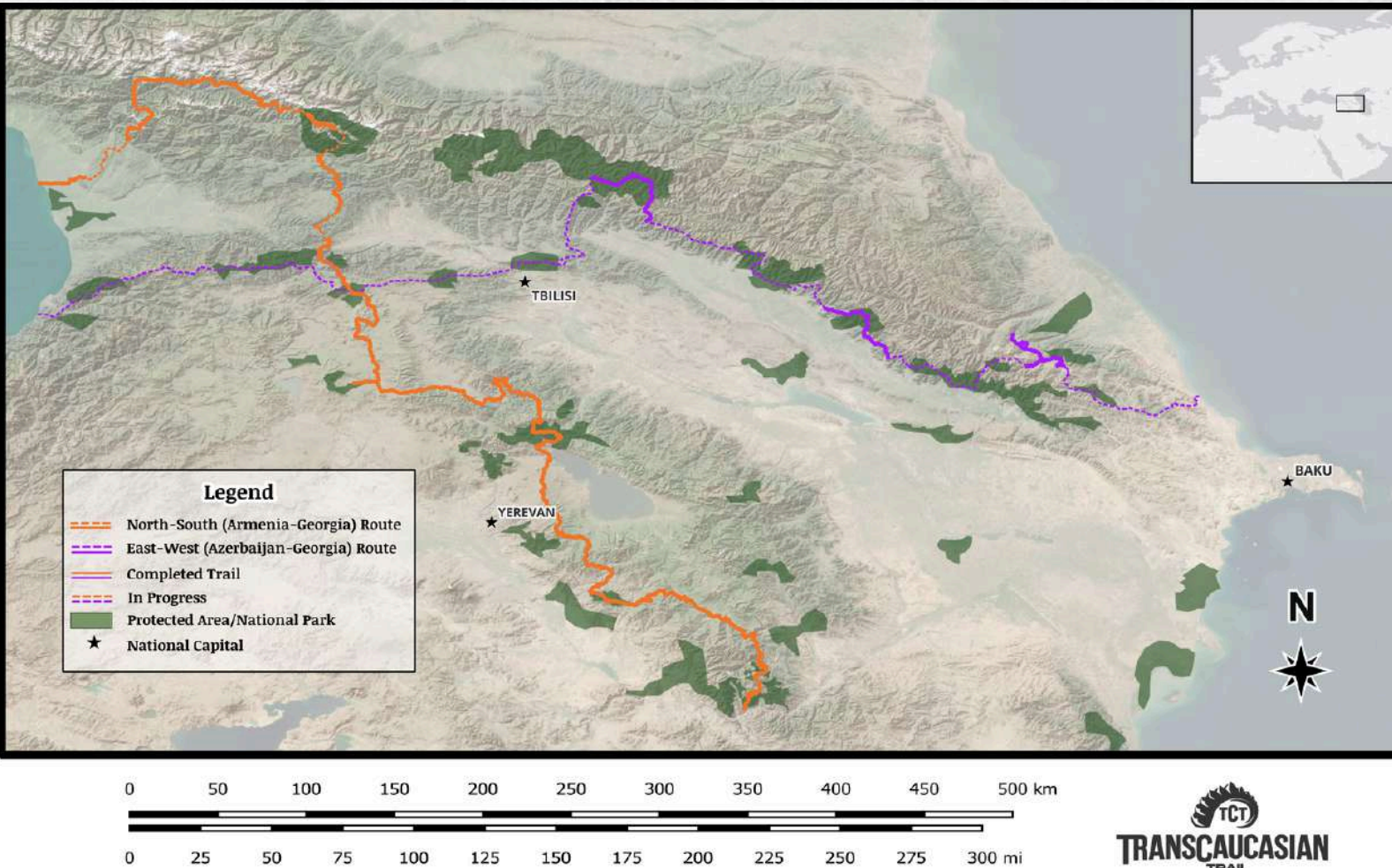
Status of the Trail

When complete, the Transcaucasian Trail will stretch over 3000 km, crossing Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. It will connect more than 20 protected areas, along with countless towns, villages, and cultural landmarks. The trail will serve as a remarkable corridor through the South Caucasus, offering hikers unparalleled access to the region's natural beauty and diverse landscapes.

As of the end of 2024, more than 1750 km of the Transcaucasian Trail has been mapped and published, creating innumerable opportunities for intrepid hikers.

While many sections offer well-trodden paths, other areas require bushwhacking or involve road walks. Much of the route is still unmarked, and hikers should be ready for a sense of exploration and challenge. Bit by bit, we are working to extend the trail and improve the conditions across this remarkable corridor.

In the spring of 2024, we completed major updates to the thru-hiking routes for Armenia and Georgia to prepare for the summer hiking season. These updates were the result of extensive collaboration within the TCT community and set the stage for an unforgettable 2024 hiking season in the South Caucasus.



Armenia Route

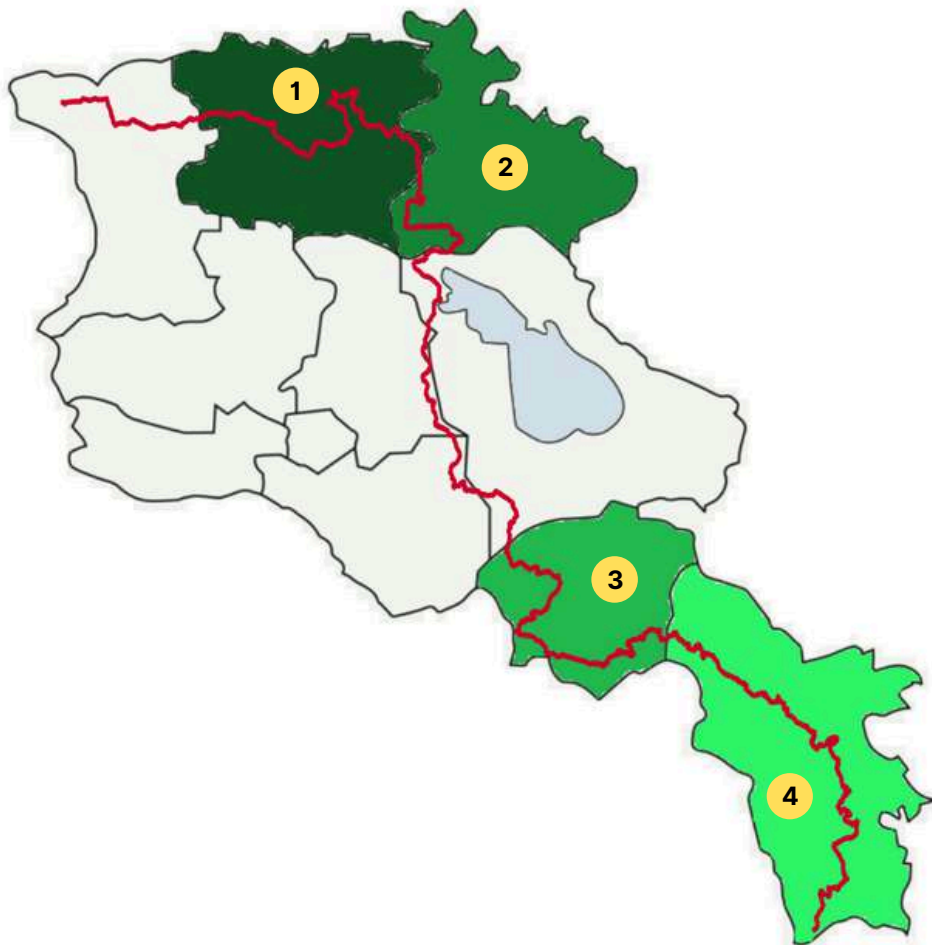
Total Trail Distance: 819kms

Trail Status

The complete TCT route is built and published, but still requires regular maintenance. Several sections of the trail are blazed and waymarked.

2024 Route Updates

The Armenia route saw a couple major changes, including a substantial reroute in Vayots Dzor due to increased tensions at the border around Jermuk. We updated our interactive CalTopo map with a wealth of new information, such as water sources, guesthouses, transport options, and cultural sites, making it easier than ever for hikers to plan their journeys.



We are grateful to our local partner [Trails For Change NGO](#), who, along with the Caucasus Conservation Corps trail crews, conducted all of the trail building and maintenance in Armenia.

2024 Completed Trail Projects

1 Lori

- Blazed & tagged the Stepanavan–Kurtan–Pushkino segment
- Maintained the following sections:
 - Arevatsag Gorge–Tsater
 - Tsater–Kobayr
 - Kobayr–Odzun
 - Odzun–Hagvi
 - Hagvi–Sanahin station
 - Sanahin station–Alaverdi

2 Tavush

- Maintained the following segments & blazed them with TCT tags:
 - Dilijan–Parz Lake
 - Parz Lake–Goshavank
 - Goshavank–Gosh lake
- Rerouted & maintained the Haghartsin–Hidden Waterfall Trail
- Maintained the Hidden Waterfall Trail–Farms segment
- Built 200m of the Apakekar Trail

3 Vayots Dzor

- Maintained the following trail segments:
 - Martiros–Gomk
 - Gomk–Kapuyt
 - Kapuyt–Artavan
 - Amaghu–Noravank

4 Syunik

- TFC assessed these sections in February for future maintenance
 - Harzhis–Tatev
 - Tandzatap–Bardzravan
 - Bardzravan–Tandzaver
- TFC assessed these sections in August for future maintenance
 - Dzorastasn–Arajadzor–Shagarshik
 - Vahanavank–Halidzor–Bekh
 - Verin Vachagan–Baghaburj

Georgia Route

Total Trail Distance: 709km

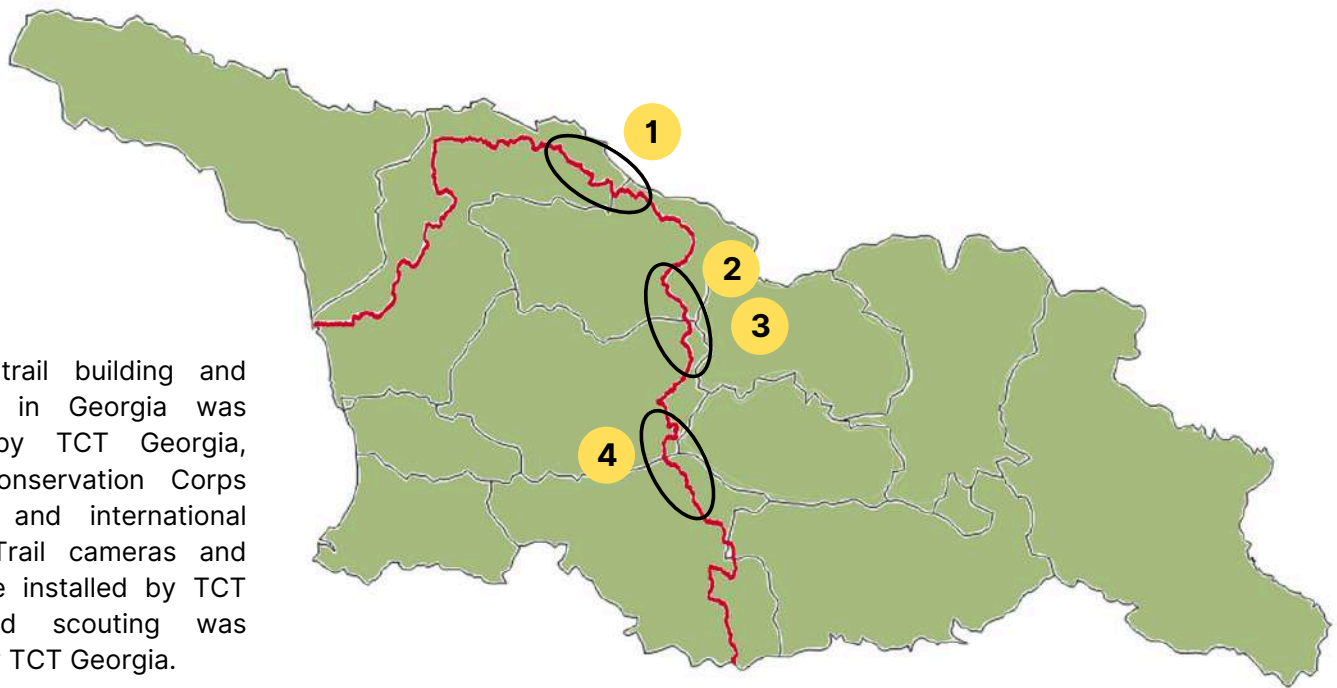
Trail Status

The North–South route is technically hikeable, but involves a lot of bushwhacking and unmaintained trails. We're currently building the Svaneti–Racha connection and scouting for alternate routes in Racha. Both the Upper Svaneti and Imereti–Racha sections are blazed and waymarked. The East–West route is in the planning phase.

2024 Route Updates

The Georgia route was updated based on feedback from 2023 thru-hikers. Thanks to the mapping data and trail conditions they shared, we added new waypoints and valuable details to enhance the hiking experience.

All of the trail building and maintenance in Georgia was conducted by TCT Georgia, Caucasus Conservation Corps trail crews, and international volunteers. Trail cameras and signage were installed by TCT Georgia, and scouting was conducted by TCT Georgia.



2024 Completed Trail Projects

1 Svaneti–Racha Trail Construction

- Site of international volunteer program
- Built 1km of new trail
- Scouted in Racha for a future trail location

2 Blazing

- The CCC blazed 10km of the Imereti–Racha section

3 Directional Sign Installation

- Designed and created 15 burnt wood signs
- Installed signs along the Imereti–Racha section

4 Trail Camera Installation

- Installed trail cameras in Borjomi to capture data about trail use
- Lesson learned: camera placement and regular footage review is important

Azerbaijan Route

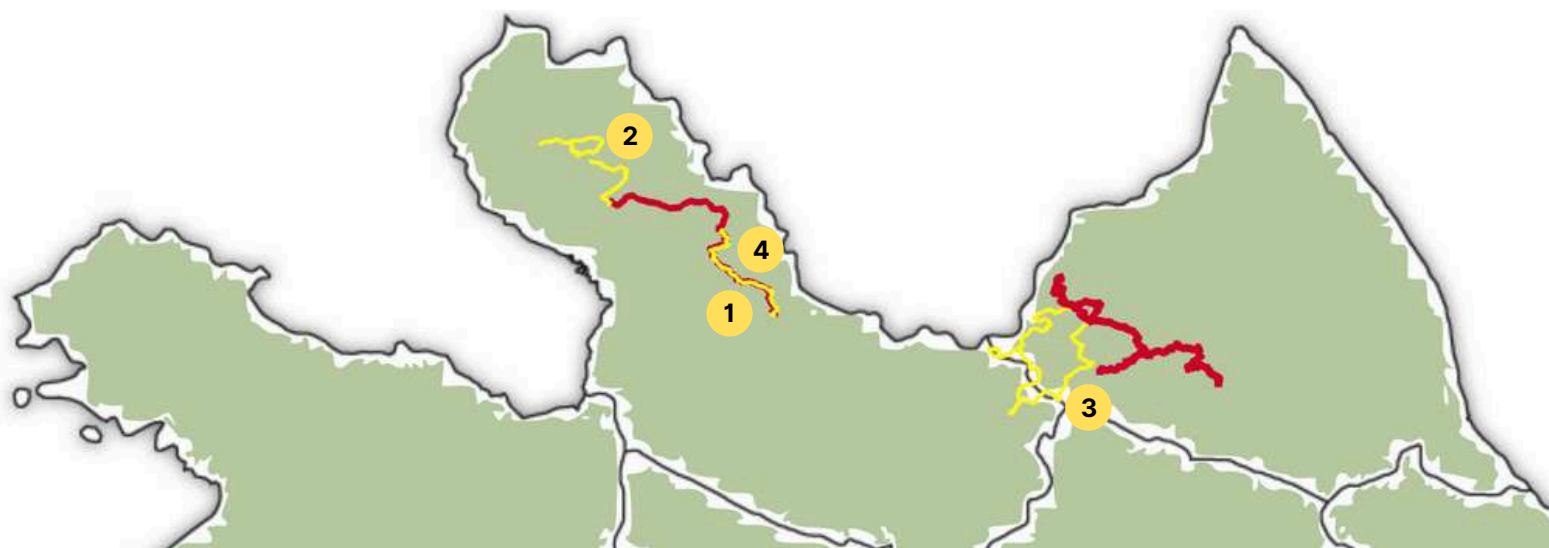
Total Trail Distance: 199km

Trail Status

Two sections (Sheki–Zagatala and Guba–Gusar) are fully open for hikers. TCT staff spent much of this summer scouting and rescouting potential routes and extensions to existing TCT sections.

2024 Route Updates

No new updates to existing routes were made.



2024 Summer Scouting Missions

1 Sheki

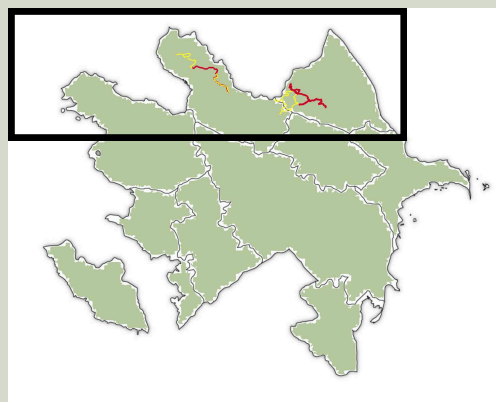
- Rescouted the Dashagil–Oraban connection
- Found existing trail between Dashagil and Oraban
- Rescouted the Kish–Bash Kungut route

2 Sheki, Gakh, and Zaqatala

- Mapped 60 kms of new trails west of the Sheki–Zaqatala route
- Scouted between Gashgachay and Ilisu
- Scouted between Mishlesh and Sabunchu
- Identified possible extensions to the TCT

3 Caucasus Crossing Loop

- Scouted 180km of trail
- Identified new connections, including the northern Shahdag Summit and Bazarduzu Summit



4 2024 Completed Trail Projects

- Brushed, benched, and blazed the TCT along the Bash Dashaghil–Oraban Village segment
- Connected the main TCT trail to last year's work with a new 50m extension
- Built 3 switchbacks & benched 350m of trail
- Planned future work on a rocky section

100 Days: Caucasus Conservation Corps Program

“Thanks to the Caucasus Conservation Corps, I can now connect with people from any culture and find shared interests.

-Nvard, Armenia

“What I enjoyed most about the experience was seeing tourists using the trail that we built. Witnessing the results of our work gave me immense satisfaction and joy

-Farida, Azerbaijan

“I want to build my own wooden guesthouse in Svaneti, where visitors will be able to grow and pick vegetables and fruits with their own hands. I want my guesthouse to have its own hiking trails. The experience gained at CCC will help me to explore the environment and create a network of easy, medium or difficult hiking trails around my guesthouse.

- Ana, Georgia

“It provided me with the opportunity to gain even more experience in trail construction

-Hrach, Armenia



The Caucasus Conservation Corps (CCC) continued to empower young conservation leaders from Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan while strengthening trail systems across the region. The 2024 program expanded considerably from a trail crew leader training program to a 100-day environmental education and leadership program focusing on teamwork, skill-building, and cultural exchange through hands-on trail work. By uniting 12 participants from all three countries and 4 local trainers, the CCC continues to not only build trails, but also foster a shared commitment to conservation and sustainable tourism throughout the South Caucasus.



100 Days: Caucasus Conservation Corps Program

Trail Work Highlights (more details on the [Storymap](#))

- Repaired a bridge along the Hidden Waterfall trail in Dilijan, Armenia
- Rerouted the Tatev–Tandzatap–Tandzaver trail in Syunik, Armenia
- Hosted local and international volunteers in Zeskho, Georgia
- Connected a trail begun last year to the Eh Route in Grizdehne, Azerbaijan, leading to the opening of a brand-new 50 meter section of trail



Percentage of participants who, after the program:

- felt confident designing a sustainable trail: 82%
- can teach others to build a sustainable trail: 91%
- can teach others about Leave No Trace practices: 100%
- felt confident in their knowledge of most aspects of camp life: 100%



“ I developed new trail knowledge, different experiences, and my language level. I learned that I can stay away from my family and my country for months.
–Arzu, Azerbaijan

“ I mastered leadership skills to manage a team alone. I gained more knowledge about the amount of work and time involved in how to build trails.
– Tigran, Armenia

“ I’m proud of learning how to build trails, doing my part for conserving nature, and developing infrastructure for tourism in the country.
– Luka, Georgia

“ When we didn’t know English, we tried to communicate in Georgian so our Georgian friends could understand, and they did the same for us
–Viktoria, Armenia.

Supporters' Treks

Supporters' treks are more than just hikes—they're immersive journeys that showcase the beauty of the Transcaucasian Trail while forging deeper connections between hikers, communities, and the trail itself.

Each 10-day hike is led by a dedicated member of the TCT team, offering participants an insider's perspective on the trail's history, the vibrant cultures it traverses, and the remarkable people who call these regions home. This year, we were thrilled to host supporters' treks across all three countries, host more than 10 participants, and unveil a brand-new itinerary in Northwest Azerbaijan.

Each of this year's hikers left the Caucasus with unforgettable memories. Hikers savored meals at cozy guesthouses, shared stories with gracious local hosts, and soaked in the scenery that makes the TCT so unique. Beyond the landscapes, the opportunity to learn about local traditions and daily life left the deepest impression.

These treks are also vital to the trail's future. As one of our key annual fundraisers, the funds raised from these hikes go directly toward building and maintaining the TCT, ensuring its beauty and cultural significance endure for generations to come.



International Volunteer Program

This summer marked our eighth year hosting international volunteers to build and maintain the Transcaucasian Trail. Three groups of volunteers worked in 9-day hitches in Zeskho, Georgia—a remote ham-let nestled in the Greater Caucasus near the Russian border—on a new trail connecting the stunning regions of Upper Svaneti and Racha.

With no cell service and hours from the nearest town, Zeskho offered a rare chance to unplug and focus on nature, human connection, and the rewarding work of trail building. Our Caucasus Conservation Corps participants joined volunteers from 11 countries, bringing diverse energy and dedication to the project.

The result? A summer filled with hard work, camaraderie, breathtaking scenery, and the satisfaction of part of a brand-new trail. 1000 meters of new trail might not seem like a lot. But when you're building a trail by hand without the luxury of large machinery, this is quite a feat and proves just how difficult building a trail in the Caucasus is.

1,064

volunteer
hours

19

participants

11

countries
represented

1000

meters of
new trail built

Participant Highlight:

“ Actually building part of a trail that
will be used for generations



Sharing the TCT Story

At the heart of the TCTA is a vibrant community of supporters, hikers, and volunteers who inspire and drive our work forward. The trail isn't just about the physical path—it's about the connections we build along the way. In 2024, we expanded our outreach with the TCTA monthly newsletter, gaining 909 new subscribers, and added valuable tools on external platforms to reach a broader audience. The TCT Armenia route debuted on the popular FarOut app, thanks to the work of 2023 thru-hiker Jeff Ballard, and TCT Azerbaijan published over 300km of trails on Wikiloc. A new "Explore the TCT" section on our website also provided essential resources to help hikers prepare for their journeys.

The Trailblazers Program continued to thrive in its third year, fostering a supportive community for thru-hikers along the North-South route through Armenia and Georgia. From active Slack channels to engaging social media campaigns, our efforts strengthened the TCT community, inspiring more people to connect with and celebrate the trail.

1313

TCT Armenia
GPX downloads

7546

Instagram
connections

8237

Facebook
connections

3585

newsletter
subscribers



345

members of the
Trailblazers
community

45

new webpages
published to the
TCT website

10

TCT webpages
translated
to Georgian

860

km of the TCT
published on
FarOut

300

km of trails TCT
AZ published to
Wikiloc



Professional Development

Professional development is vital to the success of the TCT, enabling our team to stay at the forefront of trail building, conservation, and sustainable tourism. By investing in training, workshops, and skill-sharing opportunities, we empower our staff to grow as leaders and experts in their fields. This not only enhances the quality and impact of our work but also ensures that we're building a resilient organization capable of addressing the evolving challenges of conservation and community development in the South Caucasus.

United States Study Tour

In March 2024, the CCC staff embarked on a US study tour in Arizona, supported by a grant from the US Forest Service (USFS). Hosted by the USFS and the Arizona Trail Association, the tour included workshops and training events focused on trail management and community engagement. This experience equipped staff with innovative strategies and best practices to enhance the CCC's efforts in the South Caucasus, ensuring an even greater impact in the years ahead.



Wildfire Prevention Workshop

In August 2024, an Armenian TFC crew leader and a Georgian CCC trainer participated in a wildfire prevention and safety training organized by US Forest Service partners in Urtsadzor, Armenia. This training provided participants with the knowledge and skills to educate trail crew leaders volunteers on wildfire prevention and safe practices, enhancing the safety and preparedness of our teams across the region.



Trail Data Workshop

In August 2024, TCTA and TFC staff, led by TCT Armenia founder Tom Allen, gathered in Dilijan, Armenia, for an intensive session focused on planning scouting and data collection missions, hands-on data gathering, and data analysis. This training equipped our team with the tools and knowledge needed to build a comprehensive trail data system and effectively evaluate sections of the TCT, creating a more streamlined approach to trail development and maintenance.



Events and Outreach

Outreach events are vital for the Transcaucasian Trail, as they help raise awareness, build connections, and inspire support for our mission. By engaging with global audiences at conferences, workshops, and community gatherings this year, we shared the story of the TCT, highlighted its impact, and forged valuable partnerships. These events also provided opportunities to exchange knowledge, attract new supporters, and showcase the Caucasus as a world-class destination for sustainable tourism and cultural exploration.

Royal Geographical Society's Explore Weekend, London



Photograph by Spike Reid

In November, the TCTA team represented the Transcaucasian Trail at the Royal Geographical Society's Explore Symposium in London. Executive Director Meagan Neal delivered a mainstage talk on using expeditions to advance the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and joined TCT Azerbaijan Regional Trail Manager Nazrin Garibova on panels about ethical travel and fieldwork. They emphasized the importance of connecting with local partners, thinking creatively about giving back, and staying open to new opportunities.

World Trails Conference, Ottawa



TCT Azerbaijan CCC Program Planner Gunay Murshud represented the TCT at the 2024 World Trails Conference and served as a World Trails Network ambassador. Gunay delivered an insightful presentation on lessons learned from the CCC program and participated in a panel on engaging youth in trail stewardship. As an ambassador, she connected with diverse attendees and returned with inspiring ideas to enhance the TCT and its programs.

TCT Azerbaijan Trail Talks, Baku



TCT Azerbaijan forged a new partnership with Nature Friends Azerbaijan to host a series of Trail Talks in Baku. The series brought together nature enthusiasts from across the city, and participants learned about environmental issues.

Leadership Changes

This year brought exciting transitions within the Transcaucasian Trail Association's leadership and team, marking a pivotal moment in our journey.

In January, Laura Santos-Bishop took on the role of chairperson for the Board of Directors. With her passion for trail development and extensive leadership experience, Laura is poised to guide the TCTA into its next chapter. We also welcomed Jon Saxe to the Board in October. Jon's blend of technological expertise and nonprofit experience, including his work with a local rails-to-trails organization, makes him a valuable addition to the team.

On the ground, we welcomed Nazrin Garibova as the Regional Trails Manager in Azerbaijan. Since taking on this new role in the summer, her deep knowledge of local trails and culture has been crucial to advancing the TCT's development in Azerbaijan.

At the same time, we bid farewell to two of the TCT's co-founders. Tom Allen stepped down from his role in Armenia as he embarked on a new chapter in London, and Paul Stephens departed as the Director of TCT Georgia. Their vision and dedication have been integral to the TCT's growth, and we are deeply grateful for their contributions.



Jon Saxe



Nazrin Garibova



Tom Allen



Paul Stephens



Partners and Supporters

TCTA Partners



Local Partners in Armenia



Local Partners in Georgia



Local Partners in Azerbaijan



2024 Adopt-A-Kilometer Supporters (\$1000 or more)

Ayka Agayeva

Jon Saxe

Laura Santos-Bishop

Linda Chrisman

Lizzie Schneider

Matthew and Tara Stephens

2024 Financial Report

Revenue

Donations	\$64,027.42
Supporters' Trek Fees	\$29,415.24
TOTAL	\$93,442.66

Expenses

Personnel Compensation	\$59,522.31
Program Expenses	\$5,685.25
Office & Technology Expenses	\$3,465.98
Financial & Regulatory Expenses	\$705.00
Supporters' Trek Expenses	\$28,115.24
TOTAL	\$68,673.54



