



# **Trails For Change NGO**

2018 Annual Report

## **Trails For Change NGO, Annual Report, 2018**

*We believe that trails can increase tourism, create more jobs and make a difference in Armenia. Trails For Change is still the only professional organization in Armenia that plans, designs and builds hiking, running, biking trails to promote tourism in Armenia partnering with various donors and organizations, individuals and experts, state institutions and private sector. As a professional trail builder, the owner of Los Angeles-based Bellfree Contractors company and Trails For Change NGO INC., I decided to make a contribution to my ancestral homeland by building trails and installing the trail building culture in Armenia.*

*Hans Keifer, Founder of Trails For Change NGO*

### **BACKGROUND**

Trails for Change NGO (TFC) is a non-profit organization funded by grants and donations with the mission to develop the tourism and outdoor recreational infrastructure throughout Armenia, by designing, building, and maintaining a network of trails throughout the country. The TFC team came together when International expert Hans Keifer, a professional trail builder from California with decades of experience, was brought in to provide training and guidance for the Transcaucasian Trail (TCT) project in 2017. During the trail-building process, Hans saw huge gaps in Armenia's sports and recreation infrastructure and decided that the best way to improve these problems was to start the TFC nongovernmental organization (NGO).

### **ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW**

The broader goal of TFC's trail building is to develop opportunities for rural communities to see the economic impacts as a result of an increase in tourism and to promote rural tourism ventures. The organization has the objective to diversify tourism opportunities in Armenia, making the rich nature and diverse landscapes more alluring to foreigners and locals, promoting healthy lifestyles and adventure tourism. Through the sustainable trails that TFC constructs, maintains and restores, tourists and locals alike have an easier and more appealing way to explore the regions, wander in the breathtaking mountains, visit historic cultural sights, connect with the locals, and have unforgettable experiences.

**ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**



## **2018 PROJECTS AND RESULTS**

Trails For Change has had a very busy and productive year! We have had so many successful projects in Dilijan NP, Syunik region, Vayots Dzor region and also in Artsakh.

We held our first fundraiser this year! The fundraiser/bike tour of the Janapar Trail was a lot of fun and very successful! You can read about it [here](#). Thanks to our generous donors We raised over \$15,000 for repairs and reroutes on the Janapar Trail!



Other projects were funded through Grants from AGBU, Hike Armenia, IDeA Foundation as well as generous donations from Armsoft and Bellfree Contractors. We also worked closely with partner organizations WWF and the Wesser Foundation on the Barev Trails Project and also with the Transcaucasian Trail Association to continue this epic trail!



Our team continues to grow and we are very proud of all of our team members! It has been wonderful to watch as they have become more experienced, productive and dedicated! We expect 2019 to be even more successful!

In addition to our regular crew based in Yerevan we have employed and trained three locals from Dilijan and two from Artavan. They are all hard workers and we hope our organization or another organization can employ them in the future building and maintaining trails!

Many of the trails we built will be on the new map of Dilijan NP coming soon as well as the [Hike Armenia](#) website and app! You can also check the Hike Armenia site and app for home stay options in these Villages and to find guides.

## **Vayots Dzor Project**

In Partnership with Hike Armenia we have been busy restoring historic trails, building new trails, installing trail signs and blazes in the Vayots Dzor region. It is such a scenic area with many interesting historic trails. We now have several loops ready for your hiking and or biking adventures!

### ***The Artavan Loop Trail:***

*Distance: 10 km*

*Difficulty: moderate*



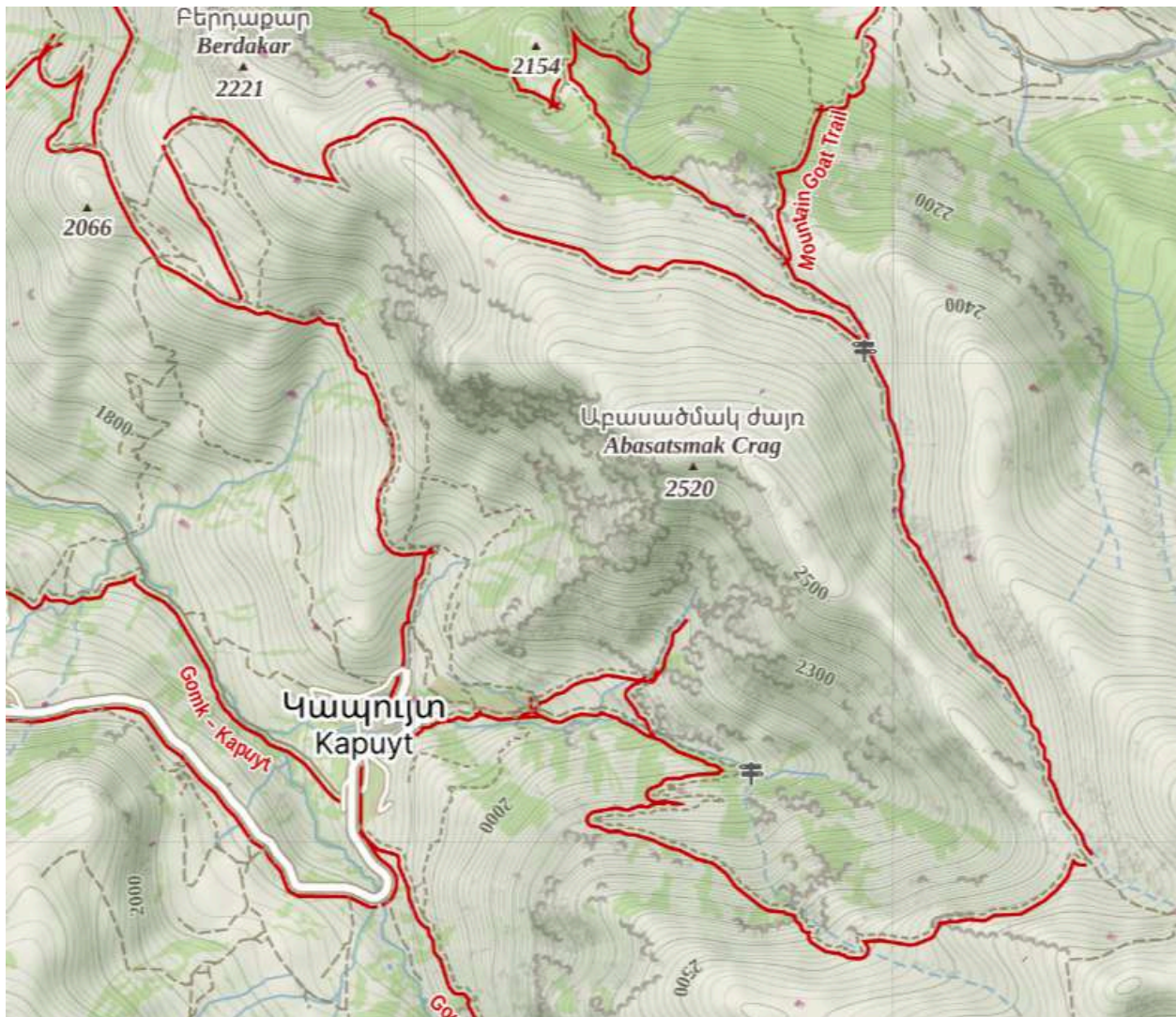
This loop can be accessed from Artavan Village or from the Kapuyt Loop Trail. This trail is a combination of newly built trail, dirt roads and two historical trails one of which we are told was part of the Silk Road, the other historical trail is a rocky trail which can provide quite a challenge for mountain bikers! The loop gives you spectacular views of

Gomk, Kapuyt, Artavan, Rock formations and the heavily forested area on the Artavan side of the mountain. If you look carefully you may be able to spot Bezoar Goats in the area. It's amazing how the scenery varies from one side of the mountain to the other.

### ***Kapuyt Loop Trail***

*Distance: 13.9 km*

*Difficulty: moderate*



This loop begins in the Village of Kapuyt. From there you can hike up the canyon or take a side trip on the Arch Trail to see the many Khachkars including some carved into a large stone wall and the natural stone arch. As you continue up the canyon the trail

turns onto what appeared to be an old trail after a few hundred meters you turn onto a newly built segment which will bring you up to another historical trail with many old rock retaining walls and armoring. It is obvious a lot of hard work went into this trail. We are told the trail was built in the 12th century but have not been able to confirm this. The trail is very steep so be ready for a good workout. You will pass a few springs along the way. Near the top you will come to an old road bed which may have very well been part of the silk road and this trail was likely a connector from Gomk/Kapuyt to the Silk Road.

There are some great places to pitch a tent near the top. From the top of the trail you will follow a dirt road to a connection with the Artavan Loop Trail. At this point you have the option to continue to Artavan or complete the loop to Kapuyt. There is also another option lower on the mountain to continue to Artavan. The lower part of the loop as you near Kapuyt Village follows dirt roads, old trails and cow trails. Navigation could be tricky especially in spring time when the grass is high and may cover the blazes.

### **Arch Trail**

*Distance: .4 km*

*Difficulty: easy*



This trail is a short out and back to a beautiful natural stone arch. Behind the arch is a spring with water flowing year round.

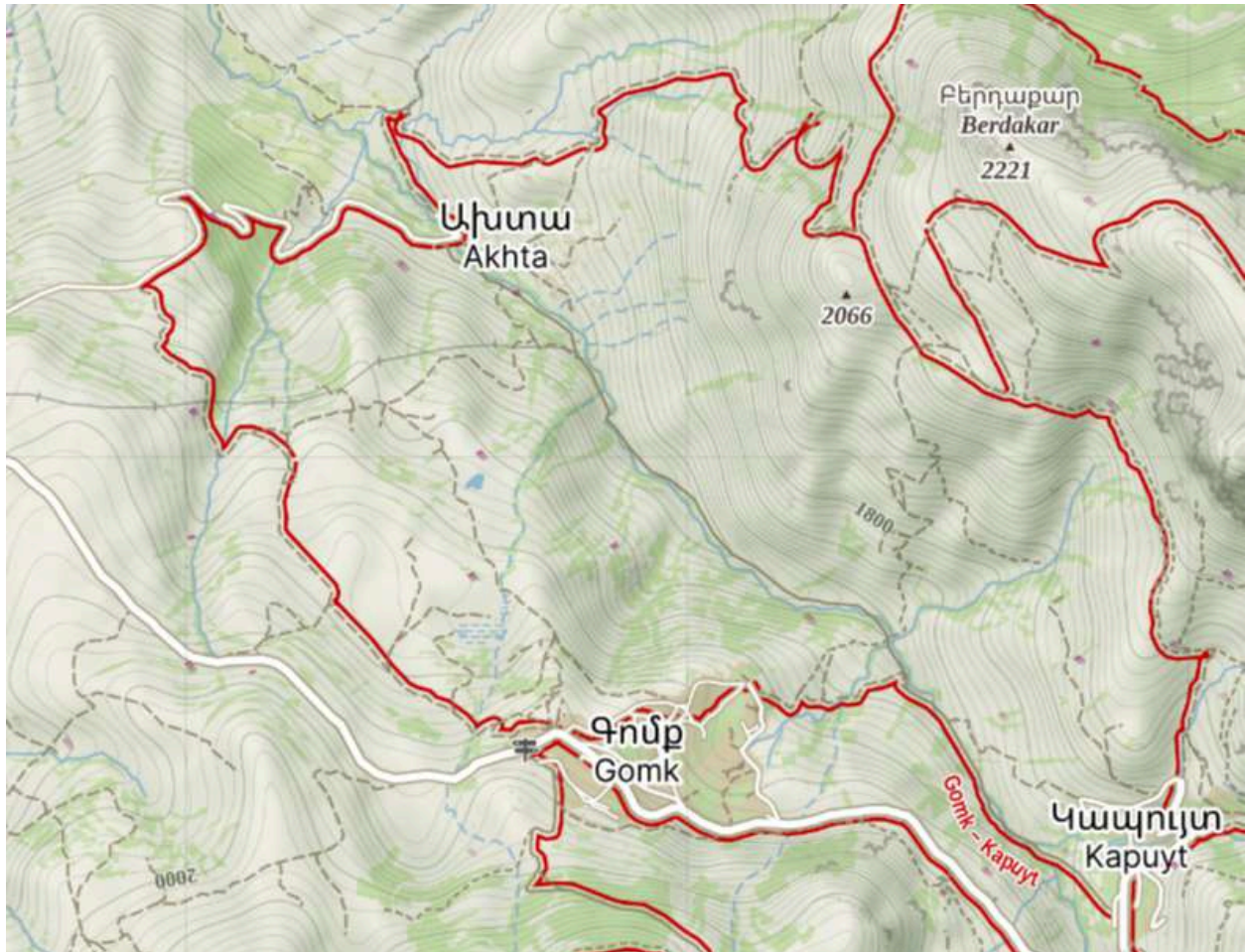


### **Gomk/Akhta Trail**



*Distance: 9.5 km.*

*Difficulty: moderate*



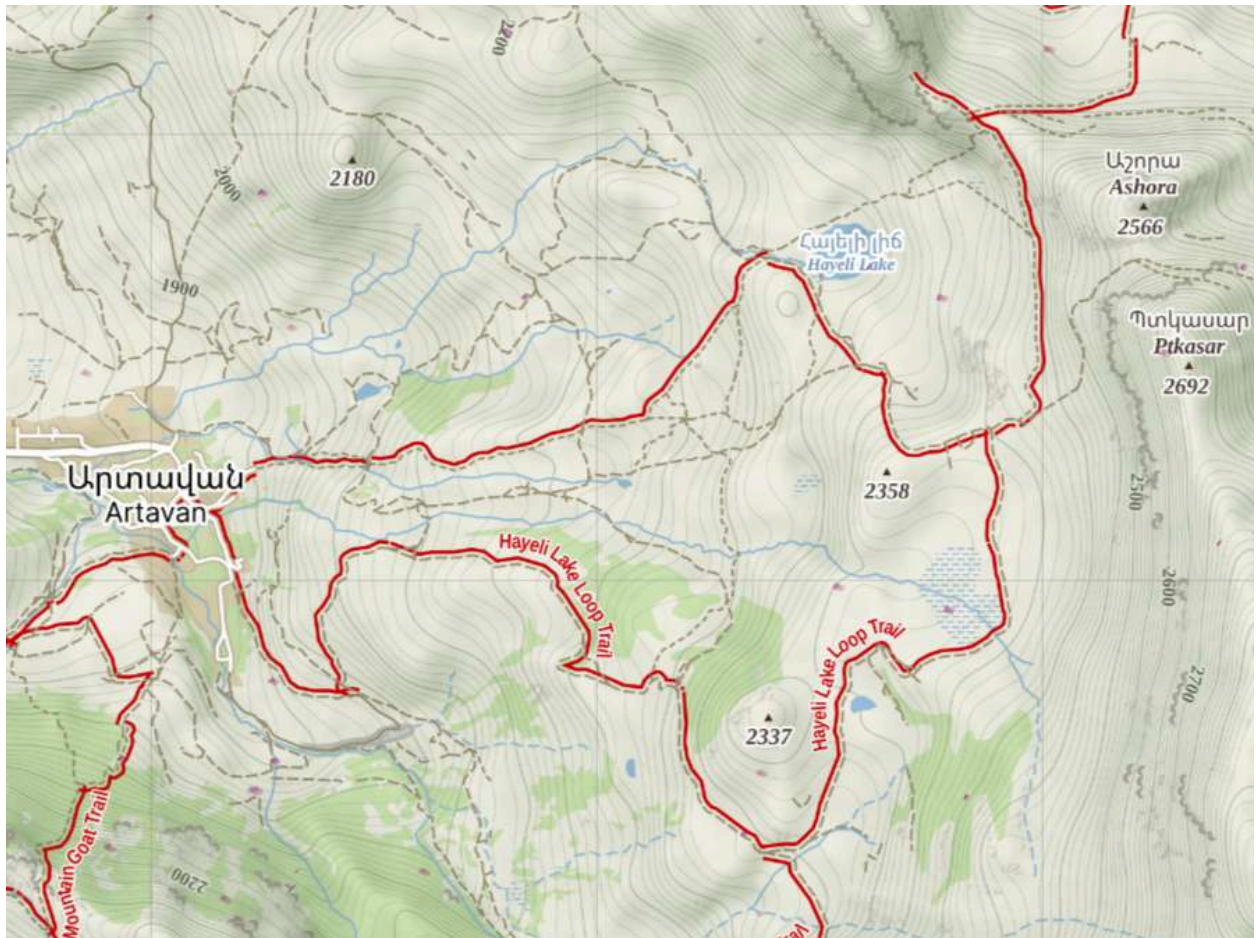
This trail follows old dirt roads from Gomk Village through the ruins of the historic Akhta Village. Here there are many options for camping. The trail can be done as an out and back to Akhta Village or continue up the dirt road to connect with the Artavan Loop Trail or the Kapuyt Loop Trail.



## Karmir Lake Loop

Distance: 8.1 km.

Difficulty: moderate



This trail follows jeep roads from Artavan Village to Karmir Lake. You can continue past the Lake to the Fortress Trail. From there you can continue up the trail to the Fortress though the last few hundred meters to the Fortress does not have a trail leading to it (hopefully we can build this in the spring of 2019) you can go cross country to reach it. The other direction on the Fortress Trail will lead you to a dead end at a small but scenic waterfall.



## **Iron Age Trail**

*Distance: 2.2 km.*

*Difficulty: moderate*



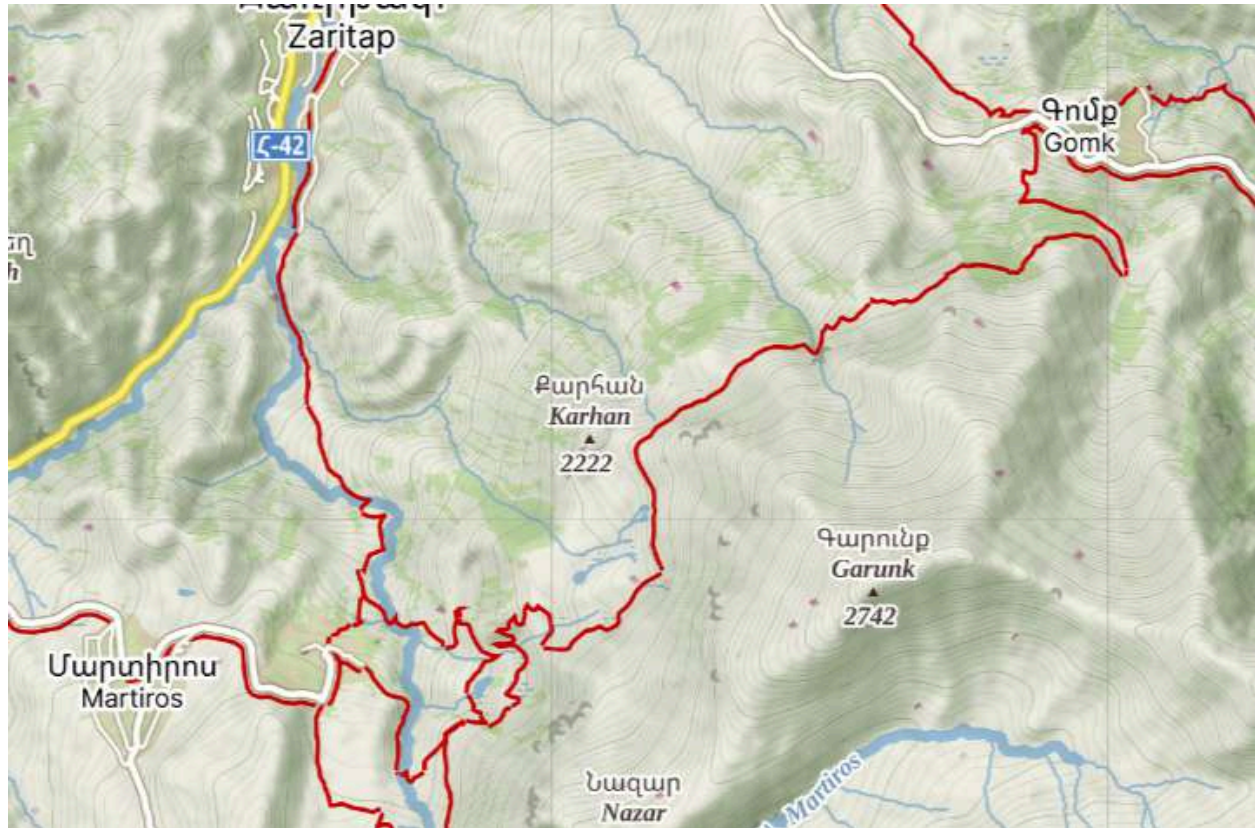
This is another old, perhaps ancient trail. It has some steep segments. This trail connects the Mountain Goat Trail to the Artavan Loop Trail. It goes through an area with signs of early Iron working.



### **The Transcaucasian Trail (TCT)**

*Segment Distance: 12.7 km.*

*Difficulty: moderate*



In partnership with Hike Armenia and a Grant from AGBU a new segment of the TCT is now complete from Martiros to Gomk. There is approximately 3 km of newly built trail with the remainder on jeep roads, cow trails and ancient trails. The TCT also shares parts of other trails listed above so you can hike on it all the way to Artavan.

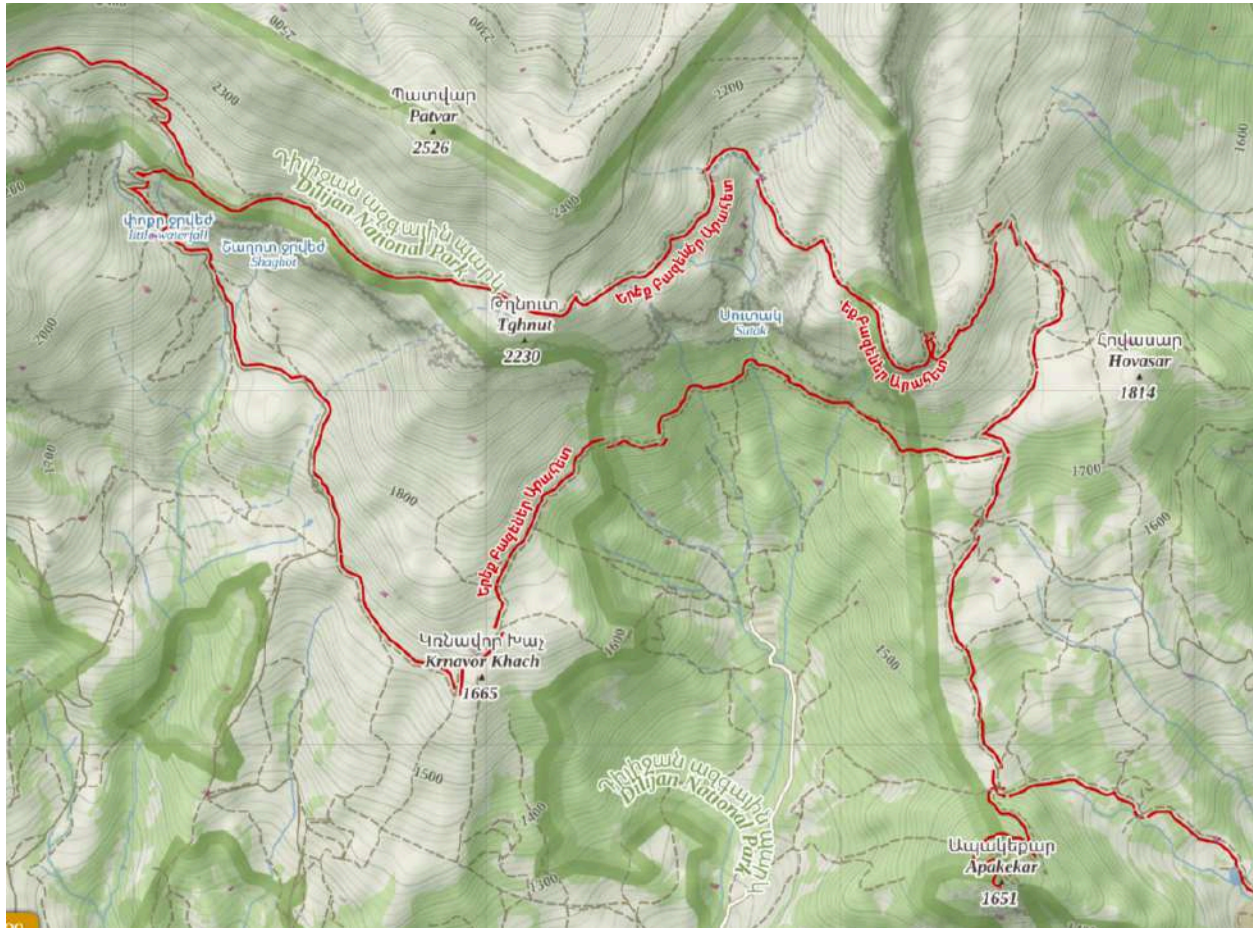
### **Barev Trails Projects**

This project is one of our favorites. It's a result of the partnership between [WWF Armenia](#), [Wesser Foundation](#) and TFC. Besides building and maintaining new trails, bridges and viewpoints, it also gives us an opportunity to promote Armenia in a new way to dozens of international volunteers. This year we had two successful Barev Trails projects. One project in the Tatev area and the second in the Noravank area. During these projects trails were restored, bridges were constructed, signs installed,

kiosks with maps and other information installed in several locations, trails cleared of brush and blazed.

## **Dilijan National Park**

### **Three Hawkes Trail**



*Distance: 17.5 km.*

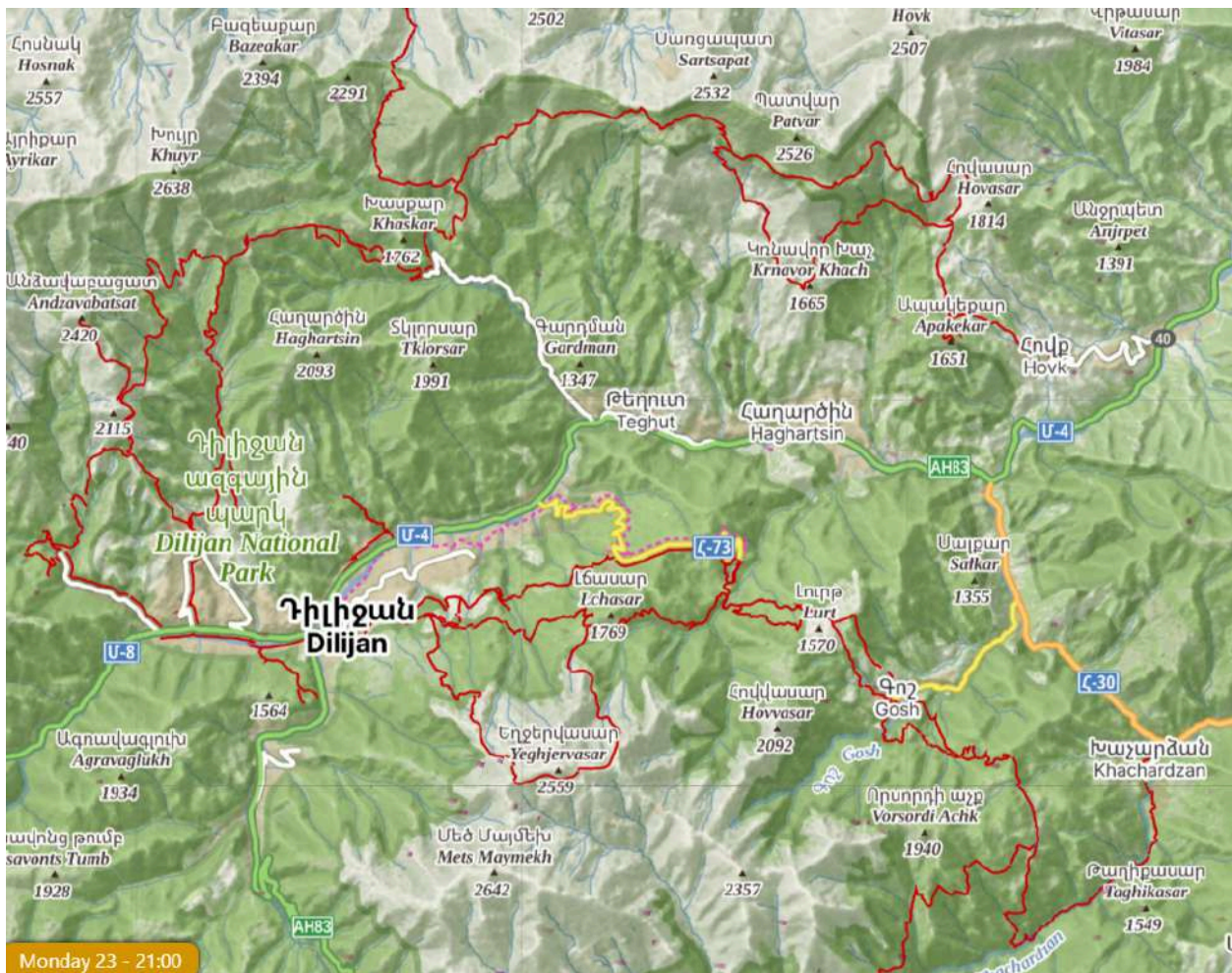
*Elevation gain: 722 m loss 723m*

*Difficulty: difficult*

This trail connects two ancient trails with existing jeep roads to form a loop. It connects to and shares part of the TCT. As you approach the cliffs you would never guess there is a trail through there. As you get closer you will begin to see a trail with many stone steps that switchbacks through the cliffs. It was an incredible amount of work the ancient ones put into this trail!

## Dilijan Community Development Initiative

In partnership with the IDeA Foundation we have built several trails, repaired and marked several old trails and jeep roads in Dilijan National Park as well as adding 10 toilets.



### Parz Lake Loop

*Distance: 1.6 km.*

*Elevation gain: 74m loss 75m*

*Difficulty: easy*

This trail starts from the Parz Lake Road and loops around the Lake to the restaurant and picnic area where you can Zipline, rent a small paddle boat or just relax, eat and

drink at the restaurant. This is also a fun trail to mountain bike or trail run. From the Lake it is a short walk to connect to the segments of the TCT built in 2017.

### ***Apakeqar Trail***

*Distance: 9.3 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 95m/-199m*

*Difficulty: Moderate*

The trail is a mix of existing dirt roads and newly built single track trails. It starts from Hovk village. After a short walk in the village you will start hiking through old roads until you reach the forests. There is a small beautiful lake near the trail, where you can have a rest while admiring nature. When you come out from the forest an amazing view of Ijevan Mountain Range will open in front of you, then you will start hiking on a newly built trail through the forest until you will reach the top of Apakeqar Mountain. Dilijan National Park is in front of you, one of the best views that you will find in Dilijan National Park. You can complete this hike as an out and back or continue to Haghartsin Village.

Many types of birds can be seen or heard here. This is also a really fun trail to mountain bike or trail run!

### ***Hidden Waterfall Trail***

*Distance: 1.5 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 95m/-199m*

*Difficulty: Moderate*

This trail is a short hike from the road near Haghartsin Monastery to the hidden waterfall. A good part of the trail is a newly constructed single track trail. We have also built a small bridge that allows you to get close to the hidden waterfall without getting your feet wet.



### ***Yew Grove Trail***

*Distance: 3.15 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 202m/-202m*

*Difficulty: Easy*

For hiking this beautiful trail you need to reach Aghavnavank Village, a tiny and old village on the main road to Chambarak. This is a very nice trail which runs next to a protected area of Yew trees. On the way you will also see the old Aghavnavank Monastery. There is an official camping area next to the trail.

### ***Whispering Waterfall Trail***

*Distance: 3.6 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 243m/-258m*

*Difficulty: Moderate*

The trail starts from the administrative office of Dilijan National Park. The first section of the trail runs next to the railway, so you need to be careful, not to cross the railway.



After that you enter the forest and will hike next to a river. You will find beautiful rocks and old paths while hiking. the most interesting site on the trail awaits you at the end. That is the 7 meters high waterfall which whispers on the rocks all year round.

### ***Tripeak Trail***

*Distance: 6.09 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 907m/-909m*

*Difficulty: Moderate*

This trail will take you to the top of Ayrikar Mountain. If you are lucky and above the clouds, you will see the "cloud ocean" in front of you. The trail starts from Shamakhyan area and enters the forest. On the way you can see eagles and other types of birds.

### ***Skywalk Trail***

*Distance: 16.2 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 1187m/-1241m*

*Difficulty: Difficult*

This is one of the most challenging but also the most beautiful hiking trails of Dilijan National Park. The trail starts from one end of Dilijan town. One section of the trail runs parallelly with the Transcaucasian Trail. Then you will climb Mount Yeghjervasar. From the top you can see all of Dilijan town looking so tiny. If you are lucky you can see red deer in the forests.

### ***Natural Pilgrimage Trail***

*Distance: 11.7 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 779m/-854m*

*Difficulty: Difficult*

The trail starts from one of the ends of Dilijan called Shamakhyan district which used to be a separate village for ages. You'll hike through many farms in the river valley and will start hiking up to the highest points of DNP (Papakhqar Mountain). The very beautiful scenery opens in front of you from this point. Then you'll start going down to the forests and will end in Haghartsin Monastery complex, one of the most visited sites of Tavush region.

### ***Medieval Monasteries Trail***

*Distance: 3.8 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 246m/-245m*

*Difficulty: Moderate*

This trail is famous for its monasteries which are very old and beautiful. This is a loop trail, so you start and end in the same location. Matosavank is on one side and Jughtakvank on the other side of the trail. You'll cross the river by an old metal bridge which is safe. There is one part of the newly built trail that we built to bypass the very steep muddy sections of the old jeep road.

This video shows some of the construction of this trail.

### ***King of the Forest Trail***

*Distance: 2.86 km*

*Elevation gain/loss: 180m/-255m*

*Difficulty: Easy*

This trail located in Dilijan town is a very good short-day hiking trail for visitors to the town. There are a couple of steep sections on the trail, where you need to be careful especially in the wet season. On one of the ends of the trail there is a cave, where many years ago a bear lived, but now it is abandoned. There are interpretive signs along the trail where you can read about Dilijan National Park ecosystem and more. The name of the trail came after a tree which has a head like a king, which had been carved by a local guy.

## **Artsakh**

### ***Janapar Trail***

*Distance 280 km from Vardenes to Hadrut*

This trail was the first long distance trail in the region. Put together in 2007 by connecting historic trails and jeep roads. The trail was never completely marked and many segments that had been marked were now faded.

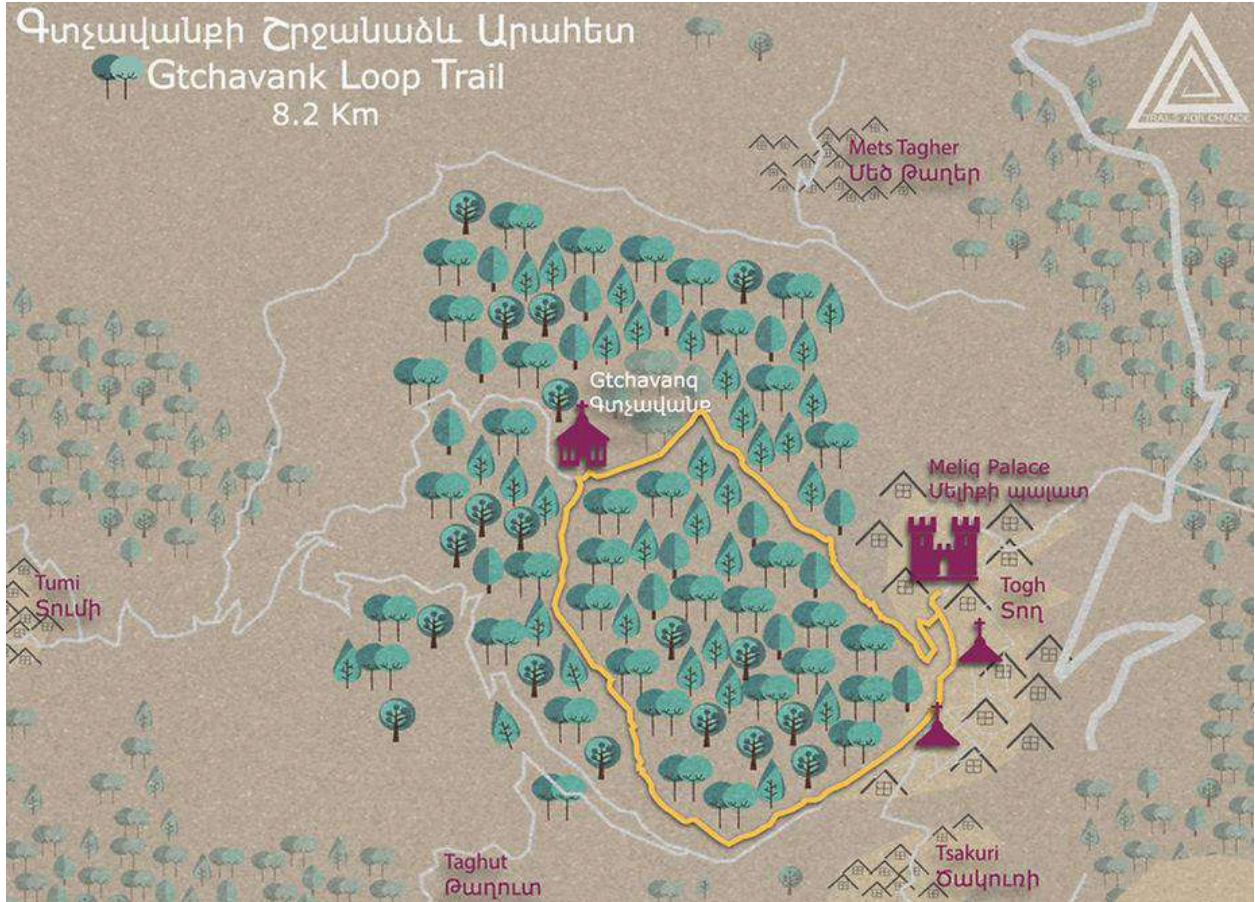
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With funding from the Artsakh Government and our fundraiser/bike tour we removed the old blazes and signs from the trail and installed new signs and blazes. For the first time the trail is now completely marked. We also cleared overgrown brush from the entire trail, rerouted the segment from Zuar to Gandzasar and another segment near Karmir Shuka that was on dirt and asphalt roads. This segment now goes through Sargsashen Canyon which is a beautiful canyon. This is a historic trail that had not seen much use in many years.



### ***Gtichavank Loop Trail***

During our work on the Janapar Trail in the Togh area we discovered many historic trails in the Togh State Reserve. In the spring of 2018 we decided to clear the Gtichavank Loop trail of heavy brush. In the summer of 2018 we marked the trail with painted red and white blazes from Togh Village to Gtichavank Monastery. We will return in the spring of 2019 to mark the remainder of the trail. There are also several other historic trails in the area that we are planning to work on in 2019.



We have many plans for 2019! With the help and support of our partner organizations, sponsors and all our supporters we are geared up for a very successful 2019!

THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!