



SHATILI (KACHU TRAIL) LEGEND

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Mountain and Elevation | Buildings and Settled Area | Hydro power station |
| River | ○ Village | KACHU TRAIL |
| Local Road | ⊙ Abandoned Village | ● Atkhira (meadow) |
| Path | Forest Area | ● Kachu (Tkhoru) Fortress |
| | Grass Area | ● Shatili - bridge (start/end point) |
| | Ground Plan | MAIN VILAGE COMMUNICATION |
| | | SAMAMATSO GZA |

KACHU TRAIL (distance 1850 m)

Shatili - Ground Plan



The map was designed in frame of the project Enhancement of Tourism Potential of Mountainous Regions in Georgia as a Means of their Development (donor Czech Development Agency, implementor Agora CE) 2017

Source publication: *Sakartvelos istoriisa da kulturis dzeplta aghtseriloba 2*, Tbilisi 2008, page 333

After a demanding hike from Tusheti through Atsunta Pass, or heading for it from the direction of Piraketa Khevsureti or Arkhoti, you will definitely deserve one day's rest in the village-fortress of Shatili, the most impressive settlement of Pirikita Khevsureti. If you are going to spend a weekend with your family visiting the stunning fortified villages of Shatili and Mutso, consider exploring their environs through several so-far neglected, yet attractive and not very difficult trails. Take into account the hospitality of proud and kind Shatilians and stay overnight in one of the guesthouses, getting acquainted with Khevsurian cuisine and traditions. Several of the guesthouses have even been established in the medieval dwelling towers in the very heart of the village.

While hiking or riding on horseback, you will be convinced that the surroundings of Shatili also have more than their fair share of natural beauties and cultural traditions.

Pirikita Khevsureti and Shatili

Shatili (approx. 70 inhabitants, main family: Chincharauli) is definitely the most vivacious village in Pirikita Khevsureti region. Historically the mountainous region of Khevsureti is divided by the Greater Caucasus range into two halves: the northern one is called Pirikita (literally, "on the other side [of the mountains]"), whereas the southern part is referred to as Piraketa (literally, "on this side [of the mountains]") Khevsureti. Already since the Middle Ages, Pirikita Khevsureti has been a Georgian ethno-cultural and linguistic outpost on the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Range. The free and fierce inhabitants of Shatili, as well as those of Mighmakhevi Gorge (in the area of Ardoti and Mutso) and the most remote Arkhoti Valley, have served as borderers, defending the frontiers of Georgia against frequent incursions from neighbouring Chechen (Kist) communities. The nature of these clashes and blood feuds—but also the mutual respect between the heroes fighting on the different sides of the struggle—are best described in the masterpiece of Georgian literature, the poem *Aluda Ketelauri* written by Vazha-Pshavela in 1888. The tower houses of Shatili serve as stunning scenery for the poem. Regardless of their constant struggles, a common ethical code, based on revering the same shrines and exhibiting similar patterns of behavior, helped to preserve a balance between the feuding communities. The respect for the sanctuaries, where the hero deities of mountain syncretic religion were jointly worshipped, stayed almost intact until the recent spread of radical Islamic beliefs in some parts of Chechen society, compounded by the rigid views of some representatives of the Georgian Orthodox clergy. One of the best examples of common religious practice was the annual feast at Anatoris Jvari (Anatori Cross) shrine, with joint sacrifices and prayers. And last but not least, the Pirikita Khevsur and Chechen (Kist) communities share at least part of their ethnogenesis with one another. Thus Pirikita Khevsurs owe their origin to the Khevsurs expanding from *Bude Khevsureti* (Core, literally "Nest" Khevsureti) on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus and intermingling with the earlier local Chechen speaking communities, who genuinely Georgianized, yet left many Chechen toponyms, mainly in Shatili and its environs. Pirikita Khevsurs traditionally make their living mainly by cow-herding with some additional subsistence agriculture. The harsh living conditions have led to the continual resettlement to the lowlands, and the loss of their traditional economy has been compensated at least partly by the development of tourism infrastructure.

The dense Shatili tower settlement is situated on the promontory above the confluence of the stream of Shatilis Khevi with the Arghuni River at the altitude of about 1400 m. Then after about 5 km, the Arghuni leaves the territory of Khevsureti and flows into neighbouring Chechnya. The Shatili landscape is visually dominated by Khomate Mountain (2175 m) to the South. The area of Shatili has been included in the newly established Khevsureti National Park.

SHATILI SIGHTS

Let's have a stroll in the narrow streets of the old village of Shatili. The highlights of the route will be briefly described according to the numeration shown on the ground plan (see on the opposite side of the leaflet). Regardless of the general hospitality and tolerance of the Shatilians, we should obey some behavioral rules during our visit, mainly connected with the shrines and cultic life of the community. The required behaviour in the area of the shrines is common for all East Georgian sacred places. Women are not allowed to enter the precincts of the shrine. Men are sometimes permitted to enter the yard of the shrine and to light a candle there, but even for them it's prohibited to touch the sacred structures or to enter the interior. By the way, the most vigorous tradition bearers of East Georgian mountain syncretic religion are Khevsurs. In this cult, older traditions of venerated heroic deities intermingle with Christian saints, both are prayed to for the abundance and luck of the community. Pay attention to *Samamatso gza* ("Men's way") marked in orange on the ground plan. Since it passes the sacred places (shrine and assembly place), it is reserved for men only.

① church of Mother of God (new church, testifying to the Orthodox religious revival in Georgia in the independence period); ② cemetery (on the opposite side of the plain, called Vake; besides traditional gravestones, one also finds the graves of Russian soldiers); ③ Goris Angelozi (Angel of the Hill) shrine on the mound above the cemetery—these precincts are inaccessible; note the ash trees, venerated as sacred trees by Georgian mountaineers; ④ Deda Ghvtismshobeli (Mother of God Shrine), main Shatili shrine—these precincts are completely inaccessible; ⑤ the place where the first Shatili church was built in 19th century during the spread of official Orthodoxy; ⑥ Sakvabe ("place for the cauldron", brewery, where the beer for the religious feast of Atengenoba is prepared); ⑦ Sapekhvno (gathering place for the men, where they discussed village matters, while at the same time making gunpowder, shoes and domestic tools); ⑧ Shua Sopeli ("Village Centre"), small square in the heart of the village; the gatherings of women took place nearby; note the scratched pictograms (displaying a hero-demon fight and God's helping hand) on the walls of one of tower houses – *kvitkiri*; in another house there is a small museum with ethnographic items; ⑨ Jalabauri's tower-house with preserved *samrevlo* (birthing cell) with a small entrance from the exterior; ⑩ spring (Aleksi's Spring); ⑪ remnants of the water mills on Shatilis Khevi; ⑫ Tsminda Giorgi (St. George Shrine); ⑬ Anatoris Nishi (the branche/dependency/chapel of the Anatori Shrine), immediately to the right of bigger shrine of Tsminda Giorgi.

Kachu Fortress Trail

Our trail is a short circular route starting and ending in Shatili near the main bridge. The overall distance is about 2,5 km and it can be easily done in 1,5 hours including the sightseeing in the fortress. The elevation difference between the start-point and the fortress is about 100 m.

The narrow path will lead us through Maushta slope to the fortress (former fortress village, composed by four tower dwellings) on the high cliff above Arghuni. Since a landslide destroyed the part of the path directly down the hill below the fortress (now it's impassable due to the mudslide above the river), we are obliged to walk back a little bit on the Atkhira meadow and go back again to the bridge by another branch of the same path, eventually joining our ascent path.

The other name of *Kachu Fortress* used to be *Tkhori Fortress* (from the word *tkhori* "cord spool"). Once upon a time, enemies besieged Kachu and destroyed their water supply system from a spring by digging. The Kachuians found a smart solution: They used a cord spool, each time secretly dropped it to the river of Arghuni, then pulled it up and after squeezing it used the water for drinking.