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Posted by [Didar Ali](#)

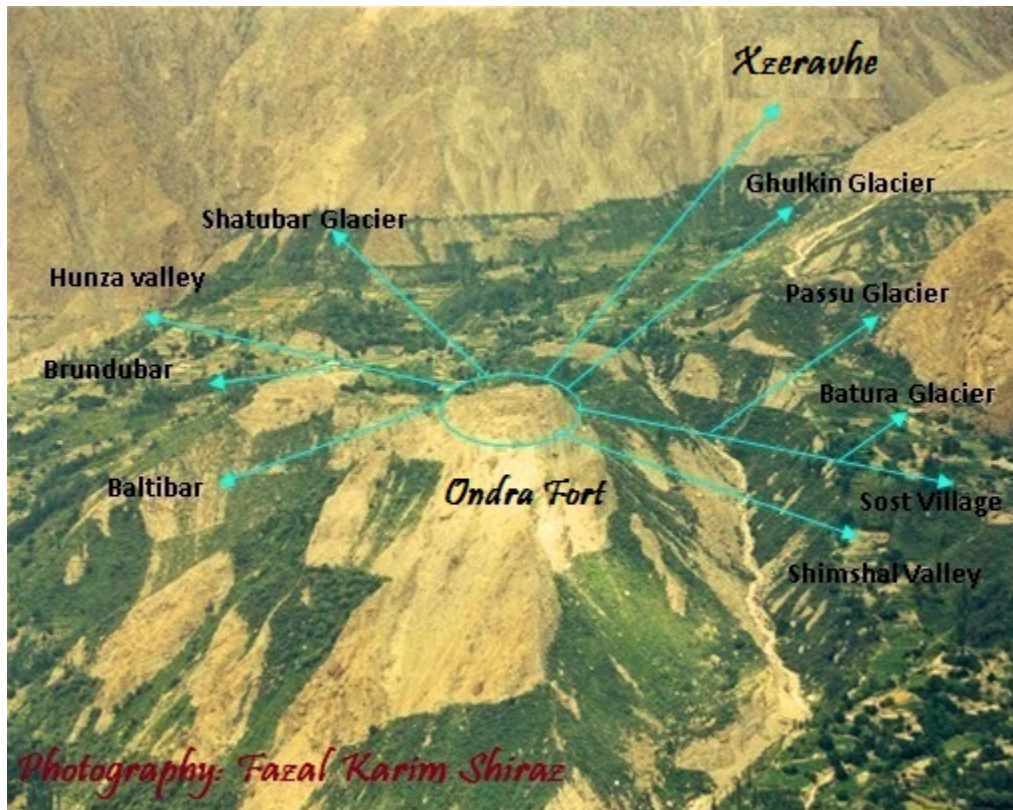
Cultural Significances and Economic Prospective of Ondra Fort in Gulmit Gojal (Part 1)

Historical and cultural sites are places that are acknowledged for their importance in nation's history. Historic sites provide a tangible link with the past and these sites are associated with an event, a person, a place, or the built heritage. They are part of nation's heritage and contribute to define its identity.

Historical sites are main asset of any society which imitates their identity and an individual can have a good grasp on his past and his forefather's lives, so this research report revealed some of the facts about the existence of the Ondra fort, which is situated in a wonder full panoramic scene. Hence forth being a student of management sciences and due to interest in the cultural values, customs and archaeological remains I opted for this topic. There were many other dimensions due to which this research report has great significance. As a novice researcher it helped me to learn how a research study should be done with proper arrangements.

What does Ondra Qlaa (Fort) or Ondareh Qileh mean?

Ondra Qlaa (Wakhi) or Ondareh Qileh (Persian) is combination of words emanate from Turkish, Wakhi and Persian languages "ON" is Turkish word which means "Ten" (digit 10) Dareh is actually Persian word which means "Passes or Valley" but the word Dareh is also in Wakhi language "Dra" (with slight difference in pronunciation but meaning is same) "Qileh" is Persian word means *Fortress* and we can find the word "Qlaa" in Wakhi language which has the same meaning. The reason for Turkish and Persian word affiliated with the fort is in such a way that in 16th and 17th century, people of the area had been speaking Turkish and Persian besides their mother tongue and adoption of words from different languages were quite common, which is in practice even in modern era. The 2nd reason is Wakhi as a language, which is originated from Persian language. There isn't any written proof, who suggested this name Ondra, to this place.



Pictorial illustration of Odra Fort Gulmit Gojal, Photo credit: Fazal Karim Shiraz

Ondra is located on such a plateau like place from where ten passes could be monitored in the ancient time by the inhabitants of Gulmit in order to make sentient the ruler of the time from the external or internal threats. As I have tried to elucidate using a photograph to show the Ten Passes. According to some local historians a man named *Shah Kushwakth* (a Qirghaiz) one of the closest friend of *Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan 1st*, suggested (around 1820) this name Onda because of its defense point of view and locale. There is no written proof regarding the Fort in specific and history of Gulmit Gojal in general therefore I have included such information in this paper which remained common in maximum of the respondents.

Tuesday, May 24, 2011

Posted by [Didar Ali](#)

[Cultural Significances and Economic Prospective of Odra Fort in Gulmit Gojal \(Part 2\)](#)

Confined history of Odra Fort (*Odra Qlaa*) Gulmit Gojal

We have reached to the moon with the help of modern technologies but still we are looking for the remains of disappeared species, and human civilization still some of us are in search of their origin their history and territories, no matter how ignorant we are but we can't forget and live without our history. During my studies I took the charge to dig some facts and figures regarding the history of Odra Fort in

specific and Gulmit in general, which was quite difficult but interesting at the same time. I am really thankful to my respondents who helped me to collect some facts and figures from the past.



Ondra Fort on top (front view) Photo credit: Zulfiqar Ali Khan

Conferring with my respondents (many of them are old aged genealogist of Gulmit) I came to a conclusion that Ondra Fort has been built during the ruling era of Mir Qutlugh around 900 years ago Mir Qutlugh was the first Wakhi ruler of Gulmit and its surrounding areas.

Mir Qutlugh's power throne reached to Khayber (a small village after Passu) and to strengthen his defense he constructed two gates (of mud, stones and woods). One was built at Khyber village (used to call Khayber-Durwoza) to protect his territory from Qirghiz (China) invaders and other at the Chamangul river side of Gulmit, to protect his main territory form the invaders of Hunza (Kanjut) and Nager (Nagriks). Unfortunately there is not enough evidence left to witness the past but some remains of these gates and the defense wall can still be seen at Khyber and Gulmit. As years passed and the possibilities of threats increased he decided to build a fort with the help of locals which is known as Ondra fort Gulmit.

There were living quarters inside the fort, still some of the remains are crying their evidence, The quarters in the north west side were constructed for the army of Qutlugh (the army were included the locals only) to keep an eye on enemy movements from that side and the southern quarters and house like were used by the soldiers to watch the enemies from Hunza side.



Odra Fort Gulmit Gojal Photo Credit: Zulfiqar Ali Khan

The defense wall has been provided with loopholes for monitoring of the area and also giving opportunity to the defenders to fire through. The battlements of the fort are still in evident condition but some part of the defense walls have crumbled. Odra fort imitates the power of Wakhi ruler Qutlugh who was never defeated by the Mirs of Hunza nor any Qirghiz. He was famous for his chivalry and swordsmanship. The Mirs of Hunza were scared of his rising power. They never dared to cross the territory. Mir Qutlugh was poisoned to death by one of his elderly female servants, which was especially on this mission sent by Mir of Hunza. She managed to feed the poisoned food to Mir Qutlugh and his other family members. Mir Qutlugh died after being poisoned, Gulmit was seized and Odra Fort fell in to the hand of Mir of Hunza. Qutlugh was buried in Gulmit along with his other family members. According to the key respondent the grave of Mir Qutlugh was located somewhere the newly built government girls high school.

Mir Qutlugh ruled over Gulmit and its adjoining areas for almost Twelve years. During his ruling era everything was safe and locals were happy but the invasion of Hunza Mirs totally destroyed the social setup of the area.



Odra Fort Gulmit Photo Credit: Zulfiqar Ali Khan

According to my key respondents, Odra Fort was renovated once during the ruling period of Mir Saleem Khan and some were in a view that it was renovated during Mir Ghanzafar Ali Khan 1st ruling period. Although the difference is there but my respondents were agreed that this Fort was once renovated, and most probably during Mir Saleem Khan's era because he was much focused on defense and protection of the area. Most the people (who participated in the renovation work) from Gulmit village and some of them where form the neighboring villages.

Mirs of Hunza were brutal and their approach was inhuman towards the locals of Gojal. Mirs of Hunza started huge tax (in good form, like wood, fruits, animals, and other valuable things) collection by force which was absolute merciless and unjust. Mirs of Hunza used Gulmit as headquarter during summer camp, especially to collect tax from the locals with the help of admirers of Mirs from Hunza and from Gojal (normally the people who were used in accompanied during Mirs visit were Tharampfa, Wazir, Arbob, Chorbu, Munshee, and other family members and servants).

During their ruling era Mirs of Hunza snatched numerous land pieces from the locals in various parts of Gojal and they forced the locals to work for them (the locals call it Mir Hashar). That's why the sentiment of hatred and enmity surged in many parts of Gojal against Mirs and their admirers, which later ended with Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's dissolution order.

The locals left this Fort during the ruling period of Mir Muhammad Jamal Khan Completely, because of developed consensus and good relationship with the Mirs of Nager and Sirqolies, later on this Fort lost its importance among the locals which led to deterioration and demolition of this fort.

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Posted by [Didar Ali](#)

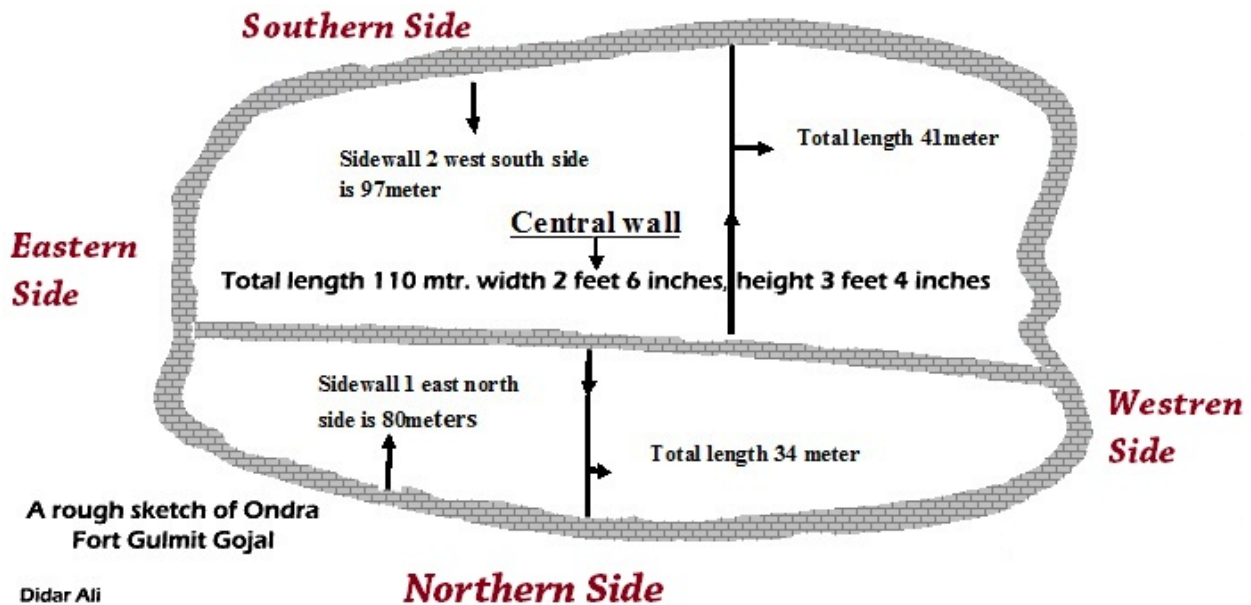
[Cultural Significances and Economic Prospective of Ondra Fort in Gulmit Gojal \(Part 3\)](#)

Locale of the Fort

Ondra Fort is situated on a plateau like place on top of Gulmit. Surrounded with fascinating views of the whole area (from Shishkat to Passu, even the Qorun Peak in Shimshal).

Locale of the Fort is like oval shaped; divided into two main parts. The rough sketch below will help us to understand the structure of the Fort.

According to my key respondents the entrance part (southern side) which is a bit lower from northern side was located for the locals and army of *Mir Qutlugh*, the remnants of the old houses are self-witness. The northern part of the Fort is a bit high, according to my key informants on the corner on the western side, there was 3 story tower built from wood mass to help the army to monitor the entire area.



Fortification Wall

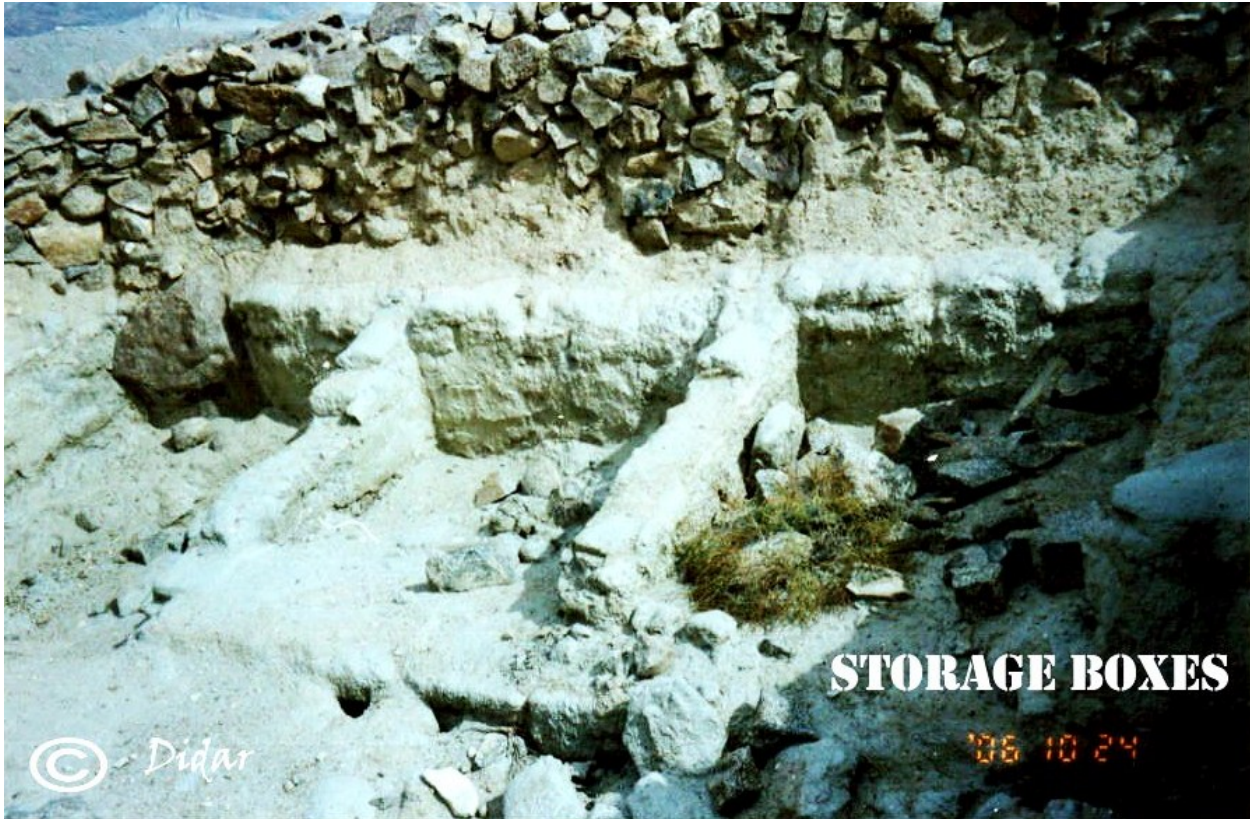
Mud and stones were mostly used to construct the boundary wall, the central wall, and as well as the houses. Average sizes of defense walls are 12feet, to make the defense wall stronger the locals have used double layer stones and on top of fortification walls there is 2feet high one line mud block wall. There are few loopholes in defense walls, which are undoubtedly for guns and other ancient weapons.



Fortification Wall of Ondra Fort Photo Credit: Writer

Storage Boxes

There are remnants of rectangle shaped boxes made from mud blocks and mud plaster. These boxes are considered to be used for storage, wheat grains, barley, dry fruits and vegetables especially when there is insecurity and flood in the area. Normal sizes of those boxes are 6x6 feet, and depth of those boxes is 3 to 4feet.



Storage Boxes Ondra Fort

Photo credit: Writer

Housing Pattern at Ondra Fort

A brief introduction will help us to understand the basic structure and ancient style of housing pattern in Gulmit Gojal.

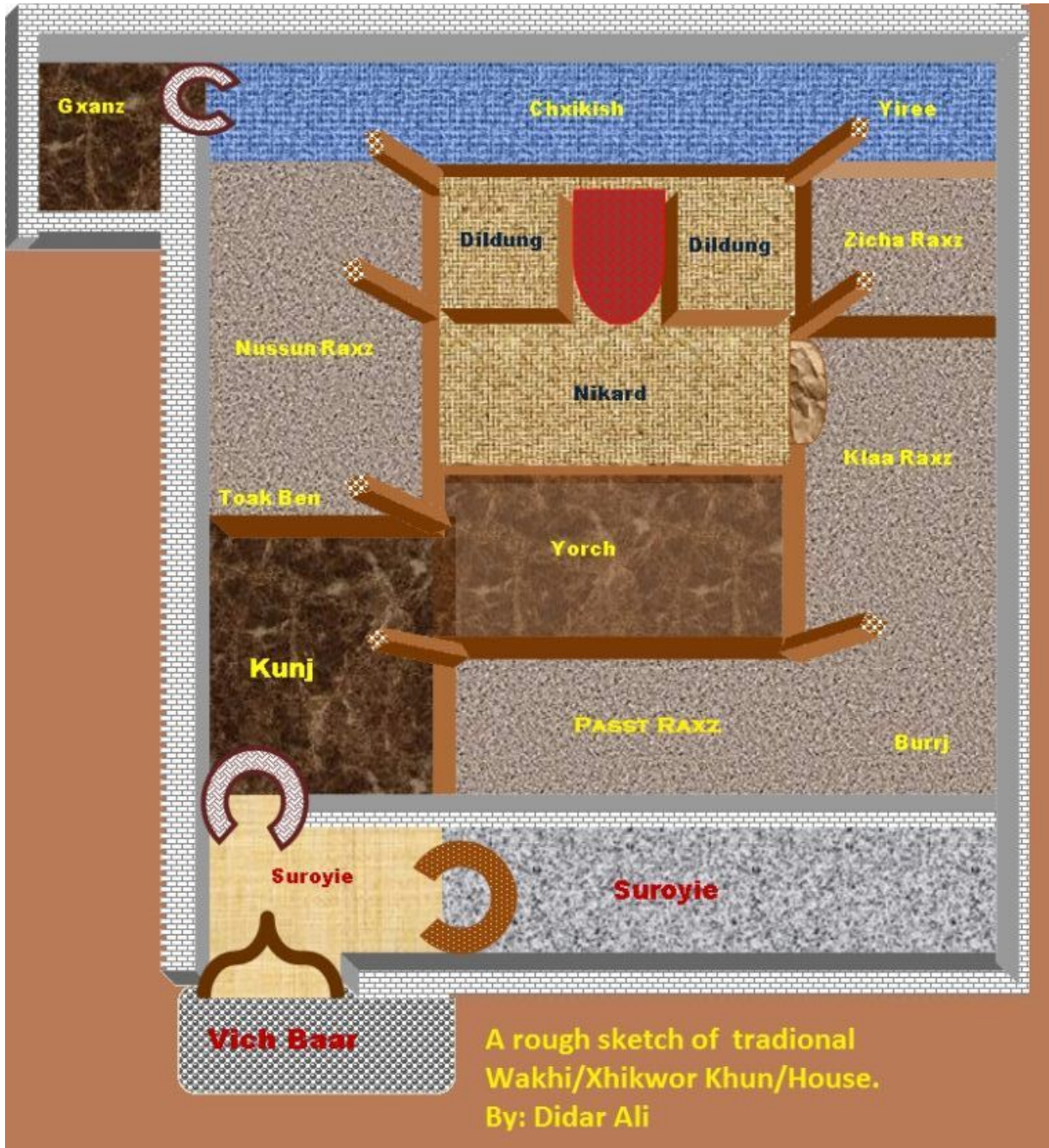
“The houses were basically simple box structures as a single with flat roof made of wood, stone and mud mortar. Now a day there is some improvement people added 2, 3 or 4 bedrooms and separate kitchen bathrooms and toilets”. (G.Rasool-1995)

In the customary houses the *Nikard* is used for sitting which is central part of a house. In winter season there is always fire in Bukhari (made of iron) which is located in the middle of Dildung, this fire is used for cooking and also for heating the house.

“The *khun*, (which generally measures anywhere from 19’ x 21’-21’ x 24’) serves a variety of activities, which range from cooking to sleeping. In order to accommodate a diverse range of activities has been broken down into different floor levels with each having a specific name and function.

The center itself is classified into the *yorch* (the internal vestibule) which acts as a secondary vestibule generally all shoes are parked in this space before going up to any other portion. The *nikard* (the portion reserved for eating) is used for dining while the *dildoong* is used presently for food preparation, and traditionally (and still very infrequently) for grain storage. The *past rajx*, the *kula raj* and the *nussoon raj* are the platforms reserved for sleeping at night and sitting during the daytime. The *past rajx* is reserved

for guests' sleeping if there are any and, while at marriage ceremonies the space is reserved for musicians. The *kula rajx* is reserved for the children or extended family. The highest floor level the *nussoon rajx* is reserved for elders, the owner, and his wife". (Eric Dudly).



A rough sketch of Traditional Wakhi House, A Khun. Credit: Writer

If we compare the housing patterns with the quarters at Ondra Fort it is quite different. Housing walls are mud plastered but not neatly like traditional houses of Wakhi people. The conditions and structures of the houses are generally rough and simple in structure. Mostly these houses have divide into three or four parts. First part includes on *Nikard* (the central area) the second and third parts included on *Razx* (the sleeping area) and the fourth part include on *Chekish* (area for food items and equipments). After the regime of Mir Jamal Khan the locals have taken away doors, wood pillars, and other valuable goods.

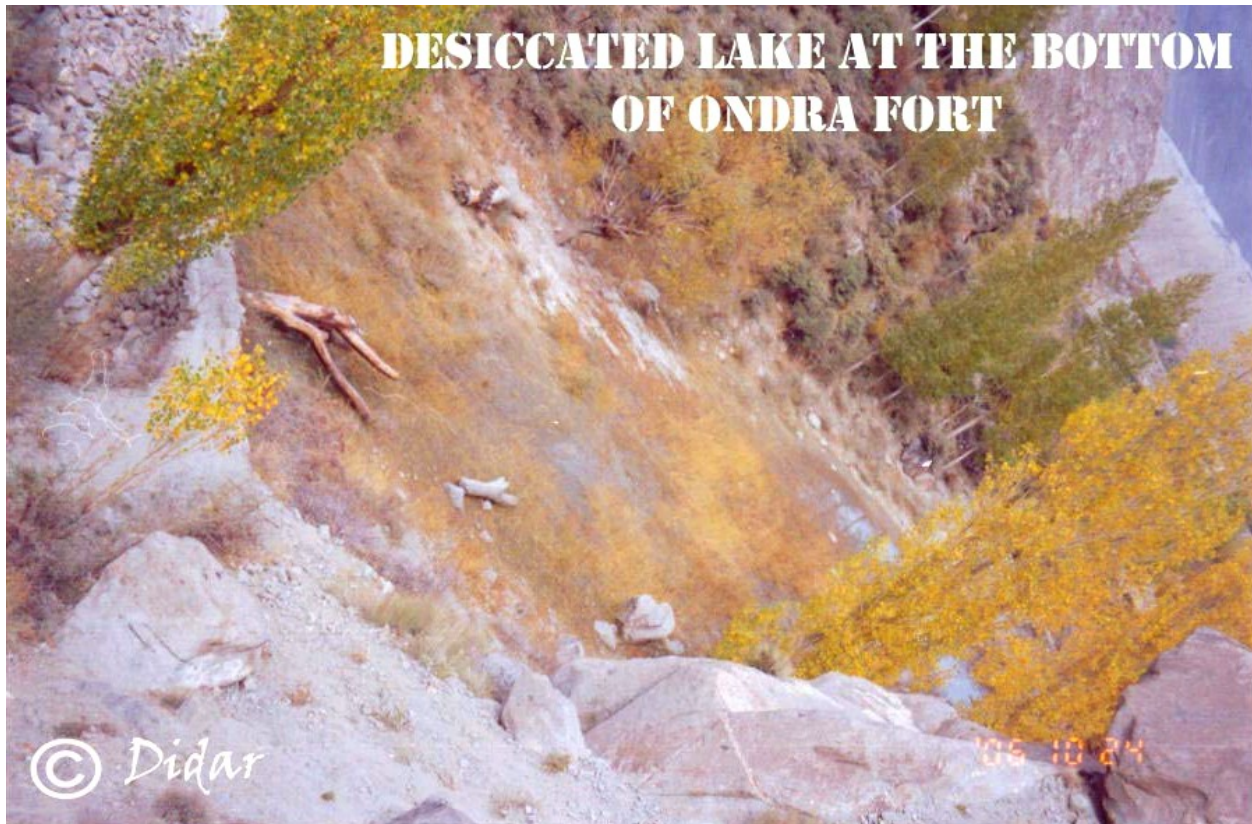


Crumbled House at Ondra Fort

Photo Credit: Writer

Desiccated lake at bottom of the Fort

Mud was one of the most essential materials to construct defense wall, houses and storage boxes. For that reason the locals shifted mud from the nearest jungle, which later turned a small but important water reservoir and during their stay at the Fort the inhabitants used water of the lake for drinking purposes.



Desiccated Lake near Ondra Fort Photo Credit: Writer

Monday, May 30, 2011

Posted by [Didar Ali](#)

[Cultural Significances and Economic Prospective of Ondra Fort in Gulmit Gojal \(Part 4\)](#)

Significance of Ondra Fort in the contemporary period

Manifestation of historical Forts are generally considered to be living monuments and reflect of history and culture of the areas they are situated in.

These monuments reflect through their architectural features, size, and internal structure, life style, economic prosperity condition, artistic skills and defense mechanism of the people of that era.

Historical forts are recognized as archaeological heritage, which influences inhabitants of the surrounding localities in a diverse manner.

Promotion of Cultural Heritages

There are few cultural sites in Gulmit, which are in plight condition; these historical sites need people's attention as quick as possible.

Heritages are pride of nations, which helps people to find their roots in the past, which gives the evidence of their past and helps to elaborate their life style, which they had.

This fort will not only serve as a tool to propagate the cultural and historical heritage of the area. It will also be helpful in boosting up self-esteem and cultural pride of inhabitants, which inherits such historical monuments.

Ondra Fort will help to preserve other historical sites of the area, which have been ignored by the locals.

Cultural Sites in Gulmit

- *Old House of Khalifa Aliyar (near Polo Ground)*
- *Shrine Khoja Mardi Wali (bottom of the Fort)*
- *Gulmit Cultural Museum (near Polo Ground)*
- *Flood-Escaped House in Dalgirum*
- *Graveyard of Mir Saleem Khan III*
- *Mir's Palace (Near Polo Ground)*
- *Shrine of Shohi Chirogh (Odver)*
- *Ismaili Mosque (Scouts Office)*
- *Suspension Bridge Gulmit*

Promotion of Craftsmanship Tradition

Restoration of Ondra Fort will be as an opportunity for training young preservationists from Gojal or any part of Pakistan. Architects, engineers, and local artisans will be promoting through on-site training sessions, supplemented by seminars, workshops, and special training courses within and outside the country.

Artisanship

Restoration of Ondra Fort will be a catalyst for positive changes and revitalization of artisanship in Gojal valley.

Micro and macro level of partnership will help to provide income-generating opportunities for local artisans through promotion of the traditional handicrafts of the region.

Woodcarving tradition has a long history in Gulmit and Gojal, which is dying as it's slowly replaced by the introduction of concrete, aluminum, steel and glass.

Restoration of the Fort will provide an opportunity to revive the woodcarving tradition through skill enhancement and training programs. This will inspire a glitch of change, in traditional building techniques and skills, which are now in high demand.

In addition, rapid and unplanned urbanization will be controllable through modern construction techniques along with traditional style.

Promotion of unique cultural tradition and language

Many activities has been carried out by local organizations and few individuals to conserve and promote the unique cultural tradition, some steps has been taken to protect the endangered language by promoting folk music using modern instrument.

Restoration of this Fort will further energize these activities, as visitors will be taking interest in music, and other traditions of the area.

Economic Significance

Transportation

The Fort will materialize the reason for transport service improvisation of the area specifically and Gojal valley in general, because some new transport service companies will step up to provide their services in the area.

General standard of locally available transport are poor and risky which is a big reason for tourist inflow.

Hotel Industry

Hotel industry throughout the Gilgit-Baltistan and particularly in the Gulmit Gojal will be a source to earn their bread for many people.

Most of the hotels managed by inexperienced local owners, who has not formal education or training in hospitality sector, and employees of these hotels are unskilled and have little work experience.

It will create competitive environment among the hotel owners, which will enhance the services to the tourists.

Promotion of Local goods

It will give an exposure to the international market, which ranges from food items to handicrafts, local handmade Carpets, traditional caps, wool sweaters, and antiques, which subsequently help in promotion of local cottage industry.

Retail Traders

It's obvious that tourists love to buy souvenirs from the local shops whether it is purchasing of Gems, Picture Postcard, local embroidery, carpets, caps, shirts, dry fruits and other different kinds of antiques from the local retail shops, which help to boost the local economy.

Significance in Tourism sector

Due to their historical importance, this Fort can attract thousands of visitors from within and outside of the country.

Promotion of Eco-Tourism

It will give a proper understanding of the term **Eco-tourism** to the local community. The locals are in a view that only nature based tourism is ecotourism; they are ignoring the social and environmental aspect of it. The reconstruction and renovation of the fort can play key role to promote ecotourism in the area to prevent from further harm.

Promotion of Trophy Hunting Sport

Trophy hunting is a form of sport hunting that has been practice as long as humans have hunted. Trophy hunting usually involves a hunter seeking for hunt/trophy; the hunter has to pay before the hunt. This is in practice everywhere to reduce the illegal hunting and poaching.

This Fort can a catalyst to promote trophy hunting which will help to earn reduce the illegal hunting and poaching further more through trophy hunting the local community will be able to earn handful amount of money in terms of

- *Government License Fees*
- *Community Trophy Fees*
- *Auctions* (Auctions usually raise the money when the hunt being offered is unique)

The practice will help to overcome the illegal hunting and will be useful too, to protect the endangered species.

Guiding and Porting

In guiding profession most of the locals are involved during tourist season, (normally they call it high season) because the locals can speak English, Urdu and some other European languages, they can communicate and exchange information easily.

Guiding is the most important field in tourism sector but ignored by the Government, the local community and the Non-governmental agencies.

This Fort possibly will provide opportunity to the locals to adopt guiding as profession and will increase the income level of those who are involved in it.

Portage is also an important part of tourism industry and source of income for many locals. Healthy tourism activities in the area will facilitate the local porters by giving earning opportunity and also awareness regarding using quality equipment for trekking and climbing to keep the safety measures.

FINDINGS

Awareness about restoration of Ondra Fort and other cultural heritages has been augmented among the educated locals but it is still lacking among the general mass.

Therefore, demand for conservation and restoration of historically unique architectures have been increased significantly in the Gojal valley. Historical and traditional architectures have now regained respect and recognition, the ecological friendly and efficient land use nature phenomena can't be denied. The local culture has been given a transformed justice with newly introduced powerful factors of change in Gulmit Gojal over the past few decades.

Using Ondra Fort as a museum and cultural center will play a vital role in research on local traditions, language. This Fort will be a center for exchange between national, international organizations interested in Gilgit-Baltistan in general and Gulmit Gojal in particular, especially for those who are in need of a base for their fieldwork.

Restoration of Ondra Fort will transform Gulmit Gojal into a focus of interest in Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan.

Restoration of Ondra Fort as a cultural heritage will be a step further for sustainable development in the region.

Recommendations

The local community should take initiative regarding rehabilitation of the Fort, if it is ignored again as the locals did in the past than it will be total disaster.

Due to the significance of this fort from historical, economic and tourism point of view, government or any non-governmental organization must invest handsome amount of money for reconstruction and maintenance of the Fort. Baltit, Altit and Shiger Forts are living examples in this connection.

There is strong need to form a Committee (e.g. Ondra Fort restoration committee) by the locals which should be included notables, historians, architectures, engineers and educated youngsters.

The Committee should adopt multi-branched initiatives, by establishing sub-committees for different purposes in Gulmit, Gilgit & Islamabad.

Giving stake and integration between Wakhi Tajik Cultural Association (WTCA), Gulmit Organization for Local Development (GOLD), Gulmit Young Stars Club and Social Welfare Organization, Open Ismaili Boy Scouts Gulmit and other local organizations will be a great help for the restoration of the Fort.

The notables of Gulmit Gojal must guarantee the ownership of Ondra Fort for restoration purpose.

There is always a room for new experiences like construction of pony track from K.K.H. Chamangul via Dalgirum and Kamaris to the Fort, and using horses on this track will beautify the excursion which will be income opportunity to the local community.

Creation of some new USP's (Unique selling proposition) will help to increase tourist inflow like jeep safari, silk route car rally, and mountain motorbike or bicycle race.