

Developing and marketing the TransCaucasian Trail (TCT) – challenges and opportunities

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The TransCaucasian Trail

A long-distance hiking trail across the Greater and Lesser Caucasus mountains that will connect over 20 national parks and protected areas in the region

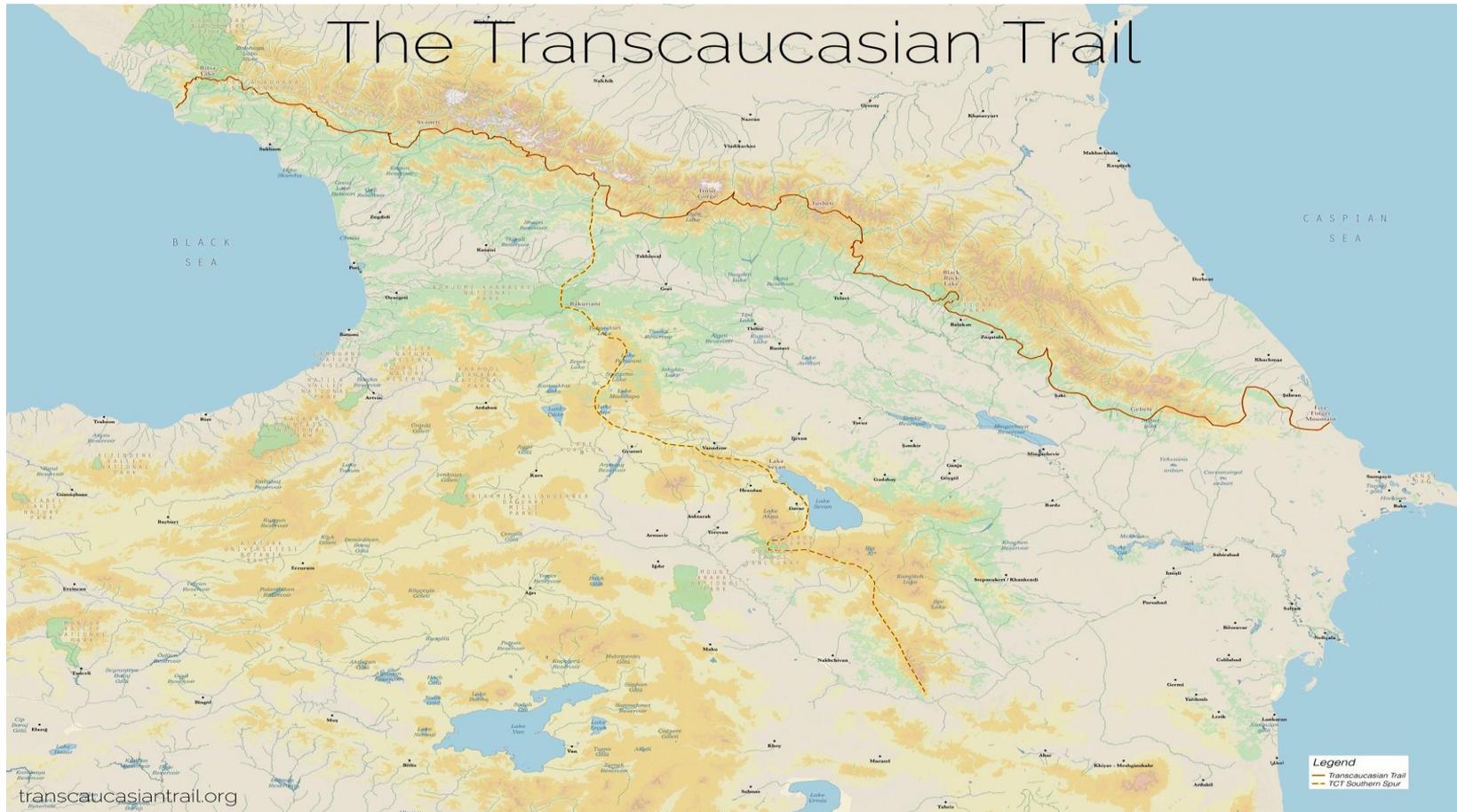
- Provides economic opportunities to rural and remote areas
- Increases access to the national parks for locals and tourists alike



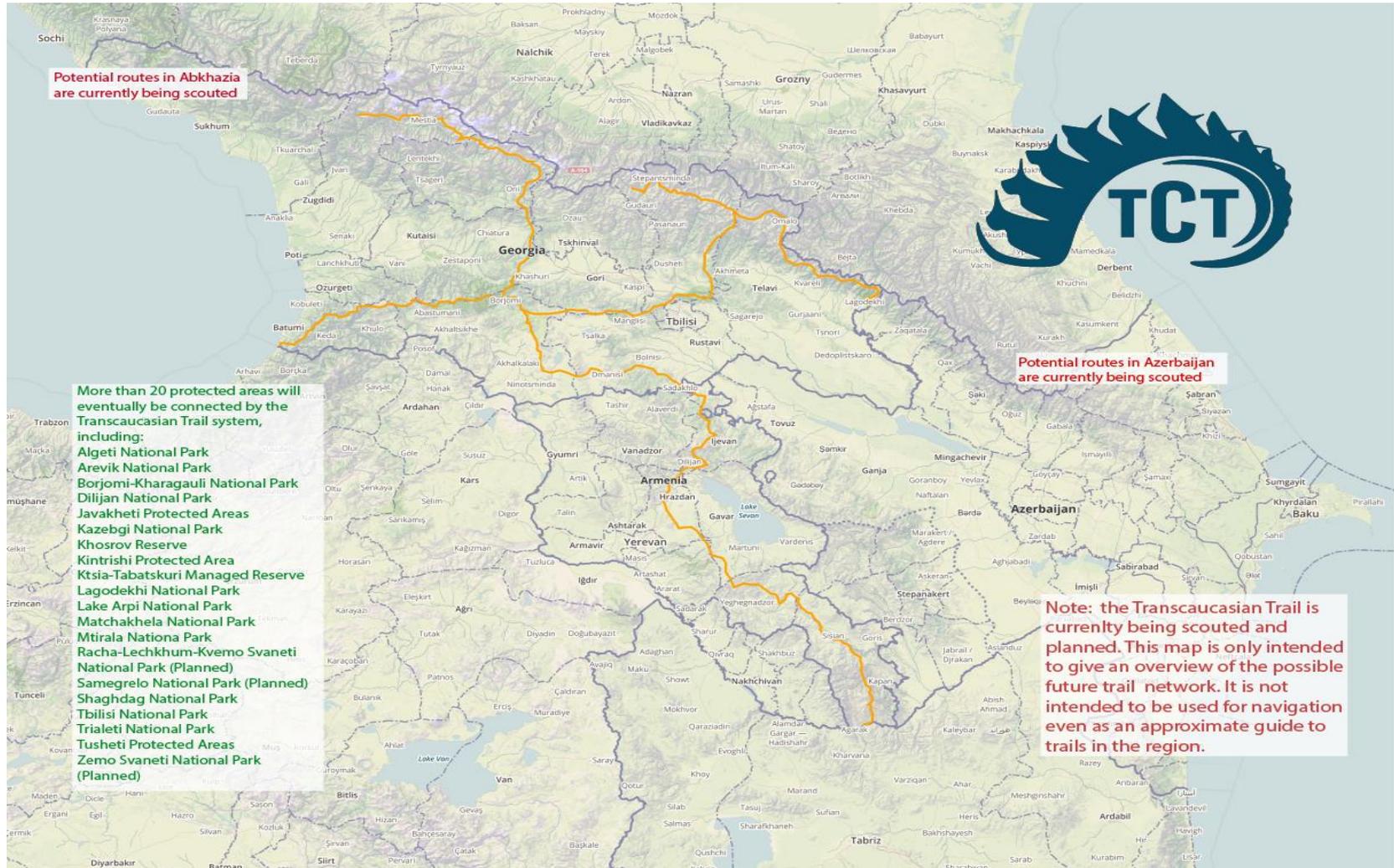
The TransCaucasian Trail



Our vision: T-shaped TCT; 2 corridors, about 1500 km each



Reality check – Y-shape



Why?

- Our own experience
- Our **mission** is to make hiking in the Caucasus safer and more accessible to everyone while benefitting the local people and protecting the environment
- TCT - a **lifeline for the local people** in remote villages, who see tourism as the main source of income for their families
(they told us that!)



Community consultation, Svaneti June 2016

<http://transcaucasiantrail.org/en/blog/first-ever-community-engagement-delivered>



Developing the TCT brand

- We are using **the unbelievable beauty of the Caucasus mountains as well as the very rich cultural heritage** to promote the trail
- Main **theme**: **mountains**; but also “authenticity”, “experience”, “connecting/reconnecting with nature”, “eco-tourism”
- **Audience**: international hikers; national hikers; communities; other stakeholders
- **Message**: we are making hiking in the Caucasus safer and more accessible for everyone



Developing the TCT brand – channels:

- Social media; traditional media (journalist's visits resulted in features in industry magazines; videos; films and photo-documentaries)
- Events – organized by us or piggyback on others
- Attending and speaking at conferences, tourism trade shows

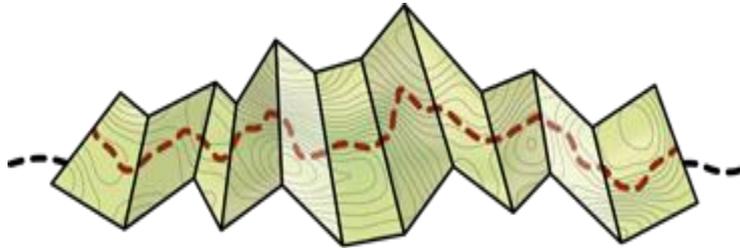




TCT Ambassadors

- Partners = TCT
Ambassadors: NHF, GNTA,
APA, AHF
- The local community (“gate
keepers”, leaders, guest
house owners)
- Local government officials,
tourist information
employees
- Hikers, eco-travelers
- Volunteers;
- Armenian Diaspora





TRANSCAUCASIAN EXPEDITION

Winner of the annual Royal Geographical Society and Land Rover bursary for
“those who want to take a journey beyond their limits and boundaries”

- April-Oct 2016, exploring and mapping in detail the rugged backcountry of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains in Armenia
- Explored the informal network of jeep tracks, animal trails and other backcountry paths to find the best route for the TCT.
- **Follow progress on Instagram, FB and twitter; live interactive map of the Expedition on the website; weekly blogs**
- Summary last week at the RGS event “Explore 2016” in London

Georgina



Developing tourism around a trail concept – challenges

- **Community involvement is key** – but a challenge is to gain trust, build and maintain, develop and nurture the relationship; managing expectations
- What's our team's position and role (now and future) – just trail building or perhaps get more involved in the development of community-based tourism
- Who owns and maintains the trail? What level of participation we want communities to have?
- Season-dependent
- Dealing with local “trail gurus”, the potential of sabotage
- Unstable governments (both local and national)
- Main team doesn't live in Georgia
- Growth in tourism – potential negative impact on the local culture (staged authenticity, commodification of culture etc)

Developing tourism around a trail concept – opportunities

- Other ways of using the trail: cycling; yoga; cross-country skiing in winter will attract a different type of traveller
- Community empowerment, job creation, increased sense of pride
- Improvements in tourism infrastructure; Improved cooperation between stakeholders
- Positive impact of tourism on the local culture
- **So what do we do not to “spoil it all”? – big challenge and also opportunity**



TCT in the media

- Front cover and 13-page feature in Wizz Magazine, July/Aug 2016
- Georgia's new Caucasus trail will link Black and Caspian seas, The Guardian, 27 Aug 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2016/aug/27/georgia-new-transcaucasian-hiking-trail-project>

- Off the beaten path, 4-page Feature in the Explore magazine, Royal Geographical Society, Nov 2016
- The Transcaucasian Trail: An Ode to Nature and a Gift to its Explorers in Armenia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uePalR7VJR4>

- Peace Trail across the Caucasus, 29 Oct 2016

<http://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/16868/peace-trail-across-caucasus>



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