



THE GREAT YETI TREK ASSESSMENT REPORT

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OVERVIEW



The Great Yeti Trek Route Assessment was carried out over eight trekking days to evaluate the route's overall suitability for future trekking operations. The assessment examined key aspects including trail conditions, campsite availability, water sources, horse accessibility, safety, and the overall trekking experience. The findings indicate that the Sakteng–Merak section (Days 1–4) is well suited for commercial trekking and requires only minor improvements to enhance the experience. In contrast, the Merak–Samcholling section (Days 5–8) presents several operational challenges, including deteriorated trail conditions, limited campsite options, insufficient water sources, and difficult terrain. As a result, this section will require substantial trail development and infrastructure improvements before it can be recommended or promoted as a regular commercial trekking route.

THE GREAT YETI TREK

Sakteng to Samcholling(83.26 Km)



DAY - DAY REPORT

Sakeng to Samcholing (83.26 km)

DAY 1: SAKTENG DAM-NYA – RONGJUNG GOO



- Distance: 8.10 km
- Highest Elevation: 4,158 m
- Camp Altitude: 4,068 m

Route Description:

The first day of the Yeti Trail assessment covers approximately 8.8 – 9.0 km, beginning at Sakteng and ending at Ronjung Goo Campsite. The route requires 7 – 8 hours of trekking and involves a continuous ascent of about 1,375 metres, making it one of the most physically demanding sections of the trail.

The trail passes through Nugtshong Chigpa, Dham Nya, Somgangtse, and Zurga before reaching Rongjung Goo. The route offers spectacular panoramic views of the Sakteng Valley, Alpine meadows, and surrounding mountain ridges.

Assessment:

A section of the existing trail shortly after departing from Sakteng consists of an extremely steep, near-vertical ascent that is physically demanding and presents significant safety risks. The trail becomes particularly hazardous during the monsoon season, when wet and muddy conditions increase the likelihood of slips, falls, and erosion. The steep gradient also makes this section unsuitable for pack animals, limiting their safe movement and creating logistical challenges for trekking operations.

During the assessment, a more suitable alternative was identified along the traditional Brokpa livestock trail. This route follows a gentler gradient, is regularly used by local herders, and provides safer and more stable footing for both trekkers and pack animals. Adopting this alignment would improve safety, accessibility, and the long-term sustainability of the trekking route while making better use of an existing traditional trail.

Recommendation:

- Realign the trekking route to follow the traditional cattle trail, which offers a more established and practical pathway. This alignment will improve route continuity, enhance safety, reduce environmental disturbance caused by creating new trails, and preserve the traditional routes historically used by local communities.
- Enhance trail infrastructure by improving route markings and stabilizing steep or hazardous sections. Clear and consistent trail markers will assist navigation, reduce the risk of trekkers losing their way, and improve emergency response if required. Additionally, reinforcing steep slopes, eroded sections, and other vulnerable areas with appropriate trail engineering measures will increase safety, improve accessibility for both trekkers and pack horses, and minimize further trail degradation.

These improvements will significantly enhance the route's safety, operational feasibility, and overall trekking experience, making it more suitable for future commercial trekking operations.

DAY 2: RONGJUNG GOO - TSHOLUNG GOEMBA



- Distance: 8.16 km
- Highest Elevation: 4,339m
- Camp Altitude: 4065 m

Route Description

This section traverses high-altitude alpine ridgelines before gently descending towards the sacred site of Tsolung Goenpa. The route offers views of glacial lakes, rugged mountain terrain, and culturally significant spiritual landmarks. The presence of the Himalayan blue poppy (*Meconopsis gakyidiana*) further enhances the ecological value of the area.

Assessment

- The trail is generally in good condition, with a clear and well-established route, reliable water sources, and minimal technical difficulty. It provides a comfortable trekking experience for most visitors and is suitable for regular trekking operations. Only minor maintenance, such as clearing vegetation, repairing small eroded sections, and maintaining drainage, is required to keep the trail in good condition.

Recommendation:

- Maintain and upgrade trail markers to improve navigation, enhance safety, and provide clear route guidance for trekkers.
- Ensure proper campsite management by establishing organized waste disposal systems and maintaining clean, sustainable camping areas.
- Conduct periodic trail inspections to monitor erosion, identify seasonal damage, and implement timely repairs to maintain long-term trail quality.

DAY 3: TSHOLUNG GOEMBA TO BUELA



- Distance: 8.68 km
- Highest Elevation: 4,334m
- Camp Altitude: 4,050 m

Route Description:

This is one of the most scenic sections of the trek, passing through pristine alpine landscapes and several sacred high-altitude lakes, including Migmar Tsho, Merak Tsho, Sakteng Tsho, and Ama Jomo Latsho. The route also features extensive alpine grasslands and panoramic mountain views.

Buela offers a well-suited campsite with reliable water sources and ample yak grazing grounds.

Assessment:

The trail is in good condition and offers an exceptional trekking experience, combining breathtaking natural scenery with the unique cultural heritage of the region. The route is well-established, safe, and suitable for regular trekking operations, requiring only routine maintenance to preserve its quality and ensure a positive experience for trekkers.

Recommendation:

- Protect and preserve the cultural and natural heritage sites along the trekking route by implementing appropriate conservation measures and promoting responsible tourism practices. Sacred sites, traditional settlements, historical landmarks, and ecologically sensitive areas should be safeguarded from damage through visitor awareness, proper route management, and collaboration with local communities. Preserving these unique cultural and natural assets will maintain the authenticity of the trekking experience while ensuring they remain intact for future generations.

- Protect sacred lakes and fragile alpine ecosystems through conservation measures, visitor awareness, and responsible management practices to minimize environmental degradation.
- Install clear directional signage at key junctions to improve navigation and enhance the trekking experience, especially in remote and less-defined sections.
- Promote responsible trekking practices among visitors, including waste management, respect for local customs, and minimizing environmental impacts along the route.

DAY 4: BUELA - MERAK



- Distance: 11.50 km
- Highest Elevation: 4,223 m
- Camp Altitude: 3,484 m

Route Description:

The trail descends gradually through alpine meadows into the highland settlement of Merak. The route offers spectacular views and leads into one of Bhutan's most culturally significant Brokpa communities.

Key cultural highlights include:

- Traditional Brokpa lifestyle and yak herding practices
- Stone-built houses and pastoral landscapes
- Merak Lhakhang
- Opportunities for homestays and cultural engagement.

Assessment:

The trail is in good condition and is suitable for both trekkers and pack animals, with a well-defined route and manageable terrain. The village of Merak offers strong potential for community-based tourism, providing opportunities to promote local culture, traditional hospitality, and livelihood diversification while enhancing the overall trekking experience.

Recommendation:

- Maintain the existing trail conditions through regular upkeep, including routine inspections, minor repairs, and vegetation management to preserve safety and accessibility.
- Strengthen homestay and local guide programs to increase community participation, support local livelihoods, and enhance visitors' cultural experiences.
- Position Merak as a key cultural hub along the trekking route by promoting its unique Brokpa heritage, traditional lifestyle, and community-based tourism opportunities.

OVERALL CONCLUSION (DAYS 1 -4)

The Sakteng–Merak section is highly recommended as a standalone trekking product due to its scenic landscapes, well-maintained trail, and rich Brokpa cultural heritage. In addition, a circular trekking route connecting Sakteng and Merak via Nakchung La Pass is considered a viable option. This loop offers a diverse and rewarding trekking experience, combining alpine scenery, traditional pastoral settlements, and immersive cultural encounters while providing an attractive alternative itinerary for visitors.

DAY 6: MERAK - NANG CHEN NANG



- Distance: 16.66 km
- Highest Elevation: 4322 m
- Camp Altitude: 3540 m
- Walking Time: 8 hours

Route Description:

The trail descends gradually through alpine meadows into the highland settlement of Merak. The route offers spectacular view and leads into one of Bhutan's most culturally significant Brokpa communities.

Key Issues

- Long Walking distance.
- No Proper campsite for overnight camping.
- Inadequate water supply along the route.

Assessment

This is the longest and most physically demanding section of the trek, requiring a full day of sustained walking through varied terrain. Although the trail remains passable, the lack of a suitable campsite and limited reliable water sources create significant logistical challenges for both trekkers and support crews. The route descends through dense forests and valleys, where sections become muddy and slippery during the monsoon season, increasing the risk of slips, falls, and difficulties for pack animals. Routine maintenance and improved campsite and water access would enhance the safety and practicality of this section.

Recommendation:

- Establish a designated campsite with reliable water access to improve logistics and provide a safe resting point for trekkers and support crews.
- Consider dividing this section into two shorter trekking days to reduce physical strain and improve the overall trekking experience.
- Improve drainage systems and reinforce muddy trail sections to enhance trail stability, reduce erosion, and improve safety during wet conditions.

DAY 7: NANG CHEN NANG - TAMEKPA



- Distance: 6.77 km
- Highest elevation: 3,967 m
- Camp Altitude: 3,873m
- Walking Time: 6 Hours

Route Description:

A short but steep ascent through dense temperate forest transitioning into alpine terrain. The route offers strong scenic value but limited camping space.

Key Issues

- Continuous uphill climb
- Muddy and slippery trail
- Difficult for horse transportation
- Limited camping areas
- Ongoing erosion

Assessment:

- The continuous uphill gradient makes this section physically demanding, requiring sustained effort from trekkers and support crews. During the monsoon season, the trail surface becomes wet and slippery, creating additional challenges for both trekkers and pack animals. Poor drainage in certain areas contributes to water accumulation, soil erosion, and gradual trail degradation. Improving drainage management and carrying out regular maintenance would help enhance trail stability, safety, and long-term sustainability.

Recommendation:

- Improve drainage systems along the trail to reduce water accumulation, prevent erosion, and maintain stable trail conditions during wet seasons.
- Reinforce steep sections using stone steps, retaining structures, or other suitable trail engineering solutions to improve safety and accessibility.
- Stabilize designated camping areas to provide safer, more comfortable, and sustainable spaces for trekkers and support crews.
- Conduct regular trail maintenance, including inspection, repairs, and clearing of damaged sections to preserve trail quality and long-term usability.

DAY 8: TAMEKPA - BRANGZUNG



- Distance: 8.95 km
- Highest Elevation: 4,072 m
- Camp Altitude: 3,702 m
- Walking Time: 6 Hours

Route Description:

The route follows alpine ridgelines before descending towards Tsogom Tsho and Brangzung. It offers excellent panoramic views but includes rocky and unstable sections.

Key Issues

- Gravel covered trail
- Unsuitable for horse travel
- Limited water availability
- Risk of erosion

Assessment:

- Loose gravel and unstable slopes along this section reduce trail safety and create challenges for both trekkers and pack animals. The uneven surface increases the risk of slips and falls, particularly during wet conditions, while unstable terrain makes animal movement difficult and unsafe. Water sources are limited and not clearly identified, creating challenges for trekking operations and requiring better marking or development of reliable water points. Trail stabilization measures and improved water access would enhance safety and overall usability.

Recommendation:

- Stabilize loose gravel and rocky sections to improve trail safety and provide more secure footing for trekkers and pack animals.
- Strengthen erosion control measures through improved drainage, slope stabilization, and regular monitoring of vulnerable areas.
- Identify, mark, and develop reliable water points to support trekkers and trekking crews along the route.
- Conduct routine trail maintenance, including vegetation clearance, surface repairs, and inspection of damaged sections to ensure long-term usability and safety.

DAY 9: BRANGZUNG - SAMCHOLLING



- Distance: 14.50 km
- Highest Elevation: 3,853 m
- Walking time: 8 hours

Route Description:

A long and continuous descent through dense broadleaf forest leading to Samcholing. The trail is poorly defined in several sections and becomes difficult to navigate during wet conditions.

Key Issues

- Long continuous descent
- Muddy Forest Trail
- Poorly developed route
- Challenging for both trekkers and horses
- High safety risk during rainfall

Assessment:

- This is considered the most challenging section of the entire trek due to its steep descent, poorly defined trail sections, and muddy forest terrain. The combination of slippery surfaces, uneven ground, and limited visibility increases the risk of slips, falls, and navigation difficulties for trekkers. These conditions also create significant challenges for pack animals, particularly during the monsoon season when the trail becomes wet and unstable.

Recommendation:

- Undertake major trail upgrading and realignment works to improve safety, accessibility, and overall trail sustainability.
- Construct proper drainage systems and install steps on steep sections to reduce erosion and provide safer footing for trekkers and pack animals.
- Improve signage and route markers to enhance navigation, particularly in forested and poorly defined sections.
- Stabilize erosion-prone areas through appropriate trail engineering measures to prevent further degradation and maintain long-term trail quality.

OVERALL CONCLUSION (DAYS 6 - 9)

Days 6–9 represent the most physically demanding and technically challenging sections of the trek, requiring sustained effort across long distances, steep ascents and descents, dense forests, and varied terrain. While the trail remains passable, several factors reduce its overall safety and practicality, including limited campsites, unreliable water sources, loose gravel, unstable slopes, muddy and slippery surfaces, poor drainage, and poorly defined trail sections. These conditions become significantly more hazardous during the monsoon season, increasing the risk of slips, falls, erosion, navigation difficulties, and operational challenges for both trekkers and pack animals. Strengthening trail maintenance, improving drainage systems, stabilizing unstable sections, developing suitable campsites and reliable water points, and enhancing trail definition would significantly improve safety, accessibility, and the long-term sustainability of these sections while providing a better overall trekking experience.



OVER ALL ASSESSMENT

Sakeng to Samcholing (83.26 km)

The Great Yeti Trek is one of Bhutan's most promising high-altitude trekking routes, traversing the pristine landscapes of eastern Bhutan from Sakteng through the Brokpa highlands of Merak to Samcholing in Samkhar Gewog. Covering Approximately 82 - 85 km over eight trekking days, the route combines spectacular Himalayan scenery, sacred lakes, traditional pastoral landscapes, unique Brokpa culture, and important Buddhist heritage sites. The assessment confirms that the trail possesses outstanding potential to become a flagship trekking product for eastern Bhutan while supporting sustainable tourism and local livelihoods.

Route Characteristics

The trek passes through diverse ecological zones, beginning in temperate forests around Sakteng before ascending into alpine meadows, high mountain passes, glacial lake systems, yak grazing grounds, and eventually descending through mixed forests to Samcholing. Elevations range from approximately 2,344 m at Samcholing to over 4,330 m near the alpine lakes, providing trekkers with dramatic changes in climate, vegetation, and scenery.

The route is physically demanding, with several sustained ascents and descents exceeding 1,000 m in elevation gain or loss. Most trekking days require between six and nine hours of walking, making the trail most suitable for experienced trekkers with adequate physical fitness and proper acclimatization.

Scenic and Natural Value:

The Great Yeti Trek possesses exceptional natural beauty throughout its length. Highlights include:

- Panoramic views across the Sakteng and Merak mountain ranges.
- Extensive alpine meadows and seasonal wildflower landscapes
- Sacred glacial lakes including Sakteng Latsho, Merak Latsho, Migmar Tsho, and Ama Jomo Latsho.
- Dense high -altitude forests rich in biodiversity.
- Traditional yak - grazing pastures enclosed by centuries - old stone walls.
- Remote wilderness landscapes largely untouched by modern developments.

These features provide visitors with an authentic Himalayan wilderness experience rarely found elsewhere in Bhutan

Cultural and Spiritual Significance

One of the greatest strength of the Great Yeti Trek is the integration of living culture with sacred landscapes.

The route passes through the traditional homeland of the Brokpa people, whose pastoral lifestyle, architecture, clothing, festivals, and hospitality remain remarkably well preserved. Cultural experiences such as the traditional Tshogchang (welcome ceremony) in Merak provide visitors with meaningful interaction with local communities.

The trail also passes numerous sacred religious sites, including:

- Tsholung Goemba
- Sacred high - altitude lakes
- Chorten Nakpo
- Brangzure sacred meditation site
- Brangzung Chorten
- Samcholing Goenpa

These sites greatly enhance the trail's appeal for pilgrimage tourism, cultural interpretation, and spiritual trekking.

Trail Conditions:

Overall, the trekking route remains clearly indentifiable and generally follows long-established traditional migration and trading paths used by the Brokpa communities.

However, field assessment identified several sections requiring improvements:

- Narrow and uneven trail surfaces
- Steep rocky descents
- Muddy sections during wet weather
- Fallen trees obstructing forest trails
- Limited drainage in erosion - prone areas
- Insufficient directional signage
- Lack of interpretation panels at key natural and cultural attractions
- Limited resting shelters on long exposed sections

Despite these challenges, no majore rerouting is required, and the trail remains suitable for trekking following targeted maintenance.



SUGGESTED ITINERARY

Sakeng to Samcholing (83.26 km)

Campsite Assessment:

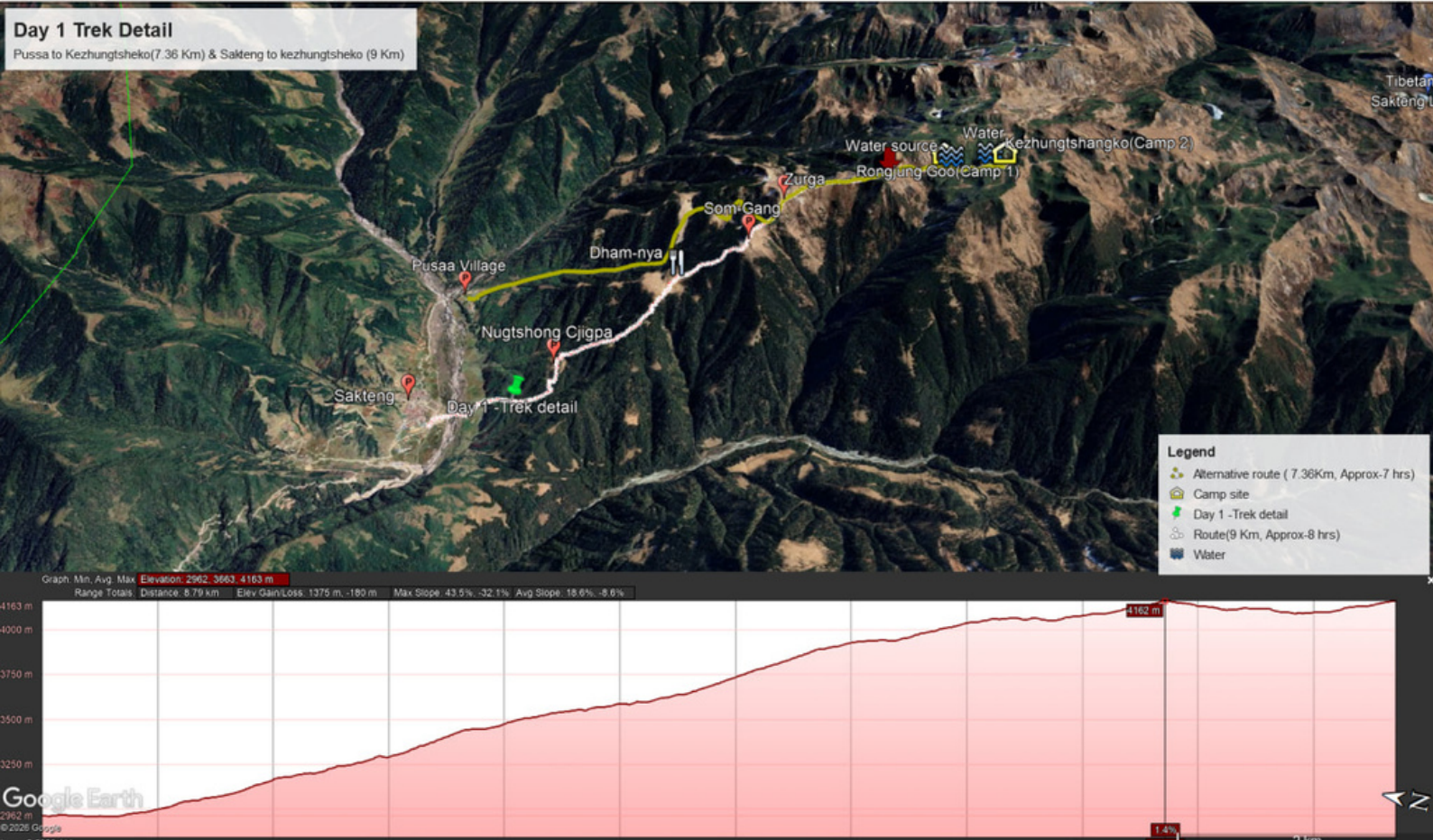
The assessment identified suitable overnight camps throughout the route, with reliable water sources available at most locations.

The recommended commercial trekking itinerary is :

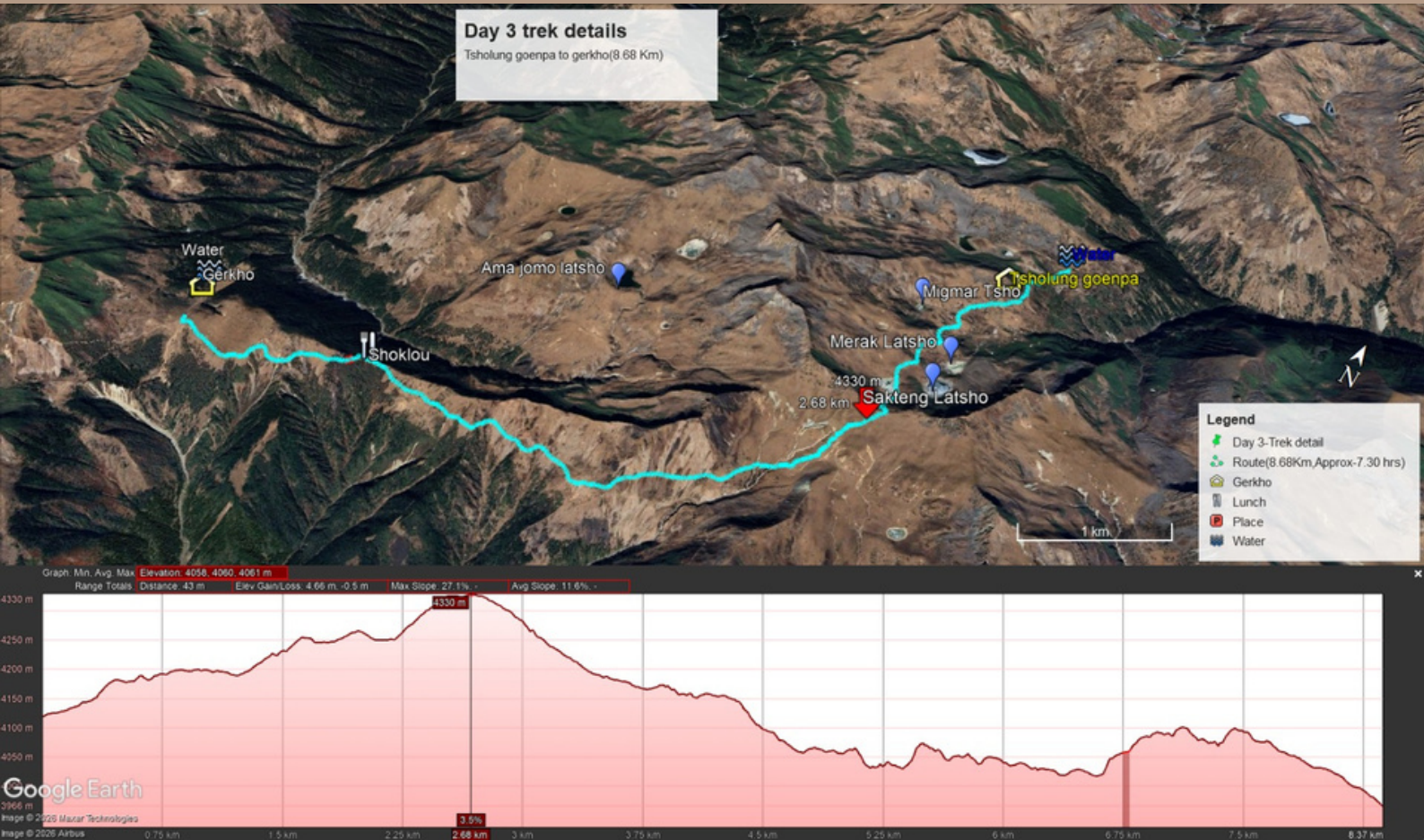
- Day 1: Pussa Village to Kezungtshangko
- Day 2: Kezungtshangko to Tsholung Goenpa
- Day 3: Tsholung Goenpa to Gerkho
- Day 4: Gerkho to Merak
- Day 5: Merak to Tshogotse
- Day 6: Tshogotse to Pangkepu
- Day 7: Pangkepu to Tsogom tse
- Day 8: Tsogom tse to Samcholing Goenpa

This revised itinerary provides balanced trekking distances, improves visitor safety, and allows greater opportunity for and cultural engagement.

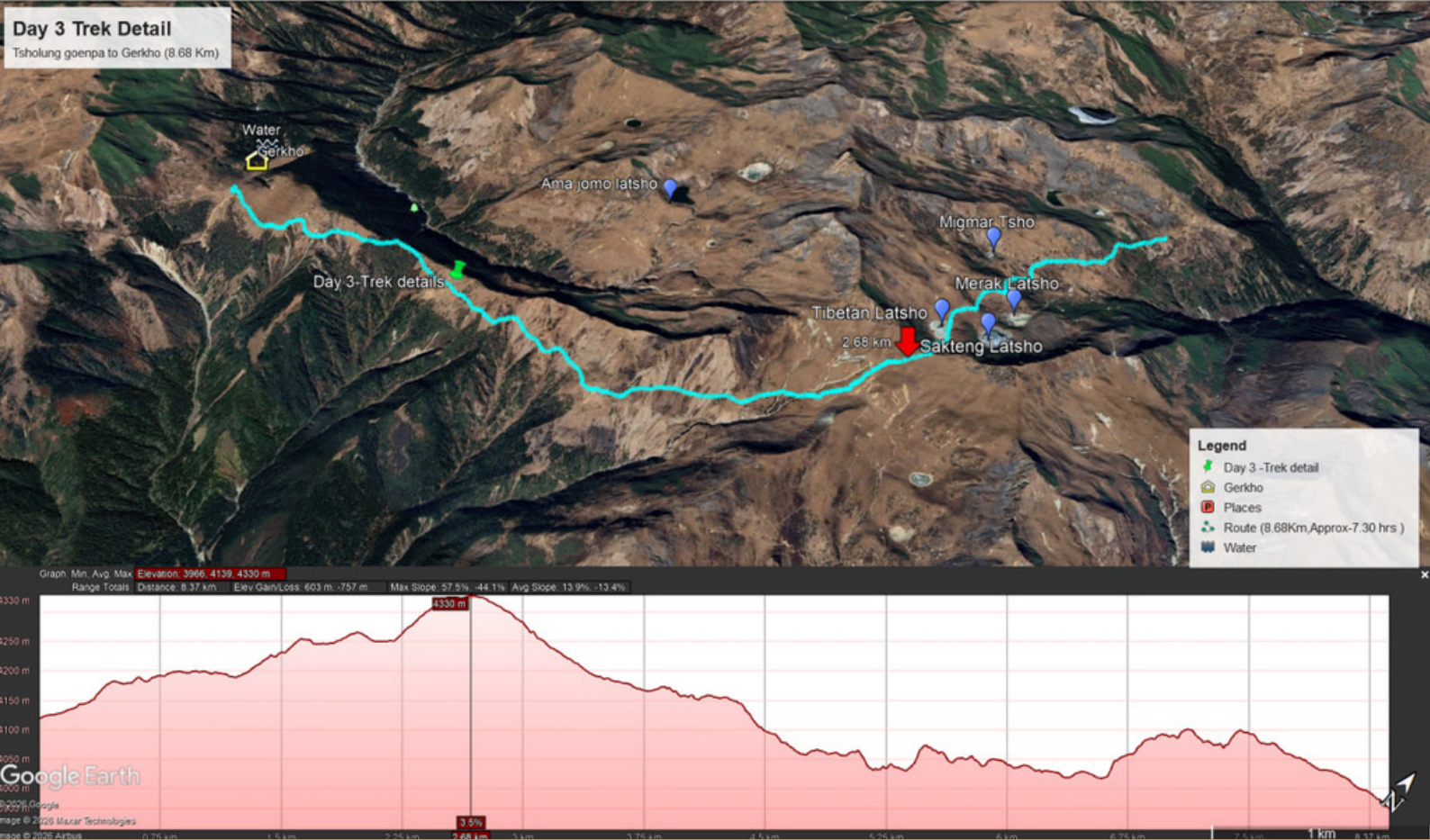
Day 1: Pussa Village - Kezungtshangko



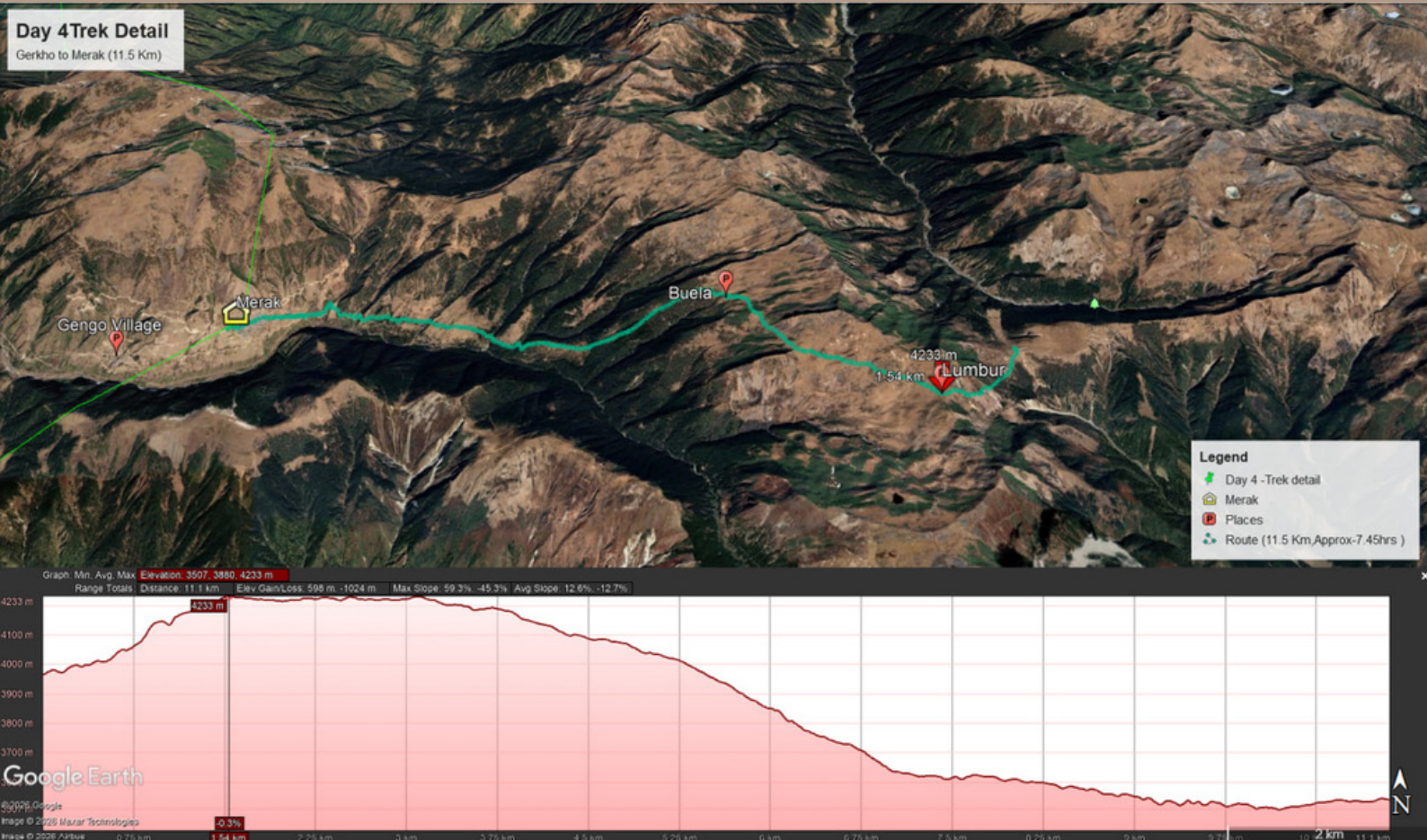
Day 2: Kezhungtsheko - Tsholung Goenpa



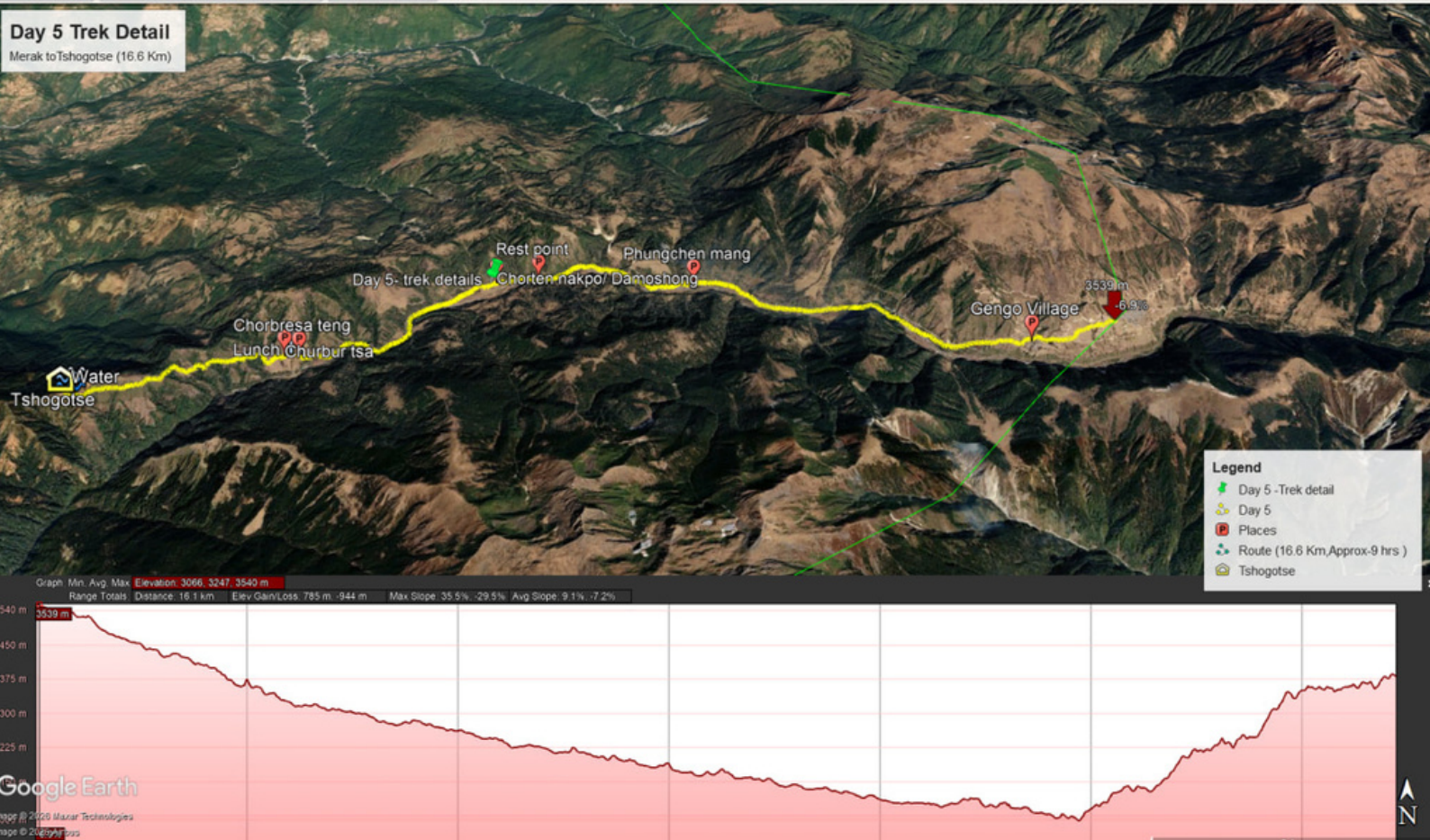
Day 3: Tsholung Goenpa - Gerkho



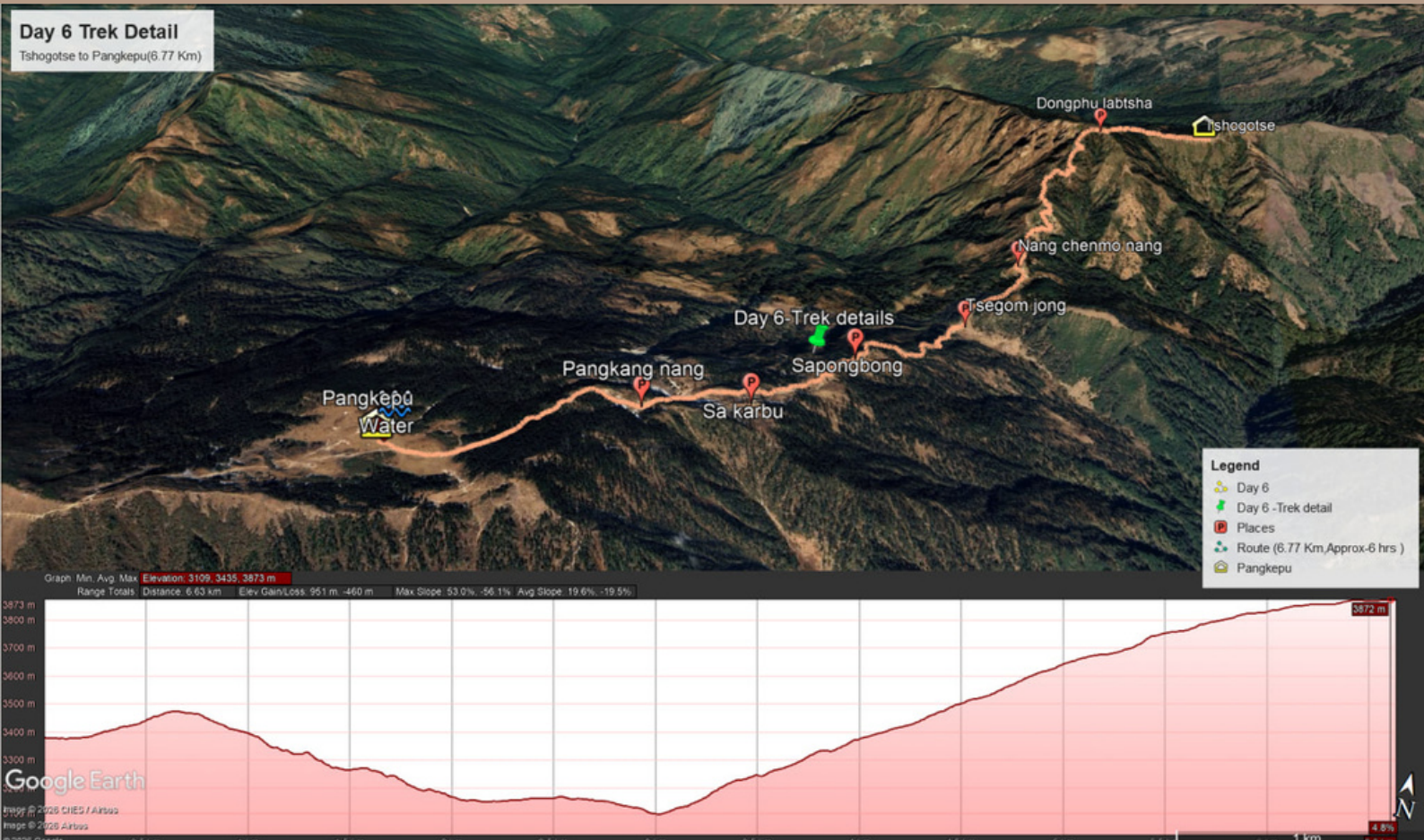
Day 4: Gerkho - Merak



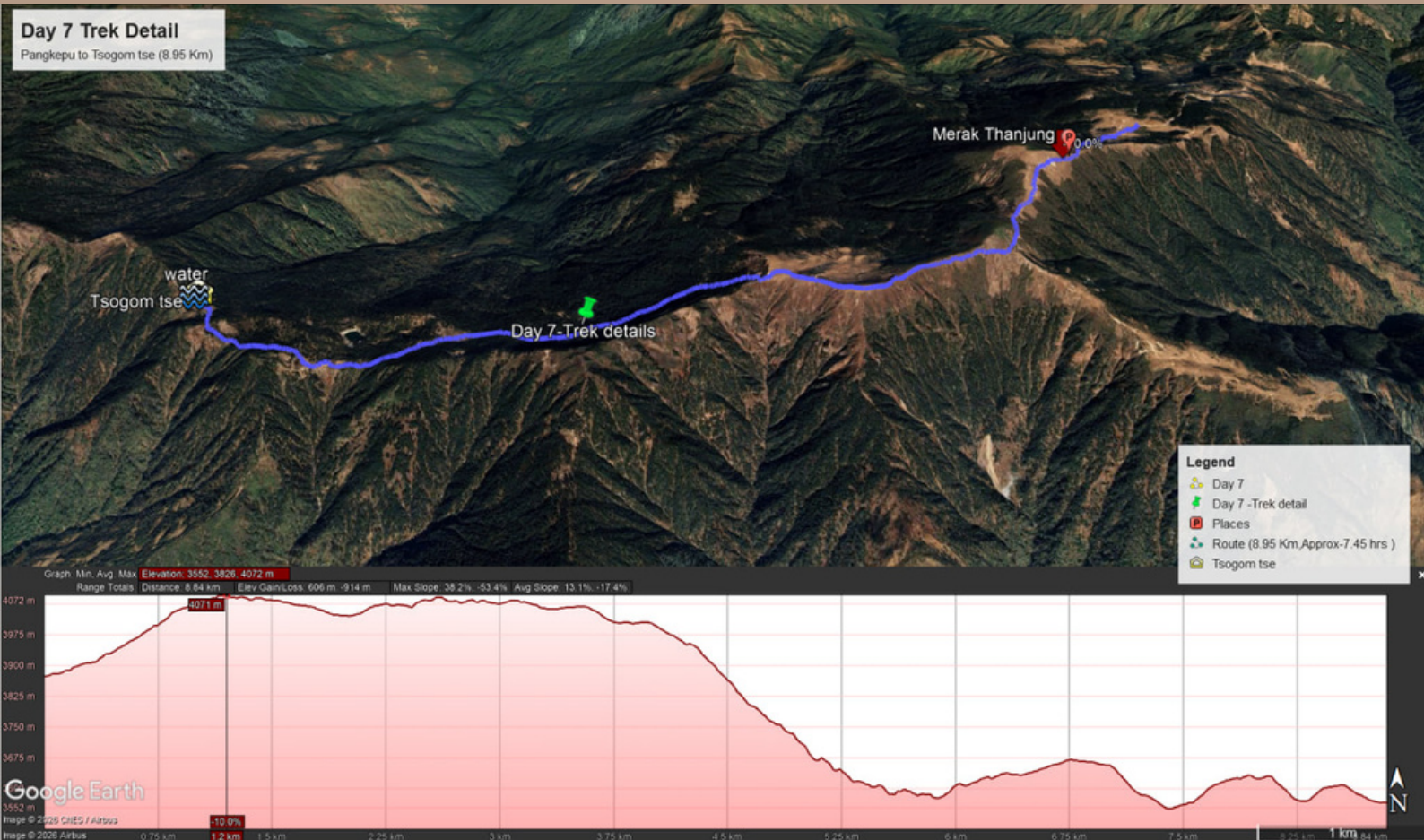
Day 5: Merak - Tshogotse



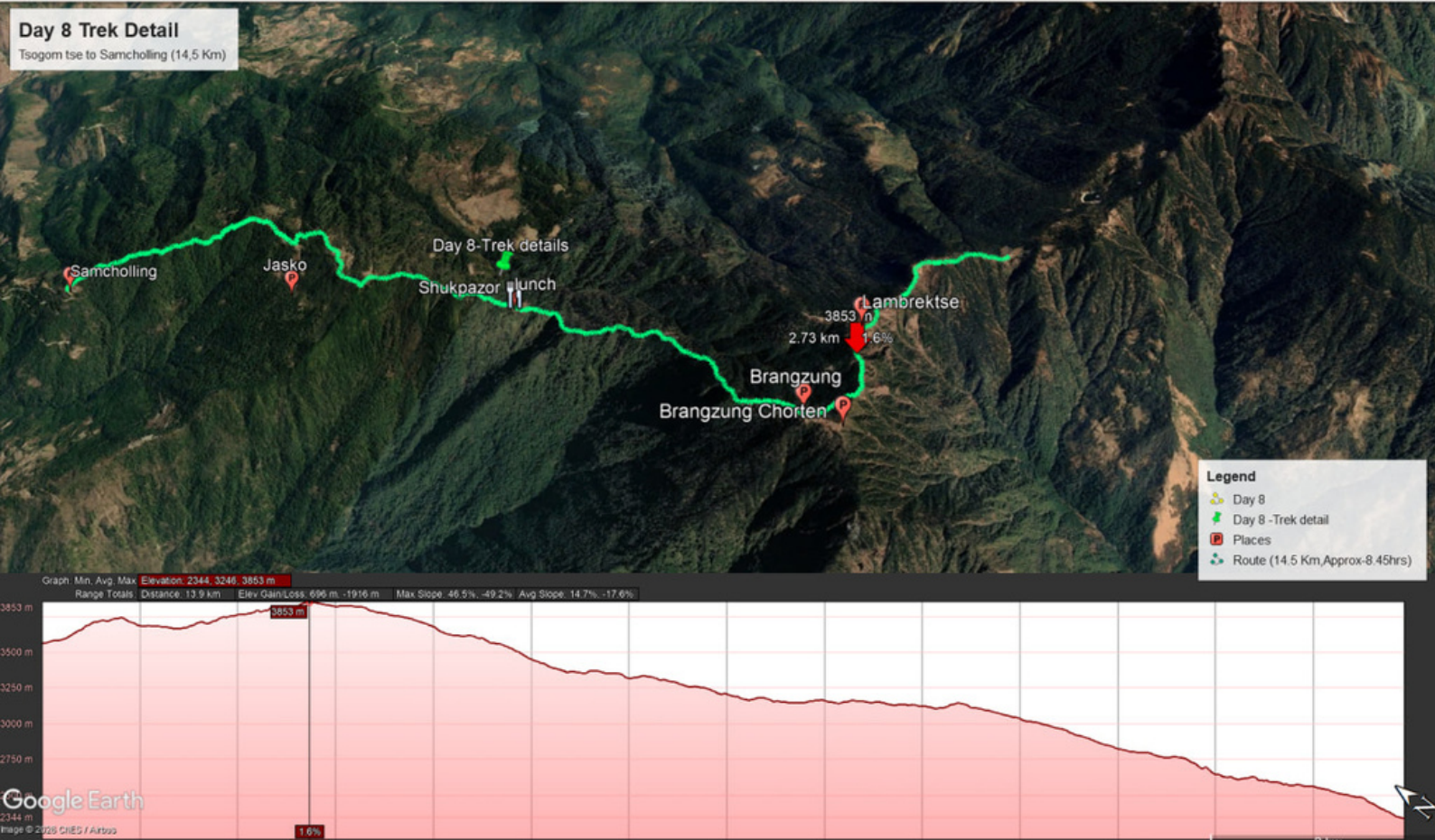
Day 6: Tshogotse - Pangkepu



Day 7: Pangkepu - Tsogom Tse



Day 8: Tsegom Tse - Samcholing



Visitor Safety Assessment

The principal safety concerns observed during the assessment include:

- Rapidly changing mountain weather.
- High - altitude exposure above 4,000 metres.
- Steep descents requiring careful footing.
- Slippery and middy trail sections.
- Fallen trees in forest areas .
- Limited emergency communications coverage.
- Absence of emergency shelters in remote sections.

To improve safety, the route would benefit from:

- Regular trail maintenance
- Installation of Kilometre markers.
- Emergency evacuation information
- Bridge improvements where necessary
- Hazard warning signs
- Standardized directional signage.



FLORA AND FAUNA FOUND

Sakeng to Samcholing (83.26 km)

Flora:

The route is particularly known for its vibrant alpine vegetation and beautiful wildflowers. Trekkers can observe a variety of species, including:

- Blue Poppy (*Meconopsis gakyidiana*) – Bhutan's national flower, found in suitable high-altitude areas along the trail.
- Primula species – A wide range of colorful primroses adding seasonal beauty to the landscape.
- Rhododendron species – Extensive rhododendron forests and flowering shrubs, including *Rhododendron anthopogon*, are found along the route.
- Setosum and other native Himalayan plant species that contribute to the rich ecological diversity of the region.

Birdlife:

The trek also provides excellent opportunities for birdwatching, with a variety of Himalayan bird species inhabiting the forests and alpine zones. Common sightings include:

- Sunbirds – Known for their vibrant colors and presence around flowering plants.
- Rose Finches – Several varieties can be observed in the higher elevations.
- Tits – Small forest birds commonly found along wooded sections of the trail.
- Bullfinches – Frequently seen in forest habitats.
- Himalayan Monal – One of the most spectacular pheasant species of the Himalayas, valued for its striking plumage and rarity.

The combination of diverse flora and rich birdlife makes the Sakteng–Merak route an exceptional destination for nature lovers, birdwatchers, and trekkers seeking an immersive Himalayan wilderness experience.



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Sakeng to Samcholing (83.26 km)

The great Yeti Trek has exceptional potential to become one of Bhutan's premier multi-day trekking experiences. Its greatest strengths include:

- Outstanding wilderness landscapes
- Rich Brokpa cultural heritage
- Sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites
- Exceptional biodiversity
- Authentic highland pastoral traditions
- Minimal tourism impacts
- Strong opportunities for community participation

The route aligns well with Bhutan's High Value, Low Volume tourism policy by attraction visitors seeking authentic cultural experiences, challenging mountain trekking, and nature based adventure.

Infrastructure Priorities:

The following improvements are recommended before commercial promotion:

1. Upgrade trail surfaces in hazardous sections.
2. Install Standardized directional and distance signage.
3. Construct environmentally sensitive resting shelters.
4. Improve campsite facilities where appropriate.
5. Install interpretation panels highlighting natural and cultural heritage.
6. Clear fallen trees and overgrown vegetation annually.
7. Improve drainage and erosion control.
8. Develop emergency response procedures and rescue protocols.
9. Produce official trekking maps and GPS data
10. Establish regular trail monitoring and maintenance programmes involving local communities.

Sustainability Considerations

The route offers significant opportunities for community – based tourism while maintaining environmental integrity. Sustainable management should prioritise:

- Community participation in tourism services.
- Waste management at campsites.
- Protection of sacred lakes and religious sites.
- Conservation of alpine ecosystems
- Preservation of Brokpa Cultural traditions
- Visitor education on responsible trekking practices.

Future tourism development should remain carefully managed to avoid overuse while ensuring local communities receive meaningful economic benefits.

Overall Assessment:

The Great Yeti Trek demonstrates exceptional potential as a world – class trekking destination in eastern Bhutan, the route successfully combines spectacular Himalayan scenery, living Brokpa culture, sacred Buddhist Heritage, and remote wilderness into a distinctive trekking experience unlike any other in the country.

Although several sections require targeted improvements to enhance safety, accessibility, and visitor interpretation, the overall condition of the trail is suitable for tourism development. With appropriate infrastructure upgrades, regular maintenance, and strong community participation, the Great Yeti Trek has the capacity to become one of Bhutan's signature trekking products while contributing to sustainable rural development and conservation of the unique cultural and natural heritage of the eastern Himalayas.



THANK YOU

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