

TREK FROM OMALO TO SHATILI

Duration: 4-5 days

This is a 5-day version of the trek, to finish it in 4 days you have to hike from Omalo to Parsma on day 1 and from Parsma to Kvakhidi on day 2. Perfectly doable if the weather is good and you are at least averagely fit.

Difficulty: Hard

You will gain elevation quite slowly and the path is well-trodden, but the trek is 75 km long, takes five days and you will need to cross 3431m high pass. I will rate it as Moderate, but if you trek early or late in the season, the difficulty goes up due to a higher chance of swollen rivers and snowfields around the pass.

When to go:

Best time to go is July-first half of September. For people looking for a shoulder season - Atsunta pass usually becomes passable in the second half of June and shepherds leave the area with their herds in the first half of October.

How to get to Omalo:

There is no public transport to Tusheti. To get to Omalo, you will need to hire a driver with 4WD. First get to Kvemo Alvani village - this can be done by marshrutka or a taxi. Marshrutka departs from Ortachala bus station in Tbilisi at 9.am and two hours later arrives at Alvani (price 7 GEL). Local drivers usually approach the tourists and offer them to arrange the transport to Tusheti, the price they offer is reasonable. If your driver doesn't, you will need to ask around for a driver - it shouldn't be too hard. The trip usually takes 5 hours and costs 250 GEL for the whole jeep (that means 50 GEL per passenger).

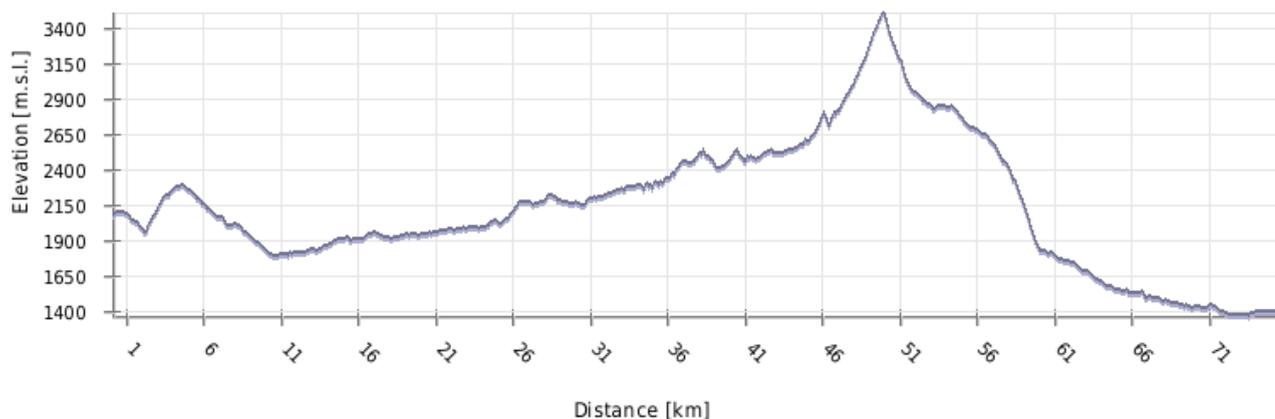
How to leave Shatili:

Marshrutka to Tbilisi leaves every Thursday and Sunday at 12:00 am and costs 20 GEL. During the season, it's often full, so I strongly recommend buying tickets in advance on the day before. Ask around the village where to find the driver. If you missed the marshrutka, you would have to hitchhike or take a taxi. Taxi to Tbilisi costs about 300 GEL.

Which way to hike:

I prefer the direction from Omalo to Shatili. It's more pleasant as you will gain elevation slowly for several days instead of a steep ascent from the other side. Also, I prefer, when the "highlight", in this case, Atsunta pass, lies more towards the end of the trek, so I have something to look forward to. But other people prefer the opposite direction since after two days of hard work, they can enjoy a pleasant downhill - Tusheti is a great reward, even though a longer walk on the road is a bit of an anticlimactic ending. So, ultimately, it depends on your other plans and how this trek fits into your whole trip - both directions work well.

Elevation profile



Prepared by www.caucasus-trekking.com

Day 1: Omalo - Dartlo

(distance 10.9km, 405m up and 670m down)

This undemanding walk can be finished the same day you arrive in Tusheti providing you leave Telavi early in the morning (but it's not worth it in my opinion, you would be in a rush and Omalo is certainly worth a visit). You follow the dirt road to Dartlo, but soon, approximately 1,5 km behind the village starts a shortcut - you need to follow the serpentine climbing the meadow to the right of the road, over the hill and into the forest (see map).

Shortly afterward, you will reach the dirt road again.

Climb a bit further to the small pass - the meadow above is called Ghele and due to its location, in the past, it served as the meeting point of elders of all three valleys. From there, follow the slowly descending road all the way to Dartlo - from the pass, the walk should take less than 2 hours.

The village is pretty nice - there is also a guesthouse, two restaurants, and a small grocery shop. For even better sights, I recommend climbing to the Kvavlo tower, standing some 200m above the village. A good place to camp is by the river, beneath the village.

An alternative panoramic trail on day 1

Route described above is "the classic one, but worth considering is also an alternative that ends in the next village in the valley, Parsma - **traverse of Pirikita range**. Here, you take a taxi to the Ghele meadow, climb the Pirikita range and follow it all the way to Nakle-Kholi pass, from which you drop to Parsma.

This route is better in many aspects, but I can't say it's better. While the normal route stays at the bottom of the valley, this follows the top of the ridge -> which means much better views during the day. But it has a price - you will miss Dartlo. Also, it's much more demanding and you will need to take a taxi to Ghele meadow, where this hike starts (for some 60 GEL) to be able to finish it in a day. But it follows a trail, not the dirt track, which is a big bonus.

Trail parameters

Distance	75,13 km
Trail type:	A → B trip
Max. elevation:	3413m
Min. elevation:	1360m
Total climb:	2948m ↑
Total descent:	3578m ↓

Day 2: Dartlo - Girevi (distance 14km, 414m up and 196m down)

In the morning, you can pick from two roads. One follows the Alazani river all the way to Parsma; the other one goes a bit uphill, passes Dano village, and descends to the river again in a series of switchbacks. But almost everybody just follows the river, few people are in a mood for detour early in the morning.

Not much can be said about the next section, you just follow the river on the dirt track. One hour later, you will pass Chesho - the village is unremarkable, but has pretty good guesthouses so if you are doing the trek in 4 days and want to sleep this night in a bed, this is a place to stay. Parsma, the next village in the valley is the exact opposite - ancient, atmospheric, with several impressive towers. But the guesthouse is very basic (or at least it was 2019).

In the afternoon, leave the jeep road behind and continue walking by the river, toward the Girevi. The path sometimes leads on the rocks very close to the water, but keep going and stay on the left bank. In Girevi, you will need to visit a border guards post (lies by the river a little southwest of the village) and fill in registration forms for trekking in the border area. It could take 15-20 minutes.

Day 3: Girevi - Kvakhidi meadows (distance 14.2km, 978m up and 584m down)

Not far behind Girevi village, Alazani valley splits into two. Follow the stream of river Kvakhidisitskali (valley to the right), the path is clearly visible. You will pass the ruins of Chontio village and then just keep walking up the valley. During the day you will be checked by border guards twice, the first time halfway through the valley, the second time towards the evening, not far before the campsite.

Finally, you will see a large basin ahead, situated at the confluence of several rivers - Khakhidi meadows. The trail will lead you to the bridge, which you will need to cross to get to the campsite. There is a lot of space, water can be taken from one of the smaller streams in the area.

Year after year, this campsite is getting busier and busier. In 2016, one shepherd turned his shelter into a little food stall so you can buy some basic food and sometimes even beer. Meadows are ideal for camping. We got water from one of the smaller streams in the area. Other enterprising shepherds with horses wait here for hikers and offer them to take their backpacks to the pass. They may even persuade them that a horse is necessary to cross the river upstream. However, most usually, it isn't - ask hikers coming from the opposite direction about this crossing so you can decide if you need it or not.

Camping closer to the pass

If you reach Khakhidi meadows in a reasonable time, let's say before 3 pm, it might be a good idea to push on to the next campsite, marked as Atsunta campsite in gpx log. This camp lies right beneath the pass, after the last river crossing, at a spot where the trail leaves the river. The advantage is that on the next day you will reach the pass much earlier. Also, the Kvakhidi campsite can get quite crowded and noisy if several larger groups meet here at the same time - Atsunta campsite has no such issue, it feels truly remote.

The main disadvantage is that this campsite is small and you might find it already occupied. In such a case, you will have to find some much less comfortable spot nearby or climb another 300 elevation meters to the next campsite, which is situated by the shepherd's hut.

Day 4: Kvakhidi - Khidotani ridge (distance 16.8km, 1405m up and 1168m down)

Continue by Kvakhidisitskali river. You will have to cross it twice. Most of the time, this crossing is quite unremarkable but sometimes, especially during early summer and after major rains, the water level makes the crossing pretty uncomfortable and even risky.

After you ford the river (there is a stone with Exit Shatili mark), you will see three valleys in front of you. Take the one to the right and start the ascent - the path in the lower section is not too obvious, but soon becomes much more visible.

You will see a saddle that looks like Atsunta pass. When you think you are almost there, the path turns right and climbs a huge hill covered with shale - Atsunta is to the right of the lowest part of the ridge. But you can't miss it, just follow the path and the map. Climb the pass, enjoy the views, climb further a ridge to the right if you want. Here starts red touristic marking.

Descent from Atsunta pass is my favorite part of the trek. You may be tempted to descend all way down to the river, but don't do it. Stay on the left side of the valley and the trail will eventually bring you to Khidotanis range (this section might be risky if still covered with snow). It is an amazing place with a great view of Tebulo mountain. If you walk far enough, you will reach a border guards camp not far above the treeline level. Nearby, you will also find a water spring so this is a good place to break a camp.

Day 5: Khidotani ridge - Shatili (distance 19.6km, 300m up and 1511m down)

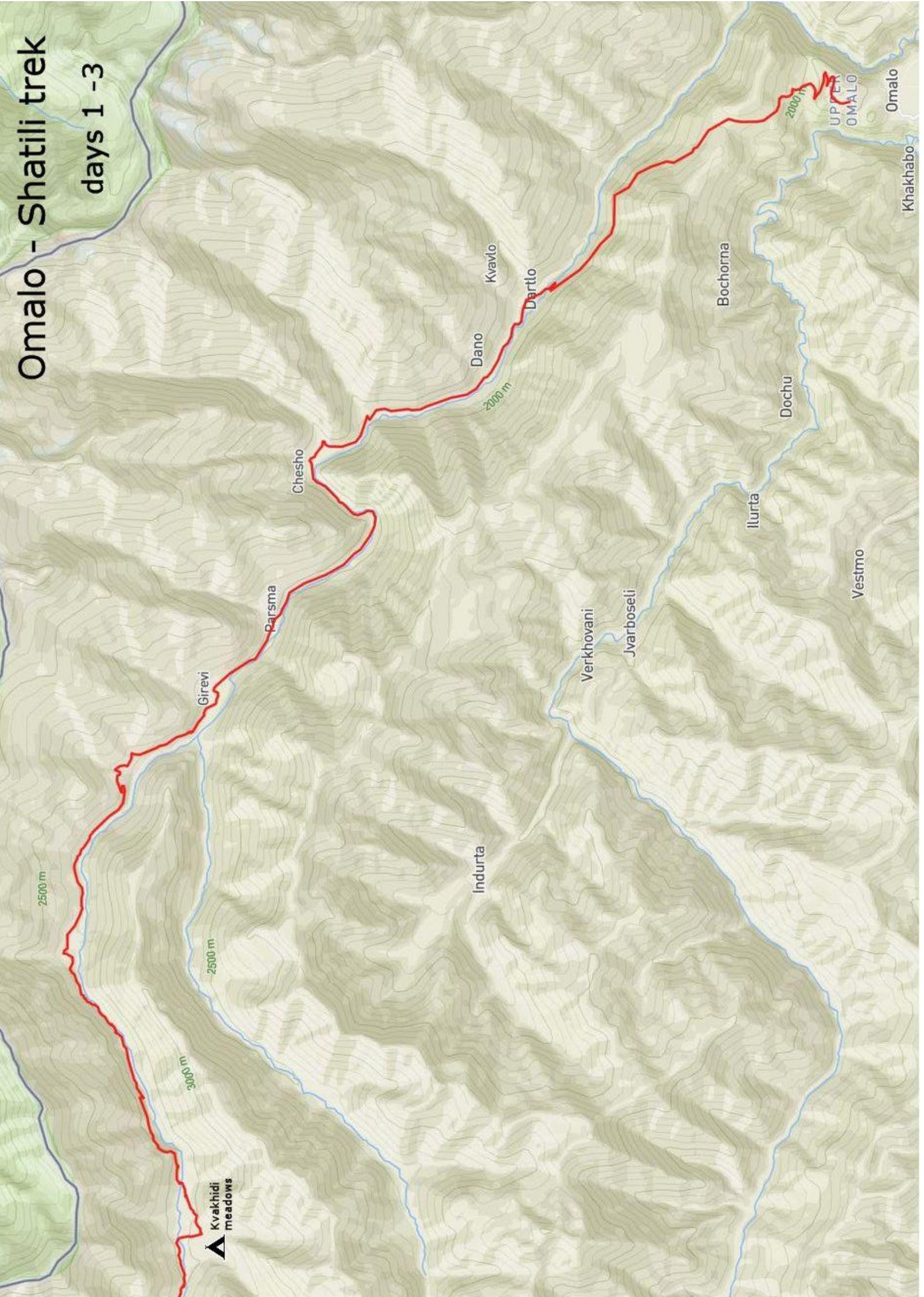
From the guard's camp, there are two ways down into the valley, both steep and muddy. One heading to the west descends to the Ardoti village but we will take the more straightforward one which leads to the north. The trail soon enters the forest and then comes a steep, arduous descent into the Khonistskali valley. Here the path turns into a dirt track again. Follow the road, it will lead you through Khonischala village to the confluence with Andaki river, where lies an ancient fortress Mutso (there is one more border checkpoint not far before the fortress).

Mutso fortress is definitely worth a visit. There was a major reconstruction project going on (finished in 2018), so some areas turned into a building site. I must admit I liked it more when Mutso was empty and quiet, but even now it's ok - they didn't touch everything, just some buildings. There is also a small restaurant by the road, another place to get food on the trek. It is certainly worth climbing it to the very top, to the well-preserved, lonely tower standing above the fortress.

Continue down the road (or hitchhike, this section is not that interesting). Another interesting sight on the road is Anatori - House of the Dead in a place where the road bends back south. From there it's only 30 minutes to Shatili fortress.

Omalo - Shatili trek

days 1 -3



Omalo - Shatili trek

days 4 - 5

