

ALONG



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THE

ENGURI

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## ALONG THE ENGURI

The Enguri is one of the main rivers of Georgia. From its source in the mountains of the Greater Caucasus to its mouth in the Black Sea, on just 213 kilometers, the river crosses a variety of landscapes but also symbolic places of Georgian identity and its fractures: part of its route has become the eastern “border” of Abkhazia along which patrol Russian soldiers since the 2008 war.



Coming out from the glaciers of Mount Shkhara (5,193 m., the highest point of Georgia), the Enguri passes through the villages of Upper Svaneti, including the iconic Ushguli and its many medieval defense towers. Considered as the highest permanent settlement in Europe, this town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Svaneti attracts a growing number of tourists thanks to its alpine landscapes and its historical and religious heritage. It was in this remote region, preserved from foreign invasions, that the Georgian clergy and nobility hid their treasures. In these mountains are also perpetuated very ancient traditions combining Christianity and pagan rites.

Halfway through, the stream is blocked by the monumental Djvari dam, one of the tallest in the world, built during the Soviet period. It is a strategic infrastructure for the energy supply of Georgia but also Abkhazia, the rebel province that seceded in 1992 after a fratricidal war. Today, it symbolizes one of the rare cases of “transboundary” cooperation because part of the water in the reservoir is diverted to Abkhazia, where power plants are located. A few kilometers from the dam, Potskho Etseri is the town which was built for the dam’s employees, today it is in a decrepit state after having been abandoned by the state and it shelters refugees from the Abkhaz conflict who survive here in deprivation.

A little further south, many Georgians chased out of Abkhazia during the 1992 war found refuge in the plains of Samegrelo. They can not legally go back to the other side of the river which has become a “border”, locked by a contingent of Russian soldiers. They can not return to their homes, gather on the graves of their ancestors, visit friends and relatives who remained in Abkhazia. On the Georgian side, the area is weakly militarized, an EU observer patrolling along the river.

Despite tensions, Georgia wants to develop this region adjacent to the Enguri, including through projects supposed to attract the Abkhaz who are allowed to come to the territory controlled by Tbilisi. At the mouth of the river, the construction of a large industrial port in the village of Anaklia has just begun, it raises many hopes. This infrastructure will be integrated into the network of the new silk routes. This port is added to a project of former president Mikheil Saakashvili who wanted to turn Anaklia into a futuristic seaside resort, a way to show the Abkhaz that their future is rather alongside Georgians than Russians.

10 years after the war of 2008, Georgia developed strongly thanks to a boom of tourism and the geostrategic location of the country which makes it a corridor between Europe and Asia. On the other hand, the painful Abkhazian problem and the issue of the return of the refugees seem more than ever blocked.

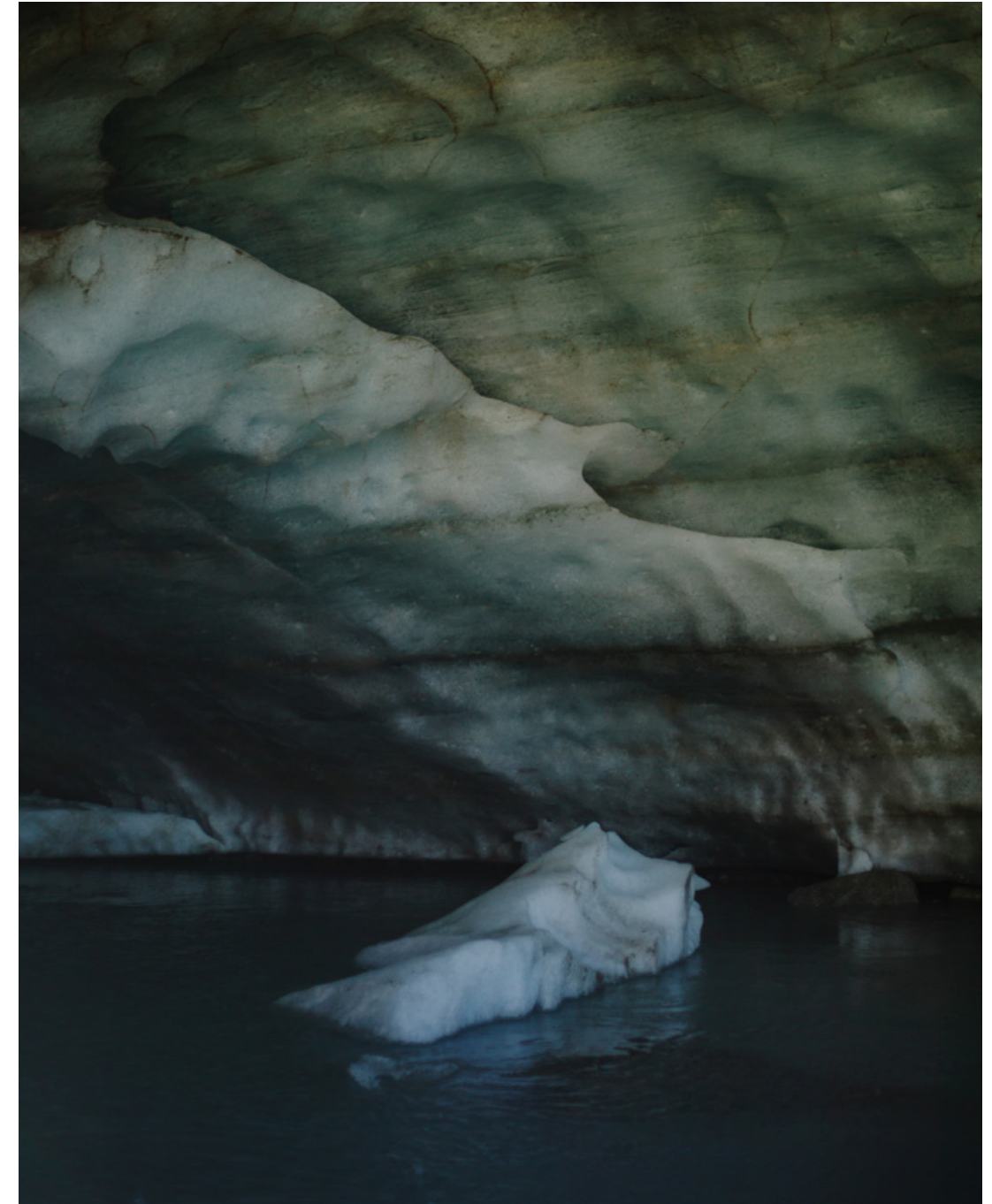
### PHOTOS

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### TEXT

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(left) Ieli, Svaneti, Georgia - The Caucasus range where Enguri source is located is seen from a house.

(right) Svaneti, Georgia - Source of Enguri River, in a glacier, at the bottom of Mount Shkhara.





Ushguli, Svaneti, Georgia - Ushguli is the first village crossed by the river, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with its medieval defensive tower houses.





Ushguli, Svaneti, Georgia - In the evening, Taniel brings back his cows who spent the day in fields near Ushguli.





Ushguli, Svaneti, Georgia - Just before, he did the same with his sheep.





Ushguli, Svaneti, Georgia - some men just killed a cow and are slowly cutting the meat.





Ieli, Svaneti, Georgia -  
Because of topography,  
a lot of Svans are still  
using bulls to work in  
the fields.





Ushguli, Svaneti, Georgia - Taniel is cutting grass and preparing haystacks in the fields near Ushguli before the cold season arrives





Potskho Etseri, Samegrelo, Georgia - Potskho Etseri is the former settlement of the Jvari dam workers. Today, only a few families of refugees are living here.





Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Ether, born in Abkhazia, in her house in Shamgona, an island on the Enguri river. On one side of Shamgona is Georgia, on the other side Abkhazia



Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Ether's house.





Potskho Etseri, Samegrelo, Georgia - Potskho Etseri is the former settlement of the Jvari dam workers. Today, only a few families of refugees are living here. Flowers reflection on a grave in the small cemetery of the village.





Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Ether, born in Abkhazia, in her house in Shamgona, an island on the Enguri river. On one side of Shamgona is Georgia, on the other side Abkhazia





Potskho Etseri, Samegrelo, Georgia - Potskho Etseri is the former settlement of the Jvari dam workers. Today, only a few families of refugees are living here.





Potskho Etseri, Samegrelo, Georgia - Potskho Etseri is the former settlement of the Jvari dam workers. Today, only a few families of refugees are living here. The hotel Enguri hosts the few travellers coming here and guest workers of the dam...





Potskho Etseri, Samegrelo, Georgia - Potskho Etseri is the former settlement of the Jvari dam workers. Today, only a few families of refugees are living here. The hotel Enguri entrance.





Khaishi, Svaneti, Georgia - Workers in a sawmill, one of the main economic activities of Svaneti. Transformed wood is then exported to Russia, Turkey, etc



Potskho Etseri, Samegrelo, Georgia - Potskho Etseri is the former settlement of the Jvari dam workers. Today, only a few families of refugees are living here. The entrance of the village





Gerasime, the priest of Ushguli



Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - In the former school of the village, an abandoned portrait of Iakob Gogebashvili, a Georgian educator and writer.





Ieli, Svaneti, Georgia - In the village school



The Khurcha Bridge (on an affluent of Enguri) is a former crossing point between Georgia and Abkhazia. It was unilaterally closed by the Abkhaz authorities. Today children are fishing on it, just on the other side, the Russian border guards are present. A Georgian man was murdered there by an Abkhaz guard in 2016.





The Jvari dam seen from Potskho Etseri. It is the world's 4th tallest arch dam.





Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - A destroyed bridge from the former railway linking Tbilisi and Moscow





Zugdidi, Samegrelo, Georgia - Niva, refugee from Abkhazia live in a former school, occupied by refugees.





Potskho Etseri, Samegrelo, Georgia - Potskho Etseri is the former settlement of the Jvari dam workers. Today, only a few families of refugees are living here. An old derelict building.





The Enguri river seen from the Jvari dam





Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Refugees from Abkhazia living in a former building of the town hall. Today some municipal workers are still occupying some offices.



Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Gulo, is a refugee from Abkhazia, she lives in a small shack build next to the entrance of a former building of the town hall. Today some municipal workers are still occupying some offices.





Shamgona, Samegrelo,  
Georgia - Vitali went  
to check if some fishes  
were caught in the nest.  
On the other bank is  
Abkhazia.





Ganarjiis Mukhuri,  
Samegrelo, Georgia -  
The village is located  
on the other bank of  
Enguri, the "border" with  
Abkhazia is one kilome-  
ter from the village.





Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Tornike is peeking some corns that he will grill and eat with some friends later in the night.





Ganarjiis Mukhuri,  
Samegrelo, Georgia -  
The village is located  
on the other shore of  
Enguri, the "border" with  
Abkhazia is one kilome-  
ter from the village.





Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Hazelnut is one of the main income of the inhabitants of the region



Shamgona, Samegrelo, Georgia - Hazelnut is one of the main income of the inhabitants of the region





Anaklia, Samegrelo,  
Georgia - A young boy  
fishing on Enguri, in the  
village of Anaklia just  
before the Enguri meets  
the Black Sea.





Anaklia, Samegrelo,  
Georgia - two young  
boys are fishing in the  
small and empty yacht  
port.





Ganarjiis Mukhuri, Samegrelo, Georgia - The beach side



Ganarjiis Mukhuri, Samegrelo, Georgia - The beach





Ganarjiis Mukhuri,  
Samegrelo, Georgia – At  
the end of the beach,  
barriers are prevent-  
ing pedestrians to go  
further. A few meters  
after is the “border” with  
Abkhazia.





On the bridge between Anaklia and Ganarjiis Mukhuri, where the Enguri River meets the Black Sea



More photos...





