

# HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT TREES OF BHUTAN



UGYEN WANGCHUCK INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH



# Historically Significant Trees of Bhutan

Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research  
Department of Forests and Park Services  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests  
Royal Government of Bhutan

**Suggested Citation:**

UWICER (2018). Historically Significant Trees of Bhutan. UWICER, Department of Forests and Park Services, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, UWICER – Press. Bumthang - Bhutan

**Prepared by:**

Sangay Wangchuk, UWICER  
Dorji Dukpa, UWICER  
Karma Tenzin, UWICER  
Kelly Tobden Dorji Tamang, UWICER  
Tashi Dhendup, UWICER

**ISBN: 978-99980-812-5-3****Disclaimer:**

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**Royal Government of Bhutan**  
**Ministry of Agriculture and Forests**  
**Thimphu**



སློན་པོ།  
**Minister**

**FOREWORD**

Every cypress tree or any tree growing near the monasteries, temples or dzongs in Bhutan are associated with great stories. The iconic cypress tree at Kurje in Bumthang; tallest cypress tree at Baylandra in Wangdue Phodrang and the biggest cypress tree at Pangri Zampa in Thimphu all have wonderful stories associated either with Guru Padmasambhava, the second Buddha or with Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the unifier of Bhutan.

Considering the importance of documenting the historically significant tree species in Bhutan, I'm delighted to write the foreword for this report as I believe that this report shall serve as a baseline to document important tree species that are present in Bhutan. It is my hope and expectation that this report will provide much needed information on the historically significant tree species of Bhutan before we lose the tree along with its stories.

Bhutan's conservation stories revolve around sacred groves; abode of protective deities; monasteries and historically significant trees. High reverence of Bhutanese to such trees and sacred groves have helped shape environmental conservation in Bhutan. Thus, it is of utmost importance for Bhutanese to know the history of each historically significant tree species.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests acknowledges, with great appreciation, the efforts of the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research to document some of the significant tree species of Bhutan.

TASHI DELEK.

**Yeshey Dorji**









Orange tree at kichu Lhakhang, Paro

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We would like to thank the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs in providing us with clearance to conduct the study. The study would not have been possible without the unwavering support we received from all twenty Dzongdags and Lam Netens; Gups and Tshogpas; and respective caretakers of each temples and monasteries.

We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to all the Chief Forestry Officers and forestry field colleagues who rendered their support in completing this study. We would like to thank Mr. Tsethup Tshering for helping us confirm the species name of trees. Last but not the least, we would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Nima Tshering who not only served as driver during field visits but also as field assistant by being a camera man during the course of the field work.

All our maps were made by Mr. Jun Saito, JICA volunteer at the institute. We are highly indebted to him.





Tachog Lhakhang, Paro

## INTRODUCTION

Like any other countries, Bhutan is filled with mythologies and we can be quite certain that every tree near the monasteries or *dzongs*<sup>1</sup> or for that matter any cypress tree in Bhutan is associated with stories. It is indeed these sacred sites; historically significant trees and some areas delineated and worshipped as the abode of local deities, which helped shape the environmental conservation policies of Bhutan.

Bhutan have many important places and monuments which are considered as virtuous legacies of *Guru Rimpoche*; *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal; Phajo Drugom Zhipo; *Lama*<sup>2</sup> Drukpa Kuenley; Pema Lingpa and many other important figures.

There are many mysterious observations from some of the much-revered trees in Bhutan. For instance, orange tree of Kichu *Lhakhang*<sup>3</sup> and Tachog *Lhakhang* in Paro are known to bear fruits throughout the year. However, since no one knows the associated stories, we couldn't document in this report. Likewise, there are many historically important tree species in Bhutan, some of which we purposefully avoided as they were believed to have been either the walking stick of local *Lama* or there are no clear-cut stories with regards to the tree. However, we would like to place on record that documenting even those tree species are important and we believe that we may be able to collect some concrete stories should we spend some more time with the locals and elders who know the stories.

In this report, we put an effort to document as many historically significant tree species as we could that exist throughout the country and we acknowledge that our report may not have covered all the existing historically significant tree species of Bhutan. The texts present in this report are also not intended to be comprehensive technical or historical guide to the historically significant trees of Bhutan.

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<sup>1</sup>Fortress

<sup>2</sup>Spiritual teacher

<sup>3</sup>Buddhist temple



## WHAT DOES SIGNIFICANT TREES MEAN?

Nature gives us vital resources which are crucial for humans and existence, this like plants, flowers, water, air, animals etc. play an important role in our lives and support our existence either directly or indirectly. Tree worship is very common worldwide and judging under trees are known in Biblical times and there are reports that even today, no Hindu or Buddhist shrine is complete without a sacred tree planted nearby. Trees, throughout the ages, have given deep and sacred meanings in many of the world's mythologies and religions. In Hinduism, almost everything given by nature are considered sacred. Hindus grow plants like Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) and Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) and worship them. In Buddhism and Hinduism, various trees are associated with Gods and Goddesses and are worshipped accordingly with religious beliefs.

Trees might have played a minor role but it did play a noticeable role in the Buddha's biography. According to legend he was born under a sal tree (*Shorea robusta*). The scriptures tell us he had his first spiritual experience under a rose-apple tree (*Eugenie jambolana*), he was enlightened under a peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), and he passed into Nirvana at Kushinara under the spreading branches of two sal trees. However, there are some confusion about the identities of these trees, even amongst traditional Buddhists. Following are some tree species considered sacred by Buddhist and Hindus:

### **Peepal** (*Ficus religiosa*)

One of the most sacred trees in Buddhism and Hinduism. Though the tree is worshipped throughout India, this tree has great significance for Buddhist as Lord Buddha is believed to have achieved enlightenment under this tree. In Hinduism this tree is associated with Lord Vishnu. Red thread or clothes are generally tied around the trunk of this tree by Hindus as they believe that Goddess Lakshmi reside in this tree every Saturday. Therefore, women pray to this tree with the hope that their wishes shall be granted.



**Banana** (*Musa sp.*)

This tree has a lot of significance in the daily lives of people in India. Offerings made to Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi are usually made on banana leaf. They are also used at the entrance of gates and are considered very auspicious in Hindu tradition.

**Ashoka** (*Saraca asoca*)

This tree has very respectable place in Hinduism. It is also known as sorrow-less tree as Ashoka means no sorrows. The tree is associated with the God of Love.

**Bodichitta** (*Ziziphus budhensis*)



Bodichitta is a holy tree to Buddhism and seeds from this tree are threaded together to make rosary beads by Buddhist. *Bodhi* means enlightenment and *chitta* means soul in Sanskrit. Thus, this tree literally means soul of enlightenment.



## **Indian Trumpet Flower** (*Oroxylum indicum*)

This is one of the most important trees for Buddhists as flowers from this tree are required to make offerings while performing religious functions and flowers are also made into garlands during the consecration ceremony of any important monasteries or infrastructure. Some communities in the Himalayas also hang garlands made from this flowers on roof of their homes with a belief that they provide protection.

## **Cypress** (*Cupressus corneyana*)

It is the national tree of Bhutan and Bhutanese consider the tree sacred and held it in great reverence. It is often planted outside the monasteries, *dzongs* and religious places. Bhutan was once known to Tibetans as *Lho Mon Tsen Den Jong* (the country of cypress). Timber from this tree is preferred for building temples, monasteries and *dzongs*. It is said that every cypress tree in Bhutan tells a tale and indeed each one has a story. It just takes going around asking about the tree to unveil it. Besides being the national tree of Bhutan, the cypress is associated with diverse myths and beliefs. There are three formidable cypress trees in Bhutan: Baylandra in Wangdue Phodrang; Pangri Zampa in Thimphu and Kurjey in Bumthang. The origin of these trees may be traced to the walking stick of the great Indian saint who visited Bhutan in 8<sup>th</sup> century, the *Guru Rimpoche*, and the unifier of Bhutan, *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel, who came to Bhutan from Tibet in 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## **IMPORTANT HISTORICAL FIGURES OF BHUTAN**

Bhutan remains blessed with many important figures, who either spent sometime in the country or settled as prophesized. Many enlightened beings are known to have subdued local deities who were creating problems to the communities and landed up converting them to being the protective deity. Almost all the significant trees present in Bhutan are known to be the walking sticks of these important beings who walked the country. Some of the important figures are:



## Guru Rimpoche

In Bhutan, *Guru Padmasambhava* is generally referred to as *Guru Rimpoche*, meaning "precious master". *Guru Rimpoche* is for most Himalayan Buddhists the second Buddha, the Buddha of every form and teaching of enlightenment, with an accent on the tantras.

*Guru Rimpoche* is believed to have visited Bhutan in 810 AD upon the invitation of King Sindhu Raja of Bumthang. The King invited *Guru* as the local deity Shelgin Karpo snatched the soul of king making the king ill. *Guru*, came from Nepal and travelled through Nabji-Korphu in Zhemgang before reaching Bumthang. *Guru Rimpoche* is believed to have visited Bhutan for three times: 810 AD; 822 AD and 876 AD.



## Pema Lingpa

Pema Lingpa, a famous Bhutanese saint, was born to Dondrup Zangpo of the *Nyö* lineage and Pema Dronma in the Tang valley of Bumthang on the fifteenth day of the second month of the male iron-horse year corresponding to the year 1450. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Seventh Month of Fire Monkey year corresponding to the year 1476, he had a vision of *Guru Padmasambhava* at the holy site of Yigé Drukma and was blessed with an inventory of 108 profound treasures to be revealed.



He discovered his first treasure from the *Mebartsho* (Burning Lake) at Tang in Bumthang, and the treasure consisted of the teachings of Secret



Heart Essence of the Luminous Expanse and became one of his most famous revelations. He is said to have jumped into the lake with a lit butter lamp and emerged from the water with a statue and a treasure casket of joined skulls tucked under one arm, and the lamp still burning in the other. After that, his fame as a great treasure revealer spread and inspired unconditional faith in people. He discovered numerous other treasures which consisted of texts, images, stupas, etc. across the country and parts of Tibet. Of the 108 treasures destined to be revealed by Pema Lingpa, he revealed only thirty-two of them. Though trained to be a blacksmith, he went on to become the foremost of the five king Tertons (treasure revealers). He spent his life revealing treasures, giving teachings, building and renovating monasteries, and established a lineage of empowerments and transmissions that have been preserved and passed down through the centuries to the present day through his Body, Speech, and Mind emanations: Gangteng, Sungtrul, and Thukse Rinpoches.

### Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel

*Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel (1594–1651) was born in Ralung Monastery, Tibet, to Mipham Tenpai Nyima and Sonam Pelgyi Butri. *Zhabdrung's* paternal side is believed to have descended from the family of Tsangpa Gyare the founder of the *Drukpa*<sup>4</sup> Lineage. *Zhabdrung*, which translates as 'At whose feet one submits', is considered to be an emanation of *Avalokitesvara*, the Buddha of Compassion.



Ngawang Namgyal was enthroned as the 18<sup>th</sup> *Drukpa* or throne-holder of the traditional *Drukpa* seat and estate of Ralung. His recognition and enthronement were however opposed by Lhatsewa Ngawang Zangpo, an influential follower of *Drukpa* Pema Karpo, who promoted the recognition of a rival candidate, Gyalwang Pagsam Wangpo. Lhatsewa Ngawang Zangpo, then persuaded the Tsang

<sup>4</sup>Referred to Drukpa Kagyud sect



*Desi*<sup>5</sup> the most powerful ruler in Tibet and patron of the rival Karma Kagyu sect, to support the recognition of Pagsam Wangpo as Gyalwang Drukpa and incarnation of Kunkhyen Pema Karpo. However, *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal retained the *Drukpa* seat of Ralung, irrespective of all the claims. After a misunderstanding with Pawo Tsugla Gyatsho a Karma Kagyu *Lama*, *Zhabdrung* was asked to return all the sacred relics of Ralung including the *Rangjung Kharsapani*<sup>6</sup> as a compensation to the Tsang *Desi*. Therefore, in 1616 *Zhabdrung* fled Tibet and established Cheri Monastery in Thimphu as a new base in Western Bhutan and unified the country.

*Zhabdrung* also established the distinctive dual system of Government, by which control of the country was shared between a spiritual leader the *Je Khempo*<sup>7</sup> to preside over the religious institutions and an administrative leader the *Druk Desi* as head of secular affairs, a policy which exists even to this day. *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel founded Bhutan and ruled the country for over 35 years. He passed away in 1651 but his death was concealed for over 54 years under the pretext that he had entered into a strict retreat.

## Phajo Drugom Zhipo

Phajo Drugom Zhipo was a Tibetan Buddhist particularly important in the early spread of the *Drukpa* school in Bhutan. Phajo Drugom Zhipo was born in 1184 at Yangtse Babchu in the eastern region of Tibet. Phajo Drugom Zhipo is believed to have arrived in Bhutan in the year 1222 as prophesized by Tsangpa Gyare the founder of the *Drukpa* lineage. He introduced the *Drukpa Kagyu* school of Tibetan Buddhism in Bhutan. Phajo Drugom Zhipo entered parinirvana in 1251.



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<sup>5</sup>Secular head

<sup>6</sup>Sacred relic, which appeared miraculously from the vertebra of Tsangpa Gyaray (founder of Drukpa Kagyu School)

<sup>7</sup>Spiritual head



## Lama Drukpa Kuenley

*Lama* Drukpa Kuenley is believed to have spent 115 years of his life [1455 – 1570] as a perpetual teenager, rebelling vehemently against conventions. He was born in the Tsang region in Tibet and is also referred to as divine mad man.

He lived as a mendicant, practiced spiritual arts and magic and wandered all over the country. He crossed the borders to enter Bhutan and purposefully lived in an unorthodox way and despised accepted ways of behavior to expose the hypocrisy of the world. *Lama* Drukpa Kuenley sang, drank with young ladies and had sex with virgins.



*Lama* Drukpa Kuenley is believed to have blessed the site where Chime *Lhakang* stands now. People from all walks of life come and offer their prayers and to receive blessings to conceive a child and it is sometimes even known as fertility monastery. Chime *Lhakang* is located in Sopsokha, Punakha and one can receive blessing of a phallus there.



## METHODS CONSIDERED FOR DATA COLLECTION

The Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research embarked on the study upon receiving an executive order from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. The institute further obtained clearance from the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs to conduct the study and requested the support of all *Dzongdags*<sup>8</sup> and *Lam Netens*<sup>9</sup> of the country. All forestry field offices; forestry divisional and national park offices were requested to document the presence of historically significant trees growing within their administrative jurisdictions.

We used diameter tape to measure the Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) of the tree and used Haglöf Vertex IV Hypsometer to measure the height of the tree. Increment borer was used to take the core samples of the tree to determine the age of the tree. However, we were not able to get good core samples as almost all the trees considered to be sacred have rotten trunk. Considering the sacredness of some significant trees, we couldn't core cypress tree of Kuje *Lhakhang* in Bumthang; and Pangri Zampa *Lhakhang* in Thimphu.



Collecting core samples

<sup>8</sup>Governors [head of the district in Bhutan]

<sup>9</sup>Spiritual head of district monk body



We took two core samples from each tree from the collar region and brought to the Tree Ring Laboratory to determine the age of the tree. In the laboratory, core samples were mounted on a mounting wood by applying fevicol glue and banded with modi-thread in order to hold the core samples in the wood, and then dried for a day. Once the core samples were dried up, we polished the mounted core samples to half their size in the belt sander machine using 220, 320, 400 and 600 abrasive grit. This process revealed tree ring sequences to be clearly visible. After this, using stereo-microscope, the two core samples collected from a same tree were cross dated and assigned a calendar year to each ring to find out the tree age.

***Note:** We found that most of the cored trees had either hollow trunk or decayed heartwood making it difficult for us to determine the actual germination year of a tree. However, we cross-dated even the rotten core samples till the portion wherein we could read the rings and left thereafter to avoid estimating the wrong age of the tree. This would mean that the age reported for those trees with rotten core samples didn't take into account the remaining decaying parts of the core samples grossly under-estimating the age of the tree.*

## **SIGNIFICANT TREES OF BHUTAN**

When we visited all twenty *dzongkhags* upon the consultation of forestry offices situated across the country, we found that some trees don't have established stories associated with the trees considered to be sacred or historically important. Owing to such situation, this report landed up not having historically significant trees from Mongar, Pemagatshel, Samtse, Sarpang, Tsirang and Zhemgang *dzongkhags*. Not having trees from these *dzongkhags* in this report, does not in any way indicate absence of historically significant trees from these areas.





Offering Sekha before coring the tree



## Bumthang

**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

Kuje *Lhakhang* today is known as one of the most important sacred sites and has become a central place for religious worship in Bhutan. *Kuje* means body impression. Behind the *Lhakhang* is an old cypress tree, which is believed to have been grown from a walking stick used by *Guru Rimpoche* while visiting Bhutan from Nepal sometime in 810 AD<sup>10</sup>.

**Height:** 46.3 m

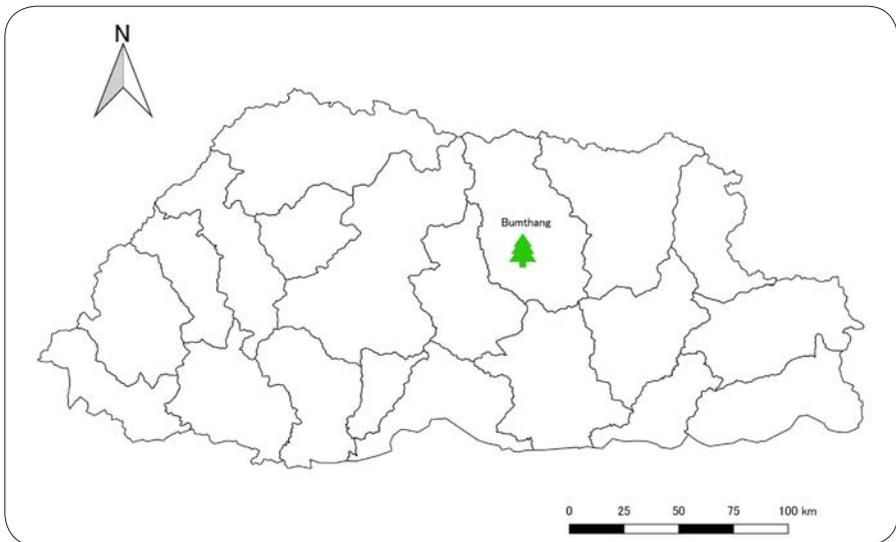
**DBH:** 204.5 cm

**Lhakhang:** Kuje *Lhakhang*

**Gewog:** Chokor

**Dzongkhag:** Bumthang

**Elevation:** 2685 m



<sup>10</sup>The year of Guru Rimpoche's arrival in Bhutan is not consistent and some literature suggests as 746 AD and some as 810 AD





**Kuje Lhakhang**



**Kuje drupchu (holy water)**



**Scientific Name:** *Juglans regia*

**Common Name:** Walnut

**Family:** Juglandaceae

The tree is believed to have been planted by Trongsa *Tshongpen*<sup>11</sup> Dolong. He received walnut seed as *tshok*<sup>12</sup> from Lhasa, Tibet, when he was there to attend *Moenlam Chenmo*<sup>13</sup> and brought the seed all the way from Lhasa to sow in present location. Dolong is son of Karma Lhawang, who brought *Rangjung Kharapani* from Lhalung in Tibet to Bhutan.

The tree was forked from the base, but one of the forked tree died. It bears fruits having soft shell nut. The trunk of the tree is rotten.

**Height:** 17.5 m

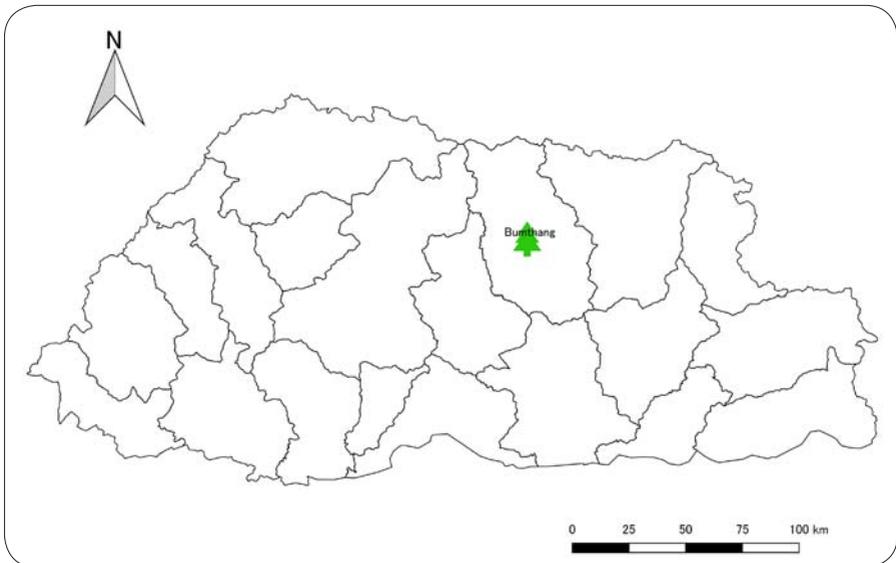
**DBH:** 58 cm

**Lhakang:** Shabjeythang *Lhakang*

**Gewog:** Chokor

**Dzongkhag:** Bumthang

**Elevation:** 2800 m



<sup>11</sup>Merchant

<sup>12</sup>Food offering

<sup>13</sup>The great prayer





**Shabjeythang Lhakhang**



## Chhukha

**Scientific Name:** *Ficus elastica*

**Common Name:** Rubber Tree

**Family:** Moraceae

This tree is believed to have been planted by George Bogle in the year 1774, en-route to Tibet. George Bogle was a Scottish adventurer and diplomat, the first to establish diplomatic relations with Tibet. It is believed that George planted four fig trees; one each in Chhukha, Gengu, Meritsemo and Pasakha, as these four sites served as resting sites for traders while traveling to Tibet. However, the tree at Meritsemo is the only surviving tree.

The tree is now worshipped by locals and considered as *Lhashing*<sup>14</sup>. The trunk of the tree is rotten with some branches broken and has many prop roots rendering it difficult to collect core samples.

**Height:** 43 m

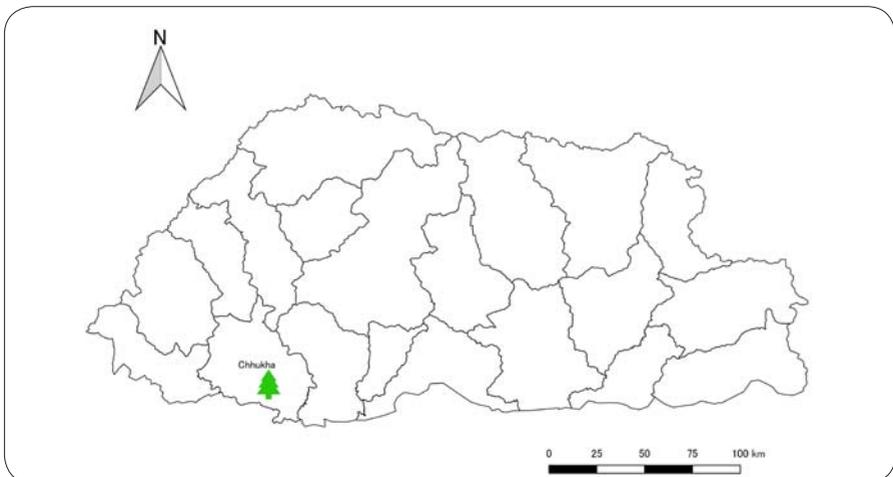
**DBH:** 529 cm

**Place:** Meritsemo

**Gewog:** Bongo

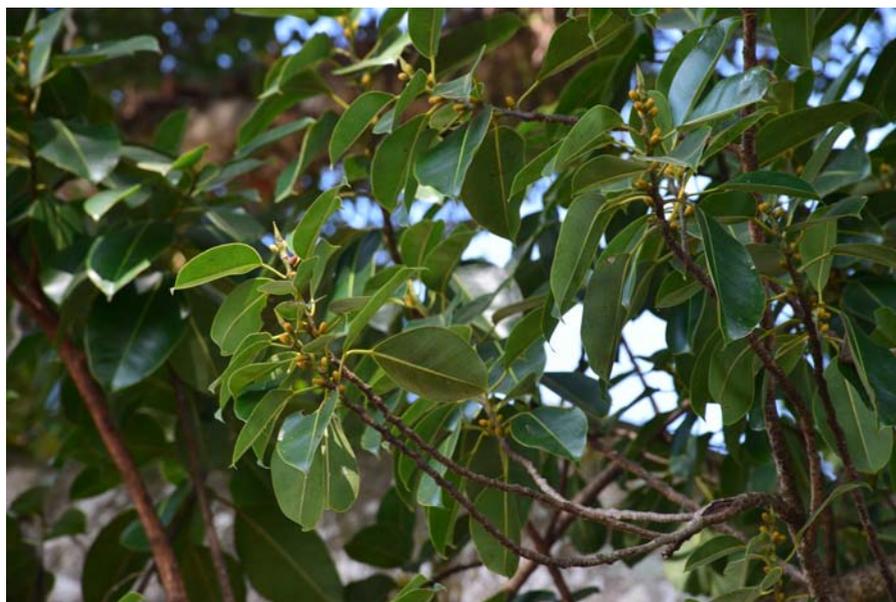
**Dzongkhag:** Chhukha

**Elevation:** 1248 m



<sup>14</sup>Tree of God





## Dagana

**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

The tree is believed to have grown from the walking stick of *Zhabdrung* Jigme Chogyel<sup>15</sup> [1862-1904] and locals now worship the tree as *Lhashing*. The tree is forked and the trunk is hollow.

**Estimated Age:** 82 years within the length of 29.2 cm [supposed to be 135 cm]\*

**Height:** 57.2 m

**DBH:** 271.3 cm

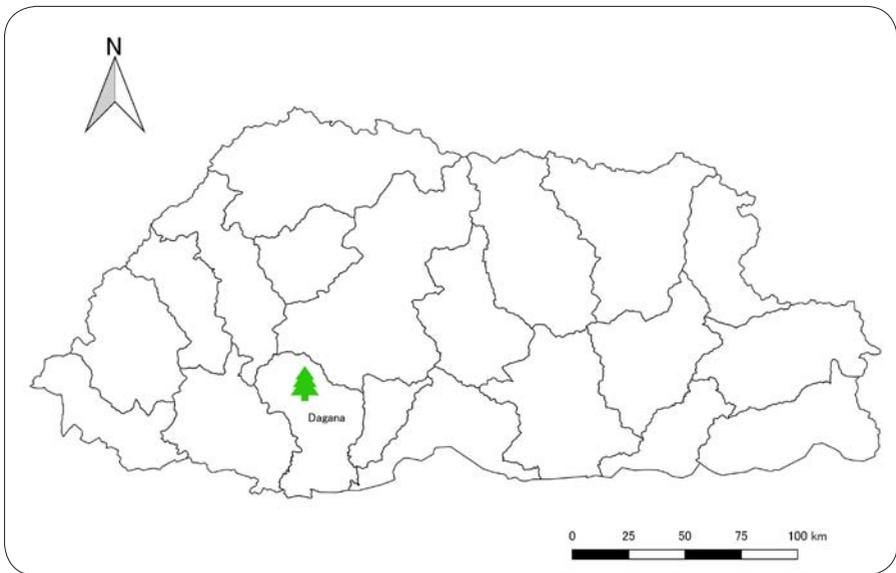
**Place:** Peling

**Gewog:** Tseza

**Dzongkhag:** Dagana

**Elevation:** 1994 m

\* We estimate rotten length of the core to be  $135 - 29.2 = 105.8$  cm



<sup>15</sup>Believed to be sixth mind incarnation of *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel.





**Scientific Name:** *Ficus glaberrima*

**Common Name:** Khasi

**Family:** Moraceae

The tree is believed to be the walking stick of 12<sup>th</sup> *Je-Khempo* Kuenga Jamtsho [1761-1771].

The tree is broken by storm and is hollow, so we didn't take core sample.

**Height:** 9.3 m

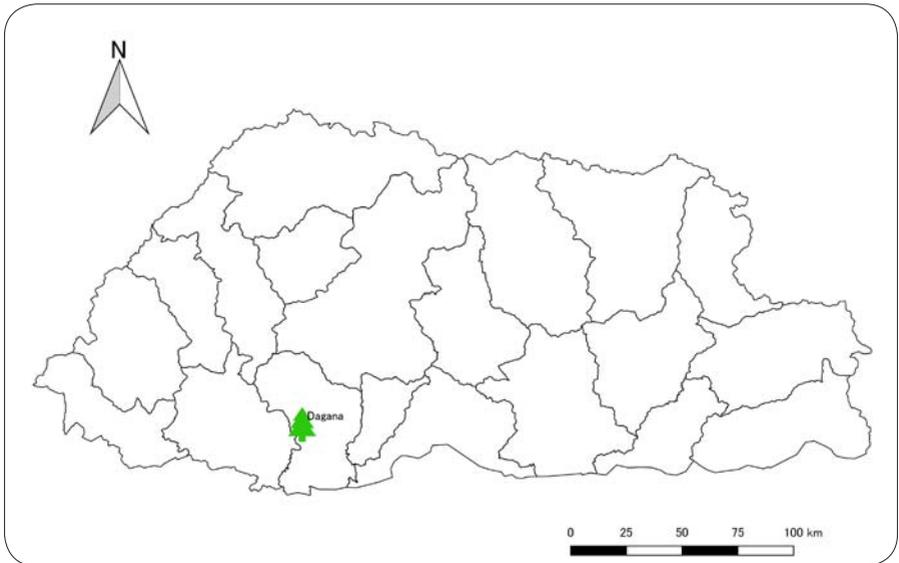
**DBH:** 131 cm

**Place:** Bartsa

**Gewog:** Kana

**Dzongkhag:** Dagana

**Elevation:** 1674 m





**Scientific Name:** *Ficus glaberrima*

**Common Name:** Khasi

**Family:** Moraceae

The tree is believed to be walking stick of *Zhabdrung* Jigme Chogyel. The tree is heavily buttressed and the trunk is hollow, so we didn't take core sample.

**Height:** 33.4 m

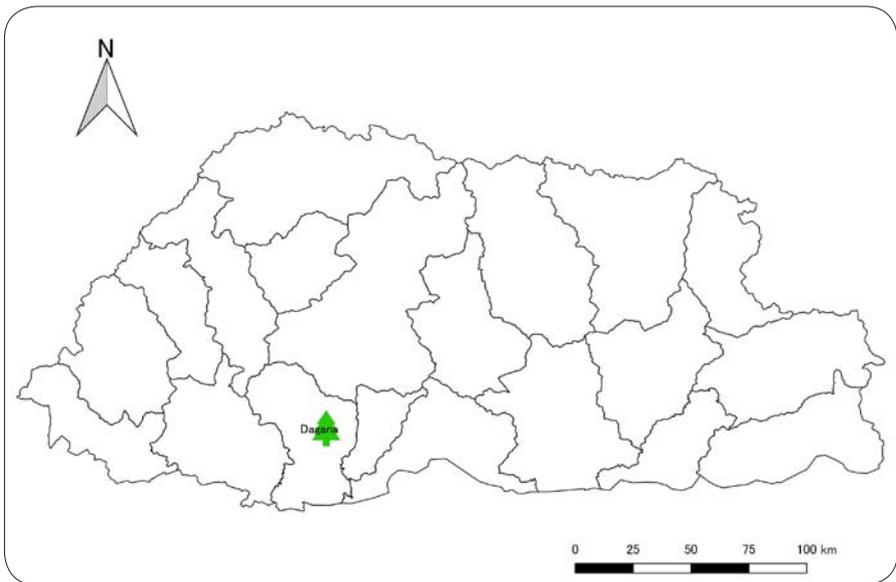
**DBH:** 321 cm

**Place:** Khabisa

**Gewog:** Khabisa

**Dzongkhag:** Dagana

**Elevation:** 1654 m





## Gasa

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**Scientific Name:** *Picea spinulosa*

**Common Name:** Spruce

**Family:** Pinaceae

Legend has it that when Tibetan armies invaded Bhutan and were nearing Laya, *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel deceived the Tibetan armies by making this spruce tree and rocks near the tree appear as armed soldiers. When the invading armies saw it, they thought that they were outnumbered by Bhutanese soldiers and returned back.

People of Laya consider the tree sacred and perform annual ritual to appease the local deity.

**Estimated Age:** 236 years within the length of 14.8 cm [supposed to be 57.5 cm]

**Height:** 17.3 m

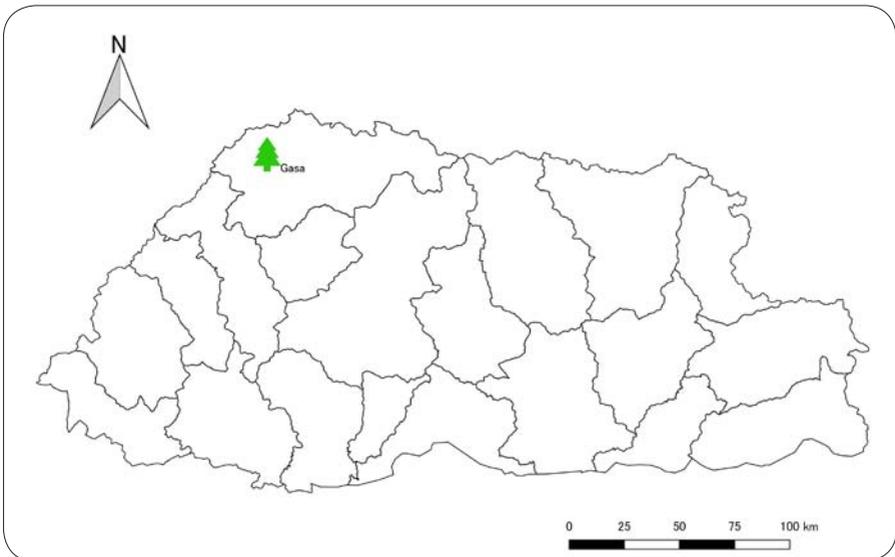
**DBH:** 115 cm

**Place:** Resu Gate

**Gewog:** Laya

**Dzongkhag:** Gasa

**Elevation:** 3772 m





## Haa

**Scientific Name:** *Juniperus pseudosabina*

**Common Name:** Black Juniper

**Family:** Cupressaceae

The 13<sup>th</sup> *Je-Khempo* of Bhutan, His Holiness Yonten Thaye (1771 – 1775) had a prophecy to construct *Densa*<sup>16</sup> in current location, so he brought two walking sticks from Katsho *Goempa*<sup>17</sup>, Haa. Of the two, one is believed to have been planted up-side down.

**Estimated Age:** 200 years within the length of 18 cm [supposed to be 62.5 cm]

**Height:** 18.5 m

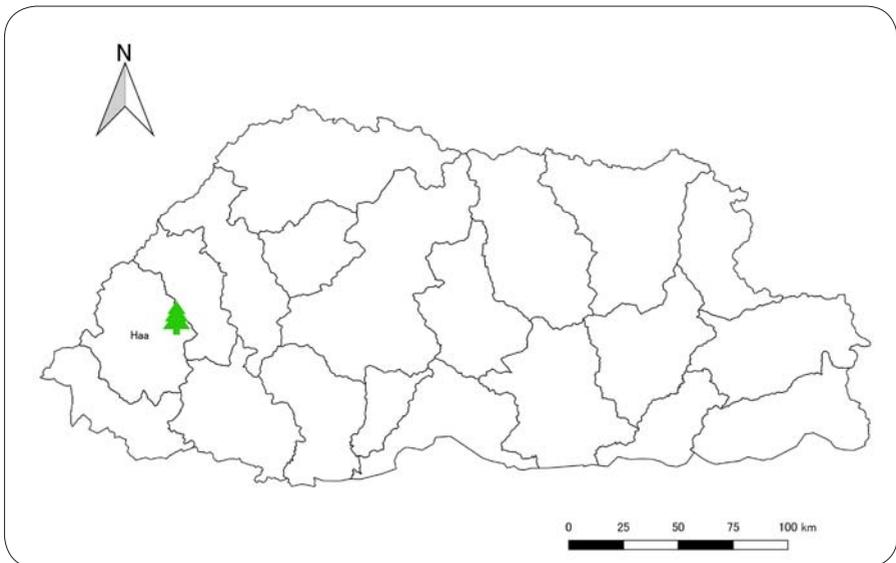
**DBH:** 123 cm

**Place:** Wangtsa

**Gewog:** Katsho

**Dzongkha:** Haa

**Elevation:** 2845 m



<sup>16</sup>Place of residence

<sup>17</sup>Monastery





**Scientific Name:** *Pinus wallichiana*

**Common Name:** Blue Pine

**Family:** Pinaceae

When Ap Chundu<sup>18</sup> was in a battle with the Tibetan armies, he used his supernatural powers to deceive Tibetan armies by depicting the presence of large troops on his side. Having seen huge troops on the side of Ap Chundu, Tibetan armies attacked with full force only to plunge into the gorge, which was deceived by the powers of Ap Chundu. Thus, to mark the victory, Ap Chundu planted this tree in the middle of the battle field. The tree is highly revered by the people of Haa and perform annual ritual to appease him. The ritual is performed annually on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the Bhutanese calendar. While coring to determine the age of the tree, we found the trunk rotten.

**Estimated Age:** 134 years within the length of 62.2 cm [supposed to be 67.5 cm]

**Height:** 45.6 m

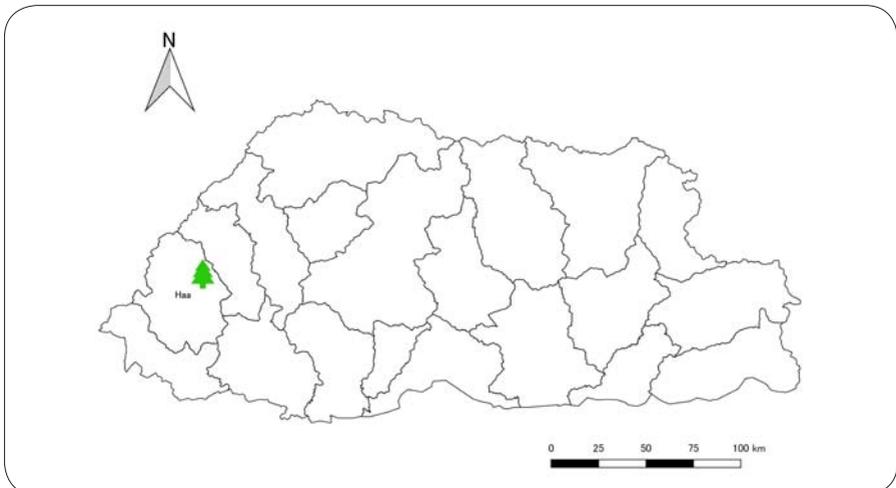
**DBH:** 135 cm

**Place:** Jangakha

**Gewog:** Bjee

**Dzongkha:** Haa

**Elevation:** 2817 m



<sup>18</sup>Believed to be a manifestation of wrathful *Vajra Pani*. *Ap Chundu* is one of the protecting deities of the country and a birth deity of all those born in Haa valley.





**Scientific Name:** *Juniperus pseudosabina*

**Common Name:** Black Juniper

**Family:** Cupressaceae

The tree is believed to have been planted by *Zhabdrung Rimpochhe Choglay Yeshe Nguldrup*<sup>19</sup> [1851-1918] when he visited Takchu *Goempa*, upon the request of the local community. The tree is believed to have been planted upside down with the prayer that should the tree survive, dharma shall flourish.

The tree appears dead and when we cored, the trunk of the tree was rotten. His Majesty the 5th *Druk Gyalpo*<sup>20</sup> of Bhutan planted new sapling in 2016 near the tree as a replacement.

**Estimated Age:** 156 years within the length of 19.5 cm [supposed to be 21.5 cm]

**Height:** 9.7 m

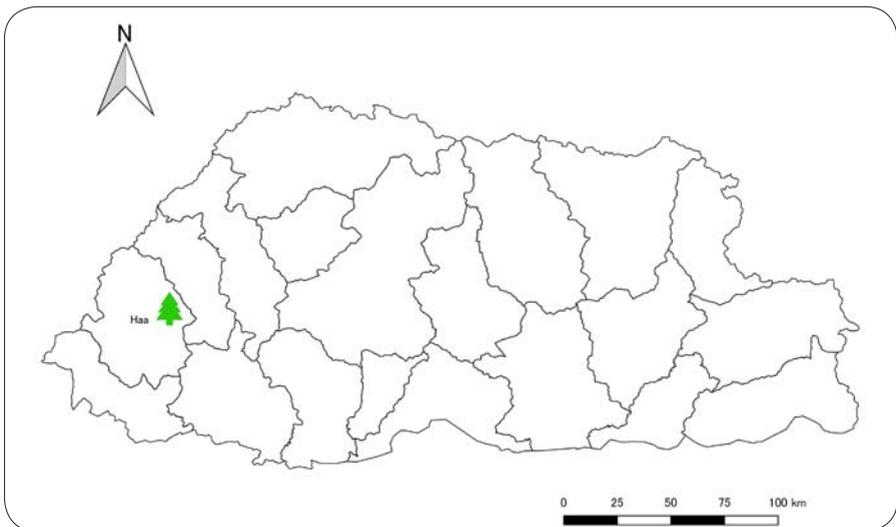
**DBH:** 43 cm

**Lhakang:** Takchu *Goempa*

**Gewog:** Eusu

**Dzongkhag:** Haa

**Elevation:** 3291 m



<sup>19</sup>Believed to be fifth speech incarnation of *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel*

<sup>20</sup>King of Bhutan





Sapling planted by His Majesty



**Scientific Name:** *Juniperus pseudosabina*

**Common Name:** Black Juniper

**Family:** Cupressaceae

During 15<sup>th</sup> Century, *Drupthop*<sup>21</sup> Ngawang Pelzang completed his retreat [3 years 3 months and 3 days] from Sakhakha [located above Katsho *Lhakhang*]. After the completion of retreat, *Drupthop* planted Juniper sapling below Katsho Goempa.

While coring, the trunk of the tree is found to be rotten.

**Height:** 19.4 m

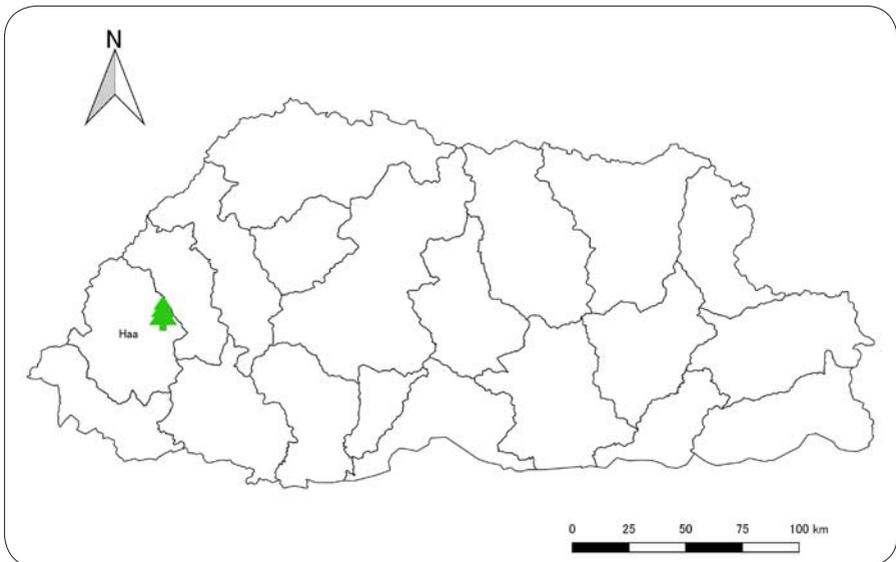
**DBH:** 73 cm

**Place:** Katsho

**Gewog:** Katsho

**Dzongkha:** Haa

**Elevation:** 2917 m



<sup>21</sup>An accomplished Buddhist master who spends time meditating in isolated areas





**Scientific Name:** *Juniperus pseudosabina*

**Common Name:** Black Juniper

**Family:** Cupressaceae

*Terton*<sup>22</sup> Rigna Lingpa discovered a treasure from one of the lakes in Tibet, which flew to Bhutan and was believed to have landed in Shekhadra *Lhakhang* in Haa. However, the treasure was sighted on this Juniper tree by the locals as they saw smoke during the day and fire during the night. The treasure was finally welcomed in the house of a *tsip*<sup>23</sup> after performing some rituals.

Every year, on 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, the villagers perform a ritual known as *Gatey Chijur* to offer *Sekha*<sup>24</sup>. The tree appears to be dead.

**Estimated Age:** 184 years within the length of 25.4 cm [supposed to be 26.5 cm]

**Height:** 14.9 m

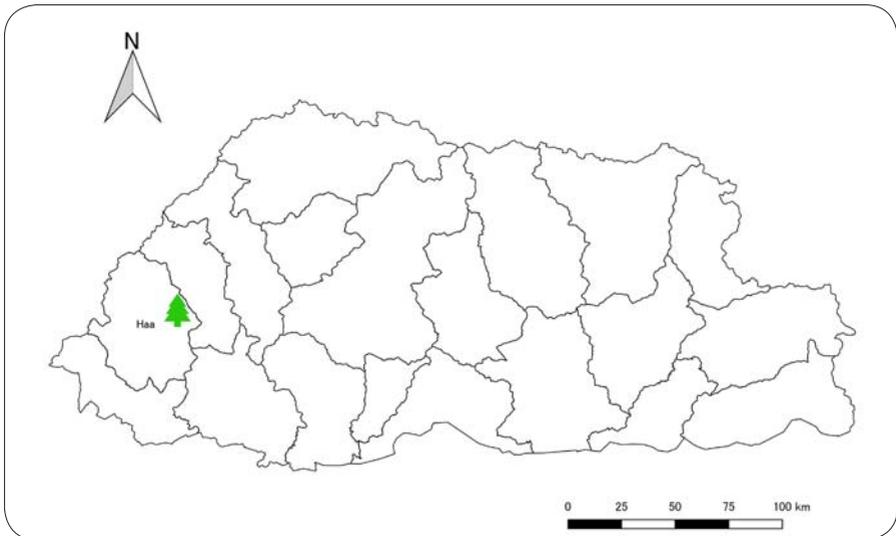
**DBH:** 53 cm

**Place:** Bangina

**Gewog:** Eusu

**Dzongkhag:** Haa

**Elevation:** 2991 m

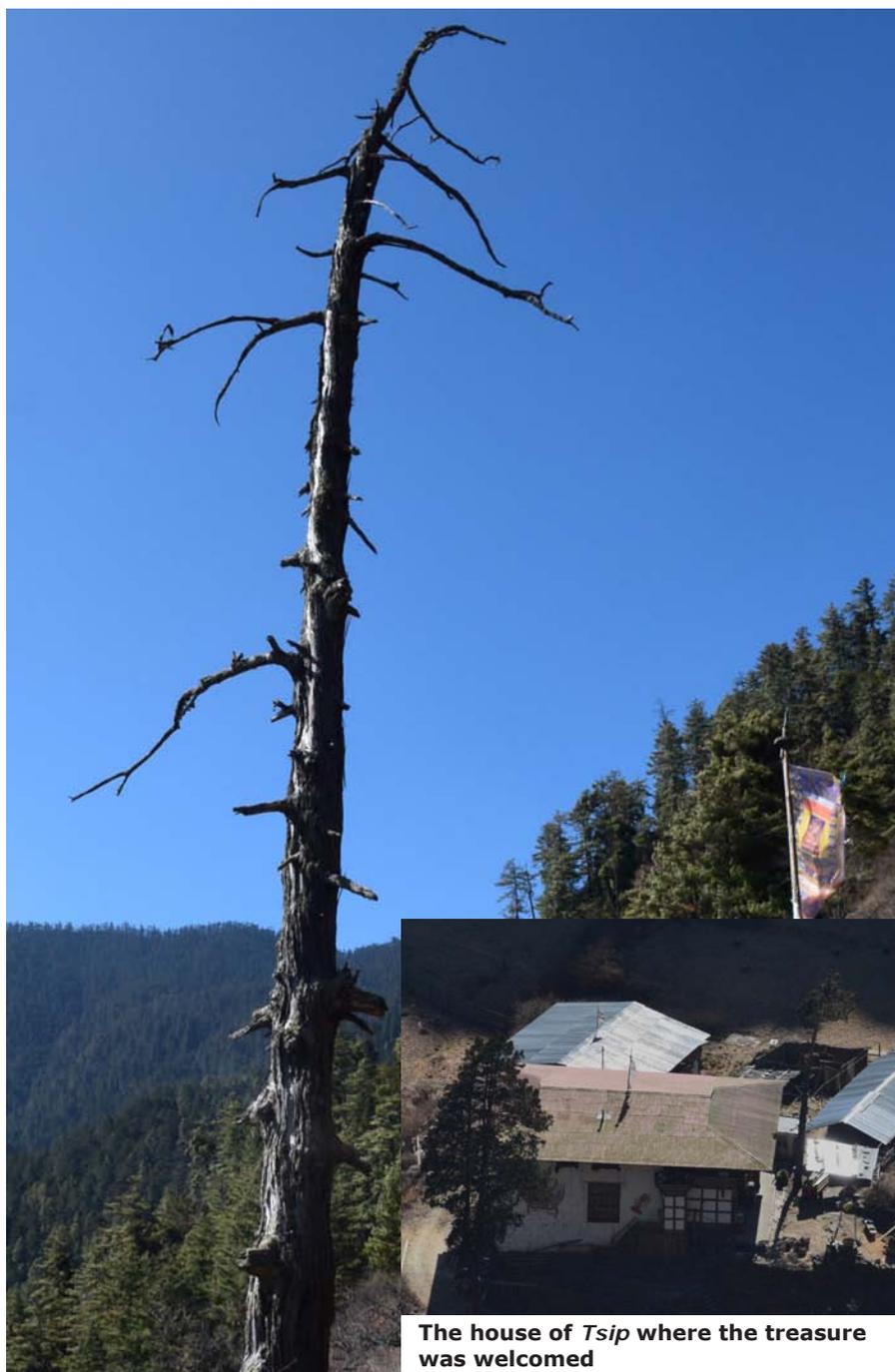


<sup>22</sup>Treasure revealer or discover of ancient hidden texts and spiritual treasures

<sup>23</sup>Astrologer

<sup>24</sup>Traditional symbolic offering made to appease local deities





The house of *Tsip* where the treasure was welcomed



## Lhuntse

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**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

This tree is believed to have been planted upside down by *Terton* Pema Lingpa. The tree appears healthy from outside, however top of the tree is dead and trunk rotten. It is forked in three areas.

**Estimated Age:** 340 years within the length of 72.3 cm [supposed to be 130 cm]

**Height:** 42.2 m

**DBH:** 260 cm

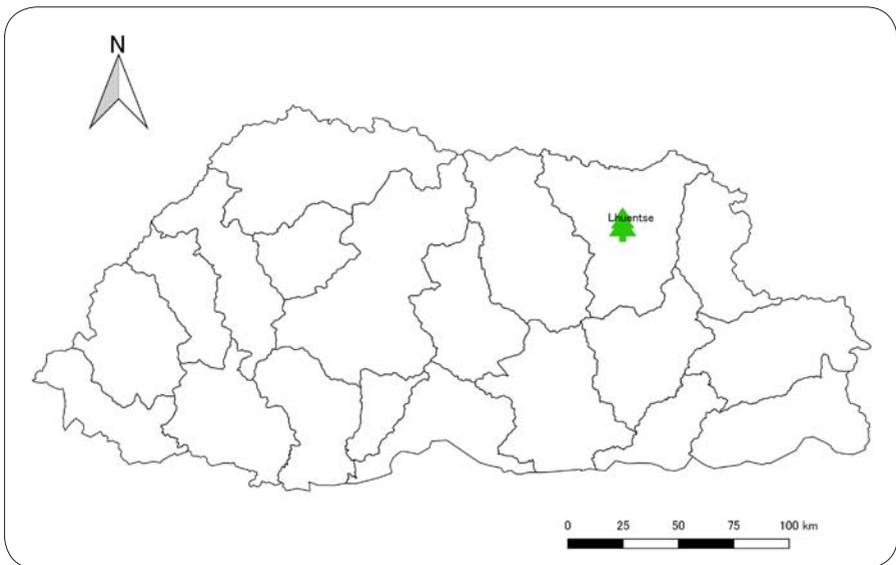
**Lhakhang:** Khawchung *Lhakhang*

**Place:** Zamling

**Gewog:** Gangzur

**Dzongkhag:** Lhuntse

**Elevation:** 2594 m





**Khawchung Lhakang**



**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

Khikha Rathoe<sup>25</sup> had a wooden bird and he would generally travel by his wooden bird. Legend has it that, at one point of time, when he was flying over Lhuentse area, some wooden nails from his bird dropped on the ground and the tree is believed to have been grown from it.

**Height:** 76.9 m

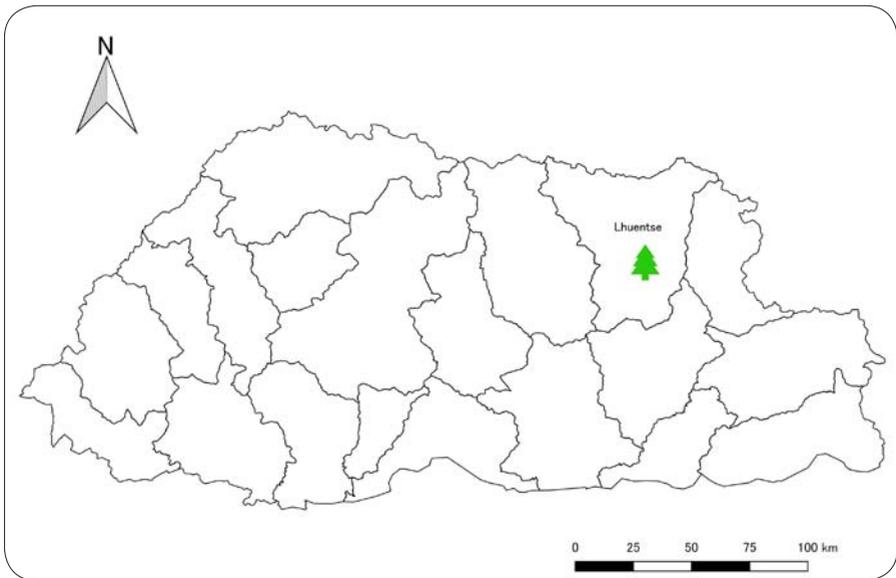
**DBH:** 262 cm

**Place:** Tshompaling

**Gewog:** Gangzur

**Dzongkhag:** Lhuentse

**Elevation:** 1533 m



<sup>25</sup>Khikha Rathoe was born to one of the Tibetan King Thrisong Doetsen's queens. According to legend, Kikha Rothoe had mouth that resembles a dog's snout and a head that looked like a goat's.





**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

Goenkhar *Lhakhang* in Goenpa Karpo was built by *Lama* Choney Rangdol from Njalam Dung in Khoma. It is believed that when *Lama* was returning from pilgrimage to Lhasa, he spent few days in present location where *Lhakhang* stands. It is in this location that *Lama* saw a fire burning in a place where *Lhakhang* stands now. The tree is believed to be the walking stick of *Lama*, which he used while returning from Aja Ney<sup>26</sup> in Mongar and *Lama* is believed to have been followed by Local deity, Luma Takdung, from Aja Ney till Goenkhar *Lhakhang*.

It is believed that if there is a natural branch breakage of the tree, it will bring misfortune to the head *Lama* of the *Lhakhang*. The tree appears healthy.

**Estimated Age:** 187 years within the length of 55.5 cm [supposed to be 63 cm]

**Height:** 43.1 m

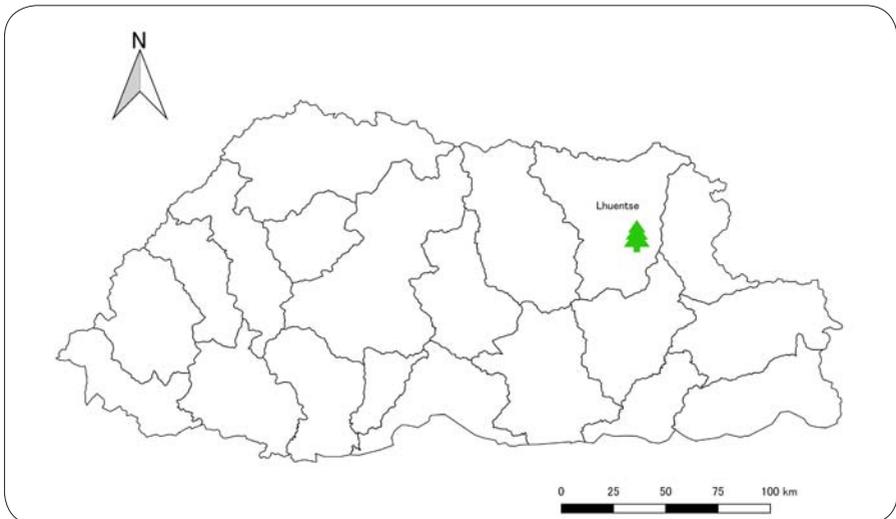
**DBH:** 126 cm

**Lhakhang:** Goenkar *Lhakhang*

**Gewog:** Khoma

**Dzongkhag:** Lhuentse

**Elevation:** 2294 m



<sup>26</sup>Sacred site





**Goenkar Lhakhang**



**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

It is believed to be the walking stick of *Lama Karma Rabzur*, who planted his walking stick upside down. Top of the tree resembles flat surface unlike normal tree top making local people believe the tree top to be root of the tree. *Lama Karma Rabzur* was root *guru* of the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, who built Zarthang *Lhakhang* and settled after he noticed his walking stick growing. Top of the tree and trunk rotten.

**Estimated Age:** 178 years within the length of 37.3 cm [supposed to be 99.5 cm]

**Height:** 29 m

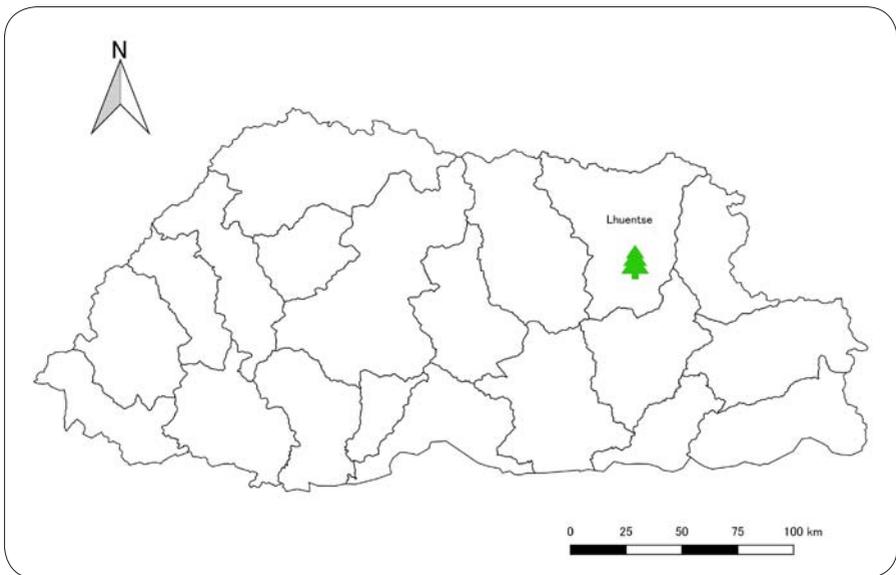
**DBH:** 199 cm

**Lhakhang:** Zarthang *Lhakhang*

**Gewog:** Menbi

**Dzongkhag:** Lhuntse

**Elevation:** 2493 m





**Zarhang Lhakhang**



## Paro

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**Scientific Name:** *Magnolia campbellii*

**Common Name:** Campbell's magnolia

**Family:** Magnoliaceae

The tree is believed to be the walking stick of *Zhabdrung Jigme Norbu*<sup>27</sup> [1831-1861].

Majority of the tree is rotten, so no core samples were collected.

**Height:** 13.7 m

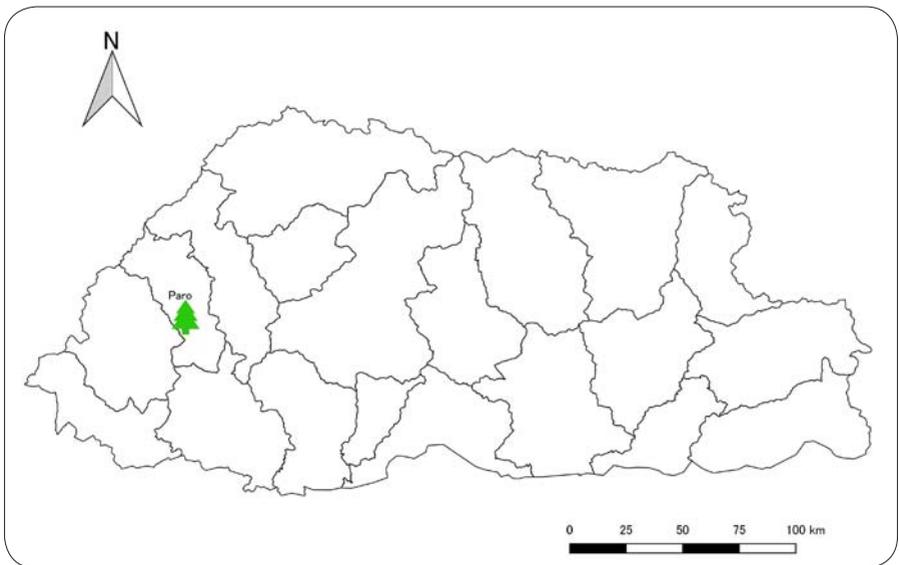
**DBH:** 53 cm

**Lhakhang:** Gorina *Lhakhang*

**Gewog:** Wangchang

**Dzongkhag:** Paro

**Elevation:** 3039 m



<sup>27</sup>Believed to be fourth mind incarnation of *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel*.





**Gorina Lhakhang**



**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*  
**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress  
**Family:** Cupressaceae

The tree is believed to be the walking stick of Phajo Drugom Zhipo and villagers perform rituals during *Lomba*<sup>28</sup>.  
The tree appears healthy.

**Estimated Age:** 188 years within the length of 44.3 cm [supposed to be 92.75 cm]

**Height:** 65.6 m

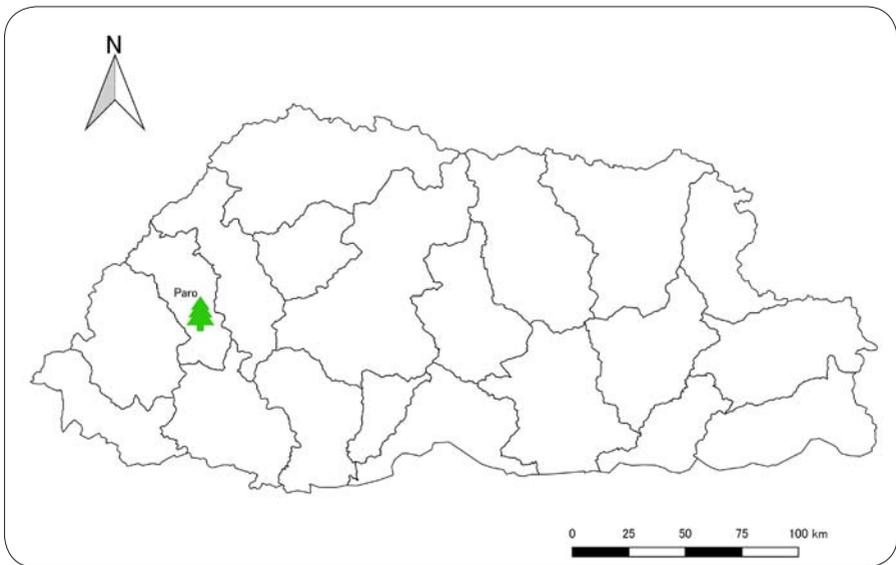
**DBH:** 185.5 cm

**Lhaxhang:** Namkhar *Lhaxhang*

**Gewog:** Wangchang

**Dzongkhag:** Paro

**Elevation:** 2280 m



<sup>28</sup>A new year festival particularly celebrated in Haa, Bhutan





## Punakha

**Scientific Name:** *Quercus lanata*

**Common Name:** Wolly-leaved Oak

**Family:** Fagaceae

While *Lama* Drukpa Kuenley was meditating by the side of a fire place and making plans for his descendants and lineage holders, he saw many malicious spirits. It was then he threw bundle of burning twigs in the middle of assembled malicious spirits and burnt the spirits alive. After having subdued malicious spirits, *Lama* Drukpa Kuenley built a *chorten*<sup>29</sup> on the spot. The tree is believed to have grown from the twigs which *Lama* threw. Branches of the tree is dead and trunk hollow, so no core samples were taken.

**Height:** 20.1 m

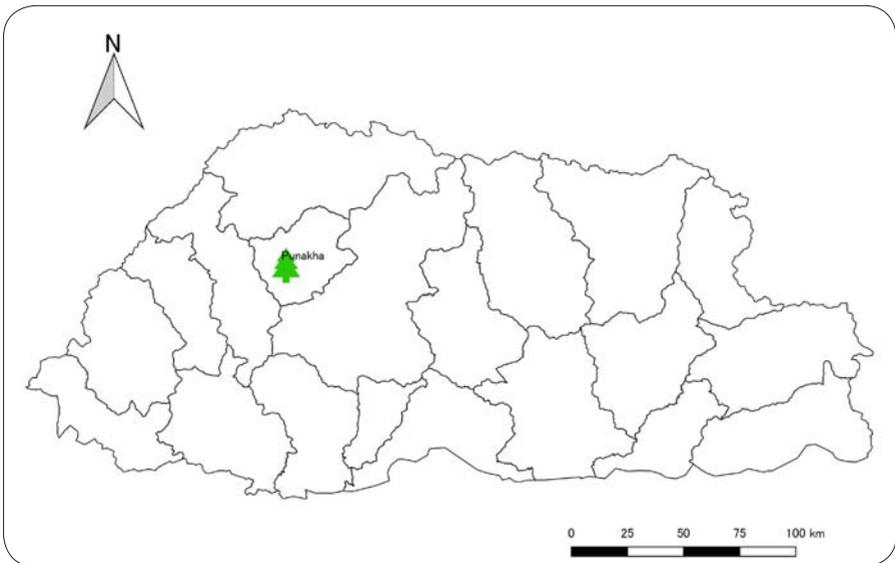
**DBH:** 231.5 cm

**Lhaxhang:** Kabi Chorten Nyingpo *Lhaxhang*

**Gewog:** Kabjisa

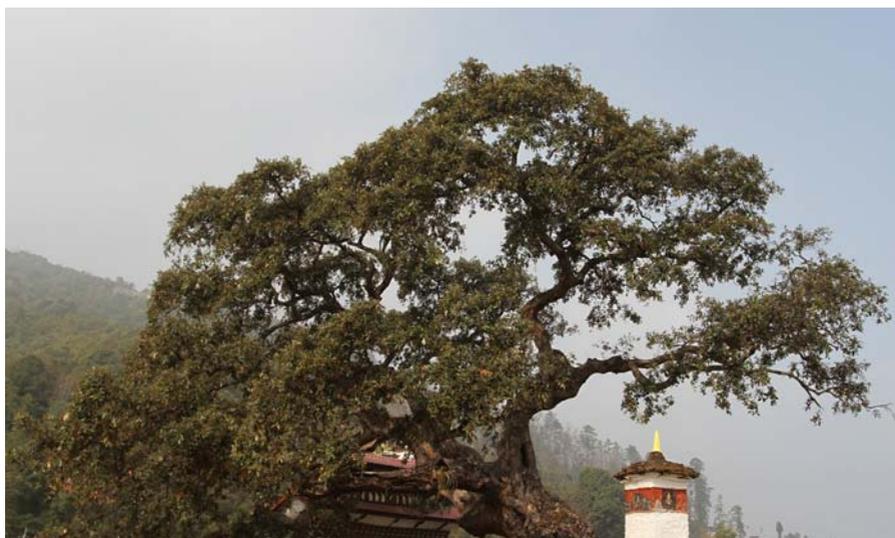
**Dzongkhag:** Punakha

**Elevation:** 1774 m



<sup>29</sup>Stupa





**Scientific Name:** *Pinus roxburghii*

**Common Name:** Chir Pine

**Family:** Pinaceae

The tree is believed to be walking stick of *Lama* Drukpa Kuenley. Though the tree is leaning towards north direction, it appears healthy

**Estimated Age:** 189 years within the length of 36.5 cm [supposed to be 42.55 cm]

**Height:** 18.9 m

**DBH:** 85.1 cm

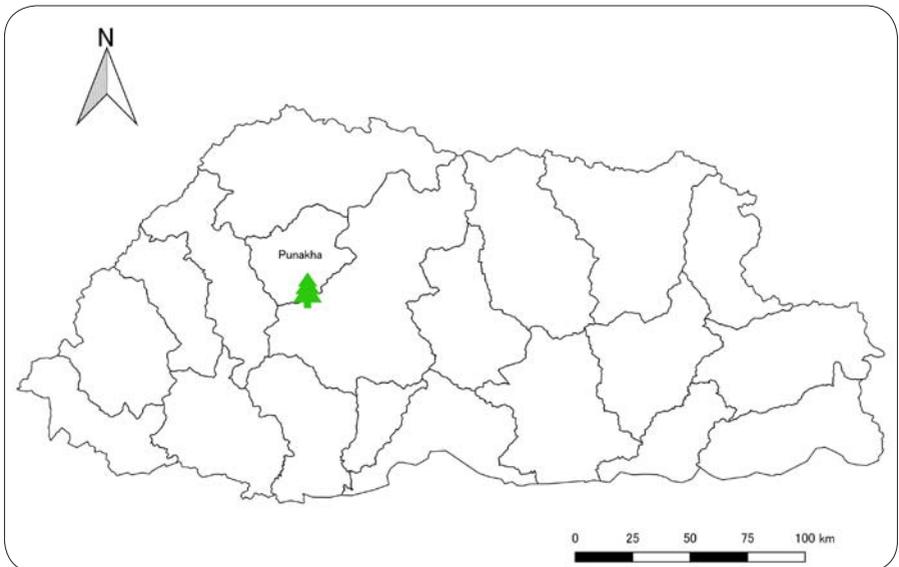
**Lhaxhang:** Chimi *Lhaxhang*

**Place:** Sopsokha

**Gewog:** Bap

**Dzongkhag:** Punakha

**Elevation:** 1335 m





## Samdrup Jongkhar

**Scientific Name:** *Ficus bengalensis*

**Common Name:** Indian Banyan

**Family:** Moraceae

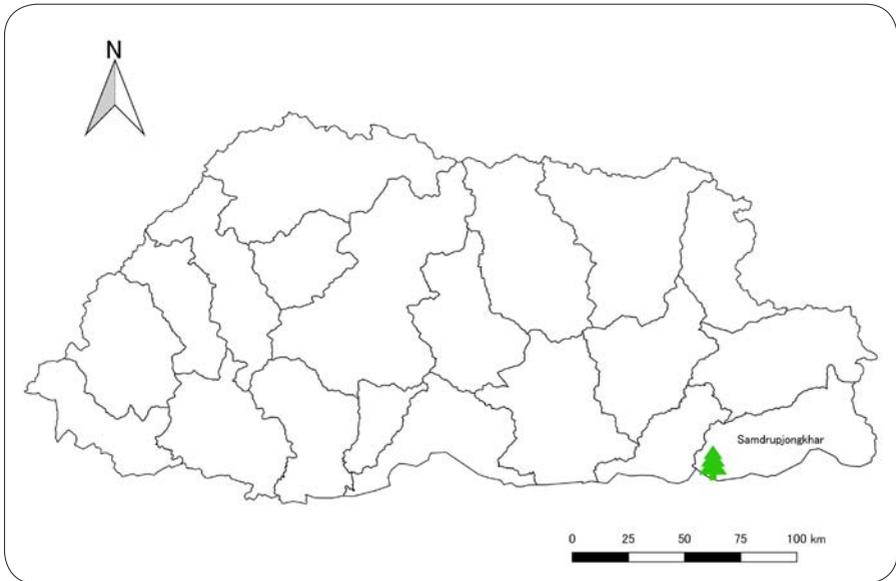
The tree is believed to house one division of army, monks and police together with nine siblings of snakes. Originally, the name of the place used to be *lbse*, resting place, but with time the pronunciation changed to Keksi. It used to be a resting place for the traders as traders then believed that the same location was the resting place of *Tshongpoen Norbu Zangpo*<sup>30</sup>. The tree is heavily branched and the roots of the tree is spread underneath nearby house. This has led to the development of cracks to the house.

**Height:** 24.5 m

**Place:** Keksi- Deothang

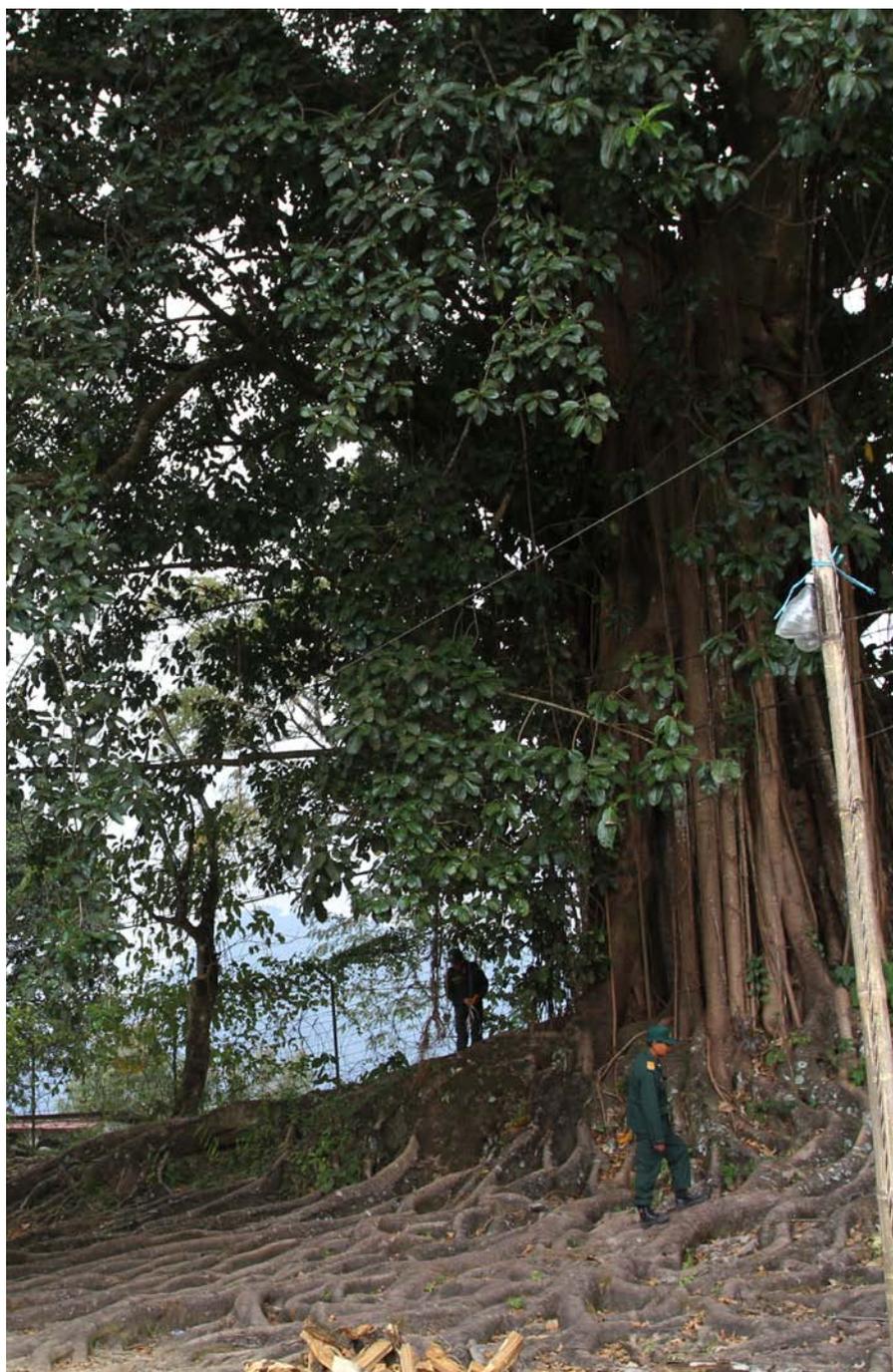
**Dzongkhag:** Samdrupjongkhar

**Elevation:** 779 m



<sup>30</sup>*Tshongpoen Norbu Zangpo*, a renowned merchant from Tibet who is known to have renounced his wealth and devoted himself to religious life





## Thimphu

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**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

*Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel saw a raven sitting on top of a tree in his dream and the very next day *Zhabdrung Rimpoche* spotted raven on top of this cypress tree. It was after this incident that *Zhabdrung Rimpoche* decided to spread dharma from Pangrizampa.

**Height:** 59.2 m

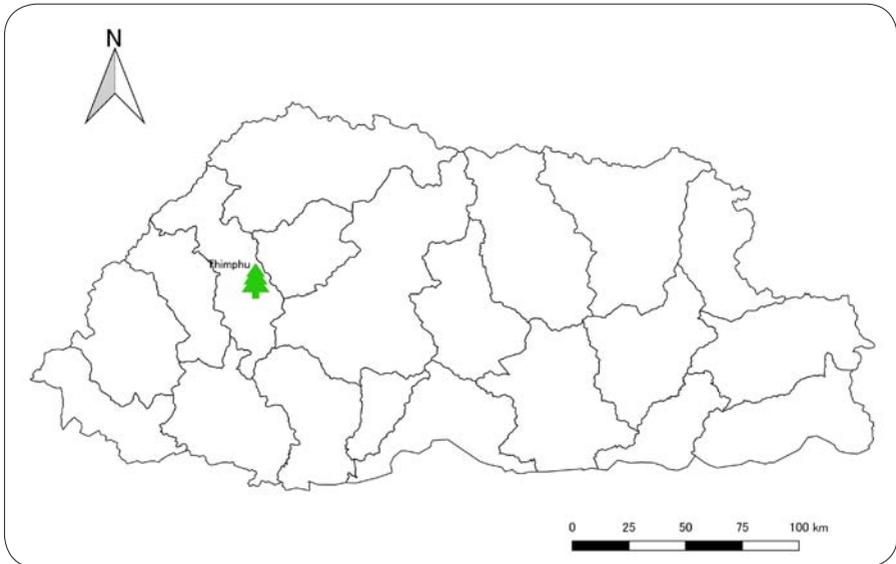
**DBH:** 479.4 cm

**Lhakang:** Pangrizampa

**Gewog:** Kawang

**Dzongkhag:** Thimphu

**Elevation:** 2408 m





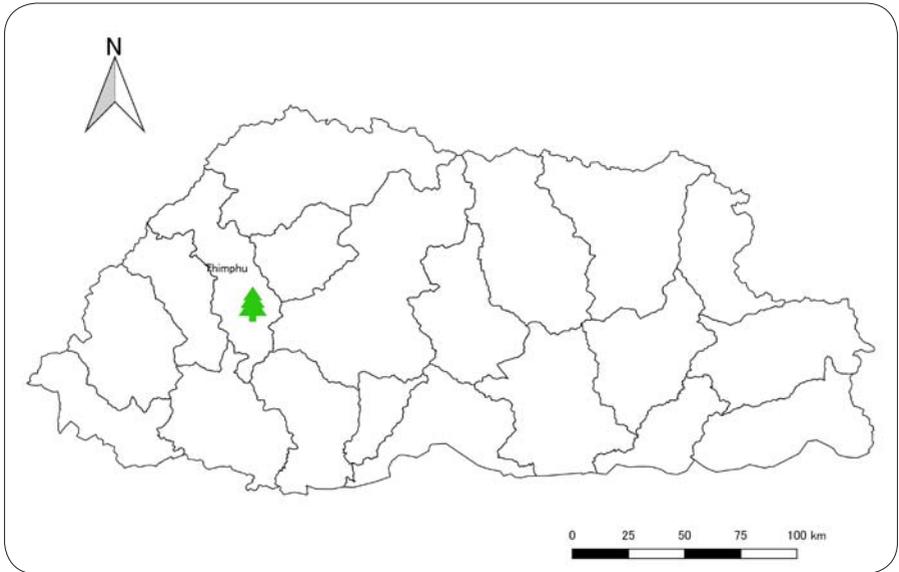
**Pangrizampa Lhakhang**



**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*  
**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress  
**Family:** Cupressaceae

When people from the locality were wondering on the *Zung*<sup>31</sup> to put inside the newly constructed *chorten*, *Lama Drukpa Kuenley* gave his walking stick to be put as *Zung*. It is believed that the tree which is growing right from the middle of the *chorten* to be his walking stick.

**Height:** 52.4 m  
**Place:** Changzamtog  
**Dzongkhag:** Thimphu  
**Elevation:** 2415 m



<sup>31</sup>Main relic of any important Buddhist structures





**Scientific Name:** *Pinus wallichiana*

**Common Name:** Blue Pine

**Family:** Pinaceae

This tree is believed to have grown from the walking stick of Phajo Drugom Zhipo, which he planted upside down.

**Estimated Age:** 141 years

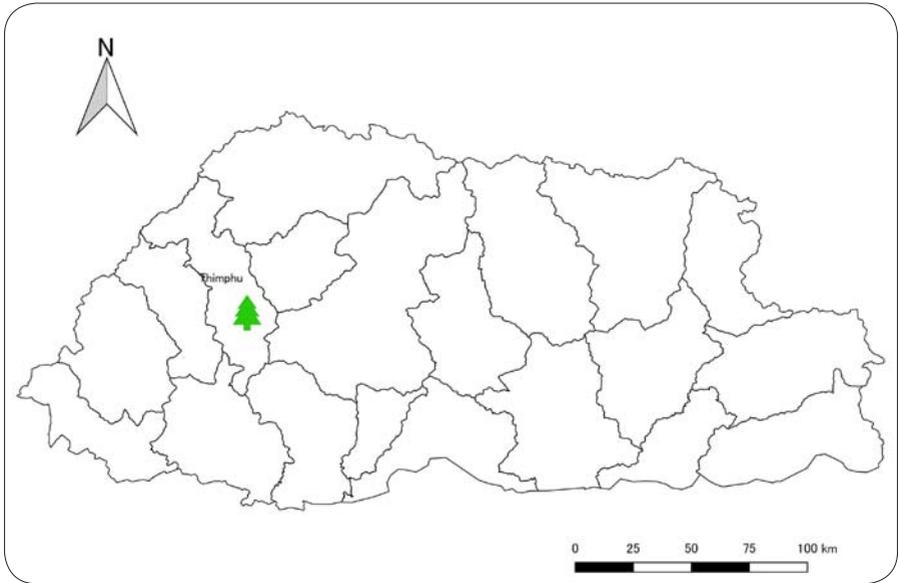
**Height:** 20.3 m

**DBH:** 104.3 cm

**Place:** Lungten Zampa

**Dzongkhag:** Thimphu

**Elevation:** 2336 m





## Trashigang

**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

The tree is believed to be walking stick of *Gyalsay*<sup>32</sup> Ganapati, who was from Khaling. Khalingpas have high regard for this tree and they fear that people will die if they harm the tree. *Gyalsey* Ganapati assumed the post of *Desi* and *Je Khempo* simultaneously in 1705. He was born in 1685 and died in 1710 at the age of 25.

The tree is forked and the trunk is hollow.

**Estimated Age:** 204 years within the length of 52.3 cm [supposed to be 198.5 cm]

**Height:** 64.3

**DBH:** 397 cm

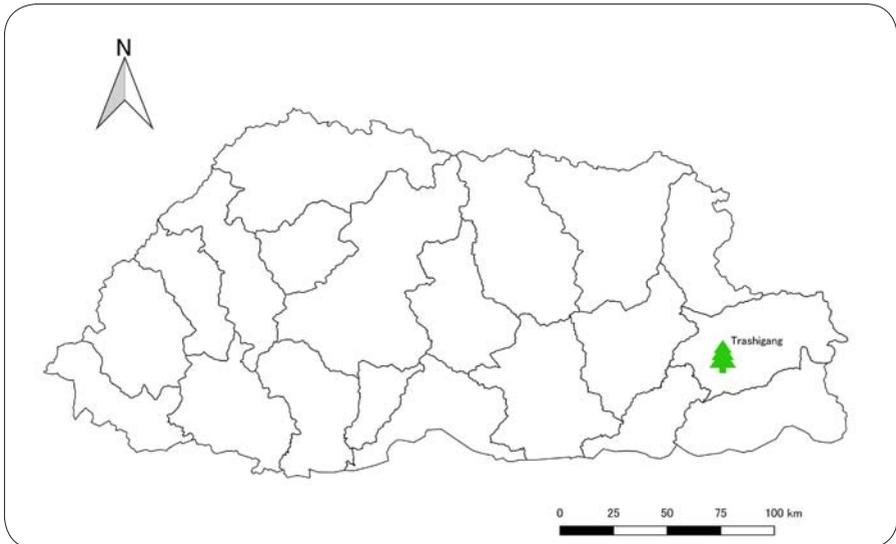
**Place:** Tashicholing *Goempa*

**Village:** Rasong

**Gewog:** Khaling

**Dzongkhag:** Trashigang

**Elevation:** 2220 m



<sup>32</sup>Prince





**Tashicholing Goempa**



**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

Second reincarnation of *Lama Sonam Bongla* had a vision of *Guru Rimpoche* instructing him to take care of his walking stick growing on the cliff of *Omba Ney*. The very next morning *Lama* with his mother combed the cliff and found the cypress tree. Thereon, the tree is believed to be the walking stick of *Guru Rimpoche* and *Guru Rimpoche* is believed to have spent two months meditating in *Omba*. There is *Schemia wallichii* tree with five forked and people believe it to be *Mandala* offering. The tree appears healthy.

**Estimated Age:** 84 years

**Height:** 24.3 m

**DBH:** 42 cm

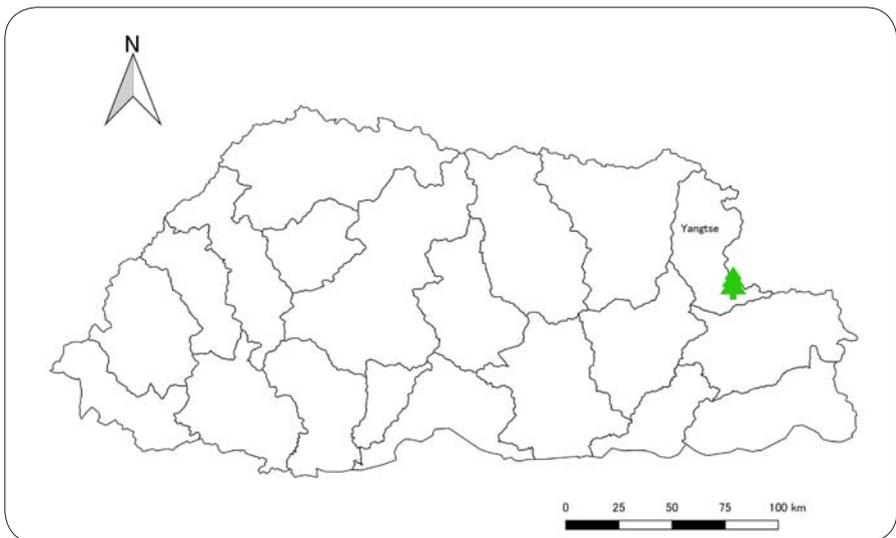
**Place:** *Omba Lhakhang*

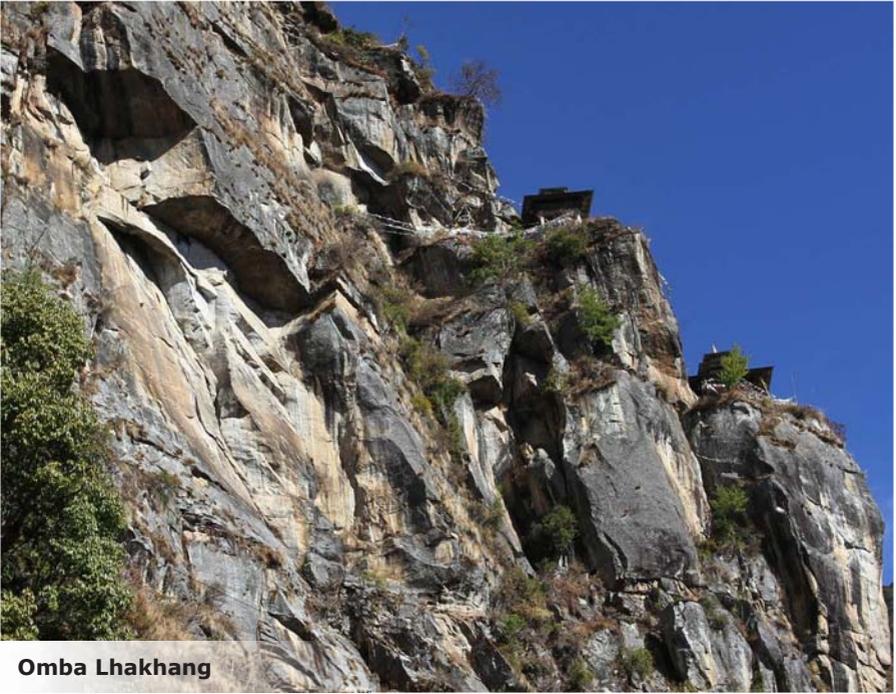
**Village:** *Omba*

**Gewog:** *Toedsho*

**Dzongkhag:** *Trashi Yangtse*

**Elevation:** 2158 m





**Omba Lhakhang**



**Five forked tree**



**Scientific Name:** *Ficus oligodon*

**Common Name:** Roxburgh Fig

**Family:** Moraceae

This tree has two different stories:

Some people believe it to have grown from the walking stick of *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel. Some believe that *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel just rested under this tree while traveling from Ramjar, Trashi Yangtse to Trashigang *dzong*.

However, whatsoever may the story be, people have high reverence to the tree and it is well fenced by stone wall. People do not harm this tree with the belief that misfortune may befall should anyone try to injure the tree let alone cutting down. Locals cite an example that recently a man cut the branch of the tree but within few months he lost one of his hands while handling explosives.

More than half of the tree appears dead.

**Estimated Age:** 218 years

**Height:** 2.1 m

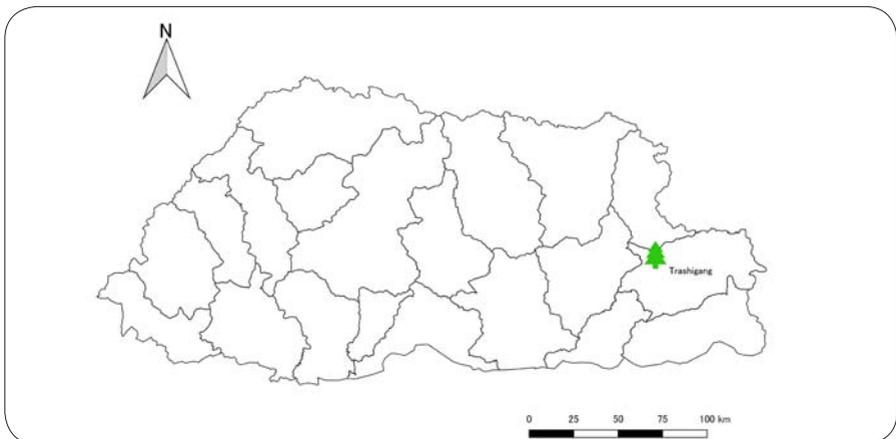
**DBH:** 36.5 cm

**Place:** Below Muktangkhar village

**Gewog:** Bartsham

**Dzongkhag:** Trasigang

**Elevation:** 1209 m





**Scientific Name:** *Pinus roxburghii*

**Common Name:** Chir Pine

**Family:** Pinaceae

This tree is believed to have been the walking stick of *Guru Rimpoche*. Legend has it that *Guru Rimpoche* visited Lhasa in Tibet upon the invitation of King Thrisong Doetsen<sup>33</sup> when the king was disturbed by local deities while constructing a palace. Thus, en-route to Lhasa, *Guru* visited many places like *Omba Ney*, *Dechen Phodrang* and *Rigsum Goempa* in *Trashi Yangtse*, *Singye Dzong* in *Lhuntse*, and *Aja* in *Mongar*. While returning from these places, *Guru* also visited *Tshanrong Ney*, which signifies complete visit of all *Ney*s and planted his walking stick, which now stands as a tree. The tree is growing on a cliff and it appears healthy.

**Estimated Age:** 89 years

**Height:** 7.3 m

**DBH:** 25 cm

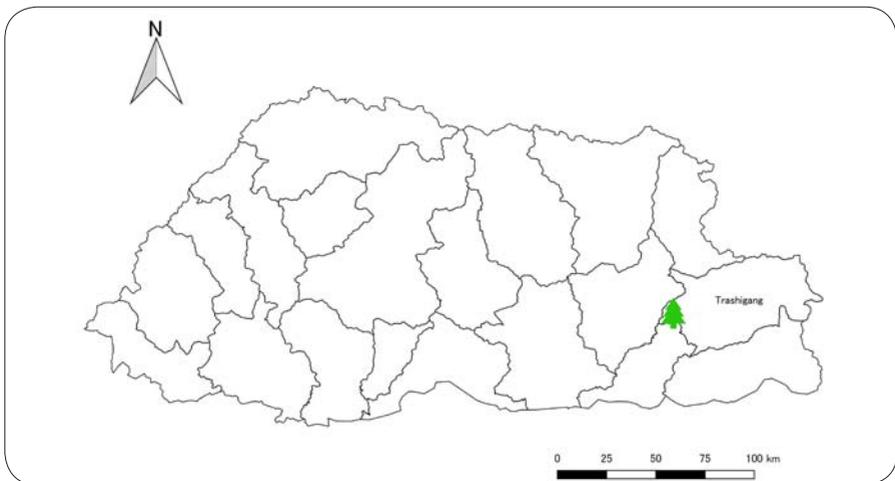
**Place:** *Tsharong Ney*

**Village:** Mangkhar

**Gewog:** Udzorong

**Dzongkhag:** Trashigang

**Elevation:** 1799 m

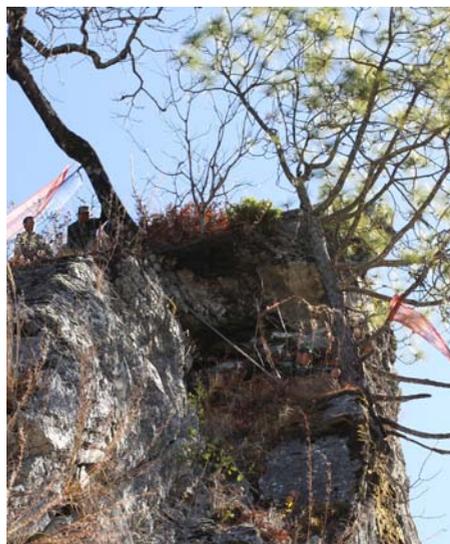


<sup>33</sup>King Thrisong Doetsen is one of the three Dharma Kings: Songtsen Gampo; Thrisong Doetsen and Ralpacan, who established Buddhism in Tibet.





**Tsharong Ney**



## Trashi Yangtse

**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

*Guru Rimpoche* is believed to have planted three cypress trees in Bhutan: Kurje in Bumthang, Baylangdra in Wangdue Phodrang and Dechen Phodrang *Lhakhang* in Trashi Yangtse. Legend has it that *Guru Rimpoche* upon invitation of local communities visited Dechen Phodrang to subdue a local deity, wherein he is said to have planted this cypress tree in present location. *Guru* is believed to have meditated for a year in this place after subduing the local deity.

The tree appears to be healthy, however the trunk is rotten.

**Estimated Age:** 139 years within the length of 33.9 cm [supposed to be 111.5 cm]

**Height:** 78.9 m

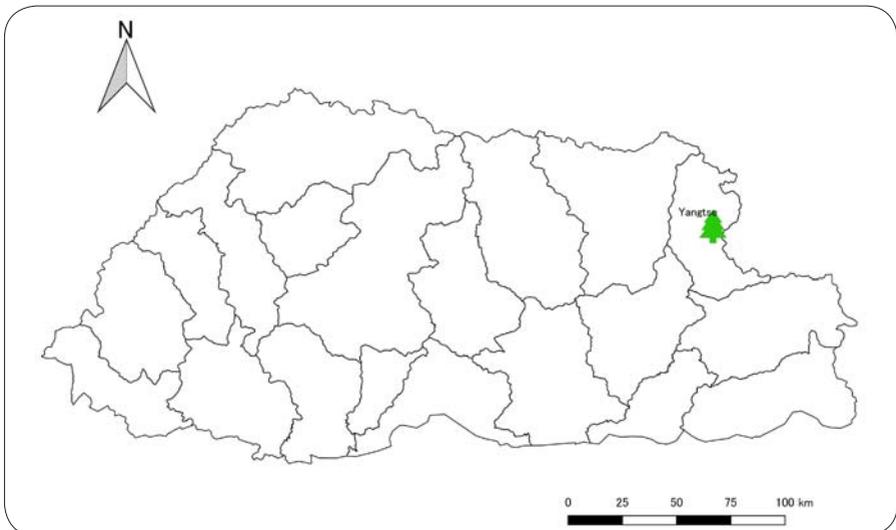
**DBH:** 223 cm

**Lhakhang:** Dechen Phodrang

**Gewog:** Bomdeling

**Dzongkhag:** Trashi Yangtse

**Elevation:** 2056 m





**Dechen Phodrang**



## Trongsa

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**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

The tree is believed to be the walking stick of *Guru Rimpoche*. *Guru* called King Nowoche and King Sindha at a place where the present *Lhaxhang* lies and erected a monolith with hand prints of both the kings.

**Estimated Age:** 134 years within the length of 54.6 cm [supposed to be 67.5 cm]

**Height:** 40 m

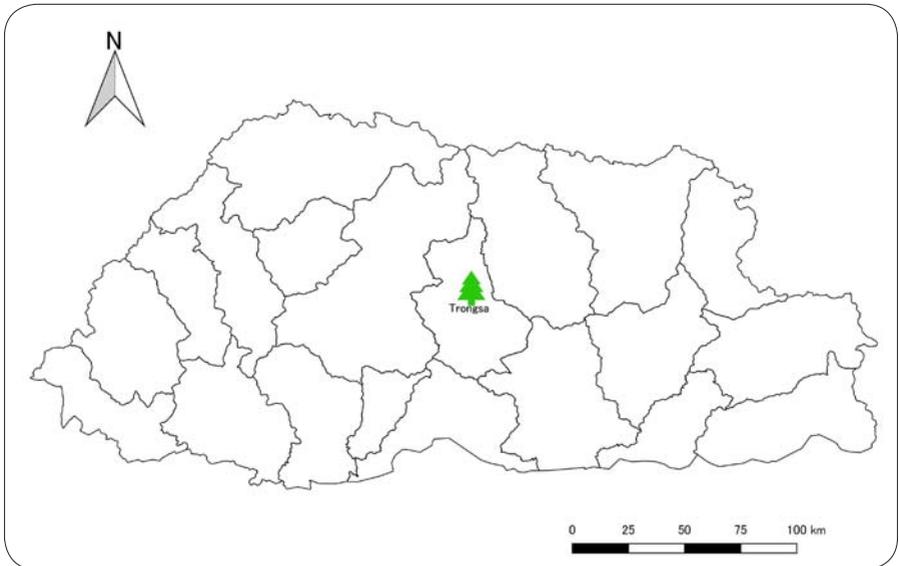
**DBH:** 135 cm

**Lhaxhang:** Nabji

**Gewog:** Nabji

**Dzongkhag:** Trongsa

**Elevation:** 1270 m





**Nabji Lhakhang**



## Wangdue Phodrang

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**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

This tree is believed to be the walking stick of *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel and is revered by the locals.

Top of the tree is broken and dead and roots are exposed.

**Estimated Age:** 164 years within the length of 30.6 cm [supposed to be 93.5 cm]

**Height:** 32.1 m

**DBH:** 187 cm

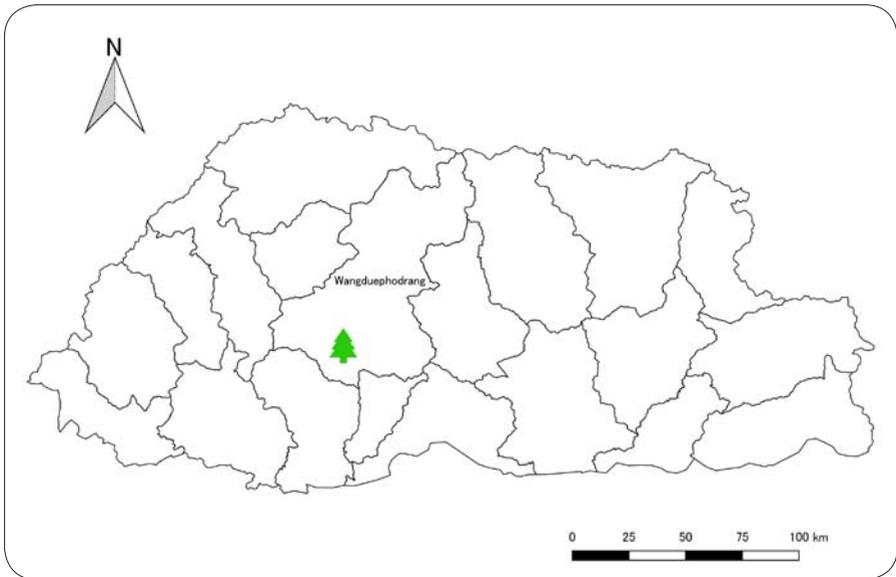
**Lhakhang:** Jarogang *Lhakhang*

**Place:** Jarogang

**Gewog:** Athang

**Dzongkhag:** Wangdue Phodrang

**Elevation:** 940 m





**Scientific Name:** *Artocarpus heterophyllus*

**Common Name:** Jackfruit

**Family:** Moraceae

When *Zhabdrung Rimpoche* visited Jarogang village, a local woman offered jackfruit to *Zhabdrung*, whose seed he threw and asked that when the tree starts to fruit, its fruit be sent to him.

Top of the tree is dead and branches are hollow with rotten trunk.

**Height:** 15.5 m

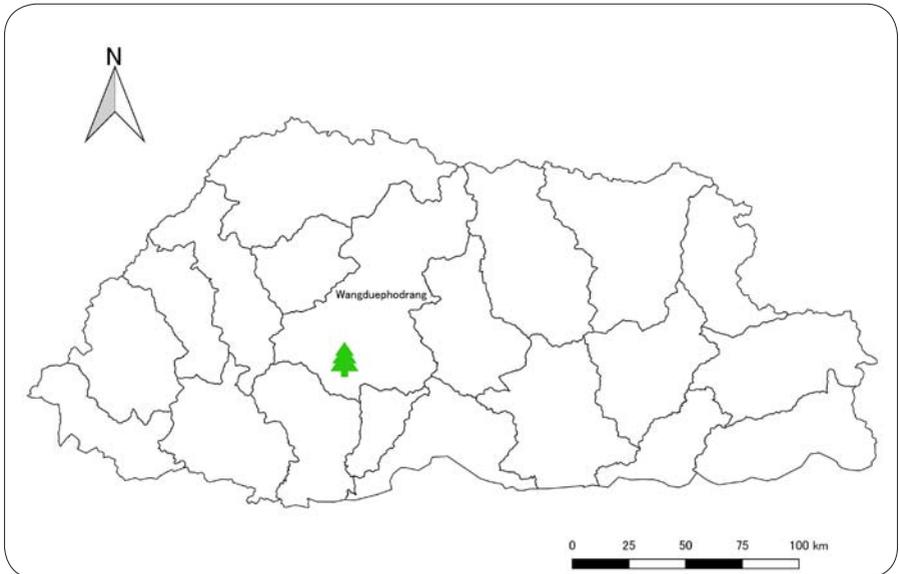
**DBH:** 186 cm

**Place:** Jarogang

**Gewog:** Athang

**Dzongkhag:** Wangdue

**Elevation:** 941 m





**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*  
**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress  
**Family:** Cupressaceae

It is believed that this cypress was walking stick of Kuenphen Longchen Rabjam<sup>34</sup>, who planted it upside down in 14<sup>th</sup> century with the prayers that if the tree grows the tradition of Peling<sup>35</sup> shall flourish in Bhutan. Top of the tree is dead with roots exposed and rotten. The tree is forked.

**Estimated Age:** 381 years within the length of 50.5 cm [supposed to be 123 cm]

**Height:** 32.2 m

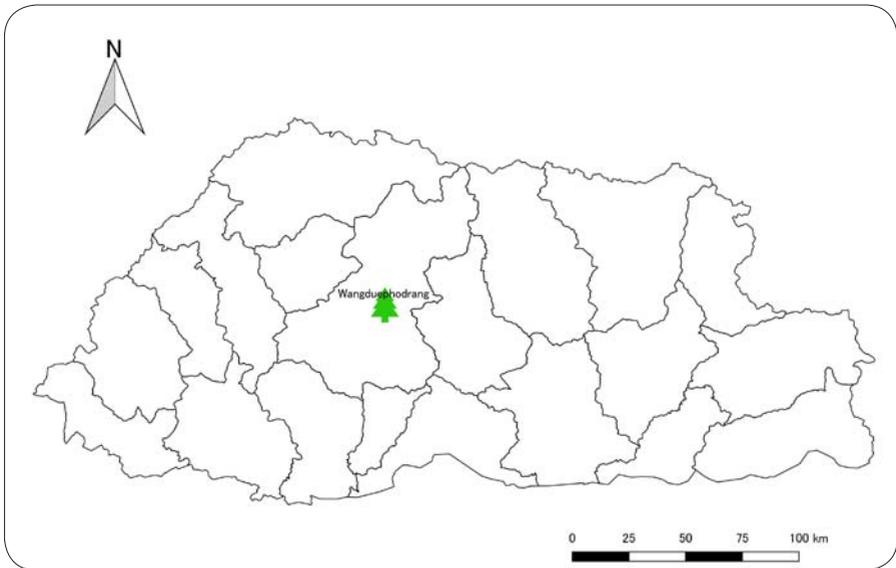
**DBH:** 246 cm

**Place:** Gella

**Gewog:** Gangtey

**Dzongkhag:** Wangdue

**Elevation:** 3030 m



<sup>34</sup>One of the most revered Lama of Nyingma sect of Buddhism

<sup>35</sup>Lineage of Tertön Pema Lingpa





**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

This tree is believed to be the walking stick of *Guru Rimpoche*. *Guru Rimpoche* was at Zhabja upon the invitation of locals to subdue demon. The tree appears healthy; however, we could see few dead branches with its trunk rotten.

**Estimated Age:** 200 years within the length of 52 cm [supposed to be 57 cm]

**Height:** 49.2 m

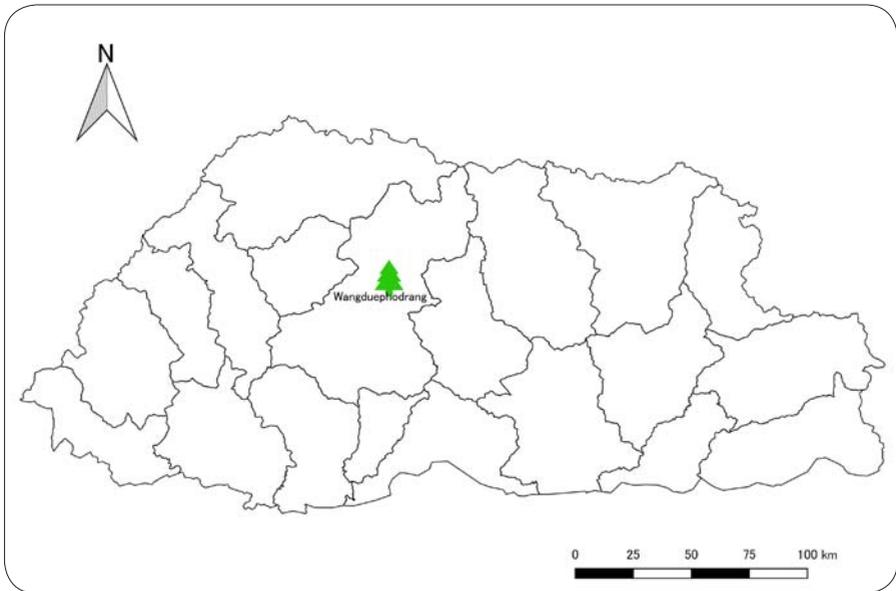
**DBH:** 114 cm

**Lhakhang:** Zhabja *Lhakhang*

**Gewog:** Dangchu

**Dzongkhag:** Wangdue

**Elevation:** 2499 m





**Zhabja Lhakhang**



**Scientific Name:** *Cupressus corneyana*

**Common Name:** Bhutan Weeping Cypress

**Family:** Cupressaceae

The tree is believed to be the walking stick of *Guru Rimpoche* and locals believe that the hollow trunk of the tree contains relic items. Locals perform annual ritual on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese month every year. Top of the tree is dead and trunk is hollow with stones and concrete filling the hollow trunk.

**Height:** 94.6 m

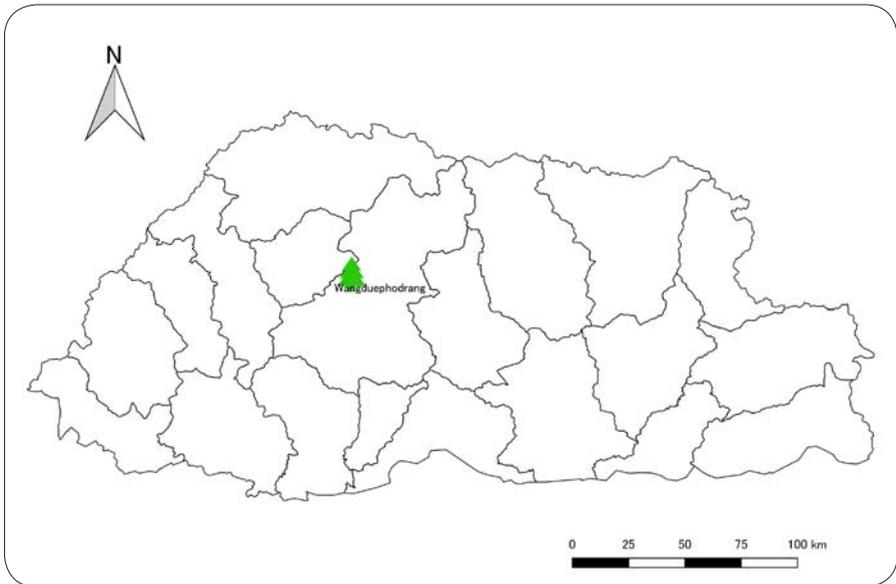
**DBH:** 427.4 cm

**Lhakhang:** Bay Langdra Ney

**Gewog:** Kazhi

**Dzongkhag:** Wangdue

**Elevation:** 2360 m





## CONCLUSION

Though there are many trees worshipped by Bhutanese, during our field visits we found that majority of the trees considered significant are abode of local deities (*Lhashing* and *Luu*). Bhutan has many such trees and documenting all would be a mammoth task; however, we do not deny the importance of documenting even those trees.

During the course of this study, we found that some stories do not tally with the age of the revered trees and the important figures associated with it. However, we believe that original trees might have died in the course of time and new saplings took over the place, but people's reverence continued to remain.

Bhutan is filled with many mythologies and we can only hope that the tales be continued to be told to keep the Bhutanese traditions of inclusiveness of nature with human society alive. From Bonism to Buddhism, Bhutanese have come a long way and under the benevolent leadership of the Kings of Bhutan, Bhutanese continue to enjoy the rich intact environment.

May the *Lhashings*; Walking sticks; abode of deities; sacred sites continue to thrive in Bhutan for it helps Bhutanese to carry forward the much recognized environmental conservation legacy.



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**Oak tree at Pema Sambha in Bumthang**





The Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research is a government based research and training institute under the Department of Forests and Park Services. We strive to foster better stewardship of our natural heritage – land, water, air and species therein – through rigorous science based research and transmission of cutting edge science results to field practitioners and policy makers. In addition to conducting research, we provide a two-year certificate course in environment, forestry and conservation. We also offer tailor made courses for professionals working within the field of conservation biology, sustainable forestry and water resources. As part of our initiative to encourage discourses and dialogue within the environmental community, we regularly organize seminars and host conferences at both national and international level.

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