

Assessment of the Potentials Tourism Resources of Choke Mountain and its Environs, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study focused on assessment and identification of potential tourism resources of Choke Mountain and its Environs. In the study, mixed research approach was employed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data which were collected via extensive review literature, questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, and field observation. 74 samples were selected from Culture and Tourism Bureau and Agriculture and Rural Development at regional, Zonal and Woreda level purposively. The collected data were systematically organized, described, verified, analyzed, and interpreted through both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. The result revealed that Choke Mountain and its surroundings are endowed with natural, cultural, and historical potential tourism resources. Such as Aba Jime forests, Arat Mekerakir, Molalit cave, lake Bahire Giyorgies, and wildlife species accompanying with both tangible and intangible cultural and historical tourism resources such as churches and monasteries. For instance, Merto le Mariyam, Debre Worq and Dima monastery, and Washa Giyorgies Filfil church and others like T/Haymanot palace, broken bridge, history of Belay Zeleke and his battle fields.

Keywords: Assessment; Choke Mountain and its environs; Potential tourism resources

Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading sectors of the world economy for the reason that it is necessary to improve balance of payments as well as income creation and employment opportunities; builds country images and helps to increase the value of natural resources [1]. It is a major source of national income for many countries especially for developing countries; a fact clearly reflected in the share tourism contributes to their gross domestic product (GDP) [2,3].

Temesgen [4] noted that tourism can be a leading role for income and job creation for many Ethiopians. The country is land of multiple tourist attractions and a visitor friendly people which is conscious of its historical, cultural and natural heritages; it is a country of great tourism potential. It was this recognition of a great potential that encouraged Ethiopia in the 1960's to start a tourism industry. After an initial period of rapid growth, the industry underwent a fast decline and virtual stagnation for many years due to the revolution that brought the military to power in 1974; the consequent turmoil, recurrent drought and famines [5]. However, during the last five years, tourism has once again emerged as a growth industry by taking advantage of the current peace and stability and government attention in the country.

The country has diversity of tourism attractions that have been noted in the literature [6-9], which includes some of the highest and lowest places in Africa along with immense wild life including some endemic ones; a very old and well preserved historical traditions with fascinating stelae, churches and castles to witness that an attractive cultural diversity of about more than 80 nations and nationalities; and various ceremonies and rituals of the Orthodox Church which open a window on the authentic world of the old testament that attract tourists.

Ethiopia can now look forward to increasing its share of the world's tourism market which is registering a faster world-wide growth than most other industries. However, the industry development still is not significant as per country's tourism potentials endowments due to different problems. Such as poor economic and infrastructural development, shortages of adequate tourist facilities and services in the

destinations [9] and inadequate promotion and marketing, lack of a win-win partnerships among different stakeholders, poor conservation and protection of tourism heritage resources [4].

The other giant problem is lack of clear identification of new potential tourism sites in the country rather than highly depend on existing destinations. Despite the fact that Choke Mountain is endowed with potential tourism resources, the local communities and the region in general are not benefited from the tourism activities due to potential tourism resources were not clearly assessed, identified, recorded and mapped. Thus, the novelty of this study was standing to assess and identify the potential tourism resources of Choke Mountain and its Environs, Ethiopia (Figure 1).

Choke Mountain is found in East and West Gojjam in Amhara regional state. The catchment area of Choke Mountain covers more than nine woredas as it is seen in the map. The area is found 333 km far from the capital city of Addis Ababa and 38 km far from the Zone capital of Debre Markos and 11 km from the woreda town of Robe Gebeya. The mountain lies between 10°42' N latitude and 372°52' E longitude. The area has different topographical features ranging from 2800 to 4088 masl, which includes plateau, deep incised valleys, escarpments, plains, and gorges.

Choke Mountain region is found within six climatic zones. These are; Upper Kola, Lower Weyna Dega, Upper Weyna Dega, Lower Dega, Upper Dega and Wurch [10]. The average temperature is between 0°C to 30°C and gets 200 to 2200 mm rainfall.

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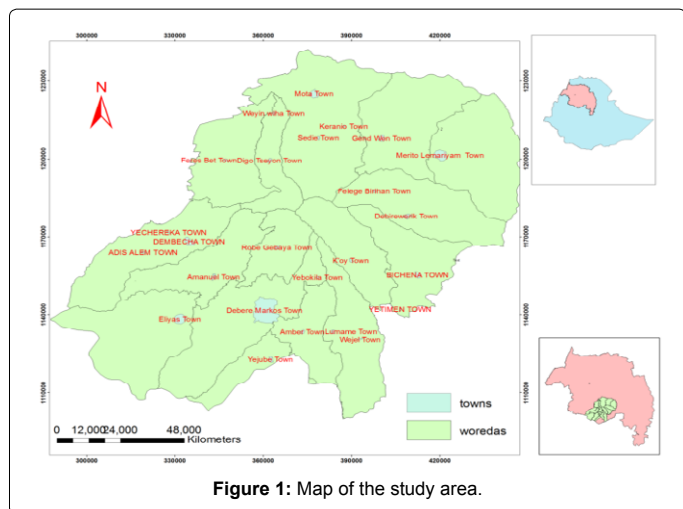


Figure 1: Map of the study area.

Choke Mountain is considered as the water tower of Nile basin countries. It is the source of more than 23 major rivers and 273 small streams flowing into the Blue Nile. This is a motivating factor for different stakeholders to maintain the ecological balance of Choke Mountain. However, the ecosystems are being threatened due to land degradation triggered by human and natural factors.

Methods and Materials

This study focused on assessment of the tourism potentials of Choke Mountain and its Environs. To achieve the intended objectives local communities, tourism experts from culture and tourism offices, staffs of agriculture and administration offices were subjects of the study. The data were collected mainly through questionnaire, personal interview, focus group discussion (FGD), and field observation.

Self-administered questionnaire, both open and close-ended types were designed distributed for 74 respondents regarding to general background of the respondents and tourism Potential of Choke Mountain and its environs. The closed ended questions were prepared in three types. Such as yes or no, multiple and five likert scale, (1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree). Finally, 63 questionnaires were properly filled and collected, and the remaining 11 were not collected due to respondent related problems.

The researcher conducted face to face interview with heads of Tourism and Culture Bureaus, religious leaders in Merto le Mariyam, Dima Giyorgies and Debre Worq Monasteries, natural resources experts, Historian and communities leaders to get first hand and genuine information about tourism potentials of Choke Mountain and its environs.

Two focus group discussions were held based on the distribution of tourism resources (Pictures 1 and 2). The researcher was conducted checklist guided field observation to observe the potential tourism resources of the area and took pictures of mega tourism resources. GPS was used to record X/Y co-ordinates of the tourism resources (Picture 3).

The collected data were systematically organized, described, verified, analyzed, and interpreted through both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. The qualitative data which was gathered through interview, focus group discussions, and personal observation was described, narrated, triangulated and redefined different views based on systematic grouping of variables and content

analysis. The data which was gathered quantitatively via questionnaire was analyzed by using descriptive statistics like mean, frequency and percentage. To do this, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 16.0 was used. In the analysis, maps, photos were also used.

Results and Discussion

As it is noted in the (Table 1), Choke Mountain and its Environs has tourism potentials ($M=1.30$ and $SD=.600$). The potential tourism attractions were viewed in terms of examining and identifying essential



Picture 1: FGD held in Dima Giyorgies Monastery (source: Author survey, 1/31/2013).



Picture 2: FGD held with culture and theater club members at Debre Worq (source: Author survey, 1/30/2013).



Picture 3: Visiting the greening program in the area, 2013).

No	Statements	N	M	SD	Min	Max
1	Choke Mountain has tourism potentials	56	1.30	0.600	1.00	4.00
2	There are abundant biodiversity resources that draw tourist	56	1.52	0.539	1.00	3.00
3	Cultural and historical values of the area can be a tourist attractions	56	1.64	0.698	1.00	4.00
4	Agricultural activities carried out in the area can be a tourist attractions	56	2.11	1.038	1.00	5.00

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard Deviation; Min: Minimum; Max: Maximum of 1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree

Table 1: Tourism potentialities of Choke Mountain and its Environs.

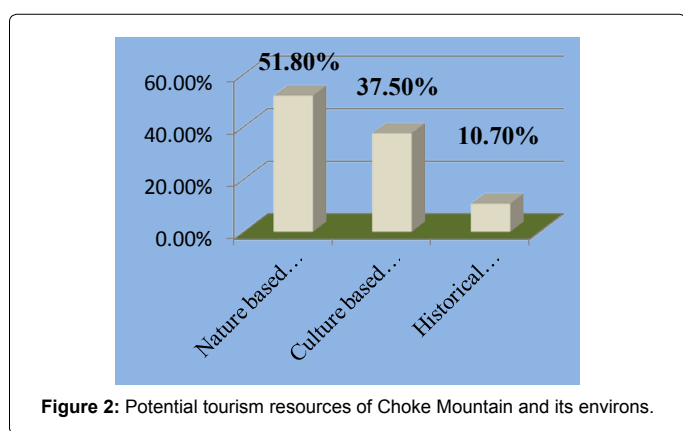


Figure 2: Potential tourism resources of Choke Mountain and its environs.

aspect of natural, cultural and historical tourism resources. The area has unique biodiversity resources which includes plant, animal, and bird species (M=1.52 and SD=0.539). The cultural and historical values of Choke Mountain also can be tourist attractions (M=1.64 and SD=0.698). According to Abebaw [5], the rural communities of Choke Mountain and their surrounding have colorful cultural values which include both tangible and intangible cultural heritages like living styles, traditional systems, artifacts, built environment, social structure, architecture, paintings, and other historical values like historical buildings, palace, battle fields, story, and oral tradition. These resources have the indispensable values to develop community-based ecotourism in the area.

The other tourism potential of the area is the agricultural activities (M=2.11 and SD=1.038). Due to this potential, agro tourism activities have to be developed in the rural area of Choke Mountain. The concept of agro tourism is a direct expansion of ecotourism in the rural areas which encourages visitors to visit working farm or any agricultural activities for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm [11]. The rural communities of Choke Mountain have practiced traditional farming system which can be very interesting for tourists. The way how to farm by using Ox and Horse, the season of farming, the type of farming activities and agricultural products are some of the elements that attract visitors in the area.

Tourism resources of Choke Mountain and its environs

The researcher viewed the potential tourism resources of Choke Mountain and its surroundings in terms of nature based resources, culture based resources and historical tourism resources. As it is shown in Figure 2, Choke Mountain has endowed with high nature based

tourism resources and limited historical tourism resources.

Nature based tourism resources of Choke Mountain and its environs

The nature based tourism resources of Choke Mountain is preferred as it has diverse range of geographical features like land forms, water basin, gorges, cliffs, native biological diversity and other spectacular views. Comprehensively, the result indicated that the scenic beauty of landscapes is the big nature based resources and wildlife resources, and variation of rainfall wind, temperature and humidity are the other nature based tourism resources (Figure 3a).

Aba Jime Forest (site 1)

The Mountain has different spectacular geographical settings which are very interesting for eye catching for visitors. After traveling 8 km from Rob Gebeya with a gravel road, there is a dense forest named Aba Jime forest. Asta (*Erica arborea*) is the dominant plant species. Kosheshila (*Acanthus sennii*), Nechate (*Helichrysum citrispinum*), Gibra (*Lobelia rynchopetalum*) and Amijja (*Hypericum revolutum*) plant species are also found. Additionally, the forest is the habitat for many animal species like Bush Pig, Monkey, Jackal, and Hyena (Picture 4a).

The four stepped mountain chains (Arat Mekerakir, site 2)

The other spectacular landscape is found in the mouth of Senan worda in the south west of the mountain which is called Arat Mekerakir (Picture 4b). The four stepped mountain ranges are wrinkled south-West to North-West. Based on the local, the name Arat Mekerakir is given because the number of the mountain chains is four.

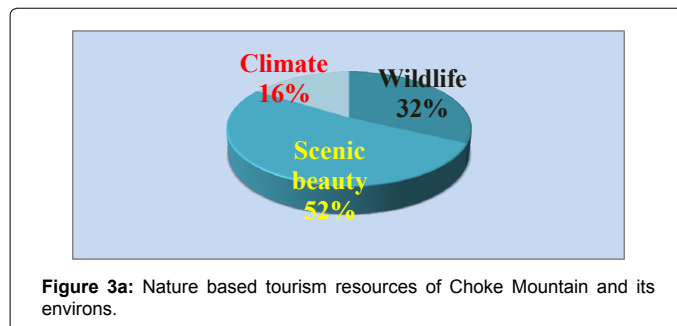


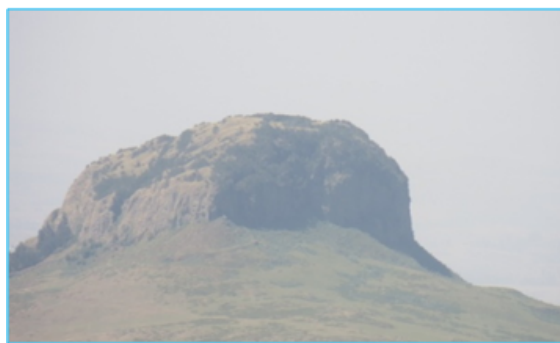
Figure 3a: Nature based tourism resources of Choke Mountain and its environs.



Picture 4a: Aba Jime forest.



Picture 4b: The four stepped mountain chains (Arat Mekerakir, site 2).



Picture 5: Enat Amba.

The four stepped mountains have their own names which are given by the local communities based on the size and the shape of each hill has. The first mountain range is “Enat Amba” (Picture 5) which means a mother hill due to its big size from all of the hills. At the top of the hill, there are marvelous land features, plant and animal species, and in the bottom of the hill, there is a church named ‘Arat Mekerakir Medehanialem.

This mountain range is important as a view point for the spectacular land features of Senan and Machakel woreda because of its high altitude and its closer to the gravel road between Bebugn and Debre Markos. The second hill is “Gemsi Amba” (Picture 6) which means a fractioned hill. It is the second nearest hill to the gravel road. The third hill is called “Qulit Amba” which means a hill with the shape of a dining tool called ‘Qulit’. The fourth hill is “Lemat Amba” which means a hill with the shape of traditional feast presenting tool called “Lemat” and this is the furthest hill from the main gravel road.

Molalit Cave (site 3)

Molalit Cave is found next to Filfil Meda just in the south of Enat Wabire in Bebugn woreda. The cave has an estimated height of 150. The unique feature of the cave besides its breathtaking view is serving as human shelter since 1902 in the form of succession.

Based on the oral tradition, once upon a time a woman has migrated to this cave before 100 years ago to protect her cattle from epidemic disease. Then after, the local communities totally isolated her from their social ties. As a result of this, the woman had no option other

than living within the cave. From that time onwards she made the cave as permanent house (Pictures 7a-7c).

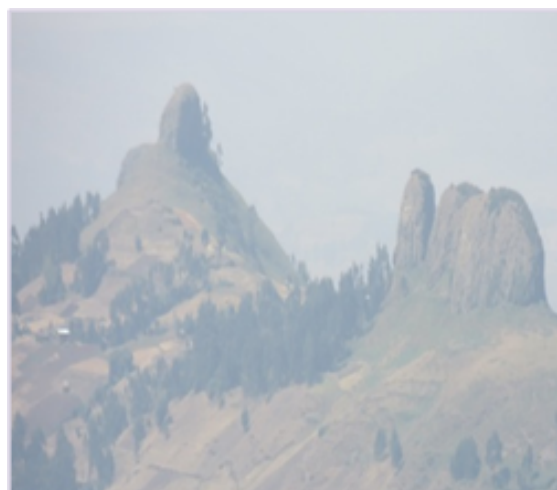
The other unique feature of the cave is the presence of lake inside the cave. The cave is covered by the lake in its half part is mysterious of God’s creature. But in relation to the size of the lake and formation, there is no information, and it needs further study.

Currently, the fourth grandchild, Ato Likenaw Ademe and his wife Chekolech Molla together with their three children are living in the cave as a permanent residential. The inside part of the cave has an estimated width of 10-15m, and which is classified in three rooms for family, cattle, sheep and goats similar with other ordinary residential houses.

Wildlife species

There are 49 bird species found in Afro tropical highland biome. From these, 16 species are found in Choke Mountain and among 31 globally threatened bird species, endemic Abyssinian Long claw (*Macronyx Flavicolis*) is also found. In this study 41 bird species are identified. Therefore, the area has great potential to attract bird watcher. Some of the bird species are endemic for Ethiopia such as Abyssinian Long claw (1), Wattled Ibis (2), Thick-billed Raven (3), White-collared Pigeon (4), and Black-winged Lovebird (5) (Pictures 8a-8e).

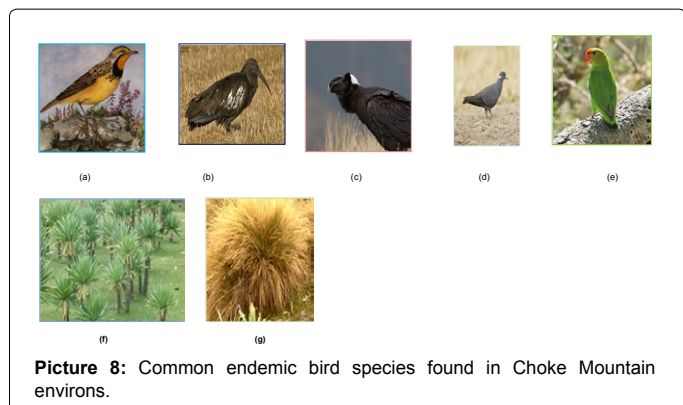
There are 16 animal species found in Choke Mountain and its Environs. For instance, Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Golden/Common Jackal (*Canis aureus*), Common Bush Back (*Tragelaphus scriptus*), Abyssinia Colobus, Common Duiker, Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*), Anubis Baboon (*Papio Anubis*), Bush Pig (*Potamochoerus*



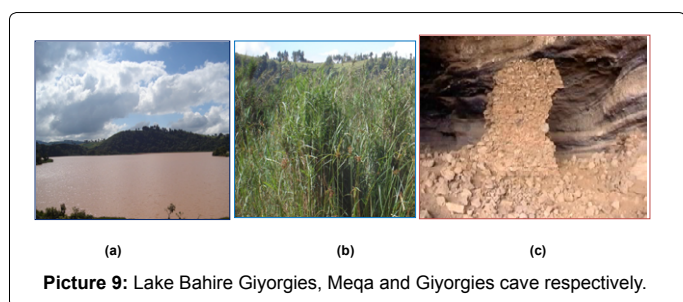
Picture 6: Gemsi and Quilit Amba.



Picture 7: Molalit cave, entrance of the house and AtoLikenaw (source: Author survey, 2013).



Picture 8: Common endemic bird species found in Choke Mountain environs.



Picture 9: Lake Bahire Giyorgies, Meqa and Giyorgies cave respectively.

porcus), and Common Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*) (Pictures 8f and 8g).

Choke Mountain is also home of many afro alpine and sub- afro alpine plant species. There are 85 plant species found in the area. Particularly,

Lake Bahire Giyorgies (the Miracle Lake) (site 4)

The Miracle Lake is found in the district of Goncha Siso Enesse woreda. The estimated area of the lake is 112 hectare and it is the fourth largest lake next to Lake Tana, Lake Estifanos, and Lake Ardibo. The unique feature of the lake is the so called “Meqa” grass which has island structure on the surface of the lake. The grass is sailing on the surface of the lake in different time and direction by forming island structure. Startlingly, as they want, they merge together and have their journey in to the edge of the lake, and in the other time, they separate each other and move individually. Based on the oral tradition, the movement of Meka has some kind of interpretation by the communities. If Meka moves together, it has the meaning of peace and unity in the country and if Meka moves individually, it shows that there will be government change and the occurrence of war in the country.

The Lake has also an attractive looking due to its location in a deep Gorge and which is surrounded by natural forests. Within the forest there are three caves named as cave 1, cave 2, and cave 3, and on the top of the hill to the south east of the Lake, Giyorgies church is found (Pictures 9a-9c).

Culture based tourism resources: Ahead of the nature based tourism resources, built features and cultural artifacts are also important attractions in and around Choke Mountain. The data obtained from focus group discussion showed that Choke Mountain and its environs are much endowed with intact tangible and intangible cultural heritages. The famous monasteries like Dima Giyorgies monastery, Debre Work Mariyam monastery, Washa Giyorgies Filfil Church, and Merto Le Mariyam Monastery are found in the area. The

hospitable and friendly people of Choke Mountain area have enormous cultural values and norms. For instance, gastronomic habit, dress code, language (Gojjam dialects), social ties and organizations, traditional ceremonies and events like senbete, mahiber, funeral ceremonies, weddings, dance, music, fukera, and shilela) attract both domestic and international visitors. Due to this, the area could be referred to as “the land of thousand smiles”.

Churches and monasteries: East Gojjam hosts about 1560 churches [5]. Among these, 163 are monasteries and others are in the status of churches. Some of these churches were founded as early as the fourteenth century in the reign of Emperor Abräha and Wo-Atsbäha. The first evangelical activity in the region seems to be performed in the time of Abba Bäkimos who later came to be known as Täkästä Berhan.

Merto Le Mariyam monastery (site 5)

Merto Le Mariyam monastery (which is considered as the second church in Ethiopia next to Axum Tsion) was built in the 4th-5th c during the reign of Abräha Wo-Atsbäha. However, European travelers and missionaries who visited the area in the 16th and 17th centuries wrote that the monastery had been built during the reign of Emperor Susenyos (1615-1640). Before the advent of Christianity, the place had once been the stronghold of Judaism where Judaic sacrifices had been offered, and the place had been called ‘Yesemaye Adarash’/Bet Mekedes (the Seat of Ruined palace of Virgin Mary) (Picture 10) .

In the monastery, there are valuable heritage resources. Abräha Wo-Atsbäha golden crown, the kings’ vestments, costumes and beds, helmets, other crowns, parchment manuscripts, different crosses made from silver and gold, silver and gold drums, silver rivan, clothes of Ahmed Gragn, Queen Eleni silver cups, Etege Mintiwabe memorial clothes are some of the cultural and historical heritages housed in the church’s treasury.

Debre Worq Mariyam monastery (site 6)

Debre Worq Mariyam monastery was established in 351 AD, but later on, it was fired out by Yodit Gudit in 857, then in 1372 it was reestablished by the order of emperor Dawit (Picture 11).

The monastery is one of the ancient and it has a long history. Different spiritual wall paintings, gifts of kings are the remarkable witness of its long history. Among Saint Luke’s paintings of Saints and Virgin Marry, Woinitu is the notable evidence of the painting [5].

The Monastery also has a single storied treasury house which still gives services. The treasury house was built during Gondarian period in the reign of Yohannes (1667-1682) (Picture 12).



Picture 10: Merto Le Mariyammonastery.



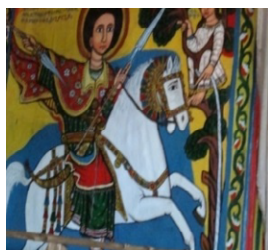
Picture 11: Photo of Debre Worq Mariyam.



Picture 12: Old treasury house.



(a)



(b)

Picture 13: Dima Giyorgiesmonastery.

Dima Giyorgies monastery (site 7)

Dima Giyorgies monastery is one of the ancient and historical monasteries of the country. Based on the history of the monastery which is written on the book Gedile Flipos and other Brana' literatures, the monastery were established in 1297AD by the religious father called 'Tekeste Birhan' or the former name 'Bäkimos'.

The monastery played significant role for the expansion of Christianity and, it is the base for the establishment of many other churches and monasteries in the parts of East Gojjam [5]. It is used for the center of modern church education. The memorable event in every individual mind is the honor of Doctor Haddis Alemayehu and his main characters Bezabih and Seble in his long Novel, 'Fikir Eske Meqabir/Love Unto Grave', of which its setting is written, and Doctor Haddis Alemayehu attended his church education (Pictures 13a and 13b).

The monastery now owns enormous invaluable heritages such

as Yohanes IV Gold Crown, different Size Gold Crosses, Gold Shoes of king Yishak, Snake shape Gold Stick, King T/Haymanot warrior weapon, different geez inscriptions and Brana books, Ras Mekonnen Cup, different paintings like (painting of Saint George on his horse) and others.

Based on the data analyzed and gathered from focus group discussions, the other potential attraction in the monastery is church education/Yabenet Timehert. The monastery is the center of modern church education. Currently, in the monastery, there is organized church school(Nibabe bet, Zema bet, Qine bet, and Metsafe bet) and with eight teachers including one female teacher. However, the number of students is decreasing because of shortage of food supply, shelter and other basic support. The communities are not willing to provide pieces of food due to increasing the living cost. The other big problem is also the migration of church servants. For instance, priests, deacons, and church school teachers are moving from Dima to other places to get more payments.

Washa Giyorgies Filfil church (site 8)

Washa Giyorgies Filfil church was established in 1100 AD. The church is surrounded by dense forest and it has stunning landscape views. There is a cave around the church which has three classes. As it is reported by the local elders, the cave was used in the past as a shelter in the time of war and epidemic diseases. In addition, the Seven Holy water could also be tourist attractions, and it could be used to develop SPA and health tourism. In this holy water, large number of patients migrates to get treatment from their health problems (Pictures 14a and 14b).

Historical tourism resources: The vicinity of Choke Mountain and its Environs has not much historical tourism resources comparing to natural and cultural tourism resources. However, historical buildings, king T/ Haymanot palace, the legendary Däjazmac Belay Zeleke history and his birth place and battle fields and related historical sites are the potential historical tourism resources (Figure 3b).

Conclusion

This study ascertained that Choke Mountain and its environs have huge tourism potentials and identified 11 potential tourism resources which consisting of natural, cultural, and historical tourism attractions. Naturally, the area has endowed with spectacular features such as majestic stepped mountain scenery, caves, water bodies, climatic variation, dense forests, and endemic plant, animal and bird species.

In line with this, the area has also an ideal place where both built



(a)



(b)

Picture 14: Washa Giyorgies Filfil church.

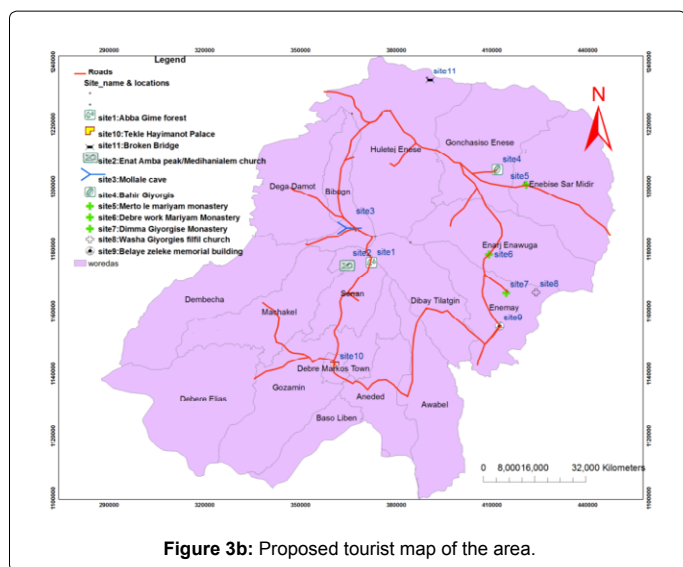


Figure 3b: Proposed tourist map of the area.

and living cultural artifacts are attention-grabbing. For example, churches and monasteries along with the religious ceremonies and festivals, church education and other heritages have huge potential tourism resources. In relation to historical tourism resources, Aba Kositer Dajazmach Belay Zeleke and associated attractions (hero's memorial palace, birth place, church, battle fields, and Kuselegnawa Warka) could be augmented with natural and cultural attractions.

Recommendation

In this study, 11 different tourism potentials of Choke Mountain and its Environs were identified. However, the study also identified different gaps which are the bottleneck for the development of tourism. Therefore, to exploit tourism potentials of the area and to make best tourism destinations, researcher has suggested the following recommendations. The potential tourism resources should be supported with basic tourism infrastructural facilities and services through the principles of sustainability. Improve and establish different

accommodation establishments; road and transportation systems should be improved; Public and institutional facilities and services (health centers, electricity, drinking water, sewage, telephone line, public lighting, safety and security, training schools or institution, banking, and etc) should be provided in the sites. Destination facilities and services should also be provided. Tourist information centers, information communication, tour and travel facilities, guiding services, recreational centers, shopping and commercial facilities, billboards and signage, maps and other facilities should be available. To make Choke Mountain and its environs for tourist destination, first the potential tourism resources of the area should be well promoted through different promotional tools and it has to have broader awareness creation program for the wider communities towards the tourism resources via awareness creation campaign.

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