
Bokel Gedam

This mountain top monastery is surrounded by a large extent of scrub. Most of the original forest has changed into scrub due to continuous tree cutting. Some areas of cultivation have reverted to scrub following soil exhaustion or erosion. Conflict between the local community and the monastery exist as to whether the wood resource should be fully exploited or conserved.



Name: **Bokel Gedam**

Status: monastery

Site Code: TU01

Floristic Region: TU

Region: 1 (Central Tigray)

Altitude: 2440 m

Latitude: 14° 11' N

Longitude: 38° 37' E

Woodland/forest

Status: secondary / logged

Size: > 10 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Olea europaea* ssp *cuspidata*,

Acacia polyacantha

shrub/ground: *Dodonaea angustifolia*,

Maytenus senegalensis

No of woody species: 36

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 6

Threats: soil erosion, overgrazing, drought, conflict with local community

Photograph: Bokel Gedam is found in a mountainous part of Tigray. The monastery is located on the summit of a flat mountain (centre at the back).

Parts of Central Tigray to the East of Aksum are quite mountainous with many summits. Bokel Gedam is situated on such a mountain somewhat flat summit. The Monastery is a substantial network of high stone walls, churches, houses and agricultural fields. The stone constructions are impressive by their sheer size and are clearly constructed for a defensive rather than decorative purpose. The place is very dry and the monastery's water must normally be carried up the mountain.

On the very summit of the mountains there is a large area of ground formerly cultivated, now reverting to woodland although the area is still regularly grazed. This woodland is very open and natural regeneration is very localized to microhabitat where soils are still present and where herbivores avoid to some extent.

The mountain side consist in a sheer cliff on one side and very steep slopes elsewhere. These vast slopes used to be covered by trees but now only scrub remains with some areas being totally treeless.

The surrounding mountains are generally covered by scrub, but few trees remain in this landscape. Even eucalypts are few.

History

This monastery has long been established and consists in a number of very impressive buildings including two churches and a major hall. In recent years the monastery has built many tall (ca 3 m high) walls and the compound looks and feel a bit like a mediaeval village. Even the large fields, adjacent to the monastery, are protected by tall stone walls. These structures appear to be partly a

consequence of the difficulties the monastery has had with local farmers.

Conservation status

The biodiversity present is of limited conservation value. However, there is great scope for habitat restoration because of the large size of the area under monastery.



There is a good mixture of large trees, shrub ground flora and open spaces in this woodland, although natural regeneration is rare.



A gate in one of the substantial stone walls found throughout the monastery. To the right the fence protects a small plantation of *Prunus rhamnoides* used in the production of local beer.

Threats

The woodland on the summit is heavily grazed and eroded and therefore regeneration slow or non-existent. On the slopes there is a steady conflict between local people who want to harvest the resource and the monastery that wants to keep a woody cover. On the lower slopes some areas are now without any woody vegetation.

Management

Conflict resolution between the religious and local community needs to be resolved and probably outside help will be required to achieve this. Only then, will various management options (planting, direct seeding, etc...) will be worth investigating.