





The Origins Project

Opening the World's Eyes to Armenian, Bashkir, Chinese and Nepalese Culture and History, to Promote Tourism

Background

1.1 Armenia and the ancient Armenian kingdoms have created a place of rich culture and history. Armenia was the world's first Christian nation, and one of the world's oldest winemaking cultures. Armenian culture includes many unique festivals, folk dances, and musical instruments (**Figure 1**). Carpet-making and metalworking crafts were thought to have originated in the area, and Armenia is the site of numerous cultural treasures. Notwithstanding this potential, Armenia has no museum where all the precious cultural aspects can be experienced in a single place, just museums related to specific aspects such as philology and manuscripts.

Discover an Ancient Land of Festivals

Year-Round Celebrations of Dance, Music, Cuisine and Wine!



Discover beautiful alpine Armenia – once ruled by Persians, Romans, and Byzantines and part of the historical Silk Road. Home of the apricot, experience the joy of ancient and new festivals in the cradle of ancient wine and carpet making!



Figure 1: Major Armenian Festivals Tourism Poster

1.2 In many Armenian villages, emigration to the cities and the few economic opportunities beyond subsistence agriculture has meant that crafts are being lost, and rural morale is low. Yet European nations such as France, Germany, and Italy demonstrate the economic potential of cultural treasures, with France being the most visited nation in the world. Therefore, the development of attractions based on Armenia's cultural aspects should be a high priority for central and local governments, in order to provide employment and strengthen the rural base of the nation.



The Adopt-a-Village Project

Transforming all Armenian Villages by
Mentoring, and Reconnecting the Diaspora

Proposal

1.3 It is proposed to recreate a village recreating traditional Armenian life from a century ago near Areni, Vayots Dzor Province, as a major tourist attraction. The site of the attraction is close to the world's oldest winery (Areni-1 cave) and the Silk Road, on the banks of the beautiful Arpa River. Nearby is the historic and beautiful Noravank Monastery, cradled by majestic mountains. It is an area of great natural beauty and historical amenity, only 90 minutes from Yerevan.

1.4 The Areni Open Air Cultural Museum ('Cultural Museum') would be a place where local villagers – with equal opportunities for men, women and disabled – could be employed in traditional dress to provide an unforgettable experience for visitors. The artisans will have the opportunity to sell their wares, while tourists will enjoy an immersive experience of the many cultural aspects in one site.

1.5 Different parts of the Cultural Museum would support Armenian cultural aspects, where artisans from around the nation could demonstrate their skills, and pass these on to the next generation:

1. **Hakobyan Armenian Kitchen:** bread-making (tonir), Armenian traditional cuisine and drinks.
2. **Areni Lodge Winery:** wine making, brandy;
3. **Artwork:** painting, art craft, Christmas gifts;
4. **Ceramics:** pottery, glassblowing;
5. **Edwards Needlework House:** haberdashery, clothing (traditional attire) and dolls.
6. **Weaving:** carpet making and tapestry; and
7. **Leatherwork:** belts, shoes, equestrian (including metalwork);
8. **Swain Sculpture House:** marble sculpture, stone masonry and khachkar;
9. **Jewellery:** gold and silver smiths;
10. **Woodcraft:** carving (nardi) and toys.
11. **Music:** musical instruments, song and music, and dance;
12. **Language:** manuscripts, poetry and folklore/storytelling, pagan and Christian festivals (conducted in the 'School' and the 'Courtyard');

1.6 Although the Cultural Museum is expected to be built to look like the traditional 'wattle and daub' construction technique, permanent materials like concrete and river stones would be used underneath the exterior wattle and daub veneer. The river stones can be locally sourced, so this could substantially reduce building costs. Overall it is intended to roughly portray how an Armenian village might look a century ago, complete with grape vines and gardens.

1.7 The signature 100 m² Hakobyan Armenian Kitchen (Meghramis Suite) building is intended for dual use, serving as an administration facility and cafe during the Museum's opening hours from midday until 20:00 (8 pm), and an attractive private vineyard suite from 20:00 until 11:00 when the Museum is closed. The building is on two levels, so the private suite and water facilities are on the lower floor near the vineyard, while the administration, cafe, shop, and kitchen museum is on the upper floor.



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1.8 The natural look would allow the site to be used for other purposes such as filmmaking. The venture requires the construction of 12 small buildings, to house the 12 cultural aspects and one administration building. The buildings would not necessarily be constructed all at the same time, but could be progressively built as funding allowed.

1.9 Apart from the buildings, access, fencing, parking and signage would need to be considered. An estimate of construction costs is provided in **Appendix 1**.

1.10 An overview of the proposed bicycle trail and water pipes are provided in **Appendix 2**.

1.11 Detail of the proposed building and facility positions on the Cultural Museum site are provided in **Appendix 3**.

1.12 A 1.5 – 2.0 metre wide recreational bicycle and walking trail that follows the Arpa River is also planned in order to connect Areni with the Cultural Museum ('Arpa River Trail', **Figure 2**). **Figure 3** provides an overview of the entire Arpa River Trail.

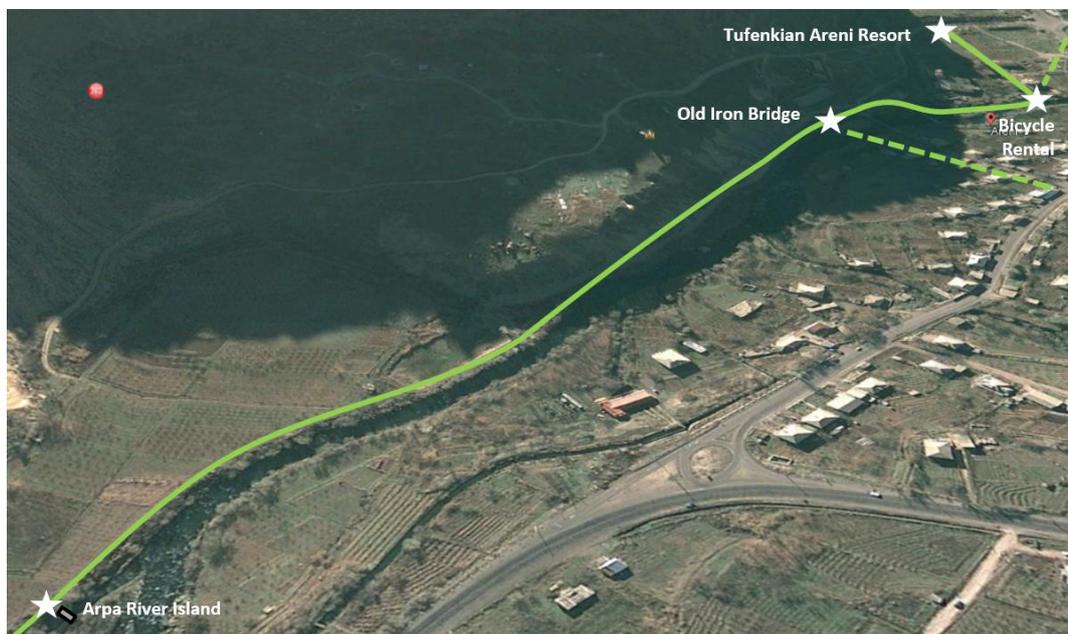


Figure 2: Arpa River Trail (Areni – Arpa River Island Section)



Figure 3: Arpa River Trail Overview – 2.25 km



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1.13 The Arpa River Trail will connect to the pedestrian access to the Cultural Museum via a series of bridges for pedestrians and bicycles across the river to the 'Tree Walk' from the main road. In addition, access for construction equipment would be provided via the [Areni Lodge](#)'s road and bridge, which is expected to be built in early 2021.

1.14 Maintenance of the Arpa River Trail will be the responsibility of the Areni Community. A small portion of the bicycle hire fee and/or more donations from the diaspora is expected to cover this cost. Eventually, Phase 2 of the Arpa River Trail connecting the Cultural Museum and the Noravank Gorge Road could be considered if sufficient funding was made available.

1.15 Separate projects for the Arpa River Island's Butterfly Conservatory and Aviary are not included in the Cultural Museum project, but are shown for clarity of planning. These amenities are intended to be free, and maintained with the proceeds from a zip line operation managed by Areni Lodge on the Tree Walk facility.

1.16 The Arpa River Island should be managed as a public park for tourists and locals, with strict control on littering and activities that might affect its natural beauty by the Areni Community.

1.17 The facility would only be open to the public during daylight hours from midday until 20:00 (8 pm), except Museum staff will be able to access the site from 11:00 and the Armenian Kitchen/Meghramis Suite can be booked overnight through Areni Lodge. Abuse by the public or tourists of the facilities can be managed with proper signage and surveillance, especially to avoid the possibility of vandalism or fire.

Barriers

2.1 The Armenian Diaspora had been wary of providing assistance in the past because of corruption and poor business practices in Armenia. However, this concern can be managed with the oversight by the Areni Community and Areni Lodge.

2.2 Armenia has vast untapped potential for tourism, given its natural beauty and the unique cultural and historical experiences it can offer. It is a relatively stable and safe nation, ideally located within a few hours' flight from 500 million Europeans and millions of potential tourists from Middle East nations who might enjoy the verdant and spectacular scenery. Unfortunately, Armenia's governmental structures supporting tourism need greater resources, many tourism sites have poor access, and English has not been widely spoken in the past.

2.3 Armenia's relatively vulnerable economic situation has meant it has few resources to advertise its potential, so many people have never even heard of Armenia. The diaspora has been active advertising Armenia but more could be done, if trust was improved and the diaspora felt more connected with their homeland.

2.4 It is important that local, regional and central government support the venture so bureaucracy is minimised, recognising that the Museum would preserve culture, promote tourism and provide employment. The Open Air Cultural Museum concept has already been endorsed by the Areni Community, and the Head of the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Armenia was briefed about the project in Yerevan on 03 July 2019.



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Project Management and Funding

3.1 Due to the need to avoid corruption and ensure a fair financial opportunity for villagers, the administration of the museum is proposed to be conducted by the Areni Community. Donations are expected to be managed under the '[Adopt-a-Village](#)' charity project, which will be registered as a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in mid-2021. The Cultural Museum will therefore be distinct from its major donor ([Areni Lodge](#)).

3.2 The Areni Community should ensure that it provides equitable opportunities to talented Armenians (men, women and disabled), so they can find local employment in the administration, security, and craft markets associated with the museum.

3.3 It is intended that Armenian citizens (and even others, at least in the beginning) should not be charged for entry to encourage people – especially children – to visit and learn about their culture. School visits in particular should be encouraged. The Museum would not be open during coldest winter months (January – February), which would be for maintenance and special visits.

3.4 After the administration and running costs, it is proposed that any profits from the museum revenue (souvenirs and donations) would be divided between the artisans employed at the museum and preservation of cultural features in Areni and its surrounds (such as the Areni-1 Cave). The museum was also expected to have artists from villages other than Areni.

Potential Challenges

3.5 Attracting and retaining artisans would be a challenge, as the Museum should be presenting the highest quality art and culture for visitors to enjoy. Marketing would be a key aspect, to ensure that people coming to Armenia were aware of the Museum in order to attract people out of Yerevan, or to stop along the way. Provision of mechanisms to bolster artist's remuneration should be considered in the early stages, when there are likely to be fewer visitors.

3.6 The building restriction from a major highway is currently set at 50 m. from the centreline (urban areas. Parts of the complex may be closer than 50 m. from the highway centreline but as the Museum would be about 12 m. below the road and on the other side of the canal, an exemption had been agreed by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of RA in response to a request on 28 June 2020.

3.7 Power and water need to be supplied to the site, but this can be managed through the facilities being designed to support the adjacent Areni Lodge. The plan is to utilise the natural mountain spring water sourced about 200 metres from the River Island to provide water for the aviary (pool for birds), butterfly conservatory (fountain/spray), at least one drinking fountain, and to the Armenian Kitchen (cafe/toilets).

3.8 Vehicular parking is a major issue, which would require the purchase of additional land. There is land available near the highway on the other side of the canal, but this would need to be funded separately.

3.9 In terms of security, the Areni Open Air Museum would be fenced so it is separated from the Areni Lodge site, or the Tree Walk elevated above Areni Lodge's property.



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UN Sustainable Development Goals

4.1 The Areni Open Air Cultural Museum Project would theoretically support at least 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as follows:



- Goal 1: *No Poverty* – promoting opportunities for employment in the area of tourism in terms of handicrafts, transport, security and administration needed to support the Open Air Museum. A major tourist drawcard would enhance employment opportunities for a wide range of villagers, with economic opportunities away from the capital Yerevan that promote health and safety due to better resources that allow a higher standard of living and an employed youth.
- Goal 2: *Zero Hunger* – promoting jobs and local cuisine.
- Goal 3: *Good Health and Well-Being* – promoting improved access to health services through employment and necessary medical facilities for both tourist and locals.
- Goal 4: *Quality Education* – promoting training in tourism-related vocations, and the special skills required to maintain traditional crafts. It would be a place where unique cultural crafts and skills using natural and sustainable materials are preserved and passed onto the next generation
- Goal 5: *Gender Equality* – promoting economic opportunities for women and the under-privileged such as disabled people.
- Goal 6: *Clean Water and Sanitation* – not directly applicable, although water will be needed for tourists, and thus will benefit some locals.
- Goal 7: *Affordable and Clean Energy* – not directly applicable.
- Goal 8: *Decent Work and Economic Growth* – promoting local employment and business opportunities, especially in the area of tourism, high quality handicrafts, information technology and agriculture.



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- Goal 9: *Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure* – promoting local employment and business opportunities, especially in the area of tourism, high quality handicrafts, information technology and agriculture.
- Goal 10: *Reducing Inequalities* – promoting economic opportunities for a land-locked nation with mainly closed borders. This would be a unique tourism experience that enhances Armenia's profile of and Armenian culture around the world and draws interest from more developed nations
- Goal 11: *Sustainable Cities and Communities* – promoting a sustainable and vibrant local community that aids its youth, and reduces the chances of depopulation.
- Goal 12: *Responsible Consumption and Production* – promoting affordable and sustainable production of traditional crafts, including organic foodstuffs and beverages.
- Goal 13: *Climate Action* – promoting an incentive (with enhanced tourism) to beautify the nation, reduce pollution and take actions to preserve the natural environment.
- Goal 14: *Life Below Water* – not directly applicable.
- Goal 15: *Life on Land* – promoting an incentive (with enhanced tourism) to beautify the nation, reduce pollution and take actions to preserve the natural environment.
- Goal 16: *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* – promoting a reduction of potential crime through employment and opportunities.
- Goal 17: *Partnerships for the Goals* – promoting an opportunity for a partnership between the Areni Community, tourism-related businesses such as airlines, and the central government's tourism and cultural branches.

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Appendix 1: Building Costs

A minimum of 12 structures are required, including an information/administration building. At an estimated cost of USD500 per square metre (which may be conservative as this does not take into account locally sourced materials), the following costs are estimated for:

- 1 Administration / Cafe – *Armenian Kitchen/Meghramis Suite*, two level @ 4.0 m x 12.0 m + 4.0 m x 12.0 m + 4.0m = 100 m² (USD35,000);
- 1 School @ 5.0 m x 8.0 m = 40 m² (USD20,000) – *Language*;
- 1 ‘house’ @ 4.0 m x 6.0 m = 24 m² (USD12,000 x 1 = 12,000) – *Winery**;
- 9 ‘houses’ @ 4.0 m x 3.0 m = 12 m² each (USD6,000 x 9 = 72,000) – *Sculpture, Leatherwork, Woodwork, Ceramics, Jewellery, Artwork, Music, Weaving, and Needlework*;
- Utilities (power and water) = USD10,000*; and
- Pathways/village roads = USD1,000.

Therefore, the total initial building cost = USD150,000.

Other constructions costs:

- fencing – USD1,000;
- ‘Tree Walk’, bicycle and walking path plus two wooden bridges = USD12,000*; and
- signage = USD3,000*.

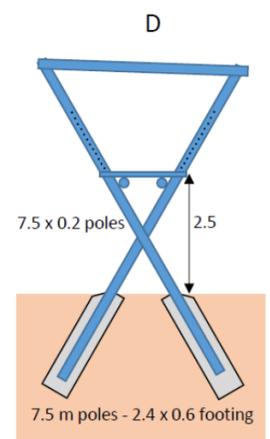
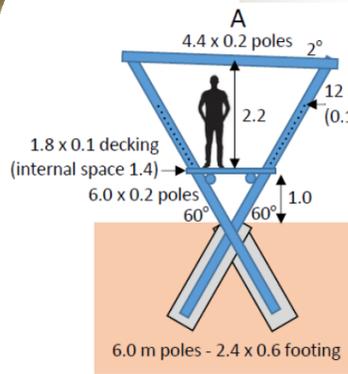
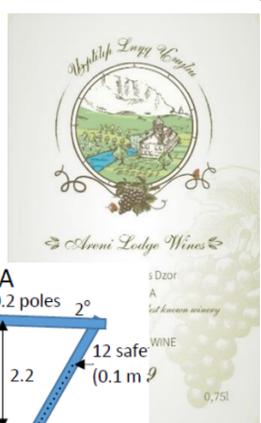
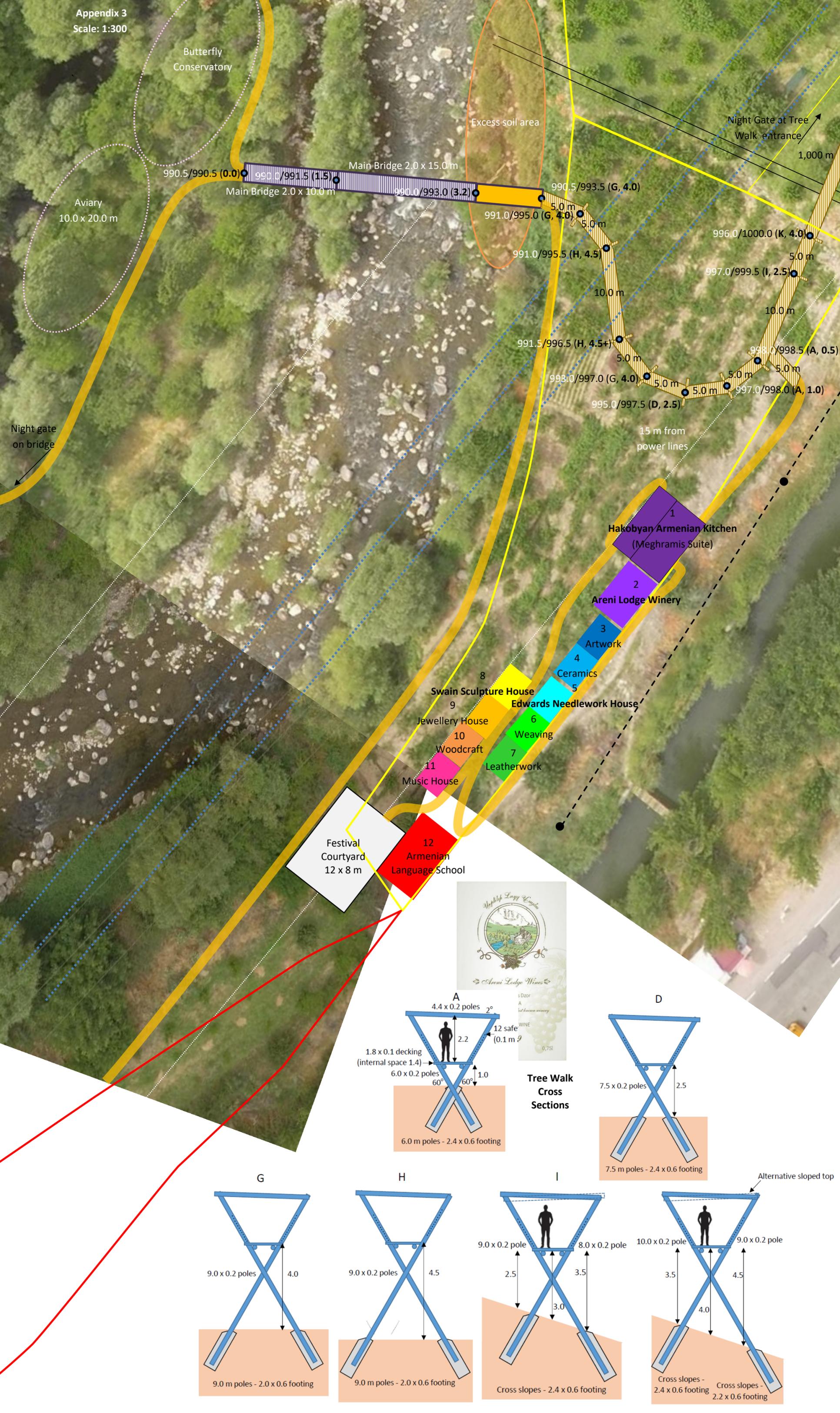
Grand Total estimate – USD166,000.

*Paid for partially or wholly by Areni Lodge

Appendix 2: Bicycle Trail and Water

Scale: 1:1,000





Tree Walk Cross Sections

