

GEORGIAN WILD

JARA HONEY





A person wearing a blue jacket is cooking over a campfire. The scene is set under a rustic shelter made of logs. Steam is rising from the fire, and sunlight filters through the trees in the background, creating a warm, natural atmosphere. The person's hands are visible, holding a metal pot or pan over the fire.

THE RUGGED BEAUTY
OF GEORGIA

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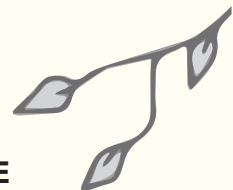
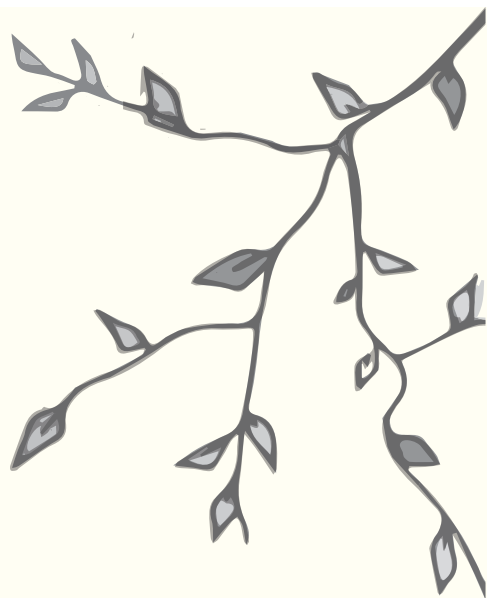
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WHAT IS JARA?

A Jara is a traditional beehive that has been used since ancient times for domesticating bees in Georgia.

There is no evidence for when exactly Jara appeared. However, several local folktales note that ancient inhabitants found the bees in a tree hollow, that they called this place in the forest 'the bee tree'. Later, locals understood that the 'bee trees' could be replicated. They collected swarms of wild bees and settled them into hollowed wooden logs and then placed them high up in trees to protect them from bears. Such wooden logs were called Jara. After the invention of frame beehives in the 19th century, Jara hives were increasingly replaced by modern beehives. But there are still few places in Western Georgia where Jara hives are still used to make the wild honey Jara.

WHAT MAKES JARA HONEY SPECIAL?

Jara honey is a very rare top-quality organic wild honey found in Georgia. It is 100% pure and wild.

Wild beekeeping techniques are rare these days, but Georgia is one of the few places in the world that has preserved wild beekeeping in remote dwellings located in the subtropical and alpine zones of Western Georgia. Here, only a ten dozen of beekeepers continue the difficult but ancient tradition of the domestication of wild bees – which is an excellent example of mutually useful coexistence of wild nature and humans.

Jara hives provide an opportunity to create true and uniquely flavoured wild honey through the replication of the tree hollow concept – the natural home of wild bees, without artificial wax and free from the involvement of beekeepers. Jara honey is also served with the honeycomb. This is top-quality honey produced from wild flowers, earning a place of honour on your table.







WHO INHABITS JARA?

Caucasian Mountain Grey Bees (Apis Melifara Caucasica) inhabit Jara hives.

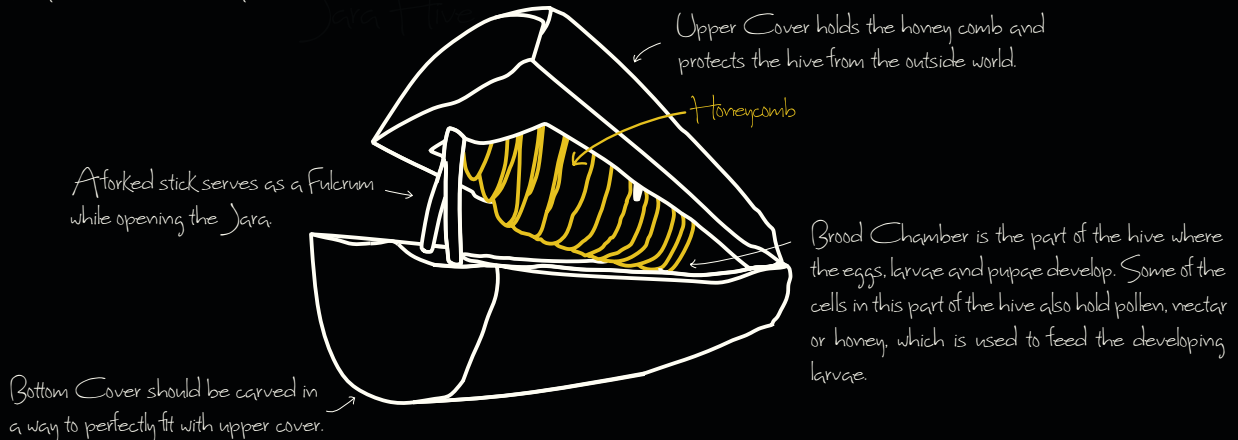
Georgia is the homeland of the well-known Caucasian Mountain Grey Bee. Georgia's complex climate paved the way for the evolution of the breed. At an average length of 7.2 millimeters, over half a millimeter longer than that of other honeybees, the Caucasian bee's tongue can reach nectar that its competitors cannot. This trait coupled with a propensity to fly earlier, later, and in cooler conditions, its high resistance and docility, results in a bee that is well known for its outstanding ability to obtain nectar from more types of flowers and in larger volumes.

WHAT DOES JARA LOOK LIKE FROM INSIDE?

The model of the Jara beehive is a replication of the natural habitat of the bees in tree hollows.

A Jara is a hollowed log cut in two. A Jara is mainly carved from the Linden tree (*Tilia begoniifolia*), which is chosen because it is lighter in weight and has no specific smell, so as to not disturb the bees. Jara hives have different lengths and sizes, which range from 70 to 120 cm. The length of the beehives is one of the factors that determine how much honey can be produced. On average, one Jara beehive can produce up to 19 kg of honey in a season.

The Jara hive sets its own rules. Divider splits the Jara in two, where one half of the honey belongs to the bees and the beekeeper is allowed to harvest from the other half.

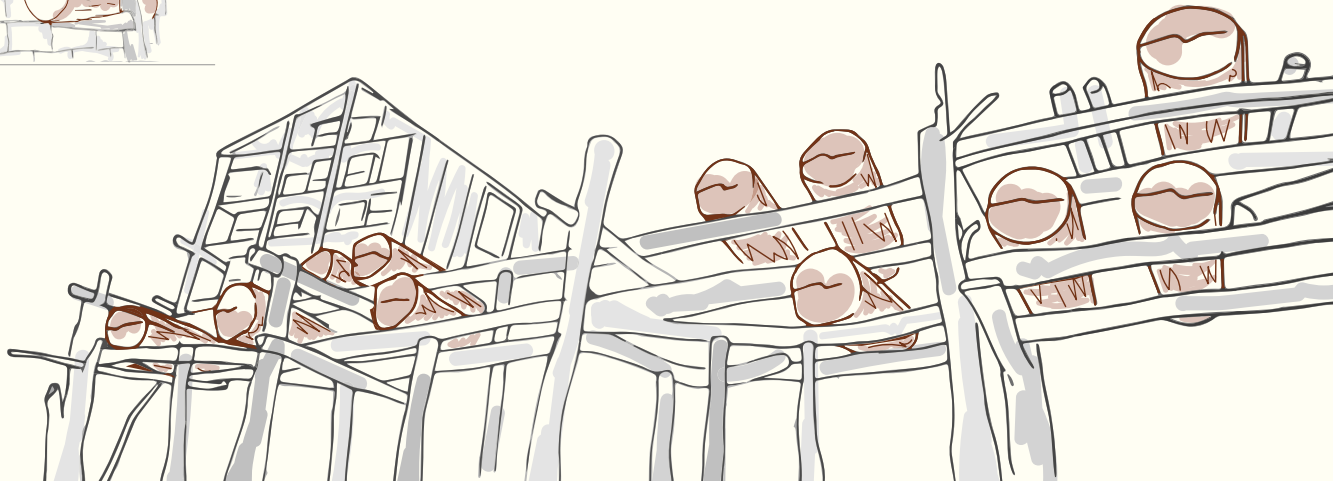
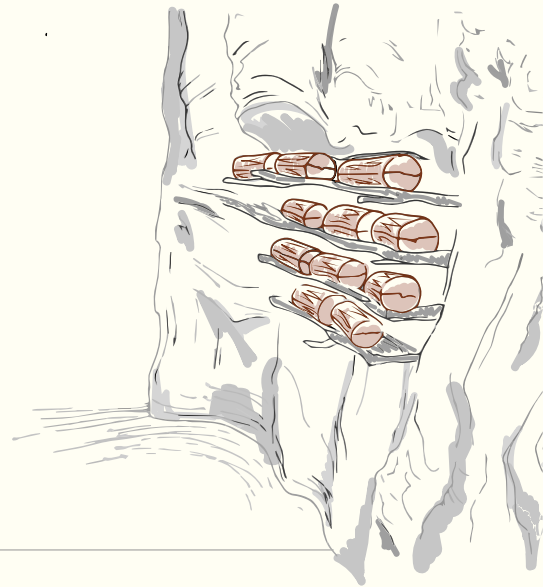
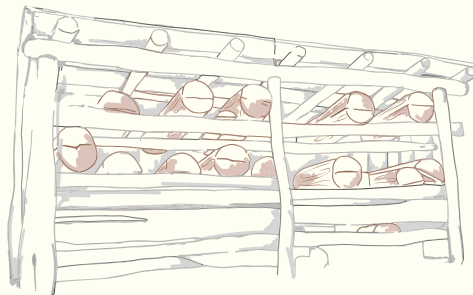
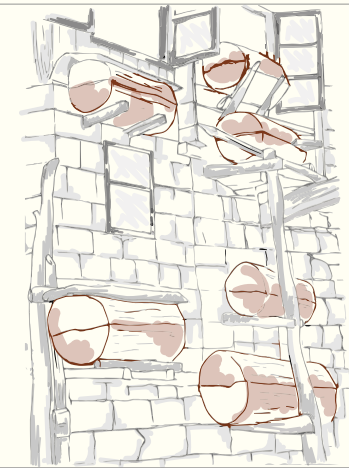


Making a Jara is a journey for the beekeeper. Some of them choose a special day for cutting wood – for example, the first Wednesday of February, because it is thought the Jara will be strongest in that way. Jara beekeepers usually walk 4-6 km to the forest, where they carefully select the wood they will use for the Jara.



WHERE ARE THE JARA SITES?

Jara are found on trees, in the forest, on cliffs, near remote houses and in special shelters on the farmstead.





IN THE TREES

The traditional site for a Jara is a *tree* – in the middle of the forest, 4-5 km walk from the village, high up in the Linden tree to protect the hive from bears and other wild animals. It was common practice when the daily routine of locals was more linked to the forest.



ON THE ROCKS

Rock is the safest place for Jara but the most difficult for harvesting. The Jara hives, placed on wooden supports on cliff faces, at about 1200 meters above sea level, are mesmerizing and frightening to see, because the first question that comes to mind is *how is it possible?* But some older beekeepers did not hesitate to put the rope on themselves, creating the places for the Jara hives by hand and placing the hives and then harvesting them. It was dangerous and required enormous effort, courage and commitment from the beekeepers, thus only skillful beekeepers could do it.



IN THE GARDEN

With the development of agriculture and weakening links with the forest, the locals began placing the Jara hives *in the garden near their homes*. It has given them the opportunity to collect swarms immediately and increase the apiary and its productivity. It is where most Jara hives are found these days.



IN THE SHELTER

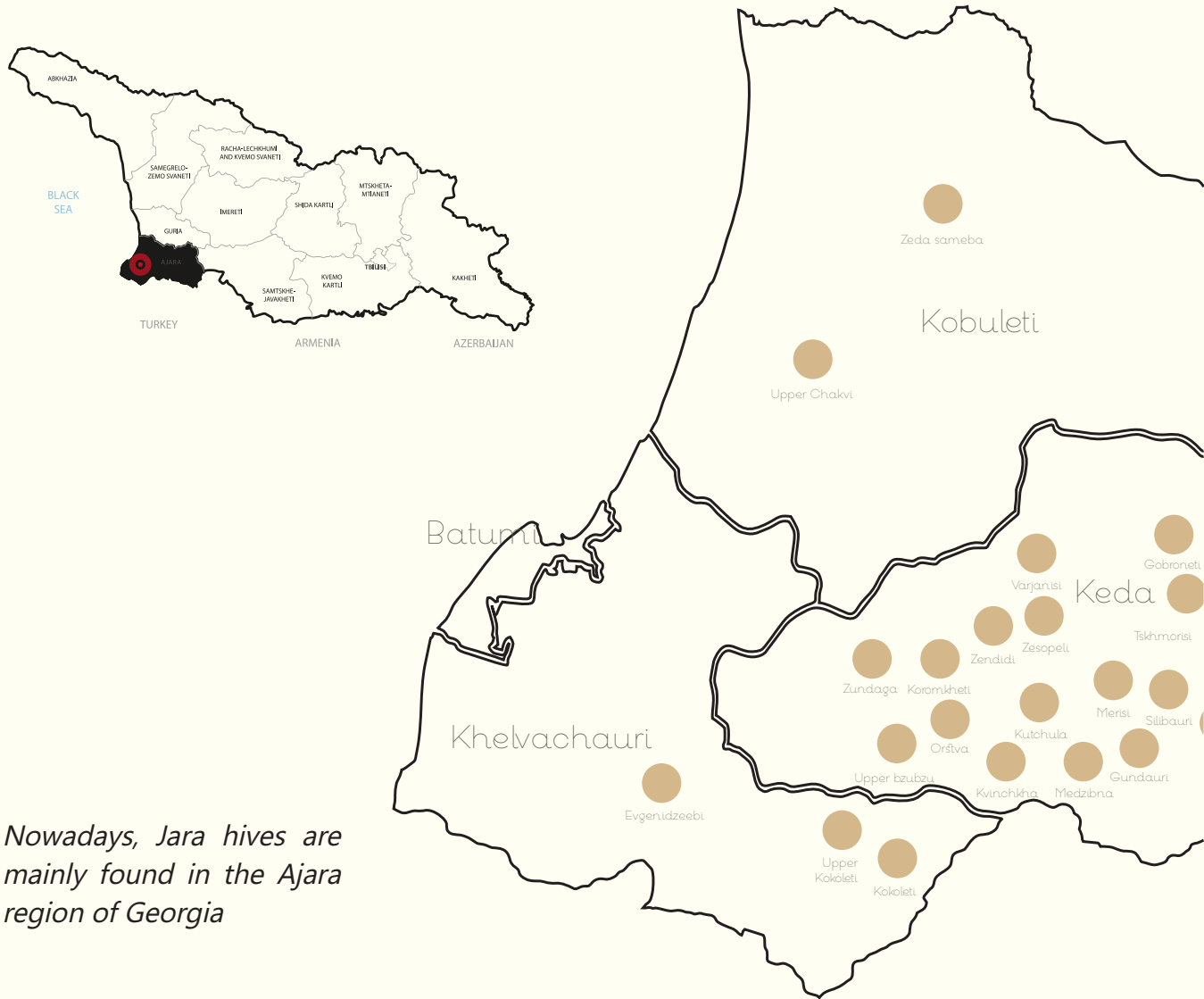
Beekeepers, living in higher mountainous places, protect the Jara hives from severe winter conditions through placing the hives in specially built wooden *shelters*, that are located in the best spot of the garden to make it easier for bees to thrive.



ON THE HOUSE

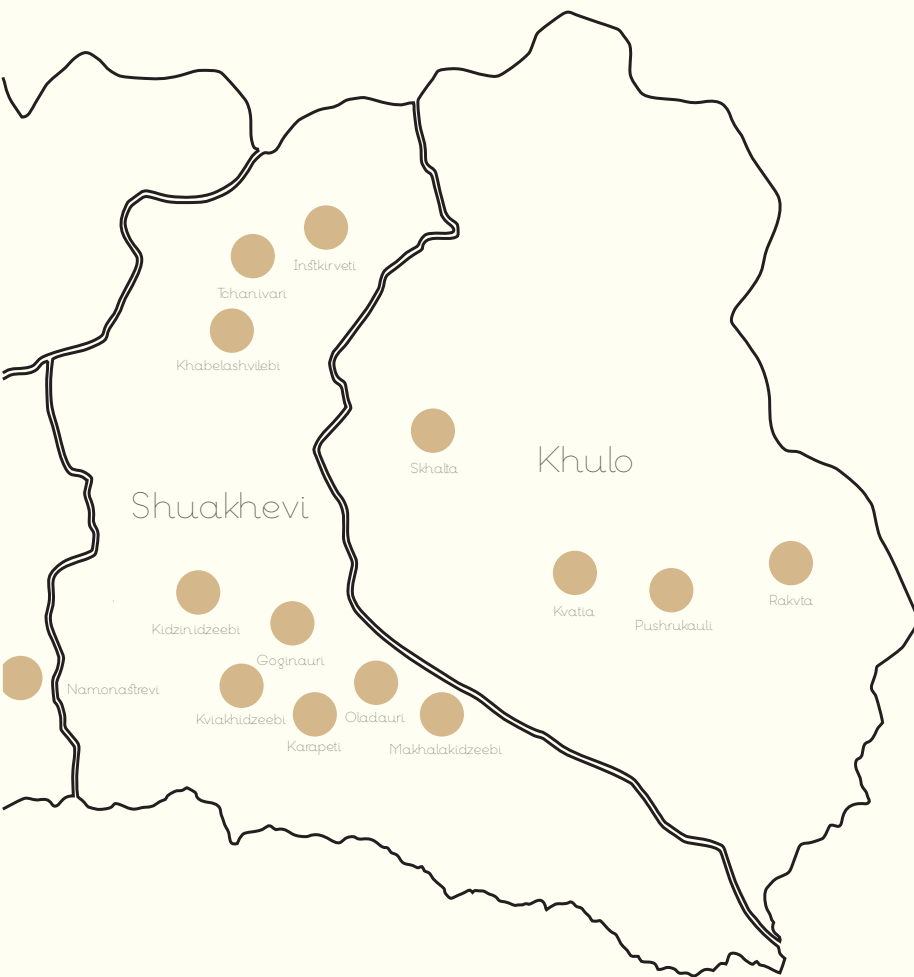
In some communities Jaras are placed on *the house*. These communities are originally and tightly linked with bee-keeping. Bees are part of their hearth and home.

DISCOVER JARA



Nowadays, Jara hives are mainly found in the Ajara region of Georgia

Ajara is a historical region in Western Georgia, known for its beauty, subtropical landscapes, 121 km coastline, forested green hills and mountains. The mountains, which reach over 3,000 meters in height, are home to dozens of mineral water springs, deep river gorges, breathtaking waterfalls and charming remote villages. The region is well-known for its rich cultural heritage. However, its main treasure is its people with their strong traditions, and Jara is one of them.



Ajara is one of 34 biodiversity hot spots in the world, determined according to the importance of the biodiversity and its danger of extinction. This means that these spots are particularly biologically rich, but at the same time particularly endangered. The region of Ajara is particularly diverse and often called 'a museum of nature'. It has survived glaciation and preserved unique species of flora and fauna, many of which are not found in any other part of the world.



JARA THE MOVIE



JARA is a fairy tale journey through one year in the mountains of Ajara. A story of the shifting boundary between human habitat and wild nature, portrays everyday lives in the changing seasons. It tells of bees in the forest, of the beauty and ruthlessness of and inevitability of nature, of people and of predators and of co-existence and conflict. The wooden jara in the forest and the bees living within it are the fixed point in the story.



JARA STORIES

Meet the Jara Beekeepers



JEMAL BERIDZE

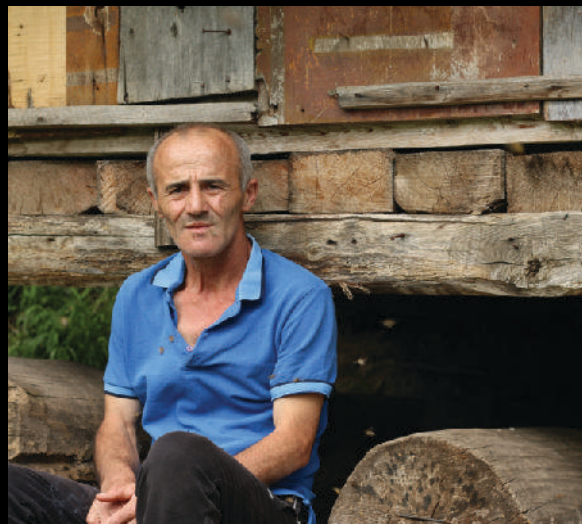
51, Makhalakidzebi village
Shuakhevi Municipality

Jemal Beridze's family continues a hundred-year tradition of his family's Jara making history, by living in a remote village in Shuakhevi, up in the mountains, surrounded by acacia, chestnut and wild nature. His journey with Jara started from a young age, he was four or five, when he made his first Jara hive by himself, and later started helping his father by going up the trees to get new swarm.

"I have a daughter; she is twenty two years old. She always helped me to take care of the Jara. She is married now and wants to have her own apiary. I am very proud that she is continuing the family tradition."

Jemal is looking forward to a stable market for Jara honey, because it is pure and natural with an exceptional aroma. He has many Turkish clients, who know and cherish this kind of honey and pay well for it, when the price of such honey on the agrarian market is remarkably low. Despite this, Jemal is motivated to produce more and keep Jara alive.

"I enjoy the noise of the bees. I sit there quietly and just listen. It calms me and I am like an addict, I want to be near bees and hives all day long. Bees buzzing is part of my life".





The Abashidzebi family created history in Jara beekeeping in Kidzinidzeebi village more than hundred years ago, by placing Jara hives on a local cliff face, but as Osman Abashidze says, there was no interest to this traditional way of making honey until Nika Tsiklauri (the Director of Jara the Documentary) visited the village two years ago. Then there was a report from the First Public Broadcaster.

"I received so many calls, even from my relatives living in Batumi, who did not know we had Jara hives".

The Jara hives, right on the rocks, is mesmerizing and frightening to see, because the first question that comes to mind is how is it possible? But the father of Osman Abashidze did not hesitate when he was 20 years old and put the rope on himself, while carving out the special place for the Jara hives and later harvesting honey from the hives.



"My father carved out the rock with his own hands, we still have hives there. It is very high and dangerous. But, I have no fear- you cannot do it if you have a fear. You have to trust the process and yourself"- says Osman Abashidze.

The market is limited, only relatives and neighbours, and a little left for personal use, but the neighbours know that Osman has healing honey and they refer to him with hope.

OSMAN ABASHIDZE

47, Kidzinidzeebi village
Shuakhevi Municipality

GURAM TURMANIDZE

65, Merisi
Keda Municipality

Guram Turmanidze's family was one of the first who started Jara beekeeping within their village.

As Guram says, he used to hear the story of how beekeeping came to the village from his grandfather. The legend says, that one day a man told the locals to go to the forest, where they would find an insect, like a fly and asked them to bring it to the village. It turned out that the fly was a bee which was then placed in an ancient beehive, a Jara, and Guram has continued to keep them his whole life.

"I always thought this story was quite mystical. Maybe this

explains my connection with Jara beekeeping, because I tried to do commonly used beekeeping practices, having typical hives, but could not get used to it. I guess you are born to be a Jara beekeeper" Says Guram with a laughter.

His family used to have hives on twenty two metre tall beech trees, four-five km walk into the forest. He used to climb these trees in a minute, always with a little fear. Now he is proud of his journey and wishes other beekeepers were more interested in Jara beekeeping, because it is something really special.





Namonastrevi village has two centuries of Jara history. The ancient inhabitants found the bees in the tree hollow and brought the idea to the village; now they call this place in the forest “the bee tree”. The village is a perfect area for Jara honey, with no emissions and pesticides. The gorge is covered with forest and the bees may find the flowers within a five hundred metre radius.

Nodar Turmanidze’s family was one of the first in the village to start pursuing Jara beekeeping. They used to have about a hundred beehives, covering most of the yard around the house, but difficulties in selling the honey was the reason for decreasing this number to thirty. Now Jara honey is mostly consumed by the family members and Nodar continues this family tradition with care.



“There is a dividing line in a Jara beehive which separates the honey belonging to the bees and the honey taken by humans. A beekeeper is greedy and if there is no barrier he will take all of the honey” – says Nodar with a smile.

He harvests Jara honey only once in a year, when the first Autumn cold appears, for the rest of the year the Jara is safely closed.

“If you need money in Summer keep your hive in Winter” – says Nodar.

NODAR TURMANIDZE

69, Namonastrevi
Keda Municipality

GENADI DOLIDZE

52, Namonastrevi
Keda Municipality

Genadi Dolidze is one of the few in the village who continues the traditional beekeeping which was started by his grandfather and father. He has twenty two hives and harvested about two hundred kg of honey last year; he also has modern beehives but considers Jara more special and natural.

"I was about thirteen years old when I made my own Jara hive and placed the bee swarm in it. I was very proud and excited. I still get that feeling when I am near to the beehives. I guess this is what keeps me connected with bees" – says Genadi modestly.

Genadi has Jara hives placed under the rocks near the house and this actually saved his family house from a falling rock last year when it was stopped by the Jara logs as it fell.

"I was so shocked to see that. The Jara literally saved our lives"– notes Genadi.





Valiko Baramidze's family has been keeping the Jara tradition for more than a century. He now recalls the time when he used to help his father to bring the harvested honey from the woods up in the horses and there was a time they used to harvest about thirty five – forty kg honey from each beehive.

Some years ago, an unknown disease destroyed the bee families in the Jara beehives and he gave up having one for more than twenty years. But something special happened this year.



“One day I just noticed that bees were buzzing around the three Jara hives placed in the trees, so they came alive somehow. I was astonished and surprised. I had carried this feeling of regret and had wanted to have Jara hives again, and surprisingly it came back to me by itself” – says Valiko with a joy.

He now plans to have more and to bring back his old life of being a Jara beekeeper.

VALIKO BARAMIDZE

62, Merisi
Keda Municipality

RAMAZ DUMBADZE

42, Oktomberi
Keda Municipality

Ramaz Dumbadze is a self-taught beekeeper who has been involved in Jara beekeeping since his childhood, when helping his grandfather to take care of the Jara hives. Today, he still has six Jara hives within the village and one in the forest placed in a tree. He continues to have Jara because of his special love of honey.

Ramaz wants to have more Jara beehives in the forest. He wants to place the hives three-four km away from the village area, and make a comfortable space for the bees to create pure and wild honey. He is now planning to build a wooden construction on one tree to place about ten hives on it. He started the process two years ago when he placed one Jara in the forest, which was inhabited by the bees right away.

"I think, there is something special about the hive hanging in the tree. It is like a separate kingdom where only bees reign" – notes Ramaz.





Mayvala Surmanidze has been doing Jara beekeeping independently for twenty nine years, since her husband passed away and she is one of the few female beekeepers in Ajara.

She was used to beekeeping as her father had about one hundred and twenty Jaras in her childhood. She used to help her father sometimes, but had never done anything alone, so she was a bit frightened at the beginning, but then she soon befriended the bees.

"I feel connected with my roots while I watch bees doing their job. It was a traditional family activity and I do not want to let it go, even though it is not easy for me as beekeeping is regarded as a male dominated field and I have a lot to learn" – says Mayvala.

Mayvala harvests about hundred-hundred twenty kg of honey in a year and sells it mainly to the neighbours or Turkish intermediaries who prefer Jara due to its unique nature. In Khulo, it even has a local name Kogha.



"Our village is known for beekeeping, nearly everyone had it in old times. It was very prestigious and had a high price. Buying a bee family was quite expensive at that time: one family in exchange for a goat and a lamb" – remembers Mayvala.

Mayvala is not only a beekeeper, but a teacher at the local elementary school and often speaks with her students about beekeeping.

MAYVALA SURMANIDZE

52, Fushrukauli
Khulo Municipality

MINDIA SURMANIDZE

33, Fushrukauli
Khulo Municipality

Mindia Surmanidze, father of four, teaches math to high school students. His love for beekeeping started while he was helping his grandfather as a child, thus his most precious childhood memories are jumping up on the tree to harvest honey from the Jaras. Since then, Spring is his favourite time of the year, as the smell in the apiary in Spring is fascinating and very attractive.

He makes beehives himself and has even modernised the Jara hives by making them not oval, but square shapes. He says math helps him while making measurements and he is always excited to try new experiments.



"Watching the bees is fascinating. Did you know that there are thief bees? They take honey from other beehives and take it to their own. While I see and hear about such things, this makes me even more curious and I want to see and know more" – says Mindia.





Bejan Beridze started Jara beekeeping twenty five years ago. He became interested in doing so after seeing his neighbour's Jaras and wanted to make additional income for his family. He is a self-taught beekeeper and takes care of about thirty Jara hives. Now all of his family members, even young granddaughters, are involved in Jara beekeeping, either in taking care of them or in selling the honey.



He reckons there was a time when one bee family used to live for more than sixteen years and many in the village had hives, but not anymore.

"I am the only one in the village who has Jaras, the bee families of others were destroyed. I am a kind-hearted man, that is why bees stay with me, they will not stay with mean people" – says Bejan with a smile.

BEJAN BERIDZE

70, Bardnali
Khulo Municipality

NINO DIASAMIDZE

30, Karpeti
Shuakhevi Municipality

Nino Diasamidze took over Jara beekeeping in her family about a year ago, when her husband passed away unexpectedly. She is very inexperienced and a little bit afraid of the bees and her neighbour is helping her with the harvesting and taking care of the Jaras. Most of the time, clients buy the Jara honey for medical purposes.

“I am a mother of four children, my youngest one is two years old and the income from honey is very important for the family. I wish to learn more about beekeeping and have a bigger harvest in the next few years” – notes Nino.





Daniel's family has been following Jara beekeeping for more than a century and they used to be largest producers of honey in the village, with about one hundred and twenty hives. But about ten years ago, the bee families were destroyed due to disease and now Daniel has only six. They used to have hives on the rocks and it required a whole day to dig just one hole in the rock to prepare a place for Jaras there.

Daniel, who is a physics and maths teacher, gained the status of beekeeper from the moment he was born, thus it is significant part of his life.

He learned to make Jaras from his father.

"There was a special day, the first Wednesday of February, which was the time to cut the wood for Jara, because it was thought the Jara will be strongest in that way. I used to go five-six km into the forest to find the tree and work with it there. I made about forty hives in a year. It was a marvelous time" – says Daniel.



Daniel chose the best spot with an excellent view in the middle of family's large land plot, looking right at the rising sun. He does not use any kind of veterinary drugs; the honey is 100% pure. He usually assesses the harvest by the weight of the beehive.

"We used to have a lot of honey. The former Chairman of the Ajara Government used to buy our honey and everyone knew about our honey. It was very prestigious for us" – mentions Daniel proudly.

DANIEL TAVDGIRIDZE

44, Kviakhidzeebi
Shuakhevi Municipality

ZVIAD PUTKARADZE

39, Kviakhidzeebi
Shuakhevi Municipality

Zviad Putkaradze and his family have been taking care of Jara hives for about one hundred and fifty years. Zviad thinks that Jara honey has a special taste, those who know its value buy it for medicinal and healing purposes.

"My morning starts by eating one spoon of honey. It is very healthy and gives me energy for the whole day" – says Zviad.

Zviad is a ranger and he spends quality time in the forest and sometimes he uses this time for making the Jara hives in the forest out of linden wood.

"I love to watch my father while he is sitting quietly next to the Jara hives and listening to the bees buzzing, it is one of the reasons I still have the hives" – says Zviad.





Genadi Gogitidze owns one beehive. He used to have more, but bears destroyed them a few years ago. He even considered not to keep Jaras anymore, but it is a family tradition and *“for me Jara honey is the most delicious, so I still keep it”*.



He thinks that bees feel much safer in a Jara hive, because they are on their own, away from us and make honey independently.

“I am a maths teacher and it was fascinating to me to see how precise bees are. For example, I discovered that when the bee family is strong, it builds honeycombs vertically in the Jara, and when it is relatively weak, then the combs are horizontal, this is how they are keeping the temperature level” – says Genadi.

GENADI GOGITIDZE

45, Dghvani
Shuakhevi Municipality

IRAKLI BEJANIDZE

37, Merisi
Keda Municipality

Irakli Bejanidze has been involved in Jara beekeeping since his childhood. He was helping his grandfather and learnt everything about Jara. They also used to have the Jaras in the forest, but there are no more bees there.

Irakli says it is harder to have Jaras, because they are closed throughout the year, and thus require more attentive observation from the beekeeper to assess the internal conditions of the hive. But he still keeps the tradition of Jara, because it gives the most natural and wild honey that many love.





Kako Turmandze continues the family tradition of Jara beekeeping; the family used to have a hundred of Jara hives in a forest. There was a high demand from the Turkish intermediaries, who were the main clients of Jara. They even took his honey and tested it in a Turkish laboratory, it was pure and 75% chestnut.



Most of the bees left the Jaras after Kako's grandfather passed away, *"which was very strange coincidence, because my grandfather was near the bees all the time and it is possible that bees felt something"*, notes Kako. He now has about ten Jaras and tries his best to keep them and have more, because *"it is part of my life. I want to continue my grandfather's heritage"*.

KAKO TURMANIDZE

44, Silibauri
Keda Municipality

DAVID KAKABADZE

40, Merisi
Keda Municipality

David Kakabadze has only one Jara. His family used to have more, but the bee families left the beehives.

"I was in a forest one day and noticed a live hive, which was about to fall down. So I took it and brought it home. I am afraid of heights and cannot keep it in a tree thus I have it in my garden" – says David.

Two more Jaras were inhabited by the bees again and David wants to keep them too.





Omar Dolidze is a young beekeeper who started his journey with Jara hives fifteen years ago after seeing it in his neighbour's field. He had an interest in having one in a tree and put about ten Jaras in the forest, all by himself. But unfortunately, due to some climate change there are no bees in there anymore. Now he has two Jaras left and still wants to keep them and have more, because for him the smell of honey during active bee season is really refreshing.

"I have never sold honey, as it is mainly for personal use. But it is so pure and natural that I think more people should know about it and have a chance to taste it" – says Omar.

OMARI DOLIDZE

34, Merisi
Keda Municipality

OTAR TURMANIDZE

65, Namonastrevi
Keda Municipality

Otar Turmanidze's family has had Jaras for a century. He has been personally involved in taking care of hives since his early childhood, as it was an important part of the family's daily business.

At that time, their Jaras were not kept at the house, they were made in the forest and put up on a high tree right away, five-six km from the house. Over the years, it became more complicated to take care of the hives there, which is why they found them a place near the house.

"I have never tried using modern beehives, because I have no idea how to work with them. Some say it is harder with Jaras, but it is the only way I can do beekeeping" – says Otar.

He notes that as bees make the honey comb, on their own, in the Jara, it is much thicker and more delicious.

"There used to be many Jara beekeepers some decades ago, because there were not many available sweets at that time and honey was used instead of sugar or as a treat" – claims Otar.





Badri Turmanidze has been a Jara beekeeper for more than forty years. He used to make Jara hives by himself. He even made more economical hives, by making them in square shapes.

He tried using modern beehives, but due to some disease he could not pursue it further. But Jara gave him the opportunity to still continue beekeeping, because it is easier for him.

"Jara honey is a golden honey. Nothing really can compare with it" – says Badri.

BADRI TURMANIDZE

56, Namonastrevi
Keda Municipality

KHASAN TURMANIDZE

53, Namonastrevi
Keda Municipality

Khasan started Jara beekeeping twenty years ago on his own will. For him it is distinguished field of agriculture, that cannot be compared to others.

"I always admired other beekeepers and thought they were quite special, especially, Jara beekeepers, as they are keeping this old tradition in this modern world, continuing the history of their families. I think it is fascinating"
– says Khasan.





Gocha's family has about five hundred modern beehives and is one of the largest beekeepers in the municipality. Even though, he still keeps the Jara hives and sells it only to the special clients who understand and cherish unique nature of Jara wild honey.

"Beekeeping is one of the main sources of income for my family. We have three Jara hives left, but still do not let them go, because it is very special. I am planning to have more for the future, to give a chance to more people to taste Jara honey" – says Gocha.

GOCHA GORGADZE

39, Medzibna
Keda Municipality

KAKHABER BOLKVADZE

32, Gobroneti
Keda Municipality

Kakhaber is a beginner in Jara beekeeping, he made one Jara beehive this year. His father used to do have Jaras, but Kakhaber did not have any interest in beekeeping at that time. But one day he met with the Jara beekeeper from neighbouring municipality and was inspired to start beekeeping by himself. As an experiment, he put the Jara hive in a tree in a forest and it was settled by the bees.

"I was charmed and decided to have the hives near the house that day. It brings me very special feeling; I really enjoy it" – notes Kakhaber.





Merab Beridze's family has been practicing Jara beekeeping for as long as living memory. He learned everything he knows about Jara beekeeping from his grandfather, who had about a hundred of Jaras in a forest nearby. He used to help his father to harvest honey as a child.

"As my father used to told me, bees came from neighboring, Kobuleti Municipality, from Mtirala National Park. Locals there, painted the bees in red point to see where would they go and were astonished to see that they travelled more than six km in a search of the honey flowers. Bees came as uninvited guests and found their place with us" – Says Merab.

MERAB BERIDZE

45, Tsoniarisi
Keda Municipality

RIZALI DOLIDZE

78, Namonastrevi,
Keda Municipality

Rizali found his interest in Jara beekeeping, when he was about eighteen years old, right after returning from his mandatory military service. He describes himself as *“young man with ambitions, who wanted to do something special”*. While searching for this, he was inspired to have Jaras.

“At that time, Jaras were kept in a forest, hanging on a high tree, which required a set of skills for taking care and harvesting honey. I liked the idea, because it seemed challenging for me, so I dared to take upon it. And here I am, after sixty years, looking after few Jaras I have left, which reminds me of good old days” – says Rizali with a smile.





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