

Sussara Village

One of just a handful of settlements across the Banjar region of Kumarikandam, Sussara Village is home to around 180 permanent residents, with a similar number of more regular itinerant visitors - hunters, trappers, herders, merchants and members of the nomadic communities that range the Banjar Mountains in which Sussara is located. Folk will travel long distances to reach here at times, as there has been a long-standing significance, indeed spirituality, about this place, near the headwaters of the great central river of Banjar, unsurprisingly known as the Heart of Banjar, the Kalabanjar. Moreover, and supporting the special nature of the area, a proliferation of large, flower-like, sometimes magical, crystal growths can be found scattered over the surface near the Village, and in parts elsewhere in the vicinity beyond this map. There is an especial concentration of such crystal flowers over flowerfield Peak, on the northwestern edge of the settlement, running down among the houses towards the hill's base, as indicated on the map. The Village's name further reflects this, as it means "Glass flower".

Farming of dates and cereals is carried out, the latter using carefully-built and maintained irrigation ditches and channels off the Billawr and Kalabanjar Rivers. Waters are commonly allowed to spill over into the marshier spots where the date palms grow without much channelling (so where palms are shown on the map, the ground can be considered muddy to wet most of the time). Livestock is kept in small numbers too, the sheds and barns for which are mostly not shown on the map for clarity, as often being too small. Larger herds of sheep and goats are pastured further out in the surrounding hills, notably the Eastern Hills, where snowmelt feeds the streams on the more southerly slopes, and there is sufficient fresh grass and shrub growth. It is usually quite dry and hot here, at around 25 degrees South latitude, in the Nibirum tropics. Nights can be colder at this mountainous altitude though, and winter snow nearby on the higher slopes is not uncommon.

Quarrying and mining is carried out on the southern slopes of flowerfield Peak, with useful mineral and ore veins in the mines, along with building stone from the quarries, as well as more of the local crystal flowers. The nearby Cedar Woods, just over the Kalabanjar ford, provide ample timber for boat and other construction. The river banks are accessible enough without the need for docks in general, meaning river fishing, together with salting and drying of caught fish, is another significant aspect of life here, and every house has at least a small garden beside it for vegetables, fruit and herbs (again, not illustrated for clarity at this scale).

Additional features too small to comfortably show at this level include the various water-control elements alongside the irrigation ditches and channels, such as the swivelling bucket-and-pole shadufs, used to move water from the channels to the fields, water-gates and locks. Only the larger, more permanent, wooden bridges where the roads and paths cross the channels are mapped. Besides these, there are many smaller ones, typically as a plank or two laid over, or next to, the channels, which are easily and swiftly moved from place to place when and where required. Three smaller freshwater well-fountains are illustrated, however, one near the Ore Inn on the slopes of flowerfield Peak, one towards the centre of the whole scattered Village, just west of the Bakery, and the third beside the Market, in the oldest part of the settlement, The Suq.

Originally, the settlement spanned both sides of the Crystal Bridge crossing (a fine, old, stone-built structure) near the confluence of the Billawr and Kalabanjar Rivers. Only that part north of the crossing still survives, in the confluence angle. This cluster of houses along the broadest and better-paved road at Sussara, while often repaired or rebuilt over time, does include some of the oldest building stones still in use here. The Guard Post is the centre for the place's police force, a total of 18 folk who deal with any local problems or disputes, and any other matters the settlement's leader, the Village Elder, decides needs attention. All able-bodied citizens would be available to defend the settlement at need, and since rumours of Banjar's invaders reached here along the Aqesh Road (which trail continues all the way downstream alongside the Kalabanjar to the sea at the Bay of Aqesh), all folks hereabouts routinely carry arms.

Long ago, there was a market place here, hence the name for this part of the Village, since Suq means Market. Now though, the actual Market has moved a little way north to the end of the row of properties, forming a variably-sized ring of stalls, wagons and tents, where both locals and wandering traders occupy the pitches, commonly changing from day to day. Suq Isle naturally gets its name from its proximity to this part of the settlement. River Inn is a pleasant hostelry, whose clientele are chiefly visitors intending to sell their goods at the Market.

South of the Bridge, on the lower slopes of the nearer, low, Wheat Hills, is the Cemetery. One of the former old houses south of the crossing stands by its gate still, now used for storing and preparing bodies for burial. There are many burial plots across the Cemetery, along with some old sculpted stones, and the low, drystone walls around it are a mixture of local loose rocks cleared from the land inside, and remains from the former, since-demolished, buildings that were once close-by. No further sign of the original settlement on this side of the Rivers survives.

The middle segment of the Village has a much less concentrated appearance, and is further from both Rivers, separated from them by The Suq and the agricultural fields with their irrigation works. The Granary is a large, communal storehouse for the Village's grain, seed stocks and other preservable foods. It is the largest property in the settlement, and there are usually a couple of guards in attendance, mostly to help keep out animals. The Bakery is, not unnaturally, nearby, where much of the cereals are ground for the whole community, along with baking in the ovens. Another large structure not far from the Granary is the Crystal Temple, the religious heart of Sussara, where natural wonders such as the local crystal flowers are celebrated, along with the veneration for someone long dead, known only as The Prophet, and where tales and information on this wonder-worker can be found, together with more regarding a less-ancient dead character, The Sailor Prince. Both are important spiritual figures for Sussara, and are a large part of why it is so significant. Activating the "Village Secret" toggle in the fCW file for the map reveals the hidden stairs down to the otherwise invisible Tomb of the Prophet and the Sailor Prince below this part of the settlement. Both sets of stairs are beneath the current cellar floors in two otherwise unremarkable houses, entrances to which would need searching for, digging or magical excavation to access, as there is no evidence for either in the cellars alone. Several people at the Village, including the Village Elder, the Crystal Temple's leading priest and the High Lama of the Shian Tak Monastery, with one or two others, are the only ones who know the secret of the Tomb's existence, and understand its significance. See the separate Atlas map, "Tomb of the Prophet" for more details. Locally-mined iron ore is used and refined at the Blacksmith's elsewhere in this section of Sussara.

The remaining buildings are concentrated mostly on the lower southeastern slopes of Flowerfield Peak, east of the stepped-levels, ledges and caves of the Quarry Mines above them, where most of the ore and minerals are found. There is also a meeting of the ways here, where the Banjar Heights Trail, the Ice Road and Hunters' Trail connect. The Banjar Heights Trail runs along the Mountains to the headwaters of Banjar's other major river, far to the west. Once over the Kalabanjar ford, the Ice Road passes the first of many old standing stones, each carved with one or more mask-like faces, that are found scattered along this trail all the way to the Shamesh Pass over the Banjar Mountains to Tiantang. It also provides ready access to the Cedar Woods. The Kalabanjar can be crossed with more difficulty much of the time at either of the two sets of rapids upstream from this ford. South over the Billawr ford (again, there are some rapids upstream from this crossing), the Hunters' Trail crosses part of the Wheat Hills, as far as the Sagirkala River, around six miles further south (10 km). The Sussara Atlas map has more information on where all these routes lead.

Golden Row, between the Quarry Mines and the rest of the Village, contains some of the newest houses in the settlement, occupied mostly by those who retrieve the rocks, minerals and ore from further up the slope. The large Mining Stores building is where items for and from the mining and quarrying are kept, adjoining the house of the mine supervisor. Mine House, further down the slope off Ice Road, was the supervisor's original dwelling. It is now a hostel for itinerant miners passing through from time to time, while the Ore Inn provides more such temporary accommodation. The most significant structure here though is the Shian Tak Monastery, established long before the mines were opened, when the quarries were much smaller. Indeed, obtaining sufficient building stone for the Monastery was what led to the discovery of the first mineral and ore veins. It was founded by a community of monks from Tiantang from far to the north of the Banjar Mountains, and who still maintain contacts there, as well as receiving occasional visitors from so far off. They were drawn here by Sussara's spiritual power, and at need, might easily become almost its most magically powerful protectors, for all their permanent community is only 15 strong. They wear distinctive pale green robes, and are well-known and liked locally, as knowledgeable healers and advisors.