



Samsu is a county seat in Ryanggang Province. Its 2021 estimated population is 43,055. The town sits on the Samsu River which flows into the Yalu. Although named for the town, the large Samsu Hydroelectric Dam is not fed by the river but by the Hochon River.

Like other parts of Ryanggang Province, prior to the 1950s, Samsu was part of an enlarged South Hamgyon Province that dated back to 1895. Samsu was first separated out of an older administrative district in 1952 before the current county was created in 1954 as part of Ryanggang Province.

Samsu does have an older history than many of other populated places in the province. The remains of its medieval city wall are still visible as is one of its historic gates. There is also a border fort within the county that likely dates to the 14th-15th century at 41.398524° 128.033850°. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find much specific history pre-1895.

Due to its remote location, Samsu and the whole area was often used as places of exile for centuries.

The area south of Samsu was the farthest north UN forces reached in Ryanggang before [encountering](#) the Chinese military during the Korea War. Samsu did not see direct combat operations.

Economy

Agriculture and logging make up the majority of Samsu's economy, with mining and the hydroelectric dam only providing occasional benefits.

The Samsu Dam is split between Samsu and Hyesan counties. Construction first began in 2004 but various construction problems and accidents delayed its opening. It didn't begin producing electricity until 2007 and still seems to be incapable of [operating](#) at peak efficiency.

Problems with the reservoir and seepage has also affected regional copper mines, causing considerable damage over the years. Evidence for poor environmental planning can be seen in the large landslide that occurred ca. 2012 at 41.322590° 128.201989°. The filling of the reservoir destabilized the rock and soil causing a slump over 400 meters in width.

Samsu has a relatively small market that occupies 880 sq. m. The market area grew between 2018 and 2020.

The construction of the dam and hydroelectric station brought new residents to the area and resulted in dozens of homes being built, but since that time there has been very little new construction of any kind in the county.

The largest mine wholly within the county is located at 41.371772° 128.039117°. The copper mine is some 8 km north of the town of Samsu. Another mine is nearby at 41.353196° 128.074063°.

Samsu town lacks rail access, but the border section of the county is serviced by the Pukbunaeryuk Line which connects Hyesan to Kusong in Chagang Province. The relevant train station is in the village of Phosong, where the border fort is also located.

The initial cellular network was installed ca. 2011, with service expanded in 2015/16.

While most of the buildings in the area are unidentified, a possible university was constructed in 2013 at 41.271063° 128.024993°. A "[children's traffic park](#)" was added in 2020, and the country's COVID facility was constructed in 2021 at 41.285834° 128.027867°.

Military

There is only one small base in Samsu and it is located at 41.221572° 128.006594°. The bulk of the province's defense sites are centered around Hyesan which is less than 20 km away. But due to Hyesan's position in the far north, it lacks a surface-to-air missile system, leaving the entire province without long-range air defenses except for the single SAM site at Hwangsuwon, 72 km south of Samsu.

***Originally created for an AccessDPRK Patreon supporter. Free online access has been granted by the patron. This city brief has been edited for tone, context, and added references when needed.**

--Jacob Bogle, originally published August 2021 (edited January 2024)

AccessDPRK.com

Patreon.com/accessdprk