



**Yonsa** is a town and county seat in the north of North Korea near the borders of North Hamgyong and Ryanggang provinces. At the last census (2008) it had a population of 37,876. The 2020 population estimate is 42,679.

Yonsa lies in the Kuunsu River valley in N. Hamgyong province and is surrounded by the Hamgyong Mountain Range, an ancient range of mountains of volcanic origin. Prior to 1952, it was part of the Musan administrative area.

Given its proximity to the Chinese border and its place in an important valley, one might expect a historic fort to defend the area, but I haven't discovered any remains in the valley. The nearest one is almost 22 km to the north, on the banks of the Tumen River in the village of Rimgang-ri.

Its economy relies on timber, agriculture, and foraging the woods for mushrooms, herbs, and other plants that can be used in local folk medicine and also traded to China as high-priced ingredients for Chinese traditional medicines.

Yonsa does not appear to be connected to the country's rail system, so all trade and transportation has to go by truck or on foot. The railway goes through Yonsa, but some parts of the line appear to have been demolished in 2011-2012, so I'm not sure how complete the town's connection to the railway is. The closest train station that is clearly connected to the system is in the village of Yonsu, some 9 km north. The closest Sino-DPRK border crossing is in Samjang, directly on the N. Hamgyong-Ryanggang provincial border.

Yonsa's marketplace has existed in its current location (41.913077° 129.014159°) since at least 2009. The official market site hasn't grown but three new stalls have been added since 2009, implying at least some economic growth. Regarding forestry activity, according to [Global Forest Watch](#), the county had 103,000 hectares of forest cover as of 2010 and lost 296 hectares in 2019. Yonsa has a lumber processing complex that occupies ~47,000 sq. meters, with the lumber holding yard covering around 6,800 sq. meters.

Being in a river valley, Yonsa is subjected to flooding. A major flood occurred in 2016 as the result of Typhoon Linrock. The flooding destroyed large portions of the town as well as caused damage throughout the north of the country. As part of the recovery process, at least 30 new apartment blocks were built along with 17 smaller multi-family homes, and dozens of existing buildings were repaired or replaced. A new school was also built. The flooded river destroyed the town stadium and a new one has yet to be built. Additional flooding occurred in 2020 as a result of three typhoons impacting the country.

There is at least one hotel in the town (41.908125° 129.010633°), located across from the “revolutionary history” quarter which contains two museums, a joint mural of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il (as all county seats have) and two smaller monuments. There are at least four grade schools and a children’s driving park (that was built after the 2016 flood).

There are no identified military installations for at least 33 km of the town.

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--Jacob Bogle, Aug. 30, 2020 (edited March 22, 2022)

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