

Kimhyongjik is a county within Ryanggang Province and has a 2021 estimated population of 61,596 at a 0.5% annual growth rate.

Originally the county and its county seat were called *Huch'ang* and it was part of Chagang Province. When Ryanggang Province was established in 1954, Huch'ang was created as its own county. In 1988 it was renamed Kimhyongjik after [Kim Hyong-jik](#) (1894-1926), the father of Kim Il Sung. This is one of only three counties in North Korea named after an individual. Kimhyongjik is home to the Phophyong Revolutionary Site.

Located on the frontier with China, the area was a historic backwater, and I can find little specific history, but it was attested to in the 15th century. There is a Yalu River fort at Tuji-ri (41.516734° 127.219000°) and a larger one at Koup (Huju) at 41.467823° 127.498999°, but those are the only historic military site I can find. A possible temple or other small historic structure is also located in Tuji-ri at 41.502349° 127.197533°.

There are three main population centers in the county, Kimhyongjik, Wolthan and Koup (Huju). Wolthan is in the south of the county and has its own market (780 sq. m.) and is the site of the Wolthan Revolutionary Museum, which commemorates Kim Il Sung's visit to the town in 1923 as part of his alleged "[250-Mile Journey](#)". Koup sits on the Namsa River, a tributary of the Yalu, and is the main interior river of the county.

The northern part of the county is connected via the Pukbunaeryuk Railway, which then turns south passing through Wolthan and entering Chagang Province on its way to Manpo. The rest of the county is only served by dirt roads.

Economy

Kimhyongjik is slightly less mountainous than neighboring Kimjongsuk County, and a strip of low mountains and hills has been deforested to allow for agriculture. This farmable terrain covers approximately 216 sq. km. of the county's 1,472 sq. km. The rest of the county is densely forested.

The Namsa River rises in the Rangrim Mountains on the border with Chagang Province and has three hydroelectric stations along it. Two of them were built between 2017-2021. A narrow timber railway also runs along the river, taking small loads of timber down to Koup and onto the main railway. It is not used for passenger transportation and is not included on most maps.

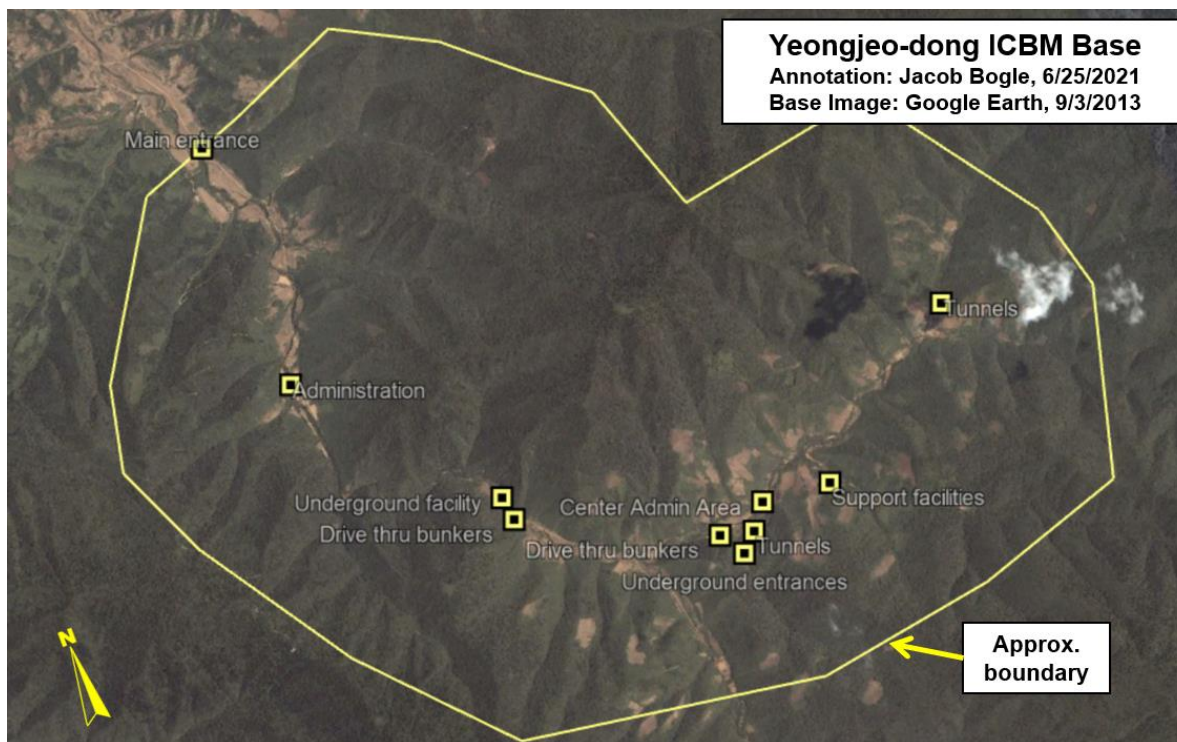
Kimhyongjik also has several mines, the largest of which is in Wolthan and another called Huchang.

The city has a health complex/spa, a restaurant, the county's school children's palace named after Kim Song-ju, and a small "stadium" squeezed against the levee protecting the town from Yalu River floods. The market is 1,070 sq. m. in size and has grown a little since 2008.

Since 2008 there have also been 44 houses and 5 apartment blocks constructed in the town of Kimhyongjik, along with smaller developments throughout the rest of the county. The largest single development, however, was built in late 2020 and consists of 47 houses that were constructed in Kumchang-ri (41.535314° 127.097508°). Dozens of homes have also been constructed in Koup (Huju) since 2008.

As it sits on the border, the area's border fence was upgraded in 2020-22 with a double row of fences and numerous additional guard posts added as a result of COVID-19 security measures. The county's COVID isolation facility was constructed at 41.499800° 127.277143° on the grounds of the Kimhyongjik Forest Management Center.

Military



Kimhyongjik has two possible small garrisons stationed there. There is also a radar installation at 41.515373° 126.973392° .

Within the town is an air defense battery, but while the barracks still exist and the emplacements are maintained, the artillery pieces have not been visible since at least 2008. This is unusual for an active battery, but North Korea lacks spare parts and quality ammunition, and so they do have a history of sometimes not keeping guns actively deployed in areas they deem under limited threat.

Kimhyongjik's most important military site is 25 km southwest: the Yeongjeo-dong Ballistic Missile Base.

Wolthan is the nearest town, just 4.4 km from the base's main entrance, and Wolthan's rail access enables equipment, weapons, and personnel to be brought nearby and then transported the rest of the way via truck.

Construction of the base began ca. 1993 and the facility now occupies 40 sq. km. It was once thought that the secret base was used for uranium enrichment, but it is now known that it is an operational base for intermediate- to long-range ballistic missiles.

The base has two drive-thru bunker sites which are used for the final "checkout" of missiles and their transporter-erector launchers. It also has three underground facilities/tunnel complexes where missiles and equipment can be safely stored.

In 2004 a large explosion was [reported](#) in the vicinity of Wolthan. If such an explosion really occurred, the most likely cause was either: a weapon's depot exploded, a fuel truck caught fire, or a missile (without its warhead) exploded during a training exercise. Until recently, North Korea only had liquid-fueled missiles and they can be very dangerous during fueling and transportation.

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Jacob Bogle, June 2021 (updated August 2023)

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