



Expedition: Borderski

Field Study: Conservation

Summary: WINGS Fellow Kate Harris skied across the Pamir Mountains in Central Asia in Spring 2015 with a all-women expedition team to document the impact of border fences on wildlife. Over the course of six weeks, the team skied across the borders of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan to “inspire others to think beyond borders.” The team is producing a documentary film about the Borderski Expedition, highlighting in particular the impact of the border fences on the migratory Marco Polo sheep and the need for conservation that transcends borders.

THE EXPEDITION

The Borderski journey explored the shapeshifting nature of borders through a ski expedition to the Pamir mountains, where wild sheep and local communities are increasingly circumscribed by fences.

The region’s most famous resident, the Marco Polo sheep, boasts horns so large that the explorer who first described them was accused of hyperbole. Until recently, sheep could wander freely through the nations



Kate Harris holding the WINGS Flag

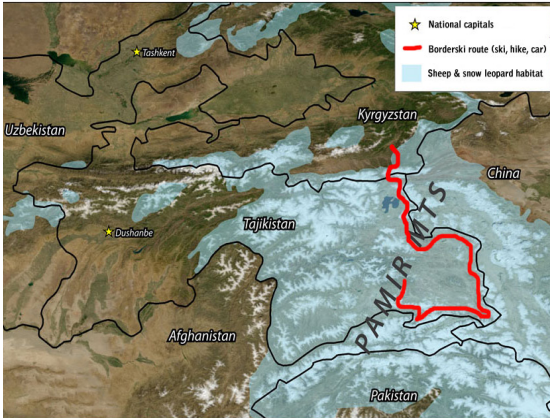


Curly-horned Marco Polo sheep on a mountain side

edged by the Pamir range, unimpeded by politics. But with border security tightening in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China, lines that once existed solely on maps are morphing into barbed wire—with harsh consequences for migratory wildlife.

EXPEDITION GOALS

Our goal was to spend six weeks edging along Tajikistan’s frontiers with Afghanistan and China, skiing endless valleys and oxygen-starved passes,



and studying the impact of fences on Marco Polo sheep herds—all while filming the expedition for a documentary.

By sharing the Borderski expedition through a short film (part adventure narrative, part wildlife documentary), we ultimately hope to bring a little-known wilderness, a threatened species of wild sheep, and the need for conservation that transcends borders that much closer to home.

CHALLENGES FACED

Bureaucracy was the first challenge we faced in planning this expedition, namely obtaining the appropriate permits and visas to travel to Central Asia. All team members but one managed to obtain these visas and permissions in time, but the filmmaker attached to our expedition was granted a shorter visa that didn't permit her to film the entire thing. Fortunately the rest of the team members were able to capture this segment of the expedition on film.

The second and biggest challenge was the unusually small amount of snow in the Pamir mountains in the winter of 2015, which meant the snowpack was unreliable

WHO

Kate Harris

WHAT

To document the impact of border fences on migratory wildlife, especially Marco Polo sheep

WHEN

February/March 2015
6 week duration

WHERE

The Pamir mountains bordering Tajikistan, Afghanistan, China, and Kyrgyzstan.

WHY

To inspire other to think beyond borders



for skiing. As a result, our planned non-stop ski traverse was fragmented into a several segments, as we'd ski for a week and then run out of snow, forcing us to haul our sleds and skis on our backs until we could arrange transportation to another, more snow-covered valley. In the process, we learned that when it comes to limits, nature draws the final line.



EXPEDITION RESULTS

In six weeks, we skied nearly 300 kilometres, observed thousands of Marco Polo sheep in the wild, edged the borders of Tajikistan with Afghanistan, China, and Kyrgyzstan (and sometimes snuck across them), and shot the entire journey in 4K and HD for a documentary film that is now under production by Lindsay Marie Stewart.

We are so thankful for WINGS' support of this journey, and we can't wait to share the film with you upon completion (we are aiming for 2017).



ABOUT THE FELLOW

I'm a writer and adventurer with a grudge against borders and a knack for getting lost. Named one of Canada's top 10 adventurers by Explore magazine, and top 100 modern-day explorers by Canadian Geographic, my journeys edging the limits of science, geopolitics, and the imagination have covered all seven continents, often by ski, bike, or foot. Most recently, I led the Borderski expedition in the eastern Pamir mountains (www.borderski.com).



Winner of the Ellen Meloy Desert Writers Award, my writing or photography have appeared in The Walrus, Orion, The Georgia Review, Sierra, CutBank, and Arc Poetry Magazine, and cited in Best American Essays and Best American Travel Writing. My forthcoming travel book about cycling the Silk Road, "Lands of Lost Borders," will be published by Knopf Canada in 2017.

Born and raised in small-town Ontario, I studied biology and geology as a Morehead-Cain scholar at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I then earned graduate degrees in the history of science at Oxford, where I was a Rhodes scholar, and in geobiology at MIT. I now live off-grid in a log cabin in Atlin, BC, with a few stints in Toronto. When I'm not away on expeditions or at home writing about them, I travel the world with IISD's environmental policy reporting team.

I'm a proud Fellow of WINGS WorldQuest, the Explorers Club, and the Royal Canadian Geographic Society. I also sit on the Steering Committee for Rivers Without Borders and the board of directors for the Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers.



Kate Harris, Rebecca Haspel, & Dr. Alison Criscitiello

EXPEDITION TEAM

Geologist
Rebecca Haspel
Glaciologist
Dr. Alison Criscitiello
Writer & Explorer
Kate Harris

Supporting Members:
Expedition Filmmaker
Lindsay Marie Stewart
Expedition Wildlife
Biologist & Conservation
Advisor
Tatjana Rosen Michel

Contact Info:

<http://kateharris.ca/>



WINGSWORLDQUEST

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.wingsworldquest.org
info@wingsworldquest.org