

## American Alpine Club trip report

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April 24, 2015

## Borderski

[www.borderski.com](http://www.borderski.com)

[www.facebook.com/borderski](https://www.facebook.com/borderski)

### Overview

Borderski is an all-woman ski expedition to document the impact of fences and borders of the Pamir Mountains, to inspire others to think, dream, and act. The Borderski team (myself, Kate Harris, and Rebecca Haspel) working in conjunction with local conservation non-profits (Panthera, Community-based Wildlife Conservation in Tajikistan) have come away from this stunning and harsh winter ski traverse with footage and photographs that we hope will bring timely attention to the issue of new fence construction along Tajikistan's borders with its neighboring countries, and the subsequent impacts on wildlife – specifically Marco Polo sheep, ibex, and snow leopards.



*Marco Polo sheep call the Pamir mountains home. Until relatively recently, herds could wander freely across this borderland, their migrations mostly unimpeded by fences. But border security has tightened in the Pamir and beyond, with harsh consequences for migratory wildlife.*

*This expedition aims to help build a robust case for keeping the Pamir—and the world generally—as fenceless as possible.*



*Screen shots of video footage of two worlds. Borderski is not only an epic ski expedition, but also a unique insight into the mind of a modern nomad and how we relate to a wild and bewitching adventure while calling for a restoration of the natural world. How do you reclaim your own place in nature?*



### The expedition

On February 3, 2015 we flew to Osh, Kyrgyzstan where the adventure began. We travelled by jeep across the border to Alichur, Tajikistan and acclimatized for a few days.



*One of three borders to get from Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan. The snowy and bumpy roads led us to Alichur - near to the base of our exploration.*

We met with a number of local conservation leaders who travelled up-valley with us for our first close views of Marco Polo sheep.



*Before we took to skis, we had a little time to explore the area by foot, accompanied by local conservationists.*



*Observing  
Marco Polo  
sheep near  
Alichur,  
Tajikistan.*

Kate, Rebecca and I were dropped off at our starting point in Tajikistan (Bash Gumbez, a small hunting camp not far from the Afghanistan border). We set off from here on foot, and reached the Zorkul Valley by double-carrying over a pass that gave us access to good snow and skiing along the Tajik/Afghan border.



*Packing up and  
heading out. The  
Borderski team  
starting our journey  
by foot. Not much  
skiable snow,  
however conditions  
changed quickly as  
we progressed in  
the days ahead.*





*Despite starting by foot, it was soon smooth sailing with tailwinds and hard-packed snow.*

After a week of skiing, when the snow ran out in Zorkul Valley, we skied on the frozen river which took us out to Jarty Gumbez (another small hunting camp).



*Where there wasn't snow on the Pamir Plateau, we skied the rivers. Looks like some Marco Polo sheep had the same idea.*



*Toeing the Afghan border with Tajikistan.*



The next week, we again toed the Afghan border, tagging it at two high remote mountain passes. With temperatures in the -30s, and sleds starting to lighten, we hit a groove and covered good ground each day.



*The Borderski team ditched camp and sleds for a day and headed to a high, remote border pass on the Tajik/Afghan border.*



*The Borderski team (and Marco the pet stuffed sheep) headed to a second remote border pass on the Tajik/Afghan border.*



*Ibex and Marco Polo sheep crossing the border freely; no one to check our passports at the Afghan border.*

After week 2, we headed back to Alichur to rendezvous with local conservationists. Kate remained in town for several days to film, while Ali and Rebecca climbed a peak ~20km north of Alichur. We headed next for the Tajik/China border, but were stifled by armed Chinese military stationed well within the legal Tajik border. For safety/security reasons, we decided to leave the Chinese border and spend our final week skiing the Tajik/Kyrgyz border instead (from the Kyrgyz side).



*Skiing over the border of Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan. The last stretch into the Alai valley where the sheep are nearly almost all gone due to poaching.*





*Borderski supporting team members, Tanya and Lindsay, spent time in the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan. They went on horseback to search for signs of snow leopards after hearing reports of three being killed in the last month. They didn't see a snow leopard, but did see their main food source - ibex.*

In the final expedition week, we skied across the Alai Valley of Kyrgyzstan to the town of Sarytash. Our last two days were spent climbing peaks on this northern edge of the Alai Valley. On March 17 we returned to Osh by jeep and left the borderlands for home.



*Final day of Borderski! Gettin' high with The Fanny Pack after skiing across the Tajik-Kyrgyz border and through the Alai Valley.*



*The Fanny Pack in the Alai Valley on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border (for the full story behind our collective moniker, see [www.borderski.com/team](http://www.borderski.com/team)).*



*One last climb, unencumbered and free of sleds and packs, on the final day of Borderski outsite Sarytash, Kyrgyzstan.*



### Stats

With 30 planned days of skiing, we skied 22 (the result of weather, border issues, and to-be-expected logistics glitches). We averaged 12 km/day.

TOTAL MILEAGE:	
263.9 km	
ZORKUL	Length (km)
1	3.1
2	16.6
3	11.7
4	15.1
5	7.5
6	10
7	10.6
TOTAL	74.6
AFGHAN	Length (km)
8	6.3
9	14.4
10	14.1
11	28.3
12	6.5
TOTAL	69.6
ALICHUR	Length (km)
13	21.7
14	20.9
15	10
TOTAL	52.6
ALAI	Length (km)
16	11.9
17	8
18	17.7
19	18.2

20	11.3
21	9.9
22	3.3
TOTAL	67.1