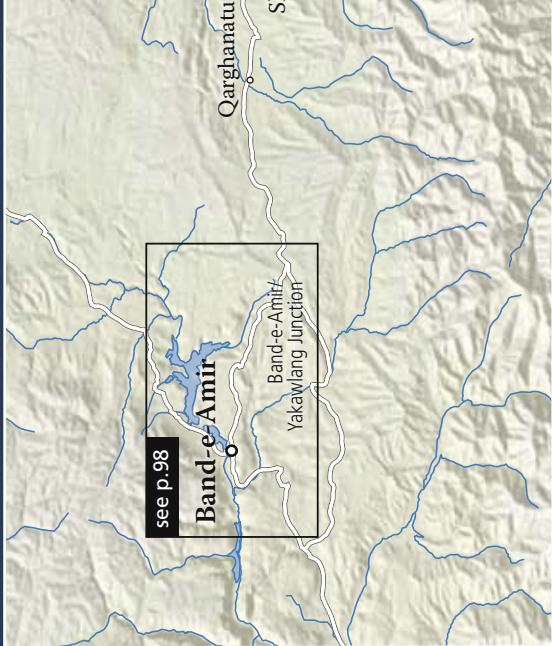


« SKI AFGHANISTAN

A Backcountry
Guide to Bamyan &
Band-e-Amir

Laurie Ashley & Chad Dear



SKI AFGHANISTAN

A Backcountry Guide to Bamyan & Band-e-Amir

Laurie Ashley & Chad Dear



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

Publisher

Aga Khan Foundation, Afghanistan
March 2011

With support from New Zealand's Aid Programme.

Authors

Laurie Ashley and Chad Dear

Design and Layout

Mareile Paley / mareile@paleymotion.com

Maps

Mareile Paley / mareile@paleymotion.com with the help of ASTER GDEM,
Afghanistan Information Management Service / USAID, Janel Day

Photo Credits

Front cover: West face of Qala-e-Khirs, Sar-e-Qazan, by Chad Dear
Back cover: Skiing Koh-e-Zard with Jula Sang Zari in background, by Laurie Ashley

Edited by

Ian MacWilliam (who also co-wrote the History chapter)

Printed by

Colorline, Islamabad

Citation

L. Ashley, and Dear, C. 2011. Ski Afghanistan: A Backcountry Guide to Bamyan & Band-e-Amir. Aga Khan Foundation, Afghanistan, 120 pp.

ISBN

978-2-940212-08-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form and by any means without the prior permission of the publisher.

© Aga Khan Foundation 2011

All photos: AKF / Laurie Ashley & Chad Dear, unless otherwise attributed. Photos in "A History of Skiing in Afghanistan" chapter courtesy of Yusuf Kargar.

Backcountry skiing, like all travel in the high mountains, involves certain risks, so safety and minimising risk is a very important concern. No publication can alert you to every hazard or anticipate the limitations of the individual skier. Many of the approaches, ascents and descents described in this guidebook require strong backcountry skills, including route finding, navigation in whiteout conditions, snow stability evaluation methods and avalanche rescue techniques. The descriptions of roads, trail approaches, ascents and descents and natural features in this book cannot guarantee that a particular place or excursion will be safe for you and your party at all times. When you participate in the activities described in this guidebook, you must assume full responsibility for your own safety.

THE BAMYAN ECOTOURISM PROGRAMME, supported by Afghanistan's Ministry of Information and Culture, the Bamyan provincial government, the Aga Khan Development Network and New Zealand's Aid Programme, is developing sustainable tourism in Bamyan to help preserve and develop the history and culture of the region, to provide employment and to give local people the ability to improve their living standards. Ski Afghanistan is published as part of the Bamyan Ecotourism Programme.

THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK (AKDN) is a group of international development agencies working in rural development, health, education, culture, microfinance and private sector development, primarily in Asia and Africa. It is dedicated to improving living conditions and opportunities for the poor, without regard to their faith, origin or gender. AKDN has been active in Afghanistan since 1995 and now implements a range of programmes to rehabilitate and develop rural infrastructure, to support and upgrade the education and healthcare systems and to promote cultural revitalisation. AKDN also makes strategic investments in important sectors of the economy, such as telecommunications, tourism and microfinance.



« TABLE OF CONTENTS

- » 08 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**
- » 11 **PREFACE**
- » 18 **FOREWORD**
- » 19 **INTRODUCTION**
 - 19 People and places
 - 23 Climate
 - 24 When to go
 - 24 Security
 - 26 A diversity of experiences
 - 30 Bamyan Social Tour Guide Association
 - 31 How to use this guidebook
- » 33 **TRAVELLING SAFELY IN THE BACKCOUNTRY: ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND EQUIPMENT**
- » 40 **A HISTORY OF SKIING IN AFGHANISTAN**
- » 48 **DUKANI VALLEY**
 - 53 Orgash
 - 56 Sar-e-Dukani
 - 61 Jawzari
 - 65 Khushkak
- » 68 **FOLADI VALLEY**
 - 71 Chapdara
 - 76 Jawkar
 - 83 Qazan
 - 88 Ali Beg
 - 93 Borghasun

- » 98 **BAND-E-AMIR AND PLACES ALONG THE WAY**
- » 103 **OTHER PLACES TO EXPLORE**
- » 106 **APPENDICES**
 - 106 Hazaragi for skiers
 - 108 Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing: Quick reference guide
 - 109 Koh ba Koh and Qol ba Qol traverse routes: Quick reference guide
 - 113 “Best of the Baba”
 - 114 Travel, accommodation and other useful information
 - 118 The authors

LIST OF BOXED TEXTS

- 52 Nam-e-Barfi: A celebration of the first snowfall
- 57 Hussein Dad
- 62 Yakh molak: Sledding across cultures
- 72 Après-tea?
- 77 A people’s park
- 89 “Bazaar skis”
- 93 Ali: Borghasun’s first skier
- 94 Nai Nawaz: Melodies in the mountains
- 101 Afghanistan’s first national park

LIST OF MAPS

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------|-----|----------------------|
| 48 | Dukani Overview | 71 | Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara |
| 50 | Dukani Driving | 77 | Jawkar Overview |
| 53 | Orgash | 81 | Sar-e-Jawkar |
| 56 | Sar-e-Dukani | 83 | Aobala-e-Qazan |
| 61 | Jawzari | 88 | Ali Beg & Borghasun |
| 65 | Khushkak | 98 | Band-e-Amir |
| 68 | Foladi Driving | 110 | Koh ba Koh Overview |



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we thank the people in the communities in and around the areas mentioned in this book. Their hospitality, detailed knowledge of the area and enthusiasm for skiing and winter recreation enabled the success of our research and will be critical for the future success of tourism in Bamyan.

Numerous staff members of the Aga Khan Development Network supported the writing of this book. Robert Thelen and Amir Foladi assisted greatly in crafting the vision of the Ski Bamyan project and provided strong leadership and support throughout. Ian MacWilliam's commitment and enthusiasm for the project propelled it to another level. Abdullah Mahmoodi was an essential contributor to the development of this book and to the wider effort to develop ski tourism in Bamyan. We are grateful for his dedication and friendship. Other AKDN Ecotourism staff, including Jawad Jahid, Gul Hussain Baizada, Ghulam Reza Mohammadi and Khaliq Bamyani also provided valuable support. We must also thank the operations staff at AKDN Bamyan for their support and flexibility with our ever-changing schedule.

Thank you to the Bamyan Social Tour Guide Association for their participation. We especially thank Hussein Dad and Jawad Wafa for their commitment to learning how to ski, to teaching others, and to promoting tourism in Bamyan. Hussein Dad deserves additional thanks for persevering through often challenging weather during the first traverse of the Koh-e-Baba along the Koh ba Koh.

Thanks also to Zekria Ahmadi, from the United Nations Environment Programme's Shah Foladi Protected Area project for his technical insights and general support of this project. Thanks to John Kelly and Kristin Anthony-Malone of the Canadian Avalanche Centre and the Canadian Avalanche Association for their significant contribution and to the Montana Backcountry Alliance as well as Chris "Corleone" Tamborini for research assistance. Finally, thanks to everyone, spanning continents, who inspired this book.



Ascending

Sar-e-Dukani basin

« PREFACE – SKIING IN AFGHANISTAN? »



Curious onlookers and welcoming hosts –
girls in a mountain village

«The hotels were full. The river was lined with people in tents. People from all over the world came to Bamyan to see the Buddhas, Koh-e-Baba, and Band-e-Amir. » – Bamyan elder, Haji Zekria Ahmadi, describing tourism in Bamyan in the 1970s

The image evoked in the quotation above is probably not the image most people have of Afghanistan. More than three decades of war have destroyed much in the country, including its once profitable tourism industry. As an enclave of relative peace and security in Afghanistan, Bamyan is preparing once again to welcome visitors from around the world to explore the province's historic sites, experience its welcoming culture, take pleasure in its natural beauty, and, for the first time, to ski in its snowy mountains. With so many challenges and so much uncertainty about the future of the country however, some may question whether it is appropriate to encourage the revival of tourism at the present time.

The global tourism industry has grown dramatically since Afghanistan was plunged into conflict three decades ago. Today, tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world and is an established component of the development agenda for many of the world's poorest countries. When planned and managed well, tourism can promote sustainable local livelihoods, improve local governance, enhance natural resource management and support other important development goals. When unplanned and unmanaged, it can have the opposite effect.

One of the many lessons learned through the expansion of the tourism industry is that places of former conflict can rapidly become popular tourist destinations. Cambodia, for example, experienced a dramatic increase in tourism in the decade following the 1991 comprehensive peace settlement. More than two million people a year now visit Angkor Watt alone. Within thirteen years of the genocide in Rwanda, tourism became that country's highest foreign currency earner. Tourism has not only created jobs in Rwanda, it has also served as a means for formerly warring groups to work together constructively and build a peaceful future. In Nepal, as peace and stability has ebbed and flowed over the past decade, tourism has consistently been

one of the fastest industries to recover, fueling economic growth and providing jobs. Tourism is contributing significantly to development in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and other former Yugoslav republics. Tourism has also been a central component of South Africa's post-apartheid development. Less than twenty years after Nelson Mandela was released from prison the country hosted hundreds of thousands of visitors attending the football World Cup.

Each of these places, and many other post-conflict countries, face great challenges to ensure a socially equitable distribution of the peace dividend, to (re) create national and local identities, heal old and often all-too-recent wounds and to protect their natural and cultural heritage. What is also true in each case is that planning for tourism's role in helping to overcome these challenges could not have happened too soon. Post-conflict recovery often hinges on planning and initiating recovery efforts before the end of the conflict. People must plan for peace.

The most successful recovery and development efforts are those that build on people's strengths, assets and comparative advantages. Bamyan was once a centre of Afghanistan's tourism industry. The world famous remains of the Bamyan Buddhas, the natural wonder of the Band-e-Amir lakes, the welcoming culture of the local people and the newly discovered world class skiing terrain ensure that it will be at the centre of Afghanistan's re-emerging tourism industry. Tourists are already coming to Bamyan. Planning now for tourism will better ensure that Afghan entrepreneurs are the leaders of tourism development, that tourism is consistent with local culture and that tourism helps to protect Bamyan's rich cultural and natural heritage.



Fresh tracks for tourism
in Afghanistan

COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

Fundamental to ski tourism in Bamyan is the principle that its development should begin with the people closest to, and most reliant on the mountains. Research for this guidebook therefore began with meetings with leaders of each of the gateway communities described in this book. Meetings were led by Aga Khan Foundation staff member, Abdullah Mahmoodi, and included discussions about the benefits and burdens of tourism, communities' previous experiences of tourism and their desires for tourism in the future. Abdullah introduced the idea of skiing and ski tourism and, most importantly, asked community leaders' permission to explore and document the skiing potential in the mountains around their villages.



Leaders of Chapdara on the roof
of the village mosque

MAPPING LOCAL PLACE NAMES

The knowledge of community members was critical to the success of the research for this guidebook. Community members described patterns in snow conditions, avalanche trends, and verbally and sometimes physically guided us through the mountainous terrain in their backyards. While the names of most of the places described by community members do not appear on published maps, all of these places are known and named by the people living among them. One goal of our research was to identify and use local place names whenever possible. To do this, Abdullah led community members in participatory exercises to identify and map mountains, creeks, pastures, lakes and other important landscape features.

At times there were contradictions between, and sometimes within villages regarding the names of landscape features. When there was a contradiction, we used the name given by the people living closest to the feature. Inevitably, there will be mistakes. We present place names in this guidebook as a first draft and encourage others to further explore and document local names.

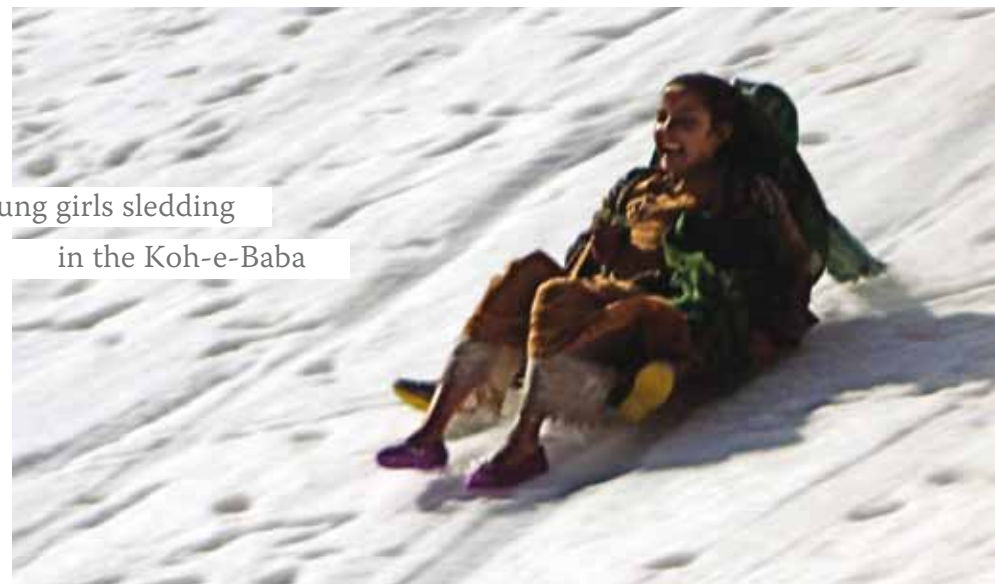


Abdullah and community
leaders from Borghasun
identifying mountain
and other landscape names

BUILDING ON COMMON GROUND

Recreational backcountry skiing may seem to be a foreign activity to people living in one of the poorest regions of one of the poorest countries in the world. The concept of climbing up and sliding down mountains for fun, however, is a much-loved tradition in Bamyan. In every village we visited, we saw boys and girls sliding down hills on homemade, sometimes very elaborate, sleds. The faces of village “greybeards” would light up as they told stories of *yakh molak* (sledding) in the mountains during their youth.

Not only was sliding down mountains a shared pastime, but the more basic concept of fun in the snow enabled cross-cultural understanding. Community members told us about winter recreational activities and traditions such as games and parties to celebrate the first snowfall of the year. Some of these activities and traditions are documented in boxed texts in the guidebook.



Young girls sledding
in the Koh-e-Baba

NAUROZ WINTER GAMES FESTIVAL

The revival of festivals has been one of the major successes of tourism development in Bamyan. After a hiatus of nearly thirty years, Bamyan started once more hosting a Nauroz (“New Year”) festival to celebrate the traditional Persian New Year on 21 March, one of the region’s most important traditional holidays. Included in the 2010 Nauroz festival was the first ever Winter Games, held in the mountains above Ali Beg village in Foladi Valley. The goal of the event was to build on traditions of fun in the snow and to introduce people to the new sport of skiing. Hundreds of people from Bamyan town and the Foladi Valley came to picnic, to *yakh molak*, and to try out locally-made *chalgal* (snowshoes), to compete in snow-running races and to participate in Bamyan’s first ever ski race.

Skis for the event were donated by Altai, a consulting company based in Kabul. In 2003 Altai employees drove a van from the French Alps to Kabul loaded with skis in the hope of encouraging development of the sport in Afghanistan. After the Nauroz event, Altai donated fifteen pairs of skis and boots to the Ski Bamyan cause. In addition to the Altai skis, five carpenters in the Bamyan bazaar constructed prototype “bazaar skis” for the race.



First time skiers racing at the
Winter Games in Foladi Valley



Prototype Bamyan
«bazaar skis»

Afghanistan's best known skier, Humayun Kargar, and his family were honoured guests at the event. Kargar, who has competed in international ski competitions and is also the coach of the Afghan national football team, provided tips and inspiration to the many fledgling Afghan skiers. The skiing Kargar family features prominently in the chapter on a history of skiing in Afghanistan.

AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE ...

We spent more than fifty days exploring and documenting the skiing potential in the Koh-e-Baba and Band-e-Amir. What is most remarkable after these fifty days is how much remains unexplored. With the exception of Band-e-Amir, the geographic scope of this guidebook is limited to access points less than twenty kilometres from the Bamyan bazaar. The more than 200 ascent/descent options described do not cover all the options even within this very limited scope, let alone within the Koh-e-Baba range. Major areas close to Bamyan town that are left to explore include Sumara, Ahangaran, Kalu, Kamati, Fatmasti and others. Other districts in Bamyan, such as Panjab, Waras, Shibar, Kahmard, Saighan and Yakawlang also offer tremendous skiing potential. Many first descents await the adventurous skier.

... RESPECTFULLY

Skiing a first descent is an extraordinary experience, especially in the 21st century. We had the honour of skiing dozens of them in the Koh-e-Baba. We were humbled not only by how small a fraction this was of the potential in the Koh-e-Baba range, but also by the understanding that we were just the most recent in a very long line of visitors to these places. The Koh-e-Baba is a rugged, remote, and beautiful cultural landscape. All of the places described in this guidebook have been ascended and descended by countless herders, traders and travellers for centuries. Most of our “first descents” were on slopes used as high-elevation summer pastures. Signs of the human presence in the landscape include gravesites, stone-walled summer grazing camps and distant views of the 1,500 year old niches that housed Bamyan's famous monumental Buddhas until they were destroyed by the Taleban in 2001. The combination of world-class skiing terrain and the deep historical, cultural and economic significance of this landscape makes the experience of skiing the Koh-e-Baba unlike any other. Approach this place and these communities respectfully and you will be rewarded by the warm welcome of an unforgettable people and landscape.

Laurie Ashley & Chad Dear



Shah Foladi, the Koh-e-Baba's
highest peak,
awaits a first descent

« FOREWORD



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Independent Directorate of Local Governance
Bamyan Province

It is a matter of great pleasure to me that the Aga Khan Development Network and the Bamyan Ecotourism Programme are publishing this guide to backcountry skiing in Bamyan and Band-e-Amir.

I would like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation for the work the Aga Khan Development Network has done with the support of New Zealand's Aid Programme to introduce skiing in Bamyan and to promote our province as a four-season tourism destination.

Afghanistan as a whole, and Bamyan in particular, is a place of great natural beauty with such sights as Band-e-Amir, Afghanistan's first national park, and the majestic Koh-e-Baba mountains with their snowfields and alpine lakes. These places are marvellous for skiing and for all ecotourism pursuits.

With the publication of this guidebook, skiing will be properly introduced to Bamyan for the first time -- a healthy and enjoyable pursuit which will also help the local economy and help to bring positive change for the people of Bamyan and all of Afghanistan.

As governor of Bamyan province, I would like to invite everyone who wishes to have a special experience of nature and culture to visit our province in all seasons, including the winter when the Koh-e-Baba is white with snow and the frozen lakes of Band-e-Amir have a special tranquility.

I would like to express my gratitude to all who have contributed to the publication of this first ever ski guide for our beautiful province of Bamyan.

Habiba Sarabi
Governor of Bamyan

« INTRODUCTION

People and Place 19 » Climate 23 » When to go 24 »
Security 24 » Diversity of Experiences 26 » Bamyan Social Tour
Guide Association 30 » How to use this Guidebook 31 »

PEOPLE & PLACES

Bamyan lies at the crossroads of ancient trade routes that traversed the Hindu Kush from north to south and east to west, linking Central Asia, India and Iran. It is a world of ancient ruins perched on red cliffs, earth-brown houses and the snowy peaks of the Koh-e-Baba rising above the valley. This crossroads is one of the most distinctive and mysterious areas of Afghanistan. It is the home of a hospitable people, ever ready to welcome visitors. To visit Bamyan is to discover one of the greatest and least known destinations of Asia, now opening up to the world once more.

KOH-E-BABA

Looking south from the Buddha niches in Bamyan town, the peaks of the Koh-e-Baba form a jagged skyline reaching an altitude of 5000m, or 2500m vertical from the valley floor. The Koh-e-Baba ("Grandfather Mountains") is the western extremity of the Hindu Kush mountain range of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, the Hindu Kush broadens out to form the Central Highlands that divide the rolling hills and alluvial plains of the north from the arid plains of the south. The Hindu Kush, by some accounts, is an extension of the Great Himalaya, placing the Koh-e-Baba on the western edge of that giant range which stretches 3000km through the heart of Asia. Like the rest of the Hindu Kush, the majestic Koh-e-Baba trends east-west, forming a continuous 200km ridge from northwest of Kabul to south of Band-e-Amir. The central ridge forms the backbone of the range with sub-ridges (sometimes higher than the central ridge) extending to north and south. The range varies from 10 to 15km in width.

The Koh-e-Baba lies in the remote Hazarajat region, also known as the Central Highlands of Afghanistan. Bamyan town, however, provides easy access to the north side of the range through a series of valleys descending from the mountain ridge to the Bamyan River. The crest of the range lies just over 20km due south of the provincial capital and forms 50km of the border between Bamyan and Wardak provinces.

The range has more than forty peaks over 4500m and is crowned in the west by Mount Shah Foladi at 5050m. It is a glaciated landscape with abundant cirques, glacial lakes, moraines, sharp ridgelines and pyramidal peaks. U-shaped valleys

dominate the higher elevations, then narrow as they drop below the historic extent of glaciation. The Koh-e-Baba is the westernmost range in Afghanistan to hold glaciers and permanent snow and ice cover. Today approximately eighteen small alpine glaciers remain tucked into the northern slopes, averaging slightly less than 500m² each.



Glacier in the
Jawkar back basin

The main Koh-e-Baba valleys facing Bamyan run north-south with the mouth opening to the north into the Bamyan valley and the top of the valley in the south opening into a wide “back basin” near the crest of the range, often extending further south than the highest peaks of the crest. The top, or head, of a valley is also called the “head” (*sar*) in Persian (Dari), hence place names such as Sar-e-Dukani and Sar-e-Jawkar.



Migrating geese
crossing the
Koh-e-Baba in spring

Historically, the area supported leopards, bears and boars, and today wolves, foxes, wild cats, rabbits, ibex, deer and numerous birds inhabit the region. Listen for the frequent call of the *qauk-e-zari*, celebrated for its beautiful song in Persian literature over the centuries. And look for animal tracks throughout the winter from near the mountain villages to the top of some of the highest peaks. In early spring, watch for geese migrating between their wintering grounds in India and Pakistan and their breeding habitats in the far north. In the rivers, look for fish including *shir mahi* (barbs), *sag mahi* (loaches) and *khal mahi* (brown trout).

Streams originating in the Koh-e-Baba are a vital water source for Afghanistan, flowing into most of the country’s chief rivers – the Harirud, Helmand, Kabul, Kunduz and Balkh Rivers. The Kunduz River eventually joins the Amu Darya (known historically as the Oxus) which flows west and north to the Aral Sea in Central Asia. The Helmand empties into Iran’s Sistan Basin, while the waters of the Kabul River flow east to join the Indus, eventually reaching the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

BAND-E-AMIR

The series of seven aquamarine lakes forming Band-e-Amir lie to the north of the western Koh-e-Baba in Yakawlang district of Bamyan province. The lakes sit at 2950m, surrounded by cliffs and bluffs rising abruptly from the lake edge. The broader landscape is a high plateau divided by drainages feeding the lake, and mountains



Band-e-Amir village huddles
under the cliffs in winter

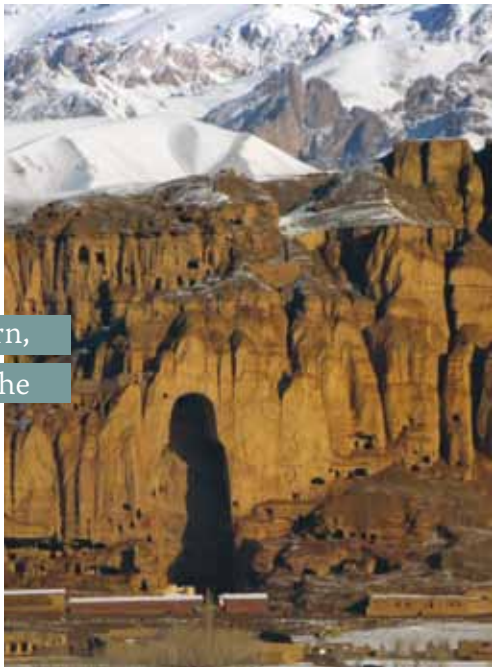
which reach over 3600m. Just north of the lakes, Koh-e-Yak Ruya (“One-Side Mountain”) rises from the high ridgeline. To the south, the peaks of the Koh-e-Baba rise in the distance. The lakes are formed by a series of natural travertine (precipitated calcium carbonate) dams that stretch across the canyon. The lakes drain to the west, with each lake several metres lower than the lake to its east. In winter, waterfalls which overflow the travertine dams freeze into ice sculptures (and offer potential for ice-climbing). The lakes stretch through 13km of the canyon. The Band-e-Amir River drains the lakes to the west and then veers north to join the Balkh River.

HISTORY

People have pursued their agro-pastoral livelihoods in the Central Highlands for millennia while religions and conquerors have come and gone. At the height of the Silk Road era, from about 150 BC until AD 1400, the area benefited from the commerce, wealth and cultural interchange of the Silk Road alongside traditional livelihoods. The Silk Road trade routes, connecting Europe and China through Central Asia, brought Buddhism, Islam, exotic merchandise and more to the region. The first detailed description of Bamyan was written by Hsuan Tsang, a Chinese Buddhist monk who visited the area around AD 630. He wrote that “people inhabit towns in the mountains and valleys” and that the area “produces wheat and ...

The western,
or *Salsal*, Buddha niche

affords pasture for many sheep and horses.” He also mentioned the two monumental Buddha statues carved into the cliff face in Bamyan, commenting that the larger statue’s “golden hues sparkle on every side and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes with their brightness.” Buddhism declined in Bamyan in the 8th and 9th centuries AD and was replaced by Islam following a series of Arab invasions. Bamyan became a prosperous Muslim city, until 1221 when the Mongols invaded under Genghis Khan, destroying the city and slaughtering much of its population.



Today, most of Bamyan’s people are ethnic Hazaras although smaller populations of ethnic Tajiks and Pashtuns also live in the province. The Hazaras are Shia Muslims while Tajiks and Pushtuns are Sunni Muslims. Some Ismaili Shias also inhabit the region. The Hazarajat – the territory inhabited by the Hazaras – extends through central Afghanistan. The Hazarajat was largely autonomous under its own tribal system until the late 19th century. In the 1890s Afghanistan’s nation-building ruler, Abdur Rahman Khan, subdued the Hazaras, bringing them under the control of Kabul. Hazara culture remains strong however, with its own dialect (Hazaragi, the local variation of Persian, or Dari), its own poetry and a local style of music with echoes of the music of Central Asia’s Turkic peoples to the north. The local economy is based on herding, farming (mainly wheat and potatoes) and small-scale retail enterprise. People make a living in this high-elevation environment through hard work in the fields and pastures, often maximising their effort by working in family and community groups.

MOUNTAIN LIVELIHOODS

In Bamyan, people live mainly in the narrow irrigated valleys that thread through the mountains and cut into the plateaus. Although pristine, quiet and snow-covered in winter, in summer, Bamyan’s mountains fill with life. Families move to high summer pastures called *ailaq* for three months or more in summer to graze their animals and harvest plants in the mountain pastures. *Ailaaq* pastures are usually marked by stone shelters, sometimes roofed, sometimes open, where the families stay or put up their tents. Others make daily forays to the mountains or send shepherds out with their flocks. The mountain pastures and small areas of valley-bottom irrigated land are the basis of people’s predominantly agro-pastoral livelihood. The mountains play a critical role in the production of livestock and rain-fed crops, the gathering of fuel and edible and medicinal plants, and the collection of water for crop and household use. The mountains also capture and hold water, often in the form of snow and ice, releasing it slowly into valley streams through the dry summer months.

CLIMATE

Bamyan has a mountainous continental climate, with warm summers and cold winters, when temperatures fall well below zero degrees Celsius. Precipitation falls mainly as snow, with most storms coming from late February into March and April and with dramatic thunderstorms continuing into May. The time of big snows corresponds with Hut (February-March), the last month of the Afghan Persian calendar. (The New Year, Nauroz, starts at the spring equinox on 21 March.) Locally, people call that month *sad barfak*, meaning “one hundred snows”. March is the wettest month, bringing mountain snow and valley snow and occasionally rain. While reliable climate data are scarce, the best approximation for annual precipitation in the Bamyan valley is about 100mm, with the mountains receiving considerably more

precipitation, almost entirely as snow. Snow stays on north-facing mountain slopes throughout the summer and snowmelt feeds the mountain streams that provide the main water source for valley crops.

In winter, temperatures on the valley floor (2500m) typically range from -12°C to +5°C with colder temperatures in the mountains. Cold temperatures preserve snow conditions well after winter storms. Bamyan experiences large daily temperature fluctuations due to its low latitude (34°N) and low humidity. Lower elevation and spring slopes are strongly sun-affected.

WHEN TO GO

The Koh-e-Baba often receives early season snowfalls that blanket upper elevations. It is sometimes possible to ski in December and even late November; however, there is no guarantee of adequate coverage. Snow cover is more reliable from February on. Most snow falls in the late winter and early spring. The longer days, warmer temperatures, and deeper snowpack of late winter and early spring (March-April) make this an ideal time to ski in the Koh-e-Baba.

The ski season doesn't end when the valley snow melts. Many of the Koh-e-Baba's high-elevation north-facing slopes hold snow well into late spring and early summer. If you are willing to hike up to the snowline and climb to higher elevations, you will typically find skiing in the Koh-e-Baba until at least early June and possibly into July.

If Band-e-Amir is your destination for a cross-country ski tour, plan your trip between late December and Nauroz (March 21). The lakes are most likely to be frozen solid during this period. Before going, however, be sure to seek local information on ice cover.

SECURITY

Although Afghanistan has become well-known for war and crime, Bamyan is a peaceful place with few security incidents. It is one of the few places in the country where foreigners can feel comfortable walking alone or at night and may freely accept invitations for tea or nan in the villages. As of this writing (2010), there have been a few, infrequent security incidents, but they are restricted to particular areas of the province which are known to be more troublesome. But this is Afghanistan, so find out the latest security information before travelling. Your best sources of information are usually local people, employees of aid organisations and resident foreigners.

Landmines should not be a concern in the areas described in this book. Although some landmines were planted in Bamyan in the 1980s and 1990s, they were planted in limited areas of strategic importance. The Koh-e-Baba was not mined on the Bamyan



Skiing an 800 vertical metre descent
in Kalu in mid-June

side of the mountains. In the Dukani, Khushkak and Foladi valleys, landmine activity was targeted within a five-kilometre radius of Bamyan town, leaving the mountains clear. There are no known minefields beyond this five-kilometre radius in these valleys south of the town. In addition, all of these valleys have been surveyed by the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA). Communities adjacent to the Koh-e-Baba in these valleys report no land mine incidents in the villages or mountains. MACCA has identified one minefield on the southern, Behsud side of the Koh-e-Baba, south of Sar-e-Dukani. This minefield lies approximately 1.5km south of the crest of the range (which forms the provincial border at this point) and slightly to the west of the main path connecting Dukani to Behsud. In the Shahidan, Shibartu, Qarghanatu and Band-e-Amir areas, some mines were laid along the main and spur roads. MACCA has overseen mine-clearing efforts along this corridor so there are no longer any known active minefields there. The most recent mine-clearing in these areas was completed on the Band-e-Amir road in April 2009. For more information about landmines contact MACCA (www.macca.org.af). Local communities are also an important source of information about landmines since the inhabitants travel regularly in nearby mountains.

A DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCES

The Koh-e-Baba and Band-e-Amir offer a great diversity of skiing experiences. Beginners and experts, those with weeks to explore and those with only half a day, skiers with an interest in rural culture as well as those focused on making turns and first descents will all find abundant opportunities. For the beginner, there are ample short, low-angle slopes (less than 10 degrees) in and around all the gateway villages. The cross-country ski and snowshoe routes outlined are also great places to learn. Intermediate-level skiers will note that approaches as well as the lower end of most ascents/descents are less than 30 degrees. For expert skiers, there are innumerable 35 to 45-plus degree slopes to be skied. Many are described in this guide, but many more await discovery. Finally, for extreme skiers, the Koh-e-Baba back basins offer many narrow, steep, snow chutes and couloirs that will test even the most extreme. (Extreme terrain is not documented in route descriptions in this guide.)



Passing the village mosque
en route to skiing

For those with a short timeframe, it is possible to find good skiing in half a day. The drive to the top of Khushkak Valley, for example, is about thirty minutes from the Bamyan bazaar. You can ascend the main ridgeline above the village in about an hour, ski a 35-degree slope back to your car and be back in town before anyone knows you're gone. There is also good skiing just above most of the gateway villages described in this guide. See the "Best of the Baba" appendix for a quick guide to easy access routes and more.

Options are nearly endless for those with a lot of time to explore. If you prefer to sleep each night in a hotel, you can ski most ascents/descents described in this guide in a day. (Some will require an early morning start.) Alternatively, you can sleep closer to the mountains in a village guesthouse. It is also possible to ski tour from village to village along the Qol ba Qol ("Village to Village") route. If you have camping gear and would like to explore the most remote and rugged places in the Koh-e-Baba back basins, you can snow camp, or camp in an *ailaq* (summer grazing camp). Perhaps the ultimate experience of the Koh-e-Baba, however, is to travel the Koh ba Koh ("Mountain to Mountain") traverse, a multi-day trail following near the crest of the Koh-e-Baba.

VILLAGE GUESTHOUSES

Many villages traditionally have guesthouses or guest rooms (*mehman khana*) with basic facilities where local wayfarers can sleep and eat. This is a tremendous way to gain an insider's view of life in a rural village – and have great skiing terrain outside the front door. There are plans to assist communities to upgrade their guesthouses to accommodate tourist skiers and hikers. Be sure to discuss possible accommodation in the gateway villages with Bamyan Ecotourism staff in the tourism office or with the Bamyan Social Tour Guide Association.

If you would like a taste of rural village life but don't want to spend the night, plan an après-ski chai stop in a village. You will probably have many offers of tea without having to organise anything but it is best to arrange community meetings or provision of food through the Tour Guide Association.



A young boy welcomes
skiers for tea

QOL BA QOL ("VILLAGE TO VILLAGE")

The eight villages described in this guide are all tucked up against the Koh-e-Baba at between 2900m and 3100m. The Qol ba Qol trail traverses the Koh-e-Baba from village to village. Options include short, low-angle climbs along the most direct routes, as well as longer ascents to ridge tops and descents into the adjacent valley. Options are outlined in each chapter. The Qol ba Qol trail can be travelled in part or in whole, east to west or vice versa. Be sure to organise your trip through the Tour Guide Association so that the villages are aware that strangers will be skiing through their communities.

AILAQ CAMPING

An *ailaq* is a summer camp in high-elevation pastures that are used for three or four months each year to graze animals and harvest pasture plants. *Ailaqs* usually have stone shelters, which can be as simple as a circular configuration of stones marking a camping spot in a level area, or they may be fully enclosed stone or mud houses. The local *ailaq* is normally a few hours' travel from the highest village and is generally located near a water source. Conveniently, many are also located near phenomenal skiing terrain. Visitors to an *ailaq* should get permission from village leaders before camping. There are plans to assist communities to develop some *ailaqs* to provide basic accommodation for skiers and hikers. The Tour Guide Association can provide the latest information.



Ailaqs (summer grazing camps)
make ideal camping sites for
spring skiers in the Koh-e-Baba

KOH BA KOH ("MOUNTAIN TO MOUNTAIN")

The Koh ba Koh route is a multi-day trail that follows the high ridgeline of the Koh-e-Baba over four mountain passes from Sar-e-Dukani to Sar-e-Borghasun. This route is the best way to experience the most remote and rugged places of the Koh-e-Baba. There are actually numerous routes crossing the Koh-e-Baba from east to west; options are outlined in each chapter. The four suggested passes of the Koh ba Koh route are marked with an asterisk (*) in the relevant chapter text. All traversing options require ascents over passes of at least 4400m, with most passes rising significantly higher. Skiers can travel portions of the route, or complete the entire Koh ba Koh. The minimum distance required to travel the entire route is approximately 45km and involves a total of 4050m of climbing over four passes. Numerous options are available for extending the trail by climbing further and higher passes, spending time exploring the basins or by including additional passes and valleys.

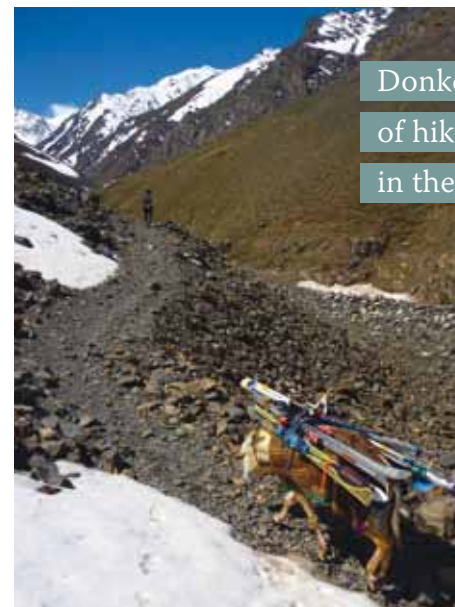
The Koh ba Koh can be travelled east to west, or west to east. Depending on your equipment, motivation and tolerance for cold, it could be travelled in winter or spring. In spring you have the choice of completing the trail carrying your equipment yourself or with the help of donkeys.

DONKEY SUPPORT

Donkeys are the main beast of burden for carrying heavy loads through the mountains and between villages in the Central Highlands. Usually those loads consist of soil, potatoes or water, but donkeys are also extremely useful for carrying skis and backpacks. Donkeys are most convenient in the spring when the snowline creeps up the valleys well beyond the reach of roads. You can use donkeys for a day trip to help get you and your gear up to snowline, or to travel the Koh ba Koh or Qol ba Qol routes.

If you find a strong donkey, or perhaps a mule or even a horse, you can try the "Bamyan donkey lift." This involves donkeys carrying you and your gear up a south-facing, snow-free, low-angle ridgeline to the top of a north-facing snowy slope. You strap on your skis and take the fast route down, meeting the donkey at the bottom.

Donkeys are always hired with the owner, who comes as well to coax the beast along. It is essential to organise donkey support through the Tour Guide Association, who have established relations with donkey owners in communities in the Koh-e-Baba. This is also a good way to supplement the limited incomes of local families, in whose backyard you are skiing. Your guide will usually hire a donkey in each village or valley. On a multi-day trip, the donkey and its owner return to the village for the night.



Donkeys reduce the burden
of hiking up to the snowline
in the spring

BAMYAN SOCIAL TOUR GUIDE ASSOCIATION

The Bamyan Social Tour Guide Association was formed in 2009 with the support of the Bamyan Ecotourism Programme. Members of the association, many of them students in Bamyan University, work as local tour guides. Most speak English, and all have received training in Bamyan's history, archaeology and geology. Association members meet regularly and continue a programme of training.

Bamyan tour guides getting their ski legs under them

In 2010, the tour guides received introductory training in backcountry skiing. While it may be some time before they are leading backcountry ski tourists down 45-plus degree couloirs, they can certainly be of tremendous assistance to any ski tourist or other tourist in Bamyan. Services the tour guides can provide include:



- Organising accommodation, meals and transport in and around Bamyan town.
- Assisting with last minute shopping in the Bamyan bazaar.
- Orienting ski tourists to ski areas in Dukani and Foladi Valleys as well as Band-e-Amir.
- Arranging introductions to community leaders.
- Organising tea, meals and accommodation in the mountain villages.
- Arranging village tours before or after skiing.
- Arranging donkey support for day-trips and for longer expeditions.
- Gaining permission from communities to camp in *ailaqs*.

A new local tour agency, Rah-e-Abresham ("Silk Road"), is starting a small ski rental business to assist visitors who forget to bring their skis with them to Bamyan.

Before or after your skiing adventures, be sure to arrange a guided tour of the Buddha niches and caves, Shahr-e-Gholghola (the "City of Screams"), Shahr-e-Zohak (the "Red City"), Dara-e-Azhdahar ("Dragon Valley") or Bamyan's many other historic sites.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook focuses on the best and most accessible skiing terrain in the Koh-e-Baba near Bamyan town. There is also a chapter on the Band-e-Amir lakes and other sites between Bamyan town and Band-e-Amir. Descriptions of the skiing opportunities in the Koh-e-Baba are divided into sections on the two main valleys draining the Koh-e-Baba near Bamyan town—Foladi and Dukani Valleys. Brief introductions to each valley include an overview, a driving map and detailed driving directions. Driving directions begin from the main roundabout at the top of the Bamyan bazaar. Major landmarks and sites of interest along the way are highlighted in the driving directions. Driving distances are approximate.

The sections on the Dukani and Foladi Valleys are divided into chapters describing each of the main access points in the respective valley. These access points are generally labeled according to the "gateway villages" at each access point. Each chapter contains an overview, additional driving directions and a driving map (if necessary), a map identifying major landscape features and descriptions of the skiing options from the access point.

The description of skiing options is divided into two parts: approaches and ascents/descents. From each access point there are generally numerous approaches. The approaches are the main routes up valleys and ridges that lead to various ascents and descents. Approaches suitable for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are mentioned in the overview for each chapter. A quick reference guide to cross-country skiing and snowshoeing options is included in an appendix. Brief directions for each of these ascents and descents are listed under their respective approach.

BAMYAN SOCIAL TOUR GUIDE ASSOCIATION:

(Can also be contacted through the Bamyan Ecotourism Programme)

phone: +93 (0) 798 429 106, +93 (0) 795 956 761

e-mail: bamyan.tourguide@gmail.com

website: www.bamyan.tourguide.blogfa.com

BAMYAN ECOTOURISM PROGRAMME:

phone: +93 (0) 778 227 935, +93 (0) 794 390 475

e-mail: amir.foladi@akdn.org, jawad.jahid@akdn.org

website: www.bamyantourism.org

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

- Directions to turn or look left or right are given along with cardinal directions whenever possible. For example, "Turn left/south at the school!"
- Translations of Persian (Dari) and English names are given whenever possible and appropriate. Persian names are written in regular font. Other Persian words are italicised.
- Nearly all distances and elevations are given as close approximations. Note that elevation data in this guidebook were collected using GPS and Google Earth. Where discrepancies existed, Google Earth elevation data were used.
- A "drainage" refers to the area drained by a stream or river. The stream itself is often dry in the summer and hidden by snow in the winter.
- A "terrain trap" is an area where the shape of the terrain traps avalanche snow, causing it to pile up deeper than on open terrain. Terrain traps are not the source of an avalanche, but they are dangerous places to be caught if an avalanche is released above you.



Sar-e-Fatmasti hovers over

Bamyan's bustling bazaar

« TRAVELLING SAFELY IN THE BACKCOUNTRY: ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND EQUIPMENT

THIS CHAPTER WAS CONTRIBUTED BY JOHN KELLY AND KRISTIN ANTHONY-MALONE OF THE CANADIAN AVALANCHE CENTRE AND THE CANADIAN AVALANCHE ASSOCIATION (WWW.AVALANCHE.CA).

RISKS OF BACKCOUNTRY SKIING

A colleague once asked me why I was putting on an avalanche transceiver to go backcountry skiing. «If we thought there was an avalanche problem, then we wouldn't go,» he said. He was kidding (I think), but his words have never left me.

Backcountry ski touring and winter mountaineering in avalanche terrain have inherent risks. Nature is unpredictable and the mountains are notoriously unforgiving. Those risks are even greater when you are far from the mountain rescue safety nets that exist in the developed world. In remote places, you have to ask yourself if you really want to expose yourself to any avalanche risk at all. Keep in mind that your decision not only affects you; it affects the people in your group, the rural communities in the area where you are skiing and your country's local embassy. All of these would be responsible for caring for you in the event of an accident.

Any winter backcountry traveller must recognise that avalanches play a central role in his or her activity because of the high likelihood of dying if buried. Preparing for avalanches should be one of your principal concerns at all stages of your trip, from planning to route selection to deciding to ski a particular slope. Avalanches are number one on the risk list for backcountry skiers. They are not the only item, however. Exposure to weather, getting lost, falling and physical wear and tear are all essential considerations that you have to plan for before heading into the mountains.

With some essential knowledge, skills, and equipment, however, backcountry skiing can be safe—even in places like the Central Highlands of Afghanistan. The following is an introduction to backcountry safety issues.

AVALANCHE AWARENESS

SNOW IS THE PROBLEM; TERRAIN IS THE SOLUTION

People who have worked a lifetime in avalanche protection become very passionate when talking about avalanche terrain. To manage your avalanche safety, they say, the answer lies in managing the terrain, not in understanding the snowpack.

Your route may take you on to particular slopes that have characteristics that make avalanches more or less likely. Even features no wider than a short-radius ski turn may make the difference between hitting the spot that triggers an avalanche and avoiding it entirely.

The message is that terrain choices need to be a conscious part of every decision of your day. Before you begin, identify the general character of the trip you are planning. Identify places where you will stop and make a decision whether to continue or not, and discuss options for bailing out. When faced with choices along your route, always choose the less exposed option. Before skiing onto a particular slope, discuss it with your group. Remember, if one person says “no”, then it’s a no-go.

THERE ARE MANY TERRAIN CHARACTERISTICS THAT INFLUENCE YOUR EXPOSURE TO AVALANCHES. HERE ARE THREE KEY FACTORS THAT YOU MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ON EVERY OUTING:

- Slope angle: Most avalanches are triggered on slopes of 35 to 45 degrees.
- Slope shape: Convex, or bulging, shapes within a slope are common trigger points for avalanches.
- Terrain traps: Cliff bands and gullies are terrain traps that are commonly associated with fatal avalanche accidents.

WHEN ON YOUR WAY, ALWAYS LOOK UP AND EVALUATE WHAT IS ABOVE YOU. SIGNS THAT SHOULD MAKE YOU MORE CAUTIOUS WHEN LOOKING ABOVE ARE:

- large expanses of open terrain overhead.
- multiple avalanche paths, especially if they have start zones that face different directions and/or overlapping runout zones.

WHENEVER POSSIBLE, TRAVEL ON THE TOPS OF RIDGES. ANY AVALANCHE YOU TRIGGER WILL RELEASE BELOW YOU.

SNOWPACK

There are more than a hundred easily identifiable factors that influence the stability of the snowpack. Any attempt to simplify the snowpack into a few key observations will result in one of two things: bad conclusions, or conservative decisions. That said, there are sets of snowpack observations that offer insight into avalanche conditions. These can be useful to help you understand how likely you are to trigger an avalanche.

The best indication of a snowpack likely to produce avalanches is recent avalanche activity. Avalanches occur in clusters.

Dry, sunny climates (such as in Bamyan) tend to produce shallow snowpacks (one to two metres deep in mid-winter) with weak layers at the base. These continental snowpacks are prone to avalanche activity, especially if a trigger is present. Danger signs include granular, “sugary” snow at the base of the snowpack and hollow sounds or feeling under your feet. You may immediately sink to near the ground if you happen to take off your skis. If a weak base is combined with a dense, compact surface layer then your danger sense should be alerted. This is a classic slab condition.

Wind is an important contributor to avalanche conditions. Certain slopes will be loaded with snow by the wind and others will be stripped bare. Windslabs can form suddenly or progressively, but you should be particularly alert to new snow or loading with wind that deposits 30cm or more of snow in 24 hours. This amount of additional weight on the snowpack is usually more than the structure can absorb.

Obvious signs of weakness in the snowpack include “whumpfung” sounds, cracks and sudden fractures during snowpack tests. These usually speak for themselves. It is up to us to listen.

Warming of the snowpack, whether by warm temperatures, rain or intense sun, is also related to increased avalanche activity.



Travelling above cornices
in Jawkar basin.

“To manage your avalanche
safety, manage the terrain.”



Navigating in a whiteout

TRAVEL PRACTICES

Travelling safely depends on two things: minimising the number of people exposed to avalanche terrain and managing group dynamics. The constraints of mountain travel often interfere with both goals. Rigorous application of these ideals may mean that travel is impossibly slow and brings about other dangers.

HERE ARE A FEW GUIDELINES THAT MAY HELP YOU TO MANAGE THE CONFLICTING PRIORITIES.

- Don't travel alone.
- Space out when crossing avalanche paths or start zones. The reason for doing this is based on the amount of time that your group will be exposed. This is not because you may trigger an avalanche if you are grouped too near each other. Standard spacing is 100m or so, but really depends on the size of the terrain that you are crossing. In practice spacing takes discipline to maintain.
- On long alpine routes in unfamiliar terrain you need to have a strategy for coping with whiteout conditions. Bamboo wands marked with fluorescent tape placed along a route is one time-tested way to retrace your steps should the weather deteriorate.
- Identify safe spots and make sure your group knows where they are. Never space out without clearly discussing where you will group up next. Try to group together only in safe spots.
- Pacing is important. The group needs to stay together. Travelling too fast for the group can expose you a variety of hazards. If you split the group up, be sure that all members agree.
- Review your situation with the group frequently and re-assess your objectives and emergency procedures.
- In sunny climates, one of the most frequent problems is afternoon heating of south- and west-facing slopes, which increases the avalanche risk. This problem is easily managed by starting early and returning home early.

PREPARATION

Backcountry travellers must be prepared to solve their own avalanche problems. Help from outside has a dismal record of saving people from avalanches in Europe and North America, let alone in Afghanistan. But the actions of you and your companions can make the difference between life and death.

RESCUE

If the unthinkable happens and you have to carry out an avalanche rescue, do not spend any more time on seeking outside help than a quick radio or sat-phone call. Most small-party accidents involve fairly simple transceiver searches. We

recommend modern three-antenna avalanche transceivers. In straightforward cases, these transceivers can enable buried skiers to be found easily with a modest amount of practice.

The best way to speed up your rescue is to practice the skills of effective probing and strategic shoveling. For probing, start quickly and proceed in a spiral pattern with 30 cm between probe holes. Probe systematically and do not get flustered: it may take a few minutes to strike the victim. Strategic shoveling is also essential and will often be the longest phase of the avalanche rescue. Begin below the victim at a distance equal to the depth of burial. Shovel in a team with one person at the front digging towards the probe strike location. Other team members assist in clearing away the snow and widening the hole. Switch the lead digger frequently.

EQUIPMENT

The following is a collection of the most important items you should take with you, including some less obvious but nonetheless useful equipment. **It should go without saying that you will be equipped with an avalanche transceiver, probe and shovel.**

- A 35-litre rucksack is the minimum useful size for day trips.
- Communications: Satellite phones, VHF radios and SPOT Personal Rescue Beacons are all available. Plan how you'll use them, their limitations, who you're going to schedule with and when. It takes careful thought to leave comprehensive instructions and phone numbers that anticipate various scenarios – such as, what happens if you miss a scheduled check-in?
- Navigation Equipment:
 - Two sets of maps - things can quickly go badly when you lose your only set of maps.
 - Extra batteries for the GPS. All those waypoints and planning can quickly lose value without juice.
- A good headlamp that you can actually travel by, not one just for snooping around in your pack.
- Protection from the elements, including sun, wind and cold.
- Ski crampons are optional but desirable, particularly in unfamiliar terrain.
- Repair kit: The primary goal here is to keep you on your skis and moving.
 - Bindings - some people carry critical spare parts; others ensure that everyone in the group is using the same binding type and take an extra binding.
 - Screws, glue, stuffing or whatever to reattach a binding that has ripped out.
 - Ski poles: These break, so have a splinting strategy
- A first aid kit is an essential tool when travelling through remote areas. We recommend consulting your local first aid provider or doctor for details on contents.

IMPORTANCE OF BACKCOUNTRY/WILDERNESS FIRST AID

To enhance your preparation for avalanche rescue you need to focus on what happens after you locate an avalanche victim. Due to the remote nature of ski touring in Afghanistan we strongly advise that you attend a wilderness first aid or wilderness first-responder course prior to embarking on your journey. The mountain environment can present many medical hazards. Often, with some medical training these hazards can be avoided or adequately treated. First aid situations can range from hypothermia or frostbite to traumatic injury from being caught in an avalanche. An avalanche incident that involves buried or injured people is always considered a medical emergency. If an individual is caught in an avalanche, the possibility of suffering a traumatic injury or being buried below the snow surface is significant. In the case of full burials, statistics in Europe show that survival chances are 91% if the subject is found within the first eighteen minutes. Since survival rates are high if the victims is found within the first eighteen minutes, injuries may be traumatic in nature. Knowing how to treat accidents and illness can save lives.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON SNOW TRAVEL/SAFETY AND AVALANCHE RESCUE:

Jamieson, Bruce. 2000. Backcountry Avalanche Awareness. Seventh edition, (first published 1989). Canadian Avalanche Association, Revelstoke, B.C., 78pp.

LaChapelle, E.R. 1985. The ABC of Avalanche Safety. Second Edition, The Mountaineers Books, Seattle, 112 pp.

McClung, D.M. and P.A. Schaerer. 2006. The Avalanche Handbook. Third Edition. The Mountaineers Books, Seattle, 342 pp.

Temper, Bruce. 2001. Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain. The Mountaineers Books, Seattle, 284 pp.



The Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) is a not-for-profit, non-government organisation that serves and supports the diverse community of professional avalanche operations in Canada. CAA establishes technical standards, delivers specialised programmes and services, and represents the avalanche community to external stakeholders.



The Canadian Avalanche Centre (CAC) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to public avalanche safety. CAC coordinates public avalanche safety programmes, delivers public avalanche awareness and education programmes, provides curriculum and support to instructors of recreational avalanche courses, acts as a central point-of-contact for avalanche information, and encourages avalanche research.



Abdullah Mahmoodi introduces skiing to the villagers of Ali Beg

« A HISTORY OF SKIING IN AFGHANISTAN

BY CHAD DEAR AND IAN MACWILLIAM

Although the earliest evidence of skiing, in the shape of rock carvings and actual skis, dates back more than 4000 years, the history of skiing in Afghanistan is a brief one.

Modern skiing was introduced to the country by European visitors in the 1960s. Some historians argue, however, that skiing may have deeper historical roots in the region. In parts of ancient Siberia, to the north of Afghanistan, people may have used skis covered in animal skins to move around in the deep snow of winter.

There is no record (known to the authors) of anyone actually skiing in Afghanistan before the 1960s. That decade was the first time when substantial numbers of foreign visitors began coming to Afghanistan so it was perhaps only a matter of time before someone spotted that in a land of mountains and snow, there must be good skiing somewhere.

One account of early skiing in Afghanistan comes from a Kabul family who has maintained the memory of Afghan skiing through the subsequent three decades of conflict when snow sports became all but impossible to pursue in the country. Yusuf Kargar – now the coach of Afghanistan’s national football team – and members of his family have managed to continue skiing when political and security conditions allowed, in the Kabul hills and the Hindu Kush. Using the skis they acquired in the 1970s, they have kept alive the idea that skiing in Afghanistan is possible.

One day in the winter of 1965, when Zahir Shah still sat on the Afghan throne, a heavy snowfall had blanketed Kabul. The Kargar family lived at the bottom of Tapa Maranjan, a low hill on the edge of Kabul where Zahir Shah’s father, Nadir Shah, lay buried under his domed mausoleum. Three of the Kargar boys were out sliding on the hill – Yusuf’s father, Sher Mohammed, and two of his uncles. Like most Afghan young people they had no sleds so they hurled themselves down the slope on serving trays and inner tubes. On this particular day, the Kargar brothers were sharing their slope with a German called Mr Hammer who had come to ski on the hill. The Kargar

boys asked if they could try out his wooden skis – thus sparking an interest which was to make them Afghanistan’s most prominent skiing family. They later managed to find one or two pairs of old skis in the bazaar, probably discarded by an embassy, to continue their interest.

About this time the Afghan tourism organisation established Afghanistan’s first ski area at Chowk-e-Arghande, near a low pass known for its heavy snowfalls just outside Kabul on the road leading southwest to Wardak. With the help of another German ski enthusiast, Afghanistan’s only ski tow rope was installed in 1967. A few years later a second rope tow was installed to take skiers to a higher, steeper slope. Together the two lifts enabled a descent about 700 metres long.

A day’s ski pass then cost 50 afghanis (later 100 afghanis) – a hefty price for most Afghans at the time. Most of the skiers were expatriates living in Kabul, but the Kargar boys became regular visitors and they were among the first Afghans to take up skiing. Within a few years, Yusuf Kargar, then aged seven or eight, began skiing at Chowk-e-Arghande, coached by another uncle, Amin. Amin was studying in Kabul University at the time. He and his skiing brother, Arif, with the backing of the Ministry of Education, encouraged other university students to take up skiing as well. Since skis could not normally be bought in Afghanistan, Yusuf’s father went to Iran and bought a large number of skis and boots to be used by the new recruits.

In 1970, the Kargars helped to organise the first Afghan ski races. University students made up one team while education officials made up another. Expatriate skiers and the Kargars themselves sometimes made up two further teams. The Kargars helped to train Afghan skiers and to promote the sport throughout the 1970s. The family, who ran a furniture business in Kabul, already helped to support a number of sports clubs in Kabul, including clubs for football, volleyball and table tennis. Now they added a skiing club to the list.



Afghan students took enthusiastically
to skiing at Chowk-e-Arghande in the 1960s and 70s

In 1975, the king, Zahir Shah, was ousted by his cousin, the prime minister Mohammed Daoud Khan, who declared himself president while the king was abroad on a visit to Italy. Afghan politics, particularly in the cities, had become increasingly polarised between social conservatives and progressive leftists, the latter strongly influenced by the Soviet Union. The political situation grew more unstable in April, 1978, when the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew and killed President Daoud in what became known as the Saur Revolution, and installed



For Afghan women it was different then –

Kabul University women's ski team

Nur Mohammed Taraki as president. When this leftist revolution seemed in danger of collapse the following year, the Soviet Union invaded in December, 1979, to ensure this new Central Asian client state did not slip out of its sphere of influence. These events marked the beginning of three decades of violent political conflict in Afghanistan. In the coming years, millions of Afghans would be killed or forced to flee their country.

These events also put an abrupt end to the country's fledgling ski industry. The last ski races were held at Chowk-e-Arghande in the winter of 1978, just before the Saur Revolution. The following winter, after a heavy snowfall, the Kargar boys tried to go to Chowk-e-Arghande to ski as usual, but they were turned back by a security guard who told them the area beyond the city limits was no longer safe. The hillside where Kabul's ski aficionados had practiced their sport fell out of use. So it remains today, awaiting the day when its slopes will be revived for winter sports once more.

Throughout the Soviet occupation of the 1980s, most violent conflict took place in the provinces well beyond Kabul, where the Mujahidin were fighting the Soviets and the PDPA government in the countryside. The capital remained relatively safe, although travel by road beyond the city was impossible. The Kargars kept the feeble skiing flame alive by continuing to ski on hillsides within the city, on Tapa Maranjan, on Asamai Hill ("TV Mountain") and at the nearby Bagh-e-Bala, an old royal garden to the west of the city.



Chowk-e-Arghande was known
as one of the snowiest areas
in the vicinity of Kabul

In 1988, the Afghan Olympic Committee received an invitation to send a skier to the Asian Winter Games in Japan. Yusuf Kargar was chosen as the Afghan representative, but a coup attempt in Kabul that year delayed his flight by two days, preventing him from competing.

Then in 1989, with the Soviet Union in political turmoil at home, the occupying Soviet forces pulled out of Afghanistan. The opposition Mujahidin continued to fight against the PDPA regime of President Najibullah, which was still receiving money and arms from Moscow.

With the Afghan government balanced on a knife edge, in 1991 Yusuf and his uncle, Nuraqa Kargar, were invited to the preliminary rounds of the Winter Olympics qualifying competition in Albertville, France. The slalom course in Albertville was particularly difficult. Yusuf watched as his uncle and many other skiers missed gates or fell on one section of the course. When his turn came, he was careful to moderate his speed through the tricky section; he managed to stay on his feet, hit all the gates and secured a place to become the first Afghan selected to ski in the Winter Olympics.

The Soviet Union imploded and vanished in 1991. Moscow ended its support for President Najibullah's tottering regime; in 1992 the Kabul government collapsed and the Mujahidin marched into town. The argumentative Mujahidin factions all tried to grab a share of power in the capital. The result was the devastating civil war of the mid-1990s when Kabul was pulverised by factional fighting and the indiscriminate

rocketing of residential areas. The war cancelled Yusuf's hoped-for trip to compete in the 1992 Winter Olympics.

Thousands of Kabulis were forced to flee the war-torn city. In 1993, the Kargars, like many other families, went to Pakistan. Unlike other refugees, they took their skis with them. "We carried our skis like a cat carries her kittens in her teeth," explained one member of the family. When asked by baffled fellow refugees what these strange items were, they replied that the skis were an electronic version of a *mashin-e-nadafi*, an instrument rather like a longbow used by local farming families to clean cotton fibres.

The Kargars returned to Kabul (with their skis) after a year in Pakistan. The skis, however, would not see snow for more than a decade. The Taliban movement emerged in Kandahar as an attempt to end the destructive feuding between Mujahidin factions there. The movement spread rapidly in the south, and in 1996 the Taliban took power in Kabul itself, beginning an oppressive five-year rule in which they enforced an ultra-conservative version of Islamic government. Meanwhile a severe drought set in and for the rest of the decade little or no snow fell in Kabul. Skiing in Afghanistan became a distant memory.

In 2001, came the shocking attacks of September 11 on New York and Washington, planned in part in Afghanistan by Al Qaeda militants being harboured by the Taliban. The Taliban were toppled soon after by a combination of American aerial bombing and a ground advance by fighters of the Taliban's chief foe, the Northern Alliance. Peace seemed to have come to Afghanistan at last and a massive international effort began to build a new national government for the country.

The drought had also ended and snow returned to Kabul in the winter of early 2002. In the heady and optimistic atmosphere of the time, it seemed only right to begin the revival of skiing as well. Some foreign journalists had come across Yusuf Kargar trying out his skis once more on the Kabul hills. In 2003, the Kargars decided



Apres-ski at Chowk-e-Arghande

before the war

to organise a publicity event to film skiing in Afghanistan for the first time in over a decade. Nuraqa Kargar was about to try out his turns for the cameras. His battered ski boots had visibly served their time. Bought in the 1970s, skied in throughout the 80s, kept in storage for much of the 90s, as he stepped into them, the boots fell apart in front of the cameras. Rather like the country itself, they had had as much as they could take.

In 2006, with partial sponsorship from China, three Kargars (Arif, Harun and Haji Daoud) competed in the Asian Winter Games in Changchun, China. Yusuf went as coach and Nuraqa as a sports official. Arif had been living in Colorado, USA, and skied regularly there, but the others had skied only intermittently since 2003 and were using borrowed and less-than-professional equipment. Arif managed to qualify and took part in the competition, but Harun and Daoud were both disqualified for missing gates. It wasn't glorious but Afghans were at least taking part in international ski competitions at last.

Meanwhile, in Kabul foreigners were once more reviving the idea of skiing in Afghanistan. The logical location for the first ski ventures was the Salang Pass, high in the Hindu Kush where the mountain peaks rise to 4500m. The Salang tunnel near the top of the pass, which had been blocked by rubble and landmines for the past four or five years, was reopened to vehicle traffic early in 2002 by the French development agency, ACTED, and the British demining organisation, the Halo Trust.

The reopening of this strategic road connection between northern and southern Afghanistan across the Hindu Kush also opened up access for skiing in the snowfields of the Salang, only a few hours' drive north of Kabul. The sides of the road through the Salang Pass had been heavily mined by the Soviets. The area has been progressively cleared of mines – but even so, skiing many of the slopes above the Salang highway is still a risky proposition.

One wide valley at the top of the pass, however, just to the west of the road as it enters the southern mouth of the Salang tunnel at a place called Gawarasang, had never been mined. This became the favoured ski area for a group of pioneering French skiers and their Afghan friends, who called themselves the Salang Ski Club. From February, 2002, they became regular visitors to the area with their touring skis, well known to the Afghan police in their highway post at Gawarasang. One or two of the local police have also taken to doing some occasional turns with skis from the Alps donated by the French visitors.

The skiing valley at Gawarasang meets the Salang highway at about 3200m. From there, with touring skis and skins, it is possible to ski up to the high central ridge of the Hindu Kush at about 4100m. This ridge marks the watershed between rivers flowing south down the Indus to the Indian Ocean, and those flowing north to the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and Central Asia's dying Aral Sea. The main skiing valley is divided into two smaller valleys by a central peak. This peak (4376m) was first climbed, and skied down, in 2006 by a group of French and British skiers. Inevitably, the peak and the route were christened the Entente Cordiale (after the Franco-British

diplomatic agreement of 1904). From 2008 a second group of expat skiers, loosely called the Kabul Kohistanis, also began regular weekend visits to ski (and snowboard) in the Salang. In the winter of 2010, a few groups of Afghan snowboarders from Kabul's pioneering skateboarding club, Skateistan, also put on their winter kit and turned up to try out the snow version of their sport.



The Kargars' ski boots
have survived many decades
and much turmoil

Apart from skiing in Salang, after big snowfalls in Kabul enthusiasts have occasionally tried out less orthodox skiing locations in the city itself. In 2005 some Salang Ski Clubbers took a late-night ski tour around the snowy streets of Shahr-e-Nau, towed at top speed behind two Town Ace minivans. They finished off with a ski descent of the west face of Bibi Maru hill ("Swimming Pool Hill") at 2am, before adjourning for après-ski cognac.

After one spectacular snowfall in February 2009, two skiers were spotted making turns down the upper slopes of Kabul's Sher Darwaza mountain, starting from the ancient city walls on the high ridgeline and carving down to the rocky crags which overlook the Old City. (Observers noted the elegance of one of the skier's telemark turns.) This venerable mountain, the backdrop to centuries of trade and turmoil in high Asia, has known shepherds, soldiers, warriors and brigands, but surely this was the first time in history it had been skied.

The rolling hills above the Qargha reservoir on the northwest edge of Kabul are another place where it is possible to ski after a good snowfall. Beyond Qargha, the winter slopes of Paghman (4710m), the highest peak near the capital and Kabul's former mountain playground, beckon to the adventurous skier – but kidnapping of visitors is still something of a local tradition around Paghman, so exploring there is not advised just yet.

Elsewhere, Afghanistan, a land of snow and mountains, is still virtually unskied. In the far northeast, in the peaceful Wakhan Corridor, where snow lingers on the mountains well into June, the possibilities of ski-touring are yet to be explored. Two

European women (Italian and British) who took their skis to the Wakhan in the spring of 2010, reported good skiing in the remote east of the corridor.

But perhaps the best prospects for the future of Afghan skiing lie in the Central Highlands, in Bamyan's Koh-e-Baba mountains. A few French aid workers working in the province in the years after 2001 made some ski outings in the mountains there. There are tales of a Scandinavian couple based in Yakawlang who went to work on cross-country skis, and a New Zealand soldier based in Bamyan has also tried out his cross-country skis there.

A skier who made a prospective venture on skis near Borghasun early in 2009 reported mile upon mile of eminently skiable snowy ridges. In the winter of early 2010, the exploratory ski tours for this guidebook were undertaken, and Bamyan's first ever winter sports days were held for local people above Ali Beg village. After giving a ski demonstration on the local hill, the Kargars handed out prizes to ski competition winners.

Following up on these pioneering efforts, the great potential of skiing in Afghanistan awaits further exploration.

The Kargar brothers and co-author Chad Dear (left)

skiing above Ali Beg during Bamyan's first Winter Games

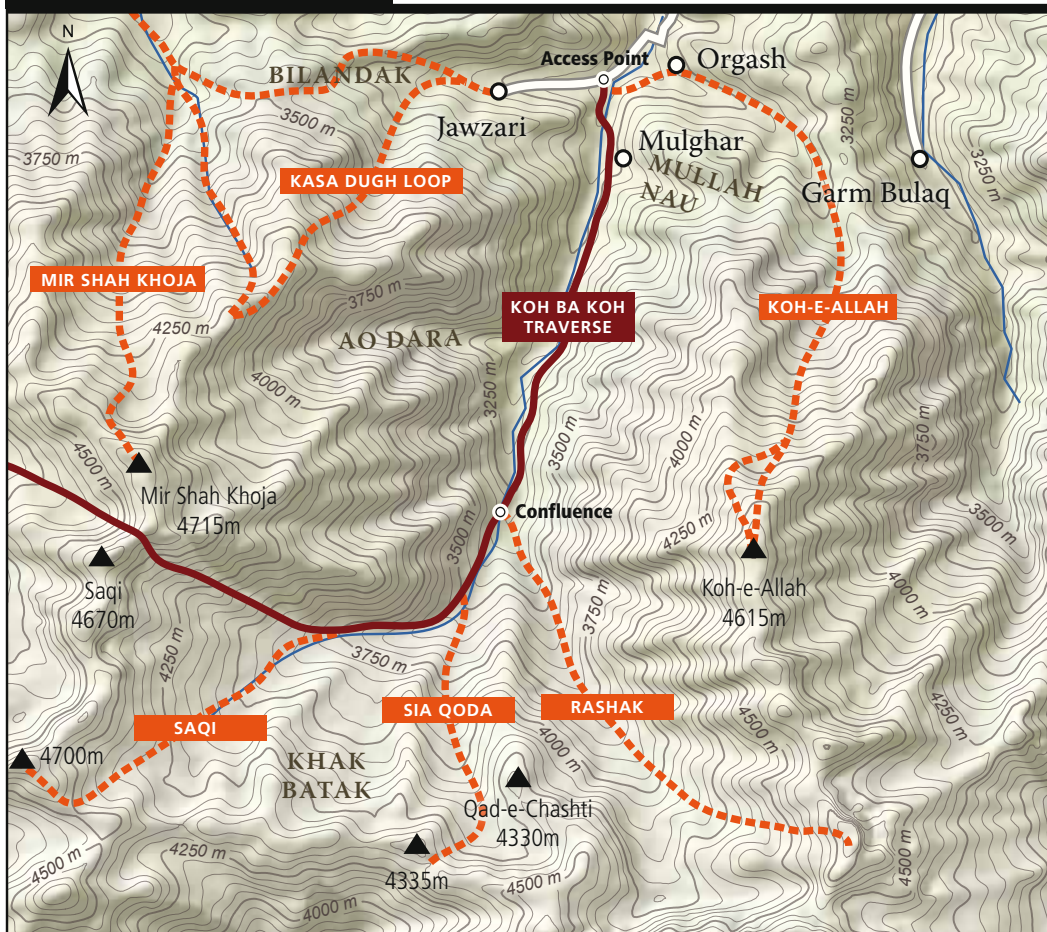


DUKANI VALLEY*

Orgash 08 » Sar-e-Dukani 08 » Jawzari 08 » Khushkak 08 »
 THE DUKANI VALLEY LEADS TO ORGASH, SAR-E-DUKANI
 AND JAWZARI

H.1 - Dukani Overview

0 1 2 3 4 Kilometres



*Dukani and Kakrak both refer to the same valley. The lower part of the valley where it meets the main Bamyan valley, particularly around the Kakrak Buddha caves, is usually called the Kakrak Valley. The upper part of the valley is called the Dukani Valley. (To avoid confusion, this guide usually refers simply to the Dukani Valley.) Likewise the Dukani River and the Kakrak River are the same river, but the former name is used in the "Dukani Valley" higher up, and the latter name in the "Kakrak Valley" lower down.

Koh-e-Allah and Mir Shah Khoja

hold their snow well into
 the spring planting season

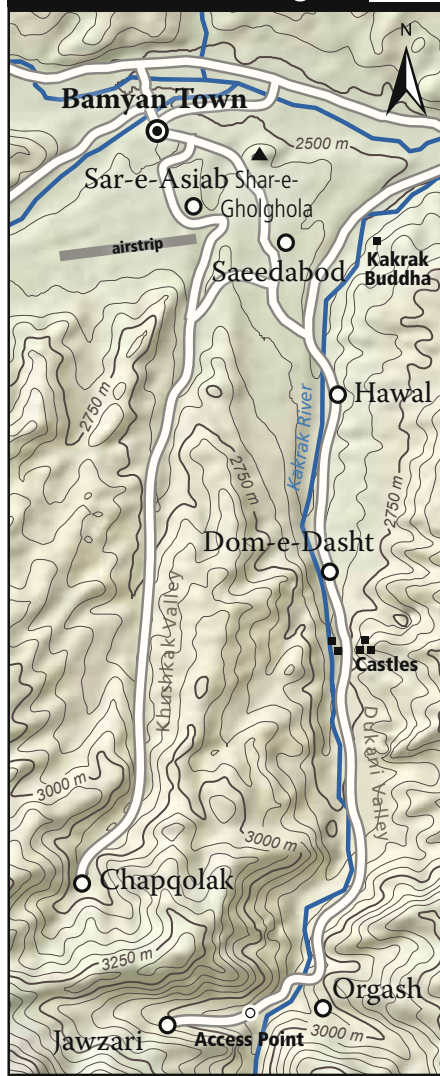


Koh-e-Allah rises sharply above Orgash village and towers over the Dukani Valley. Along with its western counterpart, Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja, Koh-e-Allah provides the familiar backdrop to Bamyan town – and it could become a classic ski summit in the Koh-e-Baba. Behind Koh-e-Allah lies Sar-e-Dukani, the most expansive of the Koh-e-Baba back basins. Sar-e-Dukani offers ample opportunities for multi-day explorations and first descents. Northwest of Sar-e-Dukani and above Jawzari village is an area known as Kasa Dugh ("Bowl of Dugh", a refreshing yoghurt drink), home to some of the most easily accessible expert terrain in the Koh-e-Baba. All of these places have beginning skier and intermediate options at lower elevations; and in the narrow valley leading to Sar-e-Dukani is a scenic cross-country ski or snowshoe route. Khushkak Valley, which offers the skiing access point closest to Bamyan town, is also included in this section.

The Dukani Valley is located directly south of Shahr-e-Gholghola, the "City of Screams," an ancient fortress dating from the 6th century which was razed by Genghis Khan in the 13th century.

In a cliff face at the northern mouth of the valley is a seven-metre high niche that once framed an intricately carved sitting Buddha. This statue, along with the famous standing Buddhas in Bamyan town, was destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. Along the road running south to the head of Dukani Valley are the remains of several *qala*, or fortresses, as well as an impressive cave dwelling once used as a hideout by the Mujahidin fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

B - Dukani Driving



Deep powder in Orgash

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

VIA SHAHR-E-GHOLGHOLA

From the roundabout at the western end of the main Bamyán bazaar, drive southeast up the hill on the paved road towards Sar-e-Asiab village, Bamyán's "upper town". Where the paved road bends right/southwest, 500m from the bazaar, continue straight on a dirt road headed southeast towards the prominent hill of Shahr-e-Gholghola. After 1.3km, pass Shahr-e-Gholghola on the left/east. Continue along the dirt road through Saeedabad village, staying right/west on the main road at the junction 250m past the Shahr-e-Gholghola ruins. In the village southeast of Shahr-e-Gholghola stands Qala-e-Chehel Dukhtaran ("Castle of Forty Maidens"), which is believed to date from the 12th century. The castle is not visible from the road. Continue on the main road until you arrive at a T-junction with a water tap stand 2.5km from the bazaar. Turn left/east at the junction.

VIA SAR-E-ASIAB VILLAGE / AIRSTRIP

From the roundabout at the western end of the main Bamyán bazaar, drive southeast up the hill, then curve west on the paved road towards Sar-e-Asiab village, Bamyán's "upper town." At the top of the hill, turn left/south at a second roundabout with a statue of the Hazara Mujahid commander, Abdul Ali Mazari, who was killed by the Taliban. Pass the compounds of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) at an intersection 200m south of the Mazari roundabout. Continue straight/south towards the airstrip. 30 metres before

reaching the airstrip checkpoint, turn left/east on to a dirt road that runs parallel to the airstrip. After 300m, this road bends to the right/south around the eastern edge of the airstrip and heads south towards the Koh-e-Baba. Drive along the plateau with a major north-south drainage on the left/east. This is the Khushkak Valley.

Pass the fortified base of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), manned by New Zealand forces, on the right/west. You will also notice many newly constructed government buildings on the right/west, just beyond the PRT. A cemetery with numerous martyrs' graves is enclosed by a rock wall on the left/east. One kilometre past the airstrip, the road drops down into the Khushkak Valley. (See *Khushkak chapter*.) Near the bottom of the valley, the road forks. From here, to go to Khushkak, continue straight/south. To continue on to the Dukani Valley, go left and turn sharply northeast down the valley. Climb the east side of the Khushkak Valley to the village of Saeedabad. Continue east through Saeedabad on the main road for 1km until you reach a tap stand. This is the junction with the Shahr-e-Gholghola route.



Shahr-e-Gholghola, the "City of Screams,"

occupies a commanding position

near the mouth of the Dukani

(Kakrak) Valley

FROM TAP STAND IN SAEEDABAD - 200m after the tap stand, turn right/south just before the road dips down further into the valley. 1km after this turn, the road bends left/southeast and drops down towards the main Dukani Valley. Visible on the east side of the valley are some of the many caves and niches cut into the cliffs and hills in the Kakrak Buddha complex. The road contours along the west side of the valley, passing through Hawal village (3.5km after the tap stand). The valley narrows 1.5km after Hawal, and the road climbs up to a plateau. Pass through the village of Dom-e-Dasht ("Tail of the Dasht," a flat, desert area) on the plateau. Soon after Dom-e-Dasht, the remains of the first of three *qalaha* (fortresses) become visible. Continue south up the valley past Kundah school. Less than half a kilometre past the school a well-developed cave dwelling is cut into the cliff walls on the west side of the gorge below. This was used as a hideout by Mujahidin fighters during the war against Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Continue south on the main road. Just before the road descends to a bridge over the Kakrak River (*Darya-e-Kakrak*), look for a path

on the left/east lead directly to Orgash village. To reach Orgash and the Koh-e-Allah approach it is normally easier to cross the bridge and continue for another kilometre along the road to a point where it turns sharply uphill to the right/west. Here you can recross the Kakrak River by foot on exposed rocks. However when the water level is too high to allow this, the lower direct path is the alternative access route for Orgash and Koh-e-Allah.

- To go to Orgash village, cross the creek at this point and continue east up the hill.
- To go to the back basin of Sar-e-Dukani, stay on the west side of the creek and walk or ski south (straight ahead).
- To go to Jawzari, continue in the vehicle up the steep hill to the right/west for 1.5km until the road ends.

CAUTION!

People in Dukani Valley report that an avalanche occurs every year on the slopes above Kundah School in an area called Chukur Nau. According to local residents, the avalanche in the winter of 2009/10 was the biggest in sixteen years. A debris pile more than seven metres high covered the road. It took residents three weeks to clear a path through the debris. Check road conditions before setting out for the upper Dukani Valley.



Residents of Dukani Valley cleared a path through seven metres of avalanche debris to reopen the road.

NAM-E-BARFI: A CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST SNOW

As soon as one winter's snow starts to melt in the spring, the people of the Central Highlands begin preparations for the coming winter. Village residents spend long hours tending food crops; harvesting, transporting and storing fodder and fuel plants; making dung patties for cooking and heating; and fixing or upgrading buildings.

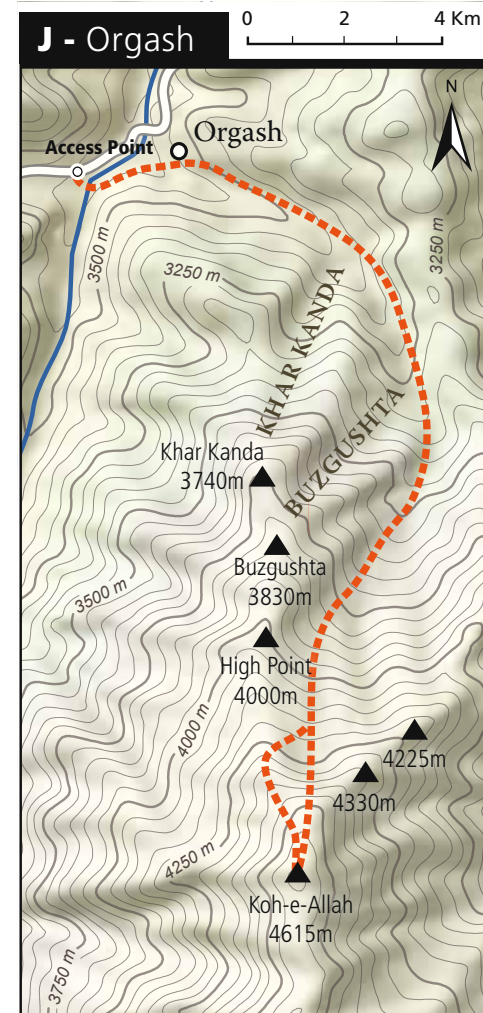
Winter in the mountains can last for six months so the first snowfall is a time of great anxiety: Is there enough fodder, enough fuel, enough food to make it through the long winter? The first snowfall is, however, also a time of celebration and chicanery. Nam-e-barfi is a game played when the first snow falls each

year. On that day, a local trickster will draft an invitation to a party. The invitation may identify party invitees, the date and location and possibly even the food to be served. The trick is to fool someone else into hosting the party. If the trickster is able to deliver the invitation letter to an unsuspecting person, then the recipient is forced to host the party. If the intended recipient is suspicious, however, he can refuse the letter and punish the trickster, sometimes by rubbing ash on the person's face. The trickster is then generally forced to host the party himself. However the trick works out, everyone gets to celebrate the coming of the first snow with good food and good company.

ORGASH

Orgash is the gateway to God's Mountain (*Koh-e-Allah*), the eastern of the two dominant peaks overlooking Bamyan town. In the late spring and throughout the summer, the upper portion of the mountain holds snow in a handful of steep chutes between outcrops of windswept rock. From a distance, the pattern of rock and snow appears to form the Persian letters of the word "Allah" (الله). It is possible to ski these chutes well into late spring.

There are many other ascent/descent options below the Koh-e-Allah summit; the top of some can be reached in under four hours from the access point. All of the skiing options involve walking through the lower, middle and upper parts of Orgash village (and receiving many invitations for tea). The older men of Orgash are great storytellers. If you have time, stop to enjoy a few cups of tea and a wintertime tale. There are very limited cross-country skiing options in Orgash. Nearby Sar-e-Dukani offers the better cross-country skiing in Dukani Valley.



Residents of the Koh-e-Baba are expert donkey packers, even with skis

KOH-E-ALLAH APPROACH

(See *Dukani Valley driving directions*.)

From either the path north or the bridge or the creek crossing, follow village paths uphill southeast or east respectively towards the lower part of Orgash village. In the village, stay on the north side of the Orgash creek and follow a path east along the creek through the village for 1.5km to the last permanently occupied house on the left/northeast. At this point, the **Khar Kanda** drainage lies to your right/south. Continue the moderate ascent southeast up the main valley. 2.75km from the lower village, on the right/southwest, is the **Buzgushta** drainage. After Buzgushta, the main valley bends slightly to the right/south. 3.75km from the lower village, on the right/southwest, is another skiable drainage leading up to **High Point 4000m** on the ridge. Here the climb up the main valley steepens. At 4km and 4.75km from the lower village, on the left/east, are two main drainages descending from the east ridge of Koh-e-Allah, **High Point 4225m** and **High Point 4330m** on the ridge. The climb up the main valley steepens significantly. At 6km (4225m), you arrive at the bottom of a large bowl below the main summit. This area is known locally as Kasa – “the Bowl”. This is a great lunch spot with views north to the Buddha niches and Bamyán town and



Khar Kanda lies just above the uppermost houses in Orgash



Tracks down the central chute

from the summit of Koh-e-Allah

south to the various descent options from the top of the bowl. From the bottom of the Bowl, you can ascend the west ridge to the Koh-e-Allah summit (4615m). Alternatively, climb the east ridge to a descent option just below the summit.

Be aware that people in Orgash say that parts of Koh-e-Allah naturally trigger avalanches every year, usually when the weather warms up.

KHAR KANDA

If the snowpack is stable, climb north up the bottom of the main Khar Kanda drainage all the way to the summit (an 875m climb from the beginning of the ascent). It is also possible to ascend the final 200 vertical metres on the east or west ridges, or to ascend the east ridge from the bottom of the drainage. There are numerous rock outcroppings on the ridge that may be challenging. If you are climbing the east ridge, there are alternative descent options down the east and west sides of the ridge at 3640m and 3720m. The descent is down a 30-35° north-northeast-facing drainage with some options for skiing different aspects. An alternative descent involves following the ridgeline south from the Khar Kanda summit to the top of Buzgushta.

BUZGUSHTA

The bottom of the drainage leading up to Buzgushta is narrow and a potential avalanche terrain trap. Rocky ridgelines

prohibit easy ascents. If conditions permit, ascend along the bottom or the side of the drainage (a 625m climb from the beginning of the ascent). The descent is down a 30-35° northeast aspect slope.

HIGH POINT 4000M

Ascend 1.25km (600m in elevation) to this high point on the west ridge for a northeast aspect descent.

HIGH POINT 4225M

Ascend 1.75km (750m) to this high point on the east ridge for a north-northwest aspect descent.

HIGH POINT 4330M

Ascend 1.5km (700m) to this high point on the east ridge for a north-northwest aspect descent.

KOH-E-ALLAH SUMMIT

From the bottom of the Bowl, ascend the west ridge and follow it south to the highest skiable point (4615m). The final ridge ascent to the high point is rocky and will likely require boot packing. From this high point, the narrow rocky ridge continues south along a technical traverse to a higher summit. There are four descent options from the Koh-e-Allah summit. The first is the central chute from the top of the peak. A second chute lies just west of the central chute. Both chutes offer 375m descents to the basin on 40° plus north aspect slopes. These two chutes are flanked on either side by good snowfields. All of these descents are visible from the valley below.



The summit of Koh-e-Allah

offers a steep descent and

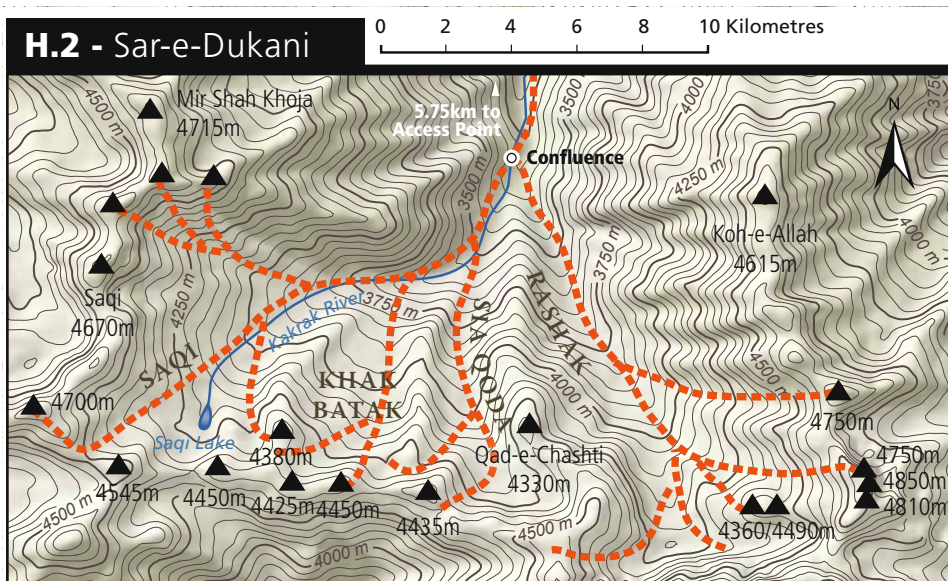
views of the Bamyán Valley

SAR-E-DUKANI

Sar-e-Dukani (“Head of Dukani”) refers to the back basin surrounding the rugged upper watershed of the Kakrak/Dukani River at the top of Dukani Valley. Sar-e-Dukani is the largest of the Koh-e-Baba back basins and offers many options for scenic touring and skiing intermediate to extreme terrain. The approach to the back basin can be skied cross-country, although there are avalanche risks from the slopes on either side. The back basin is divided into four distinct sub-basins that stretch from the crest of the Koh-e-Baba to the Kakrak/Dukani River below. The creeks of the sub-basins merge into the Kakrak River at 3300m. In spring, the snow around a nice *ailaq* camp just past this lowest confluence, 6km from the access point, may have melted sufficiently to allow camping.

From high points in Sar-e-Dukani there are great views of Jawkar, Somara, the back of Mir Shah Khoja and Koh-e-Allah. You can also peer over the divide into Behsud district at an impressive pyramid peak. From certain vantage points, it is also possible to look west all the way to the summit of Shah Foladi. Sar-e-Dukani offers access to numerous peaks over 4500m and routes to Behsud, Jawkar and Somara, as well as routes between the Sar-e-Dukani sub-basins. The route through Sar-e-Dukani across the mountains to Behsud in Wardak province is still one of the most important north-south travel corridors through the Koh-e-Baba mountains.

Two small villages, Yeti Mak and Mulghar, lie in the narrow valley leading to Sar-e-Dukani, home to thirteen and seven families respectively. These villages, tucked into the valley’s side drainages, have no road access. Villagers say there are good fish in the river, perhaps the largest in the Koh-e-Baba. In the valley bottom between the two villages is a warm spring with colourful algae and moss. Yeti Mak and Mulghar come under the leadership of Jawzari village.



HUSSEIN DAD

Hussein Dad and his family come from Saeed-abad village at the bottom of Dukani Valley. Like many inhabitants of Bamyan, Hussein Dad’s family sought refuge in the Koh-e-Baba when Taliban militants arrived in the autumn of 1999. The Taliban subsequently blockaded the valleys leading to the Koh-e-Baba, preventing supplies from reaching people hiding in the upper valleys. Displaced families survived through the generosity of their host communities and by gathering the few remaining edible and medicinal plants of the season. With food shortages and the bitter cold at the onset of winter, however, many did not survive.



Dukani Valley where he and his family had first fled eleven years earlier. He loaded donkeys again, not with relief supplies this time, but with skis. As a member of the Bamyan Social Tour Guide

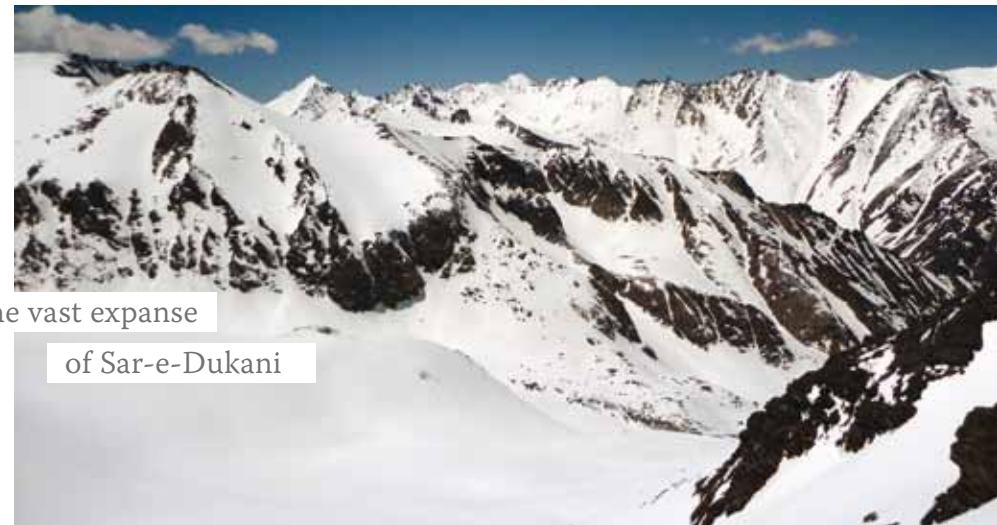
Association, Hussein Dad was organising the first multi-day, donkey-supported ski tour in the Koh-e-Baba. With the return of peace, he hopes to supplement his farming income by helping skiers and other tourists to explore the Koh-e-Baba.

Hussein Dad’s father was frail with sickness and his older brother was fighting the Taliban so he was responsible for caring for his family, though still only a young teenager. He spent days walking through the Koh-e-Baba, avoiding the Taliban-controlled lower valleys, to reach Kalu, a community with access to food and other supplies. He loaded donkeys with essential supplies and trekked back through the mountains to bring food to villages in the Dukani Valley and the hundreds of displaced people they were hosting. Hussein Dad undoubtedly saved many lives and was a hero to the people he served.

The Koh-e-Baba mountains hold painful memories of struggle and loss for the people of Bamyan. These mountains, however, are perhaps their greatest asset. They provide food, water, medicine, fuel and grazing for domestic animals. In times of conflict, the Koh-e-Baba provide security and refuge. In times of peace, the mountains can be a valuable tourism resource. Today, once again, Hussein Dad hopes the Koh-e-Baba will help support his family.

In 2010, for the first time since the fall of the Taliban, Hussein Dad returned to the upper

Hussein Dad returned to Sar-e-Dukani eleven years after he and his family sought refuge there from the Taliban.



The vast expanse
of Sar-e-Dukani

SAR-E-DUKANI APPROACH

The access point for Sar-e-Dukani is in Dahan-e-Jawzari (“Mouth of Jawzari”), along the Kakrak River. You can park near the river before the Dukani road takes a sharp right/west turn and leaves the valley floor to climb west to Jawzari village. From this point, follow paths on the right/west side of the river through the village, past a micro-hydropower station and over a concrete bridge 0.8km from the access point. Cross the bridge and continue on the path up the left/east side of the river. After one kilometre, take a path leading left/east up to Mulghar village. (See *Map H*, p. 48.)

(Alternate approach: 0.6km before the access point described above, a path leaves the road on the left/east just before the road drops down to the river and bridge. Take this path south to Orgash village. Continue through the village to a path that contours along the left/east slope above the valley bottom for one kilometre before joining the main approach near Mulghar village.)

Stay on the main lower path as it descends to the river, to a warm spring at 1.1km. At 2.25km, find the **Mullah Nau** drainage to the left/east. There are martyrs’ graves from the Taliban era marked by flags 50m from the path on the north side of the drainage. At 3.6km, find the **Ao Dara** (“Water Valley”) drainage to the right/west, across the creek. The Ao Dara drainage descends from the top of Mir Shah Khoja. There are *ailaq* houses on the north side of the Ao Dara drainage above the Kakrak River. At 5.75km (3300m), you will arrive at the first major confluence of the basin (34°40’08.00”N, 67°49’44.00”E). From this lowest confluence, the **Rashak sub-basin** extends to the left/southeast towards a jagged southern wall. The other three sub-basins—**Sia Qoda**, **Khak Batak** and **Saqi**—lie to the right/southwest.

In spring you will probably be able to follow the path for the full 5.75km to the lowest confluence. This path is well established and follows the main valley above the river, varying in elevation from near the river bank to 50m above it. In winter, the path is covered with snow and the narrow valley is prone to avalanches from the steep ridges ascending on either side. Caution is advised.

MULLAH NAU

This drainage ascends 1000m to a sub-peak of 4000m on the west ridge of Koh-e-Allah (north of Buzgushta). In winter this easily accessible drainage offers northwest and west aspect descents.

AO DARA

This drainage ascends over 1600m to the summit of Mir Shah Khoja at 4715m and offers mainly northeast aspect descents.

RASHAK SUB-BASIN

From the confluence, go left/southeast following the Rashak creek. 1.6km from the confluence, look right/west to the **Qad-e-Chashti** area. At 2.5km, look left/east to a **northwest facing drainage**. Continue up the main drainage to the west end of a prominent **east-west ridge** dividing the area (at 4100m). The ridge includes two minor peaks dwarfed by the surrounding ridges. Turn left/east at the junction to reach the **eastern area of the Rashak sub-basin**. Continue straight/south past the east-west ridge to reach the southern and western areas of the Rashak sub-basin. The ascent is a nice tour with good views up a consistent low-angle slope.

Qad-e-Chashti

From the drainage, ascend up the northeast sub-ridge to the main east ridge. There are east/northeast aspect descents of 600m from just below the rocky high point (4275m). There are also a few 500m descents from the ridge north of Qad-e-Chashti.

Northwest-facing drainage – 900m west aspect descent from the 4750m peak on the west ridge.

East-west ridge – Includes a 4490m (east) and 4360m (west) peak with 250-300m descents on all aspects.

Eastern area of Rashak sub-basin – Hosts three peaks reaching to 4750m, 4850m and 4810m respectively from north to south. Descents are 550-700m with west/northwest aspects. Ascend along ridges.

Southern and western areas of Rashak sub-basin – Two north aspect chutes descend 325m from the otherwise inaccessible cliffs of the south ridge. A 4655m peak dominates the west side of the basin offering 450m east and southeast aspect descents.

SIA QODA SUB-BASIN

From the lowest confluence, take the right/west fork and ascend the drainage for 1km to a second confluence. The Sia Qoda sub-basin lies to the left/south while the **Saqi** sub-basin is straight ahead/southwest. Looking up the Sia Qoda sub-basin, you will see the north and west aspect slopes of a prominent peak in the centre of the sub-basin, **Pk. 4435m**. This peak has a ridge extending northeast. The rest of the sub-basin is not visible from the second confluence. Follow the main drainage south up the Sia Qoda sub-basin another 2km to a fork in the valley near the base of the prominent Pk. 4435m (elevation at fork 4000m). Go left/east at the fork to access the **eastern area of the sub-basin** and the peak itself. Follow the right/west fork to reach the **western part of the sub-basin** and the pass to **Khak Batak**, the next sub-basin to the west.

Pk. 4435m – Ascend the northeast ridge. Beware of cornices. There are east and northeast aspect descents of 300m off



Descending the

Rashak sub-basin

the east side of the peak; and west and northwest aspect descents 350m off the west and northwest side of the peak.

Eastern area of the sub-basin – South/southwest aspect descents of 200m from the northeast ridge. West and northwest aspect descents of 250-300m from a rocky high point on the eastern ridge. The north/northwest aspect slope descends 250m from a col on the eastern ridge. This col also offers access to the west side of the Rashak sub-basin. A north aspect chute descends 350m just west of the col.

Western part of the sub-basin – North and east slopes descend 200m from the western ridge. The western ridge also offers access into the eastern side of **Khak Batak** sub-basin.

KHAK BATAK SUB-BASIN

From the lowest confluence, take the right/west fork and ascend the drainage 1.8km, passing the turn to **Sia Qoda** sub-basin along the way. Turn left/south into the **Khak Batak** sub-basin and ascend

2km to the base of the rocky north ridge of the basin's **central peak (4450m)**.

There are north aspect descents of 200m from the basin's south ridge, east of the central peak.

Central peak (4450m) – East, northeast, west and northwest aspect descents of 250-300m from the central peak and the saddle to the west.

There are open east aspect slopes of 200m from the west ridge. The saddle on the west ridge offers access to the eastern part of **Saqi** sub-basin.

SAQI SUB-BASIN

Saqi is the largest of the four sub-basins, with a lake nearly 200m long. Saqi is described here in three sections, east, west and south. From the lowest confluence, take the right/west fork and ascend the drainage for 3km, passing **Sia Qoda** and **Khak Batak** sub-basins along the way. At 3km, look right/north to **Saqi North**. Continue west up the drainage to 3.75km and look left/south to **Saqi East**. Continue to 4.5km, to **Saqi West**.

Saqi North – Two southeast aspect descents of 900-1000m run from two peaks on the northwest ridge of the basin. The saddles just east of each peak offer

access into neighbouring Jawkar Valley to the west. South of the two peaks described above is a third peak (4680m) with 800m east aspect descents.

Saqi East – The east ridge is dominated by a 4380m peak with a 500m north/northeast descent to the valley. The descent ends in a series of short chutes. West aspect descents of 150m run from the east ridge. The saddle on the ridge also offers access to **Khak Batak**. The prominent rounded Pk.4425m to the southeast offers 175m north aspect descents down the face. To the west on the south ridge, a 4450m peak offers east aspects descents of 200m.

Saqi West – The views south to Behsud are a highlight of Saqi West. From any high point, look southwest to the prominent Pk. 4700m on the Behsud side of the mountains. Saqi West also offers a descent into Jawkar Valley. The pyramid peak above the lake to the southeast (4450m, shared with Saqi East) offers a 225m descent along a snow strip from the top that descends east, then north down to the moraine above the lake.

The next peak, Pk. 4545m, to the west along the south ridge offers east and north aspect descents of 225-250m. The col northwest of Pk. 4545 offers west aspect descents and access to Behsud. North of the col, there are 300m northeast and southeast aspect descents from a high point (4630m) along the ridge. The ridge continues to ascend north to the prominent Pk. 4700m. There are east and south aspect descents of 400m from Pk. 4700m. The col just below this peak to the east also offers access to a chute descending into the east of Jawkar. There are additional south aspect descents of 300m from the northwest ridge.

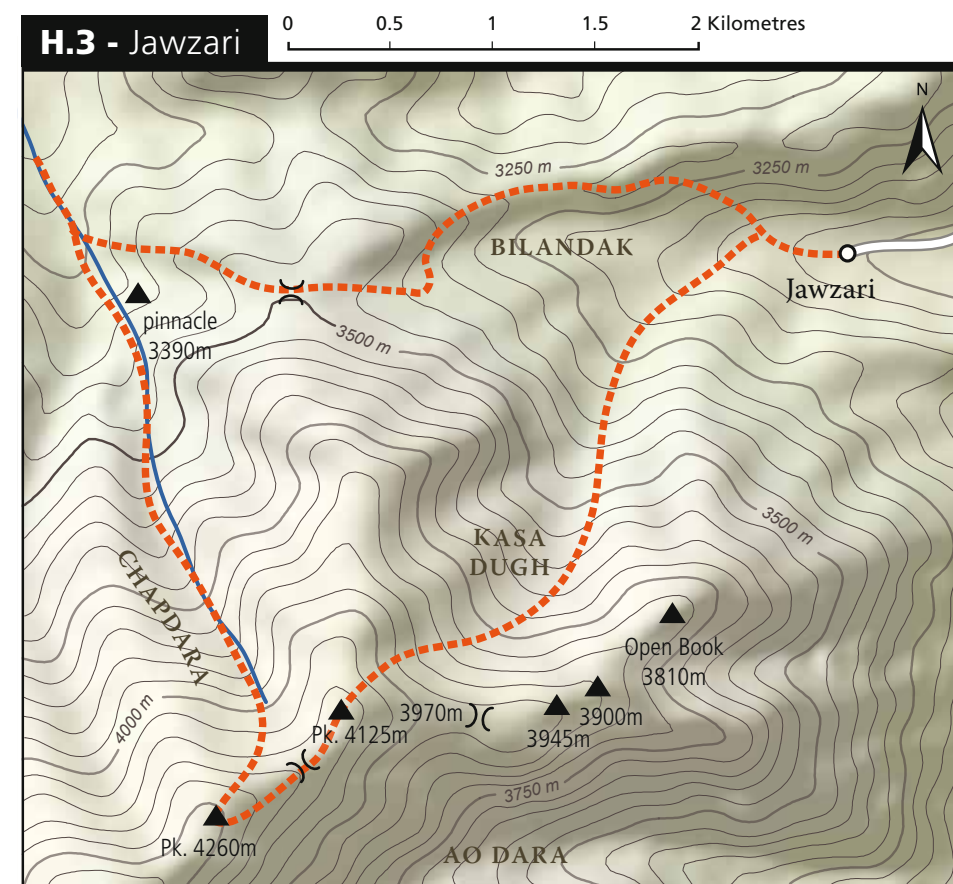


Saqi North, the Koh ba Koh path between Sar-e-Dukani and Jawkar basins

JAWZARI

Kasa Dugh (“Bowl of Dugh”), the main drainage above Jawzari, provides access to some of the best low-elevation expert terrain in the range, including an inviting slope that residents explain as looking like an open book. There are also good options for loops or point-to-point skis from Jawzari to Chapdara and Sar-e-Dukani. Beginner and intermediate skiers have lots of options in lower Kasa Dugh as well as the Bilandak area. There are good views of the options in Jawzari from the ridge above Khushkak. The terrain in Jawzari is generally too steep for cross-country skiing.

Jawzari's 28 households are nestled in a sunny east-facing valley below the outstretched east arm of Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja. Residents claim their village is the first in the Koh-e-Baba to receive the morning sun. They boast of their ample harvests and their ability to grow grapes, despite living above 3000m. Besides being excellent farmers, the people of Jawzari also have a deep knowledge of local snow and avalanche conditions. Be sure to ask their opinion before heading out to the slopes.



APPROACH

From the end of the road in Jawzari village, continue west up the drainage on a path along the creek. Less than a kilometre from the end of the road, just below the houses on the bluff, is the bottom of Kasa Dugh, a large drainage on the left/south. Continue straight/west, staying to the right/north of the houses on the bluff, to reach the Bilandak area.

KASA DUGH

From the valley junction, continue south up Kasa Dugh as the valley gently rises and slowly curves to the southwest. At 0.6km from the junction is the turn to Open Book, to the left/east. At 1km from the junction is the beginning of the ascent to High Point 3990m on the west ridge. At 1.4km is the beginning of the ascent to High Point 3810m on the east ridge. At 1.7km is the beginning of the ascent to High Point 3900m, also on the east ridge. From here the valley bends further to the right/southwest. At 2km, to the left/south is a col (3970m) providing access

to Ao Dara. To the right/northwest is the beginning of the ascent to Pk.4125m. Continue southwest up the ridge that lies north of the col, towards Pk.4125m. At 2.75km from the Kasa Dugh valley junction, arrive at another col with access to Chapdara and Ao Dara.

Open Book – Turn up this drainage just before the large rocky toe of the ridge meets the valley. The drainage narrows and then opens up to a wide slope with a distinct gully running down the middle. Routes to the summit vary, depending on snow conditions. The ridges on either side are rocky and can be difficult to navigate. There is a nice 500m north aspect descent from the scenic 3810m high point.

High Point 3990m – Descents from the west ridge 500m to the valley bottom.

High Point 3810m – Descents from the east ridge 300m to the valley bottom.

Pk.3900m – Descents from the east ridge 300m to the valley bottom.

YAKH MOLAK: SLEDDING ACROSS CULTURES

Afghans are famous for drinking tea. Even the poorest households have teapots, teacups and serving trays to host guests for an afternoon drink. In the Central Highlands, a tradition almost as deeply rooted as that of drinking tea is the other activity people do with serving trays: sledding. From the first snows of winter until the last patches of snow melt in the spring, boys and girls in every village use the family serving tray—or just about any other flat, slippery object they can find—to climb up and slide down mountains, an activity called *yakh molak*.

The distinctive culture of the Hazarajat and the unique landscape of the Koh-e-Baba can make this place seem quite foreign for visitors. Watching or participating in *yakh molak* will make you feel right at home.



Girls sledding in the Koh-e-Baba.

Col (3970m) providing access to Ao Dara – 900m descent on a southeast slope from the col into the Ao Dara drainage of Sar-e-Dukani. 280m descent to the Kasa Dugh valley bottom. Beware of cornices on the ridge.

Pk.4125m – Descents 280m to valley bottom.

Access to Chapdara (with option for loop) – From the col at the top of Kasa Dugh, you can descend directly into the Shir Beg area of Chapdara, or traverse southwest for 0.8km to Pk. 4260m and beyond. Descend one of the options northwest into the Chapdara valley below. Once in Chapdara, continue to descend north towards the village of Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara (“Top Village of Chapdara”). To loop back to Jawzari, ski down to a natural pinnacle (3390m) on the right/east near the junction with another fork of the valley to the west. From the pinnacle, descend another 0.5km to the first drainage you see entering from the right/east (3260m). Ascend this drainage for

1km to the saddle at the top of Bilandak and descend back to Jawzari village.



Descending the south ridge above Bilandak



Open Book and Kasa Dugh drainage

BILANDAK

Bilandak offers gentle slopes, easy access over a low ridge to Chapdara, a sunny south-facing slope that is often clear for hikers and steep north aspect descents from a rugged south ridge. From the valley junction just west of Jawzari village where the Bilandak and Kasa Dugh valleys divide, continue west up the main valley for 0.8km. Turn to the left/south to reach the **south ridge**. Continue west up the valley 1.75km from the junction to the **saddle** (3530m) that connects to Chapdara.

South Ridge – From the valley, ascend south-southwest along a distinct sub-ridge up to a band of rocky outcroppings (3575m). Travel through the rocky outcroppings and continue as the sub-ridge ascends more steeply to the main ridge (3750m). From where the sub-ridge meets the main ridge, descend to the northeast or travel southwest up the main ridge to a bowl for a descent further west.



The south ridge
above Bilandak

Saddle – Descend east back down the 20-25° slopes to Jawzari village. Alternatively, descend west down a slightly steeper slope to Chapdara.

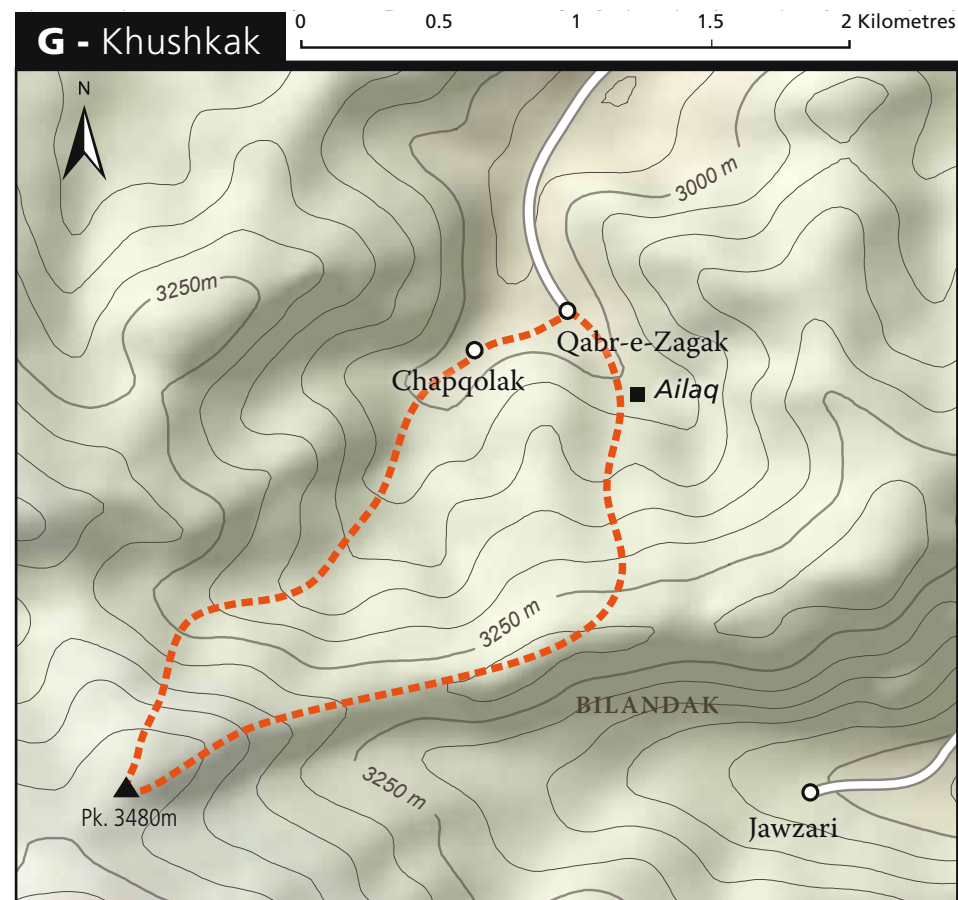
OTHER POTENTIAL DESCENTS

Directly south of Jawzari village there is a low slope and a higher peak that offer descents right down to the village. Given the potential for an avalanche triggered on these slopes to harm the village, skiing them would only be appropriate under very stable conditions.

KHUSHKAK

Khushkak Valley offers the closest skiing and snowshoeing to Bamyan town. It is possible to be at the top of a 320m descent within two hours, including the drive and the climb. The trade-off is that the access points are further from the main peaks of the Koh-e-Baba. If you are interested in climbing and skiing the taller peaks and longer runs of the Koh-e-Baba, you should consider another valley. If the snowline is low and you are interested in skiing shorter runs close to Bamyan town, this valley offers many opportunities. The ridgelines above Khushkak also offer spectacular views of the Jawzari and Chapdara basins and of Koh-e-Allah. If you're considering those options, a scouting trip to Khushkak will help inform your choice of approaches and runs.

The upper villages in Khushkak valley are 11.5km from the Bamyan bazaar roundabout and can be reached in 30-35 minutes. The valley is generally wide and is not prone to closure by avalanche debris. If the snowline is very low, the entire Khushkak Valley makes for a convenient and scenic cross-country ski.



DRIVING DIRECTIONS

From the roundabout at the western end of the main Bamyān bazaar, drive south-east up the hill, then curve back west on the paved road towards Sar-e-Asiab village (Bamyān's "upper town"). At the top of the hill, go left/south at a second roundabout with the statue of the former Hazara Mujahid commander, Abdul Ali Mazari.

Pass the compounds of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) at an intersection 200 metres south of the Mazari roundabout. Continue straight/south towards the airstrip. 30m before reaching the airstrip checkpoint, turn left-east onto a dirt road that runs parallel to the airstrip. After 300 metres, this road bends to the right/south around the eastern edge of the airstrip and heads south towards the Koh-e-Baba. Drive along the plateau with a major north-south drainage on the left/east. This is the Khushkak Valley.

Pass the fortified base of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), manned by New Zealand forces, on the right/west. You will also notice many newly constructed government buildings on the right/west, just beyond the PRT. A cemetery with numerous martyrs' graves is enclosed by a rock wall on the left/east. One kilometre past the airstrip, the road drops down into the Khushkak Valley. Near the bottom of the valley the road forks. Continue straight/south to go to Khushkak. Continue 5km to the junction of the Qabr-e-Zagak and Khushkak roads. Drop down and go straight/south to continue to Qabr-e-Zagak ("Zagak's Grave").

QABR-E-ZAGAK

From the end of the road in Qabr-e-Zagak village, go southeast up the drainage for 300m to a divide. Enter the drainage on the right/south just past an *ailaq* camp

(3010m). Gain the ridge to the east of the drainage and follow it due south for 750m to the main east-west ridge (3330m). From the ridge there are excellent views of the mountains and descents around Jawzari. Descend to the village, or ski west along the ridge for more views and descent options north back to the valley. From where you first meet the ridge, continue for 2km to **Pk. 3480m** with further views into Chapdara Valley.

PK.3480

From the peak, drop into the north-facing gully for great turns. Descend 350m to the

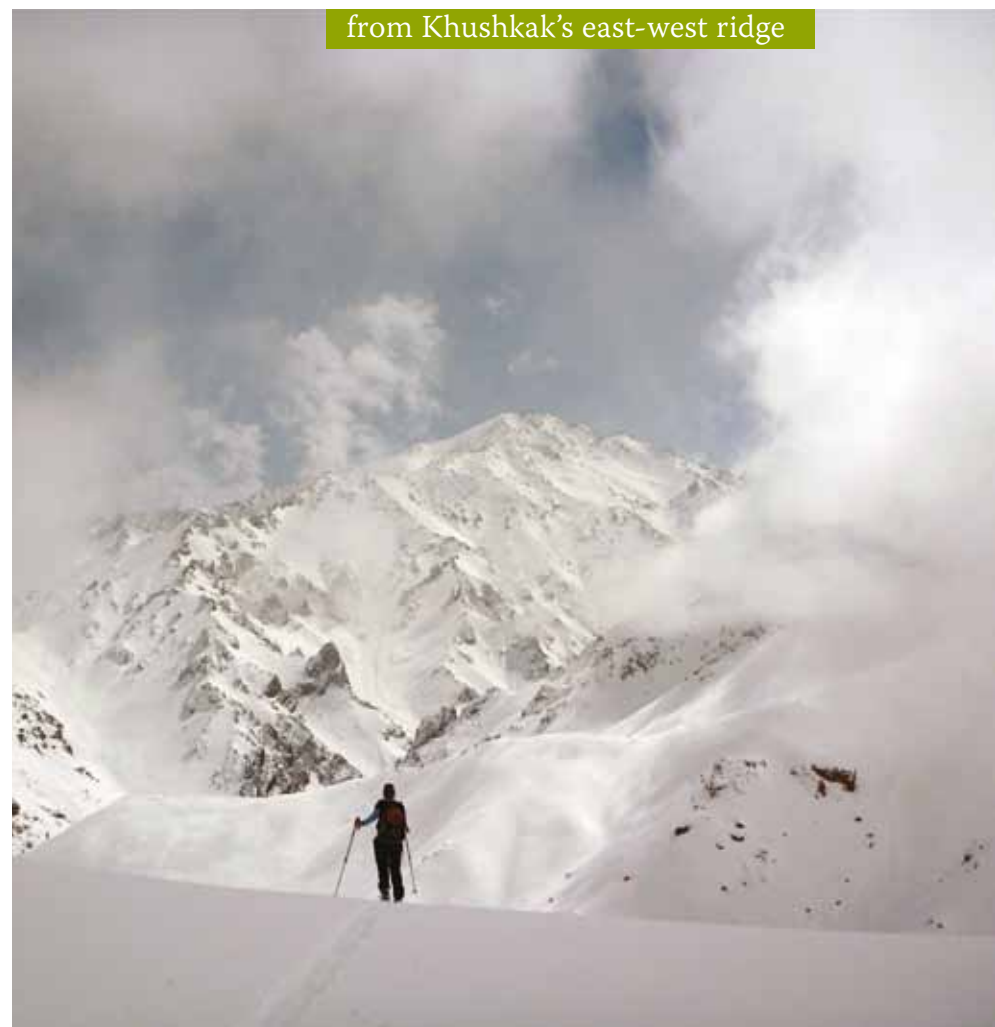
valley bottom. Traverse east occasionally to stay above the valley bottom for more turns as the valley descends.

View of Koh-e-Allah

from Khushkak's east-west ridge



Powder day on Khushkak's east-west ridge

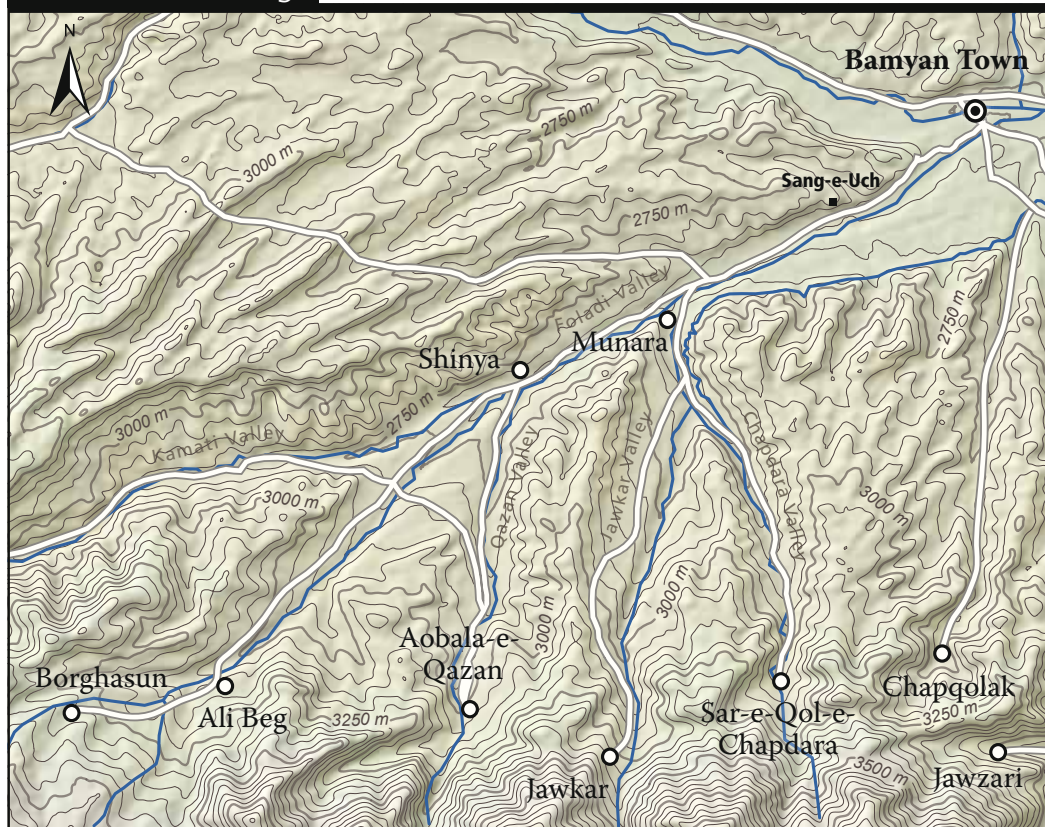


« FOLADI VALLEY

Chapdara 71 »» Jawkar 76 »» Qazan 83 »» Ali Beg 88 »»
Borghasun 93 »»

A - Foladi Driving

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Kilometres



The Foladi River is fed by six major tributaries that originate below the glaciated, jagged crest of the Koh-e-Baba. The highest villages on these tributaries—Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara, Jawkar, Aobala-e-Qazan, Ali Beg, Borghasun and Kamati—are the access points for skiing this part of the Koh-e-Baba. Above these villages there are nearly endless options to explore.

Ali Beg and Borghasun from the
bottom of Foladi Valley



The Foladi River feeds into the main Bamyán Valley near the Buddha niches. In Nancy Dupree's history of Bamyán (published in 1964), she explains that in the era in which the Buddhas were carved (6th and 7th centuries AD), the valley was home to "a bustling city [that] served the commercial needs of caravan and convent." The importance of the valley is shown by the remnants of colourful wall and ceiling frescoes in the dozens of lantern-roofed caves that adorn the cliffs at the entrance to Foladi Valley.

Today, the Foladi Valley is full of agricultural activity for much of the year. Poplar trees line the river and canals. Potato and wheat dominate the fields, along with barley and alfalfa. Vegetables, some grown in mud-walled or iron-frame greenhouses, are also gaining a foothold.

The main Foladi Valley is wide and sun-exposed. The road is not normally closed by avalanches, and snow often melts off the road rather quickly. (Beware of the mud in spring). The road can be impassable immediately after heavy snowfalls however. Villagers along the entire way usually clear the road of snow if the sun doesn't do it first.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

From the main Bamyān bazaar roundabout, drive west over the concrete bridge. Go around the second roundabout immediately over the small concrete bridge and turn left/southwest on the Foladi Valley road. Pass the Silk Road Hotel on your left 200 metres along this road. At a little over a kilometre, turn left/southwest again at a junction. Pass by Tajik village and through the often-muddy roads in Tar Nawa (“Wet Valley”). On the right, stretching for almost two kilometres, you will see the time-worn cliff caves used by Buddhist monks over a millennium ago and now marking the mouth of the Foladi Valley. At the western end of the cliff area is a rock spire called Sang-e-Uch (“Tower Stone”). 5.75km from the bazaar roundabout, on the left/south, is a concrete bridge. This is the turning to the Sadat Valley, which leads to the Chapdara and Jawkar Valleys. (See *Chapdara and Jawkar chapters*.)

Just after this junction, on the left is a small village called Munara (“Minaret”), named after the crumbling mudbrick tower on the ridge above the village. Further up the ridge are three green flags identifying a martyr’s grave. Even further up the ridge stands a mobile phone telecoms tower, providing a modern counterpoint to the ancient tower.

10km from the bazaar the road passes through the village of Shinya. A lumber mill and dozens of vendors’ shops line the road though the village. You will also notice a two-storey mosque and madrassa (Islamic school) on the left/southeast. Just past the madrassa is the turning to the Qazan Valley on the left/southeast. (See *Qazan chapter*.) Less than a kilometre past the Qazan Valley turning, climb up a switchback onto a ridge. Pass a school on the right/northwest at the top of the switchback. Continue up the main road through numerous villages. Pass a mobile phone tower immediately on the right/northwest, 12km from the main Bamyān bazaar roundabout.



Donkeys enjoy powder days too

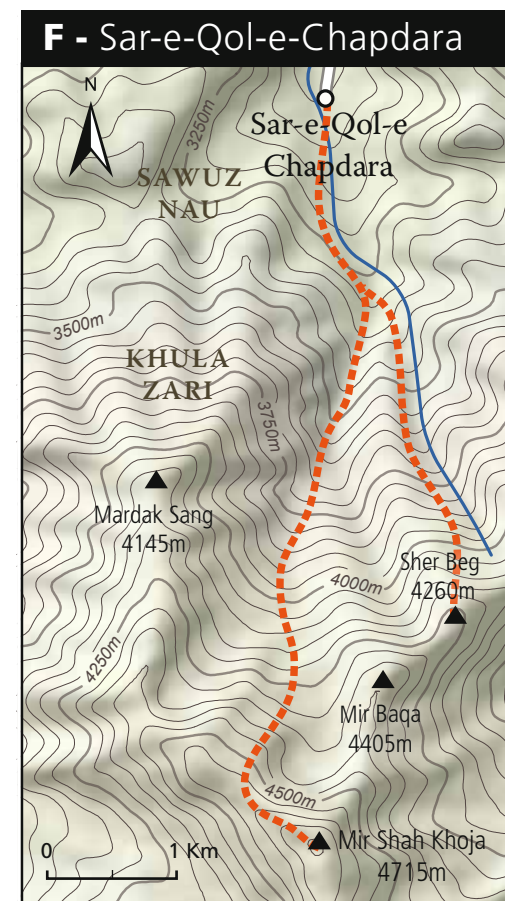
At the 13km point, you will pass the turn to Kamati Valley through a small bazaar on the right/northwest. Continue along the main road and go right/northwest at the junction at 14.5km. Continue to another junction at 17km and turn left/southwest towards Ali Beg and Borghasun. Just past the junction, look south for good views of the Ali Beg and Borghasun areas. Drop down from the ridge and, 18km from the Bamyān bazaar, you will

cross a bridge. Ali Beg village (see *Ali Beg chapter*) is just across the bridge. Continue uphill to the right/west from the Ali Beg bridge, cross a stream and continue further uphill to a bridge in Borghasun (see *Borghasun chapter*) next to a yellow schoolhouse (19km from Bamyān bazaar). In winter, this is probably the end of the road for vehicles (3210m). If the road is clear, it is possible to continue along it another kilometre or so.

CHAPDARA

Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja towers over Chapdara (“Left Valley”). Its broad wing-like ridges dominate the skyline south of Bamyān town and its rocky summit is a prominent landmark from vantage points throughout the Koh-e-Baba. Summiting Mir Shah Khoja (4750m) is one of the highlights of skiing the Koh-e-Baba, but there are many other options in the Chapdara area that offer easy access to rewarding views and to descents to match almost any desire. The lower-elevation options can be skied in two to four hours. The approaches up the main drainage and Sawuz Nau (“Green Valley”) offer cross-country skiing and snowshoe options.

Chapdara Valley is the easternmost drainage of the larger Foladi Valley. The Chapdara and Jawkar valleys converge before meeting the Foladi River; together they are referred to as the Sadat Valley. The uppermost village, and the access point for skiing the Chapdara area, is Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara, (3075m). The village lies at the confluence of the Chapdara and Sawuz Nau creeks. The village mosque sits on the ridge between the two drainages and is a good vantage point for scouting the surrounding terrain.



In 2007, a major avalanche thundered down the main Chapdara creek drainage, destroying houses and a bridge, and killing seven people in Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara. A new bridge has since been built and is known locally as Pul-e-Barf Kuch (“Avalanche Bridge”). Remains of the old bridge can still be seen in the creek.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

(See *Foladi Valley driving directions*.) Cross left/south over the concrete bridge into the Sadat Valley 5.75km from the Bamyan bazaar. The road bends immediately right/west. After 300m an ancient tower (known locally as a minaret, or *munara*) will come into view. Higher on the ridge are green flags marking a martyr's grave. Even higher on the ridge, providing an interesting modern contrast to the old tower, is a mobile phone tower. In the valley below the minaret, at the confluence of the streams flowing from Chapdara and from the Jawkar/Bamsarai area, is a village called Doabi ("Two Waters"). 500m from the bridge, the road veers south. Follow this road south along Chapdara creek for 8km. Bear left at two major junctions, at 2km and 2.5km respectively from the Foladi road turning. (The right turns both lead to Jawkar). Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja and surrounding peaks making up the Chapdara area are in full view for much of the drive. Along the way, pass through the villages of Qala-e-Amag, Qala-e-Zawar and Qala-e-Mena. (Qala means "fortress" or "fortified house.") Near the head of the valley, high on the western ridge, stand the remains of an ancient tower known locally as Qala-e-Kafiri ("Pagans' Castle"—sites described as *kafir*, or "pagan," are usually those which local people believe date from before the area's conversion to Islam.). At 8km is Pul-e-Barf Kuch (Avalanche Bridge), the highest stopping point for a vehicle (3075m).

MIR SHAH KHOJA APPROACH

From Pul-e-Barf Kuch (Avalanche Bridge), follow the main creek south, upstream, into the major valley draining Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja. You will pass the uppermost houses in the valley on the left/east within 100m distance. On the right/west, less than a kilometre from the bridge you will reach the toe of an east-west ridge that leads

APRÈS-TEA?

"It's a fair bet that Bamyan's après-ski scene will never boast beery Brits, downing glühwein at the bottom of the chairlifts as the sun sets over the mountains. Instead it's chai, and maybe some rice, naan and greasy meat on the roof of a farmer's house.... [T]he "après-tea" experience [is] worth a holiday in itself. First of all, the scenery is extraordinary. Below the snowy peaks, farmers living in mud houses busily plough their fields with ox teams. The sense of time travel is only broken with the occasional sighting of a satellite dish, a sign that, after years of neglect, things are starting to pick up here. And that is the other benefit of skiing in Bamyan – contributing much-needed cash to subsistence farmers in the high, isolated valleys of a poor and neglected province..."

From The Guardian, "The New Hot Place to Ski," 27 April, 2010



Enjoying a late spring après-tea experience in Kalu.

to the main north-south ridge extending to Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja. This east-west ridge is one of the access points for **Khula Zari**. Continue past this ridge to a towering rock outcrop which divides the valley (3320m; 1.5km from bridge). To the left/east of this outcrop is a rock spire. Pass between these prominent features up the left/southeast drainage to reach the runs on **Koh-e-Sher Beg** ("Sher Beg's Mountain"), the area northeast of Sherbeg and an



Breaking trail along the approach to Mir Shah Khoja

access route to Jawzari. Take the right/west drainage past the divide to reach all other options in the area. Just past the divide, the bottom of a descent **south of Khula Zari** lies on the right/west. This slope is a possible ascent route but with avalanche exposure. Continue up the main drainage through a narrow gully. (Note that this gully is a terrain trap with avalanche danger from the slopes on both sides.) 0.5km from the divide on the right/west is a slope leading to the descents **south of Khula Zari**. To the left/east is a possible alternative ridge route to **Koh-e-Sher Beg**. Continuing south, the gully widens as it leads to the junction (3560m) a little over 1km past the initial divide. At the junction, the wide left/southeast drainage leads to **Koh-e-Mir Baqa** while the main drainage continues right/southwest. As you continue to ascend the main drainage, there are three drainages on the right/west that offer a variety of skiing options. The upper two drainages join before meeting the main

drainage. Continue up the main drainage for a kilometre to the toe of a sub-ridge running southwest to the main west ridge. Ascend this ridge for access to the **upper west ridge**. Continue beyond to reach the summit of **Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja**.



Looking towards the gateway to Sher Beg

KHULA ZARI

Ascend the east-west ridge on the right/west side of the valley up through a series of rock outcroppings. Arrive at the high point just below the uppermost outcrop (3690m). From this high point there are two options for descents. One option is to ski the north-northeast aspect bowl on the north side of the ridge. The other option is to descend via the approach ridge. The ridge has a northeast aspect that holds snow and is a safer ski than the avalanche-prone bowl. Both runs descend to Chapdara creek. Upper slopes in the bowl and on the ridge are 35°. Lower slopes decrease to 20°.

KOH-E-SHER BEG AND AREAS NORTHEAST

Go southeast between the rock outcropping and the rock spire on the left. There is an immediate divide. Go left/east to access the northeast areas. Go right/southeast to access Koh-e-Sher Beg and the pass to Jawzari. Both have numerous options for ascents and descents.



Skiing below a dramatic
pinnacle at the base of Sher Beg

SOUTH OF KHULA ZARI

Ascend west up the slope to a sub-ridge which connects to the main west ridge of Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja. Continue to the main west ridge, or descend off the sub-ridge to the north or south. The sub-ridge meets the main ridge at 3900m. One drainage to the south and two drainages to the north descend from this high point, all offering excellent turns on 35° slopes. The north drainages merge at a midway point and descend more gradually to Chapdara Creek.

KOH-E-MIR BAQA

From the junction at 3560m, go left/southeast and ascend the Koh-e-Mir Baqa drainage. Ascending via the ridges on either side is probably the safest option, although rock outcroppings may make this difficult at points. A large northwest-facing snowfield below the Koh-e-Mir Baqa summit appears to offer excellent skiing.

UPPER WEST RIDGE

Ascend the sub-ridge to the west until it meets the main west ridge of Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja at a high point (4560m). There are a few 250m descents (40°-plus at the top) on the north aspect slope. There are lower-angle north aspect descents on the lower/east part of this sub-ridge. After the initial descent, continue down to the main drainage on wide-open lower-angle slopes.

KOH-E-MIR SHAH KHOJA

Continue 0.5km past the toe of the sub-ridge to another sub-ridge on the right/west. The craggy summit of Mir Shah Khoja is visible due south. Ascend the sub-ridge west, staying right of the rocky point, to a saddle (4605m). Looking south from

the saddle there are views of the Jawkar back basin. To the west are Qazan, Ali Beg and Borghasun and to the north is the Bamyan Valley. The final ridge to the summit will probably be windswept and rocky. There are steep descents below the final rocky ridge and summit down the highest part of the basin. These may be difficult to reach through rocks and cornices. Alternatively, traverse northwest 300m back to the **upper west ridge**.



Laying fresh tracks down

Khula Zari

KHULA ZARI, SOUTH OF MOSQUE APPROACH

South of the Chapdara mosque lies a ridge with a shallow bowl to the east leading to Khula Zari. From the west side of Chapdara creek at Pul-e-Barf Kuch (Avalanche Bridge), follow village paths west 100m up a slope to the Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara mosque. Ascend the ridge directly south of the mosque 1.5km to the top of a shallow northeast aspect bowl (3650m). Continue



Local children cheer on
skiers from atop the mosque
in Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara



Descending Mir Shah

Khoja's west ridge

southeast across the top of the bowl to an east-west ridge. Ascend the ridge to the base of a large rock outcropping (3690m). See descent options under **Khula Zari**.

SAWUZ NAU

Just below Pul-e-Barf Kuch (Avalanche Bridge) lies the bottom of the smaller Sawuz Nau Valley to the west. This area offers short cross-country skiing options and some intermediate level ascents/descents. Beware of avalanche danger.

JAWKAR

Jawkar provides easy access to good skiing next to the village, including some beginner's slopes. The valley south of the village leads to a dramatic back basin. The skiing around the village can be reached in ascents of one to three hours, while the back basin is worth spending numerous days exploring. Like the neighbouring back basin of Sar-e-Dukani, the Jawkar back basin has many options for scenic touring and skiing intermediate to extreme terrain. From the ridges and high points ringing the basin there are spectacular views into the Sar-e-Dukani and Qazan back basins to the east and west, Behsud to the south, and to mountains throughout the range. The basin offers numerous opportunities for loops and traverses, including access to Sar-e-Dukani, Behsud, Qazan and routes between the sub-basins. The approach to the back basin is a good cross-country ski route, although some steep sections require switchbacking.

The people of Jawkar are perhaps most adamant about their love of *yakh molak* (sledding) and other winter activities. Despite the difficulties of living above 3100m in rugged terrain, elders in Jawkar speak about the importance of balancing work, education and entertainment. Whether they are sledding, making snowmen, organising running races in the snow or hosting parties to celebrate the first snow of the year, the people of Jawkar know how to have fun in winter.

At 3175m, the village of Jawkar is among the highest elevation villages in the Koh-e-Baba. Snow may block the road to Jawkar for much of the winter, requiring an additional walk of 1-3km.

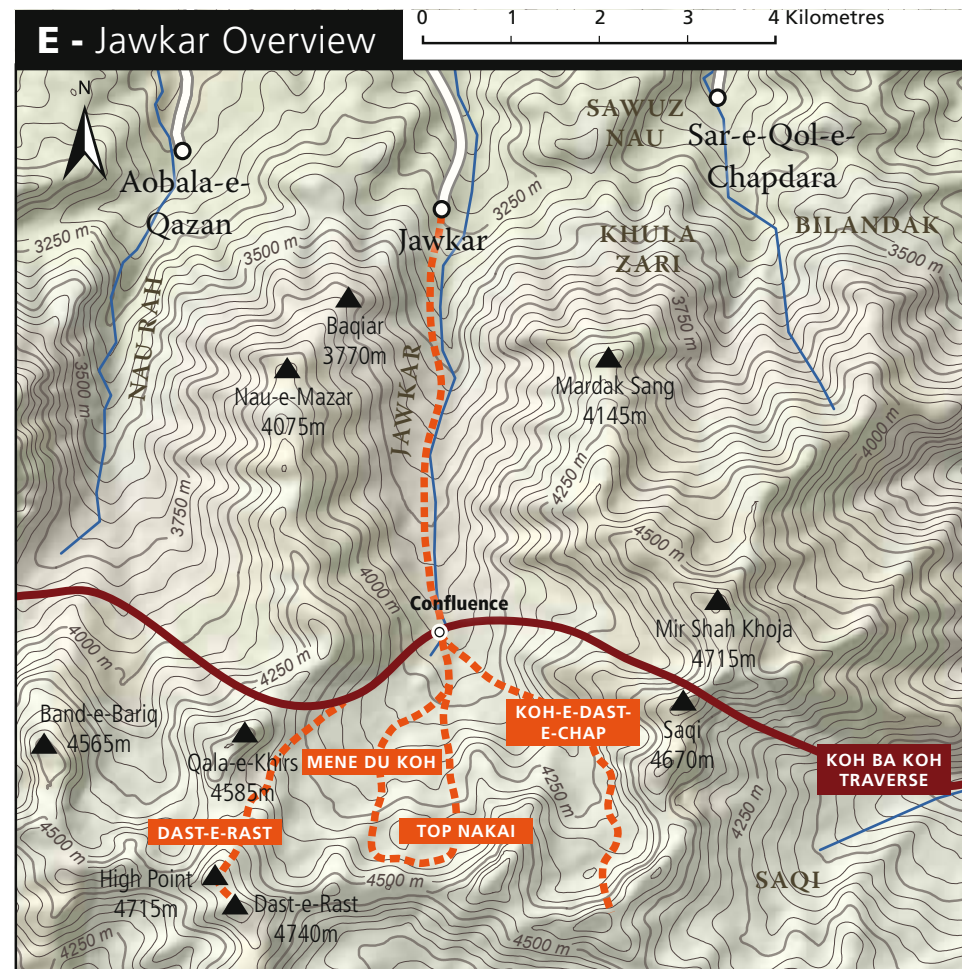


An ideal spring campsite
in Jawkar basin

A PEOPLE'S PARK

The Koh-e-Baba's scenic quality, diverse plant and animal life, provision of environmental benefits, and, most importantly, the intimate relationship between people and nature make this special place worthy of protection. The government of Afghanistan, with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme and local communities, is currently working towards designating a protected area in Bamyan's Koh-e-Baba. The proposed protected area aims to promote the sustainable use of natural resources critical both for local people's livelihood and for the villages downstream that depend on the Koh-e-Baba as a water source.

The protected area is envisioned as a working landscape—as it has been for millennia—but with a greater focus on restoring ecosystem functions, reducing the impacts of climate change and ensuring that resources are not compromised for future generations. To date, village and government representatives have established a protected area committee, villages have initiated natural resource management projects and various stakeholders have begun planning for future tourism that will benefit local communities. On your trip to Bamyan you could be skiing in Afghanistan's next protected area.



DRIVING DIRECTIONS

(See *Foladi Valley driving directions*.) Cross left/south over the concrete bridge to Sadat valley 5.75km from the Bamyan bazaar. The road veers immediately right/west. After 300m an ancient tower (known locally as a minaret, or *munara*) will come into view. Higher on the ridge are green flags marking a martyr's grave. Even higher on the ridge, providing an interesting modern contrast to the old tower, is a mobile phone telecoms tower. The road bends south 500m past the bridge. Follow this road south along the river. At 2km from the concrete bridge lies the village of Doabi and the turning to Jawkar. Turn right/southwest to Jawkar, cross the river and climb up to a plateau on the west side of the main valley. 4km after the turning to Jawkar, the road switchbacks to the left/east and ascends to a higher plateau. The road continues to climb until, 6km from the turning, it descends past a mosque and a popular spring and, 8km from the turning, arrives at the village of Jawkar. In winter, the road is often inaccessible to vehicles for the last 1-3km.

EAST OF JAWKAR VILLAGE, MARDAK SANG

From the eastern edge of Jawkar village, go 200m east to the base of Mardak Sang mountain. Mardak Sang means "Little Man Rock." Look for the "little man" standing on the east side of the west descent near the top. The mountain, 4145m, is the northern extent of the north-south ridge

which defines the east side of the Jawkar valley. Looking up from the base, you will see two chutes descending from the top and joining near the bottom. To reach the descent closest to the village, ascend 2.25km south-southeast (from 200m east of the village) and 850m in elevation to the top of Mardak Sang. Ascend up the bottom of the drainage or, alternatively, begin your ascent 100m further to the east through a rock band and up the ridge to the east of the descent. The descent has a north aspect. East of Mardak Sang is a second descent similar to the one described above. People in Jawkar say that Mardak Sang usually avalanches once each year.

WEST OF JAWKAR VILLAGE

When approaching Jawkar village, the road passes between a mosque on the left/east and a spring on the right/west. 0.5km after the mosque, look for a drainage ascending to the right/west. This drainage leads to the high point called Baqiar (3770m) west of Jawkar village. Baqiar is a rocky outcropping on the northern extent of the north-south ridge defining the west side of the Jawkar valley. From the road, climb 2.5km and 650m to the high point. (*Alternate Approach:* from Jawkar village, ascend the ridge to the west and climb 2km to Baqiar.) The north aspect descent falls 600m from Baqiar to above the road. It is possible to continue ascending the ridge to the high point between Jawkar and Aobala-e-Qazan in order to access runs in Qazan Valley or east and west descents further south on the ridge.

JAWKAR BACK BASIN

From Jawkar village, stay on the right/west side of the creek and walk on paths through the southern part of the village. Continue up the main valley, which is called Sar Dara ("Head of the Valley"), and the creek, called



Dast-e-Rast sub-basin and
the route to Behsud

Darya-e-Jawkar ("Jawkar River"). When travelling through the valley, stay on the benches or ledges on the right/west side of the creek. Climb gradually through the valley for 6km until the valley opens up into a large basin and you have good views to the east, south and west. As you near the main basin, you can see flags marking a martyr's grave from the Taliban era on a hill on the east side of the creek. Continue 0.5km past this site to the confluence of creeks from three of Jawkar's four sub-basins. Throughout the approach, there are numerous descent options from both the east and west ridges of the valley. 600-800m chutes descend from the east ridge at 2km, 3km and 4km past the village. Access to these chutes is up the descent route or possibly from the adjoining ridges. Gentler slopes (25-30°) descend from the west ridge throughout the valley.

In the Jawkar basin, four main sub-basins rise to the main crest of the Koh-e-Baba

range: **Koh-e-Dast-e-Chap** ("Left-Hand Mountain"), **Top Nakai**, **Mene Du Koh** ("Between Two Mountains") and **Dast-e-Rast** ("Right Hand"). To the northeast and northwest of these four sub-basins are additional peaks and areas for skiing, including the **area between Mir Shah Khoja and Saqi and Qala-e-Khirs** ("Bear's Castle"). There is also a "mini-basin" between Koh-e-Dast-e-Chap and Top Nakai sub-basins. Skiing options are described below, from east to west. Numerous camping options exist throughout the valley and in the basin. 6km from the village is one good option (34°40'4.61"N, 67°45'39.60"E, 3960m).

Ascents described below begin from the confluence of the two creeks that drain the Top Nakai sub-basin and the Mene Du Koh and Dast-e-Rast sub-basins (3900m). From this point, there are great views of the many skiing possibilities in the Jawkar back basin.

Powder day in Jawkar



AREA BETWEEN MIR SHAH KHOJA AND SAQI

In the northeast part of the main basin between Mir Shah Khoja and Saqi peaks there are 300-400m descents off the ridges of both peaks onto a bench or ledge with further descents below. Descents include chutes and faces with south, west and north aspects. From the col just to the north of Saqi, there is an option to descend east into the Sar-e-Dukani back basin. Also from the col there is ready access to Saqi and a high point to the south.

To the south of Saqi, there is a northwest aspect bowl with 300m descents to a bench and further descents to the valley. On the north side of the bowl (just south of Saqi), a chute ascends north then turns east to a col. This col offers another descent into Sar-e-Dukani basin.

KOH-E-DAST-E-CHAP SUB-BASIN

This is the largest of the four sub-basins, offering a scenic tour and numerous descents. From the confluence, head east/southeast for 1.5km before turning south. On this initial section, pass north of a small "mini-basin" on your right/south. Continue south for another 1.5km to a high point in the back of the sub-basin. Cross a lake (this may not be visible under snow) about two-thirds of the way through this section just before the route gets steeper on the final climb into the back of the sub-basin. From the high point (4365m), look south to a small but impressive glacier. There are numerous options in the back of this sub-basin:

- Shorter descents (200m) from below the rock band on the east ridge.
- Two chute descents (300m) from the top of the south ridge with views east from the top to Sar-e-Dukani and southwest to Behsud. These are also routes to Sar-e-Dukani.

- A chute descent (200m) from the top of the west ridge. This is also a path from Bamyan to Behsud.

- A large southeast- and south-facing slope and chutes (300m) off the west ridge. This ridge also offers access into the next sub-basin to the west.

- Further north on the west ridge there are a few chute descents (250m).

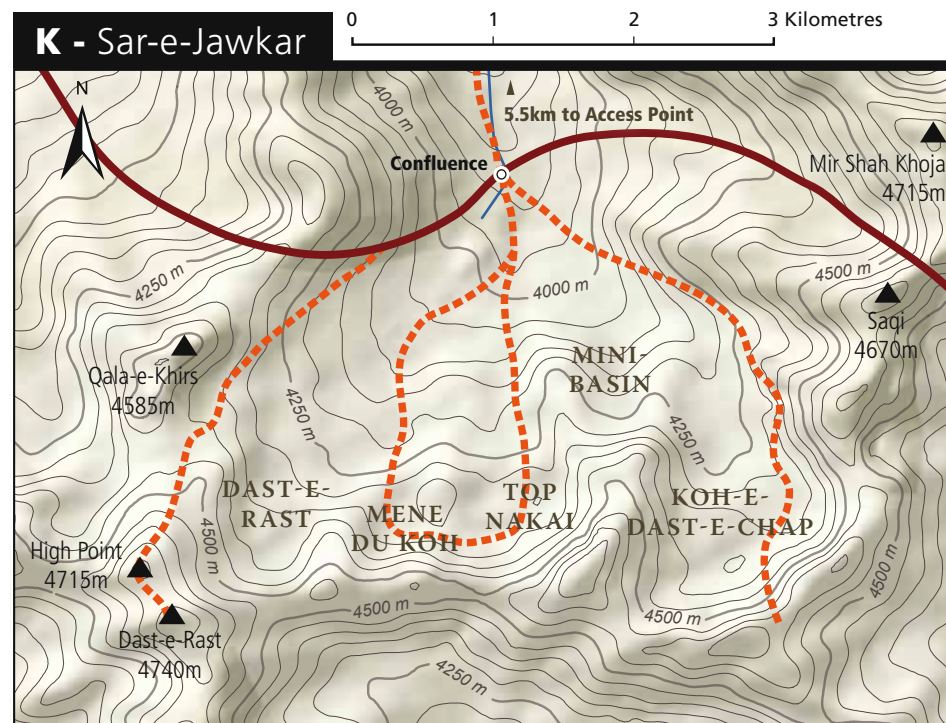
MINI-BASIN BETWEEN KOH-E-DAST-E-CHAP AND TOP NAKAI SUB-BASINS

This area is small but offers a number of good descents. From the confluence, travel 1km southeast to the mini-basin. On the way, pass below the toe of the west ridge of the mini-basin, which extends north from the main ridge of the back basin. The northern extent of this ridge offers a small 200m north-facing bowl just south of the confluence. Options in the mini-basin include gentle slopes along the apron below the rock band of the east ridge; open slopes and two chute descents (300m) off the top of the south ridge (best access may be up the west ridge); and a gentle open slope off the west ridge.



Boot packing up to saddle south of Saqi Peak

K - Sar-e-Jawkar



TOP NAKAI SUB-BASIN

This sub-basin has four lakes, a small glacier and a dramatic chute from the top of the south ridge. From the confluence, travel south and slightly east for 2.25km to a high point west of the lake at the back of the sub-basin (4340m). Descent options include:

- A slope and chute off the east ridge that connects to Koh-e-Dast-e-Chap sub-basin.
- A chute descent (300m) from the top of the east side of the south ridge (views/access to Behsud).
- Numerous descents (250m) along the south ridge up to the high point at the west end of the south ridge.
- A saddle on the west ridge that connects to Mene Du Koh sub-basin.
- Aprons below the cliff bands that dominate the sub-basin.

MENE DU KOH SUB-BASIN

This sub-basin is the smallest of the four. From the confluence, travel south and slightly west for 2km to the high point south of the lake (4335m). Alternatively, ascend Top Nakai and descend into this basin over the col on the west ridge of Top Nakai. Descent options include:

- A short descent from the col on the east ridge.
- The most dramatic descent in the sub-basin is a narrow chute descending from a notch in the peak on the east side of the south ridge (225m).
- The apron below rock bands of the south ridge.
- Numerous descents off the west ridge (200-250m).

DAST-E-RAST SUB-BASIN

This sub-basin lies northeast of the highest peak in the main basin (4740m). There is a lake just at the base of the south ridge. From the confluence, travel 2.5km south-southwest to the sub-basin. Initially follow the west creek of the confluence southwest, staying on the left/south side. After 1.25km turn south-southwest towards the sub-basin. Access to the west and south ridge descents is possible by ascending the west side of the west ridge up the slope that leads to Dast-e-Rast. (See following description.) Descent options in this sub-basin include:

- From the high point on the north part of the east ridge, two chutes descend to the basin south of the lake.
- Additional descents along the east ridge include chutes from two saddles divided by a rocky outcrop that join and descend to the lake.
- Numerous chutes (150-330m) descend from the south ridge to the lake. The chutes increase in elevation from east to west.
- Three shorter chutes (150m) descend from the west ridge.

DAST-E-RAST ALTERNATIVE AND PATH TO BEHSUD

This route provides non-technical access to Dast-e-Rast (4740m) and follows a footpath from Bamyan to Behsud. The route offers views into Qazan Valley to the west and Behsud to the south. From the confluence, travel southwest along the west drainage of the confluence as it curves south of Qala-e-Khirs. Continue in the drainage until you are beyond the west ridge of the Dast-e-Rast sub-basin (2km from the confluence). From here, turn south and follow the slope up to the west ridge of the Dast-e-Rast sub-basin. At 3.5km from the confluence, you will come to a saddle between Dast-e-Rast to the east and a pyramid high point (4715m) to the

west. Ascend the high point to the west for views into Qazan Valley. From the saddle, continue southeast on the south side of the ridge for 400m to Dast-e-Rast. This section may be windswept and rocky. Descent options include:

- Descend the ascent route with the option to drop into the Dast-e-Rast sub-basin from the chutes on its west ridge.
- Access the chutes at the top and east of Dast-e-Rast into the Dast-e-Rast sub-basin.
- Descend south into Behsud.
- From the west pyramid high point (4715m), traverse southwest 30m to a chute descending to Qazan Valley.

QALA-E-KHIRS

The northwest part of the basin is dominated by Qala-e-Khirs (4580m) and its ridgeline, which divides the Jawkar and Qazan Valleys. The pass to the north of the peak provides easy access between the two valleys. From the confluence, follow the west drainage of the confluence to the southwest for one kilometre before turning northwest and ascending another kilometre to the saddle (4400m) north of the peak. From the saddle there is a sloping descent west into the Qazan Valley. From the saddle, ascend the south side of the northeast ridge of the peak to the summit. The ridge is rocky and will likely require walking in places. Descent options include:

- Descend the ascent route.
- From south of the summit, two chutes descend west to Qazan Valley.

QAZAN

Qazan's two main valleys offer options for long descents from high mountain peaks, cross-country touring through a gorgeous canyon and easy-access turns close to the village. Koh-e-Peshgao in the Amba Valley offers big peaks and long runs from both the east and west ridges and a dramatic run along the bottom of the drainage. The lower section of Amba Valley offers easy access to great descents off Koh-e-Dawa ("Medicine Mountain"). The narrow canyon in Nau Rah Valley leading to the spectacular back basin is an accessible and scenic cross-country ski or snowshoe route. The Nau Rah Valley also offers ski descents from the east ridge south of Nau-e-Mazar. The back basin is expansive and offers more peaks and lakes, and numerous areas to explore first descents.

Aobala-e-Qazan is the uppermost village in the Qazan Valley (3025m). Elders in the village explain that the valley used to be the home of many *qazi* (judges), which gave the valley its name. (Others say such an origin is doubtful.) Considering the number of features in the valley with the name *khirs* (bear) — Qala-e-Khirs, Darya-e-Khirs and Ghar-e-Khirs (Bear Castle, Bear River and Bear Cave) — it seems likely that judges weren't the only inhabitants of Qazan.

In the lower part of the Amba Valley is a mysterious cave, known locally as the "Ice Cave" (*Ghar-e-Yakh*). The cave is cool in summer and warm in the winter. Elaborate ice stalagmites and stalactites can be found inside year round, so the cave is well worth a side trip.



View of Band-e-Bariq from Aobala-e-Qazan village



DRIVING DIRECTIONS

(See *Foladi Valley driving directions*.) Just past the madrassa in Shinya, turn left/southwest towards Qazan. Numerous roads will splinter off; stay on the main road. Within a kilometre of Shinya, the two main basins of Qazan (Nau Rah on the left and Amba on the right) come into view. Continue up the road through five of the six villages of Qazan (Qala-e-Boi, Qala-e-Juru, Qala-e-Golak, Band-e-Bala, Tainah). Keep an eye out for two old caravanserais along the drive. 5.5km from Shinya, on the right/west, you will pass an unusual rock formation called Mar Khana (Snake House) – an outcrop of rich, brownish-purple conglomerate rock with runnels and holes thought to be where the snakes live. Soon after the Snake House, and after passing through the village of Tainah, the road ascends more steeply (and is often snow-covered) and then switchbacks left/northeast towards the village of Aobala-e-Qazan (“High Water of Qazan”). The corner of this switchback is the access point for the Nau Rah and Amba Valleys (2985m, 16km from the bazaar/6.5km from the Foladi Valley turnoff).

NAU RAH APPROACH

From the access point at the switchback, follow a well-worn path west for 50m to a bridge over the creek. Cross the creek to the west side and then turn south and follow the creek upstream for 0.5km to a place where a rocky slope on the right/west comes down to the creek. Cross here to the southeast side of the creek just below the confluence of Nau Rah and Amba Creeks. (In winter there is a snow bridge.) From here you have a good view looking west up the Amba drainage and south up the Nau Rah drainage. In between the two is Koh-e-Dawa (“Medicine Mountain”). At the toe of the ridge leading to Koh-e-Dawa, there are a few *ailaq* houses situated on a bluff just southwest of the confluence, in an area named Nayaspu. From the confluence, stay to the left/east of the houses and follow the Nau Rau creek upstream/south for 0.5km to another *ailaq* house situated close to the creek on the west side. From this *ailaq* house, continue south up Nau Rah creek, crossing the drainage as needed. The rocky massif of Koh-e-Dawa comprises the right/west side of the canyon and is dominated by cliffs on this aspect. The east side of the valley hosts a few 700-800m descents

Looking west across Qazan’s back basin
to the Koh ba Koh pass to Ali Beg



from ridge top to valley. At 3.5km from the access point (3475m), the narrow valley opens into the Nau Rah basin. Here is also the confluence of the two main streams draining the basin.

On the immediate left/east, just as the basin opens, northwest aspect slopes descend from the **east ridge**. Further to the left/southeast is the rocky summit of **Qala-e-Khirs** (Bear Castle) and its snowy apron and northern col, which provides easy access to the Jawkar basin. South and west of Qala-e-Khirs is **Sub-Basin 1**. Situated in the middle of the main basin is the snowy north face of **Band-e-Barik** (“Narrow Hill”). Band-e-Barik is visible from the access point and during most of the ascent up the canyon. To the west of Band-e-Barik, a second sub-basin (**Sub-Basin 2**) sits between Band-e-Barik and the Three Lakes basin of Sar-e-Ali Beg in the neighbouring valley.

The narrow canyon of Nau Rah is a terrain trap with particular avalanche danger from the slopes to the left/east. The cliffs to the right/west are steeper with less avalanche risk, but a few chutes to the right/west may pose a hazard. In unstable conditions this route could be dangerous. Village leaders say that the slopes on the right/east typically slide in late winter or early spring.

Skiing options below are described beginning from the confluence of the basin’s two main streams (3475m).

EAST RIDGE (NORTH OF QALA-E-KHIRS)

From the confluence, ascend the left/east side of the basin for 0.5km to the first descent coming from the east ridge. This northwest aspect descent is 550m. There are three more parallel descents to the south with have similar characteristics.

QALA-E-KHIRS

From the confluence, look southeast to a

rocky peak with a wide north aspect apron below cliff bands. A col (4390m) to the northeast of the peak offers ready access to Jawkar basin. Ski 4km southeast from the confluence to the col, gaining 900m. Qala-e-Khirs can be climbed from this col. There are two north aspect descents (250m) off the peak’s northeast ridge to the bottom of the basin. The peak’s south ridge offers two 350m, west aspect chute descents at over 40°.

SUB-BASIN 1

Sub-Basin 1 can be divided into three areas: central, southeast and southwest. From the confluence, head south between Qala-e-Khirs and Band-e-Barik. Along the way, look right/west at a few east aspect descents of 400-500m falling from the ridge behind/south of Band-e-Barik. At 3.5km, you will arrive in the central area.

Central – A high jagged ridge to the south and low ridges to the east and west define the central area. There are numerous lower slopes on the east and south ridges and two chutes descending from the top of the south ridge.

Southeast – The southeast area is dominated by the southeast peak (4715m) dividing Jawkar, Qazan and Behsud. Numerous chutes of 300-500m descend from the north and west ridges of the peak, offering 40-50° descents on north and west aspects. The most dramatic descent is a north aspect chute immediately west of the summit. On the north end of the north ridge is a col offering a steep (over 40°) access to Jawkar. The west part of the southeast area includes a col which leads to the southwestern area behind/south of the central area described above.

Southwest – The southwest area is dominated by the southwest peak (4635m) dividing Sub-Basin 1 and Behsud. This area offers numerous north, west and east aspect descents of 250m.

BAND-E-BARIK

Band-e-Barik ("Narrow Hill") is a prominent peak in the centre of the main basin which is visible during the drive up Qazan Valley and on the Nau Rah approach. From the confluence, continue climbing through moraines towards the west ridge leading south to the top of the peak. From the bottom of the basin, climb up 1000m over 3.5km to the top of the peak. Above the "skier's summit" (4560m) is a slightly higher summit that requires technical climbing. You can ski down the bowl on 30-35°, north aspect slopes. Towards the bottom of the descent there are options to ski west or east off the lower slopes.

SUB-BASIN 2

Sub-Basin 2 has two lakes, seven peaks over 4500m (two of them over 4700m) and numerous slope and chute descents. From the confluence, travel south then southwest, following the westernmost creek and keeping Band-e-Barik to your left. At 2.75km, arrive at a low ridge trending northeast-southwest which divides the sub-basin. Go left/south of this sub-ridge

to reach the first four descents described below. Go right/northwest of the ridge to reach the last four descents.

- Two chutes off the west ridge of Band-e-Barik offer 300-350m, northwest aspect descents into Sub-Basin 2.
- The southeast peak of Sub-Basin 2 offers 250-300m descents off the north and west ridges to the lake below.
- The south ridge of the basin extending west from the southeast peak has a 4630m peak and a series of north aspect descents of 200-250m. A dog-leg chute descends from the top of the peak on the northeast aspect. The peak's northwest aspect offers open slopes.
- The far southwest peak of the basin (4685m) offers east aspect descents and access to the Three Lakes area of Sar-e-Ali Beg.
- The peak in the centre of the west ridge (4695m) offers 250m, south, east and north aspect descents onto either side of the low northeast-southwest ridge dividing the basin.
- The northwest part of the basin is dominated by two peaks (4750m and Koh-e-Raber, 4770m). Both peaks have east aspect descents. The south peak, Pk 4750, has a series of small cliff bands below it with one continuous descent off the north ridge. The north peak, Koh-e-Raber, has northeast aspect descents off the top that open onto a broad east aspect slope. A broad slope descends from the peak's north ridge.
- Northeast of Koh-e-Raber is a col with access to Sar-e-Ali Beg.*

Descending from

Band-e-Barik's high point



Descending Koh-e-Dawa,

"Medicine Mountain"

- Northeast of the col is a ridge leading to a 4600m peak. A series of wide, south aspect chutes descend 500-600m to the valley. Further east along the ridge are the **Peshgao** and **Koh-e-Dawa** summits. These are more easily accessible from the Amba approach.

AMBA APPROACH

From the access point follow the Nau Rah approach directions to the confluence of Nau Rah creek and Amba (also known as Jaljali) creek. From the confluence, stay to the right/north of the houses and follow the Amba creek upstream/west-southwest and ascend along the low-angle valley bottom as it slowly bends south. Koh-e-Dawa will be on the left/east. The West Ridge divides Qazan and Ali Beg Valleys. 2.3km from the access point, on the right/north, are the remains of a Mujahedin hideout with low mud walls still standing. Just beyond the old hideout, on the same side of the valley, is a chute that ascends to the ice cave (3295m, 75 vertical metres above the valley floor). The route continues along the valley bottom for another 1.5km at a low angle, then begins to ascend more steeply for another 2.5 kilometres to the top of the valley, an area called Peshgao. Traveling along the valley bottom, you are passing through a terrain trap with avalanche risk from the slopes of Koh-e-Dawa to the left/south and east. The slopes to the right/north are south-facing and hold less snow.

KOH-E-DAWA (MEDICINE MOUNTAIN AND SOUTHEAST RIDGE

(Note: Koh-e-Dawa, or "Medicine Mountain," is also called Koh-e-Zawa locally.) As you ascend the valley, look to the left for descents from the southeast ridge. At 2km from the access point you will come to the bottom of a small drainage that reaches nearly to the top of the ridge. Follow sub-ridges on the west side of this drainage to

the top of the ridge for access to 600-700m north aspect descents from the ridge.

WEST RIDGE

As you ascend the valley, look ahead/west to Koh-e-Zard (3900m). Various 500-600m, east aspect descents come off the peak and the adjacent ridges. Just south of Koh-e-Zard is a col that offers access into Sar-e-Ali Beg ("Head of Ali Beg" valley). South of the col are three north and northeast descents of 700-800m before the ridge turns into cliff bands that reach nearly to the Peshgao peak at the head of the valley.

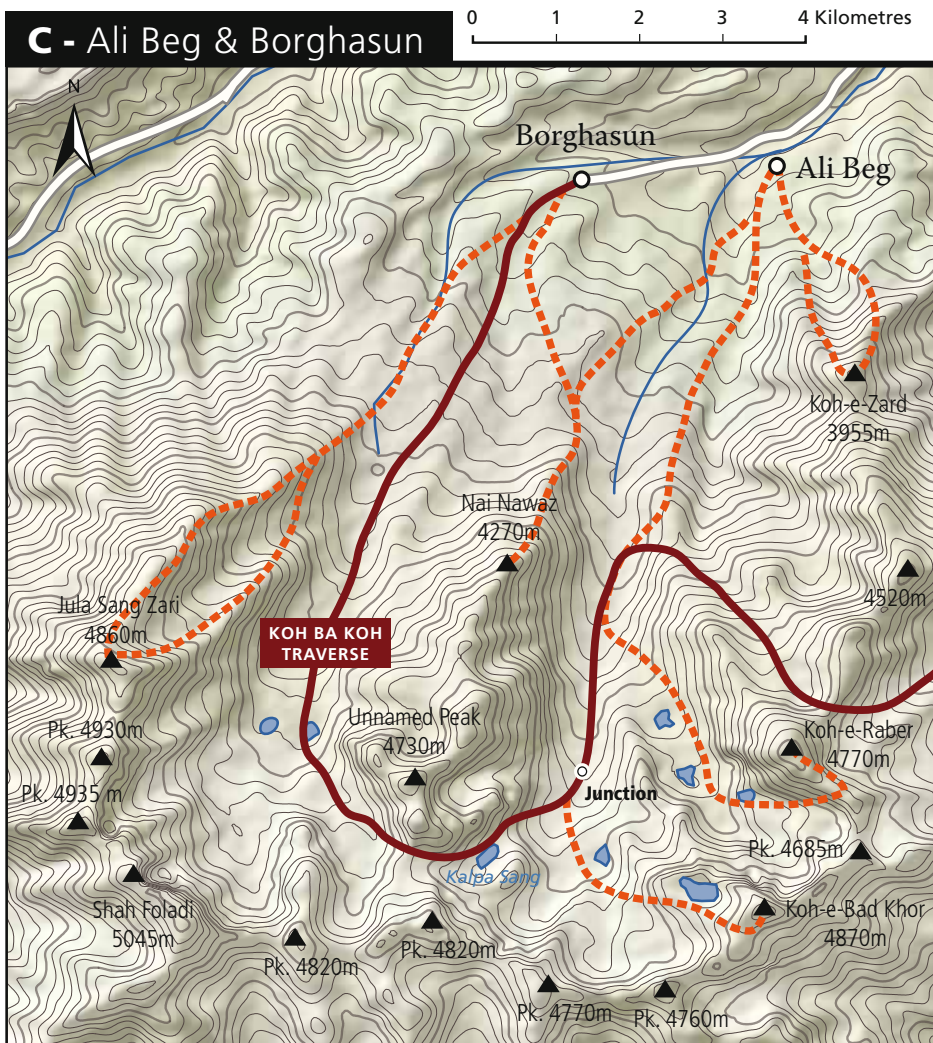
PESHGAO

Peshgao refers to the area at the top of Amba Valley and includes two peaks. The higher peak, at the head of the valley, is 4520m. To the northeast of the peak is a rocky pyramid at 4380m. From Peak 4520m and its north and east ridges, there are multiple descents of 100-300m on a northeast aspect. Peak 4380m is rocky but offers a dramatic 750m north aspect descent through small cliff bands from the top. Shorter west aspect descents take you to the top of the valley. From Peshgao, the main valley descent (beginning below the steep slopes leading to the peaks) offers a 650m descent of 35-38°, followed by a 250m descent on 20-30° slopes.

ALI BEG

Ali Beg has the largest and the highest elevation lakes in the Koh-e-Baba. The highest lake is above 4600m and sits in a hanging cirque just below a peak of nearly 4900m. The openness of the valley bottom, just above Ali Beg village, provides great views of the nearby mountains. The low-angle ascent up the main drainage is perhaps the best cross-country ski route in the Koh-e-Baba; and the route between Ali Beg and Borghasun, across the alpine Kalpa Sang lake, is one of the most dramatic of the back basin crossings.

Of all the villages in the Koh-e-Baba, Ali Beg is the most familiar with skiing. In 2010, the village hosted two major skiing events—a skiing awareness day in early March and the first annual Nauroz Winter Games in late March.



KOH-E-ZARD APPROACH

From the entrance to Ali Beg village, follow village footpaths winding southeast. Cross a stream running through the village and continue up to the highest house on the bluff east of the stream. From the house, ascend 400m to the south-southeast, to the top of a small moraine with good views of Koh-e-Zard (“Yellow Mountain”). Continue 500m to the cluster of stone *ailaq* shelters visible in the bottom of the basin. From the *ailaq*, ascend the **east ridge** towards the summit. At 3560m and 3730m on this ridge, slopes off the northeast face descend to **Tai Gar** (“bottom of a small valley”). Further up the ridge are the tops of at least three descent options east into **Qazan** Valley. Continue up the east ridge, staying left/east of a major rock outcrop on the ridge. Return to the ridge line after 40m. Alternatively, drop to the right/west under the rocks and regain the ridge on the other side. From the summit of **Koh-e-Zard** (3955m), there are good views of

Qazan and Ali Beg Valleys. People in Ali Beg say that some part of the Koh-e-Zard basin avalanches every year, usually in the spring. The east ridge approach has little avalanche exposure.



A peaceful welcome to

Ali Beg village

BAZAAR SKIS

The humble beginnings of the Ski Bamyani movement has inspired resourcefulness and creativity. One goal of the project has been to raise local awareness of skiing and to get as many Bamyani on skis as possible—not an easy task considering there were only two pairs of skis in all of Bamyani. A trip to the Bamyani bazaar with a model ski and an odd request to some of Bamyani’s most skilful carpenters led to the creation of four uniquely designed pairs of wooden skis, complete with bindings and poles. The “bazaar skis” made their debut at the ski race which was part of the first annual Nauroz Winter Games festival in Ali Beg. (See *Preface*.) Racers using the bazaar skis were often pitted against opponents on older “skinny skis” donated by a French consulting company just before the festival. Race day was unusually warm, however, and the wider bazaar skis gave racers the edge they needed to come out on top (despite the skis not actually having metal edges). While it is likely that more high-tech skis will make their way to Bamyani in the coming years, the bazaar skis’ place in Bamyani’s skiing history is guaranteed.



Testing the prototype “bazaar skis” at the first Bamyani Winter Games.

EAST RIDGE

There are short, often low-angle, descent options from nearly any point along the east ridge.

TAI GAR (see Map D, pg 83)

From the 3560m or 3730m points on the ridge, long northeast-facing slopes descend 500-600m down to the Tai Gar valley. Note that descending this route would require climbing back up (and descending back to Ali Beg) or having a vehicle pick you up in Tai Gar.

QAZAN (see Map D, pg 83)

The east-northeast aspect slopes into Qazan offer 600m consistent descents. Note that descending these routes would require climbing back up or having a vehicle pick you up.

KOH-E-ZARD

From the summit, descend into one of the gullies immediately below, or traverse west 100m to a gully with better snow coverage. Descend 700m back to the *ailaq* shelters.

Note that there may be additional descent options off the west face of Koh-e-Zard into the valley leading to Koh-e-Raber.



Approaching Koh-e-Zard

KOH-E-RABER APPROACH

From the entrance to Ali Beg village, follow footpaths south, staying on the west side of the creek. At 1km, the drainage forks. The left/east fork leads to Koh-e-Raber, while the right/west fork goes up to the back basin. Cross the drainage and ascend the ridge between the two creeks. Follow the ridge south, staying above the Koh-e-Raber drainage. After ascending the ridge for 3.75km, traverse left/east into the drainage above a place where it narrows into a rocky canyon. Ascend the drainage for another 2km to a lake (4400m) set deep behind a moraine at the base of Koh-e-Raber. From the lake, ascend the east ridge of Koh-e-Raber, to the left/east of the col (4540m). Continue up the **east ridge** past the col to the **summit** of Koh-e-Raber (4770m). Numerous more technical ascent options exist on the **west ridge**.

EAST RIDGE

The east ridge offers access into the Qazan basin from the col. Additional descents into Qazan and back to the Koh-e-Raber lake continue up the east ridge to the summit, with north aspect descents to the lake offering over 450 slopes.

WEST RIDGE

There are 500-600m west aspect descents off the west ridge down to the lowest of a group of three lakes ("Three Lakes"). There are 300m descents back to the Koh-e-Raber lake.

SUMMIT

A 400m east aspect slope descends from the summit to the Qazan basin, while a 700m north aspect descent runs back to the Koh-e-Raber lake.

ALI BEG BACK BASIN APPROACH

From the entrance to Ali Beg village, follow footpaths south, staying on the west side of the stream. Follow the stream south-southwest towards the mountains. At 1km, the drainage forks—the left/east fork going to Koh-e-Raber and the right/west fork leading up to the back basin. Stay right/west at the confluence and continue up the main valley leading to the Ali Beg basin.

Alternatively, from the bridge next to the school in Borghasun, walk or ski on village paths southeast 1km to a minor ridge above the major north-south valley extending back to Ali Beg basin. Stay on the ridge (right/west of the stream) and head south, up the valley and towards the mountains.

The major ridge on the right/west, dividing the Ali Beg and Borghasun valleys, ascends steeply to the ridge south of **Nai Nawaz** and has many ascent/descent options. (See *Borghasun chapter*.) 6km from the left/east. This drainage leads to **Three Lakes**, Rast Hauz ("Right Lake"), Chap Hauz ("Left Lake") and Hauz-e-Mene-Du Koh ("Lake between Two Mountains"), at the base of **Koh-e-Bad Khor** ("Eat Wind Mountain"). From the confluence of these two drainages, continue up the main valley 2.25km to another junction. The left/east

continues to the back basin, while the right/west ascends to the large **Kalpa Sang** lake and then to a pass that connects to Borghasun. The junction is divided by an arête trending northeast-southwest. From this junction, continue left/east up the main valley for 0.6km to a lake with great views of the top of the basin. The total distance of the approach to this final lake is 9.5km.



Ascending Koh-e-Zard's
east ridge

NAI NAWAZ (ALI BEG APPROACH)

The easiest ascents of Nai Nawaz are from the north toe of the ridge between Ali Beg and Borghasun, or from the Borghasun side. Numerous east aspect slopes of 500-600m, however, descend to the Ali Beg Basin from near the north end of the ridge to the southern high point of 4600m.

THREE LAKES

This is a beautiful tour of the lakes and glaciers tucked into this drainage. The long slopes from Koh-e-Raber to the north descend to the first lake in addition to the two short chutes descending to this lake from the south. Steep cliffs surround much of the Three Lakes area, but southeast of the highest lake, a slope descends from Pk. 4685, offering access to Qazan basin.

KALPA SANG

From the main valley, ascend to the right/west, to the 340m-long Kalpa Sang lake at 4340m. The lake is surrounded by cliff walls, with a few short north aspect descents. Ski to the west end of the lake to ascend the 4550m pass to Borghasun. To the north of the pass, two chutes descend 260m from 4810m. From the pass, descend 100m to a drainage of Borghasun* below.

TOP OF ALI BEG BASIN

The top of Ali Beg Basin offers access to four peaks over 4750m and numerous

descent options. In the northeast part of the basin is Koh-e-Bad Khor and its impressive lake. Southwest of Koh-e-Bad Khor is the prominent Pk. 4760, which is accessible from its eastern ridge. The summit is rocky but it has descents off both ridges. West of Pk. 4760 are Pk. 4770 and Pk. 4820, which sit just south of the Kalpa Sang pass. Access to these peaks is more difficult but they offer more steep north and east aspect terrain.

KOH-E-BAD KHOR

Koh-e-Bad Khor ("Eat Wind Mountain") (4870m) rises steeply to the south of the Three Lakes area. A bench or ledge of the mountain hosts another lake, the highest in the Koh-e-Baba at 4625m. At 400m in length, it is remarkably large. Koh-e-Bad Khor is best reached from the back of Ali Beg basin. It offers an overview of Behsud district to the south and 250m west aspect slopes down to the lake, with further descents down to the basin.



Kalpa Sang area

of the Ali Beg back basin

BORGHASUN

Borghasun (*for map, see p. 88*) is the uppermost catchment of the Foladi Valley and is the home of Shah Foladi (5045m), the highest peak in the Koh-e-Baba – and, as of early 2011, still unskied. This flat-topped mountain and the western ridge of Borghasun Valley leading to Jula Sang Zari ("Grindstone Place") dominates the skyline looking west from Bamyan town. These areas hold snow well into June and even July and make great late-season skiing destinations. The low-angle valley leading to the Borghasun back basin is a nice tour for cross-country skis or snowshoes.

The village of Borghasun spreads over the sloping lower end of the valley. Elders in Borghasun fondly remember tourists visiting the area in the 1970s and the village is working today to welcome tourists again. Plans are afoot to create a community tourism centre, complete with accommodation. Check with the Bamyan tour guides association regarding progress.



Summiting

Jula Sang Zari

ALI: BORGHASUN'S FIRST SKIER

Don't be surprised if you're not the only one skiing in Borghasun. After watching two odd foreigners skiing in the mountains near his village, twelve-year-old Ali took his skiing future into his own hands. He shaped a couple rectangular pieces of metal into a pair of short skis and tied his feet to them with string. He carved a couple of poles from branches and headed straight for the intermediate slopes. Considering his equipment, these were more like expert runs. Ali has since been able to practice a handful of times with a pair of "regular" skis and hopes to have a pair of his own skis someday soon. He has worked hard at his skiing and English-language skills and when he gets a little older he hopes to become a ski guide in the Koh-e-Baba.



Ali shows off his homemade skis.

BORGHASUN BACK BASIN APPROACH

From the bridge next to the school in Borghasun, travel west on the road or village footpaths, up the drainage. (Be careful not to turn south on the road leading to the southern part of the village, which sits below a low hill.) Follow the west drainage as it bends left/south after 500m towards the Koh-e-Baba. There are a few houses in the upper drainage after the bend. Travel in the drainage bottom or on the ridge to the right/west. Climb this low-angle drainage for 4km towards the pyramid-shaped **Nai Nawaz** and the ridge behind it which divides the Ali Beg and Borghasun Valleys. If you're at the bottom of the drainage, climb up and over the ridge to the right/west and enter the valley that drains the Borghasun back basin. The rocky moraine field in this part of the valley is called Dasht-e-Garda. High on the ridge to the west, across the Dasht-e-Garda, is the prominent **Koh-e-Jula Sang Zari**. Continue south up the wide, low-angle main valley to two lakes, Chap Hauz ("Left Lake") and Rast Hauz ("Right Lake"), 9km from the bridge. From these lakes, you can travel southeast to a **Sub-Basin** that includes a pass to Ali Beg. Ski southwest to the **Shah Foladi** area. Pk. 4745 divides the two areas.

NAI NAWAZ

Nai Nawaz is the name of the rocky pyramid formed by the northern toe of the ridge dividing Ali Beg and Borghasun. The north face of this ridge (immediately to the south as you ascend the low-angle drainage from Borghasun bridge) offers a 600m ascent/descent that can be reached from either side of the slope.

On the west side of the Nai Nawaz ridge are four northwest aspect chutes with the southernmost descending from Pk. 4660. These slopes offer 30-35° descents over 400-600m. Each can be reached by

NAI NAWAZ AND SHAH NAWAZ: MOUNTAIN MELODIES

Borghasun is named after a reed that once flourished in the area. People used the borghasun reed for medicine as well as to make baskets, snowshoes and flutes. Nai Nawaz and Shah Nawaz were two famous flute players who are said to have lived in the area hundreds of years ago. Nai Nawaz lived near the top of the jagged peak which divides the Ali Beg and Borghasun basins. Shah Nawaz lived on a mountain in the nearby Koh-e-Aqrabad range to the north of the Bamyan valley. The two used to communicate with their flutes between the mountain ranges, sending messages about everything from their daily tasks to warnings about approaching danger. Today, the borghasun reed that Nai Nawaz and Shah Nawaz used to make their flutes is in short supply. The legend of Nai Nawaz and Shah Nawaz, however, lives on in the mountains bearing their names and in the melodies still played on similar flutes by shepherds today. As you ascend the Borghasun back basin, listen for the lilting sound of shepherds practicing on their flutes as they wait for the snow to melt in the high summer pastures.



Approaching Nai Nawaz.



Borghasun

back basin



Descending Nai Nawaz

with Jula Sang Zari in

the background

ascending the descent, or by climbing the first (northernmost) chute and then following the ridge south. Ascend close to the windswept sub-ridge to the left/north on this ascent to limit avalanche exposure.

From the northern end of the Nai Nawaz ridge, ski south 250m to the top of the first descent on the east side of the ridge. The descent has a steep entrance and a few rocks. Additional east-facing descents can be found further south on the ridge.

KOH-E-JULA SANG ZARI

Begin the ascent to Jula Sang Zari (4860m) 6km from the bridge. From the approach to Borghasun back basin described above,

cross the main valley to a drainage entering the valley from the cirque below the peak. Ascend the sub-ridge to the left/south of this drainage, which becomes the east ridge of the peak. Alternatively, ascend the peak's west ridge from where this ridge meets the main valley north of the drainage described above. The peak and its east ridge offer numerous east aspect descents

of up to 800m back to the main valley. The summit has two main chutes and numerous side chutes which drop 300m north to the cirque below. The west ridge has additional descents to the cirque. South of the summit is Pk. 4930 with north and east descents of 800m. The lower portions of the western ridge offer shorter ascent/descent options on the wide east aspect slope.

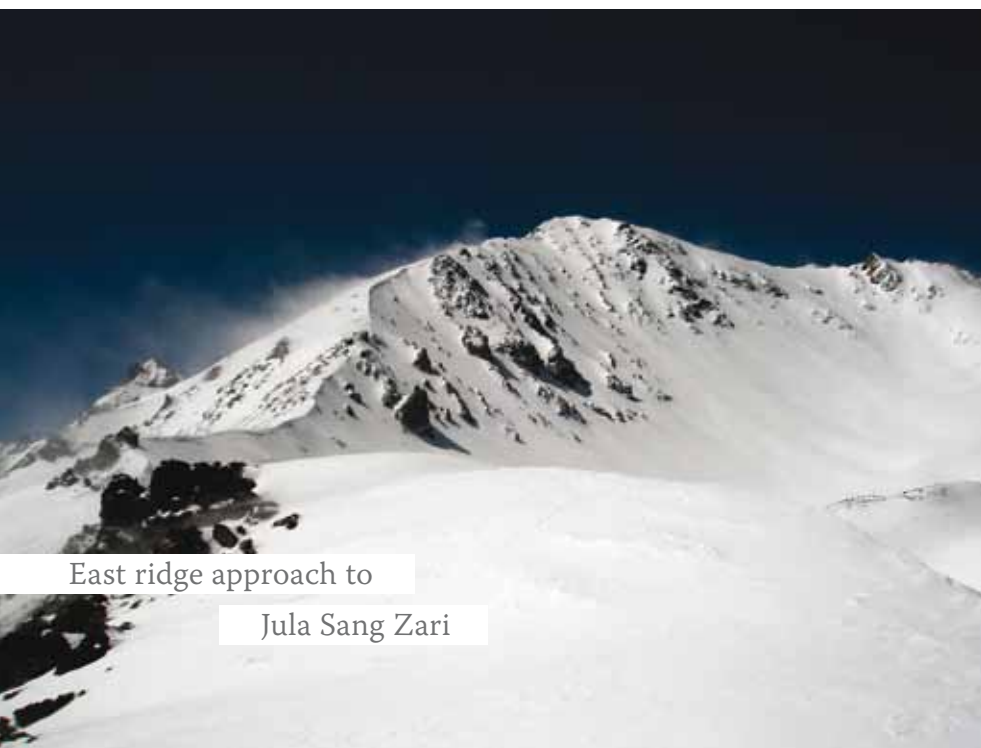
SUB-BASIN

When ascending the sub-basin, look for two pothole lakes perched in the drainage's main moraine on the west side. At 1.8km up the drainage from the lakes, the route to the Ali Beg pass lies to the left/east. Ascend 100m to the pass. The southern end of the sub-basin offers six or more north aspect chutes of 200-300m which descend to a small glacier in the bottom of the cirque.



Flat-topped Shah Foladi,

the Koh-e-Baba's highest mountain



East ridge approach to

Jula Sang Zari

SHAH FOLADI

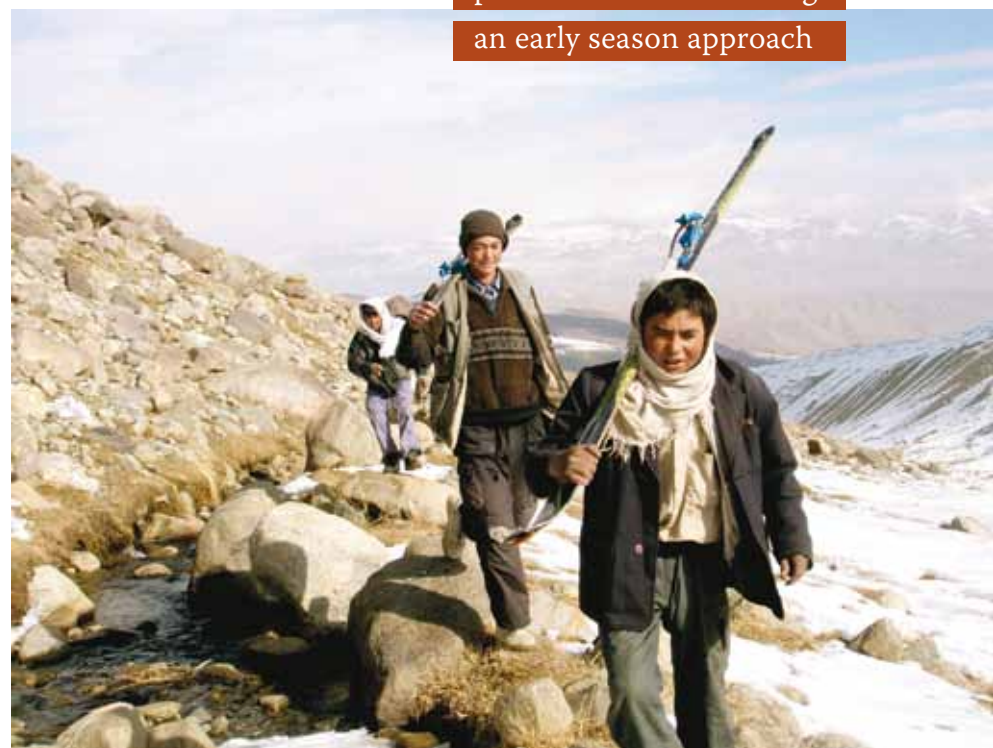
From the lakes, the broad ridge of Shah Foladi dominates the southern horizon, with Pk. 4935 and Pk. 4930 prominent to the west. The summit (5045m) is further east along the ridge. Numerous slopes up to 800m descend from the peak and its ridges, intercepted occasionally by cliff bands. The best access from this side may be up the bowl 800m to the south of the peak.

It should be noted that people in Bamy-an use the name Shah Foladi to refer to many different areas in the Koh-e-Baba. Some use the name to refer to a general area, while others use it to refer to specific mountains (not necessarily the one described above). The "Shah Foladi" described above is the highest peak in the Koh-e-Baba range.

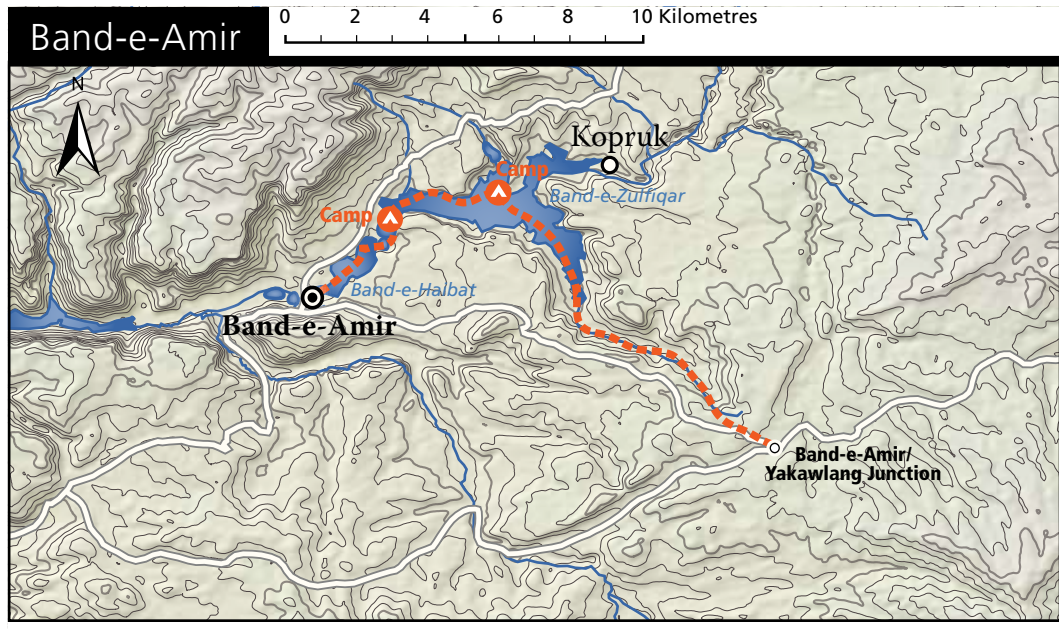
Borghasun children

provide assistance during

an early season approach



BAND-E-AMIR AND PLACES ALONG THE WAY



Sheer cliff walls

descend to Band-e-Amir's

frozen lakes

In summer, thousands of people visit Band-e-Amir to pray at the famous shrine of Hazrat Ali, to picnic by the crystal-clear azure lakes and to see the waterfalls pouring over the natural travertine dams, formed over the millennia by the water's mineral content. In winter, the area is quiet and the frozen lakes and waterfalls are blanketed in snow. People

from the local villages may be found ice-fishing on the lakes or making their way to neighbouring villages along the Yakawlang road. There are stories of buzkashi games being played on the lakes in midwinter. (Buzkashi is Afghanistan's national sport, something like a wild form of polo, played on horseback using the headless carcass of a goat instead of a ball.) Other than these occasional sightings, you're likely to have a solitary experience ski-touring in Afghanistan's national treasure and first national park.

The six lakes, at an elevation of 2950m, form a chain through a wide canyon whose walls open up to reveal bluffs, creeks and villages. They stretch through 13km of the canyon, with side branches and the surrounding bluffs and mountains presenting further opportunities to explore. *Band* literally means "dam" but also refers to the lake behind the dam. The general name, Band-e-Amir, means "Dam/lake of the Amir [Hazrat Ali]" (see boxed text, p. 101), but individually the lakes have interesting names. From east to west they are Band-e-Zulfikar (named after the sword of Ali), Band-e-Pudina (named after an edible plant which grows locally), Band-e-Panir ("Cheese Lake"), Band-e-Haibat ("Lake of Awe"), Band-e-Qanbar (named after a faithful servant of Hazrat Ali) and Band-e-Ghulaman ("Lake of Slaves").

It is possible to reach the lakes from the access point described below and to return to Bamyán town in the same day, but the area is best experienced over a few days. The drive to Band-e-Amir passes through the Shahidan, Shibartu and Qarghanatu Valleys, which offer low rolling hills and flat areas as good cross-country skiing and beginner downhill terrain. The total distance between Bamyán town and Band-e-Amir is 70km. A new paved road is currently under construction. Once complete, this will reduce the driving time significantly from the current two and a half hours.



An ice fisherman displays his catch at Band-e-Amir

© MATTHEW RODIECK

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

From the roundabout at the western end of the main Bamyan bazaar, drive northwest across the small concrete bridge to the second roundabout. Turn right/north here to follow the paved road leading towards the smaller, eastern Buddha niche. After 600m the road meets the main highway which leads east to the Shibar Pass and Kabul, and west to Band-e-Amir, Yakawlang, Chaghcharan and (eventually) Herat. Turn left/west and follow this road along the river. The road continues west for 25km to Shahidan where there is a small bazaar. You can see the prominent ruins of the Qala-e-Anbar Sumuj ("Fortress of Perfumed Caves") on a rocky bluff.

From Shahidan, leave the valley and continue west to the wide floodplain of the Shibartu valley and Shibartu village, 30km from Bamyan. From here, the road continues west to another wide floodplain. This is Qarghanatu valley. Qarghanatu village lies away from the main road to the left/south but there is a dusty truck stop and the Abdul Hamid Hotel and Tea House on the road. This is a good place to stop for a tea break, 40km from Bamyan. From Qarghanatu, follow the road west another 12.5km to the junction where the Band-e-Amir road veers off to the right. (The main road continues on to Yakawlang.) In winter, the Band-e-Amir road is not normally cleared and this junction will probably be your access point (34°46'58.50"N, 67°18'31.00"E) to the lakes. If the road is clear, it is possible to continue a further 13km, to the western end of Band-e-Haibat and the shrine.

There is an alternative road down to the lakes which can be used when this access road is muddy or still partially blocked with snow on the slopes above the lakes. Continue from the junction along the Yakawlang road. After some miles, it drops down into a wide valley. In the valley, a side road turns right/north and leads through a dramatic gateway between two cliffs in the mountain ridge. This road winds through a narrow valley and emerges near Band-e-Amir village at the western end of Band-e-Haibat. This road is not cleared in winter, but snow melts here earlier than on the higher road.

Band-e-Amir's frozen lakes are waiting
to be explored on skis



© YASMIN DAMJI

AFGHANISTAN'S FIRST NATIONAL PARK

Band-e-Amir has long been recognised as a special place, visited by pilgrims for centuries in a tradition that continues today. In local folklore, it is said that Hazrat Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed and the revered first imam of Shia Muslims, created the lakes (and killed the fearful dragon of Bamyan's Dragon Valley) all in one day. The shrine and mosque on the shores of Band-e-Haibat ("Lake of Awe") are known as the Qadamgah-e-Shah-e-Aulia ("Arrival Place of the King of Saints") in his honour as they are said to mark the spot where he first arrived to create the lakes. The shrine is also called the Qadamgah-e-Hazrat Ali.

Band-e-Amir has always been a popular destination for Afghans. In the 1960s and 70s, the area also became popular with foreign tourists, including the hippies wandering along the overland route between Europe and Kathmandu. In 1973 the Afghan Tourism Organisation approached the government about designating the area a national park. Like many other projects, however, this was put on hold for more than three decades after the coup d'état of 1978 and Soviet invasion the following year. Today, Afghans are flocking back to Band-e-Amir and growing numbers of foreign visitors are joining them. In 2009, the govern-

ment of Afghanistan dedicated Band-e-Amir as Afghanistan's first national park. In addition, it was formally proposed that the natural, historic and cultural landscape of Bamyan and Band-e-Amir should receive World Heritage Status. (A decision by the United Nations World Heritage Commission is still pending.) The aim of national park designation (and, potentially, World Heritage Status) is to help ensure that the lakes and the surrounding landscape are managed in a way that preserves their special qualities and protects the local wildlife and natural habitats so they can continue to be enjoyed by Afghan and foreigner visitors alike.



© MATTHEW RODIECK

The travertine dam of Band-e-Haibat, seen from inside the Qadamgah-e-Shah-e-Aulia mosque.

SHAHIDAN, SHIBARTU AND QARGHANATU

Occupying a vast Central Highlands plateau between Bamyan and Band-e-Amir, Shahidan, Shibartu and Qarghanatu offer open valley flood plains and endless rolling hills ideal for cross-country skiing and beginner's downhill skiing. The crest of the Koh-e-Baba rises sharply to the south, in stark contrast to the open plateau. At an elevation ranging from 2950m to 3175m (Shahidan is the lowest and Qarghanatu the highest), the area usually holds snow into mid-March. The names refer to both the

valley, important for summer grazing, and the main village in each valley. The villages make good access points, but from any appealing place along the road you can explore these three valleys all the way south to the Koh-e-Baba or north across the plateau.

BAND-E-AMIR

From the junction of the Yakawlang and Band-e-Amir roads, follow the latter 1.5km west-northwest to a drainage descending to the north. Descend the drainage north and west for 2.75km to a long narrow lake.

This lake is actually the easternmost of the Band-e-Amir chain of lakes but it is not generally counted along with the six other well-known lakes formed by travertine dams. Cross this lake and continue down the drainage. 5.5km from the top of the drainage, you will reach the southeast arm of Band-e-Zulfiqar, the largest of the six main lakes. From here, there are numerous skiing options. You can climb the bluffs above the lake for an overview. It is possible to ski 6.5km to the western end of the lake, where frozen waterfalls pour out of Band-e-Zulfiqar and into Band-e-Pudina. This is a great place to camp. The lake also has two large arms to the north, separated by a low

peninsula. This is another good camping option. Koprak village sits at the eastern end of the northeast arm of the lake.

From the western end of Band-e-Zulfiqar, descend a few metres to the small lakes of Band-e-Pudina directly below and Band-e-Panir further to the south. Beyond these two small lakes lies Band-e-Haibat. Ski southwest over Band-e-Haibat for 2.25km to the shrine at the western end of the lake. The Band-e-Amir road from the plateau down to the village crosses the stream just below Band-e-Haibat. From here, it is possible to climb back along the road to your access point, or to continue to the next lakes. (Alternatively, make a loop from the end of Band-e-Haibat by skiing around the lakes on the high bluffs north and east of the lakes.)

Below Band-e-Haibat lie two small lakes within 2km, Band-i-Qanbar (now in fact mostly dried up) and Band-i-Ghulaman. Beyond these final lakes, the canyon narrows and descends 300m over 20km to where it meets the main Yakawlang road, just east of Yakawlang town. This area has not yet been explored on skis (as far as we know), but could offer good cross-country skiing along the bottom of a beautiful canyon.

Be sure to arrange camping or other overnight options through the Bamyan Ecotourism Office and the tour guide association. They will have up to date information on national park regulations.

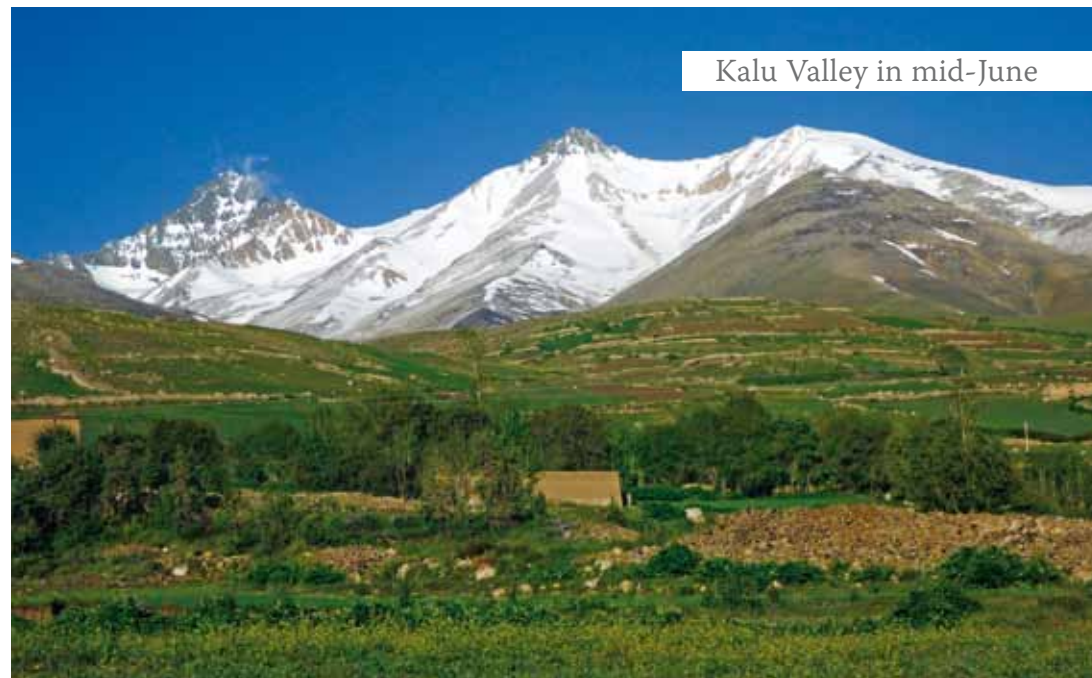


Community elder helps
to carry Laurie's skis

OTHER PLACES TO EXPLORE

With the exception of Band-e-Amir, the geographic scope of this guidebook is limited to access points less than 20 kilometres from the Bamyan bazaar.

The more than 200 ascent/descent options described in this book do not cover all the options, even within this very limited scope, let alone within the Koh-e-Baba range as a whole. Major areas close to Bamyan town still waiting to be explored include the valleys of Sumara, Ahangaran, Kalu, Kamati and others. A brief description of these valleys follows. Other districts in Bamyan, such as Panjab, Waras, Shibar, Kahmard, Saighan and Yakawlang also offer tremendous skiing potential.



Kalu Valley in mid-June

GARM BULAQ, SUMARA

Sumara is the next valley to the east of Dukani Valley. Drive east from the bazaar along the main Bamyan-Shibar-Kabul road. 5.5km from Bamyan town, on the right/south, is the turning to Sumara Valley. Drive 14km south to the uppermost village of Garm Bulaq and the end of the road. The valley up to Garm Bulaq is narrow and the road is often covered in avalanche debris in winter. When deep in snow, the road and the narrow valley make for good cross-country skiing. Beyond Garm Bulaq, the valley narrows further and becomes a canyon. Beyond the canyon, it appears to be possible to ascend and descend the east side of the ridge which extends north to south from Koh-e-Allah (Orgash). From a distance, this area would appear to offer tremendous skiing on steep slopes. Garm Bulaq's extremely friendly residents will challenge you to leave the valley without enjoying a few cups of *chai* and some nutritious wholewheat *nan* with them.

SAR-E-AHANGARAN

Dara-e-Ahangaran ("Blacksmith's Valley") is the next valley east of Sumara. 7.5km from Bamyan on the Bamyan-Shibar-Kabul road, you will see the turning to Ahangaran on the right/south. Drive 13km south through this beautiful narrow valley. The valley almost becomes a canyon at various points where, depending on the runoff, the Ahangaran stream may flow onto the road. Avalanche debris often closes the road for much of the winter. Near the top of the valley, pass the school on the right/west, follow the road down to a bridge across the stream and then climb again to a junction near the uppermost villages of Sar-e-Ahangaran ("Head of Ahangaran"). To reach the back basin of Ahangaran, continue on foot or skis south from this junction. To reach the mountains southeast of Sar-e-Ahangaran, go right/east at the junction. The road continues east to the neighbouring valley and village of Topchi, although it is probably closed through much of the winter. Some of the north-facing slopes southeast of Ahangaran hold their snow well into late spring and early summer. The back basin of Ahangaran appears to have many jagged peaks with narrow snow chutes.



A mid-June

descent in Kalu

KALU

Kalu is the uppermost village on the road over the Hajigak Pass, which leads from the east end of the Bamyan valley over the Koh-e-Baba to Maidan Shahr in Wardak province. (This is another route to Kabul, in addition to that over the Shibar Pass, but for security reasons, foreigners are strongly advised not to travel into Wardak by this road.) Drive 14km from Bamyan on the Bamyan-Shibar-Kabul road, as far as the Kalu Valley turnoff, to the right/south. At the junction, you will see high on the red sandstone cliffs to the south the dramatic ruins of Shahr-e-Zohak ("City of Zohak," or the "Red City"). This ancient fortress city once guarded the Silk Road caravan routes which, from this important geographical junction, led south to India, west to Persia and north to Central Asia.

Just beside the road, on the right is the Bamyan Family Park—a park, restaurant, cultural centre and training centre located inside a large walled complex. Also nearby, on the right just before the Family Park, stands one of Bamyan's best preserved caravansarais. It is unclear when this was built, but it is a powerful reminder of the days – not so long ago in these parts – when camels, horses and donkeys were the main means of transport along this important trade route.

Turn right/south here onto the Kalu Valley road. Drive 20km through a beautiful multi-coloured canyon to the wide-open landscape around the village of Kalu. Numerous peaks in this area reach to between 4500m and 4800m and the terrain is easily skiable in June. A guesthouse is being built in Kalu. Check with the Ecotourism office and tour guide association for up-to-date information.

KAMATI

Kamati lies to the west of the main skiing valleys described in this book, bordering the Borghasun basin. The road leading to Kamati turns right/west from the main Foladi valley road 12.5km from the western end of the main Bamyan bazaar and 800m after the mobile phone tower. The Kamati basin extends south and west of Kamati village, the last and highest village along the road. The basin includes the west aspects of Jula Sang Zari, the high rounded ridge north of Jula Sang Zari and Pk. 4935m to the south. Each of these high points offers 800-1200m north and west aspect descents into Kamati basin, with continued descents to the village. Peak 4935m is the high point in the basin. From this peak the basin's south ridge descends west to a high point of 4450m. Numerous shorter descents fall to the north from the ridge. From the western high point, the ridge extends north to a high point of 4360m, then drops to above Kamati village. This ridge offers descents of 300-1000m. The ridge ends in a bowl just above the village, with 500-800m north and east aspect descents.

APPENDICES

Hazaragi for skiers **106** » Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing:
Quick reference guide **108** » Koh ba Koh and Qol ba Qol traverse
routes: Quick reference guide **109** » “Best of the Baba” **113** »
Travel, accommodation and other useful information **114** »
The authors **118** »

HAZARAGI FOR SKIERS

Hazaragi is a dialect of Persian spoken by people in the Hazarajat region of Afghanistan. (Persian is also known as Dari in Afghanistan, Farsi in Iran or Tojiki in Tajikistan.) Below are some key words that could be useful for skiers in the Koh-e-Baba and Band-e-Amir.

LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Mountain	koh	Lake	hauz
Valley	dara, nau	South-facing	geru
Ridge	lab	North-facing	petau
Bowl	kasa	Steep slope	sar shewaki shikh
Pass/col/saddle	kotal	Gentle slope	sar shewaki
Peak/Summit	taraq, sar	Snow cornice	barf koi
River	darya	Glacier	yakhchal
Stream/creek	jui	Pasture	charaga

WEATHER AND CLIMATE

Snow	barf	Wind	bad, shamal
Sleet (“wet snow”)	tar barf	Mud	gil, lai
Hail	zalagag	Water	ao
Rain	baran	Ice	yakh
Light snow	barf-e-subuk	Cold	sard
Blizzard	barf chapqu	Cool	khunuk
Granular spring snow (“corn/sugar snow”)	barf-e-birinjag	Hot	surkh
		Warm	garm

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Persian pronunciation is fairly straightforward. For all Persian/Hazaragi words and place names in this guide, the following transliterations are used:

a, e, i, o, u: broadly, as in Italian or Spanish vowels: ah, eh, ee, oh, oo (although in Hazaragi pronunciations, long ‘a’ often sounds almost like “oh”, or like British English ‘aw’ in ‘law’).

ao, au: as in English cow.

ai: as in English tie

b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y, z: as in English (‘g’ is always hard, as in get).

q: as in Arabic transliterations, a guttural ‘k’ sound pronounced at the back of the throat.

sh: as in English “sheet”

ch: as in English “church.”

kh: a guttural fricative sound, like “ch” in Scottish “loch.”

gh: softer than “kh”, a grating sound pronounced at the back of the throat.

Note that pronunciations can vary considerably, and the local Hazaragi pronunciation can be quite different from the more formal Dari/Persian pronunciation used in Kabul.

DIRECTIONS

Top	sar	East	sharq
Bottom	taye	West	gharb
Up, above	bala	Left	chap
Down, below	zer	Right	rast
Over	rui	Road	sarak
Between, across	az ma bain	Path	rah
North	shamal	Which way to...?	Kodam rah ba...?
South	junub		

SAFETY

Avalanche	barf kuch	Food	qaza, nan
Rockfall	rezish-e-sang	Help	komak
Landslide place	sang rez	Stop!	Estad!
Fall	rezish	Let’s go!	Burem!
We’re lost	Rah gum shodim	Quickly	jalg, zud
Danger	khatar	Hospital	shafa khana
Sick	najor	Car	motar
Problem, difficulty	mushkil		

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING AND SNOWSHOEING QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

The longest and most consistent cross-country skiing and snowshoeing options are in Band-e-Amir and places along the way (Shahidan, Shibartu and Qarghanatu). Shorter options on more undulating terrain can be found around some of the “gateway” villages in the Koh-e-Baba. If you only have one day and you prefer to cross-country ski in the Koh-e-Baba, the approach to the Ali Beg back basin is the best option for scenery and terrain. Information on cross-country ski and snowshoe routes from each access village is described in the respective chapter. Below we provide a summary.

All of the cross-country skiing routes in the Koh-e-Baba lie under avalanche-prone slopes. Be aware of avalanche risks. Do not ski these valleys soon after heavy snowfalls or late in the afternoon when the sun has warmed the snow slopes, making avalanches more likely.

ACCESS POINT	ROUTE	KM (1-WAY)	DESCRIPTION
Orgash	NA	NA	Not recommended for cross-country skiing.
Sar-e-Dukani	Sar-e-Dukani approach	8-10	Narrow canyon for first 5km then views of the basin. Options for ascending any of the sub-basins.
Jawzari	NA	NA	Not recommended for cross-country skiing.
Khushkak	Driving route and areas east and west of Qabr-e-Zaghak	9	When the snowline is low this is a convenient and scenic option. Possible to ski from Bamyan town.
Chapdara	Lower part of the approaches to Mir Shah Khoja and Sawuz Nau.	3; 1.5	Gentle slopes along the creeks and good views of Mir Shah Khoja.
Jawkar	Jawkar back basin approach	6-10	This valley is wider than Dukani or Qazan. Follow ledge or bench on west of river. Some steep sections require switchbacking. After 6km, the basin opens to great views.
Qazan	Nau Rah approach and lower part of Amba Valley approach.	8-10; 3	Nau Rah: the narrow valley opens after 3km. From here continue south to Sub-Basin 1. Amba: visit the ice cave along this route.

ACCESS POINT	ROUTE	KM (1-WAY)	DESCRIPTION
Ali Beg	Ali Beg back basin approach	10	Low-angle ascent up main valley, wide enough for good views throughout the route. The best cross-country ski route in the Koh-e-Baba for scenery and terrain. Visit the Three Lakes area as a destination or side-trip.
Borghasun	Borghasun back basin approach	4-10	Follow valley bottom or, for better views, ascend and follow the small ridges on either side of valley. After 4km, ascend (switchback) the west ridge to reach the main valley west of Nai Nawaz.
Shahidan, Shibartu & Qarghanatu			Each of these areas offer open valley flood plains and endless rolling hills ideal for cross-country skiing. From the village access points, or any appealing place along the road between, you can explore these three valleys all the way to the start of the Koh-e-Baba.
Band-e-Amir			The best cross-country skiing in Bamyan. Tour for one or more days atop the frozen and snow-covered lakes in Afghanistan’s first national park.

KOH BA KOH AND QOL BA QOL TRAVERSE ROUTES: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

KOH BA KOH (“MOUNTAIN TO MOUNTAIN”)

The Koh ba Koh is a multi-day trail that traverses along the Koh-e-Baba over four mountain passes from Sar-e-Dukani to Sar-e-Borghasun. The minimum distance required to travel the entire trail is 45km and it involves at least 4050m of climbing over four passes. A possible itinerary for the Koh ba Koh is described below. Numerous options are available for extending the trail by climbing further and higher passes, spending time exploring the basins or by including additional passes and valleys. The four suggested passes of the Koh ba Koh route described below are designated with an asterisk (*) in the relevant chapter text.

DAY 1: SAR-E-DUKANI TO JAWKAR

Day 1 is the most challenging, climbing 1750m over 10.5km from the Sar-e-Dukani access to the pass north of Saqi. Follow the approach directions in the Dukani chapter to the Saqi North part of Saqi Sub-Basin. Two passes (on either side of Saqi Peak) are

described. From either pass, descend 600-900m to a camp. Another pass to a steeper descent is accessible from Saqi West.

DAY 2: JAWKAR TO QAZAN

Depending on the elevation of your camp, Day 2 involves a 500-700m ascent over

3-6km to the pass north of Qala-e-Khirs. Follow the approach directions in the Jawkar chapter to the Qala-e-Khirs part of the Jawkar back basin. Descend 700-800m to a camp. This route leaves time to explore Jawkar and/or Qazan back basins. Alternative routes are off the south ridge of Qala-e-Khirs, or west of the pyramid summit, Pk. 4715.

DAY 3: QAZAN TO ALI BEG

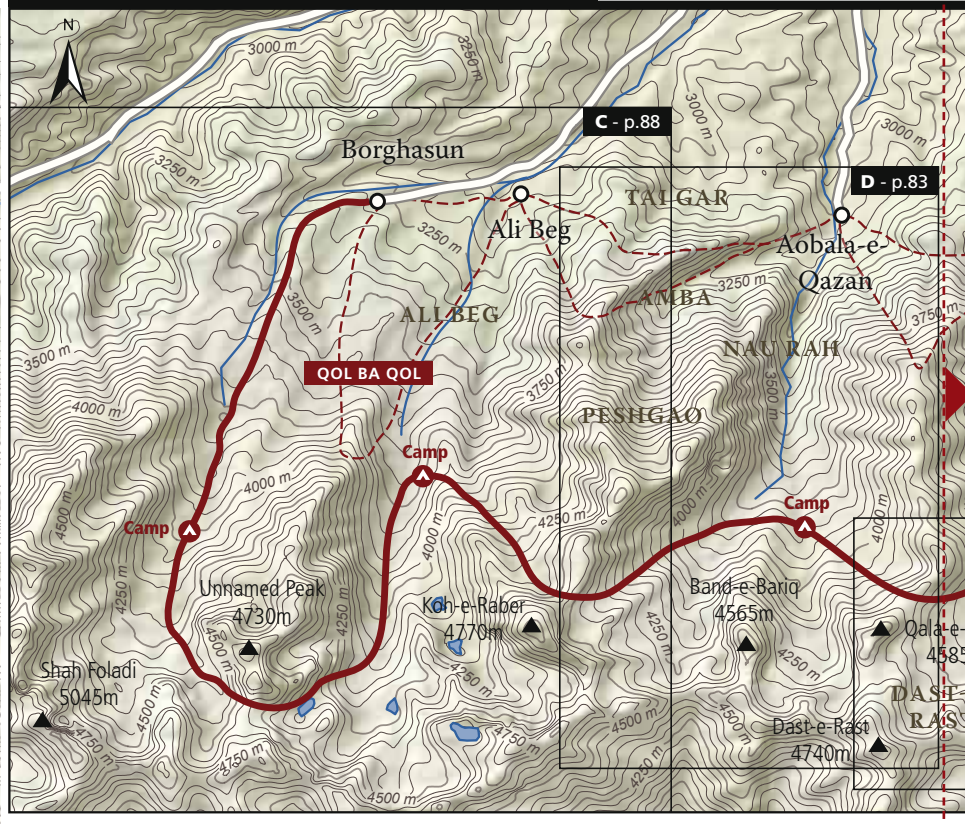
The Day 3 route is a 800-900m ascent over 3-4km to the pass northeast of Koh-e-Raber. Follow the approach directions in the Qazan chapter to the Sub-Basin 2 area of the Nau Rah Valley. Descend 800m to

a camp. This route leaves time to explore Qazan and/or Ali Beg. An alternative route through the southwest part of Nau Rah's Sub-Basin 2 descends into the Three Lakes area of Ali Beg.

DAY 4: ALI BEG TO BORGHASUN

From the Ali Beg camp, ascend 800m over 5km to the pass above Kalpa Sang lake. Follow the approach directions in the Ali Beg chapter to the Kalpa Sang part of the Ali Beg back basin approach. Descend 400m to a camp. This route allows time to explore Ali Beg and/or Borghasun. Alternatively, ski out to Borghasun village and complete the four-day traverse.

I - Koh ba Koh / Qol ba Qol Overview



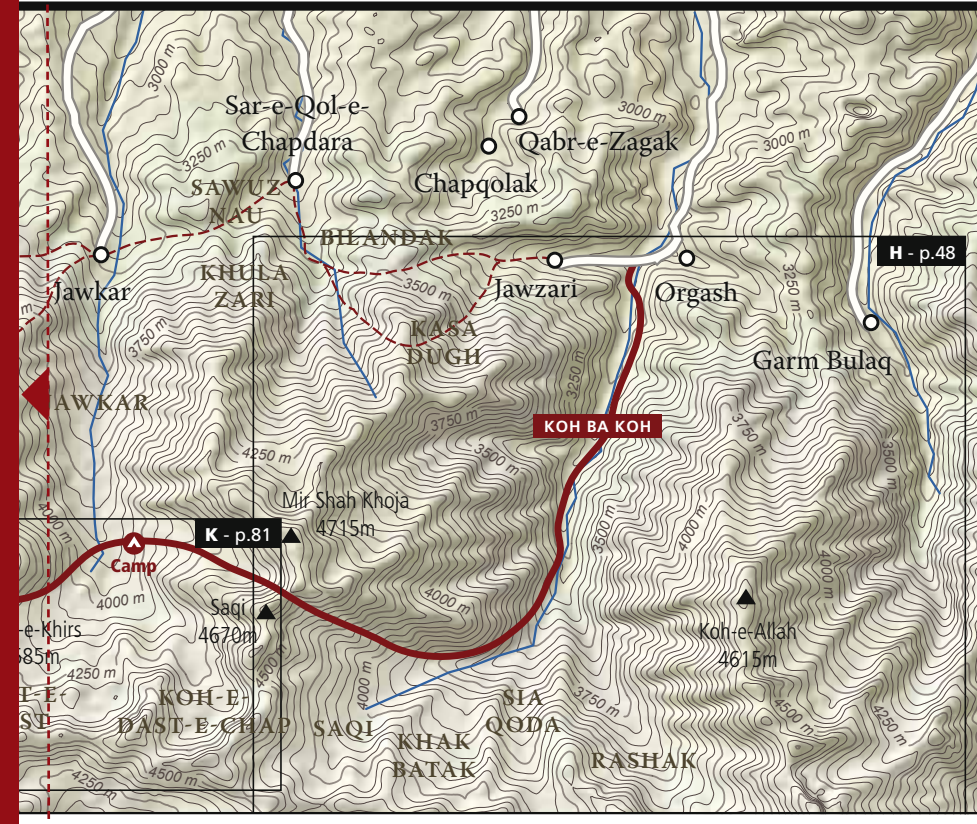
DAY 5: EXPLORE BORGHASUN AND RETURN TO BAMYAN

Use Day 5 to explore the back basin of Borghasun or to climb Nai Nawaz, Jula Sang Zari or the highest peak in the Koh-e-Baba, Shah Foladi. Ski out to Borghasun village.



A curious audience gathers
to watch Laurie
demonstrate that women
can ski too

0 1 2 3 4 5 Kilometres



QOL BA QOL (“VILLAGE TO VILLAGE”)

The Qol ba Qol route traverses east to west, or west to east, between Jawzari village at the top of the Dukani Valley and Borghasun village at the top of Foladi Valley. There are many different routes from village to village. The most direct routes involve minimal climbing and might be appealing to those interested in spending time in or near these mountain villages. There are also numerous indirect routes that climb high into the mountains, over passes, and descend all the way to the village in the next valley. The most challenging route would involve following the Koh ba Koh and descending each day all the way to the villages. None of the routes can be completed on cross-country skis. Below are some suggestions for travelling “*qol ba qol*.”

DAY 1: JAWZARI TO SAR-E-QOL-E-CHAPDARA

The most direct route is to climb the gentle slope of the Bilandak area west of Jawzari village. Cross the low saddle and descend into the Chapdara Valley. Go north 1km to Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara. A more challenging route is to ascend Kasa Dugh to the highest saddle. Descend the west face in the Sher Beg area of Chapdara, or traverse southwest for even longer descents.

DAY 2: SAR-E-QOL-E-CHAPDARA TO JAWKAR

Ascend Sawuz Nau Valley to the west of Sar-e-Qol-e-Chapdara and descend into the Mardak Sang area of Jawkar, just above Jawkar village. A challenging village-to-village route could involve climbing to just below the summit of Mir Shah Khoja and descending the southwest-facing slope into the back basin of Jawkar.

DAY 3: JAWKAR TO AOBALA-E-QAZAN

Go west from Jawkar village towards Koh-e-Baqiar. Ascend to the summit for a challenging route, or cross a lower ridge for a more direct route. There are numerous crossing options further south along the ridge between Jawkar and Qazan.



Laurie has her hands full
teaching girls to ski

DAY 4: AOBALA-E-QAZAN TO ALI BEG

Follow the Amba Valley approach and ascend one of the earlier northern slopes to reach the Koh-e-Zard area above Ali Beg village. Ascend the slope south of Koh-e-Zard for a more challenging route.

DAY 5: ALI BEG TO BORGHASUN

The most direct route is a slow climb across the open valley bottom to Borghasun village. More challenging options involve ascending Nai Nawaz ridge and descending one of the northwest-facing slopes.

“BEST OF THE BABA”

There are nearly endless skiing opportunities in the Koh-e-Baba, including many still unskied descents. Experienced skiers are encouraged to explore and create their own “Best of the Baba.” For those interested in the tried and true, below is a list of soon-to-be classic skis in the Koh-e-Baba.

BEST ONE-DAY SUMMIT ASCENTS/DESCENTS

- Koh-e-Allah (Orgash chapter)
- Jula Sang Zari (Borghasun chapter)
- Band-e-Bariq (Qazan chapter)
- Peshgao (Qazan chapter)
- Mir Shah Khoja (Chapdara chapter)

BEST ONE-TO-TWO DAY TOURS

- Ali Beg to Borghasun over the back basin saddle
- Three Lakes basin in Ali Beg

BEST EASY-ACCESS SKIS (FROM CAR TO HIGH POINT IN THREE HOURS OR LESS)

- East-west ridge (Khushkak chapter)
- Open Book (Jawzari chapter)
- Khula Zari (Chapdara chapter)
- Mardak Sang (Jawkar chapter)
- Koh-e-Zard (Ali Beg chapter)
- Koh-e-Dawa (Qazan chapter)

BEST BACK BASIN

- The back basins of Jawkar, Sar-e-Dukani and Qazan offer the most options for ascents/descents.
- Ali Beg and Borghasun offer slightly fewer ascent/descent options, but better touring.

BEST MULTI-DAY EXPERIENCE IN THE KOH-E-BABA

- Springtime, donkey-supported, five- to seven-day traverse along the Koh ba Koh.
- For those with more of an interest in rural village life, a multiple day trip along the Qol ba Qol.



Powder day

TRAVEL, ACCOMMODATION AND OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

GETTING THERE

BY ROAD

There are two possible routes to Bamyan from Kabul by road. Both take in spectacular scenery, but you must consider security issues before travelling. Before driving, you should always check the latest security and weather conditions. Given the continuing insurgency in Afghanistan, security conditions vary over time. At the time of writing (2010/11), the southern, Hajigak Pass route has been inadvisable for foreigners for some years. The northern, Shibar Pass route has been regularly used by Afghans and foreigners since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, but there are sometimes security concerns in the Ghorband valley, between Charikar and the Shibar Pass. If in doubt, it is best to travel by air.

NORTHERN ROUTE: KABUL / CHARIKAR / SHIBAR / BAMYAN, 246 km/152 miles. This is the preferred route for most people travelling from Kabul to Bamyan by road. A good tarmac road heads north from Kabul to Charikar, a journey of one to two hours. At Charikar the Bamyan road turns westward up the Ghorband valley. This rough gravel road is currently being improved. At the end of the valley, the Shibar Pass (2900m) marks the watershed between rivers flowing southeast to the Indian Ocean and those flowing northwest towards Central Asia and the Aral Sea. You enter Bamyan province at the top of this pass. In good weather, with an experienced driver, this journey takes 8-10 hours. Stops for food can be made in Charikar and in the larger bazaars in Ghorband. This road is generally open year round although heavy snowfalls can close the Shibar Pass temporarily, and rain and snowfall make the road over the pass very muddy and slippery. These conditions – and travel times – will improve once the road is paved.

There are sometimes security concerns in parts of the Ghorband valley so, as always in Afghanistan, be sure to check the current situation before travelling.

SOUTHERN ROUTE: KABUL / MAIDAN SHAHR / HAJIGAK PASS / BAMYAN, 180 km/110 miles. This is the more scenic of the two road routes to Bamyan but foreigners are currently advised not to use it because of security concerns along the road in remote areas of Wardak province. It is the shortest route between Kabul and Bamyan and was once the most commonly used. After passing through Maidan Shahr, south of Kabul, the road runs west over the Unai Pass (3200 m), then the Hajigak Pass (3450m), passes the Tangi-e-Paimuri hot springs and eventually joins the Bamyan valley near the ruined citadel of Shahr-e-Zohak. It takes 6-8 hours to reach Bamyan by this road in good conditions.

OTHER ROUTES: It is possible to travel to Bamyan from either Mazar-e-Sharif or Herat (passing the Minaret of Jam and through Chaghcharan) but these are relatively

arduous trips requiring a number of days. They are not recommended without careful planning and due consideration of the terrain, weather and current security conditions. All road routes require the use of well-maintained four-wheel drive vehicles, with experienced drivers who are familiar with the road.

BY AIR

The flight time between Kabul and Bamyan is about half an hour. At present (2010), the only flights to Bamyan from Kabul are operated by the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and PACTEC (www.pactec.org), a private airline for aid and development workers. UN employees and aid workers employed in Afghanistan can fly on UNHAS flights, but these flights do not normally take private passengers. USAID flights are for USAID employees and consultants. PACTEC primarily provides subsidised flights for humanitarian and aid workers but their small planes can sometimes be chartered for small groups of regular passengers. In due course, it is hoped that the national airline, Ariana, or other private airlines will restart normal commercial flights to Bamyan. In the meantime it is possible to charter small aircraft to take groups to the area. The government has approved plans for a new and bigger airport to be built to the west of Bamyan, but it will be some years before this plan reaches completion.

Currently there are flights from Kabul to Bamyan and back on at least three days a week. Flights are occasionally postponed due to weather conditions.

Koh-e-Mir Shah Khoja

overlooks the Roof of Bamyan

Hotel and the Silk Road Hotel.



ACCOMMODATION IN BAMYAN TOWN

The choice of accommodation is still relatively limited, but this is likely to change as private tourist guesthouses are established in coming years. Up to date information about hotels and guesthouses is available at the Bamyan Ecotourism Office and on the website of the Bamyan Ecotourism Programme, www.bamyantourism.org.

BUDDHA CAMP GUEST HOUSE

Rooms: \$40 per night.
Services: Meals, electricity.
Location: On main road between Buddha niches and the bazaar, beside UN Habitat guesthouse
Contact: +93 (0)794 607011, 709192, buddhacamp_bamyan@yahoo.com

GOVERNMENT GUEST HOUSE

Rooms: Single \$40 per night, double \$45, triple \$50/, conference room \$60.
Services: Meals, electricity, laundry, good security.
Location: On plateau in the “upper town,” next to Mazari roundabout.
Contact: +93 (0)799 317207, +93 (0)798 201007.

KOH-E-BABA GUEST HOUSE

Rooms: Single \$40 per night, double \$50.
Services: Meals, 10 hrs of electricity, security.
Location: Near main UN office (UNAMA) in Sar-e-Asiab village, the “upper town.”
Contact: +93 (0)795 686283, +93 (0)774 175190, raheabrishamtour@gmail.com

NOORBAND QALLA HOTEL

Rooms: Single \$60 per night, double \$75.
Services: Meals, electricity + hot water 24 hrs, wifi, laundry, en suite toilets.
Location: In main bazaar, across the river, beside the football stadium.
Contact: +93 (0)799 669024, +93 (0)771 071854, noorbandqala.bamyan@gmail.com
Web: www.noorbandbamyan.com

ROOF OF BAMYAN HOTEL

Rooms: Double \$60 per night, “yurts” on the roof \$50, cheaper rooms \$40.
Services: Meals, 12 hrs of electricity.
Location: On plateau in Sar-e-Asiab village, the “upper town,” panoramic view of valley.
Contact: +93 (0)799 235292, 235298, roofofbamyan@yahoo.com

SILK ROAD HOTEL (closed during winter; opens in late March)

Rooms: Single \$80 per night, double \$100.
Services: Meals, internet, 24hr electricity, security.
Location: Valley location 1km from Buddhas.
Contact: +93 (0)799 311903, +93 (0)799 040764.
Web: www.silkroadBamiyan.com (note the ‘i’ in Bamiyan in address)

FIRST AID AND MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

Bamyan has one of Afghanistan’s best provincial hospitals, managed for the Ministry of Public Health by the Aga Khan Development Network. It is located across the river from the main bazaar, on the main road to Shibar/Kabul and next to the University of Bamyan. Emergency medical services by Afghan doctors are available here. Afghanistan’s healthcare system is still developing however. For any advanced procedures, you will have to go to Kabul or be evacuated abroad.

IN KABUL, THE DK-GERMAN MEDICAL DIAGNOSTIC CENTER (“THE GERMAN CLINIC”) AND ROSHAN CLINIC PROVIDE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD MEDICAL CARE.

- **GERMAN CLINIC:** Address: Chahrah-e-Haji Yakub, Street 3, turn left, two blocks along on left. Tel: 0799-136211, 0799-136210. E-mail: dk-med-diagnostic@gmx.net. Website: www.medical-kabul.com.
- **ROSHAN CLINIC** (for patients employed by organisations registered with the Clinic): Main Shash Darak Road near Pul-i Mahmoud Khan, House #8 (next to House #179). Tel: 0799-972439, 0799-992439. E-mail: theclinic@roshan.af.

There are a number of hospitals in Kabul, but two with the best reputations are the French Medical Institute for Children (outpatient care for adults as well as children), located near Kabul University, and the Cure Hospital in Shahr-e-Nau.

Ideally, foreigners in Afghanistan should have medical insurance coverage which provides for evacuation out of the country in the event of a serious accident.

WEBSITES / TRAVEL COMPANIES / ORGANISATIONS

- **AFGHAN LOGISTICS:** Afghan travel company, one of the first on the scene after the fall of the Taleban. www.afghanlogisticstours.com
- **GREAT GAME TRAVEL:** Travel in Afghanistan, company run by an American. Street 3/1, House 3, Proje Wazirabad, Proje Taimani, Kabul, Tel: +93-(0)799 686 688, www.greatgametravel.co.uk/
- **UNTAMED BORDERS:** Adventure travel in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Untamed Borders is interested in arranging ski tours for adventurous travellers in Afghanistan, as well as its other travel offerings. www.untamedborders.com
- **ZUHAAK TOURS AND LOGISTICS:** Shahr-e-Now, Chahrah-e-Ansari, Street 4, House #33 Kabul, Mobile: +93 (0)797 406 009, +93 (0)797 406 008, E-mail: Gulzada@zuhaaktourslogistics.af, Hussaini@zuhaaktourslogistics.af
- **SHAH M BOOKS:** Afghanistan’s best (indeed only) English language bookshop. Chahrah-e-Sederat, Kabul, www.shahmbookco.com
- **WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY (USA):** Hazarajat Protected Areas Project, www.wcs.org/globalconservation/Asia/afghanistan/AfghanistanProtectedAreas

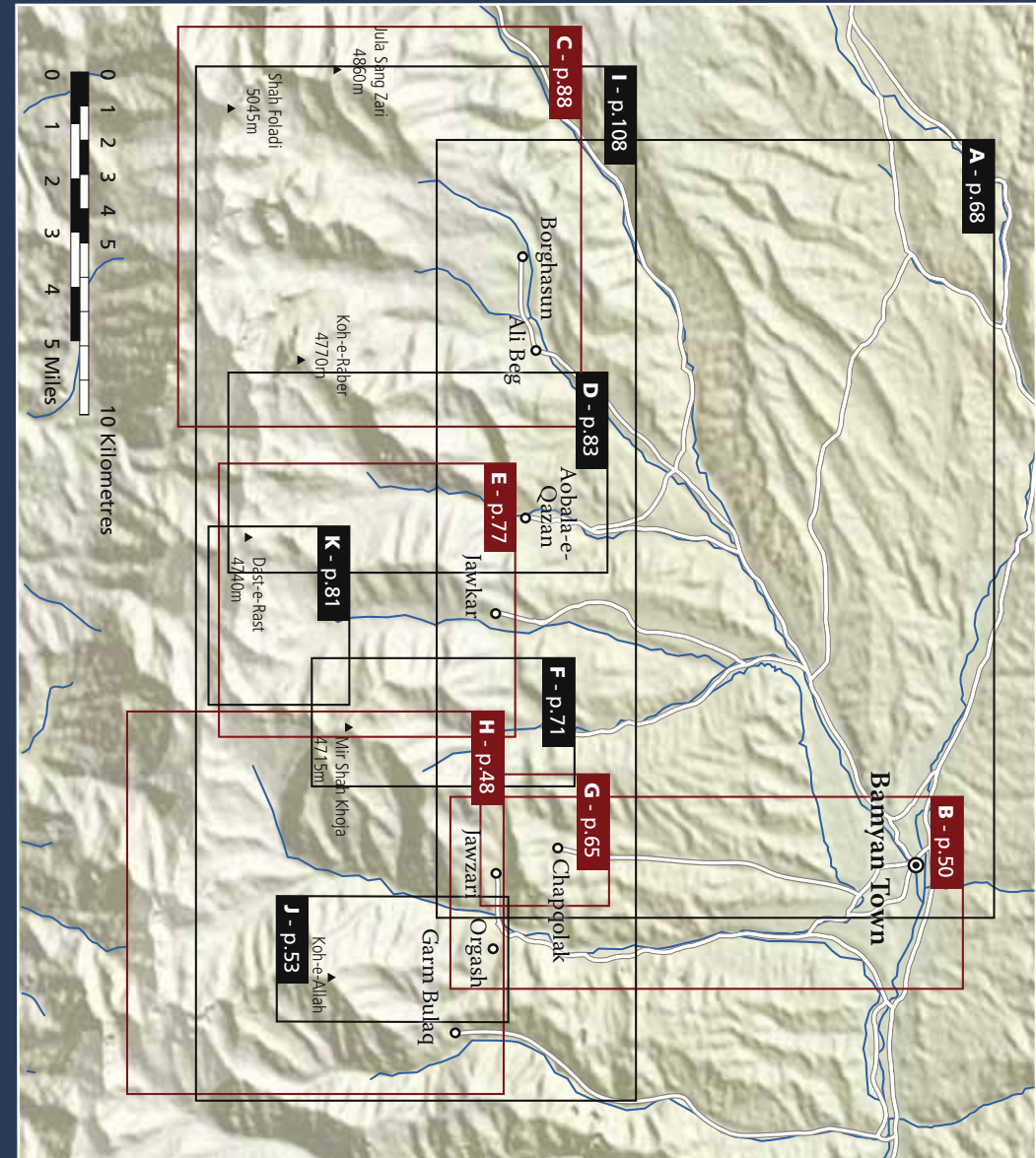
- ◉ **DELEGATION ARCHEOLOGIQUE FRANCAISE EN AFGHANISTAN:** Most active archaeological mission in Afghanistan, www.dafa.org
- ◉ **UNESCO / National Centre for Research into Cultural Properties (Japan):** Research information on Buddhas and cave complexes and World Heritage listing whc.unesco.org/en/list/208portal.unesco.org/culture
- ◉ **THE SILK ROAD:** Art and culture of people and places along the traditional Silk Road of Central Asia, www.silk-road.com/newsletter/december/Bamyan.htm

THE AUTHORS

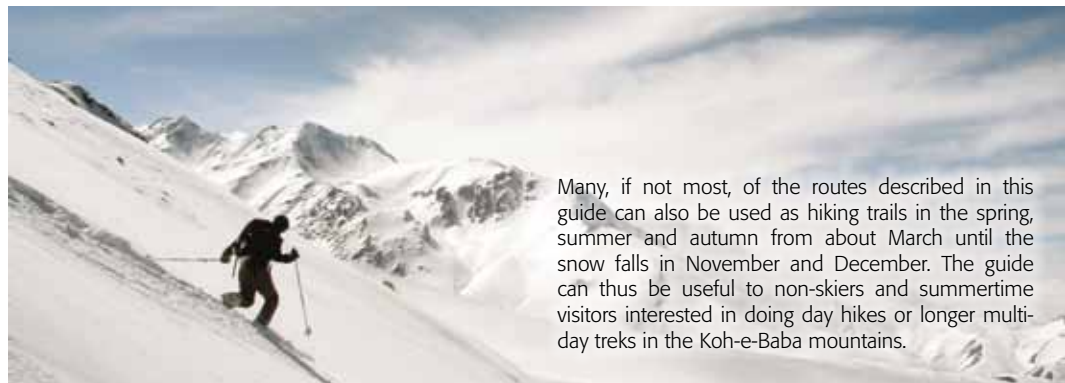
LAURIE ASHLEY is a field researcher, environmental educator and naturalist with a lifetime of skiing and backcountry experience. Her work has included leading university students on extended backcountry trips with an educational focus on conservation and rural development, environmental monitoring and outdoor skills. Laurie has an MSc in Resource Conservation from the University of Montana and is currently a natural resource management advisor in Central Asia.



CHAD DEAR is a backcountry enthusiast who, in between trips to the mountains, earned a PhD from the University of Montana. He has walked across Swaziland in southern Africa, bicycled across the United States and now, skied across the Koh-e-Baba in central Afghanistan. Chad is a former Fulbright scholar and is currently the coordinator of the Mountain Societies Research Centre at the University of Central Asia.



Ski Afghanistan describes hundreds of backcountry ski descents in the rugged and, until recently, unskied Koh-e-Baba range in the Central Highlands of Afghanistan. Routes described will appeal to a range of skiers from beginners to experts and include options for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in the Koh-e-Baba and in Band-e-Amir, Afghanistan's first national park. Also included is a history of skiing in Afghanistan, profiles of the remarkable rural communities living in these mountains and information on the cultural and historic landscape. Whether your explorations include a morning ski and afternoon *chai* in a village or a week-long, donkey-supported traverse on the Koh ba Koh ("Mountain to Mountain") trail, this is an essential guide.



Many, if not most, of the routes described in this guide can also be used as hiking trails in the spring, summer and autumn from about March until the snow falls in November and December. The guide can thus be useful to non-skiers and summertime visitors interested in doing day hikes or longer multi-day treks in the Koh-e-Baba mountains.



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

ISBN 978-2-940212-08-8



9 782940 212088