

KAZAKHSTAN Expedition 2009

KAZAKHSTAN 2009 Geographical Expedition took place in the south-west of Kazakhstan Republic, in the northern region of Aral Sea, during the month of August 2009. The expedition was organized by DS Spirit Association and sustained by the Faculty of Geography and the Research Center Land Degradation and Geomorphological Dynamics - University of Bucharest, Romanian Geographical Society, Emil Racovita Institute of Speleology, National Geographic Romania Magazine. The expedition grew from the idea of better understanding the realities of Aral Sea region and also of the desert and steppe regions the expedition covered.

From the nine participants in the expedition, three were geographers: PhD Anca Munteanu and Veronica Darmiceanu from Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest and PhD Igor Sirodoev from Institute of Geography in Chisinau. Biologists, architects, photographers and engineers completed the team. Each of the nine team members tried to observe and interpret according to its academic background, the different aspects encountered during the expedition, gathering a lot of information and also a rich imagistic material.

The main objectives of the expedition were: to gather information, to immortalize and to make known objectives of scientific (geomorphologic, geographical, etc.), socio-cultural and touristic interest from the west of Kazakhstan Republic; to produce a photo-video documentary upon the current situation of Northern Aral Sea; to investigate the evolution of the environmental components, uttering the dramatic drop in sea level and the changes that occurred in the landscape; to investigate the geomorphologic processes and relief characteristics, the changes determined by the

global warming, the expansion and intensity of desertification processes and its effect on the local communities, the evolution of the desert relief ; to analyze of the current situation of the region.

The expedition, benefiting of 4WD cars, covered approximately 9500 km through Romania, Ukraine, Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. Part of the observations were made along the way, in the Volhynian-Podolian and Donetsk Upland, north of Azov Sea, Volga and Ural Delta, Barsuki and Prearal Deserts, Mukhadzhar Hills.

In the North Aral Sea region, several routes in the eastern, north-eastern and southern part of the sea were followed. We crossed the bridge over Syr Darya and the Kokaral dike, which separates the Northern Aral from the Southern Aral Basin, we walked on the Kokaral peninsula and on the former seabed invaded by the desert, we were amazed by the former coastline modeled by the current subaerial processes and by the ships unstuck in the sand, witnessing the disaster.

The disaster seems to loose its strength in the North Aral Sea. The construction of Kok-aral Dike in 2005, in order to prevent the outflow from the North Aral in the South Aral, already gives results. The sea level raised by 12 m and the former port of Aralsk, which at one point was 100 km away from the sea, is now just 25 km from the water.

The whole expedition represented a great opportunity to better understand the reality of desert and steppe environmental conditions, which replaced, because of the uncontrolled anthropic activity, one of the largest lakes on Earth. It was also an opportunity to reach less "touristic" places from the ex-soviet space, and to travel through the wilderness of steppes from the "land of nomads".



July - September, 1989

October 5, 2008

Comparative evolution Lake Aral



The bottom and former cliffs of Lake Aral, invaded by the desert



A stranded ship. In the background one can notice the level Lake Aral had in 1930

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