

2022 BANFF MOUNTAIN PHOTO ESSAY COMPETITION



Guardians of the Zagros © Emily Garthwaite

Grand Prize: Guardians of the Zagros by Emily Garthwaite

"The Zagros mountains, in Western Iran, stretch for nearly 1,000 miles, from the sands of the Persian Gulf northwest along the modern border with Iraq and Turkey, separating the plains of Mesopotamia from the expanse of the Iranian plateau. Deep gorges and jagged peaks surpassing 14,000 feet buffered ancient empires from one another—Babylon in the Fertile Crescent and, to the east, the great metropolises of ancient Persia. They frustrated more than one invader, including Alexander the Great. But this forbidding mountain range is also rich in grasslands and rivers fed by winter snows, and for thousands of years tribal groups have migrated through the Zagros with the seasons to pasture their goats and sheep. That grueling, often dangerous feature of nomadic life has evolved, but it has not entirely disappeared. It persists to this day not only for practical reasons but also as a meaningful ritual for people whose history is rooted in the mountains.

In October, the Mokhtari family, members of the Bakhtiari tribe, prepared to set out from their summer encampment in Iran's Isfahan Province. They were parents Hossein and Jahan, three of their nine children and several cousins and other relatives. Following timeworn paths through the Zagros, allotted by custom to their tribe and clan, they would travel with around five horses, ten donkeys and mules, and hundreds of goats and sheep. Their destination in Khuzestan Province was some 150 difficult miles away. The journey, known in Farsi and in the local Luri dialect as kuch, would take two weeks."

Emily Garthwaite is an award-winning photojournalist, Forbes 30 Under 30, Leica Ambassador, and storyteller focusing on environmental and humanitarian stories. Emily's work weaves together themes of shared humanity, displacement, and coexistence with the natural world. She has a Masters in Documentary Photography and Photojournalism from the University of Westminster and lives in Iraq.

Emily has walked over 1,250km through Iraq including walking the Arba'een pilgrimage in Southern Iraq, the world's largest annual pilgrimage, three times and walking a 231km thru-hike across the Kurdistan region to document the region's first long-distance hiking trail known as the Zagros Mountain Trail. Since 2019, Emily has been documenting the trail as part of a long-term multi-disciplinary project.

In 2020, she walked 200km across the Zagros mountains in Iran to document the nomadic customs of the Bakhtiari tribe. Most recently, Emily and a team of international and Iraqi environmentalists made a 1,900km source to sea expedition, known as Expedition Dijlah, down the Tigris river, through Turkey, Syria and Iraq, over three months.

She has exhibited her work internationally, including at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and EXPO 2020 in Dubai, and in the UK, at Leica Mayfair Gallery, South Bank Centre, Somerset House, and The Natural History Museum. Her work has been published by *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Guardian*, *The Intercept*, *WeTransfer*, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *SUITCASE*, *Vice Media*, Adobe, and more.

Follow Emily Garthwaite

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The 2022 Banff Mountain Photo Essay Competition is sponsored by Nikon

Jury Comments:

"Emily's photos bring us into her story and compel an intimate connection with her subjects. I am struck by the powerful portrait of the son and mother. It feels as if I had been sitting at the campfire with them. And yet at the same time I am intrigued to know more about them"

- 2022 Photo Essay Jury Member, Robin O'Neill

"I'm someone who likes photographs with strong emotional connections and Emily's essay delivers it in the fourth photo, where you can almost feel like resting in an encampment with the Mokhtari family after a full day traveling in the Zagros mountains. It sparks my curiosity and makes me want to know more about the place and culture."

- 2022 Photo Essay Jury Member, Ana Caroline de Lima

"Emily's photo essay is a wonderful example of the power of photography as a storytelling tool. In just a few images, it transports the viewer to the distant landscapes of the Iranian mountains and gives a glimpse into its rich culture. It is obvious from the images how much time Emily has spent in the region and how well she knows the local culture. In a world full of photography that focuses on the colorful and exotic through a colonial lens, it is wonderful to see the knowledge and respect of Emily for the people in front of her camera."

- 2022 Photo Essay Jury Member, Alex Buisse





