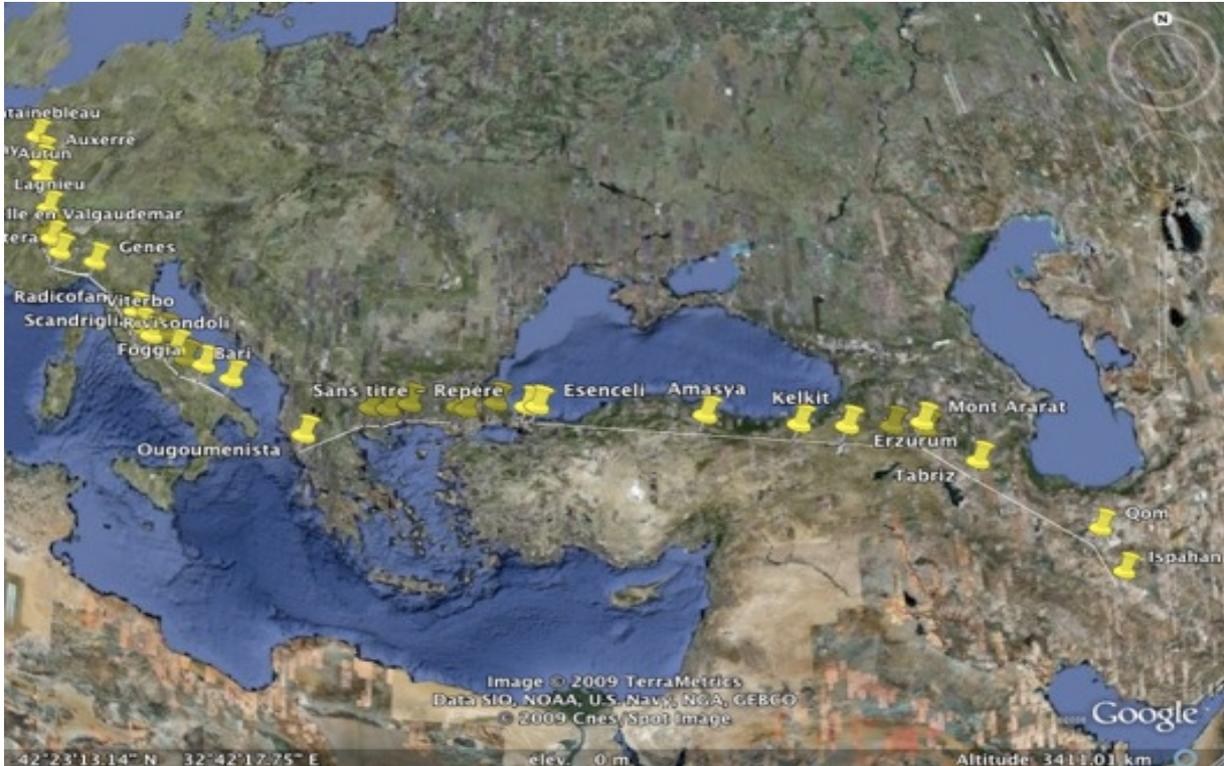


# Almila

The 6.500 km-Trail of an Akhal-Teke Mare  
from Isfahan (IRAN) to Fontainebleau (FRANCE)



## Almilas Ride in Numbers:

<b>Ridden kilometers:</b>	<b>6,504.2 km (GPS Garmin data)</b>
<b>Number of days:</b>	<b>140 riding days / 164 days total</b>
<b>Average speed:</b>	<b>46.5 km per riding day / 39.65 km in relation to total days</b>
<b>Longest trip per day:</b>	<b>77.4 km</b>
<b>Average speed Almila:</b>	<b>6.7 km/h in walk / 16 km/h in trot</b>
<b>Cardiogram:</b>	<b>28 heartrate per minute</b>
<b>Time of trail:</b>	<b>April 2009 until September 2009</b>
<b>Passed countries:</b>	<b>Iran – Turkey – Greece – Italy – France</b>



### **Laurence Bougault**

Laurence Bougault is an Akhal-Teke breeder in France and a long-distance rider. She rode on a horse more than 3.300 kilometers through south-east Africa in 2001. She wrote about this adventure, "Sous l'œil des Chevaux d'Afrique" which translates into "Under the Eye of the Horses of Africa", published by Editions Belin.

## Almila

I discovered Almila at the Isfahan horse festival in 2007. I was invited as a rider and Akhal-Teke breeder.

A Turkmen horse show was organized during the festival and the best horses from all of Iran participated, many coming from North Khorasan and Golestan Province.



The competition best Akhal Teke type and highest speed of Turkmen horses which took place during the festival, under the patronage of Louise Firouz, included 200 Turkmen horses from across the country, including the provinces of Golestan and Khorasan North where still authentic Turkmen tribes live, located in the region since the 1930s.

In pacing the sidelines, I discovered Almila, well protected in her blankets and scarf. She immediately seemed ideal for the endurance ride.

Almila was born in Northern Khorassan, within the clan Yazdani, who have a good reputation in Iran for the quality of their horses.

The clan still raises horses "in the old way", that is to say that the horses live in the courtyard of their homes, attached to a long rope, wrapped in several layers of roofing felt and cotton. They are fed six times a day with an alternation of barley and alfalfa. Only mares are released into the mountains in summer. Until the age of 3, Almila has lived in conditions close to the original conditions of Turkmen breeding.

During the festival she was purchased by Amir Raisi, a businessman with a passion for horses but only for breeding not competing. Thus she stayed inactive in her box for two years. After searching for her equivalent all over Iran, I decided to contact her new owner to ask to lend me Almila for the ride and he accepted.

Turkmen breeding tradition in Iran is to cross the two main Turkmen horse types: Yamoud and Akhal-Tekes to avoid inbreeding. This constant mix brings about horses of solid type.

The clan chief Yazdani is an old man with a long beard, a real ata, and he possesses an immense knowledge of lines and horses. The clan is a Teke tribe, a Turkmen tribe originally from the Akhal oasis in Turkmenistan who are the original breeders of the Turkmen horse now called Akhal Teke – and this is how the horse breed got their name. Their herd stems from the Akhal Tekes and Yamouds they rode in 1930 when they moved to Iran. The Turkmen of Iran do not have the same notion of purity that is stated by the Russian General Studbook and verified through blood tests. The Turkmen of Iran refer to these types of structure: Yamouds have a more big boned conformation and are prized for their stamina, Akhal-Tekes are of lighter conformation and are prized for their speed. Genetic mixing between the two types allows for horses fine, typical, fast and strong with lots of skills, including jumping.





However, Samand, Almila's father, stems from two parents registered in the Russian General Studbook. Almila has an excellent conformation; moreover, at the festival, she won first place in the category of three-year-old mares and Best of the Best of all of mares. So far she is one of the best mares Turkmen of Iran. Too bad, she can't be registered as Akhal Teke in the Russian General Studbook, it would bring new blood to this very interesting breed that we love so much.

### Adventure

The adventure took shape in April 2, 2009 after ten days of hard preparations. I had not seen Almila since 2007! She had grown up (160 cm at the withers) but had retained all her qualities: strong hindquarters, correct aplomb, very, very good topline. She also has many typical features of an Akhal Teke: sparse hair, long ears, almond eyes, neck of Teke and can be identified as a member of the breed at first glance. This is important when one wants to promote this rare breed!

We left Isfahan aiming for Paris. Everything seemed impossible at first sight: no horse had left Iran to go to Europe at least since the Islamic Revolution! No customs agreement existed. But through hard work, we managed to open up closed doors.



While the trip to Africa had the ambition of complete team autonomy due to the presence of an extra horse carrying the provisions, this time, the foremost objective was speed.

To date, Dmitri Nicolaievich Peshkov holds the previous record with a journey of 8838 kilometers of Blagoveshchensk in St. Petersburg made between November 7, 1889 to May 19, 1890, or for a period of 193 days, representing an average of 45.8 miles per day counting



days of forced rest (Peshkov was ill during this trip) and 57.4 km if you only count the days he actually rode. Peshkov has achieved this record alone and unattended with a single horse. But at the time, horses were everywhere and relay stations would provide room and board for horse and rider, no customs problems arose since he only rode within the Russian Empire, no highways, and no complicated route.

To compensate for the difficulties related to the modern route, food supply and

resting places for the horse, and the administrative hassle of border crossings, the team had minimal assistance: a vehicle and a trusted support person. Another difficulty was Almila's lack of training, my horse partner, who had spent the last two years in paddock and comfortable box without endurance training. So I decided to conduct training during the ride itself, moving gradually from 30 km per day to 80 km per day by the end of the trip.



Gradually, my mare has won fitness. Unfortunately, she was attacked and injured her right thigh when we arrived in Turkey: a cut 5 cm long and 5 cm deep. Despite this injury, Almila suffered no limp, no inflammation. She has healed properly and has continued her work like a good "battle" horse.

We have worked very well, even during very hot weather of the Greek and Italian summer and we

arrived September 12, 2009 at Fontainebleau after having covered 6504.2 kilometers in 164 days and 140 days of riding. This is the longest distance traveled in time by a modern half Akhal-Teke Turkmen horse (almost double the famous rides Ashgabat-Moscow in 1935 and 1988).

This work has helped to promote the Akhal-Teke Turkmen horse breed to countries who still know little about them: Greece, Italy and France. And the event has triggered the talk about Akhal-Teke Turkmen horses in every country we went through, both on television, radio, and in print.

If we are still far from the record of Peshkov and Serko, it is because of practical reasons:

- A horse with no training before the start, unlike Serko who was a cavalry horse;
- Losses of time linked to the organization, for instance, the last three days we had rather short rides because the date of arrival was set in advance; Turkey imposed two months, though we could have been able to make the trip in one and a half month;
- The malevolence, especially the attack of Almila.

If we left now, we would undoubtedly be faster because we're both in great shape.

The ride combined several aspects of a trip on horse back dear to Laurence Bougault:

The sporting aspect, as the goal was to travel this long distance in a minimum of time,

The cultural aspect, since this cross-border long distance ride restored life to the routes of the great migrations of prehistory that brought the peoples of Central Asia and the Middle East to the edge of Europe (especially Celtic tribes);

The cultural aspect of the horse itself as the Akhal-Teke Turkmen horse,

rare and prized since ancient times, is itself a cultural artifact that deserves to be promoted.



Finally, the political aspect, as the Akhal-Teke Turkmen horse has been chosen in Turkmenistan, his country of origin, to be the symbol of peace. The team has conveyed the idea of peace, the link between two great cultures: the Middle Eastern culture, with core values based in a tolerant Islam that leaves room for all religions, including that of the Zoroastrians, the first major monotheistic religion and Western culture, Greek and Latin. The implications for the Akhal-Teke breed are excellent since the ride proves once again that the Akhal-Teke is a good horse, strong and fast, which should be more used in endurance.

## **Almilas Pedigree:**

Sire [http://www.cheval-culture.eu/Cheval-Culture/Album\\_photo\\_Amazone\\_de\\_la\\_Paix.html](http://www.cheval-culture.eu/Cheval-Culture/Album_photo_Amazone_de_la_Paix.html) -

1 Samand 4

Dam Sefid Bal

Sister Gozargosh



## **The Trip in Photos:**

Start in Ispahan, Iran:



Almila on the road:



**Riding through Iran:**



**Riding through Kurdistan:**



**Iranian-Turkey Border (with view onto Ararat):**



**Riding through Turkey:**

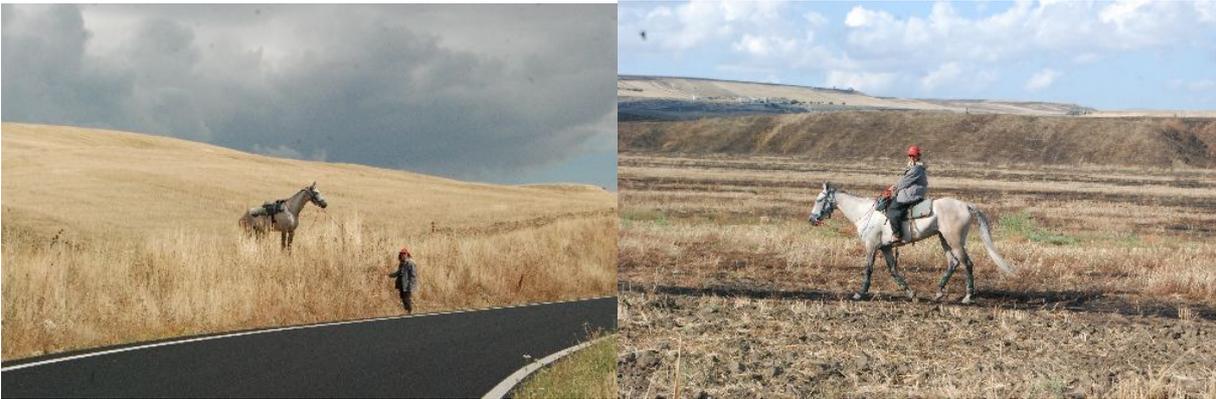




**Riding through Greece:**



**Riding through Italy:**



**Riding through France:**



....Arrival in Fontainebleau