

HUMANITARIAN
MINECLEARANCE IN:

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**Return to Nushaq Campaign Mineclearance
in Badakhshan Province, Northern Afghanistan**



A project deminer clearing mines on Julghar Mountain, Badakhshan Province, Afghanistan.

Introduction

With a population of around 50,000, Fayzabad is the provincial capital of Badakhshan and, although never part of the Taliban/ Northern Alliance conflict of the 1990s, was a major Russian military base in the 1980s. Fazyzabad is nestled in a valley surrounded by mountains and it is on these mountains that Russian troops were stationed in defensive positions overlooking the town. The soldiers laid landmines to protect their positions from attack by the Mujahiddin and twenty years later the same mines are preventing local people from walking on or farming the land.

In order to reduce the mine problem around Fayzabad a Return to Noshaq Campaign-funded manual mineclearance team was deployed onto the Julghar Mountain for one month in April 2009. During one month of operations the team found and destroyed 15 landmines and two items of unexploded ordnance whilst clearing 5,492m² of land in the process.

Julghar Mountain, Fayzabad, Badakhshan Province

Julghar minefield is located on a hilltop overlooking Fayzabad City in Badakhshan. It was the site of a Soviet tank and artillery position during the 1980's to protect the city from Mujahiddin attack. Dense belts of anti-personnel (AP) mines and fragmentation mines were laid surrounding the position on all sides. The high number of mines here coupled with their proximity to a major population center has led to a particularly high number of accidents: 29 human accidents (non-military) and 154 animal accidents were known to local people. After the withdrawal of the Soviet military in 1989, the position was occupied by the forces of President Najibullah followed by those of the Jamiat Mujahiddin. In addition to the landmine problem the heavy fighting in the area has led to a high level of UXO contamination.

A map showing the minefield location is at Annex A.



A Return to Nosbaq Campaign deminer at work in the minefield above Fayzabad.



Areas outlined in red of Julghar minefield above Fayzabad town have been ploughed, however this remaining overgrown area is a minefield which farmers dare not plough.

Clearance at the three tasks on Julghar was started in February 2009, and has since been finished. The minefield on which Return to Noshaq Campaign-funded deminers worked was completed on September 14. The land has been returned to the local community with seven families (consisting of 73 people) in the immediate area benefitting directly and a further unquantifiable number benefitting indirectly – the area is used by weekend walkers and families for picnics and is valued by the entire town for its views. As can be seen from the photographs below the local farmers barely waited for mineclearance to finish before ploughing their fields – this is valuable, fertile land and 2009 has seen an abundance of rainfall, vital for crop-growing on these non-irrigated hills.

The Return to Noshaq Campaign Manual Team consisted of 27 personnel : one Team Leader, one Assistant Team Leader, two Section Commanders, two deminer medics, one deminer driver, one ambulance driver and 19 regular deminers - giving 22 demining lanes. They destroyed 15 landmines, two items of unexploded ordnance and cleared 5,492m² of land in the process. Altogether on Julghar Mountain, 171 landmines and 483 items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed, and 57,405m² of land was cleared.



*A farmer ploughing parts of the minefield that had just been cleared hours before –
A HALO Team Leader making sure they stay in the safe area.*



A different farmer ploughing a part of the minefield that had just been cleared by HALO. Return to Noshaq Campaign-funded HALO deminers are visible in the background.

The Past and Future Mineclearance Operations in Badakhshan

HALO deminers have cleared just over 635,000m² (63.5 hectares or 157 acres) of mined land in Badakhshan Province in the past six years, destroying over 5,000 anti-personnel mines in the process. While this is significant, and has prevented mine accidents while allowing thousands of people access to their previously inaccessible land, there still remains a further 1.7 million square meters (170 hectares or 420 acres) that needs to be cleared – and there may be more that we are not yet aware of.

Badakhshan is one of the most remote provinces in Afghanistan. Many of the future clearance tasks are in what, even for Badakhshan, are considered remote areas – border areas with Tajikistan and Pakistan, on mountain passes and around former military positions on mountain tops. With vehicle access currently impossible mineclearance will be more expensive in these areas, making every HALO donor even more valuable to the people who wish to use this land.



A view from the minefield down into Fayzabad town. The green stone marks the location where a landmine was found and destroyed.

However, access to Badakhshan is improving as a tarmac road is currently under construction between Keshim in Takhar Province and Fayzabad, the capital of Badakhshan. It is scheduled for completion in late 2010/ early 2011 and will reduce the travel time for the Keshim/ Fayzabad trip down from five hours to two.

HALO envisages working in Badakhshan for many years to come.

Finances

The financial statement for the period 1st April 2009 to 30th April is attached at Annex B.

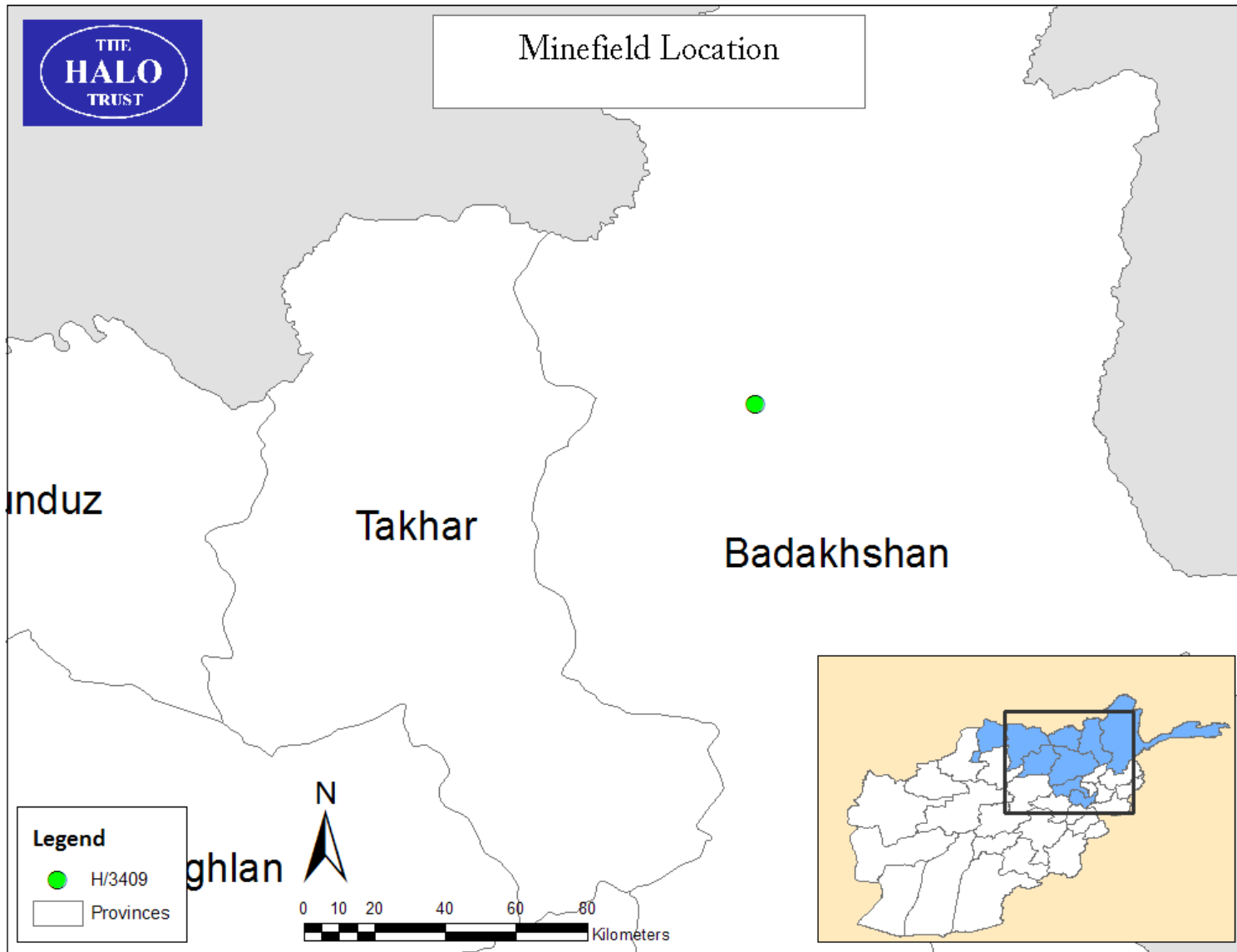
Conclusion

A Return to Noshaq Campaign-funded manual mineclearance team was effectively deployed on the Julghar Mountain minefield in Badakhshan Province during the reporting period. The team was deployed on a task, the clearance of which has allowed people to improve their livelihoods by giving access to agricultural and recreational land without them and their animals falling victim to landmine accidents.

As HALO clearance teams move into new areas local people come forward to provide information about new mineclearance needs. In July of this year alone HALO survey teams in northern Afghanistan recorded and mapped nearly 80 hectares of previously unrecorded minefields. We expect this trend to continue and envisage a need for mineclearance in Afghanistan for many years to come.

Dr. Farid Homayoun
Programme Manager
November 2009

ANNEX A



ANNEX B

**Return to Noshaq Campaign Mineclearance in Badakhshan Province, Northern Afghanistan
Financial statement**

Income

Donations Received 8,228.30

Expenditure

National Staff	5,175.00	
Project Costs / Equipment	2,500.65	
Administration	<u>552.65</u>	<u>8,228.30</u>

Balance 0.00