

Most Dangerous Ways To School, The (Series 2)

5 x 60'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. Ethiopia

When the schoolchildren wake up to the first rays of sunshine, the temperature is already over 30 degrees Celsius. They live in the Danakil desert in northeast Ethiopia, near an active volcano, in a region that is the world's hottest on average. Amongst these children are 6-year-old Looita and his sister Khadiga. Their route to school, which is many kilometres long, takes these children of the Afar tribe over jagged earth, over seemingly endless lengths, and every day they are confronted with much more than just the astounding heat. Not one shadow offers coolness; water is a rare and expensive commodity. Even if a breath of wind blows through the desert it most often quickly evolves into a sandstorm, the grains of which temporarily blind the children and whip at their skin. The very young schoolchildren deal with this until they finally reach their destination: school. But it isn't over yet. There is still plenty of danger to come. After school they have to head home in unbelievable temperatures, beyond 50 degrees Celsius. Even the youngest schoolchildren have to help dig wells, while the older children – like 14 year Mohammed – work in the salt mines, to aid their family's survival. The children as well as the adults do not give up hope that school will help them one day - not just to survive, but also to live well off the barren and inhospitable desert.

2. Nicaragua

Every morning, the three sisters Julia, Yulissa and Kenya climb into their dugout in order to row to school. They live on the east coast of Nicaragua, one of the world's poorest countries, and the youngest of them has just turned five; the oldest is nine. They row across the Rio Escondido. Not only is it one of the largest rivers in the country, it is simultaneously one of the most dangerous routes to school. While they have to watch out for snakes lurking in the trees over the river, the three sisters also struggle against the current and must ensure the dugout does not fill up with water - because it has multiples holes and could sink at any minute. Other classmates do not necessarily have it easier, because they live far from the river, and their journey to school takes them through the deep jungle. One of these classmates is 11-year-old Greyven. His daily trip takes him through the so-called 'snake field', in which coral snakes and the infamous boa constrictor reside. On the way to school, the rain drives the snakes from the empty coconuts on the ground; on the way back the afternoon heat, which is over 35 degrees, means that they are lively and belligerent. The daily journey – ashore and to water – to San Mariano's small village school is an adventure almost unimaginable to us. Every time they undertake this trip, the children expose themselves to life-threatening dangers, all for the chance to have a better future.

3. Papua New Guinea

They live in Papua New Guinea, an island in the Pacific Ocean, in the middle of one of the world's largest rainforests. And some of them take a route to school which will blow your mind. That is certainly the case for 8-year-old Junior and his cousin Ruth. Their journey in the so-called 'Land of 1000 Rivers' is a five-day one which leads the students through jungles, in which new and unique animals are continuously being discovered, and in whose branches the notorious green tree python lurks. For the children these snakes are not just a threat but also a delicacy, because they hunt their own food every day, as well as climb steep mountainsides and cross countless rivers. Their journey to school is too risky to tackle alone; that is why father Michael accompanies his son and niece on this adventure. They travel over one hundred kilometres, and on this trip the children fear nothing more than the large Takali river. It separates their home - the jungle - from modern civilisation, and has already claimed the lives of many who have attempted to cross it. It is more than just a walk to school – It is a test in the vast jungle. And not all of the students will reach their destination...

4. Mongolia

The ice covering the river is treacherous and ever-changing in appearance. Despite this, Tuguldur has to find a suitable point at which to cross the river. The 10-year-old nomadic boy rides his horse alone to school and each time must cross the frozen Tunkhel river in the north of Mongolia. His school day begins in the afternoon. Because the sun has softened the ice on some parts of the river's surface, he cannot trust the ice everywhere. One wrong decision and his horse could slip on the ice - with him on its back - or break through into the cold water below. Even if he were to remain unhurt in such a situation, little Tuguldur would not manage to get back on the horse's saddle by himself. For nomadic Mongolian girl Delgertsetseg, the route to school is equally difficult. The 12-year-old starts school early, when the thermometer at her home shows -30 degrees Celsius. Her father delivers her into the village under moonlight, through deep ruts and slippery snow slopes. Due to the possibility of sliding on the ice and the obvious associated dangers, the police have banned the use of motorbikes in villages during the winter months. However, Delgertsetseg's father has no other choice - he does not have the money for a safer car. What these two nomadic children have in common is their eager anticipation for the warm and ice-free spring, even though they have to overcome the hardships of this school route the day before the traditional Mongolian New Year.

5. Mexico

Every Monday, little Lorenzo struggles alone as he makes his way over slippery scree and past steep canyons. And all this just so he can go to school and receive something to eat there. The 6-year-old lives in northwest Mexico in the extensive Sierra Madre Occidental. This is the home of his people, the Rarámuri. These indigenous peoples live well-hidden in the mountains and have hardly any contact with the outside world. Their daily lives revolve around agriculture and livestock; poverty is a big issue for the Rarámuri. To escape this fate, Lorenzo must literally overcome more than 1000 metres altitude. One small lapse of concentration, one careless step and Lorenzo could fall off the edge. At school, Teresa, Angela and Philomena sit next to him. These sisters, aged 6, 8 and 9, can see the school from their home, which sits on a plateau opposite. But to get there requires a journey of many hours, which takes them over narrow and rocky paths, onto sharp rock edges, across a stream, and - just before they reach their destination

- forces them to climb again steeply uphill over smooth rocks on all fours. If it is raining, this journey becomes an almost impossible one: the stream is transformed within minutes into a torrent, and the rocks are suddenly as slippery as an ice rink. These children undertake their journey to school all by themselves. For up to four hours, they march through one of the most beautiful but also one of the most dangerous Mexican landscapes. Throughout this journey they all have only one goal in mind: to ultimately find a job in a city and lead a better life.