



EUROPE'S WILD BORDERS

4 × 50 min., 4K



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PART 1—THE NORTHERN BORDER

In order to reach the northernmost point of the European mainland, one needs to traverse a sparse rocky plain and reach the tip of Cape Nordkinn. This peninsula lies in Norway's Troms og Finnmark county, a land of craggy coastlines and vast tundras that become taigas at higher elevations. The landscape is covered in warped trees, meadows of herbs and grasses and flat rocks, interspersed with rivers, moors and swamps.

Elks roam the forests during the summer, while the winter belongs to the reindeer. The Sámi people, legendary hunters, fishers and reindeer breeders of the north, drive their herds from the coastal regions into the mountains in autumn. Here, the hardy animals are able to find sufficient food despite the harsh, freezing winter conditions.

If one takes the islands into account, Europe's northern border actually lies ten degrees of latitude closer to the North Pole, in Franz Josef Land. The related political border is located one degree of latitude or 111 kilometres further south and runs through Spitsbergen, the largest island of Norway's Svalbard archipelago.

Franz Josef Land and Spitsbergen lie in the Arctic. Although both are located slightly more than 1,000 kilometres from the North Pole, the two regions appear very different. Franz Josef Land is volcanic and covered in fields of rock and ice. The western coast of

Spitsbergen, on the other hand, is covered in craggy mountain ranges and deep fjords. The inland regions include flat mountain plateaus, while the north-east is defined by Newtontoppen (Newton's Peak), which towers 1,713 metres above the surrounding glaciers.

The islands are home to harp seals, ringed seals and bearded seals, as well as great bird colonies: tens of thousands of little auk breeding pairs congregate here every year, alongside flocks of thick-billed murres, black-legged kittiwakes and northern fulmars. However, researchers are primarily focused on one legendary inhabitant: the polar bear. Biologists from the Norwegian Polar Institute have observed Svalbard's polar bears for more than 30 years. Hunting the bears was banned in 1973 and population numbers have recovered. Depending on the season and the year, up to 4,000 polar bears now roam the Svalbard coasts.

However, global warming has led to a massive reduction of pack ice throughout the entire Arctic in recent years, particularly during warmer months. This has had an impact on polar bear hunting methods: the bears have begun to enter human settlements and forage through trashcans. In the summer months, they will frequently raid the bird colonies looking for young chicks. For now, Spitsbergen's polar bears and birds are not endangered, but the Arctic and Europe's northern border are changing rapidly and inexorably.



PART 2—THE EASTERN BORDER

Europe is part of Eurasia, Earth's largest continent. In fact, Europe is not a geological entity, just a historical concept rooted in antiquity. Europe ends where Eurasia ends – except for its eastern frontier, which has run along the Ural Mountains since the 18th century. This frontier was defined by the Swedish geographer Philip Johan von Strahlenberg, who had previously studied water drainage in the Ural Mountains.

This is fortunate for Europe's nature, as the Urals are home to the Yugyd Va National Park, a mountain and forest wilderness covering an area of 20,000 square kilometres. The park and the surrounding nature reserves, known as the Virgin Komi Forests, are a UNESCO World Heritage site and Europe's last great untouched wilderness.

Here, beavers and otters live along the riverbanks and the crystal-clear waters are filled with salmon that draw brown bears out of the surrounding forests. More than 200 different bird species are estimated to inhabit the park, including black grouse, willow ptarmigans and some birds that are now only rarely found in other parts of Europe: ospreys, white-tailed eagles, gyrfalcons and red-breasted geese.

If one takes a political view of Europe's easternmost point, one finds oneself near the International Date Line in the South Pacific, in New Caledonia. In October of 2020, the inhabitants of this French overseas territory once again voted against independence, so all 280,000 New Caledonians are and remain

French citizens. The archipelago lies at the heart of one of the world's largest marine parks, the „Natural Park of the Coral Sea“, which protects more than one million square kilometres of reefs and atolls.

Among the most significant inhabitants are the approximately 2,000 dugongs, a species which has long vanished from much of the rest of the Pacific. The sea cows travel between the open waters and the fields of sea grass in the shallow lagoons, where they can be seen cavorting with their young offspring.

Numerous endemic species are found on land, including one of the world's largest gecko species and a very unusual bird: the kagu. The bluish-grey bird is half a metre long and flightless, as its muscles are underdeveloped. Instead, the bird uses its fully formed wings to balance, climb and, occasionally, to glide down the slopes when fleeing from predators. Male kagus also use their wings to attract mates and fend off territorial rivals.



PART 3—THE SOUTHERN BORDER

Geographically, the southernmost point of the European mainland lies in Punta da Tarifa, Andalusia. To the west lies the Atlantic, to the east is the Mediterranean, and the Moroccan coast is just ten kilometres further south. It is not just the distinctive location that makes this region so fascinating. The former island is now connected to the mainland by a causeway and is frequently battered by strong winds. The landscape of Punta da Tarifa is untamed and captivating: in spring, cork oaks are surrounded by a sea of wildflowers, and the coast is home to a nature reserve considered one of the world's largest gathering places for migratory birds. Every year, 300 million birds cross the Strait of Gibraltar: they head for the warmer climates of Africa in autumn and return to their European breeding grounds in spring.

After the winter, large pods of killer whales congregate in the Strait of Gibraltar to hunt the bluefin tuna that travel from the Atlantic to their Mediterranean breeding grounds at this time of year.

Europe's geographic and geological southern border lies in Spain, but the European political map stretches all the way to the edge of the Antarctic. South Georgia is undoubtedly the coldest of the British Overseas Territories. Moss, lichen and grass are all that grow in these icy conditions, and even these plants only flourish in the island's sheltered fjords.

South Georgia is one of the world's most significant breeding grounds for king penguins and home to millions of macaroni penguins. All of the Antarctic seal species are found along the coasts: elephant seals, leopard seals, fur seals and crabeater seals.

The island is British to the core, even though the governor responsible for South Georgia actually lives in the Falklands. Queen Elisabeth II is the head of state, and the local currency is Pound sterling. However, the currency can only actually be used in one place: the tiny local museum. During the summer months, four staff members show cruise ship tourists around the exhibits. The museum closes in March, at the beginning of the Antarctic winter. Then the island's population consists of just 24 researchers and technicians from the "British Antarctic Survey", based at the north-west edge of the island.



PART 4—THE WESTERN BORDER

Cabo da Roca cape is mainland Europe's westernmost point. If the outlying islands are taken into account, the actual westernmost point is located on a rock off Flores Island, one of the western Azores. This area is politically, but not geologically, part of Europe, as Flores Island is actually located on the North American Plate. Europe's geological western border therefore vanishes into the sea, somewhere between the steep cliffs of the scattered islands and the fascinating underwater world of the Atlantic.

According to a recent study, approximately 1.5 million whales and dolphins currently inhabit the European Atlantic. Among them are the short-finned pilot whales which can often be seen off the Canary Islands. The pods are led by females and remain together for generations. Even the males will return to their own group after mating with females from other pods during mating season.

Strong currents in the nutrient-rich waters ensure that the dolphins and baleen whales have enough to eat. In summer, above all, marine mammals come and go constantly between the Azores and the Canary Islands. They are accompanied by millions of sea birds like the Cory's shearwaters, which breed in burrows on the Canary Islands and Madeira and can dive to depths of up to 14 metres while hunting.

If one departs the Eurasian continent in a westerly direction, one repeatedly encounters – Europe. French Guiana is part of the Eurozone, as are the Caribbean

islands Guadalupe and Montserrat. On the way to the Pacific, one encounters the Cayman Islands, another British Overseas Territory. Then there are another 7,000 kilometres as the crow flies before one reaches the westernmost European territory of all: French Polynesia.

The territory consists largely of water. Taken together, the surface area of the islands is a mere 4,000 square kilometres – just a fraction of the five million square kilometres of ocean that make up the region. Perhaps the most spectacular place in this remote area is the island of Fatu-Hiva, the southernmost of the Marquesas Islands. The island rises above the surrounding Pacific like a green fortress with overgrown battlements, protected by deep gorges and crashing waterfalls.

The fate of the endemic Fatu Hiva monarch bird reveals the dangers nature on these Pacific islands faces, despite their apparent beauty and tranquillity. Rodents and cats that were introduced to the island almost caused the extinction of the Fatu Hiva monarch, with numbers declining by almost 90 percent in just 20 years. An elaborate international conservation program was able to save the species at the last possible moment. These days, the Fatu Hiva monarch is potentially the most protected bird in the Pacific.



EUROPE'S WILD BORDERS

Raging oceans. Towering snow-capped mountains. Dense, mysterious forests. They all mark Europe's wild borders. These wild regions are home to wolves, bears, ospreys and sperm whales. In addition – and somewhat unexpectedly – Europe also contains the world's second-largest coral reef, vast lagoons, sea cows, green sea turtles and reef sharks.

The search for Europe's borders reaches from the Ural Mountains to the South Pacific and beyond, to the Antarctic. The term "Europe" is by no means easily defined: Is it only the European mainland, or do the islands off the coasts count, too?

Is "Europe" determined by geographical borders, or do political ones that include overseas territories count as well? This blue-chip documentary series takes an open-minded approach, looking for answers wherever the adventurous journey to the remotest, wildest areas of Europe leads.

Written and directed by **Harald Pokieser**
Executive producers: **Sabine Holzer, Walter Köhler**
4 x 50 mins., 4K, 5.1 + Stereo

Terra Mater Factual Studios GmbH, Wambachergasse 2, 1130 Vienna / Austria,
phone +43-1-87003-0, office@terramater.com

CONTACT:

Sabine Holzer, Head of Specialist Factual
Berend Dreier, Director Co-Productions & Sales
Sven Westphal, Director Co-Productions & Portfolio Management

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