

FRIDAY, NOV 10, 2006 08:00 AM EST

What's real in "Borat"?

Everything you wanted to know about the Kazakh road trip -- what was staged, who was an actor, and who was just hapless comedy roadkill.

DAVID MARCHESE AND WILLA PASKIN



57



30



2



0



follow salon



TOPICS: ENTERTAINMENT NEWS



The devilish pranks of "Borat" have made him the powder-blue polyester breakout hit of the season. But how many of Sacha Baron Cohen's gags are real, and which ones are staged? Which of Borat's victims were legitimately goofed, and which ones just played along for giggles?

With few exceptions, the real folks featured in "Borat," the movie

But even after our sleuthing, some mysteries remain — like where the heck did that naked wrestling match take place? No one seems to know. If you have a clue — or any great additional information — please [send it to us](#). This is a work in progress, so be sure to check back in. We think you'll find it very niice.

The Scene: *Borat goes to the rodeo*

Where: *Salem Civic Center, Salem, Va.*

Borat arrives at the rodeo, with plans to sing the national anthem. The rodeo's producer, Bobby Rowe, helpfully advises Borat to shave his mustache, so as not to be mistaken for a Muslim. When Borat tries to kiss him on the cheek, Rowe tells him never to do that, that people might get the wrong impression that he's gay. After Borat declares, "We hang homosexuals in my country!" Rowe smirkingly responds: "That's what we're trying to do

MOST READ



Portrait of a failed president: Inside the art of George W. Bush

DOUGLAS LUCAS AND AMY O'NEAL



Bush crew's deplorable return: How their reemergence sends a deadly message

ELIAS ISQUITH



Tea Party's great dunce-off: How Ted Cruz is quietly kicking Rand Paul's butt

DIGBY



Debunking Alcoholics Anonymous: Behind the myths of recovery

DR. LANCE DODES AND ZACHARY DODES



It's not about you, white liberals: Why attacks on radical people of color are so misguided

BRITTNEY COOPER



The 10 strangest facts about penises

TRACY CLARK-FLORY



"SNL's" Neil deGrasse Tyson explains climate change to the confused hosts of "Fox & Friends"

LINDSAY ABRAMS



Rob Lowe spills everything: Secrets of "West Wing," kissing men, and the ad-lib that broke a costar's heart

ROB LOWE



Near death, explained

MARIO BEAUREGARD



Richard Dawkins is so wrong it hurts: What the science-vs.-religion debate ignores

SANA SAEED

here.”

Before launching into the anthem, Borat shrieks, “We support your war of terror” — to thunderous applause. The crowd’s enthusiasm tapers off as Borat voices his wish that “George W. Bush will drink the blood of every man, woman and child in Iraq” and turns into all-out booing once Borat begins to sing the Kazakh national anthem — during which point a horse, apparently spooked by the crowd, freaks out and falls to the ground with his flag-waving rider.

What happened: The event caused quite a stir. John Saunders, the Salem Civic Center’s assistant director, told [the Roanoke Times](#) that if Borat and crew hadn’t high-tailed it out of the arena, “There would have been a riot. They would have been killed.”

Rowe told Salon that he’d agreed to let Borat sing, believing the story that Borat was a Kazakh journalist traveling across the country. Rowe says he requested a sample track, but was sent a blank CD. And what about those anti-gay comments? Rowe, who says he hasn’t seen the film, didn’t disavow them, but instead offered a curious rationale: “As long as [homosexuals] don’t mess with me and get me involved, if that’s their choice, just have at it. Just don’t come in my household and try to demand, as they’re doing now, all sorts of things. All this marriage and this mess. If you want to go live together, go live together, but don’t drag everyone else into it. It’s, like, before you could just pump your gas, but the thieves ruined it for everyone. Now everyone has to go pay for their gas first. Homosexuals, they want their rights for marriage and all this stuff, and they want respectability. If you want to live that life, live that life, but don’t involve the whole rest of the country.”

Is Rowe concerned about how he comes off in the film? “I’m not really worried about it,” he says. “It can’t be so bad that I can’t survive. No one’s coming and trying to eat me.”

The Scene: *Borat almost stays at a bed-and-breakfast*

Where: *Though the film suggests the bed-and-breakfast is somewhere between Atlanta and Dallas, it’s actually in Newton, Mass.*

Borat arrives at a bed-and-breakfast only to realize that, to his horror, the kindly owners are ... Jewish. Scared into playing nice, Borat hesitantly takes a bite out of a pastrami and rye sandwich they bring to his bedroom — then spits it out the minute they turn away. Later that night, convinced that the shape-shifting couple has transformed into a menacing pair of insects, he throws money at them and runs screaming, with his producer Azamat, into the night.

What happened: Mariam and Joseph Behar, the proprietors of the kosher bed-and-breakfast, tell Salon that they rented out three rooms to what they thought was a Kazakh documentarian and his film crew. The location had been scouted and photographed, with the Behars’ knowledge, prior to the taping. Speaking on the telephone, Joseph, with Mariam chatting in the background, says they saw the film and thought it “was not anti-Semitic at all. It was outstanding. I think [Sacha Baron Cohen] is a genius.”

Though Borat never broke character, and no one in the production let the Behars in on the joke, Joseph found Borat to be “very lovely and very polite, very attractive.”

Joseph says that he first started to have doubts about Borat’s authenticity when Borat told him he was going to be married in Malibu. “I know what kind of people live in Malibu,” Joseph said, “and I didn’t think someone in Malibu would marry this kind of man.” Mariam also overheard Borat using Hebrew words (Borat’s Kazakh is a mix of gibberish Hebrew and various Eastern European languages).

The producers did ask the Behars to bring food to Borat’s room — something not usually done for guests — though they did not say what kind of food to bring.

The Scene: *Borat has an etiquette lesson*

Where: *Birmingham, Ala.*

Borat visits etiquette instructor Kathie Martin for advice on appropriate dinner party behavior. Most memorably, Borat regales Martin with Polaroids of his very, very naked, teenage son, which Martin, with preternatural poise, suggests he not show to his fellow dinner party attendees.



Millennials just don't get it! How the Muppets created Generation X

ELIZABETH HYDE STEVENS



Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 update: Malaysian Defense Minister "cautiously hopeful" about possible pings

SARAH GRAY



Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 update: The search's status at the one month mark

SARAH GRAY



Good riddance, Barbara Walters

ALEX PAREENE



Right-wing food companies

LAUREN KELLEY, ALTERNET

VIDEO OF THE DAY



WATCH MORE HERE »



THE LISTENER: "Men We Reaped": A memoir of community, time and loss

Rolling Stone

African-American Music Museum to Be Built in Nashville

Todd Terje on the Obscure Influences Behind His

What happened: Martin was told by producers that a Kazakh documentarian would like to have a lesson before beginning his travels, so as not to embarrass himself. Martin saw the film on Saturday and told us she found that “certain parts were funny, certain parts were not.” She told [Newsweek](#), “I would’ve liked my 15 minutes of fame in this life to have been for something more worthwhile than an R-rated movie.”

Her first meeting with Borat was canceled after the crew came to Martin’s house and encountered technical difficulties — but not before Martin had prepared a five-course meal for her guest.

As for the naked pictures, Martin, polite as always, remarked, “It helped that I was not wearing my glasses.”

The Scene: *Borat eats with a Southern dining society*

Where: *The dinner took place at the Magnolia Springs Manor in Helena, Ala. The Southern plantation home was built in 1875 and currently functions as an event hall.*

Among many transgressions that night, Borat insults the wife of Mountain Brook Presbyterian Church pastor Cary Speaker; after remarking on how popular two of the women would be in Kazakhstan, Borat gestures at Speaker’s wife and says, “not so much.” Oh, he also brings a bag of his own excrement to the table after using the bathroom, mistakes a *retired* fellow diner for being *retarded*, and invites a “prostitute” over for company.

What happened: The Birmingham News [reports](#) that Borat’s dining companions weren’t that upset with how they appeared in the film. “All things considered, we got out of this pretty clean,” said the *retired* Mike Jared.

Speaker, who abruptly left the party after the alleged prostitute arrived, says his attitude is “Hey, he fooled us; it’s funny. Watching this, I’m sure it’s funny [to some people]. It was just not funny that night.”

He adds that his two college-age sons found his appearance “hysterical.”

[Updated Nov. 20, 2006:] Though Cindy Streit, the Birmingham etiquette coach who arranged the dinner and instructed Borat on how to correctly flush his feces, told The News I don’t think he made a fool of us,” she has nonetheless filed a complaint with the California Attorney General, requesting an investigation into possible violations of the California Unfair Trade Practices Act according to the Associated Press. Streit contends that the production company that set-up her meetings with Borat put into writing that the session would be filmed as part of a documentary for Belarus Television and for those purposes only. 20th Century Fox has dismissed her claims, saying that Streit signed a release and was compensated, not once, but twice the second time a number of weeks after her initial meeting with Borat. Streit has not ruled out a lawsuit.

The Scene: *Borat goes for humor lessons*

Where: *Although the film makes it appear as if Borat’s humor lessons took place in New York, he visited with humor coach Pat Haggerty, who lives and works in Washington, D.C.*

Haggerty instructs Borat to not make jokes about the “retard” brother Borat keeps in a cage, and that perhaps it’s not the best idea to tell people about having sex with his mother-in-law. Borat also proves himself to be a quick study when it comes to the subtle timing of the “not” joke — not!

What he said: Haggerty told the [BBC News](#) that about halfway through their session he realized “this guy can’t be real.” Aware that he was being made to play the straight man, Haggerty continued with the lesson because “they paid me my money and they deserve an hour of my time.” According to the same story, the public speaking coach is hoping his appearance in the film will give his career a boost. “The only downside is if I appear to be a fool.”

The Scene: *Borat talks to the Veteran Feminists of America*

Where: *New York*

Borat sits down with three members of the Veteran Feminists of America, informs them that women have smaller brains than men do, and inquires about “Baywatch.” He also cajoles one to “listen, pussycat, smile a bit,” without much luck. (To view some of the scene, [go](#)

[Electronic Summer Jams](#)

[WWE Star Ultimate Warrior Dead at 54](#)

[Pixies, Julian Casablancas Added to Coachella 2014](#)

[Julia Louis-Dreyfus Is Naked on the New Cover of Rolling Stone](#)

HUFFPOST ENTERTAINMENT

[Marc Cleary: From Dancer to Director](#)

[Amy Poehler And Brother Greg Team Up For New Comedy](#)

[Kim Kardashian Wears Plunging Top With Menswear-Inspired Look](#)

[Heidi Klum's Bra Stolen On 'America's Got Talent'](#)

['Batman vs. Superman' Won't Move For 'Captain America'](#)

here.)

What happened: Linda Stein, Grace Welch and Carole De Saram were told by producers that they would be appearing in a documentary to help women in Third World countries. Stein says she has mixed feelings about the incident. She finagled her way into an advance screening of the film and found some parts of the film funny, but thinks "the joke appeals more to men than women."

Welch, a yoga instructor, found the whole incident funny. "What he does, he does very well, so I don't feel anger," she told the British **Observer**. "I was inclined very much to laugh at the event." As a result of the encounter she did go see "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby," thinking it was "Borat." "I had to soldier on to watch that," she said. "I don't usually go to those kinds of pictures."

Cohen's Borat act was thoroughly convincing. Though Stein threw him out of the interview twice, she readily admits that "at no point during the whole event, as angry as I may have gotten, did it ever occur to me this was a comedian acting." The producer was able to sweet-talk the women into speaking with Borat again after the first heave-ho (the second time around, Borat asked the women to take off their tops). "Please," Stein says the producer begged, "he's from a third-world country, help him. He doesn't know any better." The producer then admonished Borat in a stage whisper, "You can't talk to American women this way."

When Stein told Borat that women in America can do anything men can, be president, secretary of state ("Oh, like that chocolate lady?" Borat replied) or even a reporter, Borat argued, "No. I can lift a chair!" At which point he stood up and lifted a chair. Not to be outdone, Stein lifted a chair as well. "I can lift two chairs," Borat countered, lifting two chairs. Stein did the same. And she now takes exception to the omission of this scene from the film. "He didn't choose the segments that really make the point that women are equal and strong. He didn't make the point with sexism that perhaps he did with anti-Semitism and homophobia."

The Scene: *Borat learns to drive*

Where: *Baltimore County, Md.*

After deciding that he must travel cross-country to meet Pamela Anderson, Borat decides to take driving lessons. Patiently teaching the easily distracted Kazakh is Michael Psenicksa, a driving instructor with 32 years of experience and the owner of his own **driving school**. During the harrowing car ride, Psenicksa tells Borat that in America, women must give consent for "sexy time."

"That's good, huh?" says the instructor.

"That's not good for me," Borat replies.

What happened: In an **interview** with the Baltimore Sun, Psenicksa said his encounter with Borat began in May 2005, when he received a phone call from someone saying his production company was filming a documentary about foreigners learning how to drive. He realized he'd been the victim of a gag after he told his son-in-law about the experience, who said it sounded like a gag from "Da Ali G Show." When Psenicksa saw the show, he recognized his student.

While he thought the movie was funny, Psenicksa says he was upset that other drivers were put at risk during the prank. "I'm not happy about that to this day."

The Scene: *Borat buys a car*

The Scene: *Gaithersburg, Md.*

Borat arrives at a dealership looking to buy a vehicle for somewhere in the range of \$600 to \$650. Borat asks the salesman, the aptly named Jim Sell, for a "pussy magnet," at which point he's shown a Hummer. After Borat learns that no such actual magnet exists, and that the Hummer is out of his price range, we appear to see Sell arrange for Borat to buy a used ice cream truck.

What happened: "I was approached by a man named Todd Lewis, who said he was a producer for a documentary," says Sell. "They wanted to film him negotiating with me over the price of a vehicle."

When Borat arrived, "they kept him away from most people in the dealership. I had no idea who he was. I just thought he didn't know anything about this country."

Sell knew something fishy was going on when Borat "gave me a pin and said it was a gift from his country. On one side was a flag, on the other side was a KKK sign."

"Luckily, I handled myself OK," says Sell. "I just feel bad I wasted three hours of my time for 150 bucks. And I had nothing to do with selling him an ice cream truck."

The Scene: *Borat appears on a small Southern ABC affiliate*

Where: *Jackson, Miss.*

Borat wreaks havoc at Jackson's WAPT, standing up every time he spoke, forcing the camera crew to scramble to avoid waist-level shots; offering up his sister to the silver-haired newscaster conducting the interview; interrupting the weatherman during a report by wandering on to the set.

What happened: A story in the [Jackson Clarion-Ledger](#) quotes station general manager Stuart Kellogg as saying, "We were gotten. Our folks researched the production company, which has its own Web site and sounds legitimate. They did their homework, but not well enough. It seemed plausible that he was who he said he was," Kellogg said. "Who knows what an accent from Kazakhstan sounds like?"

The story also reports that Borat's visit led the station to upgrading its policy on researching guests and on building security.

Another story reports that Dharma Arthur, the woman responsible for booking Borat on the show, says she lost her livelihood because of the incident. "I spiraled into depression, and before I could recover, I was released from my contract early. It took me three months to find another job, and now I'm thousands of dollars in debt and struggling to keep my house out of foreclosure. The upsetting thing is that a man who leaves so much harm in his path is lauded as a comic genius."

The Scene: *Borat meets a prostitute*

Where: *Helena, Ala.*

Borat invites Luenell, a prostitute whose number he found in the back of a newspaper, to the Magnolia Mansion Dining Society, whose members promptly ask them to leave. Borat and Luenell go on to enjoy a night of mechanical bull riding at a local bar. Later, after Borat concludes that things aren't going to work out with Pamela Anderson, he realizes Luenell is the woman for him, marries her, and takes her back to Kazakhstan, where she feeds his whole town with her breast milk.

What happened: Sadly, [Luenell Campbell](#) is not a Borat-style "Pretty Woman" but a 37-year-old comedian and actress who has appeared in "So I Married an Axe Murderer" and "The Rock," and is currently on a comedy tour. She's coy about her participation in the film, telling MTV, "I can't tell you about any of the inner workings. I'm sworn to secrecy ... Borat and I go back a long way. We knew each other in Kazakhstan."

The Scene: *Borat wrecks an antique store*

Where: *Adolph Rose Antiques in Vicksburg, Miss.*

After being convinced that the shop owners are not trying to trick him by selling "old things," Borat destroys a good chunk of the store's merchandise via a series of pratfalls. Borat's offer to help pay for the broken antiques with a bag of pubic hair is, unsurprisingly, turned down.

What happened: Store owner Larry Walker tells us that he was called out of the blue by a producer asking permission to come to his store, in order to film "a Belarussian documentary about life in the South."

"I had a funny feeling at first," Walker continues. "But some woman called and seemed nice and convincing, and she sent me stuff on some official-looking letterhead. Then when Borat came, all hell broke loose."

Walker, who found that he'd been duped only after a friend saw Borat on the "Today"

show, estimates that \$500 worth of merchandise was broken during the filming, which lasted about three hours. Still, he says he harbors no ill-will about being featured in the film (the damaged antiques were all paid for, even though the film implies otherwise). "It's a very funny movie. You have to laugh at it now. But at the time, we were just glad to get rid of him."

The Scene: *Borat takes a road trip with three frat boys*

Where: *The film implies that it takes place on a stretch in the Southwest. In fact, it was in South Carolina.*

Borat gets picked up on the side of the road by three members of the Chi Psi fraternity. David, Justin and Anthony fulfill just about every frat-boy stereotype possible, saying they wished they had slaves, explaining that minorities have all the power, disabusing Borat of the notion that Pamela Anderson is a virgin, and devolving into general drunken boorishness.

What happened: The University of South Carolina chapter of Chi Psi has been expectedly tight-lipped about the incident, which doesn't portray the boys in a particularly positive light. Chapter president Todd Bailey told a [Web site](#) that he's not eager to see the film: "Personally, I have no desire to see it, but I have to be aware of what's in the movie."

David Corcoran, the most outspoken of the three, spoke with [FHM](#) about the experience. "This guy said they were filming a Kazakh reporter who wanted to hang out with frat guys," Corcoran said. "They met 10 of us and I guess chose the three who wouldn't recognize Borat." The producers paid for the three men to drink at a bar, and then had them get in the RV and "pick Borat up ... as if he was hitchhiking." Once in the RV, he says, Borat showed them naked pictures of his sister and confessed to beating women.

Two of the guys — identified in court filings only as John Doe 1 and John Doe 2 — are now [suing](#) 20th Century Fox and One America Productions, the production company behind the film. The suit claims all three were told at the time that the film wouldn't show in the U.S. and their identities would be kept secret. They're seeking unspecified damages for "humiliation, mental anguish, and emotional and physical distress, loss of reputation, goodwill and standing in the community."

The Scene: *Borat tries to kidnap Pamela Anderson*

Where: *Los Angeles*

A lovelorn Borat finally meets the object of his desire at a Virgin Megastore and attempts to kidnap her by throwing a bag over her head. After she escapes, he then chases the barefoot Anderson into the parking lot, where he is thrown to the ground by two security guards.

What happened: Anderson tells [MTV](#) that she has been sworn to secrecy about her involvement with the project, but says, "I love Sacha. He's such a nice guy ... He's the new Monty Python."

Despite her silence, it seems more than likely that Anderson was in on the joke. In August 2005, when the film was still shooting, there were [suspicious reports](#) of a Malibu beach commitment ceremony between Anderson's two dogs that was interrupted by Borat, who "emerged from the surf astride an inflatable turtle." Borat, the story claimed, "sprinted toward Anderson and felled her with a perfectly executed rugby tackle ... [she] struggled to her feet and brushed sand off of her long white gown as her loyal bodyguards seized the interloper, dragged him back to the shore, and dunked him in the hungry waves." That sounds like an alternative ending that might have just been too implausible to make the final cut. But we're sure it'll wind up in the DVD.

[Added Nov. 14, 2006] The Scene: *Borat at home in Kuzcek, Kazakhstan*

Where: *Actually in Glod, Romania*

The film begins with Borat giving a tour of the run-down, poverty-stricken village of Kuzcek, where people share living quarters with livestock and the car he leaves for America in is powered not with gas, but a team of horses. Borat also introduces us to locals, like the village "mechanic and abortionist" and his sister Natalya — the fourth-best prostitute in Kazakhstan. We're also shown a brief clip of the annual "Running of the Jews," where people dressed in fanged and green-skinned "Jew" costumes run the streets of Buzcek, as the villagers attack them. Borat returns to Kuzcek at the end of the film, bringing with him

his new American bride Luenell.

What Happened: According to [this story](#) in the U.K.'s Daily Mail, the Kuzcek scenes were actually shot in Glod — a village of 1,000 people at the foot of Romania's Carpathian Mountains. The story explains how the villagers were told that the filming was for a documentary about their hardship. Upset at their portrayal as a bunch of backwoods prostitutes and rapists, the residents of the village are planning to sue the filmmakers.

After being shown the film's trailer by the Mail's reporter, Spirea Ciorobea, represented in the film as the "village mechanic and abortionist," had the following to say: "What I saw looks disgusting. Even if we are uneducated and poor, it is not fair that someone does this to us."

The disabled Nicu Tudorache, who unwittingly appears in the film with a sex toy attached to the end of his amputated arm, expressed similar concerns. "This is disgusting," he said. "They conned us into doing all these things and never told us anything about what was going on. They made us look like primitives, like uncivilised savages."

Conditions in Glod were evidently enough to disturb Cohen — whom villagers describe as "nice and friendly, if a bit weird and ugly" — as the comedian was reportedly accompanied by bodyguards while on location and stayed in a hotel in Sinaia, a nearby ski resort, rather than the "run-down" motel the rest of the crew called home.

[Added Nov. 20, 2006] Glod is now suing the makers of Borat for \$30 million dollars in damages and seeking to stop screenings of the film if its not re-cut to present the town in a more positive way. According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), the suit filed in New York (two others will be filed in Florida and Germany), seeks \$5 million to be used to improve schools and other infrastructure in the impoverished village, an additional \$25 million in humanitarian aid and an unspecified amount for fair compensation for the villagers, who were paid roughly \$4 a day for participating in the film, which has made \$90.5 million in domestic box office receipts. The production contends that the actors were paid *more* than \$4 — a sum double the amount suggested by the Romanian Film Office — and that they gave \$10,000 to the village after their stay to purchase computers for the local school.

David Marchese is associate music editor at Salon.

MORE DAVID MARCHESE.



Willa Paskin is Salon's staff TV writer.

MORE WILLA PASKIN.

Share 57
30
2
0



Bill O'Reilly: Stephen Colbert is "a deceiver"

Next Article

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE

More from Salon

- [Carrie Fisher's strange outing of John Travolta](#)
- [Brad Pitt keeps breaking his silence on how boring marriage to Jennifer Anisto...](#)

We Recommend