

Univ Roger Short Travel Scholarship Travel Journal

Jeffrey Hawke

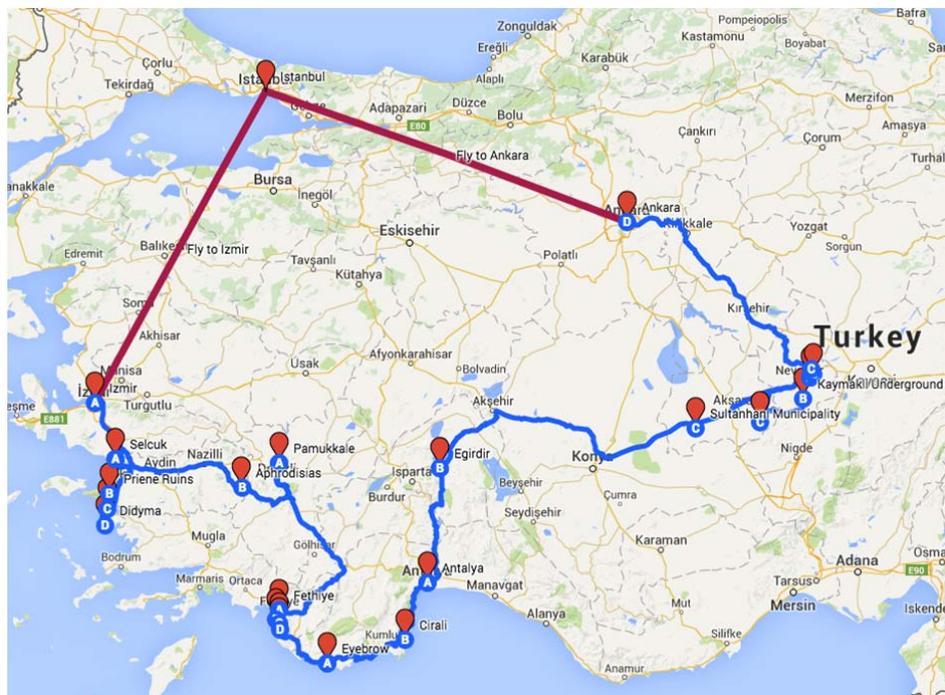
27 October 2015

I spent two weeks in Turkey on the Roger Short travel scholarship in September 2015. I need to begin by expressing my thanks to the Short scholarship fund and Univ for this scholarship, as I wouldn't have been able to make this trip without this support.

I planned my trip to take in as much of the country as I could within the time I had available as a DPhil student, particularly focussing on understanding the history and experiencing the natural environment. Growing up in New Zealand, my only prior understanding of Turkey as a country and culture was from learning about New Zealand's involvement in the Gallipoli campaign against the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. Needless to say, these significant events in New Zealand's short history form only a very, very small part of Turkey's – after all, the first humans arrived in New Zealand around the same time Univ was founded.

As I was time constrained, I hired a rental car for a one-way trip as this was much more time efficient and meant being able to go to places which are otherwise difficult to access – particularly areas where I wanted to go hiking. I was joined on my trip by Claire.

This route went down the Aegean coast, visiting Greek and Roman ruins; then across the southern coast up to Cappadocia, ending in Ankara. All up this was a 2200km journey over nine days, followed by a final five days based in Istanbul. This was an amazing trip which gave me the opportunity to comprehensively experience Turkey's history, culture, food, and natural beauty. I thoroughly enjoyed travelling there and I can't wait to return at some point.



Arrival: Taxis and traffic

August 29th – 30th

We arrived at Istanbul's second airport at around 17:00 in the evening. This airport, Sabiha Gokcen, is on the eastern side of Istanbul. We spent the evening in Pendik on the Asian side of Istanbul. Pendik is a busy, vibrant area on the coast near the airport. As we had luggage we decided to catch a taxi to Pendik – the public bus looked quite packed.

We hopped in the first taxi on the cab rank, showed the driver the address and set off. The taxi driver then called a number on his phone and spoke with someone. He then told us – via a combination of mutually bad German and Google-translate – that the place we were staying was closed for renovations. We were initially quite sceptical and had an inkling that he might be trying to scam us, but he was very insistent. He even went as far as calling a number on his phone (apparently the hotel) and said that we could stay at another place which had the same owners. Despite our protests he proceeded to drive right past the hotel we were booked in and drove south down the coast for 15 minutes and parked outside a hotel. In addition to being more expensive than what we had pre-booked, the area looked a bit sketchy.

After threatening to get a different taxi and ignoring the English speaking passer-by he roped in to translate, he finally caved in and turned the cab around. Following a very quiet 20 minute crawl back through Istanbul traffic we arrived near the hotel. Our taxi driver then continued this farce, demanding an exorbitant fare.

Luckily we had watched the meter when we passed our hotel the first time, and knew that we shouldn't pay more than 40 lira. He wasn't particularly happy about this as we had now been in the cab for about an hour (instead of 15 minutes). He eventually disappeared after a very direct refusal to hand over any more cash and we walked the block to the hotel.

Somewhat unsurprisingly by this point, the place we had booked was both open and not under renovation. The taxi saga wasn't over yet though. The taxi driver went to the front desk of the hotel while we dropped our bags in the room and told the owner that we owed him 50TL. When the owner mentioned this to us we laughed at his nerve and persistence. The owner agreed that the expected fare was correct and told us not to pay the taxi any more, particularly when we mentioned that the taxi tried to make us to go another hotel.

In hindsight we should have caught the bus.

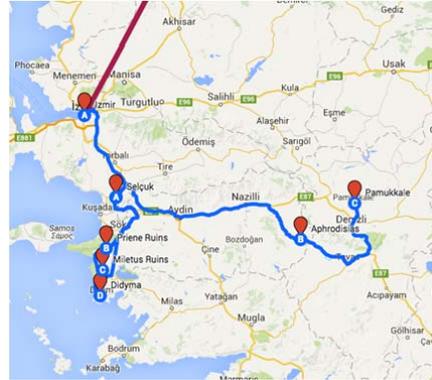
Pendik was otherwise a very nice place to stop for a night before beginning our road trip. The frustration of the previous hour was quickly solved by a large döner kebab and an evening walk around the marina.



Day 1-2: Antiquity and environmental change

August 30th – August 31st

To kick off the road trip we flew to Izmir at 08:00 and collected our rental car: a sturdy Renault diesel. I was particularly interested in exploring some of the quieter Greco-Roman ruins along the Aegean coast, so we set off south, heading towards Prienne, Miletus and Didyma. Originally a collection of busy ports along a large inlet, Prienne and Miletus are now abandoned ruins. Walking through the ruins quite clearly highlighted the extent of these ancient towns in a way that reading a book can't convey.



Temple at Didyma

What particularly struck me while exploring Prienne and Miletus is how environmental change can drastically affect people's livelihoods and society more broadly. Both these towns waned and became abandoned after sea level change meant that they lost their harbours, becoming stranded as the sea level dropped and the Büyük Menderes (Meander) River



Changing sea level at the Büyük Menderes delta

silted up the valley. I found this particularly interesting as these are good historical examples of the very types of problems that climate change presents us today.

We used our second day to see the area around Selcuk, primarily the Ephesus ruins and St John's Basilica, a Byzantine church from the 6th Century CE. Both were absolutely fascinating, though overrun with tour buses compared to what we saw yesterday. The highlight was seeing the recently excavated terraced houses in Ephesus, featuring stunning frescos including 1st century graffiti of gladiators!

We left Selcuk heading towards Pamukkale via Aphrodisias, another ruined town from classical antiquity, but one that isn't frequented by tour buses. Aphrodisias is best known for its temple to Aphrodite and its tetrapylon. However it also has a largely complete 30 000 person stadium. This stadium is the size of many modern equivalents today. It's difficult to appreciate the scale of towns and cities in the ancient world without seeing them in the flesh.



Graffiti of gladiators on frescos at Ephesus.



Stadium at Aphrodisias

Day 3-5: Hiking and myths

September 1st – 3rd

After seeing the Roman resort ruins and travertines at Hierapolis near Pamukkale we had three days heading around the southern coast, often referred to as the ‘Turquoise Coast’.

This area of Turkey is where the Lycians lived around 600BCE. There are many ruins from their era still visible, particularly tombs carved into the cliff faces.



Part of the reason we wanted to visit this area is the hiking. The Lycian Way trail runs from Fethiye to Antalya, and there are other shorter trails off it all along the coast. We were able to do a number of short day hikes in the area, hiking segments of the trail.

This was also where we first encountered some of Turkey’s more recent history. Starting from Fethiye we stopped at Kayakoy for a morning walk. This village was populated by Greek people and was forcibly abandoned in the 1920s as part of the population exchange between Turkey and Greece after the war between the two countries between 1919 and 1922. Walking through the village was a very eerie experience. The narrow paths have become rough as the cobblestones are forced apart by undergrowth, and trees and shrubs emerge from doorways and roofs in many houses.



Overgrowth at Kayakoy

After lunch at the Oludeniz beach we continued south to a place called ‘Butterfly Valley’ near the village of Faralya. This is a stunningly beautiful valley with a trail down the side of a cliff to the sea (approximately 400m or 1.5 hours each way), including a number of stretches requiring ropes. We climbed down to the bottom and, after a break and swim in the sea at the

bottom, climbed back to the top again. We met a few locals on the cliff, most of whom were quite confused that we actually wanted to scale the valley for fun.



Leg workout complete, we hopped back in the car and followed the driving directions to Kas. We found Google maps to be generally quite helpful, but we were a little concerned when the road we were following turned into a single lane dirt road on a cliff's edge with large stones and deep potholes to avoid. This was indeed a viable route, but the time estimate proved to be very optimistic as we slowly climbed to an altitude of 1600m around the side of Babadağ, the highest mountain in the region.



Scaling the cliffs at Butterfly Valley (left), and Kas (right)

While this did slow our plans, the view was absolutely stunning. The scenery reminded me of when Claire and I did a similar road trip through the Sierra Nevada mountains when I was living in California: sharp peaks with amazing forested valleys. Here we had the added benefit of coastal views over the Mediterranean. Eventually, after testing the car's suspension a little too strenuously, we joined up with an asphalt road leading to the highway to Kas, our overnight stop.

Kas is a small coastal town which has become a popular tourist destination, and with good reason. The town is beautifully quaint with a stunning harbour, and plenty of good restaurants and cafes to sit and admire the area.



Lycian sarcophagus in Kas

After looking around Kas in the morning we set off along the coast towards Çıralı. We planned to walk around two significant sites: Olympos, a ruined Lycian city near the beach, and the Yanartaş area where gases vent from the rocky ground and ignite. This area is thought to be responsible for the myth of the Chimera and has a ruined temple to Hephæstus.

We finished up this segment of the trip in Antalya, a large city with over a million inhabitants. Antalya's kaleiçi (historic city centre) is a fantastic maze of Seljuk, Ottoman, Byzantine, and Roman architecture. We were glad that we had taken a paper map with us as GPS wasn't reliable with so many narrow alleys and passages.

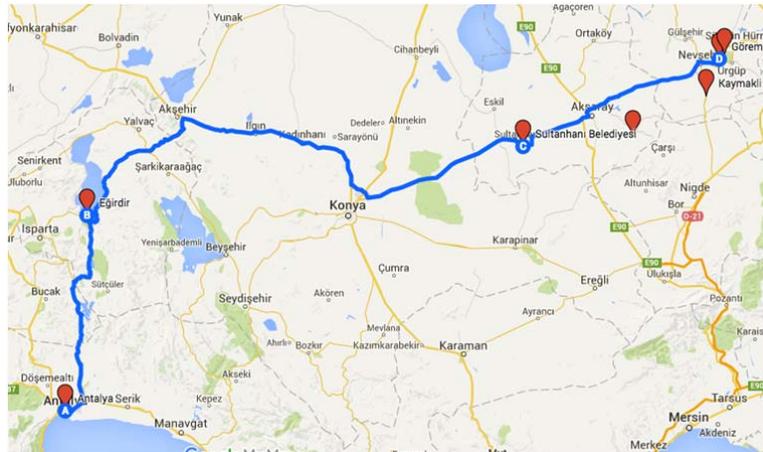


Burning vents at Çıralı (left), Lycian ruins at Olympos (right)

Day 6: Road trip

September 4th 2015

Today was the main travel day in the trip. We needed to get from Antalya on the southern coast to Cappadocia, in the centre of Turkey. The most direct route for this is about 550km, or 6.5 hours driving. As neither Claire nor I like to do things by halves, we planned to take the longer scenic route (~8 hours) and stop at a few locations we were interested in.



Setting off from Antalya we headed north towards Lake Egirdir, reaching the lake around lunch time. Refuelled and rested after a relaxing lunch stop at a bakery by the lake, we continued north up the eastern lakeshore towards a major highway to Konya.



Navigating the maze of Antalya's kaleiçi (left), and Egirdir's lakeshore (right).

Skirting Konya we continued east into the Anatolia steppes, making one last stop for the day at the Sultan Han, a 13th century Seljuk caravanserai (roadside inn) on the ancient silk road. Walking around the storage and sleeping rooms, and the massive enclosed hall where camels were housed, made me very appreciative of modern comforts and transport.

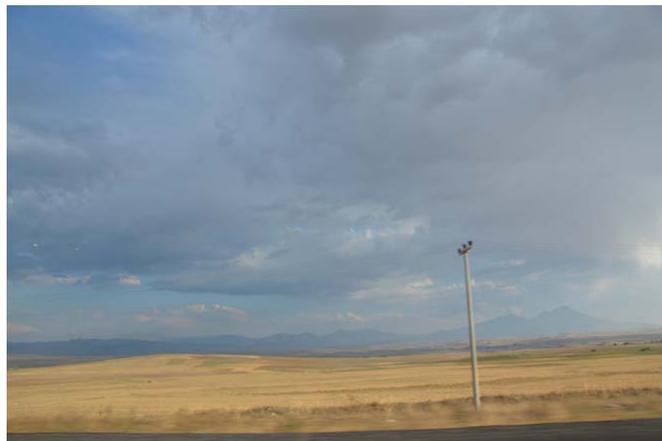


Sultan Han caravanserai

While a full day of driving was quite tiring, it had its own appeal in the many experiences we wouldn't have had otherwise. We had to drive through a busy bazaar in Antalya (with shopkeepers moving out of our way), narrowly avoided a tortoise crossing the road, nudged our way through a group of goats, saw a spectacular lake, and gained an appreciation for the vast Anatolian steppes and how this landscape influenced the local culture.



Local wildlife on the roads: a tortoise (left) and herd of goats (right).



Anatolian steppes

Day 7-8: Cappadocia

September 5th – 6th

Cappadocia in central Anatolia is an area of national parks covering landscapes formed by quite unique geomorphic processes. The area is known for its 'fairy chimney' rock formations created by thousands of years of erosion of compressed volcanic ash. This rock is relatively soft and easy to cut with simple tools, enabling the local people to carve homes and buildings into the rock itself. I spent two days in Cappadocia, walking through the open air museums, hiking trails, and through the underground cities.

While the 5th century mosaics in rock carved chapels in the Goreme open air museum were fabulous (particularly the Dark Church), I enjoyed spending an afternoon hiking and exploring similar chapels in the Ihlara valley. While the chapels are not quite as well preserved it was a more pleasant experience hiking in the sun through a valley beside a burbling river.



Mosaics in Ihlara Valley (left), Zelve Open Air Museum (right).



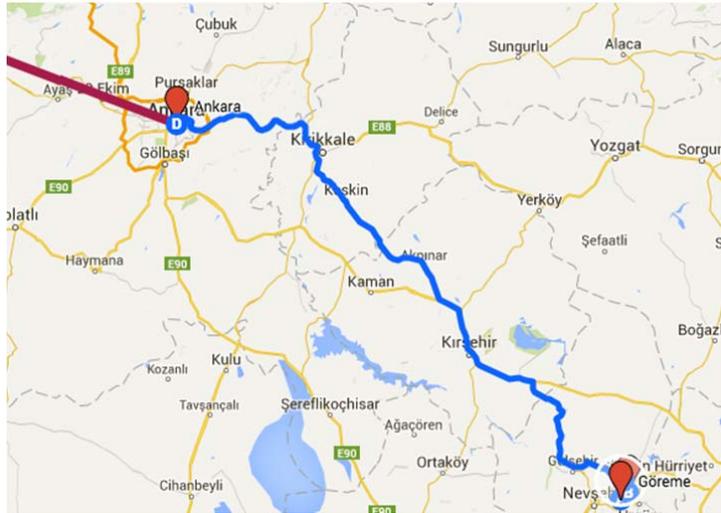
'Fairy chimney' rock formations near Goreme (left), and the 80m deep ventilation shaft in the Kaymakli underground city (right).

Day 9: Ankara and Modern Turkey

September 7th

Ankara was the last stop on the road trip before flying back to Istanbul. As visitors to Turkey, Ankara doesn't have too many sights for a city of its size, but there were two main things I took away from it.

Firstly, I gained a much better understanding of the very early history of Turkey after visiting the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations. This museum has excellent exhibits covering Turkey's history from the Paleolithic era up until Greek & Roman settlements. The highlight of this museum is the Hittite collection, including massive statues and monumental panels from the Hittite capital, Hattusa.



Hittite statue from Hattusa (left), changing of the guard at the Anitkabir (right).

Secondly, Ankara was the first time we had really experienced modern Turkish history. The places we visited to date had their roots in much earlier civilisations, and this was the focus of our time there. Ankara was designated the capital of the newly formed Turkish Republic in the 1920s, and grew from a town of 70 000 to a metropolis of 5 million. As a result the personality cult surrounding Ataturk, Turkey's founder, is particularly strong there. This, along with Turkish nationalism, is strongly embodied in the massive Anitkabir: the

mausoleum for Ataturk. This was a new (if slightly uncomfortable) experience for me as New Zealand tends to avoid nationalism outside of rugby and war commemoration ceremonies. I could also see some parallels with the United States and attitudes towards the constitution and founding fathers, but the prominence of Ataturk in Turkey is far greater and is enshrined in legislation.

Seeing this helped add context to the news stories I recall reading about the censorship and banning of websites such as Youtube or Twitter. It's a little hard to grasp how uploading a critical video to Youtube could create such a stir without seeing how strong Turkish nationalism is in some areas and how integral Ataturk is to the Turkish national identity.



Anitkabir gardens.

Day 10: Gallipoli

September 8th

After flying back to Istanbul I spent my first day there on a long day-trip southwest to visit the Gallipoli peninsula.

The Gallipoli peninsula was the site of one of the many terrible campaigns in the First World War. This is significant for Australians and New Zealanders as it marked the point when both countries began to be thought of as being independent nations, rather than colonial troops in service of the British Empire. Similarly it is equally significant for the Turkish people as it marked the dissolution of the Ottoman empire and the formation of the Republic of Turkey by the commanding general in this campaign.

Gallipoli is about a 5 hour drive from Istanbul, so we decided that it was best to do this as an organised bus tour, as neither Claire or I wanted to negotiate Istanbul's traffic ourselves. Unsurprisingly, the bus was mostly full of Australians and New Zealanders, with a few slightly confused Americans on a longer tour which included Troy.

Today the Gallipoli peninsula is set up as a national park with cemeteries and memorials from both sides dotting the landscape. It's sobering to see the places we learned about in books in high school, adding a very real human element to the descriptions in text. The tragedy of war is not new, and unfortunately we still see the suffering that it brings even today. While at the Chunuk Bair cemetery we saw five or six military jets fly low overhead towards the south-east, a further reminder that the current conflict in Syria is not all that far away.



New Zealand trenches (left), statue of a Turkish soldier helping a wounded Anzac (right).

Days 11-14: Istanbul

September 9th-12th

The last four days of my trip were spent seeing Istanbul. With a packed schedule and long days I managed to see many of the historical sights and museums I was interested in.

The most fascinating aspect of Istanbul was the incredibly visible layering of history around the city. The city has amazingly preserved Roman structures in addition to the (comparatively) more recent Byzantine churches and Ottoman palaces. I particularly enjoyed the Mosaic museum, which is very under-sold by its name. The museum houses sections of the 6th century mosaic floor from the Great Palace of Constantinople. While only some of the floor has survived, the large sections that have hint of the grandeur of the palace at the height of Byzantine power.



The Aya Sofya (left) and rose garden at the Topkapi Palace (right).

Another interesting experience was seeing the Mehter military marching band at the Military Museum. The Mehter band is believed to have been started by the Ottomans in the 13th century, making them the oldest marching band. The same museum also holds the defensive chain that was draped across the Golden Horn to protect the harbour during the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. It was also interesting to see the Turkish perspective on a number of conflicts, such as the Turkish war of independence (largely with Greece), and the conflict with the Armenian citizens of the Ottoman empire.

Walking through Taksim Square and the Beyoglu district was fascinating. I first read about this area in 2013 as the site of the mass protests against the government which resulted in

thousands of arrests. It's easy to take our expectations of free speech and personal liberties for granted when living in the UK, and seeing where this happened made these events that much more tangible.



Galata bridge over the Golden Horn (left), and the chain used in defense of Constantinople across the Golden Horn in 1453 (right).



İstiklâl Caddesi (Independence Avenue) in Beyoğlu, Istanbul (left), the Mehter marching band (right).

While walking around the Sultanahmet I was happened to run into one of the other Short scholarship recipients from Univ: David Astley. We were able to catch up and swap stories from our travels, including recommendations and tips for good places for food, accommodation, and museums. We also managed to arrange an evening to meet Victoria Short for drinks on my last evening in Istanbul.

This made for an excellent evening to finish my trip, combining conversation with one of the best views in Istanbul overlooking the Bosphoros and with most of the iconic buildings visible on the city's skyline.



Byzantine underground cistern



Sultan Ahmed Mosque (Blue Mosque)



Istanbul skyline at night, with many iconic buildings visible: Topkapi Palace, Sultan Ahmed Mosque (Blue Mosque), Süleymaniye Mosque, and the Galata Tower.