

# **RSMF Travel Journal, 2019**

Retracing Evliya Celebi's Travels In The Black Sea Region

**Piers Armitage & Isobel Jobling**



## Introduction

We arrived in the Eastern Black Sea region of Turkey in early September intending to follow in the footsteps of Evliya Celebi by bicycle – to scout a potential tourist route and to consider his travelogues. We'd travelled by bicycle enough to know that such plans are at once a necessary framework for forward progress, and vulnerable to being derailed by landscape, weather, illness, or mechanical failure. We thoroughly planned a 1790km route with +35,000m elevation, but knew we'd have to be flexible.

A good thing too, as our ride ultimately bore little resemblance to this route. Besides almost-major injury and major mechanical failure, we suffered from ongoing illness and were forced to be pragmatic, making forward progress by any means necessary. We were also a little naïve about what 'route scouting' would entail, and the route held its fair share of surprises. It was wonderfully novel to travel in a region where the amenities and quality of a road are not immediately clear from a quick google search, and we had ample opportunity to contribute to OSM data in the region.

We ultimately linked together some exciting and remote gravel riding with hitchhiking, buses, a train, and even a taxi. In the end, we cycled approximately 1,130km and +27,984m. While initially frustrating, this multimodality added to the breadth of our experience. We still managed to see most of the places we set out to, many of which are of no touristic interest besides Evliya's mention of them. We were always received with enormous warmth and hospitality.

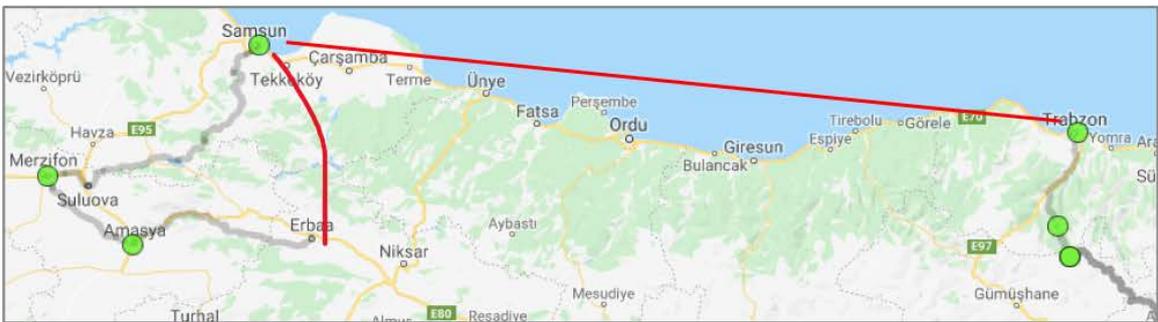
An historical framework allowed us to engage with places on a deeper level than we are used to, and by the end of our journey we felt familiar with culture and geographies both regional and national. Hemingway said 'it is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best, since you have to sweat up the hills and coast down them'. We felt this acutely on this journey, and believe Eastern Turkey has some spectacular hills to sweat up, and great potential for bicycle tourism; we hope that sharing the routes we managed to explore online will inspire others to see what the area has to offer. A cyclist's companion to this journal - with more images and a heavier emphasis on the quality of cycling - will be posted on [www.jobling.cc](http://www.jobling.cc) in due course.

We are immensely grateful to the Roger Short Memorial Fund for enabling this journey, and to the Turkish people for their unfailing generosity and humour, and especially for a never-ending supply of çay in times of need.

N.B. We have combined our writing to a single perspective (Piers') for ease of reading and formatting - we were in agreement about most things, anyway!



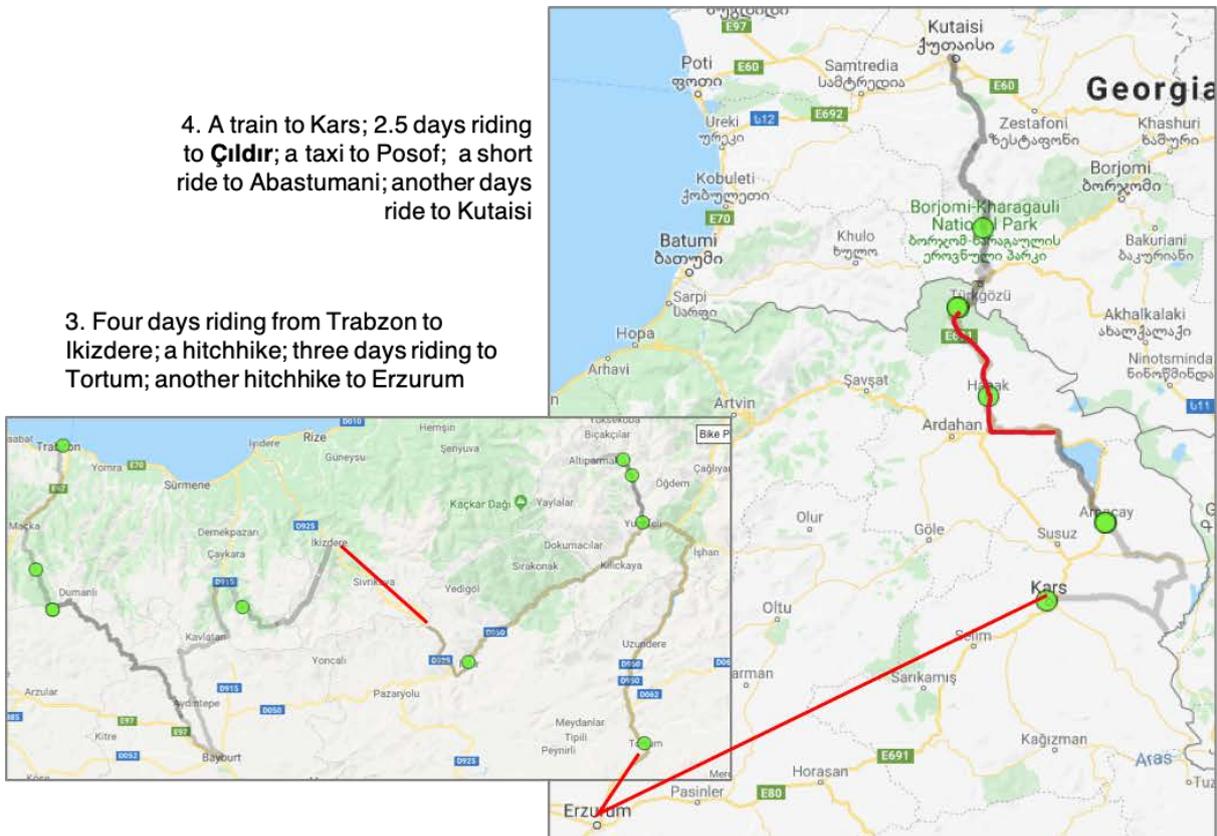
1. Our route as originally intended



2. Our first three days riding from Samsun to Erbaa, followed by buses to Samsun then Trabzon, back to Trabzon to collect my bike, then back to Trabzon!

4. A train to Kars; 2.5 days riding to **Çıldır**; a taxi to Posof; a short ride to Abastumani; another days ride to Kutaisi

3. Four days riding from Trabzon to Ikdere; a hitchhike; three days riding to Tortum; another hitchhike to Erzurum



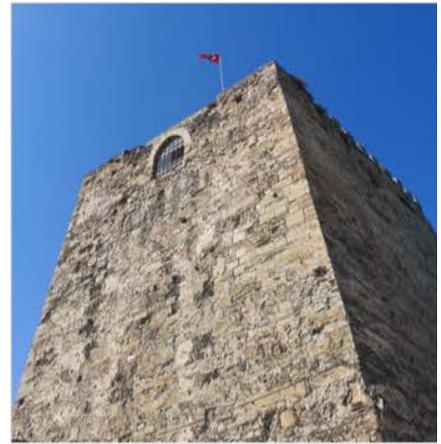
Our trip began at Sinop airport, where we reconstructed our bikes while fielding questions from the large number of curious soldiers on security duty. Though I was initially ill at ease with their presence, given one of them had the largest machine-gun I had ever seen, their questions showed a sincere interest in our trip and we got the impression they were glad we were there.

Evliya wrote extensively about Sinop, focusing largely on its castle. Standing before it holding our printout of his observations, the same morphology was evident. The castle walls, now containing a minibus terminal, made a shape 'like a ship's deck divided into three parts,' the lowest part 'washed by the waves on two sides'. While this was pleasingly clear, the 'five thousand and sixty ancient houses of stone' and the castle's 'six thousand and six battlements' noted by Evliya were not; hyperbole was one of Evliya's preferred literary devices. There was little evidence of older residential or non-military buildings. Sadly it appeared that in most places we went only the principal old monuments survived, often restored many times, while residential buildings were usually modern. However, the new vernacular frequently mimicked the old; this was immediately clear from photos we saw at Sinop's ethnography museum.

Evliya describes Sinop's history as much as its features. For Evliya, places like Sinop Castle were clearly imbued with meaning by their histories. He vividly and assiduously records incidents such as this: 'In the time of Sultán Ahmed, on a dark night, the Cossacks took the town by escalade, and the great Vizír Nassif Páshá, was put to death for having concealed it from the Sultán'. Sinop's semi-ruined castle - no longer in military use - clearly retains its symbolic power: it is home to several statues, a gigantic Turkish flag in the main keep and several Turkish flags elsewhere along its battlements.

We enjoyed a seafront lunch of manti and köfte in Sinop before opting to take a bus along the coast to Samsun. The steep geography of the region means a lack of secondary roads and the huge coastal highway was our only cycling option. Such roads usually prove both nerve-wracking and boring; the bus journey vindicated our decision. Our bus rolled into Samsun at the same time as a storm cloud, casting miles of urban sprawl in ominous pink hues. Samsun's otogar sits the other side of a steep and unavoidable hill. The air was damp and warm as we span slowly but surely to the summit on a dual carriageway. Scattered with large metal grilles and debris, the other side made for a hair-raising descent, and we were relieved to reach the centre in fading twilight, emerging onto an improbably lovely coastal bike path. A provincial capital, Samsun felt immediately cosmopolitan, and the large number of families out on the seafront development reminded us of Mediterranean Europe - owing perhaps to the subtropical climate.

Air travel with bikes often proves the riskiest part of a tour. On this occasion, both had emerged more or less intact, but mine had a bent disc rotor - a minor problem, but best fixed at a bike shop. Eastern Turkey has very few, but fortunately Samsun is blessed with a Decathlon. At 8pm, the mechanic was not around to help, but the sales assistants happily gave us access to the workshop, and between us we had the problem sorted quickly. To enter the mall, we'd had to pass through airport-style security with our bikes. We remarked on this to the young sales assistant, who spoke perfect English and told us we'd get used to it. He described it as part of the political climate and suggested there would be many security scanners, vehicle checkpoints and ID checks ahead; 'it's working, though'. The service was provided to us as a gift from the manager - the first of many such gifts. We then checked into our hotel to news of no hot water - the first of many such privations. You win some; you lose some.



Clockwise: vernacular architecture of Sinop, old and new; Sinop castle; arriving in Samsun - the view ahead and behind

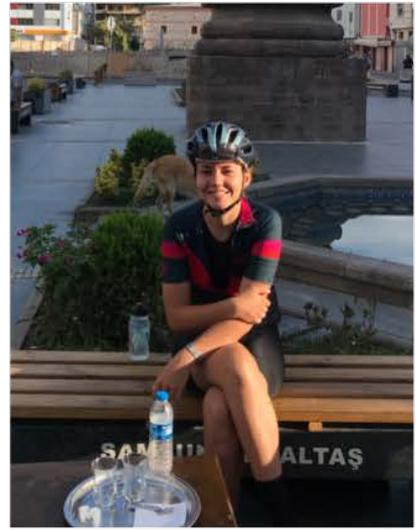
After a Nescafe, we set out to find breakfast and some sights to see. There was no trace of the castle with seventy towers, neither Samsun's pickled grapes and pears, nor its 'famous' cables, ropes and resin. We did however find the old mosque, now considered the main historical sight to see, about which Evliya had written nothing.

Evliya also claimed there was 'no port', but in 2019 Samsun has not only a large port but an impressive restoration of the old Tobacco Dock, developed as a pedestrian public space, and featuring a model of the steamer on which Atatürk arrived in the 1919 struggle for Independence. There were banners all over the city commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event, and it became clear that this place was a symbol of modern Turkish independence which featured heavily in collective memory. Despite not housing many genuine artifacts of history – apparently a modern and fast-developing city – Samsun is a place where the physical reproduction of history creates a spatialization of the collective memory. Basa (2016) observes: in Samsun 'growth and modernity is symmetrically combined with a desire for embracing its historical identity.' While Basa argues this development can be seen to some extent as a reaction against current political discourse - which 'emphasizes Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic past,' - we did find throughout our journey that although glimpses of Ottoman history are visible everywhere, Atatürk's memory dominates most public spaces. Still, we were impressed. If urban developments which considers its socio-cultural context tend to be more successful, central Samsun has done well.

We cycled out of the city along a river until its forest of well-kept tower blocks eventually thinned out and its industrial outskirts gave way to fly-tipping and stray dogs; we took pleasure in seeing the ugly hinterland of the city. We encountered several enthusiastic men who were keen to share çay, and chat at length with us, despite our complete failure to understand them. Here we had a first taste of a few recurring themes: 1) unsolicited dogs; 2) unsolicited çay; 3) our tragic lack of Turkish language ability. We knew enough to thank people though, and offline Google Translate goes a long way. Leaving the main road, we began to climb.

I had not cycled in months, was not used to cycling on gravel, and did not cope well with the day's heat. I therefore 'bonked' several times on the morning's short, steep climbs. 'Bonking', for cyclists at least, who will be familiar with the term, is when any combination of poor fitness, heat, and insufficient sugar intake conspire to make forward motion near-impossible. It's like hitting a brick wall. The morning's 50km entailed +1,600m and was one of the hardest cycles I had done in my life; I only got through the day because the gradients got easier after a lunch of kebabs and coke. Isobel's morning commentary that the heat was 'ideal for climbing' and the hills 'beautiful' and 'very doable' reflected a significant difference in perspective on the same landscape.

We arrived in Ladik as the sun was setting. There was no evidence of hotels in town so we were relieved when asking around (very 17<sup>th</sup> C!) led us to an under-construction pension where we engaged in a lengthy Google translate exchange and eventually settled down to a dinner of delicious *pide* and less-than-delicious Efes lager (also sourced by asking around) eaten off our hotel room floor. I was just pleased I had made it, and silently worried that unless I got fitter fast, the trip would prove near impossible.



Clockwise: Atatürk in Samsun; breakfast and çay in the square; Piers having a hard time; beautiful gravel road approaching Ladik; classy dinner

We popped into a small shop to get some breakfast snacks before rolling out of Ladik, and its proprietor immediately broke bread - so fresh it was still warm - and laid it out on newspaper for us with olives, salty cheese and Nutella (a classic Turkish breakfast combination).

Our morning's ride to Merzifon took us through misty rolling hills, that thankfully for my state of mind, gave a net downhill profile with a couple of fast descents. The morning would have been faster were it not for a service station gift of simit and Nescafe and a rural roadblock hugely overstaffed by bored, chain-smoking policemen.

We reached the small town of Merzifon by eleven and set out to find Evliya's 'six hundred shops almost all occupied by dyers', and 'must, pure as that of Aintáb, sweet raisins, and the white bread of Pírdedeh'. Must, as far as we could tell, is a non-alcoholic grape drink. While the region was clearly still producing grape products, we couldn't find the must - only vinegar and raisins.

Perhaps most interestingly, the town remained 'adorned with *sháhneshíns* (projecting windows)'. They did not 'all look towards the kiblah' but were a feature in buildings old and new; no matter how brazenly concrete new houses sought to emulate the vernacular projecting window, often part of tripartite first floor window arrangements that we saw across the region. Both Evliya and contemporary Merzifon architects and patrons therefore viewed '*sháhneshín*' fenestration as important to Merzifon's identity.

The afternoon's ride took us over an agricultural plain through a village whose streets were caked with dirt and occupied exclusively by tractors, and past a reservoir circled by a military helicopter. We learned that the bright red splashes on the beige landscape were synthetic sacks of onions, piled in fields mid-harvest, and sold directly from tractor trailers. A hot, thirsty climb past quarries and small villages brought us off a huge cattle ranch on the plain and onto a high ridge with expansive views of our descent into Amasya.

Unfortunately Isobel took a spill on the descent, swerving to avoid a large schoolbus coming up the hill and flying full-speed - about 45kph - into the verge. This is of course a much better outcome than full-speed into the bus, or full-speed off the mountain, and the immediate damage didn't seem too great. The schoolchildren on the bus were convinced enough of her welfare to find the whole situation thoroughly entertaining, and the bus driver moved off. She gingerly stretched out her shoulder - which took the brunt of the impact - and we continued (slowly) on our way.

Amasya's location is stunning, its river flanked on both sides by vertiginous cliffs and overlooked by an impressive castle. Evliya notes these features in passing, but what emerges most strongly from his account of Amasya is that he was writing with very different priorities. We reached the castle as the sun began to set, and like the Turkish couples and families around us on the ramparts, posing for Instagram, we were amazed by the castle's views. At a time when Eastern Turkey was a contested frontier zone, Evliya's main take away was that the castle is 'extremely strong,' though its seventy cannons were of 'no great calibre, as it is not a frontier fortress'. While we have the privilege of being able to approach such places from a primarily aesthetic standpoint, Evliya's description of the castle is a reminder that it was not always so.

Amasya displays its historic wealth in its castle, and in the large number of Ottoman period *Yalıboyu* houses which line the river, making it the most scenic town we visited. The link could easily be drawn between the town now and Evliya's description of its craftsmen, 'clever in all kind of handicraft', the 'riches of its cultivation', and its many palaces. This all lends to a charming centre to which Turks clearly flock. Amasya now - the most touristic place we visited - and Evliya's Amasya are linked by a historic evolution in which today's tourism lies on the relics of Amasya's past wealth and military importance.



Clockwise:

the kind men who gave us breakfast; one of many friendly dogs; a restorative 'house ayran' at lunch; a view of Amasya from its castle; traditional riverfront houses of Amasya

Delayed by a dysfunctional hotel breakfast, disturbed by a particularly close 5am call to prayer, and worried by Isobel's *more diclofenac necessary* shoulder injury we decided to take the flat route out of Amasya, abandoning our plans to zig-zag straight up a rockface and into the mountains. We formed the alternative route as we went, following what turned out to be a lovely hard-pack service road to the valley's irrigation canal - perhaps the modern version of '*the water which Ferhád carried to the town from the opposite mountains*'. In contrast to the scrubby hills on either side, the valley floor was green and lush, consisting of apple and plum orchards and walnut groves, and dotted with wooden shelters for the fruit-pickers. The stench of rotting apples hung in the air, and well-dressed elderly couples rolled along on improvised looking quadbike-come-tractor vehicles to tend to their orchards.

Pulling up from the valley towards our original route, we took rolling gravel roads to the village of Yenidere, where we had hoped we might find lunch. It's impossible to tell whether a village like this will have food. It's rarely clear on Google maps or OSM and one has to take a look the size of a village in a satellite image and make a guess. Unable to find anything, we asked a local man where we could find food with our well practiced Turkish - 'Yemek?' - and he directed us toward a large home where a family was processing the walnut harvest. The grandmother of the family immediately declared Isobel her daughter, pinching her cheeks, and inviting us for çay and an incredible homemade lunch. We were lucky to converse with the whole family via two grandsons, one of whom was studying engineering in Istanbul and the other who lived in Berlin. We learned that per local lore, the valley had indeed been made by Ferhád 'who cut these mountains like cheese' - a pleasing continuity of myth from Evliya's telling! 'Amasya is the friendliest place in Turkey,' we were told; we must be careful riding further East toward Erzurum because people are not always good, and it gets cold. This was far from the last time we would hear this about the weather - perhaps the frequently recurring echo from Evliya's stories.

We cycled off slowly from lunch, our bodies telling us in no uncertain terms that we had overindulged. The hills were rich for growing tobacco and increasingly lush and populated. After a short sharp climb, I noticed my front gears were no longer changing: a problem that would dictate the course of the next five days.

We were hosted in Erbaa by a local teacher who spoke excellent English and invited us to sleep on his couch, but not before drinking homemade raki with his friends on a rooftop terrace. Conversation ranged from the Armenian genocide (ambivalent) to the Turkish education system (excellent, thanks to Atatürk; less excellent than before, thanks to Erdoğan). This man was a passionate secularist who seemed generally frustrated with the acting government and with the weak Turkish Lira; keen for his children to leave for Europe, but not keen for Turkey to be European. We also heard all manner of folk tales and discussed Evliya, who seems to be widely known in Turkey, although thought of more as a wit than a great travel writer; 'he was a guy; he travelled I guess' said one man with a shrug. We heard the tale of a cat, freezing as it jumps between buildings in Erzurum, retold:

*'They asked a Dervish "from whence he came?" he said, "from the snow of Divine Mercy;" they asked, "what was the name of the place;" "Erzerúm," said the Dervish, which may be spelled Erezolúm (cruel to man); they continued to ask "whether he had seen "any summer there." The Dervish said, "By God, I remained there eleven months and nine and twenty days, the people said that summer was coming, but I did not see it. It happened, however, that a cat, which ran over the roofs of the houses, became froze there while in the act of running, and remained so for the space of nine months, when the spring arriving, the cat began to thaw, cried 'Miaú!' and fell down." This tale has become a common proverb. It is really a fact, that if a man touches a piece of iron with his wet hand during winter, they freeze together, and cannot be separated without tearing off the skin.'*



**Clockwise:**

**An orchard vehicle;  
a delicious lunch spread;  
a delicious raki spread;  
rolling down the hill into Erbaa;  
tobacco drying**

**14 September**

**Erbaa to Samsun to Trabzon by bus**

**few km cycled**

The mechanical problem could not be fixed in Erbaa, as neither of the bike shops we visited were familiar with modern road bike gearing. We did our best to fix it ourselves, but it became apparent that the shifter itself would need replacing, and the part would need sourcing. So with heavy hearts, we backtracked to Samsun. We jammed our bikes on the back row of the bus and on arrival made a tour of its bike shops, eventually directed to The Only Man Who Knows About Modern Road Bikes. We were told a new part could be delivered in three days so we sucked it up, and waited it out. Rather than revisiting Samsun, we decided to instead travel five hours along the coast by bus to see Trabzon, as Evliya had written about it extensively.

**15; 16; 17 September**

**Trabzon**

**few km cycled**

Trabzon is the kind of city whose main tourist attractions are verdant out-of-town destinations, advertised on billboards as tours and excursions. The capital of a region known for its highland culture, the city itself doesn't boast many attractions, and our first impressions were none too generous: the bus station - as bus stations often do - sits the other side of a major highway intersection in the industrial part of town. It is close to the port, and nestled amongst vast industrial sites and some of the sleaziest hotels we'd ever seen, including the fittingly named 'Hotel Paradise Lost'. The walk to our (slightly nicer) hotel crossed the hinterland of the pedestrian realm; 2ft. curbs, dangerous road crossings and poorly lit glass-strewn pavements.

We awoke the next day to the smell of frying fish from the street, and made a move from our not-quite-red-light-district digs to a relatively expensive hotel on the main square. This made for a relaxing couple of days while we waited for the bike to be fixed. Evliya writes that the people of Trabzon 'think of nothing but eating and drinking, of amusement and pleasure'; 'all idle amorous fellows'. While no doubt the people of Trabzon aren't generally *quite* this idle, our hotel offered an excellent view of the comings and goings of the main square and it felt like a fun city; and we did our best to chase amusement and pleasure.

We ate well, and managed to source many of the foods Evliya mentioned. At the heart of Evliya's account of Trabzon is its fish - especially the hamsi, a type of anchovy. He relays in great detail the various folk tales associated with the fish, and claims it is 'an aphrodisiac of extraordinary potency; strengthening and easy of digestion... and also cures sore mouths.' What's more 'if the head of this fish is burnt, serpents and other venomous reptiles are killed by the smoke.'

The hamsi remains a crucial part of Trabzon's cultural identity. Fans of the local football team Trabzonspor - a major part of Trabzon culture that Evliya certainly didn't witness - are referred to as 'hamsi kafali' ('hamsi headed'). Just as Evliya described, hamsi remains a seasonal phenomenon - it is fished in the 'season of Khamsan (the fifty days when southerly winds blow)'. We learnt at the excellent city museum that fishing remains an important part of the economy and there are now around 5,000 fishermen in Trabzon. We walked past the fishermen's huts and saw hamsi glistening under blue lights at market stalls by sea, though we did not witness the town 'in an uproar,' and nor did everyone 'even when at prayer, instantly cease, and run like madmen after it.'



Clockwise: an image of fishing boats in our hotel (date unknown); one of many fried fish meals; mosque under construction; hamsi for sale; nuts for sale; wandering by the boathouses

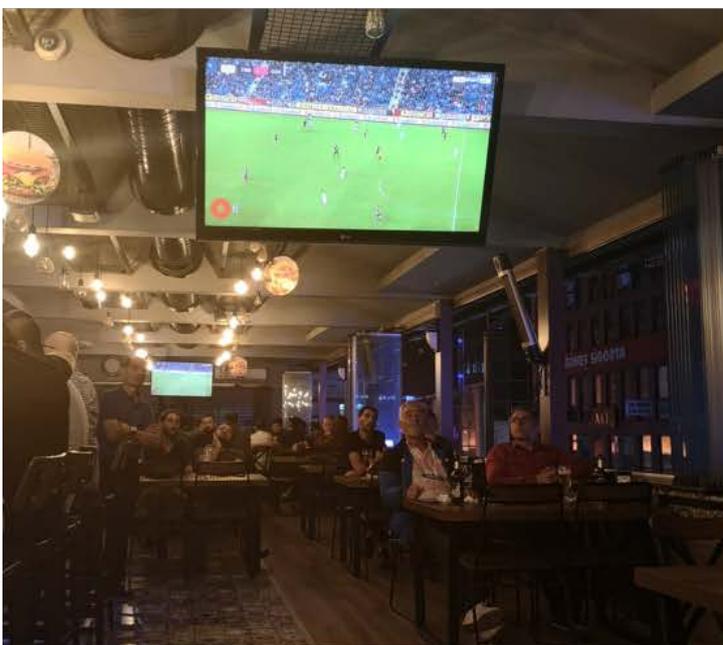
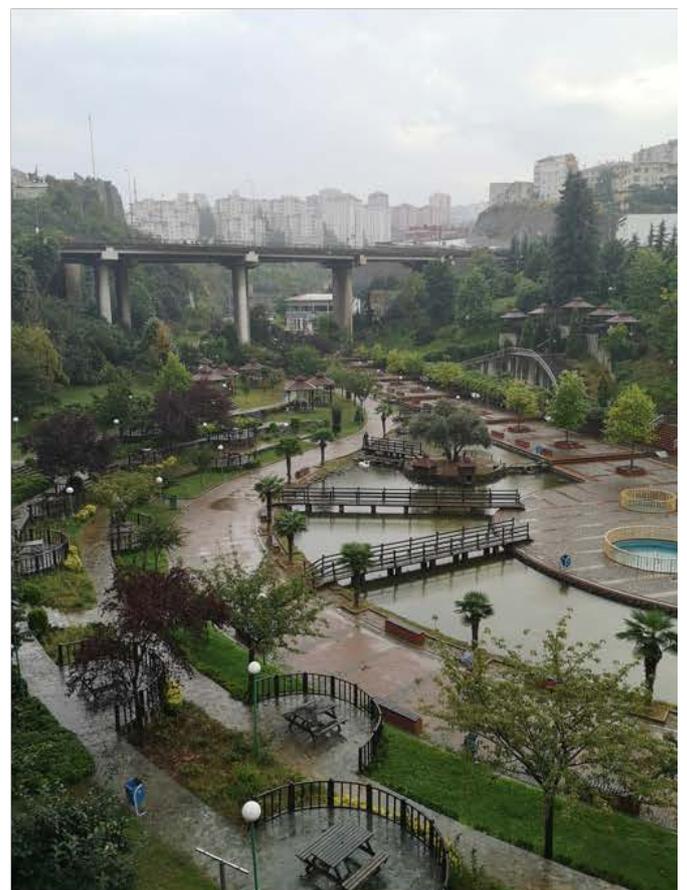
We enjoyed eating hamsi in all forms but were, as ever, less successful in locating the exotic fruits Evliya described - though we're pretty sure we found the fine flavoured grapes and the very sweet figs. While Evliya gave little mention to the nuts of the region, hazelnuts are now visible for sale everywhere in town, and account for a huge part of the regional economy, as do corn and tobacco. The city museum also gave us an excellent overview of agricultural life in the region, and we got our first taste of plains culture. People take their cattle up onto high plateaus – yaylalar - to graze during summer, and this was where we were headed. The most visible aspect of yaylalar culture was the horon, a traditional highland dance said to be inspired by the shimmying movement of the hamsi. It's possible this may have evolved quite recently, certainly after Evliya's time, and we enjoyed watching people dancing the horon all day in the main square - apparently just for fun.

Evliya wrote at length about Trabzon's '*two great castles... divided into three parts*'. This was the best castle we saw on the trip, perhaps *because* it had seen such little renovation: rather, it, its outer walls and interior had been taken over by the centuries of urban development following Evliya's visit. The main keep retained Ottoman windows as well as the mosque and some of the remains of the 'barracks for the garrison, magazines and storehouses'. While the series of bridges from the upper to lower castles that Evliya describes were gone, it was pleasing to see fragments of the lowest sea wall indicating the old shape that is most clearly visible in the still-imposing upper walls around old upper castle.

Trabzon is dissected by steep valleys, and its castle sits between two such valleys: the Zagnos Valley park on one side, and an as yet undeveloped space, apparently cleared for a similar project, on the other. A vast swath of green public space, Zagnos Valley Park came as a surprise to us and appears incongruous; as one looks inland, it is swallowed up by a forest of modern tower blocks. In the rain, the space appeared deserted, unfinished, and inaccessible. Designed to 'improve the quality of the environment', and make the area 'more attractive' construction of the park entailed a huge slum clearance project - such informal settlements 'contradicted the urban identity' and contributed to air and visual pollution (Duzgunes and Sarac, 2018). What struck us was that development across the city as a whole appeared to be entirely unregulated, polluting, and generally chaotic. It was unclear whether this particular project was consistent with a citywide approach to tackling this, or specifically an excuse for slum clearance in a low-income area with touristic potential. In any case, Güneröđlu and Bekar (2019) find it has been executed rather poorly - the low usage of the space we witnessed not just because it was raining, but also to poor accessibility, and insufficient lighting, security, and amenities; it was a contrast to Samsun.

Beyond the castle's old lower wall, on reclaimed land and in line with its main keep, stands the exposed shell of what will soon be Trabzon's largest mosque. This huge building was a looming presence during our time in Trabzon. It promises to completely rewrite the landscape of the town, though significantly it sits at the bottom of the valley of Trabzon's old town, and like the omnipresent Turkish flag on all major ruins, capitalises on older sites of significance for Turkey's modern-day priorities.

Our time in Trabzon was a blessing in disguise. We were able to wait out some bad weather, heal up, and immerse ourselves more thoroughly in the culture of the region. We were able to reconsider our approach moving forward, given time lost - we consciously chose to count our blessings, lower our expectations, and let go of our plans a little. However, we never intended to spend so much time in a city, and following collection of my bike, the hills beckoned urgently.



Clockwise: A banner depicts the two things most important to Trabzon – its football team and the horon; Piers walks the castle wall; Zagnos Valley Park; enjoying a TrabzonSpor game in a bar; a view of horon dancing from our hotel room

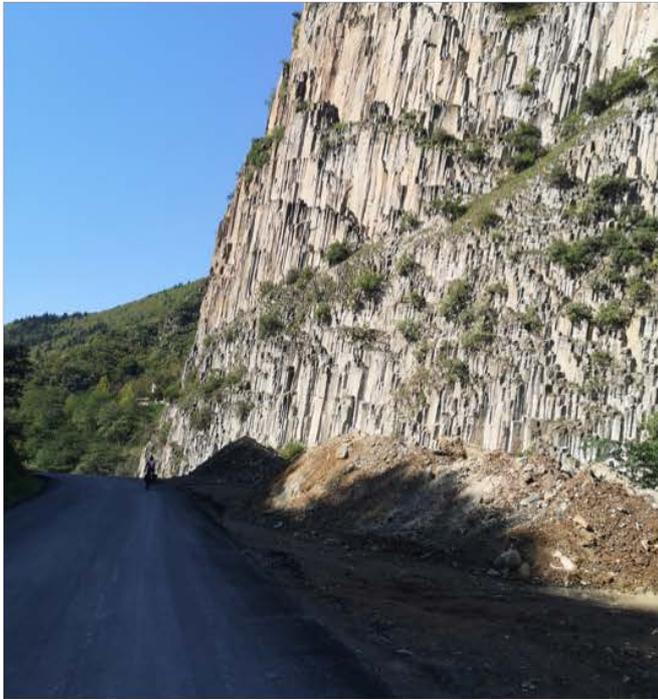
After so long off the bikes, we set off concerned we might've lost rhythm. We pushed on up and out of town through diesel choke and concrete dust, tackling minor mechanical and physical difficulties before descending into a valley and finally escaping Trabzon's clutches. After a short time on the highway, we turned off into the mountains. We were cooled by the fast flowing river which the road clung to and we stopped for lunch at a newly opening hotel that apparently had EU funding. At this point I was so hungry I was retching. Lunch was hugely restorative, though not enough to prepare us for the vicious few kilometers leading up to Sumela Monastery. The road was consistently at a 15-20% gradient, which gave passing tourists the opportunity to gawp at, photograph, and encourage us. It did not bode well for the rest of the climb.

The pass up to the plain was in the process of being transformed from a mixed-surface road to a wide asphalt one. Though much more manageable than the earlier climb, dust, altitude (over 3000 metres), exertion, and asthma combined to exacerbate the cold I had started to develop over the previous few days. I sounded like a dying man in a Dickens period drama, and walked my bike for the final 7 kilometres. Ultimately it was worth the effort - the plain was expansive in a way that I had never seen before; beautiful in the golden evening light.

We'd never needed çay like we needed it on arriving at the only hotel on the plain. Our only fellow guests were the road crews we had passed that afternoon, and there wasn't enough hot water to go around. However, a dinner of hearty stew and canned soup was just what we needed: it seems the cycling tourist and road worker's culinary demands are quite similar. While Evliya wrote largely of cities and their points of interest, we took a lot of pleasure in the in-between spaces: the villages with nothing to offer in particular besides the sense of being somewhere new; the musty hotels which have no competition for miles but which provided exactly the comfort we need. It's chilly at elevation, but we were asleep in seconds under heavy polyester fleece blankets.

"Nights alone in remote western towns where I know no one and no one I know knows where I am, nights with the strange paintings and floral spreads and cable television that furnish a reprieve from my own biography, when... I have lost myself though I know where I am. Moments when I say to myself as feet or car clear a crest or round a bend, I have never seen this place before."

– Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.

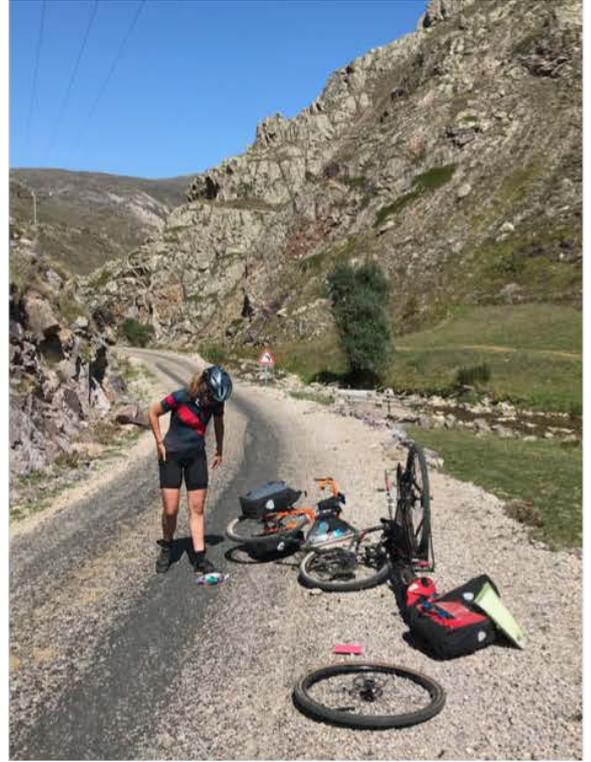


Clockwise: scenic valley; Sumela monastery; Piers having a tough day; the scene which greeted us up on the plateau; Piers after a restorative çay, and the view from our hotel

After a friendly send-off from the hotelier and workers we set off across the plain in search of Nescafe and breakfast. The landscape in the morning light was spectacular and a lengthy gravel climb gave us plenty of time to appreciate it. Though I was not riding at full fitness, I felt a great deal better. The scattered permanent architecture of the plain was reminiscent of Scandinavia; pretty single-storey houses with corrugated pitched roofs in earthy tones, built to withstand winter conditions. Sustained purely by nuts and sweets, having failed to find a square meal all day, we emerged from the plains a bit worse for wear. We eventually settled down for a 3pm lunch of white bread and Dairylea. As we ate this at a service station, we chatted with a dapper local in French about the usual topics: where we were going; where we had come from; and what we thought of Turkey. He then relayed our answers to the few other locals refilling their tractors nearby, satisfying the bemused curiosity our arrival by bike had aroused.

The ride into Bayburt took us past mines – though not the silver ones which Evliya says made it rich - and past the skeleton of a half-constructed motorway above us in the valley. This, along with many other under-construction roads, gave the sense that the region was changing fast: the same tour as ours repeated in few years would likely take the rider over better road surfaces, or along bigger roads.

Bayburt itself seemed wealthy and scenic, on account of the huge castle that stood just above it. Though we could not verify if there were still *'seventy schools for boys, who are quick and clever'*, there did seem to be a lot of students around, which gave Bayburt quite a relaxed feel. Equally, we could not check that *'the old men live to the age of a hundred and fifty, who losing their teeth pronounce with difficulty the letter S'*, though, we would agree that there were, as Evliya said *'some pretty faces'*.



Clockwise: with our host outside the hotel; a nice place for a minor mechanical problem; pitched rooves; Bayburt and its castle at dusk; scattered settlements on the plains

Fuelled by another sad hotel breakfast, (*How many boiled eggs am I willing to peel, and how much bread to eat in order to avoid being hungry later? Is this cheese too powerful to stomach at 7am?*) we were looking forward to a *big* day - not in terms of miles, but because we were going to descend the notoriously dangerous D915 'Bayburt Yolu'. Our favourite starting point for planning any bike trip outside of the realm of leisure cycling is [dangerousroads.com](http://dangerousroads.com), so of course 'Turkey's most dangerous road' became central to our route planning.

Having coughed up my own weight in phlegm onto the outskirts of Bayburt, we span painlessly up 1000m to barren high plains with views back down to Bayburt, circled at all times by birds of prey. Buoyed by enthusiastic passing drivers, and a freshly paved road surface, we made good time and then enjoyed a steep gravel descent to the village of Günbuldu. There we had hoped to find lunch at a hotel, but it proved elusive, and we instead filtered water at the mosque (a familiar pastime by now) and ate snacks under the watchful gaze of the old women of the village, arranged on their respective wooden balconies.

As we traversed rolling gravel to the eastern plains, the scenery became much greener, sheep became cows, and the villages looked much wealthier; houses were beautiful wooden constructions with first-floor barns. The roads remained terrible, however; steep, rocky, and slashed with deep rivulets. Slow progress, combined with a lack of foreseeable food and the prospect of the D915 made for a nervous day.

We reached the D915's 29 picturesque switchbacks in perfect light. They are carved into a near-vertical mountainside. It's the kind of balcony road that fundamentally shouldn't exist; a monument to humankind's longstanding determination to inhabit and traverse landscapes that really don't welcome us to. It's poorly maintained - replaced now by a larger paved road to the East - and apparently has no drainage, so besides a poor surface it has large streams running down it in places.

In fact, for cyclists, the road is not too dangerous; its narrowness was not a problem for us and switchbacks meant the gradient was okay. The views certainly made up for the tricky riding and vivid autumnal colours were in full force. At the foot of the switchbacks we were tired but exhilarated, and continued down the valley, which with steeper drop-offs and more traffic, proved more dangerous. We descended through alpine towns that mysteriously had shops and tower-blocks, but no restaurants. This was probably the grandest valley we cycled in, with high-reaching pine forests giving way to dramatic ridges on either side. By 4pm we were pretty hungry and decided to skirt around one of these ridges to the tourist centre of Uzungöl in search of food. This lakeside destination, advertised to tourists everywhere in Trabzon, promised both food and accommodation. The proprietor of Café Nebula - the first we came across - was pleased by the novelty of European (rather than Arab) tourists, and chatted to us at length about Black Sea culture. Lovely though he was, this delayed us, and we had to push fast up the climb to Uzungöl. In rain and near darkness, the neon lights of hotels lit the shadows of pines through the mist, and a dusting of white was visible on the ridgeline. Arriving both sweaty and cold, we had a quick kebab, found our hotel, and passed out.



Clockwise: herding cows on the approach to the pass; rolling gravel on the approach to the D915; the first switchbacks of the D915; Piers descending; cloud settling; the muggy approach to Uzungöl

**21 September**

**Uzungöl**

**0km cycled**

Our planned day from Uzungöl to Ikizdere was relatively short - about 70km over a single mountain pass, so we planned a lie-in and a late start. On waking, however, the rain appeared unrelenting, Isobel had inevitably caught my cold, and our limbs were aching from the previous days climbing (and braking). So, although we weren't exactly charmed by the place, we took the day off in Uzungöl.

Uzungöl was not mentioned by Evliya, as it was an insignificant village of about 300 houses until the late 21<sup>st</sup> century when it began to draw in large numbers of tourists from Gulf countries and was developed to the point where it now consists mostly of hotels. We made the most of our 'aparthotel' to cook for ourselves and plan our upcoming route, and wandered Uzungöl's fake designer-wear shops and closed fairground. Isobel nursed a hot *salep*: a custardy drink made with Orchid flour and cinnamon, popular in winter and said to relieve chest congestion. We were told again by our hotel owner and others how nice it was to have non-Arab tourists in Uzungöl. It seemed paradoxical that the residents of somewhere clearly profiting from Arab tourism might dislike Arabs so much. Equally, Uzungöl's Tripadvisor reviews were largely from Turks complaining of being priced out of the area due to Arab tourism.

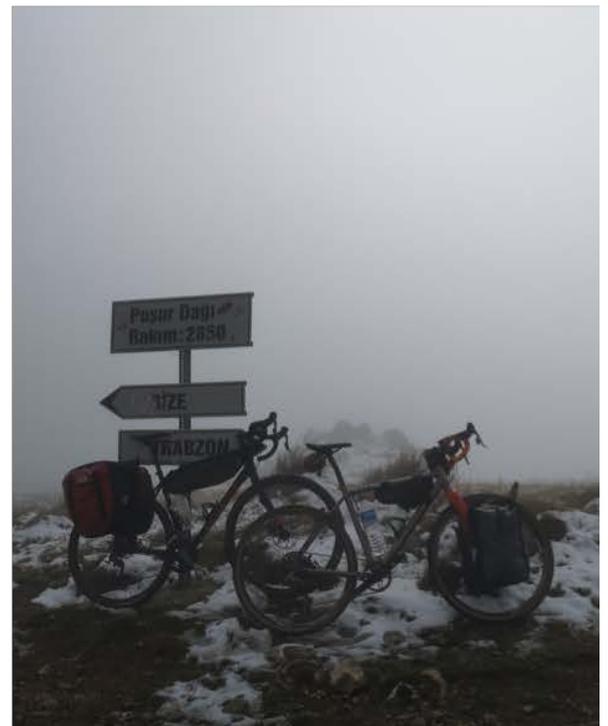
**22 September**

**Uzungöl to Ikizdere**

**67km / +1,893m cycled**

Fuelled by the last night's leftovers, we wrapped up in all the clothes we had and left Uzungöl sleeping under a clear blue sky. A cobbled climb vindicated our decision not to do this in the rain. We passed a couple having breakfast at their small tea house and approached them, planning to buy çay. Of course, they invited us to share their breakfast. Through Google Translate we chatted about the usual things while we drank glasses of fresh hot milk and shared in their breakfast of chips, sigara boregi with honey, soft-boiled eggs and tomatoes. They were hugely warm people, smiling and insistent we ate our fill of their breakfast. The woman pinched at Isobel's waist, complaining she was too thin, and needed feeding up. They saw us off with emphatic 'mashallah's (Isobel got emphatic hugs), and absolutely warmed the cockles of our hearts. We soon hit dirt, and then the snowline, which didn't impede us but made for a very chilly climb in zero visibility, and an even chillier descent.

We emerged from sandy switchbacks and out of the cloud to the still-freezing lower reaches of the mountain, swathed in autumn colour. Reluctant to pass another day's cycling without a hot lunch, we looked for food despite being just 30km from our destination. We found it at a logging village's restaurant/çay house. We were offered a choice of meat or fish and enjoyed a pile of salty fried lamb chops, a single, deep-fried fish, bread and salad. We sat shivering throughout, which surely didn't do Isobel's cold much good. A speedy tarmac descent spat us out in Ikizdere, a fairly unremarkable highway town with a very high density of apiculture supply shops. We had daylight left to consider our route planning over çay. We had planned the next day to embark on an epic and probably overambitious 3 day crossing of the Kaçkar mountain range, which would entail untold distances between resupplies, potential bad weather at elevation over 3000m and sections of hiking trail. Considering how cold we had just been at elevation, and that we were in generally poor health and short on time, we decided to reroute the next day; Evliya never mentioned the Kaçkar anyway! The çay was on the house and we settled into our Öğretmenevi to await the designated hour of hot water. An Öğretmenevis is a teacher's lodge; state funded for teachers, they also cater to members of the public and are a good option for the weary and frugal traveller. Often towns with no other accommodation will have an Öğretmenevi, and they were, in our experience, reliably clean and comfortable.



Clockwise: a driech day in Uzungöl; Isobel approaching the snowline; a terrible view at the top of the pass; and on the descent; hot salep

Isobel awoke feeling at death's door, so we decided to hitchhike over the pass and cut our day to an easy 80km from Ispir to Yusufeli, the gateway town on the Eastern side of the Kaçkar. We were picked up in seconds, despite our bikes, by a pickup taking construction workers to the top of the pass, and tried to keep calm as our driver browsed T-rap youtube videos on his phone while overtaking everyone he came across on endless blind corners. We then rolled fast down to the quaint town of Ispir and enjoyed an underserved brunch of pide and lahmacun.

The road from Ispir was fantastically boring, carrying us alongside an enormous reservoir in a rocky valley devoid of any traffic, settlement, or indeed, interest. As we pushed on, there were glimpses of the higher Kaçkar above the desert hills, but the dusty kilometres were taking their toll on Isobel, who had a dry chain, and an even drier throat, and we soon ran out of water. Eventually we came across the first green plant in 50km, and the landscape offered up tiny ruined castles, and a mosque where we could refill our water. As we approached Yusufeli there was a great deal of mining for road and housing construction in evidence, which didn't help with Isobel's respiratory problems. Just 10km from Yusufeli we stopped for fizzy drinks, and were passport-checked by jovial policemen, just for the craic, it seemed.

On arrival, we wasted a good amount of time at its (full) Öğretmenevi where various, government-employed landscape engineers pretended to help us find accomodation while really just making an excuse to shoot the breeze. These men were employed as part of the enormous decades-long process of dam construction in the valley which will, by next year, result in the relocation of 20,000 people and completely flood the town of Yusufeli. The town's residents have for decades mobilized successfully against it, but ultimately lost. It was curious to look around at all the life and history around us, knowing it would soon be gone. After hearing about the head engineer's motorbike adventures in Italy, and being told to great amusement, on hearing that I was Scottish, that 'all Turkish men are William Wallace', we made our excuses and found ourselves a very simple hotel to stay in for the night. Our dinner was also simple - we had the same as the last few nights: flame-grilled kebab with rice, though this time we watched the news with several old men, presumably widowers, sat alone on their respective tables.

Before bed, as I went for water, I was struck by how busy Yusufeli still was, yet how everyone out and about was male. In the shops, many çay houses showing the football and in the hairdressers on our street, men of all ages were chatting with each other in a kind of public society that operated completely without women. This was an instance where I felt my Western gaze very strongly - it must have felt perfectly normal for the men chaining cigarettes and bumping into old friends to be in public spaces completely devoid of women: for me it was jarring.



Clockwise: hitchhiking; incredibly boring road; ironic signage near Yusufeli; as close as we got to seeing the Kaçkar

**24 September**

**Barhal Valley**

**40km / +1,900m cycled**

We treated ourselves to breakfast on the top-floor restaurant of the town's best hotel-cum-cinema, before setting off on an undulating 30km climb up out of Yusufeli towards the Kaçkar; we had a day to play with now, partly dedicated to our health, but wanted to get a better look. The valley was so steep it had zip-line lifts for goods and people up to mountainside villages, which were a charming recurring feature of Black Sea mountain life. We visited the very bare, quite reconstructed 10th C Georgian monastery - now a mosque - at Barhal, having passed several perched castles on the way there. Unable to find any staff at our intended hostel for the night, we had a late lunch and cycled down the valley to find a campsite.

On the twisting roads by the white-water stream, we had our second near miss of the trip: as I descended a minibus had charged round a corner on my side of the road, and, both going too fast to avoid each other, had knocked my pannier from my bike. He apologised profusely, and zip-ties replaced my pannier's broken latches quite easily, however it was sobering to think how easily the encounter could have been much worse. I proceeded to the night's campsite on the narrow roads quite anxiously.

**25 September**

**Yusufeli valley to Tortum**

**110km / +2,000m cycled**

Having struck camp, we rolled down the valley back to Yusufeli, and over breakfast met some European engineers, whose work regarded the dam in some capacity, and who told us Yusufeli was a 'very strange town'. No wonder! From there we took main roads, flanked by Iranian and Turkish trucks, through many tunnels that made the steep red gorge passable. This was certainly some of our less inspired routing. The road to Erzurum at least had an incredible Iskender kebab to offer, theatrically served to us with butter poured from a great height for the benefit of the kebab house's Instagram.

To our dismay and surprise, the afternoon had brought a strong headwind and so day's final 30km of gradual climbing to Tortum was hard work. Despite the encouraging honks of passing cars, we arrived our Ogretmenevi in Tortum early but miserable. We relaxed on the hotel roof awaiting hot water, and chatted about how cold Erzurum was to the man who appeared to be the hotel's only employee. There, we have to confess, we came to the unpleasant realisation that we could not find the Tortum castle that Evliya mentioned in his account because we were 15km past the Tortum Evliya visited, in an eponymous but completely new town.

We cannot thus comment on how Tortum looks now, but can confirm that the locally grown '*pears, grapes and peaches*' which Evliya said were '*much praised*', were indeed quite nice when we ate them with breakfast. It was of course impossible to eat as locally as Evliya did. While fresh produce still seems to be relatively localised, cheaper transportation and globalised markets largely remove an element of travel that was important to Evliya in his estimations of places and their merits. While we tried to snack on local nuts and fruit, we were also slaves to haribo and suchlike.



Clockwise: Tortum; posing with an iskender kebab for the restaurant's Instagram; Tortum Waterfall

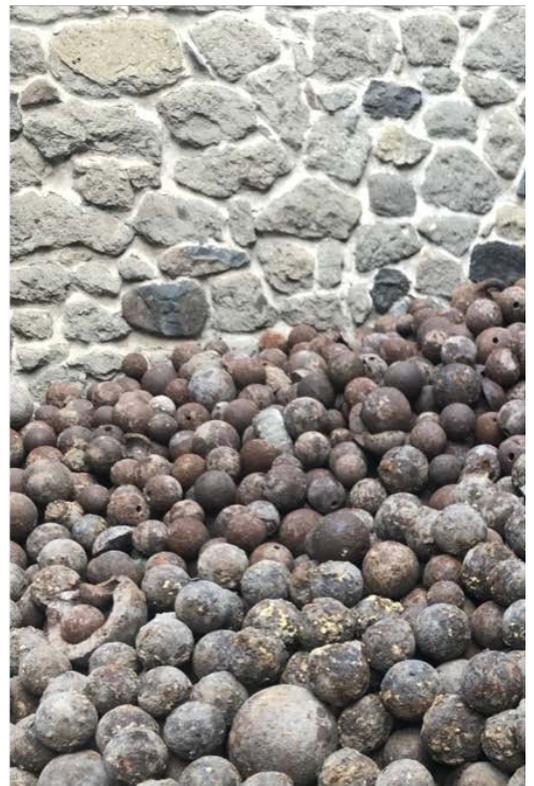
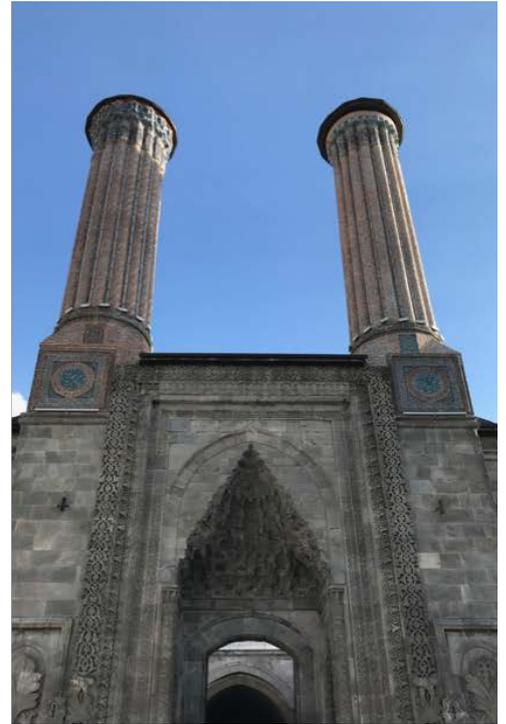
We 'enjoyed' a classic Turkish breakfast before heading out of Tortum, towards Erzurum, just 50km away on a rolling, but ultimately quite flat road. 50km, less than 1,000m climbing, how hard can it be? The answer was, as it turned out, too hard - the headwind from the day before had only increased, the road had widened to a four-lane motorway, and the tighter, green valley had given way to a vast beige plain. Having pushed on for a mere 10km we stopped for a service station coffee, and then a second, increasingly tempted by the idea of hitchhiking. Certainly we could cycle, but it would be miserable, and pointless, and this trip is already quite multimodal, and we'd have more time in Erzurum, and hitchhiking is fun, and well, go on then...

Except we couldn't get a ride! We pushed on, cleared the hill, and after a comically slow 'descent' into a brutal headwind, stuck our thumbs out again. A man with a pickup truck who spoke almost no English, let us hop in, and we exchanged the usual small talk; throwing place names and football teams at each other, and gesturing about the weather and the cold. He then took us to an incredible kebab shop in an industrial estate on the edge of Erzurum. A friend of his told us that Erzurum was too cold to work for a full 10 months a year, leaving two in which everything was done, and when he returned from work in Dubai. Our conversation ranged from how skiing in Erzurum on Mount Palandoken was an activity that *everyone* did, to how outraged he was that tea was drunk in Dubai with milk and without sugar, and that petrol cost the same as water there.

We set up in a cheap, dated hotel over a çay house and set out to explore the city, which Evliya had a lot to say about. Just as Erzurum's altitude and cold climate had been constantly emphasised by everyone we met, so Evliya wrote: '*it has been known to snow here for ten or eleven months in the year*', and noted that, 'from Constantinople to this place we had constantly ascended towards the east, and all the rivers were flowing from that direction towards us; this will show on what high ground Erzerúm is situated'.

Beyond this, Evliya focuses most on Erzurum's castle, palaces, and plant life. The castle's main keep is well-restored on the outside walls, excavated on the inside; the most outermost walls are hard to trace beyond a few older gates that are visible from the main keep. We ascended the 'immense tower reaching to the skies' to get the lay of the land. Though it lacked 'ten guns pointed from thence in all directions' that, 'intercept even the flight of birds,' the number cannons on display as artifacts suggested there was truth to this. Erzurum huddles toward the base of a range of mountains, at the edge of a completely flat plain bounded on all sides by more high ranges. Evliya's account, shaped by the temporal and geographic proximity to conflicts, naturally focuses on the military strength of Erzurum's castle, noting the dimensions of its ditches and walls. As in Amasya we had the luxury of appreciating the site as a viewpoint and historical relic alone. The scrubland behind the Northern wall appeared to be a local meeting place for young couples, and somewhere to enjoy an Efes.

Erzurum is famous for containing a wide range of architectural sites from Turkish history including the Seljuk 12th C *Ulu Camii* mosque, the 14th C Yakutiye madrasa and the 16th C Ottoman *Lala Pasa* mosque, to name a few. This makes it well worth a visit, and these sites occupied us over the afternoon and the next few days. Alongside these, we can also recommend people-watching on the main square, where the teenagers do tricks rollerblading - a summer substitute for ice skating - couples court, and older men and women socialise separately; visiting Erzurum's surprisingly reasonable museum restaurant; and shopping for fake Balenciaga trainers, which we regrettably could not buy as were travelling light.



Clockwise: Hitchhiking; madrasa; ammunition at the castle; possibly our best meal in Turkey

**27 September**

**Erzurum**

**0km cycled**

Having tried and failed to make the most of being in a big city by finding good espresso, and using the postal service, we bought our train tickets to Kars, 210km away via the plateau we had decided not to ride across because we'd become extremely averse to the bitter winds of plateau riding. In the afternoon we headed for Mount Palandoken, where we took a deserted cable car as far up as we could in search of flowers. Evliya had written that the mountain above Erzurum 'abounds in medical herbs, particularly in the Tútia flower, the scent of which perfumes the air. The odour of aromatic plants and scented flowers fills the atmosphere'. Probably because we had come in late September, we found little more than scrub and weeds, though the worryingly unstable telepherique had provided an enjoyable adrenaline rush, and the views of Erzurum from above made the trip worthwhile.

**28 September**

**Erzurum to Kars**

**one train, 0km cycled**

Our day began with a spectacular hailstorm. We were pleased to shelter in a shop offering a wide range of floral and herbal remedies, just as Evliya had described - though we had no way of knowing which was the Tútia! One train a day comes through from Ankara, and we waited patiently at the station for well over an hour, everyone else on the platform apparently confident that the train would show up eventually. An uneventful train ride later, and we arrive in Kars hungry. We finally got to eat one of the geese we'd seen so frequently by the roadside, and also try a type of sherbert - rayhan (basil) flavoured. We'd long been in search of sherbet which was drunk widely in Evliya's time but is now a traditional novelty, largely reserved for occasions such as weddings and rarely available at restaurants. The town was alive with activity due to the Besiktas vs. Galatasaray game, and felt a lot more relaxed than Erzurum - which has a reputation as a conservative city.



Clockwise: Piers and a solitary grilled mushroom, ordered in Erzurum's most expensive restaurant as a result of completely misunderstanding the menu; Isobel on the nerve-wracking gondola ride up to the barren ski resort; some of the floral products available; dinner at a museum restaurant; roast goose on arrival in Kars; a friend made at the train station

We woke early to take a look at Kars' castle. The architectural legacy of the city's 1978-1920 occupation by Russia was clear: the grid-based city planning and the dark stone buildings combined with bright skies and early morning chill to make us feel as though we were somewhere else entirely - perhaps a small town in Poland. Evliya wrote how the castle lacked in Islamic infrastructure such as 'houses for reading of the Korán or tradition'; and said nothing about its position so close to Ani, formerly an important stop on the Silk Road. This position however is hinted at by his mention of 'two hundred shops in which Indian and Persian wares are found.'

We rode on to Ani - the large ruined city we had been looking forward to seeing since we began planning this tour. Evliya in fact had little to say about Ani but its historiography has since become laden with meaning, and the 10th century city on the Armenian border felt a good place to end our travels following Evliya. The site is now in Turkey, and looks out across a deep gorge (that made it so strategically powerful) to Armenia's fences and watch-towers. It seems appropriate that Ani's 11th century bridge across the river is completely collapsed, given the Turkish border with Armenia has been closed since 1993. The site itself poses a problem for Turkish identity, as a powerful reminder of its diverse and contested history – Watenpaugh (2014) points to 'a telling irony: Anı (with an undotted i) means "memory" in Turkish' and 'the name change, the avoidance of the word "Armenian" in site interpretation, and the minimizing or erasure of the Armenian layer of Anatolian history contribute to a lacerating silence'. Indeed, we read a few weeks before we arrived that the Turkish army had begun patrolling the site once again in order to prevent intruders from flying the Armenian flag.

The Turkish and Armenian historiographies of the site are thus polarized and incompatible even to this day: Armenian authorities maintain that the Turkish government has deliberately underfunded Ani's conservation, while the Turkish authorities accuse the Armenian quarry across the gorge of contributing to the site's deterioration. It is notable that for Evliya the site presented problems also: despite being the largest ruins on his route in Turkey, and having undeniably important military and Christian ruins - frescoes and gigantic defensive walls remarkably intact even now - he talks only of 'the castle of Ana on a hill, a square mud castle, built by Núshirván, the inhabitants are Armenians'. Just as Turkish authorities now erase the Armenian history of Ani, so Evliya brushes over this Christian site in his account that cares much more about Islamic learning and monuments. The continuity of erasure here is a striking example of the way selective memory molds places.

We recommend visiting the site - the verticality and intricacy of the ecclesiastical architecture foreshadows the Gothic movement that followed it three hundred years later, and the site itself is so huge that it cannot fail to impress - bounded on three sides by a deep scenic gorge, and protect by huge walls.

Interestingly, on the roads near Ani we saw the kind of houses that Evliya had recorded in Erzurum: 'the houses are built of stone; most of them are only one story high, because the air is sharp and the winter severe' - presumably surviving in rural areas for the same reason.

After a fast afternoon's ride across flat agricultural plains, through old stone villages and by the occasional military base or Russian-style ruin, we reached the destination of Arpaçay. This highway town's only marked hotel was an Oğretmenevi which turned out to be full, so we were delighted to find an extremely cheap room above a çay house despite its black mould and filthy shared bathroom. For dinner we ate at the only open restaurant in town and ate the only item it served: barbequed poultry of some kind with lemon and bread – just what we needed.



Clockwise: Russian architecture in Kars; a church at Ani; Piers gets a closer look at Ani's cathedral from the scaffolding; the well preserved ceiling of the Mosque at Ani; sheep block the road as we approach Arpaçay; our room for the night

**30 September**

**Arpaçay to Abastumani ft. a taxi**

**84km / +1,426 m cycled**

Our final day in Turkey was our coldest, and delivered yet another change of scenery, taking us by a beautiful high lake cast in a bright wintry light which reminded us of Scotland. We had hearty bean stew in bustling Çıldır, and considering our slow progress in the face of a major headwind and Isobel's post-viral throat infection, resolved to skip the highway we had planned to ride. Finding no buses, and no luck hitchhiking, we took a cheap taxi to Posof.

Having made the most of my last opportunity to have a Turkish shave in Posof, we cycled on through autumnal colour to the Georgian border. After a border crossing complete with a mislaid passport scare, we promptly got very lost on abysmal trails, but managed to reach Abustamani where we planned to stay that night. We were struck by the amount of older residential buildings just over the border in Georgia. Georgian dogs were more aggressive, and the drivers much worse, so we didn't regret that we only had a full days riding there.

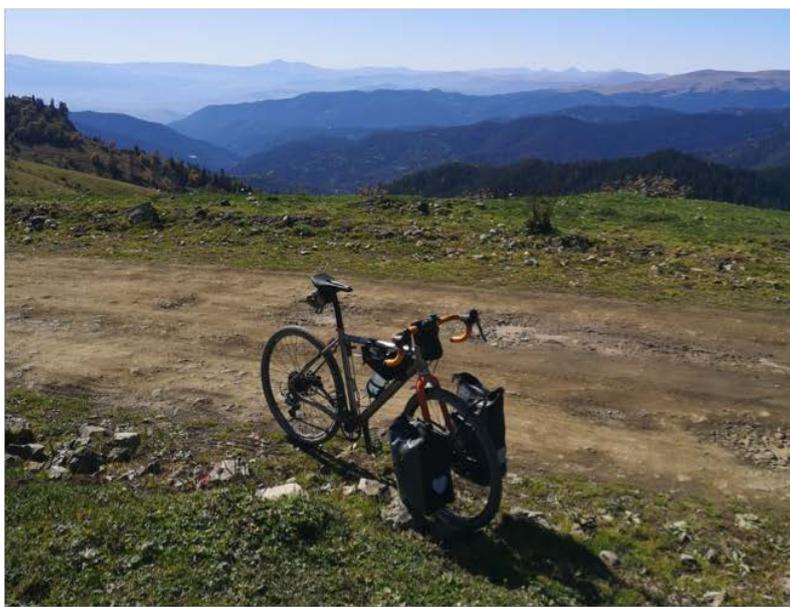
Nestled at the foot of the mountains of Borjomi National Park, the former spa town of Abastumani was beautiful, but lacked a cash point and turkish mobile signal, depriving us of Google Translate. Here, Isobel's very basic Georgian and her emergency \$100 bill saved the day, and we were able to once again share a meal and hotel with the local road workers.

**1 October**

**Abastumani to Kutaisi**

**99 km / +1,880 m cycled**

Our last day's riding entailed a 1200 metre morning climb, then a lengthy descent down to Georgia's central valley and into Kutaisi. Under perfectly clear skies, it delivered brilliant views across to the Caucasus, and we were finally fit enough that the climb was more fun than suffering. It was also a pleasure to do the pass while it was still unpaved; with a new resort hotel in the works, it won't be for long. The straight two lane roads that led into Kutaisi lacked a good shoulder, and drivers frequently overtook into oncoming traffic, forcing the traffic 3 cars wide. Frequent roadside memorials, and a lack of bumpers on at least half the cars suggested this kind of driving is not without consequence. On arrival in Kutaisi we enjoyed our first beer in two weeks, beautiful ancient monuments, enormous servings of rich Georgian cuisine, and the satisfaction of having arrived.



Clockwise: Above Çıldır lake; a bike and a view; a poorly chosen road

## Conclusions

We of course travelled very differently from Evliya: while we were two students unobtrusively arriving in cities by bike, Evliya went with a huge caravan containing dignitaries, valuable goods, and armed men. Evliya wrote of his travelling group that: 'as the procession drew near Erzerúm, the fortress began to salute by firing the great guns from the highest tower, called Kessik Kala'á, as a selám aleikum, after which the Janissaries fired the guns of the inner castle, and so continued during the procession'. Thus we had intimacy with our environment in a very different way from Evliya - while his language and social standing permitted him to meet and talk to whomever he wanted, wherever he went, our lack of Turkish put limited depth of conversation, and who we met was largely down to chance. An enjoyable aspect of cycle touring, however, is that it makes us uniquely vulnerable and accessible as tourists. Local people frequently approached us out of curiosity, allowing us closer proximity to a place, and enabling us to trust and relate to them. While Evliya was essentially self-sufficient, we were always reliant on other people for food and accomodation.

Unlike Evliya we are Western tourists, and Turkish people seemed mostly eager to make sure we liked their city of region, biasing our interactions. Our route also immersed us in nature, and we were always preoccupied with topography; Evliya talked rarely of the landscapes he saw, while for us these were the main event most days, and the bicycle offers a perfect pace to observe subtle changes in environment - flora; buildings; animals - between one valley and the next.

The main conclusion we've drawn from 'travelling with Evliya' is that a country's collective memory is carefully selective, and influences the way history is spatialized. Evliya breezed over Christian places - most notably Ani - in his accounts, focusing instead on meticulously recording the pious infrastructure towns did or did not have; a reflection of his own piety and the social context. To us, when history manifested Turkish public spaces, it often seemed to begin with Modern Turkey and the founding of the Republic: its flag omnipresent and Atatürk something of an icon. In multiple places, a house in which Atatürk had (however briefly) once lived had become the primary tourist attraction. Features and historical figures that undermine or predate Turkish unity are somewhat overwhelmed by the promotion of an imagined, united Turkey. Still, beautiful ancient mosques remain, and the folk tales and myths retold by Evliya are still retold, such as the one of Amasya's creation - pointing to a continuity of folk tales' importance in the imagining of place. Aspects of place which are more naturally than socially constructed tended to appear pleasingly durable; the fruit a region produces, and the way a microclimate shapes the way of life, for example.

French historian Ernest Renan famously argued in 1882 that, as well as memory, 'Forgetfulness, and I would even say historical error, are essential in the creation of a nation": this appears to be as true for Evliya as it was for post-Revolutionary France, and Turkey today. Though this is perhaps universally applicable, considering Evliya's travels as we explored Turkey made this clear to us, and inescapable - even as President Erdoğan himself seeks to mould what is remembered and forgotten.

We look forward to sharing these roads in more detail with the gravel cycling community. We enjoyed reflecting on these experiences, and appreciated having an impetus to put them into writing, so that we may continue to look back on them for years to come. The RSMF's aim to inspire an interest in Turkey was certainly met for both us, and we flew home with great affection for Turkey's people and culture, and a desire to return.

### Some Tips for future Short travelers:

- Stay in Öğretmenevis. They are cheap, clean, and ubiquitous; a bit like YHAs, though not listed on booking sites
- Bear in mind that poor road surfaces like gravel will slow you down when planning to travel by bike, car or minibus into the mountains
- Bear in mind that many amenities outside of major cities will not be clear on maps or listed online. When they are, Google reviews are often too few to be useful; ask locals. We found some of our best meals this way.
- Try the soups and stews available at buffets! They tend to look less appealing than a kebab, but are always delicious.
- Always have your passport accessible for police checks
- Download a VPN application on your phone or laptop, or search 'ipfs wikipedia' to avoid the Turkish Wikipedia ban
- Bring a small water filter in areas where tap water is undrinkable. This is particularly useful when hiking or cycling, but also reduces plastic consumption and gives you the freedom to travel anywhere without worrying whether there will be bottled water available.

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