

Many thanks to the family and friends of Roger Short for making the following trip possible. I travelled to Turkey in September of 2023 with a fellow Roger Short Scholar, Joshua Pearson. It was a 3-week trip across Turkey, taking us from -19 to +35°C and a 5000m mountain to coastal path. We flew into Istanbul, and then spent a week hiking in each of the Kaçkar mountains, Mount Ararat, and the Lycian way. This breadth showed us of a wide range of the cultures and landscapes in Turkey, and I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity. By hiking, we had the time to immerse ourselves in places and connect with those living there. It was an experience that I will certainly continue to treasure and I'm sure it will be one of my most vivid memories of studying at Univ.



## Day 1 - 11/9/23 Istanbul



We landed at 5:45am local time having barely slept - a strong start to a three-week trip. This was the best way for us to see Istanbul, as we were on a flight to the Kaçkar mountains in 29 hours. We got the Metro to ferry port and grabbed simit and a walnut pastry from a street vendor for breakfast - our first taste of turkey, as well as our first view of Istanbul.

The day ahead was laid out before us on the boat across, and after dropping bags in the hostel in Taksim - which seemed to be crumbling, with an unconnected sink - we started to walk towards the Grand Bazaar via a few distractions. We started the day with our first Turkish coffee, in Galataport. I'd had Turkish coffee once before at Queens Lane Coffee House opposite Univ, so this wasn't my first try, but the Turkish delight was very delicately flavoured and changed my opinion of it. We got pressure sold some later in an underpass having been 'forced' to try most flavours in the stall, which seemed like a victory for both sides.

The Grand Bazaar was a chaos of colours and sounds, and a reflection of what seems to be the general trend in Istanbul; where there is one shop, there will be many others selling identical products. Many parts of it now cater to tourists, but the tea vendors were tucked into small nooks and seemed to be serving exclusively to those working there. The people speeding around with trays of tea, never spilling any, were an image of the tea culture here - which is stronger than I expected, despite all the jokes we heard over the trip about British tea drinking.



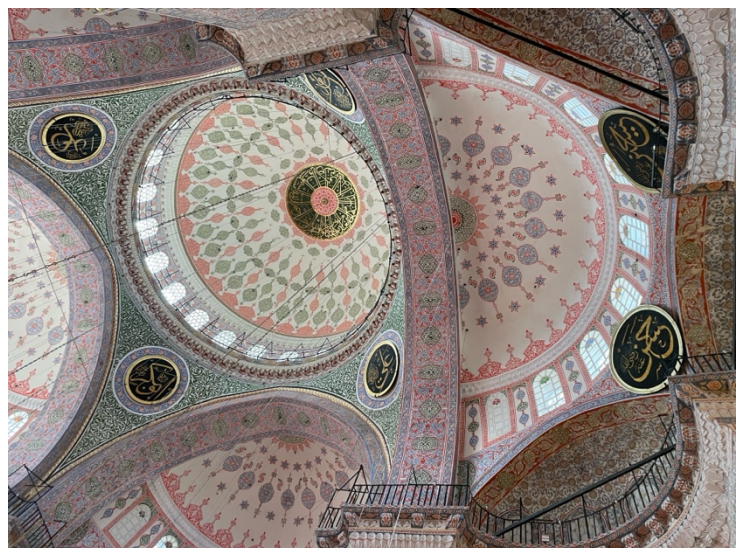
We were exhausted, hungry and getting dazed when we were lured into a small street side cafe - a fantastic lunch followed. Two plates heaped with two types of cheese pastry, Turkish tea, and then some fresh watermelon juice. We hadn't ordered this but been given it when too much had been made for another customer. We were on edge for most of our time in Istanbul, having been warned of scams, but it was just a nice gesture - and really good juice.



We visited some smaller, peaceful mosques which were absolutely beautiful, but without the visitor numbers and craziness and so a far better way to experience them. Ayasofya had a stunning golden interior, with Christian remnants in the decoration. On asking some people speaking

English to take a photo, we met some students from Magdalen who we had mutual

friends with! The Blue Mosque has beautiful stained glass and tiling which gave it a very different feel to Ayasofya, instead being light, open and airy. It was rich and intricate, without being so decadent, and I much preferred it.



We went back to near the hotel to find dinner, and got meze sold by the kilo. It felt like a young and affluent area, rather than tourist focused (unlike the restaurants under Galata bridge). Wandering around Taksim in evening, we got Baklava in small shop that seemed frequented by locals rather than tourists. We communicated with owner via the scales to discover it was opened in 1946. The call to prayer was filling the streets as we walked back to hostel, which was incredible.

## Day 2 12/9/23 Istanbul - Ayder

It was an early wake up to travel to the new airport for our flight. We got cheese simit in Taksim square and then had problems finding the bus stop. Thinking we'd missed the bus, we got a different one, but that terminated soon after. The bus we wanted was actually running late so we managed to run for a stop and beat it there.

After a far more comfortable experience with Turkish Airlines than we got with Pegasus, we landed in Rize to tea terraces lining the shore. The airport had been built out into sea but seemed to receive very few flights. The coaches for onward travel were waiting outside and it was brilliantly smooth. This bus went to Pazar, where we'd been told we'd need to get a minibus to Ayder – the gateway town into the mountains. We were quite worried about this journey as we'd



found very little information about it online - no timetables etc. This appears to be because the system is too good to need them! We asked our first driver where to find the connection and we were pointed along the road with the name 'camelhemism'. We found the minibuses immediately and, with 14:45 wiped into the dirt on the rear window, we had 30 minutes to see Pazar. First stop was some intriguing red berries just behind the bus which turned out to be sour cherries. Next was the cheese shop. We asked what would be good for hiking and we were offered a selection of aged cheese samples. The cheese from Erzurum had the most brilliant stringy texture and was quite salty, and one from Trabzon were curds of solid white cheese (feta flavour) – we bought some of both, and some olives.

We got some meat borek for lunch but with 5 minutes left, had to transfer it to a take-away box. We failed at communicating this with gestures, and moved to google translate, but they were incredibly friendly. Pazar didn't feel remotely touristy, but just Turkish people going about life which was interesting to see.

The minibus driver was taking payments and giving change while driving, dropping off packages in the small villages, and taking on bags of bread to deliver to Ayder. Everyone else on the bus was local, or Turkish. The road followed a river for most of the way to Ayder, which was lined with resorts, but these seemed to be catering to domestic tourism. 'Zip line' and 'rafting' were the

only words in English - presumably imported language. There were tea pickers along route and everywhere we went after this was selling Rize tea.

When we reached Ayder, the woman running the campsite spoke no English and chaos ensued with some Kuwaiti tourists who thought we were running it, as we both failed at asking each other the same questions back and forth. Ayder is in a cloud most of the time as moisture rolls in from the Black Sea, and we hugely stood out as only people wearing waterproof coats. Some Turkish or Arabic tourists were in plastic sheets, but locals were just wearing damp hoodies. The Kuwaiti family had cooked a traditional dish of rice, meat, with tomato sauce and yoghurt, and we were offered plates and a table. We ate separately while they produced a rug and ate on the floor with their hands. This was a level of hospitality totally unfamiliar to us, especially from people who were also visitors!

### Day 3 – 13/9/23 Ayder into mountains

We woke up at 5am, hoping for a clear sky as suggested by the guidebook, but it was already foggy. The start of our hike was a track to a town called Kavron which was fully cobbled and lined with unused tourist picnic shelters. Kavron turned out to be a developing tourist village and we



stopped for a second breakfast of Turkish coffee and sutlaç, a rice pudding topped with ground hazelnut. The owner knew the mountains very well and hand drew us a map with the current conditions – explaining that there had been 6 inches of snow recently fall where we were planning to camp that evening. In the trailhead town, we stopped again for a drink and the owner then offered to drive us the rest of the way to the path, as well as calling his son (who spoke better English) for us to talk to about our route. Everyone we met was very interested, and it was clear from this and the non-existent state of the path we'd soon be on that hikers weren't very common here.



The 'path' followed the river along the base of a wide valley, so there was no danger of getting lost despite the very thick fog. The path did become more distinct higher up, and the snow we'd been warned of had clearly melted already

so we reached the lake where we intended to camp at at 14:30. The visibility and remaining light wasn't good enough for us to keep walking though, and we spent



30 minutes looking for a flat camping spot that wasn't covered in boulders. The best spot we found in the end was a flat slab of rock, and we looped the guy lines around rocks to pitch the tent. In the brief clearings of the fog, we could see a bright blue lake with a few cows grazing.

#### Day 4 – 14/9/23

#### Davali and Sirakonaklar

We set an alarm for sunrise and woke up to the most beautifully clear day – we now knew what the area we were camping in looked like! The next realisation was that the inside of the tent was covered in ice, and even my socks and boots, which got damp yesterday, had frozen. Josh collected water from the lake, which was half frozen over, to make porridge for breakfast. The gas again didn't light so we burnt liquid, creating a quite spectacular fireball with the sun rising in the backdrop. We set off as soon as possible, starting with a 400m vertical climb to reach the col as the sun rose around us. The path came and went, with the occasional rock cairn marking the direction. As we crossed into the Davali valley, we could see the fog that would later cover the tops building. We followed a cow path down into the village, which was very clearly a temporary settlement for the summer pasture. It was about



ten huts with crude stone walls and tarpaulin or corrugated metal roofs. There were chickens running around, and we passed a few people before stopping at the end of the village to make lunch and watch life go by. There were women washing clothes in the stream, and large jugs of milk being poured away. We asked two women if we could use their water tap, got laughed with as we mangled some Turkish, and were then taught 'thank you' in the local dialect.

Just as we were finishing our lunch, a man holding two warm pastries approached. These were walnut, and one of the best things I've ever eaten – as always when hiking. After talking over google translate for a bit, we got invited to his house for tea. Everyone we had seen in the village was inside when we arrived, and this was clearly their entertainment for the week.



They estimated they'd only seen 40 hikers in the 2 months they'd been in the summer pasture. Bread and pastries were coming out of the oven permanently, and they had fun with google translate asking us what brand of suncream we used (we were both a little burnt) and repeatedly asking if I had an 'aesthetic' nose because one of the women wanted to get a nose job. It was unclear whether they have other jobs for 10 months of the year, but the sister of the man who'd invited us in was consistently correcting his spelling. We were offered flat bread and lung but politely declined, having just eaten lunch... We did drink a ridiculous amount of tea though, and I wonder whether they were just seeing how much tea they could offer us before we said no.



They also offered us a bed for the night, but we decided to continue to Sirikonaklar and so, after they'd laughed at us for taking a longer route than necessary, we were offered a trip down in the village car. This was loaded with milk and cheese before leaving, and we were then asked for medicine in exchange for their hospitality. A few of the women had bad coughs, and we handed over the ibuprofen we had with us, with very clear usage instructions. The google translate conversation continued down the mountain, and he also made some calls – which turned out to be arranging our accommodation for the night. The car stopped and he greeted a man working on scaffolding on a building. This was a not yet open pansyion, but we were warmly welcomed in to spend the evening with the family by the father, Fahrettin. Over the course of the evening, we discovered he'd been a psychology professor, tried his hand at municipality politics, and was now a farmer developing a tourist empire. While on a walk around the village to see his favourite spots and the location of his future tourist hobbit village, a car



stopped to take photos, recognising him as a politician. The woman, Ulia, had been a mechanical engineer in the city and had designed the beautiful wooden building. Fahrettin and Ulia kept fifteen goats, chickens, had a tank of 500 fish, and a small area of crop. Dinner and breakfast were

entirely their own produce – and the cheese was some of the best I've ever eaten. The goat yoghurt soup and stuffed peppers were also incredible.

Their daughter, Elvin, was home for the university holidays and spoke very enthusiastically about English literature, but also expressed confusion at her parents moving here. She said the local men weren't nice, and while this certainly isn't the impression we got in Davali, a man on the road the following morning wouldn't make eye contact with me while insisting on shaking Josh's hand and discussing our route. There is certainly a pronounced cultural difference between urban and rural Turkey.

### **Day 5 – 15/9/23**

#### **Sirikonaklar - mountains**



Following a fantastic breakfast, we were asked to take a photo with the portrait of Atatürk in their living room before being wished on our way. (While editing this diary, I discovered he'd posted these photos online with a quite political caption that had some interesting responses.) It was an hour of hiking up the road to reach the trail, and then a very slow ascent up the valley with no path. This was a passage from rich farming land into the bare rock higher up. After hearing stories of Fahrettin's dogs playing with bears, we were very

cautious and vigilant – including clattering a metal cup and fork together when there was a risk of being surprised.



When we eventually reached the col, we could see down to Dilberduzu campsite – the main camp for summit attempts on Mount Kaçkar. The map became inaccurate here and we had to find and follow a path on the ground, which was an indent in the side of a scree slope. This did lead us to where we needed to camp that night, with only a few places where the rocks were concerningly loose. We pitched the tent for a wild camp alongside a lake, with a snowbank on the opposite side.

### **Day 6 – 16/9/23**

#### **Kaçkar summit – Yaylalar**

The alarm went off at 4:45am for the summit push – we had a lot of elevation and distance to cover today, as we also needed to hike the 11km to Yaylalar. It took a while to boil all the drinking water, so we didn't manage to leave until 6am. We passed 3 people camping at the other lake, but they were the only other people on the mountain. The path was very easy to follow in some places, and totally non-existent in others. Navigating required following piles of rocks through a landscape of scoured rock, snow and ice. Competing tour guides have clearly laid multiple routes,

and so at one point we ended up off the main route and at a dead end. After some deliberation over whether we'd run out of time to continue to the summit, we did manage to find the path and it was then a fairly simple climb. The summit was totally clear, and the view was spectacular.



We made it back to our camp at 12pm to have lunch and boil more drinking water before packing up and starting the final leg of our journey through the Kaçkar. We'd enjoyed the untouched beauty of this place, having not seen any other hikers until this morning. The track out of the main camp was covered by mule poo from the guided summit trips and the toilet on this campsite had an outlet straight into the stream, which made quite the contrast.

We made it to Olgunlar at 4pm and there was a concrete road from here to Yaylalar, where we were staying and getting a bus from in the morning. We were offered apples by a man on the way into the village. The pansyion was at the bottom of the village and run by the man who also runs the village shop and the bus. We now discovered the downside of there not being any bus timetables; despite enquiring in advance, we were told that the bus doesn't run on Sundays, but they could make a special trip for us for 2500TL (about £90). This was the first leg of a multi-stage road trip across the east of Turkey to reach the start point of our Mount Ararat summit expedition. Left with no other choice, we negotiated the price down to 2000TL with the help of a guide acting a translator, but this was still four times the cost we were expecting. Fortuitously, it also turned out that we were so out of season that we were the only guests in the pansyion – which cut the price we'd been quoted in half. The water to the toilet had been disconnected, and shower seized. We were shown to the kitchen, given a bag of salad each, and shown to help ourselves to the box of 30 eggs and stacks of olives and cheeses. The guide also had a bag of salad and made certain we could point to which was ours and which was his before he was satisfied that we wouldn't savage all of it.





**Day 7 – 17/9/23**  
**Yaylalar – Erzurum**

We were up early for the bus, which was leaving at 6am. It was a stunning road, that gave way to a massive development of tunnels and reservoirs at the bus change town. We asked for breakfast recommendations at the bus station and were pointed in the direction of one of the only places open on a Sunday. It was only serving soup – but it was a rich vegetable soup with a whole loaf of bread. The neighbouring shop offered çay for 5TL; we very definitely weren't in a tourist area, and the firemen and some passing vehicles hollered at us, just asking where we were from.

On the bus to Erzurum, a stop was made at a roadside bread vendor and people got on with loaves that proceeded to fly out



of the overhead storage during the journey. Like everywhere else we've been, this road was lined with abandoned tourist facilities, most of which seemed like they'd never even opened. There was a police control check on the way into the city, and then we were in the centre. After the first priority of food, we wandered



around the historic sights of Erzurum and stopped for tea in a few places. Erzurum has a very complex history, with the castle having been invaded by every empire since the Byzantine times. The castle also contains the oldest minaret in Turkey, which gave a spectacular view over the bowl Erzurum sits in.



Needing to catch up on diary writing, we went for tea and got reminded that this was eastern Turkey. A menu was taken from me and given to Josh, and tea also came with one spoon, given to him. It is difficult to understand the true intentions of these actions with the perspective of a very different culture, and I don't wish to overly apply my viewpoints, but this did feel very strange. We were the only international tourists we spotted for our time in Erzurum and this was particularly apparent when trying to find somewhere for dinner. Having come out of the mountains, we were looking for something different and fresher. We got laughed at (perhaps with) trying to find menemen in the evening and settled on Doner and Kofte. The menu was jokingly handed towards me before being given

to Josh and a table of men took turns looking at me. The food was incredible, and they were very keen to share their local desert with us – a walnut baklava.

I'm not too sure how to interpret Erzurum. It is the first time during the trip so far that I've really felt the cultural differences. The city generally is quite strange, having once been very important but now just has hillsides of abandoned concrete building frames.

## **Day 8 – 18/9/23**

### **Erzurum – Dogubeyazit**



After a basic breakfast, we had some time before we had to leave for the otogar and so got coffee. We spent the rest of the morning on a coach across the vast emptiness of eastern Turkey, with cereal crops as far as we could see. The bus had an attendant who wheeled a trolley down the aisle with free tea and snacks, but 40 minutes into our 3-hour journey, the bus stopped at a service point, and everyone got off to have tea. It was going to be quite a long trip if it proceeded at this rate! Getting off did provide the joy of seeing someone travelling with a budgie in their footwell, however, and we got Ayran. With no further stops actually happening, we arrived at Agri bus station, and this was the place that I felt most stared at on the entire trip. I saw no women driving for the 4 hours we were in Agri; they were only passengers. In the bus station, there were groups of men trying to sell us a ticket for

the same bus. One was going for google translate, but the rest were using increasingly expressive Turkish.

We had a long layover, so walked to a café for lunch – which included sour cherry and tahini baklava. This was the university end of the town and that was quite apparent in the demographic we were seeing. I even got handed a menu, which had price stickers piled up on it because of how unstable the lira is.

We were heading to Dogubeyazit for the start point of the Mount Ararat (Agri Dagi in Turkish) climb. The bus from Agri to Dogubeyazit went through another police roadblock, and then stopped on the outside of town. This meant we had to get ourselves to the centre at 9pm. It wasn't a long walk so we decided that would probably be okay, and more appealing than trying to hail down a taxi, which had hit us with a tourist price that morning. Within a few hundred metres of badly lit suburbia, we'd witnessed a break-in, been surrounded by a group of children and teenagers, and were maybe regretting not trying to get a taxi. They were playing a game as we approached, but then started running around us. They were shouting down sidestreets to others that there were English people, but we were making sure we never actually got surrounded. Some ran off to get water from the shop and tried to sell it to us. I'm sure their intentions were good, and they were just excited to see travellers, but we really couldn't take that

risk with all of our possessions on our backs. I was then very on edge for the rest of the walk, and it felt like we were being followed down the main street. When we went back out to get food an hour later, it felt far safer, so we were probably just seeing the worst in every situation.

### **Day 9 – 20/9/23**

#### **Dogubeyazit – Camp 1 (3200m)**

Breakfast was at 6:30 and this was our first meeting of the rest of the team. It is compulsory to have a local guide on the mountain, and this company was about a third of the price of other providers. We'd assumed it was aimed at the Turkish market, but the group was actually entirely international. We still had little idea what to expect from the trip at this price point, but the website had shown good infrastructure on the mountain which was why we booked it. Later in



the trip, the owner of the company explained that they were inexpensive because they hadn't operated illegally while the mountain was closed (from 2015-2021) and so had low prices to build their business back up. Some hikers did get arrested while attempting to summit during that period, and it appears that some companies continued to offer trips without acknowledging that it was illegal. On the mountain, we seemed to be getting a much better experience than the other groups around us. While we had canvas base camp

tents with wooden bed frames and mattresses, they were getting battered by the wind in pop-up tents. We also had a team of cooks in a separate tent, and a dining tent.



Back in the hotel, we had to split our bags into day bags and mule bags, and then anything we didn't need during hiking would be transported up the mountain. After a minibus to mountain – which someone managed to miss and got left behind - we began walking. We had to stay behind the guide, who was walking very slowly compared to what we'd been doing in the Kaçkar. We were far more acclimatised than others in the group, a large proportion of whom were Dutch, having spent a week at nearly 3000m.

On getting into Camp 1 at about 11:30, our bags had arrived before us, and we discovered that the mules were also carrying watermelon. We were given large chunks to rehydrate, the guides ate to the rind, and the mules were given the rest. We had the afternoon to chat to the other hikers and move into our tents. Someone on the way down from the summit passed through and gave the information they could, exhausted and facing a barrage of questions: it was -19°C on the summit, and Camp 2 was very basic with one tent for 20 people that wouldn't zip closed



because of a snowbank. In contrast, our tent in this camp was palatial, with 'flushing' toilets and a shower when it was warm and sunny enough – although we were told it wasn't working for our trip. We were very lucky with the weather though; it was September on a high mountain, and the previous week had shown -25°C on the forecast. Many of the other guide companies we looked into when booking had already finished for the season.



Dinner was a vegetable soup followed by bulgar wheat, beans and salad, and more tea. The food massively exceeded our expectations, but I'm a tentative meat eater anyway and was sticking to vegetarian food to avoid the risk of food poisoning.

## **Day 10 – 21/9/23**

### **Acclimatisation day**

Today we were just going up to Camp 2 (4150m) and coming back down again, so breakfast was at 8, to start walking at 9am. It was a Turkish spread of salad, eggs, bread, sausage, lots of cheeses, and even more tea. A Bulgarian on the team got laughed at by (and probably some disgust from) the guides for pulling out a bag of Turkish coffee and insisting he could make it with just some hot water in a cup. The guides were all Kurdish and would break out in Kurdish song occasionally while walking. It was amusing to watch the reactions of those in the group struggling for breath. I was going slightly crazy with far too much energy for the amount of walking we were doing, but others were finding it more taxing.



As yesterday, we set off at a very measured pace and stopped for a break about halfway. The guide pulled out a thermos of tea and started handing cups around, as well as sugar cubes. It took 3 hours to reach camp 2 and we were there for an hour before returning down the mountain. The guide pointed to a plane-like object buzzing overhead and explained that it was a Turkish Drone. The mountain is 10km from the Iranian and Armenian borders, and a very sensitive area. It circled overhead for quite a while, presumably doing surveillance.

After a dinner of Aubergine and pasta, we had our crampon fitting session. They ensured we knew how to put them on correctly, and we put them away to ensure they made it to camp 2.

### **Day 11 – 22/9/23**

#### **Camp 1 – Camp 2**

The trip up to camp 2 was much the same as yesterday. While some members of the group were in bright yellow suede, crampon-rated, mountain boots, the guides were in trainers or broken and loosely tied boots. One of the mule drivers were throwing stones to get them to keep moving up the mountain, but this appeared to be an exception. Most of the horses were being treated fairly well.

In the 20-person tent, there was insulating foil over only half of the floor, and then thin foam mats over the entire floor so that there was no walkway between sleeping bags which made getting out in the night interesting. The door did indeed not shut, and the zip broke if people tried to take it down too far. Dinner was at 5pm, and then our breakfast would be at 1am, ready to go for the summit.

At 9pm however, I developed food poisoning – which was quite the experience at 4000m, while it was snowing. Someone else in the group had already had to descend from Camp 2 because they had developed altitude sickness, and another would later be ill 10m below the summit – but I was sure I didn't have altitude sickness, which was confirmed for certain when I continued to be ill after descending.

I was having to accept that I would be unable to summit but got some sleep and woke up for 1am breakfast feeling considerably better.

**Day 12 -23/9/23**  
**Summit day!**



I was able to eat a few pieces of tahini halva and had to hope that alone would be enough to get me up the final 1000m of climbing. We began hiking at 2am, with a line of head torches ahead of us up the mountain. We ascended in the dark, only able to see as far as the boot we were putting in front of the other, for what felt like forever and no time at all. It's all a blur. I took sips of water every few minutes to keep it moving to prevent freezing, and just

put it in my coat after a while, but that didn't stop it freezing. We had decided that water freezing for one morning was a better option than carrying a thermos for 3 weeks, and so we knew we were underprepared.



Pre-dawn light began at 5am, and we were just in the snow at that point. There were spectacular snow drifts and clouds coming and going on the summit. We were just below the summit when we put crampons on as, although we'd been ascending in snow for an hour, the final part was ice. It was here that the Bulgarian was ill, and I was feeling awful too, but it was a final push and then we were there. The cloud has mostly broken so the view was spectacular – with the shadow of the mountain on the clouds, and the scale of how

high we were. Mount Ararat is a volcano, the second highest in Asia, and so the land around it is 3000m below.

The descent felt like walking into a completely new place, as we'd not actually seen anything on the way up. For the hour we rested at camp 2 before continuing to camp 1, I was huddled in the tube tent – which had ripped ends- drinking rehydration solution. I was feeling terrible, but I made it.

### **Day 13 – 24/9/23**

#### **Camp 1 – Dogubeyazit**

It was a slow walk down to the trailhead in the morning, where we were met with wedges of watermelon. We fed the rinds to the horses, one of which an Australian woman with an injured ankle had just ridden down. Without stirrups, it looked like quite the core workout. It was amusing to pass groups just starting up the trail, behaving like we did a week ago - taking a photo of the mountain every two steps.



I was in the front seat of the minibus back to the hotel, between the driver and guide, and I got a great view of the scale of what we'd just summited as we drove away.



I was feeling able to eat something at lunch and we got a selection of borek and pidesi, which were just the thing. We wandered the market and then went to get baklava. This was on a street that had been totally ripped up for relaying and was total chaos.

The trip included a visit to a Turkish bath, which was the ground floor of an apartment building. The changing room the four women on the trip were shown to was a store cupboard, complete with brooms and buckets. I was unsure of how to approach the Turkish bath, having read that it was generally gender segregated but that didn't appear to be the case. We were sharing the swimming pool with the men, and the massage room had a window through, so everyone could see the other women topless. I decided to skip that, already finding the heat a bit much but it was an interesting experience. Unlike the photos we'd seen of the hamams in Istanbul, this wasn't at all decorative; it was just somewhere that normal Turkish people went. The person working in the foyer was a young girl, maybe 10, who shyly showed us her kitten.

## Day 14 - 25/9/23

### Dogubeyazit

We were up at 7am for another Turkish breakfast, and the enriched bread rolls were very stale today. The activity on the itinerary was a trip to Ishak pasha palace, which we found out wasn't until 3pm, but people were making plans to go elsewhere during the morning. The tour company offered a trip to Noah's ark for €15 each; an interesting concept as a geologist, but not worth the price as reviews indicated there was only a viewing platform ~1km away. Articles and papers from both sides of the argument suggest that some people have obsessed over it and some very poor scientific practice has ensued. Turkey officially announced this site as the discovery of Noah's ark, with a backdrop of the significant religious tensions with Armenia. Ararat was closed from 2015-2021 for military operations, and it is now compulsory to obtain a permit for Mount Ararat. It was suggested by someone more local members of our group that this is to prevent Armenians visiting the holy site.

We decided we'd instead walk the 5km to the palace over the course of the morning, to have more time there than the hour planned for the group. We tried an outdoor shop but it was closed, until a group of men started shouting at us from a second story window that they'd come and open it. In a town absolutely full of shops selling fake North Face and Columbia, this one appeared set up for tourists climbing Mount Ararat, with some very genuine price tags. Sadly, they didn't have the leather cream we were after to give our boots some love before the next section of the trip.

Alongside the road immediately outside the city was a military training area, and a lot of EU funding signs. We had some leftover baklava in a shaded picnic spot, next to the barbed wire and a sign with a very threatening depiction of a gun. Further up, the road was lined with near identical (entirely identical in function) tea gardens/holiday centres/barbecue venues? We stopped for a Turkish coffee and reflected on trip so far. Turkey has been so vibrant, and far beyond our expectations.

The entrance to the national park was also along this road, with an empty visitor centre, and every lightbulb on the wall smashed. This was the first explicitly wheelchair accessible place we've noticed, with ramps alongside the stairs. After a little more walking, a tractor with a trailer pulled up and started gesturing at us to get in. With a little too much confusion and hesitation, only Josh was in before they pulled away again. He waved as I jogged along behind for a little while, but he soon jumped out. A bit further up there was an unfinished building, presumably a hotel. It had mud plaster walls, but very ornate wooden ceilings, light fittings, and marble floor. The wiring was half complete and there was no sign of bathrooms, a kitchen, etc. Quite bizarre.







We had a picnic next to palace and watched lightning overhead before continuing on to old Beyazit castle. Some parts didn't appear to be that old, with pipes and carved basins, and large rock blasting holes near the top. This site was entirely unprotected, and we followed some steps onto a path made by many visitors. This is something that definitely wouldn't have happened in the UK, and felt quite wrong, but I think our impact was negligible.



We met back up with the group to look around the palace, which was nice, but my room in main quad this year is 117 years older. It was a product of the Silk Road, with very intricate carving into red limestone, but is now quite damaged.



Wandering up the hill towards a viewpoint, a wedding party (the fourth we'd seen in 3 hours) were making photo gestures - we assumed they were offering to take a photo of us, and handed over a phone. No, apparently not, they want photos of us with the wedding party? The bride was as baffled us, but the men were enthusiastic - there appears to be a culture of male jokers.

We soon got in the bus, and travelled a short way before stopping at one of the holiday park type things for dinner. We first sat in the shelter with mats while the guides prepared the barbecue, and then moved outside for food. There was a selection of vegetables – the tomato was incredible, as was the aubergine (beautiful texture, but I missed the skin). After the failure of being vegetarian on the mountain to avoid food poisoning, I really enjoyed the meat. There were chicken wings and lamb skewers, and

three different cuts of steak. The tour organiser refused to give us any information about how he'd done it; it was probably the best beef I've ever had. I believe he said he and his wife ran a restaurant before the tour company.

We had tea after dinner and got individually presented with summit certificates.

## **Day 16 - 26/9/23**

### **Dogubeyazit – Antalya**

We didn't fancy the hotel breakfast for an eighth day in a row and so went out to try some other local places. We had menemen and Kurdish pistachio Turkish coffee - which isn't actually coffee at all but made from a relative of the pistachio plant. We tried to buy some in the supermarket after with no luck (but did later succeed in Antalya). Still hungry, we tested our theory that we'd been eating borek at the wrong time of day, and it is indeed a breakfast food. The potato borek was incredible – still hot, crispy, and nicely spicy. We also tried a white cheese and pasta pastry, but that wasn't really to my taste.

We were taken to airport bus by the guide - we'd been unable to find an airport shuttle online, but the locals just know. The shuttle is run by Turkish airlines, and people weren't asking if the bus was going to the airport, but whether it was for Ankara or Istanbul. We started getting worried as it seemed to be travelling very slowly - having a chat at every stop - but no, this is a local airport with 3 flights a day and security took 5 minutes. Travelling with a passport was clearly a rarity here and we were channeled aside to be dealt with.

We landed in Antalya and got quite the culture shock. Palm trees, people in shorts and pink high heels weren't what we'd become accustomed to in eastern Turkey. The entire evening in the city was quite unsettling, having been away from this density of people. It was an incredibly busy, tourist city and we were now getting stared at because we've come out of a bush backwards.

We checked into the hostel, and the gap yah experience - guitar propped up in the corner, wild cats, funky decoration, etc. We were advised to use the downstairs bathroom to shower because the upper one had windows on each cubicle, and it also had either scalding or freezing water and a broken shower head.

Dinner was a fish sandwich from a street vendor, which included a salad bar. There were no longer street dogs, and this place had a dog with a collar that was clearly bred - corgi cross?

We realised at this point that shops close at 10pm, and we still needed food for the remaining week of hiking. Oh dear.

## **Day 17 - 26/9/23**

### **Antalya – Lycian Way**

We were up at 6:30 to travel across town to bus terminal, as we needed start as early as possible for the hiking planned. We picked up some potato bread from a street vendor and, still needing to buy food for the week, we got to a shop near the bus station that Google suggested was open -but this was incorrect. With time to kill before any shops did open, we got a pasta type of borek for breakfast; the meat filling was really nice. We tried asking a shopkeeper to let us in at 8:30 as they were unlocking but got the expected response. To Migros at 9, then the bus at 10 - much much later than ideal.

The journey took a lot longer than the timetable on Google maps suggested - winding around the bright coastal road for 4 hours. We were wanting to get off at a random junction to travel into the small village trailhead and the driver had been on the phone with earphones for half an hour, so I tried asking the Turkish woman across the aisle if she could ask the driver to stop. She initially seemed to agree, and then not, but wasn't responding to me trying to give her Google translate. Nearing the junction, we had to just start shouting at the driver (attempting some Turkish), and a Turkish girl in front of us who spoke English then helped us communicate. Lots of Turkish women were laughing at us as we got dropped off in the drainage ditch of a busy road.

We managed to pick up a hitchhike on only the second passing car; she'd done the Lycian way herself, but spoke no English, so discussion was limited. She clearly had more reservations about driving while using google translate than some people we'd met previously... We were dropped in the village and began walking through to find Appollonia, eating a pomegranate that was overhanging a fence. We found a Necropolis, a later church, a large cistern, and then headed down hill to join path properly towards Aperlai.



There was a well by the side of the track, but it had no bucket - just a ladder suspended by a rope. We were thirsty, but this was just too close to the start of a good horror movie. The path descended through a forest with a floor of limestone boulders, winding between them. We kept dropping, passing abandoned buildings, until we reached Aperlai - which were very scenic ruins of a Roman fishing port. There were again lots of carved sarcophagi and archways. We went for a swim here as the guidebook indicated there were submerged ruins; we saw some very large blocks but couldn't really tell otherwise. The sun was quite near setting, but we kept walking for a bit and bought some water from a house. Everything is bottled here, and they bring their water in by boat as that is the only access.



When dusk arrived, we pitched the tent amongst the limestone in the forest and made saksuka for dinner. We had pitched without the outer of the tent to look at the stars, and the super moon was so bright that we could see shadows of trees on the tent, and the shadow of our own tent.

## Day 18 - 27/9/23

We were again up early to start walking with sunrise. There was a long day ahead to catch up to the schedule. The path continued to wind up through trees until we emerged into an isthmus,



where there was a man with gun sat facing the path. There were two gunshots not long after we'd passed by, but we're not entirely sure what he was shooting. This exposed section was very hot and very dry, and we were relieved to reach Uçgiz (goal of yesterday) at 9:30 for some refreshment. We were sat drinking lemonade and offered an all-day boat trip, including lunch for 500TL - scoffed at a tourist price, until we'd done the conversion... £15. We had to walk on to Demre today regardless.

The path meandered inland for a bit before returning to the coast, where we stopped for a swim around a small island, and to make lunch. The bay filled up with tourist boat trips -likely the one we were offered - and yachts while we were there. We took a 2 -hour break to avoid the worst heat of the day, but it was still terrible, and we still had a long way to go. The path again moved inland and through an olive grove – but all the olives were entirely stone. There was supposed to be a 10m Roman tower soon on the route, but we discovered it has changed a lot since the first edition of the trail book was written. This day sounded incredible on paper, but it seems the route has moved away from all the reasons to do it and was just very hot instead. The same thing happened with Soura (a Roman settlement) when we emerged on the beach, and the route markers clearly weren't going where we expected them too. We accepted defeat at this point and followed the beach to the road to Demre. The second car that passed stopped for us, although he spoke no English - people here are very generous.

Dropped in the centre, we went to find our accommodation for the evening. The one I'd initially tried to book - aimed at tired hikers who can't really hold a conversation, and just want to eat and sleep - was closed for rebuilding, but I'd been recommended another very enthusiastically. He'd made a reservation on our behalf, and offered to meet us to show us to it if I texted when we arrived in Demre. There was no indication he was getting a cut of our booking, but maybe so. Demre clearly had some tourist industry - Myra is incredible - but the streets were full of agricultural shops and surrounded by polytunnels. We grabbed 15TL dürüm as a snack for our walk to Myra, and arrived as sun was setting. We discovered the 300 TL entrance fee and decided to come back in the morning - this would further upset our schedule, but this site was too good to miss.

**Day 19 - 28/9/23**  
**Demre - Adrasan**



We were the only people in Myra for the duration of our visit – we had to ask the the staff to stop cleaning to sell us a ticket. The carved stone tombs were what excited me about the Lycian way, and they didn't disappoint. I'd seen one high on a hillside on the bus into the trail, but this was truly spectacular, with a more recent style of solumn. It is one of two necropoli in Myra; the other further up the river was still painted when 'found' in the 1800s. The amphitheatre was incredibly preserved and very impressive. We walked back to pansiyon for the best Turkish breakfast we've

had yet, with watermelon jam, and scrambled egg as highlights, as well as different type of bread (potentially potato based?).

We arrived at the bus station and had missed one by 8 minutes. Timetables again aren't online/one on Google isn't correct. More and more people were arriving while we waited for the next in 40 minutes, and we were standing for our journey.

We arrived in good time and had to communicate that we again wanted to be dropped in a random place - although this one did have a bus stop. The driver didn't seem too bothered by that, and just stopped on the side of a major road. From here, we very quickly got a hitchhike in the direction we needed, but it wasn't taking us all the way. We walked for a bit, with no success, but it later appeared that the best road to walk wasn't the obvious route to drive. After a bit of pleasant walking in the shade, a bus drove past in the direction we wanted and we got picked up - but then told to get off again at next roundabout. A lot of confusion ensued and we bought lemon soda at the shop before we eventually realised we needed to wait here for 20 minutes for a different bus, and this one had actually just been getting us to the right place.



We made it to start of trail up to lighthouse at 2pm (with 18km of rough terrain to cover) and saw a wild tortoise crossing the road. The trail starts as track, at the top of cliffs above some beautiful water. It later turns off to path for final stretch the lighthouse. We were in the shade all afternoon



in a pine forest, which was a relief after the heat of previous days. We knew we were getting benighted and did the final hour with head torches, even passing a scorpion!

We had planned to wild camp at the back of a beach, but we'd run out of light - and really didn't fancy any new companions! The campsites were all on wooden platforms so maybe this was a reasonable fear?! The owner of the campsite we ended up on offered to have her 'staff put up our tent' because we looked so tired.

We made dinner, and the campsite kitchen had a double kettle so we could use our Ayder tea.

## Day 20 - 29/9/23 Adrasan to Çirali



We got up the next morning to head into Adrasan to find breakfast. I hated the village; it's a beautiful place, but just totally full of tourist places. There were dogs following us constantly so we couldn't eat the breakfast we'd bought in a shop. As we turned off onto a track, and they continued to follow us. We tried to distract them, and get them to join other dogs, but no luck and so we sat on a tractor trailer to eat. The dogs then continued to follow us as we walked, and one of them, which we named Charlie, followed us almost all the way to Çirali. The dogs did know the way however, so we assumed



they do this for fun every now and again. The path wound up through some beautiful forest, and we made much better time than expected. We arrived at a hole in fence to Olympos at 2:30, which seems to be a back entrance for the

trail? We saw the sarcophagi, baths, amphitheatre, etc. which are all incredibly preserved, but



not quite as impressive as Myra. Excavation is still underway, and tree roots are visible high up in some of the walls, where they had been buried. We walked along beach and then into town to shop, where we bought marshmallows for our trip to chimera this evening. We pitched in a beach-back campsite, swam, ate, and then started walking once it was dark.

It was a few km to the car park and then another up. Chimera is a source of natural gas which is seeping out of the ground and permanently burning. The carbon isotope values apparently indicate a metamorphic origin. We toasted marshmallows and boiled a pan of water for a hot drink which was so much fun.

## Day 21 - 30/9/23 Çirali to Antalya

We woke up and made a pot of tea, using the two parts of my pan as a double kettle. Menemen was for breakfast – although, as ever, we were still hungry. We bought simit, and a tahini and grape molasses spread for second breakfast and then swam. We could hear thunder building after a while so rushed back to tent to start getting ready to leave.

We just got tent down as starting to spatter, and then realised it was 11:55, and we'd seen a sign that dolmuses were every hour. We ran to the road just in time to flag it down, and also as a very heavy downpour began. The bus did a tour of the town picking people up from hotels. At one point, two people were clearly raising an issue with the driver, and then a dog emerged. The driver first shooed it off, came back on, and then got thrown off.

Arrived at the main road where we were changing bus, and it was there waiting in incredibly intense rain. It was 2 hours back to the Antalya bus station, and we were again very hungry so bought some borek - accepting it was the wrong time of day. 80TL per portion! Tram back to hostel, then out for afternoon. Josh wanted to try dibek coffee - but it turned out we'd confused the 'aroma' in its description and rather than being spiced and thickened, it was actually just stone ground coffee. We still got a Turkish coffee to catch up on some diary writing.



It was our final night in Turkey, and there were a few things we still wanted to try, so went on a mission for dinner. We got gozeleme, and fried pasta with a garlic yoghurt and chilli sauce - which was incredible. We then tried Irmik Helvasi - a semolina helva originating the ottoman period. We tried a pistachio flavour, which was served over a vanilla ice cream - definitely my favourite dessert of the trip. Künefe was next – this is a nest baklava with a stringy cheese filling, quite close to mozzarella. It was probably the most unique dessert of the trip; very good.