

Climbing Hasan Dağı in Turkey

In the summer of 1972, I was visiting family in Ankara, Turkey, I was invited to climb a Turkish mountain called Hasan Dağı (Mount Hasan) with four professors from the Mideast Technical University. I have recently corresponded with one of those professors named Yalcin Mengi who remembers many details about the trip after some 50 years.

To reach the mountain which is located in central Turkey, we took a bus to Helvadere, a village where it was arranged to go by horse-drawn carriage to the base of the mountain where we began our climb. As we went up the mountain, we passed by ancient ruins from civilizations of the past. I imagined what it must have been like to live in those times.

Halfway up the mountain, we arrived at a small itinerant village camp. People were living in tents similar to Indian teepees. There were elderly men and women, children and young adults. We were welcomed by the village elder who ordered a skin of goat's milk as a treat for the thirsty mountain climbers. It was passed around and when it was given to me, I was not enthusiastic about drinking from it. I held my breath and took a small swig. The village elder explained that they had relocated to this spot for the summer because it offered good grazing for the goats on which they depended for milk and meat.

As it began to get dark, we were wondering about where to spend the night. The four of us were offered a tent for the night, and we were very grateful. It was explained that we should not go outside the tent during the night because guard dogs were protecting the flock from predators. These are large dogs which wear spiked collars to protect them from the wolves. I took notice of this warning! Well, as it happened, during the night I had to respond to a call of nature. I got up and started out of the tent, and not too far away, I saw two eyes and heard a growl. Not knowing what else to do, I went to the edge of the tent and did my thing. I then went back into the tent and returned to a restful sleep on the ground. I will never forget this encounter with a shepherd's dog!

The next morning we emerged from the tent bright and early to continue our climb. After a bit of breakfast which we had brought in our backpacks, we thanked the villagers and continued our climb. After reaching the top of the mountain, we descended in very dry desert-like conditions. We then caught a bus back to Ankara, Turkey.

After all these years, I think about this memorable trip from time to time. I think about the villagers, the village elder, my climbing companions and the ancient ruins that we saw on the way up. It is something I will never forget!