

Pushing On East

At last the day had come to push on. This next week was definitely the least pleasant on my overland journey to the East. In Turkey today, there are a number of bridges over the Bosphorus Strait. There are modern motorways linking Istanbul with Ankara, the capital. None of that existed in 1970. It was a long and tiring trip across Turkey.

I boarded my overnight bus to Ankara in Istanbul, the only Westerner on the bus as far as I could tell. My conveyance was a fairly modern Mercedes motor coach with reclining seats, except for the back row of seats where I was sent. We had scarcely left the bus station before the bus came to a halt in the line waiting for a ferry across the Bosphorus Strait to the Asian side of Turkey.

Fortunately, I remember almost nothing of the long overnight ride to Ankara. My next vivid memory is of the bus depot in Ankara. I had time to wait for my next bus heading to Erzurum, near the Eastern border of Turkey. As I squatted on the floor of the station with my huge, red backpack next to me, I was soon surrounded by a circle of Turkish men on their haunches eyeing me. I didn't sense any hostility, just a curiosity about this bit of flotsam that had washed up in the bus station.

I boarded the bus headed for Erzurum. It seemed that the further we headed east the more rugged and forbidding the landscape became. In Ankara, we had already climbed 3,000 above the sea level of Istanbul. We continued to climb, often threading along river beds between cliffs on either side. In

the distance, even higher peaks grew. I was exhausted by the time we reached Erzurum, the largest easternmost city in Turkey and over a mile in elevation.

I had to change buses and arrange transport to the Iranian border, which was another 100 miles to the east. Up until this point, I was the lone Westerner traveling east. Much to my relief, I met up with another hippie headed east – Peter from England; he and I traveled east together. The scenery on the road was spectacular, if somewhat terrifying on the narrow, winding mountain road. The road continued to rise to about 6,000 feet elevation. At one point, we were only about ten miles from Mount Ararat, 16,854 feet above sea level.

