

Alva R. Appel (1922-2006) was a Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) minister, Chief of Chaplains for the United States Air Force Auxillary Civil Air Patrol (CAP), Chaplain Colonel of the United States Congressional Squadron, and son-in-law of a Seventh Day Adventist President of the General Conference. A strong climber and a clear-minded soul who was never swayed by "Ark Fever," Alva brought a critical-thinking attitude that was helpful to promote honest research over the decades and as secretary for the Archaeological Research Foundation (ARF) between 1965 and 1969, he kept the ARF on the straight and narrow way where he was involved. Alva received many degrees including D.Min., D.D., CHE, ABECI, LCDAPA, LPC, and BCC.

Chapter 15

1965-1969 Alva Appel, D.Min.

It was in the early part of 1966 that I was invited to join the Archeological Research Foundation (ARF) expedition to Mt. Ararat in Turkey. Among other projects, they were looking for any evidence or remains of the Biblical Ark of Noah. I had heard that they had sponsored expedition during 1962 and 1964 but knew very little of the details. It seemed like an exciting opportunity to be a part of something that was "about to happen." I then firmly believed as I do now in the accuracy of the Biblical record. There was no need for further evidence unless the Creator chose to reveal additional evidence. If additional evidence was given, what would man do with it? Worship it? Try to make money on it? Take personal glory and importance in finding it?

Permission for me to join the expedition was granted by my employer and plans began for the trip. Many questions came to mind such as, "Is this the right mountain?", "Is it possible that there are remains there?" and many others. I prepared by reading materials of former expeditions and interviews with persons who had been on the mountain or at a nearby location not far from the mountain. This would be a good place to state that as far as I know the Seventh-day Adventist church never funded or promoted these expeditions even though there were numerous members, who like myself, were on expeditions. I did indeed discuss this with a world president of the church to whom I was related.

My passport was obtained in forty-five minutes, my health shots obtained and the International vaccination book was obtained fully signed. I believe I was charged ten cents for the book. On June 27, 1966 aboard Pan Am Flight 114, Lawrence Hewitt, Cliff Burdick, Eryl Cummings and myself left for Orley Air Port. The cooperation of Pan American Airways was super and deeply appreciated. We passed through Rome on the 28th on our way to Ankara, Turkey, arriving that same day. The next morning we met Lt. Col. Davis at Tuslog, picked up our ID's and were assigned our APO (Army Post Office address) which was Headquarters, Tuslog, Box 159 APO 09254, New York, New York. I was told that this along with base exchange privileges was courtesy because of the contract with the United States Army's Natick branch for the surveys that were to be done, including glaciological, geological, plant life and medical.

Additional items supplied for this trip by Natick included the following: Six ice axes, two gasoline stoves, tent poles and pins, two tents, two hundred feet of nylon rope, seven pairs of combat boots, seven pairs of insulated boots, fourteen pair of wool socks and a supply of mixed nuts. The beans requested were not supplied. This is according to records I have was in addition to a large quantity of rations previously supplied under Agreement 236. There also were some contracts between the foundation and the members of the expedition, which agreed that the foundation would care for the actual expenses of all the individuals on the expedition. In addition, Van Arkel, Burdick and one or two others received a stipend of two hundred fifty dollars or so a month for two months. Bill Dougall and I were not included in this extra support.

Dr. Lawrence Hewitt M.D. was the leader of the expedition and spent part of his time on the mountain and part of the time off of it. Clifford Burdick was putting together the geological report. Eryl Cummings helped Burdick with the report. Bud Crawford, Bill Dougall and I performed the extensive exploratory work. Nicholas Van Arkel worked on the glaciological report. There were two Swiss climbers, Alex Staub and Theo Koller who we met us on Mt. Ararat and whose services were temporarily obtained to help in the glacial survey. One of them had a companion along whose name I cannot remember. Van Arkel and Cliff Burdick subsequently submitted very detailed reports in writing of their findings under the Archaeological Research Foundation mantra. It was in Van Arkel's report that the finding of wood was mentioned. Alex and he found about twenty pieces of wood half a meter to a meter long. These had the normal color of wood, between yellow and brown. They appeared to be part of a window or door, etc. They were found on the snow close to the moraine and on the moraine in the summit area. Van Arkel believed they were possibly the remains of a Turkish or Russian mountain hut and certainly not anything ancient. Dr. Hewitt also presented a report of plant life on and around the mountain being assisted by other members of the team.

Personal equipment was purchased and obtained. We had a couple of packs each together with sleeping bags and warm clothes. Ice axes and Crampons were supplied to all of the climbers. We had six fiber glass boxes: one for our medical supplies; one for stoves and lanterns; one for equipment; one for climbing high altitude pack; one whole duffle bag of film from Franc Shor of the National Geographic Society; one with misc. Everyone also had three canteens, two were of a new variety engineered to keep the contents from freezing and one of the older standard variety.

I cannot say enough about the excellent, courteous and efficient support and helpfulness of the Turkish government and military. Our assembly point was at the Kent Hotel in Ankara. A truck load of equipment was assembled. It was here that I was introduced as the one who would obtain the materials and equipment for hospitals in Turkey. This I had heard nothing about and was a little taken aback. It was on the day of June 30 that I began the ride by truck to Erzurum with the supplies. The other members went by train. I was impressed with the cleanliness of the towns and villages that we traveled through. We stayed at the Arnek Hotel a day or so before proceeding to Dogubeyazit on July 4 and then on to Ortulu where fifty to sixty horses were hired to take all of the supplies up to base camp at Koggel meadow. This a distance of approximately fifteen miles. A whole truck load of supplies required a lot of horses to carry. Some of our members rode horses and some of us elected to walk. It was rugged going but we were much better acclimatized this way. I learned to walk from the lowest parts from Bill Dougall along with a lot of other guidance on mountain climbing lore. Bill was an experienced mountain climber and a real asset to the group. He was steady, methodical and never motivated by personal importance or glory. Bill also taught us the value of carrying whistles to find each other especially during inclement or foggy weather, which was often the case.

Lake Koggel meadow was an excellent location for base camp. The meadow was a couple thousand feet across and surrounded on three sides with rock and snow, sheltered from the wind and treeless. There were many mountain flowers. We had a gas burner stove which took an inordinate amount of time to heat anything because of the altitude. We had a stream, flat ground and ample room. Our housing consisted of three tents for quarters and storage. We soon settled into the tasks that we had been assigned. The Swiss climbers added a pup tent to our lodging accommodations. We had a good water supply and our baths in the cold stream were invigorating to say the least. These baths seemed to be to the amazement of the occasional Kurdish shepherds and their flocks who at times shared the same plain as they did their grazing. One of these shepherds was particularly friendly and helpful. He had a bagpipe that he used to serenade us while he was watching his flocks. One day we gave him his hearts desire which was to have his picture taken with a pair of binoculars around his neck.

Some of our equipment came crated and the wood would make excellent material for a storage table and cook top. Imagine the surprise some of us had after the first day of working on the mountain to see that a certain member of the team [Eryl Cummings] had acquired the material and made a most outstanding "hole in one throne" open to the sights and sounds of this beautiful meadow. We rescued most of the lumber and this is probably the first time that a kitchen cabinet was made from a "wall-less" outhouse. Soon all were busy about their tasks. Several times in the next few weeks it was discovered that the canned fruit supplies were missing. While a certain member of the expedition was away for the day we discovered all of the fruit was hidden under his cot. This happened several times but nothing was ever said to him about it, nor did he ever make any comment. Altitude seems to effect different people differently. One of our members after spending some time at a higher altitude could not remember his wife's name till he came back down to base camp for a rest.

Mountain climbing can be dangerous even with experience, crampons, ice axes etc. One of the Swiss climbers while roped fell into a crevasse. His description of swinging there between ice walls and finally being pulled out alive was truly an event not to soon be forgotten. It would not have been the first time this mountain had been a final resting place. Reports from 1965 indicate that two persons were missing on the mountain that year. They were an Austrian doctor and a British student, Christopher Trease. We were asked to keep a lookout for anything on them but that is another story .

One evening Bill Dougall and I climbed down around one thousand feet into the Ahora Gorge to a spot near the edge of the Araxes/Black Glacier. There we planned to spend the night after a long day of climbing and searching for the elusive prize. We planned to search in the Black Glacier area the next day. We made our makeshift camp just up a little ways from the edge of the Black Glacier. It was just two days before this that we had been up on the Abich glaciers. We were roped together and traded off as anchorman so that the other could look over the edge. It was a long, long way down. As I returned from one of the looks, Bill said we'd better get the heck out of here, this glacier is going to go. His ice axe handle suddenly went down too easily. Sure enough, the night we camped down by the Black Glacier we had hardly gone to sleep when there was the noise of a hundred railroad trains as part of the glacier above broke off and came down the gorge. All we could do was lay there in the pitch dark, wait and wonder. It could be the end for all we knew. When the morning light came we saw the Black Glacier was covered with a tremendous flow of ice, the edge of which came within a few feet of where we had spent the night. We looked in awe, gazing at the tremendous mass of what had been the edge of the glacier from above as it now covered most of the black glacier. One estimate was there was about 100,000 tons that came down. One never forgets an experience like that. It was while exploring this glacier that I came across a metal bowl. It was partially sticking out of the glacier. I dug it out. It measures six inches across and almost three inches deep and one could say it resembles a oriental rice bowl in style. It is pretty badly beaten up but could be usable. It is hand beaten and has a lip. If only it could talk!

Weather, too, was also at times not very accommodating. This often came in the form of severe hail and rainstorms lasting as long as two days at a time. The daily hazard was the "widow-makers" as we called them, They were small to

tremendous sized rocks rolling and bouncing down the mountain. Often after a bounce they would shatter into many smaller rocks continuing in their erratic manner gathering speed. One could only hope that they would pass without hitting home. It was obvious why we called them "widow-makers" The earlier part of the day before the sun's rays melted and released these rocks was when we saw the least of "widow-maker" activities.

Bill Dougall and I did extensive searching of the Parrot Glacier or Navara area but found nothing significant archaeologically. Because of the uneven terrain it was possible in some places to climb under the glacier into the "reverse crevasses". That is the name I coined for it. These are caused when the glacial mass is cracked open from below as it flows through a depression then up to a ridge on its journey over the terrain of the mountain as the mass of ice makes its slow descent. The work we did was quite thorough. As we traversed and climbed the mountain we not only did a visual search of the terrain but we also took photos in multiple directions. At the very least, we took one photo up, one photo down and one from the ridge we had come from and one toward the ridge we were approaching. We soon learned to let our beards grow and to plaster our faces and beards with cream. This kept the sores, blisters and windburn to a minimum as we worked at these altitudes and under the prevailing weather conditions.

We found that cheerios, raisins and powdered milk placed in plastic bags were very convenient for a meal or trail snack. When hungry we would chip ice and put it into a plastic bag with the other contents and then place it inside our warm jackets and clothes. This we placed under our arm pits for the process of melting. As it thawed "voila" there was a appetizing snack. A variation from the "C" rations was always welcome. Apple nuggets also made a great snack but dehydrated beets were something quite different. We also found this method of warming was also a way to get our polaroid photos to develop. A good polaroid picture is a real asset in making friends. It was a Kurdish villager treat that can be given immediately and for some it was the greatest of treats. It often enhances the opportunity to take additional photos on other cameras.

As the glacial work was completed Van Arkel, the Swiss climbers and Bill Dougall left. The remaining ones made preparations to move the base camp to the northern or Russian side of the mountain. On July 26th, I found myself left alone to care for the camp as all of the others had gone down the mountain already. There were five lonely hours from four to nine pm that night. At about 9 pm, I heard folks approaching and to my great relief it turned out to be Dr. Hewitt, Bud Crawford and Sgt. Erbay of the Turkish army. They were a welcome sight. The next morning we prepared for the move. There was the usual bargaining and it almost appeared that we were buying the animals rather than hiring them for the day.

On July 27th we descended down the mountain preparing to establish another base camp on the North side adjacent to Jacob's well. The trip down was about fifteen miles or so and I carried a fifty-pound pack. While waiting to go around to the other side of the mountain we noted this weapons carrier which was the traveling vehicle for a mixed gender group of young folk from England. They said they were going to drive all the way from England to Australia. What was the interesting part of their appearance was the large sign, hand painted in full length, on the side of the vehicle. It simply read, "Miscarriage." We took a picture of them and the vehicle and wished them a safe trip.

On August 3 at 4:30am we proceed around to Ahora on the other side of the mountain. We obtained horses for the arduous trip up to Jacob's Well. Ahora was the traditional site where Noah planted his first vineyard after the flood. It is interesting to note that I saw at least one vineyard there in 1966. Jacob's Well was the water supply for the monastery of St Jacob's. This monastery was destroyed in the great earthquake and mud flow of 1840. This happened on June 20th according to Blumenthal, with the damned up debris at the end of the valley finally breaking loose onto the plain destroying or covering the monastery. All that remained of the monastery was covered with rubble from the mountain and might be a very interesting sight for future diggings. One could stand by the well, looking downhill and see the mound which certainly should contain the remains of the original monastery. I pointed this out to the others as we stood there. There was a tree near to the well where village women from below came and hung pieces of cloth, which we were told was for fertility. There was also a pile of rocks nearby, which had some spiritual significance. We enjoyed this water supply near our tents. Occasionally villagers from below came and obtained water there. Thus we often had company. It was interesting to note that a few of the young girls looked very Scandinavian. Could they be throw-backs to early history?

There were other types of animals besides the domesticated sheep, goat, and cattle herds of the Kurdish shepherds. Members of the expedition saw evidence of big cat paws, bear, and wolves. One day when Bud Crawford and I were climbing we were attacked by some large diving birds. They must have had a nest nearby but we were not able to find it. We did recover some feathers from the attack. We also found horns of animals, possibly ibex, which had apparently been eaten by some larger animals. Their lairs may have been nearby but we did not see them. Some of the bones were fairly fresh and some had been around a long time. We brought one or two to our camp but the idea of taking them home was vetoed. They really did not smell that good.

As Bill and the surveyors had already left, Bud Crawford and I did extensive searching on the Russian side of the mountain. We spent days away from base camp with meager rations, sleeping bags, cameras and climbing equipment so as to complete the task of checking out any possibilities of the location of the ark on the eastern and western sides of the Ahora Gorge. We found none. Then it was time to go. Bud Crawford was a hard working congenial person to climb with. Our work for the summer had come to an end and plans for going home were most welcome. Tired, bearded and thinner we made our way back to Jacob's Well and base camp. Packing up from there we traveled down the mountain to meet our trucks. While waiting there at the lower altitude we spent our time gathering plants for Dr Hewitt's research. The truck arrived and we were on our way back to Dogubeyasit. On the way back we had some excellent photo opportunities. We

met the remaining members of the team and spent a day or two at a hotel in Dogobyazit. During this time we went to the Diyadin Hot Springs and had the bath of the summer. Eryl Cummings and I were to fly from Erzurum to Ankara together. We would take the early morning bus from Dogubeyazit to the airport at Erzurum. They let us out of the hotel in the dark. When we arrived by bus at the officers club in Erzurum, the other party informed me that he did not have the money for his air ticket back home. I had just enough for mine. I had been informed that binoculars were at a premium so started some hard bargaining around and finally got a price, which would take care of his air ticket and that problem was solved for the moment.

The cost of this expedition was said to be under \$15,000, which was certainly a lot less than the 1964 expedition, which cost \$100,000, and with one-half the number of expedition members. The Geological Report by Cliff Burdick was some fifty pages in length. Nicholaas van Arkel of the Mathematical Institute of Leiden, Netherlands, prepared a detailed report of his glacial work. Dr. Lawrence Hewitt prepared the other two reports on plants and on the medical support to the natives. I understand that over one hundred fifty plants were pressed and cataloged.

Breakfast at the officers club in Ankara was a special event considering the weeks on "C" rations. As I went through line my tray got heavier and heavier. I then saw this beautiful advertisement of an ice cream sundae. I asked for one and added it to my already loaded breakfast tray. As I walked between the many occupied tables and sat down to eat, no one commented or even seemed to notice or care. If you have ever been on "C" rations, you can understand. That is the story of the 1966 expedition as I remember it, which happened some thirty-four years ago. Next will come the report of the sixty-eight expedition and perhaps what happened in sixty-seven.

It was August 19, 1966 when most of us were on our way home, when again Turkey was to experience another devastating earthquake. We are so glad that we were able to arrange to send a large quantity of relief supplies to the stricken areas.

Mt Ararat is still there. "Agri Dagh", or painful mountain to the Turks; "Koh-I-Nuh", the mountain of Noah to the Persians; "Massis", to the Armenians. Its ice cap of approximately seventeen square miles feeding about a dozen flows or glaciers all grinding away as they slowly make their way down the mountain gradually eroding away, as they have for centuries.

