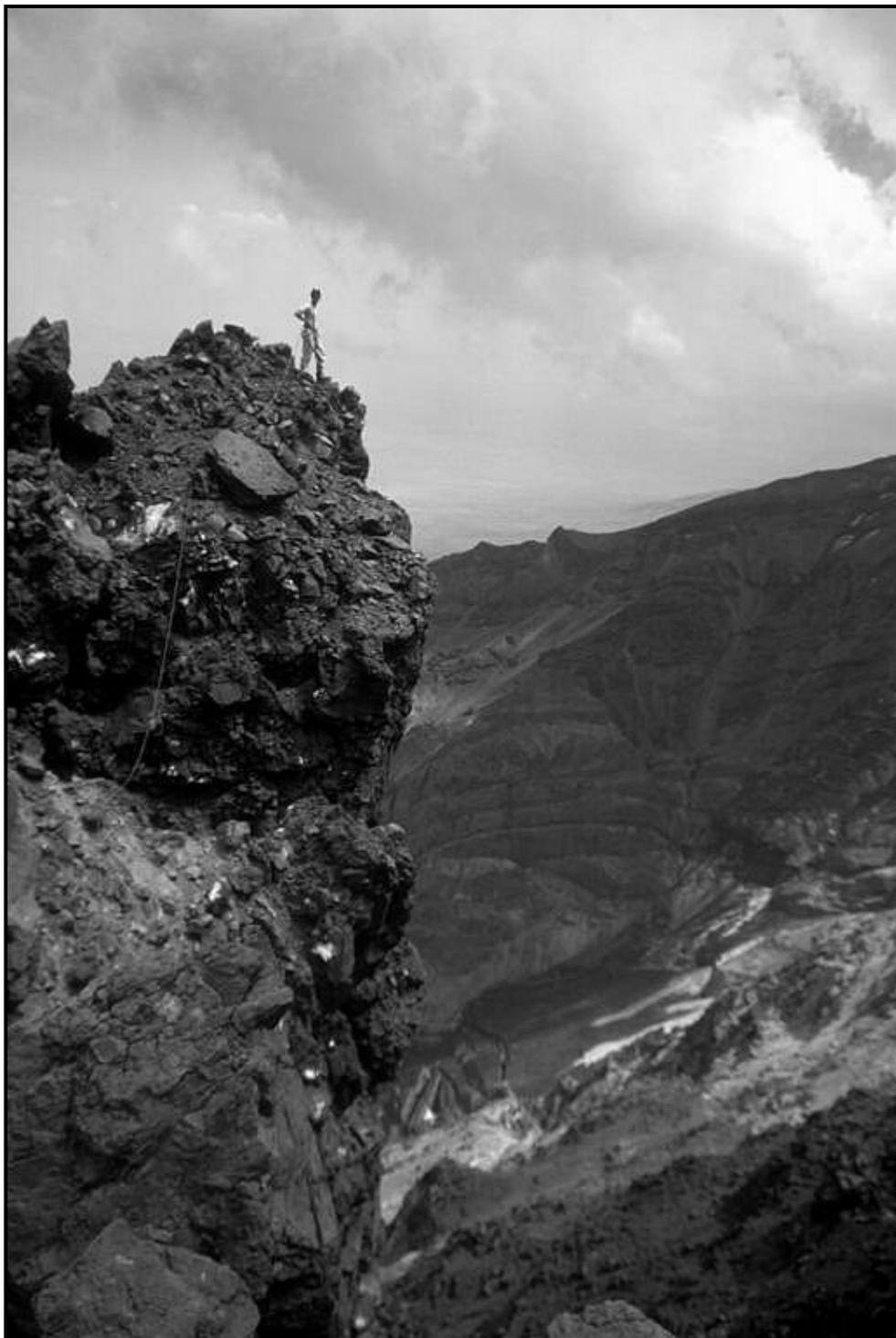


Bob Stuplich (b. 1947) was a lead climber for both Dr. John Warwick Montgomery in the 1970's and with Jim Irwin in the 1980's, and is considered by most Ark researchers as one of the best climbers to ever explore Mount Ararat.

Chapter 18

1973–2006 Bob Stuplich



Explorer Bob Stuplich rappelling into the Ahora Gorge 1982
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich

At the University of Wisconsin in Madison, one of my options for an archaeology class term paper was to find out if there was any evidence for the existence of Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat. My professor had heard of possible sightings and was interested in learning more. I began my research. I found that there were people who believed that Noah's Ark still existed. I wanted to know more. I studied everything I could find concerning "the Great Deluge" and everything written about it from every culture. My interest in biblical archaeology grew. The implications of substantiating biblical history became paramount for me. I eventually met Dr. John Warwick Montgomery at Biola University in California. He lectured on the ark history and sightings on Mt. Ararat. I was hooked.

In 1972 I went to Switzerland to study with Dr. Frances Schaeffer at L'Abri in the Alps. While I was at L'Abri a student from the University of Strasbourg stopped in for a visit and we began a discussion. I learned that Dr. Montgomery was teaching at the University of Strasbourg and was planning on an expedition to Ararat for the summer of 1973. I immediately proceeded to hitchhike up to Strasbourg to inform Dr. Montgomery how badly he needed my climbing expertise for his expedition on the mountain.

Dr. Montgomery carefully explained to me that he had all the members he needed for his expedition, that they had been preparing for months and that all their information for permission to climb had been submitted to the Turkish government long ago. I stayed in Strasbourg and sat in on Dr. Montgomery's classes—he is a great historian and one of the best



Train that Stuplich and Montgomery would occasionally take across Turkey
 Courtesy of Bob Stuplich 1973-1975

teachers I have ever had. I would often meet with Dr. Montgomery after class because he just wasn't understanding how desperately he needed me on his expedition. Finally his patience wore out. He asked me not to mention Ararat or the expedition ever again.

I gave him my phone number and address at L'Abri in Switzerland in case he changed his mind. He graciously took it and put it in his pocket. I left Strasbourg and went to visit some friends in Germany for a week. On my way back to Switzerland from that visit, I had to go right past Strasbourg. I thought that it wouldn't hurt to try Dr. Montgomery one more time. I knocked on his apartment door ready for him to open it long enough to see me and close it right in my face. He opened the door as if he were glad to see me. He invited me into his study and asked me for my passport and some other information. When I asked why he wanted the information he asked me "Didn't you get my message?" I said, "What message?" He said, "I sent a message to you in Switzerland." I apologized and explained that I had not yet returned to Switzerland. He looked me in the eye, pointed his finger at my face, and intensely inquired, "You mean, you had the audacity to come here to ask me one more time to join our expedition after I asked you not to." I politely affirmed his suspicion. He then explained to me that my persistence, patience and determination were why he chose me to replace one of his members who had to drop out at the last minute. He explained that I would need all three attributes in Turkey. Little did I realize at the time how true his statement would be.

1973 Getting to Know the People

After completing the necessary paperwork, I was given my first responsibility - driving a new Citroen Jeep and trailer full of climbing gear and supplies from Strasbourg, France through Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, and across Turkey to the Urartu Mountains. I spent over two months in Turkey without permission to climb. I waited in Erzurum, Dogubayazit, and Igdir getting to know the Turks and Kurds in the area while Dr. Montgomery was trying to get permission to climb from Ankara. I went climbing and fishing with the Turks and visited the Kurds in their villages and worked with them harvesting wheat in their fields. When we explained to the Kurds that we were about to leave the area



Turkish Military Commando in Front of East Glacier 1983
 Courtesy of Bob Stuplich

without Turkish permission to climb Mt. Ararat—my new Kurdish friends explained to me that we needed their permission also. They claimed that if the Kurds did not want us to climb—we wouldn't be able to go up.

At that time, the Kurds claimed they were in control of the mountain since they lived on the mountain. They then invited me to return anytime and we would climb where we wished. I asked if I could bring my American friends (Dr. Montgomery and group) and they said yes. When I explained this to Dr. Montgomery—he decided to send me back a month or so early in 1974 to work, climb, and go fishing for trout (God's fish) southeast of Erzurum with the Kurds for a while before the group would go over. We drove the Jeep into an old brick factory near Erzurum, stored the trailer and supplies and returned to Europe. This, however, is not the proper legal way to approach climbing the mountain today.

1974 Work, Work, Work

I flew back to Turkey on June 3rd and was finally able to work through the entanglements and difficulties of "arranging" for a climb up Ararat to the Parrot glacier beyond Lake Kop. It took 45 arduous days to work out the details with the competitive and unorganized guides. Much time was spent simply waiting at one spot or another for people to show up. It is difficult to describe how frustrating making these "arrangements" were unless you read my complete report. And Dr. Montgomery and the rest of the expedition kept waiting in the wings for word that it was OK to come to Turkey from Switzerland and the United States.

I had many old friends from last year in Erzurum. One of them took me out to see the Citroen that was stored at the brick factory. It was covered in Turkish dirt. We also went to the garage where the trailer was stored and the garage demanded 10,000 Turkish Lira (\$700.00) before we could get it out. We had never intended to leave the trailer in that garage but the Turkish friend who said he would take it out and store it in another friend's yard "forgot" to do so. We eventually had to pay about \$300.00 to get it out. It was good to be back in Erzurum with old friends and that night I met another Turkish guide who spoke English very well. It was a pleasure talking with him.

The next day was an interesting day. That morning I went to pick up the jeep. It ran quite well after a few minor adjustments. We took it to a stream to wash off the incredible quantity of Turkish dirt that had accumulated in it as well as on the outside of it. I had a hard time starting the jeep and had to make some adjustments on the carburetor. Anytime I opened the hood of the jeep there was always ten or fifteen Turks standing around to "help." I had the hood off and one Turk decided to "help" by pulling the gas line off the carburetor. The fuel pump was working quite well and pumped gas all

over the engine. The whole thing immediately went up in flames. I had never seen so many panic-stricken Turks! They all moved so fast that they were running into each other. In retrospect, the incident really seems funny, but at the time I was pretty scared. We finally put the fire out with blankets but the fire had burned out most of the electrical system as well as the rubber gas line. I spent the rest of the day finding parts to do a patch-up job on the jeep.



After a difficult month and a half of "arranging" the permission, guides, horses, and equipment, we were finally able to get on the mountain. Our expedition encountered a July snowstorm on our first night at base camp at Lake Kop. We proceeded up to the Parrot glacier and looked "everywhere" for "Navarra/SEARCH wood"—we found absolutely nothing. We did, however, see a large black object in the ice above the Parrot glacier that got us all excited. Was that "it"? We grouped together to make a plan. While we were planning we realized that Brian Bastian was very sick. He began to lose consciousness. We all got worried. Dr. Montgomery was fearful for Brian's life. Brian couldn't walk. We had to carry him. We began to realize that he had hypothermia. We needed to get him down immediately. When we got Brian down and warmed up, we realized that most of the group had other commitments and they needed to get back to the States or Switzerland.

I determined that I wasn't going anywhere until I went back up to "it." The whole group left Turkey and I stayed. I went right back up the mountain with three Turks and a Kurd. Going up we saw dogs. You cannot get from the bottom of Ararat to the snowcap without the Kurdish dogs finding you at some point. You can watch for the Kurdish tent villages and go around them, but the dogs will sense you and find you and bark, growl, and carry on until their master comes to find out what all the commotion is all about.

We had a plan to approach the "black spot" which was on the north side of the mountain from the south over the summit so we did not have to climb the north side up the Parrot glacier. It would be faster up the south side. We took one day to get to our base camp at about 14,000 feet.

At 4:00 AM the next morning Gaze, Ertugrul and I set out for the top of Ararat. Negmi decided not to press on because the storm the previous day had taken too much out of him. It was very cold and he didn't have the proper equipment. When we reached just above 15,000 feet, Ertugrul said that he couldn't continue the climb but Gazi and I were still eager to try to reach the top, so the two of us continued alone. By the time I got to 16,000 feet I didn't think I was going to make it either. Everything hurt. I could only take 10 or 15 steps before I would have to stop and rest. We could see the clouds below us and it was extremely windy, but we had to climb to the top of the mountain before we could start down the other side towards the "spot." Reaching the summit of the Agri Dag was the hardest thing I had ever done physically!



Explorer Bob Stuplich overlooking the Parrot Glacier and Ark Rock
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich 1982

When we finally reached the summit the clouds had met us there. The absence of the sun combined with a strong wind at that altitude made it bitterly cold. We could only bear to stand on the summit for about two minutes before we headed down the north side towards the "black spot." But along with the clouds had come a blinding snow. It was almost impossible to see a step in front of us. We were climbing the huge ice cap glacier, which covers the north side of Ararat from about 14,000 feet to the summit at almost 17,000 feet. The new snow together with the wind had caused huge drifts to cover the crevasses. Gazi and I could descend for only 60 to 100 feet before I would fall through the snow into a crevasse, as I was going down first. Gazi would pull me out with the rope, which tied us together while we were on the glacier. We would continue but the same thing kept happening. With the cold, wind, and snow it finally became ridiculous to continue our attempts to pass over or around crevasses we couldn't even see. I understood then why no one ever climbs Ararat from the north face. Finally we were forced to stop because we were in a total whiteout. Gazi finally convinced me that we should return to the base camp. Once again our attempt to reach that "spot" had been frustrated.

We circled around to the west and back to the south toward our base camp. We arrived back at our base camp after 14 hours of climbing, arriving late in the evening. We broke camp and descended the mountain through the night. We arrived at the road between the Iran border and Dogubayazit at about 5:00 AM. I was exhausted. Because of the storm we decided to pack up our gear and start down. When we got to the bottom of the mountain we still had eight miles to walk in the dark with a full pack of climbing gear. We got back to our hotel at 7:00 AM the next morning. Without a doubt that had been the longest and hardest day (27 hours) of my life!

I was also late for a very important date. I was to meet my fiancée in Switzerland and only had a few days to get there. I wasn't flying either. I had to drive our expedition jeep back to Switzerland. I drove the jeep back to Istanbul and then continued driving the remaining 3,800 kilometers back to France. I picked up my fiancée, we got married a week earlier than we planned, got all the burned out parts of the Jeep fixed, and got back in the jeep and drove right back to Ararat for our honeymoon. I know you are asking, "How could he do that?" Easy. You are reading this book, aren't you? You have at least a touch of "Ark Fever." I had it pretty bad. Hey, "it" was visible in 1974—we were on our way back across Europe, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey to Ararat.

When Dr. Montgomery asked me about going back to Ararat for our honeymoon, many thoughts flooded my mind. I had just left Turkey and I could still remember how good it felt to leave. I was tired and it was a long way back. Who would



Kurdish settlement two miles from Korhan greets their surprise visitor Bob with a lamb which was killed and cooked for dinner 1982

Courtesy of Bob Stuplich

I climb with? Could I take the time? How could I be sure my Turkish friends would be able to climb? When would we climb? Would it take another month or so of frustration to organize another climb?

I had planned on taking my new wife up with us to our base camp Lake Kop but "winter" had set in on the mountain. I left her in a hotel with friends in Erzurum and took off to see if we (a climbing friend Scott Little from Switzerland and I) could get to "it". Scott and I were both experienced with ice so we decided to just go right up the Parrot glacier.

We took a van to the place where two men and two horses were waiting for us. It was so cold and windy that one of the Kurds decided not to go up with us. I had warned them the night before that it was going to be "cok cok soguk" (very, very cold). I made sure to explain that when our group went up in July that it was extremely cold and that the Kurds who went with us almost froze to death because they didn't bring suitable clothing to protect themselves. Mehmet, the man with the horses, said that he would be fine. Mehmet, Scott and I started up the mountain at 6:30 AM.

Mehmet was not a guide and had never been to Lake Kop, but I felt quite sure I could find the Lake Kop area and I couldn't justify paying extra money for an extra guide. I had been careful to make sure that I could find my way back when we had gone up to Lake Kop in July. When we got about halfway to the Lake, Mehmet felt sure we were lost. It was very cold and snowing and the dense clouds made it impossible for us to see more than 20 yards ahead. I must admit there were times I wasn't really sure myself that I could find the area again. The only thing that kept Mehmet going was that I had not yet paid him. At four o'clock that afternoon I finally saw the Lake Kop area. It was a beautiful sight after a long cold climb through the clouds.

We unpacked our gear from the horses and ate. Mehmet started to get cold and scared and he wanted to go back down. He tried telling me that the agreement was to pay \$50.00 for him to go up and \$50.00 when we got to the site. I knew that he had understood that the agreement was for him to stay overnight so that we could evaluate whether or not it would be profitable to go on to the Navarra site above Lake Kop. There was snow at our base camp and it looked like more was coming. Mehmet started crying when he realized that he would have to stay the night on the mountain. I didn't

really know what to do. I could see that if he did stay the night it would certainly be a dangerous situation for him. He had no tent and only a blanket to sleep with.

He unbridled the horses and prepared to spend the night. When I saw that he was going to stay if I did not pay him and that he would almost certainly freeze to death if he did stay, I had to reconsider. I told him that if he promised to come back in 3 days to pick us up that I would pay him, and he could go down. He readily agreed to this and was on his way down the mountain in a matter of seconds.

So Scott and I were alone on the mountain. We put up my two-man tent and went to sleep. That night we were hit by an incredible storm! It snowed all-night and dumped more than a foot of new snow on us. It stopped snowing at about eleven o'clock the next morning so we packed our gear and moved up to the Navarra site. It was quite difficult getting to the Navarra site because of all the new snow, especially where the snow covered the huge rockslides and we couldn't find sure footing.

When we got to the glacier, Scott and I had to remain roped together constantly because the crevasses were completely covered by snowdrifts. When we reached the crevasse where Navarra had taken out wood, we found it frozen completely shut, which made it impossible to do any diving. Dr. Montgomery and I had planned on me diving into the melt water pond and searching for wood since there was so much water there in 1973. The wet suit I had carried up the mountain was of no use. We pitched our tent right on the glacier along side the crevasse and went to sleep in hopes that Thursday would be a better day.

When we woke up the next morning our tent was again covered with new snow and more snow was coming down. It snowed most of that day but Scott and I took every effort to look around. I could see that much of the old snow had melted since July but now the new snow had covered everything, making it impossible to see anything on the surface. I spent quite a bit of time inside crevasses but found nothing but ice and new snow. Later in the day the weather cleared enough for us to see the glacier above us, however, it was also covered with new snow so we were unable to see the "black spot." We climbed about halfway up the glacier but it would have been futile for us to climb any higher because we could not see the exact location of the "spot." After five days in that weather and conditions, we were fortunate to be able to get off the mountain with only minor snow slides and no avalanches. Obviously we never saw "it" again that year.



Bob Stuplich and Scott Little two-man tent home for 5 days after snowstorm on Parrot Glacier 1974
 Courtesy of Bob Stuplich

We drove the jeep back to Switzerland and finished our honeymoon there. I stored the jeep in the woods of a friend's farm in Switzerland with plans to return.

1975

If I could spend a part of my honeymoon on Ararat, I might as well try for my first anniversary there too. I had already developed a love/hate thing with that mountain. After training hard for a new climb, I flew with two friends back to Switzerland. The jeep started right away. When we got back into Turkey we found that the Turkish/Kurdish problem was so bad that my Kurdish friends had a hard time contemplating risking any contact with the Turkish military which was very present at and around Dogubayazit. My Kurdish friends told me that the Turkish military was watching us.

At the suggestion of our Kurdish friends, Jim Bauch, John Gustafson, and I waited until dark one night, jumped out of the back window of our hotel room, threw our gear in the back of our jeep and headed for the pass between Dogubayazit and Igdir. We had John drop us off at the pass in the dark. John drove down to Igdir and then straight back to Erzurum. Our Kurdish friends told Jim and I that we might have to wait the night and the next day before any search would be sent out for us. We climbed half way up to the Parrot glacier before we realized that we needed to turn back if we were going to get off the glacier before dark. We were off the glacier by dark and proceeded down the mountain to the saddle between Dogubayazit and Igdir at night. Our Kurdish friends were waiting on the saddle to pick us up. We were all nervous. There was too little time under too dangerous political conditions. We went back to Erzurum, packed up the Jeep and drove it back to France. The jeep was three years old and completely worn out. I thought I would never see Eastern Turkey again for a long, long time.

1982

By the time Jim Irwin got involved in the search for the ark the stress between the Kurds and the Turks had calmed down a bit. I was honored that Jim asked me to lead the climb for his expedition. We began training immediately in Jim's "back yard"—Pikes Peak.

We had dinner with Kasim Gülek, an elder statesman for the Turkish government, who was educated in the United States at Columbia University by the order of Ataturk himself. Dr. Gülek was one of Ataturk's consultants during the westernizing of Turkey. Dr. Gülek and his wife were extremely helpful in gaining permits during the 1980's as his wife was especially interested in the search for Noah's Ark. They had beautiful homes in Ankara and eastern Anatolia that contained many archaeological artifacts as well as one of the largest personal libraries in all of Turkey. Dr. Gülek stated the following to Elfred Lee in 1985.

So many civilizations have come and gone here—the Hittites, Ancient Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Turks—all have left archaeological monuments here. As a matter of fact, the Turkish nation itself is a melting pot... But the real work in Turkey is to dig into the ancient world. Unfortunately many have plundered and took it away. There are whole museums full of archaeological remains that they took away from Turkey! The Purgamum Museum in Berlin; it's a monument of shame! The British Museum is full of archaeological works that they have taken away from present-day Turkey... From that point of view I think you're doing very well in taking up archaeology in Turkey.

When Jim Irwin was introduced to the Turkish military and government personnel he was always introduced as one of the astronauts that went to the moon. They were impressed. Once we got up on the mountain, we still introduced Jim as a moonwalker but we got a totally different response from the mountain Kurds. They would look at Jim, look down at the photo of Jim standing on the moon, look up in the sky with a puzzled look, and then look back at Jim with a silly little grin on their face as if to say, "Sure, I 'believe' that one—got any other good jokes?"

This expedition covered the entire north side of Mt. Ararat. We first camped at Lake Kop with different groups going out in different directions. My group consisted of the two best climbers in the group, Dan Bass from Texas, and Orhan Basher (a Turkish commando—strong, powerful, determined, and confident—a joy to have as a climbing partner).

I was given a \$1,000 wad of money to go from our base camp at Lake Kop around the base of Ararat to Ahora village to see if I could find anyone who could give us information as to where the ark was. I was sent with Orhan Basher, the Turkish commando who spoke good English. In fact, it is interesting that the Kurds on one side of the mountain can be very different in physical appearance and customs from those on another side. Halis also went with us because he was

Kurdish and knew where to go from village to village and could ask the questions. Some of the old time villagers on the north side, however, would only speak Russian. So, for me to ask a question, I would ask Orhan in English, Orhan would ask Halis in Turkish, Halis would ask an interpreter in Kurdish, the interpreter would ask the old timer in Russian, the old timer would answer in Russian, the interpreter would answer in Kurdish to Halis, Halis would tell Orhan in Turkish, and about a half an hour later (if they still remembered the original question) Orhan would give me some kind of an idea of what they had been talking about.

We found out the next year that Halis had given me some kind of drug on that little side trip—by the time we got back to our base camp I was so sick that I thought I was going to die. I thought it was because I had just eaten everything I was offered on the little side trip, everything from Kurdish yogurt, cheese, meat, sheep organs of many imaginable kinds, etc.—once I recovered the next day I was fine. Eventually, all expeditions learned how to get up the mountain without the services of Halis.

We decided to go straight up the middle of the Parrot glacier to check out the spot we had seen in 1974. We had already checked out both sides of the glacier for wood in the areas of the Navarra and SEARCH expedition sites. We found nothing. The Turkish Climbing Federation had no record of anyone ever climbing the Parrot glacier, so the three of us decided to go straight up the middle of it. It was great ice and we made good time. We bivouacked for the night without a tent high above the Parrot glacier. The next morning we searched the Abich I ice cap to see if we could find any part that might be stationary. I for one do not believe that there could possibly be a boat of any kind in that massive slow moving glacier. That is one huge piece of ice! We searched the area where I tried so many times in the early 70's to reach. There was nothing there but a huge mass of ice slowly moving and grinding anything that may be encased in it. It would be a great place for a ski area but not for a boat. We descended back to base camp.



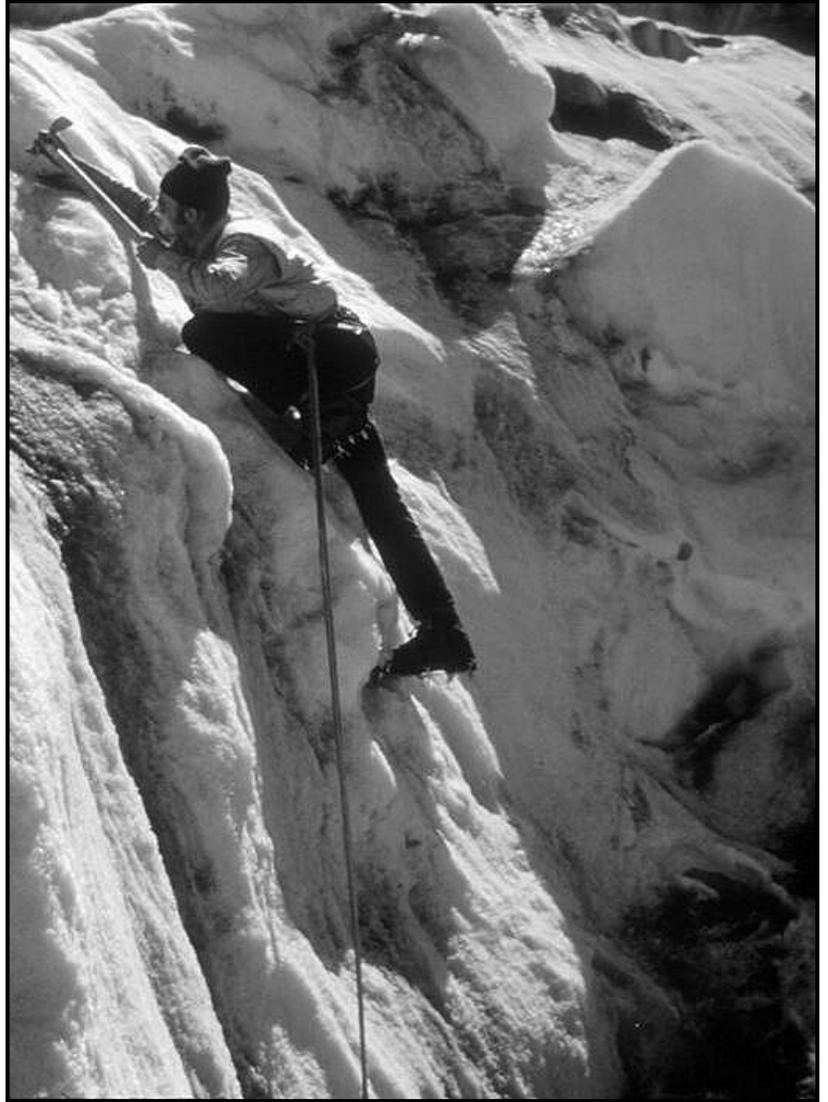
Explorer Scott Little hiking the Parrot Glacier

We then took three groups to set up a high camp above and to the east of the Parrot glacier near the Cehennem Dere above the North Canyon area (great high camp area!). We launched our three different teams in different directions. We had one group make a summit attempt—the first one failed—the second one allowed three to reach the summit. Jim Irwin was in both groups but had to return both times. He was frustrated.

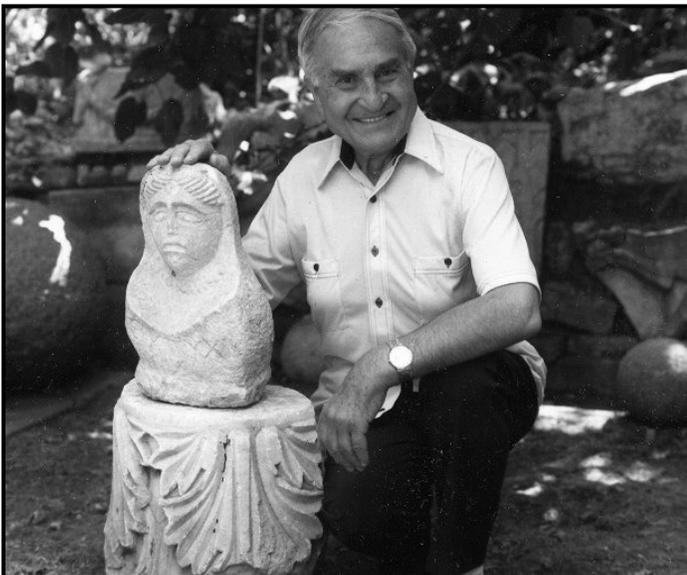
I had been spending most of my time at the western edge of the Ahora gorge rappelling in and climbing out in order to view the whole thing. At our high camp after Jim Irwin's second attempt at the summit I found out that Jim wanted to go down to base camp to get them ready to move to the other side of the gorge for a continued search. We were having perfect weather and felt that we had covered the entire north side of the mountain. I told Jim that he needed to wait for the summit group to return so that they could all go together to base camp. Jim was frustrated and in a hurry. It was a beautiful day and he said he had plenty of time. I explained to him that the mountain was dangerous and could be fatal if we didn't stay together in our groups.

After I left our high camp for another search - Jim left for base camp alone. We radioed down to base camp at our 7:00 PM usual communication time. Jim was not there. I sent out a search group from base camp and took one from high camp toward base camp. We searched until dark. We could see the flashlights and headlamps of the searchers below but it was too steep to attempt the terrain in between. We didn't sleep much that night. The search group found Jim at 8:00 AM the next morning at the bottom of one of the North Canyon chutes.

He had four gashes in his head, knocked out four teeth and his hands were cut and swollen twice normal size. Our three groups from high camp were spread out over the North Canyon area. John Christianson pulled a "Jim Irwin" on us and went a little too fast down the same chute to his father-in-law and ended up in the same rocks with cuts and an injured knee.

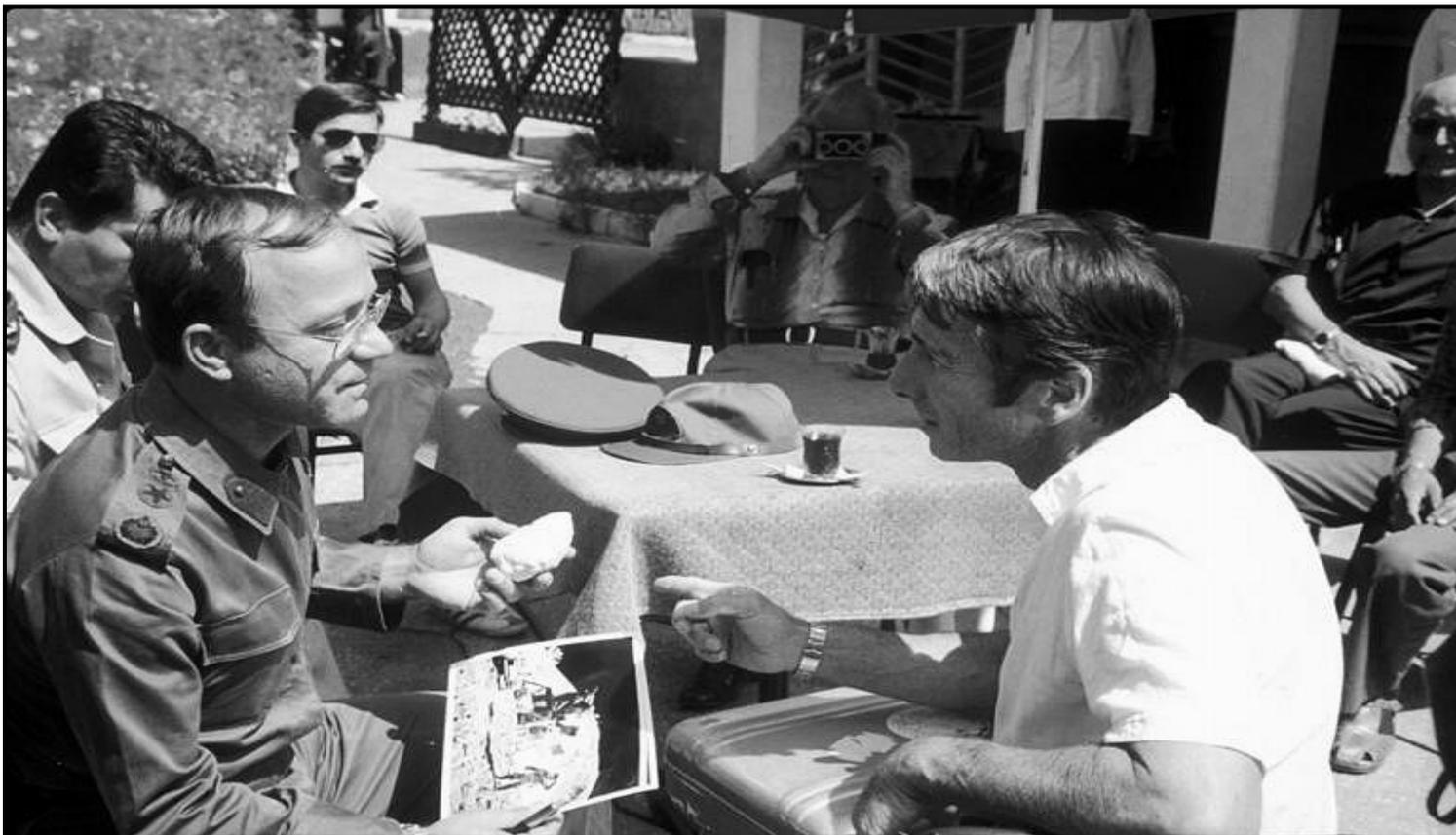


Bob Stuplich climbing out of a crevasse
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich



Kasim Gülek statesman and consultant of Atatürk
Courtesy of Elfred Lee 1985

When I finally got to John and knew that he was stable, I could hear group two above me calling for help. Group two had a man "paralyzed" or "frozen" on a rock ledge. He had just watched John slide down the chute and now he "couldn't move." I climbed back up and talked him off the ledge. We all got down to Jim just as one of the Turkish commando/medics had him stabilized and we began moving him down the mountain. Our expedition was over. We got Jim to the hospital in Erzurum to have him put back together. All he could talk about was finishing the search on the east side of the Ahora gorge. So, after about a month of recuperation in the good old U.S.A. we went back to Ararat at the end of September. There was too much snow to go up the mountain very far. We went up the middle of the gorge until we felt that it was not safe and returned to Ahora. We set up telescopes at Ahora to view the east side of the mountain. We decided that next year we would cover the east side.



Jim Irwin giving photo of himself on the moon and a replica of a moon rock 1982
 Courtesy of Bob Stuplich

1983

We had 22 people on a combined search of the east side of Ararat in 1983. There was a herd of people at base camp. It was incredible that the Turkish government allowed that and trucked us all over. In my opinion, that was not my favorite way to search the mountain. The weather was not as good as 1982 but the mornings were quite good. We covered a lot of territory. No boats. My climbing group consisted of Jim Kunes and Bill Spear—both climbing friends from Colorado. We covered everything on the eastern side up high. High on the eastern edge of the gorge, and high on the East glacier including the old Anderson sites along the East glacier. The east side of the mountain was the only side I had not been to. I had been up the south to the summit, along the western slopes low and high—twice, all along the northwestern side 4 times, last year we had covered the north and north east sides—even dropping into the Ahora gorge, and now we had covered the east side. My concentration was 15,000 feet and lower. I had ruled out anything being in the 12 square miles of glacier on the mountain unless I could find a glacial lake or area that was not moving. 1983 was a good year though. We were able to take a fixed wing plane around the mountain circling it 4 times. I shot 35mm slides of all sides of the mountain. We had work to do when we got back with our magnifying glasses and "big screens." We found no boats. I didn't go back the next year.

1984

During 1984 I had become a good friend with Jim Irwin and his best friend Bill Dodder. Jim called me one day and asked if he could come to my house for a visit. I assured him that I would be glad to see him at any time. Jim came over and explained to me that he had been angry with me for some time and needed to be relieved of it. He explained that all his anger came from the time he made his second summit attempt in 1982 and returned to our high camp alone. When I saw Jim approaching our high camp alone—I approached him quite frustrated. He had a "habit" of independence on that mountain that concerned me greatly because Jim had placed me in the position of responsibility for all the climbers on the mountain and he was one of them. I flat out told him he had to stay with his group. Jim explained that he may have been

able to take it at the time if John McIntosh hadn't been there listening to the whole confrontation. At any rate, Jim said he was mad and when I left to go back to my search group, as I explained above, he proceeded to go down to base camp and fell on the way. Jim asked me to forgive him. I asked Jim to forgive me. It was one of those "you had to be there" moments that I will never forget. I met the real Jim Irwin and he was a beautiful, godly man of peace and reconciliation.

1985

I went back with Jim in 1985. Turkish/Kurdish relationships were again becoming strained. Kurdish terrorists attacked the Probe group and the Turkish government was concerned about Jim going up the mountain. They finally allowed us to go but not without about 40 commandos with machine guns. Read Dick Bright's account of that climb. We climbed the south side to the summit but the Turks radioed us at the last minute to return without going over to the north side. (By the way Dick, you did get pulmonary edema on that climb—you were just too stubborn to stay up there and die on us.) Note: someone better get up that mountain and document a very large boat or Dick Bright will still be climbing that mountain when he is 105 years old!

1986

I went back with Jim again because of the possibility of flying again. I didn't go on the first flight, which turned out to be our last. We were arrested for international espionage. I don't recommend it but it was kind of fun (only because we had an astronaut who had been on the moon with us and the international news network knew about it).

1987

I went back with Jim for the last time. By 1987 the political situation in eastern Turkey was again severely frustrating for Ararat search groups. I was able to fly the West Side of Ararat to take 35mm slides with the door off the helicopter but



Huge and Ferocious "Wolf" or "Sheep" Dogs on Mount Ararat
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich 1974



Kurdish woman carrying water in Ahora Village
 Bob Stuplich's favorite photo of Ararat 1982
 Courtesy of Bob Stuplich

there was too much snow to be of any benefit. Despite the poor conditions on the mountain, it sure was easier than my previous climbs!

1999

Dick Bright was back on Ararat and firmly believed that he had seen Noah's ark and photographed it. When he got back to the States he called to see if we could go back and document it. Well, after all those years of work, a veteran "Ark-searcher" calls to tell you that he has "seen Noah's ark" - what do you do? You go. Bob Cornuke had already asked me to help him look for a different possible "Mt. Ararat" in Iran when Dick called. We were all set to go to Iran when we decided to leave a week early to see Dick's object in the Ahorah Gorge.

On September 1, 1999 we flew to Istanbul, and the next day we flew to Van and drove to Dogubayazit where we organized as a team. Dick Bright was the reason we were there - he had "seen a boat"! George Kralik was a friend of Dick's from Canada. Bob Cornuke from Base Institute in Colorado Springs was looking forward to his first ascent of Agri Dag but his main focus and effort at Base Institute had been in looking for a "different Ararat" in Iran. And then there was David Banks from Team Banks



Bob Stuplich Searches Ararat Via Helicopter
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich 1987

Productions and Photographic Journeys to photograph the climb. David had an incredibly impressive resume but he had never been to Turkey. He had no idea what combination of events he was about to experience.

We went up the West Side of Ararat to Lake Kop at night. We went from Lake Kop around the Parrott glacier and half way up "Ark" rock for our base camp. Early the next day we climbed up to the Abich I glacier between the Upper Parrott Glacier and the Cehennem Dere. We crossed the Abich I glacier above the Cehennem Dere to the Ahora Gorge. The meltback seemed great - we even found a few very old, half-frozen Ibex sticking out of the Abich I glacier. We had no idea how or why the Ibex would have ventured that high on the ice.

Looking around at the climbers as we ascended I found that Dick Bright had not changed. Some kind of "batteries" in Dick keeps him going, and going, and going. George seemed as determined as Dick. Bob Cornuke had that similar determined - keep going look about him. Dave Banks didn't have it. He didn't look determined at all!! Every time I looked at David, he

had a big smile on his face! We were working, and working hard - you have no idea what it takes to climb Ararat to above the Cehennem Dere in less than two days. He enjoyed every minute of it. We had a great team.

When we got to the Ahora Gorge and were able to look down at Dick's object we realized that it was not a boat but a "good looking" part of the Black or Araxes glacier. One more "object" revealed for what it really was - a part of the mountain.

We were tired and it was late. We needed to descend to base camp immediately if we were going to get back before dark. We had some technical/equipment difficulties on the way down and we ran out of water about an hour before base camp in the dark. David Banks couldn't even talk because his throat was so dry, but he kept smiling.

We had a good sleep that night, broke camp in the morning and continued descending. We made it down through the day and through that night and into Dogubayazit and our sleeping bags at 2:30 the next morning. We were tired!

Iran

At 7:00 the next morning we drove to Van, flew to Istanbul, and then Bob Cornuke and I flew to Iran to finish our search for "the real Mt. Ararat". Cornuke had interviewed Ed Davis and at this point believed that the Ed Davis eyewitness account held the most clues as to where the ark was. As Cornuke followed the Davis account from where Davis was stationed in Iran, Cornuke believed that the ark carrying mountain had to be in Iran. Iran is quite different from Turkey. It is much more conservative. We had to have a guide/interpreter with us at all times. As a climber, I was not too excited about what I thought we would find in western Iran. I did not think we would find any mountains with glaciers on them in the "Urartu" range. I was wrong. We found a mountain that really got me excited. One with glaciers and about 16,000 feet high, Mt Sabalon. We climbed to the summit up the east side of the mountain and found large glaciers on the north side of the mountain. We did not have time to search for anything so we went up just to see what the upper reaches of the mountain were like. Since our climb, Bob Cornuke has analyzed the mountain via satellite imagery and not able to locate any interesting canyons or anomalies to warrant any continued research on the ground. At this writing, Cornuke continues his search in the mountains of Iran to try to locate a mountain that Ed Davis could have been on when claims to have seen the ark. Could the real Mt. Ararat be in Iran? I don't know. I leave that part up to the researchers and scholars and the people who write these books and to you who read them. At this writing we are planning on



Guide Halis, Horseman Memete, & Ahmed Turan
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich

returning to Iran in the summer of 2005 to check out yet another mountain.

2000

The printing of this book has generated an organization called Arclmaging. I have been involved with many different organizations related with the search for the ark. Arclmaging seems to me to be the best organized of any. I'm a climber. I go where others tell me to go or I take them where they want to go. Arclmaging has done an enormous amount of research and has put together an organization to properly do research in Turkey. They are working with the Turkish government and with the recognized archaeological community in eastern Turkey. As Arclmaging's, director of climbing, I had the opportunity to go to eastern Turkey to watch Rex Geissler coordinate an archaeological research effort with Ataturk University in Erzurum. We were able to research many sites at the base of Mt. Ararat including the village of Eli which I had been to many times in previous climbs. Ataturk University and Arclmaging are working to present a report on what was for me one the most interesting ruins I have ever seen in my life. Eli village was, thousands of years ago, a thriving and intricately designed city of hundreds or thousands of people. There are just a few families there today and unless you knew where the ancient ruins were you would never know anything about it. I hope that someday soon Ataturk University and Arclmaging will finish what will surly be a fascinating report to anyone interested in Mt. Ararat



Very old Kurdish woman in Ahora Village
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich 1982

2004

In 2004, Dan McGivern got involved in the search for the ark. He had found a spot high on Mt. Ararat that had never before been revealed on any satellite imagery or photographs of the mountain. When he sent his satellite photo to me to ask if I could get to it, I did not hesitate to let him know that I believed that I could. The object of concern was high on Ararat above the Ahora Gorge and between the Abich I and Abich II glaciers. I had been above the site and below it in past climbs and had flown right over it with Jim Irwin in 1983 but had never seen this object. We could only conclude that it had previously been covered and that the new drought and meltback of the glaciers had only recently revealed it. Bob Cornuke coordinated the effort with only a two man ground and backup team. Cornuke had injured his leg, so I made the decision to attempt the climb with one Turkish Climbing Federation guide from the north rim of the Ahora Gorge based on the information we had from the guide. We failed. The only way to get up on to the ice cap from Ahora village is to either go straight up one of the many narrow ice coulars of the north face. These coulars have way too many rocks flying down them to make it safe to attempt in September. So, we abandoned the northeast side and went around to Eli village to make an attempt up the south side, over the summit, and down the north to the object. It was going to be the same approach as the hardest days of my life back in 1974 when I went alone with three Turkish climbers (see my second and failed "blown off the mountain" climb of 1974). This time I was alone with two Kurdish guides. We went from Eli village to a base camp at 14,000 feet in one day. We got up at 2:00 in the morning to start our assault of the saddle just to the west of the peak. It was cold but clear and crisp. We got to that saddle at sun up and started down the massive Abich glaciers on the north. As you can see from the photos of the mountain and from my 1974 attempt, we immediately

encountered numerous crevasses. I was able to convince the Kurdish guides to cross the first few crevasses before they refused to go any further down toward the awesome and beautiful Ahora Gorge. I had the confidence and the climbing gear to be able to do the decent to the object myself. The perfectly beautiful morning with clouds slowly rising from below gave me just enough time to cross the crevasses and rappel down to the object. A new rock outcropping. No boat. As I



Burnt remains of the Probe Expedition
 Courtesy of Bob Stuplich 1985

ascended out of the upper reaches of the Gorge the clouds continued to rise. I met up with one of the Kurdish Guides who waited to see if I would come back up and we crossed over to the Western Plateau and around to the southern slope. As soon as we reached the rock at the edge of the glacier we were engulfed in clouds and it started to snow. I remembered the clouds and snow from my previous climbs and I was glad to be on our way down. We immediately broke camp at 14,000 feet and went down to Eli village. This was, without a doubt, the most exciting of all my climbs.

Conclusion

I can't seem to find that boat. That doesn't mean that it is not there. Ararat is a big mountain! I certainly haven't proven that it is not there. Bill Crouse and Bob Cornuke seem to think that "it" may be on another mountain. Perhaps. There are a lot of mountains between Iran and Iraq.

One thing is for sure—I have met some great people who have spent quite a lot of time researching and looking for the ark of Noah—and for good reason. I have also met some very peculiar (a kind word) people over there looking for a boat. Ark search is a passion for some, and a business for others. Some ark searchers will share everything with you; some are scared to death that someone else will find it before they do. Some have had visions and dreams that God has chosen them to be the "great finder" of Noah's Ark and ordained them to be the next John the Baptist in calling the world to repent one last time. Some are just grateful that God has allowed them to live another day.

Do some remains of Noah's ark exist today? I don't know. There sure have been and are a number of people who sincerely believe that they have seen it. I know that some were mistaken. I have spoken with some that were and are so sure, and so convincing. I try to evaluate the evidence and to judge for myself. I have had enough evidence or intrigue to motivate me to be involved in this search for over 30 years now. What if only one of the many "eyewitness accounts" is accurate or right? Wow.

If the Bible had said that Noah's ark came to rest in Kansas - I probably wouldn't be too involved. We are not talking about Kansas. We are talking about the Mountains of Ararat, Urartu, ancient Sumeria, Assyria, Babalonia, Persia, and the remote mountains of modern Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

Looking for Noah's Ark is an incredible adventure. It is a great challenge. It provides an opportunity to value and appreciate different cultures. It certainly requires patience and persistence. I enjoy it.



Bob Stuplich on the Abich I Glacier Looking into the Horizon
Courtesy of Bob Stuplich 1982