

*John McIntosh is one of the most persistent, consistent, and respected Ark searchers in the modern era. Hardly a summer goes by without John at least thinking about a chance to get on Mount Ararat or to keep the research community updated with the latest news. Now that John Bradley has passed on, John McIntosh is the President of the historic SEARCH Foundation, which brought back hewn wood from Mount Ararat in 1969.*

Chapter 20

## 1976-2010 John McIntosh

I am a recently, early retired physical science and geology science teacher having taught 21 years in the California public school system. Originally from the Midwest, I grew up in Frankfort, Indiana, and attended Indiana University. Although I started out as an astronomy major, I ended up majoring in physics and math, with side interests in earth science and geology. After obtaining my masters degree in the late sixties, I moved to California and accepted a teaching job at a junior high school. Four years of teaching General Science at the junior high level convinced me I was ready for a change, so I worked in industry for the next ten years before going back to teaching.

I first became interested in the Noah's Ark search around 1976 at a home Bible study in Riverside, California. One evening after a Bible study someone brought out a book about the search for Noah's Ark. I believe that was the first time I had heard about the search for the remains of the ark. At the time I thought it was really a pretty ridiculous idea. I knew there had been an Ark at one time according to the Bible, but I wondered why people thought there could be anything left of it.

That initial curiosity began two years of research, after which I became convinced that there was a good possibility that there might have been something preserved. At that time in my life, God was working in a special way and really drawing me spiritually closer to him and I felt a calling to be involved in the search. I felt that the background I had in mountaineering, cave exploring and rope work could be useful in the Ark research. I began preparing for a possible trip to eastern Turkey and to Mount Ararat. This led to a solo trip to the mountain and what I call a spiritual odyssey in 1978.



Northeast of Mount Ararat including Ahora Gorge 1977  
Courtesy of Dennis Burchett via John McIntosh

Except for short trips into Mexico, I had never been out of the United States so going to Turkey was indeed a step of faith for me. As I prepared, and eventually headed east, I had a really deep spiritual peace that God was leading me. Basically, this was to be a trip to get acquainted with the mountain and the people of the region. I believed that God was in charge and calling the shots. This trip would lead to an open door for later research.

My 1978 trip to Mt. Ararat turned out to be one challenging experience after another. After spending a couple of days at Doğubayazıt, the largest town at the southern base of the mountain, I checked with the local police authorities to see if I could get permission to hike around the mountain. I showed one of the policemen a sketch map I had made of Örtülü and Ahora villages and indicated I wanted to go around the west side of the mountain. He seemed to indicate that I would not be allowed to get up high on the mountain—he was putting his hands up above his head, but he seemed to indicate I could go to the mountain as long as I stayed at the lower elevations. Not being completely uninformed, I thought that I had been given some kind of verbal permission to hike around the lower parts of the mountain.

I was able to hire a taxi, which took me over some very primitive roads to Örtülü. After I was dropped off there in the little village, one of the older men of the village came out, greeted me and invited me into his home to meet his family. He treated me to some Kurdish food, took me around the village to show me some of the sites of the village, and then I indicated to him that I wanted to go up over the foothills north of the village and hike around the mountain. He made it very clear at that point that I couldn't go there. He shook his head, threw his hands up over his head and waved them back and forth, indicating that it was not permitted. I thought that perhaps I could go west on through the other villages and swing far around the western side of the mountain. He went through more motions indicating that I would be tied up and beaten if I went that way, so that it appeared God was closing the door. I was ready to be satisfied with that and to return to Doğubayazıt.



John McIntosh and a gorgeous view of the Ahora Gorge 1978  
Courtesy of John McIntosh

At this point a younger Kurdish man grabbed me by the shoulder and yanked me towards the house, indicating that he really didn't want me to go anywhere. I began to feel a bit like a captive when both the older man and the younger man kept looking down the slope towards Doğubayazıt, as if they were expecting someone to come up from the town. I sat on the stone steps of the home doing a lot of praying, occasionally pointing at my watch and indicating that it was time for me to leave. This action brought only a negative response from the two. Finally, toward evening the younger man left and I once again pointed at my watch. This time the old man threw his hands up over his head and waved me on, indicating I could get my backpack and leave, which I did very quickly.

I headed up over the foothills behind his home, heading north along the western flank of Mt. Ararat. I camped that evening on top of the foothills and the next morning hiked around the western Kıp Göl plain. Toward evening I heard some sheep coming down the hillside and some boys yelling. I hid behind a large boulder, hoping not to be seen, and the sheep passed on each side of me. Finally the boys passed off to one side, glancing back at me as they went. They were heading toward some campfires, and what I assumed was a Kurdish camp. At this point, I knew that I probably was going to get more company looking for me if I stayed around very long.

I continued up the western slope of Mt. Ararat and, having run out of water, stopped to get some at a very stagnant little pond. When I turned on the flashlight to do this, someone yelled at me from further down the slope, so the rest of the evening my hike was without light. I could see lights coming up the mountain behind me, but they disappeared as I entered into a dark canyon, stumbling along and asking God for a place to sleep. I found a large boulder with about a two-foot-wide crack in it and I decided this was the place. I camped there that night thinking that I should get up early and leave the area, heading north as early as possible in order to avoid any of the local inhabitants. I committed the situation to God and went to sleep. Later that evening I woke up, and as I sat up and looked around, a big full moon was coming over the mountain. I knew it was time to proceed north around the Kıp Göl plain. I walked until I came to another valley that ended where the steep volcanic cone of Ararat continued upward, up around the 11,000-foot level, on up to the ice cap. I spent the day in this spot recuperating after throwing up from the stagnant water that I had attempted to purify. Later that day I rose to find a beautiful day ahead.

As I was about to proceed north along the base of the steep cone, I noticed three horses directly north of me right on my route. I decided the only way to avoid them was to go up the cone and try to drop back down behind them. So I began a very long slow hike up the western side of Mt. Ararat. This turned out to be a two-day hike up the side of the cone. I got up on the steep side of the mountain into an area of finger glaciers that dropped off very steeply. I couldn't cross them at their widest points and had to climb up the cone to where they narrowed. Basically, I stair-stepped up the western side of



Ahora Gorge snow and ice avalanche coming from the Abich II Glacier 1978  
Courtesy of John McIntosh

the mountain. I spent the night on a very steep slope on a little two-foot-wide level area carved out of the steep terrain. The next morning, I continued north and up around the western face. I was carrying a pack that weighed approximately seventy pounds and some snow- and cold-weather gear, but I didn't have an ice ax or crampons. I had not really planned on being up on the ice cap, so I very carefully worked around these couloirs of ice. As I gingerly crept on, the terrain began to level out a little, but I found myself on a massive ice cap. I found out later that this was part of the western ice cap, and I had crossed over above the Parrot Glacier, crossed the Cehennem Dere (Hell's Valley) and ended up at the drop-off point of the Abich II Glacier (see maps).

At this point, I knew where I was—the gorge was directly below me and I was in one of the prime research areas for the ark. I spent the night there, took some of the best photos of the gorge area that I have been privileged to take and then was faced with the task of finding a way back down the mountain. Re-crossing the northern ice cap across the Cehennem Dere area, I went down the northern slope, in the process spraining an ankle, and camped at a lower elevation from the steep drop-off that I had climbed down previously.



Southwestern foothills of Mount Ararat 1982  
 Courtesy of John McIntosh

The next day I continued northward down the slope, crossing over the western rim of the Ahora Gorge and spent the night on the west rim. This allowed me to take some very special pictures of the gorge, including one of an ice avalanche going over a 450-foot fall.

The next day I continued on down toward Ahora Village hoping to not encounter any people. On approaching the village I did meet two young men with horses and guns, who became very curious about my backpack. When they were getting some water at a small stream I was able to part company with them. At another point on the trail to the village I had stopped to take off my mountaineering boots to put on some lighter boots, and as my back was turned to the trail, I noticed a hand in the side of my backpack—a little man had come along and was attempting to rob me of my goods. We straightened that encounter out and I had almost made it through the village, when three wolfhounds decided to get acquainted with me. Anyone who has seen one of these dogs knows they are very ferocious-looking, and with hackles raised and teeth bared, they came charging at me. I was walking backwards with rocks in my hands and praying when finally a peasant lady, who evidently, owned the dogs was able to call them off.

While I was in the process of getting through the village the people stopped me, brought out a chair and had me sit in it and about fifteen or twenty of them surrounded me. A gentleman I assumed to be the mayor of the town came out with an English dictionary and asked me "what-you-doing here?" We tried to have a little conversation but eventually it became clear to me that it was time to leave, although they wanted me to stay. After spending the night north of Ahora Village, as I made my way toward Aralik, I got a ride into the village with some of the peasant people in a truck. Aralik has a bus service, so I got a ticket about ten minutes before the bus was to leave.

A plain-clothes detective looked in the window of the bus, motioned for me to get off and for the next three or four hours I was the guest of the local police department, while they filled out a report and did a very gentle interrogation as to where I had been on the mountain. When they were done the police chief said "We are done, you go to army now." My escort took me to the army post west of town and as we arrived at the commander's quarters he was screaming and yelling at a Turkish enlisted man who evidently had done something wrong. He was hitting him across the face and motioning for him to leave the room. My guide went in next, and the commander began yelling again and throwing his hands up over his head, apparently indicating he didn't want anything to do with me. We went back to the police chief and he insisted that the army do something, so everybody went back to the army post and they finally had an English-speaking officer arrive. We had a nice discussion of the trip around Ararat. The officer explained that I had been in an off-limits area, that it was under martial law that I could have been killed, and that I was worth money dead or alive. Then, after telling me I should be held for a hearing, he said "You seem like a nice person, you're free to go." Needless to say, I was thanking God! I made quick preparations to head west to Igdir, spent the night there, and then headed back to the United States.



John McIntosh, Violet and Eryl Cummings  
 Courtesy of John McIntosh 1979

After this trip, communication with Eryl and Violet Cummings helped open the door for further research. I began corresponding with them, sharing some of the pictures from this trip. I actually prepared every summer after 1978 for a return to the mountain, but circumstances seemed to close the door. In 1982, I was contacted by Dr. Willis from Fresno, California, and invited to be a part of his expedition. I prepared for that expedition but the permit did not arrive in time.

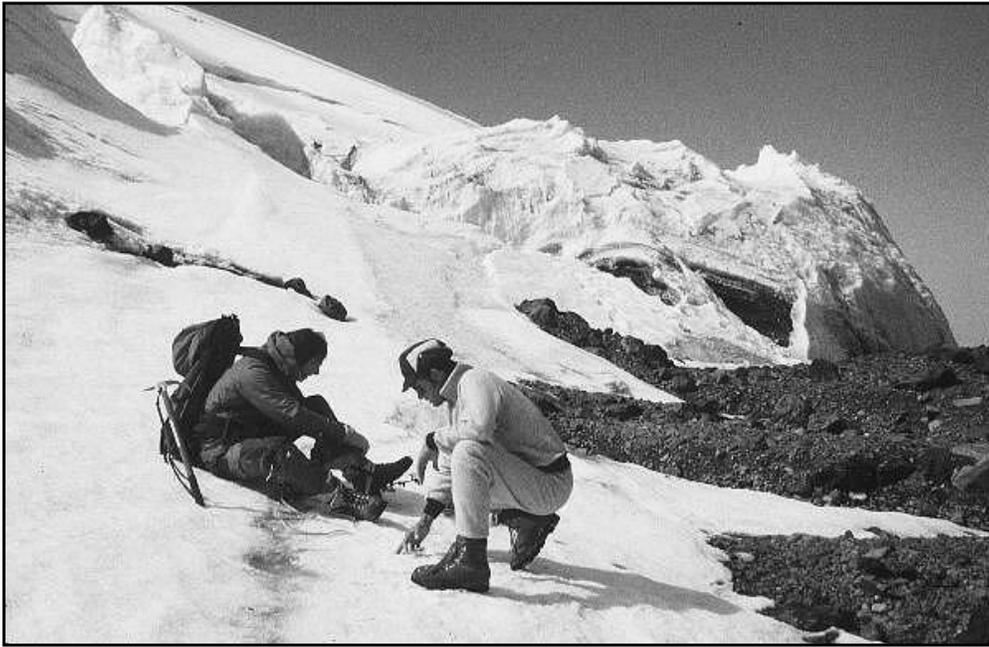
I felt led to go on my own as the finances and two-week period I needed were available and I had heard that Eryl Cummings was already in Turkey with Jim Irwin, the former Apollo 15 astronaut. I thought perhaps I could contact them and be of help. I began another solo trip began in 1982. I arrived in Doğubayazıt and after inquiring, found that the team was already on the mountain. A local truck driver who spoke a little English tried to help me. He went to several military bases trying to get permission for me to go up on the mountain.

While he was doing this, one of the expedition guides had come down to Doğubayazıt from the mountain for supplies. I was able to introduce myself to him, showed him a picture of myself and Eryl, and explained that I was trying to make contact with him. The guide and driver arranged for a meeting with the head military officer at the base east of town. I don't know all that went on there, but in my opinion, God worked another miracle. After they talked with the commanding officer for some time, and showed him some pictures, he came out to meet me, nodded, and gave me his permission to go up the mountain.

The next day, up we went with the expedition guide and several pack animals. Upon arriving at the base camp, I introduced myself to Jim Irwin, told him I was a friend of Eryl Cummings, that I was interested in the search for the Ark and I would like to help them out. If this turned out to be impossible, well, this would be just a visit. Jim let me visit with Eryl while he talked with some of the team members and prayed about it.

Later he came back to me and told me that, while their original team had had twelve members, the twelfth team member had unexpectedly had to drop out. I could take his place! So, praise God, I was part of the Irwin expedition for 1982. We conducted some very interesting research that year, mostly on the northwestern part of the mountain. We established a base camp at Kıp Göl at around 11,000 feet, then moved our higher camp up to 14,000 feet up on the ice cap. We explored around to the gorge, photographing and documenting the area. The expedition ended suddenly when Jim Irwin, the leader, had a very serious fall on North Canyon going down a very steep slope.

The experience I gained on the 1982 expedition opened more doors for me. Also, I received the nickname "KGB John." The team members were suspicious of this stranger who had suddenly arrived at the base camp. After they heard that the Russians knew the astronaut was on the mountain and that they were keeping track of him, the team began to wonder about me. The Soviets had also jammed our walkie-talkie communications during our rescue operation for Jim. I found it rather humorous to later learn that the team leaders had thoroughly researched my background at the end of the



Bob Stuplich warning Jim Irwin not to go down North Canyon alone just prior to Irwin's fall. Irwin spent the night where he fell and was lucky to survive. Mountain safety dictates that no hiking or climbing should be done without three individuals. Irwin liked to refer to hiking Ararat as walking on a mountain of bowling balls 1982  
Courtesy of John McIntosh

expedition.

In 1982, I met one of the main expedition guides. He wrote me later and said if I wanted to come back next year he could get me a permit. I told him to go ahead and see what he could do. In the meantime, I made preparations to work with Dr. Willis as a member of his 1983 expedition. As time went on and I learned more about the area Willis planned to research, I felt led to seek an opportunity to research a different part of the mountain. When I was contacted and told I had a permit, I dropped off the Willis team.

Along with two other Americans, Doris Bowers, an outdoor education teacher from Cedar Glen, California, and Rick Licata, a Bible teacher at Calvary Chapel Bible College in Twin Peaks, I went to the southeastern part of Ararat where we researched what we call the pinnacle area on the side of the eastern plateau. We set up a base camp near Mihtepe, then proceeded from there up the East Glacier on to the eastern plateau where we set up another camp. There were only three of us at the high camp and the guide and Rick were both sick, so we were only able to spend a day up there. The guide and I did go to the summit, and we got to check out the pinnacle area, but we had to descend the same day to the lower base camp and the next day on down the mountain.

About this time Jim Irwin arrived in the area. We shared with him what we had been able to research on the southeast part of the mountain and asked if we could go back up with him, since he was getting into the northeast part of the mountain, a very difficult area for which to get a permit. Jim checked with authorities and Doris and I was able to join him. We spent another week on the northeast side of the mountain and explored the east face. The group we were with was very large and included some of Jim's immediate family as well as Eryl Cummings. Eryl was supposed to have stayed

at a lower elevation. Eryl had gotten a ride on a donkey part way up the mountain and "just happened" to miss the military truck for the trip back down. So here he was, stuck with us, and of course, very happy.

We explored much of the eastern face from the east rim of the gorge around to Mihtepe. We also took a separate short trip down into Ahora Village and into the first part of the gorge. The military wouldn't let us take any pictures in this area, but we did get to see some of the village and the mouth of the gorge.

In 1984 I again obtained my own permit and, accompanied by Rick Hatch from San Bernardino, California, and Doris Bowers, was planning to explore what we were calling the "Ice Cave" about 14,500 feet up on the western side of the mountain. I had tried to get up to the cave at the end of the 1982 expedition but had run out of time, so we were hoping to get up there this year. We had also been told by one of the guides that there was a beam of wood sticking out of the ice cap near the summit.

Doris Bowers, with her blond hair, hard work and fair complexion, was especially interesting to the local Kurds. In less than one month, she received five marriage proposals from guys looking for another worker in their family. One of the offers was from a highly respected individual on the mountain and resulted in Doris being labeled the "Princess of Ararat."

In 1984 we went up the south face to the 13,500-foot camp and moved on up to the ice cap, with a three-man team.

From there we went around to the ice cave and investigated it. We climbed between approximately five hundred to a thousand feet down-slope from it and we could see at that point it just looked like a big wall of rock with an overhang. The reported beam of wood that was supposedly in the ice cap turned out to be an old pair of Russian skis that had come to be a known landmark on the mountain.



Unexcavated Urartian ruins near Eli Village  
1983

We found out later that we had been accused of removing these skis and moving them to another location and were also accused of having anti-Turkish/pro-Armenian material in our possession. This led to a house arrest and our room being sealed up. I was taken to the local police headquarters, where they proceeded to make telephone calls. They found out that the information we had in our rooms that they had noticed was a pro-Turkish/anti-Armenian publication put out by the Turkish government concerning the Armenian issue and that the claim about the skis was also false. It is very intriguing, this cloak-and-dagger mentality in eastern Turkey.



Eryl Cummings on Donkey 1983  
Courtesy of John McIntosh



Probe team including Bill Crouse, John McIntosh, Dr. Paul Meier, Chief who signed permit, Greg Cromartie, Gary Meoski  
1985  
Courtesy of Elfred Lee via John McIntosh

On that same trip we were shown some ruins near Eli Village that were very ancient. We kept this information confidential for fear that the ruins would be closed off from other researchers if the site became publicly known.

We also went out to visit another site to the south of Mt. Ararat. Ron Wyatt was there and there had been a lot of publicity generated about it. Ron had taken some samples from the site and left the country and Marv Steffins had made an announcement in either Istanbul or Ankara that they had found something of value. This resulted in a tense situation. All researchers were now suspected of stealing Ark artifacts, and our being able to leave the country was beginning to look questionable. Eventually, we were able to leave without incident and immediately began making plans for another year.

In 1985 I was asked by Bill Crouse to assist with an expedition he was putting together. The expedition was being sponsored by PROBE Ministries of Dallas, Texas. When we arrived in Turkey we heard that a mountaineering group had been attacked by some Kurdish rebels and that the military had moved in and was trying to make the mountain safe. After we arrived in Doğubeyazit and waited a number of days it was announced that the mountain was now safe and that we would be allowed to go up the mountain.

We were given a military escort that continued with us from Eli Village up to around the 11,000 or 12,000-foot level. After that they stayed behind but kept in walkie-talkie contact with the mountaineering guide who was assigned to us as we proceeded up to the 13,500-foot camp on the south face. About midnight that night we heard noise, saw lights shining and next we saw the barrels of AK-47's being shoved through our tent openings. The next three hours were a nightmare as we were held at gunpoint by masked outlaws as they searched for money, photo equipment, and passports. After they got what they wanted, they threw gasoline on everything and torched thousands of dollars worth of equipment.

We were then forced to hike down to the 11,000-foot camp, in the early morning hours, carrying extra packs of material that they wanted to look at. Stumbling and falling, with guns being poked in our backs we descended the mountain. At the 11,000-foot camp there was a campfire and more people. The marauders laid out all the material that they had us carry down the mountain, looked it over and divided it up. Then they shoved us into a line and had their gunmen level their AK-47's at us. There were some desperate thoughts and prayers taking shape in the researchers' minds. Fortunately, God still wanted us around, because all they did was take flash pictures for publicity and release us.



Explorers including Tim Brinley, Dennis Burchett, Eryl Cummings and John McIntosh  
Courtesy of Doris Bowers via John McIntosh

Exhausted and dehydrated, we made our way on down to Eli Village and reported what had happened to the authorities. One or two other groups had been attacked on the mountain also, and had received much harsher treatment than had we. The mountain was surrounded for a week by five hundred troops. They went through villages, interrogated people, sent commandos up on the ice cap, and finally found the terrorist camp and had a gun battle. Six of the eight terrorists were killed, one escaped into Iran, and the other was captured.

Around this time Jim Irwin arrived in Doğubeyazit with a large tour group. Of course, everything was shut down. There were a lot of very disappointed people in that tour group, since they were not able to even set foot on the mountain. Jim finally got permission for a small research group to go back up and I was able to join that group. We went back up to the 13,500-foot camp and spent the evening, planning to climb on up to the northeast part of the ice cap the next day. Some of the team had gotten up to the ice cap when complications with the military made it necessary for only a few to go on, and the rest had to go back down. Jim Irwin was himself in the group that had to go back down. Later, the team on the ice cap was commanded to go back down also, as it was suspected that terrorists were coming up the north side of the mountain to try to capture the astronaut. That expedition ended with no one being able to reach the northeast peak.

In 1986 I was again in eastern Turkey, this time with my own five-person team. We were hoping to check out the Davis Canyon. This was the year the Ed Davis eyewitness account had become known, and we hoped to check out this reported sighting from the northern ice cap. Terrorist activity, however, shut down the mountain before we were able to get any permit for clearance into the northern part of the mountain.

Jim Irwin had succeeded in getting permission for a flight around the mountain in a fixed-wing aircraft, and we were able to visit with him in Erzurum the day of the planned flight. The day after the flight, fifty armed Turkish security agents surrounded the hotel that we had been staying in. Everybody was placed under house arrest for suspected American spy activity. Our permit was questioned, and so for the next ten hours none of us were allowed to leave the hotel. Eventually, things were clarified and apologies were given to the American team and I was able to join the Irwin team in a dinner celebration.



Paul Olav Jernæs before his disappearance on Ararat 1986

Courtesy of Norwegian newspaper via Dr. Ole Honningdalsnes via Doris Bowers

Also in 1986, we (Doris, myself and the group) got together with a couple other climbers from Norway who were cousins. The Norwegian climbers hired a Kurd and went up the mountain illegally. So that they would not attract attention, they disobeyed the mountaineering rule of having three people together at all times and instead split up to meet at a certain point on the mountain. One of the cousins, Paul Olav Jernæs of Drammen, Norway, never arrived at the meeting place on the mountain. The Kurd made the other cousin, Leif Torkaas promise not to say anything until Torkaas left Turkey for fear both of them would be arrested and placed in jail. Meanwhile, the Kurd moved away from Ararat. Once the missing Norwegian became known, the Turkish Military reportedly sent a search party that looked on the mountain for a week but did not find anything. The official story, reported in a Norwegian newspaper and shown by explorer Dr. Ole Honningdalsnes, was that Paul, aged 28 in 1986 and who we had just spent time with, disappeared and was presumed dead somewhere on Mount Ararat. The paper stated that Paul was waiting alone at an elevation of 4500 meters located at the Cehennem Dere. They were going to climb on the glacier at the Cehennem Dere to search for the ark. Hopefully, this will dissuade those who consider climbing illegally or who don't climb in groups of three or more.

In 1987 Richard "Dick" Bright and I teamed up and were hoping to get a permit to explore the northern part of the mountain. However, terrorist activity had shut down the mountain except for the southern route to the peak. Jim Irwin had arrived in the area with a research team and was hoping to get permission for a helicopter flight. The local authorities at Doğubeyazit, however, denied them any kind of permit for the



Ed Davis in Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Photo Courtesy of Ken Long via John McIntosh

northern part of the mountain. They were limited to a brief aerial search of the southern and western parts of the mountain.

In 1988 I was asked by Al Jenny and Chuck Aaron to join them on a helicopter flight. We were able to do several flights around the mountain, over the gorge, taking hundreds of slides and some video footage. The ice cave, or "Eye of the Bird," as the locals call it, was photographed in shadow and did not seem impressive. Another linear feature was noticed on the northwest of the mountain that we later investigated and found not to be significant. It appeared from these investigations that if the Ark were still visible on Ararat, it was not obvious, and it surely must be partially or almost completely covered.

In 1989 I prepared for a trip to the mountain, but was told not to come by the advance team that was already there. Dick Bright's new Ark book had just been released and it included a picture of me baptizing a young man in the headwaters of the Euphrates. It had been seen in eastern Turkey and Jim Irwin told me that I would probably be arrested as soon as I got off the plane.

Due to terrorist activity, no permits were being granted to most of the researchers in 1990 (except the Dr. Don Shockey helicopter expedition), 1991 or 1992, but in 1993, Dick Bright was able to obtain a money grant for a possible expedition and received encouraging promises concerning a permit. So I teamed up with Dick in 1993 and we attempted to mount an expedition that would land a helicopter on the ice cap to check out the ice cap locations as possible burial sites of the ark. We flew across Turkey by helicopter to Kars, about fifty miles from the mountain, and at that point the authorities canceled our permits because of the military activity on the mountain. Later, after leaving Kars, we learned that three policemen had been shot and killed by terrorist on the street that runs past the hotel where we were staying. There was speculation that the terrorists were interested in capturing us and keeping us as American hostages. Each summer we continue to make tentative plans for a return trip to Ararat, but because of the military condition there it is never certain whether any permits will be granted. If the military condition improves in the near future, we hoped to get back to the



John McIntosh on 17,000-foot Summit 1983  
Courtesy of John McIntosh

mountain.

In 1996 I cautiously returned to Mt. Ararat with four other researchers to appraise the situation around the mountain. Larry Crews and his wife Sharon and Professor David Merling and his wife Stephanie were my research companions. Professor Merling is an archeologist with Andrews University and Curator at the Horn Archaeological Museum. We had been told that the mountain was off limits but were hoping that the area to the west of the mountain was accessible. There were large anchor stone like rocks and ancient rock carvings there that we wanted to examine.

We were able to examine many of the stones and carvings as well as the Durupinar site south of the mountain. The rural area surrounding Ararat was found to be relatively safe but the military maintained tight control of the mountain and no access to do research on Ararat was being permitted.

In 1997 Dick Bright and I returned to Ararat, having applied for a permit to do research with Dr. Salih Bayraktutan—head of the Atatürk University Earthquake Research Center and chief administrator for issuing research permits for the Ararat area. Unfortunately, the military situation on Ararat was still extremely sensitive and even Dr. Bayraktutan's permit request was denied.

Some interesting research was done, however, in Doğubeyazit (a frontier city a few miles south of Ararat). We met and interviewed several local people who claimed that they had been to the Ark on the north side of the mountain—and even in it—within the last two years. They claimed that it was broken into several pieces and was mostly buried in the Gorge area. That was a surprising development since we had never found any local people, in 21 years of research, to make such a claim. Only future research in the Gorge area will be able to substantiate if these claims are true.

In 1998 Dick Bright, Dave Larsen and I again returned to see if our permit application with Dr. Bayraktutan would be approved. The military situation was still sensitive enough to not permit research. Local research contacts were visited in the Ararat area and some new information was gained that still indicated the Gorge area as the resting place of the ark. Rumor has it that the military situation has improved significantly and that limited research access to the mountain might be permitted in 1999.

However, there is also a rumor that the military, which is reported to be a very secular anti-religious organization, knows where the Ark is buried and does not want it found and identified. It is believed that its rediscovery would only



Chuck Aaron, Al Jenny, John McIntosh Team 1988  
Courtesy of John McIntosh

cause problems for them. Evidently, having a religious relic found on their military mountain and the possibility of increased religious fervor resulting from the Arks discovery, is not a welcomed idea and situation.

Late in 1998 I joined a research group named ARP (the Ark Research Project), which was formed by Professor James Hall from Virginia. They had just returned from a trip to the Ararat area where they were involved in research meetings but were not allowed to do research on the mountain. After this trip, applications were being worked on for a possible 1999 expedition.

Although the military situation on Ararat had been relatively stabilized, research permits were still not being granted in 1999 and 2000. During this time, there were several small groups doing secret research on Ararat as a result of frustration on never being granted an authorized research permit. These small, secret groups have continued doing research almost every year until the present—but with no Ark discovery.

In July of 1999 I was voted in as the new SEARCH Foundation President. SEARCH had been inactive in the research for many years and the current President, John Bradley, wanted me to carry on the SEARCH name in the Ark research.



Bottom of Abich II Glacier near Avalanche Canyon 1983  
 Courtesy of John McIntosh

In August of 2000 I again visited the Ararat area to visit friends from past years and to appraise the situation on and around the mountain. A few small, secret groups were reporting having done research but no recognized foreign research group was being given permission to do research. From the secret groups there were reports of using local people to gain access to the mountain and in some cases of paying a military contact in order to gain access.

In 2001 Jim Hall and myself traveled to Turkey to meet with Atatürk University officials. We were representing ARP and had reached an agreement with the University to do joint archeological research on Ararat together. Plans were tentatively made for a 2002 expedition.

However, in the following year, all the necessary permits were granted except the military permission. Permission was not granted due to security reasons. This has continued to be the case until the present, 2004.

Summit climbs (sport climbs), however, from the south side of the mountain are being permitted and have been increasing in popularity for the last 5 years or so. In 2004, there was even a sports climb permitted from the west side of the mountain and a south face Victory Summit Climb involving over 500 climbers.

In 2005, myself, Matthew Kneissler and Professor Dow Pursley applied for a north west sports climb permit. Uçman Sungur and Yavuz Konca worked on securing our permits for us and succeeded in obtaining them. However, when we checked with the military commander in Doğubayazıt, he did not want to be responsible for us climbing on the NW and told us we must go up the south summit route.

So we began our climb going up the south summit route, but obtained permission from our official Turkish mountaineering guide to travel clockwise from the main south summit route up to the ice cliff area on the SW face of Ararat. We were hoping to examine close up the 'Eye of the Bird' or 'Ice Cave' formation which has been mistaken for the Ark in the past.

On the fourth day of our climb, while leading the way across the top of a canyon glacier at 14,800 feet near the south end of the 'Ice Cave', I encountered extremely hard ice and could not keep my footing. After doing a self arrest, I found that with my 50 pound pack I could not regain a climbing position and eventually, since nightfall was approaching, decided to detach from the climbing rope and glissade to the bottom of the glacier. Near the end of the glissade I struck a boulder in the ice with my right foot which broke my ankle.

Matthew and Dow reached me the next morning. Dow stayed with me at an emergency camp while Matt hiked down to the base camp for help. The following day we were rescued by a Turkish military helicopter. It was the highest rescue ever done on Ararat at about 14,000 feet elevation. We were extremely grateful to the Turkish military for their daring rescue and praised them in the press.



John McIntosh in front of Ice Cave 1984

Southwest part of Mount Ararat  
 Courtesy of John McIntosh

My foot was operated on at Ataturk University hospital where I stayed for four days before heading back to the US. The rescue attracted international news. We are trusting that the Lord will use this international news of the continuing Ark search in some way for good.

Considering the future of the research, we are hoping and praying that the Turkish authorities will soon change their policy regarding not permitting Ark research on Ararat and the final needed research will be permitted by scientifically equipped research groups.

As I have studied the evidence for the preservation of the Ark on Ararat, it seems very likely that God might have preserved the Ark as an end-times witness. The Ark is symbolic of Christ. As we put our faith in him and receive salvation, in a similar way the people entering the Ark of Noah put their trust in God and were delivered from his wrath. The discovery of the Ark would be a very appropriate end-times sign of the nearness of God's return to an unbelieving world, that a time of judgment is again approaching and that people should reexamine the Bible and its claims and put their trust in God. The rediscovery of the Ark would also have a significant impact on the creation/evolution debate.

It is not a foregone conclusion that God has preserved the ark. As we study and investigate the many reported sightings and accounts, it appears that many can be explained as mistakes. There are many "ark-like" structures on the mountain. Of special note in this regard is the western ice cave, the "eye of the bird." At the 14,500-foot elevation and in a north/south orientation, this looks very much like the ark. There are eyewitness accounts, however, of those who claimed to have actually walked on the Ark and entered it. I find it difficult to explain away eyewitness accounts. They are either true or they are deliberate lies, multiple mistakes or hoaxes. Time will tell.

Scientifically speaking, there is no problem with the idea that the Ark could be preserved on a volcanic mountain; being buried under volcanic ash would naturally petrify it, preserve it, harden it, and turn it basically into rock. It is possible that there is a structure still on the mountain, but if it is there, it is most likely, if not completely, buried. As I study the various accounts and claimed sightings, the northeast part of the mountain seems like the most likely spot for it to be buried. The Ark could be under part of the ice cap or at the very edge of the ice cap, as most reported sightings claim, on the northeast. The sites that are up around 15,000 feet or higher have the difficulty of being contrary to the Ed Davis sighting, unless there was a very extreme melt-back. In my opinion there are six to seven possible burial sites on the northeast part of Ararat that need to be checked out. If these could be thoroughly explored, I think it is possible we could settle the question of the ark's survival.

If the Ark is not on Ararat, I'm sure God has been using these trips and experiences for other good purposes. Spiritual seeds have been sown in eastern Turkey. There have been other types of good done but it is my hope that God's words in regard to the "Days of Noah" being likened to the days of his return, are an indirect reference to the fact that he has indeed preserved the Ark of Noah as that end-time witness.

Armenian tradition relates that in the end times, God will allow the Ark to be rediscovered to be a witness to his truth. Time will tell. I plan to remain open to the leading of God to contribute to this work until he shows me to do otherwise. I believe the time is close when the question of the ark's preservation will be resolved. Regardless of the outcome of the search efforts, I hope that each reader will thoroughly examine the claims and the historical facts surrounding the present day Ark of safety, Jesus Christ.



John McIntosh, Jim Irwin, Bob Stuplich, Ahmet Arslan, Dick Bright 1986  
Courtesy of John McIntosh