

Charles "Doc" Willis (b. 1925) is known for his intellect and methodical approach to researching for Noah's Ark. He does his homework and is very prepared when it comes time for an expedition.

Chapter 21

1983-2009 Charles Willis, M.D.

Dr. Charles Willis, a neuropsychiatrist who holds a degree in religion and a long-term interest in archaeology, became interested in the search for Noah's Ark when he read Eryl and Violet Cummings' book in the early 1970's. He then arranged for his oldest son, John Willis, an Eagle Scout, only sixteen years old, to go with Mr. Cummings on the 1973 expedition to Mt. Ararat. John noted that while climbing up one area, he placed his hand on one rock, which suddenly gave way along with 2-3 tons of adjacent rock that went catapulting down the mountain hundreds of feet. Fortunately, he had not placed his weight in that area yet. Such are the dangers of climbing Mount Ararat.



Dr. Willis Snow Tiger Team
Courtesy of B.J. Corbin

John Willis, Dr. Lawrence Hewitt, Eryl Cummings, Geoff McMahon and Jack Darnell climbed up the Cehennem Dere area. This was the expedition when Geoff McMahon took his 70-pound pack of gear (tent, cooking utensils, cameras, sleeping bag, etc.) up to the high camp area around 14,000 feet on a reconnoitering climb. Unfortunately for Geoff, when they arrived, Jack Darnell (who Dr. Hewitt had placed in charge of the climb) commandeered McMahon's equipment. Disappointed, Geoff had to return down the mountain to base camp without any equipment. He arrived in the dark at midnight. Then the porters wanted Geoff to go straight back up the mountain to show them where the high camp was located. Geoff was worn out and sick but he got up at 6:00AM to lead the porters back up the mountain. Since the wages for the porters were pre-paid, some of them simply left the baggage along the trail. Because McMahon was sick, the porters with the luggage beat him to the high camp. Finally, Eryl Cummings came chugging along and told Geoff to get himself some soup and minerals, which cured him. After he regained his strength, Geoff silently slipped away at dawn one

day and went by himself down the torturous, far too risky to dare, funnel-shaped Cehennem Dere, which was crested by the icy, crevassed rim of the vast glacier known as the Abich I. McMahon wanted to check out a rock outcropping which looked like a boat and knew the others would object. The ridge down was so sharp that Geoff had to plant one foot on each side and manage to maintain a precarious balance as he slipped and slid down the treacherous slope. Finally he found a narrow mountain goat trail that gave a bit firmer support. One false step and no one ever would have found the remains of Geoff McMahon. However, McMahon continued his steep descent and eventually reached the site. As he traversed the object from stem to stern, the object proved to be nothing more than a huge basaltic rock, some 300 feet long, about sixty feet wide, rising twenty feet above the ground. Lengthening shadows reminded Geoff that he still had more than 4,500 feet of stiff climbing between him and the camp with canyons and ridges darkening dangerously at every step. It was McMahon on the 1973 expedition who took the great photograph of the rock at the 12,000-foot elevation, which appears to be man-made structure from a distance. This large boulder may have been responsible for several false sightings, possibly including the George Greene, Ed Davis, Ed Behling and George Hagopian accounts. Dr. Willis interviewed alleged eyewitness Mr. Officer personally and believes he was a geriatric liar. McMahon also recounted a story of how they were caught on a security rope between Jack Darnell and John Willis on a 500-foot cliff of crystal-clear, blue ice, which was harder than rock. "I'm not usually as scared as I should be," said McMahon, "but that time I was more scared than I knew how to be!"

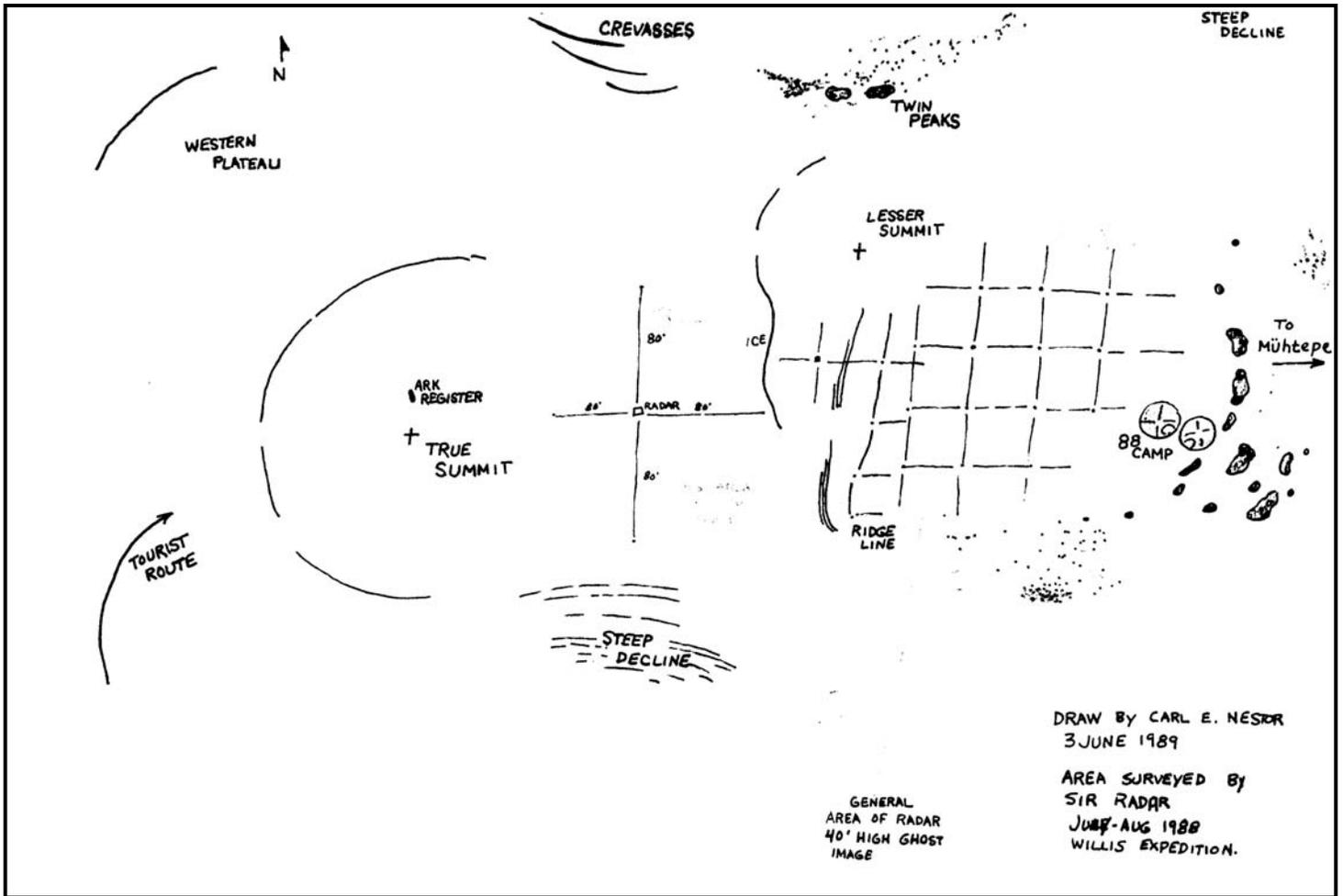
The 1973 team explored the upper reaches of the Ahora Gorge on the north side of the mountain with negative results. Subsequent reading and study led Dr. Willis to the conclusion in the early 1980's that the Ark might have survived under the ice cap. Nicholas van Arkel, Ph.D., the glaciologist who performed the ice survey of the mountain in 1966 with the Archaeological Research Foundation (ARF), was of the opinion that there might be a stationary ice bowl under the eastern plateau, since this was not a glacier formation. It was theorized that the Ark might lie hidden there. Dr. Nicholas van Arkel, the glaciologist who reigns as the person that has spent the most time on the Mount Ararat ice cap during the summers of 1965 and 1966, is the only person to create a detailed survey of the ice field. Dr. van Arkel wrote the following:



Dr. Charles Willis at Mihtepe Base Camp 1984
Courtesy of Dr. Charles Willis

Understandably, people are interested in the snow and ice conditions of the Ark site. The Easter summit (Ostigipfel) does not carry a glacier, there is no large accumulation area here, like we have on

the NW-side of Ararat. In this respect, Dr. Willis' idea to look on the Eastern summit is far more intelligent and makes more sense than the somewhat stupid earlier ideas, based at the time on Navarra's made-up stories, to look in the northwest glaciers, e.g. the Parrot glacier. Any glacier would completely crush a structure like the Ark, and its remains would have been transported off the mountain thousands of years ago... On the Eastern summit platform we might expect a more permafrost like condition. The Western summit is different in that it's a pure ice cap.



Carl Nestor Drawing of Eastern Plateau Area Surveyed by Radar 1988
 Courtesy of Carl Nestor via B.J. Corbin

In 1983, Dr. Willis led an initial probe to the eastern plateau, at which time a trenching excavation was attempted with negative results. While valuable insights were developed during this initial attempt, it was later realized that the trench was too shallow. (Members of the 1983 Snow Tiger Team were William Ball, Martin Black, Larry Mast, Gary Meosky, Rod Youngquist, James Willis, and Dr. Charles Willis.)

Dr. Willis and his team have been most appreciative of the providence of God in this search at Mt. Ararat. In 1985, he had obtained a research permit from the Turkish government, but it had a small restriction in it, which precluded effective research. His friend, the son of the former president of Turkey, advised him to use it anyway, but after careful consideration he canceled the expedition for that year. In a month or so God's providence became clear as word came of a terrorist assault on climbing groups at Ararat with seizure and burning of equipment at the point of an AK-47. Dr. Willis and his team had stayed home and not lost one penny.

In 1986, the second expedition to the plateau was attempted, this time with a larger team. A metal detector was used and a 16-foot-deep trench was cut in the ice at the base of the western ridge on the eastern plateau at 16,800 feet.¹

The 1986 effort was marked by more efficiency than that of 1983. The local formalities were handled with much more speed. After receiving our local Jendarma Permit in one hour the day after our arrival in Doğubeyazit, we were on our way up the mountain in a truck to the 6,500-foot-high village of Eli Koy where the old Chieftain Haji Baba Coktin greeted us with glasses of hot chai (tea). We slept in his walled compound that night, protected from hungry sheep dogs eager to bite into a tender visitor.



Ice Cutting Chain Saw 1986
Courtesy of Doris Bowers

¹ The ice cutting operation was performed with a special McCulloch Chain Saw, donated by the McCulloch Corporation, which operated well at high altitude.

The next morning we started up the mountain with our mountain porters and horses. The first night saw us almost missing our campsite and porters in the twilight, but the emergency whistle around Dr. Willis' neck led to the connection and our camping together by a flowing stream where everyone filled their canteens. A flowing stream on Ararat must never be passed by, since in the morning it will be dry. With hard climbing, some through hail and rain, we finally reached the base camp at Mihtepe (13,565 feet). Here we used some old campsites that had been cleared by the Turkish Army during World War II.



Willis Snow Tiger Team at Mihtepe 1988
Courtesy of B.J. Corbin

A comfortable camp was made and then the Snow Tiger Team made a final hard climb with all gear some 3,300 feet higher to the Eastern Plateau (16,800 feet), where a high camp was placed.

Climbing the southeast couloir of Ararat is dangerous because of the many falling rocks, some the size of a Volkswagen, called "widowmakers." However, the Team's courage rose to meet the challenge and this mission impossible was accomplished.

Some eight days were spent on the plateau in accomplishing the tasks needed. Cutting a trench in ice at high altitude is difficult, but it was done. The temperature on the plateau drops sharply once the sun goes down, as Dr. Willis discovered one evening, making him run for his tent and sleeping bag. Several extra trips were made to haul up more supplies and gear to the high camp and this ongoing process was successfully completed.

That same year, Mr. Guy Leduc, a Canadian engineering geologist, in view of the implications of Genesis 4:22, and theorizing that the Ark was probably constructed with some large bronze or iron pieces, completed a careful metal detector survey of the entire Eastern Plateau with a Gemini II instrument donated by the Fisher Corporation. Results were negative. The team then considered that the Ark might have been doweled and pegged to hold it together and that a final answer on the eastern plateau must await an under-ice radar and drilling operation.

On the last day the team climbed to the top of Ararat, and surveyed the Ahora Gorge. They then broke camp and, heavily laden with their packs, inched their way down the slippery rock scree.

At the top of the 3,000-foot couloir, they began to slide down, clutching their ice axes with some degree of desperation. The slide took some thirty minutes, a high-speed trip that beats any roller coaster ride. At the bottom one team member remarked that he had been terrified at the thought of sliding down the couloir, but that it actually was only "mildly terrifying!"

Members of the 1986 Snow Tiger Team were Steve Connelly, Guy Leduc, Pat Frost, Bob Garbe, S/Sgt. Carl Nestor, Richard Froiland, Deborah Redmer, James Willis, and Dr. Willis.

In 1988, the Snow Tiger Team returned with under-ice radar and a glacial ice drill. After securing the proper research permit the team left for Turkey. They spent one night in Ankara, then flew to Erzurum, then traveled overland to Doğubeyazit south of the mountain. The next morning they loaded the trucks of the Chieftain, Haji Baba, with the sixteen team members, some 35 duffel bags, the radar and ice drill and drove up the mountain to the little ranch village of Eli Koy where they camped overnight. The next morning 52 horses were packed with the gear and the team started their two-day hike to the base camp at 13,500 feet. The weather was quite good in the early phase of this expedition.

On the way up a Jendarma patrol passed us and a Turkish commando squad heading for the western slope of Ararat came over to check our permit papers, which were all in order. They were on a terrorist-hunting patrol and seemed surprised to see us. Our mountain horsemen were apprehensive about the terrorists, but we assured them that we were under the protection of the Almighty God and that the terrorists would not come near us—which they didn't, although we heard that they did get into a firefight with the commando squad later.



Willis Polar Ice Drilling Team on Eastern Summit 1988
Courtesy of B.J. Corbin



B.J. Corbin, Dr. Charles Willis, Guy Leduc at Eli
 Courtesy of B.J. Corbin 1988

We moved up slowly over a two-day period, across snowfields and many rocky ridges, passing shepherds with their flocks of sheep and the great silver peak of Agri Dagh, the "painful mountain" looming over us. Team morale was high and enhanced by our habit of praying together in a circle, in which our friend and translator joined. He reported that the mountain pack men appreciate how believers treated them in contrast to ordinary tourist climbers who are sometimes rude. The mountain packmen especially exerted themselves for our team via a new route to get their horses and our gear all the way to base camp, a difficult task. At Mihtepe Base Camp we enjoyed a superb view of the Arax River valley. The next morning our wonderful cook Debbie created a great breakfast. We then acclimated over the next few days and prepared to move camping and scientific gear up the southeast couloir—some 3,300 vertical feet.

The third of August saw teams of determined climbers begin moving up, one climber carrying the 75-pound radar unit. The team did some of this work under stress of a hailstorm. By permission of the Turkish government we were allowed to use a CB radio system, which effected easy communication between base and the high camp at 16,800 feet on the eastern plateau. The high camp team was hit by a storm, but made an igloo and waited it out, then slid down the couloir (beats any roller-coaster ride) and climbed again with more gear until the high camp provisions were secure.

The team, under the supervision of Mr. Roningen, completed the radar survey, which showed that the plateau was an 80-foot-deep bowl with no sign of an ark. The team then ran the radar survey over the ridge westward to the peak of Ararat, revealing that the ice cap thickens to about 95 feet, but again there was no sign of the Ark of Noah. To finally establish the truth of this matter, the team then drilled three test holes with the PICO ice drill in a triangle formation on the plateau to a depth of 40 feet, all with negative results. With the scientific mission having been completed over several days' time, high camp was quickly dismantled. The team then started moving gear down to base camp. Sliding the southeast couloir was, as usual, mildly terrifying! Base camp now became a scene for packing for descent. At night the Araxes River valley with its sparkling diamond lights had an ethereal quality. One gets a sense of how God sees us from a different perspective than we see ourselves. The team burned the garbage—an important point as they saw to it that the camp was left as clean as it was found.

The long, hard descent took two days and finally ended at Eli Koy Village where the team stayed overnight, sang songs with the mountain people and supplied the children with candy. The next day, our mountain friends took the team

on a steep upward climb, and suddenly there was before them an ancient lost city! The team walked with wonder through this city. Walls, houses, cisterns, paved streets, and great stone blocks with some features of possible Urartian design. The people of the past had walked these streets and lived in these houses in what could have been the most ancient kingdom of Genesis 8. No archaeological investigation of this city has ever been made.

Dr. Willis, a member of the Archeological Institute of America, checked several sources on Urartu and could find no mention of this city. He prepared a report which may be published soon in an archaeological journal. Though this forty-acre city is after Noah's time it will probably yield some valuable insights into the ancient kingdom.

While no evidence of the Ark of Noah was found, the discovery of this city on Ararat assuaged somewhat the sense of disappointment the team felt. Of course in an enterprise such as this one must remember the words of President



Guy Leduc Conducted a Survey with a Gemini II Metal Detector
Courtesy of Dr. Charles Willis

Theodore Roosevelt: "It is better to dare great deeds and fail than to do nothing at all." The discovery of the truth about the eastern plateau, even though negative, was in itself a positive find of truth which is always important.

The culminating 1988 expedition was composed of a team of highly-motivated, elite mountaineering Christians who ascended Mt. Ararat accepting the risks of snow, hail, snakes, altitude, falling rocks and terrorists, in view of the potential benefit to the Christian faith and biblical authority. They successfully completed a very difficult "Mission Impossible."

Members of the 1988 Snow Tiger Team were: Robert Baker; Robert "B.J." Corbin; Donald Davis, Jr.; Guy Leduc; Scott Little; Larry Mast; Ross Mehan; Willis Newton, Jr.; Willis Newton, III; Deborah Redmer; Robert, Margaret and Christopher Roningen; James Willis and Dr. Charles Willis.

In retrospect, it is obvious that no one has discovered any conclusive proof that Noah's Ark is on Mt. Ararat. Alleged findings of ancient wood have not passed the test of scientific examination, and the alleged sightings have been of little or no value. Mr. F. M. Gurley admitted in writing in 1989 that he had fabricated the alleged World War I Russian Expedition, and that at least his article was a total lie.

In all these efforts Dr. Willis wishes to extend appreciation to Mr. Yavuz Konca, Assistant Professor of English at the University of Erzurum, an experienced mountaineer and a true friend. His help was invaluable in all these rigorous endeavors.

Dr. Willis plans no more trips to Mt. Ararat since he has concluded that the more probable site of Noah's landing was Mt. Cudi, some two hundred miles south of Ararat. He has recruited additional team members and organized new technological instrumentation to investigate Mt. Cudi in the foreseeable future.



The 3,000-foot Slide on Southeast Ararat 1988
Courtesy of B.J. Corbin

Dr. Willis has concluded that the Ark of Noah did not survive into modern times but was broken up for houses and barns since there is nothing that has been found to date to prove its current existence. He hopes to find some evidences of Noah of a different sort. To facilitate this goal he has formed Ancient World Foundation.²

In September 1995, after evaluating his own intelligence sources, he launched himself into southeast Turkey for a three-week reconnaissance trip, successfully contacting the proper Turkish officials and ecclesiastical authorities visiting Cizre and Silopi. He finally became the guest of a Kurdish Chieftain at Sirnak on the north side of Mount Cudi (Cudi Dagı). Some brand-new, incredible information was providentially developed as a result of this trip, which Dr. Willis believes, may result in a major biblical discovery.

² Ancient World Foundation, PO Box 3118, Pinedale, California 93650. Phone (559) 439-4905 Fax (559) 447-8418.

The final enterprise to discover evidence of Father Noah is about to commence. An expedition is planned to investigate the true mountain of Noah, Mt. Cudi in southeastern Turkey. Funds are needed or it won't happen. You can be part of the greatest biblical archeological discovery of all time. We plan to investigate Noah's alleged village, Heston; his alleged altar site; the purported Ark landing site; and his now found and photographed tomb. Please send your tax-deductible donation to:

Ancient World Foundation
PO Box 3118
Pinedale, California 93650
<http://www.ancientworldfoundation.org>



Cudi Dagh From The West 1996
Courtesy of Dr. Charles Willis