

The Taurus Mountains

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Anatolia, the heartland of Turkey, is a vast and mostly treeless plateau almost completely surrounded by mountains. The Taurus, comprising East, Middle and West chains, form its southern boundary and stretch in an irregular line from the Armeno-Kurdish highlands on the Persian border to the Aegean sea, where the formation is continued as rocky promontories and islands. This geographical definition encompasses a much larger area than that usually understood by most mountaineers, who take the name to refer to one particular range, the Ala Dağ, of the Middle Taurus, probably because they have shown less interest to date in the East and West chains, with the exception of isolated volcanic cones such as Erciyes 3915 m and Ararat 5135 m and the extensive Cilo Dağ and Sat Mountains near the Kurdish town of Hakkâri. The Taurus form part of the great Alpine-Himalayan fold system and are composed of hard limestone, reddish in colour, rising to around 3800 m. Anatolia receives several metres of snow in winter, hence the mountains are snow covered throughout most of the year. Spring comes towards the end of March, accompanied by heavy rains and storms which, however, soon give way to a summer of stable fine weather lasting until the end of September. Ski-mountaineering is possible early in the year but there is a considerable risk of avalanche on the larger peaks and a better time is from mid-May onwards. In the course of two summer expeditions I experienced only four days of rain, which compares most favourably with the amount of bad weather experienced during a season in the Alps. Too much, rather than too little, sun is the problem in Turkey. There are no huts in the Taurus, and although it freezes at night above 3000 m, duvet equipment or a light tent in case of illness are sufficient.

The best starting point is Camardi, a village of 1200 persons, on the western edge of the range. The cheapest means of transport is the rather overcrowded local bus from Nigde, a market town near the Ankara-Adana highway; private hire is necessary if a party has a lot of baggage. Official permits for climbing parties are not required, but it is advisable to inform the resident military officer responsible for administering Camardi and surrounding district of intended visits to the mountains. A variety of food-stuffs, petrol and paraffin may be purchased in the village and the hire of donkeys (minimum £1 per day each) may be negotiated over the customary glass of *chi* at one of the local teashops. The hamlets of Çukurbag and Karamuk are nearer the mountains but have no shops or stocks of other essentials.

In the last century Turkey was visited by several mountaineers, including amongst others Douglas W. Freshfield,¹ later President of the Alpine Club, who made an unsuccessful attempt on Ararat in 1868. None seemed to have explored the Taurus, and the first visitors were the Austrian geologist Franz Schäfer² and his wife in 1901, who climbed a subsidiary peak on the Kizilkaya

36 *The Northern valley from the summit of Kükük Demirkazik.* This and next four photos: D. Wilson

ridge named by them 'Alaca'. My selected list includes all notable expeditions since that date, excluding those known from local inhabitants to have visited the area, but about whom no writings exist, and also Turkish climbing club expeditions. The last are definitely under-represented, as the summit books now present on most of the major peaks were placed there by Turks and they contain notes of climbs by later local parties; again, few have been recorded in Turkish or other climbing literature.

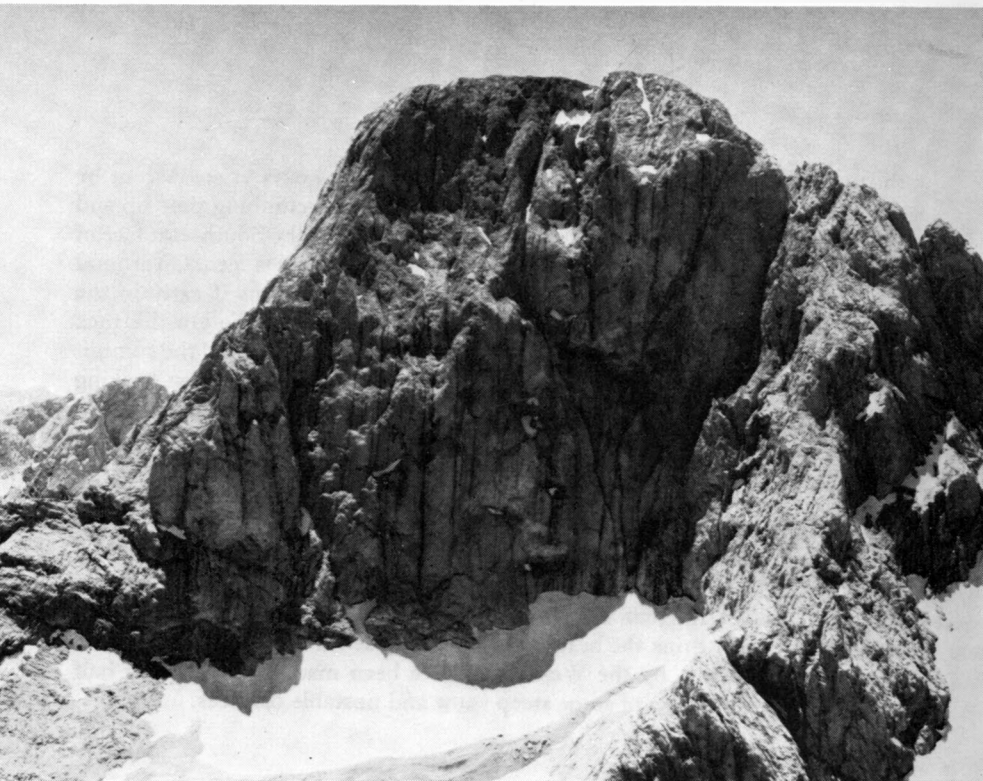
In order to visit all major parts of the Taurus at least two base camps are necessary and the length of stay at each is determined by the amount of food carried to these sites. Small parties such as those of Künne, Peck and Hodgkin covered a lot of ground by travelling light without elaborate equipment, but a group of around ten would seem to be an ideal number. The largest groups of twenty persons or more, which includes Spreitzer's two expeditions and the 1964 Ulster party from Belfast, did not accomplish any more than the smaller Cambridge or Queen's University parties in 1965 and 1969 respectively. If base camp can be reached by donkey, arrangements for additional supplies to be brought up from Camardi may be negotiated with one of the half dozen or so officially recognised guides who reside in this village. My old friend Mehmet Dönmez, who speaks good English, is one of the best and most reliable. A further requirement is a large-scale map of the range, but unfortunately none is obtainable because of legislation making the relevant data classified. Turkish surveyors with American advisers did in fact compile a map some years ago which is currently used by the military. This being so, and because from personal experience maps produced by previous climbers were found to be inaccurate, data collected by the three expeditions from Northern Ireland have been combined to produce the present map.

There are four distinct regions of interest (see pl. 36-40): the Northern Valley, Cimbar Bogazi; the Southern Valley, Emli Bogazi; Yedi Göl and lastly Torasan. Donkeys can reach the first two areas, Yedi Göl with difficulty but not Torasan.

The Northern Valley is best entered along the track marked south-east of the grassy mound, Arpalik Dere, and after a three- to four-hour trek the lake at the foot of the magnificent arc of peaks which includes Kayacik Basi, 3620 m, is reached (pl. 36). Many ascents may be made from here, including Demirkazik 3756 m, the highest peak in the Taurus. Because its striking triangular summit and Wagnerian West face are clearly visible from Camardi, this peak was the goal of most of the early expeditions and has been ascended many times. The routes from the west, however, are long, exhausting in hot sun and route-finding tricky; Künne's 1927 party, for example, got lost several times and took an epic



37 *The North face of Demirkazık (3756 m) as seen from the summit of Küçük Demirkazık*





38 *The Southern range from near Camardi village, Kaldi Dag (3715 m) left, centre background, Alaca Basi (3583 m)*

thirty-two hours compared with the normal fourteen hours or so. Ascent by the East ridge is shorter and more interesting, the total climbing time up and down being about six hours. The approach goes towards the South-east face of Demirkazik until a small lake at the foot of a 40° snow-slope is seen. Go around the right-hand (west) side, ascend the snow using crampons if early in the morning until the East ridge and South-east face are reached. Follow this rock ridge keeping as close as possible to the precipitous North face and the summit should be in view after some two hours. Descent is by the same way, making sure not to take the wrong couloirs which lead westwards into Yalak Deresi.

The Southern Valley, Emli Bogazi, is about 10 km long but close to the entrance it divides into two, with the main branch, Siyirma, continuing up to end in a cirque of peaks including Cebel Basi, 3300 m, and Guzella, 3461 m. In the lower part there is a small pine forest, the home of many beautiful butterflies and birds. Base camp should be placed as high as possible especially if the major peak in this area, Kaldi Dağ, 3688 m, is to be attempted. There are no easy routes to this summit but I think the best is via the East face which takes about sixteen hours in all. Ascents by the West ridge have been made but the lower half requires the negotiation of some steep snow and unstable cornices.



39 *Yedi Göl with Direktas (3470 m) centre*

Yedi Göl, a remarkable high plateau valley containing several lakes fed by snow-melt, is roughly circular in shape and some 5 km in diameter. The west, south and north boundaries are 3500 m peaks, while towards the east the valley floor slopes gently for 3 km, to end by abruptly plunging into the dense forests of the Zamanti Su and Seyhan river systems. The easiest access is from the west via Yalak Deresi up a purgatorial, twisting, scree-ridden gorge leading up to the broad pass between Emli Basi, 3223 m, and Kizilkaya, 3723 m. A base in Yedi Göl is not very comfortable due to the very cold nights and bitter wind which blows continuously during daytime.

In the south-east lies Torasan; the most inaccessible area of the Taurus containing the fine peak, Vay Vay Dağ, 3563 m. Mystery Peak, thought by Addis in 1963 to be unclimbed, lies east of and is joined by a ridge to point 3510 m (see map); it was ascended by the Queen's University (Belfast) expedition 1969. Two approaches into Torasan have been used by the Ulster expeditions but both are difficult. One is to take a small group carrying as much food as possible from Siyirma, traverse Cebel Basi and descend into the main Torasan valley. A stay of two to four days is feasible. The second is from the village of Karsanti along rough forest tracks and then by foot into the mountains. The 1967 Ulster party attempted this but found that the route took almost one week from Adana to base camp, due to many of the tracks being unsuitable for Land-Rovers.



40 *The main Torasan valley with Vay Vay Dag (3563 m)*

From the expeditions outlined it appears that most summits have now been climbed, although I think there may still be some virgin peaks in Torasan. Further details on this area are needed. However, major artificial routes have not yet been accomplished, this being the obvious technique for the many impressive vertical rock faces in the Taurus of which the North face of Demirkazik is one of the finest (pl. 37). Any future party can be assured of fine weather, climbs of all grades of difficulty and generous Turkish hospitality.

Selected list of Taurus expeditions (see text)

Date	Leader, place of residence (No. in party)	Nationality	Ascents and remarks
1901	F. Schäfer, ² Vienna (2)	Austrian	Climbed one peak called 'Alaca'
1927	G. Künne, ³ Hohenfinow (4)	Austrian	Demirkazik, Esnewit, Kaldi Dağ, Alaca Basi
1938	H. Spreitzer, ⁴ Vienna (large)	Austrian	About thirty peaks climbed
1942	E. H. Peck, ⁵ Ankara (1)	British	Reconnaissance
1943	E. H. Peck and R. A. Hodgkin, ⁵ Ankara (6)	British	Demirkazik, Alaca Basi, Kaldi Dağ, Kizilkaya
1944	E. H. Peck, ⁶ Adana (4)	British	Direktas, Kizilyar and others
1955	H. Spreitzer, ⁴ Vienna (large)	Austrian	Many ascents and Torasan area visited
	Party from Trieste ⁷ (small)	Italian	Kaldi Dağ and others
1962	A. Rampini, ⁸ Turin (2)	Italian	Reconnaissance
1963	P. Addis, ⁹ R.A.F.—Cyprus (12)	British	Discovered the new unclimbed summit 'Mystery peak'
1964	S. E. P. Nowill, ¹⁰ Istanbul (4)	British	Demirkazik
	Capt. Hastie, ¹¹ Army (12)	British	Kaldi Dağ and others
	Capt. Muston, ¹¹ R.A.F. (13)	British	Kaldi Dağ and others
	J. Quan, ¹² Belfast (32)	British	Many ascents and all areas except Torasan visited
1965	Mersin ¹¹ Climbing Club (8)	Turkish	Ascents in Kaldi Dağ area
	H. Kelly, ¹¹ St. Mary's School Hendon (19)	British	Little climbing accomplished
	J. Ashburner, ¹³ Cambridge, C.U.M.C. (6)	British	Many ascents—new route on Direktas
1966	Sgt. Beales, ¹¹ R.A.F.—Cyprus (12)	British	Several ascents in Kaldi Dağ area
1967	P. Wood, ¹⁴ Belfast (30)	British	Approached Mystery Peak and the Taurus from South-east
	D. Robinson, ¹⁵ Leeds University (25)	British	Little climbing
1969	B. Spark, ¹¹ London (6)	British	General mountaineering
	D. Wilson, ¹⁶ Belfast (10)	British	Traverse of the Taurus from South to North, many ascents

References

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- 8 Expeditions. *A.ŷ.* 68 124.
- 9 Addis, P. 'Report of the R.A.F. Mountain Rescue Team expedition to the Taurus, 1964.' R.G.S., London.
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- 11 Based on logbook of Mehmet Dönmez, Camardi.
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- 16 Elwood, J. H. The Queen's University expedition to the Taurus Mountains 1969, Report (1970) Q.U.B.M.C., Belfast.



41 The Monte Moro pass, looking over into Switzerland, with Täschhorn, Dom and Lenzspitze. This and next two photos: Edward Pyatt