

UNSEEN ARMENIA – MY UNFORGOTTEN YOUNG HIKING GUIDES

Posted on October 29, 2015 by Keghart



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Hovsep Dagdigian, Harvard MA, 29 October 2015

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After a 20-minute rough drive we arrived at the monastery. The building sat on a hill surrounded by trees. It dates from the 6th to 7th Centuries and operated through the 12th. On site are the remnants of the church, a bakery, a dining hall, and a large number of intricately carved stones. Our driver indicated that there are other monasteries nearby. But, he added, the most practical way to get to them is on horseback.

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Back in the village of Bujhakan, surrounded by fields of bright green cabbage, I asked if there were any historic sites within the village.

“Just remains of an old church” was the dismissive reply.

“I like old churches,” I said.

“But there's just one wall standing and one khachkar” the man replied.

“I like walls, and old khachkars,” I replied.

The dirt road through the village, though flat, was too rutted for our car, so I walked. Showing me the way was a 14-year-old boy, Abas. Abas spoke beautiful Armenian with no English or Russian words mixed in, which is not what one usually hears in Yerevan. We talked of many things during



our 20-minute walk to the church. Abas explained how each year some of the crops thrive, while others do not. This was a great year for cabbage. He explained how one could tell of impending weather by viewing the clouds over the mountains, and paying attention to the birds. He was very familiar with the surrounding mountains, often taking animals up there to graze.

He expressed the importance of history, his village's history, and of Armenian traditions. When I asked him, given his interest in Armenian history, if he had seen much of Armenia, he replied that he had not. But, he added, he and his school class would shortly be visiting the Garni Temple and Geghart. He was quite excited about the trip. When we got back to our car he disappeared – I did not get a chance to thank the inspiring teenager.

Some time after we were in the village of Hnaberd ("old fort"). I had read of the ruins of a Urartian fortress on the top of one of the foothills nearby - between the village and the slopes of Mt. Aragats. When asking a number of villagers how to get there, they would point to one of the hilltops in the distance and explain in rather vague terms the best way to get there. Finally someone volunteered to find a couple of boys to take me there. Two boys, good friends, Antranig and Hampartsoum, volunteered to lead the way. They were 12 and 14. Again, their Armenian was beautiful, devoid of foreign words or slang. As we began, it was obvious that they were ready to sprint up the hill. These hills are their back yard and their playground. They are accustomed to traipsing all over the beautiful landscape. Of course they slowed down for me. Their consideration for my welfare was constant, always asking if they could carry my water bottle or cameras, or if I was OK.



Half way up the hill I heard a loud roar. About mid-way between the village and us a jet from the nearby Russian base near the Turkish border was practicing maneuvers in the valley below. By the time I readied my camera it was gone. I waited another five minutes or so for an opportunity to get a unique photograph, but the pilot was already maneuvering in another valley.

At the top of the hill were concentric walls which archeologists call cyclopean fort; crude, undressed stones arranged for defense. The fort was interesting though not spectacular. But the view was great and my two guides were wonderful.

Heading back down, the older boy indicated that the first house we passed was his, and he introduced me to his father who was cutting hay or wheat with a scythe. I got the impression that his father, though not a large man and despite the heat, could continue this strenuous work for days on end. The boy's mother invited me to stay for supper, but that was impossible: I had to meet my wife elsewhere in the village and we were already late to meet friends in Gyumri. But the boy's parents insisted, and of course they wanted to know who this stranger was who spent the last couple of hours with their son. I politely declined dinner but indicated a cup of coffee would be great.



Sitting at the table with the boy's father, I listened to him lament that so many people are leaving Armenia. "What will become of our country?" he asked. Despite all the other hardships, economic

and otherwise, this was his primary worry. The government doesn't even know we exist; other organizations don't know we're here either. We are forgotten," he said. I've heard this many times.

I replied, "I have friends, and though they have not met you personally, they know that you and people like you exist, and they have not forgotten." I added that I can't speak for the government or any other organization, but "I shall not forget you."

We talked a bit more, then I excused myself – I had to get going. Our talk lasted five minutes, ten at the most. We got up to walk out of the house together.

I said: "I don't know if we'll ever meet again; we probably won't. But be assured that I will not forget."

We looked each other in the eyes. I'd known him for a few minutes; we understood each other perfectly. We were exactly on the same wavelength. He approached me and we hugged, with tears in our eyes. We said goodbye. I walked away with a complete mix of emotions: upset that these wonderful people are forgotten, sad that I had to leave, and frustrated that I was unable to be of much help. This was not the first time this had happened. I think of these people constantly – hoping they are well, hoping that their children can achieve their ambitions and realize their full potential without having to leave Armenia.

Advanced Summer School in Physics at Yerevan Physics Institute

Hovsep Dagdigian, Harvard MA, 16 October 2015

The Advanced Summer School in Physics was held from August 17 to 20 at the Yerevan Physics Institute (YerPhI) - named in honor of its founder Artem Alikhanyan.

Twenty-four students from Yerevan State University and the Armenian State Pedagogical University participated in the summer school. Lectures and classes, delivered by senior scientists from various divisions of YerPhI, were held both at the Cosmic Ray Division's (CRD) Nor Ambert Cosmic Ray research center on Mt. Aragats and at the Yerevan Physics Institute's headquarters in Yerevan.



A series of 15 lectures and classes introduced the students to the latest developments in cosmic ray and atmospheric physics, cosmology, accelerator physics, information technology (IT), and the practical applications of these recent developments. During laboratory sessions students assembled systems of particle detectors, measured elemental composition of materials, and familiarized themselves with modern Graphic Processing Unit (GPU) servers. They also evaluated the yield of medical isotopes produced at YerPhI's newly established Medical Isotope Division. Here the goal is to produce much-needed medical isotopes for Armenia's medical institutions.

On the final day of classes the group visited CRD's research center and cosmic ray observatory at

10,500 ft. elevation on Mt. Aragats. This is the world's largest research center for monitoring secondary cosmic rays. Students examined CRD's network of particle detectors, which register various subatomic components, as well as other instruments used in research atmospheric physics. They saw how the data is used in formulating a deeper understanding of solar and atmospheric physics, lightning initiation, and how this information is used to help predict space weather events.

The hands-on nature of the summer school impressed upon the students that physics is an experimental discipline. Knowledge advances from theory to scientific models, to experimental measurements, to improvements in scientific models, and eventually to theories culminating in practical applications.

The Yerevan Physics Institute provides modern experimental facilities along with senior staff members to encourage talented Armenians to represent Armenia and contribute to international scientific collaborations. The mission of Armenia's National Laboratory includes high standards of education in Master and PhD programs as one of its most important components. It demonstrates, in pragmatic ways, that science and education are vital components of Armenia's continuing development. The Master courses in physics prepare students for the PhD program. Upon completion graduates are prepared to do quality research in an academic environment, in national research laboratories, and in industry.

Next on YerPhI's agenda was the fifth annual workshop on Thunderstorms and Elementary Particle Acceleration (TEPA 2015), which took place from October 5 through 9 and was organized by the Cosmic Ray Division. Participants from 7 nations gathered at CRD's Nor Ambert research station and conference center to discuss this hot topic. This area of research was originally introduced and is currently led by the scientists of the Cosmic Ray Division of Yerevan Physics Institute. Young CRD scientists have already made important discoveries and contributions to this field of study.

For information on Master and PhD programs please click on



For additional information on the TEPA conference please click on



