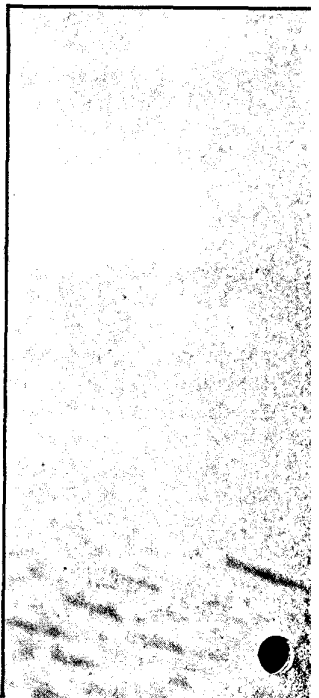


Eryl Cummings



THE SEARCH FOR NOAH'S ARK

FACT OR FABLE?

The folklore of many cultures tells of it; historians refer to it; and Jesus Christ spoke of it. But is there hard evidence that a man named Noah actually built a great Ark to escape a worldwide flood? And could that Ark still be preserved to be found in the 20th century?

by Terry Wood

Not far from the Aegean sea, where Atlantis is supposedly submerged, sits majestic Mt. Ararat in eastern Turkey, a 16,946-foot mound of volcanic rubble which, some scientists and theologians believe, serves as the fortified pedestal for the remains of Noah's Ark.

"Genesis 8:4 acts as their biblical verification: 'And the ark rested in the seventh month, in the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.'" Some five millennia afterward a dedicated coterie remains convinced that the Ark rests somewhere on that mountain, and with it lies a conclusive rebuttal to atheism, agnosticism, evolution, and any other disclaimer to the Bible's validity.

For Eryl Cummings, a New Mexico realtor and perhaps the most respected of all Ark hunters, the possibility that the Ark still exists is





NOAH'S ARK? Intriguing photo from Mt. Ararat (left) shows what appears to be a half-buried ship. Explorers (center) move carefully across an Ararat glacier. John Joseph (inset) claimed to have found the Ark in 1887. Lower inset shows Eryl Cummings (left) and guide as they appeared in a 1966 expedition.



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enough to keep him searching. "If you had the experiences I've had with atheists, agnostics, infidels, evolutionists, young kids who have given up their faith, even some of these church people who just don't believe the first 11 books of the Bible, then you know why I'm in it," he told *The Plain Truth*. "Just to see them change their whole attitude — because a tangible object could prove the Bible's story — would make it worthwhile for me."

Says 29-year-old scientist John Morris of the Institute for Creation-Research: "Its discovery would have a tremendous impact in the scientific realm to disprove many theories by proving the catastrophe of a flood."

"It would have profound implications on a lot of things," envisions John Bradley, Jr., president of the Scientific Exploration and Archaeological Research Foundation (SEARCH). "In education, politically, sociologically... it would be havoc if you really think it out."

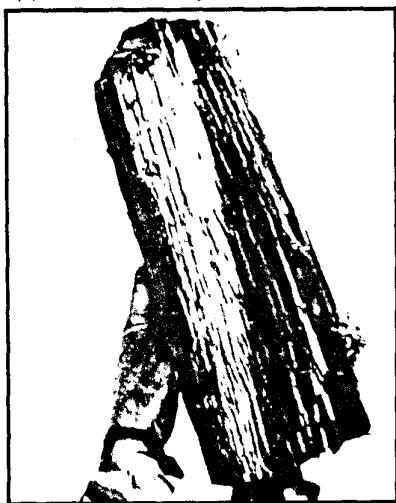
If they find it.

"There have been 37 expeditions since 1961, and I'm familiar with practically all the expeditioners," says the 71-year-old Cummings. "I don't know any one of them who has been successful."

Turkish Objections

In fact, the only success several Ark hunters have had has been in con-

HAND TOOLED WOOD, allegedly found on Mt. Ararat by Fernand Navarra, is partially fossilized and appears to be very old.

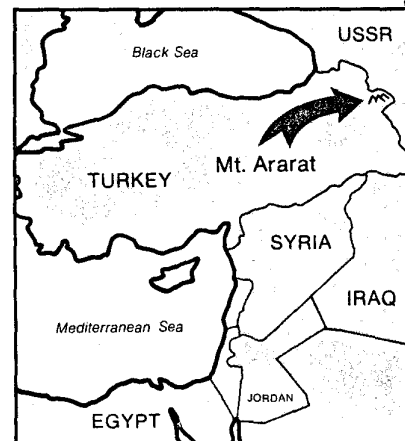


sistency of arrests. Too often groups with boundless zeal and a paucity of foresight charge boldly up Ararat's face without acquiring the appropriate government permission.

Turkey's uneasiness with a mountain full of adventurers is understandable considering that Ararat is only a short distance from the Soviet Union's border. "It's a very sensitive military zone," says Morris. "It would be like a bunch of Turks coming to the United States and messing around in Fort Knox without asking the government. You just don't do it."

Several would-be ARKeologists from France and Germany were arrested last year for barging up Ararat without a permit, and one American group of zealots was thrown in jail for the fifth consecutive year. "I told them not to go because it was October, they would run into snow, and they didn't have a permit," Cummings remembers. "It took them six days to cover five miles in snow up to their knees and sometimes their hips. One of their crew went stark crazy and had to be put in an asylum. When they got off the mountain, they were arrested, and it took high officials of the United States and Turkish governments to get them out of jail. It gives the whole endeavor a bad name."

Such flagrant disregard for Turkish concerns has severely hampered efforts to gain permits by expedi-



A STRANGE OBJECT (above) on Mt. Ararat is thought by some to be related to Noah's Ark. Below, map shows where the search is focused.

tioners who possess authentic scientific and archaeological intent. Hollywood film producer Bart LaRue, perturbed by Turkey's unwillingness to grant permits, filmed a 1974 documentary on his unauthorized search, including scenes of him bribing Turkish officials to gain access to the mountain. "I talked with LaRue about it," says Morris. "The reason he did it was to try and force the Turks to take a better view of the search, to get world opinion against them. Well, the Turks don't operate that way. You kick them in the face, and they'll kick you back. Certainly if he were to go back there, he would be

thrown in jail immediately. I don't know how it affected the rest of the search, but it couldn't have been good.

"The political tension in Turkey has lessened somewhat after being quite antagonistic for several years," adds Morris. "Now with American aid being reinstated there, our chances might be better."

But the prospects for permits this past summer were still dismal and only a precious few permits were granted. Cummings' group, one of the most respected, did receive permission, but it hasn't yet returned.

Another renowned Ark hunter, John Warwick Montgomery, professed to have "secret leads" toward obtaining permission for future expeditions.

SEARCH's Bradley is already looking forward to 1977. "One of our directors with excellent Turkish connections is a brilliant nuclear physicist presently teaching at Princeton and Oxford," he says. "This individual has obligations that will tie him up until spring. Then he'll try and personally work out the necessary details to obtain permits, structured basically as a Turkish expedition which SEARCH could support. So we're hoping for an expedition sometime next year."

Wood From Ararat

That expedition would occur 22 years after the dramatic discovery of hand-tooled wood on Ararat. The wood was allegedly found high on Ararat's slopes by the French industrialist and amateur explorer Fernand Navarra. In July 1955, he and his 11-year-old son returned to the spot where three years earlier he had spotted a massive silhouette encased in a glacier at 14,000 feet. Working within a narrow crevasse, Navarra chipped ice away until he reportedly uncovered a section of a long wooden beam. Unable to remove the entire timber, Navarra said that he cut off a five-foot section which he later cut into even smaller pieces to conceal his find from any military patrols.

His sample was verified to be hand-tooled wood covered with a pitch-like substance. Examined at the University of Bordeaux in France and the Forestry Institute of

Madrid, the fragment's age was estimated at 5,000 years. As part of a SEARCH expedition in 1969, Navarra returned to a different slope on Ararat and discovered four other samples of plank-like wood. The wood is a tantalizing specimen, but hardly conclusive evidence. "The SEARCH organization claims the wood is from Noah's Ark, but I never have. Never!" stresses Cummings.

There also remains considerable controversy involving the wood's age. In 1970, Dr. Rainer Berger, professor of anthropology, geography, and geophysics and head of U.C.L.A.'s isotope laboratory, subjected Navarra's 1955 wood sample to radiocarbon tests. Berger concluded that the fragment was a mere 1,230 years old, plus or minus 60 years. This would make the sample a closer parallel in history with Leif Ericson than with Noah. The National Physical Laboratory of Teddington, England, dated the wood's age at 1,190 years, plus or minus 90 years. Similar tests conducted on 1969 specimens at the Geochron Laboratories in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the University of Pennsylvania found the wood's age to be about 1,300 years.

But none of this is convincing to Ark hunters. "The very fact that the same wood can be dated at obviously differing dates indicates the

whole dating method is off," says Morris. "The Skylab project came out with some data showing that the equation used to date the wood is invalid because at present the C-14 is being formed 20 percent faster than it decays. There's no equilibrium in the C-14 concentration in the atmosphere."

Berger defends the method's accuracy with data from thousands of consecutive Bristlecone pine tree rings which, he says, allow you to correct for minor changes and fluctuations in the C-14 content of the atmosphere. "I have complete confidence in this method of dating," Berger told *The Plain Truth*. "I know the sources of possible error, and I believe that with proper care they can be virtually eliminated."

Cummings, meanwhile, feels somewhat bewildered by the argument over the wood's age. "I've heard estimates that vary from 6,000 to 1,200 years, so I don't know what to tell the public. All I say is that there's been hand-tooled lumber found on a mountain without a hardwood tree around for miles, so where did these samples come from?"

Berger suggests one possibility: The wood is from some sort of struc-

A RENDERING of Noah's Ark by the artist Alfred Lee, as described by "Georgie," an Armenian who supposedly saw the Ark as a child.



The Ark and The Animals

Is it unrealistic and unscientific to believe that Noah could have saved all the earth's fauna in an ark? Traditional images and popular literature picture the Ark as scarcely larger than an ordinary fishing smack. But the Bible paints a far different picture of the Ark than most realize. Genesis 6:15 gives the Ark's dimensions: "The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits [450 ft. — based on an 18-in. cubit, its commonly accepted length], the breadth of it fifty cubits [75 ft.], and the height of it thirty cubits [45 ft.]"

Based on the 18-inch cubit, the figures show that the box-shaped Ark ["ark" means "box" or "chest" in the Hebrew] was ocean-liner size in cubic capacity.

It had a volume of about 1.5 million cubic feet, and virtually the entire capacity of the Ark could be used for storage. (It had no engine room or fuel tanks!) The Ark had a capacity equal to more than 500 standard American railroad freight cars!

Still, could Noah get all those animals into the Ark?

First of all, God specifically instructed Noah to select one pair of every "kind" of unclean animal and seven pairs of every "kind" of clean animal. The Bible term "kind" refers generally to a group of creatures, all of which interbreed. The horse kind could be represented, therefore, by one pair of animals having the genetic potential to produce after the Flood all the varieties we have today. The same would be true also for dogs, cats, etc.

Second, only air-breathing, terrestrial animals were included in the Ark. Genesis 7:22 states: "All in whose nostrils was the breath of life." This excludes all sea creatures and simple forms of life which could survive the deluge.

Now consider this. Only 40% of

the animal kingdom lives on land, and 70% of all species of land animals are insects. The remaining 30% of the terrestrial animal kingdom are on a mean average the size of a rhesus monkey.

Most animals can be maintained in small confinement for long periods and remain healthy. A rhesus monkey, for example, can be maintained in a cage about 2 ft., 6 in. cubed (15.6 cu. ft.).

Estimates of the number of land-living mammal, bird, reptile, and amphibian species on earth today totals about 18,000. Recognizing that only kinds, not species, were included, it would have been necessary to represent far fewer than 18,000 animals on the Ark. Most animals are "unclean" (Lev. 11), so most animal kinds would have been represented by one pair. But let's be liberal and say 40,000 animals, whose average size is that of a rhesus monkey, were on the Ark. How much room in the Ark would be needed for all these animals? About 40% of the Ark's 1.5 million cubic feet would suffice!

What about insects? Remember, the Ark had a storage capacity of 500 freight cars. Two hundred cars would be occupied by mammals, birds, and reptiles. Giving every pair of known species of insect 16 cubic inches of space, another 21 such freight cars would be required. (Counting Genesis kinds only, the required space would be far less.)

And so, viewed from the perspective of simple arithmetic, only about half of the space on the three decks would have provided plenty of room to accommodate "all those animals." That left the other half of the ship for food and supplies and for Noah and his family.

So the final question: What did Noah ever do with all the extra space?

ture built as a monument to the Ark story. "There is no reason for a building to be that high in the mountains other than as a hermitage or a monument," he says. "like St. Katherine's Monastery built in the Sinai desert on the spot where Moses supposedly saw the burning bush. Since the Ark was a common belief in the heritage of the people around Ararat, it is quite possible that a hermitage was built to pay homage to the belief, and they needed wood for the roof."

But those who have scaled the perilous slopes of Ararat are incredulous at the thought of such an undertaking. The volcanic rubble that is Ararat's composition is somewhat akin to walking up a mountain of ball bearings. One climber recalled that "rocks the size of a car can suddenly give way under foot and one man's shout can start an avalanche."

"I can't conceive of back-packing hardwood timbers up that mountain to build a monument when there's rock right there on the spot," says Cummings. "I'll tell you one thing. It's hard enough to pack 70 pounds on your back up there, let alone four or five tons of wood."

A Universal Tradition

As tangible as the wood samples are, their dubious age and origin have given Ark hunters no concrete evidence. Instead, emphasis is placed on the rich history of Ark sightings recorded through time by explorers and historians, including a reference in Josephus' ancient writings. Theopolis of Antioch alluded to its existence in the second century A.D., as did Marco Polo in 1300. Though hardly conclusive, the similarity between these and more contemporary stories causes intriguing speculation.

Ignoring local taboos, J. J. Friedrich Parrot was the first foreigner to scale Ararat in 1829. He reportedly found wood. Near the base of the mountain was the village of Ah-ora, where many Ark relics had supposedly been stored. Unfortunately, an 1840 earthquake totally buried the village and any evidence therein. It remains unearthed to this day, an area which some day Cummings also hopes to excavate.

During World War I, a Russian airman, W. Roskovitsky, flew over Ararat and claimed to have sighted some sort of vessel. The Czar organized a search and allegedly found the Ark, even entered the ship and found hundreds of rooms. Yet another oddity of fate befell this new evidence. Only days after the discovery, the Russian government was overthrown during the Bolshevik Revolution, and all records were presumably destroyed in the zeal to discredit all religion.

Cummings has gone to great length to establish the story's veracity. "I know there were 13 Russian expeditions," he says. "I've talked to people who had relatives in the expeditions. Right now I'm trying to reach a man in Mexico whose mother was a maid in the Czar's palace when news of the 1916 discovery was made. I've checked this thing out backwards and forwards from many different viewpoints, but critics say it's just another big lie."

The Ararat Jinx

This "Ararat jinx" has apparently followed anyone who acquired evidence of the Ark. In 1952 a mining engineer, George Jefferson Greene, was flying his helicopter over Ararat on assignment and reportedly sighted the prow of a ship jutting from a glacier. He hovered above the object and took photographs from as close as 90 feet. Strangely he never published his pictures, showing them only to friends. In 1958 he was murdered in British Guiana, and none of his possessions were ever recovered, although 30 witnesses adamantly claim to have seen the pictures.

Then there was the 1920 deathbed confession of an 82-year-old Armenian who admitted that in 1856 he led a small group of English atheists to the site of the Ark. Enraged, the atheists tried futilely to destroy the ship and forced their Armenian guide to swear never to reveal the Ark's location under the threat of death. Yet this story too has never been completely validated.

Morris' favorite story is about a man named Georgie who died recently but claimed to have inadvertently discovered the Ark in 1904 as

a child. Individually, such accounts furnish Ark hunters with nothing conclusive; yet there is a cohesive similarity linking the stories to give them a collective significance. "The lost evidence is kind of odd," Morris admits. "It's been so elusive. None of the stories are as good as I'd like them to be. If there was just one, no one would pay any attention to it. Yet the fact that there are so many that are substantially the same, talking about substantially the same structure and area, makes it interesting. But it's circumstantial evidence at best. It's not firm stuff."

Cummings also feels the stories' similarities are encouraging. "The stories have come at different times, from people of different walks of life, from different countries; yet the stories pretty well coordinate when describing the positioning and condition of the ship."

Of course, this is of little solace to Ark hunters when they are unable to pursue their hypotheses on Ararat's slopes. SEARCH planned an extensive exploration in 1970, prompting Harry Crawford, a Seventh-Day Adventist and engineer who has climbed Ararat more than any other man, to describe the proposed search as "the most significant expedition since the moon landing."

But even after one and a half tons of equipment had been shipped to Turkey, the search had to be aborted because Turkish officials denied permission to explore the mountain. "One and one half tons of equipment," sighs Cummings, who has often invested nearly his net worth in expeditions, "and it's all been ruined by rain, rats, and mice. We're buying all new equipment this year. If we could use a helicopter, it would be great, but again we're talking about a restricted military zone, and none are allowed up there."

"There are some positive things," Morris hastens to add. "Turkey built a road which goes up Ararat's slopes a little way, which cuts out a day-and-a-half of walking. The use of a helicopter is not totally ruled out, but it would have to be a major government decision."

It is, in fact, the Turkish government which Morris feels may even-

tually uncover Ararat's mysterious treasure. "I tend to think the realistic chance for work in the near future is for the Turks to do it themselves. If it's not found by outsiders within three or four years, I think they'll go find it themselves."

"I've spent a lot of time with various officials in Turkey giving them all my research. I know some awfully good people over there who are involved with archaeological work who would really love to do it. Cummings and I both have a lot of friends over there. That doesn't mean the government favors us, but there are people there who will help us if they can."

"Realistically, I think the ideal search will be Turkish organized and manned with perhaps experienced Ark hunters serving as advisors. It would offer a major chance of success, and I think within four years it's a sure thing."

Discovery Inevitable?

No matter what methodology is used or who uses it, Ark hunters remain convinced that the discovery of the Ark — or whatever — is inevitable. "If it is there," Morris speculates, "God has protected it for 5,000 years. All logic would indicate that it has been destroyed on the hill. So much has occurred there: an erupting volcano, earthquakes, explosions, weathering, horrible storms. I don't think God would protect it without a reason, and it seems to me the reason is to uncover it."

Cummings hopes that the Ark's possible discovery would catalyze a spiritual renaissance. "It would be just like God to help people who are struggling with faith like doubting Thomas," says Cummings. "He wouldn't believe that Christ was with him until he had put his hand into Christ's side, and some people are like that with the Bible. They read the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis and say: 'Well, I'm not going to believe it unless there's some proof.'" Cummings pauses and smiles, thinking perhaps of this year's expedition — his tenth in 30 years — which he hopes will be his last. "It would be just like God to give people some proof, wouldn't it?" □