

Long Riders' Guild Report: The Great Anatolian Ride, phase one:

Riders Complete More Than 1300 Kilometre Journey in Evliya Çelebi's Hoofprints

The first Evliya Çelebi Ride, otherwise known as the Great Anatolian Ride, has been completed successfully. The route follows in the hoofprints of the greatest of Ottoman travellers, Evliya Çelebi (1611-c.1684). The expedition covered more than 1300 kilometres – of that we can be certain. We await a final total upon completion of the processing of the GPS data.

Between the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, an international group of scholars and horse enthusiasts retraced on horseback a section of Evliya's

*haj*

itinerary, his pilgrimage to Mecca, drawn from the penultimate volume of his ten-volume *Seyahatname*

, or 'Book of Travels,' the most important source for Ottoman history in this period. This project of historical re-enactment was designed to try to discover on a daily basis what it meant to travel by horseback on ancient pathways, in some instances the same or similar routes employed by the fabled caravans of the Silk Road. Local people along this route still speak of the

*Ipek Yolu*

, the Silk Road. They are referring, of course, to the southern trade routes linking Istanbul and Anatolian cities such as Bursa, Kütahya, and Afyon with Aleppo, Damascus, and Baghdad, rather than the northern trade routes to China through Iran and India.

From Hersek, on the southern shore of the Gulf of Izmit, the travellers wended their way to Iznik, Bursa, Kütahya, Afyon, Uşak, Simav, Çavdarhisar, and back to Kütahya, Evliya's ancestral city. Thanks to their brave and agile horses, they forded rivers, climbed mountains, made friends with local villagers, drank tea and Turkish coffee in countless *kahve*-s, explored ancient sites and Ottoman cities, attended

*rahvan*

(ridden pacing) horse races and mounted

*cirit*

(javelin) matches, and camped under the stars in unspoiled landscapes of staggering beauty. Some forty days and forty nights later, the horses and core riders fetched up in Kütahya, unfazed by their adventures and ready for more.

The project's blog is: [www.hoofprinting.blogspot.com](http://www.hoofprinting.blogspot.com) .

As well as future rides, outcomes of the project include a potential UNESCO European Cultural Route established in western Anatolia following the itinerary of the Evliya Çelebi Ride – the Evliya Çelebi Way.

### **Forthcoming books:**

A guidebook to the route will be published in English and in Turkish. A multi-authored book presenting the interdisciplinary research findings is also in the works, as is a trade book about Evliya and his travels.

### **Film:**

The expedition was accompanied for part of the journey by Mehmet Çam and other members of Ajans21. A documentary film by the company is scheduled to appear in 2011.

Although the ride probably did not achieve the Guild's 1000-mile ultimate goal, the expedition came close to logging this distance. The ride was certainly an epic journey, lasting a legendary 'forty days and forty nights'. All the horses who embarked upon the ride finished up sound and well. In fact, there was never a day's serious lameness among the lot, and nobody even lost a shoe. Of the initial seven horses, four performed the entire itinerary. Three were returned to their home stables by van after 37 days when there were no longer riders enough for them, but all could have finished the ride without any difficulty.

## Dramatis Personae

Evliya set out for Mecca in 1671 with three companions, eight servants, and fifteen *küheylan* (pedigreed) horses.

The Evliya Çelebi Ride had a support vehicle (a Mitsubishi Canter fitted with a roomy van body containing fold-down kitchen facilities), a motorbike carried by the support vehicle, and the following participants.

### Horses:

(All Turkish-bred mares, owned by Ercihan Dilari, Akhal-Teke Horse Center, Cappadocia)

Anadolu (Thoroughbred-Akhal Teke cross, 7 years old)—completed ride

Titiz (Thoroughbred, of an Akhal Teke type, 6 years old)—completed ride

Sarhoş (Arabian-Anatolian cross, 13 years old)—completed ride

Ilos (Arabian-Anatolian cross, 13 years old)—completed ride

Asya (Arabian-Anatolian cross, 6 years old)

Elis (Arabian-Anatolian cross, 8 years old)

Hidalgo (Arabian, 5 years old)

Congratulations are due to Ercihan and his support staff, Sedat Varış and Metin Aker, for producing and providing such fit, energetic, tough, and courageous horses.

### **Humans:**

Ercihan Dilari, expedition leader [www.akhal-tekehorsecenter.com](http://www.akhal-tekehorsecenter.com)

Metin Aker, artist, driver, chef

Sedat Varış, horseman

Donna Landry, FRAS, Professor of English, University of Kent

Caroline Finkel, FRAS, Ottoman historian, Honorary Fellow, Edinburgh University and University of Exeter

Gerald MacLean, FRAS, Professor of English and Co-director, Turkish Studies, University of Exeter

Susan Wirth, Photographic editor, *Der Spiegel*, New York

Thérèse Tardif, Advertising executive, Montreal

Patricia Daunt, Writer, wife of a former British ambassador to Turkey

Andrew Byfield, Botanist and author, PlantLife International

Ayşe Yetiş, veterinarian, Turkish Jockey Club, Istanbul

Özcan Görürgöz, Entrepreneur, Hanedan Kervansaray Restaurant, Avanos, Cappadocia

Alper Katrancı, Entrepreneur, Skyway Balloons, Cappadocia

Pınar Durmaz, Trekkist and academic, Istanbul Kultur University

Ross Williamson, the distinguished horse vet well known to the Long Riders' Guild, and famous throughout Turkey and the Middle East, has become a friend and supporter. He visited the horses in Kütahya on their first stop there, and gave them a clean bill of health. The expedition's fortunes doubled when Ross was joined by his Turkish colleague Ayşe Yetiş. It was a great boon that Ayşe was able to join the ride itself for several days.

### **Logistics**

### **Sponsors:**

Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Turkish Embassy (London)

Kütahya Porselen

Güral Porselen

Güral Art Craft

Municipality and Mayor's office of Kütahya

Governor of Kütahya

Zeytinoğlu Yem

Turkish Jockey Club

Avis-Koç Holding

Akhal-Teke Horse Centre of Avanos, Cappadocia

Leverhulme Trust, UK

University of Kent, UK

University of Exeter (Turkish Studies), UK

Sabancı University, Istanbul

### **Transport:**

The expedition's seven horses were transported by lorry to Hersek, courtesy of the Turkish Jockey Club, from their stables in Cappadocia. Three were transported from Eski Gediz to Kütahya in a small lorry, 3 abreast, facing forwards, courtesy of Birol Babanoğlu, President of the Equestrian Sports Club of Kütahya. These same 3 horses were transported two days later to Cappadocia in the same vehicle. The final 4 were transported in the same small lorry, facing sideways, from Çavdarhisar to Kütahya. The Turkish Jockey Club transported these 4 to Cappadocia the next day. All horses loaded without much difficulty and travelled safely, without any ill effects.

### **Feed and Water**

#### **Feed:**

Courtesy of Zeytinoğlu Yem, the horses were fed a muesli-type complete high protein (14 %) feed daily. The company supplies many racing stables in Turkey, and the mix was labelled 'Racing Mix.' They were given 7 kilos of feed a day: at daybreak, upon arrival in camp, and twice during the evening and night.

They grazed freely in camp and during stops on the ride. Hay was purchased along the route to supplement their grazing.

Both plastic feed bowls and traditional nosebags were employed to ensure that every horse got her full rations.

### **Water:**

In camp, three horses were usually left loose and the other four individually picketed. The loose horses could drink at will, the others were taken to drink at regular intervals. Water is freely available in Turkey, with fountains containing drinking troughs (*çeşmes*) by the roadside for man and beast. Passing such a fountain, we usually stopped to see if the horses wished to drink. Campsites were usually by a *çeşme*.

The support vehicle carried water at all times as well, and plastic buckets were given to the horses.

### **Farriery**

We carried blacksmithing tools and spare horseshoes with us in the support vehicle. Both Ercihan and Sedat are competent emergency farriers. Apart from attending to the odd nail, we had no trouble with the horses' shoes during the trip. The horses' usual farrier from Cappadocia joined the expedition outside Kütahya and reshod all the horses on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day.

## **Equipment**

The tack was supplied by the Akhal Teke Horse Center. The saddles were either Indian-made, according to a French randonnée design, or Australian stock saddles (2 of these). Two imported UK Thorowgood endurance saddles were tried; one (a Griffin) fit horses and riders reasonably well and stayed the course. The other newer design fit neither horses nor riders well and was quickly exchanged for an Indian saddle. Photos show that a number of the horses are wearing girth sleeves. These were largely a preventative measure. Apart from one girth sore, which appeared during the first day and a half from a too tight girth, there were no girth sores on the ride. Sore backs and small saddle sores were more of a concern. The Indian saddles' trees fit the horses but each one had its idiosyncrasies of padding or lack thereof. There were two gel pads on the ride and these helped considerably. A larger supply of thick numnahs (saddle pads) would have been a real asset. Two complete sets of saddle pads would have enabled more frequent washing. A number of the horses were fitted with breastplates, but not all. These were very useful on the mountainous sections of the ride. One horse without a breastplate sometimes



had her leading rein tied round her front and attached to the saddle's front D rings, which served the immediate purpose. Breastplates for all horses come recommended.

The snaffle bridles were Indian imports. By the end of the ride, the horses were almost all wearing bits imported from the UK. Bits varied between a rubber jointed snaffle, D-ring snaffles, plain snaffles, and full-cheek French-link snaffles. Horses wore headcollars under their bridles and had leading reins either around their necks or coiled and attached to their saddles. Several of the numnahs had small attached saddle bags that got soaked when crossing rivers. Some riders favoured larger leather saddle bags, others simply used the pockets of their various garments.

### **The Route, and Maps**

#### **Way Finding:**

A combination of maps from the Turkish government and Google Earth was essential. Read in the light of Evliya's descriptions and those of other travellers, the maps we had provided a trial itinerary. Ercihan checked parts of the route by motorbike some months before the expedition began. During the expedition, he often took the motorbike to scout out the day's route, either before starting or upon arrival in camp. Throughout the ride, consultation with local people was a critical part of determining the best rideable tracks and ways, away from asphalt roads. Amongst the riders, Ercihan and Sedat as native speakers and Caroline as fluent in Turkish did most of the negotiating about routes. Other members of the party who could speak Turkish occasionally chipped in (Mac, Donna, Andy, Tricia).

Ercihan has an excellent eye for country. He has an uncanny sense of direction, and of where to ride, at what pace, which tracks to follow, and which to avoid. The expedition's famous getting-lost-in-the-forest adventure, described in the blog entry written from Kütahya, occurred in his absence, when he was taking an Equitours ride in Cappadocia and we were guiding ourselves, aided by Sedat.

#### **Logic of the Route:**

Hersek was where horseback travellers going from Istanbul into Anatolia would ship their horses across the Izmit Gulf in small boats. A first camp there made good sense, in order to avoid the congestion of Istanbul. It is hoped that future horseback travellers will attempt this ride, and beginning from Hersek comes highly recommended. The route of the ride hinges on Kütahya, passing through and ending in this important Anatolian and Ottoman city, which has embraced Evliya as a 'native son', dedicated a small museum to him, and plans a large statue memorialising him. (Evliya himself states that he was born in Istanbul, at Unkapanı, but that all his father's family were from Kütahya.) The point of the looping itinerary – southeastwards to Afyon and back westwards to Uşak, Eski Gediz, and Simav, before returning to Kütahya – is that Evliya himself very rarely travelled straight unless he was on an official mission. When travelling to please himself, he followed obligation, curiosity, whim, and desire, and wound his way from place to place circuitously, even backtracking if he received a tempting invitation or heard of a site it would be interesting to visit. When embarking upon the *haj*, therefore, he went from Kütahya to Afyon, and then back to Uşak, before proceeding to Eski Gediz and Simav enroute to Izmir. This is by no means a direct or even obvious route to Mecca!

### Changes to Maps and Routes:

The initial idea had been to follow Evliya to Izmir but research on the route during the summer of 2008 revealed Evliya's important connections to Kütahya, as well as that city's beautiful Ottoman architecture, sense of cultural heritage, and thriving local horse culture centred around *rahvan*

riding and racing. It seemed most appropriate to end a sustainable tourism route there, rather than in urban Izmir. This decision explains the change of route map – from the map showing Izmir as the final destination that originally appeared on the Long Riders' Guild website, announcing the Great Anatolian Ride, to what appears on the University of Kent website for the project (

[www.kent.ac.uk/english/evliya/index.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/english/evliya/index.html)

) as well as on the blog.

A second change of route was decided upon during the ride. Evliya's itinerary between Afyon and Uşak is very confusing. He appears to have gone both sharply south to Şuhut and Sandıklı, and sharply west to Boyalı, Sinanpaşa, and Banaz. The original plan was to ride to Şuhut and Sandıklı and thence to Banaz and Uşak. This plan might well have put the total mileage of the route at 1000 miles. But much of the riding would have been over a fairly flat and seemingly empty plain about which Evliya has almost nothing to say. One gets the impression that he covered this part of the itinerary at great speed, hardly stopping. Taking this route might have led to a comparatively boring itinerary for the Evliya Çelebi Way. It would also have added another week or ten days to the expedition in its entirety, postponing arrival at the fascinating horse- and mule-powered village of Ovacık and the *cirit*-pursuing environs of Uşak by at least a

week. And all the while, the clement autumnal weather was holding, but could change drastically at any moment. Once winter was upon us, the later portions of the ride back up into the mountains on the way to Kütahya would become extremely difficult if not impossible. The expedition members decided at Afyon to take the more direct but also much more historically rich and detailed route described by Evliya that led to Uşak through Boyalı, Sinanpaşa, and Banaz. (How one would have satisfactorily combined both routes in one journey, as he claims he did, remains a mystery.) The expedition party felt entirely gratified by this change of plan when the new route led through some of the most interesting and hospitable horse country of the entire trip, as well as some of the most stunningly beautiful landscapes.

### The Ride

The initial group who set out from Hersek consisted of seven horses (Anadolu, Titiz, Sarhoş, Ilos, Elis, Asya, and Hidalgo) with six riders (Ercihan Dilari, Donna Landry, Caroline Finkel, Gerald MacLean, Susan Wirth, and Thérèse Tardif), leaving one horse as *yedek* or stand-by each day. After 24 days, the party were joined by Patricia Daunt and Andy Byfield, the very day that Gerald MacLean (Mac) injured his foot on the support vehicle ramp, confining him to the cab for the next fortnight and making available an extra horse for the newcomers. Susan, Thérèse, Tricia, and Andy all had to leave the ride, because of other commitments, after the 32<sup>nd</sup> day.

Various Turkish friends and supporters were fortunately able to join the ride intermittently until the 40<sup>th</sup> day, after which the original core organisers were the only riders left. On the last day of riding, the 41<sup>st</sup> day, Ercihan, Donna, and Caroline, riding Anadolu, Titiz, and Sarhoş, with Ilos as *yedek*, arrived at the ancient site of Çavdarhisar (Aizanoi, the easternmost temple of Zeus in mainland Anatolia), along with Mac, Metin, and Sedat (plus the puppies Emine and Pamuk who joined the party at Büyükoturak) in the support vehicle.

The plan for the expedition was to continue riding for two or three more days, although the exact route was still under discussion, and to be joined by Mac on Ilos as soon as possible for a triumphant entrance into Kütahya.

Unfortunately, the turning of the month from October to November coincided with the arrival of snow in the mountains and high ground and a sharp temperature drop throughout Turkey. This extreme change in the weather would have made both travelling over the mountains to Kütahya

and camping with the horses in the snow, given the equipment available, very tricky if not foolhardy, although some nineteenth-century travellers did brave such conditions. The change in the weather also coincided with the totally unexpected impounding of the expedition's support vehicle by the police in Çavdarhisar. An unforeseen circumstance that could have arisen at any time during the trip, this development was a consequence of a debt outstanding against the title of the vehicle when it had belonged to a previous owner. Nobody on the expedition was responsible for this illegality, but it fell to the members of the group to sort it out. All riders and horses, in motorised transport, had to accompany the support vehicle to Kütahya under police escort on the 42<sup>nd</sup> day. The coinciding of the severe weather with this intervention by the police and the expedition's proximity to Kütahya, where the legal matter would need to be sorted out, could be said to have been fortuitous. Upon arrival in Kütahya, the expedition announced its completion to the mayor, Mustafa Iça, a keen supporter of the project. He was delighted to learn that the group had returned safely. He held a press conference in his office. Nobody was interested in seeing the horses ridden into the city for a second time, given the inclement (in Turkish terms) conditions that prevailed.

### Ride Details:

The expedition averaged 30 and sometimes achieved 40 kilometres a day on full days. There were some half days or days with a late start as a result of hospitality or press coverage. There were complete days off for the horses near major cities so that the expedition could follow Evliya into town (Izник, Bursa, Kütahya, Afyon, Uşak, Simav).

On most days the ride began at 9:30 or 10 and finished at 6 pm. In late October, when the time changed, we had to finish by 5 to arrive in daylight. Water, fruit, biscuits, and sometimes tins were carried in our saddle bags. There were frequent stops to drink tea at villages as well as a lunch stop. We often exchanged provisions with villagers or purchased food along the way.

We kept up a fast walking pace for most of the ride, trotted intermittently, and cantered if the going appeared to be really sound and good. Many fields are riddled with *gelincik* holes (the burrows of a small hibernating mammal, *mustela frenata*, or long-tailed weasel) and should not be casually galloped over.

What the expedition has proved beyond a doubt is how suitable the western Anatolian countryside remains for riding, trekking, and other forms of sustainable tourism. So long as

traditional agricultural practices of semi-nomadic grazing and farmers' shared use of the land keep the countryside open and unprivatised, Turkey remains one of the very few places in the developed world in which it is possible to make such long distance cross-country journeys unhindered by 'No Trespassing!' signs and barbed wire fences. Turkish hospitality guarantees travellers safe passage and a warm welcome.

Even in western Anatolia, Turkey's most developed region, horse-, mule-, and donkey-power is still employed, although the tractor is very much a feature of the landscape. Horses are working animals, therefore, but they are also creatures of beauty and recreation for many rural Turks. Especially in the places where *rahvan* and *cirit* are practiced, riding horses for pleasure is also beginning to catch on. The time is ripe to promote long distance riding on a larger scale.

### Media Interest

Interest in the ride on the part of the Turkish press was great, and stories and interviews appeared on television and in more than a dozen newspapers including the nationally distributed *Radikal* and *Hürriyet*. The first newspaper story covering the ride, in the Turkish national daily *Hürriyet*, announced that the expedition was following Evliya all the way to Mecca. This was only the first of a number of myths or mistakes perpetrated by the press, although the coverage itself was favourable. Indeed, given appropriate sponsorship and permits, the expedition would have been delighted to carry on to Mecca and beyond!

Throughout the expedition, whenever they were interviewed, the participants suggested that since Evliya was born in 1611, 2011 would be an appropriate time during which to celebrate his achievements by naming that year 'The Year of Evliya Çelebi.' Expedition members were overjoyed to learn that UNESCO has recently announced that 2011 will indeed be the UNESCO 'Year of Evliya Çelebi'.

Submitted by Donna Landry

<http://www.thelongridersguild.com/GAR-report.htm>