All the World Beneath Your Feet, *The Sunday Times*, 23 July 2000 (The Lycian Way)

Mac woke me at about six. I never sleep well on hard ground, and that night, camping on the edge of a ravine, high above Turkey's Lycian coast, had been no different. It was only as the sun came up that I finally felt ready to slip into a warm, recuperative doze: which was precisely the moment that Mac chose to greet me with his wet, doggy muzzle. As far as he was concerned, it was time to start the day. His decision, it appeared, was final. Kate, my guide and travelling companion, and Mac's long- suffering owner, was already up. With a handful of pine needles she brought our smouldering fire back to life, and soon had a pot of tea going. Then Ramazan, a local shepherd boy, joined us. He had befriended Mac the previous evening and Kate had promised that when daylight came he could look through her binoculars. While he scanned the horizon, we breakfasted on cheese and olives, cleaned the fire-blackened pots with a handful of leaves and then hit the road again.

It was as we were descending into a valley, past little flocks of women in white headscarves planting tobacco, that we came to the cottage. *"Merhaba! Merhaba. Nasilsin?* How are you?" the inhabitants shouted, and invited us in for tea and breakfast. It was too spontaneous and tempting an offer to decline. We tied Mac to a post, sat down in the shade of a mulberry tree and began our second meal of the morning: fresh yoghurt and honey, tomatoes, olives, and bread, all home-grown, and the inevitable cheese.

That's when this particular scene of pastoral bliss suddenly transformed itself into one of pandemonium. As we were chatting away with some of our hosts, the man of the house led two cows out of the stable. For reasons we could only guess at, one of them took an instant dislike to Mac. The moment she saw him, she broke her halter, lowered her head and charged. Her sharp horns missed him only by a fraction of an inch, and within seconds she had turned around, ready to try again. Poor Mac was terrified. He wrenched his head out of his collar and fled, leaving our rucksacks to take the force of the second charge. By the time we had got the cow under control, he was gone. We called and searched, but could not find him anywhere.

Our hosts were acutely embarrassed, and one of the boys drove Kate on the back of his tractor to the place where we had camped last night. This was where the amateur dog psychologists among us thought it most likely that Mac had gone. I sat by the side of the track and waited. After a while, a motorbike stopped beside me. It was Ramazan's brother. Although he was coming from the wrong direction, he already knew the story of the lost dog. The bush telegraph had been at work.

"*Bulunur*," he said. "*Bulunur*. He will be found." And he was right.

Eventually, I saw Kate, coming down the road with Mac safely on his lead and looking none the worse for wear. He had run six kilometres back to our camp and tried to get down into the ravine that led to a beach where we had swum the evening before. Luckily, Ramazan, out with his goats, had spotted him from the other side and come round to rescue him, for he had missed the path and was slithering dangerously on the edge of a cliff.

"You've lost your watch," I said to Kate. "No, I haven't," she replied. She had given it to Ramazan for saving Mac's bacon.

My companion's full name is Kate Clow. She is a Turkish Englishwoman, who, with her passion for motorbikes and Roman roads, could very comfortably take her own place in that long tradition of eccentric English travellers to which Freya Stark belonged. Kate's contribution, backed by the Turkish government and the Garanti Bank, has been to invent and construct the walk we were doing. Known as the *Likya Yol*u or Lycian Way and opened this year, it is Turkey's first way-marked, long-distance walk.

We did the walk from west to east, starting in Olu Deniz, just outside Fethiye, which is the way Kate's forthcoming guide-book runs. There is no technical difficulty, but the going can be tough. The paths are stony and often steep. You can't live off the land, for villages are few and often lacking even a shop. For much of the way you have to carry your food for three to four days ahead and be equipped to camp. And you can't be too fastidious about water: on some sections, dusty wells and cisterns are the only source – and they might be dry in summer. There are, as yet, no maps, and though the red-and-white-painted markers are pretty good, you have to keep your eyes open. However, as the day of Mac's adventure showed, there are few ways to better acquaint yourself with the rhythms and textures of rural Turkey than this route. Even if you're not chased up hill and down dale by mad cows, you are at least guaranteed a close inspection of a way of life unchanged for centuries.

But what really distinguishes the Lycian Way from any other walks I know is its intimate, almost careless, relationship with history. This is, after all, an area with a rich and crowded past. For starters, the whole of the Aegean and the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor – which is now modern Turkey – was colonised by the Greeks from early in the first millennium BC and subject to a distinctly Hellenistic influence right up until the forced exchange of populations after the Greek-Turkish wars of 1919-21. : Lycia, in particular,

enjoyed a period of ascendancy and a unique culture between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, before falling into the hands first of Alexander the Great's successors and then the Romans. Later, Arabs, Crusaders, Genoese and Armenians established themselves along its length. Traces of all these hands are visible still, and nowhere more so than along this path, their romance and charm enhanced by the fact that so many of the sites are unfenced and unticketed, the old stones just lying there naturally among the scrub and goat pastures.

One of my favourite places was the village of Dodurga. The houses stand among the ruins of ancient Sidyma: tombs jut out of the mule-tilled fields, sections of columns are stacked in the hedges or support the porch of the mosque, and a grave serves as a potting shed. At Ucagiz, by the sea, and at Sura, on a hill above the coast, the path winds among great grey sarcophagi, some holed by grave-robbers, some with their enormous boat-shaped lids still in place. At Myra, above a big Roman theatre, the red cliffs are riddled with the carved, rock-cut tombs of the Lycians. Nearby stands the church of St Nicholas, where the saint we know as Santa Claus officiated in the 4th century AD.

There are castles, harbours and forts. And there are lots of vernacular monuments too: sheepfolds and cobbled mule roads, wells and cisterns, even the terraced hillsides and settlements where the herders take their flocks, and where the peasants repair for coolness in the summer. Who knows how old these are? The way of life and movement in these remote rural areas can have changed very little until now.

We did not walk every step of the way. We hopped along the route: four or five days on foot, then skipping a bit and walking again, Kate giving me a taste of its variety. There is not much scope for indulgence. The only chance of the three summertime "Ds" – drink, dance and dalliance – is in the little resort of Kas, which also has a magnificent cliff cut with tombs, a real gem of a theatre and a Greek church converted to a mosque.

In Kas we joined forces with three Dutch journalists. When Kate and Mac had to leave at the overgrown Lycian harbour of Olympos, the Dutchmen and I went on together to tackle the crux of the route, the 2,366-metre Tahtali Dag.

The weather was not encouraging. Grey drizzle fell and mist hung in the trees. At about 1,600 metres, the pines gave way to storm-beaten cedars and the gradient levelled off. Alpine flowers appeared – squills, pink *corydalis solida,* rich blue anemones and, in one place, a colony of deep-red peonies. We camped and lit a huge fire, though the tents and my bivvy bag were, nonetheless, rimed with ice by morning.

In the night, the sky cleared, but by the time we set off up the last 600 metres of scree and rock, the clouds were threatening to close in again. We took compass bearings as a precaution, for the summit ridge is not easy to escape from. But our luck was in; we had half an hour of brilliant sunshine to admire the view over the sea and the receding ranges of mountains behind us. It was only about midday, when we were already well down into the forest, that the storm overtook us, with hail rattling on our waterproofs and the lightning doing its damnedest to turn us to cinders. We were rescued, somewhat incongruously, by a 4WD safari of Ukrainian and German tourists, by which time I had abandoned any intention of continuing alone for the last four or five days and crept off to Antalya with the others.

But then, that is how it is. When I started out of my sleep the following morning, as the 5am call to prayer from a nearby minaret cracked like a whip in my ear, the sun was shining from a cloudless sky. I looked out of my *pansiyon* window and there, beyond the sea and the brown-tiled roofs and the bending cypresses of the pretty but neglected old quarter of Antalya, was Tahtali, its shoulders glistening with the innocent white of the freshly fallen snow. I knew then that I would have to come back.

Tim Salmon travelled as a guest of Turkish Airlines