TOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF AĞRI MOUNTAIN

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Introduction

Ağrı Mountain is situated near the joint of the border of Turkey, Armenia, Azarbayjan (Autonomous Republic of Nahjavan) and Iran. This mountain is in the most extremity of the mountaneous mass which is the extention of middle Toros, and which starts from the Munzur Mountains and ranges to Karasu-Aras Mountains. Approximately 65 % of the mountain is in the boundaries of Iğdır Province, and 35 % is in the boundaries of Ağrı Province.

With its peak of 5137 m, it is the highest mountain of Turkey. This mountain is 15 km from Iğdır Province and 20 km from Doğubeyazıt town. Doğubeyazıt is connected to Gürbulak Customs House in the Iranian border via E23 highway and from there to the main highway of Turkey and Iğdır Province is connected to Dilucu Customs House in the border of Azarbayjan via D080 highway and from there to the main highway of Turkey.

There are regular bus services from these towns to the large cities every day. The nearest airports are in Ağrı (100 km), in Kars (130 km) and in Erzurum (345 km). An airport has been constructed in also Iğdır province. There are hotels in Iğdır province and Doğubeyazıt to accomodate the tourists coming to Ağrı Mountain. In 1988 there were 17 licenced hotels belonging to manucipality and the number of the beds reached 1151.

Ağrı Mountain, a mass originated from a volcanoe, with its 128 km surroundings and with an area of 1188 km², situated on an area of large basis. Actually it is not a single mass, it is like two cones named Great Ağrı (5137 m) and Little Ağrı (3896 m). These two cones are divided from each other by the neck point of Serdarbulak passage with an altitude of 2700 m.

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Figure 1. Location and Topographical Map of Ağrı Mountain.

İğdir-Erivan plain lies in the North of Ağrı Mountain, through which Aras river flows. In the south of the mountain Doğubeyazıt plain lies. As
the northern plain is more close to sea level (about 800 m), especially the view of Ağrı Mountain from the north is more spectacular. For it reaches 43000 m abruptly over the plain of Iğdır.

According to Bulumenthal and Abich, the formation of Ağrı volcanoes occurred in two stages. During the first stage in the pliyosen, the andesitic stratovolcanic structure of both mountains occurred\(^1\). During the second stage, that is in the Kuvaternery, the newest basaltic lava flows and parasitic side colonies which prepared today’s morphology of these mountains occurred\(^2\).

No record has been observed as to whether Ağrı Mountain activated during the historical ages. That is, Ağrı Mountain has kept its feature of being inactive volcano throughout the history.

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The steep slopes of the mountain have been split by means of the profound radiant valleys extending from the summit to the foot. Cehennemderesi Valley, the greatest and the most famous of these, is on the north-eastern slope of the mountain. There is an ice-berg which is 6-7 km-long and covered with stone and soil in this deep valley, which starts from today’s Yenidoğan Village (Ahrç) established at the height of 1700 m. On the northern part of the valley there are two small caves in a place about 2500 m. One of them is called “Lawrence Cave”. According to the reports, Lawrence, an English spy, stayed in this cave and launched the revolt of Ağırı³. There is a fountain on the southern slope and approximately over 2800-3000 m of the subsidence. This is called “the Fountain of Prophet Jacob”. It is said that Prophet Jacob came there and took ablution and prayed⁴.

It is impossible to reach the summit by following the valley. Because at the end of the valley avalanches of ice-berg occur from hundreds of meters height. It is possible to see wild goats very often in the Cehennemderesi Valley. As the most steepy places of the mountain are here, the valley is a very good shelter and pasture for the animals in winter⁵.

There are various caves at the feet of the Great Ağırı Mountain, which is named “Cow Valley” by the local people. These caves which can hold hundreds of animals serve as natural shelters to the animals taken to mountain pasture. The Great Ağırı Mountain is covered with a covering of constant snow from about 4000 m and in the higher altitudes with “skullcap ice-berg”. 11 hanging ice-bergs were determined in this part. The length of the stretches of the ice-berg ranges from 0.5 Km to 1.5 Km⁶. Of all, the ice-berg following the Cehennemderesi Valley is the longest. The stretch of this ice-berg goes down to 3500 m. The thickness of the ice-berg becomes 50m from time to time. With its area of 12 km² skullcap ice-berg of the Great Ağırı Mountain is the biggest ice-berg of Turkey. Avalanches occur continuously in the Cehennemderesi Valley on the northeastern part of the mountain and in the Buzhane district of the eastern part and, therefore, noises are heard very often.

⁴ Doğru, A.M., 1989, the article mentioned, P.87.
⁵ Doğru, A.M., 1989, the article mentioned, P.87.
On the top of the great Ağrı Mountain there are two hills, one is called Aralıkk Hill, the other is called Doğubeyazıt Hill, each measuring 50 m. One is only 10-15 cm lower than the other. The subsidence between these hills opens to the beginning of the valley. In the slope opening towards Mıhtıpe with an altitude of 4200 m from the eastern summit facing the Aralıkk town and on the left side of this, the mountain emits sulfur. That is why the snow is yellowish there and the breathes of the climbers stop more rapidly than those of western slope. And, again, therefore matches do not catch fire easily.

Little Ağrı volcano cone rising in the southeastern part of the Great Ağrı Mountain, unlike Great Ağrı Mountain, is more vertical and exactly in a cone shape. There is a crater cavity on top of the volcano cone. Because of the steep slopes, it is possible to see rolling stones very often.

Like all of other great mountains, Ağrı Mountain has a quite different climatic condition compared to its surroundings. That is why, while on the mountain, it is almost impossible to predict how the weather will be the next day depending on the weather forecast. The weather on Ağrı Mountain is generally clear before noon and then with the formation of clouds at 14 o'clock, the weather gets worse. In the afternoon the weather becomes foggy over 4500 m, it snows and there is a severe wind. The worst weather in summer is at the end of July and at the beginning of August. The local people call this as the Tail Storm. The basic dangers of ascending the summit during the bad weather are the hail, and as a result of this, the danger of the stroke of lightning.

Camping on the eastern hill is very difficult and dangerous because of the severe wind and storm. That is why, it is necessary to take strong tents and to fix the tents with screws.

The treelike plants are rare on the slopes of Ağrı Mountain. With the exception of short birch and juniper trees the middle part of the mountain which is between 1500-3500 m is covered with wide pastures. This situation is related to the stoniness of water caused by the drainage of the rocks of volcano origin, which forms the basis of the mountain as well as to the shortness of the rain in the surroundings.

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7 Doğru, A. M., 1989, the article mentioned, P.87.
8 Doğru, A. M., 1989, the article mentioned, P.86.
9 Tail (Comet) is the name given to a star and the bad weather starts on Ağrı Mountain with the emergence of this star.
10 Doğru, A. M., 1989, the article mentioned, P.86.
11 Doğru, A. M., 1989, the article mentioned, P.87.
Ağrı Mountain, which is called Kuh-i Nus by Iranians, is still known as “Ararat” in the Western world. Ararat is not a concept from Armenian language, it is the name given to Urartu Country by Asurians. It is highly probable that the name “Ağrı” came from Turkish of Shamanism period. For in the Dictionary of Yakut Language written by Pekarsky, “Ağrı” or “Ağrı” means “Huge” or “God”

Touristic Attractions of Ağrı Mountain

There are various attractions of Ağrı Mountain turistically. The first one is, the greatness of the mountain. The feature giving this appearance to Ağrı Mountain, from base its height of 4300 m and its sharp summit. The lack of another summit to compete with it contributes an excellent view to the mountain. When the weather is not foggy and cloudy, the summit of the mountain can be seen from Ağrı, Van, Kars and from the higher parts of Bitlis and from Armenia, Nahjavân and from the areas near to Iranian border.

Other features making Ağrı Mountain attractive turistically are: This mountain is highly suitable to nature sports, winter tourism, mountain joggings, mountain biking, and parachute of slope. Ağrı Mountain, really, has all the features the people related to mountain sports need. In addition to the easy ways to climb up the mountain, there are difficult sides the qualified mountaineers search for. The height of the climbing distance and the possibility of reaching the place of the start of climbing by means of the motorvehicles is also another important advantage. Whereas in many countries in order to be able to reach the base of the mountain, sometimes it is necessary to walk days, Ağrı Mountain is in such a situation as to be able to reach easily via asphalt roads going to such centers as Doğubeyazıt, İğdır and Araklı. For instance, a person departing by bus from the furthest point of Turkey can arrive at the area next day and start climbing.

Climbing up the Great Ağrı Mountain is not only for the purpose of mountain sports, but mostly for scientific purposes. The first climbing for scientific purpose was realized by F. Parrot and his crew in 1829. This was followed by such geologists as H. Abich in 1845, W. Wager in 1948, A. Oswald in 1900 and M. Bulumenthal in 1955 in order to search for the geological structure of the mountain. Major Çevdet Sunay was the person who climbed up Ağrı Mountain and put the statue of Atatürk on the summit in 1937.

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12 Doğru, A. M., 1989, the article mentioned, P.88.
According to the Holly Books, "Vineyards of Irem" where Adem and Ewe lived are on the northern part of this mountain, somewhere in the valley of Aras river. And, again, according to the rumors, the Ark on which Noah and his followers boarded, landed on this mountain after the floods receded.

Thus, Ağrı Mountain is considered to be one of the holy mountains of Turkey and it is well-known even in the western world. Therefore, some of the strangers climbing up the Ağrı Mountain set out in order to seek for the remnants of Noah's Ark and others come to watch the mountain because of believing in the legend of Noah's Ark.

Climbing up and down Ağrı Mountain lasts at least 4 days. The most suitable time for climbing is in August and in September. During the climbing period in August, after 4500 m, the temperature drops to -10 °C. And during September to -12 °C\(^{14}\). The weather is clear before noon, after then due to the formation of the clouds over the mountain, it gets worse towards 14 o'clock. That is why the mountaineers are accustomed to climbing up and down before or until this hour.

Conclusion And Recommendations

Approximately 1200 tourists come to Ağrı Mountain annually. This touristic action provides financial support to the economy of the area even in a small portion. However, it is predicted that on condition that the touristic potential of Ağrı Mountain is thoroughly used, at least 1 Million US Dollars will be earned annually.

Ağrı Mountain has a superior characteristic of attracting more stranger tourists because of the legend of the Flood of Noah. This high touristic potential of Ağrı Mountain awaits exploiting. We expect that, to a certain height of the mountain (i.e. at the 4500 m) a symbolic Noah's Ark can be placed and by installing a telephercic line from the surrounding of Kâzım Karabekir Farming Institution at Aralıık to here and from the facilities to the summit of the mountain, it will be possible attract a lot of domestic and foreigner tourists. And on the foot of the mountain touristic facilities ought to be constructed. However, while these facilities are being constucted, a special care should be given in order not to destroy the natural appearance of the area. Therefore, by bringing electricity and water, a regular camping places should be formed and it should be emphasised that the services in these camping palces should be given in tents (especially in black tents).

\(^{14}\) Doğanay, H., 1985, the work mentioned, P.94.
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