

Aksaray to Avanos

written by Marcus | 10 March, 2015



You may be surprised to hear that I believe in fairies. For a start there's the P*nct*re Fairy, a spiteful little creature who takes great delight in deflating tyres at the most inconvenient time and is easily summoned just by mentioning the P word a few times. A good friend of hers is the Adventure Fairy who gets her kicks from chucking in a few mishaps and a dash of crisis during a trip just when you least expect it. With the proliferation of Microadventures taking hold all over the UK the Adventure Fairy has had her hands full trying to keep up with the number of bivvy bags that need raining on and stoves that need preventing from lighting. As such we've been allowed to get away with having far too good a time for far too long. But sooner or later the evil little flying pests were bound to catch up with us and have a bit of a score to

settle.

Once we arrive in Aksaray we stop at a petrol station for fuel for the stove and meet a man who thinks he looks like Tony Blair. It's uncanny, but only if you shut your eyes very tight. He offers us a Turkish flag for the back of the bike to help us win favour with other drivers on the road. It seems to work as we get plenty of waves and beeps as we ride across the town.



Flying the flag

It's been a long day so after buying fuel for our stomachs we find a small park near the outskirts which seems quiet and

dark enough for us not to be noticed and get the tent up.



Park Life. Aksaray

In the night Kirsty is woken up by a noise that sounds like someone tripping on a guy rope but when she opens her eyes there's light pouring in through a gaping hole in the side of the tent. Still half asleep it takes a few moments to realise what is going on. but then I jump out of the tent to see that there is no-one there, however several street lights have been switched on, lighting us up like a Christmas tree. Christmas isn't popular here and someone must have wanted to demonstrate that by delivering a sharp rock straight through the tent. Kirsty had found the offending object lying next to her while I was checking the bike.



Extra ventilation for the tent

We don't sleep much for the rest of the night, but for the few minutes that I do dose off my dreams are filled with images of all sorts of things breaking.

In the morning we can survey the damage more clearly and it's going to take some careful stitching and a good roll of gaffa tape to get our home weatherproof again. We can only be grateful that the missile didn't land on either of us and cause more painful damage. At least we weren't hurt.



Inspecting the weapon of choice while Kirsty tries to stitch the hole

In despondant mood we pack up and get going early and cover all of 900m when a car pulls out from a turning on our left, drives the wrong way down the road towards us then turns right across our path. There's not much time to react to such an unexpected manoeuvre so I swerve as best I can. A front pannier comes into contact with the car's rear wing and is ripped clean off. We wobble violently but stay upright.

I push the bike to the side of the road and throw the damaged pannier down in frustration while Kirsty has a sit down and takes some deep breaths. The driver of the car is a nurse and was just turning into the hospital. She comes to see if we're ok then asks us if we'd like to go and drink tea. This is not the time for tea as all we can think about is how we can continue when the pannier is ruined. At least we weren't hurt.



Pannier vs car. Car wins

She calls her husband and a few other people gather round while we try to explain our predicament. They agree to drive

us back into Aksaray to see what the local bike shops have and also to see if anyone can fix the pannier but our hopes are set very low on finding a possible solution from either option.

It's not a huge town and the only pannier we find amounts to little more than a school satchel. Our best option seems to be the Vaude dealer that we'd visited back in Ankara so I borrow a phone and give him a ring. He needs to see if he can get the bag we want from the Vaude distributor so I leave him to look into it and also for him to arrange a courier to get it to us.

Meanwhile we are driven back to the scene of the accident to be reunited with our bike. Another nurse who speaks better English is found and the negotiations begin. The driver and her husband think they've done enough by trying to help us find a new bag so want to walk away, but of course we're not happy to leave it at that and tell them about the cost of the new bag. The driver protests saying that the fault lies 50:50 and so they offer to pay half, also pleading that they don't have much money. Turkish law may be different but in our view, a driver driving the wrong way down a road and turning onto an oncoming bike should take more than half the blame. We tell her this and are given an ultimatum: either take half the cash or call the traffic police. Sitting through a foreign police procedure doesn't sound like much fun so we pursue the cash option and give our own demands for 200 TL, the approximate cost of the new bag adding that we now have to stay in Aksaray until it arrives, which maybe tomorrow (Saturday) or possibly Monday. At this the husband reluctantly pulls out a huge roll of bank notes and peels off a couple of 100s before climbing back into his new Volvo. The nurse offers a few apologies and then dashes off into the hospital.

The rest of the morning is spent in a cafe organising the delivery of the new pannier and finding somewhere to stay for the night. One of the waiters used to live on the south coast of England so speaks good English and is happy to help

wherever he can. He lets us use his phone to speak to the bike shop in Ankara and the good news is that they have the pannier and it can be delivered tomorrow morning, all for 190 TL, which is convenient.

A flurry of emails to couch surfing and warm showers hosts brings back a quick reply from Ahmet who is more than happy to help even though it's short notice. We then spend the afternoon on a park bench in Aksaray taking stock of an eventful morning and watching the crowds pass by. Every now and then a different small boy would arrive to try and sell us tissues. These are Syrian, Afghan and Somali refugees, a lot of whom will have walked hundreds of km to escape the troubles in their home countries. Our inconveniences seem incredibly petty by comparison.

We meet up with Ahmet in the evening and he and his girlfriend Orkide treat us to a great meal while Ahmet explains that he loves to assist travellers in need. He is a member of a Turkish emergency medical response team that can be deployed anywhere in the world in case of a disaster. Ahmet and Orkide have half a dozen 10 day old Labrador puppies for us to play with so the panniers will have to be checked before we leave in case Kirsty has tried to smuggle one out.

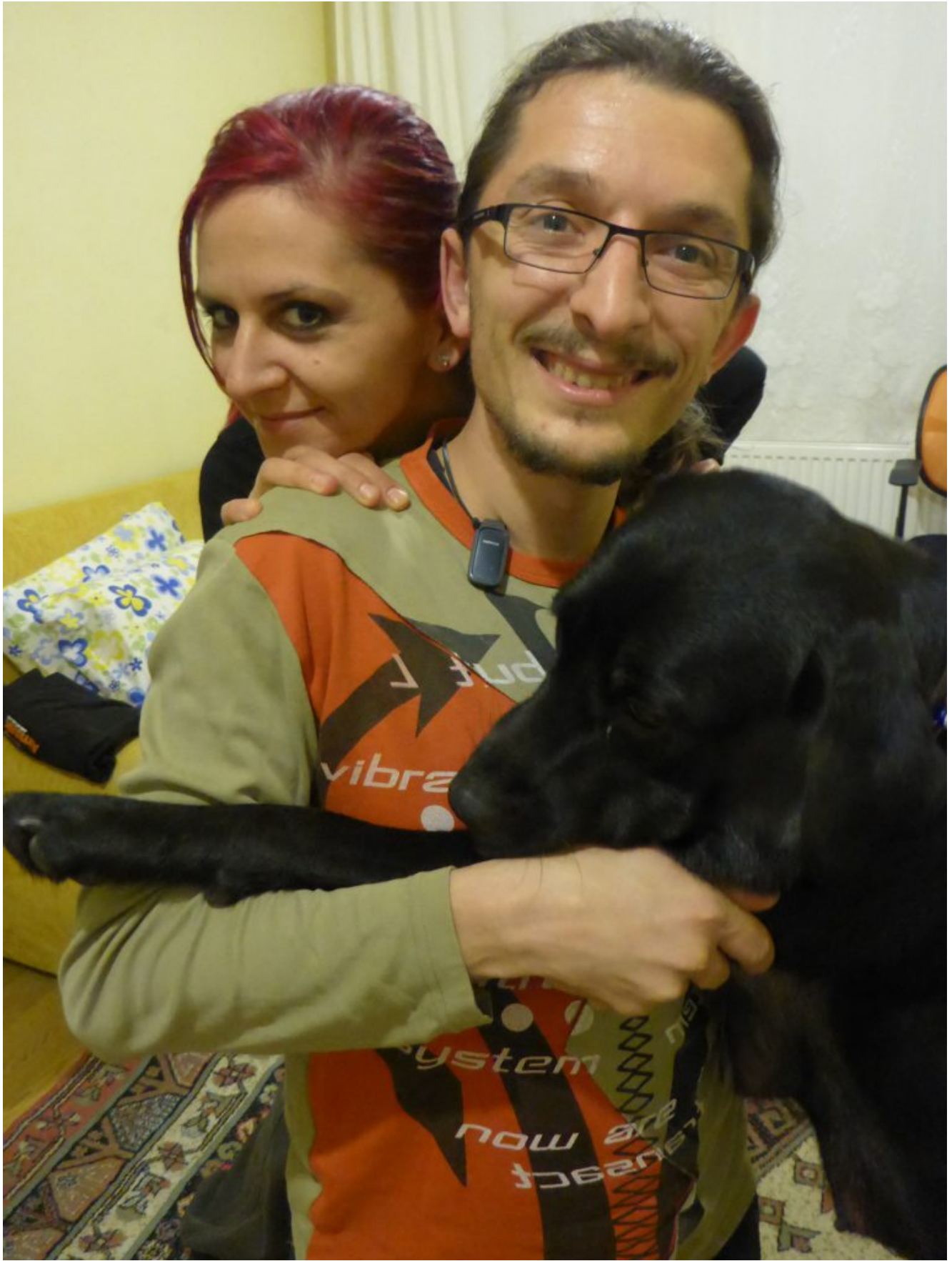


The milk bar



There really isn't any more room in the panniers Kirsty
In the morning we drive to the parcel depot and miraculously
the new pannier is there waiting for us, which means we can

get back on the road again. Waving goodbye to Ahmet and Orkide, and counting all 5 of the puppies, we set off into the glorious sunshine with Mount Hasan taking centre stage again for our view.



Orkide Ahmet and Dost



The shiny new pannier

The road to Nevşehir has a wide shoulder and being a Saturday there isn't much traffic. The temperature climbs to the mid

20s so we're in shorts and t-shirts and pootling along nicely. In many ways we are glad to be clear of Aksaray as it seemed to be a town that held bad luck for us. But at the same time we had made some new friends and hoped that we'd meet them again sometime and somewhere.



Pastures around Mount Hasan



Shepherd near Aksaray

Of course Lady Luck hadn't quite finished with us as she tends to favour dishing out her misfortune in batches of three.

After spinning up a long drag we crested the hill to see a straight descent followed by another long climb. We needed as much momentum as possible to get up the other side so we tuck down and pick up speed. I remember glancing down and seeing the speedo pass 60 kph then shortly after there's a sound that every cyclist dreads. A loud hiss from the front wheel is very quickly followed by the sound of tearing rubber, then crunching gravel and the world flips upside down.



0.01 km/h later, all hell broke loose

The bike, bags and its two riders all eventually come to a stop in a heap on the hard shoulder after bouncing and sliding

along for an unknown distance. We've both picked up a fair bit of road rash and Kirsty has a bleeding lip but on first inspection there are no major injuries so we sit and take deep breaths trying to compose ourselves.

The bike has taken a good whack too with my bars twisted and bent, the front tyre ripped and several chips in the rim. Most annoying of all though is that the only bag to be damaged is of course the brand new pannier. It lasted 35km.



Not sure we can ride away from this one

We flag down a truck from Iran whose driver takes one look at the bike, shakes his head then drives off. Shortly after

another truck pulls over and is a bit happier about chucking everything in the back and letting us climb into the cab. We just have to take our shoes off first as it was fully carpeted.



Our friendly truck driver

Our kind driver takes us to Avanos, 50km away and deposits us outside a cafe while wishing us luck (we could do with more of that). We had intended to get to Avanos the following night and had made arrangements to stay with Arif. We fired off a text message from the truck to warn him we were in a bad way and ask if we could arrive a day early.



Into Cappadocia



Into Cappadocia

While waiting for Arif to come and pick us up the waiters from the cafe come out and give us water. One of the staff is a mountain biker and calls her friend who happens to be the bike mechanic for the Turkish cycling team. Then Ahmet arrives as he happened to be passing by and had spotted us. As he is an emergency anaesthetist he has a good supply of first aid paraphernalia in his car so sets to work bandaging us up. Arif arrives shortly after and then the bike mechanic zooms in on a motorbike to give his assessment of the damaged tandem which in summary is 'no problem, I can fix it'.

We're overwhelmed by the crowd of concerned helpers but during all of this my knee has been getting steadily more painful. It had been bleeding badly when we'd got out of the truck and Kirsty suspected it would need stitches, but for now she had bandaged it tightly.

Our luggage goes in the back of Arif's friend's car with Arif hanging out of the back towing the back half of our bike. We ride in Ahmet's car and after dropping everything off at Arif's house we head to the nearest emergency clinic.



Arif tries an unconventional tandem transportation method
Kirsty's fears are confirmed when they unwrap the bandage on my knee to reveal a big hole, but the clinic isn't able to do much for me there and then. Instead they decide I should have a drip and try to put Kirsty on one too but she manages to refuse. We're then bundled into an ambulance for a ride to the main hospital in Nevşehir.



Ambulance ride

Straight away we're both inspected, scrubbed, disinfected, bandaged and I get several internal stitches and 6 external

staples to hold my knee together again. Kirsty comes away partially mummified to protect the grazing down her sides and with some superglue and steristrips on the cut on her lip. A few x-rays confirm that neither of us have any broken bones and then we're free to go. But not for free. We're handed a lengthy bill and have to pay there and then in cash. So Kirsty heads off to the nearest ATM only to find our daily limit won't allow her to withdraw enough money. When we try and explain this to the hospital they reduce the bill to a sum that we can afford making us wonder if we should have claimed that we had even less? The valuable invoices that we'll need for our insurance claim are printed off for us and we climb into a taxi to head back to Avanos, via a pharmacy for a few antibiotics. Now we need a cup of tea.



Aren't they supposed to shut the door before taking an x-ray?



Kirsty and her amazing technicolour leg



Franken-knee

So here we are again, housebound in Turkey with a waiting game to play. Kirsty has been stiff and sore for the last couple of

days and I can't really walk very far. Hopefully we'll both loosen up over the course of the next week and I'm due back at the hospital to have the staples out next weekend. How soon after that we can ride is anyone's guess, but the bike won't be serviceable for a while anyway. Once again we're at the mercy of the Turkish postal system as there are various specialist parts being sent over from the UK. As Kirsty keeps telling me, this enforced wait is probably a good thing as it prevents me trying to get pedalling too soon anyway.

Yesterday we had to give a statement to the police to say that we didn't want to blame anyone. This seemed like a huge waste of time for all concerned, but they insisted. Apparently if we hadn't gone they may have started a civil case (against whom was not clear since no-one had made a complaint) and this could have been an issue when we tried to leave the country. Quite the opposite reaction to the UK police who would struggle to give an injured cyclist a second glance even if they did want to blame someone. Arif tells us the Turkish police have been known to charge for damage to the road after a bike accident, so hopefully we didn't leave any 'tandem rash' on the hard shoulder.

It's at times like this that we realise just how wonderful and valuable the WarmShowers and Couch Surfing community is as Arif and his girlfriend Gülsün have told us we can stay with them as long as we need to. Gülsün was our translator during the police interrogations. Ahmet has also called in to see how we're doing and asked if he can help in any way. These are people who until a few days ago we'd never met and yet they are opening up their homes to us and doing everything they can to help us out. It's an amazing thing purely brought about by a shared love of pedal power and travelling, and we are incredibly grateful for what they are doing.

Travelling is all about new experiences and the last few days have given us a fair few that we hope to not have to repeat. We're both glad that our injuries are only superficial and

will take each day as it comes for the next week or two. Convalescing in Cappadocia could be worse. The region is famous for its amazing rock formations, cave towns, underground cities and tall rock hoodoos that they call fairy chimneys. Once we're mobile again we'll find the one that the P*nct*re Fairy and Adventure Fairy live under and give them a darn good kicking.



Feet up in Avanos