

Armenia Tree Project



October, 2003

A True Adventure in an Ancient Christian Land
By The Rev. Gordon L. Morrison

Armenia Tree Project (ATP) is replanting groves, parks, and mountain forests in the world's first Christian nation. ATP, which was founded in 1994 to promote Armenia's development by planting trees, is now planning the third annual eco-tourism adventure in Armenia for June 2004. RAID KAREN is the Armenian name for this eco-adventure that helps the environment and at the same time provides opportunity for participants to experience the land and culture of the oldest Christian nation.

RAID KAREN takes place in one of the most isolated countries one could ever hope to visit. It is an independent republic about the size of Maryland that has been freely open to Americans since the collapse of the USSR.

Armenia is an ancient, mountainous nation where the best-known Kentucky native may be the late Rosemary Clooney. Rosemary got her start singing the theme of Armenian hospitality, "Come on-a my house, a my house a come on, I geeve you everything". RAID KAREN 3 will be a great way to experience that legendary hospitality first hand. It would be a perfect few days to tack onto a European tour this coming summer or worth the trip on its own merit. There are regularly scheduled flights to Armenia from the major European capitals. Sponsored in partnership with Paris-based Armenie Sport Nature, RAID KAREN is a truly international holiday with participants coming from Europe, North America, and elsewhere along with the people whose ancestors invented hospitality. That hospitality in 2004 is being planned to include an overnight in a remote village beyond Lake Sevan.

Armenia is located in a corner of the world behind the Caucasus Mountains, beyond the farthest reaches of Europe at the edge of Asia. Bordered by Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, it is a landlocked beacon of light friendly to America located in a stormy neighborhood. From the capital city, Yerevan, on a clear day one can see snow-capped Mount Ararat where Noah landed his Ark. It was the smallest Soviet republic and the first brave enough to declare its independence.

Armenia has incredible vistas, snow capped mountains, sweeping valleys and archaeological sites from bronze-age civilizations. It has some of the oldest churches in the world still in use for Christian liturgy. One can rappel down a mountain cliff starting from an ancient Greek temple following the Eucharist in a church at nearby Geghard. That church at Geghard was hollowed out of the living mountain for protection against persecution a thousand years before Columbus sailed for America.

Armenia Tree Project plants trees to re-establish city parks, to renew ancient church fruit and nut groves for feeding the poor, and to re-establish mountain forests depredated in the last throes of the collapsing Soviet Union. Last year, RAID KAREN participants hiked on glaciers and canoed in Lake Sevan, the world's largest Alpine lake. They got to know modern Armenians, citizens of

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a Christian culture, which has one of the world's highest literacy rates. Many Armenians have some of the most high-tech skills of people anywhere. Their ancestors invented the science of horticulture. Armenians dress, dance, and live as modern people with venerable and rich cuisine, art, and culture. The Armenian Apostolic Church's scriptures are the oldest translation of the Bible still in liturgical use.

Last year, RAID KAREN participants climbed Mount Aragats and bicycled on routes in use since the days of Alexander the Great. They rode horseback in long valleys where Mongol hordes once swept down out of the Asian steppes. By contrast, they also took the subway to tour the capital city of Yerevan where the Opera House is the central building, where pianists can be heard practicing Classical music in the poorest neighborhoods and where the open-air art market on weekends rivals that of Paris' left bank. They visited churches constructed before Christianity reached England and they toured the brand new Armenian Apostolic cathedral whose opening in 2001 was assisted by both the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I had the good fortune of spending a month in Armenia two years ago. I am in love with that land and its people. Our parish here in Henderson, KY has helped pay for the planting of a grove of trees by the ATP. The U.S. was the first to recognize the Republic of Armenia when it broke free from the Soviet Union. In honor of that, vehicle plates issued by the Armenian government to US embassy staff cars start with the number one in red. It made me proud to be an American every time I saw one of those tags on a car going by.

RAID KAREN 3 is being planned for June 2004 right now. Call Armenia Tree Project's US offices at 617-926-8733 (ask for information about RAID KAREN). You can also check out www.armeniatree.org, or if you read French, try www.ifrance.com/raidkaren for more information about last year's RAID KAREN.