

In the Shade of the Great Cedar and Stinking Juniper

We were in the [Beydaglari mountains](#) in the Western Toros range, home to the largest forest of Toros cedars in the world. Above our heads was an evergreen roof of needle-leafed branches, so thickly woven that the sunlight could not filter through. Accompanied by our guide, the Camkuyu forest warden, we were walking along an earth road stretching for kilometres deep into the forest. We were bubbling with excitement, because at any moment we might come across the monumental Toros cedar (*Cedrus libani*). To our inexperienced eyes each one of the centuries old cedars with their thick trunks which surrounded us seem to deserve the epithet of monumental, but when we finally caught sight of a tree very different from the others we stopped in astonishment. Named the Great Cedar, this tree is 1050 years old and its trunk is 2.5 metres in diameter. Although its Latin name means cedar of Lebanon, modern botanists believe the tree to be a native of Anatolia. Only small clumps of the tree now exist in Lebanon, and the last forests of this

imposing giant survive in the Toros Mountains.

Cedar timber was so sought after by the civilisations of the Mediterranean for thousands of years, that the once vast forests of the tree have disappeared. The timber is not only strong and resistant to damp, but has a scent pleasant to human beings but repellent to insect pests. An aromatic volatile oil can be extracted from the wood. [Camkuyu](#) is the paradise of the Toros cedar, and here the protected Cedar Research Forest is situated in the district of Elmali west of Antalya. Of the many ancient trees in the forest, the 1050 year old Great Cedar and a 800 year old stinking juniper (*Juniperus foetidissima*) are the oldest. The area also abounds in other plant and animal species. Just west of Camkuyu is another nature reserve, Ciglikara, where there are nearly four hundred plant species, many of them unique to this region, and numerous large mammals, including bears, lynxes, hyenas, jackals and badgers.

From the Elmali plateau it is an ascent of several hundred metres to the Cedar Research Forest entrance, from which there is a spectacular view over Lake Avlan. If you come in April, May or June, you will be bewitched by the colourful wildflowers and butterflies in the forest glade known as Sarnic Alan. This area, where there is a well, is a walk of several kilometres from the forest entrance, from which there is a spectacular view over Lake Avlan. If you come in April, May or June, you will be bewitched by the colourful wildflowers and butterflies in the forest glade known as Sarnic Alan. This area, where there is a well, is a walk of several kilometres from the forest entrance. From here you can continue on to Camkuyu by taking the track to the southeast through cedar woods. On the way you can make a detour via a narrow path to Burcak Alan,

another forest glade the size of several football fields. This bowl of emerald green grass encircled by cedar trees, with a border of purple vetch around the periphery a

nd singing birds, is a hidden arcadia.

From here, if you turn left from the path to the high pasture of Alasar, you reach the spot where the Great Cedar grows. The largest unwooded area in the region is Camkuyu, which like the Cedar Research Forest is also under conservation due to its biological diversity. Picnicking is allowed only at weekends in specially denoted areas, otherwise entering the area requires special permission, obtainable from the Western Mediterranean Forestry Research Department in Antalya. Without this permit it is forbidden to stay overnight in the reserve. The heights around Camkuyu are entirely covered by cedars. Here there is a house for the forest warden and a guesthouse. This area of grassy open meadowland is the best place to camp, since there are four wells providing potable water through the arid summer months. In May vetch blooms beneath the cedars.

The road leading north from Camkuyu to Karakuyu rises to the tree line at 1900 metres. Here you emerge from the forest onto a mountain plateau, to be confronted in amazement by a changed landscape and vegetation. The sea of trees makes way suddenly for alpine plants, and the highest peak in the Western Toros, the 3070 metre high Kizlar Sivrisi, rises before you in all its splendour. The road across the northwest part of the plateau, with its high pastures where local villagers have grazed their flocks for centuries, takes you to Huseyin Kuyusu.

The recurrence of the word kuyu, meaning well, in so many of the place names here, is a result of the limestone structure of the Toros range. Although the winters are severe at this height, the winter rains and snowmelt quickly drain through the rock, leaving the highlands waterless in summer.

In the absence of any surface streams or pools, large wells are the only source of water on the high pastures throughout the hot season.

A visit to the region of Camkuyu, with its thick cedar forests barely penetrated by light and myriad wild flowers of its glades and pastures, is a rewarding experience never to be forgotten.

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