

Turkish undelight

Odysseus finds that things don't always go according to the travel plan.

One weekend late last September the *Financial Times* travel section was devoted to tales of mishaps and disasters, entitled 'Gone wrong'. This reflected my feelings exactly in respect of a holiday earlier that month, which ended up with my spending £1,000 for a night on a hard sofa in a locked room in Istanbul airport.

Climb every mountain

It had started promisingly enough. I had a week's leave booked for September, and was toying with somewhere in south-eastern Europe, when an email arrived: 'Would you, or anyone you know, be interested in climbing Mount Ararat?' This is not an offer you get every day, and was one that I was unable to refuse.

Departure day, which happened to be my birthday, came in due course. I got up before 5am to try to finish some work (this is not my usual hour of clocking in) and then duly proceeded to lose my house keys. This necessitated the use of a cab to make the airport on time, which I just did. But at the airport there was a mix-up over whether I could take hiking poles as hand luggage, and I had to queue for security twice. The flight was then delayed, and we sat on the ground for the best part of an hour awaiting a take-off slot. Not a great birthday so far, I thought, little knowing that things were about to get worse.

Passport control

I had arranged to meet friends in Istanbul before flying to Mount Ararat. So I arrived at Istanbul Ataturk airport just before midnight, bought my visa (£10) and presented myself at immigration. This took a long time, with the official in the booth calling over colleagues for consultation. Had I ever reported my

passport as lost or stolen, asked one senior official. No, I replied. Well, the passport was listed as stolen on the Turkish immigration computer systems, he said, as he moved me into a suite of offices behind the immigration booths.

I, and another passenger with passport problems, sat for a couple of hours in a room while little happened. I rang the UK consular service, who asked the Turkish authorities to double-check, but with the same result. I was moved into a locked room, in which a number of sofas were occupied by the recumbent forms of yet more travellers lost in the immigration/security system.

After five hours I was extracted and put on the next flight back to Heathrow. Officials all the while held my passport and ticket – at least I got to jump the security and boarding queues. On landing I was worried that I might not be readmitted to the UK. But, somewhat to my chagrin, I was told that there was no record of my passport having been stolen, and I was free to go. My hiking poles appeared on the baggage carousel, having got further into Turkey than I had.

A few days later I got a message that the group had reached the top of Ararat safely.

And the moral is...

- Try to keep calm, however frustrating and Kafkaesque the situation you find yourself in – it probably won't help you get out any more quickly or more satisfactorily, but not keeping calm can only make things worse.
- Use the time gained as a result of any cancellation as a little bonus – all those days reading, visiting friends...
- Insurance may help in some cases, but didn't in these – has anyone seen a policy that pays out on holiday curtailment on such grounds?
- Dine out on the story afterwards. □

Odysseus is a working actuary. Except where indicated, he pays for all his own travel.

Actuarial history for the making

I'm writing this to ask for volunteers, particularly younger persons, to come forward to write historical articles for *The Actuary* and perhaps elsewhere.

The Institute library's special collection at Staple Inn and the Faculty library's collection at Edinburgh University are rich in historical material offering great potential for new study. The profession's acquisition of the Equitable Life Assurance Society archive will be a further source for research of actuarial history. There is no shortage of themes waiting to be researched. Virtually all of the second half of the 19th century and most of the 20th century are open fields. Currently, few professional historians write on actuarial or insurance history, possibly because their training does not focus on the relevant requirements.

Here are a few topics for possible research to support articles:

- **William Morgan** of the Equitable, researched from actuarial sources. (The current *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry was written by a philosopher.)
- **Hilary Seal's** role in pioneering the use of statistics in the profession and the theoretical work by distinguished predecessor members that the profession did not make use of.
- **Demographic changes** and the accuracy of past forecasts. (Lancelot Hogben edited a symposium on demographic studies in 1937 and, nearly 70 years later, some of the population estimates give food for thought. Demography is a natural field for actuaries and was once part of the subjects in the Institute's examinations.)
- The development of **non-life insurance mathematics** in the 20th century.
- **Life assurance in the middle of the 19th century.** (There are comprehensive life assurance company prospectuses for the late 1830s and the late 1880s in the profession's libraries.)
- The **mathematical needs of practising actuaries** as seen from the profession's examination papers from early times to the present day.

Our librarians can provide a list of broad-based background material, some of which could repay reading before starting to write. Writing an article on a single subject involves much research and takes a lot of time but a deep knowledge of actuarial history is not usually necessary. Relating what happened in a subject with little interpretation is normally acceptable. Further, the librarians will be glad to look for persons with relevant experience to offer guidance in the preparation of articles. If you are considering writing historical articles and you wish to discuss any points, the librarians would also be glad to arrange contact with those with established knowledge who can advise you.

Authors can reasonably expect to receive a small amount of correspondence about their articles from others interested in the field. There may be opportunities to make presentations on historical subjects to actuarial societies and in the course of time there may be opportunities to write for academic publishers.

Publication of an article can be very satisfying for the author.

If you are interested, please contact David Raymont at Staple Inn, tel 020-7632 2114, email david.raymont@actuaries.org.uk.

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