

TURKEY - 2019

I'm not one for beaches and sitting around swimming pools soaking up the sun; although, I confess to the odd day around the hotel swimming pool in Turkey last September – I was still reading and sketching though. Louise and I had married in July, so Turkey was our honeymoon.

Last year's holiday in Dalyan, Turkey, was simply perfect. Days out on Captain Ali's boat live on in the memory. One voyage started in the mid-afternoon and billed as 'The Moonlight Tour.'

The voyage took on a steady pace upriver to a warm cove. Swimming with turtles was followed by a sumptuous barbeque of chicken, rice, salad and bread. The air was sultry but not overpowering. Everyone was in high spirits and looking forward to the evening. As skies cleared, we took our place on cushions at bow of the boat.

In Turkey, as soon as the sun has reached the horizon, the light drops suddenly. With no twilight, the stars appear as though someone has switched on their house lights!

The first thing I noticed was Jupiter and Saturn dancing overhead and slightly to the south-east respectfully. Venus, the brightest object in the sky at that time, rapidly followed the sun to the horizon. Egged on by my wife, I described to fellow boat guests what was on offer in the night sky. After the Planets, I soon progressed to the constellations.

Taking priority was the summer constellation of Cygnus The Swan. Cygnus resembles a crucifix and for astronomers, it is an important signpost to all other glories of the summer sky. From Britain, Cygnus is best from June through to August, however the further you venture toward the equator the constellation champions all others from June to October. The brightest star in Cygnus is Deneb at the peak of the crucifix, with a computed luminosity of 60,000 times that of our Sun.

The next stop on this celestial tour was Albireo at the foot of the crucifix. Probably my favourite summer star, using binoculars Albireo is one of the finest double stars to be seen in the entire sky. Albireo's companion is believed to revolve around Albireo's common centre of gravity. Stars are not always white and their colours can indicate age. Albireo is golden yellow; therefore, it is slightly older than our own Sun. However, Albireo's companion is blue sapphire so is younger than our own Sun. My companions on the boat were enthralled.

After pointing out the 'summer triangle' made up of Deneb in Cygnus, Vega in Lyra, and Altair in Aquilla; the sky turned coal black and served up its real showpiece, The Milky Way. Stretching from east to west, the fork was clearly visible and just how Herschel had described it. It had been over 30 years since my last real view of the Milky Way, and there it was, the highlight of the trip upriver – something for my wife and fellow boat companions to wonder in awe of this sacred phenomena.

500 words.