

Taste of Turkish delight

Alexander the Great failed to conquer it, but earthquakes and time have opened Termessos to the tread of tourists. Bridget Martin reports

SOMETIME in the 1000 years before the birth of Christ, the warlike Pisidian tribe built a city in the Toros Mountains.

The valley they chose for their citadel was 34km from modern-day Antalya, on Turkey's south coast, and commanded a position on the route between the Mediterranean and the Aegean.

They blocked the route with a wall and demanded taxes from all who passed. Termessos grew rich.

The Pisidian people had chosen their site well.

In 333BC Alexander the Great amassed his armies in the valley below, but his attack was repelled.

Later, when the Romans took control of the surrounding area, they recognised the strength of Termessos. In 70BC they signed a friendship treaty with its people, guaranteeing their independence.

In the end, it was the force of nature which was the undoing of Termessos. A massive earthquake

struck in 243AD and the city was probably abandoned at that time.

We start the climb from the car park, and soon find ourselves clambering over hewn rocks which have tumbled down from a nearby wall, once the impregnable boundary of the city.

The top of a beautifully carved pillar lies in our path. We avoid it, not wanting to walk over an ancient treasure. But the entire site of Termessos is littered with such antiquities.

Further up we take a side track to a bathhouse and gymnasium. Grooved rocks indicate the remains of a water piping system. Carved pillars sit crookedly in window frames. A doorway stands alone, the surrounding wall having disintegrated, leaving it as a portal to the sky. A sign indicates the colonnaded street, now an impassable jumble of stone blocks.

Vegetation is taking over the ancient remains and the site has never been excavated.



SEAT IN THE GODS: Termessos's amphitheatre, which seated 4200 people, is reputedly the most scenic in the world

Flowers sprout between the rocks and birds flutter among the trees — we have our first sighting of the strangely named sombre tit.

Then, suddenly, we find ourselves at the theatre. In contrast to the other ruins, it is in an excellent state of repair. Semicircles of tiered seats for 4200 people dip down below us.

Beyond, the surrounding mountain peaks rise dramatically, Gulluk Mountain reaching 1265m; understandably this has a reputation as the most scenically

positioned of all ancient theatres. The entertainment consisted of the slaughter of wild animals.

Tunnels leading under the stage were added during the Roman period, presumably for safety reasons.

This was a time when the locals were capturing the now-extinct Anatolian leopards to send to Rome. It is sad to think of such carnage in this now blissfully peaceful place.

Near the theatre, the ancient temples of Artemus and Zeus are

in ruins. We peer down into the massive cisterns, carved out of the rock for water storage below the marketplace.

Another 3km path leads further up the mountainside to the necropolis.

Dozens of stone sarcophagi here once held the remains of the dead.

Now, these massively heavy rock coffins have been thrown down the mountainside by earthquakes, as carelessly scattered as if created from cardboard.

We take a longer route down,

passing the quarry from which the limestone was cut for the city's construction.

Tombs and temples have been carved into the rock and more sarcophagi lie along the route.

Long ago the indigenous Anatolians, known to outsiders as the Solymian barbarians, grew olives and grapes and hunted wild goats, deer and bears in these mountains.

Now it is curious tourists who wander the hillsides.

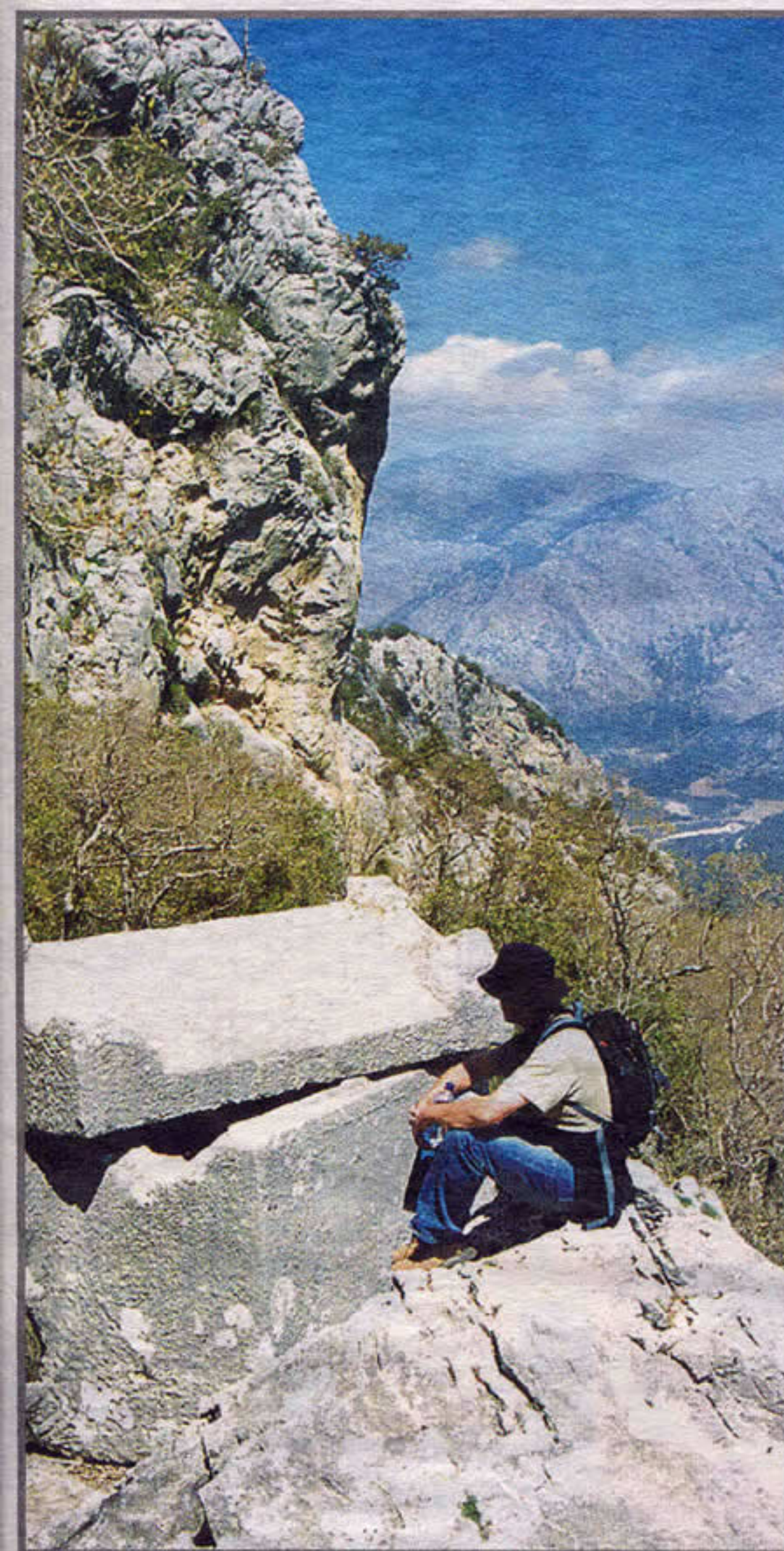
Who will be next?

TURKEY



GETTING THERE: If driving to Termessos, take the road from Antalya to Korkuteli. After 25km look out for the signpost to Termessos on the left. This is the entrance to Gulluk Mountain National Park which encompasses the site of Termessos. Entry fee is about \$A8 per person. From here, a 9km road winds through pine forests to the car park at the base of the site. Using public transport, take the Korkuteli-bound bus from the main bus station (otogar) and get off at the entrance to Gulluk Mountain National Park. Taxis wait here to take people up to the car park. Expect to pay about \$A30 for the return trip. An easier alternative is to ask your hotel in Antalya to arrange a car and driver. We paid \$A80 for two for a tour which also included the interesting Duden Waterfall.

DETAILS: Allow a minimum of two hours to explore the site. A thorough tour, including the necropolis, will take four or five hours. A visit to Termessos involves a certain amount of climbing. A reasonable degree of fitness is necessary, and visitors should wear good footwear. Also, especially in summer, carry water, hats and sunscreen.



TOMB WITH A VIEW: Massive stone sarcophagi are perched on the mountainside