

## Hemşin fondue

*Mehmet Demirci kindly made 'mulhama' for us when we stayed at his eco lodge. Mehmet and his wife Kadar are Hemşin, that is to say mountain people of the Kaçkar mountains in northeast Turkey, originally of Armenian descent. There are several traditional dishes typical of the Hemşin, of which mulhama, a hearty cheese fondue, is perhaps the most well known. We'd spent the afternoon walking in the foothills getting soaked by the perpetual mist and rain (this is the wettest part of Turkey), so the warm, gooey fondue could not have been more perfect for our meal that night. Mehmet cooked it for us on a wood-burning stove in his little patch of paradise on the mountainside. So the power cut didn't deter us – we just needed to walk back through the wood to the car to retrieve our torch. We felt very self-sufficient.*



*Serves: 4*

*Time: approx 45 mins*

mild to medium strong hard sheep's cheese, cut into 1" chunks

milk

2 handfuls fine ground polenta, or regular plain flour

plenty of butter

salt

2 eggs

1 large onion

bread

1. Cover the base of a frying pan with the cheese. Pour over milk to almost cover the cheese. Add the polenta/flour (Mehmet used flour on this occasion but the dish is often made with polenta as corn is of course more likely to grow in these parts than wheat) and two large knobs of butter.
2. Cook the mix, covered, stirring occasionally, over low-medium heat until cheese has melted, and polenta/flour is properly cooked. This will take approximately half an hour. Taste and add salt if needed (how much will depend on how strong and salty the cheese is).
3. Remove from heat and let cool slightly.
4. Meanwhile, peel, halve and then thinly slice the onion. Fry onion slices in a very generous knob of melted butter in a separate pan until soft, golden brown, caramelised and starting to turn crispy.

5. Crack two eggs into the cheese mixture, stir in and return to the heat to gently re-warm if needed. The eggs do not need to be thoroughly mixed in – Mehmet's *mulhama* contained strands of *barely* cooked egg white and egg yolk, which was rather nice.
6. Before serving pour the buttery onions over the top. Eat communally by scooping up bits of cheesy, eggy goo with hunks of bread. Delicious.



Anna Colquhoun, April 2008