

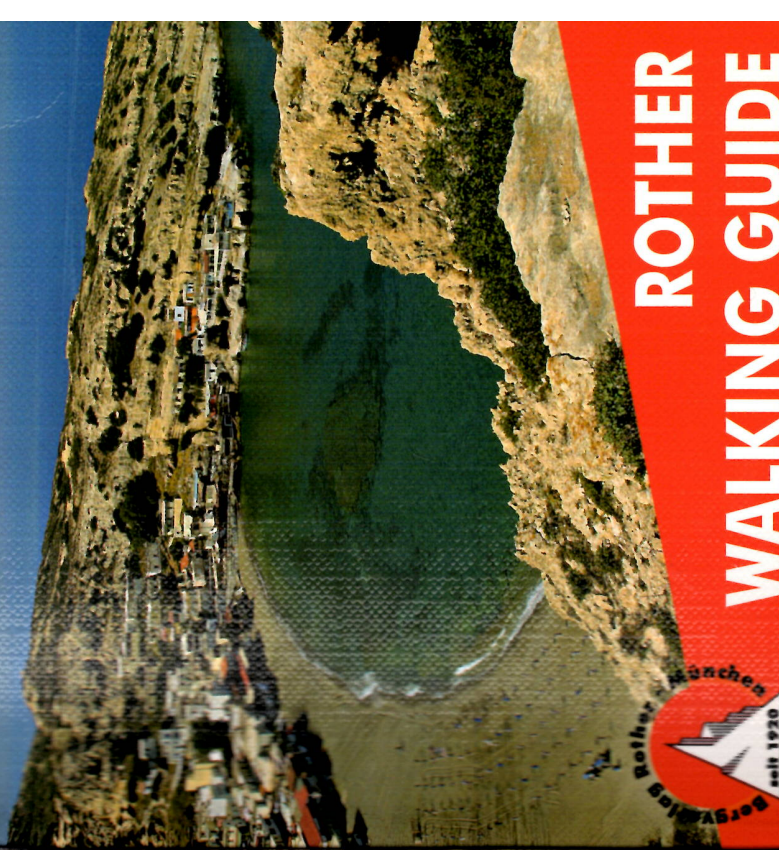
Rolf Goetz

Crete

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60 walks

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Crete

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Walking Guide Cyprus

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Preface

»I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free.« (Nikos Kazantzakis)
 »Crete in front of me – the whole world behind me.« (Mikis Theodorakis)

Walking in the mountains, living by the sea! Crete has the perfect combination ready at hand. After a full day of touring the mountains or the coast, what could be better than taking a swim in the sea or simply starting off the evening in a seafood taverna and ending it in a *kafetion* watching the old men let a string of clacking beads slide through their fingers, as if time doesn't mean a thing? With the exception, perhaps, of the hectic metropolis of Heraklion, Crete is an island just made for winding down. *Sigá, sigá, slowly, slowly*; these are the words you will hear time and again on the island. Crete is Greece in its purest form, and yet, life is very different here than on the mainland. What amazes you the most is Cretan hospitality; visitors are given a welcome here as if they were old friends. Especially outside of the summer high tourist season, in spring and in late autumn when walking is ideal, the people of Crete have plenty of time to spend on their guests.

Crete is an extremely multifaceted walking region with very different landscapes. Many areas of the island are still rugged and pristine, which you would not necessarily expect for such a fully developed holiday destination. The island's terrain is dominated by three mighty mountain ranges, furrowed by deep gorges. Vineyards and vast groves of olive trees lie sprawling in the foothills and in the valleys. Plenty of worthwhile walking destinations can be found here. Among the peaks, you will also find many challenging alpine climbs of more than 2000 metres in altitude. If you prefer to keep to the lower altitudes, you can take a coastal trail to a quiet bathing cove or walk along ancient cobbled paths to secluded monasteries and chapels. Gorge walkers and cave enthusiasts will be thrilled by breathtaking canyons and dripstone caves; Crete offers a selection not to be beaten by any other Mediterranean island. Classic routes include not only Samaria Gorge, designated as a national park and extremely popular for hordes of walkers, but also Dead's Gorge (Zakros Gorge) where the site of a Minoan palace is located at the exit, bearing witness to five thousand years of Cretan history.

In one or two weeks of walking here, you will discover many attractive routes, but that doesn't mean you have »ticked off the whole list« that Crete has to offer; a good reason to return! The guide presented here has been thoroughly researched to the best of the authors' knowledge. If you should find any changes to the trail network, we would be very grateful if you would contact the publisher. It only remains for us to wish you many relaxing and eventful days on the Med!

October 2014

Rolf Goetz

Contents

Preface	3
Overview map	6
Walking on Crete	10
Landscapes and natural areas	22
8000 years of island history	26
Cretan flora	28
Settlements and attractions	36
Tourist information	48

The north-west from Kissamos to Chania

1 Tigani Balos	54
2 Grand circular walk crossing the Rodopou peninsula	56
3 From Nopigia to Ravdoucha	60
4 Between Sirikari and Polyiria	63
5 Circular walk around Katsomatados	66
6 The circular trail at Milla	71
7 Through the Deliana Gorge	74
8 From Stavros to the chapel cave Agios Georgios	76
9 From Moni Gouverneto to Moni Katholiko	79
10 Circular walk around Douliana	82

In the centre of the White Mountains

11 Samaria Gorge National Park	84
12 Gíngilos, 2080 m	90
13 Melindaou, 2133 m	94

The southern coast between Paleochora and Plakias

14 From Krios Beach to Agios Ioannis	97
15 From Sougia to Lissos	99
16 Circular walk through the Lissos Gorge	102
17 Cape Tripiti, 405 m	104
18 From Sougia to the Polifimos Cave	108
19 Through the Agia Irini Gorge	111
20 Through the Figou Gorge	115
21 Exploratory walk through the Samaria Gorge	117
22 From Agia Roumeli to Loutro	120
23 From Agios Ioannis to Agios Pavlos	125
24 From Chora Stakion to Loutro	127
25 Through the Aradena Gorge	130
26 Circular walk from Chora Stakion via Anopolis and Loutro	136
27 A short circular walk from Loutro via Finix	141

28 Through the Imbros Gorge	144
29 Circular walk from Plakias via Mirthios	149
30 Circling the Cape Kako Mouri	152
31 Circular walk via Preveli Beach	155

Central Crete with the Psiloritis massif and Matala

32 A ramble around Argiroupolis	159
33 From Mili to Xiro Chorio	162
34 Psiloritis, 2454 m	164
35 Kamares Cave, 1627 m	168
36 Through the Rouvas Gorge to Agios Ioannis, 938 m	171
37 From Ano Asites to the Prinos hut, 1050 m	175
38 From Agia Galini to Pitsidia	177
39 Red Beach	180
40 Mystical View	182
41 Agiofarango	185
42 From Lentas to Trachoulas Beach	187
43 From Agios Ioannis to Moni Koudouma	190
44 Kofinas, 1231 m	192

Agios Nikolaos and Ierapetra

45 Circular walk above Karfi, 1141 m	195
46 Through the Havga Canyon	198
47 Kritsa Gorge	200
48 Kavousi circular walk	203
49 Afendis Stavromenos, 1476 m	208
50 Dasaki Farangi	211
51 Circular walk through the Pefki Gorge	213
52 From Moni Kapsa to Perivolakia, 300 m	216

The east coast between Palekastro and Xerokambos

53 From Vai to Palekastro	219
54 Petsofas, 255 m	224
55 Through the Chochiakies Gorge to Karoumes Beach	226
56 From Zakros to Mavros Kambos	228
57 Dead's Gorge I	231
58 Dead's Gorge II	235
59 Circular walk via the Skopeli, 395 m, to the Pelekita Cave	238
60 From Kato Zakros to Xerokambos	241

Index	244
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Kriti (Kreta)
Κρήτη



iti (Kreta)

Κρήτη



Walking on Crete

Grade

Most of the walks presented here follow distinct paths and trails. This should not obscure the fact, however, that some routes demand sure-footedness and good route-finding ability. It also should be noted that in inclement weather, difficulties could increase significantly. To better assess the particular demands of the individual routes suggested here, the walks (walk numbers) are colour-coded. The meaning of the colour codes are as follows:

Easy These trails are usually sufficiently broad and only moderately steep, so that even during inclement weather, they are relatively easy to negotiate without difficulty. They may also be undertaken by children and older people without any great danger.

Moderate These paths and steep ascents are usually narrow and may include short, somewhat precipitous, stretches. For these reasons, they should only be undertaken by sure-footed walkers. Some short sections may even demand a higher degree of route-finding skill.

Difficult These paths and mule tracks are often narrow and steep. Some sections may be precarious or, alternatively, may traverse slopes that are dangerously slippery underfoot. In some cases, scrambling may be required where even the use of hands is demanded. Therefore, these trails should only be undertaken by sure-footed, physically fit and experienced walkers with good route-finding skills.

In gorges, sometimes rugged boulder fields must be crossed (here in the Samaria Gorge).



Walking times and height differences

The times given reflect only the actual walking time and do not include rest stops or taking photos. The total walking time is noted in the walk header. The height differences given encompass the total of the height differences during the walk, including intermediate ascents and descents.

Refreshment

The possible stops for refreshment on the way are noted in the short information blocks for each of the individual walks. A symbol is used to indicate if a taverna, snack bar or a similar locality is to be found en route.

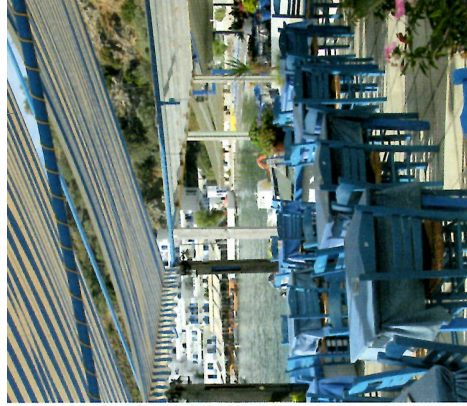
Dangers

Most of the walks follow distinct trails. Sections without a distinct path, with scrambling or with precipitous stretches demanding an excellent head for heights, will be specifically noted. In high mountain areas, clouds may suddenly gather, severely limiting visibility. Alpine walks in the White Mountains and the Psiloritis massif should only be undertaken when weather conditions

Symbols

	accessible by bus/boat		church, chapel, monastery
	refreshment along the way		archaeological site
	suitable for children		water mill
	settlement with bar/restaurant		cave
	bar/restaurant		campsite
	mountain hut, shelter		picnic area
	official car park		bridge
	bus connection		viewpoint
	pier, wharf		monumental tree
	peak		spring
	pass, saddle, col		reservoir, cistern
	turn-off		swimming spot

Seafood taverna in Loutro.





Signs warning of rock fall are not always posted.

are absolutely stable. Heavy rainfall during the winter months can turn a usually dry stream bed running through a gorge into a raging river in no time at all. Also, in the gorges, there is the constant danger of falling rock, triggered by rain or grazing goats.

Fields of old snow should be skirted around whenever possible because there is the danger of breaking through a concealed hole caused by erosion or to sustain injuries caused by sharp jagged rocks hidden under the snow cover. While traversing slopes, there is also the danger of slipping. In summer, be sure that you do not underestimate the heat. If longer walks lacking in shade near the coast are planned, we strongly suggest that you start off at sunrise. Especially in the Samaria Gorge, it is quite common for less experienced walkers to suffer from exhaustion and circulatory problems on the way – the rescue personnel have their hands full; even fatal accidents have occurred.

Walking regions

Crete's dramatic mountain and coastal landscapes provide the framework for an extraordinarily diverse walking area. On the northern coast, between Rethymnon and Kissamos, four peninsulas projecting into the Cretan Sea offer attractive areas for walking; even Akrotiri on Souda Bay, with a naval

GPS tracks

For each of the 60 walks contained in this walking guide, GPS tracks are available for download without charge at www.rother.de; also available are the alternative routes for Walks 34, 46, 47 and 51. To download, you need the following password: wfCregb01gr23s (user name: gasti).

All of the GPS data was recorded in situ by the author and some have been revised, especially those in the narrow gorges where GPS reception cannot be completely relied upon. The author and publishers have conscientiously reviewed the relevant GPS tracks and waypoints to the best of their knowledge. However, the physical properties of the area may have changed between times. GPS data is certainly a great help for planning and navigation, but still requires meticulous preparation and a certain degree of orientation skill as well as expertise in judging the (geographical) situation at hand. You should never depend solely on GPS devices or GPS data for orientation.



You can expect leftover snowfields well into the month of June (here on Melindaou).

base, an international airport and a NATO base, boasts of surprisingly quiet and pristine spots. Easy walks can be found, particularly in the walking region around Vamos on the Drapanos peninsula, and a long circular route can be undertaken on the Rodopou peninsula, an area that is almost completely deserted. In the southern interior of Kissamos, you will also discover some gorges and in the White Mountains, between Chania and the southern coast, you are guaranteed to experience the ultimate thrill of a high summit when reaching the end of a long climb on one of the two-thousand-metre peaks.

Southwestern Crete boasts of being one of the island's top walking regions. On the equally sparsely populated coastline here, the White Mountains drop ruggedly down to the Libyan Sea. Along the long-distance walking trail, E4, leading along the coast, you can tackle rewarding one-day stages between Paleochoira and Chora Sfakion; in the evening, return to the starting point by ferry. Several attractive gorges can be explored on foot, especially the Samaria Gorge which attracts up to 3000 walkers daily in the high season. Because of this number, the route must be ripe for entry into the Guinness Book of Records as the most popular walk in the entire Mediterranean region. If you prefer to avoid crowds, the gorges of Imbros, Aradena and Agia Irini present more than enough alternative choice.

Walking reaches a peak, in the truest sense of the word, in the Ida mountain range in central Crete: if you are in good physical condition, you can scale the island's highest summit, the Psiloritis, at 2454 m. On the southern slopes of the range, you'll also find plenty of metres of altitude to negotiate when as-

The best walks on Crete

Gorges

Samaria Gorge

This classic tour is one of the most popular walks in Europe. If you feel uncertain about the long descent (1200 m along the »normal« route), you can choose the route from the seaside entrance to reach the famous bottleneck, the »Iron Gates«, faster and with relatively less effort (Walk 11, 5.40 hrs; Walk 21, 2.00 hrs).



Aradena Gorge

Right at the outset, the entrance from the tiny marble rock bay is spectacular. In its upper reaches, exit the gorge via a cobbled trail that ascends in zigzags to the abandoned village of Aradena (Walk 25, 6.15 hrs).

Rouvas Gorge

Above the spring-fed lake near Zaros, a breath-taking gorge opens up which can be climbed to an altitude of almost 1000 m. After the walk, a restaurant specializing in trout is an invitation to a rest stop (Walk 36, 4.00 hrs).

Kritsa Gorge

This very popular gorge is not particularly long nor does it boast very high walls, but indeed, you will be surprised by its narrow, bizarrely-eroded, bottle-necks (Walk 47, 1.30 hrs).

Mesonas Gorge

This panoramic circular walk leads through the Tripti Mountains and crosses over a spectacular bottleneck of the Mesonas Gorge. A botanical highlight is a monumental olive tree – boasting an estimated age of over 3000 years, the tree is one of the oldest of its kind in existence (Walk 48, 4.40 hrs).

Coastal trails & bathing bays

Agia Roumeli

Located at the seaside entrance of the Samaria Gorge, here is the starting point for a spectacular walk along the southern coastline. The destination is the car-free village of Loutro, situated in a stunning location at the foot of towering coastal cliffs (Walk 22, 5.00 hrs).

Damnoni Beach

This short circular walk around the Kakomouri cape to Damnoni Beach promises captivating views of the Plakias bay and the coastal mountains on the other side (Walk 30, 1.50 hrs).

Preveli Beach

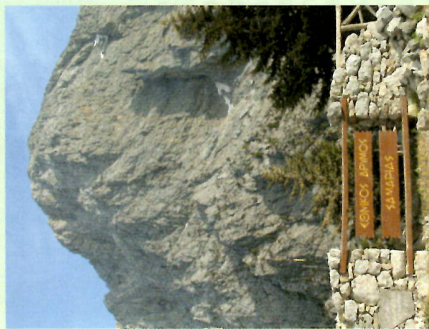
Perfect beaches can't be kept a secret for long, however, in the off-season, the onslaught of day trippers to this lagoon beach is somewhat less than usual – you can choose between bathing in freshwater or in sea water (Walk 31, 2.40 hrs).



Summits

Gingilos, 2080 m

With a north face exceeding 1000 m in height, this 2000 metre-peak is one of the White Mountains' most striking. You don't necessarily have to climb all the way to the top; already from the Alchernas saddle at 1700 m, a spectacular downwards view opens up of the southern coast (Walk 12, 5.40 hrs).



Psiloritis, 2454 m

From Crete's highest peak, enjoy a bird's eye view of the Libyan Sea to the south, as well as the Cretan Sea, facing the Aegean. Westwards, take in the White Mountains and, to the east, the Dikti Mountains (Walk 34, 7.50 hrs).

Ancient sites & monasteries

Moni Katholiko

On the Akrotiri peninsula, a cobbled trail connects two monasteries to one another. Visit the »Bear Cave«, boasting beautiful stalagmites (Walk 9, 1.40 hrs).

Lissos

The best route from the little seaside resort of Sougia is the trail to the ancient Asclepeion temple where, amongst other finds, a mosaic floor has survived the ravages of time. A picturesque pebbled bay for bathing can also be found here (Walk 15, 3.00 hrs).



Moni Koudouma

At the foot of the Asterousia Mountains, an attractive coastal path leads to the Koudouma Monastery. Be absolutely sure to take the excursion to the Agios Ioannis chapel cave (Walk 43, 3.00 hrs.).

Dead's Gorge (Zakros Gorge)

More than 3000 years ago, the Minoans placed their dead in the cave-like niches of this gorge. A palace was constructed at the mouth of the gorge. The »normal« route is not complicated but the circular walk through the secondary gorge of Xeropotamos is a little more demanding (Walk 57, 4.00 hrs; Walk 58, 3.40 hrs).



cending to the Kamares cave or climbing through the Rouvas Gorge. South-eastwards from the Ida massif, discover even more rewarding destinations located the Asterousia Mountains. But you really don't have to climb so high; relatively easy coastal walks, especially in the Matala region, have their charm. In eastern Crete, walkers are usually drawn to the Lassithi Plateau. The fertile alluvial plain is surrounded by the Dikti mountain range, with peaks of over 2000 metres in height. Eastwards from there, the somewhat lower altitude Thripti Mountains boast some worthwhile routes.

Rather unjustly, the east coast of Crete is overshadowed by the other walking regions. The mountains here only reach altitudes of up to 800 m, accommodating just about any walker not necessarily interested in conquering greater heights. Dead's Gorge near Kato Zakros is a very popular destination, as is the famous palm-surrounded beach of Vai, but apart from those, you can follow coastal paths and discover bays for bathing that are still serene.

Trail network and waymarking

Ancient cobbled trails are called *kalderimi* in Greek. These are usually former connecting trails between villages. Apart from that purpose, they lead anywhere someone needed to go – to chapels, monasteries and fortresses, through gorges and up to alpine pastureland. Normally, the trails are about two metres, and even up to four metres, in width, so that two fully laden mules could pass each other without much difficulty. These trails have been carefully paved with stones that are as flat or rounded as available and are laboriously reinforced with retaining walls along the slopes; some are even given additional support with fieldstone walls. Originally, all of Crete was criss-crossed by a network of *kalderimi* which totalled several thousand kilometres, but only a fraction of these remain. Most were destroyed during modern road construction, although the original courses of the routes were often availed upon. Others fell victim to erosion or have become overgrown by *macchia* and prickly *phrygana*. Unlike, for example, in Mallorca, where similar trails have been recently restored to accommodate walking tourism, on Crete, the ancient trail network has yet to be acknowledged as part of the island's historical heritage, let alone recognised for its touristic potential. As far as individual initiatives for the preservation and maintenance of the *kalderimi* are concerned, they are immediately confronted with another serious problem: the painstaking restoration and maintenance work that is needed simply lacks the necessary financing. There are some exceptions, though, such as the breathtaking *kalderimi* from Anopolis to Loutro (Walk 26), which was overhauled with EU funding. The famous *kalderimi* through the Aradena Gorge (Walk 25) is also well-preserved, as are some intact stretches along the connecting trail between Agia Irini and Omalos (Walk 20). In addition, many more of the suggested walks in this guide lead, at least sometimes, along ancient cobbled trails.

16



As if drawn using a straightft edge, the cobblestone *kalderimi* in the Aradena Gorge.

Aside from the *kalderimi*, there is also an extensive network of mountain paths, coastal trails and gorge trails. Many of these have also been waymarked in the meantime. However, the waymarking system is still in its infancy here and cannot be compared to the waymarking found in the Alps or in the secondary mountain ranges of Western Europe. At the starting points in many locations, you can usually find a trail board presenting an overview of the walking region and, on the way, coloured waymarkers, as well as the traditional cairn, being used for orientation. These makeshift markers are naturally subject to the winds of change. Coloured dots painted on rocks and directional arrows fade quickly under the Mediterranean sun and the life expectancy of a cairn can be even shorter. Brushwood and *phrygana* only need a few years to produce enough impenetrable undergrowth to choke off a path. Occasionally, you will need a little route-finding ability to remain on the right track because even good route description has its limits.

Wind and weather

Boasting about 300 days of sunshine annually, Crete is the sunniest and warmest destination to be found on the Med, next to Cyprus. The Mediterranean climate is characterised by hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. The change of the seasons can bring about fickle weather conditions. Prevailing northerly and westerly winter winds bring relatively large amounts of rainfall which can turn into snowfall in the higher elevations. The snow line is located at about 700 m above sea level. Most precipitation occurs in December and

17

January. The amount of rainfall decreases from the west towards the east, so that in Chania, it rains more often and for longer periods than it does in Sitia and Palekastro; the least amount of rainfall is in Ierapetra. Prevailing winds are from the northwest; on the southern coast, the occasionally turbulent *sirocco* carries hot air and reddish dust from the Sahara along with it. In summer, on the northern coast, the *meltemi* wind provides some refreshing coolness. Generally, it is about 2 °C warmer on the southern coast than in the north.

Weather forecast: www.meteo.gr/stations/chania/crete.htm

Walking weather throughout the seasons

March and April: For walkers interested in botany, this is a very good time to visit and to enjoy the mild temperatures; however, you can expect fickle weather and occasional rainfall. Walking is limited to the coastal routes and lower altitudes in the mountainous areas since snow is still lying at heights of over 1000 metres above sea level.

May to mid-June: This is the very best time for walking, with pleasant air temperatures and very little rainfall. Water temperature lies at about 20 °C. The island is already covered in green vegetation. Above 1800 m, into the month of June, you may still run into snowfields left over from winter.

Mid-June to mid-September: Stable, hot, mid-summer weather. Because of the intense heat, these months are more suitable for a beach holiday; in August, temperatures can climb up to 40 °C on the coast. Longer walks are only recommended in the mountainous areas starting at altitudes of 800 m and further up. Conditions are ideal for ascending a two-thousand-metre peak.

Mid-September to late October: The relaxed off-season with initially very warm weather and the best conditions for swimming. Above all, October is a very good month for walking. The landscape is fairly arid and burned-out as an aftermath of the summertime heat, but this does not play much of a role in the mountainous areas, which are usually barren anyway.

Climate table for Heraklion

	Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Year
Day	°C	15	15	16	20	23	27	29	29	27	24	20	16	21,8
Night	°C	9	9	10	12	15	19	22	22	20	17	14	11	15
Water	°C	16	15	16	16	19	22	24	25	24	23	20	17	19,8
Sunshine/hrs		3	5	6	8	10	12	13	12	10	6	6	4	7,9
Rainy days		14	9	10	6	4	1	1	1	2	6	11	14	79

November: Days are still pleasantly mild, but occasionally, autumn storms and heavy rainfall can spoil a walking tour. On the south coast, weather is still good for swimming.

December to February: This is Crete's rainy season, but that does not necessarily mean that it is pouring down with rain every day. Snow may fall in mountainous areas above 700 m. On the comparatively arid southern coast, temperatures rarely drop below 15 °C, thus offering pleasant walking weather. At night, however, it can get quite cool and not all of the hotels that are still open can boast effective heating.

Samaria National Park

The most famous gorge on the island of Crete was designated a national park in 1962. In 1981, UNESCO had the area declared a Biosphere Reserve. Not only taking into consideration the extraordinary beauty of the towering gorge walls, the ancient trees and the rare wildflowers, the creation of the national park was especially targeted to establish a protected area for the Cretan Ibex, which was an endangered species at the time.

The gorge begins at about 1200 m in the high country in Omalos, crosses through the White Mountains and, 17 kms later, merges into a broad delta which empties into the Libyan Sea. Xyloskalo, the starting point in the mountains, takes its name from a wooden stairway constructed by goatherds in the 19th century, afterwards expanded to provide a convenient access trail in the upper reaches of the gorge. In the sometime village of Samaria, ancient houses built of quarried stone were restored to create a popular haven for walkers from all over the world.

The E4 long-distance walking trail

A section of the E4 European long-distance walking trail (in Greek: Monopati Epsilou Tessera) starts off at the harbour in Kissamos and traverses the entire length of the island to arrive in Kato Zakros on the east coast. Posts with diamond-shaped waymarkings and with yellow/black blazes are set along the trail. The signposting, however, leaves a lot to be desired. In many cases, finding the trail is very difficult since it is not well maintained and many of the posts have gone missing in between times. Several of the diamond-



UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, Samaria Gorge.

shaped markings have been riddled with bullet holes – the Cretans see them as perfect targets. Starting from Kissamos, the E4 leads at first along the west coast to the south coast and on to Paleochora. In Sougia, it divides into a coastal stretch or a mountain alternative; the two routes merge again near Imbros. Some stages are extensive stretches through uninhabited territory, making it necessary to spend a night outdoors. Water isn't available everywhere, so carry sufficient amounts of drinking water along with you. For the 320 km-long trek, plan at least three, or even better four, weeks to walk it.

Mountain huts

The only staffed mountain hut is the Kallergi hut, 1592 m, in the White Mountains (tel +30-28210-33199, www.kallergi.com). Access is from Xyloskalo, at the rim of the Omalos high plateau, via a 5 km-long gravel track (Walk 13). Since 1977, the mountain hut has been managed by an Austrian, Josef Schwemberger, and used as a base camp for tours through the White Mountains by the Alpine School Innsbruck (ASI), as well as by other walkers. The huts sleeps up to 50 persons and costs €10–€13 per night and per person. In addition, breakfast and dinner (a three-course meal) can be booked in advance. The hut is open from the middle of April until the end of October. Advance reservations are requested.

Apart from the Kallergi hut, two others exist in the White Mountains: the Volikas hut, 1300 m, and the Katsiveli hut, 1970 m; the latter is the starting point for climbing Pachnes, 2453 m. Information available through the EOS Mountaintain Climbers' Club in Chania (tel. +30-28210-44647, www.eoshanion.gr). On the western slopes of Psiloritis, the EOS/Section Rethymnon (tel. +30-28310-57766, www.eosrethymnou.gr) manages the Stoumbotos-Prinos hut, 1600 m. Starting at the village of Fourfouras, about a 3.5-hour ascent along the E4 takes you there. Information for the Prinos hut, 1050 m, on the eastern slopes of Psiloritis is available from the EOS/Section Heraklion (tel. +30-2810-227609, www.eos-her.gr, only in Greek), from Ano Asites, the hut can be reached in about a 2-hour climb (Walk 37).

Maps

■ The best selection is the Anavasi walking maps in the scale 1:25,000; these cover the most important walking regions. The tear-resistant maps are available locally (e.g., in the Bookshop Matala) and many souvenir shops. In addition, you could purchase maps in leading map stores or order them through the internet (e.g., directly from www.anavasi.gr). The following maps have been published so far: 11.11 Lefka Ori/Stakia, 11.12 Lefka Ori/Pachnes, 11.13 Samaria/Sougia, 11.14 Mt. Ida/Psiloritis, 11.15 Mt. Dikti (in the works) and 11.16 Zakros/Vai.

■ Also published by Anavasi is the »Crete Atlas« (1:50,000) in book form. The atlas covers the entire island and also contains some interesting detailed



The Kallergi hut is preciptiously enthroned on a ridge above the Samaria Gorge.

maps for the individual walking regions. It is too heavy and impractical to carry along, however, many of the old cobbled trails are also included in it. ■ The Harms-ic-Verlag offers the maps »Crete – Eastern Part« and »Crete – Western Part«, both with a scale of 1:100,000. Aside from the E4, most of the other important trails are marked in, but for an exact orientation of the terrain, these maps are very limited in scope.

■ A good road map is »Crete« (1:150,000) from Freytag & Berndt; the long distance trail E4 is also marked on this map. A city index is included and is very useful.

Field guides

■ Anastasios Sakoulis: »Amphibians, Reptiles and Mammals of Crete«, Mysis Editions. The island's most important birds of prey are described in this guide (only available locally).

■ Vangelis Papiomitoglou, »Wildflowers of Greece« Mediterranean Editions: this field guide encompasses around 600 different species of Cretan flora and special consideration is given to the numerous endemic species (available in many local book stores).

■ Horst and Gisela Kretschmar: »Orchids: Crete and Dodecanese«, Mediterranean Editions. Includes about 100 species of orchids, occurring on Crete and the Dodecanese.

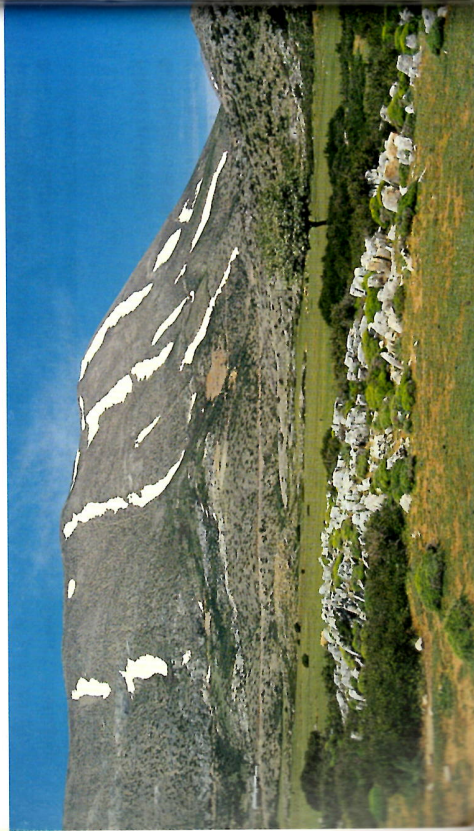
Landscapes and natural areas

The Greeks call their southernmost and largest island Megalonisos. After Sicily, Sardinia, Cyprus and Corsica, Crete is the fifth largest island in the Med. About half of its population lives in the urban centres of Heraklion, Chania and Rethymnon; one in four live in the greater metropolitan region of the capital.

Mountains

The island's land relief is determined by four major mountain ranges. Western Crete is dominated by the White Mountains (*Lefka Ori*). These mountains, the island's largest in area, live up to their name in winter when an uninterrupted blanket of snow lies over them. About 40 of its peaks reach an altitude of over 2000 m, the highest of which is Pachnes, at 2452 m. The karst mountains drop abruptly southwards to the Libyan Sea and are sliced by about 20 major gorges, the most notable being the Samaria Gorge which, with a length of somewhat more than 17 km, counts as one of the largest and most impressive canyons in Europe. Crete's geographical centre is formed by the Ida Mountains (also known as the Psiloritis massif). With Psiloritis (also called Timios Stavros) at 2454 m, the highest peaks on the island are found here. Deforestation and overgrazing has left a rugged mountainous terrain, overgrown with thorny cushion scrub. On the southern slopes, the mountain villages of Kamaries and Zaros offer attractive walks; on the northern slopes, Anogia is a good starting point for ascending Psiloritis.

The Nida high plain at the foot of Psiloritis.



The counterparts to the White Mountains in the west are the Dikti Mountains in the east. These are not quite so extensive, but indeed, the summit trio of Dikti, 2148 m, Lazaros, 2085 m, and Afendis Christos, 2141 m, can be also counted among the 2000-metre peaks. Easiest access is via the Lassithi plateau. Situated even further to the east, the Thripti Mountains and the adjacent Orno range are not quite as high; the most elevated summit in this group is Afendis Stavromenos at 1476 m.

In addition to the four major mountain ranges, quite a few smaller mountainous regions can be mentioned. Interesting for walkers are the Asterousia Mountains, towering above the southern coast and surmounted by the striking summit of Kofinas, 1231 m. Shielded by the Psiloritis massif, the range receives relatively little rainfall and, accordingly, the entire region is characteristically dry and barren.

High plateaus and lowlands

Some extensive high plateaus are sprawling between the mountain ranges; most of them are used as pastureland for sheep and goats. For the walker, the high plains are starting points for walks in the surrounding mountains. Thus, setting off from the Omalos plateau, you can climb a number of 2000 m peaks in the White Mountains. The Nida high plateau in the Ida Mountains is the starting point for an excursion to the island's highest summit. The only highland inhabited year-round is the Lassithi plateau in eastern Crete; with an area of 48 sq.kms, it is also the largest on the island.

The most extensive lowland is the Messara plain. 40 km long and up to 12 km wide, it is shielded by the Psiloritis massif and the Asterousia Mountains and counts as one of the island's most important agricultural regions. Not only olives, but also citrus fruit and winter vegetables are cultivated here. The capital is Mires, where a major market is held every Saturday.

Gorges and caves

Perhaps no other island in the Mediterranean can boast such a large number of gorges, a total of 125, only counting the major ones. The beauty of it is that many of these are open to walkers. The Samaria Gorge is a must, so to speak; also high on the list, is the gorge located in Imbros on the southern edge of the Askifou high plateau and Dead's Gorge on the easternmost end

Island facts

Area: 8335 sq.kms
Length: 255 kms
Width: 12-55 kms
Coastline: 1046 kms
Highest peak: Psiloritis, 2456 m
Distance from Athens: 320 kms, from North Africa: 310 km, from the Turkish coast: 190 km
Population: 621,000
Population density: 75 per sq.km (England: 410)
Capital: Heraklion (173,000 inhabitants); Chania (capital until 1971; 55,000 inhabitants)
Tourists: about 3 million annually
Time zone: CET +1 hour (year-round)



The Gulf of Kissamos with the Gramvousa peninsula (view from Walk 3).

of the island. In addition, there are many more easily accessible and less known canyons that are also worth visiting. For avid gorge walkers, this guide presents more than 20 walks of this kind.

There are about 3400 caves on the island. The Minoans used many of them as places of worship. The most famous one is the Dictaeon Cave (Dikteon Andron) in Lassithi; according to Greek mythology, Zeus was born here. Visitors can climb 84 m down into the illuminated cave where, in the up to 20 metre-high chamber, fascinating stalagmites and stalactites can be seen. Also claiming to be the birthplace of Zeus is the Cave of Zeus (Ideon Andron) in the Psiloritis massif. Although easily accessible via a tarmac road, the cave has not yet been developed as a tourist attraction. The Kamareas Cave, on the southern slopes of Psiloritis (Walk 35), is only accessible on foot. Thin shards of ceramic found here from so-called »eggshell pottery«, dating back to the period 2000–1700 BC, are considered representative of a unique style. The dripstone caves of Agios Georgios, Arkoudiotissa, Polifimos, Agios Ioannis and Pelekita (Walks 8, 9, 18, 43 and 59), somewhat more modest in their dimensions, but indeed, sometimes very rich in historical significance, can also only be reached on foot.

Peninsulas, coastlines and beaches

In the northwest, Crete draws attention to itself visually through its extensive peninsulas, some stretching far out to sea. Despite claiming only a modest geographical area, the coastal mountains on Gramvousa and Rodopou tower almost 800 m out of the water. These peninsulas are virtually uninhab-

ited and are ideal for walking. The northern coast is edged with broad, sweeping bays with miles of gently sloping, sandy beaches. In summer, the sprawling beaches attract millions of sea-loving tourists looking for relief from the intense heat. Extremely popular and crowded is the »Cretan Riviera« between Limenas Chersonisos and Malia. However, Crete's most beautiful and unspoiled beaches are to be found elsewhere, such as in Vai and in Xerokambos towards the east or in Elafonisi and Balos westwards. On the southern coast, with a few exceptions, you will only find small bathing bays, usually with pebble beaches. Kommos Beach on the Gulf of Messara is the longest beach and is, for the most part, unspoiled. The general quality of the waters is good to very good and the Blue Flag waves over almost 100 individual beaches, but occasionally, beach tar and in unmanaged bay areas, jetsam and plastic flotsam, can blemish the joy of bathing.

Nature and the environment

With the creation of the national park in the Samaria Gorge a good 50 years ago, an important step was taken to protect some of the natural terrain on Crete. However, considering the total area allotted to nature reserves, it's negligible. Designating a conservation area on Crete doesn't necessarily mean that everything will actually be running splendidly. Environmental awareness is still in its infancy here. Dumping refuse in the countryside, polluted beaches, untreated sewage flowing into the sea and the widespread agricultural use of pesticides and fertilisers compose only the tip of the iceberg. Centuries of deforestation have also left their mark. Reforestation programs have failed so far, not only because of lack of interest, but also because of animal husbandry – grazing sheep and goats have stripped many areas of the island completely bare.

Unfortunately, not always taken to heart.



Precisely due to the financial crisis, funds are unavailable for just about everything and investment in a sustainable environmental policy is hardly feasible for the foreseeable future. At least, you can do your part, no matter how insignificant it may seem, to avoid contributing to the island's problems and to leave things as they were before you came.

8000 years of island history

Quite a few researchers and archaeologists consider Crete the cradle of European civilisation or, at least, the first civilised culture on European soil. The first traces of settlement from the Neolithic Era date back to 8000 years ago. Over the millennia, many invaders and conquerors have left their «footprints» on the island.

The legacy of the Minoan Culture

Before the Englishman, Sir Arthur Evans (1851–1941), began his excavations at Knossos in 1900, no one knew of the island's incredible history. In the ruins of 4000 year-old Knossos, Evans found traces of a vanished culture. With a lot of imagination and concrete, he resurrected columns and walls and turned Knossos into a kind of archaeological Disneyland where visitors to this day are presented with a conceptual realisation of such quarters as the Throne Room or the Queen's Bath, as well as brightly coloured frescoes, which are, for the most part, based on fragments of Evans' imagination. Evans created a personal vision of a highly developed culture. Many of his theories were groundbreaking for researchers, but others are pure speculation. Even today's usual term for this cultural period «Minoan» is actually one of Evans' inventions. Minos is a legendary figure in Greek mythology, whose father was claimed to be Zeus and his mother, the Princess Europa, who was kidnapped by Zeus and taken to Crete. Whether a King Minos actually existed, remains completely unknown.

In Evans' footsteps, countless archaeologists journeyed to the island and excavated other major settlements and palaces, such as Festos, Malia and Kato Zakros. It is a real mystery that these places were apparently not fortified. Did the Minoans live in peace for thousands of years? Was it thanks to their position as the leading naval power that they had no fear of enemies? Nobody can say what ultimately led to the downfall of the Minoan empire.

Transient rulers

After the fall of the Minoan empire, the rise of the Hellenistic culture, with their centres in Athens, Olympia, Corinth and Sparta on the mainland of Greece, caused Crete to become quite isolated. Beginning in 67 BC, the Romans were the impetus for a modest revival of the island. The new province, including the North African region of Cyrenaica (today's Libya), was governed from the capital city of Gortis where the Roman Culture set down roots through temples, theatres and spas. The new rulers invested heavily in infrastructure, building roads and aqueducts, and turning the Messara plain into a granary for the Roman Empire. The Apostle Paul landed on the southern coast of Crete in 59 AD, probably making landfall at Kali Limenes, and began

26

spreading Christian teaching to the island.

After the division of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, Crete became a part of the Byzantine Empire and was governed by Constantinople until it was conquered by the Arabs in 826 AD. The Arabs were only able to hold out for a short time, and in 961, Crete became Byzantine once again. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, Crete fell to the city-state of Venice which was controlling a large part of the Mediterranean as a new hegemonic power. The Venetians came to Crete in 1204 and remained for four and a half centuries. They surrounded the cities of Chania, Rethymnon and Heraklion with fortresses, constructed pompous aristocratic palaces and fountains and built monasteries in the Renaissance style. A relief of the Lion of St. Mark graces some fortifications even today.

The Venetians were followed by the Turks in 1669. There is very little good to say about their reign. The new conquerors ruled the destiny of the island with an iron hand, converted churches into mosques and struck down Cretan rebellions with much bloodshed. Following the Greco-Turkish War in 1913, Crete finally aligned with Greece.

World War II

Another dark chapter in the history of the island was brought about by the Second World War. As the crossroads for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Crete became the plaything of strategic military interest. The German invasion began on May 20, 1941 with «Operation Mercury», as 8620 paratroopers were dropped on Cretan soil. In battles against allied British forces stationed on Crete, the German battalions suffered heavy losses, but were still able to set up an occupation force on the island within ten days. The Cretan resistance was, however, far from broken. Partisans perpetrated acts of sabotage time and again and the Germans struck back with brutal reprisals. During the four years of occupation, about 40 villages were razed to the ground and the entire male population living in them were summarily executed. The bloody war claimed about 8000 victims. In the mountain villages of Anogia and Kandanos, as well as on other sites of the resistance, monuments have been erected to commemorate the times.

27

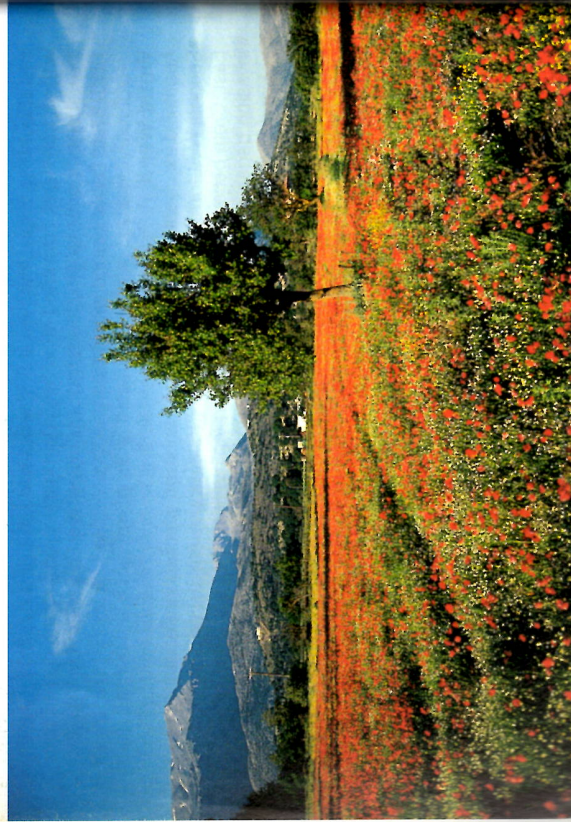


Venetian monastery Agia Triada.

Cretan flora

A walk on Crete is a feast for the senses. Already starting at the end of January, the almonds are flowering above the Gulf of Mirabello; in early spring, the daisies, yellow-flowering Jerusalem Sage and bright red poppies cover the slopes. Delicate orchids duck their heads, seeking shelter under prickly Cushion plants. The pungent scents of oregano, wild sage and thyme fill the air. Around Easter time, Crown Daisies carpet the areas of fallow land and, just in time for Pentecost, peonies unfold their lovely flowers. Somewhat later, on the high plains and the alpine meadows, white-flowering Cyclamen, dark-pink wild tulips and the iris, named after the messenger of the gods, appear. In the sub-alpine mountain areas, spring begins in June. After the snow melts, glory-of-the-snow and bugloss break out into the sunlight and on the summit of Gíngilos, at 2080 m, the Spreading Cherry is blooming. Only in the arid summer months do the flowers take a breather, but indeed, only a few days after the first rainfall in autumn, they are brought back to life, so to speak, in a second spring. Among the approximately 1800 wild species of flora, there are about 170 endemics, that is, species that are only found on Crete and nowhere else in the world.

In the right place at the right time: the Lassithi Plateau in May.



Forests and characteristic trees

In prehistoric times, the entire island was covered by dense forest, but today, woodland takes up only about five percent of the total terrain. One of Crete's characteristic trees is the cypress (Cupressus sempervirens). »Tuscan« cypress trees can also be found here, but when comparing the differences between the two, the Cretan cypress usually grows asymmetrically and takes on bizarre contortions. The oldest specimens can be found in the Samaria Gorge, some of which date back to the Middle Ages.

Extensive stands of Turkish pine (Pinus brutia) can be found as well in the Samaria Gorge. This conifer, which can reach heights up to 30 m, also puts in an appearance at the foot of the Asterousia Mountains and in the Thripti Mountains. In addition to using the pinewood, the Greeks have also found a use for pine resin – they take it to »rosin up«, what is perhaps, their best known wine, *retsina*.

One of a kind is the Cretan Date Palm (Phoenix theophrasti), which thrives in only a few locations, mainly on the beaches of Vai and Preveli. Otherwise, these can only be found on Rhodes and on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. The tree's botanical name is taken from the ancient Greek naturalist and student of Aristotle, Theophrast (about 371–287 BC), who first described this palm tree in a botanical compendium.

Cypress (above), Turkish pine (centre), Cretan Date Palm (below).



Compared to the true Date Palm, the Cretan Date Palm seldom reaches heights of over 10 m, however, it can develop multiple trunks. The fibrous fruits it produces are not edible. The Oriental plane tree (*Platanus orientalis*) has existed on Crete since ancient times. According to the myth, Zeus is supposed to have copulated with the kidnapped Europa under the plane tree from Gortyn. Plane trees thrive in wet areas; their preferred habitat, in the company of oleanders, is on the banks of rivers. With their broad tree-tops, they are a popular shade tree adorning many a village square. One of the mightiest specimens of this deciduous tree, which reaches heights of up to 30 m, is located on the *platia* of Krasi and is an estimated 2000 years old.

Macchia and phrygana

On cleared forest land, a typical mixture of Mediterranean scrub, called *macchia*, composed of evergreen sclerophyllous plants, has taken up residence. Compared to other Mediterranean islands, its allotment in Crete is relatively modest. This brushwood, which can grow to heights up to 6 m, is primarily made up of mastic (*Pistacia lentiscus*), myrtle, Strawberry Tree, Phoenician juniper and terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus*). This botanical community also embraces a number of evergreen oaks; the kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*), for example, is widespread. Superb specimens of this tree, growing up to 15 m in height under favourable conditions, can be found, for example, at the starting point for the ascent to the Kamares Cave (Walk 35). In addition to the kermes oak, there are also holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and Downy Oaks (*Quercus pubescens*), also, to a lesser extent, Valonia oaks (*Quercus macrolepis*). An ancient stand of these oaks can be found on the road between Rethymnon and Koxare.

Phoenician Juniper.



Terebinth.



In the present day, Phrygana is the most common form of vegetation found on Crete; about a quarter of the island is covered in it. This plant community is regarded as degenerate scrubland; the bushes only grow to a maximum of about one metre in height, but are rarely shorter than knee-high. Many of the evergreen plants sport leaves of a leathery texture, thereby reducing evaporation and allowing the plants to survive well through periods of summer drought.

Your first acquaintance with phrygana may be a somewhat prickly affair. Most of the plants are armed with thorns to protect them from grazing goats. At second glance, phrygana is revealed as a plant community with a diversity of dwarf shrubs and cushion scrub. A dominant species is the prickly burnet (*Sarcopoterium spinosum*), whose squarrose bracts are to be found everywhere. A member of the rose family, in spring, the plant produces fleshy fruit about the size of a cherry pit.

During the summer in the coastal areas, maritime squill (*Urginea maritima*) accentuates the landscape with stems bearing white flowers; a member of the lily family, the plant's flowering shoots form on a bulb, almost completely protruding from the ground, which can weigh in at one or two kilos.

Among the four members of the rock-rose family found on Crete, the pink rock rose (*Cistus creticus*) plays a unique role. The plant is easy to spot due to its pink petalled flowers which always bear a somewhat »wrinkled-look«. The resin, called »labdanum«, excreted from the epidermal stomata of the leaves, has been revered for its healing properties since time immemorial. In days gone by, to harvest this resin, leather straps were swept over the plants, so that the sap would collect on the straps' surfaces.



Sea squill.



Pink rock rose.



Autumn croci (Colchium macrophyllum) are often flowering in the understory of olive groves.

Among the most striking flora of the phrygana community is Cretan ebony (Ebenus cretica). From April to June, this member of the legume family creates dense mats of flora, covering road embankments, rocky slopes and fallow land in the middle elevations in a pink sea of flowers. In times gone by, the thick-haired tassels were collected for use as a filling for pillows.

The phrygana plant community also includes wild herbs, such as thyme, sage, oregano and rosemary, as well as various species of mint. Enjoying the protection provided by a cover of cushion shrub and of the ever-present gorse, grape hyacinths, wild tulips, and top lavender can be found. In terrain composed of chalky soil, Jerusalem sage (Phlomis fruticosa) flowers from April until June.

Seaside plants, crevice flora and cushion scrubland

Some examples of seaside plants are sea spurge, sea daffodil and star thistle just to name a few. Mostly found on the arid eastern coast, Spiny Rush grow in extensive thickets and, on rocky coastlines, one can spot Sea Lavender and rock samphire. In areas near the coastline, Chasteberry (Vitex agnus-castus) has taken root. Of the family lamiaceae, these produce lilac-coloured flowers from which fruit the size of peppercorns are brought forth. The plant is often referred to as Monk's Pepper and, in the Middle Ages, it could be found in many a monastery garden and was used by monks as an aphrodisiac against »sins of the flesh« to make it easier for them to adhere to the vow of chastity. Monk's Pepper grows wild near freshwater lakes, streams and especially in gorges, for example, at the outflow of the Aradena Gorge and Dead's Gorge in Kato Zakros; it flowers continuously from summer right into the autumn.



In the gorges, largely protected from human intervention and browsing goats, a unique colony of flora has taken root in the rocky crevices. One of the more well known species is the dittany of Crete (Origanum dictamnus), which gets its name from the Dikti Mountains. Since ancient times, the Cretans have considered the plant, which is related to wild marjoram, a miracle cure for relieving not only nagging aches and pains, but also serious diseases.

The tree line is situated at about 1700 m above sea level in Crete. Above it, a sub-alpine, thorny cushion plant scrubland covers the rough and rocky limestone terrain. A rare endemic found in the White Mountains is the Anchusa cespitosa. This plant, belonging to the borage family, thrives in altitudes between 1200 and 2200 m, where it grows close to the ground and presents its dark blue flowers in the spring. You can find it, for example, during the ascent to Melindaou (Walk 13).

Up to altitudes as high as of 2000 m, the glory-of-the-snow flower (Chionodoxa nana) can also be chanced upon. With its small, bright-blue flowers, it is also known as Cretan star hyacinth. Not long after the snow begins to melt, various species of Crocus pop their heads up, seeking the sunshine; one of the most beautiful is Sieber's crocus (Crocus sieberi) whose domain, like Anchusa cespitosa, is restricted to the White Mountains.

Sea daffodil (above), Cretan star hyacinth (centre), Sieber's crocus (below).

Oleander, arum lilies and orchids

Oleander is the typical Mediterranean plant to crown them all. It is one of Crete's most common shrubs and displays its flowers throughout the entire springtime until well into summer. In the wild, it serves as a decorative ornamental bush, growing along stream courses and in the outflow of gorges. In addition, oleander is cultivated everywhere you look; in the park grounds of hotels and along the roads, such as the National Highway between Chania and Agios Nikolaos, where its rose and white-coloured flowers delight the eye for over two hundred kilometres. As fragrant as the flowers of the oleander are, the plant itself is equally as poisonous. The leaves contain a highly toxic alkaloid, so that even goats shun them.

Red-flowering oleander in Lissos valley.

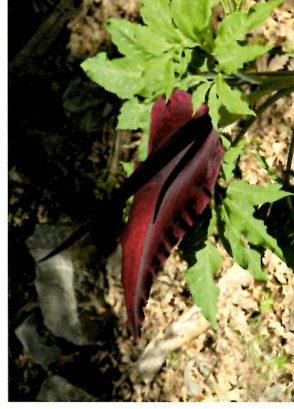


Among the most striking of Crete's natural flora are members of the arum family of plants. An elongated spathe grows out of an arrowhead-shaped, yellow bract and, colours depending on the specimen, encloses a spike-like spadix boasting tiny flowers. The island lays claim to two endemic species, the Cretan arum lily (*Arum creticum*) and the Ida arum lily (*Arum idaeum*) which takes its name from the Ida Mountains, although it also occurs in other mountain ranges. It is somewhat smaller than the Cretan arum lily and produces a white/green spadix with a purple and black coloured spathe. Also belonging to the arum family is the Dragon Arum (*Dracunculus vulgaris*), also known as the Snake Lily. The violet-coloured spathe with the same colour spadix can reach a height of up to one metre. The plant attracts insects for pollination with its pungent smell and only releases them after they have done their work. Extensive stands of Dragon Arum can be found, for example, in the gorges of Samaria and Agia Irini.

Crete is an island of orchids as well, boasting around 70 species. The main period of flowering is in March. In maccchia and open grassland, the Italian orchid (*Orchis italica*) and the Pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) are widespread. The Four-spotted Orchid (*Orchis quadripunctata*) can often be found growing along many trails. This delicate orchid can be easily identified by four spots on the lip of the pink flower. In bloom from the end of March until mid-May, the orchid usually appears in terrain in altitudes of up to 1200 m, for example, in the Rouvas Gorge, in the Thrifti Mountains and on Jouchtas, where other rare species, such as the Sawfly orchid (*Ophrys tenthredinifera*) and Ariadne's ophrys (*Ophrys cretica*), occur. Threatened with extinction is the Hooded helleborine (*Cephalanthera cucullata*): with a fair amount of luck, walkers may spot these at the upper reaches of the Rouvas Gorge.



Cretan arum lily.



Dragon Arum.

Settlements and attractions

With over 50 major seaside resorts on Crete, you are truly spoilt for choice. While on the northern coast, the majority of tourists are on a package tour, on the southern and eastern coasts, there are many independent travellers wending their own way. In places like Agia Galini, Plakias and Paleochora, the choice of small family-run guesthouses and holiday apartments is huge; even without a reservation, you normally have a good chance of finding a room. Only during the high season in summer, should you make arrangements well in advance. Looking for accommodation on site not only gives you the advantage of choosing location and amenities in your own sweet time, but you will also be able to change locality and walking region as you wish. Given the size of the island, this makes perfect sense. For example, Agios Nikolaos is, indeed, too far away from the White Mountains for a day trip and, the other way round, no one would think of exploring the eastern coast from their location in Chania, so as to walk through Dead's Gorge.

Kissamos (Kastelli)

The provincial capital, situated in the wide sweeping Gulf of Kissamos, hasn't really been discovered by tourists. From the harbour located westwards from the city, car ferries service the mainland (Peloponnese) and, in season, excursion boats bring day-trippers to the rock island of Gramvousa and to the lagoon at Balos.

Guests at the Hotel Galini Beach (Kissamos) have direct access to the beach.



Excursions: The long beach of Phalassarna on the west coast counts as one of the most attractive bathing spots on the island. In the southwest, the former runnery of Chrissokallitissa perches spectacularly at the top of a rocky cliff, about 140 m above the sea.

Walking: Kissamos is a good starting point for exploring the northwesternmost corner of the island. Very attractive are the walks along the Gramvousa and Rodopou peninsulas (Walks 1–3). In the hinterland, there are numerous gorges to explore (Walks 4, 5 and 7) and also, starting at the eco village of Milia, you can enjoy nice walks (Walk 6). Additional walks in the area: 8–10.

Accommodation: Hotel Galini Beach, tel. +30-28220-23288, www.galini-beach.com. This family-run hotel (25 air-conditioned rooms with balconies) is situated directly at the beach on the eastern village limits. Manolis Sergen-takis and his team welcome new guests as if they were old friends. The hotel has a longer season than usual, open as early as mid-March and not closing until mid-November. Good value for the money (DR €34–42).
Info: www.kissamos.net.

Chania

The second largest city on the island, with about 55,000 inhabitants, is the most urban and, because of the ferry port of Souda and the Daskalogiannis International Airport on the Akrotiri peninsula, is also western Crete's public transport centre. With the White Mountains providing a backdrop, the Old Town presents one of the most picturesque cityscapes in the entire eastern Mediterranean. Don't expect to find a sleepy little town here however; during the day, outside of the car-free pedestrian passageways, traffic is congested and hectic and parking is extremely scarce.

Worth seeing: Chania possesses a magnetic attraction for tourists. The Old Town, surrounding the picturesque harbour, has been largely influenced by the Venetians and the Ottomans and, thus, many a restored Venetian palazzo has been converted to a hotel serving tourism. In the Old Town, you will find chic boutique-style hotels located next to small and humble pensions. The major beach hotel complexes for package holiday guests are located on the seaside road to the west of Chania in the settlements of Agia Marina, Platanias and Gerani. Some of the landmarks include the Venetian light-house, the castle at the harbour and the domed Janissary mosque.



The earth pyramids at Potamida near Kissamos.



A little textile arts shop in Anogia.

Walking: Whether you have a car or are travelling by bus, Chania is an excellent starting point for walking in the White Mountains. The main attraction is the Samaria Gorge; in the high season, numerous busses drive up to the Omalas Plateau daily. From there, you can descend into the gorge or climb peaks, such as Gingilos and Melindaou (Walks 11–13). The peninsulas of Akrotiri, Drapanos and Rodopou are also close at hand (Walks 2, 3, 8, 9 and 10), even some single day excursions along the southern coast starting at Chora Sfakion and Sougia as well as through the Imbros Gorge are possible (Walks 21, 22 and 24–28).

Tourist information: EOT, Kriari 40, tel. +30-28210-92943, www.chania.eu.

Rethimnon

Crete's third largest city with about 28,000 inhabitants is located between Heraklion and Chania. In the last few years, the miles of beaches stretching westwards and eastwards from the Old Town have been built up into major tourist centres which are exceeded only by the Malia Bay in the number of beds available. Also attractive for tourists are the little seaside resorts of Panormo and Bali to the east, as well as the major package holiday centre of Georgioupolis to the west, located on a large estuary.

Worth seeing: Both the Venetians and the Turks have left their mark in the genial Old Town. Many of the old *palazzi*, as well as the castle, are Venetian, for example, and within the walls of the castle, both a church and a mosque have found a home.

Walking: In the hinterland, numerous worthwhile walks can be undertaken, for example, in the Valley of the Mills or the little circular walk around Argiroupolis (Walks 32 and 33). The Drapanos Peninsula is also not far away (Walk 10). If you have a car, both the walking regions of the White Mountains, as well as of Anogia on the northern side of the Psiloritis massif, are relatively easy to reach. Plakias, Preveli and Agia Galini can also be approached by bus (Walks 11–13, 29–31, 34 and 38).

Accommodation: Youth Hostel Rethimnon, Tobazi 41, tel. +30-28310-22848, www.yhrethymno.com. A simple hostel with dormitory rooms located in the Venetian Old Town; an international clientele (€11, per person).

Tourist information: Prokima Elefthrios Venizlou (on the seaside promenade), tel. +30-28310-29148, www.rethymnon.gr.

38

Heraklion

The American writer, Henry Miller, wrote in 1940: »Every inch of Heraklion is worth being painted«. Today, many holiday makers would disagree; most of them give the island's metropolis and fifth largest city (173,000 inhabitants) a wide berth and only a few want to spend some time here. There are reasons for this. Crete's most urban centre exudes the typical chaos which one expects from a Greek capital – noisy arterial roads, dreary residential areas and cheerless suburbs are not everyone's cup of tea.

Worth seeing: If you are interested in Minoan culture, a visit to the archaeological museum is a must. Amongst the outstanding exhibits are the faience statuette of a snake goddess, voice double axes cast in bronze with a golden shaft and the Phaistos Disc, bearing hieroglyphs arranged in a spiral; the disc remains one of the many unsolved mysteries of the Minoan civilisation. The Minoan Palace at Knossos, 5 km south of Heraklion, counts as the most important tourist attraction on the island. Whether the reconstruction of the palace, which dates back to the third millennium BC, has been true to the original, lies in the judgement that each visitor must make for himself.

Walking: We do not recommend Heraklion for a longer sojourn. If you plan on making good use of the bus transport system, however, you will find excellent service to all parts of the island. Matala and Agia Galini could easily be taken in as day trips and the mountain villages of Anogia and Zaros are included in the bus service (Walks 39, 40, 34 and 36).

Tourist information: EOT, Odos Xanthoudidou 1 (across from the archaeological museum), tel. +30-2810-247734, www.heraklion.gr.

Argiroupolis in the hinterland of Rethymnon.



Malia Bay

With room for 30,000 overnight guests, the bay situated to the east of Heraklion counts as the largest holiday centre on Crete. The two main towns along the broad, sandy beaches are Limenas Chersonisou and Malia. These can only be considered for a longer sojourn by those who can come to terms with the excesses of mass tourism. In the holiday catalogues of tour operators, Malia is colourfully described as a »lively holiday resort«. Indeed, the pubs, discos and music clubs along the rumbustious nightlife strip are open until the wee hours of the morning. In Hersonissos, you must expect aircraft noise. **Excursions:** West of Hersonissos, the Cretaquarium (www.cretaquarium.gr) in Gournes displays the diversity of the Mediterranean underwater world. **Walking:** Malia Bay is an excellent starting point for walks to Lassithi (Walks 45 and 46). Additional walks in the area: 47–49.

Agios Nikolaos

The small town (19,000 inhabitants) on the Gulf of Mirabello is the administrative centre for eastern Crete and a renowned tourist resort. Meanwhile, the town's tiny, sandy beach cannot accommodate all the bathing guests coming here during the high season, but in comparison to other dreary holiday resorts along the northern coast, the little town has retained its charm. The range of accommodation suiting every pocket is huge, but the vast majority has been pre-booked by holiday package tours or last minute ticket agencies. Several of the beachfront hotels are now getting on in years and are located on the traffic-congested coastal road. If you are looking for comfort, north of Agios Nikolaos, your dream will come true in the luxury district of Elounda.

Worth seeing: Agios Nikolaos shows its brightest side when viewed from the shores of the Voulismeni lake, which has been connected to the sea by a canal since 1870. Tavernas and the terraces of cafés line the shores of the freshwater lake, 64 m in depth. 4000 year-old tombs are on display in the archaeological museum and also, a few years older, and the star of the collection, is the so-called Goddess of Myrtos, a crude ceramic vessel sporting a long neck and attached breasts.

Excursions: To the north of Agios Nikolaos, starting from Elounda or Plaka, you can take a boat over to the island of Spinalonga, with its former Venetian fortress. Until 1957, a village housing an isolated leper colony was situated here.

Walking: The Kritsa Gorge (Walk 47), a classic walker's destination in eastern Crete, is very close at hand and, in addition, for walks in the Lassithi and the Thripti Mountains, Agios Nikolaos makes an excellent starting point (Walks 45–49). For walking regions along the eastern coast, you have to reckon about 1.5 hrs drive, to Kato Zakros, a good 2 hrs drive. Somewhat less time is needed to reach the gorges on the southeastern coast (Walks 50–52).

Tourist information: Koundourou 21 A, tel. +30-28410-22357, www.aghios-nikolaos.gr.

40



The Voulismeni lake in Agios Nikolaos.

Lassithi Plateau

Two winding mountain roads climb up to Crete's most expansive high plain; the first one starts at Malia Bay via Mochos, Krasi and the Ambelos Pass, 1050 m, the other one, from Agios Nikolaos via the Nikifordiou Pass, 1000 m. From both of the passes, you can enjoy a wonderful panoramic view taking in the ring of the Dikti Mountains surrounding the plain. 21 villages are scattered around the edges of this completely flat plateau, connected to one another by a ring road. After the winter rains and the melt water period, the plateau takes on the appearance of a great lake. The water seepage is slow and is pumped back up to the surface to irrigate the fertile fields. In days gone by, more than 1000 canvas-sailed windmills performed this task, but they have all been replaced by motor-driven pumps – nowadays, windmills can only be found on postcards, yellowed by age.

Walking: A panoramic circular walk climbs up onto Karfi, where a late-Minoan mountain settlement is to be found near the summit (Walk 45). In addition, an easy gorge walk can be undertaken through the Havga Canyon (Walk 46). The village of Koudoumalia is the starting point for demanding alpine walks onto the summits of Dikti, 2148 m, Lazaros, 2085 m, and Afendis Christos, 2141 m, – for each of the three two-thousand metre peaks, you can reckon walking times of about 9 hours, there and back.

41

Palekastro and Kato Zakros

Up until now, the east coast has only been slightly developed for tourism, but the selection of small holiday apartments is constantly growing, especially appealing to tourists looking for tranquility who prefer to keep far away from the normal touristic hurly burly. A refuge for independent travellers is Xerokambos, south of Zakros. For mobility around the east coast, you will need a hire car.

Worth seeing: The major destinations for day-trippers are: the palm beach at Vai and the 3600 year old Palace at Kato Zakros.

Walking: With a mere maximum height of about 800 m, the mountains in the far east of the island cannot compete with Crete's highest peaks, but nevertheless, this region, criss-crossed with gorges and blessed with lovely beaches, is a very good area for walking. Thanks to private initiative, a number of routes have been signed and waymarked. A very popular classic route is the final stage of the E4 from Zakros through Dead's Gorge (Walk 57). Additional walks in the area: 53–56 and 58–60.

Accommodation: Stellas Traditional Apartments, Kato Zakros, tel. +30-28430-23739, www.stelapts.com. Stella Ailamaki is renting tastefully decorated studios and apartments in rustic stone-built houses. The complex, including a garden, has been created with great attention to detail and is situated in a panoramic location above the bay of Zakros. Stella's husband, Elias, has waymarked several trails in the area. Double occupation starting at €50.

Info: www.palaikastro.com.

Stellas Apartments in a panoramic location above Dead's Gorge (Kato Zakros).



Ierapetra

Cucumber Coast is the not-so-flattering name given to the southern coast near Ierapetra (12,000 inhabitants). It is indeed true that the plastic-covered greenhouses along this coastline are not necessarily our vision of paradise. Aside from cucumbers, also artichokes, aubergines, tomatoes and a dwarf variety of bananas are cultivated here. The southwestern coast is the warmest region in Crete; in summer, it might be considered just a tad too hot, but the daytime temperatures in late autumn are pleasantly warm. The main tourist centre, Makrigialos, lies to the east of the cucumber capital. A popular meeting place for independent travellers is Mirtos, west of Ierapetra, where there are numerous little family-run pensions (www.mirtos.de).

Bathing cove at the foot of the Asterousia Mountains.

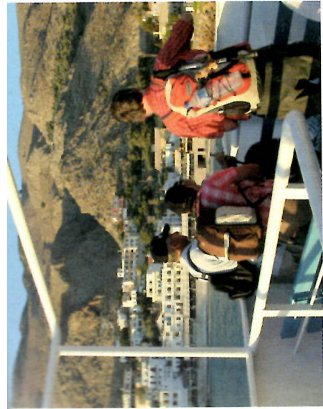
Walking: Along the southwestern coast, you can find adventurous routes through the gorges of Dasaki, Pefki and Perivolaki; also the Thripti Mountains are easy to reach (Walks 48–52). The walking region on the eastern coast is a good one and only a half hour drive away.

Lentas

It could hardly get more remote; you can only reach this little settlement on the southern coast via a winding road through the Asterousia Mountains. Lentas, with pebble beaches close at hand, is especially attractive to independent travellers looking for peace and quiet. The landmark here is the Weeping Lion: a rocky ridge, dropping steeply down to the sea, which, with a little imagination, is said to resemble a reclining lion (see photo on p. 187). **Walking:** Walk 42, leading to the beaches of Petrakis and Trachoulas, starts at your doorstep and the starting points for walks in the Asterousia Mountains can be quickly reached (Walks 43 and 44). Additional walks nearby: 37–41. Lentas is not suitable for those using public bus service. **Info:** www.lentas-online.com.

Matala, Pitsidia and Kalamaki

In the 1960s, hippies from all over Europe were trying to live out their ideals for a better world here in Matala. Today, in the high season, the beach in front of the renowned caves is fairly crowded, but Red Beach and Kommos Beach present good alternatives. In the Old Town of Matala, you can find small holiday apartments and, inland, also larger resort complexes. If you find Matala to be already too crowded or too loud, you can try the farming villages



Ferry boat offshore from Chora Sfakion.

of Pitsidia or Kalamaki, with its kilometre-long Kommos Beach.

Excursions: Highlights in the hinterland include, amongst others, the Minoan Palace of Festos, the archaeological digs at Gortis with the early-Christian basilica of Titus and the ruins of a Minoan villa in Agia Triada.

Walking: In the low season, we can recommend Matala as a good location for attractive walking tours in the immediate vicinity (Walks 38–41). In addition, Kamares and Zaros, to the south of Psiloritis, and the Asterousia Mountains, are relatively easy to approach from Matala (Walks 35–37 and 42–44).

Info: www.visitmatala.com.

Agia Galini

Despite its name (in English: Holy Silence), Agia Galini is no longer quite as quiet as you would think. In the 1970s, it was a very popular destination for backpacking tourists, but today, the resort town is one of the largest on the south coast. However, when compared to the sprawling tourist towns in the north, this harbour town, with an old centre surrounded by pensions and holiday apartments, remains idyllic even today. Especially younger tourists feel at home here.

Walking: A delightful walk begins at the harbour and leads to Kommos Beach near Pitsidia (Walk 38). Agia Galini is also a good starting point for the walks in the Matala region (Walks 39 to 41), as well as for Preveli and Plakias (Walks 29–31). On the southern side of the Psiloritis massif, the ascents to the Kamares Cave and through the Rouvas Gorge (Walks 35 and 36) are worthwhile. In addition, the routes in the hinterland of Rethymnon are within easy reach (Walks 32 and 33).

Info: www.agia-galini.com.

Plakias

The popular seaside resort on the south coast lies at the foot of a magnificent mountain backdrop. In addition to a large number of pensions, holiday apartments and a popular youth hostel, a number of major complexes have been established in recent years where package holiday tours can be booked.

Walking: Starting right in the village, two short but delightful walks set off (Walks 29 and 30). 10 km to the southeast, the »Venetian« bridge is the starting point for a walk to Preveli Beach (Walk 31). The walking region of Chora Sfakion is not quite an hour's drive away (Walks 24–28).

Accommodation: Youth Hostel Plakias, tel. +30-28320-32118, www.yhplakias.com. The popular low-budget hostel proudly lays claim to being the southernmost youth hostel in Europe and is situated only a five minute walk from the beach. Very Spartan dormitory rooms; open from Easter to the end of October. During the high season in summer, be sure to reserve well in advance (€10 per person).

Chora Sfakion

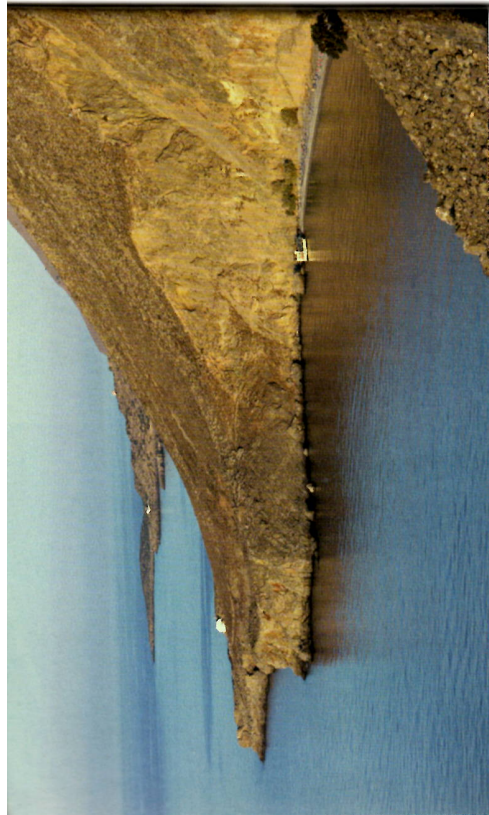
The main town of the municipality of Sfakia, which consists of 21 villages in total, is the most important hub for sea-going vessels on the southern coast due to its ferry port. Passenger boats and water taxis provide service to and from Chora Sfakion, Loutro and Agia Roumeli. Every day in the high season, thousands of day-trippers and walkers coming from the excursion through the Samaria Gorge are funnelled through the little harbour and are bussed back to their accommodations on the northern coast. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of the town itself has hardly suffered because most of the crowds flock from the harbour directly to the bus station. In the Old Town, not far from the harbour, you can find several small hotels and holiday apartments.

Walking: Chora Sfakion is an excellent starting point for walkers and includes worthwhile destinations in the immediate area, such as the gorges Imbros and Aradena as well as the villages of Loutro and Anopolis (Walks 21–28). If you have a hire car, Preveli and Plakias are also within range (Walks 29–31).

Info: www.sfakia-crete.com.

Chora Sfakion, the »capital« of the Sfakia region.





Daybreak ambience on Sweet Water Beach between Chora Stakion and Loutro.

Loutro

No roads, no cars – Loutro, to the west from Chora Stakion, is Crete straight out of a picture book. You can only reach the little settlement by boat or on foot along the E4 or along the ancient trail connecting the village to Anopolis. On the narrow beach, inviting tavernas and chic cafés have placed their tables facing the sea, so that their customers can watch the coming and going of the ferry boats.

Walking: Thanks to the excellent ferry boat connections, Loutro is a very popular place for a longer stay. Along the E4, you can walk towards Chora Stakion or Agia Roumeli, climb up to Anopolis, explore the Aradena Gorge starting at Marmara Beach, or take a short ramble into the Samaria Gorge (Walks 21–27).

Accommodation: Rooms can be rented in practically every house in the village. The best bet is Porto Loutro, tel. +30-28250-91433, www.hotelporto-loutro.com, DR €40–60).

Info: www.loutro.gr.

Agia Roumeli

The settlement at the mouth of the Samaria Gorge is only accessible by boat or on foot. The few permanent residents here are making a living almost exclusively from day-trippers or walking tourism. In the afternoon, a certain amount of turbulence rules as up to several thousand walkers and day-trippers swoop down upon the tavernas and the pebble beach.

Walking: If you spend the night in Agia Roumeli, early mornings, you can enjoy the Samaria Gorge virtually alone all the way to the Iron Gates since the droves of walkers start at the upper end and don't begin to drift in until near noon (Walk 21). Along the E4, your choice is between heading east or heading west along the breathtaking coastal cliffs (Walks 17 and 22). In the summer, ferries provide daily service from Agia Roumeli to Chora Stakion, Loutro, Sougia and Paleochora. The possible combinations are manifold.

Sougia

If there is still an insider's tip to be had for walkers on Crete, then it must be Sougia. It's true that the village, situated between Paleochora and Agia Roumeli, lives almost exclusively from tourism, but indeed, especially in the off-season, you can easily spend a couple of relaxing days here.

Walking: Directly from your doorstep, you can begin long coastal walks, either westwards towards Lissos and Paleochora or eastwards towards Cape Tripiti and to the Polifimos Cave (Walks 15–18). You won't need a hire car in Sougia since it is so easy to fill a week with walking tours without having a set of wheels. There is bus service to the starting points for the gorges of Samaria, Agia Irini and Figou (Walks 11, 19 and 20); ferries provide service from Sougia to Agia Roumeli and Paleochora.

Accommodation: Until now, the family-run pensions and little holiday apartments have been booked exclusively by independent travellers. A good bet not far from the beach is Captain George, tel. +30-28230-51133, www.sougia.info/hotels/captain_george/index.htm, DR €38–45. The owner is glad to transport walkers to Lissos and to the Tripiti Gorge with his water taxi.

Info: www.sougia.info.

Paleochora

40 years ago, this settlement was a fishing village in a remote location. Meanwhile, Paleochora (2000 inhabitants) has sprawled out all over the promontory and, with its excellent beaches, has become the largest seaside resort in the southwest island.

Excursions: In summer, boats set sail to the island of Gavdos, the geographical southernmost point in Europe; in addition, the marvellous beach of Elafonisi can be visited by boat.

Walking: Along the E4, you can walk to Sougia via Lissos (Walk 15); to the west, a short walk to the Agios Ioannis Chapel is worthwhile (Walk 14). Ferry boats connect Paleochora via Sougia to Agia Roumeli at the mouth of the Samaria Gorge; there is bus service to Omalos, which makes this village a starting point for a complete walk through the gorge (Walks 11 and 21). You can also reach both Sougia and Agia Irini quickly by road with a vehicle (Walks 16–20), but there is, unfortunately, no direct bus service.

Info: www.paleochora-info.com.

Tourist information

Getting there

By plane: Both of the international airports at Heraklion and Chania are serviced from April to the end of October by airports all over Europe (flight time about 3.5 hrs). In the winter, there are no direct flights to Heraklion and Chania, so you have to change planes in Athens and, on rare occasions, in Thessaloniki; providers are: Olympic Air, Aegean Airlines and Athens Airways. From Athens, there are also connecting flights to the national airport in Sitia on eastern Crete.

By ferry: If you wish to travel here by boat, you have to allow a lot of time. The usual route is from Ancona – Patras; fast ferries make the journey in 18 hours. From Patras, a toll motorway runs to Piräus, 200 kms away. The journey from Piräus to Crete takes an additional 6 hours. On Crete, the ferry ports are located in Heraklion, Chania, Kissamos and Sitia (only in the summer). For schedules and prices, check with the shipping companies: www.minoan.gr and www.superfast.com.

Information

■ Greek National Tourism Organisation, 4 Conduit Street, London, W1S 2DJ, tel. +44-2074959300, www.visitgreece.gr

Equipment

Apart from some easy walks along gravel trails, sturdy footwear with treaded soles is required for all routes. Light beach footwear may also prove useful – as early as June, the sand can be so hot that walking barefoot can be tortuous. For longer breaks on the beach, a small shade sail could also come in handy. Telescopic trekking poles are a possible additional aid for longer ascents and descents. Absolutely essential to take along: sufficient drinking water, rain and sun protection as well as a warm jumper or fleece jacket for cool days. Especially in the mountainous areas over 1500 m in altitude, temperatures can be surprisingly chilly even into the month of May. If you plan on paying a visit to a monastery, be sure to wear appropriate clothing (long trousers, long-sleeved blouses). Mosquito repellent is good to have against the possible onslaught of pests.

Bus transport

Intercity coaches connect the larger cities on the northern coast hourly along the National Road. The most important north to south routes are the stretches between Heraklion – Mires – Matala, as well as Rethymnon – Agia Galini and Chania – Chora Sfakion. On the southern coast, due to the sometimes rough and steep drops of the White Mountains, there is no continuous road

48



Ferry boat landing in Chora Sfakion.

along the coastline. If you want to take a bus, for example, from Plakias to Sougia or Paleochora, you would have to go first to Chania on the northern coast and then back across the island to the southern coast (by car, the situation is, naturally, the same). If departure times are especially noted in the individual walk description, these refer to the summer schedule which is valid from May until October; in winter, especially on the southern coast, but also between the seaside resorts on the northern coast, you have to expect a serious reduction in service.

Busses and schedules can be subject to change. Generally speaking, the information noted in this walking guide should be checked before every walk. Schedules, timetables and fares can be found at www.bus-service-crete-ktel.com.

Ferries

For the southwest coast, lacking in a developed network of roads, ferry service is the most important means of transport during the summer. From May until the end of October, the Anendyk Line (www.anendyk.gr; tel. +30-28210-95511) connects Chora Sfakion with Loutro, Agia Roumeli, Sougia and Paleochora; most important for walkers, these connections present some interesting linking possibilities. In stormy weather, the ferries are not in operation.

Internet

■ www.crete.tournet.gr is a good virtual travel guide with tips for special events, as well as many videos concerning the island.

49

- www.samaria.gr: the official internet site of the National Park Administration for the Samaria Gorge
- www.lefka-ori.com: walking forum focused on the White Mountains

Car hire

Car hire is quite inexpensive here when booking through the international companies (Avis, Hertz and so forth). The price of petrol is noticeably higher than that in Central Europe. Most petrol stations are closed on Sunday. The condition of the roads, especially along some secondary routes, leaves a lot to be desired: potholes, unsecured construction sites, road blocks without detours, as well as herds of goats crossing the road, demand a high degree of alertness.

Youth hostels & campsites

On Crete, youth hostels are run privately and do not belong to the International Youth Hostel Federation. Thus, a youth hostel card is not required and there are no age restrictions (addresses can be found under Rethymnon and Plakias).

You'll find a solid dozen campsites on Crete. Most of them are very simple and lacking in comfort; almost all of them are located at the seaside or not

Herds of sheep and goats always have the right of way.



far from it. Shady and relatively acceptable are: Camping Nopigia (www.campingnopigia.gr, with tent rental) on the Gulf of Kissamos, Camping Elisabeth (www.camping-elizabeth.net) 4 kms east of Rethymnon and Camping No Problem (www.agia-galini.com) in Agia Galini. Camping in the wild is not permitted but, nevertheless, you will find it on many isolated coves, for example, on Sweet Water Beach near Chora Sfakion. Along the E4, due to the lack of accommodation underway, you have no choice but to camp outdoors.

Season

Peak season for a beach holiday is the summer months from July to the beginning of September when you'll enjoy stable weather with plenty of sunshine and virtually no rain on the island. For walkers, the low seasons are ideal, from May until mid-June and from end of September until end of October. These periods are not only advantageous due to less heat and fewer crowds of tourists, but also because the prices for accommodation are reduced by about 20 percent. In winter, most of the hotels and tavernas are closed.

Crime

Crete is a safe island; violent crimes against tourists are virtually unknown and theft is very rare, but like anywhere else, you should not leave any valuables in your vehicle. At the car park near Agiotarango (Walk 41) there have been repeated incidences of car break-ins.

Taxi

For the relatively inexpensive city taxi service, the taxi metre is used (official regulations); overland, fixed prices are set, but are not inexpensive.

Telephone

The country code for Greece is 0030. From Greece to Great Britain 0044 (the zero in the local area codes is dropped). The mobile telephone network is well established on the island; dead spots are usually only encountered in sparsely populated mountain areas and in gorges.

Time zone

On Crete, clocks are set according to Eastern European Time (EET); upon arrival, if you live in the Central European Time zone, you have to set your time forwards by one hour.

Photo p. 53: At Preveli Beach, the Megalopotamos merges into the Libyan Sea (Walk 31).

Emergency numbers

- Police: 100
- Emergency: 112
- Emergency medical care and ambulance: 166
- Fire brigade: 199

A few words in Greek for the journey

good morning	kaliméra	boat	karáwi
good day	kaliméra	bridge	jéfira
good evening	kalisépéra	fountain	pigádi
greeting when coming and going	ja sas	castle	kástro
thank you	eftcharistó	bus	leoforío
please	parakaló	village	chorió
I want ...	thélo ...	fire	fofiá
... water	... neró	house	lófos
... a taxi	... éna taxi	hill	nisi
... food	... fajitó	island	akrotírio
... drink	... na pijó	cape	eklisia
where is ...?	pou iná ...	church	skopelos
... the way to	... o drómos ja ...	cliff	monastíri
... a café	... éna kafenio	monastery	thalassa
... the bus stop	... i stásis	sea	monopáti
... the harbour	... to limáni	path	kalderimi
here	edó	cobbled path	platia
there	ekí	square	vrisi
straight ahead	ethía	source	parallia
right	dexiá	beach	drómos
left	aristerá	road, trail (general)	pósimo neró
below	káto	drinking water	
above	páno	1, 2, 3	éna, díó, tríá
close by	kondá	4, 5, 6	téssera, pénte, éxi
far away	makriá	7, 8, 9	eftá, ochtío, ennéa
viewpoint	théa	10	déka
car	afokínito	100	ekató
mountain	vounó	1000	chília

The Greek alphabet

A, α	ah	η	n
B, β	»v« as in »villa«	ξ	x
Γ, γ	y before e, i otherwise soft, gargled gh	ο	oh
Δ, δ	hard »th« like »this«	π	p (soft)
Ε, ε	eh	ρ	r (rolled)
Ζ, ζ	»z« like Ouzo	σ	s
Η, η	ee	τ	t
Θ, θ	soft »th« like »thanks«	υ	ee
Ι, ι	ee	φ	f
Κ, κ	k	χ	soft, gargled ch like the sound of a cat's hiss
Λ, λ	l	ψ	ps like PS »chips«
Μ, μ	m	ω	between »awe« and »oh«



1 Tigani Balos

1.00 hrs



Ramble across the Gramvousa peninsula to a splendid coastline

In Crete's extreme north-west, the uninhabited Gramvousa peninsula, covered only in a sparse scrubland with cushion plants, extends into the Cretan Sea like a pointing finger. Pirates once made landfall on the west coast of the peninsula and a Venetian castle, perched on a fortified island lying offshore, recalls the stirring history. Today, tourist boats lay anchor in the turquoise lagoon at Balos. It is best to arrive early in the morning when hardly anybody else is around, or in late afternoon, when everyone has left. Too bad that the road leading here is so rough!



Trail at the foot of the coastal mountains.

Starting point: car park on the Gramvousa peninsula, 155 m. Approaching from Kissamos, shortly past the harbour, a narrow road forks away towards Balos. First, cross through the settlement of Kalliviani. After not quite 3 kms from the harbour, at the Balos Beach Hotel, an extremely rough and bumpy road starts off, running always along the eastern side of the Gramvousa peninsula and then passing the Agia Irini chapel. 8 km further on, the road ends at the car park for the lagoon at Balos. You will need to allow 40 minutes driving time for the 11 km stretch from the

harbour at Kissamos. For a normal car, the approach along the truly rough track is a real torture for both the vehicle and the driver, yet quite a few rental cars, without four-wheel drive, are negotiating this route. Long sections have to be driven using first gear. In high season, you have to pay a toll of €1 per person.

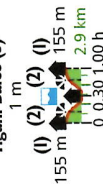
Height difference: 155 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: short, easy walk along a well laid, sometimes cobbled, trail; it can be very windy at times.

Refreshment: tavernas at the car park and on the beach at Balos' lagoon.

Worth seeing: in summer, from the ferry harbour in Kissamos, excursion boats are sailing several times every day into the lagoon and also offer an excursion to the fortress island of Imeri Gramvousa (www.gramvousa.com). From the boat landing, a steep footpath climbs up to the Venetian outpost, situated at a height of 138 m. Keep an eye out to see if the Lion of St. Mark, broken into four pieces, still lies in front of the portal to the fortress.

Tigani Balos (3)



The lagoon at Balos.

The car park (1) in front of the taverna is bordered on its western side by a knee-high wall. The upper passageway leads to a viewpoint only a few minutes away. But instead, take the trail that begins just a few paces below this passageway; at the outset, the trail is flanked by white stones. Not quite a quarter of an hour later, the turquoise coloured lagoon and Cape Tigani, which is connected by a rocky isthmus, come into view as well as the offshore islands. The Greek word *tigani* means 'frying pan', the isthmus is, so to speak, the panhandle of the island. From the panoramic viewpoint (2), climb down to the dunes along a trail, which is sometimes stepped, and meet up with the beach at Balos. Pass the boat landing and then, in only a few minutes, reach the Taverna Balos (3) on the southern end of the bay. Return back again along the approach route.





Along panoramic trails to the pilgrimage chapel of Agios Ioannis Gionis

The northern part of the Rodopou peninsula is virtually deserted and the treeless terrain is extremely desolate. Nevertheless, this circular walk presents superb views of Chania bay and of Kissamos bay. After a rather unspectacular start along a road, descend via an ancient mule track to a secluded church, situated above the coast; every August, this is the destination for an important pilgrimage.

Starting point: Rodopos, 240 m. From the National Road between Chania and Kissamos, take the exit for Aspra Nera and then follow the signs into Rodopos, 5 kms away. Parking possible at the village square.

Height difference: 540 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: long circular walk on roads, older trails and an ancient mule track. The first one and a half hours lead along a

road which is tarmac at first, later gravel-surfaced, but with almost no traffic. If you wish to ascend onto the western side of the peninsula, you should be a sure-footed walker. The coastal trail past the turn-off to Agios Pavlos is waymarked, however, the sometimes rough path leading over karst rock is not always easy to follow. No shade and sometimes very windy.

Refreshment: nothing en route. A coffee house in the village square in Rodopos.

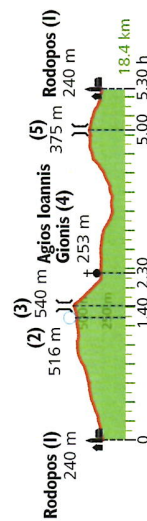


The pilgrimage church, Agios Ioannis Gionis.

From the village square in Rodopos (1), follow the main road of the village northwards and, a good 200 m on, pass a large domed church. A quarter of an hour later, the street ascends in two tight bends. Now walk through the entire length of a high valley where grapevines are being cultivated. After 40 minutes, the road becomes gravel-surfaced. The cultivated terrain is now behind us, and a treeless, rugged karst landscape begins, covered only in *phrygana* undergrowth. Eastwards, we have a view of the Chania bay, while to the left of the trail, a mountain range crops up with a height of a good 700 m; the White Mountains are behind us.

The roadway continues ascending steadily, but never unpleasantly steep. About one and a half hours after leaving Rodopos, keep an eye out to the left for a large, flat cistern

(2) that is covered with two square metal flaps. At this point, turn left onto a path to leave the gravel track behind. The path, flanked by a low embankment, leads through a narrow valley. A good 250 m further on, the path crosses over a country lane and, three minutes after that, meets up with an intersecting trail. The cone-shaped Onichas mountain appears to the left, but we turn right instead and, at the fork not quite 100 m further on, bear slightly to the left while ascending. The gravel trail leads, after another 100 m, onto a windy pass (3), 540 m. A couple of paces further on, reach a cottage with cattle watering tanks in front of it. With this to our left, head towards the sea while passing through a rocky notch in the terrain which leads, in two minutes, to a stonework viewing platform where a tiny church is located. Here, we get a wonderful view over the Kissamos Gulf, including the Gramvousa





View of the tiny church.

peninsula. Down below, a plain broadens out, filled with cultivated fields; on the right-hand edge of the plain, the pilgrimage church, surrounded with a wall, lies hidden by trees.

At the viewing platform, a cobbled mule track begins, descending sometimes roughly and in zigzags. In the lower reaches, the track has been destroyed, but orientation is very simple. At a little marble shrine, meet up with a road and take this by bearing right to reach the church dedicated to John the Baptist, **Agios Ioannis Gionis (4)**, 253 m. In this area, surrounded by a wall, two large tables have been placed which can accommodate several hundred people. It is always packed here on the 28th and 29th of August when a grand saint's day celebration is held to honour John the Baptist.

From the church, walk back to the marble shrine and then follow the road southwards along fields cultivated with grapes and olive trees, while heading in the direction of Agios Pavlos. The mountain ridge beyond the fields blocks the view of the sea at first, but a good 10 minutes later, the Kissamos Gulf appears once again.

About 40 minutes past the pilgrimage church, a downwards view opens up of a little church perched above the sea, **Agios Pavlos**, where the road ends. However, leave the trail behind a good way before then: in a sharp, right-hand bend, we head straight on along a mule track. At the outset, the track is rather indistinct as it runs at first, almost on the level, high above the coast; faded red dots and cairns lying 50 m further on are an assurance that we are on the right track. Below the mountain ridge, which divides the peninsula into two parts, we can spot a »white cottage«; the trail climbs up to the »cottage« after a final steep ascent. Arriving at the spot, the little house proves to be only a container. Now a track, ascending rather moderately, climbs up to a long, drawn-out **saddle (5)**, 375 m; from here, the Chania Gulf comes into sight once more. During the descent, the church towers at Rodopos appear again. Pass a football pitch and then meet up with an intersecting trail at the village limits. Turn right here and, a couple of paces further on, turn left to return to the village square of **Rodopos (1)**.





Lovely coastal walk on the west side of the Rodopou peninsula

Between the grand bays of Kissamos and Chania, the Rodopou peninsula extends far into the Cretan Sea. On a hitherto little-known coastal path, the rocky west coast is open for exploration to some extent. Capes and pebble beaches are lying along the way and with a constant, lovely view of the Kissamos Gulf, boredom will certainly not come to the fore. The only drawback: the pebble beaches are marred somewhat by the flotsam and plastic waste washed ashore.

Starting point: the Nopigia campsite, 2 m. From Kissamos, take the National Road (New Road) towards Chania, passing the Mithimna campsite 4 km on. 1.5 km after that, take the turn-off for the Nopigia campsite. Arriving at the sea-side, the campsite appears after another 300 m and, 150 m past the entrance gate, there's a little parking area at the side of the road. Nopigia is situated on the bus line Chania – Kissamos (ask the

driver to stop at the turn-off for the campsite).

Height difference: 375 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: not a difficult walk, leading along roads and coastal paths. The path is sometimes waymarked with cairns and red dots, however, a certain degree of route-finding skill would be helpful.

Refreshment: Taverna Nepatia in Ravdoucha.

Flowering oleander in front of the silhouette of the Gramvousa peninsula.



From the **Nopigia campsite (1)**, follow the narrow seaside road in a north-easterly direction. After a few metres, the road becomes a gravel trail and then runs parallel to the waterline in a broad bend along the west coast of the Rodopou peninsula. The pebble beach gives way to a bizarre rocky coastline. Soon, a sweeping view opens up taking in the Kissamos Gulf, which is enclosed at the western end by the Gramvousa peninsula.

A good ten minutes later, reach a **panagia (2)** with a little bathing area in front of it. Not quite 50 m past the chapel, leave the coastal trail behind by turning right onto a path and passing a couple of carob trees while ascending a slope diagonally (the coastal trail ends a few minutes further on in front of the steep coastline). The very indistinct goat path ascends through knee-high *phryganea* to an unpaved road on a little plateau; disused guard rails may be lying about. Follow the roadway northwards, that is, to the left. Five minutes later, at a fork, bear slightly to the left while descending. The stony track becomes a path which leads over outcrops of rock while dropping down to a pebble beach.

Now walking along the sea, head towards the Sidheris cape lying ahead; offshore, two concrete posts are sticking out of the water. The path leads through mastic bushes for a couple of metres, parallel to the pebble beach. Pass a circular threshing yard. Climb over two low walls built of gathered stones and, shortly after, reach the tumbledown, quarry-stone chapel of **Agios Vasilios (3)**. A little altar and sacred images bear witness that the chapel is still in use.

Not quite 200 m past the chapel, at a large thicket of oleander, keep your eyes sharp! Just past the first clump of oleander bush, there may be an





Descent along a mule track in the Tschiliana Gorge

The wide gorge at Sirikari presents an opportunity for a very pleasant walk. This route is most obliging to anyone who wishes to ramble freely without constant path-finding, scrambling over boulders or crossing over stream beds via slippery fords. The path and an idyllic rest area, located in the middle of the gorge, were recently revamped and waymarked using EU funds; an excursion into the ancient site of Polyrinia makes for a fine alternative route.

Starting point: Agios Konstantinos, 505 m. At the eastern village limits of Kissamos, turn off onto the Old Road and then follow the signs to Sirikari, 18 kms away. Drive through the village and, 0.5 km further on, head for the Agios Konstantinos church which could be seen from afar during the approach.

Height difference: 330 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a steep descent at the beginning along a well-laid mule track (be careful when wet). The trail is marked throughout with a green square on a white background.

Refreshment: nothing en route; tavernas in Polyrinia.

Alternative: just past the arched bridge, the houses of Polyrinia appear, although still quite a good distance away. 5 minutes later, meet up with a pump house. From there, ascend to a gate 30 m further on and then descend along a broad road while bearing slightly to the right. This road leads out of the gorge and then merges into a narrow, tarmac-surfaced secondary road a little later on. Follow the secondary road for not quite 20 minutes, bearing right at a fork (E-4) and then, after another 5 minutes, meet up with the village's main street; turn sharp right here at the village limits of Polyrinia to reach the Taverna Odyssseas, 257 m. Not very far from the taverna, you could climb up a hill, 417 m, to reach the modest remains of the acropolis of ancient Polyrinia, from



In the Tschiliana Gorge.

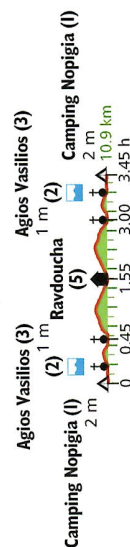
which, you can enjoy a sweeping view over the Kissamos Gulf (walking time from the arched bridge to the Taverna Odyssseas, is a good 30 minutes).

arrow formed from stones on the ground, pointing to the right (if the arrow is no longer there, this spot is marked, a couple of paces on, by a square-shaped boulder, measuring about 30 cm in height). Along the path, skirt around the dense oleander thicket and cross a stream course. Now pass through a small wood and ascend, somewhat steeply, up the slope (the path is slippery under foot), through gorse, which will be flowering in May. Shortly after passing a somewhat overhanging rock face, reach the **Sidheris cape (4)**, 60 m.

From the cape, the path (at the outset, very indistinct) veers slightly to the right, passing through cushion plant heath and then traversing a slope. Cross over another dry and rocky stream bed. From a flat headland, a view now opens up of our destination: the little boat landing at Ravdoucha. The path, now reinforced in some places with supporting walls, leads along a slightly precipitous stretch on a cornice-like projection at the foot of the rock face. Soon, we are joined by a chain-linked fence. Just when the fence begins an ascent to the right, continue straight on through a gate, entering a grove of olive trees. Afterwards, on a hairpin bend, meet up with a road, 133 m, and turn left (to the right, an ascent to the village of Ravdoucha).

A couple of minutes later, pass a wash house with the Agia Marina church perched above it. With the wash house behind us, now pass by a luxurious villa complex, sticking out of the gentle landscape like some sort of foreign body. Not quite a quarter of an hour later, take a farm track to short-cut a bend in the road and, just before reaching the seaside, meet up with the Taverna **Nepatia**, which boasts a shady terrace. From the taverna, it is only another 150 m to the boat landing of **Ravdoucha (5)**. The pebble beach located there, however, is not much to look at. Return along the approach route back to the **Nopigia campsite (1)**.

The Taverna Nepatia's garden terrace.



The path begins to the right of an information board at the car park in front of the **Agios Konstantinos (1)** church. Right away, cross through a gate and descend, at first quite steeply, along a slope which is covered in dense scrub; in autumn, the strawberry trees, bearing their bright red fruit, really catch the eye. As soon as the macchia thins out, the further course of the path can be scrutinised as it descends through the Tschiliana Gorge. Now enter a

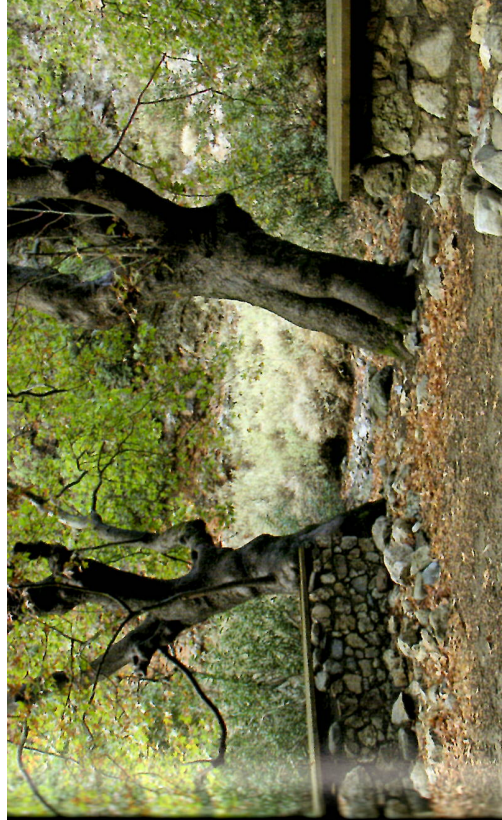
The fruit of the strawberry tree resemble ...



... those of the plane tree, almost to a T.



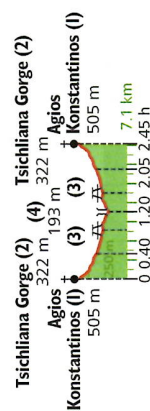
grove of olive trees. Passing two gates, one following shortly after the other, the path merges into a concrete-paved trail. Turn right onto this trail and, 50 m further on, meet up with a little **farmhouse**. Immediately in front of the farmhouse, cross over the veranda and after a few paces, in front of a stall, turn right. Just above the stream bed of the **Tschiliana Gorge (2)**, 322 m, meet up with an intersecting path and



Plane trees provide shade for the rest area in the stream bed of the Tschiliana Gorge.

turn right onto it heading down into the gorge. Along the dry stream bed, the usual flora is flourishing – plane trees, oleander bushes and Cretan maple, with some sweet chestnut trees mixed in. The western walls of the gorge tower more than 300 m in height, but they never close in to become very narrow. Afterwards, reach a **rest area (3)** right in the middle of the gorge's stream bed where picnic tables and even rubbish bins are there to use. Gnarled plane trees provide plenty of shade. If you prefer soaking up some sunshine, take the path another 200 m further on to reach a somewhat higher-lying **viewpoint** where there are also places to sit.

The most beautiful area of the Tschiliana Gorge is now already behind us, however, you could continue along the path for another 15 mins to reach an ancient **arched bridge (4)**, 193 m. Several minutes past the bridge, the idyllic stretch comes to an end and a broad roadway begins. If you don't care to continue on to Polyirinia, the bridge marks your turn-around point. Return along the approach route to head back to **Agios Konstantinos (1)**.





A two-gorge circular walk in the hinterland of Kissamos

The Topoliano Gorge is usually admired by most visitors from a viewpoint on the road along the way to the bathing paradise of Elafonisi, but indeed, you can also walk through it. The circular walk also takes in the less lengthy, but more pristine, Mouri Gorge. Between the two canyons, extensive groves of olive trees are traversed along pleasant country lanes and also, quiet villages are briefly encountered.

Starting point: the Taverna Archondas in Katsomatados, 264 m. Approaching from Kissamos, take the Old Road at the eastern city limits and then follow signs towards Elafonisi/Topolia/Paleochora. Past Topolia and not quite 2 km past the tunnel that follows, in Katsomatados, turn sharp left onto a narrow road to the Taverna Archondas where parking is possible on the river bridge in front of the taverna. If you take the bus (Chania – Elafonisi line; from Chania about 9.00; return from Katsomatados about 16.40) to Katsomatados, from the bus stop at the Taverna Kapetanios, head back along the road for 150 m in the direction of Kissamos to reach the Taverna Archondas.

Height difference: a good 500 m in both ascent and descent.

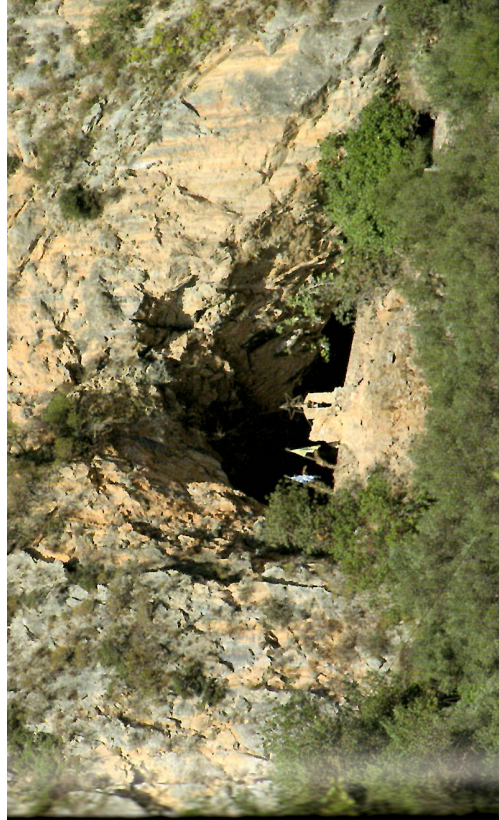
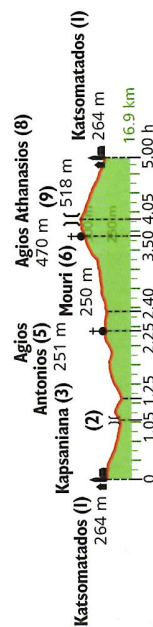
Grade: the circular walk leads mostly along broad, unpaved country lanes with no traffic. Narrow paths lead through the gorges, sometimes over very rocky terrain, and the most strenuous section of all is the short ascent through the Mouri Gorge. In the Topoliano Gorge, cairns are a help in route-finding and, in the Mouri Gorge, very faded, red waymarkers.

Otherwise, the route is not waymarked and it is important to pay close attention to a number of junctions. Outside of the gorges, expect very little shade.

Refreshment: the Taverna Archondas at the starting point; excellent Cretan homemade food at the Milia Mountain Retreat (10 km from Katsomatados; for the approach, see Walk 6).

Note: the circular walk is usually feasible starting from mid-June, but if undertaking the walk earlier than that, you must expect that the water level in the stream bed of the Topoliano Gorge is possibly still too high to negotiate.

Worth seeing: along the approach or during the return, it is worthwhile in Potamida (6 km south of Kissamos) to make an excursion to the earth pyramids (photo on p. 37). Approaching from Kissamos, shortly past the church at Potamida, a trail branches off (always follow the brown wooden signs). Also quite appealing is a visit to the Agia Sofia Cave Chapel in Katsomatados; from Café Romanza, you can reach the dripstone cave along a stepped trail in only a few minutes.



The Agia Sofia Cave Chapel in the rock face of the Topoliano Gorge.

In **Katsomatados (1)**, a country lane begins at the taverna on the upper end of the river bridge. Follow the lane along the left bank heading downstream into the Topoliano Gorge. The lane leads at first through a grove of olive trees as it runs parallel to the secondary road down below. 10 minutes later, in the western rock face of the gorge, high above, we can spot the gable belfry of the Agia Sofia Cave Chapel.

Past the olive grove, the country lane becomes a path; here, the river bed is usually completely dry – it seeps into the permeable rock and then continues underground. Not quite a half an hour after beginning the walk, the path changes over to the right bank along a **concrete-paved ford**, sometimes somewhat overgrown with Jerusalem sage and spurge. At the same height as a blue-coloured conduit, climb back down into the stream bed of the gorge; cairns are a good aid in finding the continued route.

Pass a cave in the left-hand rock face of the gorge where a cross is dangling from the ceiling, and then pass a concrete foundation, which is probably the remains of a bridge. 5 mins after that, a **chain-linked fence** has been spanned across the stream bed of the gorge. We can skirt around this by crossing through a small gate located about 5 m away from the left-hand side of the gorge. In the dry stream bed, which is now overgrown with a dense thicket of intertwining branches, we can only continue our course by sometimes ducking down. A good 5 mins past the fence, we find ourselves standing beneath an **arched bridge (2)** in front of an insurmountable preci-

pice. This means that we have gone too far, so return along the stream bed for about 75 m and then ascend to the left for a few paces while climbing up the embankment. In a grove of olive trees, about 100 m further on, meet up with a country lane. Turn left onto the lane only to meet a fork soon after and turn left again, now crossing the stream bed easily via the arched bridge. About 5 minutes past the bridge, meet up with an intersecting trail and turn right to ascend (the trail to the left leads to Topolia). At the junction, not quite 100 m on, bear right and reach a tarmac road (91 m) at the houses of **Kapsaniana (3)**. Bearing right, another bridge provides a river crossing. Immediately past the bridge, turn right again onto a narrow tarmac road and ascend. A few minutes later, the road becomes a dirt trail and continues along winding bends through terraces of olive trees while climbing eastwards up the slope of the gorge.

At the outset, a pleasant country lane leads through the Topoliano Gorge.



About 25 minutes past Kapsaniana, the trail forks in front of a vineyard hillside. Do not ascend by turning right here; instead, continue straight on. We are now at the same height as the striking church tower of Topolia, located on the western side of the gorge. 5 minutes past the vineyard, a chapel is situated below the trail with two tables in front of it, a nice place to take a break. At the fork, 100 m on, continue straight ahead along the quarry-stone walls of an abandoned house, passing it by, catch a view of Kapsaniana, already lying far below. Not much later, at the village limits of **Latsiana (4)**, 193 m, meet up with a narrow tarmac road at a fountain; next to it is a gnarled plane tree and, down below, a chapel for the cemetery. Ascend along the narrow road which is no longer tarmac once past the houses of Latsiana.

Always keeping to the main trail, a good 10 minutes past the fountain, reach a major junction and, again, continue straight ahead. At the next signed junction, 200 m past the major one, opportunity knocks for a short excursion to the church of **Agios Antonios (5)**, 251 m. The

church is situated panoramically at the terminus of a mountain ridge. From a bench on the square in front of the church, enjoy a sublime view, taking in extensive olive groves and, in a frame created by the Gramvousa peninsula and the Rodopou peninsula, the Kissamos Gulf. In the church's interior, take a peek at the vaulted ceiling, painted to portray a starry night.

Back on the main trail, turn left. 15 minutes later, reach a tarmac road at the village limits of **Mouri (6)**, 250 m. Turn right onto the road to pass through the almost completely deserted village and a *kaferion* which is usually closed. As soon as the road veers sharply to the right at the southern village limits, leave it behind by continuing straight ahead along a stony track. Once again, the route traverses extensive groves of olive trees. Continue along the





From an ecovillage through chestnut forests and remote villages

The one-time summer resort settlement of Milia is rather off the beaten track and hidden in a chestnut forest south of Kissamos. Today, Milia is a model project for sustainable tourism, driven by a committed community; the trip there is worthwhile, even if only because of the excellent taverna. A contemplative circular walk provides an insight into this peaceful region.

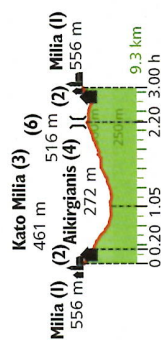
Starting point: the car park in Milia, 556 m. From Kissamos, at first take the Old Road for 2 km towards Chania to reach Kaloudiana. From there, follow the secondary road signed for Paleochora. A good 2 km past Katsomatados, turn off towards Vlatos; from there, follow the signs for Milia. The final 2.5 km is along a gravel road that is easy to drive.

Height difference: 380 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a circular walk that is not difficult, along paths and gravel-surfaced trails; the middle section follows a secondary

road with little traffic.

Refreshment and accommodation: a taverna in the Milia Mountain Retreat (tel. +30-28210-46774, www.milia.gr, DR 675-85).



In the olive grove of Kato Milia.



main trail about a half an hour past Mouri, during which, concrete-paved fords serve twice as a crossing over dry stream beds. Immediately after the second fording, a narrow path turns right into the **Mouri Gorge (7)**. The path ascends at first along the left bank of the rocky stream bed, but during the further course of the rather narrow and rocky gorge, we will be forced to change banks several times and scramble over boulders as well.

A good 10 minutes later, the rough spots of the relatively short gorge are already lying behind us. The path continues on to the left of a fence and then leads through a gate. Shortly before the **Agios Athanasios (8)** chapel, 470 m, climb down into an eroded gully, about 2 m in depth, and then, 30 m on, climb back out again by ascending the embankment to the right. At the fenced-in chapel, cross the gully once again and pass through another gate. On the other side, now follow a gravel-surfaced track. Not quite 5 minutes later, turn right onto an intersecting trail and ascend. Immediately, a view opens up into the broad valley of Sasalos and across undulating hills cultivated with olive trees.

At the next junction, turn left and the trail now heads towards a saddle. Just before this, turn right to the **pass (9)**, 518 m. Once there, on the other side of a gate, meet a junction of three trails and take the middle one which is concrete-paved at the outset and, at the fork another 250 m or so further on, bear right. Now a long descent follows, during which we keep to the main trail as it winds its way, in many bends, through treeless terrain of *phrygana*, descending towards the secondary road from Katsomatados; this road soon comes into view. Also appearing again is the Topoliano Gorge with the chapel of Agia Sofia, recessed in a cave.

At yet another chapel, enter again into a grove of olive trees and, 20 minutes later, return to the Taverna Archondas in **Katsomatados (1)**.



The lower reaches of the Topoliano Gorge.



Trail signs with Kastelos in the background.



From the car park in **Milia (1)**, a gravel trail, closed to cars, descends in 5 minutes to the houses of the ecovillage. At the **taverna (2)**, follow the trail that is cobbled at the beginning, descending slightly. About 100 m further on, before reaching a commercial building, turn left in the direction of Kato Milia. Another 30 m on, turn right to cross through a gate and soon traverse a marvellous sweet chestnut forest. Cross over a goat trail. In **Kato Milia (3)**, at the junction past a quarry-stone house, turn left to descend. A couple of especially striking chestnut trees are growing here. Now continue through a grove of olive trees while the trail keeps heading towards the prominent Kastelos. We will soon walk at its foot.

Pass a chapel and, shortly after, cross over a stream bed. The trail has become wide and gravel-surfaced as it descends fairly steeply along a stream course flanked by plane trees. Keeping to the main trail, it then merges into a secondary road. Turn right along the road and enter the hamlet of **Aikirgianis (4)**, 272 m. At the village limits, there is a fountain with good drinking water. Along the slightly ascending street through this long, drawn-out village, pass by the church. Five minutes after that, turn sharp right onto a narrow street heading in the direction of Tsourouniana. To the left, catch a church tower of Topolia, with a humpback ridge towering behind it; a cleft in the ridge marks the course of the Topoliano Gorge (Walk 5).



Restored quarry-stone house in the ecovillage, Milia.

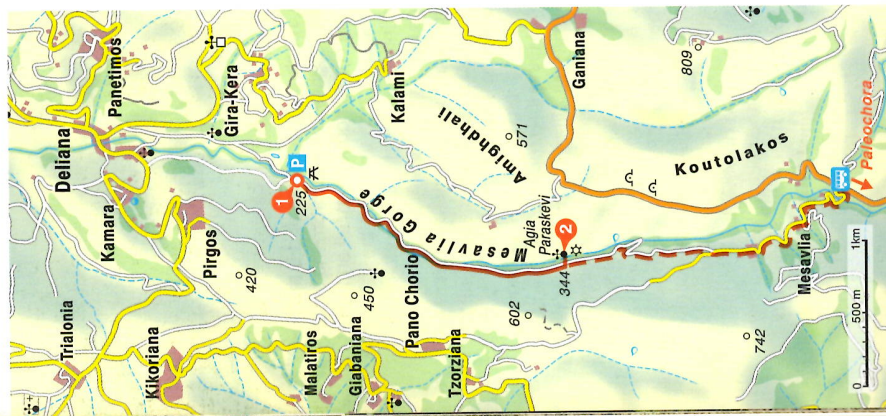
At the village limits of **Tsourouniana (5)**, reach a wash house and a memorial to the victims of the Second World War. Slightly set back from the street, a closed *kafenion* is standing. In front of the coffee house, turn left and meet up with a concrete-paved trail, 10 m further on. Climb up along the trail into the village. Once in the village, reach an intersecting, also concrete-paved, trail; turn right onto this trail and, 3 minutes later, meet up with a tarmac road. Turn sharp right onto this road. Continuing the ascent, the narrow road soon heads toward the mighty crag summit of Kastelos, to the left of which, we will descend again into the Milia valley after climbing a saddle.

About 7 minutes along the road, a dirt trail forks off; ignore this trail and instead, continue along the road another 10 m and then turn right onto a concrete-paved trail which becomes a rocky dirt trail after walking a few paces along it. To the left of Kastelos, the saddle also appears now. In a grove of olive trees, ignore all trails branching off from the main one. Shortly before reaching the saddle, the trail narrows into a path and is waymarked with red and blue markings. In the **saddle (6)**, 516 m, we find ourselves standing at about the same height as Milia, but before we return again to the taverna, we must descend again into the valley. An ancient mule track, sometimes supported with laboriously-constructed walls, leads to a gravel trail. Along this, bearing to the right, descend past strawberry trees and heather trees to meet up again with the junction for **Kato Milia (3)** and, from there, ascend straight ahead to reach the **taverna (2)** and the car park at **Milia (1)**.



Simple ramble to a little chapel

Depending on the direction from which you approach the gorge, it bears a different name: if you are coming from Deliana, it is called the Deliana Gorge; in Mesavlia, it is called the Mesavlia Gorge. The short gorge is easily reached via a pleasant trail, yet it is little-known and rarely walked.



Starting point: Deliana, 225 m. From the National Road, take the Kolimbari exit and drive from there, via the villages of Spilia, Drakona and Episkopi to reach Deliana, 13 kms away. Drive the whole way through Deliana and, shortly past the village limits, a sign to the left points out the direction to the gorge. Along a gravel road for 1.4 kms, reach a large car park with a picnic area at the entrance to the gorge.

Height difference: 120 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: the walk through the gorge follows a broad trail, pretty much the whole way on the level. Comfortable, mid-height footwear is more than adequate.

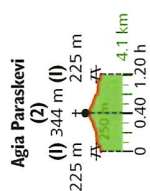
Refreshment: nothing en route. Tavernas in Deliana.

Alternative: if you are approaching by bus, begin the walk in Mesavlia. The settlement is on the bus line Chania – Paleochora (Mon–Sat, three times a day, twice on Sun.). From either location, the walk is feasible to tackle as a single day's tour. At the bus stop shelter in Mesavlia, a sign (Gorge of Mesavlia) points out a narrow tarmac road. In front of a cottage with a bread oven, the road veers to the left and ascends. 10 minutes later, in front of a cluster of houses, bear right and a good 5 minutes after that, the road leads to the right and then immediately to the left, passing between some houses. At a fork, 2 minutes later, leave the narrow road by turning right onto a gravel trail; descend along this into the gorge (walking time to the rest area at the gorge's exit and back again, 2.20 hrs.).

A pleasant gravel track leads through the Deliana Gorge.

From the **rest area (1)**, go past the WC, following a broad trail, and enter the gorge. The trail leads along a dry stream bed flanked by plane trees and oleander. Five minutes later, the trail changes over to the other bank of the stream for the first time, via a concrete-laid ford and, somewhat later on, reaches a wooden gate. Here, the walls of the gorge tower 150 m heavenwards. A little marble shrine with a cross is located to the right of the trail. After about 20 minutes, the trail, concrete-paved for a short stretch, begins to ascend gently along the right-hand side of the gorge; ignore another trail branching off to the right. Shortly after that, reach a large open area, to the left of which, the **Agia Paraskevi chapel (2)**, 344 m,

is situated. The long picnic benches in front of it are only fully occupied once a year when the festival of the chapel's patron saint is celebrated. The chapel already marks our turning back point; return along the approach route to the **rest area (1)** near Deliana.



8 From Stavros to the chapel cave Agios Georgios

2.15 hrs



Following the footsteps of Alexis Zorba

The novel »Zorba the Greek«, by Nikos Kazantzakis, lent Crete international fame. Even though it's been half a century since the story appeared as a film in cinemas, the little seaside resort on the northern coast of the Akrotiri peninsula still remains a pilgrimage site for cinema lovers and anyone else who has ever taken the cranky Greek into their hearts. In the film, the cable car broke down on the steep slope above the shallow lagoon, and Anthony Quinn danced the famous Sirtaki on the beach; the steps were invented especially for the film. From »Zorba Mountain«, a short walk leads to a hidden chapel cave.



Starting point: Stavros, 1 m. From Chania's village centre, follow the signs towards Stavros (16 km). By bus from the bus station in Chania, four to five times daily.

Height difference: 185 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: an easy walk along good trails and paths with only a modest difference in height. Very little shade!

Alternative: if you have pre-arranged transport back again or transport taking you further, you can continue the walk from the cistern along a very pretty path which will bring you, in a good hour, to the Katholiko Monastery and further on to the Gouverneto Monastery (Walk 9); or you can return from Katholiko along the approach route back to Stavros.

Refreshment: nothing en route: numerous tavernas in Stavros. A nice place to rest is the Elena garden inn.

The lagoon at Stavros.

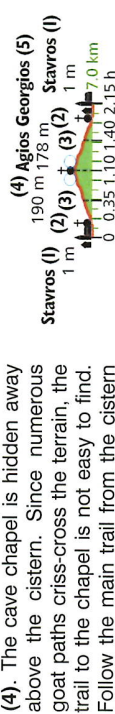
At the lagoon in **Stavros (1)**, take the access road from the bus stop about 200 m in the direction from which you came and turn left onto a narrow tar-mac road (Spyrou Lera). This heads directly to Vardires, 340 m, the »Zorba Mountain«, crowned by a wreath of crags. However, leave this road after a good 100 m by turning right onto Avlemona street, concrete-paved at the beginning. The road veers to the right and passes two villas.

76

Vardires is the setting for the spectacular final scene of the film »Zorba the Greek«.

In front of a concrete fence with a flat building behind it, turn left onto a country lane and immediately pass a **chapel (2)**. Continuing along the fence, 100 m past the chapel, ignore a trail branching off to the left. Meet up with a track and turn left, heading once again towards the »Zorba Mountain«. Halfway up to the summit, you can spot a round opening for a cave in the mountainside; this cave supposedly housed a sanctuary in ancient times. At the foot of the mountain, the track leads to the right and some minutes later, possibly pass by some bee hives where the tasty *phrygana* honey, typical for Crete, is being produced. The gravel track ends at a little **cul-de-sac (3)**. A path begins here, sometimes with blue waymarkings, which leads into a valley and heads towards a mountain with a pointed, pyramid-shaped summit. In front of the mountain, the pretty path veers slightly to the right and then becomes somewhat steeper as it ascends into a valley, along the left, sometimes the right, bank of the stream.

A good 20 minutes past the cul-de-sac, keep an eye out for a path, possibly marked by a cairn, which ascends to the left while leaving the stream bed behind and leading to a round **cistern (4)**. The cave chapel is hidden away above the cistern. Since numerous goat paths criss-cross the terrain, the trail to the chapel is not easy to find. Follow the main trail from the cistern



77



The cave chapel of Agios Georgios.

for almost another 20 m and then turn left onto a faint path. This leads immediately to the left and then ascends towards the chapel which is still hidden from view. Just about two minutes later, bear slightly to the right in front of the remains of a wall for a tumbledown settlement and, shortly after, we find ourselves standing next to the entrance to a chapel built into a cave, **Agios Georgios (5)**, 178 m. The cave, with a low, blackened ceiling, isn't very impressive; during the day, it is often taken over by goats seeking a shady spot. But the area in front of the cave is the picture of tranquility; enjoy a view of the terraces, abandoned for decades now, of the former settlement, and above all, drink in the quiet pastoral countryside.

After a break, return along the approach route back to **Stavros (1)** where, perhaps after a dip in the lagoon, you could put one of the tavernas to the test.



To the monasteries on the Akrotiri peninsula

The peninsula lying north-east of Chania boasts of three monasteries worth seeing. The oldest of the three is Moni Katholiko, built picturesquely on a rock face perched over a little gorge; this can be reached via a delightful cobbled path. From the starting point of the walk, Moni Gouverneto appears strikingly like a fortress. Moni Agia Triada, which is a prime example of the style marking the Italian Renaissance, lies along the approach route; the museum within houses a valuable collection of icons. One of the highlights of this short walk is the Arkoudiotissa Cave (Bear Cave) – taking its name from a stalagmite that most certainly looks like a bear.

Starting point: Moni Gouverneto, 254 m. The trail for the Akrotiri peninsula is not signed from the National Road. Take the exit that leads to the village centre of Chania and then follow the signs for the airport. Shortly before reaching the airport, bear left towards Agia Triada and, from there, reach the Gouverneto Monastery after another 4 kms.

Height difference: 260 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: along a pleasant cobbled path until reaching the Katholiko Monastery; the excursion to the sea leads through a gorge which is easy to walk. A short steep section has to be scrambled down to get to the floor of the gorge. To explore the Bear Cave and St. John's Cave, we recommend taking a torch along with you.



Dripstones in the Bear Cave.

Refreshment: nothing en route.

Opening hours: Agia Triada Monastery (entrance fee) is open to visitors daily in summer from 8 a.m. until sundown, in winter, from 8–14.00 and from 16.00 until sundown. Gouverneto (entrance fee) is open from Easter until mid-October, Mon, Tues and Thurs 9–12 and 17–19, Sat 9–12 and 17–20, Sun 5–12 and 17–20, in winter, closed an hour earlier in the afternoon. Be sure to respect the dress codes of the monasteries (no shorts or sleeveless blouses). The areas outside of the Katholiko Monastery, as well as the Bear Cave and St. John's Cave, are always open to the public.

Linking tip: the walk can be combined with Walk 8 from Stavros to the Agios Georgios chapel.

the mountain; after about 40 m, reach two beautifully shaped stalagmites, one of which is almost 10 m in height. Past these, the cave narrows and you can only continue by ducking down.

For the descent into the **gorge**, situated below the monastery, you have two choices. Either you cross over the imposing arched bridge spanning the gorge (narrow, at this point) and then on the other side, climb down along a rather steep path to reach the stream bed. Or, you can climb down the steps in front of the

belly and, passing between an outlying building and a vaulted cellar, scramble down a smooth, polished rock that is not so steep, into the gorge and then walk under the bridge. In the stream bed for the gorge, a rocky path that is, however, easy to negotiate, will bring you to a small, cliff-enclosed bay. Access to the monastery is still standing.

From here, by scrambling **way (4)**, where the stone was Monastery. The rugged and relaxing rest break on back to the **Gouverneto**

Along the cobbled trail to the Katholiko Monastery.

a small, cliff-enclosed bay on the sea, from which, marauding pirates gained access to the monastery. To the left, the remains of a domed boathouse are still standing.

From here, by scrambling over boulders, you can reach the ancient quarry (4), where the stone was quarried for the construction of the Gouvernato Monastery. The rugged coast is, however, not suited for bathing. After a long and relaxing rest break on the boulders, return along the approach route back to the **Gouvernato Monastery (1)**.

81





From a pearl of a village across the Drapanos peninsula

A cape projecting into the sea and capped by the 527 m high Drapanos peninsula lends the peninsula to the east of Chania its characteristic look. Between groves of olive trees and cypress woods, villages are interspersed, peopled by immigrants who have settled here. Douliana is a peaceful hamlet with no through traffic. Near the kafenia on the little village square, a delightful path begins a descent into a verdant valley. Through brushwood and groves of olive trees, the route returns to the village. Before or after the short circular walk, you could take a ramble through Varnos.

Starting point: Douliana (on trail signs, also written as Ntoulia), 129 m. From the National Road, between Georgiou-

Agios Ioannis (2) 83 m
Agios Antonios (4) 93 m
Douliana (1) 112 m
Douliana (1) 129 m
 0 0.35 1.00 1.30 h
 5.0 km



From »Natalias House« at the village limits of **Douliana (1)**, head into the little settlement. Immediately pass the Taverna Ivgortis and the kafenia on the tiny village square. 50 m past the coffee house, descend along the steep concrete-paved trail to the right; perhaps a wooden sign at foot level points out the way. In Greek, to Agios Ioannis. About 30 m further on, ignore a trail forking off to the left, and soon afterwards, pick up a cobbled trail that is flanked by fieldstone walls as it leads past carob and olive trees.

At the fork located on the valley floor, turn sharp left; the path follows the dry stream bed which is surrounded by lush greenery, as it leads to the cave chapel, **Agios Ioannis (2)**, 83 m, leaning against the rock face. Shortly past the little church, the wood thins out and the idyllic path merges into a broader trail. Continue along this trail while crossing over slabs of rock and ignoring a fork to the right. Now meet up with a junction in front of a house with a flat roof; here, turn left along the gravel trail.

The trail ascends slightly, passing between olive trees and cypress trees. Now always keep to the main trail and, 10 minutes later, at the top of a height, pass by a **shrine to the Virgin Mary (3)**, 112 m. Once again gently descending, continue to ignore all forks. On the valley floor, not quite 15 minutes past the shrine, turn left onto a dirt trail. Take this trail, keeping always straight on, until reaching the **Agios Antonios (4)**, 93 m, a quarter of an hour later. This is also a cave chapel with an area in front of it for picnicking; even a fountain with potable water is provided.

Afterwards, continue on along the trail; this merges 100 m later into a narrow road. Turn left along the road and head towards the houses of Tsivaras. About 200 m further on, the tarmac road veers sharply to the left; at this point, leave the road behind by heading straight on along a gravel trail. Before reaching the first houses of **Tsivaras (5)**, 109 m, meet up with a junction; turn left here to descend and, at the fork 50 m on, turn right to ascend. The trail leads to a high ridge up above. In front of a vineyard slope, bear right yet again. At an electricity pylon, meet an intersecting trail. Turn right along this for a short stretch and then turn left to descend until reaching the access road to Douliana in front of a cemetery wall. Take the road to the left and, in five minutes, return back to **Douliana (1)**.



Furnished: the Agios Antonios Chapel.



In the rocky upper reaches of the gorge.

sections are protected by chain link fencing which, at least, catches the smaller rocks as they fall down from up above. The path leads through a splendid mixed forest of mountain cypress, kermes oak and, in the lower reaches, Turkish pines. Every couple of hundred metres there are caches of water for fire-fighting in case a forest fire should break out. In shady spots, you'll find sizeable patches of the Cretan violet (*Cyclamen creticum*). Ironwort (*Sideritis syriaca*) is also growing here; when the plant is dried, the finished product is sold throughout Central Europe as Cretan mountain tea. Three-quarters of an hour later, the rest area, **Neroutsiko (2)**, 948 m, sheltered beneath a spreading plane tree, offers a good spot for the first break. There is a WC here and a fountain where you can refresh your drinking water supply. A good 20 minutes later, reach the rocky stream bed of the gorge for the first time; on the left bank of the bed, a trail leads to the rest area **Riza Sikias (3)**, where additional fountains can be found. In early spring, the rare Cretan helleborine is flowering here, but when the gorge opens in May, it is already withered. As compensation, walkers build hundreds of cairns at this spot to pay their respects to the gorge. Shortly past Riza Sikias, cross over the stream bed of the gorge (dozens of crossings will be made during the walk), big, smooth, round boulders fill up the bed. Oriental plane trees act as companions during the following, not quite so steep, descent.

Ancient cypresses, some as old as 600 years, tower above a cosy spot situated near the quarry-stone chapel of **Agios Nikolaos (4)**, 654 m. The chapel stands on the same site, legend has it, where an ancient sanctuary dedicated to Apollo stood in the 6th century BC. In the clearing nearby, peonies, Cretan arum lily and Dragon Arum, some specimens growing to a height of 1 m, are flowering in May – from a botanical perspective, certainly one of the most spectacular spots in the entire gorge. From the chapel, cross through a



stately cypress forest to continue on to the rest area of **Vrissi (5)**, and after a short intermediate ascent, climb back down again to **Samaria (6)**, 362 m. In front of the abandoned village, the stream bed of the gorge is crossed via a bridge. In the ancient, partially-restored, stone houses, you will find a first-aid station and toilets; a village fountain has also been included. Picnic tables, under fig and mulberry trees, are usually fully occupied around midday.

A good half of the route now lies behind us. From Samaria, cross over the bridge again and continue descending along the right bank. 2 mins later, pass the **Christos Chapel**; which appears to seek protection by squatting under a rock face. On the opposite side of the gorge, you can spot the Ossia Maria Chapel (presumably the namesake for the gorge), peeking out through the cypress trees, as well as the ruins of **Kato Samaria**. The trail changes to the other side of the stream bed for the gorge (here, a good 20 to 30 m wide) via a bridge – you can well imagine the size of the torrent that rushes through here on its way to the sea after the winter rainfall. Past the rest area, **Nero tis Perdikas** (in English, »Partridge Spring«) (7), 311 m, the actual gorge begins. Now continue directly along the stony stream bed, heading for the first bottleneck. The torrential stream is crossed several times via stepping-stones, some of which are slippery. Walk beneath rugged rock faces and scree slopes to the rest area **Christos (8)**, 170 m, snuggling under shady pines: a couple of paces above the rest area, is the chapel of the same name. This is the last major rest area along the stretch to the sea. A couple of minutes afterwards, a log-paved trail leads through **Sideroportes**, the »Iron Gates«. With a mere 3 m distance between the vertical and sometimes overhanging, gorge walls, towering 300 m above, this is the supreme bottleneck of the canyon. Afterwards, the gorge broadens once more. Along walkways and over bridges, the river is criss-crossed several times until finally reaching the national park border at the **checkpoint (9)**, 50 m, where your ticket will be cancelled. A row of kiosks are offering refreshment here. Now it's only another 3 km to reach the ferry. A cobbled trail leads soon along groves of olives and carob trees, passing the abandoned houses of **Palea Agia Roumeli (10)**. In spring of 1952, a flash flood carried away a part of the village and the inhabitants built a new village directly on the sea as a result. At the village limits, cross over a stone bridge to the Agia Triada church and the cemetery (if you are too tired to walk anymore, a shuttle bus for the ferry is available here in the high season). A concrete-paved road leads, in 20 mins, to the new village of **Agia Roumeli (11)**. At a fork on the village limits, continue straight ahead and, 3 mins later, bear slightly to the right. Finally, in the village centre, just past the Pension Sorbas, reach the ticket office for the ferry; keep left from there and a few paces will bring you to the **ferry dock (12)**.

Sometimes rickety wooden walkways – here, in front of the Iron Gates – aid in crossing the torrential stream.



12 Gingilos, 2080 m



The Xepitiras rock arch.

Starting point: Xyloskalo, 1230 m. Approaching from the northern coast along the National Road, in Chania, take the exit to Omalos and, via Lakki and the Omalos high plateau, reach the car park, Xyloskalo, at the entrance to the Samaria Gorge. From Paleochora and Sougia, reach Omalos via Agia Irini. With the bus from Chania (during the summer season, daily at 6.15, 7.45 and 8.45), from Paleochora (Mon -Sat 6.15) and from Sougia (June until Sept, Mon -Sat 7.00) to the car park at the entrance to the Samaria Gorge. For »bus travellers«, however, there is only a single return to Chania scheduled in the afternoon (15.00), otherwise, you must spend a night in one of the simple hotels in Omalos.

Height difference: a good 1000 m.

Grade: until reaching the Achenas saddle, the route ascends along a well-laid alpine path which is, however, in the last section, fairly steep, sometimes way-

5.40 hrs



Vigorous summit climb onto a popular 2000-m peak

From Xyloskalo, the north face of Gingilos appears rugged and menacing; at first glance, an ascent does not seem easy, and what seems to be, is true indeed. From the west, however, a relatively negotiable ascent trail exists for the experienced mountain walker. From the more than three dozen 2000-metre peaks of the Leika Ori (White Mountains)) Gingilos is the most popular, not only because of the magnificent view from the summit, but also due to the fact that the approach is easily accessible from the entrance to the Samaria Gorge.

marked with the E4 waymarkings. At the saddle, the steep ascent continues, heading for the summit, waymarked with yellow markings and cairns; this stretch demands absolute sure-footedness. During easy stretches of scrambling, sometimes you have to use your hands. Slightly precipitous sections in the area around the rock arch. Into the month of May, expect snowfields between the Linoseli spring and saddle, as well as in both of the depressions between the secondary and the main peak. Hardly any shade!

Alternative: from the Achenas saddle, you could descend along the E4 in a good 4 hrs to reach the Libyan Sea at Sougia. The route is very well marked until reaching Koustogerako; from there, follow Walk 18. Starting at the saddle, continue along a path, that is sometimes precipitous; later on, along pleasant gravel trails. **Refreshment:** nothing en route, self-service cafeteria in Xyloskalo.



The walk begins at the car park, Xyloskalo (1), at the entrance to the Samaria Gorge. You can't miss the towering, rugged face of the mountain in front of you whose summit is your target. Also, the destination for the first stage of the walk, the Achenas saddle between Gingilos and Strifomadi, is easy to spot. A few paces on, next to the entrance for the gorge, an E4 sign points out the direction. The stepped trail, flanked by a railing at the outset, climbs in 3 mins above the car park to pass the entrance to the Taverna Xenia (closed at the moment). Shortly afterwards, pass through a gate. From here, you can already enjoy a fantastic backwards view over the Omalos high plateau and, soon after that, also catch a splendid panoramic view into the Samaria Gorge. The alpine path is stony, but well laid, and sometimes marked with E4 posts and waymarkers. Weather-beaten cypresses flank the trail's edge.

During the first hour of the ascent, the rocky summit of Gingilos keeps almost always in sight. At a good 1500 m above sea level, the Achenas col appears once again in front of us. But before the ascent to the saddle begins, enjoy a relaxing level stretch and then descend slightly. During this section, walk along a narrow mule track to cross over the Xepitiras (2), 1461 m, a natural vaulted gangway, 10 m in height, that looks like a Gothic arch standing in the middle of the landscape.

Lovely views of the Omalos high plateau open up at the beginning of the ascent.





Along the stretch to the Afchenas col, a steep, scree-covered slope must be climbed.

The route now takes on an alpine character as the trail traverses a scree slope and passes striking crags. Shortly past an overhanging rock face and a shelter situated there in case of a sudden change in the weather, reach the **Linioseli spring (3)**, 1470 m, gushing water into a bathtub-like trough. In midsummer, *Bupleurum kakiskalae* can be found flowering here. This wildflower is found exclusively in the Linoseli region and is one of the rarest endemic flowers that Crete has to offer – entered on the Red List of Threatened Species, only a few hundred specimens of this member of the carrot family are known to exist.



turn left at the saddle and begin the ascent to Gingilos over slanted plates of rock. Sometimes along a well-trodden alpine path, sometimes over bare rock without a distinct path to follow (yellow waymarkers), finally reach the **secondary summit (5)**, 2075 m, of Gingilos which is only a few metres lower than the main summit.

At the pyramid-shaped cairn on the flat summit area, many walkers think that they have already arrived on Gingilos. The main peak, however, is actually the craggy knoll lying to the north-east. You may be able to spot a metal rod there which is actually a part of the former summit cross, now missing the cross bar. Waymarkers lead downward, at first, into a depression; skirt around this along the right-hand rim. A second, somewhat larger, depression is also skirted around along the right-hand rim via sharp-edged rocks. After some roundabout scrambling, finally reach the main peak of **Gingilos (6)**, 2080 m, a quarter of an hour later, where a little shrine is situated. The panoramic view is not much better than that from the secondary peak, but the view of the Omalos high plateau, lying down below our feet, is a pretty one. Seemingly close enough to reach out and touch, Volakias, 2116 m, lies to the south-east. Eastwards is Pachnes, 2453 m, Crete's second highest mountain. At the end of May, directly in the summit area, rose-coloured flowers appear on the Spreading cherry (*Prunus prostrata*), a small-leaved, ground-hugging shrub, which even the severe frost at this altitude, cannot cause any harm.

After taking a long look, descend again via the approach route to return to **Xyloskalo (1)**.

At the large cairn at the 2075 m point, you are already eye-to-eye with the true peak (far left).





Via the Kallergi hut into the heart of the White Mountains

Do not be put off by the relatively long walking times and the many metres of height! Melindaou is a relatively easy 2000-metre summit in the very centre of the White Mountains. The ascent leads for the most part along a pleasant and panoramic, traffic-free, gravel track; only the last third of the route, sometimes climbing a rocky alpine path, requires not only good physical fitness, but also sure-footedness. By spending the night in the Kallergi hut, you can extend the walk to a two-day trek.

Starting point: Xyloskalo, 1230 m. See Walk 12 for the approach. »Bus travellers« can take the early bus from Chania to Omalos (Xyloskalo), during the descent, spend the night in the Kallergi hut and, the next day, take the early bus back to Chania.

Height difference: 1250 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a long mountain walk demanding physical fitness. The first stretch to the pavilion is along a pleasant track, fol-

lowed by a steep and rocky alpine path to the summit. Expect snowfields up into May. The trail is sporadically marked with E4 posts. Almost no shade at all!

Refreshment and accommodation: self-service cafeteria in Xyloskalo; Kallergi hut, tel. +30-28210-33199, www.kallergi.com; it is necessary to reserve in advance for accommodation and an evening meal.

Shorter walk: the pleasant ascent to the Kallergi hut alone is worthwhile; there and back, 2.20 hrs.

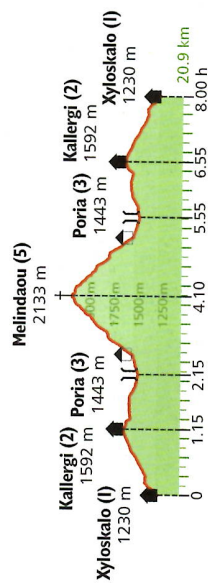
Kallergi: Crete's only catered mountain hut sits almost 1600 m above sea level.



At the car park in Xyloskalo (1), to the left of the entrance for the Samaria Gorge, is a time-worn information board for the Kallergi hut, next to which, a path begins, marked with a red arrow. The path immediately crosses through a gate; please close this carefully behind you. Keeping at first parallel to the road, the path ascends the slope on the diagonal. 20 minutes later, enjoy a view of the mighty summit of Gingilos, 2080 m. To the left of the peak stands the somewhat higher summit of Volakias, 2116 m, and to the right of Gingilos, Psilafi, 1984 m, with the Afchenas col between the two where the final ascent of Gingilos begins (see Walk 12).

Past yet another gate, the well-laid alpine path meets up with an unpaved gravel track, turn right onto this track to continue ascending. 10 mins later, at a left-hand bend, there is a possible short-cut along a meagrely-marked path that ascends along a steep, rough and rocky gully. At the end, however, we won't be saving much time by doing this, so instead, we continue along the pleasant track while enjoying a view of the Omalos high plateau.

The track climbs up to a saddle, and at the top, a shrine to the Virgin Mary is situated next to a round stone hut. Here, bear right to continue on to the Kallergi hut (2), 1592 m, now within sight. The hut is perched precariously





From Krios Beach to Agios Ioannis

Along the long-distance trail westwards

A popular second choice to Paleochora's municipal beach, usually packed to the gills and especially so in summer, is the splendid sandy beach at Krios. From there, we could walk for a stretch via the well-marked E4 along the delightful coastline to reach a chapel and, if you so wish, even continue further to the excellent beach of Elafonisi (see Alternative).

Starting point: Krios Beach, 3 m. From Paleochora, follow the signs in the direction of Kountoura and, 2 km further on at the junction, continue straight ahead towards Voutas along the road running close to the coastline, passing greenhouses, until reaching the Taverna Krios Beach; the last 0.6 km is a gravel road.

Height difference: 250 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a coastal walk along a well-marked path; a precipitous section will demand sure-footedness. Hardly any shade, be sure to take along your sun-block and bathing gear!

Refreshment: taverna on Krios Beach. **Alternative:** if you make the approach from Paleochora by taxi to reach Krios Beach, from there, you can walk the entire stage of the E4 to reach Elafonisi and, in the high season, take a ferry (normally setting sail around 16.00) to return to Paleochora. The complete coastal tour is also feasible when using Chania as a starting point: take the early bus to Paleochora (travelling time 1.30 hrs.), then a taxi to Krios Beach and take the afternoon bus from Elafonisi (departure about 16.00) to return to Chania (walking time from Krios Beach – Elafonisi 3.30 hrs.).

Jutting capes and little bays break up the coastline near Paleochora.



Barren mountain terrain during the descent from Melindaou.

on top of an alpine knoll, high above the Samaria Gorge. From the spacious viewing platform, enjoy a startling panoramic view of the 2000-metre peaks of the White Mountains, of Gíngolos directly opposite, also of Melindaou (the final destination of this walk) to the east, and of Pachmes just to the south of it. At the rear of the hut, a couple of steps descend along a fence to return to the track down below. Follow the track for five minutes until it veers off to the left at an E4 post; here, we could short-cut a zigzag along a stepped path. Returning to the track, continue on eastwards, more or less keeping on the level; to the north, cast your gaze into a valley and to the coastline far below. The rocky terrain is covered in low-growth *phrygana* with scattered cypress trees and Cretan maples punctuating the terrain.

At the foot of Psari, reach a junction in the **Poria col (3)**, 1443 m. Keep slightly to the left here, that is, keep to the track and then, three minutes later, ignore a track forking off northwards. The trail continues on along the foot of Psari to meet up with a battered **pavilion (4)**, 1512 m. Directly opposite to the pavilion, leave the track behind by turning right onto a rocky alpine path. The path is relatively well-marked with E4 posts as it ascends steeply to a saddle at about 1750 m above sea level; from there, continue on through a long, broad basin to reach yet another col. Up until late spring, this notch can be covered with extensive fields of snow. Now arriving on the uppermost col, the trail veers to the left and, finally, ascends along a broad ridge to reach the summit of **Melindaou (5)**, 2133 m.

After a good, long look at the views, return along the approach route back to **Xyloskalo (1)**.



The walk to Lissos has all the ingredients that a top tour on Crete would need: a wild and romantic gorge adorned with bushes of oleander, a high plateau with a breath-taking panoramic view of the coast, and the archaeological site of the ancient Lissos, unearthed in the 1950s. In this secluded valley, there once existed an early-Helladic spa which was later maintained by the Romans. Even the Byzantines have left their tracks on this area which, just as in the past, is only accessible on foot or by small boats. Oh, by the way, a bathing cove with an inviting pebble beach is waiting here as well.

route is an especially good choice for walkers staying in Paleochora. From there, take the early ferry (daily, mid-May to end of Oct.) to Sougia and then walk the described route to Lissos. By the

fountain at the rest area, keep the low building to your right-hand side and head

towards the west along the path over the abandoned terraces. In a good hour as-

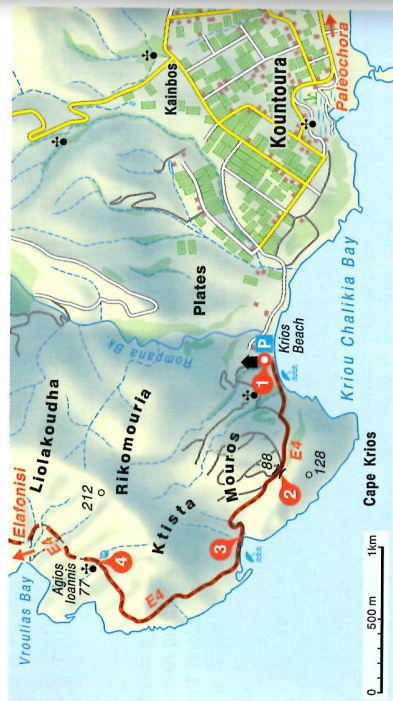
ascend to a high plateau, 250 m, while passing the Flomes Cape situated to the south. From the plateau descend again

to the coastline and then take a relatively level path following the coast. The final

stretch to Paleochora leads along a tar-mac road (walking time, a total of almost 5 hrs.).

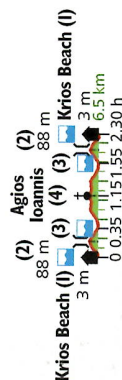


Small, but nice: the bathing cove of Lissos.



From the car park in front of the Taverna **Krios Beach (1)**, walk to the western end of the beach. There, scramble over a projecting rock, crowned by an E4 post. A tiny, but very popular bathing cove (naturism), about 30 m in length, follows. At the cove's end, scramble up over the coastal rocks to yet another E4 post.

After the first rough and tumble metres, soon continue along the well-laid alpine path which leads for a few paces above a track running parallel, to reach a **saddle (2)**, 88 m, at the top of Krios cape. While the track now turns towards the interior, instead, follow a gravel trail from the saddle straight ahead for a good 100 m and then fork off to the left onto a path. Far in the distance, westwards, the view stretches all the way to the Elafonisi island. The path now drops to a **bathing cove (3)**, peppered with countless boulders and boasting tiny beaches in between. The last cove along the way, but also the prettiest, is something to note down for the return. In front of the cove, the still well-marked trail veers to the right and, passing a tiny church perched on a cliff 100 m in the distance, ascends again along the coastal cliffs. Skirt around the cape that lies in front of us. At the same height as a crag, a breathtaking panoramic view opens up over the wide sweeping bay with the offshore island of Elafonisi. For a short stretch, the path is slightly precipitous as it leads along striking cliffs. At the end, reach the little church





Byzantine chapel with integrated ancient marble friezes.

Begin the walk in **Sougia (1)** at the Taverna Galini (bus stop) and ramble the seaside road along the pebble beach, heading westwards. From the ferry dock at the **harbour (2)**, turn right to pass the fishing boats. Past a large boulder lying directly in front of the steep coast and near a goat pen, look for the entrance to the **Lissos Gorge**. Not quite another 100 m further on, scramble over a smoothly polished boulder; in the further course of the route, several large boulders and bottlenecks must be skirted around, however, the trail through the gorge is always relatively easy to negotiate.

About five minutes past a narrow passage between overhanging rocks (see photo, Walk 16), keep an eye out for a yellow/black waymarker. Here, leave the gorge behind by turning left onto an ancient mule path which climbs up in zigzags to the uppermost edge of the gorge (Walk 16 continues straight on along the stream bed of the gorge). At a fork, 7 minutes later, bear right and, shortly afterwards, reach the high plateau **Kandouni (3)**, 160 m.

The rust-brown coloured path now leads panoramically through undemanding, thorny cushion plant undergrowth. Soon the small, turquoise-coloured bay of Lissos appears. In tight bends, descend from the plateau while traversing a steep rock face and, after passing a grove of



Roman floor mosaic in Lissos.

olive trees and just past a cave, meet up with an intersecting trail. Bearing to the right, reach the fenced-in grounds of ancient **Lissos (4)**. On the lower end of the fence, follow the fence further to the right to reach the entrance to the archaeological digs. A stone stairway ascends to a wall constructed from precisely dressed stone blocks, behind which, the **Asklepios Temple** lies hidden. This sanctuary, dedicated to the Greek God of Healing, dates back to the 3rd century BC. The well-preserved floor mosaic was laid 200 years later by the Romans.

After visiting the temple, return to the entrance and turn right to follow the fence leading to a Byzantine chapel. In front of the chapel, the remains of another floor mosaic can be seen. A path descends slightly from the chapel to a low building, behind which, a towering eucalyptus tree is growing. Here, next to the warden's house, meet up with a shady **picnic site** with a fountain.

From the warden's house, it seems like a very good idea to pay a visit to **Lissos Beach (5)**. The path leads past ancient olive trees and, just before reaching the beach, another Byzantine chapel (14th century), whose construction includes ancient fragments of temples and marble friezes.

After taking a bathing break at the pebble beach, return along the approach route back to **Sougia (1)**.



16 Circular walk through the Lissos Gorge

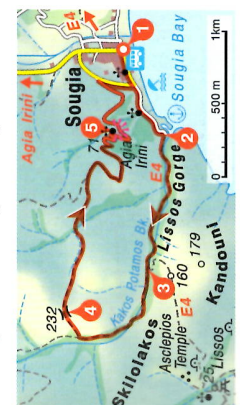
2.10 hrs

The little canyon at Sougia

For more than 2000 years, a path runs through the Lissos Gorge, and now, just as then, it is still the shortest route overland from Sougia to the ancient settlement of Lissos. This walk, however, does not have the early-Helladic Asclepius temple as its destination (see Walk 15), but instead, it continues for a stretch further through the accessible gorge and then cuts a wide arc across the pastoral hill country to return to Sougia.

Starting point: Sougia, 1 m. For the approach, see Walk 15.
Height difference: 250 m in both ascent and descent.
Grade: uncomplicated gorge walk; al-

The circular walk begins in **Sougia** (1) at the Taverna Galini (bus stop). From there, ramble westwards along the seaside road, passing other tavernas on the way, until reaching the **harbour** (2) 10 mins later. In front of the ferry dock, bear to the right and pass a couple of fishing boats bobbing in the waters of the sea. Past a large boulder, directly at the edge of the steep coast, look for the entrance to the **Lissos Gorge**, located next to a goat pen. Not quite another 100 m further on, scramble over a smoothly polished boulder; in the further course of the route, along the stream bed of the gorge, choked with oleander bush, several large boulders and bottlenecks must be skirted around. The most striking section of the gorge is reached at an approximately 50 m high, slightly **overhanging rock face**; a narrow passage allows the walk to continue. Shortly afterwards, another bottleneck can be passed through via a path on the left. About 5 mins past the overhanging rock face, the **E4** (3) cuts away to the left and climbs out of the gorge (yellow/black waymarkers), however, continue straight on here along the stream bed of the gorge which continues to be fairly easy to negotiate. 15 mins later, climb over a steep ledge about one metre high and, 2 mins after that, scramble over a boulder once again.



102



The overhanging rock face in the Lissos Gorge.

The gorge begins to open up slightly. About 25 mins past the point where the E4 branched off, reach a boulder, about 2.5 metres in height, located in the dry stream bed. Cairns and red waymarkers draw attention to a path breaking away to the right: following this to reach a **saddle** (4), 232 m. From the saddle, descend slightly for a couple of minutes through a little valley, until it veers southward to the sea. Our path, however, continues to lightly ascend. In the meantime, goat paths create some confusion while cairns and red spot waymarkers help to keep us on the right track.

Meanwhile, enjoy a view of the Libyan Sea. Reach the **course of a stream** which carries water only after periods of rainfall. Follow the stream bed to the right, but soon after, 5 m further on, ascend again to the left. With the sea always in sight, traverse the slope above the stream bed along a path. In front of us, the beach at Sougia comes into view; keep an eye out for waymarkers. The trail leads for a stretch along a wire fence and, at a goat pen, merges into a farm road. Descend straight ahead along this road to reach the **Agia Irini** chapel (5), 71 m, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. From the area in front of the chapel, enjoy a downwards view of the harbour.

From the chapel, continue descending along the trail. Below the chapel, in a bend to the left, there is a picnic table in the shade, next to a fountain. At the village limits of Sougia, the gravel trail merges into a street. Keeping to the right along this street, at the large village church, meet up again with the harbour road which brings us back to the village centre of **Sougia** (1).

103



To a ringside view high above the Libyan Sea

From the seaside road in Sougia, we can already spot the destination for this walk: far to the east, a chapel is perched on a humpbacked cape. The ruins of a castle that was built by the Venetians are, however, not yet visible. The Venetians took advantage of the strategic location somewhat below the cape. The well-trodden path along the coast that leads there opens up a breathtaking panoramic view of the pristine and completely uninhabited coastline. The path is waymarked as a stage of the E4 long distance trail.



The ruins of a Venetian fortress.

Starting point: Sougia, 1 m. For the approach, see Walk 15.

Height difference: about 850 m in both ascent and descent.

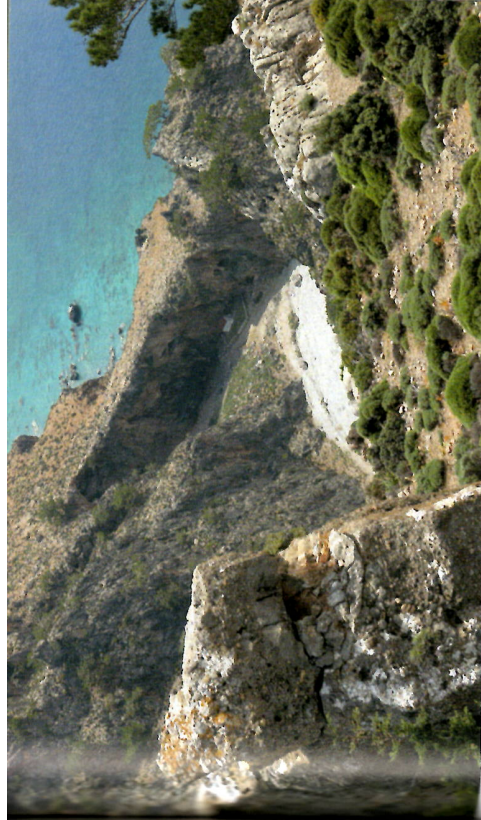
Grade: a long coastal walk via the relatively well-marked E4 with a steep final ascent onto the cape; some stretches are somewhat precipitous. The constant up and down walking should not be taken lightly. Bring along plenty of drinking water as the spring located a short distance before the cape has hardly any water in

the summer months.

Refreshment: nothing en route, several tavernas in Sougia.

Alternatives: 1. Since the route there and back is rather strenuous, you may prefer to make it a linear walk by hiring a boat to take you from Sougia to the Agios Nikolaos Chapel at the mouth of the Tripiti Gorge (information at Captain George in the pension of the same name in Sougia, tel. +30-28230-51133, www.sougia.info/taxi-boats.htm). From there, a steep ascent along the E4 will bring you, in 1 hr, to the saddle below the Tripiti fortress.

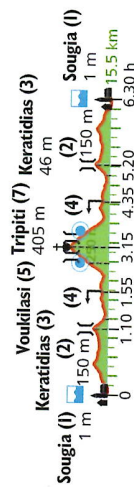
2. It is very adventurous, but very long, strenuous and demanding to tackle the entire stage along the E4 from Sougia to Agia Roumeli. Even if you start off at sunrise, the route can only be done in one day by absolutely physically fit walkers (walking time is a good 10 hrs.). It would be better if you plan on a two-day trek, taking along a sleeping bag and plenty of drinking water (at least 5 litres per person). A popular place to spend the night is the beach at Domata, from which, on the following day, you will ascend steeply to the top of a 500 m high cape and descend as steeply to Agia Roumeli (many rooms to rent are available here). With the help of Captain George (see Alternative 1), you can also begin the walk to Agia Roumeli at the exit for the Tripiti Gorge, then the tour can be made in a single day without much effort.



If your eyesight is good, you can spot the Agios Nikolaos chapel at the mouth of the Tripiti Gorge.

In **Sougia (1)**, at the Taverna Galini, turn eastwards along the seaside promenade and then, not quite 100 m on, turn left onto a concrete-paved trail heading towards the interior. Another 200 m on, a commercial sign points the way to the Taverna Polifimos; at the sign, cross diagonally over a broad, dry stream bed by following the traces of a path. On the opposite side, cross over a track and head straight for a house perched on the slope. In front of the metal gate, bear slightly to the left, heading towards a stone wall bordered by a chain-linked fence about 25 m away. Following the fence, pass through a grove of olive trees. After about 100 m, the trail veers to the right, still following the fence, and then becomes a path climbing up the slope.

The path forks in front of a **goat pen** (E4 post). Bearing slightly to the left, meet up with a gravel trail and ascend along it. This merges 40 m further on into an unpaved road. Here, turn sharp right, continuing the ascent along the slope, and then 150 m further on, at the next fork, turn left. The broad gravel trail climbs up onto a rocky headland while opening up a lovely backwards view of the bay at Sougia with its extensive pebble beach.



Arriving at the flat-topped **headland**, ignore a track forking off to the left; straight ahead, a view opens up once again of the Triptiti Cape. A couple of paces further on along the track, a well-marked coastal path breaks off to the right which sets the direction for following the coastline, which is punctuated by small coves and protruding capes. Sparse woodland, made up of pine trees and a couple of carob trees, provides a minimum amount of shade. In front of us, little by little, a cliff with a rocky ridge appears, at the foot of which, a couple of seastacks rise up out of the waters. The path leads along the left side of the cliff to reach a **saddle (2)**, 150 m, up above. About 50 m before reaching the saddle, ignore a conspicuous blue/white waymarked path that ascends to the Polifimos Cave (see Walk 18). From the col, the trail drops in zigzags down into the deep cleft of the **Keratidias Gorge (3)**. Arriving in the dry stream bed, head downstream for a stretch into the gorge. About 2 mins after passing a cave, the path leaves the bed behind by turning left and ascending to a headland, from which, you can already enjoy a lovely view of the coastline towards the west. To the east, the view takes in the Agios Antonios Chapel, perched on a lonely spot on a rocky promontory.

The path continues in easy up and down walking, at a height not quite 100 m above sea level. At an E4 waymarker on a pine tree, reach a **turn-off (4)** that leads to the Agios Antonios chapel (no longer in sight), but ignore this. Shortly after, traverse a scree-covered slope. The Triptiti Cape appears now, seeming close enough to touch. To the left of the cape, you can spot a treeless col; this is the goal for our next ascent. The trail traverses more scree-covered slopes and drops down again into a little gorge at the foot of an almost 200 m-long, scree-covered slope; the last steps for this stretch require scrambling down a steep embankment. Now the steep ascent to the col begins. At first, this leads through a rocky ravine which will be left behind 5 mins later by turning to the right (cairn). The path is reinforced by supporting walls as it ascends along tight bends to a **stone pillar**, 2 m in height, with an embedded shrine at the top. Archaeologists speculate that this is the spot where the ancient settlement of Pikilassos once stood, however, no recognisable traces have been found to support this. From the pillar, a little later



106



The rocky outcrops next to the trig point on the cape provide a spot to take a break.

on, reach the **Vouklissi spring (5)**, 214 m, where an oleander bush is clearly making good use of the water. A good 10 mins past the spring, finally reach a second pillar next to the **crest of the pass (6)**, 306 m. While the E4 continues straight ahead, descending steeply to the mouth of the Triptiti Gorge, turn right instead at the pass. Somewhat higher up, you can't fail to spot the ruins of the Venetian Triptiti fortress. The path to the chapel at the cape's summit leads along the left side of the fortress, once put to use by the Turks as well. Past a square boulder about 6 m in height, keep to the left of the rocky summit relief and finally, a quarter of an hour later, reach the apex of the **Triptiti Cape (7)**, 405 m, and the pilgrim's chapel of Profitis Ilias. The best panoramic view can be enjoyed from the tumbledown trig point located a few paces above the chapel. Especially striking is the downwards view of the Agios Nikolaos Chapel, situated at the mouth of the Triptiti Gorge.

After taking a break, return along the approach route back to **Sougia (1)**. If it be your pleasure, you can take an extra excursion, starting at the pine tree mentioned before, to the double-aisled **Agios Antonios Chapel** at the sea-side. The rocky coast, however, is not suitable for bathing. On the flat plates of rock, water sandals would be an aid for footing; to enter the water, the best spot is at the boat dock. The excursion descending to the chapel and climbing back up again, takes about 25 minutes.

107



Along a panoramic circular trail to the lair of the one-eyed Cyclops

Like almost every Cretan cave, the Polifimos Cave, high above the bay of Sougia, is shrouded in «legendary» history. In the *Odyssey*, Homer tells of the one-eyed Cyclops, Polyphemos, a shepherd, said to be living in a cave on Crete, took Odysseus and his companions, who were on a raid of the island, as prisoners and ate several of the men. At the end, Odysseus thrust a wooden stake into the eye of the sleeping brute and so escaped. After the ascent to the Cave of the Cyclops, a panoramic, high-level trail ascends to the mountain village of Koustogerako, completely untouched by tourism – it's only too bad that the kafention there is closed.

Starting point: Sougia, 1 m. For the approach, see Walk 15.

Height difference: 550 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: easy walk along wide tracks and mule paths, in the middle section, along

a relatively steep, sometimes rocky path. The route leads at first along the E4, then it ascends, well-marked, to the cave. Very little shade.

Refreshment: nothing en route; several tavernas in Sougia.

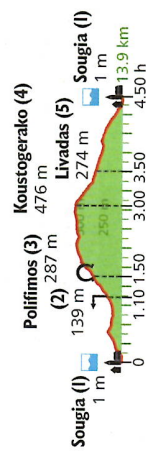
As with all walks starting in Sougia (1), this one also begins at the bus stop opposite the Taverna Galini. As already described in Walk 17, at first follow the E4 towards Tripti Cape, along a promontory above the pebble beach at Sougia. On the mountain above it, a transmission tower is standing; the later

The ascent to the Cave of the Cyclops opens up sweeping views of the southern coast.



course of the circular walk will pass not far away from this tower. On the promontory, a delightful coastal path begins which leads in 40 minutes, at first on the level, later ascending, to a col, 50 m before reaching the col, leave the route to Tripti Cape behind by turning left at a **turn-off (2)**, 139 m, onto a blue/white marked path heading towards Polifimos.

The ancient mule path, sometimes cobbled, is at first very indistinct, but way-markers simplify route-finding. At a striking crag, ascend steeply along the slope. Meet up with a signed junction and turn left, descending slightly, to reach the **Polifimos Cave (3)**, 287 m, two minutes later. The rocky cave has two entrances; additional light pours in through an opening in the roof which is 8 m in height, so that you don't need to carry a torch. In the area to the rear, there are stalag-





mites one to two metres in length. You can take a rest break on the rocky outcrops in front of the cave to enjoy a downwards view of the bay of Sougia. Back on the main trail, continue by ascending further along the slope. The path soon reaches the same height as the mobile phone transmission tower, perched on a mountain ridge, which we already spotted from the seaside promenade. The path passes, however, about 500 m away from the tower and then merges, finally, into a partially concrete-paved, rust-brown dirt road. Turn right onto this road, ascending slightly through *phrygana* with aromatic clumps of thyme.

About 15 mins past a large cistern and just before reaching **Koustogerako (4)**, 476 m, pass by a trail branching off to the right. At the village square of the sleepy settlement, on the left-hand side, there is a memorial to a resistance fighter and, behind it, a relief with a mule and a dog. An alternative route for the E4 turns off to the right towards Gingilos and to Xyloskalo. From the memorial, we turn back along the same way we came for a distance of 20 m and then turn right between two low buildings onto a path (perhaps there is a trail board here). The path first follows along a chain-linked fence, passing through an ancient grove of olive trees with dense undergrowth. Now we are following the trail, at the beginning shady, connecting the village with Livadas. At the edge of the trail, amongst others, rock roses, Jerusalem sage, Dragon Arum, Sword lilies and Mediterranean Spurge are flowering in spring; almond and pear trees are growing behind the field stone walls.

Before **Livadas (5)**, 274 m, the mule path merges into a secondary road. Turn left onto this road and descend through the handful of houses. The village church is hidden away a few metres below the road. A good 15 mins past the church, leave the secondary road behind at a sharp bend to the right by turning off onto a dirt trail. At the junction, 10 mins later, bear right; that is, do not follow the red dot waymarked trail which ascends. With a view taking in Sougia, pass a couple of new stone houses built into a rock face. A good 5 mins after that, meet up with an intersecting trail; turn left onto the trail and, 150 m further on, reach the goat pen already met during the approach route. From here, descend once again to return to **Sougia (1)**.

In the Polifimos Cave.



At the mouth of the gorge, the Oasis snack bar offers an inviting terrace for a break.

Through the gorge of Saint Irene

Compared to the impressive gorges of Samaria and Aradena, the Agia Irini Gorge seems rather modest. Nevertheless, boasting jungle-like vegetation in the upper reaches and several bottlenecks downstream, the gorge is indeed very attractive for the walker. The canyon can already be walked in April when the Samaria Gorge is still closed. Cretan Dittany is growing in crevices in the rock face and on the banks of the stream course, depending on the season, Dragon Arum, Anemones and Cyclamen are in flower. A trail that was established in the 1990s, with rest areas and fountains, leads pleasantly through the good 7 km-long gorge. At the mouth of the gorge, the Oasis snack bar offers a nice spot to take refreshment.

From there, descend along the fairly traffic-free secondary road to return to Sougia. If you prefer to avoid walking along the road, the friendly proprietor of the bar will call a taxi to pick you up.

Ticket Office (2)
538 m





112

Starting point: Agia Irini, 555 m, is located on the bus line Chania – Sougia (from Chania, Mon–Fri, 5.00 and 14.00, travelling time 1 hr; from Sougia Mon–Fri, 7.00 and 18.00, Sat 18.00, Sun, 12.00 and 18.00, travelling time, about 1 hr). The driver stops at the southern village limits of Agia Irini (approaching from Chania, about 1 km past the petrol station) directly at the entrance to the gorge. If you need to return to Chania or back to your car in Agia Irini, take the evening bus from Sougia around 18.00. If you are approaching by car, getting an early start and are staying, e.g., in Pateochora or Plakias, you would avoid needing a bus ride back by parking in Sougia and, from there, taking the early bus to Agia Irini. **Height difference:** about 70 m in ascent and 630 m in descent.

Grade: the sometimes rough path is relatively easy to walk; precipitous sections are protected by wooden railings. On some stretches, however, the path has been destroyed by rockfall. In the lower reaches of the gorge, you have to use your hands while scrambling over two steep, rocky outcrops. In the gorge itself, it is mostly shady, but the last one and half hours of the route is very sunny. Route-finding is very easy.

Refreshment: there's a taverna in Agia Irini at the petrol station; the Porofarango kiosk is at the entrance to the gorge; the Oasis snack bar is at the mouth of the gorge; there are several tavernas in Sougia. At the rest areas in the gorge, there are several fountains, but you can't be certain that they are always providing water.

Alternative: the gorge can be walked by starting at the lower entrance. If approaching by car, from the main road Chania – Sougia, turn off towards Livadas. Past the bridge spanning the Ageriniotis, turn left; there is a large car park in front of the Oasis snack bar. From there, ascend through the gorge until reaching rest area no. 4 and then return along the approach route back to the snack bar (there and back, a good 3 hrs).

Approaching from Sougia, the entrance to the gorge is situated at the sign for the village limits of **Agia Irini (1)**. At two information boards, the one providing info for the Samaria National Park, the other for the Irini Gorge, two trails begin, both marked with E4 waymarkers. With your back to the boards, take the left-hand trail to descend (the right-hand trail leads to Omalos/Figou, see Walk 20). 150 m on, pass by the Porofarango kiosk, equipped with tables (the kiosk is usually open early in the morning). The gravel trail leads straight on from there along the bank of the Ageriniotis through an ancient grove of olive trees, heading downstream. At the **ticket booth (2)**, 538 m, cancel your ticket (in the low season, the booth is usually unmanned). 200 m further on, cross over the river for the first time via a bridge. Towering plane trees line the bank. In the stream bed, oleander is thriving and massive boulders are scattered about. The gravel trail becomes a path which leads to wooded slopes, some reaching heights of 300 m, lying in front of us. 20 minutes from Agia Irini, a path merges from the left, coming out of the **Figou Gorge** (a possible excursion, see Walk 20). Keeping straight ahead, reach the **first rest area (3)**, 499 m, shortly after, with a fountain. A couple of paces further on, a small sign posts the distance in kilometres already walked (to here, **km 1**, calculated with the ticket booth as starting point). The river begins to flow underground now and leaves behind a dry, stony stream bed that only carries water after rainfall.

Five minutes past the rest area, ascend along a sometimes stepped path on the left-hand rim of the gorge in order to skirt around a longer rocky section; a fence, sometimes battered by rockfall, accompanies the trail. Arriving back at the bed of the gorge, at **km 2**, reach the second **rest area (4)**, 391 m,

113



A rough section in the lower reaches of the Irini Gorge.



Circular walk through a sometime Cretan hideaway

For most walkers, the mountain village of Agia Irini is the starting point for the transit of the St. Irene Gorge, named after the settlement (Tour 19). The route suggested here, along a lovely kalderimi, is taken almost exclusively by long-distance walkers who are ascending to the Omalos high plateau. From the well-preserved cobbled trail, pick up an ancient connecting trail through the short Figou Gorge into the canyon of Agia Irini. Like many other Cretan gorges, the Figou Gorge has a story to tell. The name is Greek for "flee" and refers to an event that took place in 1821 when many women and children were brought to safety in the gorge before the onslaught of the Turks.

Starting point: Agia Irini, 555 m. To get there, see Walk 19.

Height difference: 340 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: the ascent leads along a pleasant cobbled trail; the descent runs through the Figou Gorge along a sometimes

steep mule track, in places loose underfoot, requiring some sure-footedness.

Refreshment: Porofarango kiosk, near the end of the circular walk.

Linking tip: in the Agia Irini Gorge (4), you can use Walk 19 to descend to Sougia.

At the sign for the village limits at the southern end of the settlement, Agia Irini (1), meet up with two information boards; one provides info relating to the Samaria National Park and the other relates to the Irini Gorge. Two trails lead away from this point; both are waymarked with E4 markings. With your

The ancient kalderimi leads to the Omalos high plain.

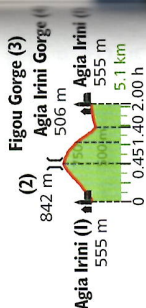


where picnic tables, located under plane trees, invite you to linger a while. In the continued course of the route, the path crosses over the stream bed numerous times; sometimes you have to hop over from stone to stone. On the rock walls, closing in on each other more and more, pine trees are desperately clinging; bizarrely-formed Oriental plane trees flank the trail. Past the third rest area (5) (boasting a WC hut), 315 m, the gorge opens up again for a short time.

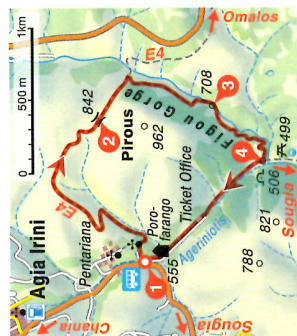
In easy up and down walking, past a boulder field of sharp rock, reach the final official rest area (6), 232 m, at km 4. Half an hour later, pass through the first bottleneck in the gorge; here, beneath an overhanging rock face, you have to scramble through a washed-out rock gully. At a second steep section, you also have to use your hands to scramble past this point. After a final stretch with an overhanging rock face, the gorge walls begin to level off. Now ramble through cultivated countryside with olive trees and, finally, reach the Oasis snack bar (7), 98 m, at the mouth of the gorge. The lovely garden here is an excellent place to take a break before you tackle the final 5.5 kms which will bring you to Sougia.

From the bar, follow the narrow road (during the week, there is hardly any traffic) to pass a large car park. To the right, the Ageriniotis River acts as our travelling companion, the banks of the river sports mullein, Spiny Starwort and other wildflowers. Arriving at a junction, bear right and cross over a bridge spanning the river. Quarter of an hour later, reach the main road Agia Irini – Sougia and a memorial (8), 59 m, dedicated to the Cretans who were deported by the German Wehrmacht to the Austrian concentration camp, Mauthausen, and lost their lives there. The road descends in half an hour to Sougia (9). (As an alternative, starting from the memorial, follow a story stream bed to the sea, but this will not save you very much time.)





back to the boards, take the right-hand trail to descend. Immediately after, cross over the stream bed of the Ageriniotis via an arched bridge. Then, the trail leads through a grove of olive trees. A good 150 further on, turn right onto a cobbled trail, broad at the outset (E4 sign to Omalos), and pass through a gate. We soon leave the open woodland of mountain cypress and holm oak down below. The trail is now overgrown in some sections with Thorny Primrose and ferns; sometimes the trail tapers down into a narrow path. As the higher altitudes are reached, superb views open up over the broad mountain valley of Agia Iринi and the surrounding mountains. Down below, we can make out the forest-covered notch of the Agia Iринi Gorge. The trail leads past a copse of Turkish pines and, 10 minutes later, meets up with a broad **col** (2), 842 m. At this point, descend into a funnel-shaped basin and then continue on past a cistern with a watering trough. Shortly afterwards, reach a junction. While the E4 continues straight ahead to the Omalos high plain, we descend to the right along a narrow mule track leading down into the Figou Gorge; the last stretch climbs down via zigzags. Arriving at the dry stream bed of the **Figou Gorge** (3), 708 m, pick up a path, sometimes rough, which, at first, traverses the foot of a scree-covered slope. Then the route continues, sometimes along the left bank, sometimes along the right, criss-crossing the stony stream bed. In the lower reaches, the path squeezes its way between huge boulders. At the remains of a wall for the sometime guard post of the Cretan resistance fighters against the Turks, bear slightly right (to the left, an excursion to the Xirotripa Cave is possible). Shortly afterwards, pass an open quarry-stone hut. 100 m below this point, the Figou Gorge merges into the **Agia Iринi Gorge** (4), 506 m. (To the left, you could walk a stretch into the gorge of St. Irene and after only a few minutes, arrive at a rest area where a fountain with drinking water is located.) We turn



Agia Roumeli, at the mouth of the Samaría Gorge.

From Agia Roumeli to the Iron Gates in the national park

The usual route through the Samaría Gorge descends from the Omalos high plateau down to the seaside (see Walk 11), however, you don't necessarily have to walk through the entire gorge. If you spend the night in Agia Roumeli and get an early start the next day, you have the advantage (when taking the »easy version«) that you can enjoy a fantastic experience in this natural setting without having to share it with others, since most walkers descend from above and don't reach the Iron Gates until just before noon. Even without adding the overnight stay, you can walk the exploratory route comfortably as a day trip and still be certain to relish the high point of a »classic« visit to Crete – this begins with a sensational boat ride along the dramatic cliffs dropping down to the sea.



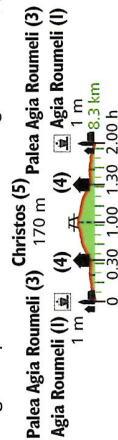
In the scree-covered stream bed.

Starting point: Agia Roumeli, 1 m. Approach with the ferry (May–October) from Chora Sfakion, Paleochora and Sougia. The tour is also possible when starting from Chania; from there, with the early bus, daily around 8.30, to Chora Sfakion (transfer to the ferry at about 10.30).

Return: with the ferry from Agia Roumeli to Chora Sfakion and Sougia/Paleochora around 17.30 (up-to-date schedules available locally and at www.anendyk.gr). Bus from Chora Sfakion to Chania, daily around 18.30 (the bus waits for the arrival of the ferry).

From the **ferry landing (1)**, reach the village main street of **Roumeli (2)**, only a few steps away. At the ticket office, the main street is flanked by tavernas and apartment houses. Turn right onto the street and, in front of Apartments Sorbas, immediately turn left again.

A concrete-paved road leads, at first, through the alluvial plain while heading into the gorge. A good quarter of an hour from Agia Roumeli, pass the Agia



Height difference: 170 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: relatively easy gorge walk along a well-laid trail. »Exploratory tour« doesn't mean, however, that the route is a piece of cake – the log-paved trail through the Iron Gates demands sure-footedness.

Opening times: the gorge is usually open from the beginning of May until the end of October; entrance fee is €5.

Refreshment and accommodation: tavernas and many rooms to rent in Agia Roumeli; snack bars at the Check Point near the gorge entrance; fountain with potable water at the Christos rest area.

Alternative: either before or after walking the gorge, you have the possibility of ascending to a Turkish castle, enthroned high above the mouth of the Samaria Gorge on the spur of a ridge. The fortress once secured the access to the gorge from the seaward side, although the Turks were never able to completely control the vast canyon since the Cretans held the Iron Gates firmly in hand. The ascent, not quite a half an hour to climb, leads along a zigzag path which begins behind the village church of Agia Roumeli, situated somewhat on the outskirts of the settlement. You can get there by starting diagonally across from the ticket office and taking the passageway towards the interior; when it ends, turn right. The short tour is rewarded with a spectacular panoramic view of the village and the river delta.

Triada church at **Palea Agia Roumeli (3)**; a bridge allows you to cross over the river bed. The houses here lie hidden behind the walls; the village was destroyed by a flood in spring of 1952 and has been abandoned ever since.

Past a row of kiosks, you have to cancel your ticket at the **checkpoint (4)** for the official entrance to the gorge, which has been designated a national park. Now you have to cross footbridges several times over the stream bed, flanked by oleander, Turkish pines and cypress trees. The walls of the gorge close in more and more; the log-paved trail through the **Sideroportes**, the



The Iron Gates.

Iron Gates, is simply fantastic as the steep rock faces, separated here by a mere 3 m of breadth, tower up to almost 300 m in height.

A few minutes past the bottleneck, reach the major **rest area, Christos (5)**, 170 m, where there are picnic tables, toilets and a fountain with potable water; a few paces above the rest area is the eponymous chapel. The most spectacular section of the gorge is now behind us, but that doesn't mean that continuing on would be uninteresting. If you want to continue further into the gorge, you can walk to the next rest area, Nero tis Perdikas, in a good hour. Otherwise, turn back again from Christos and take the approach route back to **Agia Roumeli (2)** and the **ferry dock (1)**.



The classic walk on Crete's southern coast

The trail at the foot of the steep coastal cliffs offers one of the most impressive routes for southern Crete. During the walk, pass by several pebble coves, some small and some spacious, as well as a Byzantine chapel, well worth a visit. A small pine forest provides a splash of green and some shade, too. In-viting tavernas can also be found on the way. The route also provides an over-view of what the region still has to offer in the way of other walks: along the trail, turn-offs and starting points for the walks to Agios Ioannis (Walk 23) and the Aradena Gorge (Walk 25), as well as the circular walk from Loutro to Finix (Walk 27).

Starting point: Agia Roumeli, 1 m. Approach with the ferry (May–October) three times daily from Chora Sfakion. The first ferry sets sail from Chora Sfakion at about 10.30 and reaches Agia Roumeli after about 1.15 hrs. Ferries to Agia Roumeli also set sail from Paleochora and Sougla, but you have to plan an overnight in Loutro or Chora Sfakion since you would be unable to return on the same day.

Return: between May and October, the last ferry from Loutro to Chora Sfakion sets sail at 18.15. The time needed for the walk is then more than adequate, but bathing or rest breaks, even for lively walkers, are limited to a total of one and a half hours at the most.

Height difference: a good 300 m in both ascent and descent.

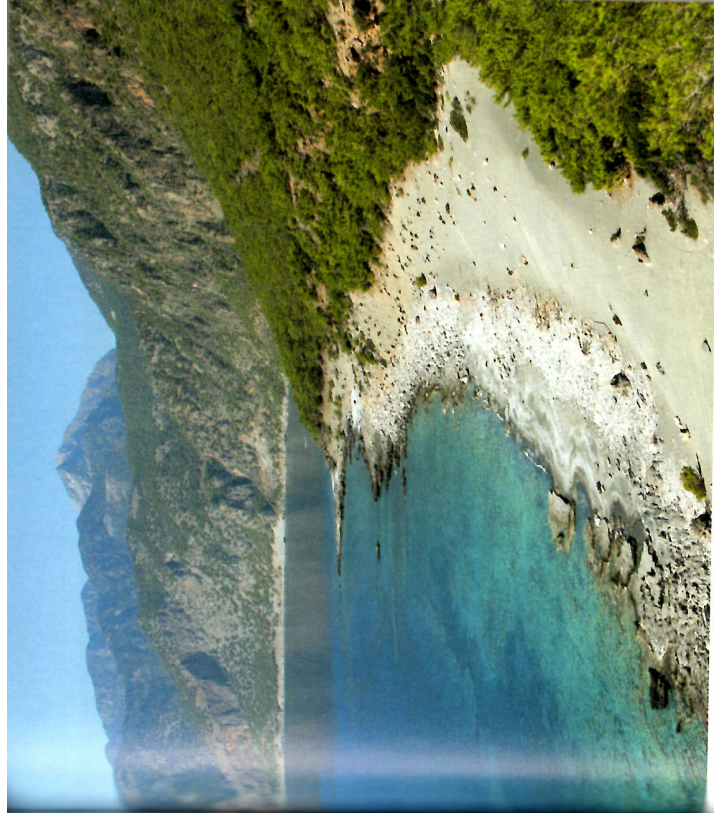
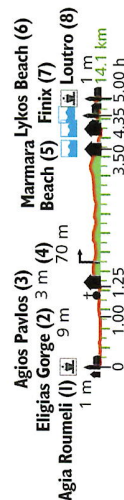
Grade: this relatively long walk leads mostly along a well-laid coastal path; a short stretch between Marmara and Lykos demands being sure-footed and vertigo-free. Path-finding is very simple; the route is waymarked throughout with yellow/black markings and E4 posts

(without diamonds). The final 3 hours is virtually without shade and, in mid-summer, fairly exposed to the blazing heat. Be sure to take along your sunblock and bathing gear!

Refreshment: numerous tavernas in Agia Roumeli and Loutro; en route, near the Agios Pavlos church, is the Taverna Saint Paul (also with rooms to rent), as well as beach bars in Lykos Beach, Marmara and Finix.

Alternative: if you are staying in Loutro, you can start the walk from there and take the ferry back from Agia Roumeli in the afternoon. If you get an early start, you could also begin the walk from Chora Sfakion (at the outset, follow the instructions in Walk 24 to Loutro).

Linking tips: physically fit walkers could also reach Chora Sfakion on the same day by following Walk 24 in the opposite direction. Samaria Gorge walkers (Walk 11) can spend the night in Agia Roumeli and, the next day, continue on to Loutro, then by boat or using Walk 24, reach Chora Sfakion.



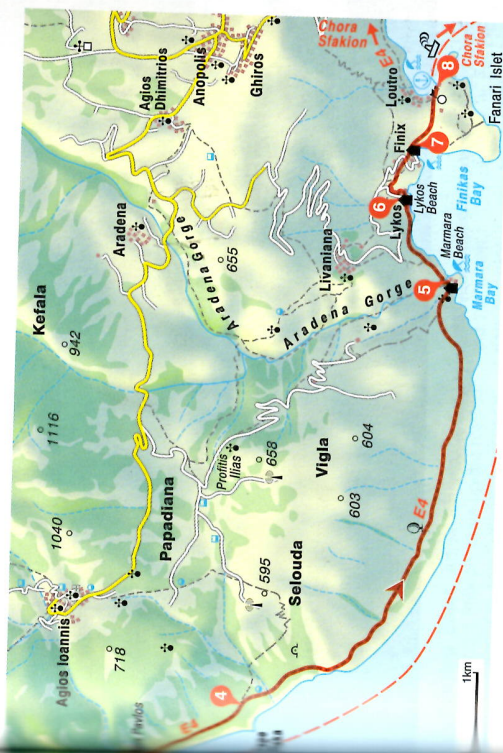
The southern coast between Agios Pavlos and Marmara Beach.

After a short visit to **Agia Roumeli (1)**, and perhaps an excursion to the Turkish castle (Walk 21), start off at the ferry dock along the promenade, at the outset flanked by low walls, and head east. 150 m further on, the cobbled trail veers towards the interior and the seaside entrance to the Samaria Gorge. At the Taverna Rousios, leave the trail behind by turning right. Cross over the broad, dry stream bed and, at the eastern bank, reach a stone wall, which is reinforced by a chain-link fence. Follow the wall towards the sea until it ends; here, meet up with a coastal path, sandy at the beginning, waymarked with E4 markings. At the outset, the path leads along a pebble cove. Half an hour later, pass bizarre boulders with a rock arch. A second, adjoining pebble cove, almost 500 m in length, comes next. Some minutes afterwards, reach the mouth of the **Eligias Gorge (2)**. If this point was not marked by two boulders towering out of the sea, it would be very easy to pass by without even noticing the inaccessible canyon.

At the rocky slope, Turkish pines now provide a little shade; it is also shady on the roofed terrace of the **Taverna Saint Paul**, reached not quite half an hour past the Eligias Gorge. Prior to that, reach another beach which is quite suited for a bathing break. Not far from the taverna, an in-depth visit to the little Byzantine chapel, **Agios Pavlos (3)**, is well worthwhile; the chapel goes back to the 10th century (see photo, page 126). About 15 m below the chapel, the source for a fresh water spring can be found directly at the beach. Directly in front of the chapel, scramble up the steep, rocky embankment. Up above, the coastal path continues, sandy at first, and soon ascends along a well-laid stretch, following tight bends and passing through a relatively dense pine wood until reaching the **turn-off for Agios Ioannis (4)**, 70 m. Diagonally to the left, a spectacular, red/white waymarked alpine path climbs up the steep coastal slope (Walk 23), but we keep to the E4 and keep heading straight on. In spring, the air is filled with the aromatic scent of thyme; in autumn, the metre-high, torch-like rosette of the sea squill appears here by the thousands.

Pass a round **cistern**. A good 10 minutes afterwards, reach a rock face with caves and again enjoy a lovely backwards view of the coastline peppered

Sometimes the trail winds through bizarrely formed boulders.



with pebble coves. Now we have left the shade behind us, since the Turkish pines have had to make way for a low-growth, cushion plant scrubland. The path leads along the foot of the sometimes sheer cliff belonging to the 600 m-high Vigla. Below us, we can spot a flat, rocky beach. Cross over a rock-strewn tongue and then pass another rock slope, riddled with caves, as well as a solitary **olive tree**.

After a long stretch without any noteworthy features, finally a view opens up of the peninsula between the bays of Finix and Loutro, on which you can spot the watchtower of a Venetian castle. Down below, perched above the bay of Marmara at the seaside, a chapel and a handful of summer cottages appear. Starting in front of the chapel, pass through a gate and then, at an E4 post, descend to a broad, gravel trail which leads into the Aradena Gorge (Walk 25). Turning right, only a few paces lead to **Marmara Beach (5)**, and if we haven't taken one already, we have most certainly earned a bathing break at this splendid cove, which offers sun loungers and parasols, as well as an inviting taverna situated up above the beach.

Afterwards, it's time to cut to the chase. At the little pebble cove of Marmara, we get our bearing from an E4 post and climb up the rocky promontory (white marble!), which borders the beach to the east. 10 minutes later, pass by a waymarked turn-off heading towards Livaniana. In the further course of the route, the **mule track** becomes rather rough and somewhat precipitous with a cliff dropping vertically for 20 m. Past a cave-like overhanging cliff (see





Panoramic descent to a Byzantine chapel on the sea

A descent as pretty as this one, taking in the turquoise-coloured Libyan Sea, can hardly be matched by any other. On top of that, it leads along a kalerimi, cobbled at the outset. The walk's destination is the thousand-year old church of Agios Pavlos. The church stands on the spot where the Apostle Paul, on his missionary journey to Crete in 59 AD, supposedly made landfall; no evidence exists to support the legend, however. Originally, Paul wanted to spend the winter somewhat further east in the harbour town of Phoenix (today's Finix). But as the ship cruised offshore from the Cretan coast, a north-easterly squall came up and drove the boat to Gavdos instead (as set down in the New Testament, Acts 27). Next to the St. Paul Chapel, we can also gather strength in the Taverna Saint Paul for the long return ascent and, in front of the chapel, there is a tolerable pebble beach.

Starting point: Agios Ioannis, 755 m. From Chora Stakion, drive up the road to reach Anopolis and there at the roundabout (sporting a monument to the Cretan resistance fighter, Daskalogiannis), keep straight on and, 5 km past the Aradena bridge, reach the car park located at the village limits of Agios Ioannis.

Height difference: 770 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: aside from a few slight precipitous and rough sections through scree fields, the ancient mule track is well-laid, as well as waymarked throughout (until reaching the E4, the descent is white/red and then, the E4 is yellow/black). Be sure to take along your bathing gear! The lower third of the strenuous, steep intermediary ascent is lying solely in shade.

Refreshment: Taverna Saint Paul at the

Pure tranquility: the car-free holiday village of Loutro.

photo on page 130), descend again to the seaside; you may need to use your hands during the scramble.

Passing goat pens and ancient olive trees, ramble on to traverse **Lykos Beach (6)**, where beneath rubber trees and salt cedars, the Taverna Akrogiail presents a place to take a break. Afterwards, cross the terrace of the Taverna Nikos Small Paradise, and immediately past it, climb up a couple of steps. Above Nikos, the gravel trail, flanked by a chain-link fence, veers to the left. At a goat pen and a car park, follow the track for a stretch towards the interior. 200 m on, the track turns to the right, leave it behind about 75 m further on at a sharp left-hand bend, but keep straight ahead (yellow/black waymarkers). Now arriving back at the coastal path, climb up to a rocky plateau. Arriving there, cross through a gate and then ignore another turn-off leading to Livaniana. Also ignore the signed path turning off to the right towards the Old Phoenix Restaurant (this is another very attractive place to take refreshment). 5 minutes later, cross diagonally over a gravel track and then our path leads for a couple of metres above the pretty chapel of **Finix (7)**, passing it by.

In a final short ascent, now climb up the peninsula situated between Finix and Loutro. First pass a couple of carob trees, then pass the Venetian **castle**; from here, enjoy a downwards view of the row of houses, belonging to Loutro, that appear just like a picture in a holiday brochure. At the junction, halfway down, turn right onto the seaside promenade of **Loutro (8)**; the ferry dock with a ticket office is located about 75 m further on to the right.

Agios Pavlos Chapel (you can also spend the night here). The café/bar at the car park in Agios Ioannis is only open sporadically; if it is closed, there is a self-service refrigerator on the terrace.

Short walk: if a spectacular view of the coast is enough for you, only walk as far as the edge of the cliff (2), where you can take a break and enjoy the superlative panoramic view (there and back, 1.30 hrs.).

Alternatives: if you hitch a ride or take a taxi to Agios Ioannis and, because of that, you don't have to ascend again to the village after the descent, you can either walk the E4 westwards until reaching Agia Roumeli or eastwards to reach Loutro/Chora Stakion (Walk 22). The last ferryboat to Chora Stakion from Agia Roumeli (May–October) sets sail around 17.30, from Loutro, around 18.15.





To the official insider's tip on the Libyan Sea

In peace and quiet, from the return trip by ferry, we can take another look at the walk we have left behind us. Sweet Water Beach is crouched in a spectacular spot at the foot of the towering coastal cliffs, more than 800 m in height. Thinking back, it is difficult to imagine that a path, and moreover, the popular long-distance trail E4, leads along there, in fact, it looks pretty dangerous (due to rock fall) – but thank goodness, nothing tragic has occurred up to now. And regarding Loutro itself: the location of the car-free village, which can be reached only by boat or on foot, is simply sensational!

Starting point: Chora Sfakion, 7 m. Synchronised with the arrival of the ferry, a good bus connection to Chania.

Return: from Loutro, ferry boat service four or five times daily in the summer months to Chora Sfakion, the last one sets sail at around 18.15.

Height difference: about 200 m in ascent and descent.

Grade: a well-laid coastal path without extreme differences in height, nevertheless, slightly precipitous sections de-

mand sure-footedness. The trail is along a stage of the E4 and waymarked yellow/black throughout. No shade; bring along your sunscreen and bathing gear!

Refreshment: beach bar at Sweet Water Beach, numerous cafés and tavernas in Chora Sfakion and Loutro (a good cappuccino in the Café Loutro).

Linking tips: in Loutro, the route can be linked with crossing the Aradena Gorge (Walk 25) or with the circular walk to Finix (Walk 27).

The adventurous descent to Sweet Water Beach, as seen from the ferry.



From the car park at the village limits of **Agios Ioannis (1)**, descend along a narrow tarmac road. 75 m further on, a stony trail, flanked by field stones, starts off to the right (white/red waymarkings) and leads between two chapels (one to the right and another to the left, both situated somewhat off-trail) through an open wood of cypress and Turkish pine. A good quarter of an hour later, cross an intersecting trail and, 40 m further on, continue straight ahead along a narrow path. Some minutes later, cross through a valley notch. A short intermediate ascent climbs up to a karst plateau; here, cross a country lane again and finally reach the cliff's edge, called **Seloudha (2)**, 540 m. A fantastic view opens up of the coastal countryside – far below, the Libyan Sea shimmerers in various tones of green and blue; westwards, you can spot Agia Roumeli.

The descent begins along a cobbled trail, perfectly preserved at the outset, which was a very busy connecting trail between the highlands and the coast in the past. After some tight bends, traverse the first stony scree slope, which is slightly precipitous sometimes. During the descent, the sea is almost constantly in view. After crossing over more scree slopes, the pine wood begins to provide more shade, a fact that we will especially appreciate during the return ascent. Located in the middle of the wood belt, meet up with the **E4 (3)**, 70 m, and turn right onto it. Soon the E4 follows sharp zigzags until it finally reaches the **Agios Pavlos chapel (4)**. Below the chapel, there is a long pebble beach and, 100 m further on, the shady terrace of the Taverna Saint Paul. After a good, long rest stop, ascend again along the approach route back to **Agios Ioannis (1)**.

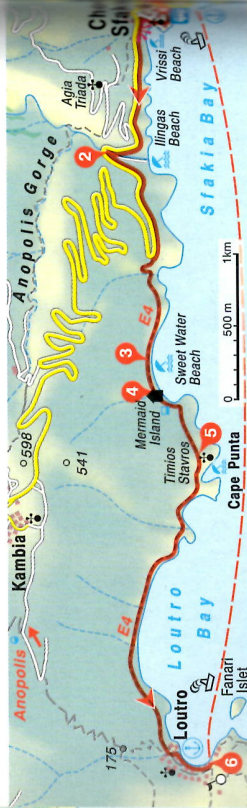
1000 years old: the Agios Pavlos Chapel.





Spectacular location: Sweet Water Beach.

hind it, you can spot the Timios Stavros Chapel, which our path will lead past. First, descend along a rocky, but well-laid, alpine path climbing down in zig-zags. Soon traverse a somewhat precipitous rocky slope of scree (see photo on page 127) and continue descending, while scrambling under an overhanging cliff face, down to the sea. A few minutes later, reach **Sweet Water Beach (3)**. On maps, it is listed as in Greek as *Glilka Nera* (sweet water) and



From Loutro (here in the photo), return to Chora Sfakion in comfort by ferry.

takes its name from freshwater springs whose sources flow directly on the beach. The springs benefit numerous individuals, camping in the wild on the beach, who have put up little tents in the shade of the salt cedars. If the novel beach bar, **Mermaid Island (4)**, built on a boulder in the sea, is open, you can get yourself a hot or cold drink. If you want to take a longer break here, there are sun loungers and parasols to rent at the beach.

At the beach bar, the coastal path continues on. Not quite a quarter of an hour later, meet up with the **Timios Stavros Chapel (5)**, situated somewhat below the trail, where you can take a break on a bench and enjoy a view of Loutro. Past the chapel, descend to a little pebble beach; early mornings, you can enjoy it on your own. Another pebble cove follows immediately after. From there, the path ascends again to a height of about 50 m above the sea and then finally reaches the eastern village limits of **Loutro (6)** at the Hotel Oasis. In front of the hotel, turn left to descend to the Taverna Pavlos on the seaside promenade and, from there, meet up with the ferry dock at the southern end of the little settlement in 5 minutes.

- Sweet Water Beach (3) Mermaid Island (4)
 Ilingas Beach (2) Timios Stavros
 Chora Sfakion (1) (5) Loutro (6)
 7 m 1 m
 0 0.45 1.05 2.00 h
 7.0 km

25 Through the Aradena Gorge

6.15 hrs



Fascinating gorge walk west of Loutro

When it comes to connecting with nature, the Aradena Gorge walk is most certainly one of the best in western Crete. In the picturesque village of Loutro, a coastal trail sets off, passing splendid bathing coves. From Marmara Beach, climb up along a challenging alpine path through the imposing canyon to reach the abandoned village of Aradena. A cross-in-square church, well worth seeing, is one of the few buildings still standing in the once major mountain village. The reason that the settlement has been abandoned for the last three generations is said to be the result of a bitter blood feud. Perhaps for many of the inhabitants, it was too cumbersome to have a home which could only be left or reached via a single trail through a gorge, even though the kalerimi is cobbled and perfectly laid. The steel bridge has only been in existence since 1986. From the bridge, 138 m in height, you can enjoy an impressive view into the gorge – if you fancy an adrenalin rush, you could also bungee-jump from the bridge into the canyon (www.bungy.gr). The crowning climax of this adventurous circular walk is the panoramic return descent to the Libyan Sea, during which, you should be sure to allow for a stopover at the taverna in Finix.

The precipitous stretch between Lykos Beach and Marmara Beach.



Starting point: Loutro, 1 m.

From Chora Stakion, ferry boat service 4–5 times daily in the summer months to Loutro (a 20-minute voyage). The first one sets sail from Chora Stakion at around 10.30 and the last ferry from Loutro returns between 17.00 and 18.15, depending on the season. You could also start from Chania (synchronised with the arrival of the ferry, a good bus connection).

Height difference: 750 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: the walk leads to Marmara Beach along the well-laid and well-marked E4, during which, shortly past Lykos, you have to scramble up the cliff and then face a stretch that follows which is somewhat precipitous and exposed. The trail through the Aradena Gorge, green/red waymarked, is sometimes interrupted by sheer, steep drop-offs; here, too, you must sometimes use your hands while scrambling. The gorge walls provide shade, depending on the time of day; the descent from Aradena runs continuously exposed to the sun.

Refreshment: tavernas in Loutro, Finix, Lykos and Marmara; a kiosk selling drinks in Aradena.

Important Note: if you are not staying in Loutro, the time frame for the walk depends on the ferry schedule. The total walking time of 6.15 hrs has been generously calculated, but needing less than 6

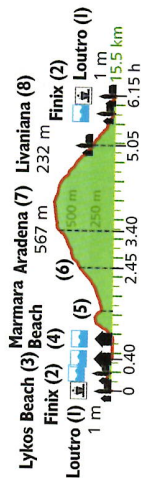
hrs. to complete the walk is not very likely. We recommend, therefore, that you only take short rest stops, totalling a maximum of 1.30 hrs.

Alternatives: 1. The walk can also start off from Marmara. During the season, a water taxi runs daily about 11.00 from Loutro (Poseidonas Boat, tel. +30-28250-91257 and +30-6988-981255) to Marmara Beach (voyage of 15 minutes). The walking time is then reduced by a good hour (but since the water taxi doesn't set sail until 11.00, the time frame for the walk isn't affected very much).

2. If you are satisfied with only taking an exploratory walk into the gorge, take the water taxi to Marmara, ascend for a stretch into the gorge, at the halfway point, turn back again and while away the time at the beach of Marmara until the water taxi returns to Loutro (17.00).

3. Physically fit walkers needn't be dependent on the 10.30 ferry if they begin the walk early in the morning, starting from Chora Stakion and using the route described in Walk 24, additional walking time: 2 hrs.

From the ferry dock in **Loutro (1)**, ramble along the seaside promenade to the first set of tavernas and, 75 m on, keep an eye out for a stepped trail branching off between the Hotel Daskalogiannis and the Hotel Madares (that is, do not take the steps in front of the Hotel Daskalogiannis). Some minutes later, the trail meets up with the E4; turn left onto the E4 and continue ascending the slope (yellow/black waymarkers). Shortly past a gate, reach the ridge of the peninsula separating the two bays of Loutro and of Finix; the ruins of a Venetian castle are lying to the left. Cross over the peninsula while enjoying a view of the mountain village of Livaniana; to the left, you can spot the notch for Aradena Gorge. The path drops down to the bay of Finix, but then ignore a turn-off towards the houses at the little boat landing. Instead,



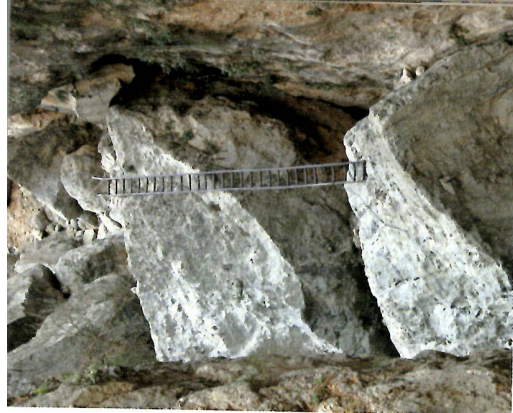
skirt around the bay along the upper rim. Shortly past the **chapel at Finix (2)**, the E4 crosses diagonally over a gravel track and then ascends for a couple of metres of height along a chain-link fence. A blue-marked turn-off to Livaniana is ignored (the return trail later on). Past another gate, descend along a gravel-paved (perhaps soon tarmac-paved) access trail towards Lykos, following the trail towards the sea. At the same height as a goat pen, below which, a car park is located, the trail veers to the left and a stepped trail leads to the tavernas at **Lykos Beach (3)**. Our trail leads directly across the terraces of Nikos Small Paradise and of the Taverna Akrogiati next door. Now continue on along a chain-link fence for a stretch directly at the seaside. Past a small sandy beach, the path climbs steeply up a cliff where we have no choice but to use our hands while scrambling. Past a cave-like overhang, the path leads along a narrow and precipitous, cornice-like stretch. Ignore a second turn-off towards Livaniana and, shortly afterwards, descend to **Marmara Beach (4)**. If you are making good time, you can take a short bathing break on the little pebble beach. Upon closer inspection, the beach is actu-



ally also the mouth of the **Aradena Gorge**. From the seaside, follow the stream bed, at first broad and gravelly, into the gorge and find yourself immediately surrounded by rusty-red coloured rock faces, towering more than 200 m high. In autumn, the Chasteberry, growing up to 4 m in height, displays its lilac-coloured flowers; in spring, red flowering oleander bush casts its spell. Skirt around two bottlenecks, sporting boulders as big as a lorry, along a rocky alpine path on the right-hand side; waymarkers are an additional aid, during the further course of this stretch, in finding the perfect way between the boulders. Sometimes, short, steep spots have to be scrambled over, but in between times, stretches are met which lead pleasantly along the dry stream bed.

After a good half an hour in the gorge, pass two striking **rock spires (5)**, 120 m. Afterwards, the gorge widens briefly to form a basin. Ignore a third, waymarked turn-off to Livaniana and a half an hour after that, beneath a rock face, an alpine path heading towards Agios Ioannis turns off to the left through a crevice. We bear right instead and then tackle the next steep stretch via zigzags.

A good 20 minutes past the turn-off leading to Agios Ioannis, reach the former **crux (6)**, 349 m, of the gorge. Until about ten years ago, this steep section could only be negotiated by climbing ladders. Now it can be skirted around on the left hand side of the gorge, via an alpine path, protected by railings and sometimes stepped. The railings are battered and missing in some sections and the path is somewhat precipitous here. A good 10 minutes later, the detour leads back to the stream bed of the gorge. Towering high above us, we can spot the steel bridge at Aradena which boldly joins the two rims of the gorge walls together. Before the bridge was built, the gorge could only be crossed here along an ancient **mule track**, which was elaborately laid using supporting walls. Meet up with this trail after passing beneath the bridge and ascend along it on the left-hand side of the gorge. Arriving at the rim of the canyon high above, reach the ruins of a house at the Aradena village limits. Past a gate, bear left and, 10 m further on, meet up with a narrow tarmac road; follow this through a grove of olive trees into



You don't have to scramble up the ladder; the steep stretch can be skirted around via an alpine path.



The restaurant Old Phoenix.

cross-in-square church, 75 m on, turn left at the first fork in front of a flat, rendered building with brown shutters. The church, hailing from the 14th century, was built on the ruins of an early Christian basilica right on the rim of the gorge. After visiting the church, at the entrance, turn left and a couple of paces afterwards, turn left again and finally meet up with the kiosk at the steel bridge in **Aradena (7)**, 567 m.

After a little refreshment, cross over the bridge spanning the gorge and take in a bird's eye view of the stream bed in the gorge lying 138 m down below. Behind the cross-in-square church, the White Mountains appear in all their grandeur, including Pachnes, at 2453 m. Not quite 400 m further on, turn right onto the access road towards Livaniana/Finix. The sign says 7.5 kms to Livaniana, but many bends can be shortcut on the way. At the outset, the tarmac road winds through cushion plant scrubland while ascending slightly. Pass small fields which have been wrung out of this stony wasteland. Now pass a long farm building with a corrugated iron roof and, shortly after, reach a **rise**, at a good 600 m, where you can enjoy a downwards view of the Libyan Sea. Pass yet another farm building and, a little later, at a right-hand bend, ignore a blue-waymarked turn-off to Anopolis. Continuing along the road, a breathtaking panoramic view opens up of the southern coast; you can spot the village of Livaniana and the Loutro peninsula once again. Follow the road past two more hairpin bends and, directly past the second one, turn off onto a mule track (waymarkers). 10 minutes later, the track meets up again with the tarmac road. Ascend along the tarmac road straight ahead until it meets up again, about 100 m further on, with the mule track, at first, rough and somewhat precipitous as it continues on.

Suddenly, the Aradena Gorge appears again. The mule track, well-laid and cobbled here, leads for a stretch along the rim of the gorge; we lose altitude quickly as we descend in tight bends. At the end of the cobbled section, con-

tinue in the same direction and walk for a short way along a fieldstone wall until afterwards, the **cemetery** at the upper village limits of Livaniana comes into view. 15 m above the cemetery's church, reach a junction; turn left to descend to Livaniana down below (turning right, you could climb down into the gorge again and continue the descent to Marmara).

From the church, blue waymarkers lead downwards into the village. At the junction, 3 minutes past the church, continue straight ahead to a concrete-paved street 25 m away: take it to reach the sometime taverna at the lower village limits of **Livaniana (8)**, 232 m – provided that new innkeepers have been found in the meantime, this is a panoramic spot to take refreshment. From the taverna, keep descending along the street and, 200 m further on, ignore the tarmac-paved turn-off to Finix. A good 50 m past the turn-off, take the blue-marked path towards Loutro/Finix/Lykos. This leads immediately above two flat buildings and then ascends, now well-laid, along the slope in bends, while constantly allowing a view to the sea. Half an hour past the taverna, meet up with a fork and keep straight ahead (a right turn leads to Lykos). Cross diagonally over a gravel track. 200 m further on, shortly before Finix, reach the E4 at a spot already met on the approach route. A little later, pass the trail turning off to the right which leads to the restaurant Old Phoenix (possible stop for refreshment, see also Walk 27), then, passing the chapel at **Finix (2)**, continue on to return back to **Loutro (1)**.

The descent trail to Finix leads along a barren slope.





Magnificent descent from the highlands to the sea

After an ascent through the Anopolis Gorge, a fantastic descent into the car-free resort village of Loutro, with a good choice of places for refreshment, as well as fine panoramic views of the coast and two remote chapels along the way; all in all, an excellent combination for an very interesting day's excursion. Even the element of water plays a major role: not quite an hour before the end of the circular walk, situated in a splendid spot at the foot of a cliff face and only accessible on foot, Sweet Water Beach is an inviting place for a bathing break. Do not be put off by the long walking times and the many metres of height to be negotiated – there are also shorter alternatives.

Starting point: Chora Sfakion, 7 m.

Good bus connections from Chania.

Height difference: about 900 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a sometimes strenuous ascent through the Anopolis Gorge, where you have to scramble over and around boulders on the way. The trail from Chora

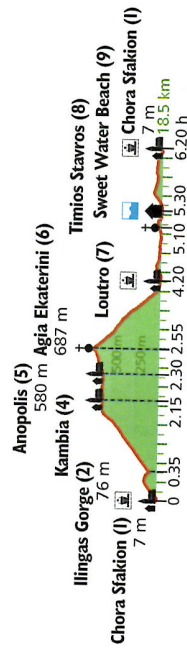
»Trail squatters« on the Anopolis high plateau.



In Chora Sfakion, a pine wood in front of the rugged, sheer cliffs on the coast lends a green touch.

Begin the walk in **Chora Sfakion (1)** at the roundabout on the village limits where the tourist information booth is also located. At Taverna Nikos, follow the line of restaurants until reaching the Café Akrogiali; in front of it, a concrete-paved trail ascends to the right. Just before a couple of steps, bear left (blue arrow) and climb up stairs to the main road leading to Anopolis. Turn left on the main road and, 100 m past the last house, keep a sharp eye out for a blue-waymarked path that climbs up the embankment. Just after two short bends, the path, cobblestone-paved only sometimes along the way, turns out to be the ancient connecting trail between Chora Sfakion and Anopolis. At the same time, a beautiful backwards view opens up of Chora Sfakion and the harbour.

10 minutes later, the path merges onto a gravel trail. Not quite 100 m further on, ignore a track turning off in a sharp angle. As soon as the gravel trail turns sharp left while descending the slope down to the road, turn right instead, along a path (waymarker) that continues climbing down into the Ilingas Gorge, opening up before us. Here, the trail is cut somewhat into the rock face and begins to drop, rather loose underfoot, down into the stream



bed of the gorge. On the eastern side of the gorge, you can already spot the continued route of the trail. Along the last stretch, the old trail course has broken away and, while scrambling down almost eight metres, you will probably have to use your hands at times.

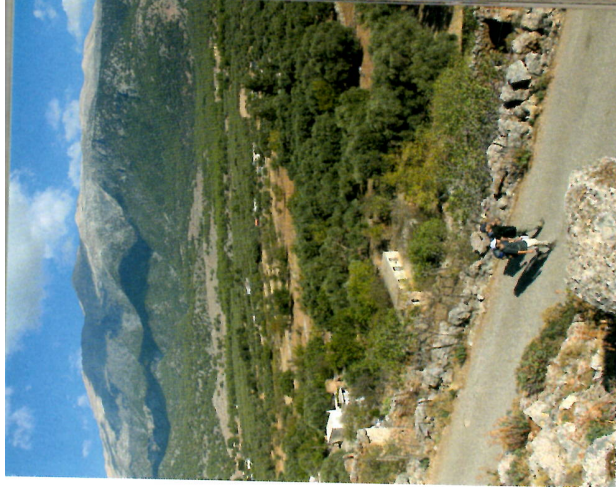
In the broad, dry stream bed of the **Ilingas Gorge (2)**, 76 m, ascend for a short stretch until, about 75 m on, the villages' connecting trail continues to the left. Here, the trail has been laboriously reinforced with supporting walls as it ascends through the Anopolis Gorge, a branch, so to speak, of the Ilingas Gorge. In the dry stream bed, sometimes narrow and rocky, the cobbles of the ancient *kalderimi* are only preserved in fragments. At two steep sections, one following soon after the other, each about 2 m in height, you have to scramble while using your hands. Further scrambles follow through bottlenecks. As soon as the rock faces begin to lose in steepness, the trail climbs out of the stream bed and continues ascending on the left bank. Still a good distance ahead of us, mobile phone transmission masts appear; we will pass these by later on. At a pump house with an electricity pylon next to it, meet up with a gravel trail and take this to ascend further up the gorge. Pass another, smaller, pump house and, 5 mins after that, at the same height as some animal pens, climb up the broad track to the left. 75 m further on, the track veers to the left; leave it behind by continuing straight ahead along a stony path, heading towards a third pump house. 15 m before reaching it, turn left to climb up the embankment. A section of the ancient trail course continues above the pump house and then, at a hairpin bend, touches on the secondary road. 10 mins later, the trail meets up with a fork at a chain-link fence, next to the **mobile phone transmission masts (3)**, 590 m. Pass

through the gate and, on the other side of the fence, bear right onto the gravel trail. The ascent is now behind us; we have reached the Anopolis high plateau and can enjoy the view of the White Mountains, dominated by the highest peak, Pachnes, at an altitude of 2453 m. Past a grove of olive trees surrounded by field-stone walls, the trail meets up with the road in **Kambia (4)**, 580 m, (a couple of paces to the left, heading along the road, leads to the Taverna Tria Adelfia, one of the first possible spots to take refreshment).

Turning right onto the road and 10 mins later, just past the bakery and the church, reach the village centre of **Anopolis (5)**, 580 m, at a major roundabout where

the Taverna Platanos offers a rest stop. Located in the middle of the roundabout is a bust of the resistance fighter, Daskalogiannis, who was born in the village, and is the namesake, amongst others, for a ferry providing service along the southern coast and for the international airport at Chania. At the taverna, turn off onto a tarmac road heading towards Agia Ekaterini. The road soon ascends onto a mountain ridge. Past a bend to the right, ignore a trail turning off to the left and continue straight ahead. Before the semi-abandoned district of Ghiros, the narrow road veers sharply to the left and then ends at the foot of the chapel, **Agia Ekaterini (6)**, 687 m. The excursion climbing up to the summit chapel is worthwhile; with our backs to Pachnes, we can enjoy a bird's eye view of the semi-circular bay of Loutro down below.

At the end of the narrow road, pass through a gate and begin the climb down to Loutro. In tight zigzags, lose altitude quickly and, 25 mins later, meet up with a trail that is approaching from Kambia. Turn right onto this trail until reaching the next left-hand bend; a few paces further on, continue along a path. Almost the entire time while we are descending along this path, which is sometimes very loose underfoot, we are rewarded with a panoramic view



Pachnes, Crete's second highest peak, above the Anopolis high plateau.

1.50 hrs



A short circular walk from Loutro via Finix

27

A short walk to ancient ruins and to a day-tripper's restaurant

Loutro is simply beautiful. Not only the picturesque setting on the crescent-shaped bay, but also the terraces of the cafés and restaurants, right on the sea, are pure Mediterranean stereotypes. In addition, the short excursion by ferry opens up an enchanting panoramic view of the rugged, sheer cliffs towering over the coastline. You can put your legs to work by taking a short circular stroll to a charming restaurant above the little pebble beach at Finix, but the brief ascent here should not be taken lightly when the midday sun is ablaze. In ancient times, the sheltered bay at Finix (also known as Finikas or Phoenix) served as the harbour for the important mountain village of Anopolis.

Starting point: Loutro, 1 m. From Chora Sfakion, ferry boat service to Loutro four or five times daily in the summer months. The first one sets sail from Chora Sfakion at around 10.30 and the last ferry from Loutro returns between 17.00 and 18.15, depending on the season.

Height difference: about 200 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: the circular walk almost always leads along sometimes stony paths; at

the beginning, a short, relatively steep ascent. During the descent that follows, a short stretch requires some route-finding skill. Hardly any shade; be sure to bring along your bathing gear!

Refreshment: numerous tavernas and cafés in Loutro, the restaurant Old Phoenix in Finix (you could also spend the night here; www.old-phoenix.com).

Linking tips: the walk could also be combined with Walks 24 and 26.

The little pebble beach at Finix and the shady terrace of the day tripper's restaurant.



During the descent from Anopolis, a bird's eye view of Loutro opens up.

of Loutro. After descending for about an hour, meet up with the turn-off to Lykos, 175 m. Turn left here to finally cross the village limits of **Loutro (7)** at the ruins of a house. A stopover in the village, picturesquely nestled along the bay, is a must. So, keep to the right (to the left, the E4 leads to Chora Sfakion) and, at the Hotel Oasis, descend to the Taverna Pavlos on the sea-side promenade. Here, we are spoilt for choice between numerous restaurants and cafés (if you wish to end the walk in Loutro, continue on to the ferry dock at the end of the promenade). After a break, ascend back to the ruins of the house at the northern edge of the bay and now follow the E4 towards Chora Sfakion. At first, the well-laid path leads about 50 m above sea level as it follows the coastline, but then it drops down to the seaside. Now pass two pebble beaches and then the secluded chapel of **Timios Stavros (8)**. From the chapel, it only takes about 15 mins to reach **Sweet Water Beach (9)**, which, because of its location at the foot of the towering coastal cliffs, rising up to 800 m in height, and the freshwater springs found here (Greek: *glika nera*; sweet water), is one of Crete's most extraordinary beaches.

From the beach, ascend along a narrow mule track through a scree-covered slope to reach the secondary road Anopolis – Chora Sfakion, which leads, in half an hour, to the village limits of **Chora Sfakion (1)**. Past the Pension Kelaidas, a stepped trail descends to the seaside promenade down below, flanked by tavernas; from here, return back to the roundabout and the car park situated above it.

From the ferry boat landing in **Loutro (1)**, take the seaside promenade, flanked by tavernas, at the narrow pebble beach until it ends at the restaurant Pavlos. From there, pick up a concrete-laid trail through a passageway and immediately ascend along a narrow cobbled trail reaching the Hotel Oasis after only a few paces.

In front of the hotel, turn sharp right and take the path, stepped at the outset, to the village limits and then reach a gate. Past the gate, bear left and head towards a tiny church with a concrete foundation and then ascend along an ancient connecting trail, heading towards Anopolis (continuing straight ahead at the gate, the E4 leads towards Chora Sfakion).

Along the *kalderimi*, cobbled in some sections, ascend very steeply while gaining altitude quickly. With every metre of altitude won, the panoramic view of the picturesque bay of Loutro just gets better. After about a 20-minute ascent, we have already reached a height of about 175 m above sea level and we have to keep our eyes peeled for a **turn-off (2)**: a sharp right turn here ascends further towards Anapolis, but we bear left instead. From this trail, also very well-laid, a view immediately opens up of a steep cliff face sporting an almost perfectly square entrance to a cave. The trail leads for a few paces below this cave. Afterwards, enjoy yet another view of the houses at Loutro and of the ruins of a Venetian castle, enthroned on a peninsula. To the west, you can spot the mountain village, Livaniana and, below it, Mar-mara Bay, situated at the mouth of the Aradena Gorge (Walk 25).

But we shouldn't be too distracted by this panoramic view; we have to keep an eye out for the route as well. A good 5 minutes past the cave, watch out for a **metre-high boulder**, possibly crowned by a cairn. Here, a path descends to the left, but we continue straight ahead instead, at first, more or less keeping to the same height, along a narrow, indistinct path heading in the direction of Livaniana (cairn). Down below, the few houses scattered in

the bay from Finix come into view. Not quite 10 minutes past the boulder, the course of the trail becomes somewhat difficult to follow; the path veers sharp left at first, then immediately to the right and, finally, well-laid and distinct, descends along the slope.

In front of a couple of dog kennels, cross over a gravel trail. Follow the red and blue-coloured markings to an intersecting trail, situated 50 m below. Turn diagonally left onto this



In the tavernas of Loutro, you can sit right at the seaside – this table, however, is private.

trail and head in the direction of the houses of Finix. At a chain-link fence, the path merges with the E4 (yellow/black waymarkers). Turn left onto the E4, following the chain-link fence, 100 m further on, a sign points out the way to the restaurant Old Phoenix; here, leave the E4 behind by turning right onto a descending path. The path soon merges into a gravel trail; turn right on the trail to pass the chapel for the cemetery and then reach the restaurant Old Phoenix in **Finix (3)**. The restaurant's terrace, shaded by bowers of bougainvillea, is just perfect for a rest stop; just below it, a pebble beach, flanked by salt cedars, is an inviting place for a swim.

From the restaurant, cross the beach to the neighbouring apartment house. Past this, a sign points left to an ascent towards Loutro, however, keep walking along the narrow concrete-paved trail on the coastline and continue on to another house, 50 m on. Before reaching it, go through an opening in the fence and, a few paces on, pass through a gate. Past the gate, a lovely, blue-waymarked coastal path sets off. Soon, catch a view of the southern tip of the peninsula, levelling off here, which separates the bays of Finix and Loutro from one another. At the end, cross over the peninsula while heading eastwards. Past a power pylon, meet up with a **chapel (4)**, its gable bell tower placed separately on top of a boulder. The old quarry stone walls of ancient Finix are lying next to it. About 3 minutes past the archaeological digs, pass by Loutro's little **cemetery** and a bench standing in front of the cemetery chapel. A view opens up, taking in an offshore islet and, towards the east, far in the distance, Chora Sfakion. The path now passes a couple of metres below a miniature church perched on top of two pillars and then passes through a gate to return again to the ferry dock in **Loutro (1)**.



The Samaria Gorge's »little sister«

If you are walking on Crete in early spring and the Samaria Gorge is still closed, you can still be well served with the Imbros Gorge as an alternative. The somewhat demeaning appellation »little Samaria« given to the gorge is actually advantageous because it isn't quite as crowded here as it is at her famous »big sister«. But still, you will rarely find yourself alone here; even organised walking tours include Imbros in their programmes. With 7 kms of length, the gorge is much shorter, but therefore, not quite as strenuous. Plus, you will find a spectacular bottleneck here as well: if you spread your arms out in this bottleneck, you can touch both walls of the gorge at the same time! Most walkers end the walk in Komitades – some suggestions to continue from there are described under the key point »Alternatives«.

Starting point: the bus stop at the Taverna Porofarango on the southern village limits of Imbros, 730 m. Imbros is situated on the bus line Chania (daily: 8.30 and 14.00) – Chora Sfakion (daily: 7.00, 11.00, 18.30) and Rethymon (7.00, 13.00) – Vrisses – Chora Sfakion (7.00, 11.00, 18.30).

Height difference: a good 120 m in ascent and 840 m in descent.

Grade: a mostly pleasant to walk and, at times, cobbled trail leads through the gorge. Scrambling over sticks and stones, as is the case in many other gorges, is not necessary here. In the

Homespun rest area.



Olive cultivation at the gorge exit of Imbros.

On the southern village limits of Imbros, at the Taverna Porofarango (1) and the entrance sign for the gorge, descend along the path that, at the outset, is flanked by a railing into the stream bed of the gorge. The gorge itself is initially barely recognisable as such. Some minutes later, reach the ticket office (quite often, the entrance fee isn't demanded until reaching the second ticket office at the gorge exit). The sometimes cobbled *kalderimi* leads in or along the broad, gravel stream bed of the gorge, flanked by stately mountain cypresses, Holm oaks and Cretan maple trees. A quarter of an hour past the ticket office, the trail leads beneath an **overhanging rock face**, and afterwards, the feeling of walking through a gorge gradually takes over; the rock faces begin to draw nearer and to climb vertically upwards.

Afterwards, reach the gorge's **famous bottleneck (2)**, 461 m. The rock faces here are a mere 160 cm apart, even narrower than the one at the Iron Gates of the Samaria Gorge, however, it is not quite so spectacular, since the rock faces are not nearly as high. Nevertheless, the spot is impressive enough; it is so narrow that only a little light can enter here.





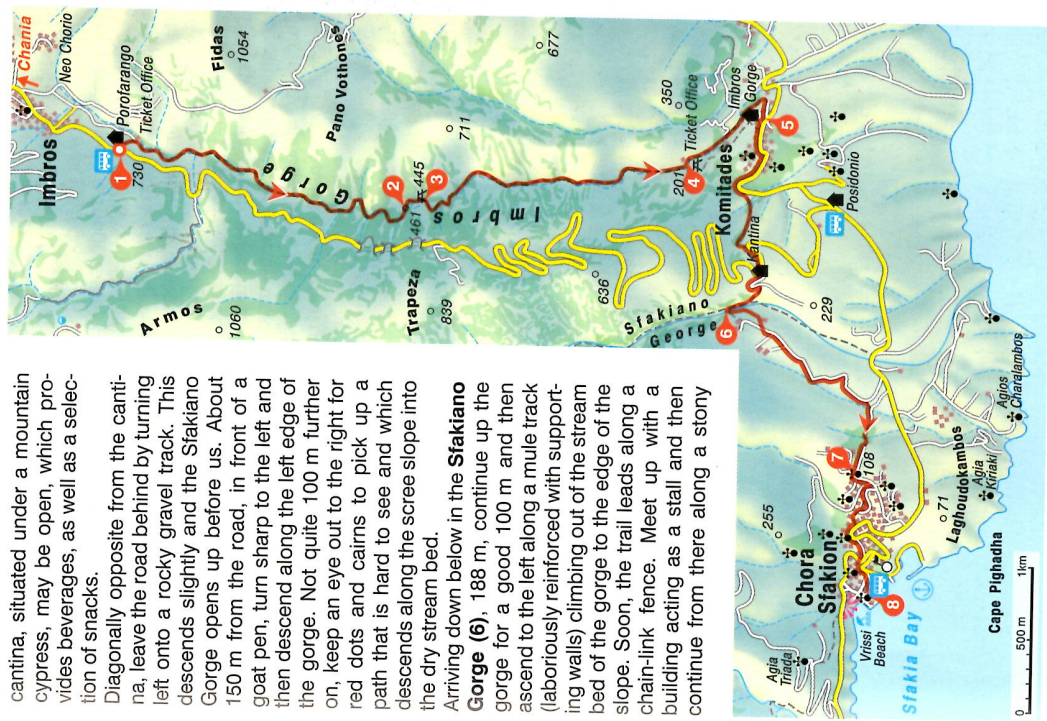
The bottleneck in the Imbros Gorge.

A few minutes later, the gorge becomes slightly wider and allows space for a little **rest area (3)**, 445 m. Above the bench with a wall hanging, many walkers have become immortalised by leaving a passport photo of themselves! Past the rest area, the gorge widens even more, but the walls of the gorge, coloured in a scale from ochre to sienna red, tower higher and higher up. At a rock arch about 12 m in height, the gorge narrows somewhat again. A quarter of an hour after that, reach the exit of the gorge at a second **ticket office (4)**, 201 m. Here is another little picnic area with benches.

About 5 mins later, pass some kiosks offering refreshment. At this point, ignore the left hand turn onto an ascending track; instead, continue on along the dry, stony stream bed. Shortly afterwards, follow signs pointing right to reach two tavernas: Meltemi and Imbros Gorge (the E4 continues straight ahead and, 5 mins past the official exit of the gorge, meets up with the road). Our path leads along a fieldstone wall through a grove of olive trees. At the next junction, keeping slightly to the right once again, pass the tavernas, Dionysos and Imbros Gorge to reach the tarmac road from **Komitades (5)**, 168 m. Turn right along the road to reach the village centre with a church and even more tavernas.

If you do not wish to end the walk in Komitades, continue along the road to exit the village again. A few paces past the first left-hand bend, leave the road behind at a power pylon by picking up a path, indistinct at the outset, but actually well-marked by red dot waymarkers, and climb steeply up the embankment. 75 m further on, pass through the first gate. We are back on a section of the ancient trail connecting the Imbros Gorge and on to the southern coast. The four high plateau through the Imbros Gorge and on to the southern coast. The trail, no longer maintained, has partially fallen into ruin and is somewhat rough; sometimes, you need to pay close attention to spot the red waymarking.

Past another gate, continue on through a rocky valley notch. The trail leads below a goat pen and, 5 mins after that, past a farm building, reach a hairpin bend on the secondary road Chania – Chora Sfakion. Turn right onto the secondary road to ascend for about 200 m; here, perhaps, a little mobile



cantina, situated under a mountain cypress, may be open, which provides beverages, as well as a selection of snacks.

Diagonally opposite from the cantina, leave the road behind by turning left onto a rocky gravel track. This descends slightly and the Sfakiano Gorge opens up before us. About 150 m from the road, in front of a goat pen, turn sharp to the left and then descend along the left edge of the gorge. Not quite 100 m further on, keep an eye out to the right for red dots and cairns to pick up a path that is hard to see and which descends along the scree slope into the dry stream bed.

Arriving down below in the **Sfakiano Gorge (6)**, 188 m, continue up the gorge for a good 100 m and then ascend to the left along a mule track (laboriously reinforced with supporting walls) climbing out of the stream bed of the gorge to the edge of the slope. Soon, the trail leads along a chain-link fence. Meet up with a building acting as a stall and then continue from there along a stony



road. Now pass even more stalls. The trail climbs down along the course for a power line and heads toward the old district at Chora Stakion, where you can spot the bell tower for a domed church. We will soon be passing this by. At a round cistern with a trough for a fountain, the trail veers to the left; continue following the trail for a good 5 mins more and then leave it behind shortly before a power pylon by turning right onto an eroded trail. This trail meets up with a road somewhat further down; turn right onto the road to reach a squat stall. From here, ascend along a path flanked by fieldstone walls, through a grove of olive trees, to the **Chapel of the Twelve Apostles (7)**, 108 m. Below the chapel, turn left onto a narrow tarmac road and then, 200 m on, turn right onto another narrow road, immediately passing the Agios Nikolaos Chapel. 10 minutes later, reach yet another chapel with a cistern located next to it and then, 50 m on, meet up with the chapel for the cemetery. From there, descend along a narrow concrete-paved trail, passing several abandoned houses. At the junction below the chapel for the cemetery, turn left in front of a white-washed well, one and a half metres in height. Along a stepped trail, descend through a tunnel-like stretch of dense brushwood to reach the main road. Turn right along the road and, past the Taverna Mesohori, leave it behind again by turning right onto a narrow tarmac trail and descending. The trail becomes a stairway that descends to the bus stop and the roundabout at the village limits of **Chora Stakion (8)**.

Chapel of the Twelve Apostles with its free-standing belfry.



Along the mill trail into a picturesque mountain village

In the hinterland of the aspiring seaside resort of Plakias, two watermills have withstood the test of time. In particular, the »Old Mill«, with its monumental aqueduct, conveys an idea of how complicated it was to grind grain into flour in the past. A chapel is hidden away nearby. The tavernas located in the cosy mountain village of Mirthios above the » Mill Valley« are very popular with walkers and day-trippers due to their excellent homemade meals and the fine views they offer.

Starting point: Plakias, 2 m. A bus line connects Rethymnon, on the northern coast, with Plakias, four to five times daily.

Height difference: 170 m in both ascent and descent.

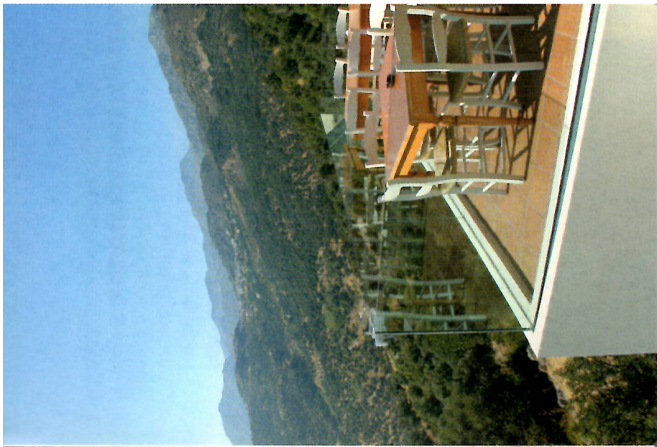
Grade: a simple circular walk along broad farm trails and narrow paths. A stream must be crossed via a ford, where you may get your feet wet, depending on the water level. Very little shade.

Refreshment: numerous cafés and restaurants in Plakias. In Mirthios, the Taverna Plateia serving good Cretan food and boasting a lovely belvedere-like terrace, from which you can enjoy a view of the Bay of Plakias down below.

The Old Mill in the Mirthios Valley.



The walk begins at the combination bus stop and taxi rank in the village centre of **Plakias (1)**. Follow the seaside road towards the jetty and, just after a few paces, cross over a little bridge spanning a river (the mill stream). 100 m further on, past the Taverna Sifis and a little supermarket, turn right onto a very narrow street. At a junction about 300 m further on, bear to the right (sign: Youth Hostel) and then cross over the river once again via a second bridge. At the next junction, turn left (straight ahead is the trail for the return) and then immediately pass by the **youth hostel (2)**, where the narrow street becomes a gravel trail. Keeping to the main trail, in a grove of olive trees, pass a library, run by Brits (which is, according to their own advert, the »southernmost lending library in Europe«). A few minutes after passing Studios Adonis, meet up with the **first mill (3)**, of which, only a few quarry stone walls remain.



Panoramic: the terrace of the Taverna Plateia.

rows into a path and, below a second mill, meets up with an arched bridge. Before we continue on to the mill, an excursion is possible by keeping straight ahead to reach the mill chapel, 100 m further on.

Arriving back at the arched bridge, use it to cross over the stream. Below the imposing wall of the second mill, the so-called **Old Mill (4)**, 60 m, and to the right, there may be a little sign for Mirthios. Ascend steeply to the aqueduct which was once used to bring water here to run the millstones. On the other side of an arch in the aqueduct, take a path

150

The gravel trail leads somewhat above the mill stream that is flanked by dense patches of reeds. To our right and up above, we can spot the houses of Mirthios, which is the destination for the walk. Not quite 100 m past the tumbledown mill, turn left at a fork and, shortly after, ignore a trail turning off to the right.

At the following fork, turn left onto the trail climbing down towards the river. (At the first left-hand bend, a trail forks off to the right, but peters out in the undergrowth as it heads upriver.) Not quite 10 m past the left-hand bend, a path leads to the mill stream; here, the course of the stream can be crossed via a ford of laid stepping stones; in early spring, depending on the water level, this may prove to be not very easy. On the other bank, take a gravel trail to continue upstream. The trail nar-



for a short stretch along the narrow water channel and then continue an ascent along the now well-trodden path. After a hook to the right, enjoy another lovely view of the mill chapel down below. The path merges into an intersecting trail; turn right onto this trail. At the seaside down below, you can spot Plakias. At a junction 50 m further on (possibly with a new, blue-waymarked route), bear left to continue climbing up. The path merges 5 minutes later into a broad gravel trail; turn right along this trail. Ignore a concrete-paved track descending down to a house. Some minutes after that, at the lower village limits of **Mirthios (5)**, 167 m, reach the settlement's ancient wash house; there is also a fountain with potable water here. From the wash house, ascend next to the Taverna Vrisi along a broad stone stairway to reach the village main street where, to the left, the Taverna Plateia offers an invitation for refreshment.

After a rest break, descend back again to the wash house, bear slightly to the left and descend steeply along the narrow tarmac road. Always keeping straight ahead, soon after, along a concrete-paved trail, finally reach the **youth hostel (2)** at the village limits of Plakias; from there, cross over the bridge spanning the mill stream to return to the seaside road in **Plakias (1)**.

The Bay of Plakias, as seen during the ascent to Cape Kako Mourí (Walk 30).



Old Mill (4) Mirthios (5)
Plakias (1) (3) 167 m Plakias (1)
2 m 2 m
0 0.35 1.10 1.40 h
4.6 km



To the fine, sandy beach at Damnoni

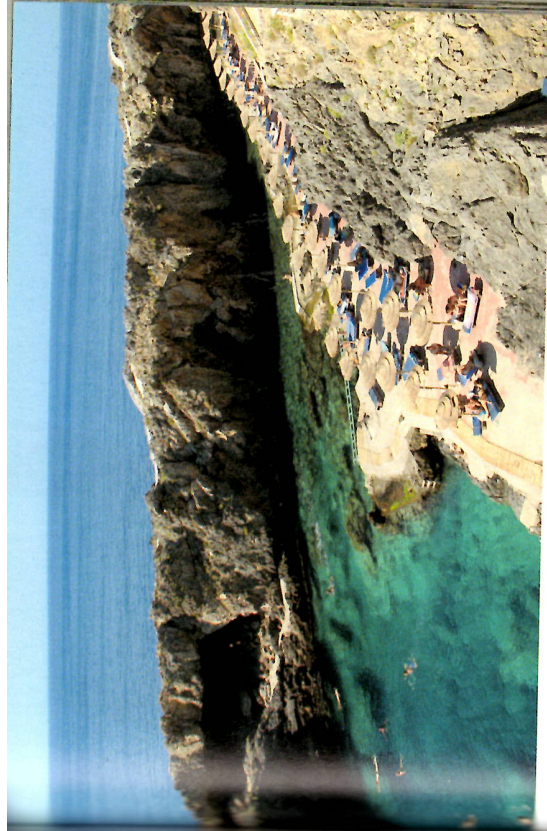
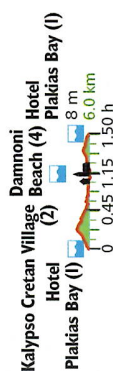
The sandy beach at Plakias counts as one of the best bathing spots on the southern coast, so it is no wonder that what was once an insider's tip for backpackers has increased slowly, but surely, in popularity as a bathing destination for the run-of-the-mill tourist. Also, Damnoni Bay, to the east of Plakias, has been »discovered« in the meantime and much of it has been taken over by a major time-share complex belonging to the Swiss firm Hapimag. Despite this fact, the beach is still beautiful and the walk, skirting around the surprisingly pristine and rugged cape between Plakias and Damnoni, is still quite appealing.

Starting point: Hotel Plakias Bay at the south end of the beach in Plakias, 8 m. A bus line connects Rethymnon, on the northern coast, with Plakias, four to five times daily. From the bus stop in the village centre of Plakias, follow the seaside road southwards for 1.3 km until reaching a dead-end street sign shortly before the Hotel Plakias Bay (added walking time: there and back 40 minutes).

Height difference: 220 m in both ascent and descent.

Begin the walk at the southern end of the beach (naturalist section) of Plakias. From the beach road, ascend to the **Hotel Plakias Bay (1)** up above. To the right, next to the reception entrance, a path starts off, signed for Damnoni/Kalypso. At the fork 20 m past the hotel, continue straight ahead through a gate and, at the next gate, not quite 200 m further on, turn sharp right to climb up along a gravel trail (the trail straight ahead will be our return route later on). Right away, enjoy a charming and fantastic panoramic view taking in Plakias Bay, above which, the villages of Mirthios (to the right) and Sellia (to the left) are perched; in between the two, the notch marking the Kotsifou Gorge can be spotted (see photo on page 151). Ignore the first fork to the left. 3 minutes after that, turn off to the left onto a well-trodden path which leads towards a steep rock face and then ascends along it.

Past a metre-wide gap through the rock, at about 135 m above sea level, begin to descend again. The path veers to the left in front of striking crags and then continues the descent along tight bends. Soon,



The fjord-like incised bay at the cape has been taken over completely by the Village Resort Kalypso.

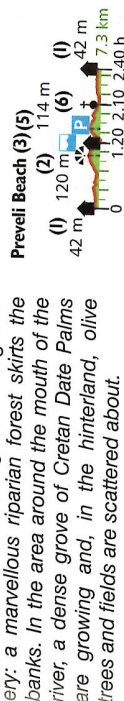
take a look at the dark, bizarre formation of the coastal cliffs at the foot of the cape. A short section of the trail is secured here by a railing. Then the path meets up with a road; turn right to descend along this road. 5 minutes later, reach the grand entrance gate of the **Kalypso Cretan Village (2)**, 43 m. Pass through this gate. At the point where the road turns to the right, 200 m further on, into the bungelow resort, leave it behind at a car park and take a **stepped trail**, secured laboriously with concrete walls and which you cannot possibly miss, to climb up to the top of a rocky cliff. On top of the cliff, a broad gravel trail sets off and slightly descends along the southern flank of the cape. On your left hand side, pass a cave that is usually occupied by goats. Shortly afterwards, a view of the Damnoni Bay opens up. Pass





Through the Megalopotamos Valley to a marvellous beach

In the late 60s, the palm-dotted beach on the southern coast of Crete was a short-term destination for hippies and societal drop-outs, but today, Preveli is a popular target for excursionists – not least, because in every travel guide for the island, this fine, sandy beach is justly regarded as the loveliest bathing spot that Crete has to offer. This walk acquaints us with the valley of the Megalopotamos River; in spring, lush with greenery: a marvellous riparian forest skirts the banks. In the area around the mouth of the river, a dense grove of Cretan Date Palms are growing and, in the hinterland, olive trees and fields are scattered about.



Starting point: the Venetian bridge by Kato Moni Preveli, 42 m. From the north-south connection Rethymnon – Agia Galini, approaching from the north and 7 km before reaching Spili, turn off towards Plakias. The road runs through the spectacular Kourtagioto Canyon. 6 km before reaching Plakias, follow the signs in the direction of Preveli and, 2 km further on, reach the bridge. You can park near the bridge or in front of the Taverna Gefyra. In summer, there is bus service to Moni Preveli from Rethymnon (twice daily) and Plakias (once daily, heading there at 12.15, and returning from Moni Preveli at about 18.45). The driver will stop near the Taverna Gefyra if you ask him to.

Height difference: a good 200 m.

Grade: not a difficult circular walk along roads and country lanes as well as narrow paths. The approach route is red waymarked and sometimes slightly precipitous. The descent to the beach is relatively steep and the path along the return route is sometimes overgrown, but route finding is simple. Take along your bathing gear!

Refreshment: Taverna Gefyra, at the starting point/destination of the circular walk; a simple beach bar at Preveli Beach, where you can also order fish or souvlaki.

Alternatives: 1. In summer, tourist boats set sail from Agia Galini and Plakias to Preveli Beach, so you can start the circular walk from there.

2. On the western bank of the river, you can walk through the palm grove and, for about 30 mins, enter into the untamed and unspoilt gorge of the Megalopotamos River, until boulders block the way.

3. From the Venetian bridge, if you continue in the direction of Piso Moni Preveli, 2.3 kms further on, a road forks off to a pay and display car park (WP 5). From there, you can descend, in 15 minutes, to the beach.

Worth seeing: 2.5 kms from the Venetian bridge, reach the monastery Piso Moni Preveli, perched high above the Libyan Sea. In the monastery church, amongst others, the iconostasis and valuable reliquary cross are noteworthy. A small museum displays icons and other sacred objects. Like many other monasteries on the island, the Preveli Monastery, at present only inhabited by a handful of monks, played an important role in the Cretans' centuries-long struggle for freedom. Opening times: March 25–May 31, daily 9–18.30, June 1–October 31, from 9–13.30; a small entrance fee is charged for the visit (www.preveli.org).

an access road leading to a boat landing in a little mi-nor cove and then reach a complex **Hapimag (3)**.

Bear right here and, at a water sports centre, meet up with **Damnoni Beach (4)**. To find some refreshment, continue on to pass the swimming pool for the Poseidon Hotel, cross over the course of a stream via a footbridge and then you have the choice between the Taverna Violakis or the Damnoni; both boast spacious terraces shaded by Salt cedars.

After a break and/or a pause for a swim, return again to the fork near the bungalows of the Hapimag complex and then turn right onto the gravel road. 5 minutes later, meet up with a major **junction**. At this point, cross over the tarmac road and then, to the left of a power pylon, open a gate and, on the other side, pick up an only slightly discernible path which heads towards a mobile phone transmission tower. 50 m further on, pass a cattle trough and, at the fork 10 m past that, bear slightly to the left, now following a distinct farm road through a grove of olive trees.

About 10 minutes past the junction, meet up with an unpaved road. Turn left along this road and descend. At the following junction, 100 m further on, turn sharp left and pass through two gates, one right after the other, and pick up a path which leads through a newly-planted grove of olive trees. The path meets up with an intersecting trail. Turn left onto this trail to reach the gate already met during the approach where we began the circular walk around the cape. A few minutes later, return to the **Hotel Plakias Bay (1)** and the beach at Plakias.

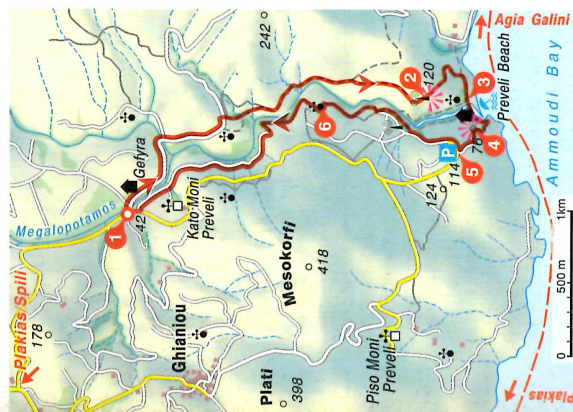
Along the precipitous mule track on the Cape.



At the **bridge (1)** (known to all as the Venetian Bridge, although it was not built by the Venetians but instead, was erected later, in 1852, during the Turkish occupation), use a ford to cross over the Megalopotamos. Just after, bear right and, a few paces further on, reach the **Taverna Gefyra**. 100 m past the taverna, the narrow road becomes a gravel trail. Take this, at first along the left bank, heading down the valley; we are accompanied by ancient olive and carob trees. The river is flanked by a dense riparian forest of Cretan maple, cypress and oleander; the scenery set around us is of steep, towering coastal cliffs. Not quite 10 mins later, cross over a stone bridge spanning a tributary of the Megalopotamos. Afterwards, continue to the right along a broad road and, another 10 mins later, meet up with a farm road that is blocked off by a **metal gate**; a tumbledown chapel for the monastery is situated below it. Keep to the road for another 20 m and then leave it behind by turning right onto another farm road. A few paces on, two paths fork away; take the right-hand path, leading along a fence heading down the valley. Arriving at the valley floor, cross over the course of a stream, then continue on between about 30 and 50 m of altitude above the river. Sometimes the stretch is somewhat precipitous. The path eventually leads away from the river and then ascends to a rise up above. Cross under power lines and, at the same height as a little and, at the same height as a little **transmission tower (2)**, 120 m, a view opens up of the southern coast and the Paximadia Islands lying offshore; to the left, a downwards view of the Ammoudi Bay.

Along the descent trail, steep at first, at a fork not quite 10 mins later, bear left and, shortly after, on a projecting rock, turn right (red dot waymarkings). Continuing a good stretch still above the coast, meet up with an intersecting path. To the left, you could reach the Ammoudi Bay, but we turn right instead, pass through a gate, and 100 m further on, enjoy a picture-perfect panorama of **Preveli Beach (3)** and the mouth of the river, flanked by Date Palms. A stepped trail climbs down to the beach below; on the opposite side

The gorge of the Megalopotamos.





To a little waterfall and the ancient necropolis of Lappa

Argiroupolis is a touristy village spruced up with quaint little cafés and several souvenir shops. Here, you can buy, amongst other things, avocado-based cosmetics which are produced from the oil of the fruit from the plantation, presently numbering 2000 trees, located somewhat on the outskirts of the village. Those interested in cultural history will be attracted to the ancient necropolis, and the waterfalls somewhat below Argiroupolis are popular destinations. This short circular walk takes in all three of these attractions. In addition, while rambling through the old village centre, you will discover relics from ancient times. Eye-catching is the Venetian portal arch in the main passageway bearing the thought-provoking inscription »All the world is but smoke and shadow«.

Starting point: the village square of Argiroupolis, 265 m. From the National Road near Rethymnon, follow the signs via Episkopi to Argiroupolis. You can park at the village square in front of the church and the clock tower. By bus from Rethymnon Mon-Fri around 6.00, return from Argiroupolis around 15.30.

Height difference: 200 m.

Hawker at the village square in Argiroupolis.

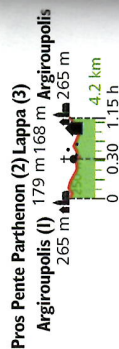


To cross over the mouth of the river at Preveli Beach, you have to take your shoes off.

of the river, we can already spot the stepped trail for the return route. But, first of all, a bathing break is an absolute must – in freshwater or saltwater, whatever strikes your fancy. After a good, long rest stop in the shade of a salt cedar, cross over the river at an appropriate spot. In early spring, when the water level is high, this may be a difficult undertaking, depending on the situation. Starting in May, however, the water level is seldom over knee-high. On the western side of the bay, there is a beach bar where you can gather some strength for the return route. Past the bar, climb up the stepped trail mentioned above to reach a **terrace viewpoint (4)**, 76 m, from which, professional photographers take the ultimate postcard photo of the fabulous beach. 5 mins later, reach a **car park (5)**, 114 m, with a ticket booth. Bear right and at the eastern edge of the car park, there is a gate which can be opened. Go through the gate and then turn left onto a path that descends along a fence and, at the same time, once again enjoy the spectacular panoramic view of the Megalopotamos Gorge, flanked by palm trees. The path is overgrown sometimes as it leads for a stretch along the sheer drop at the rim; a wobbly railing provides more psychological than actual security. Past a transmission mast, cross under the power lines again and, some minutes afterwards, the path drops down to a **chapel (6)**, surrounded by olive trees; the chapel bell, as is typical on Crete, has been hung on a cypress tree. A farm road begins at the chapel and leads for a short time directly along the river and then for a short stretch below the tumbledown monastery grounds, destroyed by the Turks in the 19th century, of Kato Moni Preveli. At the end, the road returns to the »Venetian« **bridge (1)**.

From the village square in **Argiroupolis (1)**, with the archway housing the Lappa Avocado shop to your left, head back 50 m along the road to Rethymnon and then, opposite a little supermarket, turn right onto a path which is concrete-paved at the outset. The path, flanked with fieldstone walls, begins somewhat overgrown and with sometimes damaged pavement as it descends into a stream valley which boasts jungle-like vegetation. The path continues on the opposite bank of the stream, sometimes over steps, climbing up the valley slope in tight bends and, 5 mins later, merges into a road. Follow the road, bearing slightly to the left, and 10 m on, continue straight ahead. Far before us, the northern coastline appears with the gently curving Gulf of Almirou, bordered to the west by the Drapanos peninsula. At the next fork, turn left onto a gravel trail descending slightly through a grove of olive trees. The trail is concrete-paved as it continues further and then it merges into the secondary road Argiroupolis – Kato Poros. Turn left onto the secondary road. This leads above and along the course of a stream and then crosses over it. In front of a miniature church, leave the road behind by turning right onto a cobblestone trail (sign: »Church of Holy Five Virgins«).

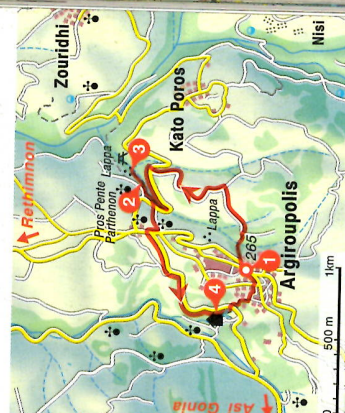
The Oriental plane tree in Lappa is considered one of Crete's oldest.



Just a few minutes later, meet up with the **Pros Pente Parthenon (2)**, 179 m, the chapel of the five holy virgins. Next to it, there are several graves which have been set into the embankment. Somewhat further below, at the ancient necropolis **Lappa (3)**, 168 m, with even more graves set into the rock face, there is a shady picnic area with a five-armed fountain and, next to it, an ancient plane tree. After taking a break, climb back up to the secondary road, cross over it and then continue descending slightly along the cobble trail. Not quite 5 mins later, the trail meets up with a tarmac road at yet another chapel. Turn right onto the tarmac road and at the fork not quite 100 m further on (mini market and a café), turn left onto the road heading in the direction of Asi Gonia.

10 minutes later, the houses of Argiroupolis appear again above the road. Shortly after, we are standing 167 m, fed by a prolific spring gushing out of the rock face and tumbling down towards the valley over artificially created spillways. Half a dozen seafood tavernas have been established here for the Cretan day-trippers arriving in hordes at this popular destination, especially at the weekend. At the second taverna, climb up a large flight of stairs and immediately pass a chapel built into a cave where the waters of the spring are gushing along in a channel. In front of the Taverna Kastro, somewhat above the chapel, the trail forks. Ascend to the left along the narrow, concrete-paved trail to return to the village up above. Arriving at the lower village limits, just a little further up, we can already spot the bell tower of **Argiroupolis (1)**.

The waterfalls of Argiroupolis.





Through the untamed and unspoilt valley of the water mills

Only a few kilometres south of the resort town of Rethymnon, you will be surprised to find an evergreen valley, supplied with water the entire year round by a mill stream, which ran 20 mills and provided the livelihood for an entire village through the power of water. During Venetian rule, Mili supplied the entire region with flour. Most of the mills and quarry-stone houses have fallen into ruin today, but a rather morbid charm still haunts this ancient milling settlement.

Starting point: Mili, 225 m. At the eastern village limits of Rethymnon, leave the National Road behind in the district of Perivolli (not signed) by heading towards Amari. Then cross over the National Road and, at the roundabout 100 m further on, turn right towards Amari/Mylioi/Chromonastiri and immediately afterwards, turn right again towards Chromonastiri. 4 km further on, ignore a turn-off to the right to Rousospiti and another kilometre further along, do not turn right into the newly established part of Mili, but instead, continue straight ahead to reach

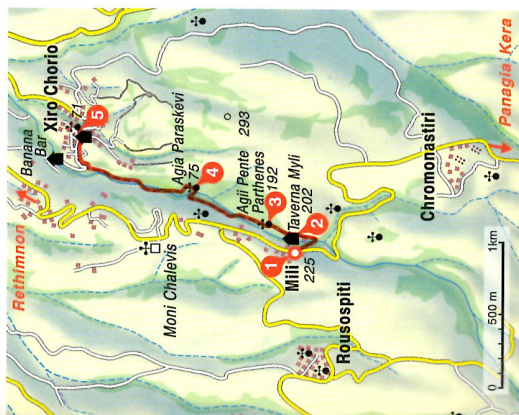
a viewpoint, 200 m on. There is no public bus service; from Perivolli in Rethymnon, you could take a taxi to the starting point only 5 kms away.

Height difference: 250 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: for the most part, a shady ramble along well-trodden and sometimes cobble, narrow paths. Numerous stream crossings over, at times, slippery stones require a certain amount of sure-footedness.

Refreshment: taverna in Mili, *kafenion* in Xiro Chorio.

From the lay-by car park on the side of the road at the viewpoint **Mili (1)**, at first, take a quick look at the roofed terrace of the Taverna Myli, situated somewhat above the valley floor and impossible to miss; this is where our trail will pass by. A sign points out the descent into «Water Mills Valley». Immediately pass a chapel built into a cave which seems to seek protection by squatting under a rock face. In the valley floor, overgrown in dense greenery, a concrete bridge spans the mill stream. After the bridge, pass abandoned houses lying to the left to reach the **Taverna Myli (2)**, 202 m. From there, the idyllic path leads



more or less at the same height along the right edge of the valley, heading downriver to the cemetery chapel of **Agii Pente Parthenes (3)**, 192 m; from the forecourt of the chapel, enjoy a view through the valley, reaching all the way to the north coast. From the chapel of the five holy virgins, now begin an easy descent: fig, pomegranate and orange trees flank the edge of the trail and, in between, ivy is climbing up the plane trees. Pass several mills, along some of them, the water channel, supported by an aqueduct, still remains. The path then descends in zigzags to the **mill stream** down below. Past another abandoned building, cross over the stream via a ford; depending on the time of the year, you may get your shoes wet. On the other flank of the valley, the path leads along the foot of a steep, ochre-yellow coloured rock face. After passing two arches of an aqueduct and crossing over the stream once again, reach the chapel **Agia Paraskevi (4)**, 75 m. Five minutes later, follow the path that leads again over the stream (straight ahead and 300 m further on, the chapel Agios Nikolaos). Past a bottleneck, where an aqueduct is spanning the stream bed, the path merges into a concrete-paved trail (at this point, you can make a short excursion to the quaint Banana Bar and its art-loving owner, only 150 m away).

Climb up the concrete-paved trail to the right and, keeping always straight ahead, reach the village square of **Xiro Chorio (5)**, 71 m, some minutes later; opposite the church, you can find a *kafenion*. If you do not have to return to the starting point, you can order a taxi here, otherwise, return along the approach route back to **Mili (1)**. From the taverna, by the way, you can spot the Villa Archontiko on the other side of the valley where the Venetian tax collectors bade the millers to open their purses to pay the piper.



»Ideal Home« at the Banana Bar.



34 Psiloritis, 2454 m

7.50 hrs

Breathtaking views from Crete's highest peak

Apart from Psiloritis and Timios Stavros, the highest peak on the island also bears a common name from ancient times: *Ida*. At least four separate routes climb up to the summit. Starting points are the Nida high plateau and Livadia on the northern slopes of the massif (from which a hitherto little-known trail leads to the peak), as well as Kamares on the southern flank and Fourfouras to the west. Out of all these climbing routes, the one starting from the Nida plateau is the most pleasant and, therefore, also the one most used. Pleasant doesn't mean that a visit to Crete's highest elevation is a simple ramble. Technically, the route, aside from a slightly precipitous stretch, is almost problem-free, but 1300 metres in ascent and descent through mostly rough karst terrain demands endurance and physical fitness. As a reward for the exertion, you will be greeted at the summit chapel by a spectacular panoramic view of the island – assuming, of course, that weather allows. You should be sure to take advantage of a relatively stable period of good weather; quite often clouds already begin to form around noon. Once a year, usually on the first or the second Sunday in June, crowds appear on and around Psiloritis; hordes of onlookers for the Psiloritis Race cheer on 300 extreme sportsmen as they climb up a tortuous course from the Nida high plateau to the summit. The best time achieved for the 35 km-long stretch stands currently at 3:43 hours.

Psiloritis – a panoramic summit par excellence.



Starting point: the Nida high plateau, 1380 m. From Anogia, follow the signs in the direction of Ideon Andron. 2.5 km above the mountain village, the tarmac road passes by the Delina Mountain Lodge, and 14 km further on, you ignore a turn-off to the left heading towards Skinakas, and another 6 km after that, the road ends at a taverna on the Nida high plateau (total driving time from Anogia for the entire 22 km stretch is about 30 minutes). You can approach by bus from Heraklion to Anogia: Mon-Sat, four times daily; from Rethymnon, Mon-Fri, twice daily; from Anogia to the Nida high plateau by taxi. Since you can't return by bus on the same day, you should plan one or two overnights in Anogia.

Note: no matter where you are staying on the coast, the approach to the Nida high plateau takes at least 1.30 hrs when driving a hire car, therefore, there and back, 3 hrs. If the walk is planned as a day trip, due to the long ascent and descent, the time left over for tarrying on the peak is relatively short. To walk the route without any time pressure, we recommend spending one or two nights in Anogia.

Height difference: 1300 m.

Best time: for climbing to the summit, we recommend mid-June-end of October. Until end of May/beginning of June you can expect leftover snowfields. Apart from June, when springtime in the mountains awakens the *phrygana*, mid-summer is a good time; early mornings, it is still pleasantly cool even on the Nida high plateau.

Grade: because of the long walking time involved, this is a demanding alpine tour along a mostly rugged path. The route is waymarked throughout with red dots and the yellow/black waymarkers of the E4, so it does not demand much in the way of route-finding skill in good weather. No shade; be sure to take sunblock and plenty of drinking water along with you.

Refreshment and accommodation: nothing en route; a taverna at the starting point on the Nida high plateau. In the unfinished inn, you could also rent a simple

The ascent route past the Kolita alpine pasture.

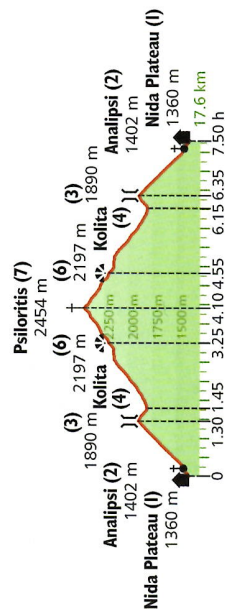
room (mobile +30-69716-50541). In Anogia, you can rent simple rooms at the Hotel Marina (www.marina.anogia.info) and at the Pension Aris (www.aris-anogia.info); if you are looking for comfort, try the Delina Mountain Resort (www.delina.gr) 2 km from the village limits along the approach to the Nida Plateau.

Alternative: unlike the usual route, the alternative route, which is longer, opens up good views of the neighbouring peaks and the coastlines. The route has the disadvantage, however, that it is not as well-marked as the E4 route via Kolita. We recommend taking the alternative route for the return, which means that approaching from the summit, you turn left at the cairn. At the beginning, the path is very indistinct and follows cairns for not quite 100 m to pass a hip-high hunter's blind and, 10 minutes after that, a traditional herdsman's shelter, built from quarry stones piled one on top of the other (*mitata*). From there, follow cairns over a gently rounded ridge and then climb down to reach a saddle. Past a crater-like sinkhole, finally meet up with an E4 post at the col (3).



From the large car park on the **Nida high plateau (1)**, ascend along a path, stepped at the outset, which is flanked by a railing. The path crosses over an unpaved road twice in quick succession at a stone-built house and, 5 minutes later, at the mountain chapel **Analipsi (2)**, 1402 m, meets up again with the road. Climb up the road about 250 m until reaching a sharp right-hand bend. Here, turn off onto a rough alpine path (red waymarker) and, at the same time, cut to the chase. The path is steep, but well-marked with red dots, as it ascends along the slope. Soon, the alpine path is also marked by an E4 post and the yellow/black waymarkers of the long distance trail. 20 minutes later, the path veers to the right into a long depression in the terrain and climbs up along it, at first, along the right-hand rim, passing through subalpine scrubland of cushion plants.

After a good three-quarters of an hour of plodding along the depression, reach a **col (3)**, 1890 m, sporting an E4 post. To the northwest, Agathias, 2424 m, where our route will continue on the northern flank, blocks the view



to Psiloritis. In the col, the trail forks; both routes are waymarked: diagonally to the left, a trail with yellow/black markings; the right-hand one, with red markings and with cairns (the Alternative). We follow the E4 diagonally to the left and descend, at first in a southwesterly direction, to the alpine pastureage **Kolita (4)**, 1799 m, down below. You will end up seeking in vain, however, for an alpine hut or lush alpine meadows; in the hollow, you will only find a metal frame where there was once a trail sign. At the »alpine pastureage«, a trail, ascending from Kamares, merges into ours. From Kolita, follow the waymarkers to climb up a valley; at the outset, the ascent is easy, but somewhat later, it gets steep again. You can skirt to the left around the rocky knoll and, somewhat later, skirt around a large, funnel-shaped **sinkhole (5)**, 2141 m, to the right along its upper edge.

From the sinkhole, climb up to a cairn a metre in height and, after a couple of metres of climbing back down, ascend again from this point through a broad valley to reach a second cairn up above (the alternative route turns off to the right here, but it is very difficult to spot). We have already reached an altitude of about 2200 m. Our route now ascends to an E4 post at a **viewpoint (6)**, 2197 m, up above, from which we can get the first view of the summit chapel on top of Psiloritis. Here, the trail veers slightly to the left and traverses Agathias' rugged, stony northern slope. Virtually unnoticed, an alpine path ascending from Livadia merges into our trail and, shortly after that, the trail becomes somewhat precipitous. A broad ridgeline soon opens up downward views of the Cretan Sea to the north, as well as the Libyan Sea to the south. After the final ascent, meet up finally with the summit chapel Timios Stavros at the top of **Psiloritis (7)**, 2454 m. Next to it, there is a shelter that is always left open and a cistern containing, however, brackish melt water. After taking in a breathtaking view of the island, descend along the approach route to return back to the **Nida high plateau (1)** down below.

Crete's apex: the chapel on the summit of Psiloritis.

35 Kamares Cave, 1627 m

6.20 hrs



To a Minoan sanctum high above the Messara Plain

As long as the weather is clear, the entrance to the Kamares Cave, 42 m wide and 19 m in height, lying a good 1600 m above sea level, can be spotted from many places in the Messara plain, and especially from the Minoan palace complex on top of Festos Hill. The Kamares Cave, on the southern slopes of the Psiloritis massif, counts as one of Crete's most famous caves; however, due to the long ascent needed to get there, the cave is seldom visited. The reason for its notoriety lies in the ceramic vessels that have been found there, dating back 3500 to 4000 years ago. The thin, delicate vases and bowls in red or white ornamental designs on a dark background earned their own name as a ceramic style: Kamares ware. If you are a fan of tackling great heights, you will be very well-served by this long ascent to the cave. Also, from a botanical point of view, this walk is very rewarding; along the way, there are magnificent kermes oaks and cypress trees; in spring, amongst others, sword lilies, arum lilies and Four-spotted Orchids are flowering here.



Starting point: Kamares, 572 m. From the Mires – Timbaki road, follow the signs in the direction of Kamares/Vori. In Vori, in the village centre, bear left and from there, reach Kamares which is located 17 kms further away. Parking is possible near the Taverna Zaharias on the side of the road. There is a bus from Heraklion to Kamares providing service once a day, but you won't be able to return on the same day, so you have to plan to stay for the night.

Height difference: a good 1050 m in both ascent and descent

Grade: for the long, sometimes fairly steep ascent and descent, trekking poles are useful. The route is somewhat difficult to follow for the first few minutes, but further along, the alpine path is waymarked with E4 posts set far apart from each other; in between, cairns are an aid for route-finding. Nevertheless, the course of the route is not always easy to spot straightaway. For the first 1 ½ hrs, a concrete watercourse provides orientation.

Refreshment: Taverna Zaharias at the starting point for the walk.

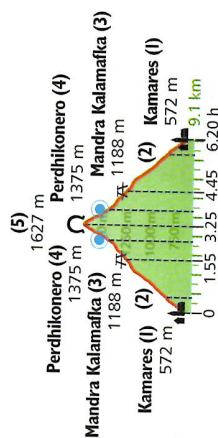
168

The walk begins in **Kamares (1)**, at the eastern village limits on the road to Heraklion. Diagonally opposite the Taverna Zaharias, pick up a trail that is concrete-paved at the outset. 200 m on, when the trail ends, pass through a gate and ascend along the slope via a path which is indistinct as it starts off. Past a second gate, below a water reservoir, meet up with an intersecting trail and turn left onto it. About 15 m further on, the path continues to the right and ascends to an E4 post which is standing on the slope up above. Arriving at the post, turn sharp right and use other E4 posts, spaced far apart from each other, to use as orientation.

We gain altitude quickly and can soon enjoy wonderful downward views of Kamares and the Gulf of Messara. Half an hour later, cross over a **watercourse (2)**,. This serves as an orientation aid for the further route. While the watercourse leads steeply straight up onto a rocky knoll, the path negotiates the climb in numerous bends, but en route, it touches on the concrete watercourse time and again. At a fountain in the shade of a cypress tree, we can treat ourselves to a breather. Here, we have already gone over the 900 m above sea level mark. Starting at the **fountain**, the alpine path is well laid and, in the meantime, an open wood of mostly cypress and oak provides plenty of shade.

Sometimes climbing up directly along the watercourse and after an ascent of almost two hours, reach a rectangular watercourse and **Mandra Kalamafka (3)**, 1188 m, where a loud, gushing, pressure-adjusting chamber is situated. 40 m to the left of the trough,

An aid to orientation during the ascent: the old watercourse.



169



From the trout village through a canyon at the foot of Psiloritis

The summer retreat of Zaros draws our attention through its charming location on the southern side of Psiloritis; the tavernas lining the nearby spring-fed lake are also popular day-tripper destinations – taken from the only fish farm to be found on Crete, fresh salmon trout are on the menu. In the region around Zaros, abounding in water, spring water is bottled and can be bought in any supermarket on the island – perhaps you have a bottle of it in your rucksack at this very moment. The little lake is the starting point for one of the most popular gorge walks on the island. The trail, built in the 1990s using footbridges and railings, however, left the impression that it was in need of maintenance when we walked it last time. Nevertheless, the gorge itself is still relatively easy to negotiate.

Starting point: Votomos Lake, 420 m. Between Mires and Agii Deka, 0.4 km before reaching the early Christian basilika of Gortis, follow the signs and pass through the villages of Plouti and Panagia to reach Zaros (14 kms). In Zaros, just past the village centre, turn right towards Votomos, pass the Hotel Idi and the Taverna Votomos and, 1.4 km past the hotel, reach Votomos Lake. A bus from Heraklion to Zaros via Mires runs twice a day, but the return schedule is awkward for walkers, so you must spend the night in Zaros.

Height difference: 520 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: crossing through the gorge demands a high degree of surefootedness; some short scrambles require the use of hands from time to time. In spring, in the upper reaches, you have to cross over the stream bed several times over slippery stones.

Refreshment: you can relax on the shores of the lake in the Taverna Limni at the starting point for the walk. Fresh salmon trout is the speciality. Another major restaurant serving trout is the Votomos next to the Idi Hotel.

Accommodation: the Idi Hotel in Zaros (tel. +30-28940-31301, www.idi-hotel.gr)



The Taverna Limni on Votomos Lake.

is a popular spot for walkers.

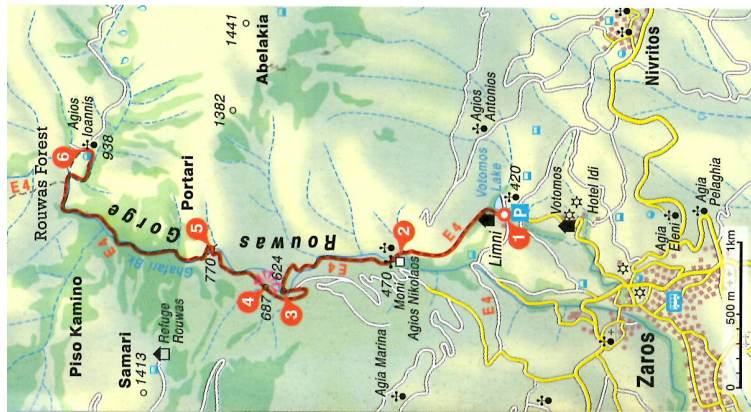
Worth seeing: on the return journey, a visit to the archaeological digs of Gortis is worthwhile. Directly on the road are also the ruins of an impressive, early Christian, cross-domed church (Titus-Basilika) from 600 AD. North of there, in Odeon, you can read the renowned texts of law written in ancient Greek – these were engraved on stone blocks 2500 years ago (daily, 8.00–17.00, admission €4).

On the long-distance trail E4, high above the mountain village of Kamares.

herdsmen have set up a table with a little circle of stones around it to sit on. The path now continues along the watercourse while crossing through a forest of kermes oaks and, 10 minutes later, meets up with a second water chamber; here, leave the narrow channel behind by turning right (onto the E4). A black conduit is an aid for orientation. Possibly, signs have been placed on tree trunks with directions written in German: »Höhle« (cave). Meet up with an enclosed water source called **Perdhikonero (4)**, 1375 m, in English, »partridge water«.

From here, continue following the black conduit to reach a walled-in water reservoir, the source of water for the conduit, situated beneath an overhanging rock face. Here, bear slightly to the right and ascend, more or less without a distinct path, across rocky ground and leading through a broad cleft in the terrain, during which, you have to rely more and more on cairns and faded red waymarkers. After a last, steep ascent, finally meet up with the spacious entrance to the **Kamares Cave (5)**, 1627 m. You certainly won't be alone here – the immense cave is home to flocks of Red-billed choughs and colonies of bats. Some metres in front of the cave, there is a little, level area where a view opens up of the Messara plain, 1600 m down below, and the broad sweep of the Gulf of Messara. After enjoying a break, climb back down along the approach route to return to **Kamares (1)**.

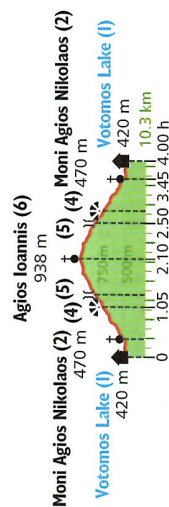




From the car park on **Votomos Lake (1)**, pass through an archway topped by a thick tree trunk and, along the left shore of the lake, reach the Taverna Limni. Just past the restaurant, a path starts off that is flanked by wooden railings and is stepped at the beginning (sign: »To the Gorge/Agios Ioannis«). Along the tight zigzag bends, ascend through a little pine wood, climbing up the slope. 5 minutes later, meet up with a metal gate and an intersecting trail. Turn sharp left onto the trail leading along a chain-link fence, while crossing over matted sage and thyme, and heading towards the cleft of the Rouvas Gorge which soon comes into sight.

Next to the mouth of the gorge, the **Moni Agios Nikolaos (2)**, 470 m, lies crouched under a rock face. At a gate just before the monastery, continue straight ahead. Cross diagonally over a rocky, dry stream bed and then climb steeply up the embankment to a secondary building of the monastery. Keep the monastery church to your left about 75

m away. The path now leads along the left bank of the rocky stream bed heading into the gorge. On a stone bench situated under a cluster of trees, treat yourself to a short breather. The path then changes over to the other bank of the gorge's stream bed. Half an hour past the monastery, reach a striking **overhanging rock (3)**, 624 m; possibly, while scrambling over smooth-polished boulders, you will need to use your hands. Afterwards, a



The wooden ramp through the rocky bottleneck of the gorge is not in good shape as you can see in the photo.

pleasant trail leads down the valley, but leave this behind again, 150 m further on, by turning right. Ascend steeply up a scree-covered slope, loose underfoot, and at the end, ignore a turn-off towards Agios Nikolaos.

A stretch of trail follows, opening panoramic views. The path, stepped again and flanked with a ramshackle railing, ascends somewhat precipitously along the left side of the gorge. Shortly after passing two benches situated beneath a pine tree, reach a vertiginous **viewpoint (4)**, 687 m. We are standing a good 100 m above the stream bed of the gorge and can enjoy a view reaching far into the valley. The remains of numerous dead trees bear witness to a devastating forest fire which occurred in the 1990s and destroyed extensive stands of woodland in the gorge.

The canyon narrows here and you continue by scrambling over boulders polished smooth by the stream. At the ruins of a wooden ramp, the trail



Panoramic ascent on the eastern slopes of Psiloritis

Around Ano Asites, at the foot of the eastern foothills of the Psiloritis massif, mountain vineyards and olive groves make up the landscape. The alpine hut, perched at a dizzying height, gives a sweeping panoramic view taking in the peaks of Eastern Crete, the northern coast and the metropolis of Heraklion. With a little bit of luck, you can spot Griffon Vultures circling overhead.

Starting point: Ano Asites, 470 m. From the Heraklion – Mires road, in Agia Varvara, turn off towards Prinias and 9 kms further on, reach the village limits of Ano Asites. About 200 m past the sign for the village limits, a narrow road turns off to the left. Parking possible on the side of the road. By bus from Heraklion, Mon-Fri, four times daily, twice on Sat to Ano Asites (the last bus returns about 15.15).

Height difference: 580 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: along a broad farm track, paying attention to numerous junctions, to the rock face situated at a good 800 m of altitude. The final stretch past the rock face along a steep, well-marked alpine path.

Refreshment: a kafenerion in Ano Asites.

Accommodation: info for the mountain hut see page 20.

In **Ano Asites (1)**, at the wooden sign for Prinias Village, turn onto the narrow road, tarmac at the outset. About 8 m further on, an E4 waymarker appears on a power pylon (this is the only one) to prove that we're on the right track. About 150 m past that, the trail branches in front of a copse of gnarled olive trees; bear right here (possibly, a weathered sign is posted to the left). Now along a gravel trail, ignore a turn-off to the right shortly afterwards. Our trail heads directly towards Gristi, 1779 m, the highest peak on the eastern slopes of the Psiloritis massif. Groves of olive trees climb up the slopes of this mountain. Above the groves, you can spot the destination for this walk: the Prinos hut and, to the left of it, a small, white house is standing. Ignore another turn-off to the right. The trail is sometimes waymarked in yellow/black as it ascends, relatively steeply, along the right-hand flank of a lush,



squeezes through a bottleneck in the gorge. Once above, cross over the **bridge (5)**, 770 m. Shortly afterwards, meet up with a little rest area boasting a round stone plate as a table. The steepest section of the route is behind us. Now keep steadily ascending along the torrential stream, slightly climbing, and cross over it several times. If you are here before May, you will discover if your shoes are truly waterproof.

At the sign marking **kilometre 1**, bear slightly to the right and reach a little waterfall cascading into a rock pool. In spring, above the waterfall, numerous other rock pools are awaiting to invite you to a dip to cool off. 25 mins past the waterfall, after crossing over the stream many times, the forest opens up to a large clearing. There is a fountain with good spring water here and picnic benches situated beneath shady plane trees. Somewhat above this area, reach the chapel, **Agios Ioannis (6)**, 938 m, our turn-around point. From the high plateau, you can enjoy fine views taking in the surrounding mountain peaks.

The bridge spanning the narrow gap of the gorge has been washed away repeatedly by the torrential stream after the spring runoff. Now it is supported by an added steel girder (above). At the destination: the fieldstone chapel Agios Ioannis (below).





A good, long beach walk along the Gulf of Messara

In Agia Galini, you don't really have to take to the air, as did the mythological characters Dādalus and Ikarus, to escape to freedom from the clutches of King Minos – their attempt to fly ended tragically anyway. This popular seaside resort on the southern coast is the perfect starting point for a delightful walk along the beach. The first stretch between Galini and Kokkino Pigos is simply picturesque: rambling along directly at the seaside, you pass along the foot of ochre to red-coloured coastal cliffs.

Starting point: the harbour in Agia Galini, 2 m. You can reach Agia Galini by bus from Heraklion (Mon-Sat, four times daily, limited service on Sun), Rethymnon (four to five times daily), Mires (Mon-Sat, four times daily, limited service on Sun), Matala (Mon-Sat, an early bus around 7.00 via Mires or Festos) and Pitsidia (an early bus around 7.00 via Mires or Festos). If approaching by car, you may be interested in the Alternatives.

Return: Pitsidia is located on the bus line Heraklion – Matala; also bus service to Agia Galini (via Mires or Festos).

Height difference: 80 m in ascent.

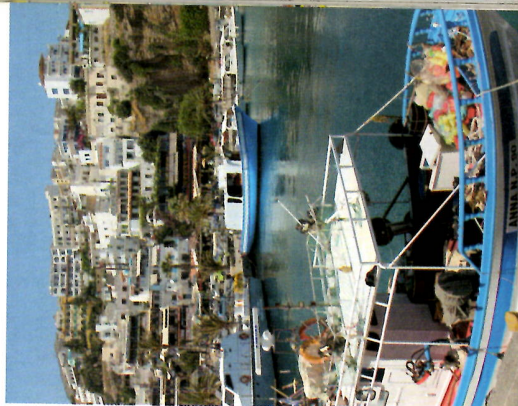
Grade: this relatively long walk leads, at times, without a distinct path, and along pebble beaches and rock plates, somewhat unpleasant to negotiate; the sandy beach stretching from Kalamaki to Kokkino Pigos, can be walked barefoot. For this coastal walk, you should pick a day when the sea is relatively quiet because by stormy seas, the sometimes narrow pebble beach is impassable. From time to time, sections of the coastal cliffs may come tumbling down, but the waves usually wash away any obstructions fairly quickly. Shortly before reaching Kalamaki, the beach is blocked by a barrier of rock; here you have to skirt around via the steep embankment. Bring along your bathing gear and sun protection!

Refreshment: tavernas in Agia Galini, Kokkino Pigos, Kalamaki and Pitsidia.

Note: in the summer, the Loggerhead sea turtle comes ashore to lay its eggs at the beach at Kokkino Pigos; camping is strictly forbidden.

Alternatives: you don't have to walk all the way to Pitsidia; you could, e.g., after a break in Kokkino Pigos, turn around to return to Agia Galini (there and back, a good 3 hrs). Or, you could start in Pitsidia, go as far as Kalamaki and then return again (there and back, a good 2 hrs).

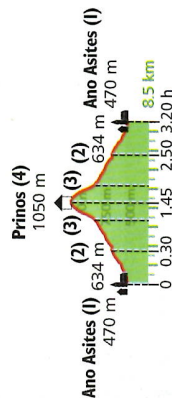
At the harbour in Agia Galini.

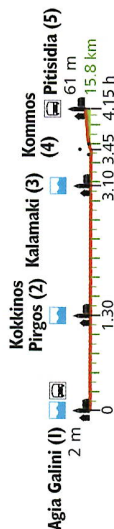


The Prinos mountain hut lies a good 1000 m above sea level.

green valley where Mediterranean Cypress trees catch the eye. Along very steep sections, the trail has been concrete-paved. About 30 mins later, the trail forks in front of a **gate (2)**, 634 m; bear to the left, keeping to the main trail, which descends slightly here as it crosses the valley along a sweeping left-hand bend. At the fork 10 mins later on, turn right. From here, the mountain hut is easy to spot again, somewhat below a pointed, pyramid-shaped peak. Another 10 mins later, the trail, concrete-paved once again, veers sharply to the right about 100 m in front of a steep slope. Shortly afterwards, the trail forks once again at a **mitata**, a circular hut, built from fieldstones, used by mountain dairy farmers. Turn left here and, five minutes later at a watering trough, turn left again, heading towards a Cretan maple tree standing in front of a **rock face (3)**, 810 m. At this tree, a yellow-marked trail starts off which leads along the foot of a rock face and then climbs steeply up a broad depression in the terrain.

25 mins later, the steep section is behind us now; keeping slightly to the left, cross through low-growth cushion plant vegetation while continuing a gentle ascent. A red-waymarked path merges from the right. Suddenly, the **mountain hut, Prinos (4)**, 1050 m, appears. From a bench on the terrace, enjoy a far-reaching view and then take the approach route to descend back to **Ano Asites (1)**.

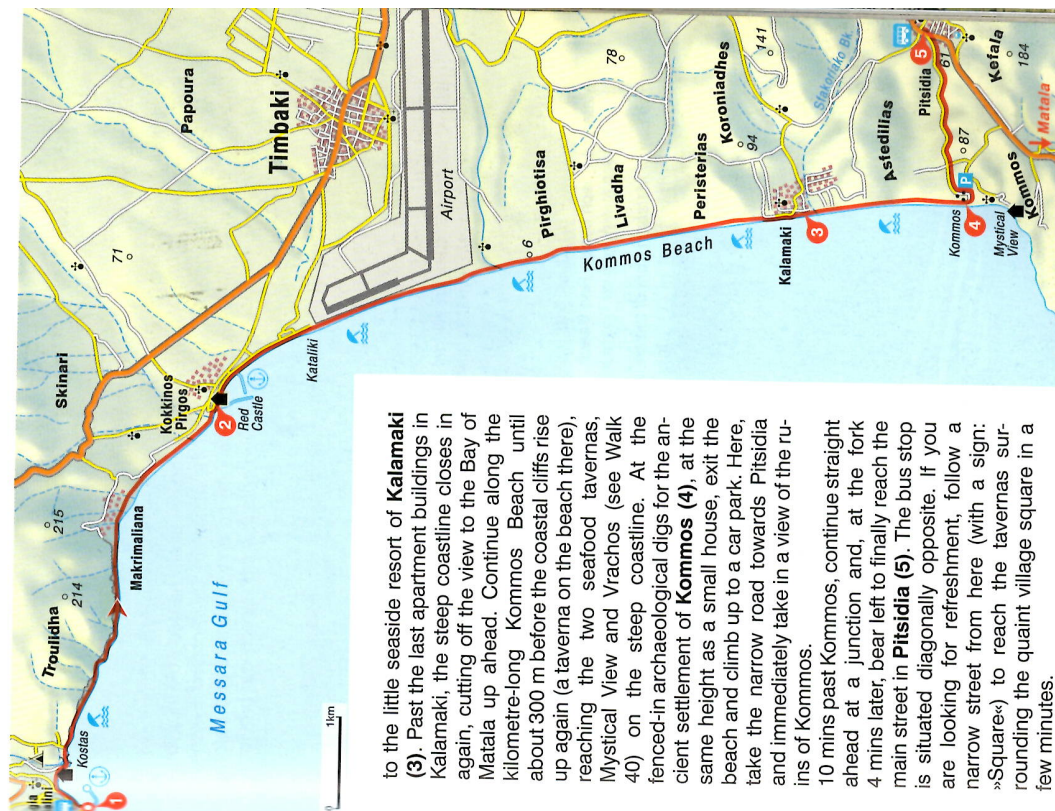




At the harbour of **Agia Galini (1)**, stroll along the promenade, heading in a northeasterly direction, to reach the most popular beach of the seaside resort in a few minutes. Past the Taverna Kostas, cross over the steel bridge spanning the Platis River which empties into the sea here. Shortly after, the promenade ends and, at the same time, so does the sun lounge area, packed to the gills with bathers during the high season. Now continue directly along the pebble beach at the foot of the steep and rugged coastal cliffs. (If you prefer the going easier, you can take the gravel track running parallel above, however, you have to pay attention to find the right way back again).

Three-quarters of an hour later, reach the first **narrow strip**. Here, the ochre-yellow coloured coastal cliff makes room for only about a 2 m wide strip of pebble beach; when the sea is rough, this section is impassable! Another 45 minutes later, reach the harbour at **Kokkinos Pargos (2)**, with its inviting Taverna Red Castle, nestled in the shade of Salt cedars and offering refreshment. Past the breakwater, an 8 km-long sandy beach begins. At first, stroll along the seaside promenade, passing by other tavernas and cafés, until the promenade ends abruptly. Past the trampled-down fence for the military airport, continue directly along the pebble beach until, shortly before reaching Kalamaki, the steep coastline begins again. There, you cannot continue directly on the beach for a short stretch. Along relatively solid, baked rock, climb up the steep embankment, about 12 m high, and then descend again

Aside from crossing over a lot of sand, the beach walk also leads over rugged plates of rock.



to the little seaside resort of **Kalamaki (3)**. Past the last apartment buildings in Kalamaki, the steep coastline closes in again, cutting off the view to the Bay of Matala up ahead. Continue along the kilometre-long Kommos Beach until about 300 m before the coastal cliffs rise up again (a taverna on the beach there), reaching the two seafood tavernas, Mystical View and Vrachos (see Walk 40) on the steep coastline. At the fenced-in archaeological digs for the ancient settlement of **Kommos (4)**, at the same height as a small house, exit the beach and climb up to a car park. Here, take the narrow road towards Pitsidia and immediately take in a view of the ruins of Kommos.

10 mins past Kommos, continue straight ahead at a junction and, at the fork 4 mins later, bear left to finally reach the main street in **Pitsidia (5)**. The bus stop is situated diagonally opposite, if you are looking for refreshment, follow a narrow street from here (with a sign: »Square«) to reach the tavernas surrounding the quaint village square in a few minutes.

39 Red Beach

1.00 hrs


Obligatory ramble to Matala's posh neighbouring beach

A daily pilgrimage takes place starting at Matala as hundreds of tourists climb over the mountain ridge to Red Beach, which is actually named Kokkinos Ammos and, since the hippie era, is one of the most famous in-crowd beaches on Crete. The fine, sandy beach shimmers in red only at sunrise and before sunset; during the day, it is a vibrant ochre colour. A little beach bar provides basic refreshment.

Starting point: Matala, 4 m. From Heraklion to Matala, bus service three to four times a day (only once on Sun). The settlement can also be reached from Agia Galini via Mires or Festos. If you are approaching by car, there is a spacious car park at the beach before the village limits.

Height difference: 170 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: easy ramble with short, steep stretches of ascent and descent along a rocky path. No shade!

Refreshment: tavernas and cafés in Matala; a beach bar on Red Beach.



The Bay of Matala in front of the snow-covered Psiloritis massif.



In both low and high season, there is usually a lot of room on Red Beach with its fine sand.

The ramble begins at the village limits of **Matala (1)** in front of the »Hippie Memorial«, opposite the restaurant Minos Palace. Heading into the village, pass the village church, 150 m further on and, 100 m past that, turn left at Giannis Family Grill House onto a steep concrete-paved track climbing upwards. At the last house, climb up a couple of steps to the left and then a view opens up of the caves from Matala. The path ascends relatively steeply up the slope, soon crossing over rugged bands of limestone rock. A path that is also waymarked in blue merges from the left. Continue along a chain-link fence. At a col (2), 84 m, you can get a lovely view of the southern coast. Now pass through a gate, 50 m past the gate, the path veers downward towards **Red Beach (3)**, lying down below. At its western limits, it is tucked under the mighty limestone cliff. You don't necessarily need any bathing gear – the fine, sandy beach is, for the large part, a tourist area. The return follows the approach route back again.

(2) Red Beach (3)
 84 m
 Matala (1)
 4 m
 2.5 km
 0.030 1.00 h

To a viewpoint above the caves of Matala

The two seafood tavernas, Mystical View and Vrachos, are panoramically situated on the steep coastline of Kommos Bay. Whether the view of the sprawling sandy beach and the Psiloritis massif, blanketed in snow well into the spring, is actually a mystical one, every walker must decide for himself. In any case, bizarre panoramic views of the coast and a spectacular one of Matala are guaranteed during this entertaining walk.

Starting point: the car park at the Taverna Mystical View, 53 m. From the Pitsidia – Matala road, at the roundabout 2 km before reaching Matala, turn right (a left turn leads along the Old Road to Matala). Drive along the narrow tarmac road for 700 m. At the welcome sign for the seafood taverna Vrachos, keep the driveway to the taverna to your right and park your car next to the steep coast in front of the Taverna Mystical View (please

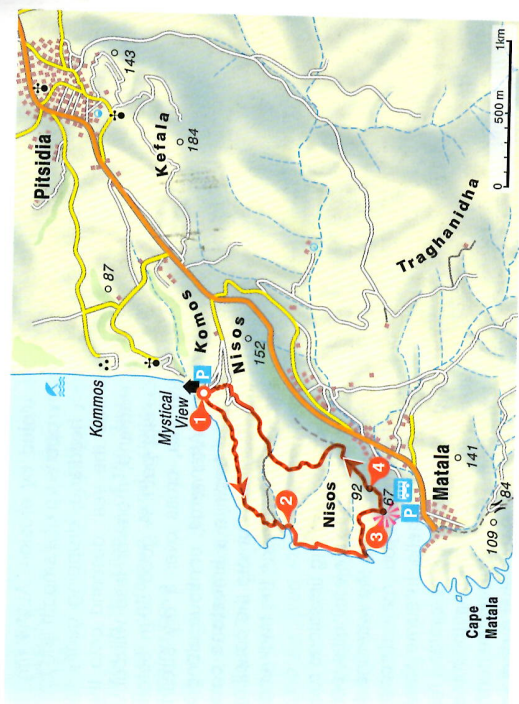
don't park your car in front of the gate for the taverna).

Height difference: a good 160 m.

Grade: a circular walk along coastal paths; numerous sections without a distinct path. Be careful at the sheer drop at the rim! No shade.

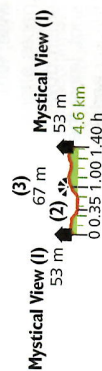
Refreshment: the seafood tavernas Mystical View and Vrachos at the starting point/destination for the walk – boasting spectacular sunsets.

Bizarre formations in the limestone cliffs on the rim of the sheer, steep coastline.



At **Mystical View (1)**, at first enjoy the view of the long beach, along which, you can walk all the way to Agia Galini (Walk 38, in the opposite direction). Psiloritis rises up majestically above the wide, sweeping Gulf of Messara; to Psiloritis' left is Kedros, at whose foot nestles the seaside resort of Agia Galini. From the sheer drop at the rim of the coastal cliffs, turn left and walk for about 50 m to reach an animal pen with a chain-link fence. This can be skirted around along a narrow path on the side facing the sea – watch out, the stretch is somewhat precipitous. Past the fenced-in area, ascend for a couple of paces to reach a well-trodden path up above, which soon leads over stratum of rock to continue along the rim of the steep coastal cliffs. In front of us, we can spot the **Paximadia Islands**. It is hard to believe that the western island reaches a height of 252 m.

The path winds through a row of huge boulders, which seem to have been strewn by a giant's hand. The path widens for a short while into a road not far from three caves appearing in the sloping coastal plateau; here, lime was mined in times gone by. As soon as the trail veers towards the interior, leave it behind by continuing straight ahead, that is, keep to the edge of the sloping plateau. The path keeps heading towards the sheer drop at the rim, bizarrely



sculpted by erosion. At the rim, a view opens up of a smooth and barren headland, dropping gently towards the sea; descend onto the headland, more or less without a distinct path. A good 50 m before the sea, cross over a dry stream bed. Afterwards, continue along a rugged track to a **limestone cove** that has been cut into the coastline like a miniature fjord; the track ends here.

Now continue along limestone rock plates for the next few minutes, only a few metres above the waterline. In the limestone, you may discover fossils of seashells. In some small, natural potholes, seawater has

Fossilised seashell in the limestone plateau.

evaporated to leave salt deposits. About a quarter of an hour past the miniature fjord, Matala appears. Now ascend towards the interior along the hump-backed ridge, keeping to the left of a rocky crevice. Somewhat further up, the crevice can be easily skirted around. Shortly afterwards, meet up with the sheer drop at the rim of the ridge, from which, you can enjoy a brilliant **panoramic view (3)**, 67 m, of the beach, the bay and the houses of Matala (see cover photo). You are standing directly above the guardhouse for the caves of Matala: mind you, these are only visible when you are looking at them from Matala itself.

At the rim of the sheer drop of the ridge, climb up along the traces of a path to the top of a **stone pyramid (4)**, 92 m, about one and a half metres high. Continuing along the rim, not quite 10 minutes later, meet up with yet another stone pyramid. Shortly past this one, the path forks. Here, bear to the left, that is, walk away from the sheer drop at the rim. (Be sure to resist the temptation to climb down to Matala from here. Possibly the paths end down below in front of the fenced-in cave grounds or in a thicket of impenetrable macchia at the course of a stream.) Soon the path becomes only vaguely discernible (cairns) and, some minutes later, meets up with a track. Turn right onto the track and, a good 150 m on, reach yet another fork. If you are up for it, descend once again to the miniature fjord at the limestone cove, otherwise, turn right and, after a good 5 minutes, pass a goat pen. A couple of paces after that, the two tavernas, Vrachos and **Mystical View (1)**, appear again down below; climb down to them along some bends. At a suitable spot, leave the track and walk cross-country for the last metres to return to the car park down below.

184

2.10 hrs



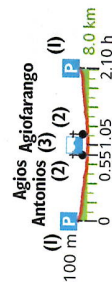
Agiofarango 41

Through the Gorge of the Saints to an untamed and unspoilt bathing cove

The Gorge of the Saints counts as one of Crete's shortest and easiest to walk. The gorge has earned its name from the hermits who, in days gone by, lived their lives secluded from the world in the rock faces of the gorge. Today, the sheer plunging walls of the Agiofarango is a popular rock-climbing area and the pebble beach, which opens to the sea at the end, is a much-loved bathing spot for walkers and individualists who can do without sun loungers and beach bars. Unless water taxis are anchored offshore in the turquoise waters during your visit, this is a cosy little spot to enjoy.

Scrambling at the Gourmenospili Cave.

Starting point: the dusty road between Moni Odigitrias and Kali Limenes, 100 m. From the Mires – Matala road, not quite 2 kms before reaching Pitsidia, turn off towards Sivas. At Siva's village square, follow the signs straight ahead towards Listaros and Moni Odigitrias. At the monastery, bear left and drive along the dusty road towards Kali Limenes for 3.4 kms until meeting up with a trail branching off to the right. Parking possible on the side of the road. (If your vehicle is not too low to the ground, you could, depending on



the condition of the surface, drive along the trail going down into the valley until you reach a car park).

Height difference: 100 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: in view of the shortness of the route, this easy gorge walk can also be done in summer. Take along your bathing gear and sunblock; very little shade is available at the beach.

Worth seeing: either before or after the walk, you could visit the Odigitrias Monastery, built in the 16th century. In the monastery church, you can marvel at some icons.

Refreshment: nothing en route; tavernas in Listaros and Sivas. We recommend Ksa Sou, a traditional coffee house in Listaros, with a little inn attached.

185

3.40 hrs



From Lentas to Trachoulas Beach

42

Adventurous coastal route with a short visit to a gorge

The approach to Lentas along the narrow mountain road through the Asterousia Mountains is an adventure in itself. Far above the little seaside resort on the southern coast, you can already spot the humpbacked contour of the »Weeping Lion«, which closes the Bay of Lentas to the west. The walk follows the coastline, crossing over pebble beaches, to reach a bathing cove that is only accessible on foot.

Starting point: the village square in Lentas, 7 m. From the Heraklion – Mires road, in Agii Deki, follow the signs for Lentas. In Platanos, bear to the left. Before reaching Apesokari, turn right and then follow a road along many bends leading to a pass as it crosses through the Asterousia Mountains on the southern coast. If you approach by bus (from Heraklion via Agii Deki, once a day), you have to plan to spend the night in Lentas since the return from there is only possible on the morning after.

Height difference: 220 m.

Grade: an uncomplicated coastal walk without any great difference in height. A couple of slightly precipitous sections along the path to Petrakis Beach. In the Trachoulas Gorge, short, steep spots where you have to use your hands while scrambling. No shade; be sure to take your bathing gear. If you plan to spend some time at Trachoulas Beach, you should pack along a little sunshade sail.

Refreshment: tavernas in Petrakis Beach and Loutra Beach; from the numerous tavernas in Lentas, we recommend El Greco.

A landmark from far and wide on the southern coast: the »Weeping Lion« of Lentas.



From the car park (1), on the dusty road, take the road that descends into the valley. At the valley floor, keep the sheep farm to your right. The trail follows along a stream bed that is only running water during periods of rain; along the banks, there are dense thickets of oleander. Past a fenced-in cattle trough, the rugged road ends at a car park just before the entrance to the gorge.

Now pass through a gate. Past the gate, a path leads between towering rock faces, which soon reach heights of 100 m; you can frequently spot rock-climbers. Pass a large cave; opposite to it, hidden behind oleander bushes, a picnic bench can be found. Shortly afterwards, meet up with the Byzantine chapel, Agios Antonios (2); standing in front of a sheer, towering rock face, the chapel presents a picturesque photo motif. The chapel bell is hanging from an olive tree and an ancient well is standing in front of it.

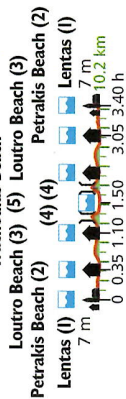
About 100 m past the chapel, you could scramble up to the Goumenospilio Cave, which once served the monks as a communal meeting place. There is a comfortable hall inside and the roof is 9 m high in spots. Continuing along the broad, gravel steam bed in the gorge, which is now opening up, finally meet up with the beach of Agiofarango (3). This delightful bathing cove is enclosed on both sides by steep promontories and, here, several climbers are usually at their sport. After a good, long bathing break, return along the approach route back to the car park (1).



The Agios Antonios Chapel.



Trachoulas Beach



Begin the walk in **Lentas (1)** at the rectangular village square, surrounded by tavernas and cafés. Between two cafés, a cobbled trail sets off in an easterly direction. 15 m on, the trail hooks off to the left and, a couple of paces afterwards, turns right to continue. At the tavernas, Zorbas and El Greco, signs point out the way to the beach, but we keep to the cobbled trail and, in front of the **Café Petros** (»homemade pastries«), meet up with a little square (the bus from Heraklion stops just above). Opposite the café, descend along the concrete-paved road to the right. In front of the Lentas Paradise Studios, the road immediately veers slightly to the left towards an abandoned house built from natural stone. Directly in front of the house, keep an eye out for a path that is difficult to spot, but is well-trodden (red waymarkers), which ascends from behind the house towards a low coastal hillock up above. Immediately enjoy a marvellous view of the »Weeping Lion«. To the east, a view opens up of a rock arch situated offshore and the silhouette of the Asterousia Mountains, dominated by the cone-shaped summit of Kofinas (Walk 44). At the outset of **Petrakis Beach (2)**, cross over a dry stream bed. You could continue along the rather story beach at first, but it is more pleasant to keep to the path following the shoreline embankment. We make a mental note of the peaceful terrace of the Taverna Anatoli for the way back. From the neighbouring tavern, now take to the coarse-gravel beach which is, nevertheless, good for bathing. At the eastern end of the beach, a sheer coastal cliff, dropping down, blocks a continued route along the shoreline. Here, bear to the

On the coastline at Lentas, a little rock arch sticks out of the water.



left and climb up along a dry, rocky stream bed, through a valley notch to reach the coastal road up above. Bear to the right to continue along the road and, only a few minutes later, catch a downwards glimpse of the new fishing harbour of Loutro. In front of a cluster of houses, ignore a trail turning off to Hamam Beach. Past the Taverna To Libyko (also boasting a shady terrace), descend along the road to **Loutro Beach (3)** down below.

Above the harbour, leave the road behind by turning left onto a dusty track. The track leads, in 10 minutes, to a **saddle (4)**, 82 m, where we can enjoy a downwards view of a gorge as it winds its way to the sea. At the col, a path begins, which descends in zigzags, rather slippery underfoot, into the stream bed for the gorge. Bearing right, continue along the gravel stream bed towards the sea, skirt around smooth polished boulders without any problem, some short, steep sections must be scrambled over using your hands. Soon reach a bottleneck, the narrowest one, only 2.5 m between the rock faces of the gorge towering a good 50 m upwards. The gorge widens out again soon after, then reach **Trachoulas Beach (5)**. The only thing missing at the semi-circular cove with a fine, sandy beach, is some shade.

After a break for bathing, return along the approach route back to **Lentas (1)**.





Along a coastal trail at the foot of the Asterousia Mountains

The Asterousia Mountains drop down ruggedly to the Libyan Sea, but there is still room enough for a marvellous coastal path. Amidst the barren terrain, you will be surprised to find a stately pine wood. A highlight for the route is the chapel cave of Agios Antonios, which once served as a shelter for a hermit. Also, there is a lot to discover in the Koudouma monastery.

Starting point: Agios Ioannis, 35 m. From the Heraklion – Mires road, in Agii Dekia, turn off towards Vagionia. Arriving at the village centre, bear left and, via Loukia, reach the twin village of Kapetaniana. Shortly before the village limits, continue driving straight ahead towards Ano Kapetaniana. The tarmac road ends at a car park at the village limits. Bearing slightly to the left, a broad, dusty road continues on; you can also drive this road with a standard vehicle, if you are careful. The road runs along the upper edge of the settlement and, 150 m further on, reaches a junction. Here, bear right and descend (perhaps there is a sign for the Taverna Zervos). 7.5 kms past Kapetaniana, above the houses of Agios Ioannis, pass a chapel. 400 m further on, reach a fork; you can park your car in the bend below it.

Height difference: about 300 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a coastal walk along a well laid path with short stretches of ascent and descent; route-finding is simple. You will need a torch if you want to explore the cave.

Refreshment: taverna in Agios Ioannis.



From the car park, shortly before reaching the village limits of Agios Ioannis (1), head back for 50 m to reach a fork. Here, a board provides info concerning the walk to the Koudouma monastery. Follow the gravel trail eastwards. 150 m further on, the trail forks at a concrete cattle trough. Turn right here to reach the steep coastline, 25 m further on, and from there, descend along a stepped trail to the mouth of the little Chonos Gorge (2) down below (the sandy bathing cove to the right is good place to take a break for a swim during the return).

On the other side of the stream bed for the gorge, climb up a stepped trail to reach a rocky rise above; from this point, you can already spot the entrance to the cave of Agios Antonios which still lies a good distance away. The path leads above the steep coastline, at first opening up panoramic views. Half an hour since starting off from Agios Ioannis, pass a number of caves being used as livestock pens. From there, the trail, flanked by a wooden railing, leads above a turquoise-coloured cove and, afterwards, meets up with a fork. At first, bear right to make an excursion to the hermit's cave, Agios Antonios (3), 39 m. Pass through the cave entrance, which is shaped like a pointed Gothic arch, pass by the chapel and four water basins to penetrate into the furthest reaches of the cave where you can marvel at the stalactites. Since ancient times, the local inhabitants have collected water dripping from these stalactites – rumour has it that this water possesses healing properties. Returning to the main trail, turn right onto it and continue by climbing up the slope through an open wood of Turkish pines. At a col (4), 121 m, pass by a little cross made of marble. A good quarter of an hour later, at another marble cross, a view opens up of the Bay of Koudouma. Along a path, which is sometimes loose and slippery underfoot, finally reach the Koudouma Monastery (5). After paying a visit to the monastery courtyard and, perhaps, taking a rest stop for bathing at the pebble beach that lies below, return along the approach route back to Agios Ioannis (1).

Moni Koudouma

Agios Antonios (3) 39 m (4) 5 m (5) 39 m
Agios Ioannis (1) 35 m



Moni Koudouma: the monastery on the sea.

Along the way, you could repeat the short excursion to Agios Antonios – in the afternoon light from the sun, the entrance to the cave is especially photogenic.

44 Kofinas, 1231 m

4.00 hrs

On top of the highest peak in the Asterousia Mountains

From the remote mountain village of Kapetaniana, a panoramic, high route, situated a good 800 m above the southern coast, leads to one of Crete's most striking summits. The conical mountain, which can be seen from far and wide, boasts a remarkable viewing perspective; when the weather is clear, you can spot all three of Crete's highest peaks. There's a lot of activity on the spacious Kofinas Plateau every September 14 when the very popular pilgrimage to the summit chapel takes place.

Starting point: Kapetaniana, 800 m. From the Heraklion – Miras road, in Agii Deka, turn off towards Vagionia. Arriving at the village centre, bear left and, via Loukia, reach the twin village of Kapetaniana. Shortly before both of the villages, at the junction, continue driving straight ahead towards Ano Kapetaniana and, 500 m further on, park your car.

Height difference: 500 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: up to the foot of the summit, a pleasant, unpaved road that is only used from time to time by herdsmen driving their pick-up trucks. The precipitous as-

cent to the summit demands sure-footedness and an absolute head for heights. A narrow gully is negotiated by climbing up ladders. Route-finding skill is required for the descent from the Panagia Kera to the road. No shade!

Alternative: the walk is worthwhile even without the dodgy final ascent to the summit. Just follow the panoramic road until reaching the Panagia Kera – if you decide to leave out the shortcut through the stream courses, the route leads only via unpaved roads; at the end, the alternative can simply be graded blue (easy). **Refreshment:** nothing en route.

From the summit plateau of Kofinas, a brilliant view opens up of the Libyan Sea.

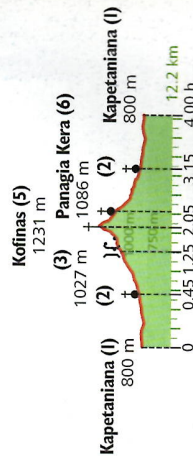


At the car park before reaching the village limits of Kapetaniana (1), three trails start off. We choose the dirt road that leads above the houses, continuing eastwards. At the fork, 150 m further on, bear left. The trail heads straight towards the cone-shaped peak of Kofinas. After passing a little valley notch, turn right at a fork and, shortly afterwards, pass the access road to a silo. A verdant valley with poplar trees sprawls down below the trail, appearing almost like a mirage in this otherwise barren and treeless landscape. This green oasis is skirted around along the upper edge and, afterwards, we ignore a trail forking off to the right. Also, in the further course of the route, always keep following the main trail.

Just before arriving at the foot of Kofinas, pass an abandoned chapel (2), 832 m. In a sharp, left-hand bend shortly afterwards, the trail forks at the same height as a livestock pen outfitted with stalls. Bearing left, continue following the road. During the ascent to a col, which can be spotted from far away, we can also spot a chapel, the Panagia Kera, perched on a flank of Kofinas; near the chapel, a path begins which ascends to the peak. Kofinas has now changed its appearance in the meantime, instead of the cone shape, it is now transformed to a immense massif where a spacious plateau stretches up to the summit.

At the col (3), 1027 m, meet up with a major junction. While the track descends straight ahead to the Koudouma monastery, we turn right to ascend onto an elongated ridge. Not quite ten minutes later, pass an archaeological dig (4), 1069 m, where the meagre foundations of a Minoan temple are located. The trail continues heading directly for the rocky summit area of Kofinas.

At the junction, 100 m before the Panagia Kera, bear left to pass through a barrier and reach the track's end. Now continue along a path leading over rock, sometimes





To the ancient fortress above the Lassithi Plateau

From the ring of mountains surrounding the Lassithi high plateau, Karfi is the lowest and easiest to climb. In the col below the summit, the scanty ruins of a Minoan mountain settlement are situated. From the pillar at the summit, you can enjoy a marvellous panoramic view of the Lassithi high plateau and the 2000 metre peaks of the Dikti Mountains.

Starting point: Tzermiadon, 820 m. Approaching from the northern coast, beginning at Malia and Agios Nikolaos, follow winding roads crossing over passes to reach the Lassithi Plateau. Parking possible in one of the side streets near the Restaurant Kronio. By bus, you can only approach from Heraklion to Tzermiadon, however, the time schedule is so mistimed that you will have to plan to spend an overnight.

Height difference: 320 m in both as-

cent and descent.

Grade: except for a short, steep section in the area around the summit, the ascent is moderately difficult along cobbled trails and paths. The descent from the Nissimos Plateau leads over an easy to walk, concrete-paved road. The return route from Karfi's peak is well-marked.

Refreshment: in Tzermiadon, numerous tavernas, the Restaurant Kronio at the starting point of the walk is very popular.

The main summit of Karfi above the Nissimos Plateau.



stepped, sometimes loose underfoot, as it ascends steeply along the massif. 5 minutes later, climb up a steep rocky gully via small metal rungs. A very precipitous stretch follows: you are standing almost vertically above the chapel. A little later, scramble up footholds to negotiate another precipitous section. The most difficult part of the climb is behind us now. 5 minutes later, we are standing in front of the chapel, Timios Stavros, and a couple of paces further on, at the cross marking the summit of **Kofinas (5)**, 1231 m. From the relatively narrow, but extensive, plateau on the summit, a brilliant view of the island opens up.

Climbing aids at the critical point on Kofinas.



Psiloritis towers above the Messara Plain, overflowing with olive and fruit trees, and westwards, in central Crete, the 2000 metre peaks of the White Mountains appear; to the east, you can spot the Dikti Mountains. The southern coast can be viewed to the heart's content; a striking landmark is found in the Weeping Lion of Lentas (see photo on page 187). Also, from the sheer drop at the rim, enjoy a breathtaking downwards view of the Koudouma Monastery (Walk 43). The chapel at the summit is set on the ruins of an ancient temple from the 7th century BC; nearby, numerous idols have been found, suggesting that a prehistorical shrine once stood here as well.

After enjoying the view for a good, long time, scramble back down again to the foot of the summit area below and then turn towards the **Panagia Kera (6)**, 1086 m. If we choose not to return along the approach route, from here, we can short-cut the road somewhat. To the right of the gate in the fence in front of the chapel, a goat path descends across the scree-covered slope to reach a mountain spring, **Koutsounari Keras**, with a watering trough next to it. From the spring, continue descending, more or less without a distinct path, to a stream lying about 75 m of altitude lower down. Cross over the stream on the diagonal and, shortly afterwards, pass a triangular-shaped boulder, about 3 m in height, where a **threshing circle (7)** is located, enclosed by stones. Past the threshing circle, climb down into another little valley with a stream where you can spot a goat path ascending to the road already used during the approach route – the terrain is easy for orientation and the gravel road cannot be missed. At a livestock pen with a corrugated iron container next to it, reach the road which will bring us back to **Kapetaniana (1)**.



At the junction in the village centre of Tzermiadon (1), at the Restaurant Krontio, take the road towards Heraklion. Pass by arts & crafts shops, tavernas and the church to reach the village limits with a road signed «Archaeological Site/Timios Stavros» (this will be included in our return route). 5 minutes later, at an information board, turn off onto an unpaved farm road heading straight on. Flanked by walnut and quince trees, the road heads towards an estate with a red roof and two large garage doors. Past this house, bear slightly to the left and ascend to a metal gate up above: on the other side of the gate, a cobbled *kalderimi* begins. 20 minutes later, meet up with a signed junction. The cobbled trail veers to the right here (sign: Karfi), now blue waymarkers appear, but they are orientated to the opposite direction from which we are approaching.

The trail climbs up to a *col* (2), 960 m, where semi-dilapidated windmills are standing. From here, a far-reaching downwards view takes in the Bay of Malia; if the weather is clear, the panorama reaches all the way to the Psiloritis massif in central Crete. In days gone by, these windmills were used to grind the grain grown in the Lassithi high plateau. At the col, the cobbled trail merges into a gravel road. Turn right onto this road and immediately pass through a gate. Shortly afterwards, the striking summit of Karfi appears before us. At the fork, 150 m past the gate, the trail leads through a treeless terrain of cushion plant scrubland, heading directly for the humpbacked mountain and soon narrows down into a path. Still a way below the summit, meet up with an enclosed *spring* (3), to the left of which, a trail forks towards

Krasi. Bear right here to continue heading towards Karfi (red way-markers).

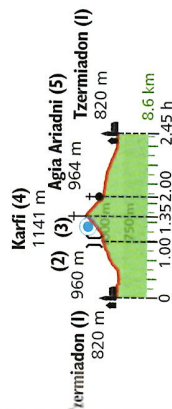
Faded red dots mark the steep ascent to a saddle up above where you can spot Karfi's main peak, only some metres higher in altitude, topped by a circular pillar. The humble ruins of the walls marking a late-Minoan mountain settlement are located in the saddle. It is believed that a settlement for Minoan refugees was established here in about the 12th century BC. Now heading for the trig point pillar, reach yet another col, just below the main peak, from which, we complete the climb up to **Karfi (4)**, 1141 m. From the pillar, a spectacular downwards

You can't miss the trail to Karfi.

view opens up of the mountain village of Kera, to the east, the Selena chain appears close enough to reach out and touch; it serves as a border for the northern edge of Lassithi. The plateau is dominated by the 2000 metre peaks of Dikti and Lazaros. Our return route is also easy to spot: at the foot of Selena, at the half-way point, so to speak, in a drop down to the Lassithi high plateau, you can see the Nissimos Plateau, through which, a road is running, clearly in view. Also, the chapel, Timios Stavros, is visible, perched on a hill above the plain; below the chapel, we will be descending to Lassithi.

From Karfi, at first descend again along the 50 m stretch to the saddle. In the saddle, bear left (waymarkers). About 30 m further on, the path begins to show its contour more distinctly as it heads directly towards the gently curved chain of peaks marking the Selena range and finally drops down to the **Nissimos Plateau**. At the fork by the chapel **Agia Ariadni (5)**, 964 m, with the chapel to your right, cross over the high plain along a gravel trail heading towards the hill where the Timios Stavros chapel is perched. At the junction almost on the southern edge of the plain, bear right and, a good 100 m further on, meet up with a

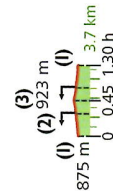
concrete-paved road which turns sharp left and ascends towards Timios Stavros. Keep straight on, descending to the main road on the Lassithi Plateau, and return along the main road back to **Tzermiadon (1)**.





Easy walk through a gorge at the edge of the Lassithi Plateau

Up until 20 years ago, the Lassithi Plateau, located above the northern coast at about 900 m of altitude, was famous for its picturesque windmills, but today, the most significant attraction here on the widely cultivated high plateau is the Cave of Zeus near Psichro. Every day in high season, hundreds of tourists are brought by coach to climb down the 84 m deep, mystifying cave. Gorge walkers have also been well-served here ever since a signed road has lead to the entrance of the Havga Canyon. The mouth of the canyon merges into the high plateau at its eastern edge and the first stretch is easy to walk, however, 45 minutes into the gorge, the continued route can only be negotiated by experienced rock-climbers.



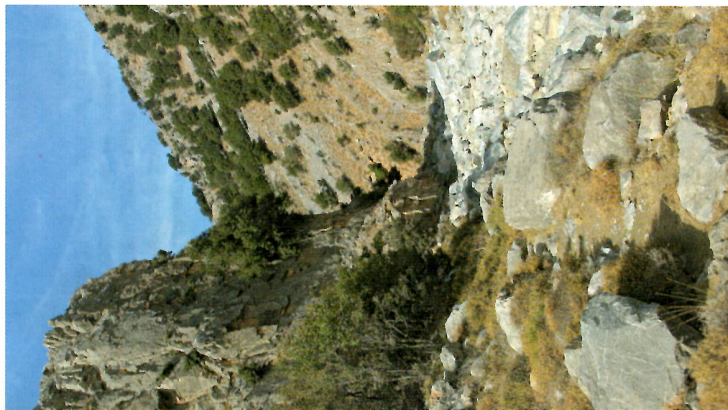
Starting point: the dam 2.5 km southwest of Agios Konstantinos, 875 m. Approaching from Malia or Agios Nikolaos, reach the Lassithi Plateau after an hour's drive. In the village centre of Agios Konstantinos, about 150 m past the church, turn left onto a narrow tarmac street (sign: Havga Canyon). At the junction 75 m further on, bear left again and then immediately turn right and, 0.3 km on, at a fork, bear left onto a gravel road. Turn right shortly afterwards and then keep straight ahead, following the little brown signs, to reach a fenced-in artificial lake at a junction. Now follow the road straight ahead along the fence, at the end of the artificial lake, the trail veers to the left. A kilometre further on, bear right in front of a vineyard and, shortly after, meet up with a dam in front of the gorge entrance.

Height difference: 50 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a gorge that is easy to walk without any significant differences in height.

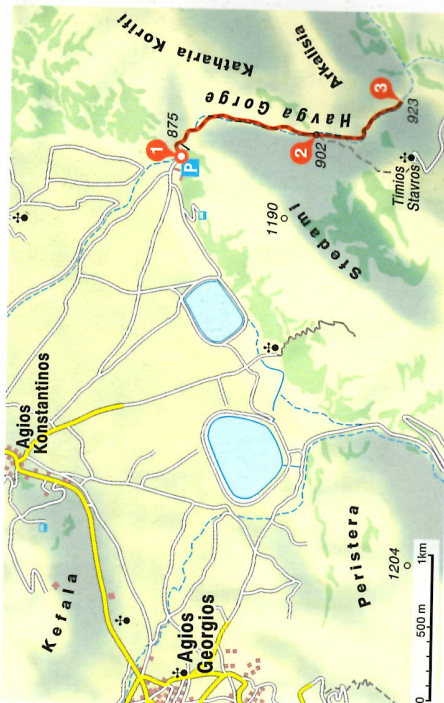
Refreshment: tavernas in Agios Konstantinos.

In the lower reaches of the Havga Gorge.



At the car park in front of the dam (1), pass through a metal gate and then follow the gravel road towards the gorge entrance already in sight. The trail ends at a little livestock pen and then a path continues up the gorge. On a boulder situated in the middle of the stream bed for the gorge, a yellow arrow points to the left bank. At the outset, more way-markers save us from the unpleasant route leading directly in the dry stream bed, while often crossing from one bank over to the other. 25 minutes later, meet up with a fork (2), 902 m. To the right, a way-marked alpine path ascends to the chapel Timios Stavros up above, but we continue along the stream bed heading up the gorge. Shortly after passing through an open wood of Holm oaks and Cretan maple, continue directly in the stream bed until finally reaching a **boulder impasse** (3), 923 m, of gigantic blocks of stone. This is relatively easy to scramble over in the middle, but soon afterwards, continuing on is very difficult. So instead, we turn back at the barrier and return along the approach route back to the dam (1).

Huge boulders mark the turn-around point.





Short, but nice gorge walk that is very popular as well

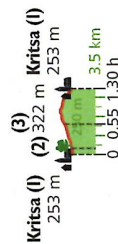
Should you happen to pick a day for walking the Kritsa Gorge when no other walkers are there, you would still have company – in the gravel stream bed, hundreds of cairns will greet you on your way. The gorge counts as one of Crete's most impressive and is especially enchanting due to several bizarrely eroded bottlenecks, formed by the running water, in the course of the stream bed. If you find the one and a half hour circular walk much too short, you can double your walking time by following the alternative route.

Starting point: Kritsa, 253 m. At the southern village limits of Agios Nikolaos, at the major junction, follow the road to Kritsa, 9 kms away. At the roundabout on the village limits, turn right onto the road towards Lato and, 200 m past the sign marking Kritsa's village limits and past a bridge, turn left onto a farm road signed with »Gorge« that heads directly towards the entrance to the gorge. You can park your car 300 m further on in front of a power pylon. By bus, you can reach Kritsa from Agios Nikolaos several times daily (additional walking time to the starting point is a good 15 minutes).

Height difference: 150 m.

Grade: in the gorge, sometimes you may have to use your hands when scrambling easily over boulders. The route leads along broad farm roads and an ancient *kalderimi*. Route-finding is simple. Outside of the gorge itself, you will find very little shade.

Worth seeing: after the walk, a ramble through the narrow passageways in Kritsa is worthwhile. Before reaching the village, on the approach, one of Crete's most notable Byzantine churches, Panagia Kera, lies hidden away; the interior is completely



The entrance to the Kritsa Gorge.

decorated with very well-preserved frescoes from the 13th to the 15th centuries (Tues–Sun 8–15.00, entrance fee €3).

Refreshment: restaurants in Kritsa. **Alternative:** from the sign for »Tapes«, continue on along the gorge; the walls are now noticeably lower. Soon, you enter a newly cultivated grove of olive trees and then, later on, pass through two chain-linked fences, both provided with openings for passing through on the right-hand sides. The gorge then narrows once again and, 10 mins after that, you reach a fence blocking the way (45 mins from the »Tapes« sign). Before reaching this point, leave the gorge behind by turning off sharp right onto an ill-maintained *kalderimi* that is supported by walls (straight ahead leads to Tapes; refreshment). Soon, the old cobbled surface of the trail is visible for a stretch as it ascends along the northern flank of the gorge. Once above, a path marked by cairns heads towards a flat farm building and then meets up with a broad unpaved road. Take this road to pass the farm building and descend slightly through a high valley. As soon as the road veers to the left, the old mule track continues straight ahead (waymarkers). From here, pick up the main course of the walk again and use it to return to the starting point (additional walking time: 1.30 hrs).



Panoramic circular walk through the Orno and Thripti Mountains

If you are acquainted with the island of Madeira, when you first spot the narrow watercourse at Kavousi, you will be reminded at once of the Madeira levadas which bring precious water from sources in the mountains to feed the plantations below. On Crete, this type of irrigation system was, and is, far less developed, but indeed, not only at Kavousi, but also, e.g., on the route to the Kamareas Cave (Walk 35) and into Dead's Gorge (Walk 57), the remains of such watercourses can still be seen. The most spectacular watercourse can be appreciated during this circular walk; a stretch leads right through the middle of the breathtaking Mesonas Gorge. But this is not all there is: a cobbled mule track and, a not to be slighted, obviously ancient olive tree, are additional highlights of this adventurous circuit route. All in all, this is a fantastic circular walk, although, it's true, a major part of it follows broad roads.

Starting point: Kavousi, 100 m. The village is located on the National Road between Agios Nikolaos and Sitia. Bus service available on this line, Mon-Fri, four times daily; limited service at the weekend.

Height difference: 650 m.

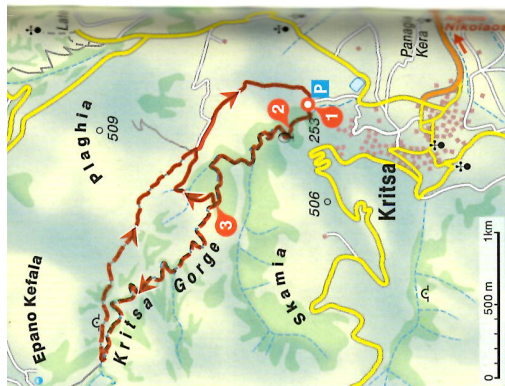
Grade: a circular walk along ancient cobbled trails and unpaved roads. The stretch along the watercourse demands an excellent head for heights and sure-footedness. The cobbled trail and the channel route are waymarked in yellow; however, the track from Melisses to the pass is not.

Refreshment: numerous tavernas and coffee houses in Kavousi.

Worth seeing: the monumental olive tree at Kavousi is said to have an estimated age of 3250 years. This would make it the oldest tree of its kind (*Olea europaea*) in existence – a specimen exceeding this in longevity would, indeed, be very difficult to find in the entire Mediterranean region. The dimensions are extraordinary: trunk diameter, 4.90 m, trunk circumference, 14.20 m, trunk circumference at the base, 22.10 m. As a kind of homage to this hardwood Methuselah, the gold medal winner of the marathon, held during the Olympic Games of 2004 in

Athens, was honourably crowned with a wreath braided from the branches of the Kavousi monumental olive tree.

The 3000 year old olive tree of Kavousi.



At the **car park (1)**, in front of a power pylon, turn left onto a path to descend. After a few paces, in front of a metal gate, turn left again and cross through a terraced grove of olive trees to descend to the stream bed of the gorge. Follow the stream bed up the gorge. Right away, you must scramble over huge, round boulders that have been polished smooth by the stream. At an especially imposing boulder, metal rungs on the right-hand side provide help for scrambling up. Immediately after, pass a **carob tree (2)**, 250 m, growing in the middle of the gorge.

Continuing on, encounter spectacular bottlenecks where only narrow openings allow you to slip between the rock faces towering up to 150 m in height. Metal rungs provide assistance for scrambling over a water-eroded stretch, sculpted into a **tube-like form**. Shortly after, some boulders, not yet smoothed by the water, catch our attention; these date back to a rock slip occurring only a few years ago – like all of the other Cretan gorges, the Kritsa Gorge is also still »in the works«. More boulder barriers and water-eroded steep sections must be skirted around; arrows are always provided to point out the best way around these. The gorge widens somewhat. The most spectacular stretch is now behind us. About 150 m past a trampled-down fence, keep looking right to spot a cairn marking a **path (3)** which leads out of the stream bed for the gorge (straight ahead, a sign points out the way to Tapes; see Alternative).

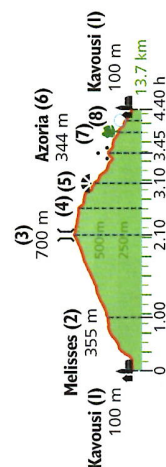
A few paces further on, pass by a square foundation of concrete blocks. The path widens into a broad gravel trail which ascends through a slope of brushwood and Holm oaks. A trail, approaching from the left, merges into ours. A good 5 mins later, meet up with an intersecting **gravel track**. Turn right along the track and descend slightly while enjoying a panoramic view of the Orno Mountains. Another 5 mins after that, the track veers to the left, but we continue straight ahead along an ancient mule track which is sometimes cobbled and soon flanked by low fieldstone walls. Along this trail, enjoy a fine view of a broad valley, filled with olive trees, which is situated below Kritsa. Past a gate, the path drops down in increments, then merges into a farm road which leads straight ahead through a grove of olive trees and climbs down to the **car park (1)** at the power pylon.



Panoramic view over the olive plantations of Kavousi to the offshore island of Psira.

The circular walk begins on the main road in **Kavousi (1)**. From the bus stop shelter diagonally opposite from the large, main church (here, a road turns off to Tholos Beach), at first, follow the main road for a short stretch towards Sittia, while passing by two tavernas. 200 m further on, turn right onto a tar-mac trail (sign Tripti/Archaeological Site/Ancient Olive Tree, etc.); here, you can also find a trail board; however, it is not very helpful.

Shortly, 100 m on, leave the narrow road behind by turning left onto an unpaved trail, leading through a grove of olive trees and heading towards the entrance to the **Mesonas Gorge**, which slices through the Orno Mountains here as a deep rift. To the left, above the chasm, you can already spot the course of the ancient *kalderimi* leading to Melisses. Bear left in front of the entrance to the gorge and ascend to the mule track up above after only a few paces. The mostly cobbled *kalderimi* climbs up the left flank of the Mesonas Gorge, following tight bends; early mornings, the ascent route still lies in the



shade cast by the Orno Mountains. Right away, the trail allows breathtaking downwards views into the floor of the gorge and the first panoramic view opens up beyond Kavousi to the Gulf of Mirabello in the distance.

The cobbled trail traverses a stony, scree-covered slope and, a good half an hour later, merges into an unpaved road. Continuing the climb up the slope, 5 mins later, ignore a trail leading to a chapel located below which soon comes into sight. In front of us, the houses of **Melisses (2)**, 355 m, appear, surrounded by modest fields, fig trees and natural groves of olive trees. At the first house, past a metal gate, meet up with a fork where a sign directs us to the right towards Tripti. Immediately after, cross over a stream bed, overgrown with plane trees and Spanish cane. During the course of the route that follows, keep always to the main trail. About 10 mins later, pass by two trails forking off to the left, one quickly following the other, and both blocked off by metal gates. At the fork about 250 m past the second gate, turn right. Not quite 5 mins later, at a junction situated below a house perched on an embankment, keep straight on and immediately enjoy a view of the gulf once again. Another 10 mins later, 50 m past a gate, reach yet another junction; bear right here.

The road climbs up along hairpin bends to reach a **pass (3)**, 700 m, up above. Here, too, keep to the main trail to continue. As you cross over the pass, leave the high valley of Melisses behind and, in front of us, Afendis Stavromenos appears with a transmission tower perched on its summit.





The old watercourse in the Mesonas Gorge.

From the pass, the road descends into a valley while opening up panoramic views. Not quite 20 minutes later, in a right-hand bend above some abandoned quarry-stone houses, cross over a stream bed. 150 m further on, a **gully (4)** intersects the trail. Here, leave the road behind by turning right (yellow way-marking) and descending along a narrow maintenance trail for the water channel, rather dilapidated at first, leading down to the quarry-stone houses below. The next stretch is steep and somewhat precipitous. Below the houses, the gully cuts through another stream bed and, after that, the course of the channel keeps at about the same height and then descends to the narrow stream bed of the **Mesonas Gorge**. Some sections are secured with a rusty fence, but nevertheless, this stretch requires an absolute head for heights.

The channel then crosses over the bed of the gorge along an aqueduct and, shortly after, is covered with a metal grid. Suddenly, instead of the water flowing through a conduit, it flows freely along an open channel. Now reach a striking projecting rock where the channel hooks to the left in a right angle. From the point where the channel hooks, a couple of strides lead to a cobbled **viewpoint (5)**, 494 m. While we take a short break, we can enjoy views of the Mirabello Gulf and the wind farm above Plaka; down below, on the other side of the gorge on the valley floor, we can spot the road into which, during our ascent two and a half hours before, the cobbled trail had merged. Continuing along the panoramic maintenance trail next to the channel, pass a fig tree. Here, the trail skirts around a protruding rock along a narrow, cornice-like stretch of wall, once again, somewhat precipitously. A good 20 minutes past the viewpoint, both the trail and the channel veer to the left and leave the gorge behind; at this point, we are looking down upon a **farm track** below, to where we next descend. 50 m further on, ignore an indistinct path forking away and, 200 m after that, keep an eye out for a yellow waymarker pointing out a path, loose underfoot, which leads to the track. Take the track straight on to continue the descent and, 75 m further on, meet up with a broad gravel trail that is ascending from the gorge. Here, a short excursion is possible to the excavation of a Minoan settlement; follow the road to the right for a short way and then immediately turn left along an ascending path

flanked by tumbledown stone walls. Just below the summit of a hill lie the ruins of the Minoan settlement **Azoria (6)**, 344 m, from which, we can enjoy a fantastic panoramic view of Kavousi, down below our feet. Returning to the main trail, turn right and follow it through a grove of olive trees. Always keeping to the main trail, meet up with a **chapel**, surrounded by eucalyptus trees. A few minutes later, finally reach the monumental **olive tree (7)**, 246 m. Despite its incredible age of more than 3000 years, the tree bears fruit annually. After showing appropriate esteem to this Methuselah, continue following the road and, 100 m further on, keep an eye out for a yellow waymarker. Here, turn right onto a cobbled path that, 5 minutes later, merges into a farm road. Turn left onto the farm road and, 30 m further on, meet up again with the road and descend along it. About 5 minutes later, yellow waymarkers point out a path turning off to the right which, surprisingly enough, returns us once again to the narrow channel. The path crosses over the road again and then leads past a square **water reservoir (8)**, 160 m. Somewhat later on, at the upper village limits of Kavousi, meet up with a domed church. From here, descend along a narrow concrete-paved trail that forks 50 m below the church; here, bear to the left. Past the little chapel of Agios Georgios, finally reach the village square of **Kavousi (1)**, boasting cafés and tavernas with shady terraces. After perhaps taking a break, keep slightly to the right and, shortly after, pass the main church to reach the bus stop shelter on the main road leading through the village.

The cobbled kalderimi above the Gulf of Mirabello.



49 Afendis Stavromenos, 1476 m

3.20 hrs

Along a vertiginous summit path with views of the Mirabello Gulf

The highest peak of the *Thripti* Mountains is a scenic viewpoint *par excellence*; when the sky is clear, enjoy a view taking in the entire eastern and central regions of Crete. The only pity is the clatter made by the generator for the transmission station located on the summit which disturbs the tranquillity. Starting point for the demanding summit climb with alpine character is the *Thripti*, a solitary, scattered settlement lying at 900 m above sea level, where only a handful of people live year round. Only on hot summer days at the weekend is there some action in the spacious taverna, when Cretans drive up in their pick-up trucks for a couple of hours respite from the suffocating heat below.

Starting point: *Thripti*, 873 m. Approaching from *Agios Nikolaos*, take the road towards *Ierapetra* to reach *Kato Chorio*. In the settlement, signs point the way to *Thripti* (12 km). In *Pano Chorio*, bear right (the turn-off is easy to miss). For the first km, drive along a narrow, rugged concrete-paved road, which later becomes a tarmac road leading to the summer resort of *Thripti*. At the village limits, meet up at a little square (two fountains) where you can park your car. Driving time from *Agios Nikolaos* is about 1.20 hrs.

Height difference: a good 600 m.

Grade: a long ascent along a sometimes steep, slightly precipitous alpine path that can be loose underfoot. At the outset, you have to pay close attention at numerous junctions. Along the formerly well-marked trail, only very faded red/green waymarkers are left over; in the woodland area, a thick carpet of pine needles on the ground make route-finding difficult. As long as you start the walk early in the morning, almost the entire ascent route will still be lying in shade.

Refreshment: taverna *To Probarma* in *Thripti*.

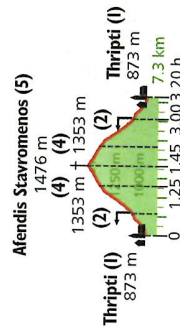
The settlement of *Thripti* is the starting point for the climb to *Afendis Stavromenos*.



The walk begins at the little, unassuming village square of *Thripti* (1). To the left of a sign, »no through road«, a trail leads to the Taverna *To Probarma*, 20 m away. The only ornamentation for the square, which is laid in stone slabs, is a large and a small fountain. Follow the concrete-paved trail that leads past the small fountain. Right away, on the opposite side to the left, we can spot the village church perched on top of a hill. 400 m further on, turn right at an acute angle onto a steep, ascending, concrete-paved road. At the fork that immediately follows, turn right onto a gravel trail to continue, but leave it behind again, 10 m further on at an electricity meter, by turning left onto a path that is concrete-paved at the outset. A couple of steps climb up to a house with a veranda and, past the house, the path veers to the right; sometimes the ancient cobblestones are exposed. Continue ascending steeply along the slope and, for a short stretch, follow a wall built of concrete blocks; little vineyards are lying on the other side of the wall. Past a closed metal gate at an entrance to a vine bower, bear right and ascend along the path next to a flight of steps. Now you have to pay close attention; the path is sometimes extremely overgrown as we continue through more vineyards. About 40 m above the steps, pass between a building under construction (possibly finished in the meantime) and an old stone-built cottage and then the path leads constantly in one direction through once cultivated, now abandoned, terrain. At a cluster of trees, bear slightly to the left and, below two cottages, meet up with a **gravel trail** and turn right onto it to continue.

Not quite 100 m further on, turn sharp left onto another gravel trail, then pass through a gate in a fence, which can be opened on the right-hand side. Shortly after, enter a little pine wood and then meet up with a **junction of three trails** (2), 1017 m. Here, turn right onto a forest path that is covered in pine needles and, therefore, not very easy to follow. In order not to lose track of the route, you must keep an eye out for cairns; occasionally, you may spot very faded red/green waymarkers.

As the altitude increases, the path becomes more distinct. As soon as the woodland belt begins to thin out, a view opens up of the Gulf of





From Koutsouras' communal park through Butterfly Gorge

The butterfly appellation somewhat confuses the issue; it's true that the gorge is named after this colourful creature, but they are no more to be seen here than in other places. The best time to spot one or the other species, numbering up to 50 different varieties on Crete, is from May until September. Nevertheless, the walker will be pleasantly surprised at the abundance of greenery found here. Well into the month of May, however, the stream bed may be running with a little too much current to allow a walker to continue through the little canyon to the chapel.

Starting point: Communal Park Koutsouras, 6 m. The signed communal park of Koutsouras is located on the coastal road 20 km east of Ierapetra and about one kilometre west of Koutsouras. The bus line Ierapetra – Makrigialos stops directly in front of it (Mon-Sat, up to eight times daily; Sun, limited service). You can also reach Koutsouras by bus from the northern coast starting from Sitia.

At the outset of the walk, a successful reforestation project provides fresh greenery.



Height difference: 120 m in both ascent and descent.
Grade: a gorge walk along a sometimes extremely overgrown path; however, waymarkers make route-finding easier. A steep section is negotiated by climbing a ladder.

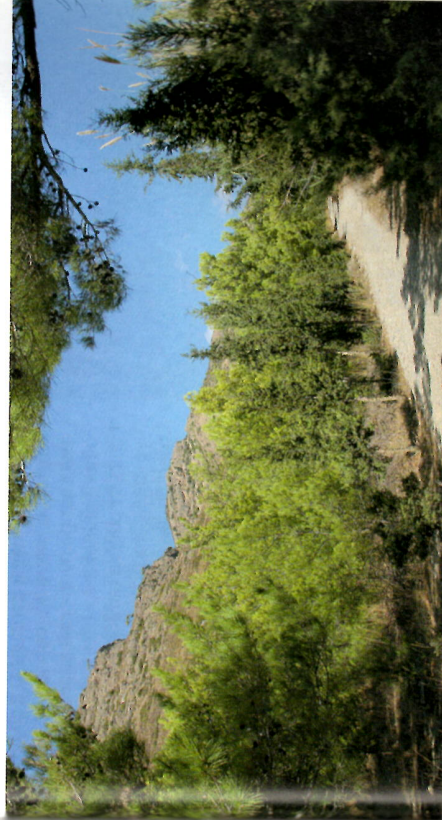
Refreshment: the modern-style café/wine bar Koursaros on the through road 400 m east of the starting point.

Right at the beginning, a view opens up of the northern coast.

Mirabello and Psira Island, lying offshore; above the eastern end of the large bay, you can see the spinning blades of the wind turbines of Plaka. Below a jagged rock face, our trail veers to the right in front of a **field of scree**. Now above the woodland belt, the orientation is relatively easy thanks to the closely placed waymarkers. The terrain becomes more alpine in nature as we laboriously ascend the rocky eastern slope of Stavromenos along tight bends; some sections of the path are slightly precipitous.

After the strenuous ascent, reach a little **high plateau (3)**, 1309 m, from which, our summit destination can first be seen. The path heads directly towards the transmission towers and only a few minutes later, meets up with a **road (4)**, 1353 m, which climbs up past the towers to the chapel and the four-sided column at the summit of **Afendis Stavromenos (5)**, 1476 m. The panoramic view has now increased to take in the greenhouse cultivation which has taken over the Ierapetra plain; on the south-eastern coast, you can spot the resort town of Makrigialos.

After a break on the, at times, windy peak (at the building below the chapel, there is a terrace protected from the wind), descend along the approach route back to **Thripti (1)**.





Through a grove of olive trees in a little canyon

The Pefki Gorge counts as one of the smallest on the island, but it is, nevertheless, interesting. Above all, it is lovely to explore the gorge along a well-laid circular trail which, at the same time,

opens up a fantastic view of the mountain village of Pefki, framed by groves of olive trees and proudly presenting its landmark: a chapel perched cleverly on top of a conical hillock. Thanks to the »Zur Weinlaube«, there is also a quaint café in the village. If you are staying in Makrigialos or if you are approaching here by bus, you could also visit the gorge starting from its lower end.



Starting point: Pefki, 386 m. In Makrigialos/Analipsi, on the coast road and shortly after passing Sunwing Resort, a road branches off to Pefki, 7 kms away. 30 m past the sign for the Pefki village limits, a sign (Gorge) points to the left towards the gorge. Parking possible on the side of the road at the sign for the village limits. As an alternative, you could reach the gorge, starting from Makrigialos. You can reach the resort town by bus from Ierapetra as well (up to eight times daily; only twice on Sun) or from Sitia (Mon–Sat, four times daily, twice on Sun).

Height difference: a good 230 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: circular walk along mostly pleasant farm tracks and cobbled trails. The stretch through the gorge along a narrow path demands sure-footedness. The route is waymarked and the most important junctions are signed.

Refreshment: in Pefki, the kafenion »Zur Weinlaube«, where you can sample local country wine from the barrel.

Alternative starting at Makrigialos/Analipsi: from the bus stop at the Sun-

wing Resort in Makrigialos, descend along the main through road towards Ierapetra and, 400 m further on, turn right onto a narrow, concrete-paved road (sign: »White River Cottages«). A good 5 minutes later, the concrete trail crosses under a bridge and, at the fork 400 m further on, bear left; a little later on, continue past the White River Cottages. At both of the following forks, one soon following after the other, bear right each time and then ascend steeply, following signs towards the »Gorge«. Above a couple of holiday bungalows clad in natural stone, the concrete pavement ends at a junction; keep straight on, continuing along a gravel trail and, 400 m further on, meet up with an intersecting trail. Turn right onto this trail and ascend, in a good 5 minutes, to reach a light-blue coloured hydrant at an altitude of 212 m above sea level. Here, you have the opportunity to either follow the main route to the left towards Pefki and then, at the fountain, descend into the gorge or you could continue straight on from the hydrant and climb down into the gorge.

From the car park at the municipal park of Koutsouras (1), follow the broad trail through a reforested pine wood which appears like an oasis compared to the rest of the southern coast. Behind a row of recently planted fan palms, a children's playground lies hidden; keep this to your left hand side. 10 mins later, in front of a bizarre mountain ridge with caves, meet up with a **water house** (2), 24 m. From there, follow the stream bed, dry during the summer months, into the gorge via a path soon waymarked with yellow markings and weaving between boulders. A **ladder** (3), 45 m, helps the scramble up a steep wall, about 4 m in height. After that, continue, higgledy-piggledy, through the washed-out stream bed. Through jungle-like thickets of oleander and very tall reeds, cross over onto the right bank. There, the path continues in easy up and down walking, passing dead trees which bear witness to a forest fire dating back to the 1990s. In front of us, still a good distance away, we can spot the destination for our walk, a white-washed chapel. As the path continues through the gorge, it changes twice from one side of the stream bed to the other. Now meet up with a somewhat dilapidated, narrow **channel**, whose function has been replaced by a large, black conduit. At a chain-link fence, leave the conduit behind and change over, once again, to the other bank of the stream bed. Now pass through a terraced grove of olive trees and, from there, a farm road finally leads to **Agios Dimitrios** (4), 123 m. Next to the chapel, a bench situated under a large cypress tree provides a nice spot to take a break; a fountain is also there for drinking water. After a break, return along the approach route back to the communal park at **Koutsouras** (1).



markings and weaving between boulders. A ladder (3), 45 m, helps the scramble up a steep wall, about 4 m in height. After that, continue, higgledy-piggledy, through the washed-out stream bed. Through jungle-like thickets of oleander and very tall reeds, cross over onto the right bank. There, the path continues in easy up and down walking, passing dead trees which bear witness to a forest fire dating back to the 1990s. In front of us, still a good distance away, we can spot the destination for our walk, a white-washed chapel. As the path continues through the gorge, it changes twice from one side of the stream bed to the other. Now meet up with a somewhat dilapidated, narrow channel, whose function has been replaced by a large, black conduit. At a chain-link fence, leave the conduit behind and change over, once again, to the other bank of the stream bed. Now pass through a terraced grove of olive trees and, from there, a farm road finally leads to Agios Dimitrios (4), 123 m. Next to the chapel, a bench situated under a large cypress tree provides a nice spot to take a break; a fountain is also there for drinking water. After a break, return along the approach route back to the communal park at Koutsouras (1).

Old watercourse in the Dasaki Gorge.





Not quite 5 minutes later, leave the farm road behind by turning left onto a path (sign: »Gorge«), and shortly afterwards, enjoy a view that stretches through the gorge all the way to the Libyan Sea.

At a **fountain (3)**, 303 m, you will also find a bench; here, meet up with another junction. Turn left here to descend into the gorge (straight ahead is the return route). At a steep spot, cross over the **stream bed** for the gorge; after rainfall, a waterfall cascades down here and fills a rock pool with its waters. A **boulder** blocking the way can be skirted around to the left (if you prefer, you could scramble under it to get through). Afterwards, waymarkers lead us along the right-hand bank of the stream bed for the gorge to two **metal stairways**, along which, two steep sections can be climbed down. During a short intermediary ascent, the path then climbs up along the left side of the gorge. Not far from the gorge's exit, meet up with a broad gravel trail. Turn right onto this trail and descend for about 100 m; then, at a **fork (4)**, 188 m, cross over the stream bed of the gorge, which is overgrown here with a thicket of reeds.

214

At the village limits of **Pefki (1)**, descend along a concrete-paved trail into a grove of olive trees. At a fork, not quite 100 m further on, turn left and then immediately left again, 5 m after that: here, an ancient mule track begins. At an arbour a little later on, meet up with an intersecting concrete-paved trail. Turn left onto this trail and, a couple of paces further on, the descent through the olive grove continues.

Not quite 10 minutes later, the path merges into a farm road. A backwards look treats you to a thrilling view of Pefki and, towering above it, Afendis Stavromenos, with the chapel at the summit. Keeping diagonally left, 3 minutes later, the farm road ascends to a fountain and a picnic bench at the tumbledown walls of **Milos (2)**, 313 m; the aqueduct for the ancient water mill is still well preserved. Continue descending along the farm road. To your left, the contours of the Pefki Gorge begin to take shape; the trail leads along the upper rim of the gorge.

The white houses of Pefki squat down at the foot of Afendis Stavromenos.

The broad trail ascends along the western side of the gorge to reach another fork up above where a light-blue coloured **hydrant (5)**, 212 m, is located. Here, turn sharp right (waymarker). Now continue northwards and, at the same time, enjoy a panoramic view of Afendis Stavromenos. The gravel trail soon becomes a cobbled path. The path ascends via tight bends to climb up along the western side of the gorge. Arriving at the upper rim of the gorge, enjoy views of the eastern flank of the gorge and of Pefki, surrounded by groves of olive trees. The path, secured by a railing, leads for a stretch directly along the sheer drop at the rim and finally meets up with the **fountain (3)** and the approach route. From here, return along the approach route back to **Pefki (1)**.





Through a breathtaking canyon into a trim mountain village

Due to its remote location above the southeastern coast, the canyon at Perivolakia has long counted as one of Crete's least known, despite the fact that it is relatively easy to access along a well-laid and well-marked path. The fortress-like monastery of Kapsa, which is opened to the public, is enthroned above the gorge's imposing entrance. After ending the walk, you could spend some time relaxing in a little cove, nestled amidst Salt cedars; all in all, this is a daytrip abounding in diversity.

Starting point: Moni Kapsa, 3 m, 35 km east of Ierapetra. From the coastal road, 0.6 km past the Sunwing Resort in Makrigialos, turn off onto a secondary road towards the Kapsa Monastery. In front of the monastery, you can park above the pebble beach under the shade of Salt cedars. Driving time from Agios Nikolaos is a good 1.5 hrs.

Height difference: a good 300 m in both ascent and descent.

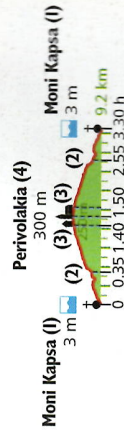


The monk's monastery Kapsa at the exit of the Perivolakia Gorge.

From the car park at the foot of the **Moni Kapsa (1)**, cross the secondary road and immediately reach the entrance to the Perivolakia Gorge. At an information board, a path leads into the stream bed of the gorge, filled with oleander. Right away, we find ourselves standing in the middle of an extraordinary canyon flanked by towering walls almost 100 m in height and peppered by countless caves. At first, the waymarked trail leads along the left bank of the stream bed for the gorge, but in the further course of the walk, the route will change banks several times. About 20 mins later, traverse a scree-covered slope. The next stretch leads over smoothly-eroded outcrops of rock. Afterwards, the path runs beneath an overhanging rock to the other side and then ascends through a gully along the left flank of the gorge. Further up, cross over a field of boulders. Now meet up with a steep section, about 5 m in height, negotiated by climbing up a **ladder (2)**, 89 m. The path continues climbing steeply up the gorge, sometimes loose underfoot (be very careful on the return!), along sometimes somewhat precipitous spots. A short stretch is secured by a cable.

A good hour later, meet up with the upper entrance to the gorge.

Still a good distance away, you can spot a high voltage power pylon perched at a height that



A ladder helps negotiate a steep section.



Crete's marvellous coastline in the far east

About 5000 Date palms line the popular and, in summer, rather crowded, beach at Vai – the most beautiful palm beach on the entire island of Crete is, perhaps, yours alone only in the wee hours of the morning. If you haven't hit the trail until later in the day, that's not too bad either, along the coastal walk to Palekastro, you'll find plenty of remote bathing spots, without palm trees, however. If a GPS device is not part of your walking gear, you should plan plenty of time for this coastal walk; aside from bathing breaks, most certainly you will need a quarter of an hour here, 15 minutes there, just to pick up the sometimes indistinct route again.

Starting point: the palm beach of Vai, 1 m, 9 kms north of Palekastro. In summer, bus service twice daily from Sitia via Palekastro.

Return: the first bus reaches Vai shortly before 12.00; the afternoon bus from Palekastro, leaves already around 16.30 to return to Sitia, therefore, the time element needed for the walk and the return by bus is relatively short. From Palekastro, it is better to organise private transport or to take a taxi.

Height difference: about 340 m in ascent and 300 m in descent.

Grade: aside from some short stretches of ascent and descent demanding sure-footedness, the coastal trail is technically relatively easy; the difficulty of the walk lies more in route-finding. The formerly rather good waymarking has virtually disappeared in the meantime; many red waymarkers are now extremely faded and numerous posts (red dot on a yellow background) are missing. No shade; bring along your bathing gear.

Refreshment: tavernas in Vai and Maridati; it's very nice to sit in the Taverna Batis on Chiona Beach.

Cretan date palms flank the picturesque beach at Vai.



we will reach later on. After a long stretch leading directly through the stream bed of the gorge, cross under a **rock arch**, a very narrow passage, above which, a massive boulder has become wedged.

The walls of the gorge begin to level off somewhat while our alpine path heads directly towards a striking **crag (3)**, 283 m, enthroned above the upper entrance to the gorge like a sentinel. At the foot of the crag, pass through a gate; the houses of Pezoulas are perched above. Shortly afterwards, meet up with a road; turn right onto the road and, 20 m further on, bear right to head towards the houses of **Perivolakia (4)**, 300 m. At a bridge, meet up with the village street; turn right to reach the *kafenion* near the church. After a break, descend back again through the gorge to return to **Moni Kapsa (1)**.

In the lower reaches of the Perivolakia Gorge.





220

In **Vai (1)**, next to a restaurant on the southern end of the beach, pick up a stepped trail, flanked by a railing, and climb up to a **viewpoint** perched above, which provides a picture-postcard view of the marvellous beach. Our coastal path begins here just on the other side of a gate. 3 mins later, the little cove of **Psilos Amos** comes into view. A path leads to the little, fine, sandy beach (just about 30 m long) down below. We bear slightly right, however, and follow the extremely faded red waymarkers leading above the cove. The first waymarking post appears and, in the course of the walk, other such posts, unfortunately spaced very far apart, will provide an important aid to route finding.

Past Psilos Amos, a light-colored sand dune is traversed briefly. Past the dune, the very indistinct path leads along the right edge of a little valley notch. Passing through mastic thicket, rockrose and patches of juniper, you have to keep your eyes peeled for faded waymarkers; sometimes your search for a route may be aided by cairns. Rocky coastal cliffs, tumbling seawards, must be skirted around by heading inland. After that, take a short excursion through a dry stream bed to reach a little, stony beach, unfortunately, not especially suited for bathing, but where the continued route can be previewed:

Psilos Amos, Vai's little neighbouring cove.

further on, a **steep headland** blocks the way directly at the coast, to the right of it, a sweeping saddle can be spotted where we will be climbing up. Now returning again to the main trail, at first, head to a waymarking post to continue over an outcropping of rock, layered in plates, and then ascend, for a short stretch, steeply up to the next post. From there, bear slightly to the left, climbing up more or less cross-country, towards the **saddle (2)**. From the saddle, descend along zigzags onto a stony valley floor down below. Now an excursion through the stream bed (faded blue arrow) to the beach, **Megali Kefala (3)** is a must. As soon as the stream bed becomes extremely overgrown with *phrygana*, you can skirt around this area via a path to the right. Steep, rugged cliff faces encircle the fine, sandy cove which is a good 100 m in length; the water is crystal clear and, at the southern end, a couple of little caves provide some shade.

Returning again to the main trail, climb up from the stream bed towards the left and surmount the next coastal cliff. Far above, another post, to the right and next to a pointed crag, marks the spot where we will meet up with the ridgeline. At the outset, well-placed cairns lead, for a short stretch, up the



221



Olive cultivation in the valley of Maridati.

slope and then slightly to the left, crossing through a notch; finally reach the **ridgeline** up above. Here, a view opens up taking in a couple of islets lying offshore in the Bay of Grandes, as well as the Plaka Peninsula in the background.

Now at first heading directly along the broad ridgeline, continue the route. 100 m past the waymarker post, pass through a gate in a fence. The path soon leads about 20 to 25 m below the ridgeline on the side of the ridge facing inland. At the end of the ridge, another valley opens

up; descend now into this valley. The ideal course for the very steep descent is difficult to establish; the best thing to do is to keep on the diagonal, heading towards the valley mouth. Shortly before reaching the valley floor, we can get some orientation by spotting a waymarker post perched on top of a Boulder, measuring a metre high. From there, we could take a short excursion through the stream bed to yet another **bathing cove** (4). This one is not quite as attractive as Megali Kefala; however, keeping in mind the scrambling section we have just left behind, perhaps a stop for a dip is a worthwhile venture. The left side of the cove is flanked by a lovely, shimmering, reddish cliff face. Returning to the main trail, from the metal post, climb up to the left along a rocky secondary slope. The climb is steep for another 3 mins until the path veers slightly to the left. Continue following red dot waymarkers to cross over a dry stream bed and, along the other side of the slope, ascend steeply once again. Soon scramble to the right of a striking protruding rock through a breach in the cliff face. Waymarkers point the way through cushion plant scrubland to a **viewpoint**. To our feet, lies the Maridati Valley, with a grove of olive trees, above which, we can look over the Bay of Kouremenos and all the way to the flat-topped mountain of Kastri; also, the villages of Agathias and Palekastro come into sight for the first time.

The following short, but very steep, descent into the **Maridati Valley** (5) is more than meets the eye. During the descent, use a large taverna for orientation. To the left of the taverna, spot a holiday home with a flat roof and a gate in front of it. Climb down to this house and then follow a farm road leading directly past the house (if the house is occupied, please respect the owner's privacy); the road crosses over the valley and then merges at the Taverna Maridatis into an unpaved access road for the beach.

If you don't plan on another bathing break, turn right along the road and, a good 5 mins past the taverna, watch out for red dot waymarkers (the turn-off

is easy to miss). To the left, a narrow path leads, for the first metres, through a dense thicket and then, following power lines, climbs up a mountain ridge that serves as the southern border for the Maridati Valley. Along the ridge, leave a battered fence behind and, at a power pylon, about 100 m further on, cross over another wire fence. The path heads directly towards a couple of villas. 20 m before reaching the first one, the path veers to the left and then descends along a low ridge and finally merges into the access road to the fishing harbour on the northern end of **Kouremenos Beach** (6). From there, continue on along the seaside road, at first, concrete-paved, later, cobbled, and flanked by a promenade, which leads parallel to the beach. Salt cedars provide a little shade along the way, as well as inviting spots to take a break, possibly combined with a dip in the sea.

The promenade becomes a gravel trail. At a fork, bear left and, 5 mins later, shortly before reaching the flat-topped mountain of Kastri, cross over a bridge spanning the **Kalogeropotamos** (7). After that, skirt around a bungalow complex surrounded by a stone wall by walking along the side facing inland. Shortly past the access road for the bungalows, meet up with an intersecting gravel road. Turn left along the road and cross through a grove of olive trees until, 10 mins later, the road reaches the tarmac road to **Chiona Beach** (8). Turn left and, 200 m further on, meet up with the lovely beach, boasting inviting seafood tavernas; by turning right instead, reach the village square in **Palekastro** (9), after a half hour walk. The bus stop is opposite the church.

The fishing harbour at Kouremenos.





To a Minoan summit sanctum above the east coast

At a mere 255 m of altitude, Petsofas certainly doesn't count as one of Crete's highest mountains. Its completely open setting, however, makes it a perfect panoramic viewpoint taking in the eastern coast, broken up by coves, beaches and headlands, as well as the flat-topped mountain of Kastri. The Minoans maintained a sanctum at Petsofas' peak, but only a couple of ruined walls have withstood the ravages of time. Archaeologists discovered several terracotta figurines of weasels and tortoises; some of this collection is exhibited in the archaeological museum in Agios Nikolaos.

Starting point: the secondary road, Palekastro – Chiona Beach, 10 m. From the village centre of Palekastro, take the road towards Agathias. At the village limits of Agathias, bear left and, 500 m further on, reach the turn-off for a gravel trail, signed for Rousolakos/Petsofas. Parking possible at the side of the road (walking time from the bus stop for the church in Palekastro, 20 minutes).

Height difference: 250 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a short walk, at first along broad farm tracks and, afterwards, a moderately steep ascent along a good path. No shade! The junctions in the grove of olive trees are signed and/or waymarked with arrows.

Refreshment: nothing en route; tavernas in Palekastro and Chiona Beach.

Starting at the **secondary road (1)** from Palekastro to Chiona Beach, follow the gravel trail turning off to the right towards Rousolakos/Petsofas through an extensive grove of olive trees. In front of us, the elongated ridge of Petsofas slopes upwards and away. At a junction, a good 100 m further on, bear right (sign: »Peak Sanctuary«). At another junction, 150 m past the first, turn left and pass a house in front of which, a pretty little **miniature church (2)** is



224

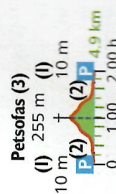


Chiona Beach with the flat-topped mountain, Kastri.

standing. At the fork immediately after, turn left to continue along the gravel trail through the olive plantation. 5 minutes later, another sign points to the right for the »Peak Sanctuary«.

The trail ascends easily and we can now take a look at our continued route as it climbs up over Petsofas' northern flank via an alpine path. Turn left once again and then meet up with a **goat pen**. Now pass through a gate into the pen and then exit the pen, 50 m further on, through another gate. The olive trees are now lying behind us. The alpine ascent path begins, traversing the mountain ridge; a red dot marks the trail head. At the same time, a marvelous view opens up of the towering flat-topped mountain, Kastri, to the north of Chiona Beach and, beyond it, of the wide, sweeping Bay of Kouremenos; in front of us, the flush islets of Nissi Grandes and Nissi Savoura are lying out to sea. Soon, the barren Plaka Peninsula makes an appearance.

Afterwards, the path veers to the right and, not quite 10 minutes later, we reach the column on the summit of **Petsofas (3)**, 255 m. A couple of metres below the summit, a square fragment of a foundation wall bears witness to the ancient sanctum once situated here; the shards of pottery scattered about are probably of a much more recent origin. From the summit, return along the approach route back to the **secondary road (1)**.



225

55 Through the Chochoiakies Gorge to Karoumes Beach

2.00 hrs



To a bathing cove only accessible on foot

Despite the good access road, Chochoiakies is in the process of becoming a ghost town; only a handful of houses are still inhabited and it appears to be only a matter of time until the kafention closes its doors. Just past the grove of olive trees behind the village, meet up with the entrance to a gorge. The trail through the impressive canyon leading to its mouth, opening wide to the sea, is neither very complicated nor very long.



Starting point: Chochoiakies, 90 m. The village is located on the secondary road between Paleokastro and Zakros; limited parking possible on the side of the road (if you are approaching by car, you could drive to the cemetery which has a large car park). A bus stop for the line Sitia - Paleokastro - Zakros is situated directly at the starting point: from Sitia, Mon, Thurs

and Fri, around 6.00 and 14.15; return from Zakros, 7.00 and 15.30; in Chochoiakies, the bus arrives about 15.45.
Height difference: 190 m.
Grade: The gorge trail is relatively easy to walk and is waymarked throughout with red arrows.
Refreshment: a coffee house in Chochoiakies.
From the village limits of **Chochoiakies (1)**, a narrow road, next to the bus stop shelter and a telephone box, leads into the settlement. 20 m further on, pass the little kafention located on the left-hand side of the road; don't blink because you might miss it. In Chochoiakies, too, the rural exodus has left its mark; several houses have been completely abandoned. At the village limits on the other side, you can spot a **cemetery chapel (2)**, rather on the outskirts of town, where the concrete trail ends, a good 5 minutes later. A couple of paces before reaching the chapel, keep left at the car park and then, along a gravel trail, pass a pavilion. A few metres further on, a direc-

226

tional arrow points to the right. Continue on through a grove of olive trees and, 5 minutes later, cross over a stream bed via a **concrete-reinforced ford**. About 15 m further on, turn left. Another good 100 m after that, you have to pay close attention: leave the farm road behind by turning left onto a path (red waymarker). Past a gate, about 3 minutes later, we have left the olive grove behind.

The path bears slightly left, heading towards the **gorge entrance (3)**, now impossible to miss. In the usually rather broad stream bed, you must, at this point, keep your balance while walking over smooth, round, black stones. Sections that are not so steep (at the most, one and a half metres in height) can either be skirted around or scrambled over with little problem, usually without the aid of your hands. From time to time, the waymarked trail has to squeeze between boulders.

About 50 minutes later, the gorge's walls begin to lose in height and the sea comes into view. To the right of the stream bed, a path leads through extensive patches of spiny rush growing at the gorge's mouth. A couple of paces finally brings us to two ancient Salt cedars at **Karoumes Beach (4)**. After a break beneath the shade of Salt cedars on the lovely beach enclosed by promontories and/or a break for a refreshing dip, return along the approach route back to **Chochoiakies (1)**.

Spiny rushes at Karoumes Beach.



Chochoiakies (1) Karoumes Beach (4) Chochoiakies (1)
90 m (2) 90 m
0 0.20 1.00 1.40 2.00 h
6.6 km



Along the E4 traversing a high plain above the eastern coast



Portrait of St. Michael, the dragon slayer, in Agios Georgios.

This stage of the long-distance trail runs mostly along a well-preserved *kalderimi* which, in the past, served as the connecting route between the villages of Zakros, Skalia and Ziros. The usually cobbled trail leads through a barren terrain of coastal cliffs, crossing the little high plateau of Mavros Kambos, while ascending to a chapel perched high above; the ruins of the abandoned Skalia are located even further up.

Starting point: Zakros, 208 m; parking possible near the village square. The approach runs from Sitia via Palekastro to Zakros; by bus, from Sitia, Mon, Thurs and Fri, around 6.00 and 14.15 (return from Zakros, around 7.00 and 15.30).

Height difference: 460 m.

Grade: not a difficult route along cobbled and gravel trails that are good to walk. Route-finding is easy; the stretch follows the E4 waymarkers.

Worth seeing: the museum in the lovely, renovated water mill is open from 10.30–13.00 and 17.00–21.00; (closed Mondays and Wednesdays).

Refreshment: in Zakros, numerous coffee houses and snack bars.

Leave the village square of **Zakros (1)** behind by taking the road towards Kato Zakros/Xerokambos. Not quite 100 m further on, at the café/bar Neromylos, turn right onto a broad stepped trail (sign: »E4/Water Mill Museum«). At a fork located at a fountain, you could pay a short visit (50 m) to the Water Mill Museum. Otherwise, keep bearing to the left through a narrow village passageway and soon meet up with a tarmac road. Turn left along the road and, 25 m further on, leave it behind by turning right onto a concrete-paved trail. 10 mins later, meet up with a huge cistern bearing crooked pipes on its roof. The E4 continues towards Skalia by turning left and ascending, but if you wish, you could first make a little excursion to the **Zakros source (2)**, 261 m.

A rock slab trail leads below the Alendis Christos chapel and then ends, 200 m further on, at the copious spring. The area around it has been redeveloped with EU funding. Returning to the main trail, continue the ascent towards Skalia and immediately meet up with a gate. Past



the gate, bear diagonally to the right and a gravel trail leads, after two bends, to a **water reservoir**. A bench has been placed in front of the reservoir from which you can enjoy a lovely view of Zakros. From the reservoir, a cobbled trail continues now, which will set the direction of the route for the next hour. The trail climbs, sometimes very steeply, through treeless cushion plant scrubland; from time to time, E4 posts mark the trail, but indeed, route-finding couldn't be simpler.

On the high plateau, **Mavros Kambos (3)**, 522 m, meet up with a signed junction: to the left, a sign points out the way to Mount Vigilia, but we turn right along the E4 to continue, now crossing over the plateau via a farm road. Not quite 10 minutes later, about 100 m past a gate, leave the farm road behind by turning left onto a path (E4 waymarkers) which soon reveals itself through its cobbles to be our mule track.

The trail leads along the left side of another small plain and then ascends to **Agios Georgios (4)**, 626 m. A memorial to the 40 resistance fighters who lost their lives in a battle against the Turks in the 18th century is located next

The high plateau Mavros Kambos along the E4.



4.00 hrs



Dead's Gorge I 57

Circular walk through a breathtaking gorge to the Minoan Palace of Zakros

»Dead's Gorge« counts as one of the most famous and most popular canyons in eastern Crete, accordingly, the path there is a well-trodden one. At the same time, the trail through this natural marvel is the last stage for the long-distance trail E4. The Minoans built a palace at the mouth of the gorge 3600 years ago and they interred their dead in caves somewhat further up the gorge, located on the rock faces, some up to 200 m above the floor. A puzzling question arises here: How in the world did they bring the sarcophagi to the caves so far above?

Starting point: the village square in Zakros, 208 m. If you approach by car, park at route point no. 2, where there is a little lay-by for three or four cars. Reach Zakros by car from Sitia via Palekastro; by bus from Sitia, Mon, Thurs and Fri around 6.00 and 14.15 (return from Zakros, around 7.00 and 15.30).
Height difference: 260 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: a well-marked path, relatively easy to walk, through the gorge; sometimes, you have to scramble over a couple of little boulders. The return route leads along roads that are completely lacking in shade. Route-finding is simple. Bring along your bathing gear!

Refreshment: coffee houses in Zakros; numerous tavernas in Kato Zakros; it is lovely to sit in the café/snack bar Annesia at the southern end of the line of restaurants.

Worth seeing: the Minoan Palace, open daily from 8.00–18.00; entrance fee, €3.

The ruins of the Minoan Palace grounds at the exit of Dead's Gorge.



The Agios Georgios Chapel.

to the chapel. A couple of strides away, the water for an enclosed spring gushes out of the rock face. On the rise above the chapel, a short excursion through the abandoned village of Skalia is worthwhile; the village is a victim of the ongoing rural exodus which has been taking place since the 1980s. While the E4 passes by the spring and then continues towards Ziros, we follow the road that begins at the chapel instead. At the fork 5 mins later, continue straight ahead, crossing over a col (5), 663 m. At the following fork, bear right, heading towards a rocky ridgeline. Before reaching the ridgeline, the trail veers towards the right while opening up lovely views of the **Mavros Kambos (3)** plain; we will now return to the plain by descending. Once arriving there, return along the already familiar mule track back to Zakros (1).



and countless caves, they create a magnificent setting.

striking **plane tree**, seemingly growing directly out of the rock face. Almost unnoticed, the Xe-popotamos Gorge (Walk 58) emerges from the left; keep heading straight ahead for a stretch, directly along the concrete watercourse and, shortly after, reach a little **rest area** (3) in the shade of more plane trees where a stone bench and a fountain (without water) are located.

where a stone bench and a fountain (without water) are located.

On your right-hand side, pass a pointed rock face that looks like *gorge*. The walls of the gorge

the steeple of a church tower and boasts two caves. The walls of the gorge now close in somewhat and, knowing that the Minoans buried their dead in the caves here more than 3500 years ago, they create a dramatic backdrop.

at a little water house. 10 minutes later, a waymarked path forks to the right to a car park on the upper southern edge of the gorge (on the return route, we will pass by there). The stream bed for the gorge has now become packed with sprawling patches of Chasteberry which, in early autumn, bears lilac-colored flowers, and well into the summer, the red flowering elder casts its spoil.



Burial niches in Dead's Gorge.



Along the trail at the upper entrance to the gorge.



Pass by yet another waterless **fountain (4)**. The walls of the gorge begin to open up once again and, not quite a quarter of an hour later, a wooden portal marks the entrance to Dead's Gorge for walkers who are approaching from the seaside; for us, this is the gorge's exit. A couple of minutes afterwards, meet up with a concrete-paved trail at a major **ford**. Before returning back to Zakros along the Old Road, turn left here and immediately reach the fenced-in, archaeological digs of the Palace of Zakros. A little later, at the Taverna Akrogiati, the concrete trail merges with the seaside promenade in **Kato Zakros (5)**.

If it strikes your fancy, after a pause for refreshment, a relaxing rest stop on the beach and/or a visit to the Minoan Palace, return back to the **ford** and, from there, ascend along a road, at first concrete-paved. But after passing Stellas Traditional Apartments and other minor holiday resort complexes, the road becomes a gravel trail. A good half an hour past the ford, meet up with a **pavilion (6)**, 143 m, provided with a bench, where you can, once again, enjoy a fantastic panoramic view looking down into Dead's Gorge.

Continuing along the Old Road, 25 minutes later, meet up with a car park on the main road Zakros – Kato Zakros (an alternative starting point for an exploratory walk into the gorge). Follow the main road for a good 5 minutes and then leave it behind again by turning right onto the now tarmac-surfaced Old Road (*Kali Strata*), which descends to the **junction (2)** already met during the approach. From there, return back again to **Zakros (1)**.

Beach café in Kato Zakros.



Fantastic circular walk with a short scramble over a steep spot

In contrast to the regular route through Dead's Gorge (Walk 57), where the return route leads along broad roads, the circular walk, starting at Kato Zakros, consistently follows paths that are sometimes rugged. A small drawback for the walker lacking sure-footedness: a steep spot, about 8 m high, must be negotiated; this is not, however, a serious obstacle for experienced walkers. An extra bonus: the route not only leads through Dead's Gorge, but also includes another canyon worth walking, the Xeropotamos Gorge; and, along the way between the two gorges, you can enjoy panoramic views of the mountainous countryside above the eastern coast.

Starting point: Kato Zakros, 1 m. The little settlement can be approached by car via a 9 km long access road; parking possible before reaching the village limits.

Height difference: 245 m in both ascent and descent.

Grade: along a sometimes rugged path which, at first, leads over karst terrain; in the Xeropotamos Gorge, metal rungs provide aid in climbing down a sheer drop. Dead's Gorge is accessed via a relatively pleasant path. The circular walk is way-marked throughout with red dots and the most important junctions are signed. The first good one and a half hours are completely lacking in shade.

Refreshment: nothing en route; in Kato Zakros, numerous tavernas and the café/snack bar Amnesia at the southern end of the line of restaurants.



At the exit, shortly before Kato Zakros.

At the Taverna Akrogiati in **Kato Zakros (1)**, a concrete road begins, heading towards the interior, and immediately reaches a fork: to the right, you could continue on to the Pelekita Cave, but we turn to the left (this direction is signed with, amongst others, »Archaeological Site«, as well as various adverts for apartment houses). 100 m further on, pass by the fenced-in grounds for the archaeological digs, as well as the ticket booth for the Minoan Palace of Zakros. At the junction past the fenced-in area, bear left towards the Gorge and, 150 m further on, meet up with an information board. At this point, aside from our circular walk, another circular walk begins, which leads to the Pelekita Cave (Walk 59). Thus, we leave the concrete trail behind by

turning right and climbing up the rocky embankment. Not much later, pass through the first gate. At the outset, the path seems to only exist here in principle, but indeed, the closely-spaced, sometimes somewhat faded red dots, make route-finding relatively simple. The route ascends through a karst terrain, covered in cushion plant scrubland, to reach a viewpoint up above, which offers an impressive view into Dead's Gorge. At a chain-link fence, walk a few paces to the left and find a gate, which allows you to pass through. While gaining height, you can also enjoy excellent views of the Bay of Zakros. About 20 minutes past the information board, on a high plateau, 106 m, reach a signed junction: to the right, you could ascend to Traostalos, but we turn left instead, heading towards Azokeramos. The path leads a certain distance away from, and parallel to, the chasm marking Dead's Gorge. Afterwards, slightly ascending along the left edge of a mountain ridge, climb up to a flat-backed **saddle (2)**, 218 m. From there, you can spot the white houses of Zakros, towered over by the striking summit of Vigilia, 712 m. The path bears slightly to the right, heading towards the rotating blades of the wind turbines in the distance.

Cross over yet another pasture fence and, on the left-hand side, a little secondary branch of Dead's Gorge opens up. A good 10 mins later, meet up again with yet another signed junction. Leave the path heading towards Azokeramos behind by turning left (sign: »Dead's Gorge«). After a short descent, cross over the gravel bed of the secondary branch and pass through yet another gate. On the other side of the gate, the path now leads towards Zakros and its sprawling groves of olive trees. Pass another fence and then bear right: a mule track descends in tight bends into the gorge of the **Xeropotamos (3)**, 147 m, down below. In the stream bed, overgrown in brush wood and oleander, turn left. The gorge is relatively easy to walk at the be-



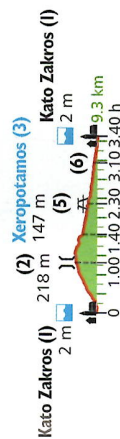
In Dead's Gorge.

ginning; from time to time, you must scramble over small boulders. The trail continues to be well-marked with red markings and leads along smooth, polished boulders between the gorge's towering walls, up to 100 m in height.

A **critical point** can be skirted around to the right along the upper edge, then metal rungs provide help in scrambling down a steep spot of about 8 m in height. The trickiest stretch is now behind us. Once again, you must scramble over a couple of smooth, polished boulders until the Xeropotamos finally merges into **Dead's Gorge (4)** at some noble plane trees. The transition from one gorge into the other is almost seamless. Meet up with a narrow, concrete water channel and follow this while bearing slightly left to reach a little

rest area (5), 92 m, with a stone bench and a fountain (without water). Now continue along a mostly well-trodden path running next to the concrete watercourse. The watercourse then ends at a little water house. The stream bed is now packed with sprawling patches of Chasteberry. Pass another dried-up **fountain (6)**. The walls of the gorge begin to open up again and, not quite 15 mins later, a wooden portal marks the entrance for walkers who are approaching from the seaside; for us, this is the **gorge exit**. A couple of minutes later, reach a

concrete-paved trail at a major ford. Pick up the trail and, bearing left, return to the Minoan Palace and, a little later, the seaside promenade in **Kato Zakros (1)**.





On top of a panoramic mountain above Zakros Bay

Rugged paths through typical cushion plant scrubland, spectacular panoramic views of the coast from a summit viewpoint and, last but not least, one of Crete's most impressive caves, combine to accent this rewarding circular walk. Exploration of the Pelekita Cave, with a length of more than 300 m, and its incredible tufa formations, is reserved for experienced spelunkers with appropriate equipment. But in any case, you can descend for a couple of metres down into the wide maw of the cave.

Starting point: Kato Zakros, 1 m. The little settlement can be approached by car via a 9 km long access road; parking possible before reaching the village limits.

Height difference: a good 400 m.

Grade: a sometimes strenuous circular walk through karst terrain; at the outset, with steep ascents and a descent through rugged boulder fields. The circular walk is waymarked throughout, however, completely lacks in shade (except in the cave). To explore the cave, you will need a strong torch or a head torch; if you are not a competent caver, however, don't overestimate your capabilities; restrict your visit to the area around the cave's entrance.

Refreshment: in Kato Zakros, numerous

ous tavernas and the café/snack bar Amnesia at the southern end of the line of restaurants.

Short walk: if you only want to visit the Pelekita Cave, turn right from the Taverna Akrogliali and follow the concrete-paved trail to exit the village. Past the boat landing and two little pebble beaches, pass through a gate and pick up a coastal path, at first rugged but, as you proceed, good to walk. In easy up-and-down walking continue on above the coast. The last 7 or 8 minutes of ascent to the cave is somewhat steeper. When compared to the rugged ascent and descent of the complete circular walk, this route is more like a ramble. Walking times there and back, not quite 1.30 hrs.

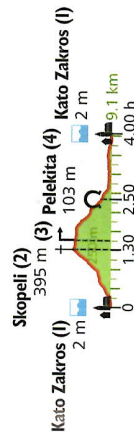
The circular walk begins at the crescent-shaped bay of Kato Zakros.



The walk begins in **Kato Zakros (1)**, on the seaside promenade in front of the Taverna Akrogliali. Just as in Walk 58, do not turn right here towards Pelekita Cave (see Short walk), instead, turn left onto the narrow, concrete-paved street, pass the fenced-in grounds of the Minoan Palace and, shortly before reaching the entrance to Dead's Gorge, meet up with an information board. Here, turn right along the red-waymarked path to climb up the embankment and, shortly afterwards, cross through a gate. At first, the path leads very close to the upper rim of Dead's Gorge and, 10 m to the left of our waymarked trail, presents a spectacular view into the canyon. Crossing through another gate, about 20 minutes past the information board, reach a signed junction at the top of a **high plain**, 106 m; turn right here towards Traostalos. The path crosses the entire plain towards a rugged mountain ridge and passes a solitary olive tree, standing forsaken in the middle of the plain. Shortly after, cross over a narrow, dry stream bed and, some minutes after that, plod up a steep karst notch. After negotiating this stretch, the path heads towards a mighty castle-like ring of rocks; skirt around this on the left-hand side.

Now continue for a couple of minutes over a high terrain and, soon afterwards, ascend steeper in the direction of a **crag**; skirt around this on the right-hand side. Up above, the rocky ridgeline of Lakomata begins to take shape with two humpbacked secondary peaks; the one to the right is called **Skopeli (2)**, 395 m. 10 minutes later, reach the column at the summit, right next to a miniature church. From a height of almost 400 m, enjoy a splendid panoramic view of the bay and the beach at Kato Zakros, as well as the surrounding coastal cliffs.

After the pause at the summit, continue by following the way-markers northwards, crossing a broad, treeless, high terrain, covered only in *phrygana*, while heading towards Traostalos. In the middle of the





Contemplative coastal route in an attractive beach district

Lovely beaches are hard to hide. Nevertheless, the faceless, scattered settlement of Xerokambos provides a haven for individualists seeking peace and quiet, and so shall it remain in the years to come as, despite the new tarmac road, the »arid plain« in Crete's extreme southeast is simply too far off the beaten track. A well-marked trail leads through humble cushion plant scrub-land along the rocky coast.

Starting point: Kato Zakros, 1 m. The little settlement can be approached by car via a 9 km long access road; parking possible before reaching the village limits.

Height difference: about 175 m.

Grade: the first 15 mins leads over sharp, rugged karst rock; in the further course of the route, the waymarked trail is relatively good to walk. Short ascents and descents through little ravines de-

mand some sure-footedness. No shade; in summer, usually too hot to attempt.

Refreshment: numerous restaurants in Kato Zakros; in Xerokambos, the tavernas Creta Sun and Kostas on the main road through the village.

Alternative: if you prefer not to take refreshment in Xerokambos, turn around again at Katsounaki Beach, walking time is thereby shortened by an hour.

From the information pavilion at the village limits of **Kato Zakros (1)**, walk back 50 m along the approach route and then cross over pebbles to the southern end of the beach. A red-waymarked coastal path begins there. Immediately, you have to ascend along a karst gully, perhaps needing the use of your hands to scramble up. The trail, rugged at the outset, leads along the Fagromouro Cape, below the rocky coastal cliffs, while crossing over a plateau covered in *phrygana*, only interrupted by a dry stream bed cutting through it. Past the cape, Xerokambos appears in the distance, as well as the two offshore Kavali Islets. Not quite an hour later, in a rocky cove, the

Sheer coastal cliffs at Rouso Spasma.

plain, meet up with a signed junction at a waist-high boulder; this is the **turn-off to Traostalos (3)**, 376 m. Turn right in the direction of Pelekita and, at first, keep to the same height to continue. 10 minutes later, walk for a short way along a rust-coloured (stone-free!) dirt path; shortly afterwards, the descent begins, heading for the eastern coast.

Now cross over a boulder field. Past a lynchet, the sometimes steep descent continues through the boulders until, after crossing through another two levels of terraces, overgrown with cushion plant scrubland, a well-trodden coastal path appears. Before meeting up with this path, bear slightly to the left and continue following the red waymarkers directly to the entrance of the **Pelekita Cave (4)**, 103 m. The once mighty fig tree in front of the entrance has now passed on to the great unknown, but perhaps one of the new saplings can carry on. Lit by daylight, a zigzag path climbs down about 30 m into the cave; there, archaeologists have left their mark.

From the cave, now follow the well-laid coastal path southwards. For the first minutes, the path descends relatively steeply along the foot of mighty rock faces. Then continue in easy up-and-down walking at about a good 30 m above sea level while passing huge boulders. About one hour past the cave, cross over the little gorge of the **Kakos Potamos (5)**, 37 m. Before reaching the village limits of **Kato Zakros (1)**, pass through a gate, now following a broad trail, and then pass two little pebble beach coves and the boat landing to return back to the seaside promenade.

Skopeli peak with the miniature chapel.



sea cave **Lidhospilia (2)** catches the eye – the cave seems to penetrate into the steep coastline like a tunnel.

The trail ascends for a short time, but then drops down again into a gorge-like notch and continues a good 40 m over the waterline, traversing above another cove. Red waymarkers point out a turn-off to the right, heading towards Ambelies, but we continue on along our path. The path soon passes to the left and below a striking breach in the rock face. The valley of the **Kalo Potami (3)** opens up in front of us; the river has cut a broad trench on its way to the sea. At first, the path leads for a short stretch towards the



interior, but then it descends steeply into the valley and finally crosses over the dry stream bed in the broad mouth of the valley situated at sea level.

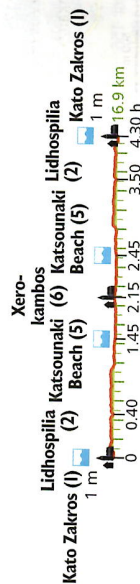
Crossing a stony, terraced beach, meet up with **Rouso Spasma (4)**. The little pebble cove catches the eye with its steep, beige to ochre-coloured escarpment. At the southern edge, there is a sheer drop at a rocky heap of fallen rock that towers



You still have plenty of room on the beaches at Xerokambos.

out of the sea; here, you could climb down to the pebble beach – but only if you are an experienced rock climber.

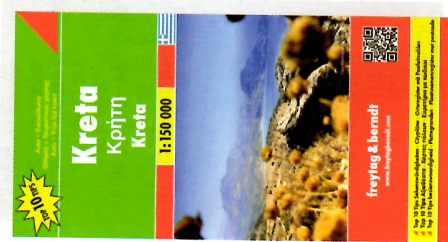
15 mins later, meet up with a fence; a gate allows us entrance onto **Katsounaki Beach (5)**. This is the northernmost beach at Xerokambos and, with its fine, powdery sand, it is one of the very best. Please be sure to pay close attention when walking over the dunes – in the autumn, hundreds of white sea daffodils are flowering in this fragile ecosystem (photo on p. 33). From the eastern end of Katsounaki Beach, follow the trail along the now level coastline to a crescent-shaped pebble beach, flanked with Salt cedars, and then to another sandy beach. Further on, in the **shallow lagoon**, flocks of migrating birds, amongst which are Herons and flamingos, stop over for a rest from their journeys. At the end of the lagoon's beach, an unpaved road begins at a cubical cottage; the road merges, 5 mins later, into the village street of **Xerokambos (6)**. Bearing to the left, another 5 mins later, meet up with the Taverna Creta Sun and, just a little later, the Taverna Kostas. If you haven't arranged to be picked up here or if you do not wish to take an (expensive) taxi ride back, return along the approach route back to **Kato Zakros (1)**.



Index

- A** Achenas 92
Aftendis Stavromenos 208
Agathias 167, 224
Agerimiotis 113
Agia Ariadni 197
Agia Ekaterini 139
Agia Galini 44, 177
Agia Irini 103, 112, 115
Agia Irini Gorge 111, 116
Agia Paraskevi 75, 163
Agia Roumeli 46, 88, 104, 117, 120, 125
Agia Sofia 67
Agii Pente Parthenes 163
Agiofarango 185
Agios Antonios (Agiofarango) 186
Agios Antonios (Doulia) 83
Agios Antonios (Katsomata-dos) 69
Agios Antonios (Moni Koudouma) 190
Agios Antonios (Sougia) 107
Agios Athanasios 70
Agios Dimitrios 212
Agios Georgios (Stavros) 76
Agios Georgios (Zakros) 229
Agios Ioannis (Doulia) 83
Agios Ioannis Gionis 56
Agios Ioannis (Kapetaniana) 190
Agios Ioannis (Krios Beach) 97
Agios Ioannis (Rouwas Gorge) 171
Agios Ioannis (village) 122, 125
Agios Konstantinos 63, 198
Agios Nikolaos 40, 87
Agios Pavlos (Agia Roumeli) 122, 125
Agios Pavlos (Rodopou) 58
Agios Vasiliou 61
Aikrigianis 72
Akrotiri 79
Ammoudi 156
Analipsi 166
- B** Babos, taverna 55
Bear Cave 79
- C** Café Petros 188
Chania 37
Chapel of the Twelve Apostles 148
Chiona Beach 223
Chochoiakies 226
Chonios Gorge 226
Chonios Gorge 190
Chora Stakion 45
Chora Stakion (Hora Stakion) 120, 125, 127, 131, 136, 148
Christos 88, 119
Communal Park Koutsouras 211
- D** Damnoni 152
Damnoni Beach 154
Dasaki Farangi 211
Dead's Gorge 231, 235
Delliana 74
Dikri Mountains 23
Domata 104
Doulia 82
Drapanos 82
- E** E4 long-distance trail 19
Elafonisi 97
Eligias Gorge 121
- F** Fagromouro Cape 241
- G** Geyra, taverna 156
Gingilos 90
Gourmesopolis 186
Gramvousa 54
- H** Hapimag 154
Havga Canyon 198
Heraklion (Iraklion) 39
Hotel Plakias Bay 152
- I** Ida 164
Ida Mountains 22
Ierapetra 43
Ilingas Beach 128
Ilingas Gorge 138
Imbros 144
Imbros Gorge 144
Iraklion (Heraklion) 39
- K** Kalo Mouri, Cape 152
Kakos Potamos 240
Kalamaki 43, 179
Kali Limenes 185
Kallergi hut 20, 94
Kalogeropoulos 223
Kalo Potami 242
Kalypso Cretan Village 153
Kamaries 168
Kamaries Cave 168
Kambia 139
Kandouni 100
Kapetaniana 192
Kapsaniana 68
Karfi 195
Karoumes Beach 226
Kato Chorio 208
Kato Milia 72
Kato Moni Preveli 155
Kato Samaria 88
Kato Zakros 42, 234, 235, 238, 241
Katsomata 66
Katsounaki Beach 243
- L** Lappa 159
Lassithi 41, 195, 198
Latsiana 69
Lefka Ori 22, 90
Lentias 43, 187
Lithopilia 242
- M** Makrigialos 213
Malla 40
Mandra Kalamafka 169
Mardati 222
Marmara Beach 123, 132
Matala 43, 180, 182
Mavros Kambos 228
Megali Keifala 221
Megaloportamos 155
Melindaou 94
Meliada, taverna 62
Nero tis Perdikas 88, 119
- N** Nafplio 203
Neratzias Gorge 106
Nissanos 36
Nissanos 192
Nissanos Ammos 180
Nissanos Pigos 178
Nissanos 167
Nissanos 146
Nissanos 179
Nissanos Beach 223
Nissanos 110
Nissanos Keras 194
Nissanos 211
Nissanos Beach 97
Nissanos 200
Nissanos Gorge 200
Nissanos restaurant 196
- O** Oia 164
Oia Mountains 22
Oia 43
Oia Beach 128
Oia Gorge 138
Oia 144
Oia Gorge 144
Oia (Heraklion) 39
- P** Pano Mouri, Cape 152
Pano Potamos 240
Palamaki 43, 179
Pali Limenes 185
Pallergi hut 20, 94
Palogeropoulos 223
Palo Potami 242
Palypso Cretan Village 153
Pamaries 168
Pamaries Cave 168
Pambia 139
Pandouni 100
Papetaniana 192
Papsaniana 68
Pari 195
Parioumes Beach 226
Pato Chorio 208
Pato Milia 72
Pato Moni Preveli 155
Pato Samaria 88
Pato Zakros 42, 234, 235, 238, 241
Patsomata 66
Patsounaki Beach 243
- R** Rappa 159
Rassithi 41, 195, 198
Ratsiana 69
Rafka Ori 22, 90
Rentas 43, 187
Rithopilia 242
- S** Sappa 159
Sassithi 41, 195, 198
Satsiana 69
Sefka Ori 22, 90
Sentas 43, 187
Sithopilia 242
- T** Tappa 159
Tassithi 41, 195, 198
Tatsiana 69
Tefka Ori 22, 90
Tentas 43, 187
Tithopilia 242
- V** Vappa 159
Vassithi 41, 195, 198
Vatsiana 69
Vefka Ori 22, 90
Ventas 43, 187
Vithopilia 242
- W** Wappa 159
Wassithi 41, 195, 198
Watsiana 69
Wefka Ori 22, 90
Wentas 43, 187
Withopilia 242
- X** Xappa 159
Xassithi 41, 195, 198
Xatsiana 69
Xefka Ori 22, 90
Xentas 43, 187
Xithopilia 242
- Y** Yappa 159
Yassithi 41, 195, 198
Yatsiana 69
Yefka Ori 22, 90
Yentas 43, 187
Yithopilia 242
- Z** Zappa 159
Zassithi 41, 195, 198
Zatsiana 69
Zefka Ori 22, 90
Zentas 43, 187
Zithopilia 242

- K** Kavousi 203
Keratzias Gorge 106
Kissamos 36
Kotinas 192
Kokkinos Ammos 180
Kokkinos Pigos 178
Kotila 167
Komitades 146
Kommos 179
Kourmenos Beach 223
Koustogiraki 110
Koutsouraki Keras 194
Koutsouras 211
Krios Beach 97
Kritsa 200
Kritsa Gorge 200
Kronio, restaurant 196
- L** Lappa 159
Lassithi 41, 195, 198
Latsiana 69
Lefka Ori 22, 90
Lentias 43, 187
Lithopilia 242
- M** Makrigialos 213
Malla 40
Mandra Kalamafka 169
Mardati 222
Marmara Beach 123, 132
Matala 43, 180, 182
Mavros Kambos 228
Megali Keifala 221
Megaloportamos 155
Melindaou 94
Meliada, taverna 62
Nero tis Perdikas 88, 119
- N** Nafplio 203
Neratzias Gorge 106
Nissanos 36
Nissanos 192
Nissanos Ammos 180
Nissanos Pigos 178
Nissanos 167
Nissanos 146
Nissanos 179
Nissanos Beach 223
Nissanos 110
Nissanos Keras 194
Nissanos 211
Nissanos Beach 97
Nissanos 200
Nissanos Gorge 200
Nissanos restaurant 196
- O** Oia 164
Oia Mountains 22
Oia 43
Oia Beach 128
Oia Gorge 138
Oia 144
Oia Gorge 144
Oia (Heraklion) 39
- P** Pano Mouri, Cape 152
Pano Potamos 240
Palamaki 43, 179
Pali Limenes 185
Pallergi hut 20, 94
Palogeropoulos 223
Palo Potami 242
Palypso Cretan Village 153
Pamaries 168
Pamaries Cave 168
Pambia 139
Pandouni 100
Papetaniana 192
Papsaniana 68
Pari 195
Parioumes Beach 226
Pato Chorio 208
Pato Milia 72
Pato Moni Preveli 155
Pato Samaria 88
Pato Zakros 42, 234, 235, 238, 241
Patsomata 66
Patsounaki Beach 243
- R** Rappa 159
Rassithi 41, 195, 198
Ratsiana 69
Rafka Ori 22, 90
Rentas 43, 187
Rithopilia 242
- S** Sappa 159
Sassithi 41, 195, 198
Satsiana 69
Sefka Ori 22, 90
Sentas 43, 187
Sithopilia 242
- T** Tappa 159
Tassithi 41, 195, 198
Tatsiana 69
Tefka Ori 22, 90
Tentas 43, 187
Tithopilia 242
- V** Vappa 159
Vassithi 41, 195, 198
Vatsiana 69
Vefka Ori 22, 90
Ventas 43, 187
Vithopilia 242
- W** Wappa 159
Wassithi 41, 195, 198
Watsiana 69
Wefka Ori 22, 90
Wentas 43, 187
Withopilia 242
- X** Xappa 159
Xassithi 41, 195, 198
Xatsiana 69
Xefka Ori 22, 90
Xentas 43, 187
Xithopilia 242
- Y** Yappa 159
Yassithi 41, 195, 198
Yatsiana 69
Yefka Ori 22, 90
Yentas 43, 187
Yithopilia 242
- Z** Zappa 159
Zassithi 41, 195, 198
Zatsiana 69
Zefka Ori 22, 90
Zentas 43, 187
Zithopilia 242



For the approach to the walking routes described here, we recommend the road and tourist map

Kreta (Crete)

with a scale of 1:150,000

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Neroutsiko 87
 Nida high plateau 164, 166
 Nissimos Plateau 197
 Nopigia 60
O
 Oasis, snack bar 112
 Old Mill 150
 Omalos 84, 90, 94
 Orno Mountains 203
P
 Palea Agia Roumeli 88, 119
 Palekastro 42, 219
 Paleochora 47
 Paleochora (Palaochora)
 97, 99
 Panagia Kera (Korfinas) 193
 Panagia Kera (Kritsa) 200
 Paximadia Islands 183
 Pefki 213
 Pefki Gorge 213
 Pelekta Cave 238
 Perdikionero 170
 Perivolakia 216
 Perivolakia Gorge 217
 Petrakis Beach 188
 Petsotas 224
 Pikiassos 106
 Piso Moni Preveli 155
 Pitsidia 43, 177
 Plakias 44, 149, 152
 Polifimos Cave 108
 Polyrinia 63
 Porta 96
 Porofarango, taverna 144
 Posidonio, taverna 144
 Potamida 66
 Preveli Beach 155
 Prinos hut 175
 Pros Pente Parthenon 161
 Psiloritis 164
 Psiloritis massif 22, 168, 175
 Psilos Amos 220
R
 Ravdoucha 60
 Red Beach 180
 Rethimnon 38
 Riza Sikias 87
 Rodopos 56
 Rodopou 56, 60
 Rouso Spasma 242
 Rouwas Gorge 171
S
 Saint Paul, taverna 122
 Samaria 88
 Samaria Gorge 84, 117
 Samaria National Park 19,
 84, 117
 Seloudha 126
 Stakiano Gorge 147
 Sideriportes 88, 119
 Sidheris, cape 62
 Sirikari 63
 Skopeli 239
 Sougia 47, 90, 99, 102, 104,
 108, 114
 Stavros 76
 Sweet Water Beach 128, 140
T
 Tapes 200
 Thripti 208
 Thripti Mountains 203, 208
 Tigani Balos 54
 Timos Stavros 129, 140,
 164
 Topoliano Gorge 66
 Trachoulas Beach 187
 Traostalos 240
 Tripti, cape 104
 Tripti Gorge 104
 Tsichlana Gorge 63
 Tsivaras 83
 Tsourouniana, 73
 Tzermiadon 195
V
 Vai 219
 Varnos 82
 Vardires 76
 Votomos Lake 171
 Vouklasi 107
 Vrachos, taverna 182
 Vrissi 88
W
 White Mountains 22, 90, 94
 White River Cottages 213
X
 Xepitiras 91
 Xerokambos 241
 Xeropotamos 236
 Xeropotamos Gorge 235
 Xiro Chorio 162
 Xirotripa 116
 Xyloskalo 84, 90, 94
Z
 Zakros 228, 231
 Zakros source 228

Cover photo:
Bay of Matala.

Frontispiece (page 1):

The Psiloritis massif at the end of the melt water period in June.

All 187 photos are by the author.

Cartography:

61 small walking maps with a scale of 1:50,000 and 1:75,000

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as well as two overview maps with a scale of 1:700,000 and

an overview map with a scale of 1:2,000,000

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The descriptions of all of the walks given in this guide are

conscientiously made according to the best knowledge of the author.

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We heartily welcome any suggestions for amendment to this walking guide!

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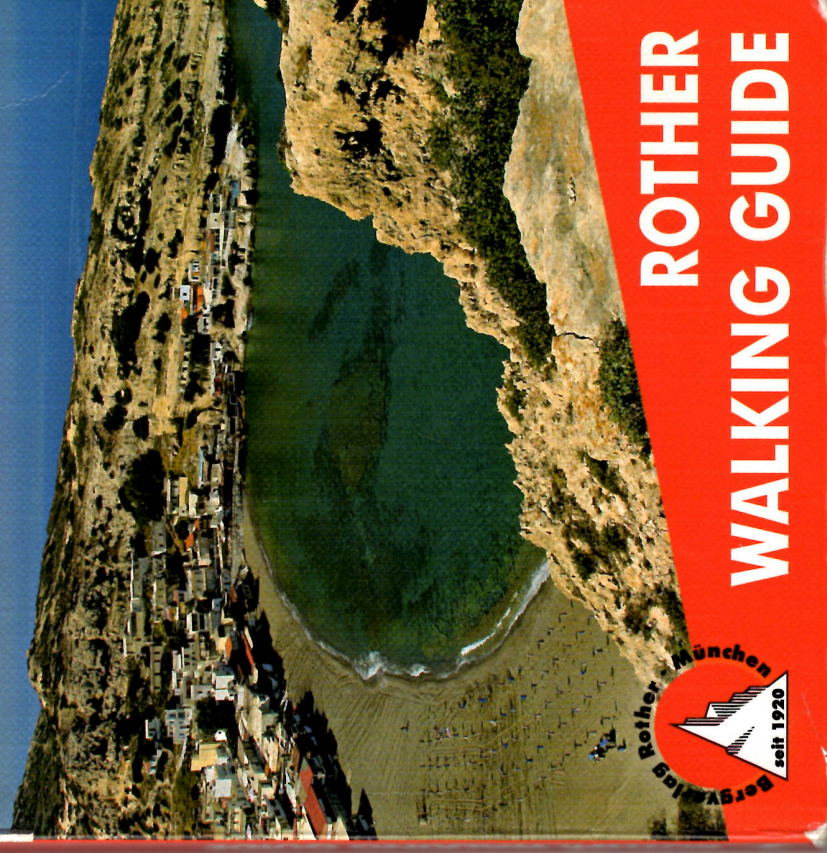
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