

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**Excursion to Vreiko-Cave / Orno-/Thriptis-Mountain (South Crete)**
Ant genus (*Messor ssp.*) and White-lipped snail (*Cepaea ssp.*)

The cave is located in the spur of the *Orno-/ Thriptis* Mountain range near the village *Pefkis* [Πεύκοι] in the southern of Crete. Therefore you take the road on the south coast from *Ierapetra* [Ιεράπετρα] towards east (direction *Siteias* [Σητείας]) for approx. 12 miles through *Koutsouras* [Κουτσουρας] and *Analipsi* [Αναληψις]. Here take a left at the village exit towards the hills and *Pefkis* (about 4 miles). Approximately 0.6 miles before the village *Pefki* is right a small asphalt runway, take this (also approx. 0.6 miles) uphill until a lock (turning circle).

From here it goes only "by foot". Follow a "trail", first straight ahead (200 m) and then left of the hillside (approx. 400 m) to the cave. The cave entrance is indeed "spacious", but still easy to miss; it is hidden below the crown of a fig tree growing out of the cave. A wire fence secures the vertical access (for protection against crashes of goats and sheep); it is to be opened and closed with wire loops (please don't miss to close again!). Although a staircase with a handrail facilitates the vertical access, the cave is not developed for tourists (in the traditional sense). Inside it is not easy to walk because of soil debris, cracks and very narrow aisles of cave (with very steep "channels") complicate a large-scale exploring, which should not be done without sufficient experience and equipment. A safe visit should therefore restrict itself to the first main hall of the cave, which is below the access on the 1st level. Also it is worth seeing and impressive and at any time the worth. For "inexperienced cave visitors" deeper inspections (from the main hall) should end at the barrier which border the main hall (see figures) for security reasons!

Because the cave is still not archaeologically examined, unfortunately nothing is known about a possible "use" in prehistoric time. Also speleology (speleology = scientific study of caves) this Karst cave is yet not sufficiently been explored and mapped so, currently no further data is available.



The entrance to the Vreiko cave (via a wooden ladder) from outside (**left**) and inside (**right**).



Pictures from the main hall of the cave (centre image) and the barrier towards further levels (left and right images).

Photos: H. Eikamp (2004)



Ant genus (*Messor ssp.*) from the family Myrmicinae is often found on Crete. The extreme difference in size between the “workers” attracts attention within this dark brown to black coloured species; besides small in stature with also small heads there are real big ones with big heads (see picture). They live in underground, far extensive nests. In addition to animal prey they collect especially plant seeds, they take into the nest and sort by flora and distribute various nest chambers. The seeds are later freed from the seed shells; the chaff is removed from the nest and deposited on special waste places. The seeds are chewed by the workers and mixed with saliva; the amylum is gradually transformed into sugar. This creates the so-called "Ant bread", the main food source of the Ant's and also feed of the larvae.



The presence of housing gastropods primarily from the family of “typical snail” (Helicidae), is masses in patches on Crete. Most common species are “White-lipped snails” (*Cepaea ssp.*) and “Stone snail” (*Chilotrema ssp.*). All “shell snails” live exclusively from rotten organic material and attack rarely live plants. Zoological they among to Gastropoda s and owe this name due to the fact that they creep "on the belly". However this is a fallacy. They do not glide above ground and plants on the belly but rather with a broad creep-sole also able to clutch on the ground. Worldwide there are over 100,000 snail species, with and without House, in the water in the mud or country alive.

Photos: U. Kluge (2004)

