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On the trail of the pirates in Plakias: A hike on Crete's South coast

An article from our member *Maria Eleftheria*, Agios Nektarios / South Crete.



About 18 miles from *Rethymno*, at the end of the *Kotsifou Canyon*, flows the creek *Kotsifos* in the middle of the tranquil seaside resort *Plakias* in the Libyan Sea. The village Plakias is embedded in a magnificent landscape (see fig. left) and has even today some decidedly paradisiacal with its long sandy beach (see fig. right).



It is surprising and makes glad that there are only a few larger hotels. In the small port (see fig. left) it is still placid and idyllic although the former fishing village that consists, until some decades ago only of a handful of houses, of course has equipped for tourism since in the sixties the first hippies discovered Plakias and made it known. "Backpackers" can still find a cheap accommodation in the youth hostel (see fig. right) (see: [<http://www.yhplakias.com/home/index.php?lang=en>]).



One reason for the relatively low tourist development of the place is certainly the North wind which can be quite refreshing and welcome in the summer, then again is able to blow often more than violently by accelerating won in the Canyon.

These are the days where even in high season the beach is almost deserted and even the obstinate run away at some time, because the fine sand painful grinds the skin (see fig left).



But fortunately Plakias has nearby attractions that pleasant bypass such "beach failures". In addition to visiting the Preveli Monastery located near Plakias (therefore see our leaflet [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/055-04E.pdf]), or a hike through the Kotsifou-Canyon itself, there is a route along the coast which is fairly unknown and which I like to describe to you. You should in any case be sure-footed and free from giddiness, and take a good flashlight with you, when you are in the East of Bay on your way to the imposing, steep rock face, which is also used for exercises in the free climbing (see fig above right). Near the end of the path is the entrance to a cave (see fig. left), whose interior walls reflect the incident light with a bluish-green, fascinating gleam, what is probably based on the composition of the rock. Existing wall remains indicate that this place was a valued retreat in earlier times. Unfortunately very much crap is around here. From here, continue along the narrow path leading along the coast (see fig. right).



If you hope to get to a secluded beach, you will be disappointed: This small hike, for which you should quote a good hour, is to show you the rugged dismissive rocky coast and how people took advantage of these natural resources in the past.

After already 300 meters rear two powerful rocks up from the sea, where the remains of a former fortress raise (see fig. left). Relating to this building can be found unfortunately only poor and sometimes contradictory information, which by the way has no (more) connection to the country, as well as to the actions of the pirates of Plakias. The entire fjord is well manageable from this point. Only a few hundred meters further you get to an opening in the mountain (see fig. right).



The flashlight is needed for exploring the approximately 2 meters wide, but only about 1.60 metre high tunnel. I have lighted the rock walls and did not discover a single blast; this passage was therefore worked by hand out of the mountain.

The tunnel ends after about 60 meters and let you back out to the daylight again. You find yourself now on a rock shelter, lots of metres above the waters. A cleft rear steeply up behind you, forward is the view over to Plakias and the Kotsifou-Canyon (see fig left and our leaflet No. 056-04 about the Kotsifou-Canyon at [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/056-04E.pdf]). On your left is a second passage which leads you forward (see fig. right).



This shaft ends after about fifteen meters abruptly on a steep slope and releases the view of another part of the fortress (see fig. left next page). Whether this has been once the anchorage of pirates and the entrance of the country side to their hideout? Who knows?

Crete in its turbulent history was repeated venue and springboard of pirates. Protected and easily accessible fjords, especially in the North and East of the island, offered pirates as well as conquerors at sea, always secure anchorages and hiding places. The bay of Plakias offers this possibility and is therefore one of many on the island. Another pirate's cove for example is at Balos (Gramvousa) in the North-West of Crete; and the today being under nature conservation Palm Beach of Vai, on the East coast of the island, shall be owe to Arab pirates according to legend, who camped there, eat brought dates, spat the cores in the sand, and so established the Caribbean atmosphere of the place.



In present times at this great strands of this wonderful island reminds hardly something at these bygone times. But every rock and each bay has its very own exciting story to tell. These are the treasures we can find on Crete.

Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling

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