



**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**  
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

**Φαράγγι Κοτσυφού**  
**Kotsifou Canyon**

## Excursion to the Kotsifou-Canyon / South Crete

### Fig tree (*Ficus carica*) / Kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*)

With reference to our leaflet No. 055-05/E – “Excursion to the Kourtaliotiko-Gorge and Monastery Preveli” is the excursion to the also drive through possible *Kotsifou-Canyon* a rewarding experience. Starting from *Preveli* you bypasses the Kouroupa-Massif (984 m) westwards to *Plakias*. Close to *Plakias* turn northwards direction *Mirthios*. A few miles after the village you hit a junction where left is the way to *Frangokastello* and right to *Kanevos/Agios Ioannis*. Following this branch, you cross one of probably the most impressive canyons of Crete. The Canyon walls come very close together here and are in the upper third just a few metres apart. In the spring, smaller "waterfalls" coming down the rock walls are not uncommon and feed the Gorge stream (right of the road). The *Kotsifou-* (=Blackbird)*Canyon* separates the mountains *Kouroupa* and *Krioneritis*: an entry in the Gorge is possible in the village *Agios Ioannis* at 460 m. About in the middle of the Canyon (left the street) a small church (like the one in the Kourtaliotiko Gorge) is built into a rock niche; a small icon altar is decorating the tiny interior here.



At the "end" of the Canyon (after a left turn, right on the pass) is a tavern with a beautiful view of the *Krioneritis* Massif (1312 m) and here you can enjoy "Cretan diet". A "menu" is not available here, you go in the kitchen, look into the pots - and select your food.



The picture left shows a view from the street into the Kotsifou-Canyon towards North. Picture right towards South. The picture in the middle shows the 1900 build Chapel in a rock nich (left of the street when driving towards North).

**Pictures:** U. Kluge (2004)



### Fig tree (*Ficus carica*)

The Fig is an important food in Crete since the early Minoan period. As spreading bush or tree, the fig tree can reach height up to 5 metre; the trunk, twigs and arms are ash-grey and smooth. The large leaves are deeply lobate and rough. Instead of the usual flowers appear small, green figs in the twigs. Pollination is performed by an insect ("fig wasp") which slips into the pear-like structure through a small opening at the top. Both the fresh and dried figs are very sugary. Figs are used in folk medicine for skin infections and serve as a laxative. The milky juice shall dry up warts.



A fig brush near Mirthios on the roadside (fig. left); detail image of the fruit (fig right) **Pictures.** U. Kluge (2004)

Fig trees even reach no old age, but the genus fig, however, belongs to the Pleistocene trees and originated long before the people in the history. Today there are the fig in many different local characteristics and cultivations. The Chilean fig for example delivers yellow-green fruits, while the Neapolitan fig has blue fruits. The Fig (fruit) actually is the inflorescence and that what we like to eat as fruit pulp is tissue that encloses the tiny flowers. The while eating noticeable sand-like kernels are the actual fruits.

#### **Cultural aspect** (source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficus\\_carica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficus_carica))

In Greek mythology, the god Apollo sends a crow to collect water from a stream for him. The crow sees a fig tree and waits for the figs to ripen, tempted by the fruit. He knows that he is late and that his tardiness will be punished, so he gets a snake from the stream and collects the water. He presents Apollo with the water and uses the snake as an excuse. Apollo sees through the crow's lie and throws the crow, goblet, and snake into the sky where they form the constellations Hydra, Crater, and Corvus.



### Kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*)

The "Tanner-" or Kermes oak is a tree with holly like leaves; he wears long acorns in spiky cups. He occurs in rocky terrain and low altitudes. The tender, dark red offshoots are an excellent food for the goats. The bark is used for dyeing. On the leaves lives the insect *Coccus ilicus*, from its female people won a red colouring substance. THESEUS shall have dyed his sails with this "crimson", when he came to Crete to kill the Minotaur. The Evergreen Kermes oak occurs only occasionally on Crete and "big" trees are rare.

A full-grown Kermes oak at **Kera** (close to the Lassithi plateau)(fig right), and a detail image of the fruit (fig. left) **Pictures:** U. Kluge (2004)



Older locals still remember dense oak forests interspersed by mule tracks on the North Coast. Only in the time of need during the 1940s were the stocks of Kermes-and Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) taken as stove wood and processed to charcoal. Emerging young shoots are mostly eaten by the goats or are disfigured by goat browsing. The pictured tree owes its beauty and its age probably its location; he is located on a hill directly to a "hidden, wild landfill". The washed-out pollutants from the rubbish dump do not reach him (they seep directly into the karst subsoil of the hollow) and even goat shun away from this place, so emerging offshoots in the area have a chance to be also once "large".