

# THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

December 2024: Editor Dave Gray



## Introduction

Welcome to the December Newsletter! Merry Christmas to all our readers!

This is an Extra! edition, with an article from Steve Swygart on his rock climbing road trip in Greece. Some lovely sunny photos to lighten dull December days! A big thank you to Steve, and to Chris Harris, Gill Eccles, John Simpson, Mike Doyle, Nicky, Ray, and Reg, and as ever David LJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is 27<sup>th</sup> December.

## Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for December and January, details are on the Club Website. The meets list is constantly being updated, please **check it out regularly** on the Website. Meets added to the programme since the last edition are in bold as a reminder **in case you've missed them...**

<b>3 December</b>	<b>Christmas Pizza Night at Gallaghers</b>
6/8 December	Hut Weekend
14 December	Saturday walk – Classic Clwyds
20 December – 1 January	GMC Hut Christmas Meet
11 January	Saturday walk – Halkyn Mountain
24/26 January	Hut weekend – Burns Night

## Venues in Focus

Winter and its shorter days often see us on trips closer to home. This December we're on the **Classic Clwyds**, all being well doing Foel Fenlli, and Moel Famau. Both of these host hill forts, so we'll pass two out of the six such forts on the range.

Let me take you back then to the Iron Age...roughly 800 BC to Roman times...

Hill forts were structures found all over Great Britain, and in Ireland and northern France. There are even a couple in the hill-free fens. A good overall account is in '*The Making of the British Landscape*' by Time Team's Francis Prior (2010; available on Amazon). Prior highlights Moel y Gaer (trans 'Bald Hill of the Fortress') on a spur of Moel Famau as one of the two most influential hill fort excavation sites in Britain.

Yer typical hill fort has one, two or more rings of ramparts made by digging out a ditch in front of them and piling up the spoil. There is evidence of some them being developed in phases, and from unfinished ones archaeologists deduce that some were made by individual 'gangs' of workers allocated sections, perhaps around 50m long. The ramparts might be

topped out with stone walls or wooden palisades. At Tre'r Ceiri fort on Yr Eifl on the Lleyn, the stone walls are still well above my head with intact doors and lintels, and in places go up to 13' high.

Forts usually were either fortified livestock corrals, or contained round houses in which people living and worked. Perhaps these latter also sheltered animals in emergency. My friend Alastair Rogers who worked with cattle in his younger days told me that driving cows over even just earth ramparts would have been difficult and time consuming. So these forts would have been 'hard targets' deterring the casual raiding party. They also in some cases would have projected prestige, or had religious significance. Some have features that can only really be seen from the air: perhaps by the gods, or by shamans who 'flew' in their trances (the modern Santa Claus character is thought by some to be partly derived from a Sami (Lapp) shaman. He wears red and flies with reindeer!)

Here is Moel y Gaer from the air, it sits on a defensible promontory ridge of Moel Famau dominating the Vale of Clwyd below.

Excavations have taken place from 1849 through to 2009, and in summary reveal that the 7 acre site has one all round early rampart, that was built of and faced with stone, a second rampart at the western end, and a third at the eastern entrance end. These are thought to have been added later.



Photo [www.clwydianrangeanddeevallyaonb.org.uk](http://www.clwydianrangeanddeevallyaonb.org.uk)

There is an informative report of the 2009 work online, search for Moel y Gaer Clwyds and look on the bangor.ac.uk result. The report summarises the earlier findings on this fort too. It had a paved entrance and some paved paths, 15 roundhouses, and evidence of burnt offerings being made within the original rampart structure to hallow their construction.

The report also suggests there was a palisade on the ramparts, and makes it clear why evidence of these is hard to find – basically the it gets lost once the walls start to slump.

This is a diagram from the report of how the walls might have looked, with the possible palisade.

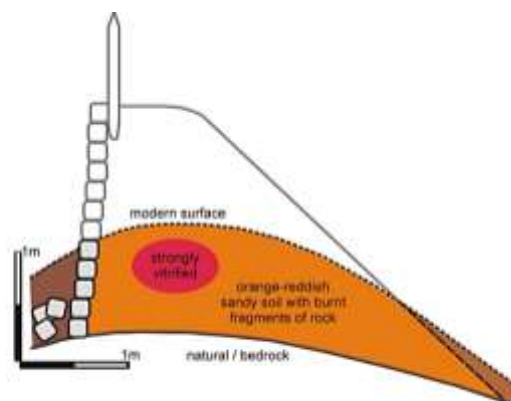


Figure 9: Tentative reconstruction of rampart based on simplified section drawing.



Figure 5: The rampart in section, with the subsoil layer (CN 15) and bedrock (CN 3) exposed in the foreground, clearly showing no exposure to heat as compared with the rampart body (CN 11) itself. The stone facing of the rampart (CN 18) is to the left of the rampart body.

And this is a photo of a section excavated through the rampart, showing the original stone facing.

The other hill fort, which we will actually walk through, is right on top of Foel Fenlli. The aerial photo below is from the website

<https://nearlyuphill.co.uk>

...which is posted by a lady called Hilary Pullen and has loads of N. Wales walking ideas on it, well worth a look.



The site is about 24 acres, and the fort contained around two dozen round houses.

The name Foel Fenlli ('The bald hill of Benlli') is traditionally after Benlli Gawr, or 'Giant Benlli'/Benlli the Great'. He was traditionally thought to be a Welsh king around 430 AD, that is in the immediate post-Roman period, and this suggests the fort was reoccupied at that time. There have been Roman finds there so maybe occupation in some form was in fact continuous. There is a spring on site which I have never seen, so it had a water supply.

Benlli was described in Nennius's *'History of the Britons'* as 'iniquitous and tyrannical'. Not least for opposing the saint, Germanus of Auxerre. Germanus had been sent by the Church to Britain to oppose the Pelagian 'heresy' (involving denial of original sin and predestination), so I would guess Benlli's iniquity involved sticking to his beliefs. Nennius was writing around 828 AD so a long time after the event and only 11<sup>th</sup> century copies of his work survive. And he was a monk and monks were usually rude about kings who didn't toe the Church's line!



So put on your best woad, join the walk and take in the forts! For completeness. the other forts on the range are Moel Arthur, Pen y Cloddiau, another Moel y Gaer near Bodfari, and Moel Hirradug, the last of which some of us visited earlier this year.

## Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

First up is **climbing**. At the end of last month Mike Doyle had ‘...a good day out in the October sunshine with DLJ on *Penmaenbach SW Buttress* - an easy 2 pitch sport route’. Mmm... looks a big enough drop to me Mike!



I was chatting with Reg and he said he'd enjoyed 'a cracking **Bonfire Party**'. He thanked Kev and Vanda for the catering, and all the other people involved in making the night go well. This **Hut Weekend** also saw a dozen or so of us enjoy tackling tackle Moel Siabod, up to the summit which was misty. And then down the west ridge...





...above Llynau Diawaunedd. Thanks to Nicky for these pictures!

And to Ray who has posted some atmospheric shots of the **Tal y Fan from Rowen** day trip.



*Above the Conwy valley*

This trip was organised by Gill Eccles who writes 'We enjoyed a lovely walk today in the Conwy Valley. 13 of us, including current and prospective members, started from Rowen and headed 'up' on the very steep road through the village, then onward to the summit of Tal-y-fan. Weather was kind and we were treated to some great views and spectacular scenery.'



*On the north slopes of Tal y Fan*





*Maen y Bardd ('Stone of the Bard' - neolithic burial chamber – c.3,500BC)*

The news on the **Ecuador Triple Crown Trip** is good, thanks to Chris Harris for his Facebook posts, thanks also John Simpson who summarised things in his posts as 'Ecuador trip, 5 volcanoes, up to 6310m. Hard but fun 😊'. I'm leaving it to the team themselves to tell the full story in due course, but the main news is that there were successful ascents of the higher target summits of Chimborazo (20,701') and Cotapaxi (19,347'),

I couldn't resist one of Chris's photos, of one of their training summits, Yanaurco, a tiddler at around 15,000'. So North Wales, so Blaenau Ffestiniog-esq!



'And finally' as they say, a rare picture of **GMC members on skis**. This is Helen Swygart doing cross country in Llandegla Forest, taken by Steve. Sadly the snow's all gone now so the season may be over!







**EXTRA!**

## **CLIMBING IN THE PELEPONNESE - A GREEK ODYSSEY/ROAD TRIP Mk II – by Steve Swygart**

**Greece – lots of beaches, but even more mountains.**

One of the most beautiful descriptions of Greece was penned by Nobel Prize winning poet Odysseas Elytis. Loosely translated, it was “*if you deconstruct Greece, you will be left with an olive, a vine and a ship. Which means, this is all you need to rebuild it*”. The sea, the Greek’s gateway to the rest of the world since antiquity, is an integral part of the Greek consciousness. And for good reason; with the longest coastline in the Mediterranean and more than 1000 islands, over 200 of which are inhabited, the sea is the country’s star attraction and an important source of income for many of its people.

But what most non-Greeks don’t know is that Greece is also one of the most mountainous countries in Europe. Flat terrain and plains are relatively rare, although we will come across some on this trip. The highest mountain in Greece is Mount Olympus (2,917m), but dozens of other rugged peaks and mountain ranges cover about 80% of the country. Furthermore, the area’s intense seismic activity has pushed up some amazing rock formations in many parts of the country. But the best part? Mountains and sea are never separate. No matter which part of Greece you go to, the sea is never more than 50 miles away.

Greece is dry and angular, but at the same time, approachable and laid back. It is a country on a human scale. The unsmiling black-clad grandmas (*yiayias*) might look weathered and austere but most of them have hearts of gold and particularly on Kalymnos, where we have spent an awful lot of time, they will stop you in the street to discuss your respective families and their troubles. The country’s rough, hard exterior is just a shell that protects a simplicity that’s hard to resist. Through centuries of hardship, its people have become accustomed to the small pleasures of life; the pure sunlight, dusty earth or the deafening song of the cicadas, or a simple meal of bread, cheese and succulent fruit. I have never tasted better satsumas than the green ones we had last year from the Leonidian farmer that we stayed with (and again, this year), given to us just before he sent them off on a lorry to the market in Athens. This is the beauty of Greece. Beyond being a simple climbing trip, it becomes an experience that goes straight to your soul, making you hope it will never end.

We started our love of Greece through Kalymnos (the now-overcrowded European Mecca of sport climbing) and must have visited it over a dozen times over the years. We loved it so much that when we retired in March 2023, the first thing we did was to spend a month there and do nothing else but chill out and climb nearly every day. We’ve made quite a few friends of local restaurateurs and business owners there as a consequence and have seen Massouri grow accordingly; now to almost unpleasant proportions at peak times with climbers coming from as far afield as NZ, USA and Russia (although banned now since they started war in Ukraine), particularly in October. It wasn’t until 2008 that other Greek climbing areas such as Leonidio woke up to the prospect of obtaining EU and municipal funds to develop crags to assist with their tourist industries. In late 2018, we finally made it to Leonidio at the end of November with snow on the tops and we were able to see the potential of the area. It’s not Kalymnos (and nor can it ever be) but it certainly does have its own old school Greek charm and style that we finally investigated in more detail on last October’s two week road trip, also encompassing Nafplio, Zobolo and Frygani. This was such a great trip through mountains, vineyards and citrus groves the length of the

Peloponnese with wonderful weather that the moment it was finished, we were planning a double-length version taking in 4 new areas for this year.

### **Logistics**

Manchester to Athens on Jet2 (4 hours). Pre-booked hire car collected at airport. Drive straight out of the airport, directly onto the motorway network (with various cheap but frequently annoying manned tolls) and so onto the first objective, nearly 4 hours or so of driving later.

Our accommodation was a mix of holiday lets booked through Airbnb and Booking.com, and a fab hotel in Kyparissi.

### **The Climbing**

**Kardamyli** is an elegant seaside village built along the rocky coast 20 miles southeast of Kalamata. Stone-built houses, restored medieval towers and intimate coves dotted with olive and cypress trees abound. Cozy guesthouses, good restaurants and shops with boho flair come together in a sophisticated ensemble. Rising above the village, Mount Taygetus (2,407m; the highest in the Peloponnese) is home to an intricate network of well-marked walking trails and the wider area is a small oasis of beauty and tradition. We started off our road trip here at Kalamitsi, a superb crag of mostly grey limestone, with plenty of long, top-quality routes mainly in the 5b – 6b grade range, overlooking the bay with a swim just a few minutes' drive away.



*Crag shot from the parking spot*



*Prasinos Skorprios 6a+ \*\*\*; elegant and brilliant.*





*Sensational view over the bay from our apartment, owned by a French lady retiree.*

The climbing was fabulous and quite Verdoneque and we managed to get 3 great days out of it.

**Nedousa** is a very remote, small and high village (c 100 inhabitants, 20km from Kalamata at 750m with nothing in between and yet 4 bars of 5G, like most of Greece), situated deep inside a stunning gorge on the slopes of Mount Taygetus, on a part of the mountain that is called Alagonia. Shimmering olive groves, walnut trees and golden jackals populate the mountainsides. Thanks to crag orientation and the area's climate, climbing is possible all year, but October is ideal ([Current Weather Conditions at Nedousa of Messinia \(weather-messinia.gr\)](http://weather-messinia.gr)). Again, we are talking limestone, with everything from hard routes on tufa colonettes to immaculate grey slabs (yum, our favourite), all set in beautiful surroundings.



We were out climbing on our last day there when a guy turned up at the crag, on his own, and asked if he could join us. His name was Hans, from the Wachau in eastern Austria. His wife didn't climb, and she had dropped him off, seemingly in this very remote valley, to check out the crags for a possible future visit with his friends. He asked where we were staying, and it turned out that they were now upstairs in the house that we were renting!

It also turned out that he was 62 and retired (the same as me), as were all of his friends, and that they would all be in Kyparissi at the same time as we were going to be! We got on and did a few routes and there the similarities kind of ended.....he could climb 7c+ (mainly steep tufa action), whereas I'd only ever climbed two 7a's and lots of 6c's around 25 years ago!

*Hans on Freaky Sequence 7a+\*\*\**

He warmed up on a 6a+\*\*\* that we'd done previously (more like hard 6b, as there seemed to be a lot of sandbagging [reckless route undergrading - ed.] going on at this crag), before trying a 7a+\*\*\* called *Freaky Sequence*. The clue was clearly in the name, as he didn't get it on sight, and it looked a ridiculous set of moves that would be extremely difficult to replicate!

That night, we pooled our meagre drinking resources (half a bottle of wine, some beer, and our half-bottle of tsipouro) to discuss life in general and our places in it currently. An unexpected event and evening that will lead to a long friendship, I feel sure!

**Lagada** is hidden high amongst the "alpine" meadows and pine forests of the majestic Mount Taygetus. The main crag at 800m is just above a narrow meandering road in a mountain setting so crisp that it is easy to forget how far south in Greece you actually are. The road comes over from Kalamata / Nedousa, topping out at about 1320m and ends up in a dramatic gorge just before the climbing. The cone-shaped summit of Taygetus itself, with its 250m high rock faces, is a constant temptation in the background, as are the well-marked walking trails as they unfold along old, cobbled paths through traditional hamlets. The climbing is classic Greek limestone in a truly stunning gorge, on holes, tufas and crimps, with slabs full of pockets, overhanging caves with stalactites and tufa snakes. And sadly, full of sandbags.

We were staying near the base of the gorge which had sensational views of the valley that contained Sparta and Mystras. Our host clearly liked company and enjoyed a drink. He invited us in for some wine and he could see we had been to Greece before as our tsipouro had come from the fridge.

This was a chance to discuss the Greek psyche, particularly our perceived 'Greek non-compliance with rules syndrome' (e.g. not wearing helmets on motor-bikes, or a penchant for cash when conducting financial transactions we'd met on past trips). Our host attributed all this to their ancient democratic traditions, and therefore as a consequence, their rights to 'personal freedom'. With respect to helmets not being worn on scooters - you could run as fast as that and so you don't need a helmet! There weren't enough policemen to catch everyone and they hate writing tickets anyway. On requests for cash - ah well that was because the new systems weren't all yet set up, went the theory....

The Greek economic crisis was in...2007/8. Mmm...quite a transition period then!



*Looking up  
the valley  
- from  
below Aloni  
crag*



The best thing about this area was Mystras ([Archaeological Site of Mystras - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#)), a Byzantine city mostly built in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. We also visited Sparta ([Sparta | History, Location, Population, Map, & Facts | Britannica](#)) of the 300 fame beforehand, only to find not much there, because most of it had been used to build Mystras, and in the 1850's, the locals had another go at it in order to build the Sparta that we see today; sadly, really just a grid of apartment blocks. A bit of a letdown to put it mildly, but what was left was pretty awe-inspiring, given its age and history. Mystras was phenomenal and well worth a visit to see just how advanced civilisation was in this part of the globe at that time. A fabulous place.



*Column piece at Sparta*

*Mystras*

*Stunning iconography*

**Kyparissi** is a secluded, beautiful paradise backed by the craggy slopes of Mount Parnon and fronted by the cobalt blue of the Myrtoan Sea on the east coast of the Peloponnese peninsula. It is over an hour's twisty drive from Leonidio and home to about 400 people with no petrol station or ATM, so you should really fill up with both before you visit.



*The road down to the harbour / beach at Kyparissi*

Surrounded by limestone of impeccable quality, the potential at all grades has only just begun to be explored. Again, the use of municipal funds and local benefactors in 2015/16 has been invaluable in terms of the bolting, and Kyparissi is home to shedloads of world-class hard tufa routes; most of them being 8a and above, so well beyond our paygrade, sadly!



*View from the Trocadero restaurant, Kyparissi*

The climbing was pretty good here too, with some nice routes to be had at Kastraki, just behind the churchyard cemetery (5b-7a; 25m), and we made a 32km trip on extremely windy roads over to Vlychada, which is a crag by a fairly large, deserted beach, with none of the usual signs of “civilisation”, which was great. Unfortunately, everyone was far too cold as a stiff wind was blowing across the crag, but that didn’t stop a young German girl from wiring a top 8a+. Just watching her was an education, completely fearless on finger pockets on severely overhanging walls. If you go there, try Le Sabre (6a+\*\*\* 40m) on the extreme left-hand end; a fabulous piece of climbing and it’s in the sun for most of the day. This is completely anathema to those operating in the 7’s, however! A “desert island” crag for some, for sure!



*(L) Karl on Le Sabre 6a+\*\*\**



*(R) Sepp on C' a L'Envers 6c\*\*\**





*Unknown (to us, but probably a superstar) German girl on Silberblick 8a+\*\**



*Our crew (L to R) - Myself, Hannes, Sepp, Karl, Hans and Helen*

A word on the Kyparissi crew – a very interesting group of friends who have been climbing together for many (~ 40) years.

Hannes – a trumpeter (now retired) with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. Has occasional trouble with tinnitus, owing to being in front of the percussion for many years and playing too much of Shostakovich's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony!

Sepp – a now retired electronics lecturer in the Austrian college system. Had somehow racked up over 3 years of leave and so has now decided he's not going back to work!

Karl – now owner of [Schagerl Meisterinstrumente - Handcrafted Brass Instruments Since 1961](#).

This was a family business founded by his father. Basically, they make instruments for the gods of classical and jazz music, including Wynton Marsalis, amongst others. A very interesting guy.

Hans – a retired IT Manager, who also has a bit of a fruit farm going. Hans and Karl have climbed together since their early 20's, when they started doing ridiculous things on the Marmalada. The local alpine club couldn't believe what they were getting up (i.e. *Don Quixote* etc) until they saw it for themselves.

All of these guys have a real love of climbing and as well as their own heroes (Messner, Bonatti etc), they have an extremely in-depth knowledge of British climbing heroes too, particularly from the 60's/70's and 80's, such as Ron Fawcett, Pete Livesey, Jerry Moffat and Johnny Dawes. It's just as well that I too am more than familiar with British climbing history and fortunately have read all of the above's autobiographies during my time as a climber, because they were pumping me for additional information and snippets on these guys! They've never climbed in the UK but now they have the time, I guess that could become attractive. Especially *Master's Edge* (E7) at Millstone – they are absolutely obsessed with it!

We now have an invite back to the Wachau to climb on their local crags and mountains, so we'll have to see if we can get across in the van next summer! After this, we headed to Leonidio, whilst the guys stayed on for a few days before heading off to Kalymnos, where they again managed to find where Ron Fawcett was hiding out, which was at a new crag called Snake Valley!



*One of the great heroes of British climbing in the 70's and 80's – Ron Fawcett*



**Leonidio** is in a valley at the foot of Mount Parnon on the southeast coast of Greece. Towering above the town is a massive 250m red limestone cliff and the entire valley (which is absolutely miles long) is well on its way to becoming a vast climbing park, much like Kalymnos. It seems to be better loved by the Germans than us Brits, although I do know of one activist, with whom we used to climb many years ago, who seems to manage to somehow stay well beyond the 90-day EU limit over winter, renewing fixed ropes on the harder crags, building toilets at crags and maintaining stuff who obviously loves it. We asked him how he was doing it, but we've not had a response! We've since worked out that you can get a Digital Nomad visa providing you meet certain criteria; might just have to enquire further into this! We first visited here in November 2018 and it was a bit too cold (snow on the tops up the valley) but the potential was obvious! Many new routes and crags have been developed since, and the new Panjika guidebook (a climbing cooperative in the town) has now righted a few sandbags since its first edition.

For me there are quite significant differences between Leonidio and Kalymnos; the most obvious one is that if you are stood at the bottom of any crag above the town and understand the term "Arcadia", then this is surely it. The sylvan, green valley set out below that stretches all the way to the sea is growing all manner of fruit and vegetables and is a truly stunning sight. Arcadia is also the name of a province further north of here, but let's not let that stand in the way of a Utopian fantasy! Needless to say you don't have this view overly much in Kalymnos.



*Kokkinovrachos Area -*

*Hospital Sector : Manolis Glezos 6a\*\*\* 40m    Douvari : Rodomelo Extension 6b\*\*\* 35m*

We spent a week here as there is so much to go at, and we also had an apartment adjacent to the beach, so it was pretty much a dip in the sea every day after cragging. The owner brought us a shedload of nicely sharp satsumas, mainly with green patches on; looking back

as a kid, you only got these at Christmas as a treat, but now they are available almost all year round, which is completely wrong. I'm now struggling to eat them back in the UK as the ones we get are rubbish.

Another difference between Leonidio and Kalymnos is that if you get out at a reasonable time in the morning here, you will get a parking spot relatively straightforwardly. On Kalymnos, there's the "tyranny of the scooters" to contend with as people buzz off to their daily objectives. Here at Leonidio, I'm not sure that many (new?) climbers have cottoned onto the fact that its best to get a park early and not start climbing in the middle of the day when the sun is at its hottest. We only had to retreat just the one day at 2.30pm as there wasn't a breeze on a south-facing crag (29C), but it didn't seem to deter people from walking up in the middle of the day, and we are used to climbing in the heat.

Either way, it's a veritable paradise and should be on anyone's tick list of venues to visit.



*The Arcadia that is Leonidio; from the path up to Red Rock*

**Frygani** is one of the latest developments in Peloponnese climbing. We visited it last year for 2 days as it is on the way back to Athens, which is 1.5 hours west of this and so perfect to end the road trip with. We did 12 fantastic routes, ranging from 5c to 6b+. There's still another couple of days' worth to tick off after last year (38 routes in total up to 6c+), as it's late in October by now and it faces east (happy days) so here we are once again! There's an



amazing amount of rock there that is surely worthy of further development, particularly in the multi-pitch department.

This is a long limestone face with superb conglomerate features on the eastern foot of Mount Ziria and near the plateau of the mythical Lake Stymphalia. A bit like Meteora, but the bolting is infinitely better! The crag is in idyllic rural surroundings, with hills and plains covered in both vineyards and vegetables. The crag was developed by local businesses, who raised money to get Aris (Theodoropoulos; THE Greek climbing guru) in to assist with the bolting. Route names are slightly weird (and are written on handmade ceramic plaques at the foot of the climbs) – *Nemea Wineland* or *Natural Mineral Water Zireia*, anybody? But the quality of them is surely undeniable. The worst of them is 2 stars, with the majority being 3 star and there's a decent scattering of musical notes [ these indicate extra quality in some continental guidebooks - ed.] *Nemea Wineland* was 6a+\*\*, but I'd rate it 6b and a musical note for the demanding headwall; a phenomenal route and one that is the equal of anything anywhere.



*The 'original' Nemea wineland, resplendent in autumn colours*



*The view from our accommodation (Angelic in the Mountains, Kaisario)*

Again, we managed to cram in double figures in the 2 days, with *Armonia* (6a+\*\*\*), *Nemea Wineland* (6b\*\*\*) and *Tourix* (6b+\*\*\*) being highlights.



*Nemea Wineland 6b\*\*\**

*Dinner at a roadside Taverna*

Whilst there, we were struggling to get some dinner over the weekend as it was Oxi Day [The Greek National Holiday of October 28th - OXI Day | Omilo](#) and everyone seemed to want to go out to eat. There weren't many restaurants in this very rural location, and those few available had actually run out of food by the time we got there after a day's climbing! There was a lone taverna just outside the village on the main road that was our last hope, and there didn't seem to be many takers. We went along and found the lights on, but the door was locked. Just then, an old lady shouted us from a house across the road. She had been tending her chickens and fortunately she spoke good English, as she had lived in Canada for around 15 years. There wasn't a menu, and we had no idea of prices, but the food was homely (it was just what her and her husband – in their late 70's? - cooked for themselves - meatballs, rape di cime or the Greek equivalent) and it was pretty good. We had conversations about making spanakopita, which obviously impressed her enough to offer us a couple of kilos of quince to take back with us. We went back again for a very nice veal steak, so you never know what's going to happen when you knock on the door of an empty taverna! They also seemed to be "distributing" bottles of their own hooch to locals, which we sadly didn't manage to sample!

So; what have we learnt from this 1200km climbing road trip around Greece? That the friendliness and generosity of the Greek people is still pretty amazing. I don't think we encountered anyone anywhere that wasn't prepared to go out of their way to help you in any respect possible. Of this you can be certain if you are thinking of going. Us Brits are still loved by the Greeks in the main and it seems to be a function of WWII.

From a climbing point of view, if we repeated the trip, we probably wouldn't include Nedousa and Lagada, as much as we had great experiences in both locations. I'd substitute in **Zobolo**



and Anatoli crag at **Nafplio**, overlooking Karathona Beach. The climbing at these locations suits our style much better and they are also fabulous locations to boot. Also, don't go anywhere in the general area of Athens. A couple of Greek climbers told us it's all a sandbag and it certainly doesn't look as scenic as anything we have visited in our travels thus far.

We've also finally, after nearly 40 years of playing this game, learnt to pace ourselves on long trips, especially now we are relatively old! Instead of continually being kids in the proverbial candy shop, which sums up our approach to new crags, our usual strategy of 3 days on and one day off only worked for 2.5 weeks out of our month on Kalymnos, before we got a bit burnt out. This time we threw in the odd rest day as required and certainly having 6 locations and therefore 6 driving days as rest days helped us last the course.



Anyone who has been to Greece will know that there are cats literally everywhere (in Turkey, it seems to be dogs – discuss the relative merits of these national choices amongst yourselves!). The Greeks love their free-spiritedness (obviously!) and you literally won't survive a visit to any taverna without being pestered by them. Our last accommodation near Frygani appeared to have a resident cat and it seemed so taken with us that it decided it wanted to come back to the UK.....sadly we had to leave her behind (see above). We look forward to seeing if she is still there next time!

Hopefully we have inspired you to get yourselves out there and have some similar adventures in this fabulous country. I've attached a link to the guidebook, which is probably out of print now, but there should be a new edition available from what I can see. If anyone wants to borrow ours for a look, then just say the word and I can bring it to The Boardroom on a Thursday for your perusal. [Climb Greece | Greece Guidebook](#)

Ευχαριστώ που διαβάσατε και τα λέμε αργότερα! / Efcharistó pou diavásate kai ta léme argótera! / Thank you for reading!

**Steve Swygart - November 2024**

**Editorial Note on Climbing Grades**– All the grades in Steve's article above are in the French grading system used extensively outside France for bolted climbs.

Given that this newsletter often mentions grades and is viewable by everyone, this seemed like a good time for a brief **cautionary** note on climbing grades, a complex subject which can easily cause confusion. Thanks to Steve once more for his input on this.

Most importantly climbers readily acknowledge that **grading is not an exact science, and the interpretation of grades demands an element of caution**. Unlike the indoor climbing wall, many variables can alter the nominal grade of an outdoor climb on any given day; weather conditions, vegetation, wet rock, missing holds, all may spring a surprise.

A measure of things being inexact is that at one point the Mountaineering Scotland website talks of a grade giving 'clues' to the nature of a climb. So Sherlock Holmes not CSI Miami!

In addition to the subjective nature of grades there are **a number of different grading systems used in the UK** for different aspects of mountaineering and climbing. So there are different systems for Trad rock climbing, bolted climbing, bouldering, and winter ice climbing. Added to that are **a number of other systems used across the world** for different aspects of the sport. These may look similar but they are not, and **the same terms – right down to simple letter number combinations like '5a' - may and do mean different things in different systems**. For example there is currently a two-step difference between technical gradings in the French and British Trad systems - 6a French = 5b British Trad; 5b French = 4c British Trad and so on; so a British Trad 6a is materially harder than a French one.

Finally, the grading systems, and grades attributed to individual routes, have evolved and changed over time so older literature may be misleading in today's terms.

#### **More information can be found online.**

For the rock climbing side of things a useful article currently, not least on 'How to Recognise a Dangerous Route from the British Trad Grade' can be found at [Grade Conversions – Rockfax](#) . That caution is the watchword as is shown by the way the Rockfax article ends with a recommendation to consult guidebooks and ask other climbers if one is in any doubt on an unfamiliar Trad route.

The Mountaineering Scotland <https://www.mountaineering.scot/> and BMC <https://www.thebmc.co.uk/en> websites also have information on grades; you need currently to dig around with quite a few clicks within each site to find it.]