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Hike through the “Valley of the Dead” Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)

The entry point to the **Zakros Gorge** (*Nekron Canyon*), the "Valley of the dead" is about 1.5 miles behind the village **Ano Zakros** and leads the hike 8 km to **Kato Zakros** on the East coast of the island. In the caves of the Valley, located in the vertical cliffs (see figures), the Minoans bury their dead thousands of years ago. The easy hike (with sturdy shoes) leads in the upper third through plane trees, meadow and forest where Oleander occurs as undergrowth. The meadow leads in a brook dell which has still plenty of water in April. The trail follows the brook bed to the end point in **Kato Zakros** where, close to the sea (about 300 metres from the canyon exit) is a Minoan palace, which was built around 1600 BC and destroyed again around 1450 BC (volcanic eruption on **Santorin**/earthquake).

As geological feature several Earth formations come together in the Canyon. Phyllite-Quartzite with Argillaceous shale (deposited 320 - 200 million years ago), Neogene and Quarternary, and the “Tripolitza” formation, consisting of different tremendous layers (from top to bottom): 200 metres shale, marl, sandstone (“Tripolitza Flych, 44 – 37 million years); 1000 metres carbonate (174 – 44 million years) und 200 metres shale-carbonate (~210 million years). Due to the great thickness of carbonate layer significant karst phenomena occur in the canyon.

Botanically the gorge provides within the gravel area (next to the water pointers such as watercress [*Nasturtium officinale*]) species from the families Brassicaceae (**Cruciferae**, also known as the **crucifers**, the **mustard family** or **cabbage family**), Asteraceae (*Compositae*, known as the **aster**, **daisy**, or **sunflower family**), Liliaceae (Lily family) und Lamiaceae (**Labiatae**, also known as the mint family). An Eastern Mediterranean bush formation (Garrigue) dominates the transition area to the Canyon walls, which approximately has a height of 1 m. In the lower course the escarpments are closer, so no Garrigue is developed. The Oleander gives way to *Vitex agnus-castus* (commonly called just **Vitex**, but also called **Chaste Tree**, **Chasteberry**, or **Monk's Pepper**).

Since a few years it is possible to follow the Canyon over the ridge on a newly created road. With an off-road vehicle (Jeep) and appropriate experience it is possible to follow the right-handed runway. It has impressive views inside the Canyon at particularly marked places and bends. But you must schedule 1.5 more miles for this way because the "descent" to the coast leads only on a serpentine-like route.



The figure left shows Karst forms of carbonate rock in the lower third of the Canyon; the figure right shows the exit of the Canyon in April with the still water leading brook. It is possible to observe the (departing) night heron (*Nycticorax Nycticorax*).



The figure left shows a Minoan burial cave in a wall of the Canyon (in 30 meters height); the above centre figure shows an (empty) burial chamber inside the cave. The figure below shows the power of the out flowing brook; the complete structure of the asphalt road was washed away and, including tar cover, shipped towards the sea. The figure right is a glance into the Canyon.

Pictures: U. Kluge/H. Eikamp (28.04.2004)

Pararge aegeria (Speckled Wood)

The medium, brown Butterfly with auburn and whitish-yellow spots flies at most places in two generations from March to June and from late June to early October. Both genera are similar coloured. Compared to the butterflies on the mainland (with auburn spots), the brown-shading of the Crete type is generally lighter with pale-yellow.

For more information see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pararge_aegeria



The Eruca of the Speckled Wood is mainly green dyed, the bright side lines are the best distinctive feature. The eggs are whitish; at the top are very fine longitudinal ribs to be recognized. The bright green cocoon is mostly found at parched stalks.

Picture of butterfly: U. Kluge, 28.04.2004;

Origin of photo material: Eggs, Cocoon and Eruca: „Tagfalter und ihre Lebensräume“ (1987): Bd. 1, S. 310; Schweizerischer Bund für Naturschutz, Basel.

Picture left: Speckled Wood on *Cistus creticus* (species of shrubby plant in the family Cistaceae): it usually has pink flowers, of 4.5-5 cm diameter, this species is very variable. It is widely known as a decorative plant.

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