

Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**Excursion to the shaft cave at Lakonia / Agios Nikolaos**
St. John's bread / Carob Tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*)

Shaft caves, especially if they are from early history time, are very rare at Crete; only 56 have been registered until today. This is very sparse in relation to the around 2000 grottos and more than 3000 caves spread over Crete [Caves: Prefecture Iraklion (695), Lassithi (625), Rethymnon (696) and Chania (1003)]. Taken together there are currently over 5,000 registered cave formations to be found at Crete which are worth to be protected ¹.

Shaft caves are less spectacular compared to the real caves; nevertheless they are still important cultural testimonies and interesting in particular for the mining archaeology. A special shaft cave is located just a few miles away from *Agios Nikolaos* [Άγιος Νικόλαος], close to the village *Lakonia* [Schisma Messa Lakkonia - Σχίσμα Μέσα Λακκώνια]. It is located at the village exit of *Lakonia* (towards Lassithi), straight at the hill bank, on the right side of the road.



Picture are showing (from left to right): the entrance of the shaft cave, the adit which leads exact 48 meters horizontal into the hill and the exit seen from inside. Unfortunately the entrance area is used as land-fill and it is hoped that a further infilling remains undone, particularly because the endpoint of the adit seams to be a habitation of bats.

Photos: H. Eikamp (16.07.2004)

¹ Cave protection

Scientific caving ethics include the respectful dealing with these sensitive natural phenomena, which are scientific archives, as habitats and last but not least for aesthetic reasons are necessarily it worthy of preservation. Anyone who has ever seen the comparison between a pristine cave with a cave destroyed by vandalism or a cave filled with garbage will quickly see cave protection is essential. Karst caves are no isolated features but are part of a large Karst system involved in a total cycle. Rubbish and refuses can get rapidly and almost unfiltered into the groundwater and can cause harmful contaminants!

Caves are a unique and vulnerable part of our natural history heritage. They are significant archives of geology and provide scientifically valuable information on the development of human cultures, the fauna and the creation of the landscape and the impact of climate and environmental changes.

It is a moral duty to protect caves for the benefit and joy of future world generations!

St. John's bread, Carob Tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*)[Greek: *χαρουπιά haroubia*]

If St. John's bread is originally in Crete is not exactly known. In any case, it was already used in prehistoric times. The sweet pulp of his pulses is the nutritious locust beans. The swellable seeds (carob bean seed meal) are used as thickeners in food processing. In Crete, approximately 30,000 tonnes are produced in the year; about 1 / 10 of worldwide production. The seeds of the Carob Tree weigh approximately 200 mg (= 1 K) and were previously used to the weighing of gold (or diamonds). The scientific name "*Ceratonia*" and the word "Carat" derived from the ancient Greek "to kerátion"= Horn, based on the shape of the fruits. Carob- St. John's bread loves overlooking the sea. The exceptionally resistant tree prefers limy soils as habitat and tolerate even a salinity in soil up to 3%. The tree can reach a height of 12 m. The harvest season in the Mediterranean is in August/September. The mature, brownish black fruits (pods) reach a length of 10-20 cm and indicate the following substances: 40-50% invert sugar, pectin, mucilage and tannins. The flour is 93% water-soluble polysaccharide.



The protruding crown of the Carob tree can shade a radius of 12-15 m diameter; the picture top right shows a flower, below the (still immature) pod

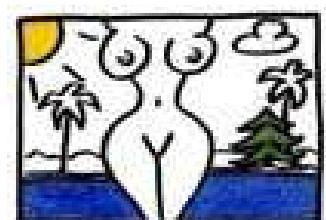
Photos: U. Kluge (2004)

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