



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

By Jeep (and foot) in the White Mountains (Lefka Ori)
(Askifou plateau and Niáto plateau – E4)



The starting point of this challenging excursion, will bring you to Mount *Kastro* around 1300 meters above sea-level, there will be the village of *Amoudhári* in the *Askifou plateau* (Picture right), which lies approximately in the middle of the crossroad with *Vrysses* in the north and *Chora Sfakion* in the south. For more information about the "White Mountains" (*Lefka Ori*) see also Info-bulletin 81-05/E.



Approximately in the village center of *Amoudhári* a sign points to *Tavri*. Shortly past the village, at the fork keep left and follow the tarred road which gently wiggles upwards. Soon it will be a crushed stone runway and can only be mastered with a jeep. In a far bend, you then drive through a cypress forest and after approximately 3 miles you should reach the white building of *EOS*, the Greek mountain climber association, standing on a hill within your view. You will reach a small meagre covered plain. The field-path to the right (Picture left) ends at a large *Mitado*, an abandoned Sheppard hut, nuzzled below powerful oak trees, protected by the cliff behind.



(Picture on Page 2)



Artfully constructed from natural stone, this *Mitado* is divided in different areas of use. Close to the entrance is the so called "*Lavetzi*", where the cheese was squeezed.

A badly rusted table, and the remains of a large press tell of the activities once performed here. Through a steel door you then arrive in the cool, dark *Koumos*, the part of the building where the cheese was stored and left to rippen (**Pictures below**).



Accompanied by curious goats, turn back to the main track, and turn left again after another 100 m. This path leads likewise to a *Mitado*, but the other path branches to the left, which brings you up to a barrier, here you can park your car. Behind the barrier are the markings of the E4 trail, from *Amoudhári* into the *White Mountains*. Follow the way marks up to a fence. This has a section, you can open to a trampling path which leads on the left side up to the chapel *Agio Pneuma* (**Picture left**). The simple prayer house is open. On the cosy wood bank, in the shade of an overhanging oak, you can take a reflective rest, enjoy the silence, and the fantastic view.

Afterwards follow the main track again up to the mountains, pass the rather unattractive and closed mountain hut of *EOS* until you arrive to the next plateau. The *Niato Plateau* (**Panorama picture Page 3**) is a meagre area, with only a few sheep and goats however beehives are set up in several places. Therefore please drive slowly and if your jeep has an open cover, protect your eyes with sun glasses.



Out of the *Niato* you have a beautiful view up to the summit of the 2219 meters high *Kastro*. The gravel road encircles the plateau. Head for the point in the north, where the path leads uphill to two cisterns. Park your vehicle at the first cistern and take the footpath to your left up the mountain (**Picture left**). Here you will again find the marked trail E4, which leads across the mountains (**centre Picture**). Again and again you will find signs at trees or stone hills as signposts (Picture right). The path continues uphill up to 1300 meters where you know you've reached your goal when a distinctive dead tree emerges. One branch points to the entrance of the cave ^[1] (**Picture left Page 4**), which because of its steep dropping walls can only be explored with appropriate equipment and experience.



^[1] Here another reference to the caves of *Lefka Ori* [<http://stigmes.gr/br/brpages/articles/gourgouth.htm>]; following fig. right (**page 4**) points to the entrance of the *Gourgouthakas* cave in the White Mountains



The ascent in fresh mountain air is worthwhile itself. Along the edge of path the bushy juniper prospers (*Juniperus phoenicea*), (Picture left), likewise a short kind of heather (*Erica* sp.), and in June you can collect the tasty and healthy mountain tea within this seclusion, the much praised “Malotiras” [2]



[2] **Cretan Mountain tea** (*Sideritis syriaca*), also called "Malotiras", is a species from the genus *Sideritis* and is botanically described as *Sideritis syriaca*. *Sideritis syriaca* is a tough, decorative perennial of the mint family, growing 30 - 45 cm high. It forms dense, slowly expanding clumps with erect to nearly prostrate, leafy stems. The leaves are roughly lance-shaped, 2.5 - 6 cm long and covered in white wool, sometimes with a slight yellowish cast. Slender stalks carry small, pale yellow flowers in interrupted clusters during the summer months. With the exception of the roots, the whole plant is used for this tea. It grows wildly in rocky locations throughout the entire eastern Mediterranean area. It is insensitive to dryness and heat and prefers a light alkaline soil. The plant contains antibiotic. The Cretan drink it as a house-tea and it has a light lemon taste. It is well recommended for all kinds of colds, particularly ones with sore throats (the leaves should be cooked for 10 minutes). The Cretan Mountain tea (*Sideritis clandestina*), is related to the *Sideritis syriaca*, and is offered sporadically within Central Europe.

*This bulletin has been provided by Maria Eleftheria for the NLUK e.V.
Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling.*