

The Corfiot

Corfu's English Language Monthly Magazine

May 2008

2 euro

No. 209

The Truth about the Durrells

Perfect
Picnic
Places

Arillas's
Local Hero

Two walks
to Unknown Corfu

Before they made it straight
Flashback to the Old Road to Palaeokastritsa

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ear to the ground

LAST MONTH'S PROTRACTED TRUCK-DRIVERS' STRIKE demonstrated the dangers of our reliance on imported products. Lidl, which brings most of its produce from abroad, ran completely out of fresh foods. Even supplies of Greek produce were diminishing; one friend was unable to buy yoghurt. Another few days, the bakers would have run out of flour. And all because one cog in the wheel of our over-sophisticated society failed to function.

Meanwhile in Arillas, vast fields of artichokes proclaimed Corfu's fertility and its ability to provide for its population. Arillas is the 'Artichoke Capital' of Corfu, and canny shoppers used to demand artichokes grown in its clay soil. April and early May I spent scrumping my favourite vegetable - at first guiltily, but increasingly with no remorse; for no-one harvested them. At the time of writing, in the last half of May, thousands upon thousands of heads are bursting into purple thistly flower.

So why weren't they sent to the shops? Apparently, it is cheaper to import artichokes from Italy, so our local ones, more expensive to harvest, are not marketed. I guess Italy uses migrant labour from North Africa in its artichoke fields, whereas the Arillas 'farmers' were too busy waiting for the start of the tourist season to bother about gathering the great crop on their doorstep.

Artichokes are just one of the food products which Corfu could be self-sufficient in. Not so long ago, the people ate what they grew. Now, with depressing regularity, 'fresh' vegetables are labelled as originating from other parts of Greece and from overseas. Recently, a friend was served in a restaurant with a lemon from Brazil. Imagine that! In a land where you can reach out and pluck a lemon from the tree, they bring them all the way from Brazil...

But a backlash is surely coming. The recent massive hike in fuel prices must soon make long-distance transport of goods less economically viable, and people may have to turn to goods from closer to home. In the UK, food writers and chefs are promoting seasonality as the next trend (Gordon Ramsey has even suggested that chefs be fined if they serve ingredients out of season). Here on our island, 'Made in Corfu' is showing the way to go.

And in Arillas, we are planning an 'Artichoke Festival' for May 2009, so that our fertile fields no longer bear a futile crop.

OFTEN WHEN I'M PULLING *THE CORFIOT* TOGETHER, I step back and look at the whole. Often a trend - one that's not been deliberately generated by me - becomes apparent. Looking in my notebook at this month's content list, I see the influence of GreenCorfuNet.

There's no 'greener' activity than going for a walk, and we've got a number of suggestions, from short 'picnic' strolls to an excursion along a newly created coastal path, and another through the streets of Corfu Town, guided by the sketches of Theresa Nicholas and the words of John Waller. Theresa also brings us a rare glimpse of life how it was in the 1960, when Corfu was truly 'green', and Durrell guru Peter Harrison takes us even further back, to the 1930s. Sarah Button examines how Corfu can become self-sufficient in holidays, instead of relying on high-impact mass tourism. Even Chaplain Clifford, unasked, writes about pilgrimage - and pilgrim routes to some of our old churches and monasteries are part of the GreenCorfuNet project.

And if being 'green' often involves hankering after a long-lost era (whether or not it was as idyllic as one recalls), Lionel Mann serves up a great splodge of nostalgia, with a timely memoir of Queen Elizabeth's coronation.

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SUNDAY SERVICES

Sundays 10.30 Holy Communion
19.00 (1st, 3rd & 5th of month) Songs of Praise
(Sunday School & Youth Group run same time as Services except Family Service)

REGULAR EVENTS

Tuesdays 10.00 Library & Coffee Morning
Wednesdays 10.00 Coffee & Kids
Wednesdays 12.00-14.30 Lunch Box
Wednesdays 19.00 Scrabble Club (last Wed. in the month)
Thursdays 10.30 Bible Study, the Old Testament (new series)
Fridays 10.30-12.00 Informal Prayer Meeting

HOW TO FIND HTC: From San

Rocco Square: Walk down Alexandros Avenue to the first set of lights TURN LEFT up the hill. Look for the Bella Venezia Hotel sign at the end up a bank. Bear right on up the hill past the Orpheas Cinema. The main road bends left; you should see the sea now! Turn immediately left into Zambeli Street. Holy Trinity Church is 100 metres along past the Bella Venezia Hotel.

From the Liston/Spianada: Find the band stand in the middle! Take the street directly opposite (it takes vehicles). The old Ionian Parliament building is at the top of that street and HTC is behind it.

This month's name days

02. Nikiforos
04. Martha
05. Apollon, Dorothea
08. Kalliopi
11. Vartholomeos
15. Avgoustinos
29. Pavlos, Petros
30. Apostolos

Name-day ritual dictates that you visit the home of the celebrating person, who will be holding an 'at home' - no invitation required. Take along a simple gift (alcohol, flowers, cake) and you will be offered a drink, nuts, cake, and possibly some nibbles.

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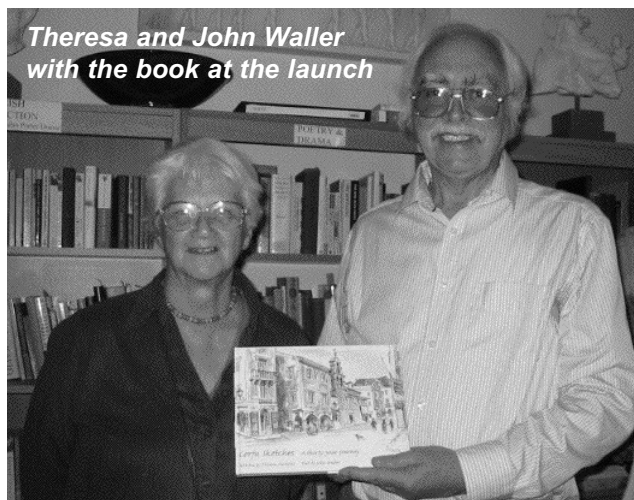
Organised by and for the Council of Thinali Parents' Association. Held outside the Dimitra Supermarket in Acharavi between 9.30 & 12.30 every Saturday (weather permitting). All our books and handmade cards are 1.50 euros, and proceeds are used to enrich the lives of children attending Acharavi Primary School. Most of the books are donated by local residents, and local hotels and apartments are also encouraged during summer to recycle and donate books left by holidaymakers.

ACHARAVI

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Corfu Sketches

A book that takes you on a journey through time



The book *Corfu Sketches - a thirty-year journey* was presented to the public for the first time at the Durrell School of Corfu on Wednesday, 7 May.

The book features sketches of local scenes drawn by Theresa Nicholas, with commentary by its publisher, John Waller. Theresa Nicholas has been called the 'Observer of Corfu' in recognition of her talent for capturing the essence of Old Corfu. Having sketched local scenes since the early 60s, her work serves as a record 'of a way of life that no-one at that time realized was already approaching its swansong.'

The book is not just for the coffee table (though it deserves pride of place there too); it's also a guide book which actively helps you track down what's left of the Old Corfu that Theresa first knew. The first section contains five themed walking routes around Corfu Town - a World Heritage Site - which, with the help of the sketches in the book, take the walker back in time. In the second section, which focuses on the villages, the book helps the visitor observe their remarkable architecture with a fresh eye. When introducing the book, Durrell School Director Richard Pine was keen to stress that the 'journey' in the title does not just refer to Theresa's past travels, but also to a trip that readers can - and should - themselves take.

Corfu Sketches - a thirty-year journey is published by Yiannis Books (www.yiannisbooks.com), Twickenham, UK. ISBN 978-0-9547887-4-2. 128 pages, RRP 29 euros.

Ilios Jewellery celebrates new premises

Ilios Jewellery of Agios Georgios Bay (North West) recently celebrated a move to new beachfront premises close to the Alkyon Hotel at the south west end of the resort. The enterprise was formerly located a hundred metres inland on the Pagi road.

Ilios is a cooperative of six jewellers working in Corfu and Germany. Each has a signature style, and their prototype work is on display in beautifully lit cabinets in the showcase shopfront.



Party time at Ilios Jewellery as they introduce friends to their new premises

Behind, the workshop is more nitty-gritty in character, and you can often watch a team member crafting their wares.

And Ilios is the only jewellery business in Corfu to offer seminars and courses, either booked in advance or ad hoc. After even a half-day seminar, visitors from age six and upwards can take home a piece of jewellery they've created themselves. Alex, who presides over the courses, encourages the use of local materials, so that a piece may contain some beach sand, or may utilize a shell or an olive pit to create a cast for gold or silver. A real 'souvenir' of Corfu!

To contact Ilios phone 26630 96083. Email: ilios@ilios-living-art.com. Fluent English and German are spoken.

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Last summer at sea - QE2 at Corfu

The world's most famous cruise liner, the Queen Elizabeth II, called in at Corfu on Wednesday, May 15. The Cunard ship, which has circumnavigated the world over 20 times, will be delivered to Dubai World in November 2008, where she will cease her role as an ocean-going passenger vessel and be refurbished and adapted for her new home. From 2009, the vessel will be berthed at a specially-constructed pier at The Palm Jumeirah, the world's largest man-made island, to create a luxury floating hotel, retail and entertainment destination.

The QE2 was built on Clydeside and launched by Queen Elizabeth II on 20 September 1967. She has since clocked up over 20 world cruises and well over five million miles at sea, during which her adventures include a mid-Atlantic ransom demand and a hit by a 95 foot wave. She also served in the Falklands War, when she delivered 3000 troops to the point of conflict.

Almost 300 metres long and with a gross tonnage of over 70,000, the QE2's 32 foot draft meant she could not dock at Corfu's cruise facility, and instead she moored between the port and Vidos Island. The passengers were brought to shore by tenders. The ship carries a maximum of 1,900 passenger and 1,015 crew. She will visit Corfu for the last time on 8 July during a two-week mini-cruise of the Mediterranean.

Queen Elizabeth 2 May 15 2008 07:33 GMT
Position: Corfu, Greece GMT +3



Right, top and bottom: Tenders ferried in passengers from the giant cruise ship in the early morning light.

Left: View from the webcam



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EVENTS

Corfu Music Festival : Corfu Environment Week

Ionian Concerts 2008

Sunday, 1 June - Sunday, 8 June

TUESDAY, 1 JULY - THURSDAY, 10 JULY

Open-air concerts

Town Hall Square

TUESDAY, 1 JULY

Open-air happening with Trombone Ensemble

Liston, 21.00

WEDNESDAY, 2 JULY

Melos Brass & Friends

Ionian Academy, 21.00

Ticket Price: 10€

FRIDAY, 4 JULY

Percussion Concert

City Theatre, 21.00

Ticket Price: 10€

SATURDAY, 5 JULY

Brass Ensemble

Ionian Academy, 21.00

Ticket Price: 10€

SUNDAY, 6 JULY

Canadian Brass Live!

Old Fortress, 21.00

Ticket Price: 10€

MONDAY, 7 JULY

Brass and Percussion Concert

Old Fortress, 19.30

Ticket Price: 10€

MONDAY, 7 JULY

Concert by the Alaska Symphony Orchestra

with works by Saint Saens and Brahms

City Theatre, 21.00

Ticket Price: 10€

The full programme throughout the month of July will be shown in the next edition

Please note that concerts may be subject to change at the last minute

Advance Notice

The 4th Pelekas Arts Festival takes place from 25 - 27 July in Pelekas village. Expect cutting-edge music, busking and jamming, and graffiti performances on a 1,200 metre wall.

The 1st Corfu Environment Week will take place from Sunday, 1 June to Sunday, 8 June in the City Theatre in Corfu Town. The Week is organized by the DDikeoma Institute, an NGO which for the past 18 months has run programmes of walks and which is in the process of creating GreenCorfuNet (see page 27).

The Week will kick off at 20.00 on Sunday, 1 June with a competition in the fields of Painting, Photography, Poetry and Drawing. Members of the public can vote throughout the week (11.00 - 13.00 and 19.00 - 21.00) for which works they like best, with the winner in each category to be announced at the end. Among entrants are those who participated in the walking programme, and subject matter relates to their experiences of the environment during the walks.

On Monday, 2 June at 19.00 the Institute will present GreenCorfuNet, and a public discussion, which will be maintained throughout the week, will follow.

On Wednesday, 4 June at 19.00 an exhibition of Corfiot books takes place, along with a competition for the best poster by a local student. Special judge will be Stephen Mackay, who was the only Corfiot to take part in every single walk!

On Thursday, 5 June - World Environment Day - cleaning of the beach at Agios Georgios (North West) will take place with the help of pupils of the 12th Primary School and the Afra Primary School, in the framework of action by the Mediterranean SOS Network and the Italian organization Legambiente.

On the morning of Saturday, 7 June, everyone is invited to join a walk on the newly-created footpath network between Agios Stefanos and Avlaki (see page 27). Starting time is 10.30 at Agios Stefanos.

For further information about GreenCorfuNet, see www.altercorfu.eu, and for photos of the walks www.ddikeoma.eu/ddikeoma_el.htm.

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JOKE OF THE MONTH

Little Zachary was doing very badly in maths. His parents had tried everything: Tutors, mentors, flash cards, special learning centers. In short, everything they could think of to help his maths.

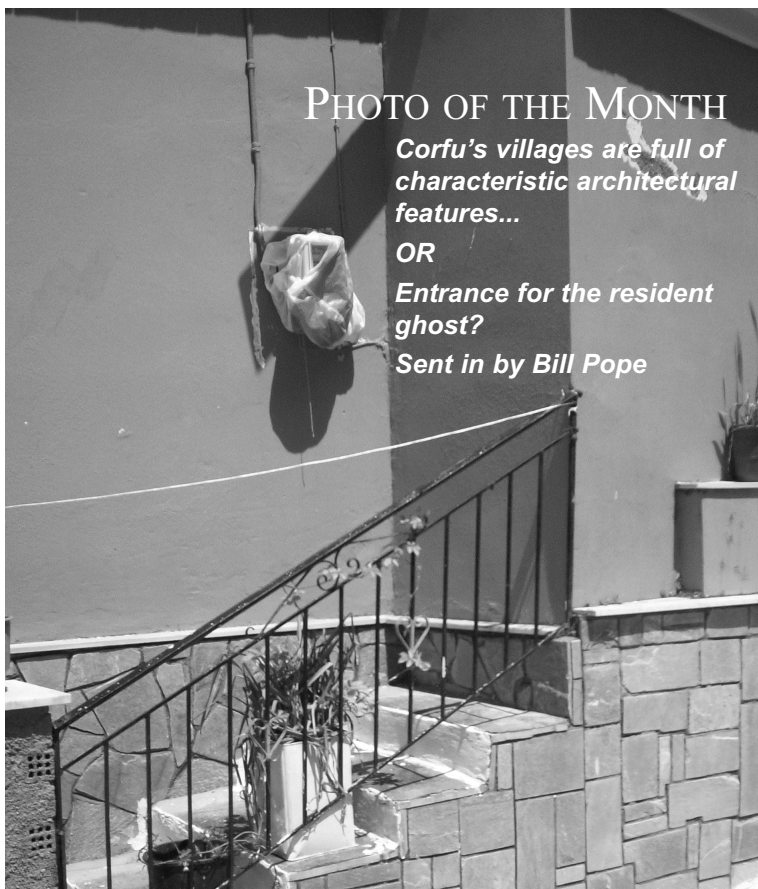
Finally, in a last ditch effort, they took Zachary down and enrolled him in the local Catholic school. After the first day, little Zachary came home with a very serious look on his face. He didn't even kiss his mother hello. Instead, he went straight to his room and started studying. Books and papers were spread out all over the room and little Zachary was hard at work.

His mother was amazed. She called him down to dinner. To her shock, the minute he was done, he marched back to his room without a word, and in no time, he was back hitting the books as hard as before. This went on for some time, day after day, while the mother tried to understand what made all the difference. Finally, little Zachary brought home his report card. He quietly laid it on the table, went up to his room and hit the books. With great trepidation, his Mom looked at it and to her great surprise, little Zachary had got an 'A' in maths. She could no longer contain her curiosity.

She went to his room and said, 'Son, what was it? Was it the nuns?' Little Zachary looked at her and shook his head. 'Well, then,' she continued, 'was it the books, the discipline, the structure, the uniforms? What was it?'

Little Zachary looked at her and said, 'Well, on the first day of school, when I saw that guy nailed to the plus sign, I knew they weren't fooling around.'

Sent in by Lionel Mann



Four things you probably didn't know your mobile phone could do

In grave emergency, your mobile phone can actually be a life saver or an emergency tool for survival. Check out the things that you can do with it:

EMERGENCY

The Worldwide Emergency Number for mobile phones is 112. If you find yourself out of the coverage area of your own mobile network and there is an emergency, dial 112 and the mobile will search any existing network to establish the emergency number for you; and interestingly this number 112 can be dialed even if the keypad is locked. Try it out.

LOCKED OUT OF THE CAR

Does your car have remote keyless entry? If so, this may come in handy someday. Good reason to own a cell phone: If you lock your keys in the car and the spare keys are at home, call someone at home on their mobile phone from your own cell phone. Hold your cell phone about a foot from your car door and have the person at your home press the unlock button, holding it near the mobile phone on their end. Your car will unlock. Saves someone from having to drive your keys to you. Distance is no object. You could be hundreds of miles away, but if you can reach someone who has the other 'remote' for your car, you can unlock the door.

HIDDEN BATTERY POWER

Imagine your mobile battery is very low and you've got no way of recharging. You can activate reserve battery power! Press the keys *3370#. Your mobile will restart with this reserve and the instrument will show a 50% increase in battery. The reserve will get charged when you plug in your mobile next time.

DISABLING A STOLEN MOBILE PHONE

To check your mobile phone's serial number, key in the following digits on your phone *#06#. A 15 digit code will appear on the screen. This number is unique to your handset. Write it down and keep it somewhere safe. If your phone get stolen, you can phone your service provider and give them this code. They will then be able to block your handset so even if the thief changes the SIM card, your phone will be totally useless. You probably won't get your phone back, but at least you know that whoever stole it can't use it, or sell it either. If everybody does this, there would be no point in people stealing mobile phones.

Sent in by Paul Scotter

Tourists and Pilgrims

 **Clifford Owen**

If I could swop places with anyone, I suppose it has to be Michael Palin: Round the World in 80 days, Pole to Pole, Sahara, Pacific Rim; whatever journey he does there is something about his approach to travel which I find irresistibly attractive. He doesn't hang about and yet he lingers long enough in his venues to absorb a sufficient mix of their history, culture and simple feel. Indeed, watching Michael's programmes makes one feel we are on the journey with him.

I have been a traveller of sorts all my life, from a teenage trainspotter, intent on covering all the railways of the West Midlands in a week, to a 50s-something cyclist doing Land's End to John O'Groats, by bicycle. The latter journey required seventeen days in the saddle to cover the thousand miles. It provided x times the satisfaction than three hours cooped up like a battery hen on easyJet going to Gatwick. My four-day cycling trip from Corfu to Athens left me with more valuable memories of Greece than the one-hour feeder flight on the same route.

So what motivates we travellers and tourists? I watch the droves coming off our visiting cruise liners drifting towards town each morning to 'do' Corfu. But what is required to 'do' Corfu? After five years I am still finding out new things about the island and feel I am only scratching the surface.

Apart from the rich and leisured in previous generations, modern popular tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon. This paradigm shift began with the railways in the nineteenth century, exploded with popular car ownership in the fifties, and received its ultimate wind with the relatively cheap global air travel of recent decades. I am all for it. Travel is one way in which our souls expand, our knowledge and vision increase, and we are more balanced people. But I do wonder if the whole world is now on a journey from everywhere to everywhere, to see whatever can be seen and must be seen before we die. A simple exponential indulgence in travel movements seems to provide diminishing returns.

But there was one group of people who indulged in popular travel over the centuries for more than the scenery, food and wine: the pilgrims. Pilgrims went to shrines, usually on foot. It was the journey of a lifetime. Whether it was Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims, or Catholics to Walsingham, Lourdes or Rome, their motivation to travel was religious. Their journey was both geographical and interior into their own souls. Travel for the Pilgrim was more than seeing places and learning facts. It was an encounter with the numinous and consequently a journey into themselves.

During 1997, I was involved with organising a spur pilgrimage to the Augustine/Columba memorial pilgrimages from Rome to Canterbury and then on through four routes through England and Scotland to Londonderry. My task was to link four rival claimants to the venue where St. Augustine of Canterbury met the Celtic Bishops in 597 AD. One claimed site was Aust near the first Severn Bridge. Our Pilgrims mustered at St.

Augustine's Droitchich and travelled via Hartlebury and Tintern in the Wye Valley to Hereford where the main Canterbury - Londonderry Pilgrims were stabled overnight. What became obvious was that this was more than a tour of attractive places. It was a journey into religious and social history. There were lectures and artefacts to see, such as St. Augustine's Chair at Acton Beauchamp. But most interestingly, people started to rediscover the spiritual dimension of their own persons. It is sometimes said that people retain about 10% of what they hear, 25% of what they see, but 70% of what they do. In this respect pilgrimage represents a religious 'way in' of rediscovery. Perhaps that is why Michael Palin appeals. He somehow manages to touch on the mystery of places, glimpsing their soul. I have always noticed that somehow people who visit Israel never seem quite the same again. The Bible has come alive in a wholly new way for them. Similarly those who go on tours in the steps of St. Paul (including Athens) or the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, find new perspectives on faith and themselves.

Has Corfu the potential for Pilgrimage? Indeed is this not what Greek Easter is all about? But could it not be taken several stages further as a quiet introduction to the Greek Orthodox Church? On our Saturday morning walks with Hilary Paipeti, we have often paused at churches and places of spiritual interest. There is probably a huge market to be tapped here, not just in terms of tourist 'bucks'; but far more importantly in helping people to rediscover the spiritual dimension within themselves.

It would be good if any Corfiot readers who have been on pilgrimages could tell us about them. Boots on everybody!



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Local Hero's website boosts tourism for Arillas

by Sarah Button

Dimitris Kourkoulos is a mild mannered man with a warm smile and a glint in his eye. He grew up in 'Brouklis', his father's taverna in Arillas and has been running it for the past 17 years. He is a self-taught man who speaks five European languages fluently, has a lovely wife Litsa and a gorgeous five month old baby son. Like many other tavernas in the village, his is a family-run business and, with several rooms above the restaurant, visitors keep the family busy for much of the summer. Dimitris's sister Roula works twelve hours a day cooking traditional delights such as Bianco, Pastitsio, Briam and Stifado, assisted by cousin Stamattella. Dimitris's brother-in-law Nikos helps out too, and German language teacher Antje washes up.

I enjoy a coffee at the taverna whilst talking to Dimitris about the future of tourism in Corfu.

Dimitris launched www.arillas.com in 1999. This website, which he built and maintains, is the first electronic port of call for many a visitor to the north of the island and is packed with local information. In addition, it has a delightful webcam which is perched on a seafront hotel and which refreshes its view of the promenade and the sea beyond every twenty seconds. Holidaymakers can sit at home and indulge in a fantasy trip to the beach. There is a chat room, fantastic aerial views of Arillas and the surrounding villages, and on-line polls which keep a finger on the pulse of holidaymakers' views and ideas. One of the poll questions asks if visitors believe all-inclusive resorts are good for the island.

'Don't fix the roads,' Dimitris once told a vote-chasing aspiring Prefect. If his request had been granted it would have made life hard for the all-inclusive resort at Saint Spiridon, a whopping 800-bed complex which provides food, drink and everything else under one safe umbrella. Its existence has meant the demise of some local businesses, as holidaymakers venture no further than the hotel grounds.

Dimitris points out that Arillas has a capacity to provide 800 visitor beds too. The population of 460 people includes some 46 families, most of whom make their living from tourism. For the village, this is sustainable; there is work for everyone and in the winter enough labour and skills to restore, repair or rebuild existing facilities.

But what about the tour companies - what is their impact? I am aware that they hold providers' prices down, I say, and I believe they have a detrimental effect on the economy. But Dimitris has a positive word to say for the big boys. They encourage first-time visitors, he says, those who without the safety, guidance and guarantees that the tour operators give would not otherwise venture to Greece. Once here, these previously anxious visitors then explore and, when they have familiarised themselves, find other places to stay; places like the rooms over Brouklis Taverna. Once they feel comfortable, they become confident to make their own arrangements, returning as independent travellers.

Dimitris was once approached by a tour company who wanted

to do a deal; it would have meant building more rooms - an increase in business, yes, but he prefers to stay small, and the deal would have meant laying concrete over his father's much-loved smallholding which provides vegetables, eggs, chickens and fruit for the seasonal menu.

He says it's taken time to build up a loyal client base, but people come back year after year. He points to four of the taverna's tables. 'These are booked by the same people, for the next two weeks.'

• *'If we want to see into the future we must look at the past,' he says, and goes on to explain that maybe there are clues there. In the seventies Corfu had the back-packer... they trusted to luck in their search for places to sleep and eat by sizing them up for themselves. The independent traveller does much the same thing now - but all their searching is done on the web...*

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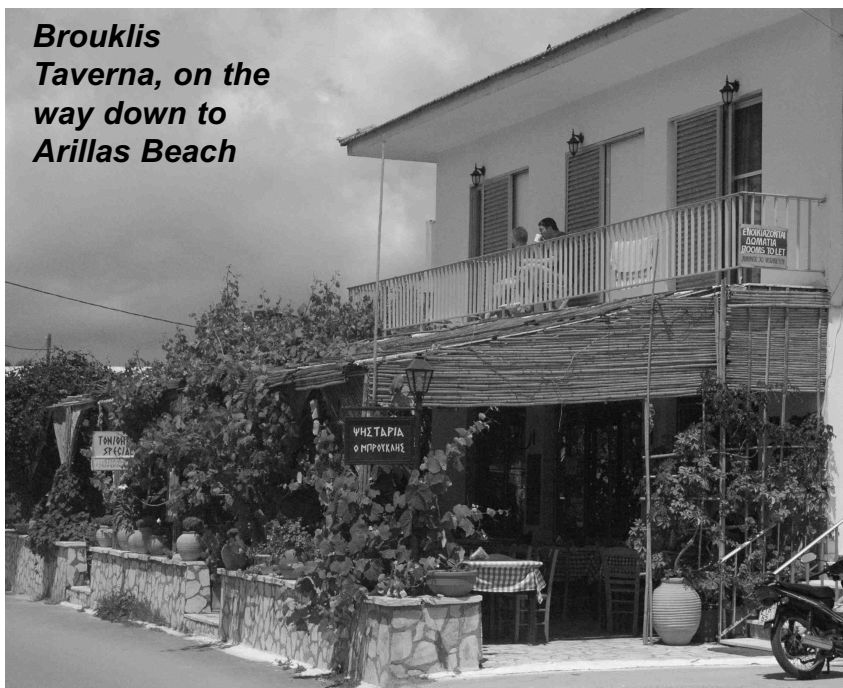
TOURISM

I tell Dimitris I like his restaurant because it is traditionally Greek, the delicious food honest and simple. He says he would not describe his restaurant as 'Greek' anymore than an Englishman in England would describe his restaurant as 'English'. He doesn't need to tell his customers that his food is traditional, for he is supplying food cooked with local ingredients in the way it has been prepared for many years.

There are no plastic laminated menus or boards displaying fare in four languages. There is no need because Dimitris's customers are discerning; they know what they want and the restaurant is generally full because they get it. Dimitris once suggested to a holidaymaker who requested 'Bisto' gravy that perhaps his restaurant was not for them, and they should get what they wanted elsewhere.

Dimitris seems to be defending local culture without appearing to try. But actually he has put in a lot of effort into it. He was able to build on the advice of a Swiss 'new-ager' whom he met when he was only fourteen. The hippy turned out to be a bit of a guru who appeared to see into the future. He foresaw that twenty years hence Corfu would become a home for older people - older people with some money who would embrace the local culture. He also predicted the boom in vegetarian food. In fact, the predictions were not hocus-pocus but based on sound economic and demographic knowledge. This was at a time when many providers in Corfu were preparing for a 'hip' younger generation who were expected to demand cocktails and fast food.

Brouklis Taverna, on the way down to Arillas Beach



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Dimitris, however, stuck to his guns and now it turns out the Swiss guy was right; people have stopped poking fun at Dimitris's Pumpkin Pie and now tuck into it themselves.

So, where do you think tourism going? I ask Dimitris.

'If we want to see into the future we must look at the past,' he says, and goes on to explain that maybe there are clues there. In the seventies Corfu had the back-packer: young folk from all over the world arriving by ferry. Of course, there was no internet in those days, and they trusted to luck in their search for places to sleep and eat by sizing them up for themselves. The independent traveller does much the same thing now - but all their searching is done beforehand on the web in the comfort of their own home; holidays have not changed that much, but what has changed is the way we go about planning them.

Then the eighties and nineties saw a rush of mass tourism, with package tourism dominating the market. In those days you couldn't do your own thing so easily, for the tour companies wouldn't have you on board their planes unless you gave an address for where you were staying; they had it all sewn up in a vertical monopoly. Now, with 'flight only' services available as well as easyJet, that necessity has thankfully gone, and once more visitors are allowed a choice.

Dimitris says the downturn came in the aftermath of 7/11, when the airlines were forced to become more security conscious, so prices inevitably went up.

But all is not lost. Tourism is Greece's biggest Industry. Dimitris says EOT (The Greek Tourist Board) will continue to promote package tours, while in parallel others will do their own thing.

Corfu is safe. And compared to other tourist hot spots like the Spanish Costas and the Canaries you are much less likely to be robbed or mugged here - in fact less than anywhere else in Europe. Greece is the safest European country - and Corfu is the safest part of Greece.

Dimitris is something of a local hero, and he cares passionately for Arillas and its future. He says many people are surprised that he is happy to post advertisements for other tavernas and accommodation providers on his website, but he doesn't see it as competition; all the businesses are different and each has its own character. He is savvy enough to know that people are glutted for information, and the more you can give them the better they will like it.

The webcam provides a window into the soul of Arillas; you can stand on the pier and wave to jealous friends back home. For us, though, it took on a much more practical role one day when my husband Pete and I took our kayaks out to the islands just off the beach. Once there we realised we might have left the car boot open, and it had started to rain. Worried, we phoned our daughter Natasha in England and asked her to check the webcam and see if indeed it was open. We enjoyed the involvement we could give our daughter in our lives, and as a result she visits Arillas electronically every day now. With its accessible approach, www.arillas.com keeps everyone in touch, but most of all it provides choice, allowing its visitors to pick-and-mix a holiday experience that absolutely suits their tastes and needs.

My first visit to Corfu was in 1973 - the year Dimitris was born. I was one of those backpackers, and it's amazing that my behaviour thereafter was predicted - I am one of those who returned in middle age to live here. I think I'm what's described as a 'Residential Tourist'. And I also fit the guru's prediction on choice of food, for I have to say that I really do adore Dimitris's Pumpkin Pie.

For a table at Brouklis Taverna call Dimitris on 26630 51418.

Or book on-line at www.brouklis.com

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The Durrells and Corfu 70 years on, the True Story

 **Peter Harrison**

In the spring of 1935, a small British family, made up of a widowed mother and three children under the age of 20, arrived in Corfu for an extended stay. They had been preceded a few weeks earlier by a fourth child, who was in his twenties and married; and they all initially settled in Perama. The mother and her younger progeny took up residence in what came to be called the Strawberry Pink Villa; and the older son and his wife stayed, initially, in a near-by fisherman's cottage.

They were, of course, the Durrell family. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Or is it?

Perhaps not. In the years that have passed since that event, much has been written about the Durrells and the five years they spent in Corfu, 1935 to 1939; and most this has been written by the Durrells themselves. Yet there are still many questions waiting to be answered about this period; and the biggest of these questions remains: Exactly what did happen during these years?

This was a question I was able to put to Gerald Durrell myself, in the 1970s, when I took a group of schoolboys to Gerald's zoo in Jersey while on a trip to the Channel Islands.

Gerald was kindness itself, to all of us. But he refused to answer my Corfu questions, unless I promised to return with another school group the following year. So I did. And he then answered, with amazing frankness, all of the questions I put to him.

At the time this happened, I presumed that this was a confidential interview, so much of what he told me then I never repeated. But I did use the framework of his story to seek clarification from others; and the greater picture I thus gathered was shared with Douglas Botting when he subsequently wrote his 'Authorised Biography of Gerald Durrell', and with Hilary Paipeti when she wrote her guidebook, 'In the Footsteps of Lawrence Durrell and Gerald Durrell in Corfu, 1935 - 1939'.

Now, however, things have changed. In particular, all of the original family have now died. Mr Durrell died in India in 1928; Mrs Durrell in England in 1965; Leslie Durrell in England in 1981; Lawrence Durrell in France in 1990; Gerald Durrell in Jersey in 1995; and finally Margo Durrell died in England in 2006.

They have all left descendants, except Gerald; but the 'raison d'être' for leaving anything still unsaid died with Margo.

So what now needs to be said?

Well, in my opinion, the following important answers need to be given, to the following perpetual Durrell/Corfu questions that everyone still asks. So here, at last, are my own answers to these questions, written as honestly as I can, and based mostly on what Gerald told me himself.

Question 1: *Is Gerald's book, *My Family and Other Animals*, mainly a work of fiction or non-fiction?*

Non-fiction. The people mentioned in it were all real people, and all were accurately described by Gerald. So were all the ani-

mals mentioned. And all of the various incidents described were also factual, although not always told in the order and sequence as described; but this is something Gerald acknowledged himself in his preface to the book. And the dialogue was a true rendition of the manner in which the Durrells always talked amongst themselves.

Question 2: *If this is the case, why then is Lawrence described as living with the family, when he was in fact married and living in his own home in Kalami? And why is his wife, Nancy Durrell, never mentioned at all?*

Because Lawrence and Nancy actually spent much of their time in Corfu living with the Durrell family and not at the White House in Kalami, during those periods that Mrs Durrell was leasing the enormous Daffodil Yellow and Snow-White villas (that is, from September 1935 until August 1937; and from September 1937 until they left Corfu in mid-1939. The initial period, in the smaller Strawberry Pink Villa, lasted for less than six months).

The Durrells were, in fact, always a close-knit family, and Mrs Durrell was always the focus of family life during these years. Both Leslie and Margo also spent some time in separate houses on Corfu after they had turned 20; but their places of abode in Corfu, and those of Lawrence and Nancy, always included Mrs

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Durrell's villas during these years.

With reference to Nancy Durrell, however, it must be said that she was never a full or real part of the family; and she split permanently from Lawrence after the Corfu period came to an end.

Question 3: *So if My Family and Other Animals is more or less a true account of these events, what about Gerald's other books and stories about Corfu?*

These became progressively more fictionalised as the years progressed. In his second Corfu book, Birds, Beasts and Relatives, Gerald told some of the best anecdotes he ever wrote about his time in Corfu, and most of these were true. But some were not; and a few were also actually rather silly stories that he subsequently regretted writing.

The same can also be said about many of the events described in the third book, The Garden of the Gods. The simple fact is that the whole sequence of their stay in Corfu was accurately told in the first book. The second book included some stories that had been missed out of this first book, but these incidents were insufficient to fill the book, so were 'padded out' with fictional happenings. And the third book, and the subsequent short stories, while often containing some measure of truth, were substantially works of fiction.

Question 4: *By the time he finished writing about Corfu, was everything that was factual about these years finally included in Gerald's books and stories, or was there anything he deliberately missed out?*

There were things deliberately missed out. And quite necessarily

so. As the period progressed, Gerald became more and more independent of his mothers control, and he actually spent some period of time living with Lawrence and Nancy in Kalami. This was a period he never wrote about, for a number of reasons. But if there was ever a more true 'Child of Nature', or 'Wild Child', then it was Gerald during these times.

Thus, if childhood really is the 'bank-balance of the novelist', as they say it is, it was during these periods in particular, and during the Corfu period taken as a whole, that both Gerald and Lawrence filled their bank-balances to over-flowing with experiential riches, which subsequently spilled out during their writing careers.

Question 5: *It has sometimes been suggested that the Durrells led a life-style in Corfu that was amoral and which upset some of the Corfiot people at the time. Is this true?*

Never Gerald. He was never anything other than a small and much-loved boy during his years in Corfu. And not only was he much loved by his mother and family, but he was also adored by everyone else around him: by the Corfiot people who knew him, and to whom he always spoke, in passable Greek; by the various tutors he had during these years, and especially by Theodore Stephanides, who treated him as his own son; and by the Durrell's guide and mentor, 'Spiro Amerikanos', the taxi driver.

The rest of the family did, however, give some offence, in particular over the following matters: Lawrence and Nancy, by having their first child aborted and buried in Kalami Bay; Margo, by almost certainly becoming pregnant herself and having to go

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off to England to have her baby adopted out; and Leslie, by making the family servant girl, Maria Kontou, pregnant, and then refusing to either marry her or support their son.

The incident concerning Margo was hinted at by Gerald at the start of his chapter entitled 'Interlude for Spirits' in *Birds, Beasts and Relatives*; but the story he wrote there was one of his silly ones, and only conveys the fact that, half-way through their stay in Corfu, Mrs Durrell had to rush Margo to London to deal with a 'sudden spectacular increase in weight'.

The actual background to this event was, of course, described in *My Family and Other Animals* at the start of Chapter 12. The 'villain of the piece' was Gerald's tutor, Peter, in real life Pat Evans. Pat was ostracised by the Durrells from then on. But Pat did not leave Greece when he left Corfu - he subsequently became a hero of the Greek Resistance during World War Two. After the war he returned to England and married. But he never spoke about the Durrells, to either his wife or his son.

Question 6: *During the Corfu years, and the first post-war years, the Durrells were relatively unknown. But just how famous have Lawrence and Gerald become since those times?*

Lawrence has now become recognised as one of the significant writers of the 20th century. Almost all of his books are still on sale, and two of his earliest novels will be reprinted in the next 12 months through the efforts of the Durrell School of Corfu and its Director and Founder, Richard Pine. And it is not only his novels which remain admired - his travel books are also amongst the best ever written.

Gerald Durrell, on the other hand, wrote 37 books during his lifetime, but few of them are now in print. Unlike Lawrence, he will not be remembered so much as a writer but as a communicator and naturalist. His two great contributions to posterity are his zoo on Jersey, where endangered species are being bred and returned to the wild, and his book *My Family and Other Animals*, one of the best books of travel literature ever written.

Question 7: *The Durrells appear to have made their decision to leave Corfu in 1938, 70 years ago this year. Why exactly did they go to Corfu in the first place? Why did they leave in 1939? And why did they never return to live in Corfu again, if the experiences they had there were so pivotal to Lawrence's and Gerald's writings?*

The fact that another World War was approaching was recognised by them early in 1938, and they started to prepare then to leave Corfu in 1939. However, whether or not they could have remained in Corfu, had there not been a war, is a moot question. Mrs Durrell had initially followed her son Lawrence to Corfu in 1935 because it promised to be somewhere where her pension could go much further than it could in England. But by 1938 she was in financial difficulties and needed to return to England anyway. Also, her family were by that time growing up and leaving home; and Gerald, the youngest, needed to be schooled. By the time the Second World War had finished, everything had changed. Gerald was by then 20. All of the children were now making their own way in life. And the post-war world was not one that would allow a repetition of the kind of lifestyle they had led before the war, on relatively meagre resources.

And also, Corfu had changed forever.

The Durrells did, however, return for numerous holidays. But

both Lawrence and Gerald purchased homes of their own in France; and Margo purchased a home near her Mother in Bournemouth in England. Only Leslie can be said to have been a financial failure in his subsequent life, and he died in relative poverty in 1981.

Question 8: *Are any people now left alive who knew the Durrells in Corfu? And where is the best place to go in Corfu to retrace those events?*

Mary Stephanides, the widow of Theodore, still lives on, at a great age, in London. So does her daughter, Alexia, who lives in Greece. And in Corfu itself, the Kontos family, who knew the Durrells from 1935, still live in Perama. The head of the family remains Menelaos Kontos, who owns the Aegli Hotel in Perama. Vassilis Kontos, his son, who is the Managing Director of Corfu Holidays, now owns the nearby Strawberry Pink Villa, the Durrell's first home in Corfu. This is currently up for sale for 1,200,000 euros.

Next door to the Aegli is the Batis Taverna, owned by Elena, the sister of Menelaos. And Elena's son and daughter-in-law, Babis and Lisa, own some luxury holiday flats on the hillside above it. Her daughter and grand-daughter also own hotels, including the Hotel Pondikonissi, which stands almost directly opposite the Aegli, and immediately beside the beach the Durrells used in their Perama days.

The best guide to those years is the book *In the footsteps of Lawrence Durrell and Gerald Durrell in Corfu 1935 - 1939*, by Hilary Paipeti.

And based in the centre of Corfu Town is the Durrell School of Corfu, which runs courses every year, under the guidance of one of the biographers of Lawrence Durrell, Richard Pine.

Question 9: *Finally, what then, if anything, is the legacy that the Durrells have left Corfu?*

A very great legacy. And one that the Corfiot government and people have just begun to recognise. The book *My Family and Other Animals* has not only sold millions of copies worldwide, but has now been read as a school text by several generations of children. And this book alone has brought huge publicity and prosperity to the island and people of Corfu.

Added to this are all the other books written by or about the Durrells; and this has resulted in what can now be described as the 'Durrell Industry', which continues to generate huge amounts of money and involves a multi-million group of people who subsequently visit the island. And they have helped substantially to forge the tourist industry which now exists on the island for everyone else, Durrell-fan or not.

Gerald himself actually regretted the influence he had had on the development of Corfu; but this development has, in fact, been mainly for the good. Because, when the Durrells first arrived on the island in 1935, most of the local people lived in poverty. Now, largely as a consequence of their stay, the whole world knows of the wonderful island of Corfu, and most Corfiots live a relatively prosperous existence.

And that is the greatest legacy the Durrell family have left Corfu.

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Perfect Picnic Places Hilary Paipeti

Summer Time is Picnic Time, and many venues in Corfu lend themselves to al fresco dining. What are the criteria for a perfect picnic spot?

PEACE AND QUIET While there are some fantastic viewpoints on Corfu's main roads, you really don't want to eat with lorries roaring past, and passing locals staring! An out-of-the-way spot that is reasonably accessible is what you are looking for.

SHADE Sunshine is lovely, but you can get too much of it! The perfect spot is shady, but gives the option for a seat in the sun if you wish.

SOMEWHERE TO SIT Only kids are comfortable sitting cross-legged on the ground, so it's nice if benches are laid on. And a table or two as well!

WATER Wine is a must, but unfortunately it never comes on tap at the picnic spot! Liquid is heavy, so the presence of a water source or spring at your chosen spot is a bonus. Don't forget to take an empty plastic bottle to fill up and take home - greener and better for you than supermarket bottled water!

ACCESS Carrying food, drink and equipment for miles isn't much fun, so we prefer places that don't involve a huge walk to reach the actual eating venue. We would recommend a 4x4 vehicle to reach some of the locations.

Here we have picked out five of our favourite picnic spots. Not all of them meet every one of the above criteria, but each offers a lovely environment for an outdoor meal, plus the possibility of a short pre-lunch walk if you're that way inclined and want to make a day of it, or maybe have guests to amuse with an alternative activity. We present five more picnic venues next month.

So here they are, in reverse order of preference:

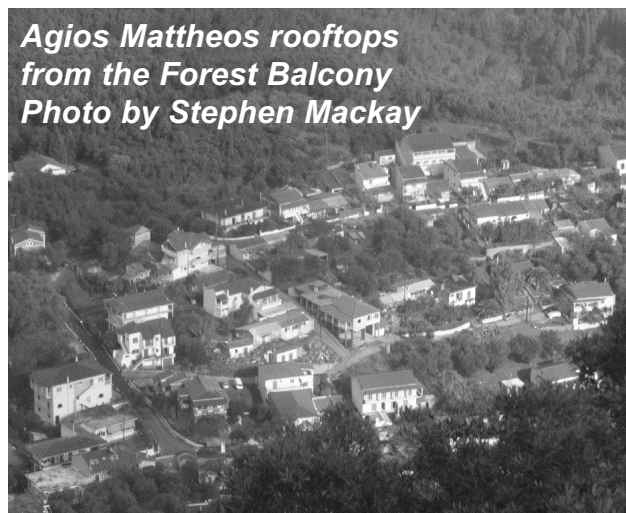
DANDALO TOWER, BEHIND ACHARAVI Unless you have folding chairs, you'll have to sit on the ground - but the location is spectacular, and you can reach it directly by car. The three-floor Tower was built in the years following the Fourth Crusade of 1204. The Crusaders failed to reach Jerusalem and sacked Constantinople instead, partitioning the Byzantine Empire out between them. Venice got Corfu, and its ruler, Doge Dandolo, gave the northern part of the island to a nephew, who built the Tower as his administrative centre and place of refuge. You can see the base for the drawbridge. There is also a church and a ruined water mill with intact millstone.

TO GET THERE Turn off Acharavi's main street at the 'round-about', taking the inner village road. Just after a bridge, the first road right takes you inland, gently ascending beside oak forest. Shortly after the climb steepens, look on the right for blue signs nailed to a tree, pointing to a dirt track leading off left. The track leads to a church, where you park. The Tower is behind.

WALK The Tower is on two of the Blue Routes, a waymarked network of walks mainly in the hinterland of Acharavi. Follow the blue paint markers beyond the Tower on a narrow footpath through the woods. The path drops down a bank to a track, where you go right. Fork left at a junction of tracks, then look carefully for a footpath on your left, your onward way. This winds through gradually clearing woodland into olive groves and then onto a road (this was your way with the car). Turn left and follow the road and track back to the Tower.

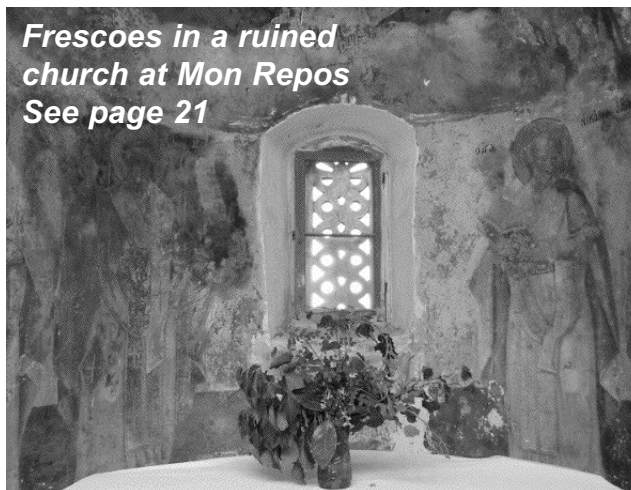
FOREST BALCONY, MOUNT AGIOS MATTHEOS At a natural balcony just under the summit of Mount Agios Mattheos (463m) in southern Corfu, the setting has been enhanced by the local cultural society. They've cleared a path for easy access, and built rustic railings to protect the steep drop, which gives a bird's eye view of the rooftops of Agios Mattheos village below and the great Messongi River Valley beyond. The low, twisted oaks trees, draped with lichen, seem to have sprouted out of an illustration by Arthur Rackham.

Agios Mattheos rooftops from the Forest Balcony
Photo by Stephen Mackay



TO GET THERE You can walk to the summit up the old path from the north end of the village - but not lugging your picnic gear. Vehicle access is by way of a steep-in-places concrete road that leaves the main village road at the south end of Agios Mattheos village. It is signposted for the Monastery. A small, loaded hire car will probably not make it. Just keep climbing until you reach the Monastery grounds, then walk up to the left of the monastery wall, where a path leads to the summit. As you walk up, a smaller 'balcony' on the right of the path gives a map-like vista of the west coast at Halikouna and over Lake Korission. A little higher, right at the summit, an oblong construction of loose stones was a German gun emplacement > 21

Frescoes in a ruined church at Mon Repos
See page 21



in World War Two. Clamber up to the trig point and you will gain a view that on a clear day encompasses the Diapontian Islands to Corfu's north west and Paxos to the south. The path to the Forest Balcony is initially alongside the wall to the left of the emplacement, then twisting through the trees. It is marked with orange paint splashes. Keep left for the Balcony.

WALK The local cultural society has cleared and marked a number of paths on the mountain. Our walk takes you along one, halfway down the hillside, then back up the road. Walk back from the Balcony towards the gun emplacement. You will see paint splashes to the left. Go this way, then when a few steps on they diverge, bear right, ducking under tree trunks. The marked way takes you to the edge of the summit plateau, and then drops very steeply. The path is narrow and vertiginous at first, but well defined as it zigzags down, giving glimpses of sea or valley at every turn. When it levels out go straight on rather than taking another marked path to the right. A few steps on, it emerges onto the ascending concrete road on the outside of a bend. Take the road back up to the Monastery - a steep climb which rewards you with great views every time you stop to catch your breath.

OLD ALONI, KRINI No, it's not a Mediaeval helicopter landing pad - it's an old threshing floor (aloni in Greek). The circular floors were always built to catch the wind in order to winnow the chaff. The stone-block surface - smoother in past times - was coated with a thick layer of padded manure to make a flat surface to sweep off the grain later, and the sheaves were stomped with human or animal feet. Nowadays - except if a donkey's been grazing nearby - there's no manure, but there is a fantastic view over the sea to Afionas on its headland and the Diapontian Islands beyond. Inland, Makrades lies on a ridge. Solid rustic benches can be shifted to make a convenient seating layout.

TO GET THERE Park the car in the Krini parking lot (after the square) then walk back to the little diamond-shaped square (pick up water and other essentials at the tiny shop). Turn left and follow the alleyway, which bends left and then runs straight. Just out of the houses, fork left up a small rocky path, and you are almost immediately on the aloni.

WALK Starting at the car park, head back the way you came in the car, towards the square. Before the first 90 degree bend right, take a lane to the left. A few steps up, go left at a T, then follow the main alley. It rounds an old house and then squeezes between two buildings. Persevere and you are immediately on a roughly cobbled, walled path. It descends to a meadow, which it skirts on a raised way. Go right around the meadow and then the path, between high walls, descends like a corkscrew to meet a dirt track, where you turn left. Follow the track to its junction with a road; JUST before it meets the road, look on the right for a small path, initially over a rock, then downhill between low walls. You emerge onto the road again where it stops at the entrance to Angelokastro. If you wish, climb to the summit (you can get as far as the gate in the curtain wall - the fortress is under renovation and access is restricted, but there is a very good interpretation board at the foot of the path which will let you know what you're missing). Return to your starting point at the car park by following the asphalt road, or back the way you came.

FRESCO CHURCH, MON REPOS PARK The villa where Prince Philip was born has been stunningly restored and now houses an excellent museum with archaeological finds, interpretive displays, Regency design, contemporary antiques and

botanical paintings - truly eclectic! But - shamefully - preservation works did not stretch to the stunning old church a few hundred metres behind the villa (pass the main building and turn left). It is roofless, and the exceptional wall frescoes are only protected from the weather by some makeshift plastic sheets. Appalling graffiti defaces walls inside and out, though the 'artists' have so far balked at scrawling on the frescoes. On one side, the church and its associated buildings are surrounded by remains of a formal garden, and on the other with a grand terrace. Anywhere in this magical spot is perfect for a picnic - if you can ignore the mess.

TO GET THERE Mon Repos Park is to the south of Corfu Town, on the road to Kanoni. The entrance is on a crossroads, opposite the ruined Basilica of Agia Kerkira (3rd century AD). Access to the park is free, but there is a small charge for the museum.

WALK The Park is criss-crossed with a network of paths and tracks - ask for a map at the entrance or in the Museum. You can't get lost, so just wander at will. Through shady woods with a variety of exotic trees introduced by the British, you will discover temples - the Temple of Apollo is in the best state of preservation - viewpoints, a swimming jetty, and cottages long abandoned. Keep children close as there are some unexpected and unprotected drops.

SISSY'S SPRING, GASTOURI This month's top picnic spot was created by the Empress Elizabeth of Austria (Sissi) in the last decade of the 19th century to provide a convenient well for the needs of local peasant women. The domed spring is unused now, but the flow has been directed into taps below the road level. The water is of excellent quality. Next to the taps is the old laundry, where villagers could scrub clothes on concrete washboards, using running water lacking in their homes. Opposite the taps and next to Sissi's well-head, an elevated picnic area has been created, with a table, benches and concrete ledges to sit on. Steps up beside the area lead to the foot of a huge plane tree. In Sissi's time, an old lady lived in its hollow core with her pig. A perhaps apocryphal story tells of how, watching the lovely Empress pass by, the old lady commented on her beauty, adding '...but she's not as beautiful as my pig.' Indeed, in the eye of the beholder! Mercifully, Sissi's reply is not recorded...

TO GET THERE Shortly after you enter the village of Gastouri, on the way to the Achillion Palace, you turn off the main street into a smaller road to the right. It is signposted to Sissi's Spring, about half a kilometre on.

WALK Follow in the footsteps of Sissi to the summit of Mount Agia Kyriaki, which at 288 metres looms above the village of Gastouri. From the Spring, follow the road onwards for about 70 metres, to where it bends sharp right. On your left, on the outside of the bend, take a stone-cobbled path, which shortly bears left and winds up the hill. Higher up and depending on the seasonal undergrowth, it sometimes becomes indistinct; keep going uphill until you emerge onto a large flat olive grove, with a little hut in sight ahead and slightly to the right. Head for the hut and then continue up a low terrace. Then veer off right where the olive grove is bordered by a thicket hedge. Go through a gap in the hedge, then turn left along a track, to meet a road. Turn right and continue uphill. Passing under an overhead electricity cable, look on the right for a path. Now you've got about ten minutes steep climb to the chapel on the summit with its fantastic view. A plaque on the wall reads (in translation): 'In this sacred place, the wounded Empress Elizabeth prayed and regained her

peace'. Relax in this truly lovely spo... and peace may steal into your own soul.

To return, descend the path to the road and turn back the way you came. This time, follow the road all the way back to Gastouri; you will reach the village street at a crossroads. The Achillion Palace is to the right, but you turn left. A short distance on, the street bends left, and a paved alley heads straight on, into the square where the village fiesta takes place in August. Follow the lane which skirts the square on its near-side. Through old houses, the lane becomes a path amongst trees (you can take a short detour up some steps to the right, to a chapel with a great view). Reaching houses again, the path once more becomes a lane, and descends to the main village road. Turn left here and a few steps takes you to the village 'square', really just a widening in the road. A small church sits beside a coffee bar and opposite is the 'Made in Corfu' shop with village-style antique furniture and old wares (open 10-2 weekdays).

To continue, take the paved alleyway immediately behind the church. Follow it down until it forks - here go left, down to the road. Almost opposite is a building whose arcaded front carries frescoes depicting the Achillion Palace when newly built, and a very primitively drawn Sissi. Turn right here along the village street, then about 100 metres along, on the outside of the corner, turn off left down a paved alley. The alley leads down to a square beside a church. On the far side of the square, you'll find a flight of rough stone steps leading down. At the foot of the steps, go right on the concrete lane, and then follow the path through a verdant gully. Immediately after the first house which borders the path, take a narrow lane left. This leads up to the road; go right and a minute's walk returns you to Sissi's Spring.

For a shorter, less hilly, stroll, simply follow the road back the way you came. After a bridge and a hairpin bend, you'll see the arcaded building with the Achillion frescoes. You are now on the course of the longer walk - pass the building and take the paved alley, to the left on the bend, then follow directions for the longer walk.

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ALBERT'S DROP-IN, PYRGI

Drop-In, on the main road above Pyrgi, recently changed hands and is now called 'Albert's Drop-In'. New owner Roger Albert has pared down the main menu - and this is no bad thing, for it often indicates a chef who prefers to prepare everything from scratch. Roger shops daily in the market for fresh, local ingredients, and the menu changes accordingly each day.

We started with the Greek Meze. Reading the menu, most customers will assume that it's meant for one person. I ordered two lots, just to keep the seven of us busy while the main courses were being prepared. What arrived was a platter with four bowls containing hummous, tzatziki, taramosalata and aubergine dip, surrounded by slivers of grilled pitta bread. The quantity of each dip was not much less than you'd get as a single portion in a Greek taverna, making this dish, at 4.50 euros, the best value starter on the island. The taramosalata was the real stuff, creamy and not the cheap commercial bright pink version many tavernas dupe tourists with. The hummous - which you rarely find in Corfu, was great; but we all agreed that the smoky aubergine dip was the best we'd ever tasted.

For main courses, four of our party chose the Cumberland Sausage, a dish from my part of the world and close to my heart. We couldn't, of course, expect it to be like the Cumberland Sausage I grew up with, I commented. Then out popped Roger from the kitchen and told us that he **MAKES THE SAUSAGE HIMSELF!** He also cures the gammon.

My own choice was the pasta with courgettes, wild garlic and chilli. The pasta was al dente, boiled to order, the courgettes and garlic just slightly crispy, and the chilli sufficient to cause me to blow my nose afterwards. Locals may find this sauce, with no lashings of tomato and oil, minimalistic; I thought it was accomplished.

Meal at an end, gravy mopped up by mash, carrots devoured, we were all full, and unable to sample pudding, even though there was Sticky Toffee. A very good reason to go back...

The menu includes traditional English and Mediterranean dishes, prepared to order. A la Carte and fixed price menus are available. Sunday lunch menu includes a choice of traditional English roasts. The restaurant boasts a romantic, panoramic view across the bay to Corfu Town. It's open daily in summer 12.00 - 22.00, except Sunday open for lunch only 12.00 - 17.30, and is located at Ano Pyrgi, Ipsos, on the main road to Barbati, opposite EKO petrol station. For reservations call 26610 97879 / 6938 835585.

Picnic Titbits

Artichoke Omelette

This is a 'marriage' between the filling of Marcella Hazan's Torta di Carciofi, slightly adapted from the Second Classic Italian Cookbook, prepared according to the concept of Rick Stein's Baked Greek Omelette, from his latest book, Mediterranean Escapes.

1 lemon, 4 artichokes, olive oil, 4 cloves garlic, bunch of dill or fennel, 150 gr mizithra cheese or ricotta, 50 gr freshly grated parmesan, 8 eggs, salt and freshly ground black pepper

Squeeze lemon juice into a bowl with cold water. Pull off the outer artichoke leaves until you uncover a cream-coloured cone and the leaves snap off easily. Cut off the top half (all the greeny bit) and discard. Cut off all but 3 cms of the stalk. With a small knife, pare off the outer layer of the stalk and any green bits from the outside. Half the artichoke lengthways and remove the hairy choke and any prickly inner leaves around it. Placing the choke cut side down on a board, slice it as thinly as possible lengthways, including the stalk. Throw the slices into the bowl of water with the lemon. Repeat with the other artichokes.

Heat olive oil in a heavy casserole or wide pan, enough to cover the surface. Roughly chop the garlic and saute until it begins to turn light gold. Just before you start to saute the garlic, drain the artichokes and rinse briefly under the cold tap, leaving them to drain while the garlic is cooking. Add them to the pan and turn them for a minute until they are coated in the oil. Add half a teacup of water and cover the pan. Cook until the artichokes are just tender and all the water evaporated. If the water is gone before the artichokes are cooked, add a little more. If there is still water left and the artichokes are ready, uncover the pan and turn up the heat to evaporate it quickly.

Finely chop the dill or fennel, discarding the thick stalks, and add to the artichokes, stirring to mix well. Set aside to cool.

Pre-heat the oven to 160°C. In a large bowl, lightly beat the eggs. Add the mizithra or ricotta, crumbled, the grated parmesan, the artichoke mixture, 1/2 teaspoon salt and a very good grinding of pepper. Mix well. Oil a shallow, round 20 cm non-stick cake tin. Pour in the mixture and place in the oven. Cook for 45 minutes or until set in the middle.

Tzatziki

There's nothing more cooling in warm weather than a nice tzatziki. You can buy it ready made, but the real thing is far superior. This is Rick Stein's version, again from Mediterranean Escapes, and very good it is too.

1 large cucumber, 2 cloves garlic, 500 gr 'Total' plain yoghurt, 75 gr spring onions, 2 tablespoons dill, 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, 1 teaspoon white wine vinegar, salt and freshly ground black pepper

Peel the cucumber in strips and coarsely grate. Pile it into the centre of a clean tea towel and squeeze out the excess liquid.

Crush the garlic into a smooth paste with a little salt, either on a chopping board with a

knife blade, or with a pestle in a small mortar. Trim and finely chop the spring onions, wash and chop the dill.

Tip the yogurt into a bowl and stir in the cucumber, garlic, spring onion, dill, olive oil, vinegar and salt and pepper to taste.

Tomato and Mint Salad

Prepare this salad at the picnic venue - with the dressing made in advance, it only takes a minute.

1 medium tomato per person. For the dressing (per 4 people): 1/2 teacup extra virgin olive oil, 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, a sprig or two of mint, salt and freshly ground black pepper, 1 heaped tablespoon sunflower seed kernels

Wash and dry the tomatoes and place in a lidded plastic bowl, in which you will serve the salad at the picnic.

Finely shred the mint. Put it in a screw-top jar with the oil, vinegar, salt and pepper. Put the sunflower seeds in a twist of foil.

When you're ready to eat, cut the tomatoes into smallish chunks, back into the bowl. Shake the dressing well, making sure the top is screwed on tightly first. Pour over the tomatoes. Sprinkle with the sunflower kernels.

Also bring along fresh bread from a local bakery - if you can find one that bakes in a wood-fired oven, all the better. (Close to Sissi's Spring, Hector's Bakery in Gastouri is one, and the bread is often still warm when you buy it.) Add olives, preferably the little, intensely tasty Corfiot ones. Some cold-cuts are a nice addition - look in the deli counter at the supermarket for local salami; the brand name is Kerkyraiko Allantopoio. Though I would always prefer to buy a whole salami which carries less packaging, it's obviously more convenient for a picnic to buy it ready sliced. Ask also for nouboulo, a uniquely Corfiot product - cured and dried pork loin; delicious, but a little goes a long way.

PICNIC ETIQUETTE A bit obvious, but it has to be said!

- ~ Take all litter home with you.
- ~ Do not light a fire for any reason. Outdoor fires are illegal in any case between May and the end of October.
- ~ Leave the location as you found it, for other people to enjoy as you did.

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FLASHBACK

Before they made it straight

The Road to Paleokastritsa

✍️ *Theresa Nicholas*

Once upon a time, the countryside began just outside town after the Platitera Monastery. The narrow road, full of potholes as big as hip baths and twisting and turning on itself like a snake, wound its way through a landscape of smallholdings and simple cottages with a vine trellis over a tiny garden. The only traffic was donkeys ridden by peasant ladies, followed by a few sheep or a goat, horse-carts transporting goods out to the villages and - every now and then - the old beetle bus going to or coming from one of the outlying settlements. To give an idea just how narrow the road was, driving my tiny Fiat 500 I would have to pull right into the side to let the bus pass. I was glad my driving wheel was on the near side so I could avoid the pitfalls at the verge.

At night the limekilns at Alikes blazed with leaping flames contained within the round stone structure, the figures of the man tending them silhouetted against the inferno. It was Dantesque.

The road went through the small village of Kontokali, which consisted at that time of Takis Tavera, the church, and Phillipos the Butcher - tavern and butcher's shop combined - where old men sat playing cards under the deep 'skepi', or just watched the road to see if anything appeared on it, a picturesque place often with a carcass hanging from the beam. Tourists from the new Corcyra Beach Hotel enjoyed going there. The place was one of the first to be knocked down - or pulled out like a tooth - when the tourist boom started. It was replaced by a cement and glass cafe, with a jukebox and an oil painting of ballet dancers on the wall; but it had proper toilets, a Gents and a Ladies, marked with a top hat and a high-heeled shoe.

In the middle of the village was a large barn-like structure, where a man mended bicycles and kept a tame monkey. Where the village ended and the country began again, the 'Tomato Man' sat at a table heaped with huge tomatoes - real tomatoes, the ones that taste of tomato. He was always fast asleep. People would stop, take what they wanted, and leave the money on the table.

Gouvia Bay was a virgin then, with only the remains of the old Venetian arsenal, a clutch of fisherman's cottages on the peninsula, and the little chapel on its island. No marina. The two peninsulas which contained the bay were virgin too, with no building visible except the Actons' lovely old house with its tall palm tree.

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The road wound its way through olive groves, the silver-grey leaves shimmering overhead like a shoal of minnows, and the sunlight on the green grass made it stained-glass illuminated from below rather than above. In spring, the bright mixture of the wild flowers changed colour from week to week, from white to yellow, yellow to the mauve of the honesty, and finally the asphodel in full flower like a sea of foam suspended beneath the posturing olives. Each bend in the road presented a new vista - and there were lots of bends in that road then.

And when you got to your destination, Paleokastritsa? That cup-shaped bay of jade water held to the lip of the small crescent beach, with the white monastery perched in the rock above as if on a bull's brow. At the far end of the beach, a small ramshackle taverna with rickety tables and chairs. The Xenia Hotel in the middle of the beach, and another place behind offering primitive rooms like monks' cells. The olive grove came right down to the beach then, filling the whole area between the two bays of Paleokastritsa and Alipa.

Reminiscing about her childhood, the late Marie Aspioti would speak of family and friends camping out in that olive grove for the whole month of August; transporting their tents and provisions by horse carriage the 25 kilometres from Town. It was a long way to Paleokastritsa then - but what a beautiful journey.

Postscript: It was during the period of the Junta (1967-1974) that the crooked way to Paleokastritsa was made straight by NATO so that they could secure weapons in the hollowed-out rocks on Alipa Bay. I remember vividly the bulldozers destroying the olive trees by Kontokali, where the main road now goes outside the village. An old peasant was watching their destruction in disbelief. 'Why are they doing this?' he asked Cristo. He had spent his whole life tending the trees; they had depended on the olives for generations. They called it the Black Gold, didn't they? He turned away from the sight in a state of grief, saying, 'To see that tree to be down is like to see a man die...'

Time changes all values.

But at least the chapel on its island remains unchanged



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On the Tourist Trail

with Theresa Nicholas and John Waller

 Hilary Paipeti

‘...stop looking at the shops,’ instructs John in the introduction to *Corfu Sketches - A thirty-year journey*. ‘Look up: see the faces on the keystones, admire the ornamented doors; even check out the chimneys... Ignore the window fronts... behind the facade, the heart of the town is still the same.’

My flying visits to Corfu Town usually consist of a dash to my P.O. box and the bank, then a gulp of coffee as I read my mail. But with this book in hand, I took a more leisurely trip, away from the commercial area of San Rocco Square and into the heart of the Old Town. This is tourist paradise, and the shops are filled with glitzy displays of jewellery, furs and souvenirs. But, John contends, above eye-level everything changes. I followed the 'Tourist Trail' to see if I could catch a glimpse of the Corfu that Theresa captured in her sketches.

Theresa has lived in Corfu since the 60s, and has witnessed the accelerating development of the town from a backwater to a vibrant tourist attraction which is now a World Heritage Site. Subsequently, little has been done to capitalize on the town's new standing, nor to assist visitors in accessing the characteristics that helped give it that status. With its walks, *Corfu Sketches* does both.



I started, as John advises, in the centre of the cricket ground (most games are now played in a state-of-the-art ground in the Gouvia Marina). Ahead, the Liston remains unchanged, even traffic-free. You can delay your start by visiting the Old Fortress with its bijou Byzantine Museum and ad hoc exhibitions, and the beautifully presented Museum of Asian Art in the Palace of Saint Michael and Saint George. I 'did' the museums last autumn, so set off straight away down N. Theotoki Street, which leads from the centre of the Liston all the way to the Old Port. Your first landmark is the 'Square of the Saint', with its large statue. The Square is bordered by two churches; inset in the wall of the one to your left is an exceptional icon depicting the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, with a lovely carved surround. Also in the Square, the Paper Money Museum is worth a visit as long as it's not a Monday or Tuesday when it's closed.

Continuing, you reach the crossroads at Pinia, the scene on the cover of the book. Pinia means pinecone, and if you look carefully at first floor level on your right, you can spot the metal pinecone it's named for (John writes that it's 'disappeared' but in fact it's still hanging there). You can spend ages admiring the next building down (especially as Corfu's best bookstore is housed under its arches! And if you haven't bought the book yet, they have it here), the Cobici Mansion. Compare the stone heads with Theresa's sketches, then sneak round the far corner to the handsomely carved main door. I actually hadn't noticed that the keystone is a representation of a 'Green Man' - thanks for that, Theresa!

There are more head carvings further down Theotoki Street, which again I had never noticed; Theresa's eye spots the details, and brings them to the attention of less observant persons. This is where you turn back to Pinia, and head left for Saint Spiridon Street, the 'Street of the Tourist Shops.'

I made two sweeps of the street, one looking above the shops for architectural details, and, in reverse, eyeing the shops. I was pleasantly surprised to see that the standard of souvenirs has improved mightily since I was last there - several shops even sell 'Made in Corfu' products such as Patounis olive oil soap, local nougat, and mandoles with their rich caramel enclosing a whole almond, sweet but good for you too! In the 1990s, they were peddling porn on this street.

So perhaps even the most blatantly touristic part of Corfu Town is reverting to a more genteel past. This book brings that past into our present.

Left: The cover of the book, top, and the scene today. Very little has changed - even the same shops remain.

Corfu Sketches - A thirty-year journey is published by Yiannis Books (www.yiannisbooks.com), Twickenham, UK. ISBN 978-0-9547887-4-2. 128 pages, RRP 29 euros.

Agia Barbara Headland

A new footpath network in the making

by Hilary Paipeti

When I was preparing the very first 'Book of Walks' in the mid-1980s, one of the routes I chose was from Kassiopi to Agios Stefanos, along the North East Coast. The coast was less developed then, and what are now roads were tracks. Avlaki, at more or less the mid-point of the walk, had no road at all, and you had to walk on the hard pebbles of the shoreline. The way between Avlaki and Agios Stefanos was a grind in both directions, being on one hand a long track (now asphalt) viewlessly passing through forest, and on the other a thirst-enducing sun-blached road. I tried very hard to find a way across the headland which separated the two big bays, but dense undergrowth defeated me. Access to the heart of the headland, called Agia Barbara, was anyway restricted due to the military watchtower spying on Albania.

This lack of access no doubt has been the major factor in the preservation of one of the few sections of Corfu's coastline which remains completely undeveloped. Now, an initiative by a team of locals has opened up the headland - but for walkers and nature lovers, not for building speculators.

Dimitris Katsaros started the ball rolling a few years ago when he established a horse-riding centre just behind Avlaki. So that riders could enjoy the natural beauty of the area, he opened up a number of trails at the Avlaki end of the headland. Now, with the establishment of a footpath which links Avlaki with Agios Stefanos, the project is reaching its final phase.

'We had to use a small bulldozer, the vegetation was so dense,' Dimitris told me. 'But by next year, plants will have grown up around the edges, and only the strip where people walk will be clear.' In truth, the way looks a bit raw, but the first greenery is already sprouting - and more importantly, visitors are already using it to get to previously inaccessible beaches.

Led by Dimitris, we took the path from the northern end of Agios Stefanos, where a new beach has also been created. The path rose and dipped as it followed the coastline, leading sometimes high above the shore and sometimes along unspoilt beaches. We stopped at Vromolimni, a small lagoon separated from the sea by a bank of pebbles. This expanse of

water, and another a short distance further, constitutes important wetland habitats for migrating birds, and a rest-stop for those taking the shorter trip between the marshes of Butrint and the Antinioti Lagoon near Acharavi. It is also home to otters. The second lagoon is called Akoli ('Bottomless') because of quick-sands which in the past have swallowed animals whole.

The headland also has remains of quarries where rock was extracted during the Venetian era to build the fortresses in town.

As well as the main coastal way, the network will include cut-offs between the road and the shore, and walkers will also be able to take circular walks using Dimitris's riding trails. The network will be waymarked, with signs giving the names of destinations, and all vehicular transport, including quad bikes, will be denied access.

Like the Nissos Headland near the Antinioti Lagoon, the Agia Barbara Headland is threatened by speculators sniffing out a virgin site for yet another all-inclusive hotel. Dimitris hopes that the creation of the footpath network will demonstrate that the area can offer alternative leisure possibilities.

We all need these wild areas. Constant vigilance, and efforts like Dimitris's, are required to preserve them for ourselves and for future generations.



Vromolimni - a valuable wetland habitat

What is GreenCorfuNet?

GreenCorfuNet is an initiative inspired by Apostolos Petroulias of the DDikeoma Institute to provide an infrastructure for alternative forms of tourism.

The project will run over three years, at the end of which a network of sites will be registered and made available to the visitor. These will include: walking trails in the countryside and around villages; gastronomy trails in which kafenions and tavernas serving traditional food will be registered; cultural trails bringing in monuments and museums; and ecological sites whether natural (like the Natura 2000 ones) or created (like an ecological farm or animal sanctuary).

The recommended trails and sites will be available as a guided or self-guided route, or as a pick-and-choose menu for visitors exploring a certain area. The project also launches many opportunities for the development of alternative tourism businesses.

Vivat Regina!

 **Lionel Mann**

One evening late in May 1953 I was visiting some friends in Kilburn. Fred Usher was a London taxi-driver, a great character. His wife, Flo, older son Alan, 18, recently started as a Post Office Telephones technician, and younger son, Francis, 11, a first-former at Kilburn Grammar School, were likewise excellent company. I visited weekly and always left with my sides aching from laughter; conversation between the four was a cross-talk act that surpassed anything to be heard on radio! That evening our talk was mainly concerned with the forthcoming Coronation.

"I'd like to go to see it," Francis affirmed.

"Don't be such a wozzlenut. They'd never let you in." Alan was scathing.

"We've just got that new TV. You'll see it all on that," Mother offered. Television was a novelty in those days, and the Ushers had just become proud possessors of a 30-inch monster.

"But I shan't be able to say I was there," Francis complained. "I'd only want to be outside to see them coming and going."

"You'd have to stay there all night to get a good place and you'd have to have someone with you," his father stated.

"Not me," Alan hastened. "I'm not standing around all night, not even for that."

Mother agreed with him, Fred would be working that day, probably the most lucrative of his entire life.

I had been considering going to join the crowds that would line the routes to and from Westminster Abbey and wondering whom I might persuade to join me. Francis greeted my offer with delighted alacrity and his parents consented, though all considered me somewhat crazy to consider spending a night on the streets.

On the eve of the great day we left Francis's home at seven in the evening, loaded with provisions provided by his mother, as well as a groundsheet, to catch a train from Kensal Green station to Trafalgar Square. There was no way that I was going to try to drive and find parking in central London that night!

When we emerged from Trafalgar Square underground station we were horrified to find the entire route around the square and down the Mall already lined eight, nine, ten deep. What to do? We decided to try to find a place on the route to the Abbey and then to dash home to see everything else on television. Even that looked doubtful; the crowds on the streets for the outward procession were already at least four deep.

We were walking slowly, hopelessly, behind the crowds gathered along Northumberland Avenue when we were hailed by a man in the back row. "Hey, you two titches, come in here. Anyone can see over you."

People moved over to let us through to the front and Francis immediately confounded their expectations of being able to see by buying the biggest Union Jack of a street-vendor's stock!

"Is he your big brother?" our new-found friend asked the boy.

"If he were my brother I'd buy him a wig for his next

birthday." Francis grinned impishly. Although only twenty-six, I already had a great deal of face to wash!

Indulging in the sort of banter that made his home such a merry place, my companion kept the people around us chuckling on and off all evening.

"It's bedtime," he announced at about ten o'clock, after we had made some inroads into our provisions. It had started to drizzle so he wrapped himself in the groundsheet, sat on the edge of the kerb, leaned back against my legs - and went to sleep. All night I stood and chatted with those around me, not daring to move for fear of waking Francis.

Rather before five in the morning, just as dawn was breaking, we were alerted to a disturbance in the direction Trafalgar Square that spread slowly towards us. Newsboys were shouting but it was some time before we could make out their cries. Then suddenly, "Hillary conquers Everest! Hillary conquers Everest!"

Francis came awake, and enquired what was going on. He sprang to his feet and eagerly seized the newspaper that I bought. It had stopped raining and we read over his shoulder the news that Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing had reached the summit of Mount Everest, the first ever to do so, together with details of their achievement. What great news to greet the dawn of Coronation Day!

The paper also printed the order of coaches in the procession to the Abbey, and the boy spent time memorizing it between bites of his mother's copious supplies. The news provided a constant topic for conversation all around, serving to pass the time quite pleasantly.

In due course police arrived to take their places in front on widely spaced spots painted on the road. They had their backs to the crowd. The days when law and order in Britain have so deteriorated that it is necessary for shoulder-to-shoulder police to scan crowds lay far in the future.

Seeing the constables take their places upon marks in the road led us to wonder what the white circle immediately in front of Francis indicated. We soon found out. Squads of guardsmen marched along, men falling out to take up posts in those circles.

"Oh, dear. I can't see a thing," Francis plaintive.

The soldier inched sideways.

"He's afraid I'll knock off his hat," Francis assertive.

The soldier inched back.

"I didn't mean it," Francis apologetic.

The soldier inched sideways again.

"Isn't he nice? I hope his sergeant's kind to him," Francis appreciative.

Our neighbours enjoyed it, and we saw the guardsman's shoulders quivering.

Again light rain started to fall and the first coaches of dignitaries going to the Abbey were closed, but nevertheless all were greeted with cheers throughout their progress while the guardsmen smartly presented arms. My companion used the information gleaned from his earlier studies to tell us who was in each of

TRUE STORY

them. Then came an open coach seating an immense dusky lady, braving the elements and waving enthusiastically. The crowd went wild and cheered to the echo.

"That was Queen Salote of Tonga," Francis announced. "She waved to me. It's a little island in the Pacific, isn't it? I bet it went up six feet when she got off." Roars of laughter greeted that sally.

"You'd better never go there, sonny," suggested a man beside us. "They'd stake you out to the land-crabs for that."

The rain stopped. Winston Churchill's coach was another that gained an extra loud cheer. It was only eight years since he had announced victory, and the memory was still very fresh. The coach of the recently-bereaved Queen Mother also gained added recognition. Londoners recalled vividly how she and King George V had stayed with them during the Blitz.

The approaching roars and sight of the gleaming breastplates of the trotting Sovereign's Escort of the Household Cavalry brought excitement to a frenzy, and then appeared the golden State Coach bearing our beautiful young queen, accompanied by her handsome consort, to her coronation. Nobody so much as stepped from the pavement, though there was nothing stopping them, but the cheering, waving of flags, exceeded by far anything that had gone before. It was absolutely deafening. I was afraid that Francis, frantically waving his flag, would in fact remove the guardsman's busby.

Republics are welcome to their 'elected' (usually corruptly) pernicious, pompous, power-crazed, politician-presidents, blots on the face of the earth, and the very best of recommendations for an impartial hereditary monarchy. Even the worst monarchs that Britain has suffered have not unleashed so much agony on the face of the earth as it has seen in the last ninety years from the brainless brutal oafs that have held presidential or other leading office in many lands. Great Britain has its gracious Queen, inheriting the wisdom of many generations of forebears - although she may be badly served by her ministers!

The crowd dispersed. Francis grabbed my hand and dragged me urgently through the masses towards Charing Cross station. He did not always realise that I could not penetrate gaps through which he could easily slip.

"Whoa, sonny, take it easy. You got a train to catch?" A young man grinned as the boy tried whisking between him and his girl.

"Yes, and it won't wait either; the driver wants to see his TV too." Francis was never stuck for an answer.

The fellow laughed and let us pass.

We dashed into the station. Our tickets had been bought the previous evening so there was no delay. A train was being waved away but the guard saw us rushing on to the platform. He held open a door and we fell in as it moved off. People shifted to make room for us as we caught our breath. On the journey we finished our supplies.

At Kensal Green station the eagle-eyed ticket-collector halted our dash. Tickets bought the previous day were not current tender. He relented and let us pass when we urgently explained where we had been. I actually won by a short head in the race to the Usher house. Alan answered the door and was nearly flattened to the wall as his brother burst in to throw himself down on the carpet in the lounge in front of the television set.

The ceremony had not yet started so we were able to see it from the very first majestic entry of all involved. In the meantime, Flo cooked us a meal, and I can confidently affirm that I saw Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain crowned while I was eating bacon, sausage, tomatoes, eggs and toast washed down with hot sweet tea.

Without moving from his vantage point Francis had been slipping off overcoat and blazer in stages.

His mother picked them up and went through the pockets. "Here, look at this." She extracted from his blazer a half-eaten egg sandwich.

Her son seized it and stuffed it into his mouth, attached fluff and all. "Thanks, mum. I wondered where that was."

After watching the Abbey ceremony, Fred hurried away to his business amongst the crowds, leaving us watching the procession from the Abbey back to Buckingham Palace. Again Queen Salote was winning extra acclaim.

"Look, mum, she isn't half fat - even fatter than you." Giggling, Francis rolled quickly away from the slap that his mother aimed at his rear.

That day in London, all those years ago, 2 June, 1953, remains vividly in my memory. I was there!

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BOOKS

THE CAT OF PORTOVECCHIO

by Maria Strani-Potts

Athens 1952, and a six year old girl, Louisa, loses her mother to cancer. Four years later, Louisa moves with her father and his new bride into the seaside village of Portovecchio on the outskirts of Corfu Town. We are only at Chapter 3, and after that not a lot actually happens, except that a venal priest gets his comeuppance. But through the next 200-odd pages, this book enthralls with its depiction of life in Corfu in the 1950s. The characters take on a life of their own; most are women with a burden. Blossom, the new-wed whose husband married to get a free maid and cook; Zoe, whose adored communist husband was executed for all the wrong reasons; Joy, 'the most house-proud lady in Portovecchio', whose husband is an absent sea-captain. They are introduced one by one, and the story follows their interaction through the passage of a year, climaxing in Easter. In each chapter, one of the characters cooks, and the recipe becomes part of the motivation or the plot; for example, Father Antony's Savouro is the reason why Mamee, the cat of the title, always follows him - which has repercussions in the very last paragraph of the book.

The author spares no-one, from Camilla, an interfering English animal lover who wants to 'save the entire Hellenic animal kingdom', to glamorous Joy, who 'drew long, curvy lines above her dark brown eyes where her eyebrows had been before she plucked them out.' The mores and customs of the day are presented with caustic wit, with arranged marriages, a garlic-impregnated bus, and visiting village relatives who arrive with three live turkeys in tow. Maria Strani-Potts takes you back in time, so that you feel you have yourself experienced the Corfu of that era.

It's like all the best bits of Captain Corelli's Mandolin rolled into one; and if a single book deserves to be read on all Corfu's beaches this summer, The Cat of Portovecchio must be the one.

'Gerald Durrell used to be my eyes on Corfu, my only information about one of the legendary places of the world. I think I see it better now.' **Newcastle Herald**

'It's like eating a full thirty-course dinner. Maria Strani-Potts is like a river that has burst its banks. Everything is included in her work, and she's not afraid to put it down - no matter whose toes she steps on. Brilliant!' **D. Toteris, Greek American critic**

Maria Strani-Potts is also author of the just-published novella 'The Pimping of Panorea' ('To Πούλημα της Πανώραας'). The work is in Greek, but if you speak the language reasonably well it is simple enough to follow, and not long enough to get you bogged down.

The fable-like story is allegorical, a parable for our times - you soon get the drift of what it refers to, even if you're not in the know from the start.

Its force of argument is one which is truly relevant to our plight today, and it should be read and re-read and discussed by everyone on the island, not just the movers and shakers. It sends out a very relevant message which we can ill afford to ignore.

'Made in Corfu' Antiques on sale at Gastouri

Corfu's first 'village antique' shop has been established in Gastouri, central Corfu, near the Achillion Palace. Up to now, shops selling antiques have concentrated on the upper end of the market, with aristocratic furniture from mansions. In contrast, the Gastouri shop is an outlet for the sort of furniture found in village homes, much of which has in the past few decades been thrown on the dump and replaced by modern installations. Most of the articles are made from local cypress wood.

The Gastouri shop also sells a range of 'Made in Corfu' products, including local ceramics and olive wood. Along with the Perithia 'Dopio' shop, featured below, it is part of an ongoing campaign, initiated in 2001, aimed at breaking the virtual monopoly in local souvenir shops of items imported from Asia. Cheap souvenirs from China, Taiwan and other Far East countries have flooded the market during the last 20 years, with the result that local workshops have closed down and skills have been lost. In Greece, only Crete has resisted the trend, producing and actively marketing local products such as herbs and olive oil.

Now, local craftspeople can showcase their wares, in locations close to Corfu's premier tourist attraction, the Achillion Palace..

The Gastouri shop is housed in a three-floor traditional building constructed of stone (pictured right), which was purchased and restored for the purpose. It stands on the approach to the Achillion Palace, opposite a tiny church.

Plans are underway to create a 'Heritage Trail' around the settlement, which will not only incorporate the shop and the Achillion, but also will guide visitors around the pic-



turesque back lanes to viewpoints and attractions such as Sissi's Spring and Hector's Bakery.

The premises also house an office of Luvcorfu Properties and Petra Traditional Constructions, so that potential vendors can discuss their requirements with experts and view the portfolio of available properties.

The antiques on display include dressers and wardrobes, chests of drawers, traditional dowry chests, tables, chairs and benches, brass and iron beds, copper cauldrons, shelf units, pots, irons, crochet work and many smaller items.

'Dopio' at Perithia

Part of the same chain is the 'Dopio' (Made in Corfu) Shop at Perithia, on the main road between Kassiopi and Acharavi and next door to the Art of Olive Wood Shop. The shop functions as a bar and snack bar as well as selling local products such as wine and soap, and a small selection of antique furniture. There is Greek Dancing every night with Costas and Gavril, formerly of the Drunken Duck at Dassia.

You can also order 'Made in Corfu' products for delivery at your accommodation. Orders over 20 euros delivered free. And the premises function as an office of Luvcorfu Properties and Petra Traditional Constructions.



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SINIES (North East) Butrint Vista House (Modern) Large house, part awaiting finishing, in imposing location on North East Coast. Up to five bedrooms possible. Great sea view, garden with lots of fruit trees. Lots of potential for lucrative rental or for food business. 420,000 euro

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LYRA HOUSE, Ano Korakiana. Imaginatively restored two bedroom house with separate guest studio and roof terrace with sea view. 150,000 euro



HAPPY KITCHEN HOUSE, Ano Korakiana. Magnificent renovated house with delightful kitchen. Full of traditional character throughout. Unfinished basement studio, walled courtyard, road access close. 170,000 euro



ALMOND COTTAGE, Kato Garouna. Very special one bedroom cottage, renovated in old style (photo shows work in progress), only needing kitchen finishing. Garden, nice country view. 80,000 euro

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SPRING MEADOW HOUSES, Agnos. Four luxury houses for sale individually as quality holiday homes. Good rental potential. Unique in Corfu: heated pool with Internet control. From 145,000 euro



HOUSE WITH THE BLUE DOOR, Kato Garouna. Substantial old house for renovation in picturesque village. Potential for three spacious bedrooms, large lounge and kitchen, and yard and sun terrace. Parking and nice view. 55,000 euro

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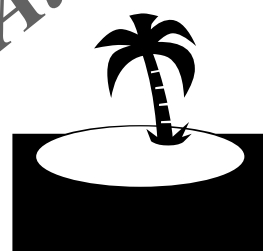
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