

Ancient Trails

The Paths of Culture project

Paths of Culture is an initiative of Elliniki Etairia, Society for the Environment and Cultural Heritage. Six paths have been restored or are in the process of being restored.

Aegina (in progress)

Marathon

Patmos

Sikinos (in progress)

Sifnos

Psari Korinthias (in progress)
monopatiapolitismou.gr

A lone runner at
Marathon



“After the second World War the Greeks started to perceive walking as something belonging to a past they wanted to forget. It became associated with the poverty they wanted to leave behind. When we first started this project to revive the ancient walking paths of Greece, people came up to us and said ‘why ever do you want to *walk*?’ But Greeks have a great history of walking. The walking trails of our ancestors can be found all across the country. Our grandfathers and mothers were all great walkers. It is something we need to rediscover.”

From time immemorial, footpaths were important arteries for the transportation of ideas, culture and goods connecting Greek villages

and towns, shrines, temples and churches, coastlines and mountain ranges. The country had an amazing collection of footpaths crossing some of the most stunning landscapes imaginable. This ancient infrastructure is now forgotten, abandoned and – in some cases – bulldozed over.

“The rise of new means of transportation resulted in the fact that most paths were abandoned. In the last 40 years, the European Union and the Greek government have invested in new asphalt roads. Nobody bothered to check if they were crossing ancient tracks. With this project we want to bring new life to several still surviving paths of a particular natural beauty and historical importance.”

One of those ancient paths was literally a road to health. It is a day’s hike from Corinth to the sanctuary of Asclepius in Epidaurus. This son of Apollo was the healing God of the Greeks. His celebrated hillside sanctuary was the best chance you had for getting well again. Close to the main temple there were hotels to house the thousands of visitors. Scattered among the hill are other sanctuaries, mineral springs and, of course, the impressive and still standing theatre of Epidaurus.

Patmos trails
Marathon trails
Patmos by
Adrien Egron
1837
Patmos, photo
by Chris
Vlachos



Theatre of
Epidaurus

Vathy harbour
Sifnos, photo
by Takeaway

It is an amazing experience to walk in the footsteps of pilgrims who, 2500 years ago, travelled here in search of a cure or better health. This classic 5th century trail is a beautiful and tranquil way to discover the timeless landscape.

Almost all of the thousands of ancient paths are in poor condition. Where to start?

Lydia Carras: "A local mayor has to write us to apply for the program. The official part of it is important. We want a real commitment in writing. Many towns are asking for our help, so we need to make

sure that the local community is committed and involved in the project. This is a lesson we first learned in Patmos. There we had earlier completely reconstructed part of an ancient path. It was too expensive, too complicated. Restoration really should not be the main focus of this project. Restoration will happen once people start to love it. The community will come with their own ideas. They can organise themselves."

The Paths of Culture project will do the initial research and find points of interest along the way; from vineyards to bird-watching

opportunities, from historical monuments to local products. Rediscovering the paths is often the result of interviewing local people. Sometimes an old shepherd remembers an ancient track where he used to play as a child. On the basis of this research, these paths are then cleaned and clearly signposted. Take, for example, Marathon, a true success story of the project – an old hunter still utilised one of these trails to go from town up to the mountains. Because Marathon is famous across the globe, it attracts visitors from across the world and the five footpaths and cycling trails



created by the project help to bring the mythical place back to life.

It is up to the local community to maintain it. All the paths are checked at least twice a year. Schools can adopt a path and put it under their protection. Teachers are keen to get the children away from their ipods and couches and into the fresh air.

“We have created special material, because we think the involvement of children is so important. We even have different schools adopting different paths, to create some healthy competition. When

the whole village gets involved, it helps these communities come alive again. They relearn what it means to live in an historical landscape and what village life is really about. The paths also are key to stimulating the local economy. The hiking and cycling industry is growing all over the world and Greece is a divine country for walking and cycling. Many tourists visit Greece in the summer, but these ancient trails can boost the tourist industry during the difficult shoulder months. There are so many more trails to rediscover. We have really just scratched the surface of the possibilities.”

Monument to the Battle of Marathon

Sifnos, photo by Phso2

Help save the Tower of Oinoe

In Marathon we can also discover the 12th century Tower of Oinoe which is in a sad state of conservation. The watchtower has two gaping holes which place it in immediate danger. Pavlos Kremezis, who chairs Elliniki Etairia's Council for the Architectural Heritage, confirms that the study for the emergency restoration has been approved by the official Central Archaeological Council. As a special gesture, all the proceeds of the ticket sales for the award giving ceremony of the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards in the famous Odeon of Herodus Atticus on the 16th of June 2013 in Athens will go to saving this tower from further damage. If you cannot make it to the ceremony, your contributions are still more than welcome. How? You can find more details on europa-nostra.org/tower