

2018

CRETE E4 EXPEDITION REPORT



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AIMS

The overall aim of the expedition was to trek unsupported across parts of one of Crete's most tiring and difficult routes E4 for three and a half weeks. Our general objectives were as follows:

- To improve our navigational skills through walking a partially unmarked trail.
- To improve our ability to manage supplies and remain organized whilst trekking unsupported.
- To test our group dynamics and improve our team-working skills in a tough unfamiliar environment.
- To document the trail through photography and use of the Imperial College London instagram to inspire others to pursue similar expeditions in future
- To inspire novice members of Imperial College to explore more challenging environments.
- To improve relations between members of different departments and years within the college.
- To improve our understanding of the natural environment.
- To extend the trekking and expedition experience of all members.
- To return home safely.

BACKGROUND

Crete is the biggest Greek island and the fifth largest in the Mediterranean. Its coastline is an internationally famous tourist destination, attracting 3 million tourists per year, but the wilder regions of its interior are pristine. There are three limestone mountain ranges that are only frequented by shepherds, their flocks and hikers from local mountaineering clubs. As they are rugged and hard to navigate (due to the non-uniform erosion of limestone, apparently typical of most Greek mountains) they are the ideal target for an expedition. In the southern face of *Lefka Ori* (the western range) erosion has produced an amazing collection of gorges which include *Samaria*. The E4 trail is 320 km long and runs from east to west. It begins at Kastelli Kissamos in the west of Crete and crosses along the whole Island reaching Kato Zakros in the east where it ends.

We followed the E4 only on its most challenging parts, in the Mountain ranges.

To this we added routes that pass through the *Samaria Gorge*, the longest and one of the most spectacular gorges in Europe, crossed the most impressive mountain ranges with varying levels of overgrowth, attempted their peaks, passed important archeological sites and beautiful beaches. The trail reveals old trackways, settlements, and monasteries.

We hiked the trail in September 2018. We chose this time of year as it is at the end of summer, temperatures will be slightly cooler than the peak summer heat. The trail was quieter and costs lower due to being outside of the holiday season. In Crete, the main language is Greek; we had four native Greek speakers on the expedition so there were no issues with communication. This was the first time any of our members have travelled to Crete.

In Crete, the E4 path is signposted by yellow markers and yellow and black arrows. However, in parts the trail is very overgrown, difficult to follow, and often not marked at all.

ITINERARY

	start	finish	Distance in km	Elevation Gain in m	Elevation Loss in m
8/29/2018	arrival in heraclion				
8/30/2018					
8/31/2018	anogia	nida	19	800	240
9/1/2018	nida	ayios ioannis chapel	12	0	470
9/2/2018	Ayios Ioannis	Zaros	15	0	590
9/3/2018	Zaros	kamares	14	450	150
9/4/2018	kamares	nida	11.7	1580	-
9/5/2018	nida	stavros-Toubotos Prinos/Fourfouras	8.5	1054	
9/6/2018	Toubotos Prinos	fourfouras	7		950
9/7/2018	fourfouras	gerakari	16	400	400
9/8/2018	rest				
9/9/2018	gerakari	Mixorouma	21.8/14	550	550
9/10/2018	Mixorouma	Kanevos	13.5	250	250
9/11/2018	Kanevos	Argiroupoli	19.3	450	260
9/12/2018	Argiroupoli	kallikratis	24.2/26.9	650	250
9/13/2018	rest				
9/14/2018	kallikratis	askifou (Petres)	21.4	400	500
9/15/2018	askifou (Petres)	Chora sfakion	15.5	100	900
9/16/2018	Chora sfakion	agia rumeli	19	370	370
9/17/2018	rest				
9/18/2018	Agia rumeli	kalergi	19	1500	
9/19/2018	gingilos	kalergi	11		
9/20/2018	melendaou	kalergi	16	483	
9/21/2018	kalergi	omalos-ag.irini gorge-sougia	19		1600
9/22/2018	Sougia	Paleochora	14.5		
9/23/2018	Paleochora	elafonissi-kania	19.3		

TEAM



[Georgios \(Yorgos\) Chatzitheoklitos](#)

Expedition Leader, 23 Years Old

3rd Year MSci Geophysics

Pre-Crete E4 Experience:

- 2018: Member of the Outdoors Club, weekly climbing (Top rope, lead) in Ethos.
- 2017: As part of a team funded by the Exploration Board, completed the GR20 in Corsica, the toughest trail in Europe.
- 2016-2018: Completed the Authentic Athens Marathon thrice (PB: 4:11:00)
- 2016: Organised, together with 2 other staff members, a 3-day hiking excursion in the Greek mountains and countryside for a group of 20 children aged 10-13, as part of the YMCA summer camp. I was the medical officer and responsible for finding safe places to sleep (we camped).
- 2016: Hiked the Rob-Roy way in the Scottish Highlands (120 km)
- 2015: Climbed and hiked in the Isle of Skye, as part of the Bart's Alpine Club
- 2014: Organised a Hiking trip to the Norwegian Fjords.

- 2014: Climbed to the top of Mount Olympus twice in a week.
- 2008-2011: Member of Greek Ski racing team, competing in national and European level.

First Aid Experience:

- 2016: Completed Fieldwork first aid course, provided by the Department of Earth Science and Engineering.
- 2013-2015: Member of BL Lifesavers, where I taught basic first aid skills to children.
- 2013-2015: Various (and assessed) first aid teaching in Bart's Medical School.
- 2014: Internship at the A&E department of a busy Greek hospital where I trained in minor surgical procedures (incisions, excisions, wound sutures).

Carla Huynh

Expedition Training Leader, 21 Years Old

3rd Year BSc Geology

Pre-Crete E4 Experience:

- 2017: My first long distance hike was as a member of the Exploration Board funded Corsica GR20 team last year. We hiked from North to South of Corsica along the GR20 trail in 14-days.
- Before this, my hiking experience was limited to 1-4 day hikes, mostly in the UK, but also in North and South Island, New Zealand.
- 2017: Last summer, I also spent a week mountaineering in the Swiss Alps, where I learnt the basics of glacier travel and summited Pigne de La Le (3396m).
- 2016: I've also completed a winter survival course in Northern Sweden, which involved 4-days of teaching and a 3-day 'survival phase' in which we had to live self-sufficient in the Arctic conditions.
- 2012-2015: DofE and various day hikes around the UK including the 3 peaks, Snowdonia, Brecon, Peak District, Lake District, Exmoor and the New Forest National Parks.

First Aid Experience:

- 2009: Personal survival and lifeguarding qualifications
- 2016: Cold weather injury first aid training (for Sweden expedition)
- 2016: Completed Fieldwork first aid course, provided by the ESE department

Nikolaos Koukoulekidis (Nikos)

Expedition Supply Expert, 21 Years Old

PhD Physics

Pre-Crete E4 Experience

- 2016-Present: Member of IC Caving Society (multiple 2-day trips include Yorkshire Dales caving system which requires single rope technique training)
 - Member of Westway Gym (top-rope climbing, bouldering)
 - Member of ETHOS (freestyle swimming training for triathlon, gyming)
- Dec 2017: Organised an 8-day winter camping and hiking trip for group of 4 in Iceland (we carried all gear and food)
- Jul-Aug 2017: Organised multiple day hikes in British Columbia, Canada, notably a mountain half-marathon from Cypress park to Mt. Lions (1600m cumulative elevation)
- 2013 – 2017: Participated in several one- and two day hikes, notably I have climbed Mt. Olympus, Greece three times staying in refugees.

Michail Chatzis

Expedition Equipment Expert, 21 Years Old

4th Year MEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering

Pre-Crete E4 Experience:

- 2017&2016: Run in multiple half-marathons
- 2016: Leader and Organizer of mountaineering expeditions for children and teenagers to Pelion mountain in Greece (YMCA employee)
- 2015: Climbed Mt. Olympus

First Aid Experience:

- 2015: First Aid Training in YMCA leadership training camp
- 2016: First Aid Theory Course in Greek Hospital

Niamh French

Expedition Journalist, 20 years old

3rd Year BSc Geology

Pre-Crete E4 Experience:

- 2017: Approx. 10 day hikes in Nicaragua, mostly unmarked trails without paths, sometimes carrying construction equipment. I lived in basic accommodation for 3 months with limited water, food and electricity in the forest.
- 2016: 3 day hikes in the Swiss Alps
- Many hikes in the Mourne Mountains in Northern Ireland, including 3 camping trips.

First Aid Experience:

- 2017: First aid course as part of a 3-month volunteer project in rural Nicaragua, focus on first aid in remote locations with limited supplies.
- 2016: First Aid training for role as kindergarten manager in Switzerland

- 2016: Fieldwork first aid course, provided by the Department of Earth Science and Engineering.

Aidan Cunnington

Expedition Photographer, 20 years old

3rd Year MEng Mechanical Engineering

Pre-Crete E4 Experience:

- 2015: Spent 2 weeks hiking and camping in Iceland
- 2016: Spent 2 weeks hiking and camping on trails in Canada
- 2017: Spent 1 week hiking in the Lofoten islands, Norway
- 2018: Lived in Nepal for 12 weeks, day hiking on weekends

Hercules Chatzitheoklitos

Expedition Historian, 21 years old

MA History International Relationships, London School of Economics

Pre-Crete E4 Experience:

- 2016-2018: Completed the Authentic Athens Marathon thrice (PB: 4:50:00)
- 2017: coordinator of a three day excursion in Pelion mountain as part of YMCA summer camp
- 2015: Climbed Mt. Olympus
- 2014: Took part in a 10 day hiking excursion in Pindos mountain
- Member of the Greek Hiking Association of Thessaloniki

RISK ASSESSMENT

<u>Hazard</u>	<u>Risk</u>	<u>Risk level</u>	<u>Steps to minimise/avoid risk</u>	<u>New risk level</u>
Wildlife				
Insects	. Bee/wasp/hornet stings . Mosquito bites	Moderate	. Wear insect repellent . Do not provoke	Low
Dogs/livestock	. Dog bites (all inoculated for rabies) . Ramming	Low	. Do not feed/entice . Do not provoke	Low
Walking				
High daily mileage	. Blisters	Moderate	. Wear well fitted and appropriate footwear (quality, non – leather, hiking boots) & quality walking socks . Look after feet (i.e. dry when wet)	Low
Carrying heavy pack	. Back/shoulder pain	Moderate	. Make sure bag is well-fitted and weight is evenly spread	Low
High daily mileage	. Tiredness/fatigue	Moderate/High	. Take regular breaks if necessary. . Walk at a pace everyone in the group is okay with. . Ensure every one eats a high	Low/Moderate

			carb breakfast every morning	
Vehicles				
Traffic	. Being hit by car etc.	Low	. Avoid roads if possible . Look both ways	Very low
Weather				
Cold weather	. Hypothermia due to cold/wet conditions	Moderate	. Wear the appropriate clothing. . If you get wet, try to dry off immediately . Worst case scenario the first aid kits will contain thermal blankets tec.	Very low
Hot weather	. Heat stroke due to warm/dry/humid conditions	Moderate	. Make sure you consume plenty of water and salty foods . Sunhat	Very low
Hot weather	. Sunburn	Moderate	. Sun cream	
Terrain				
	. Unstable terrain (rocks) from above can lead to landslides etc. which can kill or seriously injure	Moderate	. Don't walk under any cliffs/steep slopes or ledges	Very low
	. Walking on craggy terrain can lead to a twisted/broken ankle etc.	High	. Wear ankle supporting footwear . Don't run	Low
	. Rivers (fast flowing/and or deep) Risk of drowning etc.	Low	. Avoid crossing if possible . Find shallowest and slowest flowing point if you have to cross	Very low
Navigation				
	. Getting lost (E4 is poorly marked)	Moderate/High	. Use GPS mapping	Low
Night time				
	. Easier to get lost (reduced visibility) . Colder temperatures	Moderate	. Ensure we know when nightfall is each day	Low/Moderate

			. Keep an eye on the time regularly	
Lack of food & water				
	. Reduced fitness/awareness & ability to think . Risk of dehydration	Moderate	. Ensure each person has surplus water and food . Ration well	Low

BUDGET

Item	Cost (£)
Flights	1370.52
Equipment	1008.07
Training weekend	
Car rental	170
Gas	50
Gas for Humzah's Car	30
Food	46.62
Crete	
Accommodation in Chania and Heraklion	341
Accommodation	1678.86
Food	2654.33
Transport	100.76
Misc. costs in Crete (Hiking Gear, pharmaceuticals, entry fees)	561.46
Total sum:	8011.62

TRIP JOURNAL

DAY 1 – 30/08/18

Before we even set foot on the E4 trail we encountered a minotaur. Or rather, the remains of the Palace of Knossos in which the minotaur had lived. The Palace was the grandest building in Europe's oldest civilisation, formed 7000BC. We flew into this civilisation, named Heraclion, from London. After we donned our matching t-shirts (designed by Aidan), we boarded the bus to the peaceful village of Anogia where our trail began. The trail zig-zagged up through white hills. We couldn't see where the zig zag ended yet.

We camped in the grounds of a small orthodox church. We didn't use tents at any point of our trip – just sleeping bags under the stars. Three kittens had joined us in the church courtyard and Aidan's eye had swollen up dramatically from a run-in with a bug. He looked like Bear Grylls when he got stung by a bee. We drifted off to the sound of Carla's 80s music while half the team took shots with the locals.



DAY 2 – 31/08/18

Our first day of hiking. Everything hurt. We climbed uphill for 10.5 hours due to an unintentional detour.

We had encountered a lot of beauty as we got deeper into the mountains, the purest form of motivation. We had stopped at an archaeological church site for lunch and ate some cans of tuna and stuffed vine leaves. Canned food takes on a whole new character and splendour when you're in the wild with limited supplies. The first of many nature poos were taken a respectful distance away from the church grounds – a strange but not wholly unpleasant experience.

Later we stopped at a water source, the first that worked of those we had found on the map. It was a small gap in a hose that leaked into an algae-filled trough. We drank gratefully, soaked our hats and t-shirts, then continued up a steep winding road. Animals I assumed to be eagles flew around us.

We had expected to find a tavern at the end but found only a construction site and a courtyard covered in goat poo. The promised water source was a trickle from a rock wall into a trough. With the use of a small stick we managed to increase the flow to 1L per 3 minutes. We cooked the first of many rice and lentils meals and watched the mountains glow in the golden

sunset light. There was a sense of excitement in the air.



DAY 3 – 01/09/18

Yorgos woke us up to the cold sunrise with a “Happy September” each. He had already started cooking muesli for us. The walk began easily, we covered ground quickly on flat Earth. However, we then had to scramble 2.5km downhill on jagged rocks. We used our hands and feet but still tripped regularly. This was hard work but tall, beautiful mountains watched over us as we did it. Plus there’s a certain adrenaline rush that comes with knowing you could fall down a hill at any moment. The path was poorly marked and played tricks on us. Eventually we made our way to a church overlooking a valley and relaxed for an hour and a half.

Our hike continued downhill (with an accidental detour that made my calves scream) to an unattended refuge. We were blessed with three high-pressure taps to shower and wash our clothes with, as well as a working toilet and some empty rooms. We had luxurious showers crouching beneath the taps, watched by a herd of goats and a pair of German tourists. We spent hours cooking rice (one portion with Carla’s sweeteners), lentils and pasta. Carla led a much-needed stretching session. Yorgos and Nikos folded themselves into origami, Aidan and I managed to touch our toes.



DAY 4 – 02/09/18

We walked down a spectacular gorge with wooden bridges and lots of German day hikers. We took a lot of photos and made an Instagram video for Imperial. It was a gentle day, finished within a few hours. Yorgos surprised us with the best upgrade of our lives, from sleeping on the ground to sleeping in a hotel with a swimming pool and a cocktail bar. Bliss ensued. A wedding in traditional dress with swords was happening in the town of Zaros. Dinner was provided by a warm old woman who ran a buffet of homemade food.



DAY 5 – 03/09/18

A rest day. We ate a huge buffet breakfast at the hotel then took a bus up the mountain to Kamares, a small village where we set up camp in a primary school playground. It was pretty and bright. I left a spare notebook for the children to write in with a message written in Greek. Cretans are unfailingly kind; a local woman brought us cheese as a gift just because she saw our backpacks. We ate Greek salad and an omelette at a small café. The café owner offered Nikos her daughter's hand in marriage. Hercules was accused of being German. Humzah and Yorgos were asked if they were brothers. Greek salad was slowly becoming a major part of our lives.

That night Carla popped Aidan's blister for him. It was gross and unnerving and I was made to be the photographer. Yoga helped restore my inner peace.



DAY 6 – 04/09/18

We woke up at the crack of dawn to eat honey and bread before a very steep hike. Thick honey dripped over our fingers. The mysterious warmth of the school building walls had made for a pleasant night's sleep. We made a 4-hour ascent steeply uphill, the toughest walk of the trip in my view. Carla played cheesy pop music for motivation. Yorgos allowed us one and a half song's length of rest each time we paused. Springs along the route triggered our transformation into goats, heads dunked deep into the ice-cold water.

We reached the Kamares cave, famous for its role in the war. We explored with head torches. No snakes, despite Michail's fears. The cave entrance was huge and housed singing birds. It got darker and narrower and slippier the deeper we climbed. It was cool.

I peed nine times on the two-hour hike to our camp spot. Then I drank salt with Yorgos and everything was okay. We returned to the camp site of our first night as wiser and stronger hikers than we had been a few days earlier. We climbed 500m to see the cave in which baby Zeus had been hidden from

his father Kronos (in English, *time*), who was trying to eat him. The day finished as all days should, with lentils, couscous and yoga.



DAY 7 – 05/09/18

We climbed Psiloritis today, the highest point in Crete. The higher we climbed the more the mountains looked like Irish (or British) mountains. We could see



the oceans to each side of the island and eagles soared around us. The goats, a regular feature of the background until now, didn't climb up as high as we did. Reaching the peak was exciting and very cold. We had hoped to camp in a small stone house at the very top but the water source had dead mice in it and we didn't have enough water to last two days without refilling.

We stumbled downhill for 2.5 hours to a disused well. Some makeshift engineering with string, a bottle, a rock and a long stick allowed us to access the water. We purified it with chlorine tablets. The sunset over the mountains and ocean was breath-taking. It's very easy to feel fulfilled when you hike through beautiful places with good people every day. I was feeling very settled into expedition life.



DAY 8 – 06/09/18

Our descent was steep but short – 4.5 hours – due to our extra walk the day before. We'd slept for 10 hours, although a few of us had woken up and watched the sunrise from our sleeping bags before falling asleep again. We tried to get water from a source marked on our map but when we finally found it we discovered it was long dried up. We made it to the village of Fourfouras thirsty but healthy and safe. An old man piled us into his truck bed and drove us to comfortable rented rooms with showers and Wi-Fi. We scrubbed our clothes in the sinks with hand soap and hung them out to dry on the roof. Our matching white t-shirts were rapidly becoming matching brown t-shirts. Carla, Aidan and I went to a café to play cards and eat desserts because the supermarket was closed. Everything felt pretty bougie. Dinner was delicious and plentiful, traditional Greek food as always with wine for most and raki for the brave. We slept comfortably. For now, we were done with mountains and had days of easy walking ahead.



DAY 9 – 07/09/18

We woke up late and had a very sweet breakfast of rice pudding, cake and crepes at the same restaurant as the night before. After lunch we went to the hairdressers. Carla and I had hair crusty and sticky with grease – unwashed since we left London. Carla had never been to a hairdresser before and was astounded to see half of her hair on the ground. We all played bullsh*t in a café for a long time.

DAY 10 – 08/09/18

Our first day of walking through flat valleys. We had camped on an outdoor restaurant floor the night before, a kindness of the woman who owned the place and had rented a room to us the night before. When she saw that all we had for breakfast was plain bread she brought out tea, coffee, cheeses, honey and salted tomatoes for us.

They day was hot and the scenery very different to before. A kind old man asked us if we would like some walnuts then spent half an hour whacking a tree with a stick to harvest them for us. We thanked him then continued walking village to village through spiky vegetation. It was physically easily,

which made it easy to chat as we walked. We found some nice serpentine that the geologists got excited about. We had lunch under the shade of a tiny church roof. The mountains suddenly looked very far away.

We got to Yerakari, the village where we would camp by early afternoon. We set up in a basketball overlooking a beautiful mountain valley. The clouds drew in – the first clouds that we'd seen on the trip. We started to worry about rain. Dinner was bought in the supermarket.

An old man came to speak to us. At first we thought he was interrogating us, or maybe just keen to show off his English. However, he revealed he had lived in this village as a boy and returned every year to visit after he moved to New York, wanting to tell us stories about his life.

We slept with ominous dark clouds above us but only a short, light burst of rain. More alarming was an attack from sprinklers in the middle of the night. Michail picked up his things and fled – not seen again until morning. I lay awake and counted the seconds between the soakings of my face.



DAY 11 – 09/09/18

We ate local honey and bread for breakfast. Each region we passed through had its own local produce to try, consistently delicious. It was a cloudy day, providing respite from the heat. The walk was easy – flat and pretty, following dirt roads that were good to our knees. We played music for all of the walk. It's much easier to bond while we walk when we're not out of breath.

We came across a tiny church with beautiful paintings from the 13th and 15th centuries tattooing its' walls. We finished walking by 12:30. Michail and three others kicked a football between them for the last kilometre, sometimes sending it flying downhill with Michail lunging after it.

We had gyros for lunch after dumping our stuff in a school basketball court of Zarros. Michail bought chess pieces and a black marker to make a board, tired of playing on his phone. We heard that children come to play there at night and joked that we would have to fight for our territory. I held up a light for Michail and Nikos to play chess at dusk, Michail played Pale Blue Eyes by The Velvet Underground. It was peaceful.



As we were brushing our teeth, a policeman dressed like a 80's cop – orange shades and all – came into the basketball court. He was shouting angrily and took our passports to scan. He got more frustrated when Nikos didn't stop brushing his teeth while having a conversation with him. After more shouting

and questions he told us to go to a hotel and not mess with him again. Michail took a selfie with the hoard of kids gathered outside the gates. We stayed in a hotel.

DAY 12 – 10/09/18

We had bakery cheese and spinach pies for breakfast. Our walk was flat and simple, no drama, lots of goats. We slept in a small church courtyard overlooking a beautiful valley and ate in the famous tavern of Kanevos. A simple day. Since Anogia we had been walking on the same route that Patrick Leigh Fermor, Cretan Partisans and British SOE agents had taken when they kidnaped General Kreipe, the head of the Nazi Occupation in Greece.

DAY 13 – 11/09/18



The walk was long but easy. We crossed through many fields and talked about a man who is walking the entire world. We came across an old stone town that had been abandoned a few decades earlier. It was already in ruins.

We reached Argiroupoli – a pretty, touristy place – and were told the best camping spot was in the grounds behind a church. We walked down a steep hill and many steps to find a beautiful forest clearing with tiny limestone caves in the walls and an ancient burial ground. We met some French tourists who were as confused about the history of the burial ground as us. There was no water source at the clearing and a hundred thousand midges so we booked in to Thomas Nice View apartments.

The woman running the apartments was weird and erratic and not called Thomas. There was a free-standing pool where we played catch for a while. Michail cooked a lot of spaghetti on the hot plates. Three little kittens live at the apartments. One threw itself off a wall and terrified us all.

DAY 14 – 12/09/18



We woke up to find a thunderstorm had been raging all night. Some of the teams' boots were soaked. Michail resorted to drying his boots by balancing them upside-down on a colander over a hot plate. We shared a cup of local avocado and orange juice in the village then walked out into the damp world. The trail took us scrambling up a deep forest valley. It had been a while since we'd had a physical challenge on the trail and it was satisfying to reach the top. We walked along flat roads to a village shop where we bought snacks and waited out a storm. It had been grey and stormy for a few days, bad camping weather but the cool air made for good hiking.

I was stung by a bee. In many ways this is not an exciting fact, but it was my first time and made my whole leg throb and now I have a scar. Not the most impressive expedition scar admittedly, but it's the only one I've got so I'll take pride in it.

We set off walking again up a steep winding road. We had chosen a dirt path marked on the map rather than the E4 route up tarmac roads. The path was little more than goat tracks between shrubs. We lost Humzah briefly. He seemed to have the early stages of heatstroke despite the cloudy weather. He drank salt and ate sugar and seemed okay again. The route went up a dried river bed for a while then along the very steep and poorly consolidated edges of a small gorge. Rocks tumbled out from beneath our feet as we walked, marking the path our bodies would take right down to the river bed if we were to fall to our death.

We covered 700m in an hour and the path was getting no better. There was no way we would make it to shelter before dark and another storm was predicted. We turned around and carefully treaded the path back to where we had started. We agreed to descend the gorge side and walk along the dried river bed. This brought us back to the tarmac road quickly.

The people who were renting us a flat for the night came to our rescue in two vans. Aidan, Carla and I were flung side to side seatbelt-less (and seat-less) in a van with a sheep skull rattling around in the front, up a long winding road. The flat was decorated in a cosy hippy style. All the products were eco-friendly and the food healthy and handmade.

DAY 15 13/09/18

We passed a monument as we walked out of the village in cold post-storm air. The monument celebrated the 1000 men from the village who had travelled to defend in the siege of Constantinople in 1452. The town itself (Kalikratis) was named after the leader of this expeditionary force. Then we passed an other monument for the 30 people executed by the Germans in 1943 because the village was alleged to provide shelter to partisans.

The walk was easy, mainly comfortable dirt paths. The views were varied and pretty, lots of mountain scenes embellished with glimpses of the sea. The end of the walk saw the ruins of a fort which had protected the seaside town we will walk to next from the attack of the Ottoman empire. The sun broke through the clouds to light up the place we would be staying, like a heavenly beam of light. We were greeted at a hotel with a local version of raki. It burned my throat just as fiercely as raki did. Carla had stopped participating in shots by now, Humzah had been politely taking shots of water from the start.

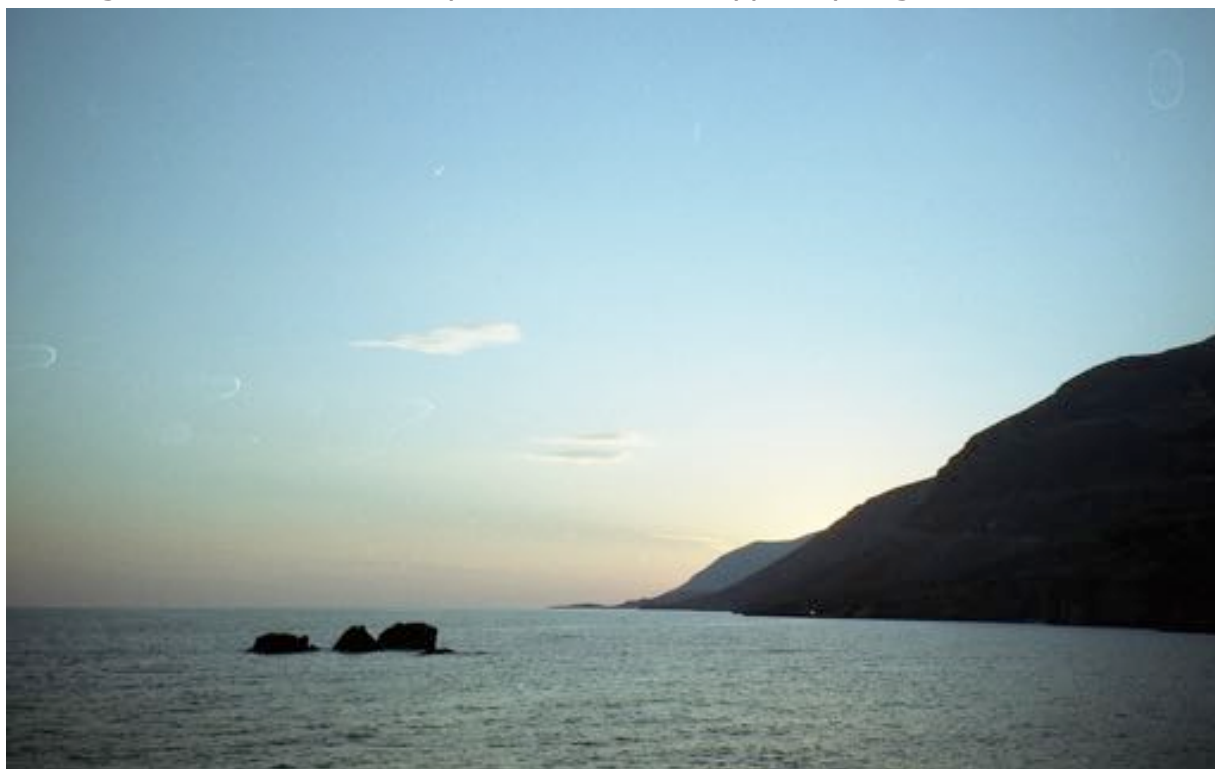


DAY 16 – 14/09/18

We followed Imbros gorge down to the seaside town of Sfakia. The British, Australian and New Zealand troops had walked exactly the same route as we did, when they were evacuating Crete in 1940. Many tourists joined us, the

most we'd seen so far. The rock had elongate black blobs that we struggled to identify. The gorge squeezed to 2m width at its narrowest point, where Aidan could touch both sides easily. I learnt how to write my name in Greek and carved it into my water bottle. We watched a goat do parkour on a cliff face.

It rained on us as we walked the last four tarmac kilometres to a tourist-filled coastal village. The water was clear as air and bright turquoise in colour. The sunset painted the sky over the sea. Humzah joined Carla and I by the water wearing homemade sandals of plastic bottles and ripped-up bags.



DAY 17 – 15/09/18

We had vanilla cream pie pastry for breakfast. Yorgos said they are a common post-night-out food in Greece, the equivalent of the British post-night-out kebab. We met two other hikers who were doing the E4 trail in the opposite direction. They were very friendly and sweet, as most of the people we came across were. We were relaxing by the sea after check out when Yorgos sprung it upon us that instead of walking for an two hours along tarmac we were going to catch a ferry that left in 10 minutes. We scrambled

to buy food. Yorgos and Michail were very nearly stranded as the ferry pulled away but managed to jump aboard.

The ferry took us to Sweet Water Beach, a cove paradise only reachable by ferry or a couple of hours hiking. The water was crystal clear and dotted with fish. The shallows were icier than the deeps. Carla repurposed her sleeping mat as a lilo. Hercules dug a hole very close to the surf and leant down to drink fresh water. We all sipped at together, a cool quirk of nature.



DAY 18 – 16/09/18

An extremely hot day. We walked from sunrise along beaches and coastal cliffs in the baking heat, eventually reaching a forest for shade. The sea provided refreshment through quick swim breaks. The saltwater and our sweat mingled together and stained our backpacks and t-shirts with wavy white lines. We arrived early in Agia Rumeli, a tourist village, checked into a hotel and had lunch with Thomas Angus, a photographer sent from Imperial to take photos of us. The sea was good for swimming, still crystal clear. The town was at the foot of the famous Samaria gorge. Aidan found a spoon on the beach, he asked me to include that in the journal.



DAY 19 – 17/09/18

Another rest day. We had two rest days with only one walking day in between in order to maximise beach time after a week of valley walking. The day was slow and easy, mainly consisting of swimming and eating local yoghurt and cheese.

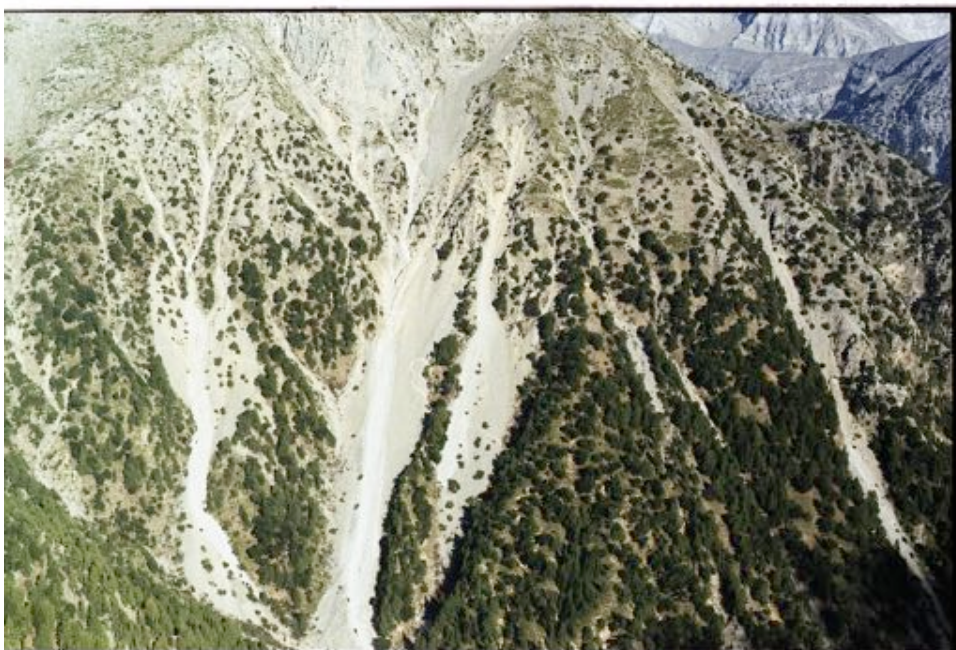
DAY 20 – 18/09/18

This day took us up Samaria Gorge. All of the tourists walk down so when we started at 6am we had a few hours of empty gorge. We had an elaborate photoshoot with Thomas Angus. It took a while to get used to posing after being used to Aidan's candid photography style. The gorge was forested and flat for the first few hours. The path was very well maintained with toilets and high-quality water taps. As we collided with the waves of tourists some smiled and encouraged us.

A special species of goats called Kri Kri live in the gorge. They are far more beautiful than the eccentric, wild-eyed goats that we're used to. Not that the crazy goats aren't special in their own right. Kri Kri look more like antelope. The gorge became dramatically steeper in the last few kilometres, breaking

Thomas' spirit. The views from the top of the gorge were stunning, debatably the best so far.

I played music from my phone, causing Carla and Aidan to dance a jig to what Carla called 'goat music' (I Don't Wanna Pray by Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeroes). We were out of the gorge, ascending through the clouds to a refuge. Carla and Michail raced to the end. The refuge toilet consisted of a wooden board with a hole dropping dozens of metres into the gorge.



DAY 21 – 19/09/18

We woke up at 2am to night-hike to the top of the Melindau (2133m). Michail said his favourite part was “the sandwich of stars then clouds then city lights then mountains”. It was freezing cold and we couldn’t see more than a few metres ahead. This made it easy to march blindly forward, there’s no way to falter in motivation if you can’t see steep hills ahead.

The cold set in as we got higher. The sun crept over the horizon as we crept over the summit. The sky glowed every colour. The sight was almost as breath-taking as the cold. We tucked into sleeping bags, which helped a little, but not enough to diffuse the internal conflict of cold vs beauty. We were back at the refuge by midday where breakfast was waiting for us. I drank the best cup of tea of my life. We slept. Some of the team shared their favourite bonding moments with me. Michail’s was playing bullsh*t in a café. Aidan’s was teaching Michail cockney swears and introducing him to Danny Dyer. Humzah’s was getting lost in the dangerous valley because we showed good teamwork. Aidan took many beautiful photos that day, I’ve collected some below.









DAY 22 – 20/09/18

We woke up at 5am and had a good breakfast in the refuge. The sun was rising as we walked downhill to the top of the gorge. This was our last day with Hercules and Thomas. The hike was beautiful – it was steep but we had grown fit and our backpacks light so we didn't get very tired. We stopped often to pose for photos, inflating our egos. The clouds tongued into the gorge, like a sea flowing into a port. The last hour of the hike was a scramble on hands and feet.

The team's highlights from the day were as follows. Yorgos liked when Carla took a bath in an algae-filled trough, an idea that had turned from an offhand joke into a reality in the space of about 30 seconds. Michail liked when Hercules dramatically tripped and almost died (but was fine). He also liked having a 20-minute conversation with Aidan, which concluded that Aidan would pay £50,000 to go skiing on the clouds if he could bring his friends but would not live in a city in the clouds if no one there laughed. Aidan liked peeing off the summit of a mountain into a blanket of clouds.



We were sad to say goodbye to Hercules. We drank raki and told our favourite stories about him, then he got into a taxi with Thomas Angus and left.

DAY 23 – 21/09/18

We left the mountains via a pretty gorge. Our path took us past tasty apple trees and, as always, many goats. The gorge was the quietest of any we'd walked down and very beautiful. Michail's ankle started to hurt but he was very stoic. A dried river valley took us out of the gorge towards the sea. We could smell the salt of the sea before we could see it.

We reached a small seaside town with dozens of people camping along the beach. It had a chill vibe and friendly people, not dominated by hikers or Northern European tourists which was a change. There had been no showers in the mountains so the beach showers provided our first wash in four days. We bumped into two young Germans that had stayed in the same refuge as us in the mountains. They met us on the beach after sunset with tea lights and raki for a few hours of sharing stories.



DAY 24 – 22/09/18

We woke up at sunrise to avoid the heat of midday, the coast is much hotter than the mountains. The town's bakery had gorgeous cheese pies. We walked up a small forested gorge then across wide cliffs. We came upon the enclosed ruins of a town, now ruled by stray cats and goats, and a man praying on an ancient mosaic. Our route traced the coast all day. Michail's ankle was getting worse so we took it easy. The penultimate walk finished by mid-afternoon at a beach with a café where we spent hours swimming, sleeping and eating. A short walk along coastal roads in the evening brought us to a campsite.



DAY 25 - 23/09/18

Our final day on the trail. I tried to get everyone to write emotional haikus about it but they didn't want to. We had pastry on the beach for breakfast then walked along the beaches and cliffs towards the end of the Crete E4. Humzah explained what we were doing in French to a big group of middle aged female hikers and they gave us a round of applause. Michail's ankle was very bad but he still didn't complain at all. We saw the most beautiful beach of the trip, a small secluded patch of sand with crystal turquoise water and

rocks to have a diving competition from. We saw more and more people the longer we walked, until at the very end we saw more people on one beach than we had seen in our entire time on the trail. It was surreal. We celebrated together and carved Crete E4 into the sand. Tourists came and took pictures with it. Then we got on a bus to Chania, from where we would fly back to London.



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