

MANAGEMENT AGENCY OF VIKOS – AOS
AND PINDOS NATIONAL PARKS

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Texts: Management Agency of Vikos - Aaos & Pindos National Parks
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 Prefecture of Grevena
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Management Agencies
of Protected Areas for the year 2017



DISCOVERING
Northern Pindos

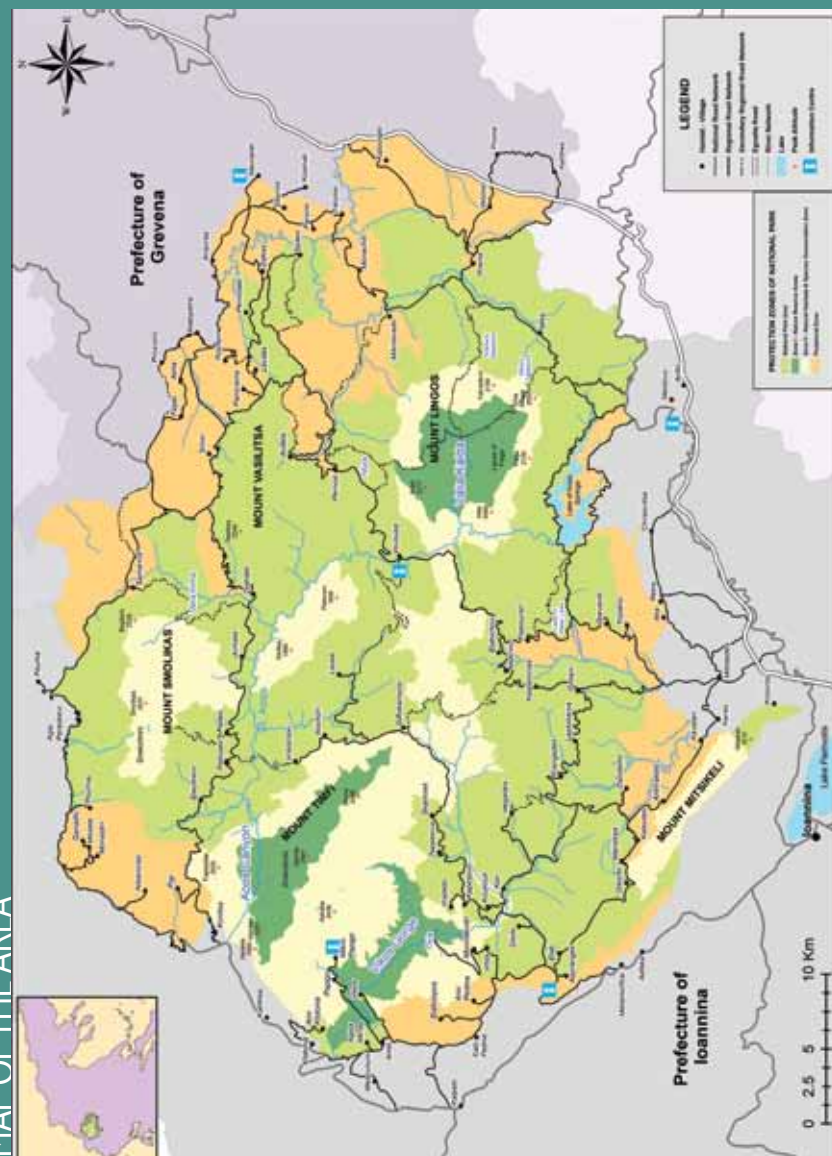
THE INSTITUTION OF PROTECTED AREAS

The «introduction» of protected areas in Greece seems to go way back in history. In ancient Greece many forests were connected with religion and were considered «sacred forests» so they were strictly protected and left to evolve naturally over the centuries.

The world' s first national park was established in 1872 in Yellowstone, USA. In Europe the protected areas created were less extensive and in their regions human populated areas and several human activities were included. The first protected areas in Greece were the Mount Olympus National Forest and the Parnassos National Forest, both founded in 1938.

Aoos Canyon

MAP OF THE AREA





THE NORTHERN PINDOS NATIONAL PARK AND ITS SPECIAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE

The Northern Pindos National Park was created in 2005 by Joint Ministerial Decision / Decree 23069/ Government Gazette 639D '(14/6/2005). It is located in northwestern Greece within the limits of Ioannina and Grevena Prefectures. It is the largest terrestrial National Park of Greece, with an area of 1,969,741 acres and it geographically unifies the pre-existing National Forests of Pindos (Valia Kalda) and Vikos-Aoos, with their in-between geographical region, which covers the entire region of Zagori, areas of Konitsa and Metsovo as well as the western part of the Grevena Prefecture.

The ecological value of the Northern Pindos National Park, which has been recognized at national, European and international level, results from the fact that it includes in its territory two (2) pre-existing National Parks, the Vikos - Aoos and the Pindos (Valia Kalda) National Parks, eleven (11) areas of the European Network of Protected areas «NATURA 2000», six of which belong entirely to the National Park, while the remaining five partly. It also includes one (1) area which is classified as a Biogenetic Reserve, within the Valia Kalda, eleven (11) Wildlife Refuges and finally an important part of the Vikos - Aoos Geopark, which is part of the European and Global Geoparks' Network and one of the four (4) Geoparks in Greece.



4

The areas of the Pan-European Network of protected areas «NATURA 2000» belonging to the National Park are the following:

NAME	DESIGNATION OF SITE	CODE OF SITE	AREA (ha)
Mount Vassilitsa	SCI	GR 1310001	8.012,78
Valia Kalda and AooS Artificial Lake	SPA	GR 1310002	14.660,48
Pindos National Park (Valia Kalda) (Wider Area)	SCI	GR 1310003	6.838,25
Orliakas and Tsourgiakas Mountains	SPA	GR 1310004	10.230,24
Vikos-Aoos National Park	SCI	GR 2130001	12.794,25
Mount Smolikak peaks	SCI-SPA	GR 2130002	19.975,72
Central part of Zagori	SCI	GR 2130004	33.114,95
Metsovo area (Anilio-Katara)	SCI	GR 2130006	7.328,82
Mitsikeli Mount	SCI	GR 2130008	8.435,99
Mount Tymfi (Gamila)	SPA	GR 2130009	27.416,44
Central Zagori and eastern part of Mitsikeli Mount	SPA	GR 2130011	53.407,84

SCI: Site of Conservation Interest SPA: Special Protected Area



Valia Kalda

5



Tymfi – Gamila

THE NATIONAL PARK'S ZONES

The Land Use within the National Park is an innovative scheme that unifies the protection of wilderness and conservation areas, with traditional rural cultures dependent on herding, lumbering and mountain-based agriculture. To preserve the ecosystem and traditional mountain lifestyle, a land-use management system was developed that established a graded system of two specific Protection Zones within the area of the Northern Pindos National Park, for each of which the permitted uses and conservation status of ecosystems was defined.

In particular, the three core areas of the National Park, namely the core of the Pindos National Forest (Valia Kalda), the Vikos Gorge and the Aaos Canyon, are designated as **Nature Reserve Zone (Zone I)**. These are the environmental hearts of the park and require the most effective protection and maintenance of the existing natural environment with minimal human intervention. Scientific researches, guided tours for visitors and eco-tourist programs have been designed to allow access to these areas, with the least environmental impact.

Around the above areas, as well as in some additional sites of the National Park, is the **Habitat and Species Conservation Zone (Zone II)**. The four areas included in this zone are also characterized by a high degree of protection, the land uses are also restricted to preserve the natural environment, while



Portitsa Gorge

the sustainable management of these zones includes research and activities of mainly traditional character to be made. The remaining part of the National Park, which also comprises its largest area, is the main area of **the National Park** and it includes almost all the settlements of the park. Within this area the degree of protection is milder as the main purpose is the preservation of the natural heritage and the ecological balance in relation to the activities carried out by residents, which should be improved regarding their traditional nature and the parallel provision of opportunities for ecotourism and educational activities.

Four sub-areas outlying the National Park borders, but considered essential to the Park's ecosystem for its most effective protection, have been designated as **Peripheral Zone (Zone Π)**. This zone targets the control of land uses, activities and projects that may have a negative impact on the natural environment of the National Park, as well as the conservation and restoration of important areas for bear protection. In these Peripheral Zones, activities

designed for mild growth of the region and the development of mild forms of recreation, are permitted. All activities carried out and on-going works within the protected area should be in accordance with the provisions of the Joint Ministerial Decision establishing the National Park. Additionally, legislation on the environment in Greece generally, the forest law and especially the law governing the National Forests are in force.

In accordance with the general regulations governing the Protected Area, sectors such as livestock breeding, agriculture, silviculture, forest management, processing and marketing of local products are not affected. On the contrary, the spatial planning of major touristic facilities and hotels, large poultry farms and hydroelectric plants are not allowed, while the small scale accommodation for tourism, the mountain refuges, the production and processing of local products is promoted and generally the balanced development with respect to environment.



Voidomatis' Springs

GEOLOGY AND MOUNTAIN RANGES «THE SEA THAT BECAME A MOUNTAIN»



The National Park rocks narrate in their own way the history of the largest mountain range, in the Greek peninsula, called Pindos. The story of a primordial and vast inland sea of Tethys, a remnant of which is the Mediterranean sea. Ophiolites, who took their name from their greenish and glowing appearance, reminiscent of snake skin, emerged from the ocean floor to accompany, as mountains, the river Aaos. Smolikas, the second highest mountain in Greece (2.637 m), Vassilitsa (2.249 m), the Lygkos mountains (2.177 m), Tsuka Rossa (1.987 m), Kleftis (1.846 m) and Flambouro (1,914 m), with a total area of approximately 1.000 km², represent the largest ophiolitic rocks cluster of the country and one of the largest in Europe.

Their soils are particularly rich in magnesium and, therefore, host a separate flora dominated by forests of black and white pine and several rare and endemic plant species. Stony slopes, naked and steep cliffs, scree, caves and potholes give away the continuity of the geological history and limestone formations. Limestone, one of the most common rocks of Greece, was created 35 million years ago at the bottom of Tethys.

There, shells of shellfish and other marine organisms precipitated on the sea floor, creating the rock gradually emerged on the surface to form



Vikos Gorge



Tymfi's Dragonlake (Drakolimni)



large sections of Pindos, such as Tymfi (2.497 m), Mitsikeli (1.810 m), but also the Vikos gorge and the Aaos gorge. Among the inaccessible mountains shallow basins are inserted called «poljes» or 'dolines'.

Characteristic of limestone, they are remnants of karst formations and irrefutable evidence of the geological history of the area.

These basins, form plateaus and small fertile valleys, putting their own stamp on the landscape of Pindos. The most impressive and largest in area, is the almost flat poljes of Asprangeli - Ano & Kato Pedina, which constitutes the only extensive lowland area in Zagori.

The limestone and ophiolitic formations in some locations, are interrupted by compressed in between dark grey flysch zones, which in reality is solidified deposits of clay and sand of shallow sea. Flysch occupies the low altitude of Central and Eastern Zagori and the mountain Kleftis. Its formations create striking folds and low hills, on which grow broadleaf forests of oak and grasslands.

The extremely high geological value of the site, both scientifically and aesthetically, contributed to the establishment of the Vikos - Aaos Geopark in 2010 and its integration in the Global Geoparks Network of UNESCO, as UNESCO World Geological Heritage. Impressive features from the Northern Pindos National Park are also the gorges of Portitsa, of Mikrolivado and Tsourgiaka in the Prefecture of Grevena.



VEGETATION - HABITATS - FLORA

CLIMATE



The climate of Northern Pindos National Park is in between the Mediterranean and central European types of climate. Specifically in the region prevail two climatic types, the continental and the mountainous ones. The continental type of climate is characterized by hot summers with few local rains and cold, rain - rich winters and prevails at lower altitudes where most villages of the National Park are situated. The mountainous type of climate is characterized by cool summers with several showers and harsh winters with abundant rains and snow and prevails at higher altitudes. As a matter of fact, the Pindos National Forest which is also known as Valia Kalda: «Warm Valley» in the Vlach dialect, took its name euphemistically as it is one of the most cold and moist areas of Greece.

Arkoudorema - Valia Kalda

The particular geomorphology, climate conditions and the long human presence, contributed to the creation of a unique, at national and European level, natural wealth held by the Northern Pindos National Park. The variety of altitudes ranging from 400 to 2.637 m, the frequent alternation of peaks, ridges, pits, streams, rivers, different orientations, steep slopes and generally strong and diverse terrain, contributed decisively to the creation of indigenous primary forest ecosystems, multitude of habitats, particularly rich vegetation, forming within the protected area all the vegetation zones of Greece.

In Northern Pindos at lower altitudes (400m - 700m) one encounters the Mediterranean temperate vegetation zone or zone of broadleaf evergreen or holm oak zone (*Quercetalia illicis*) with characteristic representative the kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*) and main species the phillyrea (*Phillyrea latifolia*), the manna ash (*Fraxinus ornus*), species of juniper (*Juniperus communis* and *Juniperus oxycedrus*), the Greek strawberry tree (*Arbutus adracnhe*) etc.

The forests of this area appear like (shrubs) bushes, split into islets, mainly in the gorges of Vikos, Voidomatis and Aaos. At altitudes of 700m - 1.000m the sub-mediterranean zone or zone of downy oak (*Quercetalia pubescentis*) is found, which is composed of thermophilic deciduous oak species, such as broadleaved Italian oak (*Quercus frainetto*), the Turkey oak (*Q. Cerris*), the Macedonian oak (*Q. trojana*), the downy oak (*Q. pubescens*), the kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*) and other tree species, such as hop hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*), the 2 hornbeam species (*Carpinus orientalis*, *Carpinus betulus*), the cornelian cherry (*Cornus mass*), manna ash (*Fraxinus ornus*) etc. Although it is strongly influenced by humans it remains diverse in habitats and species.

At altitudes of 1.000m - 1.600m the sub-Mediterranean conifer zone (*Fagetalia*) is found, which is composed of shady forests of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and beech - fir,





Flegga's Dragon lakes

such as Hybrid fir (*Abies borisii-regis*) and black pine (*Pinus nigra*) which is the dominant species of Pindos and one of the priority habitats of the National Park. Also mixed forests of the above trees according to various ecological conditions create wealthy ecosystems with very high degree of biogenetic stability.

This area lies on the slopes of Smolikas on the northern slopes of Tymfi in Vassilitsa in Avgo in Balces and Zygos, as well as in Central and Eastern Zagori. Also covers the greater part of the Pindos -Valia Kalda National Park, and the forests of the precinct of Krania, Milia etc.

At altitudes of 1.600m - 2.000m the zone of boreal conifers (*Vacinio-Picetalia*) is found, with unique appearance of the Balkan (or Bosnian) pine (*Pinus heldreichii* or *leucodermis*), whose forests have great ecological and

economic value for the region, helping to protect soil, water production and supply of precious wood, suitable for carving, cooperage, manufacturing etc.. The ecosystems of this zone extend up to the highest peaks of the Pindos natural and anthropogenic treeline as in Katara, in suburbs all the peaks around Valia Kalda, Vasilitsa and Smolikas. In Valia Kalda, and the slopes of Mount Flegga appear small populations of Scots pine (*Pinus silvestris*), which are probably remnants of the last period of glaciation.

The diversity of ecosystems and species of particular interest in this area because of its rarity. Also at high altitudes above 2.000m the above tree- line vegetation zone is found, where the rocky grasslands, the plant communities of vertical limestone cliffs and limestone screes, ie moving on stabilized, screes dominate.

The above tree- line ecosystems are found in Smolikas, in Vassilitsa, Lygkos Mountain, Tymfi in Mitsikeli and are the prime summer grazing of transhumant pastoralists.

Apart from the above vegetation zones in some places where the presence of water is strong, extremely rich riparian ecosystems are developed, consisting of hydrophilic woody species, such as oriental planes (*Platanus orientalis*), the common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), willows (*Salix* spp.)

Across the area of the Northern Pindos National Park 30 habitat types can be found, five of which are characterized by high ecological value and rarity at European level, in accordance with the evaluation criteria of Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of habitats and species and are considered priority habitat types.

These include forests of black pine (*Pinus nigra*), the ravines and forests of lime (*Tilia* sp.) and maple (*Acer* sp.), Forests with mountain juniper (*Juniperus foetidissima*), the grasslands with several species of *Nardus* various in siliceous geological bed storms and alluvial forests with common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and other tree species.

The richness of the flora of the Northern Pindos National Park is estimated to be more than 2,000 species, including impressive wildflowers such as the five species of wild lily, such as the scarlet martagon (*Lilium chalcedonicum*), the poet's narcissus (*Narcissus poeticus*), the incomparable beauty orchids

(recorded to date 52 species of orchids). Of the species of orchids of separate interest is the species Orchid or *Leucorchis frivaldii*, referred to as Balkan endemic, but rare in neighboring countries. In Valia Kalda it occurs in large populations on the slopes of Fleggas.

It also includes many endemic species of plants such as the cornflower of the Mountains of Vlachs (*Centaurea vlachorum*), the catchfly of Pindos (*Silene pindicola*), the *Onosma* of Epirus (*Onosma epirotica*) etc.

Other notable species with limited geographical distribution in the boundaries of the National Park are: the Serbian phoenix (*Ramonda sebrica*), the insectivorous *Pinguicula crystallina* ssp. *hirtiflora*, the German iris (*Iris germanica*) etc.

Of particular interest is the flora of the mountains with ophiolite geological substrate, ie Smolikas, Vasilitsas, Lygkos, Flamporo etc., as it includes many plants that have adapted to living in soils with high concentrations of metals, including *Allium smolicanum*, *Viola albanica* and others.

The use of plants for the treatment of various diseases is known since ancient times. During the 17th to 19th century the famous Vikogiatri, practical doctors who used herbs from the gorge, wandered hilling any illness in the Balkans, Istanbul and Russia. In the Northern Pindos National Park plants with medicinal properties are include: mint (*Mentha longifolia*), common sage (*Salvia officinalis*), thyme (*Thymus*





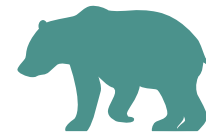
leucospermus), mountain tea (*Sideritis syriaca*), perforate St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), linden (*Tilia parvifolia*), European yew (*Taxus baccata*) and many others.

Due to the intense relief and the variety of tree species and heavy rain the suitable habitats for the growth of many species of mushrooms have been created, typically only in the region of Grevena over 2,000 species are recorded. The most popular edible species in the meadows and pastures are species of the genus *Agaricus* called locally «koukoumelia» and «koukouvakoi». In oak forests abound the chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*), the «Kalogerakia» (*Boletus* spp.) and the parasol mushroom «perdikomanitara» or «zarkadisia» (*Macrolepiota procera*). In pine forests common species of mushrooms are those of the genus *Lactarius* and in the fir forests the morels locally "mourtsekia" (*Morchella* spp.).



Mount Orliakas

FROM DRAGONS... TO LYNX, THE BEAR AND THE CHAMOIS...



Myths about the presence of dragons in the Pindos area come from the ancient times, when according to Greek mythology prince Pindos, whose name bears the mountain, a prince descended from the generation of Jupiter or Eolos, wandering in the shady forests of the mountain range met the dragon, a beast that destroyed crops and cattle. Pindos became friends with the dragon by offering him his hunt, as a sign of respect. Meanwhile, Pindos' brothers were jealous of his noble soul, so they murdered him and left his body in the woods. The dragon that found his body lamented Pindos and took his revenge by killing the prince's brothers. The Pindos mountain range took the prince's name.



Smolikas' Dragon lake

According to another legend narrated by the Sarakatsanei livestock farmers who grazed their flocks in the mountain meadows of Papigo, two dragons used to live at Dragon lakes (*Drakolimnes*) of Smolikas and Tymfi who, living opposite to one another and having great enmity between them, quarreled constantly. The dragon of Tymfi threw at his opponent giant logs and branches and the dragon of Smolikas threw white stones. This explains the fact that the

Tymfi peaks are naked, since its dragon felled all the trees and threw them at his opponent and at the black shores of Tymfi's Dragonlake (*Drakolimni*) white stones are scattered. The logs that the Tymfi's dragon threw at the Smolikas dragon are nothing but the evergreen pine trees encountered on the Smolikas slopes, while the white stones are the limestone (white) rocks of Tymfi. Similarly, in the area of Valia Kalda, legend says that there were



two dragons that lived in the two opposite peaks, Avgo and Flegga. These dragons were brothers and lived harmoniously, until one day, when going hunting, they came across a beautiful girl and loved her! As if they were enchanted, they rushed behind her to catch up with her, while she ran terrified towards Flegga to escape, she was crying and stumbling... and her tears became the lakes of Flegga. The two dragons in the meantime, would not stop arguing, and their mother, angry as she was with what went on, came as a frothy stream from the land where she lived hidden. Thus the Valia Kalda was born!

Today the wildlife of the Northern Pindos National Park is rich both in total number and in the presence of rare and protected species. Emblematic species are the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*), which retain in the area the largest population in Greece. Other large or rare mammals of mainland Greece such as the wolf (*Canis lupus*), the Wildcat (*Felis sylvestris*), the otter (*Lutra lutra*), and roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), or more common, such as the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), have appreciable populations in the region. Also in the area there is evidence for sporadic presence of lynx (*Lynx lynx*), the largest feline in Europe. Other smaller mammals found in the National Park are: fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), badger (*Meles meles*), the hare (*Lepus capensis*), hedgehog (*Erinaceus concolor*), the squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), the rare Pine Martin (*Martes martes*), many small mammals and several species of bats. Total National Park found about 60 species of mammals.

Out of the 186 species of birds in total in the area, the birds of prey are of great interest and especially the endangered worldwide Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) or as it is called locally «koukalogo» or tyrokomos (cheesemaker) or bazios, the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), the booted eagle (*Hieraetus pennatus*), the short-toed eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) and Lanner falcon (*Falco biarmicus*).



Brown bear



Also notable is the presence of woodpeckers, such as the large black woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*), the ashes woodpecker (*Picus canus*), the white-backed woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leuconotos*) etc. In the National Park other important species are met such as the mountain partridge (*Alectoris graeca*), the willow tit (*Parus montanu*), the wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*), the dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*), the black stork (*Ciconia nigra*), the horned lark (*Eremophilla alpestris*), the snow finch (*Montifrigillani valis*) et al.

In the 30 species of reptiles that can be found in the National Park 16 species of lizards, 10 species of snake and 4 species of turtle are included. Indicatively we mention the presence of the Dalmatian Algyroides (*Algyroides nigropunctatus*), the leopard snake (*Elaphequatrolineataa*) and the marginated tortoise (*Testudo marginata*). Of the 14 species of amphibians encountered at the National Park, we note the presence of the salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*), the common toad (*Bufo bufo*), the green toad (*Bufo viridis*) and the Alpine newt (*Triturus alpestris*). Especially the presence of the latter is easily perceived as it lives in small colonies in scattered ponds and small water concentrations in the high altitudes of the mountains of the National Park, for example in the Dragon lakes (Drakolimnes) of Smolikas and Tymfi and the Flegga's lakes.

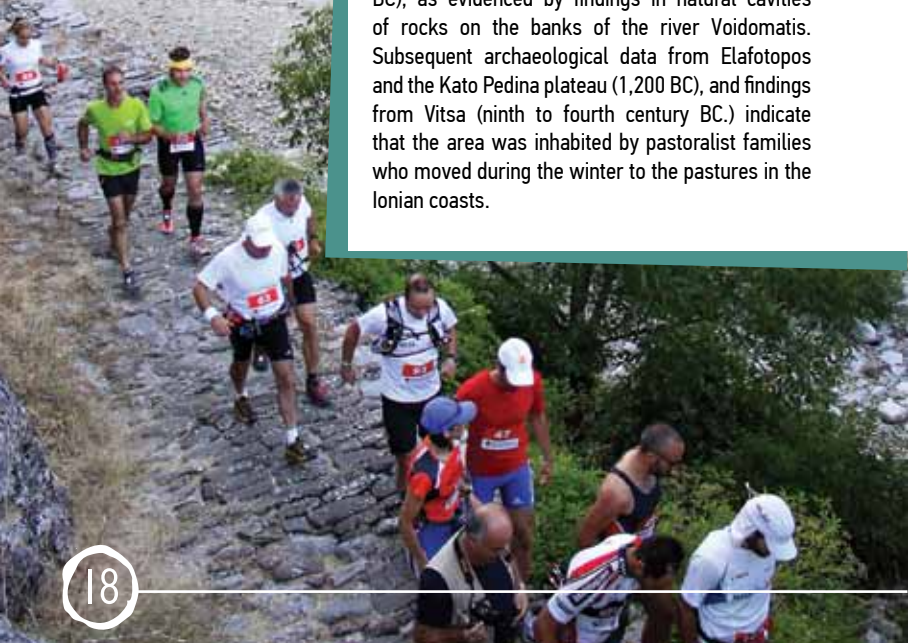
Twenty-two species of fish live in the aquatic ecosystems of Northern Pindos National Park. It worth emphasizing an endemic species of Aaos river, the Pindus stone loach (*Oxynoemacheilus pindus*), the rare species in Greece of the Albanian roach (*Pachychilon pictum*), that is restricted within Aaos river basin, and some common fishes, like the two-endemic brown trouts (*Salmo* sp.), the European chub (*Squalius* sp.), the Vardar nase (*Chondrostoma vardarense*) and three species of barbs (*Barbus* sp.). Due to some fishes enrichments that took place in Aaos dam, nowadays are found there some lacustrine species like the sturgeon, the European carb and the Pumpkinseed.



THE HUMAN PRESENCE IN THE PARK



In the mountainous forest ecosystems in northern Pindos, a wonderful relationship of balanced symbiosis between nature and man is maintained for many centuries. The history of human habitation of the area goes back to the Neolithic period (14,000 BC), as evidenced by findings in natural cavities of rocks on the banks of the river Voidomatis. Subsequent archaeological data from Elafotopos and the Kato Pedina plateau (1,200 BC), and findings from Vitsa (ninth to fourth century BC.) indicate that the area was inhabited by pastoralist families who moved during the winter to the pastures in the Ionian coasts.



During the Hellenistic period (330-167 BC), remains of fortresses and forts testify the existence of organized settlements and major crossings which connected the mountains of Epirus and the rest of the world. In the western part of Northern Pindos ruins of the fortifications of that era still exist, while in the eastern part of the region, the archaeological data (eg ancient acropolis, cemetery, necropolises in the area of the village Spileo and castle ruins in the village Prosvoro) indicate continuous habitation from the Iron Age to the Byzantine era. In the area of Grevena, ancient settlements are scattered in the area from Vourino to the depths of Chassia and the foothills of Pindos.

On this residential canvas, Macedonians kings establish or strengthen small forts, like Kastri which is being excavated in recent years in Polyneri Grevena. After the destruction of Epirus by the Romans (167 BC), the absence of archaeological findings suggest probably its depopulation. During the early Christian (4th to 6th century AD.), early and middle Byzantine period (9th century - 1204 AD), different tribes cross the region from the north, such as the Visigoths, Huns, Bulgarians, Slavs and finally Normands. Famous monuments of Middle Byzantine period are the three monasteries along the main road of the era, the so-called «Vasilikodromos», which according to tradition were built by the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV Pogonatos: Monastery of Molyvdoskepastos at the confluence of Aaos and Sarantaporos (out of the National Park), the Monastery of Sotiros Metamorphosis

(Transfiguration) in Klidonia and the Monastery of Panagia's Dormition in Votsa, between the villages Greveniti and Doliani. The economic development of the region will begin in the era of the Despotate of Epirus (1204) and will culminate in the period of the Ottoman rule (1430-1830). The villages of Zagori, capitulate with Sinan Pasha, while considerable privileges are given to Metsovo in order to ensure control of the mountainous passage of Zigos. Thus, the two regions have ensured autonomy and self-government, which, in combination with the development of trade, leads them to great economic, cultural and spiritual flourishing. Many benefactors and great intellectuals of the country originate from the region of Zagori and Metsovo. Furthermore, the heyday of husbandry in Metsovo in the 17th century, combined with the development of trade, led to the transformation of an initially livestock village into a craft center.

The people of Zagori the same period, but mainly from the mid-18th century, emigrated to Constantinople, Asia Minor, Venice, Rome, the countries along the Danube, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the African continent and later to America in search of a better fate that the poor mountain land could not provide them with. Respectively, in the Mastorochochia of Konitsa, at the same period, there is a shift from agriculture and domesticated livestock which had preserved the small communities of that time, into technical activities. As the word «Mastorochochia» itself indicates, starting with the art of bricklaying a distribution of specialization per village is developed. Stone carvers



Papigo

from Pysogianni, painters from Chionades, taliadori (woodcarvers) from Gorgopotamos (Turnovo) moved to different parts of the Ottoman Empire, even outside its limits, building houses, churches and bridges. Many of the masterpieces of their art can be admired today in the settlements located within the National Park.

Apart from the permanent resident population, transhumant pastoralists, Vlachs and Sarakatsani, following ancient routes moved with their herds from summer pastures to the Pindos mountains in winter pastures in the lowlands and the coast of Epirus, Thessaly and Macedonia. Maintaining thus, this primordial life model which is characterized by lack of a permanent and stable home, through time for almost three millennia.

Grevena goes through a similar bloom of trade and economy in the 18th century. The Bridge of Pasha in Aliakmonas river witnessed the caravans of Vlach merchants and Koupatsarei mule drivers to multiply, as products of Pindos reached the markets of Austria-Hungary and Russia.



THE SETTLEMENTS OF THE PARK

In the forest ecosystems of the Northern Pindos National Park, 82 settlements were founded and continue today to co-exist in harmony, being places of attraction and poles of reference, as they are framed by numerous religious and other monuments. Within the boundaries of the National Park, 68 settlements are enclosed and 14 others are on its brink being divided into five human-geographical, historical - cultural units. Zagori is the first unit that has 36 of the 46 villages within the National Park and 5 settlements, which may be off the limits, but have within the protected area extensive areas.

As remnants of the heyday (Ottoman Rule), private luxurious stone houses with luxurious interiors, public buildings, brilliant churches and monasteries, infrastructure such as the famous bridges in the area, fountains, paved steps and paths indicate the rich economic, cultural and social life of the past and the prosperity of the peoples in the region. Today, the main occupations of the residents of Zagori is tourism, livestock breeding, agriculture and silviculture.

The settlements of the Regional Unit of Grevena constitute the second unit comprising the five mountainous Vlach villages: Samarina, Smiksi, Perivoli, Avdella and Krania, built on the slopes of Smolikas, Vasilitsa and Lygkos, the inhabitants of which deal mainly with transhumant livestock breeding, forestry and recently with tourism. It also includes the villages of Koupatsarei, with 14 settlements within the National Park and 5 on its limits. They took their name from the Vlach word «koupatsi» which means oak, as all the settlements are built in the zone of oak.

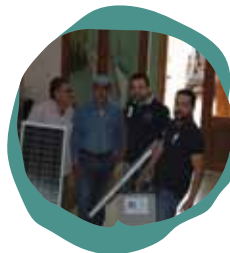
The main occupation of the locals is agriculture and livestock breeding, while in the past many used to be mule drivers «kyratzithes» (moving people or goods by pack animals for a fee). The area of Konitsa is the third unit with 12 of the 43 villages of the area within the National Park and 3 on its limits. The inhabitants of the Konitsa settlements are engaged in farming, agriculture, building art, forestry and lately in tourism. The area of Metsovo is the fourth unit with the village Milea to be located within the National Park and the village of Chrisovitsa on the limits of its area. The main occupations of the inhabitants of the area are forestry, wood carving, agriculture (eg cultivation of potato in Chrysovitsa), livestock breeding and lately tourism.



THE MANAGEMENT AGENCY AND ITS WORK

The Management Agency of Vikos – Aaos and Pindos National Forest was founded in 2002 by Law 3044 and is a Private Legal Entity of public benefit. Its main task is the administration and management of the protected area of the Northern Pindos National Park. Management is defined as the set of actions and measures necessary for the protection, organization and operation of the region while aiming at highlighting all of its values (ecological, aesthetic, historic, cultural, economic, etc.), without neglecting the main objective which is its protection.

The Management Agency is governed by an eleven member Board in which involved are representatives of co-competent ministries, the respective Regions and Municipalities, scientists, productive organizations, environmental non-governmental organizations and is overseen by the Minister of the Environment and Energy. The seat of the Management Agency has been determined to be the Municipality of Grevena and its Administrative Services, since February 2007, are housed and operate in Aspraggeli of the Zagori municipality in the Regional Unit of Ioannina. The Body currently employs 8 persons as scientific staff, 7 guards and 7 guides.



Under its supervision are 5 Information Centres located at key points throughout the National Park (Asprangeli, Metsovo, Mavranei, Vovoussa and Papigko) while in the near future an Information Centre in Klidonia of Konitsa municipality is planned to operate. Four warden groups with liability areas Zagori, Konitsa, Metsovo and the region of Grevena are in operation. The implementation of multidimensional work of the Management Agency leads to its gradual consolidation and the recognition of its role in the region. Its work has an environmental dimension and is implemented by developing partnerships with all competent bodies for the effective protection and appropriate sustainable management of natural resources of the National Park, providing advice on projects planned within the protected area and implementing annual Monitoring - Guarding Plans.

It has ecological dimension which focuses on elaborating the Management Plan of the area, which is the main tool for its management, and the important work of planning and implementation of the Scientific Monitoring Plan of the conservation status of habitat types and species of flora and fauna of the National Park based on which the outcome of management can be assessed. In addition, its work acquires economic dimension seeking cooperation with productive and other entities operating within the protected area, aiming also at promoting a balanced, but sustainable ecotourism development.

Finally, the Management Agency's work has a social dimension which is developed by implementing the annual Promotion Plan & Information-Awareness Raising Program - of the local community and the visitors to the National Park. Seeking for extroversion and promotion of the protected area and the Management Agency's work, it has created printed and online material which is available free of charge to

visitors and residents of the area and can be obtained from the Information Centres. Also, the same material is presented in tourist exhibitions in the country and abroad with the cooperation of the respective Regions and Municipalities of the area.

As part of the promotion and enhancement of the special values of the National Park, the Management Agency has established the organization of events such as hiking trails to celebrate the World Environment Day, in early June, with the escort of its staff, while the event dedicated to the Celebration of Birds, the first weekend of October, with bird watching, constructions and environmental games for the little ones has become an institution. Positive was also the response of the local community and visitors of the National Park to hosting exhibitions, with subjects relevant to the protected area, at the premises of information Centers, and the presence and assistance of the Management Agency in a number of events organized by entities of Local Authorities and local Associations.

Additionally, in the frame of an open dialogue development with a view to informing the local community and finding opportunities for sustainable development in the region, the Management Agency conducts meetings with local population groups such as tourism entrepreneurs, livestock breeders and farmers etc. operating in the protected area. Whereas aiming at the harmonious coexistence of man with wildlife species (bear, wolf) it proceeded in the allotment for a year of electrified fencing to farmers and beekeepers in the area and the disposal of Greek collie puppies. It is worth mentioning that the Management Agency, targeting to actions of informing – raising awareness of students, created and distributed for free to schools in the wider region and even further, a specific Activity Pack for Environmental Awareness entitled «Northern Pindos National Park. Let's find out... let's play...», which includes selected activities specially designed for children of school age (6-12 years) in order to get acquainted with the protected area. Moreover, it implements Environmental Awareness Programs and Environmental Interpretation Tours, with topics relevant to the settlements, water, vegetation, herbs, archaeological sites, etc., while the competent personnel visit schools, presenting the protected species, the flora and fauna of the National Park.



INFORMATION CENTRES:

In order to understand and interpret the meaning of the protected area and to derive substantial knowledge on its natural and cultural wealth, visitors should start their tour by going to one of the of the five National Park's Information Centres. These provide tourists with the practical, cultural, and environmental background essential to enriching any visit to the Park. Within the Centres are exhibits and video presentations illustrating the Park's sites of natural beauty, its flora and fauna, its traditional architecture, regional history and folklore. The staff is available for talks and questions, according to one's interests. Educational groups from schools, universities, or special interest tours are welcome.



Brochures and information circulars are available free of charge. These include both educational material and maps for sightseeing, hiking, the location of observation sites, and other activities held in the area of the Park.

► Aspraggi Information Centre

Tel - Fax: +30 26530 22241
e-mail: kpasprag@otenet.gr

► Metsovo Information Centre

Tel: +30 26560 42720
e-mail: kpmetsov@otenet.gr

► Vovoussa Information Centre

Tel: +30 26560 22843
e-mail: kpovoussas@gmail.com

► Papigko Information Centre

Tel: +30 26530 25096
e-mail: kppapigo@gmail.com

► Mavranaii Information Centre

Tel: +30 24620 87563
e-mail: kpmavran@gmail.com

PANORAMIC VIEW LOCATIONS:



Zagori area

- ▶ “Oxia” panorama location, Monodendri. View to Vikos Gorge
- ▶ Agia Paraskevi forecourt, Monodendri. View to Vikos Gorge
- ▶ “Beloi” location, Vradeto. View to Vikos Gorge
- ▶ Panoramic view location to Vikos Gorge, in Vikos village.

Konitsa area

- ▶ Panoramic view location, from Smolikas Dragon lake to mount Smolikas’ top (2,637m) and the wider area
- ▶ Prophet Elias (Epano Konitsa)
- ▶ The chapel of St. Barbara (Konitsa)
- ▶ Palaioseli, view point to Gamila peak.

Metsovo (Valia Kalda) area

- ▶ Panoramic view location at Flegla peak, of the Lygkos mountain to Aaos springs artificial lake, the Pindos National Forest (Valia Kalda) and the subalpine lakes of Flegka.
- ▶ Panoramic view location at Aftia peak of Mount Lygkos to Aaos springs artificial lake and to Valia Kalda Valley.

Grevena area

- ▶ Panoramic view – picnic location from Orliakas mountain at the entrance of Spileo village.
- ▶ Panoramic view – picnic location at the chapel of Prophet Elias, at an altitude of 1.384m, near the Prosvoro settlement
- ▶ «Kourouna» picnic location on the road from Filippei to Samarina village
- ▶ «Karastergios spring» picnic location on the road from Ziakas to Perivoli village
- ▶ «Exarchos» picnic location on the road from Ziakas to Perivoli village



Bridge of Kleftis

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