

Route 17a: Zeus Peak and Zeus Cave

Stretch: Agía Marína (Αγία Μαρίνα) – Mount Zeus (ZEYS or ZAS), Cave (σπηλιά) - Filóti (Φιλότι); ca. 8 - 9 km

Time: about 5 - 6 hours; ascent to peak 1.5 - 2 hours

Map: the Naxos map from Anavasi editions from 2003 (scale 1:40000) is helpful.

GPS-data: <http://www.ucke.de/christian/naxos/GPS-data/GPS-English.htm>

Comments: Choose a clear day for the ascent. General map of the Aegean Islands and binoculars recommended. In the summer start as early as possible. It can be rather windy and cool on the peak, even in the summer. The way from the peak to the cave is more difficult, otherwise the wander-route is easy.

Description: Take the bus until the **fork to Danakos** (Δανακός; N 37° 02' 47.0'' E 25° 30' 14.2'') the bus stops here upon request. Follow this road to Danakos uphill for 400 m to the **chapel Agia Marina** (N 37° 02' 41.7'' E 25° 30' 25.6''), which is located exactly on the crest. You could also take a taxi directly to Agia Marina, of course.



An old inscription on the way to Mount Zeus

At first the path is clear and easy. The path is marked by red-white signs with "2". It starts directly at the chapel and heads southeast, winding slowly up the slope. After 500 m you come to a **watering-place** with drinkable spring water (N 37° 02' 22.7'' E 25° 30' 35.3''). Nearby on a projecting marble block you can see the inscription in Old Greek ΟΡΟΣ ΔΙΟΣ ΜΗΛΩΣΙΟΥ (Mount Zeus, Protector of the Herds) which is mentioned in many travel descriptions. Unfortunately, some modern day barbarians have added the inscription of their own initials to it.

Shortly after the drinking-place the way winds up more steeply in serpentine through open marble rocks. It is somewhat less distinct, and in case of doubt stay up higher. Here as well as before there will be forks with red markings which indicate other routes up to the peak. After 800 m you come to the remains of two old round **limekilns** (diameter about 4 m; like very wide wells; N 37° 02' 18.6'' E 25° 30' 46.5'').

Here you should turn off the distinct path which continues south and instead head towards the southwest to west. First you go along a small wall, then straight up along animal paths to the peak. The flat, thorny phrygana can hinder you at first, then the way becomes stony.

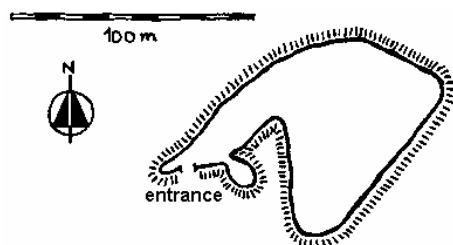
From the **peak of Mount Zeus** or in New Greek **Zas** (Ζάς; the altitude is about 1000 m; N 37° 01' 49.5'' E 25° 30' 08.6'') there is a grand view out over the island of Naxos and the

surrounding Cyclades. If we can believe earlier travel authors, even Asia Minor could be seen on a clear day. Vultures often circle around the peak at an appropriate distance.

To the southsoutheast there is the tower of Chimarrou (Πύργος του Χειμάρρου), to the northnortheast the monastery Fotodotis (Φωτοδότης). Neither structure stands out much against the surroundings. Mount Zeus slopes off to the northwest in a steep wall about 200 m long. There, in an incisive boulder field, is the Zeus Cave, but its entrance cannot be seen from the peak. Experienced climbers can climb down to this boulder field and from there directly to the cave.

You can return the same route you came and wait for the bus on the street from Filoti to Apirantos or else look for the way direct to Filoti somewhat further along the street in the direction towards Filoti.

If you feel strong enough to continue on to the cave, turn north from the peak and descend to the boulder field in a large arc almost to the south. In this way you can circumvent the steep wall. Blue marked dots help for orientation.



A rough sketch of the Zeus Cave

Continue carefully down the steep boulder field. After 300 m you can see the narrow entrance to the **cave** (N 37° 02' 04.7'' E 25° 29' 57.8''), back somewhat on the northern side. Just beneath the entrance there is a watering-place with drinkable spring water. The cave is, in principle, secured by a locked door, but this is constantly broken open and thus often stands open.

The cave is now called Argia (Η σπηλιά στ' Αργιά). In old descriptions it is called the Zeus or Jupiter Grotto, since according to one legend Zeus was raised here.

The cave is damp and warm, at the beginning still flat in the interior and then quickly becoming slippery and full of rough stones. If you are alone and without a good flashlight, an inspection of the 150 m deep cave is dangerous or even impossible. In the cave you can hear bats; additional occupants are big yellow spiders.

The royal Saxon mountain commissioner Karl Gustav FIEDLER (1791-1859) traveled through this land from 1834 to 1837 by order of the Greek government to gather information about the geological sites and their exploitation, among other things. His report in the book "Reise durch alle Theile des Königreichs Griechenland" ("Travels through all the Parts of Royal Greece"), part 2, Leipzig 1841, contains the following description of the cave:

The Zeus Cave on Naxos

From here I left the next day for the Zeus grotto, which is located on the rocky west precipice of the mountain Dia (now pronounced Zia), about 1.5 hours south of Kerami. The grotto goes into the mountain h. 4.4^{)} to the northeast. The entrance is only few Lr.^{*)} high and wide and is closed by a dry wall and a door. At the front one sees a kind of masonry that serves as an altar, upon which there is a broken oil lamp. This place is called the Church to the Holy Mother of the Grotto Apanaja, Ajia Panagia).*

If one continues on a bit further into the cave, there is a small secondary cave on the right which has also been consecrated as a church. The cave, which is rather flat from the entrance to here, is also only several Lr. wide and a few Lr. high here. If one goes on several Lr. further, a large, wide vault appears suddenly. One descends down into this and walks on over slippery, sharp-edged stone blocks which have fallen wildly on top of one another, so that one must climb forward

carefully since at any moment one could break a leg or scrape skin and flesh from the bones. The immense high vault was formed from sound limestone beds and has no stalactites.

The large cavity extends rather far to the north. One sees here the often perpendicularly separated limestone beds which strike h. 3 and dip about 30 degrees to the southeast. Completely in the northernmost section of the cave one mounts to a small secondary cave which ends the big cave. Some stalactites are here, yet but little damaged, thus but little visited. Most of these stalactites are flat and consist of rod-shaped secreted limestone spar which in some places covers the walls in a stalactite deposit several inches thick. Some of the stalactites are only 1/4 inch thick but as wide and as evenly pleated as hanging robes; some of them have very delicate, regularly notched edges since little stalactites wanted to be formed all over but were formed regularly next to one another until the water from each peak stopped dripping, and these now project about 1/4 inch from the common surface. This cave has nothing especially interesting; one sees a large, dark vault and gets the best impression when it is lit up at various spots and one stands where the front entrance opens into the large vault, without climbing around on its broken pieces. It is said that orgies were celebrated in this grotto; in reality this would have been the best ground to bring raving people back to their senses; only the front part is said to have served for this, so there weren't many raving people on Naxos. Incidentally, this cave may very well have served for secretive ceremonies, as any dark cave can. This cave was formed through a rising up and lowering down of layers; where the highest angle was formed it was sufficient to form a kind of roof, while the layers beneath broke during the lowering and thus formed the cavity. When one is between the Dia Mountain and the low limestone range opposite to the west, one sees that the layers of the low range fall to the west, as is usually the case for layers on the west side, while the layers of the Dia fall to the southeast; so one sees clearly what an impressive rising took place there. This cave is, however, when one considers the Dia's immense mass, nothing more than a bank which has broken down from the mountain. The basic mountain is not revealed anywhere on this side of the Dia, right down to its foot only limestone is in view.

The cave is naturally inhabited by a large number of bats which appear to be something special to the people here. They were lucky not to be in the narrow front entrance this time (probably they were hanging from the vault of the large cavity), because my companions, who had lit a fire there, often said: if only we had a bat (nykterihda) to burn. When I asked why, they only always answered: etsi (ἐτζι), which means so.

**) Note: Lr. is the abbreviation for Lachter, which is 6 feet 8 inches (Leipziger measurement); approx. 1.89m. h. is the abbreviation for hora (hour) and together with the time mentioned afterwards indicates the direction: h.3 = Azimut 45⁰. means SW-NO-South direction; h.6 means East-West-direction; h.12 means North-South direction.*

From the cave go down into the valley, keeping more to the north. After 300 to 400 m, leaving the northwestern section, you reach a **grove** with high, shady plane-trees (N 37° 2' 10.9" E 25° 29' 37.6"). Throughout the entire year fresh drinking water bubbles up from an old spring enframed by a round marble pool here. 1997 the whole place was restored.

From here an asphalted road leads to Filoti. In a curve of this road there is the big white domed **church Agía Irini** (N 37° 2' 39.3" E 25° 29' 31.8"). Here you can go down directly a steep slope to an asphalted road to Filoti. There is no good trail. Alternatively you pass the

church and follow the asphalted road with serpentines to Filoti. This possibility needs more time and is boring.

A nicer path starts westward down from the water reservoir. The path, sometimes a bit unclear and even difficult at first but then more and more distinct, leads along the slope right to Filoti. You finally pass a not yet ready restored **mill** (N 37° 02' 41.9'' E 25° 29' 21.6''), from where you can see Filoti's garbage dump, and near it you reach the dirt road which leads from Filoti to the south of the island (tower of Chimarrou to Kalandos). Filoti with its bus station is 1 km away.

