

THE ATHERAS WALK

In the footsteps of *Odysseus Unbound*

Introduction

These notes and the accompanying map have been produced to assist those who are interested in visiting some of the places described in the book *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*. We hope you will enjoy the walk but please note that no responsibility can be taken for any disappointment that might arise if some areas are closed for access, or in case you become lost, thirsty or hungry, or indeed for any injuries that you might experience along the way.

The Website

The latest details of the project are available at <http://www.odysseus-unbound.org> and information about visiting Cephalonia and the sites mentioned in the book is listed there at the Visit section. Please note that these details are subject to change as the project progresses.

The Book

The book was printed by Cambridge University Press in October 2005; its authors are Robert Bittlestone, with James Diggle and John Underhill, ISBN 0521853575. It is available at major bookshops or via Amazon and other online booksellers. In Greece it is available at the Eleftheroudakis and Papasotiriou chains, and a Greek translation has also been published. In Cephalonia it is usually available at the main bookshops in Argostoli and Lixouri. These notes assume that you have some familiarity with the book and that you plan to refer to it either during or after your walk.

The Thesis

The location of the island of Ithaca is described in the *Odyssey* at lines 9.25 with the words "Ithaca itself lies low, furthest to sea / Towards dusk; the rest, apart, face dawn and sun." This description of a westernmost island does not fit the island called Ithaki, which lies east of Cephalonia. The central hypothesis of the book is that during the time of Odysseus (the Late Bronze Age c. 1200 BC), the western peninsula of Cephalonia, now called Paliki, was cut off from the rest of the island by a marine seaway which stretched all the way along the region that is now called Thinia. If this can be proved geologically then it means that Paliki was a separate island at that time and that Homer's description was absolutely accurate. This would mean that ancient Ithaca was located at Paliki, not at Ithaki, and that Paliki was therefore the homeland of Odysseus.

Site access

The website states as follows: ***Visiting the Odysseus Unbound sites:*** *Several of the places described in Odysseus Unbound such as Strabo's Channel, Phorcys Bay, Ortholithos Point and Asteris can be freely visited on Cephalonia and their locations are clearly identified in the book. However, other sites such as Kastelli, Eumaios' Pigfarm, Raven's Rock, Telemachos' Cove and Laertes' Farm are located on private ground and may not be visited without the permission of the owners. An itinerary for visitors that includes several of the sites described in Odysseus Unbound is provided via this brochure, entitled **The Atheras Walk**.*

Archaeological and geological research

As well as being located on private ground, some of the restricted areas listed above (such as Kastelli) are now designated as areas of potential archaeological importance and it is therefore essential that they are preserved in their current state. Once the project gains momentum it may be possible to arrange organised visits to them: until that can be arranged, please resist the temptation to try to visit them independently. The land-owners have been asked to cooperate with the project's personnel and to preserve the official interests of the Greek national bodies concerned (the Institute of Geology and Mineral Exploration and the Greek Archaeological Service) by restricting unauthorised access.

Regulations concerning pottery

Greek law is very strict in relation to pottery and other artefacts and this applies to even the smallest sherds.

- You may photograph artefacts in place and record their location, but you may not pick them up.
- No archaeological or geological items may be disturbed in any way and no land may be excavated.
- The penalties for unauthorised possession of pottery sherds, metal detectors or related equipment can involve imprisonment.

Precautions to take before the walk

The terrain involved is not at all demanding, but as with any walk in a hot climate:

- Ensure that you are well protected from the sun
- Make sure that you have bandages, elastoplast and other first aid supplies
- Take at least 2 litres of water per person
- Take some food in case cafes are shut or you lose the way
- Bring a mobile telephone and a note of emergency numbers (although phone reception is limited)
- Tell someone what your route is and when you expect to be back

The Route

The length of the overall route on the attached map is 13 km (8 miles). Note that most of this marked route is not on the main road. It involves a beautiful beach with (in the summer season) a restaurant and a shop with refreshments en route, so it can form the basis of an exhilarating whole day's outing, but obviously much shorter segments can be tackled individually. The notes below are provided in the order of the numbered checkpoints on the map.

1. Atheras Chapel

This is a modern chapel and cemetery at the approach to Atheras village, on the right just before a flag and a sign saying "Beboula's Wish". You can park your car off-road here or arrange a taxi to take you to it and to collect you later. There is also a bus service to Atheras from Lixouri. To get here, take the road that branches off to Atheras from the main road from Lixouri to Argostoli, at the junction on the north-west corner of Argostoli Bay. Beside that junction is the Lotos cafe and restaurant, your last stop for cold drinks and provisions. There is also a petrol station with snacks for sale between this junction and the village of Livadi that lies further south (Livadi is incorrectly marked on some maps as north of this junction).

Book reference: Figs. 5.3, 32.5-6.

2. Eumaios' Pigfarm

The site diagnosed as Eumaios' pigfarm is on private agricultural ground nearby, so you would need to be accompanied by project personnel or have received the permission of the land owner if you wish to visit it. If so, the access is through a wire fence into the field to the south of the chapel, adjacent to the hillside. Ensure that you re-fasten the fence at all times to avoid livestock straying. Keep to the edge of the field to avoid trampling over the crops. At the end of the field, walk through the glade of trees and continue straight ahead until you come to the stone-wall enclosure. Beyond it is the area of damp ferns on the springline and further still is the summit of Raven's Rock. On the way back, just after the fence up on the hillside is the second candidate site for Arethousa Spring.

Book reference: Figs. 14.2-4, 14.7, 32.8.

3. Arethousa Spring

Walk up the hillside vehicle track for about 100m and on your left you will find the first candidate site for Arethousa Spring. The excavation for "Beboula's Wish" has (mercifully) stopped just to the west of it.

Book reference: Figs. 14.5-6, 32.7.

4. View (Mount Neriton)

Continue up the track along the slope of Mount Lakties (Neriton) until you reach the water tank at the northern end. Walk on across the scrubland until you are rewarded by a partial view of Atheras Bay.

Book reference: Fig. 13.4

5. Atheras village

Descend to the village of Atheras (Arethousa), where there is a general store at the Lixouri end. Follow the signs to Atheras beach and walk down the main road.

Book reference: Fig. 14.1

6. View (Atheras Bay)

At a gap in the foliage you will see a full view of Atheras Bay. Continue down the zig-zagging main road until you see the second track branching off to the left (not the one on the westerly hairpin – see map).

Book reference: Fig. 13.3

7. Agni (Telemachos) Cove

The detour to Agni (Telemachos) Cove is very worthwhile if you have the time. Again, the site is on private agricultural ground so you must check with your visit organiser whether the farmer will allow you to visit it.

Follow the track off the main road and turn left at the marked junction. Continue down the path into the first field and then bear right into the second field as you approach the sea. Walk through the foliage by the sea and you will reach the bay. To the north (on your right) across the rocks there are some excellent examples of uplifted geological rocks at unusual angles, but be particularly careful of your footing in this area.

Book reference: Cover, Figs. 16.2-6, 30.4-5, 31.1.

8 Atheras (Phorcys) Bay

Retrace your path up from the sea but turn left at the marked junction, through the farmyard until you regain the main road. Bear left at the fork and you will pass the restaurant: they serve meals throughout the day. You will arrive at the western edge of Atheras Bay and there is also a beach cafe in the centre. If you wade or swim out past the western edge of the beach you will find the cave that cannot be the Cave of the Nymphs because it would have been underwater at the time. At the eastern end of the beach is the fresh water outlet of the springline from Mount Lakties. As you look out towards the sea you will understand why the poet describes Phorcys Bay as containing two headlands that are actually 'in' the bay, as opposed to defining its outer arms: "On Ithaca there is a bay of Phorcys, / The old man of the sea: in it, two headlands, / Projecting, sheared off, crouching from the harbour, / Shield it from waves whipped up by blustering wins / Outside.

Book reference: Cover, Figs. 13.6, 13.7, 30.6, 30.9-10, 31.3-5, 32.3-4.

9 Old Path from Atheras Bay

The path starts at the far eastern end of the beach. On your left you pass some very old olive trees and a karst hillside that may contain collapsed caves. Homer describes Odysseus thus: "He climbed a rugged path up from the harbour, / Along the heights through woods, the way Athene / Pointed him to the swineherd".

Book reference: Figs. 14.1, 30.7-8,

10. View along old path

The path winds up through the hillside and reveals some beautiful views. Be careful to turn up left at the first junction and then to bear right at the second.

Book reference: Fig. 32.5

11. View on the western side of Atheras

If you cross the main road and ascent the track opposite, your route will take you round the western side of Atheras with some stunning views across the sea in the direction of Italy. When you reach the second track junction, turn left to bear back into the village. On your way through you can buy a cool drink from the general store and a few hundred metres down the Lixouri road you will end up at the chapel. Just before that on your left there is a mediaeval well above a water catchment.

Book reference: Fig. 32.5

Kastelli and other sites mentioned in the book

There is a summary map of the sites at Northern Paliki at Fig. 19.19. As explained previously, the Kastelli area is at present off-limits. The quarry operator nearby does not welcome visitors (Figs. 20.2-5) and the raised harbour marshland is a listed EEC wildlife sanctuary. The 'Double Hilltop' of Chapter 19 is on private ground but is not a particularly sensitive area. The Laertes Farm identified in Chapter 22 is privately owned but may be viewed from the road.

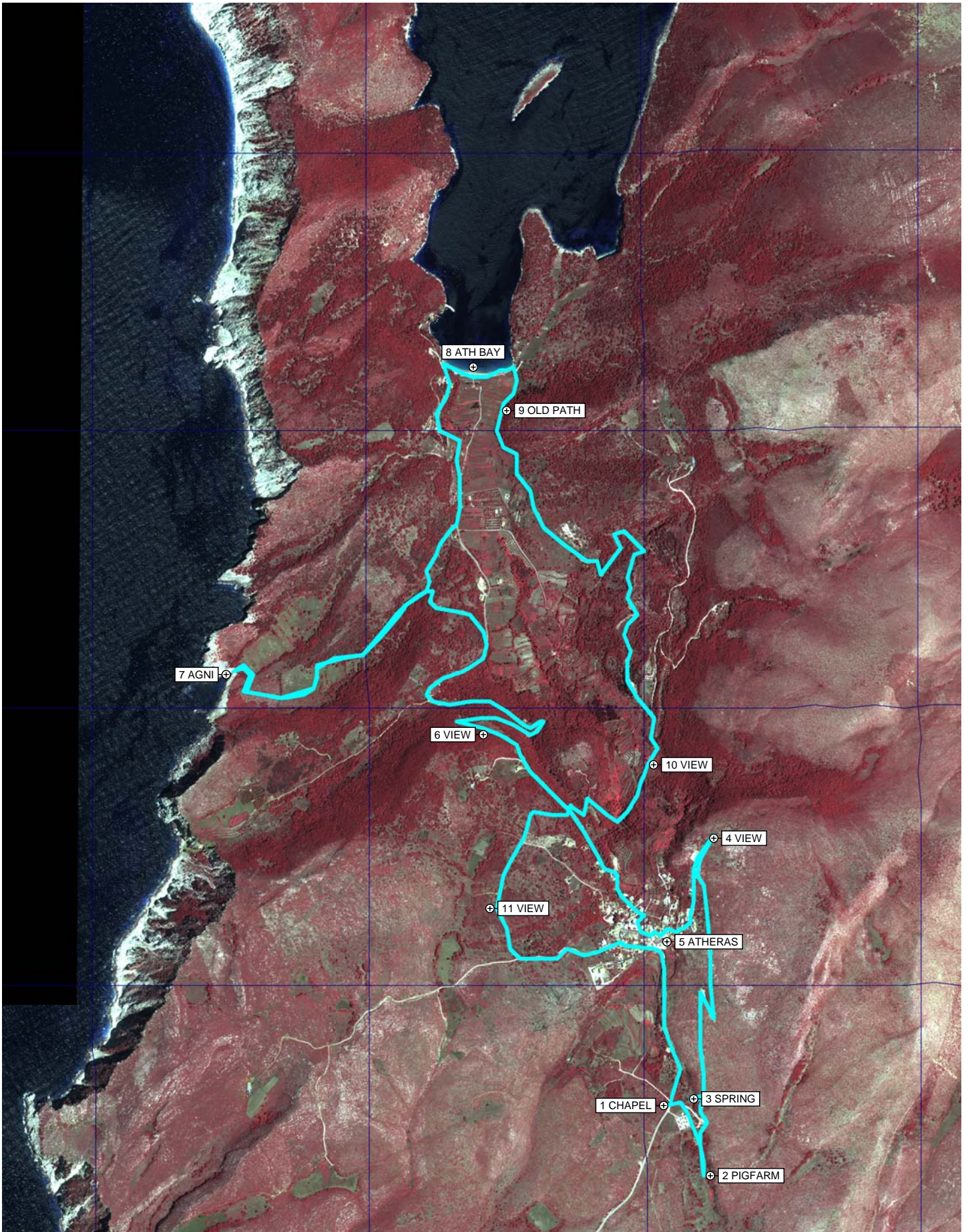
Petani Beach (Fig 16.7) is definitely worth a visit: it can be reached via the road through Ag. Georgios on Fig 5.3. The 'theatre' at Fig 25.1 lies to the west of the horseshoe-shaped road on Fig. 5.3 (Kritonou) up a short path: it is on private ground but the area is not sensitive. The Rheithron brook is crossed by a bridge on the main road just south of Livadi village.

The Thinia area itself is clearly accessible along its full length, while the proposed site of Alalcomenai at Asteris and the suitors' ambush point (Figs 15.3-6, 25.7) can be reached from the side roads alongside and opposite the Mediterranean Hotel.

Contributing to the *Odysseus Unbound* project

We hope you have enjoyed the walk. If so, please contribute a message to the website Forum. Also, if you have professional skills or equipment and techniques which might help us in these researches, please feel free to get in touch via the website Contact page.

www.odysseus-unbound.org



Quickbird image of Northern Paliki

Colour interpretation: near infra-red = red; red = green; green = blue; blue = none.

This means that chlorophyll-rich well-watered vegetation appears

red; a red roof appears green; a green roof appears blue; a blue roof is lost.

Grid: 1 km.

[Image credits: Digital Globe Quickbird 60 cm resolution false colour satellite image.

Processing: OziExplorer. Websites: www.digitalglobe.com, www.eurimage.com, www.ozexplorer.com]