



Walking in the Mani



Walk 1. Tigani

Kerry Kousiounis

'Tigani' literally means frying pan and refers to the similarly shaped promontory south of Areopolis near Mezapos.

Route status:

Easy to moderate route over uneven terrain with a small steep ascent. The walk lasts approx. 3 hours allowing time for exploration of the ruins.

The walk starts from the village of Stavri, where you can leave your car and then continue on foot. (For a longer walk start from Mézapos along some fine coastal paths - this is an additional 8 Km round trip).

The walk to Tigani's castle is well signposted (Photo above). About 20 minutes out of Stavri, you leave the tarmac road to continue on a dirt path. It is not long before the causeway leading to Tigani's castle comes into view (Photo top right) The path is all downhill now and throughout spring and early summer there is a succession of plants in bloom on the hillside (Photo right).

When you reach the beginning of the causeway, the landscape takes on an 'other worldly' feeling, part lunar landscape and part desolate wasteland. Sunglasses are indispensable walking through the sun bleached rocks of the causeway.

Photos right: Gorse, sea stocks and spurges add contrast to the bleached rocky landscape.





To make your way across, keep an eye out for cairns, which will guide you along a good footpath. Along the causeway you will see remains of dry stone huts (Photo above left) and blue painted bowls which were shaped into the rocky ground and used to produce salt. There has been a small revival of salt harvesting here in recent years. As you near the base of the plateau, the path continues to the right and starts to ascend very quickly, hugging the looming battlement.

When you enter the site, you will immediately find yourself among the ruins of the Basilica (Photo above right). The style may date back as early as the 7th century. There is a circular path on the outskirts of the plateau that takes you past further ruins and excavations. At the far end, the fortifications look down on a sheer cliff face and the sea. As you walk around you can see the strategic value of the castle with precipitous drops almost on all sides and yet you wonder what they were defending. The other thing that will strike you is how any plants or animals survive the extreme heat here. It always feels hotter and drier so it's advisable to take adequate supplies of water (especially for

The Castle of the Grand Magne

"The Chronicle of the Morea", written in French and Greek in the 14th century, tells how the Frankish prince Guillaume II of Villehardouin captured Monemvassia from the Greeks around 1248. Shortly after this, he built Mystras. Wanting to further control the wild Slavic tribes of the Taygetos, The Chronicle tells how Guillaume II summoned a council to advise him. They recommended that he build another fortification on the other side of the Taygetos to encircle the mountains and control the sea (Photos below).

"There upon the prince himself made a tour on horseback, following the directions of the people of the land, thereupon he came to Passava and from here to Magne. Here he found an awesome steep cliff standing on a promontory. On this, he had built a Fort and named the same Maina. ..." from **The Chronicle of the Morea** (anonymous).

There is still debate between scholars about the exact position of the Castle, known as "Maini", "Palaia Maini" and "Megali Maini" in Greek, but the Tigani castle is considered a possible candidate. Little is known about the history of the Tigani. Excavations in the 1970's under the Greek archaeologist Professor Drandakis, unearthed the ruins of a large church and tombs. The church dates back to the early Byzantine period and 5th century silver and gold earrings found there are now displayed in the Byzantine museum of Athens.



Patrick Leigh Fermor in his book 'Mani', describes a visit he made to the Tigani in the 50's, where he encountered two salt collectors:

"Two barefoot women, a mother and daughter in antique straw hats as wide as umbrellas, their faces burnt black by the sun and eyebrows and tangled hair caked white with dry brine, were gathering rock-salt in broad wicker baskets. They worked here all summer, they said, and sometimes in the winter too, sleeping in the huge cave by the chapel of the Hodygytria, where there was a little spring of brackish water for them to drink and dip their paximadia. It wasn't much of a life, the mother said. How much could they sell the salt for? It was equivalent, in drachmae, of sixpence an oka."



Walk 2: To Pargos

This is an easy to moderate circular walk, starting from Agios Nikolaos. It takes you above Agios Nikolaos and Riglia and then winds its way below Pargos and the outskirts of Neochori. Although not a walk in the wilderness it gives wonderful views of the local coastline.

Route status: Easy mostly on dirt track, grassy footpath and a small section of kalderimi (stone footpath), with a couple of steeper sections. Duration 2 ½ hours from Agios Nikolaos and about 3 ½ from Stoupa. The coastal path from Stoupa starts just behind the church.

1. From Agios Nikolaos, walk north from the harbour and take the coastal footpath. After about 10 minutes you will come to a big clump of Prickly pear. Come off the footpath and turn right onto the dirt track that takes you through an olive grove (Photo right). This path will lead you to the main road. Cross over and continue straight ahead onto a newly asphalted road. After about 10 minutes the asphalt continues as a gravel road. Bear right following the signs for Orato village. Further on when you reach a sharp U-turn in the road come off the road onto a dirt track and continue forward, following the coastline, with the sea to your right. This is an easy to moderate circular walk, starting from Agios Nikolaos. It takes you above Agios Nikolaos and Riglia and then winds its way below Pargos and the outskirts of Neochori. Although not a walk in the wilderness it gives wonderful views of the local coastline. with the sea to your right. From here you will see Agios Nikolaos and the coast below you. Follow the road (Photo right) which winds its way through olive groves.





Further on you will see signs for the little white washed church of Agia Paraskevi (Photo top left).

As you approach Riglia you will see bee hives left and then right of you. The road bears left but directly in front of you will see two grassy paths. One hugs the stone wall, take the middle one which is the start of what was once a kalderimi. The path now begins to climb and after a short while you will have wonderful views of Pirgos above you.

The path continues on and at some point a road will branch to the right (Photo 2 down). Take this right turn onto the cemented track and almost immediately turn left between the stone walls to continue on the old kalderimi. You will then reach another white washed church built next to a cave entrance. To the left of the church there is a smaller cave with a fountain (Photo 3 down). Beyond this you will pass a newly built house on your left with a charming garden and then a cement track with a water pumping station.



(At this point if you turn right and continue up, you will reach the main Pirgos road and very shortly after that on the left, the kalderimi that takes you towards Pirgos. For an extended walk there is an interesting footpath that starts by the main church in Pirgos towards Elaiochori).

The footpath becomes overgrown but it affords unusual perspectives of Pirgos. (Photo bottom).



Continue left and down and you will reach the outer limits of the growing Neochori. Keep the small ravine to your right. This path takes you down towards the coast with views of the promontory at Agios Nikolaos.

Keep following the path and about 30 minutes later you will reach the asphalt road taking you back to the Stoupa coastal path and the start of your walk.

