

# Connecting with the Past: a Tale of Heritage, Culture & Adventure

After the wave of migration over the last sixty years, hundreds of thousands of second and third generation Greek-Australians have been born. Unlike a lot of their parents – many of whom entered Australia as poor migrants, later generations of Australian-born Greeks have been afforded the luxury of higher education and broad career prospects.

Now that there's a level of economic and educational comfort, what's next for second, third and future-generations of Greek-Australians? In a growing number of cases, a thirst for knowledge and pioneering spirit on a different, more intellectual level. That's why learning about history is starting to grow in appeal.

Having been transplanted a great distance geographically, and with the voices of grandparents starting to fade, what can a visit to Greece really mean for Australian-born Greeks? Surely more than ouzo, mezes, nice beaches and monument tours?

In the case of the Greek island of Kythera, something new took place in July this year. A project that helped stimulate a thirst for both knowledge and adventure - through community backed archaeological excavations. Archaeology is far from new in Greece, but what was new, is the inclusion of the local community and members of the Diaspora in the project, both as sponsors and beneficiaries. Perhaps the term 'Community Backed' Archaeology is most appropriate.

A handful of Greek archaeologists planned to survey a path along the side of a mountain where Kythera's ancient capital (Paleokastro) is currently buried; an arduous task considering how overgrown the area was with dense, inhospitable scrub.

With the help of members of the Kytherian-Australian community, a team of twenty full-time volunteers were assembled to assist archaeologists, with up to fifteen more daily volunteers helping most of the time. The full-time volunteers were primarily Greek archaeology students from Athens, with logistics during their stay organised by members of the Kytherian-Australian community. Funding to feed volunteers over the 18-day period was provided from Australia through the generous support of the Nicholas Anthony Aroney Trust and Kytherian Association of Australia.

The team stayed in a picturesque 170 year-old, mountain-top monastery – with accommodation provided by the local Bishop and Greek Orthodox church. Kythera's Dimos (council) helped provide bus transport from the monastery to the dig site each day, with local supermarkets, bakeries and other businesses also supporting the team. It was a united, Greek-Australian coordinated effort, with a mix of local Greek volunteers and members of the Diaspora all pitching in to assist archaeologists.

Support involved more than just money but complete help with logistics. For example 50 meals a day were required for full-time volunteers over an 18 day period, totalling approximately 900 meals (excluding breakfast).

Hundreds of members of the public also visited the site on tours, many being Greek-Australian children. So the end result was an active, unifying, adventurous and intellectually stimulating project involving youth, parents and grandparents.

Sections of the mostly forgotten 2500+ year-old ancient Laconian-controlled capital were found, helping discover enough evidence to write a new chapter of ancient history. The team found walls, columns, coins, thousands of roof tile fragments, ancient ceramics and dozens of other different kinds of artefacts.

It would be hard to find a more interesting and practical community backed project which unified local residents with members of the Diaspora, and deeply involved; youth, culture, history, education, exploration and adventure. Not only did volunteers and visitors learn about ancient Greek history (from the dirt up) but they got to participate in the discovery of it. What a way to connect with the land of your forefathers!

Most of the volunteers who provided physical labour were 18-30 year olds, with older generations being inspired by the on-site tours. An added bonus was the clearing and opening of a path to a church called Agios Kosmas at the top of the Paleokastro mountain, built in approximately 1290AD. This church is unique as it was constructed using Doric columns from approximately 600BC, which stood in the area from a temple in the ancient city. Together with Bishop Seraphim, Kythera's Metropolit, the team organised the first church service held at Agios Kosmas over 100 years.

Youth of today is part of a generation brought up with on-screen heroes such Indiana Jones and Lara Croft, so coupled with the intellectual/cultural stimulation and feeling of adventure associated with archaeology, the project created a melting pot of learning, excitement and intrigue, resulting in something truly special.

A lecture outlining the concept of Community Backed Archaeology, perhaps sparking similar initiatives in other parts of Greece, plus a presentation of what the team discovered while excavating parts of Kythera's ancient Laconian-controlled capital will be held at Sydney University on the evening of Wednesday November 10<sup>th</sup>.

It's an interesting story, about more than just 2000 year-old artefacts but a way of unifying the community on many levels, engaging youth and providing a connection to ancient Greek heritage. Perhaps you'd like to join the team as a volunteer next year? Come along and find out how.

Call George Poulos on 02 9388 8320 for more information. Or contact Kathy Samios on 02 9349 1849 or email [john.fardoulis@gmail.com](mailto:john.fardoulis@gmail.com) to reserve your place at the free lecture.



Unearthing part of a 2000+ year old wall. Prior to the team of volunteers arriving in July, 2010, soil above this buried wall was covered in scrub, overgrown thorns and bushes with suffocating pollen. Now there's a walking path and buried walls from Kythera's ancient capital during the Classical period are starting to appear in test trenches.



Volunteering is physically demanding but rewarding work.





The project was about more than just 2000 year old artefacts. It brought together a lot of people. Above are visitors from Canada, England, America & Australia mixing with Greek archaeology students.



A number of academics also visited, increasing their interest in Kythera. Pictured above is Dr Stavros Paspalas, the Deputy Director of the AAIA.



One of the Greek archaeologists explains the process to some Kytherian-Americans.



Teenagers, parents and grandparents – all searching for Kytherian history as part of both an adventure and cultural pursuit.



Kytherian-Australian, John Prineas tells how as a boy in the 1940's, he used to seek refuge (with his two goats) in Agios Kosmas when it rained.



Here professors and lecturers from the British School at Athens, University of Peloponnese, Nottingham University and the Institute of Archaeology, University College London gathered for a tour of the site. It is hoped to collaborate more closely with such people in aggregating more research on Kythera.



A unifying element across Greek culture was experienced in general. The Arch Bishop of Kythera, Mayor, Deputy Mayor and a cross section of local residents and visitors are pictured at the blessing of the Agios Theodoros dig site.



Here's part of a wall excavated in the first Paleokastro test trench. Some of the stones are quite well worked, suggesting an important building or structure.

It's too early to tell but we suspect it was part of a shop or building in the ancient market place (Agora).

Another theory is that it might also be part of some sort of fortifications.



Lots of roof tiles are wedged below it, hinting that this structure could have been built on top of an older building. We need to dig deeper to find out more.

It's believed that this level represents a period of approximately 100BC-100AD, and with ancient text affirming that the city was occupied in 424BC, an older building could well be located underneath.



Perhaps these stones are foundations for a different building. Even though only approximately five metres away from the first trench, stonework is less elaborate.



Coins found in Kythera during July, 2010. These will take work to conserve and identify.



There's slight controversy regarding this coin from the Roman period. The initial impression is that it was silver plated (on bronze) during antiquity, to give the impression of being a silver coin. Perhaps an ancient forgery!



This object is extremely interesting. It's a lead sling bullet, a little larger than a fishing sinker of today, ammunition used with a handheld slingshot/catapult, a weapon of ancient snipers. They are said to have been able to penetrate armour from a distance of 160 metres.

It was found within the ancient city walls, raising the question regarding a potential unwritten conflict. This is definitely the kind of item to search for in future years.



Dozens of these amphora repair patches were found. In ancient times, when there was a crack in a large storage vessel, it would be repaired using lead - forming a clamp on each side, so the damaged area of pottery wouldn't break off.

Once a large amphora was repaired it could no longer hold liquid and was used to store grain and coarser items.

Finding a lot of these hints at the existence of a grain store in an ancient (Agora) marketplace. Or perhaps a repair facility within the city's commercial district.