



About the Author

Gilly Cameron-Cooper's main career was as a journalist, non-fiction author and editor, but in 2002 she and her husband Robin gave up demanding London jobs and turned their hiking hobby into a lifestyle business. They set up Walking Plus Ltd, organising and leading walking holidays initially on Naxos, and later on Paros, Amorgos and Tinos. At the time, the islands offered untapped potential for adventure and exploration, as waymarking and mapping were minimal, and there was no competition from other tour operators. Gilly already had a foothold in Greek language and culture from living in Athens, where she wrote for the English-language press, ran a weekly magazine, and produced consultation documents on sustainable tourism for the Greek government. She has hiked all over the world, publishing articles for national magazines and newspapers, and books on walking London's waterways, Beatrix Potter's Lake District, and mythology.

WALKING ON THE GREEK ISLANDS – THE CYCLADES

**NAXOS AND THE 50KM NAXOS STRADA, PAROS,
AMORGOS, SANTORINI**

by Gilly Cameron-Cooper

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Front cover: The path to the citadel of ancient Arkesini on Amorgos (Walk 31)

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Map key

	start		bridge
	finish		mine or quarry
	start/finish		built-up area
	alternative start		international/domestic airport
	route line with direction arrow		ferry route
	alternative route line		local ferry
	main asphalt road		main ferry port
	minor asphalt or concrete road		lighthouse
	dirt road		campsite
	footpath		museum
	indistinct trail		building
	watercourse		ruin
	seasonal watercourse		church or chapel
	seasonal lake, or marsh		monastery
	peak		fortification wall
	spring, well		ancient/historical monument or site
	cave		tower
	threshing circle		cemetery
	windmill, wind turbine		parking
	watermill, mill race		





All four islands are networked with traditional working paths that link villages, churches and farmland, such as this monopati on Naxos

INTRODUCTION



Grotta Bay, Mount Zas (distant centre) and Naxos town (Walk 10)

Paros, Naxos, Amorgos and Santorini: the best of Greece in four islands. Each one gives you the whole intense Greek experience condensed into digestible areas that can be explored in a week or two – although you'll want to go back for more. Cragged marble peaks are bare and bleached against the sky, and startlingly white villages and monasteries are embedded in wild landscapes. Evocative remnants of ancient history lie in olive groves and hidden valleys, and always there is the encircling, glittering sea.

These islands are southern members of the Cyclades archipelago, a roughly circular scattering of treasure islands in the southern Aegean, linked by geomorphology, history – and ferry

routes. From each island you can see at least one of the others, and yet each is a world of its own. Santorini's life and landscape are dramatically defined by its volcano; Naxos by its diversity of landscape and self-sufficiency. Paros has a gentler, more cosmopolitan ambience, and Amorgos is loved for its remoteness, stark beauty and potent shrubs. From a walker's perspective, Paros is a training ground for the much greater network of mountains and valleys on Naxos, while Amorgos is more rugged and exposed. Santorini is a warm-up exercise, too small for hikes of any length or a dedicated walking holiday, but a convenient launching-pad for the other islands, and has idiosyncratic natural and human-made

wonders quite apart from its spectacular caldera.

On most of the walks you are more likely to meet a lonely goatherd than troops of hikers, and may feel as if you are discovering places that other tourists don't reach. England has its bridleways, Spain its Moorish routes, and in rural Greece there are *monopati* and *kalderimi*, man- or mule-width paths paved with country rock, which carve their way into the heart of island life and landscape. They were built as vital lines of communication between villages, to reach a distant orchard or terrace of vines, a remote chapel or a mountain spring. Some wind crazily up vertical mountains like a collapsible ruler; others cut deeply between earthen banks thick with vegetation, or thread a route around age-old vineyards and farmland.

Although the walks are not long, they can be challenging, as they are

less manicured and managed than in other countries. Even the most beautifully marble-paved *monopati* can disintegrate into oblivion, and although many routes have been opened up and waymarked, signing can be inconsistent and/or confusing – hence the value of a guidebook.

You could allow as many days for your trip as there are walks, but it's worth building in some time to soak in the Greek island lifestyle in a village *kafenion* (café) or taverna, or to swim in the Aegean blue. Paros, Amorgos and Naxos each give two weeks of satisfying walking, and four days in Santorini can be tagged on at either end.

HISTORY

The islands – and your walks – are littered with remnants of Greek history, so here's a quick guide to key dates and periods.

KEY PERIODS

Prehistoric Before the human story was recorded

Palaeolithic (Early/Old Stone Age) from 3.3 million years ago: Hominids use stone implements

Neolithic (New Stone Age) 7000–3000BC: hunter-gatherers, using stone implements

Bronze Age 3300–1150BC: Bronze is used for tools and weapons

Helladic 2800–1600BC: Bronze Age in Greece

Cycladic 3200–2000BC: Early Bronze Age culture centred on the Cyclades

Minoan 2600–1200BC: Advanced Bronze Age civilisation based on Crete

Mycenaean 1600–1100BC: Advanced Late Bronze Age civilisation centred on Mycenae in the Peloponnese

Geometric 1100–700BC: A 'Dark Age' of limited development, with geometrical designs on pottery

Archaic 650–480BC: a period of artistic development that laid the foundation for the Classical period

Classical 480–323BC: Athens is the centre of artistic creation, philosophical and political thought. The Persian Wars (492–449BC) overlap, when the Persians annex a lot of Greece but then grant it independence

Alexander the Great 336–323BC: Alexander of Macedon builds an empire from the Adriatic Sea to the Indus River, and is granted generalship of Greece

Hellenistic 323–30BC: From Alexander's death to the emergence of the Roman Empire

Roman Greece 146BC–AD330: Greece is dominated by the Roman Empire

Byzantine Empire AD330–1204: Constantine establishes Byzantium (Constantinople) as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, and makes Christianity the official religion

Frankish/Venetian occupation 1207–1537: Follows the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusaders

Turkish/Ottoman rule 1537–1832: in the eastern Mediterranean, from Barbarossa's conquest to Greek Independence 1822–32

The particular history of the Cycladic islands is shaped by their location on the sea routes between mainland Greece, Asia and Africa, and their proximity to each other. Island-hopping has been going on since prehistory, when early humans in primitive dug-out canoes or coracles needed to keep in sight of land. Then, hunter-gatherers would have foraged in inland mountains and valleys. Their farming successors in the Early Bronze Age made small, permanent settlements on lower vales and coastal plains, and pioneering steps in crop cultivation and animal husbandry, skills and craftsmanship – a significant stage of civilisation

that archaeologists call the Cycladic period.

As sea transport improved, the islands became a hub for trade routes and the exchange of influences and technology with the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Middle East. Unfortunately, over the centuries, they also attracted invaders, from Minoans and Mycenaeans to Venetians and Turks, who exacted taxes and sometimes invested in island trade and economy. But the islands were remote outposts of empire, neglected when the ruling powers were under pressure. Then they were easy prey for pirates and privateers, sometimes whole fleets of



Ancient columns and a Byzantine chapel, Thira, Santorini (Walk 35)

them, who anchored in the sheltered bays and plundered land and people. Local populations were small, the people scratching out livings on the arid land, with no spare resources to defend themselves.

The Cycladic period's early achievements were superseded in the Middle Bronze Age by the powerful, prosperous and creative Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations, notably and uniquely developed at Akrotiri on Santorini. When these empires declined, their glittering sophistication, craftsmanship, and the Linear B alphabet were lost, and the 'Dark Ages' began. Islands were depopulated, but tribal peoples such as Dorians and Ionians migrated from the mainland, bringing with them their language, customs and gods, and consolidating, in the Cyclades, a common Greek identity and character. In some places, such as Amorgos,

city-states (*poleis*) were founded, with a fortified acropolis (high town) as the focal point of a scattered rural community, whose men could be called to arms.

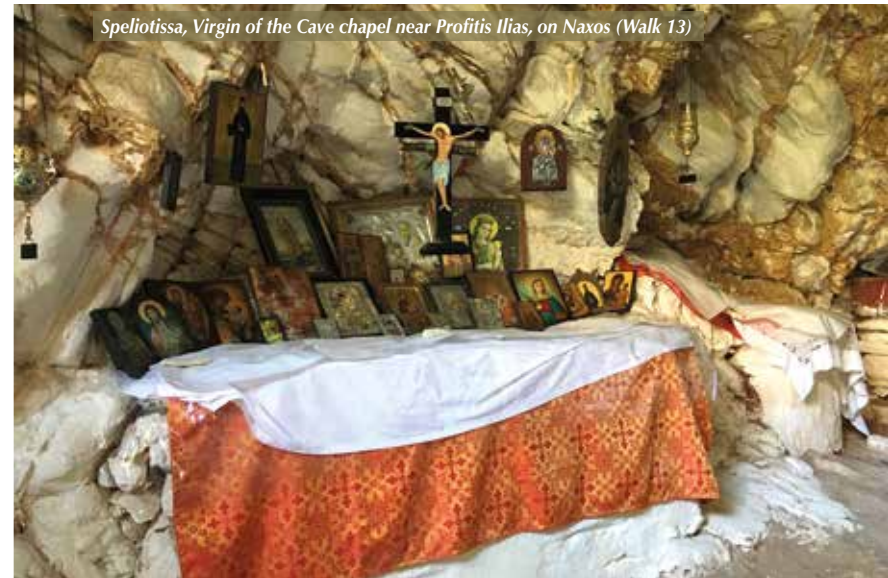
The Hellenistic period was marked by war, unrest, and a plague of pirates, as Alexander's successors and city-states jostled for power, prompting the building of defensive towers and hilltop forts. The Romans took control of the South Aegean from 133BC, but didn't colonise. They installed local governors, exacted annual taxes, raised the cost of living, and used Amorgos as a place of exile. As the Empire weakened and Greeks and Romans fought for control, pirates and bounty hunters returned. Persistent, large-scale and devastating raids in the early Byzantine period prompted islanders to move their capitals away from the coasts to high ground inland, opening

up the interiors for farming. Christian churches and chapels are the most visible legacy of the Byzantine period.

With the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusaders in 1204, the Byzantine Empire crumbled, and in the carve-up of land the Cyclades were up for grabs. Venetian adventurer Marco Sanudo and his band of mercenaries took control of Naxos and Paros, Jacopo Barozzi took Santorini, the Quirini family Amorgos, and they moved the capitals back to the sea. Although the Venetians operated a feudal system, native islanders retained property and Orthodox religious rights. Over the years, the two cultures rubbed along together and even intermarried. When times were stable and good, olive groves, terraces for wheat, and marble quarries (for the architecture of Venice) were

fully exploited, but persistent invasions, increasingly from Turks, led to depopulation as islanders were taken into slavery or left for safer shores.

In the late 1530s, Barbarossa, promoted from buccaneer to admiral by Ottoman ruler Suleiman the Magnificent, brought the Cyclades under Turkish control, which lasted for the next 300 years. The Turks didn't occupy the islands, but demanded an annual tax. They granted the Greek Orthodox Church administrative control over its people and many monasteries were founded under Turkish rule. This arrangement caused tension with the still-resident Catholic Venetians, who continued to act as lords of the manor. As a nation, the Venetians were still at war with the Turks, which triggered another period of piracy, disturbance and



Speliotissa, Virgin of the Cave chapel near Profitis Ilias, on Naxos (Walk 13)

WALK 1

Parikia town to Cape Fokas

Start	Asklepion site entrance
Finish	Krios Beach
Distance	9km
Ascent	160m
Descent	170m
Time	3hr
Terrain	Paved alleys, beaches, easy coastal trails and dirt roads
Refreshments	Parikia town, seasonal tavernas along the coast to Krios
Transport	Water taxi, Marcello Beach and Krios to Parikia port, mid May–mid October

Practically every key moment in the island's history is represented on this circuit of wide Parikia Bay. Starting from an atmospheric ancient sanctuary, you thread through Parikia's old town via one of the Aegean's most significant and gracious churches, and an archaeological museum that will enrich your understanding of the island's history and sites. After a cultural morning (if you want to visit the museum) you stroll along the shore to a string of sandy bays and a low, rocky finger of cape, looking back to the port against its mountain backdrop.

The fourth-century BC **Asklepion** Sanctuary is unlikely to be officially open, so go to the ruin at the corner L of the entrance, and turn R. Take the first R and go past the hotel entrance, go up the *monopati* (footpath). Above the swimming pool, climb over the wall and cross to a miniature temple in the style of a Hellenistic mausoleum perching on a cliff-edge.

This is the uppermost level of the **Asklepion site**, where the earliest, archaic traces of a healing sanctuary to Apollo lie embedded in the ground. Apollo, for whom healing was just one of many items in



Mausoleum-style building overlooking temple remains, Asklepion

his job description, was the father of Asklepios, god of healing and medicine. The Sanctuary was sufficiently out of town to provide isolation from infectious diseases, and water from springs. On the lower terrace, column bases remain of a Doric colonnade that supported the building where rituals invoked the god's healing powers.

From the little temple take the trail N and down to buildings, then turn L along the foot of the cliff past the marble spring basins. Drop to the colonnade and go L to and around the gate at the far end of the site. Turn R,



cross the road, go L down wide steps at the restaurant to reach the shore path, and turn R. Continue to a pine-wooded slope, go up to the road and turn L and immediately L again, past hotels to reach a paved cliff-top path.

Follow the path's rollercoaster way beneath council offices and a well-buffed Parian marble sculpture of an elongated head, to reach a road. Bear R and R again up

steps through paved gardens around the tiny chapel of **Ag Anna**, encased almost entirely in recycled Parian marble. Back on the road at a bend, cross to a wide path, go down to a little marina and turn R along the seafront.

Cross to a marble-paved courtyard in front of the triple-blue-domed **Zoodochos Pyghi** (Virgin of the life-giving spring) church. Take the alley L of the entrance and wiggle R–L through the town, over a *plateia* (square) with a centrepiece of a boat's prow. When you see ahead a peeling ochre house with rooftop balustrade, turn R at the corner before it, then take the first L, soon coming to a dumpy chapel and a marble fountain. ▶

Continue to the next R–L kink under an arch, where embedded in the wall is the Taxiarchos church, which may be open for a peep inside at richly painted screens and an intense Orthodox atmosphere. Go L just before the arcaded building and R up stepped Odysseus Eliti street, named for a 20th-century Greek poet who loved Paros and its fountains (the second of which is at the foot of the steps), to the remains of the '**Frankish Castle**' – a liquorice-allsort construction of architectural salvage occupying the former site of a 525bc temple to Athena, many of whose

This is one of three fountains donated in 1777 by Paros-born Nikolaos Mavrogenis, who thrived under the Turks but later lost favour and was beheaded. His granddaughter, Manto, was a heroine of the Greek War of Independence.

Over Parikia Bay to Cape Fokas, giant fennel and oxalis



marble column fragments, cornices and beams can be seen in the 1260 tower and surrounding churches.

Return to the (probably 16th-century) arcaded building, which has Grotesque bas-relief male and female figures clutching their stomachs on its end columns. Go L to the junction and turn R into Gravari Street, past the colourful neoclassical Centre for Southern Aegean Fine Art, the twin-belled church of **Septemvriani** with marble salvage inside and out (key with the chemist, opposite), and the third Mavrogenis fountain. Go between Distrato café and shop, straight up and over a bridged alley, and along Manto Mavrogenous to the white block of **Panagia Ekatontapyliani** church.

Ekatontapyliani (of the 100 gates, for its arcaded features) church is also known as Katapoliani (of the lower town), or simply Panagia (Our Lady). It is architecturally remarkable for a remote island church, and for being built by direct command of Byzantine emperors. The oldest part, the symmetrical, vaulted baptistery, is one of the earliest Christian buildings to have survived almost intact – for some 1700 years. The original church was founded around AD313 and expanded at the request of Emperor Constantine's mother, Helen, who had been shipwrecked and given sanctuary on Paros en route to the Holy Land. Most of today's building was added some 200 years later.

Go up the lane R of Ekatontapyliani to the **archaeological museum** (open 8am–3.30pm, closed Tuesdays).

Museum highlights include a bas-relief of a symposium depicting the seventh-century Parian poet Archilochos (whose cave you will pass later on), the earliest examples of *kouroi* (monumental marble statues of idealised youths), and a headless but huge statue of the goddess Artemis from the Delian Temple (on Walk 2). Most exciting is a fragment of inscribed marble known as the Parian Chronicle,



which contained the only known written reference in antiquity to the epic poet Homer, as well as a catalogue of events including the Trojan War.

Marble font for total immersion baptism, Katapoliani Church

From the museum, go through the pine tree park to a gap in the wall, cross the road and turn L, then R and L again to reach the seafront. ► Turn R, and in the next block, behind railings, is a **cemetery** that served a large community for 1100 years from the eighth century BC, and included a *polyandron* (of many men) tomb with funerary vases containing the washed bones of 200 men, probably soldiers.

This was where Minoans from Crete, the island's first colonists, established their port.

Continue along the seafront, then taverna-backed strands. At the far end of **Livadia Bay** join a pleasant shoreline path and look back to the port with the white slice of the Anargyroi (saints without money) monastery wedged into the mountain. Cut across a headland of rock and wild scrub and just before the first house, drop down wide steps and turn R. Almost immediately, just before a road forks R, look R to a dirt slope, at the top of which is a long, windowless mystery building, its curved apse set abruptly into the rocky hillside.



No-one is quite sure what the **Krios tower** was used for, as there are no characteristics of a temple or church, or when it was built. Art historian Nigel McGilchrist says its construction suggests third century AD (although the marble ledge in the semi-circular apse is recycled from a fourth-century BC civic building) and it may have been used for storage or as an arsenal.

Walk the curve of **Krios Bay** to the jetty at **Marcello Beach**, another summer ferry stop, and join the sandy road. After two small beaches turn L onto the coastal trail to the dapper church of **Ag Fokas** and then the ruins of an 1867 lighthouse.

Head R to the main dirt road above a sea-bitten headland, then straight up past a large end-of-island property. Keep L past the entrance to another isolated house along the now stony track, then turn towards the cliff. ◀ Follow the clearly defined cliff-top trail NE to a junction, then turn R and follow the wall and track back down to **Marcello Beach** and turn L to **Krios**. May to mid October you can catch a water taxi from either; otherwise phone for a taxi or retrace your steps along the sea-front to Parikia.

Go L towards the property boundary to look down the broken cliffs to the cave of Archilocus, named for the Paros-born pioneering lyric poet of the seventh century BC.

WALK 2

Northwest coast to Kolimbithres

Start	Delian Apollo Sanctuary
Finish	Kolimbithres
Distance	10km
Ascent	240m
Descent	360m
Time	4hr
Terrain	Exposed, wild and windy, with long stretches of dirt track, and rough cross-country trails among low, spiny shrubs
Refreshments	Kolimbithres
Transport	Parikia–Kolimbithres bus, summer only. Year-round Parikia–Naousa bus stops at the junction with the main road 1.8km SE of Kolimbithres along the bay. Alternatively, take two vehicles to Kolimbithres and return in one of them to the start, or use taxis.

The high ridge of the northwest coast drops down steep, ragged cliffs to an infinity of sea. It is wild, exposed country, with wind-carved rocks, a regiment of wind turbines, and an ancient acropolis on a granite tor. Inland, you look down to a wide vale that cuts a swathe northeast–southwest between mountain ridges from one big bite of bay to another, at Parikia.

From the stony footpath leading up to the **Delian Apollo Sanctuary**, go ENE along the dirt track.

There's a direct sightline north from this platform of jumbled rock to the island of Delos, the spiritual heart of the cult of **Apollo**, god of music and healing. The god was worshipped here from the ninth century BC, with ritual dancing on a paved path around a rock altar. Later, in the fifth century BC, it was dedicated to Apollo's sister Artemis and became the