

Expedition trip report presented for
The Exploration Society

Greece Expedition 2016

Two friends, two ridge traverses and two thousand metres of multi-pitch

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Contents

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Purpose of Trip	2
1.2	Background of the Area	2
1.3	Guidebooks Used	2
2	Expedition Team	3
2.1	John (Ioannis)	3
2.2	Yadu	3
2.3	How we met	4
2.4	Where we are now	4
3	Sport Climbing	5
3.1	Kardamyli	5
3.2	Lagada	6
3.3	Alepechori	9
4	The Two Ridges	11
4.1	Tagyetos	11
4.2	Varasova	13
5	Multi-pitch Climbing in Varasova	14
5.1	Preparation	14
5.2	The Journey of the Argonauts	14
6	Budget	15
7	Recommendations and Afterthoughts	16
7.1	What we would do differently	16
7.2	What we would recommend to others	16
7.3	Personal Experience	16
8	Acknowledgements	17
9	Appendix: Varasova ridge	18
9.1	Guide	19
9.1.1	Pitch 1	19
9.1.2	Pitch 2	19
9.1.3	Pitch 3	19
9.1.4	Pitch 4	20
9.1.5	Pitch 5	20
9.1.6	Continuing along the ridge (9 hours)	21
9.1.7	Final ascent (11 hours)	23
9.1.8	Descent (14 hours)	26

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Trip

The primary purpose of this trip was to gain exposure and experience in varied styles of climbing outdoors. We wanted to physically as well as mentally challenge ourselves. In order to do so we set ourselves certain targets - personal targets are in the section titled "Expedition Team".

- Complete a 3 day traverse of Mt Tagyetos in the Peloponnese.
- Climb in a new crag at Kardamyli pushing the grades that we have climbed outside.
- Traverse a technical ridge on Varasova and place set ropes and rappel points for future climbers. Publish a complete guide for the traverse online.
- Attempt the Argonauts, a classic multi-pitch climb on Varasova pushing the grades that we have climbed outside.
- Climb at the local crags to prepare and improve climbing ability.
- To inspire other members of Imperial College Mountaineering club to realise the potential of different types of climbing in Greece.
- Pass on skills on how to create a topo or a guide of a route.

The Varasova ridge is a largely undocumented ridge traverse in central Greece. On the other hand the Tagyetos ridge has been documented before and thus served as a guideline to what kind of details we should have been gathering information on.

1.2 Background of the Area

The mountains in Greece have been climbed since ancient times with several references to all the mountains in stories and myths. The beauty of mountaineering in Greece, particularly in the summer, is the weather. In early June and late September the weather, although hot, is consistently good with rare storms. This allows you to sleep on the mountains at night without much equipment and also gives dazzling views at the peaks. The first documented modern climbing at Varasova was in 1958. It was also the first place where mountaineering began in Greece. The routes tend to be beautiful and vary greatly in difficulty allowing climbers with different backgrounds to enjoy the rock.

1.3 Guidebooks Used

There were two main guidebooks used: A Cicerone guide of the Mountains of Greece by Tim Salmon and Sport Climbing: The best of Greece by Aris Theodoropoulos. The Mountains of Greece was used during the Tagyetos ridge. It was useful in the beginning although lacked details towards the end the first day. The other guide was used for climbing routes.

2 Expedition Team

2.1 John (Ioannis)



I am a third year Mathematician and have been mountaineering for over 10 years. I have climbed several peaks and every summer aim to complete a project. In the past these have included the Tour du Mt Blanc, Mt. Olympus and Grand Capucin. I am a keen climber, practicing biweekly in indoor gyms. I also climb outside throughout the year and in the summers.

Personal Objectives:

- Lead a 6b+ for the first time outside.
- Learn to effectively place gear and how to create a topo and describe routes.

2.2 Yadu



Im a third year Mathematician and a passionate climber. Ive been climbing for about 6 years now and done numerous trips outdoors for multi-pitch climbing, sport climbing and bouldering with and without the Imperial Mountaineering Club. I also enjoy mountaineering, hiking and running.

Personal Objectives:

- Climb a 7a outdoor pitch.
- Become more effective at leading multi-pitch routes.

2.3 How we met

Even though both of study mathematics in the same year and climb, we never met until the second year. Having so many common interests - including the type of maths we like! - we unsurprisingly became really good friends and now climb biweekly together! :)

2.4 Where we are now

The above was written at the time of the expedition. Now John is moving on to Oxford for an MSc in Mathematical Modelling. Yadu is staying on at Imperial College London for a fourth year for his MSci degree in Mathematics.

3 Sport Climbing

Sport climbing in Greece is ample and, more recently, well developed. Yet there are still many more pockets of crags that can be and are becoming developed each year. The more modern crags are being well bolted and consistently graded.

3.1 Kardamyli

After getting to Greece, on our first morning we headed out to a crag an hour drive away called Kardamyli. It is located along the rocky coast roughly 35km southeast of Kalamata.

The crag, with a 2 minute walk-in at most, contained a good number of easy routes between the range of 5b and 6b along with a few harder routes. Our goal for the day was to get used to climbing on the Greek rock and attempt to ascend our first route graded in the 7's and above outdoors.

Having gotten there quite early, both of us climbed several easy routes to begin with. They included Aletri (5b/+), Tourkospilia (5b), and Katergo(6a). Then we also climbed some more challenging routes such as Androuvista (6b) and Antartiko (6a+).



Yadu leads his first 7a outdoors - Pick n' Roll. John top rope climbs it.

We were finally feeling prepared to tackle our goal of climbing a highly recommended classic route Pick n' Roll (7a). But also being our first day we were quite slow in swapping between belaying and climbing. The sun was already over the top of the cliff and shining right on us and more importantly on the holds. Both of us decided to rush onto Pick n' Roll after a period of debate. The line is extremely striking and contains a very powerful initial crux on an overhang followed by another more technical crux higher up. Yadu although initially stumped by first crux managed to lead climb it cleanly. John then proceeded to top rope it in spectacular fashion.

At this point both of us were fairly knackered but also extremely happy and so ended the day. John had just climbed his hardest single pitch indoors or outdoors and Yadu had managed

to already achieve his trip goal of climbing a sport 7a outdoors.

3.2 Lagada

Containing multiple crags, Lagada is a very popular and well developed area containing some iconic routes such as This is Sparta (7c) - something to come back to another time! We visited Lagada twice on our trip. On day two straight after climbing in Kardamyli and also the day after completing the Tagyetos ridge although exhausted from the hike, by the time we reached the crag we were already psyched again. After climbing in the middle upper area called Aloni on the first outing we couldn't resist and returned to the exact same crag on the second outing.



We found the grades in this area to be stiff at times and the rock slippery. John went through a lot of chalk on both days. On top of that the routes were mostly around 25m long. A lot longer than either of us were used to which added an endurance based challenge to the experience. It forced us to often re climb routes to ascend them cleanly.



John leads his first 6b+ outdoors

We warmed up on and climbed many other fantastic routes on the somewhat slab like section near the approach. Each of us lead climbed Shake It (5b), Proto Perasma (6a+), Xeroelatos (6b), Gerokoutsouris (6b+), and Kremasmenos Tragos (6b+). Yadu also managed to lead climb Hrysaetos (6c+). This meant John had achieved his trip goal of lead climbing a 6b+ sport pitch outdoors.

In the middle of the crag both of us lead climbed the classic route Apse-Svise (6b+). John climbed it cleanly on his first attempt and Yadu on his second. Apse-Svise was small pocket climbing followed by a tricky last clip due to a massive cave-like overhang.



Yadu nearing the end of dihedral section of Iasonas (6c+)

Further up the crag, Yadu managed to flash the 3 star route Iasonas (6c+). The route starts off on a flat face off the wall and quickly transitions to absorbing moves on a rough dihedral two thirds of the way up. After a good rest in a cave comes the bouldery crux followed by pumpy climbing on large ledges. Unknown to us these ledges are also home to some fierce crows that really got Yadu's adrenaline pumping at the end.

3.3 Alepechori

The final and last location we went to sport climb before heading off to Varasova was Alepechori. It is a recently developed area near the beautifully remote town of the same name. Far away from most civilization we climbed on somewhat hard to access the Alepechori upper east wall.

We almost turned around before finding the wall due to the poorly constructed dirt roads with slippery rock. After this we had to hunt for the wall a little due to the 10 minute walk-in through insect teeming shrubbery. After finally getting to the wall we encountered an enormous spider much to Yadu's horror. Steering clear from the spider we finally managed to climb some extremely challenging and fun lines.



The spiders were very large

We both climbed Velonothiki (6a), Velonophobia (6a), and Kali Thea (6a+) to start off with finding the routes quite hard. We then decided to try the 3 star route Pythagoreo Theorima (6b+). The route follows the smooth inside of a perfect 90 degree dihedral just to the left of a sparse looking flat wall 8a. Both of us were high on psyche at this point and didn't quite anticipate how technical and bouldery this route really was. First Yadu tried for over an hour before John took over and also tried for an hour himself. Almost an hour after swapping back, Yadu, only with John's constant encouragement, figured out the sequence and later managed to lead the route cleanly. It involved extremely delicate smears along with a shouldery hand bridge move. The guidebook's description really was really quite concise this time: "a smooth corner with a very hard move".



Pythagoreo Theorima is a very hard route for its grade (6b+)

4 The Two Ridges

4.1 Tagyetos

After much debate we decided to skip the first day of the hike. We did this to include an extra difficult day of climbing (which was en route to the hike) and to cut out what was described an easy part of the hike. Our first day started at the village of Anavriti at 6am where we headed up the side of the range to reach the ridge. At around 11am we reached the ridge after a gruelling ascent and had lunch at Portes. Following advice given by the guide book and Giorgos from the Anavriti hotel, we followed the top of the ridge to the best of our ability. This allowed us to avoid steep sections and scree areas. The hardest section along the ridge was at Athanati Rakhi. There was a steep section that we heard would have bolts along the way. After searching around and seeing no bolts we took a leap of faith, took out a rope and our harnesses and started climbing. Luckily, we chose the right section and quickly found a few bolts after climbing 30m. After this section we continued and managed to summit the highest peak, Profitis Ilias, at 3pm. We relaxed at this point, believing the difficult part of the day was over.



Following the ridge along

However, we were mistaken. Following red dots we descended down from the ridge but quickly realised these were leading us in the wrong direction. In an attempt to correct our loss of height, we traversed round Profitis Ilias, trying our best not to gain or lose height. Eventually we reached a point where we decided we had to rejoin the ridge by either continuing at the same height level and join further on, or move straight up on difficult terrain. Deciding that height gain can never be a bad thing and being unsure whether traversing would be easy, we decided to move up. Luckily 200m ahead of we spotted a sign post and managed to discover the path we should have been on. This diversion took up 2 hours and we were 30 minutes before deciding our best option would have been to turn back. Luckily after this, the path was recently sign posted and we found our way down the mountain quickly. We eventually reached the church where we would be staying the night at 8pm concluding our 14 hour day.



Happy to have made it to the top

We woke up in the morning at 6am again due to uncomfortable night on the stone floor of the church and decided to set off early at 7am. The cold morning quickly changed to a very hot day. We descended into the Viros gorge and would zig zag the gorge sticking to the shade as much as possible. We had no real difficulties on this day finding all the correct turns and finished at the village of Exoheri at 12.30pm.



John planning the rest of the trip after sleeping in the church

4.2 Varasova

The final day in Varasova we completed the Varasova ridge. At 6am, a local, named Christos, took us on his boat to the beginning of the route. Starting at 7am, we finished the day at 9pm. The day went well and we have written a guide which we have put in the appendix.



Christos ready to head back after dropping us off at the starting point for the climb

5 Multi-pitch Climbing in Varasova

Our plan in Varasova was to spend the first day doing standard multipitch to build our efficiency up and then tackle the Argonauts on the second day and the Varasova ridge on the final day.

5.1 Preparation

The first day went to plan and we completed a total of 9 pitches. We did the routes, Generali and Hera. The main issue we came across was the ropes that kept getting stuck in cracks and grooves. This was due to the immense amounts of friction on the rock as the features were themselves quite small. Normally flicking the rope would be enough to get the rope down but on the final rappel of the day the rope got stuck again. It took a team effort of climbing back up multiple pitches to bring the rope back down.

5.2 The Journey of the Argonauts

During the night there was a thunderstorm and in the morning the Argonauts was still soaked and proved impossible to climb. So we decided to spend the second day climbing multipitch lower down and completed the routes Taz and Pinocchio.



Unforeseen Thunder and Lightening

6 Budget

Flights	£447.22
Transport cost in England	£15
Equipment	£200
Accommodation	£200
Food	£365
Travel costs	£150
Total cost in pounds	£930

We did our best to preserve our money as much as possible. This included getting lifts, staying in family accommodation and buying minimal gear, using gear owned by the Imperial College Mountaineering Club and John's father.

7 Recommendations and Afterthoughts

7.1 What we would do differently

The timing of our trip was determined not due to it being the ideal time to travel to Greece but rather when we were both free in the summer due to prior commitments. Thus we would definitely try and go in spring or autumn, to experience much better temperatures. In our case, the weather was itself posed a serious challenge and threat.

In terms of Sport Climbing, Aloni (Lagada) is a fantastic crag that caters to individuals climbing at all levels. Many routes were at a project level for each of us and we could easily have spent the rest of the trip climbing here. We recommend keeping more days for sport climbing in single locations to allow for coming back to routes and being able to project them.

7.2 What we would recommend to others

We would definitely recommend climbing in Kardamyli and Lagada to anyone who is into sport climbing. In particular, Kardamyli is well bolted and allows one to push the grades without fear. By contrast, the bolts in Varasova tend to be spaced and have been known to fail. It does, however, have extremely long multi pitch such as the Argonauts. If one was to take some gear and make full use of the bolts, it is definitely an experience worth trying and one we hope to have in the near future.

7.3 Personal Experience

John's personal experience - I had a fantastic time. It was the first time I truly pushed my lead climbing outside and I could really tell the progress I made by the end of the expedition. I have climbed outside in the summer since then and the stamina I gained and the exposure experienced allowed me to really go for moves that 3 months ago I would have been hesitant to try. Yadu is a great climber and friend and watching him figure out moves has been a great lesson for me. His dynamic style of climbing has certainly rubbed off on me and my movements have become far more athletic to emulate it. Although perhaps not the most efficient way of climbing, it certainly is the most fun.

Yadu's personal experience - It was an amazing trip. Going into the trip my expectations were that the ridge traverses would be the easier part of our expedition and that the hard multi-pitch climbing would be the most difficult. Instead I was surprised to find that the Tagyetos Ridge was by far the most challenging aspect of the trip for me. I was often lagging behind John on the hard hiking sections. Many times when we weren't sure of the route he would scout ahead in all directions with unending energy and resolve. This really inspired me to keep on going. Also for the first time in my life I got sun burnt and had to take precautions against the immense heat. In turn I was challenged a lot more than I expected which made the experience all the richer.

8 Acknowledgements

Firstly we would like to thank the exploration society because of whom we planned our trip in the utmost detail and we believe that is the reason we didn't encounter any severe problems.

We would like to thank John's Dad who sat down with us before the trip to give us information regarding all aspects of climbing in Greece.

9 Appendix: Varasova ridge

Time taken	Approx 14 hours
Height gain	Approx 960m
Height loss Approx	960m
Difficulty	5+ (French Grade). Easier variations possible
Protection	No Bolts, plenty of trees, boulders and cracks for cams, nuts or slings

The ridge is started on the east side. To get there requires a boat, which if you ask a local restaurant owner called Christos, he might take you early in the morning.



9.1 Guide

9.1.1 Pitch 1



The goal is to get onto the ridge as quickly as possible and this is done by going up, followed by a traverse to the left.

9.1.2 Pitch 2

An easy scramble following the groove of the mountain.

9.1.3 Pitch 3

This slightly trickier, the line naturally goes to the right. Be careful of moving boulders here. There are many areas to place protection. The natural end is after a gap between the ridge and the rock, where a sling can be placed.

9.1.4 Pitch 4



This climbs the side of the ridge, which would be on your left.

9.1.5 Pitch 5

Final scramble until you reach a tree. This is a good place to rest as the tree provides shade which is not often further along.



9.1.6 Continuing along the ridge (9 hours)

At this point you are on top of the ridge and you should loosely try to follow it as best as possible. Whenever a tricky part presents itself it is often useful to look around left and right just in case there are easier options (and often there are).



There are a few tricky pitches here and there, although the majority of the difficulty may come in the form of rope drag and vegetation. You will encounter three steep descents that require caution. A couple of them can be downclimbed, although it is easy to pass the rope around a boulder for protection.



Figure 11: First down climb

With the second descent, it is wiser to simply rappel. We left a purple rope around a boulder (June 2016) which may or may not still be there that can be used as an anchor to rappel, it is advisable for you to bring some spare rope to do the same.

Figure 12: Second descent and the purple rope we left around the rock



9.1.7 Final ascent (11 hours)

Eventually you will reach a section that has a steep drop on the right, and a less steep drop on the left.

Figure 13: Left Side



Figure 14: Rappelling over the lip would lead to the gorge between the two ridges



There are three ways to go about this section. One can rappel to the right and continue walking where you eventually will meet drops of red paint serving as waymarks. We cannot guarantee the difficulty of this route as we did not follow it up. One can go to the left and eventually climb back up to the ridge through 2-3 pitches of slightly tricky slab. Or one can go straight up what looks like a tricky pitch. We opted for going straight up and found it was not so hard (around 5a).

Figure 15: Taking the 'straight up' approach



Once we were over we encountered another tricky pitch. We opted to traverse to the left, using trees along the way as protection and eventually cut back up to the ridge.



At this point, we were almost at the top. After around 4 pitches of scrambling, one can unrope and simply follow the ridge. At the point where the ridge you are on and the ridge on the right join there is a water well. This signifies the end of the ascent.



9.1.8 Descent (14 hours)

Once, at the top there are two ways to get down. One way is going down the left (on the side that faces Kreoneri). This is a steep and difficult descent and not to be recommended. The other way goes to the right and ends up in a village called Ano Vasiliki. To find this path, one must first continue past the well and head to the right. The goal is to find red paint which marks the way. You follow the paint marks down until you meet a fork (about 1 hour from the well). We took the left fork (although the red marks go down the right) and eventually reach dense bushes and trees. Persevere and follow paths made by animals. After pushing the bushes for 10 minutes you will find human made paths. Follow these paths until you hit a dirt road.



Follow the dirt road until you arrive at Ano Vasiliki.