

13 PEFKI GORGE

Distance: 13km/8mi; 4h50min

Grade: moderate ascents and descents of about 450m/1475ft overall; some agility required

Equipment: walking trainers or boots, sunhat, picnic, water

How to get there and return:  to Ierapetra (Timetable 5); journey time 1h. Change to bus along south coast to Makrigialos (Ierapetra/Sitia bus, Timetable 10, or Ierapetra/Makrigialos bus, Timetable 22); journey time 30min). Use the same buses to return. Or  to/from Makrigialos: park at the 30min-point in the walk, saving about 1h (100m of ascent).

This is a lovely circular walk — a good day's outing — from Makrigialos, a low-key seaside place (Picnic 6) just east of Koutsouras on the south coast. It's usually possible to find a room to rent here, should you want to stay overnight. The Pefki Gorge was used by the villagers to take produce down to the coast, and the walk runs along the top edge of the gorge before descending into it. As you descend, you will see the houses of Aspro Potamos (White River), which the villagers originally built as overnight accommodation. From Pefki it is possible to make a 45-minute detour up to the landmark church high above the village.

Start out on the main south coast road at **Makrigialos**: take the concrete road inland, signposted 'AG STEPHANOS 7KM'. The concrete surface becomes asphalt as you rise to the outskirts of the village. Soon you have a nice view down over the coast and the strung-out village where you started out (*makri* means 'long' in Greek). You are heading towards a small church up on the hillside to the right. Just past the **CHURCH (30min)**, which is set back from the road, take the first (concreted) track going left; it soon becomes unsurfaced and bends behind the church. At a fork, keep right uphill on an old donkey trail. Soon you come to a staggered T-junction: turn left and then right, still rising on the rocky, stony trail. This narrows to a path before coming up onto the asphalt road. Turn left, then take a steep path on the other side of the road. When this path meets the road again, cross straight over and follow a wide trail. Meeting the road again, turn left and walk *downhill*, then take the narrow trail up to the right (just before a huge rock face on a bend). Meeting the road again, turn right and walk to where a stream bed crosses the road, where you pick up the old trail again, on your right. The trail turns into a wide track which runs up the east side of the valley, within sight of the tarmac road to Ag Stefanos. Some 10 minutes after leaving the road the track swings left; take the path off to the right here, still

following the stream bed. The path crosses the stream further along the valley, just below the village. As the path comes into the village, it bends sharply to the left, up to the village road. Head right to the **CHURCH in Ag Stefanos (2h25min)**.

From here you'll have to follow the asphalt road for a while: follow the signposting to the right, towards 'PEFKI'. Very soon after rounding a church, look up to the left: you will see Pefki church high in the distance. After a few more bends in the road (about 10 minutes), the beginnings of the village itself come into sight. Notice, about 100m/yds before you come into the edge of Pefki, a map of the gorge and a path leading off to the right; this is your return route. Walk on into **Pefki (3h10min)**.

(After the first houses of the village there is a sign on the left indicating the route up to Stavromenos, the church perched high above. Since it's exhilarating to know you've made it right to the top, you might like to consider



100 Walk 13: Pefki Gorge

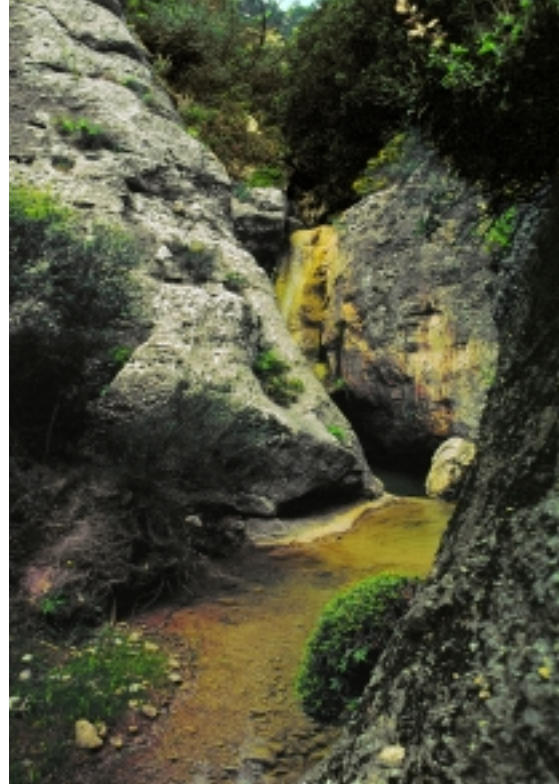
this optional detour: although it's a steep, steady climb, it only takes 25-30 minutes to get there and 20 minutes to return. The well-signposted route heads out of the village, where the track gives way to a path.)

When you are ready to return to the coast, having explored, or had something to eat, or both, head back out of Pefki the way you came in. Three minutes outside the village, look for the path passed earlier; it is clearly signposted 'GORGE' and goes down to the left about 100m/yds beyond the edge of the village (marked with red dots and arrows). As you leave the road, keep left and you will see a waymarked donkey trail going down the hill. This is the old mule track down to the coast. About 500m/yds from the top it meets a dirt track. Turn right on the track for a few paces, then pick up the continuation of your path, going left downhill through the olive groves. The path becomes wider and there are fragrant pine trees either side. As the donkey trail comes down into a more open area (15min from Pefki), you come upon a shady picnic spot with a WOODEN BENCH AND TABLE on the left and a sign pointing right to the gorge. Follow the track for five minutes, and notice the waymarking leading left down towards the gorge. The gorge walls are visible from here. A little further downhill you pass **Mylos**, an old flour mill in an open area, just by another MAP. In spring there is the sound of water far down to the left.

At a fork by another MAP and a WATERFALL (25min from Pefki; **3h35min**), a SIGNPOST points down left to the gorge and straight on to Pisokamino. Head left, down towards the gorge. The lovely WATERFALL is just visible on your right, cascading in two tiers. This narrow path descends steeply into the gorge, where you eventually cross the stream — catching a glimpse of the houses of Aspro Potamos. Now descending the right-hand side of the stream, the going is a bit more difficult; follow the red-dot waymarks. The path goes down into the stream bed, where there are waterfalls in spring. It *looks* as if you have to jump down one of them (it's only just under a metre/3ft high, but it feels a bit higher if you're clambering down it!). But, if you search about, you *don't* have to jump down: keep to the left and you can push your way through and then over the watercourse.

But agility *is* soon required, as there is a steep boulder to get down. Beyond that, after picking your way through the rocks for a few moments, you come to some railings on the right and, from here on, the route is easier. You

*In the gorge
(about three
and a half
hours into the
walk)*



then come to 18 metal steps which take you down a sheer drop in the river bed. (You might notice a lot of fire devastation amongst the pine trees around here.) A second set of 20 metal steps helps you negotiate another steep drop. Beyond these steps, you cross the watercourse again.

Emerging from the gorge (45min from Pefki; **3h55min**) the path crosses an open hillside, where fires have destroyed a pine wood. Ten minutes later the path comes down onto track (there might be a lot of track/roadwork activity here). Turn right and descend across the river bed (1h from Pefki; **4h10min**). Head towards the coast and, before long, you will have a panoramic view of the whole coastal area spread out before you. Keep round to the right when a track joins from the left, soon meeting the asphalt road to Agios Stefanos. Turn left downhill. Motorists will find their cars just round the next bend; to catch the bus, descend to the MAIN COAST ROAD at **Makrighalos** (1h40min from Pefki; **4h50min**).