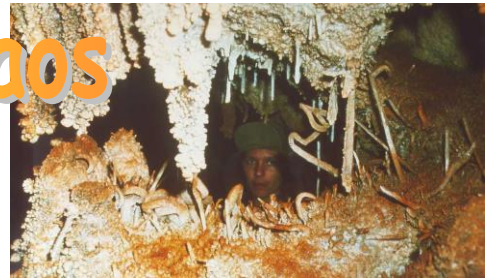


# Spilia Agios Nikolaos

Doli, Kambos, Mani, Peloponnes, Greece  
**Save this natural treasure!**



## The cave "Agios Nikolaos", Doli History of the discovery

From 1974 to 1984 I used to spend several weeks every year in Kitries. As I didn't start caving before 1971 and because I had only been in Kitries as a tourist before, I gradually became aware of the speleological potential of Mani. In summer 76 Stavros Gelasas from Doli told me about things that happened there during the time of the civil war in Greece between 1944 and 1949 under the influence of the fascist military governor Georgios Kamarineas from Doli. Among other things he told me that after the execution of more than 200 left wing patriots through the Germans in Megalopolis the collaborating fascists murdered other left wing people they regarded as kommunist. Four of them ought to be found in the shaft behind the chapel of Agios Nikolaos situated at the top of the pass between Doli and Kaliaoneiga. These effects of the political events in the 40<sup>th</sup> made me take with me some special equipment in summer 1977, which should enable me to follow the hints of Stavros Gelasas.

On 26<sup>th</sup> July 1977 I abseiled down the shaft for the first time together with another german speleologist. In a depth of about 25 meters we landed at the top of a mighty slope of stones, which was leading down some more 20 meters. It covers the bottom of the shaft with a diameter of about 10 meters and a tunnel leading downwards. In a depth of 50m it leads to a horizontal passage. The unstable slope shows an inclination of about 30° in the upper part and in the following tunnel an even steeper inclination of about 40-45°. On this slope there had been parts of human and animals skeletons as well as rusty ammunition like handgrenades and one big artillery grenade. Beside some rubbish we found a bunch of women's clothes. Since the rusty ammunition among the stones of the unstable slope was a great danger, we collected three grenades and the artillery ammunition and put it somewhere down at a place where it could not be hit by stones.

Trying to find out the original position of each skeleton I collected all parts which seemed to belong together and put it down in the place where I had found the part with the top position. I came to the conclusion that there had been five skeletons because I found 9 bones of thighs (upper leg bones). Only one of the skeletons was still complete. It lay in a small area at a protected place. I believe that it is not possible to fall there, so I think, the man had been still alive and had crept to this position before he died. Between this human remains I found a wooden cross, which identifies its owner as the monk, who was reported by witnesses to be thrown down alive.

Within the bundled up clothes I found nylon stockings, a women`s handbag and a pair of white women`s shoes. The pieces of this old bundle fell apart while untying it.

At this first visit of the cave at 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1977 we found all parts of the middle level.

The following day we returned there. We were 5 people, all of us German cavers (cave explorers). From 9.30 p.m. to 6 a.m. we were working on a photographic documentation of the cave. We found and explored the deepest level (ground floor) but lack of time made us give up scouting the top floor (third level). Since we had to proceed very carefully in order to avoid spoiling the original state of the cavern, we could only advance slowly and cautiously. Proceeding in this way takes a lot of time.

In September 1977 I met Anna Petrochilou at the International Congress of Speleology in Sheffield/England and told her about my discovery. Although I showed her some photos of the cave, she didn`t believe me. She kept saying: Its impossible that such a cavern exists in that region!

On January 6<sup>th</sup> 1978 I went down the cave for the third time supported by an assistant. From 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. we entered the upper floor, mapped those parts of the cave we had already explored and went on working on that photo documentation.

On January 8<sup>th</sup> 1978 we went down again and stayed there for about 7 hours, discovering the hall at the end of the upper floor and the traverse, the link between the middle and the upper level. By this we found all parts of the cave marked in the recent map of 2001.

Unfortunately I had made the experience with many caves in Greece, that the organized greek speleologists, led by Mrs. Petrochilou, were only interested in commercializing caves and that there was less investigation in supporting their

scientific treatment. I also realized that the Greek speleologists and the Greek government were not able to protect these fragile natural phenomena. The publication politics of the Ministry of Tourism had the bad effect that a lot of beautiful caves had been destroyed completely - most by greek local people and not by tourists. I had the chance to take pictures from a lot of acts of vandalism. That's why I decided to hide the existence of the cave from the public until there would be some more feeling for the precious scientific treasures of such a cave. I just informed the interested inhabitants of the surrounding villages about the existence of a room down the shaft.

The intention of the city of Kalamata to use the cave for disposing waste and sewage made my friend Georgios Athanasakos reveal the reason why there's an urgent necessity to protect this cave. As a consequence there had been several visits of the cave by other Germans and by the speleo group around Mrs. Petrochilou. These people informed the press and there had been some articles in the news with a vivid interest.

This caused that Mrs. Petrochilou, who told me in 1977, a cave like this would be impossible in that area, was reported in newsletters and magazines as the original explorer of the cave.

Krieg Franzjörg

