

1st route: The trail of Prasinada

STARTING POINT: Settlement of Prasinada

LENGTH OF TRAIL: 6 km

AVERAGE WALKING TIME: 2 hours

AVERAGE PROGRAM DURATION: 4 hours

The trail starts from the Square of Prasinada. We follow the old road to the north and we descend into the valley among old farms and abandoned fields, which are being quickly forested today. Around us, we observe the remains of the old berms and dry-stone walls, while at the same time we enjoy the view of the valley with the rocky outcrops, the «Meteora» of Prasinada.

After walking 1,400 meters, we reach the Oxia (beech tree) stream, one of the many streams in the area that retains water all year round. We descend smoothly, until in the last part of the trail we move away from the stream for a while. We walk over the few mountainous fields that have remained in the area and end up on the asphalt, on the road to the Dipotama settlement.



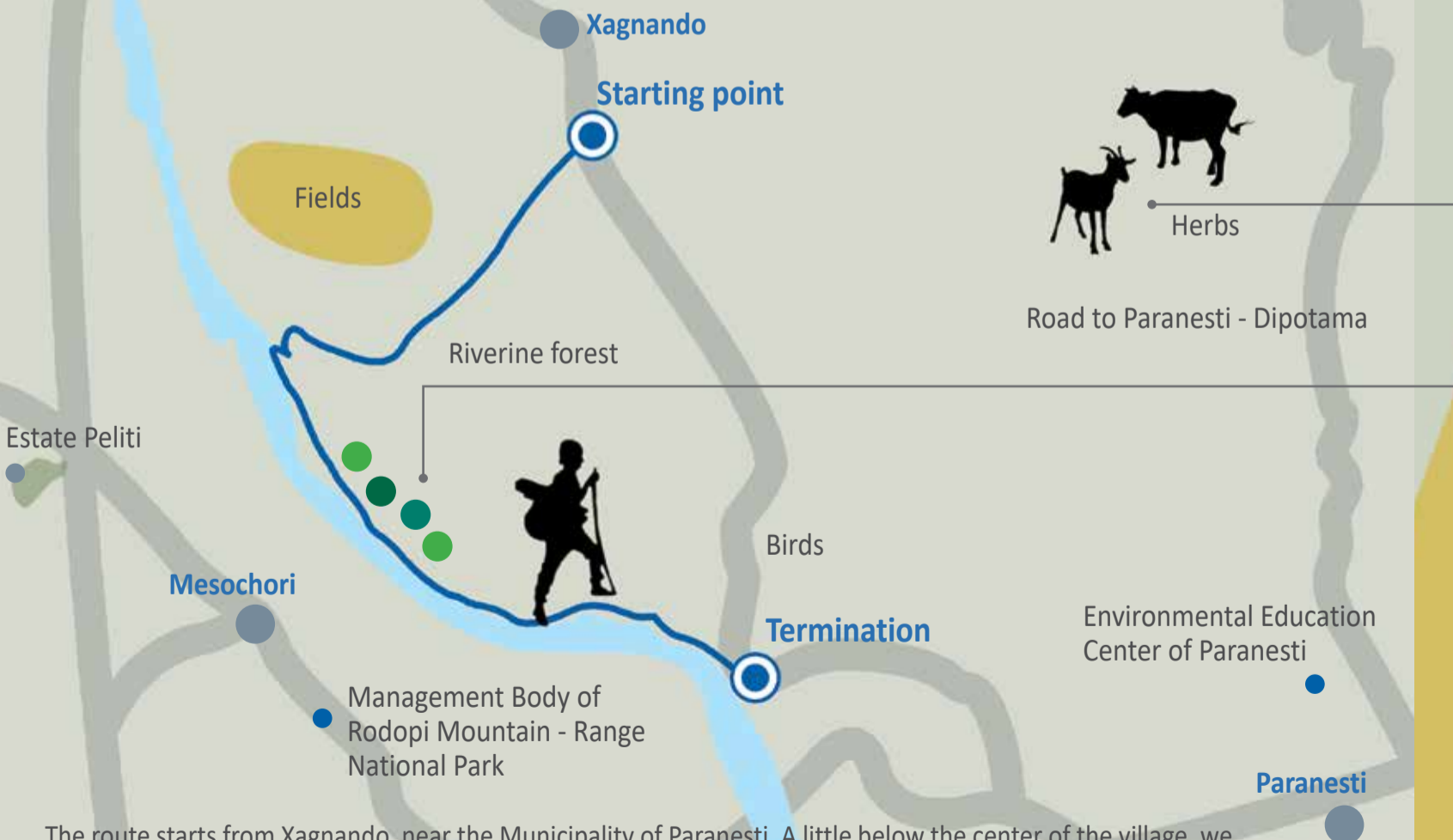
2nd route: In the riverine forest of Nestos

STARTING POINT: Settlement of Xagnando

LENGTH OF TRAIL: 2.2 km

AVERAGE WALKING TIME: Approximately 1 hour

AVERAGE PROGRAM DURATION: 2 hours



The route starts from Xagnando, near the Municipality of Paranesti. A little below the center of the village, we follow a small rural road which leads us smoothly to the river.

After walking 800 meters, we reach the riverside path. For the rest of the trail, we follow the flow of the river, walking inside the riverine forest, until we reach the railway line and a recreation space outside Paranesti.

1st route: The trail of Prasinada

1st Thematic unit: The place and the people

Prasinada, or Tzoura, as the settlement was called until 1927, is one of the few inhabited settlements that have remained in the mountains of Central Rodopi. After the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, the Turkish-speaking Muslims left, and the settlement was inhabited by 37 families of Pontic origin. The latter engaged in agriculture, logging, and animal husbandry. The current inhabitants of the Rodopi Mountain-Range National Park are mostly refugees from Pontus and Asia Minor, as well as Pomaks, while the number of Thracians is smaller.

I look around for the remnants of another era: berms, dry-stone walls, stone roadways.

I imagine what the area would have looked like a hundred years ago.

2nd Thematic unit: The Bear in the forest

Crops and orchards are gradually giving way to the oak forest and other deciduous trees. This is an ideal place for the bear, as it can search for its food here, but also find hiding places to protect itself.

The Bear is the largest wild mammal on the European mountains. It is considered an animal with exceptional intelligence, memory, as well as curiosity. It is omnivorous but prefers plant foods such as fruits from

shrubs and from other fruit-bearing trees. In the past, due to the fragmentation of its habitats, the illegal hunting and poisoned baits, the bear population had reached dangerously low levels. Today, however, the population has begun to grow again. Although the conflict continues, we cannot but recognize that there is a long tradition of coexistence of the wildlife and the inhabitants of mountainous settlements.

On the way, I am looking for traces of the brown bear: footprints, excrement, broken branches, hairs on tree trunks. I note down -and sometimes try- food sources: fruit trees, blackberries, acorns, etc.

3rd Thematic unit: Rodopi Mountain Range: two countries, one goal

The protected area of the Rodopi Mountain Range was institutionally established in 2002. In 2009 it was designated as a National Park. Seven (7) areas of the National Park have been incorporated in the Pan-European Network of Protected Areas Natura 2000. The Rodopi Mountain Range Management Body is responsible for the management of the area. A visit to its headquarters in Mesochori of the Municipality of Paranesti can answer many questions about its role and operation.

I think and discuss what is the best that can be done for the protection of nature and its coexistence with the people and the activities of the area.

The environmental education program «On the Paths of Coexistence» was created by the Environmental Organization «Callisto», in the framework of Action E.5. «Environmental Education Activities» of LIFE ARCPROM «Improving human – bear coexistence in 4 National Parks of South Europe» (LIFE18 NAT/GR/000768). It includes a tour of selected trails of the National Parks of Prespes and the Rodopi Mountain Range, as well as educational activities inside and outside the classroom.

The booklet you are holding in your hands will assist you in taking a tour and get informed about the wildlife, the plants and the habitats, the social and productive activities, the local communities which share the same area and resources as those of the wildlife. On the basis of everything we are going to see, we are called upon to reflect on the complex ways in which human activities interact with wildlife and to propose solutions that alleviate conflict and promote coexistence.

The Environmental Organization for Wildlife and Nature «Callisto» was created in 2004, with the aim of protecting the natural environment, wild animals such as bears and wolves, but also in order to ensure their harmonious coexistence with humans.

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2nd route: In the riverine forest of Nestos

1st Thematic unit: From crop cultivations to the riverine forest

The fields and the wildlife

The fields we see around us are nowadays covered with annual arable crops, corn and cereals.

In the past, we might have been able to see a wider variety of crops. The modern production patterns and the market have imposed greater uniformity on the agricultural crops, displacing the traditional varieties and replacing them with commercial hybrids, thus burdening the soil and the aquifer with fertilizers and pesticides.

Even so, the agricultural lands of the area remain a necessary and integral part of the landscape. Small mammals and tens of species of birds feed themselves there. Agricultural cultivations, especially when taking place in an innocuous manner, keep the land alive and protect it from erosion – the threat of which is escalated by climate change.

I identify the different crops around me. What nutriment does each of them give me?

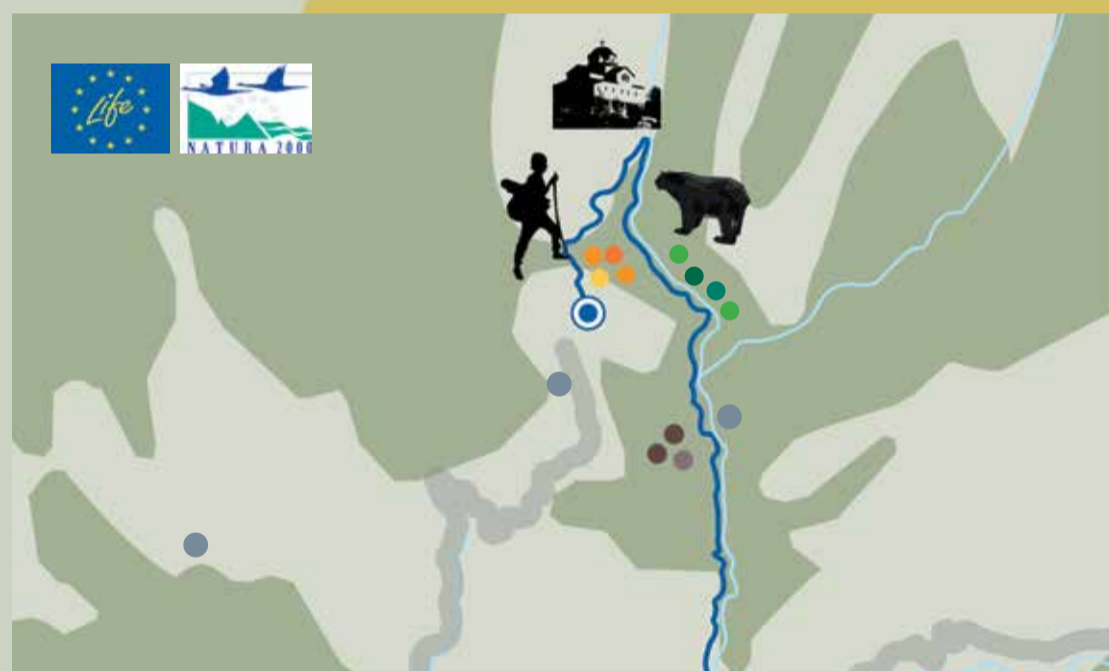
2nd Thematic unit: Nestos, the life-giving power of the river

Nestos is the real protagonist of the area. A river that connects two countries, giving life to people, forests and wild animals.

It originates from Mount Rila in central Bulgaria, passes under the Rodopi Mountain Range, flows through the fertile valley from Paranesti to Stavroupoli and then enters the Straits of Nestos. After the village of Toxotes there begins the great plain of its estuary, the Nestos Delta, one of the most important wetlands in the country, but also a rich rural area over millennia thanks to the sediments of the river.

This great river, however, is facing serious challenges today, with the main one being the fact that its course is no longer unhindered.

I imagine the course of every drop of water, every grain of soil that flows inside the river. Where it might be coming from, where it might end up.



On the Paths of Coexistence

Environmental education activities in the Rodopi Mountain-Range National Park



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