

# LESVOS

5 car tours • 65 long and short walks



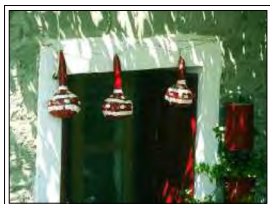
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This is a sample from the  
PDF edition of  
*Landscapes of*  
**LESVOS**

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*a countryside guide*

*Fourth edition*



*Brian and Eileen Anderson*

This shorter sampler includes some of the introductory text, the introductions to each of the main sections (Picnicking, Car Touring and Walking) with an example of each. There is a total of 144 pages, plus two touring maps, in the full book.



SUNFLOWER BOOKS



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# Getting about

By far the best way to get around on the island is to hire a car. There are bus services operating on Lesbos, but these are of little practical help.

There are in fact two types of **bus service** — a frequent local service operating around Mytilene, the main town, and a very infrequent long-distance service. On this large and under-populated island, the long-distance service is generally timetabled to take people into Mytilene in the morning and return them to their villages when the shops close after lunch.

There might be the odd occasion when a bus is helpful but in practice, **a car is essential**. With that in mind, and because we used a car ourselves, most of the walks in this book are circular.

For one or two walks, a **taxi** is a better and more economical option, and this will be indicated in the ‘Transport’ section at the start of each walk. Taxis are especially economical when there is a group sharing and the fare can be split four ways. But remember, distances on Lesbos are generally long and, depending on where you are based, the cost may be considerable in any case. *Always check the taxi fare before a journey.*

There is a small **ferry boat** operating along the north shore in summer, between Petra, Molyvos and Skala Sikaminias. This is detailed in Walk 21 on page 107. The few buses of possible use are listed on page 136.

## Further reading

Lesbos usually gets no more than a chapter in most of the general guidebooks for Greece. At the moment, the only other book dedicated to the island is *Lesbos: A Visitors Guide*, an e-book written by ourselves, available from [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk). With more information about the history, places and customs of the island, this makes a good

companion guide for ‘Landscapers’.

Also from Amazon, our book *The Orchids of Lesbos* (2018), is available as a paperback or Kindle.

For bird-watchers there is *Birding on the Greek Island of Lesbos* by Richard Brooks, available directly from the author (+44 01328 878 632).

## A country code for walkers and motorists

Regular walkers love and respect the countryside, but different countries sometimes have different requirements. The following is just a reminder.

- It is illegal to light fires in the open countryside from May 1st until the end of October, except at official barbecue sites.
- Leave all gates in the countryside as you find them. Many 'gates' are nothing more than brushwood, but are there to stop animals from wandering. Pass through and repair them.
- Do not frighten animals. There are plenty of goats and sheep around, but they are not tame, so do not treat them as such.
- Leave the flowers where you find them, in the wild, for everybody to enjoy. Remember, orchids and cyclamen are protected species.
- Take all your litter away with you.
- Do not take risks. If walking alone, be sure to tell a responsible person of your plans.
- Switch off your mobile phone except in an emergency, when you should call 112 (the all-European emergency rescue number).
- Should you need to report a forest fire, telephone 199.



*Marbled white  
butterfly seen on a thistle  
(Silybum marianum)*



# Touring

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Two large gulfs, three distinctly different upland areas, barren volcanic landscapes, eleven million olive trees, forests of pine, oak and chestnut, and vast stretches of unspoilt coastline — every single road offers new and unexpected vistas. There are no two corners of this large island anything like the same.

The car tours are designed to highlight the very best aspects of the island and to bring to your attention features or places that would otherwise be easily missed. Our experience from decades of exploring this island is distilled into these tours — and the walks. Each tour deserves a full day, and it is possible you may want to return to some of the places to enjoy a little more time there.

Most of the **roads** on the island are well surfaced now and relatively free of potholes, but a single winter can change all that. There are still a number of roads on the island which are nothing more than **stabilised tracks**. The locals use these (they mostly have no alternative), but hire car conditions may exclude their use on unmade roads and damage to the underside of the car. You will need to check with the insurers if it is possible to take your hire car on stabilised tracks, or you must use your own judgement. There is just one car tour, Car tour 3, which uses a fairly long section of stabilised track.

As in much of Greece, **car hire** on Lesbos is relatively expensive. It is often cheaper to hire from a reliable agency at home before travelling. Do be sure to check the tyres, the general condition of the car, locate the spare wheel and the tools, and try the lights. If there is any light damage on the car, like scratches, be sure to have them marked on the hire documents. Take time to study the rental conditions/insurance cover. It is *imperative* in Greece to make sure that CDW (collision damage waiver) is included. Check the insurance for exclusions (usually tyres, windscreen and the underside of the car). If these exclusions are on the list, look at the tyres, windscreen and undercarriage before accepting the car. (To cover exclusions, take out a policy with a company such as [insurance4carhire.co.uk](http://insurance4carhire.co.uk) — much cheaper than paying for insurance on arrival.) Cars

must be no more than three years old (EU rules)! In any case, *do not hesitate to reject a car if you are not satisfied with its condition.*

The wearing of **seat belts** is compulsory, and there are regular police checks. You may not necessarily see the locals wearing them, but the law will be harder on *you*.

**Petrol** is internationally priced and freely available in all parts of the island. Unleaded is *amólivthi* and diesel, *deézel*. At most stations you are still expected to wait for service and, should you want a receipt, you may need to ask, and it may be handwritten. On the other hand, if you need an air line for your tyres, just help yourself.

If the **motoring laws** seem to be only laxly applied, this leniency does not necessarily extend to tourists. The same applies to **parking**. No matter how the locals behave in parking and even double parking, it is wiser to stay within the law, even at inconvenience to yourself. The **speed limits** are 50 km/h in built-up areas and 90km/h on other roads. Hand-held radar traps are frequently in use on long stretches of road where speeding is possible, so it pays to be aware. **Police checks**, too, take place all the time, but not always in the same place. Be sure to carry your car hire documents, your passport, and your driving licence at all times when out in the car. Light-flashing by oncoming drivers, although illegal, usually indicates some police activity ahead.

**Take great care driving outside town.** There are some large flocks of sheep and herds of goats on the island, and they are often free to roam. When the weather is hot, sheep in particular gather on the roads under the shade of trees. Sometimes flocks are moved along the road, and car drivers are expected to wait or exercise great caution.

Should you need to **telephone** for help, there is fairly good coverage for mobiles. Otherwise, head for the nearest bar or taverna. A local sim card (you need your passport to buy one!) costs about € 5 — ‘pay as you go’.

The **fold-out touring maps** are designed to be held out opposite the touring notes and show all the roads followed in our tours, as well as the location of all the walks, picnic spots and other useful information. **Symbols** used in the text are explained in the map keys. Distances (in kilometres) are given cumulatively from Skala Kallonis, where all the tours begin. Skala Kallonis





## **Picnicking**

There are plenty of opportunities to find picnic spots all over the island. The Greeks themselves like to ‘picnic’, but on Lesvos this often means going to a taverna on the coast or in the country. There are one or two sites with picnic tables provided, and some of the churches which hold celebrations for their saint’s day have picnic areas.

Picnic places by the sea are always popular and, with so

*Oak trees are associated with churches on Lesvos, much as cypress trees are on other islands*

much coastline, they are not too difficult to find on Lesvos. In the countryside, small white churches often make ideal stops. They are mostly shaded by oak trees and are provided with stone seating.

Look at the top of the car tours to find some of our suggestions for particularly pleasant picnic spots.

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was chosen as the starting point for its central location; motorists joining the tours from the other main tourist centres — Molyvos, Vatera and Sigri/Eressos — may find that they can sometimes pick up the notes nearer to their own resort.

The notes are largely restricted to route directions, with occasional descriptions to give a sense of place or comments on points of interest. For more detailed background comments on the history, culture and places, see ‘Further Reading’ on page 9.

## **Car tour 1: WAY OUT WEST AND PETRIFIED**

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**Skala Kallonis • Parakila • Agra • Eressos • Skala Eressou • Sigri • Andissa • Skalohori • Filia • Kalloni • Skala Kallonis**

*135km/84mi; about 3 hours' driving*

**Walks en route:** 25, 26, (27, 28), 30; **Picnic suggestions:** Skala Eressou (48km), Sigri (75km), the Petrified Forest (85.3km)

*Generally good, surfaced roads are followed throughout this tour.*

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**A** catastrophic event occurred 20 million years ago which changed Lesvos forever. Lava rising from huge volcanic eruptions beneath the Aegean Sea poured over the western side of the island. The existing forest was smothered with a deep layer of fine ash, preserving it from total destruction, and the whole of the western landscape was reshaped on a grand scale.

The event may have been a disaster at the time, but it created an exceptional tourist attraction, unique in the Mediterranean region — a petrified forest. This is now protected as a natural monument. The Petrified Forest Park lies east of Sigri, but this tour heads first into Sigri — to visit the Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest, which is an excellent interpretation centre. The park is then visited on the return. The discovery of giant redwoods and unknown pine trees gives a remarkable insight into the climate of 20 million years ago.

There is another winner on this tour, too — the landscape. The rosy-hued barren mountains resemble something more akin to a moonscape. Dramatic views unfold around every corner, and it is like no other part of the island.

At Skala Eressou you can take your first real break from driving and have some refreshment or even lunch at one of the many restaurants which line the beach. Eressos was the birthplace of one of the island's most famous lyric poets, Sappho. Although much of her poetry has been lost, there is enough remaining to pick up on the themes of her work. It has been widely assumed, rightly or wrongly, that her orientation was towards the female sex. The Lesbian, Sappho, at some time in history became Sappho, the lesbian, and the world gained a new word. Although Eressos has tried hard to keep a family image, disciples of Sappho still like to make their pilgrimage to the resort.

Sigri is the other major stop, both to visit the town and its museum and, of course, to see the Petrified Forest Park.

Start out from the seafront in **Skala Kallonis** (☸🏠🏠🏠☸; Walk 27) by heading out west, keeping the sea on your left. Stay left on meeting the main road from Kalloni, to cross a bridge and very shortly drive along the edge of the **Gulf of Kalloni** (also known as ‘Aristotle’s Lagoon’). Gulf views stay with you until the road heads a little more inland to pass **Parakila**★ (7.5km ☸🏠). There is an old Turkish mosque and minaret to see just beyond Parakila (☸; photograph page 17). It lies fairly close to the road, but is not easily spotted through the trees. Look for a trail forking down to the left, opposite a track on the right. Park at the start of the track and walk down the trail (2min) to find it.

The road stays fairly close to the gulf for a time, before turning more inland. Around now a fairly large village can be seen high in the mountains, clustered tightly on a steep hillside. This is **Agra** (27km ☸🏠) — gateway to the volcanic west. The main road now skirts below the village, to continue as a high level road further on. The views now encompass an unfolding vista of pink mountains and green valleys (📷; photograph page 18) which lasts well beyond **Mesotopos** (☸).

Gradually the road descends towards Eressos, to a T-junction. Turn left here and drive the short distance into **Skala Eressou** (48km ☸🏠🏠☸; Walk 30). Park in the car park immediately on reaching the resort. Skala Eressou is a ribbon development running alongside a very fine beach of golden sand. It has a very good atmosphere in the main season,



### Figures from history

The island flourished in early antiquity and produced a number of people of lasting fame. The earliest one was perhaps the 7th-century BC poet Sappho, who was greatly admired for the beauty of her writing. There is a statue of Sappho to be seen on the promenade in Mytilene, and one of the island’s ferry boats is named after her. The other boat is named after Alcaeus, another poet, a contemporary of Sappho, whose work was also highly esteemed. Theophrastus, born in 372 BC, was a Greek peripatetic philosopher, regarded as the father of botany. His work included a nine-volume *Inquiry into Plants* and a six-volume *Growth of Plants*.

*Photograph: statue of Sappho in Mytilene*



*Above: harbour at Skala Kallonis, where all the tours begin.*

*Left: windmill outside the Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest at Sigri*



but tends to be quiet otherwise. Exploring the resort does not take long, but it does make a good lunch stop.

The onward route to Sigri requires going back inland to pick up the road near Andissa before going west again. Maps show a coastal track between Eressos and Sigri, but this can get into an extremely rough state at times and is not

recommended unless you are driving a 4WD. Set off inland, drive through **Eressos** (☸ 📶 📶 📶), and notice the limestone quarry on the right. Amidst all the volcanic activity 20 million years ago, an island of limestone remained untouched. Turn left on reaching the Sigri junction. Soon you pass a symmetrical volcanic cone on the left, with **Moni Ipsilou** (☸ 📶) sitting on the top. There is an access road to the top. The small monastery may not be open, but the views are fine.

Beyond the monastery you pass a modern wind farm (☸), followed by the road off left to the Petrified Forest Park (which we visit later on our return from Sigri). As you descend into **Sigri** (75km ☸ 📶 📶 📶), look for the wide road off left just as you enter. This leads up to the Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest, where there is some parking space. After visiting the museum, return to



*Above: the beach at Skala Eressou.  
Left: old Turkish mosque and  
minaret near Parakila, with iris  
(Iris germanica) in the foreground*



the main road and turn left. Park near the harbour and explore the village on foot. Sigri is just a small fishing village with a harbour, beach and castle. Unlike many of the fishing villages on Lesbos, Sigri was fortified and was able to maintain its position on the coast. From the fishing harbour, wander the narrow streets through the village, to

find the castle and beach on the far side.

Leave Sigri the way you came in, and be ready to turn right to the **Petrified Forest Park**★ (85.3km 🚗 📶 📶). Located on an open hillside, the park can be extremely hot, so it's a good idea to take a hat with you — or even an umbrella, for shade on very hot days. There are refreshments on site.

Return to the main road to continue, and turn right to start the return leg of the journey. *Be prepared to stop* on meeting the road from Eressos, regarded as the major road. Just after passing to the left of **Andissa** (🚗 📶 📶), there is a sign off right inviting you to visit its *platea* (village square). This short diversion of 2km along a wide road brings you to the lower edge of the square. Park here and walk uphill a short distance into the *platea*. It has a good atmosphere, with a church and one or two cafés. Village squares are less common on this island

## 18 Landscapes of Lesvos

than on other Greek islands. Other villages on Lesvos tended to develop an *agora* (market) street, rather than a square — a legacy from the Ottoman occupation.

Leaving Andissa behind, watch carefully on the left to see a COLLAPSED VOLCANIC CRATER. The road runs along the right-hand edge of it, but passengers should be able to get glimpses into the canyon created by the collapse.

Unfortunately, the roads are rather narrow and twisting through the crater and no provision has been made for viewing.

A right turn at **Vatousa** (☩) leads to the island's only winery, at **Hidira** (☩); open

July-September). **Skalohori** (☩☩☩) follows, and then **Filia** (☩☩☩). Walks 27 and 28 begin at Anemotia, 4.3km southwest of this village.

One of the most important monasteries on the island, **Moni Limonas** (☩☩M; Walks 25 and 26), lies along the next section of the journey, and you enjoy excellent views down over the whole monastery complex, with its satellite chapels and churches. We don't visit it at the end of this long day, but save it for Car tour 2.

Turn right on reaching the Kalloni/Molyvos road, to head into **Kalloni** (☩☩☩☩; Walk 25, Alternative walk 27-2), and from there follow signs to **Skala Kallonis** (135km).

*The mountain landscape beyond Mesotopos*





# Walking

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The Greeks were always a little bit perplexed when they saw walkers striding up some narrow footpath or along an old trail. If they were within speaking distance, they would probably call out to advise you of a better route ... along the road! Nowadays walking and bird-watching have become an accepted form of tourism, especially among the younger generation.

There are plenty of *kalderimi* (old donkey trails), footpaths and tracks throughout Lesvos. Discovering them the hard way, by trial and error, has been great fun, and assembling all the sections of paths and trails we found into interesting walks has been challenging at times. We wanted our selection of walks to reflect the island's diversity of geology, landscapes and vegetation. That was the easy part. We also wanted to bring you into contact with the island's people, culture, history and customs — and bringing all these together in the walks was a little harder.

Little has changed on Lesvos for decades, so many villages still pursue a traditional way of life and rarely see a tourist. Some of these villages feature in our walks, and it is always interesting to see the slow pace of life and how it slows to a halt in siesta time. You will have to be lucky even to get a drink in the afternoon! Agiassos is perhaps the exception; while it remains a traditional village, it has always been an important place of religious pilgrimage, so the people provide a better service to tourists.

While under Turkish rule for 400 years, Lesvos hung on grimly to its Greek Orthodox religion, and Moni Limonas became a secret school of language and religion. This, now one of the most celebrated monasteries on the island, has been incorporated into two of the walks. Ancient sites are visited, too, especially where they are difficult to reach by car.

You can travel by car and see a lot of the island, but walking unlocks so much of the hidden Lesvos. This is the way to see the many faces, the green valleys, the wooded hillsides and find the endless array of spring flowers. All that to the sound of bird song.

## Organisation of the walks

We hope this book is set out so that you can plan walks easily, depending on how far you want to go, and your abilities and equipment. The 'Where to stay' section on pages 46-47 briefly outlines the major tourist resorts and the walks nearby. Or you can look at the fold-out touring map inside the back cover. Here you can see at a glance the overall terrain, the road network, and the location of all the walks, which are highlighted in green. Quickly flipping through the book, you'll find that there's at least one photograph for each walk.





























Having selected one or two potential excursions from the map and the photographs, look over the planning information at the beginning of each walk description. Here you'll find distance/hours, grade, equipment, and transport requirements. If the walk sounds beyond your ability or fitness, see if there's a shorter or alternative version which is less demanding.

When you are on your walk, you will find that the text begins with an introduction to the overall landscape and any special points of interest and then quickly turns to a detailed description of the route itself.

The **timings** given in the walks relate to a steady walking pace with just occasional pauses to catch your breath. They do *not* allow for longer pauses to take photographs, explore a church, watch birds or any of the other activities which make walking an enjoyable overall experience. Please bear this in mind when following these walks. You are *not* meant to match the times minute-by-minute throughout the walk, but to use the frequent time checks to calculate the ***time difference to the next waypoint***.

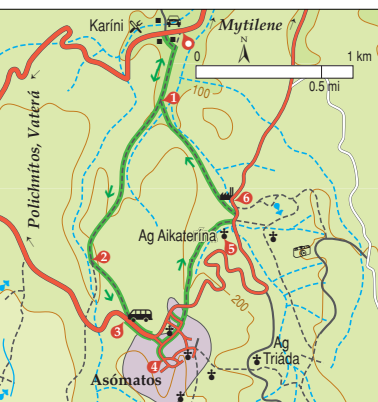
To estimate how long any walk will take you, it is wise to increase the time by *at least 50%* and, in hot weather or if you plan to botanise, picnic or bird-watch, ***double it***.

Below is a key to the symbols on our walking maps:

	dual carriageway		spring, waterfall, etc		good picnic spot
	main road		walk start.waypoint		castle, fort
	secondary road		watermill		specified building
	motorable track		church.chapel		quarry, mine
	track, wide trail		shrine or cross		stadium
	path, narrow trail		cemetery		charcoal burner's pitch/threshing floor
	main walk		picnic tables		campsite
	alternative walk		best views		local facilities (see touring map key)
	height in metres		bus stop		map continuation
			car parking		



## Walk 1: KARINI CIRCUIT



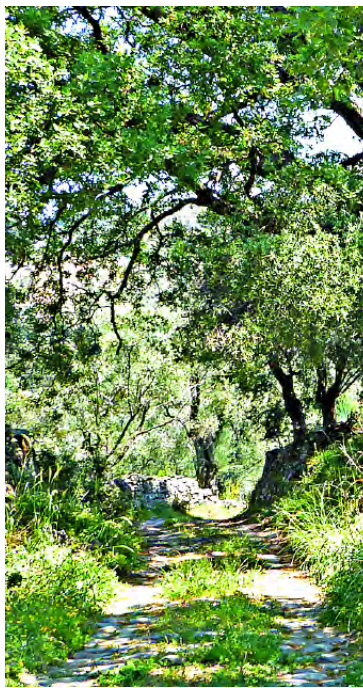
**Distance:** 5km/3m; 1h50min  
**Grade:** ● easy; gentle ascent/descent of 200m/650ft  
**Equipment:** hiking boots, sunhat, suncream, water, picnic  
**Transport:** 🚌 to Karini which, until recently, was located on the main road towards Agiassos from the east. A new bypass now cuts across just north of Karini so be sure to turn off onto the old road as you approach. Park somewhere near the wooded taverna on the right (39° 7.143'N, 26° 23.337'E).

**K**arini is barely a settlement but is famous for its deeply shaded tavern, particularly popular in summer. Karini's claim to fame is the hollow tree believed to be the summer home of Theofilos, the painter, who died in 1934. His colourful paintings were primitive but, nevertheless, he became quite famous and his paintings now command huge prices.

This walk makes good use of old cobbled trails which punctuate the hillside around these mountains. The first part takes you up to the old village of Asomatos and a second trail leads down to an old olive oil factory from where a riverside path takes you back to Karini.

**Start the walk** at the entrance to **KARINI TAVERN** (●). Cross the road carefully and take the minor trail opposite, alongside the abandoned **OLIVE OIL FACTORY** on the left. Soon meet the *kalderimi* to Agiassos and turn right on this good cobbled trail, which rises all the way uphill to Agiassos. Not far along, you pass a two-wheeled track forking joining from the left — your **RETURN ROUTE** (❶). Stay steadily uphill, until just before reaching the main road to Asomatos (**30min**), where you turn left on a path **SIGNPOSTED TO ASOMATOS** (❷). The path dips to cross a stream

*Relaxing at the church of Ag Aikaterina*



then bends right to meander through olive groves. (In winter and early spring this stream may become difficult to cross: if so, continue up the trail to the main Asomatos road and turn left to the village.)

If you stay with the path, it winds amongst olive trees. It becomes a two-wheeled track then an uphill concreted track. You emerge on the ASOMATOS ROAD by the BUS SHELTER (3; 45min) — a welcome rest stop in hot weather. Turn left uphill to continue into Asomatos. Ignore the first and second streets on the right. As the main road bends left, stay ahead uphill on the cobbled street, with RED DIAMOND WAYMARKS and WHITE ARROW. At the T-junction with the main village street, turn right towards a shop, then left into the PLATEA (4; 55min). There is a *kafeneon* here, not always open but we buy drinks at the shop. The old *kafeneon* was part of the collapsed building

in the *platea*. These villages are now very quiet as many of the younger generation live in Athens or Mytilene where they can find work. Many return to the village in summer where their old homes are used for holidays and the village comes alive. It is worth a wander round its narrow streets where it is still possible to find some cameos of village life.

Continue by retracing your steps out of the *platea* but stay along the main village street, passing the CHURCH on the left. Keep ahead as the street becomes a descending trail which continues on the far side of the main road (it's a little rough at the start). Although the land is little used at the top end of the trail, farming activity increases as you descend through olive trees with open views. Nearing the bottom of the trail, the church of Aikaterina (Katherine) nestles in the foliage on the right (5; 1h25min).

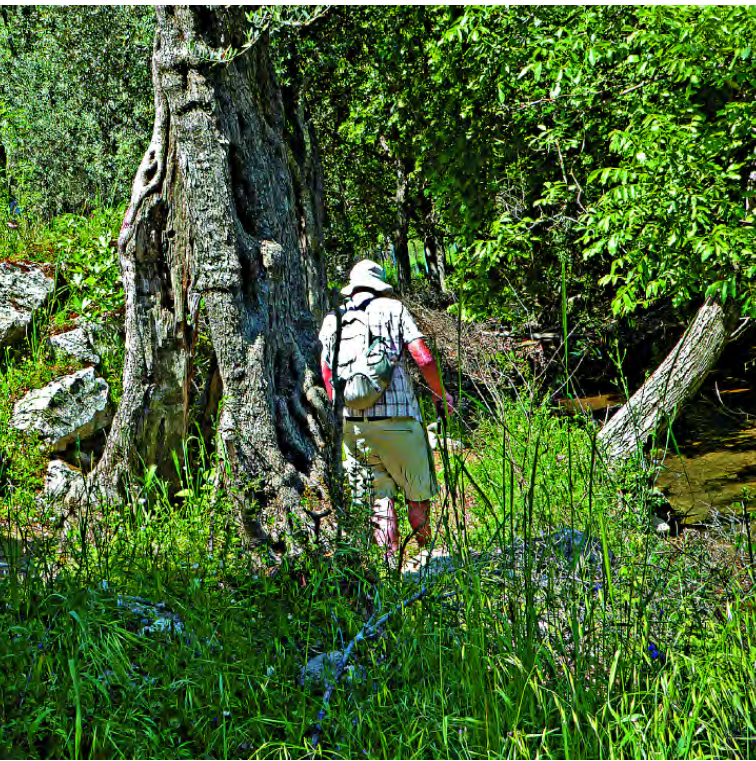
You reach the bottom of





the trail across from a large disused OLIVE OIL FACTORY. Stay ahead on the road for a few steps, pass a WATER TAP on the left, then turn left immediately on a trail marked with RED DIAMONDS. This soon dwindles to a path, undulating above a stream on the right. Replace any temporary animal gates as found. The path is stony in places as it descends close to the stream, but rises again towards a wall. Continue left uphill alongside the WALL before starting to descend through olive groves. Keep ahead on a cart track along the left-hand side of the valley. Meeting the Agiassos trail passed at the start of the walk (1), turn right downhill. Turn left at the old OLIVE OIL FACTORY and retrace your steps back to Karini (1h50min).

*Left: in Asomatos; below: by the river, nearing the end of the walk*





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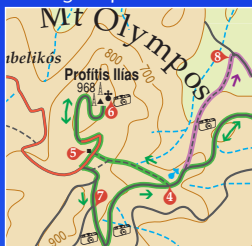
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## Lesvos (Lesbos) Fourth edition

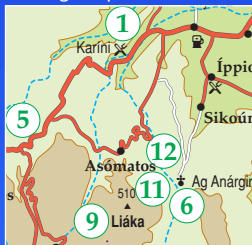
area covered by this book



walking map



touring map



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