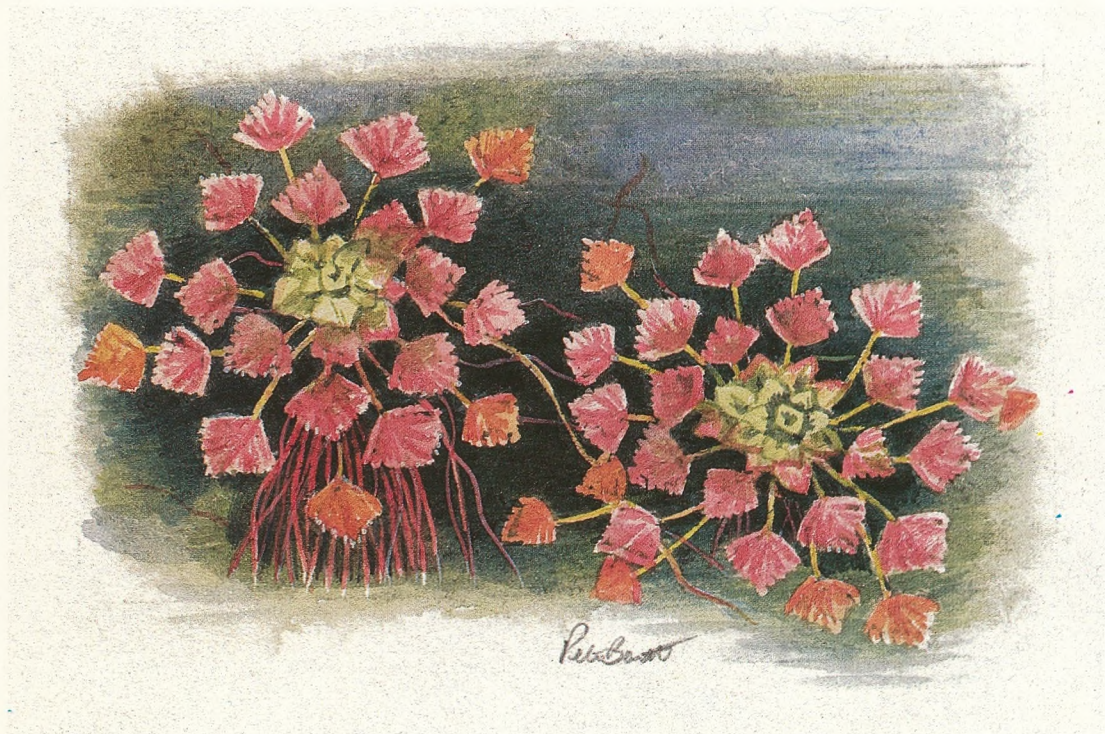




PRESPES NATIONAL PARK

A GUIDE FOR VISITORS



The rare aquatic plant *Trapa natans* (design P. Burret).

● Prespes National Park

Nations, everywhere in the world, have designated areas of their territory to be protected, particularly from intensive exploitation and degradation.

These areas, called National Parks or National Forests accordingly, are protected for many reasons:

- 1) Their superb scenic beauty
 - 2) Their rare and varied species of wildlife
 - 3) Their characteristic, unique and thriving ecosystems
 - 4) As signs of our harmonious co-existence with nature, when settlements are included.
- It is rare that a National Park would comprise of many features mentioned above.

Prespes National Park is one of ten Parks in Greece and was mainly established for the

protection of rare bird species such as, pelicans, cormorants, herons and raptors that nest in its area. Also present is a centuries old Juniper stand, unique in Europe. However, it has become apparent in the course of time that the establishment of this National Park can be justified by some other important reasons:

- The exceptional beauty of the lakes and the surrounding mountainous landscape.
- The high biotope diversity in the confined area of the National Park.
- The great variety of flora and fauna, which is found within this area, is one of the highest in Greece and Europe.
- The high aesthetic, historic and scientific value of the Prespa traditional settlements and byzantine monuments.

So in Prespa there exist all the important elements for the establishment and management of a very significant National Park.



General view of Prespa from Triklario mountain.

● Instructions for the visitor

When in the National Park one must respect nature, thus treating with a careful and discreet manner all forms of life, i.e. plants, trees, insects, all kinds of animals but even the inanimate elements of the ecosystem (the abiotics) such as rocks, stones, geomorphological formations, waters, lakes and rivers. One must certainly enjoy the natural of the environment with all of ones senses, but at the same time leaving it intact and undisturbed. It is true that pleasure and protection can exist together.

Peace and quiet are also comforts that one can enjoy in the Park, therefore, shouts and disturbing noises must be avoided.

Also it is definitely forbidden for any one to pick or destroy flowers and plants, or to collect, kill or disturb animals in any way.

No admission is allowed to the core of the park, which is marked by special signs. Here, nature must be left untouched, without the presence or intervention of man.

Visitors can go sailing around the lakes but only with licensed fishermen and on a specific route.

Litter must either be placed into the baskets around the park or taken away when leaving, do not drop it.

Making a fire is strictly forbidden, as there is a great danger of this fire spreading uncontrollably, especially in summer.

Fishing is allowed in lake Mikri Prespa (small Prespa), but only after obtaining permission and then only in certain places, with a rod or fishing line.

For more information, the visitor should take notice of the signs around the National Park, on which one will find any detail about what is allowed or not in the National Park.

• How and when one can visit Prespa

There is only one asphalt road leading to Prespa. It is a side-road at 31 km off of the main road from Florina to Kastoria or 36 km from Kastoria. Florina is a distance of 185 km from Thessaloniki, when travelling on the Thessaloniki motorway - Edessa to Florina. There is an airport in Kastoria and a regular air service with Athens. Also there is a year-round bus service between Florina and Prespa twice daily. The distance between Florina and Prespa is about 45 km.

Full appreciation of the pleasure offered by the Prespa National Park can only be gained if visited in all four seasons. Each season has something unique to offer.

In winter there are the white, snow-capped landscapes, the lake that often becomes frozen and the thousands of wild ducks and coots wintering in the calm waters.

Spring is the best season to meet the rare aquatic birds in their most brightly - coloured feathers, pelicans, herons, cormorants during the mating seasons. Also the abundance of

colourful flowers and green forests.

In summer, the visitor can swim from the enchanting beaches of Megali Prespa (Big Prespa), climb the mountains – where you are likely to encounter stock farmers – and experience all of the farming works.

Lastly, in autumn one can enjoy the various colours of the trees – changing from green to yellow, red, brown and orange – the thousands of migrants and the harvesting of crops.

• Necessary equipment for a prolonged visit

The visitor who intends to spend some days in the natural beauty of Prespa, wishes to enjoy this experience, so therefore, must be equipped with: – walking shoes, binoculars (for bird and other animal watching without disturbing them) and, naturally, a camera, for there will most certainly be many opportunities for photographs to be taken. Also, it should not be forgotten that Prespa is at a high altitude, so even summer nights are chilly; therefore warm clothes will be needed.

Pygmy cormorants (*phalacrocorax pygmaeus*) in Latsista.



Iris of the marshes (*Iris pseudacorus*).



• Accommodation and transportation in the Park

Accommodation is provided in smaller or bigger hotels (in Psarades), as well as in rooms to let in the villages, Mikrolimni, Lemos and Psarades. Also, in Agios (Saint) Germanos village, one can find accommodation in three traditional buildings which the Greek National Organization has converted into guest houses. These are managed by the Agricultural and Tourist Co-operative of the village women. For those without a car, there is a regular bus service, twice daily, from Florina to almost all the villages in Prespa. Walking is best, of course, when organizing short excursions. «Nature reveals her secrets only to the humble walker», said a great naturalist.

Special research scientists, who wish to work for a short or long period in Prespa on matters appertaining to its study and protection, can stay in the Biological Station for Scientific Observations, established and administered by the Elliniki Etairia, (The Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage) in the Mikrolimni area. Permission and arrangement with the Society is

required. Its address is: – 36, Voukourestiou st., 106 73 Athens. Tel. 3605.319 and Fax: 3622.535.

• What a visit to the National Park could reveal

Besides the magnificent panoramic views of the lake that the visitor can see from high above, all the rest worth seeing is of a small, discreet scale.

If one wishes to enjoy these thoroughly, one must «approach them, identify them, bend over and feel them closely.» Every corner in the National Park has its own beauties and its own character. These are some of the most interesting places, worth visiting: –

Mikrolimni, Biological station, Latsista, Kranies:

Mikrolimni is a small riparian village. By walking carefully along the wet meadows next to the reedbeds, in the north of the village, one can see and photograph the rare herons that prey there, in the shallow waters, on frogs, snakes, fish, insects and other aquatic organisms. Continuing on one can visit the small, exceptionally beautiful island Vidronisi (Vidrinetsi), renting the fishermen's boats. Setting off on foot from Mikrolimni and following a

Pelicans on the lake banks.



The most common aquatic bird in Greece, the coot (Fulica atra).





The ruins of the big basilica of Agios Achillios (10th century).

particular path to the south, one can visit the Elliniki Etairia Biological Station, used by scientists working in the area. Then there is the small, fabulous bay of Latsista.

Finally, one could end up at the deserted village of Kranies, after one and a half hour's walk. There is a magnificent view of the lake and aquatic birds in Latsista.

Oxia - Sfeka: Following the forest road, starting from the small settlement of Oxia, one can reach (after two hours' walk among thick forests of oak, beeches and other broad leaved trees) the deserted Sfeka village on the homonymous mountain (Sfeka or Triklario) and at an altitude of about 1,300 m. The high 'alpine' meadows are an hour walk from there, above the tree belt, where one can live by the stock-farmers grazing their flocks and herds there, in spring and summer.

Kale Hill: A panoramic and magnificent view of the entire lake; an ideal place for photo-

graphy, a pic-nic and special landscaping for that well earned rest.

Opayia, Vromolimni, Observation Post:

This area, surrounded by the village Opayia, the Koula site and the asphalt road, includes the most sensitive part of the National park core; Vromolimni, («Stinking Lake») an internal mass of water with regular exchange with the waters of Mikri Prespa. Here can be found large colonies of pelicans, cormorants, geese and many herons. But, as mentioned before, admission here is strictly forbidden. The visitor can watch the birds with binoculars, either from the low hill Goritsa, on the southeast, or from the observation post on the north, next to the road. This is the most ideal place in Prespa for bird watching.

Agios Germanos: The houses of this village are built in the traditional local architectural style. There is also a homonymous byzantine church of the 10th century. Northeast of the village, there is the small



Psarades village.



Morning fishing in the lake.

river Stara with falls, purling waters and trout. Following the forest road along the river, one can reach the impressive mixed fir - beech forests and if continuing, the summits Kalo Nero (Bella Voda) at an altitude of 2,156 m and Mazi (2,060m), where one has a unique view of both lakes. It is also interesting to meet with the stock - farmers grazing their flocks on the mountain.

Koula, Megali Prespa Beach: Long sandy beaches and plenty of choice for swimming in the clear waters of Megali Prespa. There are rest and pic-nic areas, as well as a vantage point, for watching the pelicans as they fly from the lake Mikri Prespa to fish in Megali Prespa lake.

Agios Achillios: A visit by boat of the dreamy, little island of Agios Achillios with its small settlement and rambling walks in all green meadows, is highly recommended. One should visit too, the ruins of the basilica of the 10th century, with the tomb - stone of a

heron and a hawk and the deserted monastery of Panagia Porfira, (the Virgin in purple) with the church of the 16th century.

Pyli - Daseri: Walking from Pyli village to the deserted village of Daseri, the visitor enjoys the beautiful vista of oak tree forests next to the reed beds and green meadows flooded with water. One and a half hour's walk.

Vrontero: A picturesque village of stock - farmers, 13 km from Pyli, surrounded by thick oak tree forests and box covered land.

Agios Georgios Psarades: At the highest point of the road, Koula - Psarades, there lies the chapel of Agios Georgios. It is surrounded by a centuries old stand of junipers, unique in Europe. This is the second area of complete protection in the nucleus of the National Park.

Psarades: The most traditional village in Prespa, where there are beautiful houses built in the local architectural style. Specially licensed fishermen can take the visitor to the blue beaches of the lake and steep rocky

shores. In these natural and carved cavities in the rocks, there lie hermitages and retreats, icons painted on the rocks and two churches. One, the «Metamorphosis» (Transfiguration) is of the early 13th century and the other of the 15th century is dedicated to Panagia Eleousa (The Virgin of Charity), with remarkable wall paintings. The latter, according to legend, is also known as Agios Petros (St. Peter).

It is appropriate here to say a few words about the benefits that may go unnoticed by the visitor. The value of Prespa National Park, and every National park, has many aspects. It serves recreational, educational and scientific purposes but also it has a deeply cultural character. Man of our age can rediscover the ties between himself and life, nature and even the universe by meeting and experiencing this flourishing, unspoiled and rich nature.

The visitor to Prespa, as well as his entertainment and activities in the park, must realize that this area has been inhabited for thousands of years. Human signs can be found everywhere, there is no virgin land; yet, everywhere there are plenty of natural resources and a harmony of shapes, sizes and colours.

The Elliniki Etairia Station in Mikrolimni.



It is the harmonious co-existence of man with nature and the wise management of the environment that has allowed us today to enjoy the beauty, natural resources and nature in all its magnificence. It is in our hands, our duty to preserve this harmony for us and our children and not to destroy it with inappropriate and unwise actions.

Get acquainted with and protect Prespa Park

Take an active part in the attempts for the protection of the park and the whole natural and cultural environment of our country. Proper acquaintance with it can be the first step.

There are various ways for a person to help individually (or through co-operation with Environmental Societies and groups) towards the protection of the environment. Also, one can help to raise the awareness of a great part of the public, who, due to ignorance, insensibility or lack of information, think and act against the principles of nature protection and its valuable elements and resources.

At a personal level you can adjust your activities so that you avoid or minimize any disturbance that you may cause to the environment.

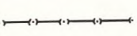
– Check carefully your habits and activities. Do not hesitate to change those you realize can harm the ecosystems or the cultural elements around you. It has been proven that a considerable amount of the damage caused can be prevented by some slight and insignificant alterations.

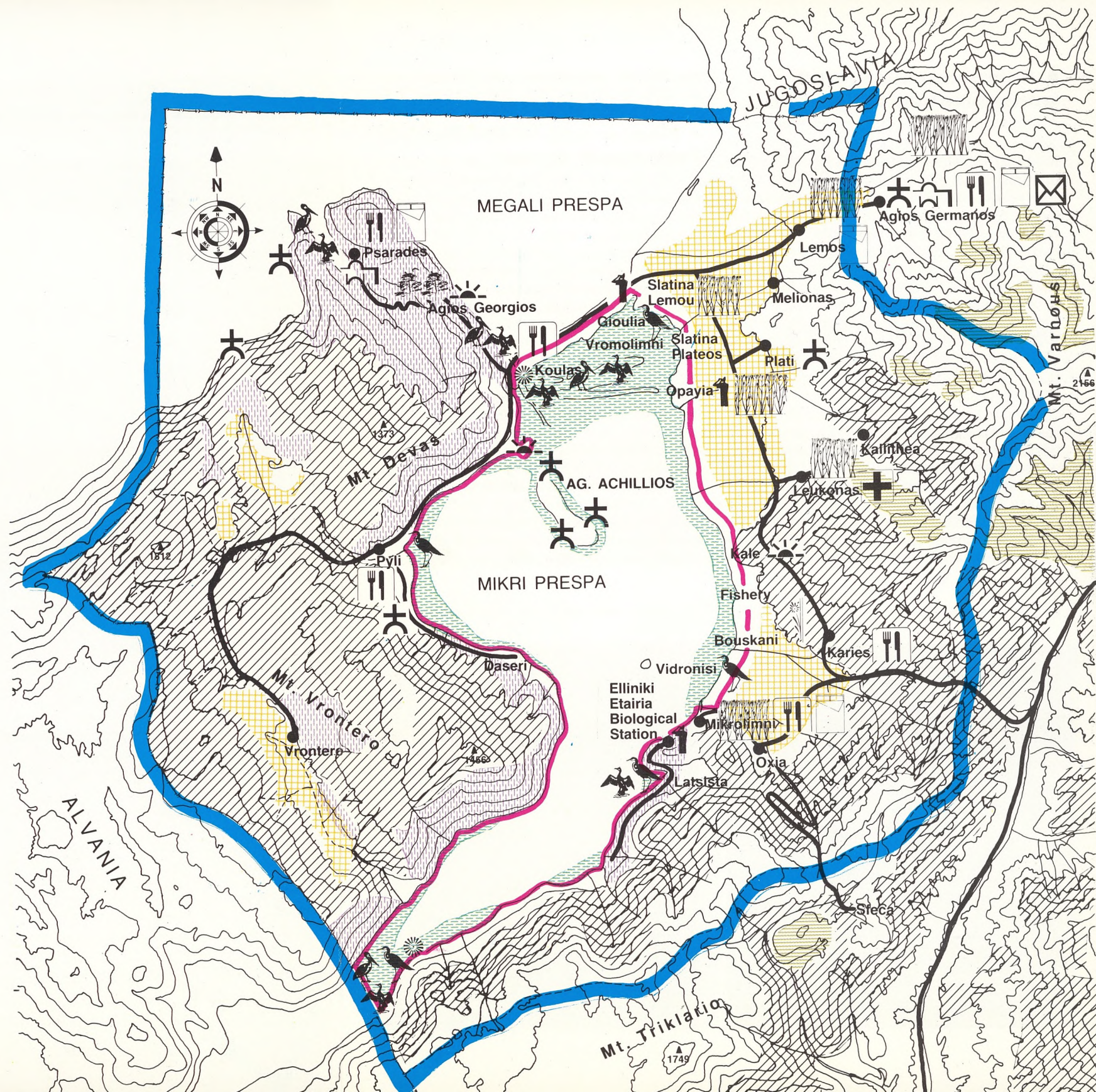
– You can help local people and authorities or the organizations struggling for the protection of the park and the environment as a whole, with your experience, enthusiasm, knowledge or contribution.

– You can promote awareness among your family members, your relatives, friends or colleagues, so being of service in two ways:

- a) To an individual, by teaching him or her to enjoy the beauty and harmony of the elements a balanced and well-preserved environment provides, and
- b) To the environment, by setting an example to others in actively protecting nature.

– Lastly, you can help by continuously improving yourself in knowledge and sensitivity and adopting the principle that «your environment starts from you».

- Watchtowers 
 Herons 
 Pelicans 
 Cormorants 
 Nice View 
 Byzantine churches & other landmarks 
 Narcissus meadows 
 Waterlilies 
 Centuries old junipers 
 Paths & walking tracks 
 Traditional settlements 
 Food 
 Sleep 
 Core of National Park 
 Reedbeds, wet meadows aquatic vegetation 
 Farm land 
 Oak tree deciduous 
 Beech tree deciduous forests Fagion noesiicum etc. 
 Juniper - Box - Macedonian Oak degraded forests 
 Deciduous Oak, Pine, Fir and Salix sp., Populus sp. Stands 
 Frontier 
 Prespa National Park Peripheral Zone 
 Post office 
 Clinic 





The lake shore in spring.

The «Indentity» of Prespa National Park

PRESPA OR PRESPEs, is the area including the Greek parts of the lakes Mikri Prespa and Megali Prespa and the land around them. On the east and south it is bordered by the mountains Varnous and Triklario and on the west and north by the frontier with Albania and Yugoslavia respectively.

GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION: Northwest Macedonia, Florina Prefecture. The National Park extends almost over the entire area of Prespes.

DESIGNATION: 14.1.1974, Presidential decree 46, 23.1.1974.

AREA: Total 256,7 sq. km. Nucleus (complete protection area), 49 sq. km.

VILLAGES: Vrontero, Pylí, Agios Achillios, Psarades, Lemos, Melion, Plati, Kallithea, Leukonas, Karies, Oxia and Mikrolimni. Agios Germanos village is the administrative centre of the area while Psarades village has been designated as a traditional settlement and therefore, protected for its traditional architectural style.

POPULATION, ACTIVITIES: The total population of Prespa amounts to 1,545 inhabitants (1981 census). Their main occupation is agriculture, then next comes stock - farming and fishing. Very few are occupied in the tertiary sector. Beans - known as very tasty - barley, wheat, rye and clover are mostly cultivated. Bean cultivation expands very rapidly and so, does that of sunflower and maize. About 75% of farm land is irrigated by the lake water.

LAKES: Mikri Prespa and Megali Prespa. Water extent in the Greek part is 43.5 and 40 sq. km. respectively. Greatest depth is 8 and 55 m respectively. Water surface altitude 853 m above sea - level.

HIGHEST MOUNTAINS: Varnous or Peristeri (summit Kalo Nero, 2,156m), Triklario or Sfeka (1,749m) Tsoutsouli (1,456m) Devas (1,373).

FLORA: More than 1,300 species of superior plants. Among them the exclusive (endemic) species of Prespa, Centaurea Prespana.

FAUNA: More than 40 species of mammals, 260 species of birds, 11 species of amphibians, more than 20 species of reptiles, 15 species of fishes. Selectively reported, about 150 couples of dalmatian pelicans, 120 couples of white pelicans about 100 couples of herons, 400 couples of cormorants, 200 couples of pygmy cormorants, 1 couple of white-tailed eagles, bears, wolves, otters, roe deer, wild boars and wild cats.

Lake Mikri Prespa is one of the 11 Greek wetlands of international interest protected under the Ramsar International Convention. Furthermore, the entire area of Prespa was declared as a place of particular Natural Beauty (State Gazette 86, 10.2.1977) and a Specialty Protected area under the EEC Bird Directive.



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