



## FOOTPATHS OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

# PRACTICAL INFORMATION ABOUT WALKING THE FOOTPATHS OF MOUNT ATHOS

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### **Background**

The extensive network of paths and mule tracks on Mount Athos was developed over many centuries. Until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century their use was the only practical way of travelling on the Holy Mountain by land. The principal routes were stone paved (*kalderimi*), built and maintained to a high standard, with impressive stone bridges, embankments and retaining walls.

Since motor transport arrived on the peninsula, increasing numbers of roads have been, and continue to be, built. Their construction has cut through or obliterated many of these paths, so that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century all but a few paths had fallen into disuse.

Over the past 15 years or so, the Friends of Mount Athos have been working to bring many remaining principal footpaths back into use. This has included regular path clearance, the erection of signposts and the production of route descriptions. However, the condition of these paths is very variable and rarely approaches their former state.

### **Practical Advice**

Walking on the paths of the Holy Mountain is a beautiful, reflective, uplifting and spiritually rewarding experience. But before undertaking any journey a few practical precautions are advisable.

- The nature and duration of the proposed journey needs to be established before setting out.
- Many paths are long, steep, exposed and run through very isolated areas. An adequate level of fitness is required to undertake the journey.
- For the same reason, it is essential to carry ample drinking water for the whole journey. Most of the historic fountains, wells and springs that were once along the route are now dry.

- The pilgrim needs to be properly equipped for exposed mountain walking. This must include protection from the sun (hat, dark glasses, sunscreen), protection from wet weather (which may lead to hypothermia), and a mobile phone, flashlight and food in case of emergencies. A well-fitting back-pack is advisable.
- Even the best-preserved paths contain uneven sections and most will be steep and rocky in places. Walkers are strongly advised wear boots with good soles and ankle supports.
- Many paths have been, and continue to be, seriously eroded by winter storm water. Even in good weather, these paths will be rocky and demanding.
- In winter months, water courses may be in flood, making them difficult and sometimes impossible to cross. Likewise, some paths may become difficult, dangerous or even impassable because of storm water.
- Particular difficulty may be encountered where a footpath joins, crosses or leaves a modern road or track because of differences in levels. Some scrambling up or down banks is often necessary.
- Many paths have been, and continue to be affected by encroaching vegetation. During spring and early summer, annual vegetation may make some sections temporarily overgrown.
- While many paths are marked by direction signs or waymark arrows, these are not universal and signs may go missing. Particular care to set out on the correct route is needed in the vicinity of monasteries and other centres of habitation (where there will be many local tracks and paths). If in doubt, seek local advice.
- Walkers are encouraged to make use of the detailed Footpath Descriptions produced by the Friends of Mount Athos for many of the commonly used routes on the Holy Mountain. These are available via [www.athosfriends.org/footpaths/footpath\\_chart/](http://www.athosfriends.org/footpaths/footpath_chart/) and in some monasteries.

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This information has been produced by **The Friends of Mount Athos**, a charitable organisation which, among other activities, works with monasteries to keep footpaths on the Holy Mountain, open. No responsibility can be taken for its accuracy or completeness. Copies of footpath descriptions are available, free, from the Friends website, [www.athosfriends.org](http://www.athosfriends.org) and in a number of places on or associated with the Holy Mountain.