

From Mount Olympus to the Acropolis: a cultural hiking adventure through northern Greece

October 1, 2016 – October 16, 2016 (trip# 1621)



The Olympia mountain range – home of the ancient Greek gods

OVERVIEW

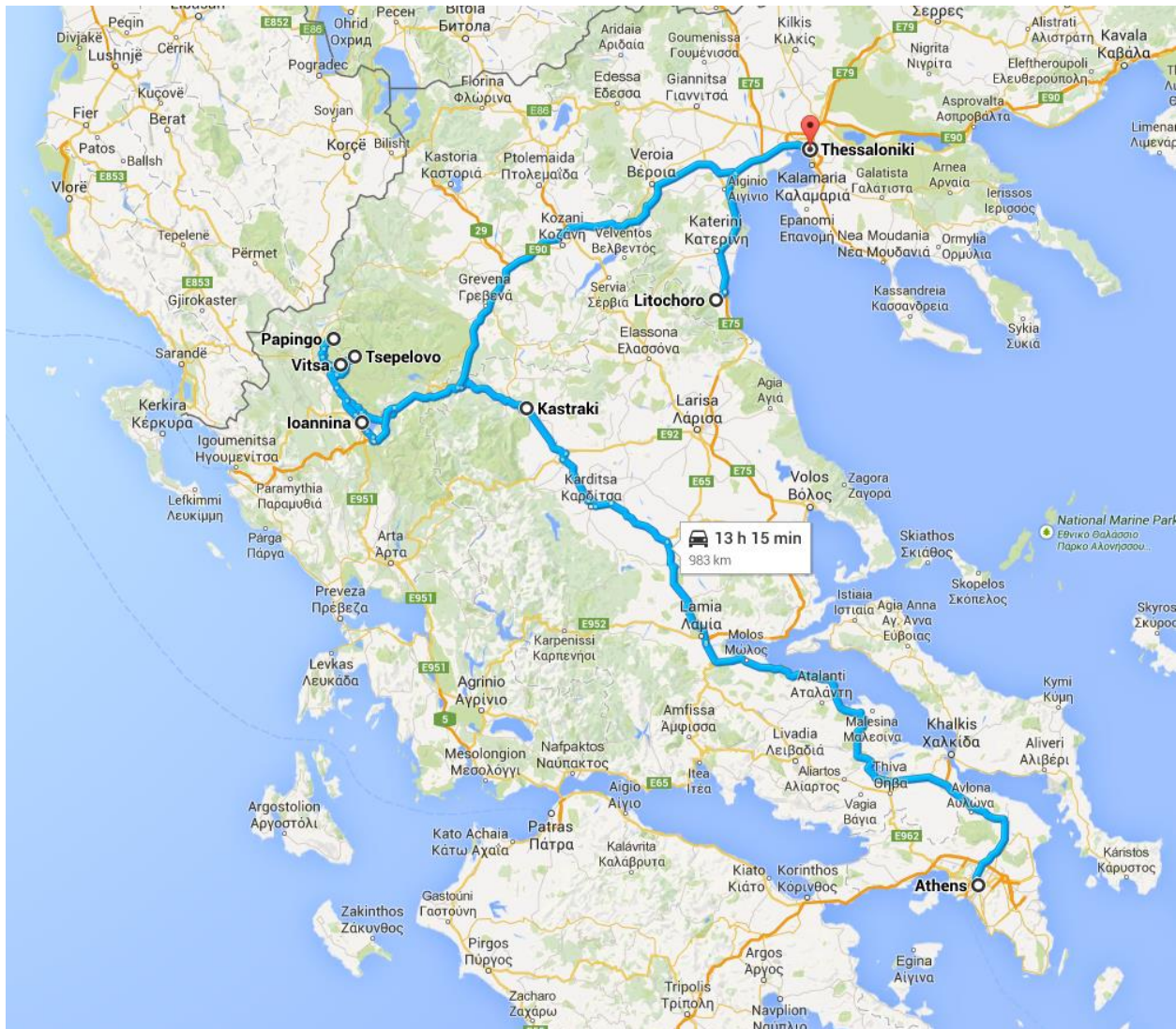
Join me on an unforgettable journey that starts from Thessaloniki, the principal city of northern Greece and ends at the steps of the Acropolis in Athens 14 days later. Trip highlights include three days climbing in the Mount Olympus region, the historical town of Ioannina, the bridges and remote mountain villages of Zagoria, the incredibly deep Vikos gorge, the Vradheto Steps, and the remarkable mountainside monasteries of Meteora. We will balance visits to archeological sites and ancient cities with great hikes, in a land of exquisite natural beauty: high snowcapped peaks, meadows of mountain wild flowers, citrus groves, and rocky shores.

Our traveling arrangements will facilitate a unique exposure to this remarkable area:

- Local English speaking guide throughout the trip.

- Extensive exploration on foot to fully explore the ancient sites and to immerse ourselves in the region's splendor. We will be walking/hiking five to eleven miles each day at a moderate pace. Daily elevation gains go from under 1,000' to ~5,300' We will spend three nights in high mountain refuges
- Small group travel - this allows us to fully experience the landscape and its treasures, enjoy hassle-free travel arrangements, stay in small, local hotels and dine in intimate village restaurants.

TRIP ITINERARY



Map of northern Greece showing our route and overnight lodging locations

ITINERARY

Day -1 (Oct 1) - Depart US

Day 0 (Oct 2) Arrive Thessaloniki The airport is approximately 10 miles from the city centre. By bus (€2) the journey takes around 40 mins and by taxi (€20) about 30 mins. Thessaloniki airport website: <http://www.airportsineurope.com/airports/thessaloniki-airport> Meet for dinner. (overnight in Thessaloniki)

Day 1 (Oct 3) Explore Thessaloniki

From our conveniently located hotel we enjoy a day of sightseeing in this important, historical city. We visit the Archaeological Museum, which houses exhibits from the city's prehistoric, Macedonian and Roman civilizations, including a permanent exhibition of the Macedonian Gold, and we also take a look at the award winning Museum of Byzantine Culture, which celebrates Thessaloniki's position as the Byzantine Empire's second city. After lunch we will stroll along the waterfront to the city's most famous landmark – the iconic White Tower. Finally we visit the Agios



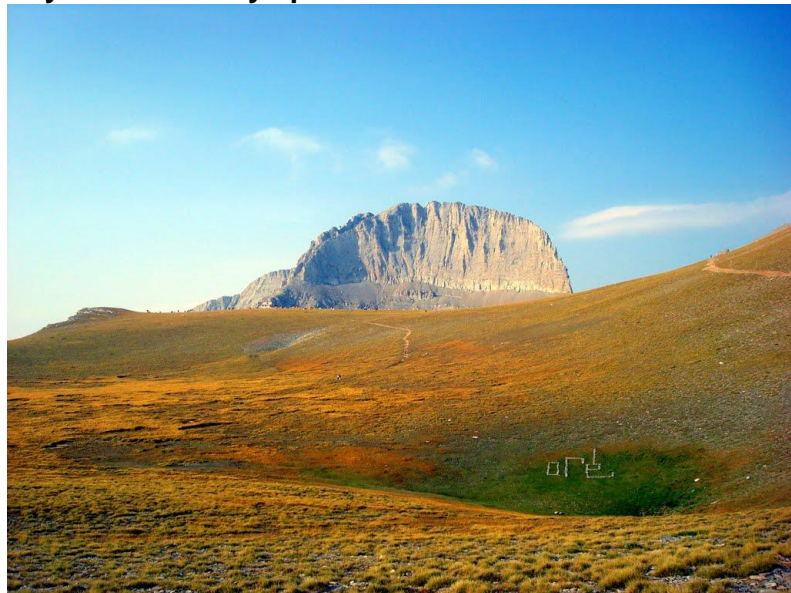
Dimitrios Basilica - Thessaloniki's most famous Byzantine church and the place of martyrdom of St. Demetrius, The Rotonda, and other Roman period ruins. Late afternoon we transfer 60 miles (1.5 hours) south to the town of Litochoro at the foot of Mount Olympus. (overnight Litochoro)

Day 2 Oct 4th Golna - Kastana Spring - Enipeas Gorge - Agios Dionysios Monastery 5
– 6.5 hours moderate ~2,400' ascent/ 1,385' descent

Our first walk in the Olympus region combines magnificent views of the high peaks with a walk through the beautiful Enipeas Gorge. We begin from the outskirts of Litochoro at 1,520' and follow a steep trail that brings us in approximately one hour to the highest point of today's walk, close to the summit of Golna (3,408'). From here on we are afforded excellent views of the Olympus peaks and of the Gorge. Our route now heads downwards, past the Kastana Spring, to join the E4 trail. We then continue up the Gorge, passing the Aghio Spileo (the Holy Cave) where St Dionysios spent part of his ascetic life. Twenty minutes further we come to the impressive but now ruined monastery founded by St Dionysios in 1542. From this point it is

possible to continue up the Gorge for a further 1.5 hours to Prionia, or to take our transportation back down into Litochoro. (overnight in Litochoro)

Day 3 Oct 5th Olympus: Hike from Dion – Koromilia refuge - Petrostrouga Refuge



Today we begin our Olympus Mythical trail. Beginning at the Konstantinos and Eleni chapel just beyond the modern town of Dion, this little known route of rare beauty is initially a well signposted path parallel to the Orlia Stream. An hour into the walk it is possible to take a short detour towards Kokkinos Vrachos, one of the most stunning waterfalls on Mount Olympus falling an impressive height of 60'. Back on the main path, we ascend towards Koromilia for approximately 1

hour and 15 minutes. From Koromilia refuge the wide trail continues through the beech forest and along the Oxoula Ridge to our overnight stop at Petrostrouga refuge (6,500'), a spot well known for its one hundred year old Bosnian pines. From the terrace of the refuge we can enjoy the magnificent view of the Thermaikos Gulf, the Northern Sporades, Samothrace, Athos Mountain, and Pagkaio Mountain beyond.

5.5 miles 5 - 6 hours moderate Total elevation gain 5600'.

Overnight Petrostrougka Refuge. The two storey refuge is managed by the Hellenic Rescue Team. It can accommodate up to 72 people. It has an organized kitchen, fireplaces and stoves for heating, toilets and cold running water. No shower available.

Day 4 Oct 6th Thursday Oct 6th Mount Olympus: Petrostrouga to Plateau of the Muses. Ascent of Prophitis Elias and Toumba Peaks.

Departing Petrostrouga after breakfast, we leave the forest behind and climb for approximately 1 hour to Skourta peak (8,170'), which offers breathtaking panoramic views. We then continue along the narrow ridge to the Plateau of the Muses (8,600'), located beneath the impressive Stefani ridge. After lunch it is a short and easy climb up to the peak of Prophitis Elias (9,200'). On the summit is Prophet Elias chapel, the highest mountain church in the Balkans, built in the 16th century by Saint Dionysius. A second short and rewarding climb is up to the summit of Toumba, from where there are incredible views down into Kazania (the cauldron).

3 hours Moderate 2,100' of elevation gain plus 2 short afternoon hikes from the plateau.

Overnight Giosos Apostolidis Refuge on the Plateau of Muses. The refuge has a capacity of 100 people. Facilities include a well organized restaurant, toilets, cold running water and cold shower.

Day 5 Oct 7th Descent from Olympus

We retrace yesterday's route from the Muses Plateau to the Petrostrouga Refuge and then take the wide path down through beech forest to the main trailhead at Gortsia. (3,300')

8.5 miles 5 hours moderate. 5,300' steady descent

Free afternoon for recovery!!! Possible visit to beach.

Overnight Litohoro

Day 6 Oct 8th Ancient Dion and Vergina Royal tombs. Transfer to Zagoria Region.

Today begins with a visit to the site of Ancient Dion just a few miles from Litohoro. Formerly less than a mile from the shores of the Thermaic Gulf, it was the most important sacred city of the Macedonians. Here Philip II celebrated one of his greatest victories, and his son, Alexander the Great, sought the aid of the King of the Gods before setting out for his campaign in the East.

Our next stop is at the Royal tombs of Vergina. In a huge, artificial tumulus are four elaborate royal tombs, two of which were discovered undisturbed, and contained rich grave-goods. In Tomb II the body was found in a solid gold casket weighing almost 25 lbs; the occupant has been identified as Philip II. In an outstanding exhibition, the casket and other grave goods are displayed adjacent to the tombs in which they were discovered.



Golden pendant from Philip II's armor

A short walk up a quiet road brings us to the remains of Ancient Aigai, capital of the ancient Kingdom of Macedonia. The monumental palace, lavishly decorated with mosaics and painted stuccoes is, unfortunately, permanently closed for restoration, but we can see the ancient theatre where Phillip II was assassinated on the day of his daughter's wedding.

We then transfer approximately 3 hours to the Zagoria Region - a community of forty-five traditional villages situated amongst dramatic mountains. On arrival in Monodendri we will walk through the historical old village with its impressive stone mansions to the abandoned

15th Century Monastery of Agia Paraskevi, where we will get our first views of the dramatic Vikos Gorge

2 hours easy walking. Total travelling distance 200 miles. Mainly highway. 4 hours plus stops.

Overnight Monodendri

Day 7: Oct 9th Bridges and Villages walk ~8 miles moderate terrain, mainly on old trails, with some optional rough riverbed walking

Due to its remoteness, the villages of Zagoria were effectively autonomous during the Ottoman empire, thus avoiding the tax collectors but enabling its people to trade widely. The area's superb Kalderini mule tracks and gracefully arched bridges are evidence of this long mercantile prosperity. During today's walk we see several of the magnificent stone bridges and impressive



villages for which the region is justly famous. We begin from our hotel and quickly reach the village of Vitsa. From here we descend a scenic traditional path to cross the Vikos Gorge at the double-arched Misiou bridge, built in 1748. A similar path on the other side

of the Gorge brings us an hour later to the tranquil village of Koukouli with its beautiful old stone buildings and an ice cold spring. After lunch we descend a shady forest path with extensive views of the high mountains, and we cross the 1764 Kusiarya bridge on the outskirts of the village of Kipoi. Kipoi was once one of the major centres of population in the area but today, like the other villages, it is just a sleepy backwater, with only its fine buildings to remind us of the wealth and glory of its past. We walk to the Mill bridge by the old water mill and take a path parallel to the river to end our walk at one of the most famous bridges in Epiros: the triple-arched Kaloyeriko or Plakidhas bridge, built in 1814 at the expense of a local monk. On the drive back to Monodendri we come to the most impressive bridge of all: the much photographed Kokkoros bridge, built in 1750 and named after the miller who maintained it.

Overnight Monodendri

Day 8 Oct 10th Vikos Gorge ~6 hours moderate with challenging sections. Easier alternative riverside walk available



The Vikos Gorge is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the deepest canyon in the world in proportion to its width. At one point it is almost 3,000' deep and 3,600' from rim to rim, giving it a depth to width ratio of 82%.

Starting from our hotel we descend a series of tight switchbacks down to just above the dry river bed. From here a well marked trail follows the line of the river between sheer cliffs down to the meadows below Vitsa. After a short diversion to

the springs of Voidomatis where the crystal clear, and ice-cold, water of the Voidomatis River emerges from underground we begin the 90 minute ascent to the delightful village of Papingo high on the north side of the gorge. For a slightly shorter and easier walk it is also possible to end at Vitsa on the south rim. It is a truly magnificent hike, though care is needed in places as parts of the trail have been eroded by landslides and there is a section of scree and some rough river bed walking.

Altitude profile: 3,500' - 2,250' – 1,580' – 3,100' (net : 1,920' ascent/descent)

Overnight Papingo

Day 9 Oct 11th Micro Papingo to Astrakas mountain refuge Papingo to Astrakas refuge: 6 miles / 4 hours moderate

After a leisurely breakfast in our luxurious hotel we depart for our hike into the heart of the Gamila range. The first section of our walk is on the old path which links the village of Papingo (3,168') with Micro Papingo half an hour away. We then follow the O3 long distance route up to the Astraka refuge. This is a steep 3 - 3.5 hrs uphill on a mule track through beautiful and serene mountain scenery to Astraka Refuge at 6,435'.

Papingo to Astrakas refuge: 6 miles / 4 hours moderate uphill hiking

Overnight Astrakas Refuge

The shelter can accommodate 51 people in rooms with bunk beds. Pillows and blankets are provided. The refuge/mountain hut is fully equipped with a kitchen and restaurant, a dining-room, shared bathroom and cold water shower.

Day 10 Oct 12th Astrakas mountain refuge – Dragon Lake - Tsepelovo

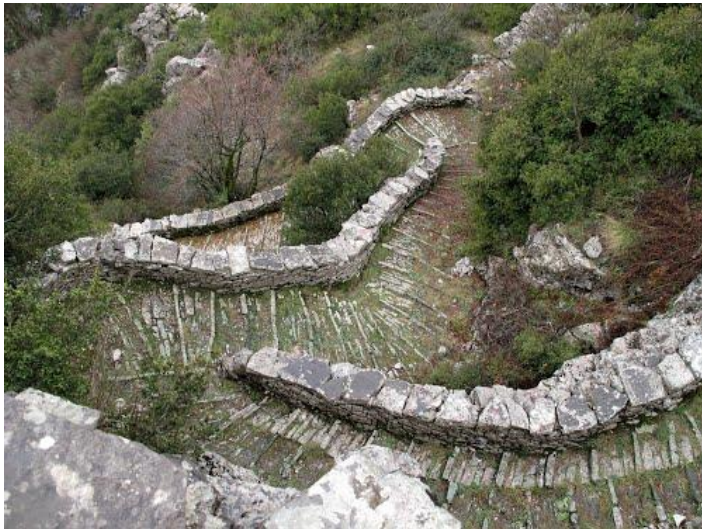
This is an excellent day's trekking. We head off early from Astraka refuge to walk to the remote and superbly beautiful Dragon Lake situated at almost 7,000' below the peak of Gamila. As we walk around the lake we will see the Tritons (amphibians which resemble a small dragon) which give the lake its name.

We retrace our steps back to the base of the Astraka ridge, then follow the well-marked shepherd's route for our descent towards the village of Tsepelovo. Most of the hike is above tree line, across mountain uplands with broad vistas, punctuated with deep gullies and natural staircases, alpine ponds and the occasional shepherd's hut. At the end of our hike a 20 minute transfer brings us to Tsepelovo, the largest of the Zagoria Villages, nestled at 4,000' on the slopes of Mount Tymfi.

Total hiking time 8 hours. Elevation profile: 6,435' - 4,950' – 6,930' – 5,800' – 5,280' (net: 1,980' ascent, 2,615' descent)

Overnight Tsepelovo

Day 11 Oct 13th Vradheto Steps ~6-7 hour walk



We start our hike from Tsepelovo village and head across a magnificent trail towards Vradeto, which, at 4,785' is Zagoria's highest settlement. We continue to Beloi, a magnificent viewpoint affording stupendous views of the Vikos Gorge from a soaring vantage point of 5,445'. We return to Vradeto for lunch then in the afternoon descend the famous Vradheto Steps – the amazing 17th century stone path built into the mountainside. This is one of the highlights of a visit to the Zagori region.

Overnight Tsepelovo

Day 12 Oct 14th Transfer to Kastraki (100 miles, 2.5 - 3 hrs) Hike around Meteora 5 miles moderate



After breakfast we transfer to our final destination: Kastraki at the foot of the great pinnacles of rock known as the Meteora, literally "suspended in the air". Here is one of the largest and most important complexes of Greek Orthodox monasteries in Greece, second only to Mount Athos. Beginning in the 14th century more than 20 monasteries were built

on the rock pillars; seven remain intact today. Our hike follows an old path which weaves around the base of the rocks before climbing up to the 2 largest monasteries: Varlaam and Grand Meteora. From here our route leads to a little visited section of the rocks with magnificent views, and then down through beech forest to the newly restored Ipapantis monastery. Shaded paths and stony track bring us to our hotel in Kastraki.

Overnight Kastraki

Day 13 Oct 15th Visit Grand Meteoro and Agia Triada monasteries. Short walk. Afternoon transfer from Meteora to Athens (5 hours 230 miles)

We begin our final day with a visit to the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration of Jesus, known as the Grand Meteoro. This is the oldest, biggest and wealthiest monastery of the complex. (Also the most visited!!!) In addition to the high quality frescoes in the church there is a rich collection of manuscripts and icons and a very interesting display of old kitchen and farm implements

We then drive the short distance to the remote monastery of Agia Triada, probably the most dramatically positioned monastery of the Meteora. It is perched atop a slender pinnacle and accessible only by 140 steep steps, making it one of the most peaceful monasteries, home to just two monks.

From Agia Triada we take a well signposted path down to the outskirts of Kalambaka from where we begin our transfer back to Athens and stay at a hotel close to the Acropolis.

Overnight Athens

Day 14 Oct 16th Say goodbye to Athens and the Acropolis and fly home.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE



You should have a keen interest in cultural and archaeological explorations and enjoy moderate - strenuous hiking. On an average day we will walk for 5-8 hours and cover 7-11 miles. Daily elevation gain ranges from 2,000' – to 5,300'. On the days that we spend in mountain refuges, you will be carrying a backpack of 15- 20 pounds. You should recognize that you may find yourself in closer

quarters or be less comfortable than you are used to at home. You should make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to their having a great time. If you do that, you will have a great time.

ACCOMMODATIONS

We will spend 11 nights in hotels, two persons/room. The hotels will provide twin-bedded (i.e. two separate mattresses) rooms. In Greece twin beds are sometimes immediately side-by-side in a single bed-frame, while in the US twin beds are in separate bed-frames and are separated by a few inches. We will also spend 3 nights in mountain refuges which have mixed-gender dormitory accommodations.

SAFETY AND RISKS

Participant safety is a high priority for all AMC-sponsored events. Participants should be aware that there are risks associated with outdoor adventure activities, including but not limited to adverse weather and environmental conditions, remote locations of our trips, and transportation in vehicles or on foot. Aside from any personal medical problems, participants should be aware of the possibilities of bug bites, dehydration, sun burn and other heat or cold related problems. You should regularly use sun screen, take care to be adequately hydrated and bring water on all day trips. Please carefully read and sign the AMC Participant Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risks and Release and Indemnity Agreement.

COST

The trip cost is \$2,600 for AMC members. Non-members can join for \$50, and get the same price. This will cover the following items:

- Lodging, breakfasts and dinners from the welcome dinner in Thessaloniki through breakfast on the last day of the trip
- All transportation within Greece
- Entrance fees to all sites
- Guide throughout the trip
- Emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage

All lunches, trail snacks, beverages (e.g. coffee/tea, mineral water, alcohol, etc) and other personal expenses are NOT included. Your transportation to Thessaloniki and return from Athens is your responsibility. The trip leaders will advise you as much as you need and will facilitate group travel. At this time, we estimate that the cost for a round trip ticket between the east coast and Thessaloniki/Athens, Greece will be in the vicinity of \$1,500.

The final trip cost may be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase.

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a non-profit basis. Leaders are volunteers who are not compensated except for their travel costs associated with the trip. The advertised trip cost includes a surcharge which goes toward the administrative expenses of the AMC Adventure Travel program.

The trip fee includes emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage, which is required by the AMC. It does *not* include insurance for travel delay, interruption, or cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. The AMC has a recommended vendor whose material will be sent to you if your application is accepted.

Any unspent funds will be refunded to the participants. If the trip's financial position is strong enough at the start, the leaders may make partial refunds during the trip, in the form of payments toward some meals and/or free time activities which would otherwise not be included

REGISTRATION and CANCELLATION

To apply, you must complete and submit the application, confidential medical form, supplemental medical form (if appropriate) and acknowledgement and assumption of risk and release form. You can download them from this website: [Greece 2016 Participant Documents](#) Mail the registration deposit of \$1,000 and all required forms to Steve Cohen at the address shown on the application form. You will not actually be accepted, and your check will not be deposited, until the leader has determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip are a good match. The final balance of \$1,600 is due July 1, 2016. Deposit checks from wait-listed applicants will not be cashed until they are accepted AND they confirm continued interest in joining the trip. All payments by check should be payable to the *Appalachian Mountain Club*.

Our cancellation policy is based on several considerations. Cancellation will not be allowed to raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. Minimum penalty schedule: \$200. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf, and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration and cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant.

This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible. When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip.

In the unlikely event that the trip is cancelled because not enough acceptable participants apply, everything you have paid will be refunded in full.

QUESTIONS and REQUESTING APPLICATION MATERIALS

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Steve. Steve can be reached at 617 997-6861 before 9PM eastern time zone or at scohen1234@gmail.com

Note: an alternative AMC trip to Greece is being offered in April, 2016 by Carl Rosenthal croenthal789@msn.com Information can be found at [Adventure Travel trip listings](#)

TRIP LEADER



Steve Cohen leads hikes for the Hiking/Backpacking Committee of the AMC Boston Chapter. He has been a participant on many major excursions in the last ten years including trips to Alaska, the Smoky Mountains, Maroon Bells (near Aspen, CO), Grand Tetons/Yellowstone, Tour du Mont Blanc, Escalante Canyons (Utah), and rock climbing in the Dolomites (Italian Alps). In the last few years he led AMC adventure travel expeditions to the Dolomites,

the Jungfrau region of Switzerland, Patagonia, the Austrian Alps, the French Pyrenees, Greece, and the Haute Route (Chamonix to Zermatt) among other destinations. He lived in Germany and Switzerland for four years and has a good command of both the French and German languages.

GUIDE

Ruth, our guide, was raised near Manchester in Northern England. She has always been a passionate hiker and history enthusiast. She majored in Oriental Studies at King's College, Cambridge, then taught in India for two years, followed by a year in Australia on a Rotary Foundation Scholarship. She has lived in southern Greece since 1987, initially teaching English to Greek teenagers before she found her perfect vocation as a tour guide.

