

## Meteora, a climbing paradise!

*Meteora have been known to the Greek people from the monasteries built on the towering rocks; years later became famous for their climbing areas. Meteora are thought to be the largest and most important climbing area of Greece nowadays, with great publicity abroad as well.*

The routes on the rocks of Meteora reach the number of 670 and are shown in the two guidebooks, which can be bought in Kalambaka and in Kastraki. The quality of the rock in Meteora is quite good with very few loose parts. However, familiarization is necessary, as its quality can be very different from the known kinds of rock like limestone etc.



Another characteristic of the climbing area of Meteora is the belay of the routes. In most of them there are bolts and in very few of them you need more gear than some runners and double ropes, of course. Attention, however, is demanded, as the belay of routes below the 6th grade of difficulty is inadequate, which means that there is the possibility of climbing even 20m without belay!

In most routes the distance between the belays is 6-8 m. The more difficult a route becomes the more you notice the presence of more belays.

During my recent visit at this incredible place and to my great disappointment I noticed a pile of rubbish next to Pyrgos Diavolou (= the Tower of the Devil) dropped from the monastery of Metamorphosis that exists on top of a rock some meters higher.

The best season to climb on Meteora is from mid April to the end of June. Of course you can go climbing during the summer months too, but then you'd better select routes that are in the shadow, as the black color of the rock will make things rather tough! In the end it's worth mentioning one of the biggest mysteries of Meteora, the one of the cross kept in the monastery of Varlaam.

In 1348 the Tsar of the Serbs Stephan Dussan placed a big metal cross on top of the most imposing tower of Meteora, Agio Pnevma (= Holy Spirit) to celebrate his victory in Epirus and Thessalia.

Agio Pnevma is a monolithic tower 300 m high, vertical at all sides. The ascent to the top includes continuous passing over the fifth (V+) difficulty grade of free climbing and demands modern climbing gear and experienced alpinists. So somebody must have climbed up the endless 300 m only

with his hands and feet, without any technical support, in order to place the cross up there!!This conclusion seems unthinkable, specially having in mind that no modern alpinist has ever dared something like that, not even motivated by the challenge of the legend.



Finally only the American Mountain Guide Jane Ballistery climbed without any belay the famous Pilier of Dreams. To keep on speculating, the super climber of 1348, after having reached the top, pulled up the cross with a rope, which he also used to climb down tying it on a small tree on the top.

As an old man from Kastraki witnesses, the cross could be seen standing on the top till the 1930s. In summer 1975 a helicopter landed on the top of Agio Pnevma for the needs of a movie. These people found and handed the cross to Varlaam Monastery. The first modern climbers managed to climb up the top a year later after hard efforts. A more rational explanation suggests that an assuming shift erased the traces of climbing. Anyway, what a pity to miss the poetry of such incredible legends stuck on an unfruitful, rational regarding of things.