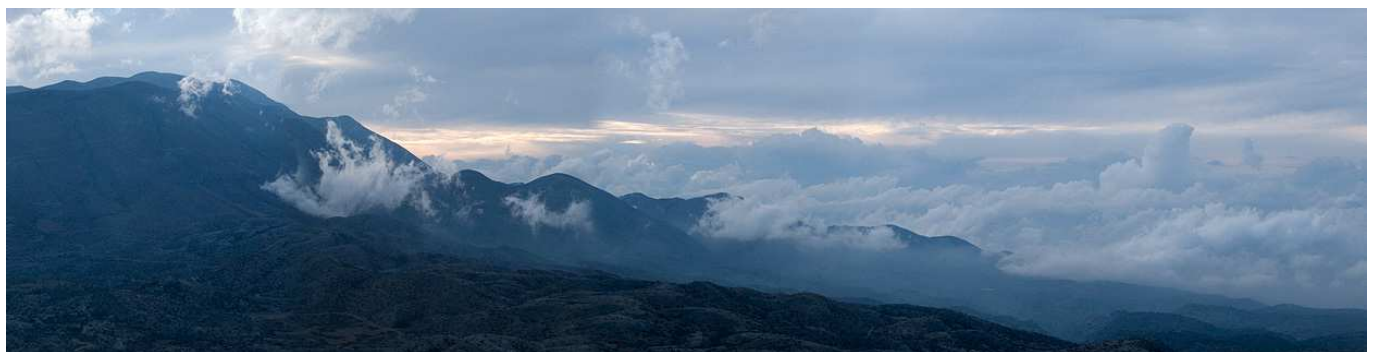


**Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:****The Capella – Observatory at Mount Skinakas****- a Greek-German consortium project at Crete**An article from our NLUK members *Diana P. Bailey* and *Maria Eleftheria*, Crete

The route towards the observatory is well signposted from the village Anogia. Reminders of the old, winding gravel road have been preserved at the edges of the well constructed road towards the Nida plateau. After about 1 mile, a large water reservoir (Vathias) can be seen left-hand on the hillside. It goes quickly uphill.



Occasionally a Mitado, those in earlier times typical, bricked from natural stones accommodation of the shepherds, upraises in the rocky area. I meet some larger herds of sheep. The area is meagre; the terrain is dried up by the summer heat. After well 8 miles I reach a lay-by with prospect far over the landscape (see fig. left). The area is well-kept; bricked seats and tables invite to rest. One mile further on one of the bright domes of the observatory is to be recognized from the road (see fig. title bar).

Short after the road branches left to the observatory. When I was there in October 2011, there was no sign but a well visible, painted with yellow colour, reference on the street. I followed the quite narrow for about 1 and a half mile uphill until it turns off left again after a hairpin curve (see fig. right). The last bit of the road is secured by an open iron-lattice-gate. The observatory is reached after another mile.



The observatory of the astronomical institute of the University of Crete has two “fathers”: The former director of the Max-Plank-Institute for extraterrestrial physics in Garching at Munich, *Gerhard Haerendel*, and his Greek colleague and Doctoral son *Jannis Papamastorakis*.

Inspired by the idea of these two astrophysicists developed in the years 1983-84 to create an observatory for training purposes, the observatory was established by the University of Crete, the Foundation for Research and Technology Hellas (FORTH) and the Max-Planck-Institute for extraterrestrial physics and taken in operation punctually for the appearance of the Halley's comet before Easter 1986.



The location at the eastern edge of the Idha Mountains in approx. 1750 m height, which has been selected by the two professors during a Crete visit in the year 1984, has been tried and tested. Indeed the sky is lightened toward the close Iraklion, but the other cardinal directions show barely or no light contamination. For stargazers, so repeated measurements resulted in, obtain here rather ideal conditions.

The observatory is used both for the training of students, and for the astronomical fundamental research. It is usually constantly taken from April to Octobers from scientist, which often perform time consuming observations during the almost invariably clear nights for which at the large observatories is too little time available.



A guesthouse with more than ten sleeping-places and a large common room with cooking area has been build in 1988. The three-storey main building has been built not far from whereas the 130 cm telescope is located below a 8 meter fiberglass dome in whose upper floor (see fig. above). Altogether the Capella-Observatory has three differently large telescopes. A control room equipped with four workplaces has been arranged on the ground floor of the main building. An old 8 meter dome vaulted original and affordable a well seated conference area nearby. The electricity supply of the observatory is guaranteed by a solar plant. An Internet connection is naturally also present.

The observatory is opened for visitors during the summer months on some days.

The dates are available at the homepage of the institute at <http://skinakas.physics.uoc.gr/en/> in Greek and English language. The page <http://www.capella-observatory.com/> with lots of information's in German and English is updated frequently and contains furthermore more pictorial material.

A hint: visitors should consider that on that meagerly vegetated Skinakas plateau is neither a public toilet, nor the possibility to buy food. Seat possibilities for people waiting are missing, when at visiting days great crowd exists, and there is as well as no shade.



During this tour hiking suitable footwear should belong to the equipment as clothes to slip on since it can become fast very fresh at this height (see fig. above left). Fascinatingly it gives even at this harsh place survival artist of the nature, which can be discovered and admired by attentive visitors (see fig. above right).

I spent the night in the lee of the observatory. On some days the view goes from here to Iraklion. Only a bluish gray landscape is offered to me first in the late afternoon (see fig. below left).

The absolutely spectacular happening with sunset then left me almost breathless. A celebration of colors (see fig. page 4); rapidly changing. Then darkness surrounds me. A strong wind flushes always new cloud formations past me, and with clear sight it seems, as I only need to stretch the hand, in order to reach for the stars.

