

Background

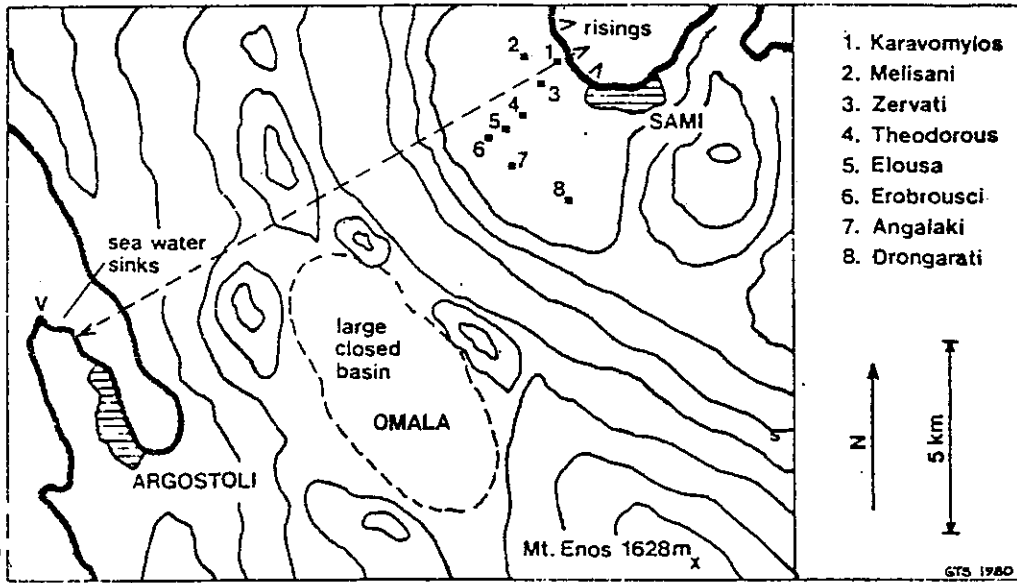
Kephallonia is the largest of the Ionian Islands, but curiously the least commercialised. It lies off the West Coast of Greece about 100 miles south of Corfu and has been featured at least twice by the Media: once by the B.B.C. in the series 'Worlds without Sun' and once in the magazine 'National Geographic'. The phenomena attributed to the Island is that water from the sea sinks at the western end at Argostoli and re-appears 15 miles to the east as risings in the sea. Since the rising water is virtually fresh, the underground streams must be complimented by sources inland.

Although several expeditions in the past, notably the French and Austrians had failed to find significant lengths of passage, the last trip by Englishmen (John Conway et al) reported that large parts of the inland area remained unexplored, mainly because of the thick undergrowth covering the island. With the whole island composed of limestone, and the central upland areas rising to over 1600 metres, prospects for large discoveries seemed good. The available evidence was enough to convince us (and the B.C.R.A. awards committee) that another expedition would be worth while.

The Expedition

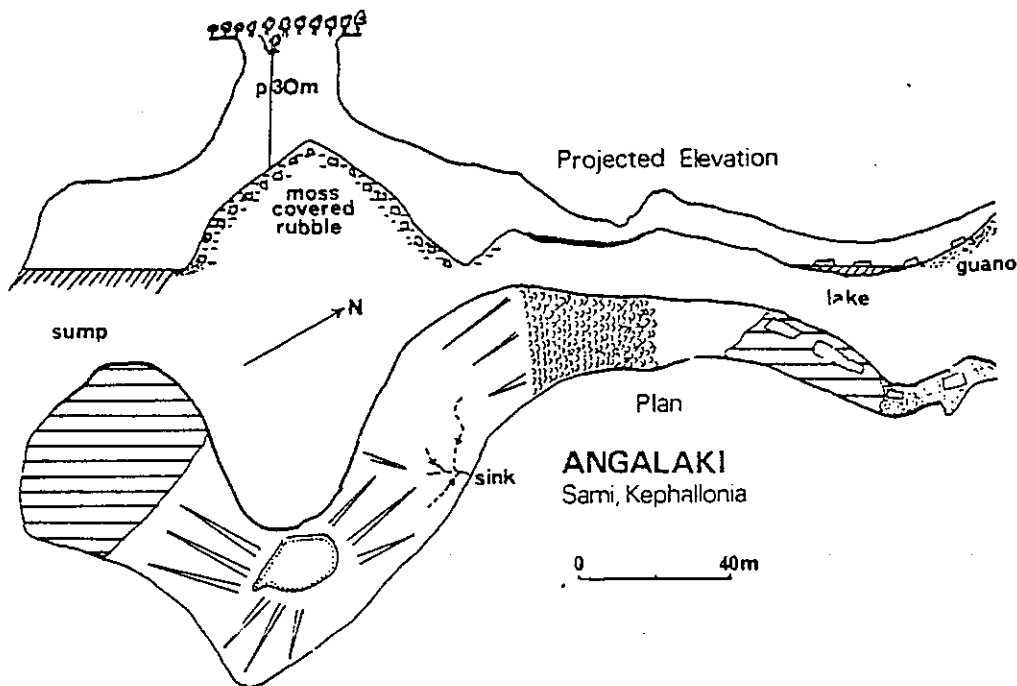
In the latter half of July 1980 John Miriam, Don Vosper and Greg Smith joined a group of cavers from the North and flew to Athens from Gatwick. Even though weight had to be kept to a minimum most members of the 13 strong party managed personal S.R.T. gear and 200 feet of rope each, together with normal caving and bivvi gear.

Once on Kephallonia, our first job was to get to know the locals, and to visit the museum at Argostoli, where we had contacts. By hiring a V.W. Beetle with our grant we were able to cover most of the Island, and ferry parties to survey the most interesting areas. Inevitably we had to start very early in the morning and do most of our walking before the heat of mid-day.



Searching

After practically three weeks of searching the hills and valleys we came to the conclusion that there were no caves of any importance on Kephallonia, other than those already known around the area of Sami: evidence from the locals also supported this conclusion. The terrain was extremely difficult to traverse because of thick bush and prickly scrub. Virtually all the valleys and plateaux were terraced and cultivated in the typical mediteranean style and we guessed that any natural sinks that might have existed were now filled in. The heavy rainfall (typically 30 inches per annum) occurs during the winter months and runs directly off the mountainsides without sinking underground, therefore the plains of Omala and Sami become saturated and act as natural reservoirs.



The Caves

The caves around Sami appear to be remnants of an ancient fossilized system. Nearly all start with an impressive entrance, probably roof collapse, and each ends abruptly in a clear deep sump, with virtually no open passage length. Descriptions are as follows:-

KARAVOMYLOS - Water resurges from a flooded cave into a shallow picturesque lake with overlooking restaurant. The water rushes through a mill-race at the opposite end of the lake, straight into the sea.

DRONCARATI - An impressive show cave, with stairway 30 metres deep to a large chamber 95 metres long, 45 metres wide, and 21 metres high. The chamber is decorated with many large speleothems, many of which have been broken, apparently by an irate cave guide after being sacked!

MELISANI - Another show cave which is in effect a large flooded chamber 160 metres long and 30 metres wide with an opening to the surface. The public are taken in boats around the chamber across crystal clear, brackish water over 20 metres deep. The cave has been dived by the Austrians (as featured in 'Worlds Without Sun') with little result.

ZERVATI - This cave is inland from the reemergences at Karavomylos, and is another large collapsed chamber containing two brackish water lakes. Both lakes have been dived by the Austrians: one leads to another large chamber with no exits, and the other is a blocked passage full of submerged stalactites.

THEODOCIOUS - A spectacular entrance. A pitch, slightly less than 30 metres, drops on a great rubble slope, covered with small trees (makes abseiling in shorts painful). The terminal lake contains eels which are peculiar to Zervati and Melisani.

ELOUSA - Very large, free-climbable crater roughly 150 metres in diameter. A dangerous, sloping pitch in one corner leads to a sump 30 metres lower.

EROBROUSCI - Two parallel shafts which are extremely unstable and terminate in large lakes.

ANCAIACI - The only cave explored which had any sort of open horizontal development. The tree-lined entrance pit, 30 metres deep to the top of a mossy, rubble cone, is very hard to find. One end of the cone ends in a large sump whilst at the other side a passage leads off across a stalagmite floor and waist-deep lake to a guano choke.

To sum up: Kephallonia's a nice place, shame about the caves though. Other members of the expedition were:~ Kev and Margaret Millington, Stan and Ann Rhodes, Ray and Jean Lonsdale, Ian Crossley, Carol Purnell, Roy Roebuck (all N.P.C.) and Steve of C.P.C.

Greg Smith

Greg and John should be doing a slide show of the Expedition soon (when John has mounted his slides!).

change etc etc - like a standard science text with illustrations of the