

Introduction: The Avakas trail is located within the Peyia state forest, on the south-western part of the Akamas Peninsula. The trail was created in 2007 and is managed by the Department of Forests of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment. Administratively, it comes under the Pafos Forest Division - Droushia Forest Station.



Trail - route: Linear path-line 1200 m long (2400 m with return), starting from a parking place which is accessible by car or by foot, through a raw-surface road starting from the St. George – Toxeftra – Lara main road (there is a sign at the junction point), at the southern edge of the Toxeftra gulf, 2.5 km north of St. George, Peyia. The trail concludes at a point inside the Avakas gorge and the walker must return following the same route back. The altitude at the beginning is 45 m and at the end, 150 m.

Degree of difficulty: The degree of difficulty for the first 700 m is 1, whereas for the remaining part it is 2. There are no significant inclinations, and the small degree of difficulty derives mainly from the rather difficult crossings of the river, where someone needs to walk over moist, slippery stepping stones.

General Description: The first part of the trail follows an existing earth road (closed for vehicles) in the middle of an open valley with low, natural, maquis vegetation on the two sides. Gradually the path enters into the gorge and follows a narrow passage with sections made of stone steps alternating with level ground. The last section of the trail virtually follows the riverbed which in most years has permanent water flow, which, however, is significantly reduced towards the end of the summer and in autumn. The route in the gorge is impressive, characterized in summer by a shady, rather cool environment which is in sharp contrast to the hot feel in the open areas.

The Avakas gorge is the most impressive and most famous gorge in Cyprus. It is characterized by high and precipitous cliffs (canyon type) with interesting geology, permanent water presence and important flora and fauna. It is an attraction for thousands of visitors, foreigners and locals, who enjoy unique experiences of contact with nature. The entire area of the Akamas Peninsula, including the Avakas gorge, is part of the European Natura 2000 network. Worth mentioning is that the biggest part of the gorge is expected to be declared as a micro-reserve with the aim to permanently protect the rare flora and other biodiversity elements of the site.

Geology-History: According to scientific evidence, the creation of the gorge began after the uplifting of the area from the sea floor, million years ago, which was followed by the constant erosive activity of the Avgas river which was carving for ages the erodible, sloping limestone rocks composed of loams, chalks, reef limestone, grain limestone and bentonitic clays. In the old past, the gorge has played an important role to the prosperity of local populations, offering shelter, food and water. Today the gorge is considered one of the masterpieces of Cyprus nature and a paradise for hikers and nature lovers, who visit the area in thousands, every year.

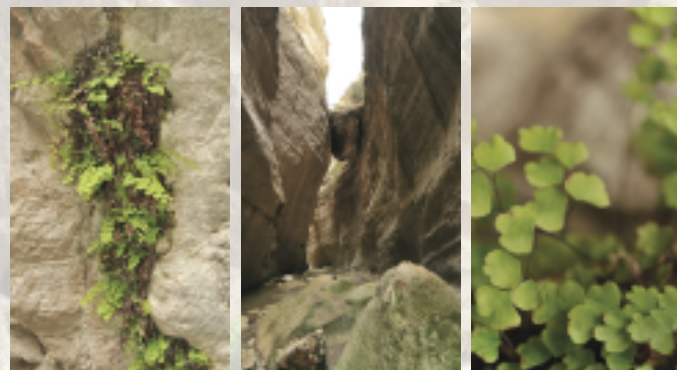
Fauna: In addition to the rich flora (see section of points of interest), if somebody is careful and a little lucky he can see a wide variety of animal species such as the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), the hare (*Lepus europaeus*), the hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus dorotheae*), the eel (*Anquilla anquilla*), the stallion lizard (*Laudacia stelio cypriaca*) and the 3 frog species living in Cyprus, namely the tree frog (*Hyla savignyi*), the marsh frog (*Rana bedriagae*) and the iridescent frog (*Bufo viridis*), as well as large variety of local and migratory birds.



Among the most common permanent residents of the area are three endemic bird species, the Cyprus wheatear (*Oenanthe cypriaca*), Cyprus warbler (*Sylvia melanothorax*) and the scops owl (*Otus scops cyprius*). Other residents are the little owl (*Athene noctua*), the partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and the wild pigeon (*Columba livia*). Many years ago, at the bluffs of the gorge, the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) used to nest in abundance, but today is a very rare visitor in the wider Akamas area. If there is enough silence, someone can hear even sounds of the fruit bat (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*), a strictly protected species roosting in a cave located in the area of the gorge.

Hundreds of pigeons and few pairs of kestrels nest on the highest cliffs of the gorge. Quite often, two very rare bird species can be observed, the blue rock thrush (*Moticola solitarius*) and the wall-creeper (*Tichodroma muraria*). At the same cliffs, a large number of wild apiaries were nesting, providing considerable yields of honey to local people. A wooden rafter, hanging for about one century in a hole on the highest rocks, reminds of the fateful attempt of a Cypriot peasant, to harvest the hive that was nesting there.

Points of interest



Along the trail, there are numbered signs interpreting natural elements, mostly plants and in some cases rock types, as follows:

1. *Olea europaea* – Olive tree: Evergreen tree up to 15 m high (alt. 0-1000 m).
2. Gypsum selinite, rock type.
3. *Dittrichia viscosa* subsp. *angustifolia* – Fleabane: Viscous small sub-shrub up to 1,5 m high (alt. 0-1500 m) growing on disturbed grounds and near water.
4. *Pistacia lentiscus* – Lentisc: Evergreen shrub or small tree up to 3 m high (alt. 0-600 m). Its resin was used for mouth refreshment and for wound sterilization. The fruits are still used for sausage flavoring.
5. *Juniperus phoenicea* – Phoenician juniper: Aromatic evergreen, coniferous shrub or small tree up to 10 m high (alt. 0-500 m), a basic constituent of the Mediterranean maquis vegetation.
6. *Pistacia terebinthus* – Terebinth: Common deciduous shrub or small tree up to 6 m high (alt. 0-1600 m). Mature fruits are edible and used in making terebinthus pies.
7. *Sarcopoterium spinosum*. – Thorny burnet: Small shrub up to 40 cm, usually found on rocky hillsides (alt. 0-1250 m). The ripe seeds find various uses in traditional medicine.
8. Stump of old Olive tree, 800 years old, with 8.40 m stem circumference.
9. *Genista fasselata* subsp. *fasselata* – Thorny gorse: Spiny shrub up to 2 m high (alt. 0-1000 m) common in burned and grazed areas.



10. *Calycotome villosa* – Thorny broom: Common spiny shrub up to 2 m high (alt. 0-1100 m). In the beginning of spring, its mass flowering gives a special yellow color and flavor to the area.
11. *Teucrium micropodioides* – Germander: Common endemic aromatic shrub up to 20 cm (alt. 0-900 m).
12. *Hyparrhenia hirta* – Thatching grass: Perennial herb up to 1m high, found on dry, rocky fields and hillsides, and along roads (alt. 0-1400 m).
13. *Urginea maritima* – Squill: Common perennial herb up to 1.5m high, found in sandy beaches, and on dry hillsides (alt. 0-1350 m).
14. *Asphodelus aestivus* – Common asphodel: Common perennial herb, typical of grazed areas with guarigue vegetation and compacted soil (alt. 0-1900 m.).
15. *Rhamnus lycioides* subsp. *graecus* – Buckthorn: Spiny shrub, characteristic of the driest areas in Cyprus (alt. 0-900 m).



16. *Ceratonia siliqua* – Carob tree: Evergreen tree up to 10 m high, growing in the wild but also widely cultivated (alt. 0-1100 m).
17. *Arundo donax* – Giant cane: Tall perennial cane, up to 6 m high, found along rivers and on damp soils (alt. 0-600 m). It is used in the traditional basketry and building.
18. *Tamarix smyrnensis* – Tamarisk: Native deciduous shrub or small tree up to 4m high, found along streams, marshy ground and moist places (alt. 0-1400 m).



19. *Cupressus sempervirens* var. *horizontalis* – Mediterranean Cypress: Evergreen tree up to 30 m high (alt. 0-1200 m).

20. *Smilax aspera* – Green brier: Common evergreen, climbing shrub, with stems up to 4m long (alt. 0-1400 m).

21. *Styrax officinalis* – Storax: Deciduous shrub or small tree up to 8 m high (alt. 0-1200 m). The gum of storax, is used in perfumery and medicine.

22. *Nerium oleander* – Oleander: Indigenous evergreen shrub up to 2-4 m high (alt. 0-900 m) occurring only along streams.

23. Reef limestone, geological formation.

24. *Ballota integrifolia*: Endemic spiny shrub, up to 1.5 m high (alt. 0-750 m).

25. Marly chalk, geological formation.

26. *Lithodora hispidula* subsp. *versicolor* – Gromwell: Perennial small shrub up to 60 cm high (alt. 0-700 m).

27. Grain stone, geological formation.

28. *Centaurea akamantis* - Akamas centaury: A very rare endemic sub-shrub up to 60 cm, confined to the Avakas gorge and to another neighboring gorge (a threatened species– protected by Habitats Directive).

29. *Adiantum capillus veneris* - Adiantum: Perennial herb up to 60 cm high (alt. 0-1300 m).



Be aware of the following!

- ☛ Fire hazard in the area is extremely high. Lighting of fire, at any part of the trail, is strictly prohibited. Avoid smoking during walking.
- ☛ Entering the gorge during heavy rainfall must be avoided, as the water level in the river may rise abruptly.
- ☛ Keep on trail; it is essential for your own safety and for other walkers' safety.
- ☛ Moist stones along the trail are very slippery and potentially dangerous. Use appropriate shoes and mind your steps.
- ☛ Be aware! There is always a possibility of falling rocks from the sides of the gorge, especially during winter or when grazing animals are walking on the gorge sides.
- ☛ Be as quiet as possible during your walk, it is good for other visitors and for wildlife as well.
- ☛ Avoid cutting or collecting plants and disturbing wildlife; it is damaging and is prohibited.
- ☛ Do not litter the area, take refuse with you.
- ☛ For any query please contact the local Forest Station of Droushia, tel. 26332322, 263321108 or the HQrs of the Pafos Forest Division, tel. 26991858, 26918860, email: paphosdiv@fd.moa.gov.cy.
- ☛ In case of fire call 1407 (24 hours).



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Nature Trail «Avakas Gorge»