

# Greece

SPORT CLIMBING: THE BEST OF  
2014 EDITION

Aris Theodoropoulos

TERRAIN  
  
EDITIONS

# 01 METEORA

THESSALY  
39.71327  
21.615777

GRADE RANGE	up to 5b+	5c to 6a+	6b to 7a	7a+ to 7c	7c+ & above
No. OF ROUTES	1	23	15	10	2



Nikos Hadjis

The spectacular location of Kastraki village with the towers of Meteora around it.

## METEORA

Meteora (pronounced meh-TEH-o-ra) is an intriguing place. The word *metéora* means 'suspended in the air', for this cluster of massive rock towers rises from the verdant plain of Thessaly in an almost mysterious and magical manner. The **conglomerate towers**, which overlook the village of *Kastráki* and the town of *Kalabáka*, feature nearly 800 single- and multi-pitch routes on towers, pinnacles and pillars. In contrast with 'ordinary' sport climbing, the peculiar nature of the rock, the otherworldly surroundings, and the ending of each route on a summit truly make climbing at Meteora a singular experience. The first people to climb these majestic towers were hermits sometime in the 11th or 12th century, who sought answers to their existential quest on these summits between earth and sky. The unusual and primitive beauty of the rocky valley has always attracted humans like an invisible magnet.

Meteora is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the wider region belongs to the Natura 2000 environmental network of protected areas.

**Geology:** The characterful conglomerates of Meteora were laid down as far back as 60 million years ago. The materials were deposited at the border of the Thessaly plain when the prehistoric sea waters, which once covered the plain, receded. The rock pinnacles and their distinctive lines were then revealed and sculpted over the millennia, inch by inch, by the forces of earthquakes, water and wind.

**Climbing:** The texture of Meteora rock results from its unique mix of pebbles, cobbles and larger stones packed into a rock surface which feels like concrete but is, in fact, a mixture of sandstone and conglomerate. Oftentimes, cobbles have come loose from the rock to leave shallow holes in their place. At first it can be hard to trust these small, often downward-sloping pebbles as handholds and footholds, but you will gradually realize that they are solid – at least on popular routes, where rock is cleaner and more solid thanks to thousands of ascents. (*Tip: don't deviate from the line of the route!*)

The **climbing style** is primarily balancy and slabby on crimpy pebbles.



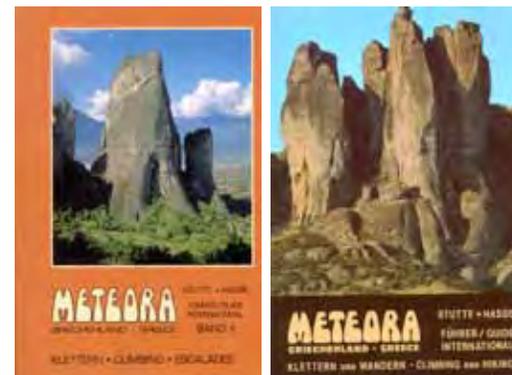
Francisco Taranto Jr.

Caroline Ciavaldini on the 2nd pitch of the modern classic 'Action Direct' (page 1)

**Guidebooks:** The two German pioneers of Meteora climbing, *Dietrich Hasse* and *Heinz Lothar Stutte*, wrote up Meteora climbing in two guidebooks:

1. *Meteora Climbing and Hiking Guide* (1986). Contains the first 230 routes up until 1986.
2. *Meteora Climbing Part II* (2000). The second volume contains the additional 440 routes bolted between 1986 and 2000. (Since 2000, an additional 150 routes have been opened.)

At the time they were published, the style of these guidebooks was innovative; but today the black-and-white diagrams and strange, almost cryptic symbols, are hard to understand and wholly unfamiliar to the young sport climbers.



The Meteora guidebooks can be purchased in Kastraki, at *Taverna Paradisos* or at *Camping Vrachos*.

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**Getting to Meteora:** Located in Central Greece, Meteora is 357km northwest of Athens.

**From the Athens International Airport,** take the Attiki Odos motorway in the direction towards Elefsina. Exit at No 8 (Greek Motorway A1/European Route E75) in the direction of Lamia. After approx. 215km, you will come to the outskirts of Lamia. Exit at E65 and drive towards Karditsa/Trikala. When you get to Karditsa (approx. 90km) follow the ring road, which bypasses the city center, towards Trikala. When you get to Trikala (approx. 28km), follow the ring road, again towards Kalabaka and Meteora. When you get to Kalabaka (approx. 26km), continue towards Kastraki (2km), the village built in the shadow of the Meteora towers. The main road through Kastraki is the same one leading to the rock towers.

*Note: The nearest airport to Meteora is Thessaloniki, to the northeast (258km)*

#### Local info

Hermits' retreats date from the 11th and 12th century. Construction of the monasteries started sometime in the 14th century; the death-defying, long and painstaking process of building them on the summits is inconceivable, even by today's standards. By the end of the 15th century, 24 monasteries crowned the summits of Meteora. Until 1925, the only way up to the monasteries was to climb a rope-and-wood ladder with more than 100 rungs, or to sit in a net made of thick rope and be hauled up to the top by the monks. According to local lore, when one of the monks was asked how often the rope was

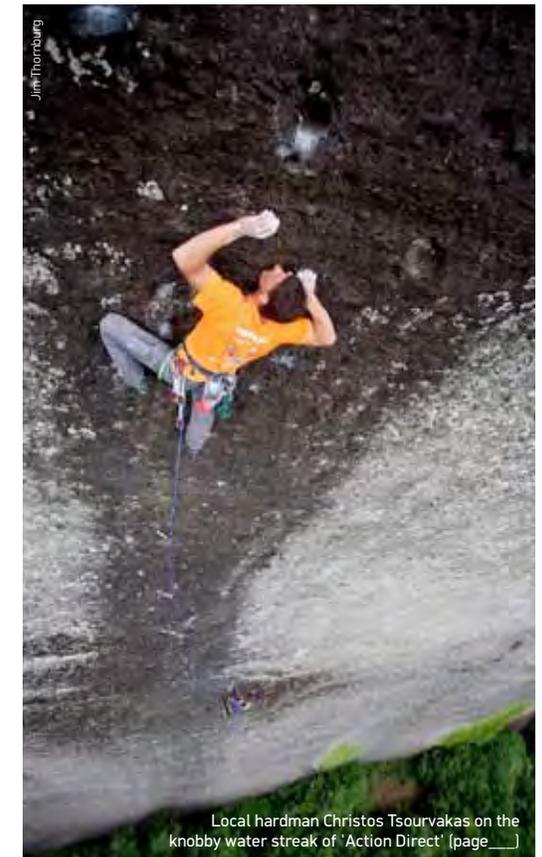
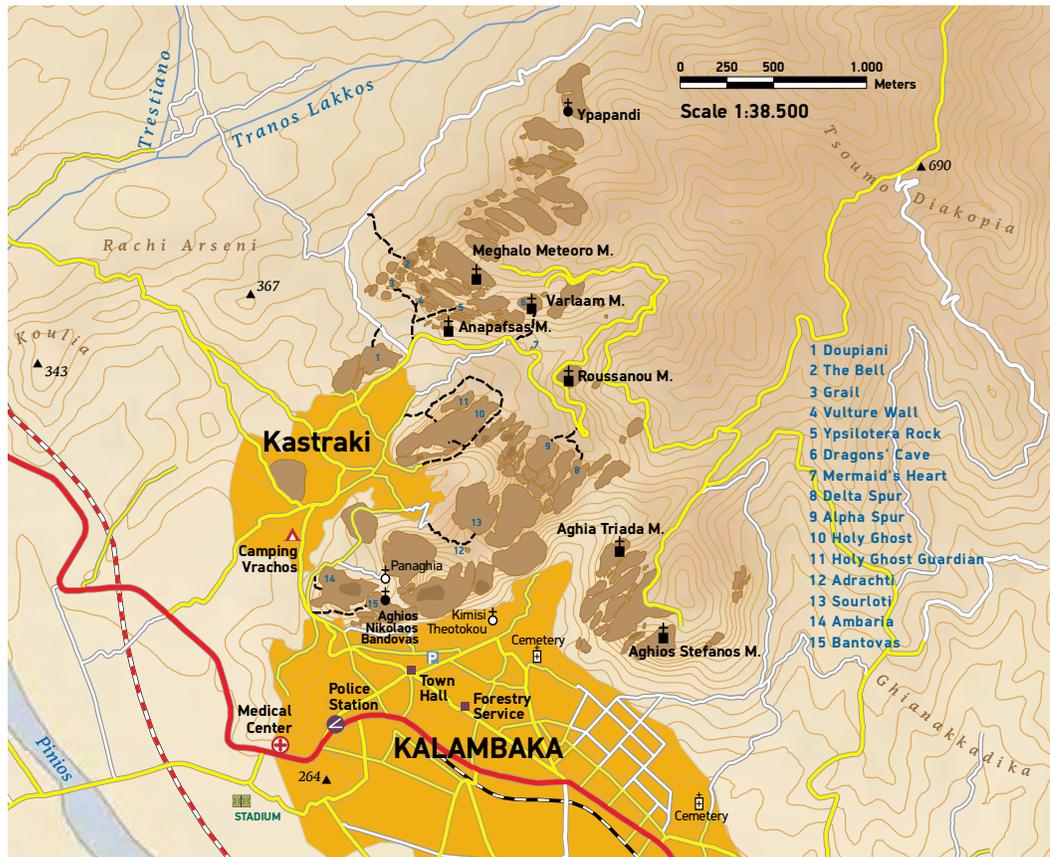
replaced, he replied "only when it breaks". Presently, only six monasteries are inhabited. Sadly, the past aura of mystique has dissipated along with most of the monasteries. The towers of Meteora are, of course, famous the world over; more so after some scenes from the 1981 James Bond movie *'For Your Eyes Only'* were filmed here. The weekends bring busloads of tourists to the six monasteries; souvenir stalls are set up all around the parking lots, and monks perform mostly clerical duties. If you do plan to visit the monasteries, keep in mind that you must be dressed 'appropriately': this means your arms must be covered, men cannot wear shorts, and women must wear long skirts; this 'rule' applies to children as well.

**Accommodation:** There are several small hotels, B&Bs, rooms for rent, and an organized campsite (*Camping Vrachos*) in Kastraki. There is also a smaller campsite near the tower of Doupiani. The nearby town of Kalabaka also features many accommodation choices, though it's not a scenic as staying under the cliffs in Kastraki.

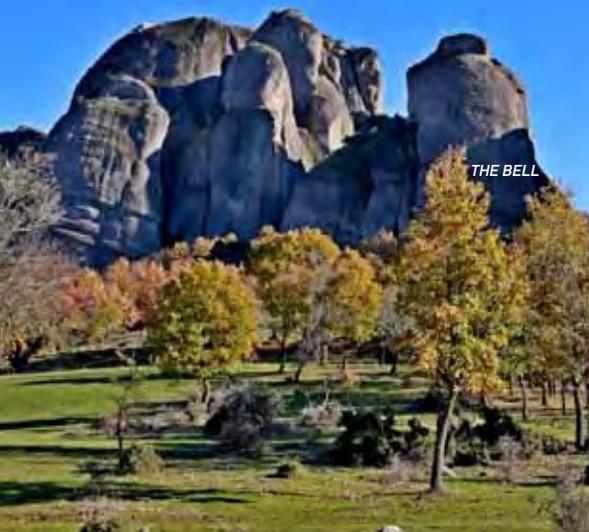
**Food/Shopping:** Basic shopping can be done at mini-markets in Kastraki; otherwise you can find supermarkets at nearby Kalabaka. The food in the little restaurants of Kastraki is very good. The entire Thessaly region produces everything and is renowned for its meat; if you are an omnivore, try local sausage or liver along with wild 'mountain greens' and baked *feta* cheese. The family-owned restaurants *Ziogas* and *Paradisos* are both good. (At *Paradisos*, you can meet *Vangelis Batsios*, one of the local climbers/route setters, who will be happy to answer any questions you have about Meteora.)

#### Links

	visitmeteora.travel meteora-greece.com
Accommodation	ziogasrooms.com thaliarooms.gr hotelkastraki.gr hotel-adrachti.com
Camping	campingkastraki.gr



## 01 METEORA

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GRAIL

THE BELL

## THE BELL

One of the towers in the 'west group' located north of Doupiani, this cliff has fairly good rock quality and it truly does resemble a gigantic bell.

☀️ **Sun:** After 14.00 **Exposure:** SW

**Approach:** From Kastraki, head northeast towards the monasteries. After Doupiani tower, turn left onto a concrete road which goes uphill, then becomes a dirt road. Park 850m past the turn (39.728388, 21.618742). The Bell is just visible about 200m to the southeast; walk along the path through a field. **Walking time:** 10 min. **Return:** Rappel twice down 'Pathfinder': 1 x 50m and 1 x 40m.



1 **Pathfinder** 3★ 6b+ 100m

**3 pitches.** A modern, well-bolted route up a consistently hard wall with an impressive direct exit. **Pitch 1:** 6a+ 40m, 14 bolts. A steep slab. **Pitch 2:** 6b 30m, 12 bolts. Wall climbing. **Pitch 3:** 6b+ 30m, 10 bolts. A small overhang. *FA G. Vaiou, Y. Telis: 6/1999*

2 **Interamerican (Direct)** 3★ 6c 100m

**4 pitches.** One of the best-protected routes in Meteora, which is why Greek climbers renamed it from the original tongue-twisting Allemannischer Schelledanz to 'Interamerican' (a large insurance agency). **Pitch 1:** 6a 35m, 11 bolts. A vertical wall. **Pitch 2:** 6a+ 30m, 9 bolts. Directly up the wall to a bulge. **Pitch 3:** 6a 20m, 6 bolts. A steep slab to a break below the Bell cap. **Pitch 4:** 6c 15m, 3 bolts. A small overhang. (There is also a 4b variation traversing far left.) *FA G. Rieth, T. Kluge: 10/1990*

3 **Carillon of the Bell (Direct)** 2★ 6c 100m

**4 pitches.** Yet another classic, with some runoff bits but well-protected cruxes. **Pitch 1:** 5c 30m, 4 bolts. A steep slab. **Pitch 2:** 5b 20m, 3 bolts. Bigger cobbles on this slab. **Pitch 3:** 6a 40m, 8 bolts. A steep wall with an easier variation to the right. **Pitch 4:** 6c 15m, 3 bolts. Finishes as for 'Interamerican'. (There is a very easy but unprotected 4b variation to the far right.) *FA H.L. Stutte, D. Hasse: 5/1983. Direct finish by M. Mittasch, J. Wunsche, J. Gerald: 3/1992*



## GRAIL

Grail (originally *Kelch*) is a distinctive tower with two summits north of Doupiani. The more impressive of the two, and the highest summit looks like an enormous upright grail, and it is easily discernible from the road.

**Approach:** Park immediately past the tower of Doupiani at an open spot off to the side of the road leading to the monasteries (39.722851, 21.622506). Follow the well-

The airy passage of 'Egg Dance'



defined trail northwest to the foot of the tower where the slabby East Ridge begins. **Walking time:** 10 min.

**Return:** The normal descent is from the west side via two rappels (1 x 35m, 1 x 30m). Over the last few years an additional, airy rappel was established on the east side (1 x 40m, 1 x 45m). Either way be very careful and secure yourself in order to approach the edge of the cliff to begin rappelling. If you cannot or will not cross over, you can descend from the previous summit and the route 'Egg Dance' itself via three rappels.

☀️ **Sun:** Until 14.00 **Exposure:** E

4 **Egg Dance** 2★ 6a+ A1 130m

**5 pitches.** One of the most celebrated routes in Meteora, it goes up the east ridge of the first summit and then across the airy passage onto the cone of the Grail. Rack: Some small-to-medium cams and a set of stoppers. **Pitch 1:** 5b 25m, 3 bolts. The first few meters of the slab are slippery and steep but then there are big cobbles. **Pitch 2:** 5c+ 25m, 7 bolts. A steep but wide ridge. **Pitch 3:** 5b 40m, 2 bolts. A wall and crack requiring nuts and cams. **Pitch 4:** 3 20m, no bolts. An easy scramble, but take care: there is loose rock. **Pitch 5:** A1 6a+, 6 bolts. Down-climb to the gap between the two cliffs and cross over, aided by the permanent slings. (It can also be done free as a 6b; easier for the tall.) Then, climb the airy vertical wall (6a+). *FA H.L. Stutte, Otto Scheda: 4/1982*

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SOURLOTI



## SOURLOTI

A huge monolithic tower looming over the east side of Kastraki, to the left of Adrachti. The spectacular vertical south face of Sourloti features some of the best rock in Meteora and wall climbs that are just as good.

**Approach:** From Kastraki, head towards Kalabaka. Shortly before you come to the highest point (beneath Ambaria tower), you will see a narrow road to the left. Attention – sharp turn! The road leads back towards the houses at the highest point of Kastraki. Near its end, the road features two uphill turns, and it stops at a parking area by a chapel and cemetery (39.714367, 21.623365).

The path starts there; it goes uphill through a wooded area and leads to the col and the foot of Adrachti. From there, follow a deep trough/path to the left which angles towards the base of the south face of Sourloti.

**Walking time:** 10-12 min

**Return:** Three rappels down the route 'Sophocles' (1 x 45m, 1 x 40m, 1 x 50m). It is also possible to descend from 'Line of the Falling Drops' with four rappels or from 'Pebble in the Sky' with three rappels.

☀ **Sun:** After 12.00 **Exposure:** S

## 1 Line of the Falling Drops 3★ 6a 180m

**6 pitches.** A brilliant direct line on steep slabs (originally Linie des Fallenden Tropfens). To your standard rack add some long slings and one or two large cams for the last pitch. **Pitch 1:** 3+ 25m, 1 bolt. Directly up the big knobs and cobbles; use slings for protection. **Pitch 2:** 6a 30m, 4 bolts. A steep slab with smaller cobbles. **Pitch 3:** 6a 45m, 3 bolts. More steep slab climbing. **Pitch 4:** 5c+ 25m, 3 bolts. Delicate face climbing on the vertical wall. **Pitch 5:** 6a 30m, 5 bolts. Climb up the right side of the vertical black streak. **Pitch 6:** 5b 15m, no bolts. A fist crack.

FA H.L. Stutte, D. Hasse: 6/1985

## 2 Sophocles 3★ 6b 180m

**6 pitches (6a+ obligatory).** A superb well-protected slab and face climb that steepens to the final powerful crux moves. The route is not named after the ancient Greek playwright, as you'd expect, but after a very likeable old waiter by the same name at Ziogas Tavern in Kastraki. When he was younger, this Sophocles would climb up the 'Chimney of the Lambs' (4c 100m) using hardly any protection, and then pull his lambs up to the summit plateau with a rope. He would let them graze freely and bring the fattened lambs back down in the autumn! **Pitch 1:** 3+ 30m, no bolts. Climb

up big cobbles and then right on easy rock. It's runout but some knobs provide relief by 'slinging' them. **Pitch 2:** 6b 45m, 6 bolts. Work your way up and to the right with devils moves connecting the big knobs. **Pitch 3:** 6a+ 45m, 6 bolts. Face climbing with difficult rockovers between the bolts. **Pitch 4:** 6a+/b 30m, 7 bolts. Vertical wall with tricky pebble-pulling. **Pitch 5:** 6b 30m, 5 bolts. Powerful start over a bulge but very well-bolted to a steep slab finish. Glorious views at the summit!

FA A. Theodoropoulos, D. Bakalis: 5/1996

## 3 Pebble in the Sky 3★ 7a+ 180m

**5 pitches.** A beautiful black streak originally named *Kiesel Am Himmel*. The first two (harder) pitches are vertical and climbing on the protruding pebbles is fun, albeit runout. **Pitch 1:** 6b+ 25m, 7 bolts. A wall climb with some bigger cobbles. **Pitch 2:** 7a+ 25m, 12 bolts. A thin vertical wall. **Pitch 3:** 6a+/b 35m, 6 bolts. An easier pitch, even though it is the route's psychological crux! **Pitch 4:** 6a 45m, 7 bolts. An open groove. **Pitch 5:** 5a 15m, 2 bolts. An easier groove.

FA R.D. Kolbe, A.Kress: 4/1990



Nicky Dyal on the provocative black streak of 'Pebble in the Sky' 7a+.