



GREECE

105<sup>th</sup> Primary School of Thessaloniki

## Our paradise nooks

1. Olympus Mt
2. Axios-Loudias-Aliakmonas wetland
3. Cholomontas Mt



## Mt OLYMPUS the first national park



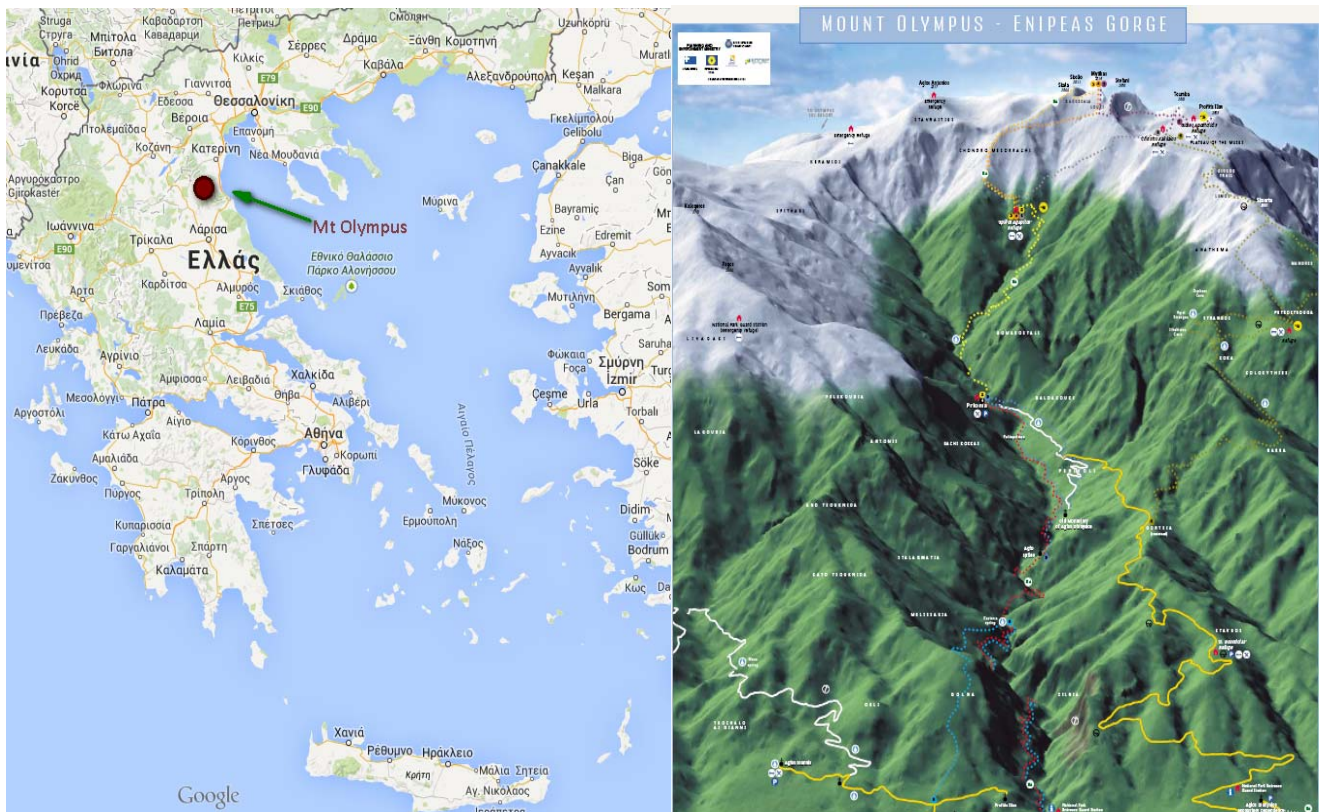
In 1938, Olympus, the highest Greek mountain, the residence of the twelve ancient gods, was the first area which **was declared as a National Park**. About 50 years ago a special regime was enforced to protect this unique part of our country.

The aim was the preservation of the natural environment; of the flora, fauna and natural landscapes, as well as of its cultural and other values. Scientific research had to be supported and people had to become aware of the environmental conditions. Furthermore tourism had to be developed in the wider area.

Specific laws prohibit any kind of exploitation in the east side of the mountain, about 10,000 acres, which constitutes the core of the National Park. The wider area around it was designated as "peripheral zone of the National Park" so that its management and exploitation won't affect negatively the protection of the core.

Olympus is internationally known as for its important ecological characteristics and incomparable natural beauty as well as for its strong relationship with ancient *Greek mythology*. The importance of the National Park has been recognized not only in Greece and Europe but all over the world. In 1981 UNESCO declared "**Olympus a Biosphere Reserve**". The European Community has included Olympus in the list of "The Most Important Bird areas of the European Community".





## LOCATION

Mount Olympus is located on the border of Macedonia and Thessaly between the prefectures of Pieria and Larissa. The **highest point of Mount Olympus, Mytikas**, is located 263 km from Athens and 78 km from Thessaloniki as the crow flies and 18 km from the coast of Pieria and 24 km from Katerini.

## SIZE

Olympus expands over **approximately 500 km<sup>2</sup>** and covers an essentially circular area with a width of approximately 25 km and a circumference of 80 km. The Olympus National Park covers an area of 238,411,000 m<sup>2</sup> with the heart being 40 million m<sup>2</sup>.

## MORPHOLOGY

Mount Olympus is **highest mountain in Greece** and the **second highest mountain in the Balkans**. The terrain contains many charming and splendid features amongst which are **sheer rocky peaks, deep gorges, alpine fields and thick forest** all combining to create the rare magic of Mount Olympus. In total there are 52 peaks ranging from altitudes of 760 m to 2918 m which combined with the sheer ravines create scenes of unique beauty.

## GEOLOGY

The strata of Mount Olympus started to form over 200 million years ago at the bottom of a comparably shallow sea from which it emerged and began to gradually take its shape. During the period of the Ice Age some significant changes took place in to the shape of the mountain **as the ice melted bringing huge layers of rock from the peak of the mountain to its foothills**. With the melting of the last ice around 10,000 years ago Mount Olympus took on its final shape.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

There are no lakes on Mount Olympus with the exception of the small periodic lakes in the areas of Bara and Dristela which are formed by melting snow. Furthermore a **small man-made lake** was created in recent years at the mouth of Xerolakki Stream above the village of Petra. Officially no mention has been made of large caves, which do not of course rule them out. However, there are frequent many small caves, chasms, caves created by the snow and crevices. Many of the streams have a water flow throughout the year and due to the exceptional quality of the water it is channeled directly into the local water supply. **There are many streams on Olympus**, but few are to be found at an altitude of over 1000 m.

## CLIMATE

The climate of Olympus is affected by its geographical location, size, strata and the exposure of the mountain slopes. Generally speaking it has a Mediterranean climate, warm and dry in the summer and wet in the winter. For **approximately seven months of the year it is covered in snow** (from November to May). Mount Olympus has a high level of precipitation throughout the year in the form of snow in the winter and rain and hail in the summer. In fact the level of precipitation on Olympus is 3 to 4 times higher than that in Athens or Thessaloniki (1100 to 1800 mm of precipitation a year, while in Thessaloniki precipitation is 500 mm and in Athens 400 mm annually). **Half of the precipitation falls as snow** and the other half in the form of rain and hail.

The average temperature in the winter ranges from **-20o C to +10o C** and in the summer from **0o C to 20o C**, though this is not to say that there are not some exceptions that fall outside these ranges. **Every 100 m up Mount Olympus the temperature drops by approximately half a degree.** Thus if at sea level the temperature is 20o C at the same time on Mytikas Peak (2918 m) the temperature will be approximately 5o C. Finally **strong winds are a common phenomenon on Mount Olympus** and sometimes the wind reaches **speeds of over 100 km per hour.**

## MYTHOLOGY – HISTORY



The shape of Olympus, the polymorphous and changeable beauty of its nature, the fog covered peaks and low clouds bringing about frequent the under storms, filled people with awe and admiration from ancient times. There are recent archaeological finds that go back to the Iron Age.

Prehistoric man chose to live at the foot of this glorious mountain. **Inspired by its mystery he created the legends that gave birth to the Twelve Greek Gods.**

The twelve gods live in ravines, “the mysterious folds of Olympus” according to Homer. They have their palaces there. Pantheon (today’s Mytikas) is their meeting place. Their tempestuous discussions are heard by the god of gods Zeus sitting on his imposing throne (today’s Stefani). From there he unlooses his thunders showing “his godly wrath”. In Iliad Olympus is described as magnificent, long, glorious and full of trees.

At the foot of the mountain, 5 kilometres from the sea, a sacred Macedonian city is dedicated to Zeus (Dias) and is called Dion. It is estimated that it flourished between the 5th century B.C. and the 5th century A.C. The excavations, that started in 1928 and are still going on, revealed archaeological finds of the Macedonian, Greek and Roman Era. They are exhibited in the museum of Dion. Piblia and Livithra are two more ancient cities near Olympus and are closely related to the legend of Orpheus and the Orphic Secret ceremonies.

The history of Olympus continued being turbulent even under the Turkish occupation. The mountain was used as a hiding place for the famous “armatol” fighting the “yoke of the tyrant”. During the German invasion in 1941, the Greek army along with Australian and New Zealand units fought important battles. Later on the Greek Resistance found a nestling place there.

**The whole Olympus has been declared an archaeological and historical place in order to preserve its monumental and historical physiognomy.**

## FLORA



**Over 1,700 species of plants** have been recorded on Mount Olympus which **represent 25% of all Greek flora**. Most of those plants exist in low altitudes. They are the usual Mediterranean and centre-European kinds. In the treeless alpine zone there are 150 kinds of plants. Half of those can be found only in the Balkan Peninsula and **23 are native** and are as follows:

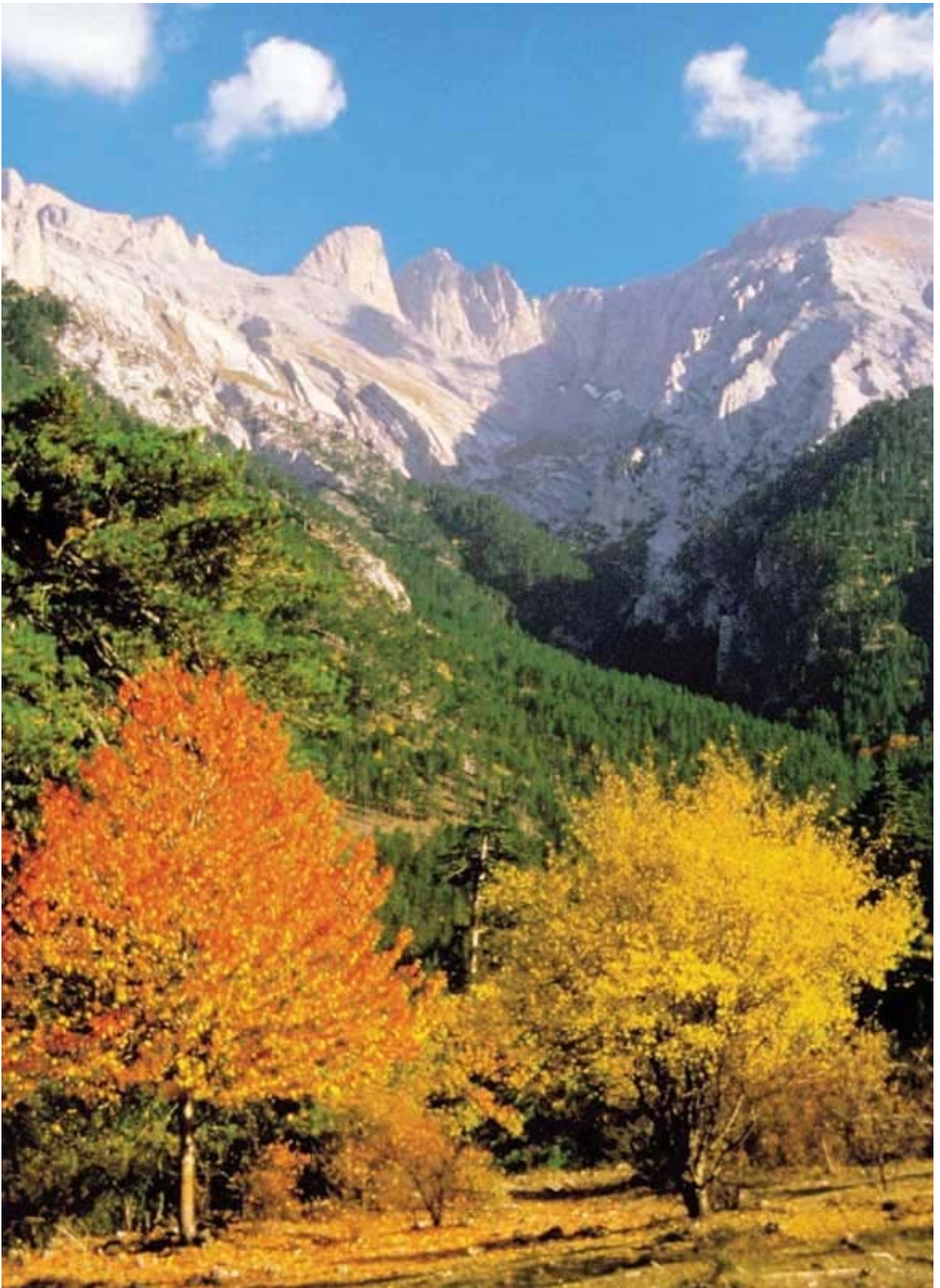
Achillea ambrosiaca, Alyssum handelii, Asperula muscosa, Aubrieta thessala, Campanula oreadum, Carum adamovicii, Centaurea incomplete, Centaurea litochorea, Centaurea transies, Cerastium theophrasti, Coincla nivalis, Erysimum olympicum, Festuca olympica, Genista sakellariadis, Jankaea heldreichii, Ligusticum olympicum, Melampyrus ciliatum, Ophrys helenae, Poa thessala, Potentilla deorum, Silene oligantha, Viola striis - notata, Viola pseudograeca



## FAUNA

**Thirty- two species of mammals** have been recorded on Mount Olympus the most common being the chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), wolf (*Canis lupus*) wild pig (*Sus scrofa*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), ferret (*Martes foina*), squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), jackal (*Canis aureus*), wild cat (*Felis sylvestris*), etc. Furthermore **108 species of bird** have been recorded which find refuge in the dense forests and the sheer rocky mountain slopes. Some of these species of fauna are under threat such as the chamois, golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and the rare woodpecker and are strictly protected under international agreements. Additionally the streams and the small lakes are home to a significant number of amphibians and reptiles and a **vast number of butterflies** for which Olympus is famous.



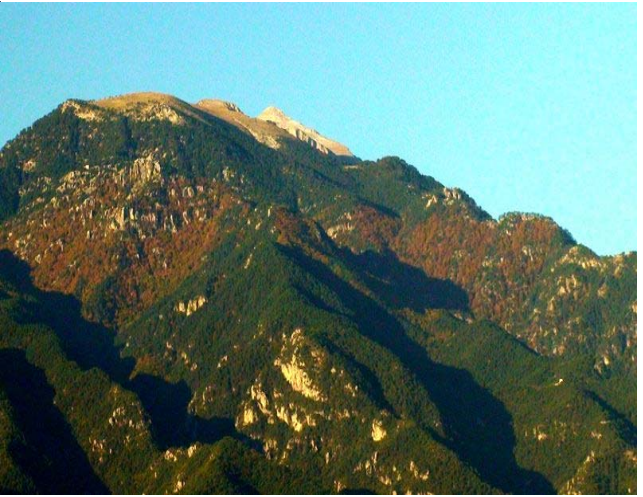








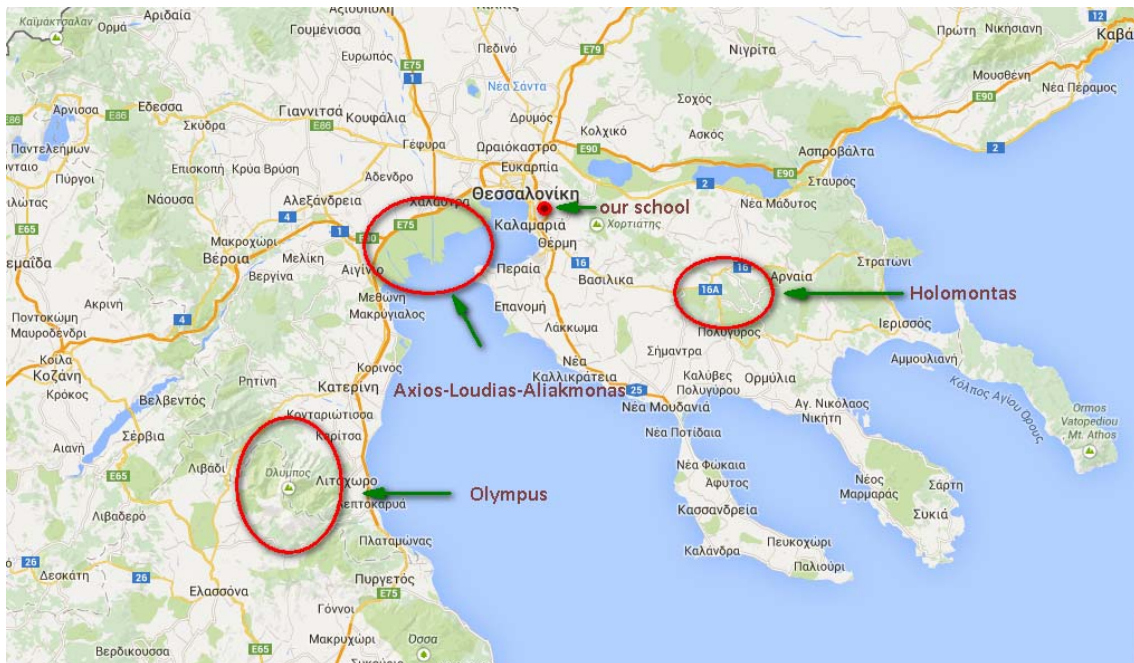






## Axios - Loudias - Aliakmonas National Park

A natural treasure at the edge of town



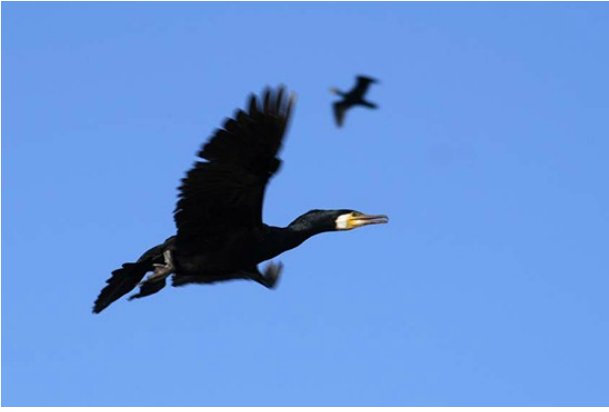
On the western shoreline of the Thermaikos Gulf can be found one of the most important wetlands in Greece. It is the Axios - Loudias - Aliakmonas Estuaries National Park, consisting of the deltas of the Axios and Aliakmonas rivers, the estuaries of the Gallikos and Loudias rivers, the Kalohori lagoon, the Nea Agathoupoli marsh and the Alyki Kitrous lagoon. It is a large complex wetland system with a total surface area of around 320 sq. kms. Thanks to the great diversity of ecological conditions –ranging from extensive ricefields, grasslands and riparian forests to salty marshes and swamps- the area makes an ideal habitat for many species of wild animals and plants.

### The birds ...

More than 270 bird species find shelter in the wetland, many of them rare and threatened. Avocets, Glossy ibises, Black - headed gulls, Dalmatian pelicans, are some of the beauties living here, whilst the riparian forest of Axios hosts one of the most important mixed heron colonies in Greece. The area lies under one of the basic migratory routes of Europe, so thousands of birds stop over for some days in order to rest and feed up, before continuing their journey.









### ...the animals

Beside birds, the area of the Axios, Loudias and Aliakmonas estuaries is a valuable habitat for many other animal species, some of which are under threat of extinction, such as the European ground squirrel, the European otter and the Hermann's tortoise. In the fields and in the islets of the Axios River lives a herd of wild horses, descendants of the animals once used by the farmers for agricultural work. In the Gallikos estuaries one can see an impressive stock of water buffalos, which enjoy spending most of their time in the water.







### ...and the plants

In total there are more than 500 species and subspecies of plants, some of which change colors during the year, producing diverse scenery. Some species are rare, such as the Sea daffodil, while others are very common, such as the glasswort, which, in autumn turns red and adorns the marshlands of the coastal zone to a colorful carpet.











## **NATURA 2000**

Because of its great ecological importance, the area of Axios, Loudias and Aliakmonas estuaries has been designated as part of the Natura 2000 Network, as Specially Protected Area and Site of Conservation Interest. It is also protected by the Ramsar Convention





## **Mt Cholimontas** Chalkidiki

**Cholomon** or **Cholomondas** (Greek: *Χολομών, Χολομώντας*) is a mountain in Central Macedonia, Greece that covers almost all of central and east Chalkidiki. The ancient Greeks called the mountain Ypsison. It is covered by dense oak forest and is part of the Natura 2000 network. The highest peak rises northeast of Polygyros, which is the capital of Chalkidiki, to 1.165 metres and is the highest point of Chalkidiki



That place is the birth place of Aristotle, the great philosopher of ancient Greece

Our main interest will focus on the Aristotle University forest in Taxiarchis.

The University Forest in Taxiarchis, in Chalkidiki, is a publicly owned forest estate. It covers an area of 58,000 hectares on the southern and southwestern slopes of mount Cholomontas (at an altitude of 1,049.86 to 3,822.17 feet, latitude 40° 23' - 40° 28' and longitude 23° 28' - 23° 34').

Broad-leaved species that grow in Greece prevail in the area of the university forest. They are regenerated naturally and, when weather conditions are adverse, they are artificially regenerated. The systematic and sustainable management of the forest over the last decades has encouraged local populations to continue to reside in their villages. The main forest products include oak, beech, pine firewood and charcoal. Since the forest is not mature enough, little timber is produced (wooden beams, planks, parquet elements, etc.).



There are mainly deciduous forests in this area, which is divided in three zones: *Quercetalia ilicis*, *Quercetalia pubescentis* and *Fagetalia*. These zones are formed based on flora composition, altitude, petrology, soil conditions, the exposure and incline of the slopes, air temperature and rainfall. The area is mostly covered with broad-leaved oak trees. The flora of the area also

includes beech trees, black pine trees, brutian pine trees and Aleppo pine trees, as well as other ligneous plants, such as *Quercus ilex*, *Erica arborea* (a plant of beekeeping interest), holly oak trees, arbutus trees, fraxinus trees, plane trees, willow trees, etc. Fir trees are very important to the region; they are planted by villagers in order to sell them as Christmas trees. Villagers have been trading Christmas trees for 30 years. There are more than 2 million fir trees in the area, offering income opportunities to villagers, protecting the land and providing shelter to wildlife. Hence, there are about 60 ligneous plant species and more than 200 herbaceous plant species. The area is also home to rich fauna, including large populations of wild boars. The animal species displayed in the museum can also be found in the forest. Villagers coexist harmoniously with wild boars and refrain from poaching. Moreover, Mount Cholomontas was granted protection under an EU order, mainly with regards to the predator birds living in the forest; there are many wildlife shelters in the forest, where any form of hunting is forbidden.

The Forest Museum is also housed in the building facilities of the University Forest. Native flora and fauna, as well as natural resources are displayed in the museum, which was founded in 2008. There are special cases in the museum where aspects of forest management planning are represented, and stuffed birds and animals are displayed. Moreover, all plant and seed species lie in cupboards, drawers and cabinets, providing visitors and students who specialize in the field of forestry with information. There is also a multi-purpose room where visitors can watch special videos and get relevant information through computer applications. The Forest Museum at the University Forest in Taxiarchis provides students of the Faculty of Forestry and Natural Environment with training, as well as providing visitors and students of all levels with environmental education, while promoting at the same time tourism in the area.



Mount Athos (holly mountain) as seen from Cholomontas





