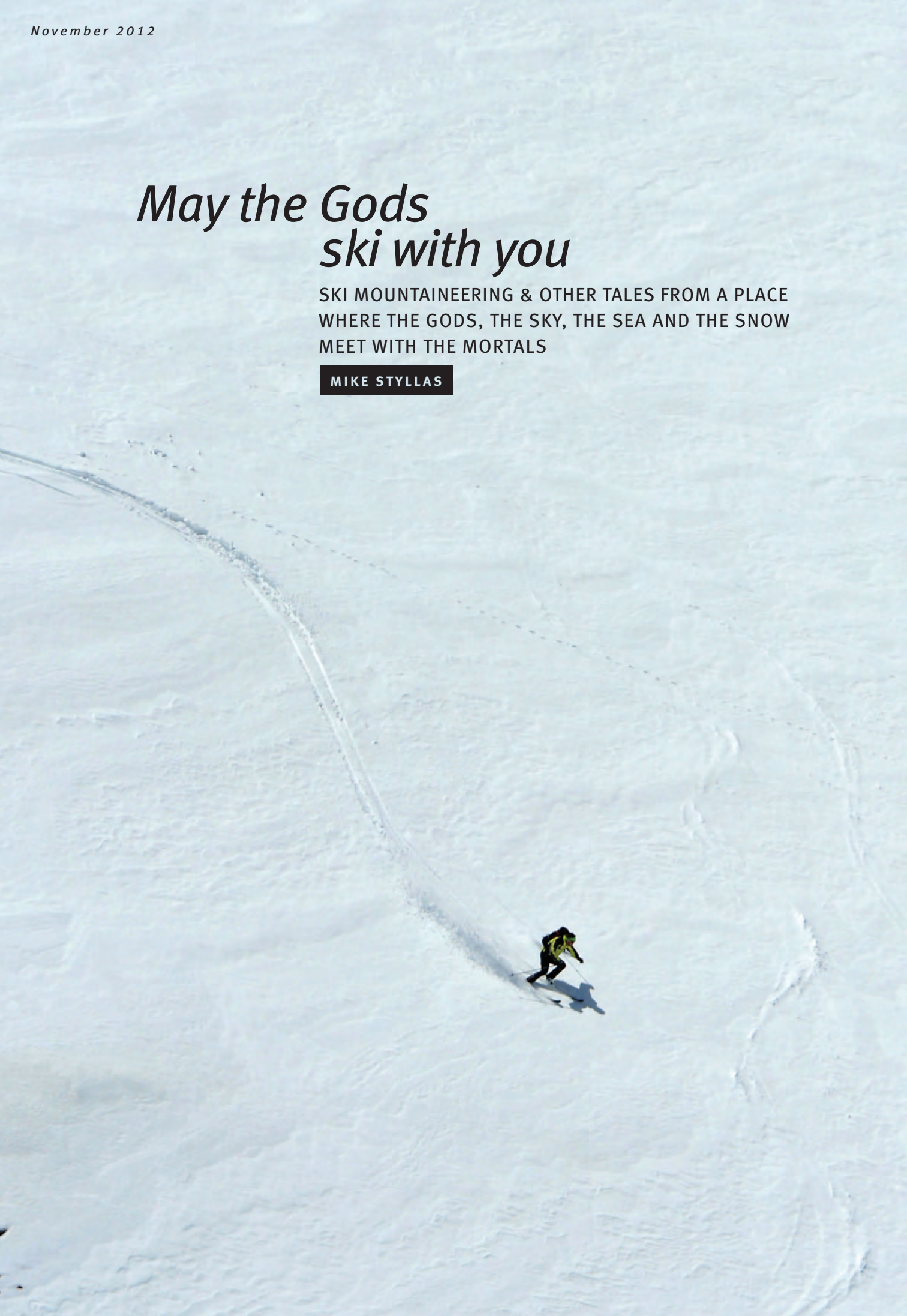


November 2012

May the Gods ski with you

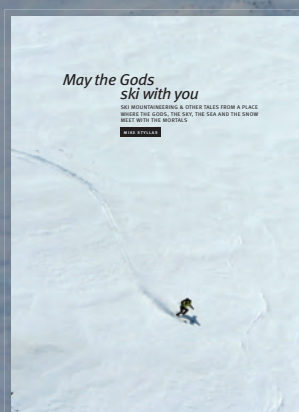
SKI MOUNTAINEERING & OTHER TALES FROM A PLACE
WHERE THE GODS, THE SKY, THE SEA AND THE SNOW
MEET WITH THE MORTALS

MIKE STYLLAS



I N D E X

- 02 From the Greek islands to the Greek mountains
- 04 From the Gods to the Mortals
- 06 Ski mountaineering on Mount Olympus
- 08 From the big cities to the ski resorts and finally to the exploration of the Greek backcountry
- 10 International skiers on Mount Olympus
- 14 Tales of Cosmogony
- 16 Tales of Geology
- 18 Tales from the biota (flowers & animals)
- 20 Tales of Mountaineering & Climbing
- 24 Tales of organization (the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering & Climbing- EOOA)
- 26 A century of Mount Olympus with Gods & Mortals



Cover: The Slovenian skier Davo Karnicar on Mount Olympus (April 2012).
photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience

May the Gods ski with you

SKI MOUNTAINEERING & OTHER TALES FROM A PLACE
WHERE THE GODS, THE SKY, THE SEA AND THE SNOW
MEET WITH THE MORTALS

Olympus at dawn.

photo by Babis Girtziotis / GO experience



From the Greek islands to the Greek mountains



The north slopes in early May when things are still skiable...
Photo by A. Vroikos



The 300-meter north walls of Mytikas, Greece highest point.
Photo by Antonis Papagiannopoulos

Since the 1960's Greece has been renowned all over the world for the beautiful beaches of the islands floating on the Aegean and Ionian Seas, presented to the public as the country's representative scenery. Mainland Greece has also been known to most people either for the beautiful coastal scenery and/or for the remarkable archaeological monuments. In most cases these attractions are blanketed with stories and myths fantasized through the ancient Greek mythology. During the 1980's a minute portion of the foreign visitors destined for the Greek territory began discovering the natural beauty and the myths of continental Greece and even fewer dwelled on the mountains...

Despite what most people believe, Greece is a mountainous country. A little more than 50% of the country's surface (including islands and mainland) is characterized as mountainous terrain; making Greece more mountainous than all European Union countries! The country's highest mountain captured the imagination of people since antiquity, so they placed their Gods on its peaks. The most renowned of the Greek mountains is the emblematic Mount Olympus. With its highest peak, Mytikas or Pantheon (the adobe of the ancient Greek Gods) rising 2918 meters above sea level and spaced only 17km from the adjacent coastline, Mount Olympus comprises a unique complex of geological evolution, natural beauty, flora and fauna diversity, tales of cosmogony and ancient Greek mythology and of great acts and stories of early explorers, famous bandits, scientists, painters and mountaineers. Even though the mountain's history dates back to more than 2500 years ago, the mountaineering history of Mount Olympus will celebrate its centennial birthday on August 2nd 2013.



From the Gods to the Mortals

It was during the foggy morning of August 2nd 1913, when local goat hunter Christos Kakkalos, together with Swiss photographer Frederic Boissonnas and also Swiss Daniel Baud Bovy reached the highest point of Greece. The publicity of the first climb to the highest point of Mount Olympus on the local press marked the end of an era when only the twelve Ancient Gods were residing on the highest peaks of the mythical mountain and the beginning of a new era; the era when mortals invaded into the Gods' territory in search of adventure, spiritual balance, sportive performance and even social recognition. Since the time of the first ascent Mount Olympus has been the center of the mountaineering, skiing and climbing evolution in Greece but also has been a subject to multidisciplinary scientific research. Today, Mount Olympus comprises one of the most popular destinations within continental Greece.



Stefani-Mytikas-Skolio Panorama from Kazania.
Photo by Christos Tsoutsias



When the powder gets deep, mortals are having fun!
Photo by Babis Girtziotis / GO experience



Enjoying the view from the top.
Photo by Mike Styllas



Topping out Xerolaki Ridge.
One of the most classic alpine routes.
Photo by Teo Christopoulos



Mount Olympus. Where the Gods sky, the snow and the sea meet with the mortals.
Photo by Stéphane Demay

Ski mountaineering on Mount Olympus



The filmmakers returning back to base camp.
Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience



George Klaoudatos diving on the east couloir of Skala.
Photo by Ruedi Fluck



Free riding in spring conditions.
Photo by Elias Lefas



It's a long way to the top...if you wanna ski virgin slopes.
Photo by Ruedi Fluck



*Dimitris "Frits" Papakonstantinou
earning some frequent flyer miles.*
Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience

During the late 1920's and 1930's the Greek mountaineering community was born and in order to start walking was aided by Swiss, British and Italian climbers mainly during the period between the first and second world wars; a period characterized by political and social stability that in turn resulted in the establishment of several local mountaineering clubs mainly in the largest cities.

Eighteen years after the inaugural ascent to the summit of Mount Olympus, the first winter ascent of the mountain was taking place, during a time when the race for the Great North faces of the Alps had started. On March 20th 1931, the French mountaineer Gustave Dorier, together with the Greek climber and skier Kostas Natsis and the Paris based Iraklis Ioannidis, were skinning up the western gentle slopes of the mountain to reach the subsidiary summit of Skala, (2866m) by noon. After a short brake they exchanged skis and ski poles to crampons and ice axes and roped together they started climbing the ridge towards the main summit. Alternating parts of soft snow and ice made the step-cutting strenuous and the going hard; the three men reached the summit by late afternoon under clear skies into snow-covered scenery looking below to the blue colors of the Aegean Sea. On the summit the trio was occupied by a mixture of colors, emotions and feelings: calmness, relaxation and a sense of physical and mental balance harmonically perplexed with the natural environment.

Backtracking their steps along the ridge they reached their skis at dusk and began the nearly 2000m descent to the monastery of Sparmos located at the western foothills of the mountain, where the remaining members of the team (including the pioneer Christos Kakkalos) were awaiting. A very long day that resulted on the first winter ascent of Mount Olympus, involving the use of all available means and techniques of snow travel and winter climbing that made the three men feeling even for a while, like the Gods.

A few years later during the summer of 1934 the celebrated Italian climber Emilio Comici arrived on Mount Olympus to establish the first rock climbing routes on the major rock faces of Stefani (Throne of Zeus, 2912m) and Mytikas (2918m) between 5 and 8th of July. A month later Slovenians Marijan Lipovsek and Leo Pipan arrived on the mountain to establish a 400m long rock route on the north wall of Skolio (2904m), where the biggest alpine routes have been established up to date.



Returning from a breakfast ride.
Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience

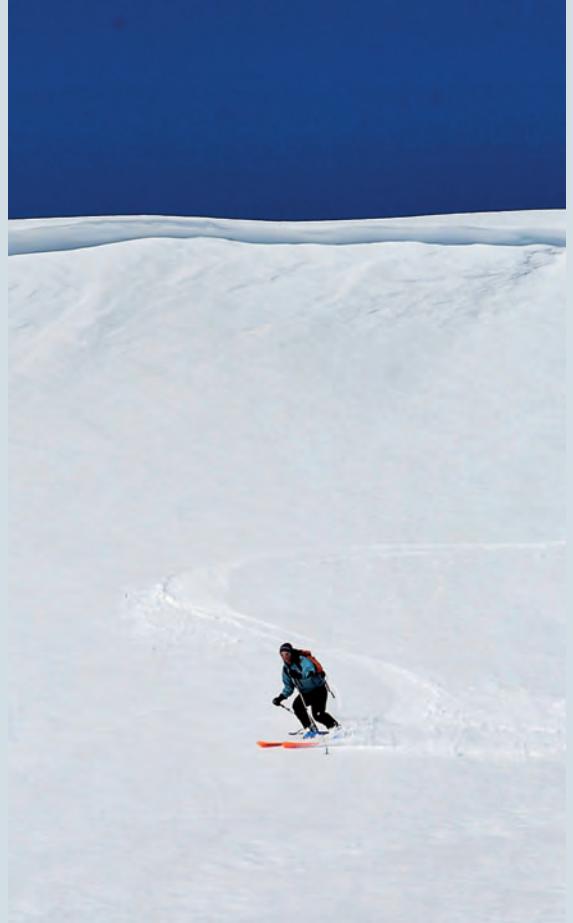
From the big cities to the ski resorts and finally to the exploration of the Greek backcountry

Following World War II and the savage Civil War that followed - an awkward transition from WWII to the Cold War - the Greek reality was characterized by an influx of foreign money that slowly led to an economical growth of the major cities but most importantly to a phenomenal, albeit gradual degradation of everyday life values and ideals like elsewhere. The big wave of internal migration to the country's big cities as well as of external migration to foreign countries like Australia, USA, Canada and Germany, was a consequence of the Civil war and the subsequent political and social instability that usually follows similar situations and resulted to the abandonment of the Greek countryside in quest for a better future within the safety of the big cities. . .

During the early 1960's and as the big cities of grew bigger the first ski resorts appeared in the scene (more specifically the first lift operated in 1957 at Seli ski resort in northern Greece) and as the standard of living was raising, skiing became popular during the winter, while other outdoor activities such as trekking, climbing, and cycling at most remained unknown among Greeks. The social status of the early skiers in Greece was either that of wealthy people from the big cities who could afford to buy the expensive gear or from passionate skiers from mountainous towns and villages and who had not the money to purchase such gear, but most important had the desire and the imagination to even manufacture their own skis not bothering about specific clothing at all. The next decades saw a phenomenal increase of the ski resorts across the country so that today Greece has 21 ski resorts! The development of mountainous tourism ultimately resulted to an increased short-term traveling of people from the big cities to the countryside, mainly during weekends and holiday periods, in search of fun and relaxation away from the frenzy of urban environment.



The western site of Mount Olympus comprises spectacular backcountry terrain.
Photo by Elias Lefas



Skiing the Olympus backcountry.
Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience

In most cases, the establishment of ski resorts across the countryside was erroneously based on short-term political deliberates, lacking long-term planning. The temporary movement of people from the major cities to the country's ski resorts was followed by a rejuvenation of the accommodation and dining services in the areas surrounding the resorts and was mainly expressed by the construction of spendy chalets and many-star hotels, that later on were gradually spaced over many Greek mountainous villages. This luxurious infrastructure established initially on the islands, was also spread on the mountainous part of the country and reflected the Modern Greek mentality derived from the not-so-real economical growth of the country, as it was based on borrowed money from abroad. The easy access to luxury made most Greeks to foresee the natural beauty of their home countryside and to be solely devoted to mass consumption of expensive accommodation and dining. Since the mid 1980's the luxurious infrastructure had been established within abandoned villages overruling old shepherds' cottages, small traditional taverns and historical buildings of the past.

However, during the late 1980's a few foreign ski mountaineers, mainly French, were visiting the still-untouched backcountry and gradually established the first ski mountaineering routes on the country's highest mountains. By the same time only a handful of local skiers were enjoying the same remote terrain discovering the abandoned villages and the real hard men still enduring the life of the countryside, while the majority of ski fans remained within the bounds of the ski resorts rediscovering the city habits under a snow-covered scenery and more or less nothing new.

However, as more and more ski resorts were being established, more and more people were picking up skiing as a winter outdoor activity, gradually raising the level of off-piste skiing and as a result more and more people began looking to the Greek backcountry. From the early 1990's the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (E00A) began organizing the first ski mountaineering races and as an increasing number of people were picking up downhill skiing during the winter and mountaineering in the broad sense (trekking and to a lesser extend climbing) during the summer, there followed the slow evolution of ski mountaineering in Greece.

International skiers on Mount Olympus



Davo Karnicar skiing on Mount Olympus (April 2012).
photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience



Eva Walkner
photo by Rued Fluck



Christophe Moulin
photo by George Klaoudatos



Davo Karnicar
photo by Christos Tsoutsias

Nearly eight decades following the inaugural ski mountaineering ascent of Mount Olympus from G. Dorier, K. Natsis and Ir. Ioannidis, the same approach for life, the common drive for adventure and love for the mountainous environment even though characterized by different clothing and skiing equipment, finds the world famous extreme skier Davo Karnicar from Slovenia (who is credited with the first complete descent from Mount Everest summit and has skied down numerous other Himalayan peaks namely Annapurna I and Nanga Parbat), his wife Petra, together with Greeks George Klaoudatos (an ENSA ski instructor who has pushed ski mountaineering in Greece a lot during the last decade), Pavlos Tsiantos (a Greek mountaineering instructor and mountain guide, film maker and producer of several documentaries, most notably "From Olympus to Everest" describing the first successful Greek ascent of Mount Everest) and Christos Tsoutsias (all around climber and film maker) retracing the route of the pioneering trio on a brisk afternoon of April 11th 2012, living through the same feelings, emotions, scenery and colors with Dorier, Natsis and Ioannidis.

The man, the sky, the snow and the views to the sea conjugated with each other leading to a unique emotional situation. A situation that cannot be priced or even better cannot be bought no matter the amount of money, but is handed in a wealth manner to those who are willing to put aside the physical torment required for wandering into the mountains and in return immensely enjoy living up to circumstances that only the natural environment offers. Ski mountaineering on remote slopes of the mountains away from the cities, where everything is downscaled and adjusted to the desires and passions of the wealthier, acts or should act as an antidote to the degradation of everyday life values.

The team's ascent to the summit of Mount Olympus through the ridge of Skala was followed by the now-classic descent of the 45o degree couloir of Mytikas and the arrival to Christos Kakkalos refuge (a small refuge on the Plateau of Muses named after the first summiteer of Mount Olympus), where many ski mountaineers were awaiting. The first ski mountaineering meeting on Mount Olympus took place a little after the fourth international ski mountaineering race on Mount Olympus (the first international ski mountaineering race on Mount Olympus took place in 1996, with subsequent races taking place in 1998, 1999 and in 2012) and that ultimately aimed to the international recognition of Mount Olympus as a major ski mountaineering destination. Both events were sponsored by the always active Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (E00A).

Davo Karnicar was not the first celebrated skier to arrive on Mount Olympus. In spring of 2007 French skier Sylvio Egéa together with snowboarder Marc Amigues and photographer Stéphan Demay from the Pyrenees skied down some steep couloirs in the vicinity of the Plateau of Muses and made an extensive article for Respyr ski magazine (Respyr no 39). Two years later George Klaoudatos with French Christophe Moulin (national ski instructor and teacher at ENSA) realized the first descent of a steep couloir immediate south of Mytikas couloir. The length of the ascent, the icy rocky ridge crossed on the way to the main summit, the steepness of the descent and the remoteness expressed by the absolute absence of any type of machinery like helicopters and telepheriques made Christophe to confess:

Damn, this is a real mountain!



En route to the plateau of Muses.
photo by Elias Lefas



Olympus time at Dusk. When miracles happen.
photo by Elias Lefas



Eva Walkner on the first descent of Stefani (Throne of Zeus) east facing couloir during a brisk April morning.
photo by Ruedi Fluck



When the Gods sleep. Enjoyng night skiing below the Throne of Zeus.
photo by Ruedi Fluck



Fun riding aah...
photo by Elias Lefas

The search for first descents on the Olympian slopes continued in the years to follow. In the spring of 2010 World Extreme Skiing Tour competitor Austrian Eva Walkner together with base jumper and skier Andy Razic from Salzburg, photographer and editor of TWIN ski magazine Ruedi Fluck of Luzerne and George Klaoudatos completed the first descent of Stefani couloir later dubbed as “You Laugh?”, the name of the first descent attributed to the long waiting times in the refuge due to bad weather and the resulted lack of much-than-necessary laughing.

Eva’s impression after her weekly stay on the mountain was better described in Black Diamond’s (climbing and skiing gear manufacturer) website:

“It all has to do with serious alpine terrain”


The presence of many high level international skiers to the mythical mountain opened the eyes of many local ski mountaineers to see the potential of their homeland’s highest mountain. As a result the first ski mountaineering meeting on Mount Olympus was organized on the Plateau of Muses during April of 2012. Besides the Slovenian Davo Karnicar the roster of skiers included the well-known Greek-American ski movie director Constantine Papanikolaou (CP) from California, as well as of the Greek novice to mountain skiing Dimitris “Frits” Papakonstantinou among others.

The outcome of the specific meeting was summarized to the simple conclusion: ski mountaineering is destined to become the most popular winter outdoor activity in Greece, leaving no space for more ski resorts, especially on Mount Olympus. Due to the absence of glaciers and the objective hazards involved when skiing in glacial terrain, the relief variability of the mountainous part of the country; a relief that ranges from gentle slopes to very steep and narrow couloirs and the relatively long period of adequate snow cover (December to May) for skiing the backcountry, ski mountaineering is definitely the future winter activity on the Greek mountains.



Tales of Cosmogony

According to Homer, Earth (Gaia) was a huge rounded disk that was created from a very big river, the Ocean. Mount Olympus was placed in the middle of this rounded disk; back then it was considered to be the center of the known world...



Homer also believed that Mount Olympus highest peaks were so high that were intruding into the sky (Uranus), becoming the sky themselves. Greek cosmogony tales support that the Uranus (as well as the Mountains and the Seas) was the son of the Earth and Eros. Uranus, who subsequently became the leader of the first divine generation, disliked his sons and daughters (the Titans) and was killing them by throwing them to Tartara (a very deep valley). Mother Earth convinced the Titans to fight against their father, so that the youngest of them Kronos (Saturn) fought with Uranus and won the fight to become the next one that dominated the world.

After the fight Saturn married his sister Rea to give birth to the Gods: Zeus, Pluto, Poseidon, Hestia, Minerva and Hera. But the Sky had foreseen that his son Saturn will have the same fate with him as he was eating his children instead of throwing them down to Tartara. Only one of his kids escaped aided by his mother Rea: Zeus who escaped to Crete and avoided death by his father. As he grew up, Zeus liberated the Cyclopes and the Ekatoxeires from Tartara and with their help he fought against Saturn and the rest of the Titans.

Zeus therefore got married to Hera to give birth to the third divine generation: Minerva, Hermes, Mars, Apollo, Artemis, Venus and Hephaestus, whom thereafter related with each other but also with mortals and gave birth to inferior gods and goddesses like Dionysus, Panas, Hercules, Aeolus, the Muses and many more.

From all the gods and goddesses superior or inferior, mortals loved most the twelve of them, seven of which were the kids of Zeus and five of them were the kids of Saturn. The twelve gods and goddesses were placed in the highest summit of Mount Olympus (Pantheon, or at present Mytikas), christened as Olympian Gods and were subsequently loved from mortals for many centuries.

People were climbing up on Mount Olympus since antiquity. The ancient trail starting from the city of Dion (at the foothills on the northeast side of the mountain) was followed by believers all the way up to the rounded and easy-to-access peak of Profitis Ilias (2803m) and had placed an altar realizing sacrifices as well as they had constructed the temple of Apollo. Later on, during the 11th century AD, Christians built a temple on top of Apollo's temple (a policy followed thoroughly by Christians to be building temples on top of ancient temples and monuments) and dedicated the stone-made construction to Profitis Ilias. Ancient altars have been found on other peaks of Mount Olympus as well (Agios Antonios – 2 815m, Skolio – 2904m).

When Zeus gets ungrateful.
Photo by Teo Christopoulos



Tales of Geology

Mount Olympus massif comprises a non continuous sequence of metamorphosed and deformed Triassic and Cretaceous to Eocene continental shelf limestones. Deposition of the Olympus sedimentary sequence represents part of the passive southwestern margin of Neotethys, which during the Mesozoic separated mainland Greece from southern Europe. Tectonic movements during ocean closure resulted to uplifting of the Olympus carbonates, in the form of tectonic window. During Pleistocene (1.8 million years ago), the uplift history of Mount Olympus was concomitant with glacial activity, evidenced from the presence glacial features (head valley cirques, moraines, etc.) and sedimentary deposits both in upland and on the side piedmonts. Mount Olympus prominent peaks are the result of tectonic uplift, glacial erosion and weathering.

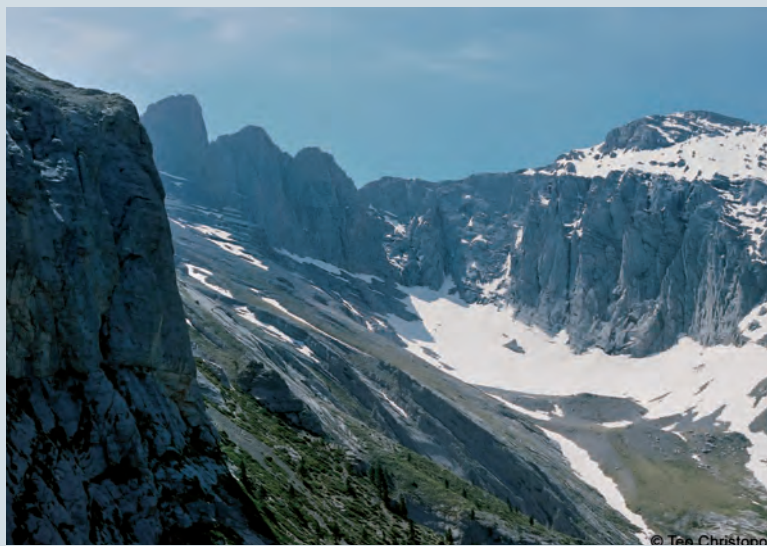


Cirques and hanging valleys.
Photo by Mike Styllas



Once under the sea, at present under the summit. Successive bands of limestone and uplift have resulted in the formation of Zonaria (belts).

Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience



Tectonic uplift and glacial erosion resulted in the formation of the Megala Kazania, where the biggest and finest alpine climbing routes exist.

Photo by Teo Christopoulos



Erosional features known as "Mytikia" (little Aiguilles).

Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience



Ranunculus Brevifolius.
Photo by Antigoni Kouramba

Tales from the biota

flowers & animals



Rupicapra - Rupicapra.
Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience



Montifringilla nivalis.
Photo by Babis Girtziotis



Alyssum Handellii.
Photo by Mike Styllas

Mount Olympus national park was established by the Greek government in 1938. The country's first national park was created in order to protect the natural resources of the area during a period when illegal logging, illegal grazing and illegal hunting were at the peak of their activity. During those years there was no sense of touristic development for any area in Greece as the country was still trying to heal its wounds from the First World War and the economic recession of the 1930's. The core of Mount Olympus national park has an area of approximately 40,000 acres bounded within a periphery of 32km. In December of 1981, UNESCO announced Mount Olympus National Park as a biosphere reserve, giving an international recognition to the still pristine ecosystem.

Despite its geological significance Mount Olympus is home to more than 1700 species of plants, representing 25% of the Greek flora. Twenty five (25) of the plant species are endemic that is they grow only on Mount Olympus. In addition to the plant species, Mount Olympus is characterized by the presence of 48 tree species (most notably *Pinus nigra* and *Pinus heldreichii*). During the 1970's Professor Arne Strid from the Danish Academy of Sciences who was researching the Greek flora since 1963, was funded by Goulandris Natural History Museum to publish the exceptional book "Wild Flowers of Mount Olympus".

The fauna of Mount Olympus involves the existence of 34 mammals the most renowned of which are the inhabitants of the rocky cliffs the Balkan chamois *Rupicapra-Rupicapra*. The 129 bird species, together with 14 species of repeats and 5 amphibian species, make up for one of the richest ecosystems of southern Europe.



Aquilegia ottonis subsp.
Photo by Babis Girtziotis



Tales of Mountaineering & Climbing

When conditions are right.
Photo by Mike Styllas



On the couloir of Mytikas with the sea on the background.
 Photo by Elias Lefas

Even though Mount Olympus history in relation to humanity dates back to more than 2,500 years, its mountaineering history records only a century. Due to political and social instability resulted from the occupation of northern Greece from the Ottoman Empire from 1453 until 1912 and despite the fact the people dwelled on its highest slopes since antiquity, as evidenced from the existence of altars, the first recorded ascent of the mountain's highest peak took place on August 2nd 1913. It was the local goat hunter and logger Christos Kakkalos together with Swiss world renowned photographer Frederic Boissonnas and the Dean of the *Geneva School of Arts*, Daniel Baud-Bovy that set foot on the highest point of Greece, rising 2918m above sea level. Their inaugural ascent was given great publicity in an era when, alike today, Greece was trying to stand up as an independent nation recovering from a long term occupation and social instability, the final act of which was expressed by the termination of the Balkan wars. The period following the first ascent was characterized by successive ascents of Mytikas mainly from members of the newly established alpine clubs of Athens and Thessaloniki. In 12th August 1921 the main summit of Throne of Zeus (the most prominent rock feature of Mount Olympus when viewed from the east, soon after christened "Stefani") was climbed by Christos Kakkalos and Swiss alpinist and engineer Marcel Kurz. From 1922 to 1934 the major ridges and couloirs leading to the summits of Mytikas and Stefani were climbed by Swiss, British and a few Greek climbers.



Christos Kakkalos



Frederic Boissonnas & Daniel Baud-Bovy



Marcel Kurz



Emilio Comici



On the lower traverses of the H. Zerf's route on the fine rock of Skolio, with Mytikas on the background.

Photo by Teo Christopoulos



The end of the central snowfield of the Comici - Escher route.

Photo by Nikos Tsavdaris

The summer of 1934 marked the beginning of the rock climbing era for Mount Olympus as Emilio Comici established the first climbing routes on the east face of Stefani and the north face of Mytikas together with Anna Escher. Nearly a month later Slovenians M. Lipovsek and L. Pipan established the first climbing route on the north wall of Skolio (2912m). The Slovenian route was by all means a much more serious undertaking as the duo climbed unknown terrain of considerable difficulty (UIAA IV+) and length (450m). Two years later in the summer of 1936 the brothers H. and S. Demleitner from Germany established the first and still very serious (VI) route on the west face of Stefani during a period when numerous first ascents and repetitions were taking place on the easier, looser and less steep east face of Stefani, mainly by international parties.

The Second World War caused a pause to all climbing activities. The end of the WWII marked the beginning another savage and instable period for Greece, translated as the Greek civil war, the onset of which took place at the foothills of Mount Olympus. When political and social stability within the Greek territory was established for one more time during the 1950's, climbing activity blossomed again on the rock faces of Mount Olympus. During the summer of 1956 German brothers B. and W. Huhn together with also German H. Wiedmann established yet another very serious (VI) route on the steep west face of Stefani.



One of the most prolific Greek climbers still active on Mount Olympus and the Alps, Sakis Spanoudis repeating his route on Mytikas norwest face.

Photo by Mike Styllas



Topping out Boteli-Zarra the first multi pitch sport route established in 1993.

Photo by Teo Christopoulos



On the third pitch of Mati - The Eye.

Photo by Teo Christopoulos

The following years were marked by the presence of Greek climber George Michailidis who dominated the climbing activity not only on Mount Olympus but on the biggest rock faces of Greece for many years. To his credit are 8 new routes on the rock faces of Mount Olympus, the establishment of Mount Olympus rock climbing school in 1959, but equally important is the fact of him being the cofounder of the Greek section of Mountain Wilderness; an organization that ultimately played a very important role in preventing the construction of a ski resort on Mount Olympus, hence protecting the Olympian environment from devastating means of utilization.

The late 1960's saw a new breed of Greek climbers led by the prolific and still-active on Mount Olympus and also in the Alps, Athanasios (Sakis) Spanoudis from Thessaloniki. This new breed of climbers aided and inspired by French and Italian climbers (namely Habib Zerf among others), began establishing more aesthetic routes of higher difficulty on Olympus rock faces. In the fall of 1972 Slovak climbers F. Kolar and M. Doubner established a very difficult and dangerous route on the northwest face of Mytikas. The "Slovak directissima" has been repeated once since then and has obtained the status of a ghost and dangerous route.

The late 1970's saw the first winter ascents of few routes, as Greek climbers had developed winter climbing skills from successive trips to the Alps. During the 1980's and 1990's numerous repetitions of the already established routes were contemplated by the opening of the first multi pitch sport climbing routes, while the period following the new millennium was characterized from the opening of even harder routes, the equipment of the belay stations of most routes with bolts, speed and free solo ascents as well as of the opening of many winter routes.

Today on the three main rock faces of Mount Olympus (Stefani, Mytikas and Skolio) 64 rock climbing routes have been established. Out of the 64 there are 4 multi pitch sport (protected only with bolts) routes their difficulty ranging from 6b to 7a+, while another 4 routes are climbed only in winter, making it for a total of 68 alpine routes, placing Mount Olympus on the map of international mountaineering and climbing destinations.



Tales of organization

The Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering
& Climbing - EOOA

*National ski mountaineering championship,
Mt Olympus 2012.*
Photo by Babis Giritziotis / GO experience



The Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (E00A), was initially established in 1930 under a different form than that of present day. During the first years of its existence the E00A was devoted to the development of mountaineering, skiing in its broader sense and to the collection of Greece's natural wealth documentation. In 1936 E00A had become a member of both UIAA and FIS. Within 10 years after its establishment E00A was expanded as 43 clubs from several localities throughout Greece had been created. E00A played a key role to the establishment of Mount Olympus National Park in 1938. Soon after its establishment E00A began constructing the first mountain refuge in Greece, on the eastern slopes of Mount Olympus at an elevation of 2100m. Refuge "Spilios Agapitos" is the largest mountain refuge in Greece, its subsequent development through funds derived from E00A played a very important role to the touristic development of Mount Olympus. Today E00A manages 13 mountain refuges while its members (local alpine clubs) manage an additional 5 refuges. On Mount Olympus, E00A besides "Spilios Agapitos" also manages refuge "Christos Kakkalos" located on the Plateau of Muses at an elevation of 2648m.

The Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing has also been devoted to the organization of all levels of mountaineering, rock climbing and ski mountaineering courses, whereas in cooperation with the Greek Association of Mountain Guides is responsible for the mountain guides courses and certifications. In addition to climbing and mountaineering instruction and guiding certification, E00A is organizing the national indoor climbing championship since the 1990 and from 1992 the national ski mountaineering championship.

At international level besides being active in the UIAA's committee, E00A has sponsored numerous trips and for Greek climbers in the Alps, the Andes and the Himalaya, while in 2004 was actively involved in the first successful national expedition on Mount Everest.





A century of Mount Olympus with Gods & Mortals



Another day arriving. Early morning glide.
Photo by Stéphan Demay

Moving towards the first century when the Mortals met up with the Gods on Greece's highest mountain, it is hard to imagine what the first climbers and skiers were thinking to be the evolution of their brave acts on the highest peaks of Mount Olympus. The human presence during the century that followed the first recorded ascent is highlighted by successes and failures of early mountaineers, the dirty but fair to the common public deeds of famous bandits, innovative research by many scientists, the opening of beautiful aesthetic climbing routes by many alpinists as well as by impressive descents of the major couloirs and slopes. Even though alpine climbing started to evolve rapidly since the 1960's, ski mountaineering blossomed on the Olympian slopes during the last decade.

Besides its sportive and/or adventurous side, ski mountaineering along the Greek backcountry offers a unique chance to better know and protect the country's natural environment increasingly threatened from road construction for mining but most importantly to seek even for a while for some kind of spiritual balance through the contact with nature itself away from the frenzy of the crowded ski resorts, that ultimately act as an extension of the city habits on the mountain rather than making skiers to feel the aura of the mountain.

May the Gods ski with you!

Within the Greek culture Mount Olympus has been the center of activity in terms of mythology, religion, art, revolutions, research and mountaineering for thousands of years. As evidenced during the spring of 2012, Mount Olympus is destined for another first: to become the center of activity of ski mountaineering in its full sense (races, extreme ski, long crossings etc.).

Mortals were allowed in the Gods territory a century ago, establishing the base for the slow evolution of climbing and ski mountaineering in Greece. A century after the opening of Mount Olympus highest peaks to everyone respectful to the natural environment and to himself, the Gods are ready to ski the gentle slopes or steepest couloirs in the years to come. You may be lucky and enjoy skiing during those days when the snow, the sky, the sea and you will be part of an ecstasy suspended in the air for thousands of years.

C R E D I T S

COPYWRITING - AUTHORSHIP

Mike Styllas

DESIGN & ART DIRECTION

Shift | visual communication

PHOTOS

Teo Christopoulos

Ruedi Fluck

Babis Giritziotis / GO experience

Antigoni Kouramba

Elias Lefas

Antonis Papagiannopoulos

Mike Styllas

Ski Sylvio

Stéphane Demay

Nikos Tsavdaris

Christos Tsoutsias

Antonis Vroikos

PRINTED IN NOVEMBER 2012 BY

Print X-Copy

PRODUCTION

GO experience

www.goexperience.com.gr





View from "Kakalos Refuge", Oropedio - Olympus.
Photo by Babis Girtziotis / GO experience



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ ΟΡΕΙΒΑΣΙΑΣ - ΑΝΑΡΡΗΧΗΣΗΣ
HELLENIC FEDERATION OF MOUNTAINEERING & CLIMBING

