

New visitors? leaflets launched in the pilot area of the Upper Vjosa valley

Visit a reconstructed Vlach dwelling - kalive

Only 3 km southeast of the town of Përmet, in the Albarist Eco Camping complex, you are offered the chance to visit a traditional Vlach dwelling - the kalive. The location correlates with one of the Vlachs' temporary camps set along their seasonal transhumance route. It represents a circular domed-structure of 20 square meters and 4 m high, made of wooden sticks and covered with a thatched roof, once housing an entire Vlach family. The interior has mud-plastered walls, a simple hearth and wooden sheeps.

This dwelling exemplifies an aspect of the Vlach's living history and was reconstructed using the same authentic techniques and materials as used in the past.

Here, you will meet two welcoming people, Dona and Robert, who can explain more about the Vlach culture and arrange multiple outdoor adventurous activities across the landscape of the Upper Vjosa valley, including rafting, hiking, climbing and a lot more.

For more information visit the website: www.eskorpamet.com

Walking with the Vlach: Hikes in the mountains of the Upper Vjosa valley

For more information about the hiking trails scan the QR codes

Trail 1 Trail 2

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Who are the Vlachs?

The Vlach know themselves as Arbërorë/Arbërinë. They are a people who have historically inhabited swathes of the Balkans. They are distinguished by their language, a dialect derived from Latin, and by their way of living, based primarily on pastoral transhumance.

The Vlach are initially mentioned in Byzantine sources of the 11th century, occupying the mountain areas of Thessaly known as Megali Vlachia, and subsequently in the territories of Epirus, Macedonia and beyond.

The Upper Vjosa valley was one of the main routes used during Vlach seasonal movements from winter pastures on the Brian coast, towards the summer pastures on the Mount Gramos. The whole journey would last around ten days, and Vlach families were followed by substantial herds of sheep. Daily camps of simple roof-top tents were set up on their belts. Once at the summer pastures, the Vlach built their steady encampment, consisting of several familiar dwellings, known as kalives.

During the Late Medieval era, Vlach families began to settle permanently in the mountain areas to the east of the Upper Vjosa valley, ultimately losing their nomadic lifestyle, but not their language. Other Vlach continued to travel until 1960, when the Albanian state banned Vlach transhumance, and several families were settled in villages of the valley.

WALKING WITH THE VLACH

Following in these nomadic footsteps will lead you along the past into the lovely countryside of the Vjosa valley.

These trails are part of longer border itineraries that in Albania start from the historic coast around Saranda, across the mountainous regions of Gjirokastra and Përmet ending at Mount Gramos in Kolonja. In the past, Vlach families would camp here in rich and extensive pasture lands. Originally, the journey continued beyond the present national borders into the mountainous regions of Greece and Macedonia.

HIKING TRAIL 1

Beginning at Mount Dherbel, this route leads towards the mountain peaks in the east, up to the border with Greece, to Mount Gramos. The entire trek should last up to 5 days for a distance of 90 km long. The suggested camping spots along the way correspond with the daily camps that Vlach used to set up during their journeys. The trail takes you among untouched mountain landscapes dotted with historical monuments and stone-built villages of a particular architecture on the way.

HIKING TRAIL 2

This is an alternative walk that strays from the main historic route of the Vlach. It is around 4 km long and it provides a daily walking alternative with a lot to explore. From the town of Përmet, you can choose to walk, cycle or drive for c. 23 km towards the south until reaching the start of the trail at the village of Drakovi. Once there, take the right-hand path that leads along a watercourse first up old pine trees and gardens up to its spring. On the slope of the hill to the west are remains of the Bronze Age settlement of Dedenah. A narrow path up past the grove of about 20 horse-walking taverns through a beech and pine forest, leading to the beautiful meadow below the steep rocky cliff of Mount Gramos.

Article and images courtesy of Eglantina Serjani (CeRPHAAL)

In April 2023, INCULTUM partner CeRPHAAL in Albania launched new visitor leaflets about the cultural heritage assets of the Upper Vjosa valley. CeRPHAAL is coordinating pilot 8, Vjosa the shared river, aiming at highlighting and promoting the diversity of cultural heritage resources embodied in the mountainous landscape of the Vjosa valley.

In line with this, two leaflets were designed and published, presenting for the first time to the public some of the lost and neglected heritage of the area, such as the Vlach culture, as well as several landmarks related to the Second World War and the Communist Period.

One of the leaflets is an introduction to the historic city of Përmet and its surrounding, accompanied by easy-to-read maps, brief explanatory texts, and images. The second brochure broadcasts historical information about the Vlach ? a people who have historically inhabited swathes of the Balkans and are distinguished by their language, which derives from Latin and their ways of living based primarily on pastoral transhumance, while also inviting the visitors to hike in the mountains of the Upper Vjosa valley following the footprints of the Vlach nomadic journeys.

During the second half of May, these promotional materials were introduced to the heritage specialist in the tourist office of Përmet

and shared with some of the hotels in the city. The materials are now available for the visitors and provided at these locations both in printed and as downloadable versions.

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