

The Pisidia Heritage Trail

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doi:10.18866/biaa2016.036

The British Institute at Ankara's cultural heritage management project sprung to life in 2013 and continues today. The main goal of the project is to create awareness about the archaeological heritage of Turkey, both among people who live in the vicinity of ancient ruins and potential tourists likely to visit these sites. Cultural heritage is, of course, a finite and fragile resource and is under constant threat. Its protection cannot be delegated simply to enforcing security measures via laws and regulations. The sites which are the focus of this project are located far from densely populated settlements and, thus, are very vulnerable to illicit digging and decay due to neglect. Since they are not very well-known to the general public and therefore not visited frequently, they don't receive sufficient government support to ensure their longevity. Their protection, therefore, must involve local communities and the fostering of a sense of pride in the sites. It is often the case that local communities become more willing to protect their local ruins when they observe them being valued and visited by others.

One of the main elements of BIAA's cultural heritage management project has been the creation of the Pisidia Heritage Trail (PHT), a long-distance trekking trail, more than 350km long, connecting ten different archaeological sites located in the ancient region of Pisidia. These archaeological sites, situated in remote, pristine and densely forested highlands, have the potential to offer a quasi-poetic experience for explorers. The route of the PHT follows the remnants of 2,000-year-old ancient roads and, where these ancient roads are no longer traceable, little paths that are still used by local villagers. The trail is designed to attract hikers, nature lovers and adventurers in general, and to provide economic benefits for the communities who live in the vicinity of these ruins. This, in turn, is expected to result in increased protection of the sites by their local communities against illicit digging.

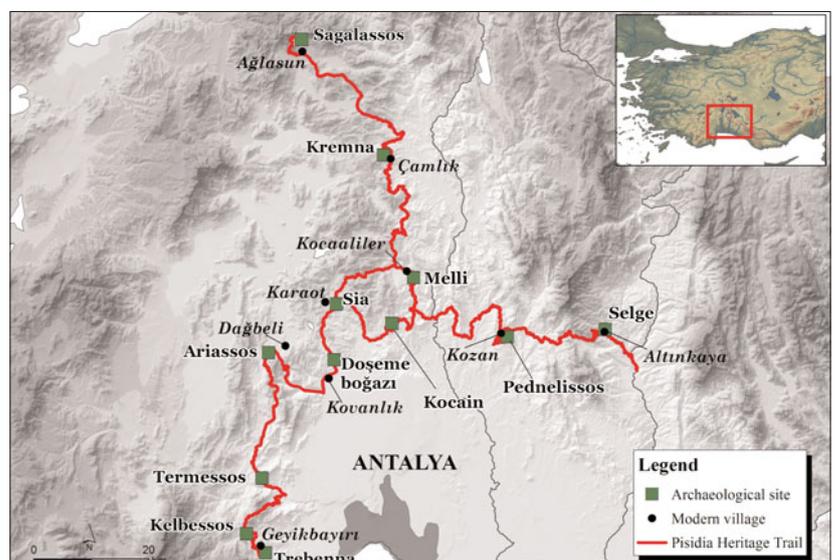
As a result of various periods of fieldwork undertaken in 2015 and 2016, the identification of the route has been finalised, with nine sub-routes connecting one archaeological site to another. The basic aim in plotting the route was to encompass the most pleasurable scenery and to arrange it in such a way that the little villages along the way could be easily visited from the trail. The sub-routes are marked by an archaeological site at each end: (1) Trebenna to Termessos: 38.3km; (2) Termessos to Ariassos: 33.7km; (3) Döşemeboğazi (ancient road) to Sia: 13.1km; (4a) Sia to Melli: 25.2km; (4b) Sia to Kocain Cave to Melli: 30.4km; (5) Melli to Pednelissos: 61.6km; (6) Pednelissos to Selge: 48km; (7) Melli to Kremna: 42.4km; (8) Kremna to Sagalassos: 54.1km.

Establishing the trail itself and its promotion through different channels are in themselves effective ways of fostering heritage protection. The project introduces an alternative tourism type to this highland region, where employment opportunities are limited, through management of this rich archaeological heritage. In the process of planning and implementing the trail, local people and authorities are being consulted at every step so that the project does not have a top-down approach, which may result in the exclusion of some parties. In addition to a formal meeting at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, to date, the Regional Conservation Council of Antalya, Burdur Museum, local administrators of the villages along the route, national and local newspapers, the Culture Routes Society, the Antalya Chamber of Commerce and community leaders from Antalya, as well as locals living in the villages along the trail have all been consulted.

The fieldwork and planning of the route, undertaken by a team of experts, was realised thanks to the support of the Aurelius Charitable Foundation. The continuation of my fellowship



Pednelissos on the Pisidia Heritage Trail





Sia to Kocain on the Pisidia Heritage Trail

for another two years was secured thanks to generous funding from the Headley Trust. Additionally, the Pisidia Appeal, which was created last year, has attracted support from both individuals and foundations, including Robert Kiln, the Society of Dilettanti, the Stevenson Family and YDS boots.

These donations have been used to enable different experts to work on various aspects of this exciting project, including our GIS and map expert (Michele Massa, Bilecik University) and our botanic expert (Gökhan Deniz, Akdeniz University). Dr Deniz is working on the endemic and rare plants of the region, as well as the use of plants for various purposes by local communities.

Furthermore, the Leche Trust is sponsoring work related to the compilation of an intangible cultural heritage inventory of the region; as I write, work on the inventory is still ongoing. Meanwhile, fundraising efforts continue for the project. We aim to produce a guidebook and a dedicated website presenting the results of all this work, and to place information and orientation signs along the route.

Impact

The concept of long-distance walking trails is becoming quite well-known in Turkey thanks to earlier examples like the Lycian Way and the St Paul Trail. Increasing numbers of people have been walking these trails, and have made a visible impact on local economies. For instance, along the Lycian Way – a 540km-long trail – there are many new accommodation facilities run by locals in addition to previously existing ones. The number of people walking it increases every year and has now reached thousands.

The Pisidia Heritage Trail, however, is unique amongst these long-distance walking trails. It is the only one which offers an experience in an unspoiled natural environment where visitors can see around 50 different endemic plants, passes through two national parks which are very rich in terms of their bio-reserves and encompasses a remarkable archaeological heritage. It does not concentrate only on the trekking per se, but adopts a holistic approach to

understanding the various characteristics of the region, including its geography, archaeology, botany and, most importantly, its current living culture.

The final route passes through two provinces (Antalya and Burdur), seven towns and 21 villages. The project places great emphasis on the employment of local people living in these places. Initial observations and interviews affirm that there has been a sharp decrease in the number of young people living in these locations. One of the expected impacts of the project is encouragement for young people from these villages to stay, rather than relocate to cities in search of jobs. To this end, contact details of those people who are willing to act as guides to people hiking the trail have been collected. Those who aspire to open a B&B or a food and beverage unit will be supported in practical terms. The Pisidia Heritage Trail prioritises the economic benefits that tourism can create for local people and places a huge emphasis on increasing job opportunities in rural areas. It involves archaeologists willing to communicate the importance and meaning of their work to the general public in order to raise awareness of cultural heritage. This project is promoting a people-centred approach to the protection and interpretation of heritage.

There is an increasing emphasis on alternative forms of tourism in Turkey, especially by the government. Therefore the combination of archaeological exploration with hiking in the natural environment is a tool that can be used to press for government support for the promotion and protection of these sites and their surrounding landscape.

The knowledge required to accomplish the establishment of the Pisidia Heritage Trail has been accumulated over 30 years of archaeological fieldwork in the region, in addition to the work of the current BIAA cultural heritage management project, which includes, in particular, the consultation of a wide range of locals and experts. The results will be shared with interested people through the final outcomes, including the guidebook and website, as well as media opportunities, face-to-face contacts and academic articles.



Termessos on the Pisidia Heritage Trail