

Travel

SMH Invasion of Crete 2002

At around 7.30am on a Tuesday morning in April, a group consisting of forty-four girls and seven adults gathered at Gatwick Airport, all looking slightly (to largely!) the worse for wear, complaining at the unnaturally early time they found themselves awake. Some were standing, others were half asleep, flopped over a suitcase or a parent. Even so, excitement and anticipation, accompanied with much yawning, were in the air. For some, it would be their first time in a plane; for others such as myself it was the long awaited return to a wonderful trip.

Check-in and departure went relatively smoothly (some trouble with visas eventually being resolved), and just after 9.30am we were in the air!

After a pleasant flight – involving some confusion with the meals – we landed at Heraklion at about 3pm local time. The

sight of sun and sea caused the excitement levels to rise, and before we knew it we were on the coach that would take us to our hotel in Aghios Nikolaos. The hotel Estoria is a small establishment (lovely, very quaint and cosy), so we found that the SMH clan had it to ourselves! We were greeted by Mr 'Pumping Iron' Spiros with his lovely little mother making our beds, serving our breakfast of cake and jam and always waiting for us when we returned each day with a warm smile on her face. Rooms were allocated, suitcases lugged, and now we were finally there. Unpacking seemed to get side-tracked by exploration of our private hotel, with its many balconies and its empty pool (which was, as promised, filled the next day). It was a relaxing evening at Grigoris Tavern, the restaurant where we would eat all but two of our evening meals. Later that evening we drove to Lerapetra and a pastry shop which we called 'Heaven'. It

was amazing and our mouths didn't stop watering. The local boys were watching football on TV and we found it amusing that they all tried to watch us and the football at the same time – it was a hard choice for them to make.

The next day was far less relaxing! In the morning we found ourselves in a site in Mallia, an old Minoan Palace, dating from 1700BC, believed to have been destroyed in 1450BC by a volcanic eruption and tsunami. From the very beginning sunbathing was the primary pastime by some, the flat areas of many archaeological sites provided the perfect setting! In the afternoon we arrived at Knossos, a truly enormous site, and home to the famous legend of Theseus and the Minotaur, the deadly sport of bull leaping and ritualised cannibalism! For those studying Classics and non-scholars alike, this was a fascinating experience, but



Royal Road at Knossos Palace



Summer Palace at Hagia Triada



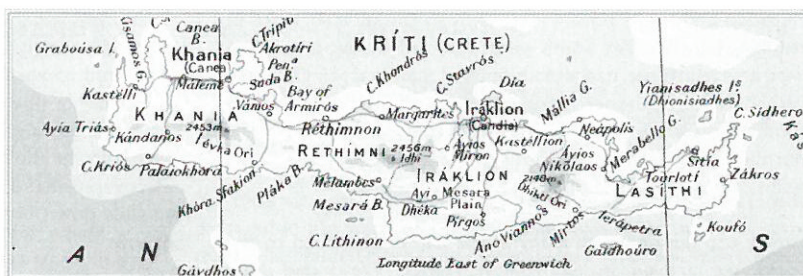
Palace of Mallia

without Mrs T's guiding and her site plans we could have been clueless. The mere size of the site was astonishing, and the remains were incredible to behold.

Thursday took us through the beautiful mountain ranges of Crete to the Lassithi Plateau. For the more adventurous among us a wonderful scrambling opportunity was offered, for the others, a chance to sit and enjoy the sun, after appreciating the archaeology of course! Close by is the Dikatean Cave, legendary birthplace of Zeus. Full of stalactites and stalagmites, a damp, cool, and sometimes slippery experience! This whole area has long been the base of rebellions and resistance fighters, including during World War II.

The next day took us, at long last, to the beach! Though slightly overcast and windy, the SMH group was largely undeterred, and many enjoyed a swim in the sea, overlooked by caves and restaurants of Matala, where we had a late lunch. In the morning we visited the monastery of Toplou, the Palace of Phaestos, which provided the disc which enabled the decipherment of Linear B Script, and the summer palace of Hagia Triada, burnt to a crisp during an ancient earthquake so that some of the rocks had been melted.

On Sunday we travelled to eastern and south eastern Crete, to visit the Water Palace of Kato Zakros. Many were glad that Mrs T had decided against making us walk down the Ravine of the Dead, a Minoan burial area, although a few of us would have enjoyed the challenge! The highlight here was undoubtedly the brief time spent on Vaii – or Bounty – Beach, where the adverts had been filmed. A truly beautiful area, with brilliant palm trees and a gorgeous blue sea, encircled by small cliffs. It is also one of the best cons in the world! The entire beach as it appears is fake, with the sand and the trees having been imported! Regardless of this, within minutes the beach-towels were out and the faithful sun worshippers were horizontal again! Later that day we went, by invitation, to the new site of Paleo Kastro, a site potentially bigger and more important than that of Knossos. Though we saw it in its infancy, it is set to become the first interactive archaeological site in Europe, and we were the first British school to visit!



Other highlights of the trip include the exceptionally enjoyable 'Cretan Night Out', where many of us joined in with traditional Cretan dancing. A couple of the young male dancers were paid particular attention! An enjoyable night was had by us all. Several of our party joined the local dancers on the stage before an appreciative audience of about 700 foreign tourists. Our Deputy Head Girl gave a particularly spirited performance! When the SMH girls go out it isn't just a minor operation but a highly technical procedure. I mean total makeovers in an hour at most. You would be amazed at what we girls can do in such a short time!

A excursion by boat to Molkhos which we were the first school group ever to have visited was another 'first' for SMH. Ferrying by two local fishermen was certainly interesting, and for a very reasonable fee they took a group of us across the bay to the ancient settlement. Further scrambling was engaged in by pupils and staff alike! The ancient town, burial area, port and small fisherman's church were also explored. Those studying Classics especially enjoyed discovering the archaeologists' dig hut and store rooms.

The visit to the Commonwealth Cemetery was a very moving experience. Dr Ashdown gave us a brief account of the Battle of Crete, the victims of which we saw before us. Flowers were laid on Pennington's grave (British archaeologist executed for espionage by the invading forces) and we walked around examining the gravestones, and the messages left by the loved ones of those who had given their lives. The one which I found most moving was one of the simplest: "For a loving husband, forever in my thoughts." The husband in question was just 24 years old.

Throughout the trip there were frequent

shopping opportunities, especially at Khania and Rethymnion, which were engaged in enthusiastically, and many of us returned to England with heavier and fuller suitcases than those we had arrived with! The weather was mostly gorgeous, usually sunny and between 27-32 degrees C! The food was fantastic. Every day we enjoyed the local and traditional foods of Crete, never going hungry.

The journey back was somewhat more complicated. When we went through to departures we discovered that our flight was delayed by approximately two hours (slightly longer in actual fact) which we found out later was due to our plane being broken! A replacement aircraft had to be flown in from Cyprus to return us to England. However, considering how well the rest of the trip had gone, we didn't complain too much, and amused ourselves by chatting, eating, reading and playing games of various sorts (I myself lost a game of chess to Mrs T's husband, John!)

All in all, the trip was one which was both interesting and highly enjoyable. What made the trip so good is that it gave different year groups a chance to bond. We all got to know people whom we had perhaps misunderstood before or never even noticed! We all came back with at least one new friend!

I know that the rest of the girls would want to join in saying a very big 'Thank You' to Mrs T, and the rest of the staff, for allowing us to go on such a fantastic trip, which I'm sure none of us will ever forget!

If you get the chance to go, take it, and fast – because trips like this one are a once in a lifetime offer that you may never get given again.

Lauren Lansdowne, Year 13,
and Josie Latham, Year 9

The Ski Trip

Everyone arrived at school very early in the morning, clad in matching blue hoodies. Some were like zombies, but others, we were amazed to see, had already applied their warpaint and had freshly curled eyelashes. Little did we know that this was a primitive ritual we would be forced to bear witness to every morning, every evening, and every time a male was in a 100ft radius.

After a trip during which many of the party were dead to the world, we arrived in (snow-less) France. We found Miss Whittaker too enthusiastic for our liking as we sped around tight hairpin bends up the mountain on the way to Alpe d'Huez.

In the afternoon we trundled downstairs to an interesting boot and ski fit. Humorously, most of the girls had fallen over after about two minutes. And contrary to what you may think, it was not due to the strange boots, but to the 'sexy' ski tech Matt.

As we were all tired and not in best humour, we decided to go to bed early. However, our plans were foiled by a supposed 'scientific breakthrough, innit?' Some year elevens had decided that static electricity was a new wonder to the world. This prompted Verity to sleep on the floor under a towel due to fear of electricity causing a reverse effect on the static appearance of her hair. Looking back it seemed pointless as she crowded the bathroom with her numerous hair products. Talking of bathrooms, ours was the envy of the teachers. It was black tiled and had a squishy floor, which Katie Beves became quite attached to. So much however that when the talking had not stopped in the early hours of the morning, she took herself and her bedding to the bathroom, expecting an uninterrupted sleep, only to be awakened by Miss Whittaker a short while later.

Everyone was woken at 7am by a suprisingly chirpy person, who turned out to be Lucy Latham, yodelling 'Wake up you mingers!' which was to become an annoyingly familiar phrase at that hour of the morning.

Not satisfied with the outcome of long eyelash curling the previous night (yes, before bed . . .) the process was repeated. After breakfast, Pippa donned her cream beret and we set off for the slopes. We were split into ability groups, and we skied with our instructors from 9 till 11am.

The beginners had a ski instructor called Eric, and had to trudge up the slope over and over again, only to fall down again. They progressed to the drag lift, which many people found hard to stay attached to. This resulted in entertaining falls and bewildered students wandering back down to the bottom again. Most of the other year 11's had an instructor called Laurent, who was often heard to be saying, 'Relax your body, everybody!' (+ French accent) whilst Katie Salt and Rishma drooled whenever he turned around. At the end of that day, everyone could stand up and convincingly roll down a hill. Let's just say that our bodies and the snow were very much acquainted. Almost everyone was pretty much crippled that evening.

That night most people set off to explore the town. Some clothed sensibly were well wrapped up. Others (ie Pippa) preferred to wear less clothing (ie one tartan skirt. Said skirt was roughly one hand width long). Some decided that their teachers, lacking somewhat in intellect would require their assistance at the quiz. Meanwhile the girls who had gone out discovered that it was harder to walk up an icy hill than it was to slide down, but managed to make it back to the hotel, boys in tow.

As the days passed everyone improved, although Pippa decided that it would be fun to ski into, and therefore mount the snow cannons (that poor little snow cannon never saw her coming) but however hard she crashed, however fast she fell, the beret never left her head. We came to the conclusion that it was firmly fixed with denture adhesive, causing her to adopt the nickname 'French poodle' (or something to that effect).

The food was great. The evening entertainment was good. Bumboarding, so named because you didn't stay on the tray, was a popular and comical event as along with St. Leonard's Mayfield we zoomed down the slopes at amazing speed.

Everyone progressed and by the third day everyone went in the telecabines to the third station. On the way we were entertained by the village idiot, eating strawberry laces from up her nose (guesses on a postcard please).

One evening most of us took part in some ice-skating. All was well as everyone clung desperately to the sides, until Mrs Fellingham decided to get friendly with the ice, causing her to talk a lot of gibberish (and we're not talking physics here) – this was translated as 'I have a squishy head.'

Soon even the beginners were going up to the Marmottes, which were blue and red slopes. It became a daily goal for many of the year 11's and 12's to 'get' a snowboarder. This means you had to cut them up on the slopes. Katie Beves took up this sport over-enthusiastically, as many snowboarders found out.

Many of us made it a nightly habit to play a vigorous game of UNO, Who's in the bag, or taboo. On the last night there was a comedy presentation ceremony, where distinctive traits were celebrated with chocolate, e.g. Most used phrase – How Rude! Best fall – Katie Beves (in the boot room!) Best costume – Saphy – the Obese fairy.

Another early morning dawned and it was time to go home. On the coach we reminisced about the past week including the lack of snow and our ski song (for further details ask year 11). Katie Beves to this day regularly reminds Mrs Fellingham of the amount of times she picked her up off the slopes (in hope of an A* physics paper.) Spirits were low, but Miss Whittaker still donned Emily's Big Issue coat truly strengthening her status as village idiot. We arrived back in England tired. We were picked up at Gatwick. It was an unwilling end to an amazing holiday. It was a trip of a lifetime, not to be missed.

Katie Beves and Verity Mayes, Year 11

French Study trip to Normandy Summer 2001

A few days after the end of the Summer Term, Mrs Doyle and Miss Cooper bravely set off with 20 girls from Years 6 and 7 for the Château de la Baudonnière in Normandy.

The week was packed with outdoor activities which – despite the rain – allowed the pupils of St Mary's to achieve things they had never thought possible!

We were all impressed by Claire Burgess scaling the eight metre vertical climbing wall in ten seconds flat. Brittany Lock and Larissa Huber made light work of the assault course, while Rachel Walsh showed no fear as blindfolded leader of the troupe through the Château grounds.

Not a single girl missed out on the chance to learn how to paddle in a kayak nor to master the skills of archery. Mountain biking was another popular activity – the only person to fall off being Miss Cooper!

There were also more relaxing events to be enjoyed; who could forget the sight of the girls dressed in stripy tops and berets at the French evening, where Georgia Rushton certainly managed to polish off far more than her fair share of snails?

Congratulations also went to Peta Golding and Amadea Hills for winning the talent competition on the last night. Their performance of 'It's raining men' had the whole room dancing!

Mrs Doyle's inspired suggestion to visit the nearby zoo was met with enthusiasm by all. It was a very close contest between the gorillas and the bouncy castle for most exciting exhibit of the day.

It should also be mentioned that somewhere amongst all the activities, visits and shopping trips, a fair amount of language learning also took place! Girls had regular French lessons and even received a class on how to bake bread entirely in the target language.

Mrs Doyle and Miss Cooper were helped tremendously throughout the week by four older pupils: Julia Bezanson, Anna Vincent-Gill, Anna Mojab and Ruth Burman. The last two will no doubt have both found the whole experience incredibly useful for their GCSE French exam later this year!

The girls arrived back with all bones intact and loaded with mud-encrusted clothing after 8 days of rainy adventure. It was a most successful trip and all those involved have fond memories of their week away.

Miss Cooper

Letter from Rwanda

Sarah Cole was the Head Girl at St Mary's Hall in 1990-1991. She has just completed two years' service in V.S.O. in Rwanda, from where she wrote to us:

My class sizes are an average of 45 here. The school was badly damaged in the war, but a few buildings have been built and some repairs completed since then. Nevertheless when you walk through the girls' dormitories, the daylight shows through the roof like the stars in a night sky. The majority of the classrooms, along with the dormitories, don't have ceilings. When it rains on the metal roofs, it is deafening and impossible to teach. In the senior classrooms there is no glass in the windows, and when the rain drives in, they close the wooden shutters – then it is not only noisy but everyone is rendered blind, sitting in the dark. So teaching waits for the rain.

This term I have been playing netball with the girls. We have a grass court, but don't imagine Wimbledon. The grass is a foot high in places, deceitfully concealing random holes dug for the National Tree Planting Day last October (the trees didn't arrive for a month). So the girls and I leap and stumble, considerably slowed by these mantraps. The school football pitch is in the village, past the primary school, where there is a flattish area with two wooden goals. They graze cows and goats here, so it's quite a messy area to play barefoot football. The primary children are still amazed by us (Andrea, my VSO colleague, and I); they are particularly fascinated by our hair. We get quite a lot of attention from small kids generally; toddlers hurl themselves at our legs, wrapping their arms around our knees and burying their snotty noses in our skirts.

Rukomo market is a wonderful colourful place, with many stalls hung with brightly patterned materials. Piles of tomatoes shine red and bunches of onions tied by strips of banana leaf are presented for inspection. Usually there is an abundance of cabbages piled on sacking, spread on the ground, and lots of pineapples too. Green and yellow bananas are sold, spread out in small fat-fingered fans.

It's night-time now and I am writing this by the light of two candles, sitting at my desk in the main room of our house. I often feel like I am camping, cooking on a kerosene stove on the cement floor, and pouring water out of a yellow jerry-can into a bucket to go down the garden and wash. At night I feel like Florence Nightingale, as I carry my lamp around with me. I'm very glad to say I haven't suffered from malaria, although there are a lot of mosquitoes here. Sleeping under my bright green net every night must work – together with the anti-malarial tablets.

I love the open-ness here, the wide sky with kites flying across it. In our village papaya trees strike up above the little mud house roofs. As you travel to Nyagatare with the sun rising, flat-topped trees wreathed in mist weave with the chocolate river in a shallow valley. You should come and see! All visitors welcome.

Some of the SMH students from Year 10 have corresponded with some of Sarah's students, and through a Mufti Day collection, we were able to send a donation which was used to purchase traditional dance equipment for the Rwanda school. We are looking forward to hearing more of Sarah's exploits when she returns to Sussex.

The Natural History Museum

This excursion was an experience and a half for me, and probably for a lot of the girls, because we had not been there before. When I got inside the museum I thought, like wow, because I saw this huge dinosaur at the very front. It looked like an excellent museum. It was quite big and had a lot of features in it, like a dinosaur section, a section on how the earth reacts, birds, an evolution section, the body and a section on creepy crawlies. There were probably some more sections, but I did not notice them.

I think my favourite section was the section on birds. It was absolutely amazing what birds they had there. They had birds from so long ago. Maybe thousands of years back. I could not stop taking photos of every single bird and Tammy could not stop writing down all their amazing names. There were so many birds there that I had never seen before. Some of the birds looked beautiful. The only thing that I thought was horrible, was that they had literally hundreds of tiny little birds in one cabinet and they were all stuffed. Well at least they looked real to me. There were so many of the same type of birds. That's mean. What's the point? Anyway, I took a picture of this historical dodo bird. Now I looked at this bird closely, and I knew that it was not real, because I saw that the legs were made out of plastic and I saw some patches on the body of the bird, which didn't have enough feathers. When I got home and told dad about the great statue of the fake dodo bird, he mentioned to me that part of the bird wasn't fake. He told me that the beak was found out in the back (storage) of the museum. So the beak was the only part of the bird that was real. At first, I didn't believe a word of it. Like part of a bird from thousands of years ago is real? He told me that it had been said on the news at one certain time. I found that fascinating. Knowing that, I'm glad I took a picture of the bird close up.

The other sections we went to were really good as well, but my favourite section was the birds. The last feature we looked at was how the earth reacts. How they put the whole section together, soooooo cool. There was this big statue of the earth and it had heaps of colourful lights in it.

Now this part was the best part (joke). After looking through the earth section, Tyla, Tammy and I got lost. We had no idea where everybody had gone. We looked through nearly all the sections, but we found no sign of them. Then we stayed in one place till someone would find us. Tyla was soooooooooooooo stressed, that we couldn't even talk to her properly, cause she would just say "Shhhhhh! Be quiet I can't hear. Shhhhhhh. No, be quiet. Listen." She decided to ring Christine on her mobile. It worked. Christine told her that they were all on the bus, while the teachers were looking for us. Well that was a bit of a relief. Then the receptionist put the microphone on and said, "Would the three SMH girls Tyla Head, Tammy Shephard and Keli Farkas please report to the reception immediately." Then she repeated herself. We ran to reception as fast as we could. Thank goodness we found Mrs Grundy waiting there. We thought that she would be cross and yell at us. Well, we were wrong. She wasn't that stressed. All she said was "Let's return to the bus, because everyone's waiting." So that's what we did. When we got on the bus, everyone's clapping, and we're like, oh gee, thanks a lot.

So overall the trip was a great experience. I really recommend it to the people who are interested in going. I really enjoyed it. Especially the last part. Ha.

Keli Farkas, Year 9



At the Science Museum



Feeding the ducks at Sussex Wildlife Trust