

JOHN FARDOULIS:

“Crazy passionate” about archaeology

INTERVIEW: ANNA ARSENIS

Tell me a few things about yourself.

I've met a lot of new people over the last nine months, through helping organise archaeology excavations in various sites in Kythera and Antikythera during the Greek summer this year. The one thing that most people comment on, is my enthusiasm.

The degree of difficulty in organising archaeology projects in Greece is quite high. Many questioned if they were actually possible. But others said “*your enthusiasm might get you through John*”, and it did!

A phrase that sums it up is “crazy passion”. Being so motivated and enthusiastic that almost no hurdle is too high. Crazy passion is necessary to get some things done in Greece, particularly at a time of difficulty, like now.

How do you spend your free time?

Every spare moment (even sneaking time out from work) over the last nine months has gone into helping organize archaeology in Greece. It has been really time consuming. Meeting and networking with a wide range of people, writing proposals, attending lectures, committee meetings, formulating budgets, talking through logistics with the archaeologists in Greece via Skype, and so on. Then, a crazy time on the ground over there in July/August; and after returning, sifting through over 3000 photos and 30 hours of video that I took. Plus the reporting phase at the moment and writing stories for the community about what happened. It's been like a full time job.

Before I became “crazy passionate” about archaeology, shipwreck diving was the thing that took up most of my free time. This went past just diving, extending to equipment engineering and maintenance - such as rebuilding compressors, boats, gas mixing and the more technical side of deep diving.

What attracts you to history?

Curiosity. Understanding what life was like under different civilizations and painting a mental picture of it.

Trying to understand the jig-

saw puzzle, based on random pieces scattered all over the place. Plus building up research to share with the community. Archaeology is a bit like a form of CSI but with evidence from hundreds or thousands of years ago. All of this is because of a bond with the island of my ancestors and yearning to explore it.

Tell me a few things about your project held in July 2010. How it all started.

After ten years without a proper holiday, my dream was to do some exploratory diving around Kythera last year. Laws changed in Greece in 2005, which made Scuba diving legal around much of island. There was challenge though, no dive shop for filling tanks.

So I had to become totally self-sufficient. This meant sending over a compressor and other equipment, about 800 kilograms of gear in total. We ended up packing it in a box trailer to be portable, which itself weighed about 200 kilograms. So adding the trailer to the dive gear, a tonne of equipment was sent over, literally.

Kythera is located at the cross roads of the Mediterranean so there's over 5000 years of maritime history associated with the island. So the big adventure last year was to go exploratory diving around Kythera, not knowing what we might find.

A passion for diving corresponds with a keen interest in maritime archaeology. Maybe a connection with the sea stems from a bloodline that comes from a Greek island? A relative who knew about my crazy passion for maritime history introduced me to the publisher of a local Kytherian newspaper - who in turn introduced me to the resident (land) archaeologist for Kythera, Aris Tsaravopoulos, in August last year.

I first met Aris in a cafe in Potamos, the village where my dad was born. We met one Sunday morning and he mentioned that they were off to dig in a 300 BC pirate fortress the next day. Would I like to come, Aris asked? Ummm... Silly question. Of course I

would!

So while digging with a team of volunteers in Antikythera, I started to see how some people really love archaeology. We were with Greek government archaeologists who took annual leave to go and dig in Antikythera while on holidays, rather than just visiting the beach or doing something relaxing. Students also came and roughed it, camping, without a hot shower for weeks during the dig period.

After participating in a project where you never know what you'll find next, I was hooked. Without any prior experience - or need for books, I was digging, under the supervision of experts.

So naturally I started on Aris' case, asking about 2010 archaeology, in Kythera.

After speaking with Aris on a fortnightly basis for months in the latter part of 2009, I learned enough to put in a proposal to the Kytherian Association of Australia and Nicholas Anthony Aroney Trust for funding support in 2010. This was primarily to feed a team of volunteers to help the archaeologists.

The contribution wasn't just in money though, I took full responsibility for logistics. Where to house 25 volunteers, being responsible for over 900 meals (excluding breakfast) during the 18 day stay, getting volunteers and visitors up and down the mountain every day. Even buying toilet paper.

The idea behind the whole thing!

The concept is a 360 degree approach, where the community/Diaspora assists archaeologists by helping support volunteer manpower and other resources, so they can go out and discover new evidence from the past.

The archaeologists then write reports and share the story about what they found. Pretty much digging up enough evidence to write new chapters of ancient history, in turn - sharing these chapters with the community. We help them, they make new discoveries and teach us more about the history of previous races that inhabited the land of our forefathers.

Archaeology is far from new



in Greece, but what was new, is the inclusion of the local community and members of the Diaspora in the project, both as sponsors and beneficiaries. Times are really tough for archaeologists in Greece at the moment. There's a lot of politics, funding has been axed, so support from the Diaspora can help a lot. But it's not a one-way street - supporting archaeology isn't just a donation but in fact an investment in our heritage.

Some local Greek people take their heritage for granted, a little like the equivalent of it being like bread and butter, just there, and in plentiful supply. We see our Greek heritage as more of a delicacy because our parents or grandparents were transplanted over here, thousands of kilometres away. That's why some people in Greece don't really appreciate archaeology and may have a short sighted view.

Paranoid about how it may affect their farm land rather than respecting cultures that existed in that area thousands of years prior, well before our civilization was born.

Education can help change this though. Especially by being open and sharing information, explaining the process and highlighting the value of objects that are found. Archaeology needs to be made accessible and welcoming.

Inviting local people along for a tour or to volunteer is important and should not be neglected due to tunnel vision regarding the academic and scientific side of things. Increasingly, due to the recession, academic research will struggle to get funding support in Greece. But in contrast, inspiring the community - including a large Diaspora from abroad, which is hungry to learn more about heritage, could become the solution regarding shortfalls.

This year, the majority of our permanent volunteers were Greek university students studying archaeology,

plus a few members of the Greek-Australian Diaspora. We also had about half that number again as casual volunteers - mostly from the Diaspora, who each volunteered for several days at a time.

In future an archaeology project could double as a youth program, bringing together locals and members of the Diaspora from around the world, creating a form of unity from doing something intense together.

How did the project change you?

Change started to occur from when I volunteered on my first dig in August 2009. Before that, I was pretty much a black sheep as far as the Greek-Australian community was concerned, not having much to do with it for the last 15-20 years. The problem was getting bored with gossip, fashion, cars, nightclubs, squabbles over inheritances and what I perceived was a generally conservative tone of the community.

What turned me into a born-again Kytherian was exploration, combining history with adventure. The Indiana Jones side of things - for want of a better analogy. Being part of a group of pioneers, digging in an ancient pirate settlement in Antikythera last year. This helped provide both intrigue and meaning.

The same may not occur for everyone but it did for several other members of the Diaspora this year, in a similar way to what happened with me in the summer of 2009.

Even where we stayed this year was an adventure, in a 170 year-old mountain top monastery, Agia Moni. A place where Kolokotronis was sheltered in the early 1800's and promised to rebuild it if the Fatherland was freed during the Greek revolution. It was, and he did, with Agia Moni being rebuilt in 1840.

Quite frankly, Kythera has a