

## ONAR VILLAGE - THE KYRENIA WALKS

**FRIDAY**

**BUFFAVENTO CASTLE TO BELLAPAIS**

*(7.1 miles/11.3 km)*

Probably our most popular walk. After pick up from your hotel we drive up to the top of the Buffavento Pass, adjacent to the famous Five Finger Mountain. The name Buffavento is thought to mean 'Defier of the Winds', which would certainly seem appropriate. Of the three castles on the mountain range this is the highest at 954 m., and probably the most spectacular of them all. It is really a summit made into a castle, rather than a castle built on a summit.



Each of the buildings is hung on the massive rock pinnacle from which there is the most amazing 360° panorama of Cyprus. Looking south we see the Troodos Mountains shimmering in the distance, and to the north the rugged coast of Turkey across the tranquil Mediterranean. An advantage of this location on hot summer days is the most welcoming cooling breeze wafting in from the sea. From the car park below the castle, as we walk towards the steps there is a small memorial to those who died in a plane crash in 1998, when a Boeing 727 flew into the mountains, killing all on board. We climb 600 steps up to the castle, eventually leading to the arched gateway and thence to the various rooms, antechambers and water systems.



Though the castle was never taken by force it was surrendered to Richard the Lion Heart by King Comnenus's daughter in 1191, when he conquered Cyprus. In 1311 the castle of Buffavento was used as a prison (Chateau de Lion) for two Lusignan princes: Chamerin, brother of the King and Constable of the Kingdom, and Balian de Ibelin, Prince of Galilee. Both were regarded as the supporters of the usurping Prince of Tyre and as traitors to King Henry II.

Buffavento is associated with a Queen at the time of the Knights' Templar, the Empress Helena, who lived a solitary life in the castle with only her dog as a companion. Today it is hard to imagine what living here could have been like; certainly tough, and for the prisoners that were held here and starved to death definitely not a nice place.



As we climb over the range to the north side on a little pass we descend into the wooded area we had seen from far below

the castle. As we walk along the wooded cover becomes sparse and we enter an area of open mountainside with the usual hardy lentisc, spiny burnett and rock roses, as lizards scurry before us.

Our backdrop is the remainder of the westward extent of the Kyrenia Mountain Range, magnificent and jagged on the horizon. The trail we follow weaves through new plantings of conifers and with the bright red soils and the bleached, almost white rocks in the fierce sunlight all the colours are magnified and brilliant. The main trail joins us from the left as we start to head down towards the gradual descent to the village of Bellapais.

Bellapais is tucked out of sight under the escarpment and it is only as we zig zag our way down that the village suddenly appears below us. The original abbey, which dates from the early 13th century, is a magnificent structure, and clearly the centre of the whole settlement, which tightly clusters around it. Bellapais is one of the few villages in North Cyprus typical of what we think of as a Mediterranean village: houses pitched close on top of each other, very narrow streets, small alleyways, tiny shops, miscellaneous doors and openings



seemingly going nowhere, all quite charming. In the middle of this agglomeration is the 'House of Bitter Lemons', home of Laurence Durrell, who lived there between 1952 and 1956. This is where he wrote 'The Bitter Lemons of North Cyprus'. He mentions 'The Tree of Idleness', which is where we stop for refreshments before we are taken back to our hotel.