

Sea Mills of Kefalonia

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Photos by Keith and Ruth Andrews

Kefalonia is the largest of the Ionian Islands, situated off the east coast of Greece, on the 'Greek subduction zone', and it is subject to numerous earthquakes. It is composed almost exclusively of heavily-folded cretaceous limestone and has very little surface water, so not a very promising place to look for watermills.

We were attracted to the coast just north of the major town of Argostoli where our map and guide book indicated **Katavothres Sea Mills**, and a short distance away **Thalassomilos Sea Mill**. The whole of Kefalonia is a *geosite* so there was a notice board explaining that sink holes by the beach used the inflow of sea water to turn waterwheels that powered mills and an ice factory. Two of the watermills were destroyed during the 1953 earthquake and, sadly, the flow of water into the sink holes was reduced to a trickle. When we visited the channels were dry, but I believe that at certain phases of the tides there is still some flow.



There is an attractive undershot waterwheel adorning the site at Katavothres.



At Thalassomilos, 100m down the coast, there is a very mill-like building, now closed up. It has a similar set of sink holes and a channel under the building where there would have been a waterwheel.



We were beginning to realising that our guide book was tantalisingly lacking in information.



Our next clue came when we visited one of the island's tourist hot-spots, **Melissani Cave and Lake**, which is a collapsed cave with an underground lake which is visited by boat. Again we found a geosite board which said that it was linked to the rest of a complex subterranean waterway that started at the Katavothres sink holes on the west coast and ended at the resurgent springs of Karavomilos, 15km away on the east coast, near Sami. The continuity of the system was confirmed in 1963 when uranium dye poured into the sink holes emerged 14 days later in the brackish springs at Karavomilos, fresh water getting mixed in.

So looking more carefully at the map we located a water mill at **Karavomilos** and went to look. Again there was a geosite board, but we didn't need it because we found another waterwheel.



Apparently, since the 1953 earthquake the subterranean passages beneath the island have been partially blocked due to rock collapses, but the upsurge of water is still enough to create a small lake, and allow the the siting of a wheel in the outflow channel, but there are no related buildings with it, and no indication of what it was used for.

