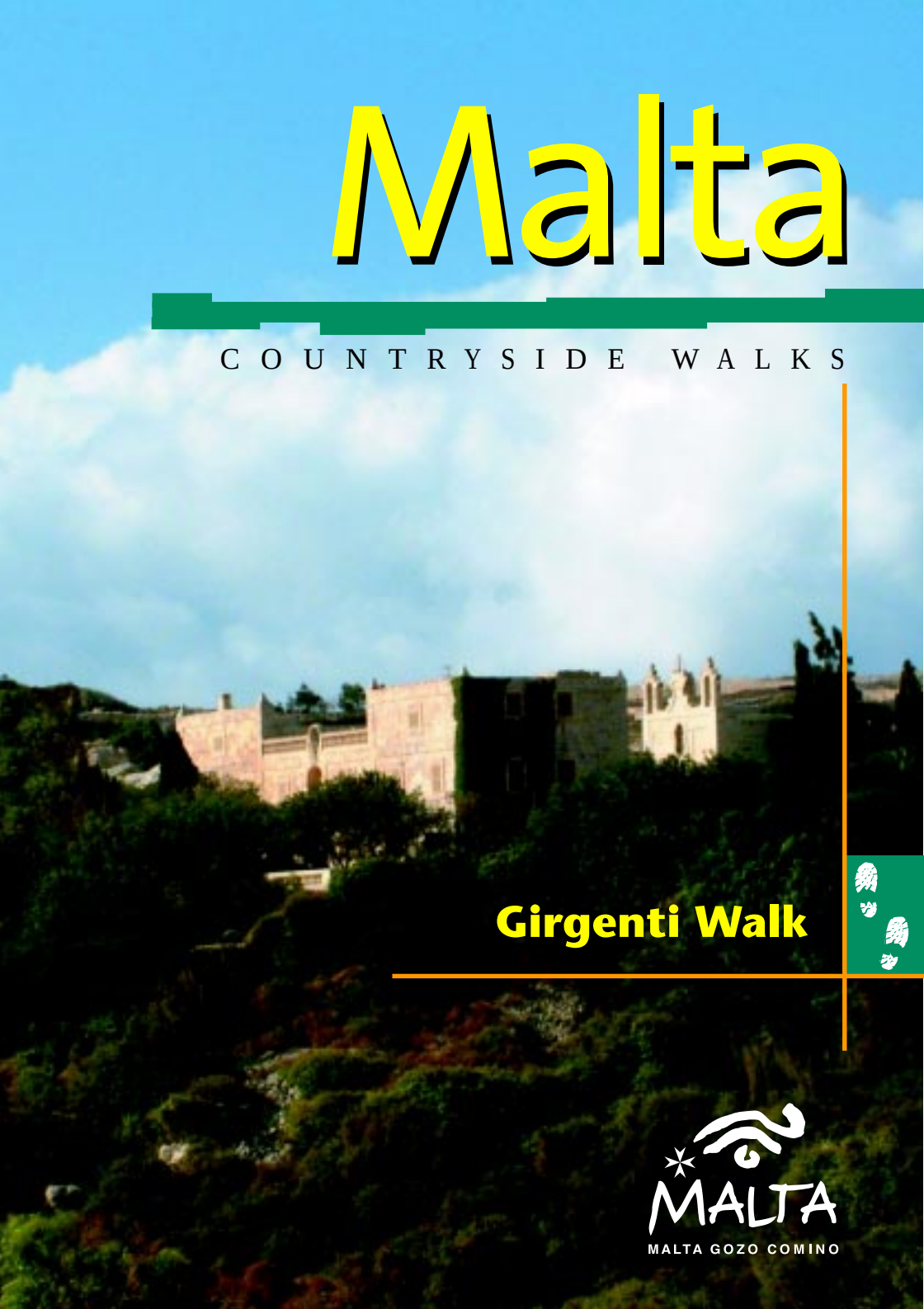
Malta

COUNTRYSIDE WALKS



Girgenti Walk

MALTA

MALTA GOZO COMINO

Introduction

The walk starts at the entrance of Buskett, on the outskirts of Dingli, and ends in Qrendi. It comprises the 16th century woodland of Buskett, prehistoric cart ruts and Ghar il-Kbir, a complex of caves which were inhabited up to 150 years ago. You will walk by Roman quarries and, further on, the Inquisitor's Girgenti Palace, an 18th century palace currently used as the Prime Minister's official residence. Laferla Cross is a landmark sited on a hill. It provides a vantage point from where spectacular views of the surrounding countryside can be enjoyed.

The walk passes through the village of Siggiewi with its numerous chapels and imposing Parish Church. Siggiewi's main square is of particular interest. Further on, a tower on the outskirts of Qrendi offers interesting architectural features. You will walk through the narrow village core road, past the monumental Parish Church and St. Anne chapel. The walk ends at Il-Maqluba, a large depression in the ground formed by the collapse of an underground cave.

The text, read in conjunction with the route map (found in the centre pages), helps you to follow the route more easily. The numbers in the text correspond to the numbers on the map.

How to get there

The walk starts at the entrance to Buskett on the way to Dingli. (For vehicles, this is the main exit from Buskett).

Public Transport
You can get there as follows:

- ✓ *From Valletta, take route bus 81 and alight near the old Government Winery (near Buskett Forest Aparthotel) across the road from the Buskett main exit.*
- ✓ *From Sliema, take route bus 65 and alight at the Saqqajja, Rabat bus stop next to the Ta' Saura home for the elderly. From the same bus stop, board the 81 bus to Dingli, alighting near the old Government Winery across the road from the Buskett main exit as indicated above.*
- ✓ *From Bugibba, take route bus 86 en route to Rabat and alight at the Ta' Saura old peoples' home to change to bus 81, from the same bus stop, to Dingli as indicated above.*

For the return journey from Qrendi it is best to return to Valletta by bus no. 35 from the Qrendi Bus Terminus situated near the Parish Church.

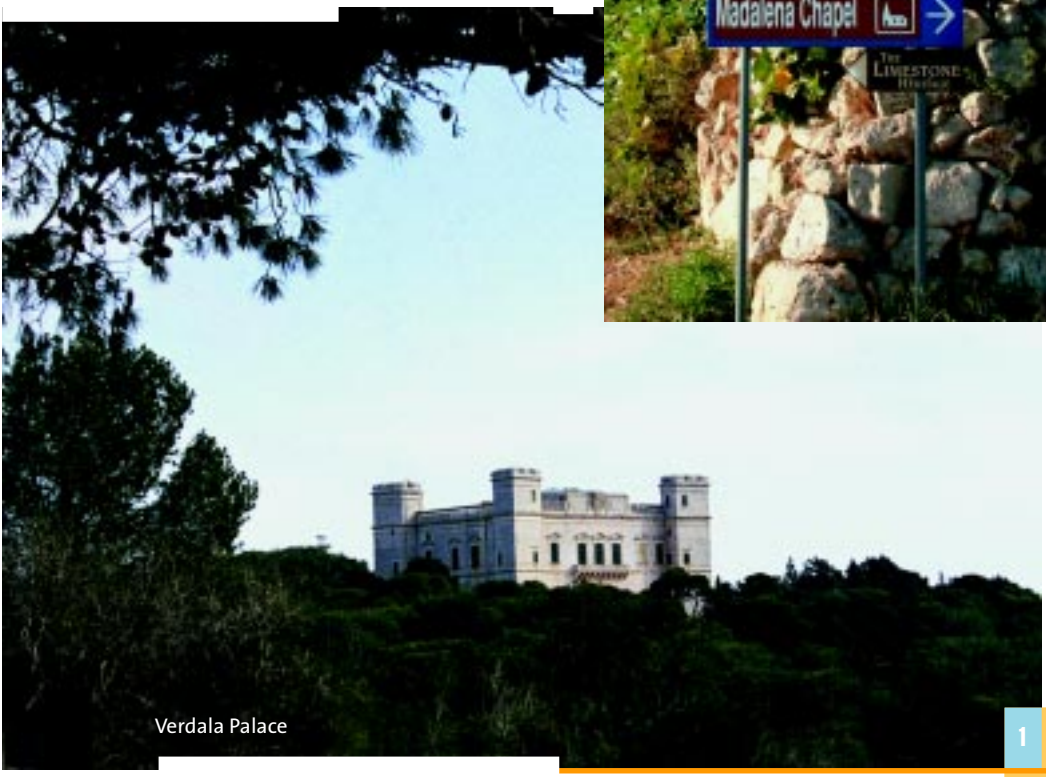
Length of the walk (excluding visit to Buskett) is 12.5 km.
Duration is approximately 4.5 to 5 hours.

Photo: Pauline Dingli

The walk starts from near the old Government winery. Follow the signs to Clapham Junction (prehistoric cart ruts) to start the walk.

Before doing so, however, you can spend some time exploring Buskett. The road to Buskett is at the crossroads a few metres away from the bus stop.

These wooded areas and gardens are well worth a visit. If you do spend some time in Buskett, make sure you remember your way back to this Buskett entrance.



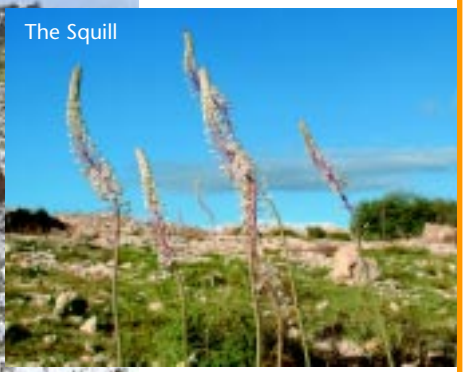
Verdala Palace

Buskett

Buskett Gardens started off in the late 16th century by Grand Master La Valette as a hunting area. It was improved upon by successive Grand Masters.

The Gardens were mostly planted during the reign of Grand Master Lascaris (1636-57). The layout of Buskett has remained virtually unchanged to this day. Buskett (meaning a small forest) is crowned by Verdala Palace built by Grand Master Verdala in the late 16th century. The pine trees surrounding the palace were planted much later during the time of the British Governor Sir Arthur Borton (1878-1884).

Upon returning to the walk route, follow the signs to the Clapham Junction prehistoric cart ruts. Walk a few metres uphill and then turn left. Some 50 metres further on, you come across a rough lane, to the right of the road. 1 This lane slopes slightly uphill and passes in between fields. The lane leads onto a large rocky area. This is Clapham Junction. If you look to your left you can distinctly see the conglomeration of prehistoric cart ruts. The cart ruts resemble the criss-crossing of lines at railway junctions – hence the name Clapham Junction. Please tread carefully as you observe these cart ruts.



The Squill

The deeply furrowed rock at Clapham Junction - (prehistoric cart ruts)

No precise information is available on these ruts. One of the theories is that they were created by the continuous nomadic movements of people.

Could an ancient civilization have made these ruts as people followed a set pattern of migration? Could they have been caused by the transportation of soil to higher grounds? If the wheel had not yet been invented, what could have produced those parallel tracks in the rocks? Could it be some form of sledge or wheel-less carts similar to those of the American Indians? And who pulled them? These are questions which bear no answers, only theories.

Keep walking along this path. From Clapham Junction, look out for a large weather beaten carob tree. Walk towards it.

Once the path reaches higher ground, avoid stepping on the small beds of soil so as not to damage the little vegetation established there. You will soon come across the large carob tree rising above the rubble wall.

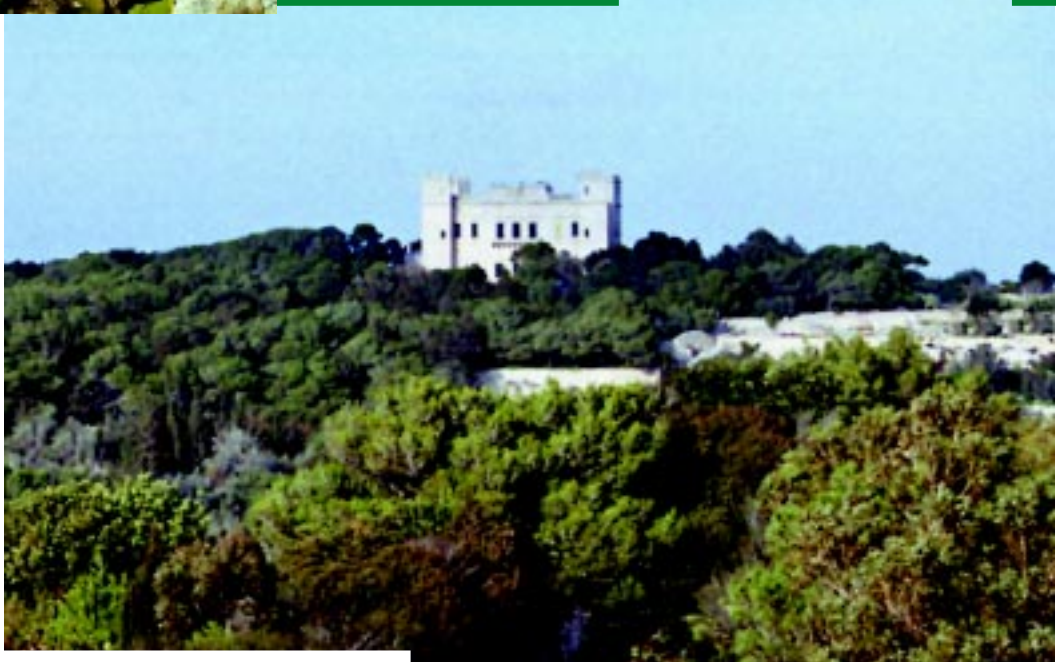
The gaping west side of the big cave at Għar il-Kbir

If you happen to be here in autumn, you can see masses of the tiny Autumn Crocus in flower. Along the path, you can also see the tall linear foliage of the Asphodel and the low-lying, wide-leaved medicinal plant, the Squill. You are advised not to touch the bulb of the Squill as this may cause skin irritations.

On your left, a narrow path leads down to the entrance of several caves. The first cave on the right can be easily accessed.

This cave was probably originally used as a burial place. Note the niches in the rocks similar to those found in the Rabat catacombs.

Upon reaching the top you will see a large cavity below you. This is Għar il-Kbir (the Big Cave) where troglodytes (cave dwellers) lived up to the early nineteenth century.



Proceeding further down the path, turning to the right beneath the burial cave, you arrive at the largest cave. Tall caper plants hang above the entrance like curtains. Once through the opening you can see that this large cave is interconnected with others. Over hundred troglodytes used to live here, together with their farm animals.

Exit the large cave and walk to another one to the right. You can see two beds complete with a headrest cut in the rocks. No chance of shifting beds there!

The holes on the side of the beds were used to tie cloth or skin material to create partitions. The shorter and wider bed has a couple of narrow steps leading on to it. Various small niches were used to hold oil lamps and icons. Holes in the ceiling and sides of the cave were used by the troglodytes to hang herbs, onions, garlic and possibly sheaves of straw and sacks of seeds.

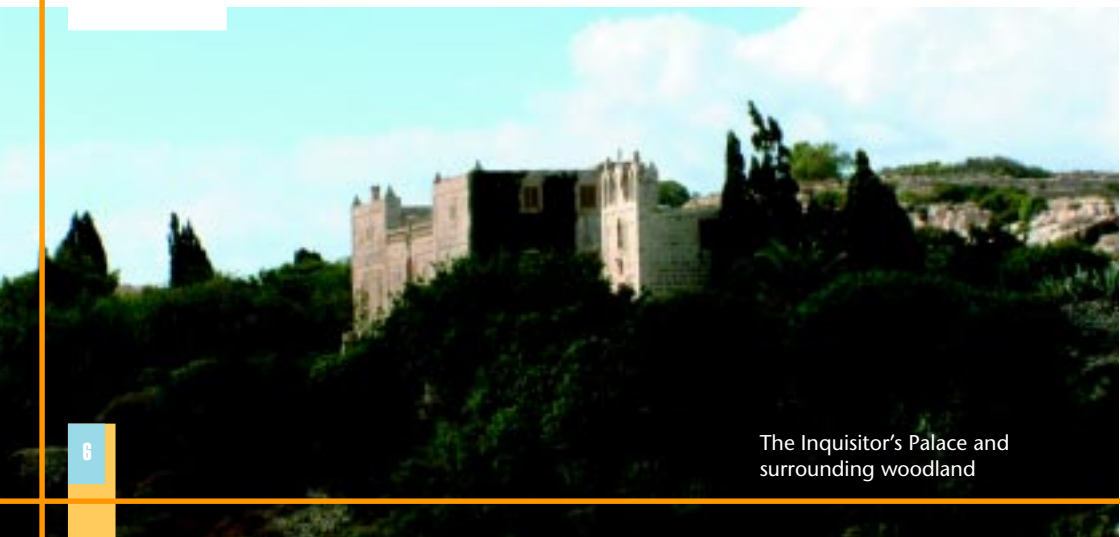
Rock tomb from Punic Times

Roman Quarries - Girgenti

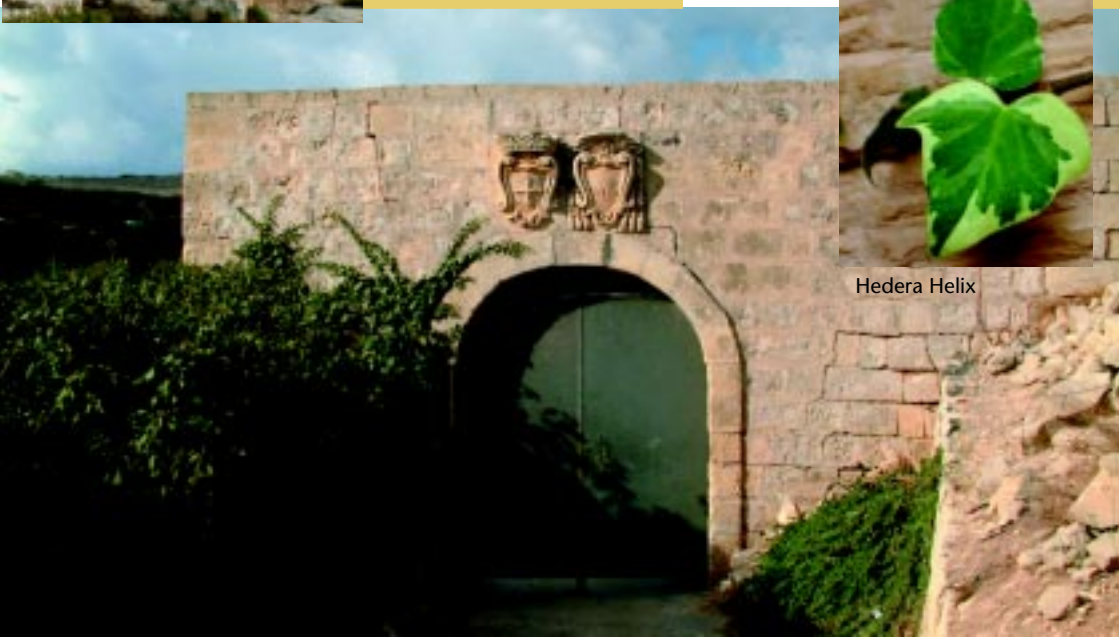
After having seen the Ghar il-Kbir complex of caves, walk back to the footpath. 2 Keep to the right, walking by the low wall, until it ends abruptly on to an area of garigue. Explore this area to discover small caves punic tombs and cart ruts. Proceed over the discernable pathway which lies between you and the country house (about 300 metres ahead of you) in a north easterly direction. Using the country house as your reference point, you will come to the rubble wall. 3 From near the country house, Verdala Palace, surrounded by woodland, can be seen in all its majesty.

You are now on a better marked path which leads to a gateway onto an asphalted road. Turn right along this road. The narrow asphalted road passes through a stretch of rocky garrigue. Once past a farm entrance on the left, you can see the remains of roman quarries - proof of a Roman colony close by. As the road starts sloping gradually downhill on the left, there is a service road leading to some farm buildings.

The road passes through arable land of heavy clayish soil composition. At the road's end, turn right into a wider road. 4



The Inquisitor's Palace and surrounding woodland



Hedera Helix

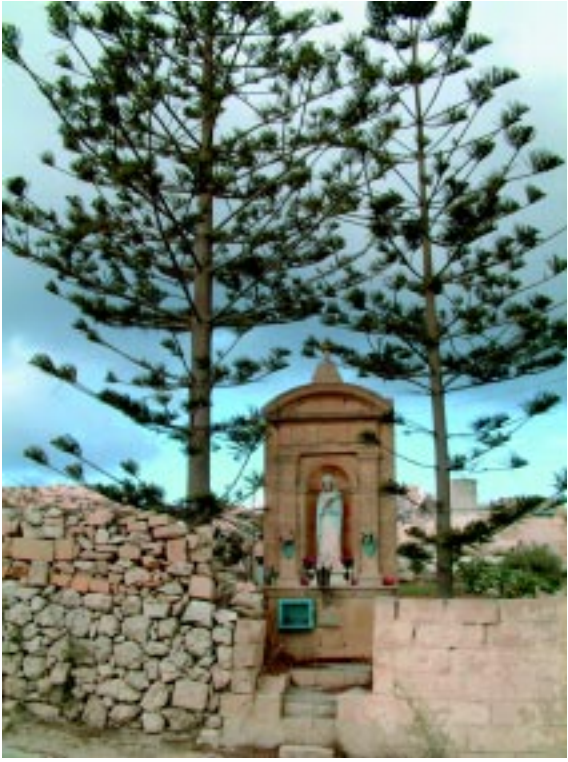
From here, you can see the fertile Girgenti Valley below. Across the valley, there is Girgenti Palace. Built by the 57th Inquisitor Mons Angelo Dorini (1760-66) as his summer residence, it commands a spectacular country view. It is surrounded by the fertile farmlands of Ghajn il-Kbira (the Great Spring).

This palace was restored in the early 1990's and is now the official residence of the Prime Minister.

Walk along the road towards the quarry in the distance. Notice a ramp on the left, leading down to a large portal, which bears a coat of arms dating back to 1728. A marble plaque states that these fields were leased to a certain Joseph Muscat.

Walking past the portal, on the left you can see the lush growth of the ivy Hedera helix, tall pecan nut trees, citrus orchards, carob and fig trees. The gateway entrance to the Girgenti Palace can be seen on the left where the road widens considerably.

Continue walking uphill towards the Ta' Zuta Quarry. This produces hard stone sand and spalls for concrete. Next to the quarry entrance as the roads turns left, there is a wayside shrine flanked by two Aruacaria trees.
The shrine, dedicated to our Lady, carries a 1961 marble plaque and a fresh stock of candles. It is customary for passers-by to stop and light a candle if the one in the lantern is spent.



Follow the Laferla Cross sign. On the left, you can see Girgenti Palace. Walking along this road, flanked by the quarry on the right, you can see quarrying activity still going on below.

The road continues uphill from where you can get a view of both Girgenti and Verdala Palaces. By now you will have noticed that several farmers channel water run-off from the roads into their artesian wells. Collecting precious water is particularly important in autumn to enable them to harvest a winter crop.

The road levels off, flanked by arable land on the left and garigue on the right. Fennel plants line the garigue alongside the squill. The road dips down slightly and terraced fields follow the lie of the land. Terracing is one of the best ways to prevent soil erosion. The road then goes slightly uphill flanked by rubble walls until a junction is met. Turn left at the junction. 5 Again, from here, Verdala Palace offers a lovely sight. Beyond, you can see the cupola of the Dingli Parish Church. Look to the left to see an arch formed by two carobs growing behind each other in a private field.

It is interesting to note that the

Archway in a carob tree

prevailing saline winds have forced the lower carob tree to grow in a wedge-like shape. In fact, wind is a problem for unprotected farming especially in such exposed areas. Rubble walls offer some shelter.

On a clear day, you can easily see the outline of the Mdina Cathedral and the Mosta Dome. The coast is visible in the distance.

Turn left and onto a concreted path. 6 The path ends at the Annunciation Chapel, which was built in 1857 with donations from galleon crews. The original chapel, which was built in 1420, fell into ruin and was rebuilt in 1494. In 1693 an earthquake struck the island and the chapel collapsed. It was rebuilt the following year. It collapsed again in 1856 due to an earth tremor. A year later the present chapel was built.

Any construction on this site is prone to damage because of an underlying clay layer. Even simple wetting and drying of the subsoil causes differential movement in the ground resulting in structural

Laferla Cross

The cross was put up in 1900 to commemorate the Holy Year. The cross is named after Rev. Paul Laferla, on whose initiative this cross was erected. The plinth contains a small chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows.

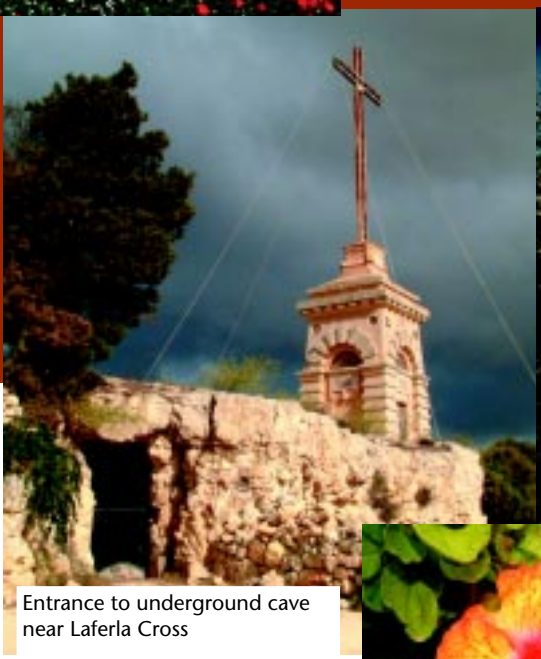
In 1904 the Archbishop blessed the cross and a painting of Our Lady of Sorrows was added. In 1946 the cross collapsed but was re-erected in 1963. The cross is 16 metres (52 feet) high. Being on high ground the cross is a landmark visible from the surrounding countryside and nearby towns and villages.

Approaching Laferla Cross

damage to the chapel. Next to the chapel stands a huge bronze cross known as Laferla Cross.

Growing near the chapel, there is the Acacia karroo, whose long, white thorns are a silent reminder of the crown of thorns adorning the head of the crucified Christ as seen in the small chapel.

Just below the chapel parvis there is a cave hewn in the rocks and beyond it the path drops down into a country lane. The path was fully cobbled until recently. This was essential to enable farmers to reach their fields on wet wintry days. Small stones were embedded in the soft terrain and kept in place every couple of metres by hardwearing kerb stones transversing the path. The lane not only gives access to the fields but



Entrance to underground cave near Laferla Cross

Annunciation Chapel

also drains excess water run-off from the fields and from high ground.

Along the downward path, on the left, a niche contains a statue of Christ carrying the cross. There are three more statues depicting stages of the way of the cross. In fact it is customary for a pilgrimage to be held here during the Holy Week. Prior to Good Friday, late in the evening, hundreds of candles and open flame torches (fjakkoli) light up the way.

Just past the shrine a solitary lentisk shrub on the left carries red berries during late autumn, a reminder of the droplets of blood left on the wayside by the crucified Christ.

Three more statues can be seen further down - namely Christ crowned with thorns, Christ tied to a column after flogging and finally Christ being comforted by an angel in the Olive orchard.

The path ends in Fawwara road. Turn right. 7 If one looks closely,

BUSKETT
WC
Winery
Gate
Roman Quarries
Portal
Ruts
Ghar il-Kbir
Cave Dwellings
GIRGENTI
Inquisitor's Palace
Laferla Cross
Annunciation Ch
Cave
Shrine
Trees Arch
Hardrock Quarries
WIED ZIKKU
Bore Hole
Dikkiena Cliffs
TA-ZUTA
DINGLI CLIFFS
Il-Kullana
Il-Fawwara
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
N
0
0.5
1 Km
Ghar Lapsi
Legend
Landmarks
Built-up areas
Height in metres
Markers
Roads
Route
Optional Detours
Direction indicators
Start/End Points
Valley bed
Refreshments
Hotel / Restaurant
Toilets
Telephone

SIGGIEWI
St Nicholas Square
Church
WIED XKORA
Mons Antiquarius
Place of interest
Local Council Hospital
Road to Mqabba
Road to Qrendi
Open Reservoir
68
Malta International Airport Runway
Hal-Xluq Ch
67
Assumption Shrine
Quarries
Quarries
Providenza Ch
QRENDI
Tower
School
WC
66
San Niklaw Reservoir
St Matthew Ch
Maqluba depression
65
51
52
WIED BABU

DETAIL OF CAVE DWELLINGS AREA
ting point
to point 4
Gateway
1
Country House
Tree
Cart Ruts
3
Clapham Junction
Rock Tombs
2
Cave
Rubble walls
the Track

Map Inset

the roof's cornice of one of the rural buildings on the right, sports a pair of horns of a bull. This was a superstitious habit, to ward off the evil eye. Farming in this village mainly consists of cabbage, cauliflowers and kohlrabi crops.

On reaching the crossroad, walk straight ahead. 8 Soon you will pass by a renovated farmhouse on the left, and on the right, the Wied Zikku borehole. Take the road to the left of the borehole. The path is narrow and flanked by raised fields. Turn left. 9

Continue straight ahead along this road. On the left, a ditch indicates the head of a valley. Soon you will reach the main road leading from Siġġiewi to Għar Lapsi. 10 Turn left and proceed for a few metres. On the right, you can see a short road leading to il-Kappella tal-Providenza (Providence Chapel). The chapel, completed in 1753, replaced an earlier one which was in ruins. The portico was added later in 1816, to buttress the chapel which had been damaged by lightning.

The walk continues along this busy road towards the village of Siggiewi. You pass by a large open storm water reservoir. Continue

Way of the cross on the hill side

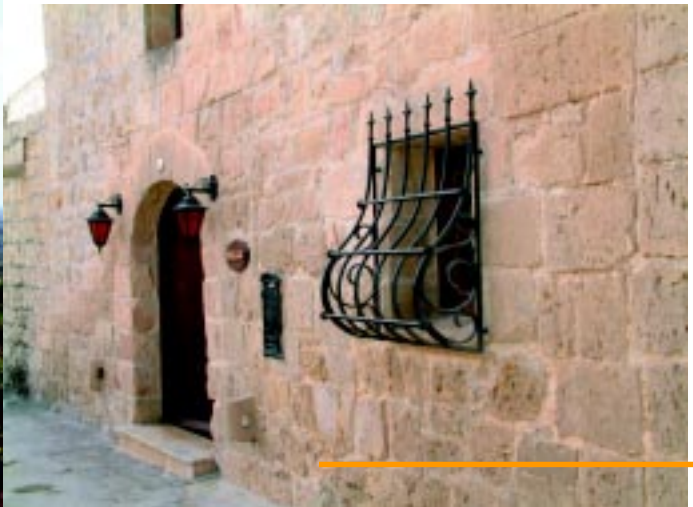
walking towards the village periphery, up to the road junction. Walk across to the other side of the junction to reach Triq Għar Lapsi as indicated by the street nameplate affixed to the first building along the road.

A few more steps will take you past the fine façade of a rehabilitated farmhouse constructed in 1765. Note the typical farmhouse features including the pregnant window and the stone waterspout.

Providence Chapel

Continue along the road towards the village core. On the right, you pass by a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Grace.

Note the variety of balconies along this street. Past the office of the Local Council and the local Police Station, there is a chapel on the left.



This chapel, built in 1730, is dedicated to the Beheading of St. John the Baptist. Peep through the grilled door (kept open during the day) to get a glimpse of a fine specimen of baroque architecture.

The walk has now reached the main square of the village. In the centre of the square, a statue of St. Nicholas acts as a focal point.

The imposing façade of the Parish Church as it now stands is a credit to the architects, craftsmen and the local population who worked hard over the years to improve it.

The original church took 17 years to construct and was completed in 1693. Three Grand Masters offered cash donations for its completion and embellishment. It was enlarged in 1864 by the addition of six side chapels. This church boasts a Mattia Preti titular painting and several works of art of foreign and local famed artists.

Pjazza San Nikola has another chapel, directly opposite the one of St. John the Baptist. This chapel, commonly known as Ta' Chuerra, is dedicated to Our Lady. It was built in 1742 over the ruins of an earlier chapel.

This walk continues by proceeding along Triq il-Qajjied situated close to the Sta. Marija Ta' Chuerra chapel.

This road goes through Misrah il-Vittmi tal-Gwerra (War Victim's Square), through Triq Nikola Saura into the Siggiewi by-pass, named after Mons. Azzopardi. At the village flag mast, turn right.

Chapel dedicated to the beheading of St John the Baptist

Siggiewi Parish Church

(Nearby there is Limestone Heritage, a visitor facility set in a disused quarry displaying crafts related to the building industry. You can take a short detour from the walk to visit the museum).
Cross the road and walk along the tree-lined pavement. The row of trees includes the tall Eucalyptus or gum trees and the flowering Albizia. The pavement stretches over the head of the Valley, towards a road junction.

Take the second turning on your left into Triq tal-Kilba. 11 The road leads to Qrendi village. It passes by

Limestone Heritage

Field Bindweed flowers in the dry season

a number of renovated farmhouses and past a road junction. Still walking straight ahead on the right, you come across a shrine dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady bearing a 1945 marble tablet. It is framed by two cypress trees. Directly opposite this shrine there is a short road, at the end of which there is a sixteenth century Hal-Xluq chapel dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady.

Continue walking along this Qrendi road. Before the road takes a slight uphill gradient to the right, you can see the squat Qrendi Reservoir in the distance.

Along this road, on the left, look out for an old rural room overlying an arched covered watercourse. The date of 1771 is engraved on the room façade. This area is the lowest part of the land, hence water run-off is directed to the valley further afield.

The road proceeds along a number of quarries. Some quarries are still active. A few spent quarries are used as orchards. From this road one can see one of the runways of

Chapel at Hal-Xluq

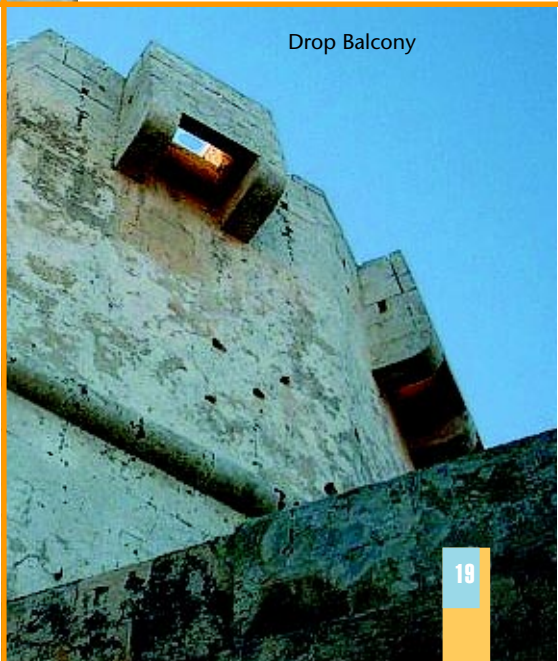
Ellul Preziosi Tower

octagonal shaped tower. This privately owned 16th century tower, commonly known as the Ellul Preziosi Tower, can be seen if you just walk a few paces into this street. The apparent balconies at the top are actually stone partitions. These would have been used to protect the defenders, from the arrows of attackers, whilst shooting or dropping missiles on anyone trying to scale the walls.

The walk continues along Triq San Nikola, and then along Triq 15 t'Awwissu. Note the Malta International Airport as well as the nearby village of Mqabba.

Once past a large poultry farm, you can see an active quarry producing soft stone blocks. The Qrendi Parish Church is clearly visible ahead. Triq Misrah is-Sinjura (now called Triq Siġġiewi) ends in Triq San Nikola. This is the periphery of Qrendi.

You will soon reach Triq it-Torri on the left, named after an old

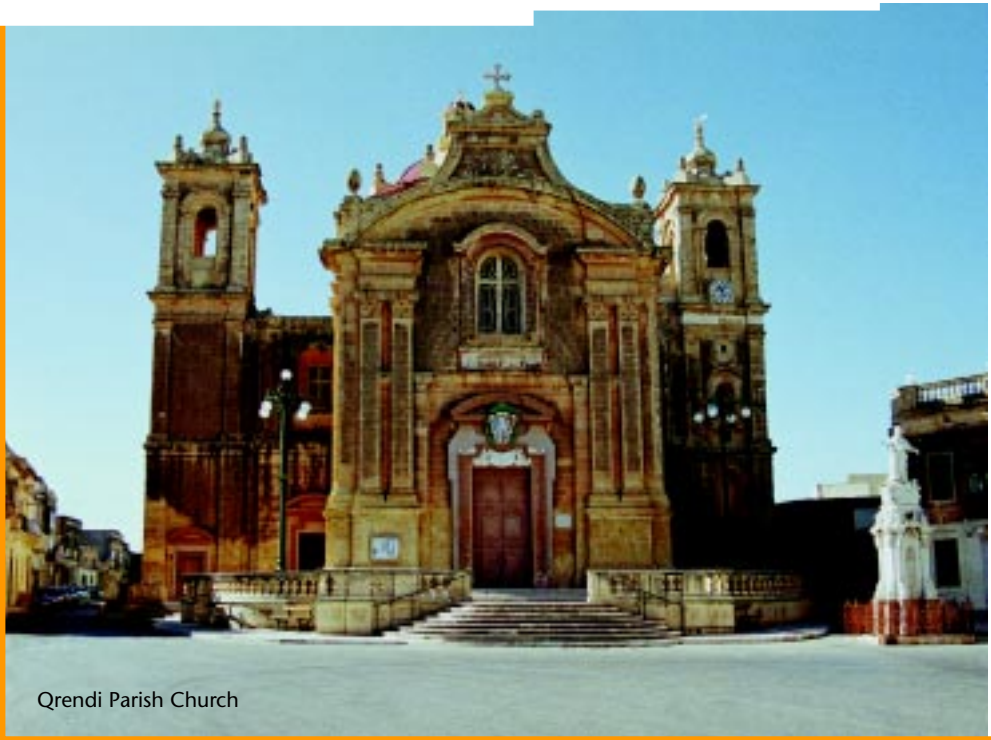


Drop Balcony

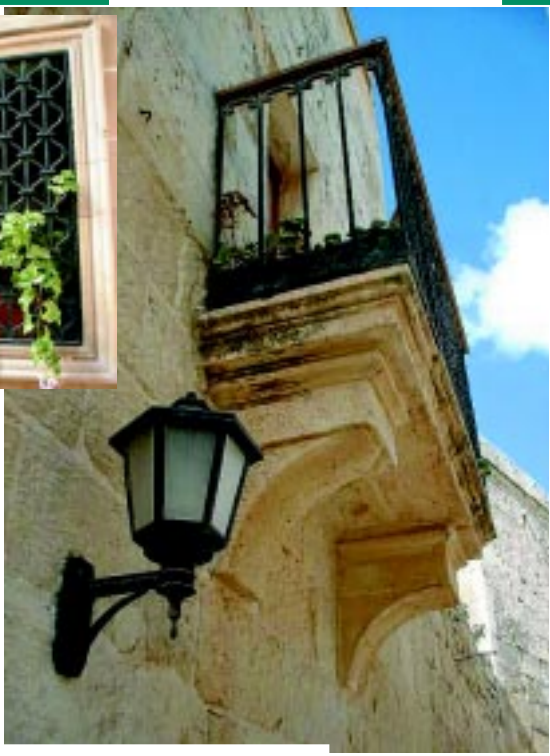
that some old buildings carry stone corbels underneath a first floor window. In the past a family, with a young daughter of a marriageable age, would place pot plants in the window. This announced to prospective suitors the possibility of arranging a marriage.

Soon the village school is reached and close by, the street passes behind the Parish Church. This monumental Church dedicated to Our Lady was built in 1712 on the site of two older chapels. These were demolished to make way for a larger church.

In the square in front of the Parish Church there is the Route Bus Terminus. This walk continues a little further before returning here for its termination.



Qrendi Parish Church



Walk past the church into a narrow road on the right, Triq il-Parrocca. You are now walking in the village core of Qrendi. At the centre of the small square, Misrah San Mattew, there is the statue of St. Matthew. Follow the sign to Wied iz-Zurrieq along Triq San Mattew.

Note the elaborate family coat-of-arms on some house façades. These are probably the homes of quarrymen and stone masons.

You will soon reach a narrow road on the left, Triq Sta. Anna. An 1892 statue of St. Anne adorns this narrow road. St. Anne's Chapel is a few metres further on.

This chapel was originally built after the Great Siege of 1565 in thanks-giving of the defeat of the invading Turkish armada. It was restored in 1796 and is still kept in pristine condition.

Proceeding along this delightfully plant-decorated village lane, you

will reach a wide road, Triq Hal-Lew, which is bypassing the village.

Turn right along Triq Hal- Lew to reach the square Pjazza tal-Maqluba.

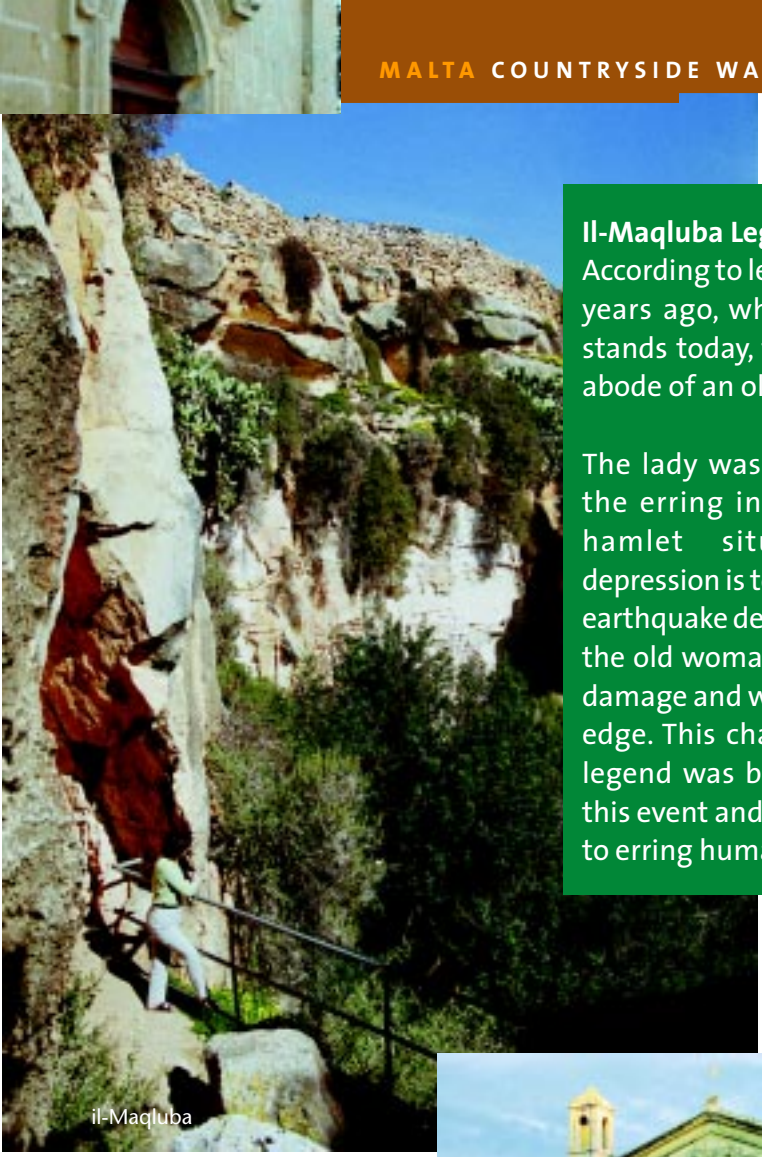
You can see to the left the large chapel dedicated to St. Matthew. The chapel was built between 1674 and 1682. Its titular painting is believed to be the work of the renowned artist Mattia Preti.

Next to the chapel and overlooking the gorge, is a smaller, fifteenth century chapel. A legend is connected with this small chapel and the nearby formation known as Il-Maqluba (the upturned).

Walk down the steps of the gorge, through a path among the lush vegetation and overhanging carob trees. You will reach a viewpoint overlooking a large cavity or depression in the rocks several metres deep. The cavity was formed by the collapse of underground caves as a result of earth movements many years ago. Growing at the bottom of this large depression are laurel, pomegranates and canes, amongst others. Overhanging the sides are several mature specimen of our National Tree, the sandarac gum tree Tetraclinis articulata. This is one place where this conifer grows in its natural state.

St. Anne's Chapel

As the walk ends here one goes back to the Bus Terminus in front of the Parish church through the same route, namely Triq Sta. Anna, Triq San Mattew, Misrah San Mattew and Triq il-Parrocca.



il-Maqluba

Il-Maqluba Legend

According to legend, several hundred years ago, where the small chapel stands today, there was the humble abode of an old pious lady.

The lady was always admonishing the erring inhabitants of a small hamlet situated where the depression is today. One day a terrible earthquake destroyed the hamlet but the old woman's house escaped any damage and was left, perched on the edge. This chapel, according to the legend was built to commemorate this event and to serve as a reminder to erring humans.

St Matthew Chapel next to il-Maqluba

Tips for the road

- The route is suitable for hikes and for pedal bikes. Only when proceeding along the country lane from Laferla Cross to Siggiewi outskirts, one is advised to dismount and to continue on foot.
- The local weather forecast should be checked before setting off as there is hardly any shelter from adverse weather conditions along the route. A raincoat can come in handy in inclement weather.
- Allow enough time to complete the walk in broad daylight. Make allowances for time required for resting, taking of photographs and observing nature.
- It is advisable to wear appropriate footwear and a hat. A packed lunch and a bottle of water are also recommended.
- Always follow the designated route. Short cuts are to be avoided as many fields are privately owned. Some rubble walls are marked with blotches of white paint and may also carry the letters RTO. These markings indicate private property.
- If one intends entering parish churches, proper attire is to be worn.
- Respect the fragility of the countryside. Do not climb over rubble walls or throw stones in valleys or over cliffs. Do not take souvenirs from historical sites or from the countryside. Do not disturb animals, plants or their natural habitats. Leave only your footprints behind you and nothing else.
- Be culturally sensitive and respect local customs. Take photographs but respect the privacy and dignity of others. Ask permission before photographing people.
- Bird trapping and hunting are practised in the countryside. There are, however, strict regulations determining areas where such activities are permitted and times of year where no such activities are allowed.

Laferla Cross

Photo: Pauline Dingli

Facilities

At Buskett Gardens there is a public convenience and a public phone booth.

At Siggiewi and at Qrendi one can find all facilities one would expect to find in a town, i.e. catering facilities, phone booths, banks and public conveniences, local council offices and police station.

Useful telephone numbers.

Emergency & Rescue	*112*
Ambulance	*196*
Siggiewi Police Station	*2146 0825*
Qrendi Police Station	*2164 9944*
Siggiewi Local Council	*2146 6000*
Qrendi Local Council	*2168 0404*
Malta Tourism Authority	*2291 5800*
Telephone enquiries	*1182*

Some of the sites along the route are provided with an Infoline sign. The system allows you to access two minutes of information on the site. Simply call 9973 0000 on your mobile. When instructed dial the 4-digit site number. The service is available in English, German, French and Italian.

The sites along the route are (site numbers given in brackets); Buskett Gardens (4007) Verdala Palace (4010) Għar il-Kbir (4008) Clapham Junction (4009) Girgenti Inquisitor's Palace (4006) Laferla Cross (4004) Providenza Chapel (4003) Annunciation Chapel (4015) St. Nicholas Statue (4014) Church of the Beheading of St. John (4002) St. Nicholas Parish Church (4004)

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Feedback and comments are welcome.
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Girgenti Walk

Enjoy the dense greenery of Buskett, a 16th century wooded area. Observe the cart ruts at Clapham Junction, a unique remnant of prehistory, Għar il-Kbir, a complex of caves which were inhabited up to 150 years ago and Il-Maqluba, a large ground cavity formed by the collapse of an underground cave. Enjoy exceptional views of the surrounding countryside from near Laferla Cross. Walk through typical village cores streets in Siġġiewi and Qrendi and note the domestic vernacular architecture as well as the churches and chapels.

Other walks in the series

Baħrija Walk

Passing through *Baħrija - Baħrija Valley - Mtaħleb Tal-Vigarju Cliffs - Fiddien Valley - Rabat*

Dwejra Lines Walk

Passing through *Mġarr - Binġemma - Dwejra Lines Speranza Valley - Mosta.*

Marfa Ridge Walk

To be published in March 2003

Passing through *Għadira - Marfa Ridge - Ponta ta' l-Aħrax Daħlet ix-Xmajjar - Ir-Ramla Tat-Torri - Armier Bay Marfa - Paradise Bay - Ras il-Qammiegħ - Red Tower.*

Tas-Silġ Walk

To be published in March 2003

Passing through *Marsaskala - St. Thomas Bay - Tal-Munxar Xrobb il-Għaġin - Delimara - Tas-Silġ - Marsaxlokk.*

The project is being launched in 2002, the World Tourism Organisation's International Year of Eco-Tourism.

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