


29 MONTE IATO

Distance: 5km/3mi; 1h50min

Grade: easy-moderate walk, with a short stretch on a concreted road, otherwise nature trails. The return path is narrow and slippery in places. Ascent and corresponding descent of 230m/750ft

Equipment: hiking boots, sun protection, windproofs, water

How to get there and return: Leave the SS624 at the exit 'S. Cipirello, Partinico' (Car tour 5). Follow the brown signposts 'Antica Iato' and 'Percorsi Natura', first through S. Cipirello and then towards Corleone. A cul-de-sac road branches off left and leads up to the entrance to the archaeological area.  park at the site. The *agriturismo* Sant'Agata, an impressive manor house, lies 9km east of Piana degli Albanesi on the road to Ficuzza-Corleone, Contrada Sant'Agata, mobile: 3336707126 or 3384598654, www.agriturismosantagata.pa.it.

Note: The archaeological site is open daily from 09.00-13.00 (but stays open until 18.00 on Tue, Thu, Sat).

On this walk along the south slope of Monte Iato you will visit the little-known but beautifully-located ancient town of Iaitas (also known as Jetae). The strong presence of the mafia in nearby villages was only crushed recently. Palermo's Tourist Board reacted accordingly, creating a network of waymarked walking trails in 1998 — the first of its kind in Sicily! and published a hiking map for the area (see under 'Maps', page 46). Sicilian citizens and tourists alike should feel encouraged to rediscover the natural beauties of the Iato Valley.

The walk begins at the **ENTRANCE** (660m/2165ft) to the archaeological site of **Antica Iato**. Follow the road climbing the eastern flank of Monte Iato; it is concreted at the outset. You pass a track off to the left (**5min**), leading down the valley to the ruins of the S. Cosmo monastery. This will be your return route later in the walk but, for now, keep ahead uphill on the road. The mountain range which divides the Iato Valley from the Conca d'Oro rises in the north. When the waymarked trail, 'N° 1-SCALA DI FERRO' (**15min**), comes in from the right, follow it up to the centre of the archaeological area. Rising in zigzags, you encounter the first remains of walls. At the **TOP** of the climb, newly-built guardians' houses stand to the left. Yellow signposts point the way to the nearby ancient **THEATRE** (**35min**). The four large sculptures found in this theatre are displayed in the Archaeological Museum at S. Cipirello (Via Roma 320, open from 08.30-13.30 and 15.30-18.00). The south-facing theatre originally had 4400 seats for spectators. To paint yourself a more vivid picture of the layout of ancient Iato, you could compare it with today's Prizzi or Gangi. The peak of **Monte Iato** (852m/2795ft) rises behind the theatre, and S. Giuseppe Iato lies at the northern foot of the



mountain. In the west you can see as far as the Gulf of Castellamare and the mountains of the Zingaro Nature Reserve (Walk 27).

Two houses with peristyles and the remains of a temple dedicated to Aphrodite have been excavated further to the west. Walk west along the gently-declining **RIDGE**, with a pinewood on the far side of the fence. Now you pick up trail 'N° 2-CAMPOSANTO VECCHIO', which rises from S. Giuseppe Iato (**40min**). Follow it in a sweep to the left, descending the limestone meadow; **WOODEN POSTS**, set at regular intervals, mark the way.

You leave this trail (now marked as 'N° 3-PERCORSO DEI MILITI') and turn off left onto trail 'N° 4-SAN COSMO' (**55min**). This narrow path — slippery in places — leads east below the plateau. It takes you past the **Grotta del Tauro** (**1h05min**), which until recently served the shepherds as a shelter. The Kumeta and Pizzuta peaks appear in front of you now. Beyond a dilapidated **WATERING PLACE** you reach a rocky **RIDGE** (**1h30min**), from where you look down on the ruins of the modest monastery and the wide valley of the Belice River. This is a pleasant place to take a short break. Then descend to the **S. Cosmo MONASTERY RUINS** and follow the cart track to the left, up the valley, until you can turn right on the concrete road, back down to your starting point at the **ENTRANCE** (**1h50min**).



The ancient theatre on Monte Iato