

A Thousand Lost Golf Balls

A Documentary

A resume of the script

At **Cape Sidero** in the north-east corner of Crete, a British company proposes a huge development, said to be the largest in the Balkans (26,000 sq kilometres – four times the size of Gibraltar) comprising several golf courses, holiday ‘villages’, and hotels accommodating 7,000 tourists, on land rented to them by the Monastery of Toploú.

Is this, as the developers claim, “a fresh start for Greek tourism” or, as its critics allege, a recipe for disaster, gambling the future?

The land today is arid and windswept, with a scanty population, but for thousands of years, from Minoan to Byzantine times, it was extensively settled and farmed. Archaeologists say that this is the landscape that we still see today, preserved to an extent probably not found anywhere else and that it is vital that it should be preserved for posterity.

It is, in addition, an area of botanical interest, its chief claim to fame being the unique forest of more than 5,000 Cretan palms at Vai, which those who have studied them say are under threat by development. The area is also home to a variety of rare drought-adapted plants, some of which are not just endemic to Crete but are found here and nowhere else in the world.

Furthermore, it is on one of the main routes for migrating birds and is especially rich in eagles and hawks, including Eleanora’s falcon which has one of its few remaining nesting sites on the offshore islands.

While “*sustainable development*” is one of the British company’s catch-phrases and they claim that the environmental and historical impact studies it commissioned showed that their project is not just compatible with conservation but will aid it, critics question the basis on which it rests, doubting the thoroughness and integrity of the studies, focussing, in particular, on the issues of water and electricity, both of which, though they will be required in huge quantities, are in short supply in eastern Crete at the moment and, with the advent global warming, will be increasingly so in the future.

Despite having the backing of the New Democracy government and powerful elements within the church, nothing has been actually done on the Project since it was first proposed, twenty years ago. Doubts have arisen as to integrity of the British company and its ability to financially cope with a project on such a huge scale. The case has been taken to the High Administrative Court in Athens and an official announcement of the decision is pending

Even if the project wasn’t so shaky from so many aspects the question would remain; is this the best kind of development for this particular area? Widespread opposition at not just a local or national but at an international level, expressed mainly through an on-line petition

that has so far gathered over 10,000 signatures, suggests that it isn't and that there are other, better alternatives.

The issue of golf-centred development isn't just local or national but has global dimensions as the use of land and water for leisure activities comes into conflict with traditional patterns of land use and ownership, threatening to displace local populations and to radically change their cultures and life styles.

A Thousand Lost Golf Balls aims to raise these complex issues mainly through a range of interviews with specialists in many fields, lawyers, church and company representatives as well, of course, as the local people who are too often left out of the equation or knocked about like golf balls without being informed what the issues really are.