Flying over St. George's beach

The ProBase World Cup comes to Symi

BY CHRISTOS BYRON christos@symigreece.com

An international meeting of athletes from one of the World's most thrilling sports will take place in Symi between the 5th and the 14th of August; the world's best base jumpers will compete in the “ProBASE Beach Challenge” at the beach of Agios Georgios (St. George) as part of the 2011 ProBASE World Cup Tour.

Base jumping is a form of parachuting where athletes jump from fixed objects wearing a parachute. The aim of the competition is to jump from a 200 meter high cliff above St. George’s Bay, open the parachute and land in a circle of 10 meters in diameter. The closer an athlete lands to the centre, the more points he/she scores. The parachute opening technique and the free-fall will also be scored.

The past few years, there have been efforts to make Symi and the cliff at St. George an attractive destination for world-class base jumpers. This began in December 2009, when the well-known Greek base jumper Stratos Giamoukoglou came to Symi and made the first test jumps from the rock of St. George. A rock that as Stratos Giamoukoglou told The Symi News is “vertical, high, with a negative slope during take-off and with space for landing on the beach. In addition, there is no wind making it a protected place ideal for jumps”.

After his first introduction to Symi, Stratos Giamoukoglou went to Spain and took part in an international base jump competition where he met Hubert Schober, the official organiser of the event. He told The Symi News “we chatted about the rock in Symi as well as the willingness of the municipality to organise a world class event in Symi in order to promote the small Greek island to the world and make it famous”. Hubert Schober embraced the idea and invited international athletes to Symi for a competition.

In August 2010, the first ever base jump event in Greece took place in Symi and was very successful. “Despite the fact that everything happened very quickly, there were no major difficulties in terms of organisation. The Municipality of Symi and especially the Mayor helped us with anything we needed and took care of the whole event”, said Stratos Giamoukoglou.

Around 30 participants from 10 countries are expected to compete in this year’s event. The competitive part of the event will take place between August 10th and 14th, with exhibition jumps by the participating athletes in the preceding days.

The ProBASE World Cup Tour starts in June with the first competition in Kjeraj in Norway on 22 June, it then visits Symi and finishes in Stechelberg in Switzerland in September. The athlete with the highest score from all 3 events will become World Champion.

The official video trailer of the event is available online at the following address: www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-1farkU5EM

A video of Stratos Giamoukoglou base jumping at St. George can be seen on www.symigreece.com/basejumping.htm

20 Questions to the Mayor

BY GIORGOS ZAHARIADIS

A video of Stratos Giamoukoglou base jumping at St. George can be seen on www.symigreece.com/basejumping.htm

1. Is the Symi Festival happening this year?
   After 16 years of organising a successful Festival, this year there was a danger of it not happening at all because of the economic crisis and the indifference of the State.

2. The Municipality can’t fund the events itself?
   The Municipality will try, even with the little revenue it has, to do an inexpensive Festival.

3. Are Municipal finances that difficult?
   The Municipality got into the black list of the Finance Ministry because of its debt. Do you think that’s fair?

4. The Municipality got into the black list of the Finance Ministry because of its debt. Do you think that’s fair?
   Of course not! The debt is 2,700,000 Euros and the infrastructure projects that took place the past 8 years are close to 35,000,000 Euros – all made entirely by the Municipality.

Continued on page S4
Webcams and surveillance of citizens

BY CHRISTOS BYRON christos@symigreece.com

Readers of past editions of this newspaper (before its change of name and ownership) may remember that two and a half years ago (November 2008), the Greek edition ran a front-page article calling for the authorities to intervene in the matter of the webcam located in the centre of Yialos which collects and records personal data, transmitting it live on the internet 24 hours a day. Those in the view of the lens of this camera are often recognizable, and doubtless a great many of them have no idea that their movements and meetings are being transmitted to the whole World.

We revisited the subject a few months later (May 2009) when the then leader (Nomarchis) of the Dodecanese Council and the current leader (Periferiaris) of the South Aegean Council, Mr Giannis Maheridis, in a visit to Symi expressed his anger about the presence and operation of this webcam and demanded its removal.

After receiving numerous complaints and following prolonged indifference from the authorities to intervene, we contacted the Hellenic Data Protection Authority in November 2009 asking them to clarify the legal situation regarding this camera and others like it.

The Authority was clear in its reply: such cameras are contrary to Law 2472/1997 regarding the protection of individuals and the processing of personal data, further stating that the camera on Symi is, in their opinion, illegal as it is possible to recognise people who walk in the central road in Yialos, or stand in front of the camera violating their personal freedom as a result.

The Authority told us that this breach of the law regarding the collection and recording of personal data can be rectified either by the permanent removal of the camera or by altering its functionality so that the recognition of people is no longer possible.

This latter can be achieved in one of the following ways:

• raising the camera so that the movements of individuals on the road, pavement, etc. is no longer visible,
• blurring the faces and other distinctive characteristics (using suitable software) of all persons who pass in front of the camera,
• reducing the image resolution which is being broadcast online so that nobody passing by can be identified.

At the suggestion of the Authority, we made our objection in writing to those who control the camera and requested that they comply with the law by one of the specific actions mentioned above. The response we received from Ms Wendy Wilcox (which we published in February 2010) was not in the least satisfactory and, as a result, we then formally to the Hellenic Data Protection Authority to intervene.

The Authority informed us that it was likely that their decision would take many months due to the very large number of complaints that were outstanding. Last month, we contacted the Authority again to find out the state of the case. They told us that the main reason for the delay was due to the new (explanatory) decision (1/2001) issued by the Authority on 31st March 2011 for the “usage of video-surveillance systems for the protection of people and goods” after a significant number of questions asked by camera controllers and citizens’ complaints which the Authority has received over the past few years in relation to the legality of the operation of specific video-surveillance systems and the subsequent use of the images that are being collected by them. As a result, all the relevant complaints (related to the use of cameras in the wider sense) were delayed until the publication of the new decision.

In a telephone conversation with the officer of the Authority dealing with the complaint, we were informed that the new decision refers to video-surveillance for the purpose of protecting people and goods, something which, he mentioned, was not relevant for the webcam in Yialos. He repeated that as long as the webcam allows the recognition of people, it should either stop or be modified.

In the next few weeks, we have been told that the Authority will send an official document to Ms Wilcox informing her of the law and the actions she needs to take for the continuation of the webcam’s operation. Non-compliance with the decisions of the Authority constitutes a criminal offence in Greece.

Maybe for some foreign tourists (mainly of Northern Europe), such webcams are “harmless” given that in their countries camera surveillance has become a way of life with very little discussion about the infringements of personal freedom (mainly because of their use –very limited, it must be said– in solving crimes). For example and according to a recent estimate, in the UK there is one camera for every 12 people and someone who commutes into London for work will have had their image recorded around 400 times each day.

In Greece, however, people are (still) resisting and refusing to accept the operation of cameras which invade our private life and monitor our movements while walking in the streets. In any case, Greek law is clear: webcams like the one in Yialos are illegal.

The Symi News is following the case very closely and will inform our readers about the final outcome of this case in a future issue.

Panormiteia 2011

On 17, 18 and 19 June, the Association of Voluntary Blood Donors of Symi “Panormitis” in cooperation with the Holy Metropolis of Symi is holding, for the second consecutive year, a three-day event called “Panormiteia” aiming to raise awareness about the important issue of donating blood to save lives.

The programme of this year’s events is as follows:

On Friday 17/6 at 20:30 at the basketball court in Yialos there will be a children’s party with music, dancing and a performance by a professional clown. All children will be given ice-cream, sweets, presents and toys.

On Saturday 18/6 at 21:00 at the Sylos Logos square in Yialos there will be a Greek music concert by Ilias Stefanou (koulouras) accompanied by Nikoletta Ikonomou (singing), Agapitos Stefanou (keyboards), Nikos Stefanou (bouzouki) and Stefanos Stefanou (drums).

On Sunday 19/6 in the morning at Panormitis monastery there will be church service by his Eminence the Metropolitan of Symi Mr. Chrisostomos with the participation of the Byzantine Music choir “Angelel Dance” under the direction of the Precentor Eleutherios Kastrounis. At the end of the service, the Metropolitan will declare Archangel Michael of Panormitis the Grand Patron of the Association of Voluntary Blood Donors of Symi and will present a special parchment. Afterwards, coffee and traditional treats will be offered at the yard of the Monastery.

To assist those attending, the Panormitis bus will leave Yialos at 07:45.

C.B.
Five Minute Lives #6 The Symi Mermaid
“Lips that put the loveliest of red roses to shame”

BY JIM GIBBINS

She’s out there somewhere... the Symi Mermaid. Well, that’s what I want to believe.

And, in a veritable time capsule of memory echoing back at least thirty years, I have the word of Kostas for her existence: “Lustrous hair streaked with white sea shells and mother of pearl. Eyes the colour of emeralds. Lips that put the loveliest of red roses to shame...”

In the late 1960’s and early seventies, when tourism was a mere trinket – a charm bracelet of British, German, and Scandinavians – on the Symi scene, Kostas ran the Symi Mermaid moonlight cruise.

And I thought of him and his cruise when, on the BBC World Service, I listened to a group of academics debating the influence of scientific breakthroughs – particularly in the realm of cyberspace – on people in the West.

Their conclusion: such miracles have been taken for granted and an inborn sense of magic has been stunted.

To quote one of the participants: “We can sit down at a computer and not only talk with someone in a distant place, we can also see that person in full colour and total animation. We take it for granted. We are blasé. Ergo, and surveys have proved this, our imagination, our capacity for enchantment has been seriously diminished. We, ever increasingly, are a robotic generation.”

There you are, then – we’re minus magic. So all aboard the Symi Mermaid Cruise in those days before the Internet, the mobile phone, the digital camera.

And here’s Captain Kostas, stocky and bare chested but with all the bravura of a maestro as he assures us that tonight we will “experience a moment that will linger in your memory like the finest music.”

A aria.

Off we go, twenty or so persons, chug along the little wheelhouse to inspect the radar, an illuminated greenish globe flickering with esoteric lines and beeps.

Kostas puts his finger on one of the bleeps. “That’s her. The mermaid. South-east of Seskilia. Twenty fathoms down and rising slowly.”

Carried away by this finding, he refills the glasses yet again and asks that everyone be upstanding in a toast to the Symi Mermaid. Pure magic. The kind of magic that is becoming increasingly, are a robotic generation.

Whatever, everything is soporific until Kostas comes round with a wake-up call – a basket of rose petals handed to every passenger. We are told to scatter the petals on the water and hold tight. He’s up on the prow, playing a bamboo pipe. “Her sere nade,” he explains.

And then – a thump that rocks the boat. A thump and a plume of water that soaks everyone. And there she is, seemingly rising Aphrodite-like from the plume, a few metres dead ahead of the boat – the Symi Mermaid.

She’s tall, silvery, with a face – especially her eyes and the lips – that accords exactly to his description. She’s there for three or four seconds. And then she’s gone and our gasps at her appearance are replaced by a spontaneous cheering – a cheering that on the moment, and never mind subsequent reasoning on the lines of theatrical stunt, acknowledges magic.

Pure magic. The kind of magic that is becoming increasingly marginal as, with our laptops and facebooks and twitterings, we adapt to the humdrum of scientific miracles...
World Environment Day in Symi

About 40 people answered the call of the Voluntary Environmental Team of Symi to help clean the beach at Agios Georgios on World Environment Day, Sunday 5 June. They took off from Yialos at 10:30 for the beach, a favourite of both Greek and non-Greek residents and visitors of Symi.

Cleaning the beach took more than three hours and in the end, 32 “giant” rubbish bags were filled with all kinds of rubbish: discarded plastic bottles, cups, tin cans, polystyrene, syringes, snack bags, prescription drug boxes, suntan oil bottles, drinking straws, broken glass and much more, which had “suffocated” the shrubs and bushes along the whole length of the beach, as mentioned in the press release that the team sent to The Symi News. Without doubt, the press release continues, many of these were deposited on the beach after being carried there by the sea, but also much had simply been left behind by irresponsible visitors.

The team’s blog (www.eposymis.blogspot.com) has accused the organisers of last year’s three-day Base Jumping event at the beach; according to the blog, they had abandoned two fridges close to the boat jetty and had left empty water bottles and other packaging behind the church.

In the evening after the beach cleaning, the team celebrated at the Gefiraki (bridge) in Yialos with live music and drinks. Those who took part in the cleaning that morning and other supporters who had been unable to join in, came together to promote the message of volunteering and action for the environment.

The team wishes to thank the following people for their kind contribution and help which made the whole day possible: Louka Fratzadaki, Manolesko Gianni, Skiathiti Giorgo, Manolesko Filimonia, super markets Taxas, Hatzipetros and Emporion, the shops of Syminet and the Adoniadis brothers, the clinic of Symi, the Kiriakakis family, and also the musicians Mike Harman, Suzan Williams and Iordanis Atitis.

The next meeting of the Team is on Tuesday 14 June with the cleaning of Agios Emilianos beach, made possible by the kind offer of Giannis Faniokos to transport volunteers there and back on his boat “Poseidon”.

20 questions to the Mayor of Symi

« Continued from page S1

5. How was the debt created?
From obligations by the state, such as the boat connection between Symi and Rhodes, health and the creation of the desalination units funded by Municipal funds.

6. Is it possible for the Festival to be financed from elsewhere?
The Symi Festival takes place on a border island and the State should realise that it’s more important to keep it alive here, compared to the big cities whose festivals are of much less importance to Greece.

7. Do you know what the Symi Festival will include this summer?
We will do our best to show off our culture with local dance groups, traditional products, local feasts, Greek-Turkish events, and sports performances like the ProBASE World Cup.

8. How is the tourist season going so far?
It’s started well, but it’s clear that the economic crisis hasn’t only touched Greece.

9. Is the harbour filled again with boats and yachts?
Compared to last year, May was a much better month.

10. Maybe the harbour can’t fit all the boats and a solution must be found?
Port infrastructure projects should be implemented immediately, like the ones our opposite neighbours have completed creating huge marinas.

11. Are the Turks the first amongst the tourists again this year?
Yes, especially Italians

12. Is it true that they support the economy of the island?
Many people from Turkey come here, and Symi supplies the petrol for their boats, and they buy things like alcohol here, and they do not pay VAT which is damaging our island economically.

13. How is your relationship with your opposite neighbours?
Because of our perfect cooperation in tourism, we have understood that good relations bring economic benefits for both our people.

14. Is it true that there are plans in Turkey for another TV series similar to “The Borders of Love”?

15. How is the debt created?
From obligations by the state, such as the boat connection between Symi and Rhodes, health and the creation of the desalination units funded by Municipal funds.

16. Do foreigners buy property on the island?
Yes, especially Italians

17. Symi made a desalination system and saved the State many million Euros for the transportation of water by water boats.
Transportation of water to Symi with water boats cost the State about 5,000,000 Euros a year. The Municipality of Symi installed a desalination plant worth 5,000,000 Euros. The State, as a result, saved this money but is refusing to contribute towards the maintenance and operating costs which are about 500,000 Euros a year; there is a danger that the desalination units may have to be shut down.

18. The indoor arena is also unfinished...
The indoor arena will give the young people on our island a place to go and to engage in sport – and we have over 800 young people on Symi. It’s a project that’s part of the European-funded programme “Thiseas”, which has stopped because of the financial crisis.

19. Is there a boat connection this year with Piraeus?
At last, after a long time the State has given us a boat twice a week.

20. Did “Kalikratias” help?
The implementation of “Kalikratias” is, I think, out of touch.

Originally in the Athenian newspaper «TA NEA»
Translation by the Symi News

It rings again!

After a most two years of silence, the clock tower in Marapigia is once again ringing the hours once again.

For many on the island, the chiming of the clock was much missed, especially during the winter months.

We’re certain that this news will also please the many Symioti who don’t live on Symi but visit the island every summer.

We thank the Municipality and we hope that with good maintenance it will not happen again.

D.P.C.

Paper recycling

The not-for-profit “Volunteers for the Environment and Culture of Rhodes” is operating a weekly collection of newspapers, magazines, school books, carton boxes and mixed paper at its wareroap on 3 Tsigante Street in Rhodes behind the Union of Farmer Associations of the Dodecanese, itself behind the EKO petrol station on Canada Road.

The facility will be open every Saturday from 9 in the morning until 1 in the afternoon.

The company’s main aim is the “promotion of volunteering, the protection of the environment and culture of Rhodes within a framework of sustainable development”. All money collected from the process will be directed towards social, environmental and cultural activities specifically for the island of Rhodes.

For more information contact Dimitris Grigoriadis at 694540451, Martinos Kabellakis at 6945374103, or send an email to rhodesvolunteers@gmail.com.

C.B.

Works in Pedi

Due to the poor state of the water pipes in Pedi, the water company of Symi (DEYAS) has replaced the section from Agios Georgios to Agios Thomas. At the same time, ten new street lamps were placed along the same road.

We have been informed that further street lamps will also be placed on the road towards Piretissa.

D.P.C.

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EXPATCAT

by Vasilakis

More ExPatCat at: www.SymiGreece.com/expatcat.htm

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SYMI NEWS

June 2011

GERMAN CUCUMBERS!!

#14 expatsad

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