The Modern Ancient Greeks

***Path of the Wolves***

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| ***BY ADRIAN VRETTOS & JANET MCGIFFIN***  *Adrian Vrettos is a field archaeologist whose work takes him to café-bars where he observes his fellow Athenians whom he calls “The Modern Ancient Greeks.”*  *Janet McGiffin is author of the four-book historical fiction series about the 8th Century Byzantine Empress Irini of Athens who poisoned her way to the throne of Constantinople. Janet can be reached through her website at* [*janmcgiffin.com*](https://janmcgiffin.com/)*.*  *An earlier version of this article appears in Matt Barrett’s* [*greecetravel.com “The Modern Ancients”*](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/articles/wolves.htm) |
| MY FRIEND who is a psychic and I were sitting on a veranda overlooking the pine forest on Lykavittos Hill in central Athens in the neighborhood called Kolonaki. She told me she heard wolves.  I did some investigating. Lykavittos means "Where the wolves go," but the Modern Ancient Greeks in the know call it "Path of the wolves." It is said that in Periclean Athens, wolves roamed freely on Lykavittos as this was their last haven in the Attica basin.  Legend also says that the goddess Athena tore Lykavittos Hill from Mt Pentelis to help fortify Athens. She fumbled it, as the Greek gods often did, and it fell to its present location where it has been ever since.  The ancient Greeks must have respected wolves because the Athenians didn't build on Lykavittos Hill. The only ancient monument was dedicated to Zeus and is on one of the little surrounding hillocks called Schisti Petra ("broken rock").  The church on top originally was called *Profitis Ilias*, or Prophet Elijah for English speakers. The name is not surprising, because this guy was probably the craziest prophet of them all, if his churches are any evidence. In Greece, they are situated atop dangerous mountain peaks or in hazardous locations, possibly inspired by the prophet’s own exit when he disappeared in a pillar of fire. At some point, this church was switched over to the not-so-crazy St George.  During this same time, the mountain was reportedly barren until it was forested by Athenian government in the 1830s, when they also quarried parts of it to build their neoclassical structures.  The captivating amphitheatre on top, where you can hear different kinds of howling during the Athens Festival, was built in 1965 at the same time as the funicular railway. This is still used by those too unfit or afraid to hike the winding path through the trees for fear of seeing wolves. It's well worth going up for the stunning view and/or to catch one of the famous bands that come to town.  Lykavittos air is sweeter than the usual Athens asthma-inducing variety, which makes the park ideal for the Modern Ancient Greek fitness fanatics to get in their early morning session running from the dogs who have just been unleashed by their owners. I am certain that the wolves are still there because my dog was affected by the wolf spirit. When I unclipped her leash at the edge of the forest, she took off as if possessed by spirits. I have asked a number of other dog walkers if they've sensed the presence of wolves.  They look at me and edge away. |

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