

# The Excavations at Nemea

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The history of Nemea and the excursions to the site by modern archaeologists and historians have been sporadic and for the most part uneventful. Even the esteemed E. N. Gardiner gave very little information as to Nemea's location, importance or its activities. New and exciting evidence has been uncovered so that a review of the archaeological evidence was in order.

Pausanias says that the games were abandoned before the end of the 2nd Century A.D., fell into disuse and eventually buried under seven meters of earth. Nemea remained so until the first modern excavation was conducted by an Englishman, Richard Chandler, in 1766 under the auspices of the Society of Dilettanti. Quiet descended on Nemea once again until 1884 when the French School of Archaeology proceeded with excavations and again in 1912, both of which were brief and short lived.

The American School of Classical Studies in Athens obtained rights from the French and under the direction of Carl Blegen, started work in the stadium, the Temple of Zeus and the prehistoric ridge of Tsoungiza. He uncovered a portion of the water channel on the easterly side of the stadium floor, a Hellenistic structure that was a gymnasium and a palestra of ancient construction. After 1926 Nemea fell quiet save for sporadic visits by scholars and then only to review the 1926 excavations.

In 1973 work began again and during this first season an inscribed stone was found and L. H. Jeffery working from sketches of letters from the stone, dated them to 460 B.C. during the supposed period of control of the Nemean and Isthmian games by Comith. In 1974 workmen started work in the prehistoric settlement area, the sanctuary of the temple and the stadium. Other important finds that were unearthed were a treasury building resembling those at Olympia and ancient Kiln which produced the roof tiles for the Temple of Zeus. Finally work was started on the stadium which lies about 500 yards southeast of the Temple of Zeus. It was quite apparent that the stadium was located in a natural hollow and the outline of the stadium was visible. A closed end sphendome shape was built into the southend of the hollow, while the northend which faced the Temple seemed level to the terrain. Blegen's test in the 1920's uncovered portions of a water channel along the east side of the track, but the amazing irony was that no plan was made of the stadium excavation.

Dr. Stephen Miller of the University of California-Berkeley was determined to uncover the entire stadium if possible. The excavators limited their digging to the south or closed end. As the bulldozers pushed aside the soil they uncovered coins, pottery sherds and finally bedrock was unearthed, traces of seats became visible. These seats seemed to have been carved into the slope of the bedrock. At a depth of over twenty feet below the soil surface, the surface of the stadium floor appeared. On the stadium floor almost parallel to the slopping bedrock seats a curved section of the stadium water channel appeared. The channels were made of limestone and several sections were badly worn. An estimate would make each section about a meter long, twelve inches wide, with each block butting for a continuous channel. The water channel's form as it was unearthed took the shape of a large U, with the legs of the channel continuing down each side of the track toward the open end of the stadium.

The starting blocks were also uncovered. The blocks were also made of limestone and measured about one meter long and ½ meter wide, which also had two sets of grooves cut into them in the shape of a V. At the western end of each block a square hole was cut near the joint between two butting blocks giving an indication that racing lanes were used, very

much the same that was used at Isthmia. The entire starting line has not been exposed since a great portion of it is still buried under the unexcavated area to the west. Dr. Miller also found the starters pit some eight or nine meters in back of the startingline, again similar to the starters pit at Isthmia. In back of the starters pit set into the base of the bedrock seats a spring house and a system of tiles was discovered and it is assumed that this was the main source of water to the stadium.

Preliminary findings now make the measurements of the starting line to be about twenty-one to twenty-three yards in length and laid out in an east to west direction. Secondly, it seems that the stadium is shorter than either Olympia or Delphi. Finally the starters pit gives every indication of a similar starting arrangement to the one used at Isthmia.

The 1976 season should uncover the entire starting line, the second leg of the water channel down the west side of the stadium and additional seating if any. And of course the exciting discovery of the Prehistoric ridge with its many neolithic discoveries and the hopes finding a key to its place in the structure of Nemea.