

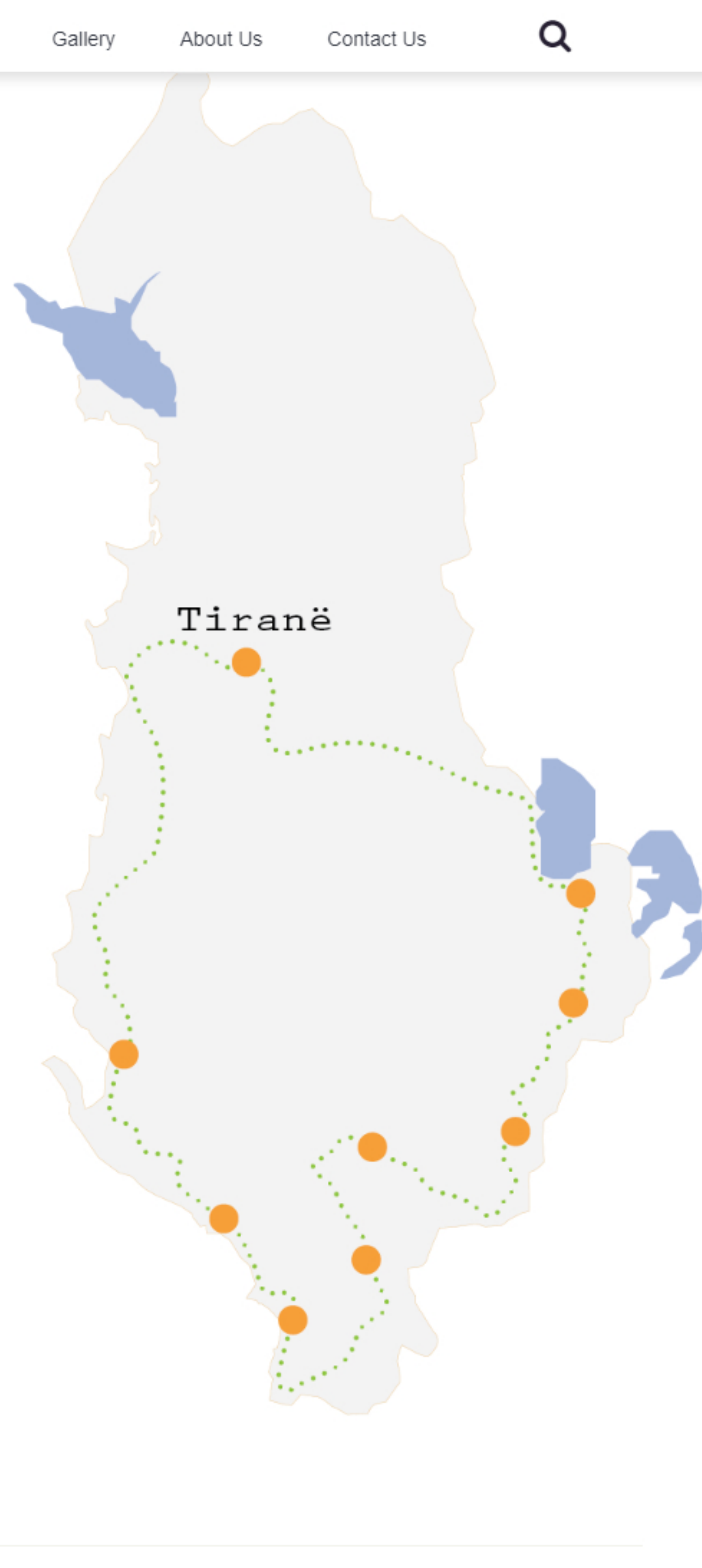
Arrival

DAY 1

Rendezvous at the hotel at 18.00 where you will meet the rest of the group and your tour leader for the tour briefing, followed by a relaxing welcome dinner. Panniers will be given to you at this point that you will use for the duration of the tour as well as a set of maps with details about each riding day.

Lively, colourful Tirana is the beating heart of Albania, where this tiny nation's hopes and dreams coalesce into a vibrant whirl of traffic, brash consumerism and unlettered fun. Having undergone a transformation of extraordinary proportions since awaking from its communist slumber in the early 1990s, Tirana's centre is now unrecognisable, with buildings painted in primary colours, and public squares and pedestrianised streets that are a pleasure to wander.

Trendy Blloku buzzes with the well-heeled and flush hanging out in bars and cafes, while the city's grand boulevards are lined with fascinating relics of its Ottoman, Italian and communist past, from delicate minarets to loud socialist murals. Add to this some excellent museums and you have a compelling list of reasons to arrive a day earlier here.

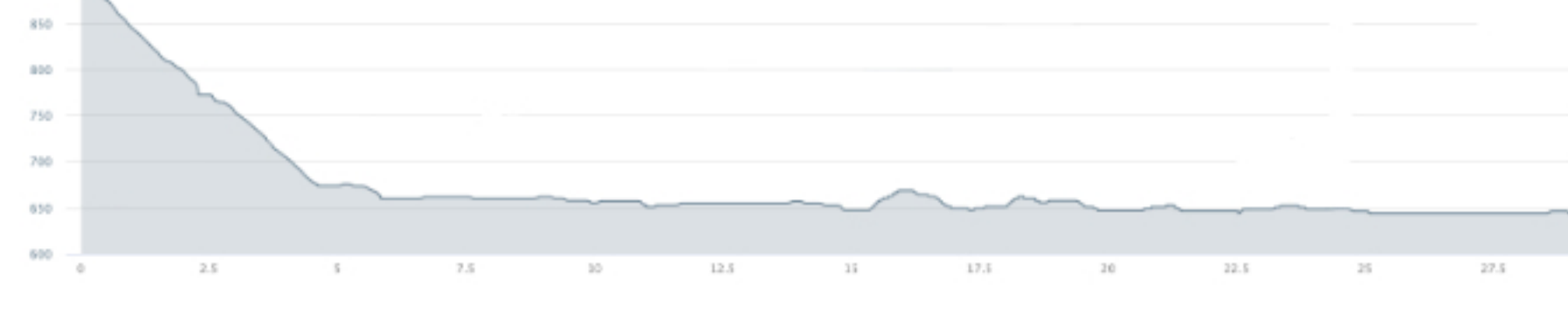
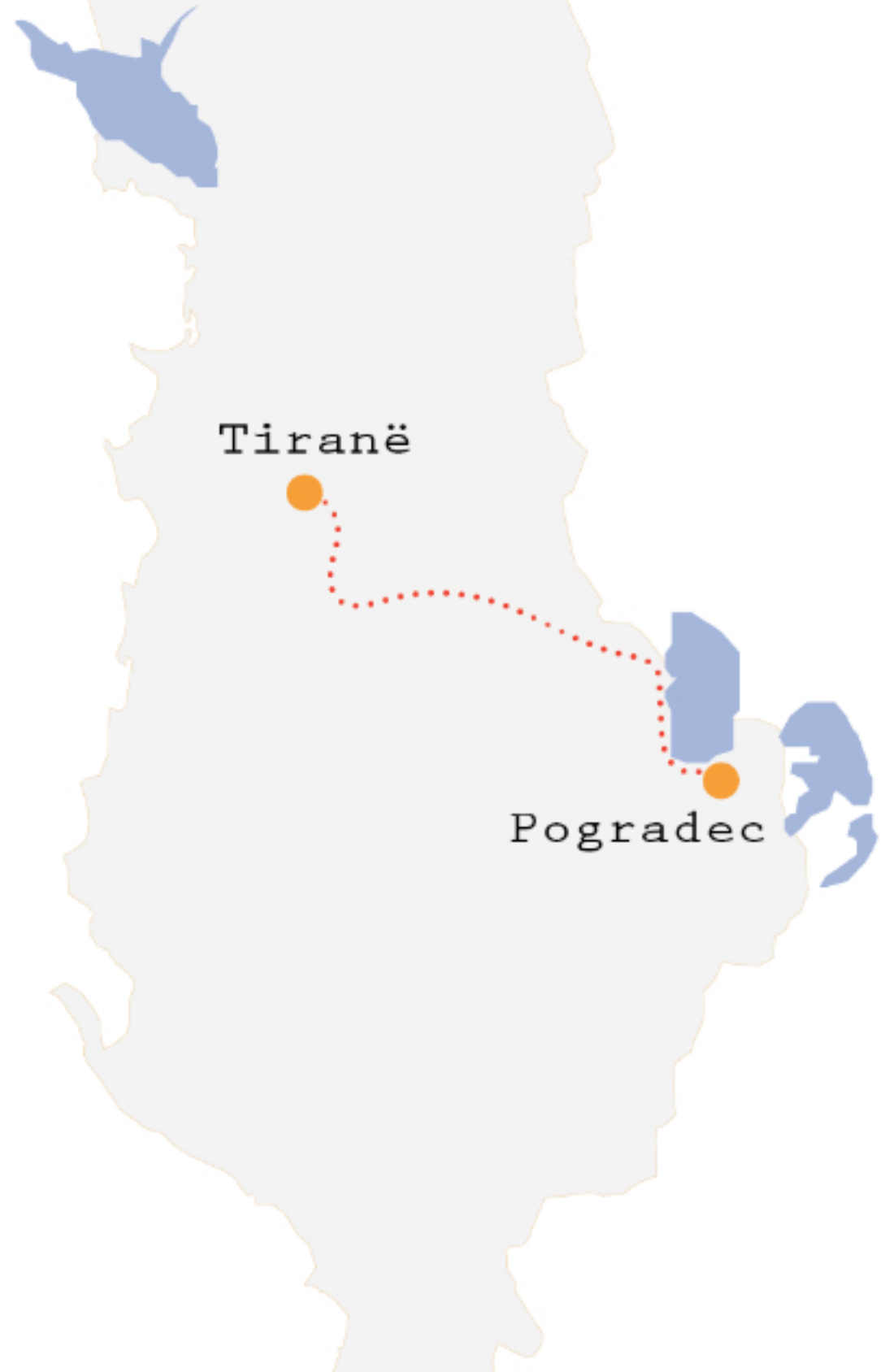


Tirane-Pogradec

DAY 2

We will start the morning with a two hour transfer to the northern side of Lake Ohrid. From where, after we have unloaded the bicycles and fitted them to everyone's comfort we will start cycling along the scenic shore of lake Ohrid towards Pogradec. After reaching our hotel in the town of Tushemisht, just 4 km east of Pogradec, lunch will be served at a waterfront restaurant at Drilon national park. After checking in the hotel we will continue cycling in the afternoon, crossing over into Macedonia, and visiting the monastery of St Naum.

Lake Ohrid, one of the oldest lakes in the world, came into existence during a remote geological ages as a result of tectonic shifts and with its unique flora and fauna the lake is one of the largest biological reserves in Europe and with 212 known endemic species and a surface area of 358 km2 it is probably the most diverse lake in the world. This lake has preserved primeval life - forms which no longer exist.

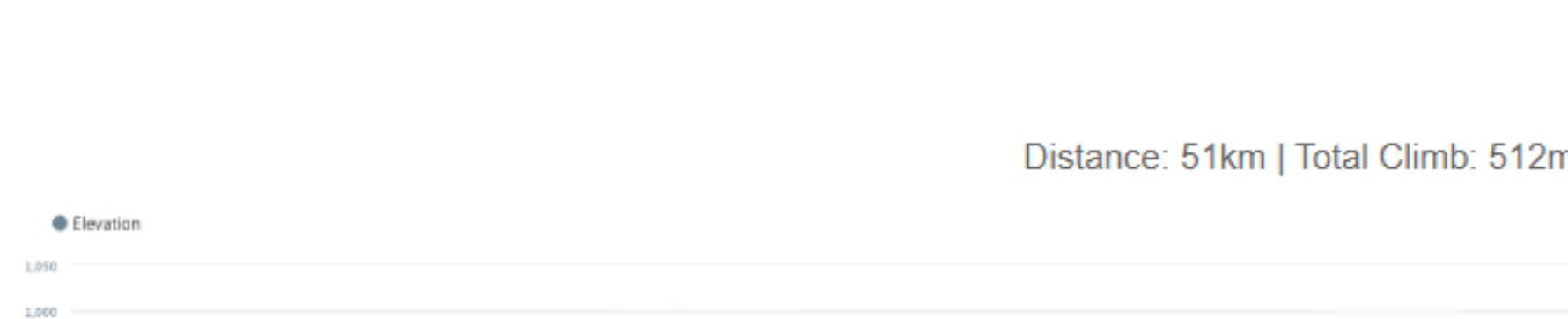


Pogradec-Korçë

DAY 3

Leaving Lake Ohrid, we climb to a high plateau bounded by mountains. We continue following the gorge for a while until the hills open up, leading to a vast plain and a colourful patchwork of individual farms. Depending on our arrival at the city, we will have the time to visit the old market and its quaint cobblestone streets run between and behind the main streets. Day ends with a short walking tour of Korçë, the Paris of Albania.

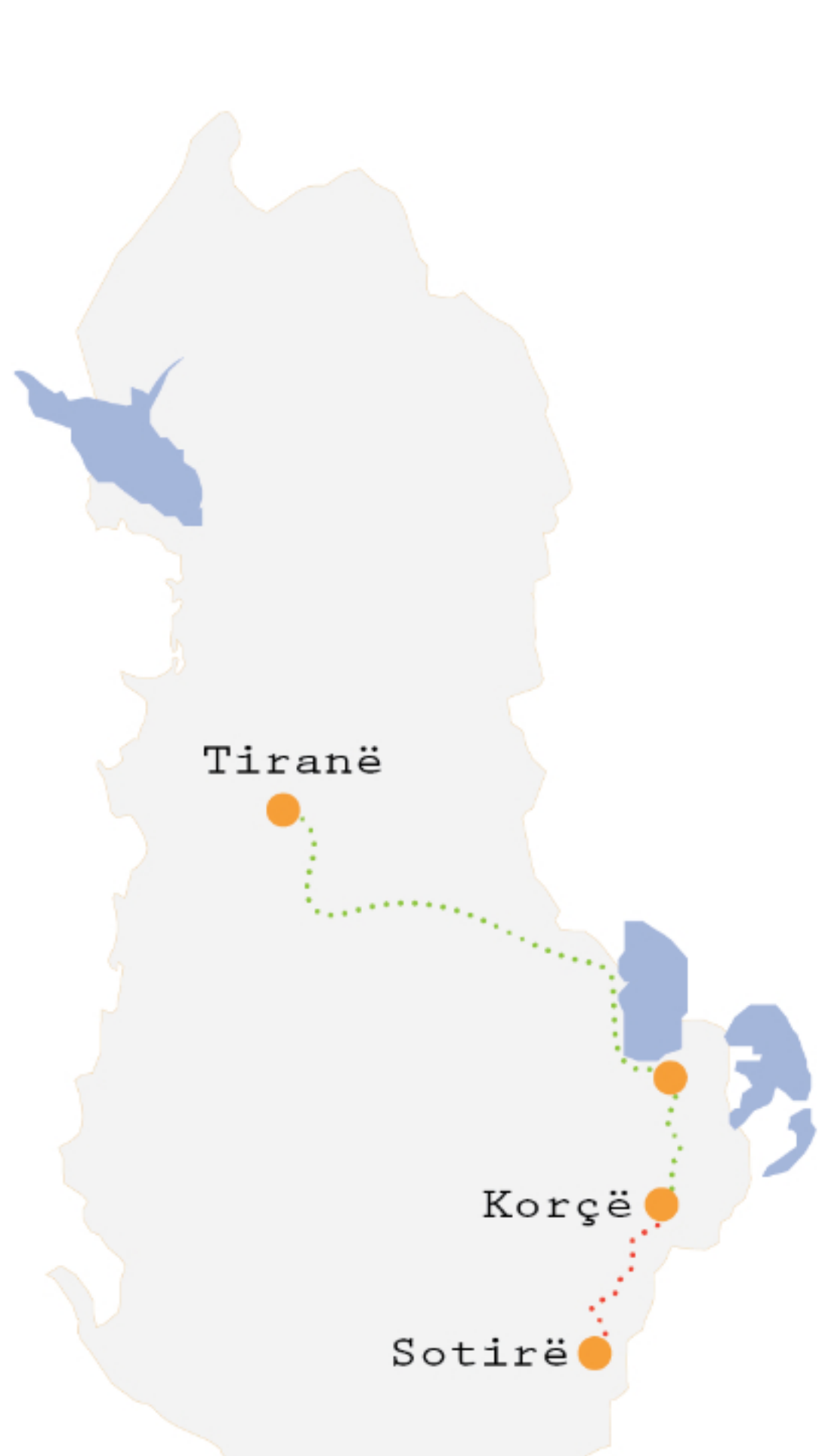
Korçë became an important trading and handicraft centre in the 18th century due to the development of trade with neighboring regions. It has been an important religious center for Orthodox Christians and Muslims for centuries. During the Ottoman period it became one of the centres of the growing Albanian identity. The first school teaching in the Albanian language was established there in 1887, followed by Albania's first school for girls in 1891.



Korçë-Sotirë

DAY 4

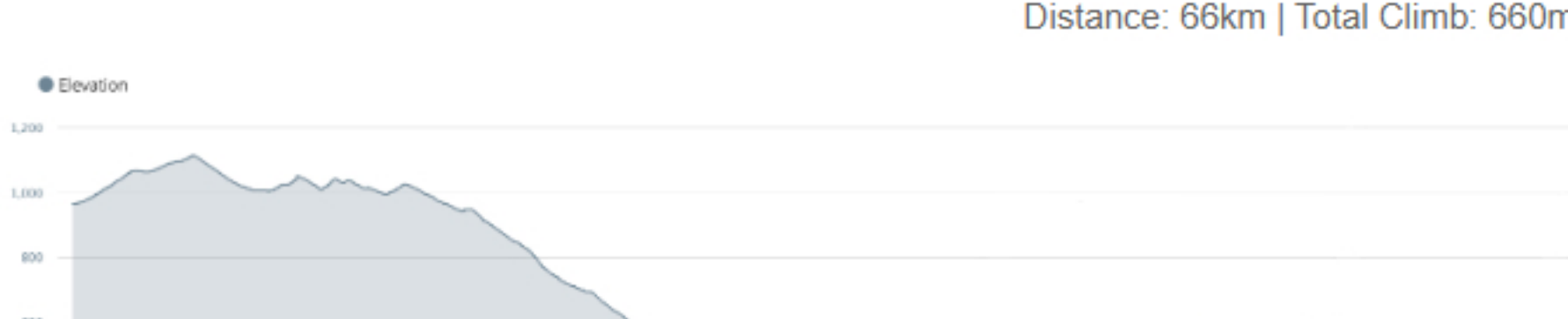
We leave behind the agricultural plateau of Korçë, ascending steadily into the border mountains through a landscape of barren rock interspersed with wild flowers. Numerous cols and valleys lie ahead, climbing into the heart of the Grammoz Mountains and over the Barmash Pass at 1,159m. We will stop for lunch in the town of Ersekë, the highest city in Albania at about 1000m above sea level. Overnight at Sotirë farm, nestled in its own tranquil valley with all kinds of animals a family farm can have. After checking in one of the wooded bungalows, relax by the fish ponds with a glass of families special red wine made from grapes growing at 1000m of elevation.



Sotirë-Bënjë

DAY 5

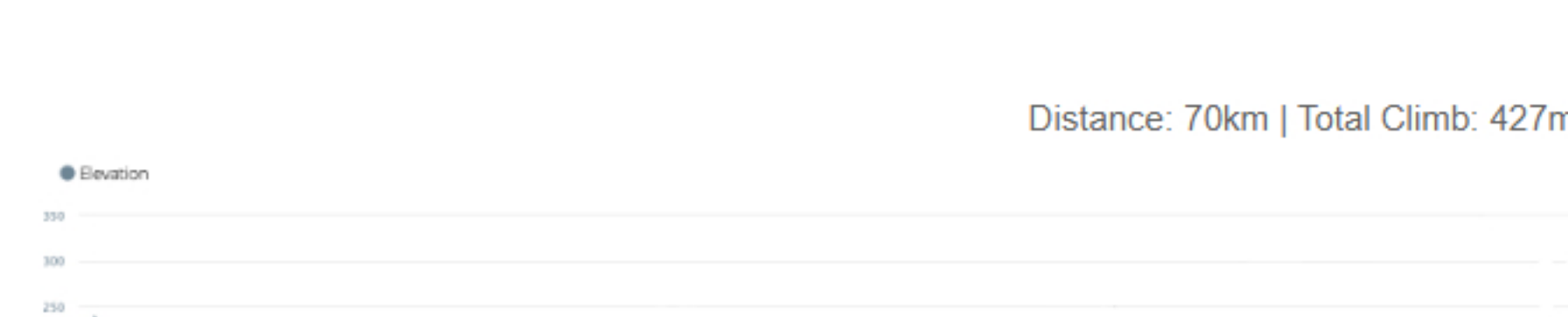
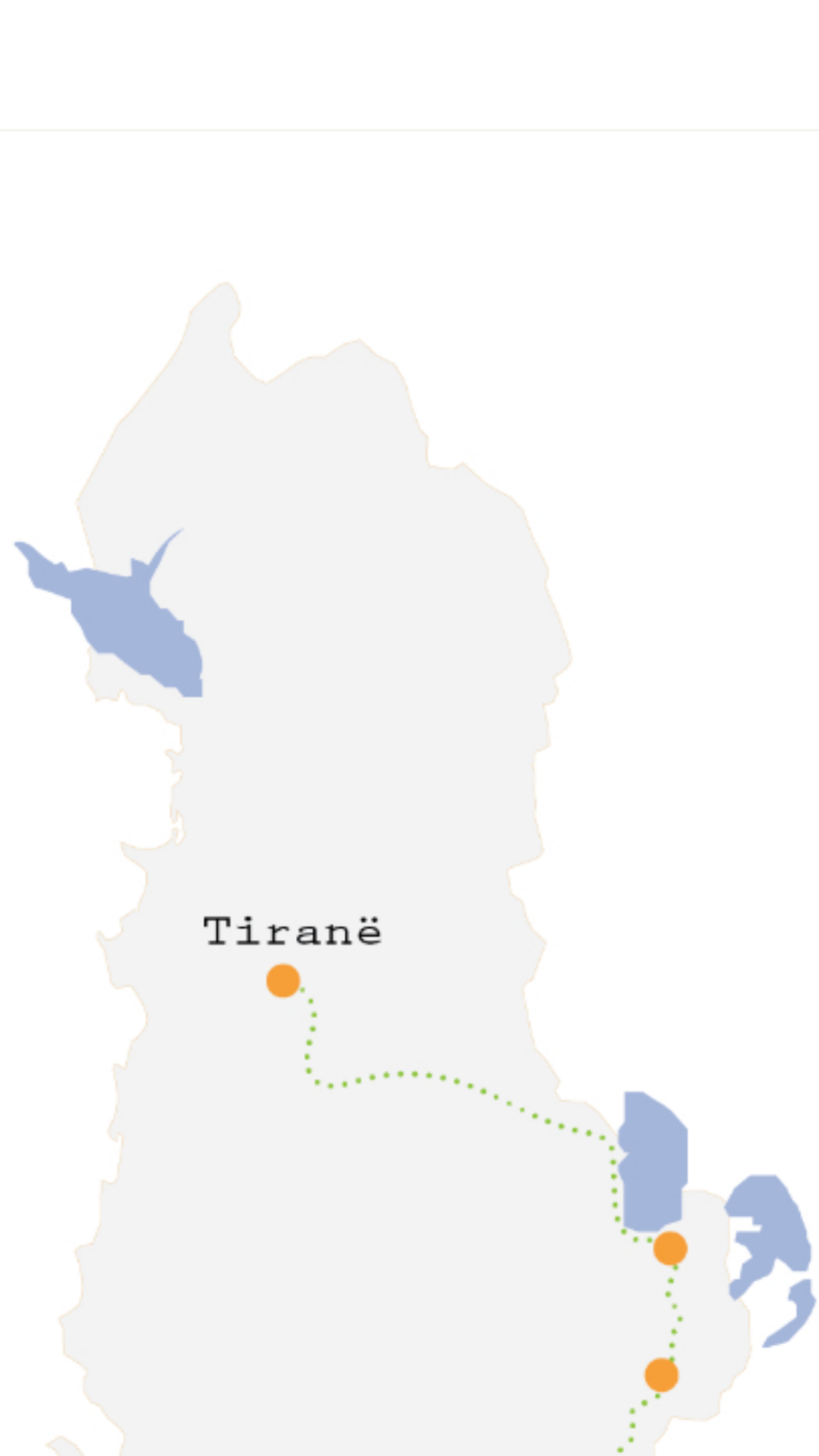
A climb out from Sotirë to a high Pine forest plateau surrounded by soaring peaks, before reaching the source of the River Vjosa and descending through its spectacular gorge to Leskovik. The 17km long descent to Çarshovë is both a pleasure and a thrill to cycle in one of the most scenic rides of the tour. We follow the corniche route high above the river to Përmet, famed for its cuisine and strong raki. After arriving at our guesthouse for lunch, in the village of Bënjë, we will there after continue cycling for another 4km to the thermal pools of Langarica and its canyon. A 18th century ancient ottoman bridge marks the spot and the end of the road. If you feel adventurous and want to swim alone in one of the more secluded pools, build every spring by the locals, hike upriver through one of the most magnificent canyons in Europe.



Bënjë-Gjirokastrë

DAY 6

We continue along the valley towards Këlcyrë, the distant shark's tooth peaks, which guard a further gorge. Ride between them to the confluence of the Drinos, following yet another gorge. This opens out into a wide plain with the town of Gjirokastrë (city of 1,000 steps) high above on the right. Gjirokastrë, a 'museum' town, is visiting the most beautiful in Albania. After checking in our hotel we will go on exploring on a guided tour, visting the charming cobbled alleyways between the white-walled buildings and the fascinating traditional houses and with a little bit of luck and good timing we might witness one of many cultural festivals, organised by the city. The most famous of which is Gjirokastrë National Folklore Festival, held since 1968, and regarded as the most important event in Albanian culture.

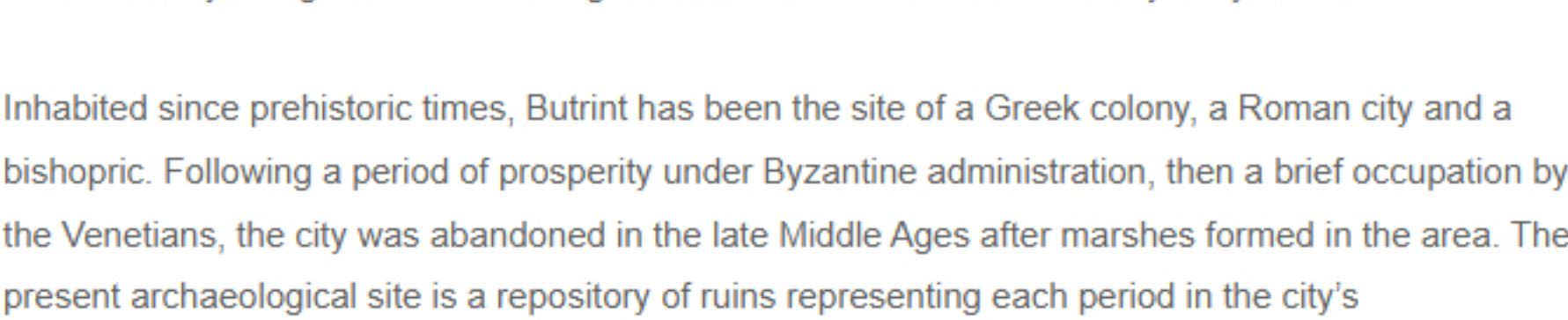


Gjirokastrë-Sarandë

DAY 7

We will start the day with a brief transfer, skipping some road and starting our cycling at the top of Muzina pass towards Sarandë. The gateway to southern Albania on the Ionian coast, sandwiched between the high mountains and the sea. A short ride on a rustic ferry brings us to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint, one of the country's most important archaeological treasures, where the influences of various ancient people are clearly visible. After a guided tour in Butrint, we will make our way along the coast heading north with the island of Corfu always at your site.

Inhabited since prehistoric times, Butrint has been the site of a Greek colony, a Roman city and a bishopric. Following a period of prosperity under Byzantine administration, then a brief occupation by the Venetians, the city was abandoned in the late Middle Ages after marshes formed in the area. The present archaeological site is a repository of ruins representing each period in the city's development.

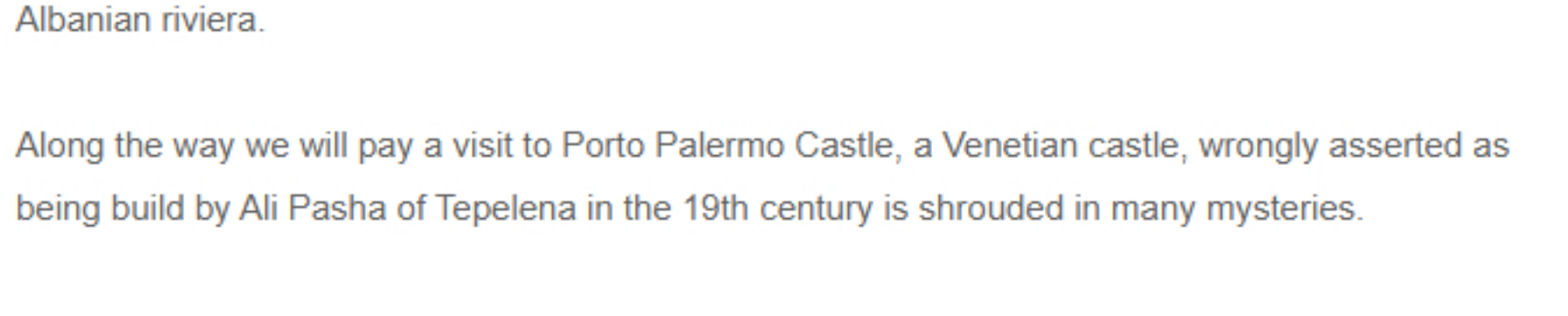


Sarandë-Himarë

DAY 8

A rollercoaster ride, we leave as the early morning mist is burnt off by the sun, climbing steeply out of Sarandë to a rocky plateau. Then it's over cols into bays and around headlands, always with the stunning mountain scenery to the right and coastal views to the left before descending to the long beach and the bay of Himarë, where there's plenty of time for a swim in the clear blue waters of the Albanian riviera.

Along the way we will pay a visit to Porto Palermo Castle, a Venetian castle, wrongly asserted as being built by Ali Pasha of Tepelena in the 19th century is shrouded in many mysteries.

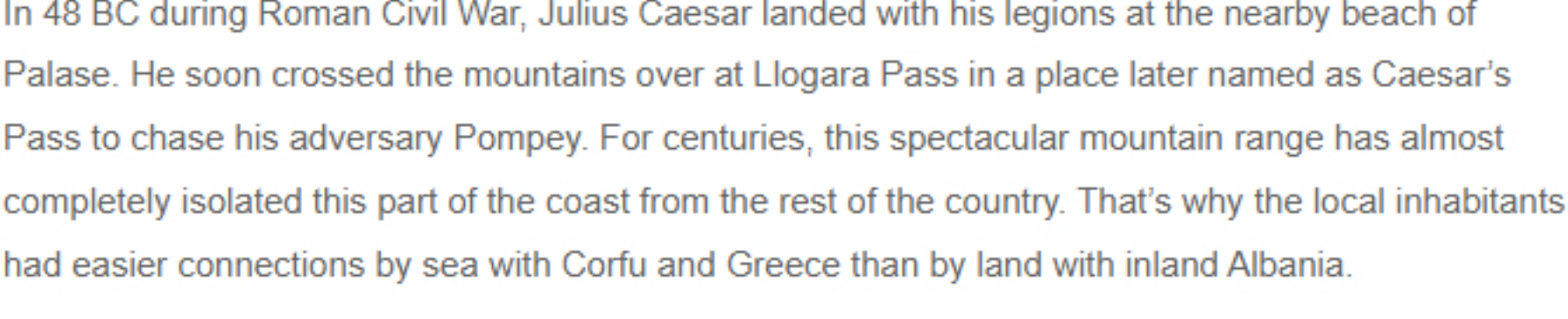
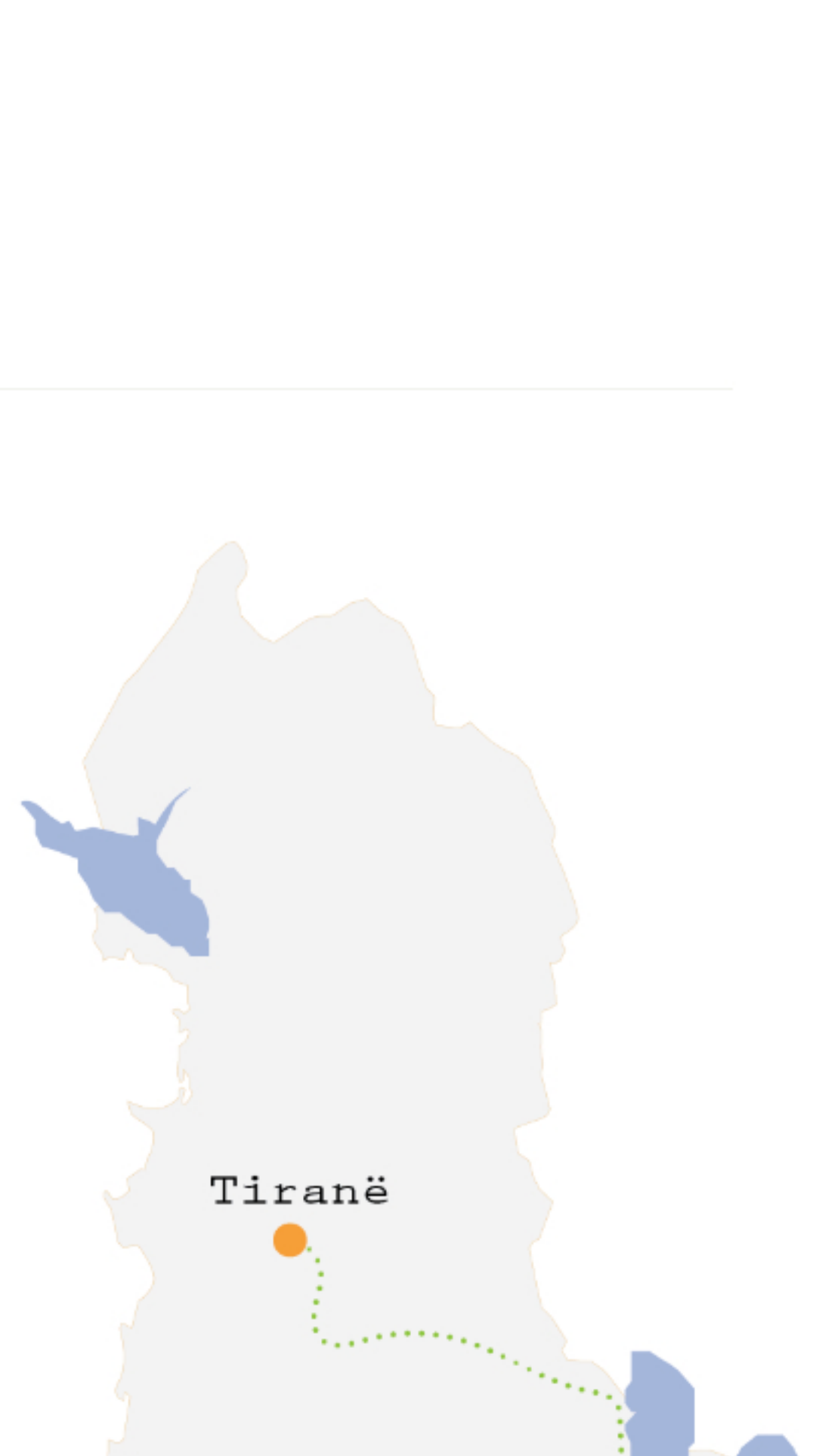


Himarë-Vlorë

DAY 9

Today's ride is not only the most challenging but also the most spectacular. You will gradually climb from sea level up to 1,000m through forests, gorges and hairpins. After lunch in the beautiful national park of Llogara we will descend towards Vlorë for an afternoon's relaxation by the Ionian coast.

In 48 BC during Roman Civil War, Julius Caesar landed with his legions at the nearby beach of Palase. He soon crossed the mountains over at Llogara Pass in a place later named as Caesar's Pass to chase his adversary Pompey. For centuries, this spectacular mountain range has almost completely isolated this part of the coast from the rest of the country. That's why the local inhabitants had easier connections by sea with Corfu and Greece than by land with inland Albania.



Departure

DAY 10

Farewell day. Depending on your flight, right after breakfast we will transfer for two and a half hours to Rinas airport in Tirana.