

## Report for treks in Iceland and Greenland 29 June to 12 July 2008

### Introduction

This was an abbreviated two week version of the treks some of us did in 1997 (Greenland) and 1999 (Iceland), but the journey was also extended with some new variations in both countries, also to try out some possible new riding opportunities with local sheep farmers in Greenland.

### 29 June Sunday

We boarded the Icelandair flight Copenhagen-Keflavik on 29 June 7.50am arriving in Iceland 9.40am. Christian missed one of his bags, but fortunately he got it in Saudarkorkur the next day. As we were approaching lunch time, Svend couldn't wait to have some whale, but the restaurant in Reykjavik which serves the most whale dishes was closed. Fortunately we had an excellent lunch at Hotel Holt instead where they had both whale and foal. Then off to Reykjavik's grand shopping mall as our youngest participant had forgotten both his rain coat and boots since he had to get up so early to catch the plane from Copenhagen to Iceland. He almost forgot his passport as well, but discovered it as the taxi just had driven a couple of hundred meters. Annick also got herself a new raincoat, similar to Rafael's, which really came in handy on the trip although at one point she thought she had lost her camera as she didn't find it in her rain coat pocket where it was supposed to be—but in fact it was Rafael's coat she had taken at that time.....We boarded a tiny Eagle Air-plane at the domestic airport in Reykjavik at 17.30 bound for Saudarkrokur in the North, arriving at 18.10. There German Katja in a minibus from Activity Tours picked us up and brought us to the Hotel <http://www.hotelvarmahlid.is/> and our first overnight stay in Iceland. This was the night of the final of the European Cup, and the hotel was full of people who watched as Spain beat Germany. We did our best to console Katja afterwards, but Rafael was very happy for the victory of his linguistic brothers.

[Icelandair Flight: 286€-483€ pp; Eagle air flight r/t: 158€ pp]

### 30 June Monday

After a traditional Icelandic breakfast with cod-liver oil (lysi) and old-Danish bitter to neutralise the taste of the lysi, we were introduced to the Icelandic horses located a short drive from the hotel. Gillie was given little Kolor and not having ridden for 42 years, we were all a bit anxious as to how this would go. But no worry! Gillie mastered the riding beautifully. Magnus took good care of his horses, and instructed those not familiar with Icelandic horses how to ride them. A 2 hour ride brought us into the foothills of the highlands and back to the stables where we enjoyed our lunch packet from the hotel while the dog, Pjokkur, hoped to get a little taste as well. After lunch more riding, and Gillie was a bit sceptical to relinquish on Kolor, but found Lysingur even better! Marianne fell in love with Eldur which she got in the afternoon. Before dinner most of us had a pleasant swim in the natural warm water pool located behind the hotel.

### 1 July Tuesday

The ride down the valley brought us close to the open air museum area near Glaumbær, but before getting there we had a stop to taste shark (hákarl) which had to be swallowed with a big mouthful of "brennivín" or "black death". Afterwards we made a circle on horseback, and Magnús with a beautiful voice led us in singing "Ridum, ridum". We spent some interesting hours at Glaumbær, first enjoying a lunch with Icelandic specialties at the café and afterwards having a guided tour of the museum which gives a good impression of life in Iceland about 100 years ago. A young boy in Icelandic national costume, called Ásgeirr did an excellent job guiding us in fluent English. At the

churchyard we saw the monument commemorating the first white baby born in North America. The rafting trip which had been planned for the evening had to be called off because of too much wind.

Our Argentine gaucho riding with three horses



the group catching up



Crossing a river



Marianne tölting along towards Glaumbær



## 2 July Wednesday

We departed in the morning from hotel Varmahlid by car to the museum and cathedral at Holar. Here we met a group of archaeologists busy excavating middle age settlements near the cathedral. Marianne discovered an archaeologist she knew from Norway, and we watched an Irish archaeologist making the most beautiful drawings. A young man studying to become a church minister gave us a very interesting tour of the church. We had lunch at the museum before continuing by car via the landing point for Viking ships near Holar.

In the evening we participated in a rafting expedition down the east Jökulselv. By now the wind had died down, and it turned out to be a fun and not very scary experience! We even stopped on the way and had hot chocolate brewed on warm water coming right up from the ground! After the rafting expedition we drove to the Fagranesi farm north of Saudarkrokur on the western coast line of the beautiful Skagafjörður. Some of us opted for the “heitta pottur” or thermal pool, while others had a pleasant dinner at a local restaurant in Saudarkrokur.

## 3 July Thursday

In the morning we went on an excursion by boat to the island of Drangey. A beautiful boat ride where we started to see more and more birds as we approached the island cumulated with the feat of getting ashore in the big waves. Some strong arms helped to lift us ashore. After a steep passage up to the top, we had our sandwiches on the island. Young Jon gave us a dramatic account of how the giant Grettir who had been outlawed by the Althing, had lived on the island for three years (1025-1028) before his enemies finally killed him (read more in Grettir’s Saga). On the way back some fishing-lines were thrown overboard, and the fish really bit! We caught cod and seith, so we had a nice fish-dinner when we got back before our return to Saudarkrokur where we did some shopping for riding equipment.

20.10 we departed for Reykjavik with Eagle Air, arriving 20.50, and we spent the night at [www.HotelHolt.is](http://www.HotelHolt.is) which has an impressive collection of Icelandic paintings. [Price: 100€ pp.]



Drangey, July 2008

#### 4 July Friday

In the morning the “girls” were picked up by Dominique Ambroise Ibsen, a friend of Gillie’s and Solveig’s from The Association Femmes d’Europe in Brussels, and who had moved back to Iceland. We enjoyed an Icelandic breakfast in her house in Hafnarfjörður, decorated with her paintings as she is an artist, before she took us to the exhibition of an early Icelandic house in downtown Reykjavik. Then we had an early lunch at the restaurant Perlan (the Pearl) before departing from the domestic airport at Reykjavik for Narsarsuaq at 14.20, arriving at 14.20 local time in Greenland. [Air Iceland Flight: 166€ pp.] But Svend’s bag did not arrive! We heard later that since there was no more space in the luggage compartment on the plane, it had just been left in Reykjavik. It was not recovered until the 18 July when it finally was delivered to him in Brussels! Overnight at the [www.Blueice.gl](http://www.Blueice.gl) hostel in Narsarsuaq. Jacky Simoud, the BlueIce outfitter provided us with information about the programme for the coming days, including the sad situation that he had not been able to organise any horseback riding for us with local sheep farmers.

We had dinner in the local restaurant at Hotel Narsarsuaq where we met many interesting tourists, inclusive a group of graduate glaciology students from the University of Wisconsin who spent the summer with their professor in Greenland studying the moves of the Inland Ice Cap and its glaciers in relation to the global climate developments. Their report will not be published until another one or two years.

The following eight day trek was organised by Blueice outfitters with a budget of 400€ per person, excluding horse rental in case we were able to find horses with the local sheep farmers after all.

In fact, the afternoon of 6 July while we were all walking in the mountains beyond Qassiarsuk, Svend managed to find one horse which he used to round up a small family of four horses. He left the horses in the evening with the Paviasen family who also invited both him and Christian for coffee and a delicious dinner of fresh seal.

Svend worked hard to round up horses for the trek ... and he found this family: a stallion, mare, yearling and a foal



#### 5 July Saturday and 6 July Sunday

In the morning of 5 July we were transferred by boat to Qassiarsuk, a sheep farming and historical community with a recent museum setting out the Norse history with Erik the Red and his son Leif who discovered America 500 years before Columbus. We stayed two days until Monday 7 July in Qassiarsuk. Qassiarsuk is also known as Brattahlid, the place where Erik the Red settled in year 982. The ruins from the Norse period are well preserved, and we visited the open-air museum of the reconstructions of a “long house” and the first church in Greenland, Tjodhilde's Church where

Icelandic Inga, the local museum guide, gave an extraordinary presentation based on the Vinland sagas. We had lunch at the local restaurant (120 Dkr pr person). After lunch we went for a walk towards a fjord with lots of ice. For dinner we enjoyed Christian's cooking: lamb chops and banana with chocolate and cracker for dessert.

The 50 local residents of Qassiarsuk are mainly sheep farmers, but the village also has a school, a church and a shop with a counter for the local Greenland Bank.

Rafael spent some time fishing, and the fish was used in a fish soup. After the soup had been prepared, a Danish tourist came with some beautiful sea trout for us, and Svend fried one for breakfast the next morning.

### **7 July Monday**

A boat brought us to Itilleq, the disembarking point for the village Igaliku. We spent the night at the youth hostel. Igaliku has many colourful houses and is situated in a green and very fertile bay with luscious grassland. On the other side of the fjord towers Illerfissalik (1752 m) in a rough and desolate landscape. Some of us walked along the river to Lake 90, mainly to fish for trout. We discovered, however, that someone had placed a fishing net across the river mouth so that no trout could enter the river; we carefully removed and left the net on the shore; later on we reported the illegal net fishing to the local police who promised to explain to the local population the damage to the fishing this way of blocking the river from the sea would lead to.

At Igaliko we also visited the ruins of the Norse cathedral of Gardar where the local bishop once lived and exchanged messages with Rome. We wrote some postcards there, but were told that it was no use mailing them, as the boat which picks up the mail only comes every fortnight.

For dinner we tried both whale and lamb. And on our little excursion after the meal we met a Dorsi "Indian" who underlined that he was not an Inuit.

### **8 July Tuesday and 9 July Wednesday**

We had another local transfer by boat to Qanisartuut where Niels Lund, the local sheep farmer and his family were glad to host us during two days and nights. Niels and his son Knud had been able to round up three horses for us, and the last afternoon they even provided us with a fourth horse so that we all could enjoy at least half a day's riding in the mountains of the Vatnahverei.

We were very well received indeed by the Lund family who invited us for dinner the first day while we prepared dinner for them the second day. The young members of the family spoke English in addition to Danish, so they could act as interpreters for our English-speaking participants. Niels has made his childhood home on the farm into a museum with lots of interesting objects.

Dinner with the Lund family



enjoying a ride in the mountains above the Lund farm



### **10 July Thursday**

We had an early boat ride back to Qassiarsuk via Igaliku. Ernst, another local sheep farmer brought us first to Igaliko, and Kristian Frederiksen then ferried us back to Qassiarsuk where the Carl Frederiksen family was offering us to stay two nights at their hostel next to their house. For dinner we enjoyed seal and beef-burgers.

### 11 July Friday

Frederik Frederiksen (cousin of Carl Frederiksen) had rounded up four horses for us so that four of us could enjoy a full day ride in the mountains west of Brattahlid towards the Icefjord. The weather was rather wet and rainy (much appreciated by the local farmers as they had not had rain for 44 days), but nevertheless four of us managed to reach the Icefjord on the other side of Erik the Red's peninsula on horse back; here the fjord is magnificent, full of icebergs from the nearby calving glaciers. The view across the fjord to the calving glaciers is splendid; and we enjoyed our lunch packet in the ruins of a Norse farm yard, while the horses enjoyed eating the grass in a stone-ringed paddock built several hundred years ago by our lost Norse ancestors. Later on three participants rode back to Qassiarsuk via the same tractor road we had used to arrive at the Norse farm ruin while Svend rode back via a more northerly valley to the Erik's Fjord passing another sheep farm on the way. When he was close to the Paviasen farm, Svend met a herd of five horses, being chased by a young Greenlander. It turned out to be one of the Paviasen daughters who was trying to round up the horses, together with the rest of the family who followed a little later. After about an hour's chase, we managed to round up all the horses where some had not been broken yet or were to be castrated to become geldings.

In the meantime Rafael did some fishing, and in the course of 10 minutes he caught 9 cods which were great for frying for dinner that evening.

Meeting a first group of free roaming horses:



Marianne near the Erik's Fjord



Meeting a group of free roaming horses between the Ice Fjord and Erik's Fjord



A large Norse farm ruin at the edge of the Ice Fjord

The Vikings had built a stone path from their farm to the river: view towards the Erik's Fjord with horses below



The Paviasen family after the round up of their horses:



### **12 July Saturday**

In the morning we said goodbye to the Fredriksen families who brought us and our luggage to the pier for the ferry boat trip across the fjord to Narsarsuaq. We had to cross a freighter to get to our boat. We spent some time there before final departure from Narsarsuaq with Air Greenland at 13.45, arriving safely in Copenhagen at 22.15. (Air Greenland flight: 492€-320€ pp).

**Plans for 2009:** We have now established excellent contacts with two groups of horse owners/sheep farmers in the Narsarsuaq region; this ensures that we can have horses and maybe even local guides coming along with us in 2009 for treks in the land of Erik the Red and in the Vatnahverei area south of Igaliku/Gardar; we could plan for three days of riding in each of these areas, staying overnight in hostels owned by the local sheep farmers. Please let us know soon if you are interested so that we can start the more detailed planning of this venture; end of June/early July 2009 would appear to be a good timing. Our old and new friends in Iceland and Greenland already look forward to our visit in 2009. At this stage an estimated total budget for one week in Iceland and a second week in Greenland, departing from and returning to Copenhagen would be in the order of 3000€, depending on how the current increase in aircraft fuel and other costs develop during the coming year.

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