

STUDENT MANUAL

FIELD SCHOOL IN NORTH ATLANTIC ARCHAEOLOGY

**Vatnsfjörður, Northwest Iceland
July 3-28, 2006**

Offered by:



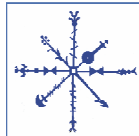
INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY, ICELAND
FORNLEIFASTOFNUN ÍSLANDS (FSÍ)

In cooperation with:



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

University of Iceland



Northern Science and Education Centre (NORSEC),
City University of New York



IAKH, University of Oslo



North Atlantic Biocultural Organization (NABO)

Medieval Westfjords Society

University Centre of the Westfjords

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Welcome

Welcome to the international Field School in North Atlantic Archaeology! This course was established in 1997 by the Institute of Archaeology, Iceland, in partnership with the North Atlantic Biocultural Organization (NABO), an international research cooperative that sponsors interdisciplinary research throughout the North Atlantic region. The field school is now affiliated with the City University of New York, the University of Oslo, and the University of Iceland, all of which offer it as a credit course. Whichever institution you applied through, you have made it through a rigorous selection processes, so congratulations!



The students who attend the field school – as well the instructors and visiting specialists – come from all over Europe, North America, and the North Atlantic region, creating an international and dynamic learning environment. One of the most exciting aspects of the field school is that students gain hands-on experience with an internationally recognised team of experts who are actively conducting interdisciplinary research in Iceland and the North Atlantic region. This intensive and interactive learning experience has inspired many students to go on to do post-graduate research in North Atlantic archaeology. We hope that you will have a great time on the course, that you will learn a lot, and that you will feel inspired, too.

Introductions

Iceland and Icelanders

Iceland is a remarkably beautiful mid-Atlantic island with diverse landscapes that include rolling green hills, rugged mountains, glaciers, waterfalls, coastal cliffs, sandy deserts, peat bogs, and active volcanic hot spots. Places that look like Ireland and places that look like northeast Greenland may be only a few miles apart. Iceland served as the model for both Rivendell and Mordor for J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Iceland's weather is highly variable – if you don't like it, wait 15 minutes. Summers are cool, with temperatures averaging around 10°C (50 F), highs of about 20°C (70 F) and lows of about 4°C (40 F). The south and west coasts get the most rain, but frequent rain and gales are a fact of life everywhere. Iceland is windy, and the best way to stay warm is to wear several insulating layers and a windbreaker.

Iceland has a rich and occasionally grim history. Major population loss due to volcanism, starvation, and epidemic disease, kept the pre-modern population at around 50,000 for centuries. Iceland was a colony of Denmark until 1944, and the long (peaceful) struggle for independence, national revival and modernization is a constant background to the modern culture. Since independence, both the population size and national prosperity have dramatically increased, transforming a poor, rural colony into a modern Scandinavian country with a high standard of living. People whose grandparents lived in turf (sod) houses now own multiple computers and vacation in Florida, and Icelanders are well aware of the amount of hard work that went into this transition. Recent conflicts over cod are not trivial to a country where 70% of the national product comes from the sea, and some tensions remain over the NATO base at Keflavík, but you will generally be forgiven your nationality if you are polite.

The present population of Iceland is around 250,000, with the majority of people living in or around the capital of Reykjavik (c. 150,000). Reykjavik is a trendy, clean, safe, modern city, with malls, high street shopping, world-class restaurants, an active nightlife, and a high density of cultural centres, bookshops, art galleries, and museums. English is widely spoken (especially by people under 50), and there will be little communication problem in most places (which is good, as Icelandic is not an easy language to pick up). After Reykjavik, the next largest city is Akureyri (15,000), in northeast Iceland, and the rest of the population is spread around in small towns and farms around the country. For more information on Iceland, you will find both the [www](#) and travel guides (e.g. Lonely Planet) useful.

The Westfjords

The landscape of the Vestfirðir peninsula in northwest Iceland is among the most rugged and beautiful in Iceland. Its coastlines are dominated by narrow fjords and steep headlands (pictured below), while its interior areas, at elevations over 700 m, contain rocky tundra dotted with hundreds of ponds. The southern coast of the largest fjord, Ísafjarðardjúp ('ice fjord deep'), is cut by numerous smaller fjords, including Vatnsfjörður, where our site is



located. The region's gravel highways follow this winding coastline, which results in beautiful views, but long driving distances. Reykjanes, where we will be staying, is a low-lying, finger-like peninsula jutting out between Reykjarfjörður and Ísafjörður, at the very base of Ísafjarðardjúp. The hot springs at Reykjanes ('smoke peninsula') heat an outdoor pool and were used for salt extraction from 1770-1790.

Although land suitable for sheep husbandry is scattered around the Vestfirðir peninsula, the landscape has always lent itself to the exploitation of marine resources, and inhabitants have placed a great emphasis on fishing, stranded marine mammals (e.g. whale), and the rendering

of shark liver oil. Many farms and fishing villages that were established in the more remote parts of the Westfjords up until the late 19th century underwent a drastic process of abandonment in the first decades of the 20th century. By 1950 the northernmost peninsula, Hornstrandir, was completely uninhabited, and the area is now a national park.

The largest settlement and commercial centre of the Vestfirðir is the pretty harbour town of Ísafjörður (population c. 3500), a 165 km (2 hour) drive northwest of Reykjanes.

Ísafjörður is arguably the most beautifully situated town in Iceland, occupying a narrow spit of land surrounded by the waters of the Skutulsfjörður ('harpoon fjord'), and hemmed in by steep mountains (pictured right). The town contains restaurants, shops, and other amenities, as well as the Westfjords Maritime Museum, one of the finest small museums in Iceland.



The site of Vatnsfjörður

The farm of Vatnsfjörður ('lake fjord') is at the bottom of the fjord of the same name (see the map below). The farm is mentioned in written texts dating as far back as the 13th and early 14th centuries, including *Landnámabók*, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, *Laxdæla Saga*, and *Grettir's Saga*, in which it was the home of colourful characters like Vermundur the Lean and his strong-willed wife, Þorbjörg the Stout. In these texts, which purport to describe events in the late 9th and 10th centuries, Vatnsfjörður is depicted as a wealthy and important farm, inhabited by chieftains who control large parts of the Westfjords. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Vatnsfirðingar clan, named after the farm that was its main seat of power, was one of the



richest and most powerful families in Iceland. They owned farms and received rents in the form of dried fish and other marine products from farms all over the Westfjords, and the location of Vatnsfjörður gave them control over lucrative trade routes. The church that was built on the farm in the 12th century was extremely influential until the Reformation in the mid-16th century. Vatnsfjörður was the site of a parish church until the late 20th century, and is still a productive farm.

In 2003, a programme of historical research, regional archaeological survey and excavations at the site of Vatnsfjörður were initiated by the Institute of Archaeology, Iceland, directed by Ragnar Edvardsson. Within its homefield boundary wall, the farm contains ruins of Viking Age buildings, a 2-3 m high mound made up of a sequence of buildings dating from the medieval period through the 19th century, ruins of numerous outhouses (e.g. animal buildings and smithies), and a circular graveyard next to the church. The two turf buildings excavated in 2004 contained artefacts datable to the 10th century, including glass beads and a spindle whorl, as well as less diagnostic artefacts such as a whetstone, a worked whale bone, a loom weight, an iron door lock, and iron nails. The excavation of the earlier of the two buildings was completed in 2005. This was a typical Viking Age house, measuring 16 m long by c. 6 m wide, with curved long-walls, a large central hearth, and evidence for platforms or benches along its sides (pictured below). In 2005, we also excavated a smithy and extensive outdoor deposits between the two buildings, including a cooking pit, two ephemeral hearths, and sheet middens. In 2006 we will complete the excavation of the smithy and will extend the excavation to include another building and associated midden deposits. We will also be conducting further tests on the farm mound, and the soils of the homefield.

Field school instructors

The field school is staffed by the Institute of Archaeology, Iceland (FSÍ), which has been carrying out excavations and field surveys throughout Iceland since 1995. Your instructors are experienced archaeologists, surveyors, and historians and are actively engaged in research projects in Iceland and elsewhere in the Viking world. Many of them are also specialists in a particular discipline within archaeology, which they will teach through lectures and practicals.

Karen Milek, Director of the Field School, FSÍ. Karen has been excavating in Canada and the British Isles since 1992 and in Iceland since 1997. She is a specialist in geoarchaeology and in the archaeology of Viking Age settlements and houses, and is doing a PhD at the University of Cambridge on ‘Houses and Households in Viking Age Iceland’.

Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir, archaeologist, FSÍ. Guðrún has worked at FSÍ as an excavator, surveyor, finds specialist, and illustrator since 2001. In 2004 she completed her MA in Archaeology at the University of Iceland, for which she wrote a dissertation on ‘Finds from the Þjórsárdalur’.

Professor Christian Keller, IAKH, University of Oslo. Christian is a specialist in landscape archaeology and the Viking Age and medieval archaeology of Norway and the North Atlantic region. He is currently collaborating on the project ‘Transformation in the Viking and Norse Middle Ages c. 750-1350’.

Oscar Aldred, Project Manager and Digital Data Manager, FSÍ. After completing his MA in Landscape Studies, Oscar worked for many years as a professional archaeologist in the United Kingdom. He has been surveying and excavating in Iceland, and teaching at the field school, since 1999. He is a specialist in landscape archaeology and computer applications that use GIS and databases. He is currently directing the ‘Northwest Landscape Project’.

Garðar Guðmundsson, Head of Palaeoenvironmental Research, FSÍ, and Manager of the Vatnsfjörður excavation project. Garðar is an archaeobotanist, and conducts research on plant remains and cereal cultivation in Viking Age and medieval Iceland. He is also president of the Society of Icelandic Archaeologists.

Astrid Daxböck, archaeologist, FSÍ. Astrid has been excavating in Austria since 2000 and in Iceland since 2002. She is doing a masters degree in archaeology and Nordic studies at the University of Vienna, and is writing a masters thesis on Viking Age weapons in Iceland.

Konrad Smiarowski, City University of New York. Konrad has excavated on sites in Iceland, Poland, the United States and Greenland. He is a specialist in zooarchaeology, and is conducting his PhD on faunal material from Truso, a Viking-Slavic trading emporium in northern Poland.

Jonas Secher Schmidt, University of Aarhus. Jonas has excavated on sites in Iceland and Denmark, and has research interests in medieval swordsmanship. He has studied historical osteology at the University of Lund, and is currently pursuing a master's degree in archaeology at the University of Aarhus.

Mjöll Snæsdóttir, Senior Archaeologist, FSÍ, and Editor of the *Yearbook of the Archaeological Society*. Mjöll is an expert in the archaeology of Viking Age and medieval Iceland and on the excavation of farm mounds. She was the director of the 'Stóraborg Farm Mound Project' (1978-1990), the largest salvage excavation project ever carried out in Iceland.

Professor Ian Simpson, School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Stirling. Ian is a soil scientist, and he specialises in human and animal ecology in the North Atlantic region. He is currently collaborating on the 'Landscapes of Settlement Project', and the 'Landscapes circa Landnám Project' on the Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland.

Dr. Colleen Batey, Curator of Archaeology, Glasgow Museums. Colleen is an expert on Viking Age and medieval material culture in the North Atlantic region, and on the archaeology of Viking Age and Late Norse Scotland.

Adolf Friðriksson, Director of FSÍ. Adolf is a specialist in the history of Icelandic archaeology, popular archaeology, and the culture of Viking Age Iceland. He is currently directing research projects on Viking Age mortuary practices and assembly sites.

Professor Torfi Tulinius, Professor of French and Medieval Literature, University of Iceland. Torfi is a specialist in the history and literature of medieval Iceland, and is engaged in research on the rise of literary fiction in thirteenth-century Iceland.

Dr. Orri Vésteinsson, Lecturer in Archaeology, University of Iceland. Orri is a specialist in the social and economic history of medieval Iceland, settlement archaeology, and the history and archaeology of the Icelandic church. He is collaborating on numerous projects, including the 'Landscapes of Settlement Project' in northeast Iceland.

Logistics

What to bring

- ✓ **Passport:** It is a good practice to make a photocopy of the first page (with your picture) and carry this separately in case you lose the original.
- ✓ **Travel & health insurance:** It is essential to have travel and health insurance coverage while you are in Iceland. EU/EEA students should bring a European Health Insurance Card, which entitles them to full medical care in Iceland.
- ✓ **Money:** Your food and accommodation will be provided from July 2-28, but you will need sufficient cash in Icelandic kronur (ISK) for the Flybus into Reykjavik city centre, accommodation and food in Reykjavik, for food during your day off in Ísafjörður, and for any miscellaneous items or alcoholic beverages that you may choose to purchase at the hotel in Reykjanes. Be warned that prices in Iceland are high compared to North America and continental Europe. A night in a youth hostel in Reykjavik will cost 3000-4000 ISK, and a bottle of beer typically costs around 600 ISK. Credit and debit cards are accepted everywhere, and it is easy to withdraw money from automated teller machines.
- ✓ **Personal medication:** Bring an adequate supply of any prescription medication you are taking. Many over-the-counter drugs are not available in Icelandic pharmacies, including decongestants and most cold remedies, so it is a good idea to bring an emergency supply.
- ✓ **Suitable clothes:** Come prepared for all weather conditions, and to wear multiple layers.
 - ✓ **Waterproofs:** Full body coverage, including both tops and bottoms. Goretex is not recommended; heavy-duty rubberized waterproofs of the kind worn by fishermen and construction workers are better.
 - ✓ **Windbreaker:** Windproof over-jacket, preferably loose enough to layer beneath.
 - ✓ **Insulation:** A fleece jacket/vest, a heavy sweater, wool shirts, and thermal socks and underwear are all useful.
 - ✓ **Hats:** Both a wool hat and a billed/brimmed hat (e.g. baseball cap) are useful, the former for particularly cold days, the latter for sunny or rainy days.
 - ✓ **Boots:** Sturdy, waterproof boots.
 - ✓ **Work clothing:** Long trousers, long-sleeved shirts, T-shirts, and work gloves. Think old and sturdy.
 - ✓ **Recreational clothing:** Lighter clothing to wear indoors and on your days off. Shoes are not worn inside, so you may want to bring slippers or Birkenstocks for indoor wear. If you intend to do any sports (there is a gymnasium at Reykjanes), you should come equipped for that as well.
- ✓ **Sleeping bag:** You will be using this inside, but in case you want to go camping during your stay, we recommend a sleeping bag that is suitable for conditions as low as +10°F/-10°C.

- ✓ **Knapsack:** You will need a bag to carry extra clothes and your lunch to the field.
- ✓ **Water bottle and box/bags for your lunches:** You will pack your own lunch every morning, and will need something to carry it in. We will provide coffee and tea on site, but if you want anything special you may want to bring your own thermos.
- ✓ **Journal, writing & reading materials:** You should come prepared to write a personal journal (compulsory assignment), and to take notes during the lectures. Books and papers on archaeology will be available, but you may also want to bring recreational reading material.
- ✓ **Eye mask and earplugs:** You will be sharing a room with other students, and may find that these accessories help you sleep. Remember: there will be nearly 24 hours of daylight!

✓ **Towel, toiletries, and rubber-soled footwear for the shower:**

The showers are clean, but the sulphur in the water can make wet floors extremely slippery, and rubber-soled footwear can prevent accidents.

✓ **Bathing suit:** There is a naturally heated outdoor pool and sauna at Reykjanes (pictured right), which you may want to use. You may also want to visit the pools in Reykjavik or the Blue Lagoon.



✓ **Sunscreen, insect repellent, and mosquito headnet**

✓ **Vitamin supplements:** The Icelandic diet tends to be high in lamb, fish, and dairy products, and may be lower in fruit and vegetables than you are accustomed. The hotel in Reykjanes will cater nutritious meals, but we nevertheless recommend that you bring your own vitamin supplements. If you have any special dietary requirements, you will have to cater for them yourself.

✓ **Personal trowel:** We have spares, but you may want to bring your own (preferably 3”).

✓ **Camera:** If you bring a camera, remember to bring a waterproof/dust-proof bag for it.

What not to bring under any circumstances

- ✗ Firearms
- ✗ Knives larger than a Swiss army knife
- ✗ Recreational drugs of any kind

ⓘ **Warning:** There is a zero tolerance policy towards drugs and weapons, and any student in possession of one of these items will be immediately removed from the field school.

Travel itinerary

You should book your flight to Keflavík international airport as soon as possible.

✈ Fly to Keflavík airport no later than Saturday July 1.

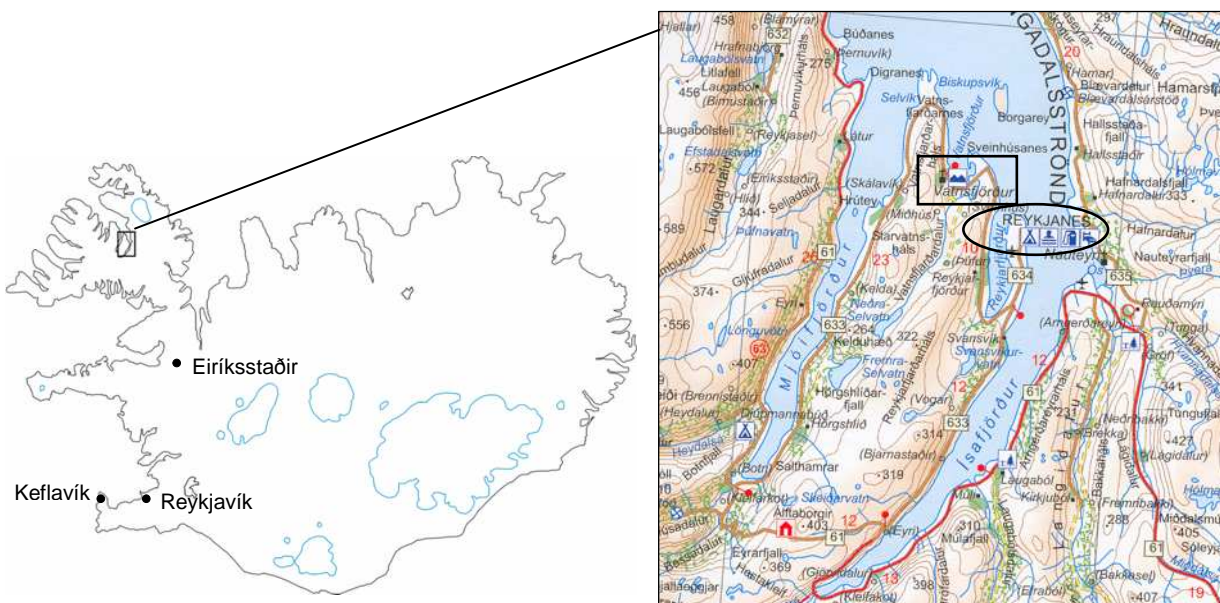
- Take the Flybus to Reykjavík city centre, which takes about 45 minutes (cost: 1150 ISK). Tell the bus driver where you are staying, and he/she will advise you on how to get there.
- It is very easy to book accommodation in Reykjavik over the web, but if you need help finding accommodation in a hotel or youth hostel close to FSÍ, please contact FSÍ's administrator, Ólöf Þorsteinsdóttir, at olof@instarch.is, as soon as possible.



An interactive map of Reykjavík is available at <http://borgarvefsja.is/website/bvs.bvs.html>

🚌 Sunday July 2: bus from Reykjavík to field school accommodation in Reykjanes.

- Meet Garðar Guðmundsson at FSÍ (address: 3 Bárugata) at 10:30 am to catch the mini-bus.
- En route to Reykjanes, the bus will stop at the reconstructed turf house at Eiríksstaðir.



Accommodation



We will be staying at Hótel Reykjanes, on the Reykjanes peninsula, about 20 minutes away from the excavation site at Vatnsfjörður (pictured left).

The hotel was formerly a school and has ideal facilities for an archaeological field school. There is abundant sea-life in the area, including sea birds, a seal colony, and occasionally whales.

At Reykjanes you will have:

- Shared accommodation, bathroom, and shower facilities (2-3 students per room)
- Meals provided
- A lecture room and laboratories
- A sitting room (pictured right)
- A pool and sauna (pictured above)
- A gymnasium (pictured below)
- A small shop (with basic toiletries, stamps, post cards, phone cards, etc.)
- A bar (open after 9 pm Thurs-Sat)
- Wireless internet access



Postal address

You can receive mail at:
Ferdáþjónustan Reykjanesi (Hotel Reykjanes)
c/o Fornleifastofnun Íslands
401 Ísafjörður
Iceland

Telephone number

In emergencies, your family can contact you at:
(+354) 456 4844

There is only one telephone at the hotel reception desk, so access is limited, but if you need to you can make calls from this phone using your credit card or an international phone card (the cheaper option). International phone cards can be bought in Keflavík airport, in Reykjavík, or in Reykjanes. Please note that there is no mobile telephone coverage in the area.



Health and Safety

On-site hazards and preventative measures

Archaeological fieldwork has inherent health and safety risks. It is important to be aware of these potential risks, and to take common-sense actions to try to prevent them. Most accidents on site happen because of careless handling of tools, or because people fail to keep an eye out for trip hazards. Please remain diligent and help to prevent injury to yourself and others!

We are also at risk from colds and flu because we are working outside, sometimes in bad weather, and because we are living in shared accommodation. Please take every precaution to prevent illness by being prepared for rapid weather changes while we are on site and on field trips (i.e. having warm clothing and full waterproofs with you at all times). We also recommend that you bring a supply of vitamin supplements with you in order to keep your immune system strong, and a supply of cold/flu medication – just in case.

Please read the Vatnsfjörður Excavation and Survey Risk Assessment, below, and take careful note of the actions that should be taken to prevent accidents or illness.

Vatnsfjörður Fieldwork Risk Assessment 2005

Hazard	Effect	Severity	Likelihood	Risk	Preventative Actions
Trenches, strung lines, uneven ground	Injury to self by tripping, falling	Medium	Low	Low-Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of trip hazards at trench edge (e.g. crumbling sections, strung lines, grid points), during survey work (e.g. uneven ground, slippery rocks), and during excursions • Sturdy footwear to prevent twisted ankles
Deep excavations, test pits, ditch sections, unstable sections	Injury to self and others by falling or causing sections to collapse	Medium	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stepped access and shoring • Use of fencing, hazard tape or railings to mark and enclose deep excavations • Protective clothing, sturdy footwear
Hand tools (e.g. spades, shovels, trowels, mallets)	Injury to self and others by accidental mishandling of tools	Medium	Low	Low-Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper handling of tools, with awareness of proximity to other people • Shallow slope barrow runs and wheelbarrows not over-filled • Solid shovelling platforms • Tools kept centralised, not lying around site, and stored at the end of the day • Shovels, spades, and other tools laid point down
Severe weather	Illness and possible hypothermia if get cold and wet	Low	Medium	Low-Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing appropriate clothing layers, including waterproof and windproof outer clothing and footwear

Scales are from low to high. Written by Karen Milek and Ragnar Edvardsson, March 2005

Off-site hazards and preventative measures

There are, of course, off-site hazards as well, and although it is impossible to mitigate against all of them, we would like to draw your attention to a few issues in particular:

Driving: You must wear seatbelts at all times.

Swimming: The pool at Reykjanes, which is geothermally heated, may sometimes become too hot, and it must be used with caution. It is too shallow to dive in, but deep enough to drown in! The pool may not be used by anyone who has been drinking.

Showers: Wet floors become very slippery, and rubber-soled footwear prevents accidents.

Hiking: If you go walking, please take a friend, a map, a compass or GPS, food, and appropriate clothing. Colour outer clothing is a simple security precaution. Tell a member of staff where you are going and when you will be back, and stick to your route and schedule.

Behaviour: Excessive drinking and other irresponsible behaviour can endanger yourself and the people around you. You are expected to behave safely and responsibly at all times.



Important Health and Safety Information

- A health and safety manual and first aid kit will be available on site at all times
- At least one trained first-aider will be available on site at all times
- Trained first-aiders: Garðar Guðmundsson, Karen Milek, Oscar Aldred
- The nearest hospitals are at Hólmavík (100 km away) and Ísafjörður (165 km away)
- Emergency telephones are at the Vatnsfjörður farmhouse and the hotel in Reykjanes



The emergency telephone number in Iceland is 112



Warning: dangerous behaviour will not be tolerated

We will be living and working in a remote area, where conditions can be harsh, and where medical assistance may be hours away. It is therefore essential that everyone behave safely and responsibly at all times. Ignoring the safety procedures set out in this manual, or the instructions of staff members, may endanger yourself and the people around you. Dangerous behaviour will not be tolerated, and any student who acts irresponsibly will be immediately removed from the field school.

Confidential Health and Safety Form



Please print, complete, and sign the Confidential Health and Safety Form below, and send it to Ólöf Þorsteinsdóttir, Fornleifastofnun Íslands, Bárugata 3, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland, by June 1, 2006.

**Field School in North Atlantic Archaeology 2006
Confidential Health and Safety Form**

Name:	University:
Email:	Address:
Telephone number(s):	

Next of Kin Contact Information

Name of someone who can be contacted in case of emergency:	
Relationship:	Address:
Telephone number(s):	

Medical Information

Do you have a medical condition that might affect your work on the field school? If yes, and you think we should be aware of your condition, please provide details:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have any allergies? If yes, please check the box to confirm that you are bringing antihistamines, epinephrine, or other medication that you normally use to treat these allergies. If yes, and you think we should be aware of your allergies, please provide details:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> I confirm <input type="checkbox"/>
Are you taking any prescription medication? If yes, please check the box to confirm that you are bringing sufficient medication for the duration of the field school.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> I confirm <input type="checkbox"/>
Are your vaccinations up to date (especially against tetanus)? Please check the box to confirm that your tetanus vaccination is up to date.	I confirm <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have health insurance to cover you while you are on the field school? (e.g. if you are from an EEA state, do you have a European Health Insurance Card?) Please check the box to confirm that you have adequate health insurance.	I confirm <input type="checkbox"/>

Statement of Informed Consent

I have read and understand the written health and safety information and the risk assessment presented to me in the student manual for the field school. I recognize that archaeology has inherent hazards that cannot be fully mitigated by any set of safety procedures, and I accept the risks inherent in participating in this field school.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Field School Programme

Aims of the course

The field school will provide you with:

- an overview of Viking Age and medieval archaeology in the North Atlantic region
- insight into the technical and theoretical issues pertinent to Icelandic archaeology, including past and present trends in field work and interpretation, current research debates, and the use of written records
- thorough grounding in archaeological field methods, including survey, excavation, recording, and sampling
- knowledge of a range of post-excavation methods, including the processing of artefacts, faunal, botanical, and sediment samples, and field data
- a certificate of participation upon completion

Pre-Course Work

You are all expected to have done some reading in preparation for the field school – at the very least the readings that have been marked with a star (see the reading list below), but preferably more.

Excavation Programme

The excavation learning programme will progress through a series of stages, but the speed and timing of these stages will remain flexible because students often come with different levels of experience.

Stage 1: Preparing for the excavation

- Surveying: topographical survey, field walking, geophysics, soil auger survey
- Evaluating a site: identify archaeological objectives
- Choosing where to dig: assessment methods and rationale for digging location
- Laying out the site grid: basic surveying techniques (total station, triangulation using tapes: 1x1x1.41; 2x2x2.83; 5x5x7.07; 10x10x14.14, etc.)
- Defining the excavation area: open area vs. trench vs. test pit
- Handling and care of tools: what to use, when, and how
- Deturfing and removing topsoil

Stage 2: Introducing vertical stratigraphy and how to record it

- Introducing the site hut and the site records: registers, recording forms, finds processing, sample processing
- Introducing vertical stratigraphy: observation of a test pit
- Drawing a section
- Describing soils and sediments: filling out context sheets
- Constructing a stratigraphic matrix
- Taking samples from vertical sections

Stage 3: Introducing horizontal archaeology and how to record it

- Sequence: clean, photo, draw, measure, excavate
- Cleaning the site
- Taking photographs
- Identifying and recording units: layers, cuts, fills, features, structures
- Drawing multi-context and single-context plans
- Taking elevations
- Keeping track of multiple relationships between layers
- Taking samples

Stage 4: Introducing excavation methods

- Excavating: spading and trowelling techniques
- Moving dirt off the site
- Screening: when to sieve sediment and how to do it
- Dealing with finds: recording finds, lifting and storing fragile finds
- Interpreting contexts



Stage 5: Beginning unsupervised excavation

- Recording and excavating a unit on your own, then another, then another...

Stage 6: Closing down the excavation

- Covering, turfing, and protecting the site

Fieldwork Logistics



Working day: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday. Please make sure that you are packed and ready to leave Reykjanes promptly at 8:00 am.



Transportation: From Reykjanes to Vatnsfjörður and back, by car and/or minibus.



Breaks: 30 minute coffee breaks in the morning and afternoon, and a 45 minute lunch break.



Facilities: At Vatnsfjörður, we will construct a shelter where we can store our equipment, and where we can take our breaks and lunches if the weather is bad. Baldur Vilhelmsson, the priest who lives at Vatnsfjörður, has graciously agreed to let us use his toilet, but remember to take your shoes off before entering the house, and to keep the toilet clean!

Landscape Survey Programme

The landscape survey programme will involve several days of walking in Vatnsfjarðardalur and surrounding areas. The following topics will be covered:

Observing the landscape

- Landscape representations: maps, photos, paintings, descriptions, place-names
- Geomorphology: bedrock, glacial deposits, rivers, fluvial deposits, beaches
- Water: ground water, surface water, water management, erosion
- Resources: homefields, pastures, remote pastures, fuel, coastal resources
- Plants: indicator plants for archaeologists, edible and usable plants
- Archaeological sites: main settlements, farm mounds, boundary walls, shielings
- Landscape use: prehistoric, historic, modern



Recording the landscape

- Field survey: integrating oral histories, documents, place-names, field observations
- Soil survey: augering and soil test pitting
- Landscape photography
- Mapping landscape features and earthworks
- High resolution digital mapping of topography and earthworks using GPS

Analysing the landscape

- Inclusivity in landscape analysis: applying methods equally to all periods and components of the landscape, no matter how transient or modern
- Concepts of scale: analysing and integrating data from local, regional, and national perspectives
- Relationships between past and present landscapes: dialogues between geography, history, archaeology, and anthropology
- Understanding processes of landscape creation, change, and continuity

Post-Excavation Work

On a daily basis students will help the staff deal with the material and records taken from the excavation. In addition, you will have a number of practicals on the various aspects of post-excavation work using material that has been recovered from the site.

Digitisation of the site archive

- downloading and registering of digital photographs
- database entry of registers and context sheets
- scanning and digitisation of context plans in AutoCAD
- scanning and digitisation of section drawings in graphics software

Artefact processing

- field conservation of artefacts
- cleaning artefacts if appropriate (washing or dry-brushing)
- weighing, measuring, describing artefacts and entering data in the digital register
- packaging artefacts for safe transport and storage

Faunal analysis

- laying bones out to dry to make them more robust
- preliminary identification, sorting, and quantification of bones

Botanical analysis

- flotation of bulk sediment samples to recover organic remains (pictured right)
- drying of light and heavy fractions
- preliminary identification and quantification of botanical material



Microrefuse analysis

- preliminary identification, sorting, and quantification of the heavy fraction recovered from the flotation of bulk sediment samples

Soil and sediment analysis

- basic pH and electrical conductivity tests on sediment samples in order to determine the preservation conditions on site
- preliminary analysis of soil and sediment thin sections using polarising light microscopes

Aerial photograph analysis

- analysis and interpretation of the landscape around Vatnsfjörður using aerial photographs

Lectures

On some weekday evenings and weekend mornings you will attend lectures on the archaeology of Iceland and the North Atlantic region. These will be given by the core teaching staff as well as a number of visiting archaeologists and specialists. The lecture schedule will be provided when you arrive at the field school, and may be somewhat flexible depending on the schedules of the visiting lecturers. Topics will include:



Introductions

- Welcome and general orientation (Karen Milek)
- Introduction to the Vatnsfjörður project (site tour) (Karen Milek)

Archaeological overviews

- Viking Age archaeology in the North Atlantic region (Christian Keller)
- Medieval archaeology in the North Atlantic region (Christian Keller)
- The history of Icelandic archaeology (Adolf Friðriksson)
- The settlement of Iceland (Orri Vésteinsson)
- The history and culture of the Westfjords (Torfi Tulinius)
- Icelandic turf buildings and site formation processes (Karen Milek)
- The excavation of turf buildings and farm mounds (Mjöll Snæsdóttir)

Specialist studies in the archaeology of Iceland and the North Atlantic region

- Viking Age and medieval material culture (Colleen Batey)
- Viking Age burial practices (Adolf Friðriksson)
- Aerial archaeology, field survey, and landscape studies (Oscar Aldred)
- Zooarchaeology and the study of subsistence economics (Konrad Smiarowski)
- Archaeobotany and the study of arable agriculture (Garðar Guðmundsson)
- Geoarchaeology and the study of homefields and houses (Karen Milek)
- Human and animal ecology and landscape degradation studies (Ian Simpson)

Assignments

You will be evaluated on the basis of your participation in the field and in post-excavation practical work, your attendance at lectures, and the quality of your assignments. These assignments are designed to be flexible, to allow you to concentrate on the subjects that interest you most, while at the same time satisfying the course requirements of the affiliated universities.

Field journal

You must keep a journal in which you should record what you have done, the concepts you have learned, the deposits or features that you are excavating, your on-going thoughts about interpretations, and so on. This journal should be maintained on a daily basis, but only in your spare time (e.g. evenings), not while you are working on site! Please feel free to include drawings or photographs as part of your journal – you may write it by hand or on computer if you choose to bring a laptop. It will be marked periodically during the course, and is expected to include the following information at the very least:

- information about the site (name, location, setting, date, type of site)
- aims and approach of the project
- the methods used by this project to excavate, record, and sample in the field
- your thoughts on the pros and cons of these methods
- the types of features and contexts you are excavating on site
- the rationale behind the selection of particular methods on site (i.e. Why are you excavating or sampling a deposit in a certain way? What do you hope to achieve?)
- your thoughts on the interpretation of the deposits and features you are excavating
- the methods you are using in your post-excavation practical work

- the sites and landscapes you are encountering during your survey work and field trips
- a self-evaluation (i.e. What skills have you learned? Have you made improvements?)
- comments about any experiences that you find especially interesting or difficult (e.g. certain lectures, field trips)

Practical project (in small groups)

During the third week of the field school you must sign up for a group practical project in which, under the supervision of a specialist on staff, you will conduct a preliminary analysis of an assemblage or sample(s) recovered from the site. You may choose to work on artefacts, bones, botanical material, or sediments – which ever interests you the most. You are expected to co-operate as a team member and to actively contribute to an oral presentation of your results. You must also submit written documentation of your data gathering and analysis, including any photographs, drawings, tables, and graphs. More information about this written assignment and its format will be provided during the field school.

Excursions



Excursions will be organised on the weekends for students who are interested in seeing more of the Westfjords and broadening their understanding of the environment and history of the region. These will take in some of the local natural wonders, interesting historical sites, and museums, including the sorcery museum at Hólmavík, the Drangajökull glacier (pictured left), the town of Ísafjörður and its excellent Maritime Museum, the living history fishing museum at Ósvör, and the Natural History Museum in Bolungarvík.

Reading List

It is essential that you read the Institute of Archaeology's Excavation Manual and the 2005 Vatnsfjörður excavation report in advance. The latter will be sent to you in pdf format, and you can download the former from <http://www.instarch.is/instarch/utgafa/handbok/> (click on 'uppgraftarhandbok'). In addition, the list below will provide you with the most important background information on the archaeology of Iceland and the North Atlantic region. To help you prioritise your reading, we recommend that you begin with those references marked with a star (★), but please do as much reading as possible to prepare for the course in advance. All 'in press' references, and a few others that might be difficult for you to find, will be sent to you electronically in pdf format. The length of each reading has been included in this list, as required by the University of Oslo.

North Atlantic Region	Pages
Amorosi T., Buckland P., Dugmore A., Ingimundarson J. & McGovern T. H. (1997) Raiding the Landscape: Human impact in the North Atlantic, in: B. Fitzhugh & T.Hunt (eds.) <i>Island Archaeology</i> , a special edition of <i>Human Ecology</i> 25(3): 491-518.	28
Amorosi, T., Buckland, P., Edwards, K., Mainland, I., McGovern, T. H., Sadler J. & Skidmore, P. (1998) They did not live by grass alone: the politics and paleoecology of animal fodder in the North Atlantic region. <i>Environmental Archaeology</i> 1: 41-54.	14
Barrett, J. H. (2003) Culture contact in Viking Age Scotland. In J. Barrett (ed.), <i>Contact, Continuity, and Collapse: The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic</i> . Turnhout: Brepols. Pp. 73-111.	39
Barrett, J., Beukens, R., Simpson, I., Ashmore, P., Poaps, S., & Huntley, J. (2000) What was the Viking Age and when did it happen? A view from Orkney. <i>Norwegian Archaeological Review</i> 33(1): 1-39.	40
Bigelow, G. F. (1989) Life in medieval Shetland: an archaeological perspective. <i>Hikuin</i> 15: 183-192.	10
Buckland, P. C., Amorosi, T., Barlow, L. K., Dugmore, A. J., Mayewski, P. A., McGovern, T. H., Ogilvie, A. E. J., Sadler, J. P. & Skidmore, P. (1996) Bioarchaeological and climatological evidence for the fate of Norse farmers in medieval Greenland. <i>Antiquity</i> 70: 88-96.	9
★ Fitzhugh, W. & Ward, E. (eds.) (2000) <i>Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga</i> . Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. Chapter 1: Scandinavia in the Viking Age (pp. 27-30), Chapter 2: Farming and Daily Life (pp. 42-54), Chapter 3: Religion, Art, and Runes (pp. 55-71), Chapter 4: Political Organization and Social Life (pp. 72-85), Chapter 5: Ships and Navigation (pp. 86-97), Chapter 9: The North Atlantic Environment (pp. 146-153), Chapter 10: Vikings in the Faeroe Islands (pp. 154-163), Chapter 14: The Viking Settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows (pp. 208-224), Chapter 21: Life and Death in Norse Greenland (pp. 285-294), Chapter 22: The Farm Beneath the Sand (pp. 295-303), Chapter 25: The Demise of Norse Greenland (pp. 327-339), Chapter 30: Sagas and Science: Climate and Human Impacts in the North Atlantic (pp. 385-393).	136
Forster, A. & Bond, J. M. (2004) North Atlantic networks: preliminary research into the trade of steatite in the Viking and Norse Periods. In R. A. Housley & G. Coles (eds.), <i>Atlantic Connections and Adaptations: Economies, Environments and Subsistence in Lands Bordering the North Atlantic</i> . Oxford: Oxbow Books. Pp. 218-229.	12
McGovern, T. (1992) Bones, buildings, and boundaries: paleoeconomic approaches to Norse Greenland. In C. D. Morris & D. J. Rackham (eds.), <i>Norse and Later Settlement and Subsistence in the North Atlantic</i> . Glasgow: Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow. Pp. 193-230.	38
★ McGovern, T., Perdikaris, S. & Tinsley, C. (2001) The economy of landnám: the evidence of zooarchaeology. In A. Wawn & Þ. Sigurðardóttir (eds.), <i>Approaches to Vínland</i> . Reykjavík: Sigurður Nordal Institute. Pp. 154-165.	12

- Myhre, B. (1998) The archaeology of the early Viking Age in Norway. In H. B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh & R. Ó Floinn (eds.), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*. Dublin: Four Courts Press. Pp. 3-36. 34
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- ★ Rafnsson, S. (1997) The Atlantic islands. In P. Sawyer (ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 110-133. 24
- Shaples, N. and Parker Pearson, M. (1999) Norse settlement in the Outer Hebrides. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 32(1): 41-62. 22
- Simpson, I., Barrett, J. & Milek, K. (2005) Interpreting the Viking Age to medieval period transition in Norse Orkney through cultural soil and sediment analysis. *Geoarchaeology: An International Journal* 20(4): 355-377. 23
- Stummann Hansen, S. (2003) The early settlement of the Faroe Islands: the creation of cultural identity. In J. Barrett (ed.), *Contact, Continuity, and Collapse: The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic*. Turnhout: Brepols. Pp. 33-71. 39
- Iceland**
- Berson, B. (2002) A contribution to the study of the medieval Icelandic farm: the byres. *Archaeologia Islandica* 2: 34-60. 27
- ★ Dugmore, A., Newton, A. J., Larsen, G. & Cook, G. T. (2000) Tephrochronology, environmental change and the Norse settlement of Iceland. *Environmental Archaeology* 5: 21-34. 14
- Einarsson, Á., Hansson, O. & Vésteinsson, O. (2002) An extensive system of medieval earthworks in northeast Iceland. *Archaeologia Íslandica* 2: 61-73. 13
- ★ Fitzhugh, W. & Ward, E. (eds.) (2000) *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. Chapter 11: The Archaeology of Landnám (pp. 164-174), Chapter 12: The Icelandic Commonwealth Period (pp. 175-187). 24
- Friðriksson, A. (1994) *Sagas and Popular Antiquarianism in Icelandic Archaeology*. Aldershot: Avebury Books. Chapter 1: Introduction (pp. 1-16), Chapter 5: Farms (pp. 146-180) & Chapter 6: From Sagas to Archaeology (pp. 181-192). 64
- Friðriksson, A., Vésteinsson, O. & McGovern, T. H. (2004) Recent Excavations at Hofstaðir, northern Iceland. In R. A. Housley & G. Coles (eds.), *Atlantic Connections and Adaptations: Economies, Environments and Subsistence in Lands Bordering the North Atlantic*. Oxford: Oxbow Books. Pp. 191-202. 12
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- Krivogorskaya, Y., Perdikaris, S. & McGovern, T. H. (2005) Fish bones and fishermen: the potential of zooarchaeology in the Westfjords. *Archaeologia Islandica* 4: 31-50. 20