STUDENT MANUAL

FIELD SCHOOL IN NORTH ATLANTIC ARCHAEOLOGY

Vatnsfjörður, Northwest Iceland
June 29-July 24, 2009

Offered by:

Government of Iceland

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

UNIVERSITY CENTRE OF THE WESTFJORDS

MEDIEVAL WESTFJORDS SOCIETY

In cooperation with:

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

University of Oslo

Northern Science and Education Centre, City University of New York

North Atlantic Biocultural Organization
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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 accredited by the City University of New York, the University of Oslo, the University of Iceland, and the University of Aberdeen. 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 the North Atlantic region, Europe, North America, and further afield, 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), reaching highs of about 20°C (70 F) and reaching lows of about 5°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 waterproof windbreaker.

Iceland has a rich and occasionally grim history. Major population loss due to starvation and epidemic disease kept the pre-modern population at around 50,000 for centuries. Iceland was
under Danish rule 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 hard work that went into this transition.

The present population of Iceland is around 320,000 with the majority of people living in or around the capital of Reykjavik (200,000 including the suburban municipalities). 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), which is lucky for us, since Icelandic is not an easy language to learn. After Reykjavik, the next largest town is Akureyri (population 16,900), 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.

Iceland has been badly affected by the current world economic crisis, and the value of its currency has plummeted. One side effect of this disaster is that the country is a cheaper tourist destination than it was a year ago, and the number of foreign tourists is likely to be at a record high this summer. This may mean that hotels and youth hostels fill up more quickly, and you are advised to make advanced bookings for your accommodation in Reykjavik and elsewhere, if you choose to do some travelling while you are in the country.

**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, a 165 km (2 hour) drive west of Reykjanes. Ísafjörður (pop. 2700), one of the most beautifully situated towns in Iceland, occupies a narrow spit of land surrounded by the waters of the Skutulsfjörður (‘harpoon fjord’) and is 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 Grettis 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 may have given them control over lucrative trade routes. The church on the farm may have been built as early as the 11th century, but it is first mentioned explicitly in a document dating to 1222. After the Reformation, the church became independent of secular control, and it took on an important role as the
seat of rural deans. Vatnsfjörður is still the site of a parish church, although the resident priest, Baldur Vilhelmsson, has retired.

In 2003 a programme of historical research, archaeological survey, and excavations at the site of Vatnsfjörður were initiated by the Institute of Archaeology, Iceland, under the direction of Ragnar Edvardsson. Within its homefield boundary wall, the farm contains ruins of Viking Age buildings and a 2-3 m high mound made up of a sequence of buildings dating from the medieval period through the 19th century. The two turf buildings excavated in 2004 contained well-dated 10th-century artefacts, such as 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. 2005 also saw the excavation of a smithy and extensive outdoor deposits between the two buildings, including a cooking pit, two hearths, and sheet middens. In 2006-8 the excavation of the smithy was completed, and four other small outbuildings were found, which were probably used as storage buildings and workshops (pictured above). In 2008, two immense cooking pits were also found, and an unusual, stone-paved building that may have been a sheehouse was partially excavated (to be continued in 2009). The sheet midden deposits around these buildings and cooking pits produced beautiful Viking Age artefacts, including a Borre-style strap-end and glass beads.

South of the Viking Age part of the site there is a large farm mound that was created by centuries of turf buildings accumulating on top of each other. This area has been under excavation since 2006, revealing the foundations of the 19th-century turf houses at the top of the mound, two which had deep cellars, and one of which was ringed by a stone pavement (pictured left). Thousands of artefacts and bones have been recovered from this area, and have shed new light on life in early modern Iceland.

In 2009 the excavation of the 19th-century house will continue, and in the Viking Age part of the site we will continue to excavate a putative sheehouse. We will also extend the excavation area west and north of the large 10th-century house that was excavated in 2005.
Field school instructors

The field school is mainly staffed by the Institute of Archaeology, Iceland (FSÍ), which has been carrying out excavations and field surveys in Iceland since 1995. The instructors are experienced archaeologists, surveyors, and historians who 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, Lecturer in Archaeology, University of Aberdeen, and Field School Director. Karen has been excavating in Canada, Israel, Ireland and the UK since 1992 and in Iceland since 1997. She has been teaching on the field school since 1998, becoming its director in 2005, when it moved to Vatnsfjörður. She is a specialist in geoarchaeology and in the archaeology of Viking Age settlements and buildings, and is directing the excavations on the Viking Age component of the site.

Garðar Guðmundsson, Head of Palaeoenvironmental Research, FSÍ, and Manager of the Vatnsfjörður 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.

Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir, archaeologist, FSÍ. Guðrún has worked at FSÍ as an excavator, surveyor, artefact specialist, and illustrator since 2001. In 2004 she completed her MA dissertation on ‘Finds from the Þjórsárdalur’. Guðrún is the artefact specialist for the Vatnsfjörður Project and is co-directing the excavations on the farm mound at Vatnsfjörður.

Uggi Ævarsson, archaeologist, FSÍ. Uggi has an MA in archaeology and has worked as an excavator and archaeological surveyor in Iceland and England since 2002. His main interests include the adaptation of landscape theories to the Icelandic environment and the transmission of archaeological knowledge using different media. Uggi is co-directing excavations on the farm mound at Vatnsfjörður.

Oscar Aldred, landscape archaeologist, University of Iceland and FSÍ. After completing his MA in Landscape Studies, Oscar worked for many years as a professional archaeologist in the UK. 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 doing his PhD at the University of Iceland on ‘Practice and Theory in a Landscape Archaeology of the Mývatn and Vatnsfjörður regions’.

Christian Keller, Professor at the 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 projects ‘Transformation in the Viking and Norse Middle Ages c. 750-1350’ and ‘Churches in the Landscape: a Comparison of Medieval Church Locations in Iceland and West Norway’.

**Oddgeir Hansson**, archaeologist, FSÍ. Oddgeir has worked for FSÍ as an excavator and surveyor since 1999. He is currently working on his MA dissertation at the University of Iceland on the state of old farm mounds in Reykjavík. His main interests are heritage management and methodology in the gathering, processing and management of archaeological data.

**Dawn Elise Mooney**, archaeologist, Cambridge Archaeological Unit and FSÍ. Dawn is a specialist in archaeobotany, and has recently finished an MPhil at the University of Cambridge on fuel use at Vatnsfjörður during the Viking Age. She has excavated and conducted post-excavation analyses at sites in Britain, Iceland, Germany and Hungary, and is directing Vatnsfjörður’s flotation programme for the recovery of plant remains.

**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 13th-century Iceland. Torfi is the director of the Medieval Westfjords Society.

**Már Jónsson**, Professor of History, University of Iceland. Már is a specialist in medieval manuscripts and medieval law, early modern literary culture and mentalities, and is the collaborating historian on the Vatnsfjörður Project.

**Adolf Friðriksson**, Director of FSÍ. Adolf is a specialist in the history of Icelandic archaeology and the archaeology of Viking Age burials and assembly sites. He is currently directing a research project on Viking Age mortuary practices and the locations of graves in the landscape.

**Jeremy Lloyd**, Lecturer in the Department of Geography, Durham University. Jerry is a specialist in the reconstruction of past sea levels using diatoms, foraminifera, and coastal landforms. He has been working on sea-level change in the Westfjords of Iceland for a number of years, and has been working specifically on the Vatnsfjörður region since 2007.

**Véronique Forbes**, Université Laval. Véronique, who has been on the Vatnsfjörður team since 2006, is a specialist in archaeoentomology, and recently finished her MSc on the use of insect remains to reconstruct past environments and the use of space in buildings at Vatnsfjörður. She is about to start a PhD on Icelandic archaeoentomology at the University of Aberdeen.

**Amanda Schreiner**, City University of New York. Amanda has excavated in Belize, Mexico, and the United States since 2000. She is a zooarchaeology specialist and is currently writing her PhD dissertation on the faunal data from several settlements in Skagafjörður, north Iceland, that date from the Viking Age to Early Danish Rule (AD 874-1800).

**Céline Dupont-Hébert**, Université Laval. Céline has recently completed an undergraduate dissertation on the animal bones from Vatnsfjörður, and will continue to analyse bones from the site for her MA. She will be assisting with the zooarchaeology teaching programme.
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 in Reykjanes from July 7-31, but you will need sufficient cash in Icelandic kronur for the Flybus into Reykjavik city centre (2300 ISK return fare), for accommodation and food in Reykjavik, for food during your excursions, 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 please bring your own 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, so you do not need a very thick one, but if you want to go camping during your stay, you would need a sleeping bag that is suitable for temperatures as low as -10°C (10 F).

✓ 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.

✓ **Paper, pens & reading materials:** You should come prepared to write your excavation diary on looseleaf paper, 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 is great to relax in after a hard day of digging. You may also want to visit the pools in Reykjavik or the Blue Lagoon.

✓ **Sunscreen, insect repellent, and mosquito head net**

✓ **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 enough for everyone, but you may want to bring your own favourite trowel (preferably 3”).

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

✓ **Optional: laptop computer:** It is not necessary to bring your own computer, but if you do chose to do so, you could use it for writing your assignments and accessing the wireless internet connection.

**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 position of one of these items will be immediately removed from the field school.
Travel itinerary

✈  Fly to Keflavík airport no later than Sunday June 28.
• Take the Flybus to Reykjavík city centre, which takes about 45 minutes (cost: 1700 ISK one way, or 3000 ISK return). Tell the bus driver where you are staying, and he/she will advise you on how to get there. The Flybus will drop you off at most hotels in Reykjavík as well as the Salvation Army Youth Hostel. See http://www.re.is/flybus for more information.
• If you wish to stay at the Salvation Army Youth Hostel, please contact FSÍ’s office manager, Ólöf Þorsteinsdóttir, at olof@instarch.is, as soon as possible.

For an interactive map of Reykjavík see: http://www.exploreiceland.is/city_guide/map_of_reykjavik.

🚌 Monday June 29: 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 Hotel Reykjanes, on the Reykjanes peninsula, about 20 minutes away from the excavation site at Vatnsfjörður (pictured left). Cooked meals will be provided for us at the hotel, and on weekday mornings you will be provided with food to make your own packed lunches. 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.

http://www.rnes.is/english/index.php

At Reykjanes you will have:
• Sleeping bag accommodation (2-3 students per room)
• Toilets and single-sex showers
• A lecture room and laboratories
• Shared laundry facilities
• A sitting room (pictured right)
• A pool and sauna (pictured above)
• A gymnasium (pictured below)
• A small shop with basic toiletries, stamps, post cards, sweets, phone cards, etc.
• A bar (open after 9 pm Thurs-Sat)
• A slow and unreliable wireless internet connection (sorry!)

Postal address
You can receive mail at:
Ferdapjónustan Reykjanesi (Hotel Reykjanes) c/o Fornleifastofnun Íslands
401 Ísafjörður, Iceland

Telephone number
In emergencies, your family can contact you at the hotel 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. The mobile telephone coverage in the area is still patchy, but is steadily improving.
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 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazard</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Preventative Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Trenches, strung lines, uneven ground      | Injury to self by tripping, falling           | Medium   | Low        | Low-Medium | • 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      | • 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 | • 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 | • Wearing appropriate clothing layers, including waterproof and windproof outer clothing and footwear |

Scales are from low to high.
**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 geothermically 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!

**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. Colourful 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 Porsteinsdóttir, Fornleifastofnun Íslands, Bárugata 3, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland, so that she will receive it by June 22 at the latest.
# Confidential Health and Safety Form

## Field School in North Atlantic Archaeology 2009

| Name: | University affiliation: |
| Date of birth: | Mailing address: |
| Email: | |
| 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? (e.g. previous back, knee, or ankle injuries; asthma) | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| If yes, and you think we should be aware of your condition, please provide details: | |
| - | |

| Do you have any allergies? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| 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: | |
| - | |

| Are you taking any prescription medication? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| If yes, please check the box to confirm that you are bringing sufficient medication for the duration of the field school. | |

| Are your vaccinations up to date (especially against tetanus)? | I confirm ☐ |
| Please check the box to confirm that your tetanus vaccination is up to date. | |

| 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?) | I confirm ☐ |
| Please check the box to confirm that you have adequate health insurance. | |

### Statement of Informed Consent

I have read and understood 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 stratigraphy and how to record it**
- Introducing the site hut and the site records: registers, recording forms, finds processing, sample processing
- Introducing stratigraphy: looking at 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 single context recording methods
- 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, 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, returfing, 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.

Coffee Breaks: 20-minute coffee breaks in the morning and afternoon, and a 40-minute lunch break.

🏠 Facilities: At Vatnsfjörður, we will have 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 two 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
- 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 site registers and context sheets
• scanning and digitisation of context plans in AutoCAD

Artefact processing
• first aid for artefacts
• cleaning artefacts if appropriate (washing or dry-brushing)
• weighing, measuring, describing artefacts and entering data in the digital register (pictured right)
• packaging artefacts for safe transport and storage

Faunal analysis
• preliminary identification, sorting, and quantification of bones

Botanical analysis
• flotation of bulk sediment samples to recover organic remains (pictured left)
• drying of light and heavy fractions
• preliminary identification and quantification of botanical material

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

Entomological analysis
• preliminary sorting, identification, and quantification of insects recovered from the flotation of bulk sediment samples from the site

Foraminiferal analysis
• preliminary sorting, identification, and quantification of foraminifera recovered from cores from coastal lakes and isolation basins, which can be used for reconstructing ancient coastlines.

Aerial photograph analysis
• analysis and interpretation of the landscape around Vatnsfjörður using aerial photographs
Lectures

On some weekday evenings and on Sundays you will attend lectures on the history, archaeology and environment of Iceland and the North Atlantic region. These will be given by the core teaching staff as well as a number of visiting historians, 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. Lecture topics will include:

Introductions
• Welcome, general orientation, and health and safety briefing (Karen Milek)
• Introduction to Vatnsfjörður (site tour) (Karen Milek and Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir)

Archaeological and historical overviews
• The Viking Age Scandinavian expansion and the settlement of Iceland (Karen Milek)
• The Norse expansion in the West Atlantic (Christian Keller)
• The history and culture of the Westfjords (Torfi Tulinius)
• Vatnsfjörður and its literary culture, AD 1100-1700 (Már Jónsson)
• Archaeological records, site archives, and Harris matrices (Karen Milek)
• Icelandic turf buildings, farm mounds and site formation processes (Karen Milek)
• Approaches to landscape archaeology (Oscar Aldred)
• Visual landscape analysis (Christian Keller)
• Artefact preservation conditions and first aid for finds (Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir)

Specialist studies in the archaeology of Iceland and the North Atlantic region
• Material culture in Iceland (Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir)
• Viking Age burial practices in Iceland (Adolf Friðriksson)
• Building, dwelling, thinking: archaeologies of Icelandic landscapes (Oscar Aldred)
• Zooarchaeology and subsistence economics in Iceland (Amanda Schreiner)
• The zooarchaeology of Vatnsfjörður in its Icelandic context (Céline Dupont-Hébert)
• Archaeobotany and the study of arable agriculture in Iceland (Garðar Guðmundsson)
• Charred plant materials and fuel resources in Iceland (Dawn Elise Mooney)
• Geoarchaeology and the study of Icelandic homefields and houses (Karen Milek)
• Archaeoentomology and the study of past environments in Iceland (Véronique Forbes)
• Sea level change and the reconstruction of ancient shorelines in Iceland (Jeremy Lloyd)

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 day journal on looseleaf paper or on your laptop computer, 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. It will be marked periodically during the course, and a copy must be provided to the director of the field school before you leave in order to satisfy the written requirement of the affiliated universities. Your journal must 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, and 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?)
• the types of features and contexts you are excavating on site
• 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)

Survey Project (in small groups)
At the end of each day of surveying, you and your survey group will process the data you collected and produce a short report.

Practical project (in small groups)
At the end of week two of the field school you must sign up for a group practical project for which, under the supervision of a specialist on staff, you will conduct a preliminary analysis of an assemblage recovered from the site. You may choose to work on artefacts, bones, botanical material, or sediments – whatever interests you the most. You are expected to cooperate as a team member and to actively contribute to an oral Powerpoint presentation of your results. Final presentations of the group practical projects will be held on the evening of Wednesday July 30.

Excursions
Excursions will be organised on 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, historical sites, and museums, including the sorcery museum at Hólmavík, Drangajökull glacier, the town of Ísafjörður and its Maritime Museum, the living history fishing museum at Ósvör (pictured left), and the Natural History Museum in Bolungarvík.
Reading List

To prepare for your excavation work, it is essential that you read the Institute of Archaeology’s Excavation Manual and the 2008 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/ (‘uppgræftarhandbók’). To prepare for your survey work, please read Bender, B., Hamilton, S. and Tilley, C. (1997) Leskernick: stone worlds; alternative narratives; nested landscapes. Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society 63:147-178. 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


Iceland


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