STUDENT MANUAL

FIELD SCHOOL IN NORTH ATLANTIC ARCHAEOLOGY

Vatnsfjörður, Northwest Iceland
June 25-July 20, 2012

Sponsored by:

Government of Iceland

Institute of Archaeology

University Centre of the Westfjords

Medieval Westfjords Society

In cooperation with:

University of Iceland

University of Aberdeen

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 Iceland, and the University of Aberdeen. Whatever institution you applied through, you have made it through a rigorous selection process, so congratulations!

The students who attend the field school – as well as 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 Plant) 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 couple of years 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...
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 2008–9, two immense cooking pits were also found, and an unusual, multi-phased, stone-paved shepherds or cattle byre was excavated. In 2010 a small Viking Age pit house containing loom weights and a corner oven was excavated below the shepherds. The sheet midden deposits around these buildings and cooking pits produced beautiful Viking Age artefacts, including a Borre-style strap-end and glass beads.

About 100 m 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 17th–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, bones, and insect remains have been recovered from this area, and have shed new light on life in early modern Iceland.

In 2012 the excavation of the 17–19th century house will continue, and a boathouse close to the shore will be excavated, which is contemporary with the occupation of the farm mound.
Field school instructors

Most of the excavation and survey staff work for the Institute of Archaeology, Iceland (Fornleifastofnun Islands, or 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 North Atlantic. 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, and became 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 directed the excavations on the Viking Age component of the site, which is now in the post-excavation phase.

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 the director of the early modern period excavations on the farm mound at Vatnsfjörður.

Oddgeir Isaksen, archaeologist and surveyor, FSÍ. Oddgeir has worked for FSÍ as an excavator and surveyor since 1999. He completed his MA at the University of Iceland on the archaeology of the settlements buried under the city of Reykjavík and is considered the foremost expert on the archaeology of Reykjavik. His main interests are heritage management and methodology in the gathering, processing and management of archaeological data.

Dawn Elise Mooney, archaeologist and archaeobotanist, FSÍ and the University of Aberdeen. Dawn finished an MPhil at the University of Cambridge on fuel use at Vatnsfjörður during the Viking Age, and is currently doing her PhD at the University of Aberdeen on wood resources in Viking and Medieval Iceland. She has excavated and conducted post-exavcation analyses at sites in Britain, Iceland, Germany and Hungary, and is directing Vatnsfjörður’s flotation programme for the recovery of plant remains.

Céline Dupont-Hébert, archaeologist and zooarchaeologist, Laval University. Céline, who has been on the Vatnsfjörður team since 2008, completed her undergraduate and MA dissertations on animal bones and stress indicators at Vatnsfjörður and Eyri, in Isafjörður. She has just started her PhD at Laval University in Quebec, Canada, on the bones from the medieval middens at Vatnsfjörður and Svalbarð.

Howell Magnus Roberts, archaeologist, FSÍ. Howell has worked at the Museum of London, the University of Birmingham, the National Museum of Iceland and chiefly the FSÍ, since 1993. In 2001 he was appointed Head of the Excavation Department at Fornleifastofnun Islands. Howell has directed excavations at Aðalstræti in Reykjavík, Gásir, Litlu Núpar, and
Ingiríðarstaðir. His interests include Viking period structures, pre-christian burials, and medieval trade.

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.

Ágústa Edwald, historical archaeologist, University of Aberdeen. Ágústa completed her undergraduate dissertation at the University of Iceland in 2004 and her MA thesis in Historical Archaeology of the Modern World from the University of Bristol in 2007. She has recently submitted her doctoral thesis at the University of Aberdeen on the archaeology of the emigration from Iceland to New Iceland, Canada in the late 19th Century. Ágústa has worked for FSÍ alongside her studies on various excavation and survey projects since 2002. She has also conducted fieldwork in Britain, Canada and the Caribbean.

Véronique Forbes, archaeologist and archaeoentomologist, University of Aberdeen. Véronique, who has been on the Vatnsfjörður team since 2006, is a specialist in the study of insect remains from archaeological sites. She is currently doing her PhD at the University of Aberdeen on living conditions on early modern Icelandic farms using insect remains.

Łukasz Mikołajczyk, archaeologist. Łukasz attended the Field School in North Atlantic Archaeology in 2009 and completed his MA dissertation on Viking Age Baltic harbour infrastructures at Jagiellonian University in Poland in 2010. He is interested in the past utilisation of coastal areas and helped to excavate the boat house at Vatnsfjörður in 2011.

Solveig Lecouturier, historian and archaeologist, University of Nanterre Paris X. Solveig, who has participated on the Vatnsfjörður excavation since 2010, completed her MA thesis on foundation deposit rituals in early Viking Age Iceland and is currently finishing an undergraduate programme on Scandinavian Civilisations and Languages at Sorbonne IV University in Paris, France.

Patrycja Kupiec, archaeologist and geoarchaeologist, University of Cambridge. Patrycja finished her undergraduate degree at the University of Aberdeen in 2011, where she did her undergraduate dissertation on the potential of geoarchaeological methods to detect the seasonality of occupation at Viking Age shieling sites. She has excavated at sites in Iceland and Scotland, including Vatnsfjörður in 2008. She is currently doing her MPhil at the University of Cambridge on shieling sites in Viking and Medieval Iceland.

Jerry Lloyd, Senior Lecturer in Geography, Durham University. Jerry specialises in sea-level and palaeoceanographic reconstruction using foraminifera in the UK, Iceland, Svalbard and Greenland margins. Jerry’s sea level research in Iceland is based in the Vestfirdir Peninsula and he has undertaken several field campaigns since 2003 collecting data to reconstruct relative sea level changes since the Lateglacial.

Anthony Newton, Teaching and Research Fellow, School of Geosciences, University of Edinburgh. Anthony, who did his PhD at the University of Edinburgh, is a specialist in tephrochronology and has been integrating research on volcanic pumice and tephras and human-environment relations in Scotland, Iceland and Mexico since 1990.
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 basic medical care in Iceland.

✓ Money: Your food and accommodation will be provided in Reykjanes during the field school, but you will need sufficient cash in Icelandic kronur for the Flybus into Reykjavik city centre (4500 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 4000-5000 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. Gore-Tex or heavy-duty rubberized waterproofs of the kind worn by fishermen are recommended.

   ✓ 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 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 Reykjaness (pictured right), which is great to relax in after a hard day of digging. You may also want to take part in the field school tradition of fjord-jumping.

✔ **Sunscreen**

✔ **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 Reykjaness will cater nutritious meals, including a salad bar but we nevertheless recommend that you bring your own vitamin supplements.

✔ **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 24.
• Take the Flybus to Reykjavík city centre, which takes about 45 minutes. Tell the bus driver where you are staying, and he/she will advise you 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, which is very close to FSÍ, you will find contact information at http://www.guesthouse.is.

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

🚗 Monday June 25: transport from Reykjavík to the hotel in Reykjanes.
• Meet Garðar Guðmundsson at FSÍ (address: 3 Bárugata) at 10:00 am to pay your accommodation fee and to join the cars going to Reykjanes.
• En route to Reykjanes, you will stop at the reconstructed Viking Age 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 wireless internet connection

Postal address
You can receive mail at:
Ferdaljonustan 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 2012

<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 complete the Confidential Health and Safety Form below, and email it to Karen Milek by June 22 at k.milek@abdn.ac.uk.
# Field School in North Atlantic Archaeology 2012
## Confidential Health and Safety Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>University affiliation:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date of birth:</th>
<th>Mailing address:</th>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Email:</th>
<th>Telephone number(s):</th>
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### Next of Kin Contact Information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name of someone who can be contacted in case of emergency:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship:</th>
<th>Address:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Telephone number(s):</th>
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### 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)
  - If yes, and you think we should be aware of your condition, please provide details:
    - Yes ☐ No ☐
    - If yes, and you think we should be aware of your condition, please provide details:

- **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 ☐ No ☐
    - I confirm □

- **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 ☐ No ☐
    - I confirm □

- **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 □

- **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 □

### 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 Icelandic archaeology from the Viking Age to the Early Modern Period
• 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.

⏰ 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 retired 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 1-2 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
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)
• Historical Archaeology in Iceland (Ágústa Edwald)
• Historic sources on household goods in Vatnsfjarðarsveit 1820-1860 (Már Jónsson)
• Archaeological records, site archives, and Harris matrices (Karen Milek)
• Icelandic turf buildings, farm mounds and site formation processes (Karen Milek)
• The study of material culture (Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir)

Specialist studies in the archaeology of Iceland and the North Atlantic region
• The locations of Viking Age burials in Iceland (Adolf Friðriksson)
• Viking Age burial practices: Litlu-Núpar and Ingiríðarstaðir (Howell Roberts)
• Zooarchaeology in Iceland and the North Atlantic region (Céline Dupont-Hébert)
• Archaeobotany and the study of arable agriculture in Iceland (Garðar Guðmundsson)
• The use of wood in Viking and Medieval 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)
• Archaeology under asphalt: the preservation of historical farms in Reykjavík (Oddgeir Isaksen)
• Tephrochronology and the study of human-environment relations in Iceland (Anthony Newton)
• Sea-level change and the reconstruction of past coastlines in Iceland (Jerry Lloyd)
• Shielings in the North Atlantic region (Patrycja Kupiec)
• Harbours and coastal structures in the Baltic and the North Atlantic region (Łukasz Mikołajczyk)
• Viking Age building foundation deposits (Solveig Lecouturier)
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 daily journal on A4 or letter-sized looseleaf paper or on your laptop computer in the style of an excavation daybook, which all excavation projects use. In this journal you should record what you are doing on the site each day, the progression of the excavation, your understanding of the site stratigraphy, your preliminary interpretations, and how what you are doing is related to what is going on elsewhere in the trench or on the site. You should illustrate your notes with sketches of the features you are working on, and photographs of features and finds, and you should record how the interpretation of the site progressed each day. Your journal will be checked periodically during the course, and if you require transfer credits 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)
• research aims and strategies of the project
• the methods you are being taught 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 on a daily basis
• your thoughts on the interpretation of the deposits and features you are excavating
• general comments about the progress of the excavation, and your ongoing interpretations, drawing on any other excavations you have worked on (include your own ideas and opinions)
• sketches and photographs of features being excavated and their interpretation, especially features that you are directly involved in excavating
• descriptions of any interesting finds made
• the methods you are using in your field survey and 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)
• the ways the project engages with the general public

Feature Report

At the end of week three of the field school you must submit a short feature report (500 words or 1 page of text, plus illustrations) that demonstrates that you fully understand the recording process associated with a particular feature you excavated or helped to excavate, and that you understood the formation processes that led to the archaeological feature and its interpretation. You should focus on one discrete feature on the archaeological site such as a pit, hearth, posthole, wall, or layer, and include the following elements:

• a description of the location of the feature, its composition, interpretation, and its relationship to other features or elements on the site
• the context numbers given to the feature and descriptions of each context associated. You (and perhaps others) will have filled out context description sheets and plans and/or
section drawings associated with the feature. The feature report should include a copy of the original records and an ‘inked’ or digitised copy of the drawing that uses appropriate archaeological drawing and recording conventions. If the feature was recorded collaboratively please clearly note which parts were done by you.

- a schematic diagram of the feature stratigraphy using a Harris matrix (e.g. of the sequence of fills within a pit or the make-up of a wall)
- photographs illustrating the feature using appropriate scales and conventions. At least one should have been taken by you (please specify which ones).
- a list of finds from the feature and a brief description of these.
- a list of all sample numbers, photo numbers, etc. associated with the feature.

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 August 17.

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 Hólmavik, 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 Field Manual (Uppgräftarhandbök) and the 2009-10 Vatnsfjörður excavation reports 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/](http://www.instarch.is/instarch/utgafa/handbok/). 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. A few references...
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, to give you a rough idea of the work involved.

**North Atlantic Region**

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<thead>
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<th>Author(s)</th>
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<th>Pages</th>
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**Iceland**


**Westfjords**


