

Scott Hocking's Icelandic Saga

2006-11-22

12:38:54, by ws, 5527 words, 1298 views

Categories: [Travel Blogs](#)

Scott Hocking's Icelandic Saga



By Scott Hocking

(During his month long Artist-In-Residence at the Guest Studio Workshop for the Gil-Society, Akureyri, Iceland, artist Scott Hocking will be sharing a bit of his daily experience, and some scenery with readers back in Detroit.)

Day 1 Friday, 11/3

I arrive at Keflavik airport near Reykjavik at 6:30 am. I don't know where to go or what to do, but, too tired to figure it out, I sleep on a chair for a bit. 2 hours later I find that I am in the wrong airport, and need to get to the small airport in Reykjavik, 45 minutes away. I've missed all the buses – crap. I decide to take a cab – an \$80 cab – to the airport. It was terribly expensive, but that's Iceland, and the conversation with the cab driver was great. A freelance Interior tour guide, he drives people throughout Iceland's barren glacial terrain in his Ford Econoline "Monster Truck" with 44" wheels. He likes Detroit because he has owned and worked on Fords for over 40 years. I wonder to myself if he was drawn to Ford 'cause it sounds like fjord (c'mon, lets ford the fjord, Bjorg!) He points out that his touring services have been used on films such as Tomb Raider, Die Another Day, and Batman Begins – driving crew and actors to film scenes in remote locations. Apparently, even Angelina Jolie had a monster truck ride.

The airport is small, and I have 3 hours before check in – so I try to sleep a bit in the corner. I have brought my resilient cold to Iceland, and have used my disgusting handkerchief to its limits at this point, frequently waking from my nap to blow my nose. The flight is short, with incredible turbulence as we approached Akureyri, flying low over the surrounding snowy mountain range. It was like an unpredictable roller coaster, and the child sitting in front of me laughed at each dip and jolt – she made us all laugh.

I am picked up by a sweet older woman – Hildur – who is holding a small sign with my name on it. She drives me into Akureyri, along the fjord – it's beautiful at the moment, sunny, clear, and the water mirrors the mountains across the inlet. The town is small, and my room is in walking distance to the 'centrum.' It is a nice, fully furnished place, with a separate bedroom and decent sized studio with skylights. I've got more linens and kitchen tools than I can handle, a washer and dryer in the bathroom, and basketed bicycle. The previous artist left behind a ton of cooking ingredients as well – oils, spices, grains, etc., as well as one can of Becks – how thoughtful! I will have to do the same. We find that the key to my room, which should be inside, is not. Hildur says she will be back as soon as she finds a copy. I say okay and proceed to pass out. I wake up around 11pm and decide to walk around the Friday night streets to see what I am in for. I do a quick loop around the centrum, witness a number of drunk men yelling at each other every half block or so, and head back to my bedroom, darkness, and sleep.

Day 2 Saturday, 11/4

It is officially Rainland, not Iceland. Woke up sometime in the middle of the night, fell back asleep, and finally got out of bed at almost 5 pm today. I guess it's a mix of my fucked up internal clock and months of sleep deprivation. However, I know that the newspaper is dropped through my mail slot at 7am – a nice loud wake up call – yet, I fell back to sleep for 10 more hours! Incredible. I still feel pretty sick though, and continue to take drugs every time I get up.

I have a visit from initial email contact Bjorg and her two children just after 5 pm. To her shock, I'm sure, I have to jump out of the shower wearing only a towel and answer the door soaking wet. It is the first time anyone has checked on me to see if I am alive, etc. She offers to give me a quick tour of the city, but insists on waiting outside (in the rain) rather than come in – gee, I wonder why towel boy? 5 minutes later we are touring, and 5 minutes after that, the tour is finished. It's not the biggest city. Along the way I am introduced to Thorarinn and Jonas at a gallery across the street, and I agree to give a lecture for Thorarinn's class. We stop at Bjorg's house to get me another key (my key wasn't working – which added to the stay-in-bed-rip-van-winkle agenda of mine), and I am invited to have coffee. Soon, Bjorg's husband returns from a fruitless day of duck hunting and we all have a light dinner. They ask me questions about my work and my plans while in Akureyri, all while enjoying bread, cheese, pate, and my first truly Icelandic dish – Skyr. Basically a nice sourdoughish yogurt, it is definitely not rotten shark. Not yet... She takes me back the studio, and, after some fiddling with the lock on my door, I soon fall asleep again.

Day 3 Sunday, 11/5

Awake at 5pm again – eventually make it outside to Cafe Karolina down the street – my first attempt at eating out. I will have to buy groceries immediately, otherwise the steep price of dining out will leave me broke in a week. I order a ham and cheese panini and 2 beers, and sit there for over 2 hours. Music is bluesy and wonderful, but inevitably I leave feeling a bit depressed and alone, go figure. Welcome to the Arctic winter! But, alas, I am really in need of this loneliness, this isolation. I need this time to quiet my mind and clear my vision; to rest and heal my body; to rejuvenate my spirit; and to put the past to bed, begin anew, and find motivation to keep going. There is no pressure to create here, and it is not my intention to force anything. I've done enough pushing this year; I'm spent. Looks like rain has turned to snow a bit – maybe the aurora borealis tonight...

Day 4 Monday, 11/6

Nope, no aurora yet. Hell, I don't even know what time it is anymore! I go shopping for groceries today, a nice walk up the steep hill to the campground area. I check out the pool and the distance to the mountains west of me – walking distance? They say that out here, in the pure northern air, your depth perception is skewed, giving a sort of two-dimensional quality to things. It's true. I notice the sun pops out for a hello. For the 7 hours of light each day the sun barely peaks out from behind the cloudy horizon. I was feeling like something was missing – it turns out I was missing that fiery ball in the sky that I suppose I take a bit for granted.

Grocery shopping is a welcome change. Food is definitely cheaper this way, but some items are still terribly expensive. Fruits and vegetables are all imported and therefore pricey, and they aren't going to win best in show prizes. Dairy and grains are the cheapest route, along with fish (imagine that) and coffee. For some reason both applesauce and canned pineapple are cheap too – fantastic! This is going to be a major dietary change for me – eating breads and cheeses and pastas and cereals and milk – all things I ritualistically avoid. Oh well, I am fine with change. Besides, I have all the tuna fish and applesauce I can eat. Later I head to the Vin Bud, where you can buy alcohol oh-so-much cheaper than at the bars, and pick up a six pack for myself.

Day 5 Tuesday, 11/7

Highlight of the day: Crown Chicken, where I eat a double cheeseburger, fries, and a Coke, and read *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger (one of 2 dozen books left in the studio by previous residents). Yep, that's the kind of day it was – not too memorable. I did go to the bank though, so that's one thing. Speaking of banks and double cheeseburgers, let me illustrate how expensive eating or drinking out in Iceland is. That greasy combo meal at Crown cost me about 1200 kronur, which equals about \$18. An average beer will run you \$10 at the bar, and mixed drinks about \$20. It is clear by now that I should expect to pay double what I am used to for most things. However, since I only plan to try each restaurant one time (there aren't very many of them), I can say what-the-hay a few times. Other expenses are much more reasonable, such as the \$3 per hour for internet use at the library, and \$5 to spend all day at the pools if you like. I spend lots of time getting my slide presentation in order tonight, updating and changing images. It's nice to have time to sit and organize my images. Oh yeah, and it's nice to do nothing at all.

Day 6 Wednesday, 11/8

I get a lot done today, or at least I feel that way. By the time I leave the studio it is perfect lighting for photos, and I take a bunch from the hill above my apartment. Resting upon this hill and ominously over the town centre is Akureyrarkirkja – the basalt church and city landmark. I could roll down the hill from the church parking lot and end up at my studio door. This proximity gives me the pleasure of hearing the astonishingly out-of-tune bells chime every hour, often every quarter hour, starting at 7:45am. While taking these shots, I encounter three Asian tourists taking photos from the same vantage point as me, and I decide to be assertively social by asking where they are from (China). This leads to a quick camaraderie, and plans to explore a volcanic lake together. Next I buy a USB memory stick and prepare my images for the slide lecture tomorrow – about 200 of 'em. I then stop by the book shop, buy some postcards and a copy of Jules Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Earth (which is very Iceland-centric). I spend an hour at the library checking emails, and head back for a fancy home cooked meal, and some good ol' reading.

Day 7 Thursday, 11/9

Yet another strange sleep cycle night – waking at 5 am even though the sun rises at 9:30am. I remember my grandmother saying once that she liked to wake around 5 in the morning because her thoughts were very active and clear then. This holds true for me as well, and the bright side to my funny sleep schedule has been lots of ideas to write down. Well, another eventful Islandian day. I had my first experience at the town Swimming pool today. It was quite busy with children, who I imagine go on school field trips to the pool frequently. I paid the clerk 300 kronur and headed off to the men's locker room, trying to read any signs for instructions on the protocol. First, you must take off your shoes before entering the locker room and leave them on the shoe rack. Then, once inside, you are to put all of your belongings into a locker, which you have a special coin for, insert the coin, close the locker, remove the key, and head to the pool. Oops, I was trying out the coin and key mechanism when I found out that it only works once – so I either need to go pay for another lil' coin, or say fuck it and leave everything unlocked. Unlocked it is. Next, you are to walk to the showers and wash en route to the pool, but I apparently did not read one important sign. A large Icelander with a booming voice, probably the pool custodian, yells at me and approaches me in the shower – not a good sign. He brings me to a sign, in English, that states you must be without swimsuit in the shower, and wash with soap before entering. How embarrassing, yes, in both ways, to have a guy come up to me in the shower and tell me to strip and wash my ass. So I wash my various parts, put my trunks back on and head to the pool. But no one brings a towel outside with them – nope, they leave them inside in these little cubby holes. Except me, of course. Well, next time I come I will know what I am doing. The pool is fantastic – it is close to freezing outside, but everyone soaks, swims, and walks around, and it just seems so damn healthy. I swim for a while, then head to the hot pot set at 43 degrees Celsius. After 5 minutes I head back to the pool again, feeling light headed as I walk in between. It's amazing – usually, walking around outside in soaking wet shorts this time of year, going from hot to cold and back, is like asking to get sick. But never did that cross my mind here. I felt invigorated, and eventually exhausted, headed back to the showers, lockers, and my stinky boots.

I ate lunch at Cafe Paris, a nice place that I think I will return to. Afterwards I go back to the studio and get my slide lecture ready to go. Thorarinn shows up to get a preview and talk for a bit. He says he may have time toward the end of my stay to take me out for photos. He has a good vehicle capable of accessing more remote locations. Sounds good to me, we'll see what happens. Soon I head to the Artschool and begin my lecture for about 25 – 30 students. I really enjoy it, and seem to keep their attention (only one person fell asleep). After the slides we spend 15 minutes talking, with me answering and asking questions. Thorarinn was happy and reiterated that he would take me to some interesting sites.

While walking back to the studio I run into Jonas, the gallery owner and my neighbor, and say hello. He says he didn't feel like seeing my slideshow, but offers that I check out his studio. Wow, gee thanks! Jonas breathes life into the Icelandic snob stereotype each time I see him. He is my neighbor, a gallery owner and artist. He has a way of tilting his head upward, so that he must look down his nose to speak with me. Jackass. Inside his studio I ask a ton of questions about his work (minimal landscape paintings, done over landscape photos printed on canvas), but as soon as I stop asking, the conversation stops too. He has never initiated even a hello when I see him, let alone been neighborly in any way. It's a strange thing coming from someone who's so connected to the whole reason I'm here. Maybe he is one of the people who voted against me? Never know...

I finish reading Verne's Journey – wow, how great it is to have time to read – I burned right through that book! I think tomorrow I will buy a copy of Moby Dick, or one of the Icelandic Sagas...or maybe a CD of Saga's greatest hits? Scratch that last one. Moby Dick seems another fitting book to read when in Iceland, and I have plenty of time to get through it. Unless I drive to Myvatn and slide off the road into a volcanic glacier.

Day 8 Friday, 11/10

Okay, now I am officially confused by my sleeping cycle. I still woke up at 5:30am today, and could not go back to sleep, even though I went to bed a 1:30am and did not take a nap yesterday... Things are definitely different up here, and my body is doing whatever it wants, I guess. Lots of ideas when I wake up too, just like previous days.

Holy crap. Today was a good day, but there was a moment when I doubted I would be sitting here, enjoying an icy Tuborg, and writing this. I traveled to Myvatn and Husavik today with my new Hong Kong connections – Isabel and Sheila. Now, the weather actually spared us most of the day, somehow opening up the blue skies above while clouds surrounded the distance. But the wind was relentless, and I quickly found that I was strapped into the backseat of car with two drivers ed students. Holy crap. As we meandered out of Akureyri and up the Ring Road along the fjord, the truth came out (verbally and visibly). "We did some driving practice last night," Sheila said. These two don't do much driving in China, and because Hong Kong sits on the tropic of Capricorn, never in wintry conditions. Their friends won't ride with them when they do drive, and even joke that wherever Isabel and Sheila are driving is to be avoided at all costs by other drivers. They weren't kidding. We weaved off the road dozens of times, but never far enough to spell catastrophe. We stopped dead in the road a number of times, even on blind curves. It is a good thing, in every way, that a Northeast Iceland November is so desolate. (dramatic pause)

Until disaster strikes! After exploring lake Myvatn and its environs, we headed to the volcanic region of Krafla, and the 320 meter explosion crater called Viti, which translates to "Hell." We made jokes about this the whole way, but the truth of Iceland's infernal resemblance is hard to deny. The barren plains and craggy volcanic formations are dotted with steaming vents all around you. The Hverarond geothermal field, for instance, with its boiling mud and steaming holes, rests right next to the Mid Atlantic Ridge, and produces an almost unbearable sulfuric stench. If you can bear the unrelenting wind forcing the fragrance of hell down your throat, you can look beyond the mud pots to where Dal fjall mountain is being torn in half by the two plates constantly pulling Iceland apart. It does seem that if there be a route to the inferno within, this would be the entrance – just ask Verne. So, it is not surprising that we would hesitate a bit as we turned onto the Krafla road, and pass underneath the geothermal pipeline that creates a 'gate' to you know where. A moment later, I was instructing Isabel to be careful as we approached an icy slope. Too late, too steep, too dangerous, too bad. We made it halfway up this small mountain curve before the car started sliding backwards and the girls started screaming. This was it, I thought to myself in those helpless seconds, we are going over the edge and rolling down the mountain – Crap! But we stopped, hard. The car had spun off the icy road and onto the gravel slope of the mountain, hanging onto the road with its two front wheels like that dumb "hang in there" kitten poster. It's hard to capture the drama of that moment. We were inches from flipping down into Icelandic Hell, and we still had to get the car back onto the road – yet we laughed. Well, they laughed more than me – I had to try saving the car. So, after a minute of photos and talking, I climbed in there, put on my seatbelt, and got ready for my fate.



The angle of the car on the slope was terrible, with the right front tire barely touching the road. It was a steep hill alone, but the gravel shoulder was just as bad, and I would have to drive that shoulder down the mountain until clear of the ice. I took a breath and tried to inch backward off the ice, only to slide farther down the gully,

rocking in a nice your-about-to-tip-over way. Cautiously, I inched it back and forth until I was driving like Burt Reynolds in Hooper along the mountainside and back onto the road, and the whole thing seemed like no big deal. Phew! What was I so worried about again? At that point I officially took over the driving their car.

So we left without seeing Hell, but I don't think we would have made it back if we did. I think we were just as lucky not making it over that mountain, but who knows. We decided to try to see the small whaling village of Husavik instead, even though the weather was getting worse and the road was partly a gravel track. It was a long drive there, and we kept thinking and realizing what had just happened on the Krafla road – it was really close, and we all felt shook up. The moral of the story: don't fuck with Iceland!

Husavik was a nice break from the action. The wind had picked up, and we were right on the Arctic Ocean / Greenland Sea. We had dinner at a cozy restaurant, took a few pictures, and headed back – with Isabel driving again. The drive back was long and lucky, with the snow clouds somehow missing us for the first half of the journey. When the snow did come, it was not sticking to the road, and Isabel drove fine. We talked about music and other things, but mostly we focused on the driving part. I drove for the final leg of the trip as we hugged the cliffs of Eyjafjördur, until we ended at my studio. Yes – I needed a beer. We rested for a while. Isabel wrote down dozens of album titles and artists from my computer, while Sheila did her first I-Ching reading. It was a very funny moment when these two Chinese women who went to Catholic school were being taught the I-Ching by an American. They left briefly and then came back to get me and cook us dinner. I was very tired at this point, going on 4 hours of sleep and a draining day. But the food was great, and their friend Lient showed up to join us. Eventually we went to a hip bar – Lient's favorite, Cafe Amour – and had drinks. By midnight they were driving me home, and we were saying goodbye and good luck. They were leaving for Reykjavik via the eastern Ring Road tomorrow morning. I was quite worried, reading how remote and dangerous that route was compared to the simple western path, and with ominous weather ahead. I didn't want them to go, for more than one reason. But they had their minds set – and, at one point earlier in the day, had suggested I come with them. Yep. The moment I will regret. I said no, that I couldn't, for a number of reasons: One, I had promised the art students I would come to their opening exhibit Saturday and Sunday; Two, money. I just didn't have enough cash to spend 3 days paying for gas, food, lodging just to get to Reykjavik, and then be able to rent a car and spend another day driving back; And Three, I said no because I thought they would never make it to Reykjavik at all – their little car was either going to get stuck or blown off the road or slide into the ocean or something. And although I wanted badly to spend more time with them, it just didn't seem to be in the cards.

Day 9 Saturday, 11/11

Depressed all day and night. Got up at 4pm. Never left here or got anything done. Totally depressed, sad, broken. I have somehow fallen for Isabel, which became clear when I got home last night and realized I would never see her again. One day – one strange day – that's it. Crap! Cafe Amour, how ironic, Jesus! Am I so desperate for something external that it could have been anyone? Is it really her, or am I just going through a hard time? I don't even know her. One day and suddenly Iceland is a terrible place to be, stuck here alone, feeling like I had a brief chance

and let it drive away. I blew it – I could have done so many things, knowing that I only had one day, one chance. But I didn't – I wasn't looking at it that way. I was a gentleman, for sure, but this situation required more initiative than that. Why didn't I go with them to Reykjavik? All my reasons went out the window by today, and I can't believe I didn't go! What a fool I am. Am I? I am having ridiculous thoughts, like renting a truck and meeting them by Monday night. I hope I will get over this and find some sense of reason soon. I guess it was the straw that blah blah blah, and I wasn't prepared for it at all.

No matter, I have continued to correspond with them through text messaging on Sheila's phone – their chosen way of communicating since they can write English pretty good. I tell them I miss them already, they say they feel the same. I feel a bit better knowing this, and continue to get updates on whether or not they are still alive or have driven off a cliff into the East Fjords. Unfortunately, they do get stuck! They slide off the road into a snow covered hill and have to walk for two hours before meeting another soul. Eventually, a local family pulls them back onto the road and they drive off into the night. By 10pm, I get the message that they have made it to Egilsstadir safely, under the guidance of the Northern Lights. I am glad they are safe, but wish I was there with them, instead of boring drunken auroraless Akureyri. Crap!

Day 10 Sunday, 11/12

Well, slept in until 4:30pm again today. Managed to get cleaned up and walk next door to the Akureyri Artschool student exhibit just as it was closing, but I did see everything, barely. Still pretty down today, but I can feel it slipping away. By tomorrow, I will probably be back to reality, convinced by my mind that it was all a dream. Snowed-in anyway; nowhere to go and nothing to do on a dismal Sunday in Akureyri. No way to rent a truck today, and driving would be a death sentence without a 4x4.

This fact was clear by midnight, when I receive an update from the traveling ladies. They have gone off the road again, stuck in the snow for a third time. After another 2 hour wait and rescue, they returned to the same little eastern village of Egilsstadir. They have bought a flight back to Reykjavik and sworn off driving in Iceland ever again. Well, I knew it was a bad idea to attempt this route with that car during this weather, but they survived, and I would have too if I'd gone with them – CRAP!

Day 11 Monday, 11/13

A couple of drips fall every now and then from the skylights in my studio, which have been rendered opaque by thick snow. It looks like a foot of snow by tomorrow. Any idea of renting a truck and heading to Reykjavik today was squashed by morning. I got out and about early today. Took photos of an installation for one of the students, stopped by the book store for a copy of Moby Dick, and then spent a couple hours emailing at the public library. Afterwards, I headed through the blizzard to my first Akureyri supermarket experience. A good long walk in the snow led me to the market and a small shopping mall. I spent as much time as I could walking around after shopping, just to get warmed up. I tried to focus on all of the gorgeous Icelandic women to get my mind off of the damn Chinese one. It worked temporarily – and then I was back out in the elements. It seemed that whatever direction I walked today, the wind shifted so that I was against it, and the snow pelted my face. But I really didn't mind. I felt pretty good today, like everything happens for a reason. I

walked home with my groceries, put everything away, and headed back out for a meal at Bautinn. It was easily the most expensive dinner I've had, and probably will have, while here. I had a peppered Icelandic lamb dinner, (which came with a potato, soup, and salad) and a beer to go with it; this came to just over \$50. But I had to try the famous Icelandic lamb someplace, and Bautinn was probably the cheapest. I relaxed for a while after eating – drank a beer, and began reading Melville while watching the town shut down for the night. The waitress was very pretty and sweet, and I caught her looking at me through the window as I waited to cross the street and head back home. "Sometime I just don't know, I just don't know, I just don't know..." I agree Mr. Withers.

It's almost 2am now, and I might as well be in Greenland. The town is asleep, the snow is silently piling up, and I am listening to a folder of music I have titled "Quiet Blues Feel Like Shit Mix." It's lonely tonight, but I have a good feeling about tomorrow...I think.

Day 12 Tuesday, 11/14

Well, so much for sleep. Insomnia – my mind is in overdrive. Maybe I can get on a better sleep cycle this way.

Holy smokes! It's been snowing since Friday, and still it comes down – 30 cm high outside my door so far. It is so nice not to be without a job that I must drive to in this weather – ah, freedom. I will not think of my ridiculous van in Detroit spinning out all winter long – I will not do it! For now I can walk everywhere; whether to the restaurants and pubs, or to the sea and mountains.

I drank a pot of coffee and walked to the library for emailing and reading. The snow has covered everything in sight – quite beautiful. I take a number of photos of this white on white. After emailing a few friends, I hunker down for the big one, the email to Isabel. Crap! I got very nervous as I was writing it, I felt sick. I wrote out 5 or 6 sentences, attached a couple of songs and images (the original reason for emailing at all), and sat there sweating over the send button. Fuck it. Message sent. I felt relieved and panicked at the same time. I can forget about it all until a rejection comes – whether by reply or no reply at all. Either way, I am happy to be honest about how I feel, no matter how crazy it makes me appear. So, we'll see. Now I can focus on something else, like what I am doing with the rest of my life.

At the studio, I read about Queequeg and Ahab until I fall asleep around 4pm – once again complicating my sleep patterns. I awake a 9pm and cook some dinner. The snow is constant now, like it's always been there. I read and write and work on ideas deep into the night. The snow outside my door now measures 35cm – about 13.5 inches. Around 5am Wednesday morning the streets are plowed by Caterpillars, and I realize I've missed another night of sleep. Too late now – let's see what today brings me. "The world is turning...I hope it don't turn away."

Day 13 Wednesday, 11/15

Today was a wash. I was up most of the night, reading, writing, definitely not sleeping. Finally I fell asleep around 8am, sleeping until about 4:30pm – once again missing my window of daylight. I wouldn't have mattered much anyway, for when I left the studio around 6pm and headed to the library, the snow was coming down in a most unpleasant manner. The 10 minute walk to the library was incredible. Once again, the snow seemed to blow straight into my face no matter what direction I

walked, and my hair, eyebrows, and beard were quickly accumulating ice! It was more like little ice bullets than snow, and when I arrived at the library I had to go straight to the men's room and towel off the melt-water that ran from my mustache alone. Holy crap!

Reading, thinking, writing, sketching, resting, cooking, eating, shitting, pissing, walking, showering, sleeping, eating, reading...

I got a really clear and effective reading from the I-Ching tonight. Not really the most positive reading, but very honest and true, and eye opening. I've been using the book more often than usual here, and this is my fifth reading in 12 days. I've got a lot of time to contemplate here, especially when I end up awake all night long and asleep all day. Any attempt at getting out for photographs has been postponed by the neverending snow. Still no northern lights yet for company either. Tomorrow morning I will go to Myvatn again, this time with a group from Europe, so I need to get to sleep early, if that's possible. But I half expect it to be cancelled if it's still snowing by then.



Scott Hocking's Icelandic Saga (Part Two)

2007-01-11

13:08:02, by ws, 7166 words, 968 views

Categories: [Travel Blogs](#)

Scott Hocking's Icelandic Saga (Part Two)



by Scott Hocking

Day 14 Thursday, 11/16

Today I will go to Lake Myvatn (part deux). I wake at 5am to the snow plows again. The sound of church bells that begins at 6:45 each morning has been muffled out by the snow encasing my apartment. Now the plows wake me up instead. This morning I can hear the snow come down the hill and hit my door each time the trucks plow

the road above me. From the sound of it, I may actually be snowed in by the time they are done. I can't wait to try and open my door – which opens out – and see. Yes, I am snowed in. Ha! I cannot open my door but a few inches, and have to slam it against the snow pile to get it opened further. Luckily I have this 12 inch double door to the right which can be opened – this little door is how I got outside. So today, at 7:30am, I shoveled myself out of a baby avalanche. It seems that the Bobcat guy who plows the Akureyrarkirkja parking lot above me dumped all of his snow in the same place, so that it slid down the hill and piled in front of my door. Very fishy. No matter what the reason for it, it was really funny – fucking hilarious! This was how the day started, so I was in a surprisingly good mood.

I was soon picked up by Gudmundor and Hildur, and driven to a kind of junior-college school (for 16 to 20 year olds) where I would join a group of Europeans on a bus trip to Myvatn. Gudmundor tells me of a tour bus that lost its window during a sort of gravel-storm about a week before I arrived in Akureyri. He says that the rescuers also lost their windows in the storm, and many people were injured. Okay then. He also tells me that it is National Icelandic Language Day. I try to learn the word for snow – Snae. The weather is still very snowy, and does not seem good for any kind of tour, but we start off anyway. I meet a few teachers, and members of this massive group – Portuguese, Scots, Swedes, Germans, Italians, and Spaniards – and we head out. It is still dark as we lumber across the fjord and up the mountains. The weather is noticeably rougher once out of Akureyri, and our tour guide decides to read us an Icelandic ghost story while it is still dark. He does not seem that enthused about the story. Still, there is nothing to see out the windows, so he continues on with a bit of an Icelandic Saga. Soon we reach Godafoss and the snow starts to reflect the invisible sun. Here we take a short smoke break and give the bus driver a moment to catch his breath.

The snow is blinding – but I hike to the foot bridge over the river and get some pictures of the crystal blue water coming from the falls – the color is incredible. Soon we are all frozen and get back on the bus. It is -10 degrees Celsius (about 14 degrees Fahrenheit) and windy as hell. As we drive on I can make out 7 ravens flying parallel to us far in the distance. It is an eerie sight, being the only contrasting forms anywhere in sight amongst the snow. They are either playing or attacking each other. How can they see where they are going in this storm?? I think about trying a photo, but decide to not to. I watch them until they disappear into some shade of white.

After a short break at the Skutustadir cafe, we head to Hverarond and Dalfjall to see the boiling mud pots and cracked mountain. The weather is so bad it is ridiculous. The scene is much different then a week ago – nothing is visible in the snowstorm. Everyone gets off the bus for maybe 2 minutes, and then, freezing, gets back on. It made for a nice photo – like penguins huddled together on some glacier. At least the intense wind limited the sulfur stench. The idea of a tour is clearly impossible at this point, and the guide and teachers know it. We head straight to the Reykjahlid pool – one part of the tour that exists no matter the weather. Finally the tourists come to life! I get some nice shots of people swimming with their hats on, surrounded by ice and fog. Then I head in for a can of Viking. The weather is getting worse still. The bus is barely visible in the parking lot, and talk of staying overnight begins.

When we start back to the Skutustadir cafe for lunch we hit a complete whiteout. Up until this point, the Icelanders on the bus had been acting very nonchalant about the

driving conditions. Often chatting to each other, never looking out the windows, while others people gasped at every turn. Now, however, with the bus at a complete stop many times – not able to find the road – the tour guide makes a few “I hope we don’t die” type comments into the microphone. Amazing. The roads in Iceland are lined with one-meter high yellow posts – marking the road when snow has accumulated a few feet. We can't see these posts. The bus' anti-lock brakes kept kicking in as we slid down slopes and through banks. Those damn ravens! Fading into the clouds! What a ride!

We make it to the restaurant. I join the Icelanders in the smoking lounge for a cigarette, where they confess to being scared – and I imagine that means that most of the tourists were terrified. We eat a nice trout dinner with many fixings, and debate whether or not we will stay at this hotel overnight until the storm clears. After eating, I talk with the Icelandic teachers for a while – one of them, Arna, wants me to do another slide talk at their school next week. They are both very curious (bordering on suspicious) of what kind of work I do. I agree to the talk, and we will figure out the exact day later.

On the road again – the weather forecast is supposed to be dying down towards Akureyri, and the driver wants to go for it. He is quite a figure. As the trip wears on, he becomes more and more of a mythic hero. He could be in his 60s, maybe even older – a tall, stoic, balding captain of his ship. His ship happens to be a 4x4 short wheel-based bus, but he could easily trade in his snow suit for a whaler's slicker. Somehow I keep finding these Moby Dick characters walking around me – their 21st century counterparts. And we are searching through this storm like a boat hoping that an iceberg doesn't appear ahead. This driver got us through a handful of close calls to come, including a problem when an 18 wheeler had to squeeze by us – and neither of us knew where the road edges were. We had to be told by the guide that we were crossing the giant Island fjord – we could even see it. But we made back, and the driver began dropping off groups at various hotels around town, like we were all coming home from school, dropped at our nearest stop. I shook his hand and thanked him as I got off, trying my best to say thank you and goodbye in Icelandic. “Gott, takk fyrir, takk, bless!” It's been a long day, but it is still Icelandic language day.

It is only just now getting dark out, and when I get to my studio I congratulate myself for not dying with a beer. After my beer, it's out to the library before they close down for the night, and then a stop by the mini-mart for some bread on the way home. I splurge and buy a pint of ice cream for \$11. Fuck it – I almost died in a fiery bus crash. At the studio I upload and work on some of the 300 photos I took today. Most of them are blurry and white, but I am happy with many. Later that night Jonas plays the soundtrack to Pulp Fiction and some Johnny Cash really loud, screaming every now and then. It may be a karaoke party, or it may be him alone, don't know. It lasts from about 2 to 3am. I was not invited, but have to endure as if I was.

Day 15 Friday, 11/17

It's my grandfather's birthday today. His name is Garfield Hocking, and he is 90 years old. He lives with his wife Ruth, my grandmother, in the same house in Redford Township that my father grew up in. It is a few blocks from my elementary school. It is very far away from here. I sent a post card last week – hope they got it.

Went to the Library around 11am. Afterwards went to the bank, running low on kron's. And then to Cafe Paris for my big meal of the day. I like this place a lot. It seems like a good deal compared to how pricey it is here, and it's such a nice atmosphere to lounge in. I spent a long time there, took my time and read a bit after eating. It was a pretty nice day today, but still very snowy. Spent the rest of the day and night in the studio – working on images. Wish I could get my own vehicle around here, so many of my shots came from the windows of a moving bus – not ideal. But I like them anyhow, it was such an eerie day yesterday. Tonight I thought about going out on the town, but committed myself to Photoshop instead.

Day 16 Saturday 11/18

I sleep all day. Get out of bed around 8pm and take a shower. Holy crap – when did I fall asleep? It's so hard to tell what time of day it is sometimes. I know I went to bed in the a.m., but I must have read for a while in bed. It could have been 10am when I fell asleep – I live in a freaking cave.

Well, since it is already so late at night, I decide to go have a fancy dinner. That doesn't really make sense, and I'm not sure why I decided tonight was the night. Maybe because the Karolina Restaurant is a 15 second walk from my studio. It is a very posh place, and the hostess wants to know if I'd like to check out their prices before I commit to eating – what, do I look like a poor person to you lady? I do? Oh, well, you're very observant... I do stick out a bit. Everyone else there is either having a romantic dinner with their lover, or some group of old friends, or dressed in suits and jewelry, and who cares. It's all candlelit and my little table is in a dark corner of the mezzanine level. I like it so far. I have to choose anywhere from 2 to 5 courses – ahem, I choose 2: steamed mussels appetizer, with a main course of reindeer in a mushroom coffee sauce, with select veggies. Oh, and an Icelandic beer called Gull. Yep, I'm going to eat reindeer. I read a bit by candlelight, nurse my one beer, and eventually slowly, very slowly, savor every bite of this incredibly expensive meal. The reindeer was one of the best dishes I've ever had – cooked perfect, and the sauce was so subtle and delicate. The waitress said the chef was an "Icelandic champion." And then the bill came. It was 5,400 kronur. That's 86 smackers. I don't think I've ever paid that much for a meal before. I wonder if everything that expensive tastes this good.

Afterwards, I walk around and check out bar scene. I'm definitely not in the mood to spend 10 bucks a beer after shelling out the wazoo at Karolina. So I just walked a bit, walked and walked, and somehow ended up back at my cave. I felt good, and full, like I didn't need to do anything else. So I didn't. Back to the photos – back to work!

At some point, Jonas starts doing his super loud karaoke again – starting with Tina Turner's Simply the Best – over which I hear him scream once. Will the excitement ever end!!

Day 17 Sunday 11/19

Not much to do on a Sunday if the weather is bad. The streets and sidewalks are sheets of ice – you get really good at walking on ice here. I get some groceries today from the mall market. Bananas. Don't feel much like writing today.

Oh, but there is one thing to write about for sure. I checked my email on my phone when I went to bed. Isabel replied to my confession. Says she is so happy to meet

me, and I'm the best man she met in Iceland. I guess that's something. It was nice to get a reply – I feel good about the whole thing, whatever the hell it was and/or is. I like honesty – just like Billy Joel. And now, I will read about whales.

Day 18 Monday 11/20

One week left! I couldn't sleep last night, so we'll see how long I last before passing out today. Sleep is for babies!

Today the crows tell me where to go. After a few photos from the church viewpoint, I watch this raven heckle me and swoop in circles over the road. Okay, so I will go that-a-way, jeez, shut up already! He appears frequently as I walk to my daily internet hour. At the library, the log-in code is not working on my computer, nor is it working for a blond woman at a station near me. She has a small boy with her, and is speaking only in English to him, and to the librarian. She asks me if mine is working, and then quickly wonders where I am from. Turns out she's a Canadian, from Ontario actually. She is married to an Asian man, they live across the fjord, and her last name is now Chan. Not surprisingly, they are good friends with Peng, and know all about the 2 Chinese woman who were just in town, Sheila and Isabel. Akureyri is a small town, but the Chinese grapevine is very very small. When I tell her that I am taking photographs, she suggests going down to the docks, where all of the fisherman are. The way things are going this day, I decide to go with the flow and head to the docks after emailing. I write the HK girls to let them know I've met their long lost Icelandic uncle, and then I head down to the fjord. Ravens sit and squawk at me from the tops of light posts. Okay okay, I'm going, I'm going. The water edge has frozen a bit, and cracks in nice little patterns. It's a very blue day today. At the end of the street is a large freighter with a Pisces symbol on the stack. Something in the stars today for sure. I get some good shots, but I am freezing. I walk to the nearby sailor's pub, but it's not open yet. I head back up towards the town for some food and shelter, and the first place open is Peng's Chinese food. Going with the flow. Someone says my name as I walk inside – it's Lient, the friend of the HK sisters. He's eating the lunch buffet, and I join him. He also knows this Canadian woman at library who I met – she is his teacher. Another friend of his sits with us, a pretty woman named Jing, who looks like Lucy Liu. She invites Lient and me to a dumpling dinner tomorrow – she will email me. She is very kind to invite me. They both leave, and I begin to read Moby Dick again until Peng himself comes up for a chat. He talks about travel, Detroit basketball, and women. Peng likes women. Eventually I leave, walk back to the studio, dump photos, use the bathroom, and go back out. To the Apotekerinn and buy a few gifts, and then on to the Vin Bud to see price of Brennivin – very expensive of course. I buy a six pack of Tuborg for now. I am going broke! Back to studio, do my laundry, and paint paperboard for drawing white, which I will leave here as my gift. At about 7pm Thorarinn stops by and invites me to see a glacier river that has overflowed in the East. We'll leave in the morning. Of course I want to go, but can I go and still be back for the dumpling dinner? Crap! Dinner is at 5pm – what the fuck man! Isn't that a bit early? Fucker! Poop! I trust that it will all work out. Moby Dick by Led Zeppelin just came on my shuffling playlist – WTF is going on – this day is crazy! Am I drunk off one beer? Suddenly realizing that I didn't sleep last night. I crash early – sometime after 8pm, and then wake at around 2am. Read for a while, back to sleep on and off until 5am-ish, when I get up.

Day 19 Tuesday 11/21

This morning things are moving faster. I can feel sand sliding through the glass as my days disappear. I dry my laundry, clean up the kitchen and bathroom, do some reading, writing, eat breakfast, shower, and read again until Thorarinn arrives around 9:30 am. It takes a couple hours to reach the glacial river he wants to check out. Thorarinn is a fly fisherman, and says that every now and then the glacial ice flowing downriver can build up, creating a dam, and leading the river to find an alternate route. He says that sometimes this leads to an entirely new course, and the river is permanently changed. He's concerned about how this will affect the fish, and fisherman, who know this river well. This particular river runs from the largest glacier in Europe, Vatnajokull, in the Southeastern highlands, creates a few spectacular waterfalls along its path, including the largest in Europe, Dettifoss, carves out a mind boggling horseshoe canyon, Asbyrgi, splits in two and eventually empties into the Arctic Ocean. The road from Husavik winds along the Arctic coastline, teeming with birds during warmer months, but quite desolate of life right now. The white snow is everywhere, but the colors are incredible, undulating and mesmerizing me as we drives. Pictures just can't capture it. If I had been driving I would have stopped every 5 minutes, but we had limited time. There was a rainbow over the ocean for about 10 minutes – I felt drawn to the water, like getting a job on some freighter from Siberia to the Hudson Bay. His 4x4 gets us pretty far into Asbyrgi canyon, but the snow is just too deep. He's got a dog with him – a boxer – who plays in the snow at every stop. Bakkahlaup, the river we came to see, was amazing. The one lane road that used to be flanked by farmland is now barely above water level – a few inches, no shit. The fields have become a lake, a flood plain for the new river route, and further north the river has busted through – the road is gone. The Arctic is probably a half mile ahead, you can make out a farmhouse or two along the coast. But there is no road to get you there anymore. Telephone poles stick out like pilings. One slip one this icy dirt road, and you're swept out to sea. The energy was intense, humbling. Everything in Iceland makes me feel dwarfed. I love it.



Thorarinn, who goes by Thoti, tells me a lot about Iceland during the drive. We talk art, politics, and philosophy. I learn that Icelanders are still so purebred, you can trace everyone back the original settlers. There is a website for it, and a few scientific researches on their genetics, etc. I learned that they cut down most trees a thousand years ago, and due to sheep out-populating humans, no trees have had a chance to grow back. So, for hundreds of years, Icelanders used driftwood that accumulates along the northern coasts to build all their houses and boats. Can you fucking believe that? That's a lot of driftwood. Apparently the Arctic currents just bring all kinds of flotsam into the craggy fjords. We talk about Bush and the war (which Iceland supported too), and we talk about money, and wanting to learn to play the stock market, so you can just make art all the time. I take 340 photos – many which just cannot contain the surroundings, and feel like one-quarter of the view I saw. We stop briefly in Husavik on the way back, one more time in this little whaling village. I get back to my studio before 5pm, thank Thoti, and say goodbye to him and his unpronounceable-Icelandic-named-dog.

I arrived at Jing Xu's just after 5pm – they were only up the hill from me. I meet her husband, an Icelander from Reykjavik named Geir, their Chinese friend Sunliang, and our mutual connection Lient. I am taught how to make dumplings. Soon an Italian man and his Scottish wife arrive, Giorgio and Rachel, along with their baby named Kierenan. They have just returned from a trip to China, and the baby looks like the last emperor. We eat and talk and drink until about 10:30 at night. I finally get an explanation from Geir regarding this certain kind of breath-sucking gasp that Icelanders will make during conversation. It is a sound you would expect when someone is a bit shocked, or maybe sees a car crash over your shoulder. But, as Geir explained, it is supposed to be more of an acknowledgement that they are listening, some sort of comforting sound. I can't write it out, but I will try. It sounds like this: úah! I guess there are really any words in English that involve inhaling, so it is unusual to me. They are very interesting people – teachers, philosophers, sociologists, students, from all over the world. Who knows how all these people end up in the capital of the north? They have stuffed me with great food and drink - I have a full belly and am a bit drunk. We say our goodbyes, and I walk home feeling fine. It's been a long day – I go right to bed.

Day 20 Wednesday 11/22

Kinda slept in today. The phone rang at some point, and I was asked by Arna to do another talk and slideshow at the local school (for 16-20 year olds) – tomorrow at 11:45am. It's nice to have an agenda. After my library routine, I buy a bottle of wine for Jing and Geir and a 1000ml bottle of Brennivin for myself. I feel a bit bad not bringing any gift for the dinner last night (Giorgio and Rachel brought a bottle of Baileys – which people seem to drink a lot of here), so I leave this gift with a note on their porch. I spend most of the day walking and photographing the town. Run into Lient again – decide to take his picture, since he seems to be the source for the chain reaction of invites I'm getting – I wanted proof that he existed. Work in the studio, on photos, the rest of the evening. Read myself to sleep again.

Day 21 Thursday 11/23

Arna picks me up around noon, for my talk at the junior college. Arna is really nice, and very interested in seeing what my work is like. We have a quick coffee before

going to the class of about 20 students. I had a good time talking today – I really got animated, like a performer. The class seemed to enjoy it, and Arna had lots of good questions and comments. One of the students, named Oskar, was very interested in me and my work – had even seen my work on the internet. Afterwards, I eat at Cafe Paris with Arna and Oskar – my payment for the talk. We have a great time talking, once again very interesting topics, philosophical, political, art-theoretical. Arna has to leave around 4pm, so Oskar drives me home. He must be between 18 and 20 years old, and intensely interested in continuing our dialog. Fine with me. We hang out in my studio and talk everything from art to movies to synchronicity. I have a beer, but he declines. This is very typically Icelandic. They are not casual drinkers. Usually, they drink only on the weekends, and they drink until they are drunk, kicked out of the bar, or passed out. Oskar seems like he might not drink at all though. Eventually, a few hours later, he offer's to cook me dinner – sounds good to me. At his apartment I meet his girlfriend Margaret, and her girlfriend. Yep. I guess open relationships are not uncommon in these parts. They go out for a meeting while we eat our meal and talk more. The conversation is good, but I am drained – it's 9 pm and I am about to pass out if Oskar keeps talking. But then the girls return, and I end up staying well past midnight. Margaret has CF, and is constantly dealing with her inevitable end. She recently had to be airlifted to a Reykjavik hospital, and shows me the 'port' implanted in her chest. She is very strong and talkative, and Oskar pretty much clams up while she's there. I learn that this guy who's talked my ear off all day is usually uncomfortably silent. He must have reeeeeeally needed to talk to somebody – I was that somebody. Later on he gets a phone call that his grandmother has died. Crazy! I also learn that earlier that day his mother had struck her head on a beam and been taken to the hospital. Is Oskar some kind of karmic magnet for death and injury? Very strange glimpse in these peoples complicated lives. Eventually I have to leave, and say goodbyes to all these new people. Like everyone I've met so far, they seem genuinely interested in me and keeping contact. I've met nothing but good people so far.

Day 22 Friday 11/24

Well, what do you know; I am invited to a Thanksgiving dinner. Jing emailed me, saying that it will be at their friend Marcus' house near the docks. I meet up at Jing and Geir's house, and walk with them to the party. There I meet Marcus, a German, and his Icelandic wife, Tim and Tom from Ireland, Rachel and Giorgio – who I met the other night, Laura from Latvia, and Damien and Emily – the Alaskans who have cooked this American feast. Damien is here on a Fullbright, and we talk about travel grants. Emily is a chipper all-American girl who has cooked every Thanksgiving dish herself. Except the turkey – that was cooked by Marcus the German, who was kinda drunk by the time I arrived. The food is great, the wine is great, the company is great. There are a few small kids running around – Marcus' maybe, and it feels very strange to have such a typical U.S. holiday scene in Iceland. At one point Jing accidentally bonks one of the baby's heads on the ceiling – oops! Oh, he'll be fine... Laura the Latvian wants to know if I would like to come to a party tomorrow night. It's her roommate's birthday party, a Finnish girl named Henna. Turns out that Henna is the same Finn who asked all the questions at my first lecture. Laura says she's heard about me, smiling; so Henna must have told her of me and the lecture. Hmm. They will email me with directions.

After dinner and drinks, I am invited to play poker at Damien and Emily's house. Tim pulls out his Irish moonshine flask, it's pretty good stuff. Poker is fun, and I only lose a few dollars. I have a couple Budweisers – ha, I wonder if it is a cheap beer around here. Just before midnight a group of us head out to the bars. I learn a new phrase from the Tim and Rachel – UK lingo: To go out to these bars solo means that you're "on the pill," meaning you just want to get laid. Are you on the pill, Scott? I suppose I am. First we head to the long pub near the docks, Oddvitinn – same place I tried to go into the other day, but was locked. Funny, if it hadn't been locked, I never would have met any of the people I am with now – at the damn bar. This is kind of the middle-aged drunken sailor / dancing hook up pub. Supposedly has the longest bar in Iceland – it is long, and apparently people do Karaoke there some nights. It gets more packed as the night wears on, and the women with us are frequently accosted by really drunk old men. Icelandic custom. After a few pints and some dancing to a bad cover band, we head out. At this point Geir and Jing go home, Rachel heads back to Giorgio, and the Alaskans poop out to – so it's just me and the Irishman, Tim. We are still on the pill. I am a walking drunk at this point, and Tim seems perpetually drunk, so we make good partners. We walk to Kaffe Akureyri, the hip bar for college students. At the bar I meet one of Tim's old students, who is now a politician. Politician buys us shots of Brennivin, followed by shots of Opal. Opal, he explains, is potent liquor that Quentin Tarantino said tastes like "poison" in some interview. Not sure if he was trying to impress the American with that info, but it didn't taste that bad to me. It was stronger than Brennivin, and more like anise. I buy pints for Tim and I, we get a table with Politician, who says "we're going to get you shitfaced!" Three others end up drinking with us – I'll call them Tough guy, Drunk girl, and Nice guy. Tim vanished at some point. Tough guy and I bullshit about who knows what, while Politician orders us more shots of something, followed by another shot of Opal. Drunk girl stumbles off into the crowd of standing drunk people, while Nice guy and I continue our talk. The bar starts kicking people out – it's between 3 and 4 am – dunno. Tim appears, butt wasted, and goes with Nice guy to snort something in the bathroom. I leave with the crowd, and hang with some random people. Everyone just kind of mingles in their drunkenness on the street – some still have their beers from inside. An older Drunk woman and a Quiet man choose to hang out with me, thinking I'm Icelandic for quite a while before I utter a word. I wanted to see how long I could fool them. She bums me a cigarette and we all talk like drunks for 10 minutes or so. The crowd thins out, people get in cabs, and I end up walking with Quiet man, named Siti, who seems fascinated with Detroit. We go to a 24 hour carry out called Tikk Takk for some grub. Our mystery sandwiches are free because his cousin works the counter. We walk home, talking about good places to photograph and other Icelandic qualities – God, that sandwich was good! Get home around 6am – fall into bed like a sack of rocks. Done.

Day 23 Saturday 11/25

Woke at 10am a bit dehydrated, but surprisingly no real hangover. Drink some water and go back to sleep until 2pm.

Received my email invite to Henna's party. Go to Vin Bud again to get beer and maybe a gift – but I don't get a gift. Back home, I get a visit from Arna inviting me to the exhibits next door and a dinner party tonight. There is a free concert in Deiglan, the space right next to my studio – a band called Thingtakk. With just a door

separating Deiglan and my studio, I would hear the concert no matter what. I check out an exhibit quickly – Veronik's husband's mixed media projection sculpture. It's not working properly, so he explains the whole thing to me. A lot to do with whaling – fancy that. I watch Thingtakk perform, not bad, and then leave with Arna. We stop by her house, I meet her son (from her marriage with a man from the Congo), and look at a portfolio of her artwork. She does beautiful performances with light – I am blown away. On her resume it says "1979 – Started a revolution." I guess that's resume-worthy. We head to dinner, in the eastern reaches of Akureyri. Along with me, there is a guest from France, Guillome, a hip-hop dance instructor in town for a short time. About 10 others arrive – mostly Icelanders, some Germans. One guy there says his brother is an artist from Reykjavik, and had done this same residency just before me. Aha! He's the one who left me a beer in the fridge. Tell him thanks. Dinner is delicious lamb and wine is good. Once again good conversation, especially with Guillome and Wolfgang – politics of course. Arna takes me home around sometime after 10 pm. She is really great, and I would like to spend more time with her tonight if I didn't have a party to go to. We agree to try to hook up tomorrow if possible, and say goodnight for now. I clean up and bring my beer to the party. It's a 15 minute walk, and I arrive around 11pm. A Viking looking guy meets me at the door, and I come inside to see Henna is dancing with her pants off. She explains that it is hot in there. Lots of cool people, artists from the Artschool where I talked, and Tim the Irishman as well. He seems like an old friend now. Henna is very pretty, even after her pants go back on. We all dance and talk – Henna pulls me to slow dance with her a few times. It is nice. The party goes on well past 1am, but, in true Icelandic fashion, everyone gets ready to hit the bar at some point. We will head back to Cafe Karolina, next to my studio. But Henna's not coming yet – she wants to clean up the studio. Hmm. Seems clear to me that she is with the Viking guy. But, as were all leaving, she stops me to give me her phone number. You realize I am here for one more night, right? She wishes I was here for longer, and says she'll see me later. Okeedokee then. I am once again confused by a woman confused.

I hang with the guys at Cafe until 4am. One of these characters is a guy named Werner, from Austria. I remember seeing him in here the first time I went out around town. He could be a real Viking, or the love child of Robert Plant and Marty Feldman. He and Tim are tripping on mushrooms tonight. As Tim put it at the party, "I'm just now peaking on some wicked Icelandic shroom's Scotty – do you want some?" Georg and Steinn, two art students that were at my lecture, offer to take me anywhere I need to go, if and when I return. Lot's of generous people here. Long since expecting Henna to walk in, I bow out. Tim leaves with me, and asks do I have any beers back home – the guy is a walking keg. We have my last two beers – including the one I was going to leave for the next artist. Oh well. We talk about women and astrology. He's a professor to many of these students, and they all say he's a great teacher. He seems like it. We bid each other good luck, and he leaves around 5am. I go to bed – alone, again.

Day 24 Sunday 11/26 – The Last Night

Well...

Many places are closed on Sunday's around here, so I try to get everything packed and cleaned up around the studio. I leave around 2 pm tomorrow. I decide to print out a large photo for the Gil Society as my donation – this drawing I began never

materialized. I launder all my clothes and linens, sweep up, put everything back to how it was, etc. Gotta pack that 66 dollar bottle of Brennivin really good. Do a final swim at the pool, and then decide to become a typical American by getting my lunch at a Subway. Yep, there's no McDonalds here. Just a Subway. Fuck it.

I feel ready to get out of here. I feel good too, like I don't want to leave yet. But I am ready. I email Henna from my phone – Happy Birthday. Wouldn't it be nice if she just showed up here? She must have been with Viking guy last night. But I don't know. I get a nice reply later in the night. Timing is everything.

Arna comes by during the day – she is too busy to hang out today, and has to say goodbye. We have a nice long hug – we really liked each other. I will miss her a lot, and know that she will help with anything related to my coming back.

In the evening, another knock – it's Bjorg. She wants to say farewell, and tell me I'd be picked up for the airport tomorrow. She wishes we had more time – she was too busy this month. She was great.

At night there is another gentle knock. Who could this be? And...it's Werner, the crazy Austrian. Wow, talk about the complete physical opposite of a pretty blond Finnish girl. He wants to get a beer with me – I don't even know how he knew I lived here. After about an hour, we are the only ones at the Cafe. Nobody drinks out on Sunday nights – unless you are Werner. He mumbles on and on about this Viking film he will make one day, and how he will buy a farm with horses and sheep, and start a commune where everyone wears Viking clothing, and everyone will be in his movie, and on and on. He is impossible to accurately describe – but he is like some archetypal figure – the fool on the hill. I've literally run out of cash, and that concludes my final excitement laced night here in Akureyri. Long after Werner leaves, I walk around the city one last time. It's so quiet and perfectly peaceful here at night. Who cares that I didn't see the Aurora. I'll come back.

Day 25 Monday 11/27 – The Last Day!!

I guess I won't finish Moby Dick after all. Made it to chapter 85. I still have to wash the dishes, take out the trash, and write in the guestbook. But I've got hours to do it. I take my final shower – I love this damn shower! I need a geo-thermal shower!

Around 9am I get a little knock knock on the door. Holy crap – it's Henna! She's has skipped class to come see me off. She wants to give me a going away massage. Are you kidding me? She says she thought of me all day before, but had made plans she couldn't get out of. She's not with Viking guy. We spend this short intense day together. I didn't get the dishes done. I didn't write in the guestbook. She whispers soft words in Finnish. We were briefly interrupted by Unnur at one point, as I gave her the images I took for her. She was very grateful, and said she owes me one. And later, there was an awkward moment when my ride showed up early – a large Icelander who just opened the door after a knock, shouting Hallo! Jesus! We had about an hour left after that. It was a beautiful ending to my trip. We separated ten minutes before my ride arrived. Time. It is certainly a strange and mysterious world. My ride, Large Icelander, helps me wash the dishes, I make sure everything is set to go, and we're off to the little airstrip on the fjord. I am glowing inside (maybe outside too). Large notices that my connecting flight in Keflavik is way to tight on time. And there is no scheduled bus from the Reykjavik to Keflavik airports. I'll figure it out – who cares! The short flight is nearly empty, and I jump around taking photos from the windows. Iceland is so gorgeous. I feel great. We land in the small Reykjavik airport,

and I quickly get a cab. Yep, another \$85 cab – who gives a shit! The driver speaks no English, but I thoroughly enjoy the quiet 45 minute drive along the volcanic terrain. In the distant north I can make out the triple peaks of the glacial mountain Snæfellsjökull, the extinct volcano that leads to the Centre of the Earth. I try to capture it as we drive past. Today seems magical somehow. I've got butterflies now. I am very close to missing my flight by the time we arrive, but I make it. Fly into Boston, and then onto Detroit. Takes about 12 hours total, I'm exhausted, but I still feel great. She is still fresh in my mind. Iceland is still there.

At home I get a ride from my good friend Clint, first back to my studio, and then to the bar for a drink. I am greeted by the stench of the incinerator tonight – welcome home! I know I am back to reality – back to bills, debt, a crappy heat-less van, a toxic studio, and a second helping of lonely winter. But it is worth it. I feel rejuvenated, healthy, alive. I am ready for what's next.



Day 69 Tuesday 1/9/07 – Epilogue

December was a rough month. Iceland withdrawal. I am still scrambling financially, trying to cover the month of no work/lots of spending that November was. I became sick almost immediately after returning, still got a little cough from it. After being in Iceland for a month, my ailing respiratory system wasn't ready for Detroit, and my studio. I shaved my Nordic beard on Christmas. By New Years weekend, I got my drive back. But I am a bit sick of winter already, and there's a long way to go. I've kept in contact with Sheila, Isabel, and Henna, emailing frequently. Things die down with time and distance, but you never know when paths might cross again. Henna is quite optimistic. I plan to go back to Iceland and work with the wood & trash that washes up along the northern shore. This time however, I will go in the summer, when the sun never sets...

Scott Hocking is a Detroit-based artist, you can learn more about him [in this review](#), and other past articles in these pages.

http://www.thedetroiter.com/b2evoEditorial/blogs/index.php?title=scott_hocking_s_icelandic_saga&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1

http://www.thedetroiter.com/b2evoEditorial/blogs/index.php?title=scott_hocking_s_icelandic_sage_part_two&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1