

*Iceland: The Formation and Evolution of a Young, Dynamic,
Volcanic Island—A Field Trip Guide*

by

Brennan T. Jordan
Department of Sustainability & Environment
University of South Dakota
Vermillion, South Dakota 57069
USA

Tamara L. Carley
Department of Earth and Environmental Geosciences
Lafayette College
Easton, Pennsylvania 18042
USA

Tenley J. Banik
Department of Geography, Geology, and the Environment
Illinois State University
Normal, Illinois 61790
USA



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Cover: The waterfall Þjófafoss, where the river Þjórsá cuts through the Tungnaá lavas below the mountain Búrfell (Stop 3.4). Photo by Brennan T. Jordan.

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Preface

This field trip was first run 3–14 July 2019 as a companion to the session “The Formation and Evolution of Iceland: Magmatic, Tectonic, and Geomorphological Processes” convened at the Geological Society of America 2019 Northeastern Section Meeting held in Portland, Maine, USA. This guide will be most valuable when used to supplement active exploration of the Icelandic countryside and its outcrops, but we hope that it will also be a useful resource for those seeking to learn more about Iceland’s geology as seen in the field.

Travel in Iceland

Although a private vehicle is recommended in order to maximize accessibility to the areas highlighted in this guide, travel via public transportation or bicycle may also be viable options for portions of this itinerary. Regardless of mode of transport, travel in Iceland may be unlike anything experienced in the United States. Roads are a maximum of two lanes outside of the capital area and Akureyri, and even two-lane highways may be quite narrow or lack guardrails along precipitous ledges. Many bridges are one lane—please use caution when approaching such bridges and yield appropriately. Many roads, including a portion of Route 1, the main “Ring Road” highway, are gravel. Blind rises are common (the road sign says *blindhæð*), as are sheep in the road. Sheep are unpredictable—if encountered, slow way down, honk the horn, and beware of lambs darting across the road if separated from their mothers. If you hit a sheep, stop and inform the nearest farmer. If you ever need to stop, pull all the way off the road—do not stop in the road! Road and weather conditions can change rapidly; the websites www.road.is and www.vedur.is provide updates on road conditions and weather, respectively. Follow posted speed limits. While mobile phone and at least 3G coverage is generally good throughout the inhabited areas of the country (and even in some uninhabited areas), please be advised that certain areas may lack coverage. Always travel with provisions, water, extra clothes, a blanket, snow removal gear and chains (if not summer), and a first aid kit. **Call 112 if an emergency arises.**

Naming Conventions

Geographic names in this guide correspond to those used on topographic maps published by the National Land Survey of Iceland (*Landmælingar Íslands*). At times these place names differ from those used in the literature. Icelandic place names are generally compound words that include people’s names or descriptive terms as well as the nature of the associated feature, e.g., *Langadalsfjall* is long (*langa*) valley (*dals*) mountain (*fjall*). It is common in the literature to include geographic descriptive terms that are redundant with components of the Icelandic name, e.g., “Reykjanes Peninsula” is redundant because Reykjanes means “smoky (*reykja*) peninsula (*nes*).” Out of respect to the Icelandic people and their language we have elected to minimize this redundancy by providing the geographic descriptive terms infrequently and asking the reader to become familiar with Icelandic words that are commonly used in place names. A glossary of such words is provided in Appendix A.

Icelandic Language: Pronunciation and Use

We use Icelandic spellings of place names and geologic terms throughout this guide. While many sounds and letters are the same as (or very similar to) those in English, there are some significant differences. Icelandic grammar is generally considered to be complicated, and words are declined according to gender,

case, number, and tense. Therefore, the same word may appear with several different spellings according to its usage. We provide the nominative (in essence, the “standard”) forms of place names and words in this guide. The brief, non-exhaustive guide to pronouncing Icelandic below contains: (1) the Icelandic alphabet as it differs from English, (2) vowel combinations, (3) consonant combinations, and (4) rules and nuances of pronunciation.

GUIDE TO PRONOUNCING ICELANDIC

1. Alphabet (as different from English)

Letters	Sound	Letters	Sound	Letters	Sound
Aa	ah as in “yacht”	li/Yy	i as in “hit”	Uu	u as in “sun”
Áa	ow as in “cow”	Íi/Ýý	ee as in “see”	Úú	oo as in “cool”
Ðð	th as in “the”	Jj	y as in “yes”	Þþ	th as in “thorn”
Ee	eh as in “met”	Oo	oo as in “poor”	Ææ	eye
Éé	yeh as in “yet”	Óó	o as in “so”	Öö	e as in “jerk”

- f between vowels or at the end of a word sounds like “v”; f before l or n sounds like “b”
 - g between vowels sounds like “y”; g before r or ð or at the end of a word sounds like the “ch” in loch
 - p before s or t sounds like “f”
-

2. Vowel combinations

Letters	Sound
ay	as the word “furry,” but without the f or the rr
ei/ey	ay as in “bay”

3. Consonant combinations

Letters	Sound
dj	j as in “jump”
hv	depends regionally, but generally “kv” or “qui” sound
ll	tl as in “kettle”
tns	s

- Double consonants (except ll, above), have a pre-aspiration (e.g., *ekkert* is *ehh-kert*).
 - Some other consonant combinations have a pre-aspiration, but they are not individually listed in this guide for the sake of minimizing confusion.
-

4. Rules and nuances of pronunciation

- In almost all instances, stress is on the first syllable of the word (i.e., *REYK-ja-nes*).
 - R is always trilled.
 - There are no compound sounds (e.g., sh, th, ph) apart from those listed above (i.e., the town Stykkishólmur is pronounced STYK-kis-hól-mur, not STYK-kish-ól-mur).
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