



Iceland

Troop 1 Southborough Big Trip 2019

27 Current and former Boy Scouts from Troop 1 Southborough along with 13 adult volunteers took a “Big Trip” to Iceland in late July of 2019. Following a long-standing tradition, the scouts of Troop 1 voted for this destination in several rounds in the Winter and Spring of 2018 to take this once-every-four-years trip.

The Big Trip team of five senior scouts, Anthony Zalev, Alexander Forrest, Joseph Greene, Zane Walter, and Garrett Goodney and Scoutmaster Jim Greene spent the next 14 months planning the adventure that saw the Troop camp in five different campsites and visit over 20 destinations during their 8-day adventure.

FRIDAY, JULY 26 and SATURDAY, JULY 27

Flight, Viking Museum, Provisioning, Hot Dogs, and the Arnastapi Coast

Departing Boston at just after 9 pm on Friday, July 26th on an Icelandair flight 630, the Troop landed just before 6 am in Iceland at Keflavik Airport after a 5-hour flight where very little sleeping occurred. After finding all of the luggage, clearing customs, getting a rented cargo van and meeting our bus, including our driver Egill (pronounced Ee-ilk), we visited the nearby Viking Museum for a breakfast buffet and to see their replica ship. We then traveled to the Costco to get provisions for the trip that we were unable to bring from home while the cargo van made stops for canopies, camping fuels, and specialty groceries.



The Troop then proceeded north up the western coast and stopped in Borgarnes for a quick lunch at an N1 rest stop featuring world-famous Icelandic hot dogs, chips, and sodas. The caravan continued north and west into the Snaeflness Peninsula, stopping at the Ytri Tunga beach to see the local seal population and at the Bárður Snæfellsás half-man/half-troll sculpture. From the sculpture we began to hike the rugged Arnastapi coastline full of birds and cliffs towards the town of Hellnar. About halfway along the short 1.5-mile path everyone learned the lesson to always have a rain layer when visiting Iceland! We got back in the bus and drove through the Snaeflness National Park in the pouring rain to reach the town of Grundarfjörður where we set up camp for the next two nights in the municipal campground. The Chief Scout Executive for Iceland, Marta Magnúsdóttir, is a native of the town and came out to meet the Troop shortly after our arrival. After making Chicken Fajitas for dinner, members of the Troop wandered into the town of 900 people to

experience the town festival, *Á góðri stund*, which occurs each year during the last weekend of July. During this festival, the town is segmented into areas that are assigned the colors red, blue, green, and yellow. The houses are decorated in these colors and the residents dress up in matching colors. The festivities are culminated with an outdoor concert down by the pier, which was enjoyed by all, even though no one understood the Icelandic lyrics. Returning to the campsite after the concert, the Troop could see that the label “midnight sun” was appropriate as it was no darker than dusk back home as we got into our tents for the night. Around 11:30 pm.



SUNDAY, JULY 28

Horseback Riding and Kirkjufell Mountain

Reveille for our first full day was at 7:30 am the next morning and we had time to make a pancake breakfast and lunches before splitting up in two groups for the day's two activities.

One group faced the wrath of nesting birds to follow a trail to the nearby Kverna Horse Rentals and took a ride up into the hills of this sheep farm that stretched "from waterfall to waterfall" on Icelandic horses that are descendants of the horses brought by the Vikings over a thousand years ago. The unusually warm 60-degree weather proved uncomfortable for the horses, several of which decided to drop to the ground and roll around in order to cool off during the ride



Meanwhile, the other group hiked down the ring road to the iconic Kirkjufell (Church Mountain) and ascended about halfway up the mountain to the third balcony (due to the volume of tourists, Kirkjufell has experienced a great amount of erosion and several hikers have died in recent years attempting to climb above this point) where they could see back across the water to the town. After lunch, the groups swapped activities and met back at the campsite to swap stories and play some card games under the canopies in a light rain until it was time to cook a dinner of Chicken Alfredo and head to bed.



MONDAY, JULY 29

Eldborg Crater, Krauma Geothermal Baths, and Víðgelmir Cave

Monday was an even sunnier and warmer day which began earlier with quick bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich breakfast and lunch prep along with everyone packing their damp tents and gear so that the bus could get underway. The first stop of the day was at the Eldborg Crater. Visiting this dormant volcano crater required a 2-mile hike through a scrub forest from the parking lot with a 400-foot climb to the rim where everyone enjoyed a full view down into the crater below.



After returning to the bus, we ventured to the Krauma geothermal baths which are located at Europe's most powerful hot spring, Deildartunguhver. The facility features pools of many different temperatures, including a single cold pool at 40-degrees that was very popular. In other pools, the hot spring water is cooled by cold water coming from Iceland's first declassified glacier on nearby Mount Ok. In addition to the

pools, steam showers, and relaxation room, just being able to get clean with soap and water was a welcome respite at this point in our adventure!

We next traveled to the Víðgelmir cave where after donning hard hats, we descended down into the cold earth and almost a mile into the cave along with our guide Mio to learn about volcanology and how the cave was formed, along with local legends about the trolls that used to be thought to inhabit the caves.

The tour was excellent but ran over time so the Big Trip team broke out the snacks while we rode the two hours to the Mosskogar campground which is to the north of Reykjavik. This campground is unique for all of the flowering plants grown at the farm and the 25-year growth of trees that have been imported to this farm (the Vikings deforested Iceland prior to the Little Ice Age between 1400-1800 and with short summers, very few native trees grow above 6 feet tall in Iceland).

Due to our late arrival, the Big Trip Team decided to make dinner of Spaghetti and Meatballs for everyone else while they set up their tents. The final event of the evening was for members of the team to review the food consumption and plan for the next day's resupply trip to Costco.



TUESDAY, JULY 30

Hiking Mount Esja, Þingvellir, Gullfoss, and Geysir

Tuesday was going to be a long day so breakfast was a quick round of Oatmeal and then lunches were made just as the bus arrived back from going into Reykjavik to be cleaned the previous evening. We traveled a short distance to the Mount Esja trailhead where we spent the morning hiking up this mountain ridge that overlooks Reykjavik to the south. The weather while calm in the parking lot was wet and quite windy in the higher elevations with clouds rolling in below us obscuring the view to Reykjavik for the most part. After returning to the parking lot, we had a quick lunch and then headed out to visit the main Golden Circle tourist sites, catching up with the cargo van which had made several stops in Reykjavik to resupply our food and fuel.



The first stop on the Golden Circle was Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park which was the site of the annual Icelandic parliament meetings, a two week summer gathering, from 930 AD until 1798 AD and is also where we were able to walk along the edge of the North American plate and see across the valley to the European plate which is moving away at a rate of 5 cm per year. A short hike took us to the man-made Öxaráfoss waterfall which was constructed hundreds of years ago by diverting the river to this location to provide water for all of the visitors to the annual parliament. We experienced our first crowds in Iceland as many people are bussed to this famous destination from the cruise ships that visit Iceland all summer long. It was here that we bumped into the 100 scouts from Portugal for the second time (the first being in the Costco on our first morning).

Leaving the park we traveled a short distance to Geysir (the root of the English word geyser, which is derived from the Icelandic verb geysa which means to gush). Eruptions were frequent and everyone had their cell phones and cameras out attempting to photograph and/or videotape this spectacle using a wide variety of picture modes like stop-motion and hyper-lapse.



Another short drive then took us to the amazing Gullfoss waterfall where we were able to walk above the falls and venture out onto an area adjacent to the middle of the falls to experience the spray and thunderous sound of this marvel.



We then settled in with a round of snacks for the 2-hour drive to our surprise destination, the Gallery Pizza shop in Hvalsöllum where we had called ahead and ordered twenty 16" pizzas - half a pie for everyone. The local Applesin orange-flavored soda was a huge hit with the scouts. After dinner, we settled into the Tjaldsvæðið Hvalsöllum campsite for the evening after getting laundry started.



WEDNESDAY, JULY 31

Lava Center, Ziplining and Puffins

We were able to have a leisurely morning and finally dry out all of our tents in the sun and wind while we finished laundry and had another pancake breakfast. The bus arrived and we deposited all of our gear and walked down the road to the Lava Center which is dedicated to explaining the seismologic and volcanic activity responsible for forming Iceland and its continuing constant (hundreds of earthquakes a week) transformation. The first thing we saw at the Lava Center was a movie of clips from volcano explosions in Iceland in the last 100 years. We then proceeded through a series of exhibitions detailing these eruptions, the formation of Iceland over time, what the mini-quakes feel like, the various forms of lava and how the lava flows work.



Upon leaving the Center, we rode the bus a short distance to the Seljalandsfoss Waterfall which drops from a cliff face (that once marked the coastline) which allows visitors to hike behind (in fact, all around) the falling water within reach of the spray from the falls. A few of us even dared to step into the falling stream to test out our rain gear, of course.



Another short bus ride took us to the southern seaside town of Vik. Once there, 27 of us got off the bus to go zip lining while the rest visited a peninsula with black sand beaches where puffins were known to visit. The weather was windy and moist, but the beach adventurers were eventually able to find puffins and while the high winds made the longest zipline unsafe, we were able to enjoy several runs through a gorge on a 140-meter line after getting lessons on some local history regarding how difficult this area of Iceland was to visit because of all the rivers, what weeds were safe to eat, and the fact that we could drink the water right out of the streams.



We also enjoyed watching our guides' dog chase after them as they rode the ziplines through the air.



Once our time was done, we rode the bus into Vik and took a short rest at a marketplace where we found food and souvenir shopping. From here we then had a two-hour ride along the ring road through the moss-covered Eldhauran lava field to Skaftafell National Park where the weather had cleared and we were able to set up camp with no wind and clear skies. Just before entering the park, we stopped at the Skeiðará Bridge Monument, a twisted remnant of a bridge wiped out by a glacier melted by a volcanic eruption.

Dinner this evening was a lamb and chicken stir-fry which was cooked assembly-line fashion under the direction of the Big Trip team. We met a BSA Venture Crew, also from Massachusetts, that was enjoying some time in the park after hiking the Lagavegur Trail earlier in the week and a large game of ultimate frisbee ensued. A number of people took advantage of the nearby hot showers before heading to bed.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 1

Hiking Kristinartindar

Eggs and potatoes were the chosen high-calorie breakfast for this day which was expected to be our most physically challenging. We had camped right at the trailhead for the ascent to Kristinartindar (Kristine's peaks) and we began our hike shortly after 10 am.



The initial 2 miles took us up 800 feet through low brush trees on the ridge overlooking our campsite until we reached an outcropping where we were finally able to see Skaftafellsjökull, the Skaftafell glacier.



We would then be able to see this glacier for the next 3 miles and 2,500 feet as we hiked and climbed. We proceeded first across a grass-covered plateau and then up along a steep grass-covered rise, which proved to be the final straw for a number of our hikers. At the top of the rise, we were on a promontory that extended out towards the glacier. From there, we hiked around a steep rim to a rocky scree-covered slope that went up 500 feet in the last quarter-mile led to the ridgeline which took us to the weather outpost from where we could see Skaftafellsjökull to the east and another glacier, Morsárjökull to the north. Both glaciers are outlets for Vatnajökull, the largest glacier in all of Europe which covers 8% of Iceland. Instead of flowing down the mountains, Morsárjökull reaches a ridge where the ice along the leading edge breaks and falls with a river that forms Morsárfoss, the tallest waterfall in Iceland, whose

spray could be seen from Kristinartindar's peak, over 3 miles away. We quickly learned that the pieces breaking off and falling was the source of the thunder-like sounds we had been hearing all afternoon.



In all, 35 of our 40 participants made it to the summit in under 5 hours. Due to some miscommunication, our descending groups took one of three different paths back to the campsite, some getting to visit the famous (at least to Game of Thrones fans) Svartifoss waterfall along the way, the last group arriving just about 10 hours after leaving camp on the 11 mile and 3,300-foot journey. The hamburger dinner was delicious and the leftovers were shared with members of the Venture Crew.



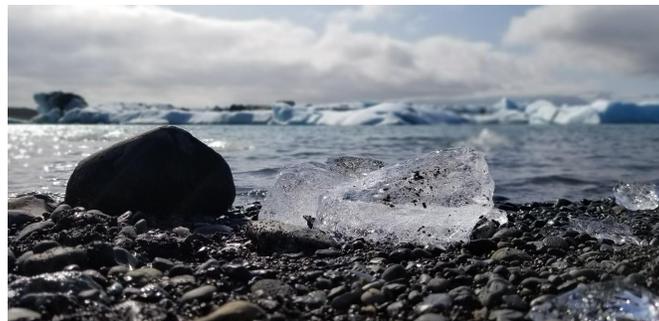
FRIDAY, AUGUST 2

Glacier Hike and Ice Climb, and Glacier Lagoon

Friday began early with a breakfast of french toast while gear and tents were packed. We split the group in half and proceeded to the Icelandic Mountain Guides center at the Skaftafell Campground to get outfitted for the day's adventure of hiking upon a glacier and ice climbing. Everyone received a helmet, crampons, and an ice axe before hopping back on the bus for the short drive to the Falljokull glacier where the outfitted group was dropped off and met their guides. We proceeded on foot about a half-mile, past the moraines (sediment deposits) and a pond formed by the retreating glacier and stopping as we first arrived on the ice to don our crampons and get a quick introduction to the use of the ice axe. Then we set off up the glacier to a ravine where the guides had gone to set up for the ice climbing. Four stations had been created along one wall that was approximately 25 feet high. The guides belayed and gave instructions to our group of climbers in our attempts to reach the upper edge. A number of people held races while others attempted to climb all four stations. After everyone had climbed enough, the group made their way down to the side of the glacier and through an ice tunnel that had formed and then we made our way back up onto and across the glacier, hopping over small rivulets from the melting ice until it was time to head to the parking area and await the return of the bus. Once the bus arrived, we returned to the climbing center so that the first group could return their gear and the second group could get issued gear for their climb. The bus repeated the journey to the glacier and dropped off the second group of climbers.



Our first group continued east along the coast for about 45 minutes to repeat the journey the other group had taken earlier to the Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon. The lagoon is a bit of a tourist destination and many of the scouts headed to the food stands initially before making their way to the black sand shore looking out at the icebergs that break off from the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier and float in it's meltwater to the sea. All along the shore, we were able to find smaller hand-sized pieces of completely transparent ice floating along.



After our time here, we headed back to the Skaftafell campsite where we prepared a big taco dinner while our bus driver, Egill, went to get the rest of the group. We all enjoyed this dinner and then packed up the rest of the gear and settled into the bus for our 4-hour journey to our final campsite. During this ride, we were heading west toward Reykjavik and got to photograph the sun as it dipped below the horizon. We arrived late at Úlfjótuvatn Outdoor and Scout Center, the northernmost national scout center in the world. Somehow they were not expecting us, but being members of the international brotherhood of scouting meant that we were very welcome. We were shown to a campsite down by the lake (Úlfjótuvatn means Úlf's ugly lake or perhaps Ugly Úlf's lake) where we camped near other scouts from Portugal and England for the night.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 3

Scout Camp, Reykjavik, and Coming Home

We awoke in the morning to a dense fog over the lake and some midges. We had a chance to meet some of our neighboring scouts and explore the camp, including the nearby sheep's pen and the somewhat primitive (although heavenly) showers. Breakfast was a smorgasbord of all our remaining food with many having eggs or oatmeal. Lunches were prepared and then we proceeded to clean and pack all of the Troop gear for the journey home. Our left-over food was donated to the scouts from Portugal and then we finished packing up our tents and personal gear and lugged it up the hill. We made sure we had the correct count of gear and sent the cargo van on its way to Reykjavik to drop off all of the rented chairs and tables. While we waited for the bus we held a short meeting to make some Troop announcements, plan our first few trips for the school year, and then remind everyone that we were going to explore Reykjavik in patrols which would include the parents.



The bus ride to Reykjavik followed a route next to a pipe from the nearby Nesjavellir geothermal plant carrying power and hot water to the capital region. Our bus dropped us off outside Hallgrímskirkja, a Lutheran Church with an almost 250-foot tower fronted by a plaza containing a statue of Leif Ericson. After getting a 25% discount from the attendant in a Boston Bruins hat, we ascended most of the way in a 6-person elevator. A short staircase led us up to an area below the bells where we could look out and see the city and the ocean beyond it. After catching the view we descended to the base and visited the church. At this point, we had broken up into smaller groups that then wandered the tourist areas of Reykjavik, checking out the souvenir stores and stopping for lunch. We met at our pre-arranged point at 4:15 pm, outside the Harpa Concert Hall and stopped for a moment to take a photograph with our bus and driver before getting in for the hour drive back to Keflavik airport.



After some effort getting boarding passes and all of the luggage and people checked in for the flight, we headed up to security and through the duty-free shopping to the gate areas. Our final meal in Iceland was at the Mathús cafeteria where everyone was given \$25 to pick whatever they wanted. While a number of people picked the lamb dinner, the burgers and chicken fingers seemed to be a big favorite and we may have purchased every bottle of Applesin they had.

Our Icelandair Flight 633 departed on time at 8:45 pm for the 5-hour flight home to Boston. We mostly enjoyed the comfort of the plane and watched movies or dozed. Upon reaching Logan airport we had to go through U.S. customs and then make sure we had all of the luggage we put on the plane before exiting the airport to find all of the parents who had come to bring us back to Southborough. We arrived back at the Pilgrim Church in Southborough around midnight and moved luggage and gear to all of the waiting vehicles. We then circled up for one last time to thank our Big Trip Team and pass out patches from the Scout Center before heading home to start laundry and spend a grateful night in our own beds.

Planning Details



Our trip was 14 months in the planning by a team of 5 scouts (3 Eagles and 2 soon-to-be Eagles) and 1 Scoutmaster. Much pizza, donuts, burgers, snacks, and a little fruit was consumed during the dozens of planning meetings. In the Fall of 2018, the Team gave a briefing meeting to all participants where we had arranged for a Notary to help with Parental Consent forms for all minors and checked passports for expiration dates as well as collected an initial deposit. A bag check meeting was held the Monday before departure where all bags were weighed and examined for conformity to the packing list, tents were erected and given extra plastic liners, forms were collected, and trip shirts and luggage tags were disseminated.

Forty people made the 8-day journey that consisted of almost 5,000 miles traveled by air, 1,000 miles traveled by bus, and 70 miles travelled by foot around the beautiful country of Iceland. Our 40 adventurers camped using 25 tents in 5 separate campsites. We had 3 restaurant meals and prepared 23 meals for ourselves. We brought 6 stoves and sets of cooking equipment, we purchased two canopies in Iceland along with most of our food and consumed 24 liters of propane, 2 liters of white gas, and 2 pounds of isobutane. Our itinerary consisted of 24 activities (8 of which required a fee) and we were able to do it all for the thrifty cost of roughly \$1,600 per person. Being in a foreign land with its unique topology, foods, sparse population centers, unique language, currency, and on the metric system presented a number of challenges, but it made the adventure one truly worthy of the title "Big Trip".

