

# Volunteer Programme

29<sup>th</sup> July – 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2007

**Report compiled by:**

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**Natural History Institute report overview by**

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# Introduction

The aim of this field work was to continue to assess the fauna and microorganisms in streams and rivers of the Western Fjords.

This programme was a continuation of a pilot project between The Natural History Institute of Iceland and volunteers from Another Way Travel.

## Methodology

This section describes the various sampling methods used. Every sample obtained was stored in a container preserved in a 70% alcohol solution. Each sample was labelled with the date, location, station and sample number, both on a paper label inside the container and on the lid.

### 1. General data collection

At each station the first data collected was the GPS position, elevation temperature, pH and conductivity of the water. The habitat was described and the width of the river was measured.

At some stations the depth of the river was measured at regular intervals and the relative percentages of sand/rocks/stones/moss/algae etc. on the riverbed were noted.

### 2. Stone samples

Five stone samples were taken from the riverbed at each station. These were randomly selected from five separate points across the transect of the river. The samples were scrubbed to remove the vegetation and wildlife attached to them. The resulting mixture was sieved using a 125 or 250 $\mu$ m sieve and preserved in a 70% alcohol solution. Details of each stone were recorded: the description (i.e. rough/smooth), average height and shape.

### 3. Kick samples

Kick samples were taken by 'kicking' for 30 seconds on the riverbed upstream of a 250 $\mu$ m net, which collected the resulting sediment. This sediment was sieved and preserved in alcohol.

#### **4. Butterfly nets**

Insect samples were taken using a butterfly net in locations where the wind was not too strong. After collection, the insects were placed into a small container and alcohol added for preservation.

#### **5. Malaysian flytrap**

The Malaysian insect trap comprised a small open tent with a sampling bottle attached. The trap was left to collect as many insects as possible and the resulting samples were placed into a small container and preserved in alcohol.

#### **6. Pipe traps**

These were static traps that were collected after being left in place for a period of two years. The traps contained antifreeze to preserve the insects caught.

# Field Work

## **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

**Location:** Gilsá near Bolungarvik, Isafarðardjúp

**Habitat:** Farmland, meadow grassland.

After an introductory briefing at the Natural History Institute, the group set off to Gilsá. Three stations were taken from an upstream location to the mouth of the river, over a distance of 250m along the river, with the assistance of Peta.

## **Monday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

**Location:** Staðará in the Staður valley, Jökulfirðir

**Habitat:** Slightly boggy meadow grassland.

After travelling to Grunnavik, the group set off along the valley before taking another three stations along the river.

## **Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2007**

**Location:** Leirá along the river Jökullá in the Leiráfjörður valley

**Habitat:** Very boggy, steep rocky banks, glacial fjord.

Two stations were taken on this river and one station was taken from a tributary, Öldugilsá. Two pipe traps were collected after surveying.

## **Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007**

**Location:** Veiðuleysuá and Suðará (named by Böðvar that day) in the Veiðuleysufjörður valley

**Habitat:** Rocky beach and grassland.

One station was taken at each river; volunteers travelled by dinghy from the main boat to reach each station.

## **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2007**

**Location:** Bolungarvik

**Habitat:** Civilisation.

After a morning at the Institute checking and collating the samples, the volunteers spent the afternoon at an Arctic Tern colony collecting chicks to be ringed by Böðvar (Buddy).

## And Finally...

Estelle not only managed to sprain her ankle but became the first person to lose her phone overboard. It was last seen when travelling back to Bolungarvik...

Laura has now been appointed Cultural Ambassador to Iceland, after her natural flair for insulting the Icelandic was recognised by the British Foreign Office:

- "I didn't know you had roads in Iceland!?"
- To Buddy "You were a fisherman?! I thought you said pissing around!"
- About an Arctic Char fish "Look, there are its lungs" and "It's like an eyeball," when talking about an eyeball.

Nina avoided falling overboard but fell off a chair when the boat rocked and sat in the Institute nursing a bruise with a frozen Arctic Skua.

Sarah managed to suck more bugs into her brace than into the sample pots, so we pickled her in brandy to preserve the bugs for a later date.

Anna desperately tried to raise the tone of the trip with little success and only managed to identify common plants; rare specimens remained elusive.

Thomas also did his bit for international relations when he came to blows with another traveller over shower reservation etiquette.

Bryony's magic pink hat kept her safe all week, only for her to take it off and fall in the shower on the last day of surveying.

Thanks to Friggi we were lucky enough to see an Arctic Fox cub, which had its own room at Grunnavik. Thanks also to Ramóna the boat for shipping us about the fjords.

Buddy only informed the volunteers at the end of the week that rivers sampled contained the diptheria fly. Note for future volunteers – fifteen minutes of walking in Iceland translates to three hours of stumbling at at least 45°, inches from a cold, watery death.

Malcolm has checked into the Priory.

# Contact Details

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