



INSPIRING ICELAND

“Can we go again next year Miss?”



On Monday 24th February...

I was, once again, very lucky to be able to lead a Geography trip to Iceland for The Gregg School students.

Iceland is a quirky, breathtaking and inspiring country - 80% of its inhabitants believe in elves and trolls and sometimes is light for 24 hours a day.

It sits almost on the Arctic Circle, it has some fascinating traditions and culture as well as some amazing Geography...in places it looks like the landscape of the moon - a serious departure from Hampshire!

As a very experienced Geographer and Iceland 'expert' (this was my 13th visit) we decided it would be a great opportunity to plan the entire trip ourselves in order to gain a more detailed experience and save a few pennies for our

parents.

I morphed from Headteacher into our resident 'expert' and 'tour guide' for 20 Year 10 Geographers, who along with the three staff set off for Heathrow on Icelandair, bound for Keflavik.



Many of our students were very interested in our flight and we had some fantastic opportunities to view the icecaps/ glaciers and recent lava flows from the air as we landed.

We were greeted by Vivi, our super-enthusiastic coach driver, and immediately we were off!

Our first stop was on the south coast of the Reykjanes Peninsular where we glimpsed our first view of the constructive plate boundary of the Mid-Atlantic ridge. It is at this point at the Bridge between the Continents where the 'rift' between the American and Eurasian plates can be witnessed very clearly.



Vivi then took us through the most recent lava fields created by the eruptions we had all witnessed on the news, and to the village of Grindavik to see just how close the lava flows came to engulfing many homes. We were lucky to gain special permission to drive on these newly opened roads - many of us remembered the spectacular pictures of hurried embankments being built to stem the lava flows as this famous town was evacuated.

Gunnhver hot spring was our next destination where the sheer force of the hot steam and terrible egg smell from the high levels of geothermal activity set the scene. This location was a stern reminder of the powerful forces that rumbled just below the earth's surface in this dynamic landscape.



We arrived at the Hotel Ork at Hveragerdi at 7.30pm just in time to unpack, have dinner and prepare ourselves for the next day.

Tuesday 25th February

We were up bright and early for a 7am breakfast and out at 8am. To our delight, Iceland had treated us to a fresh layer of snow as we started our grand 'Golden Circle' tour.

After a very careful drive in the snow we arrived at Pingvellir, a UNESCO World Heritage site and a very beautiful view across the rift 'graben' of the National Park.

Once again, we could see the plate boundary and walked down the famous Almannagja fissure/gorge to the site of the first democratic parliament on the world.

This site is particularly known for parliament (The Alpingi) being established in 930 and was used until nearly 1800 as the site for political discussion. The fantastic fissures that are underwater near the lake are also regularly used for scuba diving as the water is so clear.

The hydrothermal fields at Geysir were next in line, with the steaming hot soil and bubbling hotpots giving way to the explosion of Strokkur - one of the largest geysers in the world. It is quite a shock when it erupts and kept us amused for several cycles as we tried to predict when it was going to explode next!



Gullfoss, Iceland's (and indeed Europe's) second largest waterfall was our next stop.



You can certainly hear the roar of its majesty long before you can see it. On this occasion the icy hues penetrating the plunge pool and gorge were a fantastic sight. Keeping well away from the turbulent river Hvita we then travelled south again to a slightly more relaxing location at a steaming hot bath at Fludir.

The Secret Lagoon is Iceland's oldest outdoor swimming pool and is marvellously quiet! Hot water bubbles up on a local river bank and trickles into the sides of the lagoon where it provides a relaxing soak for visitors. Complete with some small bubbling hot and cold pots around the edge, this was a popular destination for our students.



When you wouldn't think we could pack any more into a day, we were then treated to a magical visit to Raufarholshellir lava tunnel. In February, the sparkly icicles on the floor and ceiling frame the red and purple volcanic rocks below ground, lining a path where once hot lava flowed. We learned about the formation of these tubes as well as enjoying a few minutes in complete darkness with our headtorches turned off....what a place!





In the evening, we were able to use the wonderful geothermally heated pool/ sauna/ hot pots at Hotel Ork as the snow came down! I turned into a snowman building consultant as 'Greg' the snowman took shape. We had a brief visit of a slightly green hue of the Northern lights and finally fell into our beds - it had been a very busy day!



Wednesday 26th February

The South Coast Adventure was the scene for the next day. Iceland's busiest road was caked in snow and ice, but it was no match for Vivi and her coach....her skilful driving kept us on plan.

The curtain waterfall at Skogafoss, where a legendary troll had hidden a pot of gold, was illuminated by glorious sunshine, as was our visit to Solheimjokull glacier.



We passed the Westman Islands and had clear view of the icecaps as we journeyed East over the vast outwash plains and fields of Icelandic Horses.



Our next stop was Vík - the southernmost town in Iceland where we had some lunch and viewed the famous sea stacks. Black lava crust pizza was consumed and the famous black sand beach at Reynisfjara was next on the list.



On this occasion, the stunning basalt columns were rather inaccessible as the dangerous sneaker waves were crashing onto shore - the sight was spectacular coming directly from the Southern Atlantic, (They were the biggest I'd ever seen at this site.) We stood at a very safe distance and then viewed them from the other end of the beach, at Dyrhólaey, where we were able to witness the power of the ocean from above.

En-route we stopped at the site of our important GCSE case study site, at Eyjafjallajökull, where the volcanic eruption resulted in an ash ejection that impacted the world in 2010.

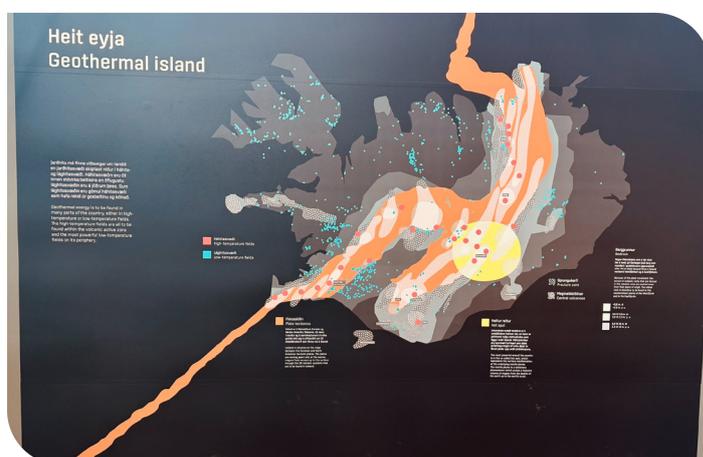


Our final, unscheduled stop of the day was at Seljalandsfoss waterfall. Sadly the ice prevented us from walking behind it but this did not detract from the view or the fun we had on the slippery paths!

A very late dinner and a dip in the pool rendered us all in bed by 10pm and easily asleep - we were shattered!

Thursday 27th February

Our final day started with a visit to Hellisheidi Geothermal power station. We learned about alternative energy in Iceland and how this power plant - the largest in Iceland - is not only enabling the use of hot water sources for district heating but the steam drives turbines to create a huge amount of Iceland's electricity.





I would liked to have stayed longer - as I am sure we all would!



This visit to Iceland was one of my most favourite. The light and views were spectacular and was an utter pleasure to be able to share it with our students. I am sure the memories of this magical land and the fun we had in the snow will stay with us forever.



I should like to thank the staff that assisted in my planning an execution of this adventure Mrs Rendell, Mrs Gregory, Mrs Wilson and to Mr Gillespie and Mrs Goodchild for accompanying us.

I have a feeling that this will not be the last time that The Gregg School visits Iceland in this way.

I am encouraging our students to submit their 10 best pictures and media clips on Firefly in the next few weeks for our photo competition.



After an emotional goodbye to Vivi, and having hosted a group of students and staff that were speechless, this whistle-stop, action-packed tour came to an end.

I am planning to host an Iceland Exhibition around the time of our next Open Morning in April - keep your eyes out for further details.

Mrs Sellers

