Frá Malarrifi



#### **Snæfellsjökull National Park**

Snæfellsjökull national park lies in the westernmost part of Snæfellsnes peninsula and covers 170 square kilometres. It was founded on 28 June 2001, with the aim of protecting the area's unique nature and important historical relics. A further aim is to facilitate travel around the area and make it accessible to people.

and make it accessible to people. The Snæfellsjökull icecap lies within the national park, and the park is the only Icelandic national park that stretches to the sea. The nature reserves of Búðahraun and of Arnarstapi and Hellnar, and the natural monument of Bárðarlaug also fall under the same management as the national

The natural monument of Bárðarlaug is an ancient water-filled crater located near Hellnar. Its bed was scoured by an ice age glacier. National parks and nature reserves are public property, free for the public to explore and enjoy, but all visitors are requested to follow the park's rules of conduct.

#### Landscape

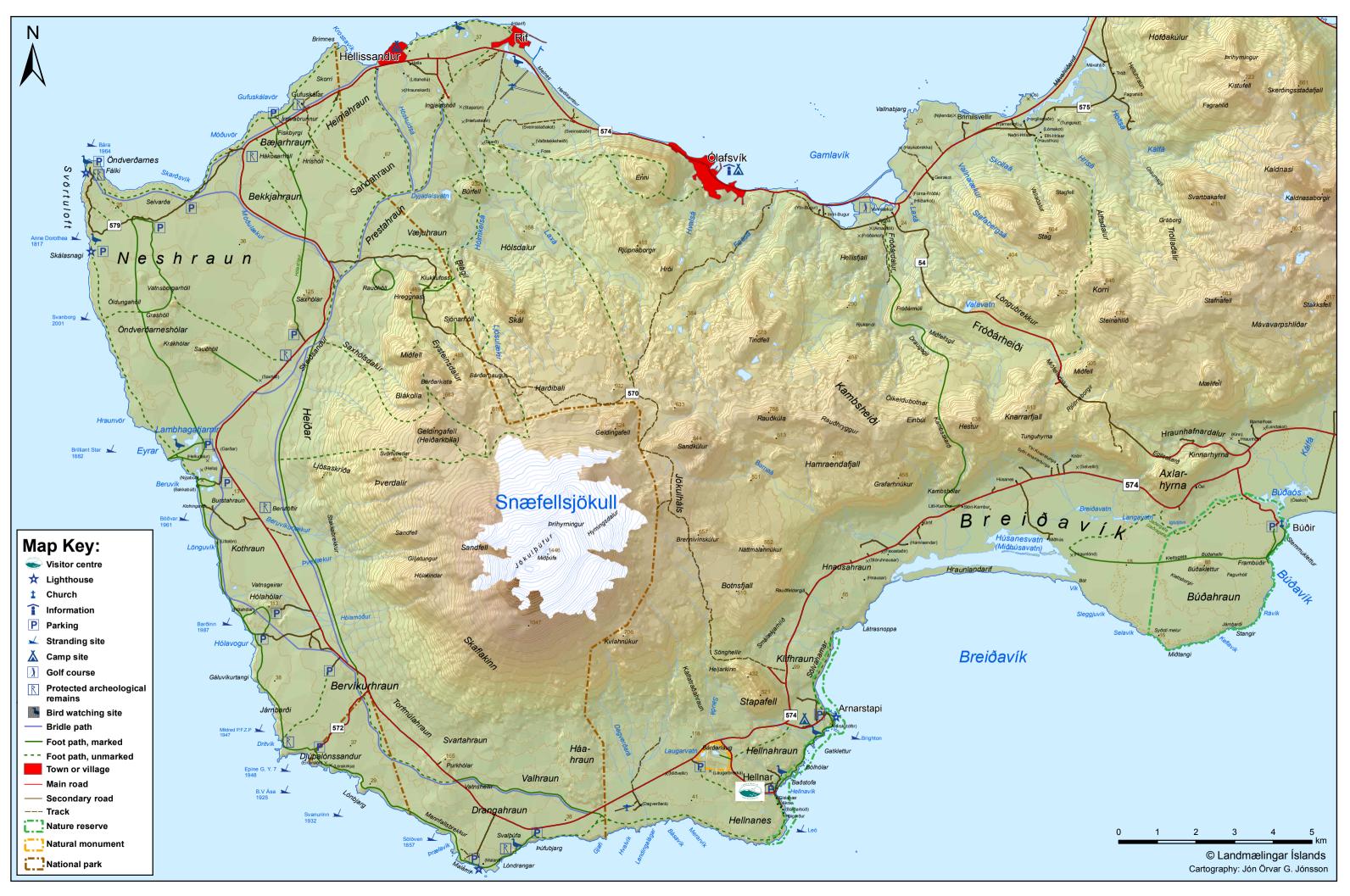
The Snæfellsnes peninsula coast line is very varied. Rocky coves alternate with black sand beaches, light sand beaches and precipitous sea cliffs that teem with sea birds in the nesting season. The lowland within the national park is mostly lava that has flowed from Snæfellsjökull and from smaller

park. Búðahraun lava field lies in the southern part of Snæfellsnes peninsula, and, its eastern part (around . 9 square kilometres) was designated a nature reserve in 1977. The lava field harbours some of the most beautiful vegetation in the country, giving shelter to approximately 130 species of plants, including 11 of the 16 species of fern that are found in Iceland. Approximately 0.6 square kilometres of coastal area around Arnarstapi and Hellnar was designated a nature reserve in 1979. Here you will find peculiar rock formations that have been carved out by the surf and have a rare opportunity to inspect flocks of kittiwakes up close.

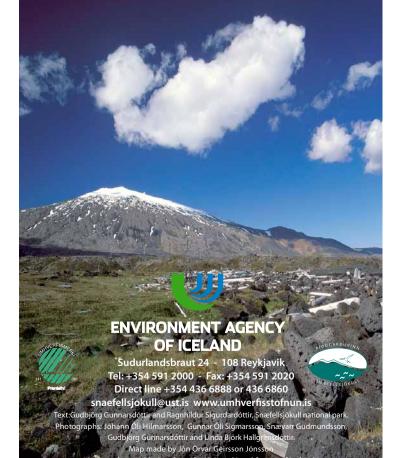
craters in the lowland. The lava fields are largely covered in moss, and intermittently they contain beautiful hollows where vegetation thrives sheltered from the wind. The lowland in the southern part of Snæfellsnes is an ancient seabed that rose up after the end of the ice age. The cliffs that divide the lowlands and highlands are thus ancient sea cliffs. Snæfellsjökull glacier towers majestically over the area, rising above a number of smaller peaks. One can see clearly how lava streams have run down its sides. The valley of Eysteinsdalur in the North is surrounded by high mountains that beckon keen hikers. Near Jökulháls,



From Eysteinsdalu



# Snæfellsjökull National Park and Nearby Protected Areas



Diúpalónssandu



you will find areas of pumice and land that was under a glacier not long ago. In the South, Mælifell and Axlarhyrna are the most imposing mountains seen from Búðir, and the 526 m high tuff mountain Stapafell watches over Arnarstapi and Hellnar. The area boasts of some beautiful waterfalls. Bjarnarfoss tumbles off the cliffs north of Búðir, and if you look carefully, you will see a lady standing in its midst, a haze of droplets draped around her shoulders She is most clearly seen from the road where it turns down to Búðir, or from Fróðárheiði heath. Klukkufoss waterfall, at the root of Hreggnasi, is surrounded by basalt columns, and further east in Blágil gorge, you will find two waterfalls, jointly named Pyerfossar, falling into the same pool.

#### glacier. Most of the rock formations in the national park are from the last glacial period of the ice age or from recent times. The mountains North of Snæfellsjökull glacier are made from volcanic tuff, formed by eruptions under the glacier or under the sea. It is thought that mount Svalþúfa is the eastern most part of a crater that erupted under the sea, and that Lóndrangar are crater plugs. Lava fields are prevalent in the landscape of the national park, both ragged block lava and smoother ropy lava. A large proportion of them have their origin in Snæfellsjökull, either from the crater in its summit or from craters in its sides. You will find all sorts of beautiful lava formations, and the area has many caves. Travellers are strongly

#### Geology

Snæfellsnes has an extremely diverse geology, and contains rock formations from almost all periods in the geological history of Iceland. The Snæfellsjökull system of volcanoes forms a strong geological whole, and there is evidence of individual eruptions both from the last glacial period of the ice age, and from recent times. The volcanic system is 30 km long, stretching from Mælifell in the East to Öndverðarnes in the West, and contains over 20 lava fields. The heart of the system is a large magma chamber that lies a few kilometres beneath the

advised not to enter the caves unless accompanied by someone familiar with them. In the lowland, you will find the craters Purkhólar, Hólahólar, Saxhólar and Öndverðarneshólar amidst lava that has flowed from them. In the middle of Búðahraun lava field stands Búðaklettur, an 88-metre-high crater from which Búðahraun flowed some 5.000-8.000 years ago. The eastern part of Búðahraun is ropy lava. It has a few caves, the best known of which is Búðahellir. This cave is the subject of much lore. It was thought, for instance, that it was bottomless, and that there was a tunnel connecting it to the sea



at Djúpasker, east of Búðahraun lava. The Búðahraun lava field stands on the sea bed, its foundations soaked in sea water, and during in spring tides, the sea will come up through its deepest hollows. Among geologists, the lava is known for its triple-flecked rock. Yellow-green flecks are olivine, white flecks are plagioclase and black flecks are pyroxen. The beach by Búðir contains almost pure olivine sand. rarely found in Iceland. Hellnahraun lava field, just North of Arnarstapi and Hellnar, is thought to be around 4,000 years old, and to have flowed from a crater that is now under the glacier.

#### Diúpalónssandu



Vegetation

#### Snæfellsiökull

Snæfellsjökull glacier has often been called the king of Icelandic mountains. At 1446 metres, it was long thought to be the highest mountain in the country, and it is believed that the peak was first reached in 1754, by Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson. The mountain is an active stratovolcano, built up from many lava fields and phreatic eruptions over the last 800 thousand years. The crater under the summit is 200 metres deep, full of ice and surrounded by icy crags. The glacier has been diminishing in recent years and is now approximately 11 square kilometres. The sides of the glacier are particularly beautiful, with ropes of lava winding their way down the slopes. The glacier last erupted near 1,800 years ago, spouting ashes over the Northern part of Snæfellsnes and the Westfjords. Lava flowed down the southern slopes, forming Háahraun lava field, among others. The Saga of Bárður Snæfellsás reports that Bárður gave up on human company and walked into the glacier. Many have since regarded him as guardian of the area. The glacier has inspired many authors, poets and artists through the ages. Some believe the glacier to be one of the seven largest centers of spiritual sources in the world.



nature reserve. This variety stems from the fact that the foundations of the lava are steeped in sea water, making the air conditions humid and favourable for many plants. Peculiar cup-shaped hollows have formed in many places in the lava, and these support approximately 130 species of plants. The ferns are the most conspicuous. Out of the 16 species of fern found in Iceland, 11 grow here. Meadowsweets, geraniums and buttercups thrive well in the lava, and the lava harbours various other types of wild flowers, ling, moss and rock growth, as well as birch and rowan. Among the species found on the sands are red fescue, lyme grass, silverweed, meadow buttercup, bladder campion, wild thyme, moss campion and dandelion.

# Birds

Soil in the outer stretches of Snæfellsnes tends to be quite permeable, but vegetation in the area is nonetheless quite diverse. The coastal area is rich in vegetation and has many clear ponds containing colourful seaweed and cupus. Thick moss covers the lava in most places, while flowers thrive in sheltered nooks and crannies. There aren't any tall trees, but small birch and rowan grow in lava hollows. Among the rare plant species found in the area are wood millet and herb paris, which is protected. Ling is widespread, and in late summer, there are plenty of wild berries to be found. It was largely due to variety of vegetation that Búðahraun lava was designated a

As one would predict, the most prominent birds in the area are sea birds. They nest along the entire coast line, and among the species found are guillemot, Brunnich's guillemot, razorbill, fulmar, kittiwake and shaq. The shag is an excellent diver and can be inspected at close range at Arnarstapi. The shag lays in huddles on low rocks and eyots. During the nesting period, a tuft of feathers adorns the head of the adult bird. In Arnarstapi, vou will also get very close to nesting kittiwakes. Kittiwakes lay two eggs into nests that they stick to the narrow rock shelves with saliva and droppings. Black guillemots are most often spotted at Malarrif and Lóndrangar. Gulls lay in many locations, the most common species being great black-backed gull, herring gull, seagull and lesser black-backed gull. Þúfubjarg and Saxhólsbjarg are accessible bird cliffs, but please approach with caution. There are no large colonies of wetland birds, but many species visit the beautiful ponds of Beruvík







bay. Red-necked phalaropes are often spotted on the ponds above Pumpa in Arnarstapi. This bird is known for its distinctive circling behaviour as it searches for food. You can often hear the song of various small birds, including golden plover, whimbrel, meadow pipit, snow bunting and wheatear. Other common birds are white wagtail, oystercatcher, ringed ployer, sandpiper, rayen and ptarmigan. Redwings nest in lava hollows and near settlements. Sea eagles used to lay eggs in Lóndrangar until the early 1900s. Falcon and merlin are rare. The area is a stopover for various migran birds that lay eggs further North, the most prevalent of which are turnstone.



brent goose and robin. Eiderduck is the most common species of duck found here. Large colonies of arctic tern nest in Arnarstapi, Rif and Öndverðarnes, with the colony at Rif being one of the largest in Europe. The arctic tern is the symbol of Snæfellsbær municipality, and is in some ways a charming bird, with its delicate but maiestic features It is, however, fiercely protective of its young and will attack those who come too close, pecking at their heads. The tern spends the winter months in the Southern Hemisphere, along the ice shelf of Antarctica. To enjoy the bright nights in its nesting period, the tern has developed a unique flight technique, enabling it to fly up to 40,000 kilometres per year.

#### )ther Animals

Walking along the coast, you can expect to see both grey seals and harbour seals, though there are no large colonies

around the national park. Pools on the beach contain various small creatures. such as cochlea, amphipods and crabs. Killer whales, minke whales and porpoises are commonly spotted around Snæfellsnes, and can be seen from the coast – so keep your eyes open! Large whales, such as sperm whales, keep further away from the coast. Foxes are quite common in the lava fields and along the coast, and mink keep to the coast where food is easily found. Field mice live the good life in the lava fields

#### Historv

The western part of Snæfellsnes does not get much mention in ancient manuscripts, but there are some accounts of stockfish being transported through the area. The best known Saga from these parts is Bárðar Saga Snæfellsáss, but it is considered rather too fanciful to count as a reliable historical source. Ruined farms dating back to the settlement era (9th to 10th century) are found in Forni-Saxhóll, Berutóftir and Írskubúðir. Near Gufuskálar, there are remains of many stonewalled shelters, believed to have been built some 500-700 years ago to store fish. If correct, these would be the oldest relics of a fishing industry to be found in the Nordic Countries. Advances in fishing around the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century were accompanied by a population growth in the area. In 1317 or 1318, a new church was





erected at Ingjaldshóll, on the site of an earlier church from 1200. At the time, it was the third largest church in the country, after Hólar and Skálholt, suggesting that the area was densely populated for at least a part of the year. Further churches were built in Einarslón and Saxhóll, and there was a small chapel in Öndverðarnes until the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century Archaeological evidence indicates that a number of locations along the Snæfellsnes coast were used as landing places at some point or other, but many of them were abandoned due to treacherous conditions, in spite of their proximity to excellent fishing grounds. Population in the area would have changed dramatically inside and outside the fishing season. The fishing station at Dritvík is the best-known fishing station in Snæfellsnes, having once been the largest in the country. In springtime, 40 to 60 ships would row from there, manned by 200 to 600 men. In the 19th

the National Museum of Iceland, but i is in the care of the Búðir parish. Búðir and Búðakirkia have a romantic air about them, and the place is popular for weddings

Búðir is an important site in terms of the history of trade and industry in Iceland, Evrbyggia Saga suggests it was a trading port in the early centuries after settlement. Around 3 km southwest of Búðir hotel is Frambúðir. Fishing boats rowed from here from early settlement times onwards, and for centuries, many land owners kept boats here. There are ruins of the fishermen's huts (lce: verbúdir) from which the place gets its name, as well as ruins of various other fishing-related structures, and old merchant buildings. Near the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, the trading centre was moved east across the estuary where it operated for around 130 years. The



and buried in three different parts on Laugarholt hill by Hellnar. This was to ensure that he wouldn't return from his grave.

#### Arnarstapi and Hellnar

The Saga of Bárður Snæfellsás takes place around Arnarstapi and Hellnar, and many of the place names in this area relate to the story. Bárður, who was half man and half troll, is said to have walked ashore at Djúpalón and taken a bath in Bárðarlaug pool. He built a farm at nearby Laugarbrekka where he lived with his daughters. who are said to have been "full-figured and sightly". Bárður's brother Þorkell lived in Arnarstapi with his two sons, Rauðfeldur and Sölvi. One day when the cousins were playing by the shore, Rauðfeldur pushed Bárður's oldest daughter Helga onto an iceberg

the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Few families now live in Arnarstapi all year round, but in the summer, the place is teeming with both birds and people. The many summerhouses in the area are occupied over the summer months, and a number of small fishing boats sail from the harbour. The harbour is eve-catching, surrounded by basalt columns, rifts and hollows. Landing conditions were improved in 1933 to accommodate motorboats, and there is excellent mooring for small boats. From the 1930s to the 1960s, pumice from Snæfellsjökull was processed at Jökulháls and shipped out from Arnarstapi. The pumice was shipped to Reykjavík and further afield and was used, among other things, for insulation. Just up from the harbour you can see the old pumice store but near the road over Jökulháls vou can see the wooden chutes that were

documenting how people lived off the natural resources through the ages. The exhibition appeals to your senses, and guests are encouraged to taste, smell and try. The visitor centre has something of interest to people of all ages.

the theme 'the fisherman and nature'

#### **Access and Services**

Services in the area are much improved since travellers were greeted by Axlar-Björn and ended up in Iglutjörn pond. Road number 574 will take you around the national park and to the surrounding nature reserves. The staff of the national park are ready to help you as best they can and answer all your questions. Guided walks and tours are scheduled, and guests are encouraged to find out what is on offer There are no camping grounds within the boundaries of the national park, but hikers and cyclists are allowed to pitch their tent for a single night. Arnarstapi has a camp site, and you will find hotels and restaurants in Búðir, Arnarstapi and Hellnar. The surrounding areas offer further options for accommodation and food. There are swimming pools in Ólafsvík, Lýsuhóll, Grundarfjörður and Stykkishólmur. The nearest supermarkets are in Hellissandur. Rif and Ólafsvík, and petrol can be bought in Hellissandur, Ólafsvík, Arnarstapi and Vegamót.



Coast between Arnarstapi and Hellnar

#### Dear Traveller

Everyone is free to walk around Snæfellsjökull national park and the surrounding nature reserves, but you are kindly asked to stay on marked paths where these are available. Driving and cycling is permitted on roads and marked tracks, and horse riding is permitted on designated riding trails Please contact the park wardens in advance if you intend to go around the national park on horseback. Please respect the nature of the area and leave it intact. Do not disturb vegetation, natural formations or wildlife. Do not light fires. Do not litter. Keep dogs and other pets on a leash, and clean up after them. The purpose of designating the area as a national park is to protect the land and enable more people

century, such isolated fishing stations were abandoned due to developments in fishing and fish processing. New technology and life-style changes led to the growth and flourishing of villages. Villages close to the national park in Snæfellsnes – Hellissandur, Rif and Ólafsvík – are old hubs of fishing and trading, and support thriving communities to this day.

#### Búðakirkja Church

Búðarkirkja church was erected in 1703 by Bent Lárusson, who was a merchant in Búðir. It rotted down but was rebuilt by Steinunn Sveinsdóttir in 1848. Legend has it that she did this following a request by Bent Lárusson in a dream. In 1984, the church was moved in one piece from the old graveyard onto its current foundations. The church was renovated to the form it was thought to have had in 1848. and was re-consecrated in 1987. The church is a listed building owned by

the most ferocious weather ever to be reported in Iceland. Violent storms combined with torrential rain, thunder and lightning and tempestuous seas. The surf charged as far as 1500 fathoms (approximately 2700 metres) inland and almost washed away Búðir village. After this, the trading place was moved back west over the estuary. In a census from 1703, approximately 100 people are said to have lived in Búðir, and for a long time, Búðir played a central role in the prosperity of some of the larger municipalities in Iceland, with people has some dark and menacing history. On the farm Öxl, located on the old national highway, lived a man called Axlar-Björn. He confessed to murdering 9 travellers who were passing by, but some believe the true number was the dead bodies in a pond at the edge of the Búðahraun lava called Iglutjörn. Axlar-Björn was executed in 1596

night of 8 January 1799 saw some of



The church at Búdir

coming from afar to trade. The area also closer to 18. It is thought that he placed and she drifted over to Greenland. While Helga was unharmed by this experience, Bárður was enraged. He pushed Rauðfeldur into Rauðfeldargjá canyon and Sölvi off Sölvahamar cliff and then walked into the glacier never to be seen again. Bárður is said to have kept his treasures in Bárðarkista, a coffin-shaped tuff mountain, and many believe that he watches over the area to this day. A stone sculpture of Bárður Snæfellsnás by Ragnar Kjartansson stands near the coast in Arnarstapi.

Arnarstapi was an important trading port, and was a large community by Icelandic standards, having circa 150 inhabitants at the beginning of



originally used to transport the pumice. Walking west along the coast from the harbour, you will see striking cliffs, gorges, rock formations and caves, many of them teeming with bird life.

Hellnar was, for centuries, home to one of the biggest fishing stations in Snæfellsnes. At the beginning of the 18th century, approximately 200 people lived at Hellnar in turf houses and fishermen's huts, and the site is rich in archaeological remains. Boats used to row from a beautiful beach under Gróuhóll hill. East of the bay, a long rock called Valasnös stretches out into the sea. It contains one of the most peculiar caves found in Iceland. In the rocks up from the beach, you will find Sauðahellir (English: sheep cave), an old cave in which sheep were kept, open in both ends. Hellnakirkia church was erected in 1945 in a beautiful spot that has had a church since 1883.

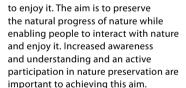
## Visitor Centre

The national park's visitor centre is located in Hellnar. It opened in 2004, in renovated sheep houses. The visitor centre is open daily from 10:00 to 18:00 during the summer months, and by arrangement at other times of year. At the visitor centre, you can acquire information about the national park from the rangers The centre has an exhibition with

the park's website.

### **Hiking Routes**

Snæfellsjökull national park offers a wide variety of hiking routes of all levels of difficulty. Some of them are staked or marked, and most of them are easy to navigate. There is not much drinking water in the national park, so make sure you take some water with you. Further information about hiking routes is available in a hiking brochure that you will find in visitor centre as well as on



Please respect the rules of conduct and help us make nature enjoyable for all



From the visitor centre