

# Útikennslunámskeið í Ásbyrgi

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# OUTDOOR TEACHING COURSE IN ÁSBYRGI

## INTRODUCTION

In autumn 2007, the authors of this document became aware of a project under the auspices of NEED, the Northern Environmental Education Development. The project in question follows a number of set themes: elements of geology, landscape, geological materials in society and their sustainable use, natural hazards and climate change. A case may be made that the Outdoor Teaching Course in Ásbyrgi has links with each one of NEED's themes, especially elements of geology and landscape.

The course is aimed at teachers working in early secondary education up to university entrance level. It may also be suitable for park wardens and others involved in public education outdoors.

The course's purpose is to introduce participants to the principles of outdoor teaching and give them practical skills in teaching elements of geology. The objective is to use experiential methods and problem solving along an environmental trail as starting points, and then tie the project to the trail as necessary.

Aðalsteinn Örn Snæþórsson, a staff member of the Northeast Iceland Nature Centre, and Sigrún Þórólfsdóttir, a teacher from Borgarhólsskóli School in the town of Húsavík, were responsible for the development and realisation of this project.

## STRUCTURE

Ásbyrgi was chosen because of its suitability. It is part of the northern section of the Vatnajökull National Park. The course was scheduled to extend over two days, with participants camping on a site in the area after a long working day.

Most of the course was structured in a manner that emphasised experiential learning. The first day was organised as though a group of secondary school pupils were being taken along the environmental trail through Ásbyrgi, ending at an outdoor kitchen. The group set off with a 28-part project which allowed for the omission of some parts if there was not enough time. The second day was used for further reading, ideas and assessment.

An existing path through Ásbyrgi can be followed and information booklets can be used to some extent. There are cooking areas which may be used along the trail, as well as campsites and toilet facilities.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The hike was set up as an environmental trail with a series of problems, games and tasks, all of which aimed to put participants in the best possible contact with the environment and at the same time improve their understanding of how Ásbyrgi and its surroundings were formed. Participants received information in the form of narrations and discussions, or on posters. They were therefore intensely involved over the entire route. 9 km and 27 km assignments

The hikers set off in the morning from the campsite in Ásbyrgi. They followed the path alongside Eyjan and onwards to Botn and the pond named Botnstjörn before turning along the east wall of Ásbyrgi to return to the campsite, ending at the outdoor kitchen late in the evening. The hikers picked wild herbs and mushrooms that they cooked later.

They were shown various ways of using fire in teaching, and how best to approach lighting a fire, keeping it alight and putting out a fire. Other important safety issues included how to organise a group of children gathered around a fire.

The next day was spent on further reading and a review of the course. The instructors tried to pass on to the participants as many ideas about outdoor teaching as they could, as they worked in forest clearings on a range of objects that could be made outdoors, played games and posed puzzles. The instructors then went briefly over material that could be used to obtain ideas for



outdoor teaching. This included books, of which there were some examples at hand, and websites.

At the end of the course, the participants sat down and reviewed the course. They went over all that had happened and were asked to assess which parts of the course had been memorable, as well as what material they might be able to use in their teaching.

## ASSESSMENT

All of the participants received a checklist with 125 objectives from the national curriculum and were asked to mark the objectives they believed had been fulfilled on the course. All 27 objectives that we set out to achieve were met satisfactorily, as a majority of the participants selected each of them. The environmental trail was popular among those who were physically fit, although it was too long for some. However, the participants were happy at the end of the course, saying that they had learnt much that they could use in their own teaching.

They adjudged all of the tasks to be interesting. What stood out were the games that touched upon controlling the group during such a hike, and how the history of Ásbyrgi and various topics connected to geology were interwoven along the way. The outdoor kitchen was very popular, not least because only simple equipment was needed to make it interesting and fun.