



Snæfellsjökull National Park and Nearby Protected Areas



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.

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

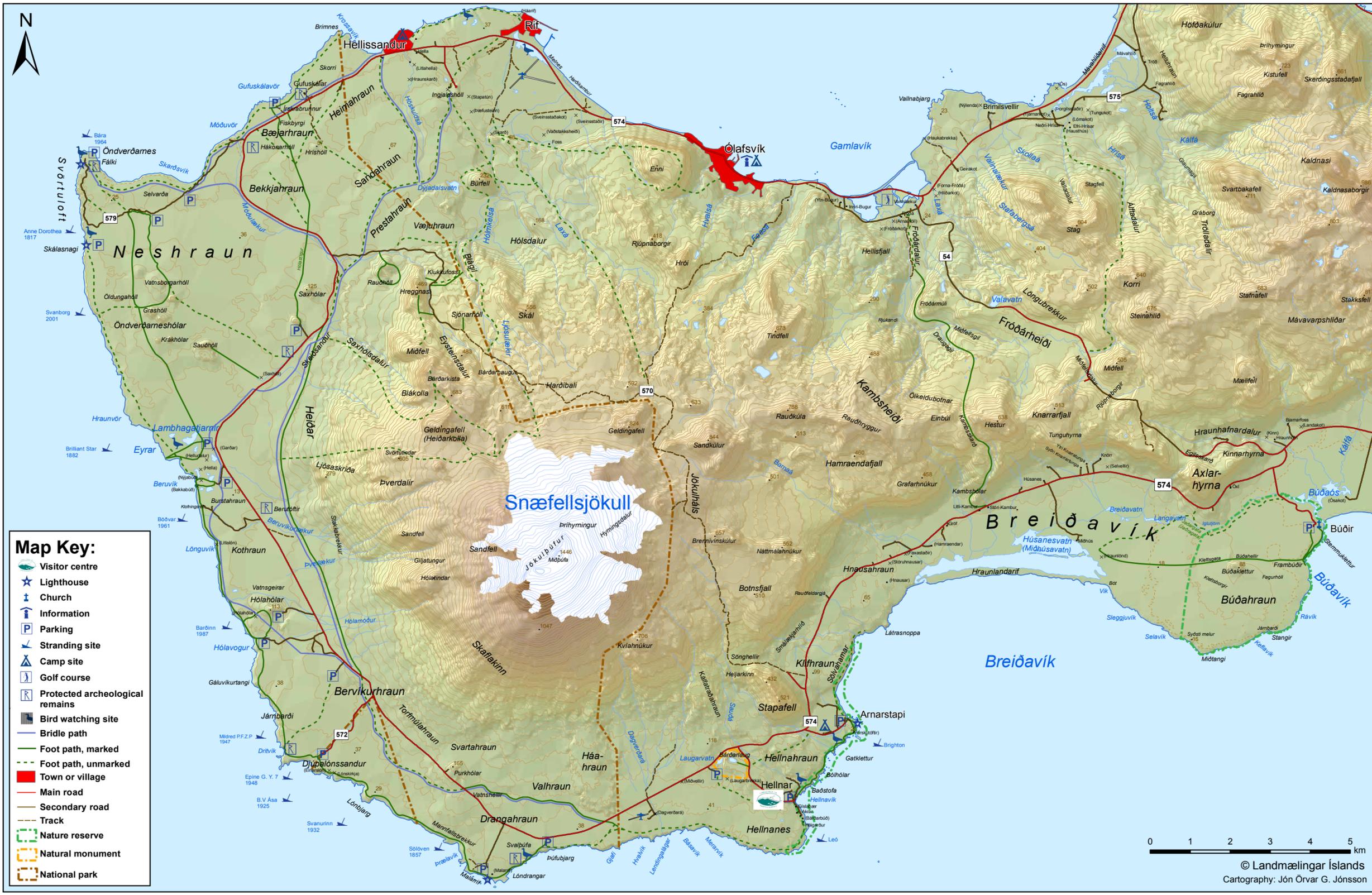
The Snæfellsnes peninsula coast line is very varied. Rocky coasts alternate with black sand beaches, light sand beaches and precipitous sea cliffs that team with sea birds in the nesting season. The lowland within the national park is mostly lava that has flowed from Snæfellsjökull and from smaller

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 Eysteinsdalur



Map Key:

- Visitor centre
- Lighthouse
- Church
- Information
- Parking
- Stranding site
- Camp site
- Golf course
- Protected archeological remains
- Bird watching site
- Bridle path
- Foot path, marked
- Foot path, unmarked
- Town or village
- Main road
- Secondary road
- Track
- Nature reserve
- Natural monument
- National park

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY OF ICELAND

Sudurlandsbraut 24 · 108 Reykjavík
 Tel: +354 591 2000 · Fax: +354 591 2020
 Direct line +354 436 6888 or 436 6860
 snæfellsjokull@ust.is www.umhverfisstofnun.is

Text: Guðbjörg Gunnarsdóttir and Ragnhildur Sigurðardóttir, Snæfellsjökull national park.
 Photographs: Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson, Gunnar Óli Sigmarsson, Snævarr Gudmundsson,
 Guðbjörg Gunnarsdóttir and Linda Björk Hallgrímssdóttir.
 Map made by Jón Örvar Geirsson Jónsson
 in accordance with data from the National Land Survey of Iceland
 Design: Ingi Rafn Ólafsson Printing: Guðjón Ó. printing publishing number: UST-2009-06



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 Þverfossar, falling into the same pool.

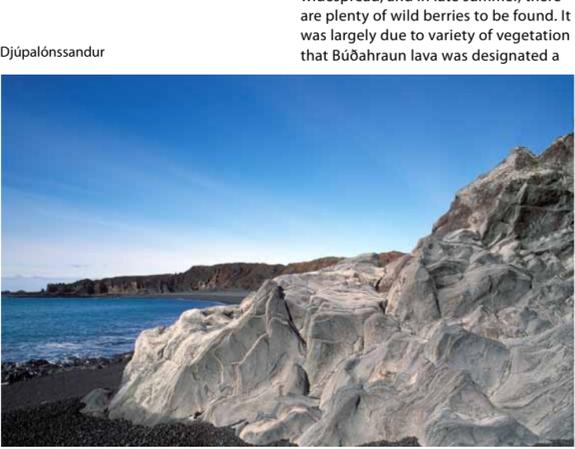
Geology

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



Lónrangar

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.



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 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 Þverfossar, falling into the same pool. Travellers are strongly

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

A large proportion of the national park is made up of volcanic tuff, formed by eruptions under the glacier or under the sea.

Vegetation

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



Ferns

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. Meadowswets, 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.

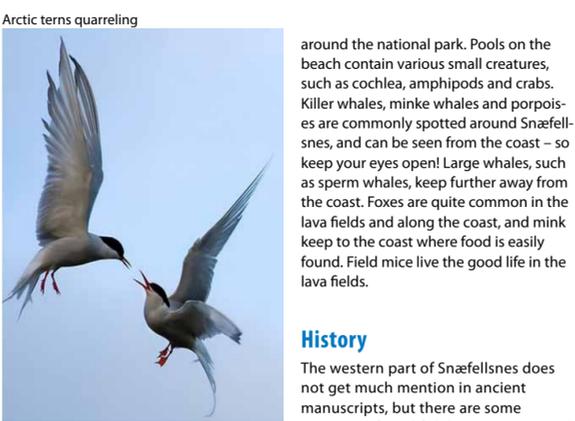
Birds

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 shag. 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, you 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

and is in some ways a charming bird, with its delicate but majestic 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.



Kittiwakes



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.

History

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 13th century were accompanied by a population growth in the area. In 1317 or 1318, a new church was

The church at Búðir

The church at Búðir



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 16th 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

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 – Helli ssandur, Rif and Ólafsvík – are old hubs of fishing and trading, and support thriving communities to this day.

Búðarkirkja Church

Búðarkirkja church was erected in 1703 by Bent Lárússon, 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 Lárússon 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 church at Búðir

The church at Búðir



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 Sölví. One day when the cousins were playing by the shore, Rauðfeldur pushed Bárður's oldest daughter Helga onto an iceberg

and she drifted over to Greenland. While Helga was unharmed by this experience, Bárður was enraged. He pushed Rauðfeldur into Rauðfeldargjá canyon and Sölví 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



From the visitor centre

From the visitor centre

the theme 'the fisherman and nature', 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.

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, Lýshóll, Grundarfjörður and Stykkishólmur. The nearest supermarkets are in Helli ssandur, Rif and Ólafsvík, and petrol can be bought in Helli ssandur, Ólafsvík, Arnarstapi and Vegamót.

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

to enjoy it. The aim is to preserve the natural progress of nature while enabling people to interact with nature and enjoy it. Increased awareness and understanding and an active participation in nature preservation are important to achieving this aim.

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

to enjoy it. The aim is to preserve the natural progress of nature while enabling people to interact with nature and enjoy it. Increased awareness and understanding and an active participation in nature preservation are important to achieving this aim.



From the visitor centre

From the visitor centre



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

to enjoy it. The aim is to preserve the natural progress of nature while enabling people to interact with nature and enjoy it. Increased awareness and understanding and an active participation in nature preservation are important to achieving this aim.

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

to enjoy it. The aim is to preserve the natural progress of nature while enabling people to interact with nature and enjoy it. Increased awareness and understanding and an active participation in nature preservation are important to achieving this aim.