

From the Editor

W. D. (Bill) Valgardson

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Victoria Icelanders must lead the most boring lives in Canada. No marriages, no births, no deaths, no promotions, no engagements, no new businesses being started, no visiting relatives. The way to keep a community together is to stay current with people's lives. I know that Icelandic Canadians have a terrible fear of "bragging". Don't worry. You send me the information and I'll brag for you. I'm half Irish. That part has no problem bragging. That's the advantage of being of mixed blood.

INL Convention Gimli 2009

They sent us into the wilderness of New Iceland on three buses. They tested our mettle. First, though, they fed us a fine breakfast at Misty Lake. Then they showed us historic spots on the old pioneer highway and Hecla. At Riverton the ladies fed us thousands of ribbon sandwiches and a multitude of desserts. Sated, we waddled out only to discover one of our buses on fire.

In true pioneer spirit people from the burning bus walked to the Riverton Park. A handy van was commandeered and with some passengers in the aisles of the larger buses, we skipped Geysir and Vidir and headed straight for the outdoor museum at Arborg. We arrived to a bitter wind and warm hearted people but soon we realized one bus was missing. Back went our bus to rescue the people on bus two. Its motor had broken down. Fortunately, the Arborg heritage group had lots of hot coffee and lots of sweets to keep us busy. Between the remaining bus, the handy van, local people and a second run by our bus everyone arrived back in time for the banquet.

Like true pioneers in New Iceland, not one person complained. We all took it in stride and treated it as an adventure we'd get to talk about for years.

Almanak 2009

Sept 25	AGM	5 pm (see insert)
Oct 25	Movie/Social	2 pm
Nov 21	Craft Fair	10 am – 4 pm
Dec 6	Christmas Party	1 pm

Please note the AGM will not be held at Norway House

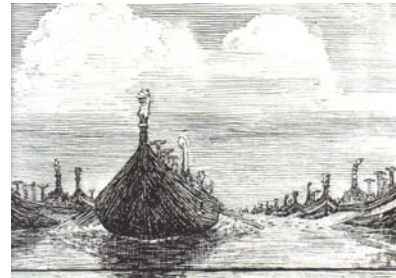


Illustration by Erik Werenskiold.

The banquet food was good. The speeches short. The next day the presentations were well received. I learned facts about New Iceland that I'd never heard before. For example, did you know that the minister that married the couple from a boat in Netley Creek was aboriginal?

Day three I left to Wayne. He was our official representative. That is until three thirty when I joined the Logberg Heimskringla meeting since I was being added to the board. Now that I'm on the board, I have one message. Buy a subscription to LH. If you have a relative or friend in Iceland who now can't afford a subscription, buy one for him or her. It's a good paper. It keeps us in touch. It's the link that keeps us aware of each other.

If you don't have a subscription to LH, you can email me or phone me with your name and email address and I'll arrange a free three month on-line subscription. It's a great deal.

It was a good convention. I enjoyed it immensely. Well done, Gimli.



Haraldur Bessason

Some people fill a bigger space than others. Haraldur Bessason was like that. After meeting him, you didn't forget him.

My wife and I took a course from him in 1962. It was a course on the sagas in English. I saw him off and on after that, most often at Icelandic Celebration. He promoted the Icelandic Department and served the Icelandic community. He came to Victoria as a Beck lecturer. We were proud to have him here. He was such an essential part of the Icelandic Canadian community, involved in everything, that when I think now of his not being here, I see a gaping hole. He was part of our identity. His leaving means we'll all have to work a little harder at preserving our community.



Photo by Trish Baer

Atli Ásmundsson's Visit

Atli, Iceland's consul general in Manitoba, and his wife Þrúður Helgadóttir visited Victoria on June 22 and were entertained by 15 members of the club at Bill Valgardsson's home. After coffee and cake, Atli spoke about the economic situation in Iceland and the Núna (now) festival and concept. Regarding the

economic situation Atli pointed out that Iceland is in an unprecedented situation, but that looking to the future the country is in a good position to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. Iceland's infrastructure of schools, universities, geothermal technology and road system carries no debt, and the country has abundant resources in terms of renewable energy and water, as well as a well managed fishery. And despite the collapse of Iceland's banking system, people's pensions are secure, though some of their value has been lost.

Icelandic culture is vibrant and the Núna (now) concept celebrates the cultural connection between Iceland and Canada. Founded three years ago, Núna (now) is currently run by a committee of Manitoba-based artists and publishers. The festival in April-May 2009 was a great success, with events in Manitoba, Calgary and Toronto. Atli hopes that it will continue to expand to other Canadian cities.

For further information on Núna (now) please visit

<http://www.nunanow.com/>

By Tom Benjamin



Photo by Beverley Dondale

June 17 Potluck

On June 17, a crowd of twenty-six people gathered to honour Iceland's Independence. The Icelanders of Victoria held their annual pot luck at Runa and Vince Pleshak's spread in Metchosin. Not only is the property particularly beautiful with its flowers, gardens and birds but the Pleshaks also raise Icelandic horses so it seems an appropriate place to hold an Independence Day party. The weather was cool but the friendships warm. Our president, Tom Benjamin, gave a toast to Iceland.

Kinsella article from the Vancouver Sun

In a shameless case of self promotion, I'm including part of an article published in the Vancouver Sun when W. P. Kinsella received the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award.

Author W. P. Kinsella has revealed the secret that made him the success that he is today: Get to the point and stop when you are done.

"The man who turned my career around was Victoria author W. D. Valgardson, "Kinsella told The Sun

A struggling graduate of UVic's creative writing program in 1975, Kinsella turned to his mentor when he could not sell his stories.

Valgardson read his work and ripped off the first page and the last page-and-a-half and handed Kinsella's manuscript back to him.

"He said, 'Look, you warm up for a page before you start your story and you wind down for a page and a half after you finish it,'" Kinsella recalled. "Don't do that."

Kinsella stopped doing that and has sold nearly every word he has written since.

"Without Bill Valgardson, I would be a retired taxi cab driver with 33 unpublished manuscripts under his bed," he laughed.

Rumours and Reality: Gaels in Greenland and America in the Viking Age"

A Richard and Margaret Beck Lecture by Professor Bo Almqvist

January 26, 2009, University of Victoria

Article by John Tucker.

Norse men and women settled Greenland from Iceland and sailed on expeditions to Vínland around the year 1000. We know this is true because we have the archeological sites, including L'Anse aux Meadows, to prove it. But the sagas in which Icelanders recorded these remarkable achievements contain much that is borrowed and fictional. More particularly, as Professor Bo Almqvist argued in a recent Beck lecture at the University of Victoria, the borrowing is often from Irish or Scottish sources.

Consider the story of Leif, the son of Erik the Red. According the saga named after his father, on a trip back to Greenland from Norway he was driven ashore on the Hebrides where he had a relationship with a Hebridean woman of magical powers named

Thorgunna, to whom he presented a Greenland mantle of homespun cloth and a belt of walrus ivory and a ring. When he refuses to take her home with him, she predicts that her unborn child, whom she mysteriously knows to be a boy, will follow him to Greenland—which he does. This story seems to be a condensed version of the story of the Irish hero Cú Chulainn and the begetting of his son Conla.

On that trip Leif had been returning from a visit to the Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason, a fanatically Christian king who in his earlier years had pillaged the Gaelic world, where he found such treasures as an Irish wolfhound that understood human speech. Among the gifts that Olaf gave Leif were two extraordinary runners who are described as Scots, a man and a woman named Haki and Hekja. These names are Norse, meaning "hook" and "eye," but Almqvist admitted that he liked to think their real names were Cró and Crúca, which would be the Irish equivalents.

The saga writer takes care to describe and name their clothing, which consists entirely of a sort of poncho, called a *bjafal* in one manuscript and a *kjafal* in another. Though neither word occurs elsewhere in Old Icelandic, the second seems preferable because it corresponds to the Irish word *cabhail* whose meanings include "shirt, coat, bodice." Clearly these two were professional runners, a known Celtic phenomenon. Interestingly, according to P.W. Joyce, "Runners, i.e. messengers or couriers, were always kept in the king's or chief's employment: and not infrequently we find women employed in this office."

Once in Vínland these runners are sent out to explore the land and come back three days later with grapes and wild wheat. Perhaps, as Almqvist speculates, King Olaf gave the runners to Leif as way of staking a sort of land-claim, for one of the rites of asserting land ownership in *Landnámabók* involves running around the borders of a tract of land within a set period of time. The faster the runner, the more the land. And these were, in a sense, the king's runners.

While in Vínland the Norsemen capture a couple of *Skrælings*, *Native Americans*, whom they teach to speak Norse. From them they learn of a country beyond the Skräling land where the people dress in white clothing, utter loud cries and carry poles with patches of cloth attached. The Norsemen think they recognize the land being described, namely

Hvítramannaland, White Man’s land. But this and other such mythical mid-Atlantic lands entered the Icelandic world-view from Irish sources.

Apart from all these Irish stories, a number of the historical people who took part in the initial expeditions were of Irish or Scottish descent, which is not surprising since they came from a part of Iceland with unusually strong Gaelic connections—the valley of Breiðafjörður and the promontory of Snæfellsnes. Thus although Erik the Red, was a Norwegian, his wife Thjodhild was said to be the granddaughter of an Irish woman named Rafarta (Irish *robhartach*, Raferty) and Kjarval Írakongr (the Irish King Cearbhall). And the nickname karlsefni, meaning “the making of a man,” which attaches to Þorfinnr, the central character in the two Vínland Sagas, seems to be based on an Irish model.

With all these Celtic connections, it’s not surprising that the stories of the settlements should include so many Gaelic elements. As Almqvist, concluded, these tales provide endless food for thought and pleasure to all those who study and read them. William Butler Yeats’s words about the Oisín and the other Fenians of yore can be applied also to the Vínland traditions: “But the tale, though words be lighter than air, will live and grow old like the wandering moon.”

**From Mud News South Island Mountain Bike Society
v.17.no.3.May-June200**

Richard Baer taught someone to mountain bike – not just anyone, but a 70-year old friend. “If you were to teach someone 70 years old to mountain bike, how would you do it? A friend wants to write a short novel about mountain biking for teenagers, and being from the realist school, he had to experience it for himself. Not having been on a bike in 40 years, he expected the learning curve to be steep.

So, one recent Sunday at Hartland, I lent him my full suspension and I took the hardtail. The dually was heavier but more comfortable. I should have given him more advice on clothing. His blue jeans were a bit loose and his leather jacket soon produced overheating. But it came in handy when the inevitable falls took him into the blackberry bushes by the TTA. Racer boy jerseys lose to blackberry thorns every time. Once we got going, I realized the first thing he needed to know was how to feather the brakes. As we

all know, a handful of disk brake introduces our faces to the dirt and rudely too. He learned that quite well and remained in control on the downhill. We stayed on the Regional Trail for an hour or so and then back to the car, all in one piece.

He enjoyed it a lot once the falling stopped and told me he thought he had been in reasonable shape until he tried this. He walks, splits lots of wood, is quite an active 70-year old, but the cardiovascular demands of Hartland were another league of fitness all together. He’s keen to try again; we’ll be better prepared this time. So all you less than 70-years olds can take comfort in the knowledge that your CV system is already tuned to keep you biking for decades to come.”

-Richard Baer

Editor’s note: That 70 year old was me.

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<http://www.victoria.tc.ca/Community/Icelanders> (case sensitive).

