



Environment And Food Agency



# SKAFTAFELL NATIONAL PARK

## THE NATIONAL PARK

The Skaftafell National Park was founded on September 15th, 1967, at which time it covered an area of 500 km<sup>2</sup>. It was enlarged on July 27th, 1984, and now encompasses 1700 km<sup>2</sup>. The National Park Superintendent is responsible for the daily management of the park under authorisation of the Environment and food agency. Wardens are on duty in the park along with the superintendent. Their role is to receive visitors and provide them with information and instructions concerning the park, and to see that the rules of conduct for the area are observed. Visitors are encouraged to direct any enquiries to the superintendent and wardens.



Birch

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Great Skua.

## LANDSCAPE AND NATURE

The landscape has been shaped by glacial action and water erosion. The valley glaciers Skeiðarárjökull, Morsárjökull and Skaftafellsjökull are prominent features in this landscape., and the rivers, Skeiðará, Morsá and Skaftafellsá emerge from them. Skeiðará is known for great floods (jökulhlaup) caused by volcanic activity under the ice in the Grímsvötn area.

The volcano Öræfajökull erupted in 1362, producing the greatest tephra fall in recorded history in Iceland. As a result, Litla Hérað (the Little District) was temporarily completely abandoned, after which the area was given the name Öræfi, meaning "wasteland". Öræfajökull erupted a second time in 1727.

The Skaftafell area enjoys a better climate than many other places in Iceland. It is sometimes much warmer there than in the neighbouring districts, because it is sheltered by Öræfajökull. Vegetation in Skaftafell is quite varied. The mountain slopes are covered with birch, in some places interspersed with rowan trees. The birch in the wood Bæjarstaðaskógur is taller than in most other places in the country. Harebell, yellow saxifrage and pyramidal saxifrage, the most characteristic plants of East Iceland, are common in Skaftafell. Vegetation is rapidly gaining ground after grazing was prohibited in the national park, and species such as wild angelica, sea pea and arctic riverbeauty, which are hardly ever seen on pasture land, are common here. Birch on the slopes are increasing. Insect life in Skaftafell is much more varied than in other areas of the country, and in mid-summer, large numbers of butterflies (especially the species *Perizoma blandiata*) can be seen there. There is considerable bird life on the wooded slopes, the redwing, common snipe, meadow pipit, and wren being the most common species. Skeiðarársandur is also one of the most important breeding areas for the great skua in the North Atlantic. The only wild mammals are Fox and field mice.



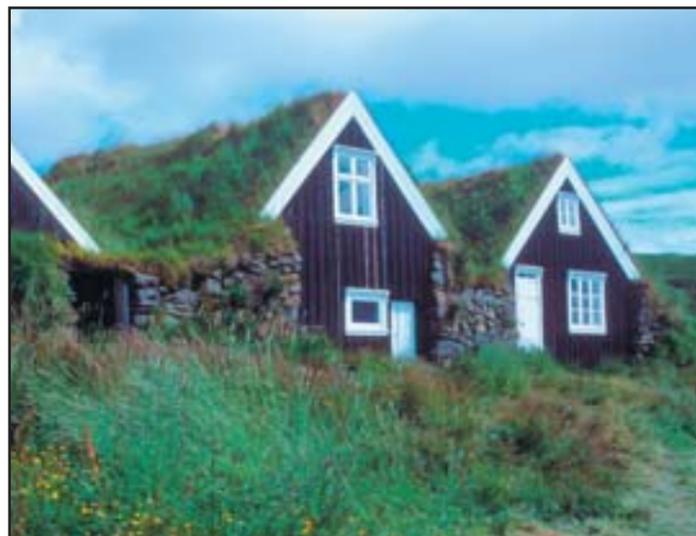
Harebell.

## HISTORY OF SETTLEMENT

Skaftafell was a manor farm and a local assembly site in the Middle Ages. The Church acquired the farm very early on and later the estate became the Kings Property. Originally the farm buildings were positioned at the far end of the campsite, in the area called Gömlutún or "Old Fields". The farm ruins are still discernable. With the encroachment of the river Skeiðará acres and fields disappeared under layers of sand and gravel and during the years between 1830-1850, the farm was relocated about 100 metres higher up on the hillside.



Old Farm Sel indoors.



Old Farm Sel.



Campsite.

## CAMPING IN THE NATIONAL PARK

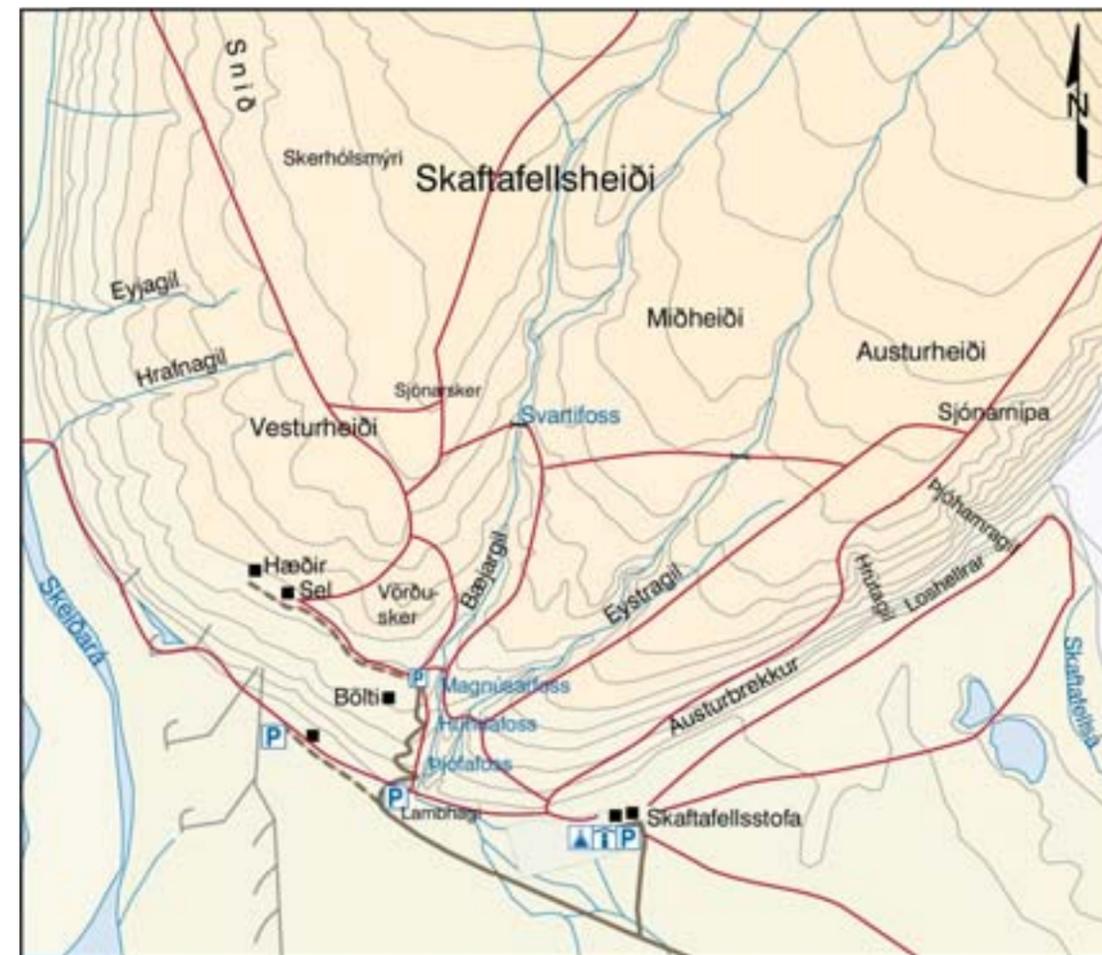
There is a spacious campsite with a special area for caravans and motor homes. Visitors can camp here for a moderate fee. They must notify the park superintendent of their arrival and observe his instructions regarding their stay. Camping or sleeping in vehicles outside the camp-site is prohibited without special permission from the park superintendent. There are no roads in the national park except for the tracks leading up to the farms. There is a carpark near the entrance of the campsite and the trails through the national park start there. Visitors are free to go anywhere in the national park but are advised to follow the marked trails.



Yellow Mountain Saxifrage.



Pyramidal Saxifrage.



## VISITOR CENTRE

The Visitor Centre includes an extensive exhibition on the nature and history of Skaftafell, an information desk, a campsite reception and a small shop for tourists. A telephone booth, mailbox and vending machine are located outside. Stamps can be purchased in the shop.

## PLEASE KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND:

Avoid making noise on the camp-site between 11 :00 p.m. and 7.00 a.m.  
Protect vegetation on the camp-site. Do not pour hot water on the ground or scorch vegetation with cooking equipment.  
Damage to vegetation, such as breaking branches or uprooting plants, is prohibited, as is disturbing animal life, tampering with basalt and other geological formations or building cairns.  
Littering and burying rubbish in the national park is prohibited.

## PROGRAMME AND OTHER INFORMATION

Skaftafellsstofa is an information center where visitors get answers to questions about the nature of Skaftafell, hiking possibilities, events in the Park and possible excursions and recreation nearby. A permanent exhibition in Skaftafellsstofa informs about the fascinating interplay of natural and human history in Skaftafell through the ages. An impressive video show enables you to witness the Skeiðarárhlaup of 1996.

Maps available from the Iceland Geodetic Survey: General map of Southeast Iceland, scale 1:250.000, sheet 9 which shows the area from Lón to Skeiðarársandur, Öræfajökull, 1:100.000, sheet 87, and a special map of Skaftafell 1:100.000 which shows most of the national park, along with Öræfajökull and Breiðamerkursandur. On the reverse side of the Skaftafell map is a map of the national park between Skaftafellsjökull and Skeiðarárjökull, 1:25.000.



Icelandic Fox.

### SCENIC SPOTS

N.B. The time given includes the walk back to visitor center.

#### LAMBHAGI 1/2hrs.

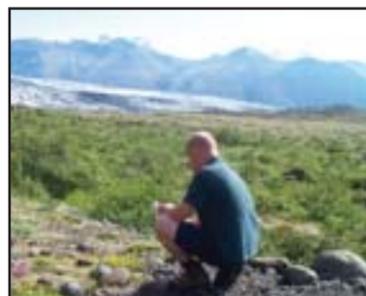
Towards the end of 1950, the residents of the farm Bölti planted aspen and pine trees here, which are now some of the highest examples of these species in Iceland.



### SKAFTAFELLSJÖKULL

#### 1 hrs.

Skaftafellsjökull is a valley glacier which descends east of the tongue of land called Skaftafellstunga.



### KRISTÍNARTINDAR

#### 7 hrs.

This mountain has two peaks, 979 and 1125 m a.s.l. People usually climb the higher of the two. Once can ascend from the cleft between the two peaks, coming from the south.



### BÆJARSTADASKÓGUR

#### 5 1/2-6 1/2hrs.

This is the tallest birch wood in the country, but it does not cover a large area. It is believed that the farm Jökulfell, mentioned in land registers from the 14th century, was located here.



### SVARTIFOSS 1 1/2hrs.

The unusually regular basalt columns were formed when a layer of molten lava cooled gradually down and contracted. The water has since then broken its way through the lava crust and revealed the basalt columns which provide the waterfall with its unique backdrop.



### HUNDAFOSS 1 hr.

Travellers riding to the farms used to be used to ford the river near the edge of this waterfall. When the water was high, dogs were known to be washed over the edge; hence the name "Dogs' Fall". There are several other beautiful cascades in the gorge.



### MORSÁRJÖKULL 6- 7 hrs.

Morsárjökull tumbles down steep cliffs, and even from a considerable distance one can often hear the rumbling and cracking of ice plunging over sheer rock faces.

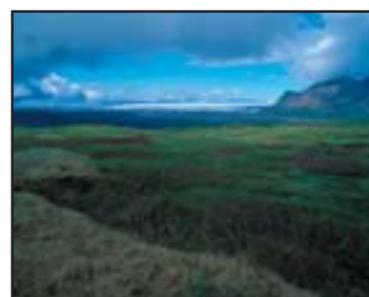


### KJÓS 10-12hrs.

In the valley of the Kjós area, magnificent colours can be seen on the sides of the mountains, which reach a height of about 1000 m. On the northern edge of Kjós is the peak Pumall, which means "thumb".

### SEL 1 1/2 hrs

The present farmhouse dates from the 1920's. Sel was abandoned in 1946, and is now in the custody of the National Museum, as are the barns located below the road.



### SJÓNARSKER 2 hrs.

A panorama dial is located here, and there are good views of the magnificent mountains, the vast sands and the sea.



Note! The trails into the Kjós area, the Skaftafell mountains (Skaftafellsfjöll), the outlet of Skeiðará and to the top of Kristínartindar are not marked!