



Deepening Our Roots

A periodic newsletter for Icelandic Roots members

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Issue 1

The Meaning of Nature and Geographic Names in Icelandic

Welcome to the first issue of Deepening Our Roots, a communique designed especially for our paying members. We consider you our partner in this work and hope these periodic communiques will increase your knowledge and strengthen the ties that make us stronger together. Currently, we are blessed to have 400+ members, like you, with access rights to the Icelandic Roots genealogy database.

Here we'll cover a wide range of topics that can open new learning opportunities for both our Icelandic and North American members. This first issue, however, is aimed primarily at those who are not native Icelandic speakers and will provide a bit of an Icelandic lesson that will help to develop a deeper appreciation for Icelandic place names.

Icelandic is a complex and beautiful language. Many Icelandic words are compound words consisting of smaller words or concepts combined together – an Icelandic language mash-up if you will. This is especially true for place names. Do you recall the 2010 eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull? News broadcasters around the world were tongue-tangled pronouncing that word, but when you recognize it as a compound word and break it into its three component parts, it's both easier to pronounce and more meaningful.

On the next page is a list of some common Icelandic words used in geographic place names. Using this guide, can you see how Eyjafjallajökull is the combination of Islands – Mountain – Glacier? This is likely a reference to the fact that from the glacier on this mountain, one has a good view of the islands off the southern coast of Iceland called Vestmannaeyjar, or the mountain glacier seen from the islands of Vestmannaeyjar.

If you are looking at something in Iceland that has the letter á at the end of the word, what geographic water feature are you likely looking at? If a small family farm is called Hlíðarkot, where might it be located? Or what would you find at Holtskirkja and where would it likely sit?

One of the benefits of being an Icelandic Roots member is that you have a solid team of genealogists, map experts, and linguists available to you. Our skill level with Icelandic ranges from basic to native speakers. Deepening your command of the language and geography will increase your effectiveness doing your own research. When we combine the efforts of our volunteer team and our member partners like you, we can solve amazing mysteries, reconnect lost families and enhance the stories of the lives of the 645,000+ people within the ever-growing IR database.

We hope this learning aid helps deepen your understanding and appreciation of place names in Iceland.



Icelandic Roots is an all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All charitable work, including genealogy, Icelandic culture and community support, Snorri scholarships and Icelandic language scholarships are supported by memberships and donations. Donations are both *welcomed and appreciated*. To give or join, please visit IcelandicRoots.com.
Thank You - Takk Fyrir

- *alda* = hilly ridge (plural: *öldur*)
- *á* = river
- *ás* = small hill, ridge
- *bær* = farm, township
- *bakki* = river bank
- *bjarg* = cliff, rock
- *borg* = city, crag
- *botn* = bottom, head of valley or fjord
- *brekka* = slope
- *brú* = bridge
- *bunga* = rounded peak
- *dalur* = valley
- *djúp* = long inlet, deep
- *drag* = watercourse (plural: *drög*)
- *drangur* = isolated column of rock
- *dyngja* = dome
- *eiði* = isthmus
- *ey* = island (plural: *eyjar*)
- *eyri* = sandspit, delta
- *fell* = mountain, hill
- *fjall* = mountain (plural: *fjöll*)
- *fjörður* = fjord, broad inlet, valley (plural: *firðir*)
- *fljót* = large river
- *foss* = waterfall
- *gata* / *götu* = path, road, street
- *gígur* = crater
- *gil* = gorge, ravine
- *gjá* = chasm, fissure
- *grunn* = shoal, shallow
- *háls* = ridge, isthmus
- *hamar* = crag
- *heiði* = heath, moor
- *hlíð* = mountain side
- *hnjúkur* / *hnúkur* = peak
- *höfði* = promontory
- *höfn* = harbour
- *hóll* = rounded hill (plural: *hólar*)
- *hólmur* = islet
- *holt* = stony hill
- *hraun* = lava field, lava
- *hryggur* = ridge
- *hver* = hot spring
- *hvoll* = hill

- *jökull* = glacier
- *jökulsá* = glacial river
- *kirkja* = church
- *klettur* = rock, cliff
- *kot* = small farm
- *kvísl* = river, branch of river
- *lækur* = brook
- *laug* = warm spring, bath
- *lón* = lagoon
- *melur* = gravel, barren plain
- *múli* = headland, spur
- *mynni* = mouth
- *mýri* = swamp
- *mörk* = forest, woods
- *nes* = headland, spur
- *núpur* = spur, peak
- *oddi* = point, tongue of land
- *öræfi* = desert, wilderness, uplands
- *ós* = estuary
- *reykur* = smoke, steam
- *rif* = reef
- *sandur* = sand(s)
- *skagi* = peninsula
- *skarð* = mountain pass
- *sker* = skerry
- *skógur* = wood, shrubland
- *slétta* = plain
- *staður* = place, parsonage (plural: *staðir*)
- *stapi* = bluff, crag
- *stræti* = street, road
- *strönd* = beach, seashore, coast
- *súlur* = (mountain) peaks
- *tangi* = narrow peninsula
- *tindur* = summit
- *tjörn* = small lake, pond
- *tunga* = tongue (of land)
- *vað* = ford (plural: *vöð*)
- *varða* = cairn (plural: *vörður*)
- *vatn* = lake, water (plural: *vötn*)
- *vegur* = road, track
- *ver* = grassy spot
- *vík* = inlet, small bay
- *vogur* = inlet, creek
- *völlur* = plain (plural: *vellir*)