



The Big 4 – Special upskilling programme



Successful moss transplantation exercise at the habitat restoration seminar in Eldhraun

ELDHRAUN
SKAFTÁRHREPPUR

REYKIR
ÖLFUSI

ICELAND

The need for training among those who do the practical work

New constructions such as footpaths at tourist sites in Iceland are mainly designed by landscape architects and engineers and constructed by contractors and machine workers. On the other hand, most additions, smaller work and maintenance in conservation areas and national parks are in the hands of rangers and volunteers. Then, caretaking of sites outside protected areas, tourist sites and recreational sites are under the responsibility of municipalities.

Due to increased tourism in Iceland, as well as increased various recreational activities among locals, the strain on upland paths has also increased, followed by increased path erosion in many places. Among some rangers there is experience and knowledge on path work, but this is a new and growing task for contractors, and a totally new challenge for most of the municipalities who generally suffer from lack of capacity to deal with the problem. And while most would probably say that the government does not take sufficient responsibility for the problem, it is spending high sums of money on the issue. So, to guarantee responsible spending of

official funding and quality of the work the need for upskilling is very urgent.

In collaboration with the AUI (Agricultural University of Iceland), SCSi developed an extensive seminar in design and construction techniques on upland path work. Those included lectures and practical teaching, but the main emphasis was on hands-on work in the ASCENT site Eldhraun, Mt. Vífilsfell (capital area) and at AUI vocational training site Reykir Ölfusi. This is an important aspect since participants are prepared in advance to undertake practical techniques supplemented with theory based scientific lectures. Target groups were rangers, local authorities, relevant

organizations and institutions, volunteer leaders, contractors and people generally interested in path work; depending on the focus of each course, whether it was habitat restoration at upland footpaths and viewpoints, local material use and traditional crafts, design and construction of upland foot paths or constructions on recreation and tourist sites.

The seminars were tailored for ASCENT purposes, however they were devised in such a way that they were transferable, to rural and protected areas.

Outcome

The outcome was a four series upskilling programme, modestly named with the working title of The Big 4. Courses were conducted over a period of two years, two days at a time, from autumn 2017 to spring 2019, the last course being held in autumn 2019.

- I. **Habitat restoration (Eldhraun Skaftárhreppur, autumn 2017)**
Emphasis: Fundamental theories and methods of habitat restoration.
Target groups: Rangers, caretakers of land, local authorities staff, volunteers.
- II. **Local material use and traditional crafts (Reykir Ölfusi, spring 2018)**
Emphasis: Introduction of new solutions based on traditional style of work.
Target groups: Contractors and machine workers, caretakers of land, local authorities, volunteers, organizations and staff of national heritage institutions.
- III. **Design and construction of upland footpaths (Reykir Ölfusi, spring 2019)**
Emphasis: Traditional footpath work and the importance of the quality of handwork for the protection of the natural landscape.
Target groups: Contractors, rangers, caretakers of land, local authorities, volunteers, organizations and institutions.
- IV. **Constructions on recreation and tourist sites (autumn 2019)**
Emphasis: Machine work in construction of upland sites and the importance of protection of the natural landscape.
Target groups: Contractors, rangers and local authorities.

The seminars covered most of the main principles of footpath work – design, construction, habitat restoration and machine work. Despite the fact that the main target groups for the seminars were fairly obvious, general citizens being interested in the courses should be expected. Also, hands-on work is a key component of courses and in fact the reason why participants register for the courses. Therefore, practical work must be a priority and participants given a real opportunity to get dirty and try themselves at hack and shovel work.



Stone work exercise and the use of traditional crafts seminar at the AUI facility at Reykir Ölfusi

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact details: Davíð Arnar Stefánsson
Project Manager
Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI)

e-mail: david@land.is
mobile +354 488 3083

www.ascent-project.eu



Key Findings & Learning Points

The cooperation with the UAI has been successful and courses have been fully booked and well received. This has led to the Environmental Ministry of Iceland to decide to adapt the structure and main focus of the courses (with minor adaptations and emphases) as part of the educational aspects of the National Scheme for Infrastructure in tourism. It will secure funding for the courses for the coming years and keep the legacy of the ASCENT project alive in an appropriate place.

It should be noted that although the courses are a good way to introduce general ideas in footpath work, they are only two days and do not go very deep into the subject, for obvious reasons. Therefore, they will never replace real experience gained through many years of work on site. Providing opportunities for key players to gain experience and in-depth knowledge of footpath work is another challenge.