



The importance of volunteer work in Iceland



Volunteers at site in Dyrhóley working on drainage

THEMATIC SEMINAR

STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING 5

TUESDAY 6TH NOVEMBER
2018

REYKJAVIK

ICELAND

Constant care and maintenance - the key to sustainable path work

In connection with the steering committee meeting in Iceland in early November 2018, the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI) organized a thematic seminar involving key stakeholders in Icelandic footpath work. The objective was to discuss the nature and structure of volunteer work in Iceland and to highlight the importance of volunteer effort.

Speakers were:

1. Mr. Árni Bragason, the director of SCSI, who gave a presentation on SCSI legacy and future, and the role of SCSI in dealing with land degradation due to recreation and tourism. He also pointed out the role of SCSI according to the Land Reclamation Laws and the Nature Conservation Act in Iceland.
2. Mr. Hreinn Óskarsson, head of coordination division at the Forestry service of Iceland, who gave a presentation on the development of footpath work in Þórsmörk nature reserve. For the past eight years the same employee of the Forestry service has coordinated the volunteer and footpath work in Þórsmörk. He has developed a highly efficient operation and has been very successful. The core of his work is the constant care for the site and having the time to develop methods that work for that particular site – being able to make mistakes and learn from them.
3. Mr. René Bíasóné, a specialist at the team of national park and nature conservation at the Environmental agency of Iceland, who gave a presentation on the agency's volunteer work organization. He talked about the main challenges facing the team leader coordinating their vast operation and maintaining the quality of the work, as well as the importance of volunteers' enjoyment of the work as a motivator for nature conservation.
4. Finally, Mr. Tómas GGíslason, environmental representative at the Municipality of Mosfellsbær, and Mr. Ævar Aðalsteinsson, from the local boy scouts in Mosfellsbær, gave a presentation on footpath work done by the boy scouts at the ASCENT site Mt. Úlfarsfell. The municipality annually grants funding for footpath work on the mountain and includes the scouts in the project. Úlfarsfell is a typical town mountain with multi-recreational use and various challenges. The constant care for the site gives them the opportunity to experiment with methods and materials and to gain experience in dealing with old and new challenges.

Outcome

Land degradation due to recreation and tourism is on the agenda in Iceland. The signs can be found in laws and in changing emphasis in key organizations. The state is catching up with the development and spending great amounts in funding sites and infrastructure, particularly footpaths and viewpoints. It can be foreseen that a lot of new work will be done in the coming years and that immense maintenance is under way in Iceland.

The trend is likely to be that contractors will be more and more entrusted with new constructions, but maintenance and restoration will continue to be in the hands of volunteers. Volunteer work on conservation sites and National parks has a long history in Iceland. A lot of experience in coordinating

and managing volunteer work has piled up in key organizations, such as the Environmental agency, which is responsible for a great share of sites scattered around the island, and the Forestry service. Boy scout work has also proven valuable at various locations, like in Mosfellsbær, and perhaps we will see more of it in the future.

For a great volunteer operation and a successful path work, it is important to invest in education and upskilling of coordinators and leaders. Engagement of those parties has proven vital for successful volunteer operation and the quality of the work. Foot path management and maintenance is a longterm commitment and employee turnover can result in degradation of paths and erosion.



Path work is done in Laki in all kinds of weather and all kinds of conditions

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

Iceland will invest heavily in tourism infrastructure in the coming years, particularly footpaths. Volunteer work has been the cornerstone of footpath work in Iceland for decades, but a change towards more contractor work, especially regarding new projects, is under way.

However, maintenance and restoration will continue to be in the hands of volunteers, their leaders and coordinators. Therefore, upskilling and empowerment of those parties is vital for their engagement, preferably longterm engagement.

Managing and maintaining paths is a constant and restless effort from those who have love and passion for the work and from the people doing the work in all kinds of weather and all kinds of conditions.