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Historical and cultural heritage in Laugarnes and Kirkjusandur

ROUTE IS 2

Presentation of the route

The route takes you to the historical heritage on Laugarnes Point and the former industrial area, Kirkjusandur. It is filled with interesting stories about the very early settlement in Laugarnes, when Laugarnes was not yet part of Reykjavik, and up to present times. It tells also of big plans of industrial expansion in Kirkjusandur in the early 20th century, plans that had to be abandoned, and new innovative use was made for the facilities already built there. The route can be seen as describing the relation of man exploiting the natural resources for survival and making the best of living. The route also tells that one of the products, salted cod (baccalá), processed at Kirkjusandur, finds its way to Southern Europe.

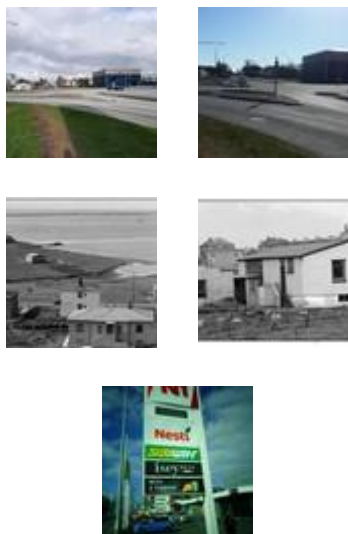
The route is an easy and pleasant walk for fifty years and older, and it takes about one and a half hour but might take longer, since it is tempting to stop longer at the waypoints and absorb the beautiful scenery. The walk goes along pavements and asphalted paths and should not be a hinder for disabled persons in the summer, but might become icy in the winter.

WAYPOINTS

POND AND BROOK	3
THE STREET LAUGARNESVEGUR.....	3
THE STREET LAUGALÆKUR	3
CHURCH AND CHURCHYARD	4
LAUGARNES FARM.....	4
RECENT INHABITANTS AT LAUGARNES	4
FISHING FACILITIES	5
HOSPITAL FOR LEPERS.....	5
LAUGARNESSTOFA BISHOP´S RESIDENCE	6
POORLY CONSTRUCTED BUILDING.....	6
ART MUSEUM.....	7
WAR CAMP	7
KIRKJUSANDUR.....	7
FISH PROCESSING.....	8
PLANTS BECAME A BANK AND ART SCHOOL	8
INDUSTRY BECAME MILITARY CAMP AND BUS COMPANY.....	9

Waypoint 1

POND AND BROOK



The intersection of the streets Krínglumýrarbraut, Sundlaugavegur and Borgartún, where you now stand, is built on a landfill. Earlier this was a place with a pond with the name Fúlatjörn (Rotting Pond, the name stems from decaying vegetation in the pond). A farm, inhabited until 1960, stood besides the pond and bore the same name. The brook, Fúlilækur, flowed into Fúlatjörn from a swamp just about where Krínglumýrarbraut is now. One had to cross Fúlilækur when going from Reykjavík to wash the laundry in the geothermal water in the washing pools (Þvottalaugar) in Laugardalur. Fúlilækur which could be a hinder when it flooded over its banks and even caused loss of life. The banks of the brook were so high that children could ski down them. Fúlilækur was covered up in 1957.

Waypoint 2

THE STREET LAUGARNESVEGUR




You are standing at the crossing of two streets, Laugarnesvegur and Sundlaugavegur (Swimming Pool Road). Laugarnesvegur is the old (ancient) road that led to the Laugarnes farm. The location of the old road can be seen at the intersection as the new street follows its direction. The first settlement in this area, the Laugarnes neighbourhood, was along Laugarnesvegur, and therefore one also finds the oldest houses there, which in the 1930's formed a small village. Some of these houses still standing are original but with modifications, many houses have disappeared and have been replaced by new ones. At that time, the settlement along Laugarnesvegur was at some distance from the town of Reykjavík, the border of the town being the streets Hringbraut and Snorrabraut.

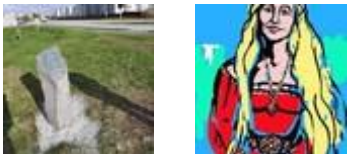
Waypoint 3


THE STREET LAUGALÆKUR



The street Laugalækur follows the bed where the stream Laugalækur used to flow. The stream had its origins in the swamp and the washing pools in Laugardalur and from there it ran to sea at Kirkjusandur. Laugalækur was early blocked to the south of the swamp, and facilities were made there for swimming. The facilities were built on initiative of students from the Reykjavík's Junior College, formerly called Lærði skólinn (The Learned School), an initiative that led to the revival of swimming skills in Reykjavík. A stately mansion, Bjarmaland, stood east of the intersection of the streets Laugalækur and Laugarnesvegur, built by a Norwegian entrepreneur,

	<p>Rokstad, who settled in Iceland around 1900. A plant for refining fish liver, owned by Rokstad, was located at Laugalækur close to the seacomb, the plant sometimes called the Train oil plant. The reason for his choice of location for his home and plant was probably that his wife Johanna was the daughter of the farmer leasing the Laugarnes farm. The mansion Bjarmaland does not exist anymore but pictures tell how magnificent it was.</p>
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Waypoint 4	CHURCH AND CHURCHYARD
	<p>A church was situated in Laugarnes in early times of Christianity and a stone where you are standing marks the spot where the church stood. The church was demolished in 1794 and its congregation united with the congregation in Reykjavík. Around the church was a cemetery where it is believed that Hallgerður Langbrók was buried. Hallgerður is a well known figure in the Icelandic sagas as being a wife of Gunnar from Hlidarendi, one of the heroes in the Saga of Njal, and for denying him strands of her hair for a bow string when he was fighting his enemies. This act is believed to have cost him his life. The last burial took place in the churchyard in 1871 when six French sailors, who died of smallpox, were buried here.</p>

Waypoint 5	LAUGARNES FARM
	<p>You are now standing on a mound where the remains of a farm, the Laugarnes farm, can be seen. The Sagas tell that a farm was located at this site since the beginning of settlement in Reykjavík in the 9th century. It is easy to understand the foundation of the farm in this place because of the abundance of land, fishing grounds close by in Faxa Bay, and the beautiful scenery. One might also conclude that natural geothermal hot water and even other resources might have had an influence, since the word „laugar“ in the name Laugarnes is a common nominator for natural hot pools. The farmland was very large and extended south to Fossvogur, or many kilometers to the south of Laugarnes.</p>

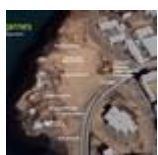
Waypoint 6	RECENT INHABITANTS AT LAUGARNES
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This is the site of the last farmhouse stood. In the early 20th century, a couple, Þorgrímur and Ingibjörg, lived in a house where the farmhouse stood before. Their grandson, writer and journalist Þorgrímur Gestsson, has written a book on the history of their descendants and the Laugarnes area. People living in Laugarnes tended to horses for people living in Reykjavík and their visitors, in the wide pastures that reached from Laugavegur and into Laugardalur. The so called Laugarnes brothers were also pioneers in establishing Reykjavík's first bus company, Strætisvagnar Reykjavíkur hf., later operated by the Reykjavík municipality, then named SVR. Sigurður Ólafsson, a singer and well known horseman, and his wife Inga Einarsdóttir from Miðdal were among the last residents of the Laugarnes farmhouse. Their daughter, Þuríður Sigurðardóttir, is a popular singer and artist in Iceland.

Waypoint 7

FISHING FACILITIES



Moorings for fishing boats used by the farmers in Laugarnes were at Norðurvör. From Norðurvör they rowed their boats out to the sea to fish in Faxe Bay, which provided an important addition to the food supply, and counted as benefits that came with the farm. From Norðurvör one can enjoy a unique and beautiful view in bright weather to the mountains in the north, and the islands outside in Faxe Bay. One of the islands, Engey, is believed to have belonged to the Laugarnes farm from very early times. There are records of early crop cultivation on the island. An annex, Norðurkot, was located besides Norðurvör and leased from the farm as it was common for larger farms to lease out their land. The lessees of the annex paid the rent by a fee or by working on the farm. Three annexes belonged to the Laugarnes farm, Norðurkot, Suðurkot and Barnhóll. Suðurvör was to the west of Laugarnes.

Waypoint 8

HOSPITAL FOR LEPERS



You are now standing on the ruins of Laugarnes Hospital where one can clearly see the outlines of the building by the foundation stones. The Danish Oddfellows fraternity financed the construction of Laugarnes Hospital as to fight leprosy in Iceland. It began its operation in the summer of 1898, which can be considered as the beginning of modern hospital operations in Iceland. The Oddfellow fraternity established high quality criteria for the operation of the hospital, criteria that were important for the development of nursing practices in Iceland. At the time of its construction, Laugarnes Hospital was the largest building in Iceland and one of the largest wooden constructions ever built in the country. It had 60 hospital beds, but it was still not enough since the estimated number of lepers in

the country was four times higher. The number of lepers decreased over time and subsequently a part of the Hospital was used for other purposes, such as dwellings. During the British occupation of Iceland in the second World War, British forces took over the Hospital and the remaining lepers were moved to Kópavogshæli, a care home and shelter for people with disabilities. Laugarnes Hospital burned down in 1943, at that time still in use by the occupation forces.

Waypoint 9

LAUGARNESSTOFA BISHOP'S RESIDENCE



Laugarnesstofa was the seat of two bishops of Iceland. The first, Steingrímur Jónsson, took office in 1825 and Laugarnesstofa was built for him in 1826 as his official residence and office. At this time the house was called the Bishop's Office or the Bishop's Office in Laugarnes. His wife Valgerður was the widow of Hannes Finnsson, the last bishop in Skálholt, and had inherited the land in Laugarnes from him. Steingrímur was considered an obliging official and a good man and wrote a lot about Icelandic history and genealogy. Jón Sigurðsson, one of Iceland's independence fighters, was bishop Steingrímur's secretary for three years, and it is believed that he developed his spirit of struggle for the country's independence while working for the bishop. Steingrímur owned an exceptionally large and good library, and an archive which was useful to Jón in his writing. The second bishop to reside in Laugarnesstofa was Helgi Thordersen, who also was a member of the Icelandic Parliament 1845-1865. He took office in 1846 and lived in Laugarnes until 1856 when he moved to Reykjavík. Helgi was the author of several publications and lectures, among them Húspostilla, sermons for all the Sunday and holiday gospels of the church year. Helgi lived in Laugarnesstofa until about 1856 when he moved to Reykjavík because the condition of the house had deteriorated, and also due to the long distance from Reykjavík. The turbulent Fúlilækur played also a role in the bishop moving from Laugarnes to Reykjavík.

Waypoint 10

POORLY CONSTRUCTED BUILDING



The bishop's residence, Laugarnesstofa, was a stone building, completed in 1826, similar in its construction to Viðeyjarstofu í Viðey. The difference was that Laugarnesstofa was an exceptionally poorly constructed building, blamed on the Danish constructors who, the story tells, drank a little too much beer that was distributed among them while working on the building. Laugarnesstofa leaked, and the wind blew right through it, and in the end no one wanted to live there. A description of the housing conditions of Laugarnesstofa is found in a satirical verse from shortly after its



construction: The storm through the building frame is a prolific driving force, it can be used for drying laundry when the building is not leaking. Before the building was completely abandoned it was, however, used to quarantine French fishermen who had contracted smallpox. Laugarnesstofa was demolished when the Hospital for lepers was built and the boulders in its foundation were used as foundations for the Hospital.

Waypoint 11

ART MUSEUM



The building you can see in front of you bears the name the Sigurjón Ólafsson Art Museum and is dedicated to the sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson. It opened in 1988, six years after Sigurjón's death, and accommodates the works of art that he left behind, such as sculptures, drawings, preliminary sketches of his works, and documentation about the artist. Sigurjón was born in 1908 in Eyrarbakki, received a certificate in professional house painting from the Vocational School in Reykjavik in 1927 and then went on to study at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. He was awarded various prizes in Denmark, and after studying in Rome in 1931–32 and graduating from the Academy in 1935, he was considered one of the most promising sculptors of the young generation in Denmark. His widow, Birgitta Spur, transformed his studio and part of their home into a museum. Tove, his first wife, was also a sculptor and her work can be seen in Hljómskálagarður park in the center of Reykjavik.

Waypoint 12

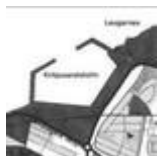
WAR CAMP



The Art Museum is located at the site of a former military camp, Laugarnes Camp, where Sigurjón lived as a young artist. Laugarnes Camp was built during World War II and was one of the biggest military camps built in Reykjavik, with tens of barracks (Nissen huts). When the war was over the barracks were used for dwellings, due to the severe housing shortage in Reykjavik at that time, caused by the ever increasing population. Living conditions there could be very unfulfilling, often the toilets were outside the barracks and utilities could be faulty. However, people could use the barracks temporarily and make living there comfortable. The last residents left the camp around 1970.

Waypoint 13

KIRKJUSANDUR



The old beachfront at Kirkjusandur (Church Sand) was near the upper edge of the present Sæbraut street which is on a later landfill where land has been extended, in some places up to 100 meters. However, you can see the former sea shore at the annex Suðurvör west of Laugarnes. The name Kirkjusandur stems from the time when the Church of Reykjavík (Víkirkirkja) had the right to collect driftwood from the shore. Originally Kirkjusandur was divided into Inner Kirkjusandur and Outer Kirkjusandur. Early and middle 20th century plans for the industrial evolution in Reykjavík showed a port at Kirkjusandur. The building of plants and facilities for fish processing and later meat processing built at Kirkjusandur were based on these plans.

Waypoint 14

FISH PROCESSING



The company Jupiter and Mars, which built the freezing plant at Kirkjusandur, was controlled by a well known entrepreneur in Iceland at that time, Tryggvi Ófeigsson. The site, then located at the sea shore, was used for extensive fish processing, initially for drying saltfish (baccalá) which offered natural conditions at the sea shore, and later other elements of processing. The saltfish was dried outdoors on beach stones when sunny, on what was called „stakkstæði“ (fish drying site) and in fact the whole sea shore between Fúlilækur and Laugarnes was used for drying saltfish. The scope was so extensive that trolleys were used to transport the saltfish from the buildings to „stakkstæði“. The saltfish was the main fish product to be exported from Iceland at this time, and therefore extremely important to the national economy. The saltfish was for example exported to Southern Europe where it became the main ingredient of a popular dish there.

Waypoint 15

PLANTS BECAME A BANK AND ART SCHOOL



When the master plans of Reykjavík were amended and the industrial port moved to Sundahöfn, east of Laugarnes, it led to the collapse of the industry in Kirkjusandur and plants and facilities were abandoned. The large building you see in front of you, originally a freezing plant, was transformed into the headquarters of Íslandsbanka and the dark house on the far left was originally intended for meat processing, but is now used for the visual art department of the Iceland University of the Arts. The bank has now moved its headquarters to another location. The apartment buildings you see, have recently risen on a site where a few industrial buildings stood, which the trawler company Íslandsfélagið used for fish processing for a long time.

Waypoint 16

INDUSTRY BECAME MILITARY CAMP AND BUS COMPANY



The site where new apartment buildings are now being constructed used to be a place for extensive fish processing. Saltfish was dried on huge fields that reach from the shore and up to this site. There were also structures for fish processing, mainly intended for saltfish processing. During the years of World War II the Allied occupation forces raised a camp on the site, mostly used as a prison, but also big warehouses and barracks. The Canadians built four big warehouses that were not demolished until the existing apartment buildings were erected. At the end of World War II, the Reykjavik Bus Company, Strætó, was allowed to use the site and some of the camp buildings. The company added a big house on the site with a workshop on the first floor and office space on the second floor, and then added another facility for cleaning the buses. The older buildings for fish processing got a new role for the operation of the bus fleet for a long time. The last buildings from this period were demolished when the construction of the apartment buildings began, except one of them that was moved to Ægisgarður in the western part of the Reykjavik harbour and is now used as a restaurant.