

# Marking Landscape

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## **Marking Landscape**

My lifelong interest in all kinds of outdoor activities led to this project. It is well known that being in natural environment has positive effects on our mental and physical health. In terms of design, the Icelandic landscape offers infinite possibilities to experience design and explore our sensory experience in a natural environment where well-being and the nourishing of body and soul are paramount.

In this project, the walking path to the volcano Mount Helgafell in Hafnarfjörður is marked with audio material and can deepen people's experience of the landscape. Visitors are invited to join locals who share their knowledge on audio recordings that can be accessed through a mobile phone.

*Marking Landscape* is concerned with making information about the environment around Mount Helgafell accessible for the public. The aim was to have the information very clear and understandable and use theories about environmental aesthetic and perception, as a background.

## **Context**

The goal in my project was to add more value to outdoor walking based on the insights offered through theories about landscape and human relations. The academic field of environmental aesthetics has been developing and growing since 1960. The collection of essays in *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*<sup>1</sup> gives an overview of the field of study known as environmental aesthetics. The thread from these theories in my project is my focus on perception and environmental aesthetics.

Landscape is explored through the metaphor of conversation in the collection *Conversations with Landscape*<sup>2</sup> and gives an insight to recent studies about landscape and human relations. The interaction between the landscape and the humans and how meaning of landscape is created, became an inspiration in my project, to add more value while walking in natural environment.

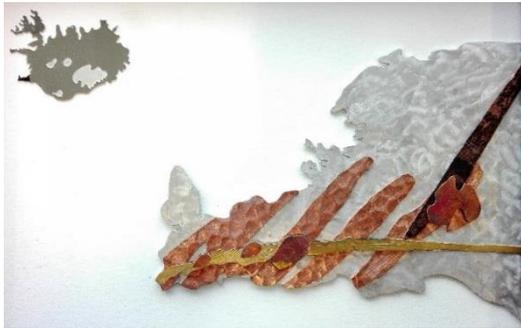
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<sup>1</sup> Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant, editors, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, (Broadview Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Benediktsson and Katrín Anna Lund, editors, *Conversations with Landscape*, (England: Ashgate, 2010).

## Process

I started my project by working with all of the walking paths in the nature reserve in Reykjanes peninsula, about 300 square kilometers. Then I made a map out of metal in layers, of Reykjanes peninsula, to understand the complicated geology in this area.



*Figure 1 Geological heart of Reykjanes peninsula*



*Figure 2 Surface layer of Reykjanes peninsula*

During the process, I realized that 300 km of walking paths were too long to be a prototype for my project. Therefore, I scaled it down and decided to use the 2.8km popular walking path of Mount Helgafell as a prototype.

Mount Helgafell is a volcano, located above Hafnarfjörður and reaches at 340 meters, rather close to Bláfjöll, the range of mountains that surrounds the capital area. From the main road passing Hafnarfjörður, we drive towards Mount Helgafell on Kaldársel road, 6km.



*Figure 3 Mount Helgafell from Kaldárselsroad*

The wonders of the natural environments are all around the walking path to Mount Helgafell. The first thing we see both beside the path and on it is different forms of lava rope which was made from a thin small lava flow from Búrfell, a crater beside Mount Helgafell. The lava stopped flowing for some time, and then started to flow again. That is how this natural twisted rope was made. The lava rope is decorated with colorful lichens and moss.



*Figure 4 Lava rope*



*Figure 5 Lichens*



*Figure 6 Variety*



*Figure 7 Lava shields*

Then we walk for a while on sand and soon we walk over huge lava shields, like beautifully structured puzzles. There is a grassy slope and as we walk up, we see various structures and colors in the tuff that the mountain is made of. The mountaintop view is impressive; we can see the mountain range Bláfjöll, above the capital area, the bay Faxaflói, the glacier Snæfellsjökull and Reykjanes peninsula.

From Hafnarfjörður municipality I got samples of guideposts that were used to mark the walking paths in the highland. Various colors mark each path.



*Figure 8 A bundle of guideposts*



*Figure 9 Various guidepost*

The smallest of three blocks of lava, that a shop owner in Kópavogur was going to throw away earlier this winter, became a pedestal. I drilled a hole in the lava block to be able to fasten the guidepost in it.



*Figure 10 The lava block as a pedestal for the guidepost*

My project involves small-scale improvements by adding new layers on the guideposts that mark the walking path to Mount Helgafell in the highlands of Hafnarfjörður. I used existing technology and QR codes with GPS location. GPS stands for “Global Positioning System” and is a satellite navigation system. It suited my project to link the ground position of each guideposts and the QR code technology, which is based on a webpage and is easy to maintain and change information. You must have QR code scan reader on your phone and scan the code to get the information shared there. If you don’t have one, it’s free to download.



*Figure 11 The guidepost with a readable QR code*

My intention was to combine the modern guidepost, with the QR code and a small version of the Icelandic “varða” or cairn, which is made of stones from the surrounding area, to signify a pathway. It was used for centuries in Iceland and was high enough to be seen during winter and even through snow. The last layer on the pedestal was lava covered with moss and lichens from my garden. The green line, close to the top of the stick is the sign for Mount Helgafell path as each route has its own color. I got help to make a laser QR code marked on the guidepost.

Beside the parking lot in Kaldársel where we started our walking tour, is an information board, with information about the area, all in Icelandic. As there are no limits, what can be behind the QR code, my first code will be located here, and guests could choose the language they want for the information.



*Figure 12 Final version for the exhibition*

For the exhibition, I decided to make a video, to show my guests the view from the Mount Helgafell walking path, as I thought audio was not enough to catch people's attention and make them want to go to a natural environment. In February, I began filming and recorded only from the path. I enjoyed being there and the natural environment was always peaceful.

## People participating

I wanted to bring my project to life through people's voices that could tell in a lively and understandable way about natural phenomena. One thing led to another, such as me reading a book about environmental issues on the web<sup>3</sup> and the following day, I phoned the author, introduced the project and myself. He was willing to participate, as were the other people I called. I thought it would be interesting for my guests to listen to people that have a passion for communicating their knowledge and have interest in everything that has to do with nature and are all experts in their fields. That is why we met in a studio and I recorded their voices.



Figure 13 Brynhildur Ólafsdóttir

Brynhildur Ólafsdóttir<sup>4</sup> an experienced guide and an extreme sport trainer, discusses how Mount Helgafell is in her mind, the crown jewel of the mountains in the capital area. When we are there, we are so much out in nature, and the mountaintop view is magnificent, and we see far away like the Snæfellsnes-glacier. The landscape is a source of endless possibilities and experiences; people can walk or run short- and long distances here.



Figure 14 Guðrún Geirsdóttir

Guðrún Geirsdóttir<sup>5</sup> has her own walking group and is the director of the Centre of Teaching and Learning, University of Iceland. When walking in lava fields, her thoughts go back in history, when people had to go on these trails out of necessity. How many people have walked this path through the years? She discussed Icelandic moss as being one of her favorite things in Icelandic nature.

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<sup>3</sup> Þorvaldur Örn Árnasson, *Umhverfismennt fyrir kennara, foreldra, stjórnendur, fagmenn og áhugafólk um umhverfismál*, ([place of publication missing], Aðstoð sf, 1998)

<sup>4</sup> Árdís Sigmundsdóttir interview with Brynhildur Ólafsdóttir, "Yfirsýn frá Helgafelli," published on Apr. 29, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNEJiJVDvrc&t=13s>

<sup>5</sup> Árdís Sigmundsdóttir interview with Guðrún Geirsdóttir, "Hraunreiði," published on Apr. 29, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCE5TytMywc&list=PL0iV8qn1eRXkcxRfzTP9MMXsCZx5O9C4y&index=6>



Figure 15 Kolbrún Björnsdóttir

The herbalist Kolbrún Björnsdóttir<sup>6</sup> has been working in her field for 25 years and has seen negative changes in people's health through the technological evolution of our society. People have to reset their values and put human needs in the first place. The discussion about how natural environment can help us to recharge our batteries, by being outdoor every day and through integration with nature, added a new layer to my project.



Figure 16 Sigrún Rósa Jónsdóttir

The artist and guide Sigrún Rósa Jónsdóttir<sup>7</sup> shed a light on the vibrant living colors in the flora and the variety of colors in the landscape around Mount Helgafell that changes every season. People should go and visits a particular plant or moss and see how it is growing. I believed it added value to the holistic aesthetic perception of the landscape.



Figure 17 Sævar Helgi Bragason

The geologist and astrologist, Sævar Helgi Bragason<sup>8</sup> discussed how Mount Helgafell was created by an eruption under the late Ice-age glacier. The material Mount Helgafell is made of is tuff, which is compacted ash by the enormous glacier. Tuff is rare and frost, wind and rain are still forming this beautiful mountain. This region in Iceland is like a geological wonderland as the creation of the land is visible like an open book.



Figure 18 Þorvaldur Örn Árnason

The biologist Þorvaldur Örn Árnason<sup>9</sup> is a specialist in moss. Moss is abundant on the way to Mount Helgafell and I believed that it would reinforce the perception of this world to discuss the marvelous world of lichens and moss.

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<sup>6</sup> Árdís Sigmundsdóttir interview with Kolbrún Björnsdóttir, "Kaldá," published on Apr. 29, 2018.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2pqBuyT\\_Fs&list=PL0iV8qn1eRXkcxRfzTP9MMXsCZx5O9C4y&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2pqBuyT_Fs&list=PL0iV8qn1eRXkcxRfzTP9MMXsCZx5O9C4y&index=1)

<sup>7</sup> Árdís Sigmundsdóttir interview with Sigrún Rósa Jónsdóttir, "Helgafell," published on Apr. 29, 2018.

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<sup>8</sup> Árdís Sigmundsdóttir interview with Sævar Helgi Bragason, "Móberg," published on Apr. 29, 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRsoTpTf0bQ&index=3&list=PL0iV8qn1eRXkcxRfzTP9MMXsCZx5O9C4y>

<sup>9</sup> Árdís Sigmundsdóttir interview with Þorvaldur Örn Árnason, "Mosi, fléttur og skófir," published on Apr. 29, 2018.

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*Figure 19 Structures of tuff in Mount Helgafell*

## **Conclusion**

My vision is to work further with my project and introduce it to The Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources and Landvernd, The Icelandic Environment Association. My way of using QR code, might be a solution for popular tourist places, instead of the huge metal information board. By using QR code is possible to serve guest better, as they can choose the language they want to get information about the natural environment.

Walking is simple and natural; we can walk alone or with friends. It does not require any instruction or skills. Walking in nature can heighten our awareness and enhance our experience. Aesthetic appreciation of nature such as we can perceive in Mount Helgafell requires our embodied participation of all our senses.

The aim of my project was to make a site come to life, and add more value to the experience people have while walking, by showing the wonders of the natural world. I used video and audio to tell how the meaning of landscape is created in the interaction between the land and the humans.

Icelandic lava landscape can capture people's attention and create fun and immersive experiences. By combining walking and aesthetic experience of landscape, walking in Mount Helgafell might be the all-encompassing work of art.

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