

Between exploration and tourism: Carl Irminger's Iceland travel diary 1826

Ebba Lisberg Jensen¹  and Ole Lisberg Jensen²

¹Department of Urban Studies, Malmö University, 205 06 Malmö, Sweden and ²Independent Researcher, Hellehuse 19, 4174 Jystrup, Midtsjælland, Denmark

Research Article

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Author for correspondence:

E. Lisberg Jensen,
Email: Ebba.lisberg.jensen@mau.se

Ole Lisberg Jensen, BA., is a naval historian and was the director of the Danish Naval Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark, from 1984 to his retirement in 2005.

Abstract

In the spring of 1826, the young Danish naval officer Carl Irminger and two of his friends sailed with a cargo ship from Copenhagen to Iceland to stay there during the summer. This article is based on Irminger's unpublished travel diary. Irminger and his friends blended in with the local elite, which provided them with equipment and contacts to travel. Their journeys out from Reykjavik were adventurous and depended on local guides and the hospitality of residents along the way. The tales of hardships during the travels, combined with contacts established during the trip, became important credentials in Irminger's future career. He was hired as an adjutant to the Danish prince, and the narrative of his summer in Iceland ignited a royal expedition there in 1834, of which Irminger was to be the trip leader. Irminger's diary reflects a broader shift from Enlightenment exploration reporting into Romantic travel writing, with more emotional and aesthetic emphasis. His journey was a forerunner of the nature tourism that eventually was to sprout in Iceland.

On April 18 1826, three young Danish naval officers were rowed out to a galeas in the harbour of Copenhagen, Denmark. They were headed for Iceland, where they were to spend their summer. One of the three travellers was Carl Irminger (1802–1888), lieutenant of the Royal Danish Navy. This article is based on his unpublished travel diary from the summer of 1826. Irminger eventually became a high-ranking naval officer and an influential figure in mapping the northwest Atlantic. His geographical and hydrographical explorations made it possible to identify a part of the Gulfstream that was named the Irminger Current. Fifty years after the journey, Irminger also was to participate in founding the Royal Danish Geography Society (Neiiendam, 1945). But when Irminger and his friends travelled to Iceland, they were not yet professionally established. Despite previous experience from merchant ships and naval ships to the West Indies, it was difficult for young Danish officers to find positions proper to their education, and maybe that is why they took the opportunity to go abroad. The oldest of the travellers, lieutenant Mathias Poulsen Secker, was born in a landowner's family and was 27 years old. Carl Irminger, keeper of the diary, was born in Holstein where his father was a customs officer. He was 24 years old at the time of the trip. Hans Wilhelm Rosenwinge, 23, came from a family of naval officers (Topsøe-Jensen & Marquard, 1935). It is not known how the trip was financed, but since all three had well-established backgrounds, it was probably paid for by their families.

So, what was the aim of their trip to Iceland, other than passing time while out of proper jobs? Irminger's diary itself is not explicit about such circumstances. Neither is it particularly eloquent or poetic, though occasionally drastic. At its core, the diary reminds one of a ship log, meticulously recording weather conditions, travel distances and time of the day. What makes it interesting is how the journey and Irminger's recording of it resonates with ways of relating to and describing the world typical of his time and of his sociocultural position. The diary also, as we will argue, points forward to habits of tourism and outdoor recreation that we, two centuries later, take for granted, and which are essential to the tourist industry of today. We will present these aspects briefly here and return to them as they show up along the road.

The first trait of the diary is the spirit of Enlightenment. European governments in the 18th century had sent out a stream of scholars to describe and map local lives and resources. One of the pioneers was the Swede Carl Linnaeus who made his first explorative journey to Lapland in 1732, initiated by the Royal Swedish Science Academy (Broberg, 2019; Linnæus, 1975 (1732)). These journeys were followed by his disciples and others to domestic peripheries as well as to distant corners of the world. Though the expeditions were presented as purely scientific, they were also part of a European “out-thrust” where data were collected as a part of colonial and military ambitions (Driver, 2001). In the genre of explorative reports, mapping and describing territories was formulated as purely rational, designed to detach the seer from what was seen, naming and ordering the world without disturbing interaction with local cosmologies (Pratt, 2008). At the core of explorative naval writing was an “observational accuracy” (Keighren, Withers, & Bell, 2015, p. 34), which Irminger adheres to, without obvious ideas of future publication plans.

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But Enlightenment exploration was neither unambiguously scientific nor exploitative. It also contained a seed of a more emotionally charged interest in the world outside a urbanising Europe (Pratt, 2008). Travels could be foretaken to experience exotic landscapes and other ways of life. This emotional side of Enlightenment leads us to the second trait found in Irminger's diary: That of Romanticism sprouting in the time of his journey. With print markets, an imagery of the sublime spread amongst the European bourgeoisie (Keighren et al., 2015; Schneider, 2017), of which naval officers were part. Idealising exotic and unspoiled places far from the everyday, Romanticism introduced the idea of an animated, exotic universe "out there" (Karlisdóttir, 2013), or, in the Icelandic case, "far north" (Oslund, 2011). If the *grand tours* of earlier bourgeois young men primarily had focused on remnants of antiquity in Greece and Rome, there was now a shift to more distant and pristine destinations. In this respect, Iceland was the perfect place to travel. It was considered a "wilderness" with natural extremes (Jóhannesson, Huijbens, & Sharpley, 2010). Iceland was also seen as the home of a lost cultural golden age, which, due to the reviving of the sagas and the Viking heritage, made it possible to picture Iceland as the home of true Scandinavian identity (Agnarsdóttir, 2008).

With Romanticism, an aesthetic ideal of the individual in encounter with Nature was popularised, for example, in Caspar David Friedrich's iconic painting *Wanderer above the sea of fog* from 1818. Nature, in the cultural context of increasing urbanisation, shifted from the everyday *heimat* of the labouring majority, into a *landscape*, a view expected to inspire intense emotions, spiritual development and self-fulfilment for those cultivated enough to appreciate it. Naval sea travellers were the popular heroes of the times (Cavell, 2007; Schneider, 2017). They personified colonial outreach, masculine bravery, education and social mobility that fit into the romantic scheme. It is in this expansive heroism that we find the third aspect of Irminger's journey: Travelling as a way of collecting personal experience. Challenges and physical effort of travel endeavours could function as rites of passage; once the traveller had endured hardships, he could return with more confidence and credibility.

For Irminger, keeping the diary seems to have been a naval habit of recording rather than an urge to process private emotions. In an impoverished, scarcely populated countryside Irminger and his fellow travellers were to experience Iceland under conditions that few contemporary tourists would be willing to endure. And they lived to tell about it, which brings us to the fourth and last aspect of Irminger journey: A brave tour could be a way to accumulate cultural capital which could eventually be socially and professionally profited upon, once back home. In Irminger's case, his experience became part of credentials that made it possible for him to achieve a position in the uppermost crust of Danish society. These four aspects: the colonial quest for knowledge, the romantic adventure, the masculine rite of passage, and finally the social gain from it, are all present in Irminger's way of travelling and writing. In this article, we follow Irminger along his journey, through the physical and social landscapes he encounters, and all the way back to his coming career in Denmark.

Notes on finding the journal, translating and tracing the journey

Carl Irminger's diary (1823–1826) was found by Ole Lisberg Jensen in the Danish Royal Defence Archive (*Forsvarets Arkiver*). It would probably have been recorded by scholars earlier, had it

been kept in the larger Royal Archive (*Det Kongelige Bibliotek*), with other diaries of Irminger. The diary, written by hand in Danish, was transcribed by Ole Lisberg Jensen. We have translated and presented the parts we found to be of interest in following Irminger around the two longer excursions he and his company made from Reykjavik, one to Þingvellir, Geysir and its surroundings, and a three-week-long trip to the district Snæfellsnessýsla in the west. The volume covers the years 1823 to 1826. In the following, all citations refer to the latter year. Irminger only paginated every second page in the diary. We have marked the citations for example, "Irminger, 1826, p. 42b", the "b" referring to a second, unpaginated, page (Fig. 1).

Tracing the travel route and translating the diary provided an unforeseen obstacle: the names of places. Irminger wrote place names as they sounded to him. The impressionistic, phonetic 19th-century Danish spelling of partly misunderstood names, made finding the places on contemporary maps with Icelandic spelling and letters very challenging. Combining Irminger's description and the satellite view on digital maps, we reconstructed the travellers' journey, sometimes not knowing where they were headed next. By following, for example, a path leading to a river, we could deduct where the travel party had waded over, scan the adjacent area and decode the name of the next destination. Further complicating the tracing was that sometimes Irminger seemed to have lost his bearings and wrote "north" when the only possible route was going east, for example. We initially thought he had been exhausted when writing or that local guides had given him unclear directions, but were later informed that in Iceland, directions were, and are still, sometimes "simplified" in a concentric pattern, so that everything closer to the centre (i.e. Reykjavik) is considered "south", while as further out is considered "north" (K. Benediktsson, personal communication November 25 2019). Realising this made it possible to crack more obscured locations, though a few remain unclear. In the following, we apply the Icelandic place names, but for the sake of authenticity, we have chosen to present Irminger's versions in brackets as they first appear. In some cases, the erroneous spelling is relevant to his subsequent notes.

A similar challenge relates to the names of people that Irminger met, spelled in or simply translated to Danish. It is possible that people presented themselves to Irminger using a Danish version of their name since the educated strata where he socialised were used to communicating in Danish. Translations of names are often transparent, like calling Pétur Pétursson "Peder Pedersen", sometimes more obscure, like "Bendixen" possibly referring to "Benediktsson". In the cases where women are mentioned by name, Irminger calls them "Mrs. Thorsteinsson" and the like. This reflects Irminger's presumption that women adopt their husband's surname at marriage. In Icelandic naming tradition, though, women keep their own patronyms. We are aware that it would be possible to search the correct names of mentioned men and women in the Icelandic archives, but have found it beside the scope of this article.

Distances and measurements are kept as recorded in the diary. An *alen* (ell) was 63 cm, which is divided into two was a Danish *fod* (foot), which is 31.5 cm. A *favn* (plural *favne*, in English fathom/fathoms) was 188 cm. A Danish *mil* (mile) in these days was a distance of 7538 m. This system was official in Denmark till the metric system was introduced in 1910. Temperature was measured in Reaumur, a scale that started at 0 °C, at the melting point of water, and went to 80 where water boils.

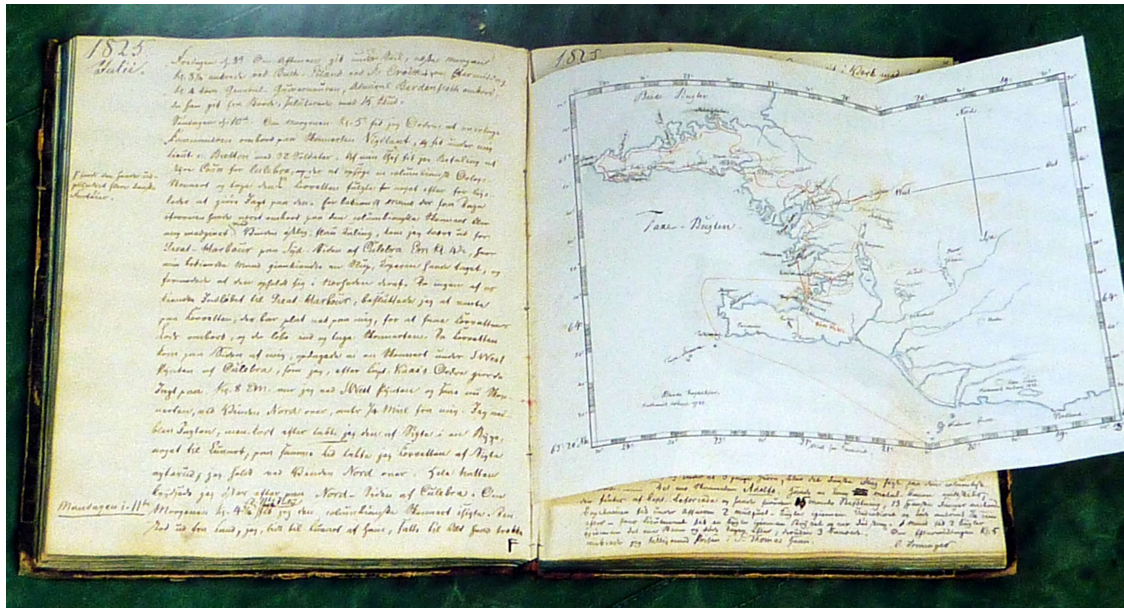


Fig. 1. Carl Irminger's diary and map over his travel in southwest Iceland. Photo: Ole Lisberg Jensen.

With the galeas *København* to Iceland

In the spring of 1826, Irminger, Secker and Rosenwinge had gone to the Copenhagen harbour to make a deal with a Captain Bruhn. Under his command was the galeas *København*, 143 register tonnes in size and with a crew of 8 men (listed in Danish Ship Register, Elsinore). Small cargo vessels of this kind sailed frequently to Iceland. In spring, they would carry timber, cereals and colonial merchandise from Denmark. They could also carry newspapers and journals, produced in Denmark for Icelandic readers (Loftsdóttir, 2019). Once in Iceland, ships sailed between smaller harbours and collected return cargo, which consisted of dried fish, wool, knitted socks and mittens, fish oil and lard, salted cod, and occasionally luxury goods like eiderdown, fox skins, swan skins and feathers. They might also bring a few passengers under plain conditions. Reykjavik would at this time have around fifty arrivals a year of smaller cargo ships (Ax, 2008).

The travellers arranged with Captain Bruhn for a trip to Iceland with departure on April 19 and return in September. The day before departure, the three men were rowed out to the galeas and went onboard with their luggage. Previously accustomed to conditions at sea, they quickly adapted to the accommodations. On schedule, the galeas sailed north through Øresund. The first couple of days, they had good winds through Kattegat and Skagerrak, and after a week, they were on the North Sea heading for the Shetland Islands. The second week was harder, but on the fifteenth day, they sighted Fair Island at the Shetlands. The third week was comfortable with good winds from north and northeast. On May 17, they sighted the Vestmannaeyjar (*Vestmannoerne*), and two days later, they could anchor on the roads of Reykjavik. The trip took twenty-six days, which was normal for the distance.

As mentioned initially, Irminger's diary takes the form of a ship log, probably due to his education and out of habit from his experience as a sailor. Still, he was more or less consciously emulating a tradition of scientific expedition writing that permeated his time, where the detailed recording was standard. Enlightenment had, during Irminger's education in the early 1820s, crept into wider circles of the European urban society. Natural science was, for

example, part of the curriculum at the Danish Naval Academy (Seerup, 2001). Studying science prepared the students for their future roles as sailors, explorers and cartographers. Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851), a famous physicist first to describe electromagnetism, had been lecturing during the years when the travellers attended the school. On the curriculum was also English, the language dominating the naval world due to Britain's imperial activities at sea. Studying English made it possible for Irminger to read the anglophone travel reports that were in vogue during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In his diary, there is only a brief mention of forerunners or inspirations for the journey, but forty years later, Irminger wrote: "Olavssen's and Povelsens's, McKengi's [sic] and especially Henderson's travels to Iceland, I knew so to say by heart, as I had studied them carefully before my first trip out there" (1866). Already in the 1750s, the Icelanders Eggert Ólafsson & Bjarni Pálsson had been appointed by the Danish king and the Danish Royal Scientific Society to make an expedition to Iceland. Their report, *Reise igjennem Island*, was published in Danish in 1772, later in English (Olafsen & Povelsen, 1805). The authors¹ produced an encyclopaedic and transdisciplinary tale of living conditions, plants, common diseases, local culture, land-use, landscapes and geological formations. The mineralogist George MacKenzie (1811) and the missionary Ebenezer Henderson (1818) followed in their footsteps, sometimes literally visiting the same places and persons. Irminger was, thus, travelling according to early versions of "where to go and what to see".

The travel reports were about to become a popular genre. Expeditions, and writing about them, eventually turned into a publishing industry and a genre of its own, reflecting the colonial culture of the time. It also standardised detailed instructions on how authors were to experience the world and how to write (Keighren et al., 2015). Taking of field notes, observations and measurements were emphasised as a way to secure geographical knowledge, often for military purposes (Driver, 2001). The genre, as well as the mode of adventurous travels it relied on for impressions, was about to shift from "tedious minuteness of detail" (Pratt, 2008) into a more

deeply felt and interactive style that was to live well into the second half of the 19th century (Stone, 2004). More of “creative reflection” was eventually to be demanded from travel writers (Driver, 2001). Irminger, though, started out as more of a recorder than a narrator. In this, he reflected the detached ideal of his naval contemporaries (Keighren et al., 2015). Before following him and his comrades further along their trip, we will take a short look at the situation of their destination.

Iceland in the early 19th century

For the majority of the population in Iceland, life was hard in the early 19th century. For long periods of time, the country had been tormented by general poverty. On several occasions, volcanic activity had destroyed vast stretches of agricultural lands. The latest severe eruption before Irminger’s visit, the Lakagigar eruption, had taken place in 1783–1784. During the following so-called *Móðuharðindin*, the mist hardship, mist, lava flows and sulphur emissions seriously disrupted agricultural possibilities in the southern regions. Lack of grazing killed large numbers of livestock and, subsequently, approximately a quarter of the human population (Agnarsdóttir, 2008; Vasey, 1991). Agriculture, the main subsistence occupation, was conducted with the same methods as in the middle ages, despite attempts from the Danish state to “improve” it (Oslund, 2011). The country’s climatic and geological conditions made a development similar to that found on the European continent difficult. Almost all food available was locally produced, consisting of dairy products, lamb’s meat, fish and tubers (Vasey, 1991). The Danish state regularly provided Iceland with subsidies. Small-scale industries had been built, and gardening with potatoes and turnips was supported to enhance living conditions and nutrition status of the population (Lyngby, 2008). The Danish state had also monopolised trade to and from Iceland, which narrowed the possibilities for domestic production and development. Fishing was performed in open boats, with sails and oars. When there was surplus fishing yield, it could be sold as dry or salted fish (Skougaard & Mentz, 2008). All land transportation was done on horseback or by foot (Karlsdóttir, 2013) on a network of trails. Housing was basic, even amongst clergymen. Dwellings were mostly constructed on a basis of stones, with beams of driftwood or whale-bones covered with turf. The common construction materials on the European continent, brick and timber, were scarce and expensive. Only the wealthiest could afford imported timber. Fuelwood was scarce too, so that houses, when heated, were fuelled with sheep dung or bog peat on open fireplaces. Most of the homes that Irminger and his friends visited along the road would have been dark, cramped, smoke-filled and smelly, even amongst some of the better-off hosts.

Iceland had initially been colonised by the Norse in the 9th century, became part of the Norwegian kingdom in 1262 and fell under the Danish crown in 1536 (Loftsdóttir, 2019). The question if Iceland was formally a Danish colony is debated. According to Agnarsdóttir (2008), Iceland was a Danish “dependency”, and it was to remain officially under Danish administration till 1944 (Jóhannesson et al., 2010). The long tradition of literacy and recitation in Iceland made its status ambiguous in the eyes of continental Europeans: It was seen as simultaneously backwards and highly cultured (Oslund, 2011). The connection with Denmark had established a more international educational arena, so that young men of the upper classes routinely were sent to Copenhagen for university studies

(Agnarsdóttir, 2008; Grímsson, 1976). Thus, most officials and clergymen were able to speak Danish, which facilitated for our travellers to communicate during their journey.

Lounging in Reykjavik

The day after arrival, the three travellers went ashore in Reykjavik, at the time hardly more than a small urban settlement. It had sprouted around the growth of administrative offices, legal institutions and church. There is a telling description of the town from only seven years after our friends’ arrival:

In the year 1833 the population consisted of 578 persons in 103 families, among which 13–14 were of the merchant class and 8 were shipowners. Among the official buildings were, except for the prefect’s residence, this of the high court, local sheriff’s residence and the poorhouse. The city has a library with about 8–9000 titles for common use. The church and the prefect’s residence are the only ones built in stone. All the other buildings are made from half-timbering or wood, which, together with their roofs, are painted with tar. In contrast, the roofs on the traditional houses are built from earth and covered with grass. To each house, there is normally a kitchen garden, for which use and permanence the Danish government yearly provides potatoes, a number of seeds for kale, herbs etc. (Magnusson in Kloss (1835), our translation).

A small sociopolitical elite, with habits and consumption patterns similar to those of merchants in cities on the European continent, had developed in Reykjavik. The town had, by the time of arrival, one establishment to accommodate bourgeois visitors, called The Club (*Klubben*). Except for sleeping and eating, guests could read papers and books, play pool and drink punch, a warm alcoholic drink much appreciated amongst the upper classes. The Club, where the three men settled, also had larger localities for dinners and parties. After accommodation had been arranged, they went to prefect Bjarni Thorsteinsson, the highest-ranking local official, to introduce themselves and inform him about their plans for the visit, as was the custom for well-educated and polite travellers (Oslund, 2011). It seems as if they were immediately welcomed, or took for granted, to socialise amongst the higher classes. In a society with a limited number of visitors, there might also have been an interest to build acquaintances with the promising young officers, because already the following day, they were invited to participate in seabird hunting on the coast. In the afternoon, they went to church to attend a confirmation, of which they reportedly did not understand a word, and were then invited to dine with the owner of The Club, Mr. Heinrich Scheel. The introductory visit to Thorsteinsson also resulted in an invitation to Bessastaðir (*Besserstad*), a large farm southwest of Reykjavik. The farm, today the residence of the Icelandic president, was the previous prefect’s residence. At the time of the visit, it functioned as a preparatory school for 40 Icelandic boys, studying there to prepare for the university in Copenhagen (Grímsson, 1976). The landscape which they rode through appeared very foreign to Irminger, who described the impressions in his self-assigned exploration style:

About a quarter of a *mil* from *Besserstad* starts a stretch of lava, which took half an hour to pass. The lava is very similar to burnt-out coal, whereupon there is no vegetation at all, and here and there piled up or hollowed out in the most irregular, sharp and edgy figurations, one ever can imagine. A narrow foot path meandered among this disturbed distance, where horses can only walk one after the other and had to use all caution not to break their legs (Irminger, 1826, p. 37b).

On June 1, there was an organised tour to the bishop Steingrímur Jónsson in Laugarnes (*Løjernaes*) half a Danish *mil* from Reykjavik. The bishop’s residence had been built just the year before.

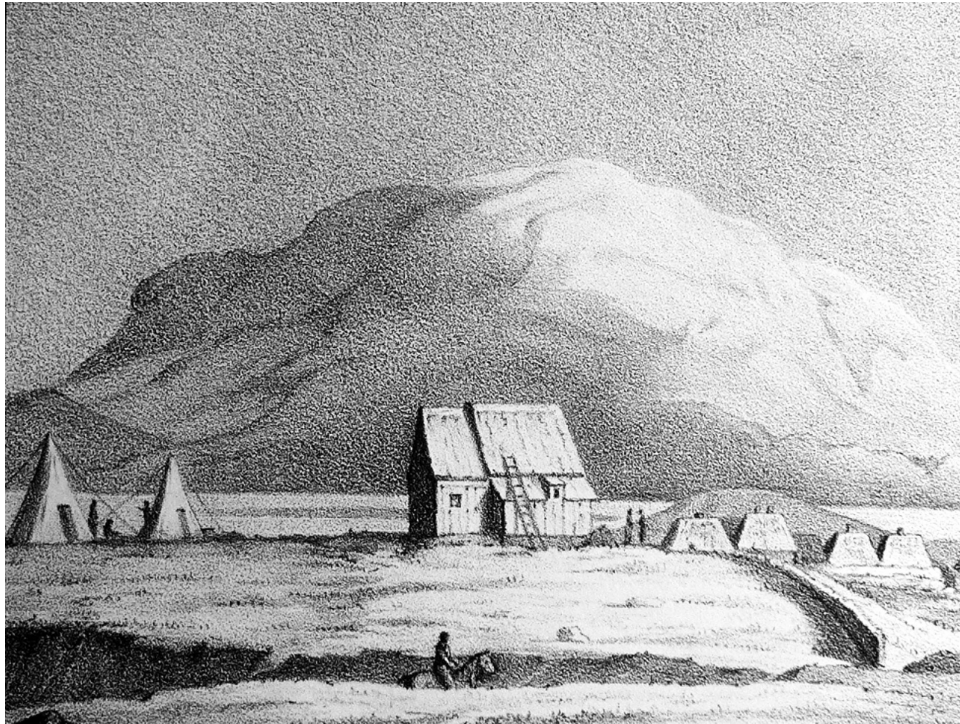


Fig. 2. View over Skalholt Church with tipi-like tents from Prince Christian Frederik's expedition to the left. Lithography by Theodor Kloss 1835.

Here, the travellers encountered thermal springs for the first time. Women were doing laundry and the travellers observed how the food was cooked in nets lowered into the boiling water. The style is telling: Irminger noted the everyday life of anonymous commoners from the horseback, as if they were part of the landscape. Back in Reykjavik, a couple of days passed with fowling on the coast without much outcome. There were large numbers of eiders, not allowed for shooting. On June 5, they were invited for dinner at the galeas *København*, where they were presented with a group of men who came to be of importance for their subsequent stay. In contrast to the launderers, they are all mentioned by name: They already knew Captain Bruhn, and there were also F.W. Willeius, the owner of the *København*, merchant Thomsen and chief prefect Peder F. Hoppe, the highest-ranking Danish official in Iceland at that time.

A few days later, prefect Bjárni Þórsteinsson organised a sailing trip to Viðey (*Vido*), half a mile northeast of Reykjavik. They arrived at a well-tended and rich farm, owned by the chief justice, Magnús Stephensen. The Stephensen family constituted the central elite of Iceland in the period, dominating administrative and religious spheres of the country (Grímsson, 1976). Stephensen himself had been participating in the mapping and possible improvement of Icelandic farming (Oslund, 2011). The farm was, according to Irminger, “surrounded by mountains scattered with eider birds”. This is one example of when the diary is confusing: The farm is on a low island, and as eiders do not hatch in mountains, there is no telling what he referred to. The travellers were informed that the farm each year was able to sell 100–200 *pund* of eiderdown. The host gave them a regal treatment and they spent the night on down pillows. Adding to the luxury, meals were accompanied by punch, rum and Madeira. To Irminger's surprise, the lady of the house herself served them morning coffee in bed and had the maid polish their boots. After breakfast, they took their goodbyes and rowed back over the bay, getting soaked by the rain. The next day they

had dinner in Hafnarfjörður (*Havnefjord*) at merchant Thomsen's. For the first three weeks of their journey, our three travellers mainly stayed in Reykjavik and its vicinities, socialising with the upper layers of society and participating in leisure activities such as hunting, shorter excursions and dinner parties. Apparently, they were in no hurry, and the row of visits and dinners worked as a kind of social investment for them, both for their coming trips and for their future reputation.

The travellers were now preparing for a longer excursion on horseback to see the geysers. It took an effort to settle the route, appointing a guide and getting horses, but they could borrow most of the gear from merchant Thomsen and tents from prefect Þórsteinsson. A century later, expeditions became increasingly competitive and travelling gear was becoming a research field of its own (Heggie, 2019), but so far, travellers mostly brought sturdy clothes and luggage consisting of what any Icelander would carry for a summertime trip. The tents were made of cotton or hemp, and came either with a roof and gables, or a tipi-like construction with a cloth attached to a pole in the middle. Paintings from a consequent travel show the tipi-like ones. The tents were unfortunately not waterproof and took longer to dry once wet. One horse carried the tents, another was loaded with provisions, and they brought one spare horse. The luggage, containing a cooking device similar to our days' spirit or kerosene stove, with some kind of oil to fuel it, food and two guns, was all tied to packsaddles under which pouts filled with dried turf (*grønsvær*), were fastened to protect the backs of the packhorses, just like mentioned in Olafsen & Povelsen (1805). If the weather was good, the travellers planned to camp in the tents, and if not, they would be able to sleep in churches (Fig. 2).

To Þingvellir and Geysir (*Tingvall* og *Geysir*)

On Thursday 29 June, the exciting trip to the geysers started. The little caravan eventually consisted of seven horses, whereof one, the

local guide Jon Gudmundsen, described as a quick and gay man, rode one. In the morning, the trail passed through a desert distance clad with moss, until noon, when they paused in a meadow and let the horses graze. They then continued to Þingvallahraun (*Tingvalla-Hraun*), a stretch of land covered with dramatic lava formations. Their path followed the lake Þingvallavatn (*Thingvallasøen*), and was partly difficult, with great risks for lethal falling. They arrived at Þingvalla vicarage at night, having been riding almost constantly for 8h. As foreseen, the vicar, Mr. Einarsson, directed them to spend the night in the church, where saddles and equipment were carried in. Soon, the "small, beautiful, pleasant vicar's wife" brought in coffee for the travellers, which she served on the altar (Irminger, 1826, p. 40b). In a countryside with few housing opportunities, churches were available for non-religious use of travellers, and as Irminger noted, receiving paying guests was a standard amongst priest families: "As there are no inns in Iceland, you turn to the vicar, who often, though in very meagre conditions, does not refrain from receiving a little payment for his effort" (Irminger 1826, p. 40).

After the coffee, the minister offered to show the young men the surroundings, with the sites so famous from *oldtiden*, the ancient past, according to Irminger (1826, p. 40b). They went to inspect the "terrifying" Almannagjá (*Almanna Giau*) and the waterfall which 300 *alen* south of the farm fell down into Þingvallavatn. Tectonic activities had created a crack, three-quarters of a *mil* long, so deep that they could not see its bottom, Irminger wrote (1826, p. 41). At this point in the diary, he was still particular with measurements, as if adhering to a duty. Visiting sites of the ancient past was probably a planned part of the trip, reflecting a new outlier of the Enlightenment travels. Oslund (2011), as well as Karlsdóttir (2013), point out that early tourists to Iceland mostly were on the look for the grand and dramatic landscapes. Irminger, though, travelled before commercial tourism. Knowledge of the sites that he and his friends were visiting was handed down to them in a transitional period of travel culture. The explorer was about to become the experienter. Pratt (2008) acknowledges this ambivalence inherent already in earlier "naturalist" seeing and writing of the Enlightenment. In the dry descriptions, a counternarrative, an "anti-conquest" relationship with the world, was sprouting. Pratt traces this anti-conquest to a search for non-exploitative relations to nature, more pure and innocent ways of life, and an allowance to interact personally with people and places. In Linnaeus' early writings, this ambivalence is obvious (Broberg, 2019). With the emergence of Romanticism, a collective interest for what had been lost was coming to the fore. Ruins, historical landmarks and other remnants of older (sometimes darker, sometimes more heroic) days attracted attention and were seen as worthy of visits by travellers from the "modern" world. This interest towards *oldtiden* was illustrated in Irminger describing the site that had historically been used to execute female convicts by throwing them over the waterfall, as well as the location of the Icelandic council meetings, the Alþingi (*Allting*), the so-called Lögberg (*Lögberget*). The last time the assembly had been held there was 1800, when it was abandoned not to be re-established till 1844 in Reykjavik (Agnarsdóttir, 2008). Irminger, though awestruck by the dramatic landscape, also suggested: "If one could plant trees instead of the naked lava-fields, the place would have been the most beautiful one could have seen" (Irminger 1826, p. 41b). This idea of agricultural or silvicultural "improvements" expressed a utilitarian thinking typical of his days (Karlsdóttir, 2013; Oslund, 2011), as well as an obviously "continental" ideal of what constitutes a beautiful landscape. Irminger had recently visited Magnús Stephenson, one

of the propagators of improvements of Icelandic nature, which possibly reflects in his comment.

At their return to the church in the light arctic summer-night, the table was laid by the vicar's wife, who generously fed them a meal of fish, potatoes and kohlrabi, which according to the charmed Irminger tasted "superbly" (1826, p. 41b). The travellers decided to put up their tents for the first time since it seemed healthier to sleep on the soft grass instead of on the hard pews in the church. Regarding their departure in the morning, Irminger commented in his diary, that they were expected to kiss everyone in the household on the cheeks: "But since this custom to us was unpleasant rather than enjoyable, at least I had seldom adhered to it, but couldn't help but to submit to Icelandic custom when saying goodbye to the beautiful vicar's wife" (1826, p.41b).

The stretch from Þingvellir was easy to ride, by a lake and over hills with fresh vegetation, entering into the lush and wet Laugardalur (*Løgerdal*). Late in the afternoon, they arrived at the vicarage in Miðdal (*Midal*). The minister Gudne Gudmundson was a peculiar personality, who received them at the door dressed in an old woolly night sweater. He was tall and shapely, known to be Iceland's strongest man. The heroism of Icelandic sagas resonated in Irminger's description: "He was so strong that without much effort, he could carry his riding horse" (1826, p. 42). The minister had coffee and milk brought out, but as they were not invited indoors, though soaked, they decided to carry on towards the geysers. The heavy rain did not discourage the minister from riding along with them to Brúará (*Broerå*), which their acquaintances in Reykjavik had warned them about. Irminger, obviously intimidated, noted about the passing of a bridge constructed over a rift in the otherwise shallow river:

Broerå is about 120 *alen* wide. In the middle, it has a five *alen* wide rift of horrible depth. Over this rift, a bridge is built out of heavy beams, five *alen* wide and five *alen* long. The ends of the bridge are attached to each edge of the rift. The bridge is placed over the rift on 2-3 *alen* from a not unsubstantial waterfall, where the water, falling down, causes a raging noise (Irminger, 1826, p. 42) (Fig. 3).

The minister rode before them and led the loaded horses to the opposite bank. Then he rode back onto the bridge and got off the horse, standing in the stream. He called for the travellers to come out to him, one after the other, and pulled their horses over. "You can only trust your horse, because just one step wrong, and you will fall into the abyss", Irminger commented. He added later in the margin that by his second visit to Iceland the bridge had been improved with a railing (Irminger, 1826, p. 42b changed 1834). They all got safe and sound over and the minister accompanied them a part of the way. This seems to have been customary in a landscape where the distance between human dwellings was long, and especially where detailed knowledge of the land was pivotal, as in the case with the dangerous ford. At his goodbyes, the minister produced a small bottle of brandy and offered them each a drink to warm up in the cold rain, before returning home.

They did not quite reach Geysir that evening. The rain continued, and they decided to spend the night in Úthlið (*Uthliid*) church, about 2h ride from Geysir. The church was as small as a Danish farmer's hut. They acquired the key from a nearby farmer and immediately started their cooking equipment to make toddy. The church, doubling as storage, was full of raw wool, which they arranged as beds, using their saddles as pillows. But the comfort was limited. Their clothes were still soaked and the church cold and damp.

In the morning, they arrived at Geysir after a brisk ride. Fortunately, the sun-dried their clothes and equipment, and they



Fig. 3. The bridge over Bruará with the railings that had been added between Irminger's first and second visit. Detail of lithography by Theodor Kloss 1835.

could lay off their coats. The enthusiasm over the splendid site was so great that they decided to stay for a couple of days. During nights, one of them stayed up to wake the others when the geysers erupted. Irminger's writing here shifted into science mode and he described the spectacle in detail, comparing his measurements to that of "Olafsen & Poulson" (Olafsen & Povelsen, 1805) in a way that makes it clear that he had brought their book. Eruptions started with a rumbling that reminded him of distanced cannon shots. After the sounds, they could observe how a huge pillar of water and steam was sent 30 feet into the air. A tremendous amount of water, foam and steam spread to all sides, whereafter the ground shook, and a water pillar rose 50 feet into the air. "So went six explosions, the fifth of which outshone all the others in both height and beauty. At each explosion, boiling water streamed over the [edges of] the spring", he noted (Irminger 1826, p. 43b). They enjoyed and explored the place and went to look down the craters when the geysers had reclined. In the afternoon, the rain returned. Irminger sighed in his diary, as if already tired of the rough conditions: "Everything in the tent was wet and I cannot say I'm a great friend of this tent-life. Our cooking device was the only comfort which often provided us with good, warm coffee" (1826, p. 44). We have no accounts of how he kept his diary dry in the wet conditions, but since it survived, he might have had it packed in oilcloth or some other waterproof envelope.

On July 3, the travellers left the geysers and returned through the same way they had come. They passed Brúará and arrived to the minister in Miðdal, where they enjoyed coffee and a soup made from salted meat, then continued through Laugardalur, where they admired the majestic volcano Hekla with its snowcap to the west. At night, they reached Þingvellir. In the morning, prepared to ride, they were invited by the minister for breakfast, surprised to find a nicely laid table with trout and kohlrabi, which served them well, since they hadn't had a proper meal for many days. They travelled

home over Mosfell (Mossfell), where they rested and bathed in the hot springs, and returned to Reykjavik.

Six days later, they were invited to a formal dinner with chief prefect Peder F. Hoppe, where wholesaler P.C. Knudsen, bishop Steingrímur Jónsson and dr. Jón Thorsteinsson also were invited (Irminger 1826, p. 45). The acquaintance with these gentlemen facilitated their next trip, to Snæfellsnessýsla (*Snæfjeldsýssel*) in western Iceland.

Setting out for Snorre Sturlasson's *baðstofa*

The preparations now went more swiftly. On July 13, late at night, the second trip started with sailing north over the bay with luggage and equipment. With headwind the relatively short distance took 6h, so they arrived at the farm Innrihólmur (*Indreholm*) early in the morning. Although the minister was awakened from his bed, he invited them for a good breakfast and gave them an opportunity to look around at the surroundings at the feet of the Akrafjall (*Akkrafield*). They noted the green pastures along the mountain. The pastor lent them riding horses and followed them 3h north, to Leirá (*Leira*). It was situated between Akrafjeld and the southern slope of Skarðsheiði (*Skarheide*), the most beautiful farm they had seen so far. Mr. Halgrimur Scheving, whom they had already met in Reykjavik, received them with great hospitality. They spent the night in a nice bed chamber and enjoyed the high standards of the farm. The next morning, they breakfasted on *carbonade* (meat patties), trout and *rödgröd* (rhubarb or berry cream), exquisitely prepared, according to Irminger, although their host excused the quality of the food with the sad tale that he had recently lost his wife (Irminger 1826, p. 45b). In the afternoon, they borrowed fresh horses out of Scheving's hundred horses. Their host and beneficiary came with them for a part of the road.

From the Skarðsheidi (*Skarheidsfjeldene*), they had 3h of trials of hard northern winds, snow and cold, the clouds all around them. Once out of the clouds, they followed the brink of the lake Skorradalvatn (*Skoverdalsvatn*), over Andakilsá (*Andekilde*) and Grímsá (Grimms-Aa) and put up their tent at a grassy field called Kálfanæs (*Kalvenæs*) close to Flókadalsá (*Floke-Aa*). During the whole day, they had only seen two small farms. In the bright sunshine of the following morning, they passed Geirsá (*Geirsá*) with its warm fountains and desert fields covered in sand and burnt stone. At the farm Stóri-Kroppur (*Store Kropp*), they left the packhorse and the spare horse to stay. Accompanied by their guide, they went to look at Reykholtisdalur (*Reikholtisdalen*), the centre in a breath-taking scenery with ascending clouds of mist towards a backdrop of ice- and snow-covered mountains with the mountain Ok by the Baldjökull (*Ok-Bald*) and Langjökull (*Lange Jøkel*) to the east. To the north, the Hvítá (*Hviteá*) meandered, “the largest river in the west of Iceland”, Irminger wrote (1826, p. 45b). Thereafter, they took a look at Kleppjárnsreykir (*Kleiphots Reiki*), where hot springs incessantly sprayed boiling water into the sky from rocky formations with a crust that, according to Irminger, looked like limestone. Not far away was the Deildartunguhver (*Tunga-Huer*) rock, with hot springs, two of which in particular ejected water to 14–15 feet high. In the Reykjadalssá (*Reikiadals-Elven*), running by closely, there were also hot springs, so that the whole river developed a great mist.

Finally, they reached Snorre Sturlason’s *baðstofa* (*badstue*, bathing hut or sauna in English), half a mile further into the valley. The local law official Jon Jonson showed them the hut, built beside three small thermal springs. It had a narrow corridor as an entrance. Inside it was very hot and the place was said to be used for treating ill people, especially those troubled by arthritis. The patient was undressed, placed on a woolly plaid on a large stone inside the house, covered with blankets and brought to transpiration by spending 2h in the cottage, Irminger was told (1826, p. 46). They then continued “north”, back and forth over the meandering Reykjadalssá. The direction here seems to be an example of a general “out”, since the next site is to the east. After the last ford, they rode for half an hour to Reykholt (*Reikholt*), where the famous Icelandic poet and author Snorre Sturlason had lived in the 13th century. Now the dean Eggert Gudmundsen resided there. They inspected the mud walls that once surrounded Snorre’s farm and his washing place, where warm water ran through a system of stone-lined tubs. The dean told the travellers that he put a lot of effort into keeping Snorre’s 600 years old farm intact. A confusing fact is that the modern Reykholt tourist visit centre, called *Snórri Stúrlasons baðstofa*, is not the little hut for sweat-baths that Irminger first visited, which was also mentioned by Olafsen & Povelsen (1805), but this latter farm.

In the evening, they turned back to Stóri-Kroppur where they raised their tents and enjoyed a glass of punch with a pastor Thodr from Lynde. The night was not to be restful: “We had a severe rain, which disturbed us greatly, as we could not keep dry in the tent”, Irminger reported (1826, p. 46b). At 3 am, the guide woke them up because a horse was missing. Since the horse was borrowed from Scheving and much needed for their journey, it was a great worry for the travellers. Everyone hastily got up and a search was started. During the whole morning till the afternoon, they searched in all directions of the farm and the surrounding mountains without the slightest trace of the horse. Finally, they took the heavy decision to leave without the horse. As they reached Stafholtsey (*Eig*) and were just about to pass Hvítá with the assistance of their guide, a man from their latest

night quarter came riding, the missing horse on tow. They were relieved to find it was unharmed:

He told us, that soon after our leave, he had found the horse inside his sheep-house. It had fallen through the roof, where it had climbed up to graze. The door to the sheep-house was too small for the horse to exit, so they had had to break down some of the wall to get it out (Irminger 1826, p. 47).

They were now to pass Hvítá, which at this ford was running in three branches. The travellers had to remove their boots, stockings and breeches, which Irminger found very unpleasant, to wade over the icy river in rain and cold, and then over the Norðurá (*Norder Aa*). They were impressed to see the horses pass through the strong current with water sometimes to their backs.

At night, they arrived to the dean Peder Pedersen at “*Skafoholt*” (which must be Stafholt), “where this honest old man and his wife treated us with coffee etc to warm us up a little again”, Irminger wrote (1826, p. 47). Their clothes and gear were hung in the large and well-kept church to dry. Beds were made up in the dean’s larger room, where the old wife and the maid helped to undress the men and did not leave the room till they were all in bed. The adventures of the day made them sleep heavily. For breakfast, they had a lamb, parted in four, and *skyr*, “a kind of fermented milk, that tastes deliciously”, Irminger wrote (1826, p. 47). In the afternoon, they said their farewells to the kind dean’s wife. The dean followed them to a ferry landing where they were rowed over, while the horses swam. They rode along Gljúfará (*Gluvar Aa*) (which according to Irminger, as well as Olafsen & Povelsen (1805) runs from the western Skarðshéidi), and then turned sharply upwards and passed Langá (*Langer River*) through difficult terrain. They now entered a more remote and sparsely populated part of Iceland (Fig. 4).

Snæfellsnessýsla

By midnight, they reached Hítardalur (*Hittedal*), where the minister Björn Bendixen lived. In the morning, the minister took on the role as a local tourist guide and went to show them the famous Hítardalur caves. The caves had been thoroughly investigated and described by Olafsen & Povelsen, calling them the Sourther (which Olafsen and Povelsen refer to the word “sourtour”, black) and Fortification (1805, pp. 65–67). The largest cave had been damaged during the latest earthquake. Eventually, they came to a place called Nafnaklettur (*Navneklitten*), the “Name Cliff”, where, according to Irminger, “all travellers according to custom carve their names into a smooth wall formed by nature. With a knife, one can easily carve in the letters” (1826, p. 47b).

After lunch, they rode by Fagraskógarfjall (*Fagra-Skovrafield*), with its sharp and edgy profile. Close to the top, there was a large hole, Irminger wrote, which one could see through (1826, p. 48). According to local lore, “the worst robber in Iceland”, Grettir (*Gretier*), was said to have stayed in the so-called Grettisbæli (*Gretiers Beile*) for two full years, before anyone could catch him. From his hiding place, the villain could allegedly look out in all directions and spot possible victims, and a large rock at the foot of the mountain had been rolled down by Grettir to ward off pursuers. We cannot tell who informed Irminger about the infamous Icelandic trickster figure Grettir Ásmundarson, called Grettir the Strong (Sæþórsdóttir, Hall, & Saarinen, 2011). Grettir is not mentioned by Olafsen and Povelsen in relation to this location. It is notable, though, that the legend was transferred to visitors, probably by the local guide.



Fig. 4. Icelandic woman helping the guest to pull off wet clothes, as was the custom in Iceland. Illustration from *The Land of Thor* by J. Ross Browne (1867, p. 540), with the caption “An awkward situation”.

After having passed under the Hafursfell (*Haver-fjeld*) and over the Haffjarðará (*Havfierdur-Aae*), the travellers arrived at the farm Dalur (*Dal*) at night, and the farmer was woken up. He had hot water brought out, so that they could prepare punch, which, according to Irminger, the farmer had never tasted before (1826, p. 48). This is one of the few mentions in the diary of direct interaction with a local farmer. The farmer, who had harvested the day before, raked in a pile of fresh hay for the campers to raise their tents on. They continued from Dal along the banks of Straumfjarðará (*Strømfiardar-Aa*), approximately along the current road Vatnaleið. At Kerlingarskarð (*Kiellingaskard*), they passed over the mountains and met a grand a view over Breiðafjörður (*Brede-Bugten*). Nature here made a great impression on Irminger, depicted in the diary in a romantic note: “burnt fjelds, looking terrifying, and where the horrible devastation of the fire could be seen” (Irminger 1826, p. 48). In the afternoon, they descended to the coast at Stykkishólmur (*Stikkelsholm*), and were invited to spend the night at merchant Bendixen’s. Madame Bendixen was an exceedingly neat and swift housewife who made their stay as comfortable as she could, Irminger stated, as if relieved to return to more civilised lodging. The farm, consisting of a couple of wooden buildings built by the Icelandic Trade Company, formed the most important trade port in Snæfellsnesýsla. As a pleasant surprise, the galeas *København* could be seen on the roads, anchored to collect cargo. The travellers were invited for lunch with the captain and a foreman Rist, who had gone onboard in Reykjavík.

On July 22, they left Stykkishólmur and passed through the Berserkjahraun (*Berserke-Rhaun*), a very demanding passage, where the trail was so steep that “one not could believe it possible for any horse to descend, as there eventually were completely vertical steps of 3 feet height, still our brave horses walked down these dangerous stairs with impressive cautiousness”, Irminger wrote

(1826, p. 48b). The trip went through a boggy dale and over a high fjeld at Tröllaháls (*Trotlehals*). In the evening, they arrived to a doctor Jon Jonsson Hjaltalin at Grundarfjörður (*Grønneffjord*). The place, the name of which means “the fjord by the farm Grund” and not “the green fjord” as Irminger’s interpretation suggests, was surrounded by fjelds, covered in greenery and embellished with cascades of water, which seemed to erupt from the mountains (1826, p. 48b). The western side of the fjord was guarded by two tall mountains. One was, according to Irminger, called The sugarloaf (*Sukkertoppen*), but its Icelandic name is Kirkjufell. The other one Irminger called The coffin (*Ligkisten*) after its shape, but its vernacular name is Stöð (K. Benediktsson, personal communication November 25 2019). Dr. Hjaltalin dined with them in the evening. As his house was small, they had to stay over at his neighbours’, an “old honourable foreman” called Helgesen.

On Sunday July 23, they rode westwards to Ólafsvík (*Olufsvig*). Dr. Hjaltalin followed them along. Between Grundarfjörður and Ólafsvík was the dangerous passing at Búlandshöfði (*Bulands Høfde*), over which the doctor felt it safer to guide them. Irminger, as always when having reason to be alarmed, retreated to numbers. The mountain was 2000 *fod* high and fell steeply into the sea. On a stretch of 300 *alen* the trail was very troubling, with rocks that had rolled down during an earthquake, causing acute danger of falling down into the abyss. The trail, it was reported, shifted from day to day due to the dirt and rocks tumbling down the mountainside. During ebb, one could pass conveniently on the beach below, a road always used in the winters. Once past the height, they came by a farm called Máfahlíð (*Maageliid*), inhabited by sheriff Sverresen. Late at night, they arrived at Ólafsvík, to the “north”, according to Irminger, though they had travelled mainly to the west. In the morning, they were visited at their tents by a local merchant, Mr. Schiøth, who invited

them to his home. The trading houses were placed close to the beach, and the coastline was described as “naked and stony”. Irminger wrote, apparently missing spectacular sceneries: “there was nothing to attract the eye” (Irminger 1826, p. 49). Although, the lack of visual impression was compensated by hospitality: “During the night”, he continued, “we slept in splendid beds in Mr. Schiøth’s house. In the morning, like in any other place here in Iceland, we were served coffee on the beds by the wife. Mr. Schiøth is a very agreeable man” (1826, p. 49). After a calm morning, they had to leave during ebb to get around the mountain. The diary reports an unpleasant distance: “The first *mil* was the worst I have ever ridden. The trail went over large slippery and loose rocks, under a 1500 *fod* high, protruding mountain called Enni (*Endet*)” (1826, p. 49b). Rocks kept falling down. But the travellers endured unharmed, and arrived at Ingjaldshól (*Ingershool*), where a Mr. Scheving lived, a brother of the magnanimous Mr. Scheving who had lent them horses. They made a short coffee-break and continued, astounded by the infinite snow- and ice stretches at Snæfjellsjökull. The dairy is unclear here: Irminger reports a ride *around* the mountain, but also that through cracks in the ice, they watched streams turning into waterfalls, which suggests that they rode on the glacier itself.

The guide took them three *mil* through naked, burnt steppes of the Neshraun (*Onvardenes-Hraun*) to the west. They passed the spectacular cliff formations Lóndrangar (*Lange Drengur*). Irminger’s translation is misleading, it does not mean “The long boys” but “the rock pillars at Lón” (K. Benediktsson, personal communication November 25 2019). At night, they arrived at Laugarbrekka (*Løgerbrekke*) church, where they had planned to spend the night. Inconveniently, a disappointment met the exhausted and wet travellers, as nobody invited them in or offered warm drinks. Something was not right in the household, and Irminger, not telling from whom, picked up information on the dubious reputation of its master:

Pastor Nifussen, who lived close to the church, was nowhere to be seen, as he had fallen ill in the evening —. [The three lines in the diary seem to indicate a doubt about the so-called illness.] He was recently returned from Copenhagen, where he had won a court case in the Highest Court. In Copenhagen, he is said to be a God-fearing and sober minister. In reality, he was a spineless drunk (1826, p. 49b).

Facing this lack of hospitality, they had to sleep in their soaked tents. As some sun shone through in the morning, they rode southwards to *Stappen* (Stapi or Arnarstapi), where their acquaintance from Reykjavik, prefect Bjarni Thorsteinsson, lived with his wife. Here, they were received in the friendliest way in a spacious home, about which Irminger stated “it could have been furnished very pleasantly, had Thorsteinsson only been able to get the building material, since he has a great taste and a desire to make things beautiful [around him]”. The travellers spent the stormy day in the host’s study, entertaining themselves with a splendid library. “The pleasant company of the wife and the prefect, their good life-style etc. etc. made us forget the bad weather, and the time passed very agreeably”, Irminger wrote (1826, p. 50).

Accompanied by Mr. Thorsteinsson, they sailed out to look at the coast in the morning. Unfortunately, harsh breakings didn’t allow them to row into the caves, but they found it exciting to see the waves break against the majestic basalt formations. There was a large portal, created by the pillars, whereof the most spectacular, named after the Fingal Cave in Scotland, according to Irminger (1826, p. 50), seems to be the Valasnös Cave. The travellers

were awestruck when thousands of seagulls fled the cave as they threw in stones.

On July 29, they rode on from *Stappen* with Mr. Thorsteinsson. They were heading for Búðahraun (*Bude-Hraun*), where they descended into a cave called the Búðaklettur (*Klette-Hule*) until darkness did not allow them to go further. The constant dripping from the ceiling had created sharp points (stalagmites) hanging down at differing lengths (Irminger 1826, p. 50b). In the afternoon, they were at *Buderstad* (either Búðir or Barðastaðir) at the south coast, a minor trading port, and arrived to a neat little farm, where Madam Hjaltalin, possibly related to Dr. Hjaltalin, lived. Mrs. Hjaltalin received them very friendly according to the diary keeper, who also commented that one of the two daughters “was fairly handsome” (Irminger 1826, p. 50b). Unfortunately, there was not much time for a closer acquaintance, since they headed on to Ölkelda (*Oel-Kilde*). The “beer-spring” had, according to Irminger, “lost the strong taste of beer due to the moist weather”. Here Irminger had misinterpreted the name, which refers to bubbly water, not to beer (K. Benediktsson, personal communication November 25 2019). On the beach, they passed large amounts of driftwood and whale skulls washed on to the shore. At the church of Staðarstaður (*Staderstad*), they were received by the dean Gudmundsen, an “honest old man” (Irminger 1826, p. 50b), who served them coffee, Madeira and sago soup, all imported food which seems luxurious in such a rural context.

On the way back

On Sunday morning, they continued along the coast. One hour later, they arrived at a large farm called *Sandhammer* (probably Stakkhamar), where they had to wait for ebb, or they would have to swim several rivers. By the friendly local farmers, they were served as much sheep milk as they could drink while waiting. At 6 pm, they got back on the horse and rode on the beach the whole evening over *Langefjordur*, which probably refers to Löngufjörur, and passed the Straumfjarðará (*Strömfjeldur-Aa*) where the horses almost had to swim over. Haffjarðará (*Havfjeldjur-Aa*), the next one, was shallower. “We preferred this sea-trip at horseback, since by riding up on dry land, one is too exhausted, and there are so many big rocks that the horses can only move very slowly. To the contrary, here on the hard sand, we could keep a steady trot”, Irminger commented (1826, p. 51). In the light night, they climbed the volcano Eldborg, loose lava making the ascent very tiring. Reaching the top, they sat at the edge with one leg at each side, admiring a “view without comparison” over the Eldborg-Hraun and the great Faxaflói (*Faxe Bugt*). They continued to Kolbeinsstaðir (*Kolbeinstadur*), where they put up their tent at only 2 °C Reaumur, and slept well (Irminger 1826, p. 51).

At this stage in the diary, there is a sense of slight hurry. Rides get brisker, reporting increasingly condensed. Possibly, they were afraid to miss the departure of *København* in Reykjavik, or they simply suffered from travel fatigue. They now rode literally over stems and stones in “the western Skarðsheimi” – not named so on current maps, but mentioned both by Olafsen & Povelsen (1805) and Henderson (1818) – and late at night, they were at Svignaskarð (*Svignagard*), where sheriff Ottesen resided. They left in the morning following the Norðurá for two *mil*, as swiftly as the horses could run. An hour later, they passed Gljúfurá (*Gluvar-Aa*) where it joins the Norðurá, probably west of Flóðatangi. The ford was, according to Irminger, the worst he had experienced. The first higher ground they got to was so soft and uneven that the horses hardly made it through, and water reached the middle of their



Fig. 5. Ferry landing by Hvítá. Painted by Auguste Mayer 1836.

saddles. For moments, Irminger's horse had its head under water (1826, p. 51). About an hour later, they stood at the impressive Hvítá. Here they got on a ferry, while the horses had to swim. They passed through deep mires until finally returning to Mr. Scheving's at the farm Leirá. Horses and equipment were controlled, returned and duly thanked for. There is no mentioning of payment Irminger and his friends took a walk, ate well and left the next afternoon. The passage over the bay from Innrihólmur met an obstacle. There was a harvest celebration in the harbour, and no one could be paid to sail them this festive evening. Eventually, the travellers had to rent a boat and row themselves to Reykjavik, having been away for three weeks (Fig. 5).

They re-settled in The Club to wait for the galeas *København* to return from the west coast. Days went pleasantly with outings and parties, and the diary gives an impression that the travellers now were even more respected in the inner circles. They had stood the test of the travels and were deserving of celebration. The standard of socialising, though, was not always what Irminger was used to from Copenhagen, and he complained: "Pretty ladies and good music lacked. In the fandango, the music stopped. We had to sing ourselves out!" (1826, p. 51b). After a row of honorary farewell dinners, bourgeois Reykjavik had duly celebrated their visitors, who went onboard *København* in the evening of August 18. The next day, merchant Willeius got onboard and they sailed off. The return trip took twenty-three days.

The destiny of the travellers and some concluding remarks

Rosenwinge suffered from weak health and died in 1834. Secker became a naval commander in 1857. Carl Irminger worked in the West Indies and travelled in France. In 1832, now a first lieutenant, he got a position as tutor and adjutant for the Danish prince Christian Frederik. The hiring of Irminger was possibly intended to introduce an element of calm and structure in the prince's life,

since he was a constant source of scandals and about to be separated from his first wife princess Vilhelmine. Soon, the idea of a royal trip to Iceland was born. According to a note by Irminger (No date), the prince was sent to Iceland by his father-in-law, King Frederik VI. According to Neiiendam (1945), the prince was "expelled" to Iceland. But Irminger later wrote that the prince himself had suggested the expedition. This was when Irminger's youthful journey was to pay off in terms of cultural capital. His experience, especially his tale of the primitive travelling conditions, seems to have compelled the prince:

When I was hired by the prince in 1832, we often talked of Iceland, and especially when I told the prince that you almost always had to ride on horse-back there and sleep in tents during the night, he was very eager to go to Iceland, and soon after, the prince himself asked the King if he, when there was possibility, could make a journey to Iceland (Irminger, 1866, our translation).

The prince's wish to foretake a rough journey predicted what would be a fad amongst European royalty: To go to sea, travel far, and demonstrate a non-spoilt intimacy with living conditions of commoners (Schneider, 2017). Irminger had the contacts and the knowledge to arrange such a trip. Unfortunately, the prince's yearn for simplicity seems to have gone unnoticed: the royal expedition turned out much grander and more well-equipped than Irminger's previous travel, with a staff of 9 servants and 70 horses. The company included the maritime painter Theodor Kloss, who made a row of illustrations of the journey (Kloss, 1835). Organising the expedition was a great achievement in Irminger's career, but he seems to have faced at least some challenges handling his highborn employer, because just a year after the expedition, 1836, Irminger wrote that introducing princes at sea was not a good idea (Schneider 2017) (Fig. 6).

Irminger himself was not explicit about why he and his friends undertook their first trip to Iceland. What we have found is a context related to knowledge, personal development and travels in his day. Enlightenment reports clearly inspired him and formed the literary tradition that he emulated. Although his diary was not

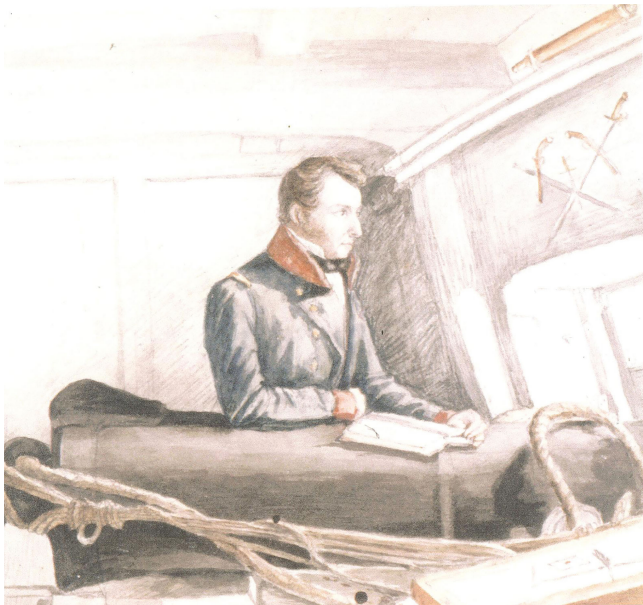


Fig. 6. Portrait of Carl Irminger in Danish naval officer's uniform, on board *Linieskibet Dronning Marie*. Water colour by Theodor Kloss 1834.

intended for publication, he wrote himself into this tradition, in a combination with habitual naval logging. Irminger's youthful enthusiasm, though, directed his recording towards food, sleeping quarters, hosts and especially hostesses. Dispersed amongst the distances and lodgings are musings over beautiful vistas and remnants of the historical past, typical of the awakening Romanticism. His ambivalence towards wilderness, finding it impressive but sometimes suggesting "improvements" to make the landscape more European or Danish, also reflects ideas of his time.

When it comes to the way of travelling, Irminger and his friends performed their journey in a fashion that reflected their aspirational status. As educated but unestablished naval officers, they had the confidence to approach the local elite and to depend on its hospitality and recommendations from one household to the next. The journey, when "outside" established society, was uncomfortable and sometimes physically dangerous. It predated the Romanticism yearning for a simple way of life (during the trip, that is) and encounters with wilderness as an imagined landscape formed by cultural preconceptions (Pratt, 2008). Enduring the self-imposed discomfort and risk seems to have been an end in itself, not unlike the *raison d'être* of adventure travels as we know them today, when hardcore adventurers voluntarily expose themselves to danger. Most contemporary nature tourism, though, is arranged to give travellers visual and physical thrills, while at the same time knowing they are fairly safe. What unifies Irminger's and latter days touristic experience are good stories of slight heroism and endurance to bring back home. In Irminger's days, the exclusiveness of his experience provided him with a cultural capital, from which he decidedly profited in his career. In the coming decades, the burgeoning travel press was to publish a flow of books about exotic places (Keighren et al., 2015; Stone, 2004). Travelling to Iceland was to become a possibility for widening layers of society and, as a response, tourism one of the main Icelandic occupations. Travellers no longer are expected to report to the prefect on arrival or rely on vicars' wives to serve them coffee in the morning.

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Conflicts of interest. None.

Note

I In the first publication of *Rejse...*, the authors' names were spelled in Danish: Eggert Olavsén & Bjørn Povlsen. In the English translation, the authors were called "Messrs. Olafsen & Povelsen" (1805). Irminger wrote "Olafsen & Poulson" in the diary and in his memoirs 1866 "Olavssen og Povelsen". In Iceland, the authors are referred to as "Eggert og Bjarni" (Oslund, 2011).

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