Tourism in Iceland
Overcooking the Golden Goose?
Foundations – Protection - Professionalism

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SCS Iceland
Helping people heal the land
The need for action

• Report – committee on protecting tourist sites
  – Action urgently needed – prevent severe damage
  – Reputation of Iceland at risk
  – Without protection – unrealistic to increase tourism in Iceland
• The year of report – 1995!
• Relatively little action since – but 7 fold increase in tourists 1995 to 2015
• Prediction for 2016 is 1.730.000 – for a nation of 330.000
• The biggest industry in Iceland – but
• Are we killing the golden goose?
Iceland is alive!
Iceland is unique!
Sensitive environments
Trampling can do excessive damage
But – how do we appreciate, respect and protect the beauty of Iceland?
Stupid is the one that sits home

Vits er þörf þeim er víða ratar dælt er heima hvað

_Hávamál_

The original definition of “stupid” is the one that always stays at home.
The black sand – A natural wonder

Ljósm: Fríður Eggertsdóttir
In contrast to most common light color in other countries
An asset for tourism from the shoreline to the volcanic central highlands.
But – Are we on track?

“... a premium motorbike tour company in Iceland”
The lack of respect for Icelandic nature

What is the real stage of nature conservation?

A logo for a tourist company

Hjólavillingar - A dirt bike club
The sensitive nature needs protection

Not only the popular places – All of Iceland is a tourist site!
But – what do we need to protect?

The beauty of nature is the foundation
Need to protect visual beauty
and landscapes – a complex issue
Is the desert a resource?
Oft ég svartan sandinn leit

The destruction of Iceland's ecosystems
Land degradation and desertification most severe environmental issue

Photo: Garðar Þorfinnsson
The consequence of soil erosion – But is also part of the stark beauty of Iceland
Policy and planning badly needed
What and how to reclaim?
Choice of plants - Landscape characteristics - View
The beauty of Iceland is the foundation for biggest revenue generator of the nation - but

• An era of massive environmental damage to sensitive nature
  – Big stakes
  – One of Iceland’s biggest environmental problems

• We are overcooking the golden goose!
What is sustainable tourism?

Is protection of nature an integral factor?
Promotion and advertising downgrade environmental awareness

Handbook for foreign dirt-bikers
Everything permitted – so long there is a track visible!
Sheep tracks an exciting option

An Icelandic bank
From an interview with tourist camper rental: „Icelandic law and regulations allow you to park almost anywhere ... at any place the tourists like.“

Increasing environmental damage
Iceland's Off-Road Academy

http://www.natureexplorer.is/4x4-training/off-road-academy
Riding into the hot spring

DV 21-23 júlí 2015, Kynningarblað – Hestar
Is there a planning chaos?

Need to clarify rules on treating the land
Improve rules and regulations
Set codes of conduct for promotions and advertisement
The governmental message?
The silence of the wilderness
“Wilderness” – Undervalued resource
Considering roads and powerlines on maps and databases (2010) the wilderness is endangered.

Taylor, 2011
How extensive roadsystem do we need?

Forms out of control – at a great cost to Iceland’s natural resources

One of biggest planning gaps in Iceland?
Roads or an environmental disaster?

- What do the maps show as roads open to public?
  - Real roads and vehicle tracks
  - Tracks of restricted use
  - Off road damages shown as roads
  - Closed tracks
  - Bridle paths
  - Footpaths

- Very weak links to planning
Paths and tourist sites

What is wrong here?
Repair or management

Path repair

• Often driven by acute site damage
• Usually reactive
• Local focus
• ‘One-off’ funding

Path management

• Ideally objective-led, inventory-based
• Pro-active or pre-emptive
• Strategic priorities
• Sustained funding stream

Management or chaotic planning?

Can we learn from the sheep?

Ljósm: Áskell Þórísson

Ljósm: Magnús Jóhannsson
The water digs

Ljósm: Guðmundur Ögmundsson
The need for professionalism

Ljósm: René Biasone
The acts of humans
Must match the natural pearls which they are to serve!
Are we at the repair stage instead of management and foresight?
Where to build?
Which places to save from development?
How to make infrastructure part of the environment?

Example from Australia
We should adapt knowledge, skills and „management culture“ from countries that take good care of nature ....
... but the Icelanders may have a bit individualistic approach to conservation.

Photos from USA
Government to blame?

- Tourism #1 in generating currency
  - 80-90% attracted by nature of Iceland, but ...
  - Tourism a dwarf in government

- Need to increase efficiency
  - Many agencies / bodies - None with a holistic role at national level
  - Tourism weak at the ministerial level

Ministry of Industries and Innovation
In closing

• How well are we prepared?
  – Black report 1995, but too little done
  – Inhabitants 60,000 more
  – Tourists 1,100,000 increase to 2015,
    - possibly > 1,500,000 for 2016
• The “system“ lagging way behind
  – Compares to NZ before 1990?
• Respect nature
  – The “golden goose“ of tourism
  – And thus the financial health of Iceland
• Let’s step gently to earth