

SVARTÁRKOT, CULTURE – NATURE (SCN)

Voices of Nature: Spirits and the daemonic in Iceland through the lens of Environmental Humanities

10-DAY SUMMER COURSE in 2026 – PROGRAMME Aug 10-20.*

** Please note that minor changes to the course content, schedule, or materials may occur. We will communicate any updates as needed.*

The rural regions of Iceland are unique environments - sometimes perceived as remote - but they are also entangled in the wider social and environmental histories of Iceland and the North Atlantic. Bárðardalur and Reykholtisdalur and their environments are traditional farming communities, but now reflect extraordinary cultural diversity. Our goal is to inspire students and professionals alike to draw inspiration for their interdisciplinary scholarship whether their work is focused on Iceland or elsewhere.

Through lectures, discussions and excursions, the course will pose a range of questions concerning the preternatural aspects of human relations to the land, natural forces and the environment--from the settlement of a virgin country to modern relations.

Overall, the program will weave a coherent strand about nature spirits and the preternatural in Iceland throughout the course. It is arranged, as much as possible, in chronological order, and framed by Old Norse mythology, both ancient and modern. At the same time, there will be several individual lectures on related themes that do not follow the chronology, and which expand the scope somewhat. These embrace topics such as North American indigenous wisdom, expressions of nature through music and art, and modern views of the preternatural.

On the first day, after a brief survey of Icelandic environmental history, there will be a lecture on the Old Norse mythology, and a short lecture on the outlaws in the highlands. This will prepare us for a bus ride across the highlands (preferably Sprengisandur, but Kjölur is a possibility). On the last day, the last lecture will be on this mythology in modern times.

DAY 1 – Monday Aug 10

9:00 Lectures at **The Reykjavík Academy**, Hafnarstræti 5, Reykjavík: Árni Daníel Júlíusson: *Before and after fossil fuel started to flow: From the environmental history of Iceland 800-2008*; Ingunn Ásdísardóttir – *Gods but not giants; An introduction into Pre-Christian religion in the North*; Viðar Hreinsson *Explorations and outlaws in the highlands*.

- 11:00 Departure, north across Sprengisandur. Short stops for lunch and at a few spectacular places such as magnificent waterfalls. Some lectures and storytelling on the way.
- 19:00 Bárðardalur Valley: Dinner. Viðar Hreinsson – Brief presentation of the Svartárvot Project. Accommodation after that.

DAY 2 – Tuesday Aug 11

- 9:00-10:00 Breakfast
- 10:00-12:00 Introductory lectures, setting the tone: – Viðar Hreinsson – *Settlement, Dragonheads and nature spirits on the move*; David Winter: *Old Wine in New Skins: how the daemonic became the demonic*.
- 12:00-13:00 Lunch
- 13:00-18:00 Svartárvot farm and surroundings, and a hike to the hidden gem Aldey waterfall and the Spring of Life. Guided by Guðrún Tryggvadóttir and Sigurlína Tryggvadóttir, farmers in Svartárvot who will tell stories of elves along the way.
- 18:00-19:00 Dinner

DAY 3 – Wednesday Aug 12

- 8:00-8:30 Breakfast
- 8:30-11:30 Astrid Ogilvie – *Spells, Storms and Snows: Weather Magic in the Sagas of Icelanders*; Viðar Hreinsson – *Christianity against a calf-tail and spectre of a bull. Cultural war in Eyrbyggja saga*; David Winter – *The Medieval Devil and his Minions*.
- 12:00-13:00 Lunch
- 13:00-19:00 Bus trip to Lake Mývatn. Gígur Centre: Auður Aðalsteinsdóttir, *Introduction of the University of Iceland Research Centre*; Ole Sandberg; “*The Fairies dance, and Christ is Nailed to the Cross*”: *On Indigeneity, Land-Connectedness and Self-Colonisation at the Margins of Modernity*; Sightseeing and free time in Reykjahlíð village.
- 19:00-20:00 Dinner

DAY 4 – Thursday Aug 13

8:00-9:00	Breakfast
9:00-12:00	3 lectures and discussions on Grettir and preternatural beings: David Winter, Steven Hartman and Viðar Hreinsson with a thread through Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss toward Jón lærði's world of demons.
12:00-13:00	Lunch
13:00-14:00	Hafdís Erla Hafsteinsdóttir: <i>Ocean, Ghosts and Queerness</i> .
14:00-17:00	Afternoon hike.
18:00-19:00	Dinner
20:00-	Steven Hartman – Presentation of UNESCO Bridges.

DAY 5 – Friday Aug 14

8:00-9:00	Breakfast
9:30-18:00	Into the lava field – a whole day excursion into Ódáðahraun by bus and foot – Jón lærði and Áradalir (Valley of Demons), outdoor lecture Viðar Hreinsson.
18:00-19:00	Dinner
20:00	Movie

DAY 6 – Saturday Aug 15

8:00-9:00	Breakfast
10:00-12:00	David Winter – <i>Oddur's Hekla: Destigmatizing Demonization in the Icelandic Renaissance</i> ; Viðar Hreinsson – <i>Enlightened Elves? Hidden people and the first Modern Novel by Eiríkur Laxdal</i> .
12:00-13:00	Lunch
13:00-17:00	Short, refreshing early afternoon hike; Vicki Ellen Szabo: <i>Monster Fish with Strange Names: Sea Monsters and Beastly Whales in North Atlantic History and Literature</i> ; Sigríður Matthíasdóttir – <i>Coping with nature through real time visualisation at a distance. Communicating clairvoyance in the Sigfús Sigfússon's stories of folklore</i> .
18:00-19:00	Dinner

DAY 7- Sunday Aug 16

8:00-9:00	Breakfast
9:00-12:00	Mark Dickinson – <i>Protocols of Place</i>

- 12:00-13:00 Lunch
- 13:00-17:00 Oddný Eir Ævarsdóttir – *Völva-songs: Natural elements and extra-natural spaces (on new ways of influencing creative writing and Björk's Biophilia)*; Auður Viðarsdóttir and Konstantine Vlasits: *Sounds and music of nature. Talks, performances plus experimental workshop*
- 18:00-19:00 Last Supper in Bárðardalur.

DAY 8 – Monday Aug 17

- 8:00-9:00 Breakfast
- 9:00-16:00 Drive to Reykholt
- 17:00-18:00 Dinner and a lecture (Bergur Þorgeirsson, Director of Snorrastofa, cultural and medieval centre in Reykholt: *Introduction to Snorri Sturluson and Snorrastofa*).

DAY 9 – Tuesday Aug 18

- 9:00-19:00 Excursion to Húsafell, Kaldidalur/Þórisdalur exhibition and lectures: Þórunn Valdimarsdóttir, historian and writer: *What Reverend Snorri in Húsafell taught me of the clash between medieval thought and enlightenment*; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir – *Enchanted Spots and Homes of the Hidden People in Icelandic Past and Present*. Páll Guðmundsson introduces his art and instruments.

DAY 10 – Wednesday Aug 19

- 9:00-12:00 Lectures: Bergur Þorgeirsson – *The Malicious God. The Demonising of Oden in Old-Icelandic texts*. Björk Bjarnadóttir, “*They often stole our children, just like yours did*”. The “*hidden people*” of Iceland and the “*Memegwesi*” of the Ojibway people. Teresa Dröfn Freysdóttir Njarðvík: *Between recreation and innovation: modern Ásatrú and fragmentary medieval sources*.
- 13:00 Presentations by participants and wrapping up discussions.

DAY 11 -Thursday Aug 20

- 8:00-9:00 Breakfast at Reykholt
- Departure to Reykjavík.

39 lecture hours/38 hours excursions. Total 77 hours.