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Across Iceland by the Sprengisandr Route

Author(s): Cuthbert E. Peek

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*Across Iceland by the Sprengisandr Route.*

By CUTHBERT E. PEEK.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, January 30th, 1882.)

Map, p. 192.

ALTHOUGH many persons annually visit Iceland, there are few who travel far into the interior to examine the barren wastes and lava fields which exist in the centre of the island. Last July Mr. Coles, Mr. Delmar Morgan and myself, left Leith by the mail-steamer *Valdemar* to explore this little-known country. The chief objects that we had in view were, to visit and examine the world-famed Geysir, and the hot springs in its immediate vicinity, to traverse the little-known Sprengisandr route, and, if possible, to fix the northern termination of the great lava stream which flowed from Askja in 1875.

The route towards Geysir passing by Thingvellir is so well known that it requires but little description, suffice it to say that the road that on starting I described in my journal as execrably bad, I entered on the return journey as exceedingly good, having quite forgotten the mention I had made of it about five weeks previously. Before leaving the island, one's ideas of good and bad when applied to roads are considerably modified. The first halting-place is at Thingvellir, where for more than a thousand years the parliament assembled, and it was here that in 1874 the King of Denmark granted the Icelanders their long-wished-for constitution. Thingvellir is approached through an enormous rift which gives one the idea of the entrance to a giant's castle, the gateway being guarded by immense boulders, masses of which have fallen from the towering cliffs above. The place where the Althing held its assemblies is surrounded by a deep chasm, and is of oval form. This chasm extends to a vast depth, and at about 30 feet from the level of the ground flows one of the affluents of the lake, the water being in many places more than 100 feet deep; it is impossible to imagine a more secure place for an assembly to have met in troublous times when the

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whole country was disturbed by perpetual feuds between petty chieftains. It was here that we noticed the first of the subterranean rivers with which Iceland abounds, and which appears to be caused by the river having been, at some remote date, overwhelmed by a flood of lava, and compelled to find its way through the rifts created by the cooling of the molten stream.

On the evening of our arrival we took observations with a boiling-point thermometer in order to discover any error in our aneroid readings, as we feared that a jog-trot of ten hours' duration might have put the instrument somewhat out of adjustment. We were, however, agreeably surprised to find that our misgivings were not fulfilled, as the two readings coincided most satisfactorily. Next morning an early start was made for Geysir, the road leading through one of the small copses which are dignified by the name of woods; it consisted of scrub birch in no part more than four feet high, and in many places hardly double that number of inches. The route lay along the western edge of a large plain in which we noticed several boiling springs. These springs might easily be taken for railway engines standing at a station giving out volumes of steam, and invest the country with an appearance of life which it is far from possessing. The word Geysir is a proper name, in the singular number, but I have throughout this paper used it in its colloquial and usually accepted sense as referring to the whole of this system of springs.

Towards evening we saw in front of us a vast quantity of vapour issuing from the ground, and soon found that we were approaching the celebrated Geysirs. On reaching them we discovered that the vapour we had noticed issued from a number of small holes in the ground, but as the evening was far advanced we deferred any closer examination till next day. I may here mention that in several plans of the Geysirs that have been made, an error with regard to the points of the compass has crept in, in some cases magnetic North has been used and laid down as true north, while in others the correct amount of variation has been allowed, but unfortunately the wrong way. This circumstance may, in part, account for the statement of some travellers, that the compass is of no use in Iceland. The truth of the matter is, that the difference between true and magnetic north is about  $41^{\circ}$  or nearly 4 points westerly variation. Another reason that we had for believing in the accuracy of the compass was that we found that the results we obtained from our observations for sun's true azimuth taken at many stations gave us errors in our compass very nearly coincident with the curves of variation as laid down on the Admiralty "Variation Chart," thus showing the absence of local attraction. Mr. Coles also took the dip of the needle in many places along the route, and found that it varied only from  $79^{\circ}$  to  $81^{\circ}$ . Now as any magnetic disturbance would affect all the elements, we came to the conclusion that these reputed eccentricities were either

entirely absent or were so small as to be inappreciable with ordinary travellers' instruments. In making these remarks I, of course, except the immediate proximity of magnetic rocks.

Next day we proceeded to make a careful examination of the Geysir system. The whole series of springs lie at the western base of a moderately high hill, and runs N.N.E. and S.S.W., the Great Geysir being at the northern end of the system and the spring marked R on the map at the southern end; the land slopes gradually from Great Geysir to R. The ground on which they are situated has very little vegetation, and what there is, is of inferior quality, as we noticed that the ponies as soon as they were turned loose started at a quick trot to the Haukadalr. It was also noticeable that the cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) which flourishes in almost all swampy places throughout the island, is entirely absent from the ground left moist by the water from these springs.

I will now attempt to give an account of the three most important and also of the smaller springs which in the plan are designated by letters. I must here mention that the whole of the angles were taken by Mr. Coles with a sextant, and I can vouch for the care taken in each observation; my own share in this part of the undertaking was to act as a station mark, a duty not altogether unattended with risk when surveying the system of small springs. The Great Geysir, as its name implies, is the largest of the series. A cone, or more properly speaking a mound created by the deposition of the substances held in solution by the water, rises above the surrounding ground, and on the top of this mound is its basin, which is 56 feet in its greatest diameter, and 49 feet in its least.

The following is an analysis of the water of the Great Geysir as given by Dr. Black. The mineral contents of a gallon of the water are soda 5.56 gr., alumina 2.80 gr., silica 31.38 gr., muriate of soda 14.42 gr., sulphate of soda 8.57 gr. It is worthy of remark that this deposit close to the water's edge is so hard that it was almost impossible to detach even the smallest fragment with a geologist's hammer, while lower down the side of the cone large pieces could be pulverised in the hands.

The basin of the Great Geysir is of an oval form, and shelves gradually from the bank to a depth of about three feet at the edge of the central funnel. This central funnel is about 15 feet in diameter and (roughly) circular. We had brought with us some rope and a block in order to ascertain the depth, and Mr. Delmar Morgan had provided himself with a registering thermometer, carefully constructed, having a large spiral spring at the under side in order to prevent any jar to the index, in the event of its striking against a rock at the bottom. On lowering this thermometer we found that it touched the bottom at a depth of 78 feet, and on hauling it up again found that the index registered a tempera-

ture of 228° F. We took a considerable number of soundings, but only twice got the instrument to descend to this depth; on all other occasions it lodged on a rock at 35 feet from the surface; from this we imagine that at the latter depth the funnel suddenly contracts, but of course the internal shape of the tube must to a great extent be a matter of conjecture.

Just as we had finished our observations we heard the mysterious booming sound which is the warning of an impending explosion, and as we had all seen illustrations of what Geysir can do when aroused, we fled for safety in various directions. However, he was not disposed to give any great exhibition of his powers, and only threw a column of water about five feet into the air, very much resembling the picture of the Apollinaris Brunnen on the Apollinaris water bottles. As long as it is in a state of rest a small channel about four inches square is enough to carry off the water which rises from the spring, but as soon as the booming noise commences, which we noticed was about once in six hours, the water overflows the banks on all sides, and thus adds to the deposit which forms the cone. We were told that a grand eruption had taken place the day before our arrival, and that they usually occurred about once in three days.

The spring next in importance is Strokkr, which is always prepared to display its powers when properly called on to do so. The mode of treatment in order to get a satisfactory exhibition is to feed it, but in this case the food consists of about a barrowful of turf, which is thrown down the circular hole about 10 feet in diameter and 42 feet deep, and which after remaining in the water from ten minutes to half an hour is violently ejected to a height of at least 100 feet. An exhibition can always be obtained by feeding it in this way, but the height to which the water is thrown varies considerably. The temperature of the water is 228° F. It is ejected without the slightest warning; so sudden are the eruptions that on one occasion our note-book got almost washed into the river. We had put it down while throwing turf in, and had forgotten it till an eruption was imminent, when we were unwilling to risk the probable chance of being boiled to save it.

The next important spring is Blesi, which has a double basin connected by a narrow channel. This may truly be called the traveller's friend, as it saves him, during the whole time of his stay, the trouble of making a fire. The water is beautifully clear and about 20 feet deep. We cooked all our food, either by putting it (in the case of game) into a cloth and lowering it into the water, or by standing the kettle in the small stream which flows from it. Although the temperature of the water is only 180° F. the alkali in it causes it to make as good tea as if it boiled. These springs, Great Geysir, Strokkr, and Blesi, appear to be intimately connected, especially the two former, as we noticed that when Great Geysir overflowed its banks, Strokkr was almost emptied,

and that Great Geysir and Blesi were always in a state of ebullition at the same time, though the ebullition of Blesi (fortunately for our culinary operations) was limited to a few bubbles of air. The rumbling sound (as far as we could judge when in the tent) appeared to come from a spot midway between Strokkur and Great Geysir.

From the reports of travellers at the commencement of this century it would seem that these springs are not so active now as they were then, since Mackenzie mentions an eruption of Strokkur which lasted more than half an hour, while at present the duration is only a few minutes. Half-way between Great Geysir and the system of small springs is situated one which has been called by visitors Little Geysir, which at times ejects a considerable quantity of water, throwing it to a height of about six feet.

We now come to the large system of small springs which constituted a somewhat hazardous part of the survey. They are situated in a rough triangle, A, B, and R being the three angles. It was requisite first of all to give each spring a distinguishing letter so as to identify it, and this we did by marking the letter on the sandy deposit. In measuring the subtended angles with a sextant it was of course necessary that the opposite end of the base and the position of the spring to which the angle was being taken, should be visible to the observer simultaneously, and in order to attain this end I had to stand at each spring as a station mark, it would have occupied too much time to set up one for each angle, besides which I question if any attempt to drive a stake into the ground would not have been followed by such a rush of steam or superheated water as would probably have brought my surveying to a premature end. As it was, much difficulty was experienced in taking the necessary angles, and we often had to wait a very considerable time before a favourable gust of wind blew the steam clear for a few moments. Another great difficulty was that the vapour laden with sulphur condensed on the horizon and index glasses of the sextant, and rendered them useless until carefully wiped. As will be seen from the plan, the whole ground is full of hot springs of various sizes and depths, and in continually changing stages of ebullition. Thus a spring which we marked on the first examination as merely a hot spring, was shortly after in a violent state of agitation. The fact of the matter seems to be that the whole of the springs in this system are connected, and that the earth is merely a thin crust originally covering a subterranean lake, which has now forced its way to the surface in the manner depicted. Judging by the apparent thinness of the crust, I believe that any one with a pickaxe or crowbar could soon create a completely new system of hot springs. I must add that the only mud-spring in the district is at A, and is always in a violent state of ebullition. I shall have more to say later on about these mud-springs.

From Geysir we visited Gullfoss, which is one of the most magnificent

falls in Iceland, and is situated about two hours' ride to the east of Geysir. At this spot the river Hvítá falls about 180 feet in two steps, and at the time of our visit was very full of water caused by the melting of the snow on Langjökull. It was at this spot, our guide informed us, that criminals were executed by being thrown into the rapidly flowing current above, and left to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

Having finished our survey of the Geysir system we started for Hekla, and in our journey had to cross the dangerous river Hvítá. It is necessary at almost all the large or dangerous rivers to obtain the services of a local guide. This was especially necessary in the present instance as the river, at the place where we crossed it, was twice as broad as the Thames at London Bridge, and full of dangerous quicksands; moreover, the ford was not in a direct line across the river, but lay in a series of zigzags, any departure from which, we were warned, would probably be fatal to us. To follow a long string of horses across such a ford as this, so as to keep accurately in the track of the guide, would, at first sight, seem to be almost impossible, but we were not long in discovering that the older and steadier packhorses, by some natural instinct, seemed to be well aware of their danger, and were careful to turn either to the right or left at the exact points where the guide had done so, and by following these we were enabled to keep pretty accurately on the proper track. I should mention that the difficulties in fording this river are greatly increased by the thick glacier water which entirely hides its bed, in addition to which the ford is continually changing its locality, and it seems wonderful how the guides are able to discover its new position.

After visiting Hekla we proceeded to Hagaey, where the guide across the Sprengisandr lives. As we had to wait for half-a-day at this place in order to get the ponies shod, &c., we took the opportunity of measuring the river Thjórská, which we found to be 640 yards across. After leaving Hagaey we followed the Thjórská to a point where it took a short turn to the east, while our route, after passing over a hill to the west, lay in a general northerly direction over sand and disintegrated lava. Previous to A.D. 1400 this is reputed to have been a fertile plain covered with woods and grass; in that year, however, an eruption of Rauðukambar took place, and overwhelming the farms and fields reduced it to its present state of desolation. From this place our route turned eastward across the Sandfell till we again came in sight of the Thjórská, at the point of junction of the Tungná, its chief affluent. In the evening we camped at Knappölduver, where for the first time we experienced one of the great inconveniences of Icelandic travelling, I mean the difficulty of procuring fuel. The only material available is the dead wood from scrub whortle-berries and birch, which is never thicker than a pencil, and burns with the greatest rapidity. We were many times

more than an hour before we could get enough wood to boil a kettle, and often thought of the sweet simplicity of the Geysir mode of cooking.

The next day's journey was over a complete desert, but did not possess any special feature of geographical interest. The camping-place for the night was on the right bank of the Thjórsá, at a small oasis named Sóleyjarhöfði. We here witnessed the great rapidity with which glacier or jökull rivers rise and fall. At this season of the year (the middle of August) the river can be crossed safely up to about noon, when the jökulls begin to melt, and send down a volume of water which renders them impassable till the next morning. The chief danger in crossing Icelandic rivers is caused by the quicksands which are continually changing their positions, and which would be immediately fatal to any one who was unfortunate enough to ride into one. This, at a later period, nearly happened to one of our party while allowing his horse to drink at what was to all appearance a wayside pond. Next day's ride brought us to Eyvindarkofaver, a place so remote from all the farms, that an outlaw named Eyvindr lived there unmolested for many years, until, indeed, his sheep-stealing propensities became intolerable, and an expedition resulting in his capture was made by the farmers who lived nearest to him.

We found all our guides extremely credulous with regard to the legends of the past. Many of the stories related to outlaws, and how it became necessary for them to invent some more rapid mode of locomotion than simply running, in order to evade their pursuers. This, in the case of Eyvindr, consisted in his running on his hands and feet, and turning what boys call cart-wheels; while in the case of another outlaw, Eyríkr of Eyríksjökull, after having had both his feet cut off, he made his escape by running on his hands alone.

From Eyvindarkofaver, next day, we made our start to cross the Sprengisandr, a track much dreaded by the Icelanders, and seldom traversed by any one. The guide whom we obtained at Hagaey is the only man who knows the route, which he has learnt in the pursuit of his business as a gatherer of Iceland moss (*Cetraria islandica*). The usual and better known Sprengisandr route lies at the foot of the magnificent Arnarfell, about 15 miles to the westward. As soon as we left our camping-ground we entered on the arid desert, and knew that we should not find food for the ponies for at least 10 hours. The track lies over undulating ground composed of sand and lava dust, varied at times by thickly strewn blocks of lava which wounded the legs and hoofs of our horses. The gloomy monotony of this desert is sometimes relieved by the beautiful shades of colour of small clusters of saxifrage which seem to flourish in portions of this inhospitable waste. At midday we halted on the west shore of a lake which extended for about seven miles in a northerly direction, its greatest breadth being about one mile. A very striking feature in many places along the route is, that on the top of the hills

there exist very large and dangerous quicksands, and it is mainly from this fact that so few persons ever cross it. In some places these quicksands extend over a space of several acres, and it is quite impossible to tell, except by practical experience, the position of the solid ground. This district, too, has a very sinister reputation on account of the fogs which at certain seasons often hang over it for days, and in the event of a traveller being overtaken by one of them, he would in all probability be starved to death. When about half-way across, a considerable breeze sprang up, and from the height to which the pumice dust rose, we could quite believe the statement that under certain conditions it would reach Norway or the Færoe Islands. These dust storms, in addition to the jog-trot of about five miles an hour, at which we usually rode, were very severe tests for the performance of the watches that we carried, and we soon found that an ordinary watch, even when of good quality, could not be depended on in the least. We had, however, with us one of the watches similar to those supplied by this Society to travellers, and this performed excellently the whole time, only varying from its regular rate  $\frac{1}{2}$  second; this seems to be good evidence that an ordinary watch is not in the least suitable for rough usage on horseback when exposed to storms of fine dust, and also that the Society has found a pattern which will perform satisfactorily under the most severe tests.

The next object worthy of notice is the district round Mývatn; the whole of this part of the country is covered with the craters of extinct volcanoes, every hillock along the route bearing unmistakable signs of having been at some remote period in a state of activity. At present, however, they are all at rest, and have been so for many years.

After passing Reykjahlíð we came to the mud-springs of Hlíðarnámar, which present a most weird appearance. They are situated in a valley, the neighbouring hills being tinged in many places with yellow from the sulphur deposits, and from the sides of which issue columns of steam from numerous hot springs. The mud-wells themselves are circular holes in the ground, from one to 20 feet across, in which a vast quantity of pitch-black mud is in a continual state of ebullition. Several of the larger wells throw up the mud to the height of six or eight feet, and this falling on the surrounding ground, has gradually made a wall of the same height, in form somewhat resembling the Great Geysir in miniature. In other places the steam issues from small vents in the ground, and condensing round the orifice, makes a deposit of nearly pure sulphur. The whole ground for a considerable distance round these springs merely consists of a crust of sulphurous mud, the surface of which has solidified. Here again there is a considerable risk of being scalded by this crust giving way; indeed, each of us got in to a certain extent, but thanks to our long boots came to no harm. All around these springs there are vast beds of sulphur pierced with small holes,

through which the vapour escapes. In many places the crust, which presents the most beautiful efflorescence, is not more than an inch thick. These springs are, I believe, as rich, if not richer, in sulphur than any in Iceland, but the cost of transport to Húsavík or Akureyri, the ports of shipment, would consume all profit arising from working them.

After leaving these wells we rode on past Krafla and the obsidian hill, and on the way passed many smaller springs of boiling mud. About 700 feet below the summit of Krafla we came on a lake of the clearest water, which is now cold, but which at the time of the visit of Henderson, 1814, must have been a most remarkable sight. He describes it as a circular pool of black liquid matter about 300 feet in circumference, from the middle of which a vast column of black liquid was being thrown up to a height of about 20 to 30 feet, and equal in volume to the Great Geysir; these eruptions took place every five minutes, and lasted two and a half minutes. This place is now much frequented by reindeer, whose tracks we observed close to its shores.

Passing on we came to a hill, which, in the glittering rays of the sun, has the appearance of being composed of innumerable broken bottles; this was the celebrated Hrafninnuhryggr. The whole of the hill, which attains a height of about 200 feet, consists of obsidian in blocks of various sizes, and pieces could easily be obtained weighing more than one hundredweight. The greater part is intensely black, and has the appearance of jet, but some is of a dark brown colour. If any use for it could be found in the arts or sciences, this hill alone would afford an almost inexhaustible supply, the only difficulty being the usual one in Iceland, the means of transport.

We now turned to the south-east in order to visit the new lava. This is a stream of lava about 20 miles long and about four miles wide, as the guide informed us, which issued from Askja in 1875. It appears to have flowed in a direction nearly due N. and S., and terminated at a point about a quarter of a mile to the S. of the road between Reykjahlíð and Hof. We fixed the position of the northern point of the stream by the bearings of Haugr, Búrfell, Jörundr, Grimstaðr-naup and Hlíðarfjall, taken with a prismatic compass by Mr. Coles, and as these were particularly good marks for bearings, I think the position as indicated on the map may be taken to be very nearly correct. The dimensions of the stream we obtained from Jón of Reykjahlíð, who was a most intelligent man, and also seemed to understand the points of the compass, a rare thing among Icelanders, owing, probably, to the variation which I have mentioned before, and was probably as well acquainted with this portion of the country as any living man. This new lava can be seen as an inky black streak for many miles, and much resembles the slag from an iron furnace. It is a very curious feature that

the ground over which it flowed has been depressed more than 20 feet below the surrounding country, as if the weight of the superimposed lava had forced it down, and this depression is not only up to the point where the lava stream ends, but continues for a considerable distance beyond. The ground around is covered with ashes about the size of a walnut, and the scant herbage still bears evident indications of the intense heat given out by the molten lava; in fact, we heard that it was hot enough to ignite paper for a long time after the eruption had taken place.

After leaving the new lava we proceeded to Eilífr, with the intention of visiting Dettifoss, which is reported to be the finest waterfall in Europe, and then to return to Akureyri by way of Uxahver and Húsavík. When, however, we reached Eilífr a blinding snowstorm came on, and after waiting for thirty-six hours, as our time was limited, and our provisions had come to an end, we were obliged to make for Akureyri, and in doing so, after leaving Hals, we passed through the forest of the Fújóska-dalr. I have made use of the word forest in its Icelandic sense, as the dwarf birches of which it is composed in no case that came under my notice exceeded twelve feet in height, or the thickness of a man's arm.

Akureyri is the town of second importance in Iceland, and its name, which means corn country, would indicate that great climatic changes must have taken place since the early Norwegian settlers gave it that name. At present there is no sign whatever of the cultivation of any kind of grain; but, strange to say, in the neighbourhood of this northern town the cultivation of the potato is carried on to a great extent, and, as I was informed, with considerable success. The Icelandic Trading Company have at this place a trading and fishing station, which we visited, and which much reminded Mr. Coles of one of the Hudson's Bay Company's posts. In connection with this establishment there is a shark fishery, and a factory for refining the oil. The smell caused by this operation is most offensive. On making inquiry as to the use to which this shark oil was applied, we were informed that it made its appearance in the European market as cod-liver oil. I may also mention that it is here that the only tree in the whole of Iceland worthy of the name is to be found.

The route from Akureyri back to Reykjavík is comparatively well known, and does not possess any feature of great geographical interest. All along this journey we carried with us a six-inch transit theodolite, which the Council of this Society were so good as to lend us. When at Reykjavík an American gentleman who had crossed the island, assured us that it would be impossible to carry this instrument over the rough country we should have to traverse without doing it such damage as to render it entirely useless. We, however, felt sure that by taking proper precautions as to the manner of packing it, we should avoid the evil consequences which had befallen this gentleman in his attempt to take with him a smaller instrument of the same kind. We procured a box about three

inches larger each way than the theodolite case, and having first laid some old rags at the bottom, the instrument (in its case) was placed in this box, and firmly fixed in its position by pushing spare clothing or anything of that sort tightly round it; then having put another layer of clothes on the top, the lid was shut down and locked, and the box fastened to a pack-saddle in the same manner as in the case of an ordinary load. The result of this mode of packing was that the instrument never got out of adjustment to any appreciable extent. Whenever we used it we tested it by taking the angles of elevation with face right and left, to discover if the diaphragm had been moved, and always with satisfactory results. This instrument is now, Mr. Coles informs me, in the Society's observatory, in good adjustment, after having been carried across Iceland on a pony, the greater portion of the journey having, as I before mentioned, been made at a jog-trot. I have dwelt rather longer than I at first intended on this subject, as I have thought that it was one of great interest to travellers. We never experienced any trouble in unpacking the instrument, and a very few minutes sufficed to have it levelled and ready for use.

During our journey across the island we were much struck by the entire absence of any provision for warming the houses by artificial means. In one house only did we see a small stove. This is the more remarkable when we consider the Arctic severity of the winter in Iceland, the thermometer falling, as we were informed, to  $25^{\circ}$  below zero. The method adopted by the inhabitants of keeping themselves warm during the winter was pointed out to us at the farm Lundar-brekka; here we saw under one roof a water-mill for grinding rye, a blacksmith's shop, and a small room in which they all assembled during the winter season, close to which was the cow-house; the walls, as is common in Icelandic farm-houses, were covered in with about six feet of turf; in the cold weather the doors are shut, and we were told that so far from suffering from cold the heat was oppressive; under these circumstances it is not difficult to imagine that such might well be the case, and I may also add we may with equal ease imagine the state of the atmosphere. The only employment that the Icelander finds to occupy his time in the winter is tending the sheep, which are all housed in buildings in the form of a T, composed of turf, with the smallest possible doors, and minute breathing holes in the roof. The sheep themselves are folded in the stem of the T, while the hay on which they are fed is stored in the cross-arms. The hay itself is often collected from spots many miles distant from the homestead, and gives the people full employment during the whole of the summer months; the horses, except in the case of the more valuable animals, are allowed to shift for themselves; the journeys that these badly-fed and ill-cared-for little animals will make over tracks which would be impassable to the horses of any other country, are truly wonderful.

I have purposely omitted any mention of Askja, as, on leaving Lundarbrekka, Mr. Coles and myself proceeded to Gautlönd, while Mr. Delmar Morgan engaged a local guide and explored this celebrated mountain. Being one of the very few Englishmen who have ever visited it, any remarks he may have to make on the subject will, I am convinced, be of great geographical interest to those present this evening.

With regard to the meteorology of Iceland, I may mention that our temperature observations varied from 80° F. in the sun to 26° F. at night. We experienced two severe snowstorms, but with those exceptions, the weather was magnificent. The displays of the aurora borealis, too, were of the most brilliant kind. At the end of August the Arctic ice was close to North Cape, and Captain Kihl, of the mail-steamer *Valdemar*, informed me that the passage round the north of the island had never during the year 1881 been entirely free from ice. On our return to Reykjavík we found that the trade in ponies and sheep was at its height, large numbers being shipped every week. Indeed, we were informed that over 2000 sheep and 750 ponies reached Leith during the first fortnight in September.

In concluding, I should like to say a few words about the Icelanders. Before our arrival we had been led to expect to meet with an indolent dirty race, whose chief object would be to obtain as much money for as little work as possible, and who would spend all they earned in drink. I am glad to say we soon found we had formed a most erroneous opinion of the people. I think one might search the world over without finding three better guides than those we engaged. Cases of extortion were extremely rare, and we only saw one man at all the worse for liquor. The great majority of the farm-houses were very clean, and no matter what time we arrived, whether the farmer had gone to bed or not, all did their utmost to make us comfortable, charging most moderately for our board and lodging.

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*Excursion to Askja, August 1881.* By E. DELMAR MORGAN.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, January 30th, 1882.)

I started the 20th August on a snowy morning for Askja, having left my companions, as mentioned by Mr. Peek in the foregoing paper, at Lundarbrekka. The storm of the previous day had not subsided, and the air was so thick with falling snow that no landmarks, not even the nearest hills, were visible. It seemed almost foolhardy to set out in such weather to cross a trackless lava desert of great extent. I possessed a compass, certainly, but though this would give the approximate direction of the mountain I was about to visit, still as it





Edw<sup>d</sup> Weller

H. Sharbau, R.G.S., del.

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Edw. Weller

H. Sharbau, R.G.S., del.

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