

# History and Culture – Workbook

## Kirkjubæjarklaustur before and during settlement

How credible do you find accounts of monks living in Iceland before the settlement of the Nordic tribes, present arguments for you answer.

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Why did Hildir Eysteinnsson die when he reached the farm Kirkjubær?

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Is it likely that Hildishaugur is the actual grave mound of Hildir? Examine the mound and make a decision based on your findings.

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How would you prove or disprove the theory that Hildishaugur was originally situated at a different location?

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Is Kirkjugólf (the church floor) a floor from an old church? Examine it and then base your answers on your findings.

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## The Skaftár Fires 1783-1784

How many people lived in the countryside which is now the area of Skaftárhreppur in the spring of 1783?

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Discuss the class distinction in the time of the Mist Hardships. How many of the independent farmer, how many tenants and how many workers do you think became unable to provide for themselves? What possibilities did these people have to survive the Mist Hardships?



Look at the remnants of the building in the old churchyard and the model of the church that was once there; located in the Memorial Chapel for reverend Jón Steingrímsson. How many people do you think could possibly fit inside the church and where did the independent farmers sit and what place was intended for the ones not able to provide for themselves?



Walk to the Systrastapi (Sister's Rock) and while you are walking, consider what the people who walked there in 1783 must have felt like. Do you believe that the people believed that God would stop the flow of lava? If not, why do you think the flow of lava did stop?

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What did people die from during the Mist Hardships? Name everything you know.

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**Read letters from farmers in the county of Leiðvallahreppur to their officials, where they write about their misery and demand a discount of the lease for their land due to the hardship in the spring of 1784. What does this letter tell you about the conditions and attitudes of the locals towards those who governed Iceland?**

**Letter from the farmers of Leiðvallahreppur, 18. June 1785.**

To the highborn and honourable Mister Governor.

With this note we are forced, miserable and weak inhabitants of Leiðvallahreppur in the county of Skaftafellssýsla, on the king's estate still surviving, to implore your eminence for the sake of our lives to hear of our emergency and dire situation, that since we were here so close to the harmful fire in 1783 that it did not only burn up farms with all they contained, dead and living, and forced us to run, some of us poisoned by the smoke steam and sulphuric destruction of all the earth's growth, leaving the cattle dead behind, during the summer as in the winter thereafter, died from excellent fodder but the few that still lingered are meagre and have not as yet regained their health due to the sickness and the still lingering fumes of poisonous smoke around here.

During the winter of 1784 we lost most of our life sustaining cattle, both out on the land as in our homes even though there was enough fodder to be had, and among these were the cattle which paid the tolls off the land to our king and we have now become so poor that we can no longer pay our debt except by giving up the only or one of very few of the cattle we still have left and our very lives depend upon these few animals. We therefore need to know where to place and deliver these cattle in order to settle our debt, since we now have no other thing with which to pay, no other thing which could possibly be considered of any value. This is why we run humbly to your honourable and noble Mr. Governor and we bow ourselves to you and hope that you consider giving us the help needed in order for us to keep our lives for so long as our Lord sees fit, and ask of you to put forth our case for his majesty's grace, to whom we needs must ask for assistance and we hereby, ever so humbly, ask for his reply and continue to be in humility and complete submissiveness the humble servants of the Mister Governor.

D. 18. June 1785



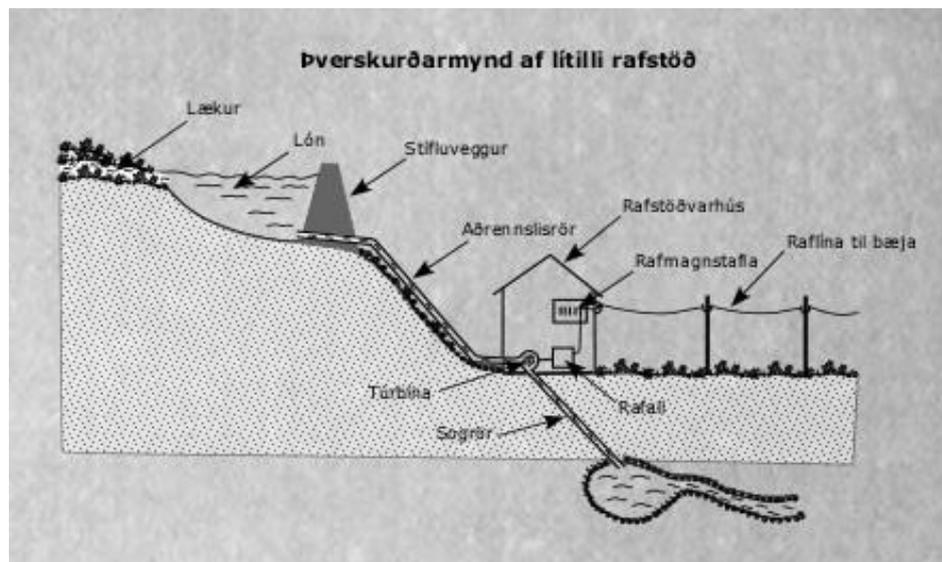
**If such an eruption were to take place today, what would be the consequences?**

## Pioneers

The people of the Vestur-Skaftafellssýsla county were true pioneers when it came to electrical lighting in Iceland; the first electric generating station was built in the area in 1913 at the farm of Pykkvibær in Landbrot. In next decades many electric generating stations were built in the county and in most cases the locals did all the designing and building of the electric generating station, building dams, building station houses, pipes, turbines and electrical equipment. Bjarni Runólfsson (1891-1938), a self-educated farmer, carpenter and pioneer in bringing electricity to Icelanders lived at Hólmur in Landbrot.



Put up a small electric generating station using the water in the creek. Imagine that you are contemporaries of Bjarni from Hólmur in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the area was isolated and people could not simply order things using the postal service or make a trip to Reykjavík to purchase them. You will need to find material in your surroundings that you can use to capture the water from the creek and power a turbine. Here is a drawing of the making of a domestic electric generating station:



Lárus Helgason and his wife Elín Sigurðardóttir moved to Klaustur in 1906. At the time it was a normal farm but during their lifespan it became an urban area. What did the couple do that caused the area to urbanize?

## Artists from Kirkjubæjarklaustur

Name at least five famous buildings designed by the building master Guðjón Samúelsson.

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Whence to you think Guðjón got the inspiration for his work, do you see anything in nature which is reminiscent of something in Guðjóns architecture?

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What are the full names of Kjarval and Erró?

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Find a good spot which gives you a clear view of Systrastapi (The Sisters' Rock). Then draw Kjarval and Erró's favourite subject, Systrastapi, in your own style.



Now draw Systrastapi in the style of either Kjarval or Erró.

