

Story from Peter Weiss, Westfjords, Iceland

Lars Racing to the Roots

Making visitations to UArctic member institutions, I thought, must be one of the privileges of a UArctic president. When UArctic president – followed by UArctic vice president – visited the University Centre of the Westfjords on a stop over from Europe to America I had to reconsider my previous assessment of the position.

As they had little time, and flights to and from the Westfjords are unpredictable due to weather and wind, and the schedule is not more reliable than a New Year's resolution, they took a car. Reykjavík-Ísafjörður-Akureyri-Reykjavík. Uff. Sounds like an itinerary for Paris-Dakar. But they are tough, these presidents.

The car was green, and so was Outi: out of the car and in to the toilets, before I could say welcome to the Westfjords. Lars obviously was still focusing on the road, the holes, the gravel, the sheep and the stomach of the co-pilot. Their luggage lost somewhere in the inter-polar air-traffic and was possibly on the way to Dakar.

Have they seen the wonderful landscape, the wonderful weather? Outi, back from the toilet, is only light green now. Yes, yes, wonderful. But we also had to concentrate on the road. Lars is driving like a fool. We wanted to be on time. – It didn't make things better telling them that the gravel roads were in fine condition at that time of the year.

They seemed to be quite impressed by little Ísafjörður with its 3000 inhabitants, they have obviously made visitations in smaller places, lost in the middle of the arctic nowhere. Smaller places with fewer shops: We found some emergency kit instead of the lost luggage. (Little Ísafjörður seemed to be the last stop before the next reception.) The shop owner has become a strong supporter of circumpolar education and awaits more visitations.

Good meeting, excellent discussions, and a better understanding for the so-called edge of the world and some relief that the 600 km between Ísafjörður and Akureyri would be 75% asphalted. So this would become a qualification for Nürburgring and Outi, with her new dress safely packed and well prepared for all upcoming receptions, began to smile the smile we know. Yet, on Lars' face, still some worry lines: We have little time, in fact, we should start now, but – there is one little thing, I had to promise one of my aunts. She is old, but still remembers well, especially the family tree. She

will ask me when I return. I had to promise her – have you ever heard about the name Ellefsen? Those are some of my ancestors that my aunt still remembers. She says they were in the Westfjords ...

Luckily, for Lars' aunt, I lived in Flateyri, 25 km and one tunnel away from Ísafjörður, where the Norwegian Ellefsen family once founded a whaling station a hundred and twenty years ago and made the village grow. Luckily, for the whales, the family is now focusing on circumpolar education.

We raced to little Flateyri. Lars took some photos for his aunt, along with a calendar from Flateyri, the only calendar in Iceland where May 17th, Norwegian National day, is a red day – in remembrance of Lars' ancestors. Maybe, in 120 years, Lars' birthday will be a red day in all UArctic calendars?



Next time, Lars, take a few moments extra for your trip back to history and then we will take the photograph with your ancestors' chimney and YOU.