

KINGDOM of TROLLS

A Magical Literary Tour of Iceland





MiddleGate's Hidden Secrets

Home to cousins Wil and Sophie, MiddleGate is an imaginary city found within the pages of Rae St. Clair Bridgman's MiddleGate Books. Now you can visit some of the REAL places in Iceland inspiring the MAGICAL places of KINGDOM OF TROLLS, the fourth MiddleGate Book. Wil's and Sophie's adventures carry them all the way to Iceland!

Take the tour!





Jón Sigurðsson Statue (Winnipeg)

MiddleGate's magical portal to Iceland



Image Source: www.hickerphoto.com

Some 20,000 Icelanders left their homeland between 1870 and 1915, due to unforgiving disasters both economic and environmental, particularly with the eruption of the Mount Askja volcano in 1875. Manitoba is now home to the largest Icelandic population outside of Iceland.

Einar Jonsson's statue of Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879), along with his bas relief *The Pioneers*, is located on the Manitoba Legislative Building grounds. It was unveiled in 1921 by the local Icelandic community to honour Jón Sigurðsson's contributions to Icelanders. He was an important Icelandic political figure during the 19th century and became the leader of Iceland's independence movement, which helped the country gain self-governance from the Danish.



Jón Sigurðsson Statue (Winnipeg)



Wil watched as the man in front of him stepped forward, neatly avoiding the rows of white petunias and red geraniums planted around the base of the statue. He took down his umbrella, bowed his head and stepped through.

It was Wil's and Sophie's and Aunt Violet's turn. Wil could see now there was a large bronze panel at the base of the statue and the name JÓN SIGURÐSSON inscribed beneath in large letters. The bronze panel pictured hundreds of people dressed in heavy cloaks. They were standing by the seashore and watching a giant, muscular and massive, with long hair and long beard, who was wearing nothing but a fur tunic slung over one shoulder. He was straining to heave gigantic stone columns.

Wil's heart was pounding and his stomach churned .

Image Source: Rae Bridgman



Viking Statue (Gimli, Manitoba)



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

The small rural town of Gimli is located on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, an hour's drive north of Winnipeg. Today, the annual Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, *Islendingadagurinn*, draws over 30,000 visitors to the town. This fifteen-foot fibreglass statue of the Viking was inaugurated in 1967.

The lights below them were getting larger and they could see the glint of moonlight on waves. Ahead, another statue loomed larger and larger as they drew closer. The ship slid into the harbour silently and moored near the statue of a tall Viking warrior wearing a long cape and a horned helmet.

"Are we there already?" asked Sophie, feeling puzzled. "Are we in Iceland?"

"Oh no, my dears," said Aunt Violet, with a chuckle. "Nowhere near. I imagine we're stopping to pick up more passengers in Gimli."

Map of Iceland

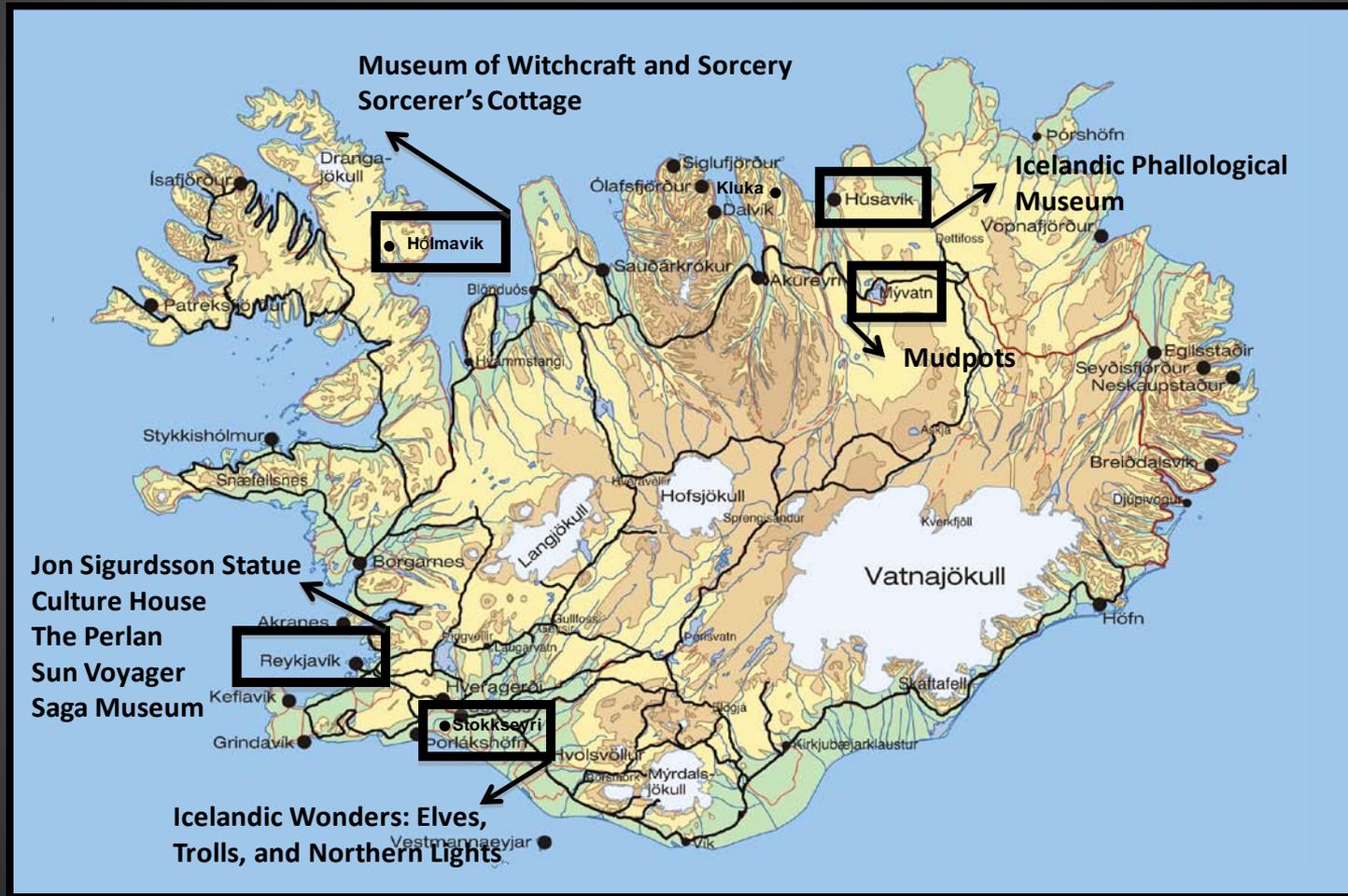


Image Source: <http://webcarta.net/carta/mapa.php?id=29039&lg=en>



Iceland



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

With a population of 320,000 inhabitants, Iceland is rich in history, tradition, and folklore. Mythical creatures (elves, dwarfs, ghosts and trolls) abound in Icelandic stories.

Iceland is also well-known for its volcanoes. The landscape is rugged with lava fields, glacial lakes, mountain ranges, dramatic fjords.

The country is at the forefront of harnessing geothermal energy (power extracted from heat stored deep within the earth) and producing electricity.



Iceland



Image Source: www.flickr.com

The day Vitellus Albumen visited Mage Tibor's cartology class, he told them all about Iceland. A place as bleak and wild, uninhabited and desolate, as anywhere on earth could possibly be. No man, no woman, no child, no bird, no living creature for miles around, the line between sea and sky invisible. Hot belches bubble from the belly of the earth and scorched volcanoes smoulder for hundreds of years, he had said. Restless spirits circle around unwary travellers and pull them down into deep chasms. A rocky place as forsaken as moonscape. The stink of rotting eggs wherever you go. And the sand is black, black as the ashes of bones.



Iceland

"I found a few here in English," said Sophie, returning from the shelves with a teetering stack of books, "and they've even got pictures. There's a good one here of the four Guardians of Iceland. According to the myths, fire-breathing dragon guards the east. Then there's a monstrous eagle guarding the north. It's so huge its wings can touch the sides of mountains on either side of a valley. A gigantic bull guards the west. And a giant, whose head is taller than any mountain, guards the south. And there's all kinds of stuff about volcanoes and geysers and boats." She set the pile down on the table next to where Wil was sitting, picked up the book sitting on top and started riffling through the pages. She gasped.

"What's the matter?" asked Beatriz, looking up from a book she'd just taken from the shelf. "What have you got?"

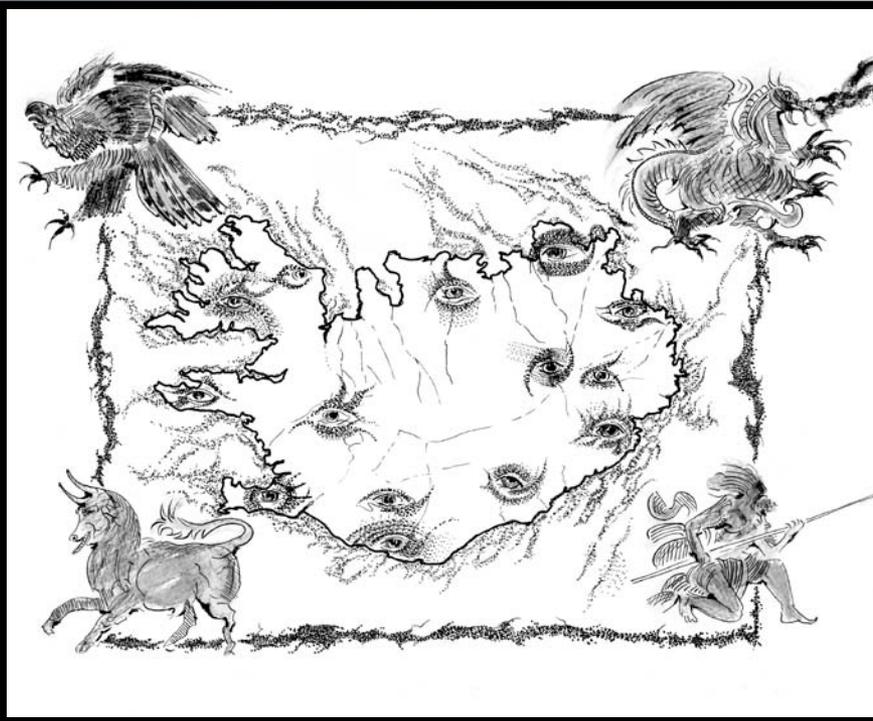


Illustration by Rae Bridgman



Reykjavik



Roughly translated as “the bay of smoke”, Reykjavik is Iceland’s capital and most populated city with some 200,000 inhabitants. The area is believed to have first been populated in 870 CE.

Although the city is located only 2 degrees south of the North Pole, Reykjavik does not receive extremely cold weather. It typically only reaches a maximum of -10 C. In comparison, Winnipeg, Reykjavik’s sister city, can reach a bone chilling -45 C!

Image Source: www.flickr.com



Reykjavik



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

At precisely ten o'clock, Aunt Violet, Wil and Sophie held onto the runestick, and as they had been instructed, recited the words:

*The first raven flew back
The second raven returned to ship
Raven three flew to Iceland.*

In a wink, they were standing beside a huge silver and glass dome on top of a large hill overlooking the city of Reykjavik. Ships, looking no larger than toy boats, sailed in the harbour below. The wind was so stiff, Sophie joked that the bun on top of Aunt Violet's head would fly off and go rolling down the hill. Aunt Violet must have used a lot of pins that morning, however, for the bun did not budge.



Jón Sigurðsson Statue (Reykjavik)



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

The Jón Sigurðsson statue in Reykjavik was made with the same cast as the statue in Winnipeg. The only substantial difference between the two is that the one in Iceland rests atop a taller pedestal.

The Reykjavik monument is located prominently in the Austurvöllur Square. It has become tradition to begin the celebration of Iceland's independence day (June 17, the same day as Jón Sigurðsson's birthday) by the statue's base.



Jón Sigurðsson Statue (Reykjavik)



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

“The portal must be at the other end of the dock,” said Sophie. The glasses of her frame were startling brilliant blue, as blue as the colour of the water. “Iceland, we’re here! Let’s go!” she shouted, ignoring Aunt Violet’s protests of ‘Please wait for me, children.’

As Wil’s feet left the wharf, he felt himself being blown through a long, cold grey tunnel of salty air. He emerged breathless from the tunnel and found himself standing in full sunshine in front of a statue in a large plaza. With a shock, he realized the statue was exactly the same as the one at the Palace of the Blazing Star. There was the small bronze plaque with the giant hoisting huge stone columns, under the gaze of hundreds of travellers wearing heavy cloaks.

“Where are we?” asked Wil, looking around puzzled.

Sun Voyager



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

Located on Reykjavik's waterfront, this steel statue faces the sea and the Akrafjall and Esjan mountains. It was created in 1971 by the sculpture Jón Gunnar Árnason, and represents a Viking ship, and it celebrates an important aspect of Icelandic culture.

Light reflects beautifully off the steel material, making it stand out against the surrounding landscape and giving it a magical quality. The atmosphere and mood it creates changes with the seasons and weather.

Sun Voyager



Scolding seagulls swirled above the barnacle-encrusted wharf in the dark, cold waters of Reykjavík's old harbour and stirred up smells of fish, salt and oil. The ship circled, then gently spiralled downward, gliding on the wind.

Excited voices exclaimed, "Look, Sólfar, the Sun Voyager. On the shore."

The Sun Voyager was a dramatic steel sculpture, the skeleton of a Viking ship. Its beams sparkled in the sun, as Hrafnhulda slid gently into the water and moored at the end of a long wooden wharf.

"We hope you had a pleasant journey," said the woman with the blond hair, as each passenger lumbered off the ship. "Thank you for including the Hrafnhulda in your travel plans. We hope to see you again soon. Bless, bless."

Image Source: www.fotothing.com/Cooler/photo/8f9f480d34f196686f5b6c09cb7e4d5a/

Mudpots



Image Source: <http://www.turas.ie/site/?p=530>

Also known as fumaroles, mudpots are located throughout Iceland, as well as in Yellowstone National Park and parts of New Zealand. They form in environments where there is hydrogen sulfide gas, little available ground water and fine particulate soil. The sulfuric gas, mixed with water turns the soil into a muddy, bubbling mixer.

The sulfuric gas emits a strong smell giving mudpots a distinctive odor, similar to the smell of rotten eggs. Mudpots come in many different colours depending on the type of soil. In Iceland they are often grey because of the high level of volcanic ash in the soil.



Mudpots

They jostled into place, each touching one finger to the marble. "Praemonitus, praemunitus. Praemonitus, praemunitus. Praemonitus, praemunitus."

It was done. The little marble grew as large as an orange, then a grapefruit, larger and larger. Sophie could feel herself being gently sucked right into the shining glass. But suddenly something seemed to go wrong. She felt as if she were losing her balance. She was sliding down a long slippery ice tunnel, only it wasn't cold. It was hot. She landed on her feet on dry clay soil. Reddish chunks of rock littered the ground for as far as she could see, and clouds of steam billowed across high, barren mountain ranges. Everything smelled like rotten eggs. Nearby, large, black mudholes were belching sulphurous bubbles. Never had Sophie seen such a desolate place.

"Aunt Violet? Wil? Are you there?" she called, feeling a rising sense of panic .



Image Source: www.flickr.com



Culture House



Image Source: http://visitreykjavik.is/desktopdefault.aspx/12_view-36/tabid-11/18_read-356/

The Culture House museum contains many of Iceland's most valuable treasures and important heritage symbols. Original Icelandic Saga manuscripts and other examples of local literature can be seen here. Contemporary works of film, artwork, music, photographs, and textiles are also presented.

Though the museum is only a decade old (it opened in 2000), the heritage building housing it dates back to 1908 and was once the National Library and National Archives of Iceland.

Culture House

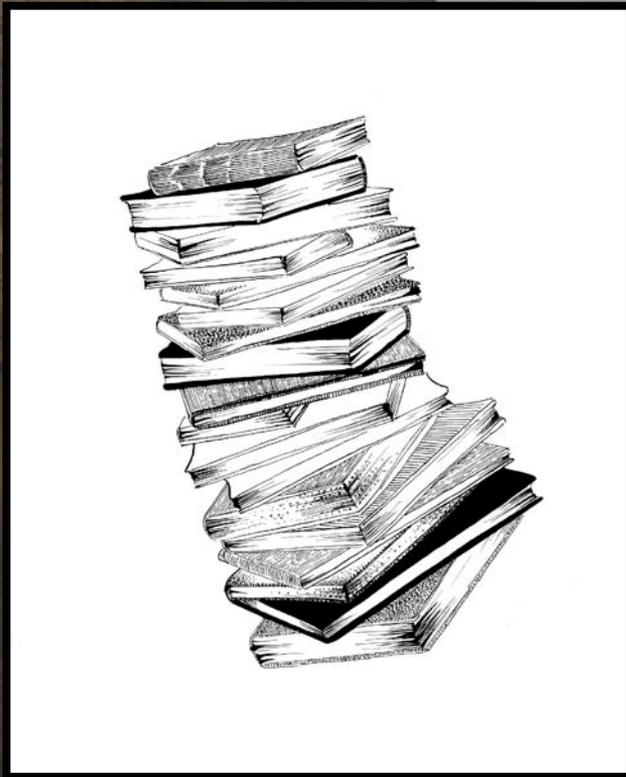


Illustration by Rae Bridgman

Grímur led them into a darkened room with large glass cases, which housed the old manuscripts. Sophie was enthralled. This was the very first time she had ever seen original manuscripts decorated with ornate, illuminated letters. Real people had put quill to this vellum hundreds of years ago. But even though the manuscripts were beautiful, in Sophie's mind, they paled in comparison with a little leather-bound book sitting alone in its case. It was much tinier than all the other bound books, about the size of Sophie's palm. Time had not been kind to it; its edges were frayed and the ink was fading. According to the label, it was a book of magical spells written in runic symbols. Small pictures lined the top half, with short instructions underneath. Sophie would love to have held the little book...



Culture House



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

The group followed Grímur into the next room, but Sophie was so taken with the small book that she lingered behind, until she felt Wil tugging on her arm.

“Sophie, come on,” said Wil. “You’re going to die in this next room!”

“Why?” said Sophie, having difficulty pulling her gaze away from the book.

“The scriptorium,” said Wil. “Come on!”

The Perlan



Image Source: www.commonswiki.org/wiki/File:Perlan.jpeg

This landmark is located on top of a hill overlooking Reykjavik harbour. The building, designed by Ingimundur Sveinsson, was originally used for hot water storage. The interior was remodeled and the glass dome was added in 1991.

Today, in addition to being used for storage, the complex also contains shops, a dome-topped revolving restaurant, a cafeteria, viewing decks, exhibition space, and the Saga Museum. It is now one of Iceland's most popular tourist attractions.



Image Source: www.flickr.com

The Perlan



Image Source: www.eestiland.wordpress.com/2009/02/

“Now,” said Grímur, “we are standing in front of an architectural masterpiece and feat of engineering, known as Perlan, The Pearl. Perlan is named for its magnificent futuristic silvery glass and steel dome, which sparkles in the sunlight and glimmers at night, refracting all the colours of the rainbow. The dome rests atop five enormous round tanks storing 24,000 tons of the city’s geothermally heated water. Geothermal energy forms the backbone of Iceland’s energy supply, we are unrivalled for geothermal energy use in the world – this is precisely why Perfect Products located here.”

“The Saga Museum is housed on the first floor...”



Saga Museum



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

The Saga Museum has an impressive collection of realistic figures recreating some of the country's most important historic events that have shaped the Iceland of today.

The silicone figures are known for their uncanny, lifelike appearance. The clothes, weapons, and household objects on display were all created using historically accurate methods that would have been used in the time period depicted.



Saga Museum



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

As everyone crowded into the museum, there were gasps and giggles and several people exclaimed, "Oh, my goodness! They look so real!" Sophie strained to see what they were looking at.

The raucous cry of ravens greeted her ears as she walked through a small dark passageway into the museum. The figure of a man dressed in a long cloak was standing on the deck of ship. He was releasing a raven into the wind, while another raven, caged, watched with beady glass eyes. It was uncanny. The birds almost seemed alive, but obviously, they were only stuffed.



Saga Museum



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

The next scene was no less real, with the smell of smoke, the sounds of crackling fire and a hammer against metal – a blacksmith was standing at an anvil.

And there was a young girl near the smithy, perhaps a little bit older than Sophie herself. She was kneeling and looking up at the sky, her eyes a startling light blue. She was holding a piece of dried fish in her hand, the same kind they had eaten on the Viking ship. Sophie stared and stared, certain the girl was going to move her head. It was all so real. People frozen in time, but they weren't real people.



Icelandic Phallogological Museum



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

This small museum located in Húsavík is considered to have the largest collection of phallic specimens in the world. It was started in 1974 by a now retired teacher and principal. Today, there are 272 different samples housed here, one from almost every species of mammals found in Iceland. Included is a variety of whales, seals, walruses, and one polar bear, as well as a many other local animals. The museum even has special specimens from creatures of folklore.

The museum provides a unique opportunity for scientific study. It is also quite popular. During the summer of 2009, it received over 11,000 visitors.



Icelandic Phallogological Museum



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

Wil and Sophie finally discovered the troll, back near the entrance to the museum, just as the man behind the counter stepped out to greet a bus filled with tourists from Reykjavík. There was a very large rock sitting in the corner. It resembled someone crouching over, with one arm raised. According to the label, it was supposed to be a Gigantus islandicus, a Troll. Young boy, thoroughly petrified. Found in North Iceland in 1941.

“They say trolls turn to stone at dawn, if they don’t get back to their caves in time,” said Wil gravely. “When the sun’s rays hit them, that’s it.”

“He must have been trying to shield his eyes from the sun,” said Sophie sadly.

“Remember those are just stories,” said Aunt Violet, obviously trying to cheer them up. “You know there aren’t really any trolls. That’s nothing but a plain old –”



Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

This unusual museum is located in Hólmavík, a town of 500 residents, on the northern edge of the country. It is believed the persecution of witches first began in this area in 1654 when three men were killed for allegedly practicing witchcraft. During this period of time, unpopular neighbours were often accused of witchcraft when unexplained events, such as mysterious illnesses, occurred in the community.

Since the museum opened in 2000, it has become a popular attraction. It provides insight into the history of witchcraft and sorcery in Iceland, and instructs visitors about different magical objects and spells that can be cast. People can also partake in special ceremonies involving ghosts during their tour.



Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

The Museum was filled with lots of oddities. There was the hooded skeleton rearing up out of the stone floor, a small sea mouse reputed to find treasure for its owner, and little books called grimoires, their pages grimy and stained, inked with black rune markings and strange words.

“I must say some of these incantations are so detailed and quite outlandish,” exclaimed Aunt Violet. “Who in snake’s name would keep whiskers from the left cheekbone of a wild mouse in their supply cabinet?”



Sorcerer's Cottage



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

The Sorcerer's Cottage is part of the Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery. It opened in 2005 and is located in Klúka. The modest structure was constructed using traditional Icelandic methods. Rocks forms the foundation, and drift wood is used for the walls and roof, topped with earth and grass for added protection against the harsh climate.

The house gives visitors an idea of the conditions the first Icelandic settlers lived in.



Sorcerer's Cottage



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

Sophie was sitting in a large pile of straw near a sod hut whose roof was covered in clumps of long, thick, green grass. They were outside, surrounded by rocky hills and mountains. In the distance were the sounds of lambs baaa-ing for their mothers. And there was another sound she didn't recognize. A high-pitched, whirring sound. It was coming from a bird whose wings fluttered and dipped through the air above their heads. Clouds chilled the sunlight, and a cold gust of wind whipped small nips of snow at their faces.

Wil was standing in the mound of straw and looked stunned. "Snow!" he exclaimed. "We must be high in the mountains."

"Don't tell me," said Sophie, shivering as another gust of wind tossed her hair. "It's the Sorcerer's Hut, isn't it?" she asked.

Icelandic Wonders: Elves, Trolls, and Northern Lights

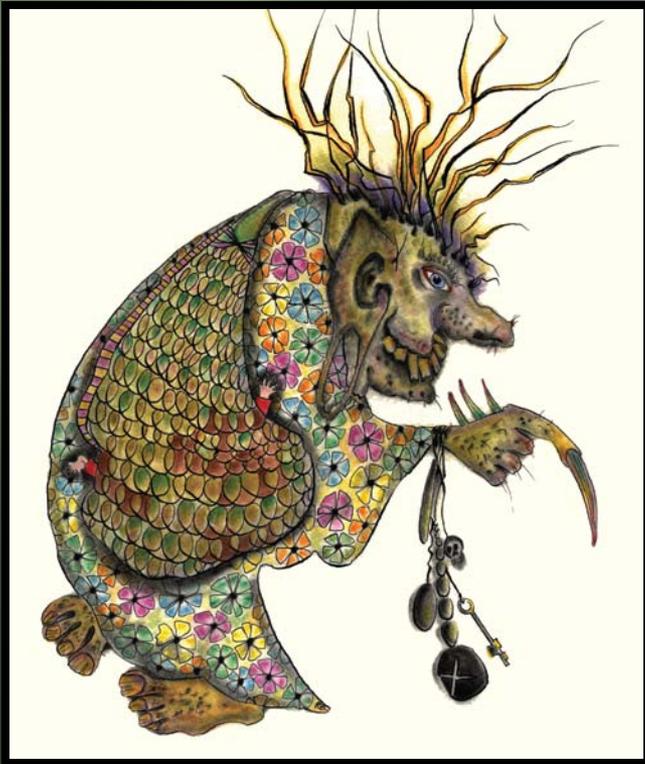


Illustration by Rae Bridgman

Located an hour's drive from Reykjavik in the town of Stokkseyri, this museum celebrates mythical Icelandic creatures. Visitors can learn about elves (usually invisible to the human eye), and explore troll caves. Grýla is Iceland's best famous female ogress.

Special guided tours are held at night and include a visit to the museum's ghost centre, as well as time to spot the Northern Lights, often active in this part of the world.



Icelandic Wonders: Elves, Trolls, and Northern Lights



Image Source: Rae Bridgman

It took Wil's eyes a moment to adjust to the darkness in the museum, as the group walked along a dark, stony tunnel lit by small glimmering lights. The sound of water falling and liltng, haunting music ahead demanded to be followed. The tunnel opened into a large cave with a water fall and sparkling pool. A light flashed and for an instant, he could see two figures seated at a fine table with silver goblets and candlesticks, with a mirror behind them. They were dressed as elves, with rich, velvet garments and silver crowns.

The next instant, the cave went dark. Tinkling laughter rang in the air, beautiful harp music strummed, and it sounded as if the elves were dancing, but no one could be seen.

Websites

Here are several websites you can visit to learn more about magical places in Iceland.

Culture House

http://www.thjodmenning.is/index_english.htm

Icelandic Wonders: Elves, Trolls and Northern Lights

<http://www.icelandicwonders.com>

Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

<http://www.galdrasyning.is>

Sorcerer's Cottage

<http://www.galdrasyning.is/kotbyli-en.pdf>

The Phallogical Museum

<http://www.phallus.is/>

Saga Museum

<http://www.sagamuseum.is/enska/english.html>



Acknowledgements

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To find out more about THE MIDDLEGATE BOOKS and follow Wil's and Sophie's adventures...

Visit Rae St. Clair Bridgman's website:
www.raebridgman.ca

