

Vatnajokull's First Post Office

by Mike Schumacher

Vatnajokull (largest glacier in Europe) is an unmistakable and important feature of the Icelandic landscape. It covers about 10% of Iceland – more than 8300 kilometers. The glacier cap has a thickness of 600 - 800 meters. The greatest ice thickness has been measured at 1000 meters. Under the ice cap there are a number of volcanoes that periodically erupt, releasing millions of gallons of water onto the Icelandic landscape. The rivers that fork from Vatnajokull carry the greatest water flow throughout nearly half of Iceland.

Thus Vatnajokull plays a significant role in the life of Icelanders. In 1936, the Swedish-Icelandic Vatnajokull Expedition jointly led by Professor Hans Wilhelmsson Ahlmann (Swedish Scientist) and Jon Eyythorsson (Icelandic Meteorologist) set out onto the glacier with the mission - to study the life and nature of the glacier (i.e. the rate of accumulation; ablation and movement). *The everyday challenges and obstacles of a glacier expedition under extreme weather conditions requires an enormous physical and psychological exertion.*

The expedition involved:

- four men obtaining scientific measurements of the glacier by digging pits 4 to 8 meters deep into the ice to assess the amount of annual precipitation and melting;
- living in tents on Vatnajokull for 8 weeks (from late April to late June);
- enduring below zero temperatures at times; howling winds, rain and snow storms, (from May 11-17th they endured 336 millimeters or 13.2 inches of precipitation which was mixed rain/snow), and
- transporting their equipment and supplies on two pulkas (sleds); one pulled by 4 sled dogs and the other pulled by them.

Figure 1



The 1936 Swedish-Icelandic Vatnajokull Expedition occurred as a result of the benevolence of the Icelandic and Swedish governments, as well as the contributions from the Swedish Anthropological and Geographical Society. The timing of the expedition was perfect, because of the 1934 spring eruption of the volcano Grimsvotn-Sviagigur which distributed a layer of black

Figure 2



ash over the ice cap of Vatnajokull.



Figure 3

The Icelandic Postmaster Sigurdur Baldvinsson [Figure 3] being interested in the expedition bestowed upon Jon Eyythorsson - *the duties of Postmaster and presented him with stamps, a special rubber stamp for cancellation purposes, mail-bag and satchel to be used while on the expedition.* The number of covers sent from Vatnajokull is unknown; few of them have come to light and it is rare to find stamps off cover with the "Vatnajokull" cancel [Figure 1]. Those known have cancel dates of either May 22, 1936 [Figure 2] or June 14, 1936.



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Christmas Party

December 15, 2016

*The fun starts at 6:30pm (Doors open at 6:00pm)
in our meeting room at the
Marks St. Senior Center
Orlando, FL*

All members and spouses are welcome

*The club will provide all paper goods and
Baked Ham and Roasted Turkey*

Attendees are invited to participate by bringing their choice of...

Favorite appetizer or

Favorite salad recipe or

Favorite side dish (veggie, etc) or

Favorite dessert

BYOB (no alcohol)

Bottled water and ice will be provided!

