

ICELAND

VOLUME THREE - THE WATERFALLS

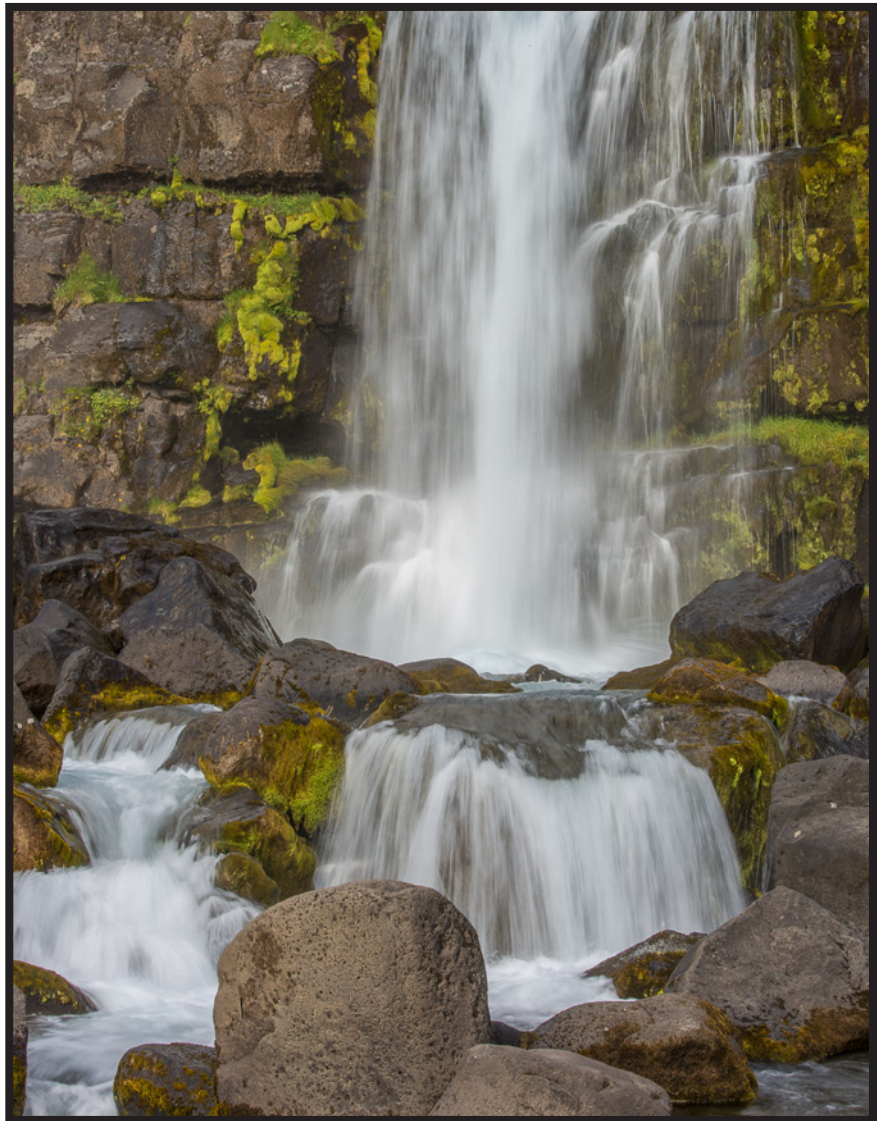
WATERFALLS, WATERFALLS, WATERFALLS!

While we did not see as many waterfalls as we did puffins, we did see a lot of waterfalls. The weather and my timing of visiting waterfalls always seemed to make photographing them difficult and problematic. Being there at the right moment of dramatic light and skies never happened, but it was still enjoyable and there were some acceptable photographs, albeit none of the award winners I had in my mind.

Öxarárfoss

Öxarárfoss (Axe Falls) in Þingvellir National Park. It flows from the river Öxará over the Almannagjá.

Hopefully you are reading this issue of *Flying Pig Adventures* out loud to someone. You should take turns....



Goðafoss



Goðafoss (waterfall of the gods) is located in the river Skjálfandafljót which runs through Bárðardalur and Kinn in Northeast Iceland and is among Iceland's larger waterfalls.

Skjálfandafljót runs across a lava field which is approximately 7000 years old. Rocky promontories in the horseshoe shaped edge of the falls divide it into two main falls and a few smaller ones, depending on the flow.

Goðafoss is closely connected with one of the most important events in Icelandic history, the conversion to Christianity from heathendom or "the old custom" in the year 1000.

At that time Þorgeir Þorkelsson, chieftain from nearby Ljósavatn was law-speaker in Iceland. As such he was faced with the task of settling the growing disputes between Christians and those who worshiped the old Nordic gods. Despite being a heathen priest himself, he decided that all of Iceland should be Christian, as is famously recorded in the Sagas.

Legend has it that, once he returned back to Ljósavatn from this historic Alþingi, he dispensed of his heathen gods by throwing them into the falls in a symbolic act of the conversion. This, according to the legend, is how Goðafoss got its name.

Kirkjufellsfoss



Kirkjufellsfoss is located in West Iceland, close to Kirkjufell Mountain and Grundarfjörður Town on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. It is a very famous photography spot because of the nearby Kirkjufell Mountain and its use as a background to Kirkjufellsfoss, with dramatic sunsets and clouds. Another of those spots that my timing of atmospheric conditions was off...

Do a Goggle search on "Kirkjufellsfoss" for images and you will see some of the dramatic lighting and clouds I was hoping for. None the less, I worked Kirkjufellsfoss for an hour or so and got some nice photographs.



Gullfoss

Gullfoss is in the river Hvítá (White River) which has its origin in the glacier lake Hvítávatn (White River Lake) at Lángjökull glacier about 25 miles north of Gullfoss.

Glacial water on this river is brownish, from lots of sediment that the glacial ice has carved off the earth.

Gullfoss is called the "Golden Falls", since on a sunny day the water plunging down the three step staircase and then tumbling in two steps down into the 105 foot deep crevice truly looks golden. It wasn't very sunny when I was there, but very rainy and windy, and thus not very 'golden' at all. Considering that, I took a B&W approach to my interpretation of Gullfoss.

Sigríður Tómasdóttir, the daughter of Tómas Tómasson who owned the waterfall in the first half of the 20th century and lived at a farm nearby, loved Gullfoss.

At this period of time much speculation about using Gullfoss to harness electricity was going on. Foreign investors who rented Gullfoss indirectly from the owners wanted to build a hydroelectric power plant, which would have changed and destroyed Gullfoss forever.

As the story goes, it is due to Sigríður Tómasdóttir that we still enjoy Gullfoss, because she was the one that protested so intensely against this idea of building a power plant, going so far as to threaten that she would throw herself into Gullfoss and thereby kill herself.

To make her threat believable she went barefoot on a protest march from Gullfoss to Reykjavik. In those days the roads weren't paved and when she arrived after 75 miles her feet were bleeding and she was in very bad shape.

The people believed her and listened and the power plant at Gullfoss was never built. Today one can see the memorial site of Sigríður that depicts her profile at the top of the falls. A modern day Icelandic Saga!



The Elf Village

I have never seen an Elf village, but I am pretty sure that this is one.

One of my goals was to explore something of the barren interior of Iceland. I had mapped out several roads of potential. Upon picking up our rental car, a Mazda SUV with something a bit less than true 4x4 capabilities, we were told most of the roads I had considered were closed to access by anything but the most sturdy of off road 4x4 vehicles. And even with those extreme 4x4 rigs, special water damage / river fording insurance, expertise and experience were required. So I tempered my off road desires... for the time being.

One day we decided to take one track that was open and seemed doable in our pseudo-4x4 rental. (Okay, I chose to and Wendy and Pat acquiesced). Anyway, we drove into the heart of Iceland, up long valleys, up escarpments, across huge lava flows and the like.

I had read about and noted an even more obscure little dirt track off the one we were on and convinced Wendy and Pat it was safe. It was and it led to a small overlook of a river. Now that I had them that far, and safely, I told about them my reading that if we went just a bit further there was another place of interest. Well, they didn't say 'yes' and they didn't say 'no'... right away... so... I didn't waste any time in heading up just the 'little farther' I'd read about. As the dirt track petered out into a dry rocky river bed and a Humvee passed us coming the other way, down the river bed, my co-adventurers began asking questions and voicing concerns... I didn't point out the emergency shelter I saw and just kept going... Not too far we came to an even more obscure track to the left. I took it to an overlook which in reality was not far up the river where we had been a few minutes earlier. The view was what I think was the Elf village below.

With this magical view I think both Wendy and Pat forgave me, for the moment, for getting them so far off the beaten dirt track and for raising their anxiety levels a bit.

Upon leaving and thinking Wendy and Pat must have a new found confidence and trust in my navigation decision skills I decided not to back-track... but continue on what was now the dirt path that lead to the dirt track that leads to the main-main dirt track. So I turned left. I do not know why, but to me back-tracking seems to be so counter productive to adventure. It is just so very difficult to force myself to do that, unless further on down the road something happens that makes back-tracking the 'only' option. And what are the chances of that? All roads lead 'somewhere'!

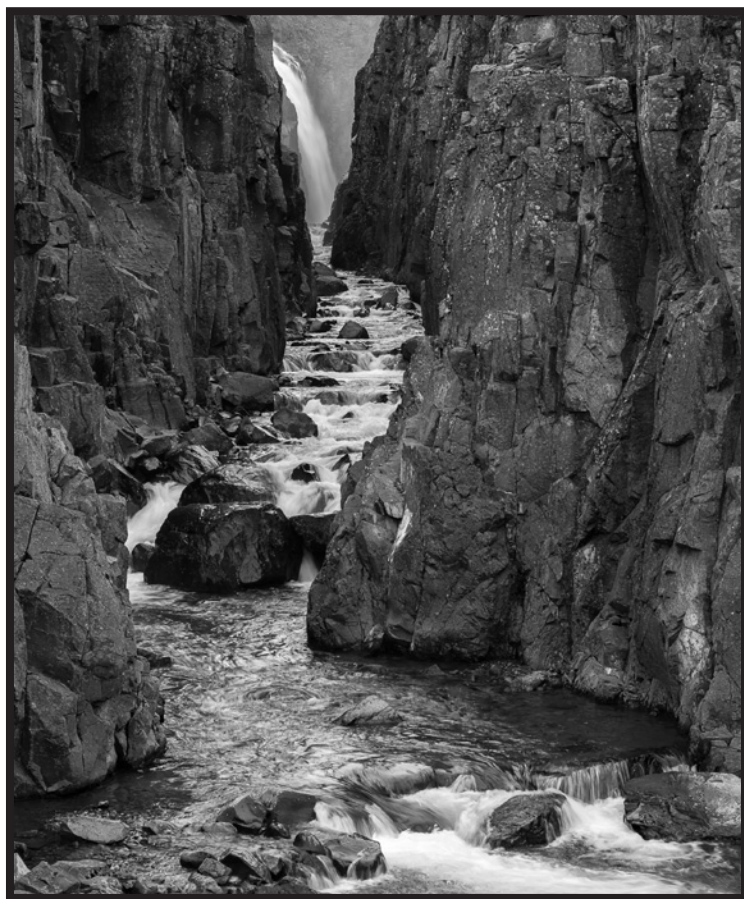


A bit further on I could see the main track maybe a half mile off to the right and some tire tracks leaving our dirt path out towards it (less than even a dirt path by any measure though). I could sense Wendy and Pat were getting nervous... or maybe it was something(s) they said, but I decided to follow the tire tracks, if just for a bit I think I said. We were truly entering into 4x4 terrain now, serious adventure! We did reach the main track, but it was a fence that separated us from the main track only a few feet away... Seriously?!

Okay... so... with tail between my legs, I back-tracked to the dirt path, turned right (no back-tracking), continued on and eventually got back to the main track.

If you want to explore this area, the 'unofficial' name is Gjainfoss.

unnamed waterfalls



Dynjandi (also known as Fjallfoss)

Dynjandi is a series of waterfalls located in the Westfjords, (Vestfirðir). The waterfalls have a cumulative height of 330 feet.

Dynjandi was my favorite waterfall because I felt it gave me the most in photographic opportunities. It is a huge one with many cascades of different characteristics.

As with many waterfalls and other sites in Iceland, there is camping right there. Should one camp (and we did not) it would be very easy to take advantage of any early morning and late evening light and be there when there are none of the tourist masses.

The photograph above was taken from across the fjord with a very long lens. It gives one an idea of the mass, size and of the many photographic opportunities at Dynjandi.

The location of the next two photographs of Dynjandi you may be able to locate in the overall image above.



Skógafoss

The Skógafoss is one of the biggest waterfalls in the country with a width of 82 feet and a drop of 200 feet.

This image with its double rainbow is due to the amount of spray the waterfall consistently produces and a single or double rainbow is normally visible on sunny days.

According to legend, the first Viking settler in the area, Þrasi Þórólfsson, buried a treasure in a cave behind the waterfall. The legend continues that locals found the chest years later, but were only able to grasp the ring on the side of the chest before it disappeared again.

The ring was allegedly given to the local church. The old church door ring is now in a museum, though whether it gives any credence to the folklore is debatable.

A trail leads up to the pass Fimmvörðuháls between the glaciers Eyjafjallajökull and Mýrdalsjökull. It goes down to Þórsmörk on the other side and continues as the famous Laugavegur to Landmannalaugar.

Are you still reading out loud?

Skógafoss was a location for the filming of the Marvel Studios film Thor: The Dark World, as well as The Secret Life of Walter Mitty.

That's it for the foss issue. I will be working on the next issue soon.



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