



## INTRODUCTION: HJALMAKLETTUR-EGILSSAGA

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#### 1. HJALMAKLETTUR

In the year 2001, the Borgarbyggð Community held its 100<sup>th</sup> town council meeting. To commemorate that event, the town council made the following agreement:

For the reason that the 100<sup>th</sup> town council meeting was held in Borgarbyggð, the town council agrees to give the Borgarfjörður Museum Centre 500 thousand IKR to develop the idea that has been put forward concerning the founding of an institution in the memory of Egill Skallagrímsson. On completion, the Results will be presented to the Town Council.

Accompanying this agreement was the following statement:

Borgarbyggð is a municipality that is situated in a historically very interesting area. This area was the setting for the saga of the settler Skallagrím Kveldulfsson and the colorful life of the poet Egill Skallagrímsson; the Egilssaga is the most famous one.

Thousands of tourists come every year to famous historical places in Borgarfjörður, for example to Borg at Myrar and to Reykholt. Borgarfjörður is also the scene for other sagas, like the saga of Gunnlaugur the serpent-tongue, the saga of Björn Hitdælakappi and other famous sagas. This historical heritage is not only valuable for the people of the area but is also a strong attraction for both Icelandic tourists and people from abroad. In recent years, an idea has been forming, both in Borgarbyggð's Education- and Cultural committee and at the Borgarfjörður Museum Centre, to establish a cultural and heritage practice related to the name of Egill Skallagrímsson. Also, the Borgarfjörður Museum Centre has been in contact with Snorrastofa in Reykholt. The Town Council is convinced that it is beneficial to develop and work with these ideas and will thus be helpful in making decisions regarding the project and regarding the raising of funds for further development.

#### 2. THE COMMITTEE

The project was started to commemorate the saga of Egill Skallagrímsson, Egils saga. In addition to the 500.000 kr. that came from the Town Council, 250.000 kr. was received from Myrasýsla Savings bank for the preparation of the first phase. Mr. Axel Kristinsson, the director of Borgarfjörður Museum Centre, was asked to lead the work. He called in Mr. Davið



Ólafsson, Mrs. Rakel Pálsdóttir, Ms. Ásthildur Sturludóttir and Mr. Rögnvaldur Guðmundsson. All of them have prepared projects related to this one before. The project also received a 350000 kr. from the State for this first phase.

The Egils saga committee has met about 15 times and will deliver a report on the project to the Town Council next autumn. Architect Guðmundur Jónsson was asked to make sketches of the heritage centre. He finished in February and presented his very modern ideas. It is the blade of an axe driven in to the cliff at the end of Borgarfjörður Bridge. The outer layer of the house will be of stone and shiny bronze that reminds us of Egill's axe and Egill the Warrior.

In this report, the committee will explain its ideas about the proposed exhibition and about the possible ways of using the building. I am proposing that Hjalma-klettur should be a multi-purpose cultural heritage centre in Borgarbyggð.

In this following introduction, I will describe the Idea of Hjalma-klettur Egils saga centre that the committee has put forward, and the ideas based on it.

### 3. THE POEM

The name Hjalma-klettur comes from a poem made by Egill Skallagrímsson and refers to the poet's head – the cliff his helmet rests upon.

Erumka leitt,  
þótt ljótr séi,  
hjalma klett  
af hilmi þiggja;  
hvar's sás gat  
af göfuglyndum  
æðri gjöf  
allvalds syni.

[Ugly as my head may be,  
the cliff my helmet rests upon.

I am not loathe  
to accept it from the king.

Where is the man who ever received a finer gift



from a noble-minded  
son of a great ruler]

The committee found the name Hjalmaklettur good and found that it describes the idea, the look of the house and the dedication and connection to the poet Egill Skallagrímsson, just brilliantly.

#### 4. EGILS SAGA

Egils saga is acknowledged as one of the masterpieces of the Icelandic Sagas, a magnificently wrought portrait of the Icelanders' poet, farmer and warrior, Egill Skallagrímsson, loosely contained within the framework of the family saga, but with an unusual twist – the feud that Egill and his forbears wage with the Kings of Norway. Egils saga takes place around 850 to 1000 AC. But it is written about 200 years later maybe by Snorri Sturluson of Reykholt. It is the only Icelandic saga whose writer might be known.

#### 5. CULTURAL TOURISM

In the year 2001, the ministry of transportation and tourism published a report on cultural tourism edited by Tómas I. Olrich who is now minister of education. That report makes clear that culture and heritage is getting more and more important in tourism. Also, people are becoming more informed about the country's culture and want to learn more about it. No longer is the beautiful nature the only attraction, though it is the prime one. Icelanders and their culture, the sagas and their life, will be a growing industry in the future. Through an exhibition like Hjalmaklettur, tourists, both from abroad and Iceland, will be better informed about the Icelandic heritage and it will hopefully encourage tourists and other guests to search for more information on the sagas and increase their interest in reading them. Borgarfjörður is also a good place for a cultural heritage centre. This is the area in which many of the most famous sagas were set, not forgetting that Snorri Sturluson, the writer, lived in Reykholt. Borgarfjörður is the first stop for many tourists travelling from Reykjavík to West and North Iceland.

#### 6. TOURIST INDUSTRY IN WEST ICELAND

If we look at the statistics we can see that most, or 98%, of the tourists that come to Iceland in the summer time visit the capital, and 48% of them visit West Iceland. In comparison, in October, 96% visit Reykjavík and only 13% visit West Iceland. By increasing opportunities



for tourists through exhibitions like Hjalmaklettur and Heimskringla it is possible to attract more guests during shoulder seasons and keep them in the area longer.

## 7. WHAT IS HJÁLMAKLETTUR?

Multi-use cultural heritage centre in Borgarbyggð, Iceland.

- Exhibition dedicated to Egill Skallagrímsson.
- Storytelling centre

One of the ideas for Hjalmaklettur is a Storytelling centre that will focus on vivid narrative, listening to stories, and talking about them. It will be based on the European project, Storytelling Renaissance, that Iceland was a part of. The Idea is to have a storyteller who will recount stories on certain dates and hold seminars on storytelling etc.

- The Storytelling renaissance database

In the above-mentioned project, about 600 stories have been collected and a homepage where the stories will be accessible for everyone is now in the process of being built. The Idea is to collect the stories in Hjalmaklettur.

- Special library on Egils saga.

One of the ideas is a special library on Egill Skallagrímsson that includes different publications of Egils saga, as well as books on Borgarfjörður and the Icelandic Sagas.

Egils saga was first printed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and has been translated into quite a large number of languages, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- Possible research centre for scholars.

By creating a good library, Hjalmaklettur could be an excellent place for scholars to research and work on projects related to Egil's saga and Borgarfjörður.

- Restaurant-café

With specialties from the area

- Souvenir shop

With specially selected souvenirs from the area.

- Information centre for tourists



Possibly the information and promotion centre in Borgarnes.

## 8. THE EXHIBITION:

The main thought is to divide the exhibition into three threads that will come together in one. The three facets will be like three threads that are twisted together and the guest will follow these three threads throughout the exhibition.

The first thread will concern the life of Kveld-Úlfur (Skallagrímur's father), Skallagrímur (Egill's father) and Egill and the society that the story depicts.

The second thread will concern the manuscripts and the publication history of Egils saga from the time when it was written until today. We will see different manuscripts and the distribution of the saga around the world.

The third thread will concern Egils saga and the heritage of the Sagas of the Icelanders in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In modern life, we can find Egill's legacy in many places, both directly and indirectly, and parts of the exhibition will be dedicated to that. Works by various artists, writers, and musicians, which have been inspired by Egils saga, will be presented, along with trademarks, associations, streets, names, and buildings that are connected with Egils saga. Use will also be made of modern technology, computers, etc.

## 9. ACHIEVEMENTS

Many goals have been set for the Hjalmaklettur centre project. Here we mention just six, but there are definitely more.

1. Inform tourists regarding the remarkable story of Borgarfjordur
2. Enable local people to learn more about the story and its heritage, and, by that, enhance their self-awareness, identity, and the image of the area.
3. Promote tourism and enhance leisure facilities in the area
4. Attract more tourists to West Iceland.
5. Increase employment opportunities for people with higher education.
6. Gather and hold together information on Egils saga



**CLOSURE:**

It is my hope that the idea of Hjalmaklettur will come to fruition. It is of course very progressive, but all good ideas are. It will support other projects in Borgarfjordur, like Snorrastofa and Heimskringla, and together they will form a strong base for a historical and heritage agenda in West Iceland.