

## Sunday Night Football

Stoovarforour, Iceland: Three days out from Reykjavik and we've reached the eastern side of the island. A very cloudy morning yielded more doubt than confidence as we drove past an enormous glacier field that was barely visible thru the overhanging gloom. But past the south-east elbow of Hoft, we emerged from a long tunnel to find sunny skies and things started looking up.

With our handy camping discount card in hand, we've found a plot of ground here in "Stoovar" that meets our financial terms.....free. Eastern Iceland is beset with a number of Fjords, resembling fingers reaching out into the Atlantic. Our camp this night is at the tip of the ring finger, will be a cold-breezy place, but not without its charms.

Charm #1 is the local "hang" the Brekkan Inn, part diner, part general store, part information center, part gossip station. The wifi is free, the hot chocolate less so, but it's in out of the wind and it's generally crowded, something rural Iceland is generally not. We've been invited to the local soccer match just across the street from our campground. There are no lights here, for none are needed. Summers in Iceland are times of eternal summer. In the four days we've been here, we have yet to see a sunrise or set...there's just sun. The eskimos have forty different words for snow, and so it must be here, with countless ways to describe the light overhead, and eventually the offsetting 24hrs of darkness come December.

Charm#2 is the passion for Sunday Night Football. While setting up our tents, a townie rolled up to avail himself of the communal water spigot to fill his paint bucket. Manager of the opposition tonight, he is also in charge of painting the lines for the game. He invited Jim and I out for the game at 9pm and got busy painting. The pitch was perched on a slab of ground which looked bolted onto the shoreline of the fjord; with the road as one barrier and the sea the other. They constructed a makeshift netting system to hopefully retain errant kicks from floating away, but the immediate impression was that there needed to be several "game balls" available.

We hung around the general store, then finished dinner before heading down to the stadium. The pregame ceremonies were unusual to say the least. With the wind peeling off the snow-capped peaks across the fjord, we estimated the air temps to be in the high 30's but the wind was really whipping, dropping the air temperatures into the 20's. Jim and I went for the winter coats, gloves and hats, but the hearty Icelanders were mostly running around in short sleeves. There was no engineered seating, rather a steep hill leading down to the pitch....we joined ten hearty souls who "sat out" for the game, stooping rather than seated. But the amazing part was the line of cars pulled over to the side of the road, high above the pitch. These were the Icelandic version of "box seats"; folks sitting in their cars basking in the heat of their running engines. The claps and cheers normally associated with good play were replaced this night with various car horns tooting their approval.

The game, a local rivalry between "Stooval" and neighboring "Breidal" was a spirited affair. An early goal by the visitors was looking like it would hold up; the local "Stooval boys" played inspired ball in the second half, won a penalty kick and then converted, earning the tie. The hard play and constant barking

of the coaches harkened back to the summer soccer games of my youth, when legs and lungs were both in better shape and games could be just games.

We wondered if there would be post-game festivities somewhere in town, but it was close to 11pm at the final whistle, and the players seemed more than content to get into their cars and warm up, as we did.

With populations hovering around 500, these small towns, like small towns everywhere, come out to support the team...On these fjords, the big games of the week are played on Sunday night...under the never-fading sun of Icelandic summer.

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