THE PATH LESS TAKEN:
THE INTERSECTION OF NARRATIVES AND THE ICELANDIC LANDSCAPE

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Of the many lenses through which the value of landscape is evaluated, the lens most prevalently used is profitability. This thesis rejects that simplistic view and instead offers an alternative: evaluating a landscape via its embedded cultural and narrative history. Specifically, this work explores the intersection between the narratives of Iceland and its landscapes as a means of unearthing and depicting cultural identity. It is through the amassed and percolated tales of the Icelandic people that significance and meaning are embedded into the land. These stories, in expressing their moral and ethical views, as well as in relaying their history, therefore become the identity of the people. By tracing and collecting various stories in the land, the narrative characteristics become a cultural identity, creating an invisible layer of meaning and memory that is imbued unto the landscape.

Employing a distantiation technique—where a subject removed from one's frame of reference is studied—whereby a foreign landscape and culture are researched, this thesis explores how architecture and design can be used to curate a sequential series of interventions in the landscape that both uncover and amplify the narratives and therefore the cultural identity of a specific site—that of the mountain Stóra-Dímon. The work further explores the intersection between narratives, landscape, and identity, by experimenting with the means of representation. Through a series of perspective boxes that encapsulate the characteristics of the landscape and the series of proposed interventions, the boxes capture and depict precise moments that truly display nuances of identity, narrative, and culture, all of which are embedded in the site.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Please note that all photography present in this thesis have been taken by the author Michelle Elizabeth Dingley*

1. & 2. For figures 38 and 39, their descriptors, copyright permission letter, and invoice can be found in the backmatter under the section Letters of Copyright Permission.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1 INTRODUCTION

During the summer before starting my master's degree, I came across cultural geographer Kent C. Ryden's book, Mapping the Invisible Landscape. This book reshaped my perception of landscape and reframed its importance in regards to cultural identity formation. Ryden argues that the physical landscape is overlaid with an invisible landscape – "an unseen layer of usage, memory, and significance - an invisible landscape, if you will, of imaginative landmarks - superimposed upon the geographical surface and the two-dimensional map. To passing observers, however, that landscape will remain invisible unless it is somehow called to their attention"[1]. These invisible landscapes are the embedded memories in the form of stories that over time, percolate into a collection of tales. The tales build up to give shape to the history of the individuals and community of that landscape. Those stories and histories form their identity by expressing their values and the key events that have shaped their identities and communities, along with cautionary tales of the land.

Arguably, those who can read these narratives in the landscape can begin to read the identity of those who have lived there. As Ryden extrapolates, "if environmental literacy enables one to read one's surroundings as if they were a text, that text must be made up of intelligible words, sentences, and paragraphs. The folk sense of place provides these units of meaning. As with any language, this sort of literacy is acquired through incessant practice and exposure; also as with any language, those who cannot read it will see the text as a meaningless jumble"[2]. By developing one's environmental literacy and using that skill to trace the folktales, legends, and myths embedded in the landscape, one would be able to read—like braille—all the bumps, crevices, and artifacts of the community's cultural identity.

While Ryden does not provide a methodology for acquiring a literacy of these invisible landscapes, he does discuss some typical artifacts that begin to aid this interpretation. For example, the use of colloquial maps—such as Shaker maps—that settlers of New England made to define the new and foreign land in which they found themselves. Along surveying lines, the settlers included pictograms and anecdotes that alluded to their day-to-day life, as well as to significant landmarks to their community. These maps, along with other artifacts (such as signs and monuments), can be used to begin to recite the tales of the land. However, unless and until a prior knowledge of these stories is possessed—either via a first-hand study, or a personal acquaintance made with the land itself—the narratives which form the crux of the identity of a region will remain locked in the landscape and forever invisible.

Acquainting oneself entirely with the folklore and legends particular to a specific place is an immense undertaking, one that is doubtless for many—if not most—insurmountably difficult. But what if the landscape could 'speak' for itself without the requiring the presence of a storyteller? What if it could convey to a newcomer the values it holds for society, for culture as a whole? Perhaps then, newcomers would have a stronger inclination to embed their own identities into the landscape and the stories embedded into this landscape. Newcomers would more easily and fluidly be able engage with the stories of the landscape.

I do not suggest that a stranger will be able to understand the entirety of the timeless narratives and shared experiences contained within a landscape, even if there were some way through which the landscape could tell these narratives. Instead, they may experience a resonance—with the story, or with the land itself—that would engender and encourage a greater sympathy with the land upon which they stand and its people. Repeated exposure can train one's eye to be more sensitive to the landscape; to seek out the artifacts, circuits, and motifs that allude to the invisible landscape, and thereby connect with something greater.

By selecting a specific site in the landscape and introducing appropriate interventions, sites can begin to transmit these unique identities through their associated stories. How do I do this with a design solution without compromising the integrity and sanctity of the site? Where would be an ideal place to test my method? And why is this exploration in sympathetic design worth pursuing?

I am convinced that architecture itself can be curated in a way that naturally reveals and amplifies the narratives present within a particular landscape. The line between curation—the interfering hand of the designer—and preservation of the site in its most natural, most pure form, will be one which will need to be established early on. The question will be, at what point do the characteristics of any intervention overwhelm and overtake the characteristics of the site? By using the fundamentals of architecture, i.e. architectonics, one can curate a connection with the narratives and the landscape by guiding the visitors through a phenomenological, time-based experience without overbuilding on the site thus keeping the spirit of the place intact.

But before I could proceed to design, I had to conduct my most important step: selecting a site. I briefly contemplated picking a location that I knew well, but decided that this familiarity could be detrimental; I would already be acquainted with the folklore and legends and attuned with its geography, I surmised that I would be too close to the material: what might appear self-evident to me in the locale or in future design decisions may seem completely obtuse and irrelevant to others. Selecting a site which was more foreign to me however, would force me to insert myself into the site, and to place me in a position similar to that which other visitors would occupy. I would first be the individual to whom narratives were to be curated, before becoming the individual charged with

curating narratives to others. This route requires more effort but would result in a design that is total—one that is more thorough, more holistic, and more thought through.

Why bother? Why is this train of thought worth pursuing? This thesis is a reflection of my beliefs that our society's approach to landscape ought to be critically reevaluated. As I see it, the current approach to landscape—one which promotes and favors profitability as a core value at the expense of folklore, of understanding, of empathy—is not only an achingly shallow perception of our finite land, but one which perpetuates environmental and ecological destruction. I would argue that this detachment from our landscape is a primary reason for the current global climate crisis; our lack of connection with the land has led to an ongoing mass-extinction event, rising temperatures, uncontrollable fires, melting ice caps, and so on. Our current approach does not allow for introspection or thought beyond the finite and myopic margins of profitability in regards to our landscape. This series of global crises are signs that our approach to landscapes, and the people on these landscapes, needs to be rethought.

If we as a society start to view our landscape not as a machine for profit, but as a reflection, what and where—or where not—we choose to build will have a more substantial and more holistic impact on the identity of the community and the environment. By using architecture as a medium between the narratives of cultural identity locked in the landscape, and its people, a link between past and current iterations of a culture may be established, which will help communities understand what they once were, and what they want to be moving forward.. In exploring this compassionate approach to landscape with a foreign culture, I hope to eliminate the antipathy towards our shared topography, and to encourage a more sympathetic view towards our land.

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1. Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 40.
2. Ibid., 72.

2 LANDSCAPES AND NARRATIVES

2.1 ICELANDIC LANDSCAPE AND ITS TEXTS

As mentioned earlier, I required a site before I could begin. From the list of places renowned not only for their landscape, but also for their strong identity and folklore I compiled, one place stood out: Iceland. Admittedly, I have always held an interest for the geographically isolated country, so for the first few months of the thesis, I amassed a foundation of Icelandic literature and researched the island itself (see Ill.1. for plan of Iceland).

The terrain of Iceland is arguably one of the most hostile environments mankind has ever decided to occupy. The northern island hugs the Arctic Circle, making food, lumber, and other organic production difficult, if not impossible. Located in the North Atlantic between Greenland and Norway, the country is therefore subject to the battery of an incredibly temperamental climate. Iceland is also an island that straddles the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates which are slowly drifting apart. The island is very geologically active as a result: there are around 130 volcanoes—30 of which are still active—hundreds of geysers, earthquakes and glacial flooding due to volcanic activity, and an ever changing and unpredictable landscape.

But out of these incredibly harsh conditions, out of the fire and ice was forged one of the most sublime landscapes on Earth. While desolate, the landscape is rife with unfathomable geological riches—from the rainbow mountains of Landmannalaugar, the black sand beaches of Reynifjara, and the basalt canyons of Studðlagil, to the thunderous waterfalls of Godafoss, the steaming rivers, and the cracking glaciers among many, many others—the landscape appears to belong to a mythical realm or at the very least, to another planet. Its austere beauty beckons poets and adventurers alike from all corners of the Earth to brave its dangers and live among the Gods.

When settlers first came to Iceland in the 870s, they came primarily from Norway as political refugees; fleeing the rule of King Harald I. One of the few things they brought with them on their voyage was their large body of Norse mythology—stories, folklore, and legends. These stories of gods, giants, elves, wizards, and sea creatures from Scandinavia were shifted and adapted from their original locale to better suit the Icelandic landscape. For example, the lumbering trolls of Norway became malicious giants capable of launching boulders at churches. Another example would be development of elves: on the mainland, they were seen as mischievous creatures, typically smaller than humans; but in Iceland they became ethereal humanoid beings (more commonly known as the Hidden Folk) that had supernatural powers and an intrinsic knowledge of the land and climate. In

researching the Icelandic folktales and legends I noticed that a large majority of them directly reference specific locations. This trend had also been noted by folklorist Jacqueline Simpson who remarked, “despite their foreign parallels, these Icelandic stories are almost always very firmly localized. They often have a strong aetiological element: this specified rock or island is a giant turned to stone; that hollow in the ground, the site of a sunken church… has some legend to account for its existence, and is in turn regarded as proof of the legend”[1].

For example, the boulders being launched at churches and other settlements were from angry giants taking their rage out on humans, not from natural processes such as eruptions. They learned not to build on the rolling knolls of lava fields, because the fields were home to the Hidden Folk who would curse trespassers, not because the porosity of these fields lacked the proper stability for building.

It came to be that certain creatures were associated with specific landscapes. Trolls resided in cliff faces and caves; elves lived in knolls; wizards lurked on remote islands and lonely mountain peaks—all these tales begin to codify the landscape. These narratives became one of the rudimentary languages of environmental literacy, as described by Ryden, for Icelanders. They became a map of sorts—imbuing unto the settlers a geographical and geological literacy of the land—of places to avoid, and places to settle, without using proper geographical or geological methods; this being the 9th century, there was no available science which could explain the phenomena of the island. They would not have been able to explain the earthquakes; the bubbling, gaseous lava fields; the thunderous cracking of the shifting glaciers; let alone the devastating volcanic eruptions without the use of stories and of folklore.

Ill. 1. Plan of Iceland | 1 : 15'000'000

While the folklore and legends were fascinating in their own right by means of their site specificity, I found them lacking in cultural substance—any indication of their critical stance, their ethics, and their values; the means by which a culture can come to be defined—that I would require to design with. While they will be included in the consideration and design of the site, the folklore alone hasn't the substance required to act as the main body of literature through which my explorations of design in the landscape may be extrapolated.

After looking at the folklore, I then came across the most important body of texts, the Íslendingasögur. Íslendingasögur is the name given to the collection of roughly 65 medieval manuscripts written between the 12th and 14th centuries and are more commonly known as the Icelandic Sagas. As Heather O'Donoghue described in the introduction to William Ian Miller's book, *'Why is Your Axe Bloody?' A Reading of Njàl's Saga*; "they are a unique literary genre: never before or since, anywhere in the world, have texts like them been composed. They are long, naturalistic prose narratives, poised somewhere between history and fiction, which offer a vivid, detailed, and uncannily believable picture of the everyday life of the first settlers in Iceland. These settlers created a self-governing republic with its own complex legal systems and a precocious parliament which lasted for four centuries after the settlement in the year AD 870"[2]. Elaborating further on her statement, the Sagas depict historical events, familial genealogy, place naming/claiming, epic battles, fearless voyages to distant lands, romantic pursuits, and complex legal proceedings.

The way in which the Íslendingasögur were written, curated, and used is also unique when compared to other medieval texts. Excepting the clergy—who wrote exclusively religious motifs; passages copied from the bible, and new doctrines which were used to dictate life and thought within the context of faith—most medieval Europeans were illiterate. Icelanders on the other hand were quite literate and, "it has been proved that the average Icelandic peasant could usually read and write his mother-tongue already in the 13th and 14th centuries"[3]. This is important to note, because when the Sagas were transcribed from oral transmission, they were disseminated amongst the sparse, remote population on the island—they were written by the people for the people.

The Sagas differ from the literature produced by the clergy of mainland Europe. Not only in its subject matter, but also in the tonality of its writing. The Sagas did not dictate how life should be lived, but were instead seen as precious heirlooms that presented narratives as topics to be debated and discussed: "the Icelandic manuscripts were valuable possessions which were often passed down from one generation of family to the next and they played a key role in the winter Kvöldvaka tradition"[4]. Because Iceland is located quite far north, the winters are long and dark—so dark, they experience periods of 24 hour darkness known as polar nights. From medieval times up until the 19th century, a common pastime during the long episodes of darkness was to read out loud to one another. They would assemble for the Kvöldvaka which took place "in the communal living and

sleeping area of the Icelandic farmhouse, the baðstofa, members of the household would work at indoor chores each evening while one member read aloud from whatever manuscript or other printed material was owned or had been borrowed”[5].

But Kvöldvaka was not a passive affair: “the transmission of texts preserved in the Saga manuscripts was shaped to a crucial degree by performance and re-oralisation, and by the dynamics between the individual(s) who took on the role of the story-teller and the assembled audience”[6]. As mentioned before, these manuscripts were used talking pieces. While they were surely used for entertainment and to keep the household awake and alert during those gloomy times of the year, they were also used to keep minds agile as “the reader is frequently interrupted, either by the head, or by some of the more intelligent members of the family, who make remarks on various parts of the story, and propose questions, with a view to exercise the ingenuity of the children and servants”[7]. In turn, while discussing the characters’ actions and motives, Icelanders were also subconsciously reinforcing the overall morals and ethics of their community. These manuscripts that were shared and dispersed around the island managed to create strong moral and ethical codes which reinforced the cultural identity of the sparsely populated country.

However, these Sagas and the oral traditions—such as the Kvöldvaka—that surround them are not solely bound to the manuscripts. While they certainly aided in their longevity and in cementing the Sagas into the cultural framework, before their introduction, the landscape did the job of transmitting these narratives, and they still do to this day. The majority of the locations described in these fantastical stories overlap with real locations in Iceland that still exist to this day. As Emily Lethbridge puts it;

> “There must, of course, have been some variation in the degree of familiarity that people had with the written or immanent Íslendingasögur corpus as a whole but presumably, they would know (or be most likely to know) the sagas and other stories associated with their local area - not least from hearing or learning them in the kvöldvaka context. They could thus consciously correlate the narrative action and topography of any single saga or episode within a saga with the landscapes around them and familiar to them, and might also unconsciously do this too. Understanding of Íslendingasögur narratives was thereby conditioned by and filtered through people's first-hand experiential knowledge of the landscapes around them - landscapes in which they were situated, and directly tied to as a result of genealogical connections and local history. Thus while the manuscripts were the vessels indoors that contained and channelled saga narratives in fully-developed written form, simultaneously, the landscape acted as medium through which these narrative were communicated outdoors”.[8]

The act of travelling across their landscape became a continual reminder to Icelanders of the link to their landscape—and through their landscape—to its stories, their past cultures, and to their future. Movement through the landscape became a ritual through which the Sagas were lived and revisited.

As Dr. Sigurdur Thorarinsson and Halldór Laxness describe beautifully in their book, *Iceland; Impressions of a Heroic Landscape*; "it has been said of this landscape that only those who know the Sagas will understand Iceland. The saying might be turned round the other way – only those who know Iceland have understood the Saga"[9].

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1. Jacqueline Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 4.
2. William Ian Miller, *'Why is your axe bloody?': a Reading of Njáls Saga*, (OUP Oxford, 2014), 1.
3. Alfred Nawrath, *Iceland; impressions of a heroic landscape*, (Switzerland: Geographical Publishers, 1959), 13.
4. Emily Lethbridge, "The Icelandic Sagas and Saga Landscapes: Writing, Reading and Retelling Íslendingasögur Narratives", *Gripla* 27, 2016. 72. https://www.academia.edu/30996367/THE_ICELANDIC_SAGAS_AND_SAGA_LANDSCAPES,
5. Ibid, 73.
6. Ibid, 73.
7. Ebenezer Henderson, *Iceland; or the Journal of a Residence in that Island, during the Years 1814 and 1815*, (Edinburgh, 1819), 283.
8. Lethbridge, "The Icelandic Sagas and Saga Landscapes: Writing, Reading and Retelling Íslendingasögur Narratives", 76.
9. Nawrath, *Iceland; impressions of a heroic landscape,* 12.

2.2 SELECTING A SAGA

With this understanding of the importance of the Íslendingasögur and their connection with the landscape, I decided that selecting a Saga with sites that can still be found in Iceland would be ideal for my explorations in using design interventions to amplify narratives found in the landscape. Of the 65 Sagas, I needed to select just one. I devised three criteria to help me select one of the Sagas. First and foremost, some—if not all— of the settings of the Saga must still exist in the landscape. While most do meet this criterion, some of the lesser-known Sagas do not due to natural disasters, renaming, or ambiguity in the texts.

Secondly, the majority of the sites from the Saga must be located in the Southern region of Iceland. The entirety of the island is open to tourists during the summer months. In other seasons however, travel is highly discouraged due to safety concerns. Unless you are travelling with a touring company, only the Southern region of Iceland is open and maintained year round for tourists. Therefore selecting a Saga based primarily in the Southern region would aid with any site visits arranged in the future.

Thirdly, the Saga must possess enough renown to have good English translations. From my research on the Sagas, rough translations were available for most of them. However some of the more well-known have been professionally translated which made them significantly more accessible and enjoyable to read.

After consolidating my search with these three criteria, one of the manuscripts that rose prominently to the top was *The Burning of Njál*[1], more commonly known as *Njál's Saga* or simply *Njála*. Written by an unknown author in the 13th century, *Njál's Saga* is known by many scholars and Saga-fans alike for being the most comprehensive and compelling Saga. The story follows a fifty-year blood-feud that traverses three generations of Icelanders from the 10th to the 11th century. Even though the story took place over a thousand years ago, it has remained relevant through its ability to resonate with its honest depictions of human passion and its consequences. The Saga takes the reader through bloody power struggles, shifting alliances, the dangers of pride, the power of prophecies, and the exploitable intricacies of the legal code through a diverse cast of men and women; such as the ever honourable warrior Gunnar Hámundarson of Hlídarendi and his spiteful wife Hallgerd Hoskuldsdottir; the wise Njál Thorgeirsson and his hot-headed son Skarphéðinn Njálsson; and the

cunning, villainous Mord Rúnólf. This medieval epic took place in over 100 locations, the majority of which are located in the Southern region of Iceland. Amongst the litany of locations, I narrowed down the site possibilities to three options: Thingvellir, Hlídarendi, and Stóra-Dímon.

1. Anonymous, *Njál's Saga*, (New York, New York University Press, 1955), 193-198

2.3 SITE SELECTION

The first location of interest was Thingvellir. Located about an hour's drive east of Reykjavík, Thingvellir is considered hallowed ground for Icelanders. From 930 to 1798, it was the seat of the Althing—the national parliament of Iceland and the oldest existing government in the world—before it was moved to Reykjavík. For two weeks in midsummer, the whole of Iceland would convene at Thingvellir for the annual assembly where the goðar (regional chieftains) and free-men would settle all legal proceedings in a multi-tiered court system and construct, abolish, or amend the laws of the country.[1] "Just as in Iceland's history there is scarcely a historic event of the first magnitude that is not in some way connected with this place, so there is scarcely a Saga in which one or more episodes are not, altogether or in part, enacted here. At the sight of this landscape, upon which some spell seems to have been cast, the Icelander feels almost physically the thousand-year-old echo of his past history; for him the heroic epic, with its blending of belief in fate and the sense of reality is reflected here"[2].

Thingvellir is where Njál and many other characters settled their lawsuits. Whether it be over murder charges, defamation, or claims to property, they would either be settled in the form of reparations (monetary or property), challenged by holms (fights), declared an outlaw (banished from Iceland for either three years or life), or death. There are numerous examples from *Njál's Saga* of these proceedings—from Gunnar being declared an outlaw for his slayings[3], to the momentous trial of Kari versus Flosi over the latter's led attack on Njál which resulted in him and his family being burned alive in their own home[4].

All of those charged events and other important encounters took place at this assembly, but they were not the only reason for why people would travel for up to two weeks (by foot or by horse) to attend. The Althing was also one of the biggest festivals of the year. For the remote population, it was the only time of year where they were able to mingle with everyone else on the island—a time to reconnect with distant family and friends as well as find partners for marriages. For example, in *Njál's Saga*, this is where Gunnar first met and fell in love with Hallgerd[5]. When the Sagas began being recorded in manuscripts, the Althing became the nexus of transmission where the Sagas would be bought, traded, or gifted, therefore disseminating these incredible narratives throughout the land, which therefore further cemented their shared cultural identity.

If we look at Thingvellir, we see no buildings—the landscape is the architecture. The two cliffs facing each other, both around 20m tall and 30m apart, housed the assembly ground for the parliament. Icelanders could not have selected a more dynamic site in the year 930 when they selected Thingvellir's cliffs—all the decisions that guided the course of their identity and country were held in the rift between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates.

Each facet of the Thingvellir landscape held a purpose for the midsummer Althing, and every event—both legal and festive—took place outdoors, in the raw landscape. The rock formation Lögberg (Law Rock) in the centre of the cliffs, for example, was where the Law Speaker would begin the assembly by reading out the laws of the land and verdicts handed down. The Drekkingarhylur pond, located north of the site, was where the convicts were drowned for their crimes. The fields on either side of the cliffs were where the Bogur (temporary housing) were set up for the visiting masses. I selected Thingvellir as a potential site then, for it is sublimely poetic in its exposure to the heavens and the Gods above—that the whole universe was called to bear witness to the ceremonies and rituals that have taken place for almost a millennium.

The second location is located one hour and forty minutes east of Reykjavík: Hlídarendi. The farm resides on the lower slopes of a chain of mountains overlooking the rolling plains of the Southern Region, out to the Atlantic Ocean. Here, nestled in the golden hillside was the home of the valiant warrior Gunnar Hámundarson. While alive he was declared the greatest fighter, unmatched in both speed and skill. Opposed to undue violence, Gunnar often found himself provoked to action. However after he killed Otkel and his following, Njál prophesized that he should "never slay more than one man in the same family, and never break the agreements which good men make between you and others… if you do what I warned you against, then you will not have long to live; otherwise, however, you will live to be an old man"[6]. His adversary Mord got wind of this prediction and manipulated Otkel's kin into attacking Gunnar—dying as a result. This led to Gunnar being declared an outlaw for three years or face his death.

But on his way out from Hlídarendi to the ship that would take him to Norway, he was kicked from his horse and he landed facing his home. Looking back at his farm and the sublime landscape, Gunnar decided he would rather be killed at Hlídarendi, his home in Iceland, than be forced to leave his native country for "Fair is the slope, fairer it seems than I have ever seen it before, with whitening grain and the home field mown; and I shall ride back home and not go abroad at all!"[7]. This profound appreciation and pride for the landscape resounded so strongly with his countrymen that even centuries later Icelandic poets, such as the much beloved Jónas Hallgrímsson, composed moving ballads about this sentiment:

“While Gunnar, glancing backward, finds the charm
of home so master him, he does not care
that savage foes have sworn to do him harm:
"Never before has Iceland seemed so fair,
the fields so white, the roses in such glory,
such crowds of sheep and cattle everywhere!
Here will I live, here die — in youth, or hoary
helpless old age — as God decrees. Good-bye,
brother and friend." Thus Gunnar's gallant story.
For Gunnar felt it nobler far to die
than flee and leave his native shores behind him,
even though foes, inflamed with hate and sly,
were forging links of death in which to bind him.
His story still can make the heart beat high
and here imagination still can find him,
where Gunnar's Holm, all green with vegetation,
glistens amid these wastes of devastation.
Where fertile meads and fields were once outspread,
foaming Cross River buries grass and stubble;
the sun-flushed glacier, with its snowy head,
sees savage torrents choke the plains with rubble;
the dwarves are gone, the mountain trolls are dead;
a desperate land abides its time of trouble;
but here some hidden favor has defended
the fertile holm where Gunnar's journey ended.

En Gunnar horfir hlíðarbrekku móti,
hræðist þá ekki frægðarhetjan góða
óvinafjöld, þó hörðum dauða hóti.
“Sá eg ei fyrr svo fagran jarðargróða,
fénaður dreifir sér um græna haga,
við bleikan akur rósin blikar rjóða.
Hér vil eg una ævi minnar daga
alla, sem guð mér sendir. Farðu vel,
bróðir og vinur!” — Svo er Gunnars saga.
Því Gunnar vildi heldur bíða hel,
en horfinn vera fósturjarðarströndum.
Grimmlegir fjendur, flárri studdir vél,
fjötruðu góðan dreng í heljarböndum.
Hugljúfa samt eg sögu Gunnars tel,
þar sem eg undrast, enn á köldum söndum
lágan að sigra ógnabylgju ólma
algrænu skrauti prýddan Gunnarshólma.
Þar sem að áður akrar huldu völl
ólgandi Þverá veltur yfir sanda;
sólroðin líta enn hin öldnu fjöll
árstrauminn harða fögrum dali granda;
flúinn er dvergur, dáin hamraröll,
dauft er í sveitum, hnipin þjóð í vanda;
en lágum hlífir hulinn verndarkraftur
hólmanum, þar sem Gunnar sneri aftur.”[8]

Translated exert from the poem Gunnarshólmi, written in 1839 by Jónas Hallgrímsson. The full poem which beautifully describes the landscape is available in the Appendix A.

The decision Gunnar made, a choice between going abroad or staying in his homeland—a choice between life and death—was based on the connection he had with his landscape. The thought alone of leaving his land is so abhorrent that he made the fatal decision to stay—this display of devotion is why I chose Hlídarendi to be another potential site.

The third site of interest for me was a lone peak, located an eleven minute drive directly south of Hlídarendi (approximately six kilometers) named Stóra-Dímon. Amongst the flat farmers’ fields in the valley between the volcanos Eyjafjallajökull and Tindfallajökull, rises the isolated mountain. Directly east of it flows the Markarfljót River (known as the Rangá River in *Njál’s Saga*) over a black riverbed. Its undulating form combined with the thick long grass is evocative of a sleeping beast. Regardless of its singular beauty, Stóra-Dímon is also the location of the most iconic and climatic battle in *Njál’s Saga*. Chapter 92 depicts how Njál’s son, led by the eldest Skarpheðinn, plotted and executed an ambush against their rivals, the Sigfussons, focusing on Thrain and Hrapp. This fight had been brewing for a long time, with both clans antagonizing each other to ever greater

heights—escalating to the point where Njál and his family determined that killing Thrain and Hrapp would be the only viable solution, and set a trap to make this slaying on Stóra-Dímon as legal as possible. Thrain and followers fell for the trap on a crisp winter day where the ice floes had built up on both sides of the river, while the Njálssons laid in wait amongst the crevices of Stóra-Dímon for their enemies. Once spotted, both parties rushed onto the ice and the legendary combat ensued, resulting in a gruesome victory for the Njálssons. Even though a settlement was reached at the following Althing, this battle set off a chain of events that ultimately resulted in the deaths of Njál and his kin. On a frozen river beside the gnarly crags of the lone peak, framed by the stoic snow-capped mountains, and beneath a clear sky, these men made a decision that reverberated throughout their families, their community, and their landscape. This monumental contest between some of the Saga's greatest warriors for such a decisive moment could not have had a more powerful backdrop than the icy embankments of the Markarfljót River, shadowed by the austere slopes of Stóra-Dímon.

At this point in my research I was faced with a dilemma: I needed to pick but one site of the three to move forward with my work. There were still factors of which I believed myself to be naïve, hindering my ability to accurately and objectively make the best decision. While I read everything I could find pertaining to the sites, poured over the GIS data and maps, and collected as many photographs and paintings alike as I could, I still did not know the *genius loci* of these spaces—that which made them unique—and what it *meant* to be there.

Since I had never been to these places myself, I did not know what it was like to stand in the same space as these historic men and women, and to gaze upon the very landscape that shaped their lives. I did not know what it was like to watch a storm roll over from the horizon, to smell the sweet grasses, to feel the bitterness of the icy northern wind, to listen to the rumbling rivers, or to bear witness to the midnight sun. To envision the narratives that took place in those very spots and to dream of the fantastical creatures that slumber in the land—all of this described beauty and allure was mere speculation, mere conjecture at that point.

Everything that I knew of Iceland came from other peoples' experiences that they curated and published in an idyllic light. This thought left me wondering what lay just beyond the frame? No landscape exists in isolation, and these photographs displayed but a patch in the magnificent quilt of the land. Were there buildings and motorways outside the frame, sullying the site? Are there throngs of tourists visiting constantly or are they forgotten, left like tombs in the land? These thoughts amongst others caused me to pause in my development of the work—it felt inauthentic and pretentious to continue to write, draw, and to begin designing on a site, let alone select one, without experiencing them first-hand. Another factor that is important to my work are the phenomenological aspects of the landscape— what does it *feel* and *mean* to be on the site—aspects which may be gleaned only after experiencing a site firsthand. I had one half of the equation by this point—the narratives; all that I was missing now was the landscape. I sought counsel from my supervisor,

Dr. Tracey Winton, about my impasse and after an insightful conversation on a cold, bleak day at the beginning of November in Cambridge, Ontario, I came to the conclusion that I had to visit Iceland and see the sites for myself. There was no time to delay, so by the end of that day, I had booked my plane tickets for an eight-day visit in two weeks' time (see Ill.2. for plan of three sites).

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1. Jesse Byock, "The Icelandic Althing: Dawn of Parliamentary Democracy", *Heritage and Identity: Shaping Nations of the North*, (Donhead St. Mary, Shaftesbury: The Heyerdahl Institute and Robert Gordon University, 2002), 1-18.
2. Alfred Nawrath, *Iceland; impressions of a heroic landscape*, (Switzerland: Geographical Publishers, 1959), 11.
3. Anonymous, *Njál's Saga*, (New York, New York University Press, 1955), 154-155
4. Ibid, 283-320
5. Ibid, 76-77
6. Ibid, 122
7. Ibid, 156
8. Jónas Hallgrímsson, "Gunnar's Holm (Gunnarshólmi)", *Jónas Hallgrímsson Selected Poetry and Prose*, August, 1996, http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/Jonas/Gunnar/Gunnar.html

Ill. 2. Plan of Southern Iceland - Three Potential Sites | 1 : 750'000

3 EXPEDITION

3.1 ANTICIPATION

The expectations I had placed, whether knowingly or unknowingly, on Iceland had been accumulating for years and had intensified rapidly during the past couple of months leading up to the excursion. This first trip to Iceland was for me to meet my muse, and the future development of my work rested heavily on its shoulders.

From reading all the books, articles, and newspaper clippings, watching documentaries, other films, and photography collections that I could find on and from Iceland, I amassed a fragmented ideological dream of Iceland upon which I based my thesis. Now that I was in the country, I was eager to commence my own exploration of the island and to get answers for my questions. Would I find what I was looking for there? Will it be as powerful an experience as I had been dreaming? What will become of the conjured fantasy in my mind when confronted with the physical reality? How would I tactically approach this brief burst of a voyage to learn as much as possible? Will any of my pre-selected sites prove to be the one for my thesis? Wanting to absorb as much as possible from the island on a variety of levels—from urban to rural—I divided my time as such: I would spend three days in Reykjavík and five days travelling the Southern Region in a rented car. While I planned exactly where I was going to stay, when I would get the car, when I would inspect the three potential thesis sites, and what I was generally going to be doing there, I still left room to allow for changing plans and unanticipated explorations. Armed with a flexible plan, an old camera, and an open mind, both optimistic and anxious, I started forth on the eight-day whirlwind of an adventure that would guide the course of my work.

After I arrived and got my luggage, I managed to find the bus that would shuttle me from Keflavík to Reykjavík and even on this hour-and-a-half-long bus ride, even after having been awake for around 23 hours by that point, I was unable to sleep. I was fascinated by how dark it was outside; I never realized how bright nights were in Canada until I went to Iceland. Having grown up in a relatively small suburban town, surrounded by farmers' fields and marshy forests, I thought I understood darkness. I thought darkness was not being able to see clearly but still able to discern masses in the distance. Being on that bus and looking outside, I could not see anything, not even the masses of mountains, housing, or rivers. I could feel that we were moving but I could not see where to. I was travelling through an impenetrable dark that eventually spit me out onto the Southern edge of Reykjavik at a bus station.

The bus station was a strange place for my official arrival to the capital, especially at 6am when the northern winter sun had not yet risen: a small, double-height room, two walls of doors on either side, with lockers and a ticket counter on the perpendicular walls. The room was lit harshly by overly bright fluorescent lights, and two rows of metal seats sat anchored in the middle of the room, where a disheveled man slept peacefully. By one set of doors stood a stand that held maps of the city and after looking up where the hostel was, I thought about whether or not to take a taxi. I decided eventually that I was going to walk to the hostel, in the early morning darkness, in a city I did not know. Suitcase in one hand and an umbrella in another, I headed out into the city. Surprisingly, I did not get lost on my excursion from the bus stop to the hostel. A part of the excursion that stuck with me was my decision to walk through Hljómskálagarður Park as a shortcut. The park had a large artificial pond, which gave off a low fog that was stirred by slow-moving swans. As I made my way through the shroud, I started seeing unsettling silhouettes of people. I then realized that they were statues, but the initial encounter had startled me. Odd; the first people I met in Reykjavík were physical manifestations of mere memories whose continued presence provided continual reminders of their deeds, deeds which were all but unknown to me.

Once I passed through the park, and as I made my way through the unfamiliar streets, I started to catch glimpses of buildings made familiar via prior research. I could feel the seed of excitement in my gut begin to sprout. It finally felt real. After all this time, I had finally arrived. The buildings were real. This place was real. I'm real and, this was real. It was a visceral moment of validation I didn't expect to feel so soon on my trip. It was a moment that reinforced my trust in my instincts—instincts that pushed me to look into Iceland, that pushed me to get mired in the cultural intricacies and the link to landscape, and pushed me to make my last minute trip to Iceland. At that moment I knew that this voyage would not be in vain. I knew that I would find what I was looking for even though I didn't know what that was yet.

3.2 INITIATION

Before my trip, I compiled a list of all the buildings I wanted to see while I was there. A list which was curated with the aid of the book, *A Guide to Icelandic Architecture*[1], which listed prominent buildings and also provided a brief historical, and sometimes technical, background for them. I plotted the locations on my map acquired from the bus station and set a route.

Immediately I deviated from my plan, for there was an exhibit I had to see. It was the Settlement Exhibit that featured the remains of the foundations of one of the oldest Viking longhouses in Iceland. The museum itself was located in the basement of a white, four-storey, corrugated-iron-clad residential building—a common building typology in the city. The only indicators of the phenomenal discovery below were the use of black slate cladding on the ground level, some larger windows and some basic signage. Though the street display was modest, the actual exhibit itself was astonishing. To see sheer the size of a longhouse was utterly dumbfounding (see Fig. 1). Of course, there were displays of items they found in and around the site, but the most interesting detail was the partially eroded walrus tusk buried into the foundation wall. The earliest settlers lacked basic resources; useable trees were scarce; the climate did not lend itself well to agriculture; and the rocks that were mined proved to be largely unusable. One resource that they could count on however—to feed their families and to generate some form of economy—were the animals. Whether it be through fishing, hunting, or husbandry, the animals on the island were what helped sustain the country for centuries. When one caught a walrus to feed their family, for example, an incredible sum could be made from the sale of the ivory tusks. However instead of selling it or even using it to craft something, this settler instead embedded it into the foundation of the longhouse (see Fig. 2). The signage next to the tusk speculated that this was to ward against evil or as an offering to the gods and I firmly believed this to be true. This settler must have known how difficult it was going to be to make a life on this new island and he was willing to pay a vast sacrificial sum for his and his family`s protection. I wondered what other sorts of offerings and traditions the settlers practiced millennia ago that are now lost to time.

While I did wander through the majority of downtown that day, camera at the ready, I will only recount two other buildings that held some significance to me. Both buildings were created by Iceland’s first state architect, Guðjón Samúelsson. Samúelsson was the first Icelander to be educated in architecture and through his work he strived to create the Icelandic Style. For him, that involved taking the modernist trends of the 50s-60s and combining them with the typical formations of Iceland’s iconic landscape. The two buildings of interest are the National Theatre of Iceland and the Hallgrimskirkja church.

I came across the National Theatre first. I was walking towards the shoreline, when over the hill I spotted the crown of the theatre. Its stark, dark grey exterior was accented with off-white columns extending upwards from the windows. From a distance, it looked like a futurist castle set into the urban fabric (see Fig. 3.). Once I managed to get close to it, its texture and composition came alive. While looking smooth from afar, the actual texture of the building was coarse as sandpaper. The exterior was covered in a layer of pulverized basalt, obsidian, and Icelandic spar, all stones native to Iceland, mixed with cement—a technique known as rough cast. Formally, the projections on the exterior and the detailing around the entrance mimed natural basalt formations. To make these connections even more direct, Samúelsson placed real basalt columns in front of the entrance. The breakdown of the volumes for the building echoed the sheared cliffs that were found all over the island. After digesting the exterior of the building, I wanted to investigate the interior. However once I got inside, I was promptly, and politely asked to leave. Overall, this building possessed an air of grandiosity that I found to be enchanting.

The last building of that first day was the Hallgrimskirkja church. It was a Lutheran cathedral, and one of the tallest buildings in Iceland, whose 74m tall steeple rose above the skyline of Reykjavik. From practically any point in the city, all day, I could see the towering beacon beckoning me to explore. The cathedral sat atop Skólavörðuholt hill in the city with an axis road which led me straight to the entrance. Out in front, emerged a proud copper statue of a man. Upon inspection I saw that it was the famous Icelandic viking Leifur Eiríksson, the first European man to set foot in North America. He stood there on top of a sculpted cliff, left foot forward, right arm bent to rest on the head of his great axe, his gaze penetrating the horizon (see Fig. 4.). The position was strikingly familiar, especially when seen from behind. It dawned on me that this was almost the exact same pose as depicted in Caspar David Friedrich's 1817 painting, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (see Fig. 5). I looked up when the sculpture was made: 1929. The prime location, the powerful and familiar pose, and the selection of one of the most influential Icelandic men cannot be a coincidence: the artist was trying to make a statement on the character of Icelanders and their relationship to their landscape in that, throughout the centuries, they unwaveringly faced its unknown hostilities.

As I walked up the road, the cathedral gradually began to dwarf the surrounding buildings. Its auxiliary wings burst out from the steeple in a graceful arc, embracing my field of view (see Fig. 6.). Behind the sculpture of Leifur Eiríksson rose the cathedral. Even though it was designed by Samúelsson 20 years after the National Theatre, many of the same design motifs were carried over. For example, the use of roughcast was again used on the exterior, and even the interior, of the cathedral, this time using only basalt. The sloping gesture of the wings, was created using rising hexagonal prisms—again referencing the natural pillar-formation of basalt. I've read that the interior of the cathedral was made to look like the elfin citadels that had been described in Icelandic folklore and, upon entry, that impression was resoundingly made (see Fig. 7). The simple elegance of the archways coupled with the elongated windows evoked a proportional system that Samúelsson derived from Elfin qualities described in folklore. The acoustics of the space were crisp: I could hear

Fig. 1. Settlement Era Long House

Fig. 2. Embedded Walrus Tusk

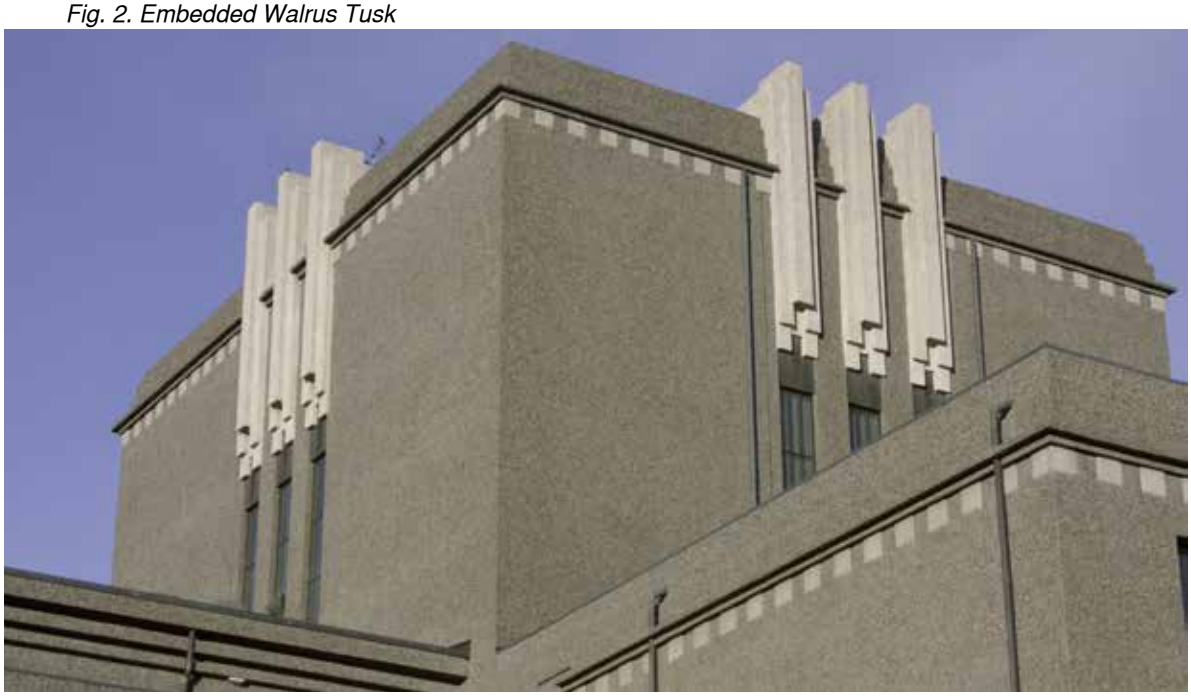

Fig. 3. Crown of the National Theatre

soft footfalls on carpet of those entering the building even at the other end of the church. The pale, northern light that filtered through the windows gave everything a soft glow. This last building of the day, coupled with the setting sun, instilled a sense of tranquility that, even as I write now, I can still feel washing over me.

1. Dennis Jóhannesson, *A guide to Icelandic Architecture*, (Reykjavík: Association of Icelandic Architects, 2000).

Fig. 6. Hallgrímskirkja

Fig. 7. Hallgrímskirkja Interior

Fig. 4. Statue of Leifur Eiríksson

Fig. 5. Caspar David Friedrich. *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog.* 1817. On permanent loan Stiftung Hamburger Kunstsammlungen © SHK / Hamburger Kunsthalle / bpk Photo: Elke Walford

3.3 CURIOSITIES

The following day I decided to explore the west side of the city. This was the more industrial side of town as it was also the location of the main harbor; the streets were narrower and grittier. The typical tourist restaurants advertising tapas gave way to more modest fish restaurants, and the trinket shops turned into places of business. Between the buildings, I saw something that piqued my curiosity. Out on the farthest pier, beyond the giant fish processing plants, was a grassy dome, at least 6m tall, upon which was perched something indiscernible. It was a completely foreign object to that pier and any connections that may be apparent to the locals were completely lost on me. I needed to make my way over to it to figure out what exactly this turf dome was and why it was on a working pier.

With that dome in mind, I made my way down the coastline. I passed by a shipyard where men rappelled off the side of torn-up ships. Heavy machinery moved to hold the large pieces while the men sprayed bright plumes of fire from their welding torches. Just beyond the shipyard were docks for smaller boats. An interesting array of vessels was present here; smaller working boats, commercial whale watching vessels, and privately owned sailing ships all bobbed quietly together in the glacial blue waters. The smell of saltwater cleared my sinuses and calmed my mind. Beyond the harbor, tall, blue mountains rose from the sea and pierced through very light cloud-cover (see Fig. 8.). Walking along the docks conjured the memory of my previous experiences on boats—I remembered the hot summers bobbing in the quays of the Thousand Islands, the languid pace of the boat on the water, and the peace from being rocked to sleep in the hull each night. The settlers must have had a completely different experience during their harrowing voyage crossing the tumultuous Norwegian Sea; it must have been rough—both emotionally and physically—to pack up your whole life and relocate to an isolated, desolate island in the middle of the ocean.

I was getting closer now. It felt a bit odd for me to be walking through this industrial park where the overpowering smell of fish and brine clung to everything, and where people were clearly hard at work. They paid me no mind as I picked my way along, stopping to take photos every once in a while. I suppose they were used to it; I was surely not the only one who has ever been enticed by the hill at the end of the pier. At last I reached the final section of the hooked pier. To my left, the bay of Reykjavik (which translates literally to “smoky bay”) and the tall blue mountains; to my right, the large pristine white processing plants. In front of me, no more than 400m away, was that dome. A pedestrian pathway started at this point, leading straight to it. Obviously, now at least, it was an art installation; but what was it trying to say, and what was in that wooden box on top of it?

As I got closer, I noticed that a narrow path no wider than a foot wound its way up to the pinnacle of the hill. What I perceived as a wooden box from afar did not capture the full picture of what sat atop the dome. It was a slatted wooden box with a sloped roof. The slats were spaced far enough apart that I could tell that something was hung inside, and my first guess was that it was a bell (see Fig. 9). At the base of the spiral walk up the hill was a small sign that simply said "ÞÚFA, Ólöf Nordal 2013;" no further description was offered. "ÞÚFA" translates to "hummock" or "knoll" in English, which I thought was an apt description for this installation. Though at this point I could tell that the object suspended within the box was clearly not a bell, I could not yet tell what it could be instead. My curiosity was piqued yet again.

Making my way up this dome, my vision wandered over the landscape. This hill provided one of the best vantage points of the bay, the mountains, and the city. It was simply stunning. Right off to the side of the dome, a breakwater, made of black stone, extruded out into the middle of the bay towards a bright yellow lighthouse. At the dome's summit was the box. The box that I had been waiting for all day. And inside the box was something that was somehow at once incredibly bizarre and incredibly fitting: about a dozen dried out fish heads (see Fig. 10.). It made sense for there to be fish heads; I was on a working pier, and those fish heads are a symbol for Iceland—the fish represent not only a major food source for the people, but also the fuel for their economy. This slatted fish curing box and the domed earth—which was likely referencing the landscape and traditional turf houses—would have been familiar icons to Icelanders. The installation may therefore be seen as sensible when one recognizes it as an amalgamation of that represent a part of the Icelandic identity.

Fig. 8. Bay of Reykjavik

Fig. 9. ÞÚFA

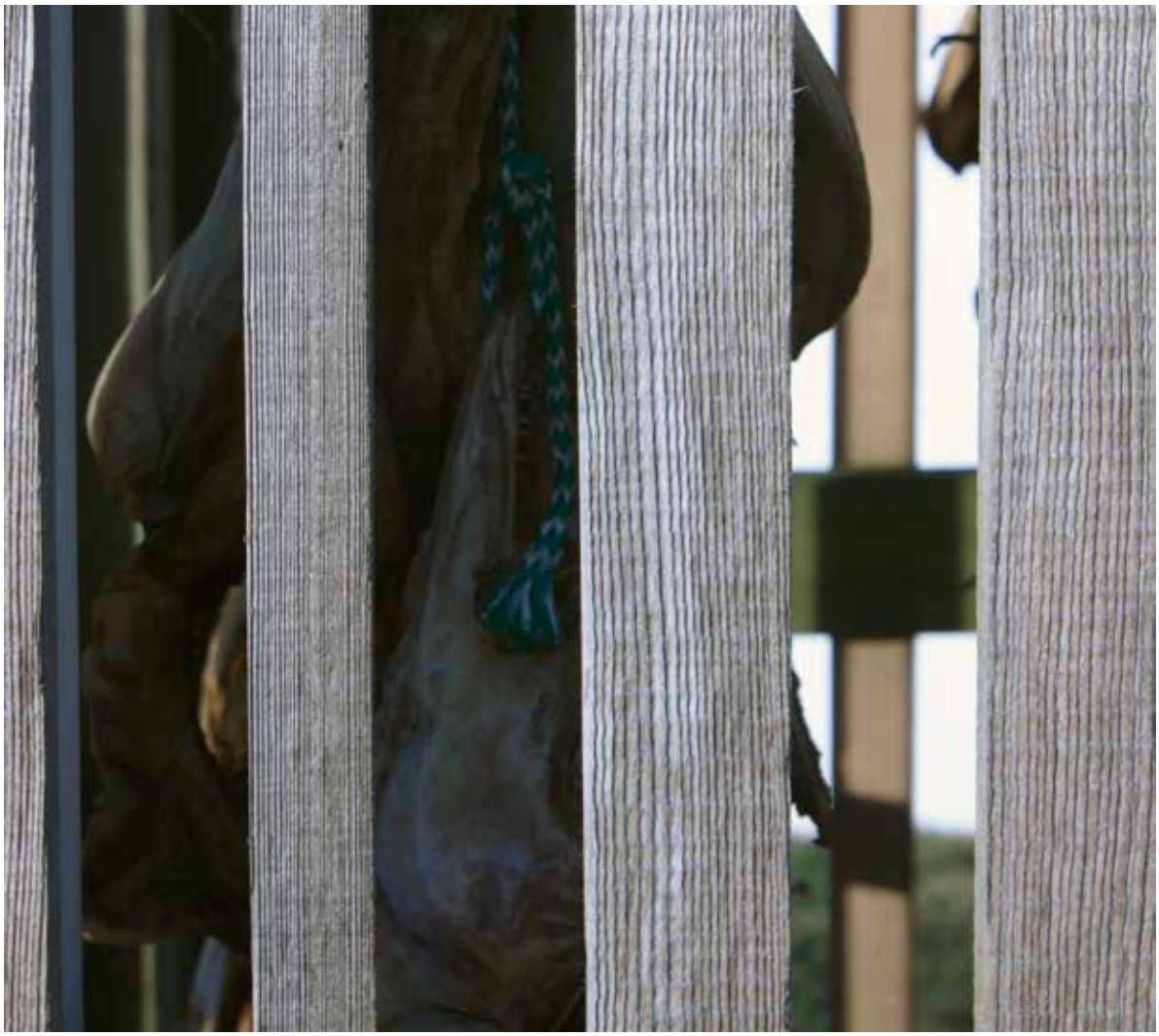

Fig. 10. Fish Heads

3.4 DIGRESSIONS

For my final day in Reykjavík, I had three goals I wanted to accomplish. One, I wanted to visit the Laugardalur Park in the east end of the city; it is the largest park in Reykjavík and features a zoo, botanical garden, and the national soccer stadium, among other things. Specifically, I wanted to visit the botanical garden which featured a traditionally-built turf house, which was of great interest to me. Secondly, I wanted to visit the building referred to as The Pearl. The Pearl is an exhibit space and fine dining restaurant that was built between 6 giant geothermal tanks arranged in a circle, all underneath a huge glass dome. These 10m water tanks house the water that heats a large portion of Reykjavík. It is also renowned for having one of the best panoramic views of the city and surrounding landscape. And thirdly, I wanted to watch the sunset from the Nauthólsvík Geothermal Beach hot spring located in the south end of town. I was determined to visit at least one hot spring during this trip, and this hot spring was as good as any.

Walking to Laugardalur Park took around an hour. I left at sunrise, which wasn't as early as it sounds since sunrise was at 10am. At this time of the year in November, the sun was in the sky for a total of only 6 hours and rose only 30 degrees from the horizon. This I found to be disorienting; should I have been waking up, or going to bed? I set off, in spite of any potential protestations from my body. I arrived at the northwest portion of the park and was greeted by the sight of the National soccer stadium and other sports complexes, which were very similar to those here in Canada.

Making my way along, I was distracted by my first tangent of the day. Before I could see it, I could smell it: sulfur. It could only be one thing: a hot spring. As I rounded the corner of the path, there it was—and it was not how I imagined it would be. In front of me were two stone basins, each roughly 8m long and a meter wide, sunken into the ground with a domed cage overtop. Only a low stream passed through the cage from which rose the gently drifting sulfuric wisps. The cages prevented me from touching the water, which was nevertheless too low. I could feel the heat, in spite of the cages and the erstwhile lack of proximity to the water. Alongside the two basins were some displays, mainly in Icelandic, describing the significance of these hot springs. From the bits of English that were on the displays, I gathered that this particular hot spring had been used as a laundering facility for the town of Reykjavik for over one hundred years before washing machines were introduced. It was interesting to note the contrast between contemporary romantic view of hot springs with a prior one, which was more pragmatic.

Walking towards the botanical gardens, the pathway changed into something familiar: a typical European boulevard. The gravel path widened to a lofty 6m breadth, and tall trees, lined the path at regular intervals. Their trunks were knotted and bulging, and the pale sunlight rested lightly on the pathway through the bare branches. Everything about this meandering pathway was cold—the air, the colours, the light—all of it heralding the inevitable hard winter which was right around the corner. The last vestiges of fall lay on the ground, where the grass stubbornly remained a pale green, refusing to give way to a dead yellow. Amongst the grass and behind the bushes emerged a form.

Maneuvering around the cover of the bushes, the form took shape and revealed itself to be a small turf house, the first one of my visit (see Fig. 11). No more than five meters long and five meters wide, the small building sat humbly in the patch of trees and shrubbery. The turf house was picturesque, nestled in the vegetation with its entrance marked by a honey-toned wood that brought warmth into the pre-winter setting. The turf house must have been assembled that summer for only the grass on the roof was long and shaggy. The turf blocks of the walls were still largely visible beneath the grass. As typical for turf houses, there were no windows to peak into the little abode. A covered chimney popped out of the sloped roof, though there was no smoke emanating from it that day. I tried the door to try my luck—you never know in Iceland; sometimes the most surprising doors are the ones left open. Unfortunately, this was not to be in this case. Regardless this was a lovely little diversion on my path through the park.

Continuing on, the path shrank down from its boulevard size to something smaller, more intimate. It deviated from the axial and began to wind its way around the garden beds which were growing more numerous by the footfall, demarcating unceremoniously the entrance to the botanical gardens. What was left of the vegetation was covered in frost; a glittery dusting, lending an altogether enchanting

Fig. 11. Turf House

atmosphere to the scene. The air was still, quiet, and thick with the pungent smell of decomposing leaves. In fact, it had been incredibly quiet for the entirety of my time in the park. For a park located in the middle of a city, it felt odd for it to feel so remote and hidden. Since entering the park, I had encountered not a single, other, person. Perhaps this was just one of mystiques of Iceland, where solace may be found, even in the most densely populated of areas. Eventually, from behind the frosted bushes and low trees, low glass box of the greenhouse came into view.

Compared to the cool hues outside, the interior vegetation was warm, lush, and vibrant. It being autumn, I knew that the season to visit the botanical gardens had come to a close. I tried the door to the greenhouse anyway and it was open, to my surprise. The greenhouse was like a lush café; it was furnished with wooden tables and chairs; a koi pond was located off-centre. Inside it felt like a party was underway but then all the participants left in a hurry – this energy to the space was dynamic even though I could tell that the space hadn't been used for a couple months by that point (see Fig. 12). Some of the chairs were still pulled out from the tables, the lights were on, and while the bar of the café was shuttered closed but the sign advertising their food was still out, highlighting their end-of-summer specials. A layer of dust covered most of the furniture alluded to the passage of time since its last public use but there were signs that the area around the koi pond and the vegetation had been swept recently. The greenhouse, to me, was a chrysalis of summer, holding the many sweet promises and memories conjured by the coldest, darkest months of winter; the warm sunlight, the flowers in bloom, the sweet smell of green, of life. Despite this delightful, brief tangent, I moved on my way towards the Pearl.

Fig. 12. Botanical Garden

The walk to the Pearl took longer than I had anticipated; by the time I arrived at the base of the Öskjuhlíð hill upon which the Pearl rested, the sun was on its downward arc towards the horizon. On the western side of the hill, a low, dense pine forest grew in like stubble while the knee length, yellowed grass acted as a transition membrane between the crumbling pavement and the forest. Paths into the thicket where clearly visible, marked by trampled grass. I knew that to eventually make my way to my final destination that night I would be taking one of these lightly trodden paths.

Only upon entering the Pearl did its bizarreness really sink in. The program was held entirely within the circle of the water tanks. Slivers of glazing webbed between the gaps of the tanks and trailed their way up to meet the sparkling dome above. The space in the centre of the tanks acted as the atrium for the Pearl, while the auxiliary programs vertically scaled the periphery of the enclosed space. An artificial river wormed its way along the ground floor while a grand staircase crossed it and made its way up the tanks. On the lower floors, there were exhibition spaces for a planetarium and natural history museum, while on top of the tanks, just beneath the dome, rested a fine dining restaurant and gift shop. Beyond the membrane of the dome was the true reason I had made the trek to the Pearl: the 360-degree panoramic deck. It was a breathtaking experience—from up there, I could see all of Reykjavík to the north, across the bay, and to the blue mountains I saw the day before. To the west, I saw the vast totality of the ocean, glinting in the sun's low rays, while to the east, the city was embraced by the folds of the mountains. To the south, was the forest I saw on my way to the Pearl, but beyond that I could see the beach, the location of the hot spring Nauthólsvík, my final destination of the day (see Fig. 13). The forest didn't look particularly large or imposing so when I finally left the deck, I was confident that I wouldn't get lost—all I had to do was head south and get there before the sun set.

I approached the fringes of the forest through the tall grass; there was a small sign that pointed to one of the paths, stating "Nauthólsvík," the name of my final destination. Eventually the pathway widened and became a maintained gravel path, and the trees bigger, and darker with the low sun. The mass of trees absorbed the noise of the cars and eventually all I could hear were the creaking of tree trunks and the soft whispers of pine needles. Light, effervescent clouds were beginning to meander their way across the colourful skyline. Even though I didn't know where I was exactly in this forest or whether or not I was going the right way, especially now that the trees obscured the sun, I felt absolutely comfortable; comfortable with the vagueness of my direction, comfortable with the direction of my thesis, and comfortable with my own self. I wondered if this was how Gunnar felt when he was looking back at his homestead before leaving Iceland. This comfort brought about from being in nature, in the landscape, and of knowing your place—both physically and cosmically—manifested as a brief peace, a fleeting worry-free calm.

A little beyond this experience, the forest gave way to a cemetery that, instead of a typical grid-like arrangement, was instead organized into a series of circular mounds, upon which graves were arranged in concentric circles which in turn, were bound by a paved pathway that separated the

cemetery from the forest beyond (see Fig. 14). For the settlers of Iceland, up until the 19th century, graves were demarcated with a soil mound or a cairn placed atop the place of burial. These rolling mounds echoed their tradition of using the earth as a marker for the deceased, and seeing this ancient tradition interpreted in a contemporary light at once demonstrated the value Icelanders placed in their history and their commitment to modernizing old traditions.

I didn't stay too long in the cemetery, nor did I take many photos, irrespective of the serene atmosphere, for there was an ongoing procession I did not want to disturb. Moving back into the woods, I eventually made my way to the shoreline. The hot spring I visited that night was not a completely natural hot spring—though the hot water was heated naturally by geothermal reactions, it was pumped artificially to the surface basin during operating hours at Nauthólsvík beach. When I arrived, the basin was not yet filled and the establishment was still shuttered. There was a building on site and it was an L-shaped, single-storey bar that was recessed into the landscape. If one were to approach Nauthólsvík from the road, it would appear as if someone had built a platform extending from the ground, for the purpose of viewing the coastline. If one were to follow the stairs attached to the deck, they would discover that facilities, such as the lifeguard station, the change rooms, a summer-only café, and the mechanical system responsible for pumping water from the hot spring were all housed underneath it. The materiality of the building resonated with the natural palette of the coast—it used concrete and corten steel, which resonated with the natural hues of the geology; and darkly stained wood, which resonated with the darkness of the forest.

Fig. 13. View from the Pearl

As I wandered more around the site, I discovered it used to be the bunker and airfield for the US Air Force during WWII. After the Americans had left, the location became a favourite for the locals, which eventually led to the site being turned into a community beach that is still in operation. The name of the place is more interesting still—Nauthólsvík, which separates into Nauthóll and Vík. The first person to build on that site was a farmer named Nauthóll in the 1800s (the farm was later burned down during the typhoid epidemic in Iceland), while "vík" translates to "bay". So the name of the place—through its many transformations from simple farm, to US Air Force base, to community beach—is still "Nauthóll's Bay," after the original owner. Through this exercise in naming, the origins of this place are never forgotten, and the fascinating story of this seemingly simple community complex is exposed.

An older narrative seemed to underlie every building and place I had visited to that point, belying and betraying the relative youth of the construction. Instead of completely erasing what came before, the people seemed inclined to build upon what was already there. This can be seen in every place that I have described so far: the Hallgrímskirkja cathedral, the sunken settler exhibit, the cemetery in the woods, Nauthólsvík—everything was built upon something else; nothing was ever completely destroyed. They instead continued by expanding, adapting, or improvising with existing narratives.

This intense moment of reflection was interrupted suddenly by a deep, throaty gurgle and a strong smell of sulfur. The thunderous roar of the basin filling announced that the time had come for my last event of the day. And with this announcement, people started to arrive—not as large groups, but as individuals or couples. The majority of them were of middle age, and seemed to be immediately familiar with each other, and so they began to converse amongst themselves. Some approached me and started to speak to me in Icelandic, but quickly found out that I did not speak the language. Most were surprised that a foreigner had found this place, but were pleased to find out I was Canadian. This resulted in a long conversation, comparing our worst winters a lecture on the benefits of bathing in hot springs during the cold months. It was a delightful experience; to be watching the sunset, soaking in the hot spring and conversing with these interesting people who have lived such different lives from my own. Once the sun had set and the stars started to peak their way out of the inky indigo sky, I packed my things and made my last walk across town to the hostel as my farewell to the city that showed me so much within three rapid-fire days. It was now time to move on, however. It was time to go meet my muses.

Fig. 14. Cemetery

3.5 THE FIRST TASTE

The next day, I rose before the sun. I debated on whether or not I should walk over to the car at the Reykjavík domestic airport on the other side of town, and eventually settled on sleeping for an extra 30 minutes and paying for a taxi. It was probably the fastest car renting process I had ever experienced; I was in and out with the keys in less than 10 minutes. What I got was a tiny, white Hyundai that could supposedly fit four people—a very generous estimate. The back seats were more like a shelf than actual seats, and the trunk could only fit my one moderately sized suitcase. Luckily, I was alone in this tiny, toy-like car. My plan for that day was to visit the Golden Circle route, which included Thingvellir (one of my potential sites), Geysir, and Gullfoss; and then head over to Hvolsvöllur where I would stay the night to visit my second site the next day. With the plan in mind, I headed off on the next leg of my journey. Driving east through Reykjavík, my heart felt like it was about to beat its way out of my chest from excitement. The city eventually gave way to smaller housing and the road out narrowed to a single lane in a valley between mountains. The clouds were low that day, obscuring the mountaintops from view, but the fine mist that seemed to pulse along the sides of the grass-covered slopes reminded me of the way the Saga authors wrote about the supernatural qualities of natural events. Winding my way through the valley definitely echoed the sensation of travelling to another world, or announcing the beginning of something extraordinary.

Breaking past the valley, the clouds lifted suddenly, allowing the low sun to sporadically poke through the coverage. The horizon burst forth, revealing a distant line of snow-capped mountains while the ground leveled out into planes of yellows and purples dotted with the pale green of moss-covered boulders. I found myself dumbstruck by the rapidity by which the scene before me had changed. Excepting emergencies, it is illegal to pull over on the side of the highway; I would have to wait for a pullover-point to stop and absorb it all. Once I found one such place, I immediately got out of the car with my camera. A glassy lake was a short distance away from the car, its surface reflecting the evolving clouds above it. I was very much taken off guard by the incredible force of wind; I felt as I was going to be blown away into the fields. The biting wind whipped and howled around me, an invisible hand that pushed and pulled. After nearly falling over, I quickly got back into my car and continued onto my first destination of the day, to one of my points of investigation: Thingvellir.

Thingvellir, as I had explained earlier, is where Icelanders had held their parliament, the Althing, for almost 1000 years. It is a charged site, both politically and culturally, for between those jagged cliffs faces, on an island where the Earth is still actively splitting, Icelanders shaped their own destiny in

the land of ice and fire. These thoughts ran through my mind as I meandered between the cliffs (see Fig. 15 and 16). The history, the Sagas, the cultural importance, the lives this place has touched, they could all be, in a sense, tied back to this place. Captured in the rugged walls were the stories of its people, and before visiting this sacred place, I thought that perhaps my hand could aid in sharing its narratives. However, having been there, having touched the walls of pumice, having smelled the sweetness of the grass, having seen what this place really was, it felt rude and insensitive to even consider it. The site attracts throngs of visitors every day; the park had already constructed a visitor centre on site, and the Prime Minister's summer residence and a church were also nearby—this place had been touched enough. Its story was already being effectively so projected to the visitors that I didn't think my intervening could amount to anything more than meddling. After having acquainted myself with the site and made this decision, I moved along to my next destination: Geysir.

It took about an hour to get to Geysir as the roads were moderately busy with all the tour buses making their daily routes around the Golden Circle. Just before I arrived at the geysers of Geysir, the grassy fields began to emit smoke. I initially thought some of the patches were ablaze, but it was just steam rising from the porous earth. When I got out of the car, the heavy smell of sulphur made it hard to breathe. I readily acclimated to the odour and then made my way to the entrance of the site. Smaller pockets of geysers bubbled along the path to Geysir; the water a startling blue surrounded by rings of crushed, red stone (see Fig. 17). As I approached the geysers, a thick green moss replaced the yellowed grass. Connecting these curiosities, small rivulets wormed their way over the

Fig. 16. Thingvellir National Park

Fig. 15. Thingvellir

ground. Warning signs along the path reminded visitors not to touch the steaming water because of its high temperature. Naturally, I had taken it upon myself to verify the legitimacy of the warnings presented on the signs, and as the small burns on my hands can attest, it was indeed scalding.
The main geyser, Stokkur, was enormous; the mineral encrusted basin was approximately 6m in diameter. The water bubbled softly, and its murmur could be heard from distant pathways. A ring of tourists gathered around Stokkur, waiting for it to erupt. I turned away briefly to change my camera's batteries and with a roar the geyser erupted. I completely missed it. I spent the next 15 minutes staring down its sulfuric abyss, waiting for the next eruption. I was concentrating so much on the geyser that when it did erupt, I was startled! The jet must have launched 20m skywards and was phenomenal to witness. In that moment, I was reminded of this country's unique character; its mountains were still growing, and its plains still expanding—this place was more alive and animated to a degree far beyond what I had ever experienced.

Continuing my journey on the road, I made my way to the last attraction on the golden circle, Gullfoss: the gigantic two-tiered waterfall. Its deafening roar could be heard from the parking lot, well before it could be seen. I was surrounded by nothing but the yellow and purple fields bracketed by the mountain range, and yet I could hear that power of the water. There was simply no visual indication of the presence of a mighty waterfall among the idyllic fields. I walked down the path towards Gullfoss, were I saw the beginnings of the ridge for the waterfall. From the edge, I was able to take in the scale of the canyon that manifested—seemingly out of nowhere—to form Gullfoss (see Fig. 18.). This hidden canyon with its black stone carried on into the landscape, clouds of mist rising from the tumbling water. It was a stunning sight and after hour of listening to the deafening roar and marveling at the crystalline water, but it was time for me to move on.

Fig. 17. Geysir Park

I headed southeast along Highway 30 towards Hvolsvöllur, where the paved lanes quickly gave way to pothole-ridden dirt roads. What was initially projected to be an hour-and-a-half drive, extended into two-and-a-half hours. The clouds overhead darkened and drooped closer to the ground while the sun began to set. The wind that had been whistling around me all day increased in fervour and began to shake the car as I wrestled to keep it on the road. Then, just as the sun dipped below the horizon, the clouds unloaded their prodigious mass onto the Earth. My headlights seemed unable to penetrate the darkness of the night and rain. It reminded me of the experience on the bus from Keflavík airport to the city—the engulfing, all-consuming black of nights in Iceland. I could see nothing outside of the shallow cone of my headlights; hear nothing beyond the wind and rain outside of my car; smell nothing other than sulfur from my earlier visits that day. I was consumed by the darkness on a little road, in a place I'd never been before, and while it was anxiety inducing, it was a surreal experience that I gradually relaxed into. When would be the next time I would be able to experience the absolute totality of sensations that completely overwhelm reality? When would be the next time that I willingly thrust myself into the unknown? With those thoughts on mind, I made my way to the farmhouse I rented that night next to the site and prepared for the next day.

Fig. 18. Gullfoss

3.6 MEETING THE MUSE

The next morning, when I prepared my breakfast and my lunch for the day, I looked out through the window beside the stove and there it was, perfectly framed between the wooden frames, Stóra-Dímon, one of my potential thesis sites. I couldn't see it last night through the storm and the darkness but in the daylight, I could see it clearly across the many farmers' fields. It stood starkly in the flat plains. I didn't think I would be able to see it from the house because it was 7 km away. It wasn't just Stóra-Dímon that I would be visiting today, I would also be visiting Hlídarendi, the home of Gunnar. While going through my morning routine, I couldn't help but look at Stóra-Dímon beyond the windows at every possible opportunity. I had read about this place and explored it thoroughly through Google Earth and other people's photographs, and now it was my turn to create my own stories of this site. I hoped in that moment, that one of the sites today would prove to be what I sought for my thesis.

I was so close to my goal by that point—I had travelled across the ocean and driven hundreds of kilometers to see this lone mountain and farm, one of which was now visible outside the kitchen window. Soon I would be able to see their contours, to feel their textures, and to listen to their stories; I was ecstatic to be there. Before I got in my car, I noticed a small patch of gnarled trees that I had missed in the dark of the storm the previous night towards the back of the house. Upon approach, I noticed that in a little clearing amongst the trees were a handful of tombstones dating back to the 19th century. Many of the older farms I had driven past the previous day also had small groupings of trees. Perhaps this was an unspoken tradition, where the planting of trees commemorates the buried dead. Recalling that the last patch of forest I encountered at the Pearl also housed a rather large cemetery, I thought this a definite plausibility. Regardless, soon enough I was in my car, packed with all the things that I would need that day, and I pulled out of the driveway, veering west towards Hlídarendi.

HLÍDARENDI

From prior research, I knew that Gunnar's farm no longer stood at Hlídarendi and had since been replaced by a church. The driveway up to the site from the main road proved to be a challenge; it was an eroded dirt road that, coupled with the steep incline, and it proved to be a bit much for my little car. The drive took me approximately halfway up the lowest slope of the mountain at around 80m above the plains below.

The clouds were quite heavy that morning and cloaked the valley in a fine mist. Like a sponge, the mist seemed to siphon the colour from the landscape leaving a muted version of the scenery, though it was no less sublime for it. The mist obscured the contours and colours of the surrounding mountains reducing them to flat grey silhouettes, like sets in a play. The plains spread out before me, a swirling carpet of varying browns.

I took this all in from the car park that overlooked the valley, and while I was there, I pulled out the Jónas Hallgrímsson's poem, *Gunnarshólmi* and reread it. I could almost picture it in the summer as a sea of green leading out to the ocean on a clear day. Even then, at the end of autumn, when all that was left were the husks of the vegetation, when the snow had covered bones of the mountains, and when the mist forced the horizon line closer, I could still feel the pull of the land—the call that pulled Gunnar home.

Further up the slope stood a wooden sign embedded into the grass. The message affixed to this sign had long been ripped from the wooden base (most likely by the elements) and now stood barren. The message that was once deemed important enough to share with visitors had all but disappeared with the wind. I reckon that this sign would most likely have informed potential newcomers of the significance of the site as it pertained to *Njál's Saga*.

To the right of the small parking lot stood the small church, Hlídarendakirkja (see Fig. 19.). It was a corrugated iron-clad church that was painted white and featured a red roof with red trim around the windows and doors. Its entrance featured a four-storey, narrow steeple behind which the body of the church extended for four bays of single pane windows beneath a traditional steep roof. It was orientated west to east, allowing the length of the church to gaze upon the landscape. After further research, Hlídarendi was not only home to Gunnar, but it was also the birthplace of St. Þorlákur, the patron saint of Iceland, which explained the presence of the church on this site. Peeking through the slightly warped windowpanes, I could see that the interior construction was wood. The walls were painted a crisp white, while the barrel-vaulted ceiling was painted a lapis blue and was studded with evenly spaced yellow stars. Coupled with the two significant homestead stories of Gunnar and St. Þorlákur, this charming church located on the hillside overlooking the plains below made perfect sense in conjunction with its orientation that allowed for a maximal connection between the interior worshipping space and the stunning landscape outside.

A path beyond the doors led me down a ways towards a fenced grove of birch trees. Like the forest near the Pearl in Reykjavík and the patch outside the home I was staying in, this grove marked another cemetery. Unlike the other cemeteries however, these trees were planted right on top of almost every grave. The ground was uneven, as the roots where lifting the sod upwards. Some headstones were so old that they were no longer legible; some were simply humble wooden crosses; and some were new and still gleamed, even in the dim lighting.

After having taken in the sights; the church through the bare tree branches, the cemetery below my feet, and the Fljótshlíð valley below, I understood why people would want to worship and be laid to rest here—much like how Gunnar changed his mind and returned here, to Hlídarendi, to live out his last days as an outlaw: this site possessed an incredibly mesmerizing and peaceful quality. With that in mind, I decided against disturbing the tranquility and sanctity of the site. As I turned to survey the landscape below me once more, the fog began to burn away with the rising sun. Lo and behold it revealed to me in the distance my final potential site, Stóra-Dímon (see Fig. 20.).

Fig. 19. Hlídarendakirkja

Fig. 20. Hlídarendi to Stóra-Dímon

STÓRA-DÍMON

As the morning progressed, the mist continued to be burned away though the sky remained stubbornly overcast. The bases of the clouds were high enough to avoid the obfuscation of the summits rising in the distance. Since I approached the site from Hlídarendi, passing by the farmhouse—atypical compared to the route usually taken by visitors—my first impression was from the north. The majority would see the south side of Stóra-Dímon from the main highway and would never see this side. As I progressed, to my left was a small thicket of gnarly, purple-toned birch trees, no taller than a man, which quickly dissipated into a golden marsh near the base of the mountain. Behind them rose the sinuous curves of the glacier-capped volcano, Eyjafjallajökull. To the right extended flat farmer's fields as far as the eye could see, their crops buzzed down to the ground from the autumn harvest. The drive was a straight shot that had me staring down the slopes of Stóra-Dímon—from the jagged edges of east face that looked like scales that had been peeled back, through the eroded steep slopes in the centre, to the 200m cliff face on the northwest, I took in the voluptuous forms of my third potential thesis site (see Fig. 21). From the Saga and photographs alone, Stóra-Dímon's isolated form exuded an arcane presence that beckoned to me from across the ocean, but at that moment it resonated within me an undeserved familiarity, and the spark of curiosity exploded into an aggressive fire.

The road that headed towards mountain veered suddenly to the west and took me closely along the northwest cliff face. Just beyond that, a path forked from the main road and snaked its way to the

Fig. 21. Stóra-Dímon; Approaching North Face

southeast corner of the site. There was no discernable parking lot, only a slightly more leveled patch of land where one other car was parked. When I pulled over and looked up, I could discern two small silhouettes descending the lone path, barely visible along the length of the slope. A laminated placard affixed to a painted wooden podium stood next to the other vehicle. Though it looked as though it had been placed there quite recently (i.e. within the last couple of years), the edges of the lamination were already being peeled off by the wind and rain, and the text was already beginning to fade (see Fig. 31). It looked out of place—it had no anchor to the landscape it found itself in. It was merely a vestige that would soon be torn asunder by the formidable forces of the climate. On the plaque, in five languages (Icelandic, English, German, French, and one I do not know) a weak translation of a selection from chapter 92 of *Njál's Saga* was provided, depicting the scene that unfolded there at the base of the mountain:

> " 'When the quarrel develops between Thrain Sigfusson and Njal's sons, they lie in ambush for him at Raudaskridur [Stóra-Dímon] where he is on his way back to Grjótá í-Fljótshlíd from Dalur [Stóri-Dalur] with six other men. Raudaskridur is in the slopes of the mountain Stóra-Dímon, and Markarfljót must have run to the west just south of the mountain. It was winter and the Markarfljót flowed between banks of ice. A large crust of ice had built up on one side of the river, as smooth as glass, and Thrain and his men were standing in the middle of it. Skarphedin jumped up and across the river between the banks of ice, and went on sliding. The ice was very slippery, and he glided as fast as a bird flies. Thrain was about to put on his helmet. Skarphedin came up to him before he could do so, and struck at him with his axe, Rimmugygun, the blade entered his head and split it down to his molars so they fell out onto the ice. Thrain and two others are killed.'" The story continues: "Skarphedin seized both of them; Gunnar Lambason and Grani Gunnarsson and said: 'I've caught two pups here. What shall we do with them?' (Chapter 92)".

This simple sign demonstrated more than just a transmission of the story of the landscape, it represented an earnest desire from the community for their story to be told. The Icelandic community wants visitors to know of their history and their Sagas—they are to be proudly shared with all. Again, this urge to connect with the world is also represented in the five languages on the plaque as well as this statement found on the bottom of the signage:

> "On the Njál Path is a local government cooperative project – The travel service in Hvolsvöllur provides all further information"
>
> "Á njáluslóð er samstarfsverkefni sveitarfélaga í rangárÞingi – sælubúiÞ ehf ferðaÞjónusta á Hvolsvelli veitir allar nánari upplýsingar"

The fact that the local government was involved with the production of this sign demonstrated the seriousness with which they take the Sagas; this enthusiasm was not limited simply to a collective of enthusiasts, but included the entirety of the community as well. I assume that, had the sign been intact at Hlídarendi, it would have also declared itself to be part of the "On the Njál Path" and I imagine at other key sites for the *Njál Saga* that one would continue to find similar plaques in the landscape.

The terrain surrounding the mountain was comprised of a mottled carpet of moss. The contrast between the flat, lime green field of the lichen, and the bulbous auburn clumps with which it was dappled, was attractively lively when within one's vicinity. However, as it extended towards the horizon, the tones muted and blended into an indiscernible brown. At the base of the mountain, the moss gave way suddenly to tall, golden grass. It grew on ground which rose rapidly at a 30-degree angle, like a skirt, midway up Stóra-Dímon. From there, the grass began to undulate and ripple along the southern side, occasionally revealing the black basalt underneath. It looked like corded muscles beneath a luscious, golden fur; it was as if I was looking at the back of a slumbering giant.

On the east side, starting just above the skirt, the grass was punctured suddenly by a line of crags. Its chain was broken into two sections, there being a gap of 12m that was accented by two columnar rock formations on either side. The grain of the rock was hidden, for only the silhouette was perceivable amongst the wet basalt (see Fig. 22). They reminded me immediately of sacred ancient entrances, like the Propylaea of ancient Greece or the entrances of Balinese temples; both monumental gateways that featured columnar formations that were used to frame and emphasize the wonders of the interior—much like how these natural Icelandic pillars seemed to be framing something in the horizon, calling for the visitor to ascend its slopes to enter into this other realm.

On the west side the sides of the northwest cliff face rose sharply from the slope. Long vertical grooves traced the bluff like it had been clawed. It shared the same blue tones of the surrounding mountains—but unlike the crags of the eastern side it was dryer , so the flowing grain of the rock

Fig. 22. Stóra-Dímon; South-East Slope & Crags

could be seen from the base. It evoked motion in the sense that one could imagine the mountain being pushed up by these layers only to be flash-frozen to the shape we see today—the distinctive humped shape of Stóra-Dímon (see Fig. 23 and 24).

Fig. 23. Stóra-Dímon; Edge of Western Cliff Face from Halfway up Mountain

Fig. 24. Stóra-Dímon; Western Cliff Face

I could see that a singular path had been carved up the side, beginning at one of two boulders on the slope, located on the left-hand side, about 500m from the car park and sign. It traced diagonally up to the second boulder where it continued diagonally above the undulations of grass (see Fig. 25). Once it reached about halfway along the southern side, the trail shot directly upwards to the summit of the mountain. As I walked over to the trail entrance, I noted the inconvenience caused by the decision to place the parking lot and sign so far from the actual footpath. Perhaps the sign was placed there before the path, but I was doubtful that people had only recently began to climb this hill. There was no discernable reason to start the experience of the mountain there, so I was left puzzled by the bizarre configuration of the site. By the time I had reached the trail, the two figures I noted upon my arrival had just made it down and with a quick nod they were back in their car, off for their next adventure, whereas I was just about to begin mine; I was about to walk in the very footsteps of Skarphedin and his brothers, and relive their exact journey.

The path wasn't so much a trail as it was two narrow treads cut into the earth. During the hike, I could tell that the path was actually cut out of the mountain: I could see the marks from what I assumed to be turf shovels along the way. Each tread was about a foot wide and spaced around a half foot from the other. As I continued up the slope, the carving gradually got deeper, at one point submerging the path knee deep into the soil. The yellow grass that went above my knees was then up to my hips as I made my way along. I could smell the sweetness of the grass mixed with the smell of fresh, wet dirt. The only sounds I heard at this point were my own breathing and footfalls, along with the wind that gradually picked up the higher I ascended.

Fig. 25. Stóra-Dímon; Trail Along Southern Side

My world shrunk to what was immediately around me. I was only concentrating on the mountain beneath my feet and the textures in my vicinity. I noticed that the second boulder was actually a larger one that had split in two. It was at least half a meter taller than me and had a rough diameter of five meters. While it was jagged in shape around the sides, instead of being domed on top it was a pocketed flat plane, canted slightly towards the ground. It wasn't until I reached the second boulder that I stopped to really look around me. I made the quick climb on top of the boulder and took a moment to look back at the mountain and the landscape. I could finally see the Markarfljót River extending out from behind the crags—the silvery tresses of water meandered its way over the riverbed, some of which was exposed to the sky (see Fig. 26). I wished the path continued towards the Propylaea instead of diverging upwards after the boulder, its forms calling me to stand between the masses. The river, the dike, and the gravel road converged at one point in the horizon, lining up perfectly with the edge of the mountain chain. I could see the wind move through the grass—the air currents tracing their fingers along the fur of the sleeping giant.

After taking a few photos, I pressed on with my trek; I was nearly at the top of Stóra-Dímon. The last 10 meters of the ascent became more difficult; the treads were no longer on a diagonal slope but instead went directly up the remaining elevation. The top of the mountain was wetter than the rest of the hill and the once firmly-packed soil quickly became mud. The intensified wind combined with the now muddy slope forced me to grip the grass to climb up the rest of the way.

Fig. 26. Stóra-Dímon; Part Way up Mountain, Looking Back on the River

The top of Stóra-Dímon was like a long camel's back—the ground humped along, dipping back and forth along its length, covered in its golden fur (see Fig. 27). The wind was so strong that I had to cling to the fur of the beast lest I be blown away. The view from the top of Stóra-Dímon completely astounded me. I had a 360-degree panoramic view of the entirety of the plains. I could see the mountains all the way up into Thorsmork valley in the north, home of the glaciers that source the Markarfljót River. I could trace the layers of the mountains where the golden grasses turned to the blue-toned rocks, which were capped by the beginnings of winter snow. The clouds obscured the summits of the mountains, which were coated in snow and ice, leaving their true heights a mystery (see Fig. 28 and 29). The farmers' fields, which were nondescript and indistinct from the ground, from the heights of the mountain resembled small quilts that were thrown haphazardly across the landscape in an attempt to keep the cold of the oncoming winter at bay. The winding ropes of the river pulled my eye from Thorsmork down to where the ocean would be, with its flashing silver colours. The green and brown moss fields spread along the untamed lands not occupied by the farmers, competing with the wild grasses for dominance.

It was at this moment where I became acutely aware of how small I was in the world. Everything in Iceland was big, from the mountains, to the rivers, to the plains, to the sky; everything was at a completely different scale. Everything here possessed a dynamism emblematic of Iceland's place as one of the most geologically active sites on earth. The mountains were still growing, the land was still expanding, and the ground still quaked. Here, more than anywhere else, the Earth was alive.

Fig. 27. Stóra-Dímon; The Camel's Back

And long after my time here is over, this island will still be making itself. We, as a species, are here only temporarily, and long after the last of has drawn their last breath, the Earth will continue to evolve—and with this realization I had never felt more alive.

Fig. 28. Stóra-Dímon; Up the Markarfljót River, Towards Thorsmork

Fig. 29. Stóra-Dímon; Apogee of Mountain looking towards Eyjafjallajökull

From the top of this mountain, I also envisioned watching Thrain's party galloping from Stóri-Dalur to the edge of the river. I could feel the power of the Njálssons standing atop this mountain, looking down at their prey. I had not had such a profound connection with the landscape with the other two sites I had visited—neither of them drew me in as much as this relatively unknown one. There, at the precipice of Stóra-Dímon, I was convinced that this was my site. The Saga narrative coupled with the sensory-rich short hike had assured me that this was the narrative and location I wanted to explore with my work. Just as I came to this epiphany, I was startled by loud caws—overhead, two large ravens began to circle. If there was even an inkling of doubt left in my mind as to whether or not this was the spot, they quickly vanished with the sight of those ravens. In Norse mythology one of the most revered gods, Odin—god of wisdom—was known to have two pet ravens; "Two ravens sit on Odin's shoulders, and into his ears they tell all the news they see or hear. Their names are Hugin [Thought] and Munin [Mind, Memory]. At sunrise he sends them off to fly throughout the whole world, and they return in time for the first meal. Thus he gathers knowledge about many things that are happening"[1]. Iceland's sublime, barren landscapes had a way of making the impossible seem real—and in that moment, those ravens represented a sign to me of Odin himself approving of my decision for this site (see Fig. 30).

My investigation was cut short as I saw a storm front approaching from the mountains. The heavy clouds were depositing visible sheets of rain that immediately saturated the lands to a darker shade and distorted the even finish of the river below. From the speed of the clouds and the whipping wind around, me I estimated that I had less than an hour before it hit me, so I quickly turned around and made my descent from the summit. I had just reached the first boulder at the base of the skirt when the onslaught began but, soon enough I was back in my car and headed off to Hvolsvöllur for the next part of my day.

Fig. 30. Stóra-Dímon; Hugin or Munin?

Fig. 31. Stóra-Dímon; Weathered Sign

SAGA CENTRE

The Saga Centre is primarily a museum featuring a permanent exhibit on *Njál's Saga*, complemented by minor auxiliary program. Located in town, the Saga Centre is a single-storey building made up of three volumes. To the left extended the largest mass, along which a bar of horizontal windows framed in dark brown extends, divided into small segments by red brick columns that ended roughly a foot short of the roof soffit. The blinds were drawn tight, and the windows were firmly closed. The rest of the walls were a beige-painted plaster that supported the brown-painted, corrugated steel roof.

While the left volume was orientated so that its long face faced the parking lot, the right most volume was oriented so that its short face faced the lot. Its overall length was unknown from this angle. No windows or red brick columns were on this wall; in their stead was a simple black mural of four Viking silhouettes with their right arms raised gripping swords, in a boat. In front of it, two picnic tables were placed where the gravel ended and met stone paving. Following this paving, in between the masses, was nestled the third, clearly the bridge between the two spaces. A door painted the same red as the brick was centred between four windows, each as wide as the door. Overhead was a sign, slightly more yellow than the beige of the walls, proudly stating this building as the Saga Centre. Pulling into the car park, I noticed only two other cars, guaranteeing me a solo expedition at the Saga centre.

Entering the centre, I was greeted by a white foyer with a welcome desk placed towards the rear; the only light came through windows on either side of the door and some small ceiling lights. On the left and right walls, doorways were punched through, connecting to the other volumes. By the door, a couple of tables were covered with tourism pamphlets. Though there were several display boxes for them, the pamphlets lay in disarray on the tables from the many curious hands that had leafed through them. In the centre of the room stood the conventional tourist shop items—postcards, stuffed toys, books, and maps. The rain outside began to pick up and its drumming was amplified by the metal roof. I could smell something cooking down a hallway, though I could not tell what. Nevertheless, as it close to lunchtime the smell was enticing.

After a quick question, the person manning the front desk informed me that the Njál Saga exhibit was to the right. Going through the archway, the tone shifted dramatically—the walls, floor, and ceiling were all pitch black. Directed lighting came from lamps discreetly placed on black rails hung from the ceiling. The space was divided by a grid of wooden columns spaced roughly 3m apart in both directions and between which hung deep red panels. Their placements defined the circulation of the exhibit, leading the visitor in a zigzagging pattern throughout the hall. They pinched the circulation at some points to denote a change in topic or to allow more room for a set to be placed.

The content was divided into two formats; text and props. The panels had text and maps printed onto their surfaces in Icelandic, English, and German. The props ranged from site models, to models of longhouses, to weapons, wax figurines, and sets depicting scenes of the Saga. The content was divided into three main modules: what it was like to live in the settlement period (when the Sagas took place); the importance of Sagas (particularly *Njál's Saga*); and the actual Saga itself. The panels worked well with the props to guide the visitor's attention back and forth between the panels on either side, making clever use of lighting to pull the visitor through the exhibit. This part of the museum took a little under an hour to go through, and afterwards I made my way to the other half of the centre.

The next sequence of rooms was organized linearly along a single axis. This axis was not located down the middle of the rooms but rather one third of the distance from the right wall, allowing for more room for the programs on the left-hand side. The first room was a windowless, bright, white room which housed a plethora of Viking clothing that visiting children could don, as well as some fake weapons. Along one wall, set up in wooden stalls, was an axe throwing station. The targets painted on the wood, were being visibly chipped away by the battering they no doubt received daily.

I followed the delicious smell I noticed upon arriving through the sequence to the next space. Again, the tone changed drastically—the once brightly lit room changed into a replica of an interior of an Icelandic longhouse. Though much wider than actual Icelandic longhouse would have been, the hall stretched out to the back with its walls paneled in wood. Two rows of columns divided the room into 3 long bars. Wood countertops affixed to the columns with a row of benches had the would-be patrons facing inwards. Behind it, another row of counters and benches where elevated on a continuous platform. Down the centre corridor was a long table that stretched the length of the hall.

On either side of the table were benches covered in pelts from various animals, though most were from sheep. On the other, smaller side of the hallway, was a long bar in front of a kitchen. There was a man working behind it and after ordering my lunch and waiting for its preparation, I inquired about the final rooms down the hall. He informed me that the last segment housed the tapestry room and an auxiliary exhibit space. The tapestry room was a space dedicated to the the creation of an incredibly long tapestry, in the style of the Bayeux Tapestry, depicting the Saga of Njál. It was headed by some women from Hvolsvöllur and surrounding areas, and visitors were allowed to help stitch small areas of the tapestry. When I visited, three women were hard at work on the tapestry, their hands moving rapidly over the fabric with clear skill while they spoke quickly and animatedly in Icelandic (see Fig. 32). I did not want to disturb them too much, so I said hello and moved along quickly.

I peered briefly into the auxiliary exhibit, which housed an art show that was still being put up with text was solely in Icelandic. Heading back to my car, I asked the man from the restaurant centre's

visitor demographic. He told me that during the summer months it was mainly tourists from abroad, while during the rest of the year, during off hours, it was mainly school children that came to visit. With a cheery goodbye, I was out the door and back on the road.

I visited a couple other places that day, but on the drive back to the farmhouse, my thoughts concerned the Saga centre primarily. While it was certainly informative, and the program diverse, the interior spaces felt disjointed—like they weren't properly connected. This was exacerbated by the constant shifting of tones from space to space, but I recognize that this was probably due to a lack of funding to create a brand-new Saga Centre, since they were located in a retrofitted building. The thing I found most frustrating however, was the introversion with which the program was designed. Like most museums, it suspended the exhibits, collections, and information in a void; in other words, there was a lack of connection to the outside world. While this typically works for most museums, I think that this centre should have taken a different approach because its location, which relates specifically to its content, provides a unique opportunity.

The narrative that the Saga Centre was trying to convey—the *Njál Saga*—is tied to very real places that still exist today. In fact, many of those locations are less than a half hour drive from the centre itself. So, in this context, why create a centre which is entirely self-contained and entirely inwardly oriented? Again, in this context, it seemed counterintuitive to create a centre which did not direct people back into the landscape. A system of signs and placards—*On the Njál Path*—relating portions within the Saga to locations in the physical world was already in place. This system could easily be expanded to redirect visitors and other travelers to this Saga centre. If I were to have helmed the design of this place, I would have taken an opposite approach to the centre—redirecting people back into the landscape. Using either interactive maps and models, pointing out the real locations while explaining the Saga, or physically opening up the museum to the outside, just to name a few methods, the Saga Centre should be and could have been that bridge between people and the landscape.

THE FINAL DAYS

A marathon of driving from Hvolsvöllur in the south to Höfn in the east and back made up the final two days. With the radio playing, the five-hour drive there was a wonderful—but at times tense—cruise that was very much like being on a different planet. The mist that developed the previous day and lingered through the rest of the trip amplified the otherworldly qualities of the landscape through which I passed. At numerous points along the drive, I stopped to absorb the beauty around me while the sun was still up. I spent my last night in Iceland in the town of Höfn, and had a lovely dinner of local, traditional food. The restaurant was in a building built in 1932 as a warehouse—the interior was still clad in the marked, stamped, and scuffed wood from the original construction and was lit by a mix of candles and dim lights. It was a romantic, cozy, and delicious experience that made for the perfect goodbye to Iceland.

With the start of the New Year came the start of the design process. I had a site, I had narratives, and now it was time to develop a project. My project evolved through three main stages over the course of that winter: narrative through architecture; narrative through artifacts; and narrative through movement.

Fig. 32. Njál's Saga Tapestry

1. Snorri Sturluson, *The prose Edda : Norse mythology*, (England, Penguin Classics, 2005), 47.

4 ROUTES AND REPRESENTATION

4.1 DISTILLATION OF DESIGN

NARRATIVE THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

Only two weeks separated my undergraduate degree and my graduate studies, so following the pattern that I had been developing steadfastly for the past five years, my first idea for transmitting these narratives in the landscape was to put buildings on the site. Over the course of many iterations, the most persistent idea was to take a version of the Saga Centre, break it into fragments, and disperse these pieces along the site and connect them with a network. That way, the stories would be told predominantly in the interiors and immediately juxtaposed with the real landscape. The small buildings would be partially embedded within the mountain so that the visitor would be 'woven' into the site; rhythmically alternating between tracing the surface and being submerged into the mountain.

In retrospect, the idea to place buildings on-site would have been detrimental. For one, the buildings, no matter how small, would compromise the integrity of the site and damage what intrinsically made it unique—the natural purity of Stóra-Dímon. The people who go to Stóra-Dímon do so to have the experience of climbing it—irrespective of whether or not they are aware of the stories steeped into its slopes, people are drawn to this raw, seemingly untouched mountain. To introduce such heavy masses would taint the perceived purity of the site. Furthermore, the construction of any such proposed buildings would require far more disturbance of the site than the footprints of the buildings alone. The machinery and labour required would surely destroy even more of the environment than the 'allowable' construction.

Lastly, while the idea was that visitors would be woven into the site, I think the opposite effect would be produced instead. Popping in and out of the land, going from the interior to the exterior, light to darkness, would create a disjointed experience. No matter how seamlessly the transitions could be designed, these continuous thresholds along the site would inevitably take away from the focus of the project—that being the landscape and its narratives.

NARRATIVE THROUGH ARTIFACTS

During this pass at design I looked at the potentially using objects in the landscape as a means of channeling and refocusing one's attention to the land and to further reinforce the narrative. As the visitors would trace Njálssons' footsteps along the slopes of Stóra-Dímon, these artifacts in the landscape would be the nodes in the network of paths that would pull the visitors along, and

transmit the stories both below their feet, and those on the horizon.

There would need to be a threshold for example, which focuses the visitor's attention to the invisible landscape of the site, or, the stories. Like the Sagas, which abruptly introduces characters and their heritage, I too would need an introduction to the site—an element which would bring attention to the story they were about to re-enact, whether knowingly or not; to know that the route laid out before them is not solely based on gazing at the scenery, but rather a curated experience that intertwines the narratives of the people with the physical landscape. It made me think back to the myth of Reykjavík's founding in 874 AD by chieftain Ingólfur Arnason. In the halls of Norse chieftains, on either side of where they sit are two wooden poles called high-seat pillars. They were there to indicate the head of the household, and not much else is known about these pillars other than the occasional presence of carvings. When Ingólfur Arnason came to settle in Iceland, he threw his high-seat pillars overboard and declared that wherever they washed ashore would be where he'd build his house—that settlement eventually became the city of Reykjavík[1]. The idea of using an artifact—high-seat pillars with name and image engravings—to demarcate the entrance to the pathway seemed like a direction worth following.

I also looked at other objects like those pillars that I could inject into the site, like mirrors such as Claude Glass[2] and other forms of signage, but all of them came across as inauthentic in the end. These objects seemed like afterthoughts pinned to the landscape that would readily be worn away, much like the sign that is already on site.

There is another reason why these objects do not mesh properly with the landscape. It is due to the scales present in the landscape. Architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz, in *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, breaks landscape into three scales: the micro, the medium, and the macro. "The micro elements define spaces which are too small to serve human purposes while the macro elements are analogously too large. Spaces which are directly suited for or dimensionally related to human dwelling have a medium or "human" scale"[3]. Each element and object in the environment pertains to one of these scales, and when in abundance, these elements become the grains and textures of the landscape. The way that they are melded or juxtaposed lays the foundation for us to relate to the space and generate a sense of order.

Let us examine some examples of the three scales, starting off with the macro scale—the scale of the Gods. The macro scale is comprised of elements whose totalities are beyond our ability to grasp: mountains, volcanoes, valleys, etc. These components are the bedrock of our existence; they frame the livable habitats and create enormous, natural thresholds between biomes. Mountains in particular have inspired countless folktales and lore—from being the homes of trolls and wizards4 to creation

2. Claude glass is a small dark convex mirror used by landscape painters and connoisseurs alike to paint or view the landscape. Its convex shape allowed for a condensed view of the landscape

myths declaring they are made from the body of giants[5]. These elements are so removed from our scale that for centuries, Icelanders believed that the only possible beings that could from and inhabit them were beings beyond human. Even their timespans are beyond our comprehension, as we perceive them to be static elements because their evolution takes place over millions of years. Nevertheless, they are alive: they expand and collapse—they respond to the inner flow of tectonic power at the core of the Earth and with it, they grow. They have existed long before we, as a species came to be, and they will continue to exist long after we have departed. But regardless of the scale of these pervasive constituents, they still are frequently overlooked in lives, and reduced to pleasant backdrops. It goes without saying, but his scale is absolutely prevalent through all of Iceland and its navigation is an absolutely integral part of the Icelanders' daily lives. In my case specifically, Stóra-Dímon is a mountain, located in a valley surrounded by other mountains, volcanoes, and the ocean—the immediate and surrounding context doesn't get more directly macro than that.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there is the micro scale. Only when we have a brief moment of repose do we stop and observe the details of our environment, or as the colloquialism goes, to "stop and smell the roses." How often do people pause to observe the different kinds of flowers or grasses they are walking by? How often do people analyze the bark of a tree, or the patterns of brick in a façade? Not often, and only when they deliberately slow down the pacing of their lives. Most of the time, these smaller objects are viewed together as a unit, or rather as a texture: they create the grains and supple textures of the environment in which we find ourselves and they greatly influence the character of the landscape.

On Stóra-Dímon—as I had described before—the elements of the micro scale would be: the yellow grasses that resemble the fur of a beast's back; the mixing tapestry of mosses that distort the depth of the landscape; the black gravel of the roads; and even the patterns in the basalt cliffs. These all make up the grains of the landscape, and rather than being seen as millions of independent parts, they act in unison, like the cells in a skin, unifying and adding character to the environment.

The last scale is the medium, the dominant scale of the spaces of our lives. In the natural world, this would be the trees, bushes, ponds, etc.—the objects used to help us visually scale our environments, navigate our world, and create thresholds between spaces. Everything we build belongs to this medium, human scale: bicycles, trains, stairs, roads, benches, buildings; everything is designed to optimize human use and comfort. Our highly constructed environments—both urban and landscape—artificially place humans at the top of the cosmic order. Everything we require and use in our daily lives pertains to the medium and therefore capitalizes on our attention. This is how elements of the macro scale are reduced to pleasant backdrops and how the micro is ignored altogether.

Turning back to the site, I have noted a distinct lack of anything pertaining to the medium scale. There were no trees, no bushes, no bicycles, no benches, etc. There were a couple of farm houses in the distance, but they were so far from the site, that they registered as little more than colourful

blips. As for vehicles, the only one in my proximity was my own and it looked so small in the vastness of the landscape that it appeared almost comical for it to be there. Aside from the mountains in the distance, there was no break in the horizon at any point around me.

This is why the object-oriented interventions from the "Narrative through Artifacts" pass would not work. Those object-based interventions belonged to the medium scale which was completely absent from the site. They felt foreign because there was no existing 'medium' fabric to connect to and reference. There was only the macro and the micro in this context. There was only the landscape and its textures; the human and the horizon; the individual and the infinite—and I needed to develop a design that worked with these two polar opposites to transmit the narratives. Within this friction caused by the juxtaposition of the two scales, we would find the stories and identity of the landscape.

NARRATIVE THROUGH MOVEMENT

So the question now was, how could I tell the stories of the landscape without using typical buildings and artifacts? In Sophia Psarra's book, *Architecture and Narrative*, she investigated how architecture can develop cultural, social, and political meaning by analyzing the spatial narratives of various buildings and comparing them with literary works. She says "the reason for analyzing works of literature is because, similar to the sequential motion of perception through language, buildings are experienced gradually through movement"[6]. Psarra extrapolates further by describing "architecture is a thing in so far as it renders itself to be experienced, and an activity that deals with the conceptual organization of the parts into a whole…The aesthetic experience is determined by a desire to organize the patterns of this world into meaningful wholes described as conceptual entities. At the same time it is fundamentally locked into reality consisting of infinite aspects that unfold sequentially. We take as much pleasure in the parts as in understanding the whole, as much satisfaction in lingering with our sense at work, as in grasping patterns with our intellect in full power"[7].

Experiencing architecture is not a passive affair and neither is the landscape. To experience a space means to move through it, and through this movement, one is able to synthesize the parts of the space into a cohesive whole. This wholeness cannot be captured by static means—i.e., it is impossible to grasp what it means to be somewhere without experiencing the transitions and the circuit that connects the spaces. It is through those transitions between the individual experiences that one is able to derive meaning from its totality.

While Psarra focuses on how architecture can achieve meaning through motion, I think the same principles can be applied to the landscape. By using architectonics, one can create a curated, time-based circuit in the landscape that, when combined with sensory and phenomenological stimuli, would be able to transmit the narratives associated with the landscape. Through this curated experience the role of the visitor evolves from a passive observer to that of an actor—by walking

through the landscape, through the design, through the narrative, they subconsciously take on an active role in the memory and identity of the place. Just as Icelanders retraced the Sagas in their landscape in the settlement era to both navigate the land and recount their stories pertaining to their identity, I too am using movement to emphasize this profound connection with the landscape and identity.

RECAPITULATING THE NARRATIVES OF THE SITE

With the site of Stóra-Dímon, there are two stories I would like to tell. The first one being chapter 92 of *Njál's Saga* which took place on that very mountain and adjoining river. Since it had a direct connection with the site and has a strong, clear narrative, it will be the focal piece of the design. However, the *Njál Saga* is not the only story present in that landscape – there is also the story of the land. As I have previously described, the environment of Iceland is ever evolving, whose growth and changes can be visibly traced in the landscape. Both the geological and ecological systems present on that land are unique and—from an ecological point of view—quite fragile. Including a looser narrative that would bring attention to these complex systems by highlighting examples both under the visitors' feet, as well as in the surrounding landscape could be a beautiful and valuable story to experience and would encourage visitors to be more mindful about the delicate systems underfoot.

As this designing phase went on over the course of the winter, I planned to go on a second visit to Iceland that summer in June. The purpose of that second visit was to test my design proposal on site by walking and documenting the alternate route. The trip would also allow me to compare Stóra-Dímon at the height of summer with my previous encounter with the site which was at the beginning of winter. Furthermore, since the majority of the people who do visit Stóra-Dímon do so during the summer, I would benefit from understanding the different character of the site during the warmer season—live vegetation, potential wildlife, warmer climate, and whatever other changes that occur during this time.

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1. Kristin Axelsdottir, "Reykjavik", The Viking Network, August 14, 2004, viking.no/e/info-sheets/iceland/reykjavi.htm
2. "Claude Glass", *Oxford Refernce*, October 24, 2019, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095615996
3. Christian Norberg-Schulz, Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1980), 32.
4. Jacqueline Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965), 64.6
5. Snorri Sturluson, *the prose Edda: Norse mythology* (England, Penguin Classics, 2005), 16.
6. Sophia Psarra, *Architecture and Narrative: The formation of space and cultural meaning* (New York, Taylor and Francis, 2009), 5.
7. Ibid., 87

4.2 DISSECTION OF NARRATIVES

NJÁL'S SAGA CHAPTER 92 BREAKDOWN

In this segment I dissect the four-page chapter into three categories: narrative events, environmental clues, and Saga literary cues:

- **Narrative Events:** Actions and events that take place in this chapter. These are quite straight forward which inform the progression of the narrative in the landscape.

- **Environmental Clues:** Descriptions provided by the text of the site, objects, and characters (what they are wearing, how many of them there are, etc.). These physical manifestations can therefore be used to direct and place the design proposal.

- **Saga Literary Cues:** Identifying narrative styles that are used throughout the text that can inform potential patterns in both the movements on site and the interventions themselves. Specifically, there are two common techniques. that are continuously used throughout the Saga and can be seen in this chapter.

  The first being the use of prophecies continuously throughout the text. In the Saga, these premonitions are used to incite intrigue in the reader and to further along the story. To clarify, everything that happens in the Saga is already known to the reader – the intrigue comes from the reader asking the question how it gets to that point – not the typical question that most contemporary literature asks, which is what happens. For example from the title *The Burning of Njál* alone, we already know the fate that will befall the titular character – that he will be burned alive – but curiosity arises by asking the questions *who* is this Njál, what did he do to warrant such a fate, and most importantly, how do events escalate to this end? The technique of baiting the reader along can also be seen in the chapter titles and even in prophecies given by the characters throughout the entire Saga – in fact there are four such premonitions in this chapter alone. This signifier/receiver technique can be used to propel visitors through the landscape.

  The second literary technique is repetition – whether it be actions from characters, motifs, or symbols, the Saga liberally used repetition within its narrative structure as a building method to develop meaning. By seeing the repetition the reader can understand the importance of the action or symbol and even learn to anticipate the outcome. The tool of repetition can be used in the design as well to solidify meaning and draw attention in the landscape.

THE BATTLE ON THE ICE. THRÁIN IS SLAIN.

Literary Cue no.1
First premonition: Chapter title already stated not only the outcome, but also where the events took place.

"Now there was considerable talk about their clash, and it seemed certain to all that there could be no peaceful settlement after what had happened. Rúnódlf, the son of Úlf Aurgodi from out east in Dale, was a good friend of Thráin. He had invited Thráin to his home, and it was agreed that he should come about three weeks or a month after the beginning of winter. The following men rode with Thráin: Killer-Hrapp and Grani Gunnarsson, Gunnar Lambason, Lambiddd Sigurdarson, Lodin, and Tjorvi. There were eight men altogether. Thorgerd and Hallgerd were to go along, too. Thráin also announced that he planned to stay at Mork with his brother Ketil, and he mentioned how many days he planned to be away. They all rode fully armed.

They rode east over the Markar River and met some poor women who begged to be taken to the west bank of the river. This they did. Then they rode to the Dale farm where they were well received. Ketil of Mork was already there. They remained there three days. Rúnólf and Ketil begged Thráin to seek a reconciliation with the sons of Njál, but he declared he would never pay them any money. He gave peevish answers and said that he considered himself a match for the sons of Njál wherever they should meet.

Literary Cue no.2
Second prediction advising Thráin to cease fighting with Njál clan or it will result in his death. But like many other characters proceeding him, Thráin will inevitably test this premonition since his moral standing will not let him back down from a fight. Within 3 stanzas, his fate is repeatedly stated, warned, and sealed.

"That may be," said Rúnólf, **"but it is my opinion that no one is the equal of the one of Njál now that Gunnar of Hlídarendi is dead. The chances are that this quarrel will bring death to either one of you."**

Thráin said he was not afraid of that.

Then Thráin went up to Mork and stayed there two days. There-upon he rode down to the Dale farm again. At both places he was presented with fitting gifts on his departure.

The Markar River was flowing between sheets of ice on either side and with ice floes here and there bridging both banks. Thráin said he planned to ride home that evening, but Rúnólf advised against it. He thought it would be more prudent to travel some time later than he had announced.

Environmental Clue no.1
Noted that this chapter took place in winter and that the river had not completely frozen over by this time.

Thráin answered: "That would be showing fear, and I shall not follow your advice!"

The beggarwomen, whom Thráin and his men had helped across the Markar River, came to Bergthórshvál, and Bergthóra asked them where they came from. They answered that they were from the east, from the slopes of Eyjafell.

"Who helped you across the Markar River?" asked Bergthóra.

Event no.1
Njál's sons prepared for battle.

Literary Cue no.3
The knocking (or ringing) of a legendary weapon: common motif in Sagas, indicating the weapon will soon be the death of someone. Seen with Gunnar's halberd[1] and Skarphedin's axe[2] previously. Repetition building meaning.

Environmental Clue no.2
Donned their finest, brightest clothes. Did not try to be discreet even though it is an ambush. Indicates that the brothers wanted Thráin and his posse to know it's them getting revenge.

Literary Cue no.4
Not the first time Njál has caught Skarphedin sneaking off to get retribution. Same type of hunting excuse used - last time for Sigmund the White he claimed to be going fishing for salmon.[2] Repetition building meaning.

Event no.2
Ascended Stóra-Dímon and waited to ambush.

Environmental Clue no.3
Waiting for the ambush took place *on* Stóra-Dímon, overlooking the river. Total of 5 people.

"The most showy people you can imagine," they answered.

"Who were they?" asked Bergthóra.

"Thráin Sigfússon and his followers," they answered. "What displeased us most was that they used such reviling and scornful language in speaking of your husband and sons."

Bergthóra answered: "You can't prevent people from talking ill about you."

Before the women went away Bergthóra gave them presents and asked them when Thráin was expected home. They replied that he would be away from home about four or five days. Then Bergthóra reported this to her sons and her son-in-law Kári, and they talked together for a long time in secret.

The same morning as Thráin and his men rode from the east **Njál awoke very early and heard Skarphedin's axe knock against the partition.** Njál arose, went out, and saw that his sons and son-in-law were all fully armed.

At the head of the group was Skarphedin dressed in a blue jacket. He had a small, round shield and carried his axe on his shoulder. Next to him came Kári; he wore a silken jacket and a gilded helmet and carried a shield on which was painted the figure of a lion. After him came Helgi in helmet and red kirtle; he carried a red shield with a hart as an emblem. All wore dyed clothes.

Njál called to Skarphedin: "Where are you going, my son?"

"To look for sheep!" he answered.

"That's what you said once before," said Njál, "but you hunted men then!"

Skarphedin laughed and said: "Do you hear what the old man says? He is not without his suspicions."

"When did you speak of such matters before?" asked Kári.

"The time I killed Sigmund the White, Gunnar's kinsman," said Skarphedin.

"Why did you do that?" asked Kári.

"Because he had slain Thórd Freedmansson, my foster father," answered Skarphedin.

Njál went back inside, **and the others proceeded up the slopes of Raudaskridur Mountain (Stóra-Dímon) and waited there**. From here one could immediately catch sight of anyone riding east from Dale. It was a clear, sunny day. Now Thráin and his men came riding down from Dale along the sandy river bank.

Lambi Sigrudarson said: "Over there on Raudaskridur Mountain I see shields gleaming in the sun, and I suspect some ambush!"

Event no.3
Both parties spotted each other and recognized the intent of the staged encounter

"Then we shall keep on riding down along the river," said Thráin. "They will meet us there if they have any business with us." They now turned to go downstream.

Skarphedin said: "They have caught sight of us now, for they are turning off their course. There is nothing else to do but run down and meet them."

Kári said: "Many an ambush is laid with greater advantage of numbers than is the case here; there are eight of them, and five of us!"

Environmental Clue no.4
Battle took place on the ice (as stated in the chapter title). Theoretically to give Thráin's posse an advantage against their attackers.

They headed downstream and saw an ice floe spanning the river below, and they planned to cross at that spot. Thráin and his men took their stand on the icy sheet above the floe.

Thráin spoke: "What can these men want? There are five of them against us eight!"

Lambi Sigurdarson answered: "I believe they would venture to attack us, even though there were still more on our side."

Thráin took off his cloak and helmet.

Event no.4
Shoe thong broke but this did not slow Skarphedin down.

It happened that Skarphedin's shoe thong broke as they ran down along the river, and he was delayed.

"Why are you so slow, Skarphedin?" asked Grím.

"I am tying my shoe thong," he answered.

"Let's go on ahead," said Kári. "I am thinking that he won't be any slower than we!"

Environmental Clue no.5
In fact he used the momentum of sprinting down the slopes to give him incredible, advantageous speed on the ice.

They turned down toward the ice floe, running as fast as they could. Skarphedin jumped up as soon as he had tied his shoe thong, and with axe raised he ran down to the river. However, there was no place nearby, either upstream or downstream, where the river could be forded, so deep was it. A big ice floe had been raised up against the other bank. It was as smooth as glass, and there in the middle of this floe stood Thráin and his men. **Skarphedin took a running start and leaped over the river from one icy bank to the other, landed on his feet, and continued to rush forward in the impetus of his slide. The ice floe was so slippery that he shot forward with the speed of a bird.** Thráin was just about to put on his helmet as **Skarphedin bore down on him and struck at him with his axe, "Battle-Troll." The axe came down upon his head and split it right down to the jaw, so that his jaw teeth dropped out on the ice.** This happened so quickly that no one could strike a blow at Skarphedin, and he continued to glide along on the ice sheet at great speed. Tjorvi threw a shield into his path, but Skarphedin cleared it with a bound and slid to the end of the ice floe.

Environmental Clue no.6
1 vs. 1
"Battle-Troll" axe premonitory knocking came to fruition. Also, it is learned later on during Skarphedin's final stand that he kept his rival's teeth in a pouch[3] which he then threw at Gunnar Lambason to mock him one last time before his demise.

Event no.5
Skarphedin slew Thráin on the ice, therefore various premonitions came true.

Then Kári and the others met him. “That’s having at them like a man!” said Kári.

“Now it’s your turn!” replied Skarphedin.

Event no.6
Grím and Helgi slew Hrapp on the ice.

Thereupon they all rushed at their opponents. Grím and Helgi saw Hrapp and immediately went for him. Hrapp struck at Grím with his axe, but Helgi forestalled him and leveled a blow at Hrapp’s hand and severed it, so that the axe fell to the ground.

Environmental Clue no.7
2 vs. 1
Spear and shield against spear.

Hrapp said: “There you did a most praiseworthy thing, for this hand has brought harm and death to many a man!”

“And now we shall make an end of that!” said Grím, and ran him through with his spear.

Event no.7
Kári slew Tjorvi on the ice.

Tjorvi set upon Kári and hurled his spear at him, but Kári leaped up and the spear flew harmlessly beneath his feet. Kári made for him and dealt him a sword blow which pierced the chest and penetrated to the vitals. He dropped dead at once.

Environmental Clue no.8
1 vs. 1
Sword against spear.

Skarphedin grabbed hold of both Gunnar Lambason and Grani Gunnarsson and called out: “Here I’ve caught two whelps! What shall I do with them?”

“It is your chance to kill both if you wish them out of the way,” answered Helgi.

“I do not have the heart to help Hogni and at the same time to kill his brother,” said Skarphedin.

Literary Cue no.5
Third prophecy in the chapter. This came true since both the apprehended took on active roles in killing the Njálssons. Gunnar Lambason in that final encounter declared to Skarphedin that he never forgot him killing Thráin on the river, which provoked Skarphedin to throw Thráin's teeth at him.[4]

“Some day you will wish that you had slain him,” said Helgi, “Because never will he be true to you, nor will any of the others who are here now!”

Skarphedin answered: “I have no fear of them!”

Thus they spared Grani Gunnarsson, Gunnar Lambason, Lambi Sigurdarson, and Lodin.

After that they returned home. Njál asked what had happened, and they told him everything exactly as it had taken place.

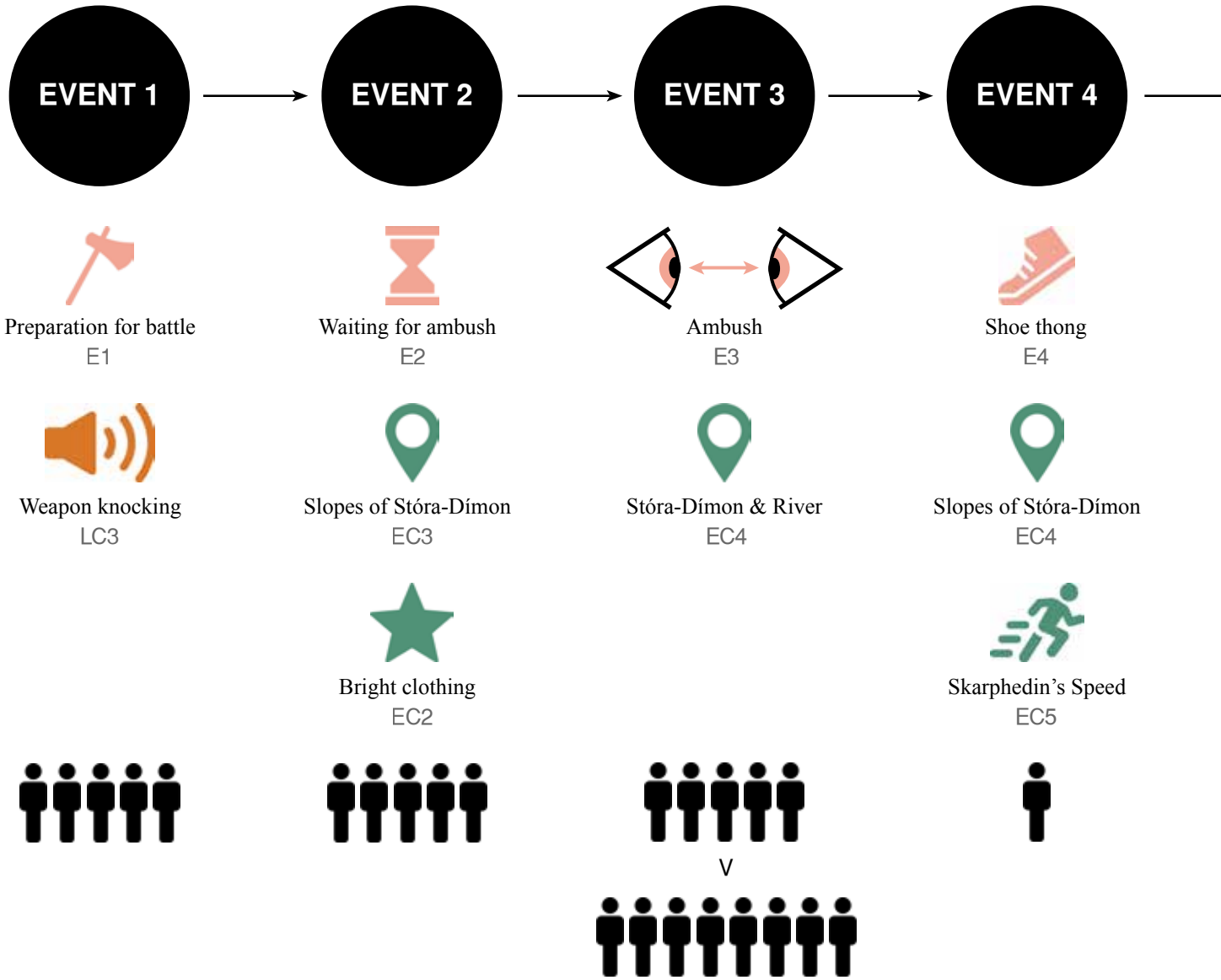
Literary Cue no.6
Fourth prophecy in the chapter. Njál predicted his sons death and even his own.

Njál said: “These are matters of great import, and it is likely that the end will see the death of one of my sons or worse still!”

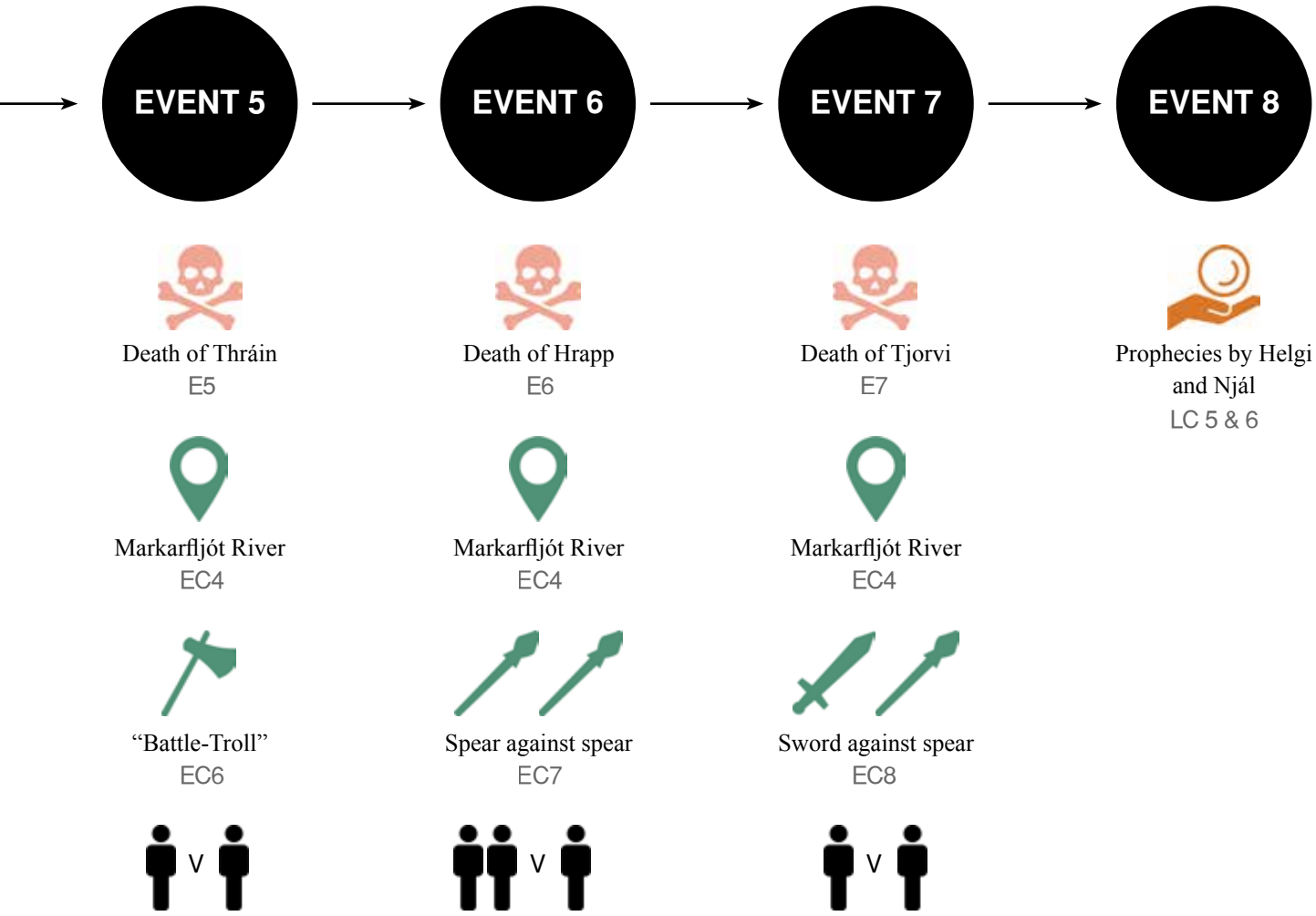
Gunnar Lambason carried Thráin’s body to the farm at Grjótá River, and there he was buried in a cairn.”[1]

Chapter 92 without the edits is available in the Appendix B.

CONSOLODATION OF CATEGORIES INTO 1 TIMELINE



Ill. 3. Diagram of Njál's Saga, Chapter 92



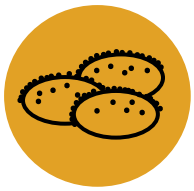
1. Anonymous, Njál's Saga, (New York, New York University Press, 1955), 70
2. Ibid, 100
3. Ibid, 268
4. Ibid, 193-198

GEOLOGICAL AND ECOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN

After the winter design phase, I conducted a second visit to Iceland. While my first trip was a mystical experience in a hibernating landscape, my second visit was conducted during the summer, when the land was bright and full of life. Much of the information below—information on the fauna and flora, as well as geology—was gathered from this second trip. To avoid confusion and redundancy of explaining my design through two parts, I will synthesize this acquisition of knowledge from the second trip into this portion of the narrative.

The Njál Saga is a linear story—the events that take place follow a sequential and chronological order. The knowledge to be transmitted does not have to follow a strict course but can instead be seen as a series of self-contained pockets that are dispersed in the landscape, which when viewed together, act like the dots of pigment in a pointillist painting.

Below, I have selected the information—the 'pigment'—with which I will populate the site. The points are organized into two categories; those that are present on site and those that are visible in distance. These will require interventions that focus the visitor's attention to both what is immediately underfoot as well as directing their eye to the landscape around them.



CETRARIA ISLANDICA
ICELANDIC MOSS

The Icelandic Moss (which is actually a lichen) forms a beautiful carpet for large portions of the landscape. This plant has a unique root system that allows it to grow in the barren, washed-out landscape of Iceland. However, the moss grows very slowly—on average about 1cm annually. It is also incredibly delicate and can be destroyed beyond repair by a single step[2]. While I noticed the dormant qualities of the moss during the winter, during the summer I was able to go to the north side of the mountain and found in the moss thriving in marshy conditions. Cetraria Islandica is also known to have medicinal properties and is used by the locals for treating "loss of appetite, the common cold, irritation of the mouth or throat, dry coughs, indigestions, fevers, lung disease"[3].

LUPINUS NOOTKATENSIS
ALASKAN 'WOLF' LUPIN

An invasive species from Alaska that was introduced to Iceland in 1884 as a means of combating soil erosion, which is seen as a significant problem on the island. It is a self-seeding plant that does not require fertilizers or human intervention to propagate. In the southern region of Iceland, the lupines can grow up to 80cm annually, and spread rapidly. It has shown to be a great aid in not only soil recovery, but also in nitrogen fixation. However, since the plant spreads so rapidly and has nothing to deter its growth, it has extended beyond its intended zone of deserts and river gravel beds and has invaded heathlands and moss heaths—some of which exist around the site—replacing the native mosses and wild grasses[4]. During my summer excursion, giant fields of these lupines were encroaching on the site from the south and will likely overrun the mountain in the near future.

WILD FLOWERS

In the summer months, the tall grass on the slopes of Stóra-Dímon were speckled in an assortment of wild flowers, adding pink, red, yellow, and white pops of colour to the green of the grasses and moss. Many of the wildflowers are edible—the Arctic Thyme (Thymus Praecox Arcticus or Blóðberg) used in cuisine and in tea; Sheep Sorrel (Rumex Acetosella or Hundasúra) whose leaves are tart in flavour; and Caraway (Carum Carvi) whose seeds are used in baking and also to make Brennivín, an Icelandic schnapps[5].

SHEEP

During the summer, many sheep were observed grazing along the slopes, crags, and even cliff faces of Stóra-Dímon. While some of the mature sheep had tags on their ears, the lambs clambering at their hooves did not. With the absence of proper agricultural fencing and close farms, I believe them to be escaped sheep who found solace on the gnarled surfaces of this lone mountain.

LOCAL BIRDS

As noted in the winter excursion, there were definitely ravens present on site. It was not until the summer visit that I was made aware of the prolific bird population at Stóra-Dímon. Excepting the howl of the wind, the site was all but silent during the winter. During the summer however, the call of a variety of birds rang clear from the cliff face along the northwest portion of the mountain. Upon inspection, many types of birds took up occupancy amongst the serrated, basalt bluffs. Apart from the year-long occupants, the ravens and the northern fulmar (similar to seagulls), migratory species such as common snipes with their bizarre drumming calls, and whimbrels nest in the cliffs on site.

MARKARFLJÓT RIVER

The source of the Markarfljót River—which passes along the east side of Stóra-Dímon on its way to the Atlantic—be found among glaciers located in Thorsmörk Valley located north of the site. Though tendrils of water do flow along the river, its full discharge is reached only after eruptions which melt icecaps. For the majority of the time, the river is low, and large portions of the black riverbed are exposed. The plains around the Markarfljót River are actually part of a large, dry canyon which was created around 1700 years ago by the melt of the Mýdalsjökull Glacier[6]. This deposited a thick layer of sand which underlies the riverbed and much of the surrounding area. In recent years, embankments had been built along the edges of the Markarfljót River in an effort to mitigate flooding and can be seen on the site.

NORTH-WEST CLIFFS & EASTERN CRAGS

When I approached the cliffs for closer observation, I noted that about halfway up the bluff, the composition of rock changed. The bottom half was readily identified as basalt from its blue-black tone and stacked hexagonal composition. However the upper layer, while still dark in complexion, had a warm brown tone and flowing appearance to it. After further investigation using the National Land Survey of Iceland7, this geology was found to be a type of pillow lava. The crags on the eastern side of Stóra-Dímon facing the river, appear to also be made of this material. The same pillow lava is also found around the base of the neighbouring volcanoes Eyjafjallajökull and Katla, leading me to believe that this small mountain must have been formed during one of the eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull.

EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL VOLCANO

Directly east of the site, right across the river is the active ice-capped volcano Eyjafjallajökull which has recorded eruptions in 1612, 1821-1823, and 2010. The 2010 eruption melted a great portion of the ice cap to melt, which flooded the Markarfljót River area, requiring the evacuation of 800 people in the area[8]. The proximity of the volcano is a constant reminder of Iceland's volatile landscape, and of the innate power of the Earth.

THÓRSMÖRK VALLEY

Thórsmörk is a valley located between the Eyjafjallajökull, Mýrdalsjökull, and Tindfjallajökull glaciers, and is named after the Norse god, Thor. It is the source of the Markarfljót River and is one of the lushest places in Iceland. Well protected by the mountains, the climate of the valley is warmer, milder, and wetter than the rest of the southern region which allows the vegetation to thrive[9]. The entrance to the valley can be seen from Stóra-Dímon.

WATERFALLS

Because of the ice-capped volcanoes and mountains surrounding the site, there are many waterfalls surrounding the Markarfljót River valley. Of note, there are Gluggafoss 5.5 km to the north, Nauthúsagil 4 km to the east, and most famously, Seljalandsfoss 7 km to the south featuring a 60m drop.

HEIMAEY ISLAND

Found due south of Stóra-Dímon, this island is located 10km from the coast and is home to around 4000 people. It has a colourful history—it was first discovered by two escaped slaves who met an unseemly end on the island around 900 AD, and was invaded by Ottoman pirates in 1627. It is now home to the largest population of puffins in the world.10 During my summer visit, with not a cloud in sight I was able to see the jagged silhouette of this island from the summit of Stóra-Dímon.

1. Anonymous, *Njál's Saga*, (New York, New York University Press, 1955), 193-198
2. Magnú Sveinn Helgason, "From the editor: Don't traðka on the moss!", *Iceland Magazine*, July 28, 2018, https://icelandmag.is/article/editor-dont-tradka-moss
3. Katrín Björk, "Plants in Iceland : Flora Under the Arctic Circle", *Guide to Iceland*, January 20, 2020, https://guidetoiceland.is/best-of-iceland/plants-in-iceland
4. Records of Borgthor Magnusson, Sigurdur H. Magnusson, & Bjarni D. Sigurdsson conference, *Wild and cultivated lupins from the Tropics to the Poles. Proceedings of the 10th International Lupin Conference,* Laugarvatn, Iceland, June 19-24, 2002. https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/20053017212
5. Katrín Björk, *Guide to Iceland*, https://guidetoiceland.is/best-of-iceland/plants-in-iceland
6. Haukur Tómasson, *The Extremes of the Extremes: Extraordinary Floods* (International Association of Hydrological Sciences, 2002), 121-126.
7. National Land Survey of Iceland, Free Digital Data, February 18, 2019, https://www.lmi.is/en/stafraen-gogn/
8. Magnús T. Gudmundsson and Rikke Pedersen, "Eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull Volcano, Iceland", *EOS: Earth and Space Science News*, vol. 91, no. 21, May 25, 2010, pages 190-191,
9. "Information about Þórsmörk", *Guide to Iceland*, January 14, 2020, https://guidetoiceland.is/travel-iceland/drive/thorsmork
10. "Information about Heimaey", *Guide to Iceland*, January 14, 2020, https://guidetoiceland.is/travel-iceland/drive/heimaey

4.3 THE PROPOSAL

TRANSPLANTING THE DESIGN

Taking the scatterplot points from both narratives, I have placed them on the site map and traced the intended route for the design proposal (see Ill.4.).

MATERIALS

Before delving into the ten interventions planned on site I am going to outline the chosen material palette. Just as how it was determined that the "artifacts" would not work in the landscape, due to their foreign qualities, so too can be true of the materials. To create a visually and tactilely cohesive project—considering the physical distance between parts—the fewer materials used, the better. Moreover, the selection should come as close to the natural palette present on site as possible to further meld the new interventions with the land. With these considerations, I have chosen only four materials for the design; basalt, concrete, iron, and sod.

Basalt is present everywhere at Stóra-Dímon—in the cliffs as extruded hexagonal prisms, in the riverbed of the Markarfljót River, and in the crushed gravel for the roads and embankments. In fact, 90% of the Iceland's rocks are made of basalt, making it one of the most common construction materials. While mainly used for infrastructure, basalt has been used for aesthetic reasons, as seen with Guðjón Samúelsson's use of the material as cladding on the exteriors of both the National Theatre of Iceland and Hallgrímskirkja in Reykjavík. I will be using basalt throughout the design in the form of crushed gravel and paving stones.

The second material selected is concrete. Much like the basalt, it is one of the most common building materials in Iceland for a variety of reasons. Some construction materials, such as wood, are harder to acquire in Iceland, as only 1% of the Iceland is forested, and therefore needs to be imported, making it an expensive material to use. When concrete was introduced to the island, it was revolutionary. Since the composition of concrete is primarily water, cement, and aggregate, it could be made readily on the island and therefore significantly reduced building costs. The harsh climate of the island and with the nearby ocean contribute to a corrosive environment. Concrete can readily withstand these conditions—unlike wood which deteriorates rapidly when exposed to these conditions. Due to concrete's durability and prolific use, it will be incorporated into the design.

The third material I will be employing is iron. Much like the concrete, iron is resistant to the harsh climate of Iceland and is frequently used as an external cladding material—especially before the introduction of concrete. While iron sheathing had to be imported to the island, the cost was significantly lower than wood, making it more readily available as I have described cladding the exterior of the church at Hlídarendi. Due to its durability, frequent use, and versatility as a material I have selected iron as the third material with either a blackened or polished finish.

The final material selected is turf. While obviously the most intrinsically natural to the site, it is not usually considered a building material. However building with turf has historical significance in the context of Iceland. Before concrete or even iron was used for building their edifices—both of which have only been present from the 19th century onwards—for over a millennium, the primary building material was turf. 50cm by 50cm by 15cm blocks of turf would be cut out of the ground and stacked in a herringbone pattern around a light wood structure in the interior. To this day in Iceland, there are many surviving examples of this type of construction, such as the one I described located in Laugardalur Park. Because of its historical context and prolific use in the Icelandic landscape, I will also be using turf blocks for this design.

PLOTTING THE NARRATIVES - LEGEND OF NODES

NJÁL'S SAGA NARRATIVE EVENTS

N.E. 1 PREPARATION FOR BATTLE

N.E. 2 WAITING FOR AMBUSH

N.E. 3 AMBUSH

N.E. 4 THE DESCENT

N.E. 5 DEATH OF THRÁIN

N.E. 6 DEATH OF HRAPP

N.E. 7 DEATH OF TJORVI

HLÍ. HLÍDARENDI *GUNNAR'S HOME*

S-M STÓRA-MÖRK *RÚNÓLF'S HOME*

B.VOLL BERGTHORSHVOLL *NJÁL'S HOME*

GEOLOGY & ECOLOGY


ICELANDIC MOSS


LUPINS


WILD FLOWERS


SHEEP


LOCAL BIRDS


HEIMAEY ISLAND


MARKARFLJÓT RIVER


N-W CLIFFS & CRAGS


EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL VOLCANO


THÓRSMÖRK VALLEY


WATERFALLS

INTERVENTIONS

I 1 COMPASS

I 2 RESONATE

I 3 FURROW

I 4 PROPYLAEA

I 5 RUSH

I 6 TORRENT

I 7 REWARD

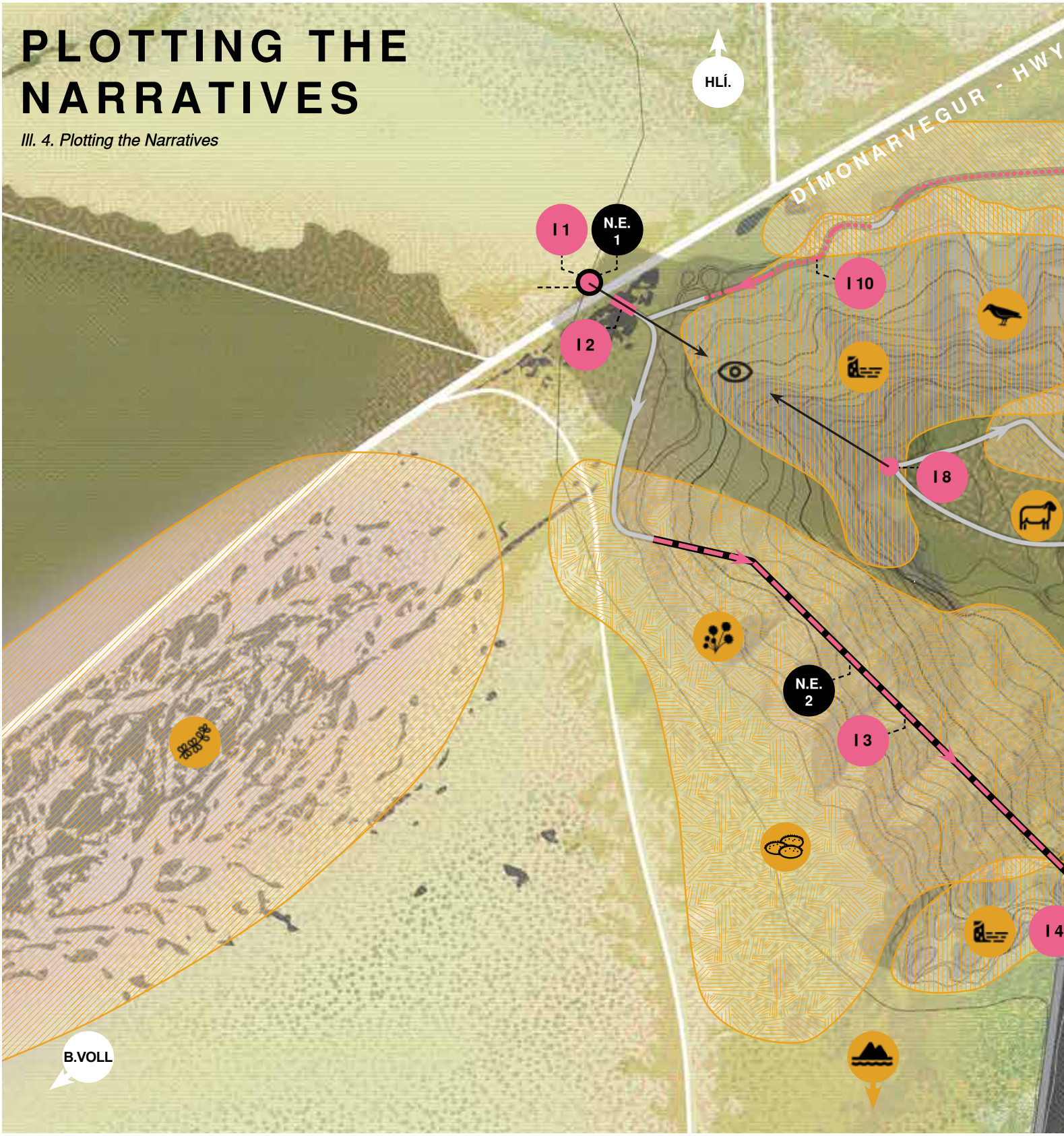
I 8 HERALD

I 9 HOVER

I 10 HUGIN & MUNINN

PLOTTING THE NARRATIVES

Ill. 4. Plotting the Narratives



LEGEND

1:4000 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 10M

LINE COLOURS

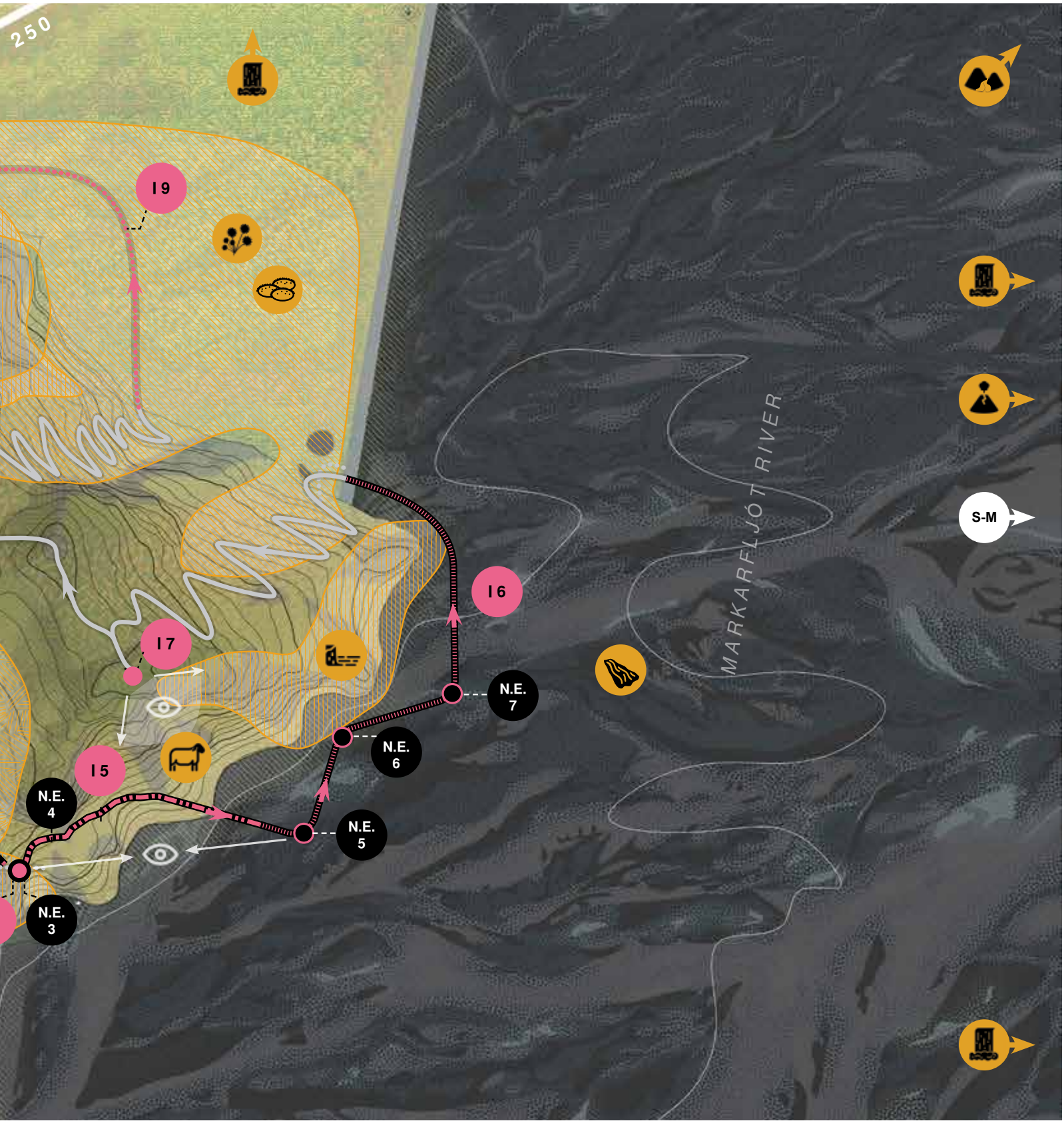
- INTERVENTIONS
- PATH ON GROUND
- PLANNED LINES OF SIGHT

LINE TYPES

- RAISED EMBANKMENT
- ELEVATED
- EMBEDDED
- ON SURFACE
- STAIRS

HATCH TYPES

- WILD FLOWERS
- RIVERBED
- MOSSES



LOW GRASSES
MID-RISE GRASSES
TALL GRASSES

GRAVEL DEPOSITS
ALASKAN LUPINES

SITE SPECIFIC GEO/ECO ZONES
EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

INTERVENTIONS
COMPASS

Originally, the parking and entrance to the site were located on south side, hugging the slope of Stóra-Dímon. For this design, I have moved them both to the other side of Dímonarvegur (highway 250), northwest of the mountain. I relocate them there because I envision this initial intervention as being exterior to the site. The Compass is to be an observatory, looking over Stóra-Dímon and the landscape in which it resides—a spatial tool for reading the landscape.

The Compass itself is comprised of three low, sloping walls that form the sides of a triangle—they are used to direct the visitor's attention to the site. Voids are left at the vertices of the triangle for paths to emerge and extend out. The north and west openings are where the visitors enter the Compass from the parking, while the east opening is the route to Stóra-Dímon. The openings towards the parking lot are wider, more porous creating breathing room around the pathways. By contrast, there is less breathing room between the edges of the eastern path, and the ends of the walls. The constriction of both walls corrals visitors into the site.

While the two meter-wide paths from the parking lot are made of crushed basalt, the route to the site is two meters in width and is composed of basalt pavers. The increase in breadth is intended to allow for people to proceed comfortably in small groups—like the Njálssons who stalked their way over to Stóra-Dímon to ambush Thráin—and the change of textures from the crushed stone to the more solid pavers clearly indicate the intended direction of circulation.

At the junction of these three paths is the Nucleus. The Nucleus is a polished, circular basalt paver, 2m in diameter, etched with a map of the Markarfljót Valley denoting to the visitor exactly where they stand, orienting them geographically in the landscape (see Ill.5. for plan of the Compass).

The three walls—made of concrete—will be etched with the names and symbols of the landmarks around the site and in the horizon; other Saga sites, volcanoes, waterfalls, islands, as well as an inscription of Chapter 92 from Njál's Saga. Unlike the current sign on site, this one will be able to withstand the tests of time and climate. The walls are inlaid with polished iron to mimetically recall bodies of water throughout the landscape; the Atlantic Ocean, the Markarfljót River from its source at Thórsmork in the north to its end at the Ocean in the south, and various waterfalls such as Seljalandsfoss and Gluggafoss along the slopes of the distant volcanoes and mountains.

Standing on the Nucleus, looking out over the terrain, the visual play between the foreground and the horizon presented by the etched walls orient the visitors in the landscape by labeling its features and thereby building up the visitors' environmental literacy—i.e. their capacity to read the characteristics of the land. They allow the visitor to view the sublime environment in which they

find themselves as more than a pleasant backdrop—it holds beautiful landmarks and stories that are part of a network that spreads out across the entirety of the topography of Iceland (see Ill.6.).

The east and south walls both start at a height of 40cm and slope upwards to a height of 90cm as they touch the main path while the west wall maintains a consistent height of 75cm. The gentle sloping of the two main walls further emphasizes the visual funnelling initiated by their very placement. All three walls are tall enough for the etchings to fit, but are low enough to be comfortably used as seating in the event that the visitors want to rest before or after their journeys. The top of the walls are each 40cm wide and flare out to 80cm at the base.

The parking lot is forms a "U" shape around the Compass, out of the way of Stóra-Dímon. From the parking lot, the road quickly slopes two metres downwards to avoid obstructing the panoramic view from the Nucleus. To further ensure that this view from the nucleus is unhampered, the area bracketed by the walls—and the walls themselves—are elevated another half meter to exaggerate the separation of the parking from the Compass.

From the Nucleus, the pathway across the road and over the bridge creates a visual axis to the northwest bluffs of the mountain. Perched atop the cliff, directly in line with this axis is a platform—which I will refer to as the Herald—where visitors can view the totality of the landscape. More than just a platform however, it purposefully stages people on the mountain, encouraging them to explore the site. Like in the Saga literature, people will be able to see where they will end up, but not how they will get there, thereby creating a sense of intrigue that pulls them into the site.

RESONATE

Proceeding from the Compass and having crossed highway 250, there is a shallow ditch 7m wide and approximately 1.5m deep that runs along the length of the road. To address this ditch, I am placing a two meter-wide footbridge between the road and the site. Though it is a literal threshold onto the site, it is also a symbolic threshold for the visitor transitioning from the baseless terrain into the narrative-rich landscape (see Ill.5.).

This bridge, which rings as it is crossed, is more than just a simple span. Drawing from legendary weapons from the Saga, such as Skarphedin's axe and Gunnar's halberd, ringing is a common motif which signals that a weapon will be used in a decisive battle. In this case however, instead of battle, ringing signals the beginning of a curated experience for the visitor. The ringing draws the visitors' attention back to the site, to the present, and to the immediacy which surrounds them.

This is achieved by supporting the bridge like a see-saw; instead of being anchored on both ends, the span is supported at a single point along its length that allows it to pivot. This pivot is located a third of the way along the bridge's 8m length. This allows the longer portion of the bridge to pitch up and

down a single degree—roughly 9 centimeters. The structure which supports the span of the bridge is made from welded HSS, and the bridge is decked in the same basalt pavers as those found in the Compass. The shorter portion of the bridge sports a counterweight which ensures that the bridge rests on that side when it is unoccupied. The bridge only pivots once a person crosses the midpoint. At this point, the weight of the visitor shifts the balance of the bridge and tips it over to its longer side, slamming the frame against a metal plate embedded into the ground to produce a ringing sound (see Ill.7.).

FURROW

The trail from the Resonate continues along the axis between the Compass and the Herald for 30m before it curves to the south side of Stóra-Dímon. Ten metres after the bridge, the basalt pavers cease and are replaced by crushed basalt. The very literal breakdown of the basalt returns the material to a state which is more commonly seen in the landscape, thereby better merging the trail with the land.

The path traces its way along the edge of the mountain to the boulder where the original path commenced. From this point, the path turns north and begins its ascent to midway up the slope to the second boulder. Before the path begins its climb, the crushed basalt ends and is replaced by a sturdy sod. It then narrows to a single metre in width. On the way to the second boulder, the pathway also embeds itself into the earth. Gradually over a distance of 96m, the trail burrows 90cm—roughly waist-height for the average person. The path turns once again to the southwest and heads towards the crags and the river beyond the second boulder (see Ill.8.).

Along the length of the trench, a herringbone pattern of the turf blocks lines the interior. A traditional sod-laying method is used both for its ability to reliably retain soil, and the part it played in the history of Iceland's turf houses.

This is the only segment along the circuit where visitors are submerged into the ground this is for three reasons. The first is a practical reason—the south side is the only location that is viable for this sort of intervention; to the east is the river, to the north is a heath, and to the west are the edges of the heath as well as the Compass. Therefore the south side is the only location dry enough to burrow into the ground.

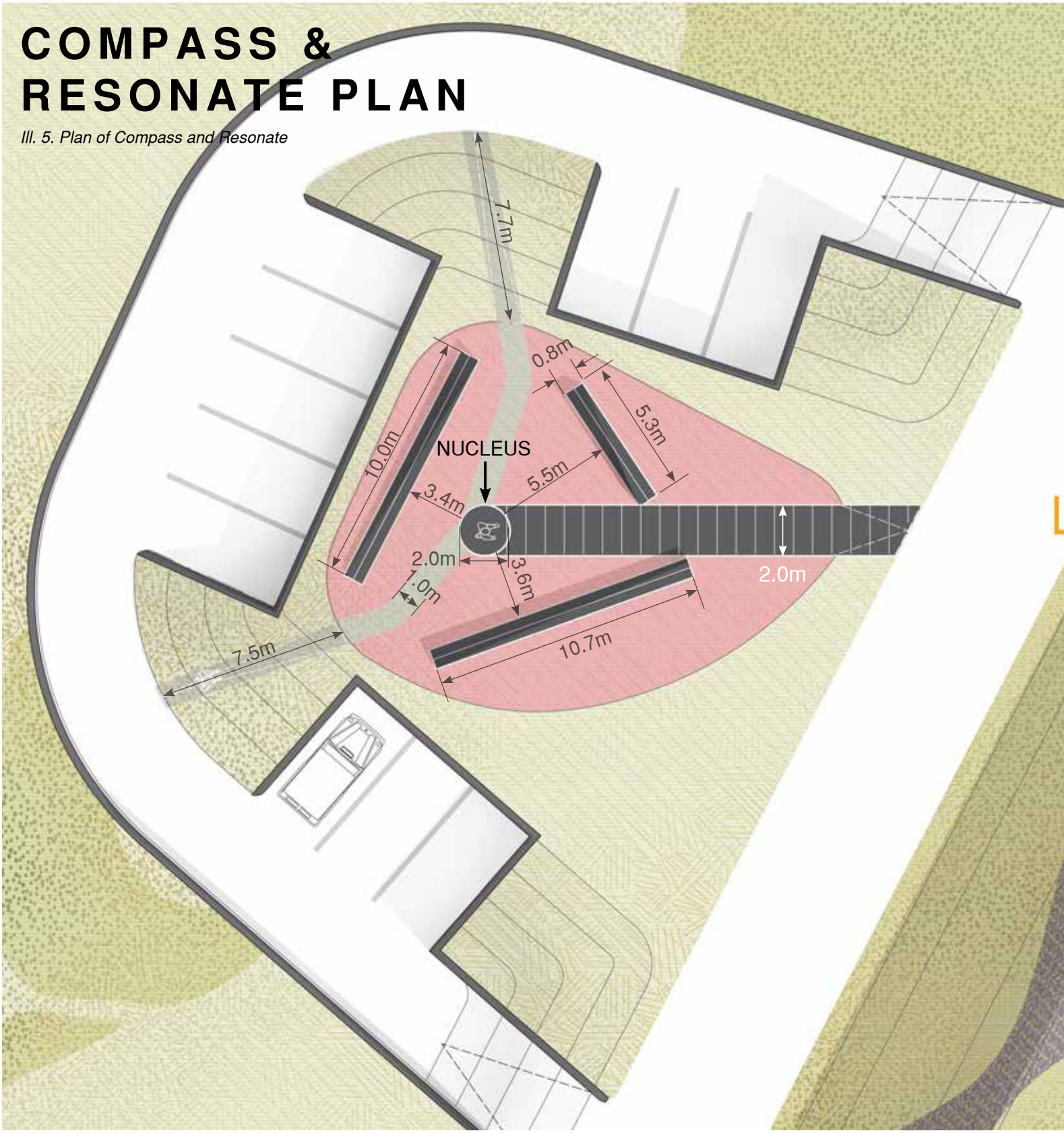
The act of embedding into the ground is representative of the Njálssons' mindset heading into the battle—the path being clear-cut and absolute reflects the stubborn resoluteness of the brothers' decision to ambush Thráin as the only means of salvaging their family's honour.

Furthermore, the south side is populated by bountiful variety of fragrant wild flowers, tall swaying grasses, bulbous mosses, and the ever-encroaching lupines. By lowering the visitors into the earth,

the diverse vegetation is in turn raised to eye level, shifting the visitor's attention from the horizon to that which encompasses them; the flora. Being among the exposed earth from the trench and amidst the flowers and grasses swaying above, the visitor is surrounded by an aromatic and tactile experience (see Ill.9).

COMPASS & RESONATE PLAN

Ill. 5. Plan of Compass and Resonate



LEGEND

1m

1:200 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

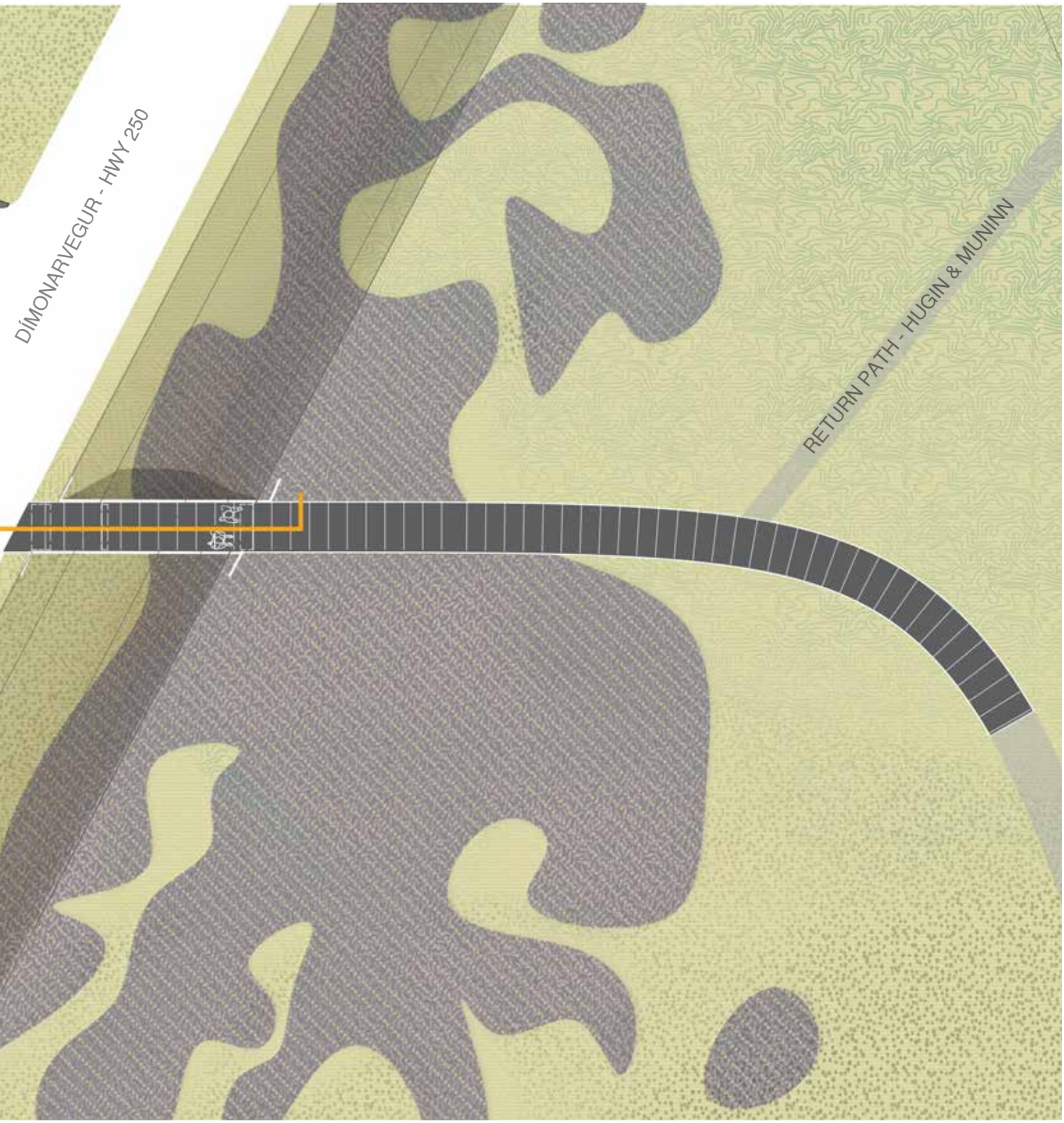
RESONATE SECTION
TOTAL LENGTH OF BRIDGE : 9m

COMPASS AREA

PATH ON GROUND

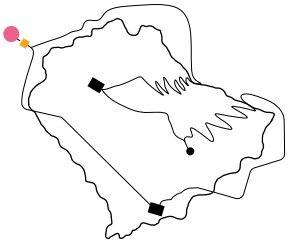
BASALT

GRAVEL DEPOSITS



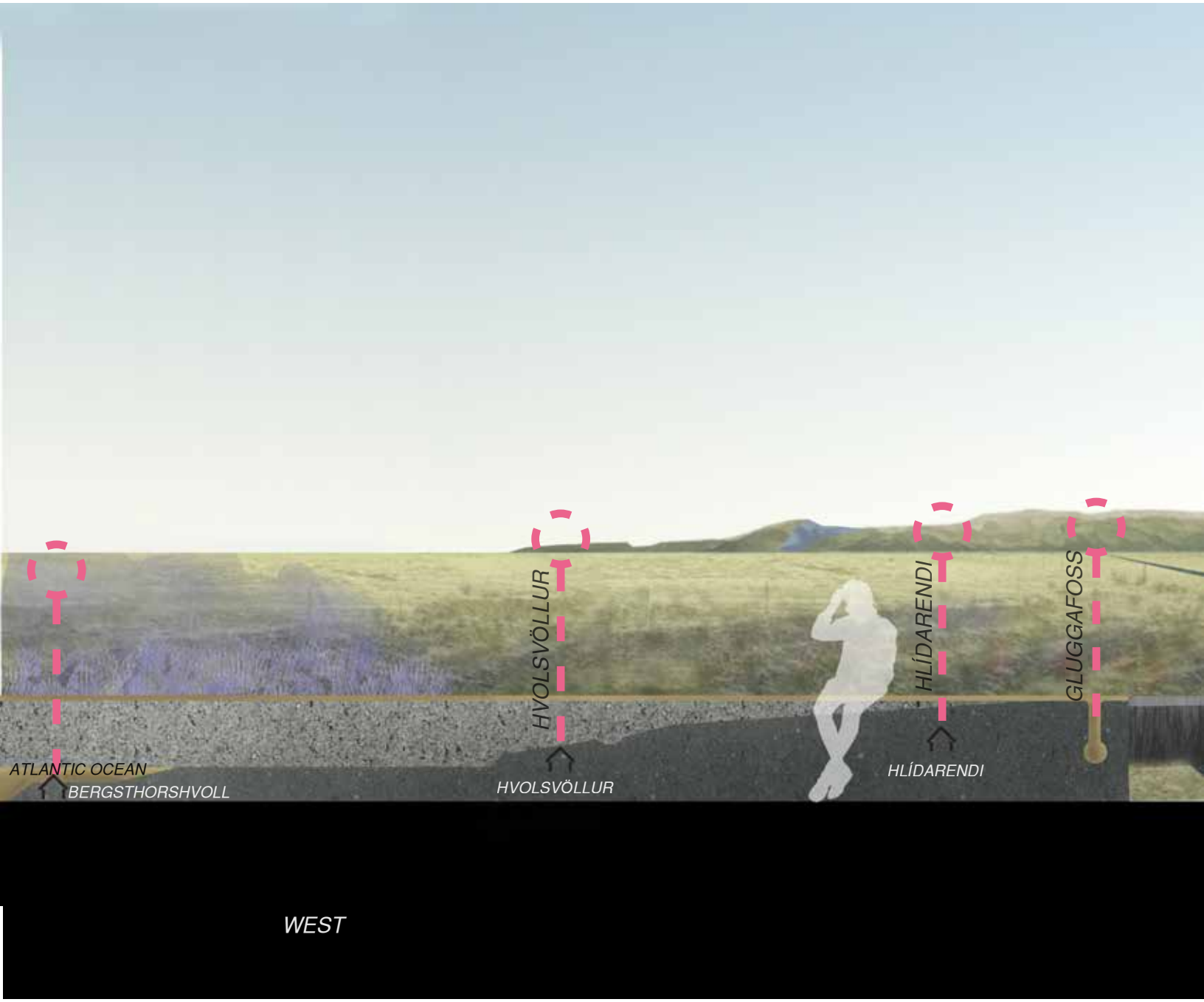
WILD FLOWERS
EXPOSED CLIFF FACE
MOSSES

LOW GRASSES
MID-RISE GRASSES
TALL GRASSES



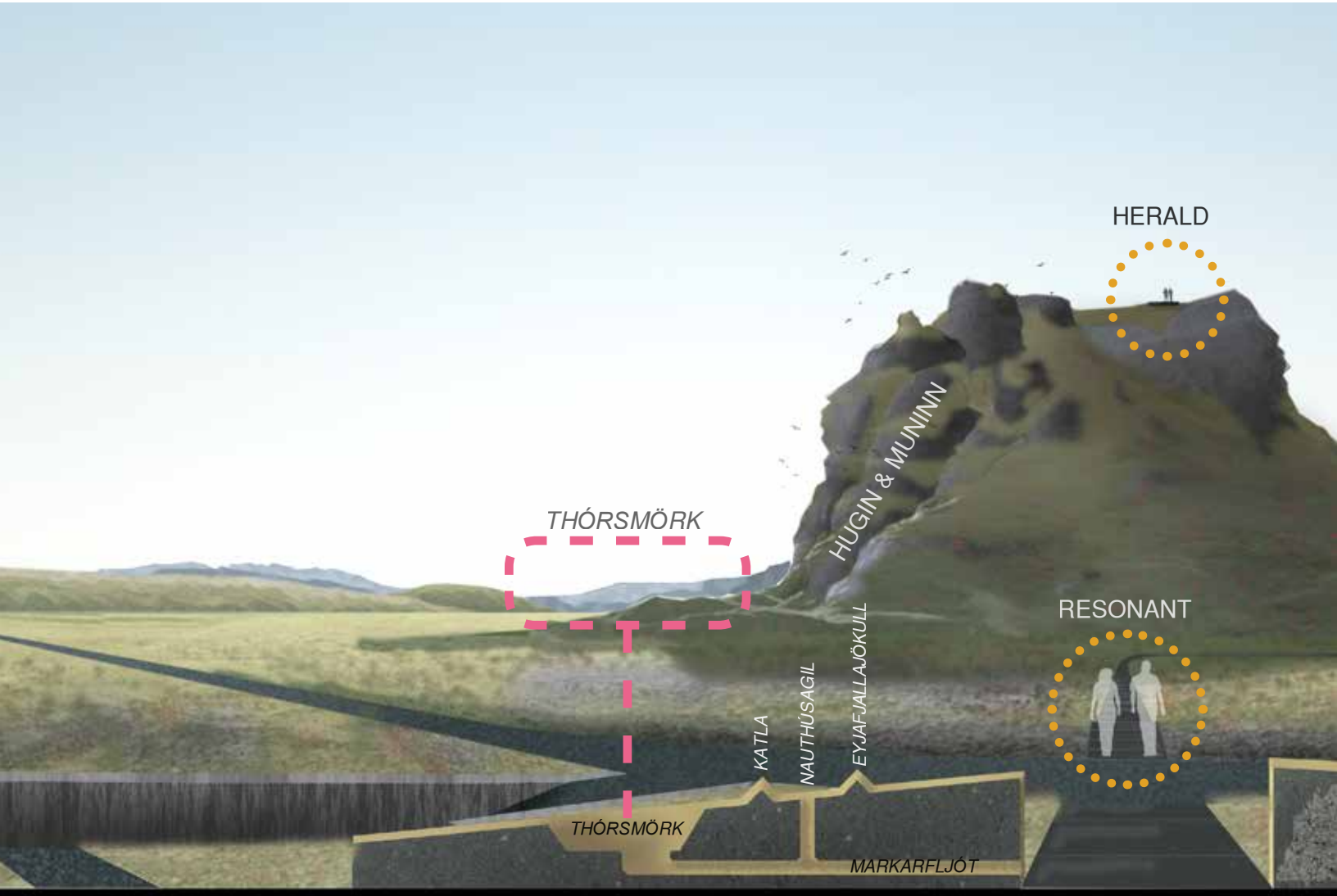
PART 1 - COMPASS INTERIOR WALL PANORAMA

Ill. 6. Panorama of Compass



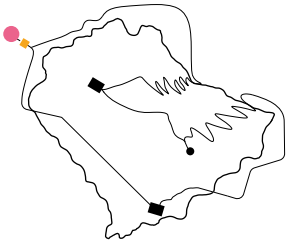
LEGEND

- PROPOSAL INTERVENTIONS
- COMPASS IDENTIFICATIONS
- VOLCANOES AND MOUNTAINS
- WATERFALLS



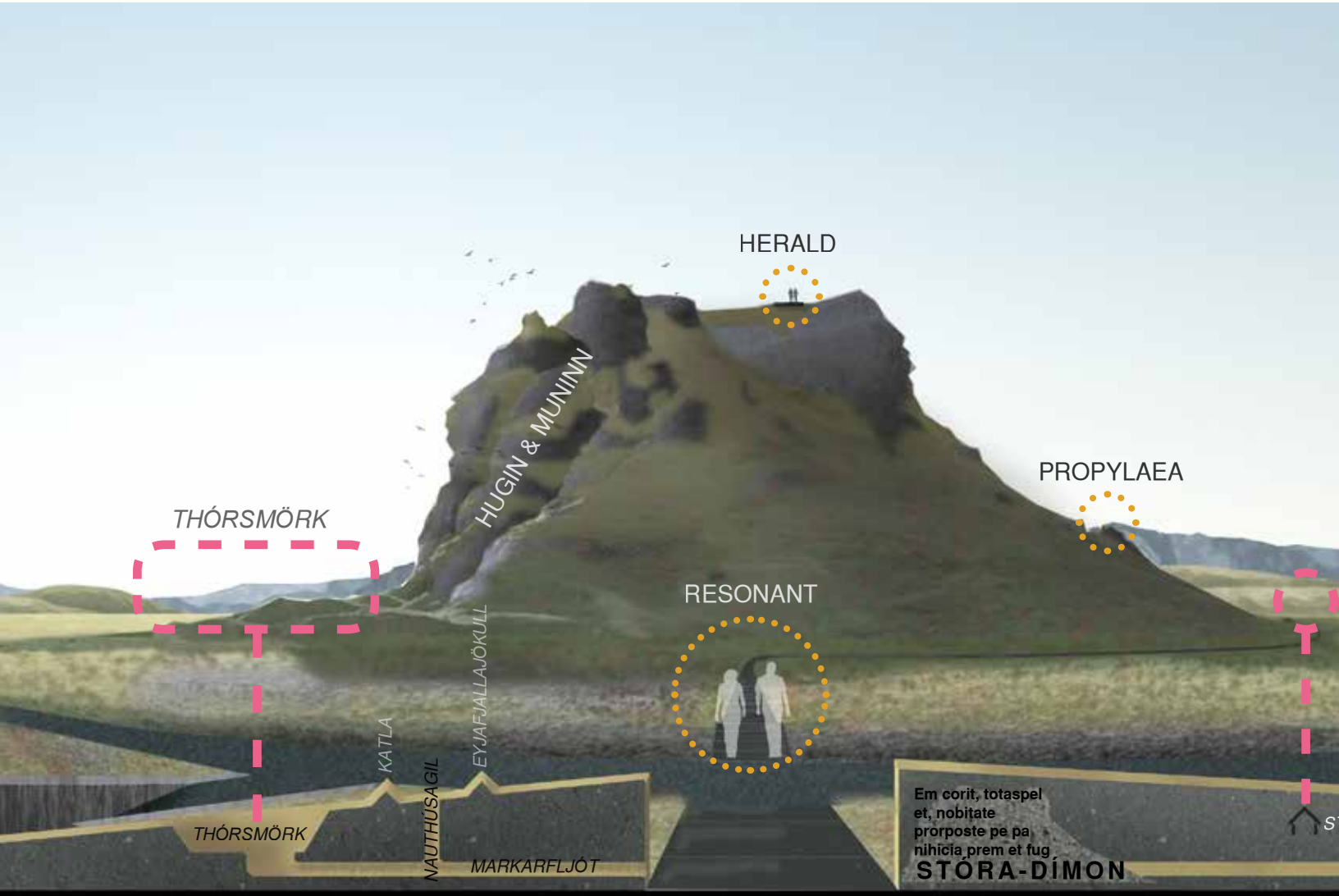
RIVERS

SAGA LOCATIONS



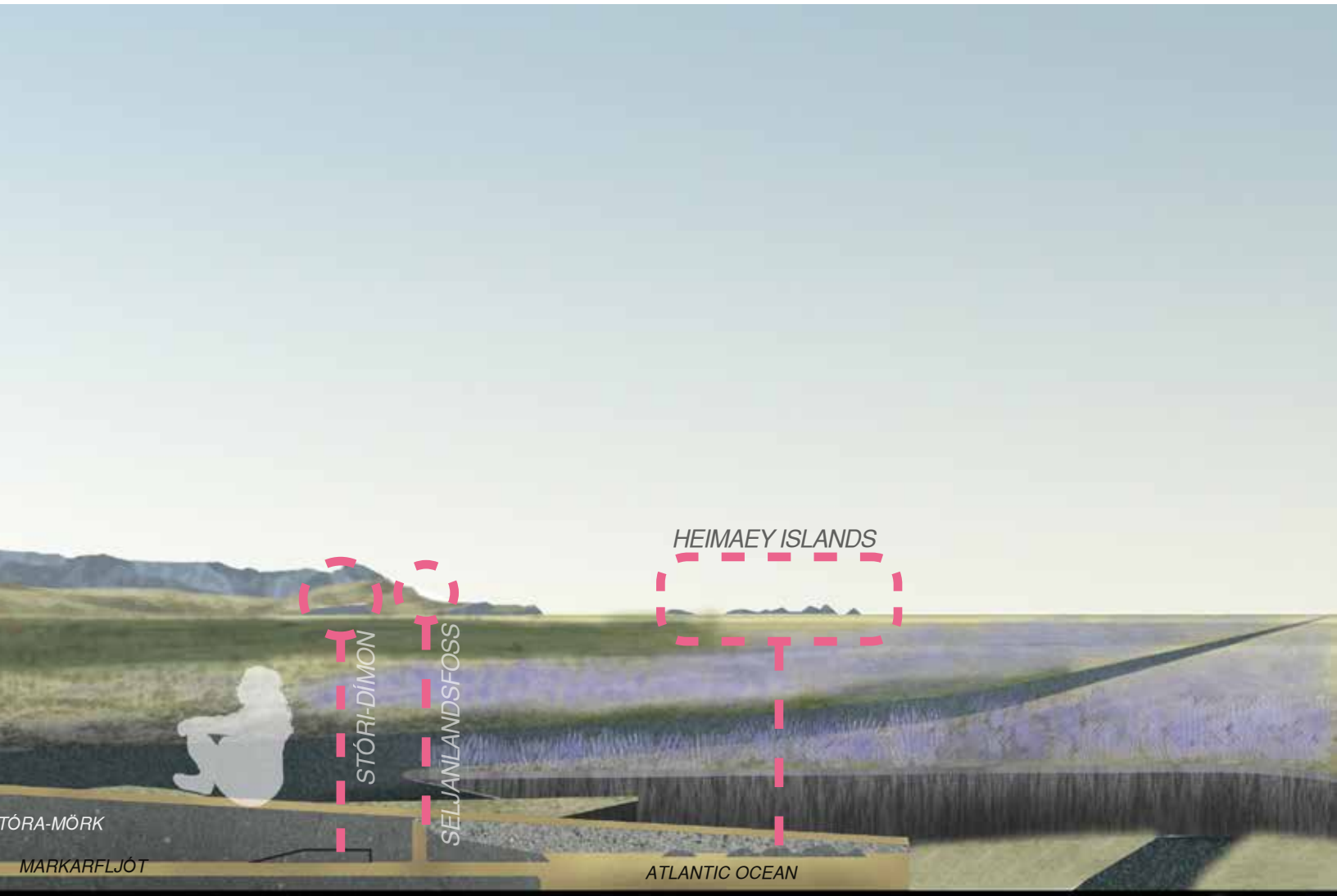
PART 2 - COMPASS INTERIOR WALL PANORAMA

Ill. 6. Panorama of Compass



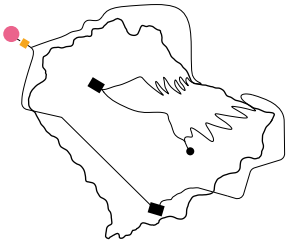
LEGEND

- PROPOSAL INTERVENTIONS
- COMPASS IDENTIFICATIONS
- VOLCANOES AND MOUNTAINS
- WATERFALLS



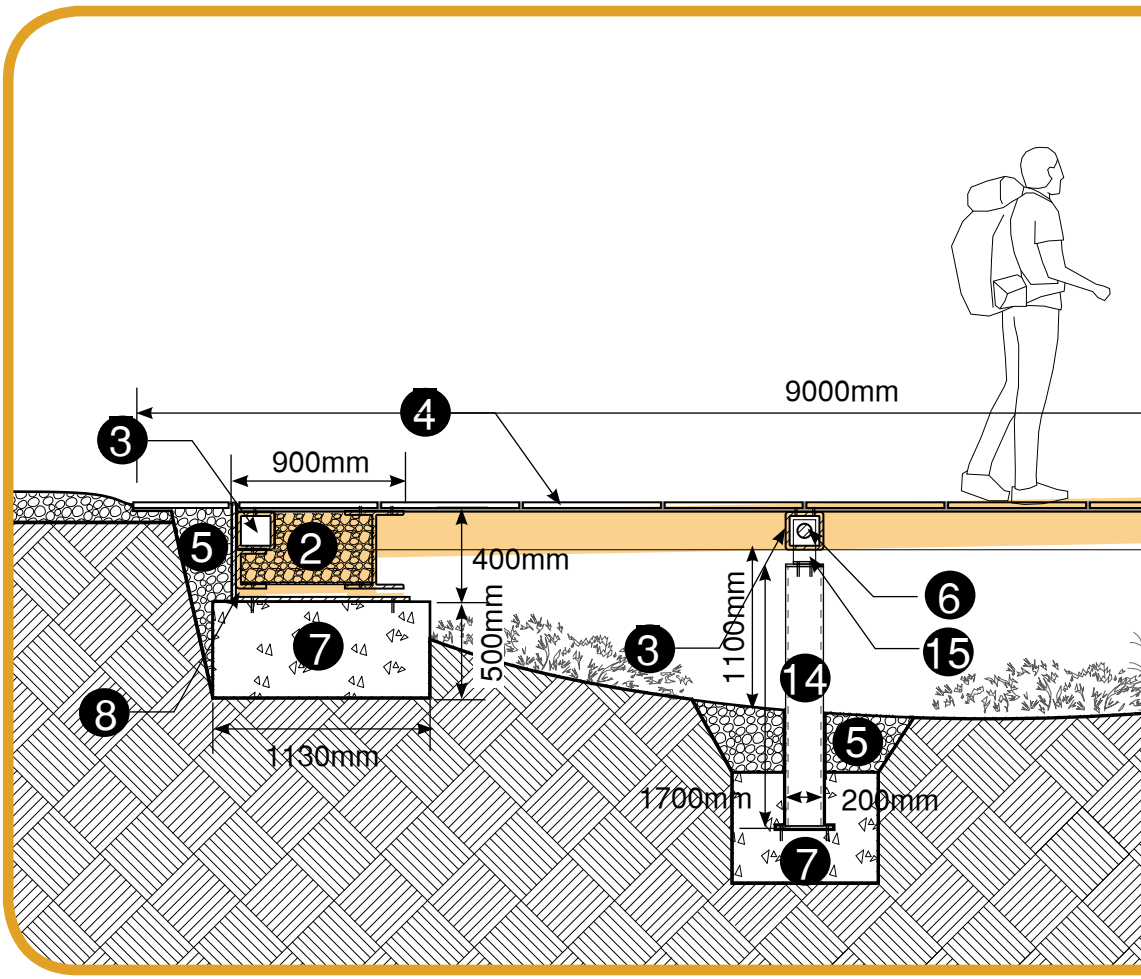
RIVERS

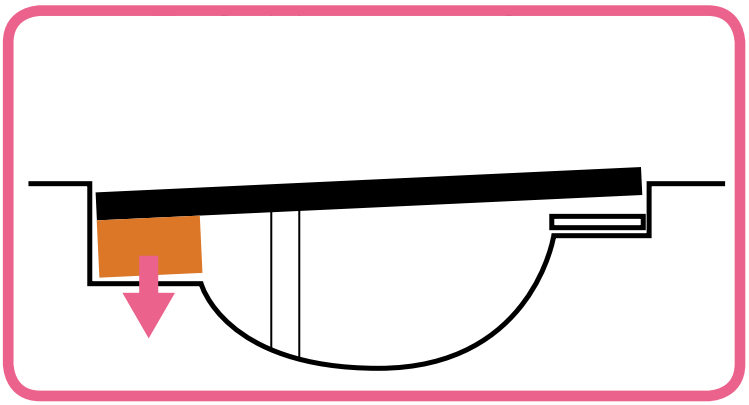
SAGA LOCATIONS



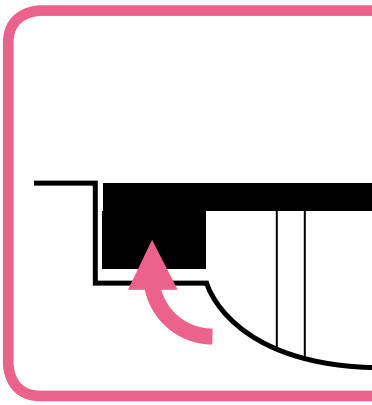
RESONATE SECTION DETAIL

Ill. 7. Resonate Section and Diagrams





1 - UNWEIGHTED POSITION
BALLAST WEIGHING DOWN

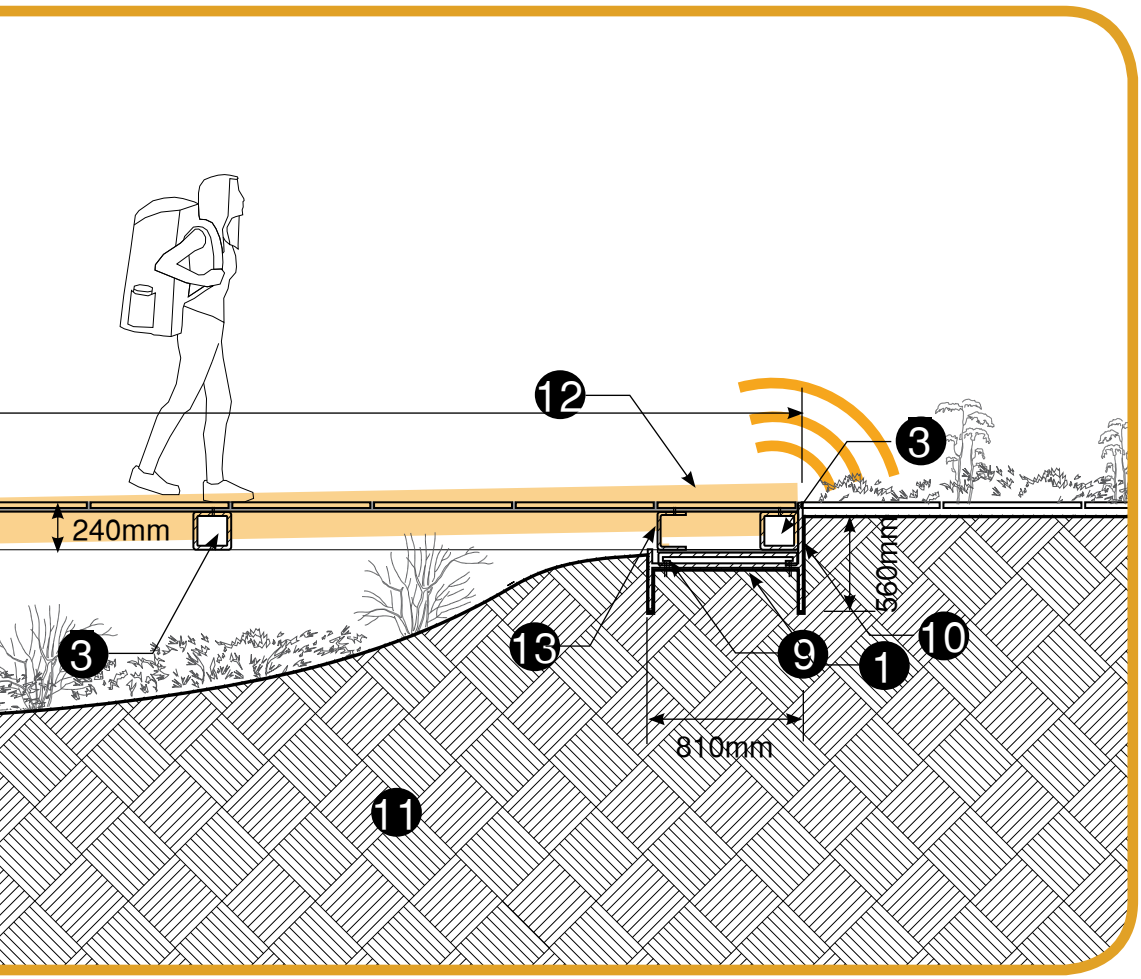


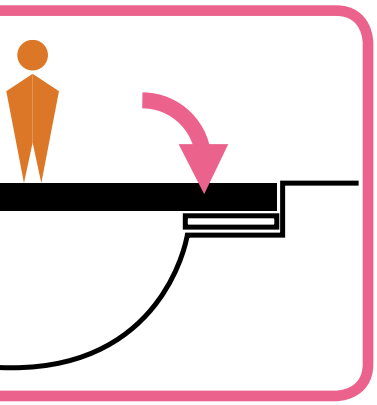
2 - WEIGHTED POS
WEIGHT OF PERSO
BRIDGE TO PIVOT

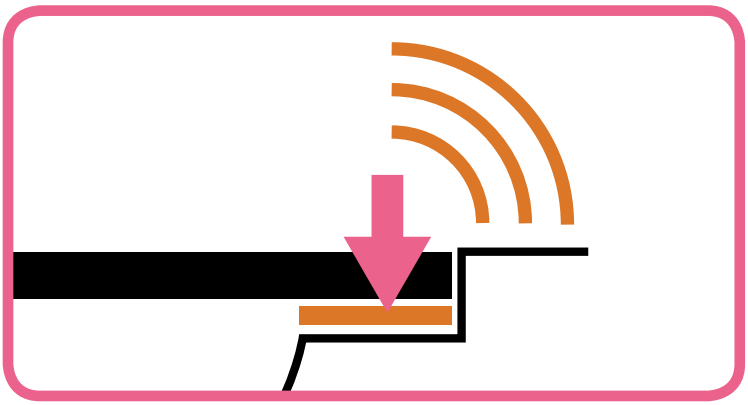
LEGEND

1:40 1m

1. FOLDED STEEL PLATE FOR AUDITORY CONNECTION
2. CRUSHED BASALT BALLAST
3. 200mm X 200mm HSS LATERAL SUPPORT BEAM, o.c. 2000mm
4. 730mm x 2000mm x 30mm BASALT PAVERS, GROUTED
5. PEA GRAVEL
6. 75mm DIAMETER STEEL PIVOT BAR
7. CONCRETE FOOTING
8. 50mm SPACE ALLOWED FOR BRIDGE PIVOT
9. 750mm x 2000mm x 13mm WELDED STEEL PLATE FOR AUDITORY CONNECTION







ITION
N(S) CAUSES

3 - BANG
CONTACT BETWEEN BRIDGE AND EMBEDDED METAL PLATE CAUSES RINGING

10 STEEL CHANNEL

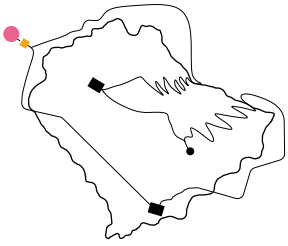
11 UNDISTURBED SOIL

12 UNWEIGHTED POSITION

13 150mm x 200mm "C" STEEL CHANNEL

14 200mm x 200mm HSS COLUMNS, BOLTED

15 235mm x 118mm x 13mm MIRRORED STEEL ANGLE TO SUPPORT PIVOT BAR



FURROW PLAN

Ill. 8. Furrow Plan

LEGEND

5m

1:1000 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

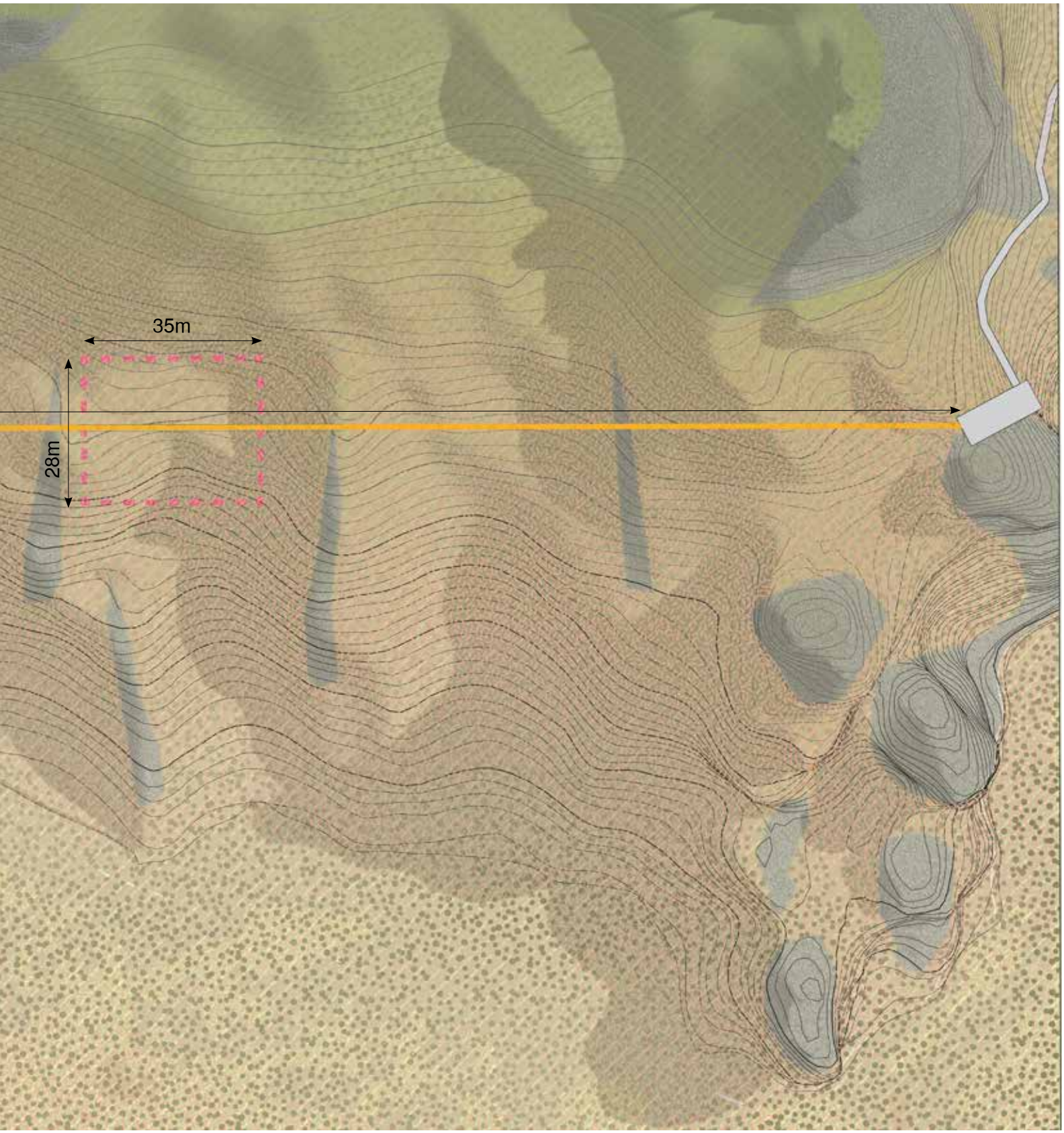
FURROW PATH
TOTAL LENGTH OF FURROW : 358m

AXO SAMPLE AREA

LOW GRASSES

MID-RISE GRASSES

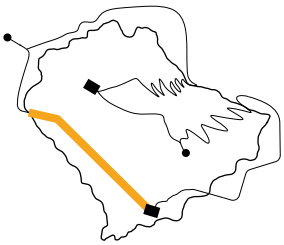
TALL GRASSES



WILD FLOWERS

EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

MOSSES



FURROW AXONOMETRIC

Ill. 9. Furrow Axonometric

ARCTIC THYME
Thymus Praecox Arcticus
12cm : Height
Small, purple, evergreen flower : Description
Spice in cuisine and medicinal teas : Uses

SHEEP SORREL
Rumex Acetosella
Height : 50cm
Description : Slender, red, perennial herb
Uses : Leaves are used as a tart salad green

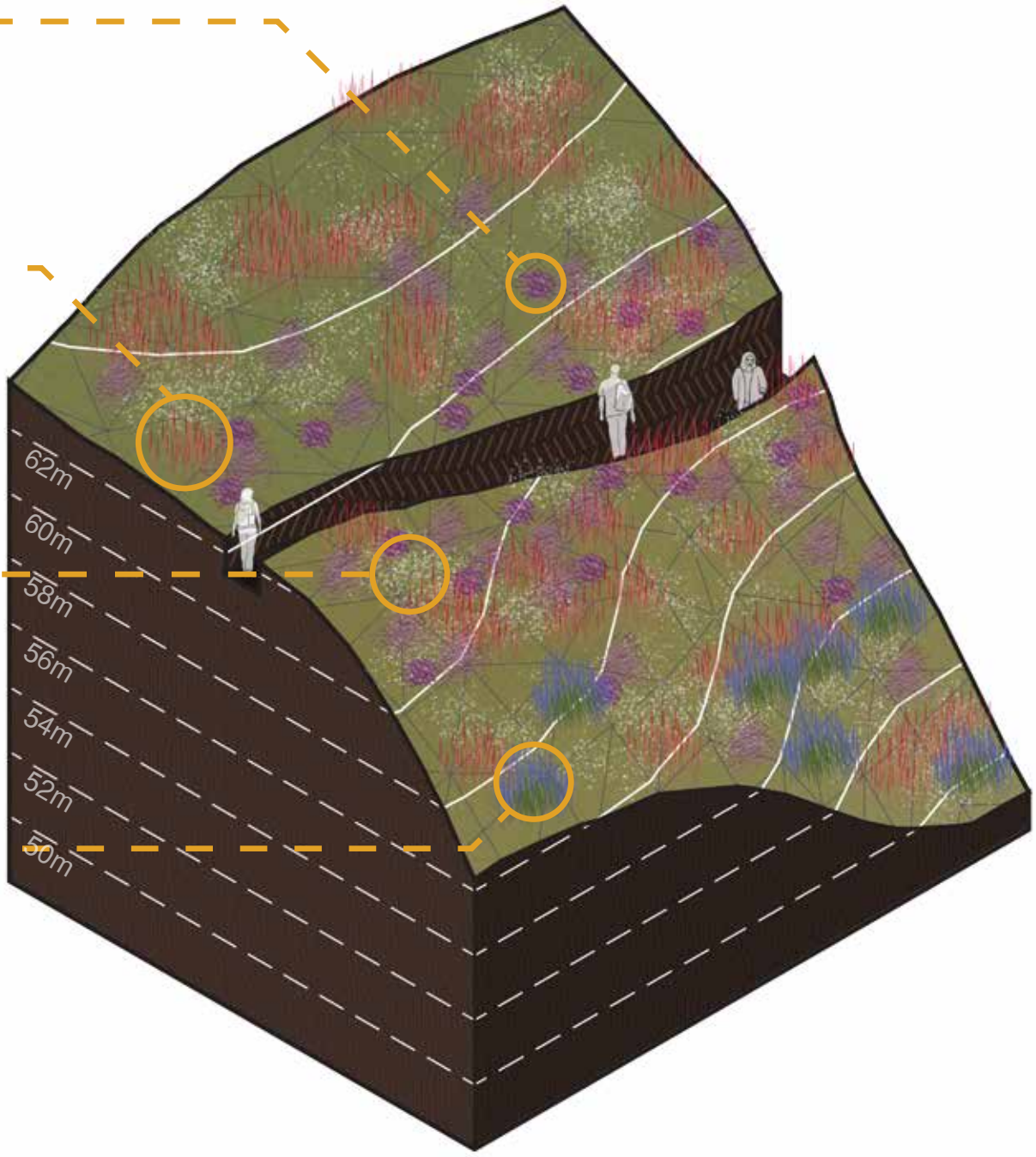
CARAWAY
Carum Carvi
60cm : Height
Small white flowers in umbels, perennial : Description
Seeds used in baking and to make liquor : Uses

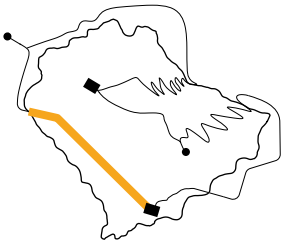
ALASKAN LUPINE
Lupinus Nootkatensis
Height : 80cm
Description : Medium, deep purple, slender flowers, perennial
Uses : Aesthetically in gardens and to combat soil erosion

LEGEND

1m

1:200 | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M


62m
60m
58m
56m
54m
52m
50m



PROPYLAEA

As the Furrow completes its trajectory eastwards, the path rises up to surface level once more. Along the ridge that separates the undulating southern slope from the bluffs facing the river stands a collection of pillow-lava crags. The grain of the dark, gnarled rocks are canted towards the ground, parallel to the angle of the slope. Two of the crags that stand side-by-side rise least double the height of the rest. Like propylaea that guard the entrance to formidable ancient cities, these two crags delineate the boundary from the slopes to the river below.

Between the crags outstretches a 15m by 6m platform. Pointing easterly, the cantilevered stage overlooks the black river below. Similar to the construction of the Resonate, basalt pavers form the deck atop an HSS frame, allowing for greater acoustic amplification of the visitor's footfalls—echoing the footsteps of the visitors down to the riverbed like a drum. Around the edges of the platform, slim guardrails made of blackened iron prevent visitors from falling off the edge (see Ill.10. and Ill.11.).

The placement of the platform overlooking the river and valley—which also faces Stóra-Mork from whence Thráin's posse came—gives visitors a moment to stop and observe the sublime landscape from an elevated position for the first time on the circuit. They will be able to see the river flow down from Stóra-Dímon to the ocean, the shimmering glacier of Eyjafjallajökull, and if the weather permits, the Heimaey islands just off the coast to the south.

Also by placing visitors at this ledge, I am staging them to re-enact the Njálssons' clan lying in wait to ambush Thráin and his followers. Like the Saga, the visitor can see the people further along the circuit on the river below who—consciously or not—have switched roles from the Njálssons to becoming the enemy that lays in wait on the river.

RUSH

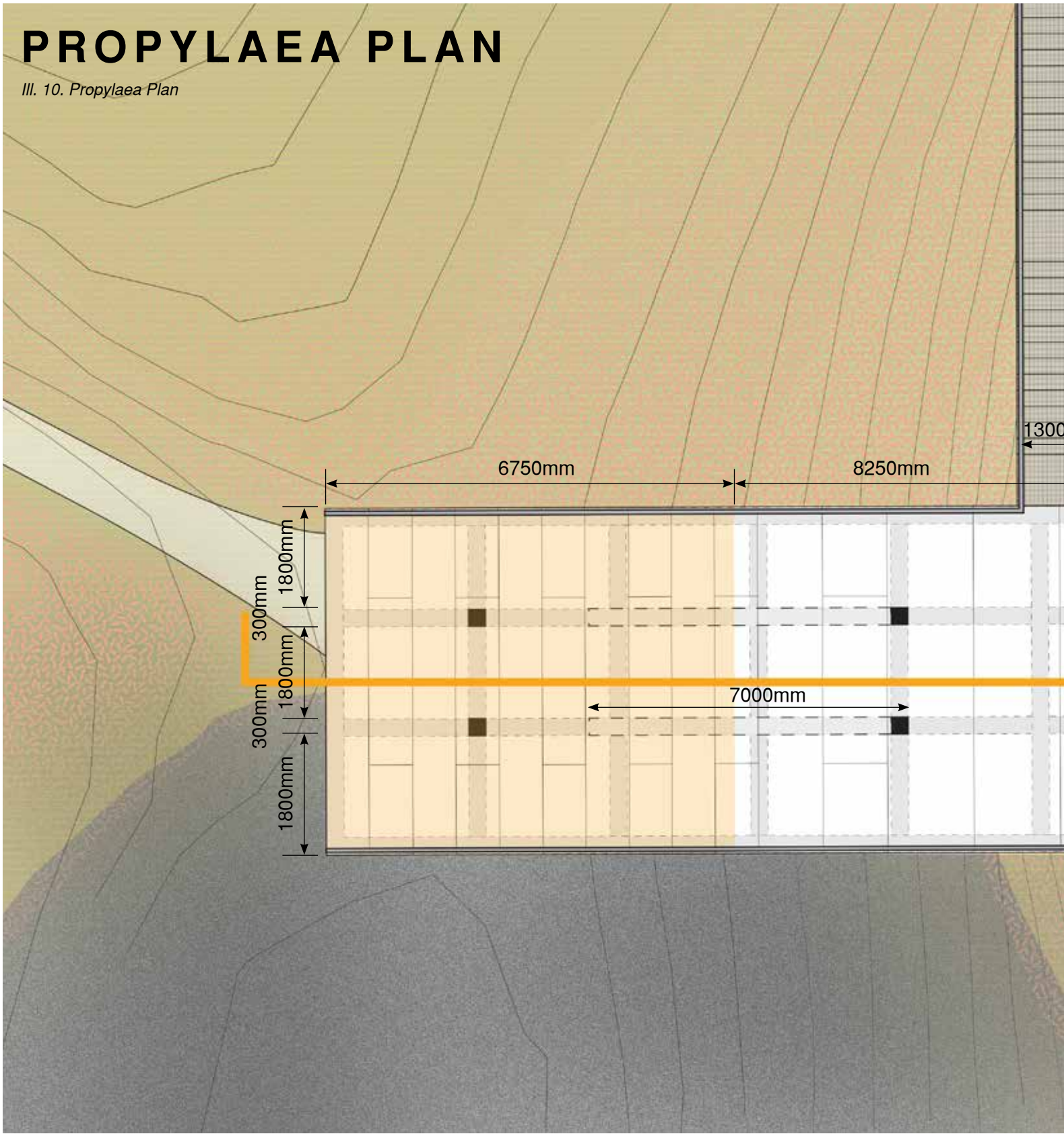
The terrain on the southeast side is too steep and rugged for a footpath to be carved out; cascading metal stairs are instead required to scale the 80m elevation. The series of steps which will escort visitors down to the river starts on the left side of the platform. The stairs are steel, both to resist the at-times-harsh climate, and to allow visitors to see through its frame to the bluffs below and maintain a visual connection with the site (see Ill.12. and 13.).

For a majority of the descent, the stairs will be place as close to the cliff-face as possible, encouraging the visitor to reach out and grip Stóra-Dímon' stoney façade as they descend towards the scene of the 'battle' waiting below. On the east side, the iron railing introduced at the Propylaea continues from the platform down to the river.

Halfway down the cliff, 40m above the river, the stairs extend to form a platform measuring 1.5m by 4m. It is there to provide a moment of reprieve from the demanding descent—acting as an extended landing—as well as to symbolize Skarphedin's pause to retie his shoe after comes undone. At this point in the chapter, his brothers race ahead of him to engage in battle. To reflect this elevated change of pace, the steps morph from their traditional formation to those of equestrian stairs found throughout Europe. The longer treads—70 centimeters; the length of an average stride—and their 5 degree downward cant work together to encourage a more rapid pace from visitors, while maintaining a degree of safety in the descent towards the river (see Ill.14.).

PROPYLAEA PLAN

Ill. 10. Propylaea Plan



LEGEND

1m

1:100 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

PROPYLAEA SECTION

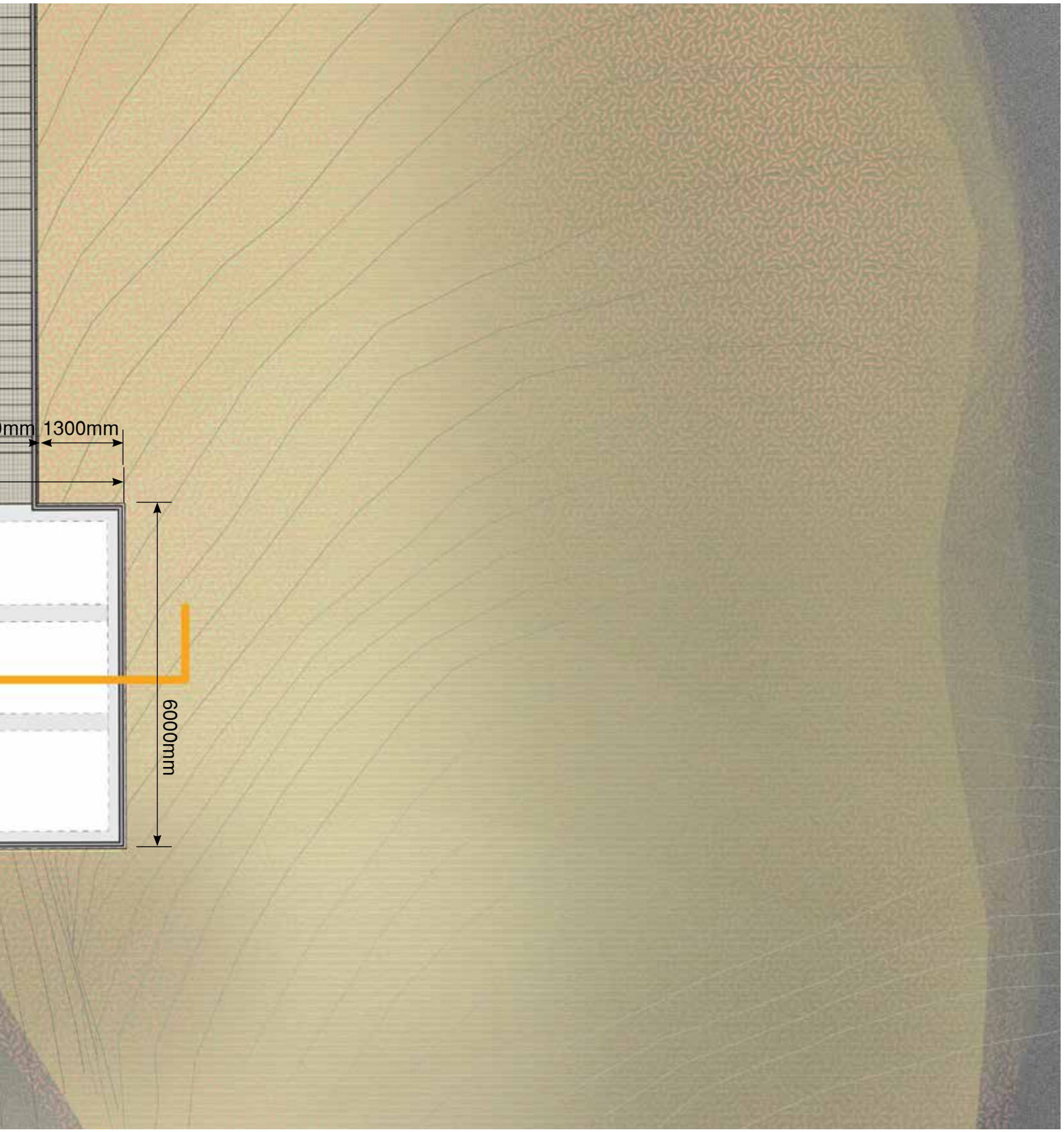
PATH ON GROUND

STAIR COLUMNS

MID-RISE GRASSES

LOW GRASSES

EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

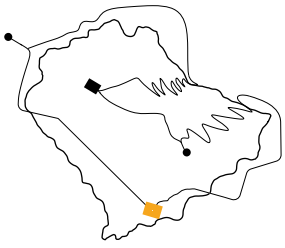


WILD FLOWERS

SUBSTRUCTURE

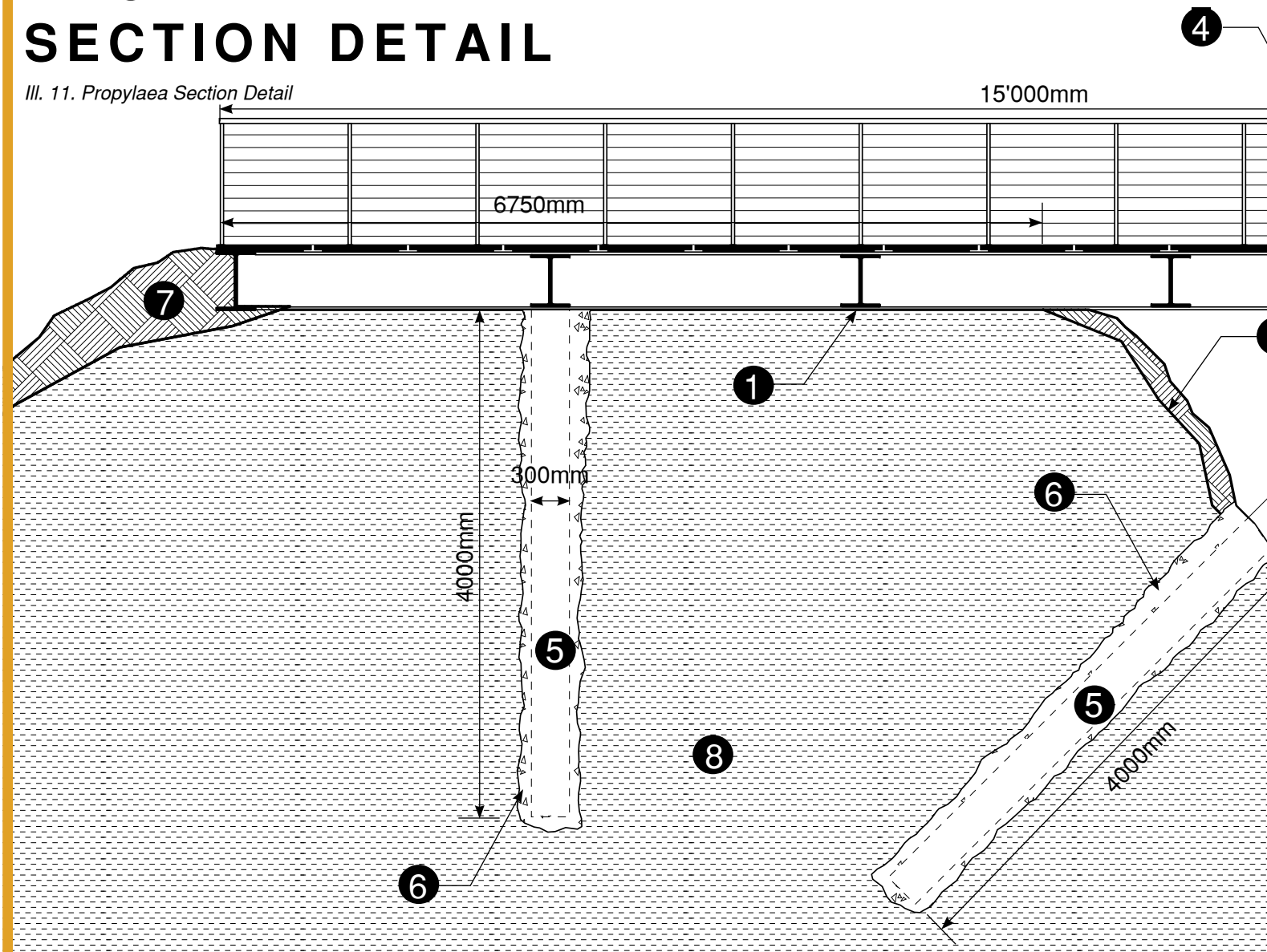
DIAGRONAL SUPPORT COLUMNS

AREA RESTING ON GROUND



PROPYLAEA
SECTION DETAIL

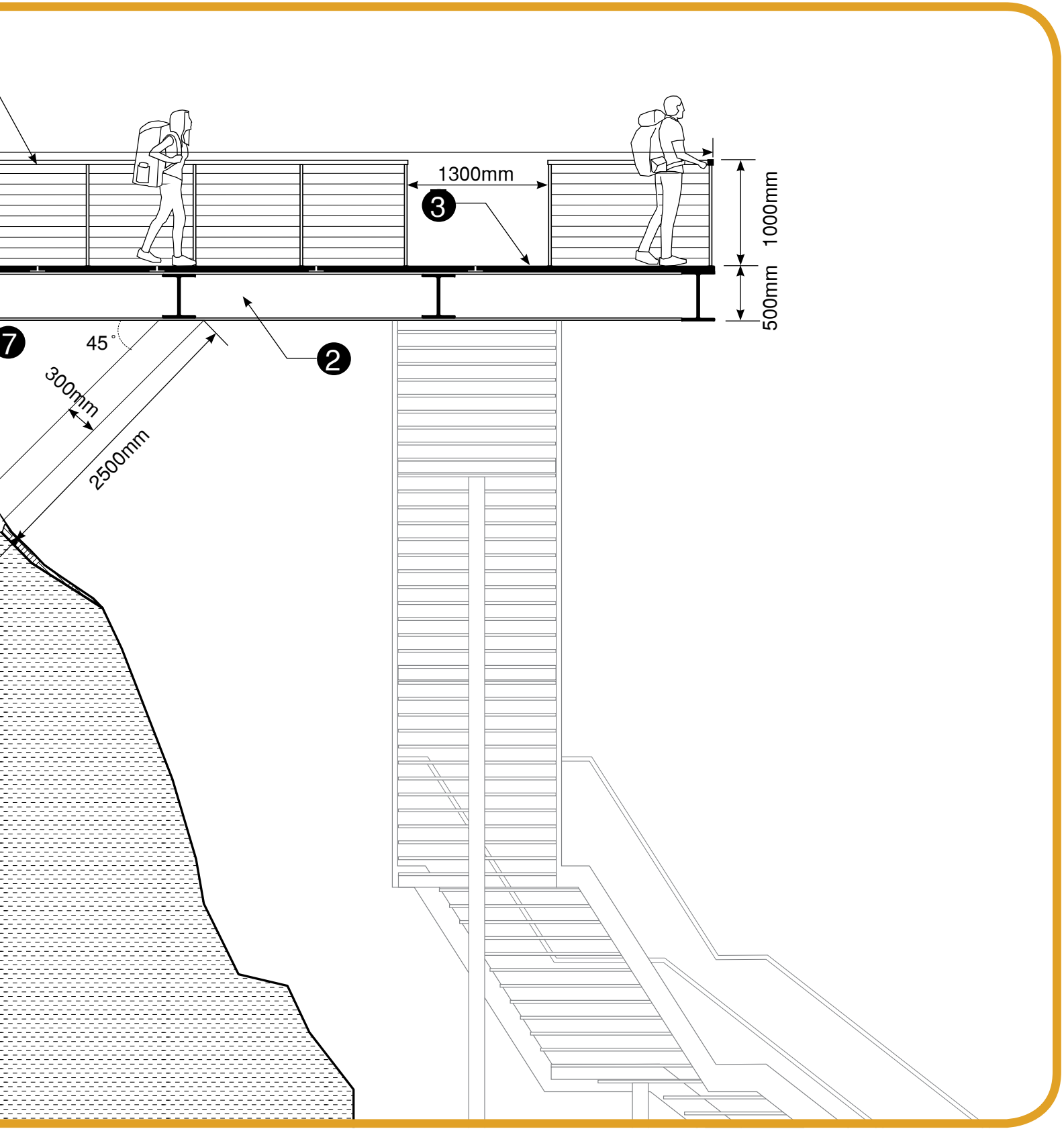
Ill. 11. Propylaea Section Detail



LEGEND

1:50 | 1m

1. 300mm x 400mm WIDE FLANGE BEAMS, o.c. 1650mm
2. 300mm x 450mm WIDE FLANGE BEAMS FOR OUTSIDE FRAME
3. 38mm THICK BASALT PAVERS ON STEEL TRACKS
4. 40mm IRON HANDRAIL WITH THREADED STEEL CABLE

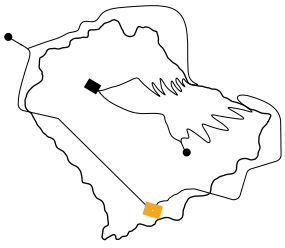


5 4000mm DEEP, SHALLOW PILE FOUNDATION

6 POURED CONCRETE INFILL

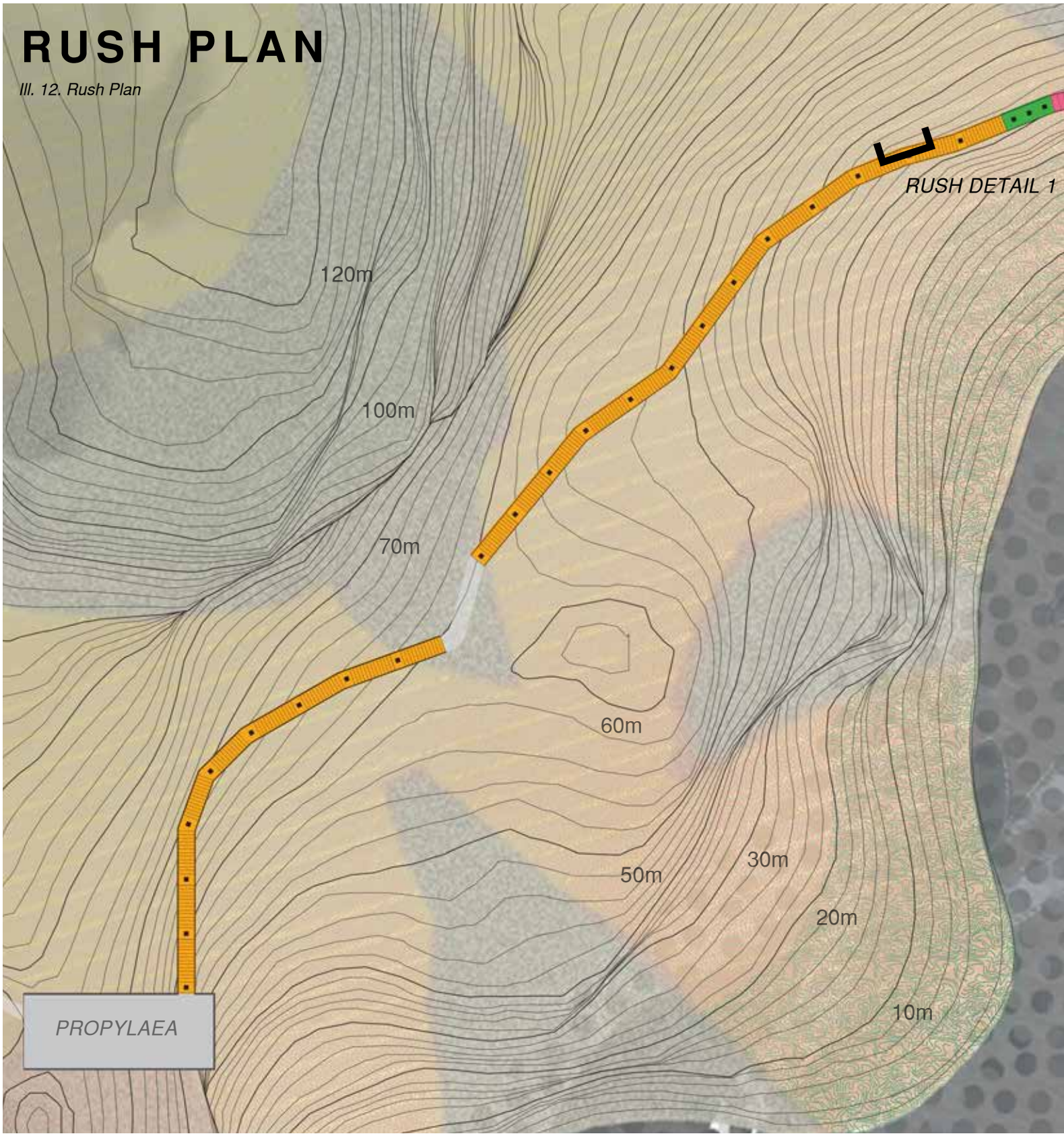
7 SOIL

8 BEDROCK



RUSH PLAN

Ill. 12. Rush Plan



LEGEND

5m

1: 400 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

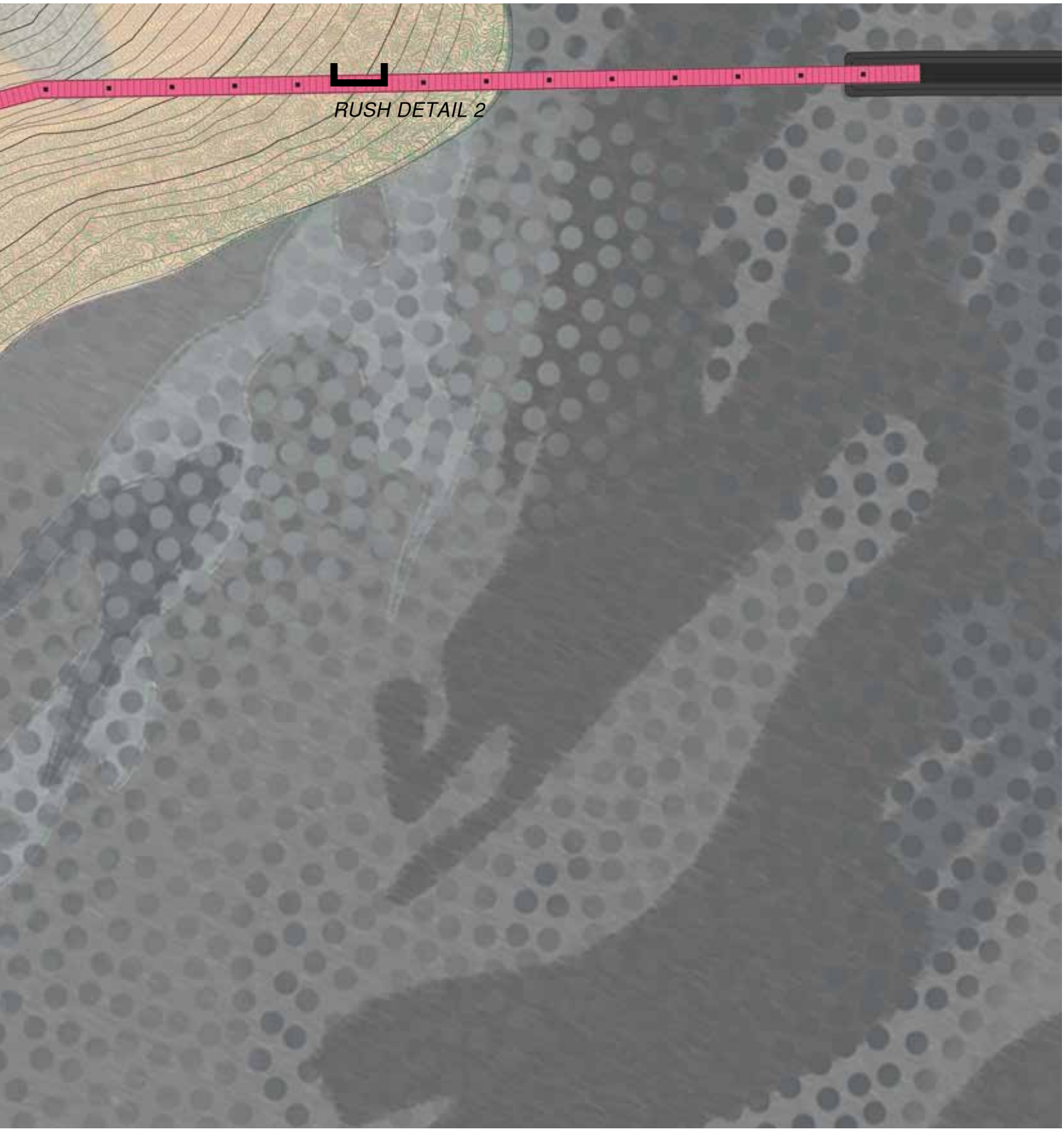
TOTAL LENGTH OF THE RUSH : 181m

REGULAR STAIRS. RUN 4.24m
LENGTH OF REG. STAIRS : 95.8m

PATH ON GROUND

PLATFORM 4.0m X 1.5m

CANTED STAIRS RUN 5.0m
LENGTH OF CANTED STAIRS : 73.8m



STAIR COLUMNS

MID-RISE GRASSES

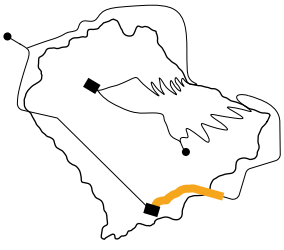
LOW GRASSES

EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

RIVERBED

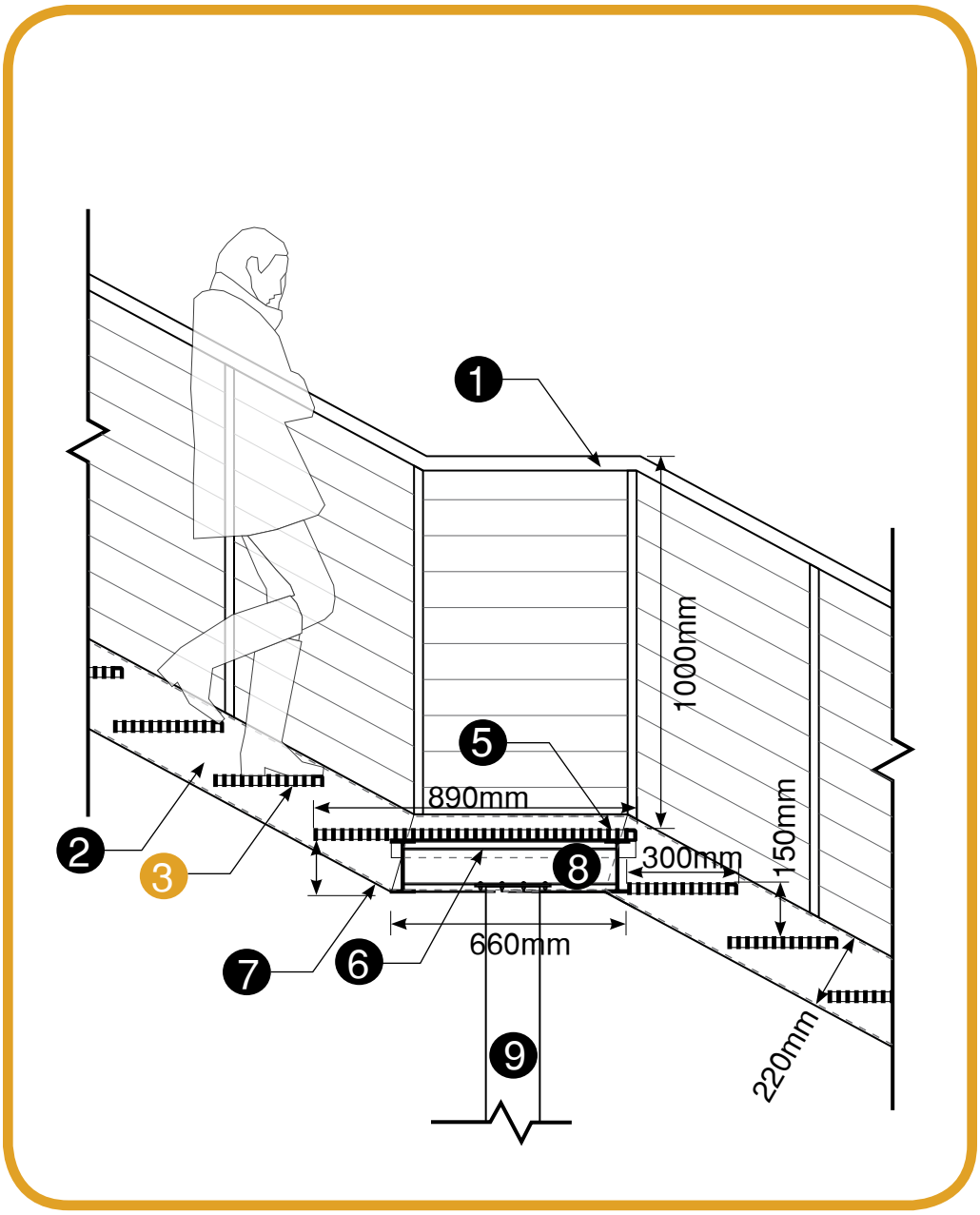
WILD FLOWERS

MOSSES



THE RUSH DETAILS - REGULAR & CANTED

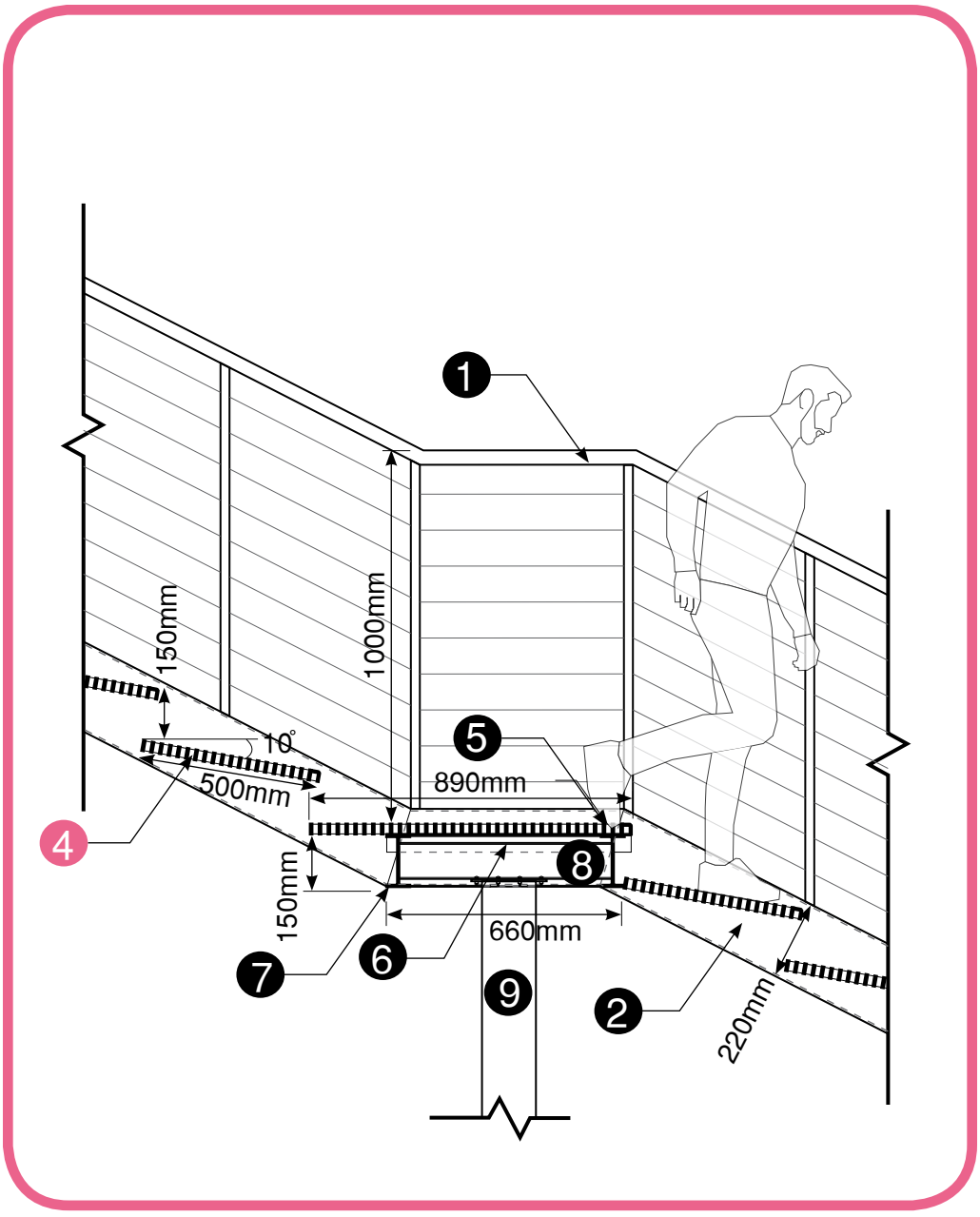
Ill. 13. Rush Stair Detail 1 (Left)
Ill. 14. Rush Stair Detail 2 (Right)



LEGEND

1:20 1m

1. 40mm IRON HANDRAIL, WITH THREADED STEEL CABLE
2. 10mm x 220mm STRINGER
3. 300mm x 1500mm x 27mm METAL GRATE TREAD, 0 DEGREE SLANT
4. 500mm x 1500mm x 27mm METAL GRATE TREAD, 10 DEGREE SLANT



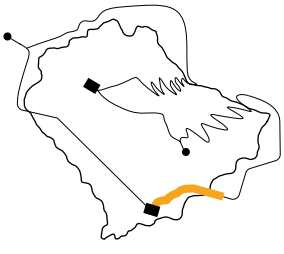
5 metal grate PLATFORM

6 50mm x 35mm STEEL ANGLE TREAD SUPPORT

7 150mm x 75mm WIDE FLANGE BEAMS

8 100mm x 100mm HSS MID-SPAN SUPPORT

9 150mm x 150mm HSS COLUMN, BOLTED



TORRENT

The stairs end at the river, and its path continues onto a jetty made of crushed basalt that rises 2m above the riverbed, echoing the same language as the embankments bracketing either side of Stóra-Dímon. Sectionally, the jetty is trapezoidal whose top surface—a continuation of the path—is 1.5m wide; wide enough for one person to comfortably walk along its length without the presence of handrails.

Like the Furrow which submerges the visitor in a trench, the Torrent also presents a singular experience on the site; nowhere else does the visitor walk atop a river. These individually distinctive, sensorial installations share a commonality in that they both use very natural, very local materials: the Furrow—which finds itself within the grassy slope—is made solely from turf blocks cut to form the trench; the Torrent—which is on the black sand riverbed—is made entirely out of basalt gravel and pavers. By slightly modifying the existing landscape, I am able to tease out the narratives of the landscape and curate an experience that connects the visitors with the land.

The overall trajectory of this segment takes the visitors east, out onto the river and then northwards along Stóra-Dímon to connect to the northern dyke. Along the procession, the path bends approximately 90˚three times in 30m long arches. At each bend, the path both widens and the surface texture changes from a crushed form to something more monolithic and solid. The change in area—spatially representing the area of the men engaged in conflict—and material rendering—the polished finish of the pavers mimicking the sheen of the ice—represents the battles as described in Chapter 92 (see Ill.15.).

The jetty initially guides the visitor eastward 120m across the river, directing them to the tempestuous Eyjafjallajökull on the other side of the river. The first bend embodies the battle between Skarphedin and Thráin, symbolic of the spatial area for the two men's encounter. Here, the path widens to 3m; wide enough for two people to comfortably occupy. Skarphedin defeats Thráin in this battle by speeding across the ice and striking him down with his axe in one blow. The curve redirects the visitors northwards, changing the line of sight from the volcano to the bluffs of Stóra-Dímon, and redirecting the story to the next conflict on the ice.

The second battle that ensued in the Saga was between Grím and Helgi, and Hrapp. Much like the first bend, the crushed form of the basalt is once again replaced by solid pavers; this time 4.5m wide to represent the three men engaged in this conflict. Working in tandem, brothers Grím and Helgi kill Hrapp out on the ice and with the end of the conflict, the path changes direction once more, this time pointing directly up the river to the source at Thorsmork (see Ill.16.).

The final battle is between Kári and Tjorvi where Kári easily cuts his oponent down. For the last time, the surface changes from crushed to solid and the width is 3m, the same as the bend representing Skarphedin and Thráin's fight. This final bend in the course directs the visitors northwest around the side of the mountain to meet the mountain on the northeast corner.

By putting people purposefully on the river, their role in the landscape once again changes from observer to actor. By tracing the route on the Markarfljót River, visitors re-enact the battles that occurred there as described in Njál's Saga. Unlike the segment leading up to the Furrow and the Propylaea, where the company they are travelling with are portrayed as the "brothers", on the "ice" above the turbulent river, these individuals have now become the villains, embodying Thráin, Hrapp, or Tjorvi. But it is not just on the river that the visitors have taken on new roles; while they may see themselves as protagonists—the Njálssons—in their own story out on the water, the people further behind on the path view them as the party waiting to be ambushed. And if the people on the river hear the echoing footsteps from the mountain, turn around and look up to the platform perched amongst the crags, they will enact another crucial scene to the chapter, the beginning of the ambush. Out on the Markarfljót River, the narratives of the Saga converge and for a singular moment, the visitor is both the protagonist and the antagonist. The uniqueness of this episode is exemplified by the rare opportunity presented by walking on a river in a valley of active volcanoes.

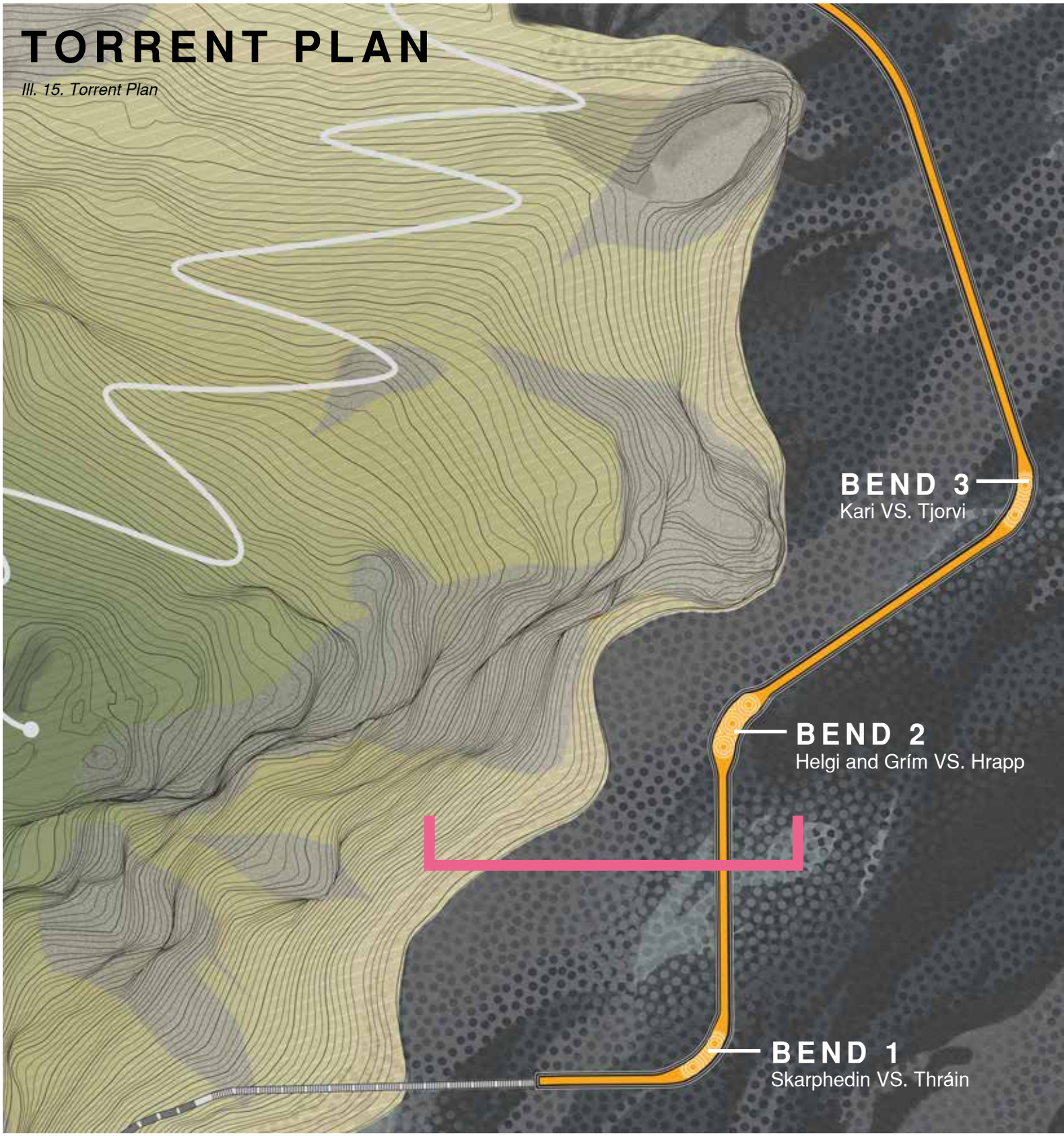
REWARD

On either end of the northern face of Stóra-Dímon—that faces the heath—there are the cliffs and crags. Most of the lower half of the face between the two bluffs is covered by the same beflowered turf as the southern face. The rock of the upper portion is largely exposed due to its acute steepness. As the path from the river turns the corner, it connects with the northern slope in the first patch of turf. The path zig-zags back and forth between the eastern crags and the exposed rock as it ascends to the summit of the mountain. The path is neither deliberately scored out of the earth, nor built up. It is an impression made in the ground by the simple act of treading along the same patch of land—a phenomenon which has brought numerous trails the world over into the existence.

Standing amongst the knee-high grass, the Markarfljót River can be traced from Thorsmork all the way to the Ocean. The volcanoes Eyjajfallajökull and Katla rise ominously across the river in their glacier-capped glory. One can see the sea of swirling mosses competing against the incoming purple haze of the lupines. This location is the Reward—the ultimate panorama of the entire valley. From this sublime vista atop Stóra-Dímon, visitors can, for the first time, perceive the totality of the landscape. The summit lacks any physical interventions because it is complete in and of itself (see Fig.33., 34., 35., and 36.).

TORRENT PLAN

Ill. 15. Torrent Plan



LEGEND

5m

1:1000 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

THE TORRENT
LENGTH OF TORRENT : 362m

PATH ON GROUND

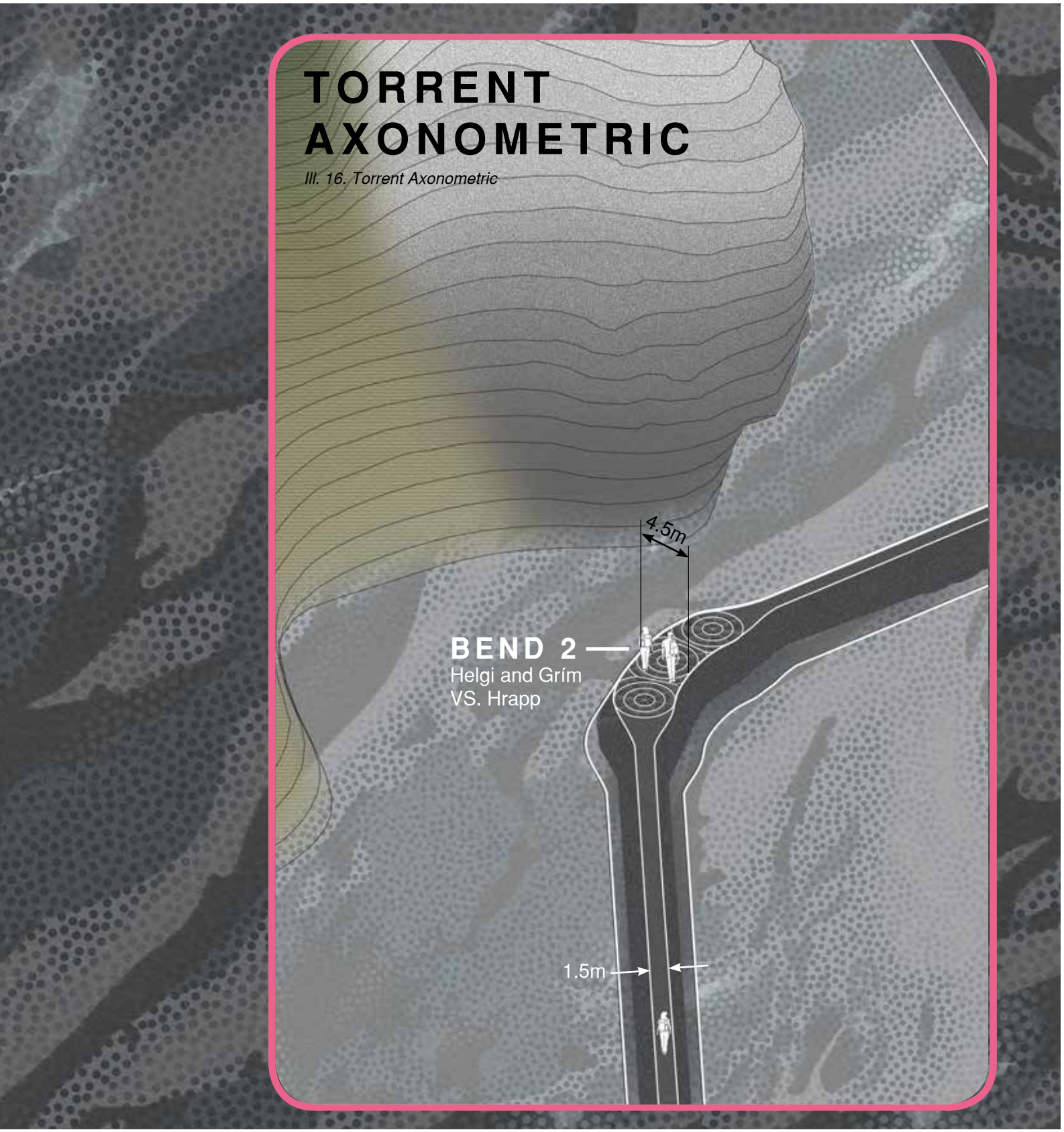
TORRENT SECTION LINE

MID-RISE GRASSES

TALL GRASSES

TORRENT AXONOMETRIC

Ill. 16. Torrent Axonometric



LEGEND

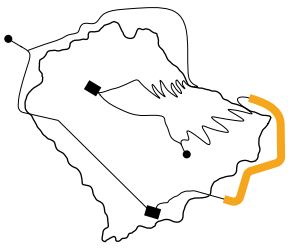
LOW GRASSES

EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

RIVERBED

1:400 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

5m



REWARD PHOTOS AND PANORAMA

Figs. 33 - 36.

REWARD IN NOVEMBER

North

East

REWARD IN JUNE

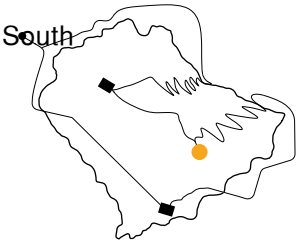
North

Since there are no design interventions at this location, I instead am providing photos from both November (top row) and June (bottom row).

South

East

South



HERALD

Continuing northwest along the humped back of Stóra-Dímon form the Reward, the mountain humps once more before descending 80m down to a large grassy plateau that extends to the top of the northern bluffs. Birds climb from the cliff below and perform aerial aerobatics, singing their unique songs. During the summer visit, small flocks of sheep grazed on this plateau, mowing the grass down to the height of a typical lawn.

Perched on this ridge is another platform 10m by 4m. Featuring the same construction as the Propylaea, the Herald is also meant to stage the visitors and amplify their footfalls. The platform itself is oriented to form the end of the visual axis started by the Compass below (see Ill.17.). While the visual cue was originally from the Compass to the Herald as a means of pulling the visitors onto the site, the amplified footsteps in this scenario are also meant to draw the visitor's attention from the Compass up to the mountain. Now that they have reached the goal, their roles have now reversed. Instead of seeing where they want to go, they can now look upon the same landscape with a renewed appreciation after having gone through the rest of the curated circuit.

HOVER

Down the grassy slope on the northern side, an elevated pathway emerges to cross the heath. North of this pathway is a large marsh. I was not able to venture very far into the marsh as I sank in knee-deep watery mud. But living in this heath was a beautiful bounty of mosses—bigger than those present on the south side—flowers, and even some small shrubs. Many specific conditions had to align at this very location for such a lush and diverse variety of flora to thrive and flourish as it was. As such, the display of this delicate and rare microcosm had to be balanced with its protection and preservation. An elevated pathway would delicately circumvent the sensitive situation below, while at the same time allowing the visitor to engage with the environment.

Only half a meter above the datum line of the marsh, the track projects north and in a big, gentle arc, it curves left around the west side of Stóra-Dímon. Because the path is elevated only half a meter above the ground, and the vegetation grows a lot taller on this side of Stóra-Dímon, the supports underneath are hidden, creating the illusion of a floating boardwalk, exemplary of the light touch necessary in this delicate environment.

An iron frame which is laterally braced every 3 meters runs parallel along the 2m wide route—comfortable for two people. Wide-flange columns driven into the earth are placed centrally under the lateral supports to elevate the track. A metal grate—which allows for drainage—supporting a layer of crushed basalt runs continuously between the frames.

Crushed basalt is by this point, an established material; it is used extensively in other parts of the circuit, and is also a generally common material in Iceland. The tactile and auditory stimulus from walking over the gravel connect the visitor back to the foundation of the island (see Ill.18.).

The 210m long arch pulls 30m away from the side of the mountain, allowing the visitor to view the horizon as well as see Stóra-Dímon in its totality (see Ill.19.). Only in one other location—The Compass—does the path grant the visitor a point whereby the mountain may be seen in the context of the landscape. As described, the track is a smooth arc that does not zig zag across the heath. By keeping the form simple, it does not distract the visitor; the simple arrangement lets the visitor focus on the flora below their feet and on the horizon.

HUGIN AND MUNINN

The Hover circles around the edge to the cliffs where knolls 2-3 meters tall roll along the bottom. While the summits of the knolls present solid ground on which to walk, their valleys are marshier. The elevated Hover continues here, bridging between the crests of the knolls (see Ill.21.). The bluffs reveal that the mountain is built from two distinct geological formations. On the bottom half, extruded hexagonal columns of basalt weave their way up the side, while above, the gnarled texture of the pillow lava falls in drapes atop the prismatic structure below.

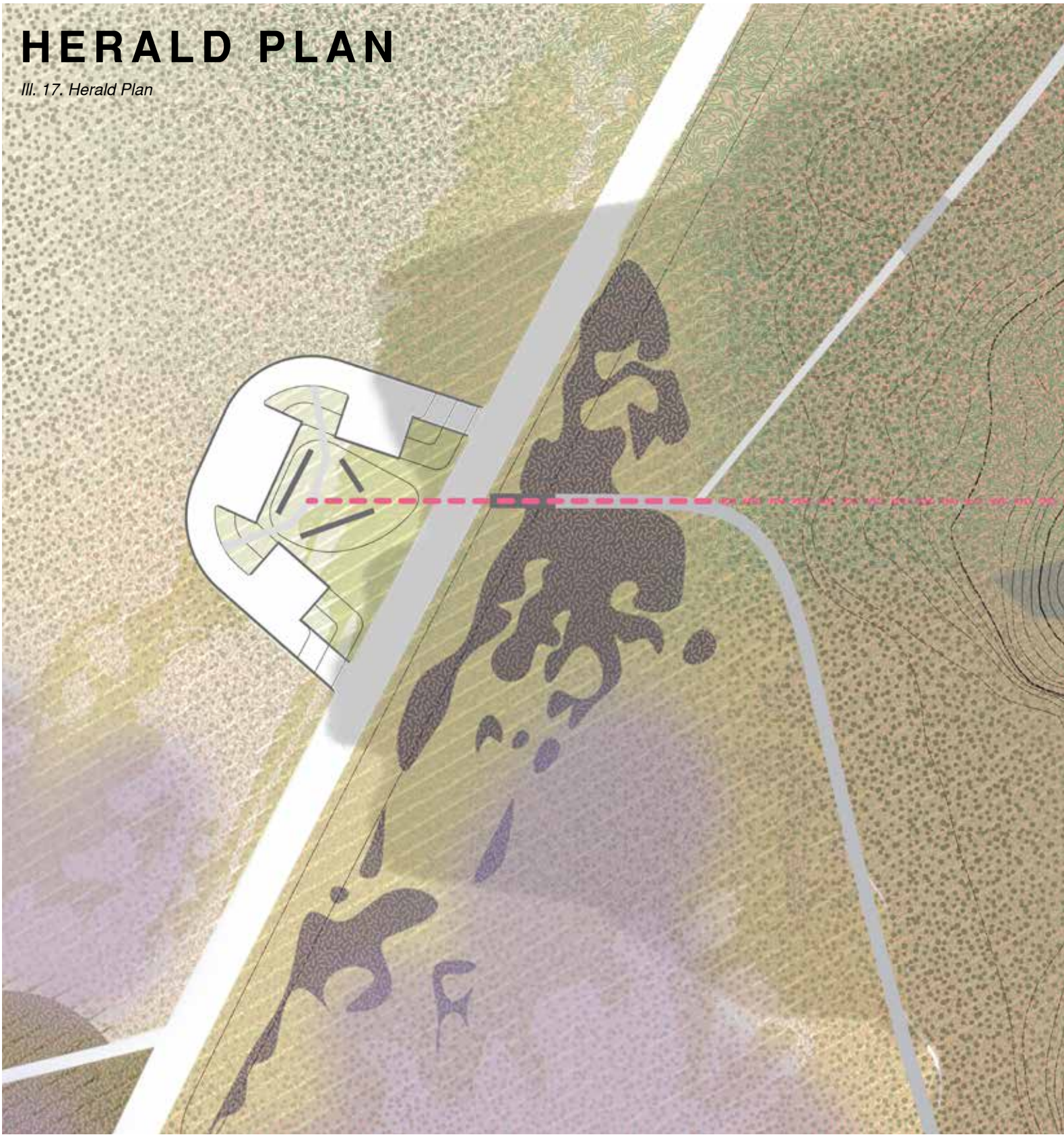
Amongst the crevices created by the dynamic composition of the bluffs, many species of birds have built their nests. Swooping around the cliff face, the visitor can readily identify ravens as well as bumbling northern fulmars and humble whimbrels and snipes. During the summer visit, I even spotted a cluster of sheep that had scaled the rugged surface to graze on the lone patches of grass that stubbornly clung to the bluff.

Over the last knoll, the path constricts to 1.2m in width. Neatly and discreetly, the trail returns to the paved axis between the Compass and the Herald. Thinner and by this point simply a worn path in the ground, the oncoming visitors will hopefully be able to read the context clues—the difference in surface texturing, the flatter topography, the width of the paths—and follow the wider, more grandiose path. Returning to their vehicles, the visitors must cross the Resonate once more, ringing it once more, and once more bringing their awareness to the here and now (see Ill.20.).

In Norse mythology—which was the main religion in Iceland until the conversion to Christianity in the year 1000 AD—the Norse god Odin, god of wisdom and knowledge, had two pet ravens named Hugin and Muninn. Each night before he went to sleep, he would release the two ravens to recount to him everything that had happened that day. In the morning, the two ravens would repeat to Odin what they had learned. With this final segment in the circuit, after having travelled around Stóra-Dímon, having learned and enacted Njál's Saga, after being introduced to the landscape and the horizon, the flora, the fauna, and the geology, the visitor returned once more to the beginning with a new understanding and perception of the landscape.

HERALD PLAN

Ill. 17. Herald Plan



LEGEND

5m

1:800 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

THE HERALD

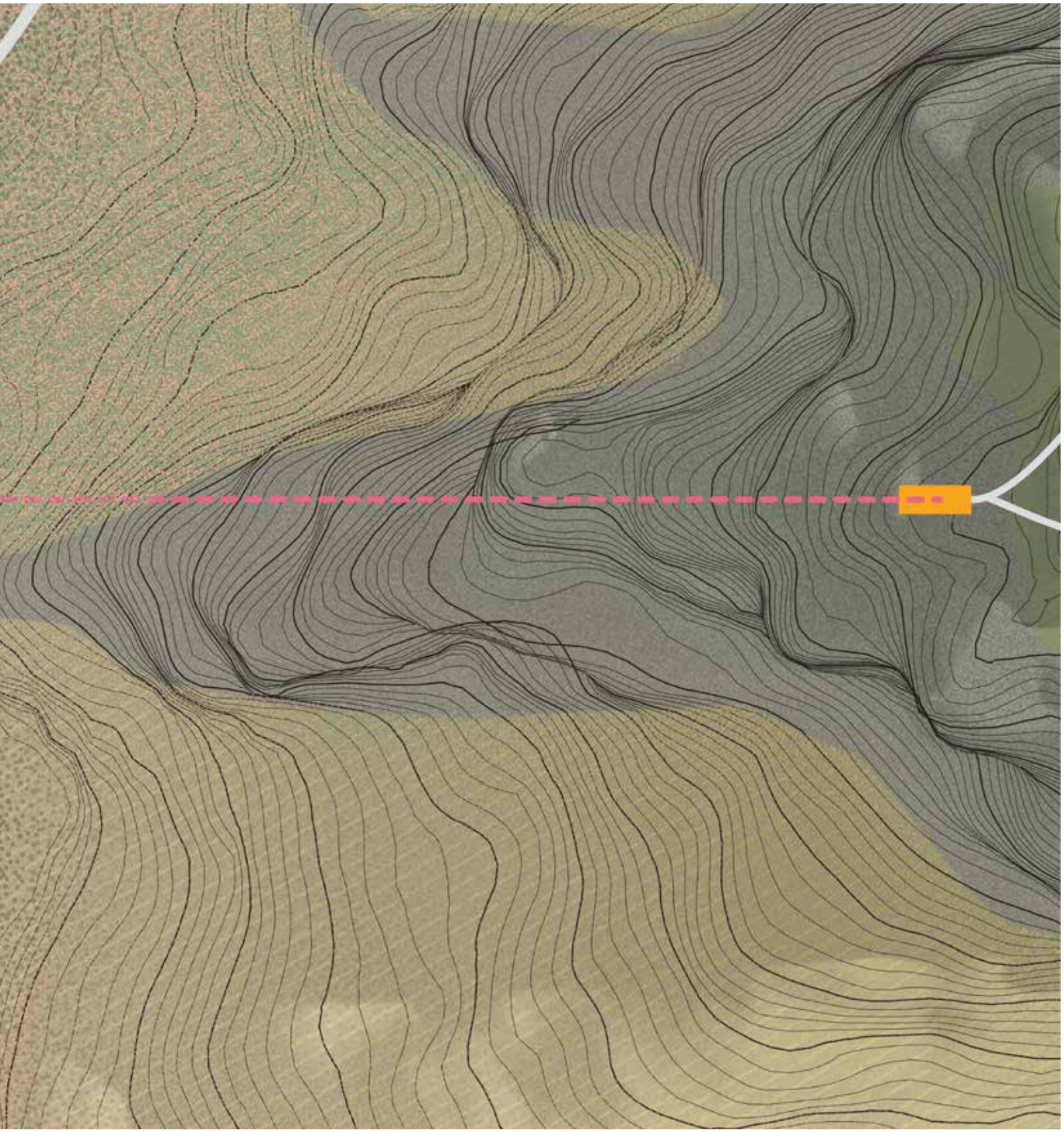
PATH ON GROUND

VISUAL AXIS LINE

WILD FLOWERS

MOSSES

ALASKAN LUPINES



MARSH

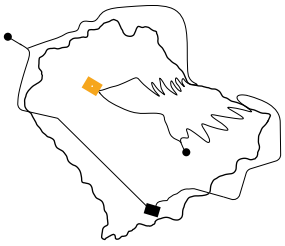
EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

GRAVEL

LOW GRASSES

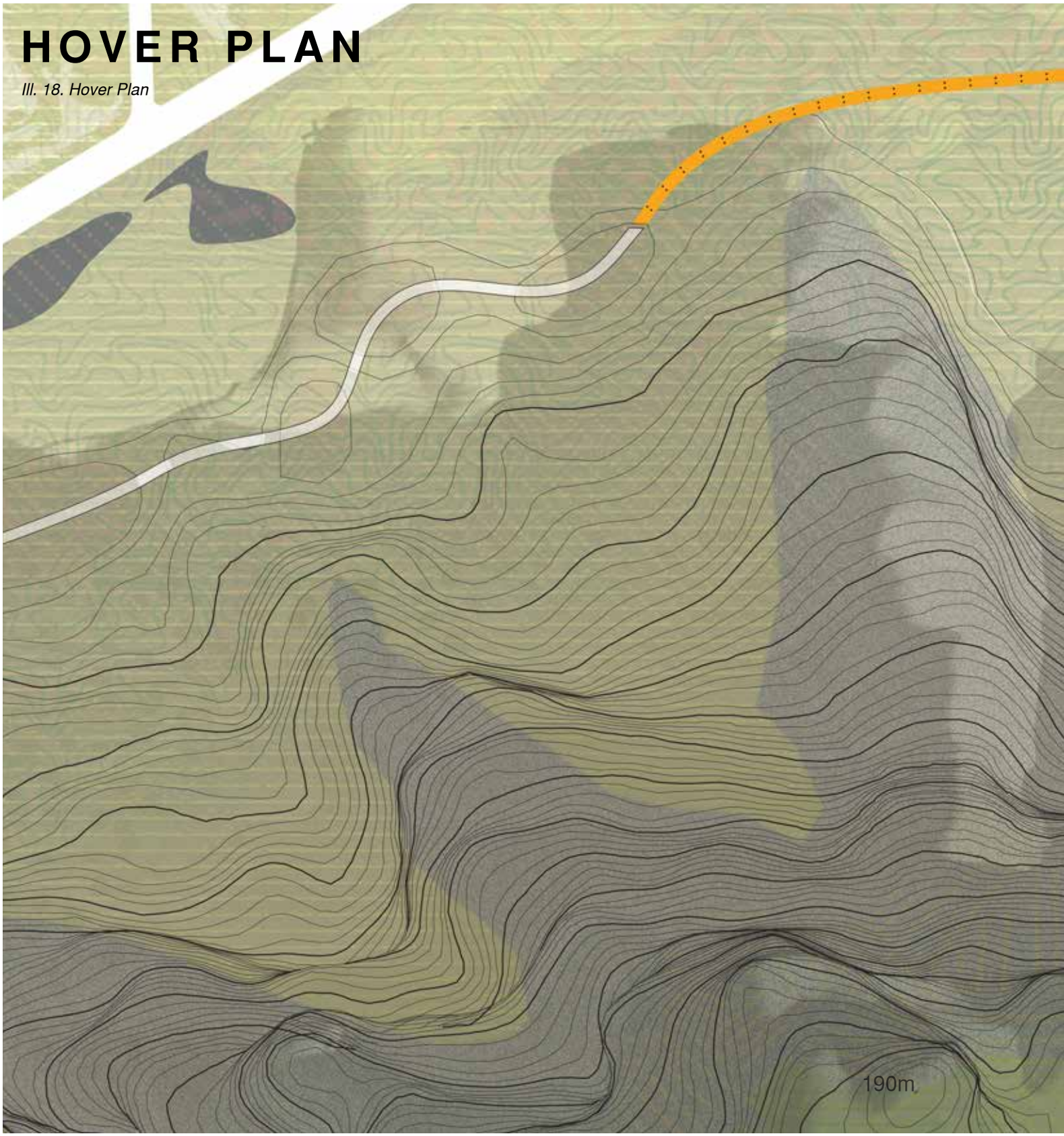
MID-RISE GRASSES

TALL GRASSES



HOVER PLAN

Ill. 18. Hover Plan



LEGEND

5m

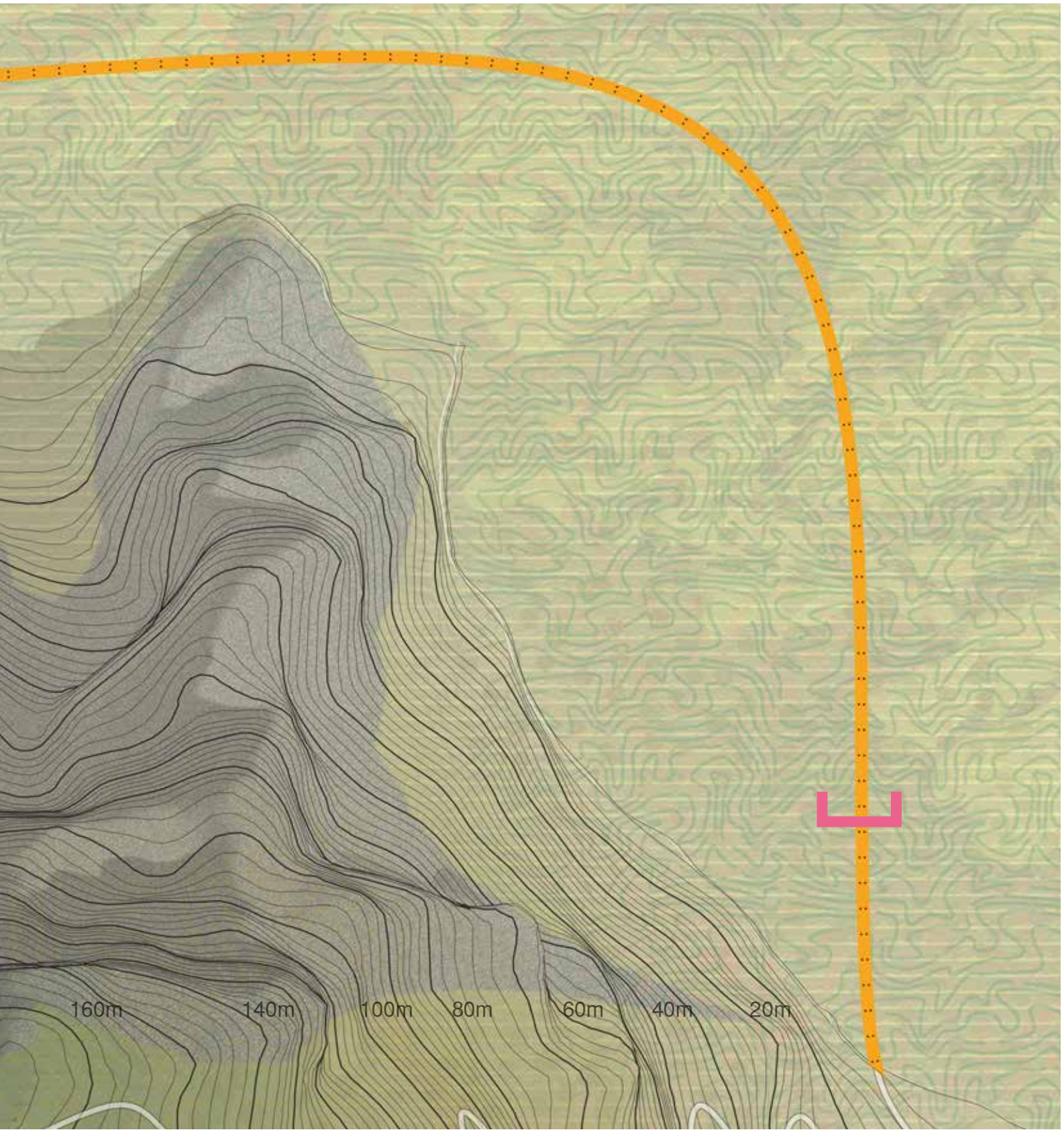
1:800 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

ELEVATED PATH "HOVER"
TOTAL LENGTH OF HOVER : 343M

PATH ON GROUND

HOVER SUPPORT COLUMNS

HOVER SECTION LINE



MARSH

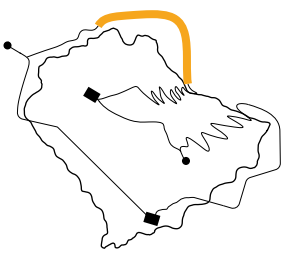
EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

GRAVEL

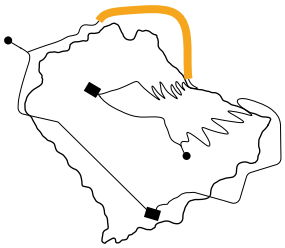
LOW GRASSES

MID-RISE GRASSES

TALL GRASSES



HOVER SECTION DETAIL

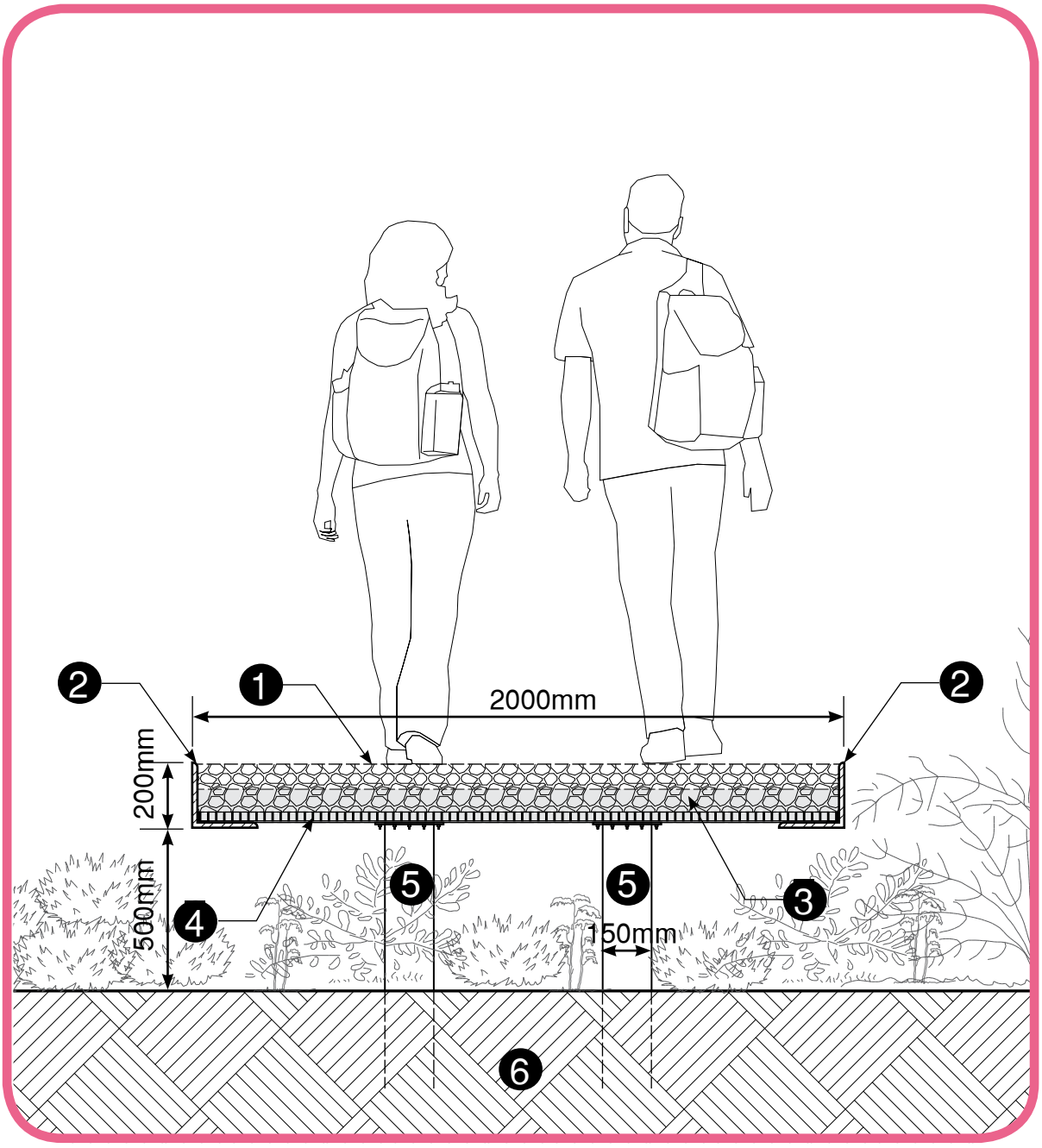


Ill. 19. Hover Section Detail

LEGEND

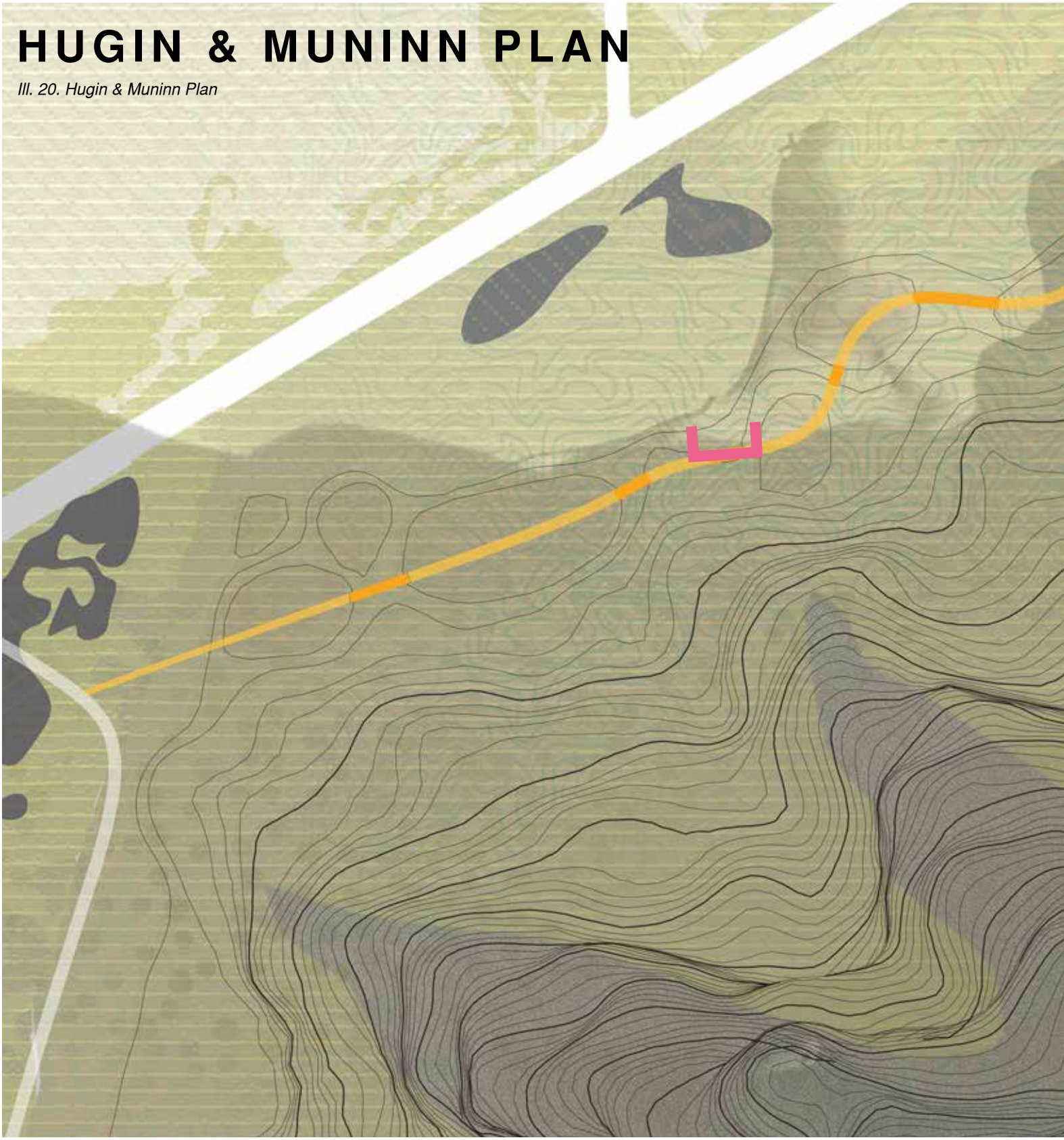
1:10 | 1m

1. 150mm CRUSHED BASALT
2. 200mm x 200mm STEEL ANGLE
3. 100mm x 100mm HSS LATERAL SUPPORT BEAM, o.c. 2000mm
4. WELDED METAL GRATE, SUPPORTED BY 35mm X 30mm STEEL ANGLE
5. 150mm x 150mm HSS MINIATURE PILES, BOLTED
6. UNDISTURBED SOIL



HUGIN & MUNINN PLAN

Ill. 20. Hugin & Muninn Plan



LEGEND

5m

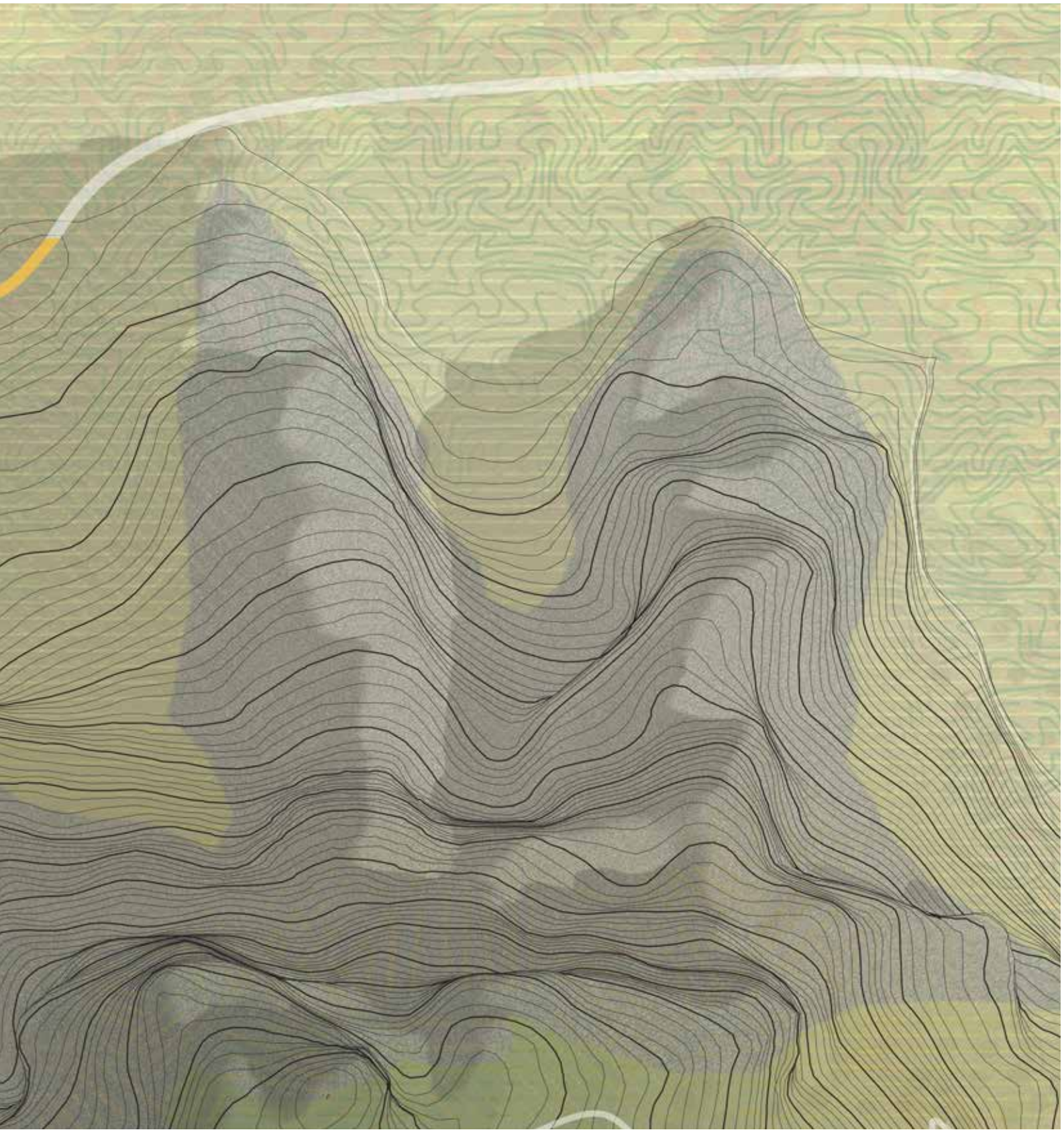
1:800 | NORTH | TOPO LINES EVERY 2M

HUGIN & MUNINN ON-GROUND ROUTE

PATH ON GROUND

HUGIN & MUNINN ELEVATED ROUTE
TOTAL LENGTH OF HOVER : 185m

HUGIN & MUNINN SECTION LINE



MARSH

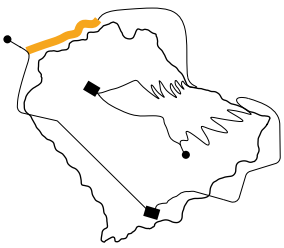
EXPOSED CLIFF FACE

GRAVEL

LOW GRASSES

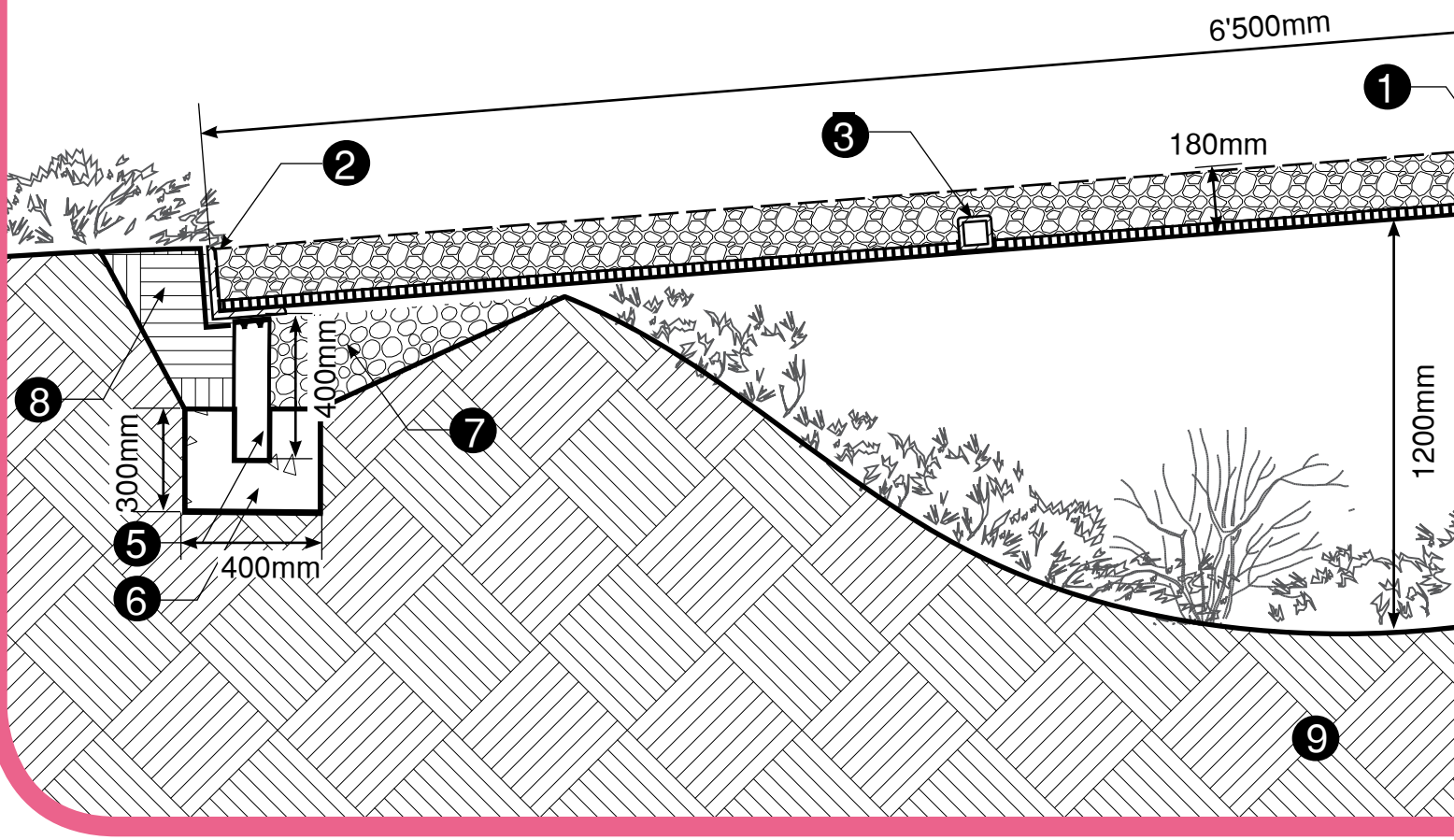
MID-RISE GRASSES

TALL GRASSES



HUGIN & MUNINN SECTION DETAIL

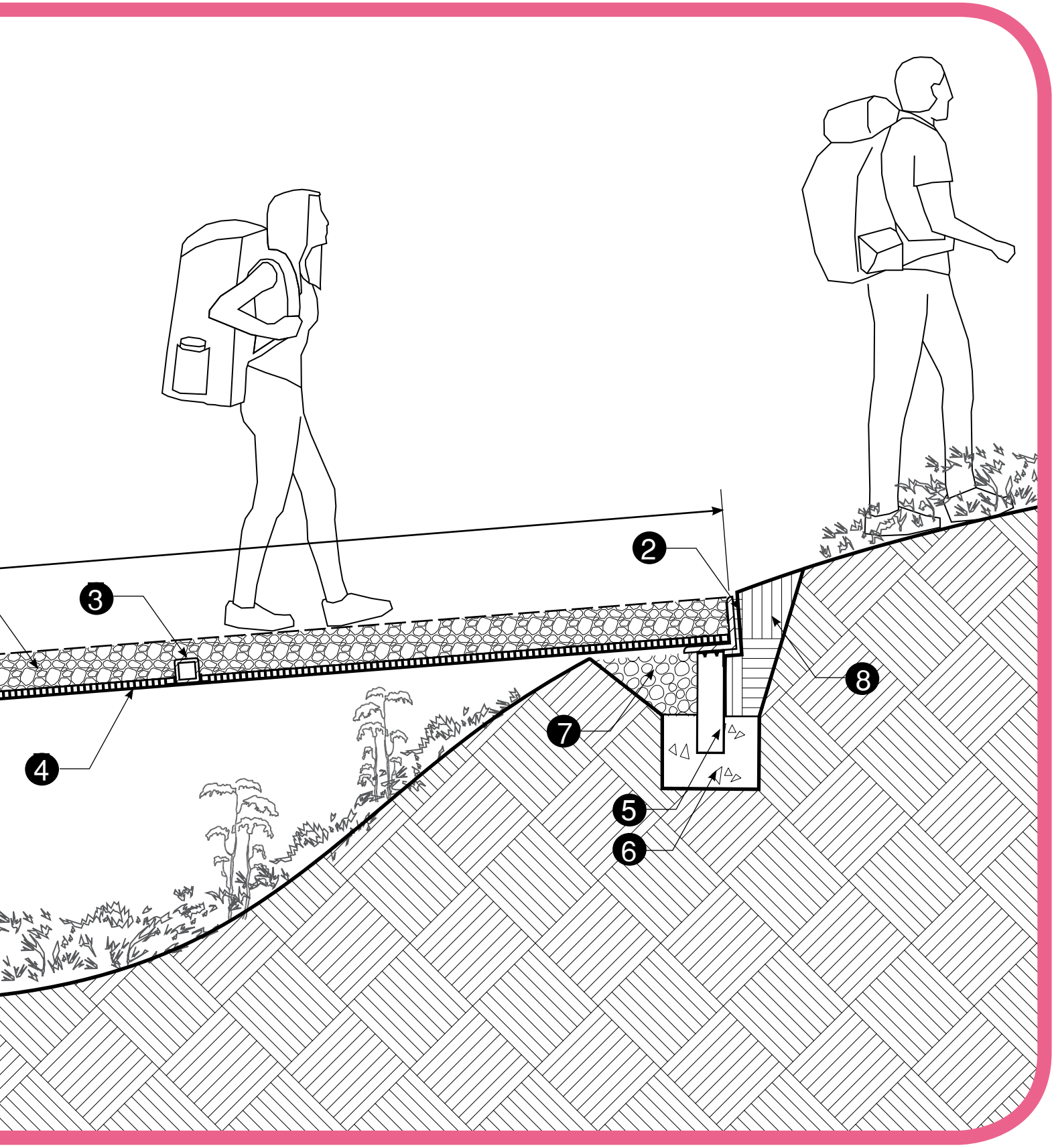
Ill. 21. Hugin & Muninn Section Detail



LEGEND

1:20 | 1m

1. 150mm CRUSHED BASALT
2. 200mm x 200mm STEEL ANGLE
3. 100mm x 100mm HSS LATERAL SUPPORT BEAM, o.c. 2000mm
4. WELDED METAL GRATE, SUPPORTED BY 35mm X 30mm STEEL ANGLE



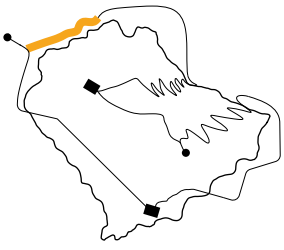
5 150mm x 150mm HSS COLUMN, BOLTED

6 400mm x 300mm CONCRETE FOOTING

7 PEA GRAVEL

8 UNDISTURBED SOIL

9 REPACKED SOIL



4.4 EXPLORATIONS IN REPRESENTATION

One of the joys of undertaking a thesis is the commensurate freedom of exploration. An area in which I espoused interest was the representation of landscapes. My only means of representation of Stóra-Dímon and my ideas were through the traditional mediums of photography and illustrations. While my photos did an excellent job of portraying the character of the site, the absence of typical landscape markers—such as trees and cars—made accurately judging the true scale of the landscape difficult, which in turn made the discussion of the development of the design difficult. The drawings were useful tools in precisely defining my interventions, but they could not properly instill the essence of the site, the genius loci. What I wanted was a means of representation that would both depict the character of the site; and the relationship between my interventions and narratives, and the land, all at the correct scale. The landscape was a physical, sensorial thing and, as I have explored through my design, so were the narratives embedded in the land. I also therefore required a medium that was tangible, and one that required physical engagement to embody the ideas and work developed over the course of the thesis.

Though my primary reason for being in Iceland that following trip was to test out my design on the site, it was also during this second trip that an idea came to mind for its representation. I was in Iceland for a total of 20 days, 15 of which were spent touring the entire country in a rented van. Starting in Reykjavík, I purposefully went clockwise around the island so that the last 3 days would be spent at Stóra-Dímon. I wanted to re-familiarize and re-acclimate myself with the land before revisiting my site. During the trip, I climbed mountains, scaled waterfalls, and trekked across black sand deserts—tracing various folklore and Sagas throughout the diverse landscape. The scenery was astonishing in its variety; its spectrum of vibrant colours—from the pitch black basalt, to red iron and mustard yellow sulfur deposits, and turquoise blue streams and lakes, to the amazing geological formations—such as the flat-faced fjords of the west, the perfectly cone-shaped mountains of Landmannalaugar in the centre, to the tumorous lava fields in the east. And all of which was steeped in stories of the Icelandic people.

The anticipation that I had been amassing from my time tracing stories in the landscape peaked as I rounded the southwest corner of Eyjafjallajökull and caught my first glimpse of Stóra-Dímon. It felt like I was reacquainting myself with an old friend or coming home after a long journey. At once, I was struck by the contradictory combination of feelings of stasis and transformation. The shape and profile of the mountain had not changed; neither had the crags, the cliffs, nor the mountains guarding

the perimeter of the plains. But the once mysterious yellow and black mountain that was hibernating in the mist of winter morphed into this picturesque, vibrant green one that stood out proudly amongst the purple lupines and tall grasses. The glacial caps of nearby volcanoes had receded, the wild flora rose eagerly to fill the resulting void, and the once dormant and dried mosses were now a lush, deep emerald colour, and dotted with almost imperceptible, tiny flowers (see Fig.37).

Approaching from the south, meter-tall lupines encroached upon both sides of the gravel road—their sweet aroma wafted into the van from the open windows. Their domain ended a kilometer from the site and in their absence, wild grasses speckled with wild flowers flourished and blanketed Stóra-Dímon. I could hear the distinctive bird calls from the van before I spotted them circling the northwest cliff face. Once I had parked the car, I noticed that the grass was not as tall as I expected it to be—instead of the hip-height I had experienced in the fall, the grass was uniformly mowed to just below knee height. The culprits I could see languidly trekking the top of the cliff, a small herd of sheep that had presumably taken up residence on the mountain. With the sun beating down on my back I began my work.

The first day, I hiked the existing path and documented everything I could, paying particular attention to the areas I couldn't access during the first trip; the knolls at the base of the northwest cliffs, the northern marsh, the Markarfljót River's edge and its southern embankment whence a better view of the eastern face could be had. These explorations were a means of reacquainting myself with the site in its then-present summer condition. I spent the second day testing my design by walking as much of the proposed route as I could—some of it being inaccessible, like the portion

Fig. 37. Stóra-Dímon from the Herald, looking back towards the Markarfljót River

on the river. While taking photographs and sketching along the way, I fine-tuned my design and recorded the experiences each segment had to offer. On the third day, having made my customary hike up Stóra-Dímon, I sat at the base of the mountain in a camping chair, sketching and thinking about how everything I experienced here on site would be best represented, when I was struck suddenly by an epiphany: a diorama. A curated, modelled scene within a self-contained box would best enable me to explore the layering of my proposed design and narratives on the site through the physical act of layering materiality and playing with a composition of depth.

I am interested in a mixing the styles of Marcel Duchamps Étant Donné (see Fig.38.), and Samuel van Hoogstraten's perspective box Views of the Interior of a Dutch House (see Fig.39.). While both works are at very different scales—the former being a one-to-one model hidden behind a mysterious wooden door and the latter being a 58 x 88 x 60.5cm painted wooden box—they both employ the same technique of constraining the artwork to a concealed space viewable only from a precise point defined by the peep hole. This singular, flattened point of view is ideal for the manipulation of perceived scale—a key element that I want to accurately display.

Fig. 38. Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . . (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .),* 1946-1966.

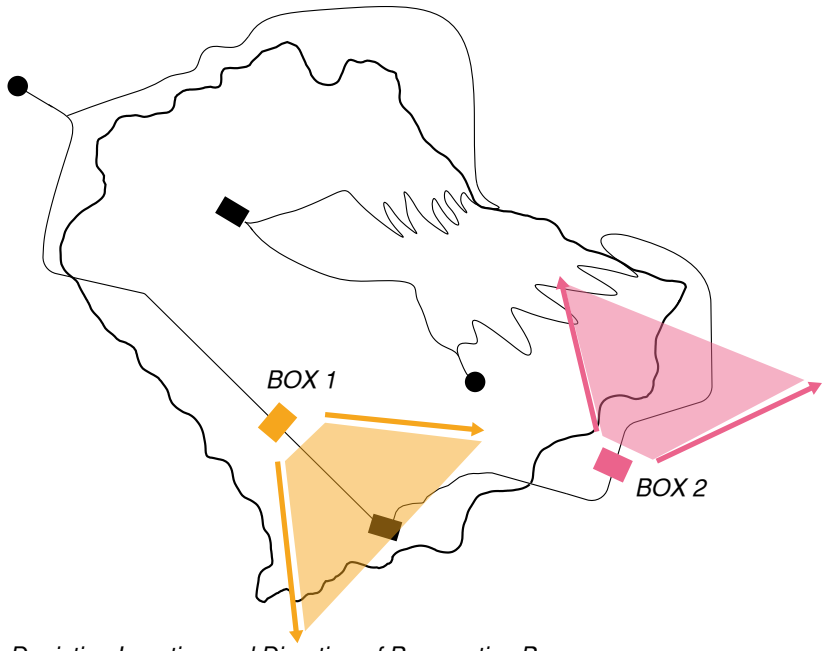
Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969-41-1.

Fig. 39. Samuel van Hoogstraten. *A Peepshow with Views of the Interior of a Dutch House.* About 1655-60.

What I envision from this is are two boxes—similar in scale and technique as van Hoogstraten—that depict, in sequence, a portion of the route from the Furrow to the Battle on the river (see Ill.22.). These smaller boxes, strategically placed amongst my drawings and photographs, will synthesize all aspects of a segment into one tangible object, capturing the genius loci of that moment.

The first box is located in the Furrow, pointed towards the Propylaea. This segment demonstrates the transition from the intimate, entrenched linear space of the Grove, to the exposed, staged platform of the Propylaea (see Fig.40. and Fig 41.). The other box is placed on the Torrent sequence, looking down the winding path over the river to the northern edge of Stóra-Dímon (see Fig.42. and Fig. 43.).

The exterior of the boxes are made of birch, with general dimensions of 50 x 45 x 40cm. I selected this wood because it is one of the few species native to Iceland and the one I encountered the most along my travels. By using this common wood, the diorama is connected back to the site. As I was processing the raw lumber into planks to make the boxes, I came across many pieces that contained knots. Usually these pieces are discarded because knots are difficult to work with and are generally not highly aesthetically regarded. I opted to keep them, realizing their potential as they related to my boxes. Instead of drilling holes without taking the grain of the wood into account, I could carve keyholes into knots present in the wood. By working with the natural grain of the wood, I can guide the viewer's eye to the hole. Just as I worked with the landscape to direct and inform my interventions, similar context clues in the wood was used to make the boxes. While the perspective boxes are heavily visual tools, focused on the act of –looking, they also engage the other senses; touching the smooth, slightly rippled texture of the wood to connects one to the materiality of the land; and smelling the scent of lumbered birch returns them metaphysically to the site. These both contribute to a sensory-heavy experience, even before the viewer actively takes in the interior composition.



Ill. 22. Plan Depicting Location and Direction of Perspective Boxes.

Fig. 40. Interior of Box 1, Top View

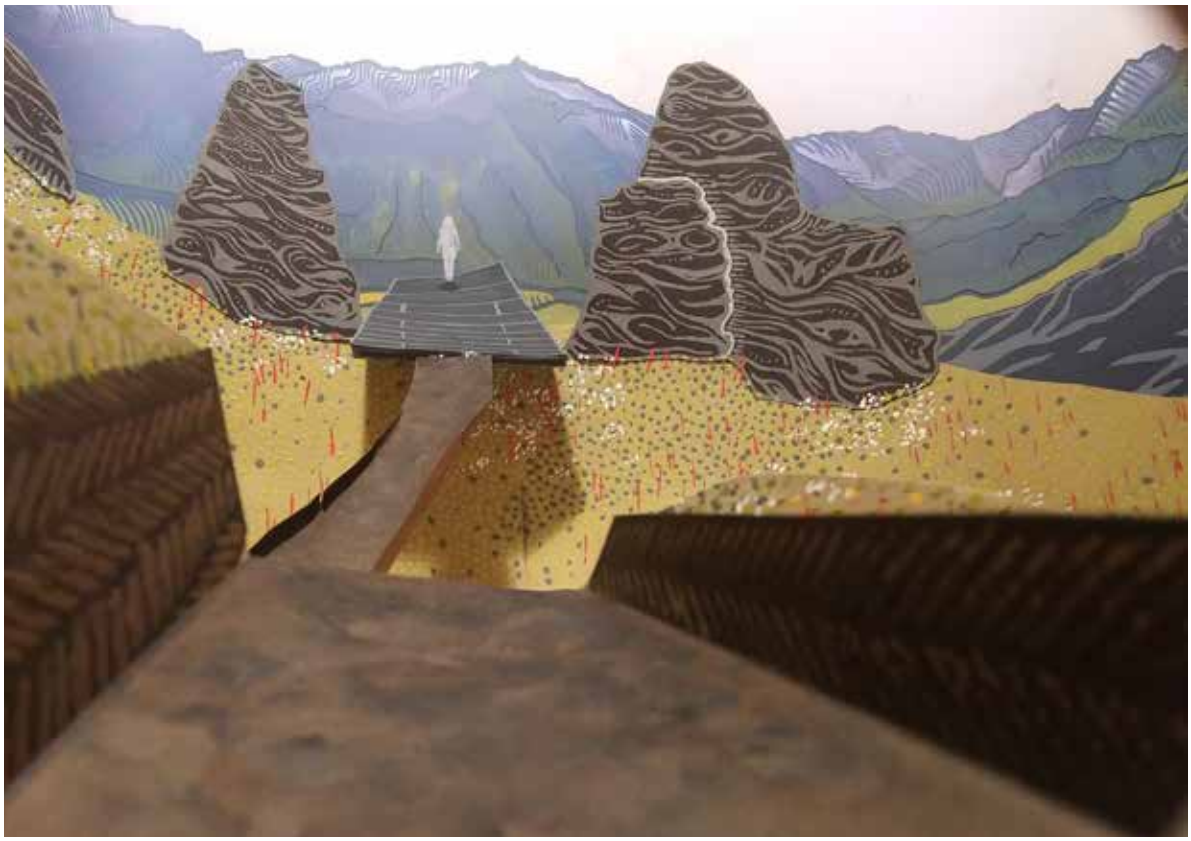


Fig. 41. Interior of Box 1, Key Hole View, Juxtaposing the Furrow and the Propylaea

Duchamps' work is punctuated by clues strewn about from the foreground to background which the visitor is encouraged to piece together to formulate the narrative. Comparably, I want the content of my boxes to represent three time-scales on site; the current landscape and character of the site (the present), the proposed route which strengthens the identity of the site (the future), and the narratives of the Saga (the past). By creating these boxes I am able to artistically distill the key components of my project into three tangible artifacts so that even a fragment the entwinement of even narrative and landscape may be experienced.

Fig. 44. Exterior of Box 2

Fig. 42. Interior of Box 2, Top View

Fig. 43. Interior of Box 2, Key Hole View, Halfway Between First and Second Bend

.5 CONCLUSION

Over the past year-and-a-half, I have been exploring what it means to unearth narratives in the landscape as it pertains to understanding a foreign culture's collective identity. By investing a significant amount of time into researching the specific stories associated with a particular landscape—with the intent of connecting to another culture—I came to understand and appreciate the complexities associated with the landscape. As I have remarked at the start of the thesis, the current practice for evaluating the value of land and of landscape is predominantly based in monetary profitability—an incredibly shallow metric that only allows for a superficial understanding and which stunts any acknowledgement any other meaningful dimension of the landscape. Our society currently fails to fully appreciate the depth of our shared landscape, which has resulted in mass environmental and ecological damage, as well as a lack of sympathy between foreign cultures. But as I have come across in my work, this doesn't need to be the status quo; landscapes are incredibly complex—physically, ecologically, socially, and culturally—and it is time for them to be recognized and re-evaluated as such.

There are many lenses through which we can begin to examine our land—this thesis focused specifically on narratives and their impact on cultural identity and how they can manifest locally and physically on site. It is through these tales that have been amassed and percolated over time that significance and meaning are instilled into a landscape. These stories, in expressing their moral and ethical views, as well as in relaying history, therefore become the identity of the people. By tracing various narratives in the land, we will be able to assemble the characteristics that make up a cultural identity.

The primary narrative of my site, the mountain Stóra-Dímon in Iceland, was the medieval epic, Njál's Saga. But through the process of exploring the site, and investigating the context of the landscape and the literature, I got involved in much more than just the Saga and the topography of the terrain. I discovered other layers of information that may be pertinent to design such as the geology, the flora, and the fauna—and the more I researched these aspects of the site, the more their own stories came to light; such as that of the invasive Alaskan Lupine that was introduced to Iceland in the 1940s, the formation of the Markarfljót River from various volcanic explosions, and the two eruptions that formed Stóra-Dímon—the evidence of which could be seen clearly in its cliff faces. The discovery of hidden narratives didn't stop there; as I began designing, I learned that the materials had their own tales to tell that would inform my selection and application on site; all the selected materials have an extensive history with the people and culture of Iceland.

By time I had finished collecting narratives from the Saga, the geology, and the materials, I had a layered network of stories whose individual reach spread out to different corners of the country but which converged at Stóra-Dímon. The need to preserve the sanctity of the site quickly became apparent as the design process progressed. Any overbuilding or intervention which was too invasive could potentially ruin the unique character of the site. On the other hand, if the intervention is too light, the narratives may be read incoherently, or not at all. Through three distinct design attempts, I found that the most compelling way to render the stories was by viewing the landscape as the stage for the stories, with the visitors as unknowingly participating actors. Traversing through my curated route, the visitors re-enact the Saga and learn about the physical components of the landscape. By using materials and building techniques that are distinctive to the site and to Iceland, the tales unfold through a diverse sequence of highly sensorial experiences.

I wasn't satisfied with leaving the project as it was; I wanted to capture the character of the site with my interventions, and share what it truly meant to experience this marvelous place. This lead to my explorations with dioramas. By creating those vibrant, self-contained scenes, I was able to share fragments of narratives and how I experienced the site. I wanted to share these wonderful tales and my own tale of discovery of the Icelandic landscape, its network of narratives, as well as my evolving understanding of the landscape—I wanted to transcribe my own account of Stóra-Dímon and add it to the invisible network of narratives. This experiment not only allowed me to understand a portion of the Icelandic identity, it also gave me the opportunity to embed some of my own identity into that very place. In devoting a pivotal year-and-a-half of my life to this endeavour that shaped my critical thinking on landscapes, my own story is now irrevocably tied to the site as well.

My work was not about defining an absolute of how landscapes should be treated and worked with moving forward; it was an exploratory probe into physically manifesting invisible elements in the landscape that are crucial to a collective's identity, and into what occurs when we start to critically evaluate the land on which we stand. There are many ways of conveying these stories and my specific exploration resulted in a minimalistic route around a mountain, storytelling through curated, sensorial experiences and materiality. However, not all narratives and cultural identities need to be expressed this way—what should be taken away from this body of work is the level of sensitivity with which the landscape and its people were addressed. By leveraging the narratives of a particular landscape as tools for establishing connections between different cultures, we can develop projects that holistically represent the communities tied to that site, construct projects that are appropriate to the environment, and create something that builds upon and responds to the invisible landscape. The practice of embedding oneself into the site and its narratives to expose usages, memories, and meanings is the lesson that I plan on further developing and applying when I begin practising architecture and landscape design. By acknowledging the complexities found in our physical environments, we can begin to instill our collective and individual identities into the very fabric of our worlds.

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FIGURE 5

The following is the letter of copyright permission for figure 5 found on page 29, Caspar David Friedrich. *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1817.

DESCRIPTION

Oil on Canvas. 94.8 × 74.8 cm.

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FIGURE 38

The following is the letter of copyright permission for figure 38 found on page 138, Marcel Duchamp. *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . . (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .)*, 1946-1966.

DESCRIPTION

Mixed media assemblage: (exterior) wooden door, iron nails, bricks, and stucco; (interior) bricks, velvet, wood, parchment over an armature of lead, steel, brass, synthetic putties and adhesives, aluminum sheet, welded steel-wire screen, and wood; Peg-Board, hair, oil paint, plastic, steel binder clips, plastic clothespins, twigs, leaves, glass, plywood, brass piano hinge, nails, screws, cotton, collotype prints, acrylic varnish, chalk, graphite, paper, cardboard, tape, pen ink, electric light fixtures, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), foam rubber, cork, electric motor, cookie tin, and linoleum 7 feet 11 1/2 inches × 70 inches × 49 inches (242.6 × 177.8 × 124.5 cm)

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FIGURE 39

The following is the invoice and permission for figure 39 found on page 139, Samuel van Hoogstraten. *A Peepshow with Views of the Interior of a Dutch House*. about 1655-60.

DESCRIPTION

Oil and egg on wood. 58 × 88 × 60.5 cm.

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	1774 - 1840
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APPENDIX A - GUNNARHÓLMI

The following is the complete poem “Gunnar’s Hole (Gunnarshólmi)”, by Jónas Hallgrímsson, written in 1837.

“The sun’s imperial pageant in the west
purples the Eyjafjalla Glacier, standing
huge in the east beneath its icy crest.
It dominates the summer dusk, commanding
the screes beneath it, sketched against the cold
sky like a reef where tattered clouds are stranding.
Hugging its roots, cascading waters hold
hoarse conversation with the trolls where wary
Frosti and Fjalar hoard their secret gold.1
Northward, you see the Summit Mountains, very
sober and formal in their blue-black frocks,
but girt with green where steep and valley marry
and helmed with snow above their sable rocks.
They stare at tarns whose streams will soon be plying
their way through meadows filled with lazy flocks
and sprinkled thick with little farmsteads, lying
deep in the shadow of the sheltering heath.
Far to the north, its snowy peak defying
the heavens, Hekla stands on guard: beneath
its bulwarks, bound in dungeons deep as night,
Terror and Death are gnashing greedy teeth,
while high above them palisades of bright
obsidian glitter, glassy as a mirror.
From there you look on scenes of pure delight:
Wood River glides through leafy glens, then, nearer,
murmuring more softly, makes its leisured way
through farmlands ripe with radiant harvest — dearer
than gold — and grassy meads where cattle stray.
High on the hillsides, fragile blossoms gleam;
golden-clawed eagles glide above their prey —
for fish are flashing there in every stream —
and whirring throngs of thrushes flit and trill

Skein yfir landi sól á sumarvegi,
og silfurbláan Eyjafjallatind
gullrauðum loga glæsti seint á degi.
Við austur gnæfir sú hin mikla mynd
hátt yfir sveit, og höfði björtu svalar
í himinblámans fagurtæru lind.
Beljandi foss við hamrabúann hjalar
á hengiflugi undir jökulrótum,
þar sem að gullið geyma Frosti og Fjalar.
En hinum megin föstum standa fótum
blásvörtum feldi búin Tindafjöll
og grænu belti gyrð á dalamótum;
með hjálminn skyggnda, hvítri líkan mjöll,
horfa þau yfir heiðavötnin bláu,
sem falla niður fagran Rangárvöll;
þar sem að una byggðarbýlin smáu,
dreifð yfir blómguð tún og grænar grundir.
Við norður rísa Heklutindar háu.
Svell er á gnípu, eldur geisar undir
í ógnadjúpi, hörðum vafin dróma
Skelfing og Dauði dvelja langar stundir.
En spegilskyggnd í háu lofti ljóma
hrafntinnuþökin yfir svörtum sal.
Þaðan má líta sælan sveitarblóma;
því Markarfljót í fögrum skógardal
dunar á eyrum, breiða þekur bakka
fullgróinn akur, fegurst engjaval
þaðan af breiðir hátt í hlíðarslakka
glitaða blæju, gróna blómum smám.
Klógulir ernir yfir veiði hlakka;
því fiskar vaka þar í öllum ám.
Blikar í laufi birkiþrastasveimur,

through birch and beech groves lovely as a dream.
Now, from the farmstead highest on the hill,
two mounted men ride solemnly, descending
down toward the ocean. Though the air is still,
the winds at peace, a raging sea is sending
its swell against the sand-shoals, where it raves
in angry warfare, ancient and unending.
Anchored offshore, a ship from Norway braves
the whirling surf, its sail still furled, and turning
dragonhead prow to face the furious waves.
Aboard this boat, their spirits proud and burning,
two brothers now must leave their native land,
destined to suffer years of homesick yearning,
far from their loved ones, on a foreign strand:
outlaws and exiles, sent abroad to hide
and pay the penalty the laws demand.
Handsome and strong, his halberd at his side,
Gunnar is leaving Hlíðarendi's hall;
beside him, girt with grey-blue sword, astride
a blood-red stallion, sitting staunch and tall
and tied to Gunnar with intense devotion,
Kolskeggur rides, a man admired by all.
Thus, in a comity of mute emotion,
the brothers guide their horses from the farm:
Kolskeggur gazes out across the ocean,
"While Gunnar, glancing backward, finds the charm
of home so master him, he does not care
that savage foes have sworn to do him harm:
"Never before has Iceland seemed so fair,
the fields so white, the roses in such glory,
such crowds of sheep and cattle everywhere!
Here will I live, here die — in youth, or hoary
helpless old age — as God decrees. Good-bye,
brother and friend." Thus Gunnar's gallant story.
For Gunnar felt it nobler far to die
than flee and leave his native shores behind him,
even though foes, inflamed with hate and sly,
were forging links of death in which to bind him.
His story still can make the heart beat high
and here imagination still can find him,
where Gunnar's Holm, all green with vegetation,
glistens amid these wastes of devastation.
Where fertile meads and fields were once outspread,

og skógar glymja, skreyttir reynitrjám.
Þá er til ferðar fákum snúið tveimur
úr rausnargarði hæstum undir Hlíð,
þangað sem heyrist öldufallaeimur;
því hafgang þann ei hefta veður blíð,
sem voldug reisir Rán á Eyjasandi,
þar sem hún heyir heimsins langa stríð.
Um trausta strengi liggur fyrir landi
borðfögur skeið, með bundin segl við rá;
skínandi trjóna gín mót sjávargrandi.
Þar eiga tignir tveir að flytjast á
bræður af fögrum fósturjarðarströndum,
og langa stund ei litið aftur fá,
fjarlægum ala aldur sinn í löndum,
útlagar verða vinaraugum fjær;
svo hafa forlög fært þeim dóm að höndum.
Nú er á brautu borinn vigur skær
frá Hlíðarenda hám; því Gunnar ríður,
atgeirnum beitta búinn — honum nær
dreyrrauðum hesti hleypir gumi fríður
og bláu saxi gyrður yfir grund;
þar mátti kenna Kolskegg allur lýður.
Svo fara báðir bræður enn um stund;
skeiðfráir jóar hverfa fram að fljóti,
Kolskeggur starir út á Eyjasund.
En Gunnar horfir hlíðarbrekku móti,
hræðist þá ekki frægðarhetjan góða
óvinafjöld, þó hörðum dauða hóti.
"Sá eg ei fyrr svo fagran jarðargróða,
fénaður dreifir sér um græna haga,
við bleikan akur rósin blikar rjóða.
Hér vil eg una ævi minnar daga
alla, sem guð mér sendir. Farðu vel,
bróðir og vinur!" — Svo er Gunnars saga.
Því Gunnar vildi heldur bíða hel,
en horfinn vera fósturjarðarströndum.
Grimmlegir fjendur, flárri studdir vél,
fjötruðu góðan dreng í heljarböndum.
Hugljúfa samt eg sögu Gunnars tel,
þar sem eg undrast, enn á köldum söndum
lágan að sigra ógnabylgju ólma
algrænu skrauti prýddan Gunnarshólma.
Þar sem að áður akrar huldu völl

foaming Cross River buries grass and stubble;
the sun-flushed glacier, with its snowy head,
sees savage torrents choke the plains with rubble;
the dwarves are gone, the mountain trolls are dead;
a desperate land abides its time of trouble;
but here some hidden favor has defended
the fertile holm where Gunnar's journey ended.

ólgandi Þverá veltur yfir sanda;
sólroðin líta enn hin öldnu fjöll
árstrauminn harða fögrum dali granda;
flúinn er dvergur, dáin hamraröll,
dauft er í sveitum, hnipin þjóð í vanda;
en lágum hlífir hulinn verndarkraftur
hólmanum, þar sem Gunnar sneri aftur."

APPENDIX B - *NJÁL'S SAGA*, CHAPTER 92

The following is the complete, unedited chapter 92 of *Njál's Saga,* pages 193-198.

"Now there was considerable talk about their clash, and it seemed certain to all that there could be no peaceful settlement after what had happened. Rúnódlf, the son of Úlf Aurgodi from out east in Dale, was a good friend of Thráin. He had invited Thráin to his home, and it was agreed that he should come about three weeks or a month after the beginning of winter. The following men rode with Thráin: Killer-Hrapp and Grani Gunnarsson, Gunnar Lambason, Lambiddd Sigurdarson, Lodin, and Tjorvi. There were eight men altogether. Thorgerd and Hallgerd were to go along, too. Thráin also announced that he planned to stay at Mork with his brother Ketil, and he mentioned how many days he planned to be away. They all rode fully armed.

They rode east over the Markar River and met some poor women who begged to be taken to the west bank of the river. This they did. Then they rode to the Dale farm where they were well received. Ketil of Mork was already there. They remained there three days. Rúnólf and Ketil begged Thráin to seek a reconciliation with the sons of Njál, but he declared he would never pay them any money. He gave peevish answers and said that he considered himself a match for the sons of Njál wherever they should meet.

"That may be," said Rúnólf, "but it is my opinion that no one is the equal of the one of Njál now that Gunnar of Hlídarendi is dead. The chances are that this quarrel will bring death to either one of you."

Thráin said he was not afraid of that.

Then Thráin went up to Mork and stayed there two days. There-upon he rode down to the Dale farm again. At both places he was presented with fitting gifts on his departure.

The Markar River was flowing between sheets of ice on either side and with ice floes here and there bridging both banks. Thráin said he planned to ride home that evening, but Rúnólf advised against it. He thought it would be more prudent to travel some time later than he had announced.

Thráin answered: "That would be showing fear, and I shall not follow your advice!"

The beggarwomen, whom Thráin and his men had helped across the Markar River, came to Bergthórshvál, and Bergthóra asked them where they came from. They answered that they were from the east, from the slopes of Eyjafell.

"Who helped you across the Markar River?" asked Bergthóra.

"The most showy people you can imagine," they answered.

"Who were they?" asked Bergthóra.

"Thráin Sigfússon and his followers," they answered. "What displeased us most was that they used such reviling and scornful language in speaking of your husband and sons."

Bergthóra answered: "You can't prevent people from talking ill about you."

Before the women went away Bergthóra gave them presents and asked them when Thráin was expected home. They replied that he would be away from home about four or five days. Then Bergthóra reported this to her sons and her son-in-law Kári, and they talked together for a long time in secret.

The same morning as Thráin and his men rode from the east Njál awoke very early and heard Skarphedin's axe knock against the partition. Njál arose, went out, and saw that his sons and son-in-law were all fully armed. At the head of the group was Skarphedin dressed in a blue jacket. He had a small, round shield and carried his axe on his shoulder. Next to him came Kári; he wore a silken jacket and a gilded helmet and carried a shield on which was painted the figure of a lion. After him came Helgi in helmet and red kirtle; he carried a red shield with a hart as an emblem. All wore dyed clothes.

Njál called to Skarphedin: "Where are you going, my son?"

"To look for sheep!" he answered.

"That's what you said once before," said Njál, "but you hunted men then!"

Skarphedin laughed and said: "Do you hear what the old man says? He is not without his suspicions."

"When did you speak of such matters before?" asked Kári.

"The time I killed Sigmund the White, Gunnar's kinsman," said Skarphedin.

"Why did you do that?" asked Kári.

"Because he had slain Thórd Freedmansson, my foster father," answered Skarphedin.
Njál went back inside, and the others proceeded up the slopes of Raudaskridur Mountain (Stóra-Dímon) and waited there. From here one could immediately catch sight of anyone riding east from Dale. It was a clear, sunny day. Now Thráin and his men came riding down from Dale along the sandy river bank.

Lambi Sigurdarson said: "Over there on Raudaskridur Mountain I see shields gleaming in the sun, and I suspect some ambush!"

"Then we shall keep on riding down along the river," said Thráin. "They will meet us there if they have any business with us." They now turned to go downstream.

Skarphedin said: "They have caught sight of us now, for they are turning off their course. There is nothing else to do but run down and meet them."

Kári said: "Many an ambush is laid with greater advantage of numbers than is the case here; there are eight of them, and five of us!"

They headed downstream and saw an ice floe spanning the river below, and they planned to cross at that spot. Thráin and his men took their stand on the icy sheet above the floe.

Thráin spoke: "What can these men want? There are five of them against us eight!"

Lambi Sigurdarson answered: "I believe they would venture to attack us, even though there were still more on our side."

Thráin took off his cloak and helmet.

It happened that Skarphedin's shoe thong broke as they ran down along the river, and he was delayed.

"Why are you so slow, Skarphedin?" asked Grím.

"I am tying my shoe thong," he answered.

"Let's go on ahead," said Kári. "I am thinking that he won't be any slower than we!"

They turned down toward the ice floe, running as fast as they could. Skarphedin jumped up as soon as he had tied his shoe thong, and with axe raised he ran down to the river. However, there

was no place nearby, either upstream or downstream, where the river could be forded, so deep was it. A big ice floe had been raised up against the other bank. It was as smooth as glass, and there in the middle of this floe stood Thráin and his men. Skarphedin took a running start and leaped over the river from one icy bank to the other, landed on his feet, and continued to rush forward in the impetus of his slide. The ice floe was so slippery that he shot forward with the speed of a bird. Thráin was just about to put on his helmet as Skarphedin bore down on him and struck at him with his axe, "Battle-Troll." The axe came down upon his head and split it right down to the jaw, so that his jaw teeth dropped out on the ice. This happened so quickly that no one could strike a blow at Skarphedin, and he continued to glide along on the ice sheet at great speed. Tjorvi threw a shield into his path, but Skarphedin cleared it with a bound and slid to the end of the ice floe.

Then Kári and the others met him. "That's having at them like a man!" said Kári.

"Now it's your turn!" replied Skarphedin.

Thereupon they all rushed at their opponents. Grím and Helgi saw Hrapp and immediately went for him. Hrapp struck at Grím with his axe, but Helgi forestalled him and leveled a blow at Hrapp's hand and severed it, so that the axe fell to the ground.

Hrapp said: "There you did a most praiseworthy thing, for this hand has brought harm and death to many a man!"

"And now we shall make an end of that!" said Grím, and ran him through with his spear.

Tjorvi set upon Kári and hurled his spear at him, but Kári leaped up and the spear flew harmlessly beneath his feet. Kári made for him and dealt him a sword blow which pierced the chest and penetrated to the vitals. He dropped dead at once.

Skarphedin grabbed hold of both Gunnar Lambason and Grani Gunnarsson and called out: "Here I've caught two whelps! What shall I do with them?"

"It is your chance to kill both if you wish them out of the way," answered Helgi.

"I do not have the heart to help Hogni and at the same time to kill his brother," said Skarphedin.

"Some day you will wish that you had slain him," said Helgi, "Because never will he be true to you, nor will any of the others who are here now!"

Skarphedin answered: "I have no fear of them!"

Thus they spared Grani Gunnarsson, Gunnar Lambason, Lambi Sigurdarson, and Lodin.

After that they returned home. Njál asked what had happened, and they told him everything exactly as it had taken place.

Njál said: “These are matters of great import, and it is likely that the end will see the death of one of my sons or worse still!”

Gunnar Lambason carried Thráin’s body to the farm at Grjótá River, and there he was buried in a cairn.”