

Crack diving in north Iceland

with Gísli A. Gudmundsson

For the exploring diver, few things are more exciting than underwater wrecks and cracks. Recently a few divers from a small town in northern Iceland went pioneering into one such crack, in an area not commonly known except perhaps to a few divers. As far as we know this crack hasn't been explored before and definitely not photographed with a professional camera.

The whole area is quite exotic and unique. Positioned in the midst of Kelduhverfi at the bottom of Öxarfjörður, with the national park in Jökulsárgljúfur and the famous Ásbyrgi nearby. The landscape is sculpted by volcanic action and glacial movement since the latter part of the last ice age, which was about 10-700 thousand years ago. Active volcanoes are not far away and the area still is seismically active with minor earthquakes occurring every now and then. The last major drift in Kelduhverfi occurred in 1975-76, changing and forming many of the cracks there, which belong to the same fracture zone as one of Iceland's

well known volcanic areas Krafla.

The day before our trip we contacted the landowner to explain our plans. Fortunately he was almost as excited as we were but emphasized that diving on his land was totally at our own risk. By 9 in the morning we were standing in front of the farm in such wonderful weather. His daughter guided us to the cracks which we had passed a few minutes earlier without noticing them, positioned on both sides along the road to the farm.

To begin with, our hopes went sour because of the amount of sediment afloat in the biggest crack. But with some exploration in the area we found one part with especially clear water, similar to the famous lake at Thingvellir with Silfra crack - a favorite spot for many divers. The formation of the area here is

Sigurður Eyvald is delighted with their findings. This crack is going to make many divers happy!! Aquatica A-200, Nikon D200, P-Mode. Exposure Time: 1 / 90, FNumber: 2.8, Focal Length: 10.5, ISO Speed Ratings: 200



of the same geological sort as in Thingvellir, lying on the North-Atlantic Ridge where the North-American and Eurasian plates drift apart. The water is very cold, varying from 2-6°C, because of the glacial origin of the groundwater. The brilliant clarity of the water suggests a current through the crack from underwater springs. We decided to have a go at it and save the rest of the area for later.

It can be difficult to climb - or slide rather - down to the water with all the equipment and a careful approach is very important to make sure nothing goes wrong. With steep cliffs on both sides and heads just above water we were ready to go down to a world that has been hidden until now.

It was quite a unique experience to drift in between the edgy cliffs with those striking colors of blue, green and brown all around us and the water so extraordinarily clear. We only went down to about 14.5 meters, but the total depth must be at least 10 meters more in some places.



Einar Hansen is leading the small group through the exciting dive!

Aquatica A-200, Nikon D200, P-Mode. Exposure Time: 1 / 30, FNumber: 2.8, Focal Length: 10.5, ISO Speed Ratings: 125

We noticed some tunnels and cave openings as we went but those will have to wait for later exploration, which only well trained and experienced cave and wreck divers are certified to do. The crack is about 0.8-1 kilometers long but the clear part is only about 4-500 meters. Not one but three huge rocks lie stuck between the cliffs and swimming under them thinking about earthquakes and volcanoes is not for the

feint hearted.

The crack is divided by rock slips in several places. In the south end we could swim under the hanging rocks into quite small and shallow parts, though it can be very dangerous. We saw small trout swimming curiously around us, but not too close though. Later the landowner told us that as a young boy he used to fish there with some success but the catch was never big. 30-40 years have



(Above) Einar Hansen is entering the crack on the second dive. Aquatica A-200, Nikon D200, P-Mode. Exposure Time: 1 / 50, FNumber: 3.5, Focal Length: 10.5, ISO Speed Ratings: 640 (Right)



Einar Hansen is about to swim under the huge rock which is stuck between the walls.

Aquatica A-200, Nikon D200, P-Mode. Exposure Time: 1 / 30, FNumber: 2.8, Focal Length: 10.5, ISO Speed Ratings: 640

now passed since the last fish were caught there.

Before returning home we thanked the 83 year old farmer for sharing his knowledge of the area and great hospitality and showed him the photos we had taken.

We are determined to go back for better photos and stay for a longer period of time. One more hidden treasure has now been found and simply must be explored further.

Gísli A. Gudmundsson



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