Sunday, August 13th. In camp at the stead of Skerðingsstaðr.

Up fairly early, and away before ten. We found out the meaning of that bank of cloud, for this morning it was blowing hard, and there were fleecy clouds hanging about the mountains, and half hiding them: happily the wind however strong was warm. We rode straight out of our camping valley into the lava through which however there was a good road, whether the berserks made it or not: it was the strangest place this lava, all tossed up into hills and fantastically twisted ridges, greyer than grey, for it is altogether covered with that grey moss I have spoken of before; it was indeed “clinkers” of the monstrous furnace, no less. Thorlacios told us of it that unseen rivers run beneath it, and break up into fountains through the sea-beach below even ordinary low-water-mark: their sources are known higher up among the mountains, and trout come up there, having passed all underneath the lava from the sea. We went on through
the windings of our path till in about two miles we came to a very steep descent, which brought us to a chasm in the lava: neither better nor worse was our road here than a broken flight of stone steps over which we and our horses had to stumble separately as well as we could; and the horses did it much the best. The bottom of this stair was the end of the lava, and we came into a long narrow valley of grass shut in on the other side by a green slope, and on our side by the heaped-up mass of grey mossy lava, quite strait and regular like a wall, but jagged and broken at its summit. They say that this lava flowed from no mountain-crater, but burst out of the earth just where it is.

It blew harder and harder now, from the south-west; just over-head it was quite bright and sunny, but a drizzle reached us from the mountains where the shifting clouds lay. Out of this little valley we turned into a wide plain with high and steep mountains all round it, except for a narrow firth that ran up from the sea and let daylight in; this was near us and on our right hand as we rode on; and on the otherside of the water the hills ran up so high in one long green-striped black slope that where a little stead stood by the water and above it were sheep feeding on steep slopes, yet when you got to the top of them you were only at the mountains’ foot: these mountains seemed to run on from this firth a long way and then, turning, shut up a long valley’s end against us, rising higher still there into an awful crowd of wild shapes, cones and peaks, and inaccessible ledges, whence long strings of water fell, and hollows unsunlighted and snowfilled, or with the clouds dragging into them which now and then sent a sharp drizzle into our faces. From these highest mountains again came lower ones towards us which gave back some two miles from where we were now to make the wide plain afore-said; over the shoulders of them we saw a strange-shaped peak far away. There were two or three steads at the feet of these lower slopes, from one of which Magnússon got us information of where our way was: so we rode off from the lit-

\* The Hraunfjörðr (Lavafirth) of Eyrbyggia. E.M.
Trollahals tle firth’s end up the long valley aforesaid right in the teeth of a most tremendous wind: the light shaly stones of the river-bed we were riding along were driven before it as our horses kicked them up; every bit of water we passed had a sheet of spray driven from it: and as to us, the horses stopped nearly dead sometimes, and I really thought I should have been unhorsed; all the while the clouds never got away from the mountain-tops, and the sun shone bright above us. So we went on till we had got to the head of the valley when we bent across to the seaward side of it, and mounting a steep hillside came into a pass, a path winding about over the steep precipices with great cliffs of basalt on either side of it: up this we straggled as we best might under the mingled rain and sunshine; once or twice I looked back at the valley we had left, and saw it swept across with mingled rain and sun too; it looked a great hollow far below us soon; a wonderful sight with those terrible mountains at its head. All the while as we went, the noise of the wind about us, entangled in the ridges and peaks of the cliffs, was not less than of loud and continuous thunder; it was a wonder of a day, and most exciting: I stuffed my whip and my hat one into one boot, one into the other, and held on by the poney’s mane, till at last we got to the brow of the pass; and looked down into the other valley, and could see the crowd of peaks and cliffs at its head: we went, down a descent so steep into it, that we had to get off and lead the horses, the wind lulling no whit till we got into a little hollow at the foot of the pass, where we rested a few minutes. The clouds had looked black and threatening round the mountains at our back, but now as we rode on they seemed to melt away before us, and the sun shone gloriously: though when we were fairly in the flat of the valley again the wind was as strong as ever but it was at our backs, where also was the black mass of clouds whence a light rain reached us still. The hills on each side of this valley were much lower than in the last (Hraunfirth): those on our right, the wrong side I sup-

* The pass is called Tröllaháls (Troll’s Neck) and is noted for its fierce winds. E.M.
Map to illustrate
Author's journey of 1873
from Galtalæk to Skagafjödur
Author's route
For names of places not shown on this map see map of first journey
Scale 1:825000 English Miles
pose of the steep slopes above told of, were of the rubbish-heap kind and buff of colour; before us lay the end of a long firth that led out to sea (Kolgrafa-firth) where it ended in a ness of the buff shaly hills: its waters were intense dark-blue flecked with "white-horses" from whose tops the spray drove in white showers like salt thrown on the wind. As we rode we saw a rainbow begin, lying over the firth and the shaly hill; it brightened, and then grew very bright till it had two more behind it; it was not a great soaring arc, but quite a flat segment: it lay on the lower slopes of the hills now, and so seemed to move with us as we rode along the strand of the firth, till it was clinging round that outer headland, and half lay over the sea. This was not the last time we saw the segmental rainbows in Iceland where we also saw the usual kind; and I don't know why they came like that.

The rain left off and the rainbow faded, and the wind fell by then we were come to the lower end of the firth, and we turned away to our left over a neck of flat land that was shorn out of the hillsides there; after a three miles' ride or so we came out on to the strand of a wide bay called Grundarfirth, that seemed a noble kind of place, where the mountains lay in a semicircle round a green flat plain, some five miles deep from the chord of the mountain arc to the sea-beach; but the mountains we could scarcely see now the clouds hung so low about them, though the day grew finer and finer. We made a regular halt of it here, and unloaded our horses, standing awhile close to the sea to watch the great seas coming thundering on the shingle: amidstmost of the bay a long slender craft which Magnússon knew for the "Fylla," the sister-ship of the "Diana," and still in the war-service: after a while we were asked into the house hard by, whose master was a silversmith, & who gave us coffee, which we accompanied with our own lunch, and there we sat for an hour I suppose, smoking and talking, and looking at snuff-mulls in course of manu-

1 Kolgrafaðór (Coalpitsfirth) of Eyrbyggia. E.M.
2 The Ere (Eyr), originally Óndverð Eyr (Onward Ere), once the family property of the Eredwellers. E.M.
Kirkjufell facture. Then we came out again to such a lovely surprise, for though the great waves still fell on the strand, there was scarce a breath of wind; there was no cloud in the sky, and those mountains unseen just now, you seemed as if you might touch them, so clear and bright they were: the plain went right up to them without a knoll or ridge; and they seemed utterly impassable, unless anyone might crawl through a black gully in their very midst that let a stream through to wander about the green plain. A little way south-west of this a great ledge of dark grey rock thrust forward from the mountain-sides, but running parallel with them for about a quarter of a mile, and rising some four hundred feet, was capped with a quite level space of bright green grass, from amidst of which fell a thin stream into the plain below: other ledges rose above this like a great stair, but not clear like the one below, and these were capped by a jagged line of peaks torn into all manner of strange shapes and with snow lying in their higher hollows, which swept round seaward till they ended in a cliff of regularly-ledged rock that looked as if it had been built; this runs on parallel, or nearly so, with the general line of the strand, and there is a flat tongue of land going out toward the other horn of the bay, from which rises suddenly the steepest mountain I ever saw, standing quite alone and in shape exactly like a French château roof, and called Kirkjufell (Church-fell).

Just as we were getting to horse here, a man came up, who offered us five beautiful pink-fleshed sea-trout, which we, mindful of supper, bought. Then on we rode through the freshest and brightest of afternoons, skirting the strand; just as we passed the furthest bight of the bay I noticed many eider-ducks again, also eider-drakes, which for some reason or other I had not seen before; they were handsome birds, with gleaming white breasts, whereas the ducks are dull-brown and dowdy; they were splashing about in high glee.

Out of Grundarfirth we rode into a flat marshy valley, with that cliff always on the left, and on the right Kirkjufell,
till we turned the flank of it, and found a long shallow reach of sea running into the flats on our left, with another isolated mountain on the tongue of it that looks at first just the shape of Castle St. Angelo at Rome, but turned out, when we saw the flank of it next day, to be long like Kirkjufell: its sides are mere scarped cliffs. Hereabout the bogs got so very bad that we were fain to turn to a poor little stead lying on a knoll under the cliffs aforesaid, to ask for guidance; there was quite a crowd of girls and children there, with an older woman or two, some twelve or thirteen in all, I should think, with three ponies to ride: they were just mounting as we came up, from three to five on a horse: they had been blue-berrying and had "askar" full of the berries, with which their teeth were blue also; exceedingly happy they seemed. We got a little lad of some eleven winters here to guide us on a bit and in half an hour come to a little stead by the waterside aforesaid, the last house before my dreaded Bulandshoffi; the cliffs are quite near the house on the one side, as the water is on the other, and there is a pretty hillocky tun in which we pitch our tents to the accompaniment of a rattling wind, for it is blowing again: "we" means Evans and C.J.F., for I went at once gravely to the stead's kitchen, where I cooked in a queer little den just big enough to hold me, my pots, the smoke, and a little girl of five, whose name was Augustina: the rest of the community stood in the doorway of the kitchen, I should mention, and I—I streamed with sweat till my soup was made and my trout were fried, when I must say I found the coolness and elegance of the tent quite delightful.

Whist after dinner, and then Evans and Magnússon to bed; but C.J.F. and I sat up (I writing up this journal), till it was past one, and dawn was in the sky again; and then we went out and walked about a bit, listening to the sea breaking outside the mouth of the firth, and most unaccountable noises of the sea-birds, with which this place is populous beyond everything I ever saw. There was a little haze about, but no cloud, and the night is grown warm again and still,

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1 See p. 97. Ed. 2 Skerdingsstadir. E.M.
Búlands-höfði and I felt very happy with our warm ride and the pleasant time, though true it is that I really thought it an even chance that I should tumble over Búlandshöfði to-morrow. So to bed.