

WHAT ONE WOMAN CAN DO

She brought the beauty of her land to the world



A TRIBUTE TO LJÓSBJÖRG PETRA MARIA SVEINSSDÓTTIR 24 December 1922 - 10 January, 2012

The grand lady of Stöðvarfjörður passed away on 10 January, 2012 at the age of 89, having lived a life devoted to a passion for collecting. Her remarkable stone collection is a testament to the vastness of the geology of East Iceland. Her remarkable life, filled with the beauty of humility and simplicity.

To describe Petra as an avid collector is an understatement and, visiting her home, you will see why. It is thought to be the largest private stone collection in the world. I asked her grandson, Ivar, if it had ever been counted "No, he says, they are quite difficult to count. Some of those more delicate have crumbled over the years, making the job of counting each and every individual stone almost impossible. We do, however, give all the stones a good clean each year in the spring

in preparation for the thousands of visitors who come every summer. The garden is cleaned of leaves and debris that collects over the winter and then each stone is put back in its rightful place - a major job that takes weeks to accomplish."

Still, just looking around we can see rocks on practically every surface of Petra's rather small house, the entirety of which is lined with shelves displaying this most amazing collection - which overflows out into her front and back gardens and around the sides, going up behind the house for about 100 metres. There could easily be 100,000 stones here. At least!

Living up to her name

The name Petra is from the Greek word petros, meaning rock or stone. However,



this name is rarely used in Iceland and so is quite remarkable that Petra's parents chose this name for her. Even as a small child, Petra had a tremendous drive, as well as an uncanny knack for finding beautiful stones, finding her first geode at the age of 7.

For the first two decades of her collecting work, Petra was restricted to searching the north slopes of the mountains in Stöðvarfjörðar. Prior to 1962, travel in Iceland was very difficult; the roads were primitive and there was no bridge over the Stöðvará River. Nevertheless, she simply walked out her

front door and up to the mountains above her home to conduct her searches, often with several of her children in tow.

In the past 30 years, hundreds of thousands of visitors of all nationalities have visited Petra's collection on display in her home at Sunnuhlíð in Stöðvarfjörður. Visitor numbers reached a zenith in 2003 with 20,000 people passing through the exhibition. During July and August, it is not uncommon for 200 to 300 visitors to be viewing the collection at the same time. It is the most popular tourist attraction of East Iceland.

In spite of all the interest that Petra's collections have garnered, she was not completely at ease with all the attention her life's work brought to her. In 1995, the then President of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, invited Petra to a special dinner at the presidential residence at Bessastaðir, where Petra was to be awarded the prestigious Order of the Falcon. Petra initially declined the invitation saying,

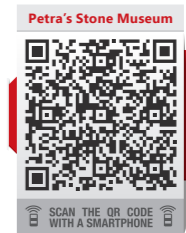


"This award is for the stones and not for myself and it is the stones that should be getting the award, not me!" After some persuasion from her family and friends, she finally decided to go and had a lovely time. Petra once remarked, "I remember feeling so frustrated at not being able to write a song or a poem about all the beauty of God's creation that I have been blessed to see. There is just so, so much variety, it is truly astounding."

If the entries in the museum's guest book are anything to go by, then it is clear that Petra has indeed succeeded

in realising her dream of being able to express her love of nature. We are indebted to Petra and now her children and grandchildren, who have opened their hearts, their lives and their home, to share one woman's passion for the beauty to be found in the geology of East Iceland.

-EMV



Petra's Stone Museum

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