

The Challenge of Developing Garden Culture in Iceland



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Growing Fruit Trees in Iceland! – Are you out of your mind?



1958

Subject:

- What is GARDENING- in Iceland?
- THE CHALLENGES:
 - The obstacles
 - The opportunities

The pioneers

The Role of IHS

Some Measures taken

A Vision of the Future



2007

Caveat!

There is no coherent, written history of gardening in Iceland - Only a large volume of stories and accounts over 125 years.

This is a short personal view based on more than 50 years involvement with forestry and gardening!

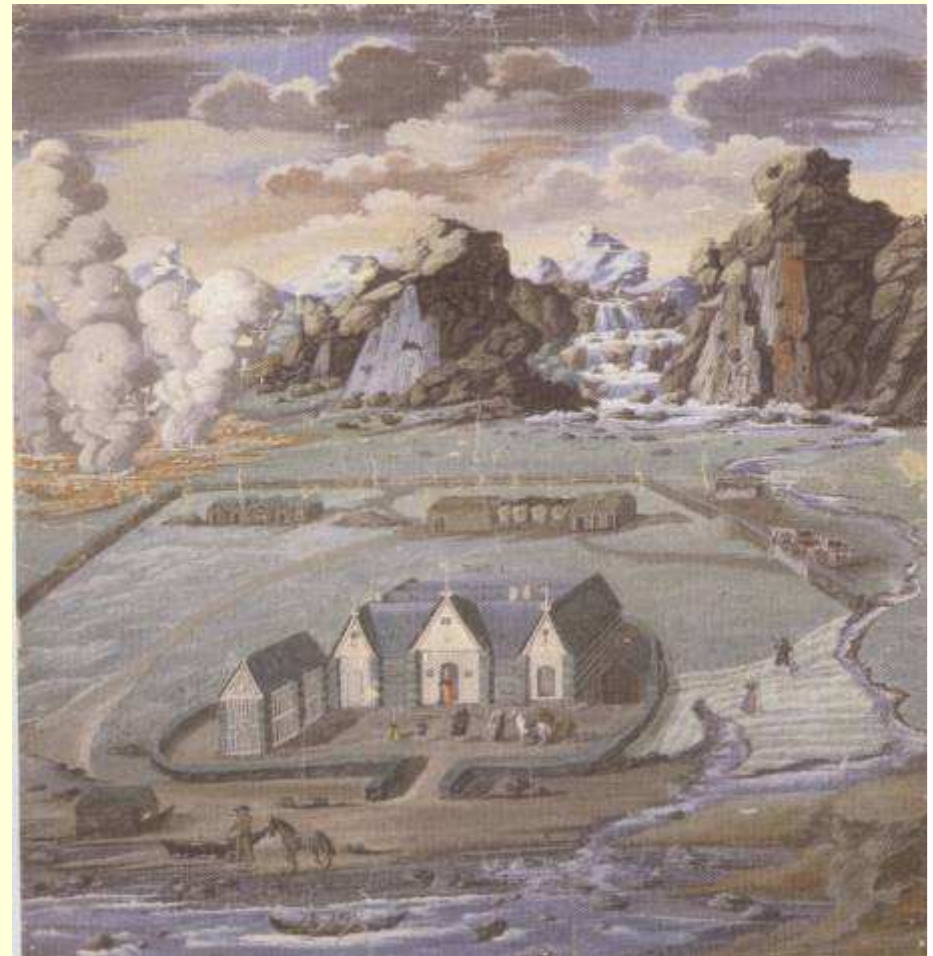
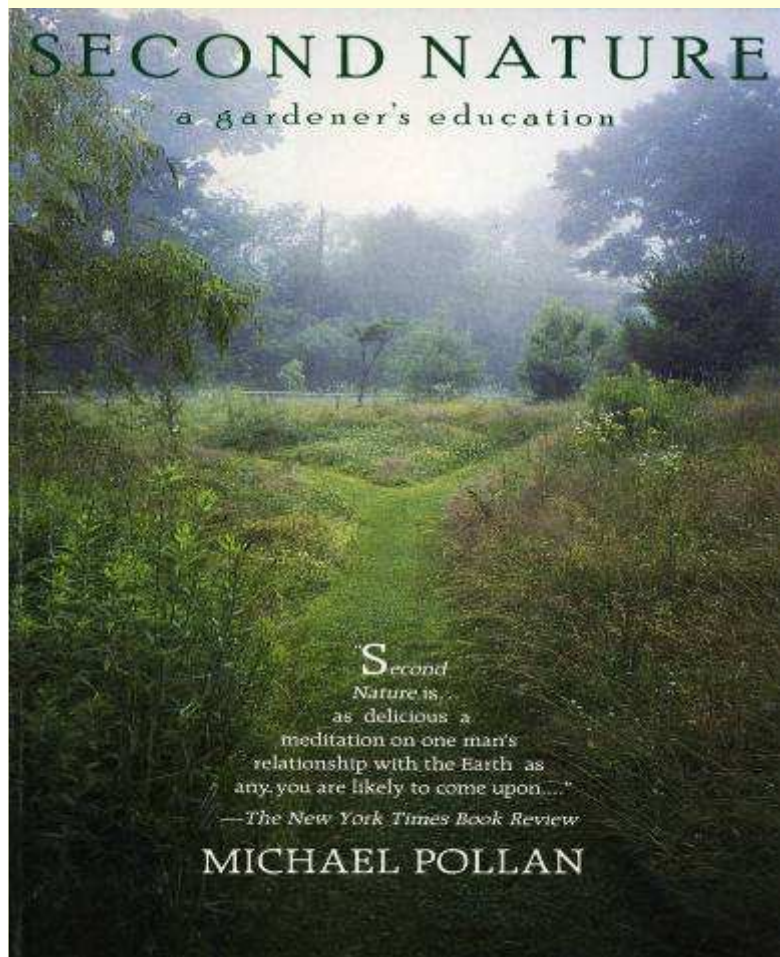
Spring 1958 at Seljadalsá
by Hafravatn 20 km East
of Reykjavik



What is Gardening ? - Enclosure separate from nature? - A relationship of man to nature?

A view of Nature as a Garden (Michael Pollan 1991)

The Icelandic Garden Idyll (Eggert Ólafsson 1760)





An English Version

....from this



What is challenging to
gardening in Iceland
today?

Gardening at the
margins!

Against the odds!

..to this?





The Challenges:

Obstacles:

- The historical context of an ecological disaster
- The climate curse!
- The soil curse!
- The lack of appropriate plants
- The socio-economic limitations
 - Recently urbanized society
 - Small market - import reliance

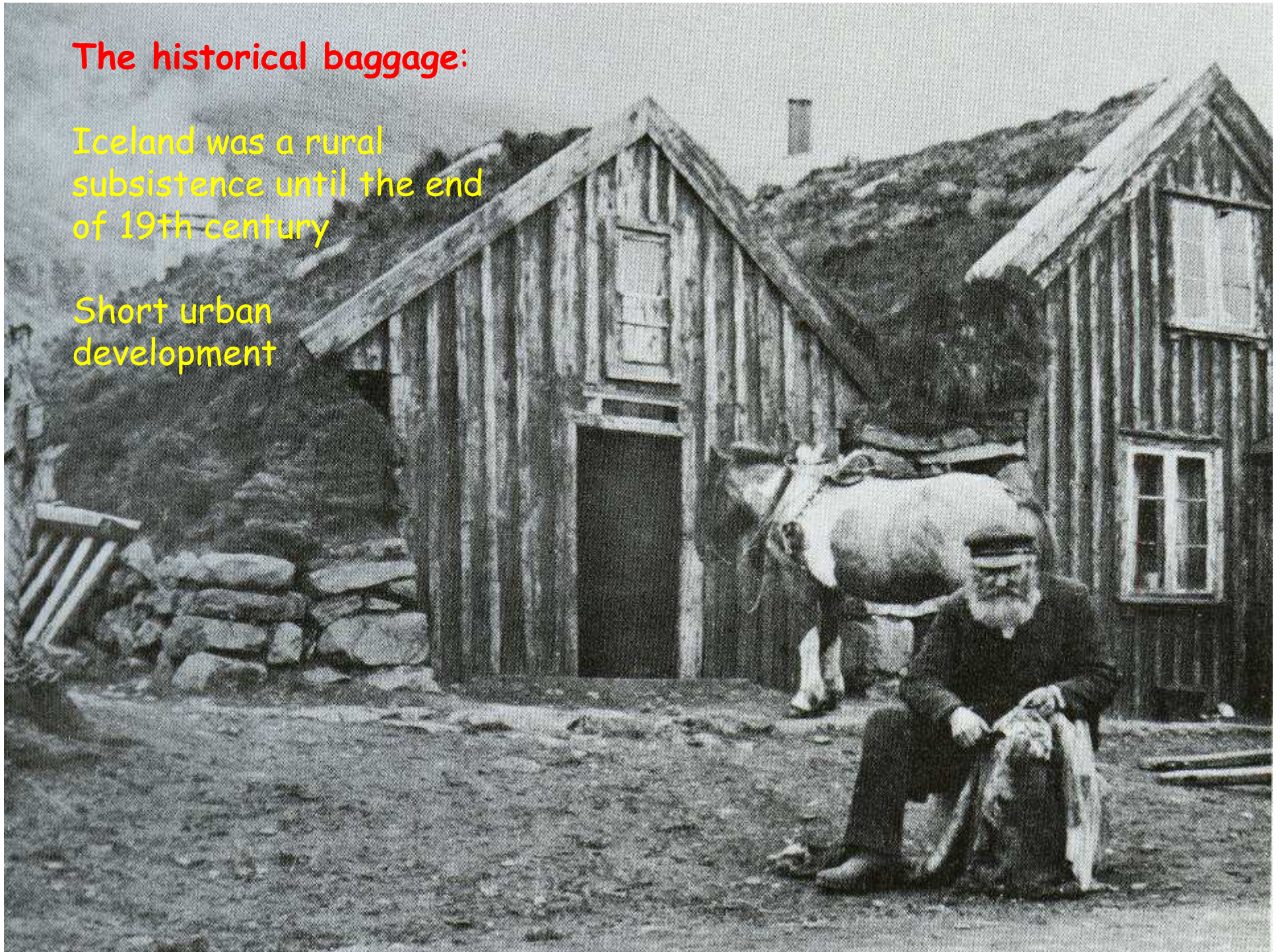
Disbelief - Nothing can be grown in Iceland!

**The Biodiversity debate and environmentalism!
Man separated from nature!**

The historical baggage:

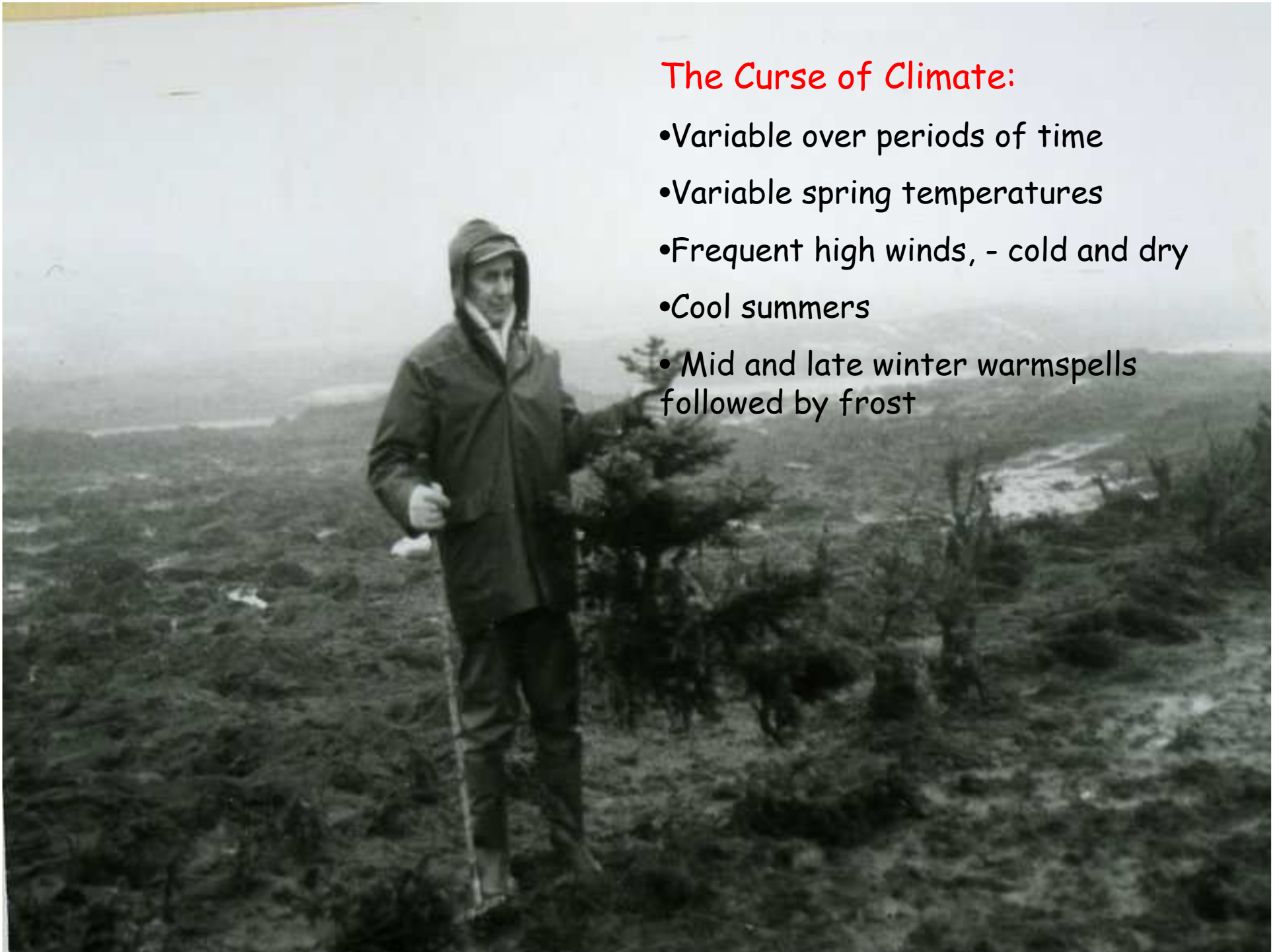
Iceland was a rural
subsistence until the end
of 19th century

Short urban
development

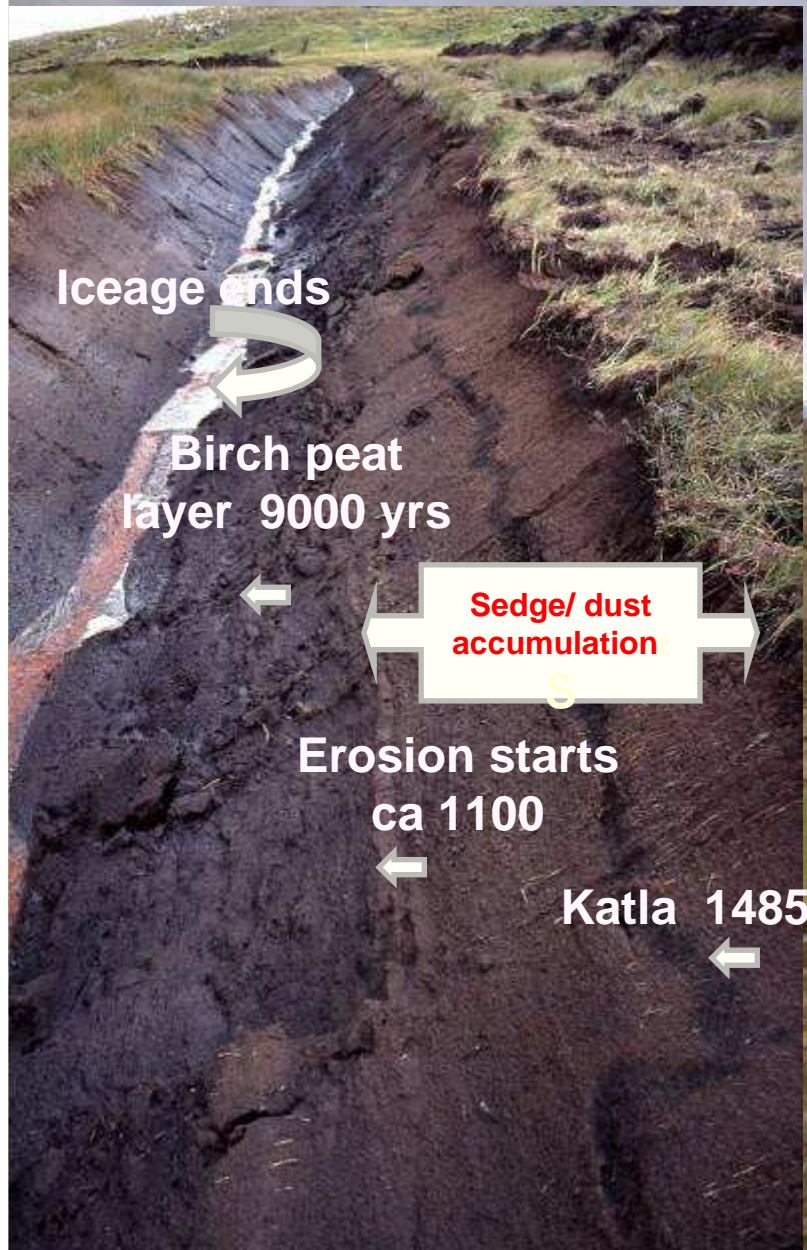


The Curse of Climate:

- Variable over periods of time
- Variable spring temperatures
- Frequent high winds, - cold and dry
- Cool summers
- Mid and late winter warm spells followed by frost



The ditch keeps the record!



Historical Baggage

The problems of the soil

An ecological disaster!



Challenges:
Opportunities:

New land use patterns!

**A new generation with
higher expectations
comes running!**



Contained grazing!



Challenges:

New Opportunities:

Sprawling summerhouses





Challenges:

Opportunities:

Increasing public interest for
gardening information



Reykjavik Centre about 1880

The highland desert inside the town



View to Háteigur and the new
watertank about 1910 -1920



**Skólavörðustígur from the
“Schooltower” ca 1890**

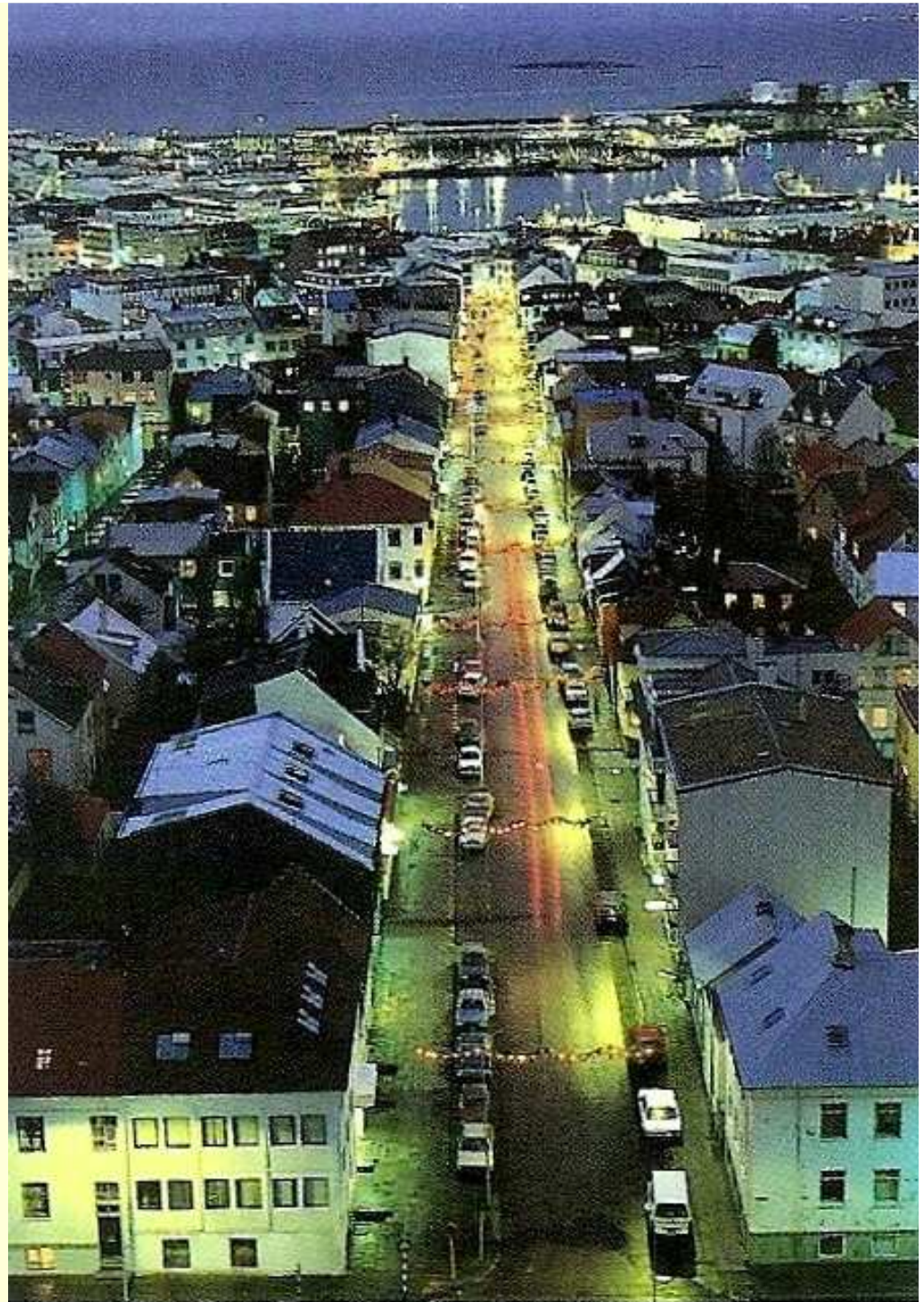


**Skólavörðustígur from
the tower of frá
Hallgríms-church**

anno 2000

**„The Reykjavik area has
become the largest forest in
Iceland ”**

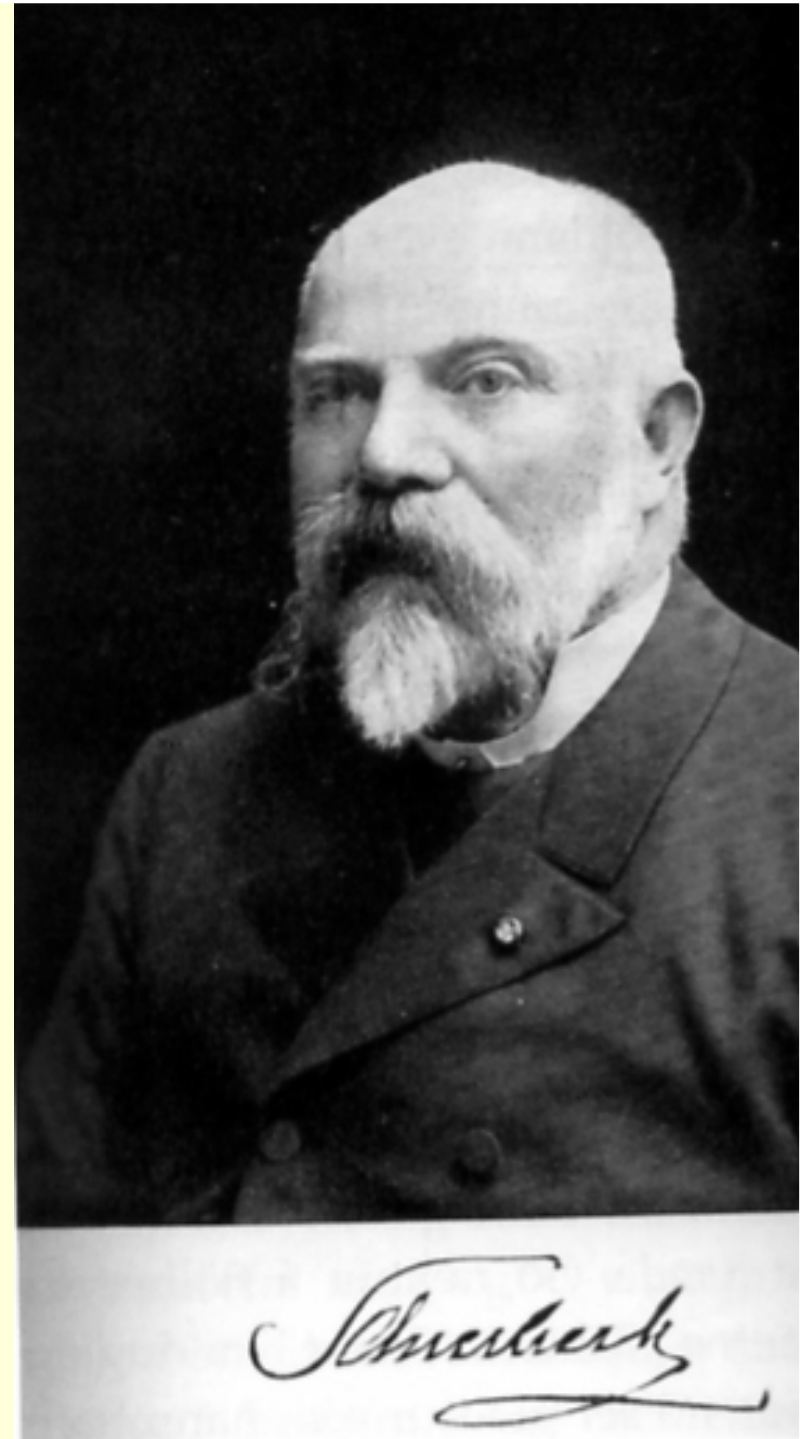
**Sigurður Blöndal – Chief of national
Forestry Service**



Hans G Schierbeck

(1847-1911)

- Gardening apprentice, Student exam. 1870
- Medical degree 1876
- Professional practice in Copenhagen Graduate training in
- Appointed Chief of National Health in Iceland 1883 against the protest of local officials
- Established a plant nursery at Rauðará and cultivated a large garden inside the ancient Reykjavik graveyard.
- Founded the Icelandic Horticultural Society 1885 - Trained and encouraged Einar Helgason
- Experimented with vegetables, garden plants, shrubs and trees and published the results (*Garðyrkjukver* 1891)
- Left Iceland in 1894 fed up with official opposition but sorely missed by the public!



**Einar Helgason and his
staff of *The Plant
Nursery (Gróðrarstöðin)*
(Established 1900)**

**Harbingers of new times
in Iceland !**





The oldest living imported tree planted by Schierbeck in 1884

About the IHS

- Established in 1885 at the initiative of Schierbeck
- Championing a better life, healthier food, lower infant mortality and cleaner environment !
- One of the oldest free public associations still working in Iceland
- Open to all interested in gardening and improvement of the human environment
- Over 2350 members now increase of 650 since 2007
- Main effort to educate its members and the public – provide access to plant materials

The impact of IHS can be seen in all communities in Iceland!

Early gardening for vegetables in central Reykavik



Recent gardening for design and color - a measure of developed culture in private gardening!



The Values of IHS members!



- **Creativity**– The pleasure of creating gardens and plant associations
- **Care**- for the plants, environment and social togetherness
- **Perseverance** - for 125 years. Members don't give up in the face of adversity and setbacks in working their own gardens
- **Curiosity** – about trying new varieties and methods to cultivate them in Iceland



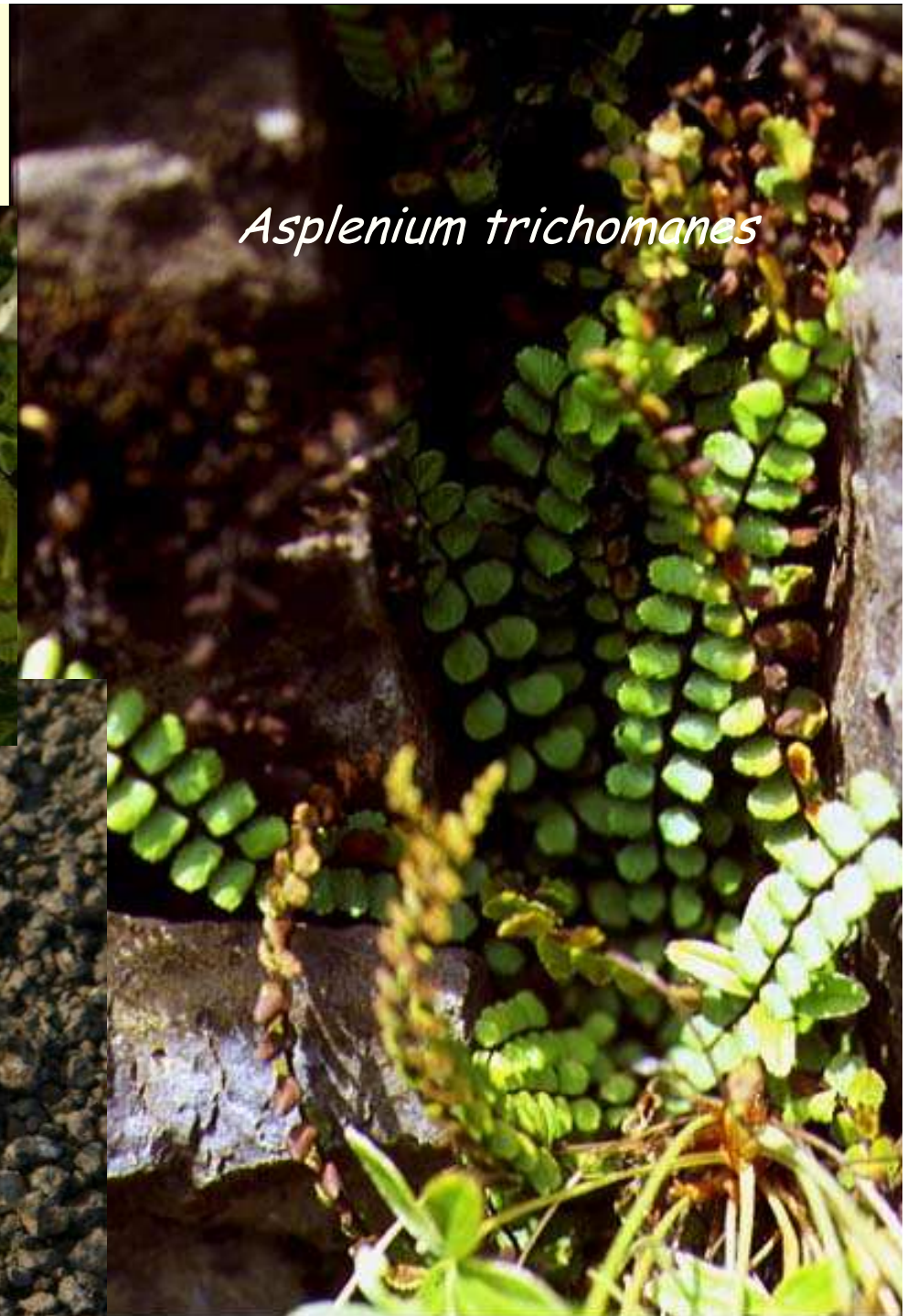
Community Service

- Cooperation with forestry associations in developing plant biodiversity in young plantations
- Útbreiðsla sjaldgæfra íslenskra tegunda í ræktarlöndum
- **Sjálfboðavinna!**

Extending populations of rare
and threatened plant species to
new locations.



Rosa spinosissima



Asplenium trichomanes



Papaver radicatum,
ssp stefanssonii

Left: Jóhann Pálsson, botanist and head of the Botanical Garden in Akureyri (Lystigarðurinn) and Director of Reykjavik City Gardens 1985-2001

Right : Óli Valur Hansson, master gardener an influential gardening adviser in the 20th century and organiser of plant collecting expeditions to Alaska and Kamtschatka

Two eminent
pioneers and
protagonists
of garden
culture in
Iceland



Meeting of the te Plant
Improvement Club 1987



Ólafur S. Njálsson (now
owner of Nátthagi
Nursery) was the main
„workhorse“ of the
project



prime interest in
species and clones of
genus *salix*



**Plantcollection expedition to Northern Finland
in 2008**

Visit to Oulujoen Taimisto





**Snowball viburnum bush ('Pohjan neito')
from Finland**



***Salix fragilis* var. 'Bullata'**
growing in Tornio Finland

Plant collection expedition at
work above the Kolymariver in
Magadan 1989



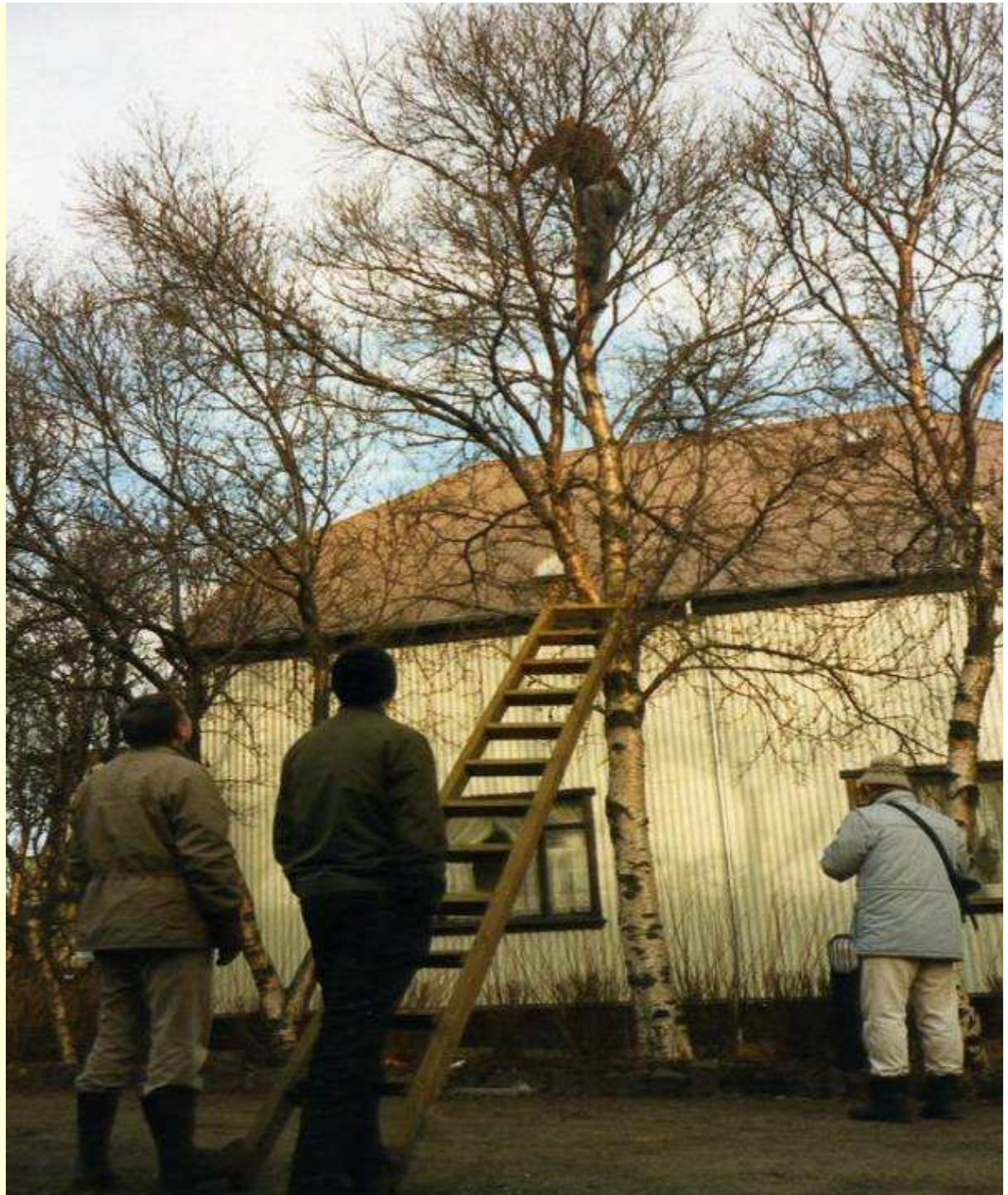
The birthday of 'Embla'
14. febr. 1987 !



Pétur N. Ólason of
Mörk Nursery

Climbing dangerously to
collect material for the
birch improvement

Februry 1987



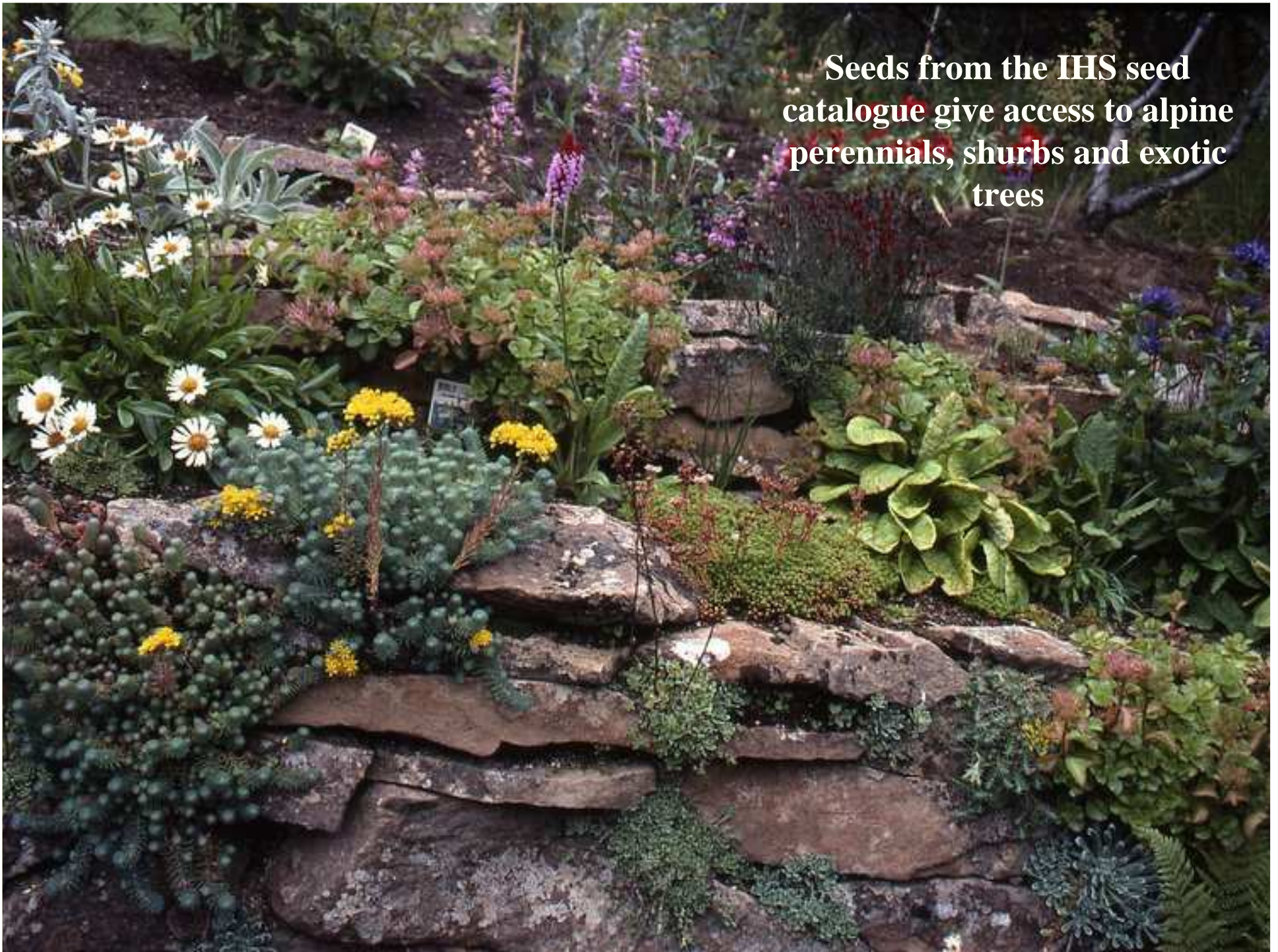
'Embla' at Suðurlandsbraut 2009



Preparation for 'Embla 2'
January 2009



Seeds from the IHS seed
catalogue give access to alpine
perennials, shrubs and exotic
trees

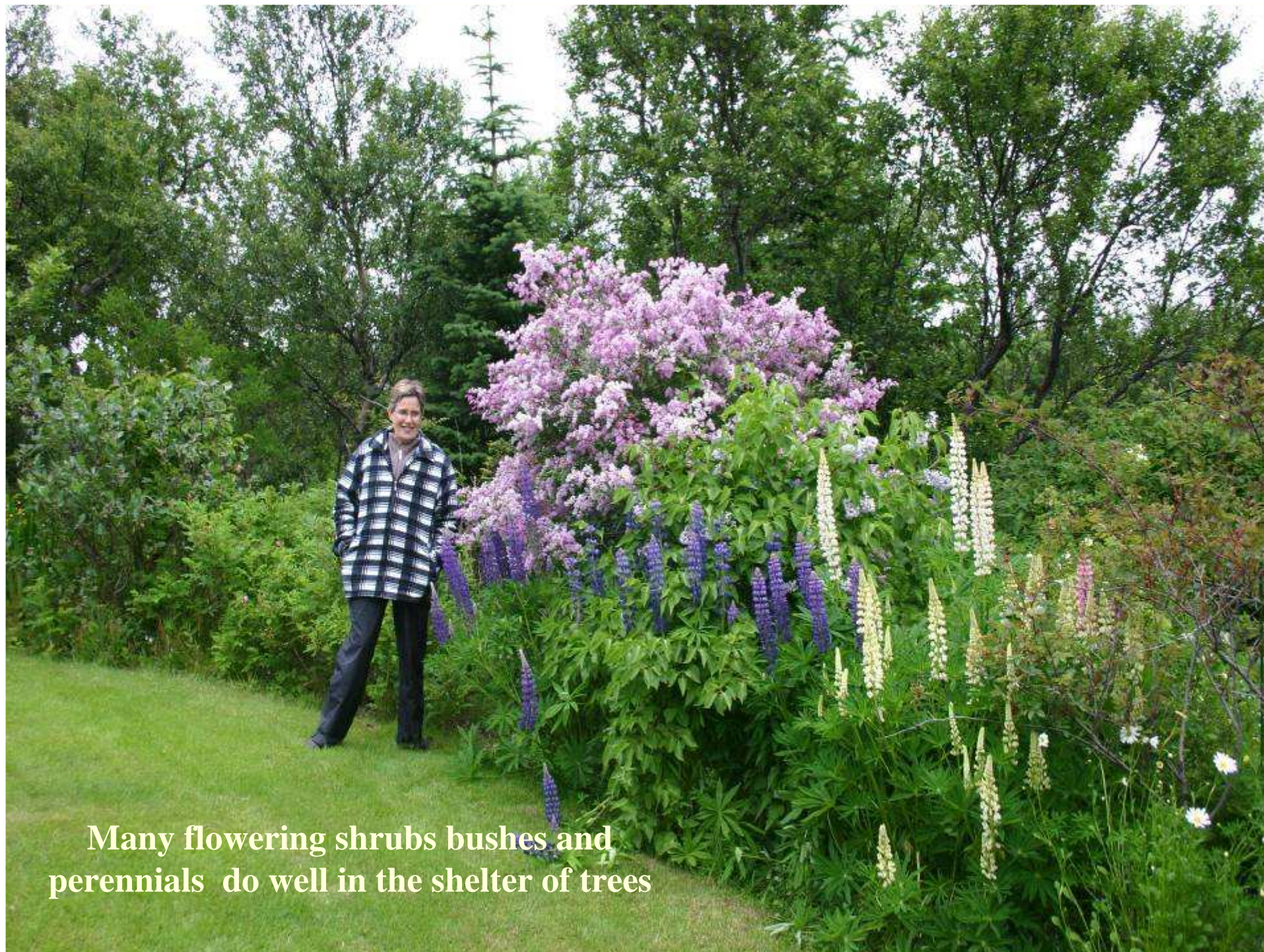




**Dwarf irises do
weel in the new
woodland bottoms**



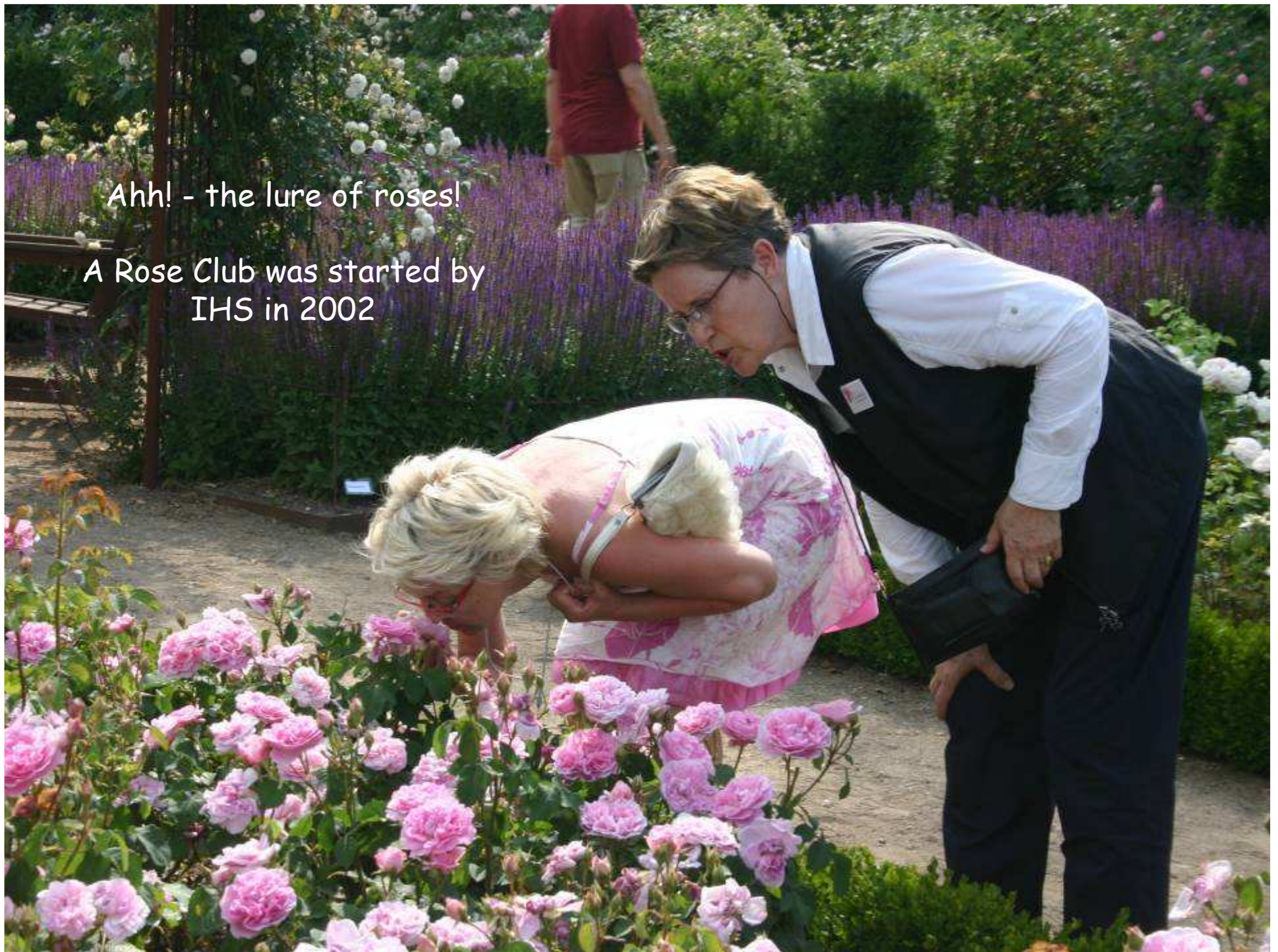
Narcissus varieties to
particularly well and live
long in Icelandic meadows
and woodlands



Many flowering shrubs bushes and
perennials do well in the shelter of trees

Ahh! - the lure of roses!

A Rose Club was started by
IHS in 2002

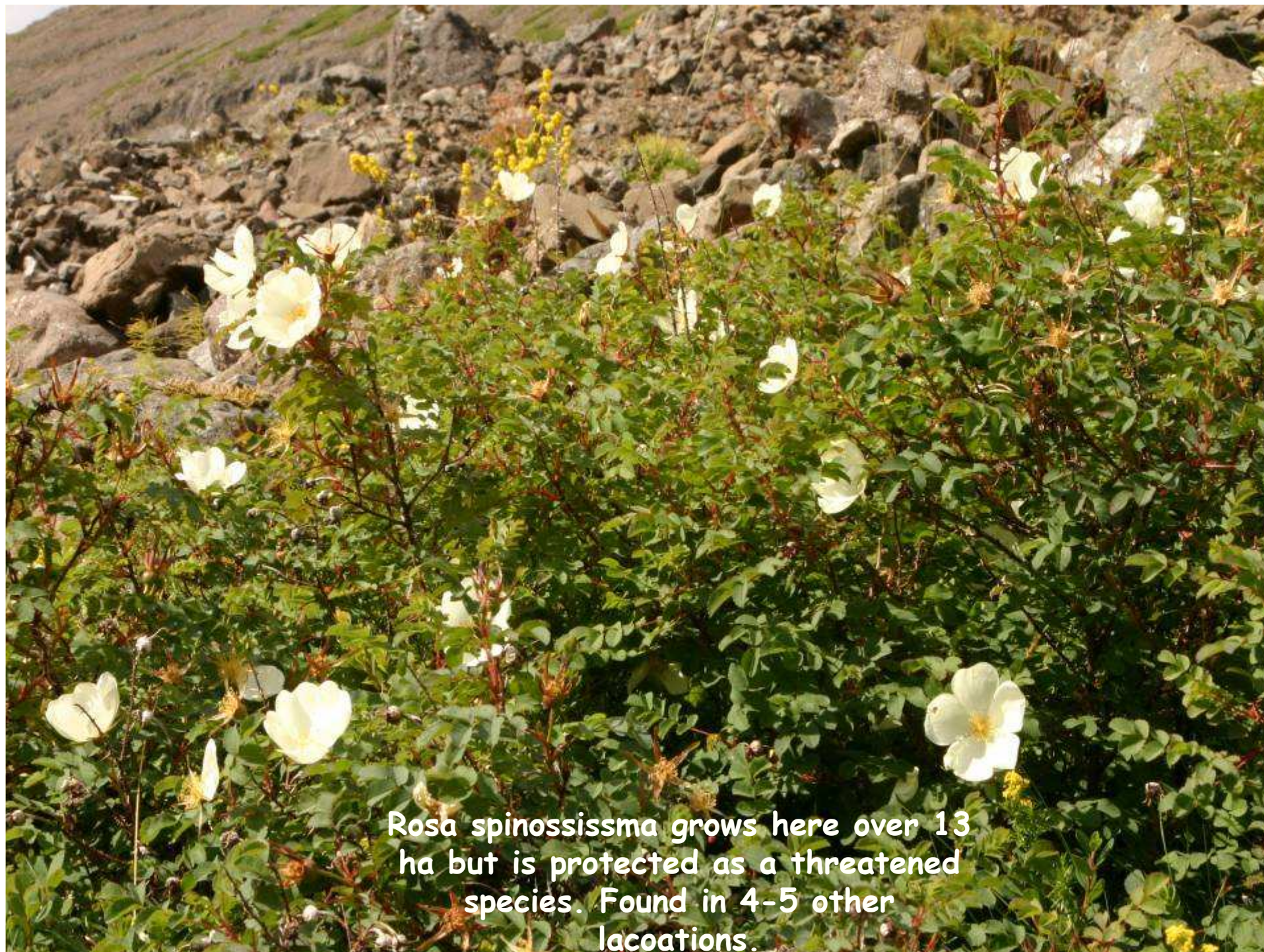


**The “Rose (trial) Garden” located in the
aforestation area of Hafnarfjörður
Forestry Association.**

Inaugurated 2005



For information see <
[http://gardurinn.is/default.asp?sid_
id=35253&tre_rod=016|007|&tld=1](http://gardurinn.is/default.asp?sid_id=35253&tre_rod=016|007|&tld=1)



Rosa spinosissima grows here over 13 ha but is protected as a threatened species. Found in 4-5 other locations.



'Hadda'

Jóhann Pálson the pioneer of
rose cultivation with some of
his introductions



'Guðfinna'



'Drífa'



**‘Yndisrós’ -
Icelandic seedplant
of a rose - lovely and
hardy.**



**Rosa alba ‘Celestial’ is hardy
in Iceland**



'Hansaland' and 'Bonica 82' doing well
on an exposed site

The Association of Nordic Rose Societies for
some 20 years ago.

A Nordic Rose Weekend every two years

IHS Rose Club joined in Denmark in 2000







Rosa 'New Dawn' is
marginal in Iceland

Challenge :
Summers too cool for
proper blooming and
maturing

Lessons from trials:
You have to try, You
cannot rely on
hardiness
information from
other countries!


Rosa helenae 'Hybrida'

Very interesting but untried
in Iceland – Looks promising



The IHS Roseclub visited Finland in 2007





A finnish introduction
'Tähtitorninkatu' -
Possibly an ancient rose -
'Blush Damask'

A photograph of an elderly man with white hair, smiling, standing in an orchard. He is wearing a brown jacket over a checkered shirt. He is holding a branch of an apple tree with several red and green apples. The background shows more trees and a clear sky.

Sæmundur - The apple
pioneer!

**They bloom
and bear
fruit!**

**Challenge for fruit
trees late spring
frosts and cool
summers for proper
maturing!**



LEIF BLOMQVIST



Våra fruktsorter



ÄPPLEN • PÄRON • PLOMMON • KÖRSBÄR

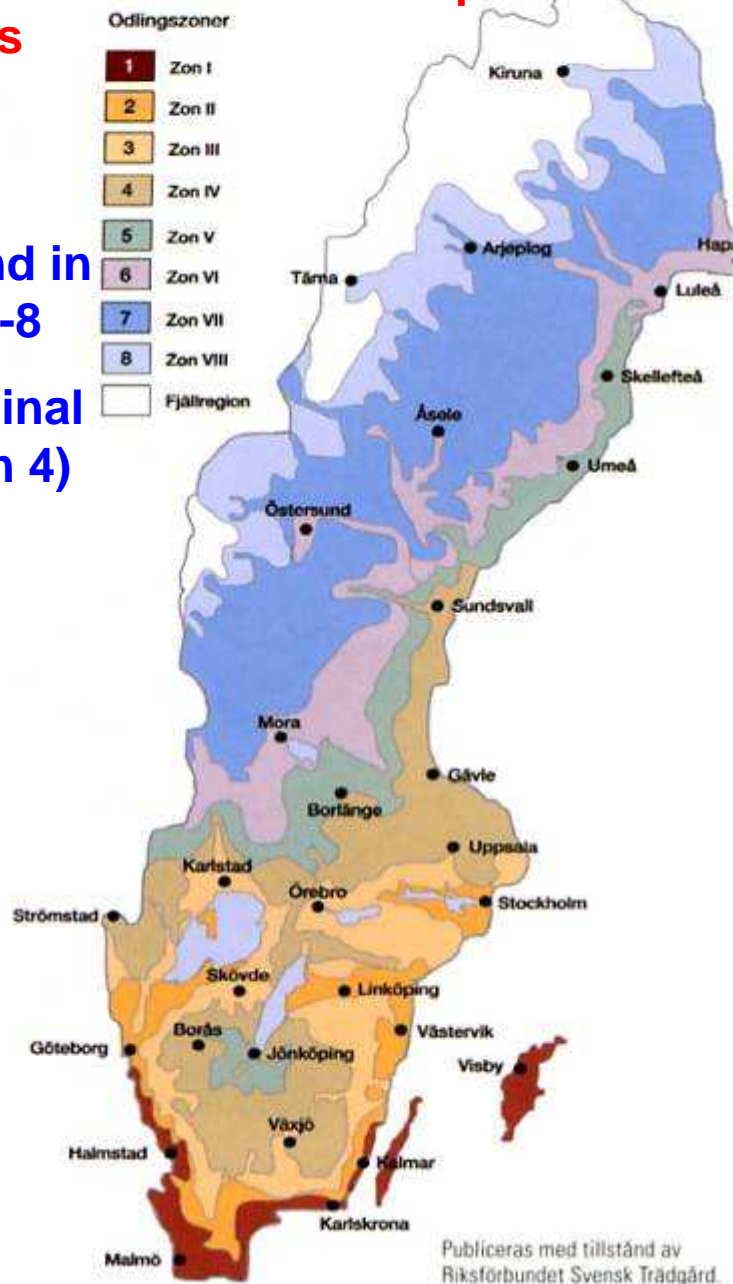


Fruit trials project

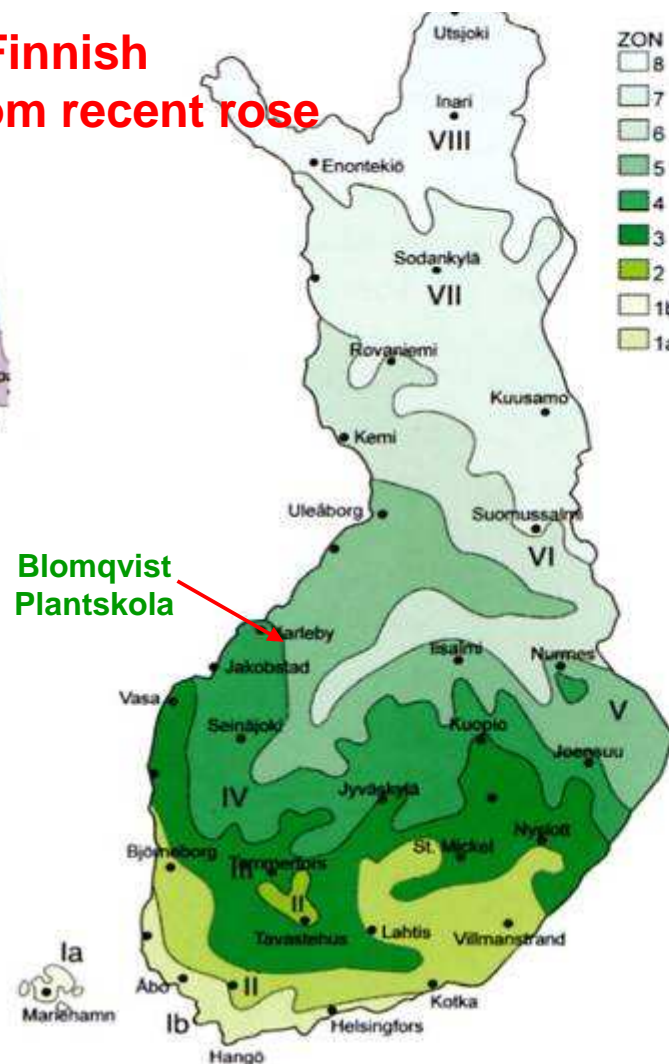
- Cooperation between IHS and IAU started winter 2010-2011
- IHS Members buy plants
- IAU advises and documents progress and results.
- 160 members of IHS Participating
- 40 in group A and 120 in B
- Received about 1750 plants smáplöntur of over 100 varieties from Blomqvist Plantskola
- Blomqvist has provided an exceptionally clear guidance to selection and care
- Varieties of russian, swedish, finnish and baltic origins.

Varieties selected by Swedish and Finnish hardiness Zones and experience from recent rose trials

Iceland in
Zon 5-8
(Marginal
at Zon 4)



Blomqvist
Plantskola



Iceland in
Zon 4-7
(Marginal
at Zon 3)

Finlands och Sveriges zon-kartor.
Här kan du kontrollera till vilken växtzon du tillhör.
Zonerna är endast riktgivande. De lokala variatio-
nerna är stora p.g.a. mikroklimatet.



The Wind is
being
challenged!

Shelter
makes all the
difference!





Soil becomes a real challenge

**Typical monosize particles
volcanic erosion deposit –
inorganic prone to
waterlogging and dryout.**



**Waterlogged and
suffocating silt gravy**



**Peat – fom anerobic
marshland -
Undecomposed organic
matter**

**The lupine has completed its
work. Living organisms
abound**





**Volcanic sand < 4mm
provides air and draining
properties to the silt**

**Brown silt mixed with
volcanic sand (scoria),
horsemanure turns
into well draining and
fertile soil within half
a year.**



**Handy tool for the
septogenarian!**

**„Soil mixing on
location!”**



**Fertile soil ready in 6
months**

**Curtesy of horsemanure
and volcanic sand with
help from microorganisms**



An exposed "orchard" !
Wind and saltspray



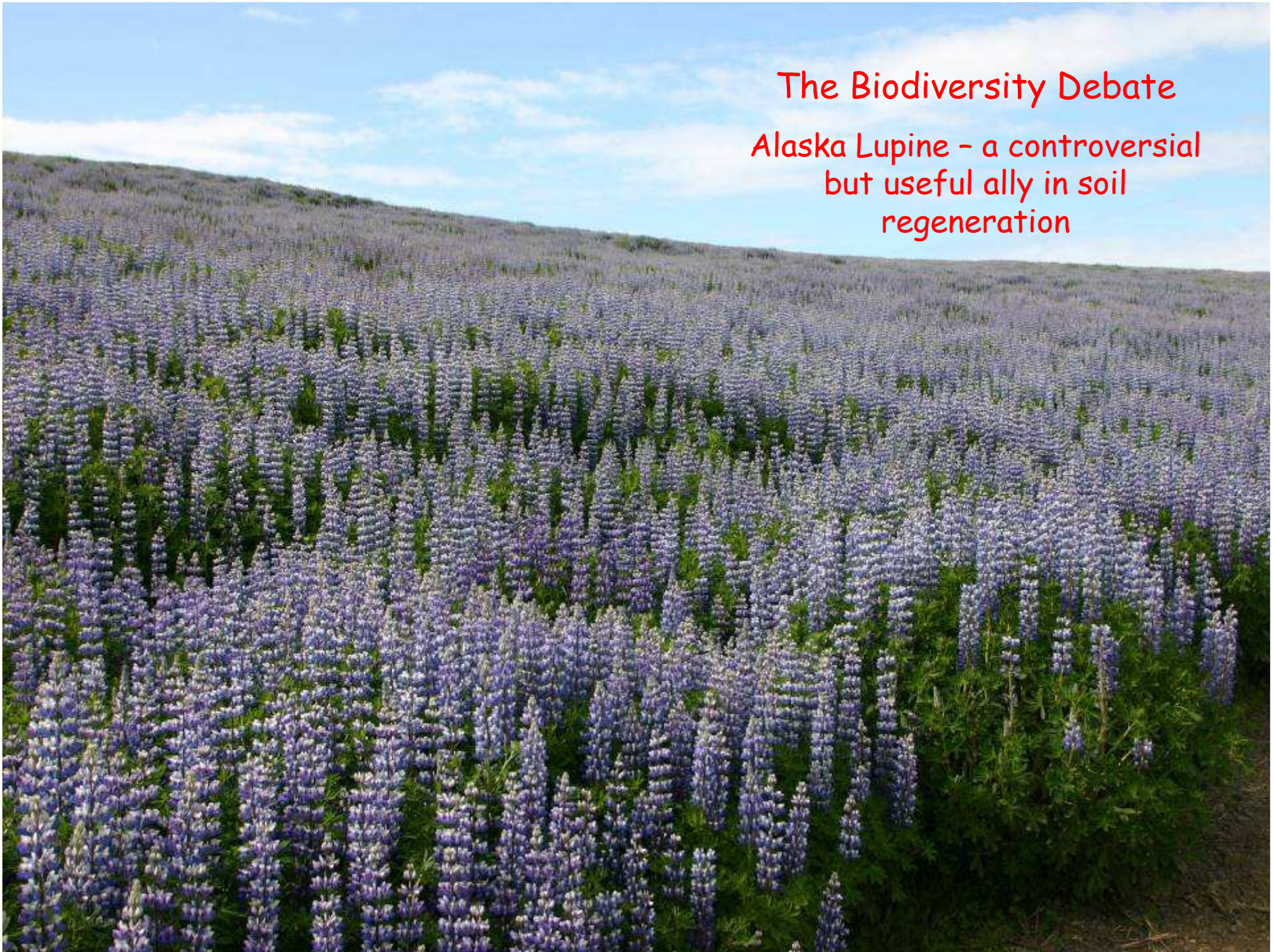
Cherries
Sunburts

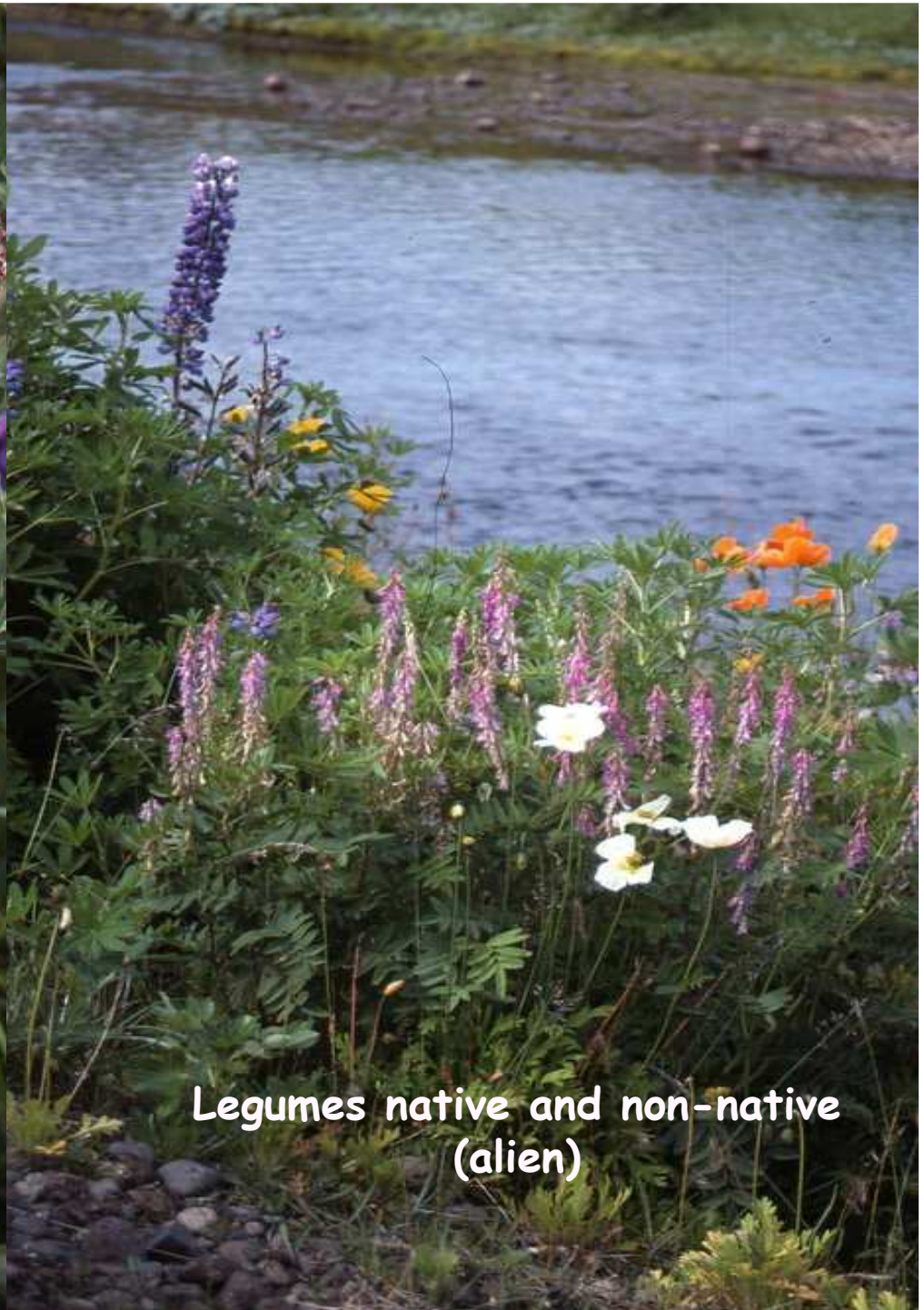


Pears

The Biodiversity Debate

Alaska Lupine - a controversial
but useful ally in soil
regeneration






Legumes native and non-native
(alien)

A close-up photograph of a raspberry plant. The image shows several green, serrated leaves with some yellowing and small dark spots. Interspersed among the leaves are several clusters of ripe, dark red raspberries. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting more foliage. The text "Unexpected crop of raspberries" is written in red in the upper right corner.

Unexpected
crop of
rasberries

Selfseeding by birds and wind in
lupine regenerated soil!





Bountiful alien "nature" by
invitation of lupine and the
Redwing Thrush.

Non-native? Yes - Invasive ????

First successful nesting reported this summer



Aliens aggressive on the natives?- Could be!



What do you want you alien upstart?
We own all fruit trees in this garden!



The blackbird has come to stay and sings
his passionate lovesongs at early daybrake



Future vision – New opportunities!

Financial Crash- Values re-evaluated

“Tend to your own garden !”

“New and better Iceland!”



- **Changing land ownership and land use patterns**
- **Successful forestry and land reclamation, -improving vegetation**
- **Rapidly changing appearance of Icelandic countryside ahead**
- **Environmental interest**
- **Prospects of a warming climate**
- **Interest in biodiversity**
- **Need for bottom-up social initiative to provide information and pioneering leadership**
- **IHS Strategi – from inward to outward looking!**
- **International cooperation !**

Final message:

Those of us that remember Iceland as it was in the mid 20th century could never have dreamed of the gardens we see to day and the plants that, with creativity, curiosity, care and perseverance are grown here today!



Thanks for listening!

