

Baring-Gould in Iceland

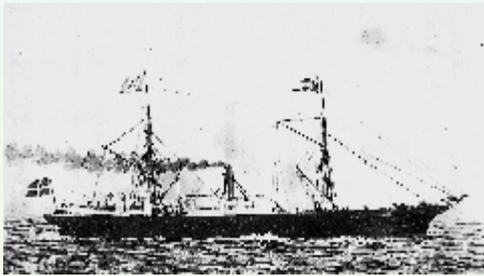
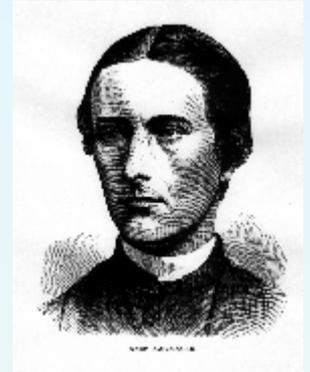
"Off at last! Farewell comfort, ease, good food, snug beds! Welcome hard riding, rain and cold, scanty diet and the ground for a couch".

With these words Sabine Baring-Gould described the start of his Journey on horseback into Iceland in 1862. In the preface to his book *'Iceland, It's Scenes and Sagas'* Baring-Gould describes his purpose as twofold - 'to examine the scenes famous in Saga and to fill a portfolio with water-colour sketches'. His plan also included writing at least one book about his adventure.

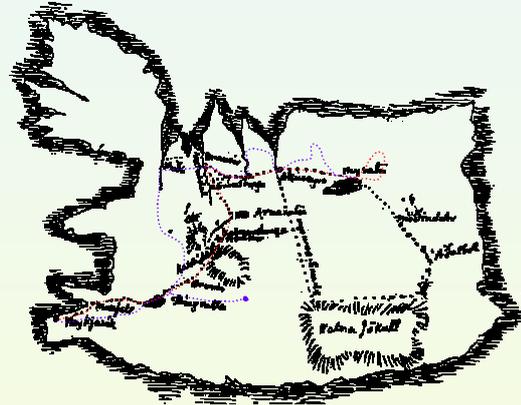


Baring-Gould's preparations for his journey were thorough, and he wrote from the school at Hurstpierpoint where he was teaching to his mother about his purchases with some pride.

I take with me all that is necessary. By poncho, I meant a waterproof one, and I shall have waterproof stockings for crossing rivers and a life belt in case of accidents. ... I have got such a snug little tent with a hammock slung in it, just 7^{ft} long by 5^{ft} wide and nearly 6^{ft} high, with a bit of waterproof over the top to let the rain run off. It all fits up with a neat case of tarpauling which will counterpoise my trunk on the horse's back. ... As I fear that I shall be sadly rubbed with the friction of the saddle after having been so long out of it I take with me a bottle of Arnica, I have as well as few common medicines in case of an emergency. The whole village here is in excitement about my expedition, the trades-people having received from me such extraordinary orders. I have just got today a knife and fork which shut up into one and go into the pocket easily. Genl Sabine provided me with opera glasses and compass.



Baring-Gould travelled to Iceland on board the 'Arcturus', a Danish steamer that carried mail, cargo and passengers between Copenhagen, Grangemouth, the Faroe Islands and Reykjavik



Baring-Gould planned a journey (black dotted line) starting and finishing in Reykjavik which took him north through Thingvalla, Kalmanstunga and Arnavatn to Hnausir. He would then strike across to Akureyri and Myvatn before the most difficult part of the journey, a great loop south-eastwards and then turning west to run along the edge of Vatna Jokull before heading northwards through Sprengisandur to Akureyri. It would be the first time, he said, that an Englishman had visited the Vatna Jokull. In the event, he followed his planned route (red dotted line) until he reached Reykjalid when he discovered that, because the grass had not grown sufficiently for the horses, he could not complete the planned journey. He returned immediately by a slightly different route (blue dotted line). He was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights.

The American writer J Ross Browne was also travelling to Iceland on the Arcturus and wrote an account of his journey for Harper's Magazine (1863). In it he describes the English Party which included Baring-Gould, before he left the others behind.

"My English Friends were so well provided with funds and equipments that they found it impossible to get ready. They had patent tents, sheets, bedsteads, mattresses, and medicine boxes. They had guns, too, in handsome gun-cases; and compasses, and chronometers, and pocket editions of the poets. They had portable kitchens packed in tin boxes, which they emptied out but never could get in again, comprising a general assortment of pots, pans, kettles, skillets, frying-pans, knives and forks, and pepper-casters. They had demijohns of brandy and kegs of Port wine; baskets of bottled porter and a dozen of Champagne; vinegar by the gallon and French mustard in patent pots; likewise, collodium for healing bruises, and mosquito-nets for keeping out snakes. They had improved oil-lamps to assist the daylight which prevails in this latitude during the twenty four hours; and shaving apparatus and nail-brushes, and cold cream for cracked lips, and dentifrice for the teeth, and patent preparations for the removal of dandruff from the hair; likewise, lint and splints for mending broken legs."

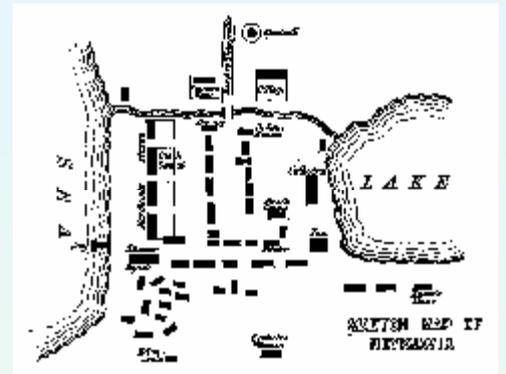


Baring-Gould's *'Iceland, Its Scenes and Sagas'* was published in 1863. He also produced two novels based on his translations of the sagas; *'Grettir the Outlaw'* (1890) and *'The Icelanders Sword'* (1858).

For more information about Sabine Baring-Gould visit the Baring-Gould web pages
<http://www.btinternet.com/~greenjack/index.htm>



One of Baring-Gould's aims was to provide artists with some resources for their work. One of his watercolour sketches (of the lake Myvatn looking towards the crater, Hverfjall) is shown left and the plate below it shows how it was translated for 'Iceland: its Scenes and Sagas'. Below that is one of the hand coloured plates from the book.



Map of Reykjavik in 1863 drawn by Baring-Gould



List of publications by Baring-Gould, based on his journey to Iceland:

Books:

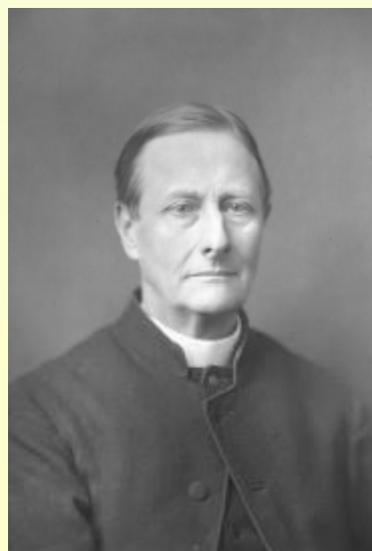
- Iceland; Its Scenes and Sagas, 1863
- Grettir the Outlaw, 1890
- The Icelander's Sword, 1894 (re-working of Oraefa-dal)

Magazine Articles:

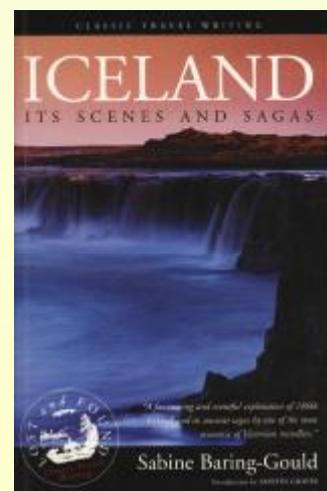
- Oraefa-dal: An Icelandic Tale, *Hurst Johnian*, 1858 - 9
- A Glimpse of the Faroes, *Once a Week*, 1865
- A Region of Lakes, *Once a Week*, 1865
- Reykjavik, *Once a Week*, 1866
- A Northern Desert: Notes on a journey into Iceland, *Good Words*, 1867
- Hekla, *Once A Week*, Vol. 4, Series 2, 30 Nov., 1867
- The Recent Eruption In Iceland (Letter to the Editor), *Once a Week*, 1867



J Ross-Browne's drawing of 'A Dandy Tourist'. Is this Sabine Baring-Gould on board *Arcturus*?



Sabine Baring-Gould in later years



Iceland; Its Scenes and Sagas has now been republished by Signal Books, Oxford. Visit their website www.signalbooks.co.uk for details