



CLEANING UP THE ICELANDIC COASTLINE

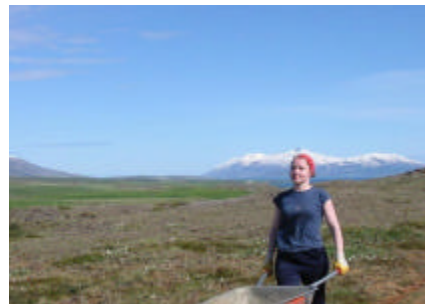
Icelandic organisation, Veraldarvinir has taken a novel approach to environmental protection, setting up camps designed to encourage visitors to help clean up their coastal environment.

In 1986 Australian yachtsman, Ian Kiernan sailed around the world in a solo yacht race. He was so appalled by the amount of rubbish he saw polluting the world's oceans that when he returned to Australia he decided something needed to be done about it – he did do something about it and Clean Up Australia, and later Clean Up the World, was born.

Fifteen years later, on the other side of the world in Iceland, a similar realisation took place. After noticing the amount of rubbish build-up in their environment, a group of concerned citizens joined together to do something about it.

The organisation Veraldarvinir was created, and now hosts nature and peace activities for volunteers looking to spend time in Iceland. Volunteers, as well as residents of

Iceland, can take part in a range of activities including work camps, seminars and youth exchange programs, all



Cleaning up the stunning Icelandic landscape

designed to raise awareness of Icelandic environmental issues, promote inter-cultural learning and encourage a culture of volunteering.

One particular Veraldarvinir project, Clean Up the Coastline, is making significant headways in the battle to conserve the Icelandic environment.

Now in its second year, the ambitious project aims to clean up the whole coastline of Iceland by collecting rubbish in

collaboration with foreign volunteers participating in work camps, school children, students, youth organisations, environmental organisations and businesses.

The campaign is divided into three main components – there are the activity camps for those looking for a unique way to see Iceland and make a positive difference to their host country during their stay; company clean ups for businesses looking for environmentally friendly team building activities, and a schools program where students learn about the environment and the value in protecting it.

“In all three parts of the project we work to raise the public's awareness of the ecological concerns caused by littering as well as getting them involved in practical activities.

“We try to show them how to prevent rubbish turning up in the environment, and how to



introduce sustainable waste management systems into the home, school or office.

“Those involved in the work camps go for one or two days, or even a week or more, to the coastline and pick up garbage there. We then try to make sure that the collected garbage is treated in an environmental friendly way and recycled wherever possible.

“In some parts of Iceland the beach is covered with garbage that originates from land based activities or is brought ashore by sea currents.

“Ecosystems at the seashore are harmed by the garbage spread. Growth of vegetation might be disturbed, animals can be entangled or they eat up the smaller pieces of plastic. Some animals, for example whales, fish or birds can die because of plastic uptake.

The primary aim of the program is to instil a culture of year-round environmental conservation in its participants, and indeed the whole of Iceland.

“Besides cleaning the coastland, we also want to teach people about environmental issues and

show them that taking care of the environment can be loads of fun.

“The clean up events we hold are not boring but fun-filled, action-packed activities, with games, music, art and education.

The fun approach is obviously working, with hundreds of people participating in the program, and particularly the environmental work camps, each year.

“The average age of our participants is between 23 and 25, however we have people of all ages involved – from teenagers to those in their eighties.

“Our work campers choose the camp for a variety of reasons. Some of them come because they like to work, because they like the atmosphere of work camps or because it is just a cheaper way to visit a country like Iceland. And there are many reasons why they choose a clean up camp. The participants like the clean up activities and enjoy the seeing the results of all their hard work at the end of it.

“The camps provide an opportunity for individuals to combine their energies and together address problems vital to our shared global future.

“Veraldarvinir has helped show the Icelandic people that keeping the environment clean is important. To be concerned about nature and sustainability is a quite new thing in Iceland, but the idea that we have to take care about the environment is spreading very quickly around the country. Nowadays many people are concerned about the condition of the environment and try to keep it clean.

“The Clean Up the Coastline project is now a part of an ongoing process to remind people of the importance of keeping the environment clean and managing waste in a sustainable way.

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