

Sveakratern 1919 – Grímsvötn revisit 2019: The legacy of Erik Ygberg and Hakon Wadell

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Abstract — *The first recorded visit to Grímsvötn occurred on the 31st of August 1919. Two Swedish geology students, Hakon Wadell and Erik Ygberg, stood on the edge of a hitherto unknown large caldera. This discovery was the most significant finding in the first west-to-east transect across Vatnajökull, starting at Síðujökull on the 27th of August. This was an expedition into the unknown, but a principal aim was nevertheless to find the source of the large jökulhlaups on Skeiðarársandur. They named the ice-filled caldera “Svíágígur”. Studies of written sources in the 1930s revealed that this place was indeed Grímsvötn, well known in the 17th and 18th centuries but the name and location had been forgotten in the 19th century. From Svíágígur they continued eastwards, descending down the crevassed Heinabergsjökull, reaching civilization in the morning the 6th. They announced the news that a huge volcano existed under Vatnajökull and this was the source of the jökulhlaups emerging from Skeiðarárjökull. Upon their return to Stockholm, they received a hero’s welcome, but soon it all changed into no one believing them, as prominent figures in Sweden at this time insisted that a volcano can’t be active beneath a glacier! After they finished their studies, both left Sweden very disappointed. Hakon Wadell had a successful geological career in America presenting a doctoral thesis in 1932 from the University of Chicago. Erik Ygberg worked as an international prospector a few years before his bad health, a result of the hardships experienced at the end of the Vatnajökull expedition, forced him back to Sweden, where he had a career at the Swedish Geological Survey. The name Svíágígur has not been used but the two nunataks marking the highest points on Grímsfjall are named in the honour of the two Swedes, Svíahúkur eystri and Svíahnúkur vestri.*

INTRODUCTION

In the last days of August 2019 it was 100 years since the Grímsvötn volcano was discovered or re-discovered. It may have been visited during the Middle Ages before the full onset of the Little Ice Age in Iceland. The climate change resulted in growth of glaciers making Grímsvötn more inaccessible. The discovery (or re-discovery) of the volcano was made by two geology students, Hakon Wadell and Erik Ygberg from Stockholm Höghskola (later Stockholm University as of 1960). They decided to explore the interior of Vatnajökull by transecting from west to east, a crossing never done before. At the time, several

short expeditions had been made on the edges of the glacier. One of the few north-south crossings had been made by William Lord Watts and his companions in 1875. They travelled from Síðujökull to Kistufell (Figure 1). This was the second attempt as Watts and his group had to turn around halfway the year before. Hakon Wadell and Erik Ygberg wanted to do something never done before and to explore the interior of Vatnajökull. Also, if possible, find the cause of the jökulhlaups periodically emerging from Skeiðarárjökull.

The Glaciological Society of Iceland (JÖRFI) arranged a trip to Grímsfjall where the Grímsvötn volcano with its large caldera (almost 50 km²) is located,

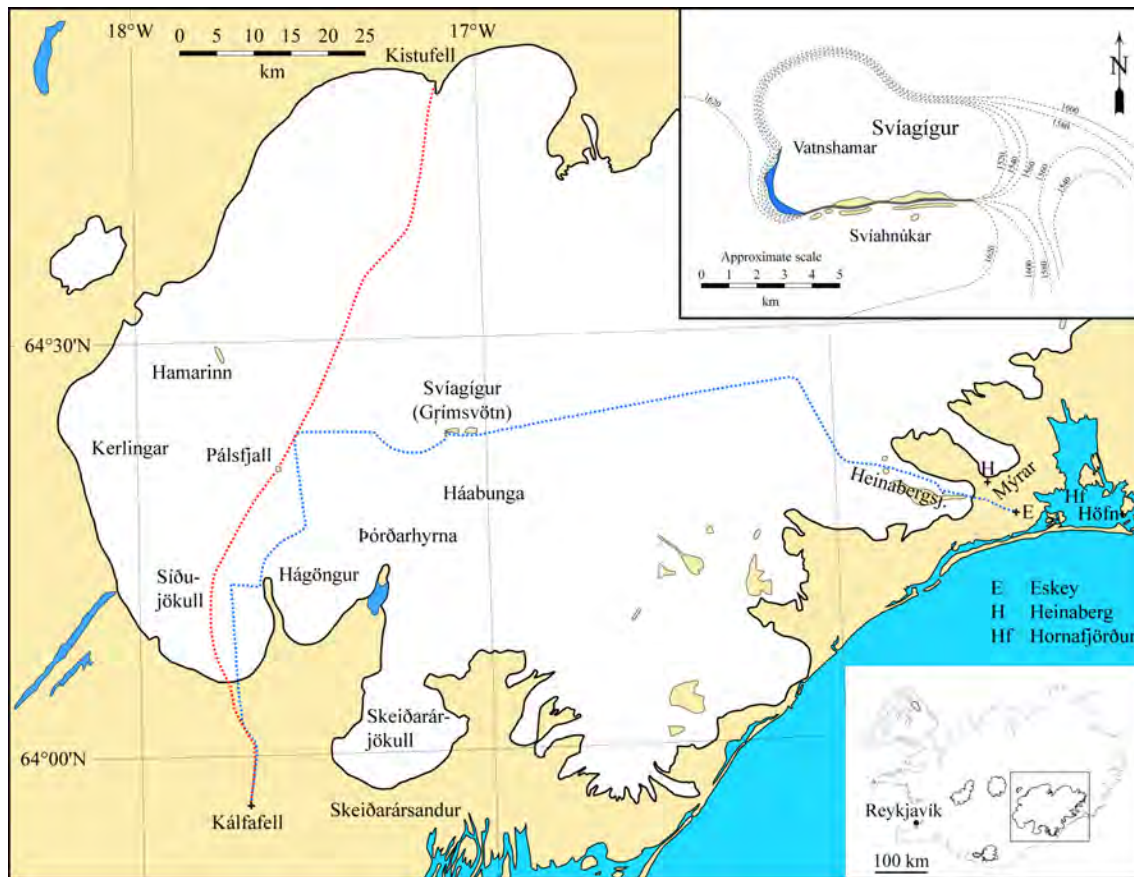


Figure 1. A simplified map based on Wadell (1920) showing the route (in blue) of Hakon and Erik in 1919. William Lord Watts route in 1875 is given in red. Both expeditions started at the farm Kálfafell. – *Korti, byggt á korti Wadell frá 1920, af leið Hakons og Eriks um Vatnajökul 1919 (blá lína). Rauða línan sýnir leið Watts og féлага árið 1875.*

at the end of August 2019. On the 31st of August 2019 at approximately the same time and place when Erik Ygberg and Hakon Wadell looked out over the volcano hundred years ago, the group of twenty-two celebrated their achievement (Figure 2). Before the informal ceremony on the glacier, the group had coffee and a cake, which had the map from Hakon Wadell’s publication 1920 on its top (Figure 3), followed by a barbecue. This was a fitting celebration of the achievements and discovery of the two young Swedes 100 years earlier. An achievement that was not acknowledged and recognized by the Swedish geological community in the early part of the 20th century.

The 1919 expedition

The travel to Iceland started on the 26th of May 1919 from Stockholm by train. A small group embarked on the steam ship ‘Island’ on the 31st of May. Upon arrival in Reykjavik, all passengers had to stay in quarantine because of the Spanish flu. It was a group of four that traveled to Iceland; the two main characters Hakon Wadell and Erik Ygberg, the geologist Henrik Strindberg and a photographer Mr. Boge. The latter two were not enthusiastic about travelling across Vatnajökull and thus disappear from this story.



Figure 2. The participants of the JÖRFÍ trip to Grímsvötn on the 31st of August 2019, approximately where Hakon and Erik stood exactly 100 years earlier. – Þátttakendur í ferð JÖRFÍ í lok ágúst 2019 á þeim stað þar sem þeir Erik og Hakon komu að Grímsvötnum nákvæmlega 100 árum áður. Photo:/Ljósm. Katla Magnúsdóttir.



Figure 3. The cake presented in the Grímsfjall hut the 31st August 2019, with the map from 1920 (see Figure 1). – Kakan sem snædd var á Grímsfjalli 31. ágúst 2019, kremið var með korti Wadell af leið þeirra félaga. Photo:/Ljósm. Ásgeir Pétursson.

In July, Hakon and Erik parted with their travel companions and travel along the south coast. On 12th of August, they arrive at the farm 'Kálfafell' (Figure 1). They set out towards Síðujökull with their own horses and horses rented from the farm. All their equipment was transported up on the glacier and the sledge was assembled. They returned to Kálfafell in darkness. An episode from this part of the expedition is described in Erik's diary (Morgunblaðið, June 9th and 10th 1920). It says: "On the 24th of August the steep climb must be abandoned. One of the horses just lay down and refused to go any further. One of the provision crates came loose and rolled downhill. Luckily, it was not containing the alcohol exclaims Ygberg relieved." On the 27th of August they set out with three horses and a sledge from the base camp established a few days earlier. The weather was superb when they set out, heading north (Figure 1). Despite the glacier in the lower parts of the accumulation area being covered by tephra from the Katla eruption in October-November 1918, they

made good progress over the ice and they camped at 9 PM. The next day they came into an area with a thick ash layer and they changed direction due east and aimed towards Hágöngur (Figure 1). From there they turned north again and passed Pálsfjall a few kilometers to the east. They continued on the northward course until reaching an elevation of 1600 meters (Figures 1 and 4), where the course was changed towards east. The sledge moved along more easily as the glacier became smother and they made good progress towards Háabunga (Figure 5). At midday on the 31st of August fog rolled in but they continued with Hakon on the sledge with the compass directing Erik riding the lead horse. The fog got thicker, and Erik reported he could see only the hooves of his horse. They still made good progress due east. Erik also reported he could occasionally smell sulfur but he believed this to be his imagination playing him a prank. Suddenly his horse stopped. Erik had learned to trust the horses and if a horse refused to continue it should be taken seriously. He got down



Figure 4. Photograph taken in the area where Erik and Hakon changed course and headed eastwards (see Figure 1), with Hamarinn to the right and Kerlingar to the left. This photograph was published as Figure 10 in Wadell (1920). – *Mynd tekin ofarlega á Tunгнаárvökli á þeim stað þar sem þeir félagar breyttu stefnunni til austurs* (10. mynd í grein Wadell, 1920).



Figure 5. This photograph was taken on the route up to Háabunga after turning to the east. Þórðarhyrna can be seen at the horizon. – *Ljósmynd úr ferð Erik og Hakon, Þórðarhyrna í fjarska*.



Figure 6. Erik Ygberg with the horses next to the tent up on the even-surfaced glacier. The indication that it is Erik on the picture comes from the article he wrote in the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet* 4th of October 1945. – *Erik Ygberg og hestarnir við tjaldið á sléttum jökli.*

and crawled with caution forward as he expected a crevasse. After only a few meters a wind gust came and the whole world opened. He was at the brink of an abyss, so he crawled in reverse back to Hakon, the horses and the sledge. They withdrew in their tracks and at a safe distance they pitched their tent. The next day when they got out of the tent (Figure 6) they saw in front of them a huge depression in the glacier, bathed in the sparkling sun. This depression was surrounded on three sides by steep to near vertical walls with the southern wall mostly composed of outcropping rocks (Figure 1). The height of the sides was estimated to be about 125 meters. The fourth side was smoother and formed a valley in the glacier surface, linking it to the upper reaches of Skeiðarárjökull (Figure 1). Roped up they reached the floor of the depression, which was covered with ice. In the southwestern part open water was present along the walls of the depression (Figure 1). They reported steam rising from the rock and the origin of the sulfur smell could be explained. The size of the crater was measured as 8 kilometers E-W and 5 km N-S. Erik and Hakon realized that they were inside a huge volcano and they inferred that they had found the source of the jökulhlaups emerging from Skeiðarárjökull. The volcano was baptized to Svíagígur or Sveakratern. This name has not survived, after the eruption of 1934 the old name of Grímsvötn was re-instated by geologists

Jóhannes Áskelsson (Áskelsson, 1936), Hans W:son Ahlmann (Ahlmann and Thorarinsson, 1937) and Sigurður Thorarinsson (Þórarinnsson, 1974).

Towards the east

Erik and Hakon left Grímsvötn on the 2nd of September and continued the expedition on a course due east from the newly discovered “Sveakraten”). The thick fog showed no intention of moving and in the following days they followed a compass course. The fog lay heavily over the landscape until the 4th of September, and on that morning they found themselves in a crevasse area. The barometer indicated that they were at an altitude of 1500 meters. The skies cleared away and they could see all the way down to Hornafjörður. This was a morale boost, they were close to the goal of reaching the eastern margin of Vatnajökull! As the number of crevasses increased they decided to leave the sledge behind as supplies were running low. They continued with two riding horses and one pack horse that carried some of the equipment, but with a part of it left behind. They had Hornafjörður in sight, but had to descend down Heinabergsjökull, which proved to be a challenge. They climbed down a steep slope, a heavily crevassed section, went around a small hill and passed over narrow ridges with deep crevasses on each side. It took them more than ten hours to cover two kilometers. On the 5th of September they

camped on a small plateau framed by abyss-like cliffs on both sides. The horses were nervous and Erik and Hakon had to hold them all night, and at midnight it started to rain. After this miserable night the journey down towards civilization continued. Hakon suffered badly from rheumatism as they followed the narrow ice ridges down the glacier. At nine o'clock on the 6th of September they finally arrived at the farm Hólar in the district of Mýrar (Figure 1).

The farm people were extremely friendly, and they were well cared for. At the farm they meet Dagbjartur Eyjólfsson, a farmer from Heinaberg. He offered to help them retrieve the sledge up on the glacier. They rested for a few days and then decided to let the world know about their achievement. They rode to Höfn in Hornafjörður and sent a wire to news agents. On the 9th of September the first news appeared in Morgunblaðið and Berlingske. The next day the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet printed the story with the headline: "The largest Icelandic crater discovered. An astonishing achievement by two young men from Stockholm. The crater perhaps the largest of the world has been named - Swede crater."

Now all they had to do was to retrieve the equipment. On the 18th of September they set out with four horses and with the guidance of Dagbjartur they followed a better route. But the last part proved to be very difficult as new crevasses had formed. Eventually after several hours they reached the sledge. The horses were loaded and they noted the wind had died completely. This was bad news. A storm from north was coming. The storm caught them and they had to sacrifice the equipment and concentrate on surviving! They succeeded wrapping the tent around the three of them, but no clothes and blankets – they had a terrible night. The next day they managed to get blankets and food. They were stranded on a tiny plateau surrounded by deep chasms. The horses were still with them on the second day of the storm, but on the third day when the storm had ceased, the horses were gone. One of the horses was found deep down in a crevasse, alive but beyond help. The three men succeeded in reaching a populated area, but they were scarred for life. Two other horses had managed to find their way down and were found by a farmer. On the 22nd of

September, five Icelanders went back to retrieve all the equipment parts they could find, but a lot of it was lost.

Erik and Hakon traveled back to Stockholm and arrived there on the 19th of November.

Other observations made by Wadell and Ygberg

Although the discovery of Grímsvötn was the most noted finding of this two-man expedition, there are other relevant observations. Firstly, their descriptions and photos bear witness to the extent and magnitude of the fallout of tephra on Vatnajökull in the eruption of Katla in 1918. Wadell (1920a) states that the tephra was up to 10–20 cm thick in the ablation area of Síðu-jökull (Wadell uses the name Skaftárjökull) and that in that area a 20–25 cm layer of packed snow was found between the tephra layer and the glacier ice. This may, however, have been an older tephra layer as this thickness is improbable given the large distance from Katla. Moreover, they used this tephra layer to estimate the mass balance in the accumulation areas, apparently by digging snow pits down to the tephra layer. Wadell states that at 1600 m above sea level the thickness of the net snow accumulation varied between 1.5 and 3 meters. These may be the first observations of mass balance on Vatnajökull. Using a firm density of 550 kg m³, these numbers are equivalent to a net mass balance of 0.8–1.7 m water equivalent, comparable to the averages reported for 1992–2006 (Björnsson and Pálsson, 2008) in the accumulation area of Vatnajökull traversed by Erik and Hakon.

Aftermath

The achievements of Erik and Hakon got a good coverage in Iceland. Morgunblaðið (1919) was the first to break the news on the 9th of September. The newspaper printed a longer story in the 21st and continued on the 23rd of September based on a telephone interview with Hakon Wadell. The next summer Morgunblaðið printed a more complete story written by Hakon (Wadell, 1920b), first introduced on the 3rd of June 1920 and when published on 9th, 10th, 12th, 20th of June, and 3rd and 8th of July. In Sweden, the news came out on the 10th of September in Svenska Dagbladet. They got a hero's welcome upon their return on the 19th November, but their fame died out



A pair of photographs from approximately the same place below Svíahnúkur eystri ($64^{\circ}25.21'N$, $17^{\circ}15.34'W$). Top: September 1st, 1919. Below: June 5th, 2005. In 1919 the Vatnshamar cliff (to the right) was exposed but fully covered by ice in 2005. However, the cliff became exposed again in 2018, after having been ice-covered for about half a century. – *Tvær ljósmyndir sem teknar eru í Grímsvötum á nokkurn veginn sama stað, 1. september 1919 og 5. júní 2005. Vatnshamar, sem sést á myndinni frá 1919 var hulinn jökli 2005, en kom aftur í ljós 2018, eftir að hafa verið hulinn jökli í a.m.k. hálfu öld.*

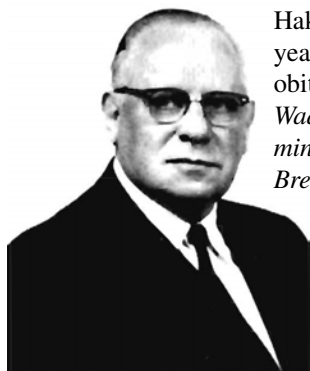
rapidly. Shortly after their return, Swedish scientists started questioning the reported findings. In Sweden they found it unlikely and impossible for a volcano to be active under a glacier. Considering this argumentation today, it looks most surprising, as only a year earlier the Katla eruption in 1918 had been reported on and it was clear to all that it had broken through a glacier. Erik and Hakon were transformed from heroes to laughingstocks, ignored and forgotten. Despite this, Hakon published an article 1920 (Wadell, 1920a). In this article page 303 he stated: “On 31 August we reached the crown of the ice-dome which is about 1,700 m high, and which is marked on the map by the name of Jökullbunga; on the evening of the same day we encountered a huge crater basin north of Skeiðarárjökull. The source of the volcanic jökulhlaup had been discovered, and that solved the principal problem of the expedition.”

The hostile environment that developed after the initial welcome, left Erik and Hakon extremely disappointed and both left Sweden after they graduated. Erik Ygberg returned home after a few years abroad because of health problems. The name “Sveakratern” the Swede crater did not survive long and the name Grímsvötn was reintroduced in 1936. It was Jóhannes Áskelsson who considered it very likely the name Grímsvötn, documented in several publications from the beginning of the 17th century and into the early part of the 19th century, applied to “Sveakratern” (Þórarinnsson, 1974). The name Grímsvötn first appeared in a letter written around the beginning of the 17th century and several other documents from around that time (Þórarinnsson, 1974). The memory of the achievements of Erik Ygberg and Hakon Wadell is preserved in the names of the two peaks of Grímsfjall, which bear the names Svíahnúkur eystri

(1723 m a.s.l.) and Svíaðnúkur vestari (1703 m a.s.l.). The names translate to Swedes peak (east and west). The huts of the Iceland Glaciological Society, built in 1957–1994 are located on the eastern peak.

In March-April of 1934 a jökulhlaup occurred in Skeiðará, triggering an eruption in Grímsvötn. This event spurred the Danish professor Niels Nielsen to make an expedition to Vatnajökull 1934 and again 1936. Nielsen (1937 p. 33) recognizes the achievements of Hakon Wadell and Erik Ygberg, and states “gav vigtige videnskablige Resultater” = provided important scientific results. They were correct with the reason and the source of the jökulhlaup. These fine words and recognition did not reach Sweden. In 1936 Hans W:son Ahlman made an important expedition to Vatnajökull. He just mentions Hakon and Erik in two lines on page 20 (Ahlman 1936). An interesting coincidence is that Ahlman met the same Dagbjartur who helped Hakon and Erik to retrieve the equipment 27 years earlier.

Hakon and Erik should have received much more credit for their achievement, both the expedition and the scientific results. However, their legacy is still manifested with the names of the two peaks at Grímsfjöll – Svíaðnúkar.



Hakon Wadell in his later years (from J. Harlen Bretz obituary, 1964). – *Hakon Wadell á miðjum aldri (úr minningargrein J. Harlen Bretz frá 1964).*

Hakon Wadell

The first thing to unravel in relation to Hakon Wadell is the name. In all printed material, except one time the name Hakon is used. In a text for Morgunblaðið (21st and 23rd September) that was translated with a slightly longer account of the expedition and this is signed by Håkon Wadell. This was a telephone in-

terview and most likely the journalist got the name wrong, so it is probably Hakon.

Hakon was born in Gothenburg 1895. After his military service he started his studies at the Stockholm Högskola in 1918 and graduated in 1920. As stated earlier, he published a scientific article in the Swedish journal *Geografiska Annaler* with the results of the Vatnajökull expedition (Wadell, 1920a), which sadly received little recognition in Sweden. He moved to Central America where he worked in the petroleum industry. In the mid-twenties he moved to the United States. In 1932 he received a Ph.D. in Geology from the University of Chicago. He worked as a geologist for several companies on the American continent. He published many research articles, mainly in sedimentology. It is for this work that he is best known, and various terminology, including suggesting the adaption of the term sedimentology for the field was made by him in the nineteen thirties (Wadell, 1932a,b, 1933, 1938). He passed away in 1962. In an obituary written by J. Haren Bretz at the University of Chicago, who was Hakon Wadell's friend and a sometime mentor, Bretz describes Hakon as a very sensitive person, a deep thinker and a perfectionist.

Erik Ygberg

Erik was born 1896 in Västerhaninge just south of Stockholm. In 1915 he started his studies at the Stockholm Högskola. After completing his geology studies in 1922 he and his wife Ria left Sweden. Erik worked as an international prospector, but after some years, the injuries he got during the expedition in Iceland came back. Because of the injuries the couple returned to Sweden. He continued working with prospecting. After some time, he got a position at the Department of Mineralogy at the Swedish Museum of Natural History and in 1937 he moved to the Swedish Geological Survey (SGU). At the time the museum and the survey were in the same building. He worked at the SGU until his death in 1953 only 57 years old. In 1945 (4th Oct) he got an article published in the newspaper *Aftonbladet* about the expedition (Ygberg, 1945). He provided the newspaper with four photos (one used in the article) and these were returned to him. These photos were later found at the Museum of Natural History by geologist Erik Jonsson.

This sparked the writing of a popular science article (Sturkell *et al.*, 2008). In this article all these photos are printed, some never published before. It is not known which one of the two took the photographs.



Erik Ygberg at the Natural History Museum in Stockholm in 1937. Photographer unknown. – *Erik Ygberg í Sænska náttúruminjasafninu í Stokkhólmi árið 1937.*

Grímsvötn 1919–2019

Þó svo að vitað hafi verið um eldstöðvar í miðjum Vatnajökli um aldir og að nafnið Grímsvötn hafi verið vel þekkt, a.m.k. frá byrjun 17. aldar fram á fyrsta hluta 19. aldar, fyrntist nafnið og í lok 19. aldar var það gleymt. Ekki er útilokað að menn hafi komið í Grímsvötn fyrir á öldum en engar heimildir eru um slíkt. Fyrsta ferðin sem vitað er um í Grímsvötn var um margt ævintýrlegur leiðangur tveggja ungra Svía, jarðfræðinemanna Erik Ygberg og Hakon Wadell. Þeir fundu Grímsvötn 31. ágúst 1919. Jöklaferð þeirra hófst 27. ágúst. Leiðin lá upp Síðujökul, þaðan í norður upp á ofanvert hjarnsvæði Tungnaár-

jökuls. Þá var tekin 90° beygja og haldið beint í austur yfir Háubungu. Þeir höfðu þrjá hesta sem drógu sleða með farangrinum. Leiðin upp Síðujökul var seinleg og erfið, m.a. var töluverð gjóska úr Kötlugosinu 1918 nálægt jafnvægislínunni og var sleðinn því mjög þungur í drætti. Skyggni var ekki sem best austan Háubungu, en skyndilega stoppaði fremsti hesturinn og vildi ekki lengra. Þá dró aðeins frá og þeir sáu að þarna inni á miðjum Vatnajökli voru þeir staddir frammi á brún mikils dals með sléttum jökulbotni, hömrum girtan að sunnan og vestan. Grímsvötn voru fundin, en þeim var nafnið ókunnugt. Erik og Hakon rannsökuðu svæðið daginn eftir, fóru niður í vötnin, mældu svæðið lauslega og gerðu af því kortskyssu.

Þann 2. september, eftir tveggja daga árangursríka dvöl við Grímsvötn í góðu veðri, héldu Erik og Hakon áfram austur á bóginn. Fljótlega þyngdi yfir og skyggnið hvarf. Annar sat á fremsta hestinum og hélt stefnu með áttavita en hinn sat á vagninum með annan áttavita og leiðrétti stefnuna þegar þess þurfti með. Eftir tveggja daga ferð voru þeir staddir norður af Heinabergsjökli. Snjó kyngdi niður, færið var að versna og heybirgðir á þrotum. Því tóku þeir stefnuna til suðurs og komust með nokkru erfiði til byggða niður Heinabergsjökul. Hluta farangursins urðu þeir að skilja eftir vegna þess hve jökullinn var sprunginn og erfiður yfirferðar.

Þeim Erik og Hakon var mjög vel tekið þegar þeir komu til byggða. Þeir dvöldu á Hólmi á Mýrum og hvíldust þar. Þann 18. september héldu þeir aftur á jökul með Dagbjarti Eyjólfssyni bónda á Heinabergi til að ná í það sem orðið hafði eftir af farangri á jöklinum. Á Heinabergsjökli skall á þá manndrápsveður. Þeir hirtust matarlitlir með tjaldið vafið utan um sig í tvo sólarhringa meðan fárviðrið geisaði. Loks komust þeir til byggða þegar veðrinu slotaði, kalnir og illa til reika. Er haft fyrir satt að Erik Ygberg hafi aldrei náð aftur fullri heilsu eftir þessa hrakninga.

Fréttir af ferð þeirra og fundi hinnar miklu eldstöðvar í miðjum jöklinum birtust í Morgunblaðinu 9. september 1919 og daginn eftir í Sænska dagblaðinu. Þær vöktu mikla athygli. Við komuna til Stokkhólms um haustið var þeim tekið sem hetjum. En fljótlega kom fram gagnrýni og þeir taldir óabyrgir ævintýramenn. Sænskir jarðfræðingar sem framarlega stóðu

á þessum tíma töldu uppgötvanir þeirra ósennilegar. Einkum þótti það fráleitt að eldfjall gæti gosið undir jökli. Þessar mótbáru verður að telja merkilegar í ljósi þess að þær eru settar fram aðeins ári eftir gosið í Kötlu 1918. Erik og Hakon voru mjög vonsviknir yfir þessum móttökum og báðir yfirgáfu þeir Svíþjóð að loknu námi. Erik Ygberg vann við rannsóknir erlendis í nokkur ár, en eftir hrakningana á Heinabergsjökli hafði hann ekki heilsu til að stunda þá erfiðu líkamlegu vinnu sem mælingar í felti krefjast. Hann flutti því aftur til Svíþjóðar og vann lengst af við Sænsku Jarðfræðistofnunina í Stokkhólmi. Erik Ygberg lést 1953 og var þá 57 ára gamall. Hakon Wadell flutti til Ameríku og lauk doktorsprófi í jarðfræði frá Háskólanum í Chicago 1932. Hans er helst minnst fyrir merkilegt framlag til setlagafraeði og er enn vitnað til greina hans um það efni frá 4. áratug 20. aldar. Hann lést 1962, 67 ára gamall. J. Harlen Bretz, prófessor við Háskólann í Chicago, sem frægastur er fyrir að hafa sýnt fram á að gríðarleg hamfarafloð hafi orðið í norðvesturhluta Bandaríkjanna í lok síðasta jökulskeiðs, skrifaði fallega minningargrein um Hakon Wadell árið 1964, og það sem vitað er um ár hans í Ameríku er einkum fengið þaðan.

Erik og Hakon gáfu hamradalnum mikla í miðjum Vatnajökli nafnið Svíagígur og áttuðu sig á að þeir höfðu fundið upptök Skeiðarárhlaupa. Nafnið festist þó ekki við staðinn. Eftir gosið í Grímsvötnum 1934 hófust rannsóknir á svæðinu og fór þar fremstur í flokki Jóhannes Áskelsson jarðfræðingur. Við lestur eldri heimilda varð öllum ljóst að gosið hafði orðið í hinum fornu Grímsvötnum. Minningu Svíanna knáu, þeirra Erik Ygberg og Hakon Wadell, er þó haldið á lofti með nafni hnúkanna tveggja sem rísa hæst á norðurbrún Grímsfjalls: Svíahnúkur eystri (1723 m y.s.) og Svíahnúkur vestri (1703 m y.s.).

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