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Bláa Lónid

Above: The Blue Lagoon, with the adjacent power plant and nearby bathing facilities and motel.

Below: The hot lake allows people to sunbathe all year, in spite of the cold Icelandic climate.

(Photos courtesy Zophónias Björgvinsson)



In 1974 the Sudurnes Regional Heating Company built a geothermal power station, which provides pollution-free electricity and heating to several towns, in one of Iceland's largest lava fields. The project unexpectedly facilitated the creation of a popular bathing and hang-out spot, which local residents call Bláa Lónid (the Blue Lagoon), because of the strikingly creamy blue color of the water.

The plant taps into an aquifer deep underground and draws up hot steam and water, which is used for driving electric generating turbines and heating buildings. The water that is discharged from the plant mixes with sea water just beneath the porous lava field, creating a hot-water lake. The healing power of the water's chemical mixture, the surreal natural setting and the vivid indus-

trial architecture have combined to make this place popular among locals and tourists alike.

The lake now has comfortable bathing facilities and a motel for longer stays, all created by entrepreneurs who were quick to realize the lagoon's potentials. SRHC has encouraged this development, which, it believes, educates people about the often hidden processes of generating electricity and heat and about the pollution-free technology the plant uses.

As Earth's resources dwindle, industries must find ways to consume less and to forge creative new relationships with their surroundings. One strategy may be to imagine industrial landscapes as places for tourism, as at Bláa Lónid. Such an approach will certainly help convince owners, managers and

investors of the benefits of pollution-free environments.

SRHC has succeeded not only in supplying its customers with power and heat but also in creating a base for economic activity for years to come — while consuming a minimum of resources, generating a minimum of waste and creating a remarkable juxtaposition of architecture and landscape. Bláa Lónid clearly demonstrates that clean and healthy technology can exist next to human habitation and have a positive influence on its surroundings. And it demonstrates the possibilities that serendipity can unleash.