

# Crossing Iceland on Foot - a Speed Record Attempt

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Conor SHEPHERD



A report written for the Lord Rootes Memorial Fund trustees

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# 1 Abstract

This report describes an expedition funded by the Lord Rootes Memorial Fund at the University of Warwick, which enabled the author to make a north to south foot crossing of Iceland.

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The Author</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Expedition</b>	<b>6</b>
6.1	Northern Tip to Reykjahlið . . . . .	6
6.2	Into the Highlands through to Landmannalaugar . . . . .	16
6.3	Fjallabak to Þórsmörk to Skogar . . . . .	29
<b>7</b>	<b>Afterthoughts</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Appendices</b>	<b>39</b>
8.1	Appendix 1: Financial Report . . . . .	39
8.2	Appendix 2: Kit List . . . . .	40
8.3	Appendix 3: List of Figures . . . . .	42



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## 3 The Author

**Conor Shepherd**

Email: [cshepherd949@gmail.com](mailto:cshepherd949@gmail.com)

## 4 Introduction

Iceland is a Nordic island which marks the juncture of the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans in the Mid-Atlantic Range. It covers an area of 100,000 square kilometres and has a population of just over 300,000. The idea was to travel from the north tip to the south coast, solely on foot, solo and unsupported. I would cover a distance of at least 520 kilometers, resupplying twice en route with food parcels sent ahead in the post.



Figure 1: My route follows the purple dots (very roughly). My start and end points are marked orange. The pink dot was my planned start point. Each of the 13 yellow dots was an overnight stop. Resupply points are at yellow dots 3 and 11 (Mývatn and Landmannalaugar).

Why walking across Iceland on foot? Travelling home from an athletics race with the University last December I was speaking to a friend who described a similar trip he had done a few years back. I was immediately captivated by the idea and the planning started that evening!

Why a 'speed record' attempt? Simply as I felt the proposal would have a greater chance of success... It was not the main motivation for the trip. The route has only been walked a handful of times (due to lack of publicity more than anything), and never in a "must

go as quickly as possible" mindset. There is no "set route" as such, thus any 'record' is quite arbitrary! In any case, 18 days is the quickest documented time, and my aim was 14, which would require an average of around 40 kilometers per day.

## 5 Planning

Lots of very useful information can be found on Jonathan Leys website - [www.phlumf.com](http://www.phlumf.com). Maps, general navigation, footwear, roads, sandstorms, river crossings, clothing, weather, insects, food, fuel, direction, logistics and other internet resources are all discussed.

This was my first backpacking trip so I was a bit clueless at first as to what equipment I would need and how it would be best organised. It turns out there are loads of great internet resources about lightweight backpacking, including how to pack a rucksack for maximum comfort and stability. After just a few hours browsing I had a good idea of what I would take and how much my bag would realistically weigh. Table 3 in the appendices gives an account of every piece of equipment I carried on the walk. It's incredible how light you can go while still travelling comfortably and safely. With relatively little effort I had a pack weight (without food) of 6.5kg. In a warmer, drier climate I would be able to get this down to less than 4.5kg no problem.

A lot of time went into deciding what food I would take and how much I would need. I settled on 3400 calories a day. For breakfast and dinner I ate freeze dried meals from Expedition Foods ([expeditionfoods.com](http://expeditionfoods.com)). They gave me a small discount after I got in touch with them describing the trip and the meals were delicious. They provided 800 calories per meal, which left 1800 calories per day which came from snacks - fig rolls, nuts, chocolate, cookies, jelly babies, dried apricots and dried berries. All the food combined to give an average of around 4.6 calories per gram - so 740 grams of food per day. I packed two shoe boxes of food to send to places on route which I would pick up. All the food for the trip was brought from England on the flight - this was cheaper than sending it from home, and I thought it would have a better chance of arriving at my resupply points.

I used 1:250,000 scale maps, bought online from the Reykjavík University bookshop. Quite a large scale to use, but the landscape in Iceland is incredibly vast, making this



Figure 2: Equipment size using a 1L bottle for perspective. From top left to bottom right - thermarest, tent, ground sheet protector, sleeping bag, pegs, water bottle, stove, fork, mug, gas. Detailed kit list can be found in the Appendices.

large scale very suitable. The maps have been scanned into the report. I didn't carry a GPS. It would have been helpful on a couple of occasions, but on the whole I didn't miss it. There is a very useful online National Land Survey of Iceland map viewer, with a tool for measuring distances, which is what all the distances quoted are based on. I think I underestimated the distances a bit, especially in the highlands. On the scans it is possible to see individual section distances marked in pencil (look for an obvious change in route direction or a landmark en route.) 1cm on the map equates to 2.5 kilometers of actual terrain.

I walked in my La Sportiva fell running shoes. They are lightweight and dry quickly, and I find them very comfortable to wear. I was able to run occasionally which was great. Everyone I met walking wore huge boots, but these are not necessary in Iceland at all. The terrain was generally very well suited for walking, mostly hard packed dirt, sand, or rock. Generally it was quite flat, especially in the North.

I don't want to describe every last detail here, as a lot of enjoyment can be had from planning a trip like this. But, any specific questions, just send an email!





Figure 3: Box of food containing over 70,000 calories.

## 6 Expedition

I arrived in Iceland (Keflavík) late on Friday 11th July, and took the bus to Reykjavík which is around an hours drive away. There is a campsite about 20 minutes walk from the centre of town with great facilities, and this made a good base to organise things and leave all my gear which wasn't being taken on the walk. I decided to head up north and get started immediately. On the Saturday I sent one of my food boxes on the daily bus to (the small shop in) Landmannalaugar, for collection 2 weeks later. I got some information about bus routes out of town, went for a walk around town and packed my rucksack for the journey.

### 6.1 Northern Tip to Reykjahlíð

This section of the walk from the northern tip to Reykjahlíð is 142km, which I split into 2 nights and 3 days.

My planned starting point was Hraunhafnartangi, just over 600km from Reykjavík. A short bus ride out of town landed me at a large crossroads where the main number 1



Figure 4: Day 1 of the walk, route highlighted in pink. I couldn't get to my planned starting point so it was 13km of road walking east instead of west to the turn south. I camped just south-west of the red road 85, around 42km for the day.

ring road heads north to Akureyri, about 400km away. I hitch-hiked up this, and got lucky - the fourth car to pick me up was a lovely couple who were heading all the way up to the north-east, perfect! It was around 12 hours of driving, with gorgeous views the whole way. We stopped in Akureyri for dinner, an ice cream at the famous ice cream shop and a walk around the botanical gardens which were lovely. I got dropped off in Kopasker, a small town near the north-east tip, and swapped numbers with Óskar and Unnur so we could meet up back in Reykjavík when I returned. There was a camp ground in Kopasker, and a post office where I could send my other box of food to Mývatn.

Unfortunately the bus route to Raufarhófn turned out to be more of a taxi service, and needed organising in advance. The road (better described as a rough track) north was pretty deserted but I started walking up it hoping to get a lift from a passing vehicle. After 30 minutes a van came by and kindly stopped to pick me up. I was dropped off at a fork in the road which was about equidistant (13km) to my turn south across the moor as Hraunhafnartangi, just further west (see Figure 4). With little prospect of seeing another vehicle for several hours, I decided to start the walk here. Monday 14th July, 12.45pm.





Figure 5: Looking north into the Arctic Circle shortly before turning south across the moor.

The road walk east was very pleasant, until I encroached on some nesting Arctic Terns who were not happy with my presence on the road! Their 'territory' spanned a large area, and large groups of them circled overhead, taking turns to dive bomb me to try and take a chunk of my skull to feed the babies. Their squawks were ear-piercing. Fortunately, my walking poles provided adequate protection, and my head stayed intact.

The turn south came quicker than I expected, where it was time to say goodbye to the feathered assassins and head cross country across rough moorland towards a small lake. It turned out that this section would be the hardest terrain on the whole walk. Spongy tussocks and tundra as far as the eye could see, steep chasms between each of the mounds waited hungrily to snap a misplaced ankle. I made very slow progress for the amount of effort put in, and it was quite dangerous as a broken ankle here would have been very nasty. No water, phone signal or road for miles kept my concentration high. It was very hot and I didn't pace the 2 litres of water I was carrying very well at all, ending up quite dehydrated. A packet of mixed berries were wonderful respite to my dry mouth. It took over 6 hours to reach the turn south west towards Kopasker and hopefully a stream for some water.



Figure 6: Vast moorland [TS]

Water didn't materialise. It would be another 2 hours and more treacherous cross country terrain before I arrived at a small tarn filled with still murky water. I knelt down on the bank and collected handfuls of the dirty water, sipping away gratefully. I was thoroughly exhausted by the time I got to the 85 road and I stumbled upon a nice patch of flat grass next to an ice cold stream, where I pitched my small green hotel for the night. Putting some water on to boil, I stumbled over to the stream, washed my socks and pants and drank litres of the crystal clear water, rehydrating my tired body. It tasted so sweet. Back at the tent, I decided on Chicken Tikka with Rice for dinner. It was piping hot, delicious and filling. After eating I collapsed almost immediately into a deep sleep.

I woke to the sound of heavy rain on the flysheet. Groggily squinting at my watch it read 07:04. It seemed to rain in the morning here, along with strong winds, giving way to afternoons and evenings which would grow gradually more settled. Coupled with the phenomenon of 24 hours daylight allowed me the luxury of sleeping every morning until at least 11am to allow the bad weather to pass.

The day began with hot porridge and strawberries. Tasty. I began the 30km of road





Figure 7: Passing a lake on the cross country section of the first day. [TS]

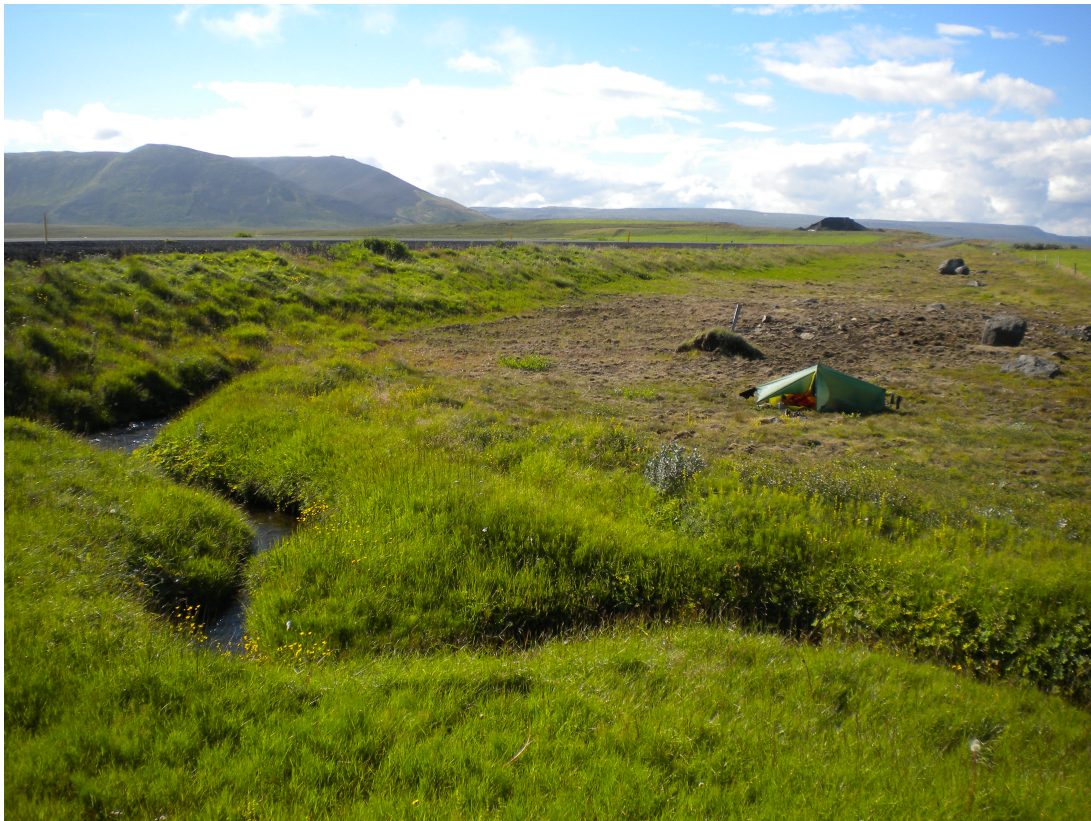


Figure 8: Perfect pitch at the end of day 1 with ice cold fresh water for washing and drinking.





Figure 9: Day 2. 30km of road walking to Asbyrgi and then 15km following the river down through Jökulsárgljúfur National Park to the marked camp site. I had planned to go a bit further down the river to find somewhere quiet, but I could barely walk by the time I arrived at the site so I just pitched up there.



Figure 10: Wild horses. [TS]

walking that lay ahead to Ásbyrgi at the northern end of Jökulsárgljúfur National Park. The tarmac was a wonderfully smooth change to the unforgiving terrain of the previous day. A few cars per hour would flash past. I started to settle into the rhythmic motion of the walking. No desire to check my watch or look at the map to worry about how far I had come or how fast I was walking. Just immersing myself in the walking. Left. Right. Left. Right. Spectacular views lay before me in all directions, and I had hours to soak it in. To my left, the jagged cliffs of Núpar, in front, the hills at the northern end of the national park near Ásbyrgi, on my right, the ocean and in the distance beyond it, a long mountain range which looked like it had been lifted straight out of the Alps. Crisp white peaks glistened above the dark blue ocean.

My walking poles began to feel like extensions of my arms, helping me glide along with ease. Unfortunately, walking so close to the coast brought me back into the territory of some more angry Arctic Terns. Their piercing squawk can be heard a mile away. They enjoyed their usual entertainment of diving at my head. Just before Ásbyrgi, the sky changed from deep blue to black, great dark clouds rolled in off the ocean, and it rained, hard. I got my waterproofs on just in time to avoid a complete soaking. My





Figure 11: Lovely colours in the river. [TS]

body started to deteriorate rapidly over the final kilometers to Ásbyrgi. When I arrived, I had a long sit down. I was feeling terrible. The efforts of the previous day across the moorland had obviously taken their toll. Everything ached. It took ages to psyche myself up to get going again, and the pace slowed to a trudge as the evening passed by. The National Park was very pretty. It was slightly disappointing to see a road snaking all the way down the canyon which would go all the way to Dettifoss. I tried to switch off to the discomfort but every few minutes a sudden jolt of pain in my leg or shoulder would bring me back suddenly. By the time I got to the camp site I was really feeling terrible. It was because of the poor terrain of the previous day, right? In the back of my head there was the possibility that I might just not be up for this! I tried to dismiss that thought and attempted to get some sleep.

I didn't sleep at all during the night due to the aches and pains, and a bad stomach, no doubt from the tarn water the previous day. By 6am I was completely exhausted and finally crashed out and slept until 12.30. I woke up to a deserted camp site and had a leisurely breakfast, putting off the day ahead... It was 57km to Mývatn from here and I could get away with splitting this up into two days which I thoroughly intended on





Figure 12: Day 3 would take me past the incredible Detifoss waterfall all the way to Lake Mývatn.

doing.

The day started off continuing along the marked trail south towards Dettifoss, a spectacular waterfall and big tourist attraction. Amazingly, although the first couple of hours were painful I soon warmed up and the pain in my joints and muscles seemed to ease off slowly but surely. I couldn't quite believe the change from the previous evening. The trail was beautiful, small waterfalls running into the huge Jökulsá á Fjöllum river and fantastic square cut pillars of rock standing proudly against the canyon walls, the environment was full of vitality and life.

I arrived at a heaving car park, where a path led to Dettifoss. I joined the hordes along the path. You can hear the waterfall from the car park which is over one and a half kilometers away. The falls are 100 metres wide and drop 45 metres down to the Jökulsárgljúfur canyon. It is the largest waterfall in Europe in terms of volume





Figure 13: Waterfalls along the trail [TS]



Figure 14: Dettifoss [TS]

discharge, having an average water flow of  $193m^3$ /second! I sat for some time listening to the mighty roar of the waterfall, mesmerised by the patterns in the plummeting white water. I was hungry, and took some time to refuel. It seemed nobody stayed at the waterfall for more than 5 minutes. Most simply walked up to the edge, head buried in a mobile phone, stopped, looked for a few seconds, took a photo, turned around and headed straight back to the car park!

I was now heading south west towards Mývatn. As the hours drifted by I just felt better and better. Arriving at the ring road, I had dinner. Feeling fantastic after some hot food I decided to head to Reykjahlið. Amazing how quickly things can change, only 18 hours before I was feeling as low as I thought possible, and now I was running along the road towards town, dancing through the kilometers, feeling fresh! Midnight came and it was calm and mild, a full moon in the east and the sun just dipping behind the mountains in the north west. I arrived at 2am and used the campsite as I really fancied a hot shower. 142km in 60 hours. I could barely believe my change of fortune... It was a fantastic shower, the hot water was being fed directly from the geothermal hot springs in the area and it really was hot. As I settled down in my sleeping bag for the night, I realised just how great it was to be off my feet and relaxing. You can bang yourself over the head with a hammer, because it's so nice when you stop...

## **6.2 Into the Highlands through to Landmannalaugar**

This was by far the longest section of the walk, around 280-300 kilometers with no resupply until Landmannalaugar, which would take 8 days. I had posted a box of food to the post office in Reykjahlið which I picked up on the morning of the 17th - my rucksack was at its heaviest now, around 14kg, dropping off day by day to roughly 7kg by the 24th.

18km of road walking around the north west side of the lake took me to a turning to a small settlement called Stöng, which had a "geothermal pool" symbol signed on a roadside information board. The road around the lake hosts a marathon, and the road was chalked up with kilometer markers - it isn't nice knowing exactly how far you have come. Flies were really bad around the lake, thick black clouds of them just buzzing around at head height, mosquito net essential here. Stöng turned out to be a small bed



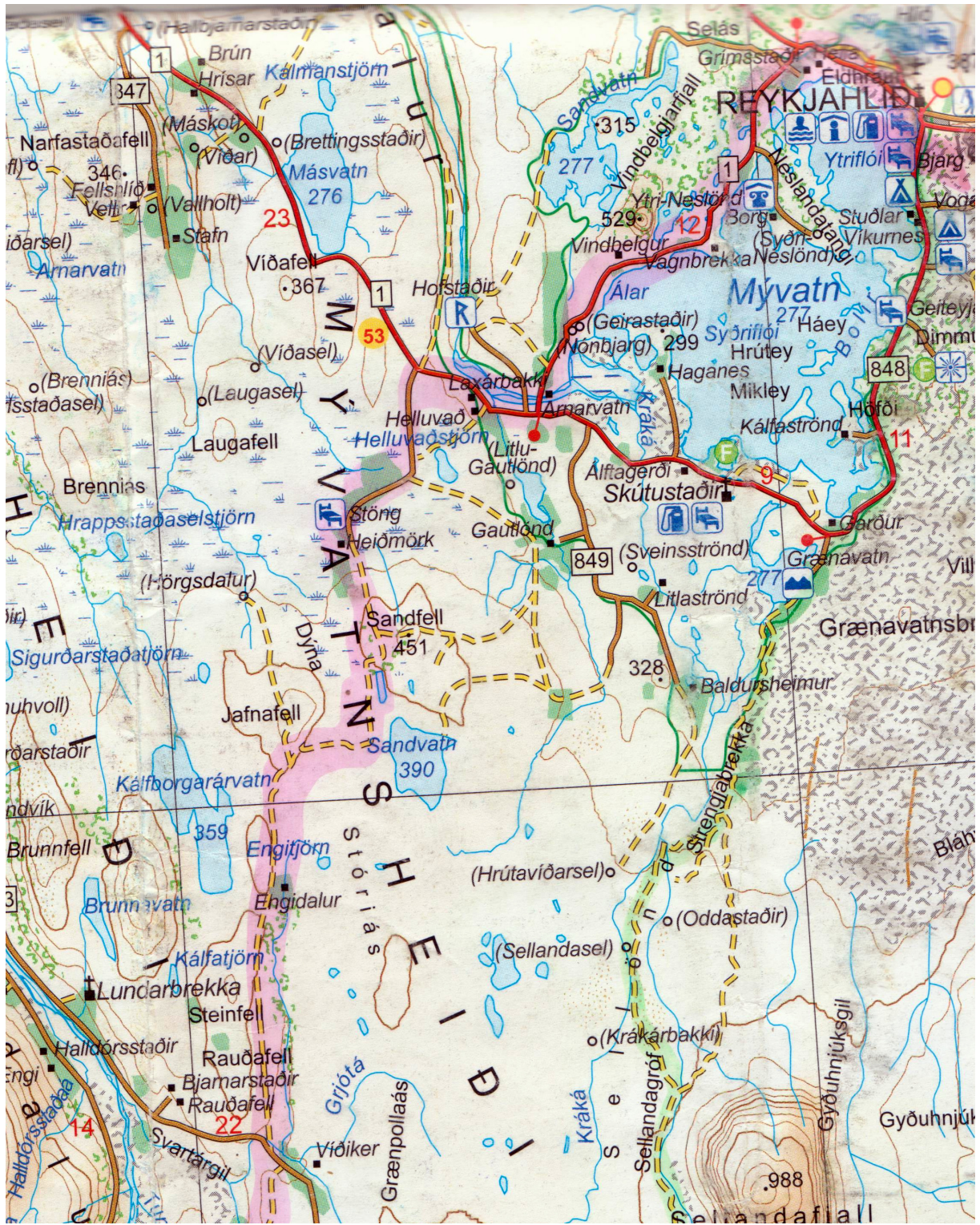


Figure 15: Day 4, 17th July. I followed the road around the north west side of Lake Mývatn, then to Stöng before continuing south into the highlands proper. I camped near Engitjörn, around 35km from the campsite on the shore of Mývatn. The route highlighted in green was my original plan, but I changed my mind and headed further west.





Figure 16: Hverfjall crater, northern Highlands. [TS]

and breakfast type place with outdoor hot tubs. I went in to ask for some information about the huts I would be passing over the next couple of days and enquired hopefully about the geothermal pool symbol I had seen. The girl at reception laughed and told me they had hot tubs which were normally only for guests, but that I looked like I could use a wash and to go ahead and use them. Amazingly kind! I had dinner in the lounge before heading off south along 4x4 tracks for another 3 hours. Towards the end of the day, I caught my first proper sighting of Vatnajökull (meaning Glacier of Rivers). It covers more than 8 per cent of the country and I could make out the sheet of white on the horizon which was a stark contrast to the grey and black landscape all around.

Day 5 took me deeper into the highlands. What a difference to the first few days in the north. A totally wild, barren landscape, which, although desolate, felt wonderfully alive. I spent the day walking south with the huge Vatnajökull glacier in full view in the distance. I felt tired all day, so took it easy and called it a day after 30km at the Rettatorfa hut. This was owned by the Icelandic 4x4 Club, and I was soon glad I had finished the day a bit early here - the weather was wild that night with howling gales and horizontal sleet and rain which lasted through to midday the next day.

19th July, day 6, started off quite gently, easy tracks meandering south. About two hours

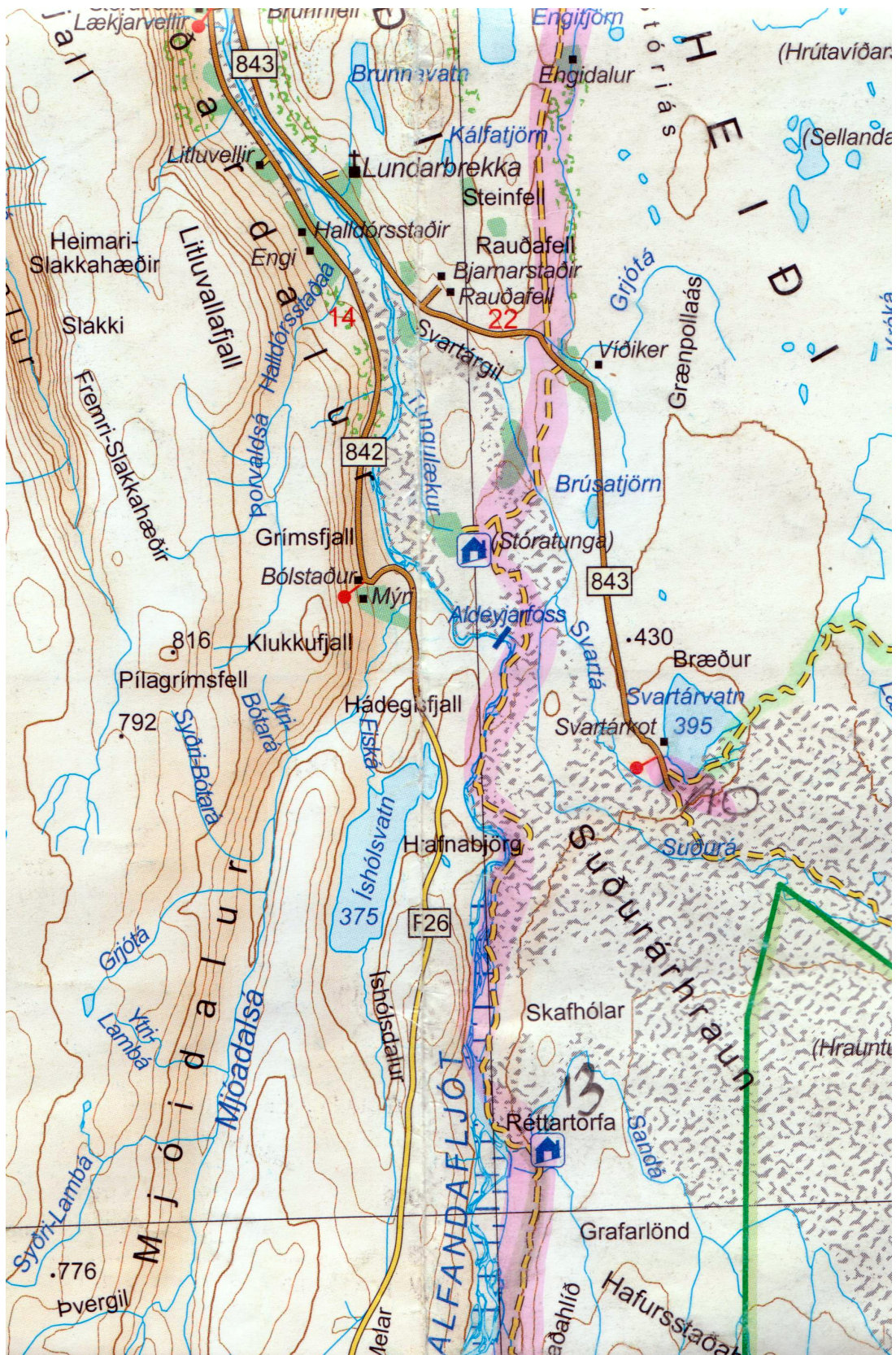


Figure 17: Day 5 took me south from Engifjörn past Aldeyjartöss to the Rettatorfa hut, around 30km.





Figure 18: Dark sky looming, rain clouds approaching. [TS]

in I arrived at a nasty looking river. It was thigh deep at the near bank, cloudy and very fast flowing, around 7 meters across. It looked much more serious than any of the other rivers I had crossed so far. The overnight rain had obviously had an effect. Walking up and down the bank to see if there was a shallower part I could cross at was unfruitful. Should I wait and cross early the next morning? It looked dangerous. I couldn't imagine a vehicle getting across.

In the end I decided to cross where the track went in and came out. It was hard going and difficult to remain upright against the icy torrent. I buried my poles into the rocky riverbed and edged carefully across to the opposite bank, facing slightly into the current to avoid getting swept sideways. With less than 2 meters to go the riverbed dropped off a few inches and I found myself waist deep and in serious trouble, my lower body was numb with cold and I was on the verge of being swept away. There was no chance of turning around, I knew as soon as I turned parallel to the current it would take me. I dug my feet and poles in as hard as I could, edged forwards inch by inch and threw myself against the bank, grabbing at the stony surface and flopping over onto the other side.





Figure 19: Day 6 - Rettatorfa to the F910 roadhead, around 35km.



Figure 20: Looking north, day 6, with the mountains around Lake Mývatn on the horizon.

I felt stupid for putting myself in such a situation. The consequences could have been pretty bad if I had been submerged, it was unlikely I would have gotten away with just a soaking. But I was unharmed, best to get moving and warm up. The remainder of the day was quite hilly, with spectacular panoramic views as I gained height.

I woke up on the 20th with a very sore left Achilles, and the first 3 hours were very painful. I'm not sure what caused it to swell up, but it would cause discomfort for the rest of the walk. Around 7 hours of walking brought me to a thermal pool which was fairly mild at around 27 Celsius, I bathed my legs and had dinner before finding a nice spot to pitch the tent next to some fresh water. The next day brought superb scenery through lava fields, lots of river crossings but no improvement in the Achilles. These two days were meant to be the easiest days on the walk, moderate distance with a fairly light pack, but the injury made them two of the hardest. I joined the F26 towards the end of the day, just before the Nyidalur hut, which marked 130km left to Landmannalaugar. It was here I suddenly realised I hadn't seen another human in 3 days.

The following two days passed by in a blur. A walking path was marked following the F26 but more directly, this meant a shorter route, but much hillier, taking an uncom-







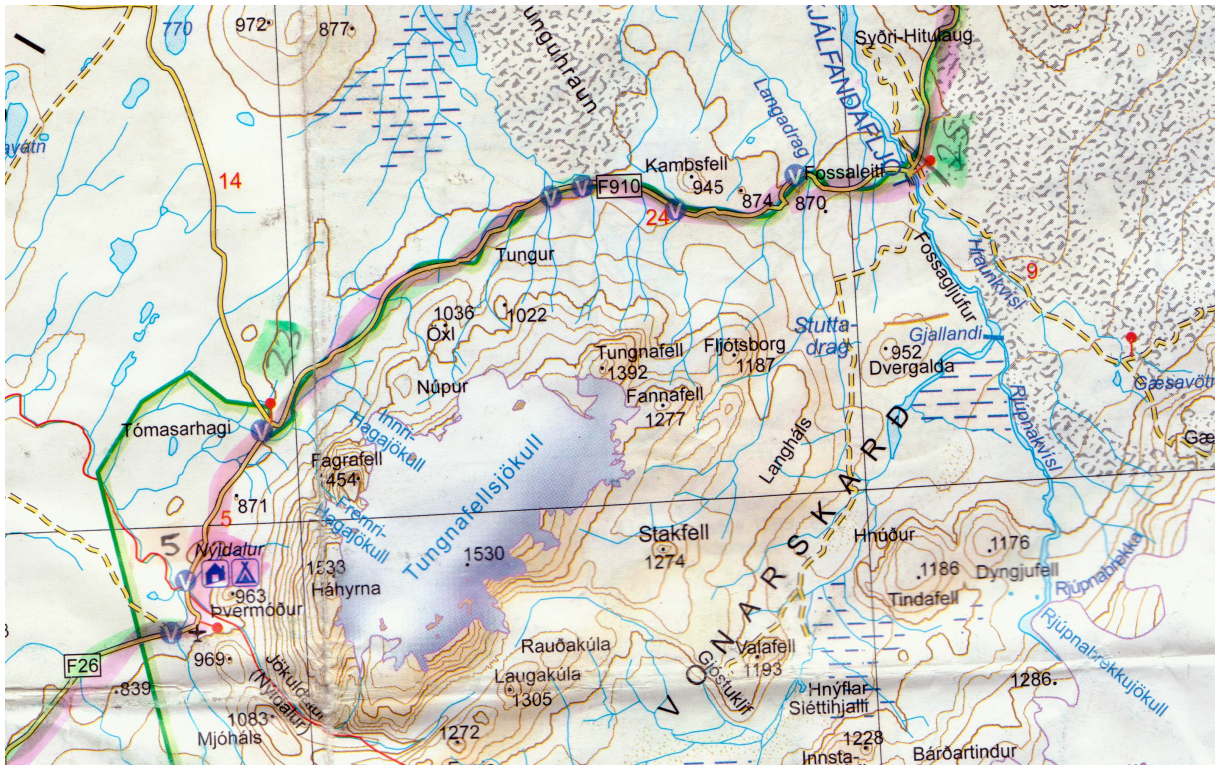


Figure 22: Day 8, 21st July. Camped at Nydalur, with 127km left to Landmannalaugar.



Figure 23: Nydalur [TS]





Figure 24: Over the next two days, 22nd and 23rd July I covered 110km, roughly following the F26 past the Versalir hut and along Þórisvatn.





Figure 25: Rare sight of some wild flowers, day 9.

promising line up and over lots of rolling hills. There was regular traffic now, perhaps 2 or 3 vehicles per hour. Partly because of this I decided to cover the distance to the Landmannalaugar quite quickly. On the 22nd I stayed in a 'hut' (see Figure 26) around 10km from Versalir which is marked on the map. Funnily, it rained and blew a gale all night, just like a few days before when I stayed in the Rettatorfa hut. There was small notepad on a table in there which was a visitors book, with entries back to 1987.

The 23rd was my longest day, around 15 hours of walking (65km or so) and took me through some wild terrain. It was also the windiest day of the trip, a strong southerly which was almost impossible to walk directly into. It was amazingly powerful. The lake Þórisvatn was hidden from view by a mountain range until I was almost at the end of it. I hit a paved road, the first I had seen for a week, at midnight, which I followed briefly before cutting off across more rough tracks to take me to the 208 road towards Landmannalaugar. I reached a river at 4am or so and crashed out in the tent, with the 2nd stage of the journey almost complete.

I woke up looking forward to a very short day of walking ahead, and took it easy. The scenery changed quite dramatically over the 4 hours I was on my feet. Greys and blacks turned to vibrant greens and blues, the brutal winds of the previous day had died



Figure 26: my 9th night was spent in this charming hut/portacabin!

down to a calm breeze and I almost felt as if I had completed the journey already. It seemed like all the hard work was behind me, with less than 100km to the coast and the spectacular Laugavegur trail just around the corner! I was in Landmannalaugar by 4pm, and it was a bit of a shock to the system. At least a hundred tents were pitched around the area, 3 large wooden huts, and a small shop on a bus. I hadn't seen this many people in one place for almost 2 weeks!





Figure 27: A short, relaxing day to Landmannalaugar. I had slept somewhere around the red number 11.





Figure 28: Bright colours approaching Landmannalaugar

### 6.3 Fjallabak to Þórsmörk to Skogar

I spent almost 24 hours in Landmannalaugar, a shop with chocolate and coke and a hot spring to swim in were absolute luxuries! It was here I met Trym, the Norwegian photographer, and Stefan who had been walking with Trym for a few days. It turned out he had been walking an almost identical route to me over the last month, with a load of photography equipment which made his rucksack weigh an unbelievable 40kg! Four zero. I wouldn't have been able to carry that for 300 yards, never mind 300 miles. We shared stories and laughed at the similar experiences we'd had, including that treacherous river crossing in the Highlands, which had been a close call for him too. They were spending a day relaxing before continuing south, and I was on a bit of a schedule unfortunately. But I spent a few hours the next morning relaxing and swimming in the hot pools, setting off at 2.30pm on the 25th to Alftavatn.

The Laugavegur trail is supposedly one of the top 3 walking trails in the world. It was absolutely stunning. It is around 50km and there are 3 huts on the way (which walkers are asked to stay in or camp near to avoid increasing the erosion in the area)



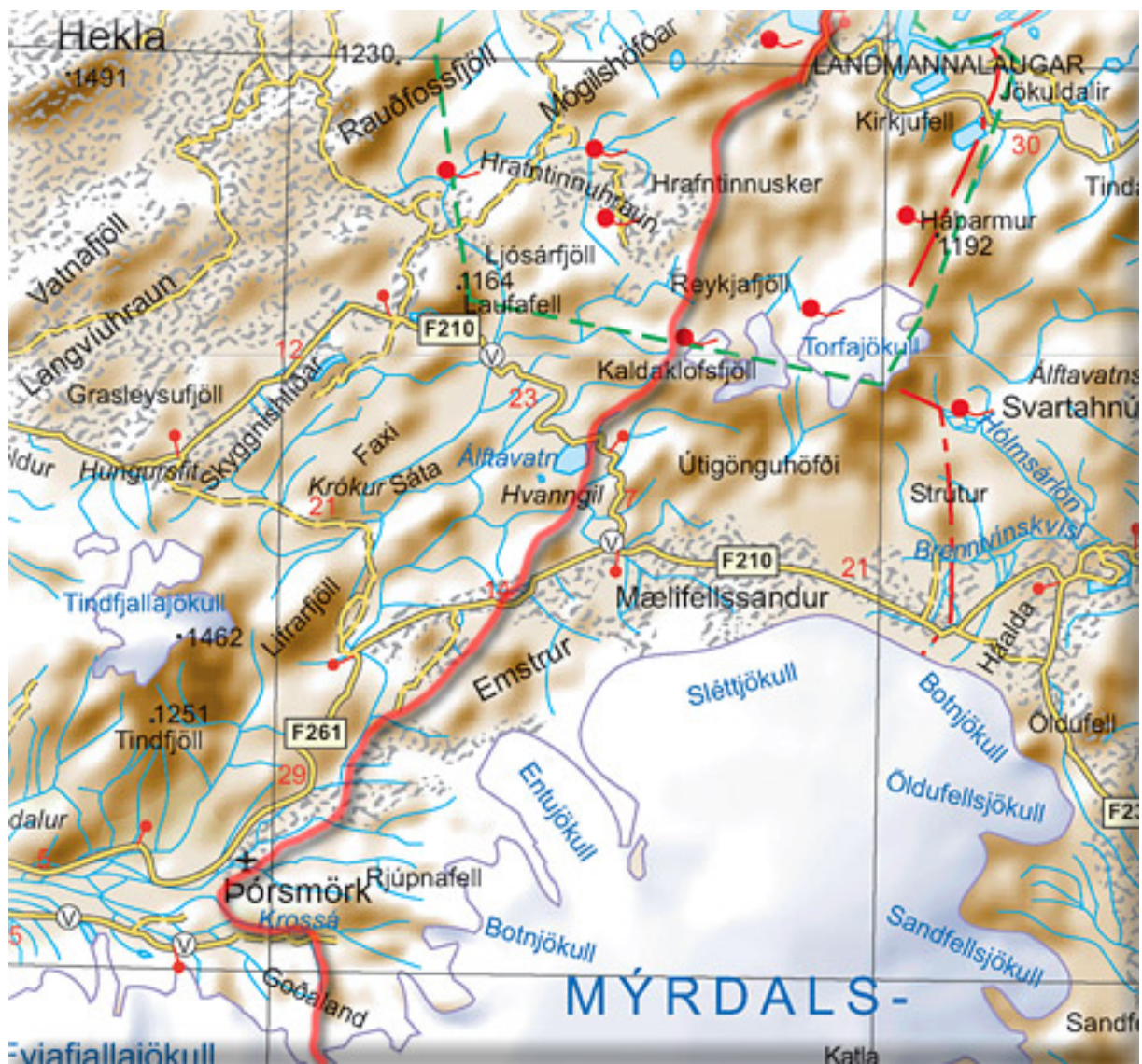


Figure 29: I split the Fjallabak route to Þórsmörk over 2 days, spending night 12 at Alftavatn.



Figure 30: No caption necessary? [TS]

which allows for a 4 day / 3 night walk for lots of visitors. The individual sections are 10/11/16/15km long, so obviously it's possible to run sections together if you fancy that. Top tip - doing it in two days, it is possible to avoid most of the crowds by setting off in the afternoon. Most people will have arrived at their next hut by midday or so, therefore it is much quieter on the trails. Particularly sections 2 and 4 which were deserted as it was early evening.

I met Rick and Simon from the Netherlands towards the end of the day and we had a great few hours together talking about all sorts, enjoying the views. Rick kindly sent me a couple of photos he took of me while we were walking together which was very kind.

The penultimate day took me to Þórsmörk, which is where the Laugavegur trail ends. It was much flatter than the previous day so took around the same time even though it was 10km further. Just before Þórsmörk, you cross a river and are greeted with a small forest. These were the first trees I had seen in Iceland! The hut at Þórsmörk was very peaceful with stunning views in all directions.





Figure 31: Early evening on the 25th July. [RF]



Figure 32: Walking with Rick and Simon on the 25th. [RF]





Figure 33: Making a brew, camp 12.



Figure 34: Day 13, near Alftavatn [TS]





Figure 35: Walking with two Austrians up to the top of the pass, in the background is the valley floor where I had set off from that morning.

The trail to Skogar from Þórsmörk is equally as impressive as the Laugarvegur route, definitely take an extra day to do it if you go! It takes a route directly between Eyjafjallajökull and Mýrdalsjökull, passing the recent eruptions from 2010. It was a hot day down in the valley and there was 800 meters of vertical height gain up ahead to get to the top of the pass, quite strenuous walking, winding up and up away from the valley floor. The views back north were some of the best on the whole trip. There was cloud covering the top of the glaciers, and when I reached the cloud level it became very cold very quickly! I went from topless to putting every layer I had with me on. The cloud was really thick and navigating across the glaciers was pretty tricky, even though the trail was marked with large yellow posts every 50 meters or so. I could only see a few feet in front of me. I was relieved to find myself heading downhill after an hour or so, and I was soon out of the fog. I could see the sea on the horizon! It looked so close, but it would be another 6 hours before I reached the beach. It was a stunning path along the river Skogar, a bright green walled gorge containing more waterfalls than I could keep count of. There must be well over 50 individual falls along the river, ending at Skogar with the huge Skogarfoss, which is right next to the main ring road.



Figure 36: The south coast! 8pm on the 27th July.

It was a long walk to the beach! The sand was actually very small pebbles, which even when wet, didn't stick to my hands or bag. Never been on a beach like it, really cool. I had finished... What a trip, absolutely unique and completely different to anything I had done before.

It was an even longer walk back to the ring road as it had started chucking it down. Now just a few hours hitch-hiking back to Reykjavik! I was picked up after just a few minutes, by a lovely Icelandic guy who drove 2 hours out of his way to drop me off in town, at the campsite... Amazingly kind!





Figure 37: The final day, with possibly the most beautiful scenery on the whole trip.

## 7 Afterthoughts

The trip was, quite simply, amazing. I am so grateful to have received funding to go and do something like this. I feel like I experienced Iceland in an involved way. Being immersed in such a wild environment for two weeks was an experience I will never forget. Walking hour after hour, day after day, through the deserted vastness of the highlands gave me the opportunity to settle into 'reality'.

*The wind blows hard among the pines  
toward the beginning  
of an endless past.  
Listen: you've heard everything.*

*Shinkichi Takahashi*

The Laugavegur was a wonderful and stunning contrast to the highlands, which was itself a completely different experience to the north. It was my first time map reading, crossing rivers, multi day walking and basically being self sufficient for more than a few days. Lots could have gone wrong, but I was very lucky. My tent didn't break, I didn't get lost, I didn't drown, the weather was not as severe as it could have been and my food parcels arrived.

### FAQ's

I have been asked lots of questions about the trip - here are a few common ones.

#### **Did you listen to music?**

Yeah, a little. My phone has a 32GB memory card loaded with music. I would put some on (not every day) right at the beginning or end of the walking day, to get me going when I was sore or to push me through for an extra hour or two when I was completely exhausted.

Memorable albums I listened to (I can pinpoint on the map exactly where I listened to these) include:

Joni Mitchell - *Song to a Seagull*, Israel Kamakawiwo'ole - *Facing Future*, Talking Heads - *More Songs about Buildings and Food*, Zion I - *Mind over Matter*, Alan Watts - *The Game*



**How often did you wash?**

Every night I washed my feet and socks, most nights my body in a river or with some boiled water if it was particularly cold. I didn't wash my actual clothes at all as I didn't have any spares and they didn't smell much at all even after two weeks.

**Did you get lonely and/or bored?**

No. I don't find solo camping in the wilderness lonely, I love it. And I only really get bored around boring people.

**What did you regret not bringing?**

More fig rolls.

**Did you get blisters?**

Only one, on the first day, which swelled up pretty big on one of my toes but didn't hurt at all fortunately.

**Did you wish you had taken longer to enjoy it?**

In hindsight, yes. On the very first day, when I was dropped off by the old man in the van, he offered to take me up the road (the left fork in Figure 4) where there was a lovely spot with 'amazing birds' (Rauðinupur), and pick me up on his way home. On several other occasions I wished I could have stopped for a day or two to see some cool things near my route. But, on the other hand it was cool to cover the distance quickly and thus travel light without masses of food weighing me down. Another 10kg in my pack would have made the walking much less enjoyable.

Table 1: Proposed Budget

<b>Proposed Expenses</b>	<b>Cost (£)</b>
Flights	242
Train Fare to Manchester Airport	34.35
Transport in Iceland (Buses)	80
BMC Trek Insurance	62.02
Food and Fuel	265
3 nights and living costs in Reykjavik	90
Maps	60
<b>TOTAL MONEY RECEIVED</b>	<b>833.37</b>

## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Appendix 1: Financial Report

Table 2: Actual Expenditure

<b>Actual Expenses</b>	<b>Cost (£)</b>
Insurance	63.29
Flights (40kg baggage)	215.41
Food and Fuel	357.09
Living costs in Iceland	244.51
Maps	30.17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>910.47</b>

I almost stayed within my budget, but as always things end up costing more than you anticipate. Food was quite a bit more, flights less, hitch-hiking saved the bus fares, living costs in general were very high even though I was almost self sufficient with a tent and lots of food.



## 8.2 Appendix 2: Kit List

Table 3: Gear List

category	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	WEIGHT (grams)	Retrospective Comments	
CLOTHES worn	shoes	<i>La Sportiva Crosslites</i>	350	superb	
	hiking socks	<i>Merino Wool Socks</i>	70	excellent and warm	
	gaiters	<i>Trek Mates Gore-tex</i>	320	didn't use once	
	rain coat	<i>Patagonia Storm Shell</i>	259	perfect against wind + water	
	hiking pants	<i>North Face Zip off trousers</i>	378	great, lots of pockets	
	short sleeve base	<i>Berhaus Base Layer T</i>	162	excellent	
	long sleeve base	<i>Mountain Warehouse Merino Zip</i>	214	perfect base layer	
	sunglasses	<i>Oakley Flaks (inc. spare lenses)</i>	35	wore yellow lenses every day	
	watch	<i>Casio Illuminator</i>	36	classic watch	
	trekking poles	<i>Fizan Altitude</i>	450	crucial, multifunctional kit	
	pants	<i>Levi Boxers</i>	73		
	warm hat	<i>Rab Fleece Hat</i>	86	great temperature regulator	
	balaclava	<i>Buff</i>	36	as above, multifunctional	
	gloves	<i>Berghaus Fleece Gloves</i>	48	lost on first day, didn't miss them	
	<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>2517</b>		
PACKING	backpack	<i>North Face Alpine Light Rucksack</i>	1363	not the most supportive, adequate	
	stuff sacks	<i>Pod Sacs</i>	270	great for organising kit	
	<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>1633</b>		
CLOTHES CARRIED in pack	rain pants	<i>North Face Hyvoent Overtrousers</i>	205	only used once, soft for pillow though	
	extra socks	<i>Merino Wool Socks</i>	70	great to have a spare pair	
	thermal trousers	<i>Mountain Warehouse Merino Leggings</i>	178	wore every night	
	warm top	<i>Prana Fleece</i>	266	wore every night	
	<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>719</b>		
SHELTER	tent	<i>Terra Nova Laser Photon 1</i>	790	just about adequate	
	pegs in envelope	<i>Alpkit Ti and Aluminim pegs (15)</i>	140		
	ground sheet protector	<i>Terra Nova</i>	239		
	<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>1169</b>		
SLEEPING	sleeping bag	<i>Mountain Equipment Zero 200</i>	650	just warm enough, tiny pack size	
	sleeping pad	<i>Thermarest X-Lite Full Length</i>	486	very comfortable	
	bivi bag	<i>Alpkit Hunka</i>	376	used a couple of times, good pillow	
	pillow	<i>packed clothes in stuff sack</i>	0	worked well	
	<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>1512</b>		
COOKING	stove	<i>Alpkit Kraku</i>	49	perfect	
	pot	<i>Alpkit MyTiMug and Fork</i>	125	perfect	
	wind-screen	<i>Tin Foil</i>	8	perfect	
	<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>182</b>		
ESSENTIALS	water bottles	<i>1L plastic bottle + 1L Sigg</i>	92	2L was enough for the most part	
	paper and pen	<i>biro and loose paper</i>	35		
	phone	<i>Swees Android with 2 spare batteries</i>	276	music and 3G for 2 weeks on 3 batteries	
	camera	<i>Nikon digital compact</i>	320	not suitable for Iceland, need good camera	
	lip balm	<i>balm</i>	12	didn't use	
	mosquito head-net	<i>Mountain Warehouse</i>	37	absolutely crucial	
	maps	<i>1:250,000 maps from Ferdakort</i>	98	scale was adequate for the most part	
	first aid kit	<i>plasters, bandage etc</i>	90	didn't use	
	repair kit	<i>duck tape, stanley knife blade, scissors</i>	78	used blade once	
	toothpaste	<i>tube</i>	50		
	toothbrush	<i>brush</i>	25		
	compass	<i>cheap no brand compass</i>	24		
	lighter	<i>2 plastic lighters</i>	25		
	elastic cord	<i>1.5m of 3mm bungee cord</i>	26	didn't use	
	passport, cash, card	<i>carried in freezer bag</i>	40		
		<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>1228</b>	
	FOOD not part of base weight	water	<i>500 ml carried on average</i>	500	
all breakfast food (7 days)		<i>Exped Foods High Energy Servings</i>	1330		
all dinner food (7 days)		<i>Exped Foods High Energy Servings</i>	1330		
all snack food (7 days)		<i>Assorted snacks</i>	2541		
fuel (1 full canister)		<i>Campingaz CV300</i>	400		
	<b>SUB-TOTAL :</b>		<b>6101</b>		
TOTALS	total base weight	<i>all gear NOT worn or eaten</i>	6443		
	total pack weight (3 days worth of food)	<i>all gear + 3 days of food added</i>	8829		
	total pack weight (7 days worth of food)	<i>all gear + 7 days of food added</i>	12544		
	total skin out weight	<i>pack weight + clothing worn</i>	15061		



### 8.3 Appendix 3: List of Figures

#### List of Figures

- 1 My route follows the purple dots (very roughly). My start and end points are marked orange. The pink dot was my planned start point. Each of the 13 yellow dots was an overnight stop. Resupply points are at yellow dots 3 and 11 (Mývatn and Landmannalaugar). . . . . 3
- 2 Equipment size using a 1L bottle for perspective. From top left to bottom right - thermarest, tent, ground sheet protector, sleeping bag, pegs, water bottle, stove, fork, mug, gas. Detailed kit list can be found in the Appendices. . . . . 5
- 3 Box of food containing over 70,000 calories. . . . . 6
- 4 Day 1 of the walk, route highlighted in pink. I couldn't get to my planned starting point so it was 13km of road walking east instead of west to the turn south. I camped just south-west of the red road 85, around 42km for the day. . . . . 7
- 5 Looking north into the Arctic Circle shortly before turning south across the moor. . . . . 8
- 6 Vast moorland [TS] . . . . . 9
- 7 Passing a lake on the cross country section of the first day. [TS] . . . . . 10
- 8 Perfect pitch at the end of day 1 with ice cold fresh water for washing and drinking. . . . . 10
- 9 Day 2. 30km of road walking to Asbyrgi and then 15km following the river down through Jökulsárgljúfur National Park to the marked camp site. I had planned to go a bit further down the river to find somewhere quiet, but I could barely walk by the time I arrived at the site so I just pitched up there. . . . . 11
- 10 Wild horses. [TS] . . . . . 12
- 11 Lovely colours in the river. [TS] . . . . . 13
- 12 Day 3 would take me past the incredible Detifoss waterfall all the way to Lake Mývatn. . . . . 14
- 13 Waterfalls along the trail [TS] . . . . . 15
- 14 Dettifoss [TS] . . . . . 15

15	Day 4, 17th July. I followed the road around the north west side of Lake Mývatn, then to Stöng before continuing south into the highlands proper. I camped near Engitjörn, around 35km from the campsite on the shore of Mývatn. The route highlighted in green was my original plan, but I changed my mind and headed further west. . . . .	17
16	Hverfjall crater, northern Highlands. [TS] . . . . .	18
17	Day 5 took me south from Engitjörn past Aldeyjarfoss to the Rettatorfa hut, around 30km. . . . .	19
18	Dark sky looming, rain clouds approaching. [TS] . . . . .	20
19	Day 6 - Rettatorfa to the F910 roadhead, around 35km. . . . .	21
20	Looking north, day 6, with the mountains around Lake Mývatn on the horizon. . . . .	22
21	Day 7 took me down the F910 towards the Nyidalur hut, crossing the halfway point of 250km. I took a small detour to the hot spring of Syðri-Hitulaug before pitching the tent just before the first river crossing after crossing the mighty Skjafandafjot river. . . . .	23
22	Day 8, 21st July. Camped at Nyidalur, with 127km left to Landmannalaugar. . . . .	24
23	Nyidalur [TS] . . . . .	24
24	Over the next two days, 22nd and 23rd July I covered 110km, roughly following the F26 past the Versalir hut and along Þórisvatn. . . . .	25
25	Rare sight of some wild flowers, day 9. . . . .	26
26	my 9th night was spent in this charming hut/portacabin! . . . . .	27
27	A short, relaxing day to Landmannalaugar. I had slept somewhere around the red number 11. . . . .	28
28	Bright colours approaching Landmannalaugar . . . . .	29
29	I split the Fjallabak route to Þórsmörk over 2 days, spending night 12 at Alftavatn. . . . .	30
30	No caption necessary? [TS] . . . . .	31
31	Early evening on the 25th July. [RF] . . . . .	32
32	Walking with Rick and Simon on the 25th. [RF] . . . . .	32
33	Making a brew, camp 12. . . . .	33
34	Day 13, near Alftavatn [TS] . . . . .	33
35	Walking with two Austrians up to the top of the pass, in the background is the valley floor where I had set off from that morning. . . . .	34



36	The south coast! 8pm on the 27th July. . . . .	35
37	The final day, with possibly the most beautiful scenery on the whole trip.	36