

# THE MANCHESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL

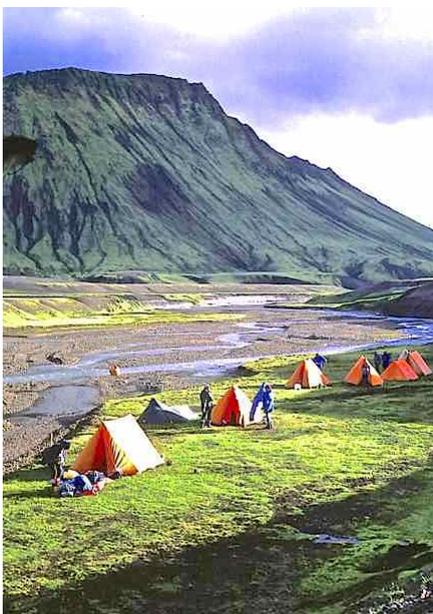
## FOREIGN TREK 1984 ICELAND



Easy trekking near Reykjadalir



One of many river crossings



Camp at Torfakvisl



Ófærufoss



The geyser Strokkur

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Having done the advanced planning and pre-expedition organisation, I suffered a slipped disc shortly before departure, and I spent 10 days in hospital having spinal traction while the party was in Iceland. John Willson took over leadership of the expedition, ably assisted by Bill Souster, John Green, Ian Orrell and Steve Adams, and he wrote the Itinerary and the Summary and Comments in the autumn of 1984.

Allan Witton

The first 38-page edition of the complete printed log was dot-matrix printed, and included a small selection of fourteen 6" by 4" prints photocopied in black and white. The printed log wasn't completed until December 1985, and copies were made available to those who wanted one. There is a copy in the paper archives.

I completed this version with scanned images, a digital sketch map and various appendices in 2023, using an Apple Macintosh and Microsoft Word, with iPhoto and Preview to edit the images. The Itinerary and Summary text remains the same, but it has been rearranged into the format used for other logs, and includes more images.

I scanned the images from 35 mm slides taken by John for the Trek Reunion in November 1984, and a set of prints taken by Steve. The prints have kept well but time has taken its toll on the slide images, many of which are now rather poor. Editing has improved them somewhat, but there remains a mismatch in colour balance between slides and prints (particularly the blue skies, the green grass and the rock colour) that my simple editors cannot correct.

To keep the overall file size down, all the images are low resolution but of sufficient quality to display fairly well at A4 page size. The average size of the 179 images used is about 65 kB giving an overall file size of about 12.2 MB, about the size of 4 medium compact digital camera images. An 8 mm cine film was taken.

After such a long time it has obviously been impossible to obtain permission from individuals to use images which include them. Anyone who finds this a problem should contact me via my website below.

A copy of this Log will be posted, together with other MGS Trek Archive material, on my website: [wittongstreks.com](http://wittongstreks.com). At monthly intervals from September 2023 all my Archives will be posted on: [MGS Life > Co-Curricular > Treks](#).

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Allan Witton

## STAFF

Inspired, planned, organised and provisioned by: Allan Witton

Led by: John Willson

Assisted by: Bill Souster, John Green, Ian Orrell and Steve Adams

## TREKKERS

Tent	Leader	Members	18 Trekkers	* Denotes a previous Foreign Trek
1	Howard Foxall (3My)**	Hugh Nicholson (OM)**	Nick Plimmer (OM)**	David Harrison (2Ma)
2	Paul Atkins (2Ba)*	James Cooper (2Ba)	Nigel Laycock (2Ba)	Andrew Trevelyan (2Ba)
3	Martin Gershman (MS2u)	Paul Goldberg (M2)*	Paul Seidman (2Mw)	
4	Simon Butterworth (5F)	Philip Deakin (3Mb)	Paul Cook (5G)	
5	Jason Price (5H)	Martin Milnes (5G)	Simon Moore (5G)	Russell Pinion (5G)

None of the party had been to Iceland before. However this was my third Foreign Trek as leader, or at least organiser in this case. Between Bill, John Willson and myself there were eight years Foreign Trek experience. John Willson and Ian Orrell had many years of Scottish Trek experience behind them, and John had led five of them.

It was the third Foreign Trek for Hugh Nicholson, Howard Foxall and Nick Plimmer, and the second for Paul Atkins and Paul Goldberg. Several other boys had been on Scottish Trek, so there was plenty of trekking experience in the party.

**DATES** Tuesday 7th August to Thursday 23rd August (17 days)

**COST** £250



The party at the coach pick-up point at Burfell

**Standing, left to right:** Nigel Laycock, Paul Cook, Jason Price, Martin Milnes, Paul Atkins, David Harrison, James Cooper, Martin Gershman, Hugh Nicholson, Philip Deakin, Nick Plimmer, Simon Butterworth, Ian Orrell, Bill Souster, Steve Adams

**Kneeling, left to right:** Paul Seidman, Simon Moore, Russell Pinion, Howard Foxall, Paul Goldberg, Andrew Trevelyan, John Green, John Willson



Steve Adams, Ian Orrell John Willson, Bill Souster with John Green kneeling at Thingvellir

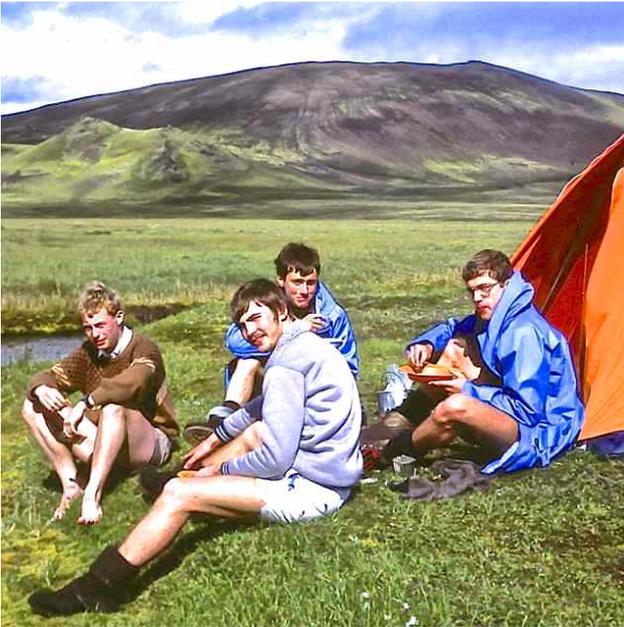


On the summit of Hekla, 1491 m (4892 ft) which previously erupted in 1980

Standing, left to right: Ian Orrell, Bill Souster, Simon Moore, Martin Milnes, Hugh Nicholson, Jason Price, Paul Atkins, Howard Foxall, Martin Gershman, Nigel Laycock, Paul Goldberg

In front, left to right: Steve Adams, Russell Pinion, David Harrison, John Green, Andrew Trevelyan, James Cooper

## TENT GROUPS



Tent 1 David Harrison, Nick Plimmer,  
Hugh Nicholson, Howard Foxall



Tent 2 Paul Atkins, Nigel Laycock,  
Andrew Trevelyan, James Cooper



Tent 3 Paul Seidman, Martin Gershman, Paul Goldberg



Tent 4 Philip Deakin, Simon Butterworth, Paul Cook



Tent 5 Russell Pinion, Simon Moore, Jason Price, Martin Milnes

## THE TREKKING ROUTE

The route was an 11 day Trek through the wilderness of south-central Iceland, an area chosen for the following reasons:

- (a) It wasn't too far from Reykjavik so that the coach transfers at the beginning and end of the route were relatively short and inexpensive.
- (b) There was a good variety of Icelandic landscape: icecaps and glaciated valleys around Thórsmörk; hot springs and other volcanic activity in the interior and at Landmannalaugar; waterfalls; a 'big' summit to climb (Hekla); and plenty of wilderness walking between.
- (c) Because Landmannalaugar is a popular stopping point for coach tours, it was possible for supplies to be taken there to be collected on arrival, and on return from Eldgja.

The planned walking route divided into three main sections.

1. Thórsmörk to Landmannalaugar
2. A loop from Landmannalaugar to Eldgja to visit the Ófærufoss waterfall
3. A walk out to pick-up point near Burfell, climbing Hekla en route.

In addition there were 'tourist' visits to Gullfoss, Geysir and Thingvellir on the return journey to Reykjavik.

## OUTLINE ITINERARY

	17 days	3½ days travel	2 free days	11½ walking days
Tuesday	7th	Travel	Reykjavik	Distance walked (miles)
Wednesday	8th	Free Day	Reykjavik	
Thursday	9th	Coach	Thórsmörk	
Friday	10th	Excursion	Valahnukur	
Saturday	11th	Trek	Hattfell	11
Sunday	12th	Trek	Torfakvisl	11
Monday	13th	Trek	Reykjadalir	11
Tuesday	14th	Trek	Landmannalaugar	6
		Coach	Eldgja	
Wednesday	15th	Excursion	Ófærufoss	5
Thursday	16th	Trek	Nordurnamur	17
Friday	17th	Excursion	Ljótípollur and Landmannalaugar	11
Saturday	18th	Trek	Helliskvisl	14
Sunday	19th	Trek	Groenavatn	11
Monday	20th	Excursion	Hekla	13
Tuesday	21st	Trek	Burfell	4
		Coach	Reykjavik	
Wednesday	22nd	Free day	Reykjavik	
Thursday	23rd	Travel	Reykjavik to Manchester	

The total distance walked was about 114 miles. The only extended climbing was 3950 feet on Hekla.



Grit and determination needed



Grit in the boots after wading

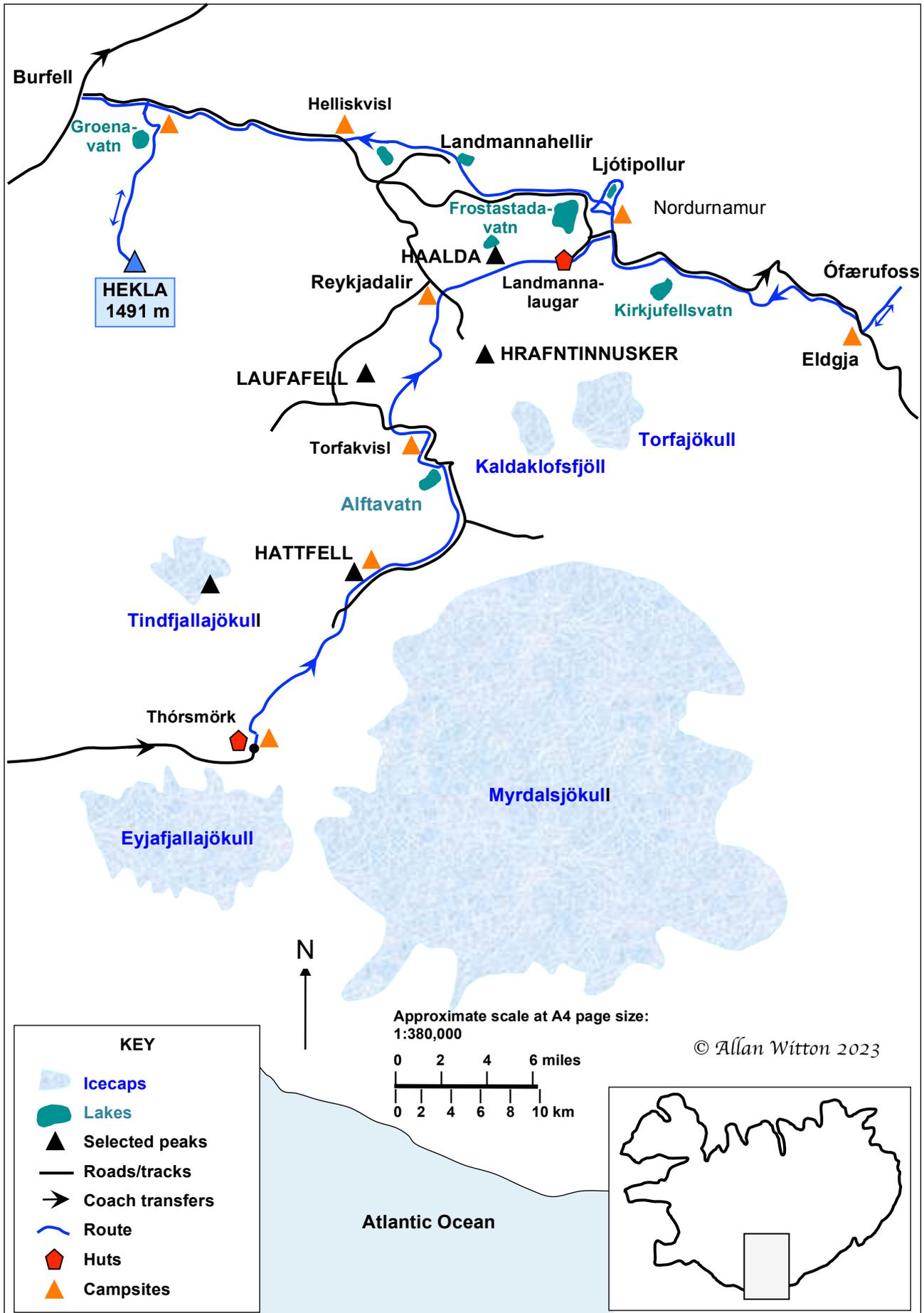


Steeply up



Steeply down the scree run

SKETCH MAP OF THE WALKING ROUTE



## MAPS

### Touring Club of Iceland

(a) 1:750,000 Tourist map of Iceland

### Geodaetisk Institut Uppdrattur Islands

(b) 1:250,000 Sheet 3 Sudvesturland  
Compilation sheet 3/6 Sudurland  
6 Midsudurland  
\*9 Sudausterland

(c) 1:100,000 Sheet 57 Hekla  
58 Eyafjallajokull  
67 Langisjor  
\*68 Skaftartunga

(d) 1:50,000 Sheet 57 Hekla SV

### Agricultural Research Institute Vegetation Maps

(e) 1:40,000 Sheet 215 Kaldaklofsfjoll  
235 Eldgja

## GUIDES

### Ice and Fire - Contrasts of Icelandic Nature

Hjalmar R. Bardarson 1980

A glossy book with lots of pictures to fire the imagination.

### Iceland - A Handbook for Expeditions

Tony Escritt 1985

(Iceland Information Centre)

This excellent book is a mine of useful information. Had it been published before our Trek it would have saved hours of work collecting information from many sources.

Trek has copies of all these maps and guides.

The maps marked \* were bought in the initial planning stages but do not cover the final route. Maps were purchased from Dick Phillips who offers a quick and efficient postal service.

- (a) is a good general physical map of the whole of Iceland.
- (b) are fine for planning a general route and logistics. Compilation Sheet 3/6 covers the whole of the route and most boys bought one for following the route in the field. John has annotated this map with the whole route.
- (c) are the most detailed maps generally available. They lack detail and accuracy (see John's comments later) and judged by the standards of British and Alpine maps are very poor.
- (d) is the only 1:50,000 map available for any of our route. It was very useful for the ascent of Hekla. John has annotated this map with the route taken up Hekla and the 1970 and 1980 lava flows. I have included a sketch copy of this map on the itinerary page for the ascent of Hekla.
- (e) were bought with the idea of trying to plan in advance suitable places to camp, but they turned out to be of little use.



Bill at Gullfoss

## ITINERARY

<b>Tuesday 7th August</b>	<b>Travel</b>	<b>Manchester &gt; Reykjavik</b>
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The party of eighteen boys and five staff left Manchester Victoria on the 2.40 p.m. Blackpool train. Although reservations had been made the two coaches couldn't seat everyone on the highly overbooked train - some found 'seats' in the guards van. There was even more chaos at Preston where porters gave conflicting information about an extra train to Glasgow but after a few false starts we got on the right train.

Progress was no better on foot in Glasgow where, on receiving ambiguous local advice, we walked a mile round three sides of a square to reach the coach station a third of a mile away. This mini-Trek was made more annoying for the two staff having to carry the 'black box', which by sheer weight and handle design rendered wrists paralysed! (The 'black box' was a trunk containing food for use in Reykjavik, supplies such as jam to be distributed on arrival, and the rope.)

There is a direct bus from Anderton Street Bus Station to Abbotsinch every half-hour. This should have a standard fare of £1 per head for those over 16 but the driver was obviously fiddling when he declared that the boys all looked under 16 and so charged £17 instead of £23, but no ticket was issued. We chose not to argue with 'foreigners' so early in the expedition.

At the airport the usual tedious wait was relieved by using an Icelandair letter of authority to waive the fee on 40 kg of excess baggage (this concession had been allowed because of a late change of departure time to a night flight).

It is interesting to note that in spite of carrying all camping and cooking equipment and virtually all supplies (except gaz) for 15 days we were only 2 kg per person over the normal baggage allowance of 20 kg.



We took off just after sunset but by flying north and west (and up) we caught up with the day and watched sunset again as we flew in continual twilight across the north Atlantic. This was no ordinary charter flight with plastic cutlery and plastic food, it was nearly 11 p.m. and we enjoyed a superb fish meal using stainless steel knife, fork and spoon!



Darkness quickly enveloped us as we dropped down to Keflavic airport at nearly midnight (11 p.m. Icelandic time). The NATO AWAC planes were impressive but the cold and the wind and the bleakness of the landscape and buildings gave it a Siberian appearance. A courier found us and directed us and many other individuals into the coach for Reykjavik. We were asked for, and should have had, a transfer ticket for the journey, but we persuaded the courier that she would be able to sort out the matter if she spoke to our Icelandic contact - a Ms Audur Jacobsen.

We were dumped at an unlit, apparently deserted school and told to wait for Peter, the caretaker. When he arrived we were allocated two classrooms (each having its own built-in toilet) and eventually got to sleep at 1 a.m.

It turned out that many other people were also staying at the school, but they were in their 'beds' hours before our arrival.

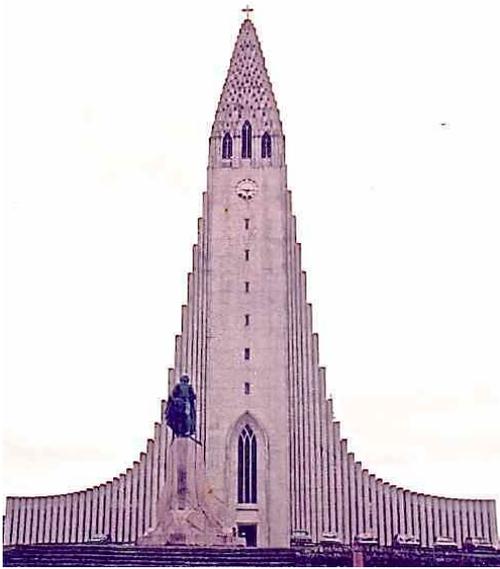
We were away by 9 a.m. and following Peter's directions walked the mile to the main campsite - 30 minutes hard labour for those with the 'black box'. The gaz ordered in advance should have been waiting for us so we could cook breakfast, but the warden knew nothing about it. He was sympathetic to our 'innocence abroad' and tried to contact Audur Jacobsen who he knew well but "she was a very busy person!".



Phone calls were made in vain during the morning, so the boys were given an allowance and sent off into town by bus or on foot to buy breakfast, lunch and tea. The fees for the next night were paid in cash - 960 Kr (about £24) with 20% school party discount

The warden told us of a good coffee shop a few hundred yards up the hill from the campsite, next to one of the few liquor stores in Iceland. With coffees only 20 Kr (50p) and the second cup free it was the best deal on Trek! The shop had an interesting clock which turned anti-clockwise!





37 'gaz' cartidges (actually made by Primus) were bought for 41 Kr (£1) each from a petrol station in Reykjavik. A further 24 were bought at the full price of 53 Kr from the Shell Centre in the suburbs about 2 miles from the city centre, a poor deal compared with garages.

We went to the British Embassy to inform them of our entering 'the interior' and then returned to the campsite for the evening meal where there was piping hot water free on tap for washing and for cooking - tea in 5 minutes, porridge in 10 minutes.



A short game of cricket, with the 'black box' as a stumps, before tea

There was still no sign of Audur but there was a message to say she would arrive at 9.30 in the morning.

Rain. At 9.30 a.m. Audur appeared at last to collect spare bags and the 'black box' to be stored until our return, together with food packs and 24 gaz cartridges to be delivered to Landmannalaugar.

At 10 a.m. the coach arrived with two drivers. There wasn't much interest on the journey - Hveragerdi was disappointing viewed from the road. After crossing the Markafljot the road deteriorated into a gravel track for the last 16 miles. We made a half mile detour to visit the lake formed by the Fjallajökull glacier flowing down from the Eyjafjallajökull icecap, the closest we got to a glacier.



The coach meandered across almost a mile of gravel river beds to cross to Thórsmörk on the northern side. It was not as we supposed a 4-wheel drive vehicle and on its return journey when it was much lighter it became stuck midstream in about 4 feet of water.

The tractor kept at Thórsmörk for such emergencies was of little use, but by chance the only other visitor to the valley was in a German ex-army truck which rescued the coach easily.

Arriving at Thórsmörk



The bus stranded in mid-stream with the tractor nearby and the German truck approaching on the far bank

Thórsmörk is a pleasant green oasis in this barren corner, with numerous trees and shrubs and a good grassy campsite. The only buildings are the tourist hut (cost of an overnight stay unknown but presumed expensive), a small shop (closed but presumably open when the crowds of campers come at weekends), and a toilet block with a fresh water tap



Tent 5 used the toilet block as a temporary refuge when their tent flooded the following day.

Judging by the evidence of the bottle bank on the river's edge there must be hundreds of visitors at peak times. The bottles are disposed of by hurling them into the river when in flood, to be pulverised before they reach the next civilisation 15 miles downstream.

After a fine, almost warm afternoon rain started in the evening.



Rain clouds approaching over the Eyjafjallajökull icecap

A whole-day excursion had been planned, the most interesting possibility being south across the valley floor and up to Fimmvorduhals on the col between the two icecaps, about 10 miles and 3000' of climbing, and according to the warden there is a path.

However it had rained hard all night and into the morning, and some tents were partly flooded, although the site itself was well drained. There was now no chance of crossing the valley floor as the river was flowing very fast and was over 4 feet deep in places. The alternative direction for an excursion was along the route we would take tomorrow so the major excursion was cancelled (mumblings from Tent one about this decision).

We stayed in sleeping bags until the rain stopped at 3 p.m. then had a brief walk to the viewpoint Valahnukur (1500') in about an hour before the rain started again. The weather was clearing by late evening and a recce was made of the hills behind the site in preparation for tomorrow's departure.



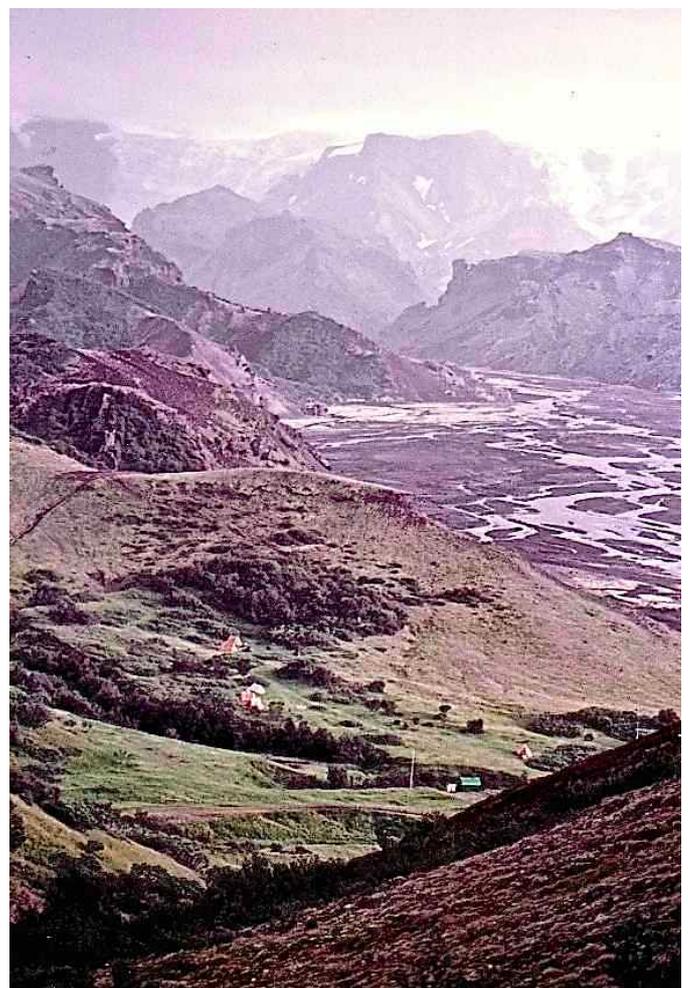
River braiding in the waters flowing down from the Myrdalsjökull icecap viewed from Valahnukur



View towards the interior



It all goes in your rucksack in the morning!



View down to camp from Valahnukur

We paid our fees for the two nights (30 Kr per person + 40 Kr per tent per night - about £50 in total) and the warden noted our plans for the next 4 days. Although there are no telephones in the interior the huts are in contact by radio and the Landmannalaugar tourist hut was told to expect us. It was a pleasant, fine morning for the start of Trek proper. The warden indicated the route out “due north up the side valley for a mile then follow the track and yellow posts in a NE direction”.



Our best view of the Eyjafjallajökull icecap



Although this is a well-used and well-marked trail, once in open country it was difficult to find the correct route initially as a good path encouraged us to swing west towards the hut on the Markarfljot. When the north-easterly path was found it led us through the last trees we would see to our first river, the Tindfjalla.



Looking for the best crossing point

It is not glacial and so is not bridged, and in spite of the recent heavy rain it wasn't in flood. The 200 yard wide gravel bed had only river channels through it, about 18" deep. The water carried fine grit particles which soon entered boots (without socks) so we had to spend 10 minutes on the far bank degritting boots and feet before socking up again.

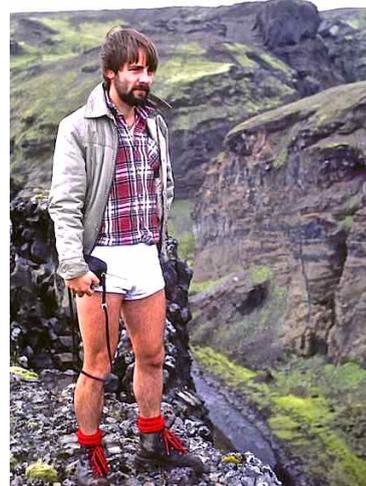


The river Grafell has a bridge just where it plunges into the side gorge down to the Markarfljot gorge. We arrived here at noon having covered about 3 miles in the first 2 hours. The prominent profile of Hattfell can be clearly seen 8 miles to the NNE.



The small bridge over the Grafell river

The streams Björgil (lunch stop here) and Styppegil were tiny and bore no relation to those shown on the 1:100,000 map. The Fremri-Emstrua is a completely different story. This is a glacial torrent, impossible to wade but bridged at the head of the side gorge where we arrived at 3.15. There was a strong smell of sulphur, originating apparently from the river.



John and Steve at the head of the side gorge where the Fremri-Emstrua river plunges towards the Markarfljot gorge



The bridge across the Fremri-Emstrua just above the gorge with the snout of the Merkurjökull glacier which flows down from the huge Myrdalsjökull ice sheet in the distance

On the other side there is a VERY steep climb for 20 minutes, which is not apparent from the map. We then entered the black ash field and continued NNW past a small hut following the line of yellow posts (5' lengths of 2" x 2" timber at roughly 200 metre intervals) to reach the stream Fauskheidargil NE of Hattfell at 5 p.m.



Crossing the black ash field with Hattfell (909) on the left and Utigöngühöfoar (675) on the right

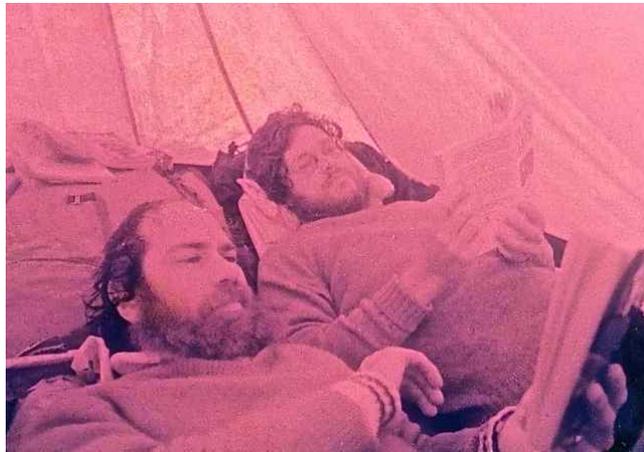
We pitched camp in the shelter of a low bank of ash by the side of the stream, and stones were used to hold the pegs into the black dust.



Camped on black ash ...



... with stones holding down the tent pegs



The warm glow inside a Vango, even when it's cold and grey outside

With very full packs it had taken 7 hours to cover the 11 miles, mostly over level, reasonable surface but with delays for the sharp climb and river wading.

There was a fine black ash everywhere. It was windy and the tents were wet so the dust stuck; some would stay with us until the end of Trek. Steve Adams realised that for the last four days he had been shooting scenes with an empty cine camera. Hands and heads were pulled back into cagoules as we plodded across the ash desert following the line of posts on the east bank of the stream until we reached the 'airfield' - a level strip defined by orange stones but nothing else.



Grey skies and black ash for 8 miles

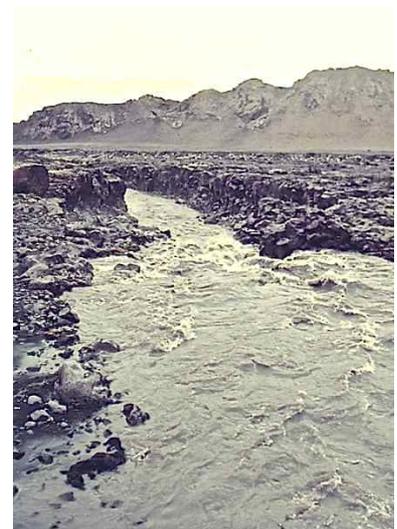
We followed the landrover track to the bridge over the Innri-Emstrua, with an impressive waterfall just below it.



The bridge over the Innri-Emstrua



Convenient seats on the bridge for a leg-stop



The raging river below the falls

The second part of the river has to be waded; it's knee deep and a rope was readied but not needed.



Hugh Nicholson leads in style!

The stream system shown on the map  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile further on did not exist at all. We cut across the second elbow of the Z-bend (the route is very clear here) and passed two solitary walkers heading south. The two streams south of Hvangill (the Blafjallakvisl and the Kaldaklofskvisl) are both quite swift and just over knee deep but easily waded by the signposts. Dick Phillips' advice had been to wade here if the water was clear (it was) but otherwise to try two miles further upstream. We had lunch here.



Wading across the Blafjallakvisl



Looking for the best place to cross the Kaldaklofskvisl



"This seems to be the deepest bit, John!"



Lunch after the crossing



Hvanngil marked the end of the 8 miles of black ash; the terrain is now a little greener but there is still no vegetation above ground level. Hvanngil is an occupied tourist hut. The track from here goes north towards Alftavatn, with a seemingly unoccupied summer house ¼ mile from the track.



Easy walking along the good track



Walking past Alftavatn

The track heads up through a gap in the low hills to the north of the lake and west to Torfakvisl. The stream is not as big as the map suggests, ankle deep only, and there is good camping on its northern bank. We arrived at 6 p.m.



View south over camp to Torfatindur (806)



View north with Tent 2 enjoying the evening sun

Fine weather at last with blue skies and fluffy clouds. An excellent track took us NE over Sutubotnar with curious stone cairns everywhere and a splendid view back over Alftavatn to numerous distant glaciers. The track turns NW and the view is then dominated by Laufafell.



View back over Alftavatn (just visible) to the Eyjafjallajökull icecap



Stone cairns on Sutubotnar



Heading towards Laufafell

There are three rivers near Launfitarsandur, SE of Laufafell. The first two are easily waded, but the third (the Markarfljot) is too deep; it came above Ian Orrell's waist and is probably even deeper near the far bank. Perhaps we were too far north as the map shows the track crossing the river just south of the junction of the Ljosa and the Markarfljot. The plan had been to follow the west bank of the Markarfljot along the flanks of Laufafell to rejoin the track at the junction by the hot spring (hver) immediately north of Laufafell, then NE along the track into Reykjadalir.

As the Markarfljot couldn't be waded, and as the east bank seemed too undulating with side valleys, and as the map showed a few hot springs just NE of Jonsvarda in Ljosartungur which lay on a more direct route to Reykjadalir, and as it was a lovely day and we were feeling much more confident about going cross-country, off the beaten track, we headed into the hills to the NE. The clear blue skies made route finding easy. We headed up to a col keeping spot heights 920, 1017 and 1057 on our right and 1007 and 972 on our left. The surface was easy shale for most of the climb, although we had to make a slight detour to the east at the stream in a small ravine SW of 920 where we had lunch in a snow gully (2 p.m.).



View back to Laufafell, on the ascent to the plateau at about 900 m



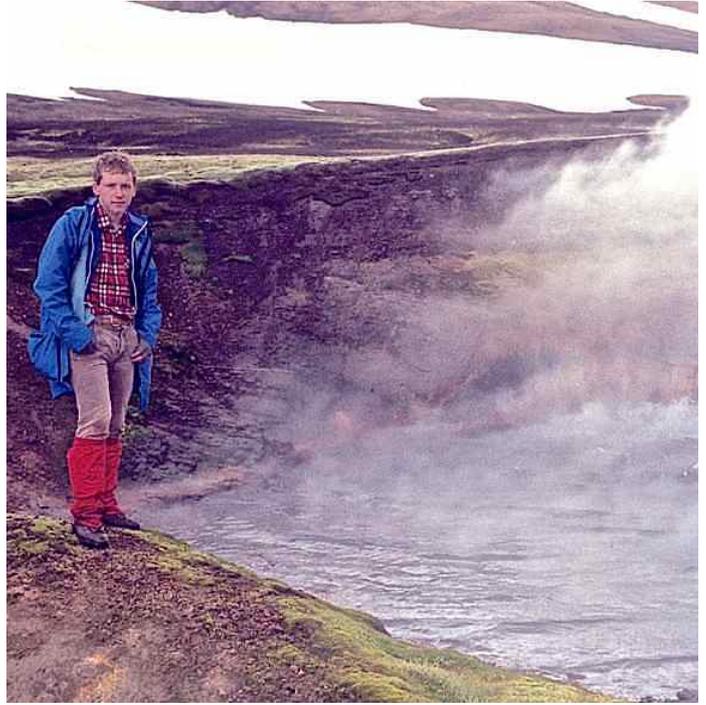
View south, the way we had come



The decision to divert in this direction was indeed fortuitous, for there are many more hot springs than marked on the map and they are spectacularly impressive. No great geysers but lots of multi-coloured, bubbling mud pools, hot and cold running water and large ponds of boiling water. A mixture of hydrogen sulphide and sulphur dioxide swamped the clouds of steam. This would be a dangerous area to negotiate in mist as a bad scald would result if someone slipped into some of the pools or streams.



Arriving at the area of hot springs

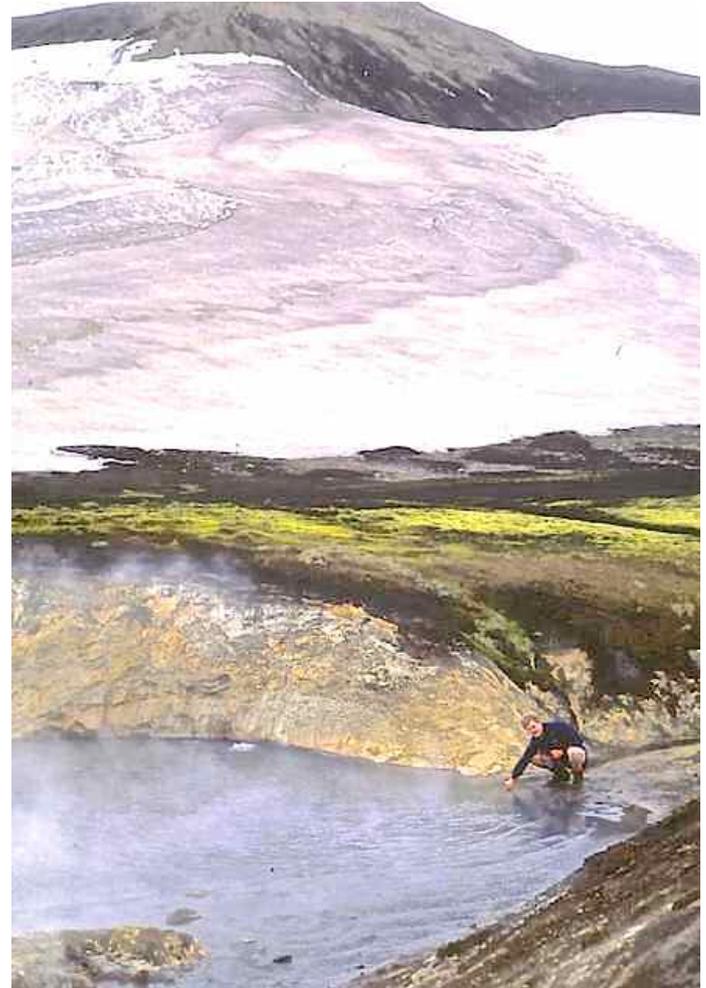


Paul Atkins



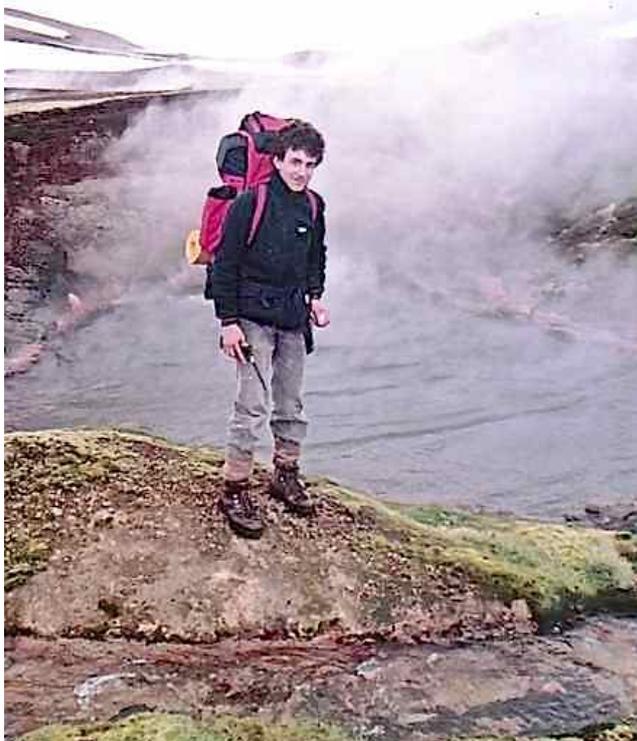
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Simon Butterworth





Steve Adams



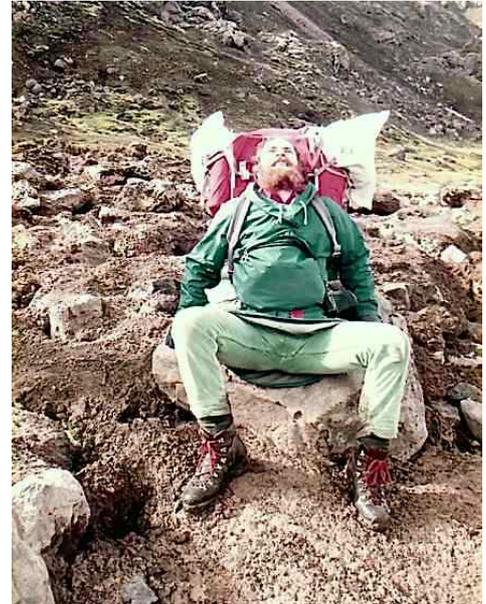
Paul Goldberg



Crystal clear boiling water issuing from a vent

We continued NE hoping to reach the track on the NW slopes of Hrafninnusker, but after crossing what we took to be the main stream valley running SE - NW we reached a second even deeper valley half a mile on and parallel to the first. Presumably the first stream and its valley are not marked on the map; from its appearance and the activity on its banks it seems possible that it is newly formed. There were still sulphurous fumes everywhere.

The second river was obviously the one shown on the map flowing NW and then N into Reykjadalir so we assumed it would provide an easy route out of this primaeva area. Unfortunately the last 1½ miles flowed alongside a block lava field which eventually encroached so much towards the river that we were forced to climb up onto it, then through it and back down to the river again.



Hard going through the block lava field

It was tedious, slow progress but we eventually reached the plain beyond and set up camp at 6.30. Fresh water flowed out from under the lava field and we found a good flat site on gritty silt in the shelter of the NE corner of the flow.



Dick Phillips had suggested that this high plateau area wasn't a place to camp in high winds as there wasn't much shelter and the ground was far from ideal for pegging. All pegs were weighted down with stones, an unnecessary precaution as it wasn't a windy night. However it was very cold, and in the morning all the surrounding hills were dusted with new snow.

The route advised by Dick Phillips was to go NE over the summit of Haalda before descending to Namskvisl; the direct route via the Vondugil valley was described as troublesome and difficult.

We waded the stream by the camp without socks and then a gradual climb brought us round the south side of 1030. Haalda was now layered with cloud and there was a deep valley separating it from us. The direct route didn't look too bad at all so we skirted the south of Haalda and descended the southern slopes of Vondugil. Because of blisters and tendon problems Ian Orrell was finding it slow going so he spurned rests and at this stage was plodding on in front, down towards Vondugil. The rest of us followed a higher, easier route, causing Ian more problems in having to climb a steep snowfield out of the steepening valley to rejoin us.



The descent towards Vondugil

The descent wasn't too arduous, but again we were fortunate in being able to see the way ahead and in reaching convenient spurs which led us progressively downwards. Just before Vondugil opens out there is another area of volcanic activity, fumaroles and steaming water, and it was here that for the first time on Trek the sun felt warm.



The valley opens out quite suddenly and then there is 2/3 mile of flat plain before 2/3 mile of old block lava through which we zig-zagged towards Landmannalaugar. We had been heading towards this goal for four days and nearly forty miles; what would we find? It came as something of a shock after so long in the wilderness to come to the edge of the lava field and look down on a sea of tents, cars, buses and PEOPLE - hundreds of them! The culture shock was too severe; we couldn't spend the night here!



Landmannalaugar, with the campsite and hut, and the hot water springs in the bottom right

Before we left England Allan had suggested that it might be possible to hire a coach here to take us the 20 miles by road to Eldgja to save us walking the same east-west route in both directions. Fate smiled on us as there was a coach and driver available that afternoon, the only time during that week when there would have been, and the coach had exactly 23 passenger seats. The cost of the three hour round trip using two drivers was £125, paid in cash sterling.

Before leaving we contacted the warden at the tourist hut to inform him of our safe arrival (he had been told to expect us by the warden at Þórs mörk) and to tell him of our plans for the next few days. Audur Jacobsen had ensured the safe delivery of the seven food packs in one of the other tourist coaches which was there for an overnight stop. Three of them were taken with us to Eldgja, the other four left with the warden to be collected on our return in three days time.

After a bucking rollercoaster bus trip we were dropped off at the turning circle where the track up the gorge to Ófærufoss leaves the 'main' road. We found a sheltered groove in the landscape about 100 yards south of the track just downstream of the river junction and small waterfall on the Strangakvisl. The site was soon cleared of small stones and then the rain started.



Our bus about to depart

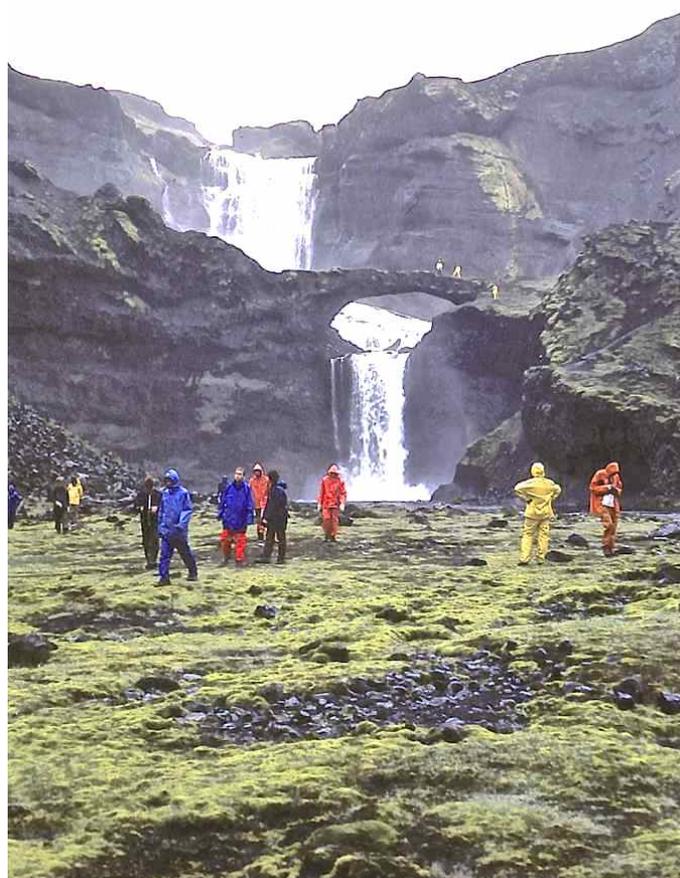


Camp at Eldgja

Rain all day. As we only needed to walk 3 miles up to the waterfall and its natural stone bridge we stayed in sleeping bags until mid-afternoon. The two hour stroll up the gorge and back was done in drizzle, but Ófærufoss was very impressive nevertheless.



Ready to set off for the falls



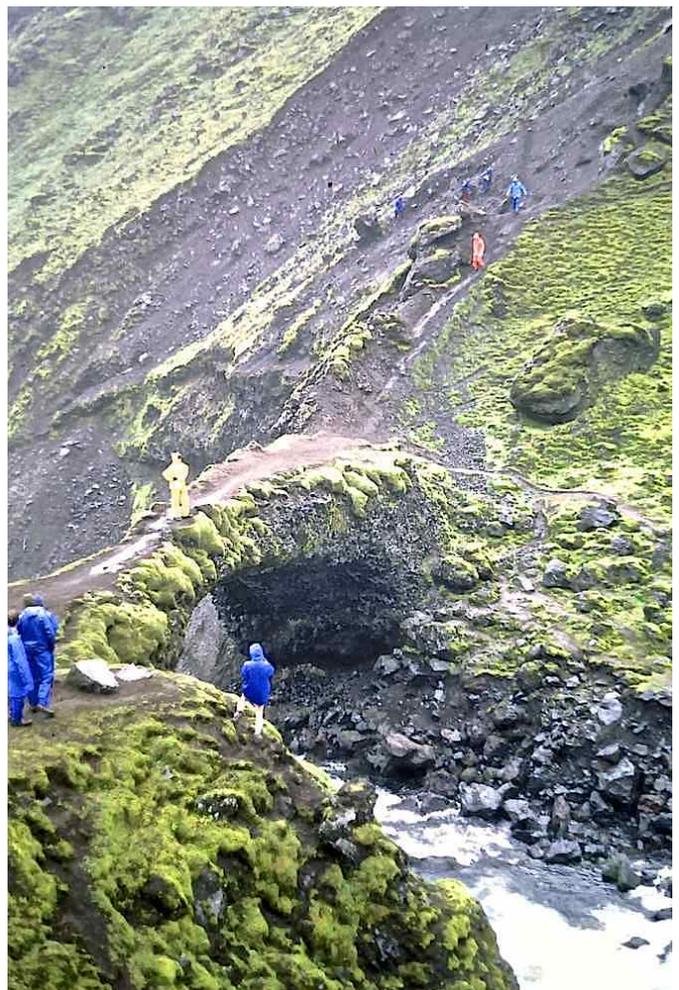
The upper and lower falls separated by the natural arch



The upper falls, above the arch



Bill at the upper falls



View across the arch

On return it was straight back into sleeping bags for the rest of the day. Had it been fine we had planned to walk the whole length of the gorge, climb out at the end and return by the track on top of the SE side.

We planned to walk west along the track towards Landmannalaugar (20 miles away), taking diversions and short cuts where the landscape looked promising and camping by streams or lakes a few miles short of Landmannalaugar.

We left at 10.45 with the weather improving rapidly. After 3 miles where the track swings through 90° towards the NW there is a new track (presumably built by the power line erectors) which continues SW towards Tindafjoll. We ignored this but met it again later when we left the 'main' road to follow the stream valley SW keeping 810 and 855 on our right with 953 on our left. The final col had a rather tedious, loose, up and down approach culminating in a pleasant 200 yard snowfield.



Many miles of track-walking today



Tent 4



Easy walking on snow for a change

It took an hour from the track to the col and the descent time was estimated at 30 minutes, but took twice that long as Steinsgill cannot be followed all the way back to the plain. At the last contour it drops quickly through narrow 'gates' which required us to de-sock, wade across (18" to 24") and then climb 150 feet up the west side of the valley (exhausting!) before finding an easy descent to the main track. We arrived there for lunch at 2.30 and met Ian Orrell and John Green who had made much better time following the Landmannaleid all the way.



"Which way do you think it is from here, Nigel?"



Over the next few miles the road is crossed by many shallow streams and indeed the two are indistinguishable for some stretches. De-socking for each was going to be too tedious so we plodged through them all.

We left packs by the road to pay a diversionary visit to Kirkjufellsvatn, a peaceful Lake District type tarn but bigger. It would have been a good place to camp but as it was only 4.30 we decided to get a few more miles behind us first.



Kirkjufellsvatn

After more road and river walking we entered the nature reserve and saw a curious swan's nest on the marshes west of Kirkjufell.



The curious swan's nest

We crossed the glacial Jokulgilskvisl by the concrete road bridge and then followed the eastern edge of the block lava to Nordurnamur where we came across an absolutely superb campsite in a cove formed by the lava edge, with a crystal clear stream bubbling out from under the lava.

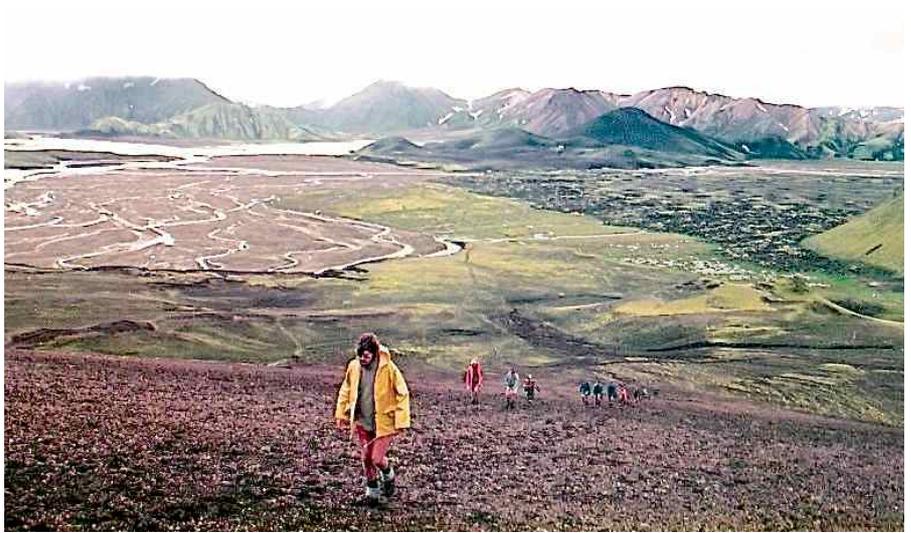
We immediately decided to stay in this idyllic spot for two nights, unaware that we were still in the nature reserve where camping is permitted only at the official site at Landmannalaugar or by the road leading out of it.



Tent 1 at Nordurnamur

In fact the nature reserve extends for another 10 miles to the west. No doubt Allan would have been aware of this and would have taken us on to Landmannalaugar as planned. Our ignorance was fortunate because this spring we chanced upon seems to be the only fresh water for miles around; we presumed the glacial river would be polluted by the hordes of tourists we had seen at Landmannalaugar.

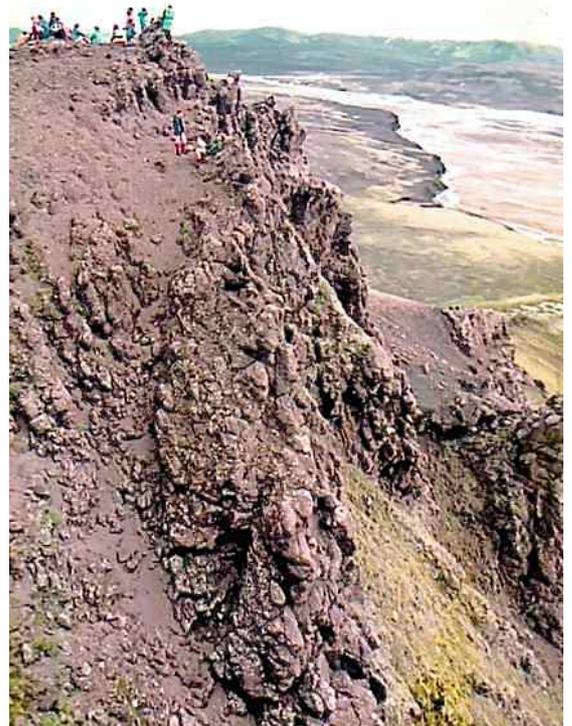
A beautiful day. We wandered across the cotton grass plain and up to the rim of Ljótípollur at 722 from where it was an easy stroll round the very impressive edge.



Ljótípollur is an explosion crater and crater lake whose name means 'Ugly Puddle'



On the cliff edge

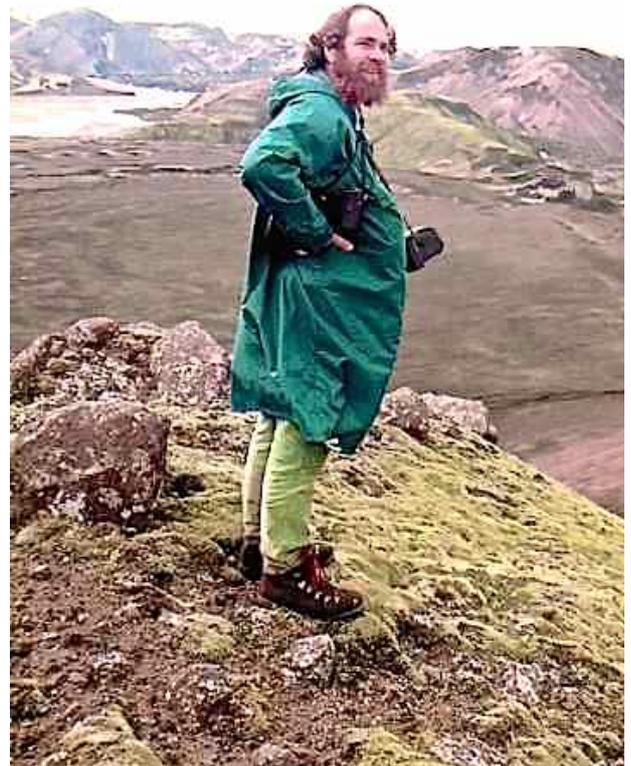


The rocky external cliffs

We descended south and then climbed up to point 786, marked as a viewpoint on some maps. Excellent views, especially down to the lava field and our camp. There is a tremendous, best quality scree run from just below the summit to the plain - one continuous run (almost free fall) dropping about 600 feet in just over a minute - exhilarating!



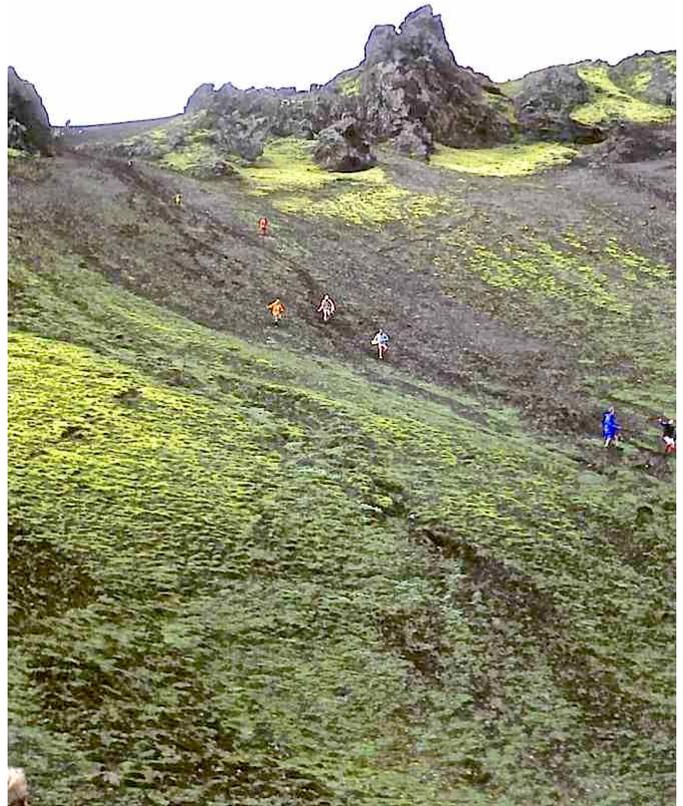
Heading up to point 786 ....



.... and on the summit



Zoomed in, the tents can just be made out tucked in by the edge of the block lava field below



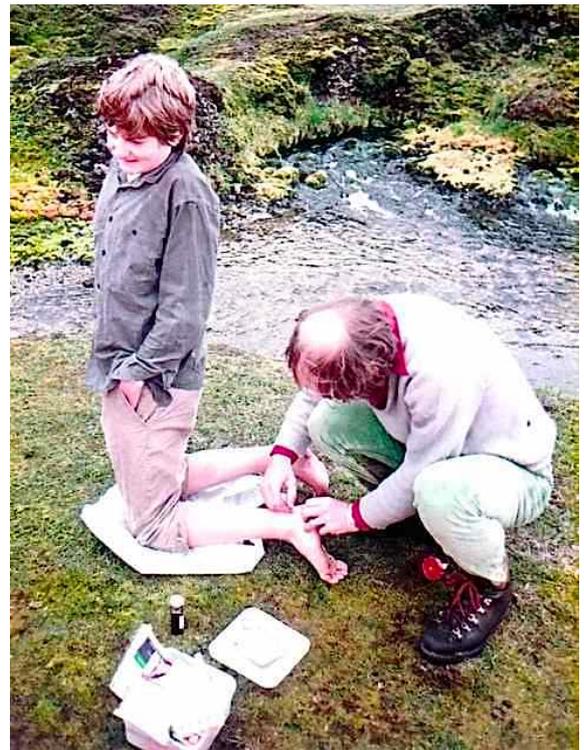
The scree run

We had a leisurely lunch back at camp where it was sunny and almost warm.





Crystal clear water flowing from the black lava field



Dr Green does foot repairs

We carried swimming gear and empty rucksacks the three miles to Landmannalaugar to collect the remaining supplies from the warden at the tourist hut. She informed us of the ban on camping where we had set up camp and said we must speak to the nature warden at his hut which we would pass on our return along the road to camp.

Landmannalaugar was now virtually empty, all the coaches and most of the tents and people had disappeared, and we spent a relaxing two hours sitting in the swimming area of the hot river - an unforgettable experience and a chance to give hair and bodies a thorough wash.





On our way back to camp we met the nature warden at his cabin by the road junction, and after we had apologised and explained our ignorance and offered to move our camp he said that as we were already camped we could stay, provided we left first thing in the morning. We offered to pay the two night's official camping fee, but he said it wasn't necessary as we hadn't used the facilities.

Off 'first thing' at 9 a.m. over the low col between Ljótípollur and 786 to rejoin the road around Frostastadavatn, and by noon we had crossed the plain of Donadalur.



The 'path marked by cairns' to Landmannahellir was not well trodden and was crossed by boggy streams. Landmannahellir itself is just two huts, a shack and a big garden shed, all apparently deserted although a couple of jeeps did pay a flying visit. The river water here looked undrinkable, so we continued hoping to find better but there was nothing further on.



After lunch at 1.30 we diverted right up a dry valley to the col between 670 and 710, and then dropped down to Saudleysuvatn. It was a cold, grey place with no vegetation and poor streams and so was not a good place to camp. We continued NW then W to reach a suitable site on the N bank of the Helliskvisi at 4 p.m., just as a thick Scottish type mist enveloped the area. If we had been an hour later progress through the hills would have been very much slower.



Half the party waded the river barefoot, the other went half a mile upstream towards Svalaskard to jump across via some rocky islands just above some mini-falls. The detour, taken with the intention of keeping feet dry, wasn't worth it; the islands were just too far apart to prevent partial or total immersion. It was then 10 miles of solid trudging along the 'main road' which isn't any different from the other tracks we'd seen in spite of being coloured brown on the 1:100,000 map. Only a couple of vehicles passed us during the whole day.

We turned left off the road when the 1970 lava flow could be seen and followed its edge S then SE for about a mile before climbing up an ash slope to look across to Groenavatn. This was the only source of water seen all day and we had planned to camp by it. However Groenavatn was grey not green and was surrounded by flat fields of loose ash. Camping there would have been too exposed so we filled our large plastic water containers and returned to camp on the ash sheltered by the 30 foot walls of the lava flow. Karrimats had to be placed below the groundsheets to prevent damage.



Leaving the 1970 lava flow ...

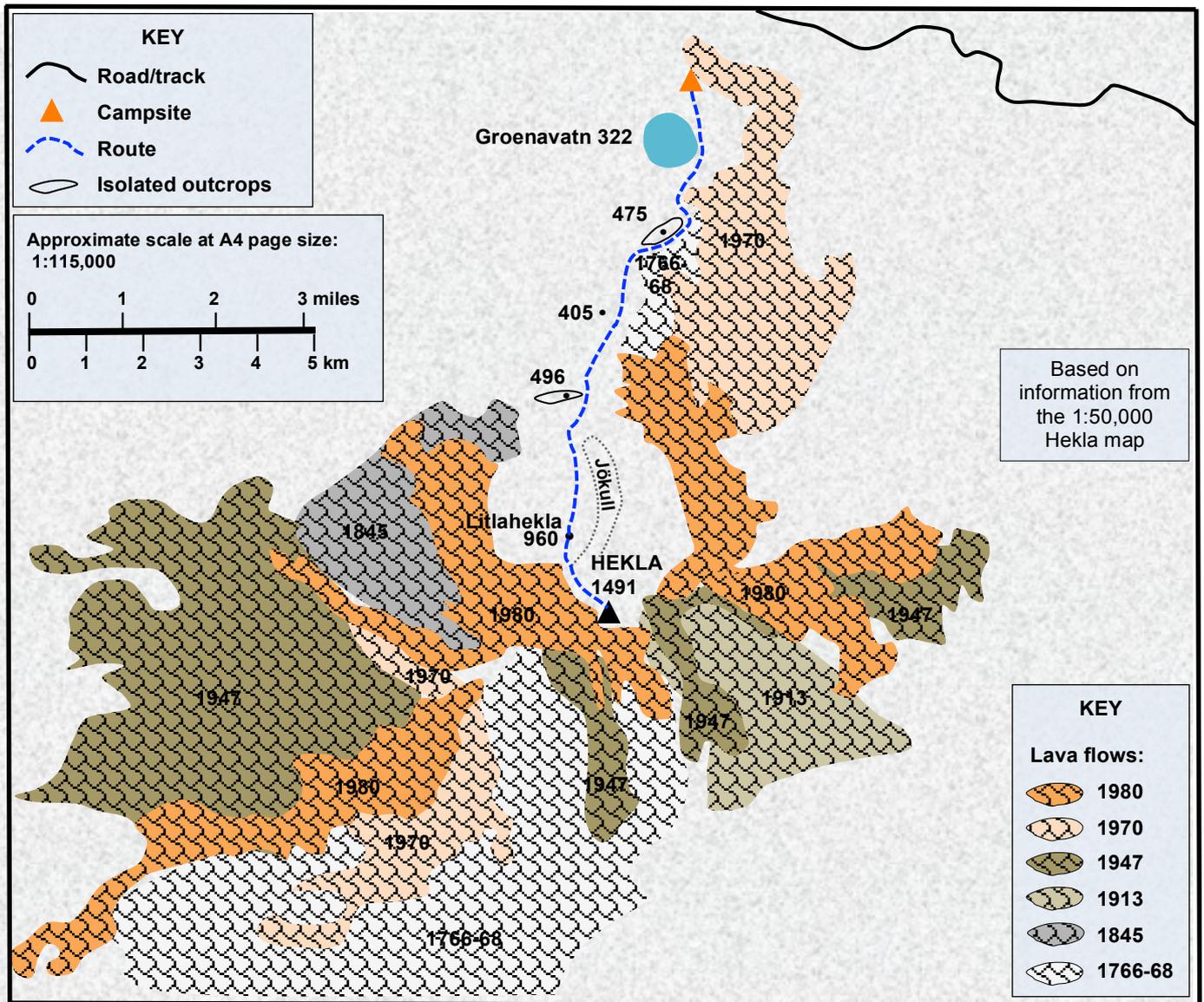


... to collect water from Groenavatn



Ash and lava

John annotated the 1:50,000 Hekla map with the ascent route and shaded the 1980 and 1970 lava flows as marked on the map. This prompted me to make a sketch copy and include all the lava flows from 1766. It's interesting to note that the major lava flows as marked on the map have occurred at decreasing intervals of 79, 68, 34, 23 and 10 years. The next eruption was in 1991, an 11 year interval.



The lava flow around the camp was 14 years old and was still as sharp as razors. It resembled a layer of giant, jagged cornflakes and was completely uncrossable. The 1980 flow was expected to be just as bad so a course was plotted to avoid both.

Four boys felt too incapacitated due to blisters or tendon trouble so a reduced party left at 9.15. We carried a sleeping bag, bivvi bag, rope and emergency kit, but fortunately none of it was needed.

The low cloud and mist made compass navigation necessary all day so we headed for recognisable features.



We walked along the E shore of the lake and climbed to the low col (378), beyond which we followed the edge of the 1970 lava flow until we could skirt SE of 475, keeping to the edge of an older block lava field. It was then a straight two miles across a rubble-strewn plain towards the large rocky outcrop 496 which looked a lot closer and smaller than it really was. The 405 spot height has nothing there at all.

The first 4 miles to 496 had taken us 2 hours. Through the gap to the E of 496 there is a gradual ascent to an obvious spur to the SSW. Jokull is a depression, almost a dry valley. Keeping to the highest part of the spur took us directly S at a very steady climb on a good surface until at 12.15 we stumbled across the remains of seismic equipment on the summit of Litlahekla.



Heading out of the mist towards the sunshine



Seismic equipment Litlahekla

We had covered this 1½ miles and 1500 feet in just one hour; the final 1500 feet was to take almost twice as long. There is a slight descent between Litlahekla and the main slope and then the deep, loose ash begins. This ash flows more freely than sand and requires you to place your boot 2 feet above the preceding one simply to make 6 inches of upward progress. It was the most exhausting ascent I have ever done.





Sulphurous emissions just below the summit

The top of Hekla is not as neat as the 1:50000 map suggests. About half a mile from the crater there was a snow/ice field to skirt, then a short band of rough lava, then a 'level' stretch of broken rock before the final climb up shattered stones to the crater. We reached the summit at 2 p.m., and at 4,900 feet we were now above the clouds, with views of distant icecaps. We had lunch and went rock searching in the crater itself with hot rocks to sit on and sulphur to add to the aroma of sardines.



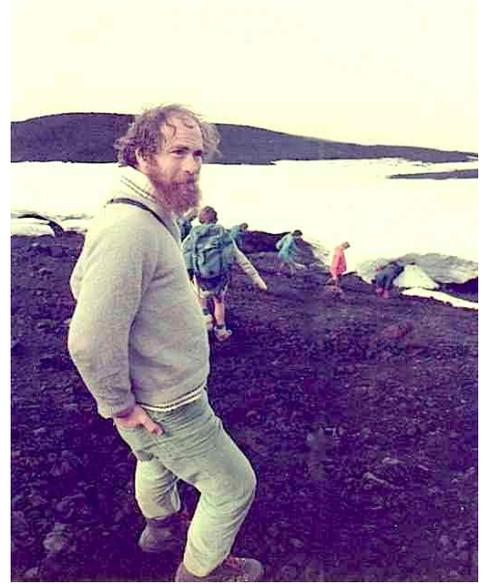
The summit party



Paul Atkins, Nigel Laycock, James Cooper



Sardines and sulphur



It took 3 hours to return to camp along the same route as the ascent, following boot prints and compass bearings. The 3000 feet drop from the summit to the plain took less than an hour.



Skirting the ice field on descent



Heading for the gap between outcrop 496 on the left and the 1980 lava flow on the right

Tuesday 21st August

Trek  
Coach

Burfell  
Reykjavik

via Gullfoss, Geysir and Thingvellir

The track going W then NW wasn't apparent so when we left at 8.00 we followed a sheep fence to rejoin Landmannaleid beyond Solvakraun. We reached the main road junction at 9.15 and the coach arrived spot on schedule at 10.00.



The 114 mile journey by foot through rivers and over bog, ash and lava is over

Our return route to Reykjavik took us past Burfell power station and Help waterfall. There were stops for lunch supplies at a shop en route and at Gullfoss, Geysir and Thingvellir. It was a lovely, sunny day and a splendid, spectacular end to our journey.



Gullfoss





The hot springs area at Geysir



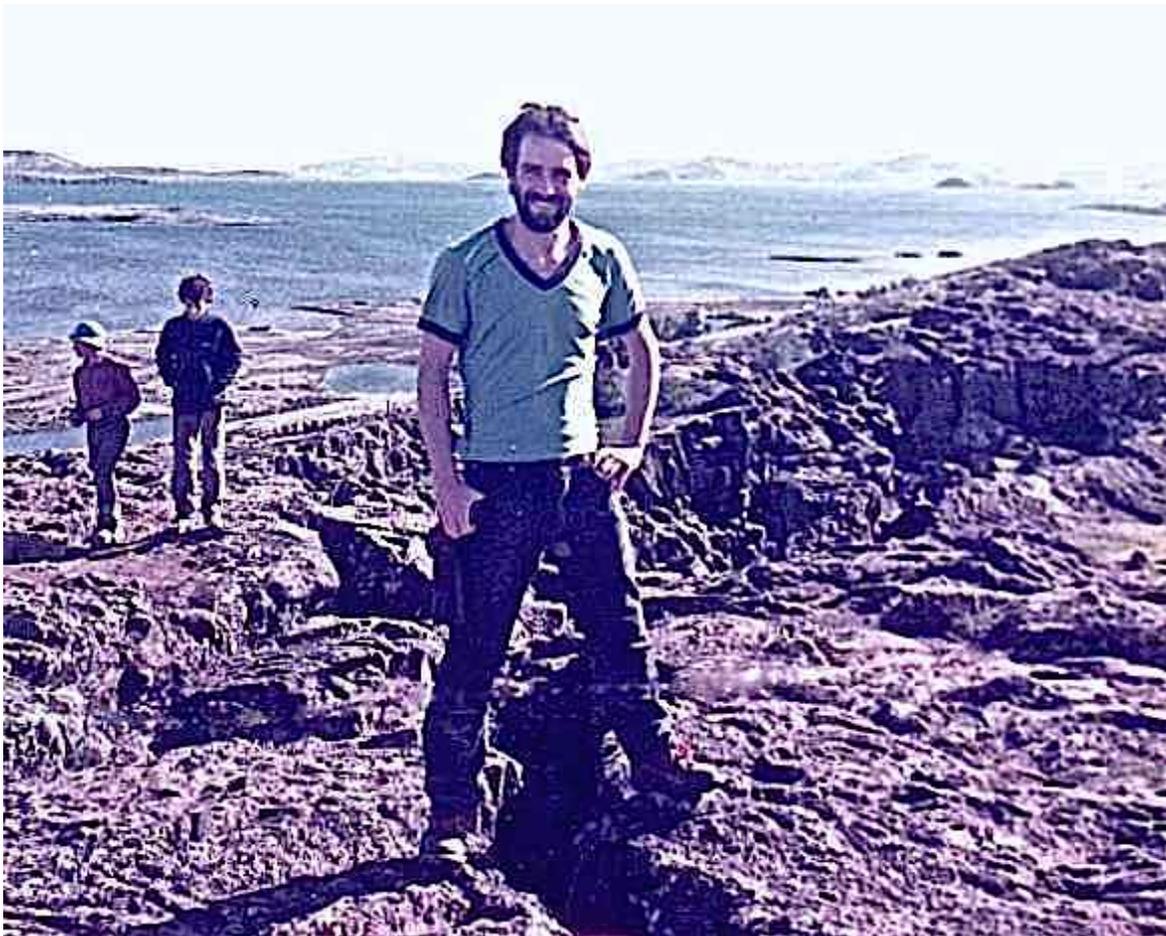
Strokkur about to erupt



The famous Great Geysir erupts very infrequently, but the smaller Strokkur erupts about every 6-10 minutes to a height of about 15-20 m



At Thingvellir, where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates are separating



At Thingvellir, with Thingvallavatn beyond  
One foot on the Eurasian plate and one on the American!

We visited the Embassy to confirm the safe completion of our Trek. Prizes were bought and some unused gaz cartridges were taken to the garage and cost was refunded in full. In order to avoid striking camp in the cold and dark early the following morning the coach to take us from the campsite to the airport had been booked by phone to pick us up at 11.00 p.m. So we packed at tea time and left the rucksacks at the campsite to walk into town for Trek Dinner.



The dull, grey city we arrived in was sunny and colourful on our return

The dinner at the Braubaer had been booked in advance from England and we had requested a 'simple but substantial' meal. We were served a delicious meal, beautifully cooked and presented, but for appetites sharpened by 12 days in the wilderness eating reconstituted dried food it wasn't sufficient - a large portion of chips would have done the trick! It is interesting to note that at about £12 a head this single meal cost 60% as much as all the rest of the food per head for 15 days!



When we arrived back at the campsite it needed several more phone calls before the coach arrived at 11.45. We slept in sleeping bags in the airport lounge from 1.30 - 5.00 a.m. Apart from avoiding the possibility of packing wet tents this arrangement also saved a night's camping fee.

There were no problems with the flight departure and we arrived back in Glasgow at 10.30 BST. We paid the full and proper fare this time for the bus into town. Due to bomb scares there was some difficulty in finding a suitable place to dump rucksacks for a couple of hours before the train departed. We arrived back at Manchester Victoria at 5.30 to be met by LAW fresh out of hospital after 10 days of spinal traction for his slipped disc.

## SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

1. As a trekking area Iceland is unique and so very different from the Alps or Pyrenees. There are few spectacular views and many miles of barren road or track across an unchanging landscape, but for those who have never visited Iceland it is an experience not to be missed.

The small areas of interest such as the hot springs, waterfalls etc. were spectacular and the combination of the trekking with tourist visits to Gullfoss and Geysir made the trip very worthwhile. Even the bleakness and bareness was worth experiencing but I don't think we could have taken much more of it without it becoming tedious and dispiriting.

2. The advance planning was very detailed and made the Trek easy to manage logistically; the coach transfers, school accommodation, campsite, food delivery to Landmannalaugar and Trek Dinner were all pre-arranged as far as was possible. The only advance arrangement which failed was the delivery of gaz cartridges to Reykjavik campsite. The advice of Dick Phillips about the provisional walking route was also very useful.
3. All food in Iceland, with the exception of fish, is very expensive. For an expedition of this sort and of this length the problem can be avoided by taking dried foods by plane rather than risking freighting by sea and the complexities of importing crated goods from the UK. We had an adequate supply of food, virtually all of which was taken with us, and were still only slightly in excess of our baggage allowance.

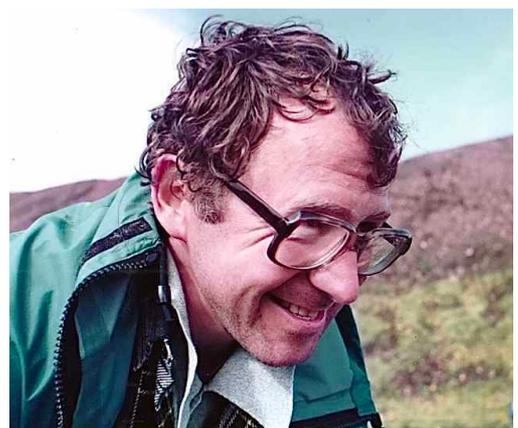
The pre-packing of food into tent-day bags made the allocation of supplies in Iceland very straightforward. The considerable time spent on this in Manchester was well worth it. One problem to be avoided though is having tins or hard biscuits in the same day pack as bags of smash, dried milk etc., several bags were burst by half way. Also spam tins pulverised the biscuits after several days.

The cheapest source of gaz cartridges is garages, although any one of them is unlikely to have sufficient for an expedition of this length and size.

4. Whilst planning the walking route or following it on the ground points to note are as follows:
  - (a) The maps are adequate but they are fallible, some deviations in contours are missing and the size or even the existence of a river may not relate directly to the map.
  - (b) Assume all recent lava flows are uncrossable.
  - (c) When crossing occasional rivers it is best to desock but wear boots.
  - (d) Some areas have no water at all and it is best to aim to camp where you can be certain (rather than hope) to find water.
  - (e) Many areas are deserted; a place name on the map does not necessarily mean that there is anything there.
  - (f) The main tourist huts, most inhabited dwellings and the coaches are fitted with two-way radio. As a safety measure it would be worth considering taking one which operates on a suitable frequency. Fortunately we were never in a position where one would have been useful, but there were places where an illness or accident could have involved severe problems of communication and evacuation.
5. The exchange rate obtained in Manchester was about 30 Kr = £1; in Reykjavik it was 40 Kr = £1 (why such a large difference?). In the accounts, costs in Iceland have been calculated at the 40 Kr rate and the loss made on money changed in Manchester written off as 'exchange loss'.

6. In spite of LAW's slipped disc and some days of bad weather, Trek was fortunate in many ways:
- (a) We had no major medical problems.
  - (b) The weather was good when we needed it; the main spells of rain came when it was convenient to wait for it to pass.
  - (c) There were no navigation problems when we were off the beaten track. Going past the hot springs area, the descent to Landmannalaugar and the ascent of Hekla were all played off the cuff and route finding was always successful. However, if we had got lost or had become stuck in mist or snow or shifting ground we would have been in difficulty in these areas.
  - (d) No vital river crossings were unfordable and so long detours were not required. The only major change of route caused by a deep river was in fact beneficial as it took us into the hot springs area.
  - (e) There were no problems with insects (some had feared macromidges).
  - (f) We always managed to find a suitable campsite where the ground would take pegs (aided by rocks) and where there was an adequate source of water. At Nordurnamur, Helliskvisl and Groenavatn we were fortunate that our hopes of finding water were justified.
  - (g) The arrangements for transport of the party and the supplies worked well, with perfect timing. We would have been in trouble if Audur Jacobsen had let us down or if the pick up coach hadn't arrived at Burfell.
  - (h) The lucky chance that we arrived at Landmannalaugar when the tourists were there enabled us to save a tedious road walk and gave us considerable flexibility in planning the last few days.
  - (i) The eighteen boys were excellent; in spite of some blisters and bad weather they maintained cheerful high spirits and an excellent morale. They were always ready to help and simply got on with the job of looking after themselves. They were the best group of trekkers I have accompanied in twelve years.
  - (j) Ian, Bill, John and Steve gave me splendid support; their advice and companionship were greatly appreciated.

John Willson



## ARTICLE FOR THE SCHOOL MAGAZINE ULULA

### 1984 FOREIGN TREK - ICELAND

I was surprised to discover that Iceland is almost wholly south of the Arctic circle, but it is far enough north of Manchester for the sun's slanting rays to be noticeably weakened, even in August. We landed in Reykjavik, a dull, prefabricated city of heavy skies, and camped by a large open-air swimming pool warmed by the copious hot waters in the local crust.

We were transported to the interior in a coach which lurched and splashed through the many glacial rivers crossing our own dirt road. 'The interior' began at Thórsmörk, a small hut perched on one side of the widest, flat, glaciated valley I have ever seen. From here we set out for Landmannalaugar, an oasis of hot springs and warm weather. Four days' walking across windy black deserts of volcanic dust, four nights of cold damp weather and flapping canvas, dried food and dramatic rushing rivers were our introduction to Iceland; an alien, daunting landscape on a shattered island of volcanoes and earthquakes.

Time and again the peculiarly tortured rock formations reminded me of Tolkien's description of the approaches to Mordor. The clouds of sulphurous gases rising from the boiling pools above hot springs, the obscenely belching mud-volcanoes, the parched cracked earth confirmed this impression.

Landmannalaugar is an Icelandic 'resort', two wooden huts and a campsite, where city dwellers come to bathe in the soothing hot water and to drink Brennivin, the national liqueur, better known as 'the black death'. We decided to press straight on, hitched a ride on a coach and were dropped at Eldja, a rift valley near the Ófærufoss waterfall, a cascading torrent passing through the arch of a high, natural, narrow rock bridge. Rain held us hostage for all but two of the next thirty-nine hours and then we embarked on the long walk back to Landmannalaugar.

Here we camped in the teeth of a lava flow and drew water from the clear springs bubbling out of the twisted rock. The following day we bathed in the hot springs, three hours of exquisite delight before moving on refreshed. The weather improved and the coloured screes looked like a vast, panoramic watercolour.

Our final objective was Hekla, a 5000 ft. volcano which last erupted in 1980. We camped a couple of miles from its base, a god-forsaken shelter between jagged new lava and rising dunes of ash. Water had to be carried from a lake over half a mile away and tents were pitched on top of Karrimats to protect them from the sharp, gritty ground.

We began our ascent in mist, marching on compass bearings to the peak of Little Hekla with its seismological equipment to warn of new eruptions. Ankle-deep ash made the climbing arduous, but at 4500 ft. we broke through the cloud and were rewarded by views of other peaks and the tops of the permanent icecaps. Trek can have had few more impressive lunch stops than we had inside the summit crater, with hot rocks to sit on and sulphur to add to the aroma of sardines.

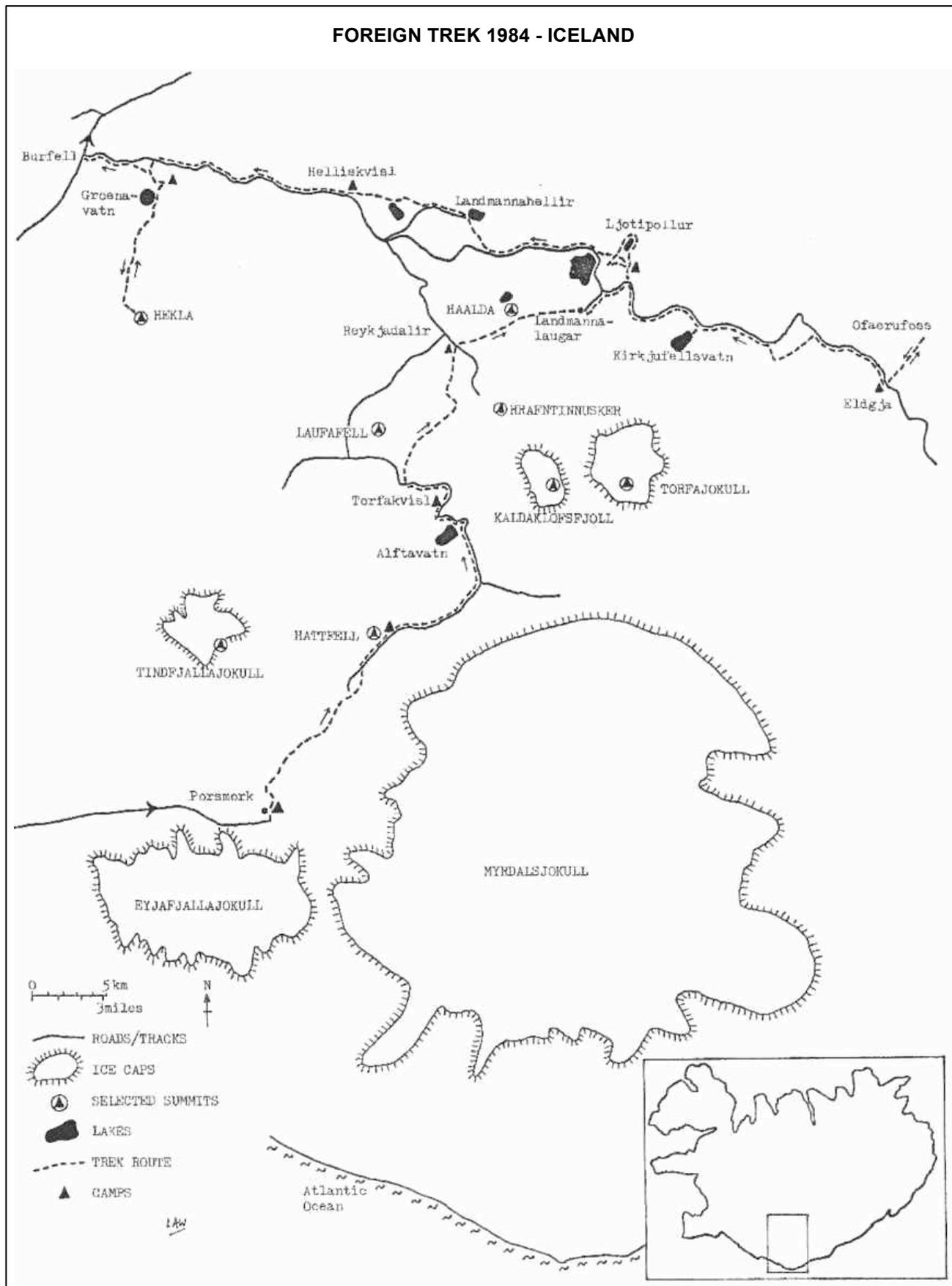
Next morning we walked out to a coach which took us back to Reykjavik via the spectacular Gullfoss waterfall, Geysir (the original) and Thingvellir (the site of the world's first parliament). Reykjavic was sunny and colourful on our return, and Trek Dinner united all in what had been a hard but rewarding expedition, owing so much to the organisation of Allan Witton who was unfortunately unable to go.

Steve Adams



**ORIGINAL SKETCH MAP**

This is a scan of the original pen-and ink sketch map showing the provisional itinerary (which was provided before departure) modified with the actual route walked. Digital map drawing technology wasn't available in 1984.



*think you can write...?  
 calligraphers-every Thursday*

# ICELAND

It is proposed that next summer Foreign Trek will make its first ever visit to Iceland. Iceland? What is there in Iceland to tempt trekkers from the more familiar delights of the Alps, Dolomites or Pyrenees? If your impression of Iceland is one of a frozen arctic waste, then you would be very much mistaken. Iceland is a place of enormous variety and contrast, a land still in the process of formation where the



elemental forces of creation and erosion work side by side, a land so very different from anywhere else in Europe.

Iceland is a land of ice, 12% of its surface has permanent ice cover, in places to a depth of thousands of feet. There are massive ice caps which feed glaciers that flow down almost to sea level.

The largest ice cap contains more ice than all other glaciers in Europe put together. It is some 80 miles long and 60 miles wide and can be seen from almost all areas of southern Iceland. But Iceland is also a land of heat and fire, for it is a highly volcanic area. There are active volcanoes, lava fields, craters, hot springs, bubbling mud pools and geysers — almost every type of volcanic activity. And the contrasts extend beyond those of ice and fire. There are green valleys rimmed by sharp mountain ridges; lakes, glacial rivers and spectacular waterfalls; and areas of such unearthly landscapes that they have been used by astronauts to test lunar vehicles. The route which Trek intends to take will be through central southern Iceland, a region where much of the island's diversity can be found.

In spite of Iceland's latitude, it is just outside the Arctic Circle, the climate is remarkably mild. In summer the mean temperature is only slightly lower than that in northern Britain, with not quite

as much rainfall. But close proximity to the Arctic Circle does mean that during summer the sun is never far below the horizon and there is almost perpetual daylight.

If you like walking and camping in remote places, and would like to see for yourself why David Bellamy rates Iceland as one of the great natural wonders of the world, then Trek 1984 could be



for you. It is open to any competent walker from the 4th, 5th, or 6th form; special mountaineering skills or previous back-packing experience are not required. Further information will be on display in the exhibition area until the end of term.

L. A. Witton.

## LAST OF A DYING BREED

The most recent set of Oxford Div. I's could well be the last in a long and illustrious list, if not, then certainly the penultimate set of Oxford Div I's at M.G.S.

The reason for this is that Oxford is moving away from the 7th term entrance exam. Whether this is a good or a bad thing will remain to be seen but as a member of a dying breed of 7th termers, I would like to pay a sentimental tribute to this all but extinct tribe.

The most fearful prospect of any Div I is not the rigorous exam which takes place towards the end of November, but simply going back to face another term at M.G.S. when most of his contemporaries have already gone off to University. Indeed some would say that getting back into the swing of regular and plentiful

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Iceland is a land of ice. 12% of its surface has permanent ice cover, in places to a depth of thousands of feet. There are massive icecaps which feed glaciers that flow down almost to sea level.

The largest icecap contains more ice than all other glaciers in Europe put together. It is some 80 miles long and 60 miles wide and can be seen from almost all areas of southern Iceland.

But Iceland is also a land of heat and fire, for it is a highly volcanic area. There are active volcanoes, lava fields, craters, hot springs, bubbling mud pools and geysers — almost every type of volcanic activity. And the contrasts extend beyond those of ice and fire. There are green valleys rimmed by sharp mountain ridges; lakes, glacial rivers and spectacular waterfalls; and areas of such unearthly landscapes that they have been used by astronauts to test lunar vehicles.

The route which Trek intends to take will be through central southern Iceland, a region where much of the island's diversity can be found

In spite of Iceland's latitude, it is just outside the Arctic Circle, the climate is remarkably mild. In summer the mean temperature is only slightly lower than that in northern Britain, with not quite as much rainfall.

But close proximity to the Arctic Circle does mean that during summer the sun is never far below the horizon and there is almost perpetual daylight.

If you like walking and camping in remote places, and would like to see for yourself why David Bellamy rates Iceland one of the great natural wonders of the world, then Trek 1984 could be for you.



It is open to any competent walker from the 4th, 5th, or 6th form; special mountaineering skills or previous back-packing experience are not required. Further information will be on display in the exhibition area until the end of term.

Note: photos inserted are from the 1984 Trek.

L. A. Witton.

## ORGANISATION

1984 was an unusual year for Trek, with two smaller expeditions each attempting something that Trek hadn't done before.

I first began looking at the possibility of taking a Trek to Iceland in early 1982, with the idea of going there in 1983. There was sufficient interest amongst 1982 Trekkers to indicate that such a venture would be viable. But the remoteness of Iceland's terrain and its unfamiliarity as a trekking area, together with more complex travel and food supply arrangements meant that a longer than usual planning period was needed, and outline arrangements were not finalised until November 1983.

A party of 18 boys and 5 staff had been recruited by January 1984, and at this point Gerry Leversha suggested offering an alternative Trek to those 18 or so boys who would have gone on a 'normal' Trek but who were not attracted by Iceland. He had in mind a route through the Brenta Dolomites using vie ferrate - impossible with our usual parties of 40+ but an attractive proposition with a smaller group. The Brenta group isn't extensive enough to occupy a fortnight, so a week there was combined with a week in the Ortler group.

Without the benefit of one of Dennis Hughes' cheap coaches and the economies of scale that packing a large party into it brings, financing the Treks at charges not too much in excess of recent ones was always going to be difficult. The Iceland Trek was budgeted to be self-financing, with a contribution of up to half the £250 cost from each of the staff going and the remainder from Trek reserves. Gerry's optimistic and rather 'loose' budgeting led to problems financing the Dolomites Trek. These were solved by an increase in the advertised price, a grant from the school, and a subsidy from Trek reserves. In the end the 'damage' to Trek reserves wasn't as bad as looked likely at one time.

With a smaller total number involved this year there was no need to purchase any major items of equipment. The only expenses were for the replacement of a few minor items and some tent spares. This amounts to a further 'hidden' subsidy of about £10 per boy on both Treks.

### Recruiting

The intention to take Trek to Iceland was announced in September 1983 and outline details were available at Trek Reunion in November. This was followed up by a talk in Main Assembly, an article in the school newspaper and a promotional display in the exhibition area until January.

It was clear from the start that the greater cost of a Trek to Iceland together with its nature as more of a remote expedition than a walking holiday would mean that it wouldn't appeal to as many boys as has been the case in recent years. But as most boys have a choice of Treks over four years, I think a more specialist venture has a place as an occasional variation on the usual Alpine theme. The party of 18 boys (half the usual number on an Alpine Trek) and 5 staff had been recruited by January 1984.

### Training

As it was an experienced party of older boys, high levels of fitness and campcraft were assumed and the pre-Trek outings were not so much for training as for getting to know one another and checking that personal kit was satisfactory. To keep costs down the outings were local - in the Pennines.

#### Training Walk 1 Saturday 17th March.

A circular walk from Glossop station.

Glossop - Shelf Brook - Doctor's Gate - Bleaklow Head - Bramah Edge - Glossop (about 11 miles, in Arctic conditions on Bleaklow).

#### Training Walk 2 Sunday 6th May.

A circular walk from Malham (Travel by minibus)

Malham - Gordale Scar - Malham Tarn - Attermire Scar - Malham (12 miles).

#### Training Camp Wednesday 11th - Thursday 12th July

Travel by rail: 11th Piccadilly to Hope

12th Glossop to Piccadilly

Route: 11th Hope - Lose Hill - Mam Tor - Rushup Edge - Brown Knoll  
Kinder Downfall - Ashop Clough (12 miles)

12th Ashop Clough to Glossop via Bleaklow Head (again!) and  
Dowstone Clough (10 miles)

## Transport

Travel between		By
Manchester Victoria	Glasgow Central	British Rail
Glasgow Central	Abbotsinch	Service bus
Abbotsinch	Keflavik	Icelandair
Keflavik	Reykjavik	Coach
Reykjavik	Interior	Coach
Landmannalaugar	Eldgja	Coach

In general the transport arrangements worked very well, with just a couple of minor problems (see itinerary for details).

Naturally transport was the largest item of expenditure, and including the training outings it amounted to 76% of the total budget.

## Equipment

With a smaller number involved this year there was no need to purchase any major items of equipment. The only expenses were for the replacement of a few minor items and some tent spares. This amounts to a 'hidden' subsidy of about £7 per head.

### Tents

Vango Force 10: 4 Mark 5 3 Mark 4

Generally they performed well, often in difficult conditions, though they are heavy to carry when wet.

### Stoves

Camping Gaz S 200 and S 206 (new versions)

In conditions which were often wet and windy most cooking was done under the flysheet in the bell-end, where the stoves performed well. 53 cartridges were used, about 8 per tent group for the 15 days the stoves were in use.

### Ropes, Ice Axes and Crampons

As there were no glacier crossings planned, crampons and ice axes were not taken this year. One rope was carried as a safety measure - its most likely use was expected to be for river crossings - but it wasn't needed.

### Personal Kit List

Essentially the same as last year (there is a copy in the paper archives). More emphasis was placed on warm clothing and a good sleeping bag this year.

### Equipment Hire

No new equipment was bought. There were ample stocks to cover the needs of those wanting to hire.

### Discount

Estcourt's continued last year's arrangements of 20% discount for Trek purchases and 10% for boys' (but with 15% on the open evenings).

## Food

Planning, buying and packing provisions for a party of 40+ for a fortnight's backpacking in the Alps is a well-practised routine, and it needed only minor modifications for this year's Trek. Almost all the food was dried or tinned, and was bought in catering quantities at wholesale outlets in Manchester.

Dried foods such as soup, Smash, rice, whirl, AFD veg and meat meals were bagged into tent-meal quantities and then bagged again as complete evening meals and packed together with the following day's lunch as a day-pack, labelled with the date of the evening meal. Foods such as muesli, tea bags coffee, dried milk and sugar were bagged in quantities sufficient for a tent group for each half of the trekking route. This pre-packing is a time-consuming process but we find it is well worth it for the convenience of food distributions on Trek, especially if the weather is bad.

The seven day-packs for each day were wrapped in strong polythene and then securely packed into a container such as an old rucksack or kit bag for transport to Iceland. In addition food for use in Reykjavik was packed in a trunk together with some other items of equipment.

Each member of the party carried with him to Iceland his own rucksack with personal kit, hand luggage plus either a complete tent or a kit bag with a day's food for the party.

## Insurance

For at least 10 years Trek has taken out insurance with the Commercial Union in the form of their standard School Journey Policy, but extended to cover the camping and other equipment owned by Trek. The local office is fully aware of the nature of our Treks i.e. walking and camping expeditions which don't involve climbing, and a special endorsement has been negotiated to the effect that our activities don't constitute 'mountaineering' which is an exclusion with that policy. There were no claims.

## First aid

A comprehensive first aid kit was made up and carried by John Green who administered to the injured. The main problems were blisters caused by having almost continually wet feet for days at a stretch, and some Achilles tendon trouble.

## Photography

John Willson took the 'official' slides for display at Reunion. Steve Adams took the cine film and a superb set of prints. Most boys took a camera and many produced excellent results.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Iain Cottam of Sonicworld	for his comprehensive and very helpful advice throughout the planning stages.
Tony Estcritt	for his useful comments on our plans.
Dick Phillips	for his helpful advice on the walking route.
Audur Jacobsen	for ensuring that the arrangements in Iceland worked.
Both Johns, Bill, Ian and Steve	for their encouragement, support and help.
Steve	for taking up my place at two days' notice, carrying the cine camera and shooting the film, and giving me a duplicate set of his superb prints.
John Willson	for taking over leadership at such short notice and converting an outline plan into such a successful Trek.
And not least the 18 trekkers	without whom there would have been no Trek to Iceland.
Allan Witton	



Heading down towards Landmannalaugar

## OUTLINE PLANNING TIMETABLE

### 1982

- January Tourist brochures about Iceland and Norway obtained. Iceland selected.
- February - Icelandic maps and much other information loaned by Ray Davies.
- May Initial stages in deciding what might be possible.  
Twickenham Travel's Expedition Planning Service looked ideal.
- July TREK 1982 - PYRENEES The idea of a trek to Iceland was mentioned.  
Sufficient interest to indicate that it would be viable.
- September - Wrote to Twickenham Travel and Sonicworld with tentative plans  
October and requested information and details of the service they offered to expedition organisers.  
No reply from Twickenham.  
Much helpful information provided by Iain Cottam of Sonicworld, but they no longer promoted Dick Phillips Walking Tours.  
Possible trekking areas were identified but there were too many unanswered questions (mainly about logistics) for plans to be ready by Reunion. Iceland Trek postponed until 1984.
- November TREK REUNION Trek 1983 to Switzerland announced.

### 1983

- January - July Planning, recruiting and organising 1983 Trek.
- February - April Contacted YET  
Further letter to Twickenham - no reply again.  
Further information from Sonicworld.  
Outline plan emerges:-  
Area: Skaftafell - Eldgja - Landmannalaugar - Porsmork  
Transport: Rail Manchester to Newcastle  
Farskip ferry Newcastle to Reykjavik  
Coach transfer to interior  
School minibus as support vehicle for supplies etc.  
(Detailed information about which 'roads' were passable still needed)  
Cost: About £220 per head
- July TREK 1983 - MONT BLANC - GRAND COMBIN
- October Doubts about Farskip ferry operating in 1984 confirmed.  
Only realistic alternative was air travel and increased cost put the viability in doubt. However by changing dates to August, area to Porsmork - Landmannalaugar - Hekla, sending supplies by sea, using coach for drop-off and pick-up but with no back-up transport, arranging food drop at Landmannalaugar, it looked possible to keep the costs below the £250 I considered the maximum to recruit sufficient numbers, given the cost of this year's Trek (£180).
- November TREK REUNION Outline plans for Iceland announced.

### 1984

- January Party of 18 boys and 5 staff recruited.
- January - July Arranging details of walking route and logistics.
- February Iceland Unit Ping - useful background information.
- April Enquiry about freighting food from Runcorn to Reykjavik (McGregor, Gow and Holland).  
Delivery to Runcorn required two weeks in advance.
- May Application for 'Announcement'
- June Coach transfer cost increased from £293 to £385!  
'Announcement' received.
- July 3rd Enquiry to Dick Phillips about the details of our walking route - prompt and very helpful reply.  
Icelandair changed flight departure time from 16.00 to 22.30, but as a concession offered to waive any excess baggage charge. Preparations to send supplies by sea abandoned and food packed for taking by air.
- August 3rd My slipped disc!
- August 5th John Willson and John Green briefed with as much 'unwritten' information as possible within two hours.  
Steve Adams agreed to step into my place.
- August 7th - 23rd TREK 1984 - ICELAND
- November TREK REUNION Trek 1985 to Austria announced.

### 1985

- December ICELAND Report finished at last!!

## FOREIGN TREK ACCOUNTS 1984 ICELAND

EXPENDITURE		1984		1983	
		Cost/head (23)		Cost/head (38)	
	See Note				
Travel	[1]	£4,225.65	£183.72	£3,729.04	£98.13
Food	[2]	£772.31	£33.58	£1,514.86	£39.86
Camping	[3]	£94.46	£4.11	£716.56	£18.86
Equipment	[4]	£48.06	£2.09	£220.30	£5.80
Maps		£65.20	£2.83	£13.77	£0.36
Guides	[5]	£17.50	£0.76	£38.08	£1.00
Insurance		£62.85	£2.73	£127.62	£3.36
Postage, phone etc.		£32.47	£1.41	£47.61	£1.25
Gaz		£58.22	£2.53	£112.96	£2.97
Photographic	[6]	£58.71	£2.55	£22.47	£0.59
First aid		£8.31	£0.36	£12.00	£0.32
Currency/bank charges	[7]	£54.25	£2.36	£42.56	£1.12
Prizes		£27.96	£1.22	£45.15	£1.19
Young Explorers' Trust	[8]	£32.00	£1.39	-	-
		<b>£5,557.95</b>	<b>£241.65</b>	<b>£6,642.98</b>	<b>£174.82</b>
'Nominal' cost per head	[9]		£249.00		£165.00
For notes see following page					
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>					<b>£5,557.95</b>
<b>INCOME</b>					
Charges	Boys	18 @ £250		£4,500.00	
	Staff	5 @ £100		£500.00	
					£5,000.00
Other		Interest on deposit account		£46.31	
		Interest on National Savings Account		£89.11	
		Equipment hire		£52.00	
					£187.42
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>					<b>£5,187.42</b>
<b>LOSS FOR 1984</b>					<b>-£370.53</b>
BALANCE at 10/1/84		Current Account		£177.63	
		Deposit Account		£276.49	
		NSB		£1,330.32	
					£1,784.44
		1984 loss		-£370.53	
		Dolomites/ Ortler Trek loss		-£90.31	
<b>BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD</b>					<b>£1,323.60</b>
BALANCE at 8/1/85		Current Account		£80.27	
		Deposit Account		£53.90	
		NSB		£1,189.43	
<b>BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD</b>					<b>£1,323.60</b>

## NOTES

### [1] TRAVEL

Flight	£3,383.00
Rail (Glasgow return)	£196.00
Coach transfer (Glasgow)	£39.00
Coach (Porsmork/Burfel)	£385.00
Coach (Landmannalaugar)	£125.00
Practice walks	£41.65
Practice camp	£33.00
Other	£23.00
	<u>£4,225.65</u>

### [3] CAMPING

		Per night
Reykjavik (2)	£46.99	£23.50
Porsmork (2)	£47.47	£23.74
	<u>£94.46</u>	

Average per night	£23.62
Average per person (23) per night	£1.03

### [5] GUIDES

Ice and Fire	£15.00
Iceland Unit guide	£1.20
Geology of Iceland	£1.30
	<u>£17.50</u>

### [7] CURRENCY/BANK CHARGES

Commission on currency	£3.86
Loss on change back to £	£50.39
	<u>£54.25</u>

### [9] 'NOMINAL' COST PER HEAD

To obtain a 'nominal' figure reflecting the cost of this year's Trek, the following amended costs have been used:

Equipment	18 @ £12 per head annual allowance	£216
	Less amount actually spent	£48
	Add:	<u>£168</u>

This makes the 'nominal' cost of this year's Trek (£5558 + £168) i.e. £249 per person

Allan Witton January 1985

### [2] FOOD

In Manchester	£417.30
Allowances	£56.24
Trek meal	£282.27
Reunion drinks	£16.50
	<u>£772.31</u>

### [4] EQUIPMENT

Spares and repairs only	<b>£48.06</b>
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### [6] PHOTOGRAPHIC

Cine film	£36.74
Slides and prints	£21.97
	<u>£58.71</u>

### [8] YOUNG EXPLORERS' TRUST

Subscription	£10.00
Iceland Ping	£22.00
	<u>£32.00</u>