

# Everyday a new Horizon

A crossing of Iceland in four seasons

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### Prolog

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If you're completely tired of studying in the library;  
if you rather prefer to walk the whole day through the Pampa with a 30-kilogram backpack;  
if you prefer to spoon pure peanut butter instead of your daily meal in the cantina;  
if you just want to be cut off from the outside world for a month without any push messages from your smartphone;  
if you like to trade summer, sun, beach with horizontal rain that whips your face;  
If you're tired of tables, chairs, a kitchen or a bathroom and yearn for a vagabond life and adventure;  
then you're ready for a month-long 600-kilometer Iceland crossing!

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Adventure out in the nature, close to the elements! This is what we want: a crossing of Iceland from the northernmost to the southernmost point of the mainland, without filling up our supplies on the road! Additionally, with the help of a portable water turbine, we want to be dependent only on nature and renewable energy sources to promote the sustainable use of resources. Thinking about these two aspects, we call our tour [unsupported!](#)

We, that's André: a haven of peace and a technical expert, that's Wendelin: a free-thinker and food specialist, that's Jens: a pioneer and photographer and that's Julian: a map guru and a camp spot perfectionist.



We prepared this adventure intensively for half a year! We spent a lot of time planning the best route, putting together an energetic and well-balanced meal without any ready-made expedition food, getting our equipment ready and thinking about emergency situations. On the hunt for portable devices to recharge our electrical equipment with wind or water energy, we received a lot of positive feedback and support.

The last days in Germany passed very fast and finally we land in *Reykjavik*, late in the evening of August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. We spend one day in the city to make the last arrangements and of course to enjoy some good Icelandic beer. On August 3<sup>rd</sup> we are standing at the road and are hitchhiking towards *Rifstangi*, the northernmost point of Iceland. Finally, our adventure starts, which we have been



## Summer - With lots of sunshine through the north of Iceland

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looking forward to for so long. The nice and open-minded Icelanders, who take us with them, are sometimes quite impressed when we talk about our project - or at least they do so. 😊



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August 5<sup>th</sup> 2018, 1:44 pm. Finally, we gonna do it. *Rifstangi*, 66°32'15.4" North 16°11'43.3" West, northernmost mainland point of Iceland, 3.6 km south of the Arctic Circle, 7 °C air temperature, constant wind from the south, a light sun-cloud mix. The nose is running.



So what do you do in such a situation before you start the big march? Sure, you transfer a little bit of this damn heavy 33-kilogram backpack - in which also 2 to 2.5 litres of water are packed - into your stomach and then jump into the ice-cold arctic sea. What else?!

After this ice-cold baptism, we feel strengthened and ready or at least believe that we are. We make our first 13 km through the typical Icelandic frost hills, which means a small but continuous and very exhausting up and down. We keep thinking how valuable a smooth Icelandic horse with its typical flying like gait would be in such a situation.

But what should become the biggest challenge of the first weeks, crystallizes already after the first half of the first day: the water. In the lava rock, the rain simply drains away and additionally very few of the map-marked lakes are really filled with water. The first source is a small pond in where our eagle eyes discover red little worms. But that is no problem, because we have capillary filters with us, which carefully remove all animals and floating particles from the water.

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In the early afternoon the first camping spot is found. We quickly nickname it with bomb crater. Bomb crater is a beautiful grassy hollow in the middle of a lava field. An English lawn looks dirty compared to this. Our tents fit perfectly next to each other and there are even comfy spots to sit in the windbreak during dinner. Mother nature gives us this valley like a gift in the unreal, energy-stealing and deserted landscape.



But this landscape of the first days is also just perfect to get familiar with a good hiking rhythm. Our route takes us through a wide, gently hilly landscape that is occasionally interrupted by sheep or farmer tracks. We impressively experience the different grasslands of Northern Iceland that have formed over thousands of years above the lava. This is how we walk comfortably in one moment over flat heathlands, that are so old that hardly anything indicates the underlying lava rock. Another moment, we make our way through turbulent terrain, out of which repeatedly lava rock emerges and reveals the black, porous stone. When passing by one of these abrupt landscape changes, we can especially well imagine how the lava streams once flowed until here.



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The **3rd** day then shows us what Icelandic continuous rain actually means. It is permanently drizzling or raining with a few short breaks - a really disgusting affair. This is the moment when one states for the first time: "Take your ponchos out!" Before the trip, we heavily debated whether this is really the best solution for the rain and the Icelandic weather conditions, but we soon realize that these ponchos are really worth the effort and most likely better than simple raincoats. Just throw them over and then march, march, march without getting wet. At temperatures around 10°C, we are only wearing the long-sleeved merino shirt under the poncho. On colder days, we add a second layer or even the 3-layer jacket if there is too much wind. But if you get too sweaty, just take the poncho off and put it behind your head. Brilliant! One could say, perfect choice, this is the way to conquer this Icelandic weather. With our blowing cloaks, we move like real vagrants over the bare hills, green fields and the narrow valleys densely covered with blueberry bushes.



It is exactly these small blueberry bushes, which show up in front of us like if we would have called them. They do not only colour our tongues completely blue, but also cheer up our mood. To stuff your belly with blueberries for minutes in the pouring rain is simply a wonderful pleasure. Rain and wetness get a bit more beautiful with this blueberry meal fresh from nature. Thank you Iceland!

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However, in the evening of the **5th day** it gets even better, as suddenly on the horizon the sky breaks open and for the first time on the whole tour, we really see the sun in its full strength. Obviously, in such a moment, there is only one way to go. And this is up! We swing our legs to the highest point in the area - a small hilltop. Up there, we experience a sunset with a sensational view of the Canyon of the *Jökulsá* - one of Iceland's largest rivers - as well as the surrounding colourful landscape and the Greenland Sea in the distance. Being up there after several days of wetness and rain, the sense of this warm evening sunset light on our skin gives us a satisfying feeling of really being fully alive. At this moment the previous efforts seem to be well worth every single bit and make the moment even more unforgettable.



The sun on this evening should only be the kick-off event, because the next four days are full of sunshine. The temperature is very close to 20°C, which means high summer for Icelandic conditions. We can even march with short trousers for some time and have to use sun cream. Summer, sun, sunshine - we would not have expected that in Iceland... The panoramas and views we are given, are breathtakingly beautiful and give us a true summer feeling! The way continues along the river through the fascinating *Vesturdalur*, which is surrounded by numerous basalt column formations and bizarre rocky mountains.



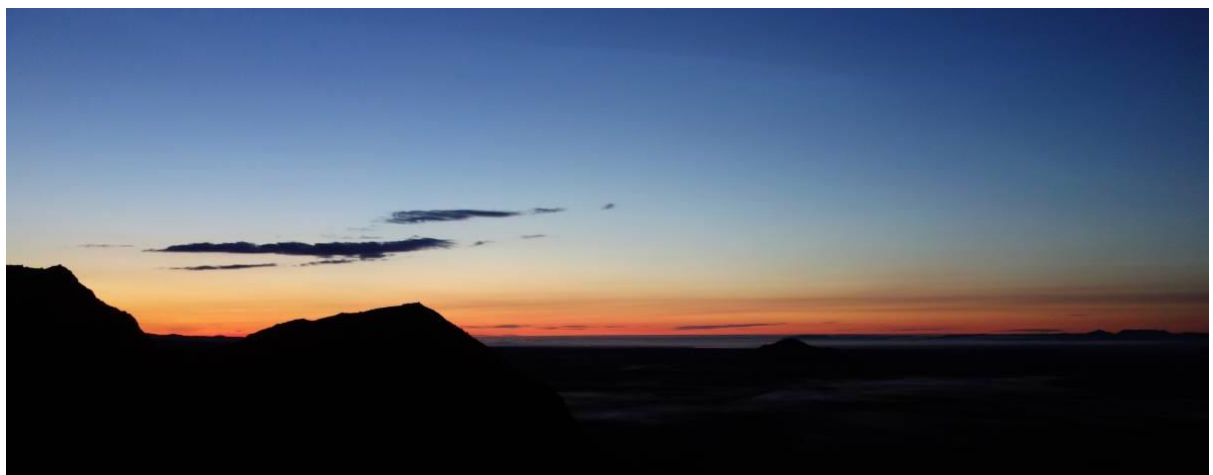
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Here you can truly experience the result of the powers that come from deep inside our earth. Fascinated by this place, we decide to take a very long relaxing break. In a green valley section - one could say a little oasis - we find a small protected stream, where we first wash ourselves with curd soap and then let our wet clothes dry in the sun. The solar cell - our backup to the water turbine - is installed here for the first time and recharges the GPS watch, the GoPro and the digital camera. With literally recharged batteries in every sense, we set off into the monotonous and flat landscape towards the southwest. To be a hundred percent sure, we have converted a packsack into a water bag so that we are not depending on waters that are only marked on the map as "not continuously water-carrying".

In the evening Wendelin pulls his Irish "Tin Whistle" (flute) out of his backpack and starts to play on it. Sometimes we listen to the theme song of Lord of the rings, sometimes Harry Potter and the other time it is a funny German children's song. The arctic sky remains red until deep into the night.



Jens uses the opportunity and walks up a mountain in this late night. Up on the top, he writes the following lines in almost complete silence into his diary:

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„Oben sitz ich hier zu später Stunde,  
nur ein kleines Bonbon in meinem Munde.  
Aus dem Tal nur ein einziger Ton,  
das ist die Flöte des Wendelinsson!  
Der Sandmann schallt aus dem Tal empor,  
der Rest lauscht und schreit: „We want more!“  
Doch Wendelinsson der muss jetzt ruhn,  
denn morgen gibt's wieder viel zu tun.  
Weit're 25 km sind dann dran,  
die er nur mit Schlaf bewält'gen kann.  
So wird es also langsam komplett leise,  
nur die blöde Meise,  
zwitschert weiter auf ihre nervende Art und Weise.  
Man denkt, sie will die Flöte übertreffen,  
doch ihr Gesumm ist schlicht nur zum Vergessen!  
Doch das Abendrot im Norden,  
vertreibt ganz einfach alle rest'chen Sorgen.  
Denn hier auf 66 Grad Nord,  
da bleibt es einfach dort!“



On the next day, the **7th**, we continuously hike up over the rising high plain towards *Krafla*. Our attention is soon caught by a fresh lava field on our right. The lava makes the impression as if it had only solidified just a few days ago. It is still completely black and absolutely no plants are visible. Not even moss. What lays in front of us, is the 40 years old solidified lava stream *Leirhnjúkshraun*. Crazy, because somewhere else plants would have grown and taken over the land already some time ago. But in Iceland, the plant world simply takes much longer to conquer back lost areas. Until moss will grow on this lava field, a few more decades may easily pass. One more reason for us to walk carefully along our paths and take care of every step we take.



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During the day, the view of the landscape in the clear Icelandic air becomes more and more beautiful. We can hardly get enough of the panorama. Now a water source would be wonderful to make us perfectly happy, because our additional water supplies are slowly running out. The area seems to be completely dried up and the *Krafla* area ahead promises rather stinking muddy sulphur water than drinking water. At a place that reminds us of a dried ford, we unexpectedly find the long-awaited elixir of life. There are only a few puddles that have stored the clear rainwater of the last days, but they are enough to fill our water bottles.



The highlight of the day definitely is the rest of the ascent to the plateau, where we have a visibility that easily covers half of our crossing (about 300-400 km). In the north our starting point at the Atlantic Ocean, in the east the highest peaks of the East Fjords, in the south the northern foothills of *Vatnajökull* - the largest glacier in Europe (except Greenland) - and in the west the setting sun over the mountains near *Akueyri*. Water supplies filled up and this absolutely mad view, can there still be more?



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Yeah, there can be more! Because now it's high time for a schnapps from the house of Buderer. Wendelin Buderer has distilled this schnapps himself with his father for the family owned farm sale. Traditionally, we mix this schnapps, only with the water of special springs, so always a unique new schnapps is created. The mixing process is almost like a centuries-old ceremony. This time the choice goes to delicious puddle water from this rather dry part of Iceland. Wendelin carefully mixes this exquisite drop according to an exact recipe (shwifty-shwifty) from puddle water and 80 percent schnapps. Sitting on the hilltop, enjoying the Icelandic summer evening and sipping this unique drink, this is when we are absolutely happy without any wishes.





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This night's schnapps is something very special for also another reason. The knee problems, which had plagued Julian for quite some time now and had not completely disappeared with consistent training in the last few months, were highly noticeable in the last few days. His final decision could be postponed to this place. Here is one of the few times to be able to get off the tour at all, because we are directly on the *Ring Road* near *Mývatn*, where he can simply hitchhike back to Reykjavik. After that the highlands begin and in case of more serious complications, we would be dependent on external help.



With this special schnapps Julian tells us his final decision to leave us on the following **8th day**. We are all very sad that only three of us will be able to go on. With Julian, however, there is also a certain relief about that the decision has finally been made.

Julian leaves us the next morning after a few kilometers. The additional weight on our backs - due to the maps and other common property of Julian - is immediately noticeable. Four is now three and with the team the landscape and surroundings around us change as well. We leave the *Mývatn* and the *Krafla* region. It is over with short trousers and the beautiful, calm summer weather.

### Autumn - Into the windy and rough highlands

We're marching up into the Highlands. The wind speeds up. Autumn has come to both our team and the landscape. The landscape is becoming increasingly sparse, the green companions are shrinking, as you can only see some moss or a small plant from time to time. Nevertheless, the first highland campspot on rocky ground convinces us with another wonderful sunset with a view to the north up to about where we started in the morning. This evening we impressively notice that in one day we have walked the distance from one horizon to the other and define a new daily motto: "Everyday to a new horizon".



Due to Julian's leaving, we now have two 2-person tents available for three ramblers, which means that our equipment is no longer optimally matched to three people. Automatically, we start rotating every night. One after the other is alone in the tent. Whoever sleeps alone naturally has much more space, can lie crosswise and only has to cope with his own smells, which one probably cannot describe with accurate words: Socks from the abyss of hell... E. Fromm defines hell as "complete separation and distancing from each other without the bridge of love". However, a little bit of shit talk, some shared peanut butter spoons and another human heater for cold nights might be able to succeed in building the bridge of love and overcome the complete separation due to the socks of hell.

On the **9th day** we definitely really arrived in the Highlands, specifically in the hostile terrain of the *Ódáðahraun* (English: offenders lava field). The legendary and huge lava field welcomes us with a cold, biting wind that blows sand into our faces. That means, glasses on, Buff over the mouth and further as real offenders. We feel a bit like in the movie *Mad Max* and it gives us real joy to sense the wind and the sand in our faces, just to march against the rough autumn wind, to really experience the raw elements of nature.



## Autumn - Into the windy and rough highlands

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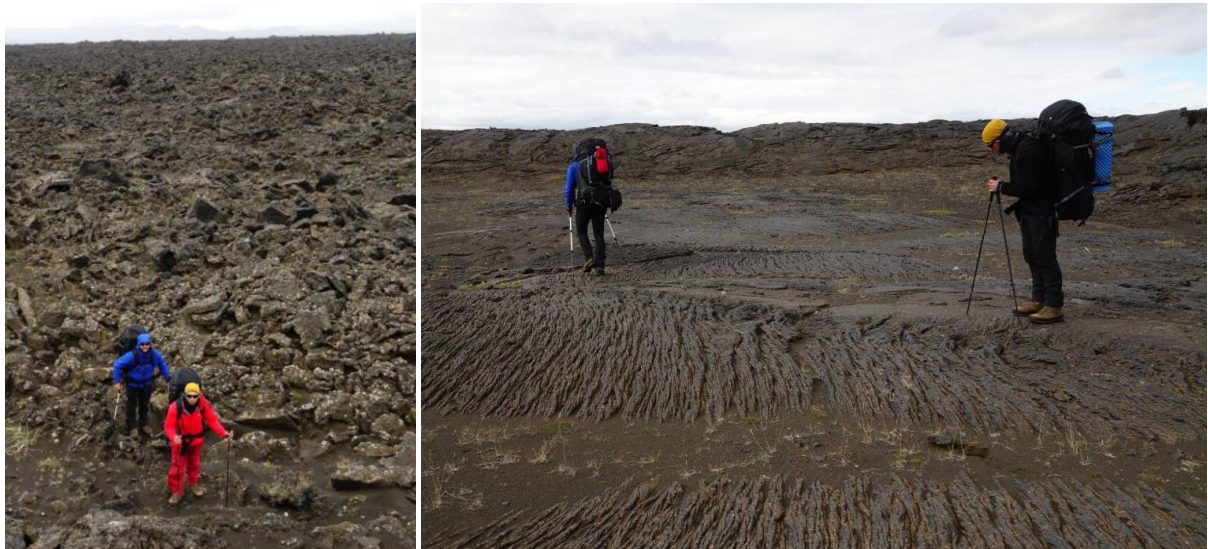
In a bandite-like look we follow the map up to a small hill in the middle of this lava sea. With its underground of sand, gravel and isolated large pebbles, the hill truly stands out from the rest of the black, sharp-edged lava field. At this hill we finally lay down to rest, while the sky at the northern edge bravely keeps its reddish tone and *Herðubreið* slowly but surely breeds out the weather cloud for the next day above its summit.



On the **10th day** the so far easy walking through the lava field becomes more and more climbing up and down. The widely flat landscape transforms to a chaotic hill and valley scenery - sharp-edged, unstable stones, which we cannot rely on when putting our weight on them. Every step must be carefully considered and the route carefully chosen to avoid the most difficult sections of lava. The *Ódáðahraun* becomes a really dangerous opponent, especially for our shoes and clothes, as the lava stone edges are as sharp as a butcher's knife. But for Iceland that is not enough and clouds with autumnal rain are showing up above us. Rain starts pouring over us without an end in sight. But we shouldn't be complaining, because this is real Iceland... not well known for sunshine and warm weather.

## Autumn - Into the windy and rough highlands

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Thus, we balance the 9 km beeline through the lava field, which is no fun with still 30 kg on our backs. Fortunately, we manage this without any incidents, as there is really nothing that would remind us of a hiking path. An unlucky fall could quickly lead to a fracture here. That would be the end of the tour for the injured not thinking of how the rescue services would get to us in this terrain. We are more than happy to reach a marked path after five hours of most complicated hiking. For the first time, we realize how great it is that we don't have to pay attention to every single step anymore and can trot along. Finally, we can philosophize again! This time about how relaxed sitting in an Icelandic gas station with classic filter coffee has always been. Sitting there for hours and sipping cheap filter coffee... A must on every Icelandic road trip in Jens' and Wendelin's Erasmus time!

So, we continue chatting and laughing on a firm gravel road through the drizzle. Just as dreamed, suddenly a hut appears on the horizon. Quickly we cover the last meters in the wet and cold rain weather, hoping for some dryness and warmth in the hut. Once there, we open the fortunately unlocked door, take off our shoes and already see the food bags in the free food shelf. Stupid that we have decided not to consume any extra food. Wendelin dares to take a look into the big box and presents with a huge grin on his face a gift of good: Colombian freeze-dried coffee. This we can't resist and find it very okay to pour this low-calorie black gold into us. Rarely a coffee with a good piece of chocolate has tasted that delicious!





## Autumn - Into the windy and rough highlands

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After this unexpected coffee tasting experience in the hut Botni, we trot a little further in the rain. During such a trotting we are often lost in thoughts - when not a melody in a continuous loop is going crazy in our heads. Now, for the first time, we have serious desires for junk food or, as in Andrés' case, a fresh orange. But it's not just desires on the subject of "gourmet pleasures" that buzz around in our heads. Also, on such a rainy day as today, the thoughts arise to simply spend the day inside in the warmth with beer and a game like "Terraria".

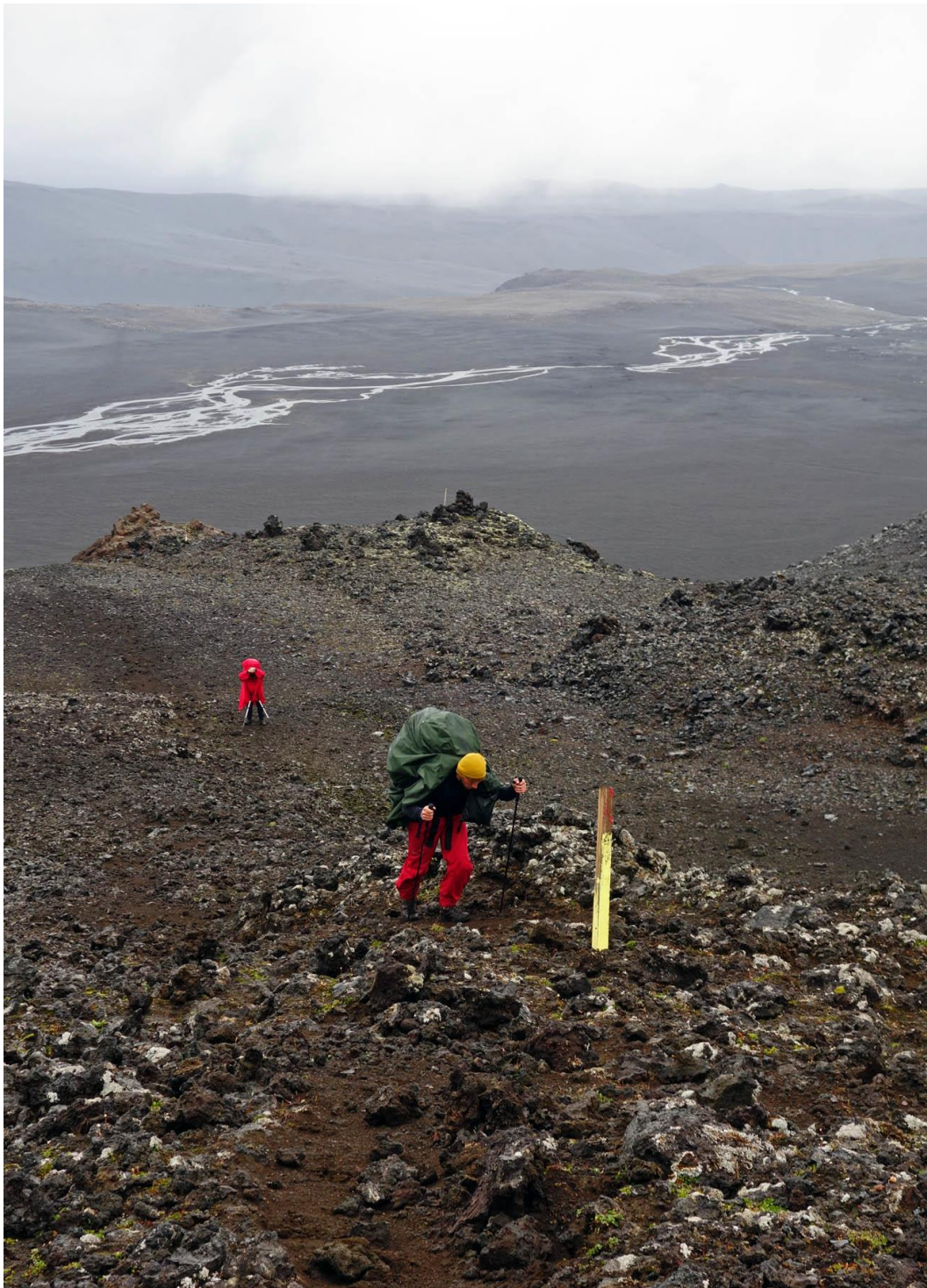
In the evening in the meantime, it gets colder and colder. In line with the progress of our crossing or in a *Game of Thrones* slang one would probably say: "Winter is coming"! Cooking outside in front of the tent, what was still possible in summer - at the beginning of the tour - is no longer possible. One screams out: "Into the tent!" as soon as the sun has set. The eating procedure with three people, two running gas burners, sharp knives and all kinds of spice bags is not that easy. We almost have to sit cross-legged in meditation and can hardly move to avoid pushing or destroying something. We must announce every big movement in order not to spill something, or even to cut into our sleeping bags or mattresses. But here, too, we quickly develop a routine.



As the last common activity of the evening, we take a close look at the map to memorize how we want to get to our next horizon the next day. In terrain without hiking trails we have to know exactly what the route looks like. Then we escape the increasingly wintry cold by crawling deep into our sleeping bags. It is not unusual for us to fall asleep trying to go through the past days in front of our mind's eyes.

### Winter - the three of us through the cold and deserted centre

**Day 11** welcomes us with a ramp! A ramp that leads us high into the cloudy *Askja* massif, a central volcano north of *Vatnajökull*. This means for us at the same time the start of winter. Eruptions around 8500 B.C. formed the large caldera, which is surrounded by mountains up to 1516 metres high. In a series of further eruptions from 1875 onwards, the two craters within the caldera were formed, which today form the second deepest lake in Iceland, *Öskjuvatn*, and the small crater lake *Víti*. The snow and the cold come closer and closer and we hardly see any plants. Everything feels like winter.





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The ascent to the edge of the Kaldera is our hardest. Within 10 kilometers it goes up about 600 meters in altitude. Step by step we fight our way up into the clouds, through snow fields that are getting bigger and bigger until we reach the pass, which with 1,292 meters is the highest point of our tour. At the top we eat a piece of our daily 4-pieces-per-person chocolate ration as a reward and start our descent to find a suitable place to sleep. We get a cloudy view of the big caldera, where we can only imagine the big *Öskjuvatn*. Wafts of fog are blowing through the landscape, there is light wind and a few raindrops fall from the sky. A truly mystical, impressive and lava desert atmosphere.



Our initial illusion of a flat, easily walkable caldera has quickly vanished. This rugged, rutted, inhuman lava-ash underground is completely unsuitable for camping. Now we understand why NASA chose this area in the 1960s to prepare for the lunar mission.

»Probably the most moon-like of the field areas.«

Glen E. Swanson: Apollo Geology Field Exercises



Luckily, we cannot destroy something here, since nothing grows or simply lives in this place. We find a somehow suitable ash surface for camping, nevertheless, we move extremely cautiously in the tents, in order to not cause any cracks in the tent floor.

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After a peaceful night on this - in geological sense - active volcano, we quickly pack up our gear and head towards the crater lake. We first pass over snow fields, then over a short, almost inaccessible section (1 on a scale of 0 to 10 rating the accessibility, even worse than the lava in the *Ódáðahraun*) and finally over a well-prepared path that leads us to the two lakes. After a mild bath in hell (in the *Víti* lake; nothing against the hell socks 😊), we leave the maintained paths again.



Cross-country along *Öskjuvatn*, we make our way through the caldera, whereby our route is surrounded by beautiful deep black obsidians. Occasionally a foot breaks into a hole, which has somehow washed out under the sand or dirt. That makes us walking carefully behind each other, always intensively reading the underground. In this way we want to leave as few traces as possible and minimize the risk of injuring ourselves. The sands are replaced by more impassable lava rocks. Again, we have to navigate more carefully through the lava to the edge of the caldera. This time flat, plain "lava highways" help us over and over again. By this we call better accessible lava parts that remind us of a dry riverbed with less lava thrown up vertically. Their only disadvantage is that they do not always lead in the right direction. However, we can move through them relatively quickly and safely, for which we gladly accept a detour. By changing our course several times in this manner, we finally arrive at the edge of the huge caldera. There we fill our bottles with melted water and head south.

Up on the saddle we look back again and say goodbye to this impressive place of earth. But every horizon is followed by a next one and already we have our horizon for the next day in sight: the *Dyngjufökull*, the northern foothills of the *Vatnajökull* and thus the first glacial ice! With this icy target in mind, we march into the evening and the dense fog.





On our **13th day** we spot the youngest lava of Iceland directly to the east of us: *Holuhraun*. The lava stream, which formed during the eruption of *Bárðarbunga* 2014-2015, stands out pitch-black from the grey surroundings and the dirty-white glacial ice. Fascinated by this sight, we stop a few times and look at this youngest spot of Iceland just next to us. Here, 4 years ago, it was really spitting and glowing everywhere...

The glacier is now only a small jump away and finally we arrive directly at its edge. Finally arrived! *Vatnajökull*! For days we could this humongous ice shelf in the distance. We feel small and insignificantly next to such a massive tank of ice. Fascinating and sad at the same time when we realize that the ice and the landscape are continuously changing. Especially today, in times of global warming, more than ever! Full of respect of the ice, we set up camp for the night and explore the icy edge of the glacier a little more.



After these first intensive highland days we decide, for the very first time on our tour, to not set an alarm and sleep out long. As exceptionally, our destination *Kistufell* is only 12 km away, which makes it possible for us to have this more or less break day. With a good feeling, we relax our tired bodies and allow ourselves this longer break. It is already 12 or 13 pm when we finally crawl out of our tents. The view to *Vatnajökull* with its impressive black "ice forest" is even better today than the day before. By ice forest we mean the black, pointed formations on the glacial ice. The reason for this is the ash, because in places with a lot of ash the ice melts less fast, because it is isolated. In places with less ash in contrast, the ice melts faster and forms these characteristic dirt towers (if you are more interested in the science behind it, check out this interesting [journal paper](#)).





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We leave at late noon - it is now 3 pm (versus on normal days: 10 am) - we are walking west, not south anymore. This means the start of the march around Vatnajökull. A short time later we cross a bizarre riverbed, where many tiny streams make their way through, and where there have not been any the day before. We are impressed by how much the amount of melting water depends on the day and night temperatures.



As we get closer to our daily destination, one detail on the map confuses us. To our right, there should appear a small hill, as the contour lines on the map indicate. However, if we look to the right while marching, there is nothing. Are we already seeing Fata Morganas, we ask ourselves... But fortunately, the solution of the mystery appears. A hole, a very deep hole, becomes visible: The thing is not an uplift, but a hollow of 170 meters depth and one kilometer diameter! *Urðarhóls* - probably a

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small sunken volcanic crater. How sudden the Icelandic nature always has new surprises prepared for us and how much our expectations affect us when reading the maps...



In contrast to the first two weeks of our tour we are now always surrounded by water. To our left is the edge of the glacier with the enormous masses of ice, whose size can hardly be grasped. More and more rivers make their way out of the glacier, which need to be crossed. The first stream crossings are simple done with our hiking boots. Soon, however, we pull our gaiters over them to get through deeper streams. For the deepest and largest glacial rivers, we even take off our trousers and put our neoprene socks on. From river to river our skills improve, and we can step by step better understand the riverbeds and the resulting best route through the water. We are very aware, that with the river crossings the tour will stand or fall. Here in the highlands there is no alternative but to turn back, whereby turning around can mean many days of a detour, which is hardly possible with our food supplies. Furthermore, most highland accidents happen when hikers (or motorists) misjudge rivers and are dragged away by them. It is therefore important to observe and look at each river carefully to figure out where it can best be crossed.



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At the same time, however, we are also very happy with all this water, because now we can finally use the Enomad - our small water turbine. If a suitable night spot directly at a stream is found, we only have to fix the Enomad in the water and wait for the next morning. The power of the water alone should then ensure that the integrated power bank is fully charged. It's wonderful what nature can do for you! But when we wake up on the morning of the **16th day**, we are shocked to discover that the small practical turbine no longer spins. "How the hell did this happen?", we are disappointedly asking ourselves. We had carefully chosen the just perfect spot. After a short examination we understand, that we did the math without the fine glacial sand that had blocked the Enomad...



But sadly, all the complaining doesn't help, because we have to move on; further south, always further south! And even then, when the whole day a biting freezing wind blows frontally into our face, there is no time to stop. Marching on and on. Fortunately, today's destination is a very good motivation, as it is a very special one from a geological point of view, but not only that:

On the one hand, it accommodates a warm stream of 38°C, which is a real highlight after so many ice-cold rivers. In the evening we spend a long time lying in perfectly tempered water, are playing the flute full of joy and energy and are singing all the songs that come to our mind, even if many of them sound really weird and the flute squeaks more often than we want. But here we can make music as crazy and weird as we want. Often, we make music during our mission. Sometimes here, sometimes there, sometimes short, sometimes long, for waking up or in a rainy lunch break under the poncho to chase away the rain. Another important pillar for our good team spirit!

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On the other hand, we are right at *Vonarskarð* - the pass that represents the water divide of Iceland. From the vast wet plain water flows either to the north or to the south of Iceland. And like for the water, the "Point of no return" is also reached for us, although from a time-related point of view we are already in the second half of the days.



In the evening we take a ground-breaking decision: The next days we will walk directly along the glacier and not past the lake *Hágöngulón* to the west, which would be the less wet alternative route. If there are obstacles in our way that cannot be crossed, turning back is out of the question! We will need to walk around them in order to get closer to our final destination, the southernmost point of Iceland. Thus, we cross some rivers with neoprene socks and notice quickly that with our choice we have chosen loneliness. The small gravel road has probably not been used for years. Generally, there are little to no signs of other human beings or even other living creatures anymore.



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## Winter - the three of us through the cold and deserted centre

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In the evening of this **17th day** we are confronted with an impassable river. Without further trying, we decide to spend the night directly at the river in order to be able to tackle it directly in the morning. Our hope is for a lower water level, since the glacier should melt less at night.

But that doesn't exactly work out how we hoped... It is 10 or 11 am when we dare to cross. Wendelin, who went ahead, notices relatively fast that a crossing at this point would lead to a wet crawl-style crossing.



For the best of our will, 10 am does not seem to be early enough and we are learning: Always wade through glacial rivers as early as possible, preferably with or before the first daylight (approx. 5:30/6 am) in order to ensure that the lowest water level is to be found. After considering all options, we decide to continue upstream in the direction of the glacier. The plan is: the closer to the glacier, the more arms with lower water levels and the easier the crossing. Faster than we can think of, we are pushed further and further to the glacier and finally make the decision to walk over it.

Here, the glacier is very flat, and an ascent seems to be easy. But by no means...as everywhere right at the edge of the glacier, treacherous quicksand is waiting for us. The only method to avoid it, is to find big stable piles of stones or frozen mud, over which one gets step by step towards the glacier. A real labyrinth of sand and stone. After a couple of missteps on stable looking stone piles, which fortunately do not have any dramatic consequences apart from muddy-sandy shoes, we finally arrive on the glacier. He greets us cheerfully and fully alive with a gurgling and splashing from under the ice. We proceed super cautiously and carefully, as of this new underground with its unusual noises, we first have a hell of a respect. But quickly, we notice that the many water sounds are completely normal for a melting glacier. The melting ice flows in small creeks on top of the glacier until it disappears in the next crack and continues under the ice. Also, our progress is surprisingly easy and much faster than "on land". The glacial ice is very grippy and easy to walk on, there are virtually no open crevasses and every crack in the ice is clearly visible. At the same time, we can admire gorgeous glacial mills and beautiful ice formations. Here, Iceland really consists only of ice and definitively honours its name of *Iceland*.



## Winter - the three of us through the cold and deserted centre

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Despite the beauty and fascination of the ice, we are all relieved when we have solid ground under our feet again a few kilometers later. Walking over glaciers requires a lot of attention and causes an awkward feeling. In this moment (and also afterwards) it was the right decision though. The risk on the glacier in very good conditions still seems to us to be less than wading through the wild arms of the river.

A short while later we are standing on a ridge with a good view of a big lake directly at the edge of the next glacier. This should be the main source of the *Sveđja* river. Our route leads of course exactly over the two powerful outflows of the lake. "Damn it!" we think, "This could get really difficult now."



From above we identify a suitable crossing point and a short period later we have left the two streams behind us without any major problems. The water is freezing cold, but the current and the depth are okay. We are really euphoric and celebrate our triumph. But as we climb up the next glacial moraine, a thundering noise is reaching louder and louder to our ears. Arriving at the top, we see the reason for it. Another powerful outlet from the lake: more rapid and much stronger than the other two before.

## Winter - the three of us through the cold and deserted centre

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Impassable! We seem to be trapped between the outflows of the glacial lake in front of *Sylgjujökull*. The outflow in front of us is too deep and strong and going back is not really an appealing option. So again, the same decision as the day before: to spend the night at the crossing point and to cross before sunrise. We have no choice but to put our hopes in the cold of the darkness. We are hoping that the water level in the lake outlet will decrease throughout the night.



The alarm is set to 4:45 am, we go to bed with an uncomfortable feeling in our stomach. If the river is still impassable in the morning, we would have to go back. Not only we would lose a lot of time, but also we would have to search for a way on and off the glacier again and an alternative route around the river. This would mean the loss of valuable time that we no longer had...

When we wake up, the lake outlet that seemed impassable in the evening actually has a much lower water level! This is indicated by a stone that was covered with water in the evening. "Yippie Yah Yei!" What a relief! Motivated we pick a crossing spot with a sandbank in the middle and start the crossing.



Step by step, with the experience from all previous crossings, we touch ourselves forward. The river isn't too deep, the water splashes just over the knees and the current is not so strong anymore. This way we quickly reach the sandbank in the middle. The second section is a little longer and a little deeper, which we clearly realize by the increasingly penetrating cold climbing up our legs and feet. Moving becomes harder and more difficult as the feeling in our legs quickly vanishes. Generally, in



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every river crossing it is a compromise between "taking your time to set every step carefully" and "making fast progress to not cool down too fast". The closer we get to the shore, the shallower the water becomes again. Still, we take the last - numb from the painful cold - steps very carefully before we reach the other shore after an endless three minutes. We did it!



"Hopefully this was the last crossing at this lake", we think, while we helplessly dry our numb feet and dress them in socks again. This is a perfect moment for tea, which we have prepared the evening before. The taste and warmth of such a hot sip of tea is like heaven! For just this moment it's worth carrying the relatively heavy thermos through Iceland!

But the break does not last very long, because the cold slowly starts creeping up our legs. As soon as possible, we need to get warm again and fill our numb feet with life. For the feet this means marching, marching, marching, since our own body is the best heater. After a short time, the feeling returns to the feet, but this does not mean warmth! First of all, this means that we now really can feel the cold in our feet! Only after a felt eternity the warmth comes back into our feet and finally also into our toes. Indeed, there is no more lake outlet coming. After taking some extra kilometers, a route over the ice and a night on a river island, we finally conquered the *Sveđja*! Wow, this is a very important milestone!

The following kilometers until our breakfast place are incredibly beautiful. Eternal vastness in all directions, the calmly located glacier and a silence surrounding everything.

## Winter - the three of us through the cold and deserted centre

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A little later we find a sheltered place in the sun, where we celebrate our Supra-Muesli breakfast. The solar cell is used perfectly in such a moment of sunshine and can recharge our GPS clock, the GoPro and the digital camera.



During this time Wendelin takes out his flute and starts playing the *Lord of the Rings* theme music, parts of German folks' music or pop music like *The Cave* from *Mumford & Sons*. At a suitable point Jens supports with the rattle and André with the harmonica. Always a funny and good jam session. We sit in the lonely nature, make music and just enjoy the moment. In such occasions we feel pure happiness. Happiness that everything was going well without any major troubles. Happiness about being able to experience everything out here together. And happiness that we have the privilege to march so alive through this incredibly beautiful place of earth!

After having finished our "breakfast music brunch", we are in a great and optimistic mood. But shortly afterwards the next river announces itself with an ever louder noise and finally manifests itself in the *Sylgia*, which even for the super huge Icelandic monster cars does not seem to be crossable. Since we do not want to lose half the day and spend the night at the river again, we walk up and down the river for some time and look for a halfway passable spot - in the truest sense of the word. At a spot that looks most promising and that lies below a big waterfall, we finally try our luck.



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However, if the water rises to your stomach and you are hardly able to fight it, then a river is in fact too deep to be waded through... As a result, we all need our dry spare underpants on the other shore, the shirt can luckily directly dry on the body in the sun. While the crossing of the *Sveðja* in the morning was clearly the coldest, this river brought us to the limit of depth and current.



After this second crossing of the day, we race down kilometer by kilometer, as if chased by something invisible – always speaking in walking terms. Green mountains slowly approach from a distance. Small, flowering plants on the edge of the trail become more frequent and bring life back to



## Winter - the three of us through the cold and deserted centre

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the landscape. Also, the temperatures are more and more pleasant and a spring-like sun appears more often at the sky.



In the evening the odometer stands at about 34 kilometers in 16 hours. Ahead of us lies another huge river: the *Tungnaá*, the largest river of all. Although our bodies yearn for rest, we have to be satisfied with little sleep again, because we also want to cross it as early as possible in the morning. After another marathon-day we fall into a very deep sleep with an incredible amount of impressions.





## Spring - Through vibrant green towards the south coast

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### Spring - Through vibrant green towards the south coast

On **day 20** the alarm clock rings at 4:30 am After a short night we pack up our tents without breakfast and leave for the *Tungnaá* at dusk. Talking about all the rivers we need to cross, the *Tungnaá* is definitely the boss. No other river kept us that busy in preparing the trip. There was no up-to-date information about this huge glacial river available. The only thing we could get beforehand was old Google satellite images. So, the temperatures and the precipitation experienced at first hand over the last few days were much more useful. Based on these we can make our own estimations of whether the river will be crossable or not. From the very beginning it was clear: whether we will be able to finish our mission according to the plan depends on the mood of the weather and therefore on the crossability of the *Tungnaá*.

Luckily, there is a ford through the *Tungnaá*... a sign that generally speaks for crossability. Nevertheless, on the way to the river, we have mixed feelings. The last days have shown that it is worth getting up early, but also that the rivers *Sveđja* and *Sylgja* have already brought us to our limits. However, every step towards the river makes us more optimistic. The sky promises great weather and the signs are good. After a cloudy march the day before and a cold, clear night, the wide river slowly opens up in front of us. Above the *Tungnaárjökull* (glacier) the sun slowly rises and warmly lights our faces. A wonderful spring day is just starting.



The water level is low. We can easily walk through the first arms. The temperatures of the clear night must have been even below zero degrees, because fragile ice cracks beneath our feet as we pass the small gravel beds between the arms of the river. Arm by arm we work our way forward and make good progress because we don't even have to take off our shoes! Gaiters are just enough. But because the river flows so wide-spread, we don't see the last arm for a long time. While Jens is already celebrating the victory, Wendelin warns in front of the treacherous main arm, which could also wait behind the next hill.

The last arms get a little deeper. Thus: shoes off, trousers off. While removing our stuff, we realize that the water seems to have risen a little higher, since the sun rises fast and lets more and more ice melt on the glacier. Nevertheless, we continue the wading through the last knee-deep arm of the *Tungnaá*... Wow! True joy and relief is overcoming us. On the piece of meadow where we land, an extended dance of joy and gratitude begins. "We made it! We fought it" This river, constantly present in our heads, is finally defeated and that in a much easier way than expected!



Well-deserved, we take a long break in the Icelandic spring sun with an excellent breakfast and relax while the solar cell loads the equipment. Every now and then you hear a cry of joy when someone finds freeze-dried ginger, a pecan nut or a dried cranberry in his muesli. How tasty and valuable such a breakfast is! We are in a fantastic mood and full of joy!

With the arrival at the *Tungnaá* everything becomes much greener than before. Even the birds start singing around of us. This magnificent weather promises to make the rest of the way especially beautiful. Ironically, less than five minutes after our super long break, another river arm appears...A joke that makes us laugh, as fortunately it is not the supposed lurking "main arm" that we had feared... the *Tungnaá* tries to tackle us another time, but again we stand stable. We are done with it!



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Our way takes us close to a little summit. Seeing that summit, for us there is no way around, there is only one way to go and this is up the summit. With each step bringing us higher up, an ever more spectacular view opens up. And the detour is worth it: A unique panorama of grey desert, white glacial ice, green mossy mountains and the deep blue and long *Langisjór* lake is presenting us.





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After a topless sunbath, a small snack and endless amazement we descend towards the lake. When we reach it, soft moss nestles up against our hiking boots. Soft moss as we only know it from deep, natural forests back home. As soft as a canopy bed. Just the right thing after days of lava stone drudgery. In such moments no discussion is necessary: in silent agreement we lie down in the soft moss - completely stretched out. Immediately we doze off in this peaceful environment and feel the first soft ground in ten days at its fullest.



The path along *Langisjór* meanders through the green mountain range and always winds up and down. Over and over again there are incredibly beautiful views of the lake, of small bays or of the gigantic, impassable *Skaftá* with its countless individual arms on the south side of the mountain range. Finally, we arrive at a wonderful bay.



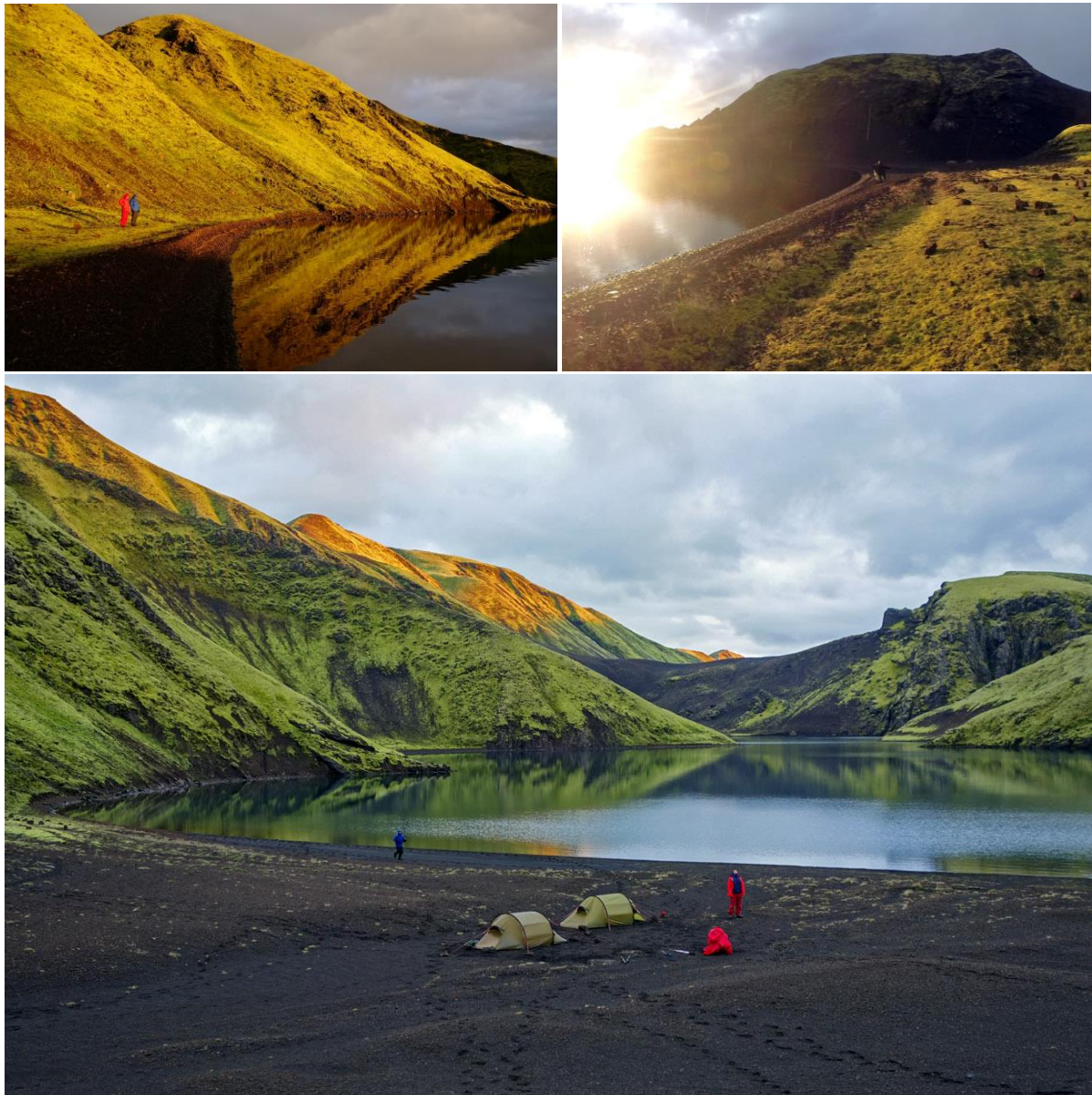
In this wonderful bay, the water gently moves back and forth in soft waves. The evening light bathes the surrounding mountain slopes in a deep golden green and the coarse-grained, deep black lava sand just invites you to camp. Again, no discussion is necessary: this place will be our night's camp. Before we set up the tents, we decide for an ice-cold bath in the bay. Even the light rain, which suddenly starts, cannot stop us. Nevertheless, it is always a huge effort to throw ourselves into the cold water, but for the good feeling afterwards it is worth every single time. If you simply "breathe a bit more" before, the plunge is only half as bad. Afterwards everything tingles and we feel one hundred percent alive! Additionally, we noticed that you should not wait for a long time until you jump in. Once cooled down, our inner couch potatoes have grown into a huge mountain troll that stands between us and the water.

The tents are set up in an instant and the sun even has a come-back. It wraps the dreamlike bay in an unreal, magical mood. The three of us stand silently on the shore and enjoy the last sun light through the rain curtain with a good sip of French *Chartreuse*. This is how short moments become long-lasting moments. The here and now becomes timeless and the moment just gets infinite. Too bad, that in everyday life we find it so much harder to enjoy the special short moments as long-lasting nearly timeless ones. Out here we are like apprentices of the best master of timelessness: Surrounded by the magical nature of the Icelandic highlands. What a privilege to be able to learn here!



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Like every evening we get together in a tent, but this time we can hardly believe our luck. What an amazing day! A smooth crossing of the *Tungnaá*, many breath-taking moments and landscapes that still seem to become more beautiful. And the best thing about it: We can experience these emotions and moments together and share them with each other! Even more sad that Julian cannot be with us, because these cooking sessions in the tent were just a great end to the day. All of us sit in one tent, cook mashed potatoes, share cheese or sausage and finally check the route for the next day. After dinner everyone writes on a small piece of paper the most remarkable thoughts of the day and puts it in a small bag. At some point later in life they will remind us of these moments! This shared time in the evenings gives us security, warmth, team cohesion and above all strength for the next day. We are totally sure: This is a very important part for the great atmosphere in the team.

The marching on **day 21** is characterized by a mixture of rain, sun and many rainbows always following the lake. Classical april weather, a German would say!

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In the afternoon we reach the end of the lake and come across a gravel road that even looks as if it is used more frequently. And indeed: shortly later we meet the first people since almost a week and this encounter, we later name "Emperor Franz", since we never knew his real name. Emperor Franz and his wife arrive in their huge Mercedes *Unimog* four-wheel drive at the end of *Langisjór* just over a hilltop. He casually leans out of the window and we greet him with a typical "Servus", whereupon he answers with a deep smile and a strong Bavarian accent: "Servus folks! So tell me, what are you doing here?"

We briefly explain our mission and Emperor Franz, with a big smile on his face, immediately asks, "Can I do something good for you?". The three of us just look at each other and say something like "No, no, we actually have everything we need just with us". But Emperor Franz cannot believe us and repeats, "Are you sure? There must be something I can do for you. You are just coming out of the middle of nowhere...". Again, we stammer something like, "No, no, it's all good." However, Emperor Franz knows exactly what starved German students need in such a situation and announces, "I still have a loaf of the best sourdough bread from my favourite Bavarian bakery back home. And would like to share that with you!" Then all our denying is broken and we simply cannot resist and have to accept this gift of god...



On this particular evening, our shared chilling and cooking session in one tent lasts much longer than usual, as the loaf is celebrated to its very last piece. First of all, it has to be equally cut into three parts. Then all combinations of the following ingredients are tried out in small quantities: Cheese, sausage, butter, salt, pepper, olive oil, peanut butter, almond cream, hazelnut cream, macadamia cream, cashew cream, roasted over a gas cooker and finally with roasted marshmallows. Yes! Jens had reserved nine marshmallows from the last evening before the tour and kept them for very special moments. And this was definitely one! If Emperor Franz knew what he had done to us with this half loaf of bread...

Every step south seems to make the grass and moss areas around us denser and larger. Our route leads us through a narrow and deep gorge of an enlarging stream. The walls of the gorge are



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completely covered in moss. Again and again there are small water springs coming out of the slope that join the stream. One of them even rises as a small fountain directly from the rock - like a perfect water dispenser from which we drink enthusiastically. Everything around us splashes and sprays with life.



The gorge spits us out directly at the *Skælingar* hut at the *Skaftá* river, where the *Skaftá* once again shows its full size. Although the cottage is about 300 m from the river, the ground is covered with fine white mud up to about 50 m from the cottage. At first, we are surprised, but it doesn't take long and we understand: The mud comes from the glacial run that took place on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. A water bubble under the glacier *Skaftárjökull* was emptied and flooded the river and the surrounding plains. 12 hours later, the [glacial run](#) also reached the *Ring Road*, which can even be seen on [satellite images](#) from 2018.

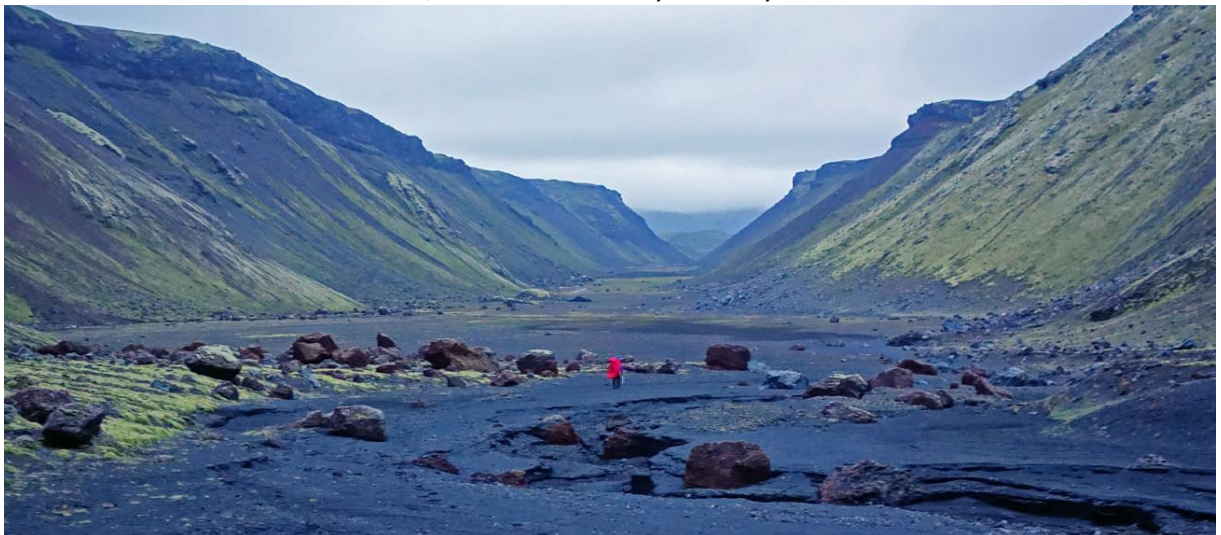




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The next highlight on the tour is *Eldgjá*. *Eldgjá* is an 8 km long canyon, which was created during an eruption in the 10th century. It is besides *Askja* another wonder of the Icelandic nature, which mainly attracts off-road motorised tourists, since it is relatively far away from the main traffic route.



Here we finally meet whole groups of people again. Jens uses the opportunity of the civilized world and disappears into the toilet hut.

When he comes back to the visitor parking lot, the following situation presents to him:



André and Wendelin are standing at the door of a tourist coach. They are offered all kinds of eatable gifts from numerous hands. "What the hell is going on?", Jens asks himself confused. When he approaches the scene, he recognizes a tour group with the Icelandic tour guide Guðbjörg. Jens quickly realizes that Guðbjörg is a very communicative and curious woman, who peppers André and Wendelin with questions about our mission. When she hears that we have been hiking in the wilderness for 23 days, she tells the excited Australian travel group



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inside. The Australians now feel really incited to give us as much food as possible. A chocolate bar is stretched out, cocoa milk protein shakes, a pack of biscuits, a nut bar... But we quickly refuse. After all, we have everything with us. The only thing, we can't withstand is a fresh apple and a banana - something fresh for our palate! We are also happy to get a bit of dried fish, because during the hike we really felt in love with this Icelandic speciality.

Thankfully we say goodbye to Guðbjörg and the tour group and shoulder our backpacks again. We immediately eat the fresh fruit and put the dried fish in our bags. We now have accepted another small "support" additionally to the bread, which we didn't really want. But what was already certain to us in advance, was that if such unique moments with other people arise on the tour, then we will appreciate the encounter and also accept small gifts.

Meanwhile we are walking for **24 days**, when suddenly a great view comes in sight. The last milestone: *Mýrdalsjökull* - the second largest glacier of our crossing, which we will pass on the eastern flank and whose outlet rivers will always make the right shoe wet first, as it faces the current first.

We would not have imagined this to be possible, but the view we are offered from here exceeds everything in colour, we have seen before. The glacial ice shines titanium white under a blue sky, occasionally covered with fair-weather clouds. In the foreground a large plain in which black sand and green moss alternate. The green moss here definitely reaches the peak of its intensity. The plain is enlivened by striking mountain groups and isolated cones such as the *Mælifell* with a black head and a green cape. The many small fair-weather clouds cast an amazing shadow play on the landscape. Individual rivers pass through in silvery shimmer.





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The whole afternoon we walk along the glacier, always towards the steep slopes of the unmistakable *Öldufell*. Although there are still three whole days ahead of us, there is an atmosphere that makes us feel the imminent end. Water is everywhere and we meet more and more sheep again. Everything becomes friendly and pleasant. The area on the east side of *Mýrdalsjökull* is simply breathtakingly beautiful. We discover this unique combination of moss green, lava sand black, sky blue and glacial white over and over again.



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We now have finally left the triste highlands behind us, so that this landscape is truly like spring. That the destination is within grasp becomes obvious when we suddenly can see the sea in the distance. Three horizons of distance we can see, up to the south coast of Iceland, our end point.





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After big rivers, rain and storm, after nights on cold, hard ground and after long days walking until 9 pm, on this day we arrive at about 6 pm at the *Öldufell*. We quickly realize: This is it for today, since there is a campground in front of us that clearly tops all previous ones in terms of comfort. Completely even, soft grass, the pegs can be set easily and firmly and right next door a crystal-clear stream for drinking water and the water turbine. A constantly rushing waterfall on the other side enhances the idyll. We just anchor the water turbine in the stream, install the solar cell in the sun and enjoy the last bright hours - it feels like a very early end of work hour. A dream end of work evening in the clear Icelandic nature. The music of the waterfall lets us gently fall asleep.



As ease as we have fallen asleep, we wake up again on the **25th day**, combined with the best weather and the sea in front of our eyes. But the day is marked by long marching - especially for Jens. He makes a lap of honour of 12 km, because he has lost one of his neoprene socks, which he had attached to the outside of his backpack. He quickly decided for the extra kilometers, as the last uncertain river crossings in the large flood plain of *Mýrdalsjökull* are still ahead.



But what are André and Wendelin doing in the meantime, when the team only consists of two instead of three? They stroll comfortably on the gravel road, stop here for a moment, have a look there for a while... The two feel reminded of one of those days long ago, when they strolled home from school without a hurry and liked to take a longer detour, because exceptionally at home there was nobody to wait for them with food. Occasionally they take off their "school bags" and wander through the countryside to inspect some strange formations or to spit from a welcoming bridge into the bubbling glacial water...

When the *Leirá* finally gets in their way - the first river in the flood plain to be waded through - they have the opportunity to take a break with coffee and crowberries, which again wastes time until Jens



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finally becomes visible. A small point in the distance, which approaches with tight steps and brings André and Wendelin back into the real world of Mission Iceland.

After this sunny and warm spring day *Leirá* – the river to be crossed – is full and fast flowing. We keep it for sunrise and set up camp.



As usual on days with river crossings we pack without breakfast. Divided into three arms we conquer the river. Jens' lap of honour was worth it! Even with neoprene socks, each time it is a painful act, since the fast flowing 1 °C cold water rinses through the socks to such an extent that our feet are full of sand and are still deaf from the cold. But still, the 2 mm neoprene are worth a mint, as the thin rubber sole gives just the right grip on the stones in the cloudy glacial water.



The day's stage leads us in save distance directly along the *Mýrdalsjökull*. Since we anticipate further large glacial rivers, we hardly take a break in order to wade through them as early as possible. We do not want to risk another extra day, otherwise we would have to half the last reduced food ration again...

But André and Wendelin, in particular, cannot stand up to the irresistible attraction of fully-draped crowberry bushes. Here – on this ancient lava field – the bushes carry larger berries than anywhere else on the tour. We fall on our knees in front of them and shovel hand after hand into our mouths. And at the same time, they are also picked so unbelievably well! With only one grab you end up with 10 to 20 berries in your hand! Unbelievable! We also keep some for the last breakfast.

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Meanwhile Jens has already marched ahead and is a bit annoyed by the constant "berry stops". Several times he calls André and Wendelin off the berries and warns that the rivers rise with every minute and that we should not lose any time. Of course they know how right Jens is, but these berries simply won't let them march past! It's probably the fading fat reserves that cost the usual patience and temper of Jens. His only focus is to finally arrive at the southernmost point. But wouldn't some sweet berries be exactly the right thing?

Afterwards we can only laugh about this short situation of tension in the team, because it was really the only one worth mentioning... The last rivers of the tour are quickly crossed and only in the early afternoon we reach *Hafursey*. That means, that we are finally finished with rivers! The more urgent is the late lunch break.

For the first and only time we set up a tent especially for this. This way we enjoy our food in peace and quietness and don't cool down that quickly. It is precisely these fading fat reserves that become noticeable so fast. The cold is the biggest enemy. Already after a few minutes of standstill it crawls into us and we have less and less to fight against it. We feel surrendered to the cold. There is simply no body insulation layer left that could hold the produced heat. In the evenings, the slogan against cooling down is: "Off to your sleeping bag" or "Put as much clothes on as you can!"

As usual, we have our supra-muesli breakfast in the morning of the last day - **the 27th** - and set off for the last kilometers. After a small ascent to *Hafursey* we can see our final destination, the end of the tour, the southernmost point of Iceland: *Kötlutangi*. Before that, we can only see the *Ring Road* with tiny cars that reflect the sunlight and seem to sparkle as well as we can see *Hjörleifshöfði*, an island in the middle of the surrounding shallow and black sand landscape. With blowing ponchos we stand on the pass and stop for a moment to grasp this situation. We almost made it, only downhill, through *Mýrdalssandur*, off to the beach, GPS set and done it is. This whole mission should be finished so fast...





But before *Hafursey* is left behind, we meet old friends: Trees. After 19 days the first trees since *Mývatn*. They are small fir trees with pointed needles. The look touches us and demonstratively we take them in our arms but pointed needles in the face and in the eye are not really pleasant. A small Icelandic tree simply cannot be hugged like the trunk of a large Black Forest fir tree...

In the plain of *Mýrdalssandur*, the view back shows more landscape than the view to the front. Something that hasn't happened before. As we cross the *Ring Road*, suddenly we are confronted with people and the speed of the rest of the world. People in rental cars racing past us to complete their sightseeing program. They seem to have no time for a chat or a moment of silence. But aren't these exactly the memorable things that happen in life? Experiencing, witnessing and enjoying the moment at its fullest? To have the time for the moment to really appreciate the beauty and solitude of nature?

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When we step around the hillside of *Hjörleifshöfði* to do our last march to the sea, a stormy wind and the smell of the sea hit our faces. Now only the GPS leads us, because there are no more geographical landmarks. The last four kilometers we walk on coarse sand with strong headwinds. Step by step by step. One last fight. Everyone feels the restlessness of the fellow hikers. No one wants to stop now. No more break should be made: "Fight until the very end!"





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The spray of the sea is already blowing in our face 50 meters before we reach the end of the beach. Huge waves break before us in rumbling roars. A flask is taken out. Hymns of praise, spells and triumphant words about waded rivers, lava fields and impressive landscapes become audible.

Cheers for the bones, the will, the land;  
for wind, weather, water and the sand.  
Schnapps moistens the tongue, sea water the skin.

August 31<sup>st</sup> 2018, 5:43 pm. It is done. Finally or already? *Kötlutangi*, 63°23'42" North 18°43'49" West, southernmost mainland point of Iceland, 352.9 km south of the Arctic Circle, 7 °C air temperature, stormy wind from the south, a light sun-cloud mix. The nose is running.



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If you lick snack bags to the last bit;  
if you get up at 4:30 am to wade through 1 °C cold water;  
if you do not take off your hat and scarf for days;  
if sharing a Parmesan becomes serious rocket science;  
if you suck single pieces of chocolate;  
if you eat thirds of power bars and grind every bite to mash;  
if you are missing the sitting-fat on your ass;  
if you scratch your shoes in lava fields and therefore get boots filled  
with glacial river water;  
if your walking poles get stuck in the lava and almost knock you over;  
if you smell like sulphur after being freshly washed;  
if wind and weather whip your face and you're happy nevertheless and  
scream like a little child: "Is that really all?"  
then you know you're doing the exact right thing by crossing Iceland!

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»Notre nature est dans le mouvement: le repos entier est la mort. «  
»Our nature lies in movement. Complete rest means death. «  
Blaise Pascal