

Kerlingarfjöll Trail guide

WELCOME TO KERLINGARFJÖLL

Kerlingarfjöll are a cluster of mountains, located a short distance to the SW of the Hofsjökull glacier, on the water divide of the rivers Hvítá and Þjórsá. The mountains and surround area are protected for its landscapes, a total of 344 km², of which the Kerlingarfjöll volcanic system covers around 140 km². The highest peaks are around 1500 m above sea level. The rivers Ásgarðsá, which flows into Hvítá, and Kisa, which flows into Þjórsá, nearly divide the mountains into two clusters, the western- and eastern mountains. The name of the mountains comes from Kerling, a 25 meter high hyaloclastite pillar that stands in a light-coloured rhyolite scree southward of Kerlingartindur (Kerling peak) on the western side of the mountains. The eastern mountains form the highest and most fearsome part of the area. The highest peaks are Loðmundur, 1432 m, and Snækollur, reaching a height of 1477 m.

Heavy volcanic activity existed here during the last ice age, but no known eruptions have occurred in post-glacial times (last 12.000 years). A large, ancient caldera partly surrounds the western mountains, which all were formed in sub-glacial eruptions at least 70.000 years ago. The slopes of some of the mountains have minor glaciers that have shrunk considerably in recent decades.

The volcanic system of Kerlingarfjöll feeds one of Iceland's most powerful geothermal systems. The Hveradalir geothermal area is divided into Vesturdalir, Miðdalir and Austurdalir (west, middle and east dales). The hot springs there are fumaroles or mudpots. Considerable continuous transformation in rock and strata characterises the hot spring areas. In addition, specialised flora grows near the springs.



RULES OF CONDUCT AND WARNINGS

The Kerlingarfjöll mountains are in the highlands at an altitude of more than 600 m. As a result, the weather can change without warning in any season. Marked hiking trails are to be followed, and all markings, rules, restrictions and travel closures are to be complied with where appropriate. Cycling is allowed on all trails in Kerlingarfjöll, except for those in Hveradalir and Ásgarðsfjall (see map). While passing Kerling, one must walk with their bikes. Please keep speed at minimum when cycling downhill. Within the hot spring area, the landscape is very special, and it is important to take great care. New hot spring activity can open up without warning while bubbling springs can lie under the surface. The growing season of vegetation is short, and it is extremely sensitive to disturbances. There is mobile phone service in most areas, although it can be unreliable. In emergency - call 112.



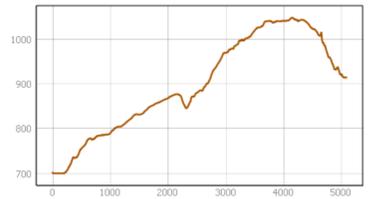
Hiking trails from Ásgarður

A. NEÐRI-HVERADALIR – 10 KM

The route is marked. Altitude increase is around 400 m. Difficulty level red. The trail ends north of Neðri-Hveradalir, a short distance from the Snorrarhver fumarole on the Hverdalahringur (see route F).

Service Centre Ásgarður (N 64° 40.998 W 19° 17.985)
Hverdalahringur (Snorrarhver) (N 64° 38.96 W 19° 18.139)

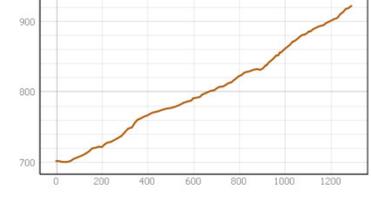
The route begins at the service centre in Ásgarður and passes over the Ásgarðsá bridge. Once it reaches the other side, there is a marked hiking trail up the esker (see trail) and from there up the slope past Hverdalahnjúkur on the left side. This is a beautiful hiking route and directs the traveller up to Neðri-Hveradalir, where it meets a hiking trail that runs in a circle in Neðri-Hveradalir (see Hveradalir circle). On the way, it is a good idea to take a break in good weather and look to the north, as the views are open to both the north of Kjölur and to the west over Kerlingarfjöll and toward the lake Hvítárvatn. This route can be travelled by most hikers and is popular among the visitors to Kerlingarfjöll. From this route, there are two other marked routes that takes hikers around Mænir or towards Kerling.



B. ÁSGARÐSFJALL – 2.5 KM

The route is marked. Altitude increase is slightly more than 200 m. Difficulty level blue. Expect the hike there and back to take 1-2 hours.

The route to the Ásgarðsfjall mountain is easy. The route begins at the service centre and lies between the summer cottages on the south side of the service centre and toward a small gully. This is used as a way up and onto the track that leads up onto Keis. The track leads up the mountain to the south-east. It then turns left toward the north and along the mountain ridge. There are quite good views over Ásgarðsfjall over northern Kjölur and toward Hofsjökull. In addition, there are excellent views over the eastern mountains in Kerlingarfjöll as well as to the north-west over Kjölur toward Hrutífell and Hvítárvatn. There are interesting hyaloclastite formations at the top of the mountain.



C. SKUGGAFOSS – 15 KM

The route is not marked. Altitude increase is around 100 m. Easy walk. Difficulty level blue. Expect the hike there and back to take 5-6 hours.

Skuggafoss (N 64° 42.424 W 19° 11.257)

Skuggafoss falls down a narrow ravine in the Jökulfall to the south by Blágnýpa, a short distance from Hofsjökull. The trail lies for the first 1.5 km along the track to Setrið. Several streams need to be crossed to begin with, but after that, the route lies to the east upward and along the Jökulfall. After approximately 5 km, hikers reach Skuggafoss, where it is a good idea to have a seat and enjoy the beauty of the landscape near Hofsjökull. The waterfall is spectacular and beautiful as it falls down the narrow ravine.

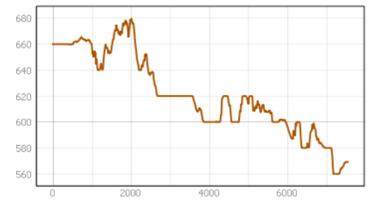


D. HVINUR – FOSSRÓFUR – 15 KM

The route is marked. The altitude increase is approximately 40 m. Easy walk. Difficulty level blue. Expect the hike there and back to take 2-3 hours.

The bridge on Jökulfallið (N 64° 42.19 W 19° 23.7)

The route starts at the bridge where the Kerlingarfjöll jeep track and the Leppistunguleið track meet. The route is along the Jökulfallið from Hvinur to Fossrófur. Jökulfall flows in huge canyons from the Hvinur waterfall down to Fossrófur. The route down is on the north side of Jökulfallið. The hike is along the river to Gigjafoss waterfall. This is a good place to take a break and have a look at this lovely waterfall where Blákvísl and Jökulfall meet. The next part of the hike is along the Jökulfallið, south of the airport, and down to Fossrófur. The section down to Fossrófur leads us past Skipholtskrók, one of the locations searched in hopes of finding the Holy Grail that was used in the Last Supper.

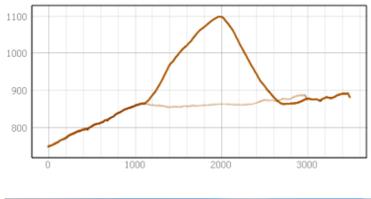


E. KERLING – 7.5 KM (FROM LEPPISTUNGULEIÐ ROUTE)

The route is marked. Altitude increase is around 150 m. Easy walk. Difficulty level blue. Expect the hike there and back to take 2-3 hours.

Parking area at Skeljafell (N 64° 39.489 W 19° 24.096)
Kerling í Tindi (N 64° 38.164 W 19° 23.193)

Drive down a rough, marked track (Leppistunguleið) over the river Fremri-Ásgarðsá and to the mountain Skeljafell. A marked parking area is located a short distance from the river. From the parking area, a marked hiking route to Kerling takes hikers between two mountains - Skeljafell and Tindur. Kerling is an approximately 24 m high pillar which the Kerlingarfjöll mountain range is named after. There is something special about standing by the pillar and reminding oneself of folk tales about a troll woman that was turned into stone. There are two options for the way back. It is possible to walk a marked route up to Skeljafell, or one can go on the west side and return by Leppistunguleið back to the parking area. If the route up to Skeljafell is selected, an approximately 250 m elevation is added. One can also follow a marked trail from Kerling to Ásgarður (see map).



Vesturnýpa in Fannborg



View over Vesturnýpa



Neðri-Hveradalir



European golden plover

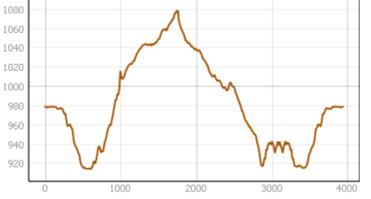
Hiking trails from the parking area at Keis

F. HVERADALAHRINGUR (HVERADALIR CIRCLE) HIKING TRAIL IN NEÐRI-HVERADALIR (LOWER HVERADALIR) – 4 KM

Circular route with detours. The route is marked. Altitude increase is around 100 m. Quite difficult up and down sections; steps and paths may be slippery. Difficulty level red. Expect the hike to take 1-2 hours if walking the entire circle.

Parking area at Hveradalir (N 64° 38.787 W 19° 16.744)

The hike begins at the parking area in Hveradalir and lies to the edge of a hill. There the route lies down steep steps that have been installed in the clay slopes. In Neðri-Hveradalir, the route is marked and goes over the river Ásgarðsá on two bridges. Here you will find hot pools, mud springs, boiling mudpots, steam vents and fumaroles so numerous and closely packed that they are a wonder. The colours created by the many different condensates of sulphur and salts are unique. The area is very sensitive, and it is important to stay on marked paths. Neðri-Hveradalir are sparsely vegetated, although there are some mosses as well as navel lichen and thrombium lichen, which have a high conservation value. Cycling is not allowed in Hveradalir because of the fragile clay soil.

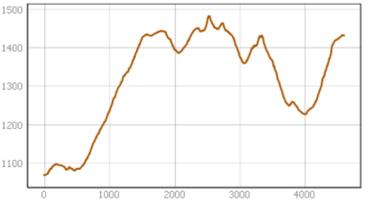


G. FANNBORG, VESTURGNÝPA, SNÆKOLLUR, SNÓT AND LOÐMUNDUR – 9 KM

Mountain route to the highest peaks of Kerlingarfjöll. The way is not marked. Altitude increase is around 650 m. Demanding walk. Passable for most of the summer. Difficulty level black. The hike up Loðmundur is not for persons who have a fear of heights. The trip may be expected to take 5-6 hours.

Parking area at Keis (N 64° 39.073 W 19° 15.295)
Snækollur (N 64° 38.620 W 19° 13.725)

The hike begins at the parking area at Keis at the house/shed that has been called Kastali (the castle). From there, the route lies along a rhyolite ridge to the south-west to the roots of Fannborg. The climb up the mountain begins on the west side, and a path up the west flank is followed. From Fannborg, the route lies to the east to Vesturgnýpa, with the path clearly visible on the west side of that mountain. After Vesturgnýpa, the way lies to Snækollur past the cliff Úrilli. The cliff is quite beautiful and is a quite good place to rest and have a snack. Snækollur is the highest peak in the range and is around 1477 m high. The view from the top is tremendous, given that Kerlingarfjöll are located very nearly in the centre of Iceland. In exceptionally clear conditions, the sea can be seen in both the west and the north. The route down from Snækollur is on the east and progresses toward Snót. From Snót, the way lies to the north along a ridge that brings us to Loðmundur. The walk up Loðmundur is steep and demanding and ends in a climb. A wire has been installed to help climbers up the last few metres.



Three-day highland hike from Ásgarður

H. HRINGBRAUTIN (THE CIRCLE) – 45 KM

A circular walk around the Kerlingarfjöll range. A demanding, three-day hike with accommodation in the huts at Kisubotnar and at Klakkur. All equipment must be carried and there are no services available in the huts along the way. The route is ideal for mountain biking, but cyclists must travel west of Mt. Mænir (see map) as cycling is not allowed on the trails in Hverabotn and Neðri-Hveradalir.

Day 1: Ásgarður – Kisubotnar, approx. 15 km.

Walk from the service centre in Ásgarður on a marked trail toward Ásgarðsfjall. On reaching the jeep track that lies up to the mountains, this is used to walk toward the south for approx. 2 km along Ásgarðsgljúfur (ravine). After that, head east below Keis and continue on the northern side of Loðmundur. Then go east of Loðmundur and continue to the south to Kisubotnar. This is an easy walk. The altitude increase is small, but several creeks need to be crossed, so it is a good idea to bring wading shoes. A small hut and a fairly good camping ground is located at Kisubotnar. The route is marked except for the mud flats below Loðmundur.

Hut in Kisubotnar (N 64° 36.509 V 19° 8.445)

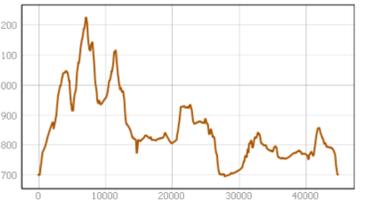
Day 2: Kisubotnar – Klakkur, approx. 11 km

This is a short day's walk, although the river Kisa needs to be waded. From the hut in Kisubotnar, the route lies to the south and then west to Kisa. On the right, a ravine can be seen on reaching the river. Enter the ravine to examine if it's worth spending time in before continuing. Once Kisa has been crossed, the route lies up a slope toward Kisugljúfur canyon. Kisugljúfur is a magnificent and awe-inspiring canyon that is well worth a visit. Particular care must be taken in the canyon. The route continues to the west toward Klakkur and Klakkur hut. The route is marked.

River Kisa fjord (N 64° 35.238 W 19° 8.022)
Hut at Klakkur (N 64° 34.027 W 19° 16.419)

Day 3: Klakkur – Ásgarður (Lower Hveradalir), approx. 19 km.

This is the longest and most difficult day's hike, but it offers stupendous colours and gorgeous mountain views. Leaving Klakkur hut, the route lies up to the pass between Ögmundur and Höttur. To begin with, the route lies along gravel plains and rocky areas and over Kerlingarágil (river gully). Kerlingará needs to be forded here. After coming over the pass between Ögmundur and Höttur, Sléttaskarð pass is next. Here you can choose whether to hike over the west or east side of Mænir. Cyclists must always go west of Mænir as cycling is not allowed in Hverabotn and Hveradalir. Those choosing the west route past Mænir will come onto a trail that will lead them on to Hveradalahnjúk, and from there, it is only 3 km to Ásgarð. Those who choose the east route past Mænir will continue on to Hverabotnar, one of the most colourful hot spring areas in Iceland. From there, the route lies up to Hveradalaskygni and down to Neðri Hveradalir and then on to Ásgarð. The route is marked for most of the way.



Woolly willow growing on a mossy slope



Neðri-Hveradalir



From right: Mænir, Ögmundur, Höttur and Röðull.



A rock formation called Kerling (Old Hag)

