



Iceland Roadtrip

A Mother-Daughter Adventure

Deb and Amelia Ehrens
August 2014

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*A Mother-Daughter Adventure
on the road, glaciers and into the volcano*

*Photos by
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Text by Deb Ehrens

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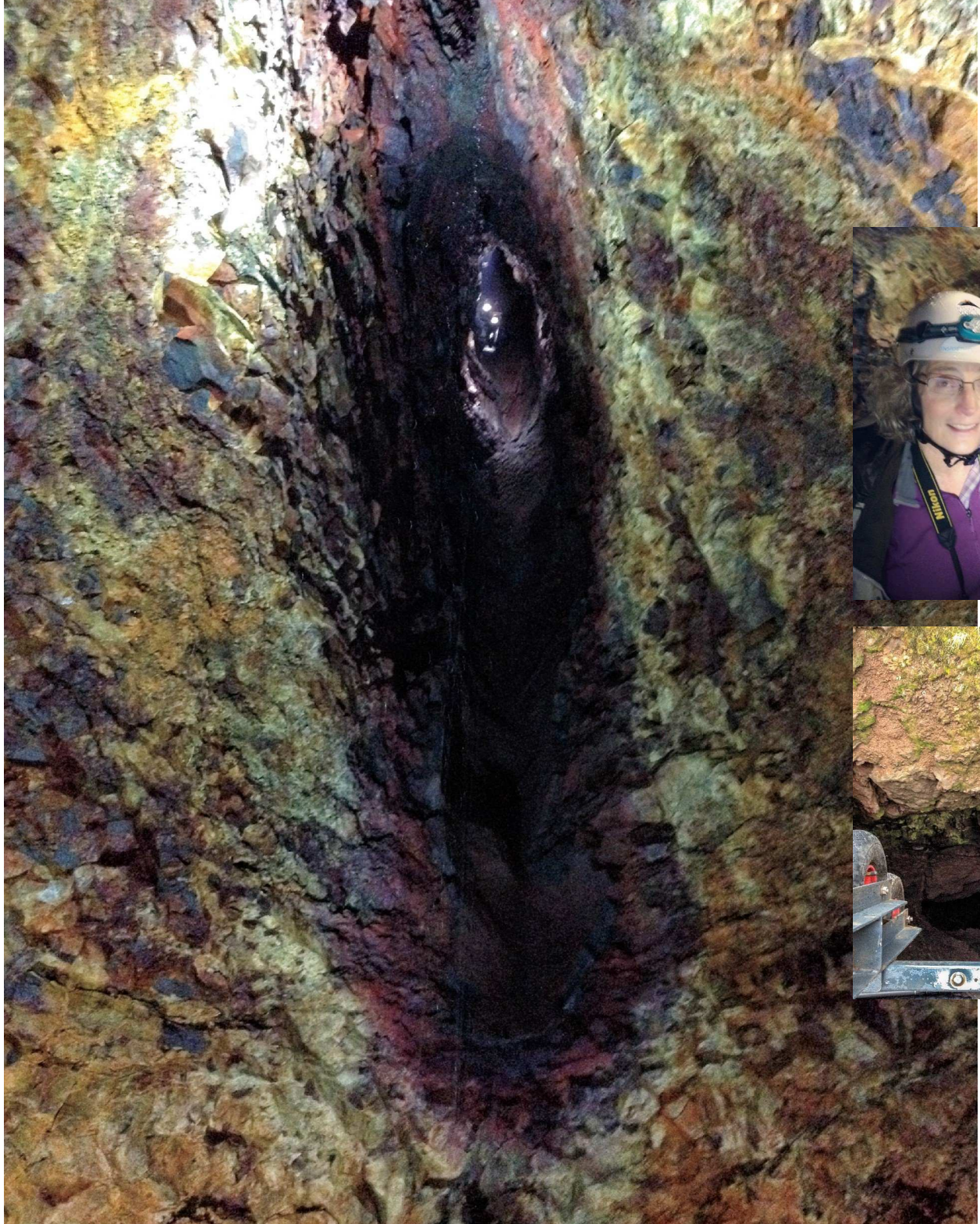


On our very first day here, Amelia and I went to meet a volcano up close and personal. We hiked several kilometers across a lava field and then traveled down 400 feet into the magma chamber of the Thrihnukagigur Volcano.











This lift was designed by a German engineering firm for a *National Geographic* project. Now it is busy bringing visitors down into the center of the earth - well at least 400 feet down.

This is not a ride for the faint of heart or height challenged. We wore harnesses and were clipped to the steel platform, but the magma chamber was carved by Mother Nature and not German engineers. There are several bumps along the wall to get around the curves.

The color on the walls is created by bacteria, not algae. It is quite a show under the klieg lights.

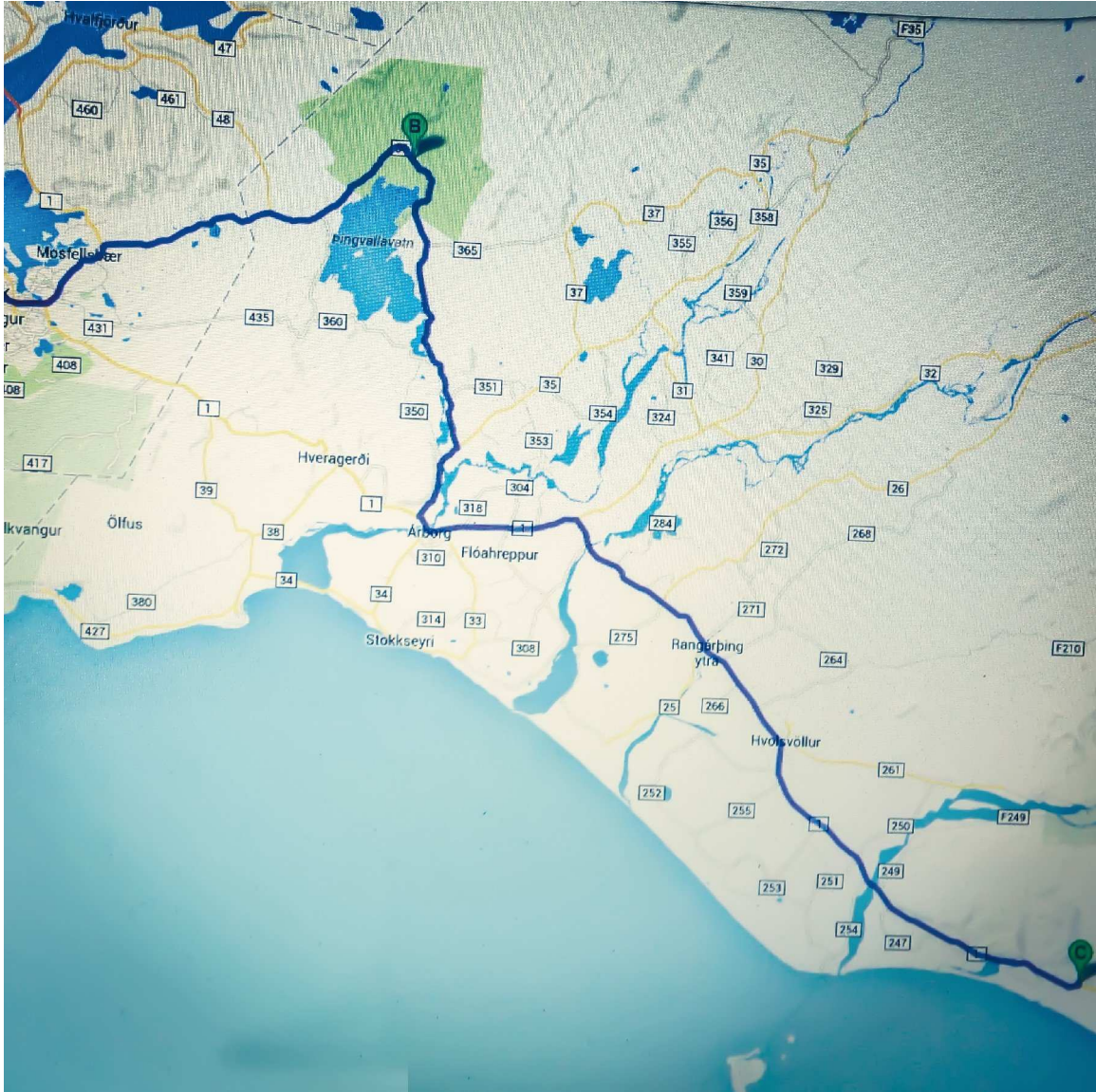






In geologic time scale, lava caves are formed in nanoseconds, compared to our limestone caves that drip for eons.



Reykjavik to Drangshlioardalur





Meet Sven, our trusty car.
 We had a rocky start when we couldn't get into reverse.
 Thankfully, in the middle of nowhere, there was a nice guy on a cherry picker who explained the unique features of the gear shift to us hapless travelers.

Volcanic activity is a fact of life in Iceland. It is one of the few places on the planet where car rental companies offer special insurance for volcanic ash damage.

	Self risk standard CDW insurance passenger cars.....€ 1.260,-	Upgrade for only: €14 pr.day
	Self risk SUPER-CDW insurance passenger cars.....€ 165,-	
	Self risk standard CDW insurance jeeps & bigger cars...€ 2.300,-	Upgrade for only: €19 pr.day
	Self risk SUPER-CDW insurance jeeps & bigger cars.....€ 305,-	
* gravel protection with minimum self risk covers damage to wind screen and headlights when gravel or stones get thrown at the vehicle by another car.		
SADW SAND AND ASH DAMAGE WAIVER		
Covers you against damage due to sand or ash storm damaging the paint of the car, windows, lights and plastic.		Add for only: €13 pr.day
SADW can be bought separately and is in no relation with other insurances.		
<small>Due to volcanic eruptions in Iceland the risk of damage to the paint and windows of our cars has increased. No insurance has been covering such damage and insurance companies refuse to cover them. Even though all safety rules are followed damage can happen when for example wind storms blowing more than forecast thus moving the sand/ash and damaging the car. These new circumstances have shown us the need to protect our customers from high damage costs due to sand-/ashstorms which might happen. For our customers protection we have decided to offer an insurance which covers this kind of damage. Please ask our staff for more information.</small>		





Thingvellir National Park was the home of Iceland's government from 930-1798. It is the oldest democracy in the world.

All of Iceland sits atop the meeting place of the European and North American tectonic plates. We were supposed to go snorkeling in a fissure where you can touch both continents at the same time. A scheduling snafu got in the way of that plan, but cairns, geysirs and waterfalls provided plenty of other entertainment.



All of the world's geysers get their name from Iceland's *Geysir* which has been active for 10,000 years.







Gullfloss has a greater water flow than any waterfall in Europe or North America. The drop is in two parts and it is pretty spectacular, even on a dreary gray day.





Amelia the intrepid
traveler tried the local
specialty -whale meat!





There are no shoulders on the road to pull over for photo taking. Amelia was a whiz at iPhone window shots - Deborah not so good, but every now and then she got it right.



Dyrhóley



Dyrhóley is a massive rock arch carved out by the sea. It is home to a lighthouse and a friendly colony of puffins. Despite the wind and gray mist the views were stunning.



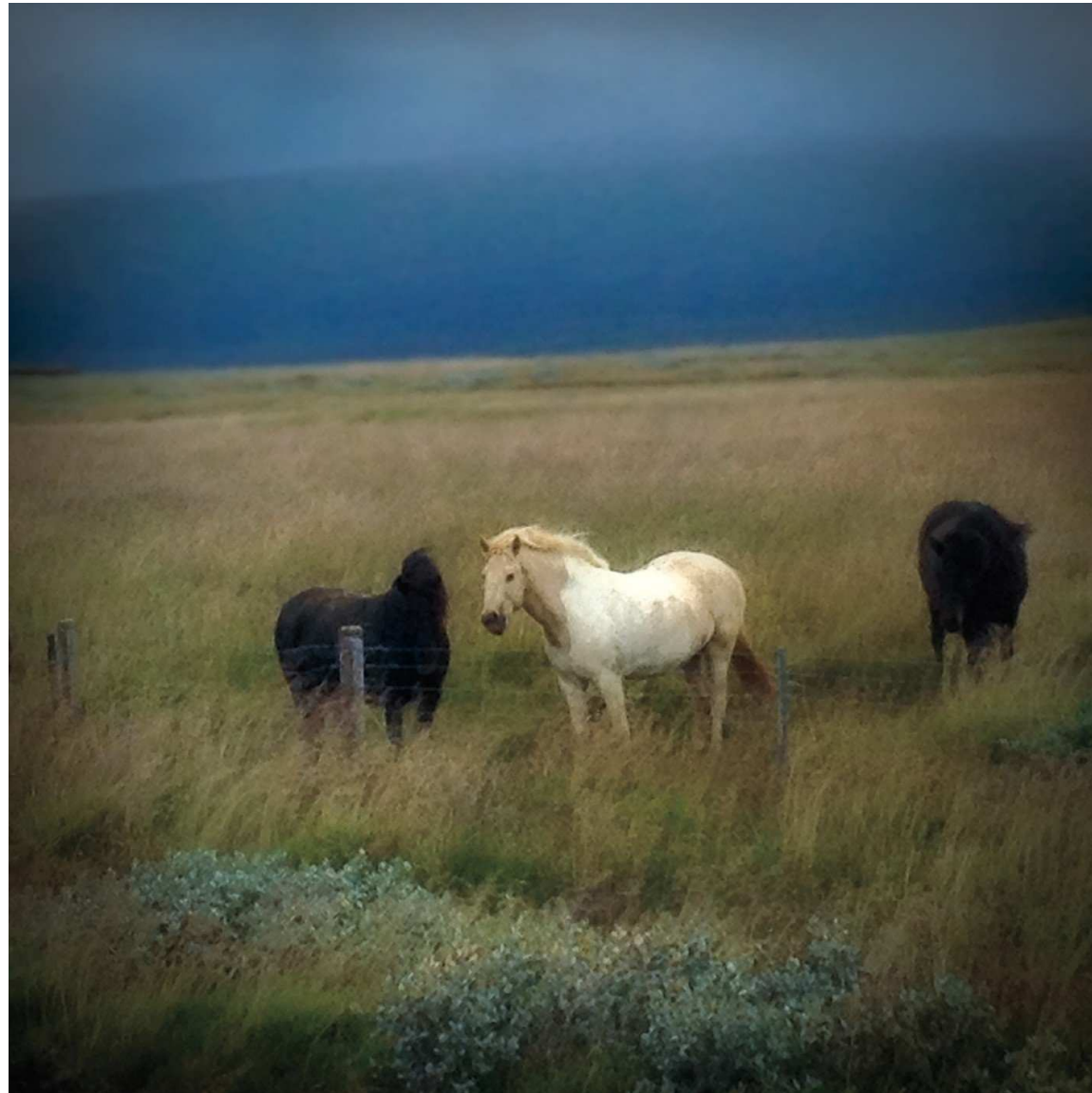










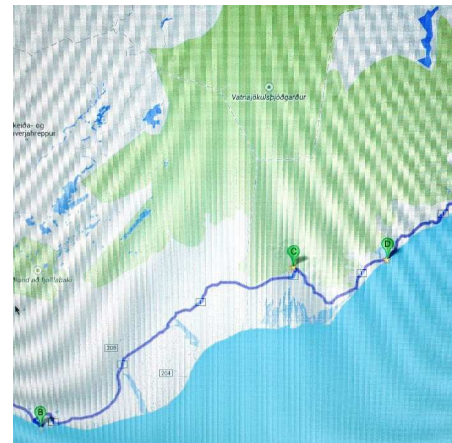


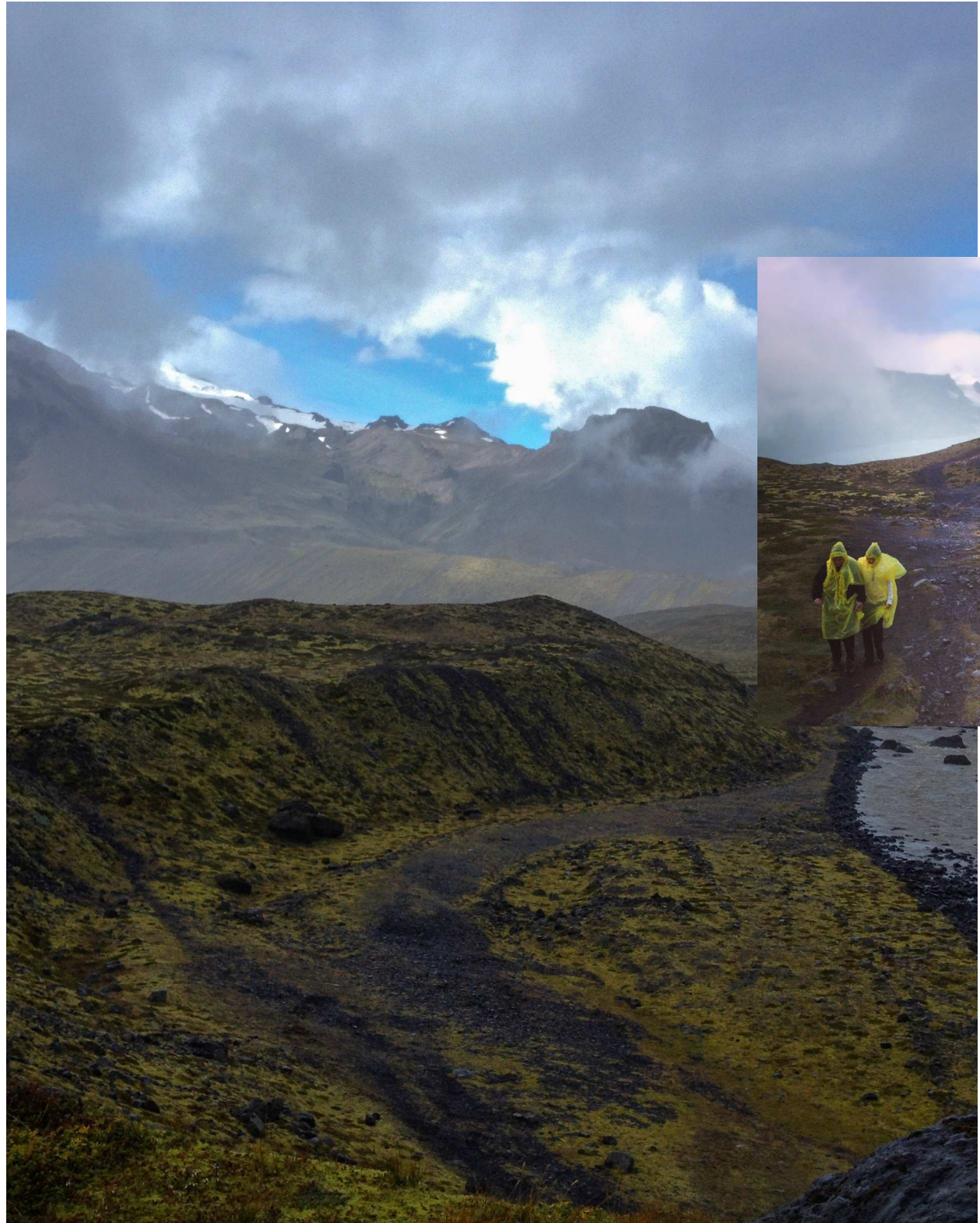
Scandinavian settlers in the ninth and tenth centuries began breeding horses. Today they are prized for their small size and hardy nature.



Drangshlioardalur to Skaftafell

The southcoast of Iceland is one of dramatic contrasts. On our right was a two kilometer wide black sand desert of volcanic mud and ash. Startling patches of green grass growing in the nutrient-rich ash looked brilliant against the gray sky. On our left were cloud-covered glaciers with their rivers and waterfalls running to the sea.







After three days of cold drizzle and gray skies, the sun broke through to reveal the glaciers that come all the way to the sea.



Jökulsárlón - The Glacier Lagoon



Iceland's deepest lake is formed by the melting of the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier. In 1920, the edge of the glacier reached the ocean. Then it began shrinking. By 1935, there was a small lake made of glacial melt. In 2014 the lake is 900 feet deep. Icebergs are calved from the glacier nearly every day. They drift across the lake until they either melt or reach the surf. It is an unworldly sight.

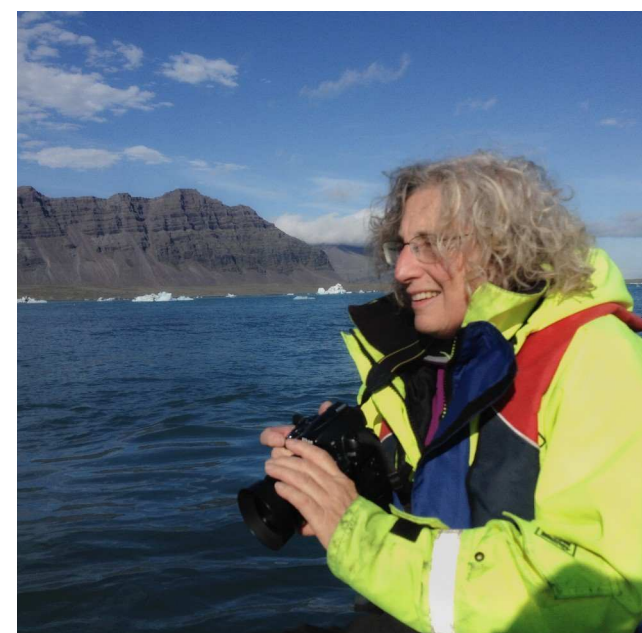


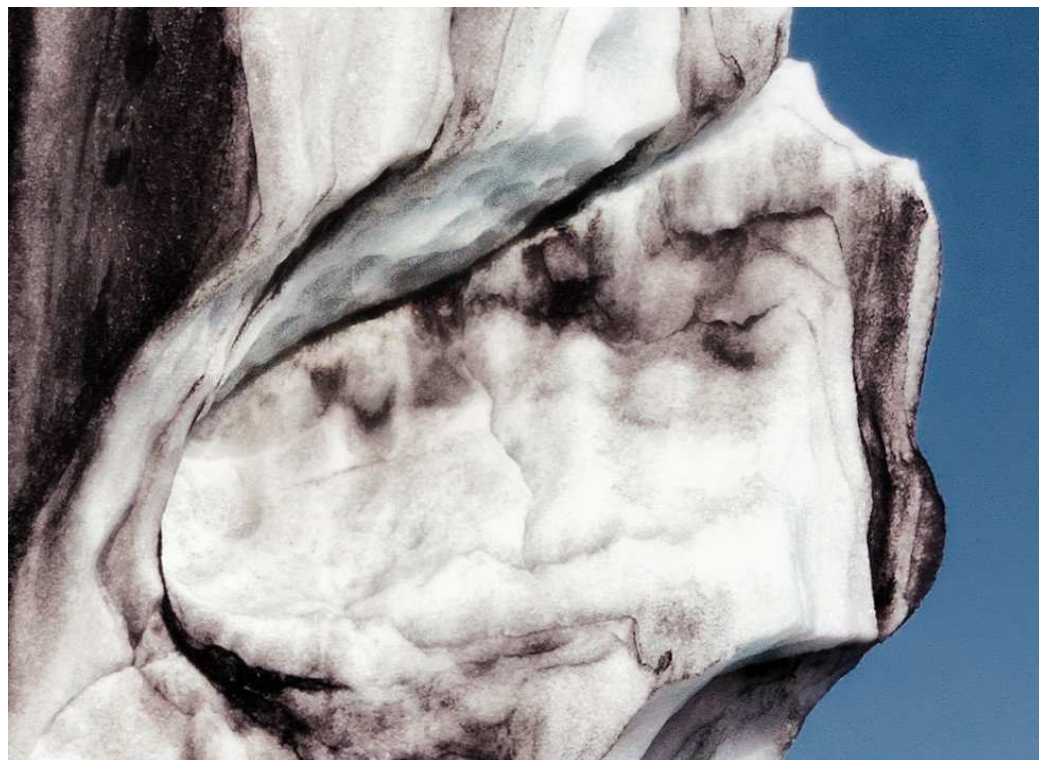
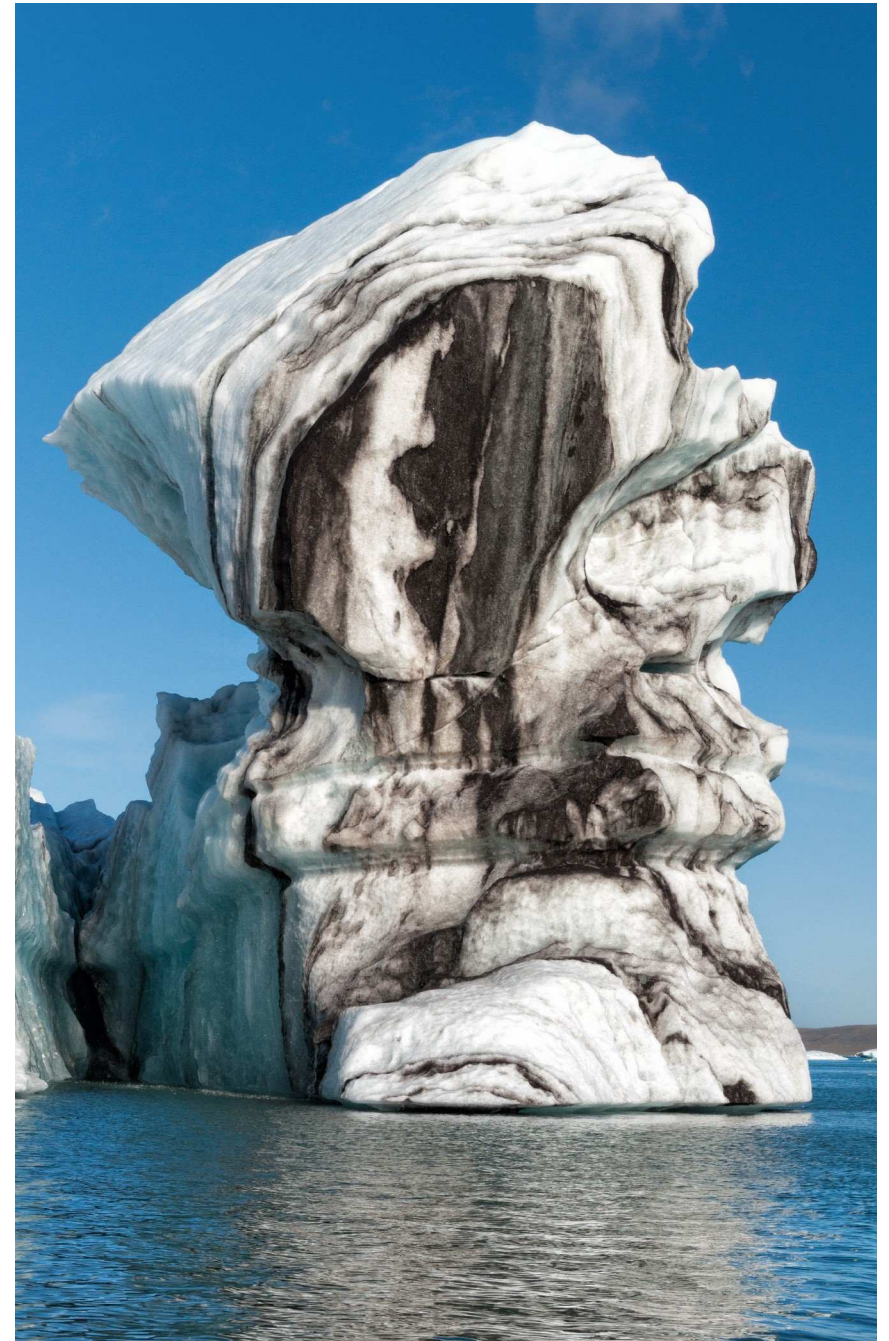
This is where the glacier meets the lagoon. Our zodiac kept a healthy distance from the glacier's edge because icebergs calve with little warning. Most of their mass is underwater and they turn suddenly.





Going out into the Glacier Lagoon in zodiac boats was without a doubt one of the coolest things ever - no pun intended, even though we were wearing cold water survival suits.





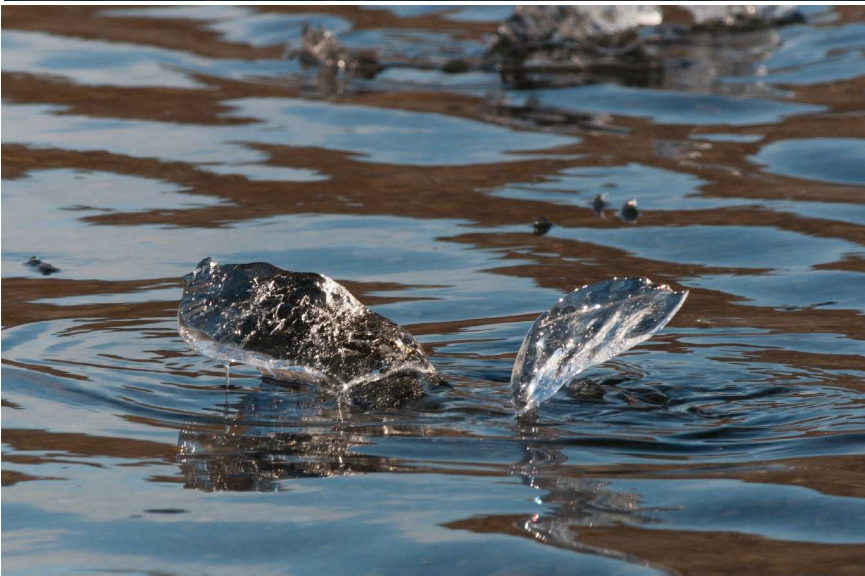
This iceberg was over two stories tall. The black stripes are volcanic ash laid down after the 2010 eruption and the stripes were horizontal until the berg tipped over.



The icebergs float through the lagoon, out a narrow channel to the sea. Many do not make it that far. Standing on the shore I watched this piece of glacier disappear before my eyes. It took about ten minutes.



In fifty years the entire glacier will be gone.





Many of the small pieces get almost to the sea only to be stranded on the black sand beach. For a few moments they look like diamonds.



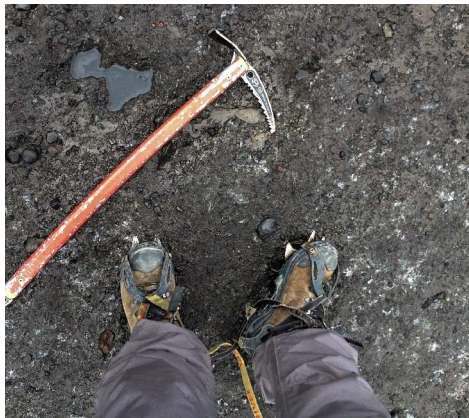


The Glacier Walk

Our glacier walk began with a hike over this rock-strewn landscape of green and gold.

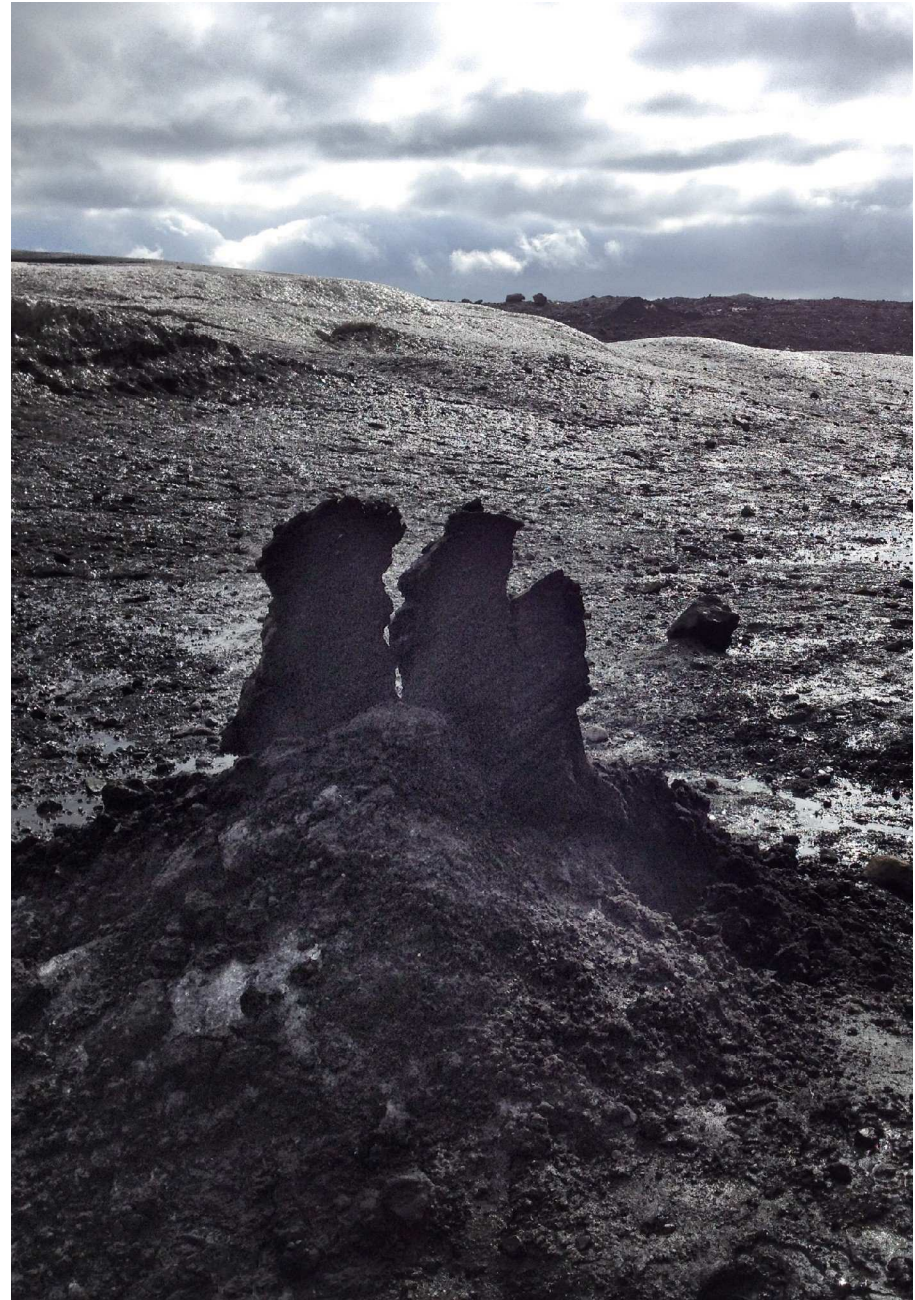
Our guide instructed us in the art of putting on crampons and off we went exploring. Our fantasies of brilliant white glaciers disappeared in the dirty blue ice. Recent eruptions deposited many layers of new black ash. Still, it was mysterious and beautiful.







The sound of melting water running underneath could be heard in this glacier hole, but it was too deep to see the bottom.



When the glacier recedes, this is what is left of a glacier hole- just the sediment.

Skaftafell to Egilsstaðir

Next was the long trip around the southeast coast. It is a wild landscape - spare and fierce. There are big rivers prone to glacial flooding, active volcanoes, glaciers, miles of black sand desert, and never-ending wind.



We couldn't pronounce anything in Icelandic.

Happily for us, it was not necessary.













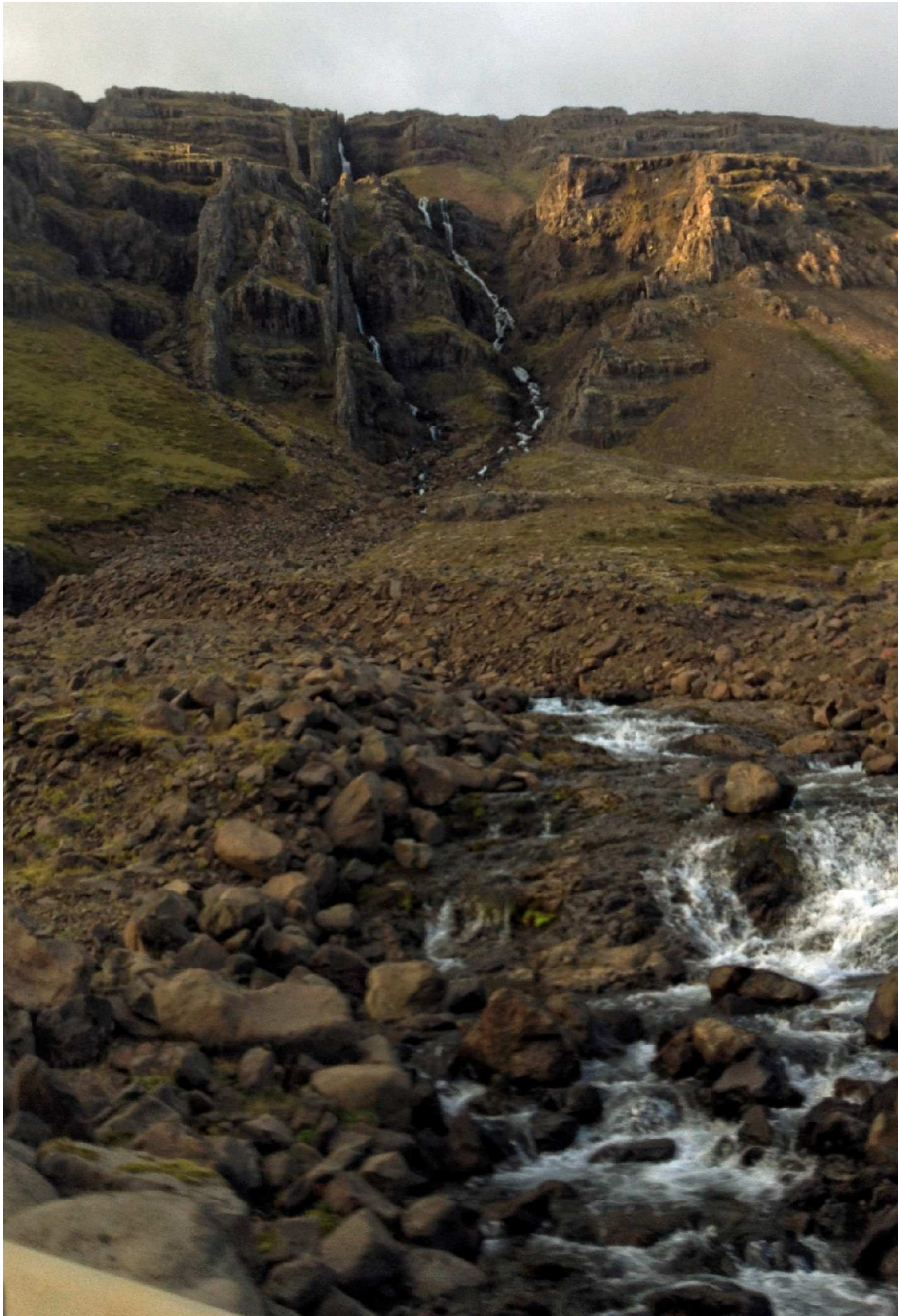
Farmers living in great isolation raise sheep and grow food that allows Iceland to be almost completely self-sufficient in food production.



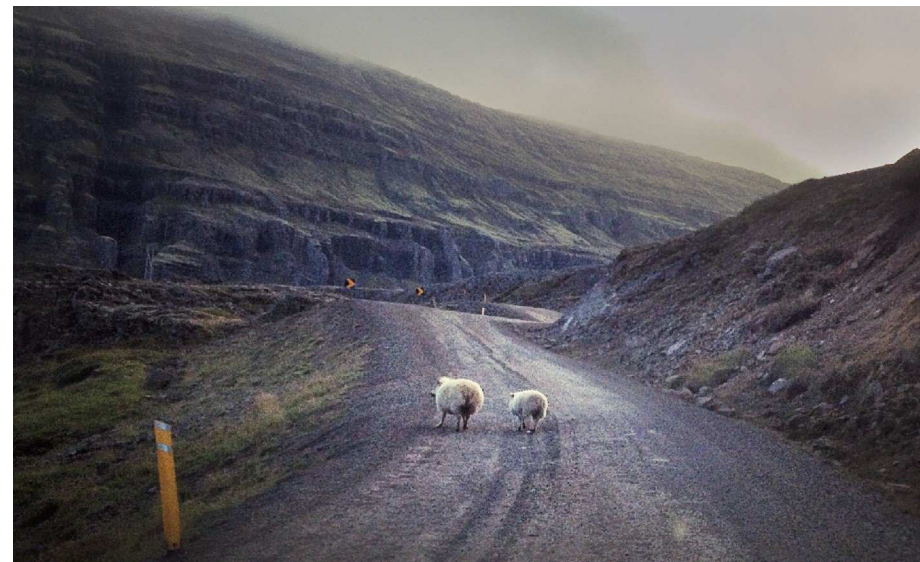


Fish farm pens, nestled deep in the fjord.

Egilsstadir to Akeyuri



While driving close to the volcanic activity near the Bardarbunga caldera and the Holuhraun lava fields we checked safety reports frequently.



A short cut over the mountain had us sharing the road with sheep. Amelia tried valiantly to get a photo of one of the cute lambs, but they refused to cooperate.



If the eruption had melted the 500 foot thick ice cap on top of the volcano, the raging flood water would have destroyed this bridge. But the lava went elsewhere, leaving the glacier and this road intact, at least for awhile.



The geothermal baths at Myvatn were delightful.



Nearby active mudpots.

Akureyi

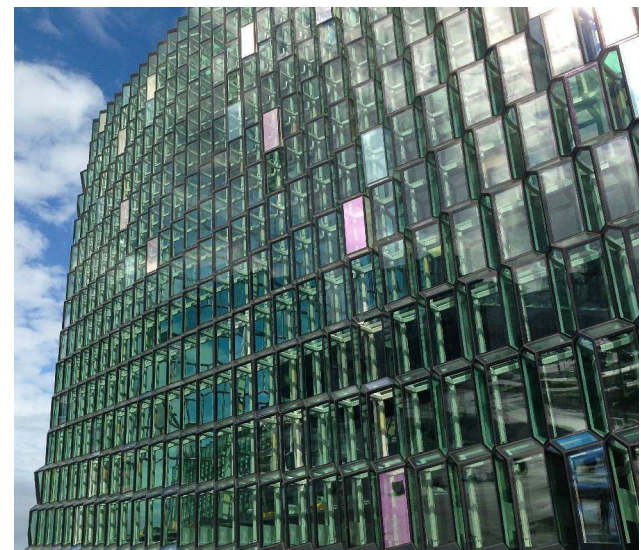
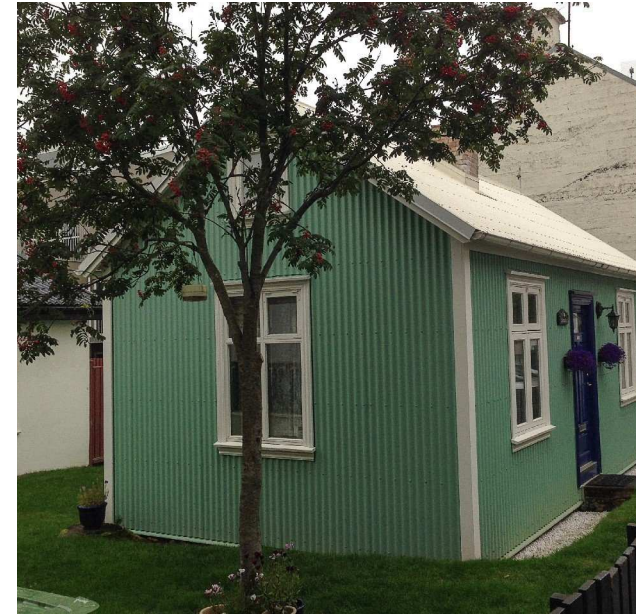
Akureyi is Iceland's second biggest city. It is the place that we had the hardest time finding lodging. Rather than standard street addresses, lodgings are often referred to by their original farm name. It didn't help that the GPS coordinates we were given put us somewhere in the deep ocean, half way to Scotland. Eventually we did locate the old farmhouse that had been totally redone. The gracious owner told us we could expect to see the aurora borealis that evening.

No, there are no photographs of the Northern Lights. Rather than fuss with equipment, Amelia and I sat together on plastic lawn chairs covered in blankets and watched the slow magic in the sky as white trails came and went over the river and mountains of Akureyi.

Sometimes, behind the lens is not the place to be.



Reykjavik - Old and New





Autumn purple and green in the Reykjavik Botanic Garden reminds me of glacial floodplains and black sand beaches.

