

This stretch changed following the 2021 eruption at Fagradalsfjall. An access road and paths now cut across the trail. At the end of the day, options include climbing Porbjörn or visiting the Blue Lagoon or Grindavík.



Climb straight up a short, steep, stony slope from **Brattháls**, watching for orange and blue markers across a stony slope. Drop into a broad, stony valley where a grassy area has been fenced at **Lyngbrekkur**. Turn right along a dirt road and keep left of a car park. ▶ Be sure to follow the dirt road onwards, and not the marked path to the volcano. Note how 'stone stripes' change to 'stone polygons' on the stony slopes, caused by centuries of freeze-thaw action. Follow the track across a gap and go down to a junction of tracks.

Keep straight ahead along the foot of **Slaga**, turning sharp right down another track. When another junction is reached, keeping right allows a quick there-and-back walk to see the southernmost snout of lava from the Fagradalsfjall eruption. If not making the detour, turn left and follow the track along the foot of **Borgarfjall** and, regardless of markers, stay on the track to climb, later levelling out. At post 29, blue Reykjavegur markers head left across rugged, pathless vegetated lava. Drift slightly left towards a car park beside a road bend. A waymarked track

There was a snack van here during the Fagradalsfjall eruption, but don't rely on it being present.



another along the crest of **Námafjall**, passing fumaroles. Cross a broad dip before a final rocky top and keep right of the summit. Zigzag steeply down and wander from one fumarole to another at **Hverir**, passing large mud-pots and looking at information boards.

Climb back towards **Námaskarð**, cross the gap and follow the road down the other side. An ash path runs parallel to the road, levelling out past a blue pool near a power station. Turn left to reach the **Nature Baths** (café and bathing, tel 4644411, myvatnnaturebaths.is). Keep right and cross a ladder-stile over a fence.

Follow an ash path, crossing yet another ladder-stile. Rise gently through forest to a junction and map-board. Keep straight ahead, rising and falling, to cross a pipe and a track. Follow a path across rugged moorland, watching for big holes. Just before reaching **Reykjahlið**, turn left to go down metal steps into a deep fissure at Stóragjá.

Walkers follow a signposted trail on the outskirts of Reykjahlið

9 SPRENGISANDUR AND KJÖLUR



Broad moorland near Gislaskáli, with Kjalfell seen in the distance (Trek 8 Stage 3)

Deep in the central highlands of Iceland, Sprengisandur and Kjölur are remote and uninhabited, covered in sand and gravel, with very little vegetation. They are Arctic deserts, between the glaciers of Vatnajökull, Hofsjökull and Langjökull. Despite being bleak and barren, cross-country routes evolved for summer travel and trade. The Sprengisandur Road was the least favoured, with barely enough vegetation to feed horses or livestock. The Kjölur Track, on the other hand, has had many incarnations, and while vehicles follow a clear dirt road today, the remains of older tracks and trails can still be traced with confidence.

In the middle of Sprengisandur, a couple of fine walks are available from the remote hut at Nýidalur (Walks 40

and 41). These explore a dale that was discovered only in 1845, as well as fells flanking the small ice-cap of Tungnafellsjökull. The Kjölur area is explored by linking a series of marked trails (Trek 8), taking advantage of opportunities to walk from hut to hut for a whole week.

The Sprengisandur Road and Kjölur Track are remote, uninhabited and blocked by snow for most of the year. They both used to feature bus services throughout their lengths in the summer, but now there is no service on the Sprengisandur Road and the Kjölur Track has a reduced service operated by Gray Line. This bus service operates from Reykjavík, passing Gullfoss, and it makes a detour to the mountain massif of Kerlingarfjöll on its way to Hveravellir.

The Dhoon, a British trawler, was wrecked in December 1947, and local farmers mounted a rescue.

deep **Geldingskorardalur** opens ahead. Look left, inland, spotting a path leading to a turning space at the end of a track. Walk in that direction to a monument and notice. ◀

Follow the track as it rises, falls and bends across stony slopes to a junction with another track. Turn left to continue along a stony crest, with views down to an enormous beach at Breiðavík. Descend to a junction with the dirt road and zigzag down past a tarn to a huddle of houses at **Fúlavík**. Continue along the dirt road to return to **Brunnaverstöð**.

WALK 48

Brjánslækur and Surtarbrandsgil

Start/Finish	Brjánslækur
Distance	6km (3¾ miles)
Total ascent/descent	200m (655ft)
Time	2hrs
Terrain	A simple valley walk on a track and moorland paths
Map	1:100,000 'Útivera Vestfirðir & Dalur 4'
Transport	Westfjords Adventures buses serve Brjánslækur from Patreksfjörður, Þingeyri and Ísafjörður (tel 4565006, www.westfjordsadventures.com). Baldur ferry serves Brjánslækur from Stykkishólmur (tel 4332254, www.seatours.is).

Sometimes travel comes to a halt at Brjánslækur while waiting for a ferry. The nearby 'protected natural monument' of Surtarbrandsgil can be explored if a guide is available – generally Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday at 1300, tel 8224080 or 8319675. Crumbling beds of lignite contain wafer-thin fossilised plants.

The start of this walk can be reached by walking south along the main road from the ferry road, turning right as signposted for **Brjánslækur**. There is a little church there, and an adjacent building was formerly the priest's house.

It now offers the Gamli Bærin café, accommodation and an exhibition about Surtarbrandsgil. Most of the time, there will be no access to Surtarbrandsgil, in which case make the most of the exhibition.



If a ranger is leading a guided walk, then further explorations can be made. Visitors are taken into a valley, heading upstream while keeping high above the river at **Lækjará**. When the valley bends right, a little ravine features small waterfalls. Walk past a twin waterfall and continue upstream.

The path leads into the rugged canyon of **Surtarbrandsgil**, running alongside the stream. Note the hard and soft beds of rock and tottering pinnacles. A fenced-off area must not be entered, as this is where the bulk of fossils are found – in rocks that split almost as thinly as the pages of the book. The ranger may display some samples of fossils, but none can be removed from the site. Trees and plants grew here beside a lake when the climate was warmer. They were later buried and compressed into lignite.



A crumbling cliff at Surtarbrandsgil is packed with lignite beds and fossilised plants