

Three days hiking trail around Kerlingarfjöll

The Ringroad

This is a short description of the Ring road (Hringbrautin in Icelandic), a three days hiking trail around Kerlingarfjöll. On day one, there are two options to select between when hiking from the Resort at Asgarður to Kisubotnar.

Day 1 – East of the mountains

The hike starts at the Highland resort, beyond the Gónhóll hut from where the trail lies up the small valley to the plains above. Here we take the track towards Mt Keis which we follow for approx. 2 Km. While walking along the road there is opportunity to view the Ásgarða gorge, but soon after the road turns from the gorge, we should see the first poles that mark the track all the way to Kisubotnar.

Soon we see a hill on our right, the name of which is Keis, drawn from the English word Casing, during the Ski School era, the northern slopes of Keis were frequently used by the skiers, using tractors outfitted with special winch to serve as a ski lift. The only remains of these days is a small hut named Nigeria. The Ski School usually operated an 5 days courses. During one of the course, when the hills at Keis were used, the skiers enjoyed extremely good weather, with clear skies and sun the whole day, the guests made jokes about them being as tanned as they had been living in Nigeria, at that time and since well-known to Icelanders as important market for dried fish.

The trail goes on, towards the Plains east of mt. Snækollur and mt Loðmundur. While walking along the plains, we follow a jeep track for few Km. On the plains we need to cross several small creeks or rivers, most of them originating from mini glaciers on the eastern side of Kerlingarfjöll. One of these Glaciers, Fannborgarjökull was the main skiing area. When we leave the Jeep track, soon after the track starts to turn east away from the mountains, the direction is taken towards the western edge of the Illahraun lavafield, the youngest geological formation in the area. At the edge of illahraun it is possible to see the water flowing straight out of the lava, forming a small creek that we have followed for a while.

Soon we enter a hill or a ridge, from where the land starts to decline towards Kisubotnar, here the water starts to flow to the south east, to Þjórsá River, whereas earlier we the water was flowing north along river Jökulfall, towards the Hvita river.



Once we have passed the highest point of the track, we see small creek being created, this is the first signs of river Kisa (the cat) which we follow until we have reached the hut at Kisubotnar.

As can evenutallu be seen, the hut is small and offers only warm but basic shelter, waiting to be improved, subject to building permits being granted..

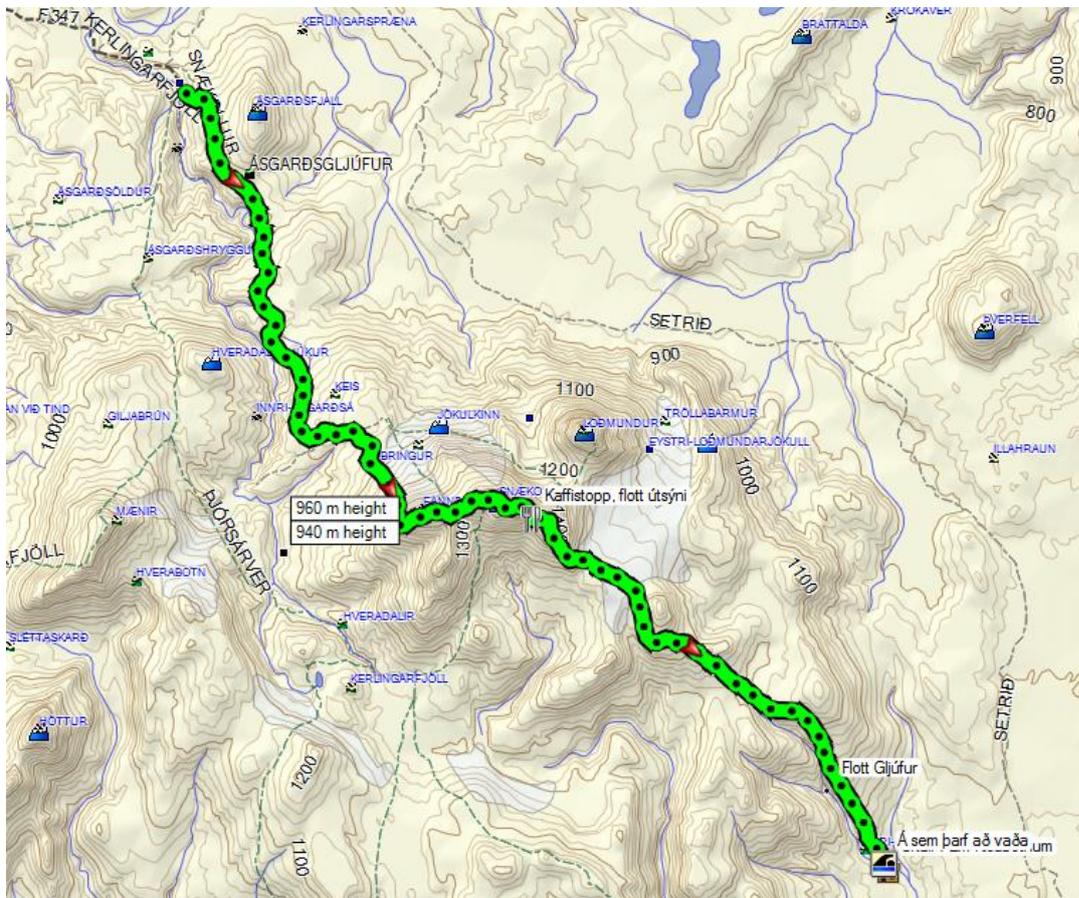
Day one – following eastern mountains

We follow the track towards Hveradalir and from there we take the jeep track towards Mt Keis. From the parking area at Keis we follow a trail towards the north-western edge of Fannborg, leading us all the way up to the top of the Mountain. From the top of Mt Fannborg and from there along the mountain ridge towards Snækollur, the highest peak in the area.

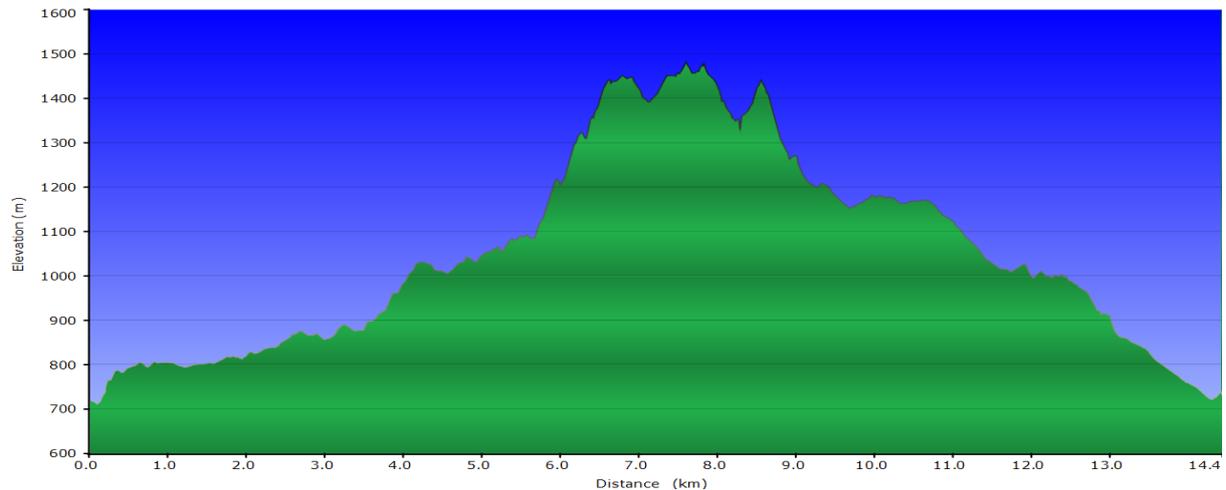
There are few places in Iceland which can match the view from Mt Fannborg and Mt Snækollur, from where and subject to visibility; one can see the ocean to the north and the south of the country from the same spot. From these mountains we can see large area of the country, near to us the Kerlingarfjöll area with its endless geological formations, the Kjölur area to the north and west, the Þjórsárver national park to the north east and not to forget the three largest glaciers in Iceland, the Vantajökull Glacier, the Hofsjökull glacier and Langjökull glacier. The mountains and summits that can be seen from Mt Snækollur are too many to count here, but to mention few, the nearby plate mountain Loðmundur, but further afield we can see Mt Hekla and the Eyjafjallajökull Glacier.

The track lies across Hveradalir, giving the hiker opportunity to view the magnificent geothermal area of Hveradalir, prior to climbing the Peaks of Fannborg and Snækollur, both areas representing ideal opportunities for taking photos.

After passing Mt Snækollur, the track continues towards east over the hill Snót and from there the direction is east and then southeast to get to the eastern side of the gorges of the creeks flowing to Kisubotnar. The last part is steep downhill walk until we are at the hut.



The figure above shows the track from Ásgarður over Hveradalir, Eastern Mountains to Kisubotnar, whereas the figure below shows the profile of this track.

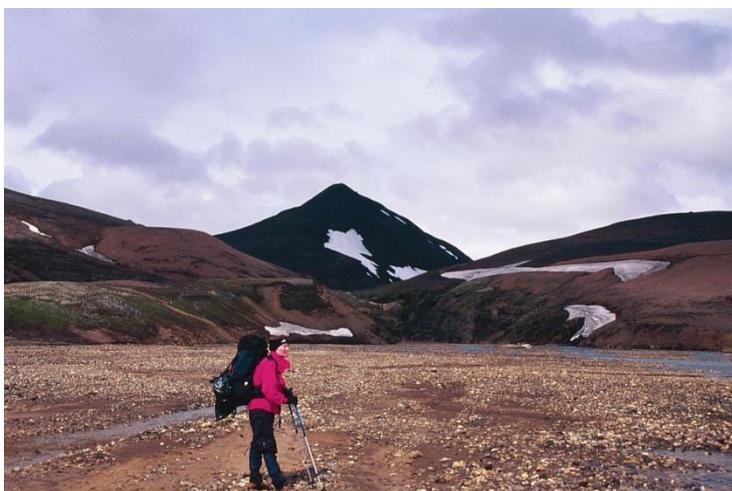


Day two

During day two we are Hiking along the eastern and south eastern side of the Kelringarfjöll, first following the side of Kisa river towards lower Kisuotnar, and then upstream from Kisubotnar on the edge of the Kisubotnar Gorge, with its steep vertical wall.

The word botn (*plural: botnar*) means bottom and can refer to a bottom or end of a valley. There are two Kisubotnar, Upper and Lower, both created by the earth movement of the ice age glacier, ceating two glacial moraines and when the glacier retreated, creating lake on the back of these moraines. The water flowing from these lakes carved the passes duringh which the Kisa river flows to day. In the pass between upper and lower Kisubotnar, there are rocks with holes or fissures where water is flowing to the surface, in the pass there are also signs of geothermal spots, which now have cooled down.

When we have reached the top of the hill west of Efri Kisubotnar, on the edge of the Kisa Gorge, the view to southeast and east opens up and in distance we see the Vatnajökull Glacier, the Þjórsárver national Park and the southern part of Sprengisandur.



The picture above is taken in Neðri (lower) Kisubotnar at the opening of the Kisa Gorge.

The last part of this day is along gravel plains between low mountains or hills, walking towards Mt Klakkur, last three Km or so above a shallow valley, which now is vesting a small creek, although we may assume that while the glacier was melting, the creek was a large river. When we arrive to the edge of the valley, we see the next hut, Klakkur.

Day 3

Day three is the most demanding day, it starts by walking along the western slopes of Mt. Klakkur, with its rough and stony landscape. After 4 Km walk we arrive to the Kerling Gorge, see photo, where we need to cross the Kisa river, last real river crossing in this hiking tour. The gorge is steep, especially on the NW side. After the gorge there are gravel plains leading to an opening of a valley that originates in the pass between Ögmundur and Höttur. The pass in itself is interesting as it has a sharp highest point, this leading to a very rapid change in the view from south few meters before the highest point to north few meters after highest point.



After the pass, we will be walking along the western slopes of Mt Höttur, again a stony hill with snow drifts or remainders of the glacier in between.

When on the gravel plains to the north of Mt Höttur, we find ourselves in an area fenced in by mountains, Mt Höttur, Mt Ögmundur, Mt Mænir and Mt Kerlingarskyggnir. Here we turn east, towards the small valley on the SA side of Mt Mænir, the Valley named Hverabotn or Hotspring Valley, probably the most picturesque spot in the whole Kerlingarfjöll area. When walking through this narrow valley, up to the hills at its bottom, we at times have geysers on both sides, with either boiling water or mud. Hverabotn is a narrow valley, with steep northern hillside. This steep northern side we have to climb before we reach the ridge between Mt Mænir and Mt Kerlingarskyggnir.

We continue to the peak of Kerlingarskyggnir from where we follow the poles downwards to the bottom of Hveradalir, the main geothermal area of Kerlingarfjöll.

From Hveradalir we have 5 Km to go to reach Ásgarður, first along narrow ridge between two gorges or river formations, then along gravel plains with some steep up- and down hills. During the last part the view is to the north with the mountains of Húnavatnssýsla and Skagafjörður close to the horizon.

