

The Breiðármörk trail is a red trail. The difficulty symbols indicate the walking terrain. They are based on the hardest stage of the journey, and follow this legend:

-  **BLUE: Easy** Pleasant and smooth paths in general, without significant obstacles or difficulties.
-  **RED: Challenging** Routes and paths may include long uneven and difficult sections and obstacles, such as unbridged streams and small rivers, gravel, high risers, etc.
-  **BLACK: Difficult** Routes and paths include obstacles and difficulties such as larger unbridged rivers, steep hills and rocky barriers that can be dangerous for inexperienced hikers and under poor conditions.
-  **GREEN: For those with reduced mobility** Paths are paved and include timber ramps or compacted gravel with no loose gravel on the surface. Paths are over 75 cm in width.

PATH DESCRIPTION

Although the Breiðármörk trail is marked red, most of it is considered blue. The trail is marked across the sands, rocky terrain and moraines. The path is not even all the way through and can get fairly rocky at times. There are no significant elevation changes, or unbridged rivers and streams, so it should not involve any special difficulties for hikers. The trail is nearly 15 km long and you can expect about 5 hours to complete it. No drinking water can be found along the way, making it necessary to bring it with you.

WELCOME TO THE REALM OF VATNAJÖKULL

This hiking map shows walking trails from Jökulsárlón lagoon in Breiðamerkursandur and Fjallsárlón lagoon. This is a part of a walking route that is being developed in Austur-Skaftafellssýsla and is expected in the future to extend from Skaftafell in the west to Lónsöræfi in the east.

During your 15 km hike between the three glacial lakes you will learn about the flora and fauna of the area as well as getting a glimpse into the ways of life in this isolated area that has been dominated by glacier tongues and fierce glacial rivers.

The realm of Vatnajökull stretches over a big area in the South East of Iceland. This is one of the most spectacular parts of the island. Here you can find glacier tongues resting on the green fields of the lowland, incredible glacial lagoons with floating icebergs, the highest peak in Iceland and the deepest lake of the country, unique black sand beaches, colourful mountains and deep valleys in one of the best trekking areas of the island. Along with having the best access to Vatnajökull National Park the area offers rich birdlife and possibly you will encounter reindeers and seals during your stay. This rich nature together with very good tourist services make the Realm of Vatnajökull one of the most interesting and most visited areas of the country.

The area is dominated by the great Vatnajökull, the largest glacier in Europe (8000 km²) and has been sculptured by it. Numerous volcanoes lie under the ice, creating the dramatic co-existence of ice and fire. The glacier has also created a special way of living and its own culture because of how the inhabitants have needed to adapt to changes in climate, with colder climates in the past and global warming in the present. This used to be a very isolated

area, closed between glacier tongues and impassible glacial rivers. People have lived on the lowlands on the south side of the glacier and farmed the short stretch of land in difficult conditions and in great touch with nature, with the Atlantic ocean ruling on the one hand and the majestic Vatnajökull ice cap on the other.

Höfn in Hornafjörður (pop. 1700) is the only village of the area. With its diverse fishing industry it is also known as the lobster capital of Iceland. The climate of the area makes Hornafjörður easily accessible all year around, both by flight and by car.



Snow gentian – *Gentiana nivalis*



VISITORS ARE ASKED TO KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND:

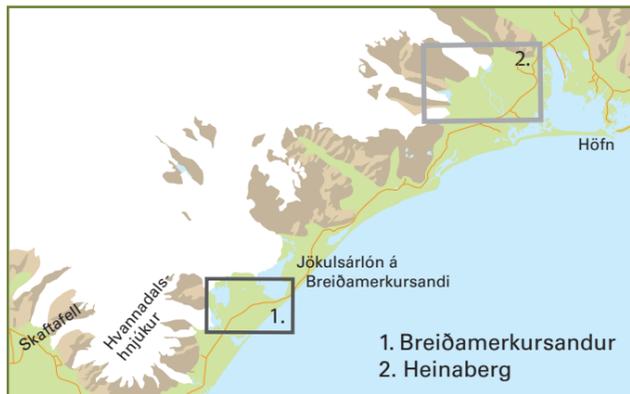
- Respect your surroundings and the pristine nature. Show care, e.g. by the shore, the rivers and glaciers.
- Do not discard or bury waste. All waste, including toilet paper shall be carried to your destination and disposed of in the appropriate containers.
- Do not disturb natural formations or sensitive vegetation. Do not remove plants or rocks. Do not stack cairns or markers.
- Keep to marked paths where possible. Footprints on sensitive vegetation take a long time to heal.
- Protect wildlife and show care by the birds' nesting areas.
- Do not pollute water.
- Take care that dogs or other pets do not disturb vegetation or interfere with other animals or travellers. Owners must clean up after their animals on the trails.
- Inform people of your itinerary. The weather can turn quickly and your preparation should take that into account.
- Respect the rules of conduct and instructions by the landowners. Show other hikers kindness and respect.
- Leave rest stops in the best possible condition. Take your pictures and memories with you - but leave nothing behind but a light footprint.

In case of an accident or need for assistance, call or message the 112 National Emergency Number.



History and land formation HIKING MAP

BREIÐARMÖRK TRAIL



THE REALM OF VATNAJÖKULL

The organization is a cluster of companies operating in tourism, food and culture in the district of Hornafjörður. Through cooperation the area serves as an ideal destination for nature and outdoor activities along with culinary and cultural experiences.

www.visitvatnajokull.is



COLONISATION AND SETTLEMENT

According to the ancient Book of Settlements, people began to settle Breiðamerkursandur at the beginning of the colonisation period nearly 1100 years ago. The land was covered in a vast forest extending from the coastline up to the mountains, according to Ari the Wise who wrote The Book of Icelanders. It is difficult to imagine maintaining livestock, let alone building a farm in the middle of the sands of Breiðamerkursandur as we know it today. But conditions have changed dramatically and the climate has become more difficult for farming than during the first century of the colonisation.

The Book of Settlements says:

Hrollaugur went to Iceland on the counsel of King Harald, bringing with him his wife and sons. He sailed eastwards to Horn and jettisoned his high-seat pillars (carved wooden totem poles), which drifted on land in Hornafjörður, but he drifted westwards, encountering foul weather and water shortage. They made land in Leiruvogur in Nesjar where he spent the first winter. He found his high-seat pillars and moved east to Ingólfsfell, where he spent his second winter. Then he went east to Hornafjörður and settled the land stretching from Horn to Kvíá, and first lived by Skarðsbrekka in Hornafjörður, and then in Breiðabólstaður in Fellshverfi. [...] Þórður son of Eyvindur broke his ship on Breiðársandur; he was given land by Hrollaugur between Jökulsá and Kvíá, and he lived at Fell by Breiðá.

It is not known exactly whether or where farmsteads were located on the sands but place names suggest that they were south of Breiðarlón lagoon. The riverbed of Breiðá has changed over the centuries and harsh conditions have undoubtedly taken their toll on any possible remains.

There are more stories of settlements in Breiðamerkursandur from the period of the Sagas. Brennu-Njálssaga tells of Kári Sölmundarson, who was the blood brother of Njáll's sons, and

LAND FORMING

The sand of Breiðamerkursandur spans the area between the Kvíá and Fellsá rivers. The sand is the collective river deposit of the Jökulsá, Breiðá and Fjallsá rivers. It was formerly named Breiðársandur after the farm Breiðá. Place names in the area reveal a long history of settlement from the very beginning of the colonisation of Iceland. The glaciers were smaller then and the sand covered with vegetation. In the 13th century the climate cooled and subsequently the outlet glaciers grew and advanced. The Breiðamerkurjökull outlet glacier reached its maximum extent in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 1880–1890s, the termini of the glacier was only 250 m from the coastline.

Very extensive land formation has taken place in Breiðamerkursandur since the glacier began retreating in the early 20th century. Lagoons started forming in 1930. The biggest lagoons are Jökulsárlón (> 23 km²), Breiðarlón (> 6 km²) and Fjallsárlón (> 3 km²). The glaciers calve into the lagoons (i.e. deposit large blocks of ice), which causes continuous changes to the lagoons as the glaciers retreat. In 2010, Breiðamerkursandur had extended 136 km² between Fjallsá and Fellsá, an increase of approximately 86 km² since 1900. The land exposed from the retreat is characterized by geomorphological features, formed under a glacier. Large plains have been fluted by the glacier and in addition to moraines that the glacier has pushed and bulldozed. Lateral moraines, hummocky terrain, kames, kettle holes and other remnants of stagnant ice formations are left from the retreat. Rivers often cut through these formations. Additionally, stream sediments and eskers reveal receded glacial lakes. Small lakes and ponds are spread throughout the area in basins in the sand.

The hiking trail between Jökulsárlón and Fjallsárlón lies across this land and cuts through glacial traces from the Esjufjallarönd og Máfabyggðarönd medial moraines. The path westwards from Jökulsárlón to Breiðarlón lies near the site where the snout of the glacier lay between 1955 and 1963. Observe the changes in vegetation as you get closer to the glacier.



brother-in-law to most of the main protagonists in the Saga. Kári was the only one of the blood brothers who escaped the eponymous burning of Bergþórshvoll which killed the Bergþórshvoll household along with Kári's son Þórður. Leading the arsonists was Flosi Þórðarson from Svínafell in Örfæfi. Flosi had a stepdaughter named Hildigunnur, who had been married to Höskuldur, the blood brother of Kári and Njáll's sons. Kári and Njáll's sons slew Höskuldur one morning after having been told lies and slander about Höskuldur and his standing by Mördur Valgarðsson. In the end Kári and Flosi made peace and Kári went on to marry Hildigunnur. Brennu-Njálssaga says that they settled on the banks of Breiðá in Breiðamerkursandur.

Little information can be found on how the settlement developed in Breiðamerkursandur up to the point where the original settlement lay abandoned. Cartularies indicate though that Breiðamerkursandur maintained a settlement to a certain extent and that the land yielded reasonable benefits until 1698, at which point it was considered to be deserted. The reason why may be attributed to climate change and a cold snap which lasted for a few centuries, dubbed "The Little Ice Age." These changes and a

fall in temperature have had a significant impact on settlement development, especially in Örfæfi and Breiðamerkursandur. Studies on the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier indicate that the oldest farmsteads were either swallowed by the glacier or washed away by glacial rivers. The eruption in the Örfæfjökull glacier in 1362 undoubtedly had a significant impact on people living in the area, not only in Örfæfi but also in Breiðamerkursandur. From the year 1387 on the farmstead Breiðá is named Breiðármörk. Sources do not mention the form of residence or any residents and can therefore be argued that the farm was merely a resource and under the ownership of the Church. In the year 1523, Breiðármörk had become the property of the episcopal seat of Skálholt, maintaining a permanent residence and a place of worship. But the glacier and climatic changes have for centuries shaped the development of both the farmsteads and the agricultural area and people adapted as well as possible, though some had to admit defeat and relocate. Whereas residence in Breiðamerkursandur certainly has been difficult, nature has in return given Iceland one of its greatest treasures, the Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon.

WHERE DO THE ICEBERGS COME FROM?

The Jökulsárlón and Breiðarlón lagoons lie in front of Breiðamerkurjökull glacier and the Fjallsárlón lagoon next to Fjallsárjökull glacier. Icebergs break off the glacier and fall into the lagoons and float. The icebergs are the final stage of the water cycle from the ocean, through the air and glaciers and to sea again. The water shifts phases, changing from liquid to vapour, then to solid form and to liquid again. The shift from water to vapour typically occurs over the sea, and from there it passes over land as moisture saturated clouds. Another shift in phase occurs when precipitation falls as rain or snow. Snow crystals and ice are the solid form of water.

Snow falling on the accumulation zones of glaciers weighs down and transforms over time into ice. The glacier moves from the accumulation zones to lowlands where it finally melts in the glaciers' ablation zone. In recent decades glaciers have retreated rapidly due to a warming climate. Lagoons have formed in front of the glacier where it previously excavated its bed into the ground. The ice, calving from the glacier snout breaks into icebergs in the lagoon. The process accelerates the recession of the glacier and it retreats more quickly. The icebergs float around in the lagoons, much to the enjoyment of travellers, but gradually melt back into water.



Rock Ptarmigan – *Lagopus muta*

