

IMPERIAL COLLEGE ICELAND EXPEDITION 2015



Expedition Report

3rd to 21st July 2015. As a team of two, we received funding from the Imperial College Expedition Board to undertake a fastpacking north to south traverse across the remote interior of Iceland, from Hofn to Asbyrgi.

Expedition Report

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Expedition Plan

Aims and Objectives

Our aim was to complete a twelve day fastpacking traverse of the remote Icelandic interior, travelling from Hofn in the south to Asbyrgi in the north. We were to be completely self sufficient, except for picking up some pre-posted food parcels at strategic points along the route.

Background

For those whom might not be aware of the nature of this expedition, which is different from a typical backpacking expedition a brief description of fastpacking is below.

“Fastpacking is a cross between Backpacking and Mountain Running. The defining characteristics of Fastpacking are:

- 1) Rapid, long-distance mountain travel, on foot, over multiple days, involving camps or bivouacs
- 2) Refined equipment choices and practiced skill sets that allow for both rapid movement and self-sufficiency in a remote mountain setting.

Fastpackers share alpinists’ “light and fast” attitude for moving in the mountains. Fastpackers use gear selection, ingenuity, and a streamlined approach as primary tools for maximizing speed and minimizing overall effort, without overly compromising safety or comfort.” (<http://www.sagetosummit.com/fastpacking>)

Fastpacking is akin to mountain marathon races, where teams navigate off path (cross country) to various checkpoints, but for longer than 2 days. Again here, lightweight kit is essential to run faster and win! However the key idea is that teams must be completely self-sufficient in the mountains.

Details

We aimed to complete a south-to-north traverse in Iceland, from the south east corner to the north coast of Iceland, over remote and challenging terrain in 12 days. Most of the traverse was on trails although some was be cross country.

This expedition took the ethos, kit and skills gained from the team’s experience of Mountain Marathons to move swiftly and lightly across the terrain, called fastpacking. It was planned to cover up to a marathon each day, with a mixture of running and walking, and running on a calorie-deficit principle with food to minimise weight. The team aimed to carry small lightweight bags, 32L running bags with a maximum weight of 7kg.

While the team should be completely self-sufficient and camping every night, pre-arranged food drops were to be delivered at key stages to prevent a crippling weight of food.

As far as we know nobody had fast-packed this route before, or had even taken this route. However we were able to gain useful information from Andrew Skurka <http://andrewskurka.com/adventures/iceland-traverse/about-the-iceland-traverse> who did an east-to-west fastpacking traverse of Iceland.

Why Iceland/this expedition?

The idea for the expedition originally started when both members of the team were interested in completing the Lonsoraefi trail. This is a stunningly beautiful, remote, unmarked trail that leads from the south coast of Iceland to the mountain of Snæfell near the Vatnajökull ice cap. Jack had originally learnt about the trail when planning his Fellwanderers summer tour to Iceland in 2013, but hadn't been able to complete it then due to its remote and difficult nature being unsuitable for a tour.

We decided, however, that we didn't really want to backpack the trail. Neither of us really enjoy trudging slowly along carrying heavy bags. The only reason you need heavy bags is because you are taking a long time so you need to carry lots of food and water. If you go quicker, you complete it faster, so you need to take less stuff, and have a lighter bag, which means you can go quicker... Better all round!

However, if we fastpacked the Lonsoraefi trail, we would complete it in 3 days. It's quite expensive to get to the start and hard to get out again at the end of the trail, so this didn't seem like a great idea. Instead, after studying the Cicerone guidebook and maps, we were able to link up several 'treks' into one long traverse of Iceland, which would let us explore many different parts of this beautiful country, from the green valleys to the desert to the huge gorge at Asbyrgi. Now it was starting to look more like an expedition- 12 days of self-supported fastpacking across remote and challenging terrain.

Both of us were aware of the expedition board, from attending talks or by having friends that had received funding. After chatting with Lorraine and Phil, we decided to apply for funding. We weren't sure if our trip would qualify as it was very unlike anything the board had funded before. Luckily it did!

Route

Our original route to traverse Iceland was from Hofn, in the south east corner, to Asbyrgi in the north. The route was 400km. It would start in the lush green highlands, along the unmarked, untrdden, beautiful remote Lonsoraefi Trail. We would then reach Snæfell, the highest mountain in Iceland at 1800m, before traversing over to the Askja crater. From here we would push on northwards and downhill, crossing the lava desert north of the icecap, before finally completing the route via the huge green gorge to Asbyrgi.

The expedition route was broken down into four distinct stages. The route was planned using a mix of treks given in the Iceland Cicerone guide, advice from previous expeditions that have crossed Iceland, and from what maps have been found online.

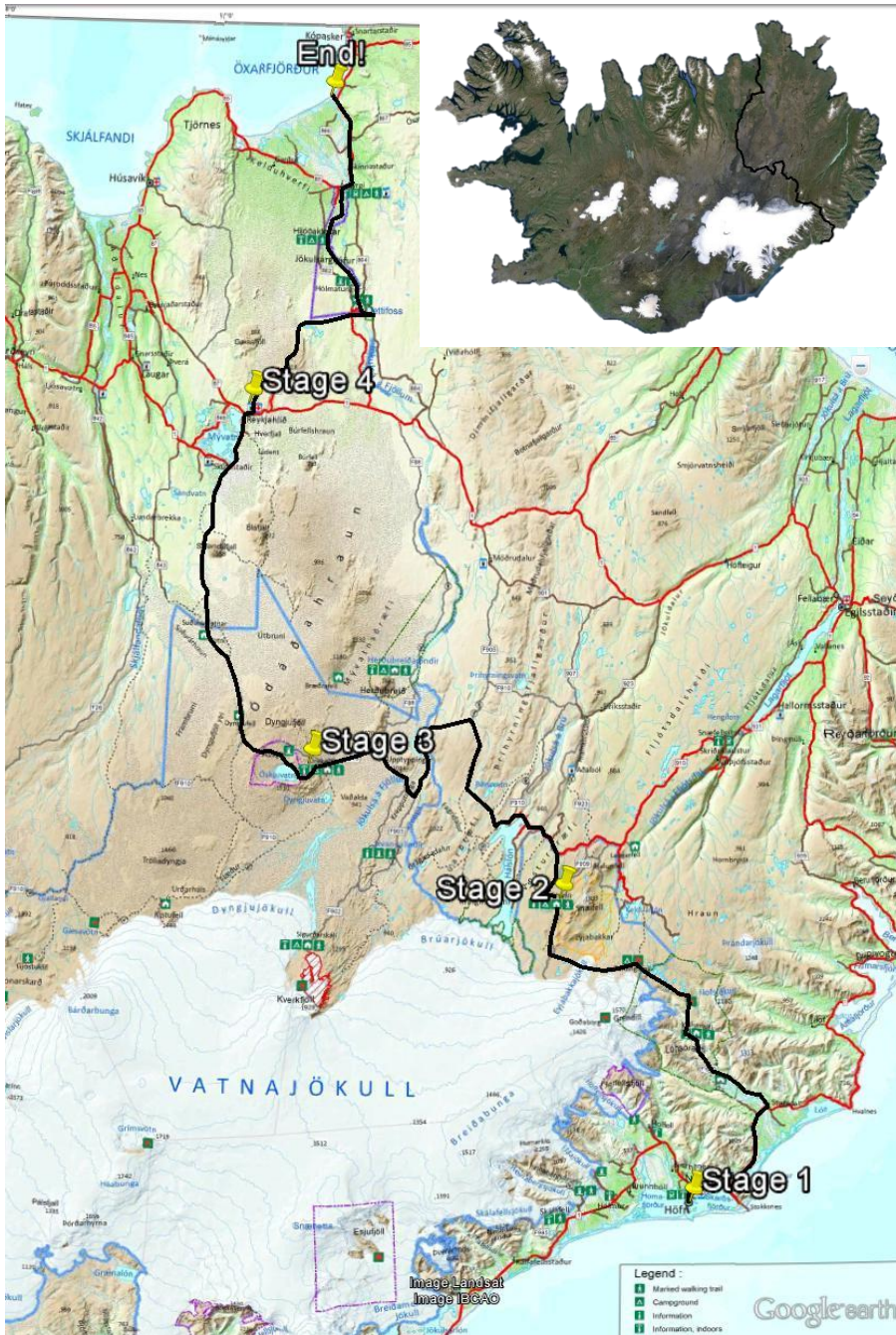
Our original itinerary reflected this:

Day	Date	Heading	Detail
	3/07	Fly In	London Gatwick to Reykjavik (Icelandair) Depart 13.10 Arrive 15.10 Flybus to Reykjavik campsite
	4/07	Travel to Start	Bus from Reyjavik to Hofn (Sterna) Depart 0730 (Harpa Concert Hall, Reykjavik) Arrive 1800 (Hofn Campsite and Hostel) Camp at Hofn Campsite

1	5/07	Stage 1 - Lonsoraefi trail	Hofn-Statafell-Eskifell (~40km) (Hut here)
2	6/07	120km (3 days)	Eskifell- Geldingafellskalli (~45km) (Hut here)
3	7/07	Total ascent ~1600m	Geldinafellsskali to Snaefellsskali (~35km) (Hut here)
4	8/07	STAGE 2: 100km (3 days)	
5	9/07	Cross country (no trail)	
6	10/07	Snaefellsskali to Drekgil huts at Askja	
7	11/07	REST DAY	Drekgil huts (camping)
8	12/07	STAGE 3: Askja to Myvatn/Reykjahild (Askja and Myvatn trails)	Drekgil to Odadahraun (wild camp but there is a hut 23km in at Dyngjufell) (~33km)
9	13/07	98km (3 days)	Odadahraun to hagalaekur near Sellandafjall (wild camping) (~30km)
10	14/07		Sellandafjall to Reykjahilid (~35km) (campsite in Reykjahilid)
11	15/07	STAGE 4&5: Reykjahilid to the coast north of Asbyrgi	Reykjahilio to Dettifoss (~40km), wild camp
12	16/07	70km (1.5 days)	Dettifoss to the north coast (~30km) Bus (Asbyrgi to Akureyri) (SBA) Departs 16.15, Arrives 18.25 Camp at Hamrar Campsite, Akureyri
	17/07	REST DAY	Rest day in Akureyri Camp at Hamrar Campsite, Akureyri
	18/07		Bus from Akureyri campsite to Reykjavik (Sterna) Departs 0715 Arrives 12.55 One night camp in Reykjavik campsite

	19/07	0400 Flybus transfer to airport from campsite Reykjavik to London Heathrow (Icelandair) Depart 07.40 Arrive 11.45
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We also mapped our original route on Google Earth which is shown below, broken down into stages:



Expedition Team Profile

The team has extensive experience of mountain running and navigation, both together and as individuals. Previous to the expedition we had run together during lots of training runs in the mountains and in the OMM 2014 (placed 3rd mixed team).

ELLIE



Ellie is a 2nd year mathematician, and a keen hiker, runner and swimmer. Since joining Imperial she has been heavily involved with the outdoor clubs, in particular Fellwanderers, where her love of cross country running developed into a love of running on the fells. She has developed both her technical running and navigation skills over the past few years with a combination of trail races, mountain marathons, and endless weekends out hiking or running in the hills in all weathers the UK has to offer! She was attracted by the idea of a fastpacking expedition to Iceland because of the beautiful nature of the country, and the challenge offered by the expedition.

Relevant Experience

Mountain Marathons: OMM 2014 (3rd mix team), Highlander 2014, 2015

Ultramarathons: Brecon Beacons Summer Ultra 2015 (42 miles, 5th lady), Four Inns Walk 2014, 2015 (40 miles)

Marathons: Brecon Beacons Winter Marathon 2014 (2nd lady, 8th overall), Hardmoors Osmotherley 26.2 2015 (5th lady)

Orienteering: Surrey Hills 30k 2015 (2nd lady)

Backpacking: 2 weeks Pyrean Haute route; 2 weeks Apuan Alps, Italy

Other: Conville Trust winter mountaineering course (Cairngorms); Yorkshire 3 Peaks; Fisherfield 6.

JACK



Jack graduated from Imperial in June 2014 with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering. Throughout his time at Imperial he was a key member of the Fellwanderers, taking presidency of the club for 2012-2013. Because of this he has experience of just about every weather the UK mountains can throw at you, and through leading groups has honed navigation and safety skills relevant to a remote expedition. Having always enjoyed the outdoors and cross country running at school, he first got into fellrunning with a winter outing to the Helvellyn ridge! Since then he has introduced many others to the sport and has gained a lot of experience through training, mountain marathon races, marathons, and ultramarathons.

Relevant Experience

Mountain Marathons: OMM 2014 (3rd mix team), Highlander 2014, 2015 (A class, 6th place)

Ultramarathons: High Peak Marathon 2013, 2014 (40 mile night race), Four Inns 2011, 2012, 2013 (40 miles), Thames Gateway (60 miles, 5th), Trionium Olympicnic (30 miles)

Marathons: Brecon Beacons Winter Marathon 2014 (4th), Coastal Trail Series Sussex Marathon 2012

Orienteering: Surrey Hills 30k 2013, 2014, 2015 (4th)

Fastpacking: 4 days solo fastpacking in the Lake District (2014)

Backpacking: 2 weeks Iceland (led 13 people), 2 weeks Dolomites, 2 weeks Montenegro

Other: 2 weeks climbing in the Alps (2010) ascending the SW ridge of Weissmies (F+), Lenzspitze-Nadelhorn traverse (AD+), Torino Hut traverse of the Mont Blanc basin; Welsh 3000's.

Training for expedition

Due to the challenging and remote nature of the expedition, the team undertook training to ensure they were sufficiently prepared. This included fitness training, where we focused on spending time on the hills building on our endurance and technical skills, and safety training, where we focused on preparing for the remote expedition and learning necessary skills.

Fitness

Regular training

We enjoy running so both train regularly anyway. We made sure to include some speed work in our weekly schedules as this would increase our cruising speed, so we could go further more easily. Ellie also swims a lot so worked on endurance leading up to the expedition.

On the hill and long runs

We do a long run every week, either in the mountains or in the hills/countryside closer to London. We also do a lot of long days hiking which are great for getting the time on your feet and covering technical mountain terrain.

Races

In the 3 months before the expedition, we did a combination of trail marathons, trail ultramarathons, mountain marathons, and orienteering events/shorter races. This is to provide a good combination of building endurance and fitness from the trail races, and honing navigational/technical mountain running skills from the mountain marathons and orienteering events:

- Mountain Marathons are 2 day paired events, where competitors navigate across technical mountainous terrain to collect checkpoints, sleeping at an overnight camp. Teams are completely self-sufficient, and carry all standard mountain marathon kit, which is very similar to our expedition kit. We

chose it as the back to back running with full bags over rugged terrain is a great mimic of what we would experience in Iceland (and the Scottish weather!).

- Trail races don't require navigation normally so are great for building up endurance, speed and stamina whilst practicing technical mountain running. They were a good choice for testing our fitness for Iceland.

Training Log

Date	Expedition Training
April	Lake District training weekend- 80km, +6000m ascent over the weekend
	Peak District long fell run
	Richmond Park long run
	Highlander Mountain Marathon (Scottish highlands)
May	Isle of Wight long run
	Ellie exams, Jack long runs
	Ellie Fisherfield 6 (hiking)
	Ellie Brecon Beacons ultramarathon 42 miles
June	Surrey Hills 30k race
	Lake District long fell run and hiking
	Ellie 10km race, Jack long run
	New forest hiking, South coast long run



Above: Training in the Lake District

Left: Looking weary at the end of the Highlander Mountain Marathon

How far...?

We decided not to go out and do a full practice fastpacking expedition (for a shorter time). Partly this was because it would have been very time consuming and expensive to get all the food, and we felt that we had a good mimic of what we would face from the Highlander Mountain Marathon. We had also used all the kit before so didn't need to test it. In addition though, if you really and truly do a proper practice then you will also have to practice the suffering that you will face! You probably wouldn't train for your first marathon by running a marathon, as it might put you off doing it or put you in the wrong mindset. We had the same feeling. Best to find out when there's no escape...

Safety

We were aware of several dangers that we could face on our expedition, and as part of our training we learnt how to minimise these dangers, and what to do if they should occur.

In our risk assessment and proposal, we highlighted some dangers that we thought we might face in Iceland. These included: the remote nature of the expedition, the availability of water in the desert, the technical terrain that we would be running on, and the fact that there were only two of us. Our full risk assessment is in the Appendix.

We were able to reduce the risk of running out of water by studying the map and guidebook carefully. We practiced running on technical terrain as much as possible to reduce risk of injury. We also both attended a two day first aid training course, and a two day expedition first aid course run by Stuart Marshall of Marlin training. These were immensely helpful in providing us with the information and skills to deal with situations should they arise.

We also made sure we trained with the kit we would be using so we knew it worked! For example, we each had to know exactly how many layers to take, depending on how cold we were in training weekends. This enabled us to minimize risk to the best of our ability.

Iceland Expedition

Route Change

A couple of days before arriving in Iceland, we became aware that the weather might have an impact on our expedition plans. Jack was reading a report online of someone who had just completed the Charlie Ramsay round, which is basically Scotland's Bob Graham equivalent, taking in 24 summits around Glen Nevis in 24 hours. What was worrying was that he reported that many of the tops were still in winter conditions, in late June. This made us wonder... If Scotland is still snowy, what would it be like in Iceland, 3000 miles further north?

Jack immediately emailed the 'Safe Travel' organization in Iceland that has rangers in all areas to give information about conditions. He was informed that "the area around Snaefell is still packed with too much snow and is, as of now, closed as is the trail from there to Lonsoraefi...due to the conditions". Asking further about how bad the snow was and when it was likely to thaw, the response was "there is very wet mud up to your ankles and mid-calf" (referring to the lower part of the trail where the snow had melted) and "it will be at least a week until people can go hiking in the upper parts of the Lonsoraefi area". Doing a bit more research on the internet, it turned out that Iceland had had an extremely harsh winter, and a very late spring. Many of the hiking trails were still shut, and large parts of road were still impassable due to snow. This was very unusual for July.

Checking again in late August, the upper part of the Lonsoraefi trail was still closed.



Map showing huge swathes of Iceland (grey area) still impassable in July

We now discussed several options as to what to do with our expedition plans. Clearly we could not take the original route; the southern part was completely impassable and probably quite dangerous. We were limited by several factors that restricted what possible alternatives we could choose.

The first and biggest restriction was bag size and weight. We had brought 32litre running bags so were physically incapable of taking more than 4 days worth of food, with emergency food. We had originally planned to carry a maximum of 3 days worth at a time. So whatever route we chose, we needed to be able to have a food parcel picked up every 3-4 days.

Next was the condition of the trails in Iceland. As shown in the picture above, huge areas of Iceland were completely impassable when we arrived, so we couldn't just pick any trail. Map coverage was also an issue. We had bought maps for the areas in which we were planning to run, so too much deviation from these areas meant we wouldn't have the right maps.

Our budget was also a big factor in deciding what to do. Buses are very expensive in Iceland so we couldn't just travel anywhere in the country. For example, the north-west peninsula was suggested to us as a good place to go, but we would have covered the area in about 3 days and then it is expensive to travel elsewhere. We also had to make sure our new route allowed for wild camping so we didn't have to pay for too many nights here.

Related to buses is time spent travelling on bus around Iceland vs running. We had some ideas about doing lots of separate 3 day mountain marathons in different areas of the country, but not only would it be very expensive to travel between areas, it would also take about a day each time which would cut quite a lot out of our expedition.

Eventually we decided that the best plan was to start by reversing our route, and hoping that by the time we reached Askja, the snow would have cleared sufficiently to allow us to carry on. With the food drops in place, this would give us maximum flexibility and options in case we needed to do something different. We also decided to add an extra day onto the beginning to give a little more time before we got to Snaefell and the snowy area. Then we just crossed our fingers and hoped!

Day by day diary

3rd July

Diary

We set off from London, and didn't miss the flight! There were beautiful views over the Lake District and the Trossachs as we flew over the UK; Ellie woke Jack up by pointing out all the hills. Arriving in Reykjavik, the temperature was about 12°C. We checked into the campsite, then went into town, checking at tourist information for info about the Lonsoraefi trail.

This is what we were told about the trail: Iceland had had a very harsh, very bad winter, and a late spring. Due to this it was about 1 month behind schedule and a lot of the highland roads and trails were still closed. The Landmannlaugar trail had only opened one week earlier to very experienced hikers only, and still had

thigh deep snow in places. The Lonsorsefi trail was closed as there was very deep mud in a fragile environment, and the area around Snaefell was completely impassable due to huge amounts of snow.

This obviously meant we were unable to run our desired route. We discussed options including running the route backwards in the hope that the trail would be clear by the time we got there.

Then we went to Bonus to buy supplies for dinner, ate and slept.

4th July

Diary

We met some Americans at breakfast who were very happy it was the 4th July. We came up with a revised plan for trip:

Because the Lonsorafi trail is impassable, the current plan is to add a day onto the beginning, starting at Husavik instead of Asbyrgi. Then we plan to run to Askja via Myvatn as planned before but in reverse, then do a 3 day Mountain Marathon loop from there. Then we will run to Akueyri (3 days, ~110km) and have some time there (boat to Arctic circle etc) before returning to Reykjavik. Hopefully we will keep the option open to run the Lonsoerafi trail if possible.



Packing all our food into the food drop bags

We received the Clif Bars from Halldor. (v. nice person!) who worked for Tmark, who had given us a great discount. Then we packed our food boxes, and bought tickets for the night bus to Akueyri to get to our start at Husavik. Ellie really wanted to go to the swimming pool because it had a waterslide but Jack said it wasn't a good idea as we wouldn't be able to dry our swimming stuff. Eventually Ellie mentioned it enough that we went swimming (the waterslide was epic). The swimming pool changing rooms had a weighing scales so we weighed ourselves after getting out of the pool:

Jack: 60.5kg

Ellie: 50.1kg

With tshirts and trousers. This will be useful to find out how much weight we have lost when we get back!

We had "traditional Icelandic hotdogs" from the stand outside the swimming pool (delicious!) then made a pasta meal using the free food at the campsite. Before we left we were both still hungry so we made cous cous. 11pm and still bright outside!

5th July

Diary

We took the night bus from Reykjavik to Akueyri. It didn't get dark. We did get a blown tyre at 3am. Luckily, some French guys in the minibus knew how to fix it. We waited outside the bus, wearing all our layers as it was very cold (the sun was technically down although it was still bright). It was freezing due to cold Arctic wind. Minor concern might have been raised about how many layers we had.

We arrived in Akueyri at 6am, having had less than 3 hours sleep each. The bus driver got chatting to French guys about their route; turned out they wanted to walk to the south of Iceland by walking down a road the whole way (F26). Unfortunately this road was completely impassable due to snow (they didn't know this). They also didn't have a stove... two small reasons why their trip might not be successful. We wished them good luck!!

We enjoyed porridge (oats and water) in the car park whilst waiting for the connection bus to Myvatn. Arriving at Myvatn, we dropped the food parcels to the Jeep Tours guy who would deliver them to Askja for us (he had very cute kids and dogs- Malimuts). Then we dropped the other parcel at Myvatn Tourist Information office to pick up later. We bought cake in the shop (luxury item!) before taking the final bus to Husavik, arriving at 12.50. Husavik is meant to be a prime whale watching destination. We didn't see any whales, although Jack claims seeing Ellie was close enough. Then we finally started running! ~1.30pm.



At the start of our running route at Husavik Quay

We set off on a resurfaced f-road. After about 12km, we turned onto a track through lava fields. The tracks were only visible when on them and there were no markers, which meant careful navigation was required. We were disappointed by the pylons cutting across the terrain but at least they helped a bit with the navigation in an otherwise featureless landscape. We slowly adapted to the 1:100,000 map, realizing just how far the distances were on the map! What looked tiny was actually 5, 10 km. The scenery was beautiful. We met no other people. There was also no running water, but it was ok as we had carried enough. It was very remote—a day's walk to civilization in any direction!

Leaving the lava field, we reached a track/road, absolutely shattered after already having covered over 40km. What had looked like a short road walk to the campsite on the map actually turned out to be about 15km as we still hadn't got used to the scale. We may have hitchhiked last 5km with some nice people....

Arriving, we set up the tent, absolutely knackered. Straight to sleep ~11.30pm.

Logistics

Total distance: 55km

Food: Jack 4 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, ½ cake

Ellie 3.5 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, ½ cake

Body: Jack Pack heavy, could feel it. Lower back sore and bruised. Occasional knee twinge.

Ellie Feet aching and very sore (minimalist shoes). Lower back sore. Very tired from lack of sleep.

Weather: Cloudy in morning with some drizzle then sunny in afternoon. Quite warm.

6th July

Diary

Today we ran down a beautiful gorge from Asbyrgi to Dettifoss. This is actually the rip between North America and Europe! There were really cool rock formations from lava pillars being eroded by running water, as well as beautiful waterfalls and lush green vegetation. The trails were nice and runnable as well. We read later in the guidebook that the route along the gorge is actually a marathon race in Iceland!

We decided we couldn't make it all the way to Myvatn as we had originally planned to so decided to stop before- we hadn't adapted to the scale of the map when planning so it would have been a 75km day (far too long). We had dinner for that evening and we had our emergency food to eat if we didn't make it to Myvtan before tourist information closed to pick up our food parcel the next day. We had enough Clif bars left over to go without breakfast.



Wildcamping near Dettifoss

We set up our wild camp off a track on the way to Myvatn. There was a slight water panic at Dettifoss as we couldn't reach the water to fill up our bottles due to a sheer cliff on both sides (the contours were quite hard to read on the map). Luckily there were lots of tourists and some nice people with a water canister in their van that helped us out. After this we rechecked the route down to Askja again across the desert- we need to be careful with water, and our back up bottles may be required. Now time to sleep.

Logistics

Total distance: 40km

Food: Jack 5 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal

Ellie 4 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal

Body: Jack Fine

Ellie Feet still very sore on the balls of them. Quite raw. Hopefully callouses will build up soon.

Weather: Warm and sunny. Beautiful visibility down the gorge.

7th July

Diary

We ran from the wildcamp near Dettifoss down a track to Myvatn. It was quite boring and sandy.



Two very different views in one day!

The later half passed near the main road. We saw geothermal fumeroles and steam vents at Namasgard; the Sulphur smelt pretty bad! There were lots of tourists there- it was quite odd seeing so many people after so 2 days. Then we walked down the main road (number 1) to Myvatn. We arrived at tourist information in time to collect our food parcel. We checked the PC in the tourist information office and saw that the area around

Snaefell was still completely closed and impassable. Ellie also checked the PC for her exam results- PASSED! We bought a bag of Doritos and dip in the shop to celebrate. We were both tired from all the time in the sun. There was lovely weather and a campsite at Myvatn, with lots of ducks and ducklings! Ellie's feet have toughened up now. The evening is slightly colder than yesterday. Ellie found an Ice Age shrimp* in the water that Jack had picked up from a lake. *very tiny

Logistics

Total distance: 35km

Food: Jack 4 Clif bars, freeze dry meal, Doritos and dip

Ellie 3 Clif bars, freeze dry meal, Doritos and dip

Body: Jack Fine

Ellie Feet much better. Calloused on bottom.

Weather: Sunny but slightly colder. Little bit of drizzle in the middle of the day



Myvatn Campsite

8th July

Also known as the 'What more can go wrong day'....

Diary

We attempted to hitchhike to the trail head (16km away from Myvatn). No one picked us up...

We paid the bus driver on route to Akueyri to take us there... he forgot about us and drove about 8km past the point where he was meant to drop us off...

We started to walk back surrounded by horrible flies that got everywhere...

A Land rover driver picked us up but also took us about 4km past where we needed to be, further than we had been when he had picked us up...

We eventually walked there and properly started at 1pm. Right at the start we saw a sign that said some of the trail was closed to jeeps as it was very muddy. Concern was raised... we carried on anyway.

There were midges....everywhere!!!

SO MANY CAN'T BREATHE

They stopped.

We spent most of the day walking down an easy track, eventually passing Sellandjafell. About 1-2 hours in we saw a sign drawn into the ground: "Turn back ↩ ☹". More concern was raised... we carried on anyway. Our bags were heavy, full of water for the desert.



Running into the desert with Sellandjafell in the background

At around 8pm we met a group of 12 hikers being picked up by jeeps to stay overnight at a hut (Botni). It was a bit creepy seeing weirdoes walking in the wilderness at 8pm... who does that?! They told us it was about 12km to the hut. We walked until 9pm then pitched camp on a grassy and sandy bank, which turned out to be the worst idea ever. There was sand everywhere and it was so hard (think concrete)!! It probably didn't help that our mats were ½ cm thick. Horrible, horrible night's sleep.



Camping in the sand was a bad idea!

Logistics

Total distance: 40km

Food: Jack 6 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal

Ellie 4 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal

Body: Jack Very tired at end of day

Ellie Legs/feet fine

Weather: Cold, rainy desert.

9th July

Also known as THE LUXURY DAY!

Diary

The day started well. Firstly, we only had a 30km day to do. Also, we decided last night (whilst sleeping on freezing concrete) to stay at a tiny hut on route – Dyunjufell.

We woke up at 8am after a terrible night's sleep. It was snowing outside. We got ready (Ellie VERY slowly) and then set off. There was tricky terrain now through the lava field, and we had to be careful. We reached the hut 'Botni' at around 11am and met the group from yesterday just leaving. We stopped in the nice warm hut to eat a Clif Bar. We carried on, following a pathless route through the lava marked by cairns. Desert, desert, more desert. We reached hut at Dyunjufell ~5pm. There was a note on the door: nearest inhabited place 40km away. Here the luxury begins...



Our first taste of running on lava

We got changed into dry clothes in a space where we could stand up. We put the STOVE on to make the place where we were sleeping WARM. We played cards, and cooked dinner. Some scientists from Cambridge (Jenny, Tim, Sven) who were doing data experiments for seismic activity in the area, and staying at Dreki (Askja), turned up in a jeep. It was a bit weird seeing a jeep in the remotest of places in the desert. They had a load of food with them so we had SECOND DINNER (hot dogs, crisps and carrot cake). Not forgetting our own dried fruit and basics milk choc. Then we went to sleep on a MATTRESS.



So much luxury

Tomorrow, we will head to Askja. Flicking through the guestbook in the hut, it seemed that a couple of people had attempted the route to the Dreki hut at Askja but had turned back because of 'thigh deep snow over water'. We decided to try anyway. The scientists said there were definitely alternative routes anyway, e.g the road they used to get to the hut from Askja.

We also discussed rest of expedition. We looked at options to do when we reached Askja. We would be picking up 7 day's worth of food there, which meant we had to spend at least 2 days there as we physically couldn't carry that much food in our bags. We decided not to go to Akueyri as looking at the maps the only way to cross the huge glacial river was by walking 25km on a F-road and we had discovered that walking on F-roads wasn't fun. So we are looking at other options.

Logistics

Total distance: 30km

Food: Jack 6 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, hot dog, crisps, cake

Ellie 4 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, 2 hot dogs, cake

Body: Jack Heavy legs, better than yesterday. Big toes hurt

Ellie Slightly swollen ankles from tricky lava

Weather: Rainy and cold and windy.

10th July

Diary

We woke up boiling hot in the hut as the stove had been on all night. It was very misty outside so we decided to wait a bit for the cloud to lift and have a lie in. We eventually set off at 10am. We left the hut and climbed up steep lava slopes. As we climbed we passed another warning sign “Turn back, water under snow ☹️”. Again we ignored it and carried on. Snow melt had made the ground quite slushy- the snow was thigh deep in places and quite soft, which made progress slow as we kept randomly falling through. Eventually we climbed up out of the mist. The path was not well marked (some of the stakes were buried/missing) so we had to concentrate quite a lot on the navigation. Fortunately we had pretty decent visibility. Jack forged the path ahead (using Ellie sized steps). The day cleared up beautifully as we climbed ever upwards- beautiful alpine conditions and the suncream even came out. Waterproofs still on however as there was still a cold arctic wind.



Climbing up to the Askja Crater, looking back to the Hut

At one point we got to a bit where we could clearly see there was water with a snowbridge underneath. We guessed this was what all the signs all the way from Myvatn 3 days earlier had been about! The funny thing was that you didn't have to cross the water at all as you would just have to cross it again! So we just went straight up the hill to where we could see another stake, not going anywhere near the water. The snow was quite deep so we knelt down to create human snowshoes with our legs which made it much easier!

Finally we came over the pass to a stunning view of the HUGE Askja crater. With clear skies and gentle snowflakes twirling round it was like being in a snowdome. After avoiding a cornice we ran like Kilian Jornet down the snow slope hill, then picked up footprints. We crossed the crater to the car park (yes, in the middle of the wilderness. It was for the super jeeps). As we crossed the crater we met a nice Norwegian lady on the way, and gave her updates of the trail. We saw a lot of tourists at the car park edge of the crater who had been driven up in a super jeep from the Dreki hut. It was a bit weird after the remoteness of the past few days. We set off ahead of them just as they were pulling away and decided to race down in front of them using the snow tracks they had made up on the way up. It wasn't even a race, we dropped them in minutes!

Eventually we reached the cleared road that led down to the Dreki hut, so we slowed down to a walk and walked the rest of the way to Dreki. As cars passed us, the vapour fumes from their car hovered around the bottom of the road as it was too cold for them to evaporate. They absolutely stunk.



Looking out over the Askja Crater. An unforgettable experience

Arriving at Dreki, there was a slight panic as there was a worry that the food parcel hadn't arrived, as the warden didn't know where it was. Luckily after a few phone calls they found it. We pitched camp on the lava rock aka a foam roller with our thin mats. We used the food boxes to try and boost our roll mats from the rocks underneath us that bruised our legs and hips as we lay down. It was still very uncomfortable. We ate our freeze dried meals in the tent along with some bread that the scientists had left in the hut. Jack got up to go to the toilet and saw the Cambridge scientists eating slow cooked pork belly on the BBQ. We were very jealous. Jack ate 2 Clif bars instead. Then we slept, or at least tried to. It was really terrible. We slowly rotated round so every part of our body was 'foam rolled' by the rocks beneath us. We decided this 'campsite' definitely wasn't worth the £7.50 each a night we had paid. To add to the suffering the water from the taps was freezing freezing cold.

Logistics

Total distance: 25km

Food: Jack 5 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal with 3 slices bread

Ellie 4 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal with 3 slices bread

Body: Jack fine

Ellie fine

Weather: Mist in the morning then cleared for a while in the afternoon before setting in again. Not too cold.



Food glorious food!

11th July

The “Rest” Day

Diary

We woke up. It had literally rained all night, and there were icicles hanging off the tent. After several hours listening to the rain/sleet/snow hammering on the tent we decided to make an expedition outside to the toilet. Then we quickly retreated back to the tent. FOUL weather. We dozed for another hour or so, and had Chilli con Carne for lunch at around 11.30am. Since we weren't allowed in the hut (we hadn't paid the £40 accommodation fee each) we had decided we had better do something rather than sit in the tent all day. We reluctantly left at around 1pm.

An enthusiastic start of 10km of running along a track petered out as the weather steadily turned worse and worse. About 6km in Ellie also tripped over and smacked her knee on a rock which hurt a lot. We tried to run over to see some new lava from an eruption that had ended in February but with the freezing arctic wind and rain in the bleak desert we decided to turn back at around the 12km mark. We were wearing all our layers, were moving swiftly, and were still cold.



Enjoying the rest day...

We then had a long trudge back, Jack in thoughts, Ellie singing. Vehicles that passed us on the track showed equal parts amusement, confusion and pity. No one stopped except for the Cambridge people who carried on after a brief chat as they were working. We also got stopped by the police in their super jeep who seemed puzzled at our definition of 'fun' and why anyone would be out in this foul weather. We retreated back to the tent fairly damp. Jack sat and worked out the cumulative and projected finances for the trip as our plans had changed slightly. The gas canister struggled in the low temperatures to warm the water but after about 15 mins the heat reflecting back onto the cylinder from the stove warmed it up.

Logistics

Total distance: 24km

Food: Jack 3 Clif bars, 2.5 porridge sachets, 2 freeze dry meals

Ellie 1 Clif bar, 2.5 porridge sachets, 2 freeze dry meals

Body: Jack fine

Ellie Fell and hit kneecap quite hard and scraped hands- feels slightly stiff but ok.

Weather: FOUL. Very cold, raining all day, decided we would be dead if we had been out on the hills injured with no tent.

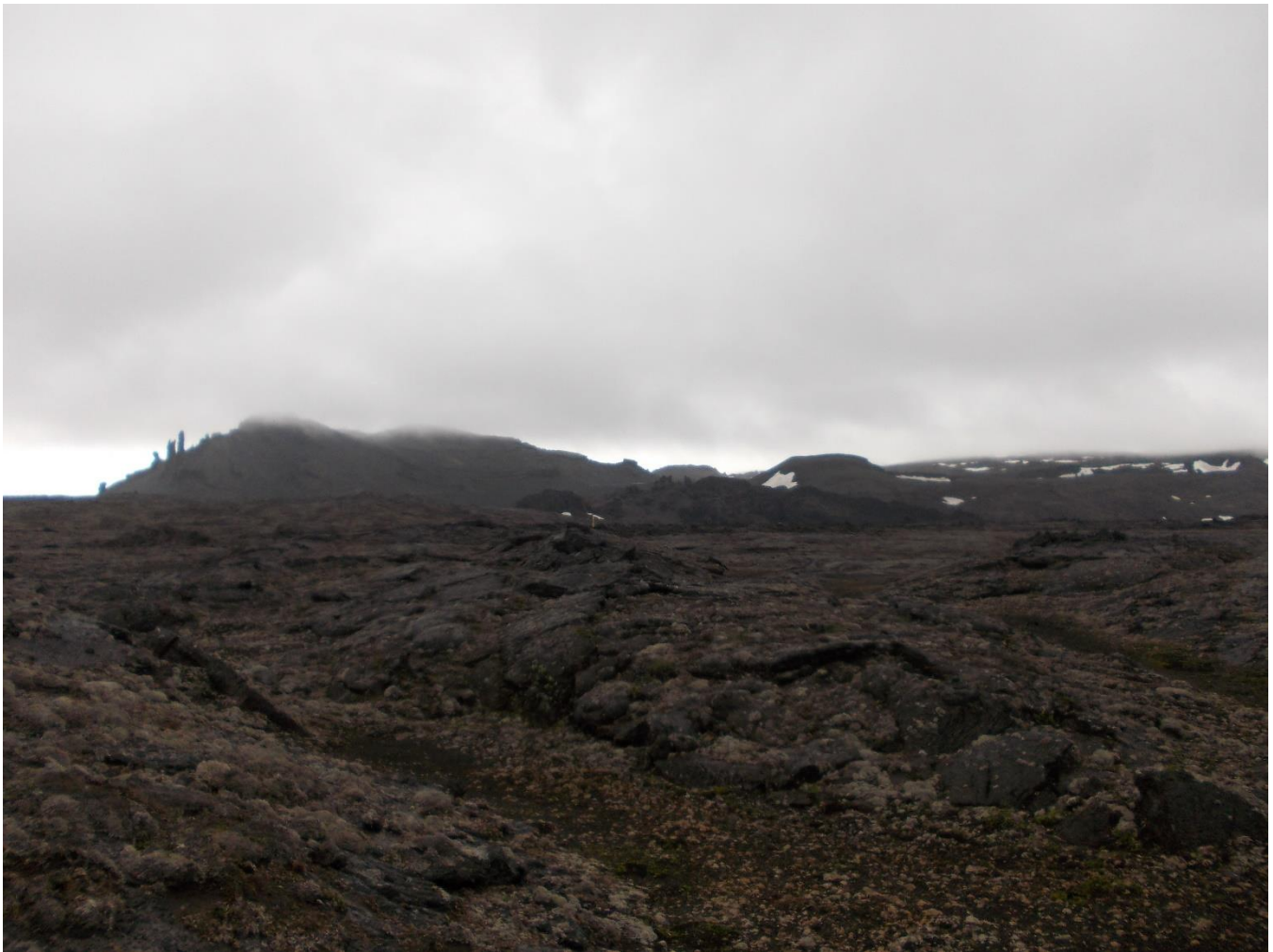
12th July

Diary

We walked from Dreki to the little hut at Braedafell. It had rained all night but stopped in the day!! We had very heavy bags as we had collected quite a lot of food at Dreki (to allow for as much flexibility in our plans as possible) so had to carry it out again. We had 9 day's worth of Clif bars!! Packing the tent away we were a bit worried that the groundsheet had been damaged by the awful ground at Dreki, but it seemed ok...

It was a very misty start to our walk, meaning it was hard to see the spikes that marked the pathless trail. The featureless, misty landscape made navigation pretty tricky. Luckily it cleared up a little later. There was rugged lava underfoot- this combined with the heavy bags meant our progress was pretty slow. On our way we met 2 couples who had come from the Braedafell hut after being dropped off by a tour jeep at the mountain Hebroulindir. One of the couples looked very very miserable!

We arrived at the hut ~4.30pm after 6 hours of walking; a very short day. We put the nice wood stove on- a great change from 2 nights of horrible camping!! Our shoulders were very sore from carrying heavy bags not designed for the weight (the bags didn't really spread the weight very well). It was not even worth trying to get the knots out of our shoulders, there were so many.



The endless lava field

We made a rough plan to try and climb the 2 mountains accessible from the hut if the mist had lifted in the morning. Currently the cloud was at about 600m, the height of the hut. One of the mountains was Herbröulindur, called the 'Queen of the Mountains' by Icelandic people because it has such an aesthetically pleasing shape. Unfortunately we couldn't even see the base of the mountain, let alone anything else! We decided that if the mist was still terrible we would not climb the mountains the next day, partly because we weren't sure about how well the paths were marked and we had learnt by now not to trust the maps, and partly because we didn't want to spend a whole day in cloud! There was also a worry about rockfall and steep snowfields, and despite having crampons, we hadn't carried helmets or ice axes.

On a side note, the mattress in the hut feels sooo good after the rocky ground.

Logistics

Total distance: 18km

Food: Jack 5 Clif bars, 2.5 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal

Ellie 3 Clif bars, 2.5 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal

Body: Jack Hips aching- heavy bag and already bruised from rocky ground

Ellie Shoulders sore from heavy bag

Weather: Raining in morning, very misty, drizzle all day, not as cold (Arctic wind not as bad as yesterday).

13th July

Diary

We woke up to very low cloud, so climbing the mountains looked pointless. We had a lazy morning as it was only a short walk to the hut at the road where the tour bus from Askja could pick us up on its way back to Myvatn.



At the finish of the Askja Trail and happy to see some vegetation after 6 days in the desert

We left at 10am. It was a very boring day just walking over lava and around the “Queen” (which we couldn’t see any of). However we did see the Cambridge lot again! They looked very happy trudging through the rain over the lava. It rained all day. We played “I Spy” but it turns out this is quite a boring game to play in a misty desert. Ellie’s shoes were in a bad way and had almost given out- the sides had blown out, with the top also threatening to go...

Eventually we arrived at the “Oasis” at 3pm to catch the 5pm bus. It was so named because it was the only bit of green in miles of desert, and was where Icelandic outlaws used to run to. Ellie was very cold and her waterproof had failed slightly. Dextrose helped. We didn’t have anywhere to wait for the bus as we were not allowed to sit in the hut so we crouched in the entrance of the toilet block to shelter from the wind and rain. Jack made surprise hot chocolate! It was very warming, but a little weak as we made it quite watery to last as long as possible. After that we drank hot water. We got on the bus at 5.30pm nice and warm but smelling like wet dog. It was a very bumpy 2 hour drive out. We bought more crisps and soup in Myvatn and were also very tempted by hot dogs. We decided that the day had been ‘Type 3’ fun.

Logistics

Total distance: 20km

Food: Jack 6 Clif bars, 2.5 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, ½ bag doritos, ½ mug hot choc

Ellie 4 Clif bars, 2.5 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, ½ bag doritos, ½ mug hot choc

Body: Jack Shoulders sore from heavy bag

Ellie Shoulders sore from heavy bag

Weather: Awful. Grey desert and grey cloud.

14th July

Diary

After 2 days of walking with heavy bags, today was running day! With light bags we planned a route to the Krafla volcano by combining 2 guidebook ‘trek’ days into one. Ww woke up in a bad mood as it was still raining. Eventually we decided to get up and we were much better when out and running; it even stopped raining! We ran on beautiful grassy runnable trails up through the hills and out of Reykjahlid. We climbed some steep, stony slopes, then crossed about 3km of lava (Ellie moaned as she now hates lava, it is literally the worst thing to run on, ever) to the volcanic area of Krafla. On the way we passed a cool lava tube that you could walk through.

Arriving at the geothermal area there were a lot of tourists, which was not surprising as there was a road leading right up to it. We had now run high enough to be in the clouds again so couldn’t see much but there were lots of hot spots and mud pools which was pretty cool. Then we ran up to see the Viti crater (‘Viti’ means ‘hell’) which was an amazing crystal blue lake at the bottom of a huge crater.

Then we ran back to Namaskard. There was a great steep trail up to a ridge with awesome views, then a fun descent through a green valley. It started raining again ☹️ but only with an easy 5km to go. We ran this back

to Myvatn and then got hot dogs at the supermarket- epic! Fried crispy onion + onion + ketchup + mustard + onion sauce + hot dog. Mmmm. Then we had second dinner and bed after a great day.



A greener Iceland with the orange Krafla Volcano behind us

Logistics

Total distance: 38km

Food: Jack 4 Clif bars, 2.5 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, hot dog

Ellie 3 Clif bars, 2.5 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, hot dog

Body: Jack fine

Ellie Hip flexor playing up- running up hills too fast!

Weather: Ok for most of the day but rained at the end.

15th July

The PROPER rest day!

Diary

We woke up late and then at 11.10 took the bus to Akueyri. We arrived and had a look in tourist info. Today was a PROPER REST DAY. First we walked round the town and had a look at all the food we wanted to eat. We eventually decided on burgers at 'Akueyri Backpacker's Café'- they were the best value. We had the 'Backpacker Burger'- beef, tomato, lettuce, gouda, camembert, Dijon, avocado, and ketchup with potato wedges and sour cream. EPICLY GOOD. They filled us up nicely (probably because our stomachs had shrunk so much by this stage!). Then we took our bags to the campsite, pitched the tent and went for a walk round the town.

First we stopped in the gift shops and looked through some beautiful photography books including 'Arctic Aerial' which had some stunning aerial shots of Iceland. We also looked at the Icelandic wool jumpers but they were very expensive.

Then we walked further and saw the 'Settler's Statue'. After that we passed a shopping centre and bought double chocolate brownie icecream. YUM. Then we followed a nice riverside walk around the town to Bonus. We picked up spicy frankfurters, Doritos, chocolate and yoghurt which made a very nice dinner when we got to the campsite. It wasn't raining!

After dinner we made our plans for the final 2 days of running for our trip. We wanted to do a 2 day mountain marathon in the hills around Akueyri and we came up with two routes, one high and more epic, the other one lower. We went for the lower one as the cloud base was still very low and we had no cloud base forecast; also there was still a lot of snow on the high mountains. The weather forecast looks ok. Epic end to trip?...

Logistics

Total distance: About 10km walking round town

Food: Jack 3 Clif bars, burger and chips, 1/2 icecream, 2/3 bag of Doritos, cous cous, frankfurters and tomato soup, 1/2 yoghurt, 2 porridge sachets

Ellie 1 Clif bar, burger and chips, 1/2 icecream, 1/3 bag of Doritos, cous cous, frankfurters and tomato soup, 1/2 yoghurt, 2 porridge sachets

Body: Jack fine

Ellie fine

Weather: Ok- surprisingly!

16th July

Diary

We left Akueyri around 10.30am in cold weather and low cloud. We had had a bad night's sleep as there were very noisy people packing their tent up very loudly at 5am. Our bags felt much lighter (we had left all the spare food in the campsite) but our legs felt sore after thinking they might have a chance to recover on the rest day! We walked about 8km on the road to get to the trail head- it was pretty horrible walking along



No paths to follow here

the 'Number 1' which is the main road around Iceland. There was some navigational faff on the f-roads due to the scale of the map making it hard to see detail.

Eventually we found the start of the trail. We climbed steeply up a green slope which was very boggy from all the meltwater running down. Ellie fell over after tripping over some barbed wire which had been lying on the ground. The path was quite hard to see as the stakes had been put quite far apart. We got to a steep snowfield about half way up; Jack climbed up it with poles but Ellie went round as by this point her shoes were pretty much sandals which only added to their flexibility. We climbed up higher and eventually made it to the summit cairn! There were nice views of Akueyri. There was also a box with a visitor's book and map- we realised our map was completely wrong (we had been following the staked path marked on their map which was different from the one marked on our map).

We knew we wanted to go down the ridge so we just followed a track that was heading that way. We crossed the road at the bottom, then into a beautiful green valley. We couldn't find the track at first (it definitely wasn't in the place the map said it was) so we just went cross country and eventually picked it up (no idea where it started!). The track eventually dropped us out on the Number 1 road in a very different place to where the map thought it should.

Again we went cross country into the next valley. We climbed up steep, stony slopes to be able to cross some deep gulleys near the top. Then we dropped down again as we were worried it would get to sleep later on and we wanted to camp in the valley. Ellie was very hungry and tired so shared one of Jack's Clif Bars. Eventually we found a path/sheep trod and followed it along, hoping to wild camp next to the river. The river stopped (went underground) so we wild camped at the point it stopped. It was absolutely beautiful! We hadn't met anyone all day. We scared a lot of sheep though! It got quite cold in the valley at night as it was quite high and northerly. It gave us an excuse to break out the luxury chocolate before bedtime.

Logistics

Total distance: 34km

Food: Jack 5 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, 4 squares plain choc

Ellie 4 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, freeze dry meal, 4 squares plain choc

Body: Jack fine

Ellie fine but very tired at the end of the day

Weather: Ok – better in the afternoon.



Lush greenery in the valley

17th July

The final day on the hill.

Diary

We woke up after a very peaceful night's sleep (no noisy people in a campsite!!). We opened the tent to find deep mist had flooded the valley- there was about 5m visibility. We set off walking ~8.45am. Ellie's tummy was quite upset in the morning. As we walked the mist gradually cleared. We hadn't been able to pick up any sign of a marked path (despite what was marked on the map) so we followed a likely looking sheep trod that wound along the valley. Then, this turned right, climbed up and led us high into the hill! We followed it as we knew that soon the valley turned into a gorge and we didn't want to get trapped.

Eventually we got to a point where we could look down and see the river T-junction and F-road that we were aiming for- the sheep trod had taken us right out of the valley. We climbed down the hill through birch forest and undergrowth to get down to the bottom. Ellie's shoes/hair got even more unrecognizable as what they had once been.

Then we picked up the track we were meant to be following which turned out to be a very pretty track alongside a glacial river (which we couldn't ford). There were lots of annoying flies again! By this point the mist had completely cleared and we were walking down the valley in beautiful sunshine. They seemed to be attracted by the Lupin flower which grows all over Iceland but is in fact not native to the country.

Eventually the track turned into a road which took us all the way down the valley. We picked up an Icelandic dog which came running out of the farmhouse as we passed. It was a beautiful collie-type dog and it followed us all the way down the road! Eventually near the junction with the main road we pointed and said 'go home'. So he did. Then we had to walk along the main road for a bit (not nice).

We then reached the place where, on the map, the track was meant to be. It wasn't. After spending about 1/2 an hour looking for it we decided going cross country was easier so we just walked straight up the hill, using pylons for direction. We reached the same summit cairn again, with stunning views of Sulur behind Akueyri and the other peaks behind it. We walked back down the track, then hitched along the main 'Number 1' road back into Akueyri (Ellie's shoe wasn't a shoe any more. The steep descent had sent it past the point of life). The woman we hitch hiked was funny. "This is the worst summer of my life, it is so cold, there is so much snow!!" Lucky for us then! We also learnt that Icelandic people don't finish school until they are 20 which we thought was pretty strange. The lady dropped us off at Bonus. We bought Frankfurters and bread, then ate and slept. A nice day.

Logistics

Total distance: 40km

Food: Jack 6 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, frankfurters, bread, cous cous, sweet&sour sauce, 4 squares plain choc

Ellie 4 Clif bars, 2 porridge sachets, frankfurters, bread, cous cous, sweet&sour sauce, 4 squares plain choc

Body: Jack fine

Ellie feet very sore as shoe ripped so grit got in the bottom causing friction on the ball of the foot

Weather: Misty in the morning then beautiful sunshine and amazing views of summits in the afternoon.



A tiring but beautiful end to our adventure!

18th/19th/20th JulyDiary

We woke up early and took the Straeto bus from Akueyri to Reykjavik. Ellie tried to detangle her dreadlocks so her hair was recognizable as hair before the bus arrived back at civilization (Reykjavik, a.k.a the shire after our journey through the desert to Mordor). The bus journey was uneventful apart from it dropped us off 6km outside Reykjavik! We took another bus into town, went to Bonus, and made dinner. We had showers (!!!) so now are feeling very clean. Very very windy... tent not holding out so well.

We got up next morning and had to move the tent to a more sheltered spot. We now had 2 days to be tourists in Reykjavik. We went swimming and went on the waterslide lots of times, we walked to the lighthouse on the island 'Grotta' at the end of the town, ate a nice lunch in cafes both days, and enjoyed plenty of icecream!

We returned back to England on the 21st early in the morning after a brilliant trip.

Logistics

Total distance: we did a 15km walk around the town.

Food: Jack Lots and lots

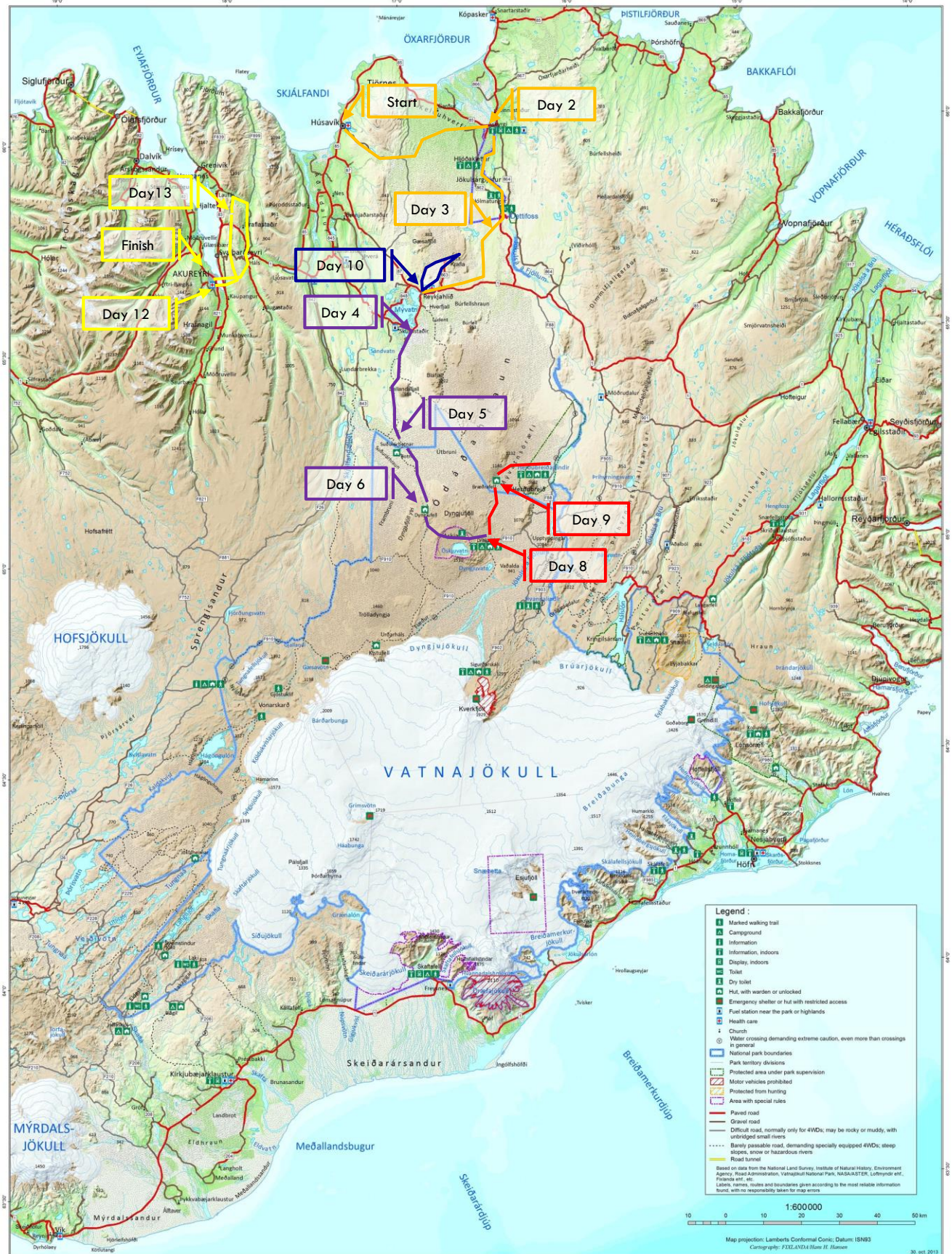
Ellie The same. Especially chocolate.

Body: Jack Clean!

Ellie Feet not waterlogged!

Weather: Lovely sunshine but very windy.

Route



Kit

Kit List

This is the kit that we were carrying/wearing at all times.

	ELLIE	JACK
CLOTHING	Tracksters	Tracksters
	Underwear x 3	Underwear x 1
	Sealksinz socks	Coolmax hiking socks
	Trailroc 245 shoes	Trailroc 255 shoes
	Technical Tshirt	Technical tshirt
	Fleece	Fleece
	Powerstretch	-
	Alpkit 'Synoment' synth jacket	Alpkit 'Synoment' synth jacket
	Waterproof jacket (RAB momentum)	Waterproof jacket (RAB atmos)
	Waterproof trousers (Sprayway Atlanta)	Waterproof trousers (Montane)
	Hat and 2 x Buff	Balaclava
	Thin powerstretch gloves and buffalo mitts	Thin fleece gloves
	Helly Hansen thermals	Merino wool baselayer and Raidlight leggings
Spare socks	Spare socks	
SLEEPING	OMM mat x2	OMM mat x2
	RAB Neutrino 400 sleeping bag in Sea to Summit Event compression bag	RAB Neutrino 400 sleeping bag in Sea to Summit Event compression bag
COOKING	Alpkit Ordos 2 tent (carried poles & pegs)	Alpkit Ordos 2 tent (carried inner, outer & footprint)
		MSR Pocket Rocket, fire steel, tripod, windshield
	Aplkit MyTi mug 750ml & spork	Aplkit MyTi mug 650ml & spork
	Gas cylinder (230 ½ full)	Gas cylinder (500 full)
SAFETY	Sol bivvy bag	Sol bivvy bag
	Bandages, dressings, plasters, gloves, wipes	Bandages, dressings, plasters, gloves, wipes
	Sam Splint	Celox

OTHER	Inhaler	Contact lens solution and spare glasses
	Dextrose tablets (4 packs)	Dextrose tablets (2 packs)
	Ibuprofen and immodium	Antibacterial hand gel and toilet roll
	Suncream	Vaseline
	Minature swiss army penknife	Minature swiss army penknife
	Headtorch	Headtorch
	Snow goggles	Sunglasses
	Compass (MOScompass thumb compass)	Compass (MOScompass thumb compass)
	Nikon Coolpix camera + spare batteries	GoPro Hero 3
	Money, receipts and tickets	SAT phone and charging cables for phones
	Passport, debit card, EHIC card	Passport, debit card, EHIC card and house keys
	Mobile phone	Mobile phone and battery pack
	Toothbrush + 15ml toothpaste	Toothbrush + 15ml toothpaste
	Guidebook	Maps, notebook and pencil
	Aplkit carbon fibre walking poles	Aplkit carbon fibre walking poles
Alpkit drybags in varying sizes	Alpkit drybags in varying sizes	
Kathoola aluminium crampons	Kathoola aluminium crampons	
WATER	1 X 750ml bottle & 3 x 500ml pouches	650 and 800ml bottle, 2 x 500ml pouches
BAGS	OMM Classic 32	OMM Classic 32
	OMM Leanweight MSC compressor	OMM Leanweight MSC compressor

Kit Review / Comments on Kit

Overall we were pretty happy with our kit choices for the expedition. Here we have highlighted a few things that we discovered about kit:

Bags:

Although we often complained about the bags when they were fully loaded, as they are really not designed to be that heavy, we were grateful for them on the lighter days when we could easily transform them into fantastic running bags. The leanweight compressor was absolutely brilliant for this, as well as extremely useful in increasing the capacity of the bags.

Crampons

We used all of our kit apart from the crampons, which we carried round due to the fact that we really didn't know what conditions were going to be like. If it had been any icier on the day to Askja, we would have needed them. They'll definitely get some use this winter anyway!

GPS/maps

One thing that we would take if we were to do a similar trip in the future would be a GPS device. In the UK, we are so used to completely relying on a map and compass in all conditions that we've never really thought about using one. However there were quite a few differences between Iceland and the UK. In the UK, even in a white out, the landscape has quite a lot of features, even if it is just a change in height. In Iceland, especially in the desert, it is much bigger and features are spread much more apart. This makes it quite difficult to pinpoint yourself navigationally. In addition, we were navigating off a 1:100,000 map which is not nearly as accurate as UK ones. This meant our navigation was not reliable. Despite reports otherwise, we didn't experience any problems with our compasses. The maps, however, were pretty useless for the most part, because paths and trails were not accurately marked, and the contours were not precise enough to be able to navigate off them (small hills were just completely missed off the map).

Gas

Taking gas instead of a petrol stove was a really good decision. Both screw and clip on gas canisters are readily available in Iceland and we were even able to pick up a free one that had been left at the Reykjavik campsite. Although a little slow at lower temperatures ($\sim 2^{\circ}\text{C}$) it warmed up quickly enough when we used the windshield to reflect the heat. We could also fix this problem by using a stove with a hose which keeps the gas pressurized and also means you can turn the cylinder upside down. We used a surprisingly low 500g of gas overall on the expedition.



Aplkit MyTi Mug

Food

Whilst on the hills in Iceland, our daily food that we were carrying in our bags was:

Breakfast 2 sachets of Sainsbury's Express Oats Golden Syrup flavor, which we stirred into hot water.

Running food We each carried 6 Clif bars per day to eat on the go, in varying flavours

Dinner 1 x Mountain House 'Big Pack' Freeze dried meal in varying flavours.

As you can also see from the diary along the way we picked up various treats such as Doritos and chocolate as 'luxury items'!

Food Review

We were lucky enough to be offered a discount by both Mountain House Europe and Clif Bar on their products. In return we have provided photographs and reviews of their products in action in Iceland.

Mountain House Food



Mountain House Big Pack meal in the Askja crater

These were the freeze dried meals that we ate every night for dinner. We used the 'Big Pack' meals instead of the normal sized ones as we reckoned we would be pretty hungry every evening! We have used the meals before on various mountain marathons and camping trips, but not for such an extended period of time.

We found the food very filling, and we were not hungry after the meals. They were very easy to prepare; you just have to boil the water, add it, stir it and wait. We were glad of this ease of preparation after long days on the hill when the weather was bad, and the last thing you want to do is prepare a meal. We also liked the fact that the meals used 'home cupboard' ingredients (we had a lot of time in the tent to read the backs of the packets very carefully!) We also thought the meals had a great calorie-to-weight ratio, and a good range of flavours. We took non-vegetarian meals and we thought there was a really good amount of meat in them.

With regards to the packaging, it was very durable and survived days of wet weather and being squashed into awkward places in our bags. We felt there was a little bit of wastage of packaging on top (the bit that you tear off) that maybe could have saved us some space but it wasn't really an issue. They were easy to tear open, even when wearing gloves, but we thought that it would have benefited from having a bit of red tape like on biscuit packs to help tear in a straight line. We also for the first time noticed that the packets have a stand that you can open at the bottom, although we found this quite fiddly to do. It wasn't really obvious it was there! The food was easy to eat from the packaging apart from the very last bits which were hard to scrape out of the corners. It stayed warm as well.

For particular flavours, we tried Spaghetti Bolognese, Pasta Lasagne Sauce, Chicken Korma, Chicken Tikka, Sweet and sour chicken, Chilli con Carne, and Chicken in Black Bean Sauce.

Spaghetti Bolognese

This was the most filling meal, and tasted great. Exactly what you'd expect from a spag bol! It was definitely the type of food we'd want to rely on if we had had a rubbish day and wanted a big hot meal. It had the most bulky packaging out of all the meals and weighed the most, so we normally used it on the first day of each stage so we didn't have to carry it far. It was also quite hard to stir and seemed to get stuck in the corners of the packaging.

Pasta Lasagne sauce

This meal had a great taste and good calorie to weight ratio. We found that adding the amount of water suggested on the instructions made it quite watery- we tried 500ml instead and that seemed to work much better.

Chicken Korma

Probably our least favourite as we like spicy food and this had the blandest flavor. Excellent calorie to weight ratio though.

Chicken Tikka

Not as spicy as expected but very tasty. It was maybe slightly watery; we again tried adding a little less water (525ml).

Sweet & Sour Chicken

Great tangy taste, spot on flavor. We found it quite salty though and it made us quite thirsty so probably not best for a low-water route.

Chilli con Carne

This had a great spicy kick to the sauce, with a surprising (very good) amount of chilli- kudos! We really enjoyed this one.

Chicken in Black Bean Sauce

This meal had a great flavor, it was nice and peppery. The chicken rehydrated really well and the meal didn't require as much water as the others, making it great for routes where water is scarce. We ate this one in the desert and found you could get away with adding less water than suggested on the instructions as well.

Clif Bars



We loved the Clif Bars! They were really filling, easy to eat and tasted great. We would definitely recommend them for any sort of endurance event.

Packaging: We would have liked there to be some sort of 'easy tear' red tape (like the stuff you get on digestive biscuit packets) to make the packet easier to open. Normally it wasn't an issue but when it was very cold and we had cold fingers or were wearing gloves it became hard to tear open the packet. However it kept the bars dry and intact and didn't seem fazed by being roughly treated and stuffed into crevices and pockets of our bags! Even when rain soaked for 3 days it held out. The colouring on the packets was very helpful when you know what flavor you want to eat, you can see which bar it is straight away.

Bars: The bars held their shape very well when crushed and stuffed into our bags. They were very filling and we thought the portion sizes were excellent. We never felt too hungry with hunger pains and cramps that we have experienced before when using other bars. They were also pretty easy to eat although when it got quite cold (i.e. less than 3°C) they became quite solid and hard to eat. It would be nice if there was a 'cold weather version' for winter use that could stay softer at lower temperatures!

We were also pretty impressed by the amount of vitamins packed into every bar. The bars looked aesthetically really nice and home made rather than factory food. We really liked the nuts in the bars; they added texture, energy and healthiness. We also loved the berries in the Blueberry Crisp bar as we felt the localized flavor packets broke up the monotony of eating oats all day!

Our favourite bar was the Chocolate Almond Fudge as we are both chocoholics, although Blueberry Crisp was a pretty close contender. Our least favourites were White Chocolate Macademia, which although tasted great at first became quite sickly sweet after a while, and Oatmeal Raisin Walnut, because again the flavor was quite intense so it was hard to eat a lot of them over many days.

Comments on Food

Overall, we took too much. This was the opposite of the problem we were expecting to have! We definitely took too many Clif Bars; 3-4 per day would have sufficed. Other than that we had a good choice of food, which was both nutritious and filling. The decision to have a hot porridge breakfast every day was a good one as getting out of the tent into the driving wind and rain to cover 30 miles was quite hard some days. Our

choice of food also meant we only ever needed to heat hot water which meant we didn't need much gas, and we needed only one mug between us. It was also a really good ration size.

We didn't really require the luxury food but the basics chocolate and celebratory Doritos were definitely appreciated! A couple of teabags might also have been a good idea.

One thing we will note is that we experienced quite a lot of flatulence during the expedition. We put this down to the fact that quite a large percentage of our diet was oats. At least we were out in the open...

Food importation

We decided that it would be much cheaper to import all of our freeze dried food and porridge whilst in Iceland. Having looked at the price of buying freeze dried food in Iceland on the Internet, we could see that it was very expensive (it is hard to fly stuff into Iceland). It was much cheaper to pay the import tax.

Having looked at documentation on the government website, we estimated that the import cost would be about £30 for the products we were importing, which contained dried meat. However, arriving at customs to declare, the officer only weighed our suitcase of food and then charged us 50p per kilogram! Definitely worth it!

Travel

We had 2 main areas of travel for our expedition: flights to Iceland and bus travel whilst in Iceland.

Flights

We flew with a company called 'Wow Air' that had very cheap tickets and bright pink planes. They had regular direct flights from London Gatwick to Reykjavik.

The airline was fine and we didn't experience any major problems. However we will note that both on the way there and back the flight was delayed.

From the airport we took a flybus to Reykjavik that could be bought from a booth at the arrivals lounge.

Buses

The main way to travel around Iceland is by bus. Big tour companies (the main ones being Sterna and operate coach travel all around the Island, and tickets are very easy to obtain from any of the tourist information offices in the towns.

However, these are tourist buses that follow routes that stop at all the attractions along the way. We later found out that there is in fact a normal bus company, SBI, that have much cheaper tickets. This company has much less advertising so it is difficult to find out about their tickets.

The buses generally ran on time and were spacious coaches with room for luggage and bikes.

Finances

We had 4 main areas of spending for our expedition:

- Flights
- Equipment
- Expedition food
- Money spent in Iceland (travel, camping, extra food).

We were able to create an accurate budget using information about travel costs and camping fees from online websites, as well as predicted equipment costs. Equipment costs were kept down as a lot of the kit we needed we already owned for mountain marathons.

Below is a budget of our overall expenditure. We were awarded £750 each (total £1500) from the expedition board, and we each also spent just over £400 of our own money.

JACK:

ITEM	PRICE	CLAIMED (Y/N)	TOTAL CLAIM
Tent	£190.00	Y	£190.00
Walking poles	£90.00	Y	£90.00
Leggings	£30.00	N	£0.00
Sawyer	£17.99	N	£0.00
Water pouches	£14.95	Y	£14.95
Sim Card	£85.20	Y	£85.20
Crampons	£141.58	Y	£141.58
Celox	£15.73	Y	£15.73
Transferred to Kr	£400.00	N	£0.00
Maps	£41.97	Y	£41.97
OMM bags	£108.78	Y	£108.78
Import tax	£2.02	N	£0.00
Flights	£254.76	Y	£254.76

TOTAL SPENT			£1,392.98
TOTAL CLAIMED			£942.97
OVERALL EXPENDITURE			£450.01

ELLIE:

ITEM	PRICE	CLAIMED (Y/N)	
Transferred to Kr (claimed)	£325.00	Y	£325.00
Flights	£ 232.32	Y	£232.32
Freeze Dried Food	£ 176.00	N	£0.00
OMM MSC	£ 13.49	N	£0.00
Food box to Askja	£ 29.30	N	£0.00
Map	£12.99	N	£0.00
Money back from ISK	-£26.61	Y	-£26.61
Transferred to Kr (not claimed)	£190.00	N	£0.00
TOTAL SPENT			£952.49
TOTAL CLAIMED			£530.71
OVERALL EXPENDITURE			£421.78

We also have a detailed breakdown of our expenditure whilst in Iceland. We roughly converted 1 GBP to 209 ISK:

ITEM	PRICE (ICELANDIC KR)
Flybus (return to Keflavik)	9000
Campsite (2 nights)	6800
Bonus shopping	1213
Clif bars	31200
Donuts	600
Gas cansiter	1985
Bus tickets (to Myvatn)	23600
Swimming pool	1300
Hot dogs	800
Snacks	398
Bus to Husavik	6000
Bus to trailhead	1600
Asbyrgi camp	2900
Myvatn camp	3000
Dreki camp	6000
Leave suitcase at Reykjavik	6000
Bus Askja-Myvatn	16000
Snacks	508
Myvatn camp (2 nights)	6000
Hot dogs	914
Bus Myvatn- Akueyri	4800
Burgers	3900
Akueyri camp	2500
Icecream	390

Bonus shopping	666
Bonus shopping	875
Akueyri camp	2500
Bus Akueyri-Reykjavik	17600
Bread and butter	570
Bonus shopping	527
Reykjavik campsite	6800
Treats/presents etcin Reykjavik	40000
TOTAL SPENT (ikr)	206946
TOTAL SPENT (gbp)	988.39

Comparing our final budget with that on our original proposal, we spent slightly more money than anticipated on luxury rest day food and treats whilst in Reykjavik. This is something we would make sure to include in future budgets as we didn't think we would need nice things but after 2 weeks of running through cold and rain we decided we did!!!

If we were to consider another fastpacking expedition in the future it would also now be a lot cheaper as we have all possible equipment we could need.

Media

We believe that media is a really important part of modern expeditions. It can really inspire people if they can keep track of the cool things you are doing, and also adds an important safety aspect for keeping in contact with people.

For our expedition we set up a Facebook page, where we posted updates of our training and preparations before the expedition. During the expedition, we sent a satellite phone message back to the UK everyday which was then uploaded onto our Facebook page, along with a location from the Satellite phone, so people could track our progress. This was great in enabling people to keep up with what we were doing whilst in Iceland.

On returning from Iceland we also met up with a journalist from the Imperial Reporter who wrote an article about our expedition and 3 other supported by the board. Hopefully lots of people will see this and be inspired to apply again next year!

Learning Outcomes

This expedition really was about learning, and we both feel that we gained a huge amount of experience and skills from the trip. We feel like we both now have very good knowledge of the logistics of organizing a safe hiking/fastpacking trip to Iceland, and we feel that we have also gained a lot of useful information about fastpacking itself.

Safety

Before setting off we had prepared a very thorough risk assessment for our expedition and had thought very carefully about our safety whilst in Iceland. This included dealing with the remote nature of the expedition, and natural obstacles such as rivers.

With regard to river crossings, we had no major ones on our trip. Beforehand we were debating whether to take rope or walking poles to aid river crossings. After doing some research and consulting with the expedition board, we eventually decided on poles as rope is very dangerous when used incorrectly, and since there were only 2 of us and we are both quite small, if we couldn't cross a river with poles then we wouldn't be crossing it. We both had prior experience of crossing much deeper, faster rivers in Scotland and the Landmannlaugar trail in Iceland, and none on our trip were comparable. This was partly because most of the places we went had very scarce water, but also because at that time of year the snow melt had caused many of the rivers to become huge and completely impassable. For anyone considering a similar expedition we would definitely recommend walking poles over rope.

We also learnt a lot about the safety and rescue system, that we hadn't picked up when doing online research prior to our expedition. We learnt that Iceland has a dedicated 'Safetravel' service which is different from its rescue service, which doesn't seem to be well used in Iceland. Safetravel have rangers in all parts of Iceland to give up to date information on the condition of trails across the country, as well as a dedicated number to call- 112, which is linked to an app. It was odd that they were not deemed the main national rescue service, as they seemed to be the main one.

One really useful thing that we learned was about the ready availability of cell phone reception across the country. Despite the remoteness of our routes, there were not really many times when we were out of signal. However we would always take the Sat phone as it was much more reliable and weatherproof.

An important piece of information we learnt was that despite the remote nature of our expedition, there are now a lot of 4x4 trails all over the country- in fact the only thing physically limits where 4x4s can go is snow, so in the summer they could physically drive all over the country. Even at Dyunjufell, the very remote hut in the desert, the scientists had driven a jeep there. This obviously adds a great deal of assurance to travelling through remote territory in Iceland, provided you can contact somebody.

One thing, however, that wasn't entirely safe about our expedition was the fact that we had no GPS device. Fortunately, the visibility never got bad enough that we couldn't use the large scale map and compass to navigate. However there were several times when we felt that a GPS device would have been helpful, or that if the weather had got any worse we would have needed one.

On a related note, we discovered that the main hiking maps for Iceland, at least for the area that we were covering, were very poor. Although features seemed to be marked correctly, paths and trails were marked on

completely the wrong place on the maps, and some seemed not to be marked at all. This is not particularly helpful when the scale of the map is so big that contours are difficult to read, and the landscape is very featureless. Again, for a future expedition we would take a GPS.

Fastpacking

For the trip, we took a 2-day mountain marathon approach, which means running with a light bag and having enough kit to be completely self-sufficient in the mountains for 36 hours. However, we discovered that this approach isn't entirely sustainable for a multiday self-supported expedition.

Firstly, we discovered that it is much better to be a swift walker for most of the day than a runner, and still cover the same distance. There were a number of reasons for this:

- You are putting less strain on your body and are therefore less likely to be injured
- Swift walking over 30-40 miles dictates a lower water consumption than slow running over the same distance, which was very important, particularly in the desert
- When walking you sweat less than when you run which means you have a cleaner body for a 2 week expedition. Whilst getting very hot and sweaty is ok for 36 hours, with no way of washing anything it is better to be cleaner for 2 weeks
- Swift walking takes less energy expenditure than running, and you are less likely to 'bonk' and get very cold and tired, which is dangerous in such remote territory.
- Most of the ground we were covering was very technical terrain in the lava fields. This was very slow and difficult to run on and there was a high risk of turning an ankle; walking was much easier.

In addition, a multi-day self-supported expedition in remote territory means that you have to carry a lot more kit than you do for a 36 hour mountain marathon, where at most you would only have to spend one night out on the hill. We had to carry a satellite phone, a bigger first aid kit, more food, more layers, spare batteries..etc... all things you wouldn't normally have to think about.

On a related note, since the expedition was for 2 weeks rather than 36 hours, we brought a lot more 'luxury' items than we normally would for a race. For example, for a race we might only take one mug between us which is fine for cooking 2 meals, but would get very tiresome over a long time. We also might normally go without toothbrush and toothpaste for 1 night, and we might only take one half-size roll mat as if your down sleeping bag gets wet or you have a terrible night's sleep, its ok as you're back home the next night!

We also discovered a lot about how much distance per day is feasible on such an expedition. Going into the trip, we had no real knowledge of how much ground we could cover each day. We didn't know how our bodies would adapt to the weight over such a long period of time.

We discovered that on good terrain (i.e paths/trails and not pathless lava fields) it is perfectly feasible to cover 40/50km per day. We were easily able to fit 40km into a day and on the first day we finished 55km at about 11pm having set off after noon. Our bodies easily adapted to travelling over the ground for long periods every day.

On the lava fields, probably about 30-40km is fine. They are quite energy sapping and much more difficult to travel over.

A musing on car culture/'roadification' in Iceland

It seems a shame that whenever we go to one of the cool or nice places in Iceland, someone has built a road there so tourists can drive literally all the way up to it in their jeep, get out, and take a photo, then get straight back in their car and drive off. Most public footpaths or tracks that would have originally been used by shepherds on ponies have been made into F-roads or similar, detracting from the ability to hike in Iceland without seeing any jeeps. The paths/roads also don't seem to be hiking orientated- more for 'purpose', i.e. across the hill instead of it. (They probably originated as shepherd's paths).

Even in a remote place like Askja, where we had hiked for 3 days across very remote territory to get there, when you arrived it was like Clapham Junction with all the jeeps and tourists that had just driven on the road about 50km to the east all the way in. When we went to Krafla, we ran all the way up there from Myvatn, but you can literally drive to within 10m of each 'sight' and then drive between each one (about 300m), so there is literally no walking whatsoever.

It seems that there are very few truly remote places in Iceland left. When in the tourist shop in Akueyri we found a couple of books telling jeeps how to get "off the beaten track" to the huts, where "unfortunately, hikers have priority". Reading the guestbooks in these huts, it was staggering the amount of jeeps that visited compared to hikers, in fact the only place where there weren't jeeps was the one where there was literally no road available to get them there. Even at the remotest hut, Dyunjufell, a jeep turned up with the Cambridge scientists in it.

As hikers and runners, we enjoy the feeling of going somewhere special on our own two feet, and exploring the beautiful places that our feet can take us. So it's kind of annoying when you get there and someone just steps out of a jeep.

The best analogy we can think of is that it's like the train that goes to the top of Snowdon, but all over Iceland. It almost made us think 'What's the point of hiking', as all the beautiful places are just cut through with road.

Overall comments on expedition

Overall we thoroughly enjoyed the expedition. We felt that it really tested us, and we gained some really invaluable skills and experiences.

Iceland is a very beautiful country and it was wonderful to be able to explore it in such a self-sufficient way, carrying with us only what we needed and travelling swiftly and lightly across stunning terrain.

We felt that we worked very well as an expedition team; we had no arguments or fallings out and were able to agree easily on route changes and navigational decisions.

We would definitely undertake a similar trip in the future, and the skills that we have learnt will be crucial in this. It would be good to see if we can go further, faster and lighter- the challenge is never ending.

We have decided that next year we will go somewhere warm on holiday!

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Lorraine Craig and the Imperial College Expedition Board for their brilliant support and advice throughout both the planning and the duration of our expedition. Their help was invaluable and we would not have been able to undertake the expedition without it.

We would also like to thank Mountain House and Clif Bar for their support of the expedition in providing us with a discount on their food products. Food really can make or break an expedition and we were extremely fortunate to have such good quality food to support us!

Finally we would like to thank Will Jones for being our ground person in England during our expedition. He did a fantastic job updating our expedition page every day with sat phone messages and location updates, thanks!

Appendix

Risk Assessment

HAZARD	SEVERITY	LIKELIHOOD	HOW TO MINIMISE
Blisters on feet	High	Low- we run regularly with these shoes, good prevention methods!	Harden up feet beforehand, plenty of tape, deal with blisters straight away. Use appropriate footcare techniques.
River crossings	Medium	Medium	In early July the rivers should not be too big. Move downstream if necessary. Possibility of bringing walking poles/a rope.
Falling into a crevasse/other trouble on glacier crossing	High	Medium	In July the glacier should be easy to cross and it is flat. However we will use Kahtoola crampons to prevent slipping and could consider taking a rope.
Fog	Medium	Low	Both members of the team have good experience navigating in extremely low vis situations. Use compass and map accurately. Carry satellite phone/gps.

Getting lost	Medium	Low	Ensure our navigation is precise. Use a 'primary and secondary navigator' system to ensure we are checking what the other person is doing.
Injury e.g. broken/twisted ankle	High	Low	Use good technique. ICECAR operate a mountain rescue system across the whole of Iceland. They often use landrovers- our route is never more than 1-2 hours drive from a road.
Volcanic eruptions	High	Low	Check at the huts along the way
Bad Weather	Medium	Medium	Check at huts along the way for a weather forecast. Be prepared to stop early/make a diversion to a hut if the weather turns particularly bad. We will be carrying a tent at all times.