

Walking trails in Mýrar

Welcome to Mýrar

The Mýrar region of Austur-Skaftafellssýsla lies between Suðursveit to the west and Nes to the east. Mýrar is one of the old rural districts that united in 1998 to form Sveitarfélagið Hornafjörður (the Municipality of Hornafjörður). The area is a rare treasure for anyone with an interest in glaciers, glacial land formations, geology, birdwatching, nature and outdoor life. There is a wealth of historical sites and relics from bygone ages. Access to the glaciers is in places easier and nowhere else in Iceland have people lived in such close proximity to and their lives been so inextricably linked with the glaciers as in the narrow strip of land under the southern margins of Vatnajökull. Discounting the highlands at the edge of the ice cap, the landscape of Mýrar is broad, open and quite flat – the name means "bogs" or "marshes". The farmsteads reflect the people's continual struggle with the glacial waters: nearly all are set on low hills standing up above the lowlands. The region offers a wide variety of walking routes in a range of landscapes, from seashore to mountain. The flatness of the countryside means that the tracks leading off the main highway are well suited to cycling and we recommend this as a means of exploring the region.

Route descriptions

1. Hjallanes

Start: Skálafell farmyard **Distance:** 7 km, about 2-3 hrs **Climb:** 120 m **Route:** Start east along the hay meadows. At the bottom of the meadow there is a "witch's grave" (völvaheiti). A little to the east you can see an old stone table of rock and turf, used for washing wool. Keep on past the Kistugil ravine and up the terraced hillside of Hjallanes to the top of Kistugil. Then turn east to the edge of the Skálafelljökull glacier, which at one time merged with Heinebergsvötn, with Hafrafell standing up in the middle. This part of the route is marked with posts and information boards are planned. There is a rich and varied bird life. Carry on under the tongue of the glacier for about a kilometre right down to where the river Kolgríma emerges. Here you can see clearly how the glacier has ground and scraped the rock and the direction it has moved. **Do not go too close to the glacier: there is ice under the glacial debris some way out from the edge of the glacier which can create deep and dangerous holes when it melts.** Farther down Kolgríma there is a quarry for porphyritic basalt, used in building the sea walls at the mouth of Hornafjörður. Follow down along Kolgríma across the grassy slopes under the terraces and back to the farm.



2. Skálafell – Káravatn

Start: Skálafell farmyard **Distance:** 9 km **Climb:** 440 m **Route:** Quite easy route, though with a fair climb. Go east along the hay meadows and up to Hjallanes (see route 1). From here, continue on up the slopes of Skálafellshnúta with the Svartugil ravine on your left, and on to lake Káravatn (see places of interest on the Suðursveit map). From here, return by the same route or by route 2 on the Suðursveit map.

3. Skálafell – Skálafellssel

Start: Skálafell farmyard **Distance:** 4 km, about 1 hr **Climb:** none **Route:** Follow the track west along the hillside and over the grassy ridge of Háaleiti to the ruins of the abandoned farm at Skálafellssel. Return either by the same route or continue as for route 1 on the Suðursveit map to the generating station at Smyrlabjargá and then down the river to route 4 at Gleyphuáran.



4. Gleyphuáran – Smyrlabjargá generating plant

Start: Highway 1, just west of Skálafell **Distance:** 2 km **Climb:** none **Route:** A nice, easy walk, suitable for all. Gleyphuáran is an attractive rocky knoll in an area of reed pools south of the farm at Skálafell. Go west along the track by the power lines. A short walk brings you to a large stone arch, wide enough for four people to ride through abreast. The rocky lavas to the east of the arch are called Kambulinnur. North of the arch are the remains of an old sheep pen called Gleysy where ewes were once herded for milking. If you want to continue, follow along the river Smyrlabjargá to the generating plant (see route 1 on the Suðursveit map) and from there by route 3 back to Skálafell.



5. Austurland – short route

Start: Highway 1, just east of Kolgríma river **Distance:** 2.5 km, about 1 hr **Climb:** slight **Route:** Follow the path marked by posts along the Austurland lavafield. Along the way you can see relics of bygone farming methods, e.g. an old drystone sheep pen and a cave that was used as a sheepshouse. Past the cave, go up the rocks to the beautiful, hidden lake of Hellvatn. Then follow down along the banks of Kolgríma to your starting point. This route can be taken in either direction.

6. Austurland – long route

Start: Highway 1, just east of Kolgríma river **Distance:** 8 km, about 3-4 hrs **Climb:** slight **Route:** Follow route 5 east under the rocks of the Austurland lavafield, with its attractive geological formations and remains of old farm buildings. Turn left up onto the grassy ridge of Ásar, with Háfína, the eastmost crag of Austurland, to your right. This is the boundary between Suðursveit and Mýrar. Just north of Háfína is the old Heinebergsvötn bridge. Then turn west to Kolgríma and then back down the river to your starting point. The route is partly marked by posts.

7. Heinebergsvötn – Heinebergsvötn bridge

Start: Heinebergsvötn **Distance:** 8 km, 2-3 hrs **Climb:** none **Route:** Turn off Highway 1 west of Flatey and drive up the track to the car park at the Heinebergsvötn meltwater lake, which often has icebergs floating on it. Set off southwest around the lake to the point where Kolgríma flows out of it. Follow down along the high banks of the river until you come to the Austurland lavafield, then east to the Heinebergsvötn bridge. Or you can start your walk from the Heinebergsvötn bridge.

8. Heinebergsvötn – Síta – Bólstaðir – Heinar

Start: Heinebergsvötn or Heinar **Distance:** 5 km **Climb:** easy **Route:** Drive up to the car park at Heinebergsvötn as for route 7. Set off more or less due north to Síta, a ice-smoothed shelf of rock that until around 1880 lay under the glacier that then cut off the Heinebergsvötn valley. From the top of Síta there is a good view over the lake and the glacial debris and up into the valley. From here head east along the slopes of the Bólstaðarfoss waterfall. If you want you can continue along the mountainside to the western tongue of the Fláajökull glacier (route 8a), where you can see an impressive line of crags with distinct volcanic dykes and, on the other side of the river, the hill Miðfell with its varied formations of columnar basalt. **You are advised not to wade the river: retrace your steps to the waterfall.** Now head south to Heinar, which are some beautiful crags of basalt columns lying horizontally and difficult to see from a distance. Return southwest over the river muds and gravels to your starting point at the lake. The rocks in the mudflats show an attractive variety of colours from the lichens growing on them, known as *heilasettur* and *grautarkleimur* (brain spatters and porridge splashes).

9. Heinebergsvötn – Heinebergsvötn

Start: Heinebergsvötn **Distance:** 12-20 km, a good day's walk **Climb:** 350 m **Route:** By car as for routes 7 and 8 to the Heinebergsvötn car park. From here there are two possible routes to up to Heinebergsvötn, the ridge that forms a natural dam across the valley and from which there is a stunning view over Vatnadalur. One follows the track to the west side of Heinebergsvötn to the middle of the valley, and then along sheep tracks up to the ridge. A prettier, but harder, route is to go up to Sáta (see route 8), then down into the valley and wading the river, which is easy to cross lower down the valley. Then follow the track as described above. On the way there are beautiful waterfalls, ravines and volcanic intrusions, and flood deposits that reveal the former surface level of the lake. You can often see reindeer in this area.

10. Old Heineberg – New Heineberg

Start: West side of Heinebergsvötn **Distance:** 2-6 km **Climb:** none **Route:** Drive east along the track by the power lines north of the Flatey land reclamation meadows as far as Heinebergsvötn, a belt of rocks to the west of the river Hólmá. This is the original site of the Heineberg farm, the remains of which can still be seen. In 1890 the farm was moved up under the hill Heinebergsvötn until it was abandoned in 1934. You can continue along the rocks all the way east to Hólmá; here you get a graphic view of the huge quantities of sand and gravel carried down by the streams of Heinebergsvötn over the centuries and deposited on the lowlands. Return by the same route, or, if you want to go further, turn northwest along the track across Hellranes to the new farmstead under Heinebergsvötn (route 10a). Try to imagine the lives of the people in days gone by who had to move their farms from one piece of raised ground to another to avoid the encroachment of the glacial streams.

11. Heinebergsvötn – Heinebergsvötn

Start: Picnic place at Heinebergsvötn **Distance:** 4 km **Climb:** 100 m **Route:** Turn off Highway 1 west of Flatey and leave your car at the parking place at Heinebergsvötn. The ridge is full of beautiful rock formations which are particularly striking in places where the water has cascaded over the rocks, sweeping away all the vegetation. Go up to the top and head north over the muds and gravel and up the rocky terraces at the western end of Heinebergsvötn. From the hilltop there is a fine view to the site of Heinebergsvötn and the surrounding mountains, as well as south over this hard region of sands and water. Before descending at the eastern end of the hill it is worth doing a detour northeast, where you can see several roches moutonnées and, on the other side of the river, the hill Miðfell with its variety of basalt columns. Go down to the ruins of the "New Heineberg" farm, abandoned in 1934, and from there west under the rocks to your starting point, or follow route 10a south to Old Heineberg. From the western end of Heinebergsvötn you can also go to Heinar (11a) and from there to the waterfall at Bólstaðir (see route 8).

12. Eskey

Start: Picnic site west of Hólmá **Distance:** 1.5 km, a good hour's walk **Climb:** light **Route:** Go through the gate up onto Eskey, the low hill that once stood as an island above the marshes. From the top there is a fine view, with information boards describing the geology of the area, the glaciers and glacial outbursts. Nearby stand the remains of the old farm. Head south over the "island" and down the gap that was once the approach to the farm. Then turn west under the south face of the rocks; up under the high rocks to your starting point, or follow route 10a south to Old Heineberg. This is an area where polar bears have come to land, as the low hill Bjarnýrshóll (Bear Hill) across the river suggests. The route is marked with posts.

13. Bakki – Keldholt

Start: Miðjóm **Distance:** 6 km **Climb:** none **Route:** Miðjóm is a rocky knoll by the track leading south to the sea (see route 14). From here, make your way to the abandoned farm of Bakki, and from there out to the marshes and islands and then east along the margins. Turn north up past the low, flat-topped knolls of Keldholt and from there back to Miðjóm. This is a unique area of wetlands with a rich bird life.

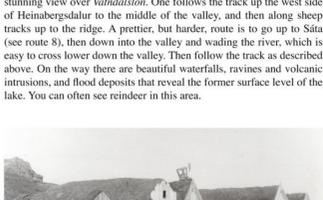
14. Skinneyjarvík

Start: Route 1 at Hellishóll **Distance:** as you please **Climb:** none **Route:** Take the track south to the sea along the east side of Hólmá. On the way you cross a rocky hill named Skinney (Skin Island) that was once a major farm. The mouth of the river moved in autumn 2002 and the high rock on the shore now to the west of the river is called Skinneyjarhöfði; there was a commercial fishing station here until as late as 1960. Take an easy stroll along the shore and enjoy its richness and variety of nature: you have every chance of seeing an inquisitive seal popping its head out of the water to take a look at you. **Do not go too close to the banks of Hólmá: the soil is loose and undercut by the current.**



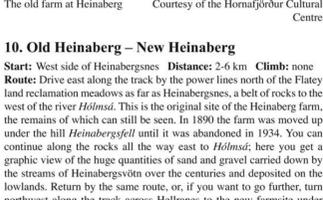
15. Melangi – Hvanney lighthouse

Start: Melangi **Distance:** 7 km **Climb:** none **Route:** Start as for route 14, but keep on along the spit right to the end. **Do not stray off the track.** At Melangi there are relics from the war years – buildings, a jetty and an airstrip. There are also the wrecks of several ships that have gone down while navigating the tricky entry to the ford. Continue east on foot to the Hvanneyjarlettur rocks and the lighthouse and observe the strong currents in the sea approaches. From here you can see the port of Höfn from a new perspective. **Take special care when climbing the rocks: they can be wet and slippery.**



16. Hólmur – Fláajökull

Start: Hólmur **Distance:** 6 km, light walking on even ground **Climb:** none **Route:** From the farmyard at Hólmur, take the old track leading north towards the glacier. Keeping to the west of the rocky knoll called Gervishóll, follow along the little stream to Hólmásvandur, where there used to be large land reclamation meadows. Keep on the track as far as the fence and from there north with the stream on your right to its source at the northern end of the fence. From here there is a path marked with cairns leading to the Óldur nature trail (route 20). Follow the trail to the lake at the head of Fláajökull. Here you can choose whether to turn east towards Fláajökull (route 21) or west along the nature trail over the high moraines to rejoin the path which you came and so back to Hólmur. This route offers a rich bird life and a chance to see the ever-changing state of the glacier at different times.



17. Brunnhöll – Fláajökull

Start: The main road at the Brunnhólsá river **Distance:** 6 km, easy walking **Climb:** none **Route:** Follow the track that leads across the Árber and Einholt land reclamation meadows. Just before the Hólögóm stream you can make a detour to Þingskálahlönd (route 18). Otherwise, keep on to the gate in the fence. Cross the heath along the banks of Hleypiklettur, over the Óldur moraines, to the meltwater lake at the head of Fláajökull. The route offers a rich bird life. To shorten the route you can drive up as far as sand cultivation meadows.

18. Brunnhöll – Þingskálahlönd (Þingskálahlönd)

Start: The main road at the Brunnhólsá river **Distance:** 3 km **Climb:** negligible **Route:** Follow the track across the Árber and Einholt land reclamation meadows. Just before the Hólögóm stream turn west to the line of rocks called Þingskálahlönd, from where there is a good view over the local lowlands. You can also drive up to the sand cultivation meadows and start your walk from there. Various local places such as Þingbrekka (Assembly Slope), Drekkingsgarður (Drowning Pool) and Gálgaklettur (Gallows Rock) point to this once having been an assembly site.

19. Óldur – Baulutjörnn

Start: At the start of the glacier moraines **Distance:** 8 km **Climb:** none **Route:** Take the track that leads in towards Fláajökull as far as the start of the Óldur moraines. Leave your car and follow the clearly marked path across the moraines to the stream Hleypiklettur. Continue across the heathland to the land reclamation meadows and on down the east bank of Hleypiklettur and then Djúpi, coming out on the main road just east of Baulutjörnn. In spring and summer the heaths are alive with birds. **There can be wet patches along much of the route and you have to pick your way across. Hotakki, the little brook that runs out of Baulutjörnn.**

20. Fláajökull – nature trail on the story of the glacier

Start: Fláajökull car park **Distance:** About one hour **Climb:** none **Route:** Take the track up to Fláajökull and leave your car at the car park (with visitors' bus). The route is marked with cairns and there are boards along the way telling you about the advance and retreat of the glacier. Follow the path to the flood wall from 1937 and from there west to the river Hólmá. Here you can see the channel that was dug by hand in 1937 to redirect the waters, now much widened. Keep on to the remains of the huts built for the workmen at the time. From here, head east over the glacial moraines, where you can see the old channel and a peculiar erratic boulder, then on to the end of the impressive flood wall built in 2002. Finally turn west across the high moraines back to your starting point. From the top of the moraines there is a fine view over the recently formed lake at the head of the glacier. You can clearly see in the moraines how far south the glacier extended at its maximum around 1880 at the end of the "little ice age".



21. Glacial moraines – Fláfall – Fláajökull

Start: As for route 20, or at the eastern end of the flood wall **Distance:** 3-5 km **Climb:** none **Route:** Take the track up to Fláajökull and then east to the end of the flood wall built in 2002. Start your walk across the glacial moraines in the direction of Fláfall and in under the mountain right up to the tongue of the glacier. The lower slopes of Fláfall here are marked with striking rock formations, recently exposed by the retreating glacier, plucked and smoothed by the glacier and bare of all vegetation. There are textbook examples of glaciological features such as glacial drift, drumlins and moraines, and of the distinctive development of vegetation along the margins of the ice. **Do not go onto the wet areas at the edge of the glacier.** The route is marked with cairns and information signs are planned.

22. Glacial moraines – Sinuhjallur

Start: Car park at the eastern end of the flood barrier **Distance:** 3 km **Climb:** 180 m **Route:** Follow route 21 across the glacial moraines in the direction of Fláfall. Where the path divides, keep on east under Hausar, the grassy slopes at the bottom of Fláfall. Go a short way along the east side of Fláfall and then up the Sinuhjallur terraces, from where there is a spectacular view over Fláajökull, the meltwater lake at its end, and the whole of Hornafjörður. The east face of Fláfall is marked by gullies and cavities cut by water which turn into surging torrents in wet weather. The route is very rocky but not hard, except the part up Sinuhjallur, which is fairly challenging.

23. Haukafell – nature trail

Start: Campsite service centre **Distance:** 2.5 km **Climb:** 80 m **Route:** Cross the campsite and go up to the ruins of the old farm. Then turn east through the wood and along the river to the waterfall at Hálsdalsá, which is a good bathing place on hot days. Climb the slope by the falls and go on along the crest of the rocks, from where there is a fine view. Continue northwest over the Klamýri bog and then back south again, then west onto the point of rocks at the Kalgrafaraldá river. From here make your way back to the service centre. You can make various short detours, or take a shorter route. The route is fairly easy but some of the slopes can be challenging for those not used to hill walking. It is marked by posts and there are information boards along the way.

24. Haukafell

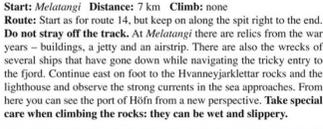
Start: Campsite service centre **Distance:** 3 km **Climb:** 110 m **Route:** Start as for route 23. At the top of Fossbrekka, the slope by the falls, turn north off route 23 and on to the rounded knoll known as Djúpdalsháms, then west to rejoin route 23 west of the Klamýri marsh. This is a rather tougher route than 23 but gives a better view of the Mýrar lowlands and up the Kalgrafaraldá valley. The route is marked with posts and there are information boards along the way.

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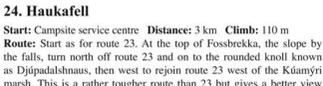
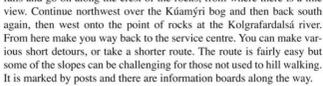
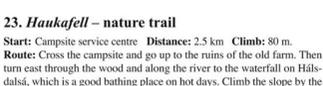
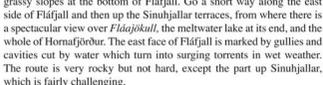
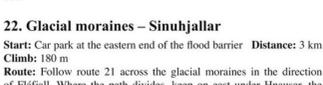
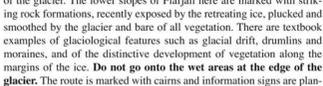
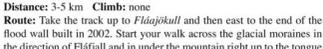
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Places of interest in Mýrar and the east of Suðursveit

Baulutjörnn (route 19)

Pond north of the farm Tjóm, just west of Hornafjörður. It is a designated site of special natural interest for its unusually rich nature and bird life. It is said that the pond contains a "nicker" or water monster, and thundering sounds, like the roaring of a bull, can often be heard coming from it, especially before bad weather. The story goes that one day the men of Höll had slaughtered a bull. In those times, blood was taken warm from slaughtered animals, heated over a fire without boiling, and mixed with raisins, sugar, cinnamon and other goodies to make a blood pudding. This was considered a rare delicacy. The men were called in for their treat with the bull still only half skinned. They went off but left behind a boy, who saw a sparrow fly down and go into the body of the bull where the men had cut off its head. At this point the carcass began to



The roots of Vatnajökull

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