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Hiking Trails

The Hengill area is an ideal recreational area that can be enjoyed the year round. It offers most of the features of Iceland's natural beauty; interesting landscapes, geothermal areas with hot springs and craters, diverse vegetation, rivers and lakes. Since 1991, Reykjavik Energy has marked interesting hiking trails, put up information signs, built a hiking lodge and has published a hiking map.

Geology and landscape

The Hengill area is in the middle of Iceland's western volcanic belt, which stretches from the Reykjanes Peninsula to the Langjökull Glacier. The bedrock is mostly palagonite, formed by eruptions under the ice cap during the last Ice Age. On the Grafningur side of the area there are a series of palagonite ridges that run along a fault line, from northeast to southwest, into Lake Þingvallavatn.

The Hengill volcanic area can be separated into three volcanic systems. Hengill, itself is the youngest of the three, followed by the Hrómundartindur system and lastly, the Hveragerði system. Since the Ice Age, there have been four or five known fissure eruptions in the area. The last eruption occurred approximately 2000 years ago, along a 30 km fissure, reaching from Þrengslí, through Hellisheiði and Innstidalur Valley to Sandey Island in Lake Þingvallavatn. Lava flowed into Hellisheiði, Nesjahraun and into the Grafningur area.

The Hengill System was last active in 1789 when a strip of land in the fissure belt, running over the Dyrafjöll Mountains and Hestvík, and north through Lake Þingvallavatn, between Almangjá and Hrafnagjá, split and subsided by approximately one to two metres.

Hot springs and pools can be found in all of the volcanic systems although they are most commonly found in the Hengill System. The most famous hot spring areas are in the Reykjadalur Valley, Ölkelduháls above Nesjavellir and in the Innstidalur Valley.

Vegetation

Before the settlement of Iceland, there were birch forests in the area with diverse undergrowth reaching up to 300-400 meters above sea level. Above that point, low growing mountain vegetation took over and covered the area to a height of 500-600 metres. The vegetation was later affected by the settlement of the land, the cooling climate and the utilization of the forest.

Today the area is covered by low growing, twisted scrub birch that can reach a height of 2 metres and can be found in demarcated areas above Lake Þingvallavatn.

The vegetation in the area is diverse, but grass cover is characteristic and by far the most extensive. There are many types of barren soil in the area, but the most prominent stretches are in Grafningur.

The land in Ölfus is rich in grassland, but rarely covers large, contiguous areas. The largest lowland wetlands are at Lake Þingvallavatn, Króksmýri and Dælur, east of the Úlfjótshálsfjall Mountain. In addition, there are marshy areas in close proximity to the ponds and brooks in the area. There is a sizeable and diverse marsh in the Fremstidalur Valley. Marsh sedge is the prevalent type of grass found there.

Sparse, open-area vegetation grows on gravelly expanses, but there are many varieties. Thrift, moss campion, northern fescue, creeping thyme, alpine mouse-ear, seaside campion and mountain avens are just some of the varieties found in the area. On Nesjahraun there is a solid cover of woolly fringe moss, which is a colonizing plant for lava. The moss form soil for other plant varieties, and crowberry, bog whortleberry, northern fescue, alpine bistort, three-leaved rush, red fescue, Icelandic bedstraw, broad-leaved willow all thrive there.

Soil reclamation and forestation

Since 1989, Reykjavik Energy has carried out extensive land reclamation and reforestation of their land. The emphasis is on restoring vegetation in disrupted areas and utilising the vegetation already present in the area. Methods include the collection and scattering of seed, the planting of moss and the collection of willow seedlings from the area

for planting purposes. A great deal of work has been carried out in areas affected by the Hellisheiði Power Plant. This type of land reclamation has been carried out in the past, in the Nesjavellir area. The Scouts and other organisations have also been involved in the successful reforestation of the area.

Nesjavellir and Hellisheiði Power Plants

Hengill is one of the largest geothermal areas in the country, covering a total area of approximately 100 km². It is believed that the temperature at a depth of 1 km can reach between 250°C-300°C.

Nesjavellir is the first geothermal power plant built by Reykjavik Energy. Nesjavellir geothermal plant generates electricity and hot water by utilizing geothermal water and steam. Production capacity is 120 MW of electricity and 300 MW of thermal energy (1800 litres per second).

The Hellisheiði Power Plant powerhouse is located just by Kolviðarhöll. Production capacity is 303 MW of electricity and 133 MW of thermal energy. The thermal energy capacity could be increased by 300MW.

Services

Reykjavik Energy owns a hiking lodge in the Hengill area. The lodge is located in the Engidalur Valley in the easternmost part of Mosfellsheiði. The shelter,

which is open to everyone, provides a safe haven for hikers. For more information on the lodge please go to our webpage: www.or.is.

Safety

The mountainous part of Hengill is a high-temperature geothermal area with an abundance of boiling springs and hot pools. Use extreme caution at these sites. Also, exercise care when going along narrow trails, steep slide areas or areas where there is a risk of falling rocks. Always carry a map, compass or other positioning device. You should not hike alone, and remember to check the weather forecast.

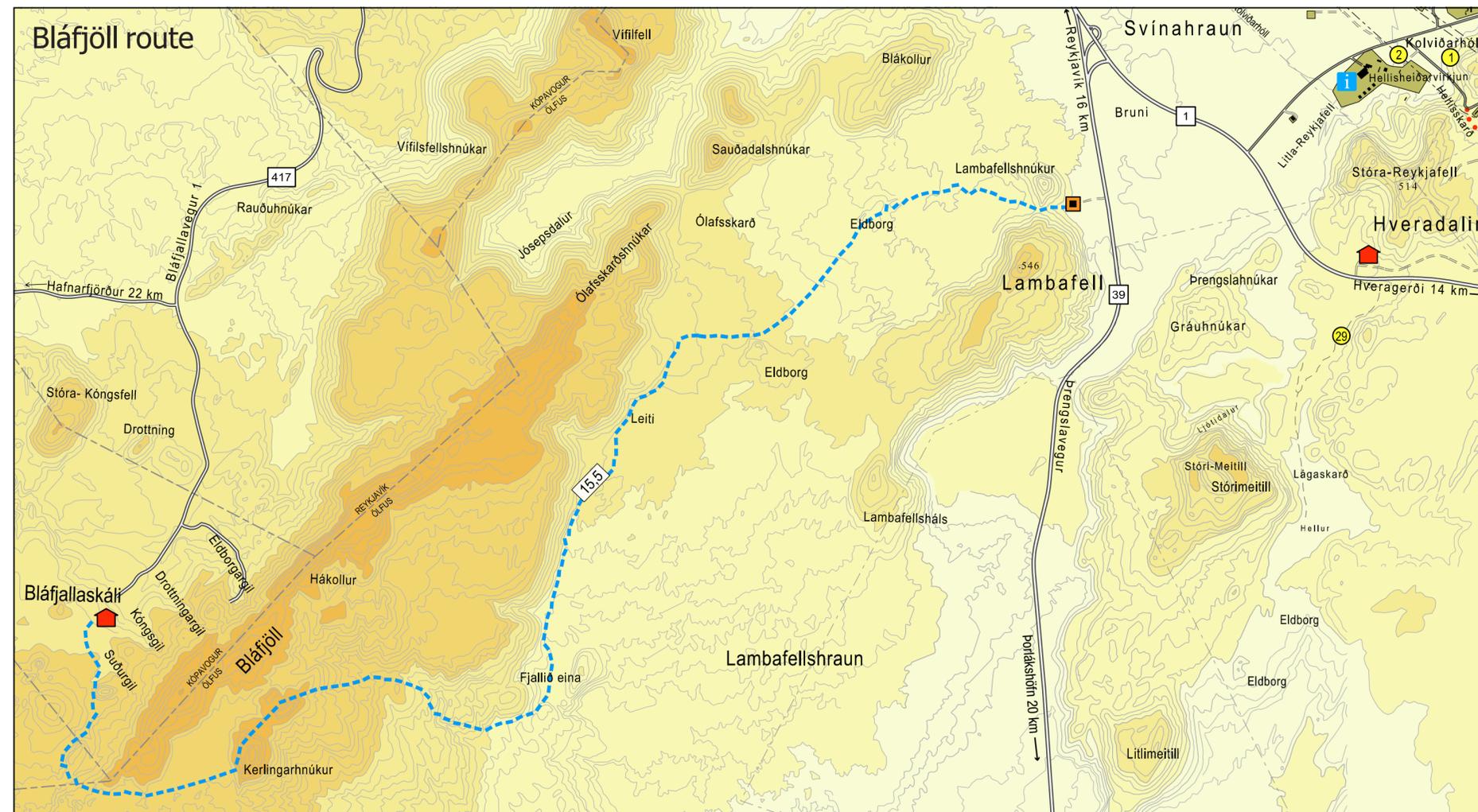
If you feel unsure; please turn back. There are public telephones at service centres in the area.

The Hellisheiði and Nesjavellir sites can be dangerous and there are a number of factors that must be taken into consideration when exploring the areas. Hydrogen sulphide is present in geothermal steam and in concentrated amounts that can be harmful to health. The drilling sites are not accessible to the public and great care should be taken when driving in the area (especially in snow) with regard to manmade structures and steam pipes.

Please remember that you are in the area at your own risk.



Hiking Trails in the Hengill area



The Emergency Call Number is **112** anywhere in Iceland

Other considerations

- Never drive off-road.
- Do not destroy or spoil vegetation.
- Do not disturb animals.
- Keep dogs leashed.
- Do not light fires.
- Do not litter.
- Do not build rock markers.
- Do not put graffiti on natural formations.
- Do not pollute hot springs and pools.
- Camp only in marked camping areas.