

# The Circle Route - a hiking route around Kerlingarfjöll

The Kerlingarfjöll mountain massif is one of Iceland's natural treasures, an area in which magnificent landscapes, varied and interesting geology and a combination of glaciers and geothermal areas, vegetation and desert result in a highly unusually colorful and striking nature.

From 2010 the new option of hiking in a circle around, or partly through, the mountain massif has been introduced, thus giving hikers the opportunity to fully enjoy the beauty of the area. Work on marking this three day route has been undertaken and two small huts on the way are now available for overnight - Klakkur hut, in the massifs' south-east part, and Kisubotnar hut in the north-east.

The Circle Route hike can be made, and is equally enjoyable, in either direction - clockwise or counter-clockwise. It is here described as hiked counter-clockwise and is then divided into the following day-stretches:

- Ásgarður – Klakkskáli (Klakkskáli = the hut at Klakkur)
- Klakkskáli – Kisubotnaskáli (Kisubotnaskáli = the hut at Kisubotnar)
- Kisubotnaskáli - Ásgarður

As can be seen from the map, the route offers a comprehensive three day tour around Kerlingarfjöll, that passes through the large geothermal areas with countless fumarals, where bathing is possible in a hot spring and, at points, it rises up to several higher mountain passes with vast views of the Icelandic central highlands. An easier variation could also be to, on day one, hike to the south of Ögmundur mountain, past Kerling rock.



The route has been partly marked - GPS points can also be attained from the Kerlingarfjöll Highland Centre.

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### Day 1 - Ásgarður to Klakkur

Starting from the Highland Centre in Ásgarður, the marked trail, in direction south-west on the hills west of Ásgarður canyon, is followed to a pass between Hveradalahnúkur and Mænir. Before the ascent a small valley is crossed, and thereafter the trail lies on the eastern part of the pass up to its top. Below is a canyon where the receding snow has formed icecaves which are likely to vanish in the coming years. At the pass itself views of Kjölur and to the north open up.

A short way from there the trail winds by the large fumaral Snorrahver, down along a ridge and, in ca. 5.2 km from the beginning of the hike, leads to a warm pool by Ásgarðsá at the bottom of Hveradalir. From the pool the river is crossed by bridge and then followed to the next bridge. Crossing the river again, the marked trail passes more fumarals, heading towards the microglacier Langafönn. As can be seen from the picture, the route then winds past Langafönn and up to Kerlingarskyggni, where wide views can be enjoyed before moving on to the roots of Mænir mountain.



Onwards from there, a small riverbed is trailed down towards Hverabotn, a uniquely beautiful geothermal area, and the site of the highest measured surface temperature in Iceland, at over 140° celcius. After leaving Hverabotn, the route trails west through Sléttaskarð pass, on the hills of Höttur mountain and up through the pass between Höttur and Mænir. A view of the central highlands, from Bláfell in the south to glacier Tungnafellsjökull in the north-east, opens up.

From this pass, through a small valley south of Röðull mountain, the course is taken on Klakkur. From thereon the hike crosses fairly smooth terrain, until shortly before reaching the hill Grákollur, it passes by a striking canyon, cut out by the river Kerlingará throughout the centuries, By crossing the canyon at the north-west corner of Grákollur and passing between the two mountains, the hut in Klakkur is reached.

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### Day 2: Klakkur - Kisubotnar

Although the second day-stretch, between Klakkur and Kisubotnar, is short, it is highly interesting for both the wider views and nature close at hand. The first part of the days' trail goes on the side of Klakkur mountain and then along a canyon in the area where the land is lowest between Draugafell and Rauðkollur hills. The canyon is a curious sight, as it is cut apart in highly unusual ways. From there the path trails between Draugafell, Kisubotnahnjúkur and Rauðkollur taking direct course at Kisubotnahnjúkur. On a clear day hiking to the top of Draugafell or the western Rauðkollur hill can be an fitting option. Approaching Kisubotnahnjúkur then, the trail passes by Kisubotnagljúfur, a spectacular canyon for both its depth and color. The canyon is followed until reaching lower Kisubotnar where the hut awaits.



### Day 3 - Kisubotnar - Ásgarður

Starting at the Kisubotnar hut on day three, the trail leads towards river Kisa which it then follows, on the western bank, right up to its source. In the spot where upper and lower Kisubotnar unite, in the lowest part of upper Kisubotnar, interesting sprouting springs can be explored. From then on the trail lies on the eastern bank of the river, which grows ever smaller, becoming clearer as the water decreases.

From the watershed, it is only a very short way to the uppermost branches of the river in Mosdalur. Ahead, the trail lies between Mosdalskambur and Illahraun lavafield, up to Tröllakambur with mountains Loðmundur, Snækollur and Fannborg towering over. The area is delimited by mountains and hills, Þverfell in the east, Hofsjökull glacier to the back, Blágnýpa and Ásgarðsfjall in front.

The trail then soon merges with a jeep track, which is followed until a marked hiking route diverges from it, a trail which lies across creek Kerlingarspræna up to Keis and along the shortest way to Ásgarður, where the circle is closed.

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## The route in numbers

The Circle Route around Kerlingarfjöll, as here described, amounts to a circa 47 km hike. Below are statistics for the stages, day by day and for comparison, the same figures for Laugavegurinn hiking route are shown. The route was measured with Garmin equipment - meant for public use rather than land surveying - therefore the numbers should be seen as approximate.

The day trail starts at:	Ásgarður	Klakkur	Kisubotnar	Totals
The day trail ends at:	Klakkur	Kisubotnar	Ásgarður	
Distance - KM	19,59	9,04	17,35	45,98
Altitude – at starting point	708	852	710	
Altitude - at end	852	710	708	
Total ascent M	1.117	213	418	1748
Total descent M	980	348	420	1748

## Altitude profile:

