

Season 1 – Part 3. Iceland.



Th 30.7.2015, day 18. Arrival in Sedisfjodur, first day in Iceland!

Even though Sedisfjodur is probably quite a nice place, we didn't even take the short detour to visit the center. We knew the first hill over the pass to Egilstadir is quite challenging and this was our first focus. So after the obligatory Coke Zero, off we pedaled. The road runs up along the river in the foot of the fjord. We soon caught up two young Germans, one on a Packfiets, the other on a 5-speed bike. They were having a very hard time getting their bikes up the hill. What a choice of bikes for Iceland!

Close to the top of the pass there is a lake. It was still half frozen with big lumps of bright blue ice piled over each other. Really nice! After a very fast and also very cold ride down the hill on the other side to Egilstadir we took a bee-line for a café to get warm. After burger and pizza, Siria went shopping for provisions for the next couple of days, also bought a gas cooker as back-up for the petrol burner and filled the fuel bottle at the gas station taking ½ a liter from a poor Japanese girl, who was filling up her rental and had no idea what I was doing. Then rode up along the N1, took a small unpaved parallel road and finally found a place to pitch the tent. Cooked a wonderful Potato soup, filtered water and crawled off to bed well after midnight. In fact it was already getting bright again.





Fr 31.7.2015 day 19. Tough ride up the back lanes.

Got up quite late, had a wonderful Müesli breakfast and continued on the gravel road. Average speed was below 10 km/h, with wind in our face and the road mostly going up and down. In the early afternoon we arrived in a funny hotel/restaurant. Had a very nice soup and round the back there was a swimming pool, complete with very hot hot-tub and shower. Everything completely free. Very very nice indeed on a day like this!!

In the afternoon we continued the hard ride along the gravel roads, with constant head wind and later even a bit of rain. Finally pitched the tent on a wonderful soft green patch of grass right beside a river. We biked only 38 km, but it felt like much much more...



Sa 1.8.2015, day 20. SWISS NATIONAL DAY and an incredible day in Iceland!!

After almost 12h of sleep, we got up, made our obligatory "Müesli" and continued on the tough dirt road not knowing what to expect of the day. After a steep hill we dropped down onto a completely flat lava field, crossed this and then climbed a steep hill up to 660 m. The view from the top was stunning! A flat landscape dotted with perfectly cone shaped volcanoes. A very friendly elderly German couple invited us into their VW T5 for coffee and some very nice cakes.

We continued on to the Mödrudalur, highly praised by Lonely Planet and had a moss soup and lamb soup. Not bad, but over-priced and 500 Kr for internet, but yes, the gas station IS cute!

After that we were blessed with tail winds that blew us all the way to Myvatn through incredible scenery. Just at the foot of the last hill before Myvatn lake we visited the fumarole field Hverir. Really quite fascinating experiencing such a phenomenon at first hand, with the smell, the noise and the heat. I finally understood why mud-pots are mud-pots: the sulfuric acid simply dissolves the rock leaving behind the insoluble residue which is Kaolinite. Simple! Exactly like normal erosion, just much much faster.

Then, with our last energy reserves we climbed the last hill and came down to the steaming other-worldly Myvatn valley shortly before sunset. We headed straight for the natural thermal baths and soaked in the azure blue steaming hot pool, sipping Viking beer almost 'till midnight. Divine!





















Su 2.8.2015, day 21. Relaxing in Myvatn.

We spent two nights on a very scenic campsite right on the shore of Myvatn lake doing what is sometimes necessary: washing dishes, washing clothes, checking bikes, getting all our stuff back into order. In the afternoon we took a very nice stroll up Hverfjall volcano.













Mo 3.8.2015, day 22. Tough ride against the wind.

Got up at 9am and spent almost 3 h packing up the bags and tent, having breakfast, doing some shopping before finally getting on the road direction the second largest town in Iceland: Akureyri.

The wind was in our faces all the way and going was very tough with some nasty hills to boot.

Just before Akureyri there is a dirt road that goes over a 540 m hill that can be used as alternative to the main N1 that makes a 35 km loop. Siria was already exhausted at the bottom from the constant head wind. We still decided to start climbing the hill. As we gradually climbed we realized that there must be a wonderful sunset right on the other side. Our pace increased until we were almost racing up the hill in the hope to catch the sunset. And we made it! Just as we reached the top of the hill the sun slowly touched the mountains on the far side of the fjord. We pitched our tents on a flat spot just beside the road and cooked a delicious vegetable soup that we eat under our sleeping bags with the icy wind whistling round the tent. As I went out to brush my teeth close to midnight the sky was still glowing red. What a spectacular end to the day!









Tu 4.8.2015, day 23. A day in the city.

We woke up at 9AM and 40 min later were all packed up and on our way. Temperature on the top of the hill was a cold 5°C and still windy. We biked down the dirt road wearing almost everything we had. As we dropped the temperature slowly rose reaching almost 10°C at sea level. We biked straight to the Akuyeri campsite and pitched the tent just before it started to rain. After the obligatory Müsli we went off to the local swimming pool for a good hot shower and sit in the hot tub. The rest of the day was spent strolling through the streets of Akuyeri and hanging out in various restaurants and cafes...

We 5.8.2015 day 24. 1000 km biked!

The plan for the next days was to start crossing the highlands on the F35, passing over the Kjölur. To get to the start of F35 there was a stretch of about 100km on the N1 to do, going westwards. In order to save time and energy and also because the weather forecast was miserable, we decided to take the bus at 10:15 to Varmhalid, close to where the highland road starts. So we packed up everything in the pouring rain and pedaled to the bus stop. However when we got there I quickly realized that the bikes were no problem, as there was a rack on the back of the bus, but there was no way I was going to get the trailer and kite board into the bus. So there was nothing for it, we'd have to cycle! Siria in an act of solidarity she would bitterly regret later on decided not to take the bus and to cycle with me. So off we went, stopping off for 1.5h at the supermarket to do some more shopping, cycling into the wind and the rain. As the road turned south into the next valley the wind was in our backs and also the rain eased. It turned out to be a wonderful ride up the U-shaped valley. Half way up the valley the highlight of the day. We have cycled 1000 km so far. Wow!



After a short stop for instant noodles with rice we reached the pass at 540m and had an incredible tail wind down hill run on the other side. But then the road turned north again and into the wind. The last 15 km took us almost 2h battling into a 60km/h wind. This was quite an experience. The power of the wind was quite incredible. We finally reached Varmhalid close to 9pm, completely exhausted and spend the night on a very nice camping protected by a forest. Actually the first forest I've seen for quite a while!



Th 6.8.2015 day 25. Towards Kjölur.

After the hard day yesterday, we started the day really slowly. Packed up and made Müesli (as always!). Then went off to the local swimming pool for a delicious sit in the hot tub and down to the mall for coffee, internet and a whole pack of Nippon biscuits.

It was close to 5pm when we finally set out into the highlands of Iceland. Weather was so-so. Still cold at 6-8°C and foggy with light drizzle from time to time. Apparently it is the coldest summer in Iceland on records. But at least there was a light wind in our backs. The going was very tough with the road climbing, but not gradually but in an unending series of extremely steep ramps followed by a flat stretch or even a drop. On one ramp my rear wheel was pulled out of its mounting by the trailer. What the hell am I doing dragging kite surf equipment up into the highlands of Iceland anyway?!?

We found a wonderful spot right on the shore of a small lake to cook an interesting mix of vegetable rice topped with a bacon-curry sauce and pitch the tent. Unfortunately it was simply too cold and wet to really enjoy the spot.



Fr 7.8.2015 day 26. Natural hot tub at Hveravellir.

We got up in the cold, packed up the soggy tent. Fog is significantly worse than rain. It drenches everything. The tent was not only wet on the outside, but also between the inner and outer tent and even on the inside. We had some cookies and bananas by the wayside as it was simply too cold to stop and make proper breakfast. Progress was slow, mainly due to bad road conditions. We finally joined up with the more frequently used F35 that was much easier to bike on. We came past the mountain hut at Afangi and paid a 1000 Kr fee for the use of toilet and kitchen to cook spaghetti. Very well invested money to get warm and dry. Then set off for the last 38 km towards Hveravellir. Again progress was extremely slow for the last 10km or so due to very difficult road conditions. But we finally made it, cooked Vegi Soup in an army tent and then just before midnight immersed ourselves in the deliciously hot natural outdoor pool! Interesting temperature control: There seems to be a more or less regular flow of hot geothermal water into the pool. This is cooled down by diverting cool mountain stream water into the pool via two pipes. Still the water is far from homogeneous, sometime scorching hot, sometimes quite cool.







Sa 8.8.2015 day 27. A rainy day at Hveraviller

Weather forecast said rain and wind from the south, i.e. the wrong direction, so we decided to hang out all day at Hveraviller. Had yet another very nice Müsli and then spent the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon in the café. After this exertion it was time for an afternoon nap to the sound of the rain drumming against the tent. Absolutely divine!

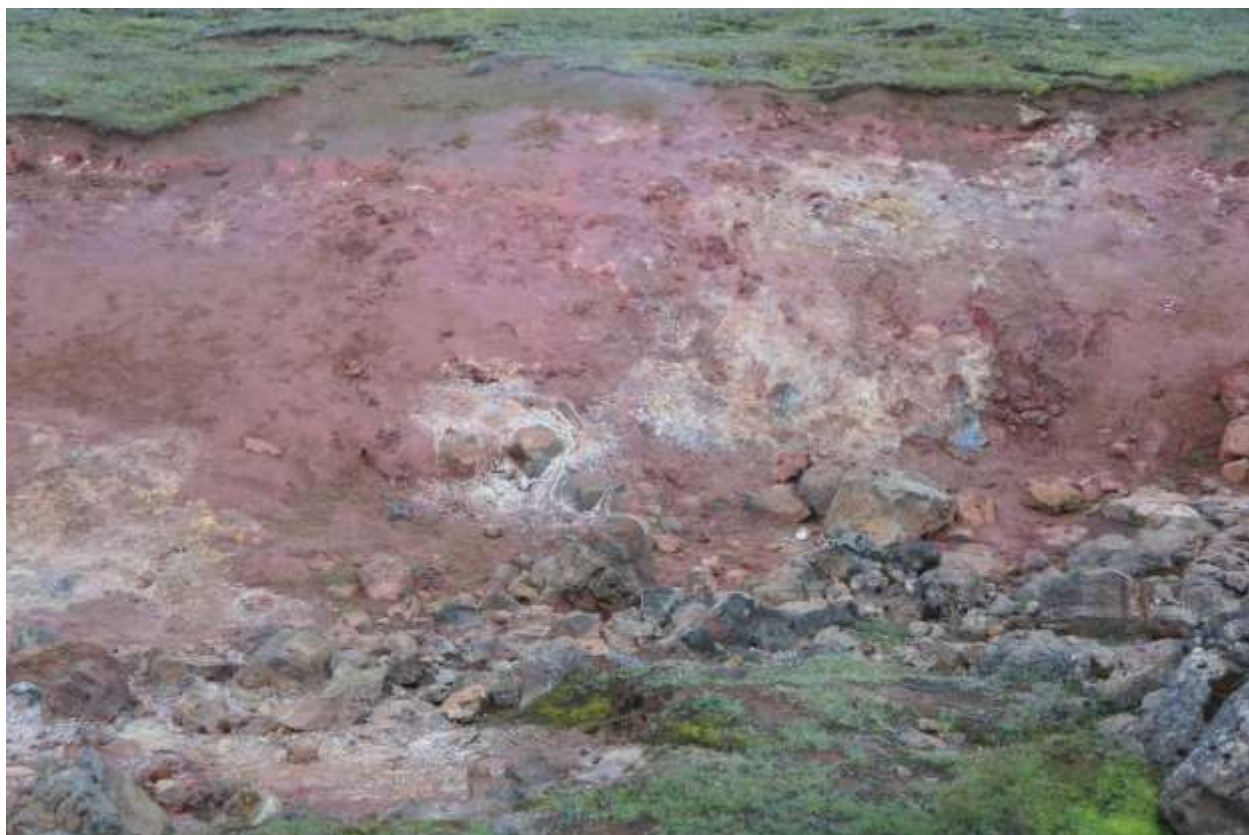
The rain stopped round evening time and we took a stroll round the fumaroles and hydrothermal vents. Late at night I took a quick shower and went off to the hot tub again. I had it all for myself this time and got the temperature control absolutely perfect. In fact there is a third pipe where the hot water comes in. The trick is to divert just enough of the hot water into the pool and let the rest flow out over the rocks. So there I sat watching the moon slowly rise and imagining how it is actually not the moon rising but me slowly spinning underneath the fixed moon and stars.















Su 9.8.2015 day 28. A monster bike ride over corrugated roads.

The ambitious plan for the day was to reach Gullfoss and civilization. The distance is about 90km but it didn't sound impossible as we had about 500m of altitude to loose. So we set off quite early at, at least for our standards, at 10:30. We soon realized that the going would be tough. Again there was a constant string of slight inclines followed by descents but by far the worst part, was the road condition. Due to the loose gravel and the large number of cars the road has been deformed into a horrendous corrugated ball-breaking stretch of hell. Landscape and also weather was wonderful but still the never ending bumpy ride as speeds almost never greater than 7 or 8 km/h, somewhat ruined the day.

We pushed on for hours, cooked spaghetti in the wind shelter of a large rock and then went on again for hours. Finally finally after a bridge the road conditions slowly improved and also finally there was significantly more downhill than uphill runs and we flew along the last 20 km or so and finally also the dirt road turned into a paved one. I could hardly even remember what it was like to bike on a paved surface. We decided to pitch our tent out in the wild somewhere before arriving down to the throngs of tourists at Gullfoss and Geysir. Supper was Chinoa with Onion and Courgette. Definitely we are eating really well!

















Mo 10.8.2015, day 29. A touristy day at Gullfoss and Geysir ending in yet another spa.

Biked 10km to get to Gullfoss. First we saw the spray kicked up by the falls, then we saw the rows and rows of busses parked by the tourist center. The falls were nice and so was the coffee (hot chocolate) in the tourist center. Then we went on to Geysir. Again millions of tourists but the geyser was also very special. A gurgling blue hole that suddenly erupts in a big or small or sometimes even in two spouts of water and steam. Absolutely mesmerizing! I could have stayed there and watched for hours...

After that a relatively short ride to Fludir, quick jaunt to the shop, pitched the tent and then off to the Secret Lagoon. A wonderful natural hot tub amidst a hot spring area. All around there are greenhouses heated by geothermal energy. Apparently they grow mushrooms in them.











Tu 11.8.2015, day 30. A slow start we were going to bitterly regret!

Got up 10ish and biked off to the advertised farmers market a couple of km out of town. It ended up being a tiny shop just next to the golf course. Bought some delicious bread and some veggies. Then went back to the village shop for breakfast. Then back to the tent, packed up, spent an hour or so on the internet, then back to the shop for a big shopping. It was after 4pm by the time we left. I checked the weather. The forecast was good with wind from the right direction but for tomorrow the forecast was 25km/h wind from the west and a little bit of rain starting in the afternoon. So we set off... The first 12km were slow as we were pedaling against the wind, but then as we took the turning towards Landmannalaugar, our next planned destination, we were blessed with tail wind and we made good progress up into the highland, stopping for coffee and icecream (that Siria dropped). We finally stopped just after a hotel by the bank of a river.













We 12.8.2015 day 31. Unexpected storm and a spot of trouble!

We knew weather was supposed to deteriorate by early afternoon, so we got up relatively early, made a müsli and packed the tent just as first raindrops started falling. The wind was in our face as expected but already far stronger than forecast. We pedaled on and the wind got stronger and stronger, the rain turning into little cold projectiles that stung our faces. It soon became obvious that there was no way we would reach Landmannalaugar. We pushed on for about 1.5 h until we reached the turning but it was obvious we would not make the remaining 35 km. So we turned round and let the wind blow us back to the hotel we had passed the night before to take shelter, had burgers and started discussing what the hell we were to do. The hotel was booked out, so staying put was not an option. There were two busses one going to Landmannalaugar, one back to Hella. As we sat, the wind got stronger and stronger, howling outside and making the huts that made up the hotel shake and rumble. It was very clear. We HAD to take either one or the other bus to simply get out of here.

I did my best to make the trailer look as small as possible by removing the kite board and hiding it out of sight and screwed off the front bracket. Finally the busses arrived and luckily in the one bound for Reykjavik there was still plenty of space for the bikes. We finally took the bus to Hella, about 100 km south on the ring road. It cost us 100CHF, but basically we had no choice. So finally we ended up on the Arhus camping in Hella, the wind still blowing and the rain still falling, together with scores of other backpacker and also bikers, all with wet clothes and backpacks spread out all over the common area, many probably stranded here after similar misfortunes as ours.



Th 13.8.2015, day 32. A cold windy and wet day in Hella.

One clear lesson so far has been that the weather dictates what can and what cannot be done. And on a day like today we did the best thing possible. All morning was spent over coffee, cakes and sandwiches in a café and all afternoon was spent in the swimming pool's hot tub. Did a bit of shopping, cooked spaghetti with a very nice mushroom sauce, got annoyed that the common area that was open yesterday was now out of bounds for seemingly no reason and crawled off to bed quite early.

Fr 14.8.2015 day 33. A very nice evening on the beach.

Weather forecast was not too bad for the day. Also we were now quite close to Reykjavik with still one week to go, so covering large distances was no longer necessary, instead we decided to take it easy with biking and to visit the local sites. Also because Siria's knees were starting to ache. So the plan for the day was to basically go where the wind blew us, which happened to be direction south-west down to the coast. We set off round lunch time, cooked a very nice mixture of egg, finely chopped potato, bacon, egg and cream under the tallest building in south Iceland, which is an art-nouveau light house. As we were cooking three elderly radio amateurs turned up, set up their toi-toi toilet and started chatting to us. Apparently it was international lighthouse day, when radio amateurs all over the world occupy lighthouses and bounce Morse code to each other, no doubt while totting a little tootle and bbqing a sausage or two. We found a wonderful pitch black beach of volcanic sand and pitched our tent.













Sa 15.8.2015, day 34. A bath in a hot river during another very wet day.

Breakfast was spend in glorious sunshine and warm enough weather to sit outside. I pondered the possibility of doing a bit of kite surfing, but the extremely strong current cause by the inflow of the nearby river and the rather weak wind out of not quite the right direction caused me to give up this idea. We biked to Hveragerdi, where there was a big town party in full swing. Apparently it was to celebrate the blooming of the flowers for which Hveragerdi apparently is famous.

Together with scores of other tourists we did the local 3.5 km walk up to the hot river. It started to rain when we got half the way up (and of course I left my rain jacket back with the bike!). The river was absolutely gorgeous, the pouring rain made it even nicer. We spent at least 2 or even more hours soaking then during a break in the rain we got dressed and walked down again. We popped into the local coffee shop that offers geothermally baked and therefore overpriced cakes, had a coffee and started to think about what to do. And the rain started pouring down again, also it was already past 8pm and starting to get dark. We were definitively starting to get tired of the wet and cold. We made a half-hearted attempt to find a guesthouse in Hveragerdi, but soon learnt that it was hopeless due to the town party. So we set off in the dark and the pouring rain towards Selfoss. Drenched we arrived at the hostel and had a lucky break. One last 3-bed room was still free. So we spent the first night in Iceland in as real bed!















Su 16.8.2015, day 35. When you expect rain you get sun.

As the weather forecast was rain all day, we went (after a delicious fry up for breakfast) straight from the hostel in Selfoss to the camping in Selfoss and pitched our tent. After a short ride through town we went to a café to stay warm and dry. However, outside there was brilliant sunshine and not a drop of rain! So we spent the day lounging around Selfoss, I went for a nice 10km run and in the evening –of course!- we went for a nice dip in the hot tub before rice and courgette dinner.

Mo 17.8.2015, day 36. Sunny evening at Thingvellir.

Weather forecast was 0% rain and some sun mixed with cloud. And just when we were dismantling the tent a rain shower caught us and drenched the tent. So much for the weather forecast! We then went for a short grocery shop and set off for Thingvellir. My calves were aching from the run the day before. I don't think I'll be running even a half-marathon in Reykjavik. Interesting how specific training is. I'm fit on the bike, but no chance to run even 10km at a decent pace. On the road a cyclist coming the other way stopped us and gave us the tip that a hydropower station just up the road had an exhibition and free coffee. Definitely not one to miss, especially as it had just started to rain again. So we stopped off. It was really quite a nice and well done exhibition and yes, free coffee! We soon came to the Thingvellir national park and found a very nice spot on the lake shore to cook spaghetti. We started cooking in glorious sunshine, when we were half way through it started to rain again.

However the rain was quickly forgotten as we reached Thingvellir and took in all the sights under the most wonderful sunny blue sky speckled with a few decorative white clouds. Really quite fascinating to

imagine how more than 1000 years ago the Vikings would come together at this really special place right on the edge of the American continental plate to govern, debate, exchange news, barter, play and also to hold an execution or two...

Ended up on the huge and quite empty camping in the national park and cooked potato and sausage soup.



















Tu 18.8.2015, day 37. Reykjavik.

Somehow we got through Iceland too quickly. We were now within 50km of Reykjavik with still 7 days to go before our flight. We were thinking of making a bit of a detour up Lake Thingvellir and over some mountains, but the weather down that direction looked very wet and if you don't HAVE to cross some high mountains to get from A to B the motivation to do so is somehow significantly lower. So basically we took a bee line to Reykjavik, helped by a strong tail wind. Very quickly we got to the suburbs, got on the bike path and got hopelessly lost! Very soon we were circling up and down steep hills in the middle of a residential area. Finally a Reykjavikian had pity with us and rolled down her window asking what was blatantly obvious: "Are you lost?".

So finally we got on the bike path again, after some wrong turnings (the bike path is nice, but there is absolutely no signposting whatsoever!) and what seemed like endless turns and hills and crossings, finally –with the help of several further Reykjavikians- we got to the camping. I cooked a rather huge pot of Noodle – tuna – cheese and corn salad, in fact I had to eat a considerable quantity of noodles during preparation to make space in the pot for the further ingredients. Then off for a first glimpse of Reykjavik.







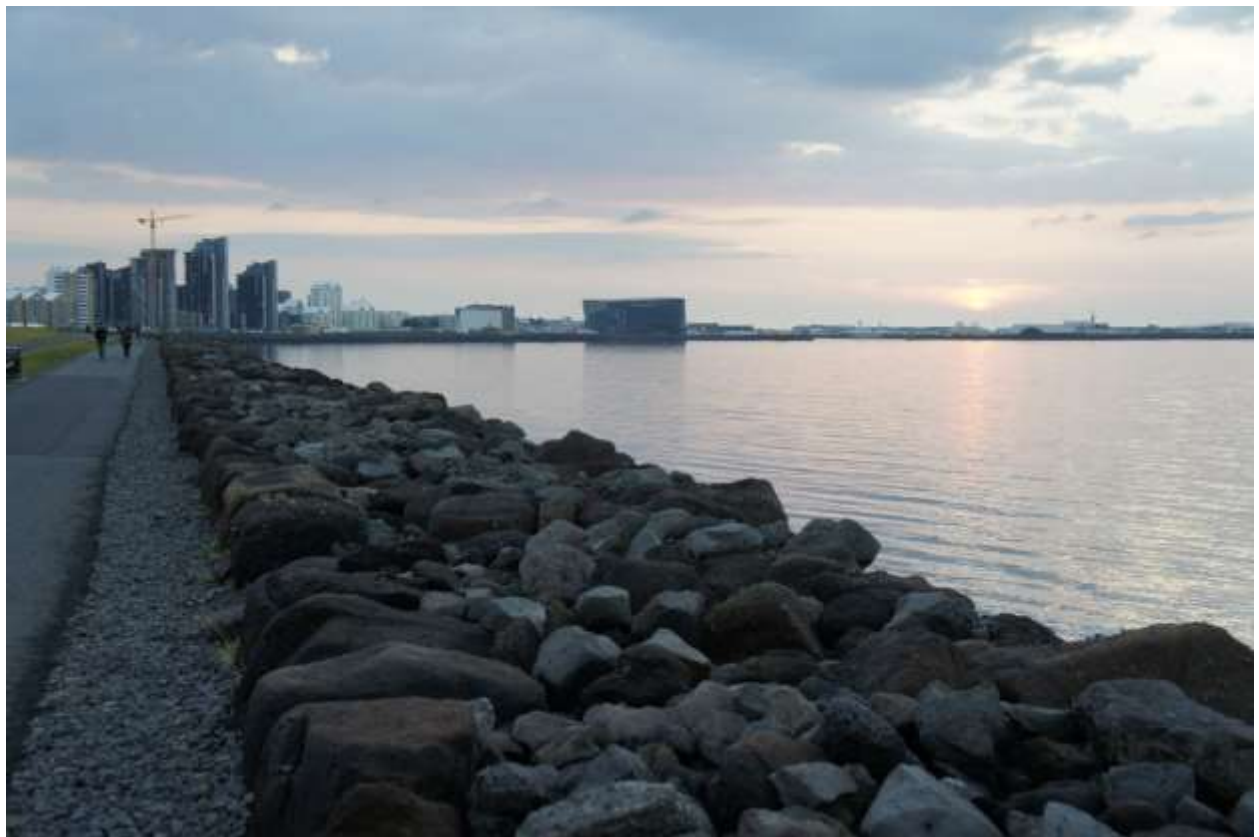


We 19.9.2015, 38. Reykjavik day 2.

Nice breakfast, some visits to some outdoor shops and shopping malls without buying anything much as prices here in Iceland are definitively on the high side, a bike trip to the hot water reservoir of Reykjavik and along the beach around the domestic airport, listening to the organists rehearse in the cathedral, a nice swim in the central swimming pool just next to the camping and finally some Asian food and a quick ride into the city for a simple dessert next to the cathedral about sums up the days activities.

Th 20.8.2015 day 39. Reykjavik day 3.

Went to Bonus for big shopping, then organized the cardboard boxes (this was significantly simpler than we thought: just go to a bike store and pick them up.), stored them next to the tent as the camping wanted ridiculous 3500Kr to store them, cooked some pasta, spent most of the rest of the day in Edmundsson bookstore and finally cooked some Mexican chili con carne on flatbread inside the tent.







Fr to Mo 21 to 24.8.2015 day 40 - 43. Reykjavik day 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The days in Reykjavik passed very quickly with visits to the mall, the swimming pool, various Bakeris, cafés and small little excursions here and there. One big event was the Reykjavik Marathon. My calves were really sore from the 10km or so I did in Selfoss. I would have liked to do the half Marathon, but it was simply not possible. But also the 10km run was very nice with a super atmosphere. Everyone was on the streets playing music or cheering. It really wasn't about the speed or time, but about having fun. Quite different from runs in Switzerland. I survived in a time of just under 1h with my calves in OK shape. Then Siria and I ran the 3km together. This was fun as well, but 3km is really a very short distance! And it was not only children as we had feared, we were not the only grown ups...

On that last evening in Iceland we treated ourselves to delicious fish and chips down by the harbor. And so Season 1 "Through Europe and Iceland" of our open ended trip came to an end...

