



ICELAND^{2ndEd}
Evanescent Light

Ian Parker





ICELAND

EVANESCENT LIGHT

Ian Parker

<http://parkerlab.bio.uci.edu/evlight.htm>

ICELAND

EVANESCENT LIGHT

Ian Parker

Dedicated to Annie, my photographic elf.

© 2013 by the author of this book. The book author retains sole copyright to his contributions to this book. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise without the permission of the author/publisher

The Blurb-provided layout designs and graphic elements are copyright Blurb Inc., 2013. This book was created using the Blurb creative publishing service.



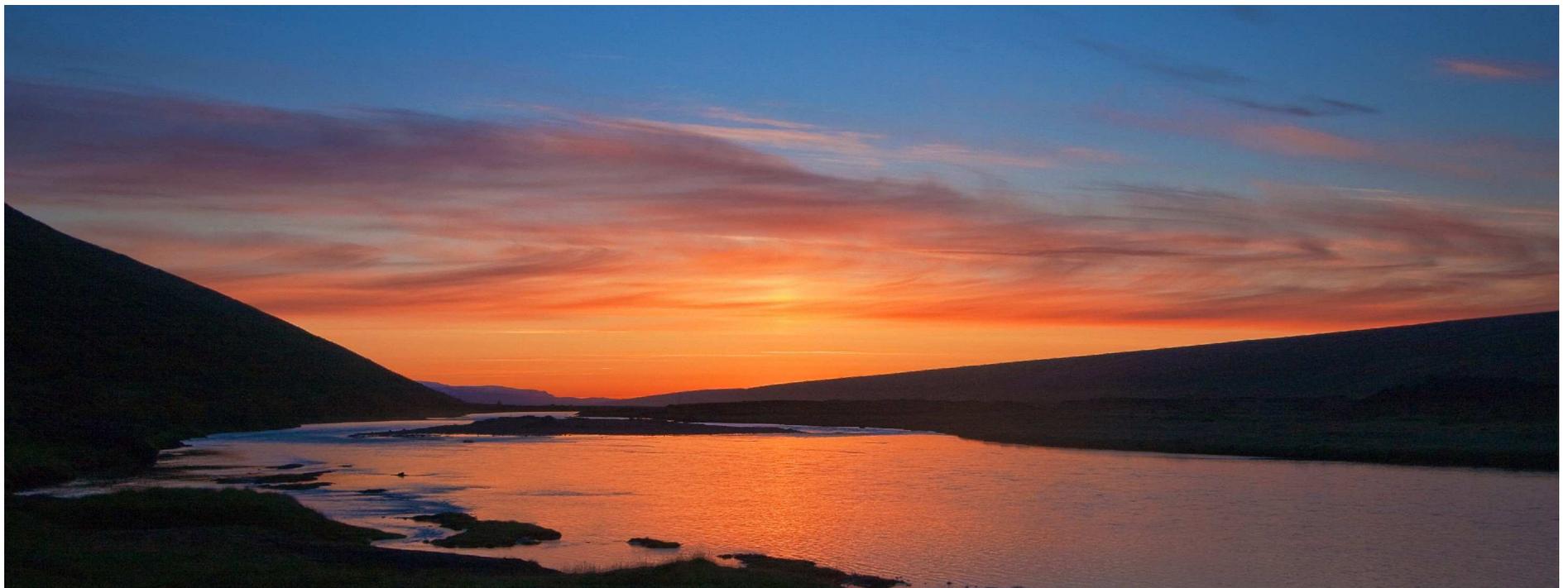
Content

- 7 Introduction - Evanescent Light
- 9 Portfolio
- 119 Notes on the photographs

Navigating in the pdf e-book.

Click any image to go to the text description.

Use the back button (or alt left arrow) to return to the photo you were looking at.





INTRODUCTION

Evanescent Light

"The one who has seen the light has seen the true Iceland and will never lose sight of it again"

Páll Asgeir Asgeirsson - from the foreword to Iceland Landscapes, by Daniel Bergmann

Iceland is located just south of the Arctic Circle, and sits astride the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the fault line along which the North American and Eurasian continental plates are separating. This geography makes Iceland a wonderful place to visit, and a photographer's paradise.

One aspect is the landscape. The island is still in the process of being formed. It is one of the most volcanically active countries in the world, with numerous volcanoes, geothermal areas and lava fields. About 10% of the land is covered by glaciers, and although most of the interior is a barren wasteland, a verdant strip of green encircles the coastline where innumerable waterfalls cascade from the icecaps down to black sand beaches. Only a little over 300,000 people live in Iceland, and over half of those are concentrated in Reykjavic. Iceland is the most sparsely populated country in Europe, and the island remains largely a pristine and remote wilderness.

A second aspect that derives from Iceland's location is its weather. Although situated far north, the Gulf Stream ensures a relatively temperate climate. But, westerlies bring a continuous succession of storms directly across from Greenland, so the weather is highly changeable and unpredictable, with strong winds common. There is a saying that if you don't like the weather in Iceland, just wait a few hours. That is great for photographers: "Bad weather makes for good photographs". Many times I have found that it is the sky that is the main subject of my images: brooding black clouds sometimes appear almost to explode apart; shafts of sunlight diagonal down through small breaks; vivid double rainbows contrast against grey sky; the underside of clouds glowing red from the low-angled sun.

Finally, the sub-arctic latitude and pollution-free air create exquisite evanescent light. In summer the 'golden hours' of soft light extend long before and after local midnight as the sun skims along and just below the northern horizon, and the land is quiet as everyone but photographers sleep. In winter the golden time reverses to encompass all the daylight hours, but the land remains still, as only photographers are out to brave the cold. A summer visit to Iceland is exhausting

because you never want to go to sleep. I had expected that winter would be more relaxing; but no, there is always the chance to step out into the cold to catch the aurora.

This book is the product of four visits to Iceland together with my wife, Annie; my self-christened 'photographic elf'. Our first visit was in summer, a circuit around the entire ring road that provided an overview of the main iconic locations, and introduced us to the staple diet of Iceland - lamb and fish soups, and hot dogs with crispy onions at every N1 gas station. On a second visit, timed for the summer solstice, we re-explored Northern Iceland, and wriggled slowly around the Western Fjords, a geologically distinct and more serene section of the island. More recently we have returned twice in late November to a snow-covered landscape, long auroral nights, and greater motivation to raise our gastronomic standards well above the hot dog level. Strangely, the winter is now our favorite time of year to visit Iceland.

The photographs here thus span across extremes of weather conditions, and across much of the island, although with a distinct concentration on a few of the most outstanding locations, most notably the unique glacial lagoon and beach at Jokulsarlon. A major omission is the interior highlands. That is largely due to difficulty of access across difficult 4wd tracks and deep stream crossings. An exorbitantly expensive encounter with a modestly protruding rock on a gentle dirt road taught us the hard way that no insurance covers damage to the underside of rental vehicles.

My aim in photographing landscapes is to achieve more than a simple illustration of a scene, but to transcend the subject matter and try to express the emotion of the place. Hence, these images are not intended to be 'straight' pictures - what a tourist might see visiting in the middle of a sunny day, or what is pictured on the postcards at the visitor centers. Instead, many were captured under dim, crepuscular light at unsociable hours or in the depth of winter, when I was alone and could let the land quietly communicate to me without distraction. Technically, the photographs involved artifices including use of an ultra-wide lens and low viewpoint to simplify composition, a long telephoto lens to abstract details, and (in a good half of these images) long exposures to blur movement and capture shades and colors too faint for the eye to see. Ultimately, however, technical details are just a means to an end, and it is only the final image that matters. If I have succeeded, I hope this book will kindle a desire to visit or return to Iceland, not merely to view the scenes as pictured (they won't look the same!), but to experience the unique and wonderfully varied 'feel' of the country.

Portfolio











Hvítserkur - dawn





Dynjandi detail

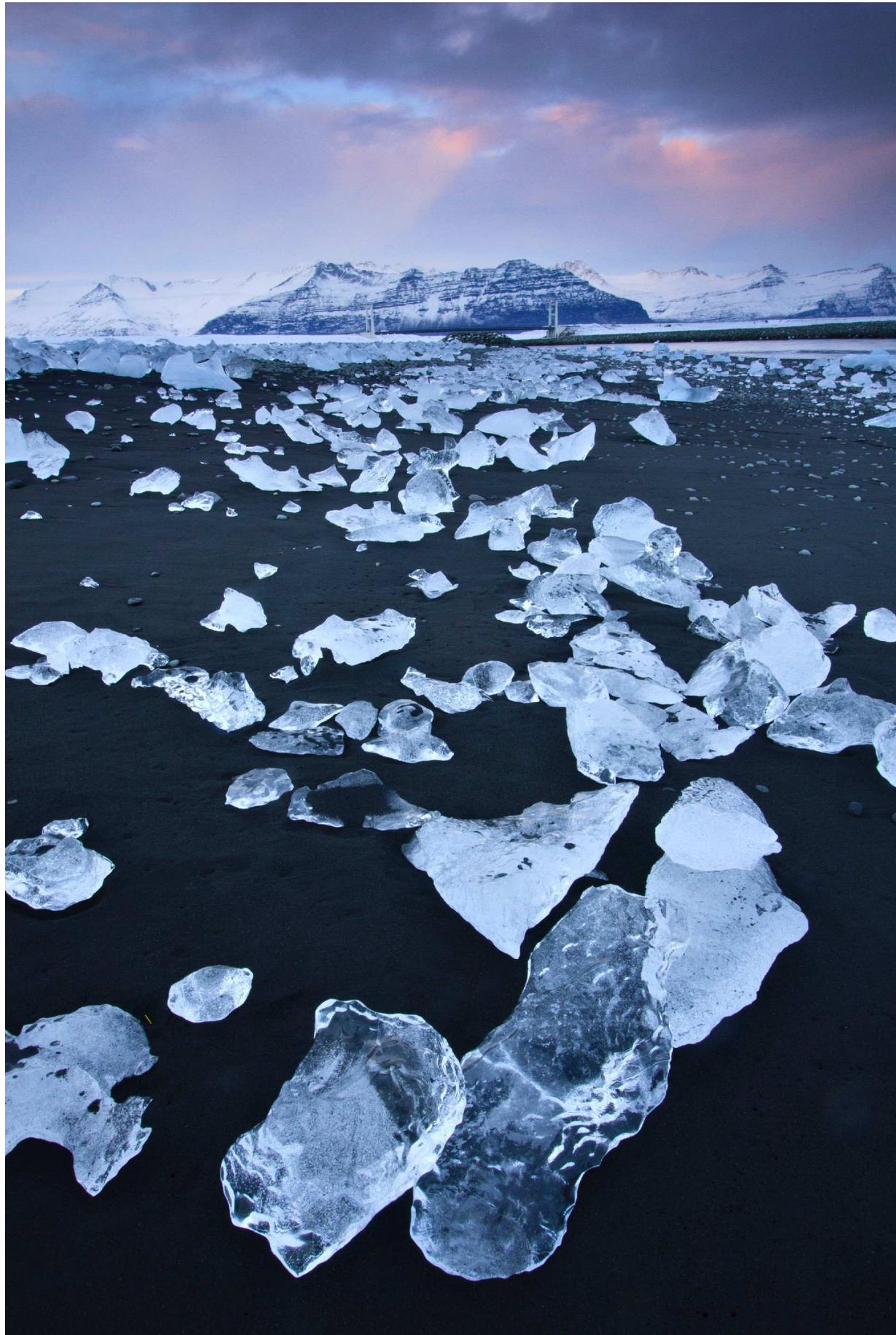




Aurora Borealis: Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon



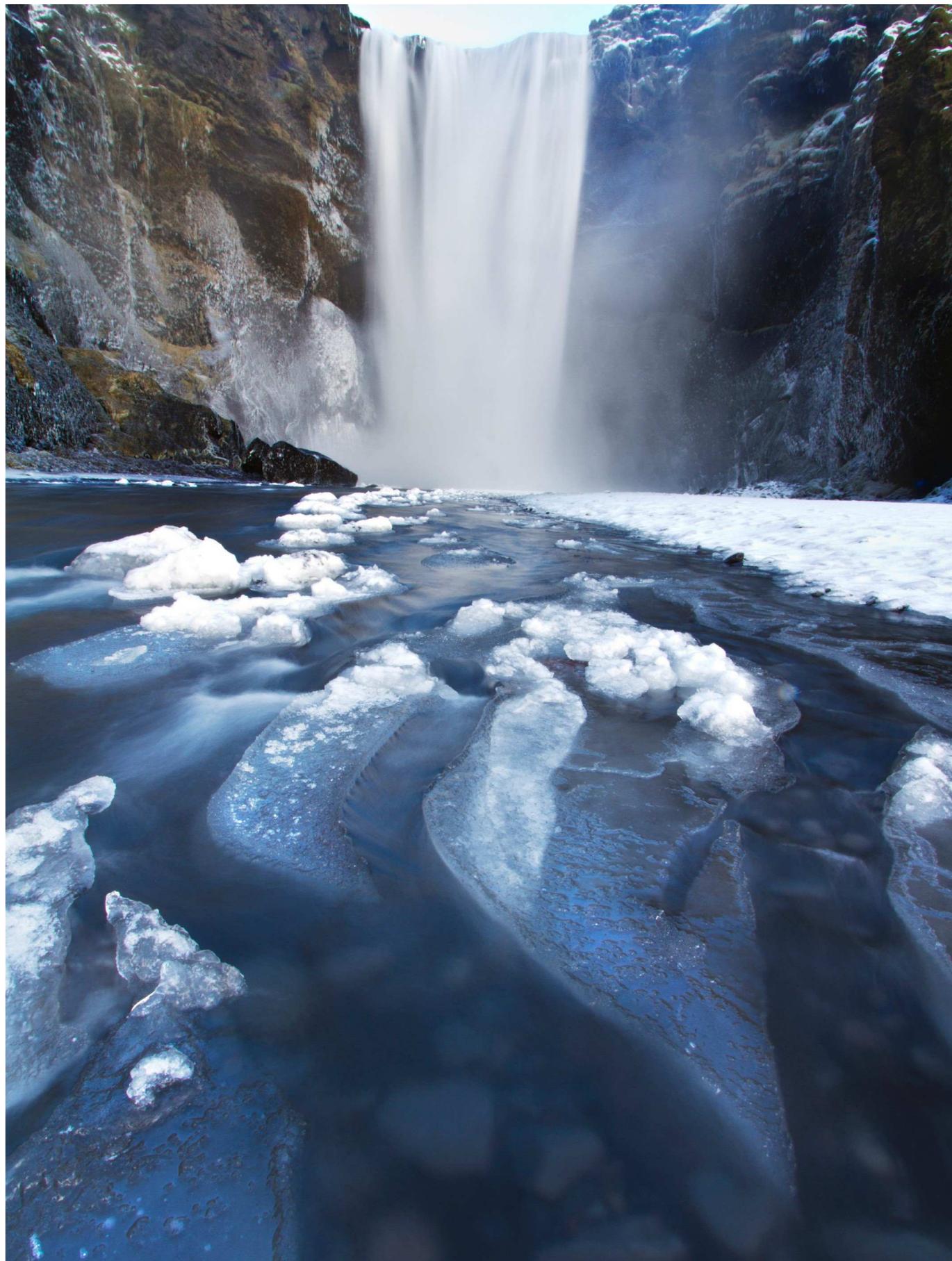






Blue berg; Jökulsárlón beach





Skógafoss









Puffin takeoff; Látrabjarg



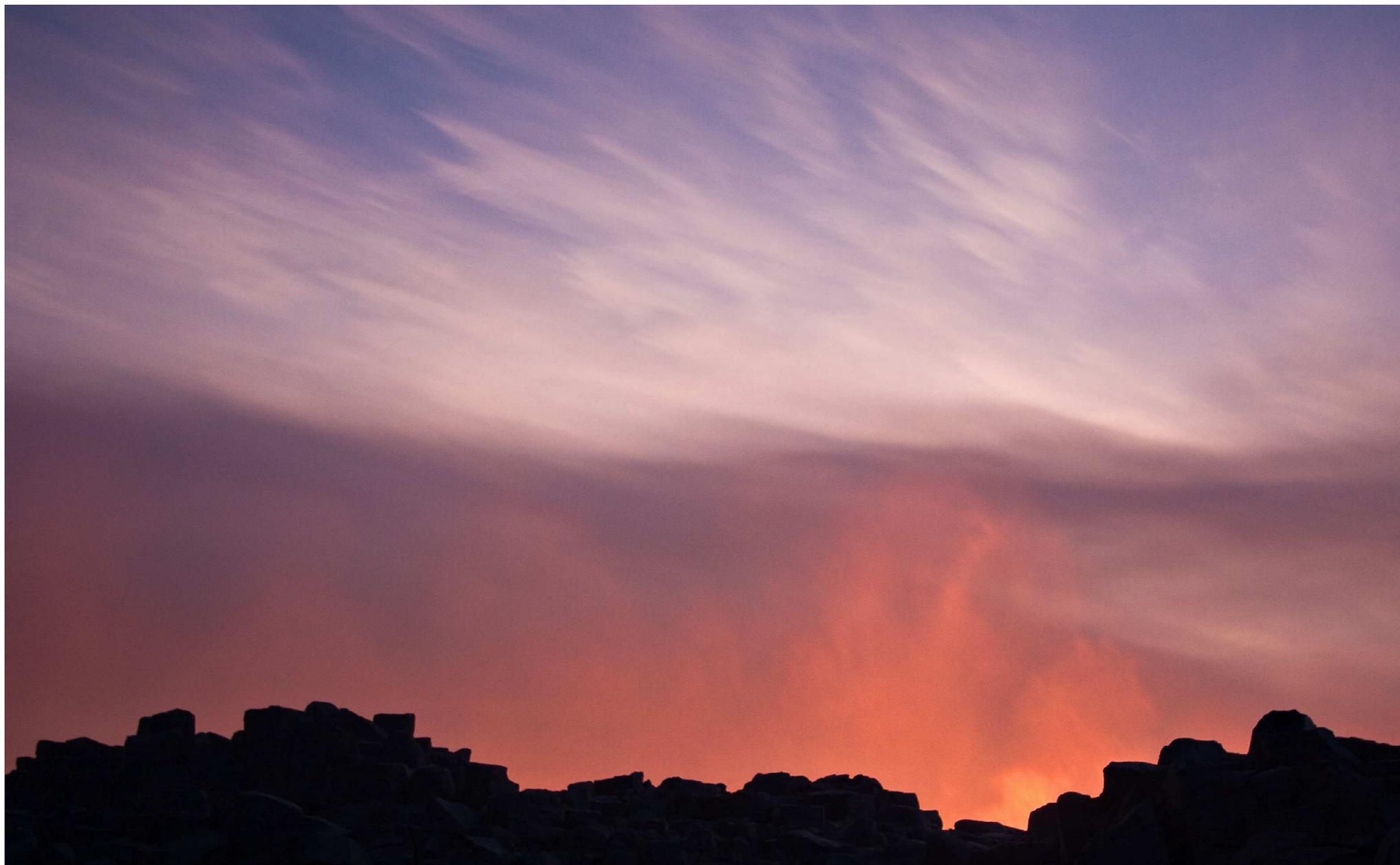


Goðafoss with angelica













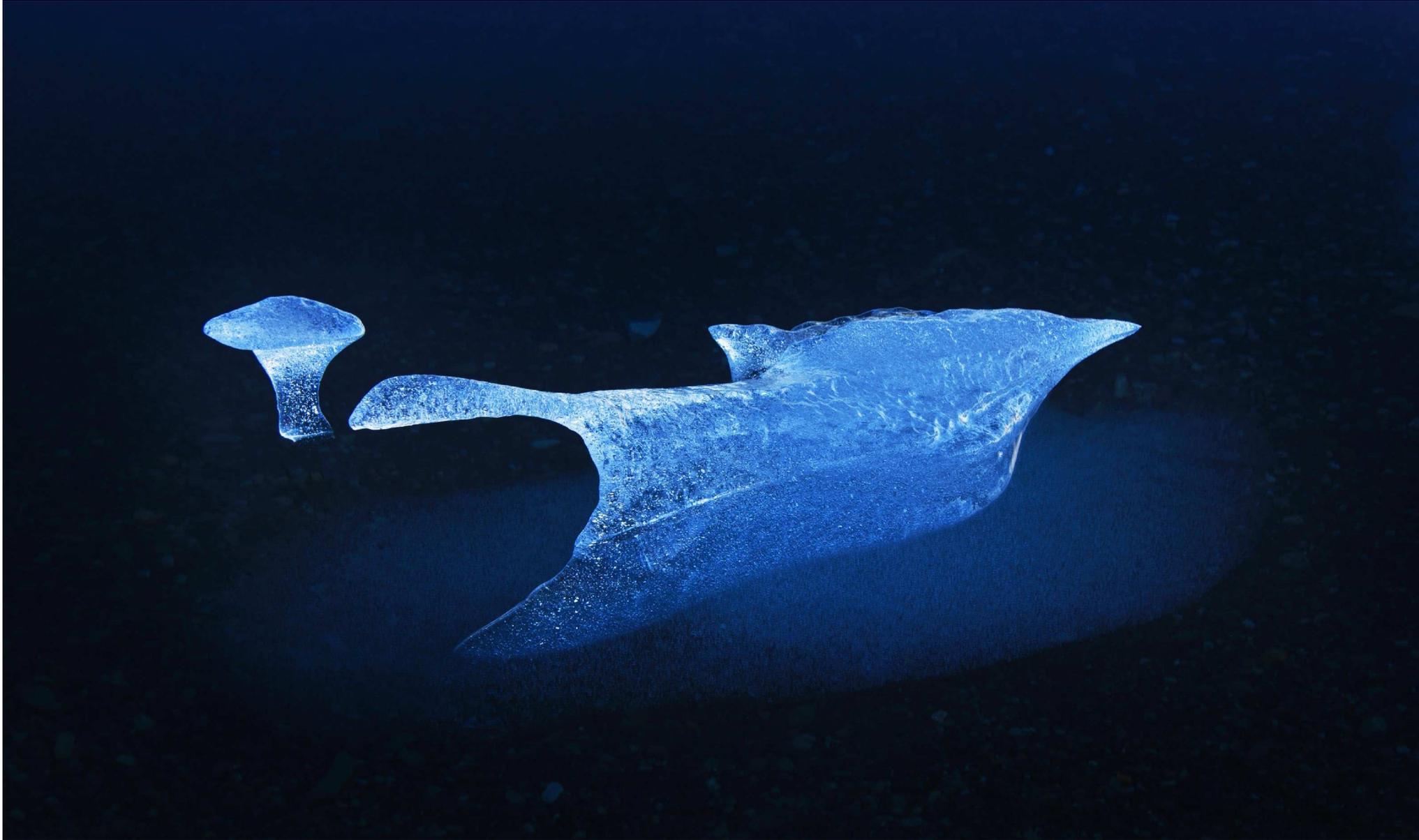
Highway 1 by Hverir





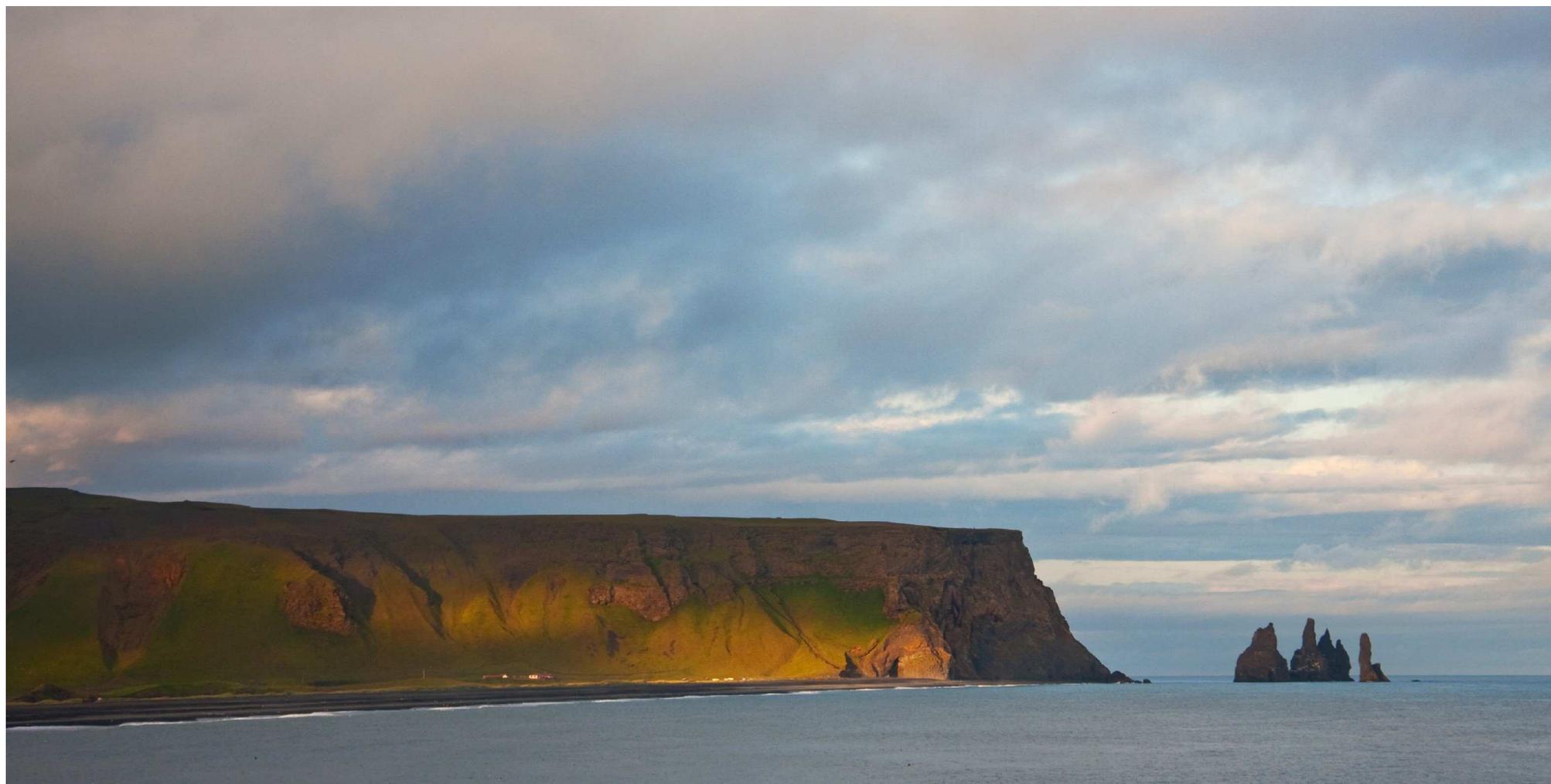








Ice prism; Jökulsárlón









Cloud; Krýsuvík













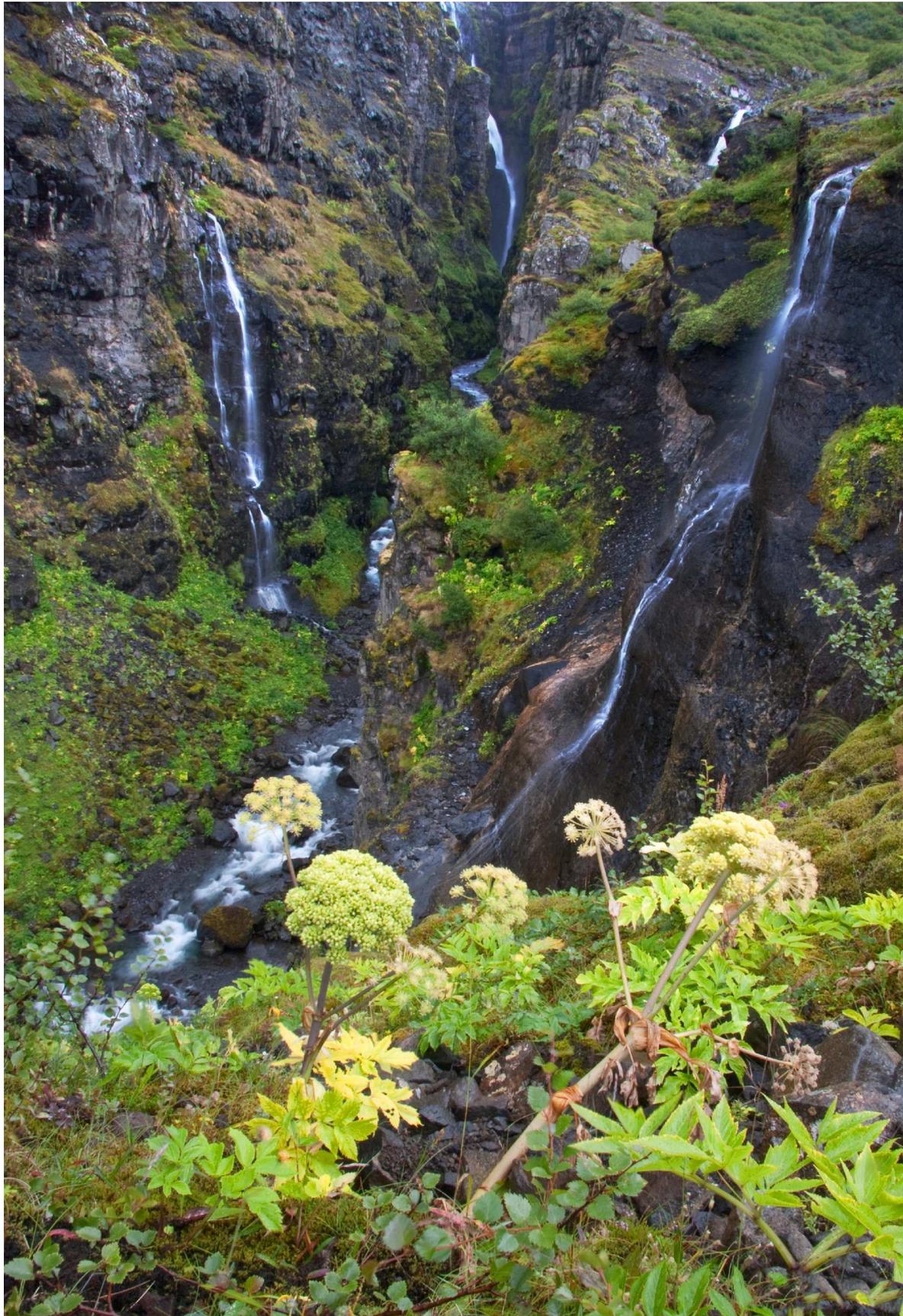








Black sand patterns, Kjölur Route





Un-named fall, Western Fjords





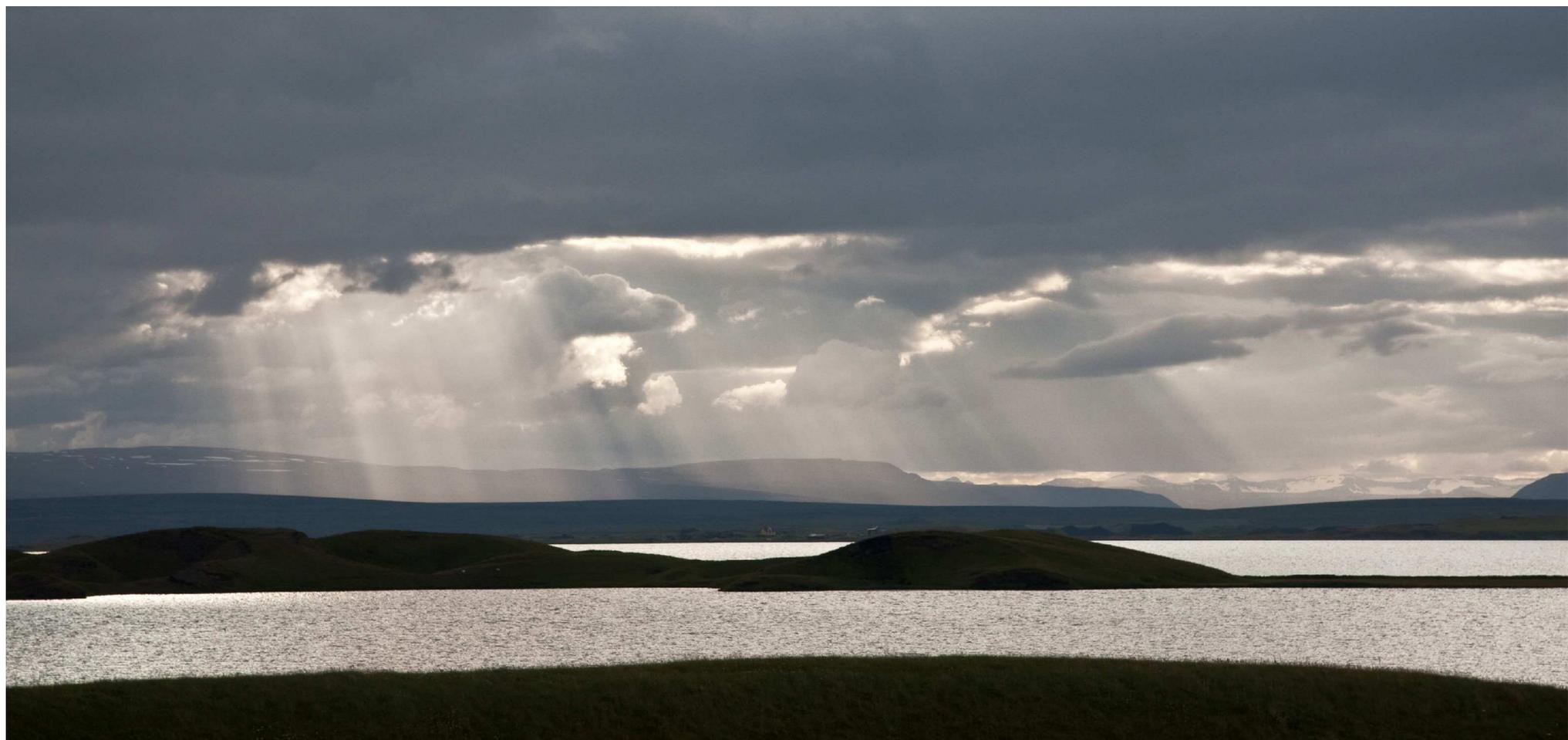




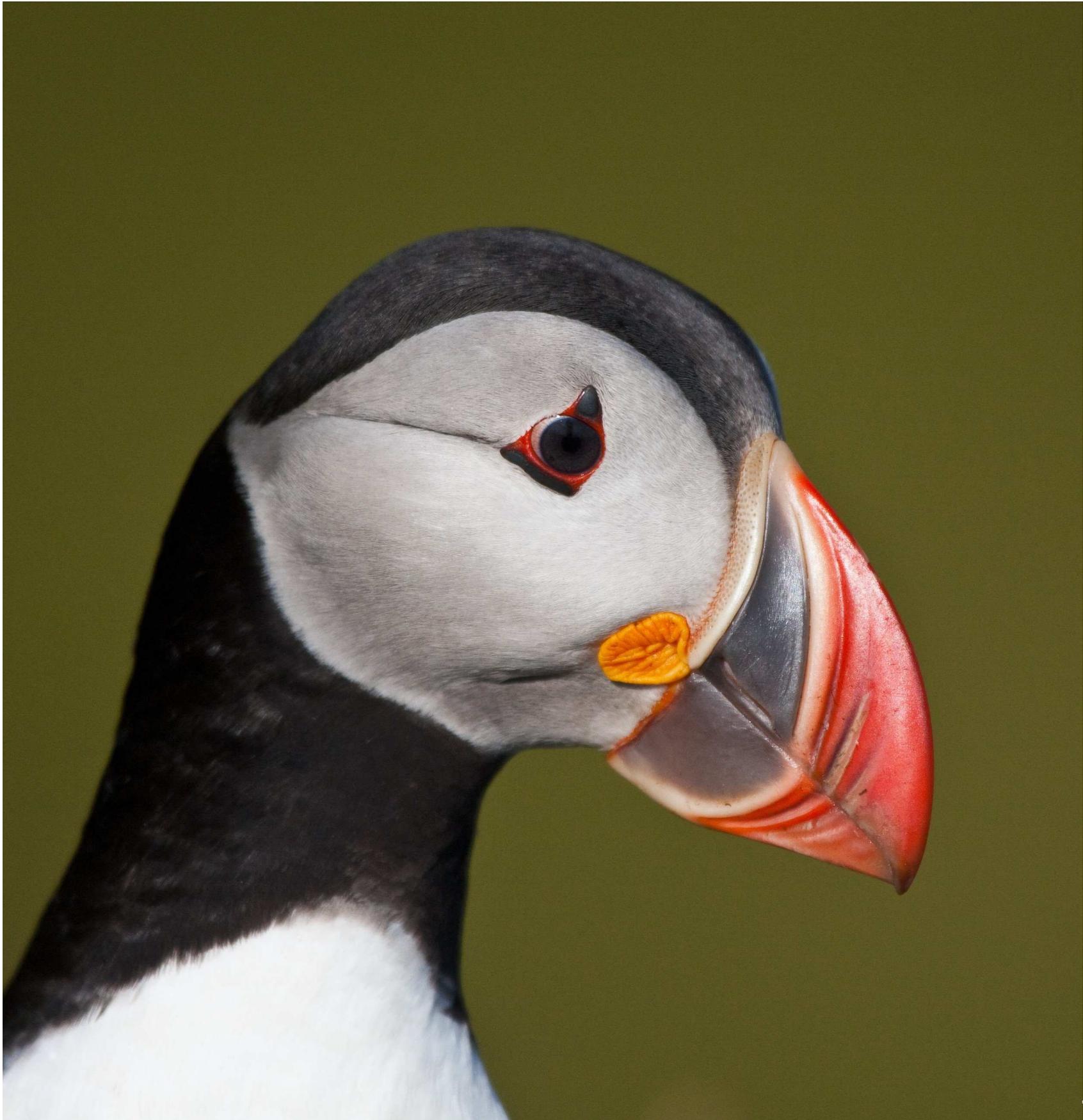
Rainbow and church; Húsafell













Icelandic horse, Hvítá Valley





Cloud above sunlit farm





Aldeyjarfoss





Pebble beach; Dyrhólaey







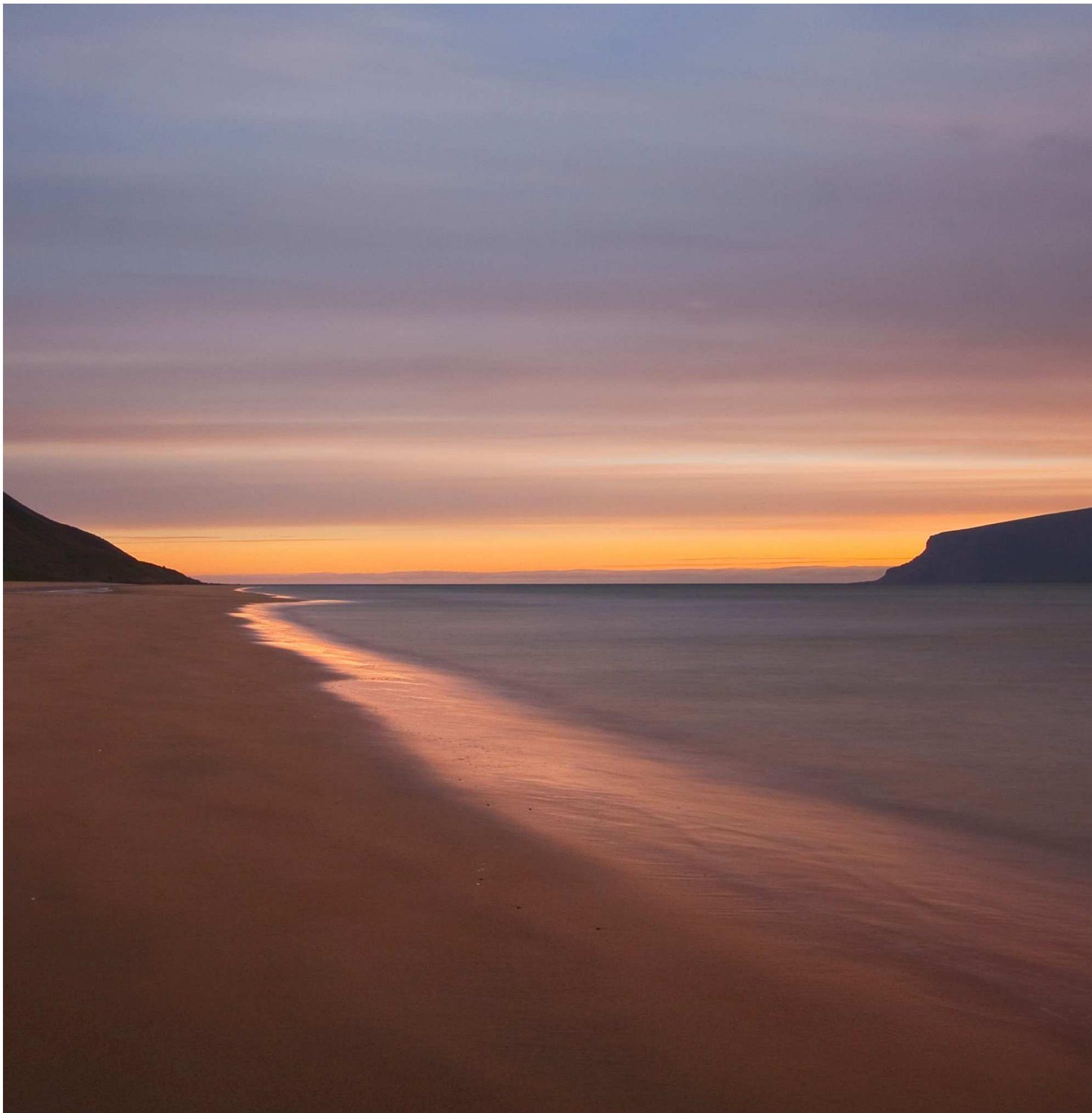


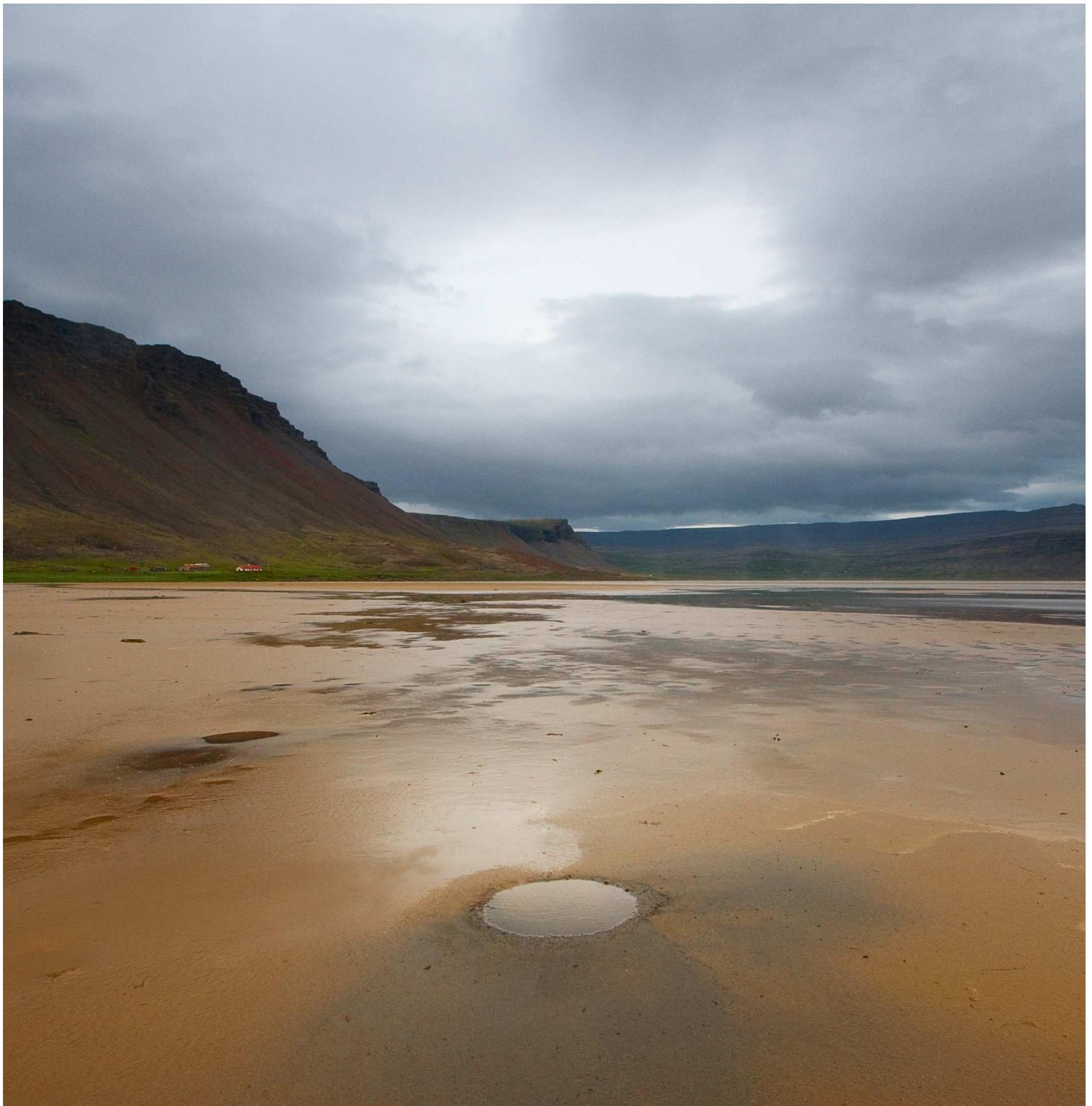
Pingeyrar Church





Winter sunset; Jökulsárlón Beach





Rauðisandur



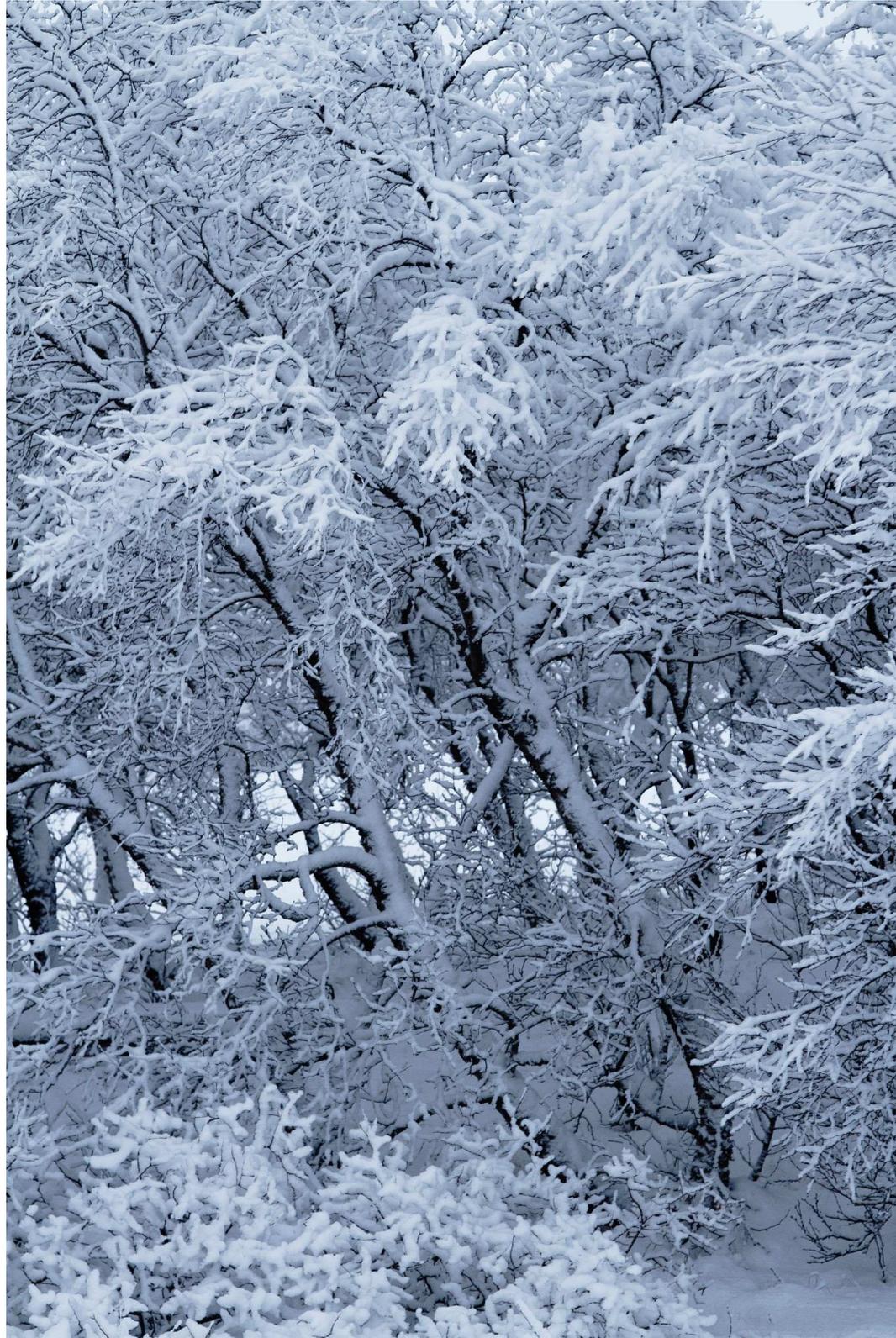


Red cloud; Bláa Lónið

















Clouds above Vatnajökull





Blue stream; Hverir









Golden light: Þingvellir





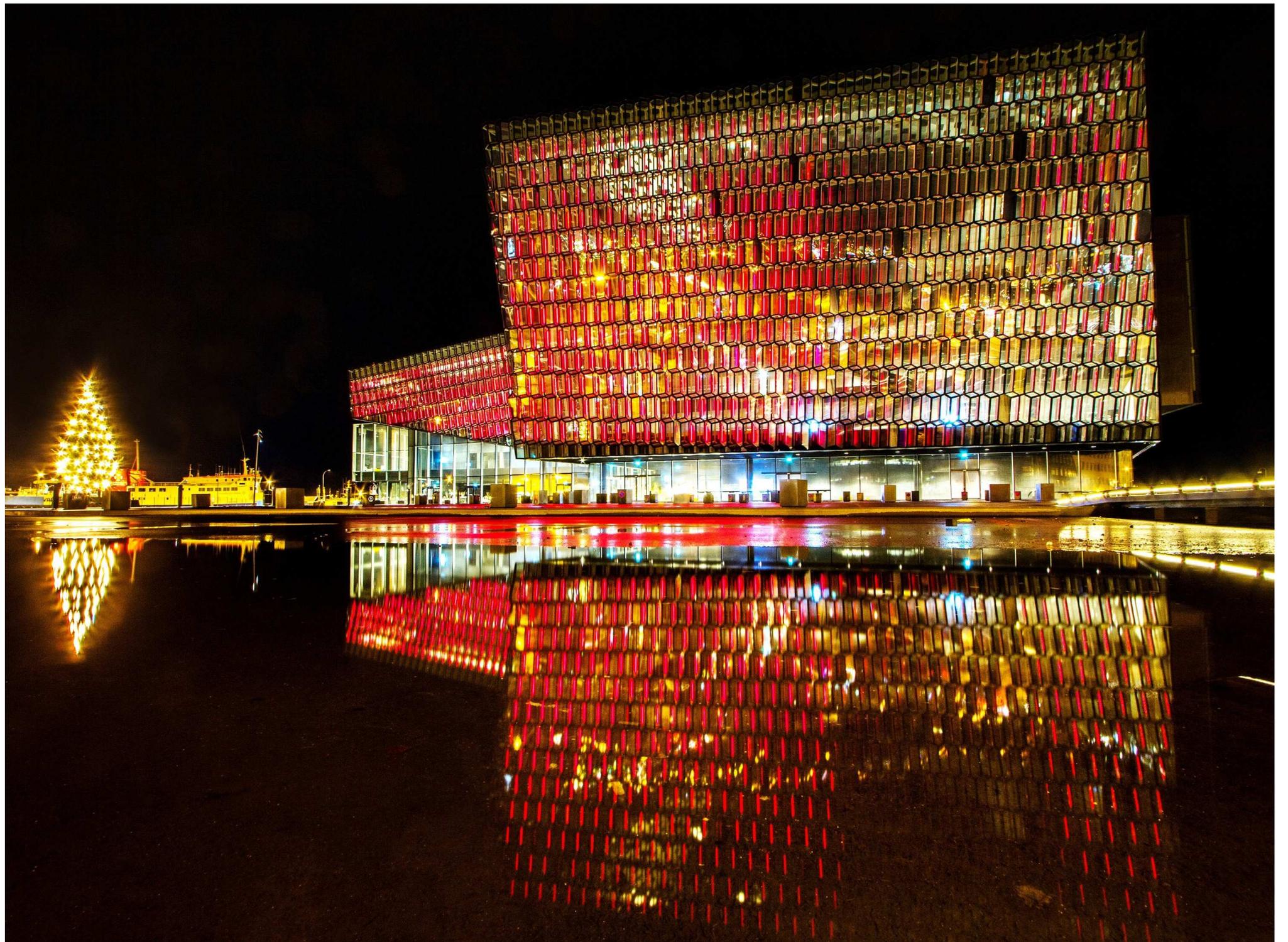
Mýrdalsjökull reflections from Reynistrangar





Breaking wave and floating berg: Jökulsá beach





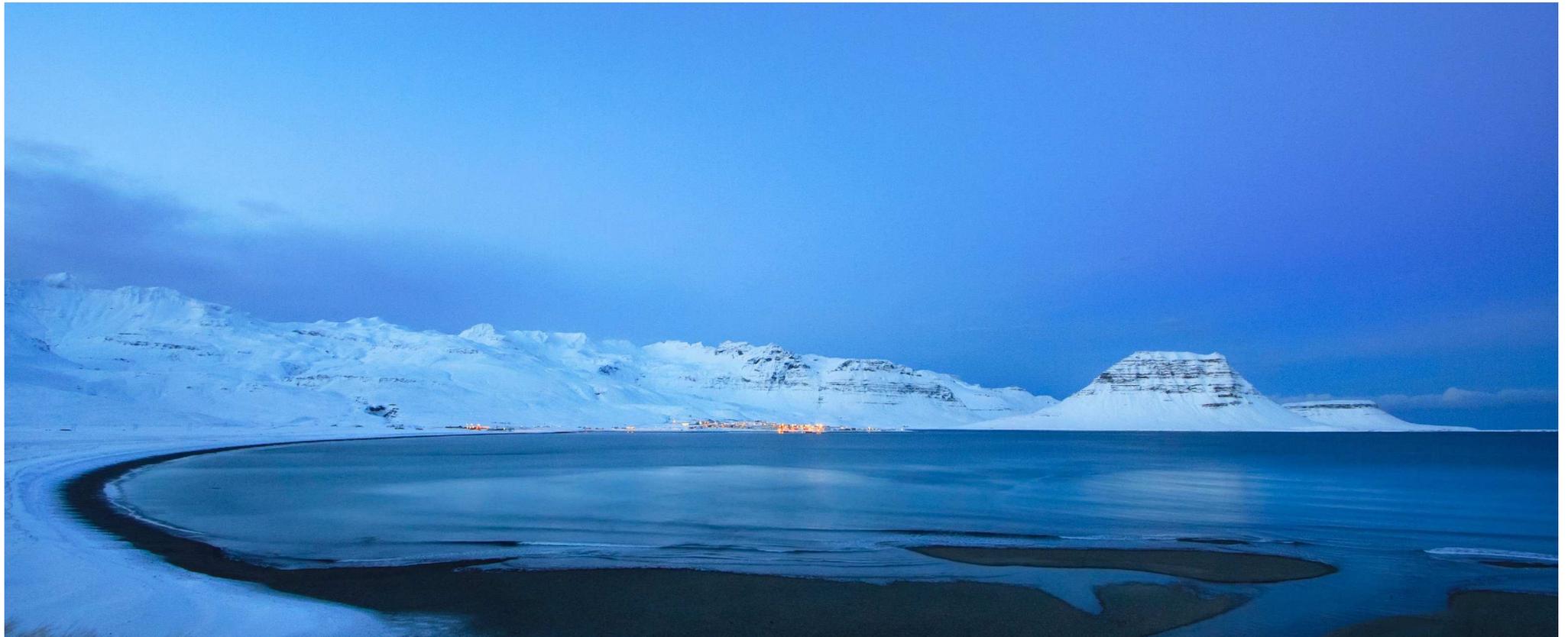
Night reflections of the Harpa Concert Hall, Reykjavík





Brain ice; Vatnajökull ice cave



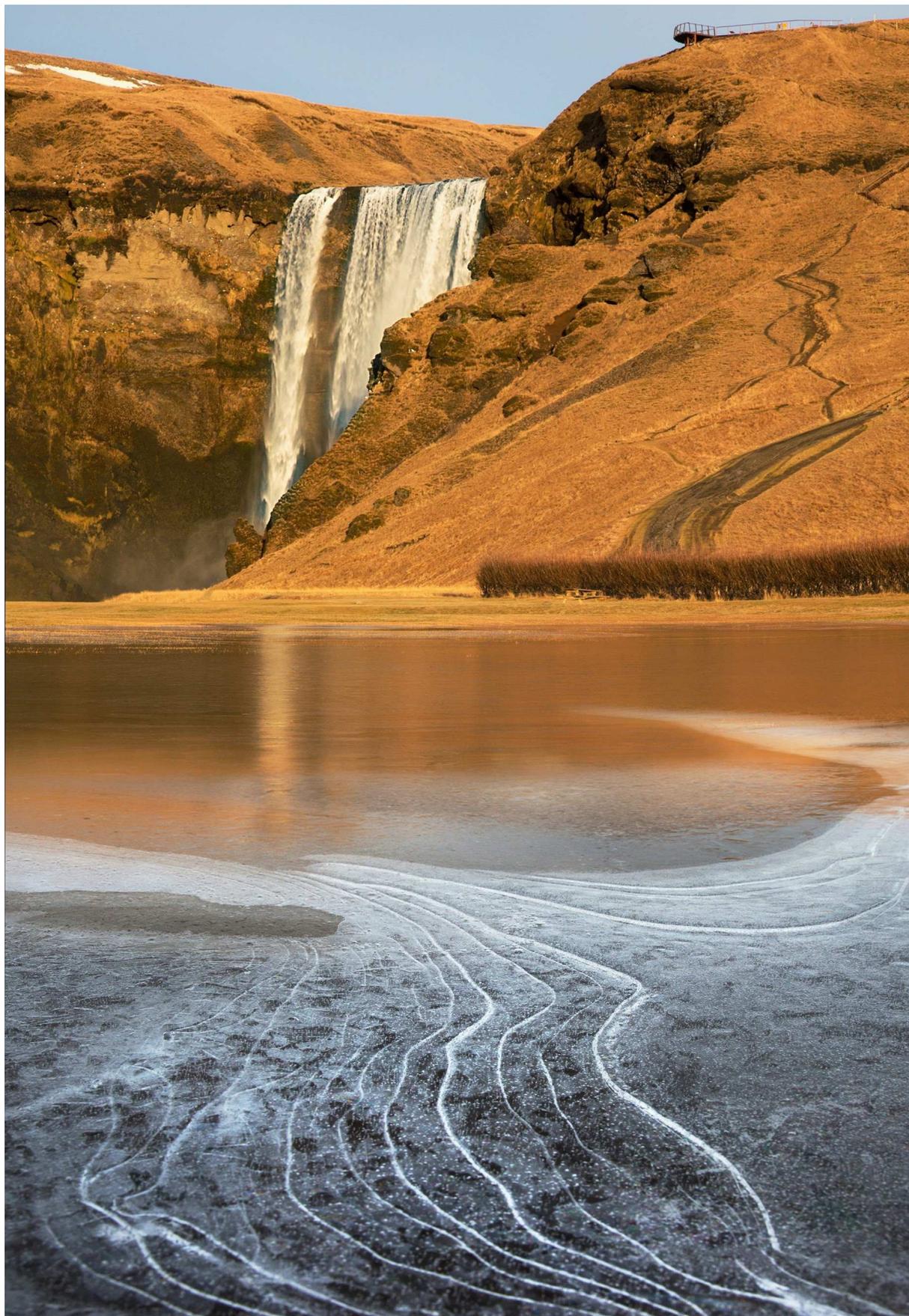






Blue pool and Strokkur eruption





Leading lines; Skógafoss





From the Ring Road; South Iceland





Vivid seaweed; Djúpalónssandur





Oxbow reflection and pingvellir church



Notes on the photographs

Frontispiece

Selfoss

June, 3:50 am, shortly after sunrise

Canon 40D, 17-85 mm lens at 24 mm, f8 at 13s, ISO 100

Selfoss vies for my affection with Goðafoss as the most beautiful waterfall in Iceland. It is usually viewed from the eastern side, where a paved road leads to the parking lot, but I find the view as pictured here from the west bank to be more attractive. At the time of our visit in 2010 that required a bumpy trip along a dirt road, but construction in progress suggested an easier drive in future, and consequent diminution of solitude. We had spent a brief night in the back of our rented Pathfinder, and I hiked across to the falls at local midnight to anticipate the sunrise. The photo was taken from as close as I dared get to the edge, just as the first rays of sun hit the cliff, using a slow shutter speed to blur the water.

Facing title page

Stranded iceberg, Jökulsá beach

December, 3:00pm

Canon 40D, 24-105mm lens at 24 mm, f11 at 13s, ISO 200, 3 stop ND grad

Icebergs calved from a glacier into an inland lagoon flow out of the short Jökulsá river channel into the sea, from where waves may push them back up onto the black lava sand beach. The color of the ice spans from white to deep blue, depending on its age. Here, an ancient blue iceberg was stranded at the high water mark, contrasting with red tints in the sky as the winter sun crept down toward an early sunset.

page 5

Midnight sun; Skjálfandafljót river, Northern Iceland

August

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens f4.5 at 1/200s, ISO 400

The sun had not yet quite set at midnight as we drove upstream following the Skjálfandafljót river along the road from Goðafoss to Aldjayerfoss.

page 6

Midnight sun, Jökulsárlón

June, 11:35pm

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 40 mm, f14 at 2s, ISO 100

The glacial lagoon at Jökulsárlón is one of Iceland's most spectacular sights; certainly one of the most photographed. Ice from the Breidamerkurjokul glacier calves into the lagoon, where it slowly melts before becoming small enough to pass through the narrow channel into the sea. However, on our first visit I was initially disappointed. We arrived on a summer afternoon, and the view from the parking lot encompassed



hundreds of tourists waiting for the amphibious tour boat, which was motoring noisily amongst densely packed icebergs. However, in summer, the night is the time to get to know and photograph Iceland, and for many enchanted hours I walked in solitude following the shoreline deep inland. The photograph was taken soon after the sun had set behind the mountains, leaving a pink glow to reflect in the still water.

pages 10,11

Rauðisandur panorama

August, morning

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 80mm, f7 at 1/4s, ISO 200. Stitched panorama from 6 shots in portrait orientation.

Most Icelandic beaches are jet black volcanic sand, against which the ochre red of Rauðisandur makes a striking exception. We had camped during a wild and wet night down by the beach, but in the morning the storm rapidly cleared to blue sky and sun, and when driving out we were treated to a vast panorama of sand exposed by the falling tide. The scene was too vast to encompass with even a wide angle lens, so I carefully leveled the tripod and took a series of shots to stitch together in Photoshop.

page 12

Hvítserkur in Húnafljóðar

June, afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10 mm, f11 at 1/50s, ISO 200

Hvítserkur is an eroded dike formation on the coast in Húnaflói bay. Its "M" shape makes for a much photographed icon. Most visitors stay up at the fenced viewpoint on the cliffs, but by scrambling down a steep and muddy path it is possible to get more interesting views from the beach. At high tide the beach is completely covered and the rock becomes its own little island, whereas low tide exposes interesting ripple patterns and draped seaweed contrasting against the black sand. This image is a classic near-far composition, taken hand-held while lying flat on the wet beach with a wide angle lens to frame the seaweed as a guide to lead the viewer's eye into the picture.

page 13

Hvítserkur dawn

June, early morning around 3:00am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10 mm, f5.6 at 1/50s, ISO 200

Another view of Hvítserkur, taken early the next morning from almost exactly the same location as that on the facing page. During the night the tide had risen, and was then receding to leave a reflecting pool around the rock. The rising sun caught scattered clouds, and by waiting and moving slightly to the side I was able to frame the rock between a drifting cloud and its reflection while also centering the curving edge of the pool.

page 14

Un-named fall, Western Fjords

August, afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 13 mm, f16 at 8s, ISO 200; 6-stop ND

Iceland abounds in numerous small but elegant waterfalls, which conveniently cascade just a few hundred yards inland of the highway. It is often a difficult decision whether to stop and take photos, or to continue driving in the confident expectation that there will be another waterfall, at least as attractive, within the next few kilometers. This is a fall where I was taken by the coloration of the mossy boulders in the stream and, obviously, we did stop! Even the smallest falls are meticulously identified by name on roadside signs, so this one is not actually un-named; I just neglected to make a note. The day was grey and overcast; but that is generally preferable for waterfalls to minimize the extreme contrast range between the water and shadows. Here I used a wide angle lens to make the boulders the main feature of the image, and added a 6-stop ND filter onto the lens to allow a long exposure to completely blur the moving water.

page 15

Dynjandi detail

August afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 13 mm, f14 at 15s, ISO 200; 6-stop ND

Just down the road from the small fall on the facing page is a much grander waterfall, Dynjandi. The Western fjords are more about tranquility and subtle light than striking iconic features, but Dynjandi is one of the few must-see postcard attractions. The main fall is a majestic broad, braided cascade high on the cliffside. However, after hiking up to the base, I was struck by veins of bright red rock exposed and cleaned by the water at the edge of the falls, and decided to concentrate on photographing small details, rather than trying to encompass the whole scene. This photograph is thus as much about color as form; black volcanic boulders, the red vein and the vivid green moss. Again, a strong ND filter served to slow the exposure time and blur the water.



page 16

Red aurora over Jökulsárlón

December, about 3:00 am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f 3.5 at 30s, ISO 800

We stayed two nights at Jökulsárlón, sleeping in the back of our rented Land Cruiser - the only people for miles around. It was cold! A bowl of hot fish soup when the little cafe opened in the morning was a treat to look forward to, and the Icelandic lady serving the soup, dressed indoors in a heavy parka, thought we were crazy. My plan was to photograph the aurora over the lagoon, and that looked hopeful in that the weather forecast promised several days of extreme cold with clear skies. But the solar activity forecast was less hopeful, so it was all down to luck. I set my iPod to wake me every two hours through the night, and scraped off the ice from the window to look for a green glow to the North. Mostly I woke hoping this would be absent, so I could stay snuggled in my nice warm down sleeping bag. Around 3 am on our second night the glow was too bright to resist. I pulled on a down jacket and wellies, and headed off into a windchill of probably around -20C into a night illuminated only by a half moon and the aurora itself. Among many photos I captured in the half hour before the display faded I like this one for the range of colors. At the time only the green was visible by eye, but a long exposure captured impressive 'comet tails' of red and yellow.

page 17

Green aurora over Jökulsárlón

December, about 3:20 am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f 3.5 at 30s, ISO 800

A second photo, captured soon after that on the facing page, at a time when the auroral display was at its peak; now a largely monochromatic green but forming a striking inverted 'V' rather than the more usual curved arc across the Northern sky.

page 18

Ingjaldsh Church , Snæfellsjness Peninsula

December, mid-day

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 10 mm, f5.6 at 1/400, ISO 200

This is one of those 'grab' shots that are not calculated, but catch the eye while driving to the next planned location. We were following the small road that runs around the Snæfells peninsula in something of a blizzard, with a fierce wind blowing drifting snow down the mountain and across the road. I was taken by the sunlight catching the clouds above the ridgeline - even though it was mid-day the sun remained hidden behind the mountain - and started looking for some foreground interest. As is often the case in Iceland, a church came to the rescue. I like this image as capturing the wildness of the country, and the tenacity of the Icelanders who make it their home.

page 19

Church and graveyard at Búðir

December, around 5pm

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f6.3 at 1/4s, ISO 200

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 22 mm, f5.6 at 1/8s, ISO 200

Búðir is a tiny hamlet on the south coast of the Snæfellsness peninsula which consists, in its entirety, of a church together with a hotel boasting one of the top gastronomic restaurants in Iceland. We were headed for the latter, but on coming to the turn-off for the hamlet and finding a drifted over dirt track it seemed improbable that the restaurant would be open. Nevertheless, with 4wd and snow tires it seemed worth a try; and, yes they were open and, yes, we could sample the chef's tasting menu. It would be a few hours before dinner, so I headed out into the blizzard to photograph the church and graveyard under fading but atmospheric light.

page 20

Jewels on the beach, Jökulsárlón

December, mid afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 14mm, f18 at 0.4s, ISO 200

The customary photographic game at Jökulsárlón is to take dreamy, long exposure captures of the washed up icebergs as receding waves draw surf patterns around them. That wasn't going to work on this day, as the bergs were all abandoned at the high water mark, while the waves were breaking well down the beach. Instead, I captured a 'straight' photograph to accentuate the jewel-like scalloped contours of the bergs set against the jet black volcanic sand.

page 21

Blue berg, Jökulsá beach

December, mid afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 22mm, f16 at 25s, 6 stop ND filter

An azure blue berg of old ice, color contrasted against the warm pebbles, and with a long exposure of the surf to add an otherworldly feel.



page 22

Hraunfossar

December, afternoon

Canon 40D, 124-105mm lens at 100 mm, f10 at 0.3s, ISO 200

Hraunfossar is an unusual waterfall, where water percolating through a lava bed emerges from multiple springs and falls in rivulets into the Hvítá river. This makes for an interesting composition, with vertical cascades down the black lava orthogonal to the horizontal flow of the river. And, the crystal clear water from the springs contrasts with the distinct blue of the glacier-fed Hvítá. In this photograph I chose a shutter speed long enough to yield an 'angel hair' effect on the cascades, yet short enough to capture some detail in the surf patterns in the river.

page 23

Skógafoss

December, morning

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f22 at 1s, ISO 100

Skógafoss is among the most famous of the Icelandic waterfalls, but although possessing a powerful simplicity in form, it cannot be described as beautiful. Moreover, its location at the back of a short but narrow gorge makes it difficult to come up with any novel composition. Here, I took advantage of the patterns of ice floes in the river to make them the prominent subject, with Skogafoss itself relegated to secondary interest. To get this shot I had to position my tripod well out into the river, and carefully wade across in water nearly up to the top of my wellies.

page 24

Plants by the side of Selfoss

August, afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 22 mm, f6.3 at 1/125s, ISO 100

A grey, overcast day, with a light rain might not be the best light for landscapes, but it served well to photograph small details of plants growing in the rocks alongside majestic Selfoss and Dettifoss



page 25

Plants and larva rocks by Selfoss

August, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 24mm, f7.1 at 1/50s, ISO 200

Another detail shot on a grey, drizzly afternoon. The volcanic rocks become even blacker during rain, and by using a polarizing filter to subdue reflections I could further enhance the green plants against the background.

page 26

Puffins; Dyrhólaey cliffs

August, morning

Canon 40D, 100-400mm lens at 400mm, f5.6 at 1/125s, ISO 200

Puffins are the iconic bird of Iceland, and nest in enormous numbers near the top of the cliffs at Dyrhólaey. In this photograph I used a long telephoto lens to isolate a group of puffins on a ledge below the cliff. Below them was an immense stretch of black sand beach. Together with the narrow depth of field of the lens, this provided an immaculately smooth black background, giving the appearance of a studio portrait.

page 27

Puffin takeoff; Látrabjarg cliffs

June, afternoon

Canon 40D, 100-400mm lens at 400mm, f6.3 at 1/500s, ISO 200

The other place to find puffins in vast numbers is Látrabjarg; the highest cliffs and the western-most point in Iceland. (Indeed, in Europe). On this day - probably on most days! - a strong wind was blowing into the cliffs, creating a updraft into which the puffins launched themselves with wings flapping furiously. I found it hard to photograph the moment of takeoff, as the birds gave very little notice of their intent, and this was the only one out of more than a hundred shots where I felt I had succeeded in capturing the decisive moment.

page 28

Goðafoss

June, late evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 70mm, f29 at 10s, ISO 100

Goðafoss ranks for me as the most serene waterfall in Iceland (with Selfoss a close second). It is not the highest or most dramatic, but late on a summer evening, after all the tourists have left, a wonderful sense of peace settles. This is particularly so if you scramble down to the river on the eastern bank, where the cliffs cut off any view of the surroundings, and the horseshoe curve of the waterfall dominates to the south. I tried to capture this feeling by using a very long exposure to blur the spray and mist into a veil, yet including foreground rocks to provide sharp relief. The problem was that I had earlier sat upon, and destroyed my strong neutral density filter. Thus, in order to achieve a 10s exposure I was obliged to use an extreme aperture, otherwise uncalled for, which introduced some diffraction blur.



page 29

Goðafoss and angelica

June, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17 mm, f22 at 0.4s, ISO 200

I am a little embarrassed about this photo, as it is a near-exact copy of the image on the front cover of our Fodor guidebook to Iceland. When at a much-photographed iconic location I usually try to find some composition or lighting that is at least a little different from the myriad of images already published or on the web. But, in this instance, the temptation was too hard to resist. It took a little juggling with the tripod on slippery wet rocks to line up the angelica with the falls; then all that remained was to set a small aperture for depth of field and to give a shutter speed slow enough to blur out the water.

pages 30,31

Double rainbow and cairns

June, early evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17mm, f13 at 1/60s, ISO 200

Some photographs are taken in panic, rather than deliberate contemplation. When I saw this double rainbow appearing I knew it would not last long, but it seemed worth the risk to keep driving in the hope that it could be paired with an interesting foreground. Luckily, Iceland is littered with rock cairns (maybe the Icelanders don't have much else to do in winter?), and a group of cairns soon appeared that looked as if they might be aligned with the rainbows. I grabbed my camera, with lens and settings as I had last used, and ran down the road in pouring rain seeking the perfect alignment. Once in place I realized that the rainbow was too wide to fit in the frame with a 17mm lens, but it was too late to go back to the car for a wider lens as the light was already starting to fade. The final image is thus a hastily improvised composite of two shots for the left and right of the rainbow; but I did remember to rotate the polarizer to optimize the contrast against the dark sky, and to wipe rain droplets off the filter.

page 32

A sundog and its reflection: Western Fjords

August, evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 60mm, f10 at 6s, ISO 200

The sun, still quite high in the sky on a summer evening, refracted from an ice cloud to create a sundog. Once you start looking out for them, these are not unusual apparitions, but here the intensified reflection of the sundog in smooth water at the edge of the fjord punctuated the curve of the black sand to make a nice composition.

page 33

Dettifoss glow

August, around 3:00am

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 28mm, f4.5 at 0.4s, ISO 400

Dettifoss is the greatest waterfall in Europe. However, it is more about power than subtlety, and is difficult to photograph well. I had aimed to photograph it at sunrise, but had slept in (until 2:30am!), and by the time I hiked to the falls the sun was already above the horizon. However, the sheer power of the falls and the vast cloud of spray it sent up gave the possibility of a different picture. A low ridge of lava blocked the direct light, allowing me to photograph the spray back-illuminated by the red rays of the sun.

page 34

Lunar landscape: Leirhnjúkur

June, a cold afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 28mm, f10 at 6s, ISO 100

The landscape around this area of recent volcanic activity is truly lunar, and on this cold and windy afternoon a threatening sky further enhanced the menacing feeling. I wanted to capture that mood, and waited until a hazy sun shone through a transient thinning in the clouds, choosing a fairly long shutter speed to slightly blur the cloud movement.

page 35

Hverir volcanic area and highway 1

June, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 56mm, f8 at 1/50s, ISO 200

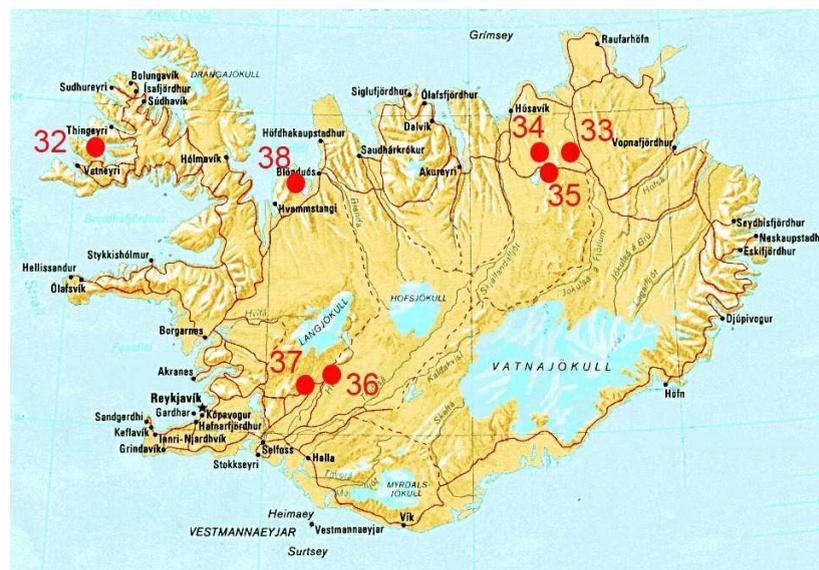
Highway 1, the main ring road of Iceland, snakes its way through and around a colorful volcanic area near Mývatn lake. In this photograph sinuous curves of the highway provide a geometric contrast to the colorful blue and ochre tints of the hot mud. As with all roads in Iceland, the highway here is adorned with reflective posts, whose essential function becomes obvious during winter blizzards. I felt they detracted from the composition, and removed them in Photoshop.

page 36

Solitary figure, Gulfoss

June, morning

Canon 40D, 100-400mm lens at 400mm, f6.3 at 1/2000s, ISO 200



I usually don't include people in my landscape photographs. Indeed, I prefer locations where few people visit or, failing that, choose times when people are not likely to be about. However, the images on these pages are of two of the most visited tourist sites in Iceland, and in them I have included solitary people to provide a sense of scale, whilst avoiding a picture postcard depiction. Here, I used a long telephoto lens to abstract a lone visitor against the shifting rainbows in the spray above Gulfoss.

page 37

Strokkur

June, late afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 85mm, f29 at 1/8s, ISO 200

Geysers around the world derive their name from Geysir in the south west of Iceland. The original Geysir has been quiescent for many years but, luckily for the Icelandic tourist industry, its close neighbor Strokkur, erupts spectacularly and regularly every five minutes. I chose a slow shutter speed to slightly blur the cascade of falling water during an eruption, and the fortuitous transit of a visitor added scale and drama.

page 38

A perfect morning; Osar

June, 5:50am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f6.3 at 1/50s, ISO 400

This is one of my favorite pictures of Iceland. A perfect, crystal clear morning with the warm light on the cliffs reflected the double arc of a tide pool framed by the jet black sand of the beach. A photograph that needed no massaging in Photoshop, but captured, in-camera, both the literal and emotional aspects of the scene. I had scrambled down to the beach to photograph Hvítserkur rock at sunrise (page 13), and turning around realized the possibilities of a shot in the opposite direction. All that was needed was to wander around to find the optimal perspective to bring out the curves of the tidepool.

page 39

Dyrhólaey from Reynisdrangur

December, 3:30pm

Canon 40D, 24-105mm lens at 24mm, f16 at 15s, ISO 100

This view along the black sand to the sea arch of Dyrhólaey is one that is literally staggering; both because of the vast scene itself, and because of the fierce wind that hits as you emerge onto the exposed beach from a path winding through a lava field. Indeed, the wind was a major challenge in getting this photograph. I wanted a long shutter speed to blur the surf, but despite using a top 'L' series Canon lens, the front section of the zoom was sufficiently loose that it wobbled in the wind. This is the sharpest of several exposures, taken using my body as a windbreak. In framing the composition I chose to include a large diagonal of the black sand as negative space to emphasize the thin horizontal sliver of the rocks and the band of orange sky lit by the setting sun.

page 40

Blue berg; Jökulsárlón

June, about 1:00 am

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 50 mm, f7.1 at 30s, ISO 100

The floating icebergs in Jökulsárlón lagoon take on fantastical shapes as they melt. Here, I sought to make a purely abstract composition of an attractive berg, completely isolating it from its environment. I waited until the darkest time of the summer night, closely framed the berg, and used a hand-held flashlight to 'paint' it with light during a long exposure. By keeping the flashlight low to the water and aiming horizontally I was able to keep the background water dark, reflecting just the dim blue of the sky overhead. The long exposure further ensured that small ripples were effectively smoothed out.

page 41

Refractive berg; Jökulsárlón

June, about 3:00am

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 85 mm, f20 at 13 s, ISO 100

Another image from a long and memorable night wandering alone by the shore of the lagoon. I was struck by this unusual little berg, which appeared monochromatic white on the surface, but showed reflections of refracted rainbow colors from the brightening sky in the north east.

page 42

Sea stacks; Reynisdrangur

June, morning

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 50mm, f5.6 at 1/160s, ISO 200

The Icelandic sky is frequently cloud covered, but fleeting breaks in the cloud may allow the sun to shine a spotlight just where you want it. You have to be ready with your camera, because it won't last long!



page 43

Brekkur from Dyrhólaey

July, evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 85mm, f8 at 1/30s, ISO 100

Another natural spotlight photograph, looking across the lagoon from the base of Dyrhólaey.

page 44

Clouds over farm; Western Iceland

July, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 30mm, f8 at 1/250s, ISO 200

Sometimes the sky becomes the main player, and the landscape is merely a supporting role. Situated near the Arctic circle, in the path of low pressure systems heading across from Greenland, the weather in Iceland is dramatic and rapidly changing. But, "bad weather makes for good photographs".

page 45

Biblical cloud; abandoned church site on Reykjanes peninsula.

December, late afternoon

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 10 mm, f22 at 30s, ISO 100, 6 stop ND filter

We had driven over a back road crossing the mountains of the Reykjanes peninsula on the way to the gastronomic Christmas dinner buffet at the Blue Lagoon, and turned following a sign to an abandoned church site. Wandering round the fenced site failed to reveal any sign of a church, excepting for a lone cross partly buried in a snowdrift. Nothing much to photograph from a landscape perspective, but the rapidly forming cloud formation was something else. I waded through the snow to line up with the cross, taking a circuitous path to avoid footprints that might mar the composition I envisaged. Once in place, it became apparent that the cloud was too vast to fit in a single frame even with a 10 mm lens, so the final photography is a composite of two shots, for the ground and the sky, using a 30s exposure to blur the cloud movement and enhance the otherworldly feel.

page 46

Pink light on the mountains above Jökulsárlón

December, 10:00am

Canon 40D, 24-105mm lens at 24 mm, f6.3 at 1/15s, ISO 200

After a long night of winter darkness punctuated by aurora, sunrise finally brought warm light; but not warm temperature.

page 47

Selfoss in pink

August, around 3:30 am

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 64mm, f9 at 25s, ISO 100

In contrast to its dramatic downstream neighbor, Dettifoss, Selfoss is an introverted waterfall, best appreciated in quiet contemplation. The photograph was taken very early in the morning, before sunrise, when the sky was tinted pink and no one else was afoot.

page 48

Jökulsárlón bridge afire

December, 10:30am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 22mm, f5 at 1/100s, ISO 200

The winter sun rises in the south, sets in the south, and never rises very high in between as it skims above the horizon. If its path coincides with a distant gap in a continuous cloud cover, that may create a golden band beneath a monochrome sky. Here, such a band fit just nicely under the deck of the suspension bridge spanning the river channel at Jökulsárlón.

page 49

Jökulsárlón bridge and ice reflection

December, 10:45am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 22 mm, f4.5 at 1/400s, ISO 200

This photograph was taken only minutes after that on the facing page: The same subject, but a different play on the changing lighting conditions. The warm glow on the horizon had largely faded, but a thinned patch of cloud drifted across the sky, allowing me to frame it and its reflection in a frozen pool against the bridge. This picture reminds me of how very cold it was that morning.

page 50

Kjölur route

June, mid-day

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 38mm, f9 at 1/60s, ISO 200

Within the ring road is a barrens of mountains, icecaps and gravel plains. No paved roads cross the country, but in summer the Kjölur route is easily tackled by a regular SUV. Excepting the thermal area around Hveravellir there are few distinctive scenes, but the long drive instills an appreciation for the vastness and stillness of the interior.



page 51

Kaldidalur Route

August, evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 56mm, f5.6 at 1/200s, ISO 200

The Kaldidalur Route provides a taste of the Icelandic interior that is accessible by a regular car and, lacking a formal 'F' road designation, does not break the insurance prohibition of taking non-4wd vehicle on mountain roads. On this crossing we had ascended from the Hvítá valley into thick clouds, which parted only transiently to reveal a narrow window onto golden hillsides. Soon after a heavy rain began, and we slept the night in the back of our rental Subaru buffeted by strong winds.

page 52

Hraunfossar spring detail

July, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17mm, f7.1 at 3s, ISO 200

The unusual waterfall at Hraunfossar is created by a myriad springs emerging from a porous lava field (page 22). After photographing the falls from the usual viewpoints on the south bank, I grew curious as to what the springs would look like close up, and after crossing the Barnafoss bridge, walked back with increasingly wet feet across the lava field. I was disappointed to find that the water did not emerge from some black hole, but by consolation the rushing waters were beautifully framed by contrasting red-tinted boulders and vivid green moss. To get this shot I stood in the middle of the stream, holding splayed tripod legs in place against the slippery rocks.

page 53

Red leaves, black rock; near Selfoss

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 75 mm, f6.3 at 1/25s, ISO 200

A light rain and overcast sky accentuated the colors in these leaves, set against the black volcanic rock.

page 54

Green swirls in thermal stream: Krafla area

August

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 30mm, f4.5 at 1/3s, ISO 200

Vegetation grows rampant in the warm streams from geothermal areas. In this image I used a polarizer to cut reflected light from the water to provide a clear view of the striking green algae swirls and red color contrasts lying underneath.

page 55

Drainage patterns in black sand; Kjölur Route

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17mm, f9 at 1/50s, ISO 200

A small detail abstracted from the vastness along the Kjölur Route.

page 56

Glymur; highest waterfall in Iceland

August, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17mm, f22 at 0.4s, ISO 100

Although high, Glymur does not rank among the most photogenic of Iceland's waterfalls. However, it may be the most fun to hike to, involving wriggling through a natural rock tunnel, and crossing a raging river balancing on two steel cables. The best viewpoint is high up on a steep, muddy path, where I was pleased to find some angelica to frame the main falls together with peripheral falls cascading into the deep gorge.

page 57

Mystery falls; Western Fjords

June, afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f20 at 13s, ISO 100, 6 stop ND

Well, not really mystery falls - they have a name, as does every mountain and waterfall in Iceland - but I neglected to note it. However, my name does fit the Tolkeinesque mood. I used a strong neutral density filter and small aperture to slow the exposure to 13 s, blurring the foam in the pool into smooth streaks, and giving a surreal appearance to the clouds.

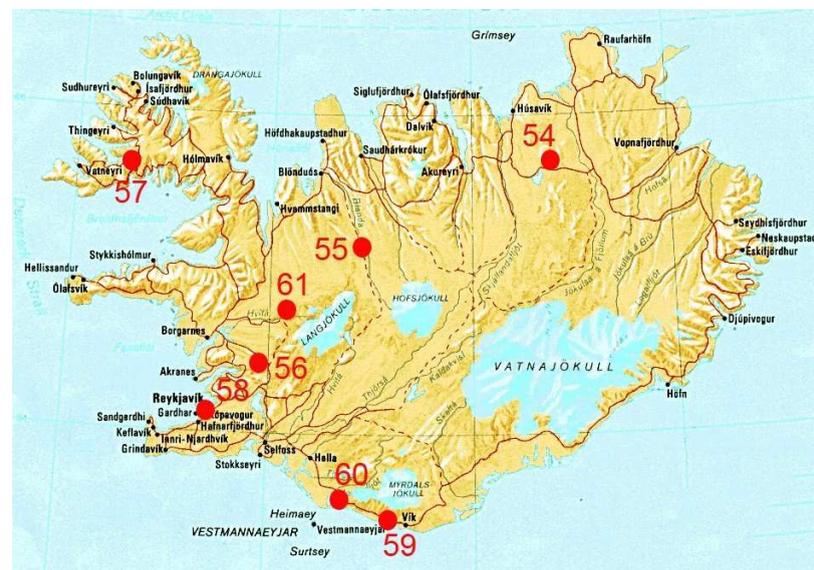
page 58

View from Reykjavík seafront

July, midnight

Canon 40D, 100-400mm lens at 150mm, f11 at 30s, ISO 200, 6 stop ND

The photographs on these pages were from our very first two nights in Iceland, revelling in the light of the almost-midnight sun. This is a view looking from the seafront at Reykjavík across to clouds descending from the mountains, with the sky still tinted from the sun only a little way below the horizon.



page 59

House in mist; Dyrhólaey

July, around midnight

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 35mm, f11 at 1/6s, ISO 200

On our first night out camping, we set up tent by the lagoon at Dyrhólaey after photographing sunset over the sea arch. A damp mist hung over the ground, and lights in a distant house showed that someone else was still awake at this late hour.

page 60

Circular rainbow, Seljalandsfoss

July, mid-afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f11 at 1/80s, ISO 200

A triangular viewing mound, together with the low altitude of the sun allowed me to frame a complete circular rainbow in spray from the Seljalandsfoss waterfall.

page 61

Rainbow and church; Húsafell

August, evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 85mm, f13 at 1/125s, ISO 200

This photograph was taken just a few minutes after capturing the double rainbow on page 31. The light had faded to uniform grey, and we drove up the valley in pouring rain. Then the sky behind started to clear and a new rainbow came into being, intense, but single this time. The need to find a foreground subject was answered quickly as we came around a bend to see a small church nestled against the side of the fell. I jumped out of the car and ran along the road seeking to line up the church with the rainbow's end, getting confused, as I usually do, by the fact that unlike distant objects such as mountains, the position of the rainbow changes as you move. Success came before the light faded, and this has become one of my favorite images; a homage on a smaller scale to Galen Rowell's famous photograph of the Potola Palace at the end of a rainbow.



pages 62,63

Jökulsárlón panorama

August, evening

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f7.1 at 1/5s, ISO 100

To the west of the main access road to the Jökulsárlón lagoon a range of low mounds left by the retreating glacial moraine block any view of the lagoon from the road. However, several rough tracks head inland, leading to secluded camping spots. We set up our tent at one of these, a short walk from a bay offering a wide view of the icebergs scattered across the lagoon. Here, I created a panorama by stitching together three separate shots taken with a wide angle lens, after positioning the camera directly behind a fractured boulder. The distortion of the ultra-wide lens has compressed the perspective, so the bay looks narrower and more symmetrical than is in fact the case.

page 64

Lake Mývatn

August, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 85mm, f7.1 at 1/200s, ISO 200

Lake Mývatn was formed only about 2000 years ago following a large basaltic lava eruption, and is surrounded by interesting volcanic landforms. This photograph, however, is more about the sky with the lake as a secondary player.

page 65

Partial rainbow over Hunafjörður

August, morning

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 33mm, f7.1 at 1/125s, ISO 200

page 66

Puffin portrait

August, afternoon; Látrabjarg cliffs

Canon 40D, 100-400mm lens at 400mm, f5.6 at 1/2500s, ISO 200

The puffin is the iconic cute bird of Iceland; even if you can buy T shirts proclaiming "we eat puffins". In that context it is surprising that puffins don't take much notice of people, and allow you to approach quite close. A long telephoto lens is thus not strictly necessary to photograph the birds, but here I capitalized on the narrow depth of field of a 400mm lens to throw the background completely out of focus to create a studio-like uniform backdrop.

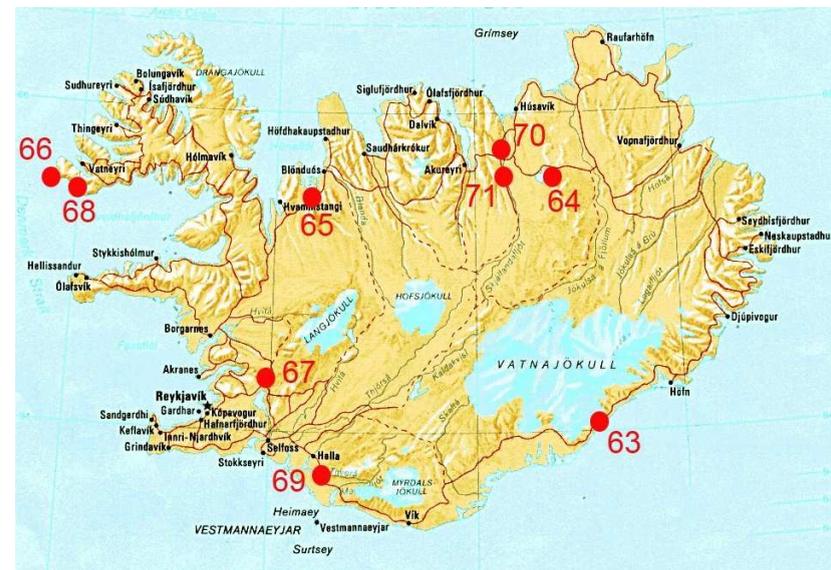
page 67

Icelandic horse portrait

December, morning

Canon 40D, 100-400mm lens at 280mm, f5.6 at 1/400s, ISO 400

The iconic cute animal of Iceland; the stocky and astonishingly shaggy Icelandic horse. This one attracted me because his deep red coat was nicely catching the sun, and he had looked up as I approached so that it was actually possible to see an eye behind all the hair. He was in a group foraging under the snow, which provided a clean, neutral background.



page 68

Clouds above Saurbær

August, morning

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 22mm, f6.3 at 1/60s, ISO 200

Soon after photographing the red beach at Raudisandur, a threatening bank of clouds swept in over the inland cliffs.

page 69

Farm, south Iceland

June, morning

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 22mm, f8 at 1/320s, ISO 200

Just a typical Icelandic farm, elegantly placed on a sunlit dome of grassy fields, and topped by a characteristically cloudy sky.

page 70

Subsidiary fall, Goðafoss

July, late evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 53mm, f8 at 1.6s, ISO 100

A composition in orthogonality. I had been waiting for hours on a peaceful summer evening at Goðafoss, hoping that the setting sun would finally break through the clouds and cast some light on the falls. But the view of the main falls is to the south, and the sun sets in the north, so when a shaft of red finally appeared, it was too far to the side to compose with Goðafoss itself. Instead, I moved around on the east bank to line up a small vertical side fall with a bank of mist glowing red in the fading sunlight.

page 71

Aldeyrfoss, midnight sunrise

June, dawn

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 22mm, f25 at 1/8, ISO 100, 2 stop hard ND grad

After photographing Goðafoss at sunset, we drove quickly upstream along the Bárðardalur valley, reaching Aldeyrfoss just in time to catch the sunrise.

page 72

Sea stacks, Reynisdrangar

December, afternoon

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 12mm, F20 at 10s, ISO 100, 6-stop ND

A recent storm had left snow covering the black sand beach, and the retreating tide revealed a strip of black. I used a long exposure to blur out the crashing surf, to create alternating white, black and white diagonals. Although the sky was heavily overcast, the low winter sun added a subtle tint to contrast with the monochromatic snow and surf.

page 73

Pebble beach, Dyrhólaey

July, evening

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 12mm, f20 at 0.5s, ISO 200

Icelandic beaches are usually formed from coarse-grained black sand, but the high water mark often shows larger, smoothly rounded black pebbles. Here, I used a near-far composition with a wide angle lens to contrast the smooth pebbles with the angular outlines of sea stacks off the Dyrhólaey peninsula.

pages 74,75

Basalt gorge, Aldeyarfoss

August, 4:00am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 16mm, f25 at 3s, ISO 100

The narrow gorge below Aldeyarfoss is lined by an impressive array of straight and contorted basalt columns. It is impossible to encompass the entire sweep in a single frame, so I carefully levelled my tripod, and took a series of 6 overlapping exposures to stitch together into this final image.

page 76

Solfar, Reykjavík

July, 11:00 pm

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 20mm, f8 at 5s, ISO 200

Flights to Iceland from the U.S. all arrive in the early morning. On our first visit we ate a lunch buffet at the Blue Lagoon restaurant, then headed to a hotel in Reykjavík to sleep off some of the jet lag. On awakening at around 10:00pm the sun was still shining, so we walked along the seafront to view the Solfar (Sun Voyager), a stainless steel sculpture evoking the Viking longboat. This photo was taken after the sun had set but when the sky was still quite light. The orange glow is from streetlight reflected by the polished steel

page 77

Interior, Þingeyrar church

July, afternoon

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f4.5 at 1/200s, ISO 800

Þingeyrar was the site of a 12th century Benedictine monastery. This is long gone, but an especially beautiful stone church now stands in its place, featuring a 15th century English altar. The photo was taken with a super-wide lens, correcting afterwards in Photoshop for perspective distortion.



page 78

Scalloped iceberg, Jökulsá beach

December, mid-day

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 16mm, f5.6 at 1/40s, ISO 200

A single, wonderfully scalloped and fluted iceberg, jewel-like against the black sand. To further isolate it, I added a further blur to the background in Photoshop.

page 79

Icebergs under dramatic sky; Jökulsá beach

December, about 3:00pm

Canon 40D, 24-105mm lens at 24mm, f22 at 1.6s and f22 at 10s, ISO 100, 6-stop ND

The tides was well out this afternoon and all the icebergs were high up on the beach at Jökulsárlón, so there was no chance to make photographs of surf breaking around the bergs. In consolation, the low afternoon sun created a dramatic red sky, and the bergs glowed both blue and red. To cope with the wide variation in brightness between the sky and beach I created this image by blending two separate shots with different exposures, using a solid ND filter to get a shutter speed long enough to blur the waves.

page 80

Soft light over the Western Fjords; Sugandafjurdur

July, 4:00am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 13mm, f13 at 15s, ISO 100, 6-stop ND

It is hard to sleep through an Icelandic night. You wake up, notice a pastel glow in the sky, and that's enough motivation to grab camera and tripod and head off down the beach. This very simple composition captures for me the stillness of that early morning excursion.

page 81

Raudisandur beach at low tide

July, morning

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f6.3 at 1/100s, ISO 200

We camped at the edge of a wide grassy area at Raudisandur, and as we went to sleep late at night the sea was lapping only a few feet away. Awakening in the morning, acres of wet sand beach lay exposed under a stormy sky.

page 82

Aurora over highway 1; South Iceland

December, 9:00pm

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f3.5 at 20s, ISO 800

The auroral forecast for this night was quiet, but we must have been lucky as a brief burst of cosmic particles hit the earth's magnetic field and created a vivid display that lasted only about 15 minutes.

page 83

Red cloud and shining path: Bláa Lónið

December, 8:30am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 13mm, f5.6 at 8s, ISO 200

A Tolkeinesque scene of an illuminated path wending through barren lava fields toward the glowing interior of a mysterious cloud. In fact, it is the path between the Blue Lagoon spa and the adjacent hotel, and the cloud glow reflects the street lights of Keflavík. But Iceland becomes surreal in the cold and quiet before a winter dawn.

page 84

Midnight mist over Jökulsárlón

July, middle of the night

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 28mm, f25 at 15s, ISO 100

Layers of mist settled briefly over Jökulsárlón late at night, while a faint pink glow remained in the northern sky.

page 85

Kissing swans: Blue bergs on Jökulsárlón

July, about 2:00am

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 20mm, f7.1 at 30s, ISO 400, 6 stop ND

About an hour after the time the photo on the facing page was taken all color from the sun had faded, creating a deep blue monochromatic background against which to contrast the fantastical shapes of melting icebergs.



page 86

Symmetric trees: Geysir visitor center

December, morning

Canon 7D, 24-105mm lens at 28mm, f5.6 at 1/30s, ISO 200

On a grey, snowy winter's morning I was having a hard time trying to photograph the eruptions of Strokkur geyser. Grey-white water and steam against a background of grey-white snow just wasn't working. Instead, the trees across the road made a pleasingly symmetrical composition; and they were on the path to a bowl of Icelandic lamb soup at the visitor center.

page 87

Tangled birch: Geysir

December, morning

Canon 7D, 24-105mm lens at 67mm, f6.3 at 1/8s, ISO 100

Snow-covered trees at the edge of the Geysir volcanic area. Nothing special, except that trees are very rare in Iceland.

pages 88,89

Hraunfossar panorama

August, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 70mm, f10 at 2s, ISO 100, 3 exposure stitch

Hraunfossar ('lava falls') is comprised from an intriguing series of springs which cascade from and down a lava flow bordering the Hvítá river. The falls extend over a total distance of nearly a kilometer, and it is thus nearly impossible to capture them in their entirety in a single picture. However, the central part is the most attractive, where the springs descend over the highest section of orange-tinted rock. This panorama was made from a sequence of 3 blended photographs.

page 90

Aurora and clouds over icebergs; Jökulsárlón

December, about 2:00am

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 13mm, f4 at 30s, ISO 1600

I had wanted to capture an image of the aurora reflected in the glacial lagoon at Jökulsárlón, with icebergs in the foreground. Not so easily done in the depths of a cold winter night, when the only light is the aurora itself. As I wriggled out from my sleeping bag the aurora was vivid and high overhead, but by the time I had hiked down to the lagoon the green light had condensed to an arc above the northern sky, and it was difficult to find reflections as the shallow water near the edge of the lagoon was frozen. Eventually I found a shallow bay, and waded out through thin ice to find a clear area of still, ice-free water.

page 91

Sunrise cloud; Jökulsárlón

December, about 10:00am

Canon 40D, 24-105mm lens at 24mm, f13 at 20s, ISO 200, 6 stop ND

The following morning the late-to-rise winter sun cast a pastel pink light on the convex curve of the mountains, complemented by the concave arc of a high cloud.

page 92

Blue line: Hverir volcanic area

August, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 22mm, f5.6 at 1/320s, ISO 200

This large geothermal field lies conveniently close to highway 1 and, alarmingly, indicates the presence of red-hot molten lava just beneath the surface. The release of acid gasses dissolves the rocks into clay, forming highly colored potholes. The ground is soft, and possibilities for varied photographic compositions are constrained by the need to stay within fenced areas to avoid sinking into boiling mud.

page 93

Mud pits: Hverir volcanic area

August afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17mm, f5.6 at 1/160s, ISO 200

Runoff from a thermal spring created a thin blue line through the orange/yellow sulphur of the hot mud flats.

page 94

Back-lit Goðafoss

August, evening

Canon 40D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f22 at 1s, ISO 100

The Skjalfandafltot river runs due north from the interior and cuts a gorge through volcanic tablelands to form Godafoss, among Iceland's most beautiful waterfalls, and one connected to a major event in the island's history when a local chieftain marked his conversion to Christianity by throwing symbols of his heathen gods into the falls.

132



page 95 - upper

Monochrome berg: Jökulsárlón

July, afternoon

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 47mm, f6.3 at 1/500s, ISO 100

On a very grey day, only slight hints of blue remain in the undersides of the icebergs at Jökulsárlón. My attention turned to the sculpted forms of the monochromatic ice.

page 95 - lower

Pink sunrise; Jökulsárlón

July, about 4:00am

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 40mm, f29 at 1s, ISO 200

Daytime is when all the tourist visit Jökulsárlón, but it is not the best time. The lagoon only really comes alive between the hours when the sun is nearly set, and when it has just arisen. All is quiet except for a gentle creaking as floating bergs pass one another, and an occasional distant crash as the glacier calves. Subdued pastel shades in the sky play against the blue ice.

page 96

Red sky at dawn over Þingvellir

December morning

Canon 5D MkIII, 24-105mm lens at 24mm, f5.6 at 1/80s, ISO 200

For our first full day in Iceland we usually drive over the mountains to Geysir and Gulfoss, which makes an easy day out while recovering from jet lag, and the restaurant at Geysir provides a welcome re-introduction to Icelandic lamb soup. On our most recent visit (2012) we stopped en-route for the first time at Þingvellir, and set off exploring in pre-dawn darkness. Luckily, we took a path that led up the hillside among the lava cliffs, and were well positioned for a view across the lake as the sun finally struggled up above the horizon and lit the clouds a vivid red.

page 97

Yellow reflections, Þingvellir

December morning

Canon 5D MkIII, 24-105mm lens at 73mm, f5.6 at 1/80s, ISO 200, 3-stop ND grad

A little later on the same morning the highlights in the sky turned from red to yellow, reflecting in the myriad convolutions of the lake. I used a hard-edge ND 3 grad filter to tame the extreme contrast range between the sky and land.

pages 98,99

Panorama; last light on Mýrdalsjökull reflected in the lagoon across from Reynisfjara

December afternoon

Canon 5D MkIII, 24-105mm lens at 60mm, f7 at 1/20s, ISO 200; 2-frame stitch

A long spit of black sand extends westward toward the cliffs of Dyrhólaey, separating the crashing ocean surf from a calm lagoon. My intent on this afternoon was to photograph the basalt columns and wave patterns on the ocean beachfront, but seeing the Mýrdalsjökull ice-cap catch the light of the setting sun I crossed over to the inland side, and waded some distance into the shallow lagoon beyond the floating strands of seaweed to get a clean reflection.

page 100

Lead-crystal berg in retreating surf: Jökulsá beach

December, 10:00am

Canon 5D MkIII, 24-105mm lens at 70mm, f22 at 1.6s, ISO 50

The beach near the outlet of the Jökulsárlón lagoon is littered with numerous icebergs of all shapes and sizes. For this photo I was attracted by the clean-cut scalloping on an unusually transparent berg. Fortunately, it lay at the edge of the beach and was periodically washed by incoming surf. To create an ethereal backdrop, I used a long exposure to blur the foam patterns of a receding wave against the black sand

page 101

Breaking waves and floating berg: Jökulsá beach

December, 10:00am

Canon 5D MkIII, 24-105mm lens at 90mm, f13 at 1/6s, ISO 50

Another photo from the same morning. Strong surf was crashing onto the beach, and jostling bergs washed up near the high-water line sent spray into the air. For safety, I stayed some way back, and focused on a sculpted blue berg. I took numerous shots, timed to catch the spray pattern as successive waves rolled in, and chose a shutter speed that would render the spray as distinct streaks without blurring into a diffuse mist.

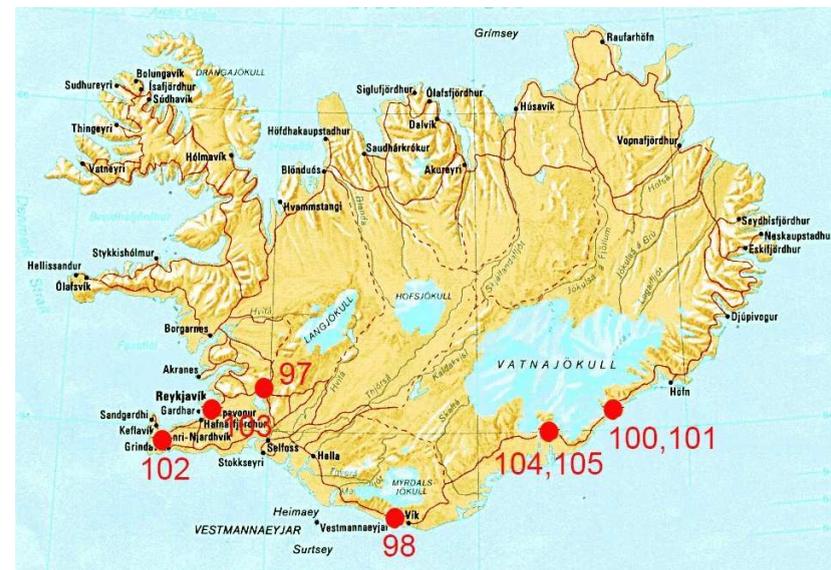
page 102

Blue lagoon (Bláa Lónið)

December, 7:30pm

Canon 5D MkIII, 24-105mm lens at 35mm, f4 at 1/8s, ISO 1600

View from inside the Lava Restaurant, taken during the famous Christmas Buffet.



page 103

December, 8:00pm

Harpa concert hall; Reykjavík

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f13 at 1/30s, ISO 200

Construction of the new concert hall in Reykjavík was finally completed in 2012, after a long hiatus caused by the banking collapse. But, the surrounding landscaping had not yet been finished, leaving a big hole in the ground to fill with water and provide a nice night-time reflection of the changing lights of the hall and its Christmas tree.

page 104

Ice cave; Vatnajökull

December, 11:00am

Canon 5D MkIII, Rokinon 14mm lens, f5.6 at 0.4s, ISO 200

Our guide Einar took us to a beautiful ice cave at the tongue of one of the glaciers descending from the Vatnajökull ice cap. The cave had a second entrance, and our visit was timed so that the rising sun that aligned to create a wonderful golden glow contrasting with the blues and greens of light filtering through the ice. I usually don't include people in my landscape photographs, but here I thought a figure was essential to provide a sense of scale to an otherwise unworldly scene.

page 105

Brain ice: Vatnajökull ice cave

December, 11:00am

Canon 5D MkIII, Rokinon 14mm lens, f5.6 at 0.8s, ISO 200

Another image from the ice cave. As a neuroscientist, I was intrigued by a transparent ice formation resembling the sulci of the brain. Getting in place to create the right composition was not easy, as the floor of the cave was littered with slippery ice boulders, but I managed to set up my tripod to capture a diagonal composition along a line of translucent blue and green ice, with the ice 'brain' set off against a group huddled in golden light from the second cave entrance.

page 106

Dyrhólaey from Reynisfjara

November 3:30pm

Canon 7D, 24-105mm lens at 45mm, f13 at 30s, ISO 200, 6-stop ND filter

Snow remained on the beach this cold winter afternoon, bracketing the black sand between the high water mark and the surf line to form a leading line toward distant Dyrhólaey peninsula.

page 107

November, 8:00am

Grundarfjordur and Kirkjufell

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 10mm, f5.6 at 1/10s, ISO 1600

We had spent the night in the back of the Landcruiser, parked on the far side of the bay across from the small town of Grundarfjordur. The night sky was clear, dropping the temperature far below freezing. Reluctant to get out of warm sleeping bags we slept in until around 8:30am, but even then only the slightest blue glimmer of dawn lit the sky, contrasting with the warm street lights of the town.

page 108

Snow-dusted Jökulberg

December, 9:30am

Canon 7D, 10-22mm lens at 12mm, f11 at 2s, ISO 200

I had hoped for a vivid red glow in the southern sky to photograph the bergs on Jokulsa beach, but this morning the sky was overcast with leaden clouds. That made it more importance to find an interesting subject, and I was happy to come across a berg whose scalloped surface had been accented by a light dusting of snow overnight. I used a super-wide lens close up to the berg to emphasize its texture while providing a broad view of the beach and sky, and lined it up with a more distant berg and a fortuitous light patch in the clouds.

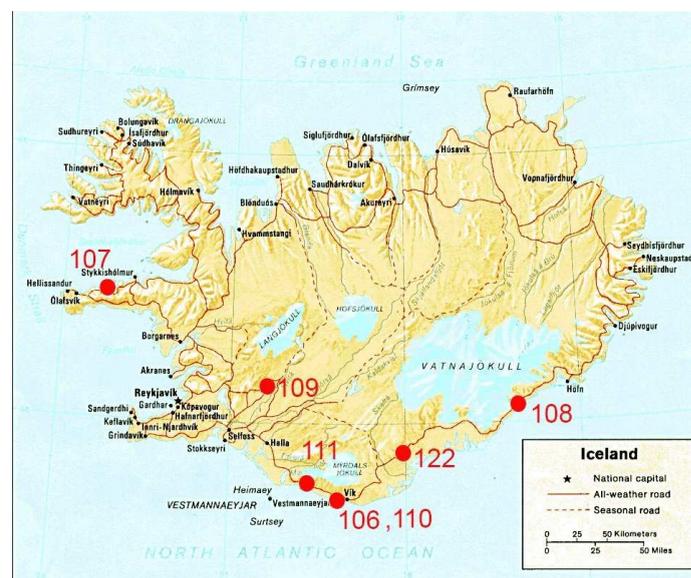
page 109

Blue pool and Strokkur eruption

December, noon

Canon 5D Mk III, 24-105mm lens at 24mm, f9 at 1/50s, ISO 400

Strokkur must be the most obliging geysir in the world, erupting regularly about every 5 minutes. On this visit the sky had clouded over as we drove up from the valley, and from past experience I knew that a dark grey plume of water and steam did not photograph well against a grey sky. I thus spent some time walking around, looking for something that would add some color. Red runoff from thermal springs seemed to offer a possibility, but I failed to find a composition that lined up well with the geysir, and instead selected a deep-blue thermal pool as my foreground. The shot took some setting up, as I needed the camera very close to the pool, and ended with my tripod (but not me!) on the far side of the low fence demarcating the area where an unwitting footstep might penetrate boiling hot ground. Then it was a matter of patience, waiting until a faint breeze cleared away steam obscuring the pool at the time of an eruption.



page 110

Drift patterns on Reynisdrangar beach

December, afternoon

Canon 5D Mk III, Rokinon 14mm lens, f5.6 at 1/20s, ISO 200

The black sand accentuated geometric patterns left by the surf at high tide, and shot with a super-wide lens created a nice leading line to the columnar basalt cave and sea stacks of Reynisdrangar.

page 111

Ice patterns below Skógafoss

December, afternoon

Canon 5D Mk III, 24-105mm lens at 28mm, f14 at 1/30s, ISO 400

Another 'leading-line' composition. On a cold December day I was able to photograph without the milling tourist crowds of summer, and tried to frame a different composition of this iconic waterfall by lying flat on the frosty ground to include curving lines in the ice at the edge of a reflecting rain pool.

pages 112-113

Panorama from alongside highway 1 in South Iceland

December, late afternoon

Canon 5D Mk III, 24-105mm lens at 24mm, f7 at 1/100s, ISO 200: stitched from 5 exposures

The warm light of the low sun was casting a yellow glow on this mountain as we drove west back toward Reykjavik, and a wide pool in the marshlands by the road offered good possibilities for reflections. To create this image I waded through the mud to the edge of the water, and then took several overlapping shots so as to be able to stitch them together to create a wide panorama.

page 114

Seaweed blur; Djúpalónssandur

December, afternoon

Canon 5D Mk III, 24-105mm lens zoomed at 24-105mm, f7 at 30s, ISO 400, ND 6

Djúpalónssandur was once the home to 60 fishing boats, but they are long gone, and the only remaining evidence that this was once the most productive harbor on the Sneafelsness peninsula are the lifting stones by which the fishermen judged their strength. On a wild winter afternoon I had the place to myself, but I was finding little photographic inspiration from the grey skies, black beach and black rocks. The only color came from seaweed washed high up on the pebble beach, so I decided to make that the subject of some small-scale portraits. This image was created by zooming the lens during a long exposure, pausing longer at the maximum zoom to form a sharp magnified image outlining an inner blur.

page 115

Seaweed color; Djúpalónssandur

December, afternoon

Canon 5D Mk III, 24-105mm lens at 40mm, f14 at 1/15s, ISO 200

The overcast conditions and light rain were ideal to bring out the saturated colors in this tangle of seaweed, which contrasted nicely with the blue/black of the pebbles. A polarizing filter further enhanced the color and cut glare from the wet pebbles and seaweed.

pages 116, 117

Spectacular sunrise above Þingvellir

December, morning

Canon 5D Mk III, 24-105mm lens at 45mm, f4.5 at 1/100s, ISO 400

This was perhaps the best sunrise we have seen in Iceland, and we were fortunate to experience it at Þingvellir, the historic site of the world's first parliament. Arctic sunrises progress in slow motion, so I had plenty of time to walk around and select different compositions; here using the classic Icelandic church to set off the sky.

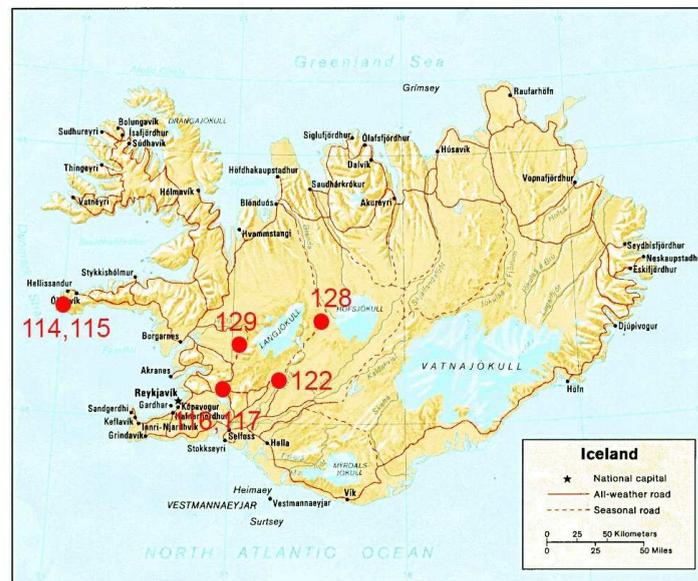
page 122

Gulfoss rainbow

July, early morning

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17mm, f7 at 1/80s, ISO 200

Gulfoss is actually two separate waterfalls in quick succession. The second fall is a right-angle drop that takes the river into a deep gorge, which is hard to photograph because of the tremendous spray that largely obscures any view. On this morning a light wind was blowing spray back over the cliffs, and the low angle of the rising sun created a rainbow stretching down below my feet. The main difficulty in taking this shot was keeping the lens dry long enough after wiping off water droplets to compose and press the shutter button.



page 128

Moss campion in the barrens along the Kjölur Route

August, mid-day

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 17mm, f13 at 1/60s, ISO 200

Isolated spots of color punctuate the long drive across the Kjölur Route from Gulfoss to the North of Iceland.

pages 138-139

Kaldidalur Route

August, evening

Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens at 56mm, f5.6 at 1/200s, ISO 200

A two-shot panoramic stitch to catch a fleeting window through the clouds that opened while crossing this route through the interior highlands.

End piece

Annie in an ice cave

December, 11:00 am

Canon 5D MkIII, Rokinon 14mm lens, f5.6 at 0.4s, ISO 200

A portrait in the beautiful blue, green and gold ice cave we visited at the tongue of one of the glaciers descending from the Vatnajökull ice cap.









Annie, my photographic elf





"The one who has seen the light has seen the true Iceland and will never lose sight of it again"

Pall Asgeir Asgeirson