

Walking routes and spots to visit

Hagi

A walk through Hagi is easy. On one hand there are inlets and off-shore cliffs, where waves break on shallows and rocks. Just off the coastline dark dikes of ancient magma withstand the ocean's erosive might, and contrast with the froth of the sea. On the other hand, cliffs tower over richly vegetated slopes. Due to erosive freezing, or possibly to breakers of bygone times, great boulders have loosened from the cliffs of Hagaklettur, forming Urðir, where they now lie here and there like buildings in a fantasy. Moss and lichens decorate their surfaces, while various ferns inhabit the sheltered niches between them where spiders can string their webs. Icelanders dug for peat up to the turn of the twentieth century and remains of the pits can still be seen near Urðir.

Brytaskálar

Overgrown ruins at Brytaskálar (Butler's lodge) are considered the remains of old fishermen's huts, the fishermen having drawn their boats up onto the shore. In those days of tiny, unpowered boats, it was important to locate such landings as close to the fishing grounds as possible, even if conditions were unsafe. The source of the place name is unclear, though some think it indicates that the butler for the pastor at Skorrastaður may have supervised fishing here to obtain food for the parsonage.

Páskahellir

A tour of Páskahellir (Easter cave) is exciting. Stairs led down to the cave and you have a choice of either following the coast further out, and climbing back up to the marked trail, or retracing your steps. The small cave of Páskahellir was carved out by waves. Inside one sees smaller holes left by trees which were covered by lava about 12 million years ago. Outside the view is of beautiful pillow lava and a mighty dike and in rocks numerous crystal can be found. The view east to the



peninsula Barðsneshorn is magnificent, dominated by the red rhyolite glow of Rauðubjörg. Marine animals are found in puddles, while Oysterplant decorates cliffs. During Easter morning sun is said to dance here. Tales tell of a nearby farmer who, one Easter, managed to steal the discarded sealskin of a pretty sealgirl (half seal - half human) thus enslaving her to him. After bearing him seven children, she managed to retrieve her skin, enabling her to return to the sea, where she already had seven other children. However, the farmer later caught a bull from the sea, which his former wife supposedly sent him to improve his cattle.

Hundsvík

One can hike on from Páskahellir to Hundsvík and descend down to the inlet. There's a fabulous view over the bay, including Viðfjörður and Hellisfjörður to the SW. Nípan, with its sharp cliffs, gullies and, in early summer, its rushing streams, rises steeply above. One can continue as far as Nípustapi, though loose or falling rocks call for precaution.

By way of Skálasnið or Klofasteinagjót

One can hike upwards from Hagi through the passages of Skálasnið and Klofasteinagjót. Though both are fairly accessible, they are steep, so one must be careful. Flowers growing under the cliffs and on the beautiful

slopes, such as Pyramidal Bugle and the Alpine Lady-fern invite the eye. Reaching the cliffs, one discovers other rare species, such as Pyramidal Saxifrage and White Mountain Saxifrage together with more common plants of open spaces. Take care not to disturb these species or their habitat.



Following Hagaklettur

One hike to recommend is: follow the edge of Hagaklettur then either continue up to Efri-Hálsar or down to Hagi through Skálasnið or Klofasteinagjót. Efri-Hálsar ends before Breiðarák at a vegetated cliff with a large boulder, called Þúfa, from which there's a fine view farther north along the mountain, or down to Hundsvík, Páskahellir and Hagi.

Viðarhjalli

Another hike leads up from Efri-Hálsar, through the opening Breiðasnið and onto the terrace Viðarhjalli. Actually, this terrace is rather steep, but has both rich plant life and a great view. In earlier times, goats grazed here along with the sheep. The stream Hálsalækur flows down from the terrace to Hagi.

Nípukollur

Only experienced mountain hikers should attempt Nípukollur. A fairly convenient, but rather steep route through the cliffs leads up west of the chasm formed by Stórlækur. Nípukollur offers a spectacular view, including Mjóifjörður, Norðfjörður, and mountain peaks. A towering rock named Kerling used to stand in the area, but is believed to have crashed down about 1850. The tale says that Kerling was a troll under a curse, while the sea rock Einbúi in Mjóifjörður was her husband.



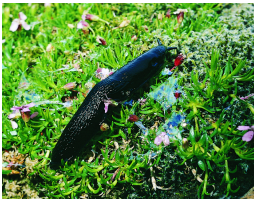


Hagaklettur cliff

Hagi. After the town council and government agencies had expressed approval, the area became formally protected on November 29, 1972, the first of its sort in the entire country. In fact, not many Icelandic towns can boast of such an ideal area for preservation at their very doorstep. The scenery and view are magnificent, while flora, fauna and geology are varied, creating a haven for recreation, observation and instruction in the Icelandic countryside.

Landscape and geology

The name of the sheer cliff, Nípa, applies to the outmost mountain in the range separating Mjóifjörður and Norðfjörður. East of the peak Nípukollur (819 m), the ridge slopes NE down to 609 m, at which point a vertical face drops seawards to Flesjartangi. Lying along the entire eastern slope of Nípa, the protected area includes the shore and shallows into the sea.



The Black Slug

Nípa consists of basalt layers of different thickness, which incline inland. Therefore, terraces and ledges between the layers rise toward the outermost headland, while numerous volcanic dikes crisscross the whole. Place names include Hagi (meadow), for the lowermost terrace, Neðri- and Efri-Hálsar (hálsar=low ridges), Selhraun (sel= shepherd protected grazing land, hraun=rocky area), and Viðarhjalli (viðar=wood, hjalli=ter-

race), 250-300 m above sea level.

In post glacial times, the terrace Hagi lay at shoreline. Evidence appears in the polished basalt cliffs, as well as the huge boulders at Urðir. At the current shoreline below Hagi and farther out beautiful eroded dikes withstand the ocean near the coast, while frequent caves or hollows, of which the largest is Páskahellir, have been carved out by the waves.

Flora

The plant diversity is abundant. The characteristic plants of East Iceland: Chickweed Wintergreen, Yellow Saxifrage, Faeroic Lady's Mantle and Harebell appear here, along with rarer species such as Fairy Flax, Pyramidal Saxifrage, Goldilocks Buttercup, Pyramidal Bugle and Pill Sedge.

Where protected from winds and shielded by winter snow cover, i.e. on slopes below the cliffs in Hagi and Hálsar, flowers bloom in early summer. Marshes cover expanses of Hálsar and parts of Hagi, sporting sedge, reed and cottongrass, but grass in drier areas. Low bushes are frequent, while cliffs and ridges near the sea present salt-tolerant species such as Scurvy Grass, Arctic Root, Oysterplant and Sea Plantain.

Vegetation has changed radically since the protection from grazing in the area began in 1972. The assortment of species has increased and flowers and



The coast by Hagi



Nípa

bushes have gradually multiplied. Now one notices Birch and Willow tufts dotting the slopes, and Angelica and Wild Angelica have become common, while species such as juniper are spreading.

Fauna

A variety of birds frequent Hagi; the utmost cliff is a veritable mass of teeming birdlife. Various sea birds nest in the coastal cliffs, including an abundance of Fulmars, Herring Gull and Great Black backed Gull, as well as Puffins. Eider Ducks live at the shore, and Great Cormorants can often be seen there during the winter. The cliffs above Hagi are inhabited by Raven and Thrush and the boulders of Urðir are home to Northern Wheatear and the occasional Winter Wren. The low ridges have both waders and dryland birds and near Hundsvík Rock Doves nest.

Puddles left on the rocky coastline as well as the wave-beaten seaside cliffs, are ideal for inspecting small marine creatures, such as crustaceans, snails and barnacles. Land Snails and Black Slugs live among the plants of Hagi and insects dwell in former pits of peat bogs.

Preservation

Statutory protection has two main aims. Firstly, to preserve the land as uninfluenced by man as possible. Continuous expanses of untouched nature, sheltering wild species in their habitats, can be seen as a sort of savings bank for biological diversity. As more and more of the world displays signs of human activities, such investments become more important. Secondly, the land which is set aside can be enjoyed by the public.

To achieve these aims, the following rules apply to this area:

- This is a preserve where only pedestrian traffic is allowed.
- Neither vegetation nor animal life may be disturbed.
- Movement of the soil, building, grazing and firearms are prohibited.

Náttúrustofa Austurlands supervises the reserve.

Neskaupstaður

Country park

