

The National Forests

Lands managed by Land and forest Iceland are called National Forests. They are open to everyone, year round, and are located in all parts of Iceland. Many are easy to reach and have a variety of facilities for outdoor recreation. Others require a 4 wheel drive vehicle or hiking up steep hillsides in order to enjoy them.

Read about forestry in Iceland on our website: www.landogskogur.is



Land and forest Iceland (LFI) carries out research and development, provides forestry advice and extension services, protects forests in general and manages the National Forests. education and oversees the protection of existing forests. The LFI also attend to support for private forestry, both financially and professionally as well as managing the National Forests. The institution has district offices and operation in all parts of the country. Mógilsá in Kollafjörður is the principal location of forestry research under the auspices of LFI, although. District National Forest offices are located in Hallormsstaður, Vaglir in Fnjóskadalur, Selfoss and Hvammur in Skorradalur.

Esja

The name of the mountain is believed to stem from the soft palagonite, the word being associated with stone that is easy to carve. The mountain was formed of alternating layers of basalt and tuff with dykes crossing the layers, bearing witness to old volcanic fissures. Esja is the southernmost basalt mountain in Iceland. Esja, now a part of the Reykjavík municipality, is one of the emblems of the city. Real estate prices are affected by the view, or not, of the mountain and some people claim that weather can be predicted by the changing colours of Esja.

The highest point Hábunga, reaches 914 m a.s.l. Several hiking trails ascend the mountain and the whole area is a popular outdoor recreation site. The skyline, seen from Reykjavík is dominated by the ridge Kerhólakambur, forming the centrepiece of the mountain as seen from the city.

Mógilsá

Mógilsá was originally part of the estate of Ingólfur Arnarson, the first settler in Iceland in 874 AD. He claimed all the southwest of Iceland, from the bottom of Hvalfjörður to the river Ölfusá.

The oldest record of farming at Mógilsá is from 1395. About 60 m southeast of the Esjustofa restaurant and car park are visible remains of an old sheep shed and enclosure made of turf, and down by the river estuary are ruins of two ancient boathouses.

The place name Línbrekka (Linen slope), indicates that flax was cultivated in the past, even though it has not been grown in Iceland for centuries.

Mógilsá was a traditional farm until 1964 when the Icelandic government bought it from the farmer and handed it over to the Icelandic Forest Service with the aim of starting a forestry research centre.

The land was then fenced off to protect it from grazing and tree planting was begun.

It is of course the nature of forest research to try a variety of tree species and many of these were planted on the slopes directly above the research centre, resulting in diverse woodland with tree species rarely seen in Iceland, such as common lime, Norway maple and western larch. The woodland also provides habitat for many species of birds, including species that only occasionally nest in Iceland and vagrants passing through in spring and autumn. In the year 2000 the Icelandic Forest Service and the Reykjavík Forestry Association came to an agreement, whereby the latter took over management of the forest at Mógilsá. Since then the forest trails have improved substantially and the woodland has been expanded far and wide up through the slopes of Esja mountain and eastwards where the RFA has acquired another former farm for planting and management.

FOREST RESEARCH AT MÓGILSÁ
Forestry in Iceland in the first half of the 20th century was based on trial and error experimentation. Experience was gradually acquired from various projects and became a foundation for later achievements. Proper forest research was only started in the 1950s when the first structured provenance trial was established in Hallormsstaður in the east of Iceland. In 1957, a forester was appointed by the IFS as a researcher. He later became the first head of the Forest Research at Mógilsá.

The building of the research centre started on the 15th of May 1964 when the Foreign Minister of Iceland at that time formally broke ground at the building site and was “the only person doing anything worthwhile at the site that day” according to a newspaper commentary. The buildings were donated by the people of Norway as a lasting memorial of the cooperation in forestry between these two Nordic nations.

The research centre opened three years later, on the 15th of August 1967. To begin with, the two employees focused on establishing provenance trials and defining variables for forestry conditions in different parts of the country. In the 1980s growing interest in forestry increased emphasis on research and by 2018 ten professionals were working in various fields of research such as: what species and provenances are best suited to forestry in Iceland; how to improve survival and tree resistance against pathogens; and the general effect of forestry on climate change, public health and ecosystems. The research centre at Mógilsá is also responsible for experimental plots in many parts of the country, e.g. trials with different clones of Alaskan poplar and several provenances of spruce and birch to name a few.

Every year teams of researchers monitor plots all over the country where among other things tree growth is estimated allowing for accurate evaluation of carbon sequestration in Icelandic forests.

However, from the beginning the main aim has not changed: to increase the success of forestry in Iceland in its widest sense, using scientific research to continually improve forestry practice. In this way forestry in Iceland becomes a sustainable and valuable resource, increasing habitat diversity in a treeless country and the quality of life in general.


GEOLOGY
The geology of the Kjalarnes peninsula is diverse. It was formed during the last ice age when volcanic eruptions occurred under the ice cap forming rocks of tuff (palagonite) and also in warmer iceless periods producing layers of basalt. After the ice age, when sea level was about 60 m higher than today the lower slopes of the Esja mountain were sea cliffs.


The lower slopes of Esja mountain form an interesting landscape with hills, gullies and streams.


The south facing slopes of Esja are furthermore moulded by three huge landslides, the one directly above the research centre, Kollafjarðarhlaup, being the largest. Both gravel and lime have been mined at Mógilsá. Lime was mined for several years from 1870 and the house Lækjargata 10 in the centre of Reykjavík is one of the few houses still standing where lime from Mógilsá was used as mortar, binding building stones from Skólavörðuholt, the site of Hallgrímskirkja. There have also been speculations that the rocks at Mógilsá might contain enough gold to make mining feasible.


Spot the tree species


Mógilsá woodland is among the most diverse in Iceland. On the lower slopes, behind the research centre many species have been tried for over half a century. Below are a few examples of the tree species found in the woods. Use the pictures to spot the trees.


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Common lime *Tilia x vulgaris*
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Crab apple *Malus fusca*
- 


Bird cherry *Prunus padus*
- 

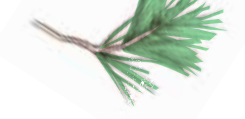
Common alder *Alnus glutinosa*
- 

Western hemlock *Tsuga heterophylla*
- 

Copper beech *Fagus sylvatica Purpurea*
- 

Wych elm *Ulmus glabra*
- 

Common ash *Fraxinus excelsior*
- 

Norway maple *Acer platanoides*
- 

Lodgepole pine *Pinus contorta*

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Welcome to the forest at Mógilsá. Please respect the environment.

MÓGILSÁ



MÓGILSÁ

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THE HIKING TRAILS AT MÓGILSÁ

As the map shows, the network of trails at Mógilsá is connected to the main trail ascending The Esja mountain. The lower trails are an excellent variation to the traditional Esja trail, a shorter Esja hike in itself.

Hiking trails



THE FOREST TRAIL
Green markers – 2.8 km/1-2 hrs.

Start from the Mógilsá centre and walk up through the oldest part of the forest. A part of the trail leading up to Sjónarhóll is a bit steep rewarding with a wide view over Kollafjörður and surroundings. On the way back, the route passes through experimental plots with different thinning regimes.



ARBORETUM TRAIL
Blue markers – 530m /15-30 min.

This short and easy trail starts at the Mógilsá centre and winds through the Arboretum, with its variety of tree species and provenances from all over the world. This is an excellent choice when people are not able to take long treks.



PLEASURE TRAIL
Orange markers – 880m / 15-30 min.

Start from the Mógilsá centre and up through the oldest part of the forest. The walk leads through dense and beautiful woodland to the Arboretum. This is a particularly nice and popular trail.



LOW SLOPE TRAIL
Grey markers – 2.1-2.8 km / 1-2 hrs.

The trail leads alternately through dense forest and open spaces with wider views. Start either from the Mógilsá centre or from Esjustofa restaurant. This is a shortcut from the Forest trail, avoiding the steepest part.

STEINN & VARÐA
Blue markers – 7 km / 2-3 hrs.

The lower part to Steinn is probably one of the most popular trekking trail in the country, a good exercise and with spectacular view. The start is at Esjustofa restaurant with a choice between two challenging trails up to Steinn, straight up through Einarasmýri or over Vað. The uppermost part from Steinn to Varða (Stone to Cairn) is very steep climbing up a rock face. There can be danger of loose, falling stones and the path is slippery when wet, so proceed with utmost care. During wintertime the upper part of the trail is only for experienced hikers with suitable equipment.

KÖGUNARHÓLL
Light brown markers – 6.3 km /1-2 hrs.

Connecting the old woodland at Mógilsá and the blue trail up to Steinn, this route can start from Mógilsá centre or the Esjustofa restaurant. The trail is not marked the whole way, it is quite tough but offers great views. Snow avalanches have been known to fall, blocking a part of the way by Rauðhóll. It is therefore important to be aware of the conditions before heading off.

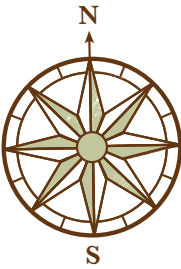
STAY SAFE ON ESJA
It is important to consult the weather forecast closely and to wear proper clothes for the hike to Esja, even in summer. During winter the mountain should not be climbed except with experienced guides and good equipment. safetravel.is/conditions. Leave your travel plan on safetravel.is.

Mountain trails

These trails can be very difficult and even dangerous. In preparation for the hike it is advisable to check the conditions on the mountain, especially in winter. safetravel.is/conditions.

MOUNTAIN TRAIL THROUGH GUNNLAUGSSKARÐ PASS

Brown markers – 10.6 -10.8 km / 4-5 hrs.
This is the most strenuous and challenging trail, only suitable for experienced hikers all year around. Start from either the Mógilsá centre or Esjustofa restaurant. This is a circular route connecting the forest and the blue trail to Steinn and Varða, via the Esjubrún ridge. Take special care on the steepest parts, where there is danger of slipping. Falling stones and even snow avalanches do occur. Besides it is easy to lose your bearings if there is fog on the mountain. During wintertime the trail is only suitable for experienced climbers with proper equipment. This trail is only partly marked but offers exceptional views.



E S J A

