

Audax UK Permanent 1413km: The Iceland Ring

Introduction

This permanent event is based on the ride done as a DIY by seven members of Audax Club Hackney in August 2016. It follows the ring road, route 1, with a couple of exceptions: taking the 96 via Reyðarfjörður to bypass a gravel section on the 1 and also using the 47 around Hvalfjörður due to the restriction of the car-only tunnel north of Reykjavik. Together these help bring the overall distance to over 1400km and a corresponding reduction in minimum speed to 12.5km/h.

The general road condition is good; we encountered no potholes and it can comfortably be ridden with 25mm tyres on a road bike, though there is some rough chip'n'seal and potential resurfacing works leaving just the hard core base exposed. There are no steep gradients and with around 10,000m of climbing it's manageable on fixed though the long descents take their toll. Most bridges out of towns are wooden single-track affairs with a frost-resistant metal mesh covering, so some caution should be exercised here. The general standard of driving and consideration to cyclists is very good, though of course there can be a lot of tourist traffic and locals aren't used to riders going two-up so it's best to keep right, especially in built up areas.

Parts of this route are exposed and remote so you need to be well prepared for every possible eventuality. The weather, and in particular the wind, can make the going tough even in summer. Controls, and the opportunity to purchase supplies, are widely spaced at times and with limited opening hours mean that you should carry extra provisions with you. If they are closed then a time stamped photo will count as 'brevidence', or supply a GPX track for validation.

The route could be ridden in either direction and with occasional direct flights and ferries to Egilsstaðir you could consider using this as the start/finish control (or any other if you so wish). We chose to ride widdershins mainly due accommodation choices, despite recommendations to go with the prevailing wind, however the weather is too unpredictable to make an informed decision based on this and is of limited potential benefit on a circular route.

The designated start/finish control is the 24hr Reykjavik City Hostel, which is conveniently located between downtown and the ring road. Left luggage is available here for bike boxes, etc., and there is a campsite next door. Also nearby is the Grey Line bus terminal, which offers direct transfers to/from the international airport. Alternatively, let me know if you wish to nominate another starting point.

Route Notes

Exit Reykjavik onto the ring road for a bit of climbing past the plumes of the geothermal power station before dropping down to the flat lava fields for the next section. There are facilities in Selfoss after 50km, otherwise the first control is in Hvolsvöllur at the N1 service station. Like most of these on the route, it has a shop, toilets, free wifi and cafeteria – the 'daily special' is good value (for Iceland) with free soda/coffee refills. There is also a supermarket opposite if needed.

From Hvolsvöllur continue to Vik, controlling at the Kjarval Supermarket (shuts 9pm), or you can explore the town for cafes, etc. About half way between these two settlements is the Eyjafjallajökull visitor's center with toilets, etc., and a chance to find out more about the famous eruption of 2010.

Next up is Kirkjubæjarklaustur (aka Klaustur) for another N1 service station on the ring road (shuts 8pm) with a limited selection, alternatively exit out of the rear of this onto the 205 into town for another Kjarval supermarket (shuts 9pm) or Systrakaffi (café open until 10pm).

For the next 200km until Höfn, depending on your schedule, it is likely that everything will be shut as you pass through, so prepare accordingly. The next control at Freynes is an Orkan service station that closes at 8pm. We went through much later than that and then bivvied for a couple of hours in front of Hof church (12km further on) where there is a public toilet and water supply, but there are also campsites/guesthouses available in the area. Jökulsárlón (Glacier Lagoon) is spectacular and worth a visit in daylight hours, there is a café here that opens at 9am, it is popular with overnighting campervans but the potential for katabatic winds limits its potential for a longer stop.

In Höfn, the route to the control at the Hafnarbúðin Diner (opens 9am) by the port takes you past several alternatives if you prefer. Soon after Höfn there is a road tunnel, the first of two that is navigable by bicycle, that leads to a beautiful section along fjords skirting the coast. Djúpvogur is a supermarket control stop, and we stocked up here before continuing to Berunes Hostel (41km further on) for the second night.

There's not a lot available to control in Breiðdalsvík, so you may want to opt for a photo by the road sign and push on to Reyðarfjörður via a fairly new 6km tunnel constructed for the aluminum smelter there. Here we stopped at Tærgesen Guest House, demolishing their breakfast buffet, but there is a N1 opposite and the next left along the waterfront leads into town where there is apparently a bakery, café, etc.

You now get to experience your first proper climbing with a long drag up to a pass at around 400m before descending to Egilsstaðir for another N1 garage stop.

Following this is the longest stage of 160km with nothing on the way except the spectacular, desolate wilderness of the interior plateau, before encountering the exotic volcanic activity around Myvatn Lake (Reykjahlid). Control at the Samkaup Strax supermarket (shuts 10pm) and/or backtrack clockwise around the lake to Daddi's Pizza (open until 11pm) at the campsite for hot food and beer. There are a lot of accommodation options around here, but we just bivvied further along en route.

Half way to Akureyri is Godafoss waterfall with a toilet block located behind the café / gift shop. Recommended control in Akureyri is the Bruna Bakery (opens 7am) but there are plenty of other options. There is the Skíðabjónustan bike shop in an industrial estate on the way out of town that can do repairs – ask for directions from bakery!

You now settle down into a bit of a pattern of climbing up long alpine style valleys to mountain passes before long swooping descents down to sea level again. The remaining controls through to Reykjavik are all service stations, though at Blönduós there is the opportunity to head into town for a supermarket stop. We spent the fourth night at the Sæberg Hostel, which is ideally placed for the final 220km run back to Reykjavik.

This last section is more reminiscent of English moors, but can be pretty heavily trafficked, with seemingly half the country leaving Reykjavik on Friday evening / Saturday morning to go to their summer houses, plus you have a fair bit of road freight between the two largest cities, and at 400km between them, this tends to arrive in the latter part of the day.

The route to avoid the car-only tunnel along the old road is a spectacular final reminder of everything Iceland has to offer though. The final control, at an Olis service station, does a mean hot dog or three, and from here it's a short stage back to the arrivée in Reykjavik.

Route Sheet Abbreviations

L: Turn left, R: Turn right, SA: Straight ahead, TL: Traffic lights, RHB: Right hand bend
RBT: Roundabout, Imm: Immediately, CP: Cycle path, \$: Signpost

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REYKJAVIK – HVOLSVÖLLUR (104km)

R from Reykjavik City Hostel	
1st R onto Laugarásvegur	0.1
R @ T onto Langholtsvegur	1.0
L @ TL onto Skeiðarvogur	1.9
R @ TL onto Súðarvogur	2.3
L on RHB onto CP (before garage) imm R on CP	3.0
Rejoin carriageway then SA @ RBT & TL	3.5
R @ TL onto Höfðabakki	5.0
1 st L @ TL after bridge onto Bæjarháls	5.6
SA @ RBT x3 then merge onto [1] \$ Vik	7.3
Continue on [1] through Selfoss	55.0
CONTROL on R (N1 service station)	103.8

HVOLSVÖLLUR – VIK (80km)

Continue on [1]	
In Vik, 2nd R onto Víkurbraut	80.0
CONTROL on L (Kjarval supermarket)	80.1

VIK – KLAUSTUR (72km)

R from control, retrace to R @ T onto [1]	0.2
CONTROL on L (N1 service station)	71.6

KLAUSTUR – FREYSNES (70km)

Continue on [1]	
CONTROL on R (Orkan service station)	69.6

FREYSNES – HÖFN (131km)

Continue on [1]	
SA on 99 \$ Höfn	126.0
L by Olis service station onto Víkurbraut	130.2
CONTROL on R (Hafnarbúðin diner)	131.0

HÖFN – DJÚPIVOGUR (104km)

Retrace out of town on [99]	
R onto [1]	5.0
Continue on [1] through tunnel	12.2
R \$ Djúpivogur	102.4
CONTROL on R (Samkaup Strax supermarket)	103.8

DJÚPIVOGUR – BREIÐDALSVÍK (64km)

L from control, retrace to R @ T onto [1]	1.4
R onto [97] \$ Breiðdalsvík	63.0
CONTROL on R (shops)	64.1

BREIÐDALSVÍK – REYÐARFJÖRÐUR (63km)

Continue on [97]	
R @ T onto [96]	0.9
L \$ Reyðarfjörður (in Fáskrúðsfjörður)	44.3
R @ T	60.9
SA @ RBT	62.1
CONTROL on L (N1 / Guesthouse)	63.0

REYÐARFJÖRÐUR – EGILSSTAÐIR (33km)

Retrace to [96]	
CONTROL on L (N1 service station)	33.0

EGILSSTAÐIR – REYKJAHLID (165km)

Rejoin [96] then imm R onto [1]	0.0
R @ T	164.4
CONTROL on R (Samkaup Strax supermarket)	164.6

REYKJAHLID – AKUREYRI (100km)

R from control onto [1]	
L \$ Akureyri	3.7
R @ T \$ Akureyri	16.1
L \$ Akureyri	38.8
R @ T \$ Akureyri, continue SA thru TLs	97.1
L @ TL before bridge, by Olis garage on R	99.5
L @ RBT to CONTROL (Bruna bakery)	99.8

AKUREYRI – VARMAHLÍÐ (93km)

Retrace to continue L along [1]	0.3
R @ T	93.2
1st L to CONTROL (N1 service station)	93.4

VARMAHLÍÐ – BLÖNDUÓS (50km)

Continue on [1]	0.2
CONTROL on R (N1 service station)	50.0

BLÖNDUÓS – BORGARNES (170km)

Continue on [1]	0.0
SA @ L \$ Reykjavik [1]	170.2
1 st L into CONTROL (N1 service station)	170.3

BORGARNES - GRUNDARHVERFI (87km)

Continue on [1]	0.1
L @ RBT \$ Hvalfjörður [47]	22.4
L @ T \$ Reykjavik [1]	82.7
R \$ Grundarhverfi	86.3
1 st L into CONTROL (Olis service station)	86.5

GRUNDARHVERFI – REYKJAVIK (27km)

Exit rear of control then L onto Vallurgrund	
Continue to R @ T onto [1]	0.6
R @ RBT \$ Grafarvogur	16.3
L @ RBT \$ [1]	18.2
R onto Hallsvegur \$ Gufuneskirkjugarður	19.2
L @ TL onto Gullinbrú	21.0
Bear L on slip road then take parallel CP on R	22.1
R @ T onto Súðarvogur	24.1
L @ TL onto Skeiðarvogur	24.8
R @ TL onto Langholtsvegur	25.1
L onto Laugarásvegur	26.0
L @ T imm L into ARRIVÉE (Youth Hostel)	27.0