

# ICELAND

July 2017

I first came to Iceland during the Cod War in the 1970's. Alcohol was prohibited but contraband was available from the USAF base in Keflavik. I've been in some tricky situations many times mountaineering and travelling but that one night in a remote campsite large numbers of Icelandic teenagers had Sprite bottles full of Jimmy Beam. I was as close as I've ever been to thinking that I might lose my life as a result of someone else's actions. A chilly recollection.

A wild, wet and windy day greeted me as a curtain raiser to this four day tour on dirt roads, in zero visibility. Occasionally a large 4x4 would emerge out of the mist, spraying volcanic gravel into the air. Once I'd made it back onto a tarmacked road I took shelter in a humble roadside café, before an early check-in.

I've never indulged in a jacuzzi before but as there was one in the middle of my hotel room, separating the bed from the sofa, I decided to give it a go. Big mistake. I turned the jets on too early, before they were immersed in water. Water shot out over the top and all round my room in large spurts. Panic.



Icelandic Dirt Road



Gullfoss

In contrast, the next three days offered up sunshine, magnificent landscapes and close to record temperatures. Along with the masses I ventured up to Gullfoss, the Golden Waterfall, famed for its scale and beauty but at least I'd ridden across country with snow capped volcanoes for company. I rode past Geysir, leaving it to the coach parties. It rarely emits a plume these days anyway, unless encouraged to do so by throwing a bar of soap down its throat.

I did stop at Thingvellir, where the nation's history began. Thingvellir translates to 'the fields of parliament' and goes back over one thousand years, making it the world's longest serving parliament. It was here that Iceland declared independence from Denmark in 1944.

Divided by the Mid-Atlantic Rift, some parts of Iceland are on the North American tectonic plate, while others to the east on the Eurasian plate. You can see the rift and edges of both plates clearly in Thingvellir and appreciate the history, if not the midges.

**Read more overleaf...**



**Contact Gordon**

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## ICELAND (continued)

I ventured north on a road that hugged the west coast, following inlets lined by volcanic cliffs and rugged mountains, reminiscent of the north coast of Scotland.

I spent my last night in Husafell, once a remote, isolated hamlet surrounded by icefields and waterfalls, offering food and lodging to weary travellers. It now boasts a golf course, campsite and several hotels. The views are still stunning though.



Determined to make the most of the fine weather on my last day, I meandered back down the coast, crossing internationally famous salmon fishing rivers and headed inland, soaking up the sun. Reversing some of my earlier route, past lakes and mountains, I met up with the south coast road and travelled west to the tip of the peninsula through barren lichen covered lava fields and back to Reykjavik.

If you are so inclined and have the time, you can reach Iceland by riding up through Denmark and taking the ferry from Hirtshals. I chose to fly and rent a bike from Biking Viking in Reykjavik. Be warned however, you need a fat wallet or a sizeable limit on your credit card before travelling. £15 for a coffee with a piece of cake and £12 for a can of beer. That said, it's well worth a visit.



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