

HOW TO DRIVE ON F ROADS IN THE HIGHLANDS OF ICELAND

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Driving tips for drivers headed for the rugged and beautiful F roads in the highlands of Iceland.

The F-Roads are home to some of Iceland's most wild and natural beauty. But for those who are not familiar with driving in the area, driving on the F-Roads can present some risks. Follow our comprehensive tips to make sure you enjoy the scenery without floating down a powerful river or getting stuck in the middle of nowhere!

(Note: Originally written in March 2012, his blog was updated January 2020 to reflect updated information, including new dates in the mountain road opening date table)



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First, let's answer the question on how to drive on the F-roads in the highlands of Iceland.

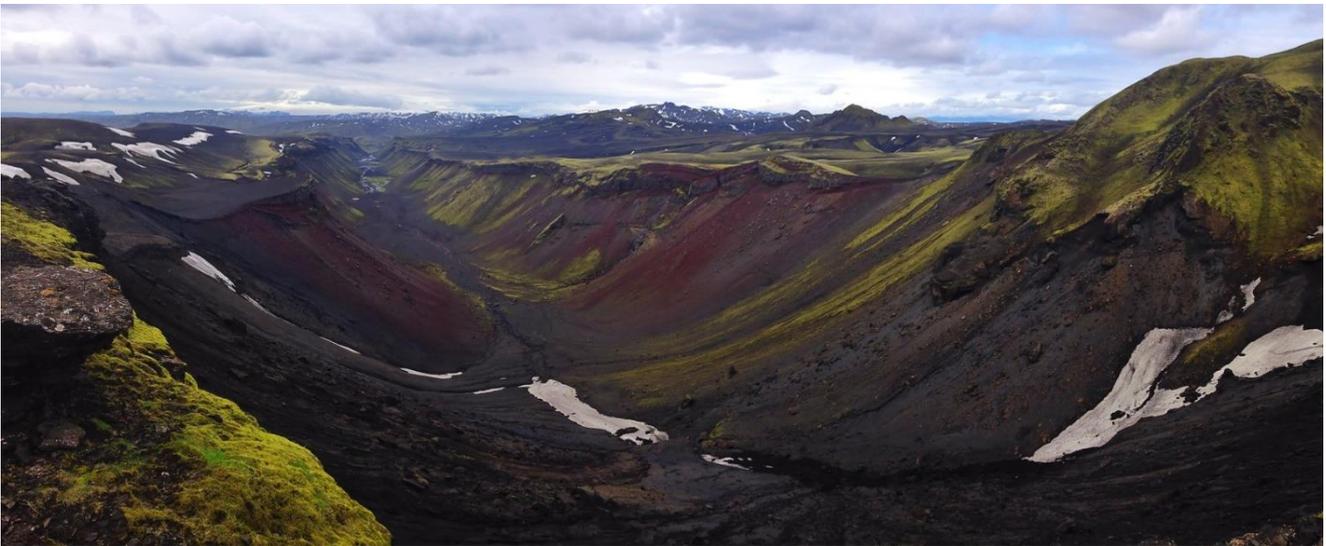
- You have to be driving a 4x4 vehicle. Other vehicles are not properly equipped to tackle the terrain.
- It is strongly advised that people travel together in 2 or more cars in case you encounter trouble and need help.
- You should check information about the conditions of the roads before you start your journey. It is best to call 1777 or check www.road.is.
- Make sure that the F-road you plan to travel on is open for traffic.
- Drive slowly and be aware of the possibly very bad gravel road in front of you.
- Cross rivers with ease after reading our instructions below.
- Driving off the designated roads in the highlands is strictly forbidden. It's worth noting that driving off-road anywhere in Iceland is always forbidden!
- Buying a detailed map of the route you will be travelling is much better than using the standard free map you can get at tourist information centers and gas stations. This is not necessary but can be very helpful.
- Whenever possible, try to talk to local people about conditions in the area, such as rangers.
- Tell somebody about your travel plans. You can, for example, tell the good people over at www.safetravel.is (or just the local ranger in the area).
- It is good to be prepared for all types of weather as the weather in the highlands can change almost in a blink of an eye.
- Be aware that the telephone signal in the highlands is not very stable and you can go for a long while without a mobile connection.
- The emergency number in Iceland is 112. You are able to call it in the highlands, even without a mobile connection.
- There is only one petrol station in the highlands, at Hveravellir, so make sure you fill up! :)

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The F-roads in the highlands of Iceland

Let me tell you a little bit about the highlands of Iceland. If you have not been there, you have a lot to experience! The rugged beauty and the powerful peace and quiet up there is a brilliant battery charger. The landscape consists of one or more of the following: white glaciers, black sands, green mountain tops, rock formations of different varieties, blue or brown rivers, colourful hot springs, small waterfalls, big waterfalls and black volcanoes to name just a few. Sometimes you go whole days without seeing a single person and other times it is like being in busy downtown Reykjavik on a lovely Saturday.



Some facts about the highlands from Wikipedia; they are situated in the middle of the country, at 400 – 500 meters (1,300 - 1640 feet) above sea level. They are mostly uninhabitable. Many glaciers are in the highlands such as Vatnajökull glacier which is the biggest glacier in Europe. Most of Iceland's active volcanoes are also situated in the highlands. Sounds amazing....and kinda scary right? :)

The mountain roads in the highlands are called F-roads and are indicated with an F in front of the number of the road on maps. You will need a 4x4 car to drive on these roads.

The notable exceptions to this are Kjalvegur road 35 (usually called Kjölur among Icelanders). Road 35 is the road to Gullfoss, but then changes to a mountain road right after Gullfoss, when it becomes F35. This means you are able to drive your small car to Gullfoss in summer and winter (depending on road conditions of course), you will only need a 4x4 car right after you pass Gullfoss. The F roads are usually narrow gravel roads with no bridges over rivers. And there are lots of rivers in the highlands! Sounds even scarier now, right? This is where many people can run into trouble on the F-roads

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Photo by 4x4offroads.com.

F-roads opening times

The F-roads are only open during the summer and some of them open as late as early July. The highland summer lasts only about a month and a half. The opening of each road depends mostly on the amount of snow covering them. Roads can be very wet after the spring and are not opened to traffic until they dry up. When roads pass through conservation areas, they are not opened until the whole area is ready to take on the pressures of visitors even if the road itself is ready to be opened.

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F roads Iceland 2014-2018

| MOUNTAIN ROADS 2011 - 2015 | Opening date earliest | Opening date latest | Opening date median |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Lakagígar, F206 | 16 June | 9 July | 25 June |
| Fjallabaksleið nyrðri, F208 | | | |
| 1. Sigalda - Landmannalaugar | 9 June | 26 June | 16 June |
| 2. Laugar - Eldgjá | 19 June | 17 July | 30 June |
| 3. Eldgjá - Skaftártunga | 13 June | 26 June | 17 June |
| Fjallabaksleið syðri F210 | | | |
| 1. Keldur - Hvanngil | 30 June | 17 July | 7 July |
| 2. Hvanngil - Skaftártunga | 30 June | 23 July | 7 July |
| Landmannaleið (Dómad.) F225 | 18 June | 3 July | 1 July |
| Emstruleið, F261 | 27 June | 10 July | 4 July |
| Kjalvegur, 35 | | | |
| 1. Gullfoss - Hveravellir | 8 June | 1 July | 17 June |
| 2. Hveravellir - Blönduvirkjun | 2 June | 25 June | 13 June |
| Sprengisandur, F26 | | | |
| 1. Hrauneyjar - Nýidalur | 20 June | 10 July | 29 June |
| 2. Nýidalur - Bárðardalur | 20 June | 10 July | 30 June |
| Skagafjarðarleið, F752 | 29 June | 16 July | 6 July |
| Eyjafjarðarleið, F821 | 1 July | 24 July | 10 July |
| Öskjuleið, F88 | | | |
| 1. To Herðubreiðarlindir | 14 June | 26 June | 20 June |
| 2. Herðubreiðarlindir - Dreki | 14 June | 26 June | 20 June |
| Öskjuvatnsvegur, F894 | 14 June | 24 July | 30 June |
| Vesturd. (Hljóðaklettur), F862 | 12 June | 24 June | 15 June |
| Kverkfjallaleið, F902 | 14 June | 27 June | 21 June |
| Uxahryggjavegur, 52 | 24 April | 31 May | 3 May |
| Kaldadalavegur, 550 | 1 June | 7 July | 14 June |

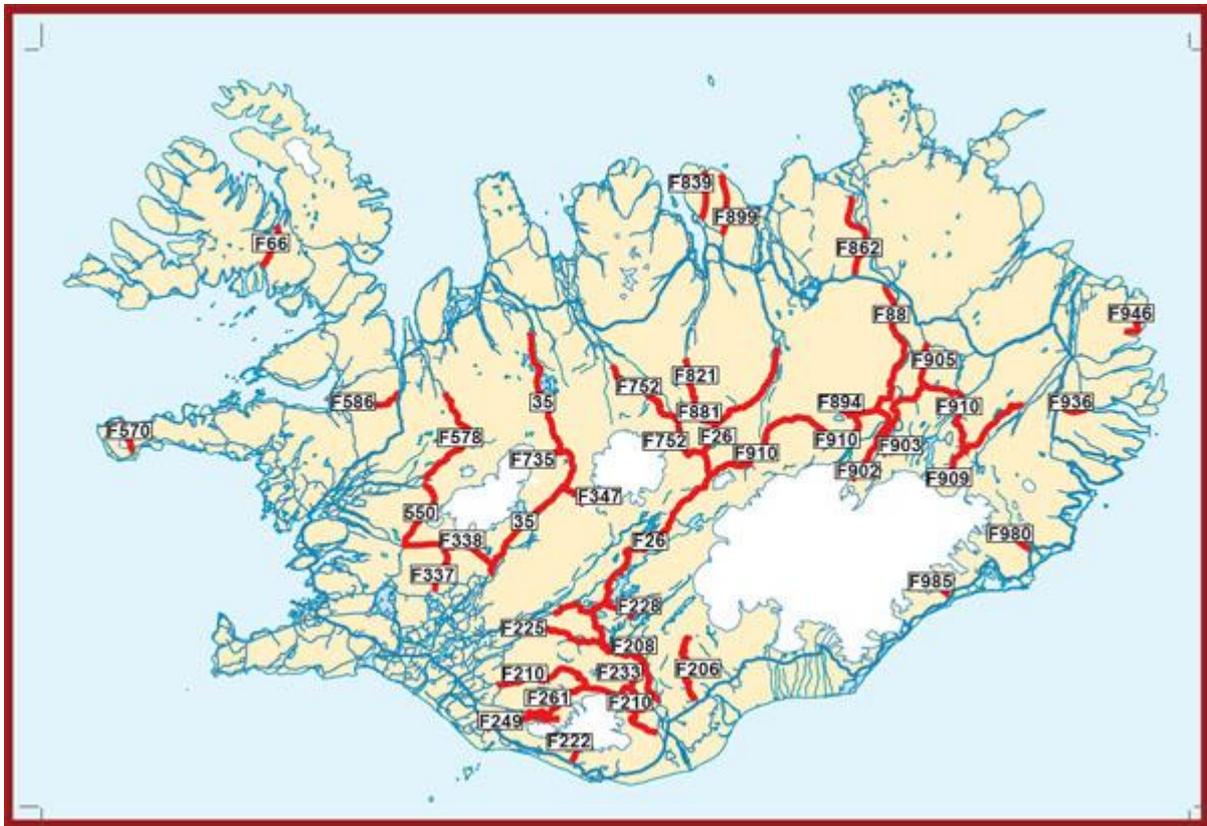
[Opening of mountain roads brochure](#) (updated June 2018).

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F-roads Iceland map

As you can see in the table and on the below map there are several highland roads in Iceland. The most known roads are F35 Kjölur, F26 Sprengisandur and F208 Fjallabaksleið Nyrðri (roughly translates as "The North road behind the mountains") which leads to Landmannalaugar. Kjölur and Sprengisandur used to be the main roads between the north and the south of Iceland and the people would travel on foot or horses. I think the people in the old days must have been super-humans for travelling without all the nice modern equipment and clothes we have. :)



[Opening of mountain roads brochure](#)

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Some things to consider when crossing glacial rivers in Iceland

- When you cross rivers, make sure that the 4 wheel drive has been engaged before going into the river. Drive very slowly and use the low range if possible. Never switch gears in the middle of the river.
- Glacial rivers usually have less water in the mornings. During warm summer days, the flow of the river can increase a lot. Heavy rain can also increase the flow of a river substantially. Be aware that rivers can sometimes not be crossed even if the road is open and you are driving a 4x4 vehicle.
- A good rule of thumb regarding glacier rivers is that if you would not want to wade through a river you should not drive through it. Crossing rivers can be a serious matter if people are not careful. Whenever possible, cross with someone with experience in crossing rivers.
- Fords over rivers are usually marked and should be easy to spot. Be aware of big rocks that might be under the surface of the water. The worst place to cross is where the water is most calm because that is usually the deepest part of the river. The best way to cross is to follow the torrent diagonally down the river, that way the torrent helps the vehicle over.



Photos by 4x4offroad.com and 4x4offroad.com respectively.

You can, of course, drive the SADcars that are suitable for F-roads driving in the highlands of Iceland. In fact, we want you to enjoy it! We offer several groups that are suitable for F-road driving; Group M (manual) and Group N (automatic) [Toyota RAV4 4x4](#) or comparable), [Group J Suzuki Jimny 4x4](#) (not suitable to drive on all highland roads under all circumstances, it depends on the amount of water flow in the rivers if they can be crossed) and Group R ([Toyota LandCruiser 4x4](#) or comparable).

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Please be aware that off-road driving is strictly forbidden by law in Iceland as it damages nature for decades. If the road does not have a number, do not drive on it, even if there are tire tracks. Those who drive off-road are subject to excessive fines or imprisonment of up to two years.

Sources and useful information:

[Opening of mountain roads brochure](#)

[The Icelandic Road Administration in English](#)

[Free app about Icelandic traffic signs](#) (can be used offline).

Hopefully, this blog gives you some ideas of what to expect when travelling on the F roads in the highlands of Iceland. Always keep in mind that you are driving in a wilderness where the weather can change very fast and you are located high above sea level so the weather can be very different from the weather in the "lowlands".

Have a happy and safe journey!