



**A SOLO, UNSUPPORTED
PERIMETER CYCLE OF ICELAND:
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2017**

Planning and Report

David Littlejohn-Carrillo

1. EXPEDITION PROPOSAL

The proposed expedition intends to cycle the perimeter of Iceland solo and unsupported. Using the standard road networks and taking advantage of the freedom camping regulations in Iceland the expedition would attempt to be as self dependent as possible. Due to academic responsibilities the expedition is proposed to begin 2 days after the end of the applicant's MSc Course end date (September 15th, 2017). The expedition dates are thus September 18th, 2017 to October 18th 2017.

2. EXPEDITION MEMBERS



Name: David Littlejohn-Carrillo

Imperial Status: MSc in Advanced Aeronautical Engineering Student (2017)

Age: 24

Seeing as the expedition is intended as a solo expedition, the sole member would be David Littlejohn-Carrillo. His direct relevant experience would be a 58 day, 6261 km solo and unsupported cycle crossing of the United States of America (New York City to Seattle). This trip would utilize much of the same set of skills, equipment, and planning techniques that were used on the crossing of the United States. In addition to this directly applicable experience, there are some further relevant experiences in outdoor pursuits and expeditions:

- 1 Month expedition mountaineering course in the Himalayas with the Himalayan Mountain Institute, 2011
- Self supported trek of the San Juan the Fuca trail (5 days) on Vancouver Island, Canada 2015
- Group cycle tour of 300 km over 5 days in the Dordogne region in France 2010
- Extensive overnight kayaking, hiking, and cycling trip experience
- First Aid certification last updated in 2016

3. TRIP DETAILS

Objectives

- Cycle the perimeter of Iceland
- Remain on the coastal sections of road as long as possible
- Give equal importance to all parts of the route, including those that are not traditionally visited by tourists on short visits
- Spend as many nights as possible wilderness camping
- Create a photo essay in combination with expedition journal of the experience

Planned Route

1. Starting in Reykjavik, take route 1 north to for 100 km to the intersection with route 60 to access the Westfjords Peninsula.
2. Using a combination of routes 60, 61, and 68 the Westfjords Peninsula will be coasted and brought back to the intersection of route 68 and route 1 at Stadur. This will be a 689 km loop.
3. From here route 1 will be followed north again for 292 km till the intersection with route 85 near Laugar.
4. Here route 85 will be taken north to access the coastal regions of the Norðurland Eystra for 312 Km. It will be followed until it rejoins route 1.
5. Route 1 will then be followed south along the coast for 708 km until returning to Reykjavik.

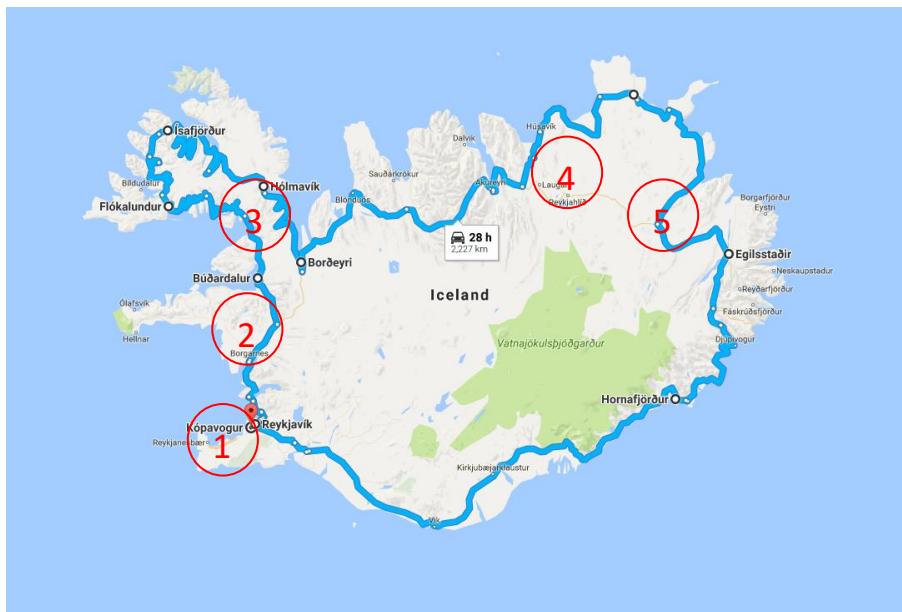


Figure 1: Planned route with numbers corresponding to route descriptors above

It is important to note that the two things that can heavily impact cycling speeds are the elevation profile of the route and head winds. Wind directions blow prevalently from the East¹ and thus the direction of route was chosen to have head winds at the start when fjords and mountainous areas will be being crossed as they may provide shelter from the wind.

When the southern, flatter areas, of Iceland are being crossed the wind will be in the direction of travel and thus can be used as an advantage.

The elevation profile of the above route is shown below. As can be seen there is quite a bit of up and down, but if attention is given to the altitude gains it can be noted that they are not massive and thus do not pose any major cause for concern to the overall average cycling pace calculations.

Elevation Profile of Iceland Perimeter Route

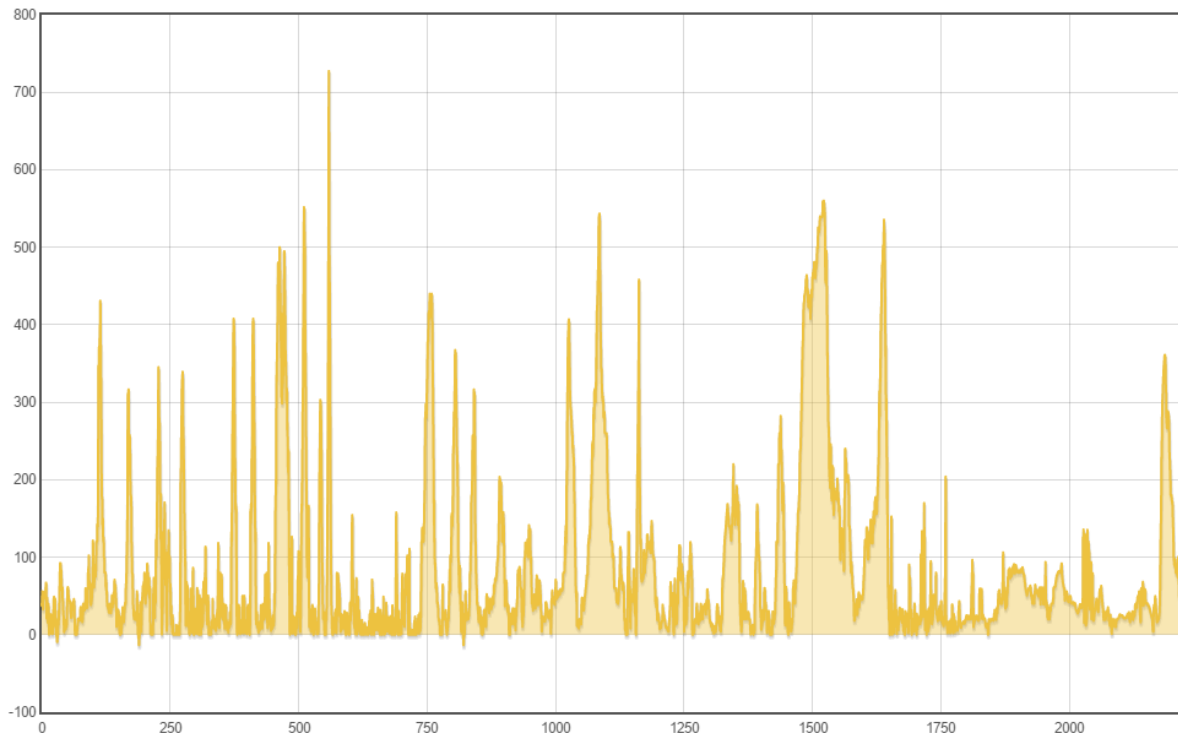


Figure 2: Elevation profile of the selected route (calculated using <https://www.doogal.co.uk/routeelevation.php>)

Using estimations from previous cycling experience, an average daily mileage of 80 mi/ 128 km a day is taken to be reasonable. This is based on an 8 hour cycling day with an average pace of 10 mi/hr taking into account breaks and pit stops. Seeing as at the proposed time of the year (September to October) Iceland has upwards of 12 hours of daylight a day, an 8 hour cycling day is not unreasonable. As a result the trip is expected to take in total 25 day. This foresees 18 cycling days, 5 rest days, 2 logistic days, and 5 buffer days to foresee any potential breakdowns or short lived sickness. This brings the entire planned expedition length to 30 days.

Proposed Itinerary

Day	Activity
1	Land in Reykjavik, buy additional supplies, reassemble bike.
2	Set off north on route 1 and arrive at turn off to route 60 (point 2 on map)
10	Arrive at Laugar (point 3 on map)- 6 days cycling and 1 rest day
14	Arrive at turn off to route 85 (point 4 on map)- 3 cycling days one rest day
18	Arrive back to route 1 (point 5 on map)- 3 cycling days and 1 rest day
25	Arrive in Reykjavik
30	Leave Reykjavik*

*the 5 day discrepancy between arriving in Reykjavik and leaving are the buffer being built in to allow for bad weather, illness, injury, and logistics.

Food

The plan is to self-cater the whole time. Seeing as main roads will be used most of the time, it won't be longer than a few days between there being access to a supermarket. By examining a sample price list a daily budget was set at 15 GBP. This was constructed by assuming a bread and cheese breakfast, ham and cheese sandwich lunch, and a pasta dinner (including meat in the sauce).²

Accommodation

The majority of the time freedom camping will be the preferred accommodation option. Freedom camping is legal throughout Iceland and is commonly practiced.³ This has a two-fold benefit. First of all it lowers the cost of the trip dramatically and secondly it introduces a useful element of flexibility. By not having to reach a set, prearranged destination every night it means variations due to breakdowns, illness, or detours do not have severe knock on effects to the structure and planning of the trip as a whole.

It should be noted that in previous experience the applicant freedom camped the whole way across the United States and has significant experience in selecting appropriate camp locations, etiquette (leave no trace taken as a core principle), and navigating the legal and social complexities involved.

Although the ideal scenario is that freedom camping could be the sole source of accommodation it must be recognized that in the case of severe weather and illness it may be necessary to take refuge in a hotel/hostel/b&b. Due to the large distance of the trip and the sheer number of variables affecting any decision to not freedom camp it is impractical to create a detailed list of possible accommodation options but rather it is more effective to choose a price point that would allow for a night in a dorm or a in-expensive (for Iceland

standards) hotel. Using 50 GBP as a guide as a budget per night and assuming all 5 rest days will be had in paid accommodation the accommodation budget is estimated to be 250 GBP.

Weather

During the proposed period the expected temperature range is between 9 and 2 degrees Celsius. Additionally with an average of 30 mm of rain falling over an average for 21 days in the month of October, and similar values for September, it is expected that this will be quite a wet and damp trip. These considerations affect the choice of gear. Not only does the sleeping bag, and clothing need to be able to withstand the temperatures that will be encountered, but they should also be made of such materials that can perform even in wet conditions. Namely this points in the direction of synthetic sleeping bags over down and the use of synthetic fabrics over cotton for the clothing options. This is due to the poor thermal performance of cotton and down when wet. Additionally a tent with a vestibule would be highly desirable as it would allow for cooking to be carried out undercover as undoubtedly there will be instances where camp will have to be made under the rain.

Hygiene/Clothes

One of the major issues with a long term expedition that bases itself around freedom camping is issues relating to personal hygiene. The area of most concern is the groin region, as the risk of ‘crotch rot’ is quite high on trips such as these due to chaffing in areas that are warm, damp, and dark for long periods of time. For this reason it has been decided (and corroborated from experience) that boxer shorts are to be worn underneath cycling shorts and to be changed daily. As a result access to a laundry machine shall be necessary periodically dependent on the number of boxer shorts brought on the trip. A reasonable number is judged to be 7 and hence a weekly wash cycle will be necessary. Due to the lack of Laundromats in Iceland laundry will have to be done either at campgrounds, hotels/hostels, or private homes.

As for washing myself, baby wipes and a daily routine of wiping down key areas before and after cycling is crucial. This combined with showers at campgrounds and/or hostels and bathing in freshwater streams at reasonable intervals (maximum 7 days) has from experience, been effective in preventing the initiation or spread of any potentially problematic hygiene related conditions.

Communication

Although sparsely populated, Iceland has remarkable cell phone coverage. This is clearly illustrated by the following illustration of available cell phone coverage in Iceland.

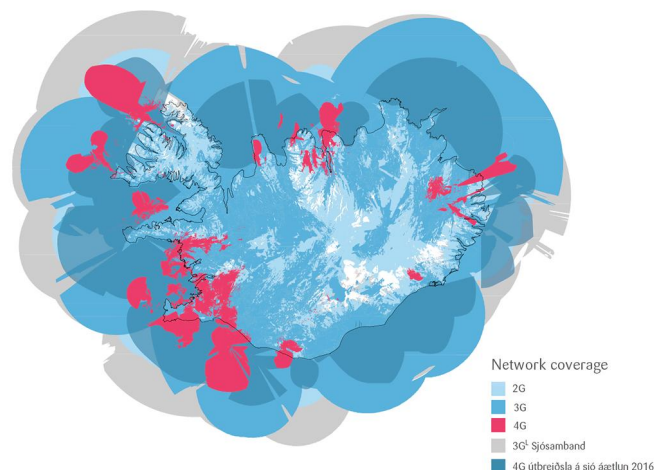


Figure 3: Cell Coverage in Iceland⁴

Examining the above graphic, it is obvious that for the majority of the expedition a cell phone will be able to be used to check weather, communicate with home, and contact emergency services if needed. Additionally though the applicant owns an InReach Explorer GPS communications system that allows to issue a SOS distress signal and connect the issuer to the local emergency services, to remotely see the location of the person carrying the device, and allows to text and navigate over satellite networks. It even allows for weather updates to be checked via satellite link. This system was used by the applicant during his crossing of the United States and it worked flawlessly without a glitch. It only required charging every 2 weeks, as use was kept to a minimum.

Power

A major issue for freedom camping based trips that also utilize technology for its day to day running is access to electricity to charge devices. A combination of portable battery pack (holding 5 mobile phone charges) and solar panels (to trickle charge the battery pack while cycling) will be used to stretch the possible time between mandatory connections to power sources. From previous experience this system should allow for roughly 1 week electricity self sufficiency. Thus syncing this schedule with the previously discussed laundry schedule would allow for laundry and electronics charging to be all done at the same time, as they both require proximity to power sources/ habitation.

Training

Seeing as the distances that are covered during expeditions of this nature are so large and are continuously done over long periods of time it is quite difficult to fully prepare for the exertions and endurance that will be required. In fact physically the first week of the expedition is the most critical and proper management is key in transitioning from normal life to a continuously cycling life style. Thus in this period slowly ramping up the mileage, taking care of chaffing, fully stretching and relaxing muscles, and dietary considerations are all things that need to be handled in a very conscious manner.

Never the less there are a series of concrete steps that can be taken to prepare as much as possible for this trip. This includes:

- Carrying out short training trips in the summer leading up to the expedition, using similar distances and cycling with full set up. (Example ride: cycling from London to the New Forest ~80 miles, spending the night and then returning).
- Using cycling as the primary mode of transport around town, and taking on some shifts as a Deliveroo cyclist. All generally adding to physical fitness and just generally getting accustomed to being on the bike for protracted periods of time
- Maintaining a general fitness regime. This includes gym sessions 3 times a week interspersed with 2 swimming sessions a week. This is especially of interest as during long distance cycling trips as the upper body begins to atrophy so having good upper body strength going in is key.

Bike Set-Up

The touring set up used will be the same that the applicant used in crossing the USA. This consists of two 17 litre panniers on the back bag rack and the transport of the tent and food for that day carried on the top of the rack in a waterproof covering.

Navigation

Due to the simplicity of the route traditional paper maps will be sufficient for navigation. This can be augmented of the use of Google Maps on the smart phone or the map navigation capabilities of the InReach Explorer mentioned previously in the Communication section.

Other Considerations (Made Due to Foreign Nature of Expedition Location)

- Permissions from local government: being a highly tourist friendly country there are no necessary special permissions necessary.
- FCO advisories: Aside from being semi-volcanically active and the potential for severe weather there are no additionally warnings.
- Currency: Cash and credit card machines are widely available in Iceland
- Language: English is widely spoken amongst the population.

Trip Reporting

Using the tracking function of the InReach Explorer the entire profile of the trip can be recorded and viewed remotely. The intention is thus to link this to a social media feed (for the applicants cycle across the USA it was linked to a Facebook page with image and status updates about the trip's progress). This way it can be easily shared and provides a nice interactive tool for others to monitor the trips progress. Additionally keeping a physical journal and dating the entries mean that when looking back a link can easily be made between the journal entry and the exact location in which it was written which is quite an interesting added level of detail introduced by the addition of technology.

Furthermore, a secondary objective of the expedition would be to create a photographic account/profile of the trip and the landscapes being travelled through. The applicant is a keen photographer (specializing in Black and White film photography) and hopes to be able to produce a photo essay to collate the experience, people, and sights come across over the course of the expedition. This could then be used to promote the goals and aims of the Exploration Board in future years, as well as serve as a something of interest for external donors.

Risk Assessment

Main Sources of Risk:

- **Traffic:** Route 1 will be the road that will be followed for the majority of the expedition. This road is predominantly a two lane tarmac road without severe traffic (with the exception of Reykjavik). Empty, flat, straight roads do encourage drivers to speed, especially at night thus all cycling will be done during daylight hours. Other than this normal road cycling techniques/awareness apply. All highly transferable from previous experience city cycling and crossing the USA.
- **Illness:** As was discussed previously personal hygiene will be the first and most important barrier to avoiding any potential skin problems that could develop such as 'crotch rot'. Furthermore a focus on proper water proofing of sleeping equipment, and always having a set of dry clothes on hand to change into, combined with the use of windbreakers and water proofs during cycling will be the first line of defence against getting a cold or hypothermia. However, if something were to happen, an emergency

fund is detailed in the budget for emergency accommodation (in order to be able to recover under a solid roof than in a tent).

- **Weather:** Largely out of my control. Though by keeping up to date with local weather conditions and forecasts for my expected trajectory decisions can be made accordingly to minimize the risk posed by potential weather hazards.
- **Injury:** This is largely out of my control as well. As for impact hazards obviously a helmet will be worn at all times and defensive cycling techniques will be employed to minimize risk of traffic collisions. As for any muscle injuries that may source from excessive exertion, by monitoring my own state of muscle pain and combining it with stretching and self massage regimes this can be managed relatively easily. Rest days will be used to allow for muscle recovery. Just as was discussed in the section on illness if an injury is serious enough the emergency fund can be used to have a place to stay under a roof and recover if it is realistic to recover within the 5 day buffer period that is included in the plan.
- **Wildlife:** There are no specific wildlife concerns to be kept in mind in Iceland except for farm dogs. By avoiding going into farm property this should be a minimal risk.
- **Volcanic Activity:** Quite an unlikely occurrence, but local authorities have broadcast systems in case of eruptions notifying of procedures to staying safe in case an eruption does occur.

Crisis management: The worst potential crisis that could occur in this sort of expedition is a serious injury cause by an accident of sorts. Due to the fact that I will be cycling along the main routes of the country the standard ambulance services can be relied upon to handle potential serious injury (Emergency number: 112). Additionally the use of the InReach's (mentioned in the communications section) SOS function if an accident occurs in an area with no mobile phone reception can be used to send out a distress signal with exact GPS coordinates.

Kit List

Bike repairs

- Spare inner tubes x2
- Adjustable spanner
- Compact bike tool pack
- Spoke repair kit
- Chain breaker
- Bike Pump
- Extra ball bearings
- Cone wrenches
- Spare axel

Camping

- Tent, 2 man with vestibule
- Sleeping bag (-10 C rating, taking into consideration potential wetness and chill factor on expected temperatures)
- Sleeping mat
- Stove (MSR universal stove- possible to burn petrol)

- Cooking pot, plate, and cutlery

Clothing

- Boxer shorts x7
- T-shirt x2
- Long sleeve thermal tops x3 (for cycling in)
- Cycling shorts x3 (to be rotated in combination with boxer shorts)
- Thermal bottoms x2
- Boardshorts
- Rain jacket
- Rain trousers
- Puffer jacket
- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Socks x7
- Water proof shoes for cycling in (in order to prevent trench foot)
- Cycling gaiters
- Towel

Technology

- Mobile phone
- GPS tracker
- Camera
- Solar panels
- Portable battery pack
- Head torch

Bike equipment

- Panniers x2
- Bike rack, rear
- Bike lock

Note: The majority of the above equipment is already owned by the applicant and thus does not need to have any budget allocation. Only the tent and solar panel would need to be purchased specially for this trip.

Risk Assessment Matrix

<i>Legend:</i>	Low	Medium			High	
<i>Weather Related</i>						
Hazard	Impact	Probability	Severity	Risk	Prevention	Response
Snow Storm	Dangerous road conditions, Low temperatures	2	3	6	Check weather forecasts in areas where I am headed a few days in advance.	Make sure I can have a sheltered camp site, enough food and fuel to wait the storm out, and only start riding when the road surface has cleared.
Inclement Weather	Dangerous riding conditions, Could be hazardous if correct equipment not used	5	2	10	Check weather forecasts in areas we I am headed regularly.	Make sure I have a shelter campsite, enough food and water to wait out any storm.
Sun, Wind, Cold Burn	Can make cycling and being outside in general very unpleasant, if left untreated escalate to more serious conditions	2	1	2	Use sun cream, face mask, and UV resistant clothing.	Treat accordingly, take rest and recuperation days necessary to heal up.
Hypothermia	Potentially life threatening	2	4	8	Ensure dry equipment, Eat properly; use synthetic materials so wet equipment is not catastrophic.	Dependent on the cause act accordingly, get to a warm secure location as fast as possible (by contacting authorities or hitchhiking)
<i>Cycling Related</i>						
Hazard	Impact	Probability	Severity	Risk	Prevention	Response
Mechanical Failure	Impede further progress if not dealt with properly.	5	1	5	Do a full maintenance of equipment before leaving, use equipment robustness as a selection criterion. Bring a reasonable amount of spares/tools.	Make a temporary fix and have my contact in Reykjavik to mail out a replacement part out if necessary.

Car accident	Potentially catastrophic	3	5	15	Defensive cycling, cycle in the road not only on the hard shoulder, no cycling at night.	Contact local emergency services. If no phone services available notify using the SOS function on the InReach Explorer.
Dehydration	Reduce performance, can cause severe problems if left untreated	2	2	4	Use a camel back to ensure constant intake of water. Monitor urine colour and quantity of intake.	Rest, recuperate and drink plenty of water.
Slipping on the bike	Can cause severe injuries and damage to equipment	1	3	3	Ensure appropriate tread on tires and correct pressure.	Fix what is broken and contact relevant authorities if necessary.
Location Related						
Hazard	Impact	Probability	Severity	Risk	Prevention	Response
Volcanic Eruption	Would result in a major reassessment of the planned route	1	4	4	Check local authority warnings and check alert websites.	Follow the advice broadcast by the local authorities.
Crime	Dependent on the nature of crime could lead to loss of expedition critical equipment or danger to my-self.	1	3	3	Avoid camping in urban areas; try to be as inconspicuous as possible.	Contact police if anything occurs.
Camping						
Hazard	Impact	Probability	Severity	Risk	Prevention	Response
Sickness	Dependent on what condition is could be quite debilitating, especially if in a remote area	3	3	9	Maintain good hygiene, maintain all sleeping clothes and bags dry, and prioritize warmth and dryness.	If not too severe rest and recuperate at camp, if more severe go to a hotel/hostel, if very severe contact the local ambulance service and go to hospital.
Camp Accidents	General cuts and grazes can become infected if not cared for properly	2	2	4	Keep knives sharp, pick low risk camp spots.	Keep any small wounds clean and get any more serious wounds examined professionally.

Fire Hazard	Stove can set fire to the tent/ other equipment	2	4	8	Cook away from the tent whenever possible, if not possible use guards around the flame	Have water on hand to be able to douse the flames to turn it off.
Fuel Leakage	Impregnating other equipment with fuel can be toxic and dangerous	2	2	4	Ensure all fuel bottles are well sealed and wrapped in fuel proof plastic bags.	Assess and repair whatever caused the leak. Wash all things that have fuel on it.
Animals	Animals getting into food stuffs can cause sickness.	2	1	2	Keep all food in smell proof bags, cook away from campsite whenever possible.	Replace anything that animals have come into contact with.
Toxic Fumes	Cooking inside the tent can lead to air poisoning.	3	3	9	Cook outside whenever possible. When having to cook in vestibule cook with it wide open to ensure good ventilation.	Keep opening the door to and ensure good ventilation.
Stove Breakage	Inhibit food preparation	1	1	1	Ensure good maintenance and stowage of stove	Attempt a repair, if not depending on point in trip switch to cold food or buy a have a new stove sent from my contact in Reykjavik.
Tent Damage	Potentially hazardous in severe weather conditions	2	2	4	Take care where pitching my tent, and use a ground sheet.	Bring a repair kit to fix in case of damage.
Flooding	All kit can get wet, and camp washed away	2	3	6	Pitch in local high points, and non porous terrain .	Move to a dry location, isolate dry things

Emergency plan

Useful numbers:

Emergencies in Iceland: 112

Local Police Station: 444-1000

Search and Rescue: 570-5900

American Express insurance contact number: +44 (0) 203 126 4134

Imperial College Security: +442075948910

Insurance Information:

Insurance: Amex Bronze Essential Annual Multi Trip (up to 31 days) with the cover being as follows

Section	Significant Features and Benefits	Bronze Cover
	Description of Cover	Benefit
1	Medical Emergency & Repatriation Service including: Burial or cremation abroad or repatriation of body to the UK Emergency dental treatment UK medical transfer to hospital Person to join/stay with you Infants born following complications of pregnancy	to £10 Million† to £5,000 to £200 to £500 to £500 to £50,000
2	Cancellation or Curtailment including: If £1,500 loss to home When a deposit is lost # Excursion cover	to £1,500†
3	Travel Delay including: If delayed more than 12 hrs For each additional 12 hr delay	to £50 to £10 to £10
4	Personal Baggage including: For any one item/pair/set For valuables in total	to £1,500† to £150 to £150
5	Money	to £100†

Medical Emergency and Repatriation Service will be subject to a policy **excess** of £200:
abseiling, archery, canoeing (up to grade/class 4), clay pigeon shooting, fell running, fencing, go-karting, horse riding, hot air ballooning, jet biking, jet skiing, mountain bicycling on tarmac, paintball, sailing (outside 20 nautical miles of the coastline), scuba diving (qualified to a depth of 40 metres), snowblading, war games, yachting (outside 20 nautical miles of the coastline).

Incident Evaluation:

Step 1.

- Am I safe? If yes 2a, if no 2b
- Is the situation deteriorating? If yes 2b, if no 2a.

Step 2a.

- How bad is the incident? Can I handle this myself or do I need help? If help is needed step 3a, if can be handled step 3b

Step 2b.

- Get to safety and stabilize the situation as best as can be done, if situation persists to be hazardous
Step 3a.

Step 3a.

- Call Emergency services and inform them of the incident await instructions and execute the evacuation procedure as is relevant.

Step 3b.

- Evaluate what needs to be done to rectify the situation. Notify the relevant parties keeping an eye on the progress of the expedition
- Do not proceed any further until things at a status where they will not deteriorate any further (120% percent effort until everything is 100% alright)

Step 4.

- Log incident
- Reflect on mitigation measure for future similar incidents
- Apply the lessons learnt to the rest of the expedition.

Evacuation Procedure:

Step 1: Contact Emergency services

- If in cell reception use mobile phone to dial 112.
- If out of coverage use SOS function on the InReach Explorer.

Step 2: Contact Insurance Company

- Contact number: +44 (0) 203 126 4134

Step 3: Contact Imperial College

- Leave a message with Imperial College Security to pas the message onto Loraine Craig: 002075948910.
- Include Location, Details of incident, and general status report.

Step 4: Contact Family and Reykjavik Contact

- Contact Family to ensure all parties are on the same page and can provide assistance if needed.

Step 5: Stand by and await instructions

- Dependent on the nature of the incident may be necessary to bivouac the night whilst waiting for help to get to me.

Step 6: Keep all relevant parties up to date

As the situation evolves contact the above as is relevant.



Figure 4: Example kit set, the proposed kit list will need warmer sleeping bag and clothing.



Figure 5: Example cycling set up

4. BUDGET

<u>Item</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Cost(GBP)</u>	<u>Toal(GBP)</u>
<i>Transport</i>			
Flights	1	90	90
Airport to Reykjavik	2	12.85	25.7
Baggage charges	2	60	120
<i>Bike Equipment</i>			
Friction gears	1	35	35
New chain	1	8	8
Cross over break	1	20	20
Derailleur	1	20	20
Solenoid Hub	1	150	150
Gear set	1	20	20
Spare inner tubes	2	7	14
Spare spokes	1	5	5
<i>Camping Equipment</i>			
Tarp shelter (to put over bivy bag for vestibule)	1	70	70
Ground sheet	1	30	30
Camping Fuel	1	10	10
<i>Food</i>			
Food in Reykjavik	2	30	60
Food while on the road, self catering	28	15	420
<i>Accommodation</i>			
Rest day Accommodation	5	50	250
Reykjavik Accommodation	2	0	0
<i>Communications</i>			
Battery Pack	1	20	20
InReach Explorer plan	1	50	50
<i>Training</i>			
Marlin First Aid Courses	1	50	50
		Total	1418

6. Journey Log

First day riding

A short and uneventful ride. After raining all morning, the sun finally came out as I started out. The actual process of getting out of Reykjavik was relatively awful. There is one main road leading out of the capital, thus it features incredibly heavy traffic. In order to avoid it, I decided to try and navigate the confusing network of walking and cycling paths that criss-cross the suburbs of Reykjavik. Once the road became single carriage, it became a lot more of a pleasant cycling experience, though the traffic was relatively heavy by Icelandic standards.

First night

After a short half-day ride (I waited 'till the sun came out from behind the rain clouds), I made it to the entrance of a tunnel meant for crossing the fjord ahead. Once there I discovered that as a cyclist I wouldn't be allowed to go through it, and would have to cycle 60 km the whole way around the fjord. But no matter: I had plenty of time on my plate. I set camp eagerly to make sure that my system was working 'in the field'.

While I was camping, a young Icelandic man came over and we chatted for a bit. Camping nearby, he was just coming back from a weekend hitch-hiking trip, and had school the next day.

Overall, this gave the trip a great start! Sun, nice camping and a friendly encounter.

Second day riding

Waking up to heavy rain, I got a late start and began the process of cycling the contours of the fjord. Though it rained and was rather cold (so much so that a pair of Icelanders stopped me and had a good laugh at my plan to cycle around Iceland in this weather), I was in good spirits.

Once I came out of the fjord, the rain stopped but the wind picked up. This is something that I would soon discover to be a pattern in Iceland.

Second night

With light fading and the need to camp before the next supermarket (as there was not going to be one for a while after), I was forced to set my tent right next to the road. Being a particularly bare landscape, I nestled my tent between some shrubs and a little hill (used to de-mark the end of the 'public land').

The wind was quite pronounced, giving me an introduction to some things that would be a

constant companion throughout the trip: wind and wind chill. I quickly realized that in order to keep warm I would need to keep moving... or get out of the wind. So, I retreated into my tent to have dinner.

Third day riding

The day started out well, but turned bad rather quickly. I woke up to quite strong winds but a bright sun. Initially, this was great; it meant that I could put my things out to dry. As I was packing down my tent, however, I let go of it for no more than 5 seconds as I counted my pegs... and the wind got under my tent and turned it into a kite. As it started to blow in the direction of the sea, I ended up chasing my tent barefoot across a marshy field. I was just lucky enough that it got caught in a bush. The whole process unfortunately bent two of the poles quite seriously. Fortunately the tent could still be pitched, but its structural strength was seriously compromised. A serious morale blow.

The rest of the day did little to rectify this. The wind blew consistently all day and I soon found myself on a continuous up-hill trajectory as under the rain. As I gained height, it got colder and the wind chill, more pronounced. It got to the point where I simply had to stop and try to recover what was left of my morale by having a relaxed camping experience.

Third night

After an exhausting day of wind and a seemingly never-ending hill, I had to stop short of my goal distance. I was absolutely shattered. Fortunately, I found a little cove next to a creek that offered full protection from the wind. I was willing to take the cessation of wind in exchange for having to camp on some rather boggy ground.

The creek offered a great opportunity to wash my dishes and (of course) myself (only the essential areas though, as it was rather... frigid). I cooked and cleaned while listening to the entirety of *Mort* by Terry Prachett. When it came time to sleep, not having any wind, being quite far from the road and having quite soft ground underfoot resulted in wonderful nights sleep.

Fourth day riding

The day started off badly: rain and windy as I climbed up to the highlands. Once I reached the high plateau, though, my fortunes changed; the wind died down and a gradual downhill greeted me on the other side. This meant that I was finally able to seriously get moving. I happily zipped down a well-paved gradual downhill with no traffic, and it did wonders for morale. From there on, I was able to cruise up hills and across the plains that waited ahead. This allowed me to easily make up for the distance I fell short of the day before and then some!

Fourth night

After a successful day of cranking out the miles, and having made up for the day before and then some, I found a rest stop within a thicket of trees. TREES! In Iceland! 'Twas a rather momentous moment when I found a spot that they would again protect me fully from the wind (I was still in shock from having my tent blown away).

Pitching next to one of the picnic tables in the rest stop, I also had access to a bathroom and a hand wash basin! Absolute luxury.

After cooking my dinner, I glanced up at the sky. This is where I saw them for the first time: The Aurora! Spellbound, I watched them for well over an hour as they waxed and waned, and flowed like galactic seaweed in a cosmic current. I eventually came to my senses and pulled out my camera and managed to get a few photos. To my dismay, I realized that I had forgotten to bring a tripod... so it became incredibly hard to not have blurred photos. Some came out well though.

Fifth day riding

I awoke to serious rain and moderate winds. The road wound itself through fields and along a river until it reached a monstrous climb.

This climb felt incredibly personal. As I climbed higher and higher, the rain started to fall heavier and heavier and the wind started to push me back. It got to a point that it became tricky to stay in a straight line. It became a personal battle of cycling a short way before having to stop and starting again. Bit by bit, creeping up this hill, I pushed on by sheer will power. Once I topped out, the wind suddenly stopped, as did the rain. This reinforced the sensation I had that this had been a personal trial for me... and I was now going to be rewarded.

Rewarded I was! What followed was a beautiful, empty, and gradual descent that skirted around mounds and little lakes until I finally reached a large stone monument (at a rest stop) that overlooked a bay dotted with islands. The perfect stop. A reward for the trials of the morning.

Fifth night

Ending the day, I came down off the highlands to the most spectacular sunset over the bay in the distance. I used the picnic tables of a rest stop to cook my dinner, and as I did so the Aurora came out again! Faint this time, but there nonetheless.

Having checked the wind forecasts, I camped down in the hollow behind a big hill. I hoped it would block the main direction of wind.

Sixth day riding

The morning promised great things. I woke up to a brilliant stillness and warmth that allowed me to thoroughly dry out all my things and warm myself in the sun. I then descended into the valley. As I stood at a gas station, filling up for water, the wind picked up out of nowhere. By the time I had filled up and drank my Huel, the cross wind was so bad that I simply could not ride safely. I was forced to walk about 2 miles, pushing against my bike to make sure that I would not get blown over.

Finally, I turned a corner and what was a crosswind became a headwind. More tiring but safer. After dejectedly sitting in the lee of a road sign and eating two cereal bars, I set off again. Crawling along a 12 km/hr, I started to make my way up this windy valley.

After what seemed like an eternity, the road turned up a different valley and the wind dropped slightly and changed direction! It was again a cross wind but not too strong. More importantly, it meant that I could angle my bike in such a way as to 'sail' across the wind- a skill I would come to hone during this trip.

I slowly climbed up a beautiful valley that eventually topped out and revealed an 18% descent and again a swing in wind direction. I now had a tail wind. Through this combination, I hit 62km/hr on the downhill and on the flat (with the combination of energetic pedalling and the wind at my back) I reached 55 km/hr! On reflection, both were rather dangerous speeds, and so I resolved to cap all future speeds at 40-45 km/hr.

This newfound speed meant that I was able to zip down the valley toward Akureyri. The valley reminded me of what I had seen in Montana and Wyoming. Big granite walls, yellow grass, and braided river in the valley bottom.

This day had been a massive wind-powered roller-coaster of a day.

Sixth night

Having blasted past my goal, I was tremendously content with the day -- even more so when I found another thicket of trees. This time they commercially planted and somewhat difficult to get amongst: long grass, uneven ground makes for tough bike pushing. I finally found a little spot nestle amongst the pines that just fit my tent and offered great views of the river valley!

I camped here because I had planned to take a rest day in Akureyri. This way, I only had to cycle 15 km the next morning before taking the whole day off. This meant that I would only have to have one night in a hostel, which was more than enough to charge and dry my things.

Seventh day riding

This was a short sunny ride into Akureyri. My legs were definitely letting me know they were in need of a rest.

Seventh night

For my rest night, I stayed at the Akureyri Backpackers hostel. Great place with great food (I even indulged in a Great Burger to give me a protein and iron boost!). I was also able to charge all my things. My sleep was more restful in my tent than in the dorm, as a rather large man with a pronounced snore was also in my room that made falling, and staying, asleep a challenge. Especially as I had not cycled far that day. Nevertheless it was nice to wake up and not worry about the wind and rain in the process of packing up.

Eighth day riding

Coming out of Akureyri, I was greeted by a big hill, but that was no problem for my freshly-rested legs.

What followed was relatively standard Icelandic scenery. Glacial valleys with waving yellow grass and rivers criss crossing the landscape. A stark contrast to the radio play I was listening to: 'Educating Rita'.

Eventually, I happened upon Godafoss, which I had seen in a number of kayaking films! That was certainly cool to see!

Eighth night

With no shelter in sight and strong winds, I had to use the rise of the road as a shelter from the wind. Not the greatest place to sleep. This was driven home at 2 AM, when a truck driver with a sense of humor decided to scare me by putting on his brights and sounding his horn as he drove past my camp. He obviously succeeded – I don't think I have ever awoken with that much of a start. It took me a good fifteen minutes to slow down my heart rate again and get back to sleep...

Ninth day riding

This was a windy day. The rain occasionally spat a few half-hearted droplets. But overall, it was a rather monotonous day of peddling against the wind through a flat, desolate landscape. Not much else to say really... it was the beginning of a 3 day crossing to the next place where I could get supplies: Eglistadir.

Ninth night

Having just crossed a volcanic desert and noticing that despite the continuous rain that there are no bodies of water to fill up from, I decided to camp next to this river. After consulting my map, it seemed to be the only water source for miles around. Seeing as I was in a desert and still a good two days from the next grocery store, habitation choices related to water were key.

Everything got covered in a fine black sand, and for days later I would still find little clumps of wet sand in everything... most annoyingly in my food. At this point, I started to get the idea that it wasn't just me that thought it had been raining a lot, as the river was definitely in flood.

Tenth day riding

After a rainy crossing of what was left of the volcanic desert, I finally came over a pass and started to descend into a green river valley. At last the scenery got interesting again! As I cycled along this river, I couldn't help but look at the rapids and think of how I would love to return for a kayaking trip here.

Tenth night

Finding myself in a long valley, where the road was continuously sided by farms, my only opportunity to pitch my tent was a rest stop on the side of the road... and what a rest stop! I found the perfect spot to pitch my tent next to a thundering waterfall.

As I pulled up to the rest stop, I bumped into some German tourists (who also camped the night there) and an American tourist. They told me about how the road I was riding on, the 'ring road', had been closed further ahead as excessive rain had damaged a number of the bridges. So, I was right! It had been exceptionally wet! Fortunately, it was still a ways away and there was a chance that it would be open again by the time I got there.

Eleventh day riding

This day was split into two distinct parts. First was this one, a rainy cycle to Eglisstaðir. This marked the half way point for me. In celebration, I had a burger in town as well as charged my things and reflected on what was to come.

Having finished my half way celebration, I set off again. I had the mouth of a tunnel as a target that I had to go through. I did not count on what was to come. As I climbed up toward a mountain pass, the weather suddenly changed. The gusts of wind got stronger and stronger (to the point that they would stop me in my tracks as I was cycling along) and it started to downpour. The clouds were so thick that although it was still 45 minutes till sundown, the sky was dark as though it was night.

The worsening weather slowed me and forced me into a position where I was cycling in the dark on a mountain road with strong winds and rain. A very unhappy state of affairs. All that I could think of (in rather unhelpful manner) was 'This is exactly the sort of circumstances that people die in... and people then comment "stupid boy"'.

On the advice of a local I managed to wave down, I continued to ride in the maelstrom toward a thicket of bushes down in the valley that would offer refuge. All the while, the wind howled, the rain lashed and the cars and trucks that zipped by made me even more nervous.

This was undoubtedly the worst part of the trip, if not one of the worst experience I have ever had/gotten myself into.

Eleventh night

After the worst ride of my life, I finally found a thicket of shrubs to give me some protection from the wind. In the dark, I started to pitch camp in a storm. Cold, wet, and freaked out, this was definitely the low point of the trip. Too exhausted and annoyed to cook, I skipped dinner and just had a few bars, wanting to end the day as fast as possible.

Adding to my stress was the sound of rushing water nearby and recent alerts for flash floods. Fortunately when I awoke in the morning, I could see that the closest river was quite far away and that the rushing water was from a pipe under the road some ways away. So, I was never in any actual danger.

Twelfth day riding

The day started badly. I woke up to heavy rain and with the memory of the night before still hanging over me. I set out toward the tunnel that I was meant to cross. My morale was at rock bottom. I stood in the tunnel for over an hour and a half, just to have some respite from the constant pitter patter of rain and the howling of the wind. I even went so far as to check it if was financially feasible for me to end the trip here, catch a bus back and change me flight. Turns out it was easily feasible...

After lunch in the tunnel and a pep talk to myself, I decided I couldn't just quit... So, I got back on my bike and pushed out of the tunnel back into the rain and wind. With gritted teeth and head down, I kept on cranking.

Twelfth night

Surrounded by farmland, I couldn't find a campsite... so I decided to go into the town to look for a campsite there. Fortunately for me, the person in charge was not there, so there was no way for

me to pay. To my great delight, I discovered that the bathrooms were heated! So, I proceeded to spend the evening hanging up things to dry. I even ate in the bathroom - the warmth was too good to give up.

On my ride in, I had noticed a brewery/bar in the town. So after dinner I walked over there to have a beer and to chat to the locals. Being the end of the tourist season the local hotel was having a party for the season workers that were leaving. So the bar was heaving... with maybe 15 people. This meant that I got to chat to the locals and get an idea of how things worked in the town, as well as hear about the conditions of the closed road ahead. They didn't have good news: it seemed like the road was going to be closed for the next week....

Thirteenth day riding

The previous night's heated bathroom had done wonders for my morale. When I awoke, the rain had stopped and it was just overcast. So, I packed up my freshly-dried kit and set out again.

The day consisted of weaving in and out of the fjords. As the day progressed, the rain came and went. Towards the end of the day, it stopped, with the wind swiftly replacing it.

As I rode it was evident that it had rained more than usual here, as all the fields were flooded and the side of the road was often just above the water.... I guess this was the remnants of the rain that had damaged the bridge ahead.

Thirteenth night

Far from any town and with anything relatively flat totally flooded, I had to pitch on a col up a scree hill. Not the greatest place to pitch, as it offered no protection from the wind whatsoever, but it was the best that I could do. Fortunately, the wind and the rain died down as I was pitching my tent. As I would soon find out, the former would not stay down for long....

Fourteenth day riding

I awoke to my tent hitting me in the face. The wind had picked up dramatically overnight and was now bending my tent over. It was 7 AM and still-pre-dawn, but I guess Iceland had decided that it was time for me to wake up. I grudgingly got up and packed up. Over the course of my ride, I had developed a new wind-proof technique for packing up my tent... if I hadn't and this wind got under my tent, I would have never ever seen it again.

The sun came out and I set out along the coast, winding along the sheer cliffs coming down to the sea. Eventually the landscape opened up, with a large wide stunning fjord spread out before me.

All the while, the wind was building from a level that was already enough to play havoc with my already-damaged tent, to one that would stop me dead in my tracks, forcing me to get off and walk. This is no easy feat when the wind is strong enough to pick up your fully-loaded bike and turn it. So, I had to walk with one hand on the handle bar steering and one hand on the seat pushing down to make sure a sudden gust of wind couldn't play a trick on me. I must have walked for 2 or 3 hours like this until the road finally turned towards some cliffs, causing the wind to abate and change direction. This meant that I could once again sail it along the road. I became apt at watching the wind ripples in the water and the grass ahead and to the side of me, in order to give me an advanced warning of what the gusts were going to do so I could prepare accordingly. Not wanting to be caught off guard and blown over.

The plus side of this wind was that once the wind direction was favourable to my direction of travel, I managed to go 25 km/hr uphill without pedaling and 37 km/hr on the flat. Who needs cars when you can sail the wind with a road bike!

Fourteenth night

Arriving battered by the wind in Hofn, I went directly to speak to the Tourist Information Office to find out the status of the bridge. Would I have to turn back? Should I just wait around? Is there any way around it?

Fortunately, they had just opened it up to walking traffic! But the lady in the office advised me to cross tomorrow, as there was no place to legally camp for the next 130 km because I was about to enter a national park. As a result, I ended up having a semi-rest day and sat in the local diner for a few hours before heading over to the local campsite. I had a wonderfully relaxing evening: showering, cooking, cleaning, and drying things!

Fifteenth day riding

An early morning, sunshine, slight tail winds, and a flat landscape meant that I made good distance. I crossed the closed bridge by simply hopping off my bike and wheeling it across as they had opened it up to foot traffic the day before.

I stopped for lunch and to marvel at the Icebergs at Jokaulsarlon. In many ways, this was the sort of day that I had dreamed about when I had first come up with the idea of cycling around Iceland! Epic scenery, beautiful days, smooth roads, and good times!

Fifteenth night

As I was still in the national park, I had to pitch in an official campsite. It had some truly fantastic views and plenty of other travelers. No one on a bike, mostly car campers.

While I was pitching my tent, a lovely older lady from California came over and gave me some apples, pot noodles, and hand warmers. She said that she no longer needed them as she was leaving the next day, and reckoned that they would cheer me up. So lovely!

Sixteenth day riding

For the second day in a row the sun came out, but the wind had changed direction. It became a pronounced crosswind, not dangerous but just enough to be annoying. So what followed was a relatively mind-numbingly boring ride, flat land with a cross wind. Seeing as I had started out early, I was able to reach my goal of Vik.

Sixteenth night

I decided to stay in Vik as I was unsure of where the end of the national park was, and did not want to end up with a Icelandic fine (which, judging by the prices of things there, must be hefty). The campsite had planted a network of trees that gave shelter to tents and also had their own mini waterfall!

Vik is tiny, but a short walk over to the beach yielded some fantastic photos of the sun setting behind the iconic rock formations of Vik. I also saw a fight scene from what I assume was either a music video or a short film.

Even better, someone had left Cheerios in the free food basket! That made for a great, great dessert.

Seventeenth day riding

The cross winds persisted into today, but the scenery change and became once again epic and dramatic.

At Skogafoss, I met a couple on a tandem bike that was cycling around Iceland in the opposite direction! Their website is: <http://www.pardenomadas.com/>. It was really lovely to meet cyclists, especially two who were even more nuts than me! As we admired the waterfall and the milling tourists taking photos of us with our laden bikes, we exchanged notes on our respective roads ahead. I told them of the desert in the north, where it is best to make sure that you have plenty of water and plenty of supplies. They in turn warned me of awful road conditions north of Selfoss. They advised me to, if I could, to skip the last bit of riding and just catch a bus as it was just heavy traffic with little to no respect for cyclists.

We eventually went our separate ways and I continued on toward Hella, savouring what would be my last full day of cycling.

Ps. Aptly, the landscape began to resemble the plains of middle America...

Seventeenth night

My last night of camping. I stayed in the local campsite, which was the worst and most expensive one that I had stayed in. The northern lights came out one last night, and the outside of my tent started to freeze. In a way, I guess it was an apt way to end my trip. A waving goodbye from the Aurora alongside a visceral reminder that winter already well on its way here.

Eighteenth day riding

After checking the bus timetables, I realized that I would only be able to catch the bus from Hella, I would not be able to make it to Selfoss in time to catch the bus from there. So I woke up, packed up my things and caught the bus to the main bus terminal in Reykjavik. I was very hesitant at first, but taking into account notes from the Icelandic cycling map (that detailed heavy traffic on the part of road) and what the tandem cyclists had told me, I thought it would be a prudent choice. Boy was I happy I did.

As I rode the bus over the road I was meant to cycle, I realized it would have been dangerous and absolutely miserable, as it consisted of a double carriage road with heavy traffic fast traffic and no shoulder. On top of this was driving rain and cross winds: a recipe for disaster.

Once I got to the bus terminal on the outskirts of Reykjavik, I had my last bit of cycling back to the hostel where it had all begun.

I got to the hostel and all of a sudden.... I was done! As I stepped into the hostel I could feel the perpetual fear and worry of what the wind and rain were going to do leave me. At last, I was dry and behind walls that the wind could not shake.

7. Comments on Essential Systems

Food

Setting out, one of my main concerns was how to ensure that I could in a relatively self-sufficient way feed myself. This is no small feat at the best of times, let alone when I'm burning 6000 calories a day. Ultimately, I resorted to having liquid breakfasts using the Huel food supplement. This supplied me with a quick and easy balanced meal to start the day off with. For lunch, I was eating mostly cheese, bread, and peanut butter with the occasional slice of ham. These provisions I bought 4 days at a time. Then for dinner, I was carrying with me instant rice bowls and soups from the Coop in Italy. I chose these as they are very cheap, incredibly tasty, light, and have a

good variety as well as a reasonable energy content. In order to bolster the energy content of these meals, I resorted to melting butter into them. Fortunately for me, butter in Iceland is delicious.

In order to cook in the evening, I was using the MSR International stove. It's ability to use petrol as a fuel was a godsend, as it meant that as long as I was in a relatively-habited area, I could easily find fuel to cook with. This would not be the case if it was a canister stove, or some other specific fuelling method.

Clothes

I carried two changes of clothes with me. One of them never came out of the sacred dry bag. This was to ensure that if there was some cataclysm that lead to everything getting wet, I would still have something dry that I could put on and get warm with. Both changes consisted of thermal leggings, a thermal top, socks, and underwear. Then while cycling I had a pair of cycling shorts over top, and board shorts over top of those. To keep dry, I used waterproof trousers from Decathlon and a Marmot Precip jacket. Both performed fantastically. The showstoppers, though, were my waterproof socks by SealSkinz. My shoes ceased to be waterproof a long time ago, so these miracle socks were what stopped me from having perpetually wet feet. I highly recommend them. While I was cycling, I would also wear a pair of mountaineering gaiters to stop my trousers getting stuck in the chain (like heavy duty trouser clips). On my hands, I had a pair of GaiterSkins waterproof gloves. Sadly, these did not perform anywhere near as well as the socks. They kept my hands warm (which ultimately was the most important thing) but they were by no means dry. I will be getting myself a pair of actually-waterproof gloves for my next trip...

Tent

My tent was a Geertop 4-Season 2-Man tent. The tent itself performed well, but there are a few things I should mention that I found to be key to have. First of all is the vestibule. In a place like Iceland where the weather changes rapidly, it is very handy for keeping all your kit undercover and makes getting changed out of wet clothes at the end of the day much easier than usual. With this in mind, my vestibule was not easy to get in and out of and also wasn't very easy to open to just take a peek outside. This came to be quite an annoyance as it meant that I couldn't lie in my sleeping bag (20F Aurora Bag from Eastern Mountain Sports) and enjoy looking at the northern lights at the same time. Alas, I guess you can't have your cake and eat it too. Finally, the last and most fantastic thing about the tent was how it was set up (and it is something I will look for in all future tents). The outer is set up before the inner, and this means that even in a downpour you can break down and set up easily without having to worry about getting the inside of your tent wet (in fact I was able to keep the inside dry through the duration of the trip, no easy feat in Iceland)

Those really were the main elements that kept me going. Navigation was easy, I was staying on one road the whole time, the roads were well-paved for the most part and so nothing special was needed for the cycling in itself. All the kit I discussed above was carried in two 17L panniers and 1 medium hiking backpack.

8. Conclusion

This trip was undoubtedly one of, if not the, hardest thing I have done. The isolation and variable weather conditions (especially the wind) made it more of a mental battle than a physical one. I cannot deny that the thought of throwing in the towel crossed my mind on more than one occasion, but I am extremely glad that for one reason or another I chose to persevere. I learnt a lot more about myself and about good expedition craft, especially in extreme conditions, than I had expected from the outset. Although the original route was not completed fully the objective of cycling the perimeter was none the less achieved, thus the trip can be termed a success! One of the original goals of the expedition was to document it through photographs thus some representative images have been appended bellow. Additionally the trip has been summarized in an interactive map that includes the actual GPS logs of the trip, diary entries, and photographs of the trip as it progressed. It can be found at:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fj46nHMw_BfEgQsfhtg1rwRUfwo&usp=sharing

9. Representative photos of the trip



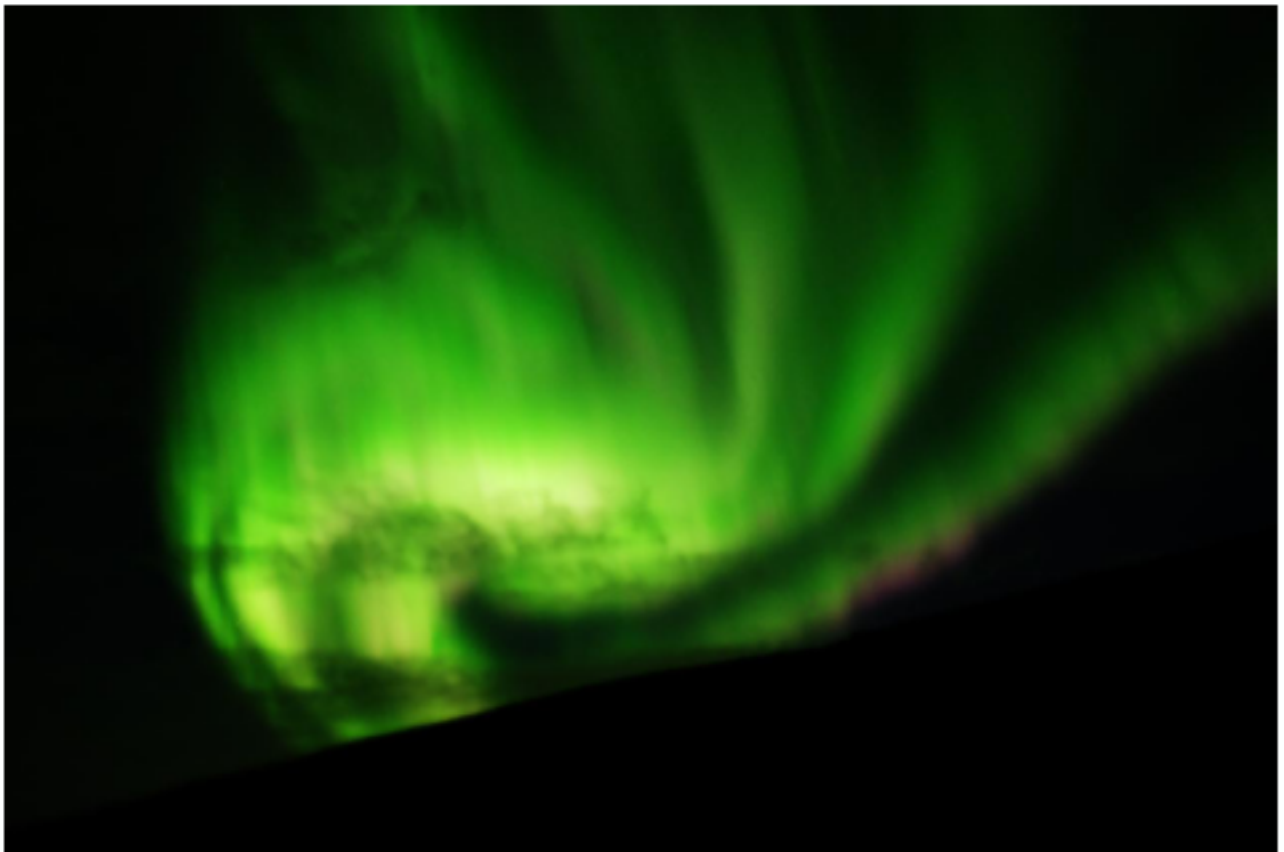
Looking out over Godafoss



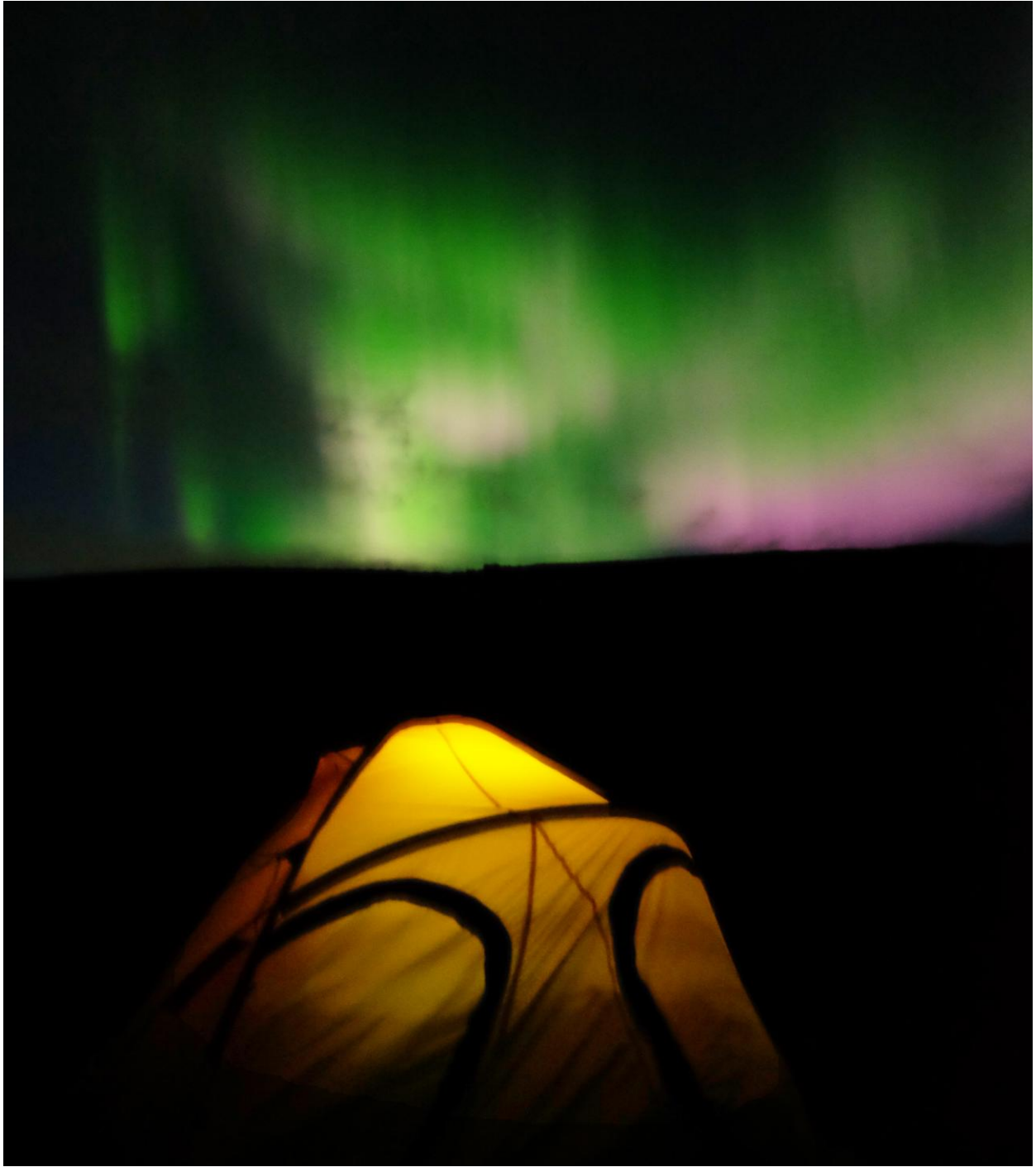
The outstretched grassy plains of Iceland



Spectacular sighting of the northern lights.



The Aurora continue to amaze



Sleeping under the stars and the northern lights



Simple living: bike and tent.



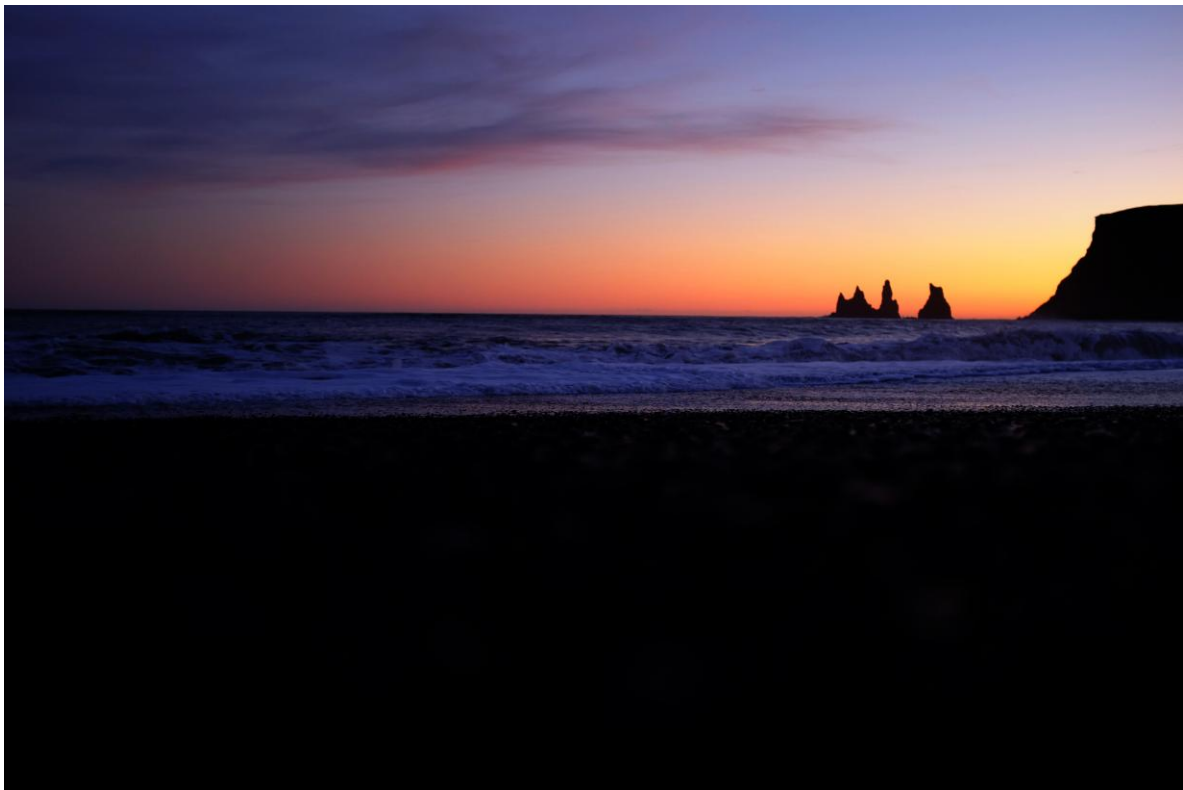
Iceland: the land of waterfalls



Headed toward the giant glaciers



Mountain flowers



Vik sunsets



The plane wreck



Skogafoss



Looking up the valley from my campsite



Akureyri Love



Entering the scorched volcanic desert



Geothermal activity



Long, flat windy roads

10. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Imperial College Exploration Board for help planning, and funding this trip. Without its support it would not have been possible to carry out this trip. I would also like to thank Anne Lee Steele for her support and encouragement throughout the planning, carrying out, and reflection of the trip.

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