

## LAND OF FIRE AND ICE

I left England for Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, in July of last year, for a most unusual holiday - an expedition into the uninhabited interior of Iceland. On landing at Reykjavik I felt as though I had landed on the moon, the scenery around the town was one of plains of lava and huge craters caused by volcanoes. I met the group and spent the first night at Reykjavik Youth Hostel.

The next day we left by mountain bus on our long journey into the interior. We passed deserts of lava, which had pushed the land three miles into the sea, and saw in the distance Surtsey, an island which had erupted in the sea over three years ago. It was still smoking. There are no roads in Iceland, only deep ruts, and the further we went the harder it became to proceed until eventually we all had to push the bus up onto a ridge, only to find a river which had completely flooded the valley. So we camped the night and the next morning started our long trek across the interior.

The first part was in the lowlands, sleeping in tents or in mountain huts - the cattle below and you on top. We all had to get used to the continual daylight. I completely lost track of time as at 2 o'clock in the morning there were blue skies and sunshine. After four days we reached Landmannalaugar and this is where the hot springs and sulphur steam starts. We crossed an extremely cold river at one point and then crossed a scalding hot one. As we were all shivering with cold we just jumped into this hot river fully clothed. We camped the night here and it was real luxury to have hot water a few feet away from the tents.

It was now that the gruelling trek began among the rough stone mountains and rubble. We passed small mountains of pastel colours - pinks, greens and blues - then huge piles of volcanic rock with jets of steam shooting forth. We gradually got higher and higher, climbing up narrow ridges with sheer drops either side until we reached the snow line, and we had to plod through waist-high snow drifts. That night we camped next to a sulphur pile which uttered "Frankenstein" noises every few minutes. There were pools of steaming hot water everywhere, and you had to watch where you trod because of the boiling mud. We cooked tins of meat and steamed pudding in the mud. It only took ten minutes, but by then the labels had all come off so we had steamed pudding for the first course and meat for the second.

The next day started off really fine and clear and we could see