

MOUNTAIN ROADS

When do mountain roads open?

On what factors does their opening depend?

How do I know which mountain roads are open?



ENVIRONMENTAL AND FOOD AGENCY PUBLIC ROADS ADMINISTRATION



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Travel in the highlands of Iceland has increased considerably in recent years; this reflects an increase in leisure time, improvements in vehicles for rough-country travel, and awakening interest in year-round travel.

SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Land which is more than 300 meters above sea level is classified as highland; the climate in the highlands is changeable, and these regions are generally blanketed with snow well into the summer months.

During the spring and early summer, when the snow melts and frozen earth thaws both roads and vegetation are in a vulnerable state and easily damaged. The greatest risk is due to the impact of premature traffic, especially when vehicles drive off-road to circumvent snowdrifts. Attempts to use snowmobiles in spring, when snow-cover is decreasing, can also inflict damage.

The highland summer lasts only a month and a half, and this is the period of growth for highland vegetation,

which is thus low-growing and sensitive to any disturbance. Even walkers can inflict permanent damage on vegetation. So all travelers in the highlands should treat the natural environment with care and respect.

OPENING OF MOUNTAIN ROADS

The state of snow cover is the most important factor on deciding when

mountain roads can be opened to traffic. Roads are often very wet following the spring melt, and this can also lead to roads remaining closed to traffic.

In cases where mountain roads pass through conservation areas, the roads

may not be opened until the area as a whole is in a state to withstand the pressures of visitors, even if the road itself is clear of snow and could withstand traffic.

MOUNTAIN ROAD CONDITIONS

Since 1989, the Public Roads Administration and the Environmental and Food Agency have published maps showing the condition of mountain roads during the spring and early summer. The maps are issued for as long as any mountain road remains closed. <http://www.road.is> Up-to-date information on the state of the roads, including mountain roads, is available on telephone 1777.

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