



### The icebergs of Jökulsárlón

There is always something slightly ethereal about icebergs, which makes this location on the south coast of Iceland a popular stop for travellers passing along the country's ring road. Breiðamerkjökull is one of the major outflow glaciers from the huge ice cap of Vatnajökull. The glacier once reached the sea, but now it calves into icebergs in the magnificent proglacial lake of Jökulsárlón (which means *glacial river lagoon* in Icelandic). This lake is impounded by a redundant terminal moraine, which is breached by a very short outlet river into the open sea. Rapid marine erosion of the moraines and the adjacent sandur flats is steadily narrowing the strip of land between the sea and the icefield. The lake has only existed since 1930, when the glacier melted back from the moraine ridge. By 2017, the ongoing ice retreat had left nearly seven kilometres of open water within the lake between glacier and moraine. There is still a steady supply of small icebergs produced by calving of the glacier front. Winds and currents generally sweep these chunks of floating ice down the length of the lake, so that they accumulate close to the outlet river. This passes beneath the ring road bridge, where a convenient roadside dock allowed summer visitors to enjoy an iceberg-spotting boat-trip round the lake. Jökulsárlón is very different in winter (when this photograph was taken from the moraine barrier). The whole lake freezes over and traps the year's flotilla of icebergs. Their shapes and ice-banding clearly show how many of them had partially melted below the water-line, had therefore become top-heavy, and had rolled over, before being frozen in for the winter. A walk across the thick lake ice is an unforgettable experience, winding a route between towering blocks of glacier ice that are a magical mix of whites and blues. It is unnerving where patches of glass-clear ice look like holes into the lake but can still be walked over, though the beautiful landscape of ice makes the nervous moments worthwhile. © *Photographs and text by Tony Waltham Geophotos*