

JÖKULLS

A great part of the highlands is covered with perpetual snow (jökull) which occupies upwards of 14 000 square kilometres, or a little more than 13 per cent. of the total area. Largest of all the jökull is the *Vatnajökull* in the south-eastern corner of the country, extending over 8500 square kilometres. There are other large jökull in the interior (*Hofsjökull*, *Langjökull*), besides a number of high ice-capped mountains here and there near the coast, the most prominent being *Eyjaflajallajökull* and *Mýrdalsjökull* in the south. The height of the snow line at *Hornstrandir* (in the north-west) is only 650 metres above the level of the sea, while in the east, north of *Vatnajökull*, it ascends to 1250 metres.

VOLCANOES AND ERUPTIONS

Iceland is thickly studded with extinct and active volcanoes. During the 1050 years it has been inhabited, over 20 volcanoes have had eruptions, some of them repeatedly, so that more than 100 eruptions are now on record. The best known of these volcanoes is Mount *Hekla* which has had 22 eruptions within historic times. Most of the volcanic mountains are situated in the south, whence a chain of them extends northward across the eastern part of the highlands to the *Mývatn* (*Midgewater*) in the north. -- These frequent eruptions have sometimes caused a great deal of damage, though neither so often nor to such an extent as might have been expected. This is because the active volcanoes are in the interior wildernesses of the country and for the most part far from human habitation. The greatest devastation on record was caused by the *Skaptá* (or *Laki*) eruption in 1783, when the lava flood laid a number of farms in ruins and showers of ashes covered the country far and wide, destroying vegetation and poisoning the air, and thus giving a terrible blow to Icelandic farming.

When ice-capped mountains erupt, the jökull partly melts, and then bursts, and an enormous flood of water, carrying huge blocks of ice, comes tearing down the mountain-side, sweeping everything before it, and turning whole districts into deserts. The floods are called *Jökulhlaup* (jökull bursts).

HOT SPRINGS

In close connexion with volcanoes and volcanic activity are the Hot Springs (*hverar*), of which there is a great number in Iceland, scattered all