

Trail maintenance project report - Laugavegurinn (summer 2014)
Partnership project with The Icelandic Mountain Guides

The aim of this project was to repair damaged sections of the Laugavegur trail between the Þröngá river and Emstrur. Sites were chosen close to Slyppugil and work began on the trail approximately 10km north of Langidalur. The sections of the trail that went through deep soil areas were the most damaged and these areas became the focus for this year's work. The work tasks included the removal of erosion scars, improvement to drainage and the restoration of damaged vegetation. Several secondary trails were closed with ropes to reduce trampling.

Long-range trail teams

The main challenge presented by this project, was its remote location as it can take more than 2.5 hours for team to walk from the base camp at Langidalur. The solution to this was to establish long-range teams who would stay at "wilderness camps" close to the work sites for several days, carrying lightweight equipment and food with them. Each team included 5 - 7 volunteers and a team leader. Additional supplies could then be sent from the Langidalur base camp whenever necessary. Tools were brought to site with the first team and removed by the last team at the end of August.

Project outline

Work began on July 7th with the arrival of the first volunteer team on site. Over a period of two months a total of 5 teams completed projects in the area and each of these lasted for 4 days. Work ended when the last group returned to the Langidalur base camp on August 28th. The teams began work close Slyppugil and work proceeded north from there.



Volunteer wilderness camp (10km north of Langidalur)



Stone water bar construction

Work methods

A variety of practical methods were used during this project and materials were gathered close to the worksites. Methods were adapted from those that were successfully developed and used on sites close to Kattarhryggur in 2013.

Repairing gullying – Areas beside the trail were filled and reprofiled. Stone and sand was used for filling and soil was added to create a growing surface. Ryegrass seed and a small amount of fertilizer were added to speed up revegetation and protect the areas from further erosion. Areas on the path were filled with stones and resurfaced with gravel and sand to establish a strong walking surface.

Undercutting – In many of the deep soil sections of the path, erosion has lead to undercutting the existing vegetation and exposing the roots. In many places, repair work involved simply undercutting the existing vegetation, reprofiling the banks and replanting. This is an effective method for stabilising the banks.

Improving drainage – Stone water bars were constructed in several locations to remove surface water on the trail. These were sighted above slopes to protect them from the effects of water erosion. Where possible, existing ditches and natural drains were used to channel water from the trail.

Removing secondary trails – In several areas, secondary trails were removed. Areas were reprofiled and seeded with ryegrass. Temporary ropes were used to close these areas to prevent trampling and allow the vegetation to recover.



(Before and after) Undercutting and reprofiling of the slope. Remaining vegetation is replanted to cover exposed roots and establish a growing surface. A small amount of fertilizer is added to promote regrowth.



(Before and After) Reprofiling and filling the gullied trail. Stone waterbars were constructed upslope to prevent further damage from water.



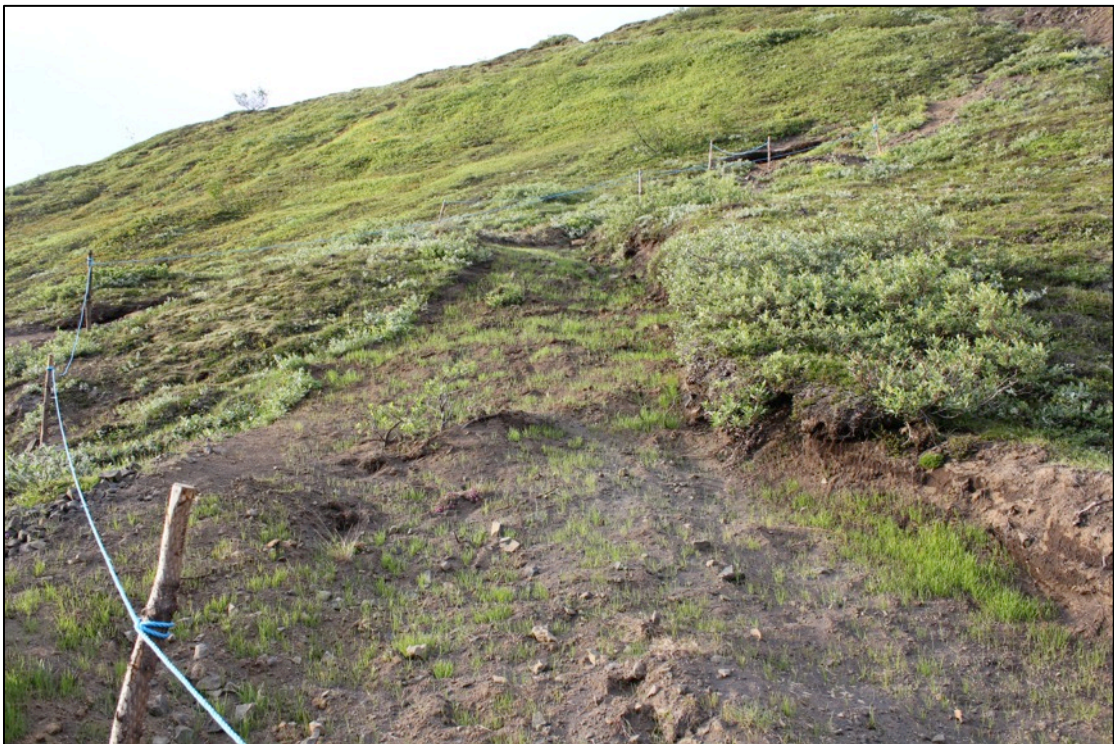
(After) Stone waterbar build to protect the repaired trail and slope ahead. The left side of the trail has been regarded where the bank has been undercut and filled. Turf has then been replanted.



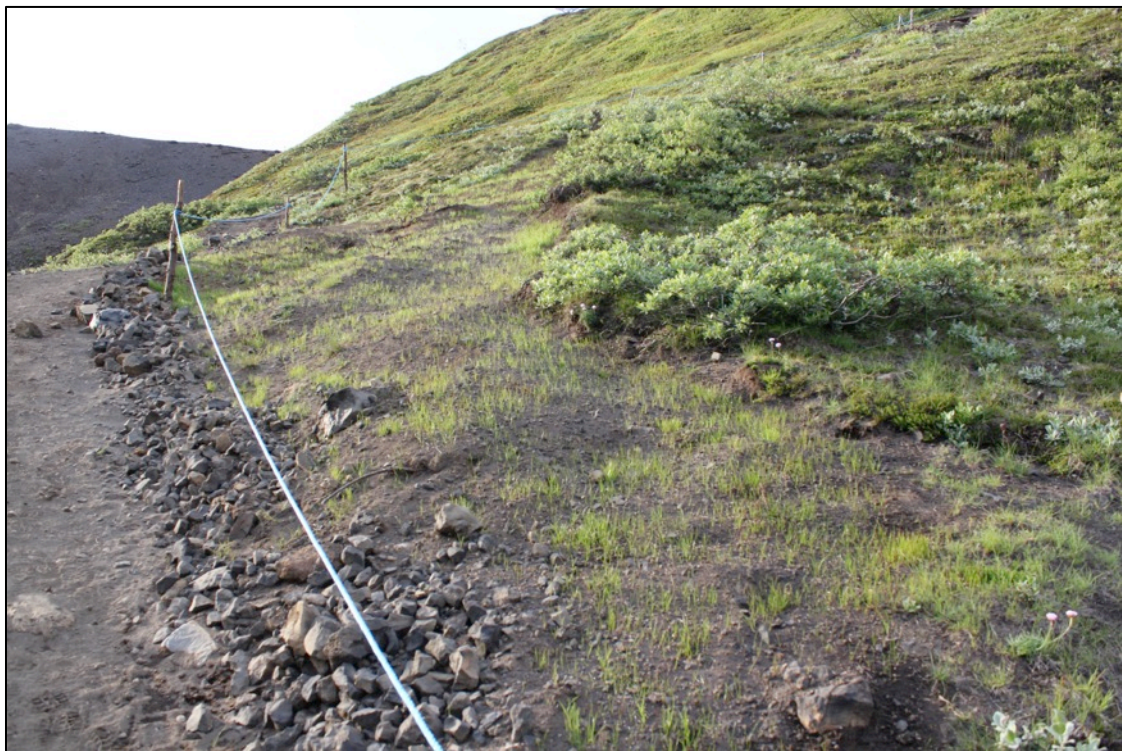
(Before) Badly eroded area showing secondary trails.



(Before) Secondary trail eroding and becoming a gully.



(After) Erosion gully filled with stone, covered with soil and planted with ryegrass.



(After) Site reprofiled and planted with ryegrass. On several sections temporary ropes were added to prevent trampling and encourage regrowth.



(During) Stone added to eroded area.



(After) Soil and ryegrass seed added.

Summary

Although the task of maintaining the Laugavegur trail is a daunting one because of the scale of the problems, this project has demonstrated an effective model for trail maintenance in these areas. Although this project can be considered just a start, small teams of trained and organised volunteers, staying at wilderness camps along the trail could be an important element of a future management strategy for the trail.

In addition to the actual trail maintenance and erosion control work that has been completed this summer, the development of an effective organisational structure that would be suitable for future projects is also a very significant result. Following the success of this summer, “long-range volunteer trail teams” based on this model could be deployed elsewhere in the future.

We would like to sincerely thank The Icelandic Mountain Guides (Íslenskir Fjallaleiðsögumenn) for their support and for making this project possible.