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## Ragnar Axelsson *Behind Mountains*

Texts by Ragnar Axelsson

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### Untamed Beauty: Iceland from the perspective of the award-winning photographer

For forty-five years, Icelandic photographer Ragnar Axelsson has observed the farmers of his homeland during the sheep roundups—a centuries-old tradition that unfolds across the country's dramatic highlands.

Every autumn, sheep farmers of Landmannafréttur uphold this ancient practice of communal herding, navigating the rugged landscape on horseback or foot to gather their flocks from summer pastures. Battling unpredictable weather, they drive the sheep into a central pen for sorting—a ritual unchanged for centuries in one of Iceland's most breathtaking and challenging terrains.

Landmannafréttur, a remote highland region in southern Iceland, is a striking geological landscape shaped by volcanic activity, tectonic shifts, and extreme weather. Situated between the volcano Hekla and the glacial area Jökulheimar, it lies in an active volcanic zone along the rift between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. The area hosts multiple volcanic systems and Iceland's largest geothermal site, Landmannalaugar. Glacial erosion and geothermal forces have sculpted an ever-changing terrain of obsidian fields, black sand, steaming fumaroles, and vibrant mineral pools.

In *Behind Mountains*, Axelsson presents powerful, atmospheric black-and-white photographs that vividly document the interaction between people, animals, and the rugged landscape.

From the introduction text by **Ragnar Axelsson**:

*Even in the rugged environment of Landmannafréttur, the balance between man and nature is a delicate one.*

*Mountain herding relies on specific knowledge, passed down through generations, that emphasises community, organisation, and endurance. But time brings change. In culture, technology, and the environment itself. What will the future of the mountain roundups be? Will the people who depend on, protect, and care for their land be able to continue in their ways? Can the freedom of the mountains remain undisturbed? What is to come is uncertain. But as Þórður Guðnason, a man of these mountains and my guide through them, says, 'no matter what happens, the mountains will remain in their place'.*

**Ragnar Axelsson**, known as Rax (b. 1958), has spent more than four decades photographing the people, animals, and landscapes of the Arctic's most remote regions, including Iceland, Siberia, and Greenland. His work has been honored with numerous awards including a shortlist nomination for the Prix Pictet and an Honorable Mention in the Leica Oskar Barnack Award. His photographs have been featured in *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Stern*, *Geo*, *National Geographic*, *Time*, and *Polka*, and have also been exhibited widely. Following *Arctic Heroes* (2020) and *Where the World is Melting* (2021), *Behind Mountains* is Axelsson's third publication with Kehrer Verlag.

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## Press Images



01\_ Sheep driven down from the mountain, 2008 © Ragnar Axelsson



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03\_ Kristinn Guðnason, the mountain king, Jökulgil, 1989 © Ragnar Axelsson



04\_ Geothermal bath, Landmannalaugar, 1989 © Ragnar Axelsson



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07\_ Herder in geothermal area, Landmannalaugar, 1999 © Ragnar Axelsson



08\_ Þórður Guðnason and Kristján Gíslason in a snowstorm, 2007 © Ragnar Axelsson



09\_ Sheep driven down from the mountain, 2010 © Ragnar Axelsson



10\_ Tóti, Ari, Kristinn, and Kalli, Áfangagil, 1989 © Ragnar Axelsson



11\_ Kristinn Guðnason in geothermal area, Landmannalaugar, 1989 © Ragnar Axelsson



12\_ Roundup, Jökulgil, 1997 © Ragnar Axelsson