Acknowledgments

The environmental challenge that accompanies the Anthropocene, the Age of Humans, is the greatest problem that humankind has faced, and it is important that it is discussed frankly and in language that people understand. This book, about living through a natural disaster, has its own long history. The idea was born some years ago, shortly before I revisited the library in Manchester to look for that first news article about the Heimaey eruption, but its content and emphasis have changed over the following years.

My experience of volcanic eruptions where I grew up in the Westman Islands is the catalyst for the autobiographical anecdotes that are recalled here in a wider context, with reference to eruptions elsewhere in Iceland and abroad, as well as other natural disasters. The content, however, has to do with the subject matter that I have worked with as an anthropologist over the decades. I have long been interested in the ideas of people in different societies and different times, about the relationship between humanity and nature, science and science history, and connections between the world of experience, society, and environment. Most of this is encompassed within the field of environmental anthropology, in which comparisons and direct experience in the field are important research tools.

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In the memory
of my brothers,
Sigurður Pór (1953–1971)
and
Novels are no use at all on days like these, they deal with people and their relationships, [...] with society, etc., as if the place for these things were assured, the earth for all time earth, the sea level fixed for all time.

_The words are eruptions within him, magma that has to come out._

You ask of my companions. Hills, sir, and the sundown, and a dog large as myself. [...] They are better than beings because they know, but do not tell: and the noise in the pool at noon excels my piano.
— Emily Dickinson, Letter to Mr. Higginson (1862)