

## Reindeer herding of the Finnish Sámi

In the Sámi region, the environment is sharply divided between a marine ecosystem and an inland one. As a result, human activities based on these two different ecosystems also differ radically. The barren Sámi region forced its indigenous population to live on food from areas even far from settlements. It explains why both salmon fishing and reindeer herding over extended territories became essential to the Sámi survival. Since its origin, the Sámi culture's core has been based on the direct use of natural resources. So, the Sámi culture revolves around what we today might call natural industries. As already noted, reindeer herding has been increasingly important among the Sámi people during the past two hundred years, and now occupies the first place in the subsistence economy. Before examining the annual cycle of reindeer herding, it is necessary to consider of reindeer herding cooperation, which plays a central role in organization of reindeer herding in Finnish Lapland. All of the Finnish reindeer territory is divided up into cooperation districts.

In many other areas, reindeer herding is, even today, of a greater importance to the Sámi people than it is in Inari, where secondary occupations are readily available to reindeer herders. Also fishing and cattle farming go on losing ground in Inari and Utsjoki.

As a rule, living off the traditional indigenous activities is vanishing. As a result, economically speaking, the Sámi community is becoming more like the country's general population. In older times, before national frontiers ran through the homeland of the Sámi, the reindeer herding Sámi used to migrate from the inner parts of their territory to the Arctic Ocean at springtime, and then back from the sea to the inland areas for the winter period. These migration routes often covered several hundred kilometres. This explains why the Sámi have lived in all four countries of this part of the Polar area: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. It distinguishes these reindeer herding families from the ones who led their life over much smaller areas and lived off fishing and hunting. Nowadays, reindeer herding Sámi live in all of the three Nordic countries.

### *Herding cycle*

The traditional migration has ceased,, the fells of Norway and the shores of the Arctic Ocean being out of reach from Finland. Enontekiö stands as the only area where the traditional seasonal migration pattern is still alive to some extent, because there are quite long strips of fell suitable for summer grazing.

Since the reindeer are permitted to run free during the summer months, it is convenient to begin the discussion of the annual herding cycle with the fall gathering. Before the motorized era, in the fall the first interest of the reindeer herder was to catch some of his draft reindeer so that the Sámi have transportation when the first snows fall. Late in September, before snowfall, the reindeer herders set out individually or in pairs to comb the woods for herds with castrates. The autumn gathering season was earlier an exciting and pleasant time for reindeer owners, the weather and woods are beautiful in the fall before the cold sets in, the mosquitoes are already gone, and it is a time to look at the herds to see how they fared through the summer.

The traditional economy of the Sámi was based principally on fishing, supplemented by hunting of the wild reindeer. Small herds of reindeer were kept as transport, milk and decoy animals. In order to prevent the domestic reindeer from mixing with the wild herds, they were kept near dwellings all year round; in summer within fenced areas, where they were provided with shelters against the sun and mosquitoes. As wild reindeer stocks declined during the nineteenth century, expansive pastoralism began to develop to replace hunting.

The reindeer herding neighbours of the Skolt Sámi are descendants of the Inari Sámi population, settled around the shores of Lake Inari, mountain Sámi settled in Western Inari and Kaamanen, and a few colonist Finns scattered along the main communication routes. The traditional reindeer economy of the Inari Sámi was essentially similar to that of the Skolt Sámi, characterized by small scale and intensivity. The mountain Sámi were rationally (traditionally?) nomadic pastoralists, migrating between high fell summer pastures and inland winter forest pastures. The closure of Norwegian/Finnish border in 1852 and pressure towards fixed settlement led to the eventual break-up of nomadic herding groups. In the Sámi region, there are 12 large "paliskunta" herding cooperatives. Each cooperative is confined within a separation fence dating from the beginning of the last century. Basically, today reindeer herding involves the exploitation of a delicate and vulnerable natural environment, and its sustainability demands that the flora or soil should not be put at risk. Nevertheless, in some areas, the number of reindeer has grown excessively in recent years, causing a risk of over-grazing. Today, reindeer has no natural enemies controlling the growth of the herd, except for a few eastern districts where predators may cause problems. It is thus the reindeer owner's role to prevent excessive growth of his herd. Most of the year, the animals roam freely, within the limits of the area of the herding co-operative. Animals are under human control only a few times a year: in spring during calving time, in summer

and autumn when we earmark the calves, in autumn and winter at slaughter and counting time. For the rest of the year, the reindeer roam the wilds at will, generally in small groups, without human interference. In early spring, after the reindeer roundup, man follows the wandering of the reindeer herds and sees that animals are guided in small groups to new pastures. The area of a herding co-operative includes: spring and summer ranges, winter pastures, calving areas and reserve ranges. In addition to reindeer husbandry, fishing and hunting are traditional activities of the Sámi, performed within the same areas.

The present day organisation of Sámi reindeer herding in Norway and Sweden has its roots in the nomadic reindeer husbandry period. It conforms, in many respects, to the Finnish reindeer husbandry which is regulated by the co-operative system.

### *Run-down on livelihoods*

In Finland, reindeer herding is not by any means a monopoly of the Sámi, whereas in Norway and Sweden, as a rule, the Sámi alone have the right to pursue this occupation.

In Finland, the Sámi people own 30 % of the entire reindeer stock. However, as a source of income, reindeer herding is more important to the Sámi than to the Finns. In the Sámi region, a reindeer owner owns, on average, 62 heads while over the entire reindeer area the corresponding number is only 31 heads.

### *The snowmobile revolution*

The snowmobile arrived in Sámi region during 1962-64. The principal fields into which the snowmobile has been adopted are herding and transport. In the first case it has replaced the traditional combination of ski man and dog, in the second case the keeping of draught castrates has been rendered redundant. In recent years a case has been made of snowmobile revolution in Lapland. Firstly, it is claimed that introduction of the snowmobile leads to a higher slaughter rate of animals for sale, possibly to a level jeopardising the continuity of the herds. Secondly, snowmobile herding is said to have led to the concentration of power in the hands of big-owners, pushing the small-owner out of business. Another consequence connected to the snowmobile is the disappearance of echinococcosis, or hydatid disease, which was not uncommon among reindeer herding Sámi people during the 1950's. The life cycle of the causative parasite involves the dog as the definitive host and the reindeer as the intermediate host, and humans get accidentally infected via dog faeces. The replacement of the herding dog by the snowmobile rider in round-ups and other herding tasks made

the dog redundant. Therefore, the Lapp dogs virtually disappeared, breaking the life cycle of echinococcus. Now, the parasite is re-emerging in Finland, not in Sámi region but in areas populated by wolves, which now act as final hosts.

### *Pastures use*

The contribution made by reindeer herds to the Sámi landscape is most conspicuously evident in the winter grazing grounds, that is, the so-called lichen heaths. Observations on the physical effects may be made in places where the lichen-covered tract is divided by means of a fence into two parts - the one being off limits to the animals and the other the part where they regularly graze. There are excellent opportunities for making such observations in some river valleys. The reindeer fence between Finnish and Norwegian territories is built on the Finnish side of the river in such a way as to leave a strip of ground where the reindeer do not graze. On the Finnish side of the fence, the animals gather together in the fall and winter in large numbers, for the river valley has served as a route followed by migratory reindeer herds since ancient times on their annual wanderings northward, and back to the south. The difference between the stretches of ground over which the animals have grazed and the freely growing lichen heath is clear to the eye.

The heaths with concentrations of lichen growth, as described in the foregoing, are the best reindeer grazing grounds in winter. The herds are led there to feed, the places being picked in turn according to the snow conditions and the supply of lichen. Depleted heaths are left ungrazed for several years. From the winter herding grounds, the reindeer are led during the months of November through February to round-ups at places of slaughter, which, to facilitate sales and deliveries to market, are situated on roadsides. After the winter herding season, at the end of April, when the calving time begins, the reindeer are set free. At the end of June and during July, the animals must be caught again for marking of the calves. The various sections of the Sámi region differ with respect to the directions taken by the reindeer in their summer migrations, the selection of grazing grounds and in the ways the animals are marked for identification of ownership.

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