

On the history of the Sámi living in the Lemmenjoki area

Before the Fjeld Sámi settled in West Inari, the Sámi speaking Inari same, an eastern dialect of the Sámi language, inhabited the areas around the river Lemmenjoki, living from fishing and deer hunting. They trapped the deer by digging pits in the ground, which were arranged in long rows. Some of these pits are still to be seen today, telling us of the culture and the way of life of old-time Sámi people. The largest rows of pitfalls are found on the isthmus between the lakes Ravadasjärvi and Härkäjärvi. This area is nowadays used mainly by the Fjeld Sámi people as a pasture for the reindeer. The dialect spoken by the Fjeld Sámi is called Fjeld Lappish or North Sámi and it is also spoken in the North of Norway.

In olden times the Sámi people pastured their reindeer in West Inari in Winter and drove them to the coast of the Arctic Sea for summer. When the border between Finland and Norway was closed in the middle of the 19th century, the reindeer culture and the life of the Sámi underwent considerable changes. After the closing of the border, several families migrated from Utsjoki to the Lemmenjoki area in the second half of the 19th century and later settled there permanently. There appeared small new villages, such as Lisma, Njurkulahti, and Angeli. The closing of the border also caused difficulty to the Sámi of Karesuavanto, Enontekiö and Kautokeino in pasturing their reindeer. A number of Sámi migrated from West Lapland to Lisma in the 1930's and further to Vaskojoki in the early 1950's. The migration ended in the late 1950's with the last arrivals in Angeli. Moreover, the closing of the border caused a change in the nature of the reindeer economy of the Fjeld Sámi people. It became impossible to continue the seasonal transfers of herds from winter to summer pastures and vice versa (for instance, from the Vasko valley to the Arctic). Before the closing of the border, reindeer raising in the area of the present Lemmenjoki National park was mainly conducted on a large scale, with big herds possessed by each owner. At that time, Salko Niila (Länsman) and Pikku Hannu (Kitti) owned a total of 10 000 reindeer, which is as many as the reindeer-owners' associations of Muotkatunturi and Sallivaara possess today. After these big owners there developed in this area a small-scale form of reindeer raising, with a large number of owners with small herds.

Because of the reduced pasturing possibilities, the village communities could no longer keep their reindeer under control through the whole year, so they had to let the animals roam free in summer. It became usual for owners to employ hired hands - giving them female reindeer in remuneration for their work - whose task was to keep the dams tethered during calving time in the spring, so as to make sure that the calves were marked with the sign of the proper owner.

When the traditional Sámi style of living began to give way to the new farming culture, some cattle were also acquired. At first the fodder was gathered from the sedge marshes and the natural meadows at the river banks, some of which can still be seen along the Lemmenjoki. When more soil was cleared, the grassland areas increased and home meadows yielded most of the fodder needed. Marshes and river bank meadows became less important as sources of fodder. In earlier times it was the custom to gather horsetail from these areas, to be used as fodder for the draught reindeer could not get at them. The horsetail harvest was brought to the farm houses as soon as the snow came. Nowadays the Sámi still gather hay from among the willows at river banks, to use it as padding on the bottom of their boots. On their hay-cutting expeditions they often do some fishing, and earlier it was customary to gather lichen and horsetail as well.

Sámi people use the Sámi costume in connection with the gathering and separation of reindeer and their trading trips to Ivalo, Inari or Northern Norway. By the style of the Sámi jacket you can tell where the wearer comes from. Two jacket styles are found among the Sámi people in the Lemmenjoki area. The jacket with rich embroidery originates from Kautokeino, whereas the less

ornamented one comes from Utsjoki. Even today you can tell by the clothes where a person's ancestors came from to Lemmenjoki.

The introduction of the motor sledge brought the greatest change in the reindeer raising since the taming of this animal and the closing of the Norwegian border. Less than fifty years ago the reindeer keepers in the Lemmenjoki area had hundreds of draught reindeer. These animals were also needed for various purposes when reindeer were gathered and driven into enclosure. Nowadays the Sámi use for which they may still use a tame reindeer is to lead the animals into enclosure. In spite of many drawbacks, this change has also brought some advantages to the reindeer keepers. With the elimination of the draught animals which did not produce any meat, the pastures consumed by them have been freed for younger and growing animals which produce meat for sale.

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