

NOMAD Fieldnews

Edition 7

May 10, 2007

In the first days of May the reindeer herders of Brigades 1 and 8 made their presence more felt in the spring pastures. Four of the reindeer herders with higher positions in the hierarchy of the brigades, including the leader of Brigade 8, spent the first five days of the month at the base camp of Brigade 8 at Kolmiavr Lake.



Picture 1. With snow cover rapidly receding, the all-terrain vehicle (*vezdekhod*) shall soon become the main vehicle that can travel between village and tundra camps.

The herders told us that they were preparing for the start of calving activities. They were to search for the “main herd” in the open tundra towards the Barents Sea coast. This, however, was not to be. Instead, the herders engaged in hunting activities on small segments of the herd roaming in the swamps close to the base camp.

This move was dictated by the prevailing transport conditions. The quickly disappearing snow cover presented the last chances for this year to use snow-scooters for chasing easily and hunting the reindeer, and for transporting reindeer carcasses to the village.

Consequently, the migrating herd began to experience hunting pressure from two directions. On the one hand, there was poaching by urban hunters which we reported in our previous issue. On the other, the herders wishing to use last opportunities for augmenting domestic private economies before thawing, also stepped up the pressure.

After four days of hunting the elite herders of the brigade, having acted as hunters, left for the village. The first ten days of May are marked by two state holidays: the First of May, Labour Day, and the Ninth of May, Victory Day. The two great holidays open up opportunities for continuous celebrations for a week – an event not to be missed. With the ‘top ranks’ of the brigade gone to the village, the base was left in the care of two lower-position herders: an old-age pensioner, and recent member of the brigade, as well as the youngest herder - Ivan, who had brought his family along.

Ivan and his wife Galina were planning to stay all through the summer at the base camp. Galina had been given a temporary contract as camp cook (*chumrabortnitsa*). Ivan and Galia’s two little girls are for the first time in the tundra together with their parents. They are happily watching the TV, which the *vezdekhod* had brought for their stay in the tundra during the summer. Vladimir Chuprov, the older herder, who has been acting as a guard at the brigade base during the winter, is sharing the fascination of the youngsters for the TV.



Picture 2. “Uncle” Vovka watching TV at Base 8 with Polina and Tania.

The hunting activities of reindeer herders resulted in some change in the location of the herd segments that we are monitoring. Toward the end of April they were slowly advancing towards the opening swamps and low hills on the southwestern banks of the lakes Kolmiavr, Ketkozero, and Kalmozero, and the stretches of River Iokanga that join them (see Nomad 6). Between 5-10 May we noticed that the fragments were dislodged from that area and have passed the Iokanga line to the northeast of the Iokanga river-lake system.



Picture 3. The Iokanga River line is an important geographical boundary: on 5 May the winter is still in its full power in the open tundra to the Northeast of the river. Flocks of tundra partridges are associated with grazing herd fragments, making use of the undergrowth that the deer open up.

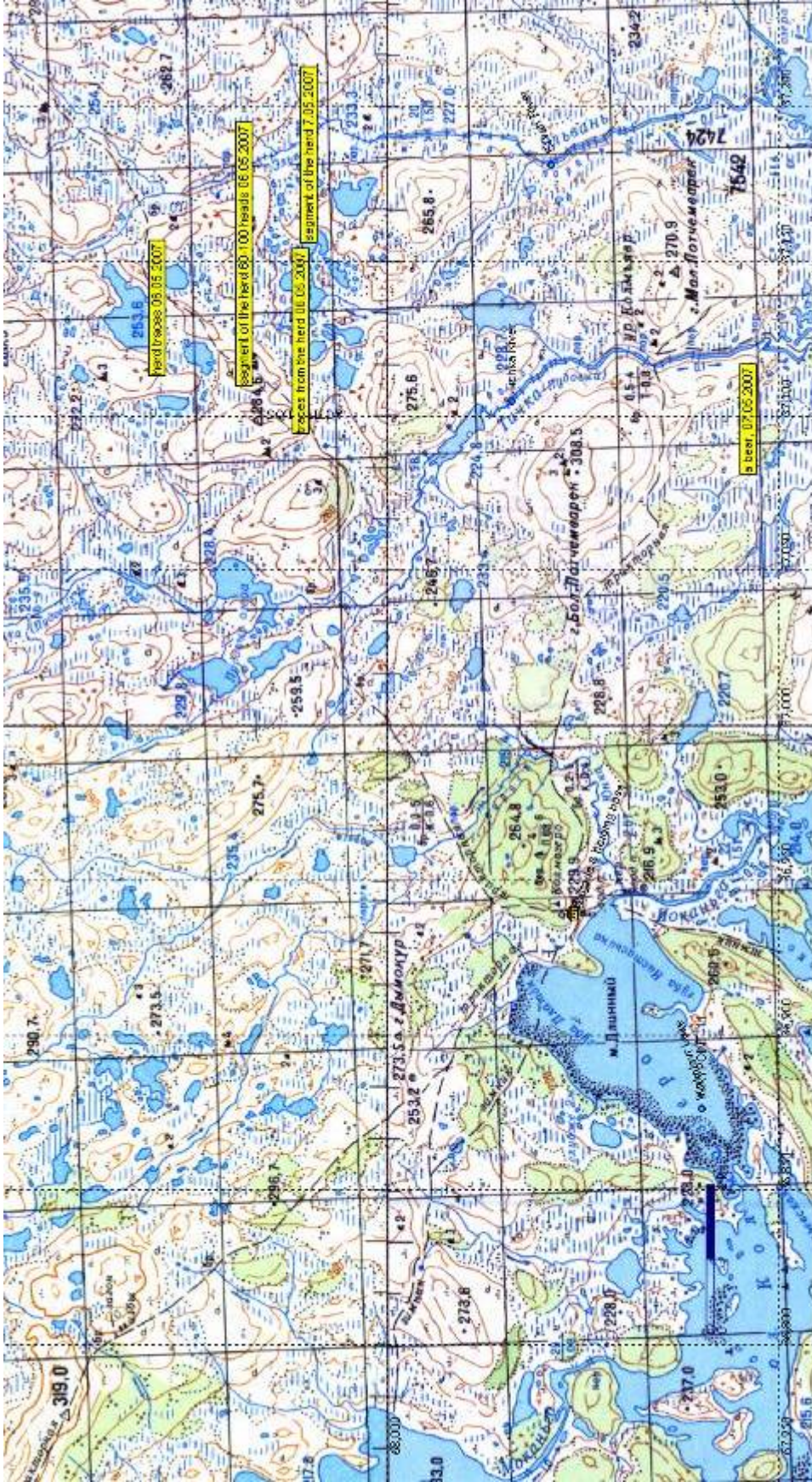
The monitored segments are now roaming in the area between the sources of rivers Tichka and El'van (El' rechka). The white, snow-covered low hills and spacious swamp-land, covered by low shrub and dwarf birch, provide a wide field of view for the reindeer, which can protect themselves more effectively here from predators and humans. At the same time, this region provides worse grazing conditions for the reindeer than the hills and swamps on the southwestern banks of the Iokanga lake-river system offer, where

sizable snowless patches are increasingly forming. In the open tundra the reindeer are forced to dig through the hard snow crust.



Picture 4. Craters for lichen and moss in the open tundra, to the northeast of the Iokanga lake-river system.

While checking the location of the reindeer segments on May, 7th, our team met a representative of another tundra species, interested in the herd, a bear. This usual reindeer predator has become already active after the period of winter hibernation, and is carefully monitoring the location of the herd, too. Its activity is only one more reason for the monitored segments to prefer the open tundra for calving, where they feel safe.



Picture 5. The location of the monitored segments of the herd.



Picture 6. The bear, alarmed by our snowscooters, is running for cover towards the forested hills.

While some fragments have already passed into the open tundra, other segments of the herd are still located to the southwest of the Iokanga line and are not hurrying to pass it. The lakes and rivers are opening more and more daily. To check the movements of these “southwestern” fragments shall be our next task.

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