

# NOMAD Fieldnews

Edition 9

June 20, 2007



**Picture 1.** *Vezdekhod*-drivers, workers, and herders of Cooperative “Tundra” on a fishing trip to Kalmozero Lake.

The first three weeks of June the weather was cold with a prevailing northeasterly wind. There were only about two days with some sunshine and temperatures higher than 10°C. The spring development of the flora and fauna was slower than usual. The good side of

this was that blood-sucking insects did not become any real bother till the very end of the month.

The various reindeer fragments in our sector of observation did not have much reason to leave the abundant grounds on the fringe of the forest zone, using the warmer parts of the day to graze in the nearby swamps. Thus, those fragments that had not already passed into the open tundra had ceased migrating activities for the moment. In addition to the fresh weather, lush greenery and absence of insects, they were reluctant to cross lakes and rivers with their still high waters.

By early June the reindeer herders of the right wing of “Tundra” had considered their job around the spring migration and calving already completed. Brigade 8 spent the first decade of the month waiting for the brigade *vezdekhod* that should take them back to the village of Lovozero. Because of the chronically bad condition of this vehicle, the waiting continued for more than two weeks.

Meanwhile, part of the herders lost patience and preferred to organize their return journey by themselves. Two reindeer herders left on draft deer and sledge. Their route from the Kolmiavr Base was to the Voronia River Ford, a little to the north of Lovozero. The draft bucks were to be released at that place and could migrate freely towards the Barents Sea coast. Using mobile phones, functional at this distance from the village (but not much beyond) the herders mobilized friends and relatives in the village to organize van transport for them and thus complete the last part of the trip, some 30 km from the overall distance of 110. Draft deer thus offer chances for autonomous trips, but, at the same time the option is not without its risks. Close to the village the draft bucks are an easy target for poachers. A driving sledge also offers very restricted possibilities for carrying heavy loads of meat and fish from tundra to village. In this respect the *vezdekhod* is the incomparably superior vehicle, despite its fragile state and unpredictable timing.

The long awaited *vezdekhod* at last arrived on 10 June, having covered the distance from Lovozero in a week. That the journey was so long was due, apart from the poor state of

the machine, to the salvaging of the Brigade 9 *vezdekhod*. This machine had sunk on a previous trip when fording Chernaia Rechka River.



**Picture 2.** The controlled herd of 1 500 head, which Brigade 1 of Krasnoshchel'e collected and drove from River Rova to the Iokanga.

After a short rest and a fishing trip to Kalmozero Lake, the brigade *vezdekhod* left back to Lovozero on 20 June. The base was left to the care of Ivan, a younger herder, his wife Galia and their two daughters (Fieldnews 7). An older herder, “Uncle Vasia” (Vasilii Khatanzei) and two old-age pensioners had also decided to stay there for the summer. One of these latter, “Uncle Vovka,” had his two grandsons with him, the young boys having arrived on the epical journey of the *vezdekhod*. This legendary vehicle is expected to bring back building materials and workers on 7-8 July, for planned repairs of the base

log cabins. Until this coming of the vehicle, the residents' task is to "keep the base going". No herding activities are planned till the autumn.

With the end of the spring migration and calving for the biggest part of the reindeer herd of "Tundra", and with the departing of the herders, we felt that we had also completed our task for this spring, at least regarding "Tundra" herding activities. But, at the same time, the neighboring location of the territory of Brigade 8, which we observe, and the mixing of reindeer between the right wing of "Tundra" and "Olenevod" on it, had posed new questions and tasks on our research agenda.



**Picture 3.** Vasilii Kanev, leader of Brigade 1, is boat-tugging his sledge deer, after the brigade herd had finally forded the Iokanga.

Our interest towards the herding activities of the neighboring Brigade 1 of "Olenevod" was also raised by the many suggestions and plans, which herders from this brigade had

shared with us at an occasional meeting in Lovozero in March and in the tundra in May. The stated intention of the brigade was to collect as much of its herd as possible and try to control it during the entire summer. This, we thought, might become a significant event in Kola herding practices, an attempt to restore all year round controlled herding, practically fully abandoned since the mid-1970s.



**Picture 4.** To be able to drive their herd to the Iokanga and ford it on 18 June, the Krasnoshchel'e herders had to camp under the open sky for the previous fortnight.

So far, in our sector of observation, i.e. the area between the Keivi Ridge and the Barents Sea Coast, an aggregate herd, in which the reindeer of many brigades had roamed mixed, for many decades had met with only minimal, but harsh interference from humans. Apart from poaching forays, this consisted mainly in increasingly late round-ups in counting-

harvesting corrals. This year was no exception in this regard as round ups at Belaia Golovka again ended only towards the end of March.

In the second decade of June we undertook a *vezdekhod* journey to the main herding base of Brigade 1 of Krasnoshchel'e, located on the right bank of River Iokanga. Our efforts to cover the distance during this time of high waters of the year, complicated further by the unfavorable weather, proved to be worth making. We met the herders of Brigade 1 in the midst of an important and delicate herding operation: driving their herd across River Iokanga, towards Mount Devin Corral Base. As we learnt from them, they had controlled the migration movement of that herd of about 1 500 head from the lower reaches of River Rova to the swamps around Tichka Corral Base. With calving occurring about 18 May they had subsequently moved the herd along the *vezdehod* track from Tichka Corral to their Iokanga Base Camp and the swamps on the eastern side of Magazin Musiur Ridge.

The task to drive the herd to the other side of Iokanga had proved to be extremely hard. Matters were complicated by the large number of calves in the herd, because of which the female deer were reluctant to swim across the deep and fast flowing waters of the river. The steep banks of the patch of the river, chosen for fording, posed further difficulties. Finally, the weather conditions did not favor the operation too. Nevertheless, with persistence and a number of skillfully completed steps, the herders finally succeeded to drive the herd across the river, but only on the third day of a long succession of futile attempts. According to plan, the herd should be corralled toward June 20 at Mount Devin, and the calves marked.

Our journey to Brigade 1 of Krasnoshchel'e bore abundant fruit. What we observed and learnt from interviews with the herders proved that their latest herding practices have come as a deliberate effort for a serious departure from the current state of Kola herding.

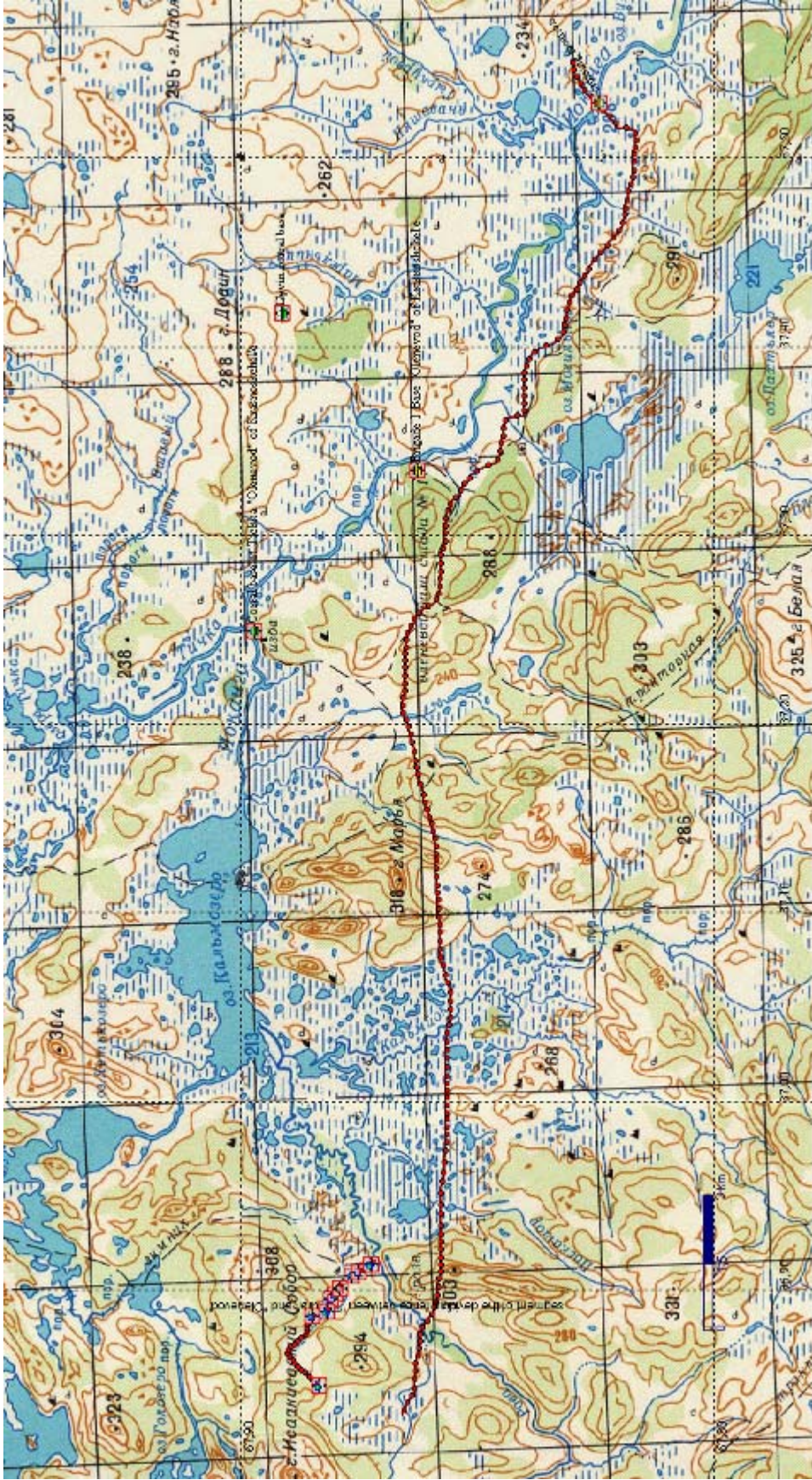
Thus, practices abandoned during late sovkhos time, i.e. since the end of 1970s, were attempted to be discontinued. Brigade 1 demonstrated before our eyes a serious attempt,



**Picture 5.** The return to controlled herding poses serious challenges for the herders: the female deer, forced to swim across Iokanga with their month-old calves, felt great stress. Mothers and calves were losing each other in the created chaos, and were swimming back and forth in search of each other.

a step from a recent series of such, to restore full annual control over their brigade herd. As we learned from Vassilii Kanev, a leader with great authority in the team, they had begun to resume tight controlling of their herd since last summer. Their effort constitutes a very significant departure from existing methods and is to be considered a most significant turning point in recent developments.

Fully controlled herding, or herding “by our grandfathers’ methods“ (*dedovskim sposobom*, in Vasilii’s words) is already showing a migration profile sharply different from that of the very “liberally” treated Lovozero right side herds. On both sides of the fence dividing Brigade 1 of Krasnoshchel’e from its immediate northern neighbor



**Picture 6.** The approximate track, which Brigade 1 of „Olenevod“ passed with its herd in the period 1-18 June, 2007.

Lovozero's Brigade 8 (see issue No 8), the reindeer are behaving differently. The herd of Brigade 1 has yielded, albeit reluctantly, to the suddenly imposed control, a process far from smooth so far, as we saw and herders agreed. Brigade 8 from the "Tundra" side has continued with what may be called "fully uncontrolled herding", following the "late sovkhov" tradition.

In this situation we are faced with the task of following two sharply different profiles of what had so far been uniform migrating behavior. The "restorative" pattern of the herders of "Olenevod" presented its own demands, while the "late sovkhov system" of the right side of "Tundra" produced an extreme fragmentation of the migrating reindeer. Consequently, the first three months of the work of the NOMAD Field Station have been marked by efforts to follow two different, but immediately adjacent responses of reindeer to human intervention.

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