

NOMAD Fieldnews

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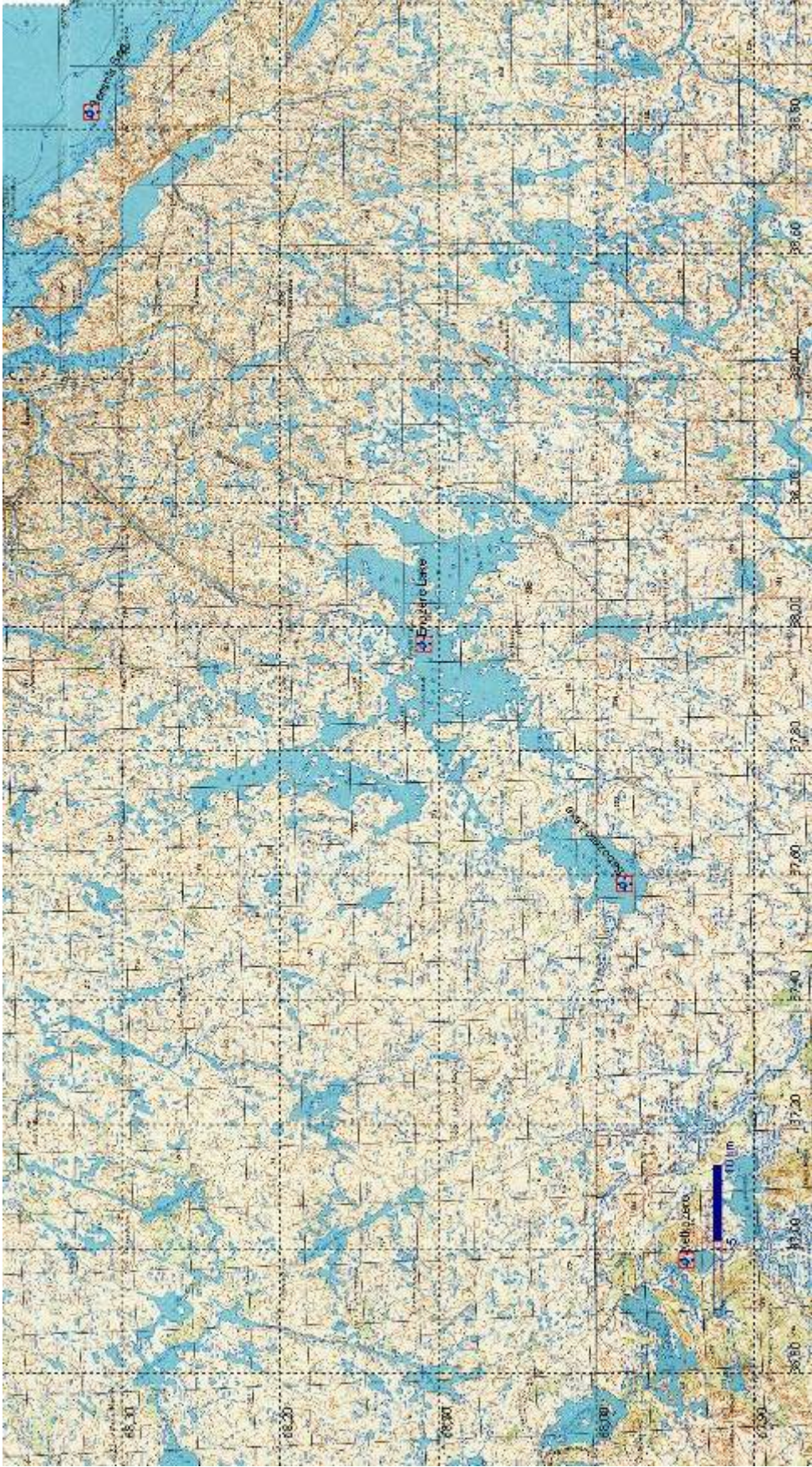
Picture 1. In the second half of July fully fledged wild ducklings become a frequent sight in the Iokanga river-lake system.

On 5 July, after some delay, caused by infrastructural problems discussed in the previous issue (NOMAD 9), we could finally set off in the direction of the summer pastures of the right wing of SKhPK “Tundra”, as well as those of Brigades 1 and 3 of “Olenevod”. The trip was to be conducted mainly by boat, which was to be portaged when crossing from the Iokanga into the Enozero river-lake system. Apart from a five and a half meter long inflatable canoe “Severianka” we had a small tent and some basic equipment. All of this composed what could be called the non-snow surface unit of the NOMAD research station. Short of using helicopters or track vehicles, it was the next best device capable of providing the high mobility necessary for the objective we had before us. This was to monitor the grazing range in the direction of the Barents Sea coast for seeing how the deer were faring in a situation of quickly intensifying blood-sucking insect pressure. A number of related research tasks were connected with herding activities as well as other forms of human impact on the fragmented herd.

Because of the new regulations of the Russian Federation, increasing the restricted border area of the country to 25 km, as well as the presence of military installations in this off-limits zone all along the Barents Sea coast, we had to limit our movements sufficiently far from the coast itself. Our transport opportunities were also limited to the use of boat and our own feet, which also put constraints on our route.

Preparations for this trip were made during a previous journey (in the middle of June), when part of the necessary equipment was stored in the currently little used Tichka corral base, situated where River Tichka flows into the Iokanga. After setting off from base camp Ketkozero we confronted very strong winds on the shallow but fairly big Kalmozero Lake. A forced camping on the southern bank delayed us for a couple of days. By 8 July we made the Tichka camp. From there we continued up the Tichka towards Mount Diovin and further on to Lakes Babozero and Enozero.

During the boat trips regular stops were made, aiming at observation of the surrounding coastal areas for reindeer. Several longer trips on foot were also undertaken, inspecting areas that are at a larger distance from the lakes, and could not be reached by boat.



Picture 2. Map of the summer pastures of the right wing of „Tundra“ and of „Olenevod“.

In this manner we could observe a fairly close to the ground picture of the summer grazing pattern of the central Kola herd. Our presence in these fairly remote territories was also useful for assessing the impact of human activities that reached this far out.



Picture 3. After a night at Lake Tichka, we continued the trip on foot in the direction of Mount Devin and the summer pastures.

In the first decade of July the weather was colder than the expected for the season. Insects were innumerable till the middle of the month, when the weather finally became warmer and an impetuous insect activity started.

By that time most of the reindeer had moved in the open tundra, where the large open areas on low hills, blown by frequent winds, provide worse life-conditions for insect. On

our way we saw separate animals and smaller groups or fresh traces of such in those areas, despite our own feelings of despair at certain favorable moments, when nevertheless clouds of mosquitoes were attacking us.



Picture 4. A simple corral structure with carcasses of two portable dwellings (*chum*) close to Babozero Lake. According to herders' evidence, parts of the herd of Brigade 1 of Krasnoshchel'e did not move to the coast and was grazed in that area during Soviet time. This new *tandra* (corral) is an attempt for the resumption of the pattern.

Our observations from the first half of the NOMAD summer trip (5-20 July) outline the following pattern of the summer grazing of reindeer. The herd is in its most fragmented state. Small clusters and often individual animals are strewn far and wide over the large territory, roughly defined by Tichka on the south-western side, and, ultimately, the

Barents Sea coast to the north-east. At the same time, we could establish also that small clusters and individual animals had remained to the south-west of the Tichka-Iokanga line. These are mainly the swamps and sparse birch groves at the foot of the low Magazin Musiur Range and the low elevations towards Mounts Maria and Isakievskii Sobor. Still, the usual pattern according to which the density of animals is higher closer to the sea coast and decreases progressively as we go south-west towards the forest zone is well evident.



Picture 5. A lonely deer is pickily choosing titbits in one of the endless swamps that surround the lake chain Babozero-Enozero. Signs of molting are well seen on the flanks and back.

Despite constant rumors, coming from herders, of poachers and tourists that roam the summer pastures and disturb the summer grazing of the reindeer herd, we did not meet or see anyone during the whole trip. Neither did we see any traces of other humans' activity, apart from those left by reindeer herders around the various corrals and fences. While this is not a proof that activities of "outsiders" are to be ruled out in these parts, it questions alleged frequency and negative effects, often circulated among the herding community.

A further aspect of the situation is related to the very problematic and costly transport opportunities for tundra travel during the summer. Almost all available vezdekhods for renting in the region are known, and most of the vezdekhod-roads pass through or close to the camps of herders. Having in mind the noise that the machines make, it is almost impossible that an external's intrusion in the tundra remains unnoticed by herders. Long research in the region confirms this observation. The same is also valid for outboard-engined dinghies.. On meeting the herders of Brigade 1 of "Olenevod" later in July, they confirmed that they had not seen or heard of any external presence in the wide area we had been trekking. The largely discussed during previous conversations tourists, they asserted, were to be expected only towards the end of the month and especially later in August, when the weather was drier and warmer for paddlers.

Satellite phone link with the NOMAD Field Station

The station has the use of a Globaltel satellite phone through which we can be accessed by e-mail messages to the following address: <79542130947@sms.globaltel.ru>

Text and photographs:

Yulian Konstantinov,
Vladislava Vladimirov