

# NOMAD Fieldnews

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The second half of August saw the gradual return of senior herders to the tundra base camps. The main task to perform was catching sled bucks from migrating herd fragments, as well as, whenever possible, marking calves, and making meat supplies for the autumn. But, again, the main emphasis was on assembling enough buck teams, these providing essential transport in the snowless autumn months.



**Picture 1.** The dangerous *mukhomor* (*Amanita muscaria*), deadly for humans, is said to be liked by reindeer.

The weather happened to be unusually warm, often even hot, during the second half of August. Cooler days came only after August 26, when temperatures fell to 8°C during day time. The first frosts turned the tundra white at night and damaged the mushrooms and the blueberry.

The herders said that all seasons were coming in late this year. This was the likely explanation, according to them, of why the reindeer were staying back in summer grounds longer than usual. Apart from zig-zag forays to the forest zone and back in search of mushrooms, as was noted in the previous issue (NOMAD 12), there was no visible sign of the autumn migration beginning in earnest. In previous years the movement would normally begin toward the middle of the month.



**Picture 2.** The summer of 2007 was marked by long needed repairs to tundra base camps. Renovation and re-insulation of walls at the Kolmiavr base camp of Brigade 8.



**Picture 3.** The building and repair of mega-structures, corral enclosures and fences of many kilometers in length, is done manually.

By 20 August reindeer talk had it that the fragments were late in coming due to very high insect activity which herders connected with the general delay of seasons. To illustrate the situation, Vasilii Khatanzei, a 51 year old hereditary herder with a life-long experience with this particular herd, gave an example with his sled bucks. He had kept a pair all through the summer. “To save them from the insects I keep them in the old sauna hut during daytime. This is unusual so late in August...”.

Another reason for the delay of the migration the herders saw in the possibility that mushrooms, so abundant this year, were abundant in the summer pastures too. Hence many herd fragments did not bother to seek them in the birch groves. This tied in well with our own observations of the animals. The core female part of the herd showed a

tendency to stay back together with the calves, this year's as well as older, while the "zig-zaggers" tended to be full grown productive males (*hirvasa*), as well as castrated sled bucks. When mushroom are scanty in the tundra, herders said, deer hurry earlier in August to the forest zone, where the plant is easier to find.

Another scenario the herders shared with us was that it was possible that an early rut (*gon*) could have already begun in the summer grounds. In such a case, the rut might keep the reindeer herds out in the tundra and closer to the Barents Sea coast well into the autumn, possibly till October.

All through the second half of August the herders were slowly gathering at their main herding camps in anticipation of the autumn migration. The camps stretch between Lake



**Picture 4.** A device for carrying rolls of steel wire.

Liavozero in the north and Ketkozero in the south, along a line of about 50 km. In this upper part of the Iokanga river-lake system there is a point in the middle which becomes extremely interesting in September and October. This is the northern end of the Porosozero Lake, where the base camp of Brigade 1 (“Tundra”) is situated. Why the autumn migration would flow exactly through this point it is difficult to say. The fact, however, is certainly connected with a series of north-south fences, the closest of which is 25 km fence between Liavozero and Porosozero, as well as another 15 km fence connecting Porosozero with Kolmiavr. Further down between Kolmiavr and Kalmozero the fence line continues, but at present is in a dilapidated state.

Porosozero, where Brigade 1 is stationed, features two enclosures: one for spring-autumn passage, and a counting harvesting winter corral, some three kilometers higher up. Both



**Picture 5.** While waiting for the bucks to appear the herders are busy building sleds.

structures follow the low hills on the left bank of the lake. For the moment the lower simpler structure was the interesting one. This corral (*tandra*) had the quality of being so positioned that fragments would often simply walk in without any need of pushing from behind through the entrance. This enclosure, built very close to the camp, is said to be one of the most functional herding structures in Central Kola. For this reason it has become usual during the last years for the herders of brigades 1, 2 and 8 to gather at the two living huts of the Porosozero camp and eagerly wait for the appearance of reindeer groups on the northern horizon.

There were strong indications that herding in this part of the Peninsula was beginning to increasingly rely on fences. This was the Lovozero brigades answer to the fact that trying



**Picture 6.** Paddlers continue on their journey up the Iokanga after visiting the NOMAD research station at Ketkozzero Lake.

to keep control over the herds by closely working with them was practically recognized to be a lost cause. As brigade leaders shared with us, the ambition was to build a checking fence all the way across the Kola, from north to south, thus connecting existing fences of the left wing of “Tundra”, the right wing with which we are currently working, and the Krasnoshchel’e brigades. This giant fence is believed to make spring and autumn corralling easier and compensate for the absence of human touch with the animals for the greater part of the year. From the point of view of the human-Rangifer relationship, the tendency, if taken to its logical outcome, would be for humans to ultimately meet deer only in corral enclosures, save for sled bucks. In order to study this interesting herding situation in more detail, the next planned step of the NOMAD research team shall be to move to herding camp 1 at the beginning of September and observe herding activities going on there.

Despite often circulated talk at herding camps about passing paddlers vandalizing cabins and even poaching on the deer, a couple of such tourists appeared for the first time on 16 August. We thus encountered the tourist factor in the guise of Vladimir and Ira, a couple of professional people from St. Petersburg. Ira was a medical doctor, while Vladimir was a university lecturer, teaching physics. These polite and soft-spoken people showed great surprise to find a research camp in these parts and asked us many questions about our work. After a very enjoyable conversation over a cup of tea, we learned that they were long-term fans of water-tourism in the Kola. They had been coming regularly for a couple of weeks in the summer ever since the mid-1980s. Between complaints about the unexpected rise of tundra transport costs during the last years, we also learnt that they knew very little about reindeer and herding in the region. With a clearly expressed nature-protecting mentality, Ira and Vladimir could hardly be accepted to fit the standard description of herders and local residents of “wild tourists” being vandals, poachers, and a general threat for the tundra. They were a very far cry from the bear hunters-poachers whom we had described in our May issue (No 6).

**Text and photographs:**

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