

# NOMAD Fieldnews

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**Picture 1.** Porosozero watch: on the look out for deer from the “mushroom migration”.

By the first days of September most of the herders from the two neighboring brigades 1 and 8, as well as from brigade 2 (Liavozero), had already gathered at the Porosozero base camp of brigade 1. Their main herding task in this season was to round up the deer from what we called the “mushroom migration” and drive them into the lower enclosure (*tandra, tandara*), described in the previous issue.

The “mushroom migration” happens before rut time and can be said to cover the time between the first appearance of mushrooms (20 July this year) and mid-September, when the rut generally begins (see also NOMAD 12 and 13). During this period deer fragments seek to move into the birch woods (*berezniak*) in search of mushrooms, but quickly go back to open or higher places in case insect pressure becomes too high. After the end of August, when insects generally disappear, the movement intensifies. Castrated bucks and other non-productive animals may then move into the forest zone with no intention of going back into the tundra. The productive part of the herd, however, would seek open tundra spaces (*chistye mesta*) and those of them who have gone on the mushroom trail would now turn back to the tundra once again. In this way August and part of September would be marked by an oscillation between tundra and forest relative to productive status.

As noted in NOMAD 13, the most important objective of the September corralling was to catch sled bucks. Alongside this main activity there was also the pressing need for fresh meat. There had gathered over twenty hungry herders in the two huts of the base and a uniform diet of macaroni and tinned meat (*tushonka*) was bringing spirits down with each passing day. The relatively deep and stony Porosozero Lake is rather poor in fish, and thus the chances for enriching the diet from this direction were meager.

There was also the hope for some calf-marking, but still catching sled bucks remained undoubtedly the main task. Transport in the difficult months of September, October, and well into November, when the rains come and the swamps present a formidable obstacle, relies very much on reindeer. Buck transport is the only solution for numerous daily tasks, from going to other camps, to tethering bucks twice a day, to fishing, carrying wood, and numerous other smaller chores which abound in the daily routine of a herder.

As is well-known among herders, the most difficult exercise is to catch deer for the first sled-team (at least two or three animals). Until this is done the herders can rely solely on their feet. With the help of even one sled catching following teams becomes considerably easier and, by and by, all other tasks.



**Picture 2.** During the non-snow months traveling for the team was mainly by boat (Porosozero, September 2007)

To highlight further the importance of reindeer-sled transport in tundra life during the non-snow months one could also add that without the teams even ensuring regular meat supply from passing fragments, becomes a serious problem. One can dodge and shoot down an animal, but it is difficult to take it back to camp. And without reindeer meat in abundance (huge pots permanently boiling on the stoves) herders quickly tend to find life in the tundra unbearable.

In order to observe this most important seasonal encounter between *Rangifer* and human, we relocated the NOMAD research station to a spot at Porosozero Lake, close to the herding camp of Brigade 1. As emphasized in the previous issue, it was here that the migration was most likely to pass.



**Picture 3.** Following the migration often demands building makeshift temporary camps. A “kitchen/sitting room” at Poroszero, built with remains from a former geologists’ base.

At Base 1 we found intensive preparations for the corralling going on. In the first week of September, three *vezdekhody* arrived from Lovozero, bringing herders from Brigades 1, 2, and 8, as well as the Head of the Reindeer Herding Department of “Tundra”, Iurii Filippov. His responsibility was to command and control the rounding up activities, as well as oversee, as the immediately responsible member of the administration, corral and fence construction and repairs. As a result, the herding camp, designed to shelter one brigade at a time and never enlarged so it could cope with a situation like the present one, was barely able to provide enough living space.



**Picture 4.** Anatolii Chuprov (Tolik), a long-time worker of the Cooperative, is combining the functions of a carpenter with that of the camp baker. “I learned bread making from the female camp-workers at Corral Km 69”, he recalled\* .

After the obligatory alcoholic bout lasting for a few days after each arrival of *vezdekhody* from Lovozero, Iura, the Head of the Herding Department, took up the organization of life and work in the camp. First, he distributed the herding and household tasks among the available personnel. Then some herders were dispatched on the look out for deer, while others went into the woods to fell and bring back fire wood for the following months – this for the camp as well as for the counting-harvesting corral three kilometers upslope, with its three bigish log-cabins and bath hut. The *vezdekhody* were busy going

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\* Km 69, now dismantled, used to be the third big counting-harvesting corral of “Tundra” and was situated on the road from Murmansk to Tumanny. The fact that there was an easy access to the northernmost herds along this highway, dealt the deathblow to the former Brigade 5 and eventually to the corral itself.

back and forth between the base and Efimozero (Efimka), coming back with loads of pine trunks, needed for fence posts. Tolik, and Sergei Mal'tsev, a new camp-worker, assisted by a few pensioners, carried out the household tasks. A "Kazanka" motor boat was supporting contact with Base 8 at Kolmiavr, as such by radio-telephone was unreliable. There was also the need for people to move constantly between the two bases, often in connection with fetching necessary spare parts for the *vezdekhody*.

At the beginning of September the herders were hopeful that corralling may happen "the easier way", i.e. when a group of reindeer either entered the corral by chance, or appeared close to it, so it could be rounded up without much effort. Such an opportunity did indeed appear on 3 September, but at the very last moment wind direction shifted abruptly and the reindeer veered off and disappeared. After a week of waiting it was decided, as



**Picture 5.** A scouting party of herders sets out from the base camp at Porosozero. The first leg of the journey is by *vezdekhod*.

described above that scouting parties of two-three herders each should be sent to various directions on both sides of the Liavozero-Porosozero fence. However, the first two weeks of the month went by without spotting any reindeer. The herders would come back tired and often wet and freezing. They had no glad news to share.

From previous years we knew that corralling should already have taken place by this time. Rather puzzled we began asking the herders whether there was a chance for the migration to take another route and perhaps pass the Iokanga line at another spot and not at Porosozero. But they were dead sure: “Don’t worry, sooner or later they shall come!”

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