

NOMAD Fieldnews

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Early Winter Migration



Reindeer herder Ivan Terent'ev with his team of bucks caught during the after-rut migration

First signs of real winter

The beginning of November in the tundra was marked by sharp change of weather. In the first days of the month it looked like winter had finally come. Temperatures finally fell below zero and snow covered the hills and swamps.



A fragment of 250 head is driven by a herder (out of the picture, to the right) in the direction of Porosozero Lake.

After a few such days however, the weather became unstable again. The wind turned from the south and day temperature often rose to zero. Such uncertain conditions did not stimulate fast migration of the reindeer fragments to the forest zone. Instead, most of them chose to graze in the range around the upper reaches of River Tichka and further east in the open tundra. Small groups of deer broke off from this main body and advanced towards the Iokanga river/lake line. They marked the forward-most line of advance at this time, as no deer had been spotted yet to the west of this line. This was reported by the herders sent to watch for fragments appearing in the forest zone. This was Egor Sorvanov (Zhora) from Brigade 1 at Lake Rova (midway to the winter pastures), and Ivan Chuprov and Vassilii Khatanzei, the two senior herders of Brigade 8, at the upper reaches of River Kuliok.

“Deer are afraid to make long marches when the swamps are not securely frozen,” was the herders’ comment. “When the ground is covered with snow and they cannot see if it is hard enough underneath to bear their weight, they are afraid of getting stuck in the mud. They prefer to wait until the swamps get frozen.”

Another comment was about the swamps “having got steamed” this year, “*bolota sparilis*”. Because snow fell before the swamps had fully frozen, they remained soft underneath, the snow acting as a lid. The herders also said that the first ice on the lakes, which was formed for the first time on October 20, was too thin, “the deer cannot see it”. “When the lakes are all white, with snow on the ice, it is only then that they shall cross over.”

Among other reasons for the herds not hurrying to cross over to the forest zone in the first half of November the herders mentioned also the current easy access to swamp grass (*osoka*), shrub, and willow on the swamps and by rivers and lakes, as well as lichen on the hill slopes. “The mosquitoes are gone, the mushrooms also, why should they hurry?” the herders would add.

Corralling

Despite the reasons that held reindeer back, more and more of them would advance towards the Iokanga line and this movement intensified with each passing day. To make use of this chance, the herders of the “right wing” of Cooperative “Tundra”, i.e. the herding teams stretched between Lake Liavozero and Lake Kolmozero (Kolmiavr), continued their attempts to organize corralling in the small enclosure (*tandra*) at Porosozero (“Tundra,” Base Camp 1). The idea was to catch sled-bucks, first and foremost, but also to mark calves or other unmarked animals, slaughter for the pot at the camp (*obshchepyt*), as well as slaughter own private deer for sale.

After having traveled to the village because of a variety of private reasons (see NOMAD 17) many of the herders from Brigades 1, 2 and 8, again gathered at Porosozero Base Camp 1 in the first week of November. By November 10 they had managed to achieve



On the watch for advancing fragments

three successful round ups. The biggest of these was accomplished on November 6, when the herders corralled a fragment of some seven hundred animals. It was noted – and remained a pattern – that females (*vazhenki*) with young calves formed the greater part of the group.

This latter fact was met with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the herders were glad that there were so many calves: about seven for ten does was said to be the average. On the other, however, they were disappointed to see so very few adult males appearing, with an extreme scarcity of sled bucks. Despite this scarcity of bucks, at the time of writing most herders of Brigades 1, 2, and 8 had somehow managed to assemble their sled-teams. Bucks were also been caught for the absent members of the brigades, i.e. Zhora at Rova Lake, and Diadia Vania and Diadia Vasia at River Kuliok.



Petr Terent'ev, a young herder from Brigade 8, is back to his duties in the tundra after a short treatment of a lung disease in the village.

A representative of Brigade 1 of Krasnoshchel'e, Pashka, had also caught what bucks belonging to herders from his team had shown up in the corral.

The transport situation

Greater success with round ups at the Porosozero *tandra* can be seen as a direct result of the more intensive migratory movement of reindeer after the rut, the latter lasting, approximately from September 15 till October 15. Even the few colder days in early November were enough to intensify the migration. The freeze ups also improved – even only for a few days - the transport situation.



The NOMAD Ketkozero camp in early November. Yulian is servicing one of the two snowmobiles for its first mission after the summer

In the first place, reindeer driven sledges became the standard transport means for the lower ranks of herders, i.e. those that did not have the few cooperative snowmobiles at their disposal. Draft deer ensured good transport especially for shorter distances, but, on the negative side, bucks required tethering twice a day to be in good shape. As pastures immediately around the camps have been exhausted long ago, the bucks have to be tethered a few kilometers away and thus a lot of walking is connected with keeping the teams fit and ready for use.

Draft teams and sleds (*upriazhki*) also permit better mobility of herders when they look for groups of deer in the tundra. In the case of Brigade 8, for example, Ivan Terent'ev has been regularly conducting trips to the tundra to the region along the Tichka River since the last days of October. His efforts bore fruit. During such trips he located several groups of migrating deer and managed to keep them to the east of the Iokanga Line. Kept in the swamps between Vas'ka Gora and the Putchimvarek Hills such fragments would be eventually redirected toward Porosozero and the *tandra* by its eastern bank. Thus, at least one corralling of the last days has been a direct result of Ivan's efforts.

The availability of reindeer-sled transport helps a lot in the round ups. Still, the herders' would rely much more on snow-scooters when corralling. A reindeer drawn sled cannot match free running deer for speed and prevent small fragments of a group "splintering off" (*otkolivatsia*). The snowmobile, with its ability to be driven at 70 km/h or even more, depending on the state of the surface, is clearly the more powerful and advantageous vehicle. When, however, the machine does not break down, and the surface is good. To the great chagrin of the herders, these two vital conditions are rarely met. Concerning the state of the surface, after the promise of the first few days of the month, conditions quickly deteriorated. The swamps could not freeze properly, and the ice on the lakes is still about only 10 cm. thick at the time of writing. These conditions permit only very limited use of snow-scooters, but, despite this, with even the first light snowfall the herders instantly put their machines to use. Surface or no surface, it was easier to drive the deer with them and besides – the Cooperative would repair them in case they broke down.



For a few days there was some relatively colder weather at the beginning of November

The NOMAD research station

The first cold days, few that they were, still helped us considerably in reestablishing continuous contact with the migrating fragments. Despite the still dangerously thin ice on swamps and lakes, we managed to monitor the movement of the various groups of deer as the general migratory rhythm intensified. We were also in close touch with the herders who were accomplishing one round up after the other at the Poroska Tandra. With this current success of corralling, an increasing number of traders (*komersanty*) came to be seen at the camps, an issue we shall bring up in following diary entries.

With the intensification of the migration of deer across the Iokanga Line, we also plan to move the mobile research station toward the winter pastures of the right wing of “Tundra”. From such a vantage point we could better follow the second part of the

migration of the reindeer to the forest zone of the Peninsula and to study human impact and activities on the herd during the rest of the winter.

Internet and 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 For ordinary e-mail messages please use yuliank@sv.uit.no

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