

NOMAD Fieldnews

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Mid-winter Corralling



Photo 1

Herd positions

By early January various fragments of reindeer had begun congregating in the winter range between Belaia Golovka Hills and the upper reaches of River Kuliok. The main task of the herders this time was to keep the reindeer to the northeast of this line and not allow them to pass over to the western part of the winter grazing range (see map, below). This latter extends all the way south to *Panskie Tundry* (Panskie Hills) which mark the present westernmost

border of the winter grazing territories of the right wing of “Tundra”. These are primarily Brigades 2, 1, and 8, if we order their territories from northwest to southeast. The neighbor of Brigade 8, Brigade 9 is also part of the right wing, but its once numerous herd¹ has at present dwindled to an uncertain, but decidedly small number which is difficult to locate. The team at present is composed of only two persons. The future of this brigade is rather precarious – it is the most distant of all “Tundra” brigades and its open tundra position makes life for the herders there very demanding. Additionally, it bears a constant poaching pressure from the nearby closed military town of Ostrovnoi (Gremikha).

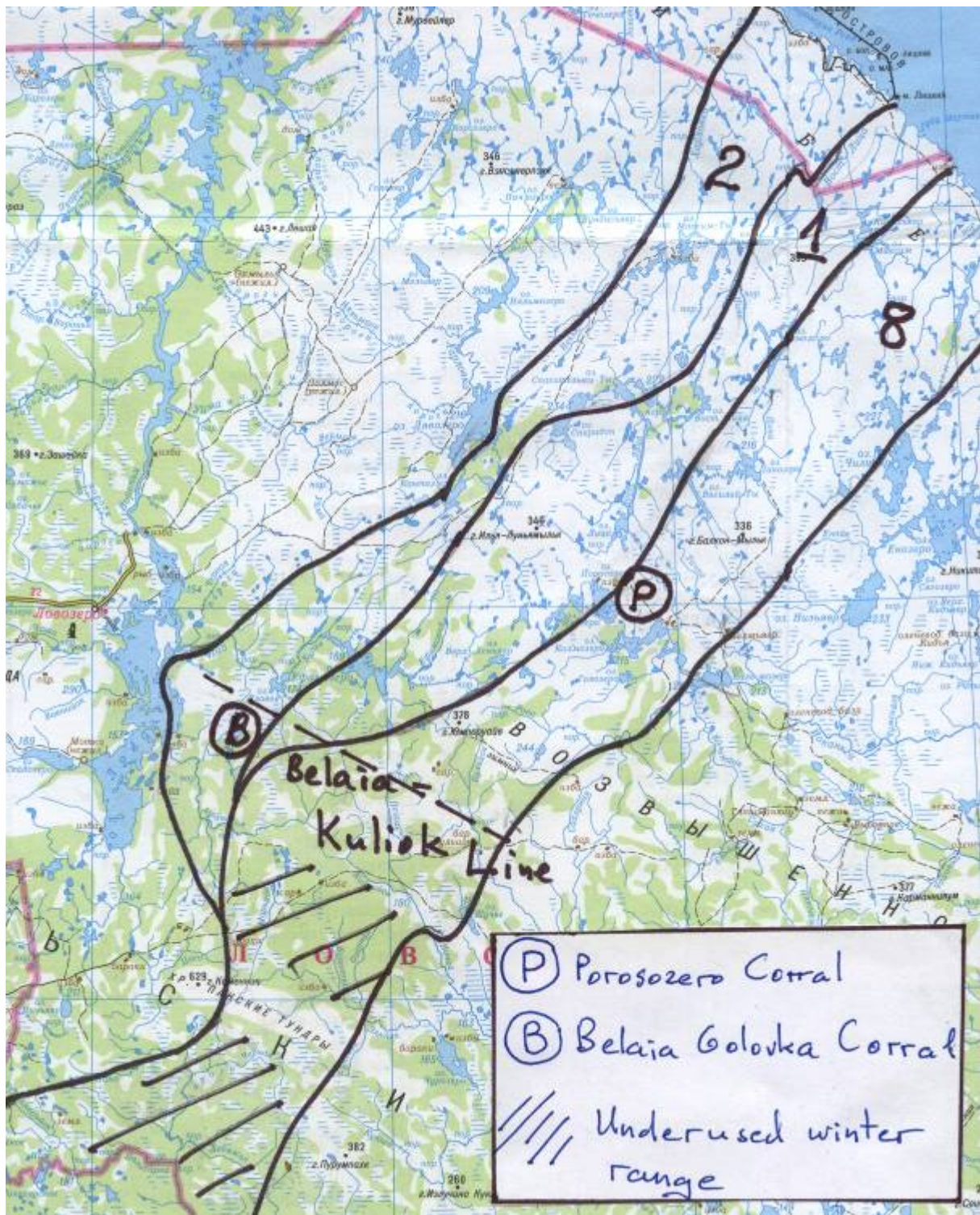
A 1962 map of Kolkhoz “Tundra” shows right wing territories to extend all the way south to Panskie Hills and beyond, to the administrative border with Terskii Raion. Properly, as it can be seen from the map below, only the territory of Brigade 8 reaches so far, Brigades 2 and 1 being left with winter pastures which resemble closely those of the present situation. The much greater winter range allotted to Brigade 8 suggests that even by the early 1960s mixing of brigade herds during the winter was a recognized practice. At present mixing of brigade herds is a routine practice throughout the year.

For a long time, at least for a decade, contact with the herds had only occasionally reached beyond the Belaia-Kuliok line, most of the winter activities being concentrated between this line and the Iokanga river-lake system. In this way at least a third of the former winter range is underused at present. As herders explained, the reason has been the difficulty they faced when trying to flush out the herd (*vykuryvat' stado*) once it got into the hilly terrain between the Keivi Ridge and Panskie Hills. An aspect of this situation can be seen in the ease with which Cooperative “Tundra” agreed that the Canadian company Barrick² established itself for mining and processing of platinum around the highest peak of Panskie Hills, Kamennik (NOMAD 16). When discussing the lease with the reindeer herding administration, the explanation they gave was that the Cooperative had not been using that part of the range for a long time anyway.

To keep the fragments from crossing the Belaia-Kuliok Line and move towards Panskie Hills, a small number of herders had been positioned at three salient points: at Belaia Corral Base, at

¹ In December 2001 the present NOMAD team witnessed a round up by Brigade 9, led by a now retired herder Semen Kanev, which was of around 8000 head.

² Barrick works in Lovozero Raion as ZAO „Fedorovo Resources“ with plans for exploitation till 2030.



Territories of Brigades 2, 1, and 8 of "Tundra" from winter to summer range. Scale 1:750000 (1 cm=7.5 km)

the Kuliok Hut (*Kuliok Domik*), and in a small mobile hut (*furgonchik*) at Lake Rova. For their transport needs these sentries relied mostly on sled-deer, thanks to the great effort invested in catching sled-bucks in October-November (NOMAD 16-20).

Keeping sled-buck teams requires a lot of work: the animals have to be moved to fresh grazing spots and tethered there twice a day, granulated feed (*kombikorm*) is to be given to them as additional nutrient, new animals have to be trained, harnesses have to be seen to. On the return side, however, sled teams are much more reliable than the constantly breaking down snowmobiles, and, crucially, one can save on fuel. This latter, as well as a host of other snowmobile essentials, the administration of the Cooperative is giving very grudgingly and in chronically insufficient quantities. A great deal of the constant tension between the administration and the brigades is rooted in the question of fuel allowances which one side sees as over generous, and the other – as appallingly miserly. Against this background sled buck teams certainly make a lot of sense.



Photo 2. Daybreak at the Kolmiavr Camp. The herders are getting ready for the round up. In the foreground: the Brigade Leader’s “foreign brand” snowmobile (inomarka)



Photo 3. A middle rank herder on his Soviet “Buran”, called jokingly “kolun” (the axe). Grigoirii Khatanzei (Grisha) is on the look out for the herd. Note reserve fuel canister at the side and spare essentials tied behind



Photo 4. A lower-rank “traditionalist”: Petr Terent’ev (Pet’ka) with his sled-bucks

Transport and brigade hierarchies

By the end of December only the left wing brigades had managed to organize successful round ups and corralling. Two fragments destined for slaughter had been sent from the Polmos Corral to the Swedish Norfrys slaughter station in Lovozero. Now came the turn of the right wing to deliver, as the greater part of the collective herd grazed on its territory. The first of these events was planned for the first week of January. Due to sudden illness, Vladi had to stay back in the village and Yulian left for the tundra camps by himself. He joined Brigade 8 at their Kolmiavr Camp on 6 January and contacted the targeted fragment, together with two herders from Brigade 8 and one from Brigade 2, on the next day.

The targeted fragment of some 850 head had been moved about a week before from the Belaia-Kuliok line and left to graze at the northernmost end of Lake Kolmiavr. As with other fragments, no vigil was kept around the grazing animals. The leader of Brigade 8, Vladimir

Khatanzei (Vovka) had driven to the fragment on the previous day and was sure the deer would not move far, as it subsequently proved to be the case.

Vovka was dashing about on his “foreign brand” snowmobile (Photo 2 above), a recent acquisition of the Cooperative. Rounding up is usually led by brigade leaders and the foreign makes, Lynxes and Yamahas, go to them. The lower ranks drive ageing Soviet Burans, while at the bottom are herders with sled-buck teams. This hierarchical order is not so straightforward, however. Thus, the most experienced and highly respected senior herder of Brigade 8, Vassilii Khatanzei (Diadia Vasia) would never have anything to do with a machine, giving his exclusive preference to the sled-team. “Traditionalists” are not rare in other brigades too, so who is where in the brigade pecking order, cannot be so easily surmised only from the vehicle one is driving.



Photo 5.

Pastures

A little beyond the Kys-karan hut, at the extreme northern-most end of Lake Kolmiavr, the fragment was grazing peacefully. The snow cover was unusually thin for early January so without great difficulty the deer could get to low brush and lichen under the snow. The branches of the birch-groves were also easily available. Under these conditions the herd had not much reason to roam the range far and wide in search of food. This explained why the herders had not opted for keeping a round-the-clock watch near the fragment.

The round up

Having located the fragment, the three herders fanned out behind the animals and began driving them in the general direction of the Porosozero Corral. This extensive structure stands on a hill on the left bank of Lake Porosozero, about a kilometer away from the smaller enclosure, the Porosozero Tandra.



Photo 6. The unusually thin snow cover in early January 2008 allowed easy reach of brush and lichen (The range between Kolmiavr and Porosozero, 7 January 2008)

It took about four hours for the herders to bring the fragment to the vicinity of the camp – covering a distance of only ten kilometers as the crow flies. Small groups of deer broke off right and left from the main mass; they had to be chased and turned back. All of this required a lot of difficult driving through birch groves. Branches would often swish into one’s face, or the machine would burrow into a snow drift and have to be extracted by lifting the body, and then executing a series of maneuvers. All of this ate up time and also precious fuel. After the end of the operation, Yulian had burnt some 20 liters of petrol, or as much as had been consumed for covering the 100 km from Lovozero to Kolmiavr. The herders were right in complaining that the administration did not account for the excessive consumption of fuel that occurs routinely in round ups.

By 14:00 hrs the fragment came to the entrance of the corral. We slowly pushed it up as the fences on both sides gradually came closer. When the distance between them was about a



Photo 7. Fencing in the fragment after pushing it into the main hall (zal) of the corral

hundred meters across, more herders on snowmobiles came from behind and a line of all these prevented the fragment from turning back and breaking free. Here and there a calf would lie trampled or paralyzed by excessive stress. Such animals were put on sleds and removed; they were later slaughtered outside the corral fence and went for the pot (*obshchepit*). By moving forward and then waiting, the herders on snow scooters and others on foot finally pushed the fragment into the main “hall” (*zal*) of the corral. The operation was over by 15:00 hrs. Processing the herd began soon afterwards.

Composition of the fragment

As during all previous round ups, this fragment showed an overwhelming presence of female animals. *Vazhenki* with this or last year’s calves counted for approx 4/5 of the whole fragment. There were very few castrated bucks and only a small number of productive males (*hirvasa*). In consequence, productive females and calves formed the main part of the slaughter fragment (*zaboiny kusok*), This came up to some 300 head and was separated into an enclosure to be subsequently driven on hoof to the slaughter house in Lovozero.

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