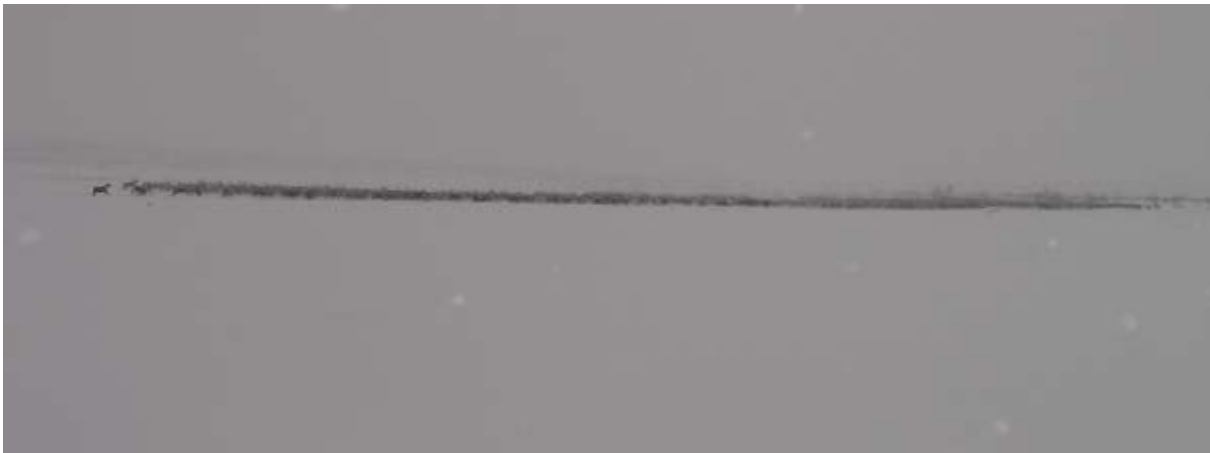


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The mid-winter herd



Holding the herd at the Belaia Golovka-Kuliok Line

After the rounding up of a fragment of the winter herd, described in the previous issue (NOMAD 22), we set forth on 15 January in the direction of the Belaia Golovka Corral Camp. According to information from the herders of Brigade 8, the composite herd of the right wing of “Tundra” was grazing in two parts along the Belaia Golovka-Kuliok Line (see map, NOMAD 22). These two parts were reported to be fairly large: of about three to five thousand animals each. The herders had every reason to believe that these two big fragments represented, in their main part, the basic stock of the right wing, *korennoe stado*. A few words need to be said about this concept, which has been a key point in herders’ discussions throughout the migration.

Korennoe stado or basic stock is defined as that part of the composite herd, which is bonded to the migratory circuit, characteristic of each sector in the overall reindeer herding territory.

In our sector of observation, i.e. the range allotted to Brigades 2, 1, and 8 (ordered from NW to SE, see map in NOMAD 22) the basic stock is considered to be the animals which graze in the winter range of the sector, and the calves get born in the calving grounds to the east of the Iokanga Line. When this herd reaches the Barents Sea Coast during the summer months, it gets mixed with parts of the other “great herds:” those of the Left Wing from the north, and those of Krasnoshchel’e from the south. On the back migration this mixture is retained, but at each corralling session the “left” (left wing) and “right” (Krasnoshchel’e) parts would be gradually weeded out and escorted to their proper winter range. In this way, in theory, the basic stock would gradually remain in its “pure” form in its respective winter range. As we shall see later on in this issue, actual practice reveals that although a certain central “basic” profile of the herd becomes gradually apparent with the progress of winter corralling, a great mixing of the herd remains the norm. To what an extent this is a mark of recent developments, or has a deeper history, we are at present unable to say.

Herders’ talk, one may note, is characteristically elliptical in this respect. The invariable comment, when outsiders see a bigger or smaller group of deer is: “Ah, this is only a fragment” (*eto tol’ko kusok*). This often means not only that the observed group is small, but also that it is an outside part, not integral to the basic stock. The statement is sometimes qualified by the herders. “This is not the herd” (*eto ne stado*), they might say, meaning that a particular fragment is not of the basic stock.

Deployment of herders

With the movement of the basic stock towards its winter grazing grounds, the tactic of the brigade leadership was to hold it at the Belaia Golovka-Kuliok Line, get the two parts together into one big mass, and drive this slowly back towards the big Porosozero Corral. It would have been much easier to run this herd through the Belaia Golovka Corral, but organizational reasons had blocked that option.

To be able to use the Belaia Corral this winter, long needed repairs had to be carried out during the previous summer. These in turn required heavy ATV (*vezdekhod*) transport, but the existing machines in running condition had been deployed to the Brigade 1, 8, and 9 camps and corrals during the summer, and there had remained none to be sent to Belaia. There was a general shortage of carpenters and other technicians, too, or more precisely, there was only one carpenter available (Sergei Tikhonov) and one electrician (Sergei Shestakovich).



Evening at the Belaia Hut. Left to right: Vladi, Kuz'kin, Vol'f, Zeba

Regarding the much needed ATVs, the administration claimed they had arranged the buying of new, i.e. little used vehicles from the Army, and that they would arrive any moment, but winter came and still there were no new *vezdekhody* in sight.

In this situation, the Porosozeroa Corral was the only answer to the demands of winter processing of herds, and the herders' tactic had to be adjusted accordingly. To accomplish the intricate task ahead, small groups of herders from the three brigades (1, 2, 8) were deployed all along the Belaia Golovka-Kuliok Line, a stretch of some 20 km as the crow flies, at the huts at Belaia Golovka, Bely Bychok, and Kuliok. One herder from Brigade 1 was left at the Rodnik Hut, halfway between Belaia Golovka-Kuliok and the Iokanga Line.

At Belaia Golovka Camp

Three herders from three different brigades were stationed at one of the three Belaia Golovka Camp huts: Alexander Zakharov (Kuz'kin) from Brigade 8, Vladimir Filippov (Vol'f)¹ from Brigade 2, and Alexander Chuprov (Zeba) from Brigade 1. Their task was to hold the northern part of the herd from crossing deeper into the winter range to the west and also help, when the time came, to join this part with the one held near Kuliok. In addition, these herders had to take care of their sled-bucks, dogs, and sleds, as the only mechanical vehicle they had at their disposal was a Buran in a very bad shape and with a very limited quantity of fuel.

Belaia Golovka Camp is situated close to the winter snow/ice road, which connects Lovozero with Krasnoshchel'e, 60 km from Lovozero, or a little more than one third of the overall journey from Lovozero. Day and night, passing snowmobile riders stop at the hut to drink tea and have a bite. Those who have alcohol with them share it with the herders. Several groups of travelers passed through the hut, during the two days we stayed there. In the afternoon of 15 January a group of three young people appeared in the doorway: two girls and a boy. They turned out to be high school students from Krasnoshchel'e, returning to the Boarding School (*shkola-internat*) in Lovozero after the long winter vacation. The boy was driving a *buran*, the girls were hauled behind on a sled. It turned out they were short of petrol and Vol'f gave them some with the promise they would give it back in Lovozero.

Deep during the night, a group of three hunters stopped outside the hut, but did not come in. As it was learned later, one of them was a former herder from Krasnoshchel'e, now a free lance hunter, generally suspected of poaching. The second was an official from the Hunting Inspection from Lovozero, known to be poaching around Krasnoschel'e with the ex-herder as a scout. The third was also a hunter from Lovozero. The herders described all three of them as poachers.

On the next day, 16 January, a large group of herders from Kanevka arrived from Lovozero on three snowmobiles. They were on their way to their home village. One of them, the leader of Brigade 2 of Kanevka, happened to be a relative to one of "our" herders, Kuz'kin. A long and very festive happening developed with the help of vodka. A short time after the Kanevka

¹ Many herders' nicknames date back to their schooldays at Lovozero Professional School (PU 26) when they were schoolmates. German-related nicknames like Vol'f, Kamrad (Kamerad), etc. come from the fact that the foreign language taught at PU 26 used to be and still is mainly German, although nowadays there are also English classes.



Vasia, a staunch traditionalist, arrives at Bely Bychok from the lower Kuliok Hut

herders had left, Ivan Terent'ev from Brigade 8 arrived and offered to lead us on the way to the Bely Bychok hut, where the main part of Brigade 8 was staying.

Bely Bychok Hut is situated at 22 km to the east of Belaia Golovka Camp, in a fork, formed by upper tributaries of River Kuliok. Vovka, the leader of Brigade 8, was there, his brother Grisha, and now Ivan came with us driving behind him. The hut was in a bad condition, the roof was leaking right onto the plank beds. The weather had warmed up outside and the snow changed to drizzle. We went to sleep, trying to cover our heads somehow, so drops did not hit us in the eye.

On the next day Vasia and Pet'ka arrived on reindeer-drawn sleds from a new small hut which had been built the previous summer lower on the Kuliok. Vasia, with a changing company of various other herders from Brigade 8, had been keeping an eye on the winter migration since



The skin of the vazhenka killed by a wolverine. The hole in the middle of the back is where the predator had severed the spine and paralyzed the animal

last October. Now he was coming with Pet'ka to take part in the round up of the massive herd that was gathering between Kuliok and Belaia Golovka.

Next morning three herders on snowmobiles, Vovka, Grisha, and Ivan went to see how the herd had moved overnight. It was decided that we should go with Pet'ka on our snowmobiles and sleds to cut wood in the forest and bring it back to the hut. The big stove there was burning day and night. Kettles with hot water (*kipiatok*) and with brewed tea (*zavarka*), as well as a huge pot with boiled reindeer meat were constantly in demand. We were glad to be of use, but had to wait for another day before we could at last contact the herd. In the meantime, other interested parties were doing so. Pet'ka brought back from the forest a beheaded female deer – the result of an attack from a wolverine. The little animal had jumped on the back of the *vazhenka* and had gnawed at the spine until the animal fell. Then the wolverine had severed the head and disappeared with it. It was decided that since the blood

had freely flown out of the body, the *vazhenka* was good for eating and so it went for the pot. We thus effectively engaged in scavenging from predation on the herd. Wolverines were rather convenient from this point of view since they could be easily chased away from the carcass, or, more precisely, would disappear before one even saw them.

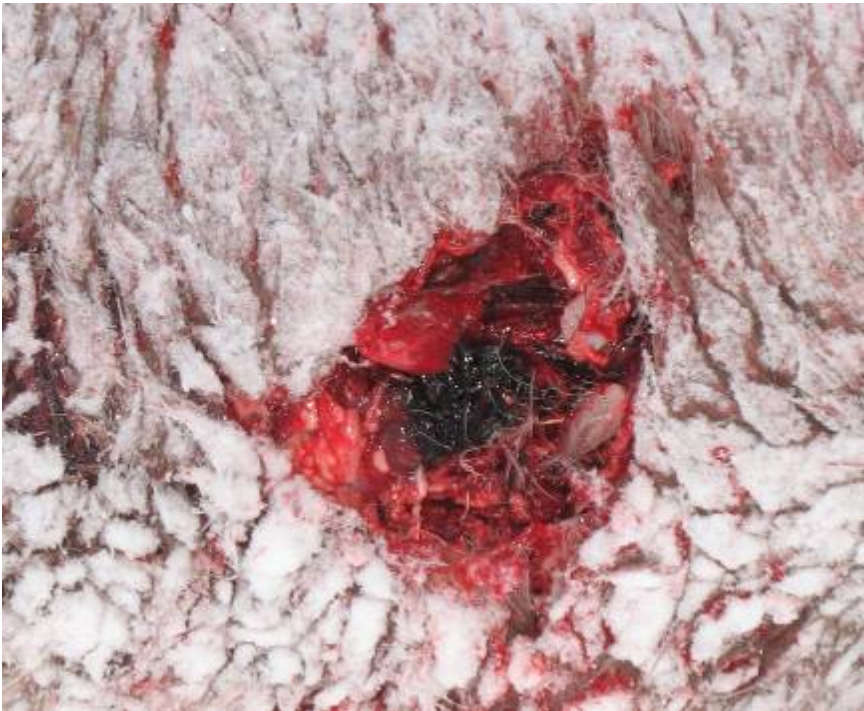
It was only on the third day that we set out with Ivan to contact the herd. The huge mass of some five thousand head of deer was located grazing halfway between Bely Bychok and the Rodnik Hut, another salient landmark in the winter range. In the meantime various fragments were being flushed out from the forest by Vovka and Grisha, and moved to join the main mass of the herd.

Rodnik

For two more days, we gathered in the herd each day as it moved towards the low hills around Lake Rodnik. Ivan Chuprov (Van' Vanich), the Leader of Brigade 1, and Pavel Sorvanov



The great herd in the valley of River Kuliok



Another wolverine victim. The predator has bitten through the back and paralyzed the animal which is still alive

(Pashka), the leader of Brigade 2, joined us at the leaky Bely Bychok Hut, with plans for joining the two big herds together.

One more victim of wolverines fell about this time. On 18 January, as we got close to the herd some five kilometers before the Rodnik Hut, a lonely deer stood alone, at some distance from the main mass. The animal had been bitten all over by a wolverine, and stood, looking at us in a state of stupor, but still upright. The herders decided to kill it for dog food and soon afterwards the animal was dragging on the snow, hitched to a snowmobile.

Late the same day, we moved camp to the Rodnik Hut with the idea of staying there for the night and continuing to Base 8 on the next day. The Brigade leader decided, however, that we should continue to the Base Camp immediately and contact the herd from that position, i.e. from the front rather than from behind. We followed these instructions and guided by Grisha



Spare time at Bely Bychok Hut. Yulian showing the video recording of the day to the three brigade leaders. Left to right: Van' Vanich (Br. 1), Vovka (Br. 8), Pashka (Br. 2)



Pet'ka Terent'ev and Vladi enjoying a cup of tea while keeping an eye on the herd

and Ivan made for Base 8 in a crisp, moon-lit night. The twenty kilometers separating the two camps, we covered in about an hour, arriving at the camp well before midnight.

New neighbors at the Base Camp

As we were crossing Lake Kolmiavr and approaching the base camp, we saw strange lights on a hut that was considerably higher than the familiar buildings of the camp. It turned out that the front part of the former Hydro-Meteorological Station “Kolmiavr” had been lit with little bulbs by some new owners.

Andrei, acting as the warden of the base, told us these were hunters from Monchegorsk, actually, those that were suspected of taking part in two major poaching incidents during the last months. The first of them was the one recorded by us on 23 April, involving the killing of a pregnant *vazhenka* (NOMAD 6). The second was an incident with twelve killed deer by the

Lake Ostrovnoi Hut (see NOMAD 21). As neither of these incidents could be conclusively tied to the names of herders' new neighbors, they were clean before the law. As Andrei explained, they had arranged with the Head Meteorological Office in Murmansk to rent the premises of the former station for an unknown period of time and use it as a bear-hunting camp.

The herders were aghast at this insolence and made gloomy remarks about the wolves being in the herd now. A great sense of frustration could be felt at the inability of the responsible authorities to do something for the defense of reindeer herding. Bitter comments were passed at the Cooperative administration for not being able to hold a stand against the long-suspected urban poachers. With such sad thoughts we went to bed to catch some sleep before the corralling. That was to begin early on the next day.

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