

NOMAD Fieldnews

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NOMAD's Last Round Up Harvesting Season '07/'08



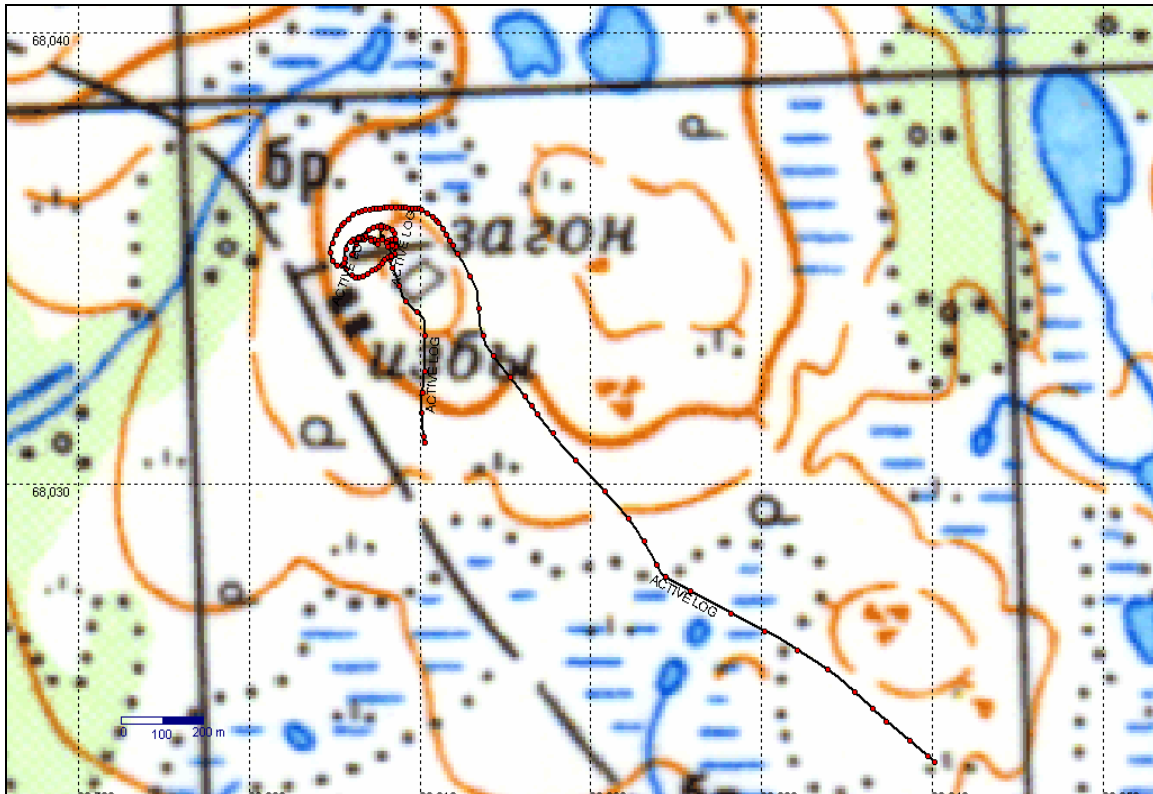
Photo 1. The track of the great herd leading towards the Porosozero Corral (23 January 2008)

By 22 January the two parts of the herd, described in the previous issue, had been gathered together into one big mass. This huge herd, counting in the region of 8-10,000 head had been left to graze overnight around the Kys-karan Hut at the extreme northern end of Lake Kolmiavr. That was the same location where a previous smaller fragment had been rounded up in early January (NOMAD 22). It was decided by the brigade leaders of the three brigades (1, 2, and 8) that the driving into the Porosozero Corral should take place on the following day, 23 January, depending on the weather.



Photo 2. Herders on snowmobiles and draft-sleds closing in behind the herd as it is moving up the entrance to the Porosozero Corral. On the far left and right can be seen the wings of the entrance funnel

A problem had appeared in the meantime. Irrespective of the general decision that winter counting/harvesting activities should be moved from Belaia Golovka to Porosozero, no final preparations had been made at the latter corral camp and the enclosure itself. There was, consequently, no readiness to process incoming herds, let alone a herd of this size. The higher level leadership of the right wing were in the village, there was no petrol for the generator which was to provide light most of the day and during the night, wood for the three huts was insufficient, auxiliary corral workers had to be summoned to help clean the enclosure from snow drifts. These auxiliary hands – camp workers, carpenters, ATV drivers, the electrician, and others also help in the skinning and gutting of the animals which get trampled in the melee and go subsequently for the common pot (*obshchepit*).



Sketch 1. A GPS outline of the Porosozero Corral superimposed on a topographic map of the area. The eastern wing is very long (approx. 2 km), while the western one is asymmetrically short, reflecting the main direction of the early spring migration

The situation was such: there was a herd of ten thousand head at the door of the corral, but the corral itself was not ready to receive it. Moreover, the antiquated radio-telephones at brigade camps could not ensure communication with the Cooperative administration in Lovozero. At this critical point, our satellite phone was the only option available and we decided to try it for whatever it was worth. After waiting for contact with the elusive Globaltel satellites for about half an hour in the cold under the stars, Yulian finally got connected to Vladimir Filippov (Valdemar), the Head of Reindeer Herding in the Cooperative. Vovka, the leader of Brigade 8, hurriedly described the situation to him. Here, some surprise: Valdemar knew already! How had the news traveled to reach him remained a mystery and could only highlight a thought we had been entertaining for a long time, that channels work in the absence of telephone or radio communication in ways that are much less restricted than commonly supposed.

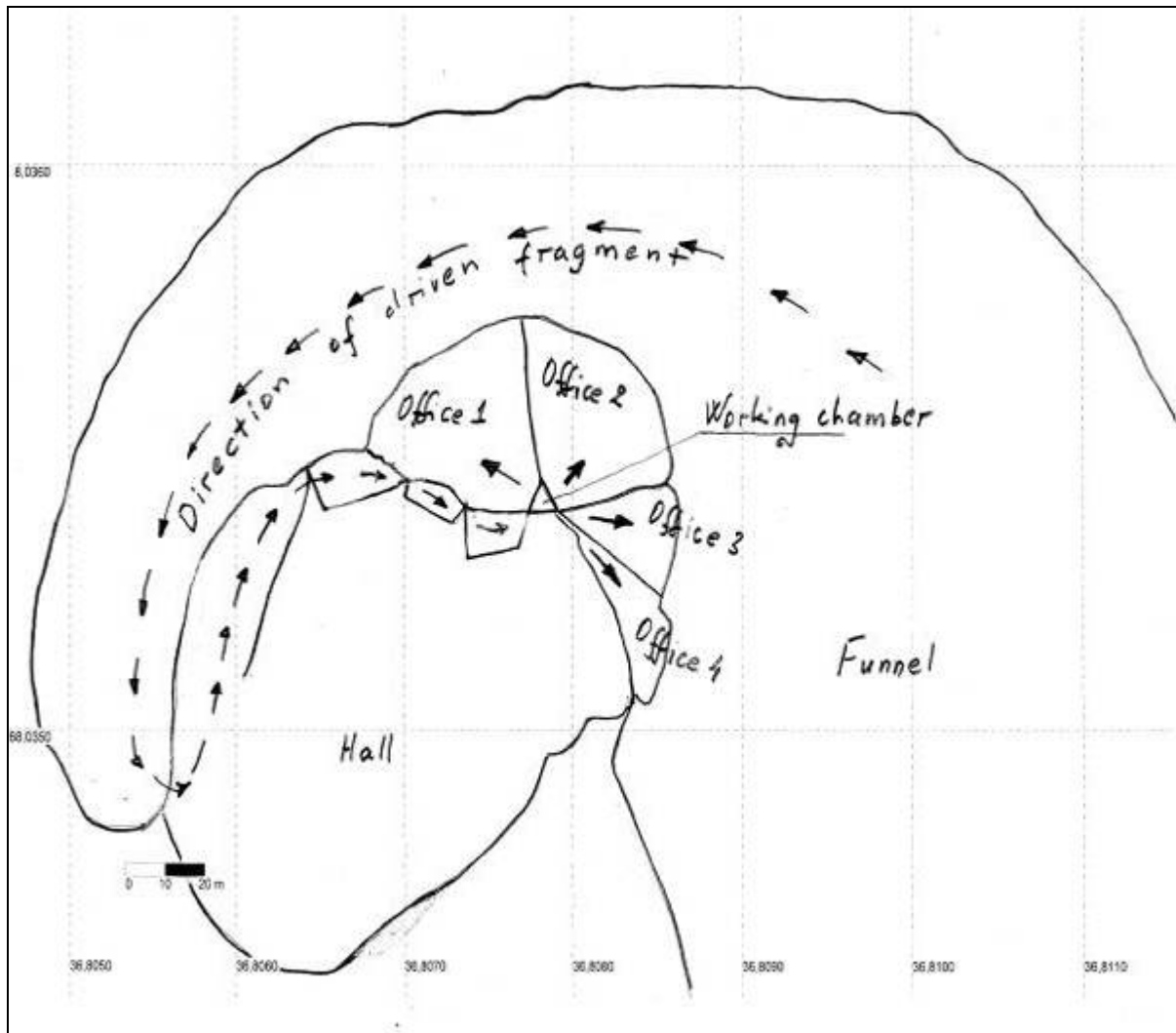


Photo 3. Pet'ka Terent'ev with his dogs in front of the line, as the herd is approaching the gate

In the event, Iura, the *Zootekhnik* of the right wing, as well as Vasiliï Pidgaetskii, the vet doctor (*vetvrach*), were already on their way to Porosozero, hauling sleds with fuel and other necessities with their snowmobiles. The Porosozero Corral Camp thus gradually came to life during the night and early on the next morning. So, as it had often happened before, problems got solved at the very last moment, one never knew how, and the moral of the story, spelled out by the herders, was: “Don’t take it too much to heart!” (*Ne perezhivai!*)

The round up

January 23, the day planned for the round up turned out to be a bright, crisp day with temperatures hovering around -7 to -10 , and a moderate westerly breeze, all in all, conditions very favorable, if not ideal, for the task ahead. Most importantly, there was good visibility, which ensured that the fragments could not break off unseen and be difficult to gather in subsequently. The relatively low temperature (considering the plus zeroes of the previous



Sketch 2. GPS-based outline of the receiving and processing area of the Porosozero corral. During the session of 23-24 January 2008 the offices were distributed in the following way: 1. Krasnoshchel'e deer; 2. Right wing (1, 2, 8, 9); 3. Private; 4. Slaughter

week) made the snow cover stable and prevented the machines from burning excessive amounts of fuel and heating up. For the fuel allowance was indeed very parsimonious: 200 liters to a herder for the whole season.

Just before noon one-half of the herd was separated from the whole mass and pushed slowly from the Kys-karan pastures across Porosozero and up towards the corral's entrance. Three herders on snowmobiles carried out the operation: the brigade leaders of the three right wing brigades. When the herd entered the opening of the enclosure, more herders, some on machines, others on draft-teams, closed in behind the mass of animals and began pushing it up



Photo 4. The sheet maneuver. Yulian's buran is in the centre, to his right a second buran with a sled for deer casualties. Ivan Terent'ev is on foot, then come herders with a second sheet which continues the line to the far right. A similar line is formed on the left (out of the picture)

into the funnel, leading to the inner enclosures. Our two snowmobiles were also part of that action. Additionally, Vladi was taking photographs which illustrate this issue, while Yulian was doing the video-recording.

It has to be noted that despite the often met description of Kola reindeer herding as a dog-using one, there were only two dogs, led by Pet'ka Terent'ev of Brigade 8, that were part of the action. Evidently, the snowmobiles make them to a great deal superfluous. The herders claim that dogs are used in flushing out fragments from wooded terrain, but we had never witnessed such an occasion. Still, every herder has a dog and would feel uncomfortable without one. The older herders comment sneeringly that nowadays dogs are not trained at all and are only pets. Great stories are told about the "old days" when a dog could be sent to turn round a fragment, or stay sentry around it and herd it like a shepherd dog.



Photo 5. Casualties. A young male (urak) is lying on the snow, paralyzed by stress

The final push into the big “hall” (*zal*) was accomplished by 13.00 hrs. During this last stretch sheets of white canvas were used to prevent the herd from turning back and stampede in panic through the line. The sheets worked successfully and the operation was performed. It had taken twenty minutes to drive the herd from the extreme end of the entrance funnel into the *zal*, and to secure it firmly behind the fence.

The working chamber

Work here began as soon as the final fencing in was over and the herders had had some tea and food at the living huts (two in number, plus a side office for the “bosses”). The “bosses” (*nachalniki*) were Iura Filippov, the vet technician, and Vasilii Pidgaetskii, the vet doctor. More and more herders from various brigades were coming on snowmobiles and draft-teams. They looked for spare plank beds in the big rooms of the huts and dumped their belongings as soon as they found one. A huge cauldron with reindeer meat was boiling on the pot, and



Photo 6. A buck has bitten his tongue in panic. Trying to fix him, from left to right: Pashka (Leader, Br. 2), Ivan Terent'ev (Br. 8), Vovka (Leader, Br. 8), unseen herder, Vladimir Bocharov (Leader, Br. 9). Iura Filippov is in the booth, putting down shorthand descriptions shouted at him from below

equally huge kettles were steaming furiously. Every herder, as also guests like traders, relatives, visiting friends, and ourselves could dump their belongings in the room, make themselves comfortable on a plank bed, provided they could find one, and help themselves to the food in the common pot. No ceremonies were observed in this respect and everything, bed and board, was considered to be common property to which any tundra-related person had access.

The herd, following the pattern of previous groupings, was mostly composed of females with this year's or older calves, as well as two-year-old males or females, *urachki* and *vondel'ki*. Nevertheless, the productive females were the most common. Practically all that one could hear, as the age/sex/ brigade description of each processed animal, was cried out to the



Photo 7. Casualties. Calves trampled or otherwise maimed get slaughtered for the pot. Skins are for those who care to preserve them, but the “leggings” (koiby), the strips from the knee to the hoof, go exclusively to the skinners. Koiby enjoy a lively market in the village and go for making short fur boots (burki), or thigh-high ones (toburki)

registering booth, rising above the churn: “*Pervy vazhenka*” (a female of Brigade 1); “*Krasny vazhenka*” (a female of Brigade 1 of Krasnoshchel’e), “*Shestoi vazhenka*” (a female of Brigade 6), etc. In the necessary shorthand for these descriptions, communicated while the herders were grappling with a deer, for some reason the attributes were in the masculine, rather than the feminine, i.e. “*pervy*” instead of “*pervaia (brigada)*”, “*vtorii*”, etc.. “*Krasnoshchel’ski*” was understandably abbreviated to “*krasny*”.

Another feature on the registering side of the process was that Iura Filippov, the *zootekhnik*, was jotting down on the “*Pentium*” both collective and private deer. In other words, no separate counter (*shchetchik*) was independently taking down the private deer. Nikolai Nikolaevich (Nikitich), who usually performed this function (NOMAD 20, Photo 3), was



Photo 8. A sample, illustrating the composition of the herd. The antlers of a full-grown male in the foreground, the rest are females and calves. Vol'f (Br. 2) is chasing the ear-marks

around, but acting as a corral worker, not as a counter. In this way, the situation was reversed from that of the smaller round ups in October and November. In those, there had been a counter only for the private deer, while the collective ones were not being registered.

Work went on all through the day and for most of the night. As the polar day is still rather short – there are some five and a half hours of daylight at the most – after 16:00 hrs work was carried out under electric lights. Electricity for the corral and the living premises came from an electric generator.

The work was to continue for many more days as the rounded up herd was big. Fragments could be brought into the enclosure not bigger than the herders could process through the working chamber in about two days and nights. There was, naturally, no grazing in the corral whose surface was quickly trampled to the consistence of concrete. If left longer, the deer



Photo 9. A batch of deer are driven into the working chamber. All of them are females (vazhenki)

would rapidly begin to suffer from lack of food and snow fit for drinking. A lot of hard work had to be done by the herders, but they were happy that there was such to do and that the reindeer herd of the Cooperative was still going strong.

Leaving for Lovozero and future plans

We had to leave the herders with their work, however, as it was time to finish our fieldwork in the tundra. Ten months had passed since we had pitched up our tent first, and eleven – since our arrival in Lovozero. The imminent task before us was to cover safely the distance to the village with our two machines and three sleds. After that we had to take care of all the equipment so it was safely stored awaiting for NOMAD 2, a continuation of this project for which we had now gathered hard-earned experience. We had begun planning for this during

all the past months: how to manage to keep contact with the herd, despite all of its unpredictable movements.

We could see also that imminent changes were on the horizon. A new structure of reindeer herding could be felt to be coming, but what form it would take remained yet to be seen. Many new actors, some of them rather ruthless, were beginning to claim possession of tundra resources, like the hunters who got hold of the former GMS “Kolmiavı”. There were also others of rather unexpected nature. A few words about each of these before we close the tundra chapter.

The herd and other actors

As we passed by the corral to say good-bye on the following day, we saw two rather newish foreign-made snowmobiles with armed men on them. “We are not OMON”, they said, “we are UGRO”. The first being the anti-terrorist formation, enjoying a rather ominous reputation,



Photo 10. The main hut at the Porosozero Corral Camp. In the foreground: Dedushka tied to one of our sleds

while the second was explained to be an investigating branch of the Militia, or *ugolovny rozysk* (Criminal Investigation Department). As it turned out, they had been traveling to the out flung Brigade 9 and were now on their way back to Lovozero. There had been a case of poaching in the territory of Brigade 9, but as always, no conclusive evidence was managed to be found after the event.

On the foraging side of the equation, there was our charge – an old dog we had named “The Old Man” (Dedushka). Dedushka had been found living near the herd in the vicinity of Bely Bychok about a week before. The herders had brought him to the camp then and had passed it on to us to take him back to Lovozero where he was expected to find his home. How long had Dedushka lived by the herd, some 120 km away from Lovozero, and how? Long debates in the Bely Bychok Hut led to the conclusion that poachers must have brought him along to that area. The back-light of an unknown snowmobile had protruded through the snow when drizzles bit through it during the warm days. Dedushka may have got lost and abandoned while chasing after the deer, or he may have been abandoned on purpose. The opinion was that he had lived off carcasses of deer that had been brought down by the very active and numerous wolverines during this winter. As there were no wolves to be seen, and the bears had gone into hibernation, there had been little competition for Dedushka, but for the crows.

Running ahead, we can say that the journey back was uneventful, except for Dedushka falling off Yulian’s back sled several times, until Vladi took him on her machine and held him in front of her. As soon as we reached the village, Dedushka jumped off the sled, and without further ceremony went away, evidently straight for home. A limp he had developed around the camp had suddenly disappeared! During the week that followed, we met him several times until it turned out that he lived in the next entrance in our block of flats.

We finished our fieldwork with the reflection that no matter how objective one tries to be, there is no way myth making can be avoided. We imagined how Dedushka’s owners, whom we never managed to meet, would be proudly saying that he had returned on his own from the tundra, 120 km away from the village.



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