

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



© Svein D. Mathiesen/EALAT.ORG



The picture shows a typical Nenets summer reindeer herder's camp in the Yamal Peninsula of Arctic Russia. Mobile tents called chums allow the Nenets to follow their reindeer during their summer migration to the Kara Sea area. The reindeer and their herders can travel up to 1000 kilometers during a typical migration driven on by a desire for fresh pasture and the persistent attentions of biting insects.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



The Nenets reindeer migration routes are nowadays crossed by modern infrastructure such as roads, railways or pipelines which resource extraction companies build to service gas fields such as the Bovanenkovo development which is projected to come on stream in 2012. Most of the extracted gas is exported to Europe.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



©Svein D Mathiesen/EALAT.ORG



The Nenets migration routes are crossed by rivers which reindeer and their sledges swim across the river. Herders travel in inflatable boats. Nenets reindeer herding depends almost entirely on reindeer for transportation purposes. Rivers and lakes also act as an important source of food in the form of fish during the summer. In recent times, The Nenets have sold the fish to nearby settlements and gas workers as a source of additional revenue to supplement their income from the sale of reindeer meat.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



The Chums used by the Nenets during the winter have larch poles covered with reindeer skins whose hollow hairs provide a superior insulation against the temperatures which can drop to minus 50° C. These dwellings can be dismantled and transported by reindeer sledges between camps on the migration routes.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



The Nenets were one of the few reindeer herders who managed to retain the family basis of their semi subsistence economy during Soviet times. Herders were collectivized into Brigades in 1961 as a means of exerting central control over the migrating herders. However The Nenets managed to retain most of their traditional culture. Nowadays the Nenets herders are increasingly turning to the private ownership of reindeer in order to maximize their control and revenues from their animals. The picture shows the reindeer herders selecting male reindeers for transportation purposes.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



A female Nenets herder feeds a reindeer as they are gathered in spring. Nenets depend on tame animals for transportation and herd control. Feeding is one way of ensuring this control over these animals. The collapse of the Soviet Union reduced the vet and helicopter services which were available to the reindeer herders up to 1991. The Nenets continue to use their traditional knowledge to help them survive during these difficult times. However they are not isolated from the effects of globalization as can be glimpsed from this woman's modern Burberry headscarf.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



The Nenets traditional migration routes and pastures are located on one of Russia's main sources of oil and gas reserves. Brigade number 4 has to cross the Bovanenkovo gas field which Gazprom is currently developing on their summer migration northwards to the Kara Sea. These gas resources estimated at 115 billion cubic meters per annum will be piped to Western Europe and should provide Russia with a valuable source of foreign exchange. Up to 50,000 migrants will be required to construct the roads, railway and other infrastructure which this new development requires. This also provides the Nenets with an opportunity to sell their reindeer meat to the workers living in this area.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



Most reindeer herders now have permanent dwellings in settlements such as Topolinoye in the Sakha region of Siberia. The Eveny herders in this area carry on a semi nomadic existence following the migration paths of their herds in the mountainous regions of the Verkhoyansky Mountains, where some of the coldest temperatures on earth have been recorded. This area was heavily affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union as their reindeer herds were organized and controlled by the Soviet state.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



© Anders Oskal/Int'l Centre for Reindeer

Evenki and Eveny herders have been herding reindeer in the taiga of Russia, China and Mongolia for Millennia. Here people ride reindeer. The picture shows an Evenki herder in Southern Sakha, Yakutia saddling his reindeer, a large and tame castrated male.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



Scientific and research staff must use traditional means of transport to follow the migrating herds in the Sakha region. Note how the reindeer's feet allow a lower ground pressure per square centimeter while travelling in deep snow or over frozen lakes.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



The sale of reindeer meat has always been a source of income for reindeer herders in Russia. Newly industrialized states like China and South Korea have opened up as valuable markets for the sale of soft antlers which are used for pharmaceutical purposes in these countries.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



©Anne Maria Magga/EALAT.org

The yaranga is a type of temporary dwelling used by the reindeer herders of Chukotka in the Russian Far East. This area used to be one of the main suppliers of reindeer meat in the Soviet Union. The degradation of the transport infrastructure made it difficult to sell their products to other parts of the country. This has led to the collapse in reindeer numbers to 90,000 animals in 1991 forcing the herders to return to a more traditional form of lifestyle. Reindeer herds are now recovering in this area.

REINDEER HERDERS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.



© Ellen Inga Turi/EALAT.org



This picture shows a Nenets herder looking over his reindeer herd during a migration in the Yamal Peninsula of Arctic Russia.

Raymond Molony F.R.G.S.