

Discovering the Arctic

The reindeer herders



SAMI - Northern Norway

Husbandry is practiced by the Sami people in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. This includes 6500 people who are employed in Scandinavia along with 200 currently being employed in Russia. Norway has the largest number of reindeer with 240,000 animals herded by 2936 Sami. Sweden has 3500 herders who are responsible for 200,000 animals. Most reindeer in Finland are herded by non Sami herders. Russian Sami have found that their reindeer numbers have dropped since the fall of the Soviet Union to about 40,000 reindeer.

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KOMI – Russia

The Komi have taken up reindeer herding from their neighbours the Nenets. They are organized in teams of up to ten people. The 52 current teams are responsible for up to 115,000 reindeer. They migrate up to up to 400 km each way during the spring and summer with the same routes being used each year.

NENETS – Russia

The Nenets are the largest indigenous group in Russia with a current population of 41,000 people. Reindeer herders account for 13,500 of the population tending to around 800,000 animals over the European and western part of the Russian Federation. They are the largest indigenous group of the Russian north. Geographically they are distributed between the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Yamel-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. These two areas cover an area amounting to 1 million kilometers square. Reindeer are used mainly for meat production, handicrafts and transportation.

DOLGANS – Russia

The population of this group numbers 7330 people. They are currently located between the Tamyrskiy Autonomous Okrug and in the northwestern part of the Republic of Sakha. They practice a small scale style reindeer husbandry and live in a semi nomadic fashion. Winter pastures are situated in tundra areas while summer pastures are located in the forest tundra of the main river basins. Unlike other reindeer groups they make use of dogs to assist them with their reindeer husbandry.

RUSSIAN EVENKI

These are the most widespread group of the Tungus speaking people located from the Sea of Okhotsk, throughout south eastern Siberia and up the entire length of the Yenisei River. Total numbers of this group are thought to number up to 50,000 people. Evenki are a nomadic people who supplement reindeer herding with the hunting of wild reindeer. They use a mixture of traditional and modern transportation types for travelling along their migration routes.

Reindeer are used for riding, transportation and milk production. One estimate indicates that their reindeer are spread over an area of up to 7 million square kilometers.

Collectivisation during the Communist era had the effect of limiting their nomadic activities and disrupting their tradition culture. Today

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they see activities such as mineral extraction, pipeline construction and industrial forestry as a threat to their current way of life.

EVENKI CHINA

The 234 people are located in the North Eastern part of China. Currently they herd about a thousand reindeer whose main product is the valuable soft antler for the Asian pharmaceutical market.

EVENY – Russia

The Eveny are a widely distributed throughout the Russian north. Numbering 20,000 people they can be found in Yakutia, Khabarovskiy Kray, the Chukotka and Magadanskay Autonomous Oblasts. Reindeer herding is small scale and semi nomadic with hunting of reindeer and other animals to supplement their income.

A feature of their lifestyle is that they ride reindeer while also using dogs for transport.

The Eveny have found it more difficult to cope with the collapse of the support structure provided by the collective system compared to the Nenets who have found new markets for their reindeer meat such as resource exploration facilities. This has limited the possible expansion of Eveny reindeer herding.

CHUKCHI – Russia

The Chukchi numbering 16,000 mainly live in rural villages in the Chukota Oblast of Russia. Their husbandry is based on large herds several thousands strong grazing in the open tundra during the summer months. During the winter they move the animals to more protected areas of the region.

In the past the Chukchi traded meat and skins with coastal Inuit in return for whale fat and seal skins.

The Chukchi are practitioners of both taiga and tundra reindeer husbandry. The tundra version involves long migrations with large herds. The 1980s saw these herds reach a peak population of some 500,000 reindeer.

The collapse of the Soviet system led to a decline of these numbers to some 90,000 animals in 2001. This has also been reflected in the decline of reindeer herders from 2,272 in 1976 to 837 in 2001. Recently there has been an increase in herders' numbers to 3000 people.

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INUPIAQ, ESKIMO, YUPIK, INUVIALUIT - Alaska and North West Territories of Canada

21 herders of the Kawerak Reindeer Herders Association in Alaska herd reindeer using an extensive management style linked to short migration patterns. Near Inuvik in Canada a herd of 4000 animals is managed by the Kunnek Resource Development Corporation. Both of these hunters used the services of Sami reindeer herders.

SCOTLAND

1952 saw the reintroduction of a reindeer herd into the Cairngorms. The herd now numbers up to 150 reindeer.

GREENLAND

1952 -2008. Three herds were introduced with Sami assistance, but currently only one family of herders is still in operation in southern Greenland.