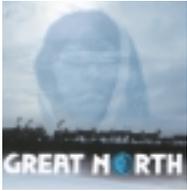


## Chapter 5



presented by



# The Saami

### GOALS

Discovering the history of the Saami people

Learning about the Saami way of life

Understanding the relationship between the Saami and their environment — in particular, reindeer

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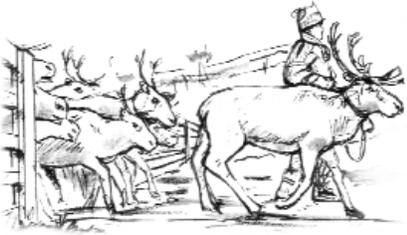


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### THE SAAMI, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

#### Who are the Saami?

The Saami (once referred to as Lapps) are the indigenous people of the Scandinavian Arctic. Their territory, known as Sápmi, extends through four different countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Russia's Saami live in the Kola peninsula at the country's northwestern extremity). There is no such thing as Saami citizenship. Each Saami is a citizen of the country he or she was born and/or resides in. However, the Saami people have had their own flag since 1986, and they celebrate a national holiday on February 6.



The Saami population is currently estimated at about 77,000 people: 50,000 in Norway, 20,000 in Sweden, 5,000 in Finland and 2,000 in Russia.

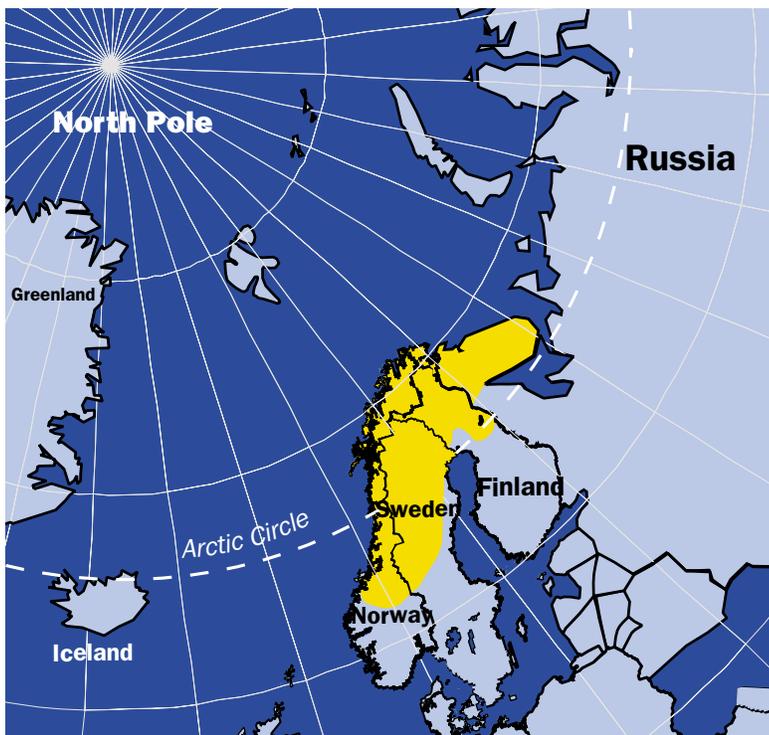
#### Where did the Saami come from?

Good question! According to the Saami themselves, they have always inhabited the region they live in now. Some researchers think that the Saami arrived after the last ice age, more than 10,000 years ago. Others believe that the Saami were already there at the time of the last ice age, living at the edges of the glaciers.

One thing is for sure: their first settlements were along the coast, where they lived primarily by hunting and fishing. From the sea came fish, seals and whales. About 8,000 years ago, some of these coastal inhabitants settled in the interior, per-

haps following retreating glaciers — which created a favourable environment for wildlife. They came across large migratory herds of wild reindeer, and wasted no time building lines of pits into which the reindeer would tumble come autumn. These lines are sometimes several kilometres (or miles) long. Over time, they would come to be used collectively, by several different groups of families. Eventually, small communities made up of ten or so families began to appear. These groups are known as *sijddas*. Within a *sijdaa*, reindeer hunting is done collectively, while each family is given a particular territory in which to hunt (moose, beaver and ptarmigan) and fish (northern pike, salmon, trout). Whatever they catch is shared by the whole group.

#### Saami Territory



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### How did the Saami domesticate reindeer?

About 3,000 years ago, the Saami managed to train reindeer, using them as lures to attract wild reindeer into their pit lines. They also used them to transport merchandise, as draught animals, and for milking. While reindeer do not produce much milk, their milk makes up in richness what it lacks in volume.



During the Middle Ages, Scandinavian monarchs coveted the riches of Saami territory. They declared the Saami to be citizens of their respective countries, in an effort to affirm their right to Saami land. The Scandinavian nations imposed taxes (which were collected by travelling merchants) and set about trying to convert the Saami to Christianity. Christianity caused a major culture shock: it ran almost entirely counter to Saami spiritual practices, which were based on shamanism.

### Other Reindeer Herding Populations

All across the Russian Arctic there live peoples who have domesticated reindeer. Moving across Siberia, from west to east we meet the following peoples:

The Nenets remain nomadic, travelling throughout the year along with their herds. They and the Saami are considered the world's greatest reindeer herders.

The Yakuts raise horses and cattle along with reindeer.

The Evenki keep smaller herds, used primarily for transportation rather than food. They ride the reindeer like horses, saddle included.

As for the Chukchi, they are divided into two groups: people of the sea and people of the reindeer. The two groups live symbiotically<sup>1</sup>, exchanging complementary products.

During the 17th century, the Scandinavians began colonizing Saami territory in earnest. Deprived of the use of part of their traditional land — and taxed as well — the Saami could no longer live off hunting and fishing alone. The arrival of outsiders had increased the sale and barter of reindeer meat and other products — making it more profitable than ever to raise reindeer. So the Saami took to large-scale reindeer herding as their main source of income.

### What is Saami life like today?

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the process of colonization continued. Mines, forests and waterways began to be exploited commercially. Official borders were demarcated among various northern nations, with no regard to the interests of indigenous people. All of this activity nibbled away at Saami lands.

By the start of the 20th century, a number of different laws governed the Saami. They were usually divided into two categories: those who were nomad herders and those who were settled. The settled Saami were gradually integrated into the dominant culture, while the nomads maintained their traditional role.

The mid-20th century saw the re-emergence of Saami identity. The Saami began taking collective action to overcome oppression. Many Saami organizations came into being at this time, including the first Saami parliament, in Finland, established in 1973. Since then, the Saami have worked to increase awareness of their values and traditions and take their place as full members of the international community.

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### REINDEER AND THE SAAMI

#### What is the role of reindeer in Saami culture?

At one time, only 10 or 20% of the Saami were reindeer herders. The Saami also practiced fishing, hunting and agriculture. But over the course of the centuries, reindeer herding came to be closely identified with Saami culture. Today, the lives of most Saami revolve in some way around reindeer.

In the past, Saami reindeer herders migrated along with their animals. They travelled on foot or by ski, carrying light tents. Summer was spent in the mountains or along the Atlantic coast. Once autumn came, they followed the reindeer north to the coniferous forests, which offer shelter and are more readily available food through the winter. Some Saami ranched in more wooded areas. They travelled only short distances over the course of the year, staying within their own community's territory.



Today, modern tools, such as like radio telemetry, helicopters and snowmobiles, have changed reindeer herding dramatically — but for the Saami, the rhythms of life are still closely tied to the reindeer life cycle.

Reindeer are born in May. The next few weeks are a quiet period, which herders use for repairing their homes or camps and any land or equipment associated with herding (fields, fences and so on). At the end of June, it is time to gather the herd together and brand the fawns. September is rutting time, and males — big and fat after a summer of grazing — are selected for slaughter. Once the snows have fallen in November and the reindeer have begun grazing on lichen, it is time to gather them together into several smaller groups and drive them to their wintering grounds. They will stay there until April, when it is time to return for calving.

While most Saami have some connection with reindeer herding, there are some groups who have less to do with it. These include the Saami of the northern Scandinavian coast, who make their living primarily by fishing in the waters of the Arctic Ocean.

#### Do the Saami today live just from reindeer herding?

Saami culture is based on using available natural resources to meet basic needs. This requires close observation of nature and animal behaviour. Reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, gathering wild plants and craftsmanship are traditional Saami livelihoods. Generally, the Saami combine several of these activities, along with agriculture (which is less significant), in order to live comfortably.

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### Jojk

#### **Kita-Játos**

(spring migration)

*The Saami and their herds are on their way to the foothills, where the reindeer spend the spring. The reindeer are tired and walk heavily. Their owners perform this little jojk to give them strength:*

“Click, reindeer hooves, click, hurry on towards the lichen in the region where the trees begin.”

#### **Miesse**

(the fawn)

*If reindeer represent capital for the Saami, then fawns are their interest. Here's what one jojk says:*

“Here are the little fawns that groan, here is the interest running. No misery as long as the fawn groans. We are many who rejoice when the fawn groans in spring.”

Culturally and economically, reindeer herding remains the most important source of Saami revenue. There are more than 400 words in the Saami vocabulary to describe reindeer according to age, type, colour, shape and so on. While much of the population is still involved in reindeer herding, herds have had to increase in size (to over 400 head) in order to remain profitable.

To make ends meet, many Saami also work in service industries — particularly tourism. They also work in the mining, forestry and hydro-electric industries.

The Saami economy remains fragile. Nearly 100,000 reindeer were contaminated by radioactive fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. About 30,000 had to be destroyed.

### **ARTS AND TRADITION**

#### **What is the role of oral tradition in Saami culture?**

Oral tradition is absolutely central to Saami culture — particularly since writing did not appear until the 17th century. Elders' memories and knowledge are passed down through song, story and legend. One of the best-known Saami cultural traditions is jojk (pronounced yoik). Jojk is a type of song based on a particular vocal technique and using melody, rhythm and simple words to describe or “sing” a person, animal or event. Jojk is a complex musical form — especially since a particular piece can be sung in different tones, depending on the singer's mood and the jojk's theme. So jojk performance is highly personal. It has also had a strong influence on contemporary music.

Nine Saami dialects are generally recognized. Some share a similar alphabet, while others have nothing in common. At one time, the Saami were forbidden to speak their language, and they were educated only in the language of their country of residence. During the 20th century, this changed, and there has since been a renaissance in Saami communications. There are now five Saami-language newspapers, as well as Saami radio broadcasts.

#### **What are Saami arts and crafts like?**

Saami traditional art is marked by the use of natural materials. It is inspired by daily life among a population constantly on the move — meaning that objects must be easy to transport. The Saami use bone, wood, antlers, animal skins, leather, roots, wool and beads for making tools and clothes for personal use as well as for sale. Clothes are embellished in a personalized way, while traditional costumes show where the wearer comes from.

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Decorative arts combine the ancient traditions and beliefs of many Scandinavian populations, such as the Vikings, as well as those of other peoples who came from the East.

Saami visual art is also largely inspired by ancient rock paintings — some more than 6,000 years old — found throughout Sápmi. These simple paintings depict the natural world, animals, humans and deities.

### **Tell me about Shamanism among the Saami.**

Up until the 16th century, shamanism played a central role in Saami society. Because of their way of life, the Saami were very much in touch with their environment and with other living creatures. Plants and animals were seen as evidence of the power and goodwill of the gods.

It was of vital importance to stay on good terms with the spirits of the natural world. To please them, the Saami would sacrifice a reindeer, fish or other creature before or after an important occasion, such as a hunt, illness, birth or death. If necessary, a shaman (or noadjdde) was called upon to act as an intermediary between the human and spirit worlds.



In order to encounter the powers of the other world, the shaman used his drum and sang jojks until he entered a trance<sup>2</sup>. In this state, he would travel to the world of the gods, with whom he would negotiate on behalf of his people. He was helped on the journey by various guides of the spirit world, including birds, reindeer and fish.

The drum was not exclusively the shaman's to use. Each family had its own drum, which allowed the head of the family to see the future. The drum hung in their cabin from a spot considered sacred.

Shamans were the target of Christian persecution. Without shamans as spiritual guides, Saami religion became a blend of shamanism and Christianity. Eventually, though, the process of conversion prevailed. Today, most Saami are Christians.

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### Glossary

**<sup>1</sup> Symbiotically:**

Living together, to mutual advantage.

**<sup>2</sup> Trance:**

Hypnotic or ecstatic state entered into by someone (such as a shaman) on an out-of-body journey to another world.

### Activity

## *Sijdda* Life: A Collective Business

**Goal:**

Understanding the importance of community in a territory with limited resources.

**Material:**

108 cards, each with the name of one resource

6 copies of the following list of items

(some are a combination of two other items):

Herbs, Berries, Moose, Beaver, Ptarmigan, Cod, Salmon, Skis (Wood and Knife), Clothing, Blanket, Drum (Thread and Skin), Reindeer, Silverware, Sacrifice (Antlers and Shaman)

5 copies of the following text, which sets the scene:



“You live in a sijdda in which each family brings its own expertise to the community. It’s time for the big annual gathering in Jokkmokk. Your family has to acquire the items it will need to be properly prepared for this long journey. Since it is not easy to acquire everything you will need in a territory with limited resources, you will have to exchange resources with other families in your sijdda. It would also be wise to earn the protection of the spirits that watch over your journey by sacrificing reindeer antlers under a shaman’s supervision. Before leaving, make sure to give your delegates enough money to pay the taxes you owe to the national authorities in Jokkmokk.”

1 copy of the above text, with the following sentence replacing the last sentence above:

“ Before leaving, make sure you have collected the tax money from all of the families in the sijdda, since you have to turn it over to the national authorities in Jokkmokk.”

*This copy will be given only to the delegates’ family.*

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Explain that the goal is for each family to be ready for the journey to the annual gathering at Jokkmokk. Encourage the families to exchange resources among themselves in order to achieve their goal. In addition, the delegates' family must collect the tax money from the other families. They do not have to barter any resources for the tax money.

### Directions:

1. Make six photocopies of the "Resources" column in the table below. Cut out each of the resources to make 108 cards. You will have 6 copies of each of the 18 resources (6 x 18 = 108).
2. Review and contextualize the concept of sijdda with participants.
3. Divide the participants into six groups; each group will be one family.
4. Give each group a copy of the text that sets the scene.
5. Give each team a copy of the item list. Emphasize that each family must obtain one item from each of the resources (for example, a card marked "Berries" is one item).
6. Give each team 18 resource cards, distributed as follows:

RESOURCES	FAMILIES					
	Fishers*	Foresters	Hunters	Herders	Artisans	Delegates
Cod	5	1	-	-	-	-
Thread	5	-	-	-	-	1
Salmon	6	-	-	-	-	-
Herbs	-	5	1	-	-	-
Wood	-	5	-	-	-	1
Berries	-	6	-	-	-	-
Ptarmigan	-	-	5	1	-	-
Moose	-	-	5	-	-	1
Beaver	-	-	6	-	-	-
Reindeer	-	-	-	5	1	-
Antlers	-	-	-	5	-	1
Hide	-	-	-	6	-	-
Blanket	-	-	-	-	5	1
Knife	-	-	-	-	5	1
Clothing	-	-	-	-	6	-
Silverware	1	-	-	-	-	5
Shaman	-	-	-	-	-	6
Money for Taxes	1	1	1	1	1	1

\* For example, a family of fishers would be given the following cards: 5 cod, 5 thread, 6 salmon, 1 silverware and 1 money for taxes.



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### Questions:

What makes Saami culture an indigenous culture? Do you know of any other indigenous peoples? How does their way of life differ from that of the Saami? How is it similar?

For a long time, the Saami were nomads. Why did they have to travel? What impact did their nomadic way of life have on their culture? Do you know of any other nomadic peoples? Why are they on the move?

Before they had a written language, what other types of communication did the Saami use? How did they transmit their culture and knowledge to their descendants? Is there an oral tradition in your family or community? How would you describe it? Is it important to you?

What other culture was also present in Scandinavia, along with the Saami? What do you know about it? Did shamanism play an important role? How would you describe your culture in a few lines?

### SOLUTIONS:

7. 1. Sapmi 2. Transe 3. Jojk 4. Lapps 5. Parliament  
6. Reindeer 7. Costume 8. Fishing 9. Natives  
10. Hunting 11. Tent 12. Whale 13. Skis 14. Gathering  
15. Sijdda 16. Ice age 17. Antlers 18. Scandinavia  
19. Shamanism 20. Drum 21. Herding

**Mystery phrase:** People of the wind and sun

### Resources

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#### BOOKS

Kuoljok, S. and J.E. Utsi. 1993. **The Saami, People of the Sun and Wind.** Swedish Mountain and Saami Museum. ISBN: 9187636077. 60 p.

Kuoljok, S. 1998. **Sami History.** Swedish Sami Parliament. ISBN: 9163070766. 44 p.

#### WEB SITES

**An introduction to the Sami people:** [www.itv.se/boreale/samieng.htm](http://www.itv.se/boreale/samieng.htm)

**Samefolket (Sami Journal):** [www.samefolket.se](http://www.samefolket.se) (English)

**The Sami in Finland:** [um1.tmt.tele.fi/finfo/english/saameng.html](http://um1.tmt.tele.fi/finfo/english/saameng.html)

**Sametinget:** [www.sametinget.se/english/index.html](http://www.sametinget.se/english/index.html) (English)