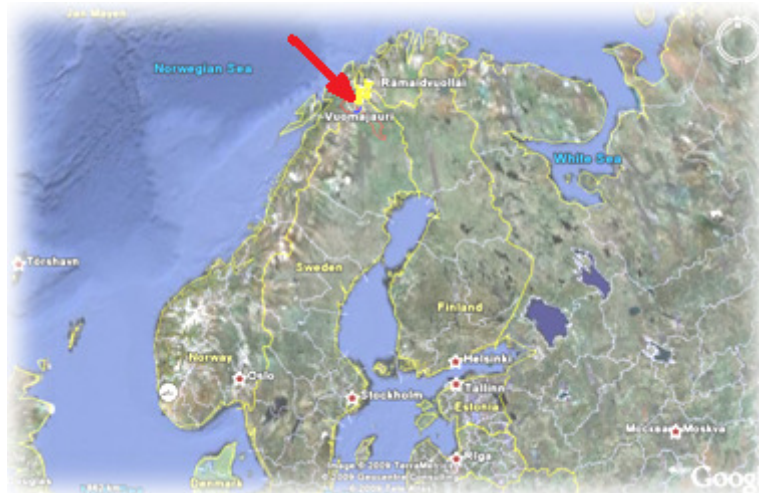


Governments neglect Sámi traditional knowledge

-A “Lapp” will always be a “Lapp” in the eyes of the Swedish government.

*In my heart I have
Always believed that the
future will be better than
the past.
That those with good
Intentions learn from
their mistakes,
In opposite to those
with bad intentions that
continue their path of
lies and deceptions.
(Lápa Nilsduommá)*



The expected increase in temperature connected to climate change will affect reindeer herding in northern Scandinavia. Summertime weather is likely to be as it was in the 1940- ties; warmer and dryer than the present. Reindeer herding was locally adapted to that climate. Summer pastures in the high mountains of Norway and winter pastures at the lichen heaths in Sweden. The Saarivuoma tribe shared Summerland (the area encompassing the summer herding pastures) with family groups from the neighbouring tribe Lainiovuoma. They needed high mountains for the survival of their reindeer due to heat and dryness and the resulting pasture dynamics related to this warmer and dryer environment. If the climate gets warmer as predicted, the Lainiovuoma tribe will once again be dependent on these areas for their reindeers' summertime pastures. The present suggestion towards a new cross-border agreement in 2009 between the governments of Sweden and Norway neglects our knowledge and the vital grazing flexibility interconnected with past, present and future climate change. High mountains that have been used as summer grazing for generations are now going to be used as winter grazing by Norwegian northern tribes. The effects of global warming are not negotiable. Reindeer need high mountains in summertime and lichen heaths in wintertime. High mountains will never be a natural winter grazing pastures in this area. We the Sámi reindeer herders know how our local grazing areas should be best utilized. Why do they (the authorities) not listen to us?

Today I'm 84 years old. I still remember the old times with governmental “Lapp commissioners” and the day when they ordered us to move our reindeer away from Norway.

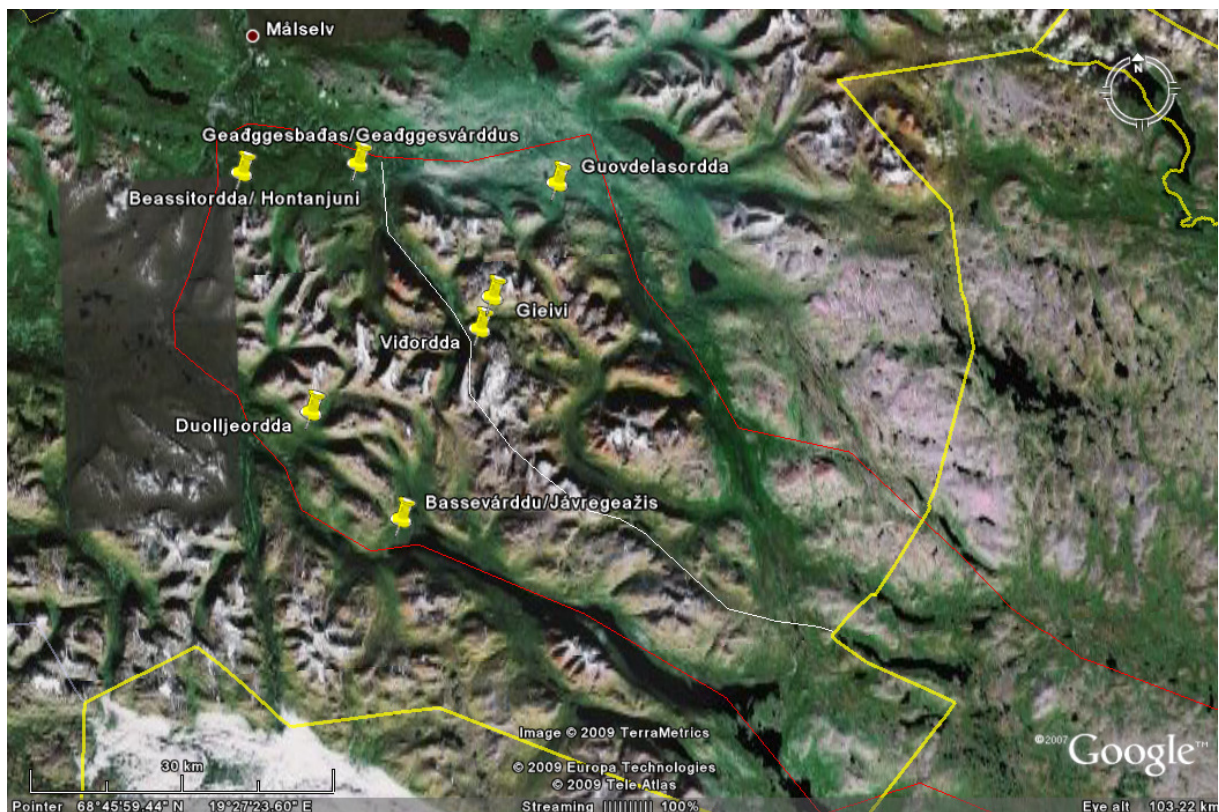
The years after the II: world war, more specifically during the summer of 1947. Norway was liberated from the Nazi regime and the daily life of the Norwegian farmer was becoming normal again. For us, the nomadic reindeer herding tribes, dependent of the Norwegian high mountains in summertime, our lives seemed to be back to normal, as normal as the lives of a repressed minority can be.

During the occupation we had been afraid to use our traditional camp sites in Norway. But our reindeer had continued with their annual migration to the high mountains, seeking shelter from parasitizing flies and mosquitoes and the warm sun, grazing in the luxuriant foliage in the green valley's surrounded by snow. Our families with women, children and elders had stayed in the free Sweden. Me and the other boys in our tribe my age had herded the reindeer

during these years. We had been hiding up in the mountains, with little food and bad tents, herding our families reindeer. The Nazi regime had accepted our border crossing according to the Lapp codicil, incorporated in the border tractate from 1752 between Denmark/Norway and Sweden/Finland. Even though we were allowed to come to Norway during the occupation, we were afraid for our lives. There was a war going on and there were soldiers with weapons.

1947 was the first year, after the war, that my tribe was back in Norway with our entire families in the camp sites that we had used since 1923. Earlier, my tribe had been further west, divided up in several smaller summer family groups, with summer camps on islands and at the shores of the Atlantic sea. These areas had been closed to us for 30 years due to a cross-border agreement between the governments of Norway and Sweden. This had created deep mistrust towards the authorities amongst the elders. This distrust was possibly because they had to leave the land where they had grown up. Their Sacred lands and places of sacrifice, buried family members and ancestors were no longer available to them. In one way, the elders were forced to leave half of their lives; their summer life.

The system that we were living inside was created by the “Lapp commissioners”, authorised by the government of Norway and Sweden. It was based on the ideology that said that a Lapp could not use nature in a sustainable way without government supervision. The “Lapp commissioner” should point out places where the different family groups could have their tents during summer, and which birch trees they were allowed to cut down as fuel for warmth and cooking. The family groups also had the duty to guard some farmer’s mountain hay fields and outland. If a family group failed, and reindeer or hair from the reindeer rugs were found on some farmer’s outland, the “Lapp commissioner” would issue a fine that had to be paid by the family group to the farmer. This fine was to be paid collectively by the tribe members. In practise, our tribe was divided into two family groups; the Anjavuopmi group and the Altesjauri group.



Map over the Saarivuoma tribe's summer land and family group camp sites in Norway.

For my family group, “Gieivi” was our summer camp site. We were guarding the outlands of a farmer named Bjorkaas. He was in one way our friend, an honest man compared with some other farmers in our fare area. But he was a Norwegian, and he had the law on his side, so we always strove to please his mind. Dried reindeer meat, fresh reindeer milk and Sami handicraft was given to him every time he visited us, or actually, when he was most likely looking to see whether there had been any reindeers on his outland.

In the middle of the summer, as usual, the farmer Bjorkaas came to our camp in “Gieivi”. As usual, we served him the best food and the freshest milk. After a while, he said that the reason for this particular visit was to bring us a message from the “Lapp commissioner”. He told us that the Norwegian “Lapp commissioners” Ivar Fosshaug and the Swedish “Lapp commissioner” Erik Hedback wanted to have an information meeting with our tribe. The meeting would be held in one week and they wanted all men in our tribe to attend. The place would be by the lake of “Voumajauri”. A lake situated between the two fare areas within our tribe land. He did not know the reason for this meeting, but we all knew it was bad news.

A rumour began to spread that the war had started again. Other rumours said that the governments of Sweden and Norway wanted to end cross-border reindeer herding, stop our tribe from using our summer lands in Norway. I knew that there was a new cross-border reindeer herding agreement being negotiated between the two countries. And I guessed that that was the reason for the information meeting.

Our fare group had a special meeting place at “Hubei-dievvá”. Due to the special situation, we decided that we should meet there once again. All men from the family groups in our fare group attended. It was us, the Lápat from “Gieivi”, the Bizet from “Viðordda”, and the Juhonasat and Simmat from “Guovdelasordda”. The family groups from “Guovdelasordda” were not really in our tribe. They had to use our areas in summertime because they had lost all their high mountains in the earlier cross-border agreement. The other family groups of their tribe used the Summerland’s of the northern most tribe of Sweden, which were still allowed to use the coastal areas.

Defá Biette, a boy of my age, or a couple of years older than me, from the northern tribe was working as a farm hand to an older widow, Báppo Gáren, in our family group. He was an educated man in our eyes; he could speak and read the Swedish and Norwegian language. He took the word when we met at “Hubei-dievvá”. He confirmed that the upcoming meeting would be about the new cross-border agreement. He said that the two fare groups within our tribe should do as the authorities order, and that there is no point in showing resistance. That the war had changed their view on us, and that we now were equal with the other citizens of Sweden and Norway, and that we could now discuss things with the “Lapp commissioners”. The elders that had met up at “Hubei-dievvá” did not agree with him. Báppo-boaris, Juhonas Biette, Bize, Gerto, Simma Guhtur, Guhtura Lásse, Nihko Jovnná ja and my uncle Bievá. They were unanimous in that we had to voice resistance against the “Lapp commissioners”. If we showed resistance, the kings of Sweden and Norway would perhaps help us, as we have once in time been under their protection. After a long discussion, whether we would say our meaning or just listen, the meeting ended without any clear decisions.

We started to walk in small groups towards the lake of Vuomajauri. I walked beside my uncle Bievá and the leader of the Bize family group. They asked me what I thought about the ideas of Defá Biette. I answered them, that you, as elders, have to tell about your life, what you felt when you were forced to leave the sea areas, your home. If the “Lapp commissioners”

understand what you felt, they can perhaps understand our situation. We cannot leave these areas; we do not have any optional areas that can take the place of these high mountain summer lands.

We met up along the lake of “Vuomajauri”, the men of our tribe, from both the Anjavuopmi and Altesjauri fare areas. The meeting started and we were told by the “Lapp commissioners” that our reindeer will not be allowed to enter Norway within a couple of years. That we were allowed to use these areas for three more years, but no more than that. They ordered us to move our reindeer away from Norway immediately, and use the time to teach the reindeer to be in Sweden. They pointed out that they were decent men that had taken their precious time to come up and inform us about this. They don't want to kill our reindeer in a couple of years, or put fines so high that we would have to slaughter all our animals just to be able to pay them off. They really wanted to give us the picture that they were our friends who have given us this extra time to adapt to the new laws by ordering us to move out of Norway.

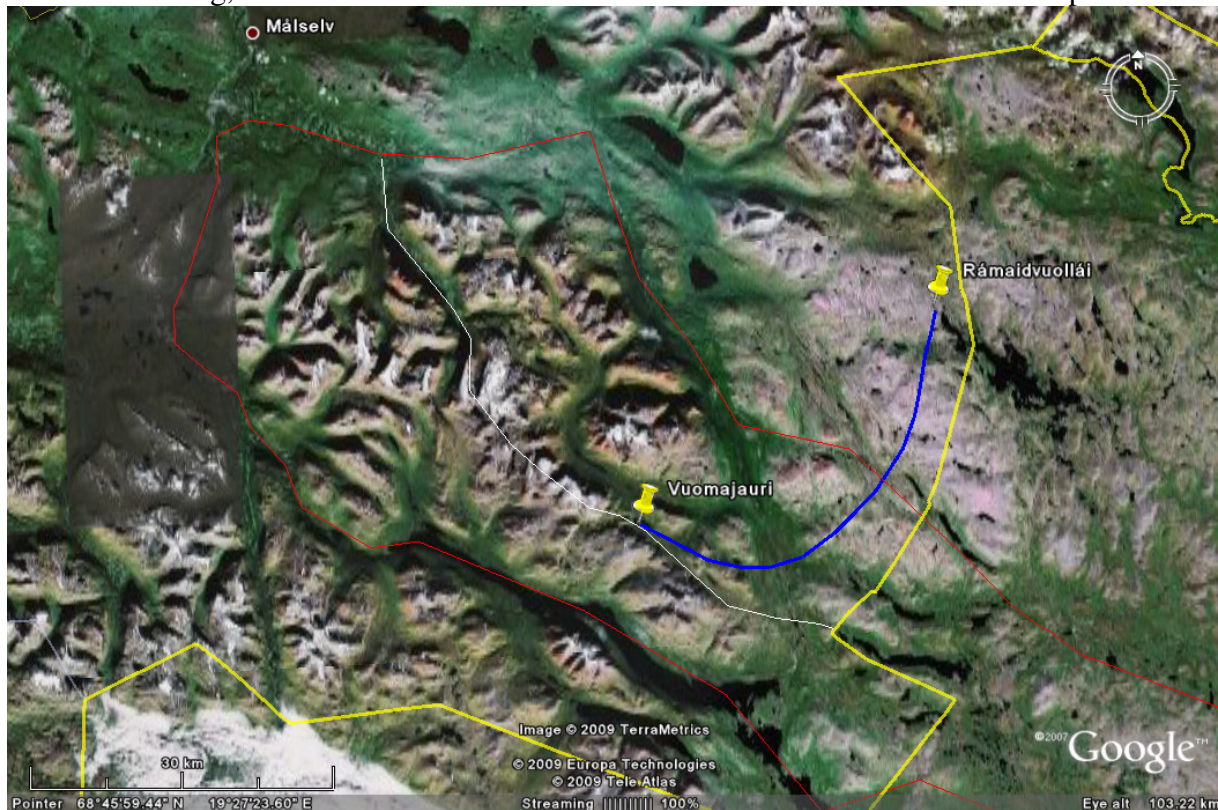
As the meeting ended and the “Lapp commissioners” had left, we started to discuss what to do. The discussion was intense, but we decided that we must do as they said and move our reindeer. We decided to gather up all the reindeer in the tribe land and round them up to the big peninsula in the lake of Vuomajauri. Before we broke up the meeting, we decided to meet in one week, at the same place, with all the reindeer in the different fare areas within the tribe.

I started to walk back home alone. When I reached to the place called Håldilátnji, my thoughts went to my dead father. How we had passed here together when I was a young boy, how he had told me that this is a sacred place, and it was not allowed to break a twig or disturb the place in any way. How he had taught me to read the weather and nature, and to know how the reindeer behave. I also remembered what my older cousins had said, who was now living as a farmer on the island of Senja: You will never be accepted when you are a Sámi. Your children will not be accepted. Perhaps your grandchild's children will, if they don't know that they are Sámi. This gave me the thought about why the “Lapp commissioners” wanted us to leave our home. Is it because we are Sámi or is it because we are bothering somebody. We did not disturb anybody; the farmers in Kirkesdalen are our friends. The same was true for the farmers in the other valleys. Why do the “Lapp commissioners” dislike us? Is it because we are who are?

I arrived back to “Gieivi” and went into the tent to sleep without talking to my family. In the morning, me and my brothers left home and went to the mountains; we had started to round up the reindeer, preparing the move. After a couple of days, all the reindeer in the Anjavuopmi fare area were gathered into one big herd. We moved the herd east and herded the reindeer close to the peninsula. When the tribe members from the other fare area arrived, there were more than ten thousand reindeer gathered. Together, we drove the herd to the peninsula. We tied the dogs up by their necks and more than ten thousand reindeer were gathered into a small place. The peninsula was alive and the sound of thousands of hoofs against stones rumbled like thunder.

Someone had started a fire and people were starting to gather there. I walked over there and felt the tension in the air. Everyone was thinking the same thought; where shall we move with the reindeer? After a while, the silence was broken by an elderly man. Lásse Biette Heaika, a man that was from the tribe north of our tribe area, suggested that we should move the herd to Rámaidvuollái, still in Norway but further north. The area is lowland and was used by the northern most tribe as a spring area. The discussion was if the lowland, without snow spots

and mires, could be used as a summer area for reindeer. The elders said that this was impossible and that the reindeer will dry out and all the calves will die. But there were no other suggestions, so it was a mutual, but silence decision to move the herd to the lowland in the north. Then we began moving the enormous reindeer herd. The family groups from Altesjavri fare area, the Bierrá from “Duolljeordda”, the Pávvet from “Geadggesbađas/Geadggesvárddus”, the Larsenat from “Bassevárddu/Jávregeažis” the Heaikka and Nihket from “Beassitordda/ Hontanjuni” and we from the fare area of Anjavuompmi. Together, we were about one hundred people and many more dogs. This was the first time that a reindeer herd of this size was gathered during summer. And that so many reindeer herders were driving a herd together. Just the sight of it was startling. It seemed as land was moving, the mountains of Doarrovárri and Návsti became alive when we past them.



Map of the track that were used

As we arrived with the herd to Rámaidvuollái, we left the reindeer to graze after the hard drive. As we turned and started to walk back home, the first reindeer ran past us within an hour, going back to their own Summerland. Our work was a total failure, but it would affect our lives forever. This mutual attempt to move away our reindeer from their natural summer area showed us how dependent we are of the benevolence of the “Lapp commissioners”. We cannot work against “Mother” nature or the needs of the reindeer. Our failure in moving our herd to a new summer range proved how dependent the reindeer are on their historical Summerland and that we can not deny them what they need to survive.

Today, climate change threatens the existence of many arctic species, and the indigenous people of the arctic are the first to be effected by this. Still, the government officials do not listen to us. Still they do not understand how nature works in a reindeer herding perspective. If the government had good intensions, they would have learned from the past and the mistakes they have made. They should listen to what we have to say about our way of living and how we can meet the effects of climate change.

Nils Tomas Labba, written by his son Niklas Labba.