

Peurapolku Trail at Jyppyrä



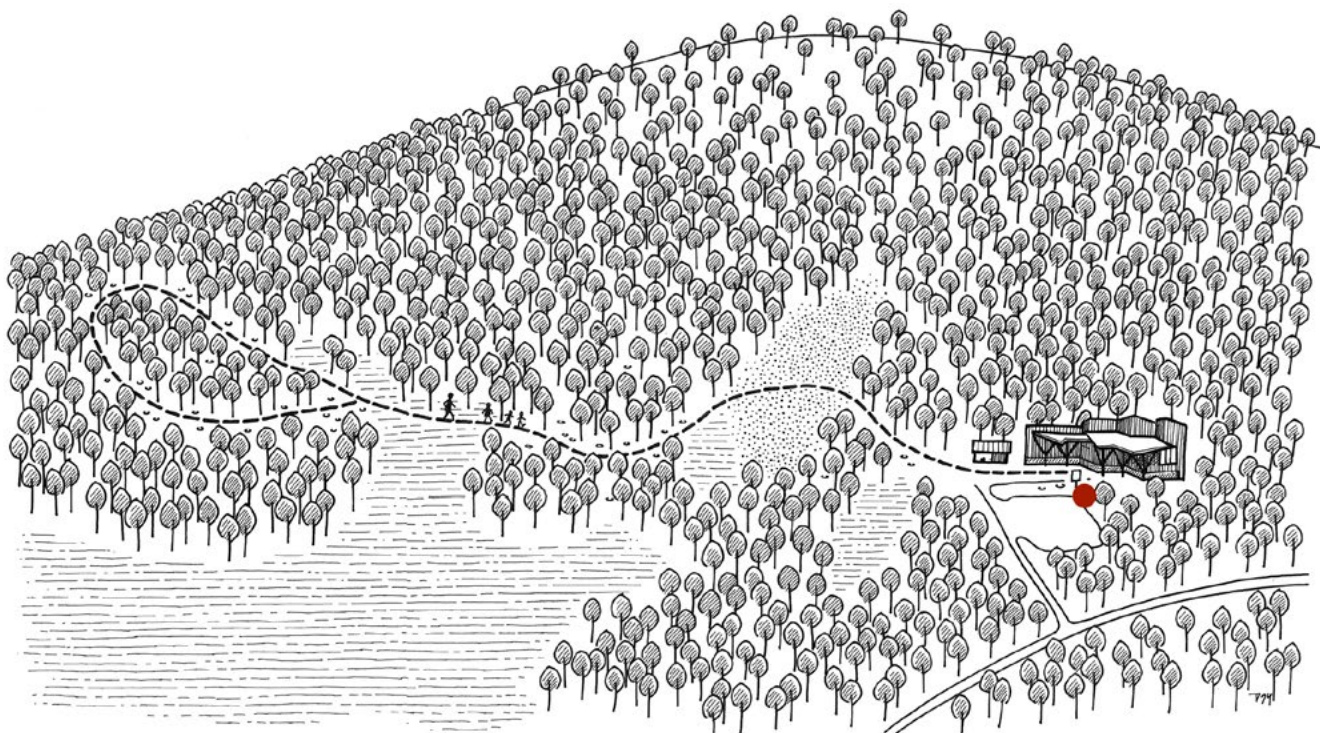
On the wild reindeer's trail

In the village of Hetta, at the foot of Jyppyrä Hill, there is an old chain of wild reindeer pitfalls. You can learn about ancient wild reindeer hunting methods on the two-kilometre nature trail.

The remains of the pitfalls are protected by the Antiquities Act. As the vegetation covering the pitfalls is extremely fragile, visitors must stay on the trail. The trail is marked with a guide fence and cloven hoof prints of the reindeer figures along the way. What do the guide fences and reindeer figures have to do with deer hunting? The answer to this can be found on the trail and the following pages!

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Illustration and layout: Tupu Vuorinen

*The trail starts from
the grounds of the Fell
Lapland Visitor Centre.*



Life in the Sámi villages of the Enontekiö area



The old Sámi villages of Enontekiö.

Old tax records mention three Sámi villages in the Enontekiö area: Rounala, Suonttajärvi and Peltojärvi. The residents of Sámi villages lived on game and fish, with reindeer only being used as pack and draught animals. The most important game animal was wild reindeer. Each Sámi village managed its well-defined hunting grounds and fishing waters.

Villagers changed their dwelling place according to the seasons. These seasonal migrations followed the movements of the wild reindeer herds, although the availability of firewood and good fishing were also factors affecting the choice of dwelling place. Each family had its own spring, summer and autumn pastures. In the winter, all the people moved to one common winter village, where public assemblies, weddings and markets were held.

While in the winter village, the residents would hunt reindeer from autumn to spring. The spring and summer pastures were located next to bird hunting and fishing grounds.



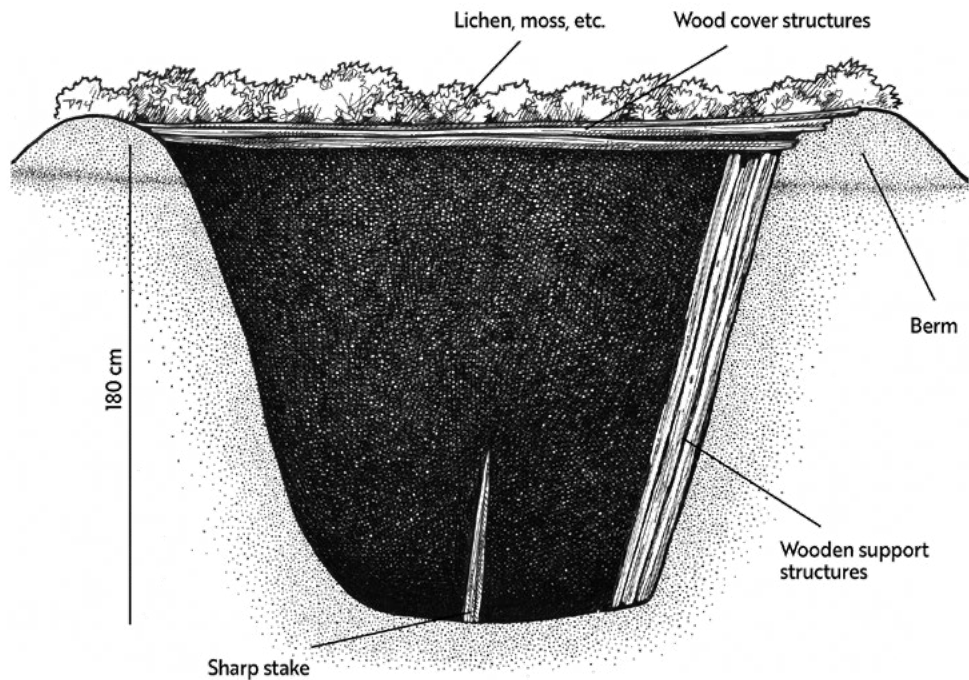
Building a wild reindeer pitfall

The collapsed wild reindeer pitfalls are almost the only preserved remains of prehistoric trapping. Although there are different names for these pitfalls, for example trapping pit, spear pit, etc., they all served one function: hunting wild reindeer.

Pitfalls were used in all areas of the north for the hunting of animals belonging to the deer family. In Finland, the pitfall hunting culture lasted thousands of years, only to be replaced by new hunting methods in the 17th century. The last wild reindeer pitfall was dug in the 1850s near the village of Leppäjärvi.

Very often the wild reindeer pitfall was dug into glacial deposits where the soil was compacted, but easy to dig. The walls of the pitfall could be supported with wood structures. The cover, which was made of dry branches and birch bark, was camouflaged with moss, lichen, sand or snow. A sharp stake or stone could be placed at the bottom of the pitfall.

Cross-section of the pitfall.



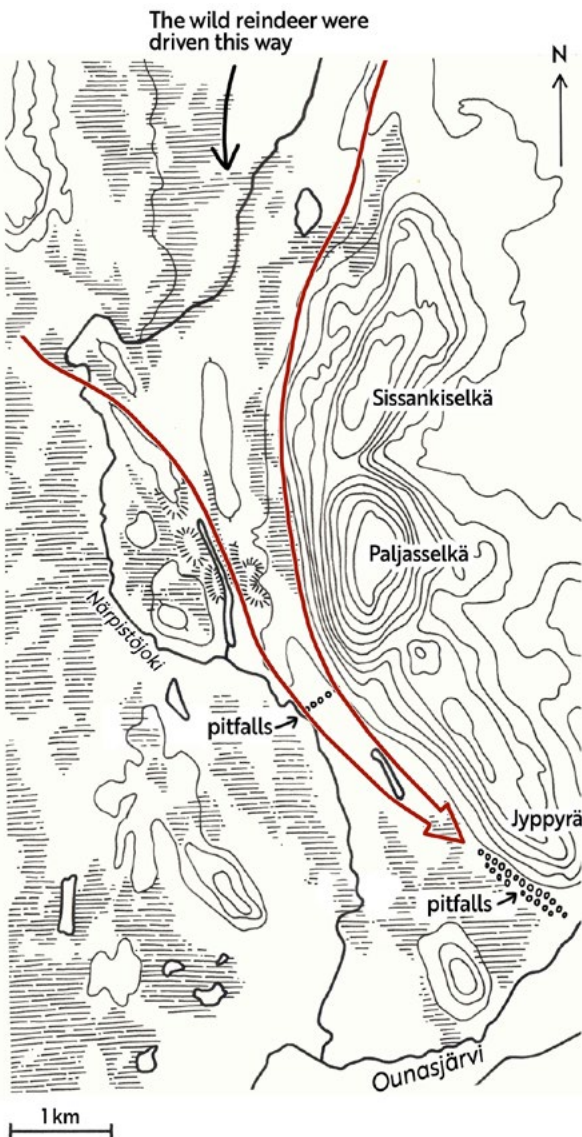
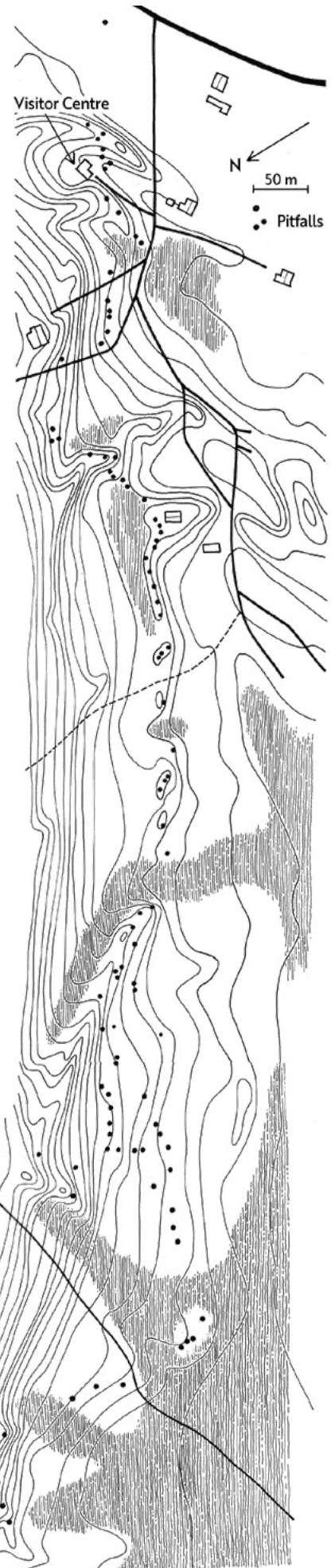
Large-scale hunting with pitfalls

The remains of 107 pitfalls have been found in the Jyppyrä area. They form a chain along a 1.5 km long sandy ridge.

Such pitfall systems were built along the migration routes or feeding areas of wild reindeer. Wild reindeer grazed around Jyppyrä in the winter. The pitfalls at Jyppyrä were most likely used in the winter.

The surrounding terrain guided the reindeer to the pitfalls. Although the reindeer might have eventually fallen into the pitfalls without being chased, in many cases they were chased towards the pitfalls by hunters and their dogs. Wedge-like fences were used to guide the reindeer towards the pitfall chain.

The building, maintenance and use of an extensive system of wild reindeer pitfalls required a well-organized hunting group. This effective hunting method could yield even thousands of kilos of wild reindeer meat. In cold weather, the meat was stored on platforms built in trees and in storehouses as well as in store holes dug into the ground. During the warmer months, the meat was smoked or submerged in springs.

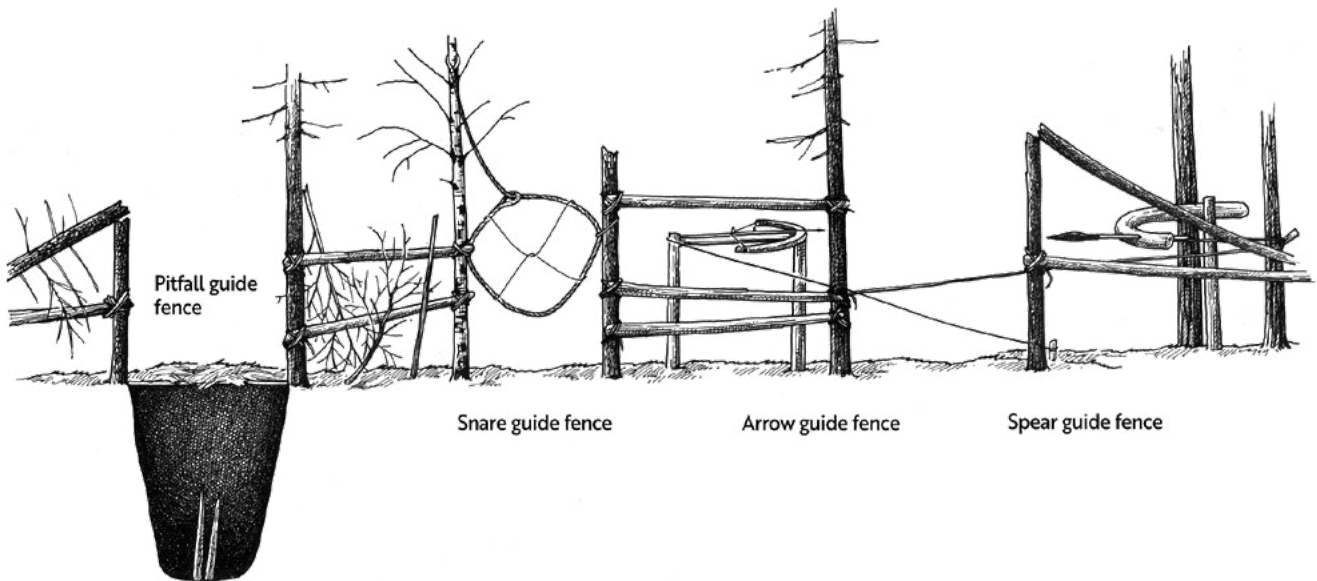


Hunting in forested areas with guide fences

Wild reindeer trails were constructed with guide fences dozens of kilometres in length. Traps were set or pitfalls were dug in the fence openings.

The long wild reindeer fences were built collectively. In 1787, one of the guide fence systems in Enontekiö "behind the Ounistunturi fell" was recorded as having 100 "neck snares". Reindeer hunters also used a guide fence to catch timid reindeer. Reindeer guide fences made of mountain birch were still used in the 1950s.

Types of guide fences.



Even a bear could become ensnared in the fence system. According to one story, a bear did not bite off the snare rope, but instead urinated on it and waited for it to rot.



Hunting with a wedge-shaped enclosure in the fell area

Wedge-shaped fence enclosures were used in the area at the edge of the forest line in Lapland. The ends of the wedge-shaped fence were located on the treeless fell slopes 10 to 20 km apart. At each end, the guide fences were made of sparsely placed stakes with thick peat tussocks or rags placed on top to scare the wild reindeer

As the wedge enclosure gradually narrowed, the fence changed into a solid wood structure. The wedge enclosure ended in a lane, in which some steep steps made of timber were set roughly 200 metres apart. These finally ended with a sheer drop into a large pitfall surrounded by a fence.

The wedge-shaped enclosures were used for hunting in the spring when the snow was good for skiing. The hunters would look for a herd of wild reindeer and drive it into the area between the rows of stakes. At first, the reindeer were driven cautiously. When the reindeer reached the point where the enclosure had solid fences on both sides, the hunters became noisy, driving the terrified reindeer directly into the pitfall.

Wedge-shaped fences also helped hunters drive reindeer off of a cliff. Paintings with wild reindeer motifs have been found on these kinds of hunting cliffs.



Päiviö's wedge-shaped enclosure

In 17th century, a well-known and powerful man named Päiviö lived at Peltovuoma in Enontekiö. It is said that he owned several hunting enclosures. One of these wedge-shaped enclosures was 50 kilometres long, stretching from Suinarova to Ounastunturi fell. Päiviö had 60 hired hands and maids working as his drivers. According to one story, Päiviö bagged more than 1,000 wild reindeer in Pasmarova.

Pasmarova is located to the east of Peltovuoma in Nunnanen. Several pitfall systems have been found in Pasmarova along with a glacial depression left from the Ice Age that is still called "Päiviö's pit." Perhaps this was actually the pitfall of Päiviö's wedge-shaped enclosure.



Hunting in the Autumn

From the 17th century on, other more effective hunting methods were developed, thus replacing pitfall hunting. In the winter villages, the season for hunting wild reindeer began in the autumn. As late as the 1860s, hunters who moved to Enontekiö from Koutokeino each year shot wild reindeer in the autumn.

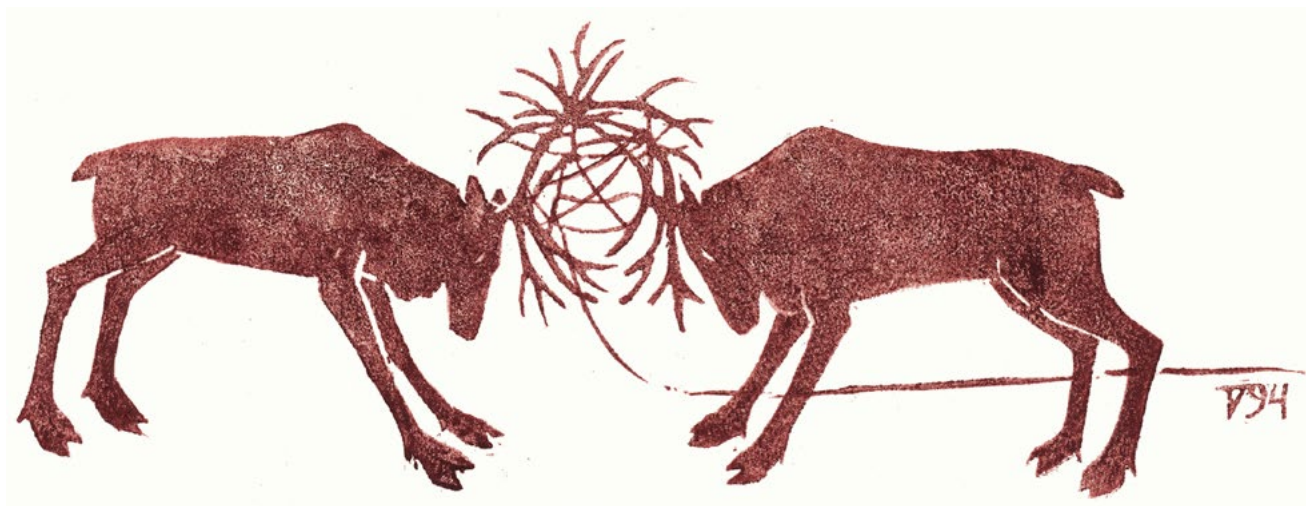
Autumn hunting started at the end of September, which was also rutting season for wild reindeer. Dogs were used to lead the hunters to the reindeer.

Many place names have their origin in wild reindeer hunting and are still used to this day.

Rutting wild reindeer bulls were lured to within shooting range by a reindeer cow tied to a tree.



In the autumn, hunters might also set a snare in the antlers of a reindeer bull and then taken it near a rutting wild reindeer bull. When the bulls butted each other, the antlers of the wild reindeer became entangled in the trap and it fell prey to the hunters.



Hunting on skis on the late winter snow

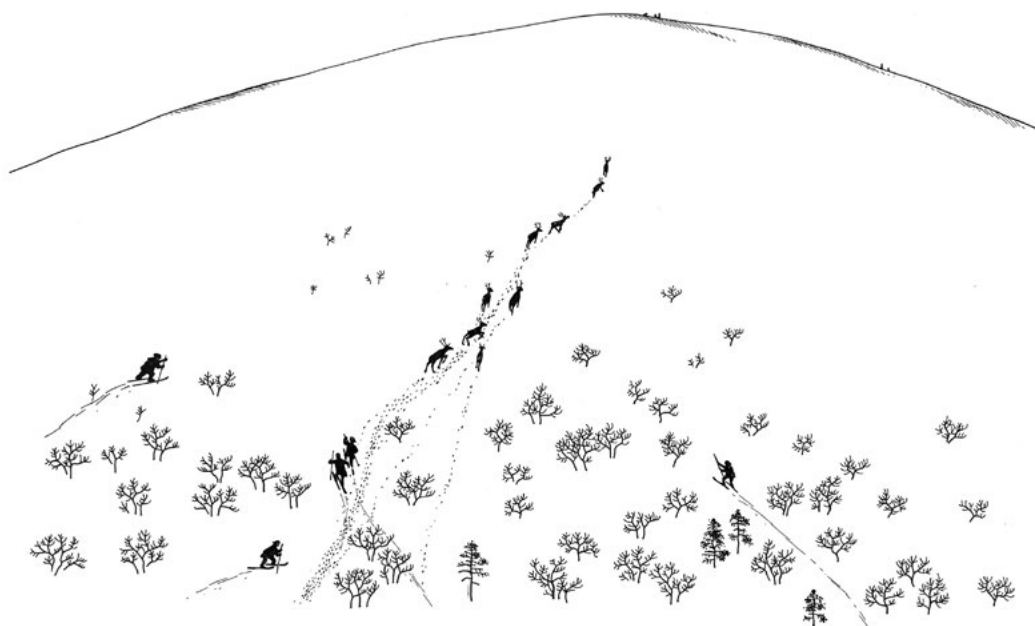
In the late winter, around the 24th of February, hunting on skis began. Hunters could glide easily across the snow, chasing down the floundering wild reindeer until they were exhausted. Hunting on skis required extremely good condition and plenty of stamina.

In the late winter, the surface of the snow melted by the sun hardened into a crust during the night: it bore the weight of the skiers, but not the wild reindeer. The snow crust broke the ankles of the wild reindeer, thus making it was easy for the hunters to spear or shoot them. Dogs were also sometimes used to stop the wild reindeer.



Hunting on the fells in the late spring

The winter hunting season usually ended with fell hunting in April. This type of hunting was similar to moose hunting. Beaters scared the wild reindeer from the foot of the fells, causing them to run up the slope to the summit, directly into the path of the catchers. During "ambush hunting" in the late spring, hunters moved alone or in small groups, lying in wait for wild reindeer to appear at riverbanks and bogs.



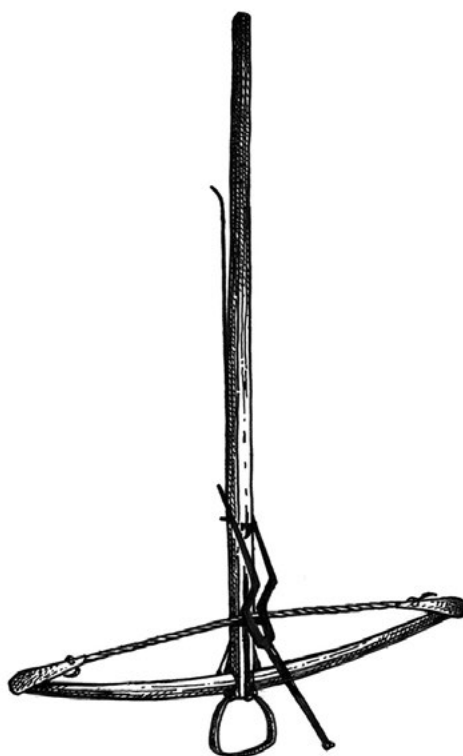
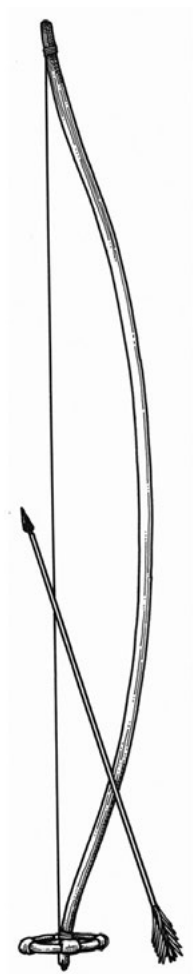
From handbow to hunting rifle

The handbow is one of the oldest hunting weapons. Wild reindeer hunters on skis used their spear and hand bow, which were equipped with a snow basket, as their ski poles. When skiing, the bowstring was not tensioned. The spears used by hunters from Enontekiö were said to be about 140 cm long. The hunter had to get close enough to the wild reindeer in order to be able to use the spear. Accurate shots with a handbow could only be made at a distance of 30 metres or less.

The crossbow was introduced as late as the 14th century. Fitted with an iron bow, this weapon took longer to load than a handbow and it was also less effective. At a short distance, however, the crossbow was accurate and the weapon of choice for hunting small game.

The first rifles for wild reindeer hunting were used in the 17th century. These rifles were long, large bore weapons. It was possible to make accurate shots at a distance of 60 to 70 metres.

*Hunting weapons:
spear, handbow, cross-
bow and rifle.*



Wild reindeer hunting dogs – the hunter's best friend

Hunting dogs were used for hunting wild reindeer in the autumn. The best hunting dogs were able to pick up the scent of game even from a distance of 10 km, with the leashed dogs pulling the hunters to the game.

When close to a wild reindeer, the dog would stop and stand still. The dog's head was covered by a tanned leather muzzle, which covered the eyes and prevented the dog from barking. The dogs and pack reindeer were tied to trees and the hunters crept to within shooting range of the wild reindeer.

Dogs were sometimes used to chase and stop the game on winter hunts and when ambush hunting in the late spring. The large "deerhounds" stopped the wild reindeer by attacking it. Smaller dogs indicated the position of reindeer laying exhausted in the snow by standing and barking

The dogs used to hunt wild reindeer disappeared along with the wild reindeer. The extinct native breed of wild reindeer hunting dogs evidently resembled the present-day Karelian Spitz.

Wild reindeer hunting dog muzzle.



Sámi stone idols for wild reindeer hunters

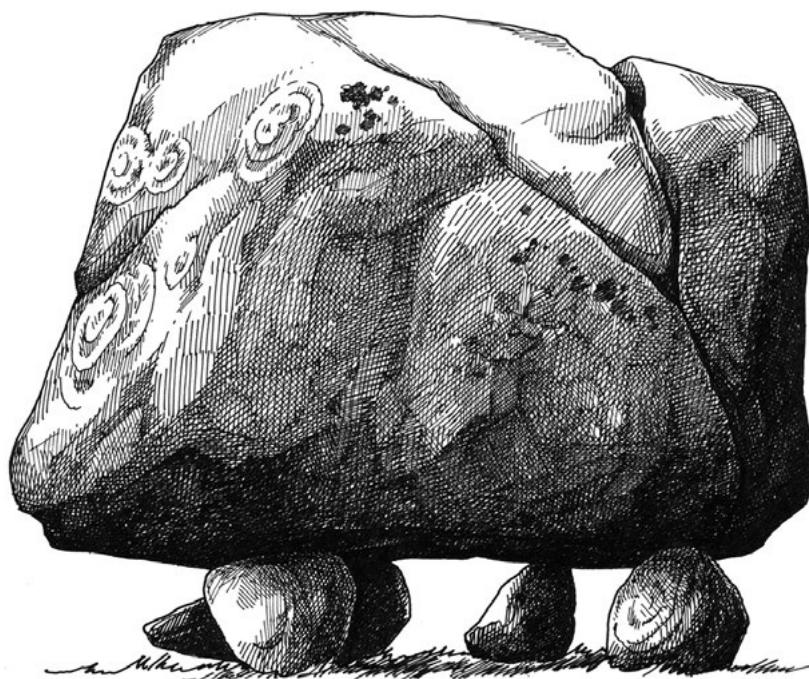
Wild reindeer hunting camps were large entities, which not only contained hunting equipment, but also served as a base for the hunters, a place to store meat and a place of worship. The wild reindeer hunters from Sámi villages likely worshipped the stone idol of Jyppyrä as their own deity, making offerings of antlers and brass buckles. The square stone idol at Jyppyrä stood at the top of the fell on four small stones.

Finnish archaeologists call stone idol constructions like that of Jyppyrä "stone tables". In Scandinavia they are known as "liggande höna". Similar constructions are also found in other parts of Finland, along the coast of Sweden and in the White Sea area. The stone at Lake Näkkäljärvi was also worshipped as a deity by wild reindeer hunters.

At the site of the killed prey, hunters might carve a statue on the trunk of a pine tree. Hunters would carve their mark on the side of the statue. In more recent times, hunters also carved the year. It is still possible to find wooden statues in the wilds of Lapland.



Wooden statue.



Jyppyrä stone idol.

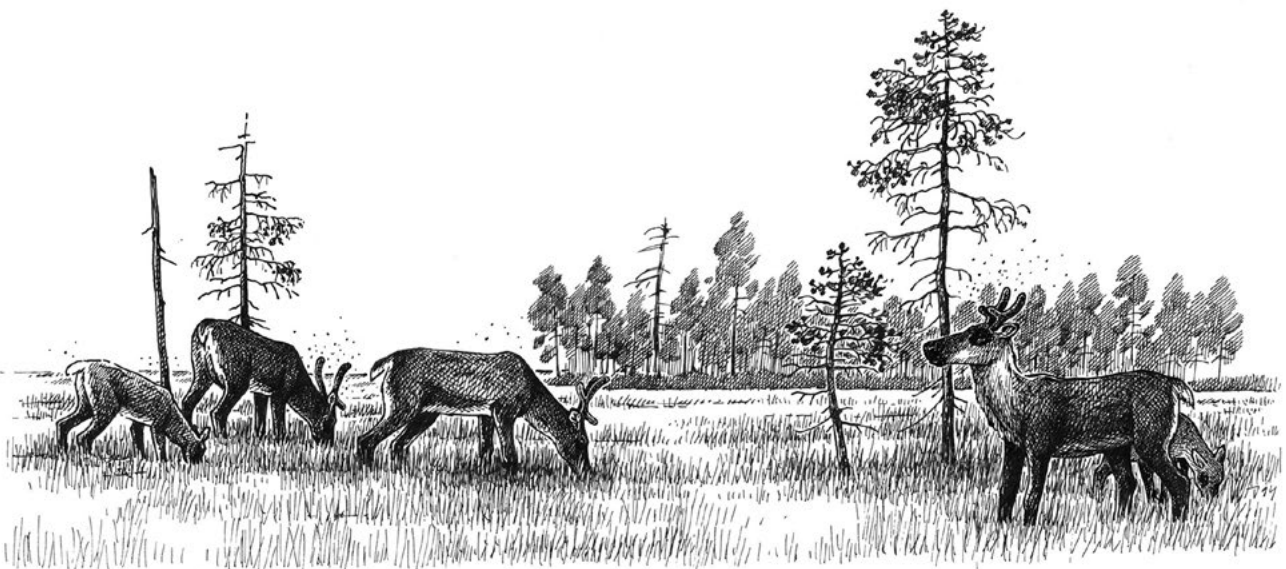
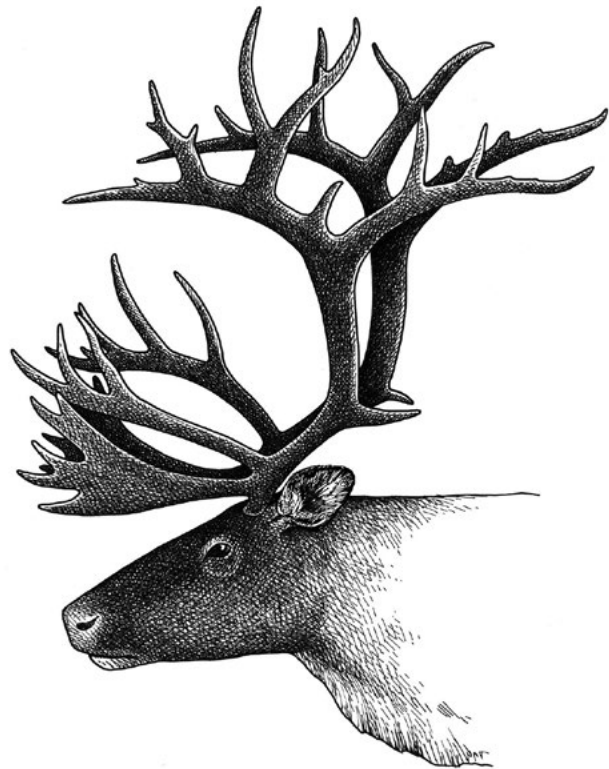


Wild reindeer from the East

The wild forest reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus fennicus*) originated from the forest areas of Siberia in the east. They arrived in Finnish forests about 3,000 years ago. The first scientific description of the wild forest reindeer was made by a Swede, Einar Lönnberg, in 1909. He found that the wild forest reindeer is a subspecies that had adapted to a forest habitat and is larger, has a longer skull and longer legs than the mountain reindeer. Einar Lönnberg based his description on the skulls of two wild forest reindeer. The most interesting fact is that one of the skulls came from Karelia in Eastern Finland and the other from Enontekiö in Lapland.

The wild forest reindeer changes its living environment according to the seasons. In winter, wild forest reindeer stay in large herds on lake shores, where the wide, open expanses of ice are safe resting places. In spring and summer, wild forest reindeer move alone or in small groups in bog areas. In the autumn after the rut they gather together in winter pastures.

Wild forest reindeer, bull.



The wild mountain reindeer of the highlands

The Scandinavian mountain reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus tarandus*) is a reindeer species adapted to fell areas with a thin snow cover. The mountain reindeer is sturdier, shorter-legged and shorter-skulled than the wild forest reindeer. It very much resembles the domesticated reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus tarandus*). According to the genotype, Finnish reindeer are pure mountain reindeer.

In the spring, the wild reindeer population of the northern forest line at Enontekiö inhabited the fells and extensive bog areas. The wild reindeer came down to spend midwinter in lichen-covered Scots pine forests. In the late winter, the wild reindeer moved back up to the fells where the snow cover was thin and where it was also easier to find food. As early as late autumn, wild reindeer living in the northern parts of Enontekiö sometimes moved over to Norwegian side, where the fells had a light covering of snow.

Wild mountain reindeer, bull.



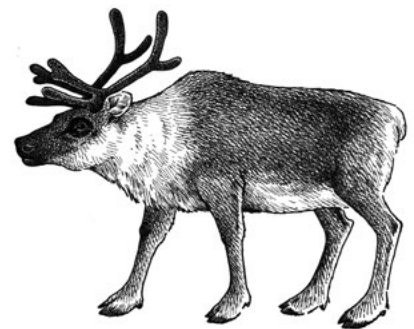
Arctic wild reindeer - past and present

The differences between forest and mountain reindeer only became clear when both had already disappeared from Finland. Only the general term "wild reindeer" is used in folklore. The ancient distribution of wild forest reindeer and wild mountain reindeer in Finnish Lapland is unknown.

Most likely, a population of pure mountain reindeer inhabited the treeless fells in Enontekiö to the north of the northern forest line. The wild reindeer population in the northern parts of Forest Lapland was composed of cross-bred of forest and mountain reindeer. The Kola Peninsula is another example of an area where different wild reindeer species have crossbred.






At its most widespread point, the distribution of wild forest reindeer stretched from the Russian boreal forest all the way to Finland and Northern Sweden. In Northern Sweden, the distribution area might have been even larger than shown on the map (below).

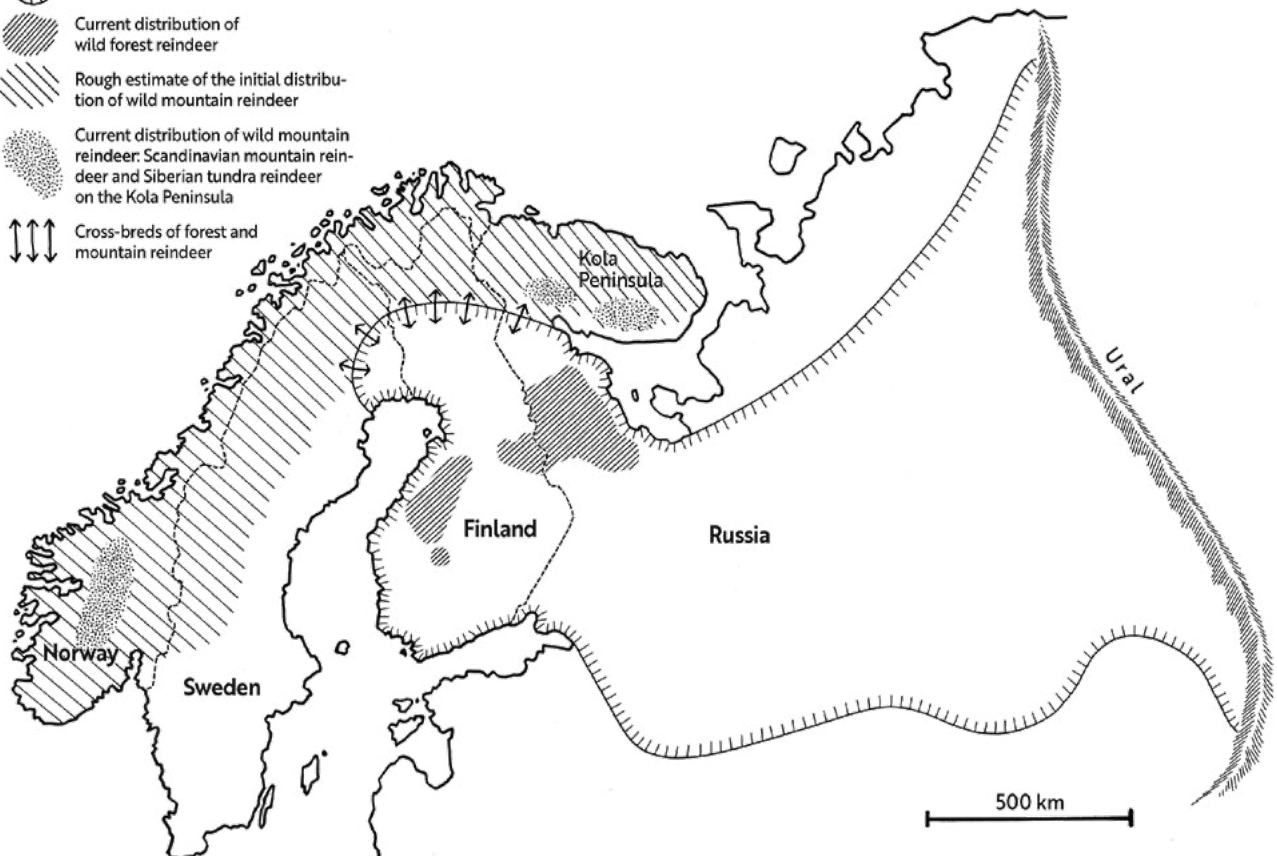
The Scandinavian mountain reindeer came originally from Central Europe. Today, it can be found only in the fells of Southern Norway, where it lives all year round on the fell highlands. On the Kola Peninsula, Siberian tundra reindeer migrate between the Arctic tundra and the area at the northern forest line, depending on the season.



On Spitzbergen lives short-legged and thick-bodied Svalbard reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus*).



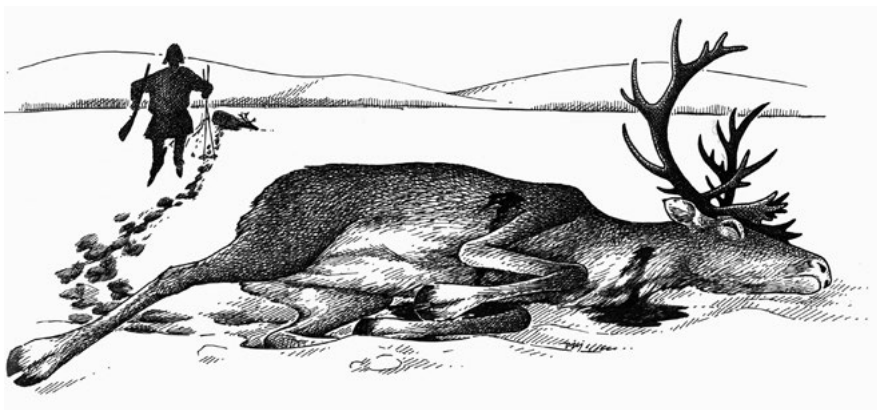
-  Original distribution of wild forest reindeer
-  Current distribution of wild forest reindeer
-  Rough estimate of the initial distribution of wild mountain reindeer
-  Current distribution of wild mountain reindeer: Scandinavian mountain reindeer and Siberian tundra reindeer on the Kola Peninsula
-  Cross-breeds of forest and mountain reindeer



The last wild reindeer

By the beginning of the 20th century, both forest and mountain reindeer almost completely disappeared from Finland. Hunters from Kautokeino were hunting wild reindeer from Western Lapland as late as the 1860s. But, two decades later, in February 1883, the last wild reindeer was shot in Kittilä.

In Muonio, a wild reindeer herd was killed in Tunturipää around 1890. The last wild reindeer were seen in eastern Enontekiö around the year 1905, and two wild reindeer were shot at Haltiatunturi in 1916.



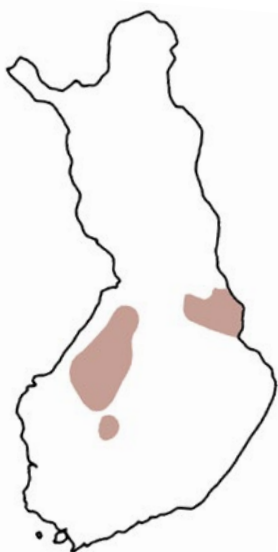
Return of the wild reindeer

In 1913, Russian Czar Nicholas II placed both the forest and the mountain reindeer under the protection of the law in the Grand Duchy of Finland. However, wild reindeer had already disappeared from Finland by that time.

In the 1940s, wild forest reindeer returned from Eastern Karelia in Russia to Kuhmo. From 1979 to 1980, wild forest reindeer were moved from Kuhmo to the Salamajärvi National Park at Suomenselkä. In the early 2020s, a couple thousand wild forest reindeer lived at Suomenselkä and roughly 800 in Kainuu.

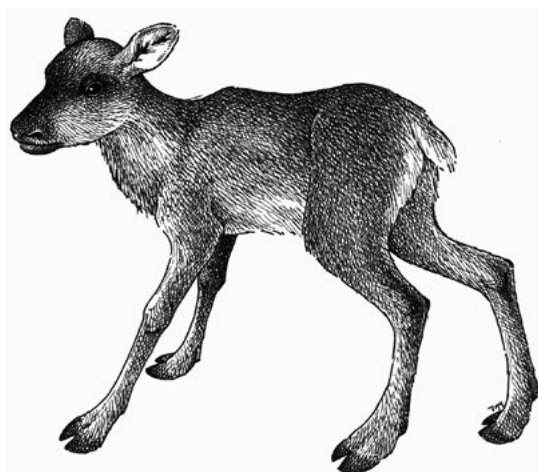
The spread of Scandinavian wild mountain reindeer into Finnish territory is practically impossible. Tundra reindeer from the Kola Peninsula, however, could migrate into Finland, even though it would not be possible to prevent them from crossbreeding with domesticated reindeer.

In the fells of Northern Finland, there are herds with thousands of domesticated reindeer. These descendants of wild mountain reindeer also visit the pitfall area of Jyppyrä every winter.



Current distribution of wild forest reindeer in Finland.

Wild reindeer calf.



Why did the wild reindeer disappear?

Unregulated hunting with modern firearms began to threaten the wild reindeer population in the 19th century. In Northern Finland, the large herds of domesticated reindeer consumed the winter pastures of the wild reindeer, which were forced out of the way by the practice of reindeer husbandry. Apparently, the reindeer plague also destroyed the wild reindeer population. The plague broke out in Southern Lapland in Sweden and spread to Enontekiö in 1745-46.

The disappearance of wild reindeer had an adverse impact on the living conditions of local people, and in some places even resulted in famine. It is said that even the old reindeer hunters became depressed, ageing far before their time and ultimately dying insane.

Lasso



Primer horn and gunpowder sack.

