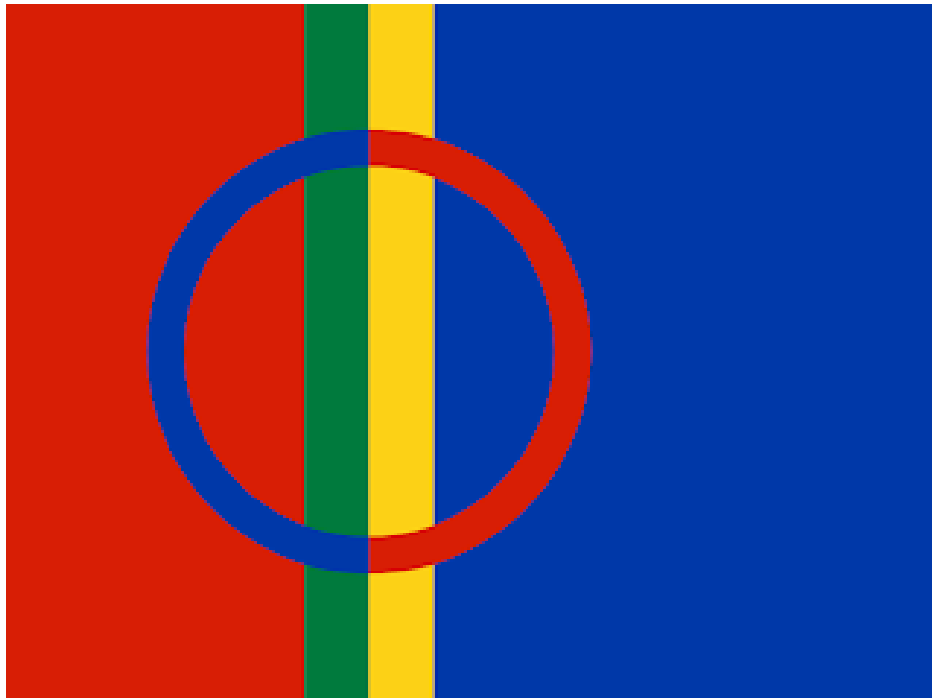


Sámi Heritage and Culture

Sámi National Day 2023

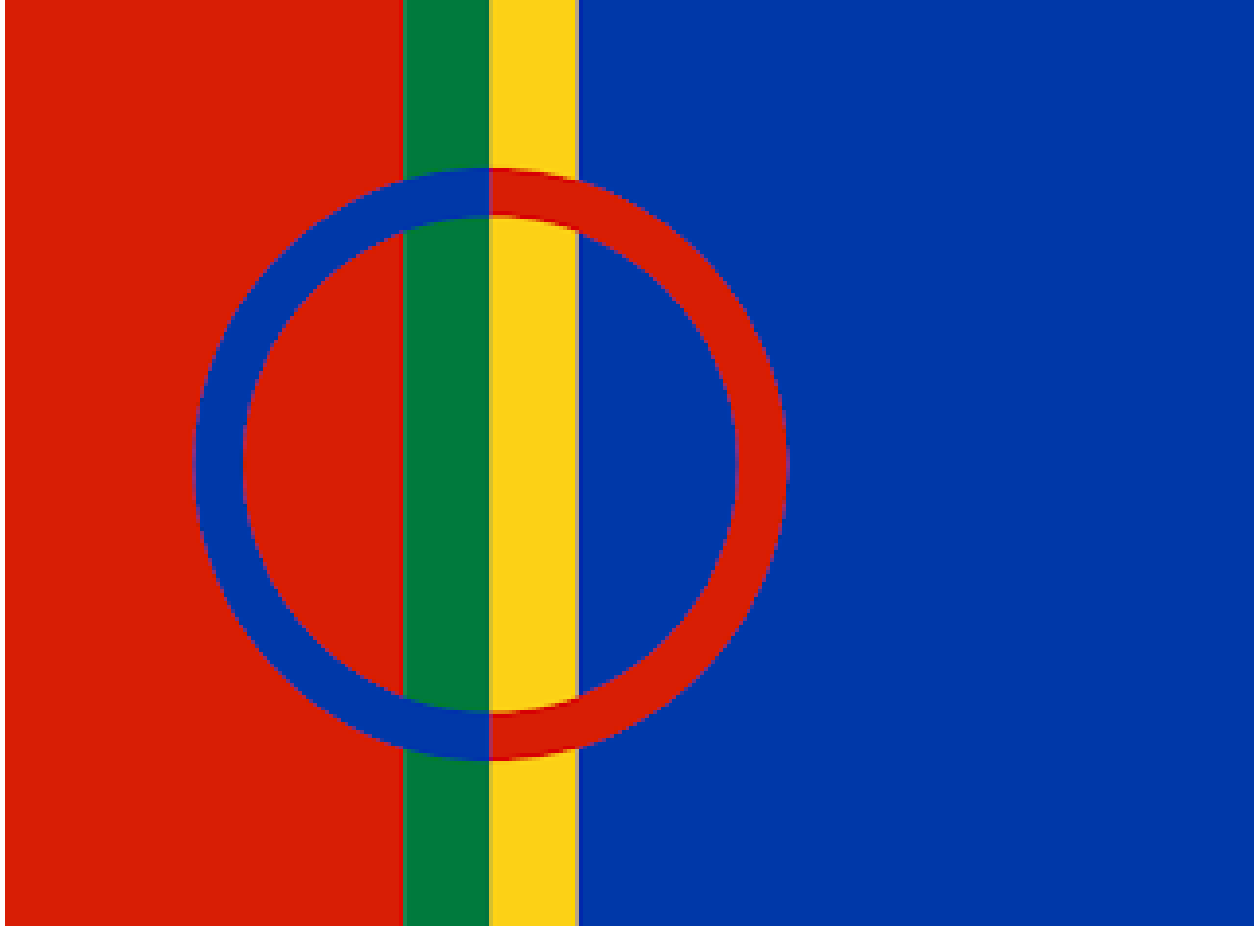


The Scandinavian Cultural Society, Burnaby, BC



CAROLYN THAUBERGER
February 6, 2023

The Sámi Flag



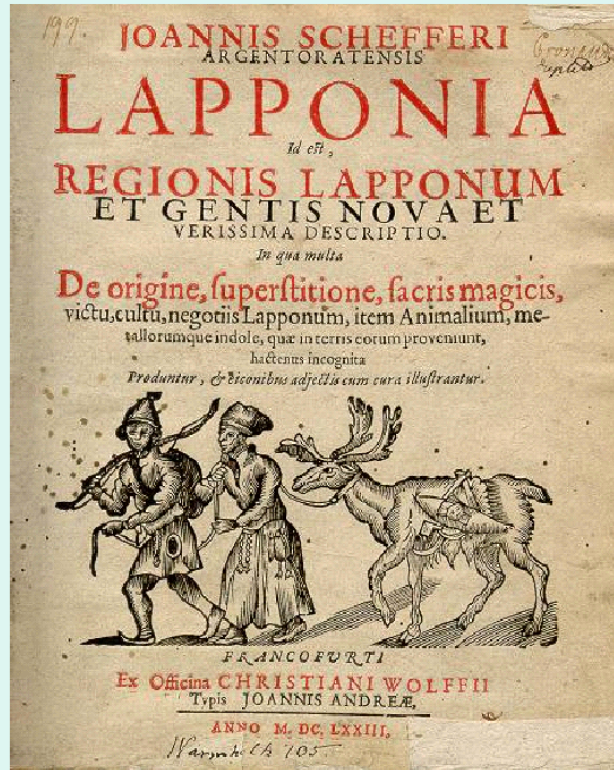
The Sámi flag above is one of the two official flags of Norway. Sámi people have established a strong political presence in Norway which now recognizes this Sámi flag as one of the country's two official flags. They are flown together on state occasions, the Sámi flag beneath the Norwegian one. Designed by Astrid Båhl, the red part of the circle symbolises the sun, the blue part the moon. The colours red, blue, green and yellow reflect the Sámi national costume. Green symbolises nature, blue water, red fire and yellow the sun. The Sámi call themselves "The people of the sun".



Sámi people call their home territories, Sapmi. These lands lie across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola Peninsula. There are 100,000 Indigenous inhabitants in this area. Ancestors of the present-day Sámi have inhabited the area since the birth of Christ and likely much longer. At least 30,000 people of Sámi ancestry live in North America.



The Sámi are a people with a rich and powerful culture one they have held for thousands of years. They are noted for their skill in living successfully in a cold environment and for their cooperative and peaceful social connections (at least before the deliberate introduction of alcohol by politicians wanting to control the Sámi lands and gather taxes from a weakened population). Some believe Sámi people may even have come to the Sapmi areas just after the last Ice Age left 10,000 years ago. Archeological evidence is limited for a nomadic people but studies of language and culture seem to support this. Considering their success there is likely much we can learn from the Sámi about living in a northern climate and about peaceful social organization.



The oldest documented information regarding the Sámi people is dated to 98 AD and is from the Roman historian Tacitus who mentioned them in one of his reports. In 1673 a Bishop in Lapponia (Sapmi) wrote the above booklet about the Sámi people for church purposes.



This illustration is from the Bishop's 1670 book.

Historically Sámi people engaged in two types of occupations: those who followed reindeer into the mountains in the summer and migrated to the sheltering forests in winter again following the herds, and those who lived along the coasts and fished. Many Sámi still engage in one or the other (or both) of these occupations.

The clothing in this 1670 illustration is still similar to what is currently worn by Sámi. Modern Sámi often save these valuable garments for special occasions: shirts and pants for men, dresses for women, shoes with turned up toes for skiing, and purses. Hats and shoes could be grass stuffed for insulation. Babies were wrapped snugly in water tight cradles that could also float upright if dropped into water. The baby could then be fished out downstream, wet and possibly disgusted, but safe.

Coastal Sámi Fishermen

engraving, 1500 – 1600

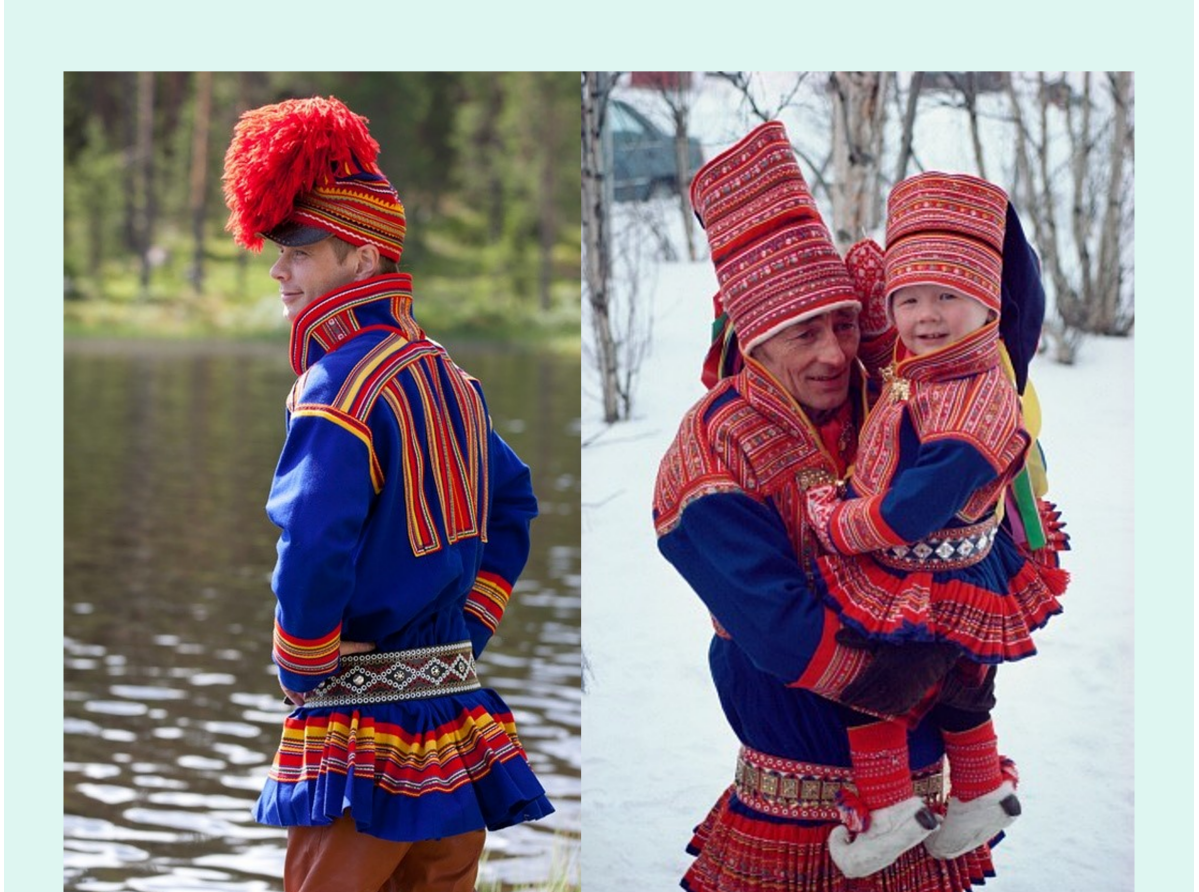


The Icelandic Sagas from around the year 1200 talked of Saami people as being expert boat builders from far into the past. Apparently, a Viking gentleman (!) called Sigured had local Sámi build him two Viking ships. The saga reports: "Their boats were fastened together with deer sinews, without nails, and with twigs of willow instead of knees, and each boat could carry twelve men." There were many rivers in Sapmi that had to be crossed to follow the reindeer to the mountains.

Gákti



Those nomadic Sámi who followed reindeer couldn't carry objects that were not immediately useful. Therefore Sámi people created almost no art for art's sake. Instead, they decorated their clothing and the few tools they needed with great beauty. Sámi belts could be woven on simple looms such as the loom in the photo. Dyes were made from plants and berries in the environment. Some Sámi also kept sheep or traded with their winter neighbours for wool to make warm finely decorated clothing. Sámi people call their clothes Gákti.



Their gákti outfits are beautiful. Also informative. A Saami can tell exactly where you are from by your style of hat. How a person wears their gákti also says much. Details communicated in this way can range from one's marital status to a number of personality traits and interests. Today we just text. Did the Sámi invent an early form of texting?

Only for Sami people



These men are from a different region than the man in the previous image. Impressive styling on the cape leaves the middle fellow's arms free to throw a lasso at a reindeer. The clothing was styled to be warm. Hats, shoes, and mitts all had room to hold grass insulation. Nordic polar explorers consulted the Saami when planning their expeditions and used Sámi practices and design ideas to enable them to survive in the cold. Some, like Fridtjof Nansen on his Greenland crossing expedition, took Saami people with them to guide and advise.

Gahkti are considered somewhat sacred and only a Sámi person should wear them. However, given their beauty, recent Sámi-like designs and tourist copies are possible to buy. Even these are expensive.



This early hand-coloured photo shows how styles have been updated somewhat over time. There has been a gradual change from clothing made of leather to more use of woven wool cloth and dyes have become brighter. See the lady's politely crossed feet. Sámi people were quick to pick up new customs and useful technology if they saw any advantage in it. Smoking might not necessarily fit into that category.

Sámi Gákti is Symbolic



Anna Maia Sorensen and her grandmother Karen Sorensen of Vancouver, and Dr. Troy Storfjel of Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA, helped organize the first large Sámi celebration at the Scandinavian Community Centre in Burnaby. Karen owned several articles of Sámi clothing which she shared with her granddaughters and other relatives as they married or as gifts for special occasions.

To most Sámi, gákti are a very special and important symbol of identity and belonging. It is inappropriate for a person to wear gákti from a region or community to which they do not belong, and generally it is completely inappropriate for non-Sámi to wear gákti.

Ella Sine Sorenson in her Summer Clothes



In the past, non-Sámi people might have looked down on gákti, considering them low-status garments. When other Scandinavians first had much contact with the Sámi their clothing was usually their work dress made primarily of leather and worn from heavy use. People began referring to the Sámi as Lapps, which became a derogatory term suggesting ragged clothing. That term no longer used. Sámi dress is enjoying a renaissance and today's clothing is finely made and beautiful. Like Karen and her granddaughters, many Sámi people are beginning to wear the gákti again and not only for special occasions. Sámi designers are making creative innovations based on local gákti traditions or are making clothing that is inspired by, but distinct from, the gákti. Many modern Sámi performers use this stylized clothing on stage.

Anna Mia Sorenson



Sámi clothes can be quite expensive with silk, silver jewelry, and other fine fabrics. Karen Sorenson's granddaughter here is wearing her Sámi clothes to celebrate Sámi National Day on February 6. This is the day the first Sámi Congress was held in 1917 and is a cultural celebration for the Sámi people.

The Sámi have established their own parliament recognized by the Norwegian government at which they discuss and make decisions about Sámi affairs and suggest measures that may impact the Sámi for the Norwegian Parliament to address. The two governments work together.

Sami Shoes



Sámi shoes were made of reindeer hide with or without fur. They have room for grass stuffing which was taken out and dried overnight before reuse. The soles usually have reindeer fur slanted backwards on the toe half and forward on the heel to give grip on ice. Note the curled-up toes for sliding the shoes under a ski strap. The shoes weren't tall but a wrapping of cloth around the top tied with a colourful braided ribbon kept snow out.

Sami Bracelets



By Anna Lengstrand
Pemberton BC

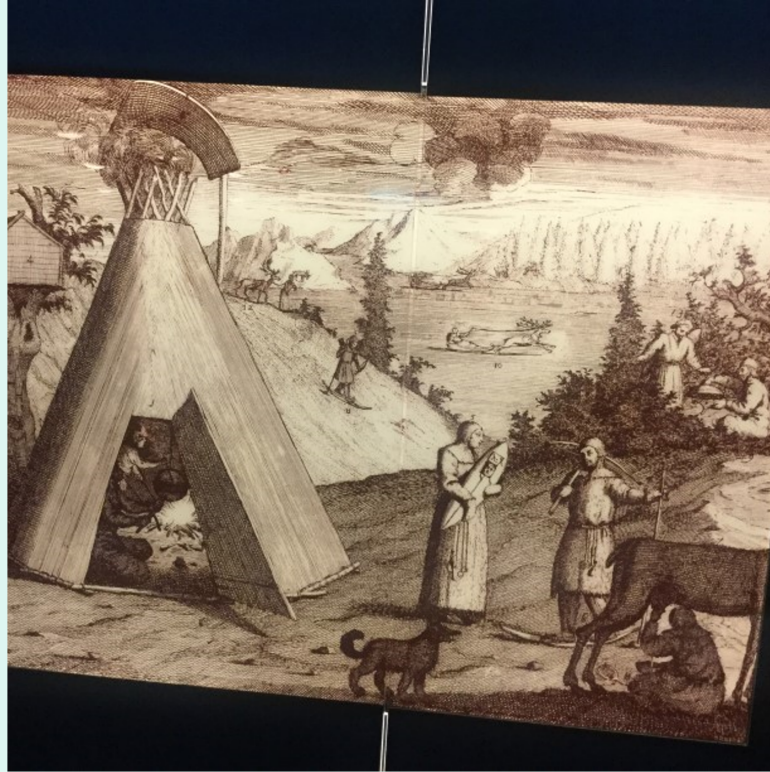
info@simplysami.ca

www.simplysami.ca

Anna Lengstrand from BC who has Norwegian and Sámi heritage makes these belts and bracelets from authentic materials. Order them from

[info@simplySámi .ca](mailto:info@simplySámi.ca)

Traveling Homestead



This fascinating older drawing shows much about Sámi life before the 20th century. In winter settlements or when following their reindeer, the Sámi slept in a lavvus - a tent made of reindeer hide and poles. Its low-rise design made it more stable in wind than North American tipis. This early lavvu has a bark covering its smoke hole to keep out snow. The cover is attached to a pole so it can be moved to suit the wind direction.

The food storage house up in a tree safe from animals and accessible in deep snow. Cooking is going on in the lavvu. A Shaman with his drum is being consulted off in the bushes. The floating baby cradle is where the baby spent his entire day, cozied warm and snug in down and fur and skins. Soft absorbent moss drew any dampness away from his skin. Milking reindeer appears to be a woman's task though she has some help. Sámi froze summer milk and used slices of it frugally in their winter coffee.

The Lapphund



The Sámi used dogs to help with herding reindeer and to draw their sleds as shown in the previous drawing. These highly trained intelligent dogs were valuable, respected and treated well.



The Finnish Lapphund

Evidence of Early Skis

- 5000 BCE. Carving, skier, one pole. Norway
- 4000 BCE. Rock drawings of man on skis holding a stick. Norway.
- 4500 or 2500 BCE. First ski, peat bog, Sweden.
- 3245 BCE. Ski found in Finland in 1938.
- 3200 BCE. Ski frozen in melting glacier. Norway

The Sámi are considered to have invented skiing. The earliest evidence of ski was found in Scandinavia though there has been a suspected ski found almost as old in China. Older Sámi ski are short compared to modern skis and were poled along on one strong pole.

Lavvu



The portable lavvu was used for spring and summer travel (the covering without fur for summer, with fur for winter). Poles too heavy to carry might be left up for use next year. The fireplace is centered inside the lavvu so flames and smoke can rise through the hole where the poles meet at the top. The earth or snow of the floor is stuck with twiggly branches from low growing shrubs stem down and all facing the same way (like feathers on a bird). The floor flattens down nicely to make a practical warm carpet. That floor may be laid over with reindeer fur in areas for sitting and sleeping.

A flat stone is the cooking area. Two or three stones set in a triangle in or around the fire hold pan or pot. A chain from the ceiling with a hook can hold the kettle for coffee. Only men were allowed to cook the reindeer meat. Women baked flat bread and cooked everything else. Berries were a staple. Food preparation was kept very clean with hands washed before. The one exception one visitor reported was that a reindeer hair in the stew was common and not to a cause for distress.

Lavvu



The man of the house held the position of honour at the back of a lavvu facing the door and with the fire in front of him so he could cook and mind the flames. His wife was at his side to the right of the door and children and visitors would be spread along the walls. Just inside the door was a place to set shoes. Reindeer hides went under and over sleepers. Reindeer hairs are hollow (reindeer float if dropped into water) and one of the warmest of furs. A stick set on nubs of branches on two of the poles might form a clothes line or even a curtain rod over which a blanket might be hung for privacy or warmth. Other knobs deliberately left on the poles were used to hold tools and purses. Everything that was needed was at hand. Including the dog.

Reindeer, Fish and Berries



Finnabiff

- Brown thin sliced reindeer and onions in butter
- Mushrooms
- salt, pepper, flour
- beer, or cream and sour cream, geitost
- Crushed juniper berries
- Simmer an hour, covered

Serve with mashed potatoes and lingonberry jam



Kaffeost

Cooking was simple with few if any herbs or spices. The reindeer meat supplied by Lloyd Binder from his Tuktoyuktuk herd and cooked in the recipe above was served for Sámi National Dinners at the Scandinavian Centre. Both Coastal and Mountain Sámi ate reindeer and fish. Berries were the other diet mainstay. These were abundant in the mountain valleys and huge amounts of them were picked and frozen for winter.

Once coffee was available it became a staple too, and was kept in finely decorated bags. Sámi drank from finely carved wooden cups with dipper handles. A soft reindeer milk cheese might be added to almost melt in the bottom of your cup.

The Drum



In the old days Sámi shamen and other Sámi used drums like this modern replica from Karen Sorensen to guide their lives. Should we go hunting today? Will I catch the eye of that man? Christians considered the drums evil, of course, so all drums were seized and burned sometimes together with the drummer. The coming of Christianity was a difficult time for the Sámi . It is always dangerous to be a peaceful minority. A few hidden drums have survived. Even those newly made like this one built without nails or screws as in the old days are very valuable.

Drums were made from the bowl of a tree carved out and covered with reindeer hide held tight with a frame. This one has several raven claws attached with sinews. The painted symbols and figures depict three main goddesses, and figures and animals including the sun and moon. Sámi people call themselves the People of the Sun. The figures have meaning. To make the drum talk, a small stone, a ring, or slice of reindeer antler was laid on the skin which was then tapped lightly with the reindeer antler drumstick. How and where the ring danced tried to tell you information. Some interpretation was required.

Thank You

Two people of Sámi heritage helped with this and other events around the Burnaby Scandinavian Community Centre. I am grateful for their knowledge and support.



Anna Mia and Karen Sorensen

Karen Sorensen, now deceased, lived back and forth between Vancouver and Sapmi, the area around Kautokano, Norway, traditionally inhabited by people of Sámi descent. As she explains, “Sámi people are nomadic.” Ella Sine Sorensen and Anna Maia Sorensen are her granddaughters. Karen lent photos and artifacts and gave much advice to the Scandinavian Cultural Society our Saami celebrations. She owned a herd of reindeer!



Lloyd Binder, his mother, father and herd manager and his 3000 reindeer

The second contributor is Lloyd Binder. He and his family owned and managed Canada’s northern herd of three to five thousand reindeer. He is descended from Mikkel

Pulk, a Sámi herder from Norway who came to manage an imported reindeer herd a century ago. Lloyd made presentations on Canadian Sámi history at our Centre.