

WHERE DO THE PEOPLE OF ROVANIEMI COME FROM?

There has probably been continuous settlement in the Rovaniemi area since the Stone Age. A pollen diagram for a site close to Ylikylä suggests that periodic clearance of new land for agriculture and the practise of slash-and-burn cultivation began around 750–530 B.C. Meanwhile, artefacts found in the area suggest that an increasing number of travellers from Karelia in the east, Häme in the south and the Arctic Ocean coast in the north must have come there from 500 A.D. onwards. Located at the confluence of two large rivers, the most important transport routes at that time, Rovaniemi began to adopt the role of a "gateway to Lapland".

The Ylikylä pollen analysis indicates that more permanent settlements characterised by grain cultivation and the keeping of livestock appeared in the area after 1250 A.D. This is also suggested by the 11th–13th century objects found at Ni-vankylä. The first farming settlements may even date from the early 12th century, in which case they would be contemporaneous with the oldest settlements in the Tornio Valley. It is likely, however, that no settlements of any great significance were established until the Late Middle Ages, around the 14th and 15th centuries.

Names tell us about the people who used them

One cannot talk about the people of Rovaniemi until the time when the area was first given its name. The oldest surviving instance of the name in writing



dates from 7th September 1453, when the bailiff of Ostrobothnia confirmed a transfer of land between the farms of Korkalo and Rovaniemi, although the name must have been in existence much earlier, of course. The word has often been considered to be of Lappish origin, as "roavve" in Saami denotes a forested ridge or hill or the site of an old forest fire. In the dialects of southern Lapland, however, "rova" means a heap of stones, a rock or group of rocks in a stretch of rapids, or even a sauna stove. This suggests that the name was given by Finns, though of which tribe we cannot tell.

The obvious presence of elements from Häme and Satakunta in the local place names suggests that most of the earliest pioneering settlers came from there, whereas Karelian elements are less numerous than was earlier believed. People from Savo also moved to Rovaniemi in the 17th century, but they were more prominent in the colonization of Kemijärvi and Tervola. Rovaniemi had slightly less than 200 inhabitants in the 1540's, some of them apparently descendants of

Fishing was a significant means of livelihood for the early settlers. The tackle used, like the "ina" net for river fishing pictured here, remained unchanged up to the present century.

the local Stone Age inhabitants, so that the influx of population from Häme and Satakunta cannot have been very large.

The Saami of Rovaniemi: from hunters to tax-paying farmers

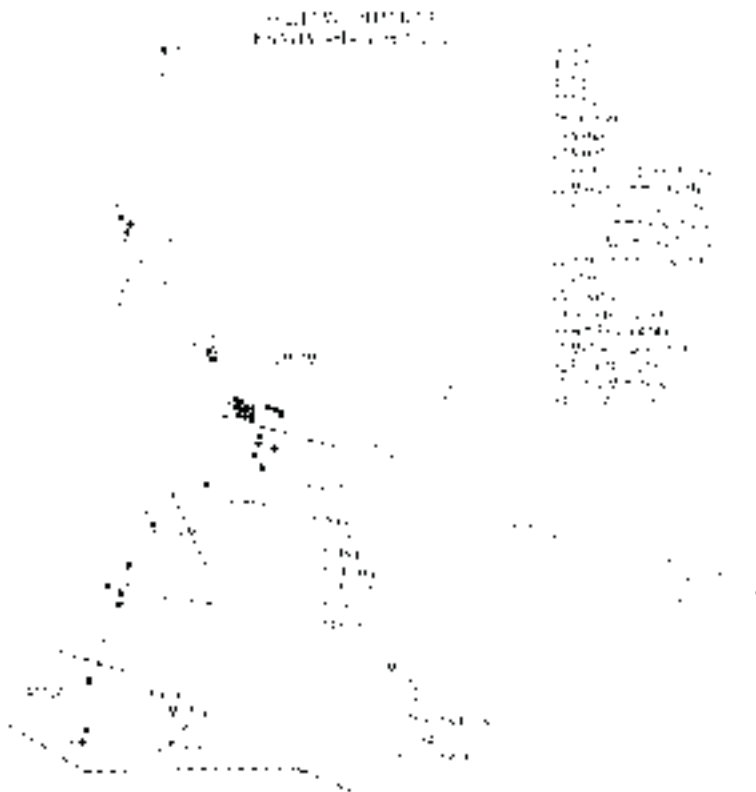
The periodical changes of dwelling site typical of the Stone Age settlement pattern remained the primary way of life among the hunting and fishing population. Thus the majority of the people who continued the settlement in Rovaniemi after the Stone Age were either Saami who had kept to the traditional sources of livelihood or Finns who had established permanent settlements in order to practise grain cultivation and cattle rearing.

There are many names, finds of artefacts and legends in the Rovaniemi area that point to the early presence of Saami. Many

The Rovaniemi of the 1550's had a couple of hundred inhabitants occupying 34 riverside farms grouped into four villages.

place names such as Autti (avdzi "gorge"), Jokka (johkka "hill top", "summit"), Kolpene (kolpan "dry heath forest") and Lainas (laaianas, "the point in the shoe where two seams meet") point to long-term peaceful interaction between the Saami and the Finns.

The Lapps of Rovaniemi were not rich reindeer owners but subsisted on hunting and fishing. The state collected a Lapp Tax from Saami living beyond the boundary of Lapland in the 17th century, although only farmers were recorded in the tax registers in Rovaniemi. The Saami are known to have



The long river boat was the main means of transport for the people of Rovaniemi for many centuries. The picture shows the bank of the River Ounasjoki at the end of the 19th century.

occasionally taken up farming, however, to the extent that they may have occupied as many as a tenth of the taxable farms in Rovaniemi at the end of the 17th century, though the majority of them moved further away as Finnish settlement expanded. Relations between the

Rovaniemi people and the Saami were so good in the 17th century, at least, that no disputes reaching the district court were reported. Racial and linguistic differences were gradually eliminated by mixed marriages, though there were many lakeside areas that were inhabited solely by the Saami well into the 18th century.

Fishing and hunting more important than farming

The new inhabitants, too, largely relied on hunting and fishing



A carved fishing totem would be erected for worship at a place where good catches had been obtained, in this case on the shore of Lake Syvälampi, north-east of Rovaniemi. Gifts of food and tobacco were still being laid before an idol of this kind at the Muurola salmon dam in the early 19th century.

for some time, thus competing with the Saami for living space. But where the Saami changed their dwelling places on a seasonal pattern, the Finns would build their houses close to nat-

The pike was an important fish for the first settlers in this area, and for centuries people would even go to quite remote lakes to catch it in order to pay off taxes, sell it or use it for food in the winter. Pike had the advantage over salmon that it could be dried for storing, so that there was no need to buy expensive salt or put effort into making barrels.



it was adopted in the Tornio valley and areas further west in the 17th and 18th centuries. Only the old manors that had already been paying taxes in the 1620's were entitled to using these dams, however, whereas all the farms located beside the river used shore dams, also known as flood dams. It has been estimated that the inhabitants of Rovaniemi were respon-

The plummets on the nets were stones wrapped in birch bark. Rovaniemi Museum of Local History.

The position of Rovaniemi beside the River Kemijoki is clearly marked on Olof Träsk's map of 1642, as is the chapel beside the Ounaskoski rapids and the fact that settlement already extended to Patokoski in the Ounasjoki valley and up the Kemijoki as far as Lake Kemijärvi.

ural meadows that provided food for cattle. The Finns had also begun to cultivate barley by the late 13th century.

Hunting was a source of both meat and furs. The main game animal was the reindeer, which was hunted with spears or bows and arrows, or by digging pits. Depressions representing old deer pits can still be found on narrow necks of land between lakes, rivers, mires or steep slopes. The most common fur-bearing animals were squirrels, ermines, martens, otters, beavers, foxes, lynxes, bears and wolves.

Fishing was practised in both rivers and lakes. Salmon were caught with nets, seines, drift nets, drum nets, removable traps and most of all by constructing dams. It is likely that the pen dam was developed in the 16th century by people living beside the River Kemijoki, from where





A seven-pronged fork for night fishing, made at a local smithy. Rovaniemi Museum of Local History.

sible for as much as a tenth of the total of 350,000 kg or so of salmon caught in the River Kemijoki in the best years in the 17th century. The majority of the catch was sold and used for paying taxes. There was a bitter struggle between the downstream and upstream farms for fishing rights at the dams from the 1650's up to 1688, and the matter was even taken as far as the king. The old Rovaniemi farms managed to retain their rights to practise pen dam fishing further downstream as well, and it became common in the 18th century in particular to repay debts to the merchants of Oulu by hiring out salmon fishing rights to them.

Grayling, whitefish and pike were the main fish caught in the river apart from salmon, and pike in the lakes. The latter was dried and either sold to pay off taxes or kept for use as winter food, so that people would even undertake fishing expeditions to faraway lakes. In fact pike was even more important than salmon to many of the local farms. The fishing rights were carefully defined and protected, and it was not until the early 18th century that the pike lakes became accessible to everyone.

The salmon dam at Muurola

Large pen dams were first constructed on the downstream parts of the River Kemijoki, where they yielded the best catch, but they were gradually extended upstream as well. There was evidently a dam at Muurola in 1686, although it may well have been constructed a hundred years earlier.

On account of the importance of log floating on the river to the expanding timber companies, the government annulled the old salmon fishing agreements in 1888 and the leases to the dam sites were acquired by either the Kemi Company or the Kemijoki Timber Floating Association from 1893. These organizations would then rent out fishing rights in places where this did not hamper log floating, such as the Korva dam at Kemi, the Kuri dam at Taivalkoski and the Muurola dam. The last mentioned was the only surviving such dam on the River Kemijoki after 1932.

The Muurola dam was located between the island of Lehmissaari and the eastern bank of the river, while the logs were floated down the west side of the island. It was 445 m in length and had a hundred nets attached to 72 trestles, which were usually dismantled around 20th July each year, when the salmon ceased to rise up the river, and re-erected the following spring.

When the salmon were rising in their greatest numbers the nets were emptied three times a day, at 6 a.m., noon and 7 p.m. They were lifted into a heavy seine drawn downstream through the pen by two boats. This required the work of five men in each boat at the high water season and four later in the summer. Two men in a smaller boat took care of the central part of the seine.

According to official statistics, the total catch from the Muurola dam in the 1870's was 13–72 barrels, i.e. 2000–10,000 kg/year, though it would obviously have been even greater in reality. The peak yield was reached in 1885, a total of 20 tons of salmon, the figures being 5500–7000 kg/year in the 1890's and 900–5600 kg/year in the 1920's and 1930's. It is recounted that 108 salmon, with a total weight of 1400 kg, were caught in one day in summer 1917.

When salmon fishing in the sea areas was prevented by mine fields during the war, salmon rose into the River Kemijoki in record quantities, the best single haul from the Muurola dam in its latter days being 69 fish, of which five escaped from the nets back into the pen and were apparently included in the next draw. There was one week in which yields averaged 120 salmon a day, with an average weight of 10 kg.

Building of the dam was abandoned entirely after the summer of 1947, however, as the hydroelectric power station at Isohaara in Kemi completely prevented salmon from entering the river.