

HARD WORK IN THE FORESTS

The conditions for forestry as an economic activity in Southern Lapland changed radically in the 1860's, when Finnish sawmills were given the right to purchase timber and use steam-powered machinery. At the same time the most important export customer, Britain, removed its import duties on timber.

Rovaniemi was well equipped to face the new challenges. Its strengthened agriculture had established a solid population base which was also capable of providing enough labour for harvesting the timber, its major rivers provided an excellent means of transporting timber from remote stretches of forest, and the local farmers had enough horses to cope with the problems of short-distance transport from the forest to the river bank. The private forests created by the Great Partition

As a prelude to the beginning of large-scale forestry operations in Lapland, the Norwegian Terje Olsén had the Konttinen manor house built to contain the forestry offices of his company.

were now available as sources of timber, although most of it was still obtained from the vast areas of state forest.

Forestry leaps into action: the "Great Contract"

Forestry work took a great stride forward in 1871, when a Norwegian businessman, Terje Olsén, purely as a matter of speculation, made a contract with the National Board of Forestry to fell a total 500 000 trees in the Rovaniemi area. Olsén and his English business partners provided the capital required for financing the work, and for three

years (1873–1876) he had the people felling timber for extremely high wages. He had the manor house of Konttinen in Rovaniemi built as his residence on the strength of the same contract, but then the money ran out. Forestry had gained such a flying start in Rovaniemi that

One consequence of the commencement of forestry work was the creation of a system of health care in Rovaniemi. Terje Olsén announced that if a district physician could be obtained, his company would contribute to the man's salary. The first doctor was appointed in 1883.





The axe was the lumberjack's only tool in the early days, and the men were so much at home with it that they resisted the introduction of the two-handed saw at first.



People were still talking about the "Olsén era", or the times of the "Great Contract" a hundred years later.

Once forestry work had been set in motion it was unlikely to fade out in a hurry. Fellings in the 1880's exceeded those achieved in

Olsén's times, and the famous Kemi Company was established on the ruins of his business in 1893. Although the sawmill and the pulp mill that followed it were located in Kemi, the main timber purchase office was still located at Konttinen.

Rovaniemi emerges as a major centre for forestry

There were thousands of men working in the forests of Rovaniemi in wintertime at the end of the 19th century, and although the main lumber camps were gradually moved upstream into the more remote forests of Kemijärvi, Sodankylä and Kitilä, Rovaniemi had created an unassailable position for itself as the centre for forestry in Lapland.

It had housed the district forest management office from 1851 onwards, and in 1905 a school for forest wardens was started at Hirvas. This soon became a school of forestry, providing training for lumber camp foremen, and later gained college status. The reorganisation

of the administration of state forests in 1923 led to the establishment of the district office for Lapland in Rovaniemi instead of Kemi, and the town was also the natural location for the Lapland Forest Management Board when this was set up in 1929 to control the private forests. Forestry was thus laying a solid foundation for the general administrative function that was to be of such vital importance to the development of Rovaniemi in later times. Since supplies to the lumber camps in Lapland were transported via Rovaniemi and the lumberjacks would pass

Hugo Richard Sandberg was a big man and a harsh taskmaster as Forest and Log Floating Manager of the Kemi Company, keeping the men working and the timber flowing.

Machines were needed to do this when the forests lay beyond the watershed. He also did much for the development of Rovaniemi as a town.

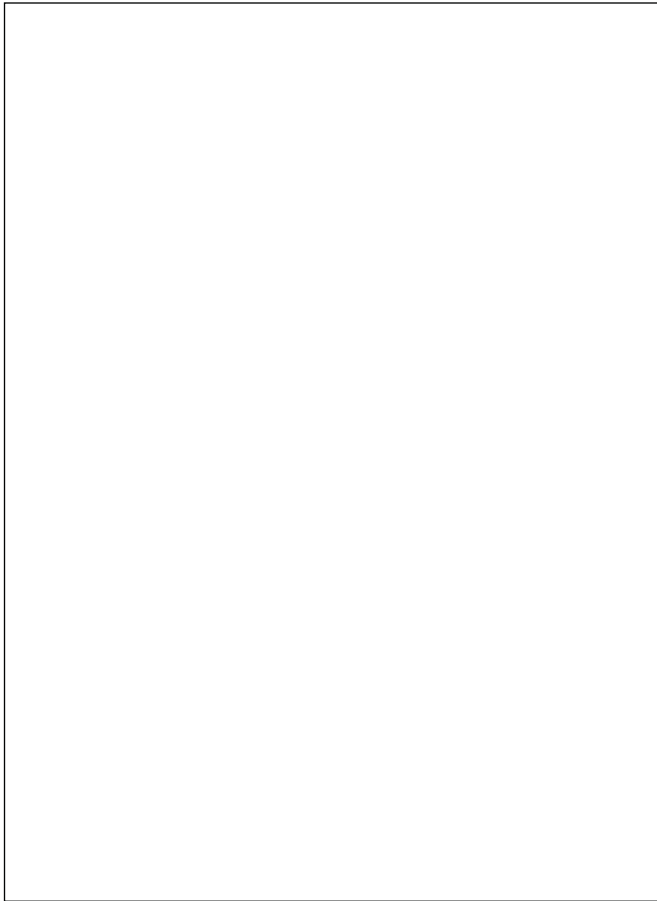


through in both directions, forestry may also be said to have led to the growth of the famous Rovaniemi market and the wide variety of shops.

Log floating on the River Kemijoki

The concentration of wood processing at the mouth of the River Kemijoki greatly increased transport needs. Timber could not be taken to Kemi on the cart road of that time, but had to be floated down the River Kemijoki and its tributaries, which together constituted a huge transportation network operating by water power. As the salmon which were so important to the riverside settlements and to the tax collectors rose upstream at the same time as the logs were being floated downstream, traffic rules were needed. The first regulations, issued in 1874, were that log floating should take place at the time of the spring high water or in autumn. The high prestige of forestry and wood processing soon overrode the interests of salmon fishing, however, and the log floating period was extended, so that by the 1920's it was permitted throughout the summer.

The River Kemijoki possessed the largest log floating system in Finland, with as many as 1200–1800 men working beside it during the busiest floating period in summer. The largest jam ever experienced occurred at Petäjäsoski in 1901, when 300 000 logs became stuck. The "Emperor of Lapland", Hugo Rikhard Sandberg, head of the forestry department of the Kemi Company, ordered 500 men out to release the logs,



The lumberjack was such a typical and important figure for the economy of Rovaniemi that there is now a statue, the work of Kallervo Kallio and erected by the Kemi Company, close to the place where the men who had come down the river with the logs used to gather to celebrate Midsummer.

and when the jam finally broke up 3 men were carried away with it and lost their lives. Log floating remained an integral part of the culture of the riverside settlements up until 1991, since when all the timber has been transported by road or rail.

The first trade union

The first trade union in Rovaniemi was founded on 2nd April 1906 for the benefit of those engaged in forestry work, lumbering and log floating, and in particular to act as a counterforce to Sandberg, the Forest Manager of the Kemi Company. The resulting League of

Northern Lumbermen began action to safeguard the interests of its members in the very same year by organizing a strike involving almost 3000 men. The number of actual members must have amounted to over a thousand before the League was absorbed into the Finnish Association of Sawmill Workers at the end of 1909. In the meantime it had managed to build its own premises in Rovaniemi, the well-known League House, despite opposition by the Kemi Company and the many efforts made by this powerful organization to prevent its construction.

The life of the lumberjack

The men employed in timber felling and log floating were recruited from the farms of Rovaniemi or further away. The way of life at the lumber camps would have been the same for all the workers, however, regardless of where they came from.

Felling work usually began when the mires froze over in November. The work was done in teams comprising a horseman and two lumbermen. The horseman made an agreement with the forest company for felling trees, transporting the logs to the floating channel, paying the lumbermen their wages and providing them with food.

The men would first build a hut in the forest, which in the early years was usually built partly underground and had a stove made of natural stones beside the entrance and a bunk at the back. In the 1920's the forest companies were required by law to build dwellings for their workers, and they would then normally engage a housekeeper for them.

Felling and the moving of the timber lasted until the beginning of March, at which point there was too much snow to continue the work. They usually tried to finish the work at a site by the time of the winter market in Rovaniemi. In the early days the lumberjacks would not have any work at all in March, so that they would just lounge around on the farms or in the village of Rovaniemi, but later they were employed at this time on cutting the logs to a fixed length at the riverside in preparation for floating.

In May the men would return to the forests to prepare for log floating. Floating from the headwaters commenced immediately the ice on the river had melted, for it was essential to have the site clear by the end of the high water season. Some would follow the logs down to Kemi, whereas the cottagers and the sons of farmers would often return home at that stage to attend to the summer farm work.

Working hours in log floating were as much as 12 hours a day even as late as the 1930's. The day's work began at 6 a.m. and ended at 8 p.m., with two breaks for meals. In the busiest hay-making period the men who were working close to their homes might even slip home at night to attend to this work.



Living and working conditions for the lumberjacks remained very primitive for a long time. This was the living quarters at the Ylä-Säynäjä lumber camp in the early 1920's.



The River Kemijoki and the tributaries and streams that flowed into it formed an excellent network of routes for transporting timber, with the river doing the majority of the work. Guides had to be built on the river banks to prevent jams, however, and the logs had to be watched as they floated downstream and any congestion resolved before a jam built up. Lumbermen on watch beside a well-appointed log floating stream in the early 1920's.

Log floating was a characteristic part of the summer life of the Kemijoki valley up until 1991, when it was decided that all the transportation of timber in Lapland should take place by road or rail. The picture shows the tail end of the last raft of logs on its way down the River Ounasjoki towards Lainas.



The first stage of the journey, from the stump to the riverside, took place by horse-drawn sleigh. The safe passage of such heavy loads required that the route should be planned to be entirely downhill or on the flat and good, icy tracks should be made beforehand for the runners of the sleigh.



Floating was again followed by a period of rest, which the men would often spend gathering in the harvest on the local farms, cutting hay on the more remote mires or servicing their working gear, as their sledges, tools and food supplies had to be ready for the new felling season, again to be spent perhaps hundreds of kilometres away from home.

The standard tool for the lumberman in early times was simply an axe, until around 1896, when the regulations required that a double-handled cross-cut saw should be used instead, although the lumberman themselves disapproved of this change. Smaller, individual saws were introduced in the 1920's. Chain saws and tractors emerged in the 1950's, replacing manual sawing and horses from the early 1960's onwards. The ordinary farm tractor was soon replaced by special forest tractors in the 1960's.

The introduction of more effective means of transport in the forests led to the abandonment of log floating in the smallest headwaters. Even the lumbermen themselves became an endangered species in the 1980's, by which time practically all the stages of the process that took place in the forest could be performed by multi-purpose machines.