

## INTERNATIONAL ROVANIEMI



*Vice-President of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson on their visit to Rovaniemi.*

**W**e can talk about being international only when there exist groups that are referred to as nations. Although the first people settling on the banks of the River Kemijoki were not numerous, they still managed to develop a culture of their own over 6000 years ago, characterised by typical stone artefacts. This marks a point in time at which a group had emerged that was capable of establishing contacts with other cultures. The resulting interaction was by no means one-sided even then, for they would learn things from others and their own skills would enrich the lives of others.

### **Connections in all directions, even in prehistoric times**

"Rovaniemi market" was evidently one of the nodal points for the international exchange of goods even during the Combed Ware Era, 4200–2000 B.C., when the shores of the Ancient Lake Kolpene had links with areas beyond the White Sea and Lake Onega in the east, the shores of Varangerfjord in the north and the Straits of Denmark in the south-west.

Bronze working skills reached Rovaniemi from east and west simultaneously around 1300–500 B.C., and iron founding was acquired from the east in the first centuries A.D.

Stimulated by the Roman Empire, the fur trade created a demand for northern products, enabling ready-made iron products and other valuable commodities to be obtained by barter. The Alajärvi buckle from around 500 A.D. and a bearded axe blade from the 6th–7th century A.D. must have reached Rovaniemi through Norway. The weapons found at Marikko-vaara, dating from 1150–1250, indicate that there were already contacts with Central Europe at that time.

### **Relations between states**

A new meaning became attached to international relations when organised states began to extend their power into the Kemijoki Valley, although Novgorod, in spite of having the Rovaniemi area incorporated in its territory in 1323, never established a local administration. Once Sweden gained a hold over the valley with the support of the Roman-Catholic Church in the 1370's, international relations were largely a matter of making war.

In retribution for the Swedish raids on the White Sea area of Karelia and the Kola Peninsula, the Russians and Karelians destroyed Rovaniemi a number of times in 1578–1611, and when Sweden conquered the Baltic and Pomerania, soldiers recruited from Rovaniemi would be stationed in the local garrisons for decades – so that when they died they would be replaced with new soldiers from Rovaniemi. Military expeditions did not end until Sweden lost its position as a ma-

*Ministers of the Environment representing eight countries signed an agreement on the conservation of Arctic environments following a series of conferences held in Rovaniemi in 1989–91. The work is still going on under the title of the "Rovaniemi Process".*

major power at the beginning of the 18th century.

Despite the fact that Finland fell under the imperial rule of the Tsar in 1809, Russian influence did not increase at all in Rovaniemi, other than through some of the farmers purchasing goods from St. Petersburg and travelling pedlars from Karelia making their habitual and usually welcome visits to the villages to sell odds and ends. More important was the western influence, especially that of the Norwegian businessman Terje OlsEn and his input of British capital, which enabled forestry to gain a foothold in the local economy.

The most international event in Rovaniemi in the late 19th century and the early 20th century was undoubtedly the market, which in addition to the more affluent local people, attracted Lapps, gypsies selling horses, Englishmen purchasing furs, Jews engaged in all sorts of trade, Russians and Tatars selling a variety of goods, and tradesmen from northern Sweden and the shores of the Arctic Ocean. There would sometimes even be a whole orchestra from Germany playing there. It is reported that in 1912 a German merchant bought all the reindeer skins on offer at the market, needing 26 railway wagons to transport them all away.

### **The influx of foreigners during the war**

Although a small group of German soldiers had visited Rovaniemi at the end of the First World War, there were no real signs of international military activity until the Second World War.



At the outbreak of the Winter War, the Russian bombing raids on Rovaniemi reminded the Finns that a similar threat could be expected from the east as they remembered from the tales of the period of oppression and Russification that had coloured the early days of the struggle for independence. On the other hand, in spite of the nationalist ideals and aspirations for a Greater Finland that aroused fear and anger in Sweden and Norway as well as the Soviet Union in the 1920's and 1930's, voluntary Swedish pilots were ready to protect Rovaniemi against enemy bombing as soon as war broke out.

From June 1940 until the beginning of the Continuation War, contacts with the Swedes were promoted by the lively traffic to and from Petsamo, a route through which large quantities of supplies were transported to Sweden as well as Finland. The Swedes consequently established offices and permanent servicing bases in Rovaniemi,

and even published their own newspaper there for a while.

A new group of foreigners, the Germans, gained a foothold in Rovaniemi at that time. The local people welcomed them readily, mainly thanks to the possession of a common enemy. Thus there were 5000–6000 Germans living in the town for some years, almost equalling the local people in number, despite the lack of dwellings, all types of goods and a joint language, and despite the differences in ways of behaving and other problems. There were also Germans stationed in almost every village in the rural district. The Germans also employed some 250 Swedes, almost a hundred Estonians and people of many other nationalities. Rovaniemi was in fact the most international place in Finland at that time, and perhaps in the whole of northern Europe.

Rovaniemi's war-time international character ended in catastrophe when the former comrades in arms destroyed the



place almost completely in autumn 1944. Compared with the wars that have taken place elsewhere since that time, however, the Lapland War was conducted on a gentlemanly basis, at least in as far as the parties jointly transported the civilians to safety before hostilities broke out.

The majority of the local people were evacuated to northern Sweden, and would thus have been able to witness personally how their western neighbours lived, and to see how the Swedes, whom they originally regarded as arrogant, had made extreme sacrifices to help their neighbours who were not even able to express themselves in Swedish. The evacuation period laid the foundation for many long-term friendships and a number of Finnish-Swedish marriages.

#### **Work for peace after the war**

Although Finland did not accept Marshall aid, Lapland did receive gifts of clothing and

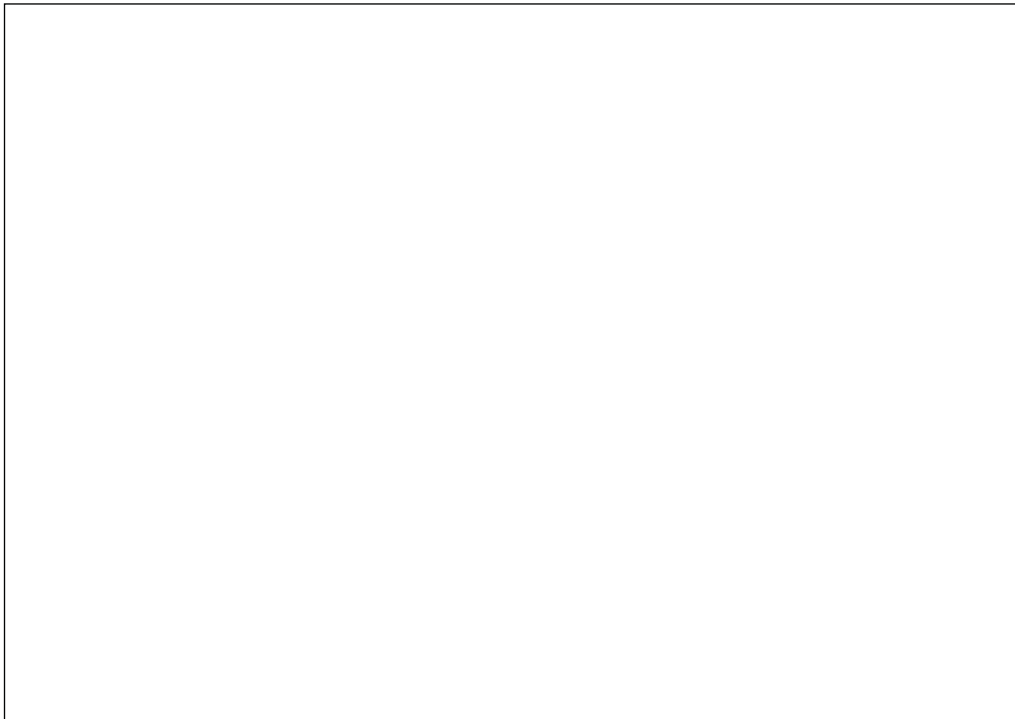
*The symbol of international cooperation in Rovaniemi is the Arcticum building, in which the Provincial Museum of Lapland is able to demonstrate connections with distant lands going back to the Stone Age and the Arctic Centre has exhibits showing the natural environments and cultures of the whole circumpolar region.*

food from the United States. Some American Quakers lived in Rovaniemi from Christmas 1945 onwards to ensure that the help reached its destination. In addition, the Evangelical-Lutheran parishes in the United States assisted in the building of a new church to replace the one burnt down by the Germans.

Ragnar Lassinantti, governor of the province of Norrbotten in Sweden, was one of the first to raise the question of cooperation in Northern Fennoscandia, the area known as 'Nordkalotten', soon after the war. Rovaniemi enthusiastically supported this type of international activity,

both in its restricted Nordic form and when expanded to include the Kola region. The town library, for example, set out to cover the entire Arctic area, and now has one of the most exhaustive collections of books in the world on this subject. The secretariat of the Northern Fennoscandia Committee, the official joint body set up by Norway, Sweden and Finland, has been located in the building of the Lapland provincial administration since the 1970's. Nowadays the provincial administration and the Regional Council of Lapland are also engaged in multinational cooperation in the Barents Sea region.

The University of Lapland has also placed arctic cooperation high on its list of priorities. The Arctic Centre was established in 1989 as a special institute within the university, housed together with the Provincial Museum of Lapland in the Arcticum building. The university has attracted a number of foreign researchers and



*The cabin provided for Eleanor Roosevelt soon became too small to cope with the numbers of visitors, and the Borough Council built a new Arctic Circle cottage. In 1984 this was extended still further by the joint efforts of the Town and Rural District Councils, to create a whole Santa Claus Village with shops and cafés and a post office to frank letters and cards with the Arctic Circle motif which had already been popular for so long. Santa Claus himself is in attendance every day of the year.*

teachers to Rovaniemi and promoted close cooperation with faraway countries such as Canada and Japan.

Local businesses have also gradually adopted more international outlooks. The J.Marttiini company began marketing its filleting knives in the United States in 1966, and Lappset Oy, which manufactures outdoor furniture, is perhaps the most

international local company in the area today, exporting to Japan as well as to many European countries. Another form of international trade is represented by Nordtrac, a local manufacturer of snowmobiles, in which the largest company in the world in this field, Canadian Bombardier, acquired a stake in 1988, so that its products are now being marketed in snowy areas all over the world.

#### **Twin towns around the world**

Kiruna and Rovaniemi concluded an official twinning agreement in 1950 as part of the Nordic system, and were joined by Narvik in Norway in 1951. Rovaniemi's subsequent twin towns have been Fredrikshavn in Denmark (1964), Murmansk in Russia (1965), Neustrelitz and Kassel in Germany (1966 and 1970), Veszprém in Hungary (1974), Olsztyn in Poland (1976), Grindavik in Iceland (1982) and Cadillac in the United States (1983).

The Rural District of Rovaniemi also has two twinning arrangements, with Sant Johan in the Tirol (Austria) and Ajka in Hungary.

#### **A venue for international conferences**

In addition to official state visits, Rovaniemi has been the scene of a number of international meetings and conferences. The most important event so far has been the meeting of the environmental authorities of the circumpolar countries held in 1989 to prepare a programme for environmental conservation in the whole Arctic area. This programme was ratified two years later by the environment ministers of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Soviet Union, Sweden and the United States, and is now referred to as the Rovaniemi Process, in recognition of the constructive spirit in which the preparations were carried through.



