

# Reindeer husbandry – an exclusive Sámi livelihood in Norway

**R**EINDEER HUSBANDRY is a traditional Sámi livelihood. In Norway, it is legally protected as an exclusive Sámi livelihood. This means that within the reindeer grazing areas, the right to herd reindeer is a statutory, exclusive right for persons of Sámi descent with the required linkage to a reindeer herding family. Approximately 2,800 people are engaged in reindeer husbandry in Norway.

The reindeer grazing districts in Norway stretch from the border with Russia in the north-east to Femunden in the southeast. The country is divided into six reindeer herding regions, which in turn are divided into 82 districts.

The Sámi reindeer herding communities move their semi-domesticated herds between coast and inland, and in some cases, across the national borders between Norway and Sweden. The reindeer communities are organised in “siidas”, which are working partnerships where several families move together between seasonal grazing lands. Today, the nomadic lifestyle has been replaced by a modernised, semi-nomadic lifestyle. However, the reindeer herds are still moved between different seasonal grazing lands.

Today, reindeer husbandry is a modernised livelihood with a large degree of mechanisation and use of technological innovations. However, in their daily operations, reindeer herders still depend on the traditional knowledge transmitted from earlier generations, such as the interaction between nature and the use of grazing areas under changing climatic conditions.

Reindeer meat makes up only a small part of the total meat market in Norway. Reindeer meat is an ecologically sound product, and valued as such. However, Sámi reindeer husbandry is not only about providing meat for family consumption and sale, but also a manifestation of an important part of the Sámi culture. It is a very specific Sámi way of life which goes far beyond being just an occupation or income-providing activity, and is an important material foundation for the Sámi culture.

[www.reindrift.no](http://www.reindrift.no)

[www.galdu.org](http://www.galdu.org)

The Sámi People – a Handbook, Karasjok 2006.



PHOTO: MIHKU SOLBÄKK