

# THE EARLY IN THE NORTH PROJECT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY

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## Abstract

The paper gives a short account of the history of archaeological research in northern Finland, which consists of the Provinces of Oulu and Lappi (north of 64°N lat). A huge material, virtually unknown for Finnish as well as for foreign archaeologists, has been collected. In 1995 a three year archaeological project called *Early in the North* was launched in order to organize the material. The project includes the following programs: (1) a database program, (2) a dating program, (3) an archaeo-osteological program, (4) a palaeoecological program, and (5) a publishing program. Formally the *Early in the North* project will continue till the end of 1997. International cooperation in archaeological research activities covering the whole of the so-called Barents Cooperation Territory in the North of Europe is recommended.

Northern Finland consist of the provinces of Oulu and Lappi. The southern border is situated somewhat south of 64°N lat. In all the area covers about 160000 sq.km, *i.e.* about half of Finland.

Occasional archaeological finds were sent to museums from northern Finland already in the middle of the 19th century. In the last quarter of the 19th century Northern Finland was included in the plan for the first regular archaeological prospecting of the country scheduled by the *Archaeological Society of Finland* (founded in 1870). During the first four decades of the 20th century professional archaeologists were not very active in the area, even if the influx of finds to the museums was considerable. The fact that excavations were conducted only at about 20 sites illustrates this. World War II, of course, stopped all archaeological activities, and it was not until the early 1950s that regular archaeological work was begun again in the area.

About 1950 the building of big hydroelectric power plants begun along the River *Oulujoki*. The *National Board of Antiquities* was not aware of what was going on, and so most of the rich archaeological heritage of the river valley between Lake *Oulujärvi* and the *Gulf of Bothnia* was destroyed by construction works or drowned by dammed water. However, when the hydroelectric project moved on to the rivers *Iijoki* and *Kemijoki* and upstream of Lake *Oulujärvi*, the Board was vigilant. Through negotiations the National Board of Antiquities acquired both time and money to investigate the river valleys before their destruction. The archaeological rescue operation along the Kemi River was, until then, the largest integrated enterprise of its kind in Finland. It took about 15 years and it nearly doubled the archaeological collections of the National Museum.

In addition to the damming of rivers, all kinds of land-use has increased considerably year after year in Northern Finland. Consequently there has been a continuous and growing threat against the archaeological heritage, and the archaeological com-

munity has had to work under growing pressure. In addition to the rescue archaeology undertaken by the National Board of Antiquities, the Departments of Archaeology at the Universities of Helsinki and Oulu started their own independent projects in order to study specific archaeological questions in the 1970s.

Today, after more than forty years of regular fieldwork in Northern Finland, the collected archaeological material represents a considerable body of information (at present about 7200 archaeological sites of various kinds are known in the area). When I as a young student joined the "North Team" in 1958, it was possible for an individual to have control of it all, but later this became impossible. Therefore, in the early 70s, when a big exhibition of the archaeology of the River Kemijoki was arranged, it became evident that something had to be done in order to have the material published, and thus made useful for both the domestic and the international archaeological community. Referring to the *Early Norrland Project* in Sweden, a project plan was drawn up and the work was to start in 1975. Eventually, this plan came to nothing.

Twenty years later, as the material and the problem were greater than ever, I decided to try once more and worked out a plan for a three year project called *Early in the North*. The effort was successful: both the *Finnish Academy* and the *Alfred Kordelin Foundation* found the plan worthwhile to support, and so the work began in 1995.

The *Early in the North* project includes the following programs:

(1) A Database Program aims at creating a versatile database of the archaeological material from Northern Finland; *Timo Jussila*, the application developer, will give a presentation at this conference.

(2) A Dating Program aims on one hand at (a) collecting information of all existing  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates related to archaeological samples from Northern Finland and compiling a data file as part of the archaeological database; and (b) having the samples dated in order to work out certain chronological questions, *e.g.* build an independent ceramic chronology based on the dating of charred crust from sherds. I refer to my poster at this conference. On the other hand the aim is the same concerning TL dating.

(3) An Archaeo-Osteological Program aims at (a) collecting information of all existing archaeo-osteological reports concerning northern Finland and compiling a data file as part of the archaeological database; and (b) having osteological collections analysed in order to work out specific questions. I refer to a poster by *Pirkko Ukkonen* at this conference.

(4) The Palaeoecological Program aims at (a) collecting information of all existing palaeoecological reports related to archaeological sites in Northern Finland and compiling a data file as part of the archaeological database; and (b) having palaeoecological samples taken and analysed in order to work out specific questions.

(5) The Publishing Program aims at inducing archaeologists and students of related topics who have carried out works in Northern Finland to write papers about their results. About fifty persons have declared their interest, and I know that many manuscripts are being prepared.

Formally, the *Early in the North* project will go on till the end of December 1997. It is soon time to plan for the future. One could think of continuing this project as a long term process and also of widening the area to cover the whole northern Fennoscandia and later, perhaps, the territory of the Barents Cooperation in eastern Europe.