

# The Early in the North Project – Background and Objectives

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*A brief history of archaeological study in northern Finland leads to the description of the Early in the North Project – background, project plan, financing, results – and a short introduction to this volume as a part of the Project.*

The circumpolar zone of the Earth is the living space of several indigenous peoples. From time immemorial small communities have based their living on the limited natural resources available in a tough environment. The conditions of their material, social and spiritual life have become more and more difficult since southern agricultural and later industrialised communities began indirectly and directly to exploit northern resources at the expense of the local communities.

The global problems caused by greedy exploitation of natural resources have been generally appreciated since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the problematic relationship between humans and their environment began when the development of human culture started. Therefore, in the study of the ecological and social problems caused by the exploitation of natural resources, human action has to be examined in a long time perspective both globally and locally.

In shedding light on backgrounds, early events and connections archaeological research may benefit from both national and international discussion concerning the state of northern indigenous peoples as well as concerning the arguments and methods of outside communities in their exploitation of various resources in the circumpolar zone. It is necessary to produce archaeological

background information for this discussion also in Finland.

Archaeology explores human activity, namely *culture*, from traces left by it in the ground. Apart from its scientific significance, archaeological information is meaningful for local communities as a factor strengthening their self-identification. Archaeological objects are historical markers in a landscape, which therefore may be loaded with recognised and unrecognised values of identity. Public and private land use and exploitation of natural resources may result in destroyed landscapes and losses of environmental identity factors.

Spoiling of the environment and cultural heritage may be unintentional due to lack of knowledge but often it is the result of deliberate action and disregard for priceless values, guided by egoism and greed. It is probably possible to influence both parts by making good archaeological information easily accessible. Planners and decision makers act on the basis of the information publicly available.

People in northern Finland have sent archaeological finds to museums since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The archaeological inventory of Finland initiated by the Antiquarian Society of Finland covered parts of North Finland, too, although professional archaeologists showed

minor interest in the region. By World War I less than twenty excavations had been carried out in the area, only three of which were north of the Polar Circle.

Regular archaeological activity in northern Finland did not begin until 1953. The damming of rivers and construction of hydroelectric power stations were the incentive to launch an archaeological rescue operation of a wide scope. As a result, the archaeological collection of the National Museum of Finland doubled in 15 years. While the hydroelectric building activity has continued and various kinds of land use has increased manifold, the threat to the archaeological heritage has grown significantly in North Finland simultaneously with the pressure on the archaeologists.

The archaeological activity in northern Finland falls in a number of directions:

1. The National Board of Antiquities carries out archaeological survey and rescue investigations according to the Ancient Monuments Act.

2. Among the many special projects launched by the National Board of Antiquities, the establishment of an office at Ivalo in the municipality of Inari, northern Lapland, in 1987 is worth mentioning. Unfortunately the office, which produced important archaeological knowledge, was closed in 1991. However, extensive excavations continued there for three additional seasons.

3. The University of Helsinki, Department of Archaeology, in 1978–1990, carried out a historical archaeological project headed the ‘Early Saami Society’. In cooperation with the National Board of Antiquities the Department carried out survey and excavations in Utsjoki, the northernmost municipality of Finland, in 1984–1990.

4. The University of Oulu, Department of History, included archaeology in its programme in the 1960’s. Since the 1970’s the Department has carried out both survey and extensive excavation projects within a radius of 200 km from the University. First, the attention was directed to the question of the establishment of the Finnish agricultural society in what is now the northernmost

Ostrobothnia in the late Iron Age and early Middle Ages. Later the scope of the studies was extended to cover also the earlier Iron Age, the Bronze Age and the Stone Age. The extensive projects aimed at the investigation of large Neolithic dwelling site complexes have, among other things, brought to light important information on house building and other constructions.

5. The province museums in Oulu, Kajaani and Rovaniemi have participated in the archaeological surveys and excavations of their territories producing interesting results.

The present author joined the ‘archaeological investigations of North Finland’ in 1958. Then it was possible for an individual to be in control of the archaeological record of the region. At present, 50 years after the beginning of regular archaeological activity in northern Finland, it is not possible. Close to 8000 spots of archaeological observations are known by now. This provides a significant stock of information consisting of collected and catalogued finds and samples, written and illustrated documentation of observations as well as reports of special investigations and analyses.

In 1974 the National Board of Antiquities, Office for Prehistory, produced an extensive exhibition called ‘Kemijoki 8000’ based on the archaeological material gathered at the excavations carried out in connection with the construction of dams and hydroelectric power stations on the River Kemijoki. The exhibition had to be assembled and the exhibition guide compiled without adequate basic research.

In this unsatisfactory situation the work group headed by Dr. Aarni Erä-Esko, Curator, began to plan a research project called the ‘Early Settlement of North Finland’. A project plan was completed in 1976 but, unfortunately, it did not gain support and the whole idea ebbed away.

Almost twenty years – and a doubled stock of finds – later it was time to try again. A plan for a three-year project called ‘Early in the North’ was presented on the following grounds:

Over many years several millions of

Finmarks and immeasurable amounts of spiritual capacity have been invested in securing archaeological material from North Finland. However, there have been minor possibilities of processing material and publishing results. As long as the material lies stored, out of reach of both national and international research, the investment has been a waste. It is necessary to make an interim account in North Finnish archaeology. This would release the spiritual capacity to find fresh points of departure in furthering the archaeological activity in the region. It was also significant to see the importance of a multidisciplinary approach and to realise that the separation of a prehistoric period from a historical one is but a formal decision. Therefore the importance of the environmental disciplines on the one hand and ethnography/cultural anthropology and history on the other was underlined in the project plan.

The Academy of Finland, Council for Humanities, decided to support the Project for a three-year term 1995–1997 and the Alfred Kordelin Foundation supported the Project in 1994–1997. It has been possible to save part of the Kordelin money for use after 1997.

The Early in the North Project included the following programmes:

1. The Data Base Programme aimed at creating an archaeological data base for northern Finland.

2. The Dating Programme aimed at (a) collecting the radiocarbon dates of samples from northern Finland made so far and including them in the data base, and (b) having radiocarbon dates made of samples collected in order to enlighten certain chronological questions. Among other things, it was considered important to begin to create an independent ceramic chronology on the basis of AMS dates of charred crust found on potsherds.

3. The Archaeo-Osteological Programme aimed at (a) collecting the archaeo-osteological data available from northern Finland so far, and (b) having the remaining archaeo-osteological collections studied.

4. The Palaeoecological Programme aimed

at (a) collecting the palaeoecological data available from northern Finland so far, and (b) having certain interesting sites investigated.

5. The Publishing Programme aimed at (a) collecting an archaeological bibliography of northern Finland, (b) encouraging researchers in the archaeology and palaeoenvironment of northern Finland to publish results of their studies in article collections published by the Project, and (c) arranging seminars on the archaeology and palaeoenvironment of northern Finland.

The following is a short evaluation of the results.

1. A data base programme running on MS-DOS, called *Soar*, was originally developed by Timo Jussila (1987). For the Project, the programme was improved and applied to run on MS Windows 3.1 (Jussila 1998). Further development led to applications running on MS Windows 95, 98 and NT. Together with a manual, the database called NILI was experimentally made available as a CD-ROM (Carpelan & Jussila, eds., 2000a; 2000b). The programme itself, now called *SOAR/WIN*, is essentially developed on a PARADOX basis.

As to the contents of the NILI database, the 'register card file', including the basic record of 6260 archaeological contexts/observations with known coordinates, may be considered more or less complete up to the end of 1999. With the exception of the municipalities of Inari and Sodankylä the other cardfiles are more or less incomplete. It is also true that there may be mistakes in the records because it has not been possible to 'read proofs'. However, the data base is useful even as such and there are plans to put it on the web when certain copyright issues have been solved.

2. At the end of 2000 the 'radiocarbon dates cardfile' of the NILI data base included 740 radiocarbon dates from northern Finland. Most of the dating has been connected to excavations carried out by the National Board of Antiquities but also other institutions have submitted samples for dating. In the period 1994–1998 the Early in the North Project had no less than 115 samples dated. With few

exceptions, the dating was performed at the Dating Laboratory, University of Helsinki, Finland, directed by Dr. Högne Jungner. (See Carpelan 2003; Jungner 1998.)

3. Some of the archaeo-osteological materials collected at excavations in north Finland had been analysed already before the Early in the North Project started. The aim of the Archaeo-Osteological Programme was to go through and analyse the remaining collections. This was done by Dr. Pirkko Ukkonen (Dept. of Geology, Division of Geology and Palaeontology, University of Helsinki, Finland). She has also continued her work and produced comprehensive archaeozoological studies that shed light on the subsistence of the ancient societies (Rankama & Ukkonen 2001; Ukkonen 1997; 2003). Antero Hakala, Lic. Phil. (lecturer, Dept. of Zoology, University of Oulu, Finland), again, produced a deep going study of the origin and prehistory of the Fennoscandian reindeer with reference to the taxonomy and background in Glacial Europe.

4. The Palaeoecological Programme, consulting Dr. Sheila Hicks (Inst. of Geosciences, University of Oulu, Finland), carried out sampling at several spots in the municipality of Inari, North Lapland, and in the municipality of Suomussalmi, Northeast Finland. Detailed studies were made of samples from three sites in Inari (Carpelan & Hicks 1995; Hicks 1993; 1995; Hicks *et al.* 2003) and one in Suomussalmi (Lavento *et al.* 2003). In each case the aim of the palynological investigation was to try to find and study anomalies in pollen strata caused by human action. In addition the studied sediment profiles illustrate the whole or most of the Holocene vegetational history at the respective sites and so these studies contribute to the understanding of the palaeoenvironmental development in northern Finland.

In addition to the palaeoecological field studies a number of generalising articles on the palaeoenvironment in Lapland with surrounding territories were prepared and published, namely on the history of climate in northern Europe (Eronen 1997), the

Fennoscandian ice sheet and the deglaciation of Lapland (Hyvärinen 1997) and the vegetation history of Northern Finland (Hicks & Hyvärinen 1997). One article touched the study of macro-subfossil plant remains (Lempiäinen 1997) and another performed a geological survey as a background for archaeological interpretations (Rehell 1997).

5. Including this one, the publishing programme of the Early in the North Project has produced five volumes. Three of them are printed article collections (Helsinki Papers in Archaeology 10, 1997, and 11, 1998; Iskos 13, 2003) but the data base and its manual exist as a CD-ROM disc (Helsinki Papers in Archaeology 12, 2000).

The 'introductory volume' (Helsinki Papers in Archaeology 11, 1998) includes an article explaining the background, objectives and scope of the Project (Carpelan 1998b) and another defining the territory of the Project (Carpelan *et al.* 1998a) as well as a survey by several authors of the history of archaeological research in the area (Carpelan 1998a; Carpelan *et al.* 1998b; Forss 1998; Huurre 1998; Kehusmaa 1998; Koivunen 1998; Kotivuori 1998; Suominen 1998; Torvinen & Schulz 1998). The volume also includes descriptions of the archaeological data base and the radiocarbon dates file, both mentioned above (Jussila 1998; Jungner 1998). A paper on the use of GIS was included, too (Kirkinen 1998).

Actually, the second volume, "The Land", appeared first (Helsinki Papers in Archaeology 10, 1997). Most of the articles mentioned above are devoted to the palaeoenvironment (Eronen 1997; Hakala 1997; Hicks & Hyvärinen 1997; Hyvärinen 1997; Lempiäinen 1997; Rehell 1997; Ukkonen 1997). In addition, one article presents the archaeological finds in a selected area (Halinen 1997), another develops a model of the initial Postglacial settling of Finland (Nunez 1997) and the third is a survey of Arctic and Boreal ethnography as a source of information for archaeology (Kankaanpää 1997).

As already said, the data base and its manual were experimentally made available as a CD-ROM (Carpelan & Jussila, eds., 2000a; 2000b).

The publication of the volume at hand (Iskos 13, 2003) exhausts the funds of the Project. It is a collection of articles, which continues the multidisciplinary scope referred to above. In addition to this introductory text, the book includes seven articles. Three of them are archaeological with a clear connection to environmental questions, one is a combined environmental/archaeological study, two are purely environmental and one is a cultural anthropological review.

Sheila *Hicks*, Antti *Huttunen* and Raija-Liisa *Huttunen* (2003) present a sediment core taken from a small lake located in the municipality of Inari, North Lapland. The remains of a subrecent Saami winter-village had been found on the shore of the lake and the aim was to study the impact of the human activity on the local environment. It turned out that the core covered the entire Holocene period and this made the core a most important document of the vegetational history in the Lake Inari region (cf. Hyvärinen 1975; Sorsa 1965). The core revealed more than one horizon of anthropogenic disturbance.

Christian *Carpelan* (2003b) lists and comments on observations made and results obtained at environmental and archaeological investigations in the Inari region of northern Finnish Lapland. The leitmotif is to compare environmental and archaeological radiocarbon dates and outline sketches related to human presence in Inari.

Ari *Siiriäinen* (2003) returns to one of his old topics, the Neolithic and Early Metal Age settlement around the confluence of the Rivers Ounasjoki and Kemijoki at Rovaniemi, North Finland, and the reconstruction of the Kolpene palaeolake (Siiriäinen 1967; 1978; 1986). Since the mid 1980's, in addition to some palaeoecological work, much archaeological fieldwork has been done in the area and important new material has been collected. Siiriäinen makes a survey of all this and gives a summary of the present state of the topic.

The starting point for Christian *Carpelan*'s second article (2003a) is the unexpected find of sherds representing the Neolithic Corded Ware at the multiperiod dwelling site Niskala

1 close to Rovaniemi (Purhonen 1973) on the shore of the Kolpene palaeolake discussed by Siiriäinen (2003). This leads to the question of the spread of traits representing the Corded Ware Culture to northern Finland. Therefore it is necessary to deal with the appearance of the culture in South Finland and its spread towards the north as well as the spread of the corresponding culture in Sweden.

Mika *Lavento*, Raija-Liisa *Huttunen* and Antti *Huttunen* (2003) focus on the Ruhtinansalmi dwelling site complex near Juntusranta in the municipality of Suomussalmi, which is one of the best-known areas of prehistoric occupation in Northern Finland. The large archaeological material collected at numerous excavations indicates a more than 6000-year Prehistoric occupation period. The aim of the palynological investigation was to try to discern and date phases of anthropogenic evidence in pollen strata. The analysis shows that human influence on vegetation was minimal until the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD when Finnish new settlers established themselves in the area.

The history of the Finnish vertebrate fauna is little known because both fossil and subfossil remains are extremely scarce in Finland. In her article Pirkko *Ukkonen* (2003) tackles the problem using burnt bone remains from archaeological dwelling sites as source material. Within the frame of the Early in the North Project the main task of the osteological analysis has been to gain understanding of the general living conditions of prehistoric people in northern Finland, the resources available to them and their hunting and fishing habits and preferences at different times and localities.

In the concluding article Jari *Mäki* (2003) describes the seasonality and means of livelihood of the native peoples of the circumpolar area in historic times. The research material based on published sources consists of travel accounts, reports of government officers and explorers sent by fur companies, and ethnographic literature of the circumpolar area. The material goes back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the latest documents are from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when some of

the circumpolar peoples still relied on a subsistence economy, utilising recurrent natural resources and producing goods mostly for their own needs. Mäki's article is a complement to Kankaanpää's (1997) article mentioned above.

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