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A visit to Nasha and Dimas log cabin, part 1

27 Dec, 04 - 01:04

GPS-pos: N67°28' | E153°42' | Alt: 11 M

It is the 26th of December today and we're holed up in our little apartment here in Srednekolymsk. The temperature is a mere -26 °F, but there's a southwesterly making life fresh enough. Sufficient enough to give us a frostbite if not careful.

"I only work here", Nasha explains when I ask her how she ended up in this log cabin, "I cook for the guys. This is Dimas house."

We had almost scared the life out of her, when we turned up at Dimas tiny log cabin the other day, located 15 km:s south of Srednekolymsk. She was preparing a hare stew when we made our way into the cabin, dressed in our big down jackets, the big black facemask and greeted her in broken Russian. It took at least three minutes before she recovered from the chock of seeing us and suppressing her scream of fright.

"But I am born in Srednekolymsk, where my parents live", she continued, "but Dima lives here all the time."

Nasha had too many modern ways, so I had problems to understand why she choose to live in a tiny log cabin like this, working as a cook. Even though I was well aware of the lack of work to be found in Srednekolymsk. She was around 30 years of age, she was dressed in jeans and a skin vest and was very articulate and seemed well read and seemed to know about most things regarding what was going on in the outside world. She was half Russian and half yakut. Her place of work, Dimas cabin, was not only run down, it was also rather primitive, with an earth floor and polyethylene bags covering the windows. It seemed, contrary to what we were used to, disorganized, dirty and not well kept. Maybe due to the fact that 4 people were sharing it and that there was very little room to move about and store gear. The room in itself was not more than 40 square meters in size and the logs that made up the walls were covered by snares and fishnets. Fur clothes, boots and fur hats were drying on lines that crisscrossed the room. The only existing light in the darkness was 3 oil lamps which dimmed the room enough to see. The room was, to say the least, drafty. Small wooden bunks with moose skins as mattresses covered 3/4 of the walls and the stove and firewood the other part. But Nasha seemed to enjoy life. And when Dima showed up in thick fur clothes an hour later, she smiled heavenly, and then there was no doubt what had brought her out here from the civilization in Srednekolymsk, love.

"Did you catch anything today?" ,she asked Dima, who shook his head and said: "Not one single hare caught in the snares."

Dima shakes our hands with a strong grip, returns immediately outside and comes back in with a big frozen raw liver from the fish called Nalim. Our favorite snack, maxa. He chops it up in pieces, places it in front of us together with a plate of salt. He is as kind, friendly and warm as everybody else we've come across the Kolyma.

"Are you guys staying over night?" asks Nasha and when we ask if that is ok, she answers: "Not a problem at all, just asked to find out how much food I should prepare."

"You're are the skiers I suppose?" Dima asked, lit his fourth cigarette since coming in and there was no doubt that he was very fit, he was a lean yakut in my own age, 42, who survived entirely on hunting, trapping and fishing.

"I've heard you've cycled through the Sahara desert. What was that like?" he continued. There was no doubt that he had either read the local newspaper or heard about us through the grapevine.

"Hot" ,I answered and that made Dima laugh out loud in a way, making it easy to see that he like most other men along the Kolyma, lacked front teeth.

Too much smoking and too much sugar are the primary reasons. One little spoon of sugar in the tea is unheard of for the people living along the Kolyma, 3 or 4 big spoons is normal.

"I was a soldier in Mongolia during the Soviet epoch and I was stationed in the Gobi desert" , he told us, "so I understand very well."

"Did you suffer as much from the heat as the Caucasian Russians did?" I asked him quickly.

"I didn't suffer from the heat at all" ,he laughed, "but the Russians, they suffered all the time."

Many of the Soviet elite troops during the second World War consisted of yakuts. Both men and women. They were considered the hardest and toughest of all soldiers. A forth of all yakut soldiers lost their life due to this. Most women. There's a few monuments in Srednekolymsk honoring local heroes who died during that war.

Part two will tag on tomorrow.



Nasha at Dimas log cabin

Ett besök till Nasha och Dimas stuga

Det är annandag jul, 26 december, och vi befinner oss i vår lilla etta här i Srednekolymsk. Det är bara -32°C ute, men en liten iskall sydväst vind gör ett besök utomhus ganska friskt ändå. Fullt tillräckligt för att ge en lätt förfrysning. Om man inte passar sig.

"Jag jobbar här bara", förklarade Nasha på min fråga hur hon hamnat här mitt ute i denna ensliga vildmark, "jag lagar mat åt killarna. Det här är Dimas hus."

Vi hade nästan skrämt livet ur Nasha, när vi häromdagen dök upp i Dimas lilla jaktkoja, lokaliserad drygt 15 km söder om Srednekolymsk. Hon höll på att förbereda en hargryta, när vi klumpade in i våra stora dunjackor, våra skrämmande svarta ansiktsmasker och hälsade glatt på bruten ryska. Det tog säkert tre minuter innan hon hämtat sig från chocken och lyckats förtränga sitt skräckfyllda skrik.

"Men jag är född i Srednekolymsk, där mina föräldrar bor", fortsatte hon, "men Dima han bor här ute hela tiden."

Nasha var för modern att passa här ute, att jobba som husa, kändes det som. Det till trots att jag var medveten om den stora bristen på job inne i Srednekolymsk. Hon var säkert en 30 år, klädd i jeans, skinnväst och var en blandning av ryska och jakutiska. Hon uttryckte sig väl hela tiden, var nyfiken och verkade påläst om det mesta. Hennes arbetsplats, Dimas stuga, var ett oerhört litet arbetsställe. Och slitet. Det var jordgolv, fyra personer delade plats om detta lilla utrymme, kanske 40 kvadrat. Överallt hängde snaror, fiskedon, pälskläder, vadmalskläder, pälsmössor och skor på tork. Det enda ljus som fanns i vintermörkret var tre oljelampor och det var ordentligt dragit inne i stugan. Fyra små träbriksar täckta av älghudar tog upp 3/4-delar av väggutrymmet och kaminen och veden resten. Men Nasha verkade trivas. När Dima, i tjocka pälskläder, dök upp en timme senare log hon stort och det vara bara att inse att det var kärlek som hade lockat hit henne från civilisationen i Srednekolymsk.

"Fick du ingenting?", frågade hon Dima, som skakade på huvudet och svarade: "Inte en enda hare hade fastnat i fällorna." Dima hälsar med fast hand, återvänder direkt ut och kommer omgående tillbaka med en frusen rå lever från malfisken Nalim. Vår favoriträtt maxa. Han hackar upp den i bitar, sätter fram ett fat salt och serverar oss. Lika hygglig, trevlig och mänsklig som alla andra längs Kolyma.

"Sover ni över inatt?", frågade Nasha och när vi svarade om det gick bra, svarade hon: "Inga problem, bara så jag vet hur mycket mat jag skall göra."

"Det är ni som är skidåkarna?" ,frågade Dima, tände sin fjärde cigarett sedan han kom innanför dörren, och det var lätt att se att han var en mycket vältränad senig jakut i min egen ålder, 42 år, som helt levde på att jaga och fiska, och fortsatte:

"Jag hörde också att ni cyklat genom Saharaöknen. Hur var det då?"

"Varmt" ,svarade jag och Dima skrattade så man kunde se att han som de flesta andra män längs Kolyma saknade framtänder.

Alltför mycket socker och rökning är två av huvudorsakerna. Längs Kolyma har man inte bara en tesked socker i teet. Oftast 3 eller 4.

"Jag var soldat i Mongoliet under två år, under Sovjettiden, och var stationerad i Gobiöknen"" ,berättade Dima, "så jag förstår."

"Hade du några problem med värmen i jämförelse med ryssarna?" frågade jag snabbt.

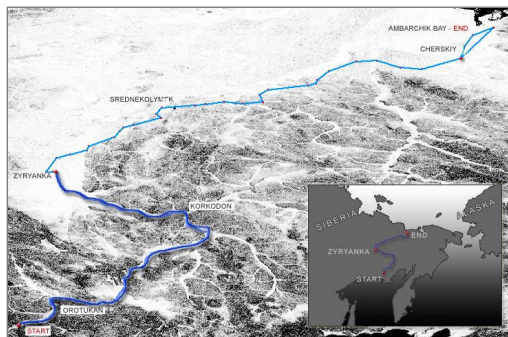
"Jag hade inga problem alls" ,skrattade han, "men ryssarna, de led hela tiden."

Flertalet av de sovjetiska elitsoldaterna under andra världskriget var jakuter. Både män och kvinnor. De ansågs de tuffaste av alla soldater. En fjärdedel av all jakuter fick sätta livet till, mest kvinnor, och i Srednekolymsk finns flera monument som hedrar traktens omkomna soldater.

Del 2 följer imorgon.

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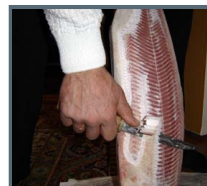
The yakut Valodja and the darkest day of the year 23 Dec, 04 - 22:03

It is the 23rd of December, a day after that the darkest day of the year appeared, and it is relatively mild out there, a mere -40°F, and Srednekolymsk is at peace. Hidden in, it feels like, a never-e

**Local cuisine & thoughts a propos Christmas** 22 Dec, 04 - 01:03

Written by Johan Ivarsson.

21st of December today and we're in our apartment in Srednekolymsk. It is warm today, only -33° F, but there's a nagging cold wind from the southwest and not one singl

**Alexei in Ambar** 19 Dec, 04 - 20:22

It is the 19th of December today and the temperature is a mere -49°F, and we're hiding indoors in our comfy little apartment in the yakut settlement of Srednekolymsk. We will stay 6 weeks here. There'



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