

Lapland 2011B; the whole text

When Anna and I had finished our winter ski hike in Swedish Lapland in April of 2011, we already planned a summer hike as well, to be conducted in August, in spite of all the damage to my toe nails from rented boots. The severe head winds made me so tired that I didn't notice the uncanny pressure I accidentally applied to my toes in my rented footwear during the incredible nine hours it took us on skis through the high winter winds from Abiskojaure to the Alesjaure huts; about 22 kilometers. I lost a few toenails, and they had barely grown back during my persistent disinfectant care over the months, when time came for the August adventure.

Our plan – which was a joint plan constructed from our two earlier individual sketches – was to start in Abisko, walk south a few kilometers and then divert up into the Ballinvággi Valley, move towards the Mårma Pass, across it, down to the Vistas hut, into the east inlet of The Unna Reaidávággi Valley, climb the Pyramid Pass and continue the entire Three Pass Trail across The Kaskasavagge (Gaskkasvággi) Valley and The Kuopervagge (Guobirvággi) Valley with their passes, the last being the Tarfala Pass, to the Tarfala hut, to finally end up in Nikkaluokta Village, the classic start or end of many a Lapland hike.

31 July 2011

I shared a six-bed compartment on the northbound train from Stockholm with a timid father and his two teenage sons and two guys that travelled together, one 66 year old Dutch environmental scientist who knew Swedish and a hardcore old-time communist from Stockholm in his 50s. They were all heading for Lapland hikes. The timid father quoted Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelöf at one time, with the line “varken varken eller eller” (“neither neither nor nor”), which startled me a bit.

We reached an understanding about a call for silence and sleep at 11 PM, and we all dozed off.

1 August 2011.

At about 7 AM the train pulled in to the Northbothnian town of Boden and screeched to a halt. I leaned out a window and saw Anna approaching up the platform along the train, and I shot a series of pictures of her carrying her backpack, until we were reunited after more than a month of physical separation. It was wonderful to be together again, and as passengers departed the train in Kiruna, we had a compartment all to ourselves the last part of the trip up to Abisko.

When we got off in Abisko, we immediately set out on the trail – The King's Trail (Kungsleden) – in solid, stable high-pressure weather. On and off we saw the timid father and his sons. They planned to hike to Kårsavagge (Gorsavággi) Valley via Abiskojaure. It was the premier hike for the teenagers, but the Ekelöf-quoting father had old experiences. Those apparently did not include mountain mist, though, because he had committed the deadly hiker sin of not bringing a compass!

When I stepped down to the Abiskojákká (Ábeskoeatnu) Canyon to fill my water flask, I also photographed some interesting and beautiful patterns in the flat bedrock by the rushing waters. Lapland hikes contain numerous discoveries of opposite magnitudes, from seemingly

unending sceneries across valleys and snowcapped mountains with hanging glaciers, to tiny, almost imperceptible flowers in all but nutrition-less cracks. Anna photographed me stooping wildly by the rushing current, photographing the rock face patterns.

The King's Trail is the most common Lapland trail, very secure, with regular huts where you can stay, cook your food and sleep in a bunk with lots of other folks doing the same thing, and all huts also have a host from STF, the Swedish Tourist Organization, and an emergency radio link connection, plus a helicopter pad right by. This means that The King's Trail is pretty crowded during the summer hiking season (July – September) and the winter skiing season (March – May), with a mixture of beginners and old folks that have decided on a relaxed hike through some of the most beautiful landscapes found in Sweden. The most common part of The King's Trail runs from Abisko in the very north, down south via the huts Abiskojaure – Alesjaure – Tjåktja – Sälka and Singi, where most people diverge from The King's Trail and conclude their hike with a dinner at the Kebnekaise Mountain Station, from where cheap helicopter bail-out to Nikkaluokta Village, where the road starts, is available. This most common section is called The Dag Hammarskjöld Trail, after the late Swedish General Secretary of The United Nations, who hiked these parts regularly, and also wrote a poetic and philosophical book with Lapland references, called *Markings (Vägmärken)*. Some quotes from this book are engraved on rocks placed at so-called meditation spots along the trail. This nature of The King's Trail makes the more experienced hiker a bit weary, so most seasoned hikers trail off The King's Trail into less traveled, more remote sections of Swedish Lapland, which is crisscrossed with rock desert valleys and high, glacier-shrouded mountains with steep passes, enough for a lifetime of discovery. In most parts there is no cell phone connection, so if you don't carry a satellite phone, you are left to your own judgment, if accident strikes. This, however, is part of the experience, since a total cut-off from society hardly otherwise ever happens in this orderly land, and therefore can be seen as a valuable add-on to our role as human beings on the planet. A special feeling is bestowed on you as you realize that not even one single mistake is allowed when you tread endless fields of rocks, because if you break an ankle, for example, you are stuck, and there is no telling when anyone is going to discover you, and the nature of the weather might be the one factor that decides whether you survive or perish. Of course, this is a clear indication that you should not go into these less traveled parts of Lapland all alone. If you hike with a companion, it might still take him or her a couple of days to reach a hut with an emergency phone to call the mountain rescue. However, with this as a backdrop for your hike, you value the beauty of the land and the wild desolation all the more. It's like reaching a long-lost condition of life, which, even though it is true also for the most urbanized fellow citizen of the world, is obscured and hidden in the modern world. This makes a good hike prime therapy for civilized man.

We stayed no longer than 5 necessary kilometers along the King's Trail. That's where an adjacent path diverts up to the left through the birch brush, zigzagging up the ascent. The day was warm; the sun was beating, so it became a sweaty endeavor. 3 kilometers up this trail we rose above the timberline and reached a place called The Tent Camp (Tältlägret). This used to be a place where people on short excursions from Abisko would go and camp the night in the 1940s, but these days it's simply a fitting place for having a break and a meal, before continuing up in The Ballinväggi Valley, or, for that matter, camp on level ground near the canyon with the fresh, rushing waters of Ballinjohka. Of course, one decisive pre-requisite for these Lapland hikes is the pristine, clean, mineral-rich waters in all the streams, which liberates you from the heavy burden of carrying your drinking water. You just fill up a flask so that it will last you till the next stream. The only water you should refrain from in Lapland is

non-flowing water and the water that comes directly from glaciers and show a grayish hue of too much sediment. Faucet water will taste lousy to you after a mountain hike!

Only last year – 2010 – the old but well-kept cot was still in place, with its photograph of the Swedish king visiting, but when Anna and I arrived, it was leveled, apparently by fire.

We rested and ate at The Tent Camp, where after we chose one of the various paths heading further up into the wide inlet of The Ballinvággi Valley. Rising up the semi-rocky slope, the paths lost their distinction in the landscape, but this had no relevance, since the direction was obvious anyway, like almost everywhere in Lapland, through valleys between high mountains. We kept the Ballinjohka rapids to our right up the ascent, as we reached the top of small rocky ridges, each time thinking we approached the watershed divide, while we actually were coming across a waveform of ridges up ahead, making us wet from sweat and tired, as most of this ascent was executed, in addition, along a slope towards the Ballinjohka stream at the bottom of the canyon to our right, straining our left feet at the ankle.

However, after straining hard (we had expected nothing less), we reached the watershed divide, and could look into a beautiful, green valley with numerous, small, shallow streams in a delta cutting through a lavishly green meadow-like terrain, unexpected and unusual in the mostly rocky and almost desert-like landscapes of high-altitude Lapland.

To our right we saw the mighty Tjåmuhas (Coamohas) Mountain towering at 1743 meters, and at left stood Pallentjåkka (Ballinčohkka) at 1523 meters, with an even higher summit further ahead at 1737 meters. A certain inflation comes with the expression, but this area really constituted an unexpected Shangri-La in the barren wilderness.

We crossed a few of the winding shallow streams, to reach an especially green and meadow-like patch of grass in the midst of the valley, towards the south of its length. It could not be called fording, because the streams were so tiny, like the ones you find at Sälka. There we pitched our tents. We had decided to live in separate tents, to have more freedom of space, so I used my Hilleberg Nallo 2, and Anna brought her smaller Hilleberg Akto, both tents red, shining like alien signposts in the pristine wilderness.

In the night I did feel some pain in one of my knees. That worried me for a while, but after consuming a painkiller I fell back asleep, and the pain subsided. I think my backpack weighed about 22 or 23 kilos, with the food to last me through all the days we would not pass a hut where provisions were held on stock, and with cooking utensils, sleeping bag and the tent. That is not especially heavy, even though my comfort weight lies below 18 kilos, and it is obvious that the same weight sometimes feels heavy and strains back and knees, while it's hardly sensed at all on other days, depending on mental and physical alertness.

2 August 2011

The morning was incredibly beautiful and warm, as soon as the sun hit. The moment the sun reached above The Pallentjåkka (Ballinčohkka) mountain and hit the tent, the temperature rose within minutes, making it really warm inside. We got out, had breakfast, got our stuff together in our backpacks and were on our way, after I had photographed a swarm of insects that settled on my pile of droppings a few hundred meters from the tent. Looking down the valley in our direction of motion, we saw the Ballinriehppi Glaciers and a long, narrow snowfield in the bending canyon that lead the glacier melting water down into Ballinvággi's south end.

We continued south through Ballinvággi, looking to reach the 90-degree angle valley to the right (west) that has no name, and which would take us between mighty, dramatic giants of the earth; Tjåmuhas (Coamohas) (1743 meters) and Ballinbogičohkka (1661 meters), to the Šiellavággi Valley. We arrived at the valley inlet, after having spotted some reindeers high up on a gravely tilting snowfield up a dizzying slope.

This short (2 – 3 kilometers) unnamed valley contained a mix of rockier sections and grass moor, and in the midst we found a little hill that looked like, perhaps, the overgrown remains of an end moraine. However, on studying this geological formation, it appears that, according to Claes Grundsten (who has written priceless hiking guides to Lapland), it in fact constitutes a collapsed pingo, a hydrolaccolith, i.e. a high gravel hill with a constant ice core, that belongs to the arctic regions of the planet.

As the cross-valley was about to open up into The Šiellavággi Valley, we came upon the reindeer herder hut that sits there. It was smaller on closer examination than it had appeared from a distance, and locked. Proportions are hard to determine in the mountains, and you often misjudge size and distance. We sat down for a rest and a power bar, before turning south-east into Šiellavággi, high up on its northern side, which tilted hard into the deep canyon of The Šiellajohka River. I felt the load of my backpack, and didn't feel fresh at all, so I had a hard time appreciating the beautiful views down toward The King's Trail north of Abiskojaure, where Anna and I had skied in April, and up the way we were heading, with equally beautiful highland views. Anna was fresh and strong, though and kept spirits high and soaring.

We kept moving easterly in Šiellavággi, kilometer after kilometer, in the increasingly rocky terrain, past a few lakes, and finally in between the dramatic towers of Hongá (1720 meters) and Šiellačohkka (1647 meters) Mountains, where the descent into The Alisvággi Valley with The Aliseatnu River commenced. The view behind us out west along the valley was beautiful, with white cloud puffs sailing above the wild and also green and kind land.

The pass threshold at the eastern end of Šiellavággi rests at 1135 meters. We inched through that section and began descending. The view across the lakes to the right (west) – Bieggaluoppal and Áhpparjávri among others – was astounding after the tight and closed-in feeling of the valley we just came out of, and the view in the opposite, easterly direction was equally hypnotic across Aliseatnu River, winding into the distance, with The Alip Vealevárri Mountain striving skywards some kilometers away. We tried to make out the outlet of the Vierrojohka Canyon, where we eventually would trek upwards toward the legendary and somewhat scary Mårma Pass.

I had read on a Swedish hiking forum (Utsidan) that the descent into Alisvággi was the trickiest part of the Mårma Trail experience, so I was apprehensive, but it was a piece of cake, all in all. The terrain was forgiving and generous, with green grass terraces, which you descended along, with admittedly steep parts in between, but never once with a feeling of danger or too much strain. In short, the descent was a happy and very beautiful one. The Siellacohkka summit soared high above, behind to the right, at 1647 meters.

We reached the trail down in Alisvággi as it snaked through the terrain just by a small lake, and made its way through the tough osier underbrush, and we moved along it, relieved to actually have a real path to keep to!

At about 6:30 PM we met a man and a woman with four dogs; three of them carrying quite big bags, strapped across their backs. They had flown with a helicopter to Mårma, and walked from there.

The trail didn't give much relief, though, as it were, because the osier was hard as hell to squeeze through, and the air was crowded with really mean gnats that dug into our skin everywhere they could; there were poisonous clouds of them. With the reindeer herder hut with its white roof visible below, about a kilometer away, and the bridge across Aliseatnu sensed a bit further down, we had to give up the ambition to reach the river crossing that night, and in severe haste we pitched our tents in an all but ideal position on a slope with a view across the river valley, ate something and retreated into our sleeping bags. Anna could have continued on down, but I was simply too worn out from the day. I'm sure, after this physically tough hike, that the ten years between us – I'm 62 and she 52 – actually means something. This realization has come hard, because I haven't been too keen on accepting that age might mean some kind of physical weakening, but as I repeatedly, during Anna's and my 2011 summer hike reached well into, and even beyond, my physical limits, I have to confess that I'm headed for an aged land, like everyone else allowed into that obscure nation populated by old folks.

3 August 2011

We woke in our tents, had a quick breakfast, recalling the gnat plague from the night before – which wasn't as severe in the morning – and were on our way at the beginning of yet a beautiful, sunny day. The path went on through the thick brush, barely making it possible for us to get through, the backpacks getting caught in the troll arm branches of the mountain birches which were added to the hassle of the underbrush, but since we were stuffed with fresh breakfast energy, we were down by the reindeer herder hut in a jiffy and soon after that by the hanging bridge across Aliseatnu River, and across it.

We consulted our map and found the most decent path to follow around an elevation and up to the right (south) along the Veirrojohka River in The Vierrovággi Valley. We worked our way down a sandy path along the steep slope toward the river at the bottom of the canyon, until we came upon the bridge that took us across to the left (east) side of Vierrojohka, where we would stay all the way up to the Mårma Cabin, about ten kilometers up ahead, all the time climbing, sometimes slightly, other times wildly.

The waters rushed madly through the rapids, drowning out any other sound, making it hard even to talk. We surely felt the spirit of the wilderness up along that river with raging glacier water, originating up above in the massive Moarhmmábákti Glacier.

I felt the weight of the backpack paining me, and didn't do much talking this day; just walking and trying to make things work in spite of the discomfort. Anna and I usually do a lot of talking, so the contrast was well contoured!

Anna massaged my upper back at one time when I got cramps, managing to relieve me of the pain.

We stopped by a rock by the river at noon and cocked our lunch. This helped, and I felt more energy seeping into my arms and legs.

We looked ahead to a canyon that connected from the left, with water up from the vicinity of The Vierroçohkka Mountain Range. This was the halfway mark to The Mårma Cabin, and

when we reached and crossed it, without any real fording; just jumping from stone to stone, we felt relief in store for us, although we couldn't yet see the cabin.

At one section we had to climb across rocks right down by the rushing waters, below a sharp incline where big stones were sticking out of the sand, ready to fall. They seemed so loosely fit into the sand that even a gust of wind would break them loose, and all the while it was impossible to keep a watch up the precipice, since we had to see where we placed our feet. It was a nerve-racking few minutes until we got past that place.

At 5:30 PM we reached the Mårma Cabin. Nobody was there, which was lucky for us, since the cabin only sports two bunks. An hour later a father and two young kids came by, the father cursing at his bad luck, but pitched a large, nice Hilleberg tent close by at a designed, stone-liberated area. A couple in their late twenties came from the opposite direction, from the Mårma Pass, heading on down the canyon toward Alisvággi. The lady was very talkative, and eased our Mårma Pass apprehension, telling us that anyone with normal fitness could climb it without any problems. They had tented by The Vássačorrojávri Lake above The Vistasvággi Valley, and had come all that way that day.

Anna went down to check the water in the rapids below the hut, but it proved much too sediment-rich, and was unusable. Instead, after being tipped-off by the young couple, I went up ahead along Vierrojohka, and about five minutes away I found a tiny trickle of fresh water across the bedrock, which collected into a minuscule stream with an equally minuscule waterfall, about a couple of decimeters high, behind a stone inside a crack in the bedrock. I removed, with most of my strength, the stone that obscured the access, and placed my flask, and then Anna's, in the mini-fall, thus collecting the necessary amount of water for our food and drinking needs.

We had moved into the Mårma hut, but it proved rather inhospitable. The small window had been broken, and a doubled piece of felt had been nailed across the opening to keep the cold air out, but it also kept the light out, so if you closed the door, it got dark and you had to use your headlamp. The bunks, though, were new and looked and felt nice, and there were pretty fresh mattresses to use too.

I decided to slip into my sleeping bag and rest for a while, and so I did, with the door open. Anna, always with extra strength in store, went for a climbing excursion instead, scrambling up the closest mountain. After a while I could see her from my horizontal position in my sleeping bag on the bunk, as she was moving high up along the ridge like a stick figure.

At this time I made a lousy discovery. When I removed my socks I saw that a couple of my toes were about to lose their nails, just like a few months before, in April when we skied. I have a couple of hammer toes that are easily affected by pressure, and for which I stand in surgery line, but I thought I had prevented this damage now by using elastic rubber protectors. So much for that. The nails get loose at the cuticle, are lifted off from the back, and cause inflammation, or, if you're in bad luck, infection. I felt really agonized, and told Anna on her return from the mountain that I might have to cut my participation in our hike short and fly out from the next hosted hut we would pass, which would be Vistas. I had no idea how this would develop, but I knew that we had a hard hike ahead, which would require healthy feet at the very least, to be successful. Anna suggested, in case things got worse, that she could hike to Vistas herself and call for a helicopter from there to pick me up at Mårma. Vistas would be the closest manned hut with an emergency radio link, a full day's hike away. In the other

direction, Alesjaure or Abiskojaure would be two full days away. There is no cell phone connection in these areas.

I sat down to apply disinfectants and pledgets to the wounded toes, and then we went to sleep.

4 August 2011.

I slept badly. Ominous dreams hijacked my senses in the Mårma night, and I woke early and looked out, only to find a grey, cool, damp morning, clouds hanging down to the ground, obscuring the view towards the pass in a dreaded grey scale.

However, when we were ready to leave at 7.30 AM, after Anna's mini hike to get breakfast water, it once again became a beautiful day. The clouds disappeared, and the fog dissipated. The air felt amazingly fresh to breathe, and had a comfortable, cool hiking temperature.

The Mårma Pass was about three kilometers away. We could already see it, though we didn't realize at that point that what we saw was the pass. It looked more like a high steep ridge across the land.

My feet didn't hurt much, so my first go at them, medically, seemed to have worked. My goal, though, was, at this stage, only to be able to get to Vistas, to perhaps fly out. It was a monster hike there; I knew that, so I could hardly imagine that my feet'd be walkable after that.

We set out toward our longed-for and apprehended and a little feared first goal of the day; The Mårma Pass; a name with an ominous ring to it. I had heard other hikers on other hikes before explain how almost impossible this pass was, how gruesome and incredibly steep and dangerous. On the other hand, I'd never heard of anyone getting hurt on it. Another strange factor about Mårma is the lack of photographs from the actual ascent (or descent). No matter how much I searched the Internet, I could not find any photographs that showed the difficulties. However, I, and also Anna, independently of each other, had found one incredibly detailed Internet account of how to climb Mårma, but it is almost so detailed that you lose yourself in it because of that! We both brought a printout of that account though. We read it at www.trekkingpath.com.

Anna carried an extra two kilos this day, from The Mårma hut to the pass. She decided to carry my tent that distance to relieve my wounded toes some. This was very generous of her, because even though her backpack was a few kilos lighter than mine, she was afflicted by back- and hip problems that would flare up at times. For me it proved a true relief, though, those kilometers, and I regained some spirit in the process.

The sun was beating down, but it was cool and nice and no wind. We moved across the rocky landscape up the left (east) side of a stream that originates by a mountain simply named after its elevation; 1468. A long, wide snowfield covers the stream for a while, and we saw footprints on it. We decided, though, to walk a little further and round it across rocks at its beginning, to avoid the tiny, but still risk, of falling through.

Before we started the approach to the actual, real live Mårma Pass, I fastened my tent again on my backpack. We each had a power bar and water, before hitting it. At 9:50 AM we stepped on to the Mårma Pass in perfect weather conditions, and in good spirits. We had been

waiting for this moment for years. We got on to the rocky wall before us, which disappeared up out of view.

It was steep, for sure, and you immediately felt like combining the thrust of one of the walking sticks with a firm grip around a rock with the other hand. This way we zigzagged ourselves up to a certain elevation on what sometimes looked like a path, because smaller pebbles and even gravel had been left in a zigzagging line when many feet had pushed the larger pebbles and stones to the side on ascending and descending.

It was clear from the very start that this had to be a very, very slow ascent because it was so steep that you would exhaust yourself shortly otherwise. Accordingly we climbed a few steps, maybe four, five meters of elevation, and then stopped to rest and breath and look around, and sometimes sip some water. To make sure, I had poured my protein powder from a flask into a double plastic bag, to have two full flasks of water on the ascent. I expected water to be scarce at the top of the pass, and water is something you don't want to lack in these circumstances!

I had also definitely decided to do what nobody else seemed to have done, i.e. shoot a number of photographs around me on the way up. I did. The reason for hikers not to take pictures at the Mårma ascent may well be that all their energy goes into the climb, which, if you try to do it continuously, will drain your strength. The way we did it, admittedly under perfect conditions (weather, temperature, visibility), step by step, made the ascent quite easy, and because we stopped so often we didn't even sweat! The ease at which we rose up this dreaded wall surprised and elated us, and when we looked back from half way up, a magnificent view across the canyon we'd arrived through, all the way down from Alisvággi, opened its beauty to us without restrictions. We did feel a little like flies on the wall, though, 'cause you couldn't see the way down, nor up, since the wall curved in below and above. At no time did it feel dangerous though. It was just a matter of finding the best way up, and most of the time there were cairns to guide you; at times even a couple of alternate ones, giving you options.

To the right (west) we saw the mighty Moarhmmá Glacier, and across the tongue of the glacier, facing us when we turned around, the beautiful, cut-through, rising ridge leading up to Moarhmbákti's two summits at 1810 and 1888 meters.

The high plateau that the Mårma Pass is part of, as the northern access ascent to it, is called Ruomasçorru, and Tore Abrahamsson, in his book *This Is Kebnekaise*, simply states that: "the steep ascent over The Ruomasçorru Ridge is a trial" while Claes Grundsten calls The Mårma Pass "a challenge for strong hikers" The fact that we found it so easy may be a combination of our apprehension (we had expected something worse), the weather (perfect conditions) and our step-by-step method of rising up the wall. It would have been quite much trickier to descend, though, when orientation is much harder, and the dizzying sense of height and a wall that curves in under you are annoying parameters, not to talk about how it would appear in bad weather.

At 11:00 we got onto the top of the pass, happy as jesters, celebrating with cool water and power bars. We saw the top marker – a big cairn – a few hundred meters to our right, so we walked over there and had us photographed! The time was 11:30 AM, and we stood in awe of the beautiful west horizon with an array of sharp, snow-clad mountains - and one mesa mountain, with a wide, flat summit - some of which must be Norwegian.

To the south, in our hiking direction, another, equally amazing view opened on us, indescribable in its visual bliss, with lakes, mountains, snow fields and glaciers.

We began the descent into what has been characterized as Lapland's largest rock field; about a square kilometer of rocks of varying sizes, some as large as Volkswagens; others of more timid dimensions. Looking out across these barren lands I was thinking about future expeditions to planet Mars, perhaps in thirty years from now.

To the left (east) across the wastelands, we could make out the Vistasjohka delta all the way down by Nikkaluokta Sami Village far away.

Down ahead, on the far side of the huge field of rocks, we saw the two lakes we were supposed to aim for in our crossing, and the greenish hill by them that we would rise above after that. This was still hours away though, and we began the descent from Mårma on its south side at 11:45 AM. It was steep indeed, and extremely rocky, with boulders of a size that are hard to engage, simply because they're so large and massive, with lots of air in between them; gaps that you're not allowed slipping into. That is one aspect of mountain hiking that is always with you; that you can't make even one single mistake! Concentration and focus are lightning sharp during these passages, and that drains you more than pure physical workouts.

After managing the straining distance across, we arrived at the stream from the lake just below the small glacier that clung to the steep incline of the east side of Vássačohkka Mountain. We drank and filled our water flasks. That's when we noticed a band of reindeer way up high on that steepness, moving along seemingly easily, on a slant that looked quite dangerous, as if death lurked around those reindeer unknowingly to them. We watched them for a long time as they moved across the danger zone way up. They made it across, and finally disappeared onto the dark color of rocks, where we couldn't make them out anymore. Time was 1:20 PM when we reached the stream on the south side of the rock field.

We continued now up a moderate slope, grassy with inserted rocks here and there, and Anna referred to Irish landscapes. It was a relief from all the grayness and rockiness for sure, and on the south side of this green hill we had our lunch and a long break, and I also tended to my feet again. They kept up unexpectedly good.

After lunch we got on our way, aiming down toward a strip of dry land between the last of the larger lakes of that valley and the final, very small lake. There are four lakes in that valley, two larger and two small. The larger one we'd pass by is called Vássajávri, and I hear people sometimes tent by it. We met nobody, though, this whole long day.

After passing between those lakes, we engaged an incline again, up around the Vássanjunji Mountain. The views from up there were strictly incredible, as we could see clear down to Nikkaluokta in the east. Looking back from where we'd come was just as breathtaking, as we could take in the whole distance from the Mårma Pass, with the descent from its south side, the huge rock field, the Irish hill and the descent from that, and the ascent to where we were – in just one glance.

A large band of reindeer came charging down right on the contour of Vássanjunji in a long, graphically perfect line on the snow, not far away, as we rounded the mountain. These sceneries with reindeer against steep snowy slopes, or along lofty ridges, reminded me of the pictorial art of late Sami artist Nils-Aslak Valkepaää, as they're shown in his book *Vidderna inom mig* (The Expanses Within)

As we came around the bend, so to say, we started receiving the thrilling view westward into Vistasvággi Valley, with the mountains Reaiddácohkka, Siehtagas, Cogwheel Ridge (Kugghjuls-kammen) and Pássustjåkka (Bossoscohkka), and the lake Vássaloamijávri reflecting the sky closer, down below us.

Our best bet was to descend down to the lake and then follow a supposed trail west by it and further on all the way to The Vistas Hut. It was a long, patience-trying descent on grassy slopes. The length of it tried our ankles and calves to the utmost but down we came. Anna had volunteered to carry my tent again after the passage of the Mårma Pass, and it helped my wounded toes greatly, but unfortunately she suffered from it the day after.

We finally had descended all the way down to Lake Vássaloamijávri at circa 5:30 PM, and began looking for the trail that guide books talked about without making it out in the flat, grassy landscape. It didn't matter, since the direction was evident, so we strolled westward along the north side of the lake, and on an elevation at the end of it, we found a cairn, and shortly there after the trail, running nicely westward as the view into Vistasvággi and Stuor Reaiddávággi with our so meaningful Nallo mountain opened majestically in the backlight. Anna and I had first met at The Nallo Hut in the summer of 2009, and talked some about The Sielmmavággi shortcut between Nallo and Tjåktja, but then we parted without further do, and met again, incredibly, in 2010, also at Nallo, without having had any contact in between. Then we hiked together to The Unna Räita cabin. I stayed the night there, and Anna went back to Nallo to continue the next day up in Šielmmavággi, but she wrote me an email, and we began corresponding, finding so many corresponding views of life and specific interests and convictions – and a strong, common attraction to each other! - that we finally became a couple. Here we were now in 2011, getting that old Nallo peak in sight. It felt magic.

We were getting seriously tired and worn out at this point, because we had already done a monster of a hike since morn, concerning the ascent up The Mårma Pass, the descent from it, the crossing of the rock field, a couple of other ascents and then the really significant descent into the Vássaloamijávri Valley, and now we were about to descend on The Vistas Hut, which we could see far below from a small, flat plateau by the path.

After the open, grassy part from Vássaloamijávri Lake, we now had to push our way through a dense mountain birch forest clinging to the slope like a green, fluffy mattress. This was where Anna began hurting from her back, and I attached my tent to my backpack again. My toes seemed to make it through well, against the odds, but we were both wasted at this stage, hardly making it down the steep, winding, narrow path going straight down through the mess of crooked, small mountain birches grabbing at our backpacks.

On a level part on the slope we met an older lady with a nice, friendly face and a smile, out to pick cloudberries (hjortron). She was the Vistas hostess, and I recognized her, from having met her when she was the hostess of The Kaitumjaure Hut, some years ago. She greeted us friendly and told us already up in the forest which part of the hut to use, so we made it on down there with some more mental energy.

The path from Mårma takes you half a kilometer past the Vistas Hut, connecting to the trail from Alesjaure 500 meters west of the hut, so when we got to the intersection, we knew we were almost home free.

The hostess was already back when we arrived, having taken a steep shortcut, and she told us to take it easy and get in order and regain our strength, so we got into the left (south) part of the hut, where just one Irish tenter was making his food. Indeed we were also tenters, but had decided to stay inside the huts we eventually would pass, to get some really good rest and relaxation, and after the day's extra long and strenuous hike we sure could use some comfort and rest; our bodies were screaming for it.

The hostess came and talked with us, telling us she appreciated that people that came from Mårma were "tough hikers", making comparisons to folks she met during her King's Trail days, and she furthermore branded us "toughies from Mårma"

It felt good that someone actually would understand the strain it had taken to get us through the day, and somehow this hostess represented the best possible characteristics of someone in her position, encouraging us, making us feel comfortable and proud, and not getting in our face, never interfering, just making us feel good, even serving us glasses of cold juice on arrival!

I went over to the stream behind the bushes to wash up, and we didn't stay up long. Sleep came like a wonderful liberator.

5 August 2011

Our plan had originally been to hike up to The Unna Råita Cabin and The Pyramid Pass via the eastern part of The Unna Reiddávággi Valley, but Anna's back was hurting badly, from carrying too heavy a load the day before (my tent), and my toes could use a break, so we decided to go for a rest day and just hike the easy 9 kilometers up to The Nallo Hut and stay the night, to approach The Pyramid Pass the following day, rested and full of energy.

However, I needed some time to get the messy contents of my backpack in order. I had in fact simply emptied my pack and shoved the stuff under my bunk the night before. Anna was always extremely quick to get in order, but I sensed I didn't have time to think, so I applied for a hold-up of action until about noon, which the lady graciously granted!

We purchased a lot of needed provisions at the Vistas Hut, since we were low on almost everything. I gave up my ambition not to drink coffee during this hike, which was an offspring of the desire to keep weight low, and bought a glass jar of instant coffee, which I emptied into two super thin plastic bags; one within the other.

After I'd gotten my utensils, clothing and the whole lot of equipment together in the backpack and hoisted it out of the hut, and we'd eaten our breakfast and cleaned up after ourselves, we were just about ready to leave. I shot some pictures of Anna and the hostess on the steps in the sun. The hostess happened to live not all that far from Anna, up in Northbothnia, in a place called Lapträsk.

Right about then five young people came up to the open space in front of the hut. Four of them hiked together, but one young man ventured the wilderness alone, and had a story to tell, to explain his possession of an old, rusted helmet from the war, which he carried in his backpack, in spite of the added weight, and which he displayed for us. It certainly had the wings of history flap over these lands.

He explained that he'd come charging down The Kaskasavagge (Gaskkasvággi) Valley, into the Vistasvággi Valley, heading for the Vistas Hut. As he rambled under Mount Njunni he

discovered that he'd lost his map. This can be fatal in these areas, or at least make things harder and more insecure. He went looking for the map, and somehow, in the process, lost track of the trail, but the logical thing would be that the trail through Vistasvággi would be coming at a 90 degree angle at him if he just kept on hiking straight down in Vistasvággi. The Kaskasavagge Trail that he'd followed had turned left (west) when he went straight down (north) to connect to the Vistasvággi Trail. The problem, though, was that the terrain in his direction turned quite ugly, with dense osier and wet marshlands, and the trail he was looking to reach ran along the other side of the river Vistasjohka, which can't be forded, being too wide and wild.

As he fought his way through these circumstances he discovered that he'd come to a small hut called Lisa's Cabin. It lies right on the river, and has its own story. Somewhere in the surrounding marsh he found that soldier's helmet that he, in spite of his dire situation, put into his pack! What better way can it be for me to hail that beautiful madness than naming this story after this helmet! Thus the story got its title; Lisa's Helmet Hike!

I photographed the young man wearing the helmet, giving me a soldier's greeting, with Anna equally alert beside him!

It was a quarter past noon, and Anna and I moved out across the red hanging bridge, in the direction of Nallo. I felt strong and jolly, eagerly conversing and singing, while it was Anna's turn to feel tired and pained. We both appreciated the fact that the hike for the day was short and well known to us since earlier hikes, and the wonderful weather kept on being sunny and clear, with an irregular distribution of white, puffy clouds to render some shade now and then.

The scenery on a sunny, clear day from Vistas to Nallo is magnificent, magic, as if taken out of The Lord of The Ring, with chunks of rock and shapes of mountains unimaginable. The Cogwheel Ridge (Kugghjulskammen) seen from the south from down in The Stuor Reaidávággi Valley throws your imagination into turmoil, awakening all the scary and wonderful fairytales of your childhood.

We had a first short break in the heat at 2 PM, with the Nallo needle towering in the distance. Nallo indeed spells "needle" in the Sami language.

The first fording place, which most of the time constitutes nothing but easily engaged streams or trickles, was somewhat stronger this day, and demanded some extra care in the balancing, but nothing major occurred.

At about 4 PM we had a second break. Anna was feeling pretty bad, but trudged along anyway, showing the kind of determination and fighting spirit that I like so much in her.

The familiar outline of The Tjåktjatjåkka (Čeakčačohkka) summits rose higher as we drew closer, and soon we made out the Nallo hut with outhouses.

At 5 PM we waded the wide stream from up in Šielmmávággi, rounding the hut and finally approaching it from below, where it lies on top a little hill in the midst of the valley. We held hands walking up to the hut, feeling the significance of the place; Nallo in the wilderness, where our love story began; where we met in 2009 and then in 2010, now going there together in 2011.

The host (proving to be a hostess) was out on a day hike, so we chose a room, or rather a section with four bunks and a curtain that could be pulled, making the area feel separate from

the kitchen, and placed our backpacks there. I pulled out my sleeping bag and placed it on the same bunk where I slept last summer. We got that whole part of the hut to ourselves; a rare luxury that had been bestowed on us back in Vistas as well.

When we were ready for some coffee and tea I shot a few pictures of Anna sitting by the kitchen window at the very place she occupied last year when I asked her if I could photograph her and she said it was ok so long as I didn't publish it on the Internet. I recalled that I'd thought that she was one of those shy and perhaps even paranoid types that hailed privacy first of all, but that, of course, proved all wrong down the line! Now she's the lady that teaches me how to ride a horse up in Northbothnia, and the one that gives me chores on her estate, the one that shares my bed and my kitchen table, the one whose hair spreads across her pillow "like a sleepy golden storm" as Leonard Cohen put it.

The hostess, who had returned from a day hike back and forth to The Unna Råita Hut, came by to collect the fee. She was a 54 year old lady with blonde hair and a healthy apparition, looking about 40. We only found out about her age because when asked how long she'd been a hostess she answered "thirty years"... Some people really retain their youth visibly; others hidden behind wrinkles!

Anyway, we also discussed our planned hike for the next day, which was to walk to The Unna Råita Hut and then, after a meal, climb The Pyramid Pass between The Pyramid Mountain and The Knife's Edge Mountain (Knivkammen), as part of The JoJo Trail, or, as it is also called, The Three Pass Trail.

The hostess discouraged us a bit when she told us that she'd met some seasoned mountain people that same day over by The Unna Råita Hut – among them a glaciologist – who'd told her that one could not climb The Pyramid Pass now, because high temperatures had molten away the layer of snow on the glacier ice more than usual. I knew what she talked about, because I had seen that steep, curving wall of a glacier a few times before, with lots of snow, and with less. I had actually done the dreaded and loved Three Pass Trail once before, with a German guy I met in the mountains, but the opposite direction, from Tarfala to Unna Råita. That was in 2008, and I climbed down the Pyramid Pass in good snow, and with my crampons mounted. It had been a very lofty and somewhat scary experience, but not hard, since the snow covered the ice good and gave your boots – even without crampons – a firm grip on the incredible steepness that curved down and out below you like the inside of a bowl. Last year, though I met a couple of North American (USA and Canada) nature scientists (South American insects, among other things) who had just come that way. That man and woman had climbed The Pyramid Pass on the rocks to the right of the ice, and didn't think much about it, so maybe our anticipation, based on hard stories told us, was un-called for. We'd see. The Nallo hostess was very interested in getting information about whether we succeeded up the pass or not, for technical and informative purposes, so I thought we'd try to contact her later with the news, somehow.

At 10 PM I photographed the shadows of mountains on the mountains around The Nallo Hut and the red-capped summits in the low sunlight. We read our books in bed half an hour after that; I Haruki Murakami's short story collection *After The Quake*, and Anna Deepak Chopra's *SynchroDestiny* in a Swedish translation.

6 August 2011

The day dawned in some mist, but it seemed to rise, so chances were good it would dissipate later in the day. Same thing happened last year, as Anna and I had done our first common hike, to The Unna Räita Hut.

We left Nallo at about 7:30 AM.

After we'd made some gain on the slow incline along the stream from Lake Reaiddájávri, the Nallo needle became visible through an opening on high in the rolling mist behind us, in a magical or shamanistic view.

We forded the stream and headed up the moderate but draining ascent into The Unna Reaiddávággi Valley, first on grassy land with sprayed small rocks, and then on terraces of flat, water-ground bedrock. The weather cleared up good, and sheer beauty appeared all around; snow-capped mountains, glaciers, streams. The Tjåktjatjåkka (Čeakčāčohkka) Mountain and The Čeakcabákti Glacier were especially distinctive features behind us, back across Stuor Reaiddávággi Valley.

At about 10 AM we'd come as far as the giant end moraine of the unnamed glacier that clings to the steep slope below The Sentry Mountain (Vaktposten). It contains an icy core that never melts, and according to Claes Grundsten, it's one of the biggest moraine ridges in Lapland.

The heavy stillness of the wild and ragged landscape of Lapland appears to be the result of either fearsome forces that were in play long ago, or occurrences that are so slow that you don't notice, like glacier motion or erosion. Sometimes, though, you hear the ice cracking deep down in a glacier, or see a rock tumbling down a precipice, and you begin to appreciate the mountain dynamics, of which the now is a snapshot of time itself. Otherwise it is water, of course, that gives you a more direct feeling of changes, as a minuscule trickle in the morning can turn into a wild torrent in the afternoon, as a result of rainfall somewhere up in the mountains.

We found some considerable snowfields along the giant end moraine, which we thankfully treaded, temporarily liberated of the rocks. We noticed at this time, about 10:30 AM, that fog once again gathered and began to close in. It was no more than a case of diminishing comfort, because I knew the valley so well, and its nature, with high walls along it, made orientation easy anyhow. Besides, we had compasses and maps, so we just moved on. Anna got us the compass direction, and we looked at the instrument from time to time. Visibility was perhaps fifteen or twenty meters at worst.

We knew we only had to reach the lake, simply called 1226, stating its elevation, to find the Unna Räita Cabin, following the left (east) shore in a slow curve.

Suddenly a kind of peculiar ripple appeared in the mist, like a mystical, silent motion, or a malfunction of vision, or like that murmuring sound in *Myst*, the computer game that my son Ivan used to play when he was a little boy. We had come upon the shore of the lake, and all of a sudden a faint object started to become visible, gradually, a few hundred meters across the waters; The Unna Räita Cabin. That felt really good, and our orientation through the fog had been spot-on.

At around noon we reached The Unna Räita Cabin, which clearly is one of my favourite spots in the world, providing cosy shelter in a land that is so wild it could be mistaken for Spitsbergen (Svalbard)

At 12:30 PM we had lunch in the cabin, and then just rested, waiting for the mist to dissipate over the Pyramid Pass. That happened at 2:30 PM and we were on our way to the dreaded, anticipated and exciting Pyramid Pass. The Pyramid Pass wall begins about one kilometer from The Unna Ráita Cabin, but that is a kilometer of rough land, through a nature that seems to have been wringed and twisted back and forth unduly by furious forces to make it look the way it now appears. First you ford the stream from Lake 1226, as it moves toward the waterfall down into the lake way below in the much lower eastern part of The Unna Reaiddávággi Valley, below the precipice. Then you walk up a small incline and around an all too steep hill with rolling gravel, which you absolutely must avoid slipping from. The visible tracks on that curving path around the hill looked too dangerous, so we scrambled up across in a straighter but draining line. That cleared, we had to deal with the slippery remnants of a glacier coming from up the Knife's Edge, slanting across our line of approach. This obstacle was diminished by lots of pebbles frozen into the ice, giving us a good grip on things, so we just crossed without further do. The final section up to the wall is a thrown-about field of big, sharp, black, mean rocks that you must engage with care, which we did.

On reaching the snow that connected to the wall, we sat down to have power bars and water, and I mounted my Petzl crampons, while Anna, on seeing the severity of the laid-bare ice on the wall, decided there and then to have a go at the incredibly steep rock wall to the right (west) of the ice instead.

At about 4 PM or some minutes after, we stepped onto the actual Pyramid Pass, with no clue as to whether we'd make it up or not. I'd never seen the wall so molten down. I couldn't see any snow at all, but just different conditions of ice.

We parted as Anna went to the right (west) and began feeling out the rock ascent, and I stepped out onto the ice to try my crampons. I felt I could get a firm grip on the ice if I bore down hard, and decided to try getting up a bit just by the vertical line where the ice stopped and the bedrock and the rocks started. This was a wildly curving line, calling for a kind of zigzagging ascent.

To begin with I trudged straight up, trusting in God and all spiritual powers, praying my crampons would get a good enough grip. This was by no means certain, because the incline gets steeper as you get higher, and there were all sorts of ice, like brittle ice that almost exploded below your feet and fell on down with a light shrill sound, and blue, swelling ice formations that were hard to get the crampons into. I felt that this was my moment on this wall though, and that I would go for it all the way. It was a strange, strong, swooping feeling through my anatomy, and I fought on upwards, sometimes halting to rest, leaning forwards into the incline not to lose my balance because of the 23 kilos that my backpack weighed, looking to my right to observe Anna's ascent a hundred meters away.

As I got to a certain stage quite high up on the wall, I could relax, sitting down on a bare section of bedrock, over-viewing the fantastic scenery below and beyond. That was no place for people affected by vertigo, because it was lofty and airy beyond description, with the icy wall stretching down a couple of hundred meters below, extremely steep from where I was sitting, and then slowly curving out like the inside of a huge bowl. I would absolutely not have climbed down in these conditions, but upwards is always easier even though this one wasn't an easy one, for glaring, screaming sure!

Anna wasn't far below over on her rock climb, and I watched with awe how she crawled up seemingly impossible rock faces, finding cracks for fingers and boots, leaning heavily into the rising rock wall.

My intention now was to traverse the ice to the right (west) to climb upwards closer to the bare rocks, where Anna would move up. As I had done three, four meters of the traversing, with nothing but incredibly steep ice below me, one foot slipped, and for a horrifying second I felt I might fall, but I got a grip with the other foot and my sticks, and walked slowly backwards to the place I'd been resting. My heart was beating wildly, but luckily Anna, who was totally focused on her own ascent, hadn't noticed the incident.

I estimated my chances, and tried the ice right up above from where I sat on the rock. It appeared, on closer inspection, that the fifteen or twenty steep, really steep, meters up to safety in the shape of the final line of rocks before the top of the pass had a pretty nice snow cover over the ice, so I gathered all my strength and set out straight up, the shortest (and steepest...) line I could find, and almost ran upwards with the weight of my backpack making me feel like the hulk, the way I gave everything for that short ascent. I was up in a jiffy grabbing on to those wonderful, wonderful black rocks, panting madly for a couple of minutes, where after I could guide Anna's last dangerous passage from the right (west) on to those treasured rocks. I had a better view from my vantage point than she from hers, but in a short while she was home free too, and we would have jumped for joy, had we had more safe space for such signs of jubilation. We knew we had made it; that we had climbed The Pyramid Pass during really hard ice conditions, and Anna even on the rock face, although we had maybe fifty meters or so to the actual highest point of the pass, but the rest included no danger at all, no tricky parts, no risks. We calmly and happily eased on up the last part, and went up to the top cairn.

At 5:10 PM we stood at the top cairn; a big, tall construction, and Anna scribbled words of love and our names on a piece of paper, rolled it up and inserted it into the cairn, in a crack between the stones, like my son Ivan did a couple of weeks ago at The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, where he'd travelled with Birthright Israel from his home in Baltimore, Maryland. I was really moved when he told me this on a Skype chat we had from a family's house he was staying at just outside Jerusalem. I was moved when Anna inserted that message into the Pyramid Pass cairn too.

We put the camera on a rock and photographed ourselves by the cairn with the camera timer, and then the rain suddenly hit. We managed to take some pictures back the way we'd come, and got our rain gear out, beginning the descent into Kaskasavagge (Gaskkasvággi) Valley, where we aimed to camp.

No matter what else would happen on this hike, we'd gone through with the two things we'd wanted to do, even long before we met, i.e. climbing The Mårma Pass and The Pyramid Pass. I had done it against the odds of my wounded toes, through intense and meticulous care; Anna against the odds of her sometimes hurting back and hips. We felt great!

Here is Anna's account of the Pyramid Pass ascent (in Swedish, followed by my English translation):

“Nu skulle det äntligen bli av. Det, inte utan viss bävan, så efterlängttade Pyramidpasset skulle bestigas. Inför min vandring 2010 hade jag gjort en noggrann research och planerat att gå Trepassleden från Tarfala till Unna Räita, men efter att ha gått i tre dagar, över Tjeuralauko i storm och sedan Tarfalapasset i fantastiskt väder, utan att möta en enda människa, kände jag att Pyramidpasset fick stå över till ett annat år när jag var i bättre fysisk form. Det beslutet ledde till att jag i stället anlände till Nallo samma dag som Ingvar kom dit, och se vad det fick för konsekvenser...

Men nu var det alltså dags. Vi hade kommit fram till den plats där det var dags för Ingvar att spanna på sig stegjärnen och ge sig ut på glaciären medan jag skulle klättra uppför klipporna till höger. Jag hade visserligen både stavar och broddar, men jag hyser en stark förkärlek för att gå på sten i stället för snö och is så jag tänkte ge det en chans. Jag blandade en energidryck och åt en halv proteinbar och sen var det dags. Vi uppmanade varandra att ta det försiktigt och så inledde vi uppstigningen.

Det såg oerhört brant ut, det måste erkännas. Långa, släta hållar i ett rostbrunt stenmaterial varvades med sektioner av grus och block. Det gällde att hitta områden där det gick att komma över hållarna och ta sig till stenområdena emellan, och att undvika de platser där det sipprade vatten och kunde bli halkigt. Jag märkte ganska snart att packningen i mitt välfyllda topplock hindrade mig från att böja bak huvudet tillräckligt mycket för att överblicka vägen upp (och det var kanske lika bra!). Hållarna var branta och släta men, som genom Guds försyn, var de försedda med små sprickhyllor, 2-3 centimeter breda, där jag, efter att ha borstat bort sand och grus och böjt upp benet så långt det bara gick, kunde få fotfäste. Mina nya byxor T&P Flexibel från ITAB levde verkligen upp till texten i katalogen och det lätta tyget i fyrvägsstretch tillät hur mycket böjning som helst utan att strama (och jag avskyr verkligen byxor som stramar över knäna när man blir svettig och klättrar uppför!)

Ytterligare någon meter upp gick det att hitta en lite skåra att borra in fingertopparna i och sedan, efter att ha provat på om fästet verkligen räckte, ta i med alla samlade krafter och häva mig upp. Här gick det bit för bit, med full koncentration, utan utrymme för misstag eller halkningar. Jag fick lite känslan av att här finns ingen återvändo, nu är det uppför som gäller, för att backa och gå utför igen kändes helt omöjligt. Jag var glad över mitt beslut att inte gå utför här ensam, vilket var förra årets plan. Det kändes bra att ha Ingvar med, som kunde hämta hjälp om olyckan, trots min försiktighet, skulle vara framme. Det var sannerligen ingen trängsel i det här passet! Jag var även oerhört tacksam över det fantastiska fästet på de nya sulorna som Lundhags skomakare lagt på mina trogna gamla vandringkängor under vintern. Jag kände snart att jag kunde lita på dem till hundra procent, även över de hållar där det inte fanns några springor att söka fäste i. Mellan hållarna sökte jag mig till höger över stenarna för att hitta en bra linje över nästa sektion. Jag har alltid älskat att klättra på stenar och hållar där jag stött på dem i min vardagsnatur, men det här kändes lite som en barndomsdröm, att få utmana mig själv och ”tvingas” klättra vidare när det hela tiden är lite på gränsen till vad som känns säkert, när det inte går att ångra sig när man väl tagit ”språnget” och hävt sig upp, ytterligare en bit.

”Anna, titta på utsikten!” ropade Ingvar när vi under en sektion närmade oss varandra. Jag vände mig om och drabbades av svindel! Snabbt återtog jag min position med magen mot berget och trevade mig fram till en hylla som erbjöd säkrare fotfäste. Då vände jag mig om och med ryggsäcken hårt tryckt mot berget avnjöt jag den fantastiska utsikten. Det var brant! Det var stort! Det var magnifikt! Jag kände mig som en fluga högst uppe på kanten av en enorm vispskål, och i botten på den skålformade dalen skar stupet i Unna Räita av de två sjöarna från varandra. Den utsikten var värd varenda meter av vägen hit.

När vi kom till det ställe där klipporna skär långt in i glaciären landade Ingvar på stenarna en stund och vi utbytte tankar om vägvalet, drack några klunkar och Ingvar hjälpte mig att dra bak topplocket en bit så att jag skulle kunna se bättre. Sedan fortsatte vi. Jag fick återigen dra mig långt till höger för att så småningom runda glaciärens övre del. Det såg brant ut på håll, men som alltid går det att hitta bra linjer att följa när man väl kommer närmare. Sen var det bara en liten bit i blockterräng kvar innan vi, oerhört lyckliga, stod vid toppröset! Även om Mårmapasset var högre så var det här verkligen vandringens höjdpunkt!”

And my English translation of Anna's description:

“The time had come. We would climb the anticipated Pyramid Pass. I had conducted a meticulous research before my hike in 2010, and planned to tread The Three Pass Trail from Tarfala to Unna Räita, but after having hiked three days – across Čievrraláhku in a storm and then through The Tarfala Pass in fantastic weather, without meeting a single person, I felt that The Pyramid Pass would have to wait till another year when I'd be in a better physical shape. That decision instead meant that I arrived at Nallo the same day Ingvar came there, and note the consequences...

So now it was due time. We'd come to the place where it was time for Ingvar to mount his crampons and head out onto the glacier, while I was to climb up the rocks. I did bring both sticks and spikes, but I have a great weakness for walking on rocks instead of snow and ice, so I'd decided to give it a go. I mixed an energy drink and munched half a protein bar, before hitting it. We told each other to be careful, and then we commenced the climb.

It looked incredibly steep, I have to admit. Long, smooth rust-brown slabs of bedrock were intersected with sections of gravel and boulders. I had to detect areas where I could traverse or climb the slabs to get to the sections of stones in between, and avoid places where water trickled, making conditions slippery. I soon discovered that the contents of my stuffed top section of my backpack prevented me from bending my neck backwards enough to estimate my way up (and perhaps for the good!). The slabs were steep and smooth, but as by the mercy of God, equipped with narrow, horizontal shelf-cracks, about 2 – 3 centimeters wide, from where I brushed off sand and gravel, bending my knee as much as I could to get a footing. My new pants – T & P Flexible from ITAB - really complied with the description in the catalog, as the light garment in fourway stretch allowed any amount of bending without tightening (and I really hate trousers that tighten across the knees when you get sweaty climbing)

Yet another meter upwards I could find a tiny chip to bore my fingertips into, and after trying the validity of the grip, pull myself up with all my might. I did this bit by bit, in full concentration, without any room for error or slips. I sort of got the feeling that there was no turning back; it was only upwards and nothing else, because backing down felt completely impossible. I was happy about my decision not to hike here alone, which had been my plan last year. It felt good to have Ingvar along, who could get help if an accident struck in spite of my cautiousness. The pass was by no means crowded! I was also grateful for the fantastic grip of the new soles that Lundhag's shoemaker had equipped my trustworthy old hiking boots with back in winter. I soon felt I could trust them 100%, even across slabs of bedrock where there were no cracks to seek support in. Between the slabs I oriented myself to the right across the boulders to find a good line over to the next section. I've always love to climb across rocks and slabs of rock where I've come across them in my every day nature, but this felt somewhat like a childhood dream, to challenge myself and “be forced to” climb on

further, a little across the limits of safety, when you can't change your mind after you've "taken the leap" and hoisted yourself up.

"Anna, watch the view!" Ingvar yelled when we approached each other during one part of the climb. I turned around and was hit by vertigo! I quickly resumed my position with my stomach against the mountain, feeling my way on to a ledge with a more secure footing. Then I turned around with my backpack pressing hard against the mountainside, enjoying the fantastic view. It was steep! It was magnificent! It was grand! I felt like a fly high up on top of the rim of an enormous whip bowl, and down at the bottom of the bowl-shaped valley the precipice of Unna Räita cut the two lakes off from each other. That view was worth every meter of the way there!

When we reached the place where the rocks cut deep into the glacier, Ingvar landed on the rocks for a while, and we exchanged thoughts of the choice of lines upwards and sipped some water, and Ingvar helped me adjust the top section of my backpack so I could see better. Then we continued. I had to pull off way to the right again to finally round the upper part of the glacier. It looked steep from a distance, but as always I could find useful lines to choose when I got up close. Then there was just a shorter section through cliffs and rocks before we, overjoyed, stood by the top cairn. Even if the Mårma Pass had been higher, this really was the climax of the hike!"

The descent into Kaskasavagge introduced rocks and rocks and rocks, sometimes displayed steeply, sometimes less steeply, now wet and slippery, but we enjoyed the support of a few snowfields into which we bored our heels, descending lightly in the rain. I remembered - from the time I ascended this slope, going up to the Pyramid Pass from down in Kaskasavagge in 2008 with that German chap - where we had to get off the snow onto the rocks to avoid a precipice, and from that point it wasn't a big deal down onto level valley-bottom ground. Besides, I'd been staring longingly at an enlargement of a photo of the valley and this ascent taken by myself from the pass between Kuopervagge (Guobirvággi) and Kaskasavagge (Gaskkasvággi), which I took in 2008, that hangs over my desk in my office at work, so I was overly familiar with the traits and joys of the vicinity.

There is a small, elevated area right in the valley, and that's where we pitched our red tents, lighting up the grey and brown land considerably. We were ready to retreat into the tents from the rain before 9 PM, and we settled in.

7 August 2011

In the morning we were fogged in, and there was no use going anywhere so we spent most of the day inside our tents, reading and dozing off into periods of trance or torpor.

Anna and I took turns going over to the closest little lake or pond, a few hundred meters off, to get our necessary water.

At 4 PM it had cleared up enough for us to see the pass across from Kaskasavagge (Gaskkasvággi) to Kuopervagge (Guobirvággi), so we got on our way across the valley, our bodies feeling tired from the days prior, not quite ready yet to accept all the slippery rocks we had to balance across, approaching the new ascent - and the damp, wet, misty weather didn't make spirits any higher. We'd been wasted with such good weather up till this day.

As we got closer to the pass, the slope began getting steep, and when we got into what looked like a rock chute, taking us upwards into the pass high up, it got really strenuous. I stopped to breath – yes, pant! – now and then, resting on my sticks. At about 5:30 PM we stepped onto the highest point of the pass, suddenly staring down into the mighty Kuopervagge (Guobirvággi) Valley with its Lake Guobirjávrit, looking turquoise deep down below us.

The way down looked hard, over slippery, huge, smaller and all size rocks, some of them with lichen on them, making them highly treacherous. I had a hard time descending, bit by bit, step by step, rock by rock, while Anna made it with some more grace and elegance! I recall I had a tough time ascending here with the German in 2008 as well. I never liked this pass. The views from it, though, are incredible, down into Kuopervagge (Guobirvággi) and across to the Tarfala Pass and with giant Gaskkasbákti Mountain (2043 meters) to the left (east) and The Dragon's Back Mountain (Drakryggen) straight across, with an unnamed glacier hanging just above the passage used by hikers.

We had originally planned to round the Guobirjávrit Lake on its left (east) side, but found an easier descent leading us down by its right (west) side, so we decided on that. I was very slow here, and tired, so Anna suggested she'd go down a little faster and wait for me down by the lake with hot water for food, which she did. We saw a lone hiker wearing an orange jacket approach along the other side of the valley toward its dead end under the Tarfala Pass.

We had our dinner by The Guobirjávrit Lake, and then got on our way along the south side of the water body, traversing the slanting rock fields below The Dragon's Back, in order not to have to fight our way straight up the very steep incline later on. We saw below us that the lone hiker had pitched his green Hilleberg Akto tent on a flat area just by the lake.

At the final approach to the pass we did encounter severe steepness anyhow, maybe for just fifty or seventy-five meters, but draining us greatly.

The weather started to deteriorate at this stage, fog blowing in speedily, and the trail, which isn't visible on the ground except for some cairns, got completely lost by the small glacier lake up there below The Dragon's Back's unnamed glacier in the tightening weather. I'd hiked that same direction up there twice before, and the opposite direction once, and Anna the opposite direction once, last year, so I felt assured and safe. As we'd covered the first small incline above the glacier lake and were about to engage the last, but larger, rocky ascent to the actual Tarfala Pass (you think of the place above the long steep ascent from Kuopervagge (Guobirvággi) as the pass because that is the difficult part, but it isn't really the pass) the fog got very dense, and the winds started blowing high; a strange combination. It suddenly was a lousy situation, and although I knew the area from previous hikes, I didn't know exactly where we were. Direction got lost, and rocks took on strange shapes that I didn't recognize. We looked at our compass to find the general direction of our ambitions, but we were lost on the spot.

After a confused while we suddenly stumbled upon the memory plaque for the three Mountain Rescue men that died there when their helicopter's rotor blades hit the side of The Gaskkasbákti Mountain about ten years ago. Now I had a better grip on directions, and we stepped on a few meters to be able to look down to The Black Lake (Lake Gaskkasjávri), which we had to approach on snowfields and then climb up to a small flat plateau from the side of the lake, to be able to get out on the side of The Giebmebákti Glacier and descend

along its edge for maybe 150 meters, in order to step on to the giant side moraine that'd take us down in the Tarfala Valley. We could hardly make out the close side of the lake in the weather, which kept getting worse, wind still rising, rain falling and the mist tightening, while it was getting cold. We made up our minds really fast to pitch my tent and stay inside it, both of us, during the night. We quickly found a possible place, visibility just about ten meters, and helped each other get the Hilleberg Nallo 2 up as fast as possible, having every connection to the sticks secured by boulders that we assembled.

The wind was getting colder, and we felt the chill when we stopped to pitch the tent, as the sweat from our climb evaporated. We retorted to our sleeping bags as fast as we could, the wind tearing at the tent. Although our bags are high quality ones, made to withstand much colder weather, it took us an hour to get warm and comfortable inside them. It was late, perhaps about 10 PM, and for the moment the weather had us stuck.

8 August 2011

When we woke to check the weather, it was the same: dense fog, high winds and from time to time showers of rain. If anything the conditions worsened. The wind got stronger, and it was very gusty, tearing madly at my Hilleberg Nallo 2.

The inside of the inner tent was highly affected by condensation from the warmth of our bodies and our breath. I had special drying cloths along just for this purpose, but it was a disappointment anyway, that so much condensation formed inside the tent. If we hadn't brought cloths to suck it up, everything inside the tent, like our sleeping bags, would have gotten all wet after a day or so. Admittedly, the conditions for formation of condensation were ideal, with air temperature falling, plus cold rain beating the tent simultaneously with very dense fog rolling in for hours and hours, but still... Hilleberg owners should be aware of this problem, which can be worrying under certain circumstances.

We tried to rest, but it was a somewhat nervous situation. We slid back into sleep or semi-sleep, the wind tore loudly at the tent, making it wobble and creak. It was very noisy. I had a fear, sometimes, that the tent wouldn't hold up, because the wind came from the side, really doing it's best to cut it to shreds, the way it sounded. I could imagine us up there right smack dab in the Tarfala Pass without a tent in this storm, getting wet and confused, freezing to death before long. In retrospect I see I was overly nervous about the situation, because these tents are made to withstand much harder winds. We did have another chance in store, too, with Anna's little Hilleberg Akto tent, if worse came to worse. I don't think, however, that what we encountered was a storm, technically – meteorologically – speaking, but a fresh gale, but the whole context made me nervous. Anna told me, also, that her Hilleberg Akto tent had withstood much harder winds last year up on the Cievrraláhku Plains. I couldn't help contemplating, though, that we'd pitched our tent right in a wind tunnel, atop The Tarfala Pass, where winds are known to be notoriously hard, and the place is famous for the hardest winds ever measured in Sweden, i.e. severe hurricane force winds, which is why the houses down in the valley are fastened in the rock with wires. I tried my best to keep my imagination from those facts, but sometimes I felt like going crazy over that nothing changed for the better as the hours went by.

We kept a watch on our provisions of water, since we couldn't get at any water sources during the fogged-out circumstances. Luckily, I had brought an extra bottle up the pass.

We tried calling the Mountain Rescue, not to ask for assistance, but for letting them know the situation we were in, and how long we would be able to hold out without other problems than

restlessness (probably about three days and nights), but we couldn't get any cell phone connection, in spite of the high altitude.

As I looked out very briefly in the middle of the day, the rain had turned into snow, which blew sideways at our tent, building up to a little wall of wet snow on one side of it. The wind got even a little bit harder; the gusts severe, and Anna went out to check the boulders that held the tent in place, and she tightened one of the ropes. She also brought my full urine bottle with her, to empty it for me. That is love: getting out of a warm, comfortable sleeping bag, into severe weather in a wild mountain pass, to empty your partner's urine bottle (I did bring the luminescent urination bottle I had found in Abiskojaure back in April, which eventually got filled-up from urine, and had to be emptied)

Later I was forced to go out to have a shit, and I rushed off ten meters to a bigger rock, seeking some shelter from the storm there, with the tent just barely visible in the fog, but it was a very quick shit, a most chilly and discomforting venture in wind and snow and fog, giving you the impression of being on a slab of land in the middle of absolutely nothing, floating about in nothing, as if all we hitherto knew and believed was just imagination, a mirage of our minds.

When I pulled up my pants and wind pants, I accidentally stepped in my own shit with my Meindl boots, which we discovered when I entered the tent again. It was quite miserable, I tell you.

At one time a loud, long, violent sound was heard over the loud noise of the wind tearing at the tent, and we realized that rocks were crashing down the precipice of The Gaskkasbákti Mountain right by us, invisible in the fog. It was an immensely scary sound, adding to the vulnerability we felt, and Anna asked me if we were far enough away from the mountainside not to risk having boulders come crashing our way. I didn't know.

The irony of the situation was that we'd come that far, hiking all the way from Abisko, managed the two dream passes of our wishes – Mårma and The Pyramid – and almost finished The Three Pass Trail, with only a couple of kilometers left down to The Tarfala Hut – when we got this seriously stuck! At times I felt that our situation was something one reads about, not something one encounters! However much I was affected by irregular fits of worry, Anna stayed cool throughout.

At about 4 PM the mist suddenly lifted enough for us to see clear across to the mountains in each direction, so we quickly got out of the tent, packed our stuff and was about to fold the tent, when conditions worsened again, showing us that visibility might be a very brief commodity up there on a low-pressure day. I decided, then, to leave the tent there, as it was, zipped and closed up in the wind, for two reasons. One reason was that the visibility window may have been of such a brief duration that we'd make it to the safety of the side moraine only if we rushed for it, and the other reason was that if we couldn't make it through the area I wasn't sure of in this weather, we'd need the tent to return to, for another night.

We went over to the edge, looking down to The Black Lake (Lake Gaskkasjávri), and saw a trail of boot prints all across the snowfields leading to the rocky part by the lake's right (southern) side. When we stepped out on the snow, we found it perfect for getting a good grip without crampons, so we eased across the field that tilts into the icy water of the lake, and arrived at the rocky part, with a steep incline some twenty, thirty meters up to our right. The path, or rather a number of paths up the steep side were marked by cairns, and soon enough

we were up on the small plateau, from where you have this wild view all across The Tarfala Valley, for the day with the cloud base (or lifted mist cover) just above us.

I felt elated by now, because I knew that even if the fog once again closed in, I'd find the way down with ease. The mist didn't return, though, and the wind had died down good. That was important too, since the balancing act the 300 elevation meters down into The Tarfala Valley atop the huge, snaking Giebmebákti side moraine would be hazardous in high winds.

We didn't waste any time up on the plateau, but moved briskly to the opposite side of it, the right (southern) side, where we got onto the ugly Giebmebákti Glacier, i.e. the very edge of it, which you must tread steeply about 150 meters or so down around the protruding plateau we just descended from, to get around it and onto the side moraine, which connects directly below the sharply rising side of the plateau, leading all the way down into the rocky, beautiful Tarfala Valley.

I mounted my crampons to be extra safe down the side of the glacier, and to be a steady support for Anna, would it be called for, but they weren't really needed, since the snow was soft enough to stick your boots into and descend safely. There was just one section around a protruding cliff that was very narrow and icy, and a slip of the foot there would instantly deliver you into one of those horrible, deep crevasses in the glacier below to your right.

At 4:15 PM we were edging down the glacier edge section, and shortly found ourselves on the wonderful Giebmebákti side moraine, easing ourselves down to comfort and bliss after our closed-off conditions up in the pass. At 5:30 PM we moved across the first snowfield down by Lake Darfáljávri, and by 6:15 we arrived at The Tarfala Hut, speaking to the hostess, who assigned us the last two bunks of the establishment, in room no 2, with two climbers who were guides from The Kebnekaise Mountain Station, out practicing.

The Tarfala Hut is seldom crowded, usually receiving only day hikers from Kebnekaise, who return down again same day, but now there was an STF tourist group doing excursions in the area, onto glaciers and so forth, plus the Kebnekaise climbers and a family of four.

The two climbers were really nice and considerate people, with whom we had interesting conversations. They told us a true story about some guys coming down the same way we'd done. One of them had stepped out further on the Giebmebákti Glacier than needed, walking backwards to take photographs, thus disappearing into a deep crevass. His pal stepped out after him, to check his condition, and fell into another crevass. Against all odds, both men were consequently rescued. You don't go out onto that ugly monster of a glacier; I wouldn't dream of it!

We also talked with campers who had their tents some distance off, visible from the kitchen windows. One of them was a guy in his 30s from Stockholm who hiked alone, and was in dire need of human company. He had a feverish way of talking that made me edgy and nervous. I could actually feel my heart rate increasing! He had no feeling at all for when to stop talking, but I'd also been hiking alone many times, and knew that warm feeling of finally speaking with somebody, so I endured the guy, and Anna didn't find him so trying. Finally he returned out into his tent in the cold. He was 190 centimeters tall, which I know because he said he thought Hilleberg Nallo 2 was too short inside to really fit him, which is true. It fits me, but just barely, and I'm 184 centimeters.

9 August 2011

As soon as I woke I glanced out the window and saw that the weather was stable, and actually a bit better than the night before, so I got myself ready to hike up to the Tarfala Pass by myself to fetch the tent. The Kebnekaise climbers had left with all their gear at 6 AM, so we had the room to ourselves for our resting day at Tarfala.

I had breakfast with Anna, packed my backpack (after emptying it of everything) with two water bottles, two power bars, the crampons and an extra long-sleeve Icebreaker Merino wool sweater, and was on my way in perfect cool air temperature at 9 AM, dressed in my orange Mammut shell jacket and my Marmot shell pants over my regular trousers.

At 9:15 I thought I saw a very grey – rock grey – tent standing by the side of my path, but on closer examination it turned out to be a rock that really looked like a tent! It must be the home of the Tarfala troll!

At the beginning of the ascent I had to take off my Mammut jacket and just wear an Icebreaker Merino t-shirt on my upper body, getting too warm from the exercise.

At about 10:15 AM I was already up at the glacier edge part of the climb. I sat down and mounted the crampons. It had been such a pleasure to hike rocks and ascent up the side moraine with such a light backpack; a totally different, jubilant way of moving across these parts! At 10:20 AM I stepped off the glacier onto the plateau, and sat down to take off the crampons. I didn't know it, but down at The Tarfala Hut Anna was photographing me and clocking me as I passed the various sections of the ascent!

Here are her timings for me on my way up:

8:45 AM: Departing from The Tarfala Hut.

9:15: Crossing the first snowfield (really the second one, but the first one visible from the hut)

9:23: Crossing the second (third) snowfield.

9:35: Moving over the first hump of the side-moraine.

9:45: Moving in front of the glacier behind the side moraine.

10:15: Moving along the Giebmebákti Glacier after the side moraine, before the plateau.

At 10:30 AM I was down by Lake Gaskkasjávri again, discovering, as I gave myself leisure time to look around, that a couple of tenting places had been cleared on the minimal possible place right down along the shore. I continued onto the snowfields and moved briskly up the ascent to the pass. As I moved up over the edge at 10:40 AM I saw my red Hilleberg Nallo 2 tent standing proud a few hundred meters away, right by the pass cairn, in a ridiculously vulnerable place, right in that natural wind tunnel, and with beautiful Dragon's Back Mountain (Drakryggen) with its glacier as an alpine backdrop. I felt a certain warm feeling for my tent as I approached it, sort of falling in love with it at this reunion. It felt so good to be back at the tent and be able to see the surroundings, the beautiful, dramatic surroundings, which, after Anna's and my extra time up there meant much more than before.

At 11:15, after munching a power bar, sipping some water and putting the Mammut jacket back on, I was at the Giebmebákti Glacier's edge again, crampons on, moving down to the side moraine with the tent safely stuffed into my backpack. Me unknowingly, Anna was still keeping watch way down, 300 altitude meters below at the Tarfala hut, clocking and photographing. My heart was light as I descended, Dylan songs dancing through my mind. At 12:15 I was moving along the eastern side of Lake Darfáljávri, home free, just a few hundred meters to the hut, and Anna came out to meet me with a warm hug.

Anna's timings for my descent:

11:40: Passing in front of the glacier behind the side moraine.

11:50: Moving over the first hump of the side moraine.

11:55: Moving across the first snowfield (now considered from the end of the side moraine)

12:00: Passing across the second snowfield.

12:25: Back at the Tarfala Hut.

Anna ventured out to the west side of the Icefall Glacier's old end moraines, photographing flowers, while I stayed in the hut, in my bunk in room no 2, a good deal of the rest of the day just resting.

We had large portions of oatmeal at night, and I stuffed myself for the long hike we expected to conduct the day after, all the way to Nikkaluokta, some 24 kilometers away, while the STF gang socialized in a loud and jolly manner.

I talked to the Tarfala hostess, who also was named Anna, and asked her if she had any contact with the hostess at Nallo, who was called Anna too. She didn't have any means of direct contact, but could send a host message through the hiker mail, i.e. sending it on with hikers, who would leave it with the Nallo hostess. I had carried mail like that once to the Teusajaure host. I asked the Tarfala hostess to please tell the Nallo hostess that Anna and I had made it across the Pyramid Pass as we planned; I on crampons, mostly on the ice, and Anna up the rocks to the right (west) of the ice. She would. The Nallo hostess had been very curious about this, as spoken about earlier in this story

10 august 2011

We got out of our bunks just before 5 AM the next morning, and had our breakfast at 5:30 AM, before getting on our way at about 6:45 AM.

Right on the south side of the Tarfala Scientific Station we saw a military camp below The Great Glacier (Storglaciären) (or rather on the north side of its side moraine) on the other side of The Darfaljohka stream; a collection of twelve green tents of various sizes, and one sentry walking about in the cool morning air.

It started to rain, while the sun was visibly shining down in The Láddjuvággi Valley, a few kilometers away and a few hundred meters below. After that we experienced a mixture of showers and sunny weather off and on for the rest of the hike, which was a fast one, for us to make the 4 PM bus from Nikkaluokta to Kiruna City.

I became enormously tired during this brisk walk, and pretty irritated, even angry. I couldn't get my backpack – which felt too heavy again, even though it as lighter than ever since the food was finished – to fit well, and I got cramps in my back. Finally I realized that there was no point in holding my anger back, so I just hurried along, trying not to give a shit about all the pains, swearing and cursing to myself – and sure enough, that helped me, getting me on due course again, putting kilometer to kilometer behind, but we didn't enjoy much conversation this day, not until we reached the western boat landing of Lake Láddjujavri, where locals have built a small restaurant for seriously hungry hikers. The time was about 2 PM, and while Anna visited he toilet, I went into the establishment and ordered muffins, rolls, chocolate bars and wonderful waffles with whipped cream and cloudberryes for the two of us, plus, of course, coffee for me. Anna prefers tea.

We enjoyed all the goodies sitting at a table with a couple in their late 20s, who'd been to Kebnekaise for the ascent up The Western Route, which they had managed, taking a lot of pictures with a system camera that the lady carried.

After this wonderful break we got lots of new energy, and hiked the last five kilometers easily, arriving at Nikkaluokta in good time for the bus. I went into the store to buy a fresh t-shirt, but sizes small and extra large were exactly the same size, so I smelled something fishy, and couldn't find a t-shirt that fit me anyway, so on a whim I bought some jewellery; a painted stone heart for Anna instead, to show her some of the appreciation she really had earned.

The bus left Nikkaluokta at 4 PM, and we soon arrived at the train station in Kiruna, despite the on and off character of he trip; the asphalt having been scraped off for shorter or longer stretches at least fifty times during those 60 kilometers, for renovation of the road, making the bus slow down and speed up.

We took the train to Boden shortly after arrival in Kiruna, and Anna's daughter met up at the Boden station and drove us home to Niemisel, where we greeted the animals; three horses, two dogs and two cats, before going to bed after a seriously strenuous but also wonderful hike.

Two weeks later I arrived at Arlanda Airport and took the fast shuttle into the city. I waited for the train right beside Sami artist Åsa Simma, whom I'd interviewed back in 2004. She had become old. I didn't say hello. I wonder what would have happen if I'd done so. Probably nothing.