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Public Engagements with Lapland's Dark Heritage: Community Archaeology in Finnish Lapland

Abstract 100 words:

Research project *Lapland's Dark Heritage* organized a one-week public excavation in Inari, Finnish Lapland, at a Second World War German military hospital site in August 2016. #InariDig was carried out with the help of international experts and pre-registered volunteers. In this field report, the archaeologists leading the excavations and an ethnographer who took part in documenting this community archaeology experiment introduce the excavation sites and activities reflecting on the engagements with volunteers and local community.

Keywords: community archaeology, public archaeology, dark heritage, Lapland, Finland, Second World War, ethnography

#InariDig: Community Archaeology in Finnish Lapland, August 2016

Lapland's Dark Heritage is a research project coordinated by the Universities of Helsinki and Oulu, and funded by the Academy of Finland. The project seeks to understand the diverse cultural values and meanings of the material heritage associated with the German military presence in northern Finland (Lapland) during WWII (e.g. Herva et al., 2016; Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas, 2016; Seitsonen, 2017). This heritage can be considered difficult and ambivalent because of the complexity of the Finnish and German relationship during the war: initially brothers-in-arms against the Soviet Union, later enemies in the so-called *Lapland War*.¹ As part of the research, we carried out public excavations “#InariDig” of a Second

¹ After the Winter War (1939-40) between Finland and the Soviet Union, Finland was afraid of a new attack by the Soviet Union. In 1941, Finland allied with Germany and over 200 000 German soldiers came to operate in the Northern frontiers of Finnish Lapland, advancing east into Soviet-held territory. The alliance ended in 1944 when Finland signed a separate cease fire treaty with the Soviet Union as the Eastern Front collapsed. One of the demands from the Soviets was that Finland had to end the collaboration with the Germans and drive the German army out of the country. The German reaction became the Lapland War (1944-45), which resulted in large-scale destruction across

World War German military hospital site in Inari August 1–5, 2016. #InariDig was carried out by the members of the research project, international experts in battlefield and public archaeology, students of archaeology and ethnology as well as nine pre-registered volunteers, most of whom participated for the whole week. The activities were organized in collaboration with the National Sámi Museum, Siida since we were studying the Sápmi, the Sámi homeland stretching across the northernmost Europe (Fig. 1).

The site of the German military hospital was selected for excavation due to various factors. Firstly, WWII hospital sites have never previously been archaeologically explored in Finland, or elsewhere in Europe. Earlier archaeological studies have typically concentrated on more martial sites, such as fortifications, military facilities, and prisoner-of-war camps (Schofield et al., 2002; Seitsonen & Herva, 2011; Banks, 2011; Carr 2014; Passmore et al., 2013). We knew from interviews that in addition to the German soldiers, Inari villagers were also treated at the site by German doctors and nurses, and the site forms a pertinent part of the local heritage. Project researchers visited the site in summer 2015 with local history expert Matti Lehtola whose father had been treated there by a German military dentist during the war. Matti provides guided village tours about the history of Inari prior to the widespread destruction caused by the Germans, who applied scorched earth tactics while retreating to Norway. When we asked if he could improvise a war history tour, he answered yes right away and led us on a tour of almost three hours around Inari village.

Furthermore, the site of the German military hospital was easily accessible (near a road and to accommodation facilities in the village, as well as the museum which offered a venue for public lectures) and relatively safe. As part of the scorched earth tactics, the German troops destroyed all their military encampments but also the local infrastructure and dwellings and placed hundreds of thousands of landmines and other explosives along the roads. In addition, the retreating army dumped tons of ammunition in the forests, lakes and bog lands. The village of Inari was also completely destroyed in the war: the only surviving constructions in Inari parish were the pharmacist's fencepost and one hut (Lehtola, 2015: 10). The area of the Inari military hospital was also burned down, which became evident when we began to uncover the site.

Figure 1. Location of Inari in Lapland, and the volunteers working at the excavation area 1 (Oula Seitsonen 2016).

Excavation area 1

The excavation area 1 was selected so that we could guarantee that the participating volunteers would find something. We placed it over a rich surface level scatter, partly visible from under the turf, of rusty tins, porcelain, bed springs and miscellaneous metal objects (Fig. 1). We had no idea what had been at the place during the WWII, and before the excavations it could have represented either a destruction dump related to the retreat in 1944 or a building burned with all the items still inside. The majority of the volunteers

Northern Finland. The Germans adopted 'scorched earth tactics', which devastated the dwellings and infrastructure of Finnish Lapland, leading to the mass evacuation of civilians to Southern Finland and Sweden. (Seitsonen & Herva 2011; Tuominen 2005).

worked at this bigger excavation area under the supervision of Oula Seitsonen, our PI Vesa-Pekka Herva and Wesa Perttola.

Based on the work carried out with the volunteers, our excavation area covered one corner of a heavily burned building, possibly a storage for medical and other related equipment based on the abundance of finds. One of the most frequent find categories were the remnants of the pumpable insecticide sprayers. Other typical finds were various buckles, clasps and clips, most likely deriving from different kinds of hospital harnesses, sherds of medicine bottles and thermometers, and lots of porcelain. Porcelain included an interesting mixture of Finnish and German military-issues wares (see Seitsonen & Herva 2011; Seitsonen et al. forthcoming), as well as sherds from domestic coffee sets and hospital containers. The building and all the material inside it had been destroyed by an extremely hot fire. This had melted, for instance, numerous glass urinal pots, some with burned substances still inside them, into barely recognizable forms. Heavy melting of glass suggests that the fire which torched the place reached temperatures of over 1200° C.

The excavation uncovered only one end of a probable storage barrack, and we have no idea of its original extent. However, the find scatter extends under the turf over a considerable area, suggesting the barrack had extended northwards from our excavation area. Excavating the building fully could be something to do in the future at the site, since there are no signs of foundations or foundation pillars to give hints of its size to the surface; this is the case with all the other buildings at the site too.

Excavation area 2

This excavation area was situated some hundreds of metres from the area 1, deeper into the woods. It lay a short distance from the narrow, overgrown track, the former German road through the camp that runs through the forest, and a couple of hundred metres downslope from a zig-zag trench, interpreted as an air-raid trench by the team. The location was identified during a walkover survey by the 'International Brigade' of the project: Gabe Moshenska (UCL, London), Jaisson Teixeira Lino (UFFS, Brazil), and Iain Banks (Centre for Battlefield Archaeology, Glasgow). The first indication of the site was a concentrated scatter of empty tubes on the ground. Stripping back the vegetation revealed that there was a huge deposit of empty tubes, glass bottles and other material. It was all consistent with a hospital site, so the location was selected for further investigation. Right from the start, it was clear that the material had been distorted and damaged by intense heat, which made it clear that the material derived from the destroyed WWII hospital.

This site was a special project for the International Brigade, along with several of the volunteers. As we removed the vegetation cover, the site proved to be far larger than had been expected. It was also clearly not a random scatter of material as would be consistent with a rubbish dump. Once the vegetation had been cleared fully, we could see that the artefacts and areas of burning were in a roughly circular shape, with a diameter of 5–6 meters. There were three main groups of artefactual material: flat tins roughly 10 cm in diameter (all very corroded and with no surviving labels, but some with liniment still inside them); brown glass bottles that had originally contained ether, many distorted or melted by the intense heat (though not as badly as some of the material from Excavation area 1); and lots of tubes (some empty and squeezed out, some probably unopened when they were burned, and some with small amounts of salve intact), which were shown by occasional surviving labels to be mostly Wehrmacht anti-frostbite salve. Some of the tubes were still packed tightly together and had clearly been in their original packing when burned. There was a lot of wood interspersed with the artefactual remains, some of which seemed to be

the remains of boxes or containers, although there was one large section of wooden material that looked like it had been a door of some form. There was also a deposit of white powder that was identified by one of the volunteers as plaster of Paris, again emphasizing the medical nature of the site. It also underlined the value of volunteers, who bring expertise from their normal lives; in this case, we had two volunteers on the site who came from medical backgrounds and who were invaluable in explaining the material that we were excavating (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Volunteers with medical background digging at the excavation area 2 (Iain Banks 2016).

Once we had finished excavating site 2, the conclusion was that the sanitary material had been stored in a circular tent, such as the Wehrmacht used for supplies. That explains the circular nature of the site, and why there was no indication of walls. This tent might have been a Finnish manufactured cardboard or plywood tent – providing accommodation, supplies and services for German troops was a lucrative business in Lapland during the WWII (e.g. Westerlund, 2008) – or if it was canvas, then it would have had a central pole that stood on the ground surface. A lot of the wood appeared to be flooring for the interior of the storage tent, underlying much of the artefactual layers. The conflagration that had engulfed the tent seemed to have been deliberate. There was still a strong smell of petrol from the soil as we excavated, and we found one shell of a flare and the screwcap of a German hand grenade (*Model 24 Stielhandgranate*) within the interior. The intensity of the fire was shown by the melting of the glass bottles, which would indicate temperatures of over 700° C, although as there was no sign of glassware becoming fully molten (as happened at Excavation area 1), the temperature probably did not reach 1200° C.

All of this works well with the historical accounts that we have. As the Germans withdrew into Norway during the Lapland War, they set fire to the materials that they were abandoning. The material in the tent was a mixture of material that had been thrown away and material that had not been used. It clearly was part of a process of abandonment and wastage during the retreat, rather than disposal of rubbish while the hospital was in use.

Doing public archaeology with volunteers

Community or public archaeology is at its best a way for archaeologists and non-archaeologists to pool their skills and knowledge in the investigation of archaeological sites, working together to understand the historical events and processes that created and contextualized the site. It should be a way of involving local communities in the archaeology of their locale, with benefits in terms of local efforts to preserve and manage the archaeology. When it works well, it means that archaeologist and non-archaeologist work in an environment of mutual respect, learning from one another, and knowing that their skills and knowledge are being valued and taken seriously. It does not work so well if the archaeologists treat the volunteers as unpaid labourers to be ignored as far as possible, or if the non-archaeologists refuse to accept the requirements of archaeological processes like excavation. In Britain, there have been many excavations that have been described as community or public archaeology, and many of them have been excellent examples of good practice. Anecdotally, going on the experience of years of involvement in projects in Britain using volunteers, the people who volunteer tend to be middle class, generally with degrees, and

with a long interest in history and archaeology. Many of them have years of experience, and they will travel long distances to participate in archaeological projects. This is an excellent advantage for a project director who gets motivated, skillful workers on the project, but it raises the question of whether we can describe these projects as public or community projects. If the volunteers are a relatively limited number of individuals who are substantially from one section of society, and who may have traveled a long way to participate, in what sense can we talk of community archaeology? Clearly, there are aspects of community or public archaeology that do not work the way that we would like. Even with intensive publicity to try to get community participation, the majority of volunteers will be middle class. At the same time, the community as a whole will turn out to visit the site, in large numbers on open days, and individually throughout the project, as was witnessed also in Inari. There appears to be no lack of interest in the projects, but for whatever reason, many people seem to feel that their relationship to archaeology is as an audience rather than as a participant.

Backgrounds of the volunteers who signed up for the #InariDig varied but most of them were middle-class, had some higher education and even experience in conducting scientific research. Of our nine volunteers three lived in Northern Lapland and six came from southern parts of Finland. Interestingly enough, only one participant lived in the area of Inari municipality, although we had other Inari residents on the waiting list to volunteer but could not be accommodated at the excavations this time. Only two of the volunteers were male and the rest were females. A clear majority were middle-aged.

All the volunteers shared an interest in outdoor life. Two friends who shared an especially strong interest in WWII history, nature and the area of Lapland, and had done several excursions to dark heritage sites in Finland and Northern Norway. They also expressed a wish to familiarize themselves with other WWII historical sites of the area and together with them, the research group organized an excursion to a nearby Prisoner-of-War (PoW) camp. All the volunteers wanted to join this excursion which took place on Thursday evening of the excavation week.

German material heritage played an active role in motivating many of the volunteers to join in. One volunteer had German background, another two reported to have German connections in their families, and others reported special interests as well. For instance, the only couple volunteering in the project reported in the registration form that they wanted to participate since they are working in the field of medical research and have a special interest in medical history, and could provide their “inside knowledge” on identifying sanitary material that we found. Only one member of the group told us she had no specific interest in history but wanted to experience something unique during her summer holiday and enjoy a get-away from her ordinary life filled with demanding work. New friendships were also forged during the dig, both between the volunteers and with the researchers: essentially an active community of researchers and volunteers was created as the result of our excavations (see Purra, 2016).

Engaging with the local community

#InariDig received a lot of media attention at a national level both prior and during the excavations², and many locals took part in the activities we organized alongside the excavations during the #InariDig week.

² Many of the volunteers told that they had seen the advertisement of the public excavations in the national state broadcasting company Yle's webpages. Also the local public Sámi channel Yle Sápmi and the local newspapers took an interest, as also with our earlier research of Lapland's WWII history. The local weekly newspaper Inarilainen managed

These included two guided tours at the excavation site, several public lectures, a story night in collaboration with the Inari library (transferred to the Ivalo municipal center some 40 km south of Inari), and a village tour at the war historical sites with the aforementioned local history expert Matti Lehtonen. The various activities, lectures and the tour lured over 30 people to learn about the WWII history of the area (Fig. 3). The various organized activities attracted good numbers of people. Some of the partakers were summer residents of the area, one of whom had a special interest in the WWII history. Several of the local history hobbyists and activists we had interviewed during our research (Herva et al, 2016; Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas, 2016) also visited us at the site.

Figure 3. Local historian Matti Lehtola directing a war historical tour in the village of Inari (Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto 2016).

One of us (IB) remembers an interesting experience working on the BBC TV series 'Two Men in a Trench' in England, which might have relevance also for planning our future work in Lapland. The program was investigating various battles using archaeology and history, where archaeologists, metal detectorists, historians, and public volunteers all worked together. On one shoot in particular, we excavated a couple of trenches in a churchyard within a small English village. During the first week, we had the normal experience of having local visitors to the site ask if we had either found gold yet or if we'd like to go and dig their garden for them, as usual. All the visitors focused on the archaeology in the trenches, either being interested in what we were finding or telling us, again as usual, that we were clearly digging in the wrong place and should instead dig where "everyone" knew the important things would be found. For this first week, roughly, the archaeology was a novelty that held everyone's attention. However, by the second week, something happened and there was a distinct change in the visitors: in this later period, they were talking and engaging with each other. Visitors were still looking at what was going on in the trenches, but their real attention and conversation was with each other and about their village. Towards the end of the film shoot, one of the villagers commented to me that the project had brought the village together in a way that it had never done before. It was a dormitory for a large city, with the inhabitants commuting to work every day, and there was no village shop or pub to act as a focal point for the community. The archaeological project provided that focal point, albeit briefly, but in the course of that two weeks, people began to engage with their fellow residents that they had never talked to before. Quite inadvertently and unexpectedly, we had caused a sense of community to begin to develop within that village. I have no idea how long it survived, but that project was one situation where the dig truly became community archaeology.

Proceedings of the #InariDig

#InariDig created a core-volunteer community that continued to interact with the researchers and each other after the public excavations. The volunteers discussed the ways in which they could keep in contact already during the excavations, and the idea of a starting a closed Facebook group for the volunteers and

to report about our excavations only after the event, although their reporter spent considerable amount of time at the site interviewing and discussing with us and the volunteers.

scholars came up. This group was set up right after the excavations ended, and altogether XXX people joined the group. Three core members of this Facebook group have also started planning further activities, for instance, sharing documentaries, books and other information and advertising for example photogrammetry courses to the group members. Some volunteers also provided the researchers with material they had acquired, such as rare old maps of Inari village.

There have also been wonderful, unexpected and unplanned, public outreaches related to the #InariDig, like in the English case described above. These include, most remarkably, a commemorative Greek-Orthodox service at one PoW Camp site in Inari, to remember the anonymous Russian PoW who were there during the war. This was initiated by two of our active volunteers, who were so overpowered by the melancholic site and haunted by it, that they asked if a local priest would like to hold a memorial service at the site. As an outcome of this, raising of an Orthodox cross was implemented at the camp in September by one of us (OS) and our project PI Vesa-Pekka Herva together with the local priest of the Skolt Sámi, father Rauno Pietarinen. A memorial service was held at this remote PoW camp deep in the forest in early October, and turned out to be surprisingly popular, attracting some twenty people to attend.

#InariDig also sparked the local community to document the WWII history of the village. Inari library who hosts a project "Stories of Inari" (*Tarinoiden Inari*), that documents local folklore by interviewing elders and creating an open virtual database of audiotapes, recorded Matti Lehtonen's war historical village tour. A few weeks after the excavations, the Inari municipal officials and local tourism entrepreneurs organized also a public discussion about initiatives to develop tourism related to the war historical sites in the area, and also asked us to participate as potential experts in executing this. This was an especially delightful turn of events, since from the start of our WWII studies we have tried to find ways in which our archaeological research could benefit the local community, for instance, through cultural tourism, and have always been trying to plant a seed of acknowledging the positive use-potential of Lapland's "dark heritage" during our fieldwork.

We received recently the brilliant news that we can continue working with the public also in 2017, uncovering more bits and pieces of Lapland's WWII material heritage. University of Helsinki's Future Fund decided to sponsor #InariDig2, planned two week field research at two German sites in northern Inari. As soon as we announced funding, several applications to attend the excavations were received from the 2016 volunteers, and we truly look forward to working with them and other public volunteers next summer. #InariDig2 will allow us to facilitate some kind of communal get-together in co-operation with the local village association, for instance, in the form of a story night, collecting oral memories and discussing the importance of the material remains with the villagers. This could hopefully also bring the locals together and get them more closely engaged with their own wartime heritage: it is anyway already part of their everyday world and they are typically very familiar with all the WWII ruins in their reindeer herding grounds in the wilderness.

More information about the #InariDig and #InariDig2 at the project's blog (<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/lapland-dark-heritage/>), public Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Laplands-Dark-Heritage-1739806009628668/>), Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/DarkLapland>; @darklapland) and Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/dig_inari/).

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