

Holy Mountain

Atoklimpen is situated in a mountainous region where Sami people have lived for thousands of years. The herding district of Vapsten, *Vaapsten Sijte*, has used Södra Storfjället's mountain massif, near the Norwegian border, for reindeer breeding, hunting and fishing for a very long time. The area surrounding the magnificent mountain (Atoklinten on the mountain map, 1 006 metres above sea level) is full of traces and remains from the nomadic society – encampments with hearths, bone deposits, cairns and remains of reindeer enclosures. Together with even older, ancient, traces and today's modern enclosures and reindeer herders' cottages, they provide a fascinating picture of how people have used this area. Some old traces and remains can be quite challenging, in that they are not always so easy to see...

Atoklimpen has a spiritual dimension as well. Memories, myths, religion and tradition have developed here in harmony with nature. According to tradition, Ato means 'that one', which indicates that the mountain is so holy that its name cannot even be mentioned. Or maybe it doesn't need a name since many Sami people know what it refers to anyway?

Atoklimpen is known as *Aejlies vaerie*, a 'divine mountain', which is not so remarkable considering its characteristic appearance. In the old days, people probably prayed and sacrificed to the mountain top itself, which could also be invoked in times of danger or in case of an accident. There were several gods in Sami pre-Christian religion, but even more important were other types of spiritual beings, such as rulers, *vearelden ålma*, who protected animals, plants and territories.



Reproductions from a magic drum from Vapsten, now at the British Museum in London.

Links between Millenniums

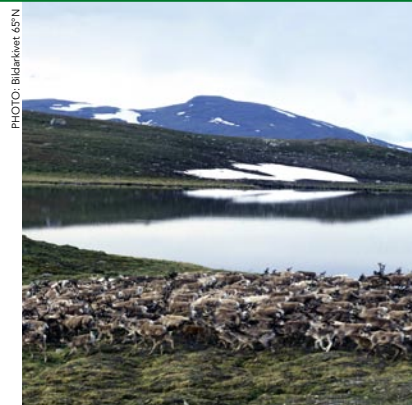
People's relationship with the reindeer has given rise to three types of landscapes at Atoklimpen; a spiritual/mental landscape, the landscape of the nomad society and the landscape of the modern reindeer breeders' society.

Bovtse, the reindeer, is the link between the millenniums – first in the wild state and later as a domesticated animal. The reindeer has primarily provided milk, cheese, meat, fur, hide, clothes and material for handicraft. It has also been used as draught animal, pack animal and as hunting lure. The reindeer's most important fodder is lichens, which can be easily digested and absorbed. In the summer, the meagre diet is supplemented with grass, herbs, leaves and mushrooms.

In the herding district of Vapsten, the reindeers' summer pasture is situated in the high mountains above the timberline. The reindeers as well as the reindeer breeders have to make long migrations between the winter pastures by the coast and the summer pastures in the mountains. Modern technology is used in this work. Some ten companies pursue reindeer breeding, with a maximum of 6 500 reindeers, within the boundaries of the herding district. Södra Storfjället's mountain massif is used as a calving area in the spring, as a calf marking site in the summer and as pastureland in the spring, summer and autumn. There are winter pasturelands in the municipalities of Lycksele, Bjurholm, Vännäs and Nordmaling.

The herding district of Vapsten is situated in the Southern Sami area. Today's reindeer breeders are, however, descendants of the Northern Sami who were forced to move here in the 1930s. The Sami people who see Atoklimpen and its environment as their home area are consequently both Northern and Southern Sami, some are reindeer breeders and some are not.

ENGLISH	SOUTHERN SAMI	NORTHERN SAMI
REINDEER BULL	sarva	sarvvis
REINDEER STAG	rääntjoe	heargi
REINDEER COW	aaltoe, gïehke	åldu
REINDEER CALF	miesie	miessi



Reindeers at Södra Storfjället.

The Ato Cottage

Around 1920, Tomas and Anna Klementsson built a peat hut near Atoklimpen. Here, in the middle of the herding district's summer encampment by Risbäcken, the family did what few other Samis had done before them – they built a dwelling-house. When it was finished in 1925, the family moved from their hut to the larger cottage, with kitchen and pantry on the ground floor, and room and attic room on the upper floor. But the timber cottage was built without a building permit and they were urged by the Sami bailiff to tear it down, since Samis were not allowed to build permanent houses in the mountain region. "A Sami must be a Sami" as the phrase went. This discriminating law was changed in 1928, largely due to the Klementsson family's fight for the right to remain in their house.

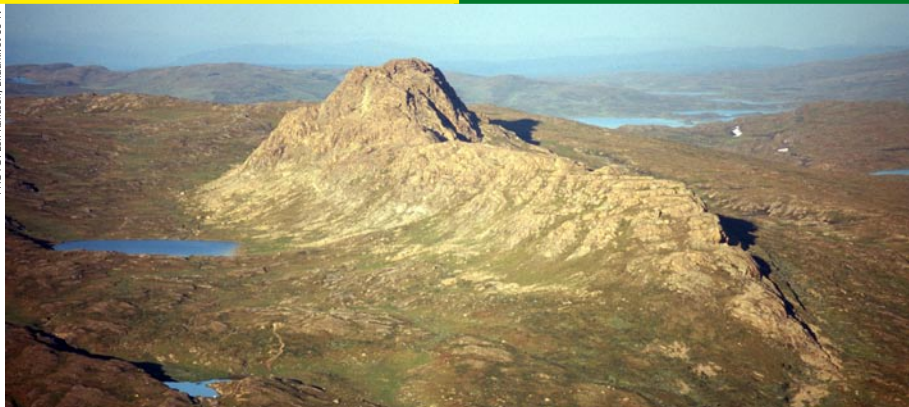
At the same time, a nomad school was opened near the Ato cottage, where Sami children were taught during a few weeks in the summer. The Swedish state considered the nomad schools to be practical as well as tactical. The children could stay near their reindeer breeding parents and were not tempted to a life beyond the mountains and the forest. The school consisted of three huts, each with its own function; one for teaching, one for eating and one for sleeping. The school was closed down in 1945 when the new nomad school in Tärnaby was opened. By that time the Klementsson family had already moved to Vilhelmina, but Sami people still lived in the encampment.

In the area around the Ato cottage, which is a central area for the Vapsten Sami, the reindeer are gathered before the autumn slaughter and the migration to the winter pastureland. Both the peat hut and the Ato cottage are open to visitors. There is also a storage shed there.



Anna Klementsson with her son Jonas in the early 1920s.

PHOTO: Leif Karlsson, Bildarkivet 65'N



Peculiar Appearance

Atoklimpen has a peculiar appearance, caused by the volcanic species of rock called peridotite, which is transformed into serpentine stone, asbestos, talcum and steatite. These serpentine mountains are called *rovhtege* in Southern Sami – a word which might refer to the colours of the mountain which changes from green to red.

This hard species of rock, with its “elephant skin”, has withstood thousands of years of weathering processes better than its surroundings. Atoklimpen is still here, like an ancient dragon, hundred metres above the bare mountain region. Neither the continental ice sheet, nor the weather gods have managed to grind down this large and strong lump.

PHOTO: Bengt Ekman, Naturfotoarkiverna



Many plants do not thrive in this environment – there are for example no blueberries or ordinary rock-inhabiting lichens near Atoklimpen. Because of the basic, nutrient-poor bed-rock, many alpine plants and lichens can't grow here. Other plants thrive excellently among the heavy metals, however, for example alpine catchfly and alpine mouse-ear.

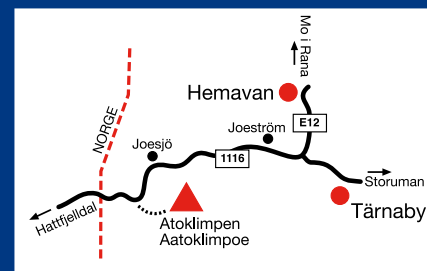
A Cultural Reserve

In 2005, Aatoklimpoe, Atoklimpen, the county of Västerbotten's second cultural reserve, was established – a Sami cultural environment. The first reserve, the catchwork water meadows in Rörträsk, is situated in the municipality of Norsjö.

Aatoklimpoe, Atoklimpen, is situated in the parish of Tärna in the municipality of Storuman. It is part of Södra Storfjället's mountain massif near the Norwegian border. The aim of the reserve is to protect, preserve and inform about the cultural-historical values in and around the mountain of Atoklimpen. Which are then these values? Briefly, the mountain, with its surrounding area, is a representative Sami environment with a continuity from prehistoric days until today. The traces, remains and spiritual landscape of Atoklimpen reflect the development of the Sami culture and people's life conditions in the mountains. Some efforts are needed in order for the cultural reserve to function according to plan, and they are specified in an action plan. The reserve is managed by the County Administration. For more information: 090 – 10 70 00, www.aclst.se

Come and acquaint yourself with the holy mountain of Atoklimpen! Signs and guides (Information: Tärnafjällen Tourist Information Office, tel: 0954 – 104 50) will provide you with more information – just as the mountain itself, of course. There is a car park by road 1116, where a smaller, disabled-adapted road leads to the entrance of the cultural reserve by the Ato cottage. After slightly more than three km of walking or skiing you will reach the top of Atoklimpen. You will not be disappointed, perhaps only slightly sweaty...

Buerie Båeteme!
Bures Boahhtin!
Welcome!



Visualiserad/FRI reklambyrå 2007 PHOTO: Bo-Anne Torgar, Norrfinland

Cultural Reserves
in the County of
Västerbotten



– a Sami Cultural Environment