

CHANGING PLANET



'Our souls touch': reindeer on the move in Norway

In [Changing Planet](#) October 27, 2011 [0 Comments](#)



[Joanna Eede](#)



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THE ARNØY / KÅGEN GROUP OF REINDEER SWIM ACROSS
KÅGSUNDET FJORD FROM THEIR SUMMER ISLAND TO THE
MAINLAND WINTERING GROUNDS. © JASON ROBERTS

Autumn in Northern Norway, and a hundred hooves power their way through the freezing waters of Kågsundet fjord, the dark mountains of Uløya rising in the distance.

During the summer months, Sámi herders round up their reindeer in Arnøy's high mountains, in preparation for the migration to the tundra plateau on the mainland. The herders consider the 3 kilometer swim across the fjord to be the most treacherous part of the herd's migration; if one calf starts swimming in a different direction, the rest of the herd can follow.

It takes a week for the entire herd to swim the 3 kms between Arnøy and Kågen. Last weekend, the swim was finally completed.

It is thought Sámi ancestors arrived in the region soon after the end of the ice age, approximately nine thousand years ago. They were traditionally nomadic or semi-nomadic; their ways of life closely tied to reindeer-herding, hunting, trapping and fishing. Like many indigenous peoples, the reindeer-herding Sámi have recently lost large tracts of pastureland as a result of dams, mining, tourism and other 'development' schemes.

For many, however, time is still measured by the seasonal migrations of their reindeer. *'Their lands and reindeer remain central to their identity'*, says Sophie Grig, Senior Campaigner at [Survival International](#).

My people have been living with reindeer for thousands of years, says a Sámi herder. We've become very close. You could say that our souls touch, or better still, they overlap.




MEET THE AUTHOR

Joanna Eede was an editorial consultant to Survival International with a particular interest in the relationship between man and nature and tribal peoples. She has created and edited three environmental books, including *Portrait of England* (Think Publishing, 2006) and *We are One: A Celebration of Tribal Peoples* (Quadrille, 2009). Joanna writes for newspapers and magazines on subjects such as the repatriation of wild Przewalski horses to Mongolia, the whales of the Alboran sea, the

chimpanzees of the Mahale rainforest, uncontacted tribes of the Amazon rainforest and the Hadza hunter gatherer people of Tanzania. Future ideas include a book about Tibet's nomads.

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