

OBITUARY

MIKEL NILS PERSSON UTSI died in Cambridge on 30 June 1979, aged 71. He will be remembered in this country as the man who re-introduced reindeer to the British Isles, and had charge of the herd in the Cairngorms for nearly thirty years.

He was born on 17 May 1908 in Karesuando, the northerly church village in Sweden. He was the second of eight sons in a well-known north Lappish reindeer-owning family, and spent his first 15 years with the family herds, migrating with the animals up to the mountains and out to the coast of Norway each summer. Border politics caused the Utsis and others to move farther south, and the family founded a new summer village, Vaisaluokta. From 1938 to 1946 Utsi ran restaurants in the capital of Norrbotten, served three periods in the Swedish army, and for eight months



Mikel Nils Persson Utsi.

played a vital role when, as a Swedish special constable, he and a colleague traced and indeed rescued from death many hundreds of Norwegian refugees escaping across the uninhabited border. He was awarded the Freedom Medal by King Haakon of Norway after the war.

Utsi came to live in England in 1947, following his marriage to Dr E. J. Lindgren. They founded the Reindeer Council of the United Kingdom in 1949, 'to encourage experiments in reindeer-breeding in suitable areas in Scotland and/or overseas'. In 1952, permission having finally been received from the government, the first importation of eight reindeer from Sweden arrived by iron-ore boat from Narvik, and the Reindeer Company Ltd, with Utsi as Managing Director,

was formed to own and operate the herd in the Aviemore region. The last import was in 1961 and the present herd of 80–100 head are all Scottish-born. The running of the herd has been Utsi's primary responsibility, and there is no doubt that he has demonstrated the viability of keeping reindeer in Scotland. He attached great importance to the scientific aspects of the work and successfully carried through a programme of research. None of this could have been done without the knowledge, enthusiasm and drive that he possessed. Some at least of his expertise has been passed on to a series of British-born herders based on Reindeer House, Glenmore. He himself became a British subject in 1955.

Utsi was a most likeable man. His sense of fun was infectious, and his fund of anecdote extensive. He was a well-loved figure in the Aviemore region, where the Christmas appearance of a reindeer sledge in the streets and even hotels has become a tradition. Since his death a new bridge over a burn on the way to the reindeer reserve has been named the Utsi Bridge. Laconic and highly perceptive, his remarks would often take his hearer by surprise; instead of passing the expected small talk, he would go straight to the heart of the matter in a crisp and sometimes devastating way. He was also a talented craftsman. The Scott Polar Research Institute's museum contains a very fine collection of his carvings in bone, antler and wood, presented by him. The museum in Jokkmokk, northern Sweden, paid him the compliment of selecting a particularly beautiful bone spoon of his for reproduction in silver.

He is survived by his widow and his son Vincent.

Terence Armstrong

Professor Ian Whitaker writes:

Mikel Utsi was a great friend to anthropologists who chose to work among the Lapps (Sami). As I know from personal experience, he spent many hours seeking to equip the uninitiated in the elements of Lappish etiquette. Few fieldworkers can avoid the unintended gaffe, committed through an incomplete comprehension of the system of manners and values of the subjects of study. That some of us were able to develop a rapport with Lappish reindeer breeders was unquestionably due to the careful instruction that we had received from this selfless man.

Utsi remained deeply interested in developments among his native people, even in his later years when his visits to Scandinavia were brief and infrequent. Indeed, he kept up till the end a running correspondence with newspapers and others concerned with reindeer breeding. This had formed the kernel of his penetrating survey of reindeer breeding techniques in Karesuando during his youth ('The reindeer breeding methods of the northern Lapps', *Man* (London), Vol 48, 1948, p 97–101).

His own experiments in introducing reindeer into Scotland were in effect also a demonstration of the enduring value of 'intensive' methods of reindeer breeding, such as were pursued in southern Lapland generally until recently. This involved the intensive care of each animal which, in a remarkable way, would respond to Utsi's oral call.

Many of us who are associated with the Institute will mourn the passing of this witty and engaging person.

Academician **VIKTOR BORISOVICH SOCHAVA**, a leading Soviet specialist in northern botany and physical geography, died in Leningrad in December 1978, aged 73. A pupil of V. N. Sukachev, he gained his first northern experience in 1926, when he started two years' work for the northern Urals expedition of the Academy of Sciences under B. N. Gorodkov, making a special study of the forests of the region adjacent to the Arctic Circle. Between 1929 and 1932 he studied the potential for reindeer pastures in the Anadyr' and Penzhina regions of the Far East. He was by now head of the geobotanical section of the Institute of Reindeer Husbandry, and when this Institute became in 1935 the reindeer section of the Arctic Institute, Sochava moved across as its head. He next turned his attention to southern Siberia, particularly east of Baykal, then to the Altay and central Urals, and after the war to the northern Caucasus and southern European Russia. This long period of energetic fieldwork, during much of which he was associated with the Botanical Institute of the Academy of Sciences, was followed by his appointment in 1958 to set up the Institute of Geography of Siberia and the Far East at Irkutsk. Of this he became the

first Director, a post he held until his death. The area of the Institute's activity was mostly in the southern half of eastern Siberia, but extended into the north in the Yenisey valley.

During his career Sochava was closely associated with a number of botanical mapping projects, including a vegetation map of European Russia (1950) and the first geobotanical map of the USSR (1954). Later he was the prime mover in preparing a series of thematic maps of Asiatic Russia and an atlas of the Baykal region (*Atlas Zabaykal'ya*, 1967). He was also deeply concerned with problems of applied geography, advising his government on many major development projects. His efforts to see geographical problems in the broadest context led him to introduce the concept of the 'geosystem', a subject to which his last monograph was devoted (*Vvedeniye v ucheniye o geosistemakh*, 1978). He was an energetic researcher and prolific writer. Before taking up his post in Irkutsk he made a contribution also as a teacher, both at Leningrad University and at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute. He became a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences in 1958 and a full Academician in 1968.

Terence Armstrong

Sir **ROBERT FALLA** died at his home in New Zealand on 23 February 1979 aged 75. He made his reputation as an Antarctic ornithologist with the publication, in 1937, of his report on the birds of the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition, 1929–31. Born in Palmerston North, in 1901, he was educated at Auckland University and became a lecturer in nature study at Auckland Teachers' College. In 1929 he was appointed Assistant Zoologist to Sir Douglas Mawson's expedition, with responsibility for ornithological studies. On return Falla was appointed to the staff of Auckland War Memorial Museum, later becoming Director of Canterbury Museum, Christchurch (1937–47). During World War II he saw service with the Cape Expedition, in charge of coast-watching operations on the Auckland Islands from 1943 to 1944. In 1947 he was appointed Director of the Dominion Museum (now the National Museum), Wellington, from which he retired in 1966; during his years of office he organized and took part in many biological expeditions to New Zealand's southern islands. Falla played a leading role in promoting New Zealand's interest in Antarctica, and was a member of the Ross Sea Committee from its inception in 1955. He was also active in New Zealand conservation, serving as Chairman of the Nature Conservation Council 1962–74. Throughout his working life he maintained a steady output of scientific papers, mostly on New Zealand and Antarctic species. He was knighted in 1973.

Bernard Stonehouse

Dr **KENNETH J. BERTRAND**, Professor Emeritus of Geography at the Catholic University of America died on 17 December 1978 at the age of 68. Dr Bertrand was the author of *Americans in Antarctica 1775–1948* (American Geographical Society, 1971), a comprehensive and authoritative history of American involvement in the region. He served as a member of the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names from 1947 and as its chairman from 1962 to 1973.

Professor **EDWIN ERNEST RICH**, the historian, died on 7 July 1979, aged 74. He held the Vere Harmsworth Chair of Imperial and Naval History at Cambridge from 1951 to 1970, and was Master of St Catharine's College from 1957 to 1973. His historical studies covered a wide range, but his major work centred on Canada and the Canadian north. His two volumes *The Hudson's Bay Company, 1670–1870* (London, 1958–59) constitute the standard history of the company, while he covered a somewhat broader field in his *The fur trade and the northwest to 1857* (Toronto, 1967). He was for 23 years (1937–60) General Editor of the Hudson's Bay Record Society, and during this time he was editor or joint editor of no fewer than 16 of its volumes. His interest in Canada and its north led him to organize and preside over a discussion group (he much disliked the word seminar) on a broad range of topics in the history of the Arctic and sub-Arctic. Participants will not quickly forget the very special atmosphere of the Master's dining room on those occasions, nor the chairman's perceptive and often trenchant comments.

Professor **DONALD A. GILL** died as a result of a road accident near Peace River, Alberta, on 28 July 1979. He was 44. Professor Gill had for 11 years been a member of the Department of Geography, University of Alberta, and was from 1973 to 1976 Director of the Boreal Institute for Northern Studies. An expert in northern ecosystems, he had a close familiarity with the Canadian north in all its aspects and had published widely.

Major **HAROLD WILLIAM TILMAN**, CBE, DSO, MC, whose death at sea is now presumed, was born in 1898. After distinguished service in two World Wars, and a climbing record in the Himalayas in the years between that made his name a household word, Bill Tilman turned his attention to the polar regions and ocean sailing—a fitting epilogue to a long life of adventure and achievement. Those who sailed and climbed with him saw the fortitude and determination that might escape a reader of his modest and light-hearted accounts of his travels. His choice of old boats and polar landfalls reflected his personal approach, as he once quoted from Belloc: ‘In venturing in sail upon strange coasts we are seeking first experiences. Trying to feel as felt the earlier man in a happier time. To see the world as they saw it.’

His many voyages in three old Bristol Channel pilot cutters between 1955 and 1977 would make an epic in themselves; more than 185 000 km in *Mischief* before she was lost at Jan Mayen, and many thousands of miles in *Sea Breeze*, also lost in Angmagssalik Fjord, and in *Baroque*. All three cutters were built before 1906 and *Baroque* survives him.

The voyages were for a purpose: to reach snow mountains worth climbing, sometimes frustrated by the hazards of sea ice, inhospitable shores, and crews unequal to his own severe standard. His major expeditions included the crossing of the Patagonia ice-cap, the Cook glacier on île Kerguelen, and Bylot Island; a season on the Qioqe peninsula in Umanak Fjord, and many other climbs in east and west Greenland, Baffin Island and Spitsbergen.

A month after the return of *Baroque* from wintering in Iceland, Tilman set out again in August 1977 with Simon Richardson and five others in *En Avant* for one more attempt at the ‘glittering prize’ of Smith Island in the South Shetland Islands where, in 1967, he had made landfall. *En Avant* left Rio de Janeiro for the Falkland Islands in November 1977. She was never heard of again.

Frank George