



## **With Reindeer and Sled in Inka Länta's Winterland**

**Dir. Erik Bergström | Sweden | 1926 | N/C 12A | b&w, tinted & toned | Swedish intertitles  
with English surtitles | 1h**

**Performing live: Hildá Länsman, Tuomas Norvio, Lávre Johan Eira and Svante Henryson  
7:30pm on Wednesday 19 March 2025**

Screening material courtesy of Swedish Film Institute. Commission funded by Tromsø  
International Film Festival

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The beauty of the Swedish winter landscape is probably one of the first things that strikes any modern-day audience of Erik Bergström's 1926 feature length documentary *Med ackja och ren i Inka Läntas vinterland* [With Sled and Reindeer in the Winterland of Inka Länta]. In picturesque icy and snowy images, captured by master cinematographer Gustaf Boge, the wilderness of the northernmost Swedish province of Lapponia is presented during the coldest and darkest time of the year. The film is, however, not a documentation of nature and wildlife, but a portrayal of the Sámi people who have lived their lives in this remote and sparsely populated region of the country since ancient times.

Following the first few minutes of snow-covered trees and frozen waterfalls, we are introduced to the film's real protagonists: Inka Länta and her family. They are reindeer herders, and although this profession is still an important part of Sámi culture, the film gives an insight into a hard nomadic life that today's Sámi population has long left behind. Much of the film focuses on the protagonists means of survival during the dark and cold winter, but life is not just a struggle, and we will also follow Inka Länta and her family along to one of the real highlights of the year: the annual market in Jokkmokk (which still to this day takes place every year). Here we get a chance to see where a large part of the Sámi community meets to trade and socialize.

It would be a bit inaccurate to see *Med ackja och ren i Inka Läntas vinterland* as a true documentation of Inka Länta's and the other protagonists' lives. Throughout the film,



genuine documentary shots are combined with scenes that are obviously staged to either show the core of everyday life or help create an exciting dramaturgy. In this way, the viewer gets to see both cooking, building a goahti (a traditional hut), an exciting wolf hunt, reindeer slaughter and – charmingly enough – a budding romance! (The slaughter scene has only survived in a severely abridged version, which might be a relief to the modern audience.) This hybrid between scenes that are more or less arranged for the camera is, after all, typical of documentary filmmaking of all times, and similarities can easily be found within the perhaps most famous ethnographic film from the silent film era – Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, released four years earlier.

A surprising fact that needs to be pointed out is that the director of *Med ackja och ren i Inka Lántas vinterland*, Erik Bergström, was not at all a traditional film person. Instead, he was an inspector for nomadic schools in Lapponia and had previously only directed one single film, the documentary *I fjällfolkets land* [In the Country of the Mountain People] (1923). That film was the first appearance of Inka Länta and her family in front of the camera, and the tremendous success following its release demanded a sequel. Since the predecessor had taken place during the summer months, it was natural that the next film would depict the hardships of Inka Länta and her family during winter.

Given his limited film experience it is impressive how Bergström not only portrays the life of the Sámi, but also effectively tells a compelling story. Bergström had, however, by his side master cinematographer Gustaf Boge, with whom he had already worked on during the making of the first film about Inka Länta. Boge was at this time one of the most experienced Swedish cinematographers and had shot documentary footage in Sweden as well as far abroad. A few years before he had, for example, been sent away on an eleven month long cinematographic expedition to present-day Indonesia. One might, however, assume that the conditions for filming the Lapponian winter life must have been something extraordinary – even compared to shooting in tropical wilderness – as one of the inter-titles in the film points out that the temperature is -47 degrees!

When Bergström made his two films about Inka Länta, making films about the indigenous Sámi people for the cinema was nothing new, since it had already been done in Sweden in the 1900s and 1910s, but the innovation lay in the feature-length format for this type of film. Bergström was also not the only Swedish documentary film maker depicting Sámis during the 1920s. A third feature-length documentary on this subject, *Där norrskenet flammar* [The land of Aurora Borealis], was made by cameraman and director Ragnar Westfelt in 1923. Compared to ethnographic films about other – from a Swedish perspective



– more exotic and remote cultures which were also made in the 1920s, these documentaries about the Sámi are always significantly more respectful and less condescending. However, it cannot be ignored that the documentary films from these years without exception are created by non-Sámi and show Sámi life from the perspective of the majority society. The oppression which Swedish society subjected the Sámi people to in the 1900s - such as forced relocations, racial biological research and denial of their language and culture - are therefore absent from the films.

*Med ackja och ren i Inka Läntas vinterland* was mainly distributed and shown in schools as an educational film. (For regular theatrical distribution, a shorter version of the film was edited, which was shown in the cinema repertoire as a pre-film for other programs.) The film still seems to have gained some distribution outside Sweden's borders, as parts of a tinted and toned nitrate print with French inter-titles was identified in the collection of EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam in 2015. That fragment became an important reference when the Swedish Film Institute digitally restored the film based on the shortened and re-edited original negative in 2021. After the restoration, *Med ackja och ren i Inka Läntas vinterland* has had several international screenings. Thereby it has gone from being an overlooked and rather forgotten work in the history of Swedish documentary film to one of the more interesting rediscoveries in international silent cinema in the last couple of years.

## MAGNUS ROSBORN

*Magnus is a film archivist and curator at the Swedish Film Institute. Throughout the years he has worked on several restoration projects of Swedish films – including Med ackja och ren i Inka Läntas vinterland. He has also curated film series and initiated film screenings of Swedish films at several international film festivals and cinematheques.*

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