



In Loving Memory of Lars Reinhold Lindkvist

Chapter One: Beginnings

Lars was born in Örby, a small town in Sweden, and even as a boy, those who loved him could see he was destined for far horizons. He studied in Sweden and later in Michigan as an exchange student, the first of many journeys that would take him across the world and deep into the lives of the people and places he loved.

His academic training took place at the Earth Science Centre at the University of Gothenburg, where he pursued studies in biology and geography and eventually completed a PhD in biogeography and bioclimatology. His doctoral thesis, *Climate Variability in High Elevation Forests*, focused on forest ecosystems, forestry practice, climate change, natural-resource management and climate modelling. He married Christina Helge and had his sons, Jacob and Jesper Lindkvist.

His professional career began in 1988 with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), as a Young Professional Officer. His first international assignments took him to Africa, including a posting in Zambia. He subsequently returned to biological and geographical research at the Earth Science Centre at Gothenburg University.

Science had taken Lars into the natural world, and his development work took him into the human world. Africa brought the two together. He would spend the rest of his professional life exploring that intersection. From 1990 to 1997 he was associated with the University of Gothenburg, before moving into applied environmental and sustainability work with Sweden's National Board of Forestry, Skogsstyrelsen, from 1997 to 2001. It was a formative combination: academic science, forestry, climate and development. He was learning that the fate of ecosystems could never be separated from the decisions people make about land. That understanding would become central to everything that followed.

Chapter Two: A Life Fully Lived

But long before any title or institution, Lars was, in every sense, an extreme athlete. He was someone who pushed his body and his spirit further than most of us would dare. He scaled mountains with Ulf and Sten Göran, and poured himself into building the Mara alongside Svein, Ole and Tina. Golf, mountain climbing, basketball, honestly it seemed nothing in sport came hard to him. He simply excelled and made it look easy.

But more than the summits themselves, Lars loved the people he climbed them with. Family time held a sacred place for him, and he set a high bar for how it should be spent. It was especially in the places that meant the most to him: the Mara, Mount Kenya, and Orüst in Sweden. He wanted everyone he loved to know these places the way he did. Not long after meeting Wanjira who would later become his wife, he asked, almost casually, whether she'd like to climb Mount Kenya that very weekend (never mind that most people train for a year before attempting it). He had done it 17 times himself, so as far as he was concerned, there was no reason she couldn't do it too. It became one of the hardest, and proudest, things she ever did. "Just get on with it" wasn't just something Lars said, it was how he lived.

Lars was also an excellent cook, and he took great pride in the many delicious recipes he had inherited from his mother. He loved to experiment in the kitchen, adding his own twists and discovering new ways to bring flavors together. Cooking was one of the ways he expressed his creativity and generosity. He was always happy to share his kitchen tricks, offer a tip or two, of course, and insist that his way was the better way! Food brought Lars enormous pleasure, but even more so when it was shared around a table with family and friends.

Nature was where Lars felt most alive, and he had a gift for shaping it into something extraordinary: be it the green paradise by the sea in Orüst, the landscapes, trees and people, he celebrated in Nyeri, and the Mara (where his life's work and legacy shine brightest). As a forester, his love of the land was not just personal but professional, and he made sure everyone around him learned to love and work with nature too. He particularly loved the "Know Your Country" tours we embarked on with friends to visit parts of Kenya we would ordinarily not and savor the beauty and wonder of home.

Lars was courageous in every way. fearless, resourceful, and never one to let limits stifle an idea. He was unafraid of a challenge, and exactly the person you'd want beside you if things ever called for a narrow escape. That same fearlessness carried into how he built community and family: he created lasting places of belonging in Orust, Nyeri and the Mara, because for Lars, home was wherever the people he loved together. In the final summer of his life, the family gathered in Orüst, his happy place. We all agreed it had been one of the best summers full of the buzz, laughter, good food, great weather, and togetherness he so treasured, with friends dropping by and everyone of his immediate family under the same roof.

Lars was an intentional and devoted father to Elsa, Ruth, Jesper, and Jacob, and a loving husband to Wanjira. He took being a father seriously and was deeply present in the lives of his children. He wanted to be there for the everyday moments as much as the important ones, and he cared deeply about the people they were becoming.

He brought the same conviction to fatherhood that he brought to everything he believed in. He encouraged his children to pay attention to what mattered, to make the most of their time together, and to hold on to the things that were truly important. He cared deeply about his family and wanted his children to appreciate and enjoy the life they were living.

As the children grew, he would often remind us, "Enjoy this time. It goes fast." He knew, perhaps better than any of us, how quickly the years pass. He wanted us to notice the small things along the way, the ordinary days, the time together, the changing stages of family life, because he understood that these

are the moments we eventually come to miss. Lars influence will remain with all of us in ways both large and small.

Chapter Three: Africa and Basecamp

By the beginning of the 2000s, Lars's professional life had moved decisively toward Africa and sustainable development. Basecamp Explorer had been initiated in Kenya in 1997 by Svein Wilhelmsen and Ole Bernt Frøshaug, with Petter Granli as its first CEO. Basecamp Foundation followed a year later, in 1998. Both were already experimenting with a different kind of tourism, one whose ambition was not simply to bring travellers into beautiful landscapes, but to use tourism as a mechanism through which conservation and local development could be financed.

Lars was recruited by Frøshaug in Oslo in the autumn of 2000. The following year, in 2001, he travelled to the Maasai Mara together with Tina Frisk and started as Camp Manager of Basecamp Maasai Mara. During his first years there, he lived on the savannah in a small canvas safari tent. He was now a scientist and development professional living, quite literally, inside the landscape he had come to study.

Lars became one of the people who gave Basecamp's philosophy intellectual and practical shape. He held a PhD in biogeography and specialized in environmental sustainability and development issues across Africa and India, and by the late 2000s was leading Basecamp Explorer and Basecamp Foundation, developing what contemporary accounts described as an award-winning, pragmatic approach to sustainable tourism. Lars was not particularly interested in sustainability as a slogan. He wanted it to work. The Basecamp model attempted to bring together three things often treated separately: communities, conservation and commercial viability. Tourism needed to create value for local people; conservation needed an economic foundation; and the enterprise itself needed to survive. This was not charity. It was an experiment in changing the incentives.

One of Lars's enduring principles was that investment was more powerful than charity. In his work on travellers' philanthropy, he argued for partnership over individualism, investment over charity, sustainable change over the status quo, and complexity before generality.

Those ideas would become tangible in the Maasai Mara, but first, they had to become tangible with the Maasai themselves. Lars developed a close relationship with the Maasai communities where he worked and formed deep, trusting friendships around Basecamp's camps. Calm, patient and a good listener, he spent days in meetings with Maasai elders, landowners and community members. He took their knowledge, culture and concerns seriously, and earned a level of trust that became fundamental to Basecamp's work in the Mara.

In 2008, he introduced Eco-Storm, an open forum where members of the local Maasai community could meet Basecamp directly, express concerns and criticism, and propose ideas. It reflected a democratic principle that remained central to Lars's and Basecamp's work: conservation and tourism could succeed only if local people were genuine participants, not manipulated by the tourism business.

Lars soon became CEO of Basecamp Explorer Kenya, and later moved into leadership of Basecamp Foundation, over the years holding several senior positions within the Basecamp system, including CEO and Executive Chairman of Basecamp Foundation Kenya. Until his death, he remained a Founding Trustee, adviser and active participant in the Foundation's work.

The Maasai Mara was where Lars's ideas met reality. By the late 2000s, Basecamp had become deeply involved in a different way of thinking about tourism and land. In 2008, Basecamp began managing Wilderness Lodge in the Mara. The emerging model changed the relationship between tourism and landowners. Rather than simply paying for the small parcel occupied by a tourism camp, the approach sought to create economic value from the wider landscape through which visitors travelled. The implication was profound. If wildlife and healthy landscapes were what attracted visitors, then the people who owned and cared for the surrounding land should share in the economic value generated by that landscape. The model began to shift the conversation from how much land a lodge needed to how the whole landscape could create value for the people who own it.

This was the beginning of a much larger experiment. Lars played a key role in establishing Mara Naboisho Conservancy in 2010, working closely with Maasai landowners, Dickson Ole Kaelo, Judy Kepher-Gona and other partners, in negotiations that ultimately involved hundreds of Maasai landowners and tourism partners. The landowners formed a company, Naiboisho Landholding Ltd., while the conservancy's management structure brought together landowners, tourism partners and Basecamp.

In 2010, roughly 500 Maasai landowners approached Basecamp Foundation about creating what became Naboisho. The conservancy ultimately encompassed approximately 50,000 acres next to the Maasai Mara National Reserve. Lars served as Chairman during the conservancy's formative years. The significance of Naboisho was not simply its size. It was its architecture.

Naboisho developed a model in which Maasai families retained ownership of their land while receiving lease income for keeping it open for wildlife, controlled livestock grazing and low-impact tourism. Tourism investors received access to a functioning landscape. Conservation gained an economic incentive. Communities gained a reason to protect wildlife and habitat. The model was neither purely public conservation nor conventional private tourism. It was something different. And that was precisely what Lars was always looking for.

Chapter Four: From Conservation Project to Movement

Lars's instinct was rarely to stop once a project worked. He wanted to understand what the project could become. Naboisho was one conservancy. But the Mara was a landscape. The next question therefore became: how could the conservancies work together? Lars subsequently became one of the founders and the first Board Chairman of the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA), established in 2013 to bring together the conservancies and strengthen the collective voice of Maasai landowners across the greater Mara ecosystem. He recruited Helen Gibbons as its first Chief Executive Officer. This was another important step in the evolution of Lars's thinking.

First came the lodge. Then the community conservancy. Then the landscape-level institution. MMWCA gave the growing network of conservancies a collective voice and helped shift conservation from individual projects toward landscape governance. This is perhaps one of the most important parts of his legacy. Lars did not simply help establish a successful tourism operation. He helped contribute to an institutional model in which landowners could become conservation actors and conservancies could become a collective political and economic force.

The philosophy received international recognition. In 2013, Mara Naboisho became the first wildlife conservancy to participate in the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Early Adopter Program. The GSTC described its model as integrating sustainable tourism with wildlife protection and improvements in the quality of life of Maasai landowners. Lars's response to the recognition was characteristically pragmatic. He welcomed the opportunity not merely to celebrate what had been achieved, but to monitor impacts, identify improvements and collaborate with others.

Lars was also closely involved in Basecamp Foundation's wider community and education programmes, including the establishment of the legacy he was most proud of: the Mara Girls Leadership School in 2016. It was an extension, into education, of the same conviction that had driven Naboisho and MMWCA: that lasting conservation depends on genuine investment in the people of the Mara. Lars cared deeply about this initiative and would share the success of its decade-long existence: 100% high school enrollment and the #1 ranked school in the Mara.

It would be easy to describe Lars simply as a sustainable-tourism pioneer. That would be too narrow. Lars always acknowledged that tourism was always for him the driver of community development. His professional record shows him moving into a succession of fields connected to African development. He founded and chaired Brighterlite Kenya, working on domestic energy access. He later served as Director and CEO of the Schooner Africa Fund, worked on African partnerships and development projects with Bright Products Norway, and became Executive Chairman of Anarrosi Forestry. In 2023 he became a co-founder of Kirinyaga Superfoods.

Lars was an ecosystem thinker obsessed with how natural resources can create lasting economic opportunity without destroying the ecological systems on which that opportunity depends. Energy, forestry, community enterprise, tourism and conservation were all part of the answer.

Chapter Five: Back to Soil

There is something almost circular about the final chapters of Lars's professional life. He began with forests. He studied climate and ecological systems. He moved into development. He came to Kenya. He worked on tourism and conservation. He helped communities establish a new relationship with land. He explored energy, finance and enterprise. And eventually he returned to forestry, farming and food.

In 2023, he became a co-founder of Kirinyaga Superfoods, based in Nyeri. It is a fitting place for the story to arrive, because soil is where so many of the questions Lars had spent his life asking ultimately meet. Climate. Forests. Food. Water. Biodiversity. Livelihoods. Community. Enterprise. All of them converge there.

Lars's legacy cannot be reduced to a list of organizations. It is tempting to count the camps, conservancies, boards, companies and initiatives. But that would miss the deeper contribution. His real legacy is an idea. Conservation can create economic value. Communities can be owners, not beneficiaries. Tourism can finance conservation rather than merely consume landscapes. Business can be part of the ecological solution. Sustainability has to work in the real world. And perhaps most importantly: the boundaries between nature and human prosperity are artificial.

The Mara conservancies are the clearest expression of this thinking. Today, the model that emerged around Naboisho and the wider Mara conservancy movement is widely regarded as an important

example of successful community-driven conservation. Basecamp Foundation itself continues to recognize him as a Founding Trustee and Adviser.

That is perhaps the most appropriate title. Founding Trustee. Because Lars was fundamentally a builder. He built organizations. He built partnerships. He built experiments. He built bridges between people who did not always naturally sit at the same table. And he built ideas before there was necessarily a vocabulary for them.

His career brought together forestry, development cooperation, science, tourism, conservation and Maasai community interests. His particular strength was his ability to translate ideas into practical projects. He believed that the Maasai were not an obstacle to conservation but essential partners in protecting the savannah ecosystem.

There is a quality that runs through the stories people tell about Lars: he was rarely satisfied with the obvious answer. When others saw tourism, he saw an economic mechanism for conservation. When others saw landowners, he saw potential conservation partners. When others saw individual conservancies, he saw a landscape. When others saw environmental projects, he looked for business models. When others saw business, he asked what it could do for communities and nature. And when people settled into an established idea of what “green” meant, Lars had a tendency to ask whether something more ambitious was possible.

That impatience could sometimes be challenging. But it was also his gift. He was not content with making existing systems slightly better. He wanted to know whether the system itself could be redesigned.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Lars is not to suggest that he found all the answers. Indeed, the systems he worked in were, and remain, messy. Community conservation involves competing interests. Tourism brings both opportunity and pressure. Markets can enable conservation but can also distort it. Climate change complicates every long-term plan. Land, livelihoods, culture and wildlife do not always point in the same direction. Lars knew this. That is why his approach was pragmatic rather than doctrinaire. He experimented. He negotiated. He built institutions. He measured. He adapted. He tried again.

The great work ahead for those who come after him is to take the principles that animated his work and push them further: to make conservation more locally owned; to make tourism more regenerative; to make enterprise more accountable to communities; to make landscapes more resilient; to make development more ecological; and to make ecological restoration economically meaningful to the people who live closest to the land. That would be a fitting continuation of his life's work.

Chapter Six: A Light That Continues to Shine

Close to five years ago, Lars was diagnosed with prostate cancer. The news was devastating for everyone who loved him, but he met it in the same way he had always met difficulty: with resolve, and rarely with self-pity. As the disease progressed and eventually took his sight, his response was characteristically pragmatic: “The blindness, I can live with.” He fought through round after round of chemotherapy and through the disease's hardest turns, sustained by his own remarkable will to live, and by those who chose, deliberately, to meet him with hope rather than fear, a gift he came to treasure more than he ever fully said aloud.

The family moved to Rotterdam so they could stay close to him through treatment. It was there, surrounded by loved ones, that Lars passed away peacefully in his sleep on 10 September 2026. He had been alert and talkative only two days before, and as he grew weaker, his family gathered close.

Lars is survived by his wife Wanjira, his daughters Elsa and Ruth, his sons Jesper and Jacob, daughters-in-law Jessica and Cecilia, and his grandson Gustaf. He is also survived by friends in Kenya, Sweden and around the world, and the countless people across the Mara who knew him first as a young camp manager living in a canvas tent, and later as a trusted partner in building something no one could have built alone.

We will remember Lars for his joy of living, the engaging conversations, times around a campfire, arguments about an idea everyone else thought was impossible. The sudden conviction that there was a better way. The willingness to take a risk. The impatience with bureaucracy. The humour. The stubbornness. The generosity. The friendships. The landscape itself. And perhaps the most important thing: the ability to make other people believe that they could build something that did not yet exist. That may ultimately be Lars Lindkvist's greatest legacy.