The Summer Solstice came and went last week. Helsinki’s latitude – roughly the same as Anchorage, Alaska – means very long days this time of year. As a result, all of our internal clocks are slightly messed up.

It never really gets dark, and daylight remains well past ten o’clock. It’s hard to get the kids to bed at night. We’ve had to put drapes over the windows. Even then, the kids aren’t in bed until ten o’clock, and Jen and I have been up until midnight or later most nights.

In the States the Summer Solstice passes each year without much notice. In Finland, however, it is celebrated enthusiastically. This is due in part to the fact that Finland’s Pagan roots aren’t buried so deeply in the past as they are in the rest of Europe. But also, with the summer season so much shorter here, people take it much more seriously; and the summer season, by all accounts, officially starts on this day, which they call Mid-Summer.

Although most Helsinkians leave the city for their family summer cottages during Mid-Summer weekend, Helsinki has the country’s largest Mid-Summer celebration. It takes place at Seurasaari Island and involves the lighting of many large bonfires (an old ritual honoring the sun) and traditional music and dancing. A large number of tourists show up for the celebration, but there are also many locals that attend. There is a festival feel, much like the Sweet Pea in Bozeman. It is a nice event. We made an evening of it, with dinner on the beach, followed by the bonfires and traditional dancing.

Perhaps the neatest thing was the lighting of the largest bon-fire, which was done by a couple that had just been married in the Island’s old church (see the pictures below). With perfect weather, the beach and dancing were also enjoyable. We had a very nice night. It was a great way to kick off summer.
At the beach at Seurasaari Island on Mid-Summer Eve.

Tug-of-war on Mid-Summer Eve.

A snipit of the crowd waiting for the big bonfire to be lit.
Bride and groom light the big bonfire,

and then float away as it bursts into flames.

Some traditional dancing after the bon-fires.