

BIOREGIONS NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer 2006 ✧ Volume 2, Issue 1



Shishged Summer

by Kate Burnaby Wright and T. Baasansuren

Summer in the Darhad is an incredible season, light dancing long days across pastures, mountains, peoples' lives. If you are lucky, it can be a time to gain insight into how a remote northern people survives. The rhythms of ancient culture and daily chores continue, even as satellite dishes and 4-wheel drive vehicles remind one that this is a modern people, living in contemporary times.

In 2001, BioRegions participants Pam and Eric Sankey provided the catalyst to initiate a literature contest at the

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Community and Environmental Health

By Cliff Montagne and Kate Burnaby Wright

As we focus on *people and place* within a bioregion, our projects always circle back to the concept of health. 'Hojil', a local mineral soil and salt source used by local people, reminds us of the vital nutritional connection between the earth and the plants, animals and people it supports. The ability to evaluate market trends and receive fair prices for livestock can be aided by the ability to read, and may require glasses. Poor forage quality reduces livestock health, with clear repercussions for families dependent on milk and meat for sustenance. Even the construction of a bridge or ferry may ultimately be motivated by difficulty reaching the hospital.

Project connections to health seem infinite, and this is no surprise. Environmental health is an obvious prerequisite for human health, human actions impact environmental health, and unhealthy communities have a hard time focusing on anything but immediate needs. The circle can be articulated many ways. The central importance of health remains.

In Renchinlhumbe, BioRegions has been cooperating with the local medical community since our first trip in 1998, when a traveling Mongolian doctor provided important medicine and advice for a very sick student. The same year, local doctors asked BioRegions to provide startup funds for a pharmacy. Today, that pharmacy operates successfully, and it is just one of the many health-related projects BioRegions has been able to support.

In Bozeman, this winter, BioRegions began meeting with George Saari, M.D. and Susan Gibson, M.S. of WWAMI, a first year medical school program connecting Montana with the University of Washington School of Medicine. Courtney Paterson, participant in the 2001 BioRegions trip, went on to WWAMI and will graduate with her MD in June; David Tarby, 2004 and 2005 participant whose initiative led to first aid trainings for remote Darhad herding families, will begin WWAMI this fall.

With financial support from donor Hal Stanley and the Montana State University Office of International Programs, these connections may lead to a formal WWAMI elective in Mongolia. In May 2006, Gibson will travel to Ulaanbaatar with BioRegions to evaluate the opportunity for student and faculty exchange. She will

"Health" continued on page 4...

Weaving the BioRegions Web: Reflections from BioRegions' President

by *Cliff Montagne*

A bioregion is a web of interconnected relationships. People and organizations active in a bioregion create their own webs. I am returning from the annual meeting of the Mongolian Society and the American Center for Mongolian Studies (ACMS), held in conjunction with the Association for Asian Studies in San Francisco, this April. Here, my colleagues and I were able to do some useful web weaving.

My primary objective was to participate with Dr. Teki Temuulen Sankey in presenting posters showing the results of her dissertation work in the Darhad Valley and the BioRegions community development approach. I had not seen Teki and her husband Joel since they left Bozeman last fall. We had a joyful reunion, and were joined by BioRegions International board member Wayne Poulsen.

While there, I attended the ACMS board of directors meeting and met Board President Ambassador Joseph Lake (retired), the US Ambassador to Mongolia starting in 1990. Ambassador Lake commended BioRegions on the quality of the fellowship applications he had recently read from several students who will be working with BioRegions this summer in the Darhad Valley. He also offered to assist BioRegions as we develop our organization and programs. At the meeting, it was interesting to watch Ambassador Lake guide discussion to help that organization step up to a higher level of professionalism. Like BioRegions, the bulk of ACMS's administrative work has been accomplished by the volunteer team of Dr. Charles Krusekopf and his wife, Francis. Deliberations also mirrored BioRegions International's development – ACMS will soon upgrade its accounting system and hire a CPA specializing in non profit organizations to oversee annual reporting, as we're doing. The major difference: ACMS receives U.S. Department of Education grant funds that support full time staff in Ulaanbaatar, while full-time staff in the capital remains a long-term goal for BioRegions.

It was a pleasure to interact with the ACMS board, as well as Ulaanbaatar staff members Dr. Peter Marsh and Demchig Enkhbaatar (Enkhe), who have been so helpful to us the past two years. Our web of contacts was also renewed and increased through conversations with

- ✓ Shel Severinghaus, founding director of the Asia Foundation office in Mongolia, recently relocated to San Francisco;
- ✓ Ariunaa, Executive Director of the Mongolian Arts Council, very interested in working with us to display and show off the Renchinlumbe

school student paintings from our yearly art contest, in the US as a 2006 Eisenhower Follow

- ✓ Robert Service, who spent last fall teaching English in the Renchinlumbe School through collaboration with Boojum Expeditions;
- ✓ Sterling Grogan, biologist and planner with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and a Holistic Management Educator, and his partner Anne Watkins who is a community planner working with water quality for the New Mexican state government, and both want to become involved with BioRegions work next year;
- ✓ Bat-Ochir, Third Secretary/Consul, Embassy of Mongolia, a school classmate of Teki's...they had not seen each other since college in Ulaanbaatar.

The list goes on, and the web spreads and strengthens. It was a pleasure to make new friends, reacquaint with old, and share with all our suite of BioRegions materials.

Coming from these meetings, we (Cliff, Teki, Joel, and Wayne) see more clearly the potential for BioRegions to participate in a web, bringing the cultural tradition and natural processes of the Darhad Valley people together. We wish to help to define and enact the wisdom of indigenous spiritual knowledge by supporting local art, song and word – expression that supports the needs of local people in harmony with the environment. We see the coming together of awareness and practice, of local traditional skills and modern ecology, into more inclusive and effective ways of learning and decision making.

In the Mongolian way – over *bunz* and listening to the horsehead fiddle, people coming in and out of conversations, in and out of attention – these meetings helped define and detail the upcoming BioRegions work trip. In particular, the synergy of conferring with Teki, Joel and Wayne gave us more clarity and purpose for the upcoming trip. I look forward to sharing our accomplishments in the 2006 fall-winter newsletter.



Farewell & Sain Yavarrai!

Kate Burnaby Wright ventured into the BioRegions web of interrelationships in 2004 as our first Program Director. Charged with helping BioRegions International develop as a non profit organization, Kate ably developed the suite of program and organization documents which document our legitimacy. She worked as closely as possible with board members and work trip participants to actualize our dreams. On the Mongolian work trips of 2004 and 2005, she collaborated with Darhad people, Wayne Poulsen, and the rest of us on multiple projects, including development of the Artists & Artisans Program which evolved from a \$10,000 grant from the International Foundation. Kate kept our books, set up a mailing list, expanded our contacts in Mongolia and in the U.S., and facilitated our growth in many ways.

Kate will step down from her position in May, but hints that she will consider providing assistance to BioRegions as we move forward. Kate, we are fairly certain you will continue to reside in the Greater Yellowstone bioregion, and we look forward to your continued counsel as BioRegions' programs evolve. So I bow to you, share a handshake, and express appreciation for your extraordinary dedication, efforts and achievement to actualize the BioRegions dreams we share. Sain Yavarrai! Have a good journey!

Sincerely,

Cliff Montagne

President and Co-founder



BioRegions International

BioRegions International works to empower the nomadic cultures of Mongolia to survive in a rapidly-changing world. We support holistic, locally-based projects promoting public health, education, environmental preservation, and sustainable economic development.

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Special Thanks!

First, we want to welcome and thank Will Swearingen and Achit Darambazar, new board members, for contributing their time, skills, and insights. Special thanks also to Insty Prints for assistance with our stationery and printing needs; to Brad Webb of Institute for Conservation Leadership, for his support and advice; and to Jerry Dixon for his amazing work on our revised website - please visit, let us know what you think! We'll look forward to updating the MSU BioRegions website next, and your comments will make a difference. Finally, our deepest appreciation to Hal Stanley for his generous capacity building donation; to Wayne Poulsen for his continued support of the Artisan & Culture Program; and to new donors Dr. & Mrs. N.C. Kirkland, Anna Kirkland, Ellen Wilson and Richard Tamber, Barbara Vance, Harvey and Laville Larson.



Pursuing A Dream

by Chinzorigt Baljinnyam (Baljaa), BioRegions interpreter

When I recently graduated from my Mongolian high school, everything was very crucial in my life and I spent sleepless nights dreaming about the future. What am I going to do? What will I be and how am I going to get there?

Public Policy has always appealed to me, so I decided to study International Relations and Diplomacy to fulfill my goal of becoming a diplomat. I want to get an excellent education to be a future leader in my community, to serve the needs of my country, and to enhance leadership, critical thinking and negotiating skills.

Presently I am studying in a university in Missouri, USA, according to my major that I always wanted. I'm working

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... *Health*, continued from page 1.

build not only from BioRegions' connections, but also from her own contacts made while teaching at the Health Sciences University of Mongolia a decade ago.

This and other activities are converging into a distinct BioRegions program, *Community and Environmental Health*. With direct consideration for the Mongolian cultural and economic context, this program will support collaboration, projects, and research that contribute to the health of local people. One objective is to stimulate partnerships and exchange between medical communities in the Darhad Valley, Ulaanbaatar, and the Greater Yellowstone. Our work with WWAMI is one example, and the goal is simple: improved healthcare and education. A second objective is to continue BioRegions International's support for Darhad medical infrastructure. Ongoing projects include eye glass distribution through the Northwest Lions Eyeglass Recycling Center, first-aid training for remote families, and eventually solar power for the local hospital. The goal here is to build from local initiative and opportunity to strengthen community health and sustainability.

A third objective of *Community and Environmental Health* is to support research investigating the health of local people and environment, research that can inform projects on the ground. Past examples include a 2000 Community Health and Services inventory conducted by Glenn Colclough, RN, Bozeman Deaconess Hospital; a 2004 survey of "Levels of Human Stress" conducted by Susan Hiers, graduate intern from the Emory University School of Public Health; and analysis of "hojil" samples, completed for locals who wanted to know what western science could tell them about the benefits and dangers of this traditional dietary supplement.

In 2006, research will include a rural health survey conducted by University of Michigan graduate student Sean Armstrong; his ultimate objective is to seek mechanisms for sustainable health care funding in impoverished Mongolian communities. Also in 2006, Loren Barber, Montana State University graduate student and Cleone Todgham, extern from Royal Roads University, will implement a water quality survey and introduce a water quality education module to local teachers and officials.

A combination of partnership, action and research has always been at the heart of BioRegions. Our *Community and Environmental Health* program will help us more clearly balance research with results and projects that help local people. Such a balance can be tricky, a challenging feedback loop to maintain – from time with local people to research questions to field projects and back into practice. We feel it is worth the challenge.



MEDICAL STUDENTS IN MONGOLIA

by Dr. George Saari, WWAMI Associate Director

The WWAMI Medical Program in conjunction with BioRegions International plans a student component in which a first year Montana WWAMI student will travel to Mongolia upon completion of the first year curriculum. Currently more than half of the first year class participates in the R/UOP Program, which allows the student a four week elective in a rural or urban underserved community. Ten students are provided the opportunity to combine this elective with an Independent Investigative Inquiry, a community project, which fulfils the research requirement of the University of Washington School of Medicine (UWSOM). The students electing this community project subsequently present a poster in a research forum. It is the intent of the WWAMI Program to model our student program after this established successful UWSOM initiative. The goals are the same but with an emphasis on understanding the global perspective. The preceptor supervision will be provided by a physician in the Montana WWAMI Program.



Senior Advisor Mishig, translator Amaraa, Batsukh and Mongolian Red Cross Instructor Otgoo at the First-Aid Training Ger, June 2005. Trainings were coordinated by Dave Tarby, who will begin medical school with WWAMI this fall.



Local herder and Dr. Natsuko Hamamura discuss harvest and use of hojil, with help from Amaraa Batsukh. 2005.



Celebrating Tradition

Throat-singing and other traditional Mongolian music takes the listener to the depth of the culture. In February, BioRegions International had the honor of sponsoring concerts on both sides of the globe. In Montana, the accomplished Tuvan group Huun-Huur-Tu shared their music with a Bozeman audience. (*Thanks to co-sponsors Boojum Expeditions*

and Northern Rockies Bioneers.) In RENCHINLHUMBE, the Darhad Traditional Performers, a local group formed in 2004 with a micro-grant from BioRegions International, was scheduled to give a concert. From our seats in the Emerson Cultural Center, we imagined the scene in the RENCHINLHUMBE Cultural Center. Wood burning stoves lit hours before, it would be a welcoming place for community on a -20°F winter evening.

... *Dream, continued from p. 3*

really hard to realize this goal and to represent my country because I am the only student from Mongolia. I feel the responsibility not only as a student, but also as an individual representing my whole country. I think this gives me a chance to gain a better understanding of the importance of active citizenship in today's global community and to represent my country by contributing as a student who represents the future of Mongolia.

I am interested in the status of women in Mongolia. Fifty and a half – 1,232,800 of Mongolia's population – are women. This means that women should be an important part of the workforce alongside men.

Although the educational achievement of women is improving year by year, women in our society are facing serious problems when they apply for administrative jobs. They are not involved in the decision making process. Currently only 8 out of 76 parliament members (10.5%) of the Parliament are women. There is only one female Cabinet member, and only one senior advisor of the Prime Minister, or heads of Provincial Governments or City Governors. Women still tend to do more than half the house work, and their role supporting the family

is still the basis of the Mongolian family. Mongolian society needs the voices of more women to make decisions and rule the country. Widening women's participation in political life is very important to make a sustainable contribution to the implementation of political rights. Since I'm representing one of those women who worry about this problem, the first thing I can do is to get very good education. My future goal is to be a very knowledgeable, educated leader in my community, if not a female diplomat representing Mongolia. I want to show people that not only a man can be a very good leader and diplomat, but also a woman can do it if she really wants to. So I hope that by studying in the United States and getting a good education will really encourage me to learn more, to develop, to discover and to realize my goal. And after I get the education and knowledge I will return to my country, where I will plant the seeds of my future tree. I hope that one day this tree will give a lot back to the people and the country of Mongolia, or whoever needs it.



... *Summer*, continued from p. 1

local Renchinlumbe boarding school. The literature contest is held in conjunction with an art contest, catalyzed by Joan Montagne during the same 2001 visit. The following piece won in the 10th grade “Shishged Summer” category, and was written by T. Baasansuren. We hope you enjoy this insight into life in the Darhad.

10th grade, 1st place: T. Baasansuren
Shishged Summer

translated by Amaraa Batsukh

I woke up when sun started shining through our ger roof. I could smell fresh grass through the opening in lower part of the ger and saw warm milk heating on stove. All these activities indicate that summer has arrived. I got up and walked outside in my long underwear and sleeveless t-shirt. I saw my mother carrying bucket of wet cow dung, as if she was trying to keep balance of both good and bad side of life.

It looks so beautiful, sun shining on water drops hanging on green grass creating tiny little rainbow colors, the magical sound of countless grasshoppers and small birds, altogether creating a combination of natural beauty.

After being released, a few small baby cows playfully jump up and down the river bank chasing each other. Soon they grow tired and start feeding on fresh green grass. The sheep herd is all over the hill east of the ger, eating peacefully while moving gradually further away. This our summer camp. Our neighbor is my brother Duuren’s family. We have a few trees not too far away from our gers. There is a bird nest neatly built between big tree branches; it houses one big brown egg. It looks as if the nest has been abandoned by its mother since the mother is rarely seen during the day, but we found out later that the mother visits only during the night. I also learned that the mystery bird is an eagle. It is very rare for them to have a nest in places like this, since they only have nests in tall mountains or rocky cliffs. Maybe this bird is very special to this place. My mother used to warn me not to disturb the nest at all.

This morning, I see several small birds playfully singing and flying off from the branches of one of those trees. Zuslan river looks so beautiful flowing further away toward distant mountains.

My sister in law Duujii, carrying steaming hot fermented condensed milk, walks out of her ger. She pours the milk in a bag made of cloth, from which the liquid part can be easily squeezed out. Then she places it between two flat pieces of wood and presses it under a heavy rock. That is how she makes sour cheese. Our dog is lying down lazily annoyed by flies buzzing around and sitting on his snout. He is so annoyed by them so that he would try to bite in

the air without much success. It gives me a smile since it looks so funny.

My mother enters the ger, apparently finished with whatever she was doing outside. She changes her deel that is soaked with yak milk and different kinds of dirt, completely changing the original color. She sits in front of the stove and starts stirring the fire, adding cow dung. I find her wooden brown bowl and pour tea for her. She smiles and asks me if I had my tea already. She says, “let’s make some sweet *aaruuul* today (cheese).”

She pours hot boiling sour milk into filtering bag, squeezes water out, and adds sweet. We make various kind of sweet cheese in different shapes and sizes and lay them on a wooden board. She takes them outside to dry, and I hear my brother’s children playing joyfully. Sun is already up straight in sky indicating noon time. Sheep are gathered together, hiding their heads in each other’s shade since it was getting really hot day. Little calves run further away to the river.

Mom sews a rug with different color of thread. My brother Duuren is softening a hide rope. His wife Duujin brings a bucket full of cold water from the river. Her children start running towards her as soon as they see her.

It looks so beautiful, mirage appearing far away in the distance. I hear young men herding their horses, whistling and shouting. It is already time to milk the sheep. Mother and Duujii take their milk buckets and start walking toward the herd. It is not easy to milk sheep in middle of a hot sunny day, but I see a big smile on her face despite all the hard work she will have to handle – and the day is not over. This is a typical summer day in our summer camp. New day brings new life.



Feeding milk from a cow-horn bottle to lambs that lost their mother during lambing season. 2005.

Program Update: Work Trip 2006

The projects and participants of our 2006 work trip represent a multiplicity of efforts focused on interchange with people of the Darhad Valley. BioRegions International and the MSU BioRegions Program work in close partnership to make these activities possible.

Community Partnerships

Montana State University civil engineering student Catherine Kirkland will continue BioRegions' work to help Renchinlumbe School increase sustainable electrical capacity, specifically to support computers. She will also scope out community wide projects, explore ways to use and provide energy more efficiently, and evaluate ways to help the local hospital improve its energy supply.

Joan Montagne will also continue our cooperative relationship with Renchinlumbe School, sponsoring art and literature contests and working with teachers Baatar and Batmunkh to continue "migration schools" for students unable to attend the central boarding school.

Community and Environmental Health

For an overview of projects and research led by Susan Gibson, Sean Armstrong, Cleone Todgham, and Loren Barber, please read the article "Community and Environmental Health", page 1. In addition to these projects, Cleone will field test a grazing model laid out in the forthcoming Herders Handbook, and will assist Cliff Montagne as he gathers baseline observations to design a study determining extent of erosion, impacts on forage,

and potential community-based solutions.

Joan Montagne will distribute used glasses and Bridger Bowl lost-and-found winter clothes; she will also work with David Tarby to prepare proposals to bring dentists, eye doctors, and continuing medical education to the Darhad. Dave is also arranging a second round of first aid training for remote herding families. Finally, Cliff Montagne will continue to refine the Darhad wealth profile. While sharing results of this living document with local government and leading citizens, he will continue to discuss local decision making modes and explore alternative paradigms with Darhad citizens.

Sustaining Artisans and Culture

Wayne Poulsen will help represent BioRegions at the first People of the Blue Valley Award, a celebration to honor outstanding Darhad artists and artisans. Wayne will also evaluate the effectiveness of this winter's Traditional Skills Workshops, led by master artisans from the Darhad Valley and sponsored by BioRegions International.

Exchanges to Promote Entrepreneurship and Micro-Enterprise in Northern Mongolia

In February, BioRegions International, with guidance from board member Will Swearingen, submitted a grant proposal to the US State Department to identify and assist promising entrepreneurs in educational tourism and local artisan products. Cliff Montagne will explain this possible opportunity, pending funding, to local government and entrepreneurs and prepare local people to participate if the grant proposal is approved in August.

*Yes, I'd like to support **BioRegions International**, 501c3 non-profit, with a tax-deductible donation!*

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Cost: \$5,500

All proceeds support our projects in Mongolia.

We only have two gers left in this shipment – please contact us soon if you are interested!

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