



Letter From the Director

BioRegions International-Mongolia makes steady progress on our mission of “Supporting community partnerships to empower nomadic cultures of Mongolia...” Returning to the Darhad Valley for the 12th time this past May and June, I found people to be receptive and eager to work with us. The two BioRegions trips brought energetic and creative participants to interact with our Mongolian hosts on partnership projects in environment, health, traditional knowledge, and education. We also established the initial contacts for the new National Geographic Society Conservation Trust grant, and are now planning for the 2009 field season. The momentum continued this October when Mongolian staff, Sunjee and Badmaa, joined Mishig to bring a Muren eye doctor and dentist to examine citizens of Bag 1, start the Medical Emergency Fund activities, and conduct leatherworking workshops with Colorado saddle makers Lisa and Loren Skyhorse. At MSU, Mongolia is the theme of MSU’s International Educational Week and MSU administrators visited Mongolia in mid-September to establish relationships with the Mongolian State University of Agriculture. We will propose a Montana State University BioRegions Institute to encourage interdisciplinary research and education to provide information needed by Darhad citizens in areas of environment and health. The institute will also study Bioregional Management techniques and sustainable community development. As rural communities become more affected by global environmental and financial change, there is even more need for us to refine and document the BioRegions’ methods of promoting sustainable community decision making and seek to replicate the process elsewhere. We welcome your interest, participation, and support.

-Cliff Montagne



Mongolian horse wrangler

Gordon Wiltsie, 2008

Summer 2008

Last May and June, BioRegions International-Mongolia collaborated with the Office of International Programs at Montana State University to conduct the MSU Honors Program Great Expeditions and the annual Work Trip to the Darhad Valley. Great Expeditions took seven students from architecture, health and human development, biomedical science, education, math, and journalism from mid-May to early June. BRI staff, a BOD member, and faculty from MSU’s medical program accompanied seven Work Trip participants from the fields of art, medicine, and education from late May through June. As is true for all BioRegions Program trips, expenses are paid by individual participants, although many are able to obtain scholarships from a variety of sponsors. Mishig Jigjidsuren from Renchinlumbe, as well as Sunjidmaa Tsagaan and Badmaa Dovchin from Ulaanbaatar, were our valued Mongolian staff for both trips. The Work Trip also included ecology faculty and students from the Mongolian State University of Agriculture, a medical student from the Health

Sciences University of Mongolia, and Mongolian doctor.

Education

Nutrition and Wellness—Darhad citizens questioned us as to how to improve their nutrition and get relief from the “aching back” ailments that result from their strenuous lifestyle. Montana State University Great Expeditions students, Christine Sommers-Austin, and the Renchinlumbe hospital staff gave nutrition and stretching exercise surveys and workshops to school students in Hatgal, Ulaan Uul, and Renchinlumbe. They found that family, boarding school, and hospital diets are high in meat and dairy products and nearly nonexistent in vegetables, with increasing amounts of imported alcohol and sugar foods. Darhad citizens indicated strong interest in learning how to improve their diets. MSU professor Dr. Lynn Paul is preparing a sabbatical application to continue this work, with emphasis on “whole community” learning and decision-making.

Ger Schools- The MSU students also participated in the administration of the final exams for Baatar-bagsh's (teacher) ger school students who completed 4 years of basic literacy and math education. The ger school program, in collaboration with the Renchinlumbe Boarding School, continues with a summer ger school located near the local salt source (hu-jir) and two winter ger schools in the Lake Hovsgol watershed.



Ger school students of 2008

Global Science Fair- With funds from a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant, BioRegions facilitated participation of the Renchinlumbe and Hatgal School ecology clubs in an Internet Global Science Fair in which they shared science project results with classes in Montana and Mali.

Children's Art Book- A landmark event for both our Education Program and our Traditional Knowledge and Skills Program is the publication of the soft-cover book, "Visions of the Blue Valley, Mongolia's Darhad Valley in the Art of Its Children," as the first in a series published by People's Press in Aspen, CO. This book celebrates watercolor art and literature (in both languages) from the students of Renchinlumbe School. It honors the role of the teachers in mentoring their students and hints at the educational value of high quality student achievement. (*Please see our ad on the back page*).

American Indian Educator- Sara Young, of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes, participated in part of the Work Trip as part of a USDA education grant. Her impressions of Darhad

culture and the communication links she started between the First Peoples of the Darhad Valley and First Peoples of North America brought a new level of awareness for everyone with whom she interacted.

Traditional Skills and Knowledge

A second landmark event was the hosting of the Blue Valley Awards festival in Ulaan Uul, a town in the southern part of the Darhad valley. The event started with an early morning shaman-led ovoo ceremony on top of the pass leading into the Darhad. The event, filmed by Mongolian National TV, was followed by an International Symposium on the "Natural Science and Cultural aspects of the Darhad Valley." BioRegions presentations included: *Bioregional Management in the Darhad Valley, Mongolia, and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, USA* by Cliff Montagne; *Geomicrobiology of Arsenic* by Natsuko Hamamura; and *Darhad Valley Mosses* by Enkjargal Enktaivan (Eggie). The festival activities were sponsored by a new NGO (non-governmental organization), "Darkhad zon", or "Darhad People", comprised of Darhad natives living in the valley, as well as in Muren and Ulaanbaatar. The Blue Valley Awards festival was promoted around the valley by BioRegions' staff, Mishig and Amarjargal, and by Darkhad zon activist, Darimaa, a Renchinlumbe native and traditional music singer, recognized as a Mongolian Leading Worker of Culture. In May, Darimaa joined the Great Expeditions group, giving traditional music workshops to school children and encouraging young and old to perform at the Blue Valley Awards. The festival showed off the Darhad Valley's impressive depth of singing and oratory talent, and garnered enthusiastic audience support, with all performers in traditional dress. The art and craft items were displayed and judged in the cultural center and attracted many admirers and buyers.



A Mongolian vest to take home

Artisans' Apprenticeships- In Renchinlumbe, artisan participants in the BioRegions 2007-2008 Artisans' Apprenticeship Program shared their products and feelings with MSU Honors students, and in turn the students produced a written evaluation of the program for BioRegions. In response to the student report, in which artisans were critical of the selection process, BioRegions worked with Renchinlumbe artisans on the selection process for the 2008-2009 Artisans' Apprenticeship Program. The report noted that some artisans were critical of a selection process involving only a few people and suggested expanding it, but in the end the artisans voted to leave the selection in the hands of BioRegions. Consequently, the 2008-09 participants submitted applications and the selections were then made by BioRegions. As the process evolves and the Darhad people experience democracy, we anticipate more local initiative and ownership.

Medicine and Health

In May, Great Expeditions participants called attention to a number of infants and youth needing medical care at a more developed hospital outside of the Darhad valley. In response, BioRegions established a Medical Emergency Fund, the Renchinlumbe Hospital medical staff prioritized a list of children needing treatment, and Dr. Zach Meyers examined some of the candidates during the Work Trip. BRI's Ulaanbaatar Coordinator, Dr. Sunjidmaa (Sunjee), traveled to Renchinlumbe in September to arrange for the first treatments. Three children were brought to Ulaanbaatar and Sunjee took them to the appropri-

ate hospitals, one for reading glasses and two for medical analyses. A fourth girl was examined in Muren and was given a clean bill of health and returned to Renchinlumbe. The Work Trip's medical team, organized by Susan Gibson, included medical technologist Roberta Ennis, Billings resident physician Dr. Zach Meyers, WWAMI medical student Madeline Turner, Mongolia medical student Otgonsuren (Otgoo), and Mongolian physician Baasansuren. In Ulaan Uul, they conducted health screenings in a ger during the Blue Valley Awards. Later, the screenings continued in Renchinlumbe and in the countryside government bags, #1 and #5. It was a joy to watch medical students Otgoo and Madeline soaking up the caring instruction of their mentor, Dr. Zach. In August, Otgoo visited Montana to shadow physicians in Bozeman and Dillon.



Eye Doctor, Erdentsetseg, giving an exam in a ger

During the 2007 Work Trip, University of Montana physical therapist, Professor Kathy Westphal, noted the need for orthotic devices in this remote, rural area. BRI collected 100's of orthotic devices from Bozeman citizens, and arranged transportation and delivery to the Renchinlumbe medical staff. We also distributed toothbrushes and reading glasses as well as warm clothes. The Renchinlumbe medical staff and the BioRegions medical team continue to increase their collaboration and sharing as they work to improve human health in the Darhad valley. After returning to Ulaanbaatar, the medical team visited the medical school and city hospitals to understand urban health care and

make contacts for a potential brucellosis study. In September, Sunjee and Mishig brought Mongolian dentist, Byambadorj, and eye doctor, Erdentsetseg, to Baag #1 to give examinations and provide prescriptions and treatment for the first time in 18 years.

Environment

In Hatgal, BioRegions met with the new director of the Lake Hovsgol National Park, Gansukh, who requested assistance with increasing pollution along the permafrost lake shore. Environmental awareness and action often spring from the elders and the young people. We notice an increasing environmental concern for the Darhad as local individuals and organizations come to BioRegions with partnership project proposals. At the Renchinlumbe School, a new 28 year-old biology teacher and his enthusiastic students are working to promote sustainable forestry, clean-up town litter, and learn how to grow vegetables to supplement diets heavy in meat and dairy products. BioRegions partnered with these students' efforts by sponsoring travel costs for the Internet Global Science Fair in Muren, the provincial capital, as well as by supplying vegetable seeds and the transport of water for a school garden, and by conducting grassland health monitoring.



Renchinlumbe School's Ecology Club

Following the sand dune erosion work of 2007, BioRegions sponsored a staff member and two student interns from the Mongolian State University of Agriculture to join the Work Trip. They established fenced demonstration plots in

the sand dune areas to show the effects of using manures, and planted several re-vegetation species, including the oil seed, camolina, from Montana.



Cliff Montagne and Davajav, one of the heads of the 23 families

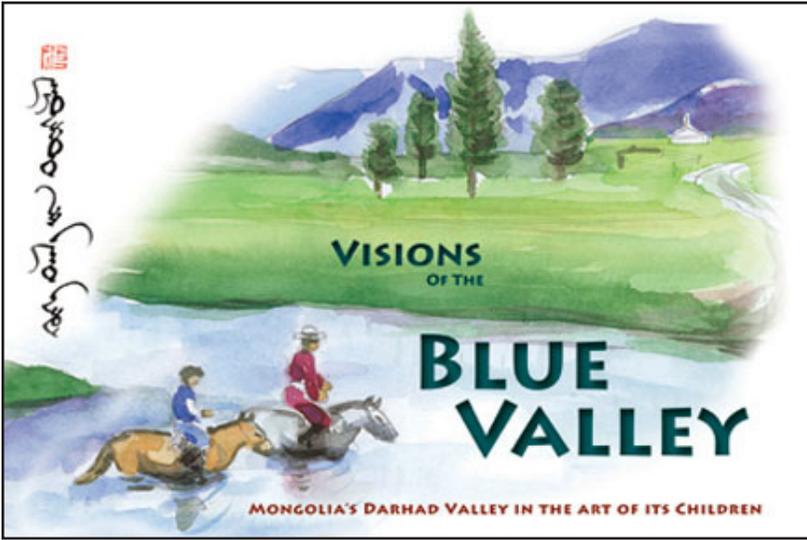
A National Geographic Conservation Trust Grant

"Enhancing Environmental and Cultural Stewardship in the Darhad Valley, Northern Mongolia"

Nyamrenchin is an innovative herder who leads a group of 23 families. These families spend winter and spring in an adjacent valley, and summer in the green riparian pastures of the Darhad valley. They call their ancestral winter home "Rich Valley" and want to be on the cutting edge of innovation to restore the environment for the 95+ people in their group and their animals. BioRegions will partner with Nyamrenchin and these families to study the forestry of the surrounding mountains, as well as erosion problems on their grasslands. We will also help begin an artisan program and bring information on drying fruit for the winter.



Local Leader, Nyamrenchin



Visions of the the Blue Valley - Mongolia's Darhad Valley In the Art of its Children

...a compilation of children's artwork from the Renchinlhumbe school in the Darhad Valley, Mongolia which displays visions of their surrounding environment. The artwork is promoted by an annual student art and music contest sponsored by BioRegions International.

A 76 page soft-covered book published by People's Press, LCC of Aspen, CO. The cost is \$20 plus \$5 handling and postage (if needed).

The book can be purchased on-line at www.bioregions.org or my mail at P.O. Box 6451, Bozeman, MT 59771.

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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