

May 19, 2013

Woody and I are traveling on a train today in north central Mongolia. We are north of UlaanBaatar heading to a Peace Corps training of trainers. I have about five sessions to facilitate in the next few days. The countryside here is very different from that of western Mongolia, our home for the last eight months. This area of Mongolia is considered the breadbasket which connotes flat fields of grain. However, we've been through some green hilly countryside with a beautiful stream flowing on the side of the track. We've seen lots of animals, goats, sheep, horses, and cows. The soil looks particularly fertile here and since it snowed yesterday, it appears really green.



Our past six weeks have been very busy. We both traveled in different directions to work with teachers. Woody went on a week-long trip to the city of Ulieasti, Zarhan Aimag (south east of Khovd) and worked with secondary school teachers. I headed northwest to Bayan Ulgii for two days to meet with a few university instructors and students. I was told that most of the students had not met with a native English speaker from the U.S. before so they were a little surprised by my English.



Following those trips, a committee in Khovd, that had been working since January, presented a conference for over a hundred English teachers/instructors. Some of the teachers traveled over 10 hours to attend. There were 22 presenters and they included 3 other English Language Fellows, two from China and one from UlaanBaatar who had just started her Mongolian visit. Half of the presenters were Mongolian instructors from the University or secondary schools who presented in English to their colleagues. The conference ran with only a few glitches, one being the University chancellor arriving late to deliver the welcome

address. Luckily, we were able to stall a bit in order to wait for her. The Aimag Director of Education gave the keynote address and that was inspiring for the teachers. She spoke in Mongolian and apparently apologized for her lack of English.

Three days before our home conference, Woody and I traveled to UlaanBaatar to attend a University English conference (planned to coincide with ours) and to try to extend our work visas in order to stay in Mongolia an extra two weeks after July 1. I presented a workshop on listening assessments and Woody tried to work with the immigration bureau. I was more successful with my workshop than he was. On the second day, I visited the Labor Offices and they sent me away with a list of documents I needed from the University. Once home in Khovd, we learned that we would need to work into July in order for the University to help us extend our visas. We want to travel in July and so we will try to find another way to stay in Mongolia/Asia.



Since May started we have had five dinners with students in which we and they made American-style pizza. Woody has become a fine dough maker and in fact practiced his mushroom biscuits all winter as an accompaniment to our stew dinners.

The students (mostly young women) were expert dough rollers (since one of the national foods is buuz (dumplings with mutton). And they were delighted to cover the rolled-out dough with sausage, sauce, cheese, peppers, cherry tomatoes and



onions. Each time we had pizza, we made 2-4 pizzas that were consumed as quickly as they came out of the oven. Most times we had a few extra pieces leftover for breakfast.

As part of our pizza-party, the students were able to go through our kitchen shelves and refrigerator, and our bookshelf in the living room to discover spices, different jars of canned goods, photographs, books, drawing materials, etc. to try and figure us out. We are a strange pair, at least to their eyes. Some even photographed our kitchen sink as they were surprised to see running water in the kitchen. Many of them still live with family or relatives in gers or houses that do not have running water.



Probably the highlight of this month (so far) was our adventure to the countryside northeast of Khovd City. We were taken by our neighbor to check on his horses that live in the countryside and are cared for by herders. He brought a fourth year university student with him to translate. We spent the day in the company of the herders' family drinking milk tea in their ger, admiring their baby goat (kid) who came in and out of the ger, and their baby calves who were tied up waiting for their moms to return. From the herder's family, we rode horses across a stream to fish for a few hours. Woody caught an eight

pound "yellow fish." And when we were ready to head back to the ger, a group of camels were herded to us for a ride. Camels are as difficult to herd as preschoolers and cats, so we enjoyed the chase for awhile before two were forced into a pen and convinced to wear a harness (a rope tied to the stick in their noses.) A herder handled all these details, as well as the saddle blankets and the steering of the camels. We forded the stream and made our way the ½ mile back to the ger. Since the horse crossing had resulted in the herder and I falling off a horse, there was a lot of laughing and joking with the herder in the ger as we ate our soup before taking family pictures and heading home. Camels are very common in western Mongolia. These are Bactrian camels and they have two humps. The humps are not stiff in the spring months as the camels have been existing on their body fat during the winter and lean feed. The rider(s) sits between the humps on a blanket on the camel's back.



Classes finish this week at Khovd University while Woody and I are in Darkhan. Once we return next week to Khovd, we will have our finals scheduled and the last gatherings before leaving Khovd. Returning to Khovd with us will be one of my former students from the University of Montana, Shogo (from Japan) who is traveling "to Asia" for the first time. He will stay with us for two weeks. Once finals are finished, we plan to travel for a week or so before my sister, Nancy and her husband, Steve arrive and we travel together for a couple weeks.

Because of our visa problems, we will be leaving Mongolia to travel to China (if we can get a Chinese visa) in order to return to Mongolia for the national holiday of Naadam. We will return to the US in mid-July.