

PART VIII

BOTANY TEAM TRAVELS NORTH OF THE SHISHGED GOL IN EAST TAIGA*Paula DePriest, Museum Conservation Institute, Smithsonian Institution*

Botany Team, Oyunbileg, Olzii, Paula, Bayanaa, Sanjim, and Tsogt-Ochir examines carved Tibetan Buddhist plaques at the ovoos on the south peak of Renchinlkhumbe Mountain.

In June 2006 the botany team led by **Paula T. DePriest**, and including Mongolian botanists **J. Oyumaa** and **Oyunbileg**, and cook **Olzii**, traveled with Dukha guides **Sanjim**, **Bayanaa**, **Batmunkh**, **Enkhbat**, **Lhagvasuren**, **Tataar**, and **Tsogt-Ochir**, on a 100 km horse-back circuit starting from the Shishged Gol ferry crossing of north of Tsaagannur (N51°24.600' E 099°17.603'), June 15-24. The goals of the trip were to examine pastures and natural areas of the Dukha's traditional reindeer-herding territory north of the Shishged Gol—called the East Taiga, to compare these areas to reindeer-herding territories south of the Shishged, and to estimate the reindeer capacity of the combined areas.

The Shishged is a tributary of the Yenesei River draining through Tuva and Siberia into the Arctic Ocean and divides the current East and West Taiga territories, north and south respectively. From the ferry crossing we traveled west along the north shore of the Shishged Gol to the mouth of Tengis Gol (N51°28.926' E 099°03.007'). Passing through this area we saw a Bronze Age khirigsuur (N52°26.493' E 099°12.357'), and Chinggis Rock and Fence (N51°28.808' E 099°03.050'), a rock dome and line of rocks with surrounding circular rock features reported to have been constructed during the Chinggis Khan period. Chinggis Khan (more likely his son Joci) is reported to have visited the confluence of the Tengis and Shishged Rivers to accept the peaceful surrender of the People of the Forest in 1207/08, leaving footprints and a fence of stacked stones. The Tengis Gol is a doubly important site for Mongolians as legend dictates that the Mongol clan originated from a blue-grey wolf and a fallow doe along a body of water named 'Tenggis.'

The Tengis valley is broad and glacier-carved. Ice dams extending from the Tengis glaciers blocked the Shishged River during the Last Glacial Maximum, making a proglacial lake of the Darkhat Valley. Continuing north and up along this Valley (N51°50.972' E 099°08.093'), and northeast along an ice-filled tributary, we reached the Ulaankhad Gol (Red Rocks River; N51°51.460' E 099°21.951'), and turned north to an unused reindeer summer pasture along the Russian border (N51°55.873' E 099°23.482'). The nearby summer camp was adjacent to a 30 m waterfall (N51°54.229' E 099°21.685') with deep river gorges above and below, demonstrating the glacier formation of these valleys. From the border we turned south, passing through the East Taiga spring pastures (N51°46.568' E 099°25.965'), and visited the 10 ortzes (tents) of the East Taiga's early summer camp (N51°39.237' E 099°22.703'). At this camp, we were the first to use the two new guest ortzes established to minimize the impact of increasingly frequent tourist guests on fragile pastures. After leaving the East Taiga camp, we traveled to south sacred Tibetan Buddhist sites on Renchinlkhumbe Mountain. Two ovoos, one

the ridgeline (N51°31.571' E 099°14.111') and one summit of the south peak (N51°32.575' E 099°12.270') were used for worship by ethnic Darkhats during the two hundred years of the Buddhist ecclesiastical estate, Darhad Ih Shav'. The ovoos on the lower ridge was the site of annual readings of sacred texts until its suppression in the 1930s. Since the 1990s, the site is being restored with new ovoos and carved plaques with Tibetan writing. Ten days after our departure we returned to the Shishged Gol ferry crossing and to Tsaagannur.



Dukha guide Bayanaa collects flowering plant along the Ulaankhad Gol in June 2006.

Our route along the Tengis and its tributaries was a major herding area for Dukha until resettlement of the herders closer to the supply sites at Tsaagannur. Traditionally, the area was connected to the reindeer herding area of northern Tuva by a major trail, with the seasonal migrations crossing today's border. Lead guide Sanjim's family escaped from Tuva in 1946 to settle in this area; we visited the camp of his relatives at the confluence of the Shishged and Tengis and in the East Taiga camps. Also, Sanjim located the poles of the ortz in the last fall camp his family used along a tributary of the Tengis Gol. Today both Dukha and Darkhat use this area for hunting and fishing, especially in the winter when the rivers are frozen making travel by reindeer easy. The only wild game that we saw was two prong-horn deer along the Tengis Gol; however, it is reported that the river valley to the west of Tengis Gol supports a herd of wild reindeer.

In comparison to the reindeer herding territories south of the Shishged Gol, the East Taiga offers a number of underutilized pastures that are easy to access. The glacial history of the area produces broad valleys excellent for seasonal pastures, low passes easily crossed, and deeply carved river gorges and waterfalls with abundant water to support camps and herding. Because of an unseasonably cool June 2006, the vegetation in this area was delayed in both germination and flowering by comparison to the more southern West Taiga. Additional collecting later in the season would be required to compare two floras, although some rare plants were documented and collected on Renchinkhumbé Mountain and near the Russian border. Use of the pastures along the Tengis Gol would significantly increase the carrying capacity of reindeer for the Sayan Mountains, but this would require protection of the area with control of hunting to increase the wild game, herd-building support such as importing appropriate Sayan breeding stock from Tuva, and infrastructure development to support year-round habitation by herding families.