

**2009 River Raft Training, Phase II,
on the Onon River near Binder, August 17-23
by Peter Weinig, contracted rafting instructor**

We met Urjinsukh the evening we arrived in Binder and he showed us to the ger camp where we would be staying. He told me that there would be 10 trainees, three of them who had done the training last year. This was a slight change of plan but what the teacher wanted and I guess it spread the knowledge about rafting further.

Day 1: We met everybody at the school and took all the new rowing gear out of its packaging. We assembled raft and frame, and talked about care, maintenance and avoiding damage to the raft.

In the afternoon we went to a quiet stretch of river and practised rowing techniques. We also practised rescue techniques, throw bag use and did a swim test while wearing the life jackets.

It became clear that the oars were too heavy for most of the trainees (apart from 2 or 3 of the boys) and that the concept of rowing seemed to be very difficult to grasp. Using the rowing frame also made the non-rowers less involved. It became clear that the best way forward would be to use a paddle raft instead of the oars and from Day 2 onwards we only used a paddle raft.

Day 2: In order to be able to give the trainees more attention I decided to train 5 students on this day, the other 5 on Day 3. We put in above the town and did numerous runs down to the ger camp using the Furgon (Soviet-made van) as a shuttle. Everybody took turns captaining the raft, practising all necessary techniques and strokes. At the end of the day we had many man-over-board manoeuvres as well as throw-bag practice. Lunch was on the river banks.

Day 3: The other 5 of the trainees attended, doing pretty much the same as we did on Day 2. The only difference was that we put in a lot further upstream but still had numerous runs. On both days, the teacher did not join in but brought us to the river. A film team from the Media Academy from Ulaan Baatar was in town and filmed the whole day. One person joined the rafting party, filming as we went along.

Day 4: All 10 trainees attended as well as the teacher which made for a very full raft. We decided to have a long journey and put in on a small river close to Batshireet. It was a beautiful stream, just big enough for the raft and gave the students an opportunity to apply the skills they had learned from previous days to quite a hard environment as the river was restrictive. It also took a lot longer than estimated, taking us 3 hours to reach the Onon River. It then took another 4

hours to reach the town of Binder where we arrived just before dark. Lunch was on a beautiful spot on the smaller river. Everybody had about 40 minutes to be in charge of the raft. It was evident that there had been a progression of skills over the course of the training week.

Day 5: This was more of a show day. Trainees demonstrated in front of all their teachers at Binder everything they had learned, including man-over-board and the use of throw-bags for river rescue. They then took numerous runs on the river without me on-board and instead with several passengers. In the afternoon we decided to have another run down to the ger camp as a last chance for everybody to get onto the river. All students jumped over-board at least once during the course of the run, and the rescues became progressively smoother. At the take out, we then cleaned and dried the raft and put it back into storage at the school. No equipment was lost. We then had a small ceremony handing out the certificates and later the teachers and the headmaster took me out for dinner.

In conclusion: All in all, this was a very successful training. I was impressed how fast the students learned, how proficient and disciplined they became towards the end of the training session, executing the various raft manoeuvres. Some of the girls found it very challenging to steer the raft and I wouldn't be comfortable to put them in charge of the raft without an adult. The 3 boys who had received training the previous summer clearly stood out. These 3 plus one of the girls I would have no trouble allowing them to be in charge on the river without an adult. I recommended this to Urjinsukh and the school headmaster, hoping they will give the kids the opportunity to go out by themselves.

Niamka, the translator, was the perfect person for the job, himself becoming a proficient rafter and therefore being able to teach the students more effectively, understanding the concepts needed. He had no problems jumping over-board many a time for rescue practice.

I thoroughly enjoyed the lessons with very friendly adults, eager kids in a beautiful environment. I am happy to go any time again!

List of trainees:

Davhar Bayar

Biderya

Darhan Bayar

Haliunaa

Battsetseg

Hulan

Sodnom

Jarantai

Gurragjaa

Erdenbayar

Nandin