



2008 Mongolian Environmental Education Outreach: Project Completion Report

A Word of Thanks to Our Sponsors

The past summer's river rafting and ecology program was a great success. The Canadian project team, comprised of Maureen Garrity, Catherine McEwen and Hector MacKenzie, thank each individual donor (without your contribution this project would not have seen the water) and the agencies who facilitated the flow of funds and provided administrative support: the American Centre for Mongolian Studies, The Asia Foundation, and Tides Canada.



The project exceeded our expectations in terms of the learning achieved and the highly appreciative nature of the trainees. Both trainees and Binder School administration staff were overwhelmed and thankful of the interest to support them that came from people (project sponsors) who had never met them.

On behalf of Binder School, the school director, Buyantogkh, expressed their thanks, *"We are very grateful for the raft and training that the school has received. The school has celebrated its 80 year anniversary and the raft project will be recorded in the school's history."*

Following below is a summary of the project to provide you with a sense of the success of the project and how well it was received.

Furthering RIVER STEWARDSHIP - ONE RIVER AT A TIME Summary Report

The Importance of the Onon River

The Onon Queen is the lifeblood for Mongolian families and their livestock. This the Mongolians know. It was on the banks of the Onon River where Binder community accesses the river that we witnessed just how important the waters are: two young children pushing a two-wheeled cart with a metal water can to the river bank, and filling the same with a smaller can, one can at a time, for the household's drinking and cooking needs; a herder tending his group of calves, directing them to the river shallows for a drink and redirecting them once finished throwing river pebbles at them to move them on; a mother washing her laundry; a herder riding across in lead of his goat herd that follow bleating out as they feel the bottom slip away from their feet and the force of the current pushing against them; three young boys playing in the current in the shallows and hanging onto the raft like limpets gleeful in their impishness; four cows lumbering down along the shoreline drinking, urinating and grazing along the bank; a driver washing his vehicle; a mother bathing her children; a couple bathing themselves, then washing their clothes; a motorbike crossing the river hopeful for shallow water in the crossing (it is the rain season and the river level fluctuates daily); a tractor following same but not so successful with the water depth relative to the engine; and as the day wore on more and more people coming to the river bank to relax and cool off from the day's heat.



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River Rafting and Ecology Training

Our journey with the 14 trainees (three teachers and eleven 15 year olds) was to awaken to the natural diversity and wealth of the Onon River, to come to understand her eddies (slack waters), her sweepers (overhanging trees) her deep and shallow channels, and her backwaters (old river channels). We came together to learn to navigate her waters in an inflatable raft with nine people on board paddling, all the while observing her richness – the water birds, like red-breasted mergansers, common goldeneye, shelduck and demoiselle cranes; her changing riparian (riverside) communities of poplars and pine, willows, and abundance of wildflowers; and her variety of habitats – fast water, calm back waters, old river channels, and gravel and mud bottoms. And we measured her features of current speed, water temperature, pH, her turbidity, and sampled and discovered the invertebrate (no backbone) animals that live in her bottom gravels.



Our goal, to further river stewardship, was clearly achieved when Khatnaa, one of the trainees, said, *"I learned about rafting on the river but what was more important was learning about looking after the river and how we must take good care of the river now that we have learned how important it is."*

Given the critical place of the Onon River in Mongolian livelihood and culture, contrasted with pressure on water quality from increased herding, industrialization and drier climatic conditions, monitoring the river's water quality is of paramount importance. By having the raft, Binder community is now able to conduct water testing in a greater length of the river and develop more data of their water quality. By maintaining a database of a

length of the river, monitoring into the future and taking action accordingly, Binder citizens can ensure that today's uses of the river may continue into tomorrow.

The Mongolian-Canadian Connection

Urjiin, our Binder school teacher presents an image of our connection when he embraces us and says, *"You train us and then we will train others. The Onon River flows out into the Pacific Ocean and eventually over to Canada. We will raft the Onon River and meet up with you."*

Due to the overwhelming eagerness of the trainees and their ability to assimilate the training and ecological awareness, we are considering a follow-up program for the summer of 2009.

With thanks and appreciation to all who supported our project,



Catherine McEwen, Project Leader

