

My stay in Takhiin Tal, Great Gobi B, Mongolia

(From May 13th to June 18th)

A neighbour's note with Anita's address was the starting point. Something new: Mongolia, English teaching instead of being a pure tourist, experiencing the remote steppe, having time for different activities as a retired teacher. These might be reasons why I'm here in Takhiin Tal. To be honest, I don't really know why, it somehow just happened.

The stay in Takhiin Tal was marvellous. Ganbaa and his team really took care of me. I could rely on them from the very beginning, from being picked up at the airport in Ulaanbaatar by Saikhanaa, then in Khovd by a ranger and finally in Altai by Agi, one of the two persons who beside Ganbaatar could communicate in English. Friendly people, partly extra food prepared by Tungaa, my own ger: all this made me feel very wonderful and welcome.

It took too long to start my English lessons at the ranger camp, which was a disappointment. However, with the many lessons in the last week I'm absolutely happy and satisfied. The rangers are very interested and study with zeal. In addition, I could teach all the classes at the school in Bugat for 2 ½ days. The weather in Bugat was bitterly cold, the dormitory the same, but the contact to the students gave me all warmth I missed.

The rangers invited me to participate in their regular work: observing and counting the members of the wild harems, counting the foals and trying to determine their sex. Every observation is meticulously written down. I was impressed by their patience in observing the harems. Several times we returned to the camp late in the evening. Several times stallions or mares ran off. Once we had to chase a mare back over a distance of more than ten kilometres. Once we had to catch one which had joined a domestic harem near the Chinese border.

A special task was building a fence in Takhin Os, a hard job because of the hot weather and the many mosquitos and horseflies. Life in Takhin Os was very basic. The rangers slept on the roof of the small cabin which was kitchen and dining room at the same time. They worked hard but also had a lot of fun together. Their attitude to the life is different. Inconveniences, a broken-down car or one which got stuck, a broken hammer or drill: those problems never changed their optimistic mood. Is it a fatalistic view or do they just know that life can only be planned to a certain extent? Program changes were as natural as their tea with the daily meals.

Ganbaa again and again took time for a little talk with me. This was important as I couldn't understand the Mongolian conversation. The Mongolian language is extremely difficult. I'm still not able to distinguish the different sounds created, the words are very long and I couldn't rely on written words. Learning this language would have been beyond my ability.

Getting to know the families of the rangers confirmed what I had read about Mongolia: Mongolian hospitality is unbeatable. Life in Takhiin Tal is basic but after the short stay in even remoter Takhiin Os, the ranger camp in Takhiin Tal was luxury, like coming home to me. I enjoyed my time and my teaching there completely.

Uli Rutz