

Mongolia July 2013 The Reindeer Shamans



Shaman Udval in Ulaanbaatar. She is actually practicing in the city which hosts about half the population of Mongolia. Here Victoria, with guide Uyangaa, asks questions while shaman is in trance.



The building in which the shaman holds her ceremonies. Udval was very impressive. Shamans kept the knowledge alive while it was banned under Communist rule. Her ancestor's spirits protect her while she is out in trance. The drum is used to call spirits.



Udval engaged in conversation about her background. She was chosen at five years of age by her grandfather to undertake training as a shaman. In addition to her drum, Udval also uses a computer. She has contact with many spirits including those of, Sky, River, Mountain, and Lake. She also contacts ancestors.



With Udval



Udval as drumming begins and the lights are on. Most of the ceremony was in darkness.



Air travel to Murun, capital of Khuvsgul Province in North Central Mongolia,



At Murungiin Temple near Murun.



Most of trip was camping and travel by Toyota Land Cruiser. Every day we broke down the camp in the morning and set up again in the evening. That fact was important in substantiating a mystical event that happened later in the trip. Uyangaa did a great job doubling as both guide and cook.



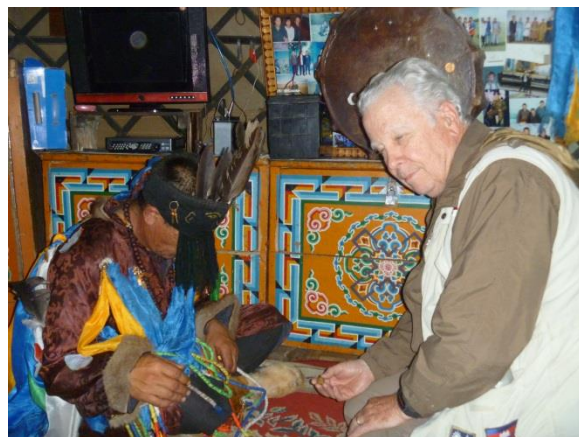
It gets chilly at night, even in mid-summer. Here Uyangaa, which translates to Melody, is in her traditional heavy coat for the night.



Such religious sites abound at every high place or pass.



There are many small glaciers



With Shaman Bold at the second ceremony He has been a shaman six years. When sick he was told he must become a shaman or die. He has three spirits that work with him, his grandmother, one called Tuza, and the powerful Mountain Spirit.



This item fell on the floor during the trance. I was told to keep it for three years. The locals present seemed to never have seen an object materialize before.



The ger of Shaman Bold. Note TV dish and solar panels for power. These were common in remote areas.



Inside Bold's Ger



There was very low light during ceremony. I was asked to throw milk for the spirits.



After the roads ran out, we went by horseback for two days. Actually, roads were more a vector pointed in the direction you want to go, not real roads. In fact we didn't even see a gravel road for ten days. The path in went to about 9000 feet in elevation crossing many glacial streams. Camp was about 7000 feet.



The pack train consisted of eleven horses, three wranglers, three guides, and us. The ground was often uneven and at one point my horse lost its footing and went down sending me flying. Lots of bruises.



Just how basic was it? This is one of the formal latrines.



With the local wranglers. They run on noodle soup. Breaking down the camp and packing everything up each morning took a couple of hours. The pack horses did not appreciate heavy loads and bucked furiously on occasion.



Here we are at the encampment of the nomadic Reindeer People. Nighttime temperatures were slightly above freezing (in July). At that, the reindeer would go up onto the glaciers and lie down to keep cool.



Shaman Saintseese at the reindeer camp. Note they use a tepee-like shelters rather than the gers seen elsewhere.



Shaman Saintseese preparing for the ceremony. There was almost no light during her drumming and trance state. Each was blessed by the shaman during the ceremony.



The shaman's robes and drum before the ceremony. Area was smudged with juniper.



Bathing was a glacier-fed lake. It was quite refreshing after days of riding. Also helped the bruising that happened when my horse went down in rough terrain and throwing me.



The reindeer in Mongolia are domesticated and used to provide milk. It is very thick and pots are kept on the fire for family and anyone else coming by. By tradition they must feed all travelers. Due to dwindling herds, the reindeer are rarely eaten.



Victoria with local children



Children at the reindeer camp school



The reindeer people live very close to the invisible border with Russia. We were required to sign in at a security outpost and this was the Mongolian Army commander.



Victoria on the set of a Mongolian movie that was being filmed in the area. We just happened onto the vacated site but met an associate producer from the Ulaanbaatar Broadcast System which even did a version of Mama Mia. The new film is due out in 2014.



Here we visit Shaman Monkhat in the vicinity of Tsagaanuur Soum. Victoria asks him questions. His mother and grandmother were shamans. People thought him crazy as he saw invisible beings. He was trained for six years after his mother died and her spirit returned to help him. He has 18 spirits that enter his body during trances.



Although I was not wearing my hearing aids, the shaman mentioned the problem. He then blew smoke into my ears. Despite the prediction, my hearing did not improve.



Shaman Tunjee (the local villagers will not speak the name out of respect) He too was thought to be crazy and would see invisible animals. Running in the forest his symbol is the spirit of the wolf.





Shaman Tunjee was in the movie *The Horse Boy*, which is well known there. It pertains to the treatment of autism. He told Victoria to get feathers of a vulture. When in trance he speaks another language and his wife translates the information.

Note Victoria went into trance during this ceremony. Tunjee was physically jolted and said it was the spirit of Victoria's father entering him. He is very impressive.



As directed, here Victoria leaves a blue scarf as a tribute to the spirits.



The next couple of days involved cross-country driving, often when no roads existed. Amazing terrain.



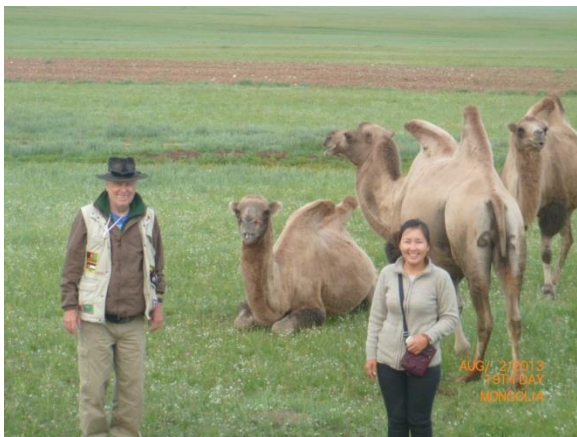
Driving up dry river beds. It was quite a testament for Toyota Land Cruisers. We only passed two motorcycles in two days of traveling. We literally drove through the mountains on a general heading. Once there was single pole stuck in the ground as a road sign indicating we should turn uphill. We crossed many stream and hit areas where the ground was so soft we had to walk to lighten the load.



The ger we stayed in two nights at Lake Khuvsgul. While the lake is considered to be a highlight of Mongolian trips, frankly it paled compared to the shamans and cross-country camping we experienced.



We also stopped by the Uushigiin Uver Deerstone archeological site. The rock art is dated to the Scythian period, 800-600 BCE with the middle Bronze Age. We found a Russian team from St. Petersburg working on the site. They were very helpful in explaining things.



On the drive back to Murun we found these two-humped camels.





Finally there was the Chinggis Khan exhibit about an hour and a half outside Ulaanbaatar. Truly an impressive place.



This is 50 meters high counting the base. The local hero, it is estimated that Genghis Khan has over 32 million descendants.



The reindeer people were located at the northernmost point in all of Mongolia.

The trip was organized on very short notice by Mongolian Ways. We recommend them.