

7/30/2004

Hello all,

Things are going well here in Siberia... today we are spending the night in a town called Sludyanka right on the shores of Lake Baikal. We visited a naturalist today, and he fed us all kinds of currants, black red and white, and nanking cherries which are ripe now. He is growing apricots and apples, plums and pears in a beautiful wild garden. The raspberries are just beginning to ripen here... it is much like life in the highlands, even maybe a few weeks later.

This morning we visited the Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill, the main source of industry and pollution in the lake. Another big source of pollution is industry in the watershed of the Selenga River, the main river which flows into the lake. There is a toxicology center in Baikalsk, but the scientists who work there haven't been paid since last November.

One of the most interesting things is that many of the scientists we have met here don't believe that there are any problems with pollution in the lake. In addition, they don't see global warming as a problem... they wish that Siberia was more like California and they could grow oranges too.

We spent a couple of days in Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Buryat Republic on the East side of Baikal. It was really interesting to be there because there is very strong Asian influence there. We visited a Buddhist monastery and the center for oriental medicine there, as well as meeting with a lot of scientists who told us about their research.

The cool thing about the houses here is the beautiful woodwork around the shutters, so incredibly intricate... and the interface of the urban and rural, with log houses and huge vegetable gardens right in the city, right next to huge Soviet era apartments. The cities are not really beautiful, but the villages are. When I come here again, I hope to spend more time in villages, and less time traveling. Hopefully on my project, which starts in a couple of days, it will be more like that. I am going to be looking at benthic organisms off shore in a small village called Bolshye Koty on the West shore of the lake. You can only get there by hydrofoil, so it should be suitably remote.

After that we were in Baikalsk area, working on the Great Baikal Trail, a 2100 km trail all around the lake. Many sections are yet to be completed, but it is the hope that the trail will be part of civilized ecotourism development around the lake. Everyone there was picking strawberries, huckleberries and currants in the forest, as well as mushrooms. While we were working on the trail it started to rain

and we all stood around a fire and had tea with the other people who were out gathering food and hiking on the trail.

It is so interesting how similar it is to home... the species of plants especially... but the rivers are so much bigger here... streams like Antoine Creek at home would just be 10 times bigger if they were here. I feel so comfortable traveling here, even more than in Turkey, I think because young people like me aren't wearing head scarves, and I never feel so out of place. And because the plants and trees and rivers and rocks seem so familiar.

So... all is well, time is flying and I am having a good time. I hope all is well with all of you... take care.

(Please send this to those who might be interested)

Love

Sarah

[Sarah is from Tonasket, Washington.]