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"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose": vignettes from multinational archaeological research in Mongolia, 1995

Abstract: 2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the Joint Mongolian-Russian-American Archaeological Expedition (JMRAAE). Vignettes of the historical contexts of and personalities involved in the genesis of JMRAAE in 1995 provided by one of the expedition's three founding co-directors, explain its organization, early achievements, and historical context.

Keywords: *Joint Mongolian-Russian-American Archaeological Expedition (JMRAAE), Mongolia, 1990s, Paleolithic, prehistoric archaeology*

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Alphonse Karr's well-known aphorism, usually rendered into English as "the more things change, the more they stay the same" ("Бүх зүйл өөрчлөгдөх тусам тэд хэвээрээ байх болно;" "Чем больше всё меняется, тем больше всё остается по-старому") is an apt, if somewhat cynical, expression of how humans tend to perceive the passage of time.

A few years ago, I reflected on the nearly universal human propensity to attach almost mystical significance to the commemoration of anniversaries that "…cause us to be retrospective, regardless of cultural background or historical circumstances" (Olsen 2018, 2019). With this in mind, 2025 is an especially portentous year for me since it marks both the thirtieth anniversary of our joint expedition and my own seventieth anniversary, as it were.

Appearances to the contrary, this is not simply a Bewusstseinsstrom exercise in documenting events and experiences. Rather, I have assembled related scenes that collectively convey what I believe is an accurate sense of the organization, early achievements, and historical context of our first expedition, and hopefully give the reader deeper insight into the cast of characters and the international milieu of mid-1990s Mongolia, Russia, and America; the anvil upon which our expedition was forged.

In thinking about how best to contribute something personal yet broadly relevant, I decided upon a *tour d'horizon* presented as a series of loosely articulated vignettes from our expedition's first field season in 1995. Since *people* are the most important component of all aspects of scientific research, I use the human element in the 1995 inception of our joint expedition's fieldwork as a means of framing a series of brief vignettes to establish the salience of Karr's assertion in this specific case.

I wasn't yet forty years old when we first gathered in Ulaanbaatar in June 1995 to operationalize several years of planning for our multiparty research. I had visited Mongolia previously in 1991 as part of a U.S. National Academy of Sciences grasslands ecology research group and had met D. Tseveendorj, the leading figure of modern Mongolian Pleistocene prehistory, who was to become my principal Mongolian colleague and good friend, but I knew next to nothing about the country or its Stone Age archaeology. My Mongolian language skills were practically limited to "Сайн байна уу?" and my Russian was optimistically rudimentary at the time (К сожалению, мой русский язык продолжает нуждаться в улучшении!). To make matters worse, the corpus of available English publications on the Mongolian Paleolithic was extremely limited and mostly out-of-date, so I was somewhat adrift. Thus, I was very fortunate to have fallen in with both Academician Tseveendorj, as well as with his Russian colleague, the doyen of Eurasian Paleolithic archaeology, Academician Anatoly Panteleevich Derevianko, whose field experience in Mongolia began in 1966. Both Tseveendorj and Derevianko took it upon themselves to bring me up to speed in Mongolian archaeology. Little did I know at the time that our professional relationships would deepen into the two most profound and rewarding friendships of my adult life.

Now, to set the stage, we must first recall the world as it was in 1995. Mongolia and Russia were in the throes of dramatic and far-reaching social and political changes, while America drifted along in its typical self-absorbed manner.

A reconfigured Mongolian People's Party remained in power in 1995, following Mongolia's democratic revolution (1990 оны ардчилсан хувьсгал) a half-decade earlier. P. Ochirbat was in office as the first President of Mongolia, while the country moved inexorably toward democratic socialism. Emerging from post-Soviet recession, Mongolia's GDP grew by ca. 6% in 1995 due to the copper boom and re-invigorated cashmere trade. Golomt Bank was founded that year as a key part of the country's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy and optimism was justifiably running high.

The stodgy Soviet Union had only recently given way to a young and vibrant Russian Federation under Boris Yeltsin's presidency. CJSC "Pallada Asset Management" (ЗАО «Паллада Эссет Менеджмент»), Russia's first such firm, was founded, providing oversight for the assets of both Russian and foreign citizens under one roof for the first time. The Norwegian Rocket Incident (Норвежский ракетный инцидент) in January 1995 dramatically elevated East-West tensions and caused us to worry about the status of our upcoming expedition. Fortunately, it was swiftly determined the whole debacle resulted from American and Norwegian incompetence which, thankfully, the Russians quickly forgave. On a lighter note, the 1994–1995 Russian Cup was won by FC Dynamo Moscow, who beat FC Rotor Volgograd in a shootout 8-7 after finishing extra time at 0-0!

Meanwhile in 1995, Bill Clinton's U.S.A. watched the first American astronaut ride into space aboard a Soyuz U2 launch vehicle from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, ushering in what seemed to be a new, presumably everlasting, era of Russian-American collaboration in the exploration of space. The so-called "dot-com bubble" ("Цэг-ком хөөс"; "Пузырь доткомов") began, coinciding with the privatization of the Internet (i.e., the U.S. government would no longer fund access to the World Wide Web with public money). In mid-1995, the average price of gasoline in the United States was approximately $1.15 per gallon

(Нэг галлон нь 1.15 ам доллар; 1,15 доллар США за галлон). The economy was thriving, and most solipsistic Americans were more obsessed with OJ Simpson's sensational murder trial than they were about world events, including looming recession.

Irrespective of our own diverse national concerns and preoccupations though, all of us – Mongolians, Russians, and Americans – were equally focused on and committed to the success of our joint scientific endeavor. The thirty years that have elapsed since 1995 are unimpeachable testimony to the clarity of that focus and the depth of that commitment.

Preparations for the 1995 expedition

In late May 1995 I flew to Novosibirsk where I joined Anatoly Panteleevich on the nearly three-day journey by train to Ulaanbaatar, fulfilling several personal ambitions along the way. Just traveling via the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Mongolian Railways was transformative. Stopping at Zima Station, made famous by Yevtushenko's eponymous poem (my mother's favorite); seeing Lake Baikal for the first time and eating *omul* (омуль) and boiled potatoes at Slyudyanka; finally waking up to the limitless Mongolian steppe with sporadic clusters of white *ger*, all profoundly impacted my nascent new worldview.

In Ulaanbaatar, our hosts, Tseveendorj-guai and other members of his institute, not only flawlessly managed our creature comforts but had also made many of the necessary logistical arrangements prior to our arrival. We stayed at the Bayangol Hotel, which I will simply say was nothing like it is today.

Our center of operations was the "Biological Base" ("Биологическая база") maintained by the Russian Academy of Sciences in the Amgalan district of eastern UB (the former Chinese quarter in Urga days). This is where we prepared our expedition vehicles for field use; two GAZ-66 trucks in military trim and a civilian UAZ-452 off-road van; and organized the myriad food and other materiel that we transported with us from Novosibirsk or purchased in Ulaanbaatar. The base is also conveniently located directly across from the Mongolian Police Academy, so we always felt perfectly comfortable leaving expensive equipment in lockers there, secured with nothing more formidable than a Chinese padlock! I must admit somewhat shamefacedly that my fondest recollection of the Biological Base is of our post-expedition use of a proper sauna (complete with freshly cut birch branches!) that our Russian colleagues had constructed in a re-purposed railroad car! I quickly realized this was no sybaritic whim (well, mostly not) as a month's worth of ingrained Gobi sand and dust were steamed out of my pores!

The human element

Before delving into vignettes of the fieldwork we accomplished in 1995, it's important to flesh-out the human component I referred to earlier.

The expedition's three co-directors were Academician D. Tseveendorj (1949-2022) of the Institute of Archaeology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences (IA, MAS), Ulaanbaatar; Academician Anatoly Panteleevich Derevianko, Director of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences (IAE, SB, RAS), Novosibirsk; and me, John Olsen, then Head of the Department (now School) of Anthropology at the University of Arizona, Tucson.

Mongolian members of the 1995 expedition *(professional titles and affiliations reflect individuals' status in 1995, not their current position or institution):*

B. Gunchinsuren – Scientist, IA, MAS. Gunchinsuren-guai's accomplishments as a first-rate archaeologist are matched by his remarkable abilities as an administrator, a rare combination. As an advanced student in 1995, Gunchinsuren repeatedly proved his exceptional skills as a field archaeologist as well as a gifted diplomat, managing and communicating with authorities in UB and locally in Bayanlig on our behalf. On the archaeology side, I was immediately impressed with his innate ability to interpret stratigraphy, and I quickly realized that here was someone I could learn a great deal from. And I have. I can also say with genuine respect that Gunchinsuren-guai was always easily the best-dressed member of the expedition, his sartorial zenith being a khaki uniform and colorful Kazakh *tubeteika* (тюбетейка; гавлын малгай) worn with carefully polished shoes for trips into town for meetings with local officials. The friendship that developed between me and Gunchin during our first field season has deepened over the decades into a dependable foundation for our ongoing collaboration and I appreciate that friendship more and more with the passing of time.

Ya. Tserendagva – Scientist, IA, MAS. A superb scholar who, even 30 years ago, was clearly destined to achieve the high status he has as an archaeologist. I've noticed that in all the photos I have of him, even the candid ones, Tsedor is always smiling, and it reminds me that his good humor and unerring willingness to contribute to all aspects of the expeditions' work made him one of our most valued colleagues from the first day. The phrase that best describes Tserendagva-guai's demeanor is "quiet competence," and he has proven himself over the years to be a reliable and conscientious colleague and friend.

The 1995 expedition was assisted capably and energetically by five enthusiastic young Senior Laboratory Assistants from the IA, MAS, all of whom have gone on to impressive careers in archaeology. I take great pride in having been involved in the early training of R. Gambat, P. Batbold, M. Bayarsaikhan,

B. Ganbaatar, and G. Sainzhargal.

Russian participants in the 1995 expedition *(professional titles and affiliations reflect individuals' status in 1995, not their current position or institution):*

V. T. Petrin (1943-2002) – Professor, Chief Scientist and Head of Russian Team, IAE, SB, RAS. Valery Trofimovich's extensive field experience in Mongolia and greater Central Asia as an archaeologist, geologist, and speleologist not only situated him perfectly to play a critical role in the expedition's scientific endeavors, but also qualified him as our "motivator," a position he relished and performed with consummate skill.

E. V. Devyatkin (1932-2004) – Professor and Head, Laboratory of Quaternary Geology, Institute of Geology, RAS, Moscow. Evgenii Viktorovich began working in Mongolia in 1964 and was an award-winning geologist of the Cenozoic of Inner Asia. We were very fortunate to have had his input and guidance during the formation of our expedition as well as his unmatched presence in the field during the 1995 field season. I learned more about Mongolian geology following Zhenya Devyatkin around and asking him naïve questions than I did from untold hours of reading.

A. N. Zenin (1962-2010) – Scientist, IAE, SB, RAS. I'm convinced that our expedition would never have been possible, let alone successful, were it not for the ingenuity and energy of Anatoly Nikolayevich Zenin. He was a superb field archaeologist and an indefatigable explorer but, he was also a logistician extraordinaire. Every organizational detail of our field operations at Tsagaan Agui, ranging from setting up the excavation grid in the cave, to constructing the camp's mess-tent and laboratory, to inventing a rather high-functioning impromptu solar-heated shower made from a suspended GAZ-66 inner tube sheltered from the persistent Gobi wind, was attributable to Tolya's indomitable spirit. He was, simply put, the most Siberian person I've ever met, the very dictionary definition of *Sibiryak* (Сибиряк; Сибирийн; a person Americans colloquially refer to as a "MacGyver" "мужик с руками из нужного места" or "асуудлыг энгийн зүйлээр шийддэг залуу"): resilient and unconquerable in the face of adversity; capable of building or repairing absolutely anything with minimal tools or spare parts, cast in the same mold as Anatoly Ivanovich Mazin. And *no one* has or ever will match Anatoly Nikolayevich's ability to single-handedly pack a GAZ-66 so efficiently that every cubic centimeter was filled and yet everything was somehow still immediately accessible with minimal rummaging through stacked boxes!

A. I. Krivoshapkin – Scientist, IAE, SB, RAS. In 1995, my dear friend Andrey Innikentyevich was a junior scientist in the Institute he now directs in Akademgorodok. His broad and deep experience in archaeology coupled with his superb English-language skills, made him the perfect interface between the American, Russian, and Mongolian teams. He contributed outstandingly to every facet of the expedition in its early years. And Andrey Innikentyevich's irrepressible good humor made him one of the most pleasant of our colleagues to associate with! I'm pleased to say that as my affiliation with the IAE, SB, RAS has deepened over the years, including being designated a Leading Researcher (Ведущий научный сотрудник) in 2016 and receiving an honorary doctoral degree (Почетный доктор археологических наук) in 2020, so has my friendship with Andrey Innikentyevich and now his wife, Kseniya A. Kolobova, herself a renowned Paleolithic archaeologist of Siberia and Central Asia. Because of our Mongolian fieldwork, Andrei Innikentyevich and I found solidarity in our mutual intolerance of тушёнка (canned corned beef) and гречка (buckwheat); see B. A. Abramov and A. I. Glotov below!

V. P. Mylnikov – Candidate of Historical Sciences, Scientist, IAE, SB, RAS. Vladimir Pavlovich was already a highly capable and accomplished archaeologist by the time he joined our expedition in 1995. An outstanding photographer in addition to his archaeological skills, Volodya was a major asset to our research activities that first year and was largely responsible for designing the surface collection strategy we employed at Tsakhiurtyn Khöndii to statistically assess the site's artifact surface density. At the end of that first expedition, Vladimir Pavlovich and I exchanged wristwatches to seal our new friendship: embarrassingly, my plastic Casio for his "Made in the USSR" mechanical Poljot (Полёт) that he referred to as his "Russian Rolex." Clearly, I got the better half of that deal. Thirty years later, I still wear that watch; it functions perfectly, and I think of Volodya every time I put it on.

B. A. Abramov (1945-2015) – Artist and Photographer, IAE, SB, RAS. If it could be said that any one person was at the center of our joint expedition in 1995, that person would have been Boris Alekseevich. Although officially employed as an artist and photographer, Boris' role as principal cook earned him the respect and admiration of all expedition members. The maxim that "an army marches on its stomach," has been attributed to both Napoleon and Frederick the Great but, whatever its origin, it is undeniably true. Borya kept our expedition fit and on-track (with occasional help from Anatoly Nikolayevich and Aleksandr Ivanovich) and all of us appreciated his ability to create culinary masterworks from the simplest of ingredients. Over the course of

many field seasons, we ate literally thousands of cans of corned beef (тушёнка; лаазалсан үхрийн мах) and at least a half metric tonne of buckwheat (гречка; сагаган), only because Borya was able to transform them into something edible, meal after meal, day after day. In his spare time, Boris Alekseevich carved the wooden handles of expedition members' Marshalltown trowels in intricate Scythian-inspired designs. I still have mine, although it has been retired from active duty.

A. I. Glotov – Artist and Photographer, IAE, SB, RAS. Aleksandr Ivanovich far transcended his official role as principal expedition photographer in 1995. Although virtually all my own photographs of Sasha depict a smiling, mustachioed man with several cameras hanging around his neck, usually including a huge Hasselblad, he also acted as Boris Alekseevich's sous-chef, a role he engaged with enthusiasm and immense skill. It was he who, with fortunate prescience, insisted we bring along a crate of spicy Czech ketchup to tart-up our otherwise boring grechka. One crate turned out to not be enough. Fortunately, an adequate supply of horseradish (хрен; тунхууны) and a personal stash of wasabi generously contributed by Jeff Brantingham also provided some relief from the monotony of unadorned grechka. Alas, none of us had yet become aware of Sriracha chili sauce (Шрирача чинжүү сумс; соус чили Шрирача)!

The success or failure of most expeditions hinges on the skills and reliability of drivers. Our 1995 expedition was certainly no exception and, fortunately, we were blessed with three superlatively competent driver/mechanics from the IAE, SB, RAS: N. I. Portnov, N. S. Ivlev and V. N. Tikonov. Nikolai Ivanovich and Nikolai Semyonovich drove and maintained the finicky GAZ-66s while Vladimir Nikolayevich wrangled the smaller but no less labor intensive UAZ mini-van. We never worried about getting from Point A to Point B on- or off-road while these three Masters of the Motor Pool were on duty!

American members of the 1995 expedition *(professional titles and affiliations reflect individuals' status in 1995, not their current position or institution):*

R. W. Reeves (1938-2021) – Professor, School of Geography and Development, University of Arizona. Richard Reeves participated in our expedition as a geographer specializing in GIS and remote sensing which, in those days, were fledgling and poorly developed technologies. Equipped with a first-generation Garmin GPS, Dick was able to create extremely useful maps for us on the fly and was an essential contributor to our reconnaissance trips away from Tsagaan Agui (predictably, his nickname was Штурман; Navigator). A proficient Russian speaker who had traveled widely in Soviet Central Asia beginning in 1990, Richard especially enjoyed his interactions with Evgenii Viktorovich and *vice versa,* I believe.

P. J. Brantingham – Doctoral Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of Arizona. The third member of the small 1995 American contingent, P. Jeffrey Brantingham, pursued his doctoral work at the University of Arizona utilizing Mongolian and Siberian Paleolithic materials, defending a dissertation in 1999 entitled *Astride the Movius Line: Late Pleistocene Lithic Technological Variability in Northeast Asia*. Jeff and Andrey Innikentyevich formed a friendship because of their similar statuses in 1995 that has stood the test of time. That friendship, based on mutual collegial interests that they shared with B. Gunchinsuren and Ya. Tserendagva, greatly facilitated the trilateral collaborative nature of our expedition. None of us ever envisioned a rigid top-down structure when we designed the expedition, thus Jeff's easy and productive interactions with his Russian and Mongolian counterparts greatly assisted all aspects of our work.

Vignettes from the 1995 field season

Establishment of Tsagaan Agui base camp

Following several days of discussion at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences which culminated in a formal trilateral research agreement, the full complement of 24 participants set off on a two-day drive to southeastern Bayankhongor *aimag* where a base camp was established and excavations initiated in Tsagaan Agui Cave (Цагаан агуй), located at N 44°42′41.06", E 101°10′11.89" (about 1860 meters above sea level) in the eastern Gobi Altai range. We have returned to that same spot to locate our base camp every year that we've worked at Tsagaan Agui.

The settlement nearest Tsagaan Agui is Bayanlig *sum* (Баянлиг сум), roughly 40 km to the west-southwest over a rough dirt track. In 1995, Bayanlig's population was around 3,000 people, distributed over roughly 119,000 square kilometers. Bayanlig had very few resources in 1995 (today it is thriving, though still a somewhat isolated community, with an only slightly larger population). Certainly, the several shops in Bayanlig combined couldn't meet the needs of our expedition, even in terms of basic foodstuffs, thus we had no choice but to bring most of what we needed from Ulaanbaatar, if not Russia, including, in the latter case, dozens of loaves of black bread (Бородинский хлеб; Бородино талх) that we dried in the intense Gobi sun and rehydrated as necessary through the field season. We could, however, count on an unlimited supply of excellent, sweet water in Bayanlig drawn from a deep public well and, usually, gasoline to replenish our expedition supply. In 1995, we pumped water and petrol by hand into 200-liter

drums. Pumping gas and water became a *rite de passage* for all expedition members and no one was excluded from the rota. Today, there are several petrol stations in Bayanlig, all with electric pumps, and there is a fine government-run well that provides the same pure water, now at the touch of a debit card to a reader.

Here, it would be gross oversight not to acknowledge the unstinting support for our expedition provided by Z. Aranjin, Brigadier of Bayanlig *sum's* Bayan-Aarag (2nd) Brigade (Баянхонгор аймаг, Баянлиг сум, Баян-Ааpаг (2-р) баг, Бригадир З. Аранжин). Tsagaan Agui is located in Bayan-Aarag *bag* and, as Brigadier, Aranjin-guai was technically responsible for overseeing our work on the government's behalf and helping as he could. Aranjin and I quickly discovered we had the same birthday, and that became the basis for an ever-deepening friendship that continues to this day. In 1995, Aranjin would arrive in camp astride a horse or, more commonly, a fine, red Izh Planeta-5 (Иж Планета-5) motorcycle that was the standard mode of transportation in rural Mongolia before the influx of Chinese bikes in the 2000s. Ostensibly, Aranjin was just keeping an eye on our activities, but he never arrived empty-handed, always bringing a few liters of fresh camel or goat milk and a bag of dried curd cheese (ааруул) that was one of his family's specialties. Aranjin-guai was our expedition's best friend for many years, insisting that we visit his family *ger*, usually not far from Tsagaan Agui, where we were plied with delicious food, including homemade fermented mare's milk (айраг) and, much to my chagrin, strongly encouraged to ride his family's horses (I am most definitely *not* a hippophile!). Following his retirement and move to Bayanlig, Aranjin nevertheless visits our Tsagaan Agui camp often during each field season and still brings us an array of much appreciated edible gifts that help relieve the monotony of our usual fare.

Excavations in Tsagaan Agui Cave in 1995

Discovered in 1972 by Mongolian archaeologists and test-excavated in 1988 and 1989 by the Joint Soviet-Mongolian Historico-Cultural Expedition, Tsagaan Agui is a solution cavity formed in a Devonian dolomitic limestone outlier of the Ikh Bogd Uul (Их Богд уул) range. The cave's main rooms, including a narrow, inclining (25°) entryway and a rotunda-like main chamber, total 38 meters in length, while the width of the cave at the drip line is nearly eight meters. The main chamber's height averages four to five meters and its anterior, western margin is presently exposed to the sky by a solution chimney approximately two meters in diameter. There are, in addition, at least two smaller chambers behind the main rotunda that are now nearly filled with debris and can only be reached by crawling on one's stomach through a four to five meter-long passage.

In 1988 and 1989, joint Soviet-Mongolian expeditions excavated a 16×2-6 meter trench spanning the drip line along the south margin of the cave's inclined entryway. In 1995 we cut back the north profile of that trench an additional 50 cm and extended it two meters east into the cave's main chamber. Reaching bedrock at depths of as much as three meters, this trench yielded stratified stone tools and vertebrate fossils, including a range of microfaunal remains. In 1995, a 2×2 meter *sondage* was excavated to a depth of 4.5 meters near the northeast margin of the main chamber to correlate the stratigraphy of that area and the cave's entry passage. We discovered red ochre geometric pictographs in the main rotunda that appear similar to known Bronze Age images, but we have been unable to determine their absolute antiquity. The cave's "lower grotto" was also partially excavated in 1995, yielding several bifacial core tools unlike stone artifacts excavated elsewhere in Tsagaan Agui. This typological disparity and the presence of fully fossilized remains of *Equus*, *Gazella*, and other mammalian and avian species suggested to us that this locus may contain evidence of the cave's earliest inhabitants.

More than 800 stone artifacts were recovered in the Tsagaan Agui excavations during our 1995 field season. From the analytical data we generated, we drew the following general conclusions: (1) raw material was exclusively local (in most cases obtained from within just a few dozen meters of the cave entrance) and consisted mostly of chert and jasper, (2) we identified a stratified cultural sequence representing the late prehistoric/early Bronze Age through Middle Palaeolithic, (3) tools recovered from the deepest strata consisted mostly of flake scrapers and comprised only a small portion (about 4%) of the lithic collection from those horizons, (4) flakes seemed to have been derived from both prepared platform (Levallois-like) and polyhedral cores with primary reduction having taken place outside of the cave at the source of the raw material. The limestone inselberg containing Tsagaan Agui is littered with the waste products of lithic reduction. A concentration of jasper and chert cobbles was found just above the cave entrance, many of which are associated with large primary flakes and smaller *débitage* indicating in situ reduction.

Reconnaissance activities undertaken in 1995

With the successful initiation of excavations in Tsagaan Agui, a ten-member party embarked on three extended and several local reconnaissance trips designed to examine areas previously unexplored by the joint Mongolian-Russian expeditions. Complete circumnavigations of the Ikh Bogd Uul (Их Богд уул) and Arts Bogd Uul (Арц Богд уул) ranges were

completed, as was a 250-km run west-northwest from base camp along the north face of the main Gobi Altai massif (Говь Алтайн массив), yielding abundant evidence of long-term occupation by prehistoric populations.

Particularly noteworthy was the discovery of an extensive quarry-workshop on the south face of Arts Bodg Uul, with such abundant surface materials that we established a camp and carried out work at the site for ten days. Called Tsakhiurtyn Khöndii (Цахиуртын хөндий; Flint Valley) by local inhabitants, three randomly-selected loci (up to 25 square meters) were chosen for thorough documentation and 100% sampling to provide the basis for statistical comparison of these surface occurrences with the excavated sequence from Tsagaan Agui as well as with open-air, buried fluvial terrace deposits in the Nariin-gol (Нарийн гол) and Orkhon-gol (Орхон гол) valleys that we also visited in 1995. The Flint Valley assemblages were impressive even after cursory examination, both in terms of their areal extent and richness (densities exceeding 1,000 artifacts per square meter were recorded over an area of nearly three square kilometers). Relatively pristine, unabraded microlithic nuclei and their products comprised one element of these surface occurrences while heavily worn, patinaed large cores and flake tools pointed to a much earlier facies of utilization as well. While the Flint Valley localities are clearly palimpsests, their sheer abundance and typological evidence indicating a long period of use encouraged us to return to the site for a longer period of work in 1996 (the results of which were published in Derevianko et al. 2002). In recent years, our Polish colleagues, under the leadership of Mirosław Masojć, have greatly expanded investigations in Flint Valley, yielding important new results, including more than 50 open-air Paleolithic localities and stratified cultural remains in Khötöl Usny Cave (Хөтөл Усны агуй) (Masojć et al. 2024).

Other reconnaissance trips undertaken in 1995 identified scattered, mostly late prehistoric and Mongol-period archaeological traces at nearly every stop, but only trial excavations conducted in Chikhen Agui (Чихэн агуй) rockshelter, some 200 kilometers west of Tsagaan Agui, produced stratified remains, apparently in primary context. The square-meter that we opened in Chikhen Agui in 1995 yielded an aceramic microlithic assemblage underlain by a non-microlithic flake industry we thought might reflect an Upper Pleistocene occupation of the region. Additional excavation campaigns at Chikhen Agui beginning in 1996 under the supervision of Sergey Anatolyevich Gladyshev did not produce conclusive evidence of occupation or use demonstrably earlier than the very late Pleistocene.

Shorter reconnaissance forays included visits to terminal Pleistocene/early Holocene archaeological complexes first reported by the Roy Chapman Andrews Central Asiatic Expeditions of the 1920s in the vicinity of Orog Nuur (Орог нуур) and his "Dune Dweller" sites near the famous Flaming Cliffs (Улаан Эрэг) at Bayanzag (Баянзаг), or Shabarakh Usu (an anglicized distortion of Шаварлаг ус), as it was known to the Andrews expeditions.

Our reconnaissance of the Orog Nuur area, including a difficult circumnavigation of the lake, yielded just a handful of Stone Age material, mostly microblades and wedge-shaped cores. This is surprising since the Andrews expeditions reported abundant archaeological materials, including ostrich eggshell beads, from the same location, so it is possible that a century of shifting sand dunes have covered the most productive find-spots (we have resurveyed the same area in recent years with the same disappointing results).

During the two days we spent at Bayanzag in 1995, we were surprised to find on the surface everything from ankylosaur osteoderms (анкилозавр остеодермүүд) to what we felt sure were remnants of one of Andrews's camps, including fragmentary wooden tea crates of the sort Andrews used to pack fossils and artifacts. We also found a rifle cartridge shell of the correct caliber (.280 Remington) to be associated with Andrews. Naturally, we left everything in place; I can only hope they've survived the massive influx of tourists to Bayanzag in the past thirty years.

One of my main non-archaeological accomplishments of 1995 was learning to drive a GAZ-66. These two metric tonne 4×4 military trucks, the darling of the Soviet, then Russian, Motorized Infantry and, without doubt, the most reliable and unstoppable large field vehicle ever, allowed us to transport all our camp needs through drift sand and ford swift-flowing streams. The Western equivalent (and I use the word "equivalent" reservedly), the Mercedes Unimog, is a vehicle best suited to suburbanites doing their grocery shopping compared with the no-nonsense seriousness of the GAZ-66; roughly like comparing the American (now Chinese) underpowered civilian Hummer with its military counterpart, the Humvee. The oddly non-ergonomic position of the GAZ's gearshift, nearly behind the driver's right side, and its unsynchronized manual transmission, necessitating constant double-clutching, was a bad combination for an American raised on field vehicles with synchromesh and, later, automatic transmissions (here, I mention parenthetically in my own defense that even the battle-proven American military Humvee and M1A2 Abrams tank have automatic transmissions)! But, a combination of Nikolai Ivanovich's patience and my

persistence ultimately yielded positive results, and we roared into camp with me behind the wheel and Kolya conspicuously lounging in the passenger seat, sipping a can of sweetened condensed milk (сгущёнка; өтгөрүүлсэн сүү), his hat casually pulled down over his eyes, much to everyone's amusement.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

Karr's popular axiom cannot be correctly regarded only as including elements of fatalism and pessimistic acceptance. It also incorporates a strong component of satisfied optimism, and it is in that regard that I use it to frame my reflections here. I hope I have provided a thought-provoking glimpse into the early days of the internationalization of Mongolian Paleolithic archaeology through reference to my own experiences and interactions with Mongolian and Russian colleagues in and around 1995. We foreign (i.e., non-Mongolian) scholars are all fortunate to be permitted to conduct research in Mongolia in collaboration with such energetic and accomplished home-grown colleagues. In the case of those of us whose research focuses on the Stone Age, especially the Paleolithic, we are doubly fortunate to have broad shoulders to stand upon, particularly those of D. Tseveendorj, A. P. Okladnikov, and A. P. Derevianko and their intellectual descendants, many (though not all) of whom I have referred to herein. The scientific rigor and academic curiosity encouraged in Mongolian archaeology by such scholars thrives today. I am certain that those of you with your own archaeological experiences in Mongolia, especially if those activities extend back to the 1990s, will recognize elements of my own recollections and perceptions, perhaps sufficient to agree with me that, in the case of Mongolian archaeology, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*." And that is a very good thing.

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