



## Valuing World Cultures

MCI has been an integral part of the **American-Mongolian Deer Stone Project** since the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, the Museum of Mongolian National History, and the Smithsonian Institution in 2004. In collaboration with the Arctic Studies Center of the National Museum of Natural History, MCI staff have participated in nine field seasons and contributed to annual field reports, conferences, and a 2005 project monograph [http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/pub\\_field.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/pub_field.html).

- **Climate change in the subarctic reindeer pastures.** MCI Deputy Director **Paula DePriest** conducted field work in July and August 2010 in two reindeer camps in northern Mongolia - reportedly the southernmost domesticated reindeer herds in the world. In response to changes in climate and pasture conditions, the West Taiga reindeer herders, ethnic Dukha, have divided their reindeer among two summer pastures for the first time in our study period. Almost half of the herd was moved to a remote pasture, a one and a half day migration from the main pasture at Minge Buleg, in a search of better grass. A comparison of vegetation and climatic conditions by Mongolian project member J. Oyumaa has demonstrated a link between rising temperatures and decreasing pasture health in a nearby area. In addition, discovery of gold near the reindeer camps has created a gold rush with thousands of *Ninja* gold miners streaming into the area, causing social upheaval and ecological damage. [MCI Director **Robert Koestler** is currently translating critical ethnographic literature on the Dukha ethnic group from French into English.]
- **Worship structures define ethnic groups.** Paula DePriest continued to document with photographs and GPS locations traditional outdoor worship structures of Hovsgol Aimag (Mongolia's northern province), adding 67 ovoos (piles of rock or tipis of wood that mark sacred areas), sacred trees, and medicinal springs to the 2009 database of 45. The focus this year was comparing the worship structures of four ethnic groups, Khalkh, Khotgoid, Darkhad, and Dukha. Because the location and construction of these worship structures reflects the important landscape and ecological resources for a group, the structures will be important windows into their ecological concepts. A catalog of worship structures will be published in the next year.
- **Deer Stone catalogue nearing completion.** MCI Head of Conservation **Rae Beaubien**, Senior Conservator **Mel Wachowiak**, and former fellow Vicki Karas are completing a database of Mongolian deer stones, many of them with 3D images. A catalog of these Bronze Age monuments will be published in the next year, with an on-line exhibit. Three new deer stone sites were documented with photographs and GPS locations in the 2010 field season.
- **Donation presented to Mongolian reindeer herders.** On behalf of the Arctic Studies Center and donor Rikki Saunders, Paula DePriest presented a gift of 32 hay-cutting 'sickles,' animal salt, and children's books to the reindeer herders of the West Taiga. Changes in precipitation patterns over the past two years, with drier summers and snowier winters, have caused disastrous zuds, a weather condition in which livestock can not find fodder through deep snow cover and die from starvation. The 2010 zud killed an estimated 20 million Mongolian farm animals, including many of the horses of the reindeer herders. The gift of sickles will help the herders prepare extra hay for the next winter.



Mongolian Field Research. Above: Khotgoid worship structure, ovoo with characteristic construction from uprooted larch trees decorated with a sheep skull. Below: West Taiga reindeer herders with gifts of hay-cutting blades, salt, and children's books in front of an ortsz (tipi).

