

Go East – West-Siberian Summer School 2014

Being in the middle of West-Siberia, moving from one place to another and studying all the different ecosystems while living in them: Sarah Hamberger, Jan Niklas Nuppenau and Barbara Scholz from the elite graduate program Global Change Ecology took part in such a Science School (1st – 25th August 2014) that had its focus in landscape ecology. It introduced its participants into all major ecosystems of Southern West-Siberia. The complex scientific input in botany, soil science, geomorphology and others broadened their understanding of the linkage between ecology and the surrounding environmental factors.



Hiking through the Golden mountains in the very South of the Altai Mountains, close to the Mongolian border.

Travelling 3000 km in almost four weeks. This sounds like a lot of sitting in the bus but even more like a lot of adventure and discovering different landscapes. The Science School is yearly organized by the Siberian institute for Ecological Initiatives in cooperation with the Hochschule Weihenstephan/Triersdorf. This international relationship is successful since 1995.

Our route within West-Siberia was set in a way that we covered the highest number of different landscapes while having the smallest distances between them. Starting in Novosibirsk, the largest city of Siberia (1.5 Mio. residents), we first went North through the region of Tomsk, going in a big circle. Afterwards, we travelled South across Barnaul into the Altai Mountains close to the Mongolian border.



Typical landscape in the Altai Mountains, here showing the Chuya river.

This way we covered a whole set of different ecosystems starting in the Southern taiga with the largest peat bog in the world (Vasjugan), across the forest steppe, and endless steppe sceneries. Reaching the mountains, these systems could then be found in a vertical order including tundra.

In these four weeks, we got overwhelmed by so many new impressions as well as by a lot of new scientific input and understanding of different ecosystems and the connections among each other. For us, it was a unique chance to get such a detailed insight into a huge area of Siberia that is on one side a very diffe-

rent, purely natural and untouched landscape compared to ours in Germany. Nevertheless, on the other side, a lot of analogies can be drawn. All in all, this Science School broadened our understanding of natural processes and dynamics that are responsible for shaping ecosystems. With this background, we will be able to apply our new knowledge in different important situations in the future.



The two buses in the middle of nowhere.

Three different lecturers travelled with us who were professionals in botany, geology/geomorphology, and soil science/climatology. On our way, they gave classes on a number of key sites where we got introduced into the local vegetation, soil profiles and the specific geomorphology. Differences between those key sites were stressed out and landscape forming processes and dynamics became clear. Questions could be asked throughout the whole excursion and individual interests were addressed whenever demanded. During the whole time, there was a major focus on interdisciplinary and integrative discussions between students and scientists. In the end, to fix our new knowledge, we had to write five exams covering the following topics: landscape ecology, botany, geomorphology, climatology and soil science.



The daily built up tent village with the participants having dinner in the background.

However, not only scientific input was a big issue but also our daily life during this time was completely different and a new experience. 30 German participants, four Russian students, three Russian professors, several bus and truck drivers, assistants, and a kitchen team resulted in a group of almost 45 people. For a month we went from one place to another, stayed in the middle of nowhere, slept in our tents and took a refreshing shower only in the rivers. The Russian team was highly organized so that we never had to be hungry and our luggage and we ourselves always reached our targets no matter what muddy or invisible paths our two buses and the truck had to go. We all had an unforgettable wonderful time during this Summer School that connected scientific input with a fascinating way of discovering the untouched West-Siberian nature in person.

