

Kyrgyzstan 2006
Ver.- 5-15

Once again I had the opportunity to go to Kyrgyzstan this time to teach basic apple production methods. My son Tristan accompanied me on this trip as chief photographer and computer schlepper. We were gone March 15–April 5. Since my last trip to Kyrgyzstan I had collected 24 pruners, 6 hand pruners and one saw, all donations from growers and Master Gardeners. Packing and transporting these items was the challenge. We left Eugene the morning of Wednesday, March 15 and arrived in Bishkek on Friday at 2:33 a.m. where we were met by Zarina and Serge. The pruners were almost stopped at Customs but at the last minute one of the officers waved us on.

Work commenced at 10 a.m. at the Winrock office. Email was unpredictable. We enjoyed a walk about old scenic Bishkek to see government buildings and watch ethnic dancing with great costumes (Turks, Uzbeks, Kyrgys and the Dugans), then visit the local museum. Lenin and Stalin were displayed almost everywhere, in statues and in all of the pictures at the museum. (Museum cost 45 soms, with 40 soms per dollar).

Our lunch on the first day was typical for a restaurant spread: a three course lunch of tomato, cucumber and carrot, 3-kabobs, French fries and water (170 som). Next we went to the Zum (department store) , the bazaar and fruit market. Then in the middle of the fruit market we ran into Bektemir and his wife whom I had met in 2005. What are the odds? By the time we make it back to the hotel at 4 p.m. it is 42°F with a light rain. Dinner is a meat main dish, salad and water (\$20).

March 17 - Sunday afternoon we headed to Karakol, a 5-hour drive. Roads are two lanes wide with three cars making their way down the bumpy road next to each other. There are no fences along the roads so animals dominate. After a couple of hours I had counted 30 herds. Saw some plastic row covers for early crop production about 80 km out of Bishkek. Snow covered all of the mountains surrounding Lake Issykul. Saw a family washing their clothes in a brown stream.

Many houses were colored blue from the old Russian influence. Saw several old power converter boxes leaking PCBs and every house has asbestos roofing. We arrived in Karakol in a near white-out snow storm. We stopped off at the guesthouse, where we would be staying for the next 15 days. It was surrounded by big metal fences. We had dinner (Borscht and bread) and then discussed what the next few days would be like. By 6:30 p.m. we had 5 cm of snow.

Breakfast the next morning was filling: cream of rice, peanut bread, hot water and yogurt. The water in the guesthouse is OK to drink. Found out last night that I will give a seminar and pruning class today and I don't even know what their needs are yet. We left at 8:30 a.m. There were lots of cows, sheep, goats, and horses along the roadway. We are on the back road south of Lake Issykul. It was mainly one lane. The road was very bumpy as all of the roads are. It was a two hour drive to Koadzysay or about 135 km.

Seminar 1 - The seminar was in the local school. 21 people showed up. Talked about apple production for over two-hours. They had lots of questions. Then off to do the pruning demo. We had 17 people for the pruning demo. They did not know how to prune. They made comments such as "look at all of the apples that would be lost," so I told them about why pruning helped with insects, disease and especially if they couldn't reach the bad apples. We pruned an apricot tree, a couple of apples trees and grape vines. Good thing I am a generalists by the variety of questions that I get asked. Lunch—the village group ate outside and Zarina, the hostess, the driver, Tristan and I ate in the house. She had prepared cabbage, fennel and sour cream, two kinds of fried breads and mutton soup. The lady was very kind and very appreciative of our seminar. After the class we stopped to see huge areas of wild sea buckhorn berry. Sea buckhorn berries are everywhere and are wild picked. They pick it for the fruit, jam and the oil.

Tuesday, March 21 was a national holiday so we headed to the mountains with a group to spend the day skiing. In an hour we drove 8 km and up 1,500 meters. The road was muddy, bumpy and washed out in places. The air was so clean. Spent the day working muscles I forgot I had though Tristan enjoyed the day immensely. We were back at the hotel by 6 p.m. Found out that Kyrgyzstan has three biological institutions, one private and two local growing predatory insects. Most of the insects are sent to Germany.

Seminar 2—Prepared for the day by dividing the scion wood, rootstock, hand lenses, hats and pruners for the various villages. Left late after a breakfast of omelets, orange juice and bread. We headed around the south side of the lake. We met again in an old school house, spring break so no kids in school. We headed to Awnerstin. We had 21 in the class. I couldn't get them very involved at first. The class went from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. At the end they had a lot of questions in reference to growing apples. Then we headed out to have lunch. We walked in and they had a table so full of food, it was hard to know where to start: cabbage salad, beet salad, garlic noodles, chia and water; three kinds of bread, enough to keep a whole army of people very well feed. The 12-course meal was so good. Then they brought in another plate of mashed potato, mutton, beets, sprouts, garlic cabbage plus a lot more. We eat way more than needed, but it is always so good. The food was unbelievable and they served one dish after another. We ate for almost an hour. Before leaving, I took a picture of all the women that helped with the meal.

Outside, we had over 31 people listening on how to prune from the "expert from America." There was an older man, the local pruner for all of the gardens in the area, and I could tell he wanted some attention. He keep pruning as I was talking. My theory is, all pruners are correct, they just do it differently. So for another hour I showed how to prune in ways differently then they were aware of. They kept asking me to prune different trees for the next hour. The group asked questions for another 35-minutes. Two of the local leaders were very thankful that a foreigner came to Kyrgyzstan to share informaton and they hoped that there would be more classes or even yearly classes, I said YES. They were so grateful and humble.

Costs to live in the city are 1,000 som per month and 1,500 som in the winter. Farmers have fewer expenses since they have food, animals, apples, vegies though their main expenses are electricity and sending kids to school, the rest is grown on the farm.

Breakfast is always such a feast, with each day new and different types of food. Today we had crepe, with sour cream, a sour kraut and carrot salad, yogurt and bread. Seminar 3 - Off to a Kyrgyz village, not a Russian village, a few km away. No one was there when we arrived because they are on Kyrgyz time, which means they get there when they get there. Later when we returned to the school it must have been 0° C. I took notes as the growers went around the room telling me what they wanted to learn so I could address their concerns. The presentation is similar each time, since I am covering the same outline that I have on the computer. 24+ people showed up for the class. They were mostly interested in thinning, grafting, storage and pruning. The class was cut short due to the TV crew that showed up. At noon we headed to lunch, ready or not. Being from America, I was treated with utmost respect and honor and asked to sit at the head of the table in most cases. When we enter the host house, off come the shoes and we go into the eating room. There was enough room for about 26 people. This group asked a lot of great questions and kept shaking there heads. hopefully it was a good sign.

Once I gave Tristan a bowl of noodle and soup and then found out I was suppose to keep the first bowl. I am not very good at this “important person” stuff. I said thank you in Russian like I had been all week. My interpreter leaned over and said this village was Kyrgyz and only spoke Kyrgyz, oops. Thank you was now “llrrr ah-mah-t. Each day is something new. At the end of the meal, everyone knells. They then cupped their hands, which means “thank you for family, friends and good food,” and then they cup their face in their hands, which means “be safe until we meet again!”

We went outside to the orchard to teach pruning. There must have been 25 or more people watching and listening plus the two people from the local TV station who took pictures. We pruned apples and pears, then looked at sunburned branches, and what to do. We found some red spider mites so we looked at them with a hand lens.

I presented a pair of pruners to the head lady and a hat and lens to the main pruner. As we left, everyone was looking at everything under the new hand lens. (IMPACT). Then back to the school house for an evaluation. Now the Winrock lead is consistent about how we do the three sessions - seminar, prune and evaluation. Lunch is as it arrives. We talked more about apple issues, how to store apples. At the end, they thank us for coming to Kyrgyzstan and sharing our knowledge with them. Then a lady got up and she said “next year when we eat an apple from the grafted trees or from our pruned tree, I will remember you and this class.”

We then capped the day by giving the head community lady 29 scab resistant scion wood pieces and 10 rootstocks. During the evaluation session, they said that they learned the most from the pruning session. Even Bektemir learned about apical dominance, the wiping of new growth to keep it from growing and the cutting of the latent buds with a knife to encourage new sucker growth.

That afternoon we visited the local laboratory where they grow Trichogramma wasps and other biological control insects. They are rearing tricho's, plus bios for aphids and spider mites. They feed the tricho's corn moth eggs. The tour of the lab in the basement felt like walking back to 1960. They grow millions of corn moth eggs which the Trichogramma oviposit eggs and grow new Trichogramma wasps. The lab techs go out into natural areas to collect new female tricho wasps rather than a continuous rearing. They start in April and have 4-5 different rearing cycles. The lab recommends 0.0125 grams of wasp per 10 trees (and costs 25 soms, and is applied 4-5 times during the year) or around 1,000 wasps per tree. One gram has 10,000 wasps. Most of the wasps are sold to Germany. The lab is in a very old building but doing a very good job.

Seminar 4. We now ask who the people are and what they want to learn, so I can cover many of things that they want to learn. I talked for two hours on apple and apricot production methods. During the pruning session it was difficult to prune and talk without proper equipment on very tall trees (most of the equipment was locked in the car). Many of the branches were way up in the air. I started to prune, opening up the tree center, talking about the how and why to prune.

Then the owner wanted to really bring down a tall tree so he started to cut as I pointed to different branches. Soon the tree that used to be 6 meters was 4 meters and really looked nice. The orchard had been planted with the trees too close together. The owner later said he was going to remove every other tree. (I am glad that he had been listening during the pruning class about the trees being too tight.) Before leaving the orchard, there was a pile of old metal iron pieces next to the fence. They asked if they can bury the iron and provide iron nutrition to the tree. I said yes if it is buried along the drip line where the small roots are located.

On the way back, we took a side trip to look at an old hot springs where people come to get healed from various illnesses. At the end of the small road, we were told that this was the Children's Sanitarium, for children born with physical and mental handicaps and the water is used to heal them. The facility was heartbreakingly in poor condition. The small canyon was beautiful with the rocky mountains, snowed covered peaks and a lot of spruce trees. As we drove down the canyon, there were cows and horses along the creek, doing what cows and horses do best, and then not more than 1/2 mile down the road, you could see children filling buckets and jugs of water. How do you spell Giardia or Cryptosporidium with capital LOOK OUT? Then right above the creek was a very old transformer that was probably leaking oil, PCB's? And outhouses very near the creeks— nitrates and coliform bacteria. Later in the week I learned that that the stats show only 1.1 young deaths. I was told it was way higher! The creek banks are covered with edible berries, sea buckhorn, wild apricot, and a new one that has a red berry, it is oval, about 1 cm diameter, and red. The buds look very much like cherry buds, with huge thorns.

Learned about the real Kyrgyzstan: The youth can go to college, even get degrees, but a Masters is no guarantee that anyone will get a job. The future is so bleak that many youth really don't have any goals since things can change so quickly. At the university a degree

can be bought, so degrees really don't mean much. To get a good job, you need to be able to bribe someone. It takes most of a young adult's money JUST to pay the meager rent, food and living expenses, plus send some money home to support the parents. This is supposed to be done by the eldest son but in many cases this is not what happens. There is NO pension for anyone that is over 55.

The tax on money is about 33%, which is supposed to pay for medical and a pension but they don't believe any of the money will be there when they retire. Banks are not true banks, they just loan money and transfer "dirty" money to other banks. There is no such thing as a savings account, a 401K, or a Keogh. There is no such thing as compound interest. There is no place to save any money other than in a jar at home.

Passports - the legislator wanted someone to design new passports. A new company owned by several parliament members got the bid. One year later, the passports still weren't done, the US and Canada said that no one from Kyrgyz was to travel to Canada or the US. The design was all wrong, all the passports are now un-usable. So many people have worthless passports. Life in the US just is too easy!

Off to scout out the city of Karakol. There was another huge market to look at things. They also have dried and roasted fava beans. They are really good. They also had 31 different flavors of fruit candy. The weather was very sunny and warm.

March 26—Got up early to take a mini van (5 som) to the market. There were trucks of potatoes. Just as we entered the market area, and many trucks and wagons full of hay. It was rather stemmy but green after 7 months. There were hundreds of people looking, selling and buying animals. There were all kinds of cows, horses, sheep and goats. We saw nice horses for 13,000 som; a goat with two kids for 2,000 som; a sheep that was pregnant for 2,500 som; a cow less than one year for 3,600 som; and a pregnant cow for 1,600 som.

Seminar 5. They had a special interest in apricot budding, how long trees will produce, scab control, when to plant trees, and grafting onto wild rootstock. We walked around the corner and headed to the village leaders house that had 100 apple trees. Of course they picked a huge gangly apple tree to prune. We then went to a small tree that needed pruning. Here we talked about knife induced suckering, apical dominance, and how to graft and the type of scion wood to use in grafting. This is where the people really got close to see how I do all of these new techniques that they have never seen or heard of before. At 1:30 p.m. we head in for lunch, another feast fit for a king (or at least a pruning specialist).

After the lunch we get together for pictures and more pictures. Everyone wants to stand by the American. Then one fellow grabbed me for another picture and exchanged hats. Everyone started to laugh. Out by the car, I asked if we were going to give away the rootstock and scion wood. Earlier we gave away two pruners. The leader host took all of the rootstock and didn't share with anyone. So, I decided to give everyone at least one scion wood piece, since we had a bunch. Everyone was giggling, and putting their hand out wanting such a prized gift.

March 28 - Off down the road to a new village about 45-minutes away, along the lake and up over a hill between the road and the lake. The landscape is really dry with only sheep along the dirt roads. Into the old school and wait until 10:30 for the rest of the village (Kyrgyz time). At 10:30 we started off teaching about apples and pears, how to care for them and what to do to make them healthier. We went until about 12:20 p.m. answering question. We walk to the demo site just across the road. Here they have already pruned. I talk about why to prune, how to make the different cuts, and why and how to stop the sucker growth in the trees. They had done a lot of heading cuts so showed then the thinning cut. I showed them how to control canker, prevent winter sunburn, and then how to graft, their main interest.

Four lunch we had a Kyrgyz borsht with chicken broth, cabbage, carrot and potato rather than the kind with tomato and or beets, a hot pepper salad; a hot tomato, cabbage and carrot salad; three kinds of bread, some we had not seen before. As we were leaving they came out with the coveted apricot jam which we had been looking for. At the end, the host lady said they were so thankful that we had come and shared with them. They did not know about copper sprays and were glad to know how much they could protect the trees from diseases.

We headed back to Karakol with a side trip to see the Heart Rock and 7-Bulls rock formation, representative of local legends.

Village 6 - a new driver takes us to our next assignment, potato growers who want to grow apples. We traveled south then toward the lake. They had a plan to grow apples so I gave him a few instructions on what to plan for. The Association manager was wearing a suit, a little strange for a potato grower. We met in an old research station. The experiment station was started in 1960 to look at apples, pears, walnuts, and berry crops. They did a lot of original Kyrgyz apple research here. They still have all the old research papers so I recommended they look through the old research papers to see what had been recommended earlier.

March 31 - Today we head off to Karakol City Hall for a meeting with the mayor and city gardeners. A driver came for us at 9:45 a.m. The City Hall was being renovated by a grant from a Swiss company. There was a newspaper fellow that wanted all sorts of information about who we were, then they wanted pictures so off to another office to find pictures and just as I found a couple of nice pictures, we were whisked off to meet the mayor personally. In we went, met the mayor, the deputy or vice mayor, a representative of a large NGO with the newspaper fellow. The mayor welcomed us and introduced us and the people in the room. The mayor had a report about all of the trees, their age and size of gardens for the whole region. He asked if we knew of this information. We said no. He then chided us for not asking the mayor about this report and that the report could have told us where the real needs were. Zarina then told him about Winrock International and how the different assignments were made. I told him that it would be a great opportunity to use this information for future assignments and asked if we could have a copy of the report. He said he only had one report. Anyway it turned out very well. The

mayor was very pleased. I told him that with this kind of information that we, Volunteers and Winrock could better serve the people of Karakol.

The vice mayor came back, again thanking us for coming to city hall and said he hoped our paths would cross again in the future. At least he knew what was going on. They were beginning to develop a city water system to keep the city water even cleaner.

The car taking us back has limited space and I had to go from two bags down to one bag, our last night in Karakol.

April 1 - We're all packed and ready to head to Bishkek. What a great experience working with the people of Kyrgyzstan and Karakol. Bektemir arrived at 8:50 a.m. and we were on our way by 9:30 a.m. Found out that the road to Cholpon Ata was closed because last year three parliament people were killed here. The brother of one of those killed applied for the parliament position and was rejected, primarily because he is the head of the mafia in Kyrgyzstan. So, since he wasn't allowed to run for parliament, he has closed the road.

The road was very bumpy and it was raining. Bektemir cruised right along on our drive to Bishkek. We made it to Ballyachi, the west end of Lake Issykul, shortly after noon. There were lots of horses, cows, sheep and goats along the road. Saw many old resorts along the lake, abandoned after Moscow left the region. In one field, a group of men were picking up rocks. The field looked like it had more rocks than soil surface. Further down the road, one farm site was located in a big field; no water, no wood and no green grass for a pasture. Near Bishkek, they are growing large red radishes under plastic. There are a lot of open man-holes in the roads that could cause major tire damage. Once over the pass, the grass turned green and the wild apricot trees are blooming.

April 3 - Headed off to the Winrock office to fill out the final report and get ready to end the assignment. I filled out paperwork until 12:30 p.m., then we headed out for lunch. We were trying to go to a place called Mac Burger, but ended up at a Turkish lunch spot. We then headed off to the Oto Si market. Later we headed back to the hotel to get a copy of our passports so we could visit the U.S. Embassy. When we entered the guard asked what we wanted. We said we wanted to visit the Embassy since we are US citizens. Next, a security check, no cameras. As we were about to enter the embassy we ran into David, the Peace Corp volunteer who we had met last year. He suggested asking for Patrick Sly. As we entered the building we were asked again why we were there. We said to see the embassy and to see Patrick. They didn't know Patrick. Finally we were taken to the Consulate room. A lady come from behind the window and asked what we wanted-again. We were told we needed an appointment. As we were leaving we met a lady from Public Affairs.

I explained we had just finished an assignment from Winrock and just wanted to see the embassy. We asked for a tour, she looked puzzled. She talked about some of their educational programs. We also asked to see the library. Inside the library, we were taken care of nicely. They said this was a U.S. library for research projects. We told them about Winrock, our visit to Karakol, the opportunities for growth, the problems with the new

government. William James, from public affairs said they had never been asked for a tour before. He said I needed appointment, this we understood. Next time I will call and make appointments.

William took us back to see the USAID director, Clifford Brown. He was from the Pacific Northwest. We talked for 30 minutes about the potential for development in the Issykul region, what could be done and how to do it. I gave him something that could make a huge difference to the people of Kyrgyzstan with little money invested. We left feeling we had FINALLY made some headway.

April 4 - Couldn't sleep. Off to one last multi course breakfast. Met our driver at 10:30 a.m. At the Osh market, another huge market, we found dried everything: nuts, raisins, figs, dates, etc. at reasonable prices. After a memorable last dinner we slept for a bit then up at midnight to get ready for our 36-hour plane trip to Eugene.