



Non-Fiction

Group 1

The Gobi Desert

French International School (Primary), Daniel Roath, 8

Have you ever heard of a rain shadow? A rain shadow is a dry area on the earth that is caused by large mountain ranges that block rain clouds from reaching that area. The result of the rain shadow is often a desert. The Gobi Desert, the largest desert in Asia and fifth largest in the world, stretching across Northern China and Southern Mongolia is an example of a rain shadow. The Himalayan mountain range to the south blocks most rain from reaching the Gobi Desert.

Very little rain falls in the Gobi Desert. In fact, only an average of 194mm of rain falls annually here. Compare that to Hong Kong which once had 145mm of rain in just one hour!

With so little water available to support life the number of people living in the Gobi Desert has never been that large. Rather than remain in one place and build large cities, people of the Gobi generally must move from location to location to find new sources of water. Because of the need to move regularly, the population of the Gobi have been traditionally nomads. Nomads are people that do not have a permanent home like you and I here in Hong Kong. Their homes are tents that they can move along with their livestock herds.

Humans aren't the only species that learned to adapt in the Gobi Desert. This desert has a wide variety of animals. Unfortunately, a few of these animals are now very endangered including the snow leopard and the Gobi bear. The largest animal of the Gobi is the Bactrian camel. It has two humps and is able to live quite comfortably despite the lack of water, very cold temperatures, and high altitudes. These camels were also used to transport goods in caravans in ancient times along the Silk Road which crossed the Gobi Desert. Without the Bactrian camel, crossing the Gobi Desert in a caravan along the Silk Road would have been very difficult!

Many plants of the region have also figured out how to survive without much water. Rather than collect water from leaves, the trees in the Gobi Desert have many long roots that are able to search for water across a large area.

Today, the Gobi Desert continues to grow. It is growing mostly because many of the surrounding trees have been cut down and the livestock have eaten much of the available grass. This is known as desertification. With no trees or grass, the wind is able to push the sand further and the desert grows. It is growing at a very fast pace. It is important to find a way to stop the desert growing and scientists are discussing possible ways. Similar to Hong Kong, reducing pollution is one of the needed steps!

Greetings from Gobi Holidays!

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Oliver Jamison, 7

Thank you for choosing a Gobi Desert Trip. I am writing to you to tell you what we will be doing on the trip, and what the trip is about. We will be seeing rare camels, Golden Eagles, wolves and snow leopards (from a distance, obviously!), we'll be feeling the heat and cold of the desert, learning what the Mongols are like and how they treat people.

First of all:

What to Pack: we'll need winter clothes, because the Gobi Desert can be extremely cold (the average Winter temperature is -40 degrees Celsius). But it also gets scorching in Summer, so bring sunglasses, trousers you can convert into shorts, a light-coloured top (to reflect heat). Water is scarce (the desert only gets 8 inches of rain a year - about a big cupful) so you'll need dry toothpaste and dry shampoo.

The Six Best Things to do in the Gobi Desert

Number 1: Camel-riding: the Gobi has the rare two-humped Bactrian camel. This is an opportunity for us to ride into the heart of the desert. We'll see the nomadic people of the desert, and we'll be looking out for wildlife such as wolves, eagles etc.

Number 2: Gold prospecting: the Gobi is famous for its copper and gold. We will provide the pick axes.

Number 3: Seeing the Gobi Mummies: Egypt is not the only country with mummies! The Gobi mummies date back as far as 1800 BC, and were found in the ancient towns of the Silk Road on the edge of the Gobi.

Number 4: Following Marco Polo's trail: Marco Polo was one of the first people to travel from Europe to China in 1271. He went along the Silk Road, which runs right past the Gobi Desert. You can track Marco's steps on his 3-year journey to China.

Number 5: Dinosaur Egg Hunt: There are lots of dinosaurs in the Gobi Desert, especially the Velociraptor which lived 75 million years ago, so there is a good chance you will be able to find your own dinosaur fossil.

Number 6: Camping in a Yurt: a Yurt is a Mongolian house. The outside is made of felt and the inside is a frame of bamboo. It will be fun to construct our own yurt in a village in the desert and to camp out in the desert. We can go out and meet some local people and say "Hello".

Something you shouldn't miss is our evening by the campfire on the last night. The desert people gather wood and camel dung and make the fire from it. They cook the food on sticks over the fire and tell traditional tales to one another under the stars.

See you soon in the Gobi Desert. Bye!



Non-Fiction

Group 2

Names of the Gobi Desert

International College Hong Kong, Hong Lok Yuen, Belle Ho, 10

The Gobi desert is a large desert region in Asia. It covers much of the southern part of Mongolia. The word “Gobi” also comes from Mongolia, it means “waterless”, “dry”, “arid” etc. The Gobi Desert also known as the “black desert”, “Place Of Dinosaurs Fossils”, “Dry Sea”. In Chinese it is also called “Sha-Mo Han-Hai”.

黑沙漠 Black Desert:

Why is the Gobi Desert known as the Black Desert? Well, the answer is very simple. Based on the evaporation of moisture and after a long time of abrasion, the iron from the soil and the sand formed a layer on the top. It takes a long time to form that! Everyone knows that iron is black. So the evaporated and worn down iron in the sand forms a thick, black layer on the surface of the desert. So people call the Gobi “The Black Desert”.

恐龍化石的地方 “Place Of Dinosaur Fossils”:

There is a reason why people call the Gobi the “Place Of Dinosaurs Fossils”. One of the main reasons is a place called the Flaming Cliffs in the Gobi Desert which were famous for yielding the first discovery of dinosaur eggs. Another main reason is that a team of Chinese and American scientists found well-preserved dinosaur fossils in the Gobi Desert. It is a really exciting discovery because most of the dinosaur fossils were complete. This shows that Gobi has provided some really good information of dinosaurs for scientists.

“Gobi” meaning Dry and Arid Place:

The Gobi is called a ‘dry sea’ because it seems like you are walking on a vast sea but it is dry and sandy. Most people think that the Gobi is very hot but actually it is a cold desert because it is on a high altitude surrounded by a lot of mountains. Even though it is cold it is very dry because it rarely rains.

Extreme Weather Desert:

The temperature in the Gobi varies from over 40 degrees Celsius to minus 40 degrees Celsius. The extreme change in temperature affects explorers and other travellers. They need to prepare clothes and a lot of protection for the extreme temperature changes. The varying temperature can also affect people's health. They can get a fever easily. Usually cold temperatures will make people feel lethargic and sometimes hot temperatures will make people get heat stroke.

沙漠 (Shāmò, a generic term for deserts) 瀚海 (Hànhǎi) "Endless Sea" 沙漠瀚海 Shāmò:

The name “瀚海 (pronounced Hǎnhǎi)” was given by some travellers on the Silk Road. This Chinese name means a “vast stretch of sea”. The famous Silk Road winds across the Gobi Desert. Imagine you are part of a travellers or traders caravan pushing along the Silk Road through the Gobi Desert, just like a barge moving slowly through the ocean. The Chinese name of “Hanhai” is very poetic because you can imagine the desert like an enormous ocean stretching far into the distance. It is a good word to describe Gobi Desert because of the size of the Gobi Desert when you are standing one spot, you will see a massive ocean of sand and stone. It seems like it has no end and that is the same as a vast sea. That is why the Gobi Desert is also known as the “沙漠瀚” in Chinese meaning “vast ocean of desert”.

So we can see that the Gobi has so many special features through the different nicknames that people from different times have given it. It shows us that the Gobi Desert is a unique desert with features that set it apart from most other deserts in the world.

The Gobi Desert

Kingston International School, Kinsey Fong, 9

The Gobi means “waterless place” in the Mongolian language. It has several alternative Chinese names, including sha-mo (sand desert) and han-hal (dry sea). The 500,000 square miles (1,294,994 sq km) Gobi Desert is the fifth largest desert in the world. It is a huge desert in Asia. It covers part of northern and northwestern China, and of southern Mongolia.

Eco-regions of the Gobi

Broadly speaking, the scientists divide Gobi into five distinct dry ecological regions: The Eastern Gobi desert steppe which covers more than 100,000 square miles at an elevation of 3,300 to 5,000 feet. The Alashan Plateau semi-desert which covers about 260,000 square miles. The Gobi Lakes Valley which covers about 53,800 square miles. The Junggar Basin (Dzungarian Basin) which has 117,500-square-mile expanse of the Alashan Plateau. The Tian Shan Range which covers about 49,800 square miles.

Climate

The climate of Gobi desert is one of the great extremes, combined with the rapid changes of temperature of as much as 35 Degree Celsius (63 Degree Fahrenheit). This situation occurs within 24 hours. The Gobi Desert is extremely dry and cold, with frost and occasionally snow on its dunes, especially during the winter when the Siberian anticyclone is at its strongest. Total precipitation per year varies from less than 2 inches (5 cm) in the west and more than 8 inches (20 cm) in the northeast. Spring is dry and cold and summer is generally warm. In July the average high is 50 Degree Celsius (122 Degree Fahrenheit) in some areas.

Wildlife

The Gobi is famous for its conspicuous wildlife, with some species now extremely rare. Some areas of the Gobi desert contain large numbers of dinosaur bones. Fossils of dinosaurs, such as the four-legged beaked Protoceratops, have been found eroding out of the desert hillsides for thousands of years. The snow leopards were found on the Tibetan Plateau but there are only about 4,000–6,000 snow leopards left on earth. Other mammals, including Bactrian Camels, jerboas, gophers, and black-tailed gazelles, brown

bears, wolves, as well as birds, amphibians and various reptiles also survive in the Gobi desert. Because of its dry climate, grass, thorn-bushes and other shrubs grow there. Plants like yellow wood, bean caper, saxaul, winter-fat, and nitre bush can be found. These plants and animals have adapted to the harsh desert conditions and are able to survive with a little or even no water.

People and Cultures

The Gobi had a long history of human habitat. Early people in the Gobi Desert were mainly nomads. Later, some of them changed into semi-nomadic way of life. Although the Gobi desert appears empty and barren, it has still served as a stage for ancient and legendary chapters in human history. For example, its soils hold fragments of stone weapons and tools of hunting and gathering nomads of 100,000 years ago. Ancient Mongolians were nomadic traders and herdsman who traveled in groups and raised goats, cattle, camels, horses, and sheep. The animals provided them with meat, milk, transportation and wool. In the 12th century, Gobi became a part of the great Mongol Empire, and in the 13th century, its trails conducted the forces of Genghis Khan southward, into China. These Gobi ancient people traded with people around them for grain, rice, tea, silk and other items. Its desert surface hosted part of the fabled Silk Road, a 4,000-mile long braid work trade routes that connected Asia and Europe for three millennia. Moreover, the Gobi's ancient city of Karakorum became a center for Buddhist monasteries such as Erdene Zuu, which was built when the religion made its way into Mongolia during the 16th century.

Gobi Desert Nowadays

At present, the people of the Gobi Desert are mainly Khalkha Mongols, Uighars and Kazakhs who live in family groups. At the edges of the Gobi, in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region of the peoples Republic of China, Han Chinese makes up the majority of the population. They are mostly farmers. There are a few small towns in the Gobi Desert, such as those along the Beijing-Ulaanbaatar railroad. Motorized vehicles become popular, but still cannot replace the traditional forms of transportation. The Khalkha people still use the camels as their transportation. There are also administration centers, which provide special services like the children's boarding schools for nomadic and semi-nomadic people so that their kids are not disrupted by the nomadic lifestyle of their parents. Some hospitals, post offices and a few hours electricity per day scheme are provided by the administration centers. Other natural resources in the Gobi desert include oil, salt, coal, petroleum, copper, and other ores.

Gobi Desert at Risk

Gobi Desert is at risk today since all of the Gobi's eco-regions have been affected negatively by the actions of humans. The unique plants and animals in Gobi desert are constantly under the threat from irrigation agriculture, industry, overgrazing, mining and other activities. Desertification is a major problem in the Gobi Desert. Since 1994, the Gobi Desert in China has expanded by about 25,000 square miles (64,750 sq km) and its sand storms are slowly encroaching on the capital city of Beijing.

Conservation

Governments, scientists and environmental organizations are working hard to conserve and protect the Gobi Desert and they also spend a lot of time to study and understand the delicate balance of life in the Gobi Desert. The most recent plan involves the planting of the Green Wall of China in order to stabilize the soil and act as a barrier against the desertification. Laws have been passed to protect desert species, and certain areas of Gobi have been set as parks and nature reserves including Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park, Great Gobi A and Great Gobi B strictly Protected Area. As the scientists and the environmentalists pay a lot of effort on learning more about the environment in the desert, we can also do our part by not polluting the beautiful cities along the Gobi.

A New Hope for Mongolia

Sha Tin Junior School, Cyrus Chan, 10

What were the main elements that made the Romans so powerful? They had celestial land, fertile soil to grow crops, channelled rivers for accessible transportation networks and a rich culture. Where else would you find another place with the similar factors? The Gobi Desert. The majority thinks that it is just an empty, waterless land and without any kind of vegetation. However, the Gobi Desert has been underestimated greatly for its true capability for developments. In fact, Gobi is not like any ordinary desert; she has sufficient fertile land, rich in mineral commodities and rivers. The Gobi Desert should be able to make itself sustainable by utilizing their endowments like the Romans did to develop as an outstanding region in Asia.

A New thought of the Gobi Desert

The Gobi Desert is situated between China and southern Mongolia which has many climatic contradictions. From being the third coldest to the second hottest desert in the world where you can see icy mountains and searing hot grounds. From the arid soil to the successful growth of grasslands. Despite these diverse weather transitions, animals and plants can still adapt to these extreme climates only receiving 8 inches of rain per year. Moreover, the nature of its land has many advantages because of its formation. Instead of merely being covered in sand, the Gobi Desert is full of bare rocks and cordillera mountains which act like a naturally formed defence mechanism to protect the area from potential attackers. More importantly, the Gobi Desert is notable for being part of the Silk Road for trading various profitable goods. The Silk Road is a financial platform for other countries to trade and the Gobi Desert is a favourable place to trade and gain riches. Also, the Gobi Desert sets a great landscape as a tourist attraction. Geographical location is an essential factor that points the success of a country's future; The Gobi seems to have these naturally gifted components.

The Lifestyles of Mongolians

"Rivers and lakes where people and cattle quench their thirst; This, this is my native land" said by the famous poet D. Natsagdorj. D. Natsagdorj is a Mongolian poet and has a memorial for this poem "My Native Land". Rarely anyone in secondary school does not recite this poem. Mongols are civilians that are full of culture and traditional practices. This shows that Mongolians truly respect their indigenous culture and heritage. For example, there are some festivals like the famous Golden Eagle Festival that shows the hunting skills of Mongolian eagles when obeying their masters, usually nomadic. This valued and unique culture of Gobi has a positive influence on people's behaviour and mindset of living which reflects on their personalities of being reserved, submissive and praising traditions. The harsh weather changes have a significant impact in the way they live and survive. One of the typical nomadic lifestyles is to move their tents called gers or yurts to different areas three times a year to avoid intolerable weather. Though it is cumbersome, the inhabitants are in fact content with their primitive lifestyle relying heavily on animals and limited natural resources. As a person you would preferably associate with friendly, welcoming and trustworthy people who are very much like the Mongols.

Gold Under your Feet

Mongolia is very famous for being called “Minegolia” or the “The Last Frontier”. It is called that because of the immense amount of valuable minerals beneath the ground in the Gobi Desert which can make the Eiffel Tower 16 times! If the Mongols keep collecting the new resources they have, Mongolia can be one of the most resourced countries in the world. The inhabitants mainly work for the mining industries that collect coal, iron, copper and gold minerals. These resources are then shipped to several places which have bid for the extraction rights such as the United States, places around Europe and China as their main buyer. If this way of managing the resources continues, the Gobi Desert may just be a mere place for others to exploit.

The mismanagement of resources is not idealistic due to the loose restrictions on extraction rights. A better way to manage this problem is to give a fixed quota on the extraction rights to foreign multinational corporations. That way Mongolia can keep most of its resources to gain higher bargaining power over other competitors. It is believed that if they take full advantage of their resources, they are more likely to speed up their economic growth and soon become the leader of this industry.

Conclusion

In the result of the Gobi Desert being a gifted place with bountiful rich resources. Those mentioned factors are the most important components to help the Gobi Desert’s future. Generally, Gobi is perceived to be useless and idle but never just judge a place by its appearance because you will not be able to see the whole picture of what it truly is like. Even though all these beneficial factors are given, they still have to learn how to use them correctly to help them. If they can do that, the Mongolians can then take full advantage so in the end it can give them power. This power can help Mongolia’s economy, become a better place and assist the country’s development. This is an opportunistic perspective for what Gobi could be. Once Gobi can utilize its full potential, she can become a leading country in the world for resources.

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The Song of the Gobi

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Laetitia Cheung, 10

Have you ever heard an acapella symphony of whistles? Have you ever listened to a chorus of barking puppies? Or walked one step and set off a booming avalanche? Out of the barren heat of the desert, out of the bumping and rubbing of fine smooth grains of sand, springs a mysterious song – the song of the Gobi Desert.

Over 1,200 years ago, the ancient Chinese first described singing dunes at the Hill of Sounding Sand, located in a line of sand dunes leading to Dunhuang:

‘This hill has strange supernatural qualities. Its peaks taper up to a point, and between them there is a mysterious hole which the sand has not been able to cover up. In the height of summer the sand gives out sounds of itself, and if trodden by men or horses, the noise is heard many tens of li (Chinese kilometer) away ...’ Tun Huang Lu, a manuscript, recorded.

Like curious boys and girls, the ancients climbed up this hill to experience a new song on festival days:

‘On Tuan Wu Day (Dragon Boat Festival), it is customary for men and women to clamber up to some of the highest points and rush down again ... which causes the sand to give forth a loud rumbling sound like thunder. Yet when you come to look at it the next morning the hill is found to be just as steep as before.’

Over the centuries, singing sand has aroused the curiosity of explorers, emperors and scientists – from Marco Polo and Afghan Emperor Baber to Charles Darwin. Yet this phenomenon remains a mystery, with scientists unable to agree on an explanation for the strange whistling or booming.

What makes a sand dune sing? If you scoot down the slopes of certain sand dunes, you may hear the sands roar or bellow like a tuba blowing a deep groaning hum. Others describe it as the sound of a propeller plane flying right over your head. Do you know how the motion of these sandy oceans affects the pitch of the singing sands?

There are several different theories about how sand produces sound. Scientists have observed that certain conditions must come together. The sand grains are round and

small, with a diameter of 0.1 mm to 0.5 mm. The sand is rich in silica. And a certain wetness or humidity surrounds the grain. In other words, singing or booming doesn't occur on all desert dunes. Booming only happens when conditions are hot and dry, and when the sand grains are clean, round and polished.

One of the first explanations came from a British commanding army officer, Ralph Bagnold, based with his troops in North Africa during World War II. Bagnold proposed a simple mathematical model to describe the dunes' songs: the high or low pitch of sound was proportional to the speed of the sand grains sliding down the dune, just like what happens in an avalanche. He also observed that the higher the note produced, the smaller the size of the sand grain.

Between 2001 and 2004, two French scientists, Bruno Andreotti and Stephane Douady studied crescent-shaped dunes known as barchans in Morocco. They accidentally set off avalanches that triggered a booming sound. They observed that sound waves were produced when two grains of sand bumped over each other.

They soon disagreed over the source of the booming. According to Douady, booming was caused by friction – the synchronized rubbing between similar sized grains. But Andreotti believed it was caused by sound waves bouncing back and forth between the moving upper surface of the avalanche and the still part of the dune, which created an echo or amplification of sound.

Whether the sound was described as booming, roaring or squeaking, scientists observed that the pitch of the note, from 60 to 105 hertz, was controlled by the rate of collision between the moving upper and lower still surface of a dune.

Scientists have spent countless hours investigating the 'what' and 'how' of singing sands. However, there is one paradox they cannot explain. Why does a grain of sand, by itself, not sing? Why does it need a nymph to arouse its song? Why does sand need a partner to dance with?

Perhaps this was part of the mystery that intrigued explorers and scientists of past centuries. Perhaps it was the chance stumbling upon these songs that captured the imaginations of boys and girls, royalty and pilgrims. Yet, beyond any doubt, it is the joy of discovery that has and will continue to intrigue scientists and philosophers for ages to come.



Non-Fiction

Group 3

The Forgotten Part of The Gobi Desert

Discovery College, Nicole Woo, 12

One's first impression upon hearing about the Gobi Desert is a mysterious waterless and vast place, deadly terrain sizzling with extreme temperature, and rural land covered by rock and gravel. As time goes by, more and more people start to discover, little by little, this magnificent desert. Together with the improvement of humanity, people are awakened to consider their surroundings more. For instance, when you are hungry, you won't care whether the steak is well cooked or not. Now, people in general are having a modernized and improved quality of life, where we're enjoying the comfort of our life, starting to worry about the environment, the climate, and even the other animals in our planet. Having said that, just imagine "Our Surrounding" is the desert, and "Basic Human Needs" is the main course, then you can easily understand what I mean.

Nowadays, the environment, the climate and endangered animals are all the hottest topics that people will talk about in any occasion, such as in school, in the office and even in family gatherings. But indeed, are we doing the right thing? Is our focus put on the right place?

Today, I'm going to share with you some of my interesting findings, facts that nobody has asked, discussed and cared about. All of this started with an article from a web-site called blogs.smithsonianmag.com.

February 8, 2012 Who Was the First to Discover Dinosaur Eggs?

The American adventurer, Roy C. Andrews, has found a fossil dinosaur egg in the Gobi Desert, which means a long long time ago, there were dinosaurs in the Gobi Desert. In my own opinion, Gobi Desert is the land of "unknown" and "Unseen" – even men's footprints are rare. Some people even say that Gobi is the Area51 in China, you can easily see a UFO flying over your head. But regardless to those sci-fi novels or conspiracy theories, the discovery of the dinosaur eggs means something else to me -

the extinct species in our world. If we don't want to see the endangered animals follow the same destiny of the dinosaur, we should do something more constructive today before it is too late.

Gobi Desert is a cold desert that it doesn't have the desired living environment for any kinds of animal. Therefore, only a handful of animals can be found in this rural area, to name them all: Camel's thorn, grasses bactrian bamel, gazelle, gerbil, jerboa, lizards and Gobi bear. Judged by the risk of extinction, none of them matches the Gobi Bear. Unlike the cuddly panda or sweet-looking polar bear, the name of Gobi Bear does not sound loud enough to draw anyone's attention. But according to the statistic research done by Mongolia's Ministry of Environment and Green Development, there is only 22 Gobi bears left in the world. In the other words, pandas outnumber Gobi bear by 70 times. The situation of the forgotten Gobi bear is similar to an ant that is stuck in the dance studio with a school of 10-12 year old tap dance students.

In terms of rarity, you can easily browse the internet and discover that none of the green sites have mentioned the Gobi bear. You may ask why it's happened, let's zoom in the picture and I believe the reasons can be concluded in the following :

1. Accessibility of the origin

Unlike any other kind of endangered animal, Gobi bear is populated in Gobi Desert, where its' harsh environment challenges people for access. It is harder for us than Harry Potter finding the secret platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ accessed through the brick wall barrier between platforms 9 and 10 at King's Cross Train Station, the starting point of the Hogwarts Express to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

2. The appearance

Gobi bear looks like the Himalayan Brown Bear where you can easily find it in northern Eurasia and North America. Even though the brown bear's range has shrunk and it has faced local extinctions, it remains listed as a least concern species by the IUCN with a total population of approximately 200,000. So, people are sometimes confused and don't pay attention on the forlorn Gobi bear. But, don't be fooled by their appearance even though they look similar to Brown Bear.

3. Study and knowledge of the species

Gobi bear is understudied and people don't have a lot of knowledge on this species. You will agree with me if you try to browse the internet or library for Gobi bear's information, you will find that it will be easier to find information on Giant panda than Gobi bear. The golden rule states "less information you can find means less people care about it".

4. Natural Resources VS Endangered Animals

Large copper and gold deposits located at Oyuu Tolgoi, about 80 kilometers from the Chinese border into Mongolia, are being investigated for development as mining operations. In the developing country, like China or Mongolia, the value of mining is way more important than protecting the endangered animal. Like Van Loon said in his book - The Story of Mankind : "The history of man is the record of a hungry creature in search of food" . We, the wisest animal in the earth, keep on destroying our nature just to optimize our benefits.

After listing out those factors about Gobi bear, you may ask – What can we do to save them? There is no straight answer to this question, because it is hard to locate Gobi bear from the Gobi desert. Try to imagine, how hard it will be to find a needle from the deep blue ocean? There is only 22 Gobi bears in an arc of land 1,295,000 km² (500,000 sq mi). But, is it the end of discussion to this topic or just hope a miracle will come and save them?

With respect to Gobi Bear, I would say there's hope – if we care. Learning from what we have done on Pandas in China, we can do something similar. We can build reserves across Gobi Desert and start necessary measures to save endangered Gobi bears.

First, and the most ideal, is to protect their habitats. Second is to work with zoos and research centers to increase the captive Gobi bear population through breeding programs. Last but not least is the combination of the first two measures, namely to release captive-bred Gobi bear back to the wild to enhance wild Gobi bear population while protecting their natural habitats.

If you want to know how soon we can take the Gobi bear from “almost extinct” to “least endanger”, here below is the math game which we can try out and it will give you the answer.

1. Think about a number from 1 to 9.
 2. Double the number.
 3. Add 26 to the result.
 4. Divide the result by 2.
 5. Subtract the original number.
 6. Convert this into a letter of alphabet :
A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5, F=6, G=7, H=8, I=9, J=10,
K=11, L=12, M=13, N=14..... Z=26.
 7. Think of the name of a country in North Asia (below) which starts with this letter.
 8. Think of an animal whose name starts with the country's fourth letter.
- If the answer you have is “Giraffe in Mongolia” then it means it still has a long way to go. But, if one day, you are given the answer “Gobi Bear in Mongolia”, then congratulations, we have made it!

The extinction of dinosaurs is due to the change of climate, so they were killed naturally. However, the situation with the Gobi bear is another completely hair-raising story. It is due to the juvenile and nonsense of human beings - furtive hunting, harvesting, poaching and an increase in illegal mining are all the causes of this phenomenon. So, in order to halt it, we ought to put laws in place and at the same time, educate the people on the importance and emergency of this act.

As we come to the end of this story, you should be hammered by this strong message. Concerted action now can reverse the Gobi bear's “final countdown” into a countdown to end the ignorance about it. Such inspiration would be a tribute to the thousands of species that went extinct because of us. Saving the Gobi bear will mean that we are not helplessly regretting the mistakes of our past or indifferently shrugging off the issue, but that we are learning from them and aspiring to become better, less destructive beings. If indeed human beings were the greatest catalysts in the extinction of the Gobi Bear, what more can or should be said, but that our generation has been impoverished by the unnecessary loss of this very unique and very mysterious animal.

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Behind the Beauty and Wonder

St. Paul's Co-educational College Secondary School, Lo Tsing Sum, 13

The Gobi Desert - a vast and growing expanse of arid terrain. A harsh and unforgiving land, yet still an unlikely shelter for the few who call it home.

The golden sand, spread in mystical patterns, provides a backdrop for the landscape. Mountains of rock give the scenery variation. Frost caps the hills - seemingly out of place but at the same time strangely wonderful.

The rare lake or line of greenery marks the appearance of life. And the extraordinary sighting of a Mongolian yurt is evidence of mankind's capability of coping with inhospitable habitats.

The beauty of the desert is unlike that of anything else. Everything about the territory is unique. The whole land resonates in a strange but undeniable harmony.

If you make your way across the sand dunes, battling the strong, dusty winds, you may just see the odd leaping gazelle or hyrax. You may even meet the gray wolf, or a gold eagle.

The sun beats down on regions of the desert, baking and cracking the surface. The air is dry, due to the Rain Shadow effect, in which mountain ranges block moisture from the sea. The mountain range in this case is the Himalayas. There are no major lakes or significant water sources near the Gobi Desert, so there is virtually no moist air in the area. In some parts of the land, paired with the sporadic hot climate, this makes for a burning, parched throat.

More often, though, the Gobi Desert is cold. Snow caps the dunes in winter. Icy gales terrorize certain regions. This creates an extreme temperature range, from -40°C to $+50^{\circ}\text{C}$. One of the only comforts the snow and ice brings is increased humidity.

The intense weather, coupled with the unimaginable temperature range, makes for a severe and almost uninhabitable place, especially for humans.

But, somehow, we have overcome this. For millennia the Gobi Desert has been home to a group of thriving but somewhat sparse cultural heritages.

Most of the people of the Gobi Desert are either of Turkish ancestry or Mongolian descent. The people of the Gobi Desert are generally herders, and do not interact much with the outside world. They usually speak in dialects derived from their origins.

They do not, however, follow their ancestral customs on cuisine, since the desert lacks in food supplies - gathering and farming are impossible, prey for hunting is scarce, and trade with the outside world is often implausible. Therefore, the people of the desert have similar eating habits - they herd goats, horses and camels, and get products directly from their cattle.

Due to their isolated status, they are largely self-sufficient. They let nothing go to waste. Animal skins are used for clothing. Camel dung is burnt for fuel.

Dairy is the most important staple of the Gobi-dweller's diet. Milk is the most nutritious food that can be found in abundance in the Gobi. Milk is mainly used in

dishes and for a local tea. Yoghurt is present in the herder's diet, and cheese can be found on rare occasions.

The locals have elaborate rituals, like tribal dancing on special occasions. Music and dance are the most common art forms present in the Gobi Desert, seeing paint and other materials are not in abundance. They are also skilled in needlework, and their traditional outfits are flavorful and beautiful.

Their spirits have not been soaked dry by the unfavorable conditions. Quite the contrary – the desert seems to have given them flamboyant personalities. They are friendly and enthusiastic, and frequently offer care to passing travelers.

The Gobi Desert is also a place of archaeological wonder. It is one of the best, most valued places for dinosaur fossil excavation. The desert holds one of the world's widest arrays of dinosaur remains.

The only fault, perhaps, is Mongolia's lack of regulations towards fossil poachers. Many of these precious historical remains fall prey to thieves, leaving a gigantic gap in history.

The Gobi Desert is an amazing place. Its natural scenery is second to none. And its rich human history and culture is absolutely unique. It houses the world's biggest collection of prehistoric fossils. Everything mentioned so far speaks of epic survival, of beauty, of diversity in inhospitable environments.

But behind the beauty and wonder, there is a destructive side. Tales told from another perspective tell of how the desert is suffering from man-caused desertification, and how the desert's expansion is having severe impacts on the environment and on our health and safety. Tales tell of how the sands are sweeping away thousands of acres of land each year, and of how homes are being buried by advancing sandstorms. Worst of all, the storms affect not only the neighboring areas, but also faraway countries like the Koreas and Japan.

Some may ask – how can such a precious place be the source of so much trouble? How can a place of such wonder and beauty destroy surrounding land?

The answer is simple. Desertification is currently prevalent in dry areas, due to the rapid growth of the farming business.

How does agriculture affect the expansion of deserts? The two may seem completely unrelated, but excessive farming can actually lead to the fire-rapid expansion of deserts.

Here's how it works. Vegetation is stripped from an area to make room for farmland. The soil unravels and loosens as its vegetative anchors – plant roots – are removed. The sand then sneaks into the ground unnoticed.

Crops are packed tightly into rows to increase production capacity. The soil's nutrients are sucked dry and the earth is completely robbed of minerals. The land dries up, and the soil turns to sand. In this case, the Gobi's sands at the borders of the farms also contribute to the effect – the sand makes its malicious way in through the loose soil.

In addition, global warming has decreased water levels in the earth, worsening soil quality and halting vegetative growth. Overgrazing has also contributed to desertification – a problem worsened by the growing number of nomadic herders. People have been exploiting and exhausting the land.

As a result, acres of farmland are being swallowed up by the desert, and fewer crops can be planted in these once fertile regions. In a way, farms planned their own demise – they removed vegetation for short-term gain, exhausting the soil of nutrients, leading to their own loss.

Increased desert area means more sand. This is a major factor for the alarming trend of the increasing number and the average intensity of sandstorms each year. In other words, desertification isn't just burying surrounding areas – it's also affecting territories far off. And these sandstorms are blowing off layers of soil from grasslands, leading to more desertification. It's a vicious cycle that must be stopped.

A small ray of hope, the Green Wall of China, exists. The Wall is a recent project launched by the government. Its aim – to reclaim land that has succumbed to the Gobi. The project mainly consists of planting huge belts of forest and desert greenery along the desert borders, to delay desertification and to reclaim desert land by increasing soil quality.

Unfortunately, this project is palliative and ridden with risks. There are only a few varieties of trees, so the artificial forests do not encourage biodiversity. Studies show 85% of the trees may fail. And those trees that root down in the soil will take up enormous moisture from the earth, giving results opposite of the desired effect.

There are actually more effective ways halting desertification, like setting up regulations to combat deforestation. The real problem is that the government refuses to consider these methods for fear of commercial issues.

It just goes to show that what we need is not a Green Wall. What we need is a Green Mind – for ourselves, for the government, for the whole of society. Raising environmental awareness is far more important than planting controversial strips of greenery along the borders of deserts. Sacrificing the ecology for the economy is a deadly sin. A Green Wall without a population willing to help is futile. People have to regard environmentalism as just as important as religion – we have to establish protecting the environment as an unwavering belief.

The Gobi Desert is a beautiful natural expanse – we should not disrupt its harmony. It is wonderful, but everything has a limit. If the Gobi goes on expanding, it will have drastic effects on the world as a whole.

We should not tamper with the Gobi Desert and its surrounding landscapes for our own selfish gains, for these gains are temporary. These short-term gains will only lead to our ultimate demise. Tampering with the environment damages the environment, disrupts civilization and causes unimaginable economic loss.

We should coexist harmoniously with the Earth, for the environment's downfall is equivalent to our own.

The Earth is our blessing; don't make it our curse.

The Gobi Desert

The ISF Academy, Secondary Division, Isaac Hon, 13

Have you ever wondered why the Gobi Desert is such an attraction to the world? Have you ever actually deeply investigated the deserts of the world instead of being like: “Deserts are just a big pile of sand and is very hot”? Well, the Gobi Desert might surprise you as it is not just a big pile of sand nor is it very hot, (well it could be at times) in fact most of the Gobi’s surface is bare rock and is known to be the frozen desert. With that being said, let me take you on a little tour and give you a background on the Gobi.

The Gobi desert is in between Mongolia and China, it is a pretty vast desert. Unlike any other, this desert is mostly flat and easy to travel around as only 5 percent of the desert are dunes. Weather and temperature there is also pretty extreme, the temperature in Ulaanbaatar could range from -47° celsius to 38.6° celsius, which in my opinion is, pretty crazy. During the stages of research I have found something of my liking, dinosaurs. A large proportion of dinosaur fossils were found in this desert, somewhere in a region called the flaming cliffs. There are also other things that might tingle your interest, desertification by the gobi desert is happening at a rapid rate, expanding into China’s grasslands and ruining the agriculture.

Something that comes to mind when the word ‘desert’ is heard is a harsh environment, well it is true. People from a long time ago until now have not been able to develop much of a difference in the way they do things as the climate and resources are a huge constraint. The desert provides little water and little amount of grassy fields for livestock to sustain themselves, once the resources run out in the current location, people tend to move out into a different area to live. Therefore being a nomad is a good idea, and thats why the shelters that the locals set up (yurts) are maneuverable. People also have to live close to animal herds for food. The majority of the people who live in a such a place are the Mongols. Being a nomad is a tradition of the Mongols and having visitors are their pride, the traditions says that: “Happy is the one who has guests, merry is the home boasting a tethering rail full of visitor’s horses.” So when ever there are travelers, they show full hospitality.

Hmm, you may think is that it? Judging from the photos in google, it is only a place with sand everywhere. Well no, aside from sand there are actually plants that inhabit the Gobi and that there are so many plants, the Gobi could be enough to feed a camel for the rest of its life (well of course not only one camel). There are two main plants that live in the Gobi Desert, one called The wild onion and another called Sauxal. There are other species of plants like the goyo plant, but the Sauxal and the Wild Onion are the most common. Lets talk about the Wild onion first, these onions are commonly known as the stone onions as well, this a perennial plant. These onions prefer to grow on dry rocky areas therefore making the Gobi a perfect place for growth. Between June and July the wild onion plant blossoms, corresponding to with something called the fruiting period which is in between July and August. This is a pretty big source of food because the plant itself lasts long and is flexible within such a harsh environment.

The Sauxal is a tree that can have a height between 3 and 16 feet, this is when the tree is fully grown. In the Gobi, this tree plays an extremely important role in the ecosystem as animals trespassing graze on the trees. The tree also provides water for animals who collect water in the bark of the tree. These barks can be used as fuel and a source of water for travelers or nomads. Small pale flowers appear on the tree in April and dark green fruits appear on September.

With such a harsh environment its hard to believe that there are inhabitants of animals, well I tell you that there are many animals that live in this desert. First off, we have the Jerboa. It is a small rodent that have features that are relatively the same as a kangaroo, with strong hind legs and a long tail to keep balance of walking, the only difference would be the huge ears and having no pouch. With such powerful hind legs the jerboa is allowed to leap up to 10 feet far and jump 6 to 7 feet high. The food that the jerboa eats doesn't make the rodent thirst, it might not need to drink water throughout its entire life, this is a stunning fact. The jerboa has a predator, called the golden eagle, the Mongolians have trained these eagles to prey on the jerboas in hopes of protecting livestock, then return to their owner.

The gobi bear (also known as the Mazaalai) is also a pretty big topic of the Gobi as it is one of the most endangered species in the world. It is similar to most bears in the world, has fur, small ears, paws... Pretty much could pass as a brown bear. The government of Mongolia has been trying to protect this bear as there are only 23 left in the wild 8 female and 14 male by 2013.

Have you ever played an iPhone game called the 'Death Worm'? Well, I think they based it off something real. In the southern parts of the gobi, there have been reports on the sight of these two meter long creatures. The Mongol Prime Minster in 1922 described the worm: "It is shaped like a sausage about two feet long, has no head nor legs and it is so poisonous that merely to touch it means instant death. It lives in the most desolate parts of the Gobi Desert..." This creature hibernates throughout most of the year but awakes in between June and July. It has two ways of killing its enemy, either electrically discharging them or spewing out venom from a distance. I could say it is a combination of an eel and a snake. Some scientists deny its existence.

The first few dinosaur eggs have been found in the Gobi. These eggs have been dug up from the flaming cliffs, not only have eggs been found but other dinosaur fossils have been found as well, for example the Velociraptors, Protoceratops, Therizinosaurus. This has been an attraction for me since I am really into dinosaurs. Archaeologists have proven that there has been major terrain and climate change since the Cretaceous

period, this is because archaeologists have unearthed large vegetarian dinosaurs that would have taken a huge supply of vegetation to sustain. Most of the fossils were buried under the sand, making it another piece of evidence of the terrain change as the sand in the Gobi takes shape.

Besides being all bright, the desert has a dark side, the desertification. This is a huge problem as it not only affects China through sand storms, but it affects neighboring countries such as Japan, North and South Korea. The Chinese government had been blamed because of the high carbon emission everyday and ended up with such a result. The Chinese have launched a project for the problem, spending billions each year, China's government plant saplings to grow trees in the north, the plan was successful and each year took back land mass larger than Switzerland. This was known as the green wall of China. The logic behind this is that the tree grown griped the sand together making it harder to spread around with the wind blowing.

So to round up facts about the Gobi, is that the Gobi has many different species of plants, and that there were once more of it but because of the desertification the number of plants dwindled. The first few dinosaur fossils were found in the flaming cliffs and that also proves the fact about having a vast variety of plants at the Cretaceous period. The Gobi Desert wasn't a desert before and in fact would have flourished with life. There are people who live in the desert, relying on livestock and plants for survival, most of the desert is populated with Mongols. The people there live in something called yurts. The world's most endangered species lives there as well, the Mazaalai, with only 23 of them left in the wild in 2013.

In my opinion, the desert is a fantastic place to visit if you are a learner and a lover of nature. It is a test for your stamina and your navigational skills, beyond that you could absorb a lot about the area like seeing animals, plants, terrain and so on. On another note, if you take a step back and look at the larger picture, the desert is actually a pretty big problem as it is expanding and if not resolved could lead into health hazard of having not enough oxygen when the desert takes over the forest. To conclude, I would love to go and experience the desert myself, because there's a Chinese quote and it says that "Reading a thousand books is not equivalent to walking a thousand miles." And it is very much true. Would you step into the desert?

The Gobi Desert

The ISF Academy, Secondary Division, Sophie Liu, 11

The Desert

The Gobi Desert is the fifth largest desert in the world, covering approximately 500,000 square miles in Southern Mongolia and Northern China. Unlike other deserts of the world, much of the Gobi desert is a cold desert, consisting of rock outcrops, gravel and dirt, with scattered shrubs. With extreme temperatures ranging from over 122°F to lower than -40°F, the largest desert in Asia is a formidably harsh habitat with 45 species of animals and about 400 species of plants that have adapted to the environment. Apart from the extreme temperatures, the Gobi desert is also known for its ferocious wind speeds which can build up to 85 miles per hour, powerful enough to bring a full-grown person off the ground and into the air. These winds usually occur during a violent sandstorm, which the Mongolians call the “black days”. The sandstorms and the wild, dry terrain make it difficult to survive in the Gobi, which “grows” every day. Alarming but true, the Gobi desert is expanding at an annual rate of 1390 square miles over the grasslands south of the desert. This is one of the most typical examples of desertification.

Desertification

Desertification is the process of turning productive land into desert. Desertification reduces the ability of land to support life, affecting wild species, domestic animals, agricultural crops and people. The reduction in plant cover that accompanies desertification leads to accelerated soil erosion and loss of water such as in the Yellow River. Due to this desertification, once productive areas surrounding the Gobi desert are rapidly being transformed into vast desert wastelands. The desert is growing so swiftly, that in the next decade, even the distant capital of China, Beijing will be affected. As we are speaking, dunes are forming just 70 km from the city, and may be drifting south at 20-25 km a year. Despite massive spending by the Chinese government on land reclamation and replanting, China cannot keep up with the rapid expansion of the desert. Only 7% of Chinese land is arable farmland, and half of China's 617

largest cities face water deficits. Beijing is among the cities which will be most affected. For neighboring countries, the clouds of sand from the Gobi desert mean respiratory illnesses and darkened skies, sometimes to the extent that airports must be shut down. However, the desertification problem in Mongolia is the most acute, resulting in 140,000 square kilometers of unusable territory and 683 streams having dried up in recent years.

Causes of Desertification

Overgrazing is the major cause of desertification worldwide. Where not properly planned and managed, provision of drinking water has contributed to the massive advance of deserts in recent years as animals gather around waterholes and overgraze the area. Some herders have poor grazing management after accidental burning of semi-arid vegetation, causing the loss of both the vegetation and the soil's nutritious components. However, overgrazing is not the only problem. Villagers, farmers, and the poorer communities often cut down trees and timber to collect firewood for cheaper fuel. This results in loose soil, and a higher chance of desertification, with no plants or vegetation to block the expansion of the desert. The over-cultivation of lands where there is a high risk of crop failure and a very low economic return is also a main factor of desertification. When the practices described above coincide with drought, the rate of desertification increases dramatically. Increasing human population and poverty further contribute to the problem of desertification, as poor people may be forced to overuse their environment in the short term, without the ability to plan for the long term effects of their actions. For example, where livestock has a social importance beyond food, people have been reluctant to reduce their stock numbers.

Fighting desertification

Due to the scale and severity of Gobi's situation, governmental involvement has become important in the attempts to fight desertification. The Mongolian government, with the aid of the United Nations, has introduced the sustainable land management and a "Great Green Wall". With the "Green Wall", a long barrier made of pines, willows, junipers, thorn bushes and other trees, Mongolia aims to protect itself from the sand of Gobi desert, gathered by storms of central Asia and transported towards the east. At the same time, the Chinese government has also taken different measures to combat desertification. First, by strengthening and solidifying sand dunes to prevent desert expansion through laying grass patches and building sand prevention walls. Second, by developing consolidated farming to prevent excessive grazing and promoting an alternate cultivation and fallow system to preserve the fertility of land. Third, by optimizing the structure of plantation, and promoting precision irrigation systems through advanced technologies learned from countries like Israel. Furthermore, herders suffering from land degradation are educated to change their mindset and attitude, so that there is certain export of labor from the regions to ease the over-dependence on the land. Meanwhile, people are encouraged to adjust their economic structures to promote higher value added industries away from agriculture. Last but not least, conservation of the valuable water resources also helps with curing and containing the further worsening of desertification.

Conclusion

The Gobi desert can be an exotic tourist destination that promises splendid scenery. But don't forget, almost one quarter of the world's population lives in the region that is being affected by the desertification of the Gobi desert. This vast population depends on the security of the food and water supply; however, the desertification is threatening their survival. This is not going to be just a regional problem, but the potential humanitarian crisis for the entire world. The many health issues created by the sandstorms and the thick haze are affecting not only the populations of Mongolia and China, but many other countries as well. Therefore, actions must be taken with a sense of urgency to stop the worsening desertification of the Gobi desert, in order to serve the best interest of mankind.

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Poetry

Group 1