

SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment 2013 Photo Award



Herder Mijiddorj Ayur's granddaughter pumps water from a shallow well to the family's herd of Bactrian camels in the South Gobi, near the Oyu Tolgoi mine in Mongolia. Herders in the area say their water level has been declining for the past few years and are worried about the future. Mongolia, the land of Genghis Khan and nomadic herders, is in the midst of a remarkable transition. Rich in coal, gold and copper, this country of fewer than 3 million people in Central Asia is riding a mineral boom that is expected to more than double its GDP within a decade.



Oxidized copper, visible here in one area of Oyu Tolgoi's open-pit mine, gave the mine in the southern Gobi region its name, which means "Turquoise Hill".



John W. Poole
for five photos published on NPR.org
"Mongolia Booms"



A camel stands at a dried-up sacred well near the house of herder Khishigdelger Adiya. There's white salt where water used to flow. As mines begin to pump more water from the Gobi, herders will be watching their wells and waiting. And as profits continue to pour into mineral companies, some Mongolians will continue to wonder what is in it for them.



An overview of the mining roads and open pit mine in the distance at Oyu Tolgoi. The gold and copper mine will be the third largest in the world when complete. The rapid economic changes simultaneously excite and unnerve many Mongolians, who hope mining can help pull many out of poverty, but worry it will ravage the environment and further erode the nation's distinctive, nomadic identity.



Digging for gold is technically illegal. But many Mongolians do it anyway when they hear of a strike to supplement their incomes. Workers in the Gobi who can't get hired by mining companies often strike out on their own. Mongolia has an estimated 70,000 illegal gold prospectors.