**Good days bad days**

There I was, trying to fall asleep in my tent by the side of the mighty Lena River in Inner Siberia. We had only slept 3 hours the previous night, and we were exhausted from traveling all day to get to this spot. My legs were red and itchy from bug bites, even though they were just exposed for a short period, when I forgot to tuck my pants in my socks. For dinner we had what best can be described as a bowl of buckwheat mixed with canned meat and some dry long-lasting crackers on the side, not the dream meal after several days of traveling. Not much conversation was had over dinner either, since most of the group communicated in Russian. Meanwhile forest fire smoke was blowing in from the south blanketing the area, we had not seen the sun since we arrived in the region. Breathing smoke all day didn’t exactly feel good, probably shortened my lifespan by a few good years. The tent was filled with it as well, but there was nothing to do about it, but to sleep it out and hope that the air would clear up by tomorrow. At that point I was thinking to myself, “how am I going to survive 30 more days like this?”. I never really was a practical man, I was always better with math, physics, computers… that sort of stuff. What am I doing on what feels like a survival trip out in the middle of nowhere? But eventually, my tiredness overtook me and I fell asleep.

Next day, we got up and had breakfast. This time it was a pasta soup with canned meat, perfect for a full day of work according to some of our colleagues. I had a little, but filled myself up with some bread with jam, which was a little more comparable to what I was used to eat for my breakfasts. The working day started, and we got showed around the archeological site we were there to visit and study. The local archeologists told us about the tools they had found in the otherwise sandy layers, and how dating them- would fill in the gaps on migration of early humanoids to Siberia. We talked and discussed where and what to sample. After all that is why we were there. Why I was there. This was part of my PhD, my job. Time to put all those years of education to use and be the expert I was trained to be, even though it was under very different circumstances than I was used to from home. We selected a few good outcrops, and we were very confident that the samples we had found, were the perfect ones to bring back home to analyze.

On the way back to our campsite I had a conversation with a local archaeology student that was there mainly as an assistant to dig holes and do dishes for the rest of the crew. He had been taking English classes and was exciting to have the chance to practice his English skills finally. And I was very happy to speak to someone else than the people I arrived with for a change. I told him about where I was from, and he listened with great interest, and told me how he would love to travel to Europe one day. He also told me about life in Yakutsk and the Yakutian language, which I was unaware even existed until then. Through him I was also able to learn more about the other people in the group, something I had missed since I arrived due to the language barrier.

When the night came closing in, not much had changed since last night. The bug bites had not yet gone away, maybe even a few had been added during the day’s labor. For dinner we had the same pasta dish we had had to begin the day. Reheating it in the cauldron over the fire didn’t do it any favors. Before I went to bed, I tried to look to the other side of the riverbank, but the smoke was still too thick to see that far, I didn’t notice the smell of it anymore though, but I was not sure if that was a good or bad thing. I went back into my tent for the night. Still roughly 30 days to go of the fieldwork. Yet that evening my mood was better, and I had excitement for what tomorrow would bring. And hey, if nothing else, at least this might be a good story to tell someday when I get back home.