

4,000,000 boxes of cherries.

I learned a few things this past weekend about the fruit industry. My husband has been involved in national and international export of fruit for over twenty years, and right now, he is *up to his neck in this season's fruit: the cherry. Washington state is one of the major cherry producers, and July and August are the two months for harvesting and shipping. We happened to be in a town called Brewster which is about an hour and a half north of Wenatchee. As you head north, the landscape becomes dryer, and fascinatingly *moon-like. You travel right along the Columbia river all the way up North. At either side of the river are high, dry hills, that continue off into the distance for miles. There are countless *gullies and tucked-away areas where wildlife live, such as coyotes, deer, and even big horn sheep. Down at the river's edge is a different story. Because of the available water, communities have sprung up, including many lush parks, and, of course, the orchards. Ironically, the dryness of the area and the heat suit many of the kinds of fruit that are grown. The water that they need is simply supplied through irrigation. So, you have a contrast between the dry, earthy, barren hills, and lush green areas all the way up the river. Brewster is a small town right on the Columbia that is in the heart of orchard country. My husband works with people who have hundreds of thousands of acres of orchards. And when it comes to cherries, there is a short window of opportunity to get them picked, packed, and shipped off. It is a very perishable fruit, and a lot of care and attention are required in bringing fruit to the customers that is in excellent condition. My visit to Brewster was actually not to visit orchards. The cherries had already been picked. There is a huge packing plant there, and that was our destination. As we approached the packing house, I could see that it was a busy season for them. The parking lot was full, and workers were coming and going, starting new shifts, and getting off of completed shifts. Hundreds of people are employed, in many different capacities. My children and I were all wide-eyed as we were shown around. We went into the cold storage room, where thousands of boxes that were already ready, were waiting to be shipped to supermarkets around the world. There were fork-lift trucks zooming forwards and backwards, busily stacking boxes up high. And then, we went to a sorting and packing line, where people sorted through a conveyor belt of cherries. They had to take out unwanted cherries, and let the others fill up various containers of different sizes. It was a fast job. There were also lines of clean water flowing past much of the machinery; a lot of washing takes place. As we left the plant, I noticed a man-made lake in front of the building. I was told that they are planning on recycling their water, and also using it for both the heating and cooling of water inside the plant. It's incredible to think that about four million boxes get packed in the region, this particular plant doing at least one million. To say that it is a remote area, there is a lot *more going on than meets the eye.

Grammar notes.

Related expressions: to be up to your neck, moon-like, more to.... than meets the eye.

1. The office is really busy at this time of year; we are all up to our necks in paperwork.
2. Our land is moon-like. However, once we put in irrigation, we'll be able to plant anything.
3. There's more to him than meets the eye. He looks like a simple man, but he has a heart of gold.

