

IOC Newsletter

April 2005

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Greeting

Hey there fellow outdoor club members!

Like Claire before me I have also been delayed in getting out this month's newsletter. My apologies. Thank you to Claire for her kind words and I hope I can rise to the challenge as this year's new editor. April means cherry blossoms in Japan and this year was no different. The whole country went hanami crazy (more on that later!) But for now let's start off with two reviews that didn't make last month's newsletter.



Look familiar?

Hakuba Happo ski trip by Benoît 18th–21st March

So, the departure was scheduled at 10pm on Friday and after having packed the van we left. The trip was long...very long and we spent lots of time talking together and discovering new friends, in my case. And finally six zombies got out of the van at 5am on Saturday. We were in Hakuba at last; and we didn't need to be asked to jump into our beds.

At 9am, everybody got up and rushed into the van with all the gear to enjoy this first sunny day at Hakuba 47. The temperature was ideal (a few degrees below freezing), the snow quite good for this spring period, and our smiles were at least as large as our face! Dean was very enthusiastic. He was the first at the top of the run and by far the first at the bottom! I improved my Japanese by learning some new words like "samui" whilst on a windy lift and much more "atsui" after a run. "Itai, itai" said Fumie when she fell down on her face! After such a wonderful day, what could be better than a hot bath? The onsen was waiting for us and we were waiting for it. The dinner was gargantuan. We were all full and half drunk and jumped into our beds for a well-deserved sleep.

The next day was as sunny, our energy and desire to ski as strong as ever. Just like the day before, Dean was faster than the wind and we lost him after a few runs. Minhao taught us his tactics for "hunting" Japanese girls: First, fall down lamentably in front of a cute specimen. Let her help you to be back on your skis, faint once or twice, show your painful injuries, and let Cupid do the rest! It was nearly perfect. Unfortunately, her boyfriend did not agree with the situation...

Later, Koji and Dean were still full of energy. They decided to go dancing at a nearby party and they were back at 3am with some strange pink paint on their face...For the last day, we decided to have a rest, walk around a bit, do some shopping, a last snow battle, and took an onsen bath. Dean wanted to ski again this last morning! He is a monster! Unfortunately, it was then time to leave... We all were a bit sad when the best moments should end sometimes.

Maya-san hike by Mari 27th March

Maya-san is just behind Shin-Kobe station. Ten of us met at the station at noon. After we took the first photo-shooting break at Nunobiki falls, we walked by the Nunobiki reservoir.

At the top, we took a late lunch while overlooking Kobe and Osaka Bay. Then five folks took the cable car down, while the rest of us played on a big roller-slide for a while before Kevin and his family boarded a bus to their home and the remaining five of us descended the mountain. Thank you all the participants for the companionship.

Mt. Hiei hike by Thomas

2nd April

Five of us gathered to climb up the 850m of Mt. Hiei. On the top, we visited the large Enryakuji temple, which contains the inextinguishable Dharma light that has been burning for 1200 years. After a nice lunch break with view on Biwa lake, our path took us down the other side towards Kyoto. We made it to an onsen but voted against entering after learning it contained radium - which they advertised for! We also did some "urban exploration" in a deserted concrete construction before finishing the 6 hour hike in a thai restaurant. What a nice day.



Lost in a Concrete Jungle

Hanami Party by Fiona

10th April

A group of around 30 of us met at Daigo station for a day of hanami and hiking. The temple was crowded, but we lost the crowds when we hiked up the mountain in the afternoon. The cherry blossoms were in full bloom and the weather was a perfect 23 degrees. We couldn't have asked for better hanami conditions! Our uphill hike was short but unrelenting. But it was worth it for the views of Kyoto and Shiga we could see from the peak.

Birthday hike/BBQ by Minhao

23rd April

The hike was organized by our resident hike aficionado Yoshimi Suzuki san. He loves Rokkosan and he leads hiking trips up Rokkosan every one or two months. It is amazing how much he knows about Rokkosan. He had led at least ten hikes up Rokkosan last year and every time it was a different trail.



Our fearless leader, Yoshimi.

We started off from JR Shin-Kobe Station with a party of thirteen. The hike started with a gentle climb, following a path that begins behind the train station. The well-maintained mountain trail soon led to a river and a few moments later we arrived at the Nunohikinotaki-Metaki. This is a beautiful waterfall that is tucked away in the mountain. In Japanese, the kanji for waterfall literally means "water-dragon". And in this blessed place, dragons come in pairs, immediately after Metaki, we came before the equally magnificent Otaki.



The water-dragon, Nunohikinotaki-Metaki.

Yoshimi led us onward to the next stop, which was a vantage point of the city of Kobe. It was a cloudy day but we could see the city bustling below and in the far horizon, the faint specks of barges and tankers. Such a spot naturally called for a group photo and you could see from our smiles that it was a great day for a hike up the mountain!



The merry band of hikers from IOC.

The trail came to a gate which was the back entrance to the Kobe Municipal Arboretum. We entered the gate and the trail windingly led us up to the arboretum. The arboretum had a well-kept garden of flowering plants and there was no lack of colour in the park.



Pink blossoms

We decided to enjoy the park more by finding a cosy spot to rest our tired legs. Ever the taskmaster, Yoshimi urged us to move on to our final destination of the hike—his house... Yoshimi's house was located on the north slope of Rokkosan. The surroundings were part of a quiet, clean suburban zone shielded from the noise and pollution of Kobe by the mountain.

Yoshimi has two young boys. Yoshimi was kind enough to prepare a barbeque feast for us and it *was* a special day. It was special because my birthday fell exactly on this day. The onigiri was especially delicious; they were the handmade specialty of Yoshimi's wife.



Gathering around the fire.

Finally, the traditional blowing-the-candle moment came. Once again, Yoshimi showed his thoughtfulness by buying two cakes for all to share. Laughter and banter continued throughout the night. We were like a bunch of raucous kids. There were plenty of good memories for all. It was a perfect hike and it was a perfect birthday night. This was my most enjoyable hike ever to Rokkosan.



All's well that ends well.

Upcoming Events

There are plenty of fun events to be done in May so get active! Unfortunately, I'm too late to tell you about the canoe trip in Shikoku at the start of the month but there's still time to sign up for a hike on Saturday, 14th in Kibune and Kuruma. And if you miss that there's also another hike up Maya-san on May 28th.

Final Thought

You can now find step by step instructions for organising an IOC event or activity on our website. So there's never been a better opportunity to get involved in the club and improve those important leadership skills. Ganbatte kudasai! Till next time take care of yourselves and each other.