

# IOC Newsletter

## *FEBRUARY* 2006!

### **Contents**

Greeting

Event Review

Hakodateyama skiing/snowboarding

Yatsugadake Snowshoe

Rokko hike

### **Greeting**

Hello everyone and welcome to the first official newsletter of 2006. I say official because I'm always a month behind and so December was technically written in 2006 too...But not anymore! You might have noticed that I skipped the January edition so that we look more up-to-date online. Keeping up appearances is very important in Japan! Anywho, there's not too much happening these days what with sub-zero temperatures and shortage of daylight to compete with. As always, there were some hardened souls who managed to brave the elements. Let's see what they got up to over the last 4 weeks.



*Apparently, the "sub-zero temperatures and shortage of daylight" have been getting the better of some of us*

## Hakodateyama by Ronan

21<sup>st</sup>&22<sup>nd</sup> Jan

Last year there were 3 trips to Hakodateyama (I think). I was lucky enough to participate on the last ski trip of the season in early March lead by Fiona. At the time, neither I or Fiona were members of the IOC. In fact, there were very few official members as I recall! But it was actually such an enjoyable event that many of the participants became members soon after. (And Fiona and I did one better by running for committee).

Why am I telling you all this? Well, this year, following in Fiona's footsteps I lead a trip to Hakodateyama and, like last year, the non-members outweighed the members. One reason is that I advertised the event to my JET friends and many of them signed up. There were 13 of us in total (we had 2 last-minute cancellations) and only 2 natives. There was also a range of abilities, from absolute beginners right through to the "off-piste" diehards. We met on the train (sleepy-eyed) and on arriving at our destination we found out 3 of us, including myself, had been sold a one day pass instead of a two-day one! It was very frustrating but thanks to some Japanese assistance (namely, Mayumi and Emika) we managed to sort it out and get going.



*Nabe time! Yes, it tasted every bit as good as it looked.*

We left our bags in the minshuku (guesthouse) nearby and then took the gondola up to the slopes. We were in our gear about 10.30am and that left plenty of time for falling over for the rest of the day (some more than others!). I decided to try my luck at snowboarding as I'd never done it before and I was curious. So did I take to it like a duck to water? ...Not exactly. Suffice to say my initial curiosity was soon replaced with a very sore pain in my behind which continued right into the following week! My

affair with boarding was short-lived and I was very happy to change to skis the next day. Luckily, I was in good company and I secretly consoled myself knowing I wasn't the only one in pain.

After a good innings on the slopes we retired to our accommodation at the foot of the mountain for some well-earned rest and nourishment. This came in the form of nabe, beers and JENGA! Michael (aka the Professor) amazed us all with his devil-may-care Jenga skills, while others played cards and chatted about the day. Apres-ski at its finest. When it was time for bed all of the men decided to sleep in the same room, even though we had 8 rooms available! Bodies completed covered the floor and Klaus, our token German, provided no end of humour by sleeping with his legs entirely under the kotatsu (table heater). We quipped that he'd come back from the ski trip with a tan on his legs!

The next day, Sunday, we slept in till 8am. (Believe me this was a generous lie-in compared with our 5am start the day before!) Most of us felt a little groggy but what better way to wake up than to some heart-shaped eggs and cooked salmon. Our traditional Japanese breakfast hit the spot. Apart from the increase in other skiers and boarders, Sunday started out much the same as Saturday...That was until the blizzard came! Sometime around the after lunch the weather drastically changed and all you could see was snow! Any poor soul without goggles was forced to take shelter or risk flying into a tree or worse. At this time, Barnaby, Klaus and myself decided to try some of "off-piste" and "off-limit" skiing. It was my first time to try this and sadly the James Bond images in my head didn't quite match up with our stuck-in-the-snow adventures. But it was different and memorable all the same. This photo shows how tough we looked. That's it. Don't forget, there's another trip this month too!



## Yatsugadake Snowshoe by Various

28<sup>th</sup>&29<sup>th</sup> Jan

I was surprised everybody had their own snowshoes (except Dean). The Cup Noodle got cold soon after pouring in the boiling water so I couldn't even wait for three minutes!  
-Koji (Leader)-

8 of us set out on a 2 day North Yatsugadake snowshoe trip under clear skies but the thermometer read minus 19c. Wow! The climbs to the top of Mt. Yokogake and Mt. Shimagare were hard but never boring with panoramic views of the snow covered Japan Alps. Furthermore we got to do some downhill sliding on both mountains which left us screamin' with joy!  
-Dean-



*Mt. Yokogake hut -19 degrees!!*

It was a nice, beautiful and chilly trip last weekend. Thank you to Koji for organising this event. I had fun time with all of you.  
-Kaori-

After one night "on the road" and the other one spent in the mountain hut with no running water and frozen springs, the outdoor onsen was more than welcome on Sunday afternoon and a real highlight as it was very cosy with view towards the mountain ridge.  
-Esther-

The lodge we stayed at the first night was recommendable. They served us home-baked bread for breakfast. Talking about food, we cooked Nabe together for dinner. Snowshoe hiking and the cold weather made the Nabe tasted better.  
-Shinobu-

The weather over the weekend was absolutely fantastic - clear and cold. The temperature at the top of the cable car was -17 degrees, but you didn't really feel it until the wind blew! Sunrise on Sunday morning was spectacular, and because of the icy conditions we had great times sledging down the hiking trails sitting on plastic sheets or the snow shovel. I definitely want to visit the area again. I had a lot of fun! -Chris-

Fortunately for us, the weather over the weekend was perfect. The most exiting thing for me was the snow-winding slide. I had no idea at the end. I totally forgot the -20 degree cold. I really liked the tranquillity on the 2,400m mountaintop while watching sunrise at 6am. -Rie-



*The top of Mt. Shimagare*

### **Rokko hike by Keiko Yamaguchi**

**8<sup>th</sup> Jan**

That morning, I woke up excited. Excited to be going on the first hike of the New Year. Jeremy (the organiser), Yoshimi H. & Rabbi Assaf met at Hankyu Rokko station and Estella joined us on the way to the starting point. The weather was clear: a beautiful sunny winter's day. Shortly after we started walking, I began sweating a lot. Jeremy had gotten an e-mail from Miyuki, who had gone on a hike the previous day, and it said that the top of Mt. Rokko was covered in snow! I never imagined we would see snow. We went up & up as we were chatting and laughing. We stopped at a viewpoint and looked out over the panorama of Kobe and Osaka. The view hadn't changed at all from that of last time I'd seen it. However, I'm sad to say, we won't be able to avoid seeing and hearing lots of airplanes the next time we come here. Kobe airport will open soon.

From the lookout, we continued to climb to our final destination (not exactly the top of Mt. Rokko, but a cafeteria near the top). After passing the viewpoint, the scenery changed to a snowscape. It was getting tougher to walk on the road with crusted snow. We didn't need to wear crampons but sticks helped us to walk on the slippery trail. We managed to reach our goal and have lunch at the cafeteria. Then we said good bye to Estella, who planned to descend via the cable car. The remaining four of us headed for the Arima hot springs. Going down the slippery trail was much more difficult than climbing up. I fell over many times but I was never fed up with walking. It was fun spending time with nature, especially with good friends and nice weather. I finished the hike feeling comfortably tired and then took a relaxing dip at Arima. I'd like to thank Jeremy for organising this event and I look forward to more enjoyable hikes and outdoor sports with the IOC folks in the year ahead.



**And finally...**

That's all for this month. As always, check out "activities and events" to find out what's happening. See you all next month for more snow stories.