

# IOC Newsletter

## June 2005

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### Greeting

Hello again readers. I hope that you had an enjoyable month. With the cool, fine weather quickly being replaced by the hot, humid weather that we all know and love (!), you could be forgiven in thinking that some the climate has been taking its toll the club's energy levels. This month there were only two events in the Kansai area compared with May's five and April's six! But not to worry there's plenty in store for July (more on that later). Anyway, now let's take look at the reviews.



*In good hands (this year's committee)*

## Mt Ibuki hike by William

12<sup>th</sup> June

It was a wonderful day for the climb as I staggered off the JR Nagahama station at about 9:30 am. The night before I think I must have had quite a bit to drink at the 'nomi-houdai' (all-you-can-drink) dinner which followed our monthly meeting.



*The morning after the night before*

Jeremy, Fiona, Yuri, Fumie and Kaori arrived a little while later, just after a whole crowd descended onto Nagahama station. You could tell that a crowd had arrived by the queue at the ladies' toilet! After some delay, we made it just in time for the 9:50am bus that took us to the base of Ibuki-san where we would start the climb from the First Station. The ride (¥750) lasted almost 45min into the countryside. It was nice to see the spacious surroundings. The flat, spread-out farmland, the greenery, the harvested fields with their headless stalks ... I'd almost bust out singing John Denver's 'Country Road'. It is good to get away from the crowds every once in a while. We'd almost the whole bus to ourselves, each of us in our own seat and catching up on the small talk. Occasionally Jeremy showed off his arm muscles!



*Jeremy showing off his arm muscles*

Nearing Ibuki-san, we could see the exposed rocky part of the mountain, where Yuri said it was the 'most exploited' mountain ... it was mined extensively for its rocks. Also we could see the gondola and ski lifts. I learnt later that from a website that this area gets quite a bit of snow every year and skiing is quite popular as well.

We began the climb almost immediately after alighting from the bus. After skirting the temple (or is it shrine?), the road quickly became steep and after several turns, we got off the road and reached the First Station sign. It read "Altitude 420m, to the summit 5090m". "What?! Nobody told me it was going to be *that* far?" I thought to myself.

As I looked longingly downwards towards the bus stop, others had already gone on far in front of me. Sighing to myself, I mumbled to myself, "shoganai". I think it must have been the alcohol effect that had made me decided to come.

After a couple of stairs, we quickly came upon a well-trodden trail and an open field with tall weed grass. As the wind blows, the tall grass sways gently undulating across the field like waves cascading along the sea-shore. Above the trail are the empty ski lifts and I can imagine this open field must be packed with skiers during winter. Later in the afternoon during the descent, we actually saw some people practicing paragliding. I would definitely like to try that some time!

Passing Second station we entered a forested part of the mountain. We found several volunteers probably repairing part of the trail. We reached Third Station about 12 noon where there is a hotel resort and lift gondola. I saw several taxis arrived with their passengers who started their climb from this point instead of First Station. I wondered why we couldn't have done that too. Better still, why not take a taxi right to the top? But I guess our group had the true climber's spirit and we had to start right from the base. The real spirit of achievement!

Sitting on the top end of the gondola having lunch, we had a beautiful panoramic view of the area. Looking out, we could see the flat plains and some scattered hills here and there. From Third Station onwards, there was no tree cover and the trail began to zig-zag up one side of Ibuki-san. Looking upwards, I could see other climbers along the trail. This view reminded me of the climb up Mt. Fuji 2 years ago. It was almost an identical image. The only differences are Ibuki-san is greener and about 2400 metre lower than Mt. Fuji (3776m).

We reached the top, 1377 m, at about 14:05. I must have missed the sign posts for Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth stations! I was probably trying to keep on going, pacing myself along the way. I almost didn't notice the colourful flowers blooming near the peak. I think Kaori must have taken quite a few pictures of the surrounding scenery as we ascended. At the peak we could see the Japanese Alps towards the north and north-eastern side.



*Jeremy decides to flex his biceps one more time*

While buying ice-cream we came across an interesting character who called himself Daniel. He was born and raised in Mexico and comes back to Ikubi-san to help out in the store which is owned by his grandmother. He charmed the girls with some spoken Spanish and I hardly have any idea what he said. Perhaps he was asking for their phone numbers! Anyway, he said we should visit the peak in the middle of June where we can watch fire-flies and their blinking lights in the early morning around 2 or 3am. It is one of the attractions not often mentioned in guide books. We should think about that in the future. Perhaps next year.

After some lessons in Spanish, Jeremy invited Daniel to attend an IOC event whenever he has time, with a suggested hint that there are more female members than male ones. The wind was getting stronger and chiller and we left the peak after resting for an hour. We descended the same trail as before and the progress was much faster. By the time we reached the base it was about 17:30 and was just in time for the bus ride to the station.

All in all, it was a good climb with equally good weather. Jeremy says that the vertical ascent at Ibuki-san is about the same as Mt. Fuji. I am not sure whether that's true or not. However, for any one who is attempting Mt. Fuji, I recommend trying out Ibuki-san first to get a feel for what it's like. It can also provide a good training as well.

### **A Valuable Experience by Yoshimi H**



*"All stars"*

I would be happy to tell you how wonderful Victoria is. I studied English there for three months recently. It's well known that Victoria is called "The Garden City", so you can see a great number of well-kept gardens and excellent parks everywhere in this city. It may not be easy to imagine but the weather in winter is mild even though Victoria is a Canadian city. I wasn't expecting that. I felt like it was the same temperature as Osaka. The sky seemed larger than Japan's. I heard the city of Victoria has a law which prohibits very high buildings. I guess that's one reason for feeling that the sky there is so big. I'm not sure but maybe there are other reasons for it. Latitude may be a factor. Anyway, those are not the best things about Victoria. I want to tell you what is.

A few days after I settled in Victoria, I was really surprised by the fact that most drivers stop for anyone who wants to cross the street, even if there are no traffic lights. I couldn't understand what was going on. I couldn't believe my eyes. You know well what I mean, because it's so rare in my town, Osaka, where there are many walkers and drivers eager to go first. It's also uncommon to hear a horn in Victoria.

On my way downtown, another surprising thing happened to me. A man asked me with a smile if he could help me as I was looking at the map. Five minutes later, a woman, who seemed to be on her way back from shopping, did the same thing! I received incredible kindness five times per day!! I didn't need to ask any of them. They came up to me on their own to help me.



*"Upper Intermediate Class"*

And here's something else. I heard one of the greatest expressions on the earth while I was on a bus. Can you guess? It was "Thank you". A lot of people said it to the driver when they get off the bus. I was extremely happy and couldn't help smiling. I'm sure these kind words make everyone happy. People who have warm and rich hearts are the foundation of Victoria. That's the best thing about Victoria.

Finally, maybe I don't need to say this but I made a lot of friends there and I can't help saying I love them as I love you all. They made me extremely happy. I will never forget my great time with them in Victoria.

### **Ajisan hike by Noriko K and Noriko K!**

**25<sup>th</sup> June**



*Norikos aren't the only twins in the club...*

Did you know that there are six Norikos in the IOC now? We are two of them! Our names are Noriko Kawata and Noriko Kamiyabu. We have the same initials "NK". I don't know why but we even feel like twins although we look nothing alike. It's amazing! We have been the members of the IOC since May. We are very pleased to meet you. Please remember us.

This time we went hiking to Mt. Maya. We met at Rokko station and as always, Yoshimi, our leader, was confused by our names when taking attendance. It was very fine day, so it

felt great to walk in the woods. At first, we walked in the valley. We could feel cool air from a stream next to a trail. And then we began the ascent. It was very hard for us and it made us tired, but it invigorated us too. Actually, it was so steep that we lost one member early on.



*Broadway eat your heart out*

There was a wonderful view from top of the mountain. But ... there was a problem – the heat! And we are very thirsty from walking. When we arrived at the lake to have lunch our water bottles were almost empty. Luckily we were able to find a vending machine on the way and stopped to quench our thirst.

It took about three hours to reach our lunch spot beside the lake. After lunch, some people climbed to the viewpoint. It looked so far and high from the lake. But we could see them on the top. There was nothing to obstruct them up there.

After resting, we continued on to Yoshimi's house for the BBQ. On the way to his house, we passed through the garden of hydrangeas. There are so many blue and pink hydrangeas. Hydrangeas change colour depending the soil. They were very beautiful. June is hydrangea season in Japan so it was the perfect time to visit the garden. Our tired minds and bodies seemed to be healed by the beautiful flowers.



*So that's why they call it the \$10,000,000 view!*

Finally, we arrived at our destination and Yoshimi's wife and sons were there to welcome us. We had a very nice BBQ party together. We ate and drank so much. For dessert we had Yoshimi's wife's homemade apple pie. It was so delicious! We would like to thank Yoshimi and his family for the BBQ and everyone else for their companionship. We really had a wonderful time together!





*"One more for the newsletter"*

### **Tanzawa relay race by Jeremy**

*(bokka edi-den rock-carrying mountain-climbing relay race)*

Though it may seem barbaric to most civilians (even though I am a civilian, most folks I talked to said events like this are only for new recruits into the army), or even stupid ("bakka", in the words of my karate instructor and classmates), every spring sees the Nabewari bokka edi-den, in Tanzawa, Kanagawa Prefecture. This kind of event dates back to the early days of Japanese strongmen, climbing up mountains with unimaginable weights on their backs, to supply mountain temples with provisions and water, repair trails, and build castles for their feudal lords (or maybe they were really just showing off their strength to impress some cute girls... who knows?).

So it turned out that, about 20 years ago, the folks who run the mountain huts on Tanzawa-san (a popular place for Tokyo dayhikers going to get a nice view of Fuji-san) decided to band together and make use of the energy of all the dayhikers from the big city (who generally need more exercise anyways). The huts were in constant need of a water supply, and what better way to get that water there than to get those hikers to bring it up the mountain for them?! But it would be

expensive to pay people to bring water up the hill. However, runners and mountain climbers are rather an irrational and competitive bunch (may God bless each and every one of them!), so one foggy morning a mountain hermit came up with the idea of asking these hikers to actually pay a fee to enter a competition, where the hikers would each race 20kg of water up the mountain. That way, the mountain huts would get the water they needed, while also receiving some money in the process (was my karate instructor right or what?!). But as long as the money was used for race prizes and maintenance of the environment (like erosion control), the participants wouldn't mind.



And thus began a long tradition of the IOC and IAC (our sister club in Tokyo) entering teams into the Nabewari race, to test our mettle against each other, and against a spectrum of Japanese hiking and running clubs from around the country. Racers now carry gravel (for trail maintenance) instead of water, as the hordes from Tokyo that climb this mountain each weekend have caused erosion control to take precedence over water supply, but the idea of the race remains the same. This year, our own Kevin Bradshaw put a team together, consisting of him and me, along with ultra-buff friends Taro-san and Taniguchi-san, both schoolteachers from Nagoya. Taro's wife Akiko and baby daughter Sakiko-chan came to help out and cheer us on as well, to our joy, but to the chagrin of poor little Sakiko-chan, who hadn't seen such tall, skinny, scary gaijin as Kevin or I before, and so cried her poor little lungs out whenever we looked at her... the poor kid probably thought we were dinosaurs, or maybe pale giraffes in need of some sun!

After arriving at the base of the mountain late on Saturday night, Taro (running the first leg of the race) set up camp at the bottom of the mountain. The other three of us ignited our headlamps and hiked up in the dark through Taro's (first) leg of the race (very long, and gradually sloping upward), and then up through Taniguchi's (second) leg (shorter but very steep), before coming to Kevin's (third) leg, which contained rather broad, flat stretches of ground, and thus made good camping. All this time, we had been in thick woods, though our campsite was on a bald rise, obviously a viewpoint for something. After sleeping a restful night in my tent through the constant pitter-patter of a rainstorm, I woke up just after sunrise to a huge conical shape looming over us from across the valley: Fuji-san! I couldn't believe how close we were to that volcano, so then I understood why Tanzawa-san is such a popular place for Tokyo dayhikers. I dozed off for a few hours, and by then Fuji was gone, sacrificed to the clouds and rains of the day, turning the view into the one in the photo below, at breakfast time:



Soon we had camp cleaned up, and Taniguchi and Kevin headed downhill to their start points. Realizing that I still had no idea what my own (fourth) leg was like, and that I still had over an hour before I'd have to carry on the backpack (the proverbial baton, but with 20kg gravel inside it) from Kevin, I decided to hike up the mountain as far as I could before having to return to my baton-passing point in time to meet Kevin. On the way up, a kind fellow from a local mountain-climbing club joined me, because he also wanted to scope out his racecourse. Turned out that our leg ran straight up, first switchbacks, then stairs. We ascended and ascended, glad for the warm-up, but finally actually tiring ourselves out somewhat, while the finish line still loomed somewhere in the clouds up above us, so we descended back down the slope, through a short flat section of trail running through blooming pink tsutsuji (azaleas) to the mountain hut at the baton handover point.

Here, we found a party raging! Music, drink, smokes, the whole works, as a bunch of jolly runners each waited for their turn to take the 20kg baton from their teammate and blast off up that last steep section of trail. There must've been 60 or 70 folks in all (the anchor for each team), of all ages, trying to slough off their pre-race jitters through companionship and conversation. But suddenly a number was yelled out, and the crowd silenced, each runner listening, to see if it was the number of his or her own team being called.

At this time an exceedingly lean Japanese man in his forties or fifties, with leg muscles so well defined that they looked to have been carved in stone with a chisel (I can only aspire for muscles like that!) fought his way up to the baton handover point, and waited ten seconds until his teammate appeared out of the forest. He took the rock-laden backpack from his fellow, and, wasting no time, sprinted his way up the trail, quickly disappearing into the clouds. It had now been over an hour since the gun went off at the bottom of the mountain, so each runner, including me, was expecting his or her teammate to come bounding out of that forest at anytime.

And bound out of the forest he did (ten minutes and a couple of runners later)! Kevin, who is probably twice the height and half the width of most of the other runners (except for scrawny ol' me) leaped powerfully up the grade to the handover point, bounding over the competition as easily as Godzilla tramples Tokyo (for this brief moment, I could understand why poor lil' Sakiko-chan found the appearance of the two of us so frightening!). The excitement of it all got me running and jumping in place at the start line, waiting for the baton, so that I could sprint off up into the clouds in close pursuit of those who came before me. And then Kevin, with his last heroic strength, put those 20kg on my back, replacing my naive dreams of sprinting pursuit with the reality of trudging straight uphill, step by painful step! And if you don't believe me that it was painful, just take a look at the expression on this poor dude's face (he's approaching the finish):



All I could think during those 25 minutes or so of pain was, "Thank goodness for trekking poles!" I had no idea whom I passed, or who passed me, or where I was; all I could do was concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other, up and up and up, until finally, out of the darkness of my pain, I heard the shouts and saw the flags of the finish line emerge from the clouds a hundred meters or so above. With that, it was one last burst of energy, up those steps, past a TV camera where I wanted to say "Hi Mom", but was too tired to do anything but pant and scowl, and straight into the kakigori (snow-cone) hut on the top. It may not exactly have been victory, but it certainly was sweet (lemon, yum)!

Kevin joined me at the top a little while later, and then so did Taniguchi-san. We hung out there for a while, sharing kakigori flavours with the other teams, as the remainder of the 20kg class teams finished, and then the really (amazing, to be honest) tough boys of the 40kg class came in (we carried one bag of gravel, while they each carried two)! Leaving the gravel at the top (where it'd be used for erosion control), we took a pleasant jog down the mountain, at least till the spot we had stashed our tents, sleeping bags, and food, so had to load up again. Finally reaching the base of the mountain, we met Taro and family, and all waited for the results to come in.

Turned out we finished a healthy 10<sup>th</sup> place, out of 40-something teams, and so actually won a prize at the awards ceremony!



The prize was a Rambo-type hunting knife for each of us. They're pretty useful in the outdoors, especially when survival skills are needed. Yeah, like when you're lost in the woods and get a craving for yaki-usagi...  
Too bad I'm a vegetarian.



*Victory photo... yeah, we know we rock!*

### **Upcoming Events**

July is shaping up to be chocker-block with lots of activities to fill up your weekends. These include the long-awaited Shimanami Kaido trip, river trekking and camping in Wakayama, a combined sea kayaking and scuba diving adventure in Tokushima, a 4-day event in Yakushima, Kyushu, a visit to the Oki islands and the annual Biwako camping outing. And if all that isn't enough there's even an ascent of Japan's highest mountain (no prizes for guessing!).

### **Final Thought**

Due to some complaints about and after consulting with Jeremy, I have decided to no longer "edit" any submissions sent to me for the newsletter. My apologies for those of you who got the "snip" in previous editions.

And to any of you brave souls attempting to climb Mt Fuji next month, I wish you my best. I climbed her last August, the same month I arrived in Japan. And it was hard. They say a wise man climbs Fuji once, a fool does it twice. I am no fool.