

IOC Newsletter

March 2006

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Greeting

Hello and welcome to this month's rundown of all those winter sports you've been doing. Who needs the Turin when you've got the the IOC to keep you busy on those cold winter weekends?! This month saw the second trip to the ever-popular Hakodateyama among other events. But first let's take a look at the other two trips organised in February.



Possible Gallery Night entry? What a great winter photo!

Takamiyama hike by Josh Wilson

Feb 4th

As I'm not a member of the IOC and this was my first outing with the club, Kei and the other folks decided that I should be the one to write the newsletter report. This would, they urged, give everyone a fresh perspective -or were they just trying to get out of the writing?

I met Kei for the first time on the Kintetsu line going towards Haibara, when out of the blue a man on the train asked "are you Josh Wilson?" He took me into the first car and introduced me to three others in our group, Rie, Miyuki, and Keiko, who was busy trying to get a few more minutes of sleep. At Haibara we were joined by Mayumi, Ute, Kaori, and, Peter for a total of nine. Introductions all around and we set off on a full bus for the Takamiyama trail.

From the trailhead the crowds were thick like Fuji-san on New Year's Eve, but luckily they thinned out when the trails diverged and we started the ascent of Takamiyama and hour later. There were more than a few others on that trail as well- testament to the beautiful sights at the top.



Another super photo of the crowds

After fifteen minutes or so we stopped and unpacked the day's most essential piece of equipment, crampons. Thanks go out to Kei for packing two extra pairs, otherwise Ute and I would have been crawling up and sliding down! With our crampons clamped on we proceeded up the mountain, into an ever colder and ever whiter landscape.

The closer we got to the peak, the whiter our surroundings became. A stinging wind blowing over the top of Takamiyama, coating every centimeter of the landscape with a frosty ice, known by the technical names "muhyou," and/or "juhyou" in Japanese (the difference escapes me), and what I think is the best definition, the German "raurief," offered by Ute, meaning something like "rough dew." Before long we were ascending through a world of white, our puffs of breath joining the frost clinging to the trees. The chorus of "mashiroi," "kirei," and "sugoi" grew louder and louder as the frost became thicker and thicker. The pictures can tell the story -it truly was a magnificent winter wonderland well worth the trip.

At the peak there's is a yamagoya with a viewing stand and a shrine. We summated at just after 12:00, and after snapping a few quick photos, searched for a place to eat out of the wind. Unfortunately, we weren't the only ones with that idea, and the hut was packed like a Tokyo commuter train. I half expected to see white-gloved men pushing people in. Outside the hut was no better, with every square centimeter of wind-protected real estate taken. The warmth built up by the hike up was fleeting by the minute, so we bid goodbye to the beautiful view and descended into the warmer valley below.

We were treated to some light snow on the way down the other side of Takamiyama -a benefit of the cold weather, as warmer temperatures would have brought a cold rain- and at around 1:00 we came across a woodsmen's hut. We had a quick lunch, did the warm-up dance, and got back on the trail to the hot spring before any ungloved fingers could freeze off.

It was an easy two hours to Takasumi Onsen, where we capped off a great day a hiking with a warm soak under a gently falling snow. "Ahhhh...." Back in Osaka, Kei, Mayumi, Ute, and I put the perfect end on the day with beers and yakiniku in Tsuruhashi.

I was asked throughout the day "are you going to become a member?" After a great hike like this, how could my answer be any different than "You bet - see you on the next hike!"

Shirakawago by Benoit

Feb 10th-12th

Leader: Keiko & Yoshimi H.

Participants: Noriko (no.5?), Yuka, and Benoit.

As the only non-Japanese person and the only boy I, once again, have the privilege to write the report for this nice trip perfectly organized by Keiko and Yoshimi. We left on Friday evening by bus. It was awesome, only three seats per row, at least 2 meters for our legs! So, in less than one hour (at least in our minds), we arrived at Kanazawa with its fantastic modern but beautiful station. It was 5am so time for an early breakfast at one convenient 24hr restaurant. Luckily, we got the dinner menu which was much better than the breakfast menu (which was kind of Western-Japanese style, not a very good combination!). The girls were great with me. As they know my Japanese is worse than poor (even though I study

my kanji every day), they try to speak in English all the time, even between themselves!

Then, we took a bus to Shirakawago. There, it was packed with snow. And as if it was not enough, it was snowing heavily! After 5 minutes we found the path dug in the snow to reach the nice little bridge to Shirakawa village. Our wooden farmhouse was beautiful and so warm inside. The lady taking care of the lodge was of course very kind: she lent the girls some umbrellas for our "hike" around the village and a pair of boots for me (as my old shoes – not waterproof anymore - got wet after 5 min). It was cold outside, a little bit less than inside, but the soba were really tasty and warmed up our bodies. The village was wonderful, the scenery with the river grandiose and the wooden houses with their steep thatched roof terrific, especially with in the snow. Now I understand now why it's a UNESCO World Heritage site.



The girls with their nice umbrellas.



A typical house.

In the evening, we took a bus to the top of a neighbouring hill with a nice view of the village. It's quite a famous place for photographers waiting for the sunset with their impressive lenses (even Damien would have been impressed!). Like any famous place in Japan, it's packed! Even Totoro joined the "viewing party" (maybe he left his forest to see us!). So, we enjoyed the view but it was cold and snowy and we were freezing! The illuminated village was really beautiful but it wasn't easy to take good pictures without a tripod. Hence most of them are fuzzy. And Yuka started going crazy because she couldn't take a nice photo! And what a surprise when we decided to leave...there was an hour-long queue for the bus. But as always with some good conversation time went fast and we were soon back at the farmhouse for our delicious dinner. And the onsen afterwards was perfect for the digestion (even if the girls didn't allow me to join them on their side and left me to go into the men's alone!).



We even saw Totoro in the flesh... well, he was a bit cold!



The illuminated village

The following day, we left Shirakawago for a cute little ski resort nearby with one lift and two runs. It was enough for Noriko and Keiko who are beginners. I tried best I could to teach them how to turn and more specifically how to stop! It's a lot of fun to be a teacher but not that easy to explain what sounds natural for someone who has skied for more than 10 years! Eventually, after a few hours and a lesson with a professional teacher, they improved a lot in their style. During that time, Yoshimi and Yuka were snow-boarding. I had a go myself at some of the numerous slaloms prepared for some of the ski classes. All in all, it was a very good day. But sadly it was time to go home...

Hakodateyama ski/snowboard by Matteo

25th & 26th Feb

There were more thrills and spills on the slopes of Hakodateyama this February as the KIOC organised its second Ski and Snowboard outing of 2006. IOC members Ronan, Matteo, Keiko and Yoshimi were joined by a mix of skiers and boarders from Canada, the UK, the US and France. Leading in the fashion stakes were the trendy Norman and Carolyn, whose one-piece boarding outfits impressed as much as their boarding ability! Saturday was beautifully sunny, though the melting snow made navigating the slopes challenging. We were joined on Saturday by Alan and Fiona from Kyoto. Having skied since he was six, Alan patiently helped me, a relative newcomer, to perfect my right turns!

We convened at the restaurant for a hot meal (and chocolate almonds) at lunchtime, before hitting the slopes again in the afternoon. Although quite small in size, the resort of Hakodateyama caters to participants of all abilities, as it features gentle hills as well as difficult slopes and moguls. We enjoyed a full day's action with a great view of Lake Biwa before returning to the minshuku.

Suitably refreshed after a relaxing onsen, we sat down to a delicious nabe meal. IOC members Keiko and Yoshimi replied to our questions and observations about Japanese life and culture. Afterwards, all attention

focused on the 'Jenga Olympics'. Ronan's 'Michael Mayes' approach had us in stitches as he pulled the precarious pile down on his turn!



Just before it all comes crashing down!

After an early night, we awoke next morning to torrential rain, putting an end to any hopes of an early morning on the slopes. A few brave souls wandered off to Kunizakai as the slopes there were still open (and it is part of the same JR pass). The rest of us enjoyed a relaxing morning in the minshuku, drinking coffee and discussing upcoming KIOC events! Many thanks to our leader Ronan for organising a great weekend, and let's enjoying more ski-trips in the future!

