

IOC Newsletter

November 2005

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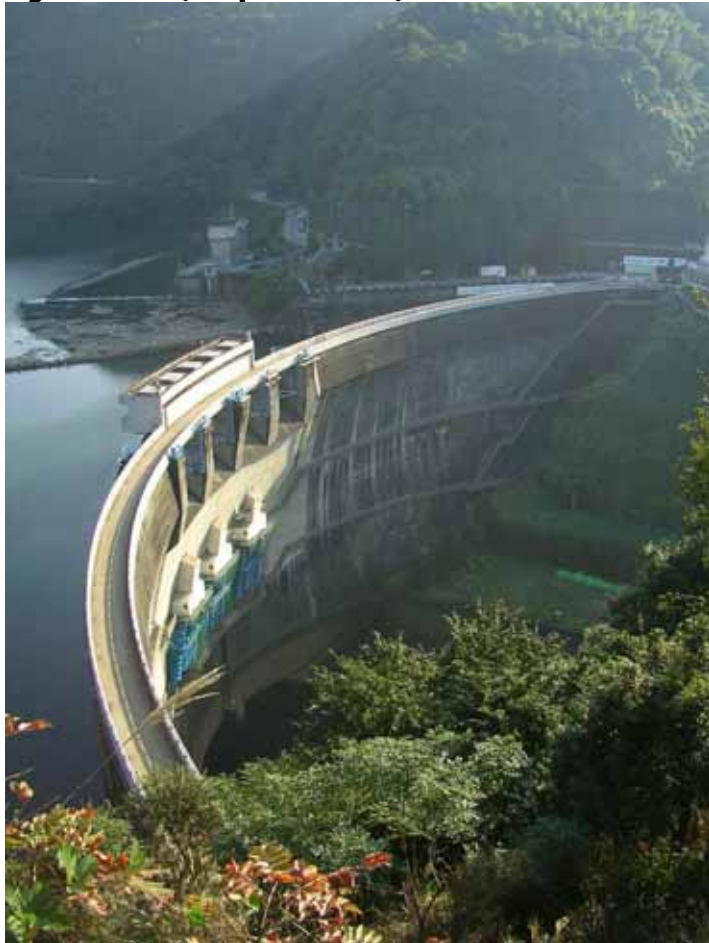
Time to wrap up warm – winter is finally here! Too late for camping but still too early for winter sports; it's no wonder why there weren't many outdoor activities on offer this month. So without further ado let's see what happened to those who decided to brave the elements...



...and those who opted for the comfort of indoors!

Uji Hike (in pictures)

Saturday, 5th







Getting into the swing of things!

This was my first Gallery Night and after all the hype I'd heard, my expectations were high. Of course, with Fiona in charge of operations the night was bound to be a success from the word go. We met in the basement of a building near city hall. When I arrived people were busying putting up photos and generally preparing for the party. There were six categories in the photo competition: humorous/funny, hardcore, landscapes/scenery, IOC people, slideshow and overseas travels. Each category had its own area and members could vote for their favourite photo from each section by putting a coloured sticker on it. I think everyone was impressed at the quality of the photos.



In charge of operations, Fiona (accompanied by Noriko)

All the while we were eating snacks and drinking wine. We also had a slideshow presentation with commentary (some of the commentary was better than others! "This is a pigeon"). The committee decided on the winner of the slideshow. There were mystery prizes for the winner and runner-up of each section. Afterwards, many of us went for dinner at a very nice Italian restaurant nearby. It was fun sitting at one huge table (see above) and a very enjoyable social night was had by all. Thank you especially to Fiona and Keiko for organising everything. No doubt it will be another fixture in next year's calendar.



Keiko keeping an eye on everything

Cycling in Kansai by Jeremy

Sunday, 27th

It was a beautiful autumn day in Kansai, at the beginning of November, and I needed to get my bicycle's wheels spinning fast fast fast, to relieve the stresses that had come from my job recently. So I decided to cycle around Awaji Island, which I had done once before, a year previous. I was alone on this trip, as I posted it on the message board only one day earlier, and already missed the companionship I had the previous year, when I had cycled with a giant IOC president of legend, Lars.

The day began with a trip across the Akashi Strait on the Taco Ferry (so named because the Akashi Strait, with its ripping tidal currents, is a popular place in Japan for catching octopus, or tako in Japanese) before dawn. When I disembarked, I was very happy not to have a flat tire, as the last time I took my bicycle on that boat, a puncture resulted. Then I got on my trusty mount and started pedalling. This time, I took Jacquelyn's advice, and rode clockwise, so that I'd be cycling on the ocean side of the road the entire time, instead of the mountain side as I had last year. The dawn was slow and sweet, and my energy exploded with the sun's rays. I felt as if I had a tailwind for all my first 50km down the eastern side of the island. My steed being a mountain bike, the gears just didn't go high enough for the speed I wanted on those long, flat stretches of road nestled between steep mountains and the sea. I was absorbed in watching the asphalt fly by me, by the time I noticed a searing thirst in my throat. At that time, I passed a small shop on a hill by the sea, advertising delicious mikans (oranges) for sale. The one-san in charge of the place was selling huge sacks of the things for ¥500, but I couldn't carry so much weight on this ride, so I wanted only 5 or 10 mikans. I told the one-san that I'd pay for the fruits individually, but she insisted that, if I don't buy the whole big sack, she should just give me some mikans for free. I argued in vain that I should pay her for them, but to no avail. Those oranges were the sweetest I've ever tasted! I must've sat on the front step of that shop for half an hour, eating mikan after mikan, before getting back on my bicycle and pushing onward.

After the sun rose higher into the late morning sky, I cycled the mountainous southeast portion of the island. The previous year, this road had been closed due to typhoon damage, and I was not able to cycle it. Because of the slopes, my speed suffered, and so did my quads! The pain was doubled when, toward the end of this kibishii leg of the trip, I came to a dead end on top of a mountain lookout. Up here were a pack of motorbikers, stopped to take a smoke while enjoying the view of the Naruto Strait (famed for its tidally-induced whirlpools). I asked them which way it was to Naruto (on my route), and they started laughing. Turns out I took a wrong turn and climbed this mountain when I should have just continued straight. An hour or so lost, but a nice view as the result.

Flying back down the hill, I pushed on to the tip of the Naruto peninsula, where I had a lunch of soba and tofu at the michi-no-eki near the base of the bridge there. That was a much-needed recharge for both my empty stomach, and my aching quads, calves, and especially gluts! The tide wasn't ripping too strong at the time, though, so I couldn't see any whirlpools.

It was easy going after this, as the roads once again became flat and ran straight through rice fields and traditional towns. I began cycling up the western side of the island, and rejoined the coast. As the clock hit about 3, and I passed by go-shiki-beach, I ran across, of all people, Fiona, the globetrotting IOC special activities coordinator, and her friend at a convenience store! She was on the island to visit her friend's home, and have dinner with her friend and friend's husband. Well, these two overpowered me and stuffed my bicycle and myself into their car. I was summarily blindfolded and kidnapped, transported to a beautiful mountain stronghold somewhere in the middle of the island where ajisai and chestnuts are grown, and fed endless amounts of the most delicious ume-shu (plum wine) and vegetable nabe that I've ever tasted! Afterwards, late at night, my bicycle and I were again transported along dark, winding mountain roads, to the taco ferry, where we were abandoned to the whims of the sea.

And finally...

That's all for this month's newsletter. Keep your eye on our events section for news of upcoming winter sports activities, including a return trip to last year's very successful Hakodateyama trip. And due to Christmas holidays the December issue will be a little late next month.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

