

# IOC Newsletter

## October 2005

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### Greeting

Happy Halloween everyone! Well, I'm a few days late but it's the thought that counts. So October was a fairly quiet month for the club but we did have one big event that was a success by all accounts. So let's find out what happened at the long-awaited and much anticipated and oh-so-controversial...MOMOI KAMPU!



*The Usual Suspects and then some!*

## Momoi Camp by Fiona

22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup>

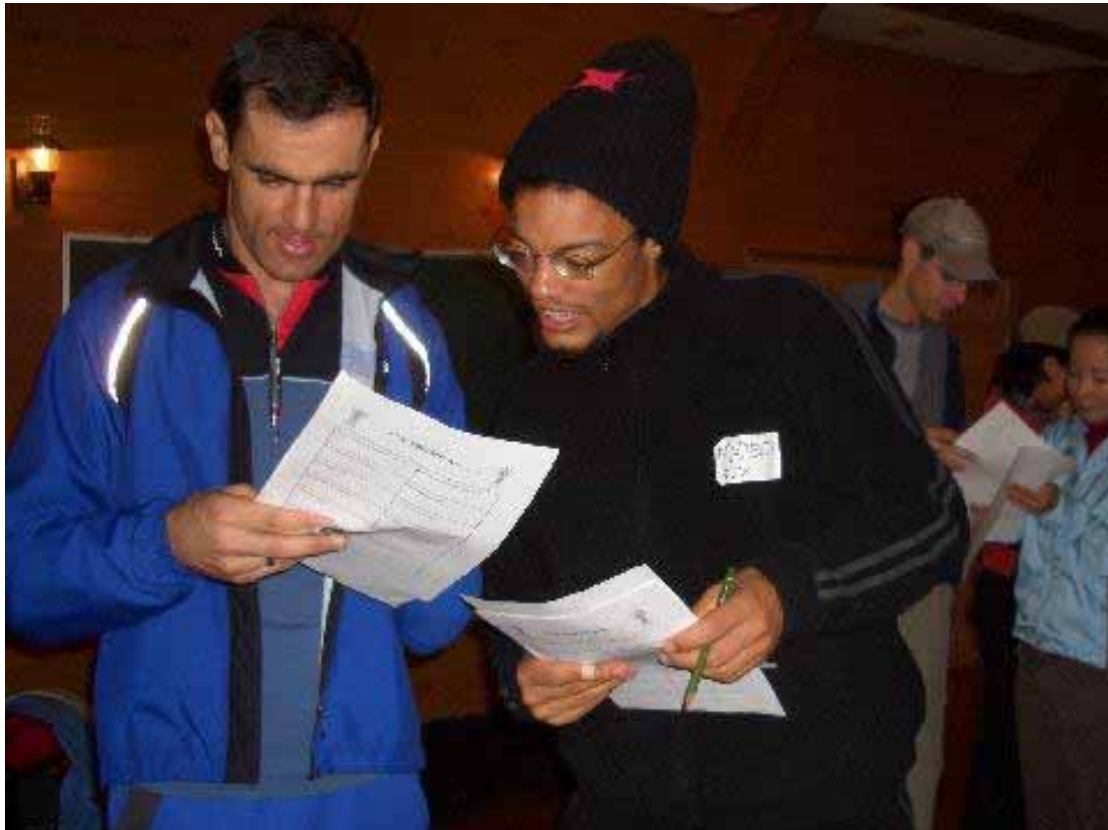
We (the hiking group) met at Demachiyanagi station in Kyoto at 12:30 pm. Our one hour bus ride took us to a bus stop in the mountains called Hanase-toge. We had been expecting that Momoi would be around 5 degrees cooler than Kyoto, but we were shocked to read on a nearby electric signboard that it was only 8 degrees! We headed off for a hike at a fast pace, but unfortunately (?) right from the start we were going in the wrong direction. We walked for around one hour before we reached a village. It was then we realised that we'd gone completely the opposite way to Momoi Camp. We headed back uphill and finally arrived in Momoi at 4:30 pm. Our planned arrival time was 3 pm, but no one was complaining about hiking the extra distance in the fresh air and green surroundings of Momoi.



*At least it was warm!*

Once at camp we met up with the cyclists and other people who had come by car. We had a brief meeting to discuss the schedule and teams (fire, BBQ, pasta, salad & garlic bread, snacks, breakfast teams). After this we got straight to work preparing our dinner in our various teams. For dinner we feasted on pasta (with a choice of veggie, tuna, and meat sauce), garlic bread, salad (green and Caesar), baked sweet potatoes, Nachos with salsa & guacamole, and wiener

sausages. I was surprised that tuna and tomato sauce aren't that popular in Japan, but I think I have converted a few sceptical people now. Of course almost as important as the food was selecting the drinks. We whet our pallets with red and white wine from California, and XXXX (four X) beer from Australia.



*John and Matteo do some last minute rehearsals before the campfire sing-song*

After dinner we migrated to the warm campfire for our evening's entertainment. Matteo and Thomas played the guitar while we squinted to read the lyrics of our song books in the dark. We sang a range of songs ranging from 'Row Your Boat', 'Yesterday', 'Paint it Black' to the hit of the night 'When the Saints Go Marching In'. Ken demonstrated some original dance moves, while Yuka wooed us with her latin style dancing. We all jumped up to do a congo line dance around the fire to 'When the Saints Go Marching In'. When we weren't singing we were mastering the art of making 'S'mores'. The experts showed us how to toast the perfect marshmallow, but some people still went for the 'well done' version.



*CONGO-TIME!*

When the fire cooled down we headed to bed in our lodges, or tents. Around 30 of us squashed in to the 'yama no ie'. Bodies lay head to head, with not much room to manoeuvre between the futons. In the middle of the night some of us woke up to Matteo yelling in his sleep, and other people were doing their best to sleep through Minhao's snores.

Sunday morning the breakfast team got up bright and early (around 6:30 am), to prepare the meal. Due to the rain we set up our buffet style breakfast in the hall. Most people had cereal, bread and fruit for breakfast as was expected. But what surprised me was one member who had salad on top of cereal, a combination I've never seen before.

Our monthly meeting was followed by an ice-breaker activity. After we got to know each other a bit better we split into two groups for two information sessions. Yuri and Yuka lead the First Aid info session, while Damien did his best to teach us beginners a few photography tips.



*Photography Tips by Thomas*

Before heading back home we soaked until we were wrinkly in the hot springs (rotenburo) at Kurama. What a nice relaxing end to the weekend. Thank you to everyone who participated for making it such a fun weekend!



*What the IOC is all about*

## **Impressions of Japan by Ronan**

You know the feeling you get when you arrive somewhere new and you think to yourself "This really reminds me of such-and-such"? Well, that never happens in Japan. Simply because Japan is like no other country on Earth. My father summed it up on a recent visit "Japan is different, very different". Possibly nothing has been more influential in bringing about this uniqueness than the period of over 200 years of national seclusion that Japan entered during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, the Japanese were forbidden on pain of death to travel abroad or engage in trade with foreign countries. Today, *gaijin* (foreigner) numbers are increasing but the boundary between Japanese and non-Japanese still remains very clear. It's almost impossible for foreigners to get Japanese citizenship, no matter how well you speak the lingo or how natural your bowing looks. When it comes to turning Japanese, you're either in the club or you're not.

Ironically, it's this *gaijin* status that can make your time in Japan very...*interesting*. Especially in rural areas, you are treated like a celebrity with local TV reporters coming to interview you and people going out of their way to help you. I once had a lady chase me down the street to tell me she had given me the wrong directions! It's also the place where shoes seldom fit, doors frames are too small, cooked fish is rare, cutlery even rarer and squat toilets are the norm. And in the cities, most Japanese prefer cycling on the footpath *in between* the pedestrians because it's "safer". Of course, these are all trivial inconveniences when compared with benefits like efficient public transport (ahem!), litter-free streets, superior customer service, and one of the lowest crime rates in the world (all this despite being the world's tenth most populous country).

"Why did you choose to teach English in Japan?" is a question that I get asked very often. And funnily enough, after one year on the clock I still haven't come up with a satisfactory answer. Clearly, there are the financial benefits of working in the world's second largest economy. However, as anyone who's visited the country can testify, Japan is anything but cheap. Tokyo and Osaka have come first and second respectively in the world's most expensive cities list for 12 years in a row. Indeed, during the height of the 1980s boom, real estate prices soared so much that Tokyo alone was worth more than the whole of the United States!

But it wasn't *just* the allure of Yen that attracted me. If that were the case I would have made a beeline for Saudi Arabia where teaching can be even more lucrative. Like many guys, I have a fascination with gadgets. If you're in the market for electronics and new technology look no further. This is the land where toilets have built-in speakers to hide your sound effects. And the fun doesn't stop with fancy digital cameras either. This July Osaka hosted Robocup, an event that "aims to develop a team of fully autonomous humanoid robots that can win against the human world soccer champion team". No prizes for guessing what country pioneered the idea. Manchester United watch out!

I'm now a second year Osaka city ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) programme. The programme which is run by the government has a very good reputation and after being here for over a year I can see why. Like everything in Japan, its operation is very smooth. Over my year I've taught at no less than eight elementary schools and one senior high school, all public. The only requirements are to be under 40 years old, hold a degree in any discipline, and have an eagerness to experience a different culture. After a lengthy application process by the Japanese embassy in Dublin, I finally arrived at the Tokyo orientation in July 2004.

Teaching elementary students especially can be full of surprises. "Kancho", where students make their hands into the shape of a gun and then launch their index fingers up the teacher's bum, takes some getting used to! I once got brought to the school gym and was asked to teach 120 children at the same time. You quickly lose all inhibitions and singing "Head, shoulders, knees and toes" becomes second nature. Being *genki* (lively) is the key to success here. I try to think of myself less as a teacher and more as an educational clown.

However, the biggest surprise of the year had nothing to do with teaching at all. As clichéd as it sounds, you'll never forget your first earthquake! Everyone knows of course that Japan is one of the most quake-prone countries in the world. Even still, it's not exactly something you're expecting to happen. I was at a friend's party on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor of my building when I experienced my first earthquake. Being so high up the apartment continued to sway for a few minutes after the initial shock. A few hours later, the party was over and I was lying on my futon asleep. I woke up suddenly to the terrifying sensation of a being shaken by the floor. This second

quake was much stronger and in the dark I scrambled for the safety of the kitchen table. No sooner was I under however and it had passed. Not long after I started having earthquake nightmares. There are plenty of things I'm going to miss about Japan when I return to Ireland.

Seismic activity will not be one of them.

### **Postcards from Abroad**

Here's a photo from our very popular former committee member Shinobu. She is now in the US and this photo was taken in Leavenworth, Washington, alleged home to Bigfoot! Here homepage is [www.homefiresbakery.com](http://www.homefiresbakery.com) for those of you that want to keep up to date on what she's doing.



### **That's it!**

Short and sweet this month. Thanks again to Fiona for all her hard work organising Momoi. I'm sure you're all looking forward to Gallery Night and The Christmas party. If you're looking for that perfect gift you can't go wrong with a stylish IOC T-shirt. Available to purchase at the meetings for a very attractive price.