

Adventure to Aomori via a new route



With another man also hitchhiking! His partner with him took the photo



The red line shows the route to Hirosaki
I took this trip. The blue line is my
normal route.

In order to save a bit more money, rather than take a train from Niigata city to Murakami, I decided to take that train only as far as Shibata. This placed me directly on Route 7 rather than Route 345 on the Sea of Japan. The last two times hitchhiking on Route 345, I had to wait over an hour to catch the first ride. I thought perhaps my chances would be better on Route 7.

The first driver was a professional cook. He took me only as far as Tainai City, a few kilometers down the road.

The second driver was a lady who saw my sign (I often hold up A4 size signs in Japanese showing my destination) which shown my next destination as Murakami city. But she was going only as far as the entrance of Murakami and dropped me off at a place I had rather not have gotten off at.

The day was a traffic and pedestrian safety campaign day of the Niigata police department. There were many traffic cops visible. One policeman saw me hitchhiking and told me it was dangerous to stand where I stood on the road. It wasn't just any road, but a major national highway he said! But there was plenty of room on the side of the road for cars to stop. I didn't feel any danger in the least. Nevertheless the policeman took down all my personal information and let me go after advising me to take a train!



Hiroaki Abe, the truck driver who
took me to Tsuruoka City in
Yamagata Prefecture.

Now I felt I was in a yet more difficult situation. I prayed I wouldn't see the same policeman again and get a ride quickly. After walking up the road a couple more traffic lights after only a few minutes I saw a man walking up to me. His name was Hiroaki Abe and he offered to take me as far as Tsuruoka City in his truck! It's not common that truck drivers pick me up these days. Mr. Abe is a very friendly guy. We had constant conversation and he even became my Facebook friend!



Pedro who took me from Tsuruoka to
Shiwa SA in Iwate Prefecture

At Tsuruoka after a relatively short wait, an older man saw my Sakata sign and offered to take me there. His Christian name is Pedro and is one of the few Japanese I've met with some Christian background. When he said he was going all the way to Morioka city in Iwate Prefecture, I decided to go with him rather than go only 20 kilometers further with him to Sakata. The route to Iwate took me on roads crossing Yamagata Prefecture that I've never been on before. And it took me to roads and places such as Shinjo, Yokote and Yuzawa, cities I haven't been to in over 30 years. Pedro took me to Shiwa Service area on the Tohoku Expressway.

As you can see from the map above, going the way Pedro took me is actually a much longer route than the one I normally take via Route 7. Readers of my hitchhike adventures on this blog know that I usually take the Tohoku Expressway on my way back to Niigata, but not from Niigata to Aomori. Today was a notable exception. The reason why the Tohoku expressway is not necessarily better going north than it is going south is because the amount of traffic significantly decreases past Morioka City. But because Pedro was going so far, I applied another principle I learned in hitchhiking: *The closer I can get to my destination in a single ride, the better!*

I was now at the Shiwa Service area just before Morioka, but after an hour wait I still couldn't find a driver going past Morioka! I could have saved that hour wait by going all the way to Morioka with Pedro. As it turned out, I accepted a ride from a lady going to Morioka with the hope that my chances would be better from Morioka. But who knows? I believe nothing happens by accident. Maybe God wanted me to meet that particular lady.

The lady dropped me off just on the other side of the toll gate of the Morioka interchange. It was a good place to hitchhike because the cars are going slow at that point, but because I've often been kicked out by expressway workers from the area near the tollbooth (where normal pedestrians do not go), I usually hitchhike at the normal highway which leads to the toll booth. But the lady told me the cars would be going too fast to stop for me at that point and wanted to drop me off near the toll booth, and so I let her.



Midori and Miki who took me from
Morioka to Hirosaki in Aomori
Prefecture.

I prayed desperately to get a ride before being asked to leave the area. In only a few minutes, two ladies stopped and offered me a ride. Their names are Midori and Miki and they were on their way to Mutsu City in Aomori. Because Mutsu is on the east, they would not normally be going past Hirosaki but would take a junction that leads to Hachinohe, way out of my way. I therefore asked them to drop me off at the Iwatesan Service Area which is just before the junction that goes to Hachinohe. But the girls seemed to like to talk to me and decided to go out of their way and take me all the way to Hirosaki! This was not only more time for them, but it cost more money for the toll on the expressway. Most of the expressways in Japan are toll roads. Midori and Miki went 63 kilometers out of their way to take me to Hirosaki.

I got to Hirosaki by 6:30 p.m. about an hour later than I usually do. Perhaps I won't be taking the Tohoku Expressway route to Aomori in the future. □