

# Adventure to Kita-Karuizawa



Route from Niigata to Kita-Karuizawa

**July 17:** The purpose of this trip is to visit new friends, Brian from the UK and his Japanese wife Mieko. They spend their summers in Kita-Karuizawa near Mt. Asama in Gunma Prefecture, which is about 370 kilometers or 230 miles from my home. They first contacted me because of their interest in this blog. I had never met them face to face before. Though Kita-Karuizawa is in Gunma, I saw from the map that the surest way to get to it is to take a round about way through Nagano. I had never been to that area before. This trip took me over the 80,000 kilometer mark since keeping [records from August of 2003](#).



Mt. Asama

Hitchhiking 370 kilometers to Kita-Karuizawa in only 4 rides with very little waiting time was as good as it gets! I left home at 10:30AM and arrived at the very door of my destination a few minutes after 4PM.

The first driver was a Yamazaki Bread man. He went out of his way to take me to the expressway entrance at Sanjo.

The second driver, Mr. Tsukioka, took me to Echigo Kawaguchi which was the epicenter of the Niigata Chuetsu earthquake of October 23, 2004. This was the second time to meet Mr. Tsukioka when hitchhiking! He remembered picking me up last year at Tokamachi City.



Tokyo man who took

me to Kamisato  
from Echigo  
Kawaguchi



Brian and Mieko

Because Brian gave me the exact latitude and longitude to his house, I felt that Mr. Kubo may have turned down the wrong road and gone past it. He turned around and went back to the last intersection. I saw a man who appeared to be a foreigner walking in front of the house at the corner of the intersection and called out, "Brian!" He turned and said, "James, you made it!"

**July 18:** The next day at noon, Brian and Mieko took me to the Saku interchange of the Joushin'estu expressway. I called Mr. Kobayashi who lives in Nagano city and has a company in Chikuma city which is 54 kilometers from Saku. Mr. Kobayashi has been a good friend whom I met many times since we first met back in 2001. I was hitchhiking in Nagano and he picked me up. Mr. Kobayashi invited me to lunch and encouraged me to come as quickly as possible to Chikuma. At first he offered to pay for a train, but then realized I could arrive even quicker if I hitchhiked. I told him I would call again after getting picked up.



Young man who took me to Shiojiri  
City from Midoriko

After a 10 minutes wait at the interchange, a lady who appeared to be in her 30s, Sachie, offered me a ride as far as the Yunomaru Service area about 14 kilometers toward my destination. Sachie carries blood samples from doctor clinics to hospitals. She says she washes her hands frequently to avoid getting infected. It's possible some of the samples may even contain HIV!

A few minutes into our journey, Sachie offered to take me all the way to Chikuma after a brief stop at a hospital in Yunomaru to drop off her blood samples. Chikuma was still 39 kilometers away and it cost her another 950 yen and 40 minutes of her time to take me there! Mr. Kobayashi waited for us at the Koshoku interchange exit. He was delighted that a lady picked me up and offered to take her out to lunch with me. However Sachie declined the offer saying that she still had more work that day.

Mr. Kobayashi took me back to his office where we met an associate of his, Mr. Sano. Mr. Sano was wearing a fine gold ring. When I inquired about it, he said it is a special ring that helps blood circulation and improves health. One ring costs 1,800,000 yen or about \$19,000 US. I asked Mr. Kobayashi if he bought one and he said no.

Mr. Kobayashi knew that Mr. Sano was heading in the same direction I wanted to go, and he asked him if he would take me. Mr. Sano was glad to and said that he would take me to Akashina train station, about 80% of the way to my destination. Mr. Kobayashi then said I would not want to take the train but rather hitchhike the rest of the way. I expected that he would tell Mr. Sano how much I love to hitchhike and meet people, but instead he said I hitchhike because I have no money! I told them that's not entirely true! I had plenty of cash with me, a little over 4000 yen or about 10 times what that train fare would be. Of course I do love to save money as well as meet people.