

First all day hitchhike adventure of 2013



Route to Osaka from Niigata. Click on map to see an enlargement

On February 22nd, I hitchhiked from Niigata to Osaka, the first all day hitchhiking trip this year. My destination of Osaka is 600 kilometers from home. I wanted to get a good start and arrive early, so I took a train and a highway bus to take me as far as Ozumi Parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway. It was snowing and just above freezing. I wished I could have left the day before when it was bright and sunny.

After only a few minutes wait, a lady stopped and said she could take me as far as Yoneyama SA, a larger parking area on the expressway. She called herself brave for picking up a stranger for the first time.



Truck driver who took me from Yoneyama SA in Niigata to Amagozen in Fukui



The truck that took me to Fukui

At Yoneyama I had to wait 2 hours for the next ride! It continued to snow. In this part of Japan because temperatures do not get below freezing in the daytime, water sprinklers are used to melt the snow. This is fine for cars but people walking through it tend to get their shoes wet and their legs sprayed with water if they don't watch carefully where they are walking!

After about an hour and a half, a man who I recognized to be a truck driver walked past me, I showed him my Osaka sign but he shook his head and said he's not going to Osaka, but Himeji in Hyogo ken. From where I stood Himeji is past Osaka but his intended route would not take him through Osaka but further north and then west of it. However I knew he could take me at least 200 plus kilometers on my way before his direction changed. It was only matter if he was willing or not. I asked him if he could take me at least part way but the truck driver walked off into the rest room without replying.

I hoped he would return to where I was standing but he didn't. About 30 minutes later I spied a truck and walked up to see the license plate. It was the same truck driver I saw and he motioned for me to get in the truck! The driver was very friendly and talkative and so the time went by quickly. He took me to Amagozen Parking Area in Fukui. It was only 2'30 p.m. and the sun was shining with no snow. I was now in excellent shape!



Mr. Yokoyama who took met o
Kanda parking area in Shiga
Prefecture.

The wait in Amagozen for the next ride was quite short, only a few minutes. The driver, Mr. Yokoyama is a company president and a fluent English speaker which is quite unusually. It turned out he lived in London for a couple years, and then Helsinki Finland for a couple more. Mr. Yokoyama was on his way home to Gifu, the opposite way from Osaka on the Meishin Expressway, but his route took me Kanda parking area, a point in Shiga ken just before the expressway junction to the Meishin. From there at least half of the traffic would be going my direction to Osaka. At Kanda PA Mr. Yokoyama took me to the cafe and treated me to coffee before departing.



Hydrogen gas truck that took me to
Osaka

Immediately after Mr. Yokoyama left, a man walked past me and I showed him my Osaka sigh. He agreed to take me to Suita SA in Osaka, the exact place I needed to go! It was a tanker truck, and the tank was filled with compressed hydrogen gas! "If we have an accident could the tank explode?" I asked the driver. "Yes" he replied. "This company has a strict safety policy. They check if there is any alcohol content in my blood not only before I start, but also when I return the truck to the company."

From Suita it was just a short bus ride and a 15 minute walk to get to my friend's place. I arrived at 6:30 p.m. 11.5 hours after leaving home. Not bad. The last time I didn't arrive till after 11 p.m.!



Mikiko and her daughter Asako. They rescued me from cold and windy Tokumitsu Service area while on my way back home to Niigata