

Hitch-hike back to Niigata from Saitama



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

After waiting only a minute at the entrance of the Kan'etsu Expressway in Kawagoe, Mr. Aikawa picked me up and took me to the Takasaka Service area. This was excellent because it is in the direction toward home in Niigata. Often I get picked up by drivers going in the opposite direction, southbound toward Tokyo. I'll go with them as far as Miyoshi Service Area and then walk 20 minutes to get to the northbound area. I was making good time and knew I might be able to even stop for an hour in Tokamachi to see more friends on the way back.



Nobu



Nobu's camping car

From Takasaka, a retired man named Nobu driving a camping car took me as far as Akagi Kogen in Gunma. This was excellent because it is past Takasaki and Maebashi. Often I have to get off at Kamisato, a service area just before these two cities. Many of the drivers will go only as far as Takasaki or Maebashi. I normally reject offers from them to go only that far because I learned from experience it is difficult from those points to get back on the expressway.

Nobu lived 8 years in the USA and spoke good English. His hobby is snowboarding. He said he would travel all the way to Hokkaido in that camping car to go snowboarding. He knew of my friend in Aomori, Simon Bernard (www.hakkodapowder.com), who helped save the lives of skiers caught in an avalanche on Mt. Hakoda in 2008.



Young people heading toward a ski resort

After waiting around 30 minutes at scenic Akagi Kogen, two cars of young people passed me by but then stopped a few feet away. The driver of the second car drove back toward me in reverse and asked my destination. They were going snowboarding to a mountain resort in Shiozawa just past Yuzawa. Both cars were full of both people and luggage. The driver of the second car had to persuade the driver of the first car to take me and part of my luggage which was two cases. After a bit of negotiation he agreed.

I was glad to get to Shiozawa, but it wasn't exactly an ideal location to hitchhike from. There was too few cars in the parking area. I decided to leave the expressway parking area and walk to the regular highway, route 17. From there I knew it would be fairly easy to hitchhike further. But though route 17 was fairly close within eye shot only about half a kilometer away, I didn't see a road leading to it. I was separated by a snow covered rice field. In the summer it may be possible to walk across the banks of the rice field, but not when it is covered with a meter of snow! I had to walk a long circuitous path just to leave the expressway and then walk along a road that went somewhat parallel to route 17 hoping to get to an intersection. But there was none in sight! There was hardly any traffic along that road and the drivers of handful of cars that passed by ignored me. But God sent another angel to rescue me, a lady who at first said she wasn't going exactly the way I wanted to go but decided to take me to the highway later. I probably would have been walking close to an hour in all if she hadn't come.



People in front of a castle from
from snow!

From Shiozawa man heading to Nagaoka took me as far as Muika Machi. From there a family took me to Tokamachi. This city is famous for its deep snowfalls in the winter and it's snow festivals. I saw many well crafted snow sculptures throughout the city. The only other city in Japan where I have seen such snow sculptures is Sapporo in Hokkaido.



Mr. Saito

In Tokamachi I spent an hour with my friends Keiji and Miyoko, and then hitchhiked the remaining 100 kilometers back home – in a single car! The driver, Mr. Saito, was heading to a town right next to mine and dropped me off at a point only a few minutes walk to my house! This is nothing short of miraculous considering the distance involved and the numerous other places a

person may be heading to from that point. I walked in the door at 5:15PM, in plenty time for our Sunday evening weekly Christian fellowship meeting.