

Hitchhiking on a rainy day to Saitama



Hisami and Toshio Yamaguchi. They went out of their way to take me to Sakae PA on the Hokuriku Expressway

October 15, 2010: Today was cloudy with light showers from time to time. I needed be in the city of Kumagaya in Saitama Prefecture by 10:30AM the next day for important business. My destination was Noda city in Chiba Prefecture, about 300 kilometers from home. Noda is close to Tokyo to the northeast. From there I would make it in two trains to Kumagaya in plenty of time if I left by 8AM.

The first ride, Mr. and Mrs. Yamaguchi who were heading to Nagaoka City by regular road, went out of their way for me to take me to Sakae Parking area on the Hokuriku expressway. After waiting slightly over an hour at Sakae and getting a bit impatient, a man from the Tohoku Power Co. offered to take me to Muika Machi, nearly a 1/3 of my journey. He took me to the Muika Machi interchange.

After a few minutes it started to rain. I spotted a Jusco department store only a couple hundred meters away and walked to it. By the time I got there, it began raining pretty hard. I was glad to have shelter and eat lunch at the Jusco.

Thirty minutes later the rain stopped and I walked back to the interchange. After about 15 minutes, a Noodle shop man took me to Echigo Yuzawa, about 22 kilometers further. He looked different from most Japanese because of his long sideburns, something uncommon in Japan. There is a Parking Area called Ishiuchi about 6 kilometers before Echigo Yuzawa, but I didn't want to get off there because there were only a dozen cars parked in the area. That might have been a mistake because things did not go according to expectation at Echigo Yuzawa! Half a dozen drivers offered me rides, but they were all going back in the direction I just came from. This is just the opposite of what I experienced at the same place a couple years ago! I was heading home to

Niigata, but all the drivers where going the opposite way toward Tokyo.

After waiting over an hour, it was getting dark just a little after 5PM. I checked the train time with my cell phone's Internet connection and found a train leaving at 5:56PM. This train with its connections would get me to Noda before midnight. The station was about a 20 minute walk from the interchange and I started walking toward it going up route 17 with traffic heading to Saitama and still holding out a paper sign showing my destination in a last ditch effort to catch a ride. It paid off! A kind man who sells Japanese pastries took me as far as Shinmachi Station on the Takasaki line in Saitama Prefecture! This saved me over 2000 yen and at least an hour of time because he took the expressway which is much faster than local trains.