

October 2011 IPPS Japan Exchange.

ニュージーランド交換留学生 **Richard Beaumont**

Japan is like no other country I have visited before, and was not what I expected, though I really didn't know what to expect.

I flew in from Mumbai after biking through Bangladesh, Nepal and India. I couldn't have travelled from much further extremes. With bike in hand I arrived at Osaka where Naoki was to be meeting me, but he thought I was arriving the following day. I thought to myself as luck would have it I have my bike! Not to worry I was able to catch the high speed train to Okayama where I met Naoki.

For the first part of the exchange I was with the Ohuchi family. They grew orchids, grapes and dragon fruit. My work here included fertilizing orchids and the annual transportation of the orchids from the mountains back to the home property on the outskirts of Okayama. One of the days after I had finished fertilizing I had free time to go sightseeing on my bicycle. This was somewhat of a challenge as Mr and Mrs Ohuchi did not speak much English nor did I speak much Japanese. With a print out from google maps of the area in Japanese and the points of interest circled, I was off. This was a great way for me to see the local area and visit temples and gardens. In my brief stay it was evident that family is very important and the staff were also very much part of the family. The family house where I stayed was a traditional Japanese style house with traditional features like the low dinner table and paper walls with sliding panels.



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Mr. & Mrs. Ohuchi preparing a map for sightseeing for me



Sightseeing by bicycle



Takuyaki for dinner.



Loading the truck with Orchids



Tea break after unloading Orchids.

With a lovely bunch of grapes in hand, courtesy of Johnny, Naoki and I were off to Matsuyama to the Japanese IPPS conference. Approx 70% of Japan is covered with forest and on this trip we passed through many tunnels of the extensive network of roading infrastructure the Japanese have developed. This included the massive bridges to the Island of Matsuyama.

The first day I was in Matsuyama I was fortunate enough to have two students show me around. One of the standout sights was Matsuyama Castle, we also visited a number of gardens and temples. The conference was held at the University and was over two days. The first day was a series of lectures on IPPS related research based topics with a number of them from school students. I thought it was great to see that IPPS Japan were including school age students. Thankfully I had a copy of all the presentations in English. For my presentation I talked about Ardmore Nurseries field grown crops, and the horticultural industry in NZ. The second day was field trips, I thought T-shirt, shorts and jandals would be appropriate but everyone else was dressed in suits. The majority of the companies in the horticulture industry are small scale and family based.



Oishi Dinner with the IPPS board.



Fieldtrip day of the conference.

After the conference Akemi and I were off to Kyoto. On the way to Kyoto we visited Ritsurin garden, a beautiful Japanese garden where we had traditional Japanese tea. The next major point of interest was the bridges back to Honshu island. One of the bridges Akashi-Kaikyō Bridge has the longest central span of any suspension bridge in the world at 1,991 metres.

Akemi and I had a wonderful day in Kyoto biking around many of the beautiful streets, temples and gardens. I think bicycle is the best way to see a city and it gives you the freedom to do as you choose.

Following on from Kyoto, Akemi and I travelled on to Toyohashi, Akemi's home town. Akemi is the President of Verde, a tissue culture company. Two of the companies major crops are Sweet potato and Mandevilla, 50% of production cost is labour and 30% is electricity. At Verde they grow the plants through to the growing on line size before selling.



Akashi-Kaikyō Bridge



Verde – everyone hard at work and one Kiwi.



Akemi and her mother.

From Verde I biked to Suzuka to the Uchida Family. This was a 120km bike ride along route 1, the original connecting road between Tokyo and Osaka. It was a great ride with countless traffic lights, I think the trip would have only been about an hour shorter by car. I had a great time helping Mr Uchida with landscaping. The job that we were working on was a small project, similar to an apartment in Auckland, with it measuring 9m x 2.5m. The Japanese customer wanted low maintenance, as she did not have time to look after her garden. One of the days that we were on the job she asked for the whole front lawn to be removed and replaced with stones. Guess who's job that was to dig it out.



Landscaping – Planting an olive tree.

I was very fortunate that Mr Uchida took me to Shorinji Kempo training and a competition, and also to traditional Japanese Samurai training. This was amazing and a once in a lifetime opportunity to see as it is not for tourists and many Japanese would not have seen this before. I was delighted that Mr Uchida took me to this training venue.



Sushi at the Uchida family home.



Unloading mondo grass 7 trays at a time



Digging large field grown trees.



Tadao and I at Akatsuka Garden Co.



End of the day at container and field grown nursery.



Working with students sowing seed.



Tokyo Flower auction.

My next stop was Hamamatsu. Mr Uchida took me part way and then I biked the remainder. Here I was looked after by Hayami, he showed me around the University he lectured at and several IPSS members companies. The last stop was Tokyo which I travelled to by high speed rail and meet up with Akemi. I had a whistle wind tour of



Halloween

Tokyo but did get to go to the Tokyo flower auctions which was great to see in action.

There are many stories that I have missed but I do still remember and I'm grateful for the time everyone took to show me around and the willingness to share their knowledge was much appreciated.

In Summary the knowledge I gained is:

- Family life is very important
- Employees are treated as family
- You are never too old to work. (Age is of concern in the NZ horticultural industry but not to worry I learnt that in Japan 61% of the current agricultural workforce is over the age of 65 therefore everyone in New Zealand has plenty of years left in them yet.)
- The need to change with the times/demands (one grower previously grew ornamental plants, now produces food crops)
- Diversification to insure a consistent income all year round
- Add value to your own produce.
- Turning homogenous goods into a higher value end product.



Field grown tree – root wrapping.

Finally a big thanks to IPPS Japan and to all who hosted me. I had a wonderful time and appreciated the wonderful hospitality. Also thank you to IPPS NZ for the opportunity to visit Japan and experience horticultural practises in different businesses.



Nymphaea-Akatsuka Garden co.Ltd.

I hope this exchange continues for many years between our Countries, for it is not only an exchange in horticultural experiences but an exchange of friendship, and one that gives us greater understanding of each others cultures. Our family would be happy to host any who wish to visit New Zealand.

With thanks to all of you that make this possible.

Richard Beaumont