

June 15 Adventure from Niigata to Hirosaki



James Arendt



The scene of Route 7 near Majima station. The sign says Majima Bridge.

June 15, 2012: The day is bright and sunny with thin and wispy cirrus clouds. Again as I did the previous week, I started off from Majima station on Route 345 at 7:35 AM. This time I didn't catch the first ride till 8:25, about 50 minutes later. The driver was a cook on his way to work at a restaurant in Sasagarenagare, a spa and resort area in northern Niigata. His name is Mr. Toki., a very friendly man who was constantly smiling. It may be redundant to call him "friendly" for all who voluntary stop for me are friendly.

The only drivers who are sometimes not friendly nor talkative are the ones who reluctantly picked me because I approached them when they were parked and asked them to. For this reason, unless I'm absolutely desperate for a ride, I don't like to approach drivers sitting in their car. Most of them will only say no. The ones who do say yes are still sometimes reluctant and fearful. I would rather they come to me out of their own volition and offer me a ride. One lady who I approached actually scolded me for not taking the train! It doesn't make for a pleasant journey to have to deal with people like that.

Sasagarenagare is a 15 minute drive from Majima on lonely Route 345 with few cars. I had hoped to get a ride as far as the junction of Route 7 from where there would be more traffic going north. I walked about a 100 meters further up the road to the end of the shop and hotel area. About 40 minutes later at 9:30 a.m., a car that had just passed turned around and came back for me. The driver's name is Teru and he was on his way to Hokkaido!

Teru has been spending his retirement years traveling and camping around Japan. Though his home is in Amagasaki next to Osaka, he knows the Tohoku and Hokkaido regions very well. He goes from camp ground to camp ground. In the day he rides around the area on a folding bicycle which he carries easily in the back of his car. I suggested to Teru for him to take a free stretch of the expressway to save time, but he was no hurry to go anywhere. Teru

preferred to take the slower but scenic coastal road. He took me all the way to Akita city, a good distance of nearly 200 kilometers from Sasagarenagare! In spite of a relatively show start out of Niigata, this ride more than made up for it. I arrived Akita City at 12:30 p.m.



Maiko

At Akita City, I arranged to meet a lady who had picked me up last year, July 29. Her name is Maiko and she's a nurse care who cares for the elderly. I have friends in Akita and encouraged her to visit them. We had lunch together. After about an hour, Maiko took me to a spot on Route 7 near where she first met me. I didn't want Maiko to go too far out of her way for me. The spot where she dropped me off was heavily congested with mostly city traffic.

I had to wait 2 whole hours for the next ride! The next town of Noshiro was 50 kilometers away. Everybody ignored my sign that said "Noshiro". Finally I put it away and just stuck out my thumb. It was about 4 p.m when the next car stopped: Two men on their way to Noshiro! They took the expressway and went a bit out of their way to take me to Futatsui on Route 7 just past Noshiro.



Children walking home from school/

The next major city is Odate, about 40 kilometers further, and it was now around 5 p.m. After waiting only a minute, a man driving a rather expensive looking car saw my Odate sign and stopped. He was an interesting man, a watch retailer, whose hobby is collecting Rolex watches! He has a 40 year old daughter who is still single, a high school teacher. He said his daughter doesn't want to marry because she saw the way he treated her mother, the "teishu-kanpaku" style, meaning, the MAN is the absolute lord over the house and he expects his wife to fulfill his every whim and desire! I don't think his daughter needs to fear such treatment in marriage because the younger generation of Japanese men are not inclined to treat their wives so bossy and discourteously as their father's generation did.



Setting sun over Mr. Iwaki near
Hirosaki. Mt. Iwaki is an inactive
volcano.

It was after 6 p.m when I arrived in Odate. I walked a bit up Route 7. The next major city is Hirosaki and my destination, about 40 kilometers further. A young man stopped, a dentist by the name of Shuho. He's from Saitama but is now living in Hirakawa next to Hirosaki. Shuho graciously went a bit further

for me to take me to Hirosaki Station. From there the hotel where I spent the night was only a 20 minute walk away.