

June 10 Adventure Hitchhiking from Hirosaki to Niigata



Mr. and Mrs. Sakura in their living room

Sunday, June 10, 2012: I hitchhiked 404 kilometers (253 miles) from Aomori Prefecture to Niigata City in 9 cars. They consisted of 4 married couples, two small children, 4 single men, 2 ladies and one single couple. A highlight of this trip was visiting Mr. and Mrs. Sakurada's home in Noshiro. They picked me up when hitchhiking exactly one month before on May 6 during my previous trip back to Niigata. I also made 3 new Facebook friends.

I left the capsule hotel in Hirosaki bright and early to catch the 6:51 a.m train, the first one going to Akita Prefecture. The fare to Nagamine, 24 minutes and 3 stations down the line, was only 320 yen. Nagamine is next to Route 7, the highway toward home.

The sky was overcast and there was a light precipitation. I opened the small folding umbrella I often carry with me. Traffic on the road was sparse. Around 7:35 a.m. a middle aged couple stopped for me. They saw my Odate sign and turned around. Their destination was Odate but decided take me all the way to Higashi Noshiro, an extra distance of 80 kilometers round trip out of their way!

I sent a SMS text message to Mr. Sakurada just before I arrived, and he replied he would be waiting for me at the convenience store near the Higashi Noshiro exit of the expressway. I arrived a few minutes before him.



One of the riceburgers I had for lunch.

Mr. and Mrs. Sakuada were great hosts. They gave me a good breakfast of fish and rice balls with salad, and a lunch bag for my trip: Two rice-burgers! In the 34 some years I've lived in Japan, today was a first time ever for me to even see a rice-burger! They were delicious!

I spent about an hour at the Sakurada home. During that time a lady friend of theirs visited, a true Bible believing and Bible reading Christian who attends a small church in Noshiro. The population of Japan is said to be 1% Christian, but I would say Bible readers are probably much less, only two or three out of a thousand. Her name is Mikiko and she became my Facebook friend!



Mikiko

Mr. & Mrs Sakurada offered to take me to Akita City, 50 kilometers from Noshiro, just as they did before when I first met them. But because they had no business in Akita City that day, I didn't want to be a burden to them. I told them that the expressway entrance of Higashi Noshiro which is only a few minutes drive from their home would be fine. The time was now about 10:30 a.m.

At 11:05 a.m. a young man named Yusuke stopped for me and took me to Akita City. Yusuke is a software developer. He wanted to drop me off at the train station, but because it was a good hour drive from Noshiro and because the train would be leaving an hour later at 12:10, there wasn't quite enough time to catch it. If I had caught that train, I would have taken it 3 stops down the line to get out of town and back to Route 7. The next train was 2 hours later, too long to wait. Yusuke therefore took me to Route 7 at the point it leaves Akita City going toward Yamagata, the way to Niigata.

Though it was *not supposed* to rain in Akita that day, it did, a constant but light precipitation. I wasn't in a very good location to hitchhike. The traffic was heavy but going quite fast. I walked up the road for at least an hour in the rain holding my umbrella and pulling my luggage behind me (it has wheels). I hoped to find an intersection with a good traffic light, but there was none. I was now in a desolate area in country.

A middle age lady took pity on me and stopped. She told me she would take me to a nearby train station. I declined her offer because she wasn't going very far. Twenty or so more minutes later it began to rain harder and I still hadn't caught a ride. I regretted not accepting the lady's offer. After walking further up the road to what I thought was an intersection, I saw it was actually an overpass going over a crossroad. The shoulder of the road became narrower which made it even harder for drivers to stop. I turned around and walked back the way I had just come to where the shoulder was wider. I stopped walking and started praying while holding out my thumb, smiling and facing traffic.



Route 7 in Akita close to the Yamagata border. Mt. Chokai is in the background.

The rain continued. About 10 minutes later another lady stopped. She was going as far as Michikawa station, about 20 kilometers up the road. Progress! When we arrived at Michikawa, the rain had stopped. There was a traffic light with a push button to turn the signal red for pedestrians to cross the road. I pushed the button every time a group of cars approached me to stop the traffic. This way I get a good look at the drivers faces and see if anyone will make eye contact with me. The first person who does usually offers me a ride. It also gives the drivers more time to check me out and decide whether they want to pick me up.



Another view of Route 7 close to Yamagata

After a few minutes a middle age married couple stopped and took me to Sakata city. The husband said his ancestors are samurai. Samurai families often have records of their family tree of hundreds of years. He knew some interesting facts of history of the area, things you won't find in a school history textbook.

The stretch of Route 7 from Kisagata to Sakata passes by Mt. Chokai which sits on the boarder between Akita Prefecture and Yamagata Prefecture. The Daimyo (feudal lords who were vassals of the Shogun) of Akita and the Daimyo of Tsuruoka quarreled over which prefecture would lay claim to Mt. Chokai's summit. They took their dispute to the Tokugawa government in Tokyo. Because the Tsuruoka Daimyo was richer than the Akita Daimyo, the Tokugawa government awarded the summit to the Tsuruoka Daimyo. He was lord over the Shonai area of Yamagata Prefecture. One of the officials of the Akita Daimyo took responsibility for the failure to gain Mt. Chokai's summit for Akita, and committed seppuku, also known as hara-kiri.



Keita, my new Facebook friend.

The couple took me to the other side of Sakata from where there would be more traffic to Tsuruoka, the next big town about 30 kilometers away. Three young men averaging 26 years old saw my sign and stopped for me. They are in a network marketing business called Amway. One of them became my Facebook friend!



Mr. and Mrs. Hayasaka with their son Ryodai

The three young men dropped me off at an intersection on the Route 7 bypass. The city traffic was heavy with few cars going very far. I walked further up

the road hoping to get to a better intersection. After a few minutes, Mr. And Mrs. Hayasaka with their young son, Ryodai, stopped for me. They took me to the very edge of Tsuruoka proper, a few kilometers further up the road. The husband asked me when I hoped to returned home. "Of course, sometime this evening!" I replied. He gave me an incredulous look indicating he didn't think I would make it. It surprised me thought so considering the distance I had already come that day, 250 kilometers with only around 150 kilometers remaining. With 2 hours of summer sunlight remaining I considered it a piece of cake!



One of the tunnels of the Nihonkai Tohoku Expressway. The purpose of the blue lighting on the ceiling may be an attempt to keep the driver alert.

I walked further up the road. After only a few minutes a lady stopped and offered me a ride as far as Sanze, half way to Atsumi Onsen. She took the brand new stretch of the Nihonkai Tohoku, a section of the expressway that is still toll free.



The single couple who took me to Sanze

From Sanze on Route 7 I had to wait at least 30 minutes for the next ride. It was a young single couple who saw my Atsumi Onsen sign. The car was a station wagon with two seats in the front but none in the back. I sat down on the floor next to the back door.



Atsumi Onsen

The couple didn't go quite as far as I had hoped they would go. The end of the Nihonkai Tohoku expressway was yet a couple kilometers up the road, walking distance. I knew there would be more traffic from that point going further. It was now around 6 pm, an hour before dusk. The sky was blue with fleecy clouds, and the low sun illuminated the scenery in golden hues. I walked about 20 minutes.



Atsumi Onsen

Just before arriving to the access point of the Nihonkai Tohoku expressway, a car coming from the way I just walked stopped about half a football field distance up the road. It was a young married couple with their 5 year old daughter. They were headed home to Toyota City in Aichi Prefecture, not far from Nagoya. This was the final ride for me that day. Their route would pass directly through Niigata City! Toyota City is 580 kilometers from the point the family picked me up. It would take them 7 more hours to get home arriving round 2 a.m.!

The husband is from Tsuruoka and was visiting his parents. It was now about 6:30 p.m. He offered to take me to Niigata station from where I could catch a short train ride home, but rather than have them get off the expressway which would delay their journey by at least a half hour, I asked them to let me off at the Toyosaka Service area just inside Niigata city. Another stretch of the yet unfinished Nihonkai Tohoku expressway began at Murakami, about 70 kilometers from Niigata city. I knew the expressway ran close to and parallel with the Shinhaku train line. I wasn't sure what the closest train station was, but knew it had to be in walking distance from Toyosaka SA.

It was close to 8 p.m when we arrived Toyosaka SA. The sun had completely set. My eyesight has weakened the past year, and it's especially harder for me to see in low light conditions. The Toyosaka service area was more like a small parking area with no concession stands and only a restroom. I knew there had to be an access road to it leading to a city street, but the exit to the access road was not apparent. I walked in one direction and then another only to see the expressway on one side and dense forage on the other. I went to a lighted area in the restroom and studied the highway map, The map didn't give me enough detail to determine a direction. I then used the map / position locator feature of my cell phone. It helped me several times before when I wound up in an unknown area. Sure enough, the cell phone map showed roads leading to the service area! With renewed confidence, I walked a new direction, one toward a lighted area and saw the exit of the service area. It lead to a city road. But because it was dark, I still didn't have my bearings and was unsure of the direction to the train station. Again I pulled out the cell phone, determined my location, and walked a hundred meters in the direction I thought might be correct. I stopped and again checked my location. The map clearly showed me I had walked away from the station. I turned around and within 15 minutes found the train station. From there it was only a few hundred yen fare to home. I arrived around 9:30 p.m.

That evening I accessed my Facebook account and wrote to my 3 new Facebook friends that I had returned home safely. Mr. Hayasaka replied: "Wow, you really made it back Sunday evening as you said you would. Congratulations!" I've been in far worst situations than today and still was able to arrive to my destination thanks to the help of my "Higher Power." His name is Yeshua Hamashiach, AKA Jesus of Nazareth.

Summer Adventure Hitchhiking to Aomori City



Route 345 from Majima with my luggage in the foreground.

On June 8, 2012: I hitchhiked 402 kilometers from Majima Station in Murakami, Niigata Prefecture, to Aomori City. The drivers consisted of one elderly couple, two recently married young men, a man about my age driving a large truck carrying tons of rice, a car with 3 ladies and a man, and finally, a middle age lady who took me to the very door of my destination.

Hitchhiking from Niigata to Aomori in the summer is much easier than in the winter. I'm always in a race with the sun to catch the last ride before dark. In the summer I have 2 extra hours to work with. In the winter I often can only hitchhike as far as Odate city in Akita, 100 kilometers short of the goal.

I began hitchhiking on Route 345 which runs along the coast of the Sea of Japan. It's a rather desolate area with not much traffic. However the drivers are usually going at least 20 or more kilometers.



The first driver who picked me up. The background is Nezumigaseki in northern Niigata on the coast of the Sea of Japan.

After only a few minutes the first car stopped, an elderly couple. They took me as far as Nesumigasaki, an area with many scenic views. I thought to walk from there to a large parking area at Atsumi Onsen, a popular spa visited by many tourists. But after seeing a road sign that said Atsumi Onsen is 10

kilometers further up the road, I quit walking. I had already walked about 3 kilometers.



Motomu who took me to Akita City.

After only a few minutes after I stopped walking, a young man named Motomu who works at Kanshiwazaki Nuclear Power plant picked me up and took me all the way to Akita City, 170 kilometers further or 42% of the way toward my goal! Motomu was on his way back to his home town to visit his parents. Soon his company will transfer him to an oil rig on a small island near Australia. I asked him if his job was dangerous, "Yes," he replied. But at least he'll be able to take his wife with him.

Motomu dropped me off at Route 7 in the center of Akita city. The traffic there was very heavy. Holding out a paper sign showing the town of my destination is ineffective in such a situation. I found it's best just to hold out a thumb and hope for a curious driver to stop and ask me where I want to go. I'm happy just to get a ride to the edge of town from where drivers will be going longer distances.



Two of the ladies in the car that took me to Oiwake just north of Akita City.

In only a few minutes a car with 4 elderly people pulled up, 3 ladies and a man. They found it strange to see a foreigner hitchhiking. It was their first time ever to pick up a hitchhiker. They took me to the Oiwake, outside of Akita city.

From Oiwake, a newly wed young man took me to Odate City, about 90 kilometers further. It was only 2:45 p.m. when we arrived!



The truck driver and his rig that took me to Aomori City.

I stood close to a Lawson's convenience store on Route 7 and held out a sign that says, "Aomori." To my surprise, a large truck stopped! It's quite rare for such a big rig to pull over to the side of the road for me. The driver said he would take me to Hirosaki city, but ended up going further than I expected and went to the Aomori city Route 7 bypass! It was now 5 p.m.

I continued to walk further up Route 7. I was now in actual walking distance

to my goal! But it was still pretty far and would have taken me 3 more hours had I walked it. The final driver was a lady who went out of her way a few kilometers to take me to the very door of my friend's house.

[Hitchhike Adventure from Hamamatsu City back to Niigata](#)



Yusuke and Noriko, the first people to pick me up.

Sunday, May 20, 2012: Today was the last day of my trip and my return to home. The challenge was to hitchhike 600 kilometers (about 400 miles), the same distance I traveled on day one of my journey, but this time I would be crossing Tokyo. It's not easy to cross Tokyo by hitchhiking, I usually take the train. Today I was successful.

After waiting a whole hour at Mikatahara PA next to Hamamatsu, a young man approached me and offered me a ride. His name is Yusuke and he was with his girlfriend, Noriko. It's not too often that young single couples pick me up; they consist of only 3% of the total.



Mt. Fuji viewed from Fujikawa Service Area

Yusuke and Noriko, both from Nagoya, were going mountain climbing that day and would be getting off the expressway at Shizuoka city. They offered to take me as far as the Fujikawa Service area. From Fujikawa there is a

magnificent view of Mt. Fuji in good weather.

After close to another hour of waiting, a truck driver from Kure City in Hiroshima Prefecture offered me a ride as far as Kawasaki which is near Tokyo! Truck drivers are only 6% of the total of people who pick me up, and a truck driver on the expressway is probably less than half that percentage. He was a friendly guy, and quite intelligent compared to many truck drivers I've ridden with. He urged me not to return home to Niigata that day but to spend the night in Tokyo so I could see the total solar eclipse the next day, Monday May 21! "I can't," I replied, "I've got to be home by evening. We have a little dog that goes crazy with loneliness when nobody is around! If I don't return home tonight, there won't be anybody home to care for her!" The truck driver replied, "You're going to miss an opportunity that happens only once in a lifetime for a dog!"



Dog riding in the back of a motorcycle at Kokuho PA in Kawasaki.

The truck driver took me to Kokuho PA in Kawasaki. I had thought to walk to a train station from there and take trains to cross Tokyo to get to the Kanetsu expressway, but changed my mind thinking I might not only save money but time if I could catch a ride to some place in Saitama. It paid off. A married couple saw my Niigata sign and offered to take me to Narimasu station on the Tobu Tojo line! Great! From Narimasu it was only a short train ride to a station near the Miyoshi service area on the Kanetsu expressway, the highway home.

From Miyoshi SA 3 more vehicles took me back to Niigata. One was a couple from Brazil. Non-Japanese who pick me up are only 2% of the total of 2407 drivers who picked me up since I've been keeping statistics from August 2003.

[Hitchhike Adventure from Osaka to Hamamatsu City](#)



Left to right: Driver
from Hiroshima
Prefecture and Mr.
Sayama, my hitchhike
partner.

May 18, 2012: Today was the second day of my trip. The main purpose was to help my friend in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, to purchase and set up a laptop PC. It's only 290 kilometers (180 miles) from Osaka to Hamamatsu, half the distance I hitchhiked the day before from Niigata to Osaka, "a piece of cake!"

It was just after 9 a.m and only few minutes after arriving to the Suita Service Area of the Meishin Expressway when a young man walked close to where I was standing. He looked at me and I guessed immediately that he also was a hitchhiker! I've met up with other people hitchhiking, but it's pretty rare, only a handful of people in thousands of times. The man, Mr. Sayama, was on his way to Yokohama, about twice the distance I needed to go that day.

When the Japanese people tell me that hitchhiking is uncommon in Japan, I tell them that's why it's so easy to do it; I have no competition! Of course I'm joking. I didn't consider Mr. Sayama a competitor, but a potential partner in my journey.



Udon noodle lunch

I told Mr. Sayama that he need not worry about me. I would give him preference in case the driver was not willing to pick up more than one passenger. It turned out that we became a team! I met the first driver who took us both to Otsu Service Area in Shiga Prefecture, and Mr. Sayama met the second driver, a man from Fukuyama Hiroshima Prefecture who took me as far as Shinshiro PA before Hamamatsu, and Mr. Sayama to Gotemba. The Hiroshima man

bought us all a nice lunch of Udon noodles.

From Shinshiro PA a man working for an IT company took me to Hamamatsu Station.

May Hitchhike Adventure to Osaka



Jackie next to his French sports car

May 17, 2012: Osaka is about 600 kilometers or 400 miles from home. I made it in a very good time, 8.5 hours in 4 vehicles spending less than \$10 that day for food and a bit of public transportation to get me started.

The first driver, Tomoshi, is an airplane mechanic serving in the Japan Self Defense Force. He's stationed in Higashi Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, very close to where the tsunami of March 11, 2011 hit. Tomoshi was on his way to Kanazawa while his wife was in labor. He was hoping to be in time for the birth of his first child! I don't know if he made it in time or not, but he sure helped me get to my destination in a good time. Kanazawa is exactly half way to Osaka from Niigata.

The last driver, Jackie, a rather affluent looking businessman who speaks good English, was driving a French sports car, a Peugeot. I showed his photo to my Japanese friends, and they all recognized the car by the symbol on the hood.

Jackie is in the insurance business, a *dealer* with insurance companies! It's not very often I get to travel in an imported vehicle speaking to the driver in English, but even rarer still, Jackie is one of those uncommon people in the world who is very knowledgeable about [who the real rulers of the world](#) are, their secret societies, and what their agenda is!

Jackie seemed to appreciate hearing what knowledge I have about the subject. He went out of his way to take me to the very area where my friend in Osaka lives.

May 6, 2012 Hitchhike Adventure: Hirosaki to Akita City



Miss Tomoko. She took
from from Nagamine to
Igarigaseki

Hirosaki was under a clear blue sky when I boarded the first train out of town at 6:54 a.m. My destination was home to Niigata and I was hoping to hitchhike all the way back from Nagamine station, just 3 train stations from Hirosaki and right on Route 7, a straight shot to Niigata. It turned out I was able to hitchhike in 5 rides only as far as Akita City. It started to rain just before car #5 and was raining heavily when I arrived in Akita City, still 270 kilometers from home. Heavy rain means the train the rest of the journey.

Car #1: A young single lady who works at Furutobe Spa. She took me as far as Igarigaseki, about half way to Odate City.

Car #2: A middle age man to Odate.

Car #3: A truck driver to Takenosu, part way to Noshiro City. I was surprised he stopped. The truck carries Home Center supplies. It's not very often for truck drivers to stop for me.



Lady who took me to
Noshiro City

Car #4: A middle age lady driving a van to Higashi Noshiro. She past me by, turned around and offered me a ride. It's not uncommon for drivers to turn around after considering for a few moments whether to pick me up. I explained to the lady some principles of my faith from the Book of Genesis. Favorite words in the Japanese language are "nature" and expressions of appreciation such as "thank you". I told her that if Genesis 1:1 is true, and we are created beings by God, shouldn't it be a part of our nature to say, "thank you" to our Creator for life and all things He created? She agreed and understood that point quite well!



Mrs. and Mr. Sakurada of Noshiro City

Car #5: Mr. And Mrs. Sakurada of Noshiro City who took me to Akita station. Mr. Sakurada loves history and he was completely turned on when I explained to him the real reason the Japanese Tokugawa government of the 16th century began to persecute Christians in Nagasaki. It was not the true Gospel of Christ that the Tokugawa government feared, it was the influence of ROME, the Roman Catholic church, the Pope and the Jesuits!! The Japanese government knew the power of Rome and what the Pope did to Europe. The Nagasaki Christians they persecuted were all Roman Catholics, people who would have their ultimate allegiance to the Pope, not to the Japanese government. Tokugawa Iemitsu feared revolt. He feared Japan would become a colony of Rome. He therefore closed Japan to foreigners, but *ESPECIALLY* to Roman Catholic countries like Portugal. He had no problem with the English or Dutch because he knew they broke off from Rome after the Protestant reformation. I told that to the driver and it was like turning on a light in his head. He immediately put together the dots and was totally amazed!

[Spring hitchhike adventure: Nagano, Osaka, Tokyo](#)



The red line shows my route from Niigata to Nagano, Osaka, Tokyo, and back to Niigata. You can see that Niigata Prefecture is neighbor to Fukushima. The damaged nuclear reactors are only 160 kilometers away from my home. I hope you do not believe the hype of extreme radiation levels that some alternative media people are broadcasting about Fukushima! (Soon to be posted on this site.) Click on the map to see more detail.



Two young men who took me from Sakae PA to Yoneyama SA in Niigata



Mr. and Mrs. Hamada of Mie Prefecture. They took me from Niigata to Midoriko PA near Shiojiri City, Nagano Prefecture.



Mr. Tanaka who took me to Osaka



Tomoko (32) who took

me to Tokyo from the
Makinohara SA in
Shizuoka Prefecture

On Wednesday, April 18th, I began another week long hitchhike adventure. This time I hitchhiked 1430 kilometers (894 miles) in 17 vehicles. Among these were only 2 trucks. The drivers and passengers consisted of 6 married couples, 1 single lady, and the rest male company employees. The total cost of the trip was about 10,000 yen or around \$78 US. About 4000 yen was used for transportation in and around Tokyo. The Kanto area of which Tokyo is the center is always more expensive than Kansai (Kyoto / Osaka / Kobe) because it's much larger and my destinations are usually from one end to the other. When in Kanto, time for me is more important than saving money by hitchhiking. It's a nice place to visit, but I'm glad I don't live there. I especially would not want to be in Tokyo in the event of a major earthquake!

My first stop was Shiojiri in Nagano Prefecture to see a dear friend, Esther who has stomach cancer. The second, Osaka to see a friend, and the third, Kanto, Tokyo and vicinity where I visited 5 different homes, fixed one PC, setup Skype on another PC, and attended an inspiring fellowship dinner with old and new friends.

Day 1, Wednesday April 18: Destination Shiojiri City, Nagano Prefecture

Car #1: An older couple who took me to Sanjo city. They stopped for me after a 30 minute wait. The wife was very talkative.

Car #2: Two young men (see photo) driving a truck on their way to Gifu. They are some kind of engineers fixing farm machinery. They dropped me off at Yoneyama SA on the Hokuriku expressway.

Car #3: Mr. and Mrs. Hamada from Mie Prefecture (see photo). They went to a spa in Niigata and stayed 3 days. The closest route to Mie Prefecture from Niigata is through Nagano and they would be passing the Midoroko Parking area! Esther's house is close enough to walk to from Midoriko! Well, it's still 4.5 kilometers and so I hitchhiked.

Car #4 An older man the 4.5 kilometers to Esther's house. I spent 3 hours with her then took a train to Chino (because it was too late to hitchhike further) and stayed a night in Tateshina and another night in Fujimi Town with friends.

Day 3, Friday April 20. Destination Osaka:

Car #5 A truck from Suwa SA to Okurogawa PA on the Chou expressway. The driver's company markets Shingen Mochi, a Japanese sweet made with rice. He gave me a box to give to friends.

Car #6 A foreign couple from Peru! It's not often I meet foreigners. Neither of them could speak English and my high school Spanish is practically non-existent. I talked mostly with the wife all in Japanese. They were going just north of Nagoya, a bit out of my way. At first I asked them to drop me off at

Enakyo SA because it is before a junction that goes south of Nagoya connecting to a faster route going to Osaka, but after 30 minutes of waiting for a ride and still nobody stopping, and because the Peru couple had stopped at Enakyo for lunch, I was able to catch them again before they left the service area and asked them to take me further to Uchitsutoge which is closer to Nagoya.

Car #7 Mr. Tanaka (see photo) to a bus stop just before Osaka! It was great to talk to Mr. Tanaka. He told me his wife is somewhat fearful every time he has to travel on business. He called her on his cell phone so I could introduce myself. I gave a Japanese New Testament to Mr. Tanaka to give to his wife and wrote a little message in the side cover for her.

Day 4, Saturday April 21. Destination Tokyo:

Car #8: The distance from Osaka to Tokyo was the longest leg of my journey, some 530 kilometers. I tried to get an early start and arrived at the Suita SA by 9 a.m. After a 30 minute wait two men on their way to Kyoto offered me a ride. One of them remarked he thought I was probably a Christian missionary of some sort. Both men were friendly and talkative. They took me to Katsuragawa Service close to Kyoto. Just before we parted, one man offered to buy me a cup of coffee but then gave me a 1000 yen bill instead! It's not often drivers offer me money. Of course I never ask them for it.

Car #9 A friendly married couple to Otsu SA in Shiga Prefecture, just past Kyoto.

Car #10 Mr. Setto on his way back home to a city near Suwa in Nagano. At first I thought to go all the way with Mr. Setto to Nagano because it's only 200 kilometers from Tokyo. But because it is on the Chou expressway and my destination is the end of the Tomei expressway, I decided to get off at the Owari Ichinomiya service area hoping for a ride toward Shizuoka on the Tomei.

Car #11 A man to Akahata PA on the Tomei expressway. It was a bit of a wait to meet him.

Car #12 Mr. and Mrs Maesada in their little car to Makinohara Service area in Shizuoka. It was such fun talking to them because they laughed often after hearing of my adventures. It could have been because I mentioned that the first driver today gave me a gift of money that Mr. Maesada pulled 3000 yen out of his wallet and handed it to me! I felt embarrassed and said I don't expect to receive money, I am thankful for just the ride, but Mr. Maesada insisted on giving it. Receiving a gift of cash from drivers twice in the same day is probably a first for me.

Car #13 Miss Tomoko (see photo) all the way to Tokyo! I had to wait a whole hour for Tomoko to come, but it was worth every minute! She was on her way back home to Saitama after surfing with a friend. Because she was going to Saitama, she would be getting off at Yoga, the end of the Tomei, which is exactly the place I would be meeting a friend. Tomoko listened attentively while I shared with her basic Bible stories from the Book of Genesis and the Gospels for the next 2.5 hours. I hope to continue to communicate with her

through Facebook.

Day 7, Tuesday April 24. Destination Niigata and home:

Car #14: Mr. Nozaki who took me to Kamisato SA from Miyoshi SA on the Kanetsu Expressway. He said I'm the first foreigner he's ever met. I hope to stay in touch with him.

Car #15: An elderly couple to Komayose PA just past Maebashi in Gunma Prefecture. The husband who drove seemed to have a hearing problem but his wife understood me better.

Car #16: A company president to Akagi Kogen. I bought lunch there, a bowl of curry rice.

Car #17: The final driver, Mr. Tanaka (the second Tanaka this trip, not related), is from Kawasaki and had an appointment in Niigata city after 5 p.m. He was the most interesting person yet to meet because though he said he is a member of Sokagakkai – a sect of Buddhism which is very aggressive in proselyting others to their cause – he did not push his religion on me at all. Instead he told me of his interest in the Bible. He likes the stories of the Old Testament, and is interested in learning more about Jesus Christ. Not only that, but Mr. Tanaka is one of those very rare Japanese who is very knowledgeable about the Freemasons, the [Bildbergers](#), the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) (CFR), [the Illuminati](#), and even the [Vatican / Jesuit connection](#)! I asked him how he came to learn about the New World Order conspiracy of world take over. He replied that he thirsts for knowledge and spends much time in bookstores buying and reading any book he thinks can help him in his journey in life.

Mr. Tanaka graciously took me all the way to my home in Niigata city. It was not really out of the way for him, but because my area is far from the expressway, the detour added at least 30 more minutes to the arrival time of his destination. He said he would still arrive in time.

Cherry blossom viewing is extremely popular among all Japanese. Families and friends often have a picnic under the cherry trees in full bloom. They sit on tarps and eat lunch and or drink rice wine. When I left Niigata on April 18th, the cherry blossoms had not yet bloomed and I wondered if I would see them this year. Nagano is a bit further south but higher elevation and the cherry blossoms hadn't bloomed there either. But both Osaka and Tokyo have already finished their cherry blossom season this year. When I returned to Niigata the following Tuesday, the cherry blossoms had bloomed and were 2 days past mid point. The blossoms last one week and at the time of this post are already nearly gone. I'll have one more opportunity to see them in Hirosaki Park this coming Sunday, April 29. Hirosaki is 400 kilometers north of Niigata.

Hitchhike adventure to Hirosaki



Couple who took me from Adatarara to Bandaisan SA on the Banetsu Expressway

March 2, 2012: It's been nearly two months since my last trip. Sometimes I wonder if getting older will discourage folks from picking me up, but this adventure proves to me otherwise. It was one of the least expensive considering the distance traveled. The round trip was 906 kilometers in 11 vehicles.

At 7:35 a.m. I began hitchhiking along route 345 from Majima station, just past Murakami. This road runs parallel to the Sea of Japan and very close to it. The day was sunny and views of the coast lovely. Only 10 minutes later a lady picked me up and took me as far as Sanboku, about 20 kilometers up the road and just before the connection to route 7, the main highway going north.

From Samboku I walked about 3.5 kilometers in 55 minutes to Fuya. There were several tunnels along the way. One was about 600 meters long, too long and dangerous to walk through seeing it had no sidewalk for pedestrians, and the traffic was medium. Adjacent to that tunnel closer to the coast was another tunnel that ran parallel to it. It was shorter and for some reason closed to traffic. I could see the end of the tunnel and hoped that there would be a road going further. I walked through it and found yet more short tunnels, all closed to traffic, and walked through them. All the way I saw no one but apparently some do walk through them because I saw footprints and bicycle tracks entering the tunnels. Finally I came back to the main highway, route 7, close to Fuya station. I walked to an intersection with a traffic signal and began hitchhiking again.

From Fuya an older man took me to Atsumi Onsen, a tourist area with a large "Michi no Eki" or parking area with shops and restaurants.

From Atsumi Onsen a mother and son took me to Tsuruoka city, about 140

kilometers from home. Often I get stuck for a while at this point, but shortly afterward a truck driver took me to Sakata city, 20 kilometers further.

I've been stuck for a while at Sakata as well. The next large city is Akita, a good 80 kilometers away. But today a man coming all the way from Osaka picked me up when seeing my Akita sign, and it turned out he was traveling all the way to a town in Aomori right next to my destination! His name is Mr. Kajiwara, and we had a great conversation the entire trip, about 4 hours. He bought me lunch and took me to Hirosaki station, actual walking distance to the hotel where I stayed that night.

Meeting a man from “the strongest country in the world”



Meeting a truck driver in Japan from Afghanistan

First hitchhike adventure of 2012 – Kobe and back via Tokyo





Ms. Mitsuko and Mr. Nakazawa who took me to the Oyabe Service area from Sanjo city

From January 4 to January 8, I traveled to Osaka, Kobe, Hamamatsu (Shizuoka Prefecture), Tokyo, and back home to Niigata in 10 cars. The actual distance hitchhiked was 1386 kilometers.

It was a snowy day when I began my journey at 8AM. My destination was Osaka, some 580 kilometers from my home in Niigata city. I had some serious doubts I would make it. Over half of my route would be the Hokuetsu Expressway that runs parallel close to the Sea of Japan, and the Sea of Japan is often stormy in the winter. It sure was that day.

I believe that where God guides, He also provides. To test that, today I didn't try to make it easier for myself by taking a short highway bus to the Sakae Parking area, but instead I hitchhiked at the Sanjo Tsubame IC. with the condition that if I was going to go to Osaka today, God would provide a good ride within the first hour or I would return home. Within 10 minutes a car pulled over and the driver said he was going to Kanazawa city in Ishikawa prefecture, just about half way to my destination! Now I knew for sure I was going to make it no matter what!

[End of year 2011 hitchhike analysis](#)



The graph shows the distances I traveled over the past 7 years in Japan by hitchhiking.



Since I've been keeping records from August 2003, the grand total of distance

traveled is 124,321 kilometers in 2338 vehicles. As you can see, I traveled a bit further this year than last. But the prognosis for 2012 will probably be less traveling. I have more work locally.

Final hitchhike adventure of 2011



Shuhei and Natsumi, (both 27) who took me to Kamisato Service area near Takasaki

December 22, 2011: I was invited to attend a meeting in Tokyo of the NPO Leap High, 300 kilometers from home. It had been raining all day yesterday and today the weather forecast predicted the same, but by 10AM it stopped raining to the point I ventured outside and walked to the highway.

Within 10 minutes I caught a ride from a man going all the way to Nagaoka city! This meant he could take me close enough to walk to Sakae Parking area on the Hokuriku expressway. This saves me the 180 bus ride from Sanjo city.

The driver, Mr. Sodeyama, is involved in a humanitarian aid project to help poor children in Nepal get an education. He goes to Nepal yearly and said he visited Mt. Everest South Base camp, elevation of 5,364 meters.

At Sakae parking area, an expressway patrolman saw me hitchhiking and warned me not to do anything that would cause somebody to phone the police. He said this was the *second time* to warn me! The first time some driver did phone the police thinking I was doing something illegal. I wasn't, but my days hitchhiking via expressway may be numbered if the highway commission decides to forbid hitchhiking at parking areas.

I waited over an hour and a half for the next ride, but it was worth the wait. The driver was on his way to Yokohama which meant he would be going

right to my *very destination* of Yoga Station on the Denentoshi Line! I hoped to be there by 5PM and arrived just after 4PM.

On Christmas Eve I hitchhiked in 2 vehicles back to Niigata. The first car, young lovers, Shuhei and Natsumi, took me to Kamisato Service area. The second car was a lady, Mrs. Itou, going to Tokamachi in Niigata and would therefore be getting off the expressway at Muika Machi. I asked Mrs. Itou if she knows my Tokamachi friends, Keiji and Miyoko and their family, and she said that she was one of the caretakers of their youngest daughter, Marin, at the Hokuetsu Preschool! I immediately phoned Keiji and told him Mrs. Itou had picked me up. He was really glad to say the least. I would have gone with Mrs. Itou to Tokamachi and visited Keiji, but he said he wouldn't be home then. Instead Mrs. Itou took me to the Muika Machi train station from where I took a train the rest of the way home. It was past 5PM and too dark to hitchhike.

Traumatic trip to Aomori city



Went the wrong way! The blue line from Nikaho City to Akita City was my intended route. The orange line going to Daizen city is the detour route the truck driver took me, 38 kilometers out of my way costing nearly an hour extra time! The end of the orange line points to Route 13 where the driver intended to drop me off. The dark green line is the Akita expressway which took me from Daizen City to Hachiryu Station. It made up for the lost time of the detour.

September 19: Today was warm, bright and sunny, a very good day to travel by hitchhiking. I was on my way to Aomori city, about 480 kilometers from my home in Niigata city. It was imperative that I reach Aomori by evening because I had to travel further the next day to Misawa city, 70 kilometers from Aomori, and be there by 10PAM to do a job assignment.

My motivation to hitchhike is not just to save money, but to make new friends. The very first driver who picked me up was a talkative lady, Miss Tsuneko, who took me to Tainai city on Route 7, about 60 kilometers from home, a very good distance for the first ride. Tsuneko is not a Christian but she is interested in helping her Christian friend find a Christian husband.

From Route 7 I walked 4 kilometers to get to the Arakawa-Tainai interchange of the Nihonkai-Tohoku Expressway. I hoped catching a ride on the expressway would speed my journey by getting a vehicle going at least as far as somewhere in Yamagata Prefecture and thereby bypassing Murakami City entirely. Expressway drivers tend to go longer distances. Moreover, traffic on Route 7 past Murakami is minimal. In times past I had to wait more than an hour in Murakami to catch a ride going any significant distance.

The 40 minute hike to the expressway bore fruit – I got an immediate ride to Atsumi Onsen in Yamagata! From Atsumi Onsen I caught 3 more cars and got as far as Nikaho City in Akita Prefecture. It was about 3PM. I hoped to catch a ride from Nikaho to Akita city. There was just enough time for me to catch the 4:30 train from Akita station which would arrive in Aomori at 8PM.

After just a few minutes wait in Nikaho, a truck stopped and the driver said he would take me to Route 13 in Akita. I assumed he meant the intersection of Route 13 and Route 7 in Akita City, but I was terribly wrong! The driver was a foreigner, a man from Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. He's lived in Japan for 18 years and spoke good Japanese, the only common language between us. The driver got off Route 7 to take a free expressway heading toward Akita City, but partway he got off the expressway at Ohuchi and took Route 105 toward Daizen city. I didn't know it at the time, but Daizen city is the new name for Omagari city. Had he said he was going to Omagari, I would have immediately asked him to let me off at Ohuchi for I knew that Omagari was way out of my way! But the name "Daizen" confused me. The driver was so positive and tried to be encouraging. "Don't worry! This road runs through the rice fields with very few stop lights and little traffic! I'll take you to Route 13 and from there you can catch a ride to Akita city which is next to Daizen! But looking at the map, I realized I made an awful mistake!

Why did I heed the driver's advice and go with him further? It could be because he is Vietnamese, and I don't ever remember meeting anyone from Vietnam before. It's always interesting to meet people from difference countries and cultures. On September 9th two young men from Nepal took me to Akita city. They corrected me when I said the founder of Buddhism was from India. "You're twice our age and know many things, and yet you didn't know that Buddha was born in our country, in Nepal!" □

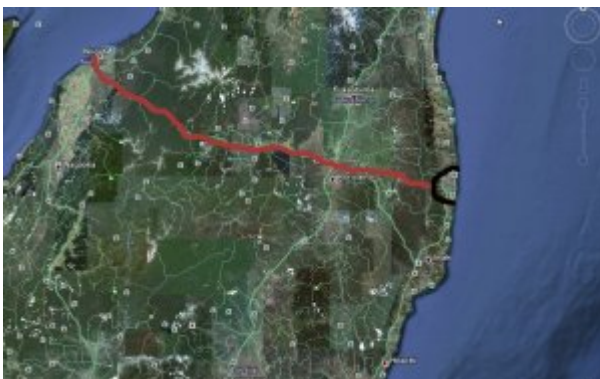
There was now no way I could arrive Akita city in time to catch the 4:35PM train. After that there was only one more train left, the one leaving Akita

station at 6:46PM which would get me to Aomori city at 10:40PM. If I missed that one too, I would be in bad trouble indeed. It would mean hitchhiking in the dark. I have hitchhiked after sunset occasionally, but it's not nearly as easy as hitchhiking during daylight hours. It's harder for drivers to see me and more dangerous at night.

I began to realize I had to stop listening to the driver and start to follow what I knew from experience to be best. Letting him take me to Route 13 was no guarantee I would make the 6:46PM train. From the map I saw the Omagari Interchange of the Akita expressway a few kilometers before Route 13. It was right on Route 105. I asked the driver to let me off at the expressway entrance, and he did so but expressed doubts I would catch a car going on it. I didn't listen to him this time, I knew catching a ride on the expressway had the potential to make up for the time I lost on the detour.

The decision to take the Akita Expressway paid off! After only a couple minutes wait, a driver stopped and took me to the Nishisenboku Service Area. I got off there because the driver was going to Akita Airport. From Nishisenboku an elderly couple took me to the train station at Hachuryu, about 30 kilometers past Akita city. Because of the speed of the expressway, I actually caught up with and past the 4:35PM train from Akita city and caught it at Hachiryu with 5 minutes to spare! It was a happy ending to an otherwise traumatic trip. God is good. ☐

[Attempt to hitchhike to the Fukushima Pacific coastline](#)



An attempt to visit the damaged nuclear power plants in Fukushima, Japan.

July 31 hitchhike adventure from Aomori city



Women's Table Tennis
Coach Ohka Iwao

July 31: I was on my way back home from Aomori city to Niigata. I decided to take the Tohoku Expressway which passes through Sendai and Fukushima and the Banetsu Expressway from Fukushima to Niigata rather than the much slower Route 7 that runs along the Sea of Japan. Though the Tohoku / Banetsu route is 125 kilometers longer, it's faster because it's expressway and because most drivers are going longer distances.

I didn't have to walk to Aomori Chuo Expressway Interchange today like I did on July 18th. An off duty taxi cab driver saw me and offered me a ride which saved me an hour. But unlike July 18th, I had to wait over twice the time I waited before, 2.5 hours, to catch the next ride.

It was sunny but not too hot. After over an hour of rejections, I decided to stand at another traffic light. Most of the cars turning right at that traffic light were going on the expressway. This way I could walk past each of the drivers hoping for positive eye contact. Most of them ignored me. Some waved their hands in the Japanese manner that means, "NO!"

Two drivers offered me rides but both were going only as far as Hirosaki, only about 8% of the distance back home. I actually got into one of the cars but after thinking about it for a few seconds I decided I needed to look for "bigger fish." I consider hitchhiking to be akin of fishing. You don't have to take the small fish even if you catch one, you can return them back. Usually it takes longer to find a big fish, but when you do catch one, it's worth the wait. This is especially true when looking for cars going an expressway. My first ride on the Tohoku expressway needed to take me at least 200 kilometers or 1/3 of the way toward home if I was to get home that day without having to resort to take a long train ride. When hitchhiking on a

regular road, I'm happy for little fish that comes along no matter how short a distance the driver is going. But today via the expressway, I had to catch a fairly "big fish."

It was indeed worth the 2.5 hour wait for I finally caught one! At 11:30 a man who was going all the way to Sendai offered me a ride. His name is Mr. Ohka Iwao and he is a head coach of women's junior table tennis and one of the representatives of all of Japan in international tournaments! Mr. Ohka took me to Chojahara Service area, the largest one before Sendai, a distance of 304 kilometers and **over half of the way home!** I now knew for sure I would make it home by evening.

It's always great to ride with educated and influential people for the conversation is usually deep and interesting. In 1973, one year after China and Japan established diplomatic relations, Mr. Ohka took his team to China to compete with Chinese teams. He said his team never won even once though he made many subsequent trips. According to Mr. Ohka, the main reason the Chinese are so strong in table tennis is because good players can gain quite a bit of wealth. There's no money in table tennis in Japan, he says. During his first visit to China, Mr. Ohka met the Chinese premier Chou En-lai and was photographed with him.

Mr. Ohka's home is in the Shichigahama area of Sendai and close to the ocean. He was in Aomori city at the time of the earthquake and tsunami of March 11th. His wife witnessed the tsunami from the window of their home! Their house is on a hill and therefore was not hit by the tsunami, but she saw all the houses below swept away. For the next 3 weeks there was no electricity in Sendai. Mr. Ohka was unsure of road conditions, so rather than return home by car he took trains and buses in a circular route to get home carrying as much food with him that he could hold.



Sachi, Masako and Nozomi at Chojahara SA.

I told Mr. Ohka that I would be fine at Chojahara Service Area. It was 3PM when we arrived and I've never experienced long waits for the next ride there. Three smiling young ladies, Sachi, Masako and Nozomi approached me and asked where I was heading. They all spoke some English (probably why they were interested in me) and said they would ask the driver of their van if he would take me. They all wanted to talk to me to practice their English. Unfortunately for both them and me, the driver said the van was too packed with luggage and there was no room for me to sit.

Almost immediately after the 3 girls left, a passing driver made eye contact with me and then stopped a few meters up the road. I walked cautiously to the vehicle not knowing for sure if the driver meant to pick me up or not. I've been wrong before. Sometimes drivers stop not far from me but with other intents in mind such as making a phone call. But this driver indicated he was stopping for me.

It was yet another sports coach, this time High School Soccer, Mr Shun. He took me as far as Kunimi SA in Fukushima Prefecture.

It was raining in Kunimi and so I decided to wait a bit hoping the rain would stop. After about 15 minutes and rain subsided and I walked out again to the parking area. After a few minutes, an older couple picked me up and took me to Adatarara Service Area. Their daughter is married to a man from the UK where she is now. I've often been picked up by parents whose son or daughter is married to a foreigner.

The Adatarara Service Area is always challenging for me. It's the closest point just before the Banetsu junction heading to Niigata, but the preponderance of the traffic is going a different direction toward the Kanto area, Tokyo and vicinity. This time in an effort to work around the problem, I held out an Aizu sign instead of the Niigata sign. The city of Aizuwakamatsu in the Aizu area is about 1/3 of the distance home from that point. I knew there were probably more cars going to Aizuwakamatsu than there would be to Niigata. This bore fruit. Within a relatively short time an older man picked me up. He took me to the Bandaisan Service Area which is just before the Aizuwakamatsu exit.

Now I was in an excellent situation indeed! The sky was clearer with no more threat of rain. A far higher percentage of cars were heading to Niigata from that point. After only a few minutes waiting, and just before sunset, a young married couple who were headed to Joetsu picked me up and took me to an expressway bus stop on the Banetsu expressway which is relatively close to home. From there it was a short 10 minute walk to the train station, and only 180 yen train ride 2 stations the rest of the way. I arrived home 8:50PM. □

Forced to hitchhike due to heavy rain



Miss Maiko who went

out of her way to
take me to Higashi
Noshiro station.

July 29: I needed to go this day to Aomori city, 470 kilometers from my home in Niigata. It was raining hard. I attempted to take the very first train out at 6:16AM but after arriving at the station was told that all trains were stopped on that particular train line. When a rainfall reaches a certain level, the railroad company cancels all trains to make time to check the tracks. Landslides due to heavy rain are not uncommon in Japan.

To make any progress at all, I need to take a different line using going a slightly different direction but which would take to me the main station of Niigata city where another train line going to Murakami city would take me further. But due to heavy rains, that train had to stop at Nakajo, about 2/3s of the way to Murakami.

I'm now in a do or die situation. It was imperative that I be in Aomori city that evening. My only recourse was to hitchhike. It continued to rain hard for the first 30 minutes after arriving to Nakajo, but then the rain subsided to the point I could walk outside with an umbrella.



Terata Kouki who took
me to Iwawa Sakura
Station in Akita
Prefecture

The day turned out to be another miracle day of hitchhiking! Six drivers took me as far as Noshiro city in Akita Prefecture. It was 5:30PM by the time I got to Noshiro, just in time to take a train the rest of the way arriving in Aomori at 8PM. Five of the six drivers went out of their way for me! One man went as far as 1 hour or about 60 kilometers to take me to Yamagata Prefecture. The last two drivers, a young man and young lady want to see me again, and they will therefore be meeting each other for the first time when they do when I pass through Akita city again next month.