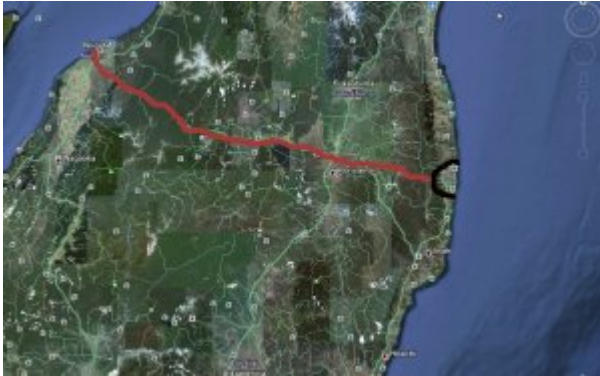


Attempt to hitchhike to the Fukushima Pacific coastline



The red line shows the route I took. The black semi-circle is roughly the no-go zone around the damaged nuclear powerplants.

August 6: Today I thought to visit the Pacific coast and take some photographs of the tsunami aftermath. Fukushima Prefecture is a neighbor to Niigata Prefecture where I live. As the crow flies it's about 185 kilometers from home to the Pacific. I hoped to hitchhike there and be back home the same day. Later I realized how unreasonable a feat that would be! I had no guarantee of a smooth ride back.



Mr. Inamura who drove me 330 kilometers



The Agano River as seen from Route 49. It overflowed its banks on July 29th due to heavy rains.

A kind lady saw me hitchhiking on a lonely mountain road not far from home. She took me as far as Aga Town on route 49, the road that goes to Fukushima. It was a hot sunny day. I saw a whirlwind blow up dust at a parking area across the street from where I stood. Later on I learned that same area was flooded with water on July 29 when torrential rains hit Niigata and Fukushima which caused the Agano river to overflow its banks.



Whirlwind creates dust cloud in parking lot.

After about a 15 minute wait, a 58 year old man driving a Toyota Prius offered me a ride. His name is Mr. Inamura and he was just out for a drive. I told Mr. Inamura that I wanted to photograph the Pacific coastline of Fukushima. He told me he would take me as far as he could. He tried to take the closest route to the Pacific coast but he didn't realize that route led directly toward the two damaged nuclear power plants! Of course, we were stopped when we got to a point at the 20-kilometer no-go zone surrounding the damaged power plants. In order to reach the coast, Mr. Inamura would have to take a circular route toward Iwaki city, and I didn't want him to go any further out of his way. I knew he would be going back to Niigata, and remembering the old adage, "A bird in the hand..." I offered to return back home with him. He agreed and said we would stop for lunch first. Mr. Inamura bought me a nice bowl of Udon noodles and we drove back home.



The signs in Japanese say, "Keep Out!"



Uncultivated rice field near the no go zone

Next time I hope to plan a bit better. □