

Another hitchhike adventure up north on a rainy day



Carrying an umbrella in one hand while riding my bicycle through heavy rain, I road 15 minutes to the local train station to catch a train just after 6 a.m. It was imperative for me to travel to the city of Aomori, 470 kilometers to the north, and I intended to take trains all the way. But upon arrival at the train station, I learned the trains were not running past Murakami City, only 60 kilometers!

I was glad that just the day before I checked the map for a new route. Hirakida station is the closest to the Arakawa-OKi expressway interchange and appeared to be close enough to walk to. When I arrived at 7'10 a.m. the rain had stopped.

It took me 50 minutes to walk to the expressway interchange but it bore fruit. Only a few minutes wait and I got a ride. Four vehicles later I got as far as the southern border of Akita Prefecture, 200 kilometers from home. By then the rain was so hard I asked the driver to take me to a train station. Happily the trains were running from that point and I made it to Aomori by 7 p.m.

Hitchhike Adventure to Tokyo – July 6-7, 2013



First driver who picked me up. He repeated to me 4 or 5 times in English, "Enjoy my life!" I'm not sure whose life he meant.



Miss Akiko Abe and friends who took me to Kamisato SA from Takasaka SA

Highlights of this trip:

- Had to wait 2 hours and 40 minutes for the first ride! But the next 2 cars picked me up relatively quick and I arrived at my destination in Tokyo (300 kilometers from Niigata) on time.
- The third and final car to Tokyo took me exactly where I wanted to go. He was headed to Yokohama which meant my destination of Yoga in Tokyo was exactly on his way.
- On the way back to Niigata the next day, after an hour wait at Takasaka SA in Saitama, the first car was Miss Aikiko Abe and her two friends. We became Facebook friends! See my [Facebook page for more photos](#).

[June 29 to July 1 2013 Hitchhike Adventure to Hirosaki, Sendai and Niigata](#)



Route 345 in Niigata Prefecture
along the Sea of Japan



Helicopter pilot Lt. Abe who took
me to Tsuruoka



Midori, Marie and Nagisa who took
me to Noshiro City.



The Shoji family who went 100
kilometers out of their way to take
me to my destination, Hirosaki.



Mr. Tateyama who rescued me from
what he deemed a dangerous place to
stand on Route 4



Dr. Masegi who took me from
Bandaisan SA on the Banetsu
expressway to Niigata City.

Highlights of this trip

- Mrs. Fujiwara, the fish market lady, picked me up for the 4th time to date. It's likely I'll see her again unless I change my route.
- A helicopter pilot, Lt. Abe who serves in the Self Defense Force took me to Tsuruoka in Yamagata Prefecture. He says he can also fly light

aircraft.

- Approached at a highway rest stop between Akita City and Noshiro by two sisters, Midori and Marie. They offered me a ride to Noshiro City.
 - Got stuck for 2 hours in Noshiro City! One possible reason is I let Midori and Marie take me further to Noshiro Minami rather than Hachiryu which is the beginning of the free expressway where it was more likely to get a ride further past Noshiro. The expressway entrance at Noshiro Minamri is narrower and harder for drivers to stop.
 - Rescued from my plight by a man who took me to Higashi Noshiro station. I approached him at a convenience store parking lot asking him where the closest train station was, and he offered me a ride. From there I walked to Higashi Noshiro IC. I knew was only 10 minutes away by foot. The next train was an hour later which meant I had plenty of time to both hitchhike and walk back to the station if I didn't catch a ride in time. But after only 10 minutes wait at Noshiro Higashi IC, I caught a ride from the Shoji family who were on their way to Kita-Aikita City. At first they said they would take me to Fatatsui just past Noshiro, but then they decided to take me all the way to my destination, Hirosaki in Amori! It was at least 100 kilometers out of their way.
 - Pioneered a new way to get out of Sendai. Took a train from Minami Sendai to Tategoshi and hitchhiked on National Route 4 which leads to the Shiroishi interchange of the Tohoku Expressway. Mr. Tateyama took pity on me because he thought the place I was standing on Route 4 was too dangerous. It was indeed narrow and hard for cars to stop.
 - Got a ride on Route 4 by an elementary school teacher on his way to Aizu, the very direction I needed to go. Moreover, he took the expressway from Shiorishi which saved me the time I would have needed to hitchhike there.
- Dr. Masegi, a professor at a university in Niigata, took me back home to Niigata city. One of his hobbies is wind-surfing.

[June 21-23 Hitchhike Adventure to Hirosaki](#)





Young man who took me back home.

June 21st is my birthday but I had to celebrate it on the road traveling. The Sea of Japan was a bit choppier than last week with an overcast sky.

The first car was a mother and her son on the way to Yunohama in Tsuruoka city. Because Yunohama is on the coast and away from the main National Route 7, I debated going with them all the way. However because the map showed me the coastal road that passes through Yunohama was more direct to my destination, I decided to pioneer it. I regreted my decision after a few minutes of arrival. The traffic was sparse. I walked up the road a couple kilometers to get past the village and 40 some minutes later caught a ride from a man going to Sakata City.

Unfortunately the driver's destination in Sakata did not pass close to Route 7. He told me it was a couple kilometers further and showed me a road perpendicular to the one we were on that connects to the closest point of Route 7. Instead I opted to hitchhike further straight ahead. I knew the road would eventually meet up with Route 7.

A lady saw me hitchhiking and turned around to come back for me. It turned out she is a Christian and attends a local church! It's quite rare for me to run into Japanese believers in Jesus Christ. Official statistics put the Christian population of Japan at 1%, but for sure much less than one out of a hundred drivers who pick me up are Christians.



Truck that took me from Higashi Noshiro to Odate City. You can see my luggage on the side.

At Higashi Noshiro on the road leading to an expressway, a large truck stopped for me. It's not common for truck drivers to offer me a ride these days. Only 6% of the vehicles are trucks, and probably less the type of trucks you see in the photo.

The truck driver took me to the center of Odate City and pointed out the road I needed to continue on to Aomori. My favorite hitchhike spot in this city was around 5 kilometers further, too far to walk. I saw a Lawson convenience store a hundred meters further and walked up to it so I could use the store's free WIFI to connect my Google Android to the Internet and see a map. In the process of doing so, a young man approached me and asked where I want to go. He said he would take me to Odate Station. I went with him not because I intended to get on a train, but because the station was on my way. From there I walked a couple kilometers further to my usual spot in Odate. A few minutes later a man picked me up and took me exactly where I wanted to go in Hirosaki.

The return to Niigata



Mother and her 7 year old daughter,
Chiehiro.

Two days later I headed back home, this time intending to take the Tohoku Expressway which runs through Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures.

The first car was a mother and her 7 year old daughter who were on their way to a children's marathon. They took me to the Hirosaki / Owani Tohoku Expressway interchange.



Mr and Mrs. Miyamoto who took me to
Iwatesan Service Area.

The second car was a young couple on their way to Morioka. They are shop owners dealing in antique furniture. I hope to see them again when I return to Hirosaki next Saturday for their shop is quite near where I have my business.

The next driver was on his way to Sendai, a very good distance toward home, over 150 kilometers further. I asked him to take me to Chojahara Service area. We expected to arrive by noon but due to a big accident on the expressway, the road was closed from Maesawa to Ichinoseki. A large truck had overturned which affected traffic in both directions. It took us some 40 minutes to travel only a few kilometers on Route 4 which runs parallel to the Tohoku Expressway. Sunday traffic was congested.

Though I arrived at Chojahara later than expected, the next car more than made up for it. I caught a driver from Hachinohe going all the way to Niigata! This is possibly a first for me. Usually from that point it takes 2 or 3 more cars to get me home.

[June 14-15 Hitchhike Adventures to Aomori and back](#)



This trip I broke the 150,000 kilometer mark of distance traveled by hitchhiking since keeping statistics from August of 2005.

After only a few minutes wait at my usual spot near Majima Station at Murakami City, a man driving a large van stopped for me. He lives in Osaka but is originally from Okinawa. Some of my readers may not know that Okinawa used to be part of what is known as "Ryukyu Okoku" or the Kingdom of Ryukyu. The peoples of Okinawa the many islands of Ryukyu are ethnically different from the Japanese. They have their own language and culture but have accepted Japanese rule over them. The driver told me there is no such word as "pitiable" in the Okinawan language because everybody equally in Okinawa has toils and troubles in life!□

We stopped frequently along the way to take photos. The man was in no hurry to get anywhere and drove the longer scenic route along the seacoast. I worried a bit that it might take longer to go with him and considered getting off if he veered too far from the main route. But because of previous experiences waiting up to an hour for the next ride, I figured a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. We basically stayed not too far from Route 7 and though we even stopped to have lunch at a noodle shop, we arrived in Akita city around 1 p.m. Sometimes I don't get to Akita till after 2 p.m. From Murakami to Akita City is a considerable distance of 210 kilometers. That's very good for a single ride on regular roads.



The noodle shop the driver treated me to lunch.



The driver and his treat

On the way we noticed the Sea of Japan was unusually calm! I've never seen it such. On most days it's choppy and windy. It was a windless day.



The Sea of Japan near the border of Niigata and Yamagata



Couple on their way to Sapporo who took me to Aomori City from Odate.

The 4th and last car took me from Odate City in Akita Ken all the way to my destination of Aomori city, a good 80 some kilometers. I was surprised to learn the driver, a software developer, was only 23 years old but his wife is 48! I asked her age after asking his because I couldn't see her face clearly while sitting in the back seat and had no idea she was that old! But she didn't seem to mind. Because she asked permission to take my photo when getting off I was emboldened to ask permission for theirs.

On the way back to Niigata the next day, I arrived at the Tohoku Expressway IC at Hirosaki at 12:30 p.m. which is rather late. But in only 3 rides I got as far as Adatara S.A. which is just before the Koriyama junction of the Tohoku – Banetsu expressways. The Banetsu takes me home to Niigata, about 137 kilometers away.

After a relatively short wait I caught a ride with a family on their way to Aizuwakamatsu. The husband was driving quite fast while I engaged in lively conversation with him. The distance to the junction from Adatara is only 7.3 kilometers (distance learned at the time of this post) and because of the speed we were traveling, after 5 minutes I wondered why we hadn't made the turn on the junction yet. I asked the driver but he replied, "It's 20 kilometers further up the road." I accepted his word but when after 10 more minutes we *still* hadn't made the turn on the junction I knew we had definitely missed it! It was raining hard, visibility was poorer, and the driver had his navigation turned off! He acknowledged that I was correct. We pulled off the Tohoku Expressway at the first exit and got back on at a further point the other direction. The mistake cost me at least 30 minutes of time and I got to the Bandaisan Service Area at 7:00 p.m.

It was almost dark but to get to Bandaisan at any time means a certain ride home. After a few minutes two ladies on their way home to Niigata picked me up. I told them of the mistake the previous driver made, but said that as a believer in the providence of my Creator, I know nothing happens by accident, it was all part of a [Divine Plan](#). If the driver didn't miss the junction I probably never would have met them. The ladies agreed with me.

Record time hitchhiking back from Aomori



This trip I hitchhiked 951 kilometers from Niigata Prefecture to Aomori Prefecture and back in 16 cars. Again the first person to pick me up in Murakami city near Majima station was Mrs. Fujiwara, a lady who buys and sells fish. It was the third time to meet her! It's highly likely we will meet again.

The return trip from Hiroshima to Niigata was via the Tohoku Expressway though Fukushima in 5 cars. A man took me directly to the train station where I park my bicycle. Fifteen minutes later I was back home at 3 p.m.! This is the best time ever. The previous record was 4 p.m. The distance traveled was 560 kilometers.



Steep hill close to Nezugasaki near the border of Niigata and Yamagata



Mr. Saito who took me to Atsumi Onsen in Yamagata. He looks a bit like the current Japanese Prime minister Abe.



This car was so small I had to hold my luggage on my lap!



Lady who took me from Kisarazu to Honjo City in Akita Prefecture. She's a dance teacher. Her husband passed away 2 years ago from cancer leaving her and two daughters, 1 and 5 years old.



Two men who took me to Higashi Noshiro from Akita City. The older man says he always stops for hitchhikers!



On June 9th on the way back to Niigata, a minivan of two men and 5 ladies took me from Hirosaki in Aomori Ken to Iwate. The fifth lady took the photo. Mt. Iwate is in the background.



A high school gymnastics teacher and his friend. They took me all the way from Iwate Prefecture to Kunimi Service area in Fukushima Prefecture.

May 2013 Adventure to Aomori



Mr. Yasutake Natsukasa from Fukuyama City HIroshima Prefecture. Atsumi Onsen to Tsuruoka. He's retired and travels around Japan living in his car.

From May 10 to 12 I traveled 870 kilometers from Niigata Murakami City to Aomori City and back in 22 vehicles.

The first driver, a lady, took me from Majima station to Nezegaseki near the Yamagata border line. She was on her way to help oversee a group of elementary children (which including her son) climb Mt. Nihonkoku, a small mountain of 300 meters high. From there a van took me to Atsumi Onsen, just 5 kilometers further.

At Atsumi Onsen a man on foot approached me asking if I can speak English. His name is Yasutaka Nakatsukasa, a retired businessman from Fukuyama City in Hiroshima Prefecture. He was living in his car touring the Tohoku area for a month. Yasutaka's hobby is water painting. He showed me drawings of the local scenery. He took me to Tsuruoka City which is where he had just come from that day.



View from Sakata of Mt. Chokai

From Tsuuoka a lady who attends Hawaiian dance classes took me to me to the next city of Sakata. She said she has been a widow from 17 years ago. Her husband was a policeman investigating an accident and was hit by a driver who wasn't watching where he was going! Her husband died immediately. "Was the driver arrested and put in prison? I asked. "No," the lady replied, "But he was an irresponsible man with bad eyesight who never should have had a driver's license in the first place. "



Single couple who took me from
Sakata to Omagari to Konoura

The lady dropped me off in the middle of Sataka city. I would rather have been further down the road closer to the edge of the city from where there would be less city traffic, and so I walked. After about 10 minutes I got to a bridge. It's not likely that anyone would stop for me in the middle of a bridge but a car suddenly stopped in the lane it was in. Usually a driver will pull over to the side and so I thought it rather odd. But because there was no traffic behind the car the driver was blocking anybody. It was a young single couple, Shunta and Mizuki, both 20 years old, high school dropouts on their way to Magari in Akita Prefecture, their home. They were debating with each other whether to pick me up or not. After questioning me and being satisfied with my answers, they took me to Konoura Interchange of the Akita Expressway. There are no tolls for the first 40 kilometers of that expressway which made it a good place to hitchhike to catch traffic going some distance. Expressway tolls in Japan are probably the highest in the world. It costs 7000 yen to travel 300 kilometers.

A car transport lorry took me to Honjo City from Konoura. From Honjo another 20 year old man, Mr. Suzuki, took me as far as Akita Station, some 40 kilometers further. He's a seaman who works on a fishing vessel 10 months out of the year. Mr. Suzuki said he has to work 18 hour days for weeks on end. The only days off are when they aren't fishing. The boat goes as far as Peru in S.A. He was on his way to see his girlfriend. The pay, he said, is good, earning enough to easily save to buy a house.

I got to Akita Station just in time to catch a train going to Noshiro City, but took it only a distance of 240 yen to Oiwake Station from where I again hitchhiked. A mother and her daughter who were going to their home in Noshiro went a few kilometers out of their way for me to take me to Futsui, the end of the expressway.

It was hot and I was thirsty. Though it was fine weather in Futatui, unlike previous times standing in Futatsu, I waited a relatively long time for a ride. I decided to walk further up the road. After walking nearly a kilometer, I came close to a tunnel and knew I wouldn't be able to walk through it safely. Just then a car pulled over. It was truck driver on his way home in a regular car. He not only took me a good distance up the road to Takanosu, but he even found the next ride for me a man going all the way to Aomori city, my destination!

Photos from Aomori back to Niigata



Newly wed couple to Hirosaki from
Aomori Chuo

Toru who took me from Odate City to Takanosuke in Akita Prefecture

Road sign in Takanosu.

Miss Yoshimi who took me to Yurihonjo City from Noshiro City in Akita Prefecture. She was very interested in the Biblical account of Creation and said she wants to believe and accept God's Son Jesus into her life.

A family who took me to Nezugasaki in Niigata Prefecture from Atsumi Onsen in Yamagata Prefecture

□□□□□□□□□□□□ A single couple who took me to a train station near home where I had my bicycle parked.

[Second Trip of Golden Week 2013](#) [Hitchhiking Adventures](#)



Toward the end of Golden Week, I again went to Aomori Prefecture and back. Six vehicles took me 431 kilometers to Aomori City, and 5 cars took me 632 kilometers back to Niigata via the Tohoku and Banetsu Expressways. Though I expected sunny weather, there again was slight precipitation from time to time.

Three of the drivers offered to treat me to coffee but I politely declined. I've been reading [Caffeine Blues](#) by Stephen Cherniske, M.S. and have finally woken up to the hidden dangers of the world's #1 drug! An older man who took me 300 kilometers to Fukushima handed me a can of coffee which he bought for me without asking me. I accepted it but didn't drink it. I gave it to the next driver, a lady who took me toward Aizuwakamatsu. I explained why I don't drink any caffeine containing beverages anymore, and told her that coffee is especially bad for women. "Better not drink it!" I told her. I had mixed feelings about offering her the coffee, but she told me she loves the stuff.

Hopefully it'll be her last fix.



Mr. & Mrs. Kobayashi from Amagasaki City. They took me from Murakami City in Niigata to Sakata City in Yamagata.



Lady who took me to Katagami City just past Akita City. She went a bit out of her way from me.



Satoh Maki from Toyosaki in Niigata Prefecture. She and her parents took me from Katagami City to a point close to Odate City. They were on their way to Lake Towada.



Kazumasa Hikita who took me to Hirosaki.



Family who took me to my destination in Aomori City. They went a bit out of their way for me.

May 4: Hirosaki to Aomori City

Two couples on their way to Hachinohe went a bit out of their way to take me to my destination. They work for a pharmaceutical company. I told them I stay away from all drugs, including caffeine. Drugs only treat symptoms, not the basic causes of illness. Only lifestyle changes can correct the causes. One man agreed with me but said that most people find it difficult to change their lifestyle. "We sometimes need a coach", I told him. A coach could be a loved one, a church pastor, or a professional therapist. If you ever seek professional help for personal problems such as an addiction, it's best to consult with a person who has had the same problem you have, and have

overcome it.



Setting sun over Mt. Iwaki. Cherry tree in foreground.



Mr. & Mrs. Manabe and their friends who took me back to Aomori city from Hirosaki.

May 5: Aomori City to Niigata City

Today was *supposed* to be sunny according to the weather forecast, but again there was a slight rain. I waited over 2 hours at the Aomori Chuo interchange! Though there was much traffic and a long line of cars, nearly everyone of the drivers avoided making eye contact with me. The few who offered me a ride were going only a short distance. I was hoping for the first ride to get me at least as far as Morioka City in Iwate.

Finally, a lady who spoke English said she would be going to Fukushima that evening, but she would stop at Goshogawara first to see her elderly mother. Goshogawara is a good hour out of my way. It would take at least two and a half hours for her to get back on the expressway going the direction I needed to go. Normally I would not have accepted a ride in such circumstances. But because the lady was quite fluent in English, and because I wanted to move on, I went with her. But after considering the matter further, I decided not to go with her all the way but to get off only 10 minutes later when she would arrive at Route 7 between Aomori City and Hirosaki. The point is rather desolate with little traffic.

I didn't consider myself in a good situation but within a few minutes a car stopped for me. It was a man with his Chinese wife. At first I thought the Chinese wife was deaf because she was moving her hands when trying to communicate with her husband as if she was using sign language. But I realized later she cannot speak Japanese, and he doesn't speak Chinese! Sometimes she would write down words in Chinese characters, the ones Japanese can understand. They took me to Hirosaki. I still had an opportunity to get back on the Tohoku Expressway from that point. Another option was to take Route 7 back all the way if I could catch a car going far enough.

An older couple with Tokyo license plates stopped for me. I rejoiced because I knew they would be going at least as far as Fukushima. But the driver said he may go only up to Sendai which is still a good distance. I accepted. The Golden Week traffic was heavy and there were traffic jams at the beginning of slopes and before tunnels where many drivers unconsciously slow down. The couple decided not to spend the night in Sendai after all and

therefore took me to Adatara in Fukushima. I arrived around 6:30 p.m. just before dark. From there it was a relatively short wait for the next two cars that took me home.



Ohtake Chio, daughter Noe and son Satoi. They took me from Adatara SA of the Tohoku Expressway to Bandaisan SA on the Banetsu Expressway



Mr. & Mrs. Kasiwagi and their son. Sosuke. who were on their way to Ehime Prefecture in Shikoku. They took me to Niigata City.

[2013 Golden Week Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori](#)



The Tohoku area of Northern Honshu, Japan. The red light shows my usual route to Aomori City, and the blue line shows the route I took back via the Tohoku and Banetsu Expressways. It is 130 kilometers longer than the Sea of Japan route, but potentially faster.

From April 27th to April 29th I hitchhiked 986 kilometers in 12 vehicles From Niigata to Aomori Prefecture and back. (See map) This time is the beginning of what is called "Golden Week" in Japan, a string of holidays which includes Emperor Showa's birthday.

It rained hard the night before I left but by morning, the rain had stopped in Niigata. I caught an immediate ride at my starting point on Route 345 near Majima station, the first car that came! The driver took me to Tsuruoka City in Yamagata Prefecture, a good 1.5 hour distance of about 100 kilometers. It was raining heavily when I arrived and so I sought for shelter at a store for some 30 minutes. The rain subsided by then but there were strong gusts of wind. My umbrella strained against it but survived.

The second car also came very quickly, a man who took me to Sakata City about 20 kilometers up the road. He offered me a can of coffee to drink but I politely declined. I explained to him that I quit all caffeine intake only 4 days before. I shared with him the physiological and psychological harm caffeine does to my body, things I read from "Caffeine Blues."

The final car that day was a mother and her one and a half year old daughter.



Mr. and Mrs. Kamimoto who took me from Iwate to Fukushima

The longest ride on the way back was from Iwatesan Service Area in Iwate Prefecture just before Morioka City to Adatara in Fukushima, 310 kilometers. The driver, Mr. Kamimoto and his wife were one of the sweetest couples as well. They treated me to lunch at Kunimi Service Area in Fukushima Prefecture. It turns out Mr. Kamimoto served some 34 years in the Japanese Self Defense Force! I knew from my own military experience as an Airman in the USAF that he must have rose fairly high in rank to be in the military so long, and I learned he retired as a Lt. General! I think Mr. Kamimoto must be the highest ranking officer who ever befriended me. I've only known colonels before.

The Kamimotos took me to Adatara SA which is just before the Banetsu Expressway junction. From experience I know this is the hardest point to catch a ride toward my destination of Niigata. Nearly all of the traffic is heading south toward Tokyo. However today, I got an immediate ride! A high

school science teacher and his elderly mother saw my sign and stopped for me. I asked him if he believes in evolution. "Of course!", the teacher replied. I explained why I reject it as false science. They took me to Bandaisan Service Area. At that point a good percentage of the traffic is going to Niigata.



Mr. and Mrs. Satoh who took me to Niigata City

The final ride to Niigata City was a couple from the Unification Church, Mr. and Mrs. Satoh. He's also a nuclear power plant engineer at the power plant at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, the largest nuclear power plant in the world. We talked about his job for a while, and then he switched to biblical doctrinal matters. For some reason, these dear people do not think that Jesus' death on the Cross of Calvary was necessary or good! They think that Jesus failed! I told them Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, and His blood shed on the cross cleans us from all sin.

Colossians 1:20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Adventures in Kanto



Shinsaku Okuchi

From March 16th to the 19th I traveled to and around the Kanto area of central Honshu in 15 vehicles, a distance of 698 kilometers. "Kanto"

literally means “Eastern Barrier” of which Tokyo is the center. Osaka is the center of “Kansai” which means “Western Barrier.” There are historical reasons for these names. You historians can correct me if I’m wrong, but if I remember correctly, only those with permission from the Tokugawa government were allowed to travel.

Besides Tokyo, Kanto also holds the prefectures of Kanagawa, Saitama, Gunma, Ibaragi, Tochigi, and Chiba. This trip I hitchhiked through everyone of them except for Kanagawa.

At the Sakae Parking area from where I always get on the Hokuriku / Kanetsu expressways, I saw a young man hitchhiking on his way to Toyama. He was standing in my favorite spot! I pulled out my Tokyo sign to show him I was also intending to hitchhike. Boy, was he surprised! His name is Shinsaku Okuchi. We took photos together. He’s now my Facebook friend.



The Kanetsu Expressway approaching
Yuzawa Ski Resort

I told Shinsaku that because our destinations differ, I would stand in a different place in the parking area. After about 15 minutes or so, I saw an older man walk up to Shinsaku and begin talking to him. It turned out the man was heading toward Tokyo and Shinsaku directed him to me. He man took me all the way to Kawagoe city in Saitama Prefecture, about 280 kilometers from home and only 10 kilometers away from my destination that day. From the Kawagoe IC it was just a short walk and two stop train ride to get to Sayama city where I spent the night with a friend.



The man with his car who took me to
Kawagoe, Saitama Prefecture.

The next day I hitchhiked 30 more kilometers to the center of Tokyo and took trains the rest of that day to three different locations. By evening I arrived at Noda City, Chiba Prefecture, very near where I used to live from 1980 – 1982. I know the place quite well. It was convenient to live there for it’s close to Route 16, the national highway which circles Tokyo.



Route 4 on the way to Oyama City

The following day I hitchhiked from Noda city to Oyama City in Tochigi

Prefecture, first on Route 16 and then up Route 4 just after Kasukabe city. This route passes through parts of Saitama and Ibaragi Prefectures on the way to Oyama. It was a very windy day with dust blowing and clouding the atmosphere. A couple times gusts of wind nearly knocked me off balance! Though routes 16 and 4 are relatively much slower than traveling on an expressway, my destination was only 56 kilometers away and I was in no hurry. It took 6 vehicles to get to Oyama city. The most interesting and sweetest people I met were a young couple from Bangladesh. They are both students at Tsukuba University. The man is working on his P.H.D in computer science, and the lady her degree in business. Though they were heading in the opposite direction and preparing to travel later that day far south to Tokushima, they turned around and went out of their way taking me approximately 15 kilometers toward my destination! And not only that, after we first parted they immediately returned insisting to take me a bit further down the road! "It is our duty," the man said. I assume they were referring to Islamic teachings. Jesus also taught His followers to go the extra mile. Do most Christians follow that teaching? Those who love Jesus, do.

The Bangladeshi man seemed to be well aware of political realities. He smiled when I told him I didn't believe in the "[left right paradigm](#)" anymore. I believe instead in the [Hegelian Dialectic](#) And I believe all political events, both good and bad, are engineered.

"In politics, nothing happens by accident. If it happens, you can bet it was planned that way." –Franklin D. Roosevelt



Couple from Bangladesh



Family to Oyama



The Kanetsu Expressway approaching
The Kanetsu Tunnel, the longest car
tunnel in Japan, 11 kilometers
long.



Man who took me to Echigo Kawaguchi
from Akagi Kougen in Gunma



Yuzawa Ski Resort



View from Akagi Kougen

The next day I hitchhiked back to Niigata in 6 vehicles. The final car was an off duty policeman. We talked about how low crime is in Japan compared to other countries. One reason is Japan doesn't have much of a drug problem. There are some burglaries but low compared to America or the U.K. The greatest amount of theft is bicycle theft! The culprits are often teenagers and drunken businessman on their way home after getting off the train and seeing an unlocked bicycle near the train station.



Mountains bordering Niigata and Gunma

[First all day hitchhike adventure of 2013](#)



Route to Osaka from Niigata. Click on map to see an enlargement

On February 22nd, I hitchhiked from Niigata to Osaka, the first all day hitchhiking trip this year. My destination of Osaka is 600 kilometers from home. I wanted to get a good start and arrive early, so I took a train and a highway bus to take me as far as Ozumi Parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway. It was snowing and just above freezing. I wished I could have left the day before when it was bright and sunny.

After only a few minutes wait, a lady stopped and said she could take me as

far as Yoneyama SA, a larger parking area on the expressway. She called herself brave for picking up a stranger for the first time.



Truck driver who took me from
Yoneyama SA in Niigata to Amagozen
in Fukui



The truck that took me to Fukui

At Yoneyama I had to wait 2 hours for the next ride! It continued to snow. In this part of Japan because temperatures do not get below freezing in the daytime, water sprinklers are used to melt the snow. This is fine for cars but people walking through it tend to get their shoes wet and their legs sprayed with water if they don't watch carefully where they are walking!

After about an hour and a half, a man who I recognized to be a truck driver walked past me, I showed him my Osaka sign but he shook his head and said he's not going to Osaka, but Himeji in Hyogo ken. From where I stood Himeji is past Osaka but his intended route would not take him through Osaka but further north and then west of it. However I knew he could take me at least 200 plus kilometers on my way before his direction changed. It was only matter if he was willing or not. I asked him if he could take me at least part way but the truck driver walked off into the rest room without replying.

I hoped he would return to where I was standing but he didn't. About 30 minutes later I spied a truck and walked up to see the license plate. It was the same truck driver I saw and he motioned for me to get in the truck! The driver was very friendly and talkative and so the time went by quickly. He took me to Amagozen Parking Area in Fukui. It was only 2'30 p.m. and the sun was shining with no snow. I was now in excellent shape!



Mr. Yokoyama who took met o
Kanda parking area in Shiga
Prefecture.

The wait in Amagozen for the next ride was quite short, only a few minutes. The driver, Mr. Yokoyama is a company president and a fluent English speaker which is quite unusually. It turned out he lived in London for a couple years, and then Helsinki Finland for a couple more. Mr. Yokoyama was on his way home to Gifu, the opposite way from Osaka on the Meishin Expressway, but his route took me Kanda parking area, a point in Shiga ken just before the expressway junction to the Meishin. From there at least half of the traffic would be going my direction to Osaka. At Kanda PA Mr. Yokoyama took me to the cafe and treated me to coffee before departing.



Hydrogen gas truck that took me to Osaka

Immediately after Mr. Yokoyama left, a man walked past me and I showed him my Osaka sigh. He agreed to take me to Suita SA in Osaka, the exact place I needed to go! It was a tanker truck, and the tank was filled with compressed hydrogen gas! "If we have an accident could the tank explode?" I asked the driver. "Yes" he replied. "This company has a strict safety policy. They check if there is any alcohol content in my blood not only before I start, but also when I return the truck to the company."

From Suita it was just a short bus ride and a 15 minute walk to get to my friend's place. I arrived at 6:30 p.m. 11.5 hours after leaving home. Not bad. The last time I didn't arrive till after 11 p.m.!



Mikiko and her daughter Asako. They rescued me from cold and windy Tokumitsu Service area while on my way back home to Niigata

[Year 2012 Hitchhike Distance Chart](#)



The chart shows the distance travelled by hitch hiking in Japan from 2005 to 2012.

The final trip of the year was to Tokyo on December 26, an unusually cold day with icy streets. It took twice as long as normal to get to the Sakae Parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway, and 3 hours to catch the next ride! I was about to quit when an elementary school teacher from Murakami city came and rescued me.



As you can see, year 2012, was slightly lower than 2010. The distances are in kilometers.

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
18537	11150	7487	12185	19530	15795	17558	15710

November 2012 Adventure to Aomori



Today was cloudy when I started out on my journey to Aomori city, 470 kilometers from home. I wore for the first time this season a warm overcoat. I heard it had been snowing in Aomori, the northernmost prefecture of Honshu.



Mr. Toki who previously picked me up twice.

At 8:05 a.m. after walking 25 minutes on Route 345 from Majime station, the first car of the day stopped for me. It was again Mr. Toki, a cook who picked me up twice previously!. This time I remembered to take his photo. I'll very likely see him again because he drives to work daily on that road usually the same time in the morning when I hitchhike to Aomori Prefecture.



Lady who took me to Atsumi Onsen

The next car was a lady who had picked me once before this year! That's twice in a row meeting people who had previously picked me up. She's a fish merchant who makes daily trips to Murakami City. It's highly likely to meet

her again as well. She took me to Route 7 which is the main road going to Aomori Prefecture.

After that I walked about an hour passing through 3 tunnels further up Route 7 to seek a better spot to hitchhike. At Iwasaki a lady stopped for me. She saw my sign that says, "Atsumi Onsen" and was going there. I thought she was in her 20s but she told me she has a 14 year old daughter!



Coast of Iwasaki, Niigata Prefecture on the Sea of Japan. Notice the hole in the rock which was created by erosion from the ocean.



Truck that took me to Odate City,
Akita Prefecture

Atsumi Onsen has a large "*michi no eki*" which in English means "road station", a place where cars and trucks stop to rest. I've stood there many times. Usually from Atsumi Onsen the next vehicle will take me to Tsuruoka City, about 30 kilometers further up Route 7, but this time a truck driver from Maizuru City in Kyoto Prefecture took me all the way to Odate city in AKita! He was going to Aomori Prefecture, but a different area, Mutsu City in the Shimokita peninsula, and therefore wouldn't be passing Aomori city. Though it was only 4:45 p.m. when arriving Odate city, it was already dark. And because it was also raining, I took a train the rest of the way to Aomori City.



Rainbow Bridge in Aomori City.

[Autumn Adventure to Saitama](#)



Mother with 2 year old daughter who took me from Echigo Kawaguchi in Niigata to to AkagiKogen in Gunma

It was fine weather when I started out from Niigata City at 10 a.m. My destination was Sayama City in Saitama Prefecture which is just to the north of Tokyo. The distance from home is about 280 kilometers, only half of the 560 kilometers to Osaka which I hitchhiked the previous week. I thought it would be piece of cake not only because the distance to travel was much less, but because it was a Saturday. Weekends are always easier to hitchhike. People are often traveling either to or from their home towns which means they are going further than they would be on a workday. Normally it gets easier and easier to catch rides the closer I get to my destination. Today was different!

The first driver was an architect who designs homes and buildings. I asked him if he thought that the collapse at near free fall of the World Trade Center buildings was caused by burning jet fuel melting the steel girders. "No way!" he replied. "It was done by an explosive called Termite." I said, "Do you mean Super Termite or Nano-Termite?" The man was surprised I knew of those words. He said that termite is unknowingly being used in building construction. He said Termite's chemical reaction with a combination of steel and aluminum is powerful.

The second driver was a lady, a young mother with her two young daughters, Chika (6) and Mei (3). It's so uncommon for me to be picked up with little kids in the car without the father or an adult man present. Out of 2550 vehicles since keeping records from August of 2003, the total number so far is 45 cars which is 1.67% of the total, a number higher than I thought it would be. I wanted to take their photos but she said no when I said I wanted to post it on the Internet!

The third driver, a man by the name of Hidetoshi, said he just came from Fukushima only 25 kilometers away from the damaged nuclear powerplant. His job is to restore a fossil fuel power plant not far from the damaged nuclear plant. Hedetoshi said he likes America and its freedoms. I told him my

experience of getting thrown in jail for 3 hours for passing out Gospel literature on the street at a western suburb of Chicago.

The 4th car was another mother with her child! It is possibly a first ever experience to be picked up by two mothers with little children in a single day! Ladies who pick me up are 15% of the drivers. Drivers with little children in the car are about 6% of the total number of vehicles but the father is usually present. Mothers with little children without their husbands present are possibly less than 0.01% of the total number of cars. The mother in the photo on this post has an older daughter who is 20 years old, just married and is herself about to have a baby! This is a gap of 18 years between bearing children. I asked the mother if she purposely wanted to have a 2nd child after raising one to adulthood, and she said yes! God bless her.

Her home in Fukushima near the border of Ibaragi was destroyed by the March 11, 2011 earthquake which forced her to move. She took me to Akagikogen in Gunman.

After waiting some 30 minutes at the Akagikogen service area, a highway patrol car pulled up and 4 men got out and questioned me. These guys are no police but have the power to ask me to leave. They are often followed up by police.

This time I was able to talk my way out of getting kicked out of the expressway service area! The last time I was stopped like this, they called the cops and I was escorted to a town from where I was told to catch a bus. But today I asked them if I could stand near the restroom area and ask drivers directly for a ride. After about 10 minutes of waiting and further negotiation, they got the OK from their boss. They made me promise not to step out into the street, a promise I kept.

After another 30 minutes a man offered to take me to the Takasaka service area in Saitama Prefecture. This is just short of where I wanted to get off the Kan'etsu expressway in Kawagoe! His highschool son was in the car and I spoke to him in English, something the father appreciated.

It was after 5 p.m. and dark when I arrived in Takasaka. The service area was crowded with people and cars, but everybody seemed to be in a busy mood. From experience I knew I was in a bad situation. When the service area is too crowded, nobody seems to care about the lone hitchhiker. And because it was dark, it made the situation even worse. I knew there had to be a train line within walking distance from the service area. After 20 minutes of vain efforts asking drivers for rides, I opted to leave the service area out the back way and walked the regular road toward the distant lights of a town toward the east. I knew the train line was in that direction. This paid off and in 30 minutes I arrived at the Kita Sakado train station! From there it was only 570 yen to get to Sayama city.

God is good.

Tribulated trip to Osaka



Kana and Rami (the driver) who took me from Kusatsu to Taga in Shiga Prefecture.

It's been about half a year since visiting the Kansai area of Japan. "Kansai" literally means, "Western Barrier" and consists of three main cities, Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe. You might ask, "Is there an Eastern Barrier? Yes, there is. It's called the Kanto plain with Tokyo being the main city. "Kanto" literally means "Eastern Barrier." This all has to do with Japanese history from the Samurai times of 500 years ago.



Torhu, a university student, who took me from Osaka to Kyoto

Japan is divided into political regions called *ken* in Japanese or Prefecture in English. Prefectures are similar to states of the USA or provinces in Canada. There are 5 prefectures between Niigata Prefecture and Osaka spanning a distance of 500 kilometers or 315 miles.

Thanks to expressways that go that entire distance, it's actually easier for me to make in all the way to Osaka from Niigata in one day, a distance approximately 100 kilometers further than hitchhiking to Aomori city. Now with 2 hours less daylight than in the summer, I often cannot catch the final car before dark and have to take a train the rest of the way.

I left home at 7:00 a.m. took a train to Sanjo city (25 kilometers from

home), and got to the Sakae Parking Area on the Hokuriku Expressway around 8:30 a.m. It was a warm and bright sunny day. Three cars took me to the Tokumitsu Parking area just past Kanazawa, about the half way point arriving just after 3:00 p.m. But the weather had changed and it was raining heavily! I stopped for lunch hoping the rain would subside, but it didn't. Even though I had an umbrella, I knew from experience standing near the parking area exit where cars would re-enter the expressway in the middle of the rain would get me nowhere. Drivers have rarely stopped for me in such a case. I stood under a covered area next to the parking area and walked out holding a sign that said either "Fukui" (the next Prefecture" or "Osaka" depending which way I turned the sign. Many of the vehicles had Fukui plates but everyone I asked turned me down.



Two men who took me from Kyoto to
Kusatsu Service Area in Shiga

Though I stood under the covering most of the time, my legs and left arm got wet from the rain. An hour and a half past and it began to get dark. If I was going to Aomori city, I would have stopped hitchhiking at this time and opted for the train. But in Ishikawa prefecture, I had no such recourse. I was nowhere near a train station.

I was in a desperate situation but remembering that I've been in worse gave me comfort. I prayed asking God to supply my needs – the need of a driver going to Osaka! It wasn't absolutely imperative that I arrive to my destination that evening, but I was facing an uncomfortable night if I didn't. There is no long bench to sleep on at the Tokumitsu Parking area like there was at Adatara in Fukushima Prefecture. (another story).

It gets dark early in the Japan in Autumn, Rather than stand in the parking area under heavy rain, I stood next to the entrance of the parking area's restroom and showed my A4 paper sign to all which said "Fukui" the next Prefecture on the way to Osaka. After many rejections, at 5:55 p.m. an man said,

"I'm going to Osaka, not Fukui." I turned my plastic case of A4 signs around, showed him the Osaka sign and replied, "Osaka! Yes, I want to go to Osaka! Would you take me please?"

He replied, "Sure, just wait where you are now till I have some dinner."

I replied as he left toward the restaurant in the parking area, "Don't forsake me!"

The man is a truck driver and true to his word, he took me to Osaka, and quite close to my actual destination! Because of the rain, waiting for rides and the fact the truck driver got off the expressway at Tsuruga and took the regular road along the western shore of Lake Biwa to Kyoto and Osaka, the entire trip took 16 hours.

In contrast the return trip to Niigata on Sunday took only half the time, about 8.5 hours. It was sunny weather and a weekend. Saturdays, Sundays and holidays are always better for me when hitchhiking. People on their day off are more likely to pick me up than those going to work or back. There was little waiting time. An elderly couple took me from Shizugatake in Shiga Prefecture to Nadachihama in Niigata, a good 300 kilometer distance! And I made 3 new Facebook friends!

Two Adventures through Northeast Japan



Having fun hitchhiking in northern Japan, making new friends, and saving a bucket of cash.