

We came in the usual "glad we got here alive" taxi ride to the Shinjuku Station. It is now about 11:40 PM. Tokunaga-san pointed out that we were just passing Yokogawa. There is a very big sign on top of the Castle of No Excuses, which we could see very clearly from the train.

It is about 3:40 in the morning. We get off at the station after this one that we are stopping at now. Temperature when we left was 23°, I don't know yet the temperature outside - but the windows are all heavily fogged over on this train.

4:00 AM - we switched over to another train. The first one had reclining seats in the reserved car and we could get some sleep. On this one we have another hour and a half to go - high straight-back seats. Not so sure how much sleep we can get.

Probably 30% of the people are carrying packs, some of the girls are carrying enormous packs, so wide they have to go down the aisles sideways. This station is Tatsuno.

4:50 - Komagane - the station we get off at. The temperature must be about 4 or 5°. In the station building now there are about a dozen people, all hikers with packs. No bus and no taxi right now, so we have got to wait for transportation. - Beautiful clear sky.

We got a taxi about 5:00. We'll probably have to wait until 8:00 for the ropeway to start, but the driver isn't sure. Weekdays 8:00 but Sundays sometimes earlier.

At the station I went to the WC, yes, I mean the WC.

Sky to the east is starting to get light. The first 5 or 6 km were nicely paved road, kind of narrow but paved. Now we are on

Japanese country road - narrow, gravel - and my ears are popping as we keep going up in altitude. Another kilometer or so and the road is becoming a narrow way hacked out of the side of the mountain in places. Steep switchbacks; the driver has to go back into low gear at times. This afternoon when we come back down I'm sure I'm going to see a lot of nice sharp drop-offs at the shoulder of the road. Not enough light yet - all you can see is that there is space off there.

5:35 - still going on the rough road. These roads prove that the Japanese cars are really ruggedly built. Sharp switchbacks, steep climbs, very rough and narrow. It is getting quite bright now, can see the brightly colored trees and high up above can see the mountain peak. At 5:45 we arrived at the base of the ropeway on a little flat spot.

6:20 - Sunrise has gotten to us here at the base of the ropeway. Nobody else here at all, so I guess we are going to have to wait until 8:00. It was below freezing when we got here this morning. Now the frost on the awnings is melting and dripping off as water. I took a couple of pictures from the ropeway station. The second one shows just the top peak of Mt. Hoken. Hoken means treasure sword. You can see from the picture how sharp it is and why it is called sword.

We are going up on the ropeway now at the average rate of five meters per second. They have had to cut away some rock in places to let the cars go through and in others we must be as much as 30 or 40 meters above the ground below us.

The upper end of the ropeway is another little flat spot called Senjojiki. The temperature is well below freezing in the shade here, but the sun is very bright and warm, so I stripped down to shirt only.

Took a few pictures. First one is Southern Alps with Fuji-san in the background. Second one shows heavy fog in the valley farther to the north. Third one shows a little shrine at Senjojiki plus the peak and Ken and Ishii-san.

It is now hachi ji han (8:30) when we are starting to climb up the col to the right of the peak. Nine o'clock, still going up the col. We stopped for one, maybe 2-minute, break. At the location of the hut I took some pictures, one showing the Senjo ropeway station with Ken and Ishii-san, another one from about the same place of Fuji-san, still bottomless; another one showing north with a sign saying, "this is a wild plant preserve and do not pick the flowers". The hut is in the saddle at the head of the col. We got there about 9:10. Kind of muddy but still frozen solid in the shade. Picture of Tokunaga-san looking at the sign that says, "Be careful - don't fall over the side", and in the background is Mt. Ontake. Back of the sign post gives directions, but it is not clear which way directions are for, so we will follow Ishii-san.

We left our packs at the hut and are going up to the summit now. The actual summit is a very small maybe hanjoo jiki. Picture taken by another hiker at the summit of Ken, Ishii-san and me with Yatsugatake in the background. Picture taken south showing a trail (not the one we are going to go on) that goes over all the peaks. The trail up and down from this peak has a chain for assisting the hikers through some of the spots. I'll take a picture on the way down. Picture of trail shows Utugatake in the background. The trail goes across the peak called Jusoo, which means trail. Several years ago Tokunaga-san was organizer of a hike of a dozen people that hiked all the way from Komagane over Utugatake up to Komagatake

and then on down going west to Uematsu and back to the roads again.

We are back down at the hut - it is about 10:25. On the way up from the ropeway station we saw a peculiar looking box, maybe 15x25x30 cm. It was lying in a packrack on the ground. We couldn't figure it out but later we came across four men carrying another one, so we asked. It was a thermal box in which there was a HAM radio rig they plan to set up on the mountain. These guys are just arriving now. Temperature inside the hut the thermometer says is 5°. We bought a pot of tea. Ken supplied bananas and kaki, Ishii-san manju - very luxurious lunch.

10:55. Just left the hut on our way northeast. 11:10 - after a steady but not steep climb came to a place where there is a lake during the springtime, but now just a little stream flowing through. Another five minutes down fairly steeply, crossing the brook which became a rushing brook, we started up again. Picture of red berry against blue sky - "Don't use tree for fire wood because it doesn't burn". Nana kama do. Kama is fireplace. Nana is seven. Try to burn seven times and you give up.

Trail is slabbing slowly up across the side. Many special plants have been labeled, some just with shipping tags and the name of the plant.

11:30 - Came to a much bigger lake, maybe two meters long. Beautiful clear water and cold. Another five minutes brought us to a big one, maybe 20 meters across, the lake bed is maybe 50 or 60 meters long where the lake forms in the springtime. Nobody else is here at this lake, but there are great piles of beer cans and empty bottles to show that many people have been here.

Picture from behind the little Jizoo and torii across the lake and including Komagatake. The lake is called Nogaieke. Noga means thick, maybe it's because this time of the year it is very thick - that is, almost solid sand! (Northeast of Kiso Koma)

12:30, after some more lunch and a little nap, getting sunburned, we are on our way. We have about an hour of climbing to do now. In about three minutes our trail came to a junction and we turned about 90° to the left. Very steep for 15 minutes, then we have a respite - a little down, a lot almost horizontal. Now we are going about southwest, I guess. Picture taken from ridge just as we reached it - North Alps in the distance. In the center Hodake and just to the right of that, Yaridake. Yari means spear. Another picture from the same place with Ontake in the middle with Ishii-san and Ken framing it, to the left Sanmosadake, farthest most. Pictures were taken from Umanose - horse's back. Took a picture back down at the lake with Ishii-san and Tokunaga-san, also one back down the ridge we just came up. That picture was the first one on the next roll. (I sure get panting on these climbs above 8000 or 9000 feet.)

1:40 - Here we are at the shrine. Ni sen ku hyaku go ju roku meters. Koma also means horse, made of two characters - uma and another one. This summit has two shrines, has a little building with galvanized closures, pretty much like the one on top of Monadnock. Has a pillar with bronze contour map of surrounding mountains and names all the mountains; many, many cairns and several large piles of rock make protective walls. There are many mountains of this name in Japan - they were mountains that farmers said prayers on for their very valuable horses. It is said that the snow on the top running down the cols in the springtime looked like horses.

We sat behind the rock wall in front of the fancier of the two shrines and ate some more and drank some more tea, heated on Ishii-san's stove just like it was this morning.

About 2:45 - We are getting ready to leave now. The temperature is 5°. Sun isn't quite as hot as it was. High thin clouds. We got to the hut at 3:05 and the ropeway station at 3:25, bottom of ropeway at 3:50. Bus started at 4:00. It is now about 4:30 and we are still going down. We have just passed an automobile and the bridge was narrow enough that the bus stopped with, I would guess, about 4 inches between his wheel and the edge. Couldn't really tell because although I am on that side I couldn't see. The next bridge we came to I noticed heavy truck tracks within 3 inches of the edge.

I took several pictures but with this 20-exposure film I couldn't take all that I wanted. We passed many taxis going the other way, several buses, and a very large gravel truck. No crisis yet. The bus is just about the same size as The Shoe, so as he wheels it around these sharp corners with culverts and trees and posts to duck it reminds me an awful lot of driving the Shoe down through Baxter State Park. He has a somewhat shorter turning radius than I do, fortunately, or he would never make it. Also he has a better engine and transmission combination. -- There goes a bigger gravel truck, almost as big in size as the bus. As luck would have it, we were right in a wide spot of the road when they came up.

We are now in the Hotel Kogensuō. We have a very special room. It has two sides with views. The river goes down on one side. This hotel is famous around here now because this is where the Crown Prince and Princess stayed this summer. The hotel was rebuilt

for the occasion. We have concluded that since the red carpet goes all the way from the front door to our room, and this is the best room in the hotel, that this must have been the room the Crown Prince and Princess lived in. We are not going to ask because it may spoil it!

We have just had our bath. I complained because it was only 41 or 42°. I had to stay in a long time before it began to feel hot to me - right in front of the spigot.

Even the tatami is very special in this room - gold and green edged. -- But Ishii-san made the mistake - he asked and nope, it was the room below! So our bubble has burst.

For dinner tonight we started with bee larva* boiled in honey; you've heard of seaweed, well we have some river weed**--both of those are very tasty; a cross section piece of boiled carp; tempura crabs with total spread about 3 cm - very crunchy; also tempura of shitake which is a cone of the pasania (?) mushroom. It is a mushroom that grows on the pasania tree. Ken says this is a normal dried mushroom that you purchase in Japan.

* These are wild bees living under ground and finding them is an occupation of children often. What they do is string up little tiny pieces of beef on a long thread tied between two trees or posts and cover the beef with cotton - a thin layer of absorbent cotton. The bees then get cotton caught on their legs when they come to get some of the beef and it is easy to follow them back to their nest.

** The "river weed" really was a mold that grows on logs in the woods. Guess it is quite similar to river weed, but that wasn't what we had.

We woke up to beautiful clear cloudless sky. Ate breakfast - pretty much usual breakfast except added was yamaimo, which is a long root that grows in the woods. It is finely shredded, mixed with raw egg and whipped up into a thick sort of soup. Some of the small mushrooms are added and then this is put over gohan and eaten just like raw egg over gohan.

We drove over to the Tenryu River where we are going on a boat ride. It was pretty foggy when we got down here to the river, but it is kind of clearing off now. Before they let us get into the boat we have to sign a statement, giving name and stating whether or not we can swim.

Another taxi just came up. In it was the man who sat next to Ishii-san on the train the other night and the three women who were with him. Small world! - (A government office manager and three of the office girls.)

We started about 8:50. -- In a few feet we start hitting the rapid water. Our guide, a fancy-dressed girl, has the assistance of a PA system. She is continually giving us little comments. -- As we go down we come to more and more rivers running into this one and the whole river becomes faster. Just before we come to a rapid the two oarsmen work very hard to speed us up. I'm guessing it is so we come more nearly to the speed of the water and won't get turned around by the water going faster than us. There are four boats in this particular group, the one ahead is only a hundred feet or so away. Sometimes we come pretty close to the rocks.

Our guide is also a singer.....That was a song of the river, words of which are on the back of the piece of paper we received giving instruction for behavior, like "don't stand up, don't drink,

don't offer drinks to others".

Along on the bank at one place were maybe a dozen hawks, almost as many crows. ... We just hit a rock going over one of the rapids. That noise in the background is the front oarsman. The oars are held in place by rope and the slot in the side in the side of the boat worn by the oars.

You've heard of bus stops - well, we've just come to a boat stop. A lot more people came aboard all the boats. We got two more. Our friend from the government agency who was with us on the train the other night suddenly rushed for the shore, completely open, and he reminded me a lot of the Kita-san-Yaji-san story.

We are now the last of the 4 boats. I am glad now that I brought my yellow rain jacket and the waterproof pack, because there is a fair amount of splashing comes inboard.

Every 4 kilometers we see a pole with 4 very large exponential horns and something that looks like a siren. Our guide just explained these are for alarms in flood conditions.

We've worked up to about 30 km an hour speed, I guess. We just went by a spot up on the rocks where a camera was set up on a tripod with a couple of men around. One of them called to us and waved his arm, and explained they were professional photographers taking pictures of every boat as it goes by. We will be offered an opportunity to buy prints when we get down below.

The river is about 1 meter below normal height - still fast.

Now about 10:15. We are going through a narrows - two high cliffs called Tenryukyo. It is a town with hotels built high up.

Picture of a rock, a very steep high peak called Dragon Horn Peak or Dragon Horn Rock.

10:15 - We got to the end of the trail. One picture taken as we went up from the beach and another one from the top of the Dragon Horn Lookout, then another 40 feet on higher we got to an apple orchard. Sign at the bottom said Fresh Apple Juice - in eigo. The apple juice is ichiban oishii. The apple trees are very, very thick with apples. They have an arrangement here where you pick your own apples, they weigh them and charge you for what you have. The little house, both store and home, was tended by the grandmother, running around spry as can be - 73 years old. When I showed interest, she took out a hanging that her mother had made - an outline of Fuji-san - at the age of 103 just before she died. Each one of us got a bag of apples. I said the grandmother runs around - I mean it!

The train went up along the river we just came down by boat. Just went by the bright red bridge which the guide explained had been repainted for the Prince and Princess, but the river was considered too dangerous for the ride so they didn't enjoy the special bridge painting.

12:48 - We are back to Iida which was our starting place in the boat this morning. Took a picture of threshing rice. There is a problem of rice surplus this year because of Japanese Government subsidy. Another picture of the Chuo Alps, about where we went up. You cannot see Komagatake because it is behind some other mountains.

This is a single track railroad and they have a way of avoiding collisions. Each station is double tracked and at each station the train exchanges keys. The train slows down even in stations where it doesn't stop. Each section of single track has a key

that belongs to it and a train cannot proceed on that track unless it has that key. At each station the train picks up the key for the next section of track and gives up the one for the last section. So far it has worked very successfully on this trip.

We are in the station of Suwa. At the last station there was a wedding party. Newlyweds got aboard and a large party stood outside and saw them off. Now here at Suwa same thing is happening again - this time fire-crackers, streamers, and this honeymoon couple is coming on the same car. Car was almost empty before this. Now a 3rd couple just came onto the car after the train started. This is a lucky day for weddings, according to superstition.

Shinjuko Station about 7:45. Really mobbed. Many, many people with packs on, coming back from weekend hiking.

MB:h