

## Hokkaido University, and Sapporo Japan- November, 2000

The following is a journal of a trip made (with Jack Schmid), to Japan as an invited scholar to present a keynote address at an international conference at Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan. This fortunate circumstance came about through an earlier visit from a Japanese scientist and professor, Dr. Shintaro Yokoyama who came to visit with me and local ventilation expert Phil Loudon in late December 1999, and got some data for a paper for the conference which I was ultimately invited to attend. And even more wonderful, I was offered money to cover the travel to Sapporo to give a keynote paper on our Alaskan experience.

Finally in the midst of a hectic travel month, our departure time came, and we boarded an Alaska Airlines jet for Seattle on a red-eye, flight 114, departing at 1 A.M. on the 28th of October. In order to try to be as fresh and healthy as possible on my arrival in Japan, I opted to get a hotel room at the Seattle airport for the five-hour layover we had there. Jack at first thought this wasn't necessary, but once we'd arrived and he hadn't slept well on the flight, he too thought it was a fairly reasonable plan. We both slept fairly well, and the whole experience was a blur, as I had a headache and took two Advil before crashing. But I awoke and showered in time for the 11:15 departure back to the airport, and to our first flight on American Airlines to Tokyo non-stop. I had also managed to get us very good free mileage tickets on American Airlines for only 50,000 miles each, as it is the off season and apparently they don't have the high volume of traffic in the autumn, so they lower the mileage price for flights to Asia. All the better for us.

The flight over was great, albeit tourist class, and the meal was Japanese influenced, since this was a new arrangement, a co-numbered cooperative flight with Japan Airlines. An interesting feature was a film in Japanese with English subtitles about a Samurai and his single-handed heroic cleaning up of a whole countryside district while keeping an adoring bevy of admiring women on his trail at various moments. It seems the Samurai admiration has not waned among the Japanese. Also great was an Olympics overview with marvelous moments of glory. Sydney certainly was spectacular, and Kathy (?) the aboriginal daughter of Australia gave a huge dramatic aspect to the national experience for the great show.

We landed in the foggy mist at Narita, and I feared the weather would be like this for our trip on the train, but it was not a problem. We got our money changed, got to the hotel in short order, and were in bed soon, and arose at a good hour for the buffet breakfast.

Then back to the airport for the start of another great railway journey on the fabulous trains of Japan. It took us a while to get the rail passes validated, but we did and were off to Tokyo station and Marioka before 10 AM. An hour into the trip the weather got sunny and was wonderful for the next two days. It was already Monday evening as we arrived at Aomori for the night, and wandered around trying to find a hotel. We ran into another American who had the same guidebook as we did, and was looking for the same ryokans, but had called ahead. After following him and finding the ryokans full, we found a hotel much to our liking for about 9500 yen, and took it. After settling in, we walked around this city of Aomori in the dark, a city that had been severely bombed in WWII, and was now recovering somewhat. Just as we were returning to the hotel, I made a fateful choice and bought a small deli meal at a convenience store in Aomori.

November 1, 2000 Sapporo Station Hotel, Hokkaido

After a great first two days of travel (surprisingly good!) I now know I made an extremely bad choice in buying a cold box takeout dinner at the convenience store in Aomori. The next day, (Oct. 31st: Halloween) we were to take a ferry from Aomori to Muroran, but that journey was seven hours and didn't arrive until 9 PM. So we opted for a shorter ferry ride to Hakodate. A good choice and a beautiful day for a ferry trip. But as

soon as we arrived at the ferry terminal, I felt a diarrhea attack coming on, and my worst fears were confirmed. I had several bouts and was eventually so weakened that I could only lie down nearly the entire three hours and forty-five minutes to Hakodate. Once we arrived at Hakodate, there was a \$17 cab ride to the JR rail station. Jack ate a normal box lunch there and even topped it off with a Baskin and Robbins Ice cream cone, but I had no interest whatsoever in eating, only in staying hydrated and trying to sleep. I have rarely felt so drained and exhausted.

After another three hours on the train we got to Sapporo after viewing the hardwood forest of Hokkaido for the first time in gray cloudy light, which faded in the early autumn evening. We found the hotel very convenient, right across from the railway station, and got our room with minimum hassle. After a hot shower, one of the most wantonly wonderful amenities I could ask for considering the way I felt, I could do nothing but lie down and nap for the entire evening.

But now it is morning and raining lightly, and I am much recovered, enough to actually anticipate breakfast with some optimism.

During the journey, and in the midst of my food poisoning episode, I began to reflect on my distant past and its connection with Hokkaido University, and I told some of the story to Jack. I began by explaining how I had come to apply for a Japanese government Mombusho scholarship when I was a finishing graduate student at the University of Alaska in 1972. This scholarship was, I believe, quite a new idea when I discovered in the summer of 1972. Because I was studying sea ice physics, and Japanese scientists had actually helped me in my techniques in the laboratory in Barrow Alaska, I had some wonderful contacts and a formidably strong application, which I had put together. However, when it became clear I wouldn't finish in time to start the scholarship in early 1973, I put off the application for a year, and re-submitted it in early 1973. I left the University before I finished my thesis, one of several events, which estranged me from my thesis advisor, Dr. Tom Osterkamp. In August I got a job offer to return to Alaska to work in a real job with real wages, in the place I had come to love and need. I jumped at the chance to come back to the Alaska I missed terribly, and the Mombusho scholarship slipped into the background of my emerging real life.

When I got back to Fairbanks and the University, I was pleased to sign a new contract and get on with the new life, but I kept finding various strange pieces of information cropping up with my old friend and acquaintances. Finally after several days, I suddenly put it together that the application I had made for the Mombusho was not only strong; I had apparently been *offered it!* However, for some reason which to this day I can't quite fathom, my illustrious major professor Osterkamp, had not only refused to let me know that I had been offered it, but he had turned the whole situation into something of an international incident, since he wouldn't tell me about it, but only I could refuse it, and so all was held in a very uncomfortable limbo. To add to the difficulties, it is an honor given to the major professor to receive the news of the scholarship first, as this is the tradition in Japan. So the Japanese wouldn't break out of the mold to tell me directly. All this was made clear to me by a professor at the Geophysical Institute, a Japanese speaking native of Japan, Dr. Takeshi Ohtake who had the misfortune, owing to his ability to communicate with the Japanese embassy, was right in the middle of it all, an unwitting player, very uncomfortable with all this silly intrigue and embarrassing behavior by the Alaskans. Here I was, being offered perhaps the best opportunity to build strong relations between the emerging Japanese scientific establishment *by the Japanese, no less* and I was the first Alaskan to be offered it, and now all this was stymied by a jerk of a professor who wouldn't relent and tell me about the glorious opportunity he didn't want me to have. Very perplexing and gut wrenching for all involved, but no one as much as me. I have often wondered since what would have happened if I had not come back to Alaska to resolve this issue. It could have gone unresolved for a long while, I presume.

So there I was, offered this wonderful scholarship, eighteen months expenses paid in Japan, first six months are language training, and then a year of graduate study, and my

choice would have been Hokkaido University. It was a huge crossroads in my life, and I still wonder how different or similar my life would have been if I had taken the path to study in Japan. I didn't of course. I had already signed a work contract in Alaska, before I knew the Mombusho had been offered, so I felt I'd made a commitment I should keep. But the circumstances made the decision for me and I have always felt very uneasy about that path not taken, and where it might have led.

Now twenty-seven years later, I am finally visiting Hokkaido University for the first time, and in the hugely ironic circumstance of a visiting scholar, and professor at the University of Alaska. I was about to close a circle on events that had occurred many years before, and I was very uneasy in that same strange way that I am each time I think about this crossroads I passed through so long ago.

But now, a day later, I've done it. I've walked on the campus, thought it through, and I simply feel huge relief, and am wondering now what all the fuss was about. I have simply resolved that the past is gone and I made my choice, and there is no point in wondering or questioning what that crucial test of choice in my youth meant, or could have meant.

That said and done, Hokkaido University is large, very beautiful, high quality, well-funded, and unique in Japan in a way that I would have and still do appreciate. I remarked to Jack that the campus looks like Dartmouth College, hardwoods, even some elms, fall colors, and the smell of drying dying leaves in the moist grass. It would have been a remarkable and broadening experience to have come here in 1973, and I probably could have worked my way up to a professorship here. A few Americans have done exactly that.

It is a huge city (Sapporo), consumer driven, a cool climate, and it experiences radical seasonal changes. Exciting and full of diversity in many aspects, it is still nothing close to my experiences of Alaska.

The experiences I am having with the Japanese I met are that uniquely difficult mix of being instructive and refreshing while at the same time baffling and irreconcilable with the history of Japan. The polite demeanor, the strong compulsion (almost) to be extremely helpful to foreigners when in a service role, all the body language, all this makes awareness of the Japanese history, the rape of Nanking, the obsessive drive to demonstrate racial purity, distinct from the rest of Asia, by funding intensive self-serving and highly questionable archeological and anthropological research: all this is the conundrum of modern Japan. What I see, but do not understand, even with its youthful hair dyes, 8-inch high female boots, alcohol and cigarettes, soul-deadening, and blindingly flashy consumerism, is a mystery of reckoning fascist nationalism and tribal loyalty to the individual, kind, meek, polite, honorable, and intelligent human being that the Japanese man or woman seems to be.

Last night at the banquet feast for the conference, a group of five female kotoists played and sang for the group. They were fabulous. But rudest of all, talking over the quiet, pleasant music and singing were the Japanese in the audience. They carried on loud and overbearing conversations much to the clearly demonstrated annoyance of the westerners and Europeans who wanted to listen to the musicians. Very incongruous, mostly male rudeness.

I sat next to a Swedish couple, and shared great stories with them. Jan Fahlen was the guy, a building scientist working on heat pump/storage systems for residences in Sweden. The systems he reviewed looked very promising, and could provide all sorts of very nice energy balanced options for Swedish conditions.

November 3, 2000 Sapporo

Jack and I will present today, and we are quite confident of a good experience, and of the virtue of our paper. Last evening at the end of the conference sessions for the day, as we left we encountered a Japanese man holding a sign with my name on it. This was the result of Phil Loudon's most impressive and wonderful international contacts. Phil,

through the exchange program at Weller elementary School in Fairbanks, and his daughter Rita's exchange experience, had developed a good relationship with this man and his family, named Hisashi Kanamori, a deputy Secretary General of the Hokkaido Economic Federation, (whatever that may be..). We were invited to have dinner with he and his family tonight. The family is two sons, a daughter, wife, and Kanamori's mother, the usual mother-in-law deal in Japan. Should be a very pleasant evening, and we get to enter a private Japanese home. Jack has some Alaskan Birch syrup to offer and I will take a bottle of sake.

The health scene with me is stable, and I am fully recovered, in spite of too much Sapporo beer at the conference last evening.

November 4, 2000

Last night we ate a wonderful Japanese dinner in a private home and exchanged great dialog with the Hisashi Kanamori family: two sons who are both college students, one a physics major, and the other an engineering major, a lovely daughter who played Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" for us, a grandmother, wife who is a fabulous partner and great cook, and a sacred traditional Japanese tatami mat covered room with shrines and art pieces of kanji. We shared the photo albums of Phil's family visits, attitudes toward Russia, and the mention of Jack's Russian wife, politics (they don't trust their present prime minister Mori), Sho's (the second son) trip to Alaska and ascent of Mt Wrangell and the 26 days in the Wrangell Mountains. A night to remember. Food: tempuras, kim-chee, pickled veggies, sashimi of a half dozen varieties, sake, both otsu and cold, beer, all topped off with Hokkaido apple pie a la mode, with a wonderful vanilla ice cream. I don't know how we'll ever repay Phil for this wonderful and totally unexpected opportunity to share such a private and valuable experience with these Japanese wonders. But I do have chocolates to deliver to Phil from Hisashi. All a wondrous happy time, and apparently a wondrous happy family.

A Japanese shrine is kept in the sacred room, which was located just off the dining room. It has Buddhist and Shinto aspects, and is covered on the floor with tatami. The tradition of shoe removal is scrupulously enforced, as we awkwardly found out when we took our shoes off too soon and inadvertently stepped on the lower floor where the shoes are kept, with our socks. This is the tainted and impure shoe contact area and we were given looks of horror by the boys as they pointed out our error.

Walking home after our evening, we were escorted by Sho the second son, and he did so, (we only discovered later) because he was duty-bound to do so. He had no idea where our hotel was! He finally admitted so, and asked if it would be OK if he left us halfway and went back home. Of course we said, "yes" and laughed about this situation a lot on the way back to the hotel. We also stopped by the "Vegas Vegas" pachinko parlor/gambling hall, which was full of lethal tarry cigarette smoke. We had only wanted a taste of what pachinko was, and we tasted the cigarette smoke all the way home. I needed a shower to get rid of the smell from the smoke. Very much indeed like Las Vegas.

Although I tried to shop for things early the next morning, I should have known better because everything was closed until 10 AM. This ultimately turned out to be a blessing however. When I arrived back at the hotel, I found that Jack had gone searching for me, because he had gotten a call from a hydrologist friend of his with an offer to take us to a National Park for the day, Lake Shikotsu, a volcanic caldera lake with volcanic peaks of smoking hydrogen sulfide 1000 meters high, and all within sight of Chitose, and the southern coast of Hokkaido. This was to be yet another wondrous day because Chikita was a good scientific guide in addition to having the best weather we'd had in Hokkaido, a spectacularly clear and cool autumn day. We climbed Mt Tarumae, and could see Mt. Iyote, the highest peak in the immediate vicinity, a rare view we were told. We must have had at least a ninetieth percentile day. It was much welcomed and incredibly good timing, since it was our only free day in Sapporo, and all the days of the conference were cloudy and some

quite oppressively so. I especially enjoyed getting out and seeing the forest ecosystem (at least that which hadn't been eradicated and re-planted with monoculture larches or pines)

(On the train to Ueno where I am now writing this the day after, we are passing through lovely country with vast numbers of leafless mandarin orange trees with just the oranges still on the trees. It is a lovely foggy morning.)

Coz, as Chikita is known, took us on a hike up Mt Tarumae, to the peak. It was cool and the best hiking conditions I can imagine and fortunately he had brought a six-pack of beer along too. After the invigorating and strenuous hike he took us back to Sapporo past the 1972 Olympic Ice Arena, and the Munchner Brucke, the Munich Bridge, named because Munich is the sister city of Sapporo, both great cities built on brewing great beer.

We finished the day off with a ramen meal in Sapporo, and left Chikita about 4 PM. So with lots of time left until the overnight sleeper train departure (7:25 PM), Jack suggested shopping. It was a great chance to do so, especially before we picked up our luggage. I had success with everything except "dena en-bah-su". Sorry Sarah, but I tried and many people knew what I was seeking but didn't know where I could find it. Perhaps I will be able to find it in Tokyo or Narita. We'll see.

November 5, 2000

Awoke this morning on the Hokutosei limited express from Sapporo to Tokyo's Ueno station, a sleeper train, after a reasonably good night in the top bunk. I slept above a Japanese woman and during the night the other two bunks opposite us were also filled. Early in the morning however the other two guys left, so there was ample room to sit and ride in comfort on the bench, which forms the lower bunk when unoccupied. As it was a Saturday night, the train was very full, and it took Jack and I three tries walking the four cars to the dining area to finally get seated for a good railroad western breakfast. Although there is smoking in the dining car, we sat opposite a Japanese gentleman who didn't smoke, a welcome respite from the normally unprotected smoking, which is tolerated in Japan much more than in the U.S. As we ate, I got to again watch the fog lift into a beautiful day, and adored the fall colors, still remnant, and the manicured rice fields, the naked but fruitful mandarin orange groves.

The fog did burn off and it became a downright hot day in Tokyo. We did well in getting on the Yamanote line, a JR rail line, so we could travel all day with our rail passes in Tokyo, and this was the last day to use them. First order of business was to relieve ourselves of our large packages and luggage for the day, which had become really difficult to handle with the shopping the last evening in Sapporo. By getting on the Yamanote line, we took care of all three imperatives in less than an hour. We found storage lockers on the level of the Tokyo main station for our luggage, got tickets for the last train that evening to Narita for our last stay at the Tobu Narita Holiday Inn, and found a place to get a good map of Tokyo for our day of exploration.

First place to explore was the area around the Imperial Palace, and the location of Frank Lloyd Wright's Tokyo Imperial hotel, which made him very famous because it survived the 1923 Tokyo earthquake. Unfortunately all it showed was how ignorant I was of the realities of the hotel, because I knew when I saw the modern incarnation of the Imperial hotel, that it wasn't the old Wright version I remembered. Obviously so, because the hotel had a retrospective historical display in its lobby which noted clearly that because the old hotel had been bombed in 1945, and was used to bivouac soldiers after the war, it was in very bad repair and was razed in 1967. Sad but true, and I hadn't known that. I went up to the information desk though and asked if they still had a photograph or a post card of the old hotel, and they gave me a lovely one, and of course it was what I remembered seeing in the biographical story of Frank Lloyd Wright.

From that disappointment we headed across the street to the Hibuya park and lot's of events, flower shows, concerts, and for some reason we never understood, a large contingent of riot police in their gear with many riot trucks. Apparently much was suspected, but nothing much seemed to be happening or threatening. From there it was an

easy walk to the Imperial Palace, and for the first time in the trip, I sought shade. It was so warm and my head was uncovered, ripe for sunburn. I actually did get some color this day. We couldn't get very close to the palace, but could see its splendor from the lower moat. After walking the park for some time, we got back on the Yamanote line and went to Otsuka, and took the only remaining tram in Tokyo, the wrong direction! I didn't realize it was the wrong direction until the next day when I looked on the Tokyo map and saw the distinction we should have made. So it goes. It gave us a late afternoon chance to eat another ramen meal at a restaurant after completion of the tram trip, and it was already getting dark at 4 PM.

We headed on to the Ikebukuro Station and took the long escalator ride to the art plaza, but generally not much was happening there. So we went on to Shinjuku. Wow, action and flash central! Much to see and people watching was superb here. All kinds, including a group of South American Andean musicians playing in the street with a sound system powered by a little Honda generator, and making the entire square sway to their influence. Jack tried some new food here, a fried taco with shrimp fill and a sort of mayonnaise, and very good. I was not really keen on trying too many new foods, as I was still very gun-shy from my food poisoning episode. We found a beautiful new building, walked around the whole area, a temple area, closed for the evening, and simply watched the crowds. The impression is one of a rich flashy culture, with lots of money and lots of time to shop with it, all electrified with lit signs and commercial inducements. Modernity. It quickly becomes boring I'm afraid.

We headed back to Tokyo station and got our bags in plenty of time to get the train to Narita. Eventually we were the only ones in the green car, an under used service late at night it seems. And oddly, we had to pass through a security check coming into Narita! It seems there is still concern for the locals who despise the airport because it ruined the local farmlands and the Naritasan temple quietude. Back to Tobu Narita and to bed.

November 6, 2000 The longest day back to Fairbanks.

Woke to a wonderful breakfast again at the Tobu Narita, and used their bus service to travel to the Narita City JR station and walked to the Naritasan temple complex, via a route I wish we'd used when Patty and Sarah were with me. It was through the old town and it was alive with small shops and beautiful old buildings, which were a treasure to behold. We spent hours at the Temple complex, and saw all the old wooden buildings, with their bas-relief carving, and I especially enjoyed the lovely cool garden with its waterfall grotto. A cloudy cool day however, and it remained so the whole day. We lunched at a very nice restaurant in Narita, and I had tempura and Jack did his sake' thing. Then back to the hotel, pick up our baggage, and to the airport for our check in and last minute shopping. All went well and we had plenty of time so we went out on the observation deck and watched aircraft arrive for an hour or more. Narita has a solar PV array out on the deck with an explanatory sign indicating they are trying to make Narita an Eco-airport. Good luck.

Onto the plane, a much quicker flight home to Seattle, hours shorter: 7 hours 40 minutes back, compared to more than ten hours flying to Japan. But Jack and I both only slept about an hour, so we arrived at Seattle feeling pretty bad, and my luggage was the very last off the flight, owing to the old standard, first on-last off pattern.

Jack had a great idea though to use the Alaska Airlines "board room" the special service of the airline for its frequent customers who need a safe and restful place to lay over while they travel. An excellent choice, but we were subjugated to hearing all the election rhetoric on CNN while we waited, and it seemed to go on for hours.

I was really bushed by now, but finally had a rejuvenating moment when we were fed at about 2 PM, as it was "breakfast time in Tokyo!" and my biological clock responded.

Very weird, but I at least felt a bit better. Arrived home in Fairbanks about a half-hour late, and poor Jack's car was still at the airport with a flat tire! So I helped him change

it, and we were off home. The next day I asked Jack to join me for lunch so we could thank and treat Phil Loudon for his putting us in touch with the Hisashi Kanamori family. It was an easy first payment on our debt: lunch at the Thai house restaurant.

A great trip and more to come I hope. Hokkaido University would be a grand sabbatical destination. A great culture, a great experience, a great journey, and a great education.

Richard Seifert November 12, 2000