

# The Yamanashi Grapevine

July 2003



## Editor's note

Before summer's heat saps all our energy, we went to visit two cities in Yamanashi. The first, Fujiyoshida, is probably the most famous place in Yamanashi as it is the point from where most Mount Fuji climbers start their long journey to the top. The second, Nirasaki, may not be as well renowned, but it might be known to some football (or should I say "soccer"?! ) fans as the home of the high school where current Parma player Hidetoshi Nakata's talent was discovered. On page 8, Geoff Wigan, an Assistant Language Teacher on the JET programme, takes us on a philosophical journey through his first year in Yamanashi.

This edition holds a special meaning to me as it marks my last contribution to the Grapevine. As a writer and an editor, I have had the opportunity to experience and share the richness of nature in Yamanashi as well as the warmth of its people, which is something I will never forget.

Lastly, you might be surprised by the cover photograph. But don't! This is one of the Showa Era houses destined to become a trendy bar in Fujiyoshida.

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Maguelonne Billy



Nirasaki. “Leek point.” The name of this city in the north-western region of Yamanashi Prefecture was enough to intrigue me, and so I set off to find out what it was all about. As it happens, there’s a good enough reason for this appellation, though it has nothing to do with growing leeks! Nirasaki is located between two rivers, Kamanashi-gawa to

the west, and Shio-kawa to the east. These rivers meet to the south of the city, and as seen from above, carve the point of land upon which the city rests into the shape of the long thin leaf of a Japanese leek, or chive. The sheer sides of the unusual extended wall of rock known as the Shichi-Ri Iwa which runs 28km from Nagano Prefecture and terminates in Nirasaki, cleaving the city centre in two, are testimony to the erosive power of these two rivers in the past.



Where you may be disappointed if visiting Nirasaki looking to find leeks, the abundance of green nature and fruits of the land - rice in particular - will restore your spirits. In spring, the cherry and peach blossom can be found blooming even amidst the paddy fields, complementing the snow-capped peaks of the mountains which stretch across the skyline in all directions.

When the Grapevine stopped by to visit in late May, the rich greenery of the tree-carpeted hills and young rice saplings was a refreshing and wholesome sight. The nearby Mount Amari is famed for its beautiful azaleas, which bloom red in mid-May. For a city of over 32,000 people, Nirasaki has a wealth of unspoiled nature at its very doorstep.



The city is also steeped in history, with the roots of the renowned Takeda family reaching back to Nirasaki. It is home to the Takeda Hachimangu shrine, founded by the grandfather of ancient Yamanashi’s ruler Takeda Shingen. The shrine bears the 4-diamond standard of the Takeda family, a design echoed in the emblem of the modern city. The path of this influential family came full circle when the son of Takeda Shingen, Katsuyori, retreated from the invading Tokugawa army to Nirasaki and occupied Shimpu Castle upon the steep-sided Shichi-Ri Iwa, only to be pursued further, finally forced to set fire to his own stronghold and flee. He committed suicide a mere 8 days later, bringing the Takeda family’s powerful reign to an end.



Whilst the area has a long and varied history, the city of Nirasaki itself is preparing to greet its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the coming year, 2004. Designated Nirasaki City in Showa 29 (1954), the city has grown in size to incorporate several surrounding villages over the years, and the recent wave of village, town and city mergers may not leave Nirasaki untouched. Plans for celebratory golden anniversary events are currently on the drawing board, and increased focus on providing care for the elderly and a high standard and broad field of education for the children of the city will be a priority as Nirasaki looks to the future.



Although remaining a modest rural city, Nirasaki’s national and international links are not to be underestimated. As the statue outside Nirasaki Station and the footballs edging the driveway of the City Hall testify, football is an important sporting feature of the city with no little history, and the Soccer Festival held each summer brings the best teams, male and female, of all age groups from across



Japan together in competition. The city’s links with California’s Fairfield City, U.S. and Jiamusi City in China date from 1971 and 1984 respectively, and the high school exchange programme with Fairfield has helped to encourage international awareness in Nirasaki over the years.



Like the kestrel, which enjoys Nirasaki’s rich habitat and represents love and courage to the citizens who have adopted it as a symbol of their city, may the people here hold on to their valuable history, nature, and future potential as Nirasaki hovers on the boundary between ancient and modern Japan.



by Lisa Barrett

Nirasaki’s Japanese homepage can be found at <http://www.city.nirasaki.yamanashi.jp>



Fujiyoshida City

Historical Kamiyoshida

Contemporary Shimoyoshida

As I went out sight-seeing around Fujiyoshida, I sensed that anyone who likes variety will be able to enjoy and make good use of their time in this quite touristic city. It has a population of approximately 56.000, and in actual numbers there are also 715 foreigners registered in this mountain city where Japan’s most famous volcano, Mt. FUJI, still sleeps...

The interest of this city lies in the coexistence of its historical part which is called “Kamiyoshida” and the contemporary part which is “Shimoyoshida” .

Going up to Honcho dori in the direction of Mt. Fuji, there is a row of historic houses called “oshi no ie” (pilgrim’s inns) marked by narrow stone pillars in front of each house. These houses used to be places of purification and worship. In older times, it was there that the pilgrims of Mt. Fuji would stay before climbing.

This city has prospered since ancient times as the area where the famous Kaiki silk is woven, and as a centre for worshipping and climbing Mt. Fuji. Kamiyoshida is considered the “sacred area” of this city where history was born through those who came to worship and pray to Mt. Fuji.

There are 5 routes available to climb Mt. Fuji. From the Yamanashi Prefecture side there are 2 routes: Yoshida guchi and Kawaguchiko guchi. “Guchi” are the starting points to climb Mt. Fuji. The Yoshidaguchi trail is full of history and myths. Climbers need to go through a ceremony before starting to climb in return for purification and protection. Yoshidaguchi is regarded as the best equipped trail of the five Mt. Fuji climbing routes. The trail officially starts at Kitaguchi

hongu Fuji Sengen Shrine (left). The Fuji Sengen Shrine became the focal point of worshipping Mt. Fuji and pilgrim activities during the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1608-1868. It served as the entrance to the Yoshidaguchi Climbing Trail. People can still climb from here to the top of the mountain even now!

The Shimoyoshida area may be enjoyed by just walking down the streets or taking a stroll through the shops and houses which bring nostalgic feelings for anyone sightseeing in this area. Many buildings from the Showa period, the 1950s in particular, have remained intact, and now this interesting city has made the choice to preserve the antiques and nostalgic mood of the Showa Era. Even though this helps the area to retain its former charm and atmosphere, this part of city is still contemporary and modern.

When you start walking toward Gekkoji dori, you may face a wooden 3-floored building. The sign is written in “retro font” and the wall painted in dark brown, retaining the mood and atmosphere of earlier days.

“Shinsekai dori” was renowned as a place where men usually used to go to enjoy the city’s “night life”.

Fujiyoshida city is host to an array of restaurants and bars with individual styles and flavours. Fujiyoshida would not be the same without its “teuchi udon”, the hearty dish of homemade thick noodles, and perfect for the traveler’s budget. Each udon restaurant makes its noodles using pure Mt. Fuji water and special kneading techniques. The chefs run their restaurants from home and usually open only for lunch.

Throughout the year, whether it’s spring or summer, autumn or winter, FUJIYOSHIDA is the best place to view the majestic and highest peak of Japan.



上

下



吉

吉



田

田



F u j i



S h r i n e

S e n g e n



F u j i  
yoshida’s



UDON

home made







UNESCO World Natural Heritage sites: rejection of Mount Fuji and Southern Japanese Alps applications

On 26 May 2003, a Japanese commission in Tokyo investigated the Japanese monuments and locations to be recommended to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee later in the year.

From Yamanashi, Mount Fuji and the Southern Japanese Alps were candidates to become World Natural Heritage sites. According to the commission, the ecosystem of the Japanese Southern Alps is not particularly uncommon, and so they won't recommend its candidature to the UNESCO. As for Mount Fuji, despite its candidature receiving many positive comments, it eventually failed because the commission judged that the conservation of nature was insufficiently guaranteed, and that the base of the mountain was far too developed.

Tens of thousands of tourists climb the mountain every year, but no effective policy has yet been taken in order to improve the disposal of garbage and the treatment of human waste.

Many in Yamanashi are disappointed by the commission's decision but the mayor of Fujiyoshida City among others indicated that they were going to make all necessary efforts to meet the criteria required by the commission and to allow coexistence between nature and humans. All hopes for Mount Fuji being inscribed someday as a World Natural Heritage site are not lost.

# Grapevine News Spotlight

## A new Governor for Yamanashi

After Governor Amano's retirement, it is Takahiko Yamamoto, age 67 and a former mayor of Kofu City, who has been elected as Yamanashi's new governor. His 4-year term of service began on 17 February 2003. Governor Yamamoto is keen to keep promoting Yamanashi's main strengths (gemstones, wine and robotics, as well as its beautiful nature) and make the Prefecture more accessible to visitors.

## Municipal mergers: an update

Following the important changes brought about by the city, town and village mergers, many of the place names you are used to are going to disappear in Yamanashi, as well as in the rest of Japan.

Minami Alps City was born on 1 April 2003, the result of a merger of six towns and villages. Earlier in the year, Nambu Town and Tomizawa Town merged, keeping the name of Nambu. Below are listed the scheduled mergers in Yamanashi. Please note that there are still negotiations going on, however, and thus some changes might occur.

Nov. 03: Southern part of Kamikuishiki, Kawaguchiko, Katsuyama and Ashiwada

March 04: Ichikawa Daimon, Rokugo and Kajikazawa

June or Nov. 04: Nakamichi, Ashigawa and the northern part of Kamikuishiki will be incorporated into Kofu

Sep. 04: Ryuo, Shikishima and Futaba

Sep. 04: Shimobe, Nakatomi and Minobu

Oct. 04: Kasugai, Isawa, Misaka, Ichinomiya, Yatsushiro and Sakaigawa

Nov. 04: Akeno, Sutama, Takane, Nagasaka, Oizumi, Hakushu and Mukawa

March 05: Akiyama and Uenohara

## Roppongi Hills

A huge commercial and business complex opened in Roppongi on 25 April 2003. The aim of the developers of the project was to make Roppongi Hills "a source of trends and innovation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century". Besides hundreds of shops and restaurants, the Grand Hyatt Tokyo, Virgin cinemas and the Mori Arts centre, this complex also hosts residences, offices and TV Asahi's new headquarters. Nature has not been neglected either, in particular with rooftop gardens and a traditional Japanese garden covering 4,300 square metres. Other projects of this type have already been launched in different areas of Tokyo. Architecture in the metropolis seems never to rest.

<http://www.roppongihills.com/en/information/>

## Rediscovering Edo

Edo is the ancient name for Tokyo, and it was the capital of Japan in the feudal government established by Tokugawa Ieyasu 400 years ago. At this time, Edo was constructed on the current Chiyoda district, with Edo castle at its centre.

This year's celebration gives the chance to discover from a different angle the huge metropolis, often associated with modernity. Although Tokyo was in great part destroyed during World War II, there are a few places left that will take you back to the Edo of old. For more information on the various events organised over the year and the places to go, please check: <http://en.edo400.net/index.jsp>



## Internationalisation of sumo

This year in January, Asashoryu, 22, has been promoted to the rank of yokozuna (the highest rank in sumo). Originally from Mongolia, he is the third foreign-born rikishi (sumo wrestler) to reach this rank, after Akebono (who is now retired) and Musashimaru, both from Hawaii. After only 25 tournaments, it is the fastest rise to the top in the history of sumo.

The promotion of Asashoryu attests to the internationalisation of sumo, the Japanese sport par excellence. Currently 51 out of the 674 rikishi come from 11 countries other than Japan. 31 are from Mongolia, 4 from Russia, 3 each from America and Brazil, 2 each from South Korea, China and Tonga, and 1 each from Argentina, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Georgia and Bulgaria.

The first foreigner ever to become a rikishi was Hiragamasahi from Los Angeles, in 1934. Even though adaptation to the strict training and relationships ruled by sumo is far from being easy for foreigners, the fact that this year the only 2 yokozuna present are foreigners shows that these difficulties can be overcome.

Recently, however, Japanese people's interest in sumo seems to be fading. And this especially after the retirement of the famous Japanese yokozuna Takanohana in January. Japan seems to be waiting for the next Japanese born yokozuna to revive their interest in the sport.

# Under Yamanashi skies

A samurai cannot live under the same sky as his father's murderer – one of them must die.



Paragliding near Mount Fuji

This old samurai axiom gives one an impression of the world that Japan once was. It is also the world that influences what Japan is today in so many ways. In the west, there exists a romantic view of Japan, and this gives colour to the Samurai's sky; a grim dark monotone that was a life of unwavering loyalty and controlled (and perhaps some would say repressed)

In The Inland Sea, Donald Richie made mention of how the samurai's philosophy bore little resemblance to the world in which he actually lived. So now that I find myself under this sky, what do I make of the world of Japan? Yes, I still find the concepts of loyalty and control of emotion still part of the cultural landscape. After years of reading about this it has been rewarding to experience this firsthand.

Perhaps more importantly, what does the world of Japan make of me? For my school I am the representative of my culture and country in particular, the Western world in general. They have been able to experience what I am as a person, and the cultural traits I hope I imbue: friendly, relaxed, open-minded and creative. And they probably get to experience the bad side of me too. But I have been able to share my interest in Rocketry with my students by teaching them to build and fly rockets, as well as fixing my school's wonderful telescope to show them the night sky. These are part of me and the culture I bring.



Students rocket at launch

I have also been expanding my interest in Japanese culture by learning about Takagari, the traditional falconry of Japan. I have also taken the opportunity to study Kyudo and Zen while here. Finally, there are mutual interests I have been able to share with likeminded people here by going mountain biking, paragliding and snowboarding.



Two of my students with a rocket they built

But none of these matters at all without one thing: the people I get to meet and share ideas with, the ones I learn from and the ones I can teach new ideas and skills to. All these people, including myself, are the culture and make internationalization a reality.

Kyudo Archers from my club



Being here has also allowed me to use Japan as a mirror to reflect the western culture that I have come from back at me. You only know what you look like when standing in front of a mirror, so what does the culture that I "wore" into Japan look like? General notions of individualism, democracy, capitalism, open mindedness and egalitarianism spring to mind; but now coming from New Zealand I also think of a young culture, internationally associated with Rugby and too many sheep, still forming its own clear identity and searching for acceptance from international peers, strangely declining praise where given and loathing of due criticism.

Perhaps the best compliment of my life has been paid to me while in Japan; A JTE (Japanese Teacher of English) mentioned "Geoff-sensei, you have the manners of a Bushi." I thanked the JTE, mentioning that I understood the gravity of her compliment. She replied, "Geoff-sensei, I am Bushi". Her compliment took on new meaning with this; the Bushi class only made up approximately 5% of Japan's population (if memory serves). Perhaps the mirror and the man are not so different.



Mr. Zenjiro Tagamori of the Suwa Falconry School

Understanding comes little by little, day by day. Of myself and of Japan. However, if there's a revelation in all of this, I'm still waiting. But perhaps that's the point.



At the end of my interview for the JET program, I was asked if I had any questions. "Yes, but I'll get the answers when I go to Japan". The answers are coming. And the sky is becoming clearer.

Elementary School kids

by GEOFFREY WIGAN



## Upcoming Events in Yamanashi

July

July 7<sup>th</sup>~August 19<sup>th</sup> Cormorant Fishing in Isawa Town

Place: Fuefuki River, in front of the Town Office Information: 055-262-4111

The tradition of cormorant fishing in Isawa goes back 800 years. The fishermen hold lit torches to guide the cormorants in this night-time fishing. The freshly fished ayu (a type of Japanese fish) are grilled so that the spectators can eat them while enjoying the scene.

25<sup>th</sup> Fireworks in Yamanashi City

Place: Manriki Park Information: 0553-22-0806

This is the 46<sup>th</sup> celebration of this annual fireworks display that marks the beginning of the fireworks season in Yamanashi. It starts at 7:30pm and lasts an hour and a half, accompanied by appropriate music. The hundred food and drink stalls in the park make the event even more festive. It is a only 5 minute walk from Yamanashi station, so if you plan to attend the event, you are advised to get there by train as the roads are always congested on this day.

Late July ~ end of August Sunflowers in Akeno Village

Place: Koryu Sokushin Centre Information: 0551-25-2311

With Mount Fuji, Yatsugatake and Kayagatake rising in the background, Akeno Village's sunflowers stretch out over 45,000 square metres. This is a real joy to see and it is the place to go if you want to recharge your batteries! You can enter a photography contest where the main subject is, of course, sunflowers. There is also an open market where you can find locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables.

august

August is definitely the season of fireworks in Japan! Below is a list of most of the fireworks displays held this year in Yamanashi:

8/1 Lake Yamanaka 8/2 Obuchizawa Town Sutama Town 8/3 Wakakusa Town 8/7 Ichikawa Daimon Town 8/8 Oshino Village 8/9 Makioka Town early August Otsuki City 8/13 Narusawa Village 8/14 Mukawa Village Oizumi Village Toyotomi Village Tamaho Town 8/15 Nakamichi Town Hakushu Town Nagasaka Town Nishikatsura Town 8/16 Ichinomiya Town Nirasaki City mid August Kajikazawa Town 8/21 Isawa Town

26<sup>th</sup> 27<sup>th</sup> Fire Festival in Fujiyoshida City

Place: Sengen Shrine Information: 0555-22-1111

This is one of the major events held in Fujiyoshida and it marks the end of the climbing season of Mount Fuji. It starts at around 5pm with portable shrines being carried from Sengen Shrine around the city. 70 three metre-high beacons are lit on the way taken by the procession. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the portable shrines are brought back in procession to Sengen Shrine. Don't miss the portable shrine shaped like a shiny red Mount Fuji and weighing up to one ton!

4<sup>th</sup>~6<sup>th</sup> Ushikura Festival in Uenohara Town

Place: Ushikura Shrine area Information: 0554-62-3111

September

This three-day long festival used to be held to thank the gods for the autumn's good harvests, and it is one of the most important festivals in Uenohara, always attracting many visitors. It is a very traditional festival, with portable shrines, parade floats, traditional music, but also a karaoke contest on the last day!

## July to December 2003

21<sup>st</sup> Annual Kyoho Marathon in Makioka Town

Place: Start/Goal at Makioka Dai-ichi Primary School Information: 0553-35-3111

5km, 10km, and 20km courses Participation fee: 3,000 yen

The particularly hilly route of this marathon makes its way among Kyoho grape vineyards. Makioka is indeed renowned for this Japanese variety of grape, and among other souvenirs all participants receive a bunch! So come, take part in the race, and you return home with your hands full of delicious Kyoho grapes.

October

5<sup>th</sup> Grape Festival in Katsunuma Town

Place: Katsunuma Chuo Park Information: 0553- 44-2100

Katsunuma is the cradle of wine in Japan. This festival is an occasion for Katsunuma inhabitants to celebrate the grape, which is an essential element in their lives. Visitors are offered grapes and wine, while enjoying the various stage attractions organised for them.

Mid-October Kofu Week

Place: Maizuru Park and Kofu city centre Information: 055-237-1161

Centred on the 17 October, the day of the creation of the City of Kofu, this event gives you the opportunity to discover Kofu's traditional and local products, such as gemstones, in a friendly atmosphere. Numerous events fashion show, parades, bazaars, etc. are also organised by Kofu's residents.

Mid-October Paul Rusch Festival ~ Yatsugatake County Fair~ in Takane Town

Place: Seisen Ryo in Kiyosato Information: 0551-48-2114

Including concerts and the County fair, this is an event centred on international exchange and outdoor activities.

November

3<sup>rd</sup> Daikon Festival in Akeno Village

Place: around the Furusato Taiyo Kaikan ~ from 9:30a.m to 3:30pm

Information: 0551-25-2311

Come with your family and pick daikon (Japanese radish)! There are also facilities for you to take up the challenge and try to prepare various daikon-based meals yourself, plus an open market, a karaoke contest and attractions for children.

9<sup>th</sup> Hoto festival in Yamato Village

Place: Nikkawa Keikoku Leisure Centre Information: 0553-48-2111

Hoto, a speciality from Yamanashi, is a type of thick noodles served in a soup with lots of vegetables and mushrooms. Come and join people coming from all over Yamanashi and the neighbouring prefectures! This is a good opportunity for you to eat as much hoto as you want for free, and it is prepared before your eyes.

december

early December

Maimon Morning Market ~ Oysters Festival in Hatta Village

Place: Happy Park

Information: 055-285- 8066

Hatta Village is twinned with Anamizu, a port town in Ishikawa Prefecture. To celebrate this, every year people from Anamizu come to Hatta and sell fresh oysters, as well as fresh fish and sake. It is also possible to grill the oysters that you have just bought and eat them on the spot.

# Meet the Authors



**Maguelonne Billy** comes from Nantes in France. After two years spent as a Coordinator for International Relations in Yamanashi 県 Prefectural Government Office, she is going to head on to new adventures, either in Japan or in France. Wherever it will be, she will never forget all the experiences and friends she made here in Yamanashi.



**Lisa Barrett** will also sign off from her CIR duties in Yamanashi this summer, having spent a very enjoyable year in the International Affairs Division in Kofu. She will return to the UK in August, sad to be leaving behind new friends and old in Japan, but looking forward to what lies ahead. Goodbye and God bless!



**Deysi Lika Kamiji** entered her second year as a CIR on the JET Programme this April. She 県 a Japanese-Brazilian, born and raised in Brazil but from a Japanese background. She received a rather traditional Japanese education from her parents, but thinks and feels like a Brazilian most of the time. Deysi hopes to do her best to make her time in Japan worthwhile and fruitful!!



**Geoff Wigan** is an Electrical Engineer and budding Japanophile from New Zealand who decided to pack up a life of aircraft work to come and teach English in Japan on the JET programme. He is an outdoor activity junkie who has realized the foolishness of only planning to spend a year in Japan, a decision that is constantly being revised. He would like to say a big 適 ia Ora to the wonderful team at La



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