

Yatsugatake— Deer Connections

Story and Photos by Bill Tingey

With 80% of the population living on approximately 18% of its land area, it is little wonder that Japan seems so urban. But although more than 60% of the nation is built up, much of the rest is thankfully taken up with tree covered mountains and foothills as well as extensive areas of cultivated land.

Some of these forested areas are given over to highland resorts providing skiing opportunities in winter and a variety of outdoor activities during the remainder of the year.

One of these areas is Yatsugatake, so named because of the symbolic range of eight peaks running more or less north to south along part of the border between Yamanashi Prefecture and Nagano Prefecture, some three to four hours by car west of Tokyo.

Having negotiated the tunnels and passes on the western edge of the Kanto plain where Tokyo sprawls, the landscape first opens up to reveal the Kofu Basin, which is famous for its fruit orchards and wineries. Then, continuing along the Chuo Highway, the peaks of Yatsugatake soon come into view to the

By train, take the Chuo Main Line to Kobuchizawa and change on to the Koumi Line for Nobeyama. For Yatsugatake Kogen turn off Route 141 at the sign with a bird on it for Seiyo Yatsugatake Kogen. Fine accommodation, food, tennis, pottery classes, cross country skiing and concerts are available at Yatsugatake Kogen Lodge (Tel: 0267 98 2131; Fax: 0267 98 3133). Buses to the lodge run five times a day from Nobeyama station. For deerhide craft goods visit Inden Ya in Aoyama, Tokyo (Tel: 03 4379 3200), in Itachibori, Osaka (Tel: 06 532 8500), and in Chuo, Kofu (Tel: 0552 33 1100). This craft can also be seen and purchased at the Japan Traditional Craft Center, Minami Aoyama, Tokyo (Tel: 03 3403 2460). For other tourist information contact the Japan National Tourist Office in

Deerhide delicately patterned with natural lacquer



Smoking the hide, primitive but effective



The silhouetted peaks of Yatsugatake

right, with more peaks of the Southern Alps taking up the rest of the vista.

Leaving the Chuo Highway at the Sudama interchange and taking Route 141, the road continues to rise steadily, finally levelling off in the vicinity of the Nobeyama radio telescope. It is near here, too, that the Koumi line from Kobuchizawa reaches a height of 1,374.3 meters, making it the highest point on Japan's extensive railway system.

A little further along Route 141 and off to the left down narrow roads flanked by farmland is Yatsugatake Kogen, an

exclusive resort with holiday homes and exclusive facilities to be enjoyed throughout the year.

Needless to say, the altitude here makes tire-chains a necessity between November and March, although snow falls are not usually heavy. Before the onset of winter proper, the glories of the fall can be enjoyed during October through to the beginning of November, while the altitude also keeps temperatures reasonable and the air clear for the rest of the year, making hiking, tennis, riding and other outdoor pursuits all the more pleasurable.

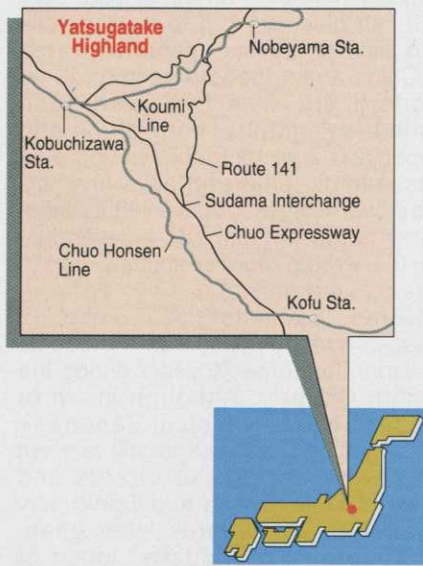
A walk in the woods around Yatsugatake may even bring you close to some deer, which were a resource in the past for one of Japan's traditional crafts, *inden*, or lacquered deerhide.

Although the craft may have been introduced to Japan from India in the 16th century, its roots reach right back to the 8th century, when the skills of tanning came to Japan via Korea. The craft got its start in Kofu, however, after a monk returning from the continent presented the local feudal lord, Takeda Shingen, with something made from tiger skin.

It was the decoration of deerhide for armor and other pieces of military paraphernalia during the period of civil war in the 16th century that increased demand for the craft which has changed little over the ensuing centuries.

The hide, in fact, is usually decorated in one of two ways. A hide can be smoked with copious amounts of thick

English (Tel: 03 3201 3331), or access <http://www.jnto.go.jp>



milky yellow smoke from rice straw to produce a caramel hue, having first applied a rice-paste resist of the required pattern. Alternatively, the same smoked or color stained hide can be decorated with a raised pattern of colored natural lacquer applied through a paper stencil with a wooden squeegee. In both cases, however, it is the permeability of the hide which helps it to take color and to provide a key for the lac-

quer.

Formerly, the ability of the hide to "breathe", its water resistance, durability and almost everlasting softness made it suitable for some formal pieces of clothing and more especially for pouches, money belts, and tobacco pouches. Today, it is used to make belts, ladies' handbags, business-card holders, purses, and very attractive draw-string bags.

Hides are now seldom obtained in

Japan and anyway, many would no doubt be happier to see them gracing the back of a deer. Such doubts apart, the craft is as precious as Yatsugatake's delights and neither should be missed.



In cooperation with the
JAPAN TRADITIONAL
CRAFT CENTER

TABLE TALK

Scheveningen—Spaghetti with a Twist



I was given the opportunity to go to Europe for the first time in 1965 to attend the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva. At that time, it was of course quite normal to fly the Polar route from Haneda, but being so excited, I did not get a wink of sleep during the long flight. Despite all this, I still have vivid memories of how thrilled I was to see the characteristic patchwork of fields stretching out below us as we commenced our descent into Holland's Schiphol airport, the Gateway to Europe.

It was as though I was seeing what I had read about in Prof. Watsuji Tetsuro's book "Climate". Here was the result of the pastoral climate of Europe, inherently so different from the monsoon climate of Asia and the desert climate of the Middle East.

On actually arriving in Holland, I became rather envious of the fact that sheep, cows and horses graze happily in the fields no more than a stone's throw from the built up areas, which

occupy most of this very flat nation, even though it has a higher population density than Japan where much of the land mass is covered with mountains and forests.

As I needed to go to the Japanese Embassy in The Hague, in the Netherlands, I took the opportunity to go with a senior colleague of mine to Scheveningen, a town on the coast some 20 minutes away by train. Much loved by the people of The Hague for its bathing, the white sandy beaches here are crowded with sun-worshippers during the summer. I was thus rather surprised to find that the name of this town had been used for an interesting pasta restaurant in Tokyo's Ginza.

Although Scheveningen has no particular meaning in Dutch, the pronunciation of it in Japanese, *sukebeningen*, refers to someone who is rather worse than a playboy and is the kind of word that we would normally be reluctant to use in polite conversation. Despite this, Kunio Onozawa who owns *Scheveningen* and who was often in Holland when he worked for a travel agent, decided to adopt the name for his restaurant, having first gained official approval from The Hague, with the idea of promoting friendship between Holland and Japan. As a result, the restaurant is recommended to this day by the Hague Tourist Board.

That apart and quite contradictory to its name, the restaurant in the main serves 45 types of spaghetti using the fine *Mia Napoli* type of spaghetti made from hard wheat grown around Napoli, the birth place of both spaghetti and ice cream which were recommended to me by an acquaintance of mine from Southern Italy. As the firm pasta goes very well with soup, there are many orders for this combination.

The restaurant, which was opened in 1980, has a seating capacity of fifty. Large and small pottery dishes by one of Picasso's foremost pupils, Giovanni de Simone from Sicily grace its walls as well as some fine Venetian masks. The restaurant is by no means large but it is filled with a very homely atmosphere and if the queues outside every day are anything to go by, it is clearly not only the taste of the food or the reasonable prices that help maintain Scheveningen's popularity. In fact, about 80% of the clientele are young women.

There are plenty of dishes on the menu besides spaghetti and, even in the evening, it is possible to dine well for ¥3,000 without drinks. There are 16 varieties of wine to choose from ranging in price from between ¥2,500 and ¥4,300.

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Scheveningen
B1, Naritaya Building
3-7-13 Ginza
Chuo-ku, Tokyo
Tel: 03-3567-5346
Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.
Closed: Sundays and holidays
Reservation: Party of four or more (dinner only)

