

Mountaineering in Japan

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51 Yari-Hodaka range from the E Photo: Y. Keikoku



Once upon a time, no . . . until recent years, Japan was symbolised by Fujisan and other things such as Bushido (feudal chivalry) and especially the beautiful so-called Geisha girls. But by the end of World War II, Bushido had more or less disappeared underground and Geisha girls were no longer so much in evidence.

At present, the symbols of Japan are two; one is of course the symmetrical cone of Fujisan. This has not been changed and should continue as long as Japan and the mountain continue. The second is the highly industrialised economic system, to which we owe the thoughtless destruction of nature, and the notorious pollution of our air and our water. In the mountaineering world, especially in recent years, Japan has broken all records in producing numbers of unnecessary fatal accidents in the Himalaya, Andes, Alaska and other high mountain ranges. I am told that there are some Europeans who call the Japanese overseas (even in the Alps) mob-like climbers, climbing animals or even insects. It seems, even to me, that they have good reason to do so.

Let me return to the main theme. People say that Fujisan is the symbol of Japan because it is the highest peak (3776 m) within the country and because of its noble outline. But I should like to add one thing more to it; it is one of the dirtiest mountains in Japan, with a huge quantity of rubbish distributed on its paths and summit, especially in the summer season, which serves to illustrate the present typical attitude of Japanese hikers and scramblers to their own mountains and to nature as a whole.

In 1954 I had the temerity to write a long article on 'British Mountains and Mountaineers' for the Japanese mountaineering press at a time when I had never been to Britain. Fourteen years later I had the good fortune to visit North Wales (Snowdon and Llanberis) and England when I was appointed the Japanese delegate to attend the General Assembly of the UIAA which was held in London in 1968. Some months ago I had the following books from Gaston's 'Alpine Books,' one of which was kindly presented by my good friend, Mr L. C. Baume, 1) *Munro's Tables*, 2) *Mountains of England and Wales*, and 3) E. C. Pyatt's *Mountains of Britain*. With their aid I was able to add to my knowledge of British mountains.

According to the above books, there are 544 mountains over 3000 ft (914 m) in Scotland, including twelve peaks over 4000 ft (1219 m), among them Ben Nevis, the highest is 4406 ft (1343 m). In England and Wales, they have 408 peaks over 2000 ft (610 m) including four peaks over 1000 m. Among them Y Wyddfa (Snowdon) is the highest, 3560 ft (1085 m).

Meanwhile, the *Mountaineering Diary*, which is edited and published by the Japanese Alpine Club every year, shows that there are 1196 mountains or peaks over 1600 m in Japan. The breakdown is as follows: 28 peaks over 3000 m, 507 peaks over 2000 m, and 661 over 1600m. The highest mountain of Japan is, of course, Fujisan, the dormant volcano. Foreigners used to call this mountain Mount Fuji or Fujiyama, but we never use these words. We call it Fujisan, or simply Fuji. Here is a list of the ten highest mountains of Japan: 1) Fujisan

The Mountains of Japan

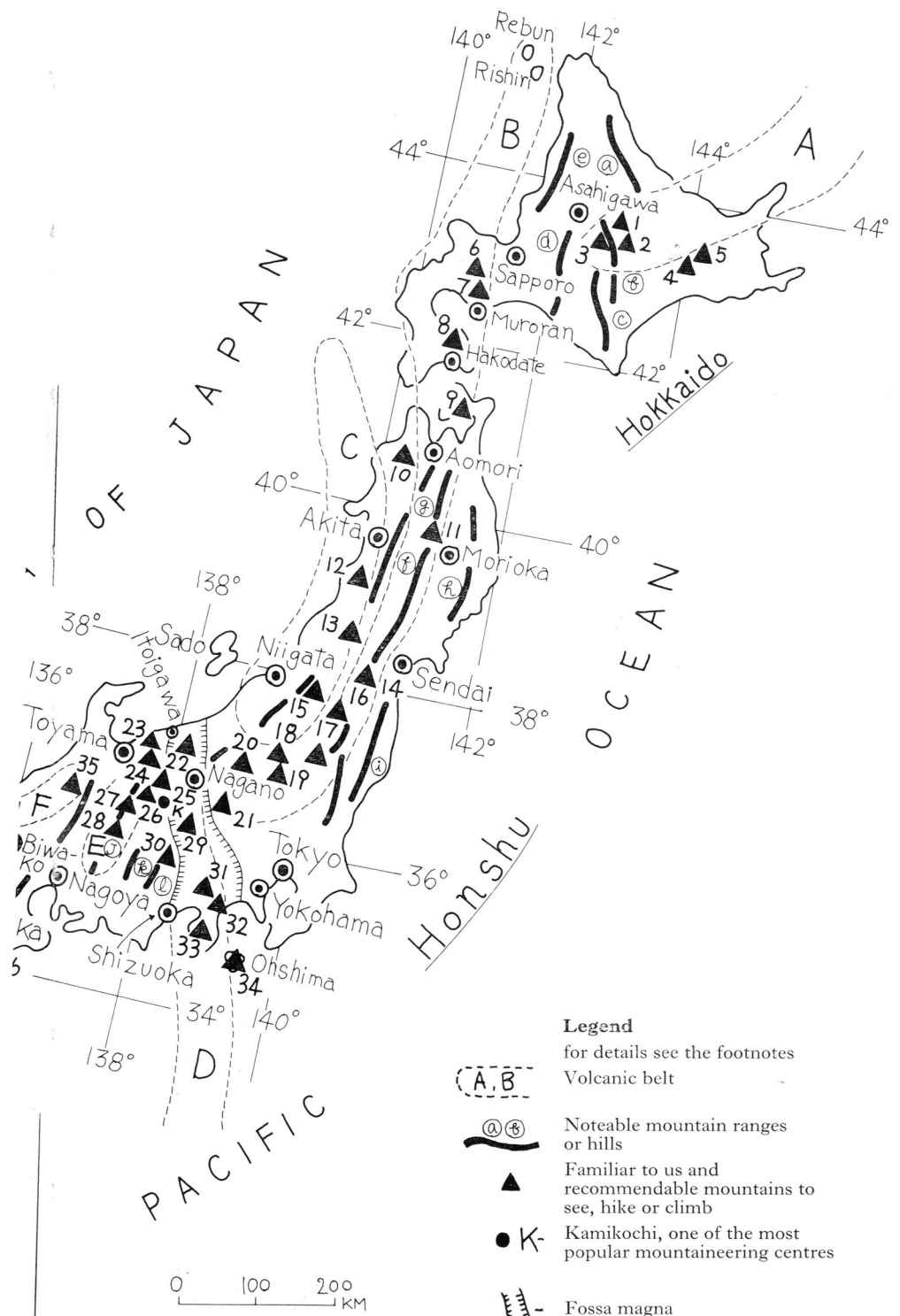
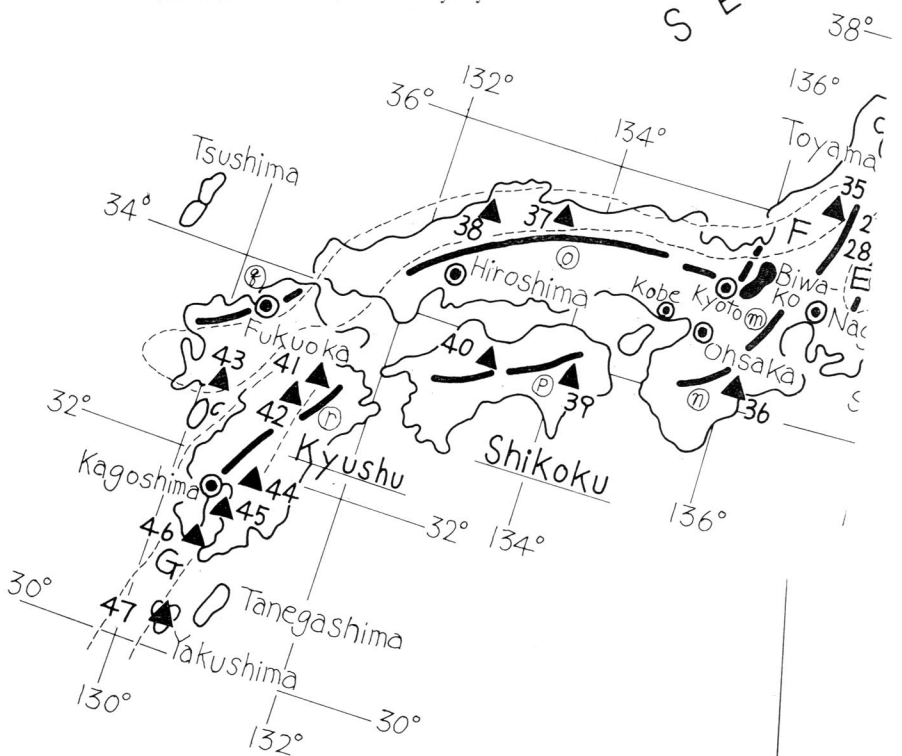
- ▲ 1 Daisetsuzan (2290 m) 2 Ishikaridake (1980 m) 3 Tokachidake (2077 m)
 4 Meakandake (1503 m) 5 Oakandake (1371 m) 6 Yoteizan (1893 m) 7
 Usudake (725 m) 8 Komagatake (1140 m) 9 Osorezan (828 m) 10 Iwakisan
 (1625 m) 11 Iwatesan (2041 m) 12 Chokaisan (2230 m) 13 Gassan
 (1980 m) 14 Zaosan (1841 m) 15 Iidesan (2105 m) 16 Bantaisan (1819 m)
 17 Nasudake (1918 m) 18 Hiuchidake (2346 m) 19 Nantaisan (2484 m)
 20 Tanigawadake (1963 m) 21 Asamayama (2542 m) 22 Myokosan (2446 m)
 23 Tsurugidake (2998 m) 24 Tateyama (3015 m) 25 Yarigatake (3180 m)
 26 Okuhodakadake (3190 m) 27 Norikuradake (3026 m) 28 Ontakesan
 (3063 m) 29 Yatsugatake (2899 m) 30 Kitadake (3192 m) 31 Fujisan
 (3776 m) 32 Hakone-Kamiyama (1438 m) 33 Amagisan (1407 m) 34
 Miharayama (755 m) 35 Hakusan (2702 m) 36 Odaigaharayama (1695 m)
 37 Daisen (1712 m) 38 Sanbeyama (1126 m) 39 Kenzan (1955 m) 40
 Ishizuchiyama (1981 m) 41 Kujusan (1788 m) 42 Asozan (1592 m) 43
 Unzendake (1360 m) 44 Kirishimayama (1700 m) 45 Sakurajima-Ontake
 (1118 m) 46 Kaimondake (922 m) 47 Miyanouradake (1935 m, highest in
 Kyushu)

Notable mountain ranges or hills

- a Kitami b Ishikari c Hidaka d Yubari e Teshio f Ohu g Dewa
 h Kitagami i Abukuma j Hida (Northern Alps) k Kiso (Central Alps)
 l Akaishi m Suzuka n Kii o Chugoku p Shikoku q Chikushi
 r Kyushu

A,B,C---Volcanic belt

- A Chishima B Nasu C Chokai D Fuji E Norikura or Ontake
 F Hakusan or Daisen G Kirishima or Ryukyu



Legend

for details see the footnotes

Volcanic belt

(A,B)

Noteable mountain ranges
or hills



Familiar to us and
recommendable mountains to
see, hike or climb



Kamikochi, one of the most
popular mountaineering centres



Fossa magna

(3776 m); 2) Kitadake (3192 m); 3) Okuhodakadake (3190 m); 4) Ainotake (3189 m); 5) Yarigatake (3180 m); 6) Arakawadake (3146 m); 7) Akaishidake (3120 m); 8) Ohbamidake (3120 m); 9) Karasawadake (3103 m); 10) Kitahodakadake (3100 m).

As for volcanoes, and forgetting for a moment about altitudes, we have 186 volcanoes, about 60 of them active. The highest active volcano is Asamayama (2542 m) situated 140 km NW of Tokyo. It is interesting, and I think it natural, that almost all the National Parks (23) of Japan have a volcano or two within their boundaries.

As to the passes, we have about 333 (from 1102 m to 3000 m) which can be used as such in the snow-free season. Pass-walking in Japan in the spring or autumn seasons is very good and exhilarating. Veteran mountaineers can still come back for many years to their familiar passes and enjoy the valleys, forests and surrounding mountains in which they passed their younger days.

Mountain huts and lodgings There are a few mountain huts built by school's or businessmen's Alpine clubs. The Japanese Alpine Club has only one hut in Kamikohchi, though many of its local branches have small ones of their own, but these are not open and free for the general public.

We have now about 1250 mountain huts throughout Japan's mountain area, but almost all of them are privately run and profit-making. They are situated at the important places from the mountaineering point of view. But you must be prepared there to find a rather unpleasant atmosphere, especially in the height of the season. According to our *Mountaineering Diary*, we have mountain huts as above in the major mountain groups as follows: Hokkaido (56), North East district (153), Northern Alps (235), Central Alps (108), Fujisan (78), Kanto district (174), and others.

The average Japanese standard of behaviour is very low and poor, especially in the case of hikers and mountaineers with very little education or social conscience. Because of them, and because of the commercialism of the hut proprietors (I do not, of course, apply it to all of them), one should not expect very neat and comfortable mountain trips and accommodation comparable with those of the European Alps, North American mountains and other civilised places.

Beside these mountain huts mainly for mountaineers, there are about 1500 public lodgings and 120 youth hostels which are used by the general public through some formal procedures. Among them we have Public and Private National Lodgings, National Vacation Villages, Public Youth Hostels, Lodgings run by Prefecture, City and Village authorities, and Mountain Huts of the National Railways. But these are mainly for hikers and sightseers, and places need to be reserved some time ahead if you really want to use them. Thus we have too many huts and lodgings in such a small country. It seems to us that they serve to promote more and more the destruction of our irreplaceable natural heritage.



52 *E face of Tsurugidake* Photo: H. Ishizaka

The characteristics of Japan are that, on the one hand, it has many mountains for its small size, and on the other, great variations of weather during the year. The beauty of Japanese mountains can be found in its dense forests, deep and clear valleys and peaceful passes. We can scarcely find four seasons in the highest mountain areas of the world, but in Japan they come and pass one after the other regularly, changing the varied nature of our countryside. The late Mr Tetsuno Ueda, a famous mountaineer and outstanding poet and writer, who had been abroad sometimes as leader of climbing expeditions, realised in his last years that the mountains of Japan were his spiritual home. I heartily endorse this view.

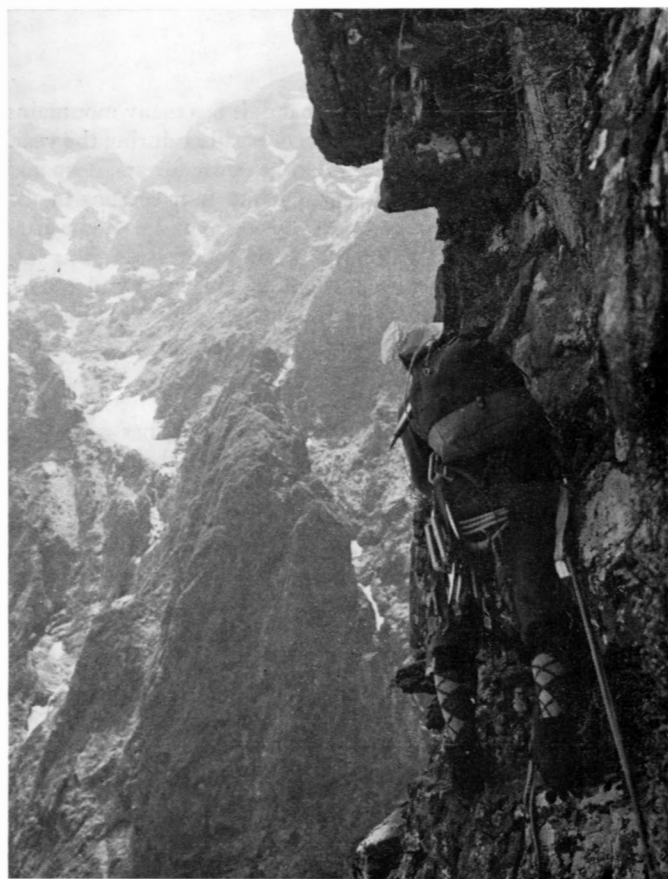
As to the history of Japanese mountaineering, Yasuji Yamazaki has written an article 'Modern Mountaineering in Japan' for *AJ 71* in which the brief history of our mountaineering and our major overseas expeditions are described. And later Kyuya Fukada (1903-71) wrote 'After Manaslu . . . Post-war Japanese Alpine Expeditions' in the *Japan Quarterly 12* 1965 (Asahi Press). Both articles included our activities up to 1965, so now they have become a little out of date. I think we must some day compile the history of our expeditions from 1966 to the present day.

Let me have a moment to digress from the main subject. Recently Mr Fosco Maraini handed me a letter from M Lucien Devies of Paris addressed to him. In short: 1) M Devies does not agree with the methods of Japanese Alpinists, especially in the Alps. They use too many pitons and artificial techniques. 2)

He cannot find any articles revealing the true Japanese spirit in regard to mountains or difficult mountaineering. He says he has been reading *Sangaku* every year and it offers nothing which reflects a pure, deep, poetical and philosophical attitude to the mountains. 3) Let me have two or three titles of outstanding Japanese books on mountains and climbing even if they have never been translated. It may be a good chance to have such books translated and brought to the attention of Western climbers.

As for the first claim of M Devies, I agree with him entirely. I have written about it several times in the leading magazines and had given warnings to them, until now without any serious response. Secondly, like France and other leading countries, we also have many mountaineer poets, artists and philosophers of whom we too can boast. But it is true at the same time to say that we have many climbers who should rather be described as mobs or climbing animals. However, I would not like to believe that all the Japanese climbers or mountaineers are like that. You should read some of our fine books which have attained a very high quality, such as Yuko Maki's *Sanko* (Mountain Scrambling). How happy we would be if the rest of the world had time to learn Japanese!

53 *High standard rock climbing on Tanigawadake* Photo: Y. Keikoku



Returning to the subject. According to the announcement of the Police Headquarters of Nagano Prefecture, we had a total of 170 persons who had met with accidents in 1972 within the area under its control, mainly the E side of the Northern Alps. Among them 69 were fatal, 76 injured and 25 rescued. The number of mountaineers who entered this area was 130,000 in spring (April to June), 570,000 in summer (July and August), 270,000 in autumn (September to November) and 50,000 in winter (December to March).

It is certain that rock-climbing is an independent kind of sport which does not always equate with mountaineering. There are many cases where I must severely discriminate between rock-climber and mountaineer. Anyway, it can be rightly said that rock-climbing as a sport was introduced into Japan by Yuko Maki for the first time in 1921. We have some popular rock-climbing places in Japan; the Hodaka-Yari group, Tsurugidake (near Tateyama) and some splendid rock walls along the Kurobe river in the Northern Alps. In the Kanto district (W, NW and N of Tokyo), Ichinokuradani is the most famous, while Mitsutohge is for beginners. In Chubu and Kansai, we have some fine crags near Nagoya (Gozaishoyama) and near Kobe (Rokkozan, one of the birth places of our rock-climbing). The Great Buttress of Kitadake and Kaikomagatake are in the Southern Alps. You can also find some fine places in Yatsugatake near Kohfu City, Yamanashi Prefecture.

The high mountain valleys of Japan are very deep, with waterfalls at times, high rock walls and forests on both sides and many violent rapids to be crossed. So valley-climbing calls for many kinds of mountain-climbing techniques and as such it is very popular in Japan. In the past, I have been several times in unrecorded valleys and fortunately have taken part in some pioneering valley ascents. Nowadays, around Tanzawayama, Tanigawadake, Iidesan, Asahidake, Ohminesan and Ohdaigaharayama we still have many interesting large scale playgrounds for it.

Skiing It is said generally that skiing was introduced to Japan in 1911, first in Niigata Prefecture by an Austrian General, Theodor von Lerch (1869-1945) who was a leading disciple of Matthias Zdarsky (1856-1940). Lerch's handwritten manuscript *Erinnerungen eines Österreichischen Generals an Japan (1910-1912)* was found in Austria, translated by Osamu Nakano into Japanese and published in 1970.

We have now about 400 ski resorts, among them the most popular ones are as follows: Daisetsuzan and around Sapporo in Hokkaido, Zaozan in Yamagata Prefecture, Myoto, Akakura, Shigakohgen, Naebayama and Nozawa Hot Spring in Nagano Prefecture, Tateyama in Toyama, Ibukiyama, NE of the Lake Biwa and Daisen in Tottori Prefecture. Now we have a much too large ski population and you must expect to find a great mass of colourful so-called experts and permanent novices gathered on small sugar hills everywhere. You had better take care not to catch a cold when queueing up in a long line for a lift or a rope-way.

As to the naming of the Japanese Alps, the Rev Walter Weston (1861-1940) is believed to have been the first one to christen them. But the fact is that he was

the most influential distributor of the names through his two wonderful books, *Mountaineering and Exploration in the Japanese Alps* and *The Playground of the Far East*, published in 1896 and 1918 respectively by John Murray in London. Now he has a bronze portrait hanging on a big rock facing the clean and cold stream of the Azusa river in Kamikochi. The Weston Festival is held in front of it every June. Many names were originally due to William Gowland (1842–1922), who first gave a name to the Hida range (Northern Japanese Alps).

This British mountaineer came to Japan in 1872 and climbed Yarigatake in 1878 as the first foreigner. I think the Central and Southern Alps were so named by the Japanese some time later. By reading the Rev W. H. Murray Walton's *Scrambles in Japan and Formosa*, now one of the rarest books relevant to earlier Japanese mountaineering, I found he was the first foreigner to climb in the Central Japanese Alps (Kiso range) in 1927.

Mr Alan Blackshaw, a friend of mine, presented me with a new edition of his *Mountaineering*, full of the latest information and very instructive for us all. It shows that British mountaineers have two collective organisations—BMC (British Mountaineering Council) and ASCC (Association of Scottish Climbing Clubs). The former has 130 clubs and the latter 30, and both organisations work closely together. As for such organisations in Japan, we have only one, namely the Japanese Mountaineering Association, which is constituted of all 46 Prefectural Mountaineering Federations, which total 1917 Alpine clubs and 69,930 individual climbers. The movement to establish a national mountaineering organisation had begun by 1930. In 1965 it was set up in the present form and joined the Japan Athletic Society, which is controlled by the Ministry of Education. In 1968 the JMA was incorporated. The Japanese Alpine Club joined the Tokyo Mountaineering Federation and has been sending some executive directors to the JMA and TMF. The latest President of the JMA was the world-famous Mr Saburo Matsukata, an Honorary Member of the Alpine Club and of the JAC, but sad to say he passed away on 15 September 1973 after a long illness. At present Japanese climbers cannot go to the mountains of India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan without recommendations of the club to which they belong, then that of the Prefectural Mountaineering Federation, and lastly of the JMA. It is a great pity that in spite of this system, we still have many accidents (for various reasons) in these countries every year. In Japan we have about 1000 universities including junior colleges, and almost all of them have their own Alpine clubs. There has been a movement among them to organise a University Mountaineering Federation, but owing to various incomprehensible reasons they did not do so until recently.

As for mountaineering training institutes, there is one under the direct control of the Ministry of Education in Toyama Prefecture on the western foot of Tateyama. This was opened in 1967 and has short courses of training in practical technique and lectures in theory all through the year. The instructors are generally recommended by the Prefectural Federations or the leaders and would-be leaders of the university alpine clubs. There are similar institutes in Kobe (established in 1970) and in Ohmachi (Nagano Prefecture Mountaineering All-round Centre, opened in 1969). The JMA also has annual meetings.



54 *Chokaiizan in winter* Photo: A. Shoji

There we have lectures and exchange of opinions and ideas among the members attending. Winter lectures and training are held, mainly on Fujisan, under the leadership of the JAC every year. There are some serious mountaineering schools in Japan but their scale is small as yet.

The basis of mountaineering in Japan is very wide. This is due in some measure to the active propaganda of 'Return to Nature' and to the excessively developed transport facilities. Ten per cent of the population of Japan (over 100 million) go to high or low mountains, and among them about 100,000 seem to climb very difficult mountains in winter and summer or other seasons. But the number of mountaineers who have climbed overseas seems to be under 10,000.

Mountaineering books, periodicals and magazines In Japan nowadays, books, periodicals and magazines concerning mountaineering, have a great circulation, especially the latter, and because of this the prices are rather low compared with other publications; their contents include many beautiful and artistic pictures. Foreigners often wonder at the unbelievably low prices of such luxurious magazines. The most popular ones are *Yama to Keikoku* (*Mountain and Valley*), *Iwa to Yuki* (*Rock and Snow*) and *Gakujin* (*Mountaineer*).

The first number of the former was published 43 years ago and I have been writing something for it from the first volume right up to the present almost without interruption. The latter two are popular among the mountaineers and

climbers of the middle and higher classes. Recently *Mountain* of London has also been available in Japan. The JAC issues *Sangaku (Mountain)* annually and it has become one of the famous and essential mountaineering periodicals throughout the world. But we are very sorry that it has no English edition.

Some advice for foreigners Here we have some advice for would-be hikers or climbers from foreign countries. The first problem lies in Japan's special weather conditions. Even out of the rainy season, the weather is quickly changeable. Generally speaking the rainy season begins in June and ends in the middle of July, but in Hokkaido there is no rainy season. High mountain climbing can be done in all seasons in Japan if you are the complete all-the-year-round climber. But for moderate climbers and hikers, spring or autumn are best; then the weather is comparatively settled. Vigorous typhoons visit us from the end of August to 10 September almost regularly. Winter mountaineering in the high mountains of Japan is very severe and dangerous, so you must be prepared for it in every way.

Facilities for transportation (air-flight, railway and bus) have been developed rather too much to every corner of the four islands. But in the high season you will not be able to use these facilities without reserving accommodation beforehand in hotels and lodgings, though perhaps not in mountain huts.

You can find sports shops in our major cities and towns. But you cannot obtain very large or very long sizes of equipment such as clothing, shoes, stockings, packs or skis. According to an article written by Mr Glen Converse, an American member of the JAC, the average Japanese is about 10-15 cm shorter than the average Westerner.

As the JAC usually do not render trip service except on a personal basis, you should consult the JTB directly. Its address is: The Japan Tourist Bureau, 1-6-4, Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo. This is located five minutes' walk from Tokyo Central Railway Station.

Lastly, again you should remember that in the period between the middle of December and the beginning of January, we Japanese are usually very busy preparing for the New Year's Festival and visiting each other for thanksgiving for the past days and greetings for the New Year. Many students and employees go mountain-climbing and skiing, while some well-to-do folk go to hot springs with their families, so you may find people are not available in this period. It is the same in the summer season.