

A Fabulous Trip to Japan

Penny and Grant Patton, August 18, 2013

We have made a number of trips to Japan beginning in 1986 when we traveled on a bus tour with the ZNA Southern California Koi Club. The first two Club trip introduced us to the Japanese culture including shopping, Temple visits and a few koi. Each trip has been a special experience. Recent trips have involved mostly koi. In the fall of 2011 we discovered Mr. Kodama's book *Koishi*, in which he described his visits and friendships with many of the breeders in Ojiya during his long career. At that point, we decided to accompany Mr. Kodama and Taro as they purchased koi during the last week of Harvest leading up to the Nogynosai show.

On Day one we flew Delta from Atlanta direct to Narita airport in Japan. Remember that you lose a day going and gain a day when you return. We landed in the afternoon and took the Narita Express into Tokyo Station. Fortunately, we had done this before and didn't make any wrong turns... we met a friend of Taro's, who was also named Taro at the train station and followed him through the station as he explained where to find the bullet train and helped us buy a ticket that we would need the following morning. Everyone in the station runs around at full speed and seems to know exactly where they are going. The answer is to follow the green line.

Taro's friend walked with us to the hotel which was next to the station. In our hotel room high above the city we could see the Needle and other landmarks. Penny thought it was like being in the clouds. Dinner was noodles and seafood in a small restaurant in the station. You just follow the crowd and begin to feel like a local.



The bullet train is terrific: quiet, fast and exactly on time. We passed through the city, then small towns, farms and mountains, all real Japanese country side. The trip lasts about 90 minutes and really is pleasant as they serve juice, tea and snacks. It's the way a train trip should be.

The Nagoaka train station is smaller and meeting Taro was easy. We loaded the bags in the car, said hello to Mr. Kodama and were off to see Kohaku at a small breeder just outside the city. There were



kohaku all over, large and small. Two looked very promising but we waited to see more before buying. We had lunch at small restaurant and meet Torazo and-----two breeders we had met on earlier trips. We then sped off to visit Marudo to see a beautiful 4 year old sanke Mr. Kodama had been developing in the mud pond and finally made a short visit to Dainichi.

We checked in at the Business Man's hotel in Ojiya, which is popular with hobbyists and dealers which often included many international collectors. On this trip we didn't see many friends. or dealers. We and many others had been staying at the hotel the night on the earthquake. Fortunately, the hotel suffered very little damage.

We were able to identify each breeder in Mr. Kodama's book and to reread about each as we drove along. It was fun to ask Mr. Kodama to tell us about the breeders with whom he had been friends for many years. He related the breeder's interest, the blood lines he had developed and his successes.



The trip was one adventure after another, Taro's friend, girl friend and another couple visited Ojiya for a day of koi hunting after which we celebrated with a special eel dinner together. Eel is a real delicacy which sounds questionable but was a special Japanese experience and it was delicious. Late in the trip Mr. Kodama surprised us with a formal Japanese dinner prepared by a very special chef at a small restaurant near the hotel. Many creative courses involving a myriad of sea creatures prepared in fascinating style arrived one after the other and all were delicious. We ended the meal with black sesame ice cream which just seemed perfect.

Each day we visited different breeders in different parts of the Ojiya district including Musigame and many other small communities. Koi is the common bond throughout this part of Japan and an integral part of the culture. Sometimes we would return to check and compare a koi we had seen earlier. Sometimes we had to make quick decisions. One day in the Dianichi warehouse there was a concrete pond of 2 year old showa that had arrived the day before. As we were looking at hundreds of beautiful young showa Futoshi Mano, president of Dainichi Koi Farm, walked up and asked if we had a favorite fish. I looked at all of those fish wondering, when Penny said "yes, that one ". They netted it and we bought it. Mr. Kodama smiled. Fortunately, it is a special fish that we took to Louisville this year. Lucky!

We asked to visit Kansuke since he was our last visit before the earthquake and he lost all of his koi in the tragedy. He specializes in Kohaku. Mr. Kodama found Kansuke's greenhouse high in the mountains one afternoon and we renewed past acquaintances. He had only Kohaku large and small. The large fish were beautiful but we found a three year old that we fell in love with and were able to buy. Kansuke stated that he had entered it in the Nogoyosai show and asked if we minded which of course we didn't. It was good to see an old friend back in action with great kohaku.

We visited a Shiro Utsuri at Yamanaka Koi Farm many times and also the Isa greenhouse to compare a showa an equal number of visits . At tea, Mr. Isa talked about showa and encouraged us “to never give up on a koi we truly liked”. On the last day we selected the Shiro, but Isa’s fish were wonderful.

Penny found a beautiful platinum at Yamacho Koi farm. All he raises are platinums. I found a special 2 year old kohaku at Murata koi Farm which I am convinced will grow large. At least, the parents are very large and it has a broad head.

One special experience was our visit to the Japanese Inn Izuziya not to be confused with the koi dealer. This was a traditional Japanese Inn that was popular with Japanese couples on vacation. No one spoke English and we don’t speak Japanese. In spite of this it was wonderful. We enjoyed the hot baths under the stars and didn’t use the wrong gender. Again the meals were great and by this time we were old hands at handling the many courses. I tried to ask a few questions but that was a failed effort. It was best to let things happen by themselves. No shoes and no street clothes, of course.



On Saturday we went to the Nogyosai and were astonished by the quality of the large Grand champion Dainichi Kohaku, a great sanke and a really beautiful Showa. We enjoyed this show more than the All Japan Show because it was smaller and more intimate. You recognized the owners of many of the great fish. We met a number of Americans that we had seen at dealers such as Kaneko and we all laughed at our good fortune to be among such special koi.

At the Nosgyosai we looked for Penny’s kohaku but did not see it in Kansuke’s tank. Mr. Kodama laughed and pointed to a separate group of tanks where our Kohaku had been awarded best in size 55. This was our first Japanese show award and an unbelievable experience.

On Sunday we returned to Tokyo and found our way to the hotel without a guide. We were old hands by this time and had a Starbucks coffee on Monday morning on the way to the Narita Express and the ride back to Narita airport. We departed on Monday and arrived back in Charleston also on Monday. The Delta flight was very nice.

The new fish spent the quarantine in Honolulu and all have been swimming happily in our front yard for many months. If you visit Charleston, come see the koi.

Penny and I offer a warm thank you to Mr. Kodama and Taro for our best Japan trip ever.

Grant and Penny Patton