

DISCOVER AKITA 秋田

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Innai: Beautiful Nature

"I wish I could convey to you any idea of the beauty and wildness of that mountain route, of the surprises on the way, of views, of the violent deluges of rain which turned rivulets into torrents..." (Bird, 282)

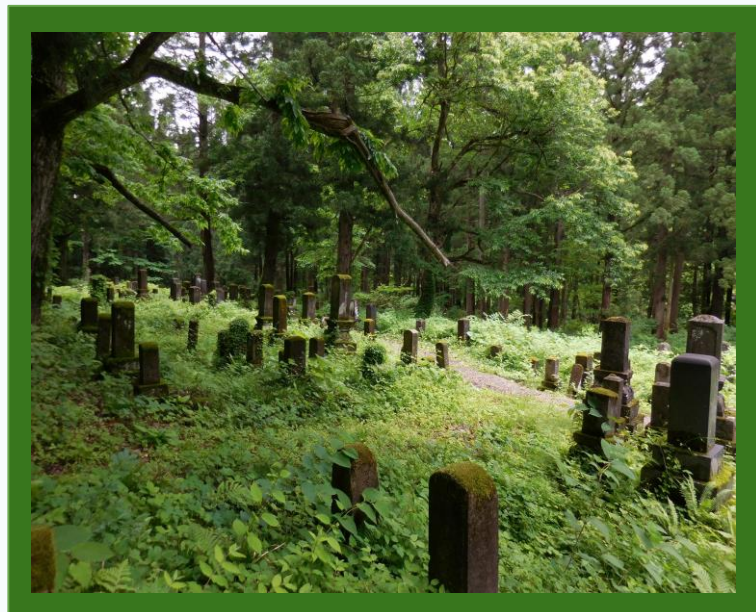
In the quote above, Isabella Bird is describing her entrance into Innai. The Innai that Bird saw was so beautiful and unique that it was difficult for her to describe to readers in the West what she had seen. Set in the mountains, it was a lively mining town, abundant with people. The checkpoint gate, monumented in the picture below, saw many people come to Innai to work in the silver mine. It was a major checkpoint for all travelers, Japanese or otherwise, and saw many people come and go. It stands as a testament to the large town that Bird visited.



Although the Innai of today is vastly different from the Innai of the Meiji Era, it still holds the beautiful mountain nature that was so breathtaking to Bird. The nature imaged above has grown over where buildings used to stand by the entrance of the silver mine. Towering cedar trees have replaced the homes and businesses of Innai, leaving little remnants behind.



Innai is now a much smaller place and the remnants of the silver mining town is lost in the mountain nature. Imaged to the right, the cemetery of the previous mining town is now settled into abundant nature, with foliage growing over the headstones, and moss flourishing in the crevices of statues. Standing amongst the nature in Innai, it is clear that the people here are connected to nature.



All photos by Laura Pueringer

Yokote: Inns to Agriculture

“Yokote, a town of 10,000 people with a large trade in cottons.” (Bird, 288)



Yokote resident farmer

Bird and Yokote

During Bird's visit to Yokote, her opinion was not high. She declared Yokote's best inns to be "ill-favoured and a miserable place". Her opinion of Yokote in contrast to people's opinion today is drastically different. Yokote is celebrated for its food culture and untouched heritage sites as well as boasting wonderful agriculture and many seasonal matsuri, such as *kamakura*- an old tradition of constructing snow huts and illuminating them from the inside.

Yokote Now

Yokote now sports a population of over 100,000 people and is known for its agricultural produce. In 2008, 8 cities (Yokote, Omori, Masuda, Jumonji, Sannai, Taiyu, Hiraka and Omonogawa) within the neighbouring areas combined to create what is now known as Yokote city. Yokote is often described as a heritage city with various sites such as Yokote Castle and Samurai residences.



The combination of eight cities known Today as Yokote

Yokote Specialty

Yokote is the leading producer of Apples, Watermelons, Asparagus and Chrysanthemums in Akita prefecture. 50% of all apples in Akita are produced in Yokote city. Yokote is also known for it's production of Akitakomachi rice which took second place in Akita rice production. Yokote is also famous For it's own variety of yakisoba.



Jinguji: Religion in Akita

"[Japan is]....an Empire with a splendid despotism for its apex, and naked coolies for its base a bald materialism its highest creed and material good its goal, reforming, destroying, constructing, appropriating the fruits of Christian civilization, but rejecting the tree from which they spring - such are among the contrasts and incongruities everywhere!" (Bird, 306)

Bird visited a school in Kubota(Akita) and what she found there was that the curriculum did not include religion. Furthermore, they ridiculed the idea of doing so. They stated, "We have no religion, and all your learned men know that religion is false." Bird's quote above is in reference to this. She had difficulty believing that people.

Jinguji shrine photo by Laura

However, Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples have existed throughout Japanese history. Why did teachers tell her that Japan has no religion? The priest in Jinguji explained that there are three things necessary for religion; founder, scripture, and propagation. Shinto has none of these and Shinto itself is a way of living, There are no strict rules. As Shinto does not follow religion in a typical sense, perhaps this is why they stated to Bird that they do not have "religion".



Inside of Jinguji photo by Yuki

The priest also explained how Shinto has changed. When buddhism came to Japan, Shinto gradually changed along side of it. Jinguji shrine was also affected. Shrines in Shinto are relatively small, but Jinguji is large because of the influence of buddhism. Not only this but Jinguji is also open to the public.. When we visited, the priest taught us how to pray and what to pray for kindly. He gave a casual speech about the history of the shrine and Shintoism. This allowed us to easily understand religion in Akita.

People of Akita: Us and Bird

"The great melancholy stare is depressing." (Bird, 287)



Isabella Lucy Bird

<http://vignette2.wikia.nocookie.net/curious-expedition/images/d/d3/Bird.jpg/>

Bird is commenting on how people in Akita seem to not be energetic people in the quote above. Their faces were ones of people who did not appear to be happy in their lives nor welcoming to outside people.



Image by Ryota Watai

When staying with host families in Akita, imaged below, we found them to be very loving and happy people. They offered us a great amount of food, and welcomed us into their homes warmly. Pictured above is some of the local foods they treated us to. They showed us what they did in their daily lives, and shared their homes enthusiastically. We were able to see the connections to the community they had, such as the local produce sold within the community. We got a great sense for what people in Akita are really like: friendly, hospitable, and communal.



Yuki and Ryota's host Father studied in Tokyo when he was a university student and studied English. He is a very open minded person.

Photo by Ryota



Nash and Laura's host family were excited to share their home and were eager to teach them about their daily life in Akita.

Photo by Laura