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Japan Video Topics 2009/2010 No.2 June '09 English Summary

Hiking the Shinetsu Trail

4'29"

This newly completed hiking trail runs for 80 km through the Sekida mountains, an easily accessible range of 1,000 m peaks covered with old forests of Japanese *buna* beech trees. These woods, filled with springs, lakes and ponds, are unique for being almost entirely free from other tree species, and also for the way they have been shaped and polished by the region's heavy winter snowfall. The Shinetsu Trail is open year-round, and is a wonderfully convenient way to explore the delights of nature in Japan.

When Mending Becomes an Art

3'24"

Mottainai is a traditional Japanese custom of never wasting anything that can be repaired instead. *Kintsugi* originated 400 years ago as a method for mending broken pottery with a lacquer resin glue, repeatedly polishing many layers of lacquer for a seamless join. Artisans decorated their repairs by adding gold dust to the lacquer, and *kintsugi* gradually developed into an art form in which the repair actually added beauty and value. Old ceramics mended in this way can be extremely valuable, and the art itself is becoming popular again.

A Better Way to Peaceful Sleep

3'21"

Japan, like many parts of the world, suffers from biting insects during the hot, humid summer nights. Insecticides or air conditioning are not ideal for health or for the environment, so people are rediscovering the benefits of the traditional mosquito net for insect-free sleep. The Japanese *kaya* mosquito net is a uniquely spacious, box-like design, but the weave used for its netting impeded the flow of air, making it warm inside. Modern weaving techniques have now solved this, and the *kaya* is regaining popularity as a natural, healthy way to ensure a good night's sleep.

New Technology for Disabled Sports

4'22"

A vital factor in the current worldwide advance of disabled sports is the development of specialized technology to allow athletes with disabilities to take part in competitive sports. Athletic wheelchairs and prosthetic equipment must be specially designed for each sport and also customized to meet the greatly differing requirements of each user. We introduce a Japanese company that has revolutionized sports wheelchair design with a new frame-building technique, and a sports trainer/equipment developer who refines his designs through daily feedback from the athletes he coaches.

Hiking the Shinetsu Trail

4'29"

01 (Mountains - map)
The Sekida mountain range runs along the border between Niigata and Nagano, 170 kilometers from Tokyo. Easy to access, these 1000-meter high mountains are a fine introduction to outdoor Japan.

02 (Pan R over rice paddies)
Here, in autumn 2008, Japan's longest trekking trail was completed.
This is the Shinetsu Trail.

03 (View down from hills)
For over a thousand years, paths along these ridges served as trade routes connecting the villages of the region. Those far off times are recalled by old stone markers along the trail, inscribed with prayers for safe travel.

04 (Signpost)
This historical route has now been reborn as a trekking trail for enjoying the delightful local scenery.

05 (Long shot of mountain – zoom in)
It takes about six days to walk the full length of the 80-kilometer trail, with overnight stops at lodgings at the foot of mountains. However, since the trail is easily accessible from the lowlands, it's easy to join it at any point for a day trek.

06 (Signpost)
Come with us now, as we walk the trail with a local guide.

07 (Long shot of man walking)
The first thing to catch the eye is the deep beech forest. The beech trees, 100 to 200 years old, that cover these slopes are often bent out of shape by the winter snow. This is one of the world's snowiest regions, with a seasonal snowfall of over 6 meters.

08 (Pan R - trees)
The heavy snow smoothes the trees' bark, giving them a beauty quite unlike beeches in other regions. These forests are also unique in being almost purely beech, containing very few other species.

09 (Spring)
Beech forests are often called "green dams" for their ability to act as natural reservoirs, and the sights and sounds of water are ever present.

09a (Lake)

Lakes and ponds can be seen at many points along the trail.

10 (Zoom in on eggs under water)
The pure spring water nurtures many interesting life forms.
These are the eggs of the black salamander.
And these curious eggs will grow into forest green tree frogs.

11 (Bird on tree trunk)
In May and June, as the last snows melt away, many flowers unique to this area begin blooming by the trailside.

11a (Pink flowers –> butterfly)
Another seasonal sight is this butterfly, known as the "goddess of Spring."

12 (Hikers)
One of the local mountains gives its name to this rare plant.

13 (Hikers in open field)
It's worth making the small effort to climb one of the peaks for the superb view.

14 (Autumn leaves)
Throughout the autumn month of October, the trail is carpeted in fallen yellow and red beech leaves.

15 (Snow scene)
Hikers still walk the trail even in the depths of winter, clad in snowshoes.

16 (Green forest)
The Shinetsu Trail – one of the easiest and most delightful ways to enjoy the Japanese landscape.

When Mending Becomes an Art

3'24"

01 (Broken bowl)
Break a favorite bowl, and you throw it out, right?
Not in Japan, where the traditional habit of *mottainai* refuses to waste anything.
The old Japanese went even further, mending crockery in ways that actually make it more valuable and beautiful.

02 (Workshop)
This method for repairing ceramics is called *kintsugi*, and it's been used for over 400 years. Broken pieces are bonded, and the line of the repair is decorated with gold.

03 (Interview - M)
"*Kintsugi* offers a lot to us in the present age too, and I am getting many more students today. People see how old items can be given new life and made even more beautiful than before they broke."

04 (Broken pot)
Let's look at the processes involved in *kintsugi*.
First, the edges of the broken fragments are coated with a glue made from lacquer resin.
The fragments are firmly bonded back into place.
Then the joints are rubbed with an abrasive such as charcoal until the surface is perfectly smooth again.

05 (Using a brush)
After drying, more lacquer is applied and again rubbed smooth. This process is repeated many times before lacquer mixed with gold dust adds the final finish.

06 (Pan up on repaired pot)
It took about one month's work to restore this broken pot to life.

07 (Workshop)
A number of other repair methods use the same principles as *kintsugi*.

08 (Broken glass)
It's an effective way to repair broken glass items.

09 (Pot)
Another effect is obtained using a silver finish instead of gold.

10 (Blue and white bowl)
The original design and pattern can be incorporated into the repair.

11 (Yellow plate)
Sometimes the lacquer is colored to match the original surface and hide the repair.
All these traditional techniques use a lacquer mixture.

12 (Pot with black background)
Kintsugi is far more than just an appealing technique for repairing broken or chipped crockery. Using gold to emphasize the line of the repair became a way of adding beauty to the original – a method for mending breakages became an artistic technique in its own right.

13 (Brown bowl)
For example, here the gold repair is made to suggest a waterfall – the accidental crack now adds to the design.

14 (Red and gold bowl)
Kintsugi has a long history of such use for artistic purposes.
This famous work by ceramic artist Honami Koetsu dates from the 16th century, and is still much admired today.

15 (Interview – M – starts from zoom in on bowl)
"It's important to develop a different way to appreciate beauty. Then you can begin to see things like landscapes in the shape and line of the cracks."

16 (Brushing gold dust on teapot handle)
Taking something as ordinary as mending cracked pottery and developing it into a sophisticated way of expressing a fresh kind of beauty – *kintsugi* is a very Japanese art form.

A Better Way to Peaceful Sleep

3'21"

01 (Forest road)
In the heat and humidity of the Japanese summer, mosquitoes and other biting insects become a constant irritation that makes it hard to get a good night's sleep. We can protect ourselves with coils or insecticide sprays, or shut the windows and sleep with the air conditioner on, but none of these methods are ideal for healthy sleep or for the environment.

02 (Erecting mosquito net)
Mosquito netting is an effective natural method of keeping insects away without wasting energy or causing allergies. These benefits are helping a revival of the *kaya*, the uniquely spacious design of mosquito net traditionally used in Japan.

03 (Blue *kaya*)
A drawback of traditional *kaya* is that they can't be washed, which limits their usable life.

04 (Sewing net)
This has now changed, thanks to the introduction of different weaving techniques to make the netting. These days, summer kimonos are made using a modern type of weave that allows air to pass more freely, and this specialist netting company realized it could use new weaving technology to make a better mosquito net.

05 (Interview - M)
"In the traditional plain weave, the vertical and horizontal threads would easily slip and make the holes too big unless the whole net was starched. That's why you couldn't wash the old *kaya*. We thought about this and experimented to see if we could use modern weaving technology to make a better mosquito net to solve this problem."

06 (Chart)
This chart shows how the inside of a traditionally made *kaya* gradually heats up as you sleep. In a *kaya* made with the new technique, the opposite is true – the temperature actually keeps falling. The new weaving method requires no starch to maintain its shape, so air passes much more freely and the netting can be washed as required.

07 (Raised bed with *kaya*)

The old *kaya* were designed to match the traditional Japanese style of sleeping on the floor on *futon* quilts. Today's *kaya* are designed to match modern lifestyles, with *kaya* to fit beds, and compact, easily portable versions. Thanks to this new versatility, the Japanese *kaya* design is now being adopted around the world to combat malaria and other insect-borne diseases.

08 (Interview - F)
"In a *kaya*, you can sleep with the windows open and not be bothered by mosquitoes. It's big and comfortable inside, the air flows freely, and it's made of natural, safe materials."

09 (Outdoor *kaya*)
The *kaya* mosquito net ensures a natural, insect free sleep, with no need for allergy causing chemicals or wasted electricity.

New Technology for Disabled Sports

4'22"

01 (Runners)
Disabled sports programs are booming around the world, and Japan is no exception.
An important factor has been advances in technology for making sports equipment such as specialized wheelchairs and prosthetic devices for athletes.
Japanese technology is now playing a significant role in developing the gear that makes such activities possible.

02 (Racetrack & wheelchair)
Wheelchairs must be custom designed for each sport and to match the unique needs of athletes who have greatly varying types of disabilities.
What is needed is technology that allows the greatest possible freedom for customization.

03 (Pipe frame)
Athletic wheelchair frames are usually made from preformed metal pipes, but this greatly limits the possible frame designs and shapes.

04 (3D design)
When a Japanese manufacturer recently began making frames by welding molded parts together, this technology enormously increased the freedom to vary frame thickness.
Frames can now be made thicker in some places for added strength, and thinner in others for better flexibility.

05 (Man in racing wheelchair – technician's voiceover)
"The level of your shoulders is much lower now. I think we've about found the perfect fit."

06 (Measuring height from other side)
This technology, which allows the wheelchair to be shaped to exactly match its user's needs, is having a great impact in many sports, ranging from tennis to basketball.

07 (Standing man in black)
Fumio Usui, Japan's foremost expert in disabled sports equipment research and development, works as a trainer at a sports club for lower limb amputees.
Every day, he sees how the ability to take part in sports brings fun and confidence back into the lives of his trainees.

08 (Interview - M)
"The change in people is very obvious – when they get together to train and compete, smiles are everywhere. This group spirit and enthusiasm constantly produces new ideas for improved equipment."

09 (Interview - F)
"If I don't understand anything, he will always check how I'm using the device and correct my style. He's always giving good advice on how to run better."

10 (Five athletes & coach)
Being constantly involved with sports like this gives Usui a deep insight into athletes' needs and helps him develop improved products.

11 (Tilt down on crowd)
Until now, many people with disabilities have hesitated to take part in sports because the equipment they needed was expensive and difficult to maintain.

12 (Runner)
This device was designed to make it easier for more people with lower limb amputations to take up competitive sports.

13 (Parts diagram)
With a simple, modular design, it is also quite inexpensive to make.

14 (Still photo of boy)
The benefits of taking part in such sports are greatest for children, and much thought is being devoted to designing special devices to encourage them to participate.

15 (Workshop & racing wheelchair)
Advances in disabled sports equipment are being driven by the close collaboration between users and developers.
Proof that these new designs are improving life for many can be seen in the smiling faces of these athletes.
And now this new Japanese technology is beginning to have an impact on the international scene too.

Japan Video Topics 2009/2010 No.2 June, Contact List

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New Technology for Disabled Sports

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