

Aikido in Australia

Aiki-Kai Australia National Newsletter

Volume 2 Number 3 Autumn 2008.



Talking with Sensei

A unique article based on extracts from interviews with Sensei between the years 1974 to 2007

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Aiki-Kai Australia is the sole qualifying organisation for Aikido with the Federal Government National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.

All members are advised that Aiki-Kai Australia is a signatory to the anti-doping policy developed by the Australian Coaching Council and consequently all students are bound by the rules of the policy. A copy of this policy is available on Coaching Council website.

NEW EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY

Aiki-Kai (Australia) has had an equal opportunity policy drawn up. The policy contains procedures to be followed should, for example, any person feel that they have been victimised or sexually harassed. This policy is posted on the website. Should anyone experience or have a matter of concern, they should contact Andrew Dziedzic to find out the appropriate officer to speak to. All enquiries will be handled with the strictest confidence and should discussion be needed Andrew will phone back at Aiki-Kai Australia's expense.

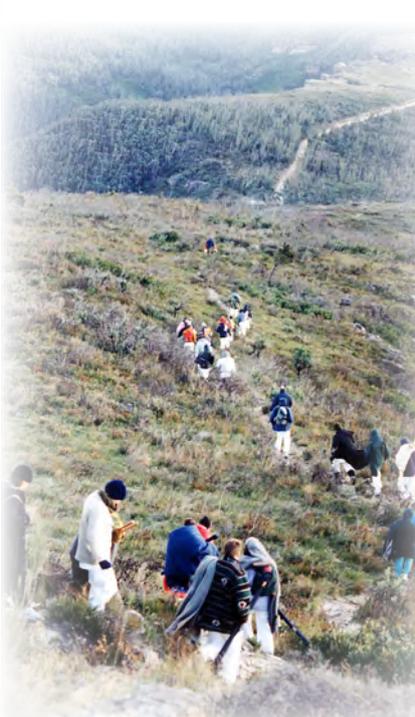


Sugano Sensei in the Blue Mountains 1995.



Middle picture: Training in the Blue Mountains circa early 1970's.

Bottom: going up the mountain in 1995.



After Sugano Shihan moved from Australia to Europe he asked Andrew Dziedzic Sensei to continue the tradition of Mountain Training in the Blue Mountains. As the years went by Andrew not only led the annual Spring, Winter, and Autumn trainings but also co-ordinated many Winter Schools when Sense himself led the mountain training. The recent 40th Anniversary DVD commemorates one of those last mountain trainings, just before Sugano Sensei's amputation. We asked Dziedzic Sensei to describe Mountain Training and remind readers that these trainings may be attended by any student of Aiki-Kai Australia - just contact Andrew Dziedzic Sensei c/o the Area Representative listing in this issue.

Mountain Training a long tradition in Australia

by Andrew Dziedzic Sensei

In the 1960's, Sugano Shihan was taken down about a kilometre down a windy, deeply corrugated and dangerous dirt road off the Bell's Line of Road in the Blue Mountains. Many were the sumps and petrol lines that fell victim to that road over the years! That road then turned into an even more dangerous fire trail going up the side of a mountain. Just before you reached the top, the road was so steep, you couldn't see over the front of the car bonnet! That mountain was Mount Banks, and that journey was the beginning of a tradition that has now stretched on for about 40 years of holding training on the escarpments overlooking the wilderness of the Grose Valley in the Blue Mountains just outside Sydney.

After that, Sugano Sensei would take students up for training at Mount Banks three times a year, for Autumn, Winter (misogi), and Spring training. Training session would begin after lunch on Saturday and end on Sunday morning. In those years, several of Sensei's students would make the drive from Melbourne just to participate in this training.

The training would take place on the edge of a sheer escarpment with a breath-taking view down into the Grose Valley. The escarpment was reached by 20 minute climb up a rocky and slippery path. Sometimes it is so cold there that the breath seems to freeze as it goes into your lungs, and sometimes the wind is so strong that you have to fight hard to remain upright. On Sunday morning, you might have to scrape the ice and snow off the top of your sleeping bag. Even after the sunrise meditation on Sunday, the pools of water on the cliff top can be frozen solid. At other times, the sun can shine and the weather can be balmy, you just never know.

It is this range of extremes and the overwhelming natural beauty of this location that help to make this such a special spot for our training, and especially suitable for winter training. Sensei Sugano has described this as the most important form of training for the whole year. After he had long left Australia, Sensei still wanted us to keep up this form of training.

When we have mid-winter training, there is no unnecessary talk and we only drink water. I refer to it as an aikido retreat, an occasion for reflection and an opportunity to purify ourselves: hence its other name of misogi (purification) training. This is also the time when we practice Kotodama, a sound meditation which O-Sensei practised. It relates to a theory of the origin of the universe through sound. At the conclusion of our weapons training on the escarpment, we sit on the edge of the cliff and we make this strange succession of sounds, we hear them reverberate inside ourselves, we hear them reverberate and echo in the hollows of the cliff face, and we hear the interplay of vibrations with each other, setting up an interplay of strange and deep harmonies. As we seek to become the sound, we hear something beyond ourselves, in the voids — both the infinite one and the small one stretching before us, and we are brought back to the one in ourselves.

In the evening we set up a dojo for meditation at our camping spot at the bottom of the mountain: this consists of an entrance signified by the placement of two rocks, and the boundaries by the blankets and ground sheets of those will sit a circle here, eating the misogi supper and meditating. We bow as we enter the dojo; we may only walk clockwise in the dojo, with our hands together as if in prayer as we walk. We bow in

gratitude to our place of sitting before we actually place ourselves there, waiting for our dinner to be served. Trying to sit patiently waiting for the meal to be served, our hands still together in front of us, we sniff the smoke of the fire and the scent of the brown rice and sweet potato. As the servers approach we bow, and then signal with a slide of one hand against the other when our bowl holds enough of this strange mixture, with a few dried apricots added. Once everyone is served, we eat slowly, chewing each mouthful slowly, savouring each spoonful, absorbing the texture, the smells, the flavour, using all our senses, preparing our mindfulness. Once we have eaten, I sound the gong to signal the commencement and end of each meditation session. At first short, the sessions get longer and longer, until an hour or so has passed. We strive not to wriggle and squirm and to focus on that thing in ourselves that we seek to find.

Then we take a break to stand by the fire to have a cup of boiling water with raw sugar, an energy boost to keep us going. Then it is back to the dojo, now bowing to our sitting place one last time. Everyone knows the next session is the long one, when I shall sound the gong half way through, several times, insistently, as an encouragement to keep going to the end. Most struggle, some in pain, some experienced meditators sit with an air of complete stillness; all do their best, on a journey inside, confronting themselves. By our effort to do this together, we help each other. At last the last sounding of the gong, and the meditation is over, the dojo is declared to be closed and we all stretch and some grunt as we try to find sensation again in our legs, our feet, to relieve stiff legs and backs. As we get up, we may or may not notice the feeling in ourselves, and now no-one feels the need to speak much.

We sleep under the stars: no tents are allowed on misogi. We sleep in touch with the sky above us. Our faces must be open to the stars.

Well before dawn, we wake and assemble. In order of rank, we set off in single file up the mountain again. The way up the mountain is dark and windy, and at times steep, but the teacher leads the way. The last time Sugano Shihan took all attendees at a Winter School up to Mountain Banks for a sunrise meditation, the long line of white gi's stretched down for what seemed like hundreds of metres behind him in the barely grey morning light, a wonderful sight I'll never forget.

Now we are on the mountain escarpment as the horizon begins to grey, sometimes with a line of blood red in the east. In what may easily be sub-zero temperatures, males strip to the waist, as we perform extended Funekogi, pushing our energy beyond the horizon. At times, as we shake our hands in Furitama, we have felt the sharpness of little arrows of ice on our backs as sleet begins to fall. Then gratefully we put on our gi's, parka's and beanies to find a good spot from which to meditate on the sunrise. The chill factor of the pre-dawn wind can cut through like a knife in mid-winter, as we wait for that first gleam on the top of the mountain opposite us. We sit in nature, part of nature; birds may come and twitter a few feet from us. As the first point of light appears and then grows into a line, until the sun rises above the horizon, we sit transfixed, either extending out to welcome it, or closing our eyes to accept its rays on our eye-lids.

As the sun rises into the sky, so we are renewed.



植芝盛平翁没後40周年記念事業
 第10回
国際合気道大会
 The 10th International Aikido Congress
 2008年10月15日(日)~18日(水)
 稲佐川町立
 国際合気道連盟総会・講習会
 国際合気道在籍演武大会
 植芝盛平翁名譽会
 植芝盛平翁遺品・パネル展



Japan: A must see country by Rionne McAvoy

The International Aikido Federation's 4-yearly meeting, known as the IAF International Congress, is being held from October 5th to 13th, 2008 in Tanabe, O'Sensei's birthplace (approx 3.5 hours by bullet train from Tokyo). This is a perfect opportunity for international visitors to not only practice Aikido in Japan, but to see a culture that is completely different to other Western societies.

Japan is divided into 47 Prefectures over four main islands from the north to the south, Hokkaido, Honshu (the main island), Shikoku, and Kyushu. More than 4,000 smaller islands surround these four main islands.

Japan combines the most traditional of societies with the most modern of techniques. Having lived in Tokyo for around 5 years now (spending time as a student and now working), I can definitely say: *Japan will leave a lasting impression in your mind.*

From city based attractions in Tokyo, all the way to the natural wonders like Mount Fuji and the hot springs, Japan has something for everyone. The Aikido here will be like nothing you have ever experienced before, and spending just a week here will surely leave a lingering taste in your mouth, something I'm sure you will want to taste over and over again. Here are the places and Aikido dojo's I recommend you visit while in Japan.

Places to see:

Tanabe:

Tanabe is the second biggest city in Wakayama Prefecture and is on the coast surrounded by a lot of mountains. Within the city itself, there are many famous sites on the Kumano Kodo, ([From Wikitravel.org](http://www.wikitravel.org): The *Kumano Kodō* is), a series of ancient pilgrimage routes that crisscross the Kii-hanto, the largest Peninsula of Japan. These sacred trails were and are still used for the pilgrimage to the sacred site "Kumano Sanzan" or the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano. The *Kumano Kodō* and *Kumano Sanzan* were registered as UNESCO World Heritage on July 7, 2004".

In my opinion, seeing all this can be done in one day, so after training hard, do go out and see the country.

Japan Railway (JR) offers a "JR Pass" and I highly recommend you get one if you plan to do a fair bit of travel. See <http://www.japanrailpass.net/english/001.html> for details. It will save you literally thousands of dollars if you plan to go to Tokyo and Osaka instead of just staying in Tanabe.

The best places to go are:

Close to Tanabe:

Osaka

If Tokyo is Japan's capital, one might call Osaka its anti-capital. The people are different to any other in Japan and very down to earth. Like the people, Osaka

Aikido is also very different from Aikido in Tokyo and other areas. Osaka has served as an international gateway since ancient times, beginning in the 5th century and has definitely played a leading role in the cultural development of Japan. Must see places in Osaka include:

Osaka Museum of History

Universal Studios Japan

Osaka Castle Tenshukaku (simply amazing)

Osaka International Peace Center

Nanba

Shinsaibashi

American Town

For more information, please see http://www.city.osaka.jp/english/for_tourists/places_of_interest.html

Aiki-Kai (Australia) is organizing a fully escorted training and cultural tour to Japan which will include the International Aikido federation Congress and Training Seminar at the birthplace of O' Sensei, Tanabe City.

1 - 17 October 2008.

Details of this tour are at the end of this article.



Kyōto

Kyōto was the capital of Japan and the residence of the Emperor from 794 until the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when the capital was moved to Tokyo. Nestled among mountains in Western Honshu, Kyōto has a reputation worldwide as Japan's most beautiful city. However, visitors may be surprised by how much work they will have to do to see its beautiful side. However, the persistent tourist will soon discover Kyōto's hidden beauty in the temples and parks which ring the city center, and find that the city has much more than immediately meets the eye. Definite places to see in Osaka include:

Kinkaku-ji - The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (the most popular tourist attraction in Kyōto)

Ryōan-ji - Famous for its Zen garden

Nijō Castle - Certainly one of the highlights of

Kyōto

Kyōto Tower (just north of Kyōto Station).

Gion district - The flagstone-paved streets and traditional buildings of the Gion district are where you're most likely to see geisha in Kyōto

Kobe

Best known for the terrible Earthquake in 1995 that killed almost 5000 people, Kobe is located just to the west of centre on the main island of Honshu in an area known as the Kansai Region. Travel time from Tokyo takes 1 hour 20 minutes by plane and 2 hours 50 minutes by Shinkansen Bullet Train. From Osaka, train travel takes around 30 minutes. Kobe is famous for many local products such as its sake, wine, bread, shoes, pearls as well as its beef (which may rival our own Aussie beef for taste). Great places to see in Kobe include Harbor Land, Ijinkan, Kikuseidai (beautiful night scenery), Kyoryuchi (museums, art galleries, cafes) and Nankin Town (nankinmachi: some of the best Chinese I've ever tasted, even though it's in Japan!)

Tokyo

Tokyo, previously called Edo, has been the capital of Japan since 1868, when the ruling Samurai family was overthrown and power of the country was restored to the Emperor (Meiji). Tokyo then replaced the old capital of Kyōto (just north of Osaka).

Emperor's Palace and Gardens

The Imperial Palace, home to the current royal family, is in the middle of Tokyo, and the outer grounds are open to the public whenever it's not closed to accommodate a special guest of the Emperor. The closest station is Tokyo Station (JR) or Otemachi Station (subway). If gardens and parks are your thing, I suggest a visit to Ueno Park. The park and areas surrounding it are large enough that you can easily spend the whole day there and still not see everything. Right in the middle of Ueno Park is Ueno Zoo which is small as far as zoos go, but they have a couple of pandas there so it's worth a look.

To see the "other side" of life in Japan, take a stroll through Shinjuku Park, just west of Shinjuku station. There you will find dozens of cardboard shacks erected by the homeless of Tokyo. The amazing thing is that these people actually make an effort to keep their places nice and tidy. Some of the places are quite elaborate, considering

that they're made from cardboard and scrap.

My personal recommendations however, are Shibuya and Harajuku. If you have seen the traditional side of Japan in Kansai (Osaka, Kyōto, Kobe) then its time to check out today's youth and what they get up to. Definitely take your camera! Harajuku is an area between Shinjuku (location of the Hombu Dojo) and Shibuya. Be sure to check out local landmarks such as Meiji Shrine, and Yoyogi Park (one of the main venues for the 1964 Olympics). The area has two main shopping streets, Omotesandō and Takeshita-dōri. The latter is a shopping street catering to fashion and has many small stores selling every kind of style known, as well as numerous fast food outlets.

You may have heard the term "Harajuku Girls" used in Gwen Stefani's songs. These girls fall into various sub-culture categories including Gothic and Lolita, Ganguro, Gyaru, and Kogal. They may also be dressed as characters from an anime, movie, or manga (known as cosplay).

Shibuya is known as one of the fashion centers of Japan, particularly for young people, and as a major nightlife area (along with Roppongi).

Temples and Shrines:

If you like temples and shrines, then Meiji Shrine and Asakusa Kannon must be on your list of places to see. These are easy to find and are in all guide books and plenty of information is also available online.

Shopping:

There are also various shopping districts, the most famous of which are Ginza and Akihabara. In Ginza you can find everything from massive department stores to small artsy-like stores. Personally, I am a fan of Shibuya and Shinjuku.

For computers, audio, video, games, and general electronic stuff, Akihabara is a must. Take your passport and get great deals on duty free items (don't get caught at the airport, wait for Akihabara). Akihabara is one of the few places (if not the only) where you can bargain the staff down. Almost all can speak English, again, one of the few places that do. To get to Akihabara, take the JR Sobu or Chuo Lines and get off at JR Akihabara station. Head out the "Electric Town" exit. This place is worth seeing even if you don't intend to buy anything of an electronic nature.

Aikido and Training

The Hombu Dojo (本部道場)

As far as training in Japan, you cannot go past the Mecca of World Aikido that is the Hombu Dojo. Training is held everyday by various Shihan, each with his own different outlook on Aikido.

Gessoji Dojo (月窓寺道場)

A different alternative to the Hombu is Gessoji Dojo. This dojo is run by Hiroshi Tada Shihan, currently the worlds highest ranking Shihan and a senior to our own Sugano Shihan. Although I prefer the "training" at the Hombu, make no mistake about it, Tada Shihan is second to none in Japan. This dojo has been my home for the past 3 years and I look at Tada Shihan with amazement every time he steps on the mats, his gracefulness at 79 years old is amazing. Training is done in groups of 3 and 4 due to the large numbers and in order to train there, an invite is appropriate.

Important Websites to check before you go:

Aikido Australia is organizing a trip to Japan for the congress. All information can be found at http://www.aikido.org.au/News/tour_Japan08.htm

<http://aikido-international.org/> Has all the information about the congress you will need.

http://www.city.tanabe.lg.jp/sports/uetsuiba/The_10th_IAF_Congress_2.html

English guide about Tanabe and the congress.

http://www.tb-kumano.jp/en/aikido/IAF_International_Aikido_Congress_2008_Tanabe.html

English guide about Tanabe and the congress.

<http://www.aikikai.or.jp/>

Hombu Dojo Homepage

<http://www.japanrailpass.net/eng/en001.html>

Information on the Japan Rail Pass. You can also get your travel agent to organize one.

References:

Wikitravel: <http://wikitravel.org/>

City of Osaka official homepage: <http://www.city.osaka.jp/english>

City of Kobe official homepage: <http://www.city.kobe.jp/>

City of Kyōto official homepage: <http://www.city.Kyōto.jp/koho/eng/index.html>



About the writer:

Rionne (pronounced rye own) McAvoy was a member of the Queensland Aikikai (Gold Coast dojo) before moving back to Tokyo at the end of 2005. He is based mainly at the Hombu Dojo but also travels to Hiroshi Tada Shihan's Gessoji dojo and in June received his 2nd dan from Tada Shihan. A primary school teacher and part time translator, Rionne's email address is rionne@hotmail.com and would welcome any emails from people doing Aikido in Australia.

Photo by J Litchen: Rionne at National Winter School 2007., Gold Coast.



A Great Way to Get There is The Aiki-Kai (Australia) Japan Tour !

Aiki-Kai (Australia) Japan Tour 2008.

A fully escorted Training and Cultural Tour for individuals and families to Japan and the International Aikido Federation Congress and Training Seminar...

Highlights and Inclusions:

Return flights from Melbourne and Sydney to Tokyo with Qantas.

14 nights accommodation with breakfast includes 3 nights in Tokyo, 8 nights in Tanabe and 3 nights in Kyoto.

Escorted Sightseeing Tours

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Half day tour to Kumano Shrine

Full day Kyoto Tour with lunch

Afternoon Tour of Nara

Train journey from Tokyo to Osaka

International Aikido federation Congress and Training Seminars

PRICE :

Twin Share \$5655

per person twin share ex Melbourne, Sydney

Single Share \$5985

per person single share ex Melbourne, Sydney

Triple Share \$4995

per person triple share ex Melbourne, Sydney

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Talking with Sensei

Extracts from Interviews with Sensei over forty years



In early interviews the questions asked of Sensei often focussed on fighting – after all it was a martial art they wanted to know about – and the connotation was that if it's a martial art then it must be about fighting. Sensei went to great lengths to try and change that attitude and sometimes I sense a feeling of frustration behind the lines in his answers as he tried to put into words concepts that were difficult for him to translate into English especially if the interviewer's mind was focussing on the violent aspects of the martial arts as seen in movies during the 1980's. One other aspect that should be taken into context when reading interviews is that the questions asked by the interviewer are often biased towards the answers the interviewer needs to bolster his or her personal expectations. I hope that I am not guilty of the same approach in selecting the following extracts from some of the many interviews Sensei has given. (J. Litchen, Editor.)

In 1974 Mike Yates asked Sugano Sensei (during an interview for Australasian Fighting Arts magazine – sadly long gone from the publishing scene):

As martial arts are not used much for one's own protection these days, is the greater emphasis on technique and character building detrimental to the effectiveness of the technique?

Sensei said: Maybe this could happen. But when you look at the total martial art, one way of solving this particular problem is having competitions. Another way to develop is to practice techniques. Another way is to practice the essence of a martial art in everyday use as an alternative to wanting to fight. In the sporting aspect the aim is to win. Aikido tries to eliminate this desire to win. This benefits students who do not participate in competitions, where there must always be a loser. This way a student does not gain negative feelings about himself or the art because he was declared a loser.

In Aikido though you do not have strict competition, surely students try to compete against fellow students, even if subconsciously?

Sensei: I guess in the beginning all students try to throw someone showing superiority, but through training they change

their opinion. In most arts they train to try and take points – whether throwing in judo, punching in karate, and striking in kendo. We are seeking more to harmonise with someone with any movement they do. This attitude is completely opposite to point taking. Of course this does not mean that the throws and other techniques are done softly. People still can have accidents and be hurt.

Two interesting points from a radio interview (in Perth in 1982) were Sensei's explanation of what Aikido is about.

He said: The first point in Aikido is that we are more concerned with self-control... in trying to develop ourselves physically and mentally rather than aiming at fighting.

And, in response to a question about whether or not you should disable an opponent if attacked by someone with a machete or other weapon;

Sensei said: Basically in Aikido training we are not seeking any fights or problems. That's probably the important thing, to be able to see that you don't have to fight.

In Aikido we don't have any competitions so that way you are able to control yourself mentally and physically. If you have competitions, naturally you are fighting to win as main

purpose, rather than trying to control yourself and be calm, you are always developing aggressive feelings towards someone. In Aikido this doesn't have a chance to develop so we can have a better chance of controlling a situation without necessarily fighting.

And when pressed, what would you do in the above circumstance,

Sensei replied: Well honestly, until things happen it is difficult to say. If someone attacks you should be able to fight back. From the purely martial point, a practical point, if anyone attacks, you must kill them!

If you train for competition you are always being restricted by certain rules, therefore you are always conditioned to do certain movements. But in Aikido there is no competition, therefore you are free to do whatever you wish to do. In a practical situation until someone actually does attack you it's really hard to say what really would occur.



Sugano Sensei : circa 1987
Uke for Sensei on these two pages is Tony Smibert.

During another radio interview in Canberra in 1987 Sensei said in response to the question: Do people come just thinking it is a martial art?

Some people yes, but I think nowadays most students know something about Aikido so it is not necessary they just come to look for a martial art. They are looking for something else as well; rather than just fighting technique.

The interviewer (who had watched a number of classes) observed; when you are actually training you have two people literally fighting against each other.

Sensei responded: To look at it, it seems that way, but in actuality one person is giving the movement and one is receiving. So that is where you can develop the idea of unity and receptiveness. And most people believe what they can see rather than what they can understand, so if you are outside of the training you see just the physical training and it looks as if we are fighting each other, But if you understand the reason for what you are doing when you are training it changes your viewpoint. It's not what you see, it's what you believe.

So the person that I see then as fighting against is actually helping?

Yes. Both people are working together to help and understand the energy and harmonising that each has to offer. Because the movements developed from the martial arts exactly the same movements can be used for self defence or for fighting against someone but that is a secondary consideration.

Is Aikido for everyone?

Yes it is. Virtually there is no age limit. Anyone can train within their capacity. We are not aiming at the idea of competition that is the important thing – there is no competition. Because if you are training to find that unity with yourself and with others there is no use for competition in the training method because it develops the idea of fighting against someone, so in Aikido we have no competitions

Interviewer: Could you go over that again, why you don't have competitions?

Sensei: Because you are to look at improving yourself, trying to unify yourself with other people rather than having conflicts. If you have competitions you have to fight against someone and your mental attitude will develop in a different way.

In Aikido you don't have competition so your mental attitude will go more towards developing yourself or with your partner as a unit. So that is one reason why we don't have competition. And coming to the point of martial arts competition, higher level is fighting and killing each other.



In a 1990 interview for this publication (Aikido Australia) Sensei was asked;

From the student point of view, the technical side of Aikido is presented with constant changes and variations to technique rather than a single fixed form. How does this fit into Aikido?

That's really the essence of Aikido, constantly transforming the movement. That's something you have to learn. That's the main point for your study, not that there is one fixed movement! The whole thing keeps transforming, one technique to another, evolving. So that's something you have to study. If you have a fixed idea then you think that you have to relearn or learn a new movement, but the transforming is really the essence which you have to study. There are lots of different ways of training. You have to take all of them, not just one. If people think to take just one that makes a problem.

Does that mean we have to be adaptable to change?

That's really the essence – the whole thing about Aikido.

Also: You have often said there is a difference between warming up and "preparing your body" for training...

Generally when people warm up it's in preparation for some physical activity, but in Aikido's case of course, you also have to prepare mentally.

In 1991 Sensei offered these thoughts:

Aikido is just like a person's life, your true nature does not change, however your understanding of matter and physical motion keeps evolving. I can see this within myself and within some of you.

To many younger and newer students of Aikido you need to have attentiveness and patience in your training, because much of the teaching is non-verbal. You must watch carefully when your teacher shows you the technique and gives you a short explanation at the same time. This is the method of Aikido training.

You need to be patient then slowly your understanding of Aikido and yourself develops.

You must remember that this development begins the first day of your training, and it never ends.

In 1994 Mike Clarke published in interview with Sugano Sensei in (Australasian Fighting Arts – one of many that he did for that magazine as well as others)

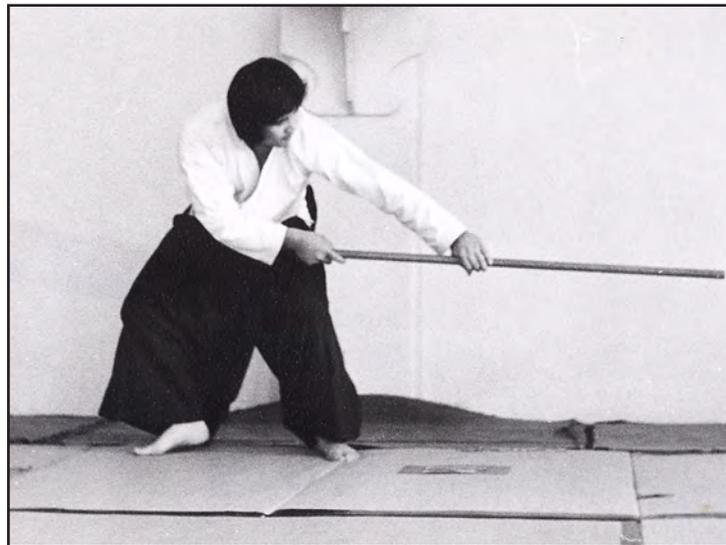
Sensei, you said in a previous interview that the training before War Two was much rougher than it is today. How and why has it changed?

When I said rougher, I meant that today it is much more stylized than in those days. This is because Aikido has been exposed to many people now. People's understanding of their body and the world has changed a lot too. Before, whoever was training was directly connected to O-Sensei. That was a relatively small number of people and their exposure to other things would not have been like it is for people now.

How has your training changed over the years (30 or so) since you began?

It has changed because I have grown older and spent many years doing Aikido. That's why my Aikido has developed as it has. Other teachers will be teaching maybe in a different way, according to the way they are thinking and the different experiences they have had.

O-Sensei said that before the age of 25 is better for



Above: Sensei circa late 1960's or early 70's in Sydney.

Below: Beach training with David Scott. 1987



Below: Sensei in Sydney, late 1960's or early 70's

Iriminage. Uke Roger Savage.





training hard. You can concentrate on the physical technique at this time and train hard because you are still growing and getting stronger. By 30 you should be expanding your technical understanding through your experience, as well as the physical. By then you have stopped growing, physically anyway. But your Aikido has not stopped. So it is not like a planned change, but more like without even knowing your Aikido evolves. This is only generally speaking, and for people who start training as a teenager. Again the way you evolve has a lot to do with who you are following. The teacher makes a big difference to your development.

For me, I would say my technical understanding is different now than 10 or 20 years ago. Also my experience grows as time goes by, so even if you look at my technique and see no change, this does not mean that inside I have not changed, because I may now have a better understanding of what I'm doing.

How does this evolution affect the way you teach?

One of my students in Europe said that my way of teaching was more difficult than other teachers. Not that I do things more difficult than other teachers, but in the way I teach. They said I was difficult to copy. Some of the more stylized teachers are easy to copy by the students; they can imitate their physical form. With the way I teach that is little more difficult because I don't like to direct people. When I am teaching I like to give up the information and try to get people to move spontaneously. And even on the same day my movements might be quite different from one class to another. If you look at a teacher who has a strong style their followers have the same style. With me this has not happened as I don't have such a thing. As I said before, my understanding has changed a lot from 10 or 20 years ago, so my Aikido has also changed with my better understanding.

Is this what O-Sensei meant when he said nothing is fixed in Aikido?

That's right, not fixed. Also he gave us a big question mark about Aikido itself. Because it is never fixed, it therefore depends on how the individual studies it and pursues its message. This is why we have so many styles in Aikido.

In 1998 Sugano Sensei spoke to the editors of Aikido East (official journal of United States Aikido Federation, Eastern Region, and not currently being published). Sensei, your style of Aikido creates a lot of energy. Is that deliberate?

Yes. The system of Aikido is based on interacting with others. If you're not interacting with another's energy, there is no system. The system exists to create energy. When I teach I am responding to the student's response.

Has your teaching changed much?

Well my Aikido understanding is so different. On the other hand some might say iriminage is iriminage, but the insides are very different. It's the same thing with students, they are continuously evolving. It's true that ikkyo is ikkyo, but the inner understanding is different. It's difficult to pinpoint. When I go back to Belgium they see me as moving much faster. Perhaps consciously or unconsciously my way of using my body is changing and becoming more technically precise, more exact, more efficient.

Your classes are very strenuous. Do you plan that?

Aikido should create energy. If you only focus on what you see in the physical form, you tend to become static. I never have any plan to teach. Whatever comes out is the result of my experience and knowledge. There is no intention to lead anyone



in any direction. I want it to come spontaneously.

You have said that you consider Aikido more of a personal development than a martial art.

I prefer not to describe Aikido in the category of a martial art. When O-Sensei created Aikido he broke with the traditional concept of martial arts. That is how Aikido developed. Aikido is not for fighting but for harmony and love. If you look at martial arts from a Western standpoint, they are fighting arts. In Japan, Budo is vaguely known to involve mental and spiritual aspects. But here people don't see it that way. O-Sensei created Aikido to break through the traditional concept of martial arts. It was a simple thing, his idea, harmony with the universe.

You train technically to be efficient and precise. Accuracy involves timing and rhythm. So if you understand that timing and rhythm creates a balance, then you begin to understand that's how we can stand on the earth perfectly. Earth has two forces balancing perfectly: rotation and gravity. If you understand that balance or rhythm, then you can begin to understand that we're part of the universe.

If you only look at Aikido like it's a martial art, for purpose of attack and defence, our training will be limited to those purposes. Traditional martial arts were always passed on through static method, kata form, passed on without changing. O-Sensei broke that form. He moved spontaneously.

In 1998 Sugano Sensei was interviewed by Stanley Pranin of Aikido Journal (formerly Aiki-News) and these excerpts are used with his kind permission. The full interview can be found in the archives of the Aikido Journal website.

Training in Aikido is characteristic because it does not use the old style training method. It is true that the ways of teaching Aikido are so various and causing confusion in learners. However Aikido is not taught through kata as such. Training in kata in Japanese martial arts is to inherit something, set forms. However, today's way of Aikido training is repetition of jutsu or techniques. That means that it is the same as general sports, although the concepts are different.

I don't think many people realise the reason why Aikido has become so popular. Contrary to what one would expect Aikido adopts the same method as general sports. In sport the usual training method is repetition of the techniques involved. So it is in Aikido. In the sporting sense the method would vary depending upon the instructor. It is the same in Aikido. In other words each Sensei has individual feeling in techniques. Even if it is the same technique, each teacher teaches in his own way. I think that is why Aikido has become so popular.

The reason O-Sensei's technique evolved into Aikido and not classical Jutsu is that he broke with the old transmission method which is inheriting or passing on of kata.

Kata is the Japanese way of preserving and passing down of an art. O-Sensei broke with that tradition and created today's training method. However it is still taught in Japanese terms and therefore not many people realise it.

In creating Aikido O-Sensei broke free from the predetermination of kata. His techniques were different each time, as was his way of teaching. The result was that everyone who trained under him developed his or her own individual Aikido. If you train in kata-like fashion, after 10 years you will be doing the same thing, the same form, and there will not have been any development or growth at all. In such a scenario transmission becomes the priority, leaving no room for your own personal progress.

Aikido does not have clearly defined techniques so

many people stick to kata. Without definition many people insist on different things. This might be hard to understand.

From Aikido Online: People often say that each of O-Sensei's students took a different part of him into themselves. Do you think that is true, and if so, what was the influence O-Sensei had on you personally?

Partly I think he made me more aware that Aikido was something I had to continue to search for. He didn't provide any system. The individual person had to search for himself. So perhaps the greatest influence from him is probably to make each person free to search for something individually. ...O-Sensei never fixed the concept of technique, but the spiritual aspect, he created and fixed Aikido to be harmony, love, peace, etc.

The question is how to study the important things. Obviously it is very important to carefully observe what the teacher is showing, how the teacher is applying the technical points... The basic principles are distance and direction. With any technique, you need to know the clear distance and direction. These you can apply to any technique in your training. Without those there are no techniques.

...How you approach practice makes a difference. The technique itself is one thing.

If you practice to kill someone or control someone, or defend yourself, that's a result. It's there and is the result of your training. However, the only way to make something different is to change how you approach these objectives through your training.

If you're aiming at applying the concept of harmony then the process of practice changes into a sort of contemplation of your moral spirit, it changes the direction of practice. The technical result won't change, but just how you approach the practice makes a difference.

You can approach the practice as a martial artist and learn to kill someone, or defend yourself, or you can apply the principle of harmony which cultivates your spirit and moral sense so they have some kind of value in daily life.

In Aikido there are so many different things. That's why technically I focus on the study of distance and direction. ...No matter how you do the technique you must have a concept of distance and direction.

As a teacher I am trying to help people discover and develop feelings from within themselves.

After so many years of training, I am still always finding something new, even in the way of teaching. It is still fascinating for me, the whole idea of Aikido. To me it is still a big question mark. O-Sensei knew that it was important to keep looking.

In 2000 at Summer School Sensei explained in an interview with Bill Birnbauer of the Melbourne newspaper, The Age:

To classify Aikido as a martial art to me is wrong. Once you start saying martial art, obviously that's combat technique – Aikido is not in the same category. Aikido is very much self-improvement, or self-development. That's why I don't like to see training as just attack defence. That application is there... but fighting concepts overshadow the real purpose of Aikido – to improve oneself.

If you think attack defence attack...you are thinking at that level so you think how strong or how to beat someone, but never achieve the real idea of Aikido.



Mike Clarke, a highly respected writer and Karateka, as already mentioned has interviewed Sugano Sensei many times over the years. Recent interviews appeared in Bujutsu International and Blitz – Australasian martial arts magazine. Sensei's comments below have been extracted from those interviews with kind permission from Mike Clarke.

From Bujutsu International Jan/Feb, 2006.

When people train in Aikido, the way they train in Aikido becomes an expression of their understanding of Aikido. That understanding evolves in many different ways. For example many people hold the idea that Aikido is an expression of Japanese culture. Nowadays I don't think that way. Today's Aikido did not just evolve from us (the Japanese). Aikido has changed since it left Japan and began to be practiced internationally, and so the way I look at Aikido and understand it now is evolving. There are more people training in Aikido outside Japan these days and Aikido itself has been exposed to all sorts of different cultures. So therefore, responding to that it is natural that Aikido should be evolving. Because in Aikido we talk about harmony and peace, it is not necessarily a reflection of Japanese culture. Every country expresses the same hope.

In Aikido we don't have any competition, but the system of training is the same as regular sport in that we learn and continually repeat our technique. There are many people teaching Aikido differently, and like in sports you can find many coaches teaching the same things but in different ways, this is the same in Aikido. Some people don't want to see it this way and don't want to recognize this, but the reality is that this is the way of training in Aikido today. This crossing of the lines makes Aikido today international rather than purely Japanese.

From an interview in Blitz Australasian Martial Arts magazine August 2006.

You spoke about the choice people can make when they come to Aikido, and whether or not they see it as a martial art or as something else, beyond that. What exactly did you mean?

O-Sensei did not just teach Aikido as a martial art. In fact he departed from the traditional so-called martial arts to create Aikido. So, Aikido is Aikido. Generally it is easier for people to approach the idea of Aikido through the idea of martial arts or self defence, but in truth, O-Sensei's idea was that Aikido is just that, Aikido! It doesn't matter, in a way, what you put your efforts into when train; aikido can be practised on many levels, but in the end it is still O-Sensei's idea, and that idea was: boundless.

The problem with understanding Aikido only as a martial art is that (this) has limits, and once you see Aikido as just a martial art, you can never get past them. Practice becomes just another way of attacking and defending, and people fighting, but this was not O-Sensei's idea.

So how is it possible for someone to move beyond the martial arts aspect of the training?

The teaching of Aikido itself should be enough to get someone out. But if people are brought into Aikido and taught it only as a martial art, they can never get out.

Ideas of harmony, peace and love amongst the population of the world might seem unreachable, but it is the process of working towards these things that is the important part. That process is what we are doing with Aikido.

This is why if we keep Aikido in the frame of martial arts, we are only fighting to kill someone – and with that idea we limit each other. So even though the techniques could be used to kill, the real challenge of Aikido is the fight against ourselves

to become better people. When we continue with our training and try to evolve our technique, this is the fascinating part of training. I think most people come to Aikido for recreational purposes maybe, because they don't feel they need to train.

When I'm teaching I try to show something of how I'm evolving, not just demonstrate a technique and tell people to do it. To me that is not teaching. So if you don't have the notion of teaching to develop something, you can just throw people around on the mat. This is not Aikido.

In relation to training with weapons, (specifically bokken and Jo) Sensei said circa 1999:

Weapons training is a tool to intensify focus and to confirm open hand technique.

Editor: He demonstrated this at the 2007 winter school on the Gold Coast when he explained that it was clear to see if you were attacking correctly when you used a bokken to attack shomen uchi for example, and compared that when you make the same attack without the bokken. The cutting line is defined with the weapon and must be accurate to be effective.

Aikido has no set weapons training. A difficulty in using weapons in Aikido is in having sufficient training for an instructor to know enough about weapons and their relationship to Aikido to have the knowledge to properly teach weapons. My idea in teaching weapons is that weapons training should be functional. There must be a point to it.



Photographs accompanying this article supplied by Margaret Carter, David Scott, Graham Morris, John Litchen.



Sensei teaching application of technique with a Jo. Note the two different hand positions, above Junte (honte) and below gyakute.
Photos by J. Litchen. Summer School, Melbourne, January 2008.

A Special Award for Students with more than 25 years training with Sensei

Report by John Watson Sensei.

Sugano Shihan chose the 2008 Summer school to recognise and celebrate the achievement of those students who had been studying with him for 25 years or more. These students were individually invited to attend the Summer School. Out of 44 students who were invited, a total of 39 students were able to attend. Several of these students travelled very long distances to make the event, with Ken Trebilco Sensei coming from Indonesia and Bob Hill Sensei travelling all the way from England. Apologies were received from Roger Savage Sensei, Steven Armfield Sensei, and Margaret Carter Sensei. Stephen Boyce also sent his apologies in a very nice letter, parts of which I have quoted below:

“First of all I would like to thank Shihan Sugano for recognising me for my commitment... I would also like to thank Aiki-Kai for giving me the opportunity to be part of such a life changing experience. I would say it is me who has been honoured by having the chance to watch Sensei and the Aiki-Kai develop into such a strong Organisation.... I hope that if you have the opportunity that you could thank Sensei and all my friends in the Aiki-Kai family for giving their time and patience to me over all these years.”

Medals were presented individually to each student by Sugano Shihan. The words “STRIVE WITH UNCEASING EFFORT” are based on an article written by Sugano Shihan titled ‘Struggle with Non-Stop Effort’ which first appeared in our February 1980 Newsletter and was recently re-published in our Special 40th Anniversary Newsletter in 2005. The character in the centre of the medal is ‘agatsu’, which is part of an ‘aphorism’ from O’Sensei:

Masakatsu (True / Correct Victory)
Agatsu (Victory over Self)
Katsu Hayabi (Day of Swift Victory)

(The translation given here is a fairly literal one given the different interpretations and levels of meaning that may be construed from such a saying.)

Being involved in any activity for 25 years or more, is a wonderful achievement and all of these ‘25 year’ students deserve our warmest congratulations. I think we should also be grateful to these individuals who, while striving with unceasing effort for 25 years or more to achieve ‘self victory’, have also contributed so much to Aiki-Kai Australia from which we have all benefited and will continue to do so into the future.



Here is the first group to be presented with medals. Many in the group have been training for 40 years with Sensei and most of them would be 30 years or more. The 25 year mark was the starting point. The names with the asterisk in front are not in the photo since they were not there on the day the medals were initially presented, but received their medals on Friday in a small ceremony before the Dan grading tests commenced. (The names are presented, as were the medals, in alphabetical order. Editor:)

Richard Barnes, Felicia Birman, Robert Botterill, David Brown, Alfred Camilleri, Michael De Young, Hugh Derham, Guy Fripp, Robert Hill, Austin James, Hanan Janiv, Kaye Jenkins, Brian Johns, John Karas, *George Lo, *Darren Love, Bruce MacGregor, Mark Matcott, *Leon Metzeling, Robin Misso, Peter Morgenroth, Graham Morris, Ray Oldman, *Rae Ming Ong, Marie Petery, Michael Petery, Seik Ramadanovic, John Rockstrom, Geoffrey Savage, David Scott, Wayne Sheils, Tony Smibert, Kenneth Trebilco, Ruth Treyde, James Waller, John Watson, Peter Weston.



At any national school there are many participants who can be found at the end of each class writing in notebooks. Attempting to recall everything Sensei said and did they find they can't always do that so they compare notes with each other, discussing what they thought Sensei did and said, and so between them, with each one contributing to the other, collectively they each finish with a reasonable summary of the training for further study during the period between national schools and Sensei's next visit.

There are others who don't do this, but who rely upon absorbing what they can and integrating this into their body and the understanding they have evolved over many years of training and studying with Sensei. The underlying consideration here is: *if I can't absorb it and integrate it then I'm not ready for it.* For these people taking notes won't help; they don't mean much later on and out of context, but core absorption on a subconscious level occurs from time to time and when this happens there is a leap up to a new level of understanding, with a consequent improvement in one's aikido.

As editor of this publication I take notes as well as photos. My notes however are not technical descriptions or summaries of technique but are more overall impressions of what I think Sugano Sensei was saying and doing. They are personal impressions and interpretations based on my own training and limited understanding. If you were there you would no doubt have a different interpretation — and that's fine. Each of us filters what Sensei says through our own individual experiences and so inevitably we have different understandings. That these understandings evolve over time as we develop as students goes

A Report from Summer School

photographs and text by John Litchen



without saying. So nothing is fixed. It is always changing and is always open to renewed interpretation.

Extracts from my notes:

Sensei spoke about studying, and about the opportunity to study. He indicated that we had the opportunity to study by doing things rather than by having them explained. He suggested that by observing and then doing, we study and understand with our bodies. (This implies we should observe very carefully rather than ask questions.)

He also spoke about movement and that through the study of Aikido we can improve and cultivate ourselves as human beings.

We are not learning technique. Technique only leads to mechanical movement and that is not natural. Natural movement emanates from our own bodies rather than being something that is imposed upon them. Natural movement is something that occurs without conscious thought — it's just there, an aspect of our interaction with our surroundings and with other people.

Sensei often speaks of these aspects, and if you look through the extracts from interviews Sensei has done over the years you will see this concept is a common thread.

I think one of the most important things he said that first morning was: ***the dojo is a place for the student, not for the teacher.*** This is something we should all remember.

Smibert Sensei reiterated this in the class he took that first afternoon. He demonstrated how natural stepping forward

to shake hands is in our culture, and how this simple action and movement creates hanmi or entering into hanmi. He showed how natural shomen uchi is as a response to someone entering into our perceived space, and how this up and down movement combined with a turn backwards (Tenkan) can become Iriminage, or if the person grabs Morotedori kokyunage, it can become shihonage. Up down, turn back, or around: all perfectly natural movements, all integral parts of Aikido.

In Sugano Sensei's next class he again focussed on movement, using the 7 step Jo movements as an example of firstly the mechanics of the individual movements while counting. Then once the pattern is remembered there is no counting and each individual movement is allowed to flow from one into the other. These first two exercises were practiced in a straight line, forwards and backwards.

Then we went beyond the constraints of straight line movement with movement in any direction. This third exercise changed the aspect of the 7 steps so much that they didn't seem to be the same thing we were mechanically counting at the start, but the freedom to move in any direction increased the complexity, and made the focus much more intense. He had us do the 7 steps on the left side as well as the right, and with other exercises involving different hand grips, Junte (honte) and Gyakute. The idea was to allow the Jo to express our movement as well as to facilitate it.

He reminded us that the Jo, like the bokken, is a fixed object that couldn't change shape, and that by using the Jo we can see if we are doing things correctly. Similarly with a bokken; it's easy to see when you strike offline because the weapon shows us. Without the weapon the parameters keep changing and there are too many variables to see if we are



Above: Kokyunage with Sensei.

Below: Ikkyo Ura ... Uke: Andrew Dzedzic Sensei





Above: Sensei about to use atemi.

doing something correctly or not, but with the weapon it is easy to see.

The weapon, he pointed out, is an aid to understanding Aikido and not something used for fighting.

As usual Melbourne turned on a hot day. Thursday left everyone frazzled and worn out as the temperatures got close to 40 degrees. Friday morning was no better. It looked as if many were exhausted by the time they had walked from the accommodation at St Hilda's to the dojo at University High, and they still had the classes to do. Luckily for those who were testing for Dan grades the weather changed abruptly about midday, dropping to a pleasant 28 degrees with a cool breeze.

Dan tests are a highlight for those people who are testing, as well as for those who are bursting with enthusiasm to get up and assist when multiple attacks and jiyuwaza are called for. One highlight was when Debbie Noble got so enthusiastic at the end of her test, that when it was time for her partner to commence his test, she started again... The grading panel had to remind her that she had finished and to let her partner have a go. The Yondan test with Linda Godfrey was very energetic and enthusiastic. She had Uke's flying all over the place. Well done everyone!

With the test results, also came the announcement by Sugano Shihan that he had recommended Tony Smibert Sensei, Robert Botterill Sensei and Hanan Janiv Sensei for promotion to the title of Shihan. This is an important milestone as Australia will consequently have three internationally recognized resident Shihan. All three will travel with Sugano Shihan to the International Aikido Federation's Congress in Japan in October where they will meet with Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.

continued next page...





Sensei with two wonderful ladies who have been training with him for more than 25 years: Marie Petery Sensei and Felicia Birman Sensei.

continued from previous page

The formal dinner was an excellent affair, and the first time in many years that some of Sensei's earliest students were able to get together again after almost 40 years. One student, our youngest, Alex Yuile, turned 16 on that day. He was presented with a birthday cake loaded with sparklers and everyone sang happy birthday and wished him all the best. It was also Alex, being the youngest, (and possibly the newest student to attend Sensei's national school) who was asked to present Sensei with his gift at the formal end of the training on Saturday morning. He rushed up and did it so quickly that no one had a chance to take a photo of him doing it.

Once again those who couldn't attend missed a wonderful school.

My final impression was that there seemed to be a renewed enthusiasm and a more intense focus overall, perhaps because there were a lot more younger people there this time. But whatever the reason it was certainly a school that will stand out in my memory.

Summer School 2008 Promotions

Shodan:

Hamish Begley, Vic
 Annalise Bennett, ACT/WA
 Justin Bree, Vic
 Frank Brierley, Qld
 Joe Costa, Vic
 Luke Derham, WA
 Choon Hoong Ding, Vic
 Deborah Harrison, WA
 Benjamin Lewis, ACT
 John Robbins, ACT
 Kate Stankovich, Vic
 Lance Wilson, Qld

Nidan:

Viatcheslav Barouline, ACT
 Russell Boon, Vic
 Jago Dodson, Qld
 Merrill Gonsalves, Vic

Richard Leong, Vic
 Debbie Noble, Qld
 Paul Osborne, Vic

Sandan:

David Ford, Vic
 Dennis Harbard, Vic
 Lynford Rosos, Qld

Yondan:

Linda Godfrey, Vic

Godan:

Austin James, NSW
 Bruce Mac Gregor, NT
 Peter Morgenroth, Vic
 Peter Weston, SA

Rokudan:

Felicia Birman, Vic
 Hugh Derham, WA
 Andrew Dziedzic, NSW
 George Lo, NSW
 Graham Morris, Qld
 Ray Oldman, Vic
 Marie Petery, NT
 Mike Petery, NT
 Geoffrey Savage, Vic
 David Scott, SA
 John Watson, Vic

Reccomendation for promotion to the title of Shihan:

Robert Botterill
 Hanan Janiv
 Tony Smibert





Sugano Shihan with five of his longest practicing Australian students who have been training under his direction for 40 years or more. They are: back row, Robert Hill Sensei, Tony Smibert Sensei, Robert Botterill Sensei, and front row, David Brown Sensei, Richard Barnes Sensei, and of course Sugano Shihan himself.





Aiki-Kai Australia would like to thank the Webmaster Duncan Stephenson for his time and work involved in maintaining and presenting the Website. Duncan is retiring from this position. The new Webmaster will be John Rockstrom and we welcome his input and expertise. John will be involved with setting up short videos to run on the website. He can be contacted at the numbers and the address listed on page 2.



Images from Summer Scool 2008 which show the intensity and the joy of training, especially notable during group training.

LATE NEWS:

For anyone contemplating a visit to the Gold Coast who may be expecting to train at the Burleigh West Dojo, I have to report that this dojo no longer exists.

We were given notice to quit with time to relocate but unfortunately the owners of the site and the properties located on it brought forward the demolition date, and at the end of November told us we had to be gone by the last week in January because the demolition would now occur in the first week in February.

And demolish it they did! It looked like an earthquake had struck. Within 24 hours there was nothing left but piles of bricks, and cement blocks, and tangled masses of roofing iron, metal girders and supports.

We had a few days training in January when we came back and then came the sad task of getting everything out and putting it into storage until we can find a new permanent location.

In the meantime we are training 3 nights a week at the community hall in Mudgeeraba, just off the back Highway opposite the Robina Town centre.

The nights there are Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7-00 pm until 8-30 pm.

Please come along if you are visiting the Gold Coast. We would love to see you there.



Aikido in Australia
Aiki-Kai Australia National Newsletter

