

Aikido in Australia

Aiki Kai Australia National Newsletter
Volume 5 Number 5



***2020 Aikido Summer School
5-10 January, 2020
in Melbourne
with very special guest,
Aiki Kai Australia Patron
Yamada Shihan,
8th Dan
New York Aikikai***

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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 Aus-
tralia's expense.*



Don't miss Summer School 2020!

In January 2020 we will celebrate the history and future of Aiki Kai Australia with a very special Summer School taught by our Patron, Yoshimitsu Yamada Shihan, one of the last of the pioneering uchideshis of O'Sensei who took Aikido to the world during the 1960's. Yamada Sensei is not only a great master, but was also Sugano Sensei's senior, sempai and close friend and who generously agreed to become Aiki Kai Australia's Patron after Sugano Sensei died.

After many larger events here in recent years, we explained to Yamada Sensei that we wanted this one to be lower key, without banquets or massive numbers of trainees – just the chance to train together - and he immediately agreed to make the long journey from New York to Australia.

We can also look forward to welcoming a number of American shihans and senior instructors who will be coming with him and want this Summer School to be a very special celebration of the achievements of all of the thousands of trainees and instructors from every generation who, over the years have worked together to create and sustain Aiki Kai Australia.



The Ageless Art of Aikido after 60 by Marie Petery

I remember many years ago, during our Summer School, Sugano Sensei would often get participants to train in groups and would use age and rank to separate the classes. Occasionally he would call for the groups to be “all women”, however due to his accent and the softness of his voice the ladies in the group only heard “old women”. No-one would move, even though at the time some of us were well into our 50s. He repeated his request several times before Sensei must have sensed the faux pas and instead said - while looking directly at us - “ladies” and was pleased when we responded by getting up to train.

Now with some reluctance and also some pride, I will have to admit that I am now one of the “older” women. I found that reaching the milestone of 60, my body was beginning to remind me that I was no longer a spring chicken and was beginning to show the usual signs of wear and tear. I was starting to get knee pain and suffered a couple of tears in my meniscus; and was told - after having an arthroscopy - that my ACL had completely torn through. I was informed that I would have to live with a partially functional knee until I was old enough to have a knee replacement. Apparently 60 was too young! I was also told that it was time to hang up my hakama!

It was true that due to my knee injuries I had been finding training difficult. I was still able to roll, however getting back up was difficult as my leg muscles were too weak to let me stand in the usual graceful manner. I was unable to sit in Seiza and doing Shikko and Suwari Waza was impossible. This was particularly problematic as I was the only instructor in our dojo that was able to demonstrate to the students Suwari Waza techniques. I found that due to these limitations and the effects they were having on my entire fitness level I was unable to train at my full potential; and during my last trip to Japan I avoided Hombu because I would be unable to train to the extent that I would have liked.

This was when I decided to do something to improve my fitness, because giving up Aikido was not an option. I decided to return to my old gym and joined a six-week health and fitness challenge. “The moment you take responsibility for everything in your life is the moment you can change anything in your life” says the American author Hal Elrod.

Once I committed to the program, I set out my goals to lose weight and to rebuild my leg muscles. I wanted to turn back the clock; fighting against the depletion that age had worked on my body by regaining the strength and flexibility that I had lost. It is no secret that as we age our muscles and joints become stiffer and tighter; they tell us that this is all part of the aging process: the combination of physical degeneration, inactivity and general wear and tear over the long years. Although we cannot help getting older, it does not mean that we should just give up on all the activities that we have always loved doing. Age should not be a barrier to a fit and active life.

During the six weeks challenge I changed my eating habits and began attending classes three days a week that involved a combination of weights, cardio and balance. This was in addition to Aikido training three days a week. Within six months I was feeling great; after twelve months, my ukemi was back to normal and my energy levels were high. The stiffness in my

*Marie Petery Sensei
with special summer
school guest: Minegishi
Mutsuko Shihan, 7th
Dan.*



shoulders are no longer a problem and my knees are no longer suffering the effects of damaged and weakened muscles.

Being able to train at my normal capacity at the 2017 Summer school was my big goal. I was delighted by the results that hard work and perseverance had made to my strength and fitness levels; and I was able to attend almost every class at my former abilities. I was able to repeat this during the Alice Springs annual Easter Camp and then again at the Winter school. Although my injuries have not miraculously healed, the supporting muscles have been strengthened allowing me to return to demonstrating Suwari Waza techniques; and although I'm not back to chasing the kids around the mat doing Shikko, I am once again able to stand with ease after rolling.

By returning to fitness classes I am able to enjoy a fit and active lifestyle, despite being considered part of the “older generation”. My Aikido journey is far from over and I look forward to many more years of the pleasure that Aikido brings to those that are part of the discipline. Age is not a barrier to stop people from achieving what they want. Look after your body and mind through strengthening with the appropriate exercises and you can continue to enjoy being active and reducing the risk of injuries.

After all we are all 21 with a little more experience!!





Relaxing with the cherry blossoms



A Dubai Visit...by Matt Aitken



On the 27th & 28th of May, we were lucky enough to again have Tony Smibert Shihan visit us here in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

He has been kind enough to instruct annual seminars on behalf of the Sugano Foundation in this country for close to 7 years.

This year's seminar was held over two nights at our Al Nasr Dojo, and given that it was during the fasting month of Ramadan, was well attended, with some participants from other dojos, including Saudi Arabia.

The first sessions built on kihon waza, with a focus on leading and blending movements, and a range of empty hand techniques. The second sessions re-introduced the 7 Jo movements, which were then developed into 7 dynamic Jo nage techniques, following a continuous thread.

An intense work-out was had by all, and members thoroughly enjoyed the classes and the opportunity to study and draw their own unique experiences from his visit.

We would like to thank Smibert Shihan for his continuous support, as AikiKai Aikido continues to grow within the Gulf region.

Matt Aitken President

UAE AikiKai Aikido (Dubai AikiKai Aikido Association) is a licensed and registered non-profit organisation, recognised by the AikiKai Hombu Dojo and Dubai Sports Council.



Smibert Shihan in Dubai

Hanami Geiko 2018 by Bodhi McSweeney

Another flowering of the cherries on the banks of the Meander and another Hamani Geiko.

The blossoms were beautiful and lasted for our sake and sushi picnic.

Having to schedule the event ahead of time isn't ideal as nature has no calendar. Traditionally the day of Hanami is called at the peak of the blossoms so for our event it's hit and miss.

In the past Carmel and I would be the blossom watchers and name our casual picnic day to view the flowers. Usually, but not always, the last week in September or the first week in October.

Sitting under these heady blooms is beautiful and potent. The sake and company add to the richness. It is something to be experienced, as there is nothing to compare.

Hanami, viewing of the flowers, is at the end of the weekend training. Before hand we have spent time on the mat, time on the farm, eating together and enjoying each other's company.

Saturday night we made pizza together and Sunday morning is always a scramble to get the sushi done after breakfast before class..... It's worth it and I must say we have a few pretty good sushi makers after a few years at it.

John Watson Sensei instructed the weekend TTC event. His classes were valued, enjoyed and greatly appreciated. There was much food for thought. It was special to have John Sensei and his wife Jane come for the weekend. Students took the teaching very seriously and trained with focus and energy.

I do love the catch up with old Aikido friends, meeting new, it is a very bonding time.

It is a lot of work for Martin and I, but hey that's life.

I must say I was pretty tired by Saturday night and retired to bed 10ish...

Every time I dropped off to sleep I was woken by Martin's laugh from the lounge downstairs (with the riff raff I was thinking).

Too tired to get out of bed I called the home phone — mobile to home phone— and the laughing soon stopped. I asked in the morning, who was the rowdy crowd to hear it was John Sensei and Martin!

Sorry about that John Sensei.

Dear John Sensei did say it was time to go to bed and he that thought Martin was being very restrained considering the famous Martin laugh.

We are still friends.

Summer School 2019

Shodan

Vivien Apoutou	ACT
Steven Burns	NSW
Paul Bury	Vic
Megumi Eddison	ACT
Guillermo Pérez Gonzáles	Vic
Rohan Harrington	Vic
Anja Marzuki	Vic
Sasha Muller	NT
Christina Samson	Vic
Jonathan Wigley	WA
Ronny Williams	NT
Steven Zosky	WA

Nidan:

Janice Marsh	WA
Wei Yng Chua	Vic
Frank Kimble	Tas

Sandan:

Zigmund Pfau	Vic
Joe Costa	Vic
Ben Lewis	ACT
Alfredo Mori	Vic
Greg Giannis	Vic

Yondan:

Andrew Chambers	Vic
Justin Bree	Vic
Yusuf Iqbal	NSW

Grading results

Winter School 2019

Shodan:

Luke Dolbey	TAS
Anna Liu	VIC
Fabiano Morais	VIC
Jess Ngan	NSW
Jason Smith	QLD
Michael Smith	VIC

Nidan:

Chris Bligh	QLD
Chris Jones	TAS
Michael McHugh	QLD
Mark Mc Laughlin	NT

Sandan:

Dave Robinson	QLD
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Yondan:

Paul Kung	NSW
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A Rare Opportunity...

A rare opportunity to study with one of the great masters

We are very privileged Yoshimitsu Yamada Shihan has consented to travel all the way from New York to attend this commemorative Summer School! Yamada Shihan was an uchi-deshi (live-in student) for Ueshiba O Sensei, the Founder of Aikido, and a very close friend of Sugano Sensei, our teacher and the man who started Aiki Kai Australia.

Yamada Shihan is in great demand to teach internationally and we are very fortunate he had both the time and desire to teach at this event.

The numbers are limited to 200 trainees due to the mat space, therefore don't delay in completing your registration form! This is a very rare opportunity, one you wouldn't want to miss.

Other instructors will include our own most senior teachers, Smibert Shihan, Janiv Shihan and Botterill Shihan along with van Thieghem Shihan from Belgium and we are also expecting a cohort of very senior teachers from the USA to attend.

My Rocky Path to Shodan By Mike Smith



I started aikido training with Aiki Kai Australia back in July, 2011 at the Mt. Eliza dojo under John Rockstrom Sensei. The first few grades, 5th, 4th and 3rd neatly took place around September TTCs each year. I did my 5th kyu by special approval at the dojo before a trip to Japan in 2012 so I had at least one grade before training at Hombu Dojo. 4th kyu followed the next year, 2013, but at the time of my 3rd kyu in 2014, I remember the path suddenly got steeper. The grading panel wanted to see more continuous flow with the techniques; a sign of things to come.

My approach to the training in those first few years was fairly laid back. I used to turn up to training, usually late and just in time to help lay the last few mats, for which I started to get a bad reputation – half jokingly but definitely not good on my part. I got a great workout, enjoyed rolling and stretching, and after which I felt spiritually energised. I like aikido for that feeling, to make it a part of my life. It definitely helps me manage the day-to-day life challenges with a more positive and proactive approach, which for me, is the benefit and reward of regularly training.

I was happy that aikido training fulfilled the fitness in my life. I didn't really concern myself with the grading techniques until the next TTC weekend arrived and just hoped I would have picked up enough at training to get me through. Usually you would get a trial run before a grading to help brush up anything that was missing.

This casual approach to training started to come undone by the time 2nd kyu came around. A year after my 3rd kyu grading I was training regularly and had sufficient training days to attempt 2nd kyu. However, during the trial run I was caught out not knowing some of the techniques. I was then obliged to wait another three months and at the next

rehearsal I was still not ready and knocked back again for attempting 2nd kyu, and so it continued until after two years I was finally judged sufficiently ready to try for 2nd kyu grading; and sad to relate, I just scraped through. I felt it was not a very good grading and should really have handed back the certificate, but as the grading panel had passed me, I accepted it with the determination to really improve for 1st kyu.

A year later I had a sufficient number of training days to try for 1st kyu, and as usual, we had a trial run. The local dojo panel looked at my demonstration and thought I was not ready, so I waited another three months until the grading in June 2017. I had (finally) passed the trial run in the dojo but at the actual grading itself there were a few stop-start moments, not knowing the techniques and pauses while I was fumbling around. Overall it was not a good demonstration and, deservedly, the grading panel did not pass me for 1st kyu. Although I had failed on this first attempt, I felt the grading panel was correct in not passing me. It was good that the panel was maintaining high standards for the grading criteria, expecting students to reach a certain minimum standard. I resolved I had to go back to the dojo and improve even more before I could re-sit the examination.

For me, the analogy is like receiving ukemi: we may take a hit and get knocked down but ukemi teaches us to roll back up off the mats, to rebound and keep going.

Even though, or maybe because, I had been knocked back for 1st kyu, I started to learn that you are responsible for your training. You just cannot hope to turn up and wing it. My attitude had to change, and it started with getting to training on time. I had to study these techniques and learn what the syllabus required. I was always reluctant to grade and content to stay in my comfort zone, just turn up to training like you were going to the gym. Gradually my attitude changed. I actually started grabbing some senior dan grades after class and worked on learning these techniques. Rockstrom Sensei was encouraging me to try for 1st kyu again at the next grading which was three months away, but my training had slacked off a bit. I was stalling for time, at which point I basically got a verbal boot up the ass to keep going. Part of that 'encouragement' was to re-kit with a new Gi to look the part, to ditch the old stained worn out one I had been wearing for some years. Perhaps a subtle metaphor of my training.

Training aikido you need the grading in order grow and step up to another level. It's a martial art, yes, but it is more than that. For me it's about self-growth – to train and develop into a better version of yourself. The grading takes me out of my comfort zone and pushes me to the next level. You cannot stay at one level and be satisfied. I finally realised the training is meant to be difficult and put you under pressure in order grow and evolve as a person. We get comfortable just turning up and training, which is all well and good but it is only the start. I feel your training needs to keep evolving and this is where the grading helps to elevate you to another level of understanding and performance.

Sometimes it takes me a while to work things out. I probably take things a bit slower than the usual student, preferring to take

my time to get it right. But sometimes you need that extra push to jump to the next level. You always feel that you are not ready and would like more time to prepare, so you just keep putting it off, waiting until 'the time is right'. Six months later, December 2017, I regraded for 1st kyu and passed this time (hallelujah!). I remember the grading panel saying that they were looking for 1st kyu to be getting closer to shodan level. I remember Botterill Sensei saying: "You're approaching shodan level now, so we begin taking an interest in you, in your commitment to the training and study." Next step Shodan.

The shodan grading was probably a year and a half away after grading 1st kyu and I thought I could relax for a while... Well guess again, Rockstrom Sensei was pushing for me to attempt it in a year's time, to grade at the next Summer School, but when that date came around, I hadn't clocked up enough training days to reach the required 150. I was only at 100. It finally took a year and a half until I had sufficient training sessions. I still didn't think I was ready and I could do with at least another 6 months, but there I was again wanting to do it comfortably. I realise now you will never feel totally comfortable/ready/safe. The grading requires a leap of faith. I had to take the plunge and find out.

The Winter School in Sydney was at the excellent location of St. Ignatius School by the river with a magnificent view out to the city skyline. Staying on the campus in the dormitory felt like being back at school with exams coming up. I was met on the Saturday night by Graham Coombe, also up from Mt Eliza dojo, and Yui, a visitor from Singapore. In this close environment and meeting up with familiar faces in the aikido community it was all very uplifting. I felt a great degree of comraderie being there with positive, like-minded people. This definitely helped in making me feel relaxed and positive about the upcoming grading.

There was some fear and self-doubt; history repeating itself. What if I failed at the first attempt the way I did for 1st kyu? Would it happen again? Thinking to myself, "Give it all you got", I took away the expectation of passing and just relaxed. On the Monday night before grading it was good to just go for a walk and clear the mind. I resolved in myself to give it a go and just relaxed. If I did not pass, it would be good experience to take to the next grading. I could treat this as a practise run to find out what I don't know and hopefully in another six months I would get it right.

Next day, the day of the grading, I remember having a calm centred feeling, I was resigned in myself not to worry too much and just relax, take whatever may come. I was not going to waste mental energy on anxiety. I would just stay in the moment, have breakfast, chat, enjoy the company, the grading is later. I know it's coming up after lunch, I will cross that bridge when I get there. I did try to cram in some last few pointers with help from a couple of other Victorians who were there, Fabiano Morais (who like me was also going for Shodan Grading) and Christina Sampson (who had achieved Shodan at the previous Summer School), but if I didn't know it by then it's too late. I could only show what I did know. For me, always the key was to relax. I got a lot of encouragement from people prior to the grading, who had said it's over quicker than you think.

After a light lunch and I headed back to the Ramsay Hall

dojo, a relaxed but focussed energy was evident, building already, with people getting primed for the big event. I positioned myself to the right end of the mat in front of the grading panel, weapons handed to my senior dan grade, Graham, who had been a great moral support and mentor throughout the week.

The afternoon grading began with the previous grading certificates handed out from last Summer School, so I think that was a nice touch to see those who, before us, have passed what we are about to go through. Then it begins, the call is for Jason Smith and Michael Smith, I am to be uke first for Jason. That is a bonus. I can warm up and receive, and it would take some of the pressure off not having to present first. Sorry, Jason!

A few techniques in and Jason is nailing this. He knew the techniques well and was reeling them off as I was receiving them which also gave me confidence. I knew most of the techniques too. Maybe I can do this! The other thing was that the routine for each round of techniques was shorter than I expected, the juwaza was maybe dozen or so and then it was over. I thought 'I can survive this. I might just be able to do this and not look like a total klutz.'

The uke gets a couple of breaks during multiple attacks and I used this time to recover. Halfway point, around 25 minutes and now it's my turn. I can do this. After the switch over from uke to nage I feel I am warmed up and moving well. I also have energy in reserve. I can really give it my full effort and spirit, pour my soul into this, holding nothing back.

My turn starts with jiyu waza! - yeah why not, get that over and done with. It's usually at the end which I dread, but hit it up front it works in my favour. It gets me moving and with no time to think, just do something. Then on to the ikkyo to yonkyo in suwariwaza - I can take some time on the pins to rest a bit and breathe. I use this time to reset.

Good fitness was critical to getting through; all that build up with endless jiyu waza, grading preparation, with rounds of shomenuchi irminage ten times continuously for each partner had built up my fitness level. In the dojo we were run ragged until you were on your haunches and legs felt like lead. It was different in the grading; as people had said, it was over quicker than you think. I still felt I had plenty of energy in reserve, this gave me the confidence to keep going, to keep moving. Give your energy and spirit, leave nothing on the mat; this was the attitude I had in my head to get me through.

Keep moving, don't think, there is no time, and hopefully something resembles aikido-like techniques will happen. This is the zone our training leads us to where we can unconsciously do a technique, a satori like experience, zen meditation on the move. The rest of grading continued with tachi waza ushiro ryote dori, ryote dori kokyu nage, weapons taking jiyu waza.... I just kept moving, even if I did not do the correct technique I did something, there was no pausing and scratching my head this time, just the thought to do something.

And before you know it it's over. I survived. There was this huge feeling of relief within myself. I had given all that I had. I turned to Rockstrom Sensei who was on the grading panel and gave a nod in his direction to say without words that's it, I have done everything possible within my capability from all that he had instructed to me up to that point in time. I got a nod back.

Sitting back down after one of the most intense energetic

50 minutes of my training, I felt the internal spiritual energy resonating inside me. It was a great feeling. I had survived. I had given all my energy and there was personal satisfaction with that. Getting through the grading was reward enough in itself for me. I felt I had given my best; I had demonstrated the best I could. Whether I passed or failed was of little concern. It was just a great sense of achievement to get through it. The achievement was having survived the grading.

The sheer relief of having got through the grading after the past eight years of preparation was quite overwhelming. Just thinking about how much the dojo supported me in the effort, the senior dan grades, Grant Read, Tom Mason, Elliot Beniada and Graham and all the kyu grades who had helped to focus on getting me up to that level. This is a wonderful benefit of the non-competitive training, which is cooperation to help each other improve. There was relief because it is not just about you. There is an obligation to train and study for the dojo which had invested time and energy and a belief in me, so it was nice to feel I had given the best possible grading for my capability and paid back to the dojo that helped me get there.

Sitting in seiza for the next couple of hours as we go through

the nidan grading, alternating between crossed legs, I just wanted to stand up as the muscles around my knees were aching. And then we got the sandan grading, and you could see how the development of aikido increased. Okay, knees are throbbing now and I need to stand up when this is over. But wait; there is a yondan grading. Impressive as this was to watch, my knees, thighs, and legs are killing me. This was probably the hardest most painful part of the grading!

At the end, Smibert Sensei's review of the shodan gradings suggested they were at a good level. Sure, there were a few techniques that were not totally right, but he said we had all demonstrated something with good movement energy and spirit – and this is what got me through I think, and what is probably more important, the attitude towards the grading. It changed from self-doubt to exhilaration – I actually enjoyed it!

Finally, Smibert Sensei said you have all passed.

Wow! Ok... cool... bonus - I won't have to re-sit a shodan grading!

Now before me, I can see another rocky path up a mountain called nidan.

I'd better start preparing to climb that one.

Rediscovering Kaiten Nage Tjang lfei (Yui)

30 June 2019 to 04 July 2019 — Winter School

I disliked kaiten nage. During my second year of training, a second-dan rank senior of mine gave me a sudden fright by pushing my neck down physically hard, and almost dislocated my shoulder while executing this technique. While this might have been his best understanding of the technique at that point of time as an effective way of 'controlling' the uke, this very effectively made me disown this technique from that very moment. So, from that day during jiyu waza, whenever someone started to do this technique, I would instantly turn into a life-size block of ice. Nor did I ever feel any inclination to do this technique either. After that, any time I experienced or thought about this technique it vividly brought back the blood curdling fear I experienced six years ago; little did I know that this situation could change as a result of the class I am about to describe.

On the third day of Aiki Kai Australia's Winter School in 2019, John Rockstrom Sensei was the overseeing instructor for Focus Class, with six instructors doing the actual teaching. We were split into 6 groups, each instructor rotating from group to group teaching for 7 minutes, and then we moved on to be welcomed by the next instructor. But we would practise kaiten nage and nothing else!

When I heard the word kaiten nage, my heart groaned out loud. I was just thinking, why? Why? I didn't choose any group in particular. I just walked to the nearest one. My mind went blank.

Surprisingly, I did not have time to worry or to think. I sat, I watched and listened, I stood up and got a partner; we bowed to each other, and tried to do what specifically the current group instructor had shown to us. In the midst of the busy class, Rockstrom Sensei went around to 'inspect' what was going on. I saw

Smibert Shiban, Watson and Dziedzic Senseis with Yui



him smile more than once!

We had a bit more time in the last group, and I had a chance to partner Tristan Derham Sensei! Somehow, while we practised Tristan Sensei and I were often 'forced' to stall the technique momentarily, as we were caught in the middle of uke's rolling here and there, and it was really hard to complete the final throw. Once, I really could not find a safe spot for Tristan Sensei to take ukemi, and I told him that I would stop the waza then and there. Soon I could sense Tristan Sensei also paused, as he looked to find a safe spot for me to roll. But he did not rush, and he did not exert excessive control. Tristan Sensei maintained contact that made me feel as if this was only a brief pause before we found a gap into which I could roll.

It was true that we could keep our uke going in circles, until we found a safe space into which to throw them. But we could never tell what others would do to their ukes right after we did our throw. And in the middle of this movement, the uke might find it difficult to get straight up again, as that would be the safest strategy. I don't know how Tristan Sensei usually practices kaiten nage; but his immediate unspoken understanding for my concern for my safety in this technique, was truly a heart-warming experience.

During this special class, as I was sitting in circle with my

fellow participants, then moving together from one instructor to the next one, I found myself to be like a student seeing this technique for the first time. Looking intently at the instructors' movement, I was trying to follow the spoken and unspoken guidance as closely as possible. It was like someone had reset the clock, giving me a second chance to learn this technique differently.

After the class, I shared with Rockstrom Sensei that I liked this focus class style of learning very much. I also told that one particular instructor really impressed me: he broke up the waza into several parts so we did only a single segment of it at a time.

Aiki Kai Australia's Winter School 2019 @ Saint Ignatius' College Riverview, Sydney
report from Tjang Ifei (Yui)

It was mid-winter, and with a fluttering heart I entered Ramsay Hall, the dojo for Aiki Kai Australia's (AKA) Winter School 2019. The cold wind and bright sky dressed up the morning of Sunday, 30 June 2019, the first day of the School. Close to ninety of us were all seated in seiza, in respectful stillness as Tony Smibert Shihan, President of AKA stepped onto the mat.

Smibert Shihan conducted two consecutive classes that morning, and I was blown away in no time. Shihan led the taiso (warm-ups) himself, and in the midst of my clumsy efforts to copy his elegant movements, I watched the rising of energy and that energy captured me deep inside. Throughout the following two hours plus, the air was filled awesomely with grace, care, and a spirit of our training together. During these lessons, with just a few minutes break in between, I had the true luxury of having Hanan Janiv Shihan's constant guidance. A gifted teacher, Hanan Shihan offered me his concise direction each time I was lost, enabling me to see the basic principles underlying each movement, especially in sets of multiple continuous waza. During group exercises, fellow participants were spontaneously taking the role of uke without hesitation such that I could clearly see the form of the intended waza. (I remember Benjamin being such a joyful and energetic uke!). I found myself full of sadness as noon approached, and the morning session of the first day of the school was completed.

One class succeeded another, each morning and afternoon, so one day rolled swiftly into another. While the weather could not have been more perfect for training, the lower temperatures hit me hard being accustomed to weather in Singapore. My body refused to co-operate, playing up as my body temperature rose, reminding me of past injuries. As some of new found friends chose to take a break in the afternoons, I started to walk alone to the afternoon classes. But once I entered the training hall and stepped onto the mat, all these concerns gradually disappeared and appeared trivial. In awe, I witnessed the first- and second-generation students of Sugano Sensei who never failed to show up. While acknowledging their own physical restrictions, none complained about their tiredness or other problems. They were sitting unobtrusively all over the mat, seeing themselves as being there simply as students, but also in this way continuously building a bridge to the students who would be the future of Aikido; these students also were there to connect with old Aikido

It might look slow and meaningless, but I am very sure that both instructor and students really benefited from doing it this way.

I still can't say that I like kaiten nage, but my body has learned to accept the form and speed that come with this technique. I see that it would still take many years for me to be able to say that I like kaiten nage, but I am deeply grateful for the chance for me to re-learn it from fresh perspectives.

I believe John Rockstrom Sensei did not know about my past painful experiences with kaiten nage, but like Rockstrom Sensei said once, Sugano Shihan said that Aikido is all about connection, at many levels, and I believe that connection is simply magic.

friends from all over Australia and to make friends with new ones in the younger generations.

During the day and in the evenings, I was in close proximity to the students of Sugano Shihan, and I used this opportunity to advance my study. I witnessed that age is not a barrier to training, to accept the various physical characteristics as they are, that gender is a given, and that origins are unique. It seemed to me that the original students of Sugano Shihan were all of one heart in remembering and continuing the legacy of their teacher, Seiichi Sugano Shihan. The students of Sugano Shihan dedicate their lives into building the succeeding generations, one after another, striving to ensure that some of his teaching and vision would keep on touching others from all over Australia. I believe that Sugano Shihan who is sitting somewhere, would be very proud to see how these students, who had so benefited from his life's work, had developed and were in turn reaching out to others.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all the teachers, senior members and students of AKA, for their constant care and thoughtfulness during my stay. I was lucky to have been shown the blue bright sky; I was taken to the rise of the gleaming sun and woke up under the glittering stars; I was taken to the cliff edge and witnessed a giant wave breaking high on the wall of the cliff. I would never forget the scent of lavender, nor my panic when I experienced freedom from gravity. To each of you with whom I trained with such care and consideration and even tenderness, I shall always retain the memory within me of those training sessions.

However, my first and foremost thanks are reserved for John Rockstrom Sensei: he helped me with so many difficulties and problems before during and after the School, and I cannot thank him enough for all his kindness.

Here, from where the summer is all-year long, I am sending my eternal gratitude; and may you all be safe, healthy and continue to manifest joy in your training. I set out from Singapore to go to a Winter School, but then I found that I had arrived at home.

Yui (Tjang Ifei)

An aikidoka from Singapore we all knew simply as Yui, but whose name is Tjang Ifei, who met Tony and John Rockstrom when they went to Singapore for the Shinjukai anniversary celebrations last year in honour of Philip Lee Sensei, Shinjukai's founder. Yui was thrilled with the teaching etc at the Winter School, and has joined Aiki Kai Australia as an overseas member.

In Conversation with the Women at GIAS Belgium 2019
Linda Godfrey

I went to the 20th anniversary school for many reasons but most because I felt it was important to mark the 20th year, the strong relationship with Louis Sensei, and because it provided me with another excuse to spend some with my beloved Aunt who lives in London. The classes were incredibly familiar as in it was just like being at Summer School because I had been to many classes of all the instructors before. Yes, it was wonderful but something extraordinary also happened.

The unexpected happened to me at the school when I was greeted by women whom I had never met before who knew me by name and all sorts of details because of the book we had written a few years ago, 'In Conversation with Aikido Women'. There was a connection that existed before I turned up. I was able to train with so many women of all ages and abilities from Europe who wanted to train with me. I had young women come up to me and say how much I had inspired them. It was very humbling but it also reinforced simply the need to be authentic and train with honesty and respect of others.

In the book, many of us women describe how women 'talk' in the change rooms. Well the whole of the GIAS outside of the training classes was an opportunity to 'talk and

share' with the women from Europe. Many of the issues are the same as ours, some are worse. In the end, through the fellowship and studentship of training we were able to connect and develop wonderful supportive friendships that are continuing the conversations that women all over the world need in order to develop in their practice of aikido. I know that my presence and example encouraged three ladies to participate in the school differently to what they would have otherwise. They volunteered to teach in the learning to instruct component of the school. They overcame their self-doubt, enjoyed the experience and found it to be very positive.

We had several formal dress events at GIAS. Perhaps only women can understand this, but to have a friend turn up with a vast array of dresses, accessories and other items so that you can choose what you would like to wear was one of the most touching events of the whole GIAS for Julie Boydell and myself. I look forward to many years of friendship with these lovely ladies.

These photos were taken by Tony Smibert Shihan. It is Petra and her daughter Anna who is training so sweetly on the mat. She was the youngest girl I got to train with.



With Linda is Petra and her daughter Anna. photos taken by Tony Smibert AO

A brief report from Olivia Giovannazo

A big part of aikido for me is having fun with my friends. So, a five-day tour around Belgium with new aikido friends was an absolute ball!

What's more fun than drinking fruit flavoured beers, riding ridiculous bikes in Oostende, getting lost in a maize maze, a boat tour in Bruges and tempting everyone with a midnight dorm party, but definitely being too tired at the end of a jam-packed day??

With my time in Belgium I made new friends through a mutual interest in studying Aikido. I was also able to catch up with friends who live outside of Melbourne.

We all came to Maredsous to train together. There was an incredible feeling on the first night at Maredsous when the Australians were introduced and asked to stand up. The entire room broke into an applause and cheered for us. It was a feeling of welcome and excitement, and I was made more than certain that for me Aikido is about friendship and training together.

I am grateful to have been a part of an effort to continue a connection between Australian and Belgium at the GIAS 20th anniversary.



Ruihong Lu, the creator of the drawings with Christina Samson.



massaging legs
after a period of
meditation



CLENCH



THE
SINGING
BOWL



Apparently, Jikou Sensei's
sequence in the morning
meditations were the
closest out of the teachers
to Sugano Sensei's sequence:

- 1 BOONNG at the start of meditation
- 3 BOONNGS at the end of meditation
- 5 BOONNGS to end the entire session

Source:
Hans
Sensei

"The Funny Walk"
→ dubbed by Olivia

→ an obstacle course of pillows,
sleeping bags, blankets and
cushions done between
the 2 key me still sitting
sessions

→ A wonderful guilt-free way
of curing pins and needles. Can
use in everyday life



"One foot sliding close
to the other"

"Stillness walking"
"maintain stillness"
begun from sitting"

Jikou Sensei's interpretation

A Rough Guide/Sequence
to the Seminar morning
meditations, as discussed
with Jikou Sugano Sensei:

"guided often
by feeling" → sensei

①
1A
1B



Preparation

→ Alternate between closed
and open hand,
lowering and raising,
heaven & earth

② We Ho We Ho, We sa Ye sa
Ye, Ye, Ye, Ye



Fune kogi & Furutama



③



MOVING FROM THE CENTER

④

STUDY/PRACTICE:

Front Outside
point of
view

Different
angles
of Hands
Focus



outside left
point of view
I found a
way to
capture hand
knuckles!



own angle/
field of view

MOUNTAIN VIEWING EXERCISE



*KEY POINT

- Levels/Heights
of Topmost
Finger Point:
- ① Between Eyes
 - ② At Chin level
 - ③ At Heart level
 - ④ Back to Eye Level

1A



1B



SECOND & THIRD PREPARATION

All of this is
before the meditation
rounds themselves...

There is
so much behind
each step!

TMI theme
How We Do
What We Do

Higher Purpose

Physical Form

⑤ **MEDITATIONS TIME!**

summary:

- 2 sitting
- 1 standing
- 1 sitting

1 BOONNG
3 BOONNGS
1 BOONNG
3 BOONNGS
1 BOONNG
3 BOONNG

Sitting Part of Meditation

Right Eye View

right hand on top
Left Hand at bottom
rhumbs not quite

⑥ This can change, depending on how the teacher is feeling

MASSAGING OF LEGS

Turning of Back

⑦ **SELF-BOXING** → "Left before right"

Arms
Pectorals & chest & core
Patting the lower back
Pat the bum
Gentle taps at the neck & around head
Up & Under the legs
Back & Trapezius muscles

⑧ **CHEST & SHOULDER STRETCH**

⑨ **Kyu-do-inspired STRETCH**

The feeling aimed for:
Like a spring being stretched horizontally

⑩ **BREATHING EXERCISE**

EXHALE
INHALE

Ruihong Lu, who was one of the GIAS participants, has done these beautiful sketches of Jikou's morning meditations. this is what she gleaned from the experience - They are not meant to be a manual or anything definitive, but are a lovely perspective on what she experienced.



Waiting for the training to commence.



A beautiful view of Dinant on the banks of the Meuse river.

Global Inner Aikido School 2019 Christina Samson

It was my first time in Belgium and Global Inner Aikido School (GIAS) 2019 was the first Aiki Kai International School I've attended since I joined Aiki Kai in 2015.

I immensely enjoyed GIAS. I had the opportunity of meeting and training with wonderful fellow Aikidokas in Maredsous. They were amazing people on and off the mat. I also had so much fun spending time with friends from Australia exploring the amazing cities in Belgium.

GIAS Teacher School

I actively participated in the two-day Teacher School as I am curious on how a Sensei plans his or her aikido class when teaching. I find the pointers in building the sequence or class very educational and answered some of the questions I have in mind when it comes to teaching aikido. Sugano Shihan's teachings were evident throughout, especially with the Senior Senseis, who formatted and taught their classes amazingly. The Senseis that participated in teaching have done a great job in building their classes that follow Sugano Shihan's teachings, as demonstrated by the Senior Senseis. What I enjoyed most was a class that incorporated a hand technique with weapon technique using jo.

GIAS 2019 Meditation

I was so pleased that GIAS included daily meditation. A mindfulness exercise that I love doing whenever I get the chance. I must admit that on the first day of meditation, when I stood up after about 30 minutes of sitting on the mat, I had to bend my knees to steady and regain control of my legs as I couldn't feel them, and I thought I was going to fall over! It got easier and easier though till get to day 5. Thanks to GIAS I started doing meditation at least three times a week since I got back to Australia.

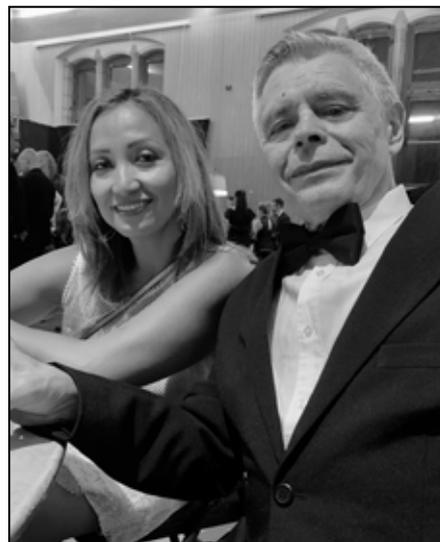
GIAS 2019 Events / Activities

I liked the way classes were structured during the school. Between the end of the morning class at 12:30 and the start of the afternoon class at 16:30, there was a lot of time to either chill out or join in the organised activities.

The highlight for me, was the horse riding for 2 and a half hours. Darwin, my horse, by just looking at her for the first time, I could tell that she was a spirited horse and I said to myself that harmonising with her would be a challenge; I would have to try my best to hold on and try not to do ukemi during the ride. That was my first horse riding experience and I will do it again.

Evening activities were spectacular which included campfire, gala dinner & fireworks! The school even hired dealers from the local casino for a James Bond 007 Casino Royale Night and gave us each \$200 in play money to use. Even though I didn't win the most money that night, I had a great time playing like a pro.

Overall, the GIAS experience for me was amazing and memorable. I was moved by how Sugano Shihan has touched the lives of Aikidokas on this side of the world through Aikido. I am going back to Maredsous to do GIAS again in the future.



Christina Samson with Louis van Thieghem Shihan.



Editor's note: Aiki Kai Australia thanks most sincerely the organizers of the GIAS, but in particular we want to thank Lucy and Manon for their wonderful hospitality and organization for the Australians who attended the GIAS. Their enthusiasm and delight is reflected in the articles presented here.



Photos from the
GIAS: Global Inner Aikido
School Belgium 2019

Learning to Give a Lesson — Julie Boydell in Belgium

After spending a busy week visiting many of the sights and experiences (and the beers!) that Belgium has to offer, it was time to get down to the real reason for traveling half-way around the world: studying Aikido.

As a nidan I know that I am a small fish in a very large pond, especially so at an international school, and no less a school than one of an Anniversary nature, started by our mutual Aikido founder Sugano Shihan. Little did I realise that by the end of the first day of training I would have to give my first international class... but I get ahead of myself.

The first two days of the school were devoted to shidosha; specifically, the teaching of potential teachers, how to teach and what to teach. The structure was as follows (times are approximate):

- normal 90min class taught by a senior instructor
- 10min briefing by organising instructors to candidates: what they had seen in the class, and how each candidate plans to progress the class whilst still maintaining the basic elements

of the class

- 5-10min to plan the class/structure/techniques
- teach a short 15-20min class
- repeat the class for each group of students present; similar to our round-robin style of Focus Classes at national schools in Australia
- de-brief with organising instructors (who participated in the classes): what was good, what could be improved
- receive feedback forms from participating students, worded so that feedback was constructive and given in a positive way

Candidates were self-nominated, and there were no minimum requirements that I could determine.

I enjoyed participating in the morning classes as a student: I trained with all of the other people in my group of seven; I helped out as uke to the instructor when requested to; I submitted a feedback form and verbal encouragement to each instructor at the end the morning session.

When we returned from lunch, I again tried my best to



Photos from the 2019 Winter School at Saint Ignatius College

follow the class taught by Louis van Thieghem Shihan, taking particular care to train diligently, and to spot any differences to what I'm used to doing at home. My mind was still full of these thoughts when instructor candidates were asked to present themselves, so I was not prepared for the nudge in the ribs from my neighbour.

"You should do this."

What? No! Why? I'm only a nidan; I'm not experienced enough in Aikido; I'm not good enough to teach strangers; I'm not a local; I'm only female... the excuses plagued me one after another.

As I felt Linda's hand under my elbow, I realised that only one person had volunteered to teach. There needed to be more than one teacher candidate for the session to work. The excuses were just that – excuses. I had seen in the morning how the session progressed; I had noted what I liked about each earlier candidate, and some of the pitfalls to avoid; I had seen how students responded to an instructor regardless of rank or gender. The inevitable conclusion was that I may as well give this a go as I may never get another opportunity like it. Also, I'd never live with my conscience and Linda forever saying "you should have given it a go".

At my briefing with the organizing instructors I decided to stick to the basics – repeat small sections of Louis Sensei's hand technique class but use the jo to illustrate the differences in distance and timing. After a brief practise with Linda to ensure I'd gotten my techniques sorted and a parting word of encouragement, I was as ready to face the class as I'd ever be.

As I prepared to bow to "my class", I realised that I was not

scared nor embarrassed to be there but the self-doubt in abilities were high. I tried to forget about the barriers and pressures: many students present did not speak English; I would be teaching in front of my seniors; what if I made a mistake? I tried hard to think of it like a Special Training Day at my home dojo, and make it engaging like the University sessions I used to help out with. I could only do my best.

All too soon we were given the "wrap up" warning, just as I felt that the students were getting in to the groove of the lesson and enjoying where it was progressing. As I bowed to "my class" I felt that in a very short time I had achieved my goal – to pass on a small piece of technique and hopefully a slightly larger piece of the spirit of aikido. As I looked up I could see the smiles of encouragement and thanks. I then realised that I would really be put to the test: I had to repeat the class to the other half of the students!

At the end of the teaching session the general feedback from the organising instructors was good. Whilst some criticisms I believe would be negated by a normal length 90-minute class as opposed to the brief time allotted, other comments require me to further my studies of Aikido and the art of teaching. Many of the students enjoyed my friendly approach to Aikido, and were happy to have a chat about my class whilst handing me their completed feedback forms.

The dozen or so paper feedback slips I received are sitting on my work desk where I can reference them from time to time. They are some of the most meaningful and personal souvenirs from my Belgium trip, and I will treasure them for some time to come.



Ibaraki Dojo – Iwama 2019 Embu

The context

Every year a different prefecture in Japan holds an event to showcase the various sports and arts practised in that prefecture. In 2019 the event was to be held in Ibaraki Prefecture.

The Ibaraki Dojo, in Iwama, was to organise a large embu on the grounds of the dojo. The IAF was invited by the Ibaraki Dojo to bring a delegation of international Aikido students to contribute to the demonstration. The students were all between 2nd dan and 6th dan and the expectation was that they would give energetic and dynamic demonstrations.

The embu represented an opportunity for collaboration between the IAF, The Aikikai Foundation ('Hombu') and the Ibaraki Dojo. Relations between Hombu and the Ibaraki Dojo and between Hombu and the IAF have been complicated in the past. Diana Hope (2nd dan) and Tristan Derham (4th dan) were asked by the Teaching Committee to participate as Australian representatives in the IAF delegation. The itinerary included dinner with all the IAF delegates in Tokyo on Thursday 22nd September, travel together to Iwama on the Friday, training and preparation for the embu on the Saturday and Sunday mornings and participation in the embu itself on Sunday afternoon.

Tokyo

Tristan had dinner with Suzuki Sensei and Fumiko Noguchi (a Victorian student living in Japan) on the Tuesday night prior to the event. On Thursday evening, Diana and Tristan met with the IAF group and went out for a relaxed dinner at a local restaurant with some Hombu officials and Hombu Dojocho. Diana and Tristan presented a gift (wine) to Dojocho on behalf of Aiki Kai Australia. The IAF officials in attendance were Kei Izawa Sensei (Chairman), Wilko Vriesman Sensei (Secretary), Dorin Marchis (recently appointed Technical Director) plus a media duo: Sorin Toma, Irina Gaspar. The IAF group trained at Hombu dojo on Friday morning. Tristan trained with Tani Sensei, Diana with Fumiko. Following training, the IAF group caught the train together to Iwama.

Iwama/Ibaraki dojo

The Ibaraki dojo is in the town of Iwama, situated opposite the Aiki Shrine, which houses the 42 guardian deities of Aikido. The grounds include an orchard and fields, O Sensei's house, the dojo and a kitchen and other facilities for guests. Saito Sensei was the caretaker and dojocho for many years. After his death he was succeeded by his son, who has left the Aikikai to establish a dojo nearby. Hombu Dojocho has been dojocho for the Ibaraki dojo since 2015. Isoyama Sensei is chief instructor and Executive Advisor. The most active teachers are Inagaki and Isoyama Senseis. Hombu sends an instructor every week, a different person each time. Doshu and Hombu Dojocho also teach regularly. Watahiki Sensei recently passed away and is sorely missed. There is no teacher in residence. Three Japanese and international students were living on site with plans to stay for a few weeks or months.

The general schedule was to wake up at 5am to clean the dojo and shrine. Morning keiko was at 6am (weapons), and evening keiko around 7pm. We trained on Friday evening, Saturday morning, Saturday evening and Sunday morning. The rest of the time we spent cleaning the dojo, shrine and grounds, helping set up for the embu, relaxing, eating together or waiting for instructions. All the students slept either in the dojo or in a building next door.

Embu

Preparations for the event started over a year and a half ago. There were 600 demonstrators, including kindergarten, primary and high school students, university level students, local dojos, the Ibaraki dojo and Doshu. There was not only the demonstration hall, but also several food and merchandise stalls, giving the event the feeling of a matsuri (festival). Banners and posters were put up all around the town of Iwama. Ibarakii (the town's mascot - a little yellow "monster") is featured performing the different sports on the banners. Inagaki Sensei's demonstration was first, Doshu's was last. The IAF demonstration was immediately before Doshu Sensei's - a prestigious position. Some footage of Doshu's demonstration is here: <https://youtu.be/8URfrX6wIG0>.

Diana and Tristan were asked specifically to demonstrate ikkyo, nikkyo, sankyo and yonkyo in hanmi hantachi and using ryotedori attack, taking turns to be uke and nage. Vriesman Sensei was particularly concerned that the IAF show discipline and coordination. We practiced the entrance and exit several times so that all movements (such as bowing) were synchronised with other group members. Inagaki Sensei appeared to be the main coordinator in charge (with Isoyama Sensei consulted as well). Inagaki Sensei initially gave the IAF 2 x 2-minute embu slots but extended it to 6 minutes as they were impressed by our efforts during the rehearsals. Doshu had left the stage to stretch before his demonstration but came back specifically to watch the IAF demonstrations. The IAF demonstrations were all carried out with precision and energy. Isoyama commented to Vriesman that in some respects they surpassed many of the Japanese demonstrations.

As Doshu was demonstrating, there was a torrential downpour which lasted for at least an hour. This threw the outdoor after party into chaos. We ran around in the rain and mud with several other students and organisers putting the meal together.

Diana presented our gifts to Isoyama Sensei, Doshu and Inagaki Sensei. Diana also arranged and passed out small gifts to the other IAF delegates and the three uchideshi at Iwama. Tristan, along with Vriesman Sensei, Izawa Sensei and several students left on Sunday night for Tokyo, which was a good opportunity to debrief with that group. Vriesman and Izawa Senseis were extremely pleased with the embu and the event more generally. Diana left later on the Monday after being given a tour of O Sensei's room and was allowed to view O Sensei's dogi and books. Vriesman and Izawa Senseis and several of the delegates went on to the 2019 Chungju World Martial Arts Masterships, South Korea.

General comments

This is the first time that Hombu, the Ibaraki dojo and the IAF have worked together so seniors were apparently all cautious to begin with. Vriesman has ambitious plans for further collaborations, including direct collaboration between the Ibaraki dojo and the IAF. Vriesman Sensei was explicit about identifying future leaders of the IAF, and spoke to Tristan, Adam Manikowski (Poland) and Tomasz Kujawa (Poland), asking for their assistance in the near future. Dmitri Crenier has already been asked to focus on a programme for promoting training among younger people. In addition, Vriesman Sensei is hoping to channel keen students from around the world into Hombu dojo as uchideshi, including female trainees.

During training at Hombu dojo, there were several people taking photographs and videos in the dojo for promotional purposes, which is a rare occurrence. Interviews were conducted by the IAF media duo on Sunday morning on the steps of the Aiki shrine. At least three photographers and videographers recorded the embu. Videos will be edited and released by the IAF in the coming weeks, along with footage from the Chungju World Martial Arts Masterships. We will continue to share these videos and photographs primarily through the Aiki Kai Australia Facebook page.

Lastly, while we were in Tokyo, Fumiko Noguchi was very generous with her time, offering assistance at every step. She took significant time off work to host both Tristan and Diana. She also came to dinner with Tristan and Suzuki to translate the conversation and kindly collected some luggage that Tristan accidentally left at Narita Airport.

A Visit to Iwama — 2019 by Tristan Derham

‘Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to travel to Tokyo, Japan. Join other international Aikido students for training at Hombu Dojo, then travel to Iwama Dojo, Ibaraki Prefecture and await further instructions’

That was pretty much all the information that Diana Hope and I had with us as we met with other international students on a hot Thursday night in Tokyo in August. For several months, the International Aikido Federation had been working with the Aikido Foundation (Aikido World Headquarters) and Ibaraki Dojo to join in a huge embu.

Every year a different prefecture in Japan holds an event to showcase the various sports and arts practised in that prefecture. In 2019 the honour fell to Ibaraki Prefecture. The Ibaraki Dojo, in the town of Iwama, was to organise a large embu on the grounds of the dojo. In recognition of the thousands of students that had travelled to Iwama over the decades, the Ibaraki Dojo had also invited the International Aikido Federation to bring a delegation of international students to contribute. Six hundred people, including Doshu Sensei, would be demonstrating Aikido over the course of one and a half hours and, at some point in the evening, we would be front and centre. But first, there was a dinner in Tokyo and morning training with Doshu Sensei at Hombu dojo. On Friday morning we all piled onto a train to Iwama.

Tokyo is huge. It’s difficult to hold the sheer size of the place in your mind. Every time I have visited, I think I’ve gotten a handle on the scale of the place. Then I try to leave the city and find myself overwhelmed by hour after hour of tall buildings, power lines, traffic and advertisements. The trip from Tokyo to Iwama was no different. It took a long time before the buildings gave way to rice fields, hours before the skyline opened up so that we could see through to the hills in the distance. The country slowly went from grey to green and then finally we had arrived.

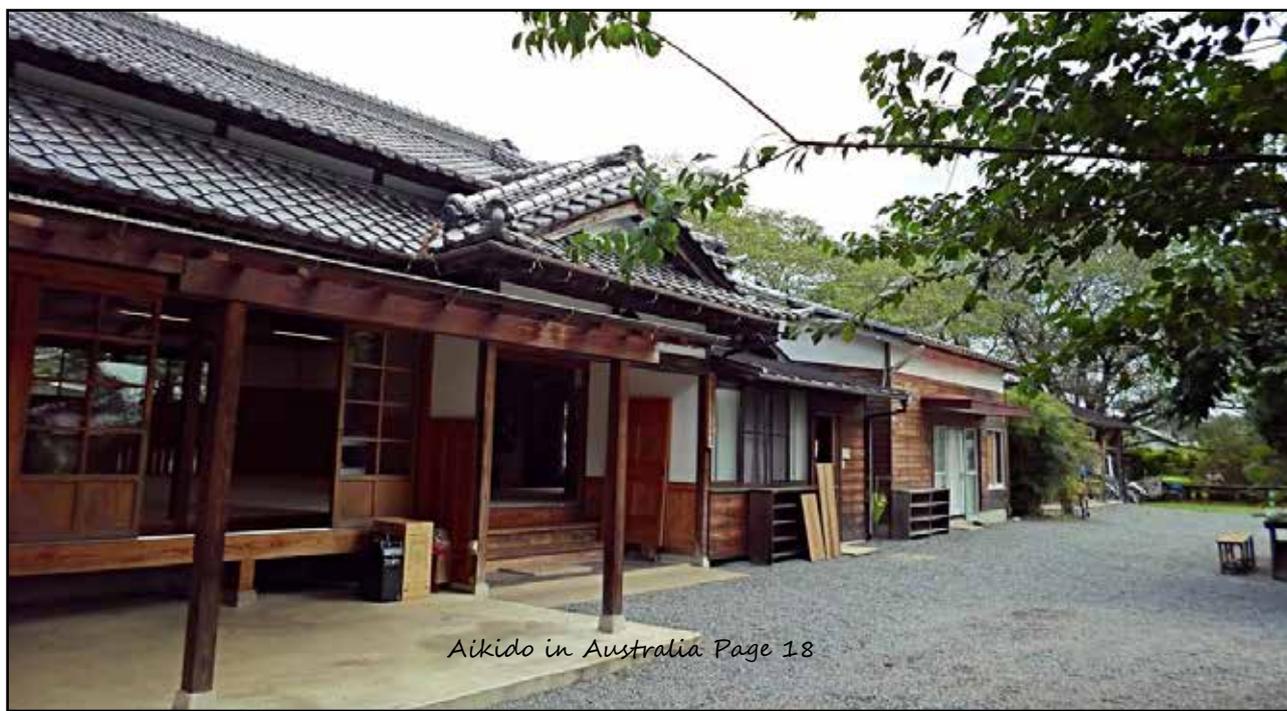
I had only been to Iwama once before, for the Aiki-Jinja Taisai Aikido Festival in 2017. I had never trained at the dojo, but I knew a few stories: It was the home of O Sensei and his wife, Hatsu Ueshiba, from 1942 to 1969. It was where O Sensei,

Morihiro Saito Sensei and their students trained and worked, day in and day out for decades. Thousands of people travelled from all over the world to visit what was described to me several times as ‘the mecca of Aikido’. I had also heard stories of deshis with arms forged to steel cables by hundreds of hours of training, ready to tear foreign students limb from limb for daring to step on the mat. Thankfully this last story was a bit outdated.

We arrived in Iwama, seemingly just another station on the way to somewhere further north. There is no doubt about the importance of Aikido to this place, and vice versa. A statue of O Sensei is the first thing you see as you step out of the station. A series of photographs of O Sensei lines the street that leads to the dojo and shrine. The shrine quietly sits behind cedar trees, a clean-swept gravel clearing in front, and another statue of O Sensei to one side. Across the road is the Ibaraki dojo complex, comprised of fields, an orchard, a large kitchen, some storage buildings and the dojo itself, attached to O Sensei’s house. Our group, gathered from Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Denmark, Australia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Egypt, Belgium and the Netherlands, dragged our suitcases up the gravel driveway and settled in for three days of training, cleaning, gardening, and preparations for the embu.

Let me introduce you to some of the characters at Ibaraki Dojo: Isoyama Sensei came to the Iwama dojo in 1949, at the age of 12, to study under O Sensei. I once watched Isoyama Sensei stop a class of several hundred students because one of them was up the back of the hall, more than fifty metres away, standing with his arms crossed. Isoyama Sensei, broad shouldered, white haired and fierce, skewered the poor soul with a shout from across the room!

Inagaki Sensei on the other hand seemed much more gentle. He joined Iwama dojo in 1958 and studied under both O Sensei and Saito Sensei from childhood. Inagaki Sensei began one of our classes with a lecture he had carefully prepared. He spoke about O Sensei’s reasons for establishing Iwama dojo and the Aiki Shrine. There were three reasons, he explained: to pass on the techniques of Aikido, to house the forty-two deities of Aikido, and to study the unification of budo and farming.



Lastly, there were the live-in students: Noa from Israel, Rafi from Switzerland and Arata from Japan. Each of them was staying for a few weeks and would be spending their days training, cleaning, maintaining the dojo and taking care of guests.

For the embu itself Diana and I were expected to demonstrate precision: we had exactly four minutes to do four techniques each, alongside three other pairs of students. We were to start and finish every technique at the same time. This was not the kind of free-form, creative embu I am accustomed to! There would be 600 people participating in total, plus an audience and camera crew and the international students were scheduled to demonstrate immediately before Doshu. While we practiced the sequence of techniques, a huge pavilion was slowly being built up on one corner of the grounds.

The demonstration itself was a huge affair with a long row of dignitaries at the head of the dojo, including Doshu, Isoyama Sensei and regional officials, plus an audience of hundreds. There were six hundred participants, from primary school children to Doshu himself. The international students were asked to demonstrate immediately prior to Doshu, a privileged position in the schedule.

Rain threatened as each Aikido group gave a careful demonstration of technique, braziers flaming in the corners of the pavilion and hundreds of people looking on. Finally, we were asked to move backstage, then onto the mat, then the taiko drum beat once and we were off!

I'm told our demonstration went well but mostly it was a blur. Afterwards we moved aside to watch Doshu give his performance with Suzuki Sensei and others taking ukemi. As the embu wrapped up, the rain started falling... and began pouring! Suddenly there were dozens of people running, either trying to escape the flood or trying to piece together a celebratory meal for the distinguished guests. Students from first kyu to eighth dan charged about in the rain carrying long tables, hot food, drinks, ice, and napkins. What a mess!

There were plenty of grins, though, and we were all pleased to hear that Isoyama Sensei had been very happy with the standard of Aikido demonstrated by the international students. It was a soggy ride back to Tokyo for those of us who left later that night, the two-hour journey made somewhat easier by smiles and a bottle or two of sake passed around the train carriage. Until next time, Iwama.



A Visit to Iwama — 2019
by Diana Hope

Sometime around April, I got a phone call from Tony Smibert sensei: “We want to send you and Tristan to Iwama in August to represent Aikikai Australia for the IAF at an embu. Would you like to go?”

At the time, I didn't know much about Iwama, except that everyone there is very strong, very strict, and very fierce. When I asked people if they knew anything about it, all I heard were stories about literally training all day and sleeping on a futon on the dojo tatami, meaning packed straw covered in canvas, not soft foam like we have here. Ibaraki Dojo (the actual name of the dojo) in the middle of the countryside where the only building in the town is the dojo, so there's nothing else to do there except train. Not to mention, August will be the hottest and most humid part of summer, so you'll be eaten alive by bugs while turning into a puddle of sweat.

Wait. An embu?

Four months later, I flew out of Melbourne when it was a mere 6 degrees and raining. I arrived after 9pm to 30+ degrees and even more rain! I was meeting up with the IAF team and Tristan for Doshu's early morning class on Friday, so I arrived a day earlier to try to adjust to the weather before really getting stuck into it.

The first friend I met in Tokyo was our very own Fumiko Noguchi. She had moved back to Tokyo so it was great to catch up with her on her home turf. Even though she was working while we were there, she still found time to share meals and train with us at Hombu and just be incredibly supportive during the trip. Thank you Fumiko, especially for recommending that I get some bug repellent and anti-itch cream before leaving the big city!



Tristan and I had dinner with the IAF group on Thursday night. Even Dojocho (Waka-sensei) joined us for a bit! There were about 20 of us from 11 different countries. Quite a few of them had trained in Iwama before, some had even done multiple stays as uchideshi there. And so far, the stories I heard in Australia were proving to be accurate...

The next morning at Doshu's class, it was so hot and humid even at 6:30am! The training wasn't easy by any defi-

niton. I had to sit down when I got white and shaky from the heat, and Tristan somehow tore the skin on his back so badly, he was bleeding through his gi. But we survived, and had enough time for breakfast before we all had to troop over to Ueno to catch the train to Iwama.



When we arrived in Iwama, we saw many flags lining the streets announcing some sort of festival. All of them had a strangely cute birthday cake-shaped mascot in a hakama. We later found out it was the town's mascot "*Ibarakii*", and is actually a "*monster*", not a birthday cake.



We walked to the Aiki shrine, paid our respects and were met by one of the three uchideshi (Noa Lamdan from Israel). She showed us around the buildings (including O-Sensei's house) and gardens. Another two uchideshi (Hiroshi Arata from Japan and Ralf Eggenberger from Switzerland) popped around and helped us all settle in.

At this point, we still didn't know very much about the festival or the embu that was happening on Sunday. As it turned out, the National Sports Festival of Japan is hosted by a different prefecture every year, and the last time it was in Iwama was 11 years ago. There would be 600 people presenting at the embu, all the way from kindergarden kids to Doshu. On top of that, this was the first time that the IAF, Hombu Dojo and Ibaraki Dojo have ever worked together, so we weren't just just presenting at an embu, but working to establish ties between members of all the three groups and test the waters for future collaborations. No pressure at all!

Since we were only there for three days, we got stuck into the daily routine immediately. We woke up before 5am every day to clean the shrine. This usually takes the uchideshi a whole hour, but having 20 extra pairs of hands made it much quicker!

After cleaning was weapons training with Inagaki Sensei. It started with a dedication ritual in the dojo, then moved outside in front of the shrine. We also trained in the evenings with Osawa Sensei from Hombu. During the daytime, we trained and practiced for the embu ourselves, both in the dojo and on the outdoors stage.

The rest of our days were basically filled with doing chores – gardening, cooking, cleaning and SO MUCH laundry...

On Saturday night, Ibaraki dojo hosted a welcome party for us. There were immense amounts of food, alcohol and long speeches – including a round of drinking songs from each country! This was our first chance to do Australia proud in front of everyone, so we sang *Waltzing Matilda* at the top of our lungs. We were also taught a song that Isoyama Sensei wrote about Aikido, which everyone did their best to learn before we could get back to more eating and drinking...

The day of the embu soon came, and the dojo grounds were transformed into a proper festival with lots of food and merchandise stalls. Doshu and other Iwama town officials opened the embu with a torch lighting ceremony and an half-hour of speeches... Due to a small misunderstanding, Tristan and I wound up sitting in seiza with four other members of the IAF group during the entire opening ceremony!

The youngest children's demonstrations were interesting. They demonstrated how they are taught kihonwaza (such as irimi nage, ikkyo and shiho nage) by breaking the tai-sabaki (body movement) into four distinct steps while their Sensei counted for them. While it's not how we train, it was fascinating to see how they executed the movements in such unison.

Ibaraki dojo's embu included a "women's self defence" demonstration with two of the students dressed in street clothes rather than dogi. Tobita-san, a very patient and gentle person who I trained with in the morning, played the role of a purse-snatcher who was very efficiently shown the error of his ways!

Our group was granted three 2-minute timeslots in the embu, appearing immediately before Doshu's embu at the end of the event. Again, unlike how we would normally conduct embu in Australia,



Tristan and I were asked to demonstrate hanmi hantachi ryotodori ikkyo to yonkyo. The others in our group also did other versions of hanmi hantachi or suwariwaza ikkyo to yonkyo. Other groups did more freestyle tachi and suwariwaza techniques, and also weapons demonstrations. The feeling of the whole trip culminating after those moments on stage was exhilarating – and not just because an absolute downpour started bucketing down right as Doshu started his embu!

You can see some videos of the embu on the IAF YouTube channel, and re-posted on the Aikikai Australia Facebook page. We'll be sure to update when the official videos are posted.

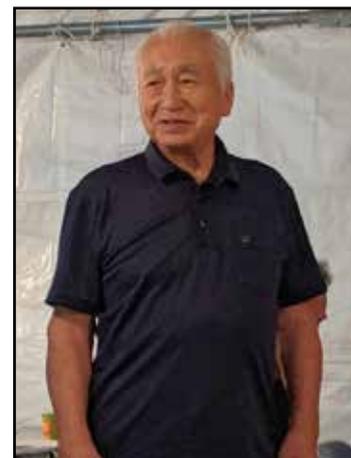
After the embu, a massive afterparty was held on the stage. People were dashing backwards and forwards in the rain, bringing out massive trays of sushi (made by Saito Sensei's daughter, who still runs a sushiya right outside the dojo), yakitori and yakisoba. The table decorations were made by Maki san, another local who trains at Ibaraki and runs a woodcraft factory down the road. Unfortunately, many of the IAF group had to leave during the party to catch flights to the next big event (the World Martial Arts Masterships in Chungju, where our own Jikou Sugano Sensei was presenting), but the Australian presence was made by so many people somehow wearing tiny koalas pinned to their clothes or hair...

Morning training was cancelled on my final day in Iwama, since there was still a lot of cleaning (and recovering) to do. I was granted a huge favour of being allowed inside O-Sensei's rooms, to see how he lived, and his belongings like his gi, books, and his calligraphy. It was here that I really felt how precious our Aikido history is. Iwama and the Ibaraki dojo are a physical representation of how we need to preserve what we learn carefully, so we can cultivate new understandings and connections.

And so – were the stories of Iwama true? Yes – in a totally unexpected way. The ties I now feel to the dojo and the people I trained with are strong. The discipline they have comes from a deep respect for each other, and their surroundings. The fierceness – well, I don't think I'll ever get used to doing kiai, but it was fun to at least try!

PS: If you do stay at the dojo, I'd advise bringing your own pillow. The part about the futon and tatami was definitely also true...

My deepest thanks to Aikikai Australia and our Founders for offering Tristan and I the opportunity to visit Ibaraki dojo, Hombu and to represent us at the 74th National Sports Festival in Iwama. I hope we did you all proud, and that the future holds many more opportunities for us to continue building these ties.





*Iwama Photographs courtesy of
Tristan Derham and Diana Hope*



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