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## FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE JAPANESE ALPS - SUMMER 1949

By Chester Fennell

### Part II

A few cups of tea, a bowl of rice and a hot steaming bowl of fish soup sufficed to quell the inner man for the time being and with excitement running high I grabbed up my binoculars and trusty Kodak 35 and was off for the summit of Yakedake. I had difficulty in locating the right trail and ended up by scrambling over endless stretches of loose rock scree and thick, high-well impenetrable underbrush which covered the old fiery path of the lava flow of 1915 and which dammed up the Azusa-gawa forming the present Taisho pond. Of this particular area, the Rev. W. H. Murray Walton in his "Scrambles in Japan and Formosa" gives the following description:

Only three years previously it had suddenly blown out at the side and a torrent of boiling mud and rock had rushed down the slope and dammed the valley making a lake over a mile in length. How fearful this eruption must have been was brought home to us very vividly as we made our way through the woods at its base. We had passed through a veritable fairy forest carpeted with moss and flowers, and broken here and there by some small and silent pool, and then suddenly - a scene of absolute desolation. In places it is true a single tree had stood out against the onrush, but in most cases trees and rocks and weird shapes of hardened mud were piled together in hopeless confusion.

The actual ascent is not difficult, though the last thousand feet are an eerie experience. Vegetation of all kinds has ceased except for the occasional trunk of a blasted tree, but all around from every little rock and stone come oozing out wisps of evil-looking yellow smoke. Yake has three craters, but we only saw one. It was like a cave on the side of a steep slope, dark and empty, but filled with a deafening roar. All around where we stood the ground was yellow with sulphur. Had we been above the cave instead of immediately below, no doubt we should have felt the heat of the unseen furnaces within. It was a fearsome place and we were not sorry to turn back.

Heavy masses of cloud and fog enveloped me just below the summit, so that I had to be content with examining one of the more active fumaroles rather than to achieve the satisfaction of having reach the topmost ridge. Then, too, it was already growing late and I had no desire to be overtaken by darkness on this unfamiliar cone. So I hastily beat a retreat down the loose rock slope and eventually struck the trail along which I should have ascended. As I paused to rest from time to time the sweet call notes of the Japanese cuckoo and the rapid outbursts of the little cuckoo or hototogisu drifted up from the darkening valley floor. The mellow vespers of the turtle dove were added to the avian chorus and occasionally I heard the low, strident call of the jays. Bush warblers, as usual



were vocally active, too, and once I thought I caught the weak, sibilant song of the blue flycatcher.

I arrived at the hotel at seven o'clock just as darkness made further hiking quite impracticable. Another hot bath and one of the most delicious fresh trout dinners I have ever had the joy of tasting more than restored the energy I had expended and I snuggled in among the heavy futon (comforters) soon to be lulled into the arms of Morpheus by the murmur of the river and the moonlight songs of the hototogisu and the jungle nightjar.

Promptly at five-thirty the following morning I was aroused by the congenial old innkeeper and served another full course meal of fish soup, rice, daikon, fried eggs, sashimi, sweetened seaweed, bread and coffee. For this was the day of all days - the ascent of Oku-Hotaka, the second highest peak in the Alps (11,500 feet) and the third highest in Japan, and I would need all the strength and fortitude I could possibly absorb. My guide, Makiya Kawakami, arrived at quarter to seven and by seven o'clock sharp we had bade the innkeeper farewell and were silently striding along the shaded banks of the Azusa-gawa drinking in the fresh morning crispness and alert to all the beauties of the surrounding countryside. An occasional shujukara (great tit) or kogara (willow tit) "zee-zee-zee-ed" us his "good morning" from an overhanging pine branch and the loud, full, pulsating, whistled outpouring of the komadori (Japanese robin) often smote our ears from a small fir tree along the trail practically at our elbows. The volume of song that his little long-legs can produce never ceases to amaze me. The whole surrounding forest seems to echo with the outburst. If its famed European cousin, the nightingale, has a song one-half as wondrous, I don't begrudge its publicity one wit.

Once he realized my intense interest in the wildlife and flora of the region, my guide fairly outdid himself pointing out and bringing to my attention innumerable observations. He, too, as one could easily see, intensely loved the outdoors and particularly this section which he called home, so that our personalities seemed at once to be in perfect agreement. Whenever the trail closely bordered the headwaters of the Azusa-gawa, he fastened his gaze on the clear, icy stream and often pointed out an exceptionally fine rainbow or Eastern brook trout. These species have been introduced into Japan and have added immeasurably to the richness of the waters in this area. Once, as we came around a bend in the trail he suddenly stopped and through the dense tangle of lower fir branches drew my attention to a whole family of wild mallards, adult male and female and three immature birds, all quietly swimming downstream towards the broader portion of the river. Although they appeared keenly alert to our presence, they apparently felt well concealed and instead of flushing from the water, swiftly and silently drew out of sight among the underbrush. The teal (anas crecca crecca) is, also, said to breed in this region, though we failed to observe it.

Within one hour we had reached the Tokusawa Hütte, which lies in a richly verdant meadow and from which a most excellent view of Maw-Hotaka may be had. Here we enjoyed several cups of hot tea generously offered us by the keeper of the hut and talked with a couple of university students from Tokyo who had just returned from the summit of Oku-Hotaka the day before.

Around eleven o'clock the trail left the bank of the river and steeply began to ascend the canyon which directly led to the summit ridge of Oku-Hotaka. From this point on it was work in earnest and our difficulties were soon added to by a long, perpetual snow bank which extends all the way down from the summit. Good



skiing is to be found here throughout the summer and groups of students often hike in this far to enjoy the king of sports. The slope seemed to be nigh-well endless and one long, tiresome traverse followed another and another and yet another till at length the Karasawa Hütte came into sight, perched high up on a small outcropping of loose granite entirely surrounded by snow fields. A more lonely, lovely, utterly idyllic site is hard to imagine. We dragged ourselves up over the last rock and snow barrier at one-fifteen and throwing our packs gladly partook of seemingly gallons of hot tea and the most delicious boiled peas I have ever tasted. The refreshments were served on a little low table on the narrow rock ledge immediately before the entrance of the hut, and I was given the seat of honor - a log covered with my guide's patch of Kamoshika skin. No king of history or fairy tale ever enjoyed such luxury or felt so thoroughly blessed. They may all keep their velvet, over-stuffed, plush-covered thrones and divans trimmed in gold braid and sparkling with jewels. Give me an old log covered with a kamoshika hide and a pot of boiled peas for complete happiness. A trusty guide, a mountain to climb and what more can a man want of this life!

We were reluctant to leave this pleasant retreat and for nearly an hour prolonged our visit with the hut-keeper, his wife and son. The son, a likeable lad of some 18 years, had both his hands wrapped in bandages and upon inquiry we learned that he had fallen only the day before while attempting a rock climb on the north face of Oku-Hotaka. Friends of his were climbing the same wall that day and though out of sight of the hut we often were able to hear their calls as we sat and rested. Since the snow slope leading to the summit sharply increased its degree of pitch directly behind the Karasawa Hütte, the son offered to let me use his crampons and ice axe. This proved to be a most fortunate break for me, for I seriously doubt that I would have been able to attain the summit without their aid.

Feeling well refreshed and rested we departed the comforts of the Karasawa Hütte shortly after two o'clock and began the long, steep grade up to the Hotaka Hütte. It was an arduous task and took us a full three hours. Five-thirty found us warm and snug within the Hotaka Hütte and enjoying a small, well-earned repast of rice and fried bacon. The Hotaka Hütte lies on a narrow saddle some 400 feet below the summit of Oku-Hotaka. On either side the hut itself, and on each end of the saddle the summits of Oku-Hotaka and Mao-Hotaka rise equally sheer. Certainly, it's a site not productive of the feeling of security.

Hardly had we been in the hut an hour when the wind rose to a most frightful, disconcerting degree and shook the little old hut from stem to stern. Blast after blast hit us broadside, the saddle acting as a sort of natural funnel through which the gale streamed at a tremendous rate of speed. Sheets of rain and sleet were soon added to the tempest and seemed to accentuate the ferocity of the storm. The hut trembled and quaked before its fury and seemed destined to be pitched over the side of the saddle at any moment. My guide and I packed everything together just in case we had to make a quick exit. Seeking shelter behind some rock as small as it might be and getting soaked to the skin was far more preferable to being blown over the side and landing some 1000 feet below in a pile of jagged rock. After some two hours of waiting and watching in the dark, every minute expecting to hear and feel that last, final wrenching of the hut's supporting timbers, we decided that we might as well await our fate in at least comparative warmth and comfort, and crawled into our sleeping bags. I must admit that I finally adopted the old Japanese "Shigata ga nai" (it can't be helped) philosophy and actually dozed off to sleep a couple of times. However, the frightful awakening each time as some particularly strong gust of wind attacked the hut and violently caused it



to shudder in its boots, so to speak, was far worse than if I had not relaxed into slumber at all. This fear of being blown over the side of the ridge has been the most real, terrifying emotion I have yet experienced. I, ordinarily, thoroughly enjoy storms of even the most severe intensity, but this other attendant fear, I must confess, had me unpleasantly worried.

To be continued.

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# RESUME OF AN ARTICLE ON A TRIP TO THE ISLAND OF HAWAII

By Mark Kerr

In the last week of August of last year I went up to the island of Hawaii to botanize in and about the Pohakuloa district. On the 24th we took our first planting trip on the Judd trail. This trail is about halfway between Kealahou and Kailua and goes from Holualoa up to the 1859 lava flow, and to reach it one must make a long drive over rough and rocky dirt roads over and around strange formations of both aa and pahoehoe lava. We saw Apapane, and had a close view of Iiwi in low bushes along the way, and disturbed a number of skylarks which were apparently roosting on the road, as they flew up in front of our headlights as we drove along.

The predominating trees on this trail were the Ohia, the sandalwood and the *Railliardia* spurge. Some of the shrubs and plants noted or collected were *Dodonaea*, several kinds of *Bidens*, a rare *Exocarpus*, and *Dianellas* or *Painia*.

On the 27th we took a trip to the Kohala mountains. While passing through the Parker ranch, the road was lined on both sides with thistles which were a feeding ground for many House finch. A number of other birds were seen, but they wouldn't stay put long enough to be identified. The plant life was especially interesting, and in one gorge we had a momentary glimpse of Ape-ape growing part way down the almost perpendicular sides - and then the clouds blew in and obliterated the sight. In this section we made several collecting trips to the kipukas that dot the region, and many species of trees and shrubs were observed.

On August 31st we packed our equipment and headed for Hale Pohaku which is located at the 9,350 foot level, about 5 miles beyond the Humuulu sheep station. On the way to the new camp we saw a goodly number of Plover, some Skylark and a few House finch. While making our headquarters here at Hale Pohaku we took a hike northeast of camp, and one northwest to the Waikahalulu gulch. On September 3rd, at 7:30 a.m. we started up the Mauna Kea trail, and as we climbed the plants got scarcer, smaller and then disappeared completely. We saw two large, and numerous smaller Hawaiian adz quarries, some olivine crystals and REAL SNOW.

We took pictures at Lake Waiau and reached the summit at 4 p.m. where we discovered a dead Hill Robbin wedged between the rocks of the summit stone monument. The scene was one not to be soon forgotten, with the red and blue colored cinder cones standing out in sharp contrast as they stretched up into the leveled-off white clouds.

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## LETTERS AND GENERAL NOTES

Nature in Kapiolani Park: The heavy rains of January 22nd made a large pond in the vicinity of the proposed site of the Wildlife Refuge. There was water still there till the 31st. Plover were always present on its edge as long as the water lasted. This is encouraging for the refuge when made; it will not take long for the plover to utilize it. They may even spend the night on the island. A few days ago I found where a house cat had partly eaten a plover not far from the pond. It would seem by this that the plover are spending the night in the park, as a cat could hardly catch one in the open park in the daytime. If so, they will soon learn to use the safety of the island as a roosting place.-- G. C. Munro.

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Kobe, Japan: The return voyage on the General Haseo was quite rewarding, along the birding line with the black-footed albatrosses taking first place in daily numbers. Usually there were from 20 to 25 following in the wake of the ship towards evening with only five or six persisting throughout the day. However, on the evening of the 19th, October, no less than fifty (50) were skimming along behind the stern picking up refuse from the ship's wake. This is the largest number I have ever yet observed at a single time.

Three different times golden plover circled the ship in apparent attempts to land but only once did they actually settle to the deck. This, too, was in the evening, just at dark and the day before we put into Yokohama. A lieutenant friend and I were up on the topmost portion of the sundeck enjoying the lavish sunset and conjecturing as to when we should see the first landfall when suddenly this lone plover circled over our heads and uttered its plaintive whistle. In fun we attempted an answering call which upon repetition decoyed the bird to landing momentarily on the deck beside us within some five or six feet. It resumed flight almost at once but soon returned to settle again. The third time it alighted on the taut canvas top over one of the lifeboats and remained for some 8 minutes, preening itself and watching out of the corner of its eye. Finally, with a last farewell note it took to wing and disappeared into the dusk to the north.-- C. Fennell.

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Poamoho Trail, Oahu: Sunday, March 5, 1950, dawned clear and bright, however, by the time sunrise was observed on this date we were at the start of Poamoho Trail, preparing for the long trek toward the summit. Even at this wee hour proceeding the sunrise the woods were alive, in more than words alone, with all types of bird life.

Upon parking our transportation, which made a considerable amount of noise, the "tweet-tweet" was more nearly the sound of a hot summer night in the swamp lands of the Northeast, but none-the-less a sound most conducive to birding.

Proceeding from the parking area on foot, with only the pre-day light to assist, a few Apapane were noted. Also one green bird (unknown to this neophyte birder). Sunrise, breaking as only a Poamoho sunrise can, found us ready and willing to start the long walk. Almost immediately we were rewarded with the sight of several Apapane. A little further several more of the same. Still the forest was alive with song. So much so that it was nearly impossible to pick out any one bird by its own song.



A few minutes out on the trail we found we were not alone in the forest, for there were found four pig-hunters with their dogs. Proceeding along at a modest rate, a few Amakihi were noted. Then we received our first clear view of the Elopeaio. Taking a short rest about one hour's slow walk along the trail, we were entertained by a rather lengthy visit by a family of linnets. One male, one female, and another, apparently an immature male. This visit lasted at least ten minutes with the birds nearly stationary and at a distance of approximately ten feet.

About ten o'clock our trip was made a complete success with the first verso from our "Mystery Bird." It took a matter of ten minutes to call them nearer. A rather inquisitive, yet scary creature, its song was an exact duplicate of a hunter in the woods. As a matter of fact, an argument arose between the three members of the party, and I would have bet my bottom dollar that it was the party of pig-hunters giving us a hard time. However, Ruth Dingus, having a slight advantage over the rest of us, persuaded us that no hunter was making the sound. At this point it was noted that throughout the song a slight throaty warble, impossible to make by man was included.

Glasses came out, cameras readied, and sore throats acquired by all in the whistling attempt to draw our quarry nearer. Success? Yes, for in a few minutes they were noted at approximately fifty feet distance. A period of about ten more minutes was spent in close observation but unfortunately shrubbery didn't allow the taking of pictures. For a matter of record a complete description follows: A rather large bird resembling bodily a member of the Babbler thrush family. The bird has a mask similar to the domino worn at society balls. This mask traveled down the beak making the bird appear to have a false face. The back was of a heavy rufous color extending to the wings. It's long tail was toned from the rufous of the back to nearer the last half of the tail a rusty brown. Undersides of the tail were noted to be lighter. A puff of pure white was seen under the tail. The underside, from the throat to the white puff was a pale cream to yellow white. When noted there were five of these birds visible in the glasses at one time; however, it is estimated that there were at least twelve in the group. An odd feature of this bird is it's peeling off into a power dive prior to taking flight, which it will apparently do at the drop of a hat. A couple of feet of film was used on the bird (with unknown results) while one bird was apparently feeding on some insects or growth on an Ohia tree, in the manner of a woodpecker. Along with its extremely melodious song (described by Grace Gossard as "me-re-sol-me do") was a sharp squawk and another sound similar to the scream of a bird being robbed. Why, I don't know. All I can say is: Better luck next time on this creature. A note of interest is the chance second meeting of the hunters who, upon being questioned by us, said that it was the general opinion that the bird was an import of Australian origin. These men seemed local to the area. Their statement is a clue, certainly, but we put no promise in it.

One Iiwi was noted along with a most beautiful display of the wares of the Hill Robin.

As the afternoon sun bore down in all it's ferocity, the welcome cooling rains then sent us back home, and the assembly of these facts for those few who can see fit to aid in the identification of this rare (?) bird. A successful day? Perhaps, but I would much rather be snug in bed instead of sitting here trying to describe something of which I know so little.-- Richard A. Brasier.



One of the exchange publications received by the Editor of the Elepaio is The Western Tanager, the organ of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. In the February 1950 issue is an accounting of that Society's annual Christmas bird count, taken in the same area for 13 years. The forty observers in 22 parties recorded a total of 146 species and subspecies and included 22,006 individuals. The comment "birds in general were the scarcest experienced observers have ever seen at this time of year in this same 13 year old count area...most of the usual species could be found by closer hunting, but fewer individuals..." could have been made, in part, by some of the Oahu parties.

Those species seen in the Los Angeles area which are also seen on Oahu during the Christmas count and their numbers were: 10 Black-crowned night heron; 3 Black brant; 1362 Pintail ducks; 6 Ruddy turnstones; 232 Sanderlings; 177 Mockingbirds; 339 English sparrow; and 2340 House finch (linnet).

Mr. and Mrs. Wyatt A. Kent and Howard Cogswell, three of the observers who took part in the Los Angeles count, will be remembered by our local Auduboners.

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#### APRIL ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIP: April 16th, to Poamoho. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 A.M. bringing lunch (and car if possible). Note change of date made because the usual date is Easter Sunday. The Poamoho trip is being repeated because it is by far the best area for observing forest birds, particularly this time of year when the lehua is in flower.

MEETING: February 17th, Staff Work Room of the Library of Hawaii (first floor on the left corridor opposite the courtyard) at 7:30 P.M. The meeting will constitute the first in a series of nature study groups.

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#### HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS:

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Editor, The Elepaio: Mrs. Priscilla G. Harpham, 3661 Tantalus Drive, Honolulu

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