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**REDDITCH BONSAI**

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### **THE THREE MUSKETEERS IN JAPAN.**

The three of us flew out to Tokyo on 5th Feb, with a 3AM start, and picked up a 4th (Sven's colleague) in Frankfurt. We arrived in Tokyo at about 11am, and after resolving an issue with a misplaced bag, found ourselves in a quiet guest house 10 minutes from Ueno Park by early afternoon. We sampled the local food and liquor in an Izakaya - a social setting with small plates of food and drink.

On day two, we visited some shops and arcades in Akihabara – bright with its wonderful neon lights<sup>1</sup> - and the giant flea market at Tokyo racecourse. After enjoying daytime temperatures of 15 Celsius on day one, the weather changed and we saw overnight snow flutters throughout the day with more predicted overnight. We were surprised to see hundreds of traders at the flea market, and not really anything relating to bonsai.

Day three was the opening day of the 100th Kokofu Ten<sup>2</sup> and we took the morning to view half the exhibition before retiring to a Sake and street food festival that conveniently happened to be in Ueno Park on the same day. The show comprises two parts with a break in between, and a change of trees for the second part. With full bellies and some samples of warm sake to fend off the snowy weather, we returned to soak in the bonsai masterpieces. Initial impressions were that the trees were of such quality, and with but a few examples of trees which felt incomplete, that the many trees felt like "just another masterpiece black pine". They could have benefitted from some of our sticks in pots to ground expectations □. Many of the apricot and plum trees<sup>3</sup> were highlights for us with spectacularly craggy bark and beautiful flowers. A particular Hinoki forest<sup>4</sup> was also very popular.

From there, we took the overnight bus to Nagoya, which wasn't as comfortable as we would have hoped. We met up with one of Julio's friends and started our anticipated trip to Tokoname. Stop one was a ceramics outlet which stocks wares from many Tokoname potters. We duly stocked up on the great value pots. Given there's no possibility of bringing trees home, pots were high on our radar, and if we had to sacrifice some of the clothes we'd brought with us, so be it. The owners of the

shop were very gracious and dropped us off at our next stop, lunch at a local ramen shop! Ramen shops tend to have individual cubicles in Japan<sup>5</sup> and close whenever they run out of daily supply which was the case by the time we left<sup>6</sup>. After another hearty meal we were off to a local pottery where we tried our hands at throwing our own pots (led by the 90 year old shop keeper), of varying levels of ambition<sup>7</sup>! They also had a selection of antique teapots from the 70s of which we were happy to purchase a few as gifts<sup>8</sup>.

Next on the itinerary was a road trip by rental car. We drove along the coast line southwards to reach Wakayama. We stopped the night at a rural farmhouse which was very different from the Tokyo stay<sup>9</sup>. Next morning, we visited a temple that was being restored to its former glory – with the financial support by generous people like Julio – under guidance by the local hunter. At this point a journalist from a newspaper joined as he wanted to write an article about bringing more tourists away from the big cities into the more rural areas. At the point of writing, we haven't heard yet about the publication but if we do, we will share the link to the article. Lunch was provided at the hunter's house – a hot pot with deer and wild boar meat<sup>10</sup> which recently had the misfortune of being caught in one of his traps. With the journalist still following us, we visited more temples in the mountains, and walked beneath abandoned farm terraces overrun with enormous cedars<sup>11</sup>; we will let you count the rings on one that was cut down. To end the day we headed to a temple that had finished its restoration and was now serving as a hotel – which had a spectacular window to wake up to<sup>12</sup>.

Back to the big cities we went (Kyoto) and this time we took the more scenic mountain route. The absolutely spectacular views made the 5 hour drive fly by. After touring Kyoto and the famous geisha district and the bamboo forest at Arashiyama, we met up with David Cheshire and a couple of his tour guests for a drink.

The change of locations and general travelling was slowly catching up with all of us when we visited Osaka. A visit to Osaka castle with its beautiful flowering apricot gardens<sup>13</sup> and a sampling of A5 Wagyu got our spirits up again very quickly. After a visit to the largest aquarium in the world, we took a bullet train back to Tokyo for part 2 of the Kokofu Ten. The trees on display were just as spectacular as in part one, though we were left wondering whether the lighting couldn't have been better for the shohin and mame trees.

The following day, we visited Omiya bonsai village, an establishment from 1925 where Bonsai practitioners moved out from the city to the suburbs of Saitama. To move there, residents must have 10 bonsai trees and open their gardens to the public. Though the rule has since been dropped, and most of the 35 gardens that were originally set up have closed, 6 nurseries remain and they were among the most moving experiences we had in Japan. Toju-en in particular was a beautiful highlight, with exquisite landscaping complementing an array of trees worthy of the Kokofu in their own right.

The bonsai museum in Omiya was also well worth a visit.

We missed out on seeing Mount Fuji from the bullet train and we felt a trip to Japan wasn't complete without seeing 'Fujisan' so we booked a last minute day trip for it. We had a clear day which gave us some excellent views of Mount Fuji<sup>14</sup> while spending the day touring the popular scenic areas around it.

On our final day, we visited the palace temple gardens in our t-shirts as the weather had gone really warm again and pushing 20 degrees!

We also stocked up on souvenirs before heading back to a gloomy Heathrow on our Pokemon themed airplane<sup>15</sup>. Back to reality, but with plenty of memories and inspiration to show for it! The food, the people, the public transport, the customer service were simply unforgettable.

Back just in time to begin repotting into our pots which we are happy to report all survived in our luggage.

David How and Sven (For photos see separate file following)

### **IAN HOMER AT THE MBS IN MARCH.**

The March meeting at the MBS consisted of a return visit by Ian Homer of Walsall Bonsai. The central subject was GROUP PLANTINGS and Ian's species of choice was LARCH.

After some initial advice about the general principles of this type of planting Ian set about creating a small group of 5 trees using one set of 3 trees which had been grown together in a pot for about a year and 2 "singletons", one of which would never have made it as a bonsai on its own due to a substantial bare patch in the centre section of the trunk but which performed perfectly well when surrounded by the other trees.

The second half of the evening ok governments actually creating their own groups from material supplied by Ian. Seven members formed 2 teams and when finished the assembled company voted for the best group. Quite how the winners were going to split the rather fine pot which was donated by Ian as a prize.

We believe that everyone enjoyed the evening immensely. Even Malcolm, who does not of course have any trees himself, and we are sure he won't mind us telling you, that even he had learned a lot.

### **EDITOR'S NOTE.**

During the evening DUSTIN (Leavelle-Anderson) was, as you will have spotted, making a recording of the event. He has now produced a video and has sent the link. Here it is:-

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dfmDD9ofhbtASIM9EHKK2txj4raHZkM6/view?usp=drivesdk>

If you have any problem accessing the material do let us know.

## **BONSAI FEST AT NEWARK – SUNDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> MARCH.**

David, Brian, Tarun and Jonathan (Moult) visited this show and report that the quality of trees and Traders was good overall. There were bargains to be had and everyone came back with pots and/or trees. Brian reports being inspired by some of the displays. One of the show trees is included below.

## **COMING UP AT THE MBS.**

April's meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> will be supported by DAVID CHESHIRE and features Displaying trees/Stands and Showing.

## **COMING UP AT REDDITCH BONSAI.**

The April meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> of the month features group workshops (small groups) on material supplied or even brought along by members followed by an auction of those trees/efforts. Please bring along for the table display any tree with Spring colour.

VIDEO RECORDING OF IAN HOMER'S PRESENTATION AT THE MBS

Here's the link, anyone with it should be able to access the video but if there's any problems let me know.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dfmDD9ofhbtASIM9EHKK2txj4raHZkM6/view?usp=drivesdk>

## **BONSAI TIP OF THE MONTH.**

Recent high winds have highlighted the need to be careful about putting your trees out on display unless they are in a sheltered spot.

We should think that you will have finished any re-potting by now. Don't forget to keep a record of the trees that have been thus dealt with. When this time comes around in twelve months you will certainly not remember exactly which were and which weren't.

Take any opportunity which arises to visit a show and don't forget to send in a report for the Newsletter.

The other important task is to make sure that your stands are in good order. Some of ours look as if they have gone beyond repairing and the other bad news is that the local wood yard that we have used/relied on for years has closed!

## **GARDENING TIP OF THE MONTH.**

- Weed your vegetable beds and [dig in organic matter](#), ready for spring planting.
- [Plant onions](#) and shallots now, and cover them with fleece for the first month to stop birds pulling out the young plants.

- Now's the time to [plant dahlias](#) and other summer-flowering bulbs in pots and borders for a great summer display.
- Start chitting your seed potatoes.
- In mild areas, sow hardy annuals like nigella, cornflowers and poppies outside, or create your own meadow with a [wildflower seed mix](#).
- [Cut back](#) bush and shrub roses before new growth really gets going. Remove dead, damaged or crossing stems to encourage strong flowering.

Editor's note:- These notes come to you this month courtesy of Marshalls. Personally I think it's a bit early to be thinking about getting dahlias started in any shape or form even though Monty was on about it too in mid March! Up to you.



Newark Bonsai Fest

Richard and Angela Gilkes, Editors. So that's your lot for this edition. Thanks to David and Sven for their report on the Tokyo Experience.