



## Report on Activities of the Yoshino Trip Organized by the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies led by Professors Ori Akemi and Tsuge Takahiro on 20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2023

Day 1

### Introduction

During the period October 20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>, a group of twelve students and two professors (Professor Tsuge and Professor Ori) from Sophia University's Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies visited the Yoshino Kumano National Park in Yoshino Yama. The objective of this study trip was to learn about the Yoshino Forest history, management, and industry.

On 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2023, we started the day at 9:30 am arriving at an area of the national park to cut trees to assist with thinning the forest. This area was designated to be thinned to prevent the forest from becoming too dense. This is done to reduce stress and competition in the forest and to ensure forest health and preservation. We had an opportunity to learn and experience how to measure and cut the trees for responsible and sustainable forest management.



*Students and teachers cutting the trees at the thinned forest*

We were divided into two groups and before cutting the trees, we received a short training and guidance from the experts on how to technically cut the trees. Each of us was able to cut at least one tree and as a whole team, we cut more than 20 trees. This activity not only helped us to understand sustainable forest preservation, but also how to work effectively as a team.



*The manual process of cutting the cedar trees using knife and rope*

After lunch, we walked to the well-known Kinpusen-ji temple. Kinpusen-ji Temple is a symbol of Yoshino Yama and time-honoured sacred ground amongst ascetics in Japan. This is considered as the second largest wooden structured temple in Japan and is regarded as a National Treasure and World Heritage site. When we visited there was a cultural event taking place. It was a fire painting which the artist burnt a bunch of leaves from trees.

In the afternoon, at around 2:30 pm, we visited the Yoshino Wood Festival, which was aimed at educating people about the importance of trees and providing them with an opportunity to connect with these vital natural resources. Several exhibition booths displayed the derivative products of Yoshino wood (mainly cedar and cypress), such as furniture, chopsticks, cutlery, and many more. The cut cedar wood has a pleasant smell, so it is used to make essential oils and aromatic sprays. The wood festival had some interactive games, one of which was making chopsticks by yourself. One of us even participated in the Nara Tagahoop (hula hoop) World Championship and won a bottle of soy sauce. Some local food stalls were also available, with products such as alcoholic peach smoothies, Japanese dumpling (*dango*) and rice crackers. The local people said that they only use thick trees to make chopsticks. They also said they used the thin trees to produce other goods as well. The chopsticks factory booth at the event told us that their method for making chopsticks follows the SDGs principles. The factories use all the wood to make the goods with zero waste. The used chopsticks are then sent to the paper company to make paper. Their principle is to only use trees that can be legally cut down. People of all ages, from children to adults, seemingly enjoyed this event.



*Wood festival and wood factory visit*

We then visited the Yoshino Central Factory, where we had an opportunity to see the entire process of the wood industry in Yoshino, from cutting, drying, skin peeling, to the storage phase. One particular aspect that left a profound impression on us was the use of a unique blade in the wood crafting process, named Asari. The blade is like a belt, with each tip expertly welded using incredibly durable metal. After each stage of wood processing, the craftsmen grind the tip, which reflects their firm dedication to their craft. On the first day, we enjoyed ourselves and learned so many things.

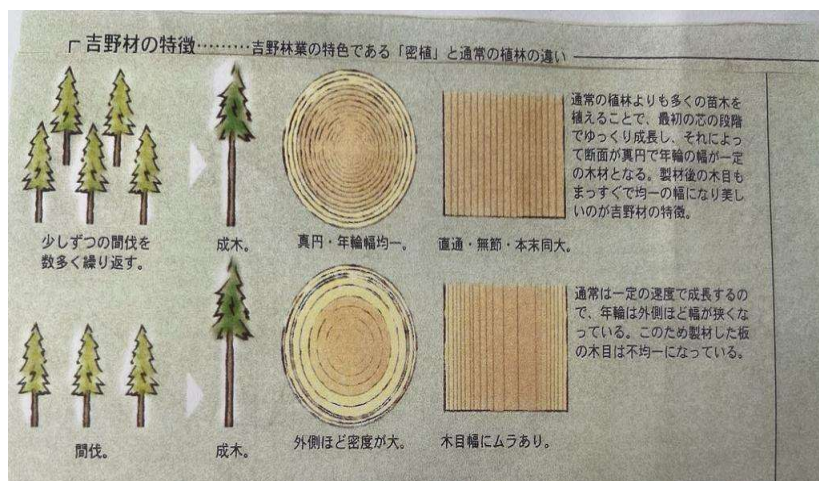


*Wood production processes in Yoshino Forestry industry system*

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Day 2

In Day 2, we visited the Yoshino Timber Market. Mr. Sakamoto, the representative of Yoshino Central Forestry Cooperative, explained us the whole processes of how timbers are cut, peeled and until marketed under the mechanism of B2B (Business to Business). We learned about the price of cypress and Yoshino cedar and learned how to identify the quality of wood. The method of timber quality assessment is through examining the distance between the annual rings. We also had a chance to see Yoshino cedar with a distinct red and white cross-section of the trunk. Mr. Sakamoto told us that the white part of the outer ring engages in photosynthesis while the red part of the inner ring is resting. Therefore, the quality of the red part is better than the white part, and the price is also higher than the white part.



Timber quality assessment



Mr. Sakamoto explained about timber market

In the afternoon, we took a bus to a protected forest area led by Mr. Sakamoto, who explained to us that there were big trees over 250 years old. Being in this forest, I felt the preciousness of the hundreds of years old trees and the awe of nature. It shows how important it is Yoshino Forest to the livelihood. After the formative and interesting forest visit, we had an exceedingly good lunch with Mr. Sakamoto, and then prepared for the lecture.



A 250 years-old cedar tree in Yoshino Forest

After lunch, we went to the ranger office to hear Mr. Ukai who is the national park ranger of the Ministry of the Environment talk about the management of national parks. We learned that most of Yoshino's national park is privately owned, and that they are made possible by the exquisite relationship between landowners and the government. Afterwards, we did field work on the Mt. Yoshino. On the way to Mt. Yoshino, we saw the artwork of mind trail, a piece of artwork made of waste embedded in old trees. The strong contrast between nature and waste creates an end-of-the-world landscape. It leads us to think about the relationship between people and the environment, waste and the natural.



*Discussions about Yoshino National Park*



*Outdoor art installation in Yoshino Forest*

Long time ago Japanese people believe that cherry blossom is not an ordinary tree but an offering to the Gods. The cherry blossom garden we visited is managed by a non-governmental organization which is operated by only 3 persons, and thanks to the NGO and all the people living in Mt. Yoshino, the cherry blossom has become a symbol of here and attract tourists from home and abroad. Then, we headed to Yoshino Mikumari Shrine, one of the sacred sites of *Shugendo* in Yoshino. This shrine is the 72nd temple of *Shugendo* and is said to be beneficial for childbearing and child protection. We then walked for about 10 minutes to the *Hanayagura* Observation point. The view of the Yoshino mountains and the town of Yoshino, formed by a series of ridges, was beautiful. We also gained a deeper understanding of the national park management through the eyes of a bird.



*Shugendo Temple*



*A breathtaking view of Hanayagura observatory*

Everyone became so excited when the night was coming, as we were looking forward to the BBQ tonight. "We learned a lot through this field study, and we need to celebrate this moment, for forest, for friendship. May be next time we can come here to see the cherry blossoms together." Yamashita-san, one of the members of this field study said. He definitely spoke out everyone's thoughts.



*Making Yakionigiri together*



*BBQ party to end the field trip*

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