

Clean Breaks

Aokigahara Forest at the foot of Mount Fuji

As environmental awareness grows, eco-tours are becoming an increasingly popular way for Japanese to learn about the environment and protect it. We recently took part in two of the most popular tours.

In the Foothills of Mount Fuji

On Saturday, July 3, people could be found working in a drizzle in a forest at the foot of Mount Fuji, picking up garbage and cleaning the surrounds. The altitude is at about 900 meters, and the forest was thick as we walked along the trail.

About eighty participants were digging up the soil in silence.

In the past, vehicles, tires, refrigerators, furniture and many other items were dumped illegally in the forests at the foot of Mount Fuji. Fujisan Club (*“san”* is the Japanese for *“mountain”*) began cleaning the area in 2003, and has held 368 cleaning days to date, with about 32,000 people collecting approximately 360 tons of garbage. The number of participants has increased each year, even as the volume of garbage collected has decreased.

“There is almost no more large garbage left at all at the foot of Mount Fuji,” says Hiroaki Funatsu of NPO Fujisan Club. “Most of the work done these days is digging out small items buried underground with a wooden paddle.”

Tokyo residents took part in a tour organized by a travel agent, paying about 8,000 yen to participate in the cleaning activity. Ages varied widely, from elementary school students to senior citizens in the eighties, and participants included parents and children, husbands and wives, and three-generation families. A female company worker in her thirties noted, “I feel we have accomplished something when the



A Fujisan Club representative explains the clean-up procedure to the gathered volunteers.

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area is cleaned. I would love to participate again.”

The collected garbage is recycled when possible, or else it is incinerated and the ash is reused as asphalt for paving roads.



The volunteers remove the litter they have collected from the forest.

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Though it runs through central Tokyo, the water of Nihonbashi-gawa river today is extremely clear.

ALL PHOTOS TAKASHI AIZAWA



Tokyo Sky Tree under construction, as viewed from the Sumida-gawa river



The eco-tour passes under Nihonbashi bridge, an important landmark for Tokyoites for more than 400 years. The current bridge was built in 1911.

On the Urban Waterfront

Kanda-gawa and Nihonbashi-gawa are rivers that flow through central Tokyo. On July 8, an eco-tour along the two rivers was held using an electric boat.

“The water is very clean, even though this is an urban river.”

All participants seemed surprised to see the water of Nihonbashi-gawa river held in a glass diaphanometer. The water was not turbid at all.

Until the 1970s, the water quality of rivers in central Tokyo was poor, contaminated by industrial discharge and effluent. However, the water quality has since improved greatly, thanks to drainage

limitations and the development of sewerage treatment facilities.

Electric boats emit no engine noise, so there are always birds such as great cormorants and seagulls flying around. The fact that so many birds are gathered to prey on the fish in the rivers indicates that the number and diversity of fish in the river have increased.

“Recently, more and more restaurants have been setting up terraces on riverbanks,” says Hirotaka Nakabayashi of Enjoy Eco School, the NPO that organizes the tour. “When the rivers become clean, the townscapes also change.”