



Journeys in Japan

Encounters on the Road to Recovery

In Tohoku, on the outskirts of Akita City, Akita Prefecture, lies the lush green campus of Akita International University (AIU). For every student sitting alone reading on a bench surrounded by trees, you can also find students lying on great expanses of grass chatting with their friends. There is even a class being held with around twenty students gathered on a fairly large bench.

Since its founding in 2004, AIU has been actively recruiting exchange students.

"It's cool to be an AIU student, because I now have friends all over the world," says Benjamin Bowers, an

exchange student who came from the University of Colorado in the United States in April. "I want to meet as many people as I can in Japan."

Since coming to Japan, Bowers has already done volunteer work three times with other AIU students in areas heavily damaged by the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake. He's been to places like Kesenuma in Miyagi Prefecture and Miyako in Iwate Prefecture, removing mud and debris from street ditches and homes.

"It was very hard work," says Bowers. "I cleaned up the house of one married couple who said



Benjamin Bowers (second from left) and Candace Graue (center) chat with Japanese friends on the campus of AIU.

‘thank you’ in English when I left and bowed to me many times. I was really glad to be able to help.”

Normally Japanese schools and colleges start their school year from April. But since the Great East Japan Earthquake struck just before that, there was uncertainty among many of the exchange students who were planning to come and among their families. Though Akita Prefecture was not directly affected by the quake, AIU has been disseminating information through its website and by e-mail, responding to inquiries from exchange students to re-

lieve their fears.

“Everybody worried about radioactivity from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. But the AIU website has a link to another site releasing data about radiation levels every day,” says Candace Graue, another student who came from the University of Colorado in April. “By showing this information to my parents, I was able to convince them to let me go.”

Graue has been taking part in events both on and off the campus since she arrived in Japan, deepening

her relationships with many Japanese. She teaches English at a junior high school in Akita.

“Teaching English is really fun. I may work in Japan teaching English for a couple of years,” says Graue. “I came here with my boyfriend, and we have already decided that, when we get married, we will come to Japan on our honeymoon!”

The exchange students who left Japan and the areas that were damaged soon after the Great East Japan Earthquake have returned to their respective schools. According to a survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, of 135 universities across Japan, as of May 20, 96% of the exchange students remain within commuting distance of their universities.

In this month’s special report we’ll be hearing from foreigners living in Japan who remained after the Great East Japan Earthquake, as well as those who have come recently, plus take a look at Japan as it returns to life as normal.

