

OREGON KARA AI

By Ian Pearce

As a non-native in Japan the inevitable question of their origin arises. Oregon is my answer to that never-ending question. Many questioners reply with, "Oh! Oregon Kara Ai!" This was a Fuji TV drama from many years ago. Somehow someone managed to find me an episode on DVD. To my surprise the Oregon in the drama looked nothing like the Oregon I lived in.

The Fuji drama is about a Japanese family who moved to Oregon to raise cattle (cows for meat). It takes place on a ranch somewhere in central or eastern Oregon. The characters wear clothes that remind me of cowboys. The scenery is beautiful, open, and wide. I have never lived in such a place.

The place I call home in Oregon is Portland. Portland is the largest city in Oregon with over 1 million people (but not the capital). I have never worn cowboy clothes. I have never raised cattle. There is no wide, open sky. The sky is blocked by beautiful skyscrapers and the mountains nearby.

Perhaps I should explain more about Oregon. Look north of California on a map and you will find Oregon next to the Pacific Ocean. It is 12 times larger than the island of Shikoku. That makes Oregon seem gigantic. And yet, it is the 9th largest state in the United States. Despite being so large, few people call Oregon home. Shikoku has a larger population than Oregon, 3.93 million people to 3.8 million people.

As an island, Shikoku is made up of rugged mountains and rivers. Surprisingly, Shikoku has no volcanoes. Rice and wheat are grown but fruit is extensively grown around Shikoku. In some places fields can be double-cropped.

Oregon has quite a diverse geography. Not only mountains, valleys, and rivers, but Oregon also has rainforests, barren deserts, volcanoes, high plateaus, meadows, and glaciers. The Cascade Mountains north to south, nearly split the state into 2 halves. The

western half is quite wet with 180 days of rain a year. This makes the forests very crowded with tall Douglas Fir trees. If your favorite color is green, this place would be heaven for you. The 2 valleys, Willamette and Rogue, have many farms that grow fruits and vegetables. Oregon strawberries are famous and are harvested in late spring/summer. The rivers are full of fish, salmon fishing being very popular. So popular, in fact, that you might be able to cross the river just by jumping from boat to boat.

The Cascade Mountains are always snow-capped on top. If you climb to the top of one, you can see its brothers and sisters. The Cascades are volcanoes and on a clear day you can see 5 of them as they rise above the clouds. These mountains are a formidable obstacle. Even tall enough to block the clouds from passing to the east.

Eastern Oregon becomes dry. With the mountains blocking the clouds the forests get thinner and thinner. The trees are only half as tall. And soon enough there are no trees at all. This is the high plateau and desert of Oregon. Red, orange, and yellow are the colors you'll see. Very few people live here. Towns are nearly 100km apart. And between those towns not a single person lives there. This area is a frontier land. Which means when you go there, you are on your own. There will be no one to help you in times of danger. People still go there because you can find dinosaur fossils in the dirt.

If you stay near the rivers you will find that wheat is grown by farmers. In the Northeast of Oregon, wheat farms are so large that you cannot see the other side of the farm. They are sometimes 2 km long. Here is where you will find cowboys and rodeos. A rodeo (pronounced ro-DEE-oh) is a cowboy festival where people race horses and



Oregon State Highway 242 by Dougtone

ride angry bulls. Oregon has a world-famous rodeo in Pendleton every year.

With so much land and agriculture, you would forget that Oregon has some wonderful culture as well. In Ashland (a city), every year is a famous Shakespeare Festival that has won Tony Awards. Famous films as well have been made in Oregon: Kindergarten Cop, Free Willy, Stand by Me, The Goonies, and Animal House. The creator of the Simpsons cartoon is from Oregon as well.

Portland is also known as "Beer Town". More than 40 breweries make every type of beer imaginable (and some unimaginable). In June, I was lucky enough to enjoy the Beer Festival with 200 beers from around the USA (though I didn't get to drink every one :-).

World famous companies are also from Oregon. Nike is an Oregon company as well as Columbia Sportswear. Intel, the computer chip maker, has many factories in Oregon. In my searches I found at least 2 dozen Japanese companies in Oregon as well: Ajinomoto, Tokyo Mitsubishi UFJ, Fujitsu, Matsushita Electronics, Mitsubishi, Sony, Sumitomo, Ushio, Toshiba, and many more.

The Fuji TV drama "Oregon Kara Ai" only gave you a small peek at one part of Oregon. I hope my little journey around all of Oregon has intrigued you. My little story can only begin to describe the diversity of Oregon. If possible, please visit Oregon some time. By the way, Oregon has no sales/consumption tax.