

Camping in Audra, and some training too!

“You know in all these years we’ve never had a clinic in Audra state park when it rained”, were the famous words of Sensei Hetterman, just before the heaviest downpour hit Audra state park many years ago during a Chito-ryu clinic. This and many other stories about training and camping in Audra state park had got me looking forward to this trip. On Friday morning the Yoshisu caravan setup slowly, amidst the confusion of missing belts, passports, and other things karateka are likely to forget, and finally we were off. The long drive from Cincinnati to Audra state park flew by quickly and finally came to a halt outside our campsite. In what seemed like minutes, though was probably hours we setup the tents and settled in for the night.

The next morning we headed out to the large field, by the river that ran through the park, where the clinic was going to happen. The tone of the clinic was that of getting back to nature with the sound of flowing water behind us making its way through Audra state park smashing against rocks and the occasional camper. The clinic was well attended and there were a large number of karateka from all the different Chito-ryu dojos and even some practitioners of other martial arts.

The main focus of the clinic was on refining basic body movement and positioning through the kihon and tai kyu ku katas, the speed and execution of kihon kata yon by the black belts who demonstrated it was extremely impressive. Training out in the open in a field was a welcome change for most of us. The outdoors brought a new dimension to every exercise we did due to the ground beneath you not being completely flat. Learning basic techniques on uneven ground helped greatly with the different stances and after a few grueling hours of practice the sound of the water seemed more welcome than ever. The clinic moved onto some demonstrations of aikido techniques which seemed a lot like the Henshu ho drills in Chito-ryu. The demonstrations were accompanied with short explanations on the different principles in Aikido. The demonstrations came to an end and it was time to stop watching and start doing!

Aikido or ‘the Way of harmonious spirit’ seemed to focus on grappling and on subduing the attacker without out harming them too much. The parallels between the aikido techniques we practiced and the karate techniques we had learnt seem to grow stronger the longer we kept at it. Basic body movement is the strongest link I could think of between Aikido and Karate. The drills we practiced revolved around quick methods of disabling an attacker on the street. Despite the large differences that seemed to exist on the surface between the two martial arts the more we practiced the aikido techniques the less different from karate it seemed. Controlling your own centre and taking your opponents centre and other similar concepts were shared by both martial arts.

The focus soon shifted back to karate basics. Soon the Tai kyu ku katas were being performed in full swing and the constant renzoku waza up and down the field finally came to an end. Several introductions between students of different dojos were made and the unofficial photo session began. As with all clinics the five hours that we were out in the sun training seemed too short, but now it was time for another kind of fun. After spending a large amount of time out in the sun the

perfect way to cool off was right next to us. The Yoshisu crew, the Takanako crew and several others quickly headed into the stream. Despite how ridiculous it looks doing ju ni waza in the river as a group is a lot of fun.

The day gradually came to an end with a terribly good dinner and cakes and pastries, there was a lot of singing that went on which included the Japanese version of Happy Birthday by Hanshi Dometrich which is something everyone should listen to at least once, and Country Roads which I had secretly been hoping someone would sing. The night slowly wound down around the campfire with burnt smores and stories and hookah. I can't wait till next year when Audra calls us back again for more camping and training, I hope it doesn't rain!

-Nikhil Balakumar