

Comment

A special forum for individuals to respond in detail to material published in the Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness or to raise issues which relate to the specialized field of work with blind and visually handicapped persons. Contributions should be 350-1000 words in length.

Winter Traveling in Hokkaido Land Japan

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Hokkaido, the second largest island in Japan, is located in the far north of the islands: at 45 degrees latitude, and 138 degrees longitude, it is covered with snow for six months of the year, from November to April.

As a trainer for winter traveling for 10 years in this area, I have developed some

systems which may be of interest in similar climates.

1. Attachment for white canes: to prevent the tip of the cane from penetrating snow, I invented several attachments which enable the blind person to walk easily, even swiftly, through the snow. These attachments will not penetrate the snow; can slide on the snow; and can be taken off and put on easily.

No. 1 and No. 2 cane (Figure 1) came in 1971. But it was made of plastic and was too slippery. In 1972, I cut the end of the "spuit" made of rubber and put it into the tip of the cane, developing Number 3 and 4. These have proven very resistant to the snow.

2. Classification of snowy roads by progress of the season:

a. Early stage (end of November to

the beginning of December): From 10 cm. to 15 cm. of snow during the night melts within the next day. More than 20 to 30 cm. of snow requires several days to melt. Different classifications apply to parts of the road for cars and parts for pedestrians; a sidewalk is always classified as a clear path (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Sidewalks, designated as "clear paths" in Hokkaido, are usually kept somewhat clear of snow.

b. Middle stage (mid-December to mid-March: In this period, I divided the snow roads into five groups:

(1) crossing: from a wide road to a wide road,

(2) a crossing: from a wide road to a narrow road (Figure 3),



Figure 3. An example of a street intersection where a wide road becomes a narrow road.

(3) a crossing: from a small road to a small road,

(4) intersection of a wide street (Figure 4), and

(5) intersection of a narrow street.

Knowing the type of crossing one faces helps determine the technique — and sometimes the route.

c. Late stage (end of March to the end of April): The surface of the road is

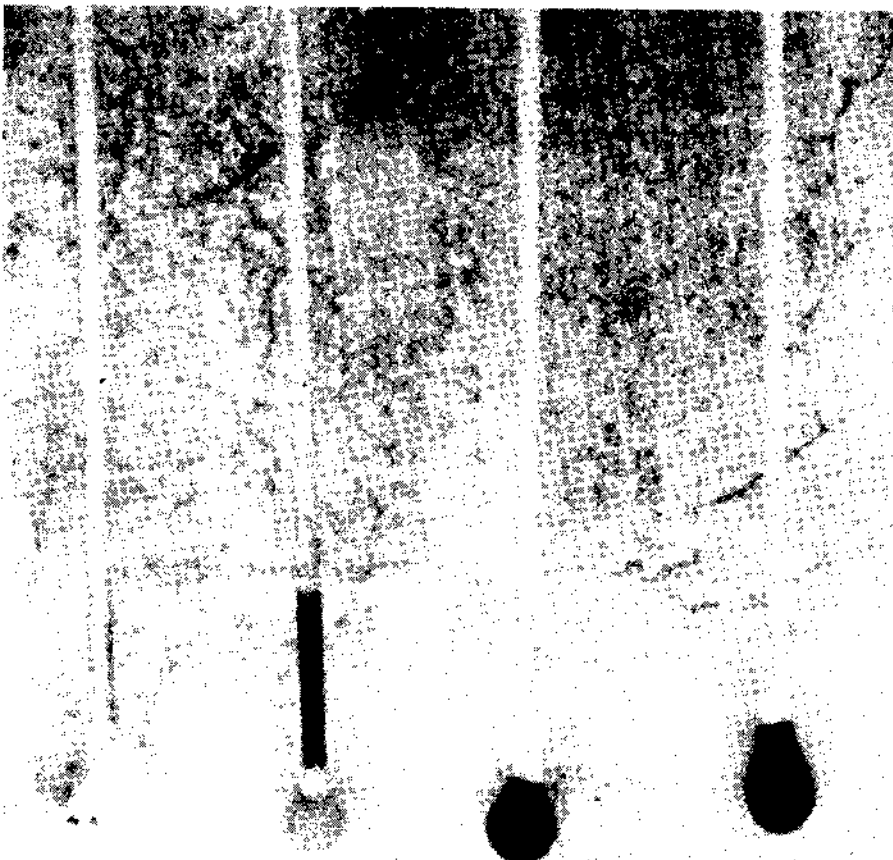


Figure 1. Cane tips modified to cope with winter conditions. The plastic tips found on the two canes on the left were too slippery for winter use. The two canes on the right were modified with the addition of rubber tips.



Figure 4. A wide street intersection of a type of often encountered in Hokkaido.



Figure 5. During April, much snow has melted exposing road surfaces, yet many mountains of cleared icy snow still must be navigated.



Figure 6. In March, much snow has melted on the sunny side of the road.



Figure 7. By May, snow has almost completely melted, and the road's lines are redefined.

exposed except for mountains of frozen snow (Figure 5), icy-hard and dangerously slippery. Snow which on a sunny day might melt into sherbet now freezes at night. Gradually this snow melts, the surface of the road can begin to be scraped by the cane's spike, and dirt mountains piled at the side of the road replace the frozen ones.

3. Classification of snowy roads by time of day:

- a. New-snow stage (from midnight to six o'clock in the morning): existing snow is hard and well-trod; new snow covers it only lightly.
- b. Treaded snow stage (from 6 in the morning to the noon): as the road is narrow, passable portions may change as snow is removed.
- c. Stable snow stage (from noon to . . .): roads revert to the first stage pattern.

4. Changes in the roads between December and May:

- a. December: snowfall of 30 cm.,
- b. January: snowfall of 100 cm.,
- c. February: snow sometimes melts and the sides of the road turn black,
- d. March: snow melts on the sunny side of the road (Figure 6),
- e. April: snow is completely gone from the sunny side and is starting to melt on the other side, and
- f. May: snow is gone; redefine the lines of the road (Figure 7).

5. Cane techniques for traveling on snowy roads: it is necessary to master "slide technique" and "guide technique," and to use "diagonal technique" roads.

When walking at the edge of the road using the "guide cane technique," they must angle the cane upward by 20 or 30 cm. to the sides of buildings. This keeps the sense of direction constant, and prevents walking into the road in a snow storm.

6. Training for winter traveling:

- a. By using pictures made of thermo-form, trainers can instruct trainees on the characteristics of the previous winter;
 - b. Trainees check the outside environment themselves against the pattern of the thermo-form.
- Cane and street-crossing techniques are taught only after basic picture of the environment has been built up for each student.

7. Training with the Sonic-Guide™ for snowy roads:

- a. Use of summer landmarks
- b. Use an environment which is similar to the inside of a building (Figure 8)
- c. Use a crossing road whose entrance is clear.

8. Inside the city center and inside buildings: Trainees must take off the rubber attachment to the cane (Figure 9)—



Figure 8. When training with a Sonic-Guide™, the use of an environment similar to the wide expanses found in the inside of buildings, such as large cleared snow areas, is recommended.



Figure 9. As the climate warms, trainees may often find it useful to remove the rubber tip from the cane to navigate inside buildings, on cleared sidewalks, and so on.

this means carrying a waterproof bag.

These are the ways I train my students to travel safely for six months of every year in Hokkaido land Japan. I would like

to hear from readers in other winter climates about special adaptations and techniques they have discovered.

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