

On Sunday, I took my first trip to Aoyama Kougen. I had heard of the place before, but I had never been there, and to be honest, I didn't really know what it was. On a clear day, I can see the white windmills on a mountaintop in the distance when I am driving to school. Are they the same windmills that I saw in Aoyama? I presume, but I don't entirely know. I went to Aoyama together with a large group of friends and we all got a shuttle bus that took us to the top of the mountain. As we went up, up, up into the clouds, I couldn't help but start to get a little bit nervous. We were going there to run a 5k race, and I started to realize it might be hard to run on a mountain top!

Over the past year or so, I have wanted to start running. It's free and I can do it anywhere, so it seemed like a good thing to do. But each time I started running, I couldn't go for more than 5 minutes at the most before stopping. It seemed too hard. And every time I thought I was starting to get better, something would happen—like the rainy season came, the hot and humid summer came, my schedule got too busy or I broke my tailbone. There was always a reason that I stopped and I never got into a good routine. So this spring, I convinced some friends to join me to run a 3k at Spain Mura theme park. Most of my friends didn't care about the race, but they were happy to get free entry to the park! In the end, everyone had a great time. They felt excited that we finished a race, and on the way home we agreed that we would run a 5k together, too... someday.

Luckily, I found information about a 5k race in Aoyama just a few days after the 3k race. Somehow I convinced most of my friends to join, and soon we had a large group of ALTs who registered to run. The easy part was signing up, but the harder part was actually training for the race. I had never been able to run for a long time, especially not in a race like this. So I started to run a few times a week, either alone or together with a friend who lived in Hisai. One day, we ran for only 20 minutes and I was so exhausted that I was sure I couldn't finish a 5k race. But little by little, we ran more and more and suddenly we could run for 40 minutes easily. I realized that the week before the race I was running 6k easily! We thought we were ready for the race, but when we got there and saw all the huge hills, we started to worry. The only good thing about running on top of the mountains was the cool air on an otherwise hot and sunny day.

The race went by more quickly than I would have imagined. I ran together with two friends and the three of us had promised not to slow down and walk at all. It was very difficult at times, but together, we made it to the end. We ran slowly, but we weren't the last people to cross the finish line. I reached my goal so I was thrilled! It felt really good to finish that race especially because running was so hard for me just a few months ago. And a good part about running at Aoyama Kougen was having the chance to see another famous place in Mie that I hadn't yet visited. Now I am thinking about running even more. I wonder if I can run a 10k someday...