

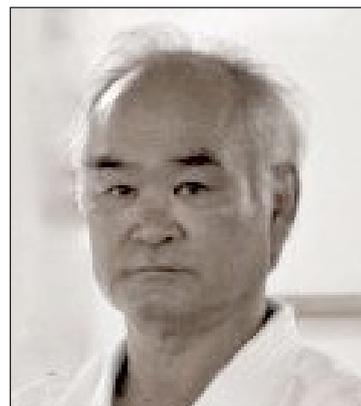


## Chiba Sensei offers a solution to the contradiction between Diamonds and Rocks and Order and Freedom

Traveling extensively, I have seen many styles of Aikido in the world. Some of them were beyond my imagination to be called Aikido. I used to worry about this, and think about what I should do about it. But gradually I became less and less worried, and in fact I am no longer worried about it at all.

First of all, there is nothing you can do about it - you can't be responsible for it. Secondly, I came to the realization that as long as the people practising enjoyed it, and as long as Aikido enriches their lives or is meaningful in their lives, I should be pleased and happy regardless of its physical form.

Of course we should not be blind to what's going on in the Aikido world today. We should strive hard to maintain and preserve the quality as best we can. However, the nature of Aikido is strongly self-developmental and allows itself to develop harmoniously with the environment and various human conditions. Idealistically and hopefully, we have to rely on the conscience and sincerity of the individual teacher. In other words, whoever is involved in teaching



Chiba Sensei

has to be competent, with a strong foundation and responsible in their teaching. Furthermore, I believe it is important to have a historical sense of this profound art left to us by the generations before us, supported by deep conviction and respect.

There is a Japanese expression "mixture of diamonds and rocks". Of course I see that in the Aikido world today. So what does it matter? A diamond as a precious stone carries its own value and beauty. At the same time, a rock also carries a value and use. If Aikido is the path that truly reveals the principles of nature, we should be able to live with the contradiction between order and freedom.

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**Founder**

Shihan TK Chiba 8th Dan

**European Birankai Shihankai**

- Norberto Chiesa 6th Dan, Birankai France
- Gabriel Valibouze 6th Dan, Birankai France
- Dee Chen 6th Dan, British Birankai
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**Editor (English):** Dee Chen  
[deechen626@gmail.com](mailto:deechen626@gmail.com)

**Editor (French):** Jean-luc Busmey  
[jlbusemey@neuf.fr](mailto:jlbusemey@neuf.fr)

**Sub-editor:** Wellington Tsang  
[wellington.tsang@googlemail.com](mailto:wellington.tsang@googlemail.com)

**Design Consultant:** Franco Chen

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**Diamonds and Rocks...**

*continued from page 1*

This world is so interesting. It is so dynamic and beautiful in its as-it-is-ness, because there are things like diamonds and rocks coexisting without conflicting against one another, and everything is in its place in its own right. Needless to say, this should not be our excuse to avoid responsibility. The law of nature, of cause and effect, is

evident and inescapable, and therefore what is to perish will perish in its natural course.

**Shihan TK Chiba  
Birankai Founder**

**Excerpt from article published  
in *Sansho*, Summer/Fall 1994**

**Mrs M Chiba, Special Guest at British Birankai Autumn Course 8-9 October 2016 celebrating 50 years since Chiba Sensei came to the UK**



Photos: Dee Chen

## Misogi 2017: A great vintage

# When a raging snowstorm challenges a group of Aikidoists in France there can only be one winner



Following T K Chiba



Jean-Luc Busmey

Sensei's recommendations, misogi is an opportunity for a limited number of people to establish a close and sustained relationship between partners in contact with natural surroundings. Therefore ideal conditions consist of a wild environment, snow and a temperature never reaching 5°C. Having judged the weather too comfortable during the past winters, it was decided to postpone the date to January so as to benefit from a more 'suitable' climate. On this particular point the kamis were to meet our wishes beyond expectations.

Tempo was set from the very start. Heavy snowfall made driving difficult; trucks stuck across the road or a car having trouble driving uphill and in need of a push were our lot on the way. Reaching strenuously the plateau under constant but windless snowfall, we hear that we are in the eye of the



Photos from Patrick Barthélémy

Ardèche under snow

storm and that the next days are expected to be tough; access to the site is not recommended. In fact a strong wind rose during the night and everything got buried under about 1 m20 of powdery snow.

Our yurt started to yield dangerously under the enormous snowdrift. In time our environment changed, we felt

like lost in the middle of Siberia. In the morning the weather got even worse and it became impossible to prepare our meals outside.

Our field kitchen seemed to have been buried under an avalanche and we had then to carry our outfit inside the yurt.

Collecting wood with snowshoes is rather hard and demands three times as much energy as usually. The wood we have to find, cut down and bring back (or rather drag back) to camp,



After dinner

soon disappears under the snow and we have to spend as much time to find it again. All this wear us down thoroughly and our head sometimes feels heavy during zazen.

Trips we are making out to train are conducted following the principle of the 'rope' with one of us ahead on a recce opening up the way in the powdery snow and the others following putting their snowshoes in his tracks. Visibility



After dinner

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is bad and walking made difficult and potentially dangerous if one gets lost. We keep in mind that not so long ago, lost people had lost their life on the plateau during heavy snowfall and strong 'burle' (*local French name for this kind of wind*).

During drill, we find that snow and wind coming together form a dangerous mixture. Weapons' training under snowfall and wind is really something! Wind squall are equal to blows intended to throw us off balance and fall; clad as we are in heavy clothing and snowshoes, getting back on our feet by ourselves is then very difficult. What a fine opportunity to improve centering and body balance! At times the wind becomes the real adversary that we have to confront. Facing its assaults, movement become autonomous while spirit steps back and watches.

On the third day, the wind gets the best of Patrick Sensei's tent which breaks down. This tent was a veteran from Himalaya and the Kazakhstan steppe but could not take on the 'ardeche burle'. Amazing! We begin to think that

misogi may be going to last a little longer than expected.

The sweat lodge ritual is a key misogi moment. The snow brought this year a special dimension to it. Holes and trenches we dig in the snow soon make the place look like a battlefield. As it is impossible to find enough material to build it, so then we shall use snow! That is how I learned that snow could withstand heat better than I could have ever imagined. Even though the walls are made out of snow and the heat reaches 100°C, we do not end up in a pool of water. What we take for granted is often contradicted by reality and this can be applied



Photos from Patrick Barthélémy

Snow? what snow?



Fabrice wood collecting



Going out in the wild



Patrick Sensei's tent (before breakdown)



From left to right: Ivan Peyron, Jean-Luc Busmey, Thierry Moulinet, Patrick Barthélémy Sensei and Fabrice Mahieux

to martial arts: we should experiment on a regular basis and never rest on certainty. Within the lodge we let the vapor burn our body and spirit at leisure before releasing our energy by diving into the snow, thus coming instantly from a temperature of +100°C to a minus something: what a whiplash!

In the end this misogi left me with the feeling of having a bird on my shoulder (in reality). It remains as a very outstanding souvenir, especially during the past August heat wave. Now... Every misogi being unique, let's try to imagine what the next one is going to be like. And have a nice trip!

**Jean-Luc Busmey 4th Dan  
Dai jyo kan  
Bagnols sur Ceze  
Birankai France  
31/08/2017**

*Translated by Jean-Luc Busmey/Norberto Chiesa*



*Alexander Gheorghiu reports on his trip*

## As the spirit of Aikido spreads over Kazakhstan Chris Mooney Shihan stresses the importance of kihon

Many years ago, there was a teacher by the name of Viktor Trusov,



Alexander Gheorghiu

who founded a dojo in a school in Almaty, then the capital of Kazakhstan. It was a permanent dojo where students from both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan would live, and in those days, be fed by the teacher. Viktor Trusov Sensei had heard of Chiba Shihan's work and wanted to join his school so he made his way to the south of France where the master was teaching a seminar. Subsequently, he made his way to San Diego with two of his students, Oleg Agibalov and Dimitry Kakotkin and they became uchi-deshi. When they returned they brought Chiba Shihan's work back with them.

Chris Mooney Shihan's (Ei Mei Kan, UK) involvement in Kazakhstan began in 2001 with a seminar, though he had met Trusov Sensei when he came to France. He returned in 2003 with Gabriel Valibouze Shihan, who was the first of Chiba Shihan's students ever

to teach in the country some years prior. Over the next decade several different Birankai teachers made the journey, and in 2007 the Kazakhs invited the dragon himself. Sadly, due to ill health he was unable to go, so in his place he sent Chris Mooney Shihan. At the same time another student of Trusov Sensei, Sergei Sobbotin, left his teacher and went to see Chiba Shihan in San Diego, USA. He too became uchi-deshi. Finally, at a seminar in Israel in 2010, to which the Kazakhs attended, Chiba Shihan instructed Mooney Shihan that he was to take responsibility over Kazakhstan. Ever since then Mooney Shihan has been travelling to the country once a year, sometimes twice, to support the aikidoka there. Currently in the ninth largest country in the world there are four Birankai dojos, meaning some of them are as much as two days apart.

Ei Mei Kan Dojo (Birmingham, UK) has existed for almost thirty years and during this time, many odd characters have blown through the doors, but none quite so strange as the group that travelled to the central Asian subcontinent to attend the Birankai Kazakhstan summer

school in July 2017. These characters were Izram Ali, Fero Slamenik, and Alexander Gheorghiu. They were further joined by Sadek Khettab Sensei (Aikido Strasbourg Eurométropole, France) with his student Olivier Nebinger, and Yiannis Zorgianos (Shu Ren Kan, Greece) at the invitation of Chris Mooney Shihan who was heading the seminar.

There are three quick observations one makes when one arrives in the country. Firstly, as the plane flies over the former capital Almaty one sees the sheer snow-capped mountains forming a rim around an extraordinary valley, the country is beautiful. Secondly, Kazakhstan is not a desert or forgotten vestige of humanity on the edge of the world. There are people, plants, and buildings here in a rich variety. Finally, it is hot. Part of this is unique to Almaty as the Altai mountains lock in whatever climate there is resulting in extraordinarily hot summers and cringe inducing cold winters.

We were greeted at the airport by our hosts for the next week, an exceptional and eclectic mix of people showcasing a variety of Kazakhstan's sons.



From left to right: Dimitry Kakotkin, Oleg Agibalov, Nikolay Aikinov, Sergei Sobbotin, and Yury Bochkaryov

Photo from Birankai Kazakhstan

Oleg Agibalov Sensei is the most senior Aikidoka in the organization in both age and training as the only Yondan in the country, and he is well respected. He is Russian-Kazakh, short with broad shoulder, strong build, short white hair, and a persistently quiet and kind expression. In Aikido, he is like a cloud; no force is required to work with him, only good tai-sabaki.

Sergei Sobbotin Sensei is younger than Agibalov Sensei, and is Sandan in Aikido. He too is Russian-Kazakh, but big and formerly trained in Systema meaning his whole body is completely soft until he needs it to be solid. He is open and has the kind of laugh that jumps out of the body and infects the listening crowd.

Yermek Daytov is affectionately known by Sensei as the horse-man. In Kazakh culture, the horse is a respected animal and though Yermek is only Shodan in Aikido he was elected the President of the organization due to the care and balance with which he handles himself. He is native Kazakh and has the typical thick darker skin, jet black hair, and dark eyes.

Anton Kosarenko is the youngest of the hosting group, he is the secretary of the organization, Ikkyu in Aikido and a student of Sobbotin Sensei. Exceptionally tall he gave me quite a fright when he came up

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Banquet at home of Biysen Kuranbek, Vice President of Birankai Kazakhstan, (standing left of Chris Mooney Shihan)

Photo: Alexander Gheorghiu



Entertained by the Doombra (only about 150 people in the world can play it)

Photo: Alexander Gheorghiu



On the way to the Master's Lodge in the countryside near Tekeli for a traditional sauna

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to us at the airport, but he is open, friendly and always ready to help.

Four hours away from Almaty is the small village of Tekeli where the seminar was being held. The dojo was big and spacious with tall north facing windows; a big mat split into two yellow squares by a frame of blue formed the tatami. When we entered we were immediately impressed by the number of children that were there. During the following week we were continually delighted by the seriousness with which they took their training. A testament to their teachers.

Each day started with three body art classes, first one taught by one of the Kazakh teachers, second one taught by Khettab Sensei, and finally a class by Mooney Shihan. We had lunch and then back to the dojo for two weapon classes, a bokken class and a jo class, both taught by Mooney Shihan. During these afternoon classes, the children would usually work with either Khettab Sensei, or Izram, so that the more senior attendees could work on more advanced material. Some of the body art classes were also split, and occasionally teachers were taken outside for a small and more focused class. Yiannis taught body art on the final afternoon.

Mooney Shihan's theme for the week was made very clear from the start. The importance of kihon, the

importance of getting the basics right, otherwise Aikido becomes dancing or as Chiba Shihan once wrote 'a living yoga'. In one of the body art classes he taught there was no nage. This one was the most intense of the week, simply developing basic tai-sabaki. This summer I have followed my teacher to three different summer schools, he taught the same class each time, he teaches the class every year in his dojo, and each time it is extraordinarily revealing.

Sitting outside one warm night with Yiannis, Fero, Sasha, Anton, Sergev Sensei, and several litres of beer, the Kazakhs told us that in this country fighting is a part of life. Not necessarily out of animosity or crime, but just because that's the way things are. Therefore, martial arts are on the rise, one must learn how to defend oneself. However, only real budo will survive as if the art isn't effective they'll know soon enough. Boxing, Karate and Judo are popular and have been for a long time – Aikido is just starting. Reflecting on this I have seen Sensei do some fancy things, big throws, which go round and round and round and up and down and round again, in the past. These are for conditioning at the dojo. At this seminar, everything was direct. Anton and Sasha's warning is that Almaty night life is

not a west-end musical, dancing doesn't work. Therefore, so many years ago Viktor sought out Chiba Shihan, he needed something that really works. During this night-time bonding, high above on the balcony we see Mooney Shihan still deep in meetings.

A longer and more detailed article about our trip is available at [www.eimeikan.org.uk/kazakhstan2017.html](http://www.eimeikan.org.uk/kazakhstan2017.html).

**Alexander V Gheorghiu,  
4th Kyu  
Ei Mei Kan, Central Aikikai  
British Birankai**



# Anne Ducouret Sensei's dojo tempers vigorous practice with love and friendship



*Rowan Mason's first Dojo visit abroad to Paris with Tony Cassells Sensei and Mark Pickering Sensei, 19-21 May 2017*

I have been wanting to do a seminar abroad since I was 14 (2013) and was very excited to finally get the chance.

Paris itself was a nice city though I found the near constant road rage rather funny. The dojo was filled with an indescribable energy and from the second I walked in I knew I was in for a great weekend.

On first meeting Ducouret Sensei, I found her to be very friendly, warm and hospitable. Then training began. To say the least, it was tough. Despite this, the quality of the classes was exemplary, very high energy and technical. All the teachers on the course did a fantastic job; I felt engaged and connected even when pushing

past my physical and mental limits. During a class taught by Mark Pickering Sensei I had the opportunity to practise with Ducouret Sensei. Her practice is focused and intense. She truly wants to bring out the best in all the students to help them achieve more. The training experience overall was incredible and I really learned a lot.

Sleeping in the dojo was another great experience, and being able to talk with new people whom I have trained with. Over the weekend I met so many fantastic people, all with their own interesting backgrounds and stories. The food was also to die for. The whole dojo helped to prepare food on Saturday night and I have never tasted

anything so magical. Everyone sang and danced and truly it had the atmosphere of one huge family. It is an experience everyone should feel for themselves and I know I will return many more times because these experiences are what makes Aikido for me. This is when new friends become like family.

**Rowan Mason 1st Kyu  
Cocks Moors Woods Dojo,  
Central Aikikai  
British Birankai**



Photo courtesy of Ann Jyuu Kan Dojo, Paris



Manchester Autumn Course 7-8 October 2017

## Janet Clift Sensei's precise instruction is reflected in success as Wellington Tsang found out

The British Birankai Autumn course in Sale (South Manchester) was very well attended with students coming from as far as London, South Wales, Glasgow and Portugal and other organisations inside and outside of the Joint Aikikai Council.

Our instructors Chris Mooney Shihan, Davinder Bath Sensei and special guest Janet Clift Sensei, the technical director of Aikikai Greece, gave us complementary lessons in centre line and tai sabaki.

Clift Sensei has dedicated her life to Aikido by studying intensely for years at Hombu Dojo and San Diego Aikikai. She is a regular guest instructor in Europe and was invited to the 12th International Aikido Federation Congress where she participated in the Journey of Women in Aikido forum.

I briefly trained with Clift Sensei at her Chester class before she left for Athens and her lessons are as clear as ever, something my fellow attendees reflected upon.

If you need to know more about Clift Sensei, her dojo is on Facebook (Aikikai Greece), as are Sensei Mooney's (Ei Mei Kan) and Sensei Bath's Dojos (London Aikikai Traditional Aikido).

Many thanks to all who made the effort to make this course a success. I know it wasn't easy but good Aikido is not easy!



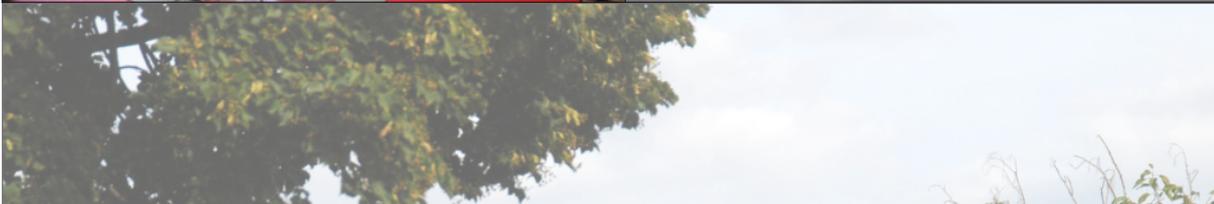
Photos: Tomasz Jopek

Wellington Tsang 3rd Dan  
South Manchester Aikido,  
North West Aikikai  
British Birankai

# Birankai Europe Aikido Summer Camp 15-21 July 2017, Annweiler am Trifels, Pfalz, Germany Guest Instructor: Etsuji Horii Shihan 7th Dan, Aikido Kobe Sanda Dojo

Handwritten signature or mark.

Photos: Achim Goldemann





**British Birankai Summer School**  
**22-28 July 2017, University of Worcester, England**  
*Guest instructor: Makoto Ito Shihan 6th Dan, Hombu Dojo, Japan*

Photos: Stephen Kloda & Lisa Rowley

