



Interior of the Peace Memorial Hall, Hiroshima.



by the families of those who worked there and suffered the after-effects as a consequence, the museum's stated intent is to "alert as many people as possible to the dreadful truths about poison gas".

It is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed on Tuesdays, and admission costs ¥100. No photography is permitted inside the museum, which is a single room, approximately twenty five feet by fifteen. Glass cases of exhibits line two and a half sides. Ceramic containers used for storing liquefied gas complete the display. There are section titles in English, but the individual artefacts are only described in Japanese, so the personal connections and stories they tell were admittedly lost to me. There is however an A4 leaflet in English that details the categories of gas manufactured, and their effects.

Workers suffered from respiratory conditions and horrendous blisters on their skin. Those that suffered after-effects from production of Iprit gas (mustard gas), were transferred to the Lachrymatory department to manufacture tear gas, where numerous eye injuries occurred.

In 1929, the Japanese government constructed the chemical weapons facility on the island in secret, selected because it was hidden from the mainland and isolated from the population in case of an accident. Ōkunoshima was then officially removed from the map. Although the use of such weapons was banned, bizarrely their manufacture and storage was not. Japan's chemical weapon capability was subsequently deployed in China between 1937 and 1945, and the mustard gas was responsible for reportedly over 80,000 casualties and over 6,000 deaths of civilian and military personnel.





Necktie noose, Aokigahara.



that skirts the forest. Compass and GPS remain in agreement and before long there's the sound of traffic in the distance. As the forest opens a convenient mouth to disgorge us back onto the road, Adam steps over a boundary log and I discover a palm-held camcorder in its pouch, squarely placed upon it, kindly retrieved from where it had fallen to the ground.

Closer inspection reveals the innards of the camcorder gutted and corroding, both batteries and memory card removed. There's nothing to see and no story here.

I TAKE MY TURN TO FIRE UP THE HEATER BEFORE STEPPING OUT onto the porch to assess the weather. Snow came again overnight, but the sky is clear this morning, and the view across the lake to the backdrop of mountains is as monochromatic as it is spectacular, trees etched as if with a needle, the water below still and black, framed with a lush white ribbon shore. The inspiration for all those remarkable Japanese winter landscape prints is right there, before my eyes.

Inside Adam has his feet under the *kotatsu*, swotting up on nuclear fission on YouTube, and I join him to give a brief weather report, to enthuse about the view outside, but mostly because toasting my toes under the table is irresistible. We agree to return to the trail and recover our umbrellas, before someone else discovers them and assumes we were a pair of stereotypical Japanese lovers, doomed by our respective family's disapproval, retreating into the woods in a final pact of defiance. If we'd found a pair of umbrellas, left at the edge of the

