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## Article :

**Blind Paraclimber Koichiro Kobayashi Takes on New Heights in Utah**

Directions: Read the following article aloud.

"Life is Climbing!" documents the adventures of paraclimber Koichiro Kobayashi as he defies limitations with the unwavering friendship of his sighted guide.

National paraclimbing champion Koichiro Kobayashi announced his retirement from competitive climbing earlier this year (2023). The 55-year-old legend is based in Musashino City, Tokyo.

Now, the documentary Life is Climbing! follows the blind paraclimber as he tackles Fisher Towers, which are huge sandstone formations in Utah, the United States. Kobayashi is [accompanied by](#) his friends as he climbs peculiarly-shaped spires, roughly 100 m (328 ft) high. Life is Climbing! was released in Japanese theaters on May 12.

The great part about this feel-good film is that it is absolutely real.

It all began five years ago when Kobayashi won four consecutive world championships in the men's B1 class (for fully or almost fully blind athletes) in 2014 to 2019. His sighted guide Naoya Suzuki then urged him to try climbing Fisher Towers.

Suzuki has followed Kobayashi on more than 10 overseas climbs since 2011, when he began accompanying the Japanese squad for para championships. They wanted to share their experience with the world online, so they approached Sokichi Nakahara, who made his film directorial debut with Life is Climbing!

The original plan was to shoot in the US in the fall of 2019. However, it was shelved due to a long backlog of permit applications for the natural conservation area.

The crew then aimed for the spring of 2020, but the US went into lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Japan also declared a state of emergency. It even became difficult for the three of them to continue working together.

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## Blind Paraclimber Koichiro Kobayashi Takes on New Heights in Utah

Directions: Read the following article aloud.

**The Adventure Begins**

In October 2021, the three finally made it to the United States. Suzuki, who had experienced free climbing in the US when he was 15, [insisted on](#) traveling in an old van and other climbs along the journey. It is a style that was favored by climbers who took on Yosemite Valley in the 1960s and 1970s.

The white van against the red sandstone makes for a picturesque scene. But Kobayashi laughs as he says, "The van was really worn out and it kept breaking down, like in a cartoon."

The most challenging climb was the Stolen Chimney route, which is around 100 m (328 ft) high and has oddly-shaped spires. Although they were harnessed with a top rope, it was a difficult climb for Kobayashi, who is completely blind. One misstep could be [life-threatening](#).

Some sighted guides use a model to explain the route in a tactile way to a blind climber. But when asked how he guides Kobayashi, Suzuki says he uses simple instructions like "It's twisted ahead." And according to Kobayashi, "He's always like that."

But even Suzuki knows his explanations are sometimes too simple. "It's amazing how you can climb [with instructions like that]. I definitely wouldn't be able to," he tells Kobayashi.

**A Way of Life**

Their great partnership is evident throughout the documentary. It almost seems unfair how much fun they're having.

The two also visited places and people that held special significance for them. For example, they met a mutual friend who had introduced them to each other nearly 20 years earlier and visited Colorado Mountain College where Suzuki had studied.

They also reunited with Erik Weihenmayer. He is the blind climber who had changed Kobayashi's life when he had fallen into despair after being diagnosed with a rare disease that causes vision loss.

Weihenmayer says that friendship is what makes adventures possible and life beautiful. His words have a depth that would [resonate with](#) many.

"The protagonist of this movie is Naoya. He treats everyone equally and enjoys spending time with them from the bottom of his heart," says Kobayashi. "It would be wonderful if people could see that there is such a way of life."

The film's premiere was held on May 10 at Yebisu Garden Cinema in Tokyo. In addition to Kobayashi and Suzuki, wheelchair tennis champion Shingo Kunieda also attended. Kobayashi and Suzuki also participated in events in the Kansai region on May 20 at Cine Libre Umeda in Osaka and Uplink Kyoto.

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## 2 Key phrases and vocabulary

Directions: First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. **be accompanied by** ～ ～に付き添われる、～と同時に起こる、～がつきものである

He was **accompanied by** his new secretary.

2. **insist on** ～ ～を強く主張する、～を強く求める

He **insisted on** doing everything his own way.

3. **life-threatening** 生きるか死ぬかの、命にかかわる、命を脅かす、致命的な

The injuries are serious but not **life-threatening**.

4. **resonate with** ～ ～（人）の心に響く、～の共感を呼ぶ、～に反響する

We have to create contents that **resonate with** Generation Z.

## 3 Questions

Directions: Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. What motivated Kobayashi and his sighted guide Suzuki to make the film “Life is Climbing!”?
2. How did Erik Weißenmayer change Kobayashi’s life after Kobayashi found he would lose his vision?
3. Have you ever tried or interested in climbing?
4. Do you like documentary films? If so, what is your favorite movie? If not, what types of movies do you like?

## 4

## 日本語関連記事：パラクライミング「レジェンド」の挑戦 ロードムービーに

パラクライミングの国内第一人者の「レジェンド」で、今年競技生活を引退した小林幸一郎さん（55）＝東京都武蔵野市＝が米ユタ州の砂岩「フィッシャー・タワーズ」に挑んだドキュメンタリー映画「ライフ・イズ・クライミング！」が5月12日から、全国の劇場で公開される。高さ約100メートルの奇妙な形の尖塔（せんとう）に、全盲の小林さんが仲間と登る過程を追ったロードムービー。「人生は美しい」と心から感じられる作品は映画だが、紛れもない実話だ。

きっかけは5年前。小林さんが2014～19年の世界選手権・全盲クラスで4連覇した際に目の代わりの「サイトガイド」を務めた鈴木直也さん（47）が、「コバちゃん（小林さん）をここに登らせたいんだよ。行こうよ」と持ちかけた。11年からパラ選手権の日本代表チームに同行する鈴木さんは10回超、小林さんの海外クライミングに同行している。せっかくなら映像をネットにでも上げたいと相談したのが、今作品で映画デビューした中原想吉監督（46）だった。

当初は2019年の秋に渡米して撮影する計画だった。しかし、現地は自然保護区で許可申請が間に合わず、延期に。次に20年春を目指したが、今度は新型コロナウイルスの感染拡大により米国はロックダウン、日本でも緊急事態宣言が発出され、3人とも生業の維持が課題という事態に追い込まれた。

渡米がかなったのは21年10月。15歳の時に米国でフリークライミングに出会った鈴木さんがこだわった、古いバンで移動しながらクライミングする一というスタイルで旅は始まる。60～70年代に米・ヨセミテを開拓したクライマーたちが好んだスタイルだ。ダイナミックな赤い砂岩に白いバンは実に絵になるが、「本当にぼろぼろで、漫画みたいに次々とあちこち壊れた」と小林さんは笑う。

今回のメイン課題は、奇妙な尖塔がある高さ約100メートルの「ストールン・チムニー」ルート。あらかじめロープを張ったトップロープで登るとはいえ、全盲の小林さんが一歩間違えば...という厳しい課題だ。鈴木さんは一体どうガイドしたのか。聞くと、「くねくねしてるよ、って」。サイトガイドの中には、模型を触らせて説明する人もいるというが、「ナオヤ、いつもそんな感じです」と小林さん。「コバちゃん、本当によく登れるよねえ。俺だったら絶対無理！」。最強の名コンビぶりは作品中でも、うらやましくなるほど楽しそう。

2人は約20年前に出会ったきっかけを作った友人、鈴木さんが学んだコロラド山岳大学...と、大切な場所や人を訪ね、28歳で視力を失う難病と判明して失意の中にあった小林さんの人生を変えた全盲のクライマー、エリック・ヴァイエンマイヤーさん（54）とも再会する。「仲間がいるから冒険ができ、人生は美しい。君たちも、そうだろう」と語るエリックさんの言葉には、あらゆる人を包む深さがある。

小林さんは「この映画の主人公はナオヤ」だという。「誰にも分け隔てなく接し、共に心から楽しむ。こんな生き方があるんだ、ということを知ってもらえたら」

10日には、2人のほか車いすテニスの第一人者・国枝慎吾さんらをゲストに迎えてのプレミア上映会を東京・恵比寿ガーデンシネマで開催。関西では20日、シネ・リーブル梅田（大阪）とアップリンク京都（京都）で小林さん、鈴木さんが参加してのイベントも予定されている。

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