

Japanese 100 Great Mountains Vol.1: Episode 001-005



# **JAPANESE 100 GREAT MOUNTAINS**

## **VOL. 1**

### **: EPISODE 001-005**

# **HODAKA**

Originally written in Japanese and translated by Hodaka

Photographs by Hodaka

Cover design by Tanya

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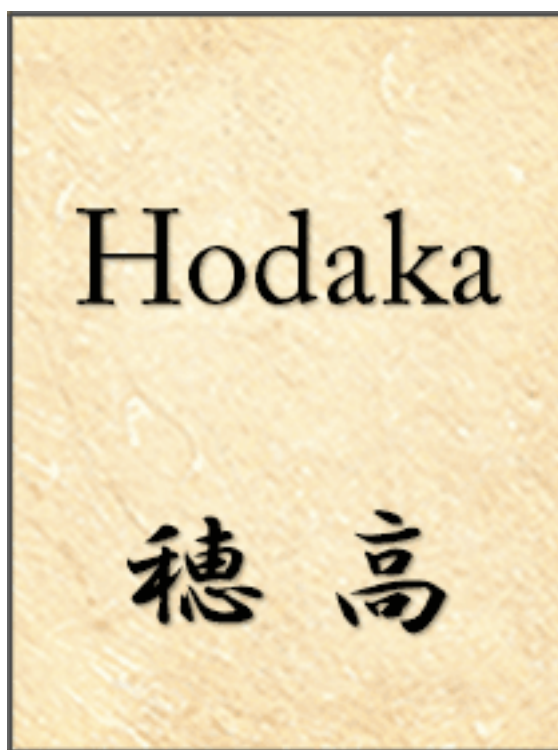
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ISBN: 978-1-387-39820-1



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## Episode 001: Mount Kumotori



Mount Kumotori, the highest mountain in Tokyo (2,017 meters) stands at the boundary of Tokyo, Saitama, and Yamanashi Prefectures. It is one of Japanese 100 Great Mountains.

The mountain gathers lots of hikers throughout the year because it is easily accessible from the Kanto (eastern Japan) region. The climbing route to the top is roughly divided into two courses: the one at the side of Tokyo and Yamanashi, and the other at the side of Saitama. There are various trails in each course and it is said that it is difficult to return in a day no matter where you start from. This time I will aim at the summit from Kamosawa, easily accessible for me, in Yamanashi.

Soon after I have passed Lake Okutama in Tokyo, and ascended the road ahead of the Kamosawa bus stop, I see a parking lot that can hold about 60 cars. Only a few cars are parked there because of a weekday. I have changed clothes and packed the mountain tools as usual. Finishing the warm-ups, I have departed before 7 am. It seems that I can expect a comfortable climbing thanks to the good weather.

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Usually, it takes about five hours when you choose a standard route to get to the summit. Not a short distance, but you can climb through a gently inclined forest zone with no risky spot. In the middle of that, I notice the mountain path is covered with a thin coat of snow. Then, the snow is gradually getting as thick as tens of centimeters. The snow still remains until the middle of April every year and I know it actually does beforehand because I checked the latest information on the Web. However, it is more than expected seemingly due to the heavy snow last night.

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I climbed the snowy road while considering the timing to use the climbing iron. A long and boring trail continues, but during about the last one hour a broad view opens up and you can see Mount Fuji on your left. While savoring the ideal walk on the ridge, I'm approaching the mountain top.



You will be able to see a lodge at the summit in about 5 hours even if you climb slowly. The view from the lodge, standing on top of the gentle slope, is magnificent. You can see Okutama Mountains, Southern Alps (Akaishi Mountains), Yatsugatake Mountains and here is also the best vantage point to appreciate Mount Fuji from Tokyo. Mount Fuji is covered by a haze on the day I'm climbing this time, but I still might be able to see beautiful Mount Fuji during the sunset and the morning glow.

After going on another 50 meters from the lodge, you will reach the peak of Mount Kumotori. The altitude is 2,017m. It corresponds to the number of this year (A. D. 2017), so Mount Kumotori has attracted much attention in 2017 as featured in the media including mountain magazines. Even a new monument with the altitude has been built at the summit.

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When I climbed Mount Kumotori a few years ago, I couldn't stay long at the summit since it was a day trip. But this time I intend to stay at a mountain cottage because I expect much time to climb down due to the heavy snow and I want to take many photographs at leisure.

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During a few hours before the sunset, I have decided to first head for the mountain cottage, located about 30 minutes' walk through the forest zone from the summit. However, it takes longer than I expect, for the snow comes above my knees. I have occasionally missed the trace but managed to reach the lodge while feeling uneasy.



The lodge called Kumotori Sanso, which is located on the border between Tokyo and Saitama Prefectures, can accommodate 200 people. Normally you share a room with other guests, but this time the facility has only three guests including me at night on a weekday and we are luckily allocated one spacious room per each.



About a usage of mountain cottage, I recommend you make a reservation in advance if you are sure to stay at the night. However, you can also stay without reservation. Prices are different depending on whether you stay with or without meals, but the price ranges from about 8,000 yen to 9,000 yen with half board. It costs you reasonably, but gives you a comfortable experience with meals and bedding. I think staying at a cottage is a pleasure of my mountaineering.

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Well, after accomplishing a procedure to stay, I'm shown into my room, which is as large as eight *tatami* (straw) mats. Entering inside, I have found a *kotatsu* desk (Japanese heating system) is installed at the center of the room. While warming my cold body in the *kotatsu*, I'm taking a rest for a while. I thought that I could go back to the summit again to take pictures of the sunset, but I'm afraid I have to give it up, considering that it would be difficult for me to come back by supper at 6 pm.



Set meals with hamburgers are served and we, the three guests, have the good meal while talking merrily about today's climbing and mountaineering in general. We keep chatting after the meal about mountains in the lounge. Having a pleasant time by talking with others about common topics is a charm of staying at such an accommodation. The night at a mountain cottage is short, as the lights are turned off by 8 pm.



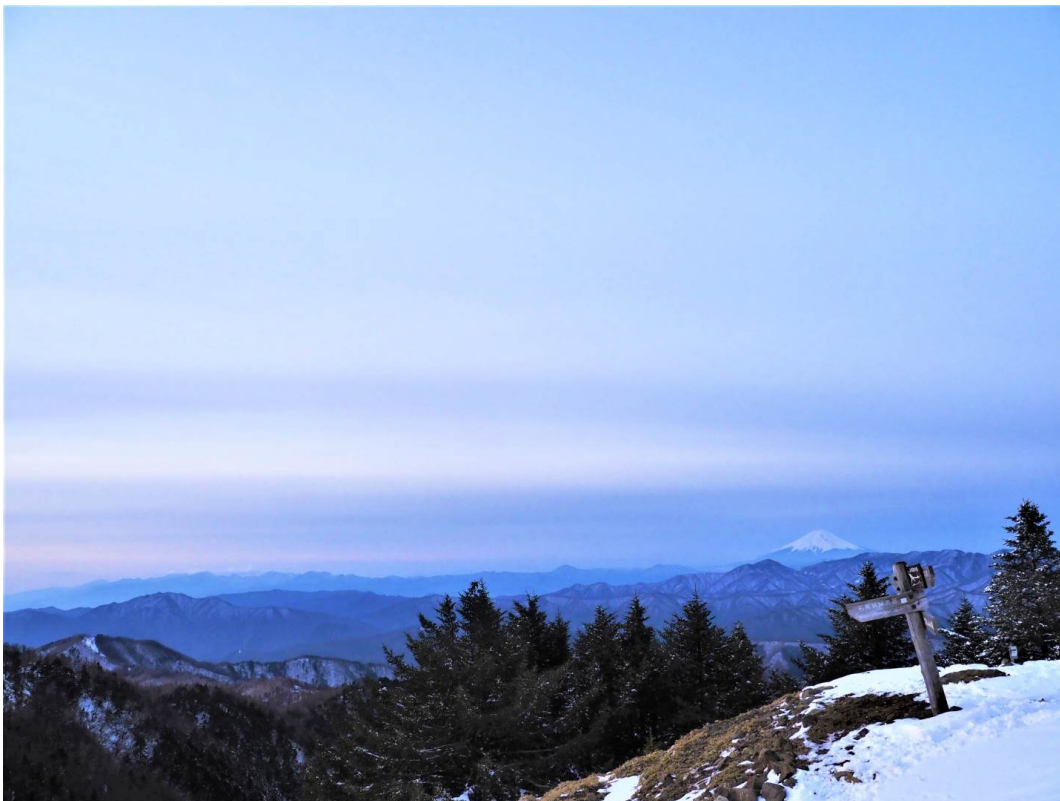
The following day starts early in the morning, for our breakfasts are served at 5 am. While having the meal, the three of us are worried about climbing the snow-covered steep slope which we climbed down from the summit yesterday. I prepare quickly after finishing the breakfast.

The sunrise time will be around 5:30 am. Originally, I planned to see it from the summit, but I have decided to see it from the cottage instead because it would be difficult to reach the summit by then. Despite the cloudy sky, the sun appearing through the clouds looks beautiful. The temperature is minus 5 degrees, but I don't feel it's so cold.





I have equipped myself with crampons to climb the snow-covered slope. Thanks to them, it seems that I can go up to the summit without any problems. It is regrettable that the thick clouds prevent Mount Fuji from shining today, but anyway I think I have enjoyed climbing the snowy mountain and staying at the comfortable cottage.



By the way, there is a mountain named Nanatsu-ishi-yama on the way to Mount Kumotori. The mountain has a folklore relating to Taira no Masakado, a legendary samurai in the 10th century. When Masakado was defeated in a war and took refuge on the mountain, he seemed to bring his six *kagemusha* (meaning political decoys). After he was killed, he and six *kagemusha* were turned into seven stones. They say the name of the mountain derives from this legend.



## Episode 002: Mount Tsukuba



Mount Tsukuba, located in the east of the Kanto Plain, has two peaks: Nantai-san (literally meaning "man's body mountain") and Nyotai-san (literally meaning "woman's body mountain"). The altitude is 877 meters, the lowest among Japanese 100 Great Mountains. However, it is one of the symbols of Ibaraki Prefecture. There are two starting points for climbing the mountain. One is the Tsukuba-san Shrine, the other is Tsutsujigaoka (the hill of azaleas). You can reach the mountaintop in less than two hours on average from either side, so it's crowded with mountaineers of a wide age group during the season. A cable railway is available from the Tsukuba-san Shrine and a ropeway from Tsutsujigaoka. These convenient transportation leading to the summit contributes to the popularity of this mountain.

Since I once climbed Mount Tsukuba from the Tsukuba-san shrine a few years ago, this time I have decided to climb up from Tsutsujigaoka for the first time. Leaving my house at around 3 am, driving on an expressway, I have arrived at the Tsutsujigaoka by around 5 am. Only a few cars are parked, although the parking lot can accommodate 260 vehicles. I have begun climbing by 5:30 am. From the starting point in this side, Nyotai-san is your first target. Despite the congestion during the day, few mountaineers are now climbing in the early hours. It's already bright enough at 5:30 am and still sunny. But because the forecast said the weather would change for the worse in the afternoon, I'm climbing at a quick pace.

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The mountain path is somewhat rocky, but you can climb up at a fast pace without any danger. In approximately 30 minutes, you will get to a square named "Benkei Chaya", joined by the other route from the Tsukuba-san shrine. Then, many strange rocks are looming up on the way to the summit of Nyotai-san. Although it is not easy to take many photographs during the day because of the congestion, this time I can even try various angles with composure in the early morning.





In another 30 minutes from Benkei Chaya, the summit is coming into view. Passing a small shrine, I have reached the peak of Nyotai-san. I don't feel tired at all, because only about one hour has passed since I started climbing.

Despite the low altitude, the view from the summit is really superb and you can overlook the Kanto plain. The summit looks like a cliff, which gives us a feeling that it is much higher than its actual altitude. The place is not very spacious, so you need to watch your step when in many climbers.



From the summit of Nyotai-san, you can see the other peak, Nantai-san, within a close distance. Climbing down on a gentle slope, you will get to a broad space called Miyukigahara where souvenir shops and dinners are lined up. This is a very lively place as the mountaintop station of the cable railway. It will only take about 15 minutes from here to the summit of Nantai-san. The altitude is 871 meters, not much different from Nyotai-san. But its view is not as good as that of Nyotai-san. So, after bowing to a small shrine, I start descending immediately.

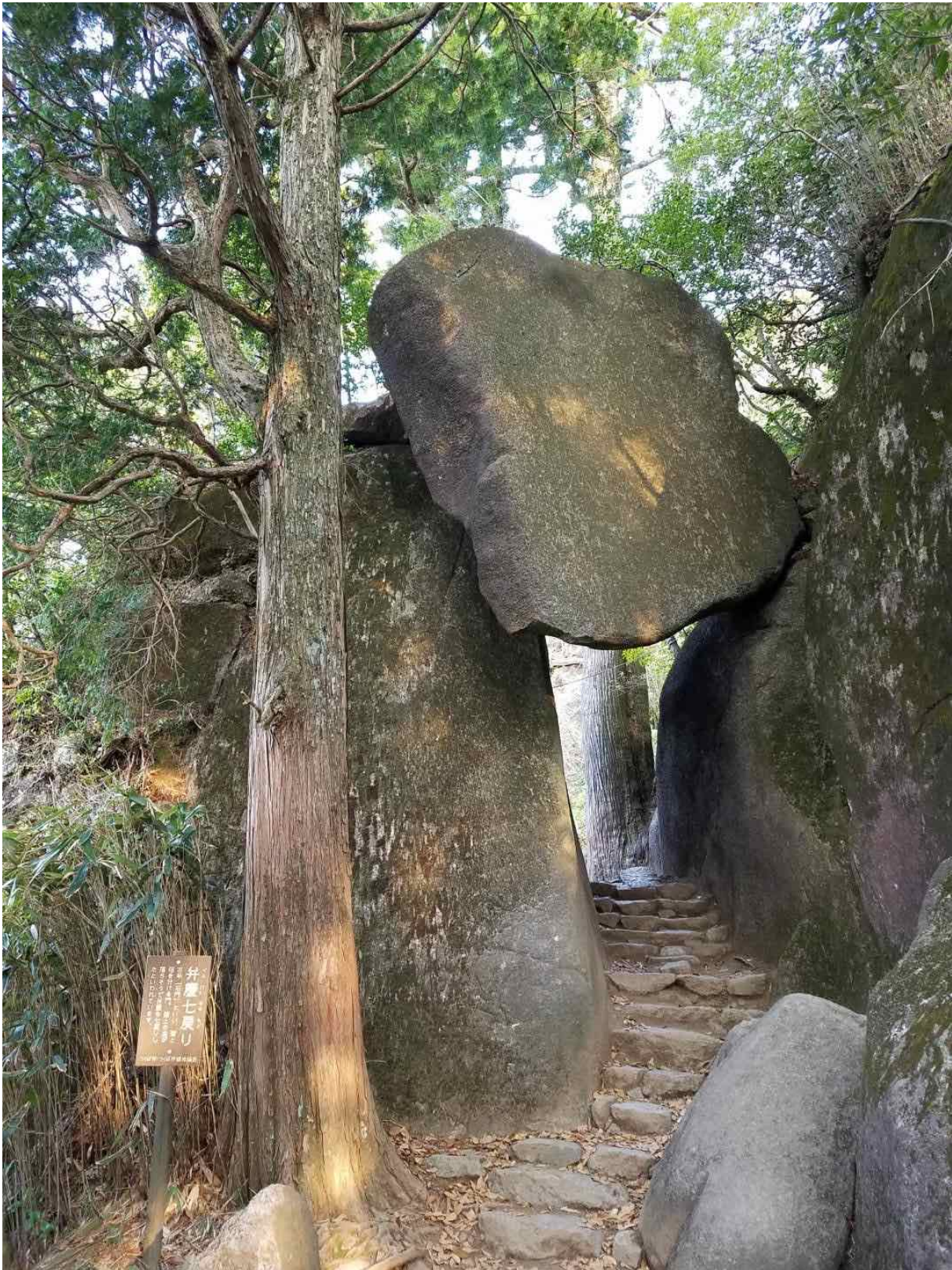
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Mount Tsukuba is famous for its strange rocks. While climbing, you can see strangely shaped rocks and gigantic stones reaching heights of over 10 meters. These rocks have respective names, related to myths and histories, and any of them make me feel mysterious. Let me introduce some unique rocks below.

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[Benkei Nana Modori]

"Benkei Nana Modori" literally means "Benkei's Turning Back Seven Times". It is said that even Benkei, the most legendary warrior monk in Japanese history, turned back seven times here because the overhead rock was going to fall down any minute. We wonder why it hasn't fallen down by now.

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[Haha No Tainai Kuguri]

"Haha No Tainai Kuguri" literally means "Getting Through Mother's Womb".

This strange rock was liken to a mother's womb and ancient people said you could return to your birth figure by passing it through. I actually tried, but it was so narrow for an adult that I barely made it.





[Defune Irifune]

"Defune Irifune" literally means "Departing Ship and Arriving Ship". It seems that the rocks were named so because the appearance of the stones looked as if a departing ship and an arriving ship sailed side by side. An ancient god for the safety of voyage has been enshrined here.

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[Takamagahara]

"Takamagahara" was the place where ancient Japanese gods lived in the myth. Beyond the stairs is Inamura Shrine that enshrines Amaterasu (a Japanese goddess).

Mount Tsukuba has many other strange rocks like these, so we can enjoy climbing while savoring various interesting places.

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I have climbed down Mount Tsukuba after walking the Natural Research Road at Miyukigahara near the mountaintop for about an hour. Since it is still in the morning and the weather holds, I have headed for the Tsukuba-san shrine. It takes about 10 minutes to get there by car. This shrine is known as typical of so-called "power spots" (or vortexes in spiritual term) in Ibaraki prefecture.

Mount Tsukuba has two summits and Izanagi (a husband/brother god in Japanese ancient myth) is worshiped at Nantai-san and Izanami (a wife/sister god) at Nyotai-san, respectively.

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Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters) said that Japan as a country was born when these two gods stood on the bridge called Ame-no-ukihashi (literally meaning "the floating bridge in the air") dropped a drip from the tip of the halberd.

It is said that they gave birth to many other offspring gods after their marriage and established the country. So, people believe they can get the grace of the gods at the shrine for matchmaking, harmony between husband and wife, home safety, and pregnancy.

Also, they say your dreams will come true if you bring a stone, prayed at the shrine, to the specific place named "Ooishi gasane" (meaning "the pile of big stones") near the summit and put it there.

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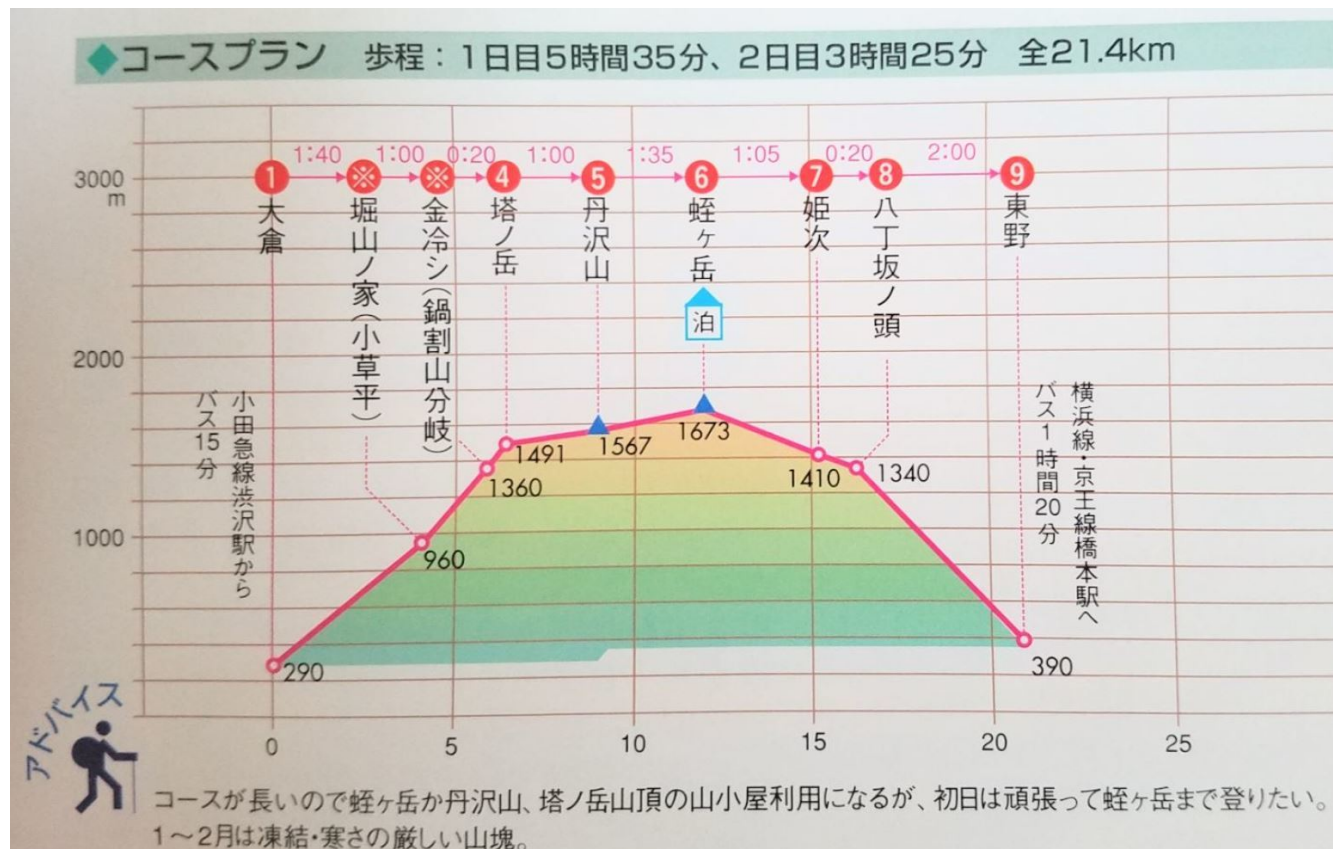




The precincts are so spacious that you have to climb up the stairs and pass through several gates to reach the main shrine. Many mountaineers are praying before climbing up to the summit.

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## Episode 003: Tanzawa Mountains



I'm visiting Tanzawa mountains which I have visited several times before. Tanzawa is a generic term for a mountain range in the northwestern part of Kanagawa Prefecture. It covers an area as wide as about one-sixth of the prefecture.

The guidelines for conquering Japanese 100 Great Mountains prescribe that you need to reach the highest peak of each mountain range. So, this time I will climb Mount Hiru or Hiru-ga-take in Japanese (1,673 meters), the tallest one in Tanzawa mountains.

Tanzawa is a very popular mountaineering spot, because it is easily accessible by train and bus and the view from the top is so great. As a main starting point of Tanzawa, Yabitsu Pass and Okura are common. In order to reach Mount Hiru, you need to pass through Mount To or To-no-dake in Japanese and Mount Tanzawa or Tanzawa-san. Since I started from Yabitsu Pass last time, I have decided to climb up the route from Okura this time. Considering I should walk more than 9 hours a day, I have arrived at Okura at 4:30 am and started climbing at around 5 am.





After walking on a roadway for about 10 minutes, I can see a trail, leading to the deep mountain. The trail from Okura has wooden steps and is in good condition with no dangerous place. However, this gentle slope that goes on forever is called "Stupid Ridge". As the nickname indicates, the trail is really long and the endless steps might dishearten the climbers. But since there are several lodges on the way, I'm climbing while taking rests not to be in a hurry.

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When I look backward in the middle of the trail, I can see the ocean in the distance and the scenery comforts me. But if we can see nothing in this deep mountain on a cloudy day, the imagination gives me a shudder.

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The last one kilometer to the mountaintop is a bit steep slope. After climbing from Okura for nearly three and a half hours, I have finally reached the summit of Mount To or To-no-dake (1,491 meters). The difference in elevation from Okura is no less than about 1,200 meters. This summit commands a panoramic view of Sagami Bay, Mount Fuji, and the Southern Alps or Akaishi Mountains. I think it would blow away your fatigue in a moment.

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There is a large mountaintop sign of To-no-dake in front of a lodge. Wooden steps are widely installed in the area, so you can eat and rest without worrying about congestion.

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After leisurely taking a rest while having a meal, I restart climbing to the Mount Hiru or Hiru-ga-take, the highest peak of Tanzawa Mountains. I feel mountaineering becomes easier because of a decrease in climbers, but I'm climbing at my own pace without being in a hurry, considering the accumulated fatigue.

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In about an hour, I have arrived at the top of Mount Tanzawa or Tanzawa-san (1,567 meters). Although it is spacious, surrounded by trees, the visibility is not good. I take a short rest and begin climbing again to Mount Hiru.

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The summit of Hiru-ga-take and its lodge can be seen clearly in the middle of the mountain trail. Experiencing ups and downs repeatedly, I finally get there. The peak of Mount Hiru at altitude of 1,673 meters is the highest among Tanzawa Mountains, but there are few climbers and less crowded than at Mount To. I think that many people would be satisfied with To-no-dake because one-day climbing is too tight.

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Although good walkers can climb Mount Hiru (Hiru-ga-take) and back in a day, I have decided to stay at a lodge called Sonbutsu Sanso. That's why I heard a good reputation of this lodge from the climbers whom I met at Kumotori Sanso before (refer to Episode 001).

Many people seem to stay at the lodge because they aim to savor the night view, which is really marvelous, from here. Also, I am attracted by the fact that the lodge always serves curry and rice for dinner and Oden (Japanese stew) for breakfast. I have never eaten Oden in a lodge.

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They say the name of this lodge derived from the huge rock called Sonbutsu Rock, which once existed at the summit. Currently, only the small statues of Buddha are lined up in front of the lodge. Sonbutsu Sanso can accommodate 150 people. Since I avoid a weekend, the guests are only three solo climbers including me and one party consisting of 14 mountaineers. I am allocated one room and can stay leisurely.



I think that 6,500 yen per night with two meals is reasonable. The dinner starts at 17:30 and I enjoy talking with other guests about mountains at a shared table. The well-stewed curry is sinking deep into me. Generously, we can refill it as we like, which makes me so happy.

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As getting dark, the lights in the city at the foot of the mountain are gradually turned on here and there. When the night falls and I get outside at around 19:30, I am overwhelmed by the night scenery, which is far beyond my expectation. I'm afraid we cannot see the stars due to the cloudy sky, but we can savor the night scenery instead. We are watching it forever without getting tired.

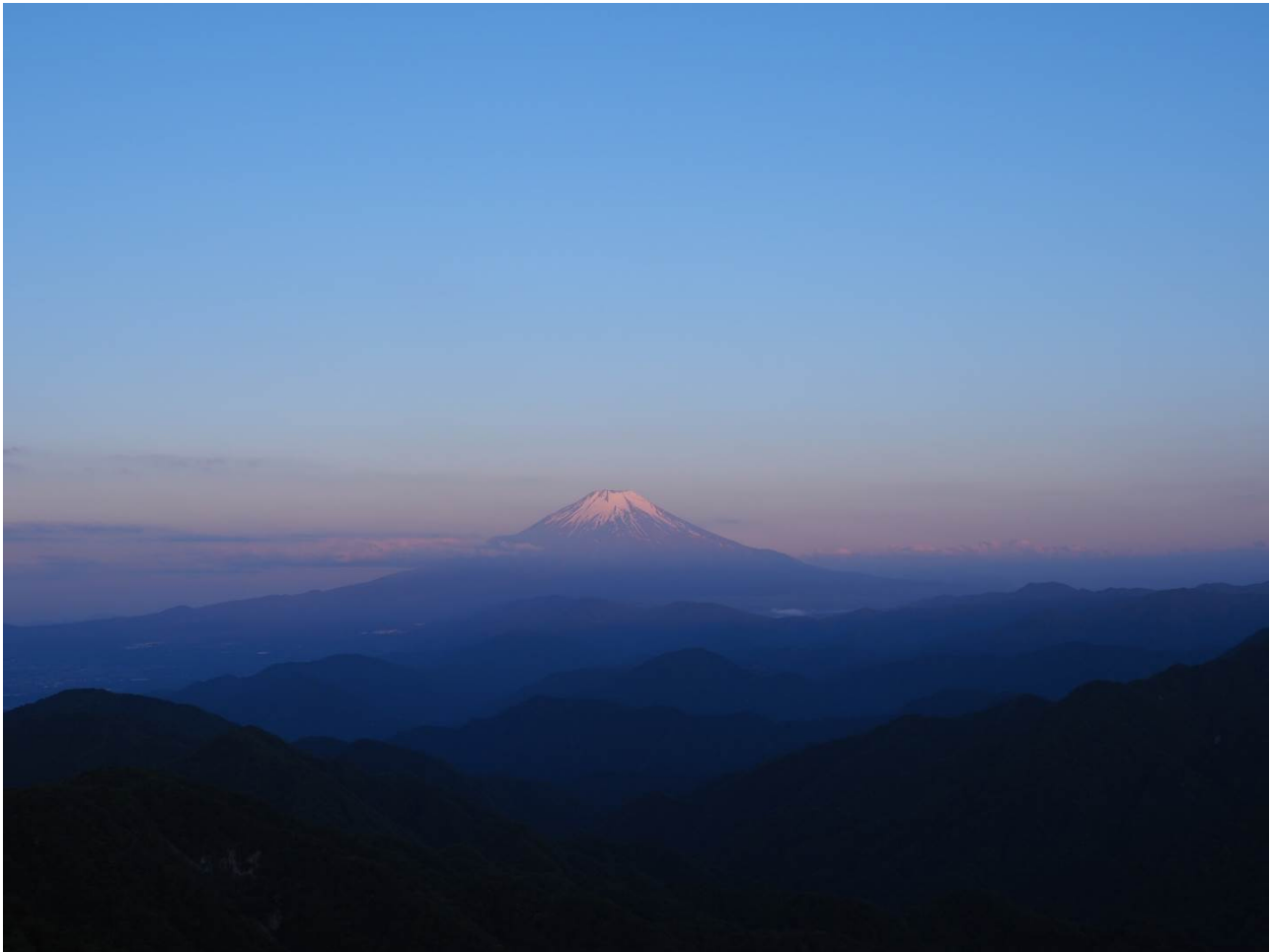
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The second day, I have woken up with a loud noise from the group of 14 mountaineers. The sky is already bright just before the sunrise. Through a windowpane of the lodge, the sun rising from the opening in the clouds can be clearly seen. Getting outside, I face the magnificent Mount Fuji, which I could hardly see yesterday. It is towering and inspiring me. As the sun is gradually rising, I can recognize well the colors of the town and the sea below are also being changed.

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At 5:30 am, we have Oden (Japanese stew) for breakfast. The taste is soaked in. Oden warms me from inside. It is not bad for breakfast.





By the way, one of the reason why I visit Tanzawa this time is to meet a particular cat. There was once a cat name "Mee-kun", which had been protected at this lodge (Sonbutsu Sanso) and then was loved by the staff and climbers for as long as 18 years. I'm afraid the cat seemed to have died in 2016. On the other hand, according to a mountaineer whom I met Kumotori Sanso, another wild cat dubbed "To-kun" lives at the mountain top of To-no-dake instead. Many visitors have posted the photographs of the cat online. Its plump body and dauntless face are so lovely. I was really looking forward to meeting him. When I cannot find To-kun here, I'm worrying about him. But a staff of the lodge tells me that someone took the cat at the end of March 2017, and it seems to live happily somewhere. The episode made me feel relieved.

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Speaking of Tanzawa, it is also famous for Bokka. Bokka is a person who carries food and daily necessities on his back to a lodge. They carry a 70 to 80 kilograms of load on average. Some veteran Bokkas often carry a 100 kilograms or more of load.

Coincidentally, an Ekiden (long-distance relay running race) seems to be held today at the section between Okura (the start of the climbing route) to a lodge in the middle of the way to To-no-dake. I haven't known the event being held in advance and cannot see the actual race because I am at the mountaintop when the race starts. Still, I have an opportunity to talk with some event staff at relay points and somewhere in the

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middle. The Ekiden seems that four participants form one team and they compete in relay race to run with prescribed weight loads.

After climbing down the mountain, I have watched the races in the past on YouTube. I'm shocked by how tough race it is, for I felt just climbing the mountain was really tough.



In Tanzawa, there is a legendary Bokka called "Champ", who was introduced in the newspaper in January 2017. He has climbed To-no-dake up to 5,500 time to date. It seems that he is still working on active service, so you may encounter him if you are lucky.

Through the mountaineering this time, I would like to appreciate Bokka people again because we have comfortable stays on mountain lodges thanks to their massive contributions.



## Episode 004: Mount Amagi



Mount Amagi (Amagi-san in Japanese) is a generic term for the mountain range located in the central part of the Izu peninsula, which has a longitudinal way traversing from Amagi Pass to Amagikogen Golf Course via Banzaburodake, the highest peak of the mountains. If you only aim at reaching Banzaburodake, it will take about four hours from Amagikogen Golf Course to get there and back. But this time I am climbing up from Amagi Pass (altitude of 600 meters) to Banzaburodake (1,406 meters) and walking down to Amagikogen Golf Course. It's 17 kilometers in total.

When arriving at Amagi Pass around 5:30 am, no car is parked. Originally, I thought I would get back to Amagi Pass after reaching Banzaburodake. Right after I have started, I'm getting lost in a forest road for about 30 minutes. Although I can climb smoothly on a maintained path after that, it was really hard to find the way at the beginning.

Mount Amagi is known as a mountain which doesn't have a good visibility. The primeval beech forest blocks off the direct sunlight. Still, the temperature reaches more than 30 degrees Celsius, which makes me sweat profusely even before 7:00 am.

I have reached Haccho Pond after climbing up on a gentle slope for about two hours. While enjoying a tranquil scenery, I take a short rest. Then, a boring mountain path with almost no ups and downs stretches to Totsuka Pass, which continues for about one and a half hour. I sped up to shorten the time.





Beyond Totsuka Pass, the slope has become steeper. When I have walked for another hour, the summit of Banzaburodake is appearing. If the weather is fine, you can enjoy the view from the mountaintop to a certain extent. But it is filled with gas today, so I'm afraid I can see nothing.



Mount Amagi is in a rainy region, whose annual precipitation amounts to 3,000 millimeters. Combined with its warm climate, the environment is very suitable for trees to grow. Rhododendrons are at their best from May to June. You can see many plants such as azalea, beech, tall stewartia (or Hime-syara in Japanese), and asebi (ashibi or *Pieris japonica*) along the mountain path, which attracts many climbers during this period. Among them, the Asebi tunnel on the horse's back (ridge) between Banzaburodakeo and Banjirodake is especially famous. Asebi has a poison which is strong enough to make a horse drunk. So, this plant written with the three kanji characters signifying "horse", "drunk", and "tree", respectively.

The beech forests, occupying vast areas, obstructs the view during your mountaineering. Still, Haccho-ike (Haccho-pond) on the way is a good view spot. This pond is famous as a habitat for *Moriaogaeru* (*Rhacophorus arboreus*). They lay bubble-wrapped eggs not in the water, but on branches of trees. So, you can see a lot of bubbles in the trees during the breeding season.



This time one female mountaineer asks me, “Haven't you seen white camellia on your way?” Camellia's flowers fall on the earth with its face upward and there seem to be a spot filled with white camellia. She says she's going to see them.

I'm hearing the chirps of insects and cicadas all the time while climbing. Many plants make me aware of the richness of nature. When climbing down from Banjirodake, a deer suddenly jumps from behind and overtakes me. I'm afraid it is too sudden to take a photo. Many deer seem to inhabit Mount Amagi.

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From Amagi Pass to Banzaburodake, I have been climbing alone without encountering anyone for about five hours. But when I'm about to leave Banzaburodake after a short rest, I see one man climbing here. He says, "I have met someone for the first time today." I replies, "So have I." We are sitting on a bench and talking with each other for a while.

This man, maybe in his sixties, tells me that he has driven about 900 kilometers from Yamaguchi Prefecture since yesterday. He now needs 17 mountains to conquer all of Japanese 100 Great Mountains. He has a plan to climb 30 mountains, including the remainder of the 100 mountains, within a month. He kindly shows me his congested schedule, in which he will climb mountains almost every day. I'm amazed and really moved.





Our talk doesn't seem to end and he says, "Let's go together to Banjirodake." So, I can listen to his talks for one more hour about the mountains he climbed and various places he visited. He has climbed roughly 1,000 mountains to date and conquered Japanese 100 Great Mountains in Hokkaido and Kyushu. To complete the 100 mountains, he only needs to conquer the ones in the Kanto region and plans to finish them by the end of this summer. I'm more and more fascinated by his story.

We also talk about things other than mountaineering while eating lunch at Banjirodake. He has a seventh dan (grade) in kendo, which he could get at his sixth challenge. The examination is so difficult that many challengers seem to fail it more than ten times. As for the examination for an eighth dan, only about one percent of the challengers can pass. It seems to be one of the most difficult examinations conducted in Japan.





While climbing Banzaburodake, I'm thinking that it would be boring for me to go back on the same road again for about four hours. So, I have come up with the idea of walking to Amagikogen Golf Course (the goal of the longitudinal way), using public transportation, and returning on the seaside road of the Izu Peninsula.

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Then, about one hour after I parted from the swordsman, I have arrived at the golf course. Although I once visited here during the climbing Mount Amagi in the past, I come to the front desk for the first time. I say, "Excuse me, how do I get back to Amagi Pass by public transportation from here ...?" A female receptionist is surprised, but she kindly checks it up in cooperation with other staff and gives me a time schedule in which I can return by bus, train, and taxi. It doesn't seem common, though. I have spent leisurely time at a café until a bus coming after 3 pm and watched some wild deer in a roadside forest from inside the bus heading for Ito Station. Getting on the Izu Kyuko Line (a local express) at Ito Station, I appreciate the beautiful ocean thanks to the fine weather from inside the train running toward Kawazu Station. From Kawazu Station, I can return by taxi to Amagi Pass, where I parked my own vehicle. The taxi driver asks me, "Sir, have you already seen Kawazu Seven Falls (a famous sightseeing spot)?" I answer, "I have traversed Mount Amagi today and am now about to go back to Tokyo." Then, he has introduced another great fall on the way.

In the morning, there was few mountaineers and I originally intended to get the summit and back at my own pace. However, in the end, it has become a mountaineering involving many people.

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Speaking of Mount Amagi, it is famous for a story titled "The Dancing Girl of Izu" or "The Izu Dancer", written by Yasunari Kawabata, a winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. You can see its monuments at Amagi Pass and Kawazu station.

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Also, it is a setting of a novel titled "Amagi-goe (meaning "Crossing Amagi Pass")", written by Seicho Matsumoto, one of the most legendary mystery writers in Japanese history. Although I have not watched the movie version of "Amagi-goe", I have done that a couple of days before the mountaineering. In the movie, bare footprints in an icehouse in Amagi Pass are served as a clue to specify the criminal. I have seen the actual ice house this time. During the early Showa era (the first half of the 20th century), people made use of the winter coldness in Mount Amagi to produce artificial ice and stocked them in this icehouse. While I recall the criminal hiding in the icehouse, the dim space has made me feel a bit eerie.

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When I visited Mount Amagi in the past, I just climbed without researching anything related to it. But this time I have fully enjoyed traversing the 17-kilometer longitudinal way, encountered people, and even appreciated related literary works. Which has made Mount Amagi especially impressive to me.

Now I remember the words of Naomi Uemura, who conquered the highest peaks of the five continents for the first time in the world history. He said, "I have climbed the highest summits of the five continents. But I never think conquering tall mountains and climbing up the steep rock wall are great only by themselves. I think there is no difference among our mountaineering. Even though it is a small mountain, if a mountaineer is deeply moved, the climbing is genuine, definitely."

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## Episode 005: Mount Adatara



With some business in the Tohoku region, I have made a plan to climb Mount Adatara (or Adatara-yama) in Fukushima Prefecture on this occasion. Mount Adatara is an active volcano that has an altitude of 1,700 meters. There were few dangerous places under the fine weather. As a whole, it is a gentle mountain suitable for beginners. It takes about 40 minutes by car from Fukushima Station to Okudake, the starting point which I use this time. Very accessible.

When I was driving to Fukushima on an expressway in the early morning, it began raining and I had to consider if I should give up climbing. But the rain was getting lighter and I had decided to head for the starting point just in case. Then, a patch of blue sky was gradually spreading and the clear blue sky was above me when I got there.

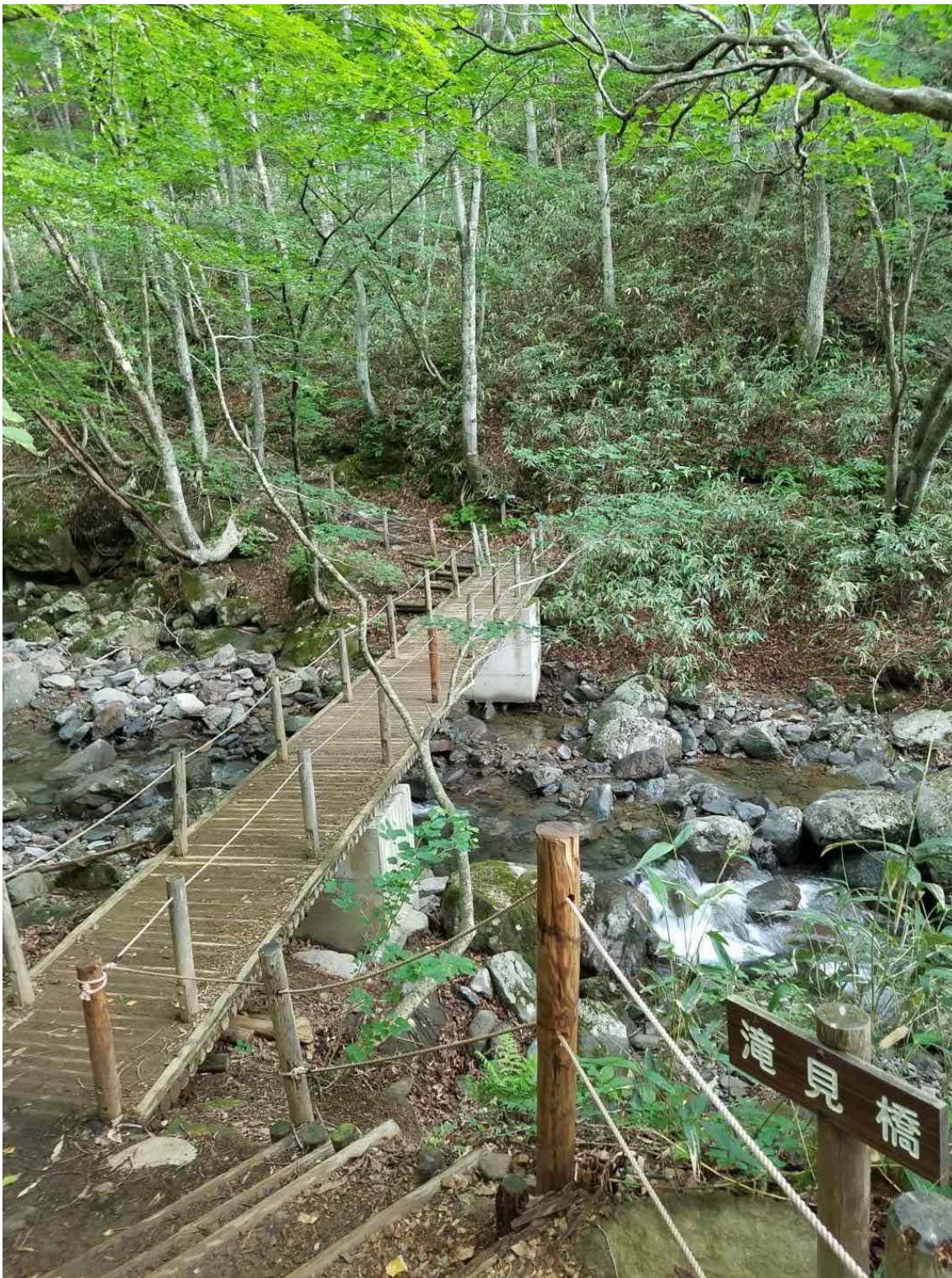




The Okudake starting point has a huge parking space which can accommodate hundreds of vehicles. But only a few cars are parked today. I have changed clothes and packed for preparation, when an old-married couple stopped their car next to mine. I greet them and start mountaineering. I love to climb a same mountain several times because I always discover something new each time. On the other hand, when I'm climbing a new mountain like this time, I'm really thrilled.

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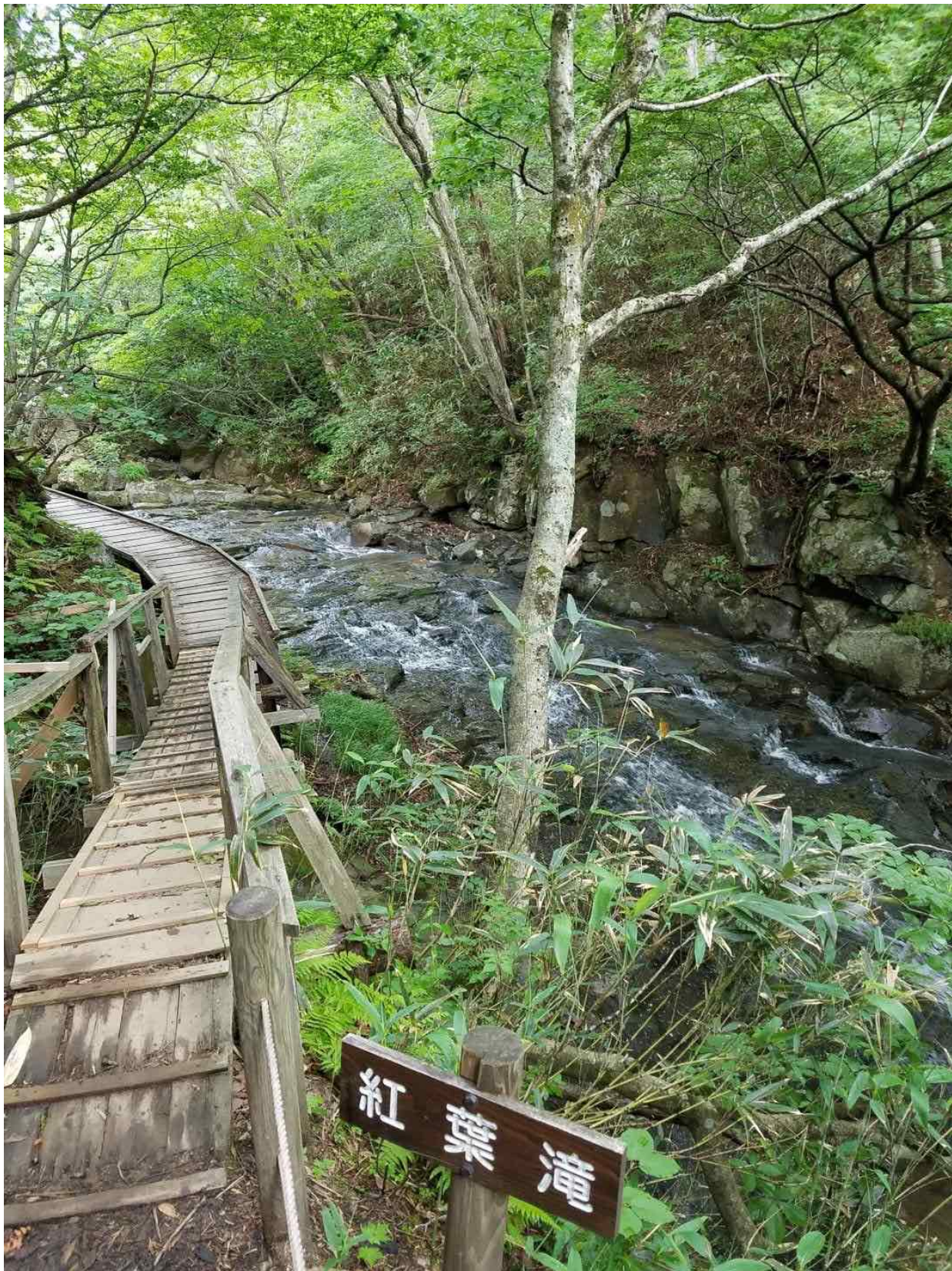




I have found a maintained promenade along the river from the starting point. Although it might go the long way, I have taken the opportunity to walk on the path. A stream is running through the forest and I'm walking on the cool trail toward the upper reaches of the river while watching several waterfalls. You can skip this promenade, but I recommend you to walk here first because it can be a comfortable warm-up. The path continues about one kilometer. After that, a gently detouring carriage drive and a direct shortcut lead to the summit while intersecting with each other.

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While I'm walking toward the summit through flat gravel roads and steep mountain trails in bushes, various flowers appear one after another on both sides of the track. I'm climbing at a slow pace to take photographs.

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After a while, I begin sensing a sulfur smell. As an active volcano, volcanic gases are being emitted from Mount Adatara and some courses are not allowed to enter. In 1997, four mountaineers mistakenly entered the restricted area due to the poor visibility and died by inhaling the volcanic gases.

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As I go halfway up the mountain, the Kurogane lodge, which is famous for its hot spring, comes into my view. The building is followed by a wide mountain road, on which volcanic rugged rocks are scattered. The sign indicating a climbing route is drawn on rocks. The road is hard to walk, so I have to climb with short steps. It is too wide to be recognized as a mountain path. So, you might be lost in the mountain, when you cannot find the signs in a dense fog. I have a fine view today, but my fatigue has been accumulated by the climbing in the intense heat.

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After the continuing gravel roads, I have finally arrived at an open crossroad with a rocky mound. In front of it, I see the sign that reads Adatara-yama. The top of the mound is the summit of Mount Adatara.

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After climbing over a rocky stretch, I have reached the summit in a few minutes. It has a 360-degree superb view. In this season, a horde of scary dragonflies are flying near the summit, but they are not particularly harmful because they don't come close to people.

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The old-married couple whom I greeted at the parking lot are eating lunch at the rocky stretch and I speak to them. They seem to have climbed up here on the shortcut road without enjoying the promenade. On their recommendation, I have decided to head for Tetsu-yama (meaning "Iron Mountain"), which is up ahead. They say it would take about 45 minutes one way. On the way, I see a gigantic crater, which makes me raise my voice in admiration.

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Its whitish surface and enormous hollow are magnificent and overwhelming me. If I didn't spoke to the old-married couple in the morning, I might haven't talked with them at the summit. Which means, I might not be able to savor this scenery.



When I come back to Mount Adatara again, it starts raining a little. So, I will descend at a quick pace. Although it clears up later, I have decided to take a ropeway to climb down. Mount Adatara has the ropeway and you can climb up and down comfortably in about 10 minutes. It is appeal of this mountain to be climbed easily this way.

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Mount Adatara is also known as Japanese 100 "Flowery" Great Mountains and I can see many flowers of this season while climbing. Although I am not familiar with them, I take pictures of the flowers one after another. I have not been very interested in flowers before, but the flowers are blooming so fascinating that I feel like knowing the names and features.

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Mount Adatara has many attractions besides the flowers. I can point out the mountain has been loved by countless people. For example, it was introduced in "Chieko-sho" (one of the most famous collections of Japanese poems written by Kotaro Takamura) and "The Man'yoshu" (the oldest collection of Japanese poems in between 7th and 8th centuries).

Then, more than anything, I recommend you onsen (hot springs) of Mount Adatara. The Okudake starting point which I started climbing is a perfect location with a hot spring facility right next to the parking lot. So, you can wash your sweaty body immediately after climbing down the mountain. Since there are few climbers today, only after I wait for a little while, I monopolize the hot spring and fully savor it.





It is said that this Dake Onsen was discovered by Sakanoue no Tamuramaro (a Shogun in the Heian period) during his expedition to the east. It is also said that even Mito Komon (very popular historical figure) praised its efficacy in the old times. There are hot springs on other climbing courses of Mount Adatara, so you can rest your tired body at leisure.

I have climbed Mount Adatara for the first time. It is gentle, but has various unique places such as rocky stretches and the crater. Also, its flowers and hot springs are really attractive. I think this mountain has now become one of my favorites.

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The Japanese version of this article with more photographs can be read at the author's blog.  
<http://hodakaclimber.blog.fc2.com>

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**This work was exclusively written as one of the made-in-Japan contents belonging to The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books.**

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Mountaineering, Photographs, and World Heritage Sites (Under the name of Hiroyuki Nakada)

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