

Japanese 100 Great Mountains Vol.3: Episode 011-015



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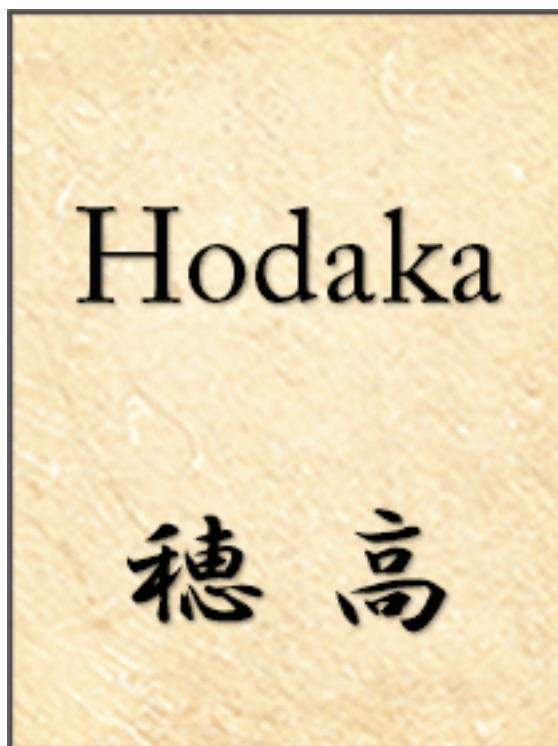
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Episode 011: Mount Daibosatsu



Mount Daibosatsu with an altitude of 2,057 meters, one of Japanese 100 Great Mountains, is located in Yamanashi Prefecture. So, it is easy to access from Tokyo. The mountain is known for its magnificent view of Mount Fuji. This is my third time to climb the mountain. At the first and second visits, I couldn't see Mount Fuji clearly due to thick clouds. But this time, on a fine day in February (2018), I can finally see a satisfying scenery. Its snow-covered summit, unique to winter, pleases my eyes.



Originally, I planned to go by car to the Kaminikkawa Pass near the summit from the Daibosatsu Pass starting point. But the road was closed during the winter. So, I had changed the plan and decided to choose the route via the Marukawa Pass to the summit. When I arrive there at around 6 am, a few vehicles have already parked. Before the departure, I have talked with the driver of the car arriving right after me about today's weather and the course we choose. Then, we proceed to the different courses.



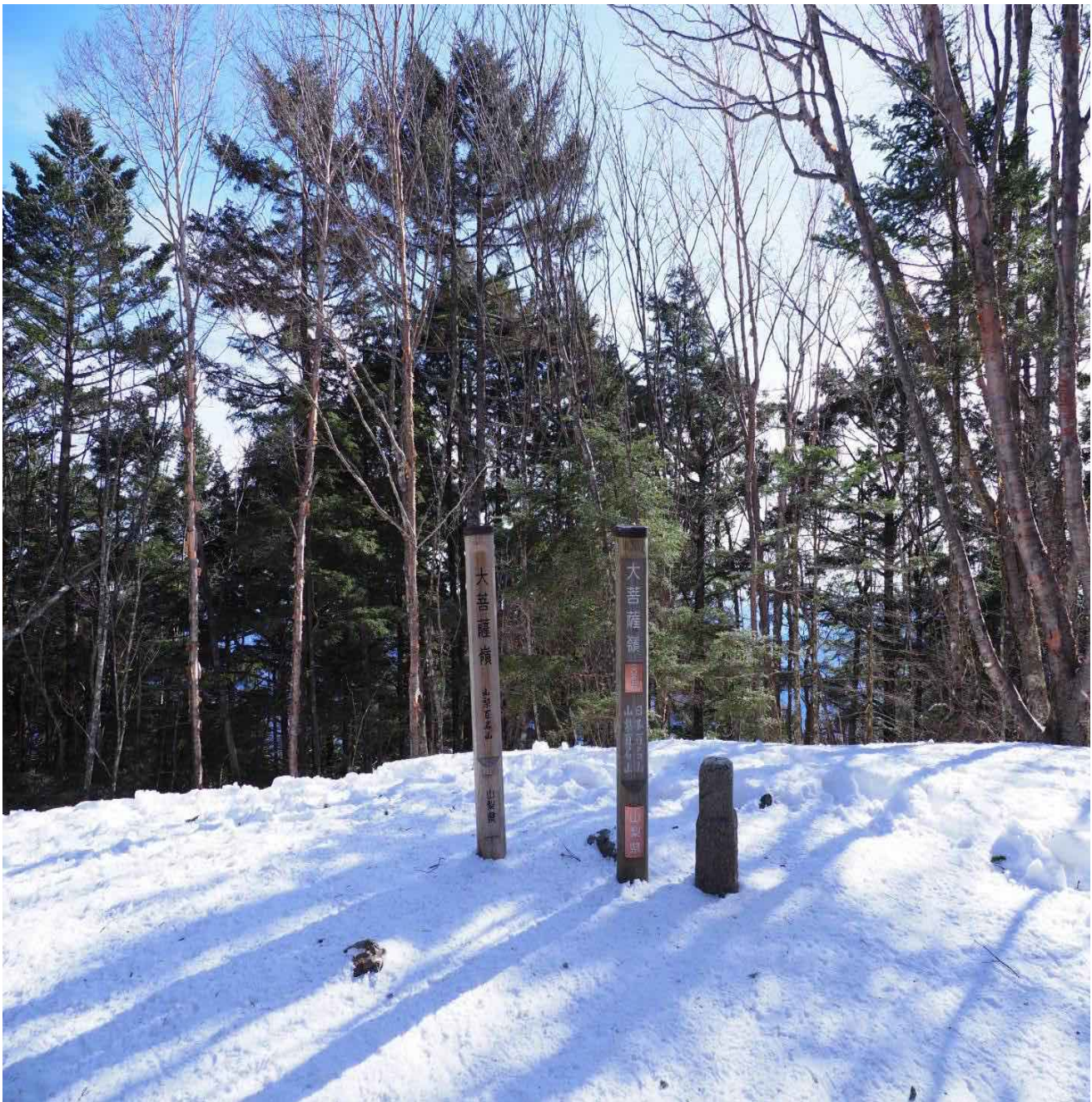
I am walking through a forest zone with a relatively steep slope for a while. I can gain altitude steadily because there is no snow around the area. The snow gradually appears in the mountain path. Since some parts of the road is frozen, I have to step forward with care.



After walking about two hours, I get to the Marukawa Pass, where I equip myself with crampons in a lodge named Marukawa-so. Other climbers are doing the same thing. It seems that it would be difficult for us to keep climbing without crampons. But we can climb safely even on a snowy slope with crampons. The route is easy to recognize and I can see the trace clearly. I'm climbing on the snowy slope for about one and a half hours. While walking, I don't feel cold. But once I take a rest, my body is getting cold in a moment. The plastic bottle of hot drink is almost frozen.



When I'm getting tired of the snow road, the sky opens and I have arrived at the summit of Mount Daibosatsu. Despite the summit, its visibility is too poor because of the forest zone surrounding it. I just take some pictures and head for a place called Kaminari-iwa (meaning thunderstone), which is a 10-minute walk from the summit.



The view of Mount Fuji and the Southern Alps from the point is awesome. Mount Fuji is the most clearly visible among my experiences to climb Mount Daibosastu and the snow-covered Southern Alps looks very close over the Kohfu basin. The Kaminari-iwa can be written with the kanji characters indicating it is a godlike rock. Ancient people once regarded it as a rock connecting to a god and seemed to pray for rain here. Also, it is said that the name derived from the fact that it is a path for thunderclouds.



Then, the walking on the ridge line from here to the Daibosatsu Pass is attractive enough to be considered the highlight of the climbing Mount Daibosatsu. If the weather permits, you can walk comfortably on a gentle slope while seeing Mount Fuji and the Southern Alps.



There is a big sign in the Daibosatsu Pass and a mountain hut called Kaizan-so, which is suitable for you to take a rest because it has a fine view. In the Edo era, the Daibosatsu Pass was historic spot and once known as a dangerous place between Tokyo and Yamanashi Prefectures.



The snow is decreased beyond the summit. So, I have to be careful while walking on rocky stretches with crampons. It ends up consuming much time. When I'm taking off my crampons, a climber coming from the other side is speaking to me. We have exchanged information with each other about the snow conditions in the mountain paths we have been climbing.



The mountain hut is closed in February when I'm climbing this time. But I had a chance to talk with the owner of Kaizan-so at the Daibosatsu Pass when I visited it last October (2017). At the time, I originally planned to meet the man from Yamaguchi Prefecture (refer to Episode 004) again, whom I had met before in Mount Amagi, but he couldn't come because of a typhoon approaching back then. Since I had already made a plan, I climbed the mountain soon after the typhoon had passed. The sky was not as clear as I expected, though. At the visit, I came by car to the Kaminikkawa Pass and arrived at the Daibosatsu Pass in the early morning. The owner of the mountain hut pointed in the direction of Tokyo and said, "If the weather permits, you can see the Tokyo Skytree in the morning." This time, although it is before the sky is getting bright, I can barely see the Skytree and take pictures of it with a telephoto lens. Also, the owner said to me, "The night view of the Kohfu Basin is really great, so I would like you to stay here someday in the future." I think I will stay at this Kaizan-so at the fourth time.



Souvenirs are sold here and you can enjoy only by looking them. I have bought a shop curtain (or “Noren” in Japanese), printing all the names of Japanese 100 Great Mountains on it. In fact, I buy the pin badge of the mountain each time I climb one of the 100 mountains. I plan to attach the pin badges at each mountain name of the shop curtain. I’m really looking forward to seeing the shop curtain with all the pin badges when I complete Japanese 100 Great Mountains.



I have descended to the Kaminikkawa Pass and found the snow is so heavy that it would be difficult to come here by car. I need another hour to return to the Marukawa Pass to pick up my own vehicle. I dare not to put on the crampons because I think I don't need that. But the mountain path is frozen with still-remaining snow, which makes me slipper and fall several times.



A photograph of a two-story building with a balcony and a sign that reads "甲州名物 ほうとう 山崎 番屋茶屋 山崎 ぼ うどん ユーピー". The building has a light-colored facade and a dark roof. A sign on the balcony reads "甲州名物 ほうとう". The sign on the ground floor reads "山崎 番屋茶屋 山崎 ぼ うどん ユーピー". The building is located on a street corner, and there is a paved area in front of it. The background shows a hillside with trees and a clear blue sky.

Since I want to eat it soon, I enter the restaurant and am warmly welcomed by an open-hearted proprietress. Several guests seem to have just climbed down the mountain, so I enjoy talking with them about mountains. The homely atmosphere makes me feel relaxed. The plenty of well-simmered vegetables in the Hoto matches the miso taste very well. I eat it up quickly and my cold body is warmed.



After that, I head for a hot spring called “Daibosatsu-no-Yu”, which is a few minutes drive from the restaurant. The hot spring features its globally rare, highest level of alkaline. The slimy hot water is soft and comfortable and gets rid of my fatigue. I think regional dishes and hot springs are the best match, so I would like to savor it in and around the mountains where I will visit in the future.

Episode 012: Mount Kirigamine



I frequently checked the weather forecast these days because I wanted to climb snow-covered Mount Tanigawa (or Tanigawa-dake in Japanese). After we had rainy days at the end of March (2018), they said we would finally have a good weather in a few days. So, I decided to go to the mountain on the day. The forecast in the morning said it would be sunny in Gunma Prefecture, where Mount Tanigawa belongs. On the other hand, a website specializing in mountain weather said we would have an inclement weather at Mount Tanigawa. I knew mountain weather is easily changeable, so I had decided to head for it anyway, expecting the weather to improve. Generally, many mountaineers use the ropeway to get to Tenjindaira and reach the summit after climbing for about two and a half hours.



While driving to the mountain, the weather was fine. But it was snowing when I arrived at the ropeway station and the vision was so white that I couldn't see anything beyond that. According to the forecast, the weather wouldn't improve until the afternoon. I thought I had to give up this time. Getting back to Tokyo by car, I ate chocolate that I had bought as high-energy food. But the blue sky in the direction of Tokyo urged me to climb a mountain. I checked the forecast again and found the weather in the direction of Yatsugatake Mountains was stable. It seemed that I could manage to climb Mount Kirigamine because it was considered the mountain that you need to the shortest time to climb among Japanese 100 Great Mountains. Suddenly though, I decided to move from Gunma to Nagano Prefecture.



It had been sunny on the way and I didn't believe the bad weather at Mount Tanigawa. The blue sky was all clear at the Venus line leading to the starting point of Mount Kirigamine. I took pictures at an observatory deck in the middle and came to the parking lot called Kurumayamakata with an altitude of 1,800 meters.



The highest peak of Mount Kirigamine is Mount Kuruma, with an altitude of 1,925 meters. The mountains are mild enough to enjoy hiking rather than climbing. You can go up to the summit by ropeway conveyor or by chairlift. If you climb from a parking lot, you need less than one hour to reach the top by walking on a gentle slope. A weather radar dome has been installed at the summit of Mount Kuruma and the white spherical object is conspicuous from any direction.



When I get there, it has already been past noon. Still, I don't feel uneasy because I have a fine view and the course is easy to understand. The snow is not piled up high, so I can enjoy snow-hiking rather than climbing. First, I'm heading for Mount Chocho-miyama, with an altitude of 1,836 meters. The road on which I'm walking is maintained with planks and covered with about 10-centimeter-deep snow. No steep uphill. I have reached the top in 20 to 30 minutes. The summit is spacious and the view from here is excellent. As the ground was almost completely covered with snow, I put my backpack on a rock protruding from the snow field and have a light meal. I guess there would be lots of visitors here during summer because of its coolness. Although I can see only one family beside me today, I myself like this quiet snow scene during the winter.



After savoring the scenery at the summit to the full, I'm heading for Yashimagahara Marsh ahead. This marsh and other Kirigamine moorlands are designated as national natural monuments. Alpine plants are in full bloom during summer and the species reach several hundreds.



I see some ski traces here and there beyond Mount Choco-Miyama, but with no footprint. Then, I'm advancing on the beautifully snow-covered field. At times, I am knee-deep in the snow. Even though I don't recognize which part of the ground is a road, anyway, I'm heading for the direction of a moorland. Still, I don't have to be worried that I might get lost because this course commands a fine view.



While I'm walking, animal footprints continue on the snow field in places. I enjoy imagining what kind of animals passed here and when. For the preservation, the marsh is surrounded by fences to prevent sika deer (or Japanese deer) from entering. When I reach the point, I have to unlock and open the fence, get through it, and close and lock again by myself. The marsh is covered with snow during this season. I have a sense of spaciousness in this vast field and I want to come back here again in the summer when alpine plants are in full bloom.



I keep walking alone on a path along the moorland in silence. Even in the distance, I can see the weather radar dome. So, I always know where I am now. After fully enjoying the snow-hiking for nearly three hours, I have returned to Kurumayamakata the starting point.



Although it's at around 16:00, the sky is still bright. All I have to do is to climb to the top. Leaving the backpack behind, I only take the camera and start climbing. Finally, I have arrived in front of the weather radar dome which I have seen all the time. From the summit, Yatsugatake Mountains covered with clouds, the Southern Alps, and Mount Asama can be seen clearly. Also, I can recognize the course I have tramped today.



It seems that the name “Mount Kuruma” derives from the fact that the mountain looks similar to Daihachi-guruma (large two-wheeled cart) as viewed from Lake Suwa. The weather radar at the summit was installed in 1999 as a successor to the weather radar which had been working at Mount Fuji. The one at Mount Fuji was active during the period between 1964 and 1999. After that, the one here at Mount Kuruma and another one in Shizuoka Prefecture were installed as substitutes. In this white spherical dome, an antenna with a diameter of 4 meters is rotating while emitting radio waves to measures the wind. As this observatory is remote controlled by the Meteorological Agency in Tokyo, the facility is usually unattended. Observed data is used not only for weather forecast but also for announcement of disaster weather information to prevent disasters caused by concentrated heavy rain from occurring. By the way, the spherical cover, called “Radome”, plays a role to protect the antenna from the natural environment such as wind and rain, sunlight, and so on.



I also visit Mount Kuruma Shrine standing behind the weather radar. We sometimes see a small shrine at a mountaintop. Among them, Mount Kuruma Shrine is relatively large and even has a main building surrounded by four pillars and a torii (shinto-style sacred gate) at the front side. This area was once developed as a tourist site for driving or skiing during the Japanese economic miracle. As time goes by, Mount Kuruma Shrine is worshipped by people visiting here to pray for their peace and quiet.



The more the sun is declining, the stronger the wind is getting. My hands holding the camera begin shivering. But since I got here late, I can fully savor the quiet summit scenery before the sunset.



Episode 013: Mount Nikko-Shirane



One day in the last ten days of April (2018), I was considering which mountain to climb on the next day because the weather forecast said it would be sunny nationwide. First, I was thinking of Mount Tanigawa (with an altitude of 1,977 meters) which I gave up the last time (refer to Episode 12). But according to the information on the Internet, most of the snow on the mountain seemed to have already melted away. Since I had the desire to climb a snow mountain again, I had decided to head for Mount Nikko-Shirane, with an altitude of 2,578 meters. Usually, you can climb this mountain from the mountain top station after getting on the ropeway. It was not available in this season, though. If there are only a small number of climbers, I would be able to enjoy a quiet mountaineering. That was the decisive factor why I had selected the mountain this time.

The day is at the beginning of Golden Week (a spring holiday week in Japan). Thanks to the early departure at the previous night, I have reached a starting point for climbing after smoothly and comfortably driving through Iroha Slope and Lake Chuzenji in Nikko City, which are usually expected to be heavily crowded. The altitude of the starting point is 1,735 meters and the beginning part of the climbing route is already covered with snow.



The snowy level ground continues and then I'm climbing a snow-covered forest zone. You can advance by checking the marks on the tree branches. Some of the marks are not noticeable, so I might get lost without the traces on the snow ground. I try to walk on the beaten path. Still, I sometimes make mistakes. I mean, I accidentally have my legs buried completely in the snow while walking. If this happens, I end up consuming extra energy. So, I need to prevent this from happening as less as possible.



The snow is deeper than I expected. There are some places where I'm buried even by my crotch. The slope is gradually getting steeper. After about two-hour climbing, I have reached Midaga Pond, whose surface is frozen. Mount Nikko-Shirane is towering in front of the pond. It is an ideal place to take a rest.

In a short rest at Midaga Pond, I take pictures with other climbers. The altitude here is 2,317 meters and a steep slope leads to the summit for over 200 meters. I put on the crampons and start climbing the final slope.



A group of five veteran-like climbers is preceding me. They are climbing a very steep slope and I follow them. It seems that the route is not on the map and unusually sharp. But I optimistically think it wouldn't be a problem because there is a clearly beaten path like a stairway. However, the angle is gradually getting sharper with the higher altitude. When looking upward and backward, I am struck by a sudden fear.



If I lose balance, I will slide down to the bottom in a flash. So, I kick the snow with the crampons several times at each step to secure a foothold, shorten up on the stock, and stick it deep into the snow. Like a crawling on the surface of the snow, I'm ascending little by little. When I take a rest in the middle, I look around and am healed by the snow-covered scenery in the distance. Then, finally, I manage to reach a bare rock with no snow. Looking down, I am surprised how steep the slope I have climbed is.



I see some mountaineers climbing up on a rocky cliff with ropes. Almost no snow is seen from here to the summit, so I remove the crampons to prepare for climbing a steep rocky stretch. There are a lot of climbers at the top. Since I haven't seen many climbers in my route, I am a bit surprised by the number of them.



Mount Nikko-Shirane is the highest among the mountains in and north of the Kanto region. The official name is Mount Shirane, but it is generally called Mount Nikko-Shirane to distinguish it from Mount Kusatsu-Shirane. Mount Nikko-Shirane is an active volcano just like Mount Kusatsu-Shirane, which had an eruption about three months ago (in January 2018).

This mountain has volcanic lakes such as Goshikinuma Pond and Midaga Pond on the mountainside. In summer, you can see the beautiful light blue color of the lakes from the summit. Around volcanic lakes are filled with alpine plants in bloom. Shirane-aoi, which was an alpine plant named after this mountain, are about to be exterminated because they are eaten by deer. So, people try to protect them by installing electric fences or transplanting their seedlings.



The summit has a roughly rocky terrain, from which you can overlook the Alps mountains and savor its magnificent views whichever direction you see. Especially, Mount Nantai, one of Japanese 100 Great Mountains, is conspicuously standing by Lake Chuzenji.

At the mountaintop signs of Mount Nikko-Shirane, I have taken photographs with other climbers. The area around the sign is narrow. But, a rocky place, a little away from it, is spacious and many climbers take a rest and have a lunch there.



I too have a lunch at the place while seeing Mount Nantai and take photographs when I feel like doing so. Then, I have decided to climb down on a general route, which is through Goshikinuma Pond. Because this mountain has been worshipped people since ancient times, there is a small shrine near the summit. Although the snow on the mountain seems to be melting, I'm climbing down the rocky stretches while seeing snow valleys in some places.



After a while, I need to traverse the snowy slope. The term “traverse” is to cross the mountain slope and I have to be careful enough not to slip down. The slope was as steep as an uphill, so I have a fear again. Although there is a trace on the snow, if I slide down, I will straight fall down into the invisible bottom of a gorge. So, I carefully advance step by step while using the edge of the crampons. It is difficult for me to look back because I'm afraid of losing the balance. Still, I have finally managed to cross over it. After that, while struggling the deep snow not to have my legs buried, I'm descending steadily.



The traces of climbing shoes are continuing. I notice some of them come with slipped marks. They are the traces of “Shirissade”, a method in which you can smoothly climb down the snowy mountain. With your butt on the slope, by putting your legs forward, you can slide down while controlling the speed with your heels. If you get a proper angle, you will easily climb down in an instant. By the way, the method in which you slide down with your legs while taking the standing posture is called “Glissade”. This time I try Sirissade, by which I can climb down in a short time while enjoying the feeling as if I rode on a sled. Shortening the time required, I have arrived at a swamp named Goshikinuma. The swamp looks bright blue in summer, whereas the surface is frozen in this season. With the snow around it, the swamp has an impressive scenery and I take pictures of it with my smartphone. I wish to take pictures with a single-lens reflex camera as well and try to pick it up from a side bag. However, the bag is empty for some reason.



I guess I must have dropped my camera from the unzipped side bag when I slid down by doing “Shirissade” a while ago. I have never lost my camera during climbing. With a great shock, I have turned pale. The mountain photographs I have recently taken, including today’s ones, are stored in it. More than anything, I really like the camera itself. So, I need to find it out one way or another. If someone is descending, I would ask the one about my camera. But since no one seems to appear, I can do nothing but put on the crampons again and begin climbing on the slope I have just slid down. I’m

carefully ascending while slowly looking around because my camera might have slid down the slope after dropping from the bag.

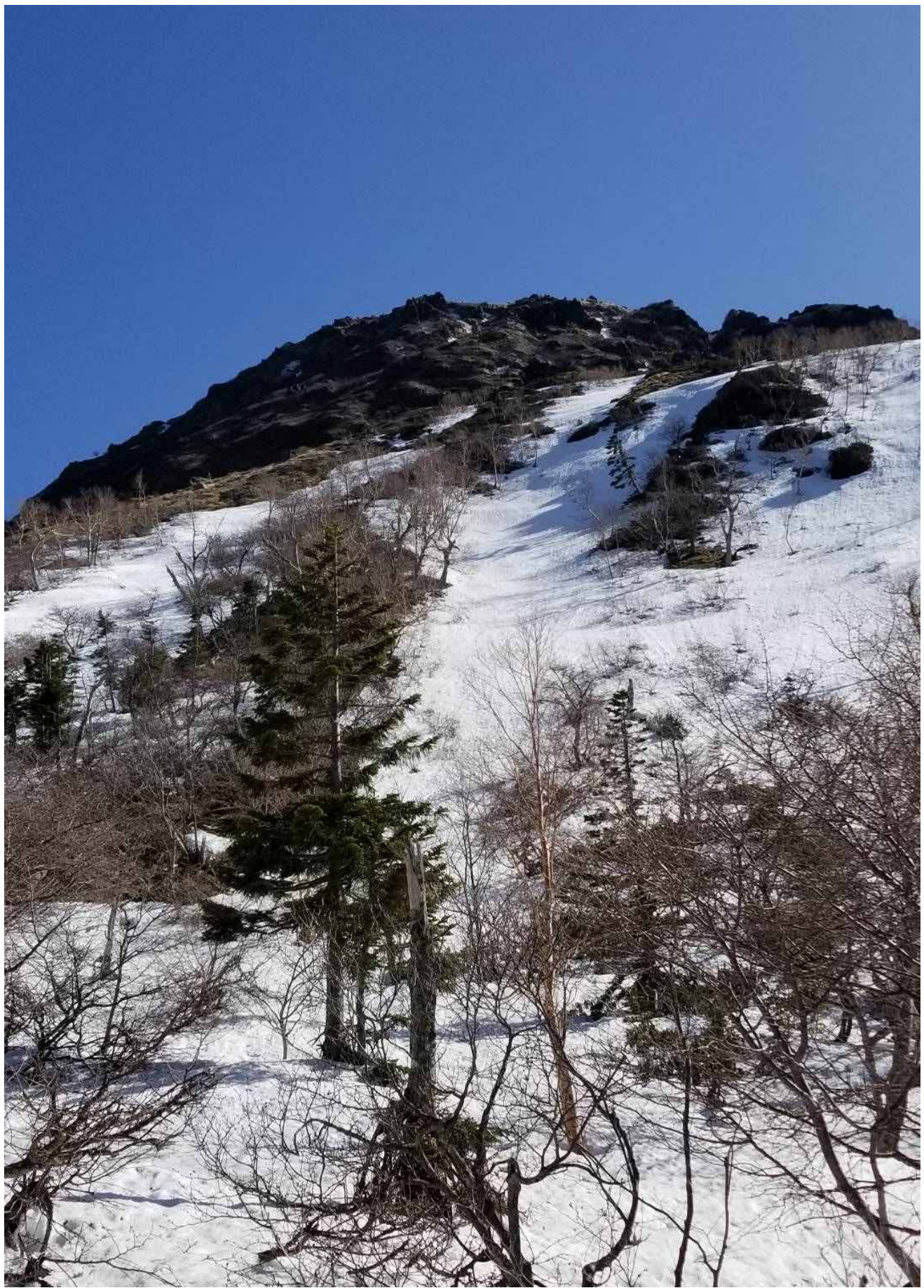
I don't want to waste time here because it would take more than two hours to climb down the mountain. The time I can spend is probably within 30 minutes. After climbing for a while, I have found the camera in the middle of the snowy slope more easily than expected. I'm so relieved that I kneel down in the snow. After that, I don't feel like doing "Shirissade" again and walk down the slope.



When washing the crampons at Goshikinuma, I witness a deer on my way to the Midaga pond. The deer doesn't seem to run away but it is seeing me from the shade of a tree. Since then, I have walked down very smoothly since then and finished climbing down before dark.



This time I enjoyed climbing the snowy mountain. But more than that, it became a memorable mountaineering because I experienced the fear at the steep slope and dropped my camera.



Episode 014: Mount Makihata



One sunny day before the rainy season starts (2018), I'm going to make a day trip to Mount Makihata, located on the border between Niigata and Gunma Prefectures. This mountain is known as a great one around the Joetsu border with a legend of Orihime (imaginary princess). Although its altitude is shorter than 2,000 meters, its graceful and magnanimous appearance attracts many people.

Textile manufacture has prospered since ancient times at the foot of the mountain in former Muikamachi and Shiozawamachi, Minami Uonuma City. People living in the villages talk about the legend in which some saw a beautiful woman was weaving in the mountain. It is said to be the origin of the mountain name ("makihata" indicates weaving instruments) and Mount Makihata has been worshipped as a god of weaving and silkworm raising.

Once upon a time, one youth went into the mountain to search for medicinal herbs for his sickly mother and got lost in the way. At the time, he encountered a beautiful maiden who was weaving. When carrying her on his back, she said, "I will show you the way unless you don't look back." But the legend told us that he looked back in the middle and lost the eyesight of one eye.



I spent the last night in my car at a rest area on a highway. I entered Niigata Prefecture before dawn and headed for a starting point for mountaineering while seeing the peaceful rural landscapes. When I have arrived there at around 4:30 am, more than 10 vehicles have already been parked at a parking lot that can accommodate about 100 cars. Despite the early hour, more cars are coming one after another.



According to my research in advance, there seem to be still unmelted snow in part. But since the amount is not as much as I need a pickaxe and crampons, I come there with relatively light equipment. By the time I start climbing at 5 am, it is bright enough and the morning sun makes me feel good.



A turning point soon appears and the path is divided into two courses. One is Ido-one (Well-like Ridge) course for general climbers and the other is Tengu-one (Demon's Ridge) course with a higher degree of difficulty. The latter has many regulations and requires sufficient equipment. So, this time I have decided to choose the former.

Climbing through a forest zone filled with dazzling fresh green leaves for about an hour, I have reached the 5th station, where I can see a waterfall running down in a steep valley. When I'm taking photographs, the sun is just rising from the valley.



The following 6th station has an observatory, from which the Mount Waremeki, standing next to Mount Makihata, looks beautiful. Also, the place is suitable to take a break. Then, climbing in another forest zone for a while, I have arrived at the 7th station when about two hours have passed from the start. With the altitude higher than the tree line, the wide open view makes me feel comfortable.

A steep slope follows it and long wooden stairs have been installed in the middle. It reminds me of “Stupid Ridge” of Tanzawa Mountains (refer to Episode 3). Although I’m really exhausted, I climb slowly and have reached the 9th station. Obviously, this point is not the summit as it has a sign with the letters of “Nise Mount Makihata” (meaning “Fake Summit of Mount Makihata”).



After that, you can enjoy a wonderful walking on the mountain ridge because the rest of the course doesn't have steep slopes. It was such a hard route up to this point that I'm especially impressed with the scenery from here.

Some parts of the road are covered with snow, followed by many ponds called "Orihime-no-Ike" which reflects the sky like a mirror. Asian Skunk Cabbage (or Mizubasho in Japanese) is in bloom and many mountaineers stop here to take pictures.



In the middle of an uphill slope from “Orihime-no-Ike”, a mountaintop square called “Ohataya” suddenly appears, where several climbers are sitting on benches to rest. There is a mountaintop sign indicating an altitude of 1,967 meters. So, many would think this place must be the summit of Mount Makihta. However, the real summit with the highest peak is another place, which is about 10 minutes’ walk from here.

Fortunately, I know the fact because I checked the information regarding this mountain beforehand. I hear that some climbers mistakenly go down from here without realizing it. In fact, I meet some climbers who know it for the first time and are surprised.



It would be a pity if someone goes down before he or she reaches the real summit although climbing all the way up to this point.

So, I myself start heading for the real summit right away. After walking through a meadow-like path, around which some ponds make me feel the spaciousness, I only find a cairn (a pile of stones). If you don't have the information, it would be difficult for you to recognize it as the summit.



I first think the mountaintop sign is standing at Ohataya to conserve the vegetation or to offer climbers the fine view from the square with it. But I check and know the true reason. It seems that ancient people regarded Ohataya as the summit for purpose of worshipping a god of weaving at the place. Then, I walk beyond the cairn and extend the mountaineering to the summit of Mount Ushigatake. This wonderful walking on the mountain ridged reminds me of Mount Aizu-Komagatake (refer to Episode 006) that I conquered before. It is not strange even if the two mountains have similar appearances because they are not so far from each other.



While coming back from the cairn to Ohataya, I see Mount Waremeki in the opposite direction. I got the information beforehand that a route to the mountain has still so much snow that it would be dangerous without crampons. However, judging from the condition of the snow and the slope, it doesn't seem to cause a serious problem as long as I step forward carefully. Although my legs feel so tired, I don't have an option not to come there. The entire figure of the mountain can be seen on the way. Unlike Mount Makihata, it is steep and sharp. It has a great view and gives me a feeling as if I were at a higher place than its actual altitude.



As I have been climbing since the early morning, I start descending before noon. Again, I take pictures at Orihime-no-Ike, where I did so while ascending. Unlike the scenery I saw while ascending, the ponds are reflecting the clouds. It gives me an impression like a paradise in the sky.



After that, I'm climbing down a monotonous path endlessly. I am passing other climbers and being passed by others so repeatedly that I feel as if it continues forever.



Originally, I planned to go to a particular hot spring that was indicated on a sign at the parking lot I used. But in the end, I have decided to head for another hot spring listed in a guidebook because I think the first hot spring might be crowded with other climbers. One male climber, who is descending at almost the same pace as mine, comes to the hot spring and we meet again in the facility. He says he comes from Ibaraki Prefecture and stayed last night in his car parked at a rest area on a highway. While soaking in the hot spring, we enjoy talking about mountains for a while.

The rainy season is about to begin in the Kanto region, so it might be difficult for me to climb a mountain on a fine day until the end of the season. Still, I think I could appreciate the afterglow of this achievement.



Episode 015: Mount Kinpu



The rainy season was over earlier than usual (2018), so I have decided to climb Mount Kinpu in Yamanashi Prefecture on a day trip. It's my second time to Mount Kinpu. This time I'm climbing with a person whom I met at a mountain hut and had dinner together in Mount Jonen last year (refer to Episode 008). Sending the photographs to each other back then, we have kept in touch since then. Because of her transfer to Tokyo from the Kansai region (western Japan), it has become easier for her to climb a mountain in the Kanto region (eastern Japan). It is the reason why we are climbing together. As she has something to do in the evening, we have chosen Mount Kinpu that we can easily climb and go back in a day.

Mount Kinpu, with an altitude of 2,599 meters, has a conspicuous appearance. There is a stack of huge rocks at the summit and it is called "Gojo-seki". Among several climbing routes, we have chosen the shortest one from the Ohdarumi Pass on the east side. The pass, our starting point, has an altitude of 2,360 meters, which is the highest in Japan among passes that vehicles can get through. The difference in elevation between the pass and the summit is small and many parts of the route are flat roads. So, you can climb from the pass relatively easily.



It is a hot day and the temperature reaches above 30 degrees Celsius. But when I have arrived at the Ohdarumi Pass, I feel the air is cool. Although I see the blue sky on the way, the starting point is covered with white clouds. Since the course time is not so long (about 4 hours to get there and back), we have started climbing at a later hour than usual (at 9:30 am).

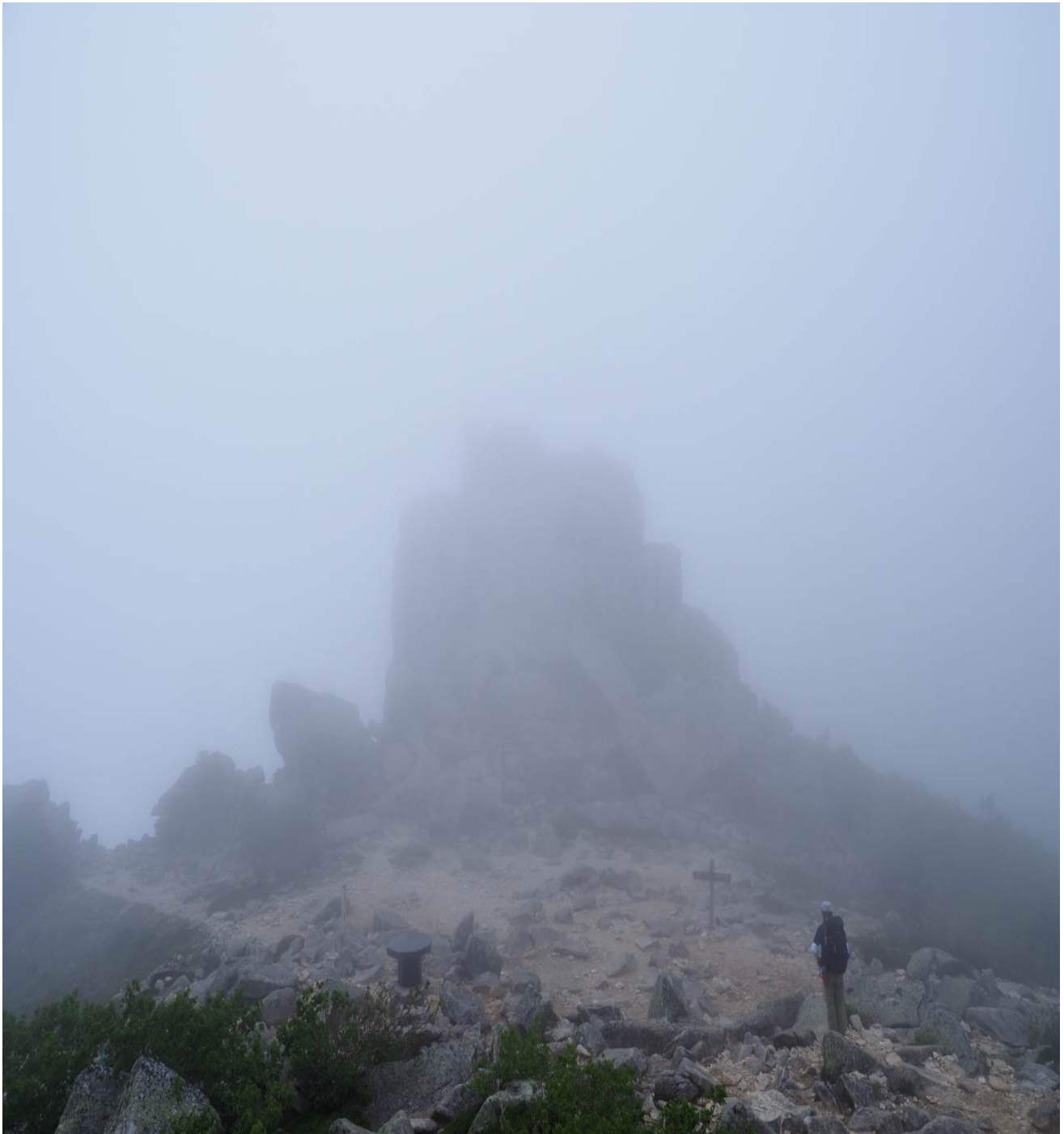
At first, we are walking through a forest zone of *Abies veitchii*. Most parts are flat and we can move forward at a quick pace. It's already getting warmer. Taking off my jacket, I go on climbing.



After climbing up and down repeatedly, we have reached a rocky stretch in front of Mount Asahigatake, one of the mountains we are getting through, where a broad view opens up and we can appreciate the beautiful scenery. Even though some parts are covered with clouds, it uplifts me because we haven't had an open view until then. A blue sky spread in the distance and we can recognize Mount Mizugaki, whose protruding rocks are impressive, close to us. On a fine day, it could be an excellent shooting spot where you can see Mount Asama and Yatsugatake Mountains in the north and the Southern Alps and Mount Fuji in the south.



We start climbing down a steep slope and then keep ascending again to the summit of Mount Kinpu. Before long, we have crossed the tree line and reached the ridge line which have a pile of cairn with thick-grown creeping pine (Japanese stone pine). By the time, the sky has been covered completely with the clouds. While stepping forward on the road consisting of huge rocks, we can see “Gojo-seki”, the symbol of Mount Kinpu, in the distance. One time, it vanished into the fog. Another time, its entire figure can be barely recognized when some parts of the fog are cleared.



The gigantic “Gojo-seki” was as tall as 20 meters. When I stand right in front of it, the hugeness is overwhelming. It is really mysterious that such an enormous rock is standing at such a high altitude. The figure is so well-formed that I cannot but think it might have been artificially made. The fog makes the rock looming up look more mysterious. By the way, during my previous visit, the rock was in the fog like this time and another climber told me he always saw it in the fog. It seems difficult to see “Gojo-seki” under the clear blue sky.



My climbing companion carries a mill to drink coffee. We grind the beans to prepare for authentic coffee. Before we start descending, we have a luxury time by appreciating the delicacy of bean-ground coffee while seeing “Gojo-seki”.



When I was browsing the Internet about Mount Kinpu a few days after I finished climbing the mountain, I saw a photograph of “Gojo-seki” in fine weather in someone’s blog. I was fascinated by the beauty and craved to see the stone standing against the clear blue sky.

Another several days have passed. One sunny day, I am going to climb Mount Mizugaki, my next target among Japanese 100 Great Mountains. Since Mount Kinpu is located near Mount Mizugaki, I have decided to head for “Gojo-seki” again through another course.

The weather is perfect and the forecast says it will be getting hotter than the previous time. So, I have started climbing before 5:00 am. By using Fujimidaira Hut as a foothold on this climbing route, you can climb both Mount Kinpu and Mount Mizugaki in a single day.



This time the difference in elevation is about 1,200 meters, although it was about 240 meters in the previous course. It gives me an impression of authentic mountaineering. As I am getting through a forest zone for a while, I do not feel too much heat fortunately. The blue sky is so clear that I feel as if I were being absorbed into it. Looking forward to seeing “Gojo-seki”, I am climbing step by step.



Once you pass through the forest zone, a broad view opens up suddenly. As you step forward, you will be welcomed by the more wonderfully spectacular view. This place, whose south side is a precipitous cliff, is called “Chiyo-no-fukiage”. The beauty of the shape makes us feel the greatness of the nature of the earth.



There is a legend here like this. Once upon a time, a married couple tried to climb Mount Kinpu which women weren't allowed to climb back then. The wife named Chiyo slipped down near here. The husband was afraid of the curse of mountain god, fasting, and praying for it desperately. It is said that the Chiyo was blown up from the bottom of the valley and returned. (The word "fukiage" means "blown up".)



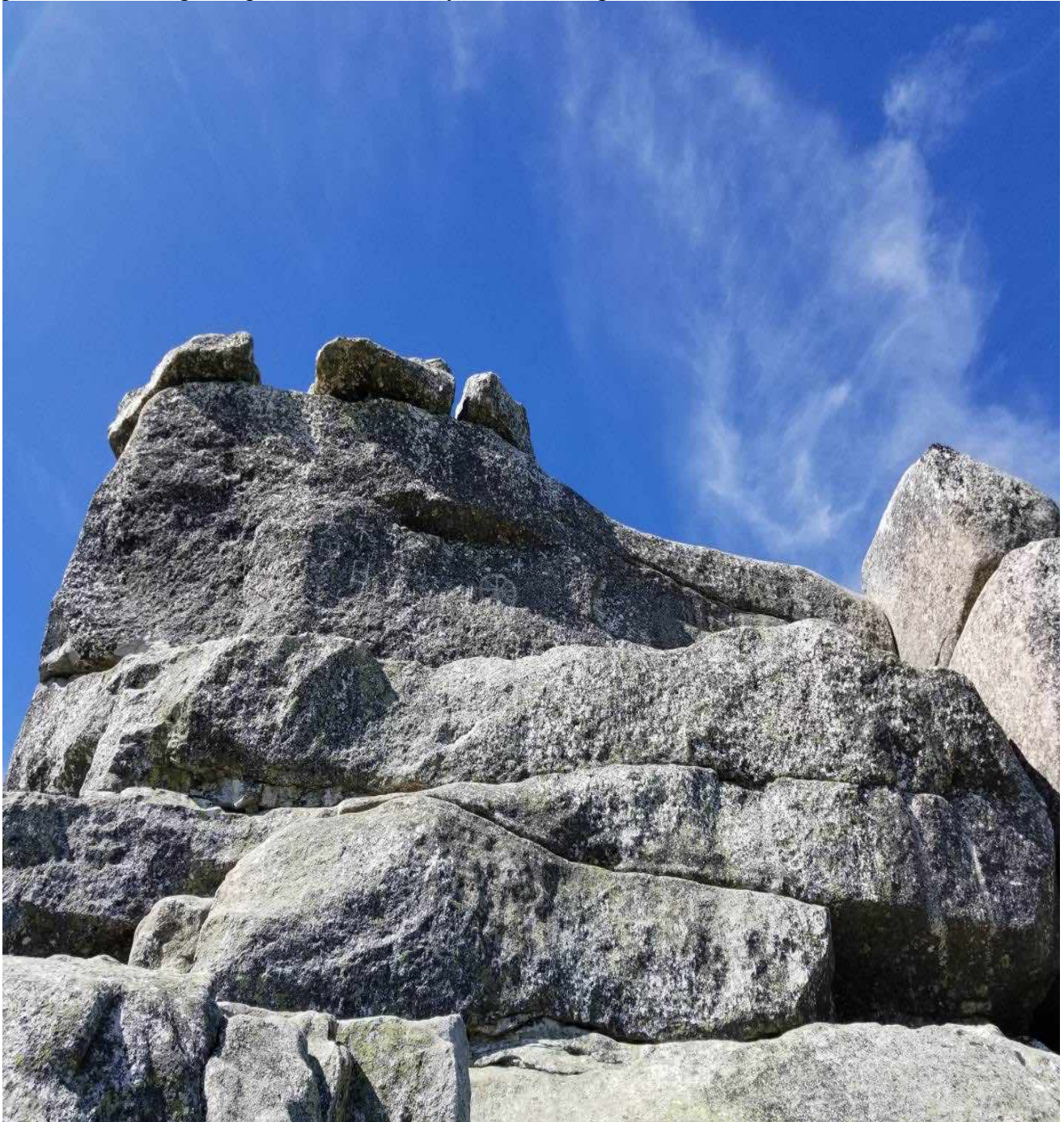
From the cliff called "Chiyo-no-fukiage", you can overlook Mount Kinpu and Mount Mizugaki. I am fascinated by the unique scenery in which rocks protrude here and there. Even Mount Fuji can be clearly seen in the far distance. Then, the gigantic "Gojo-seki" is standing conspicuously in the mountain route ahead of me.



It is hugely enjoyable for me to climb up the rocks while seeing the panoramic view in both sides. At last, I have reached “Gojo-seki” and finally been able to see it under the clear blue sky as I saw it in someone’s blog.



Although this stone has been worshipped by people, climbing up this stone is not prohibited. It looks easy to climb. But in fact, it is quite difficult. The stone is too huge for us to find enough scaffolds. Many mountaineers try to climb and most of them end up giving up in the middle. I tried it twice in the past, each time I gave up, too. So, this is my third challenge.



Like the previous experiences, I can easily climb up to the middle part. After that, three difficult stages are waiting for me. When the timing is good, I jump to a huge rock with no scaffold. Then, I grab the rocks while keeping my balance, scramble steadily, clamber up the rocky stretch at the higher place, and have finally conquered it. I'm a little surprised that I can do it in this occasion more easily than expected. The top of the rock is flat, where I can savor the scenery while lying down on it. I get a sense of accomplishment and the scenery from the top of the "Gojo-seki" is excellent.

I have climbed Mount Kinpu twice in a short period of time and fully enjoyed different climbing styles. It has become unforgettable mountaineering.



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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