**The Hotaka Mountain Range**

The Hotaka mountain range includes 8 of the 21 mountains in Japan with elevations of over 3,000 meters. This is the heart of Chubusangaku National Park and home to the region’s most iconic peak, Mt. Yarigatake, which, true to its meaning in Japanese (“spear mountain”) tapers to a sharp point. Yarigatake is also called Japan’s Matterhorn for its resemblance to the well-known pyramidal peak that straddles the Swiss-Italian Alps.

 The rugged makeup of these relatively young mountains is the result of a geologic upthrust of granite strata that were then carved out by glacial activity some 10,000 years ago. This left huge, U-shaped curves that can be seen on the face of Mt. Yarigatake, for example. While these mountains are not particularly tall by global standards, the varied landscapes and precipitous inclines make this range an exciting and enjoyable place for climbers of all levels to test their skills and stamina.

 Besides its natural beauty, this area of the national park is also historically important, as it was the birthplace of Japanese mountaineering. It was here in the eighteenth century that an ascetic monk made the first known ascent of Mt. Yarigatake, and where a half-century later a British alpinist summited the mountain and coined the term “the Japanese Alps.” Over the next century, the sport of mountaineering developed at a rapid pace, eventually spreading to the rest of this mountainous country.

 Through a system of mountain huts and well-maintained trails of varying difficulty, the peaks are now accessible to hikers keen to experience the region’s stunning views, its diverse alpine flora and fauna, and the challenge of its steeper trails.