

## **Park History: Mining, Factories, and Railways**

The rapid, aggressive development of Japanese industry on Honshu was mirrored during the development of Hokkaido. There was little concern about natural preservation or sustainable development; Hokkaido was seen as a large, resource-rich area with a negligible indigenous population, a land that could be easily exploited to help grow the Japanese economy. With this mindset, mining became a major industry. Long before this was a national park, mining activity was occurring in places such as Noboribetsu and Bifue, and a gold mine was located right on the western shore of Lake Shikotsu.

Mining was not the only industry that left scars on the landscape. For example, the vast, virgin forests around Lake Shikotsu were desirable resources for paper companies seeking cheap raw materials. They soon began clearing the forests and building factories in nearby Tomakomai. In 1908 the Yamasen railway was built from Tomakomai to Lake Shikotsu to carry logs for pulp production, as well as to transport construction materials for a new power plant on the Chitose River. In support of the rail line, the Oji Paper Company bought a solid iron bridge and moved it to a location spanning the Chitose River, where it became known as the Yamasen Bridge.

In time, this area was designated a national park, and all the mines and factories were closed. Today, little remains to bear witness to the short period of heavy industry in this area. However, the bright red Yamasen railway bridge still stands, the oldest such structure in Hokkaido. It is a reminder of a time when economic development was deemed more important than environmental conservation.