

A Gold Medal in Reforestation

Until 1964, the Olympic Games were almost exclusively held in North America or Europe. So it was a very big deal when the Summer Olympics came to Tokyo in 1964, and just two years later, when Sapporo was selected as the venue for the 1972 Winter Olympics. Japan, which had never hosted the Olympics, would be able to host twice in a decade. The venue chosen for the alpine downhill skiing event was Mount Eniwa on the northwest side of Lake Shikotsu. Mount Eniwa is part of Shikotsu-Toya National Park, and the idea of cutting down part of a beautiful old forest to build ski runs was highly controversial. Other mountains closer to Sapporo City were to be used for ski jumping, alpine slalom, bobsleigh, and so forth, so why should Mount Eniwa be damaged just to make facilities for a sporting event that would last only ten days?

Eventually, opponents of using Mount Eniwa were persuaded, in part by the promise that the environment would be restored as soon as the Winter Games were finished, and that all the new facilities built for this event would be removed. As promised, the buildings and the ski runs were demolished right after the Olympics, and restoration work began. New trees were planted and ongoing maintenance continued for years. Today, it is still possible to see where the two-kilometer ski runs were located, but the mountain has nearly recovered and in a short time should heal completely.