

Nature and History

The Hiruzen Highlands is a plateau situated at 500–600 m above sea level. Jersey cows graze in pastures that look up to the Three Hiruzen Peaks of Mt. Kamihiruzen, Mt. Nakahiruzen, and Mt. Shimohiruzen. A variety of wildflowers, such as the dogtooth violet (*Erythronium japonicum*) and fringed galax (*Schizocodon soldanelloides*), grow along the climbing trails. A traditional land management practice, called *yamayaki*, has been carried out every spring for many generations. *Yamayaki* is a form of controlled burning that involves setting fire to the slopes of the mountains. This practice encourages the growth of new grass for the livestock to graze on, and helps to maintain the grassland habitat that supports the diverse insects and plants living in the area. Without the annual burn, the vegetation and environment would change, and the unique wildlife found here now would gradually disappear.

The Hiruzen Highlands are the largest and most famous breeding ground for Jersey cows in Japan. In springtime, visitors can view the mountains through a veil of *yamayaki* smoke, or watch the peaks pop up above a sea of clouds. The Kimendai Observatory, along the border of Okayama and Tottori prefectures, offers a breathtaking panorama extending from the Hiruzen Highlands to Mt. Daisen.

Activities

The Hiruzen Highlands offer superb hiking, camping, and cycling. There are several camping sites on these highlands, including a permanent glamping site that features tents hanging between trees, and a camping site with a great view of the grassland. The Hiruzen Highlands Cycling Course is about 30 km long, and hiking paths with extensive vistas lead up to the surrounding peaks.