

Mt. Oakan Profile

Mt. Oakan (1,371 m), standing to the east of Lake Akan, is popular with hikers for its sweeping views of the Akan area. It is one of Akan-Mashu National Park's most iconic peaks. From the summit, there is an all-encompassing view of the Akan Caldera and the lakes formed within it.

Originally the caldera contained a single, very large lake, but this was divided into several smaller lakes when multiple eruptions and lava flows created Mt. Oakan around 10,000 years ago. Lake Akan, Lake Panketo, and Lake Penketo are among the largest of these lakes.

The indigenous people of Hokkaido, the Ainu, called Mt. Oakan "Pinneshiri," meaning "male mountain." In Japan, mountains are sometimes considered either male or female depending on their shape. Mt. Oakan is conical with a single peak. Mt. Meakan, ("Machineshiri" in the Ainu language), to the southwest, has two distinct peaks and is considered female.

There is only one trail leading to the summit of Mt. Oakan. It is significantly more difficult than the trails on Mt. Meakan, so hiking experience and a good level of fitness are essential.

Mt. Oakan Trekking Trail

Mt. Oakan is a rewarding hike, with views of Lakes Panketo and Penketo, Lake Akan, and the wider Akan area. The path starts gently from the trailhead at the eastern end of Lake Akan, just off National Route 240. It winds along the eastern shore of the lake for a few hundred meters before passing between two very small lakes, Taro and Jiro. If you do not have time to climb to the peak of Oakan, consider at least walking the scenic initial stretch of the trail as far as Lake Jiro. The return trip takes around 40 minutes.

From Lake Jiro, the path rises precipitously through a mixed needleleaf and broadleaf forest with trees such as Sakhalin spruce, Sakhalin fir, and Erman's birch. Sakhalin spruce is distinguishable from Sakhalin fir by its needles: the spruce's needles are short and sharp, while those of the fir are soft and flat.

From around an altitude of 1,200 meters, the trail levels out, the forest becomes less dense, and taller trees give way to Japanese stone pines. From here, the hike gets significantly easier, and offers views of Lake Akan and Mt. Meakan. From June to July, purple-petaled keyflowers, Amur honeysuckle, and white-petaled Labrador tea plants grow in abundance. At the Eighth Station are stone columns and building foundations, which are the remains of a Japanese army weather station that operated from 1944 to 1946 to monitor weather at higher altitudes for military aircraft. This is a good spot for a rest.

The peak of Mt. Oakan is 20 minutes from the Eighth Station. The views from the peak are a rewarding end to a difficult climb.

Takiguchi

This small dam on the eastern edge of Lake Akan marks the start of the Mt. Oakan hiking trail, and is where the Akan River begins. At the trailhead, you will see a hiking register and warnings about bears. Be sure to fill out the register before starting your climb. Takiguchi is a scenic spot with views of Lake Akan. Pink and purple rhododendrons flower along the lakeside near the dam in summer and the leaves of trees turn vibrant colors in autumn.

Takimi Bridge

Takimi Bridge is a scenic spot popular in autumn for fall colors. It is not on the Mt. Oakan hiking trail, but it is only a few minutes by car from the turnoff to the trailhead on Route 240. The bridge spans the Akan River, fed by water from Lake Akan and Lake Taro. Views from the bridge are best from early to mid-October, when the fast-flowing river is framed by red-leaved maples and the yellow-leaved Japanese Judas trees.