

【Yumemidaira Hiking Trail】

The Yumemidaira Hiking Trail was created in 1991 by local businessman Tsukuda Noboru (1932–) and includes the site of a former lumber mill. This area was a lakebed some twenty-five thousand years ago, but volcanic activity has gradually raised it to an elevation of over 1,200 meters.

The hiking trail has many subalpine plants, especially in its marshy areas. When clearing the path, Tsukuda came upon a pond of flowering Asian skunk cabbage that seemed like a mirage, so he named the trail *yumemidaira* (“Dream-seeing Plain”). The pond is located on the Rabbit Course just beyond the turnoff to the Fox Course.

Rabbits were once common here, but the lumber workers saw them as pests who ate tree saplings, so foxes were brought in from Hokkaidō to control their numbers. Today, this area is inhabited by monkeys, Japanese serows, Himalayan cuckoos, and other wildlife.

The top of the steps that lead southwest to the Yumemidaira trailhead is a fine vantage point for surveying the surrounding mountains. Mt. Hiuchi (2,462 m) is the tallest, and plumes of volcanic smoke can sometimes be seen rising from Mt. Yake (2,400 m).

(Note: toilet facilities are available at the beginning of the Rabbit Course and along the Fox Course.)

Rabbit Course (Nature walk, 3 km, 2 hours)

Asian fawn lilies (*katakuri*) bloom along this path from late May through early June. A few minutes of walking will bring hikers to Mino Pond and its neighboring stone frog statue, which represents the frogs and Japanese black salamanders who lay their eggs there in June. The path then straightens and runs along an old rail line, where horse-drawn carts were once used to transport lumber to what is now Kurohime Station, 20 kilometers away.

Farther along the trail is a small shrine to Inari Ōkami, a patron deity of rice and agriculture who is also commonly associated with foxes. The shrine is thought to date back to the Edo period (1603–1867), but it was abandoned at some point in the past and only rediscovered when the trail was created. According to some folk beliefs, Inari descends from the mountains in spring to protect the rice crops. Appropriately, this shrine was originally located halfway up Mt. Shindō but has been relocated to a spot between two Japanese oak trees (*mizunara*) lower down the mountain, from where Inari can watch over hikers.

Fox Course (Nature and history walk, 10 km, 4.5 hours)

The beginning of this course is dominated by two groves of Japanese larch trees (*karamatsu*), which are prized as lumber for the sturdiness of their wood. There are rest facilities beyond the second grove.

Nearby, a dead-end path branches off toward a 300-year-old *katsura* tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*), which stands 20 meters tall with a diameter of 3.5 meters. When the leaves change color in autumn, they give off a sweet scent.

(Note: taking this path will add another hour to the hike.)

Beyond the second grove is the site of the former Takada Forestry Office lumber mill, which once employed around 100 people. It was built in 1932 and operated for about two decades. The residential area included an elementary school and extended to Hyōzawa Jinja shrine beside the old charcoal kiln.

During the early twentieth century, the trees in this area were milled into building materials and lumber for making skis, and the tree branches were used to produce charcoal. The area was once populated with beech, Japanese horse chestnut, Japanese white birch, and Erman's birch trees, but these have been replaced by Japanese cedar, Japanese larch, and Japanese white birch.

The nearby Hyōzawa River marks the border between Niigata and Nagano prefectures.