The Camellias of Ashizuri

Cape Ashizuri is renowned for its groves of some 60,000 camellia (*tsubaki*) shrubs. They bloom in winter, adding touches of red and pink to the cape. The landscape is not entirely natural; it was formed as a result of local people cutting down trees in the area for wood. *Ubame-gashi* oak was used as firewood, while Simon bamboo was used for everything from reinforcing walls to making bamboo baskets. These baskets were used in the smoking of bullet tuna to make Tosashimizu's famous *sodabushi* fish fillets. Only the camellias were left standing, as their most valuable product was the oil extracted from the seed of their fruit. This oil is still used in beauty products today.

When the modernization of building materials removed demand for Simon bamboo, the fast-growing plant was left to flourish, and eventually came to threaten the camellias by encroaching on their habitat. In 2016, the Cape Ashizuri Association for the Protection of Nature, the Ministry of the Environment, and several other parties came together to start the Camellia Regeneration Project, which aims to plant 20,000 new camellias using seeds from the cape's existing shrubs. The bamboo is mostly cut down to make room for the camellias, but is left standing along the shore to provide shelter from the strong sea wind.