

### **Contemporary History of Okunikko (from 1945)**

The number of tourists to Okunikko rapidly increased after the end of World War II, and the infrastructure was also expanded quickly to support this influx. The first wave of visitors consisted of members of the Allied Occupation Forces, which built a resort on the north side of the lake.

The postwar years were difficult in Okunikko, as they were elsewhere in Japan. One problem was a chronic food shortage. Some of Senjogahara Marshland was reclaimed and used to grow food until the early 1970s, after which the area was returned to its natural state. As the economy grew in the postwar years, more and more people had the means to buy cars, and driving became a national pastime. As the number of visitors arriving in Okunikko increased, so did the need for new roads and parking lots. To meet the needs of the growing community during the 1960s, several public works projects were completed, such as the Chuzenji Dam and a sewage treatment plant at Lake Yunoko to safeguard the water quality in the lake.

Since the 1970s, there has been a greater awareness of the environment and growing recognition of the need to protect natural resources in Japan. The Nature Conservation Law was enacted in 1972 and the Basic Environment Law in 1993. In 1995, Okunikko became part of the government's Green Diamond Plan, a conservation project involving national and quasi-national parks.

Various measures have been developed to protect Okunikko's abundant rivers, lakes, marshes, and other natural resources. The Ministry of the Environment has conducted several water quality surveys of the lakes and rivers, and Lake Yunoko was dredged in the 1990s to improve water quality. In 2005, over 260 hectares of land, including Lake Yunoko and the Odashirogahara and Senjogahara marshlands, were registered as Okunikko-shitsugen under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

Captions (from right to left):

- Allied Occupation Forces at the Nikko Kanko Hotel

The Nikko Kanko Hotel (now the Chuzenji Kanaya Hotel) on the north shore of Lake Chuzenji was built as part of an initiative to increase tourism in Okunikko. After World War II, it was requisitioned by the Allied Occupation Forces and used as a resort facility until 1956.

- Lake Chuzenji Boat House

This iconic landmark of Lake Chuzenji was built in 1947 for the Allied Occupation Forces by the Nikko Kanko Hotel for use as a lakeside resort facility. The hotel burned down in 1949, but the boathouse survived. After the hotel was rebuilt, it was used as a restaurant until 1996. In 1999, Tochigi Prefecture acquired the building and in 2002 reopened the boathouse after restoring it to its original appearance.

- Tapping the Hot Springs at Yumoto Onsen

In 1951, a 12-kilometer pipeline was laid to carry water from the source of the hot springs of Yumoto Onsen to the Chugushi area, creating Chuzenji Onsen.

- Iroha Slope Toll Road

In response to the increasing number of tourists traveling by car, the road to Okunikko was improved and opened in 1954 as the Iroha Slope Toll Road. A second road was

opened in 1965, which enabled one-way traffic both up and down the mountain. The roads became toll-free in 1984.

- Dredging Lake Yunoko

A public sewage treatment plant was built in 1966 to address the deterioration of water quality and sludge at the bottom of the lake. The lake was dredged from 1992 to 1996 to remove sludge from the lakebed, as shown here.

- Low-Emission Buses

Low-emission buses have been used throughout Okunikko since 1993 and run from Akanuma to Odashirogahara, and as far as Senjugahama.