

Opening of the Jōetsu Line and the Mountaineering Boom

In the past, people entered the mountains to hunt, forage, and collect firewood, and there was no concept of mountain climbing as recreation. Mt. Tanigawadake was revered as the home of deities, spirits, and the dead; it was not a place that people entered lightly.

The British introduced the sport of mountaineering during the Meiji era (1868–1912), but it did not reach Minakami until the 1920s. The first recorded traversal of Mt. Tanigawadake was on July 2, 1920. Two Japanese climbers named Fujishima Toshio (1896–1976) and Mori Takashi (1896–1989) followed old paths used by mountain ascetics and hunters from Tsuchitaru to the town of Tanigawa Onsen. Their ascent drew the attention of other climbers, and Mt. Tanigawadake's fame only grew after it was celebrated by the great climber Ōshima Ryōkichi (1899–1928) as both close to the capital and well-suited for climbing.

The completion of the Jōetsu rail line in 1931 provided Tokyo climbing enthusiasts with easy access to Mt. Tanigawadake. As the hobby's popularity increased, so too did the number of accidents, earning Mt. Tanigawadake a reputation as one of the world's deadliest mountains. In 1966, the deaths of 37 climbers led to an outcry over the lack of safety precautions. In 1967, the Mt. Tanigawadake Accident Prevention Ordinance was instituted. Since then, safety precautions have been tightened, and the number of deaths each year has begun to gradually decrease.