

## **Opening of the Jōetsu Line and the Mountaineering Boom**

The first traversal of Mt. Tanigawadake was recorded on July 2, 1920. Two mountaineers named Fujishima Toshio (1896–1976) and Mori Takashi (1896–1989), accompanied by a guide, followed old paths used by mountain ascetics and hunters to trek from Tsuchitaru via Mt. Shigekuradake, Mt. Ichinokuradake, Mt. Tanigawadake, and Tenjin Pass to the town of Tanigawa Onsen. The expedition drew the attention of climbers in Japan, 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 made Minakami much more accessible and opened up Mt. Tanigawadake to climbers from Tokyo. As the hobby's popularity increased, so too did the accident rate, and Mt. Tanigawadake became infamous as a "cursed mountain." This did not prevent veterans and novices alike from taking on the challenge. Climbing associations were established and the skills of Japan's mountaineers improved, but climbing-related fatalities remained high.

In 1956, after a Japanese expedition became the first to ascend Manaslu in Nepal, a true mountaineering craze began in Japan. In an effort to prevent accidents, in 1958 the Gunma police department established the Mt. Tanigawadake Guard, and the Mt. Tanigawadake Accident Prevention Team was formed by local residents. It seemed like the only way to keep the mountain safe was through strict regulations, but climbers fiercely opposed them.

More than 800 mountaineers have died on Mt. Tanigawadake since the 1930s, earning it a reputation as one of the world's deadliest mountains. Mt. Everest, by comparison, has recorded approximately 300 deaths since the 1920s. Fatalities on Mt. Tanigawadake peaked in 1966, when 37 climbers died during a single year, sparking public outcry about the lack of safety precautions. Climbers yielded, and in 1967 the Mt. Tanigawadake Accident Prevention Ordinance was introduced. The ordinance established a Mountaineering Guidance Center and Mt. Tanigawadake's Danger Zone, which covers areas where accidents and avalanches most often occur. Since the introduction of the Accident Prevention Ordinance, safety measures have been strengthened, and the number of deaths each year has begun to gradually decrease.