

## **Ikemeguri Nature Trail: Mt. Shiratoriyama**

Mt. Shiratoriyama was formed by volcanic activity roughly 100,000 years ago, making it one of the older mountains in the area. Its original crater was partly destroyed by the eruption that created Lake Byakushiike tens of thousands of years later.

### **Highest Point Northwest of Mt. Karakunidake**

The summit, at 1,363 meters above sea level, is the geopark's highest point northwest of Mt. Karakunidake. It affords superb views not only of nearby lakes Byakushiike and Rokkannon-miike but also of Mt. Koshikidake to the northeast, sprawling Mt. Hinamoriidake far to the east, Mt. Ioyama and Mt. Karakunidake to the southeast, and even the Sakurajima volcano in Kagoshima Bay far to the south.

Strong winds and a lack of soil mean that only the hardiest plants can grow here in the upper reaches of Mt. Shiratoriyama. These include Miyama-Kirishima azaleas (*Rhododendron kiusianum*), panicle hydrangea with its delicate white blossoms in summer, and poison ivy. Dragonflies also buzz through the air in search of prey.

### **Giant Cedar on the Road to Lake Rokkannon-miike**

Lower down the mountain, the flora returns to a mixture of temperate and warm-temperate forest. This is characteristic of the park, which is at just the right latitude and altitude for conifers like red pines to thrive alongside deciduous beeches and oaks. The leaves on the deciduous trees turn gold and crimson in mid-October, slightly earlier than in lower areas. In spring, the lighter beech and oak shoots are a striking contrast against the darker pine forest.

On the descent toward Lake Rokkannon-miike, keep an eye out for the huge Japanese cedar to the left of the trail. Well over 500 years old, it is believed to have been transplanted from one of the major Shinto shrines of central or southern Kyushu, probably by worshipers of the Buddhist deity Kannon at the lakeside Rokkannon-do Shrine.