

Daira Gorge and Ihai Rock

This trail leads to the bottom of Daira Gorge and the bank of the Fujikoto River. It is just under 1 kilometer (round-trip) and descends through a mixed forest of Japanese beech (*Fagus crenata*) and 200-year-old Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*).

Although Daira Gorge lies outside the core zone of the Shirakami Sanchi World Natural Heritage Site, it shares many characteristics with the protected forest. Spanning 51 hectares, the gorge contains more than 100 tree species. Fruiting plants such as silver vine (*Actinidia polygama*, a type of kiwifruit) and Japanese wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*, a species of raspberry) grow along the trail. Japanese wineberry is sometimes called *kuma-ichigo*, meaning “bear strawberry,” and is a favorite food of the Asian black bears living here.

In addition to bears, Japanese macaque monkeys (*Macaca fuscata*) and Japanese flying squirrels (*Pteromys momonga*) make their homes in these woods. Blue-and-white flycatchers (*Cyanoptila cyanomelana*) and crested kingfishers (*Megaceryle lugubris*) flit among the trees.

Many large boulders border the trail and line the banks of the Fujikoto River. A short side trail branches off the main trail and leads to the riverside. From the water’s edge, Ihai Rock is visible to the north. This giant stone slab was named for its resemblance to a Buddhist mortuary tablet (*ihai*). The main trail continues a short way past Ihai Rock, ending in a small clearing with a glimpse of an abandoned railway bridge. The trail used to continue beyond that point, but a landslide in 2013 destroyed the remainder.

The trail is steep in places and can be slippery. Those who may have difficulty with the trail can best view Daira Gorge from nearby Daira Bridge.