

Higashi-Taisetsu VR video

Tokachi-Mitsumata: A Train Journey into the Past

1. Welcome aboard! Join us as we embark on a journey through Tokachi-Mitsumata, a logging town that flourished in the mid-twentieth century.
2. Before the Meiji era (1868–1912), primary-growth forests filled the Tokachi-Mitsumata Caldera. Groves of ancient Yezo spruce, Sakhalin fir, and Erman's birch thrived in the rich volcanic soil. The area was largely uninhabited.
3. In 1936, a violent typhoon fells many of these towering giants. Word spreads, and loggers arrive to claim these enormous old-growth trees for the lumber industry.
4. There are no roads or railways in this uncharted territory, so logs are transported on the Otofuke River.
5. A new era begins in 1939, when the Japanese National Railway extends its Shihoro Line service and connects Nukabira to Tokachi-Mitsumata. Giant logs are now transported by rail on lumber cars. There are still no roads to the logging settlement, which is growing rapidly.
6. The Otofuke Logging Railway is built as an extension of the train line. It runs from the lumberyard in the Tokachi-Mitsumata settlement into the mountains.
7. A grand building is constructed at the last stop, deep in the mountains. It serves as the main forestry office in charge of coordinating lumber removal.
8. More buildings begin popping up around Tokachi-Mitsumata, including a locomotive repair depot. The town quickly becomes a major hub of the logging industry.
9. In September 1954, another violent typhoon strikes the region. It causes great damage, felling as many trees as 20 to 30 years of logging would remove.
10. [Mr. Tanaka] "The wind was so strong that it blew the roof off the woodworking shop."

11. Loggers and villagers work quickly to remove the fallen trees. If left as they are, they might spread pest infestations to the trees left standing nearby.

12. As the settlement continues to grow, restaurants, stores, bunkhouses, and meeting places spring up, and the population of Tokachi-Mitsumata surpasses 1,000.

13. Families grow. An elementary and a junior high school are built. People hold celebrations and festivals, and a lively community develops.

14. Between 60 and 70 lumber cars leave from Tokachi-Mitsumata Station each day. The trains are so fast that they are compared to “bullets.”

15. The train stops along the way to pick up cargo. The journey to Obihiro, a town 50 kilometers away, takes 3 hours.

16. Diesel-powered passenger trains begin running in 1955, while steam-powered locomotives continue to carry freight. As faster-moving passenger trains are added, students can now commute to school in Obihiro.

17. The same year, the first road is opened from Nukabira to Tokachi-Mitsumata. This signals the end of an era for the railway line, as logs can now be transported by truck.

18. Soon after, the Otofuke Logging Railway and its forestry offices close.

19. The logging industry falls into rapid decline in the 1970s. Loggers move to bigger towns, and the population of Tokachi-Mitsumata begins to dwindle. In 1976, both the elementary school and the last sawmill close.

20. With fewer passengers and no logs to carry, the Shihoro Line begins running a bus service between Nukabira and Tokachi-Mitsumata in 1978. Nine years later, the Shihoro Line discontinues all services.

21. In a span of 50 years, the logging industry goes from boom to bust.

22. Over 30 years have passed since the closing of the Shihoro Line. Relics of the railway remain, such as bridges and abandoned station platforms.

23. The homes and businesses of the once-bustling village of Tokachi-Mitsumata have all but disappeared. Two households remain in a clearing in the caldera.

24. The old-growth forests that were once logged here disappeared in a short period of time. But nature has reclaimed the land once again.

25. The dense forest covering the land today makes it difficult to imagine a former logging town here. Today, it is a place where visitors can enjoy the beautiful scenery of Daisetsuzan National Park.