

Kushiro Railroad

This part of the Mashu Kussharo Trail (MKT) follows the path of the Kushiro Railroad, parallel to Route 391, for approximately 1.2 kilometers. The railroad tracks are gone, but the embankments remain, obscured here and there by vegetation. They are distinguished from natural banks by their uniform tops, which are minimally graded or almost level, and by their straight or gently curving course.

Mining at Mt. Io was a major industry in the Kushiro region in the late nineteenth century. Sulfur ore was mined on the mountain, and refined locally in Shibechea, before being shipped onwards as sulfur from the port at Kushiro. The Kushiro Railroad supported the industry and facilitated its growth by enabling large quantities of ore to be transported more quickly and cost-effectively than by horse-drawn carts. At the time, natural sulfur was a highly prized commodity used in many industries from manufacturing to commercial agriculture. It was also a key ingredient of gunpowder.

The railroad opened in 1887 and operated until the sulfur ore reserves became almost completely depleted in 1896. Two locomotives operated on the line and, at the industry's peak, transported more than 22,000 tons of ore a year. A 1:3 scale model of one of the locomotives is displayed at the Mt. Io Rest House, at the base of Mt. Io.