

## **Former Temiya Line Walking Path**

A 1.6-kilometer walking path follows a section of Hokkaido's first railway line through the banking and commercial districts of Otaru to the Former Temiya Railway Facility. The tracks and some level crossing gates have been preserved. Walking the path affords a glimpse of what life was like in the old city as it developed as a major trade hub. At some points, the trains that transported coal and other commodities to the port passed barely a meter from the front doors of homes.

### *Hokkaido's first railway*

The Temiya Line was the first section of the Horonai Railway, which opened in 1882 to connect the new coal mine in Horonai (now Mikasa City) to a coal loading pier at Temiya in Otaru Port. Steam locomotives transported coal on the Horonai Railway to Otaru for shipment to the main island of Honshu, and carried goods and passengers between Otaru and destinations in central Hokkaido.

During the Meiji period (1868–1912), the Japanese government prioritized the development of Hokkaido as a northern frontier. As part of the policy to modernize the nation, engineers and agricultural experts were engaged who had experienced the rapid industrialization following the American Civil War (1861–1865) and who were familiar with harsh winters like those in Hokkaido. Railway engineer Joseph Crawford (1842–1924) was hired to develop Hokkaido's first train lines.

### *Built for local conditions*

Hokkaido railway tracks were built using the same narrow gauge (1,067 mm) rails used on the main island of Honshu, which were cheaper and easier to lay than the standard gauge (1,435 mm) rails widely used in Europe. Small, lightweight locomotives (16.5 tons) and rail cars were custom-built for the railway. The first two engines in Hokkaido were named Yoshitsune and Benkei, after legendary Japanese warriors of the twelfth century. One month before the Temiya Line officially opened in 1880, Crawford and his engineers made a trial run on Benkei. Accounts of the time record the astonishment of the citizens

of Otaru to see a steam locomotive for the first time.

### *Changing priorities*

In the 1880s, the Horonai Railway operated one round trip per day between Temiya and Sapporo. Passengers paid one yen for a one-way trip, which took three hours. By 1906, the volume of coal being shipped from Otaru had become so high that passenger services were suspended to prioritize more lucrative coal transport. In response to campaigning by residents, an extra track was added in 1912 to accommodate passenger trains. Temiya Station became freight-only, and a new dedicated passenger station was built a few hundred meters up the line.

### *The end of the line*

The Temiya section of the Horonai Railway remained a vital link between inland Hokkaido and Otaru Port until 1985 when service was finally suspended. As the rail network in Hokkaido developed, passenger trains from Sapporo and Hakodate passed through the new Otaru Station further inland, while freight and coal continued to use the Temiya Line, with limited local passenger services. Passenger trains on the Temiya Line were ultimately discontinued in 1962. Freight services continued to operate on the line until 1985.

The passenger station platform next to the rail line near the Ironai banking district remains, waiting for a train that never comes. It is a reminder of the Temiya Line's presence in the daily lives of Otaru's citizens as the port city flourished.