

Doro-kyo Gorge and the Doro Hotel

(Web)

Doro-kyo Gorge is a 31-kilometer-long section of the Kitayama River, which straddles the border of three prefectures (Nara, Mie, and Wakayama). The rocks of the gorge are layers of sedimentary rock pushed up from the sea about 70 million years ago. Magma later heated the rocks, hardening them and making them resistant to erosion. Over many millennia, the hard rock forced the Kitayama River to cut deep, forming a steep V-shaped canyon rather than a wide valley.

For over six centuries, the Kitayama River was used by log drivers to transport harvested timber downriver. (A part of “Raftsmen’s Path,” a route the men would use to walk back home after delivering the logs, is now maintained as a hiking trail.) Until just a few decades ago, this area was roadless and isolated, accessible only by river transport. However, as news of the sheer cliffs, fantastic rock formations, and emerald waters of the gorge spread in the late nineteenth century, tourists began making their way here, and in 1936 the area was designated part of Yoshino-Kumano National Park. Today, the gorge’s features can be enjoyed via a variety of modes of river transport, from traditional rafts to motorboats.

The Doro Hotel sits in a particularly scenic part of the gorge. It was built more than a century ago as an inn to house tired raftsmen, but soon found itself catering to a booming tourist trade. At one time, some five inns were operating in the area. In 2004, the hotel closed after three generations of management by the same family. It now operates as a café, offering simple meals, bird’s-eye views of the gorge, and a nostalgic atmosphere recalling its century-old origins. Displays and artifacts from the

days when the river was the only available transportation for logs and local residents decorate the interior. The hotel is a designated Nara Prefectural Cultural Property.