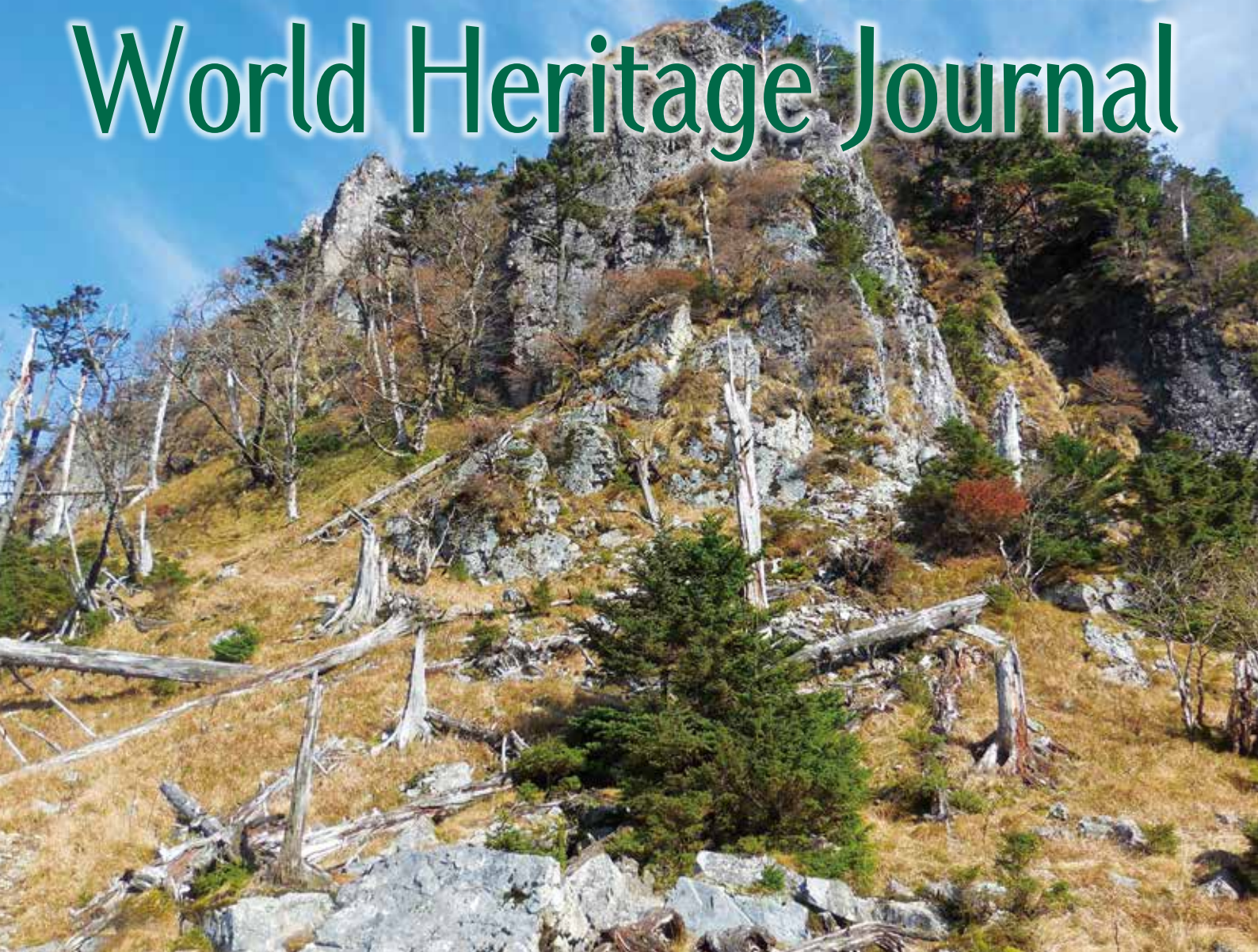


Vol.7

Nara Prefecture

Thinking deeper about World Heritage

World Heritage Journal



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《Special Feature》

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the Kii Mountain Range’

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Nara Prefecture, Japan

‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range’

1. What values are recognized by World Heritage status?

The Yoshino area to the south, separated from the Nara Basin by mountains, was considered a natural environment particularly worthy of veneration from before the time a nation under the Ritsuryō Codes was established, later being conceived of as a land of great spiritual power. The Kii Mountains, which stretch south from the mountains of Yoshinoyama have, since mythical times, also been conceived of as a land where gods reside, later becoming the location of many sacred sites.

Three sacred sites – Yoshino and Omine, the main sites for Shugendō spiritual practices; Koyasan, established by Kobo Daishi (Kukai); and the Kumano Sanzan, prospered with the fusion of Shinto and Buddhism – are linked through pilgrimages, which established the routes leading to these sacred places.

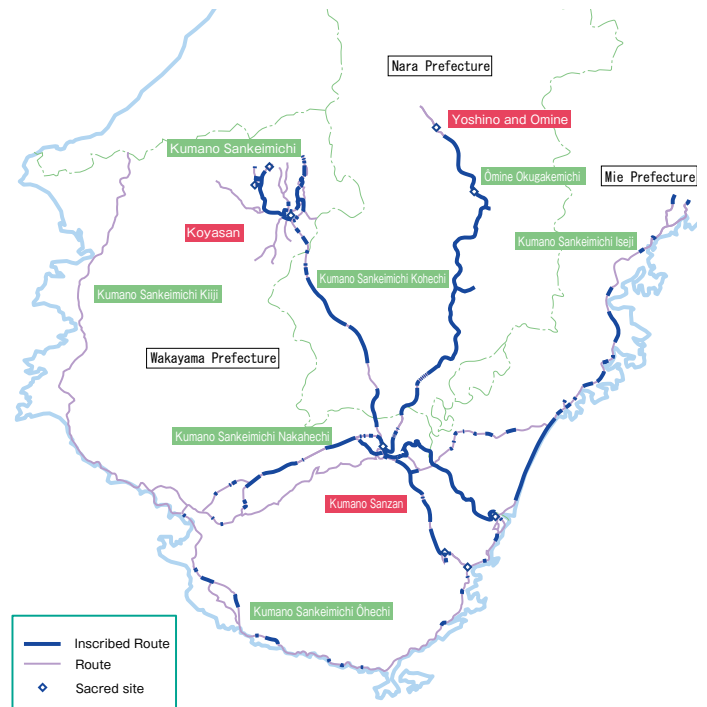
These were the Koya Sankeimichi which led to Koyasan, the Kumano Sankeimichi which led to the Kumano Sanzan, and the Omine Okugakemichi, a Shugendō trail which connected Yoshino-Omine and the Kumano Sanzan.

This issue is a special edition which, in 2024, marks 20 years since the inscription of ‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range’ on the World Heritage list.

These heritage sites were proposed by three prefectures: Mie, Nara, and Wakayama. They were duly inscribed on the World Heritage list, in July 2004, at the 28th World Heritage Committee meeting held in Suzhou, China.

What values were recognized in ‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range’?

Under World Heritage evaluation criteria, it was clearly demonstrated that the heritage represented by the cultural landscape of the Kii Mountains was characterized by unique properties in the syncretic nature of Shintō and Buddhism, that the exchanges and development of religious culture in East Asia were also manifested (Criterion(ii)), that observances found in the shrines and temples in the Kii Mountains have, for over a thousand years, been rare evidence of the development of Japan’s religious culture (Criterion (iii)), that unique architectural styles in the Kii Mountains have had a deep influence on shrine and temple architecture throughout Japan (Criterion(vi)), and that collective heritage and forested landscapes in the Kii Mountains, preserved and handed down for more than 1,200 years, reflect sacred mountain traditions (Criterion(vi)).



Sacred Site Yoshino and Omine

Yoshinoyama, Yoshino Mikumari-jinja, Kinpu-jinja, Kinpusen-ji, Yoshimizu-jinja, Ōminesan-ji

Sacred Site Kumano Sanzan

Kumano Hongū Taisha, Kumano Hayatama Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha, Seiganto-ji, Nachino Ōtaki, Nachi Primeval Forest, Fudarakusan-ji

Sacred Site Koyasan

Niutsumi-jinja, Kongobu-ji, Jison-in, Niukanshōfu-jinja

Pilgrimage Routes

Ōmine Okugakemichi (including Tamaki-jinja), Kumano Sankeimichi (Nakahechi (including the Kumanogawa), Kohechi, Ōhechi, Iseji, (including Shichirimihama, Hananoiwaya), Kōya Sankeimichi (including the Chōishimichi, Mitanzaka, Kyō-osakamichi Fudozaka, Kurokomichi, Nyoinmichi)

2. Yoshino and Omine sacred sites and the Omine Okugakemichi

History of “Shugendo”

It is said that Shugendo was founded in the 7th- 8th centuries by En no Gyoja (or En no Ozuno). It is a set of beliefs unique to Japan, a fusion of Shintō, Buddhism, and Taoism, characterized by an ancient reverence towards nature, and mountain worship in particular. Zao Gongen is the main object of worship, realized, it is said, by En no Gyoja, and the aim of followers is to achieve enlightenment through various ascetic practices in challenging mountain ranges.

Those engaged in these practices are known as shugenja, yamabushi, or gyoja. Shugenja wear unique costumes with sashes, head coverings, and carry staffs and conches.

An introduction to Yoshino and Omine, and the Omine Okugakemichi

Yoshino and Omine are located the furthest north of the three sites which make up the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountains. Yoshino and Omine consists of the mountains of Yoshinoyama which dominates the water resources indispensable to agriculture, and produces gold - and the mountains of Omimesan, one of the main ascetic practice areas of this mountain sect.

The distance of the Omine Okugakemichi remain uncertain. The World Heritage nomination notes a distance of about 80km, but that is in a straight line distance on a map. The actual total distance is more like 170km once you take the repeated ascents and descents over peaks between 1,000m and 1,900m.

Many ascetic practice sites, places known as gyosho, are located along a route which has numerous steep paths. Stopping at these, practitioners will carry out what are known as okugake and mineiri.

There are 75 gyosho sites between the Kumano Hongu Taisha Hongu Shoseiden and the Yanagi no Yado on the banks of the Yoshino River. The journey starting at Hongu, the first station, is called the Junpu, the journey starting from the 75th station or the Yanagi no Yado, the Gyakubu.

It is said that doing the entire itinerary, even for Shugenja (practitioners) , takes about one week.



The 73rd gyosho Kinpusen-ji Zaodo (provided by Kinpusen-ji)
The present Zaodo Hall was rebuilt in 1592, although we know it was constructed by 1103.



The 72nd gyosho Yoshino Mikumari-jinja Honden (provided by the Yoshino Mikumari-jinja)
The shrine dates back to beliefs in the watershed in Yoshinoyama. The oldest records date the shrine to 698.



Yoshimizu-jinja (provided by Yoshimizu-jinja)
Whilst today it is a shrine, in pre-modern times it was a central temple annexed to Kinpusen-ji.



The 67th gyosho Omimesan-ji Hondo (provided by Omimesan-ji)
The Hondo had been built by 905. Two gold Buddha statues were unearthed, amongst other things, during dismantling and repair work.



Inamuragadake
(1726m)

Sanjogatake
(1719m)

Ryugatake
(1724m)

The Omine Okugakemichi mountains viewed from near the peak of Mt. Misen.

From the left, there are many steep mountains, including Inamuragadake, known as Nyonin Omine, Sanjogatake where Omimesan-ji, a key Shugendo ascetic training spot, is located, with a succession of challenging obstacles passable only with ladders and chains stretching along a route traversing peaks such as Daifugendake - Shichiyodake - Gyojagaeridake.



There are various small shrines beside the Omine Okugakemichi route, where Shugendo gyoja offer prayers.



The 29th gyosho, Zenkisan, is one of the more important Omine Okugakemichi gyosho. Descendants of the five families of En no Gyoja's attendants protected temple lodging here, but today only Gokijo family's Onakabo pilgrim's lodgings today.

Tamakistan, the 10th gyosho, has what have become a nationally renowned power spot in recent years, Tamaki-jinja. Sites to visit are the peak of Tamakistan 1,076m, from which there are fine views. Even the Pacific Ocean you can see from there.





3. Members of the World Heritage office staff hiked the Omine Okugakemichi!

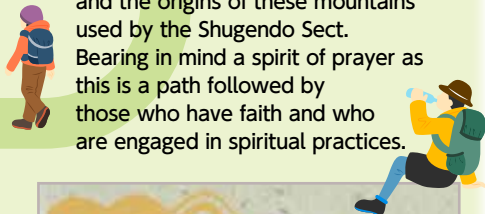
From April 2023, Nara Prefecture established a World Heritage Office for World Heritage property conservation and management which will have responsibility for administering the promotion of Asuka/Fujiwara World Heritage registration. Here we report on what members discovered hiking the Omine Okugakemichi, a property registered in the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range inscription.



Setting off from the Gyojagaeri Tunnel West Exit trail head having first submitted a hiking notification form.



Offering prayers to the statue of Rigen Taishi at the remains of the Seiho no Yado site lodging, which have a connection to the founder and the origins of these mountains used by the Shugendo Sect. Bearing in mind a spirit of prayer as this is a path followed by those who have faith and who are engaged in spiritual practices.



Arriving at the summit of Misen 1,895m. Before you stands Hakkyogadake, the highest peak in the Kinki area! From here you descend, only to climb again.



Heading up a steep incline known as Shoho Hacho. Members climbing step by step, persevering and wondering when they would reach the summit of Misen.



Arriving at the summit of Hakkyogadake 1,915m.



Rules for hikers

The World Heritage "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" are a cultural heritage that represents Japanese spiritual culture. Taking a form that reveres nature and the universe that is the origin of life and everything as prayers for gods and Buddhas who reside in the mountains and forests, it has been kept for a long time. When walking the pilgrimage routes, we honor the following rules to preserve the blessings of this irreplaceable property for people all over the world forever.

1. We all preserve the "Heritage of Humanity".
2. Tread among the spirits of prayers from ancient times.
3. Enjoy our humanity, with a smile and greetings.
4. We will not harm nor bring in any plants or animals, cherishing them deeply.
5. Prepare a plan and equipment, and let's walk at a proper pace.
6. Do not stray from the path.
7. Be careful with fire.
8. Carry out your garbage. Keep the paths beautiful.

When hiking the Omine Okugakemichi, remain alert to the end, even on the descents, and make sure to observe the pilgrimage route rules! Never forgetting to fill in a hiking notification form!

What is meant by 'Integrity'

'Integrity', along with 'authenticity', is one of the three conditions supporting OUV (Outstanding Universal Value). To be included on the World Heritage list, this condition must be met. 'Authenticity' is a condition only for cultural heritage. 'Integrity' is a condition which needs to be fulfilled for both cultural and natural heritage. 'Integrity' was, originally, only required for natural heritage, but since 2005 it has been a condition required for cultural heritage as well. Firstly, let's have a look at the 'Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention'.



Shiretoko
(Japan, 2005)

Integrity is a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes. Examining the conditions of integrity, therefore requires assessing the extent to which the property:

- a) includes all elements necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value;
- b) is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance;
- c) suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect.

This should be presented in a statement of integrity.

Furthermore, the following additional conditions are specified in the case of cultural heritage.

For properties nominated under criteria (i) to (vi), the physical fabric of the property and/or its significant features should be in good condition, and the impact of deterioration processes controlled. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the elements necessary to convey the totality of the value conveyed by the property should be included. Relationships and dynamic functions present in cultural landscapes, historic towns or other living properties essential to their distinctive character should also be maintained.



Tasmanian Wilderness
(Australia, 1982, 1989)

More specifically,

a) Are all elements necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value included?

In other words, whether the number and type of constituent properties which express World Heritage values been correctly specified, without elaboration or neglect, will be examined. For example, in the case of Hiraizumi, whether or not all the component properties fulfilled the nomination criteria at the time is a subject of much debate. Having incorporated the values and constituent properties which were ultimately asserted, Hiraizumi succeeded in World Heritage list inscription in 2011 as its architecture, gardens, and archaeological remains evidenced Bukkokudo (Jodo - Pure Land or 'Buddha-field').



b) Is the property of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance;

Does the scope of all the properties nominated comprehensively specify the values they represent?

Is what this means. The scope, therefore, links to whether or not these are subject which ought to be rightly protected.

c) Do properties suffer from adverse effects of development and/or neglect?

It is of course important that properties have not suffered adverse effects. In other words, are measures in place to protect nominated properties under the laws of a country, and are effective administrative systems in place? Furthermore, sustainable social and economic systems for ensuring the future of those historical cities and villages are also required.

Making “Asuka-Fujiwara” a World Heritage Site!

Asuka and Fujiwara nominated property candidates Introduction ⑤ Fujiwara Buddhist Temples

Outline Fujiwarakyo capital and Buddhist Temples

Following the transmission of Buddhism to Japan, considered to be influential, in 538 or 552, Buddhist temple building started in our country with the construction of Asukadera Temple by the Soga clan. The Nihon Shoki records that from the time powerful families started building temples, with imperial families erecting temples, by 680 there were some 24 temples located around the Asuka and Fujiwara area.

Many temples had been constructed in our first full-scale capital, Fujiwarakyo, centred on the Fujiwara Palace, to which the Asuka Kiyomigaharanomiya had been moved in 694. These were thought to have been sited on a city plan (Jobosei) with an orderly, checkerboard pattern.

Here, we introduce the sites of the Daikandai-ji and Motoyakushi-ji temples, properties forming the Asuka-Fujiwara capital and related properties cluster, together with the most important temples in this area.

Daikandai-ji Site

Originally named Kudara Ôtera at the wish of Emperor Jomei in 639, in 673 the temple was renamed Takechiôtera, then, in 677, Daikandai-ji. It seems that construction of the temples buildings started in Fujiwarakyo, laid out according to Jobosei system, with the main buildings being completed in the reign of Emperor Monmu (697 - 707). When Fujiwarakyo was moved in 710, the temple was relocated and called Daian-ji. Records note that the buildings remaining in Fujiwarakyo were destroyed by fire in 711.

The results of an archaeological survey of the temple area showed that the temple was on the largest scale, covering about 205m east to west, and about 354m north to south.

The foundations of the Kondo (Main Hall) and a pagoda remain today in an area covered by rice fields. It is said that in pre-modern times foundation stones of them existed on the original platform, but in about 1890 they were removed. None of them remains today.

The Kondo site remains today as generally rather higher fields standing amongst other rice fields. The east-west length at the front is about 45m, equalling in size the Daigokuden Hall in the Fujiwara Palace.

The pagoda site to the southeast of the Kondo was of a very large site, with the stone platform measuring about 35m on one side and the pagoda structure about 15m-on one side, inferred from the position of the exttaction holes formed by the foundation stone. It is clear from the records that this was a nine storey pagoda. It is thought that the height of the tower was about 100m, meaning it exceeded the summit height of nearby Mt.Kaguyama.

The nine-storey pagoda, an iconic Buddhist temple structure, was designed for the protection of the nation. This idea was widely adopted in ancient times right across East Asia.

The archaeological survey, as well as revealing sites of a lecture hall and corridors, confirmed a middle gate site and rows of pillars which surrounded the temple precinct and, as noted in the records, traces of buildings which were destroyed in a fire.



Daikandai-ji site -Nine storey pagoda site



Daikandai-ji site Panorama
(Mt. Kaguyama and Mt. Miminashiyama can be seen in the distance)

Motoyakushi-ji Site

Emperor Tenmu, wishing for Empress Unonosarara no Himemiko's recovery from illness, started construction of the temple in 680. She recovered immediately, but construction of the temple continued. (Emperor Tenmu eventually passed away in 695.) It is recorded that the temple construction was nearly completed in 698, after Empress-Jito, who had succeeded Emperor Tenmu, retired. Even though there are records showing that the temple was moved in 728, following transfer of the capital to Heijoykyo, we know that Motoyakushi-ji buildings existed up until the first half of the 12th century. However, the temple disappeared in the middle ages, with only some vestiges of buildings remaining.

Motoyakushi-ji temple building was characterized by pagodas sited symmetrically to the east and west in front of the Kondo (a sotoshiki or 'twin tower' layout). This is the oldest example of sotoshiki in Japan.

19 stones platform which formed the foundations of the Kondo remain, of which 14 are thought to be in their original positions (there was a total of 36 stones). The granite rock is beautifully carved to form the flat base for the square pillars.

16 out of 17 of the stones used for the eastern pagoda remain. The base stone for the central pillar has a 3-step, circular aperture for relics of the Buddha. On the other side, there is no aperture for relics in the base stone. Only a protrusion on the surface used to secure a pillar in position.



Motoyakushi-ji Birds eye view



Motoyakushi-ji Kondo foundation stones

(※All photos in this section are provided by the Asuka-Fujiwara World Heritage Inscription Promotion Council.)

Editorial note

This issue is a special edition focusing on 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range'. In 2024, it marks 20 years since its inscription, following on from having commemorated 30 years since the inscription of 'Buddhist Monuments in the Horyuji Area' in 2023, and 25 years since inscription of 'Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara'. On this occasion, we hope to promote interest in the very many cultural heritage sites in Nara Prefecture, helping ensure that our World Heritage is passed on for future generations.

The Nara Prefecture World Heritage office will continue to provide information about Nara's World Heritage and other wonderful cultural resources.

